

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## Chennai Metro Loses Its Head on Stations

It was too good to last. Just when we thought the Chennai Metrorail had not gone the way of the MRTS when it comes to station design, it transpires that the same blunder is going to be repeated. A news report has it as far as the ongoing phase II is concerned, CMRL stations are going to be planned on a giant scale, rather on the lines of what was done for MRTS. The logic for this too is identical. Will we never learn from past mistakes?

As per the *Hindu* dated November 17, 2025, CMRL is planning to develop over 3,000,000 square feet of office and retail space at its phase two stations. The report goes on to say that while huge towers will come up at Chennai Central, Mandaveli, Thousand Lights

and Thirumangalam stations, CMRL will build additional floors for use as office and commercial spaces at stations including Nungambakkam, Royapettah, Adyar depot and Tirumayilai. The usual reasons that are normally given out when commercial space is to be developed have been gone

● by **Sriram V.**

through. These include the fact that the extra floors on top of the stations will be hired out as office and retail space so that people will be saved the job of commuting far from the stations themselves.

All very good on paper no doubt. But CMRL would do

well to think about what happened to the MRTS stations. These were developed as huge barn-like structures with vast spaces in them with precisely the same reasons. And without exception all of them ended up as failures. Not one shop or commercial entity was interested. One of the key reasons for that could have been the low patronage extended to MRTS owing to the enormous delays in the construction and then the poor routing which deterred commuters from using the service. CMRL with its faster delivery and it's more comprehensive coverage can certainly hope for better utilization of its retail space but will it overcome the standard poor

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## Can we please leave the Pallikaranai Marsh alone?

Our city is indeed a gift that continues to keep giving, especially in civic issues. You can keep writing on the same matters repeatedly and yet be sure that there will be more that can be written for years to come. Take for instance the Pallikaranai marshland. These pages carry a report as early as May 2009 titled "Going slow on saving Pallikaranai marsh", (MM, May 1-15 2009) on how the government's demarcation exercise announced in 2007 was going on at a tardy pace. More recently, in February 2024 this column had commented on its pathetic state

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

emerging out of details of a hearing conducted by the National Green Tribunal. Earlier this year, the need to restore the land at the earliest, so critical for our city's ecological and urban resilience had been laid out (MM, May 16-31, 2025). The marsh, a RAMSAR site since 2022, keeps appearing amidst public consciousness on a repeated basis, and almost always for the wrong reasons. The latest drama that is playing out is with respect to the

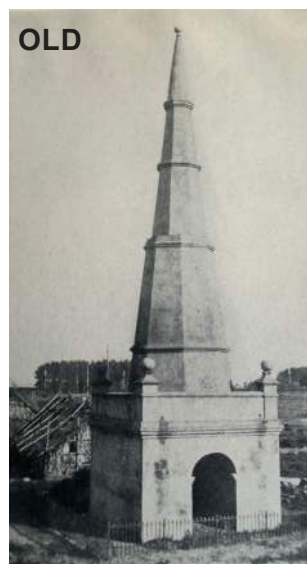
alleged illegalities in granting permissions to a private developer to undertake a massive project comprising more than 1,200 flats on land designated as marshland. The Madras High Court has ordered a stay on the construction until the project's site relative to the marshland is decided and with the matter being sub-judice, this column will not go into the case specific details.

That the number of waterbodies that once dotted our city and its fringes has come down steadily over the decades due to encroachments is no

(Continued on page 2)

## HERITAGE WATCH

### When a Monument gets a Vista



OLD

We at *Madras Musings* have written repeatedly that our heritage monuments need vistas – an unencumbered view from afar – to appreciate the architecture in full. That has been more a pipe dream with what little approach spaces that were left being now crammed with modern buildings. But occasionally, we get a pleasant surprise.

The future of the Hymers Obelisk in the High Court compound may depend on judgement from the Supreme Court, but just at present, it has been gifted with an untrammelled vista. The restoration of the Law College

building as the heritage additional wing of the High Court has led to the demolition of many modern structures around the obelisk. The providing of a new judges' gate on the Esplanade means the monument can be seen from afar. And so here we have three views.

The Old from Yale University archives and featured in Hiram Bingham's book – *Elihu Yale, the American Nabob of Queen's Square* (1939) was probably taken sometime in the 19th century, when the High Court and Law College were yet to be constructed. The Recent is by your Deputy Editor, taken in 2010, when a proper photo of the obelisk was impossible given the way it was hemmed in. And now we have the NEW. Let us enjoy it while it lasts.



RECENT



NEW

## CHENNAI METRO LOSES ITS HEAD ON STATIONS

(Continued from page 1)

maintenance that is associated with government-run facilities?

In case the CMRL stations become successes it would truly be a feather in the government's cap. But if they fail, then there are going to be enormous issues associated with safety and maintenance at such unoccupied spaces. It will be recalled that there have been accidents at MRTS facilities owing to precisely the same reasons.

CMRL would also do well to consider that the government has announced that all properties within 500 meters of metro stations will benefit from higher FSI going up to five times. This will mean that a lot more real estate will turn commercial and will be offered for rent and sale. Does Chennai have the wherewithal to absorb so much of new capacity in the commercial or residential market especially at a time when there has not been much industrial growth in the city itself?

## Can we please leave the Pallikaranai marsh alone?

(Continued from page 1)

secret. The IT boom in the early 2000s brought about with it an increasing demand for real estate particularly in the OMR area as it started expanding, which in turn gave rise to several layouts and colonies. Many of these came up on erstwhile waterbodies. This writer was witness to one such violation, accompanying a cousin sometime in 2007 to visit a potential layout somewhere in Thoraipakkam. Following the developer's instructions over phone led us to a small waterbody, which he had grandiose plans of filling up and converting into real estate. As subsequent flooding episodes have shown over the years, the destruction of these waterbodies has come with a huge price.

The ground truthing exercise to demarcate the clear boundaries of the Pallikaranai marsh as mandated by the Supreme Court is yet to be completed. At present, the Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority has provisionally marked a one-kilometer buffer as the marshland's zone of influence and the CMDA, acting under directions of the southern bench of the National Green Tribunal, has issued an order not to grant planning or building approvals within the RAMSAR site boundary and its

One of the key reasons behind the success of the phase I stations was their sheer manageability. There was not much commute between entry and the concourse and the spaces being small have had excellent maintenance and lighting. There has also been much praise for the fact that the stations themselves do not deter from the surroundings and being of low height, blend beautifully with the localities. This is particularly important in places that have several heritage buildings.

If monstrosities are to come up in places like Thousand Lights, Nungambakkam and Tirumayilai there is every likelihood that the heritage structures in these places will be dwarfed. While this may not be a prime consideration when there is the enticement of commercial development, it is also necessary to keep this requirement in mind when planning for the future.

zone of influence. This has naturally created anxiety amongst residents of the populous neighbourhoods, where people have invested in real-estate approved by the authorities. The CMDA has however assured that the halt is only temporary and that it would issue planning permissions following due procedures once the notification of the RAMSAR site and its zone of influence is notified.

Despite so much of uncertainty surrounding the entire administrative exercise concerning the site and its boundaries, one cannot help but think that this is a region that will continue to attract attention in the name of development. While officially the boundaries and the zone of influence will be known soon, whether the region can afford more high-rises anywhere in its vicinity is a question that needs to be debated upon. Can the environment, an ecological hotspot, bear more stress and afford to deal with the attendant problems? Surely, it is time for the state, which boasts of the maximum number of RAMSAR sites in the country to draw up a comprehensive management plan with the well-being of the fragile ecosystem of the Pallikaranai marsh at its core and follow it in spirit. Until then, can we please leave the marsh alone?

## Singapore in Stone Age

The Man from Madras Musings is aware that the State's leadership had long ago promised that this city of ours will one day become like Singapore. And he lives in hope, though that hope, never very robust, is showing signs of giving up the ghost. At least MMM's recent experience of his road being relayed was not very encouraging.

Mind you, MMM is not complaining about higher officialdom. That was cooperative at its best and did everything that it could to make the process of relaying the road a smooth one. But it is the very technology and the method adopted in laying the road that makes MMM wonder as to which century we in this wonderful city are living in.

MMM is certain that there are localities in this world in underdeveloped countries where road laying is essentially a process of pickaxes and shovels. But he is sure that when it comes to first world nations and those that are in the top bracket when it comes to GDP, which is where we as a state and a nation claim to be, there must be a considerable amount of mechanization. That it is possible to claim that we are at the top and yet manage to remain in the stone ages was made manifest to MMM when he witnessed the actual laying process of the road.

There is no doubt a certain nobility in retaining old world processes chiefly because they give rise to employment. Keynesian economics if you recall. But at the same time it needs to be examined whether this is the most efficient. Picture then for yourself a group of desultory workers arriving who would languidly chip away the existing road. Considerable leeway was given to completing this activity and therefore there were days on end when nothing much really happened. And once this was done came in the process of relaying the road itself. This involved blue metal, known for some reason in Madras as jelly, to be spread on to the milled surface. This by itself took time and thereafter the stones were left as they were for a few weeks on end. Walking on that surface was an adventure and as for driving on it MMM can assure you that it was no pleasure.

Thus it was that MMM having taken his car out, found it suddenly moving by itself, guided no doubt by the loose stones underneath. Try as MMM might to control the vehicle, there was no success, and rather in the manner of the deaf adder, the car proceeded on its own course till it found a convenient soak pit into which it could rest one tyre. Thereafter it would not

be dislodged, thereby causing a crisis. The urgency was also because rather like the ship that blocked the entire Suez Canal in recent times, the car was spanning the width of the road. It was all that MMM could do to station himself at one end and ward off vehicles and then periodically run to the other end and ward off some more vehicles. Eventually old technology came to the rescue – a few men arrived, chief among whom was MMM's driver and between them and amidst much roaring and shouting they managed to lift the vehicle from the pit and all was well.

After a few weeks a massive road roller arrived to make sure that the laying process was well underway. Its arrival was heralded as the beginning of the next stage but thereafter there was no action and it remained at one end of the street. And then work began. Here again manual effort, particularly of the vocal variety appeared to

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

be at its maximum and over a couple of nights and amidst much grinding and groaning the laying of the road was done. As a laid road the thoroughfare is a treat. But it has at the same time managed to cover some of the manholes and MMM is fairly certain that there is going to be a fresh process of drilling by the CMWSB.

### The TANGEDCO-TASMAR Connect

Shortly after the road laying, a new problem cropped up. One evening, at around sundown, the junction box outside MMM's residence let off a minor explosion and with that two of the three phases in MMM's house took their departure. The first phase (pun intended) of inactivity – wherein you assume your neighbours too are having the same trouble and so take it for granted that someone else will complain about it to TANGEDCO and all will be well – was gone through. At least that was MMM's attitude. After all, one single phase was going strong, there was water in the overhead tank, and so God was in his heaven.

But MMM's good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, and always of restless mind, proceeded to institute enquiries. And it transpired that the neighbours were enjoying power in all three phases. And that meant a complaint had to be registered. This was duly done by She, and shortly there-

after, to give TANGEDCO credit, a technician arrived. MMM was despatched to deal with him and the man got to work. Despite being afflicted with a twitch all over his body, which seemed to increase with time, the man was efficient. The fuse problem was fixed he announced. MMM showered a purse of gold on him and he was gone.

Now, MMM's cook, who was watching it all, did not seem happy. Why, asked MMM. The reply was that MMM had been overly generous and that the fix was temporary at best. The man was twitching all over as it was happy hour and he needed cash to go to the closest TASMAR said the cook. MMM was not inclined to believe the story but the cook merely asked MMM to wait and see.

The next evening, the explosion occurred again and the process of complaint and a technician (a different one) appearing was repeated. This man seemed to have palsy – so powerful were the tremors. But he managed the fuse with a firm hand, cursed the inefficiency of the earlier man, said that very inferior people were now infiltrating what was once a noble profession, collected his purse of gold, and left. Once again MMM's cook clucked disapprovingly.

The next evening the explosion occurred again but this time She, who had wizened up to the situation felt it would be best to wait till morning and manage till then on a single phase. The complaint, registered on the morning, brought forth a delegation from TANGEDCO, all of them steady. They clustered around the junction box, probed its innards, held a discussion over the body and pronounced their verdict. The evening shift people had tied a wire around a metal leg of the junction box that led to repeated short-circuiting they said and smiled with an attitude of how boys will be boys. It was an old trick they said, wherein foolish houseowners were repeatedly made to part with cash. They hoped MMM was not one of them. The cook hovering around, MMM made no reply.

The problem could be rectified said the delegation, provided a purse of gold was flung at them. Otherwise, MMM could go through the official process, when in the fullness of time, a tender would be floated and the parts for the repair obtained. MMM flung the purse of gold, this time with cook approving. He said acts of charity in the morning qualified as piety. Whatever it may be, the fuses are holding well, up until now.

– MMM



# OUR READERS WRITE



## Reg. A Magazine Devoted to Agriculture

Dear Editor, I would appreciate it if you could kindly forward this message to Karthik Bhatt. Kudos for writing *A magazine devoted to agriculture*, (MM, Vol. XXXIV No. 22, March 1-15, 2025).

I recently came across your article in *Madras Musings* about my great grandfather Rao Bahadur Dharmaranga Raju. It was a great read. We only had a vague idea of his contributions to society. My 84-year old father was thrilled to learn about our past.

Hats off to your efforts. I would love to know more about how you did it. Thank you for documenting this part of our collective and personal history.

Rakesh Raju  
rakesh@raju.net

## The Delhi Tamils

The write up about the Tamils in Delhi by MR Narayanaswamy was an excellent one accounting vividly the realities faced by the early Tamil settlers and the present state of their second and third generation. Having lived in Delhi for around 10 years I vouchsafe the fact the Tamils have established themselves as an important group due to their honesty and hardwork. It is a fact that North Indians especially the Punjabis prefer Tamils as their tenant.

It happened to me when I first went to Delhi in 2005. The real estate owner who was a Sindhi lady, on my first meeting itself said that I can get a house easily. She said a Punjabi owner will prefer to give it to us than persons from his own community. Now a good number of Tamils are settled in Mayur Vihar Phase I, II, III where I stayed. It is a mini Mylapore with our people casually walking on the roads in veshtis. There are at least five South Indian Temples in this area.

Parantharami Mani  
F8, Krishna Kutir  
18/11, Justice Sundaram  
Road  
Mylapore, Chennai 600004

\* \* \*

The riveting article brought back a flood of memories of what may be called the 'Delhi Chalo' times, decades ago. Beginning in the late 1950s, many young graduates from Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu got selected as Assistants and Stenographers in the Central Secretariat, New Delhi, after cracking competitive examinations conducted by the UPSC. Clerks and junior stenographers were also recruited by the Staff Selection Commission much later for filling posts in Government offices in the Capital. Add to this Central Government officers like me who got posted in Delhi from other places.

Thousands of persons in this cohort (1960-90) may roughly be called the second or third generation of the earlier Tamil migrants mentioned in the article. Economically, they were better off than their predecessors. Most of them got routine promotions and retired as Under Secretary or Deputy Secretary-level officers. Some among them who came out successful in the Departmental Competitive examination for selection of Section Officers, went up the ladder faster to retire as Director or Joint Secretary.

Only a limited number of employees got Government accommodation in RK Puram, Sarojini Nagar, and other areas. The rest lived in rented houses or in housing society flats in Janakpuri, Mayur Vihar, Munirka, etc. Their children were well educated and were employed within the country or abroad. After retirement, a majority of them settled down in places like Chennai, Bengaluru, etc., where they owned houses or apartments.

Running parallel to the Tamil people's white collar migration stream of the 1960s was the major migration of the labouring class from Tamil Nadu. Due to adverse agricultural conditions and yarn scarcity, cultivators and weavers looked for pastures new. Those who had contact with earlier settlers did not mind going to far-off Delhi with their

support, to earn their living. A majority of such migrants who belonged to the backward or reserved categories were from Salem, Madurai, and Dharmapuri. Men among them took up jobs like cleaners, loaders, rag pickers, scrap collectors, etc., or ran small grocery stores, sold vegetables and fruits, or were involved in other petty trades. Skilled among them worked as electricians, plumbers, or automobile mechanics. Women migrants mostly worked as domestic maids.

All of them felt satisfied in their new roles and wished to continue in Delhi. In the course of time, some got better jobs in the organised sector. Initially, they lived in slum settlements in Karol Bagh, Moti Bagh, etc. Later, under the Slum Clearance Programme, they were shifted to resettlement colonies in Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri, etc. Their children who studied in Tamil Schools got well settled in life.

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## Website Comments

When Tamils made  
Delhi their Home,  
amid Struggle and  
Hope

(Vol. XXXV No. 14,  
November 1-15, 2025)

Beautiful description of how South Indians came to pre-Independent Delhi and adjusted to various hardships. They took care of their children and brought them up with their culture and tradition.

My father LK Murthy came to Delhi around 1930. We were born and brought up in Delhi.

I feel what you wrote is also my life. I like the minute detail of your article

V. Rohini Srivatsa  
vrohini51@gmail.com

## Road Name Apathy

Procrastination does not pay. I have been wanting to raise an issue (even prepared a draft); Ramesh C. Kumar (Distortion of a Street Name, MM Oct 16-31) beat me to it.

Inspired by the Bard who said 'A Rose by any other name . . .', this writer avers 'A Street by any other name (spelling) shall contain the same number of potholes'. So why bother? But it does bother this writer to the extent of putting pen to paper or rather finger to keyboard.

The manner in which street signs are 'prepared' (I do not know what word to use; earlier they were painted) clearly reveals that records are maintained only in the vernacular. And so, when it is time to create a new signage, presumably the concerned person in the corporation writes (or rather scribbles) the name and hands it over to the person preparing the signage.

This leads to two errors. First, error made while 'translating' Tamil to English. Secondly, error in deciphering the scribble. Let us consider the second error first. The painter or 'preparer' who didn't take the trouble to get a degree in English literature mistakes a C for G, V for U and so on. This leads to Wheatgrofts Road (Wheatcrofts Road), DSilua Road (D'Silva Road), Gaudna Mutt Road (Gaudia Mutt Road) and so on (errors since corrected).

The first error leads to spellings such as Dr. Basant Road (Dr. Besant Road), Vengatachalam Street (Venkatachalam Street), Conron Smith Road (Conran Smith Road) and Kandran Smith Lane (Conran Smith Lane; Smith must be turning in his grave). (I look forward to the day when the Road is 'renamed' Kaanraan Smith Road.) Another example is 'my' road (Wallajah Road, see pictures). Even simple names are misspelled – Adayar (Adyar), Aavadi (Avadi), etc. What takes the cake is of course Muresh Gate Road (Murray's Gate Road). Since this was highlighted in the city's newspaper, the error was fixed. (This raises the fundamental issue – How much 'clout' or influence does MM have? Not for nothing did I suggest in an earlier mail that MM be made compulsory reading for all IAS officers based in Chennai.)

An interesting sidelight is the remarkable consistency regarding the spelling of several roads bearing the same name. All these roads have an Ambal Temple whose name the wife of the Pandavas bears. These roads or rather narrow streets are all called Throwpathi Amman Koil Street.

Misspellings spill over to other areas such as addresses displayed in shop signs and even Metro signage.

How difficult is it for the Corporation to prepare a list of street names in English which is just a one-time exercise? Sadly, such issues do not seem to bother us, may be because there are other pressing issues such as potholes, stagnant rain water, mosquitos, and more. As a society, we just accept mediocrity, sloppiness, incompetence, inefficiency, etc. How sad.

Finally, and to end on a positive note, I am elated that there is at least one other person, Ramesh C. Kumar, who believes that such issues should be raised and takes the trouble to snap a few photographs and compose a letter. May his (our!) tribe increase!

B. Gautham  
137 Wallajah Road  
Chennai 600 002





### ● 3 Pages for the Music Season

# Muthuswami Dikshitar – The Madras Years

This being the 250<sup>th</sup> year of birth of Muthuswami Dikshitar the Carnatic composer, we bring extracts from an ongoing series that is being written by me in the classical arts magazine *Sruti*. This is to celebrate the December Music Season, the 250<sup>th</sup> year of Dikshitar, and the role our city played in his growth as a composer.

– Sriram V

The *Vaggeyakarula Charitramu* (VC) of Subbarama Dikshitar in the *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini* (SSP), 1904, is clear that it was the dubash Manali Muthukrishna Mudali who brought the Dikshitar family to Madras. In his critical introduction and notes to the undated and anonymous work *Sarva Deva Vilasa* (SDV), Dr V Raghavan has written based on his independent research that Muthukrishna Mudali died in 1792. This helps us establish that the Dikshitar family moved to Madras prior to this year. Even if we assume that the shift happened only that year, we can see that Muthuswami Dikshitar would have been around 17, and his youngest brother, Balaswami, just six. After Muthukrishna

Mudali's passing, his son Venkatakrishna aka Chinnayya Mudali took over the administration of the estates and patronage of musicians. From the fact that Ramaswami Dikshitar uses the mudra Venkatakrishna in several of his songs and has none dedicated to Muthukrishna Mudali, we can assume that the majority of the years in Manali patronage were with the son and not the father.

Where did the Dikshitar live while in Madras? The VC gives no clues. Further details emerge from Bharanidharan's book *Dikshitar Padiya Thiruttalanga* (Kalaignan Pathippagam, 1988). This was the compilation of a series he wrote under the same title in the 1970s for *Ananda Vikatan*. As part of his research, Bharanidharan met with Ramakrishna Mudaliar, a descendant of the Manali family and the latter confirmed to him that the Dikshitar family was accommodated at No 63, Sannidhi Street, Tiruvottriyur.

This seems logical given that that village had a temple for Shiva that was in many ways similar to Tiruvarur. Sundaramurthy Nayanar, a subject of one of Muthuswami Dikshitar's com-



Entrance to the Thyagesa sanctum, Tiruvottriyur.

positions (*Sundaramurtim Ashrayami*, Takka/Rupaka) was closely associated with both shrines, having a consort at each with Lord Shiva playing a key role in the respective unions. The main deity in both places is an anthill and the processional icon is Tyagesa. The Dikshitar may have therefore opted to stay at Tiruvottriyur. Outside of the SSP is the kriti *Adipuriswaram* (Arabhi/Adi), attributed to Muthuswami Dikshitar, dedicated to the deity at this shrine. It however suffers from prosodical weaknesses.

We also know for sure of two other locations that the Manali family was associated with and which the Dikshitar must have visited. The details of the first are from Bharanidharan. He went to Manali as part of his quest and there at one end of Tiruvalluvar Salai First Street, he was taken to a vast compound in which a ruined building and a derelict swimming pool replete with ornate tiles stood. This was *Meddai Thottam*, the Manali residence of the Mudaliars. Today all of this has vanished without a trace. The other was *Manali House* on Govindappa Naicken Street. A double-storied classical building with an arched frontage, this

survived till the 2000s and was then demolished to make way for a parking lot.

Reverting to the SDV, we read of how the dubashes of that era had musicians and dancers in their retinue. The Dikshitar were clearly the Manali Mudali family's musicians. But there were other itinerant scholars and musicians who called and were

As per the first, given in the VC, realising that the visitor had with him a manuscript of the CDP and other works, Venkatakrishna Mudaliar expressed a desire to test if the patron was worthy of this. He gave a murchana in a raga, and asked for it to be identified. Ramaswami Dikshitar immediately composed a pada,

● by  
Sriram V

rewarded after a test of their abilities. We know that when Arunachala Kavi completed his *Rama Natakam*, Muthukrishna Mudali was one of the patrons he called on to present his work. That was long before the Dikshitar came here. He was richly compensated. Likewise, another visitor was Govinda Dikshita, a great-grandson of the 17<sup>th</sup> century scholar Venkatamakthin whose *Chaturdandi Prakasika* (CDP) was a work of importance for Ramaswami Dikshitar. Subbarama Dikshitar gives two conflicting versions of what happened next.

*Nannu Parikshinchanela* in that raga, which was Tanukirti, incorporated the murchana in it and making it out as if Venkatakrishna Mudaliar had composed it, got his sons Chinnaswami and Balaswami to perform it.

The other version, given under the section of Tanukirti in the SSP, has it that it was Ramaswami Dikshitar who got Venkatakrishna Mudaliar to request for the treatises. And when challenged, Mudaliar, who in this account "was a scholar in musical literature and other branches of knowledge," composed this

pada and Ramaswami Dikshitar, along with Chinnaswami and Balaswami, performed it.

The outcome was the same however – Govinda Dikshita was delighted. He recognised that the composer (whoever it was) was from the Venkatamakhi tradition and parted with the treatises. In later years, these would become the mainstay of Muthuswami Dikshitar's composing style and also be the musical wealth of the Dikshitar family. It is interesting to note that Muthuswami Dikshitar had no role to play in this incident.

Another day, another visitor, equally distinguished. The SDV says that Sonti Venkataramanayya, son of Sonti Venkatasubba was escorted on an elephant by the Dubash Kalingaraya to a sadas in Tirunirmalai. We all know that Venkataramanayya was the guru of Tyagaraja. His father too seems to have been a familiar figure in Madras circles. And he too called on Manali Venkatakrishna Mudali. On this occasion, Venkasubba played gita and tanam in Takka raga and said it was his family property. This time, the reply came from young Balaswami who immediately sang the piece *Aramajha Aparadha* (attributed to Venkatamakthin in the SSP) in the same raga, in

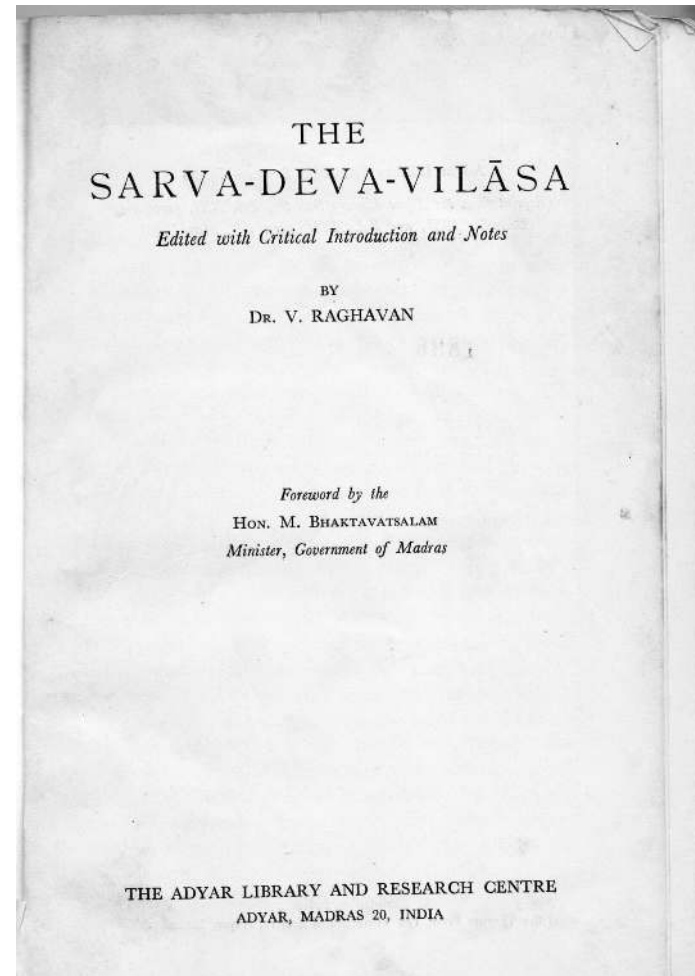
Jhampa Tala. He was rewarded with a pearl necklace and pair of shawls. The composition is given in the SSP.

The association with Venkatakrishna Mudali was musically very propitious. It was he who arranged for an Englishman to teach young Balaswami the fiddle. Soon the latter had become an expert and pleased his patron and other connoisseurs by performing English and Indian music on it. Could this statement, as given in the VC in the portion pertaining to Balaswami's life, hold the secret to Muthuswami Dikshitar's Nottuswara sahi-tyam-s?

Both Ramaswami Dikshitar and Venkatakrishna Mudali died the same year – 1817. Their association seems to have been very close, and apart from using his patron's name as mudra, Ramaswami Dikshitar also honoured him with what is today recognised as the longest composition in Carnatic Music – a 108 ragatalamalika. *Natakadi Vidyala*, available in the SSP and having only 60 ragas and talas is said to be this piece, with several sections missing. In what is printed too, among the talas, the details of five are not available and Subbarama Dikshitar says they need to be sung as cycles of Adi Tala. What is not clear is whether there were 48 other ragas in this composition or whether it did end the way it does now. A more recent query that has been raised by Dr RS Jayalakshmi is whether this ragatalamalika is entirely different from the 108 ragatalamalika that Subbarama Dikshitar mentions as being composed by Ramaswami Dikshitar on his patron. Perhaps this is another and restricted to just sixty ragas and talas. This will remain a puzzle for all time to come.

Venkatakrishna Mudali showed Ramaswami Dikshitar with gold for the 108 ragatalamalika. While the father was thus being busy in the Mudaliar retinue, his eldest son was not idle. Subbarama Dikshitar writes that by the age of sixteen, Muthuswami Dikshitar had completed the learning of "veda, kavya, nataka, alankara, Kaumudi, jyotisha sastra, mantrasastra, tantra and commentaries of music." This means that even when the family moved to Madras, Muthuswami Dikshitar was ripe for greater achievements.

He also seems to have been married by the time he moved to Madras with his parents. Intriguingly, Dikshitar had two living wives. This can only be



The Sarva Deva Vilasa.

indirectly gleaned from the SSP. Bharanidharan has explanations for this but does not cite sources. The first marriage he says was finalised very early, but Muthuswami Dikshitar did not show any interest in conjugal life, filled as his hours were with learning. His parents felt that this indifference was due to the wife being dark and unattractive. And so he was married again, with possibly the same results.

It is very doubtful if such an explanation holds water, apart from the fundamental indifference to married life that is. Dikshitar, if indeed he was a realised soul, and a Devi upasaka, could have never been disappointed by looks. And later in life, he seems to have been above prejudice when it came to teaching women of the Devadasi order. Could such a person have been swayed by more mortal considerations? We need not add to the speculation on what led to his two marriages. Suffice it to say that he had two living wives.

Life in Madras may have continued its peaceful course had not yet another distinguished visitor come calling. This was Chidambaranatha Yogi and he had come to the Manali household enroute to Varanasi. Subbarama Dikshitar says he stayed

in Manali for a few days, which indicates that acquaintance with the Dikshitar family was fleeting at this stage. He was pleased with the devotion of Muthuswami Dikshitar and initiated him into the Srividya Mahamantra. Hereafter, Dikshitar would become a follower of the Srividya cult, with the Srichakra being an important element in his puja. This still survives as a Meru icon, along with an idol of the Goddess, another of Vallabha Ganapati and a Thanjavur portrait of Lord Subrahmanya on a peacock and accompanied by consorts. They are all with Subbarama Dikshitar's descendants.

But Chidambaranatha Yogi was not just satisfied with this. He desired that Muthuswami Dikshitar accompany him to Varanasi, a journey fraught with many risks and no guarantee of a return to Madras.

(Dikshitar journeyed forth to Varanasi from Madras with his Guru and returned after five years in 1799. He then embarked on his career as a composer, beginning with songs at Tiruttani. He seems to have left Madras for Tiruvannur in 1802 or so. A life of remarkable amount of travel and music, ended at Ettayapuram in 1835 – Sriram V)



Muthuswami Dikshitar. Painting by S. Rajam.



Bharanidharan's (TS Sridhar) book on Dikshitar that offers new information on his Madras years.



# Celebrating Chitra Visweswaran at 75 – Dance Unbound

Milestone birthdays often become points of reflection for artists, moments to assess what has been built and what still urges to be created. For Chitra Visweswaran, one of India's most influential and intellectually rigorous Bharatanatyam artists, her 75th year is not a retrospective curtain call. Instead, it is a vibrant, searching, celebration of a practice that continues to evolve with clarity, courage, and curiosity.

*Dance Unbound*, comprising the exhibition *What Anchored Me Made Me Fly* and the performance *Panchali*, offered audiences an intimate encounter with the artist's world: her memories, tools, questions, and the restless imagination that has defined her journey. The event was not simply a tribute; it was an unfolding, a way of stepping into the texture of a life shaped by discipline and devotion, yet always reaching for new interpretations.



Chitra Visweswaran.

black-and-white photographs. They captured the dancer not in grand poses but in moments of transition – the micro-pauses that define breath, intention, and the quiet intelligence behind movement. These were not decorative images; they were evidence of process. They revealed how a dancer thinks with the body, how gesture becomes text.

truth, and the ethical responsibility of performance.

Another space displayed costume fragments and jewellery. Some pieces were worn and frayed, accompanied by brief stories about how they shaped or were shaped by the choreography. Rather than presenting them as relics, the exhibition positioned them as tools, objects that influence movement, weight, balance, and silhouette. These displays illuminated her sensitivity to how material culture interacts with dance vocabulary.

Piecing together the exhibition felt like entering an active studio rather than a memorial archive. Sound installations featuring interviews, reflections

being featured in covers of several magazines. The final wall was perhaps the most poignant, bridging the past and the future, where her life's work, her *bani*, was given a name "Vichitra Bani" thus giving us a legacy to follow. This closed the loop: even at 75, Chitra Visweswaran's creative engine remains restless and alive. *What Anchored Me Made Me Fly* ultimately framed her career not as a series of finished works but as an ongoing inquiry, one that continues to expand.

*Panchali* was a retelling rooted in power, vulnerability, and poetic imagination. If the exhibition gave us the scaffolding of the artist, *Panchali* gave us her dramatic heart. The perfor-



Anita Ratnam performing at the exhibition.

as solitary and as exposed – a visual metaphor for her shifting agency. The stage became a

● by  
**Sukanya Ravindhar & Shreya Nagarajan Singh**  
Pics: BRS Sreenag, Sathya, and Iyappan

The exhibition at Alliance Francaise, was curated by Bhooma Padmanabhan. The title perfectly encapsulated the forces shaping Chitra Visweswaran's artistic philosophy. Anchors – lineage, training, mentors, practice, ground her. But these very anchors also launched her into new terrain. This duality guided the curatorial approach, which sidestepped linear biography in favour of a constellation-like display of images, objects, notes, and video fragments.

The first gallery introduced the visitor to a series of striking

The pedagogy-focused section of the exhibition was perhaps its emotional centre. Photographs of teaching moments captured intimate exchanges: a hand adjusting a mudra, a quiet correction of footwork, a shared glance of recognition, between teacher and student. These images underscored how Visweswaran's legacy is not simply housed in her performances but lives in the bodies of the many dancers she has guided. Archival video of performances further demonstrated her clarity as a teacher, her insistence on integrity of line, emotional



A scene from Panchali.

from collaborators, and excerpts from reviews added layers of context. They reminded viewers that an artist's journey is shaped by communities of musicians, designers, critics, institutions, and, crucially, students.

A particularly compelling corner displayed press clippings over the years and her

mance re-centered Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*, not as a distant epic heroine but as a woman negotiating humiliation, desire, rage, and dignity within patriarchal and political systems. The choreography held the tension between classicism and contemporary resonance, making the piece both timeless and urgent.

Chitra Visweswaran's deep grounding in Bharatanatyam technique guided *Panchali* – clean lines, rich abhinaya, and intricate rhythmic phrasing. Yet the choreography expanded beyond tradition, incorporating theatrical stillness, spatial asymmetry, and gestures shaped by psychological nuance rather than narrative literalness. This layering created a Draupadi who was both myth and woman – an archetype and an intimate self.

Lighting and costume extended the dramaturgy. Rather than imitating period attire, the design abstracted certain elements, allowing for expressive freedom. Pools of light framed Draupadi alternately

psychological arena: a place where emotion transformed into architecture.

This tension echoed Chitra Visweswaran's long-standing interest in reinterpreting classical material not by dismantling its grammar but by excavating its emotional and ethical depths. In *Panchali*, technique served thought; thought served emotion; emotion served truth. The performance was directed by Sukanya Ravindhar and Anusuya Ghosh Banerjee and performed by four generations of students of Chitra Visweswaran. It was staged at Kalakshetra on October 12, Chitra Visweswaran's 75th birthday.

Practice, pedagogy, and translation are the triad of Chitra Visweswaran's legacy. Throughout *Dance Unbound*, one theme emerged consistently: the inseparability of practice and pedagogy. Chitra Visweswaran has shaped generations of dancers through her disciplined, intellectually



Sudharani Raghupathy, Chitra Visweswaran, Shobana, Thota Tharani and Sukanya Ravindhar at the inauguration of the exhibition.

(Continued on page 7)

# Recalling A Vellayan

Arunachalam Vellayan (72 years) belonged to the fourth generation of the Murugappa Group. Having worked his way up, he ended up as chairman of the group in 2009.

The large Murugappa family has been lucky in finding capable family members to run the group among themselves. They attract and hire professionals, but the head of the group is always from the family. It always takes care to choose the family member who is most competent for the job.

Vellayan was more than equipped to head the group with his many qualifications, experience and leadership qualities. During his tenure as chairman, the Group entered a period of rapid expansion and organisational strengthening that helped shape it into one of India's most respected business conglomerates, says the *Times of India*.

Known for his calm authority and long-term outlook, Vellayan brought to the Group what many describe as a "strategic lens rare even among business leaders".

"He had a high level of business acumen and a strong grasp of international developments."

He did his schooling at Doon School, away from home. When I asked him once why the family sent their children to the North to study, he said it was to make sure the children got proficient in Hindi, as the group had extensive activities in the North. "The problems my father faced when he was the president of FICCI was that all the Marwaris were talking in

● by Sushila Ravindranath

Hindi and he couldn't understand. So, early on, he decided that if one had to run a national business, one had to know Hindi," he says.

Vellayan had a bachelor's degree in commerce from Shri Ram College of Commerce, in Delhi and a Diploma in Industrial Administration from Aston, UK. "He also received a Master's in Business Studies from the University of Warwick Business School and a Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) conferred by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University."

Apart from being the Chairman of the Indian Institute of

Management, Kozhikode, he was an Independent Director in Kanoria Chemicals & Industries.

After his earlier training, he worked extensively in the group's fertiliser business. Later as head of the group he was fully involved in general management, and financial planning. Vellayan excelled in anything he did. He constantly travelled and never thought of the Murugappa group as restricted to the South. He expanded business across the country. Mergers and acquisitions became a key part of the Murugappa Group's strategy under his leadership. Size was important to him.

Vellayan said in an interview, "If you are big enough, you get a fair share of voice." He described how they built up the fertiliser business. "By sheer size, we are creating inter-dependence in the economy. As the economy grows, we grow."

One of the companies he took over in Gujarat, Sabero Organics (2011), became the subject of an insider trading investigation by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in 2015, which led to Vellayan stepping down as chairman. When I met him

then he was his normal cool self and was sure that nothing will come out of this accusation. He was proved right. He was totally exonerated and took over as chairman again. Running an ethical business was important to him.

Vellayan played a pivotal role in steering the Group's growth. Under his leadership, revenues nearly doubled – from Rs. 15,907 crore in 2008-09 to Rs. 30,023 crore in 2016-17 – through a mix of organic expansion and acquisitions. His M&A strategy was focused on acquiring and turning around distressed companies.

For all his success he completely remained low key and never projected himself. Vellayan will be remembered as one of the most respected businessmen of his generation.



A Vellayan. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

As the press release from the Murugappa family says "Mr. Vellayan dedicated several decades to the Group, providing strategic direction across its diversified businesses. His vision, integrity, and long-term approach to value-creation helped strengthen and expand the Group, contributing significantly to its reputation as one of India's most respected conglomerates."

## Celebrating Chitra Visweswaran at 75 – Dance Unbound

(Continued from page 6)

engaged method of teaching. In the context of the exhibition and performance, this became evident not only in the archival material but also in the

presence of younger artists who reflected her influence. Their clarity of technique and freshness of interpretation suggested a lineage built not on imitation but on inquiry.

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– THE EDITOR

This is perhaps the most significant thread in her legacy: a commitment to translating classical idioms for the present without diluting their rigour. Her dancers learn both the grammar and the spirit of the form. They inherit tools, not templates.

*Dance Unbound* illuminated this beautifully. The exhibition offered the blueprint; *Panchali* demonstrated the architecture.

A celebration of a senior artist often risks drifting into nostalgia or turning the artist into an unreachable icon. *Dance Unbound* avoided both. It centred curiosity over sentiment, making clear that Chitra Visweswaran's artistic journey is still unfolding. The event invited audiences to reflect on the ecosystem of classical dance, how it relies on mentorship, experimentation, critical engagement, and structures of support.

For many viewers, the event prompted deeper questions: What does it mean to sustain a practice for seven decades? What must be preserved, and what must evolve? How do dancers carry forward the vision of their teachers while forging paths of their own?

In this sense, the celebration was not only for Chitra



Chitra with her husband R. Visweswaran.

Visweswaran but also for the community that continues to uphold, challenge, and reimagine the classical arts.

Leaving the event, the audience carried with them the intertwined images of *What Anchored Me Made Me Fly* and *Panchali* – the candid rehearsal notes, the textured soundscape, the intense emotional landscapes, the lines of students absorbing and transforming knowledge. Together, they offered a portrait of an artist who has spent her life negotiating between discipline and imagination, tradition and innovation, anchoring and flight.

At 75, Chitra Visweswaran stands not at a culmination but at a threshold, still questioning, still creating, still finding new ways to make dance a language capacious enough to hold memory, myth, critique, and desire.

*Dance Unbound* was ultimately a reminder that legacy is not something inherited passively; it is something lived, shaped, and continually expanded. In celebrating her, we celebrate the enduring and ever-evolving possibilities of the classical arts themselves.



# Ross, Tamilselvi: Chennai's rowing stars in the making

The comparison is improper, one might say, but still as opposed to another competitive water sport sailing, the development of talent in rowing sport, popular since many decades in Tamil Nadu – before sailing – has been rather slow, if not really feeble. In fact, a few potential talents in rowing sport have also taken seriously to sailing, which has been steadily developing since 2010 backed by the emergence of young talents in Chennai.

The rowing sport too has been seeing the rise of a few promising talents. Two of them showing good promise are Chennai's Tamilselvi and Ross Meril. Their talent came to the

fore in the Khelo India Games, according to Rowing Federation of India (RFI) official Balaji Mardappa.

Talking to *Madras Musings*, Ross, daughter of a fisherman, narrated her rowing journey. Says the rower, "I started in this sport in 2019 when I was in Class 11. My hometown is Kanyakumari. I came to Chennai to attend trials for selection to Khelo India Games. I was selected along with a few others, based on my height and weight. I attended a three-day physical assessment camp and got selected for the Khelo India selection camp. That's how I happened to take to rowing seriously."

Ross has now been in rowing sport for six years. And, after the COVID pandemic lockdown, in 2022 she bagged her first medal at the national level, which spurred her to develop a passion for competitive rowing, with high motivation from coach and senior administrator in this sport Balaji.

"She is very dedicated. We are confident that she, along with the other promising rower Tamilselvi, will make it to the forthcoming National championships camp," says Balaji,

● by  
**V. Venkataramana**

himself a rower and also joint secretary of Tamil Nadu Olympic Association (TNOA). Balaji has been coaching Ross after her regular coach left. Pointing out that a strong point of Ross and Tamilselvi is their great dedication to the sport, Balaji says "if everything goes as we see, Ross and Tamilselvi can also be expected to represent India in Asian rowing championships next year." I only wish that some corporate entity comes forward to adopt talents like Ross and Tamilselvi who are willing to train hard and succeed against all odds.

In fact, recently IIS had come forward to tie-up with Rowing Federation of India (RFI) to support the development of women's rowing in the country. We hope Ross and Tamilselvi also are taken into that, or the new rowing centre which is coming up at Bellary in Karnataka," Balaji says.

Narrating her progress in big competitions, Ross says "So far, I have won eight national medals and three National Games Medals. I have also had the honour of representing India in the rowing World Cup competition in Poznan-Poland, the 19th Asian Games in China, the Asian championships in Thailand and the World University championships in the Netherlands."

Twenty-two-year old S. Tamilselvi, who is pursuing Master's Degree in Sport Psychology, has been in rowing sports since 2018. Like Ross, Tamilselvi was also picked for selection to compete in Khelo India Games. She was selected, and then began her love for this tough sport. "It soon turned into passion. Initially it was tough, but every session on the water made me feel stronger and more connected to rowing," she explains, adding that her coach and Tamil Nadu Amateur Rowing Association (TARA), noticing

her potential, had constantly motivated her.

Tamilselvi's first national competition in rowing was in 2019. Then she progressed further, recovering from a big setback of compression fracture in her spinal cord. "After two months of rehabilitation, and another month of good training, I came back through the Senior national championships in 2022. I won my first medal – a bronze. And overcoming a few back problems again, I went on to win eight national medals, two National Games medals and two All India University medals. Another high point in my career was representing India at the World University Games in 2024," she recalls.

Tamilselvi attributes the better development of sailing sport vis-a-vis rowing to the fact that Chennai being a coastal city has access to the sea and yacht clubs, therefore better infrastructure plus greater public awareness about sailing. "One of the biggest challenges the rowing sport development faces in Tamil Nadu is lack of proper facilities. The fact that we train on 500 metre lakes in Tamil Nadu limits our ability to simulate real race conditions while training," Tamilselvi explains.



Tamilselvi (left) and Ross in the boat.

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