

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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The city is going through a plethora of improvements – here a pedestrian plaza, there a pothole free road and a park under a flyover someplace else. Added to this is the spate of announcements – flyovers and name change of streets being the most visible among them. All of this is an indication that the electoral code of conduct will kick in soon. If you want anything done by the authorities, now is your opportunity. You may at worst get an assurance of action and at best you may find action taken. The problem is, that all of these activities, these massive and miniscule civic projects, are only keeping in mind visibility. There are no long term and sustainable solutions in sight for the city's perennial problems. Take for instance the issue of erratic drains and rising

road levels. We are yet to find a lasting solution to these twin menaces that have left countless residential localities subject to flooding. The city is crying out for an area-by-area study of this issue and a lasting solution that demands political will and a massive financial outlay. Once

● by **Sriram V.**

this is done there need be no further piecemeal fixes but then, that may not be an ideal answer given the way politics works in our country.

We next come to the traffic problem. Our city administration has only one answer – widen roads, sacrifice sidewalks and build flyovers. All this panders

only to the transit and therefore vehicle population. What happens to local residents? Why should they accept a less-than-ideal quality of life to allow cars and two-wheelers to get faster to their destination? Are the people in these areas of lesser importance? With the CMRL rapidly forging ahead and much work being done with other means of public transport, the city authorities need to focus on getting commuters to use public transport to a greater degree and therefore free up road space. Simply widening roads and constructing flyovers is hardly a sustainable solution.

Let us now consider the rampant permits being given to construct high-rise just about anywhere. Time and again the

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The city gets a new pedestrian plaza

The makeover of one of the most happening commercial spaces in our city, Khader Nawaz Khan Road with the creation of a pedestrian plaza is complete. The project, which was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister earlier this month was undertaken under the Complete Streets programme and is the second of its kind, following the T Nagar plaza which was inaugurated in 2019. While the excitement is palpable amongst the many businesses that dot the area that

this would attract more foot-falls, not everyone shares the enthusiasm, as is evidenced by the troubles faced by residents in the vicinity.

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

As has been mentioned in these columns on the subject earlier (MM Oct 16-31, 2023), that a well-designed and maintained pedestrian plaza can boost the local economy and

also act as an incentive for community building is undeniable. However, given the general civic apathy and the tendency to treat public infrastructure of all kinds as private property, this is easier said than done. There were reports of shopkeepers converting the pedestrian space into private parking lots even before the plaza was made fully functional. Of course, it has to be mentioned that this is a phenomenon that is rampant all over the city and not unique to

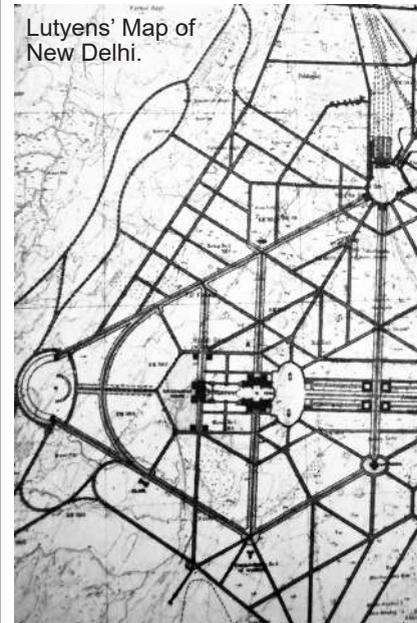
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HERITAGE WATCH

A Little Bit of Lutyens

Last week, Sir Edwin Lutyens was all in the news, around 81 years after he died. His bust was removed from the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a means of cleansing us of our colonial past – or so it was claimed. In his place will be C Rajagopalachari aka Rajaji, one of the greatest leaders India had. Which is all to the good. In the defence of Lutyens' banishment, it was cited that no other building has a statue of its architect and the man was a racist anyway. That does not detract from his genius and the great building and city he designed for us to delight in.

Madras too had its Lutyens connect. He did not like the city, or its people, which was understandable given



that his wife was here all the time in an admiration for J Krishnamurti that bordered on obsession, leading to the neglect of her family. But he did design a plaque for the Madras Club in memory of its members who died in WWI. That was when the Club resided at what became *Express Estates*. From there the plaque travelled with the Club and

came to rest in the present premises. It still is on the club wall. And we copied his design of New Delhi, scaled it down, and called it T'Nagar. We present maps of both to establish this claim.



Our T'Nagar.

With An Eye on Optics

(Continued from page 1)

Government itself is the culprit, for it has announced mega building projects in core congested areas that are already crying out for open space. Kuralagam is a classic example, as is the construction of Central Plaza on which work has already begun. We then hear of Island Grounds being eyed. What do we then have left? And couple this with repeated failures by the authorities to rein in rogue builders who construct on just about any space, including lakes. Does it require judicial intervention each time? If so, why not simply adopt a policy that all real estate projects will need High Court clearance?

If we take up traffic discipline next, how do we impose it on the everyday road user when politicians and government servants are the biggest

violators? Does our police have the wherewithal to fine these rogue vehicles that go around with the arrogance of being above the law? Lastly, there is city beautification, which is always only cosmetic and never structural. To what purpose a war on posters when the party in power is the greatest violator? To what end pedestrian plazas if the neighbourhood must bear the brunt of a haphazard car parking? To what conclusion do we come on garbage handling if segregation at source cannot be implemented and mere collection of refuse, to be dumped elsewhere, is continued forever? And finally, how does rainwater harvesting help if most of the larger projects do not implement it?

A party that is elected needs to ponder over the long term, if it intends to continue in power in the long run.

The city gets a new pedestrian plaza

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the space. On the topic of parking space itself, already there are complaints of it being grossly inadequate to handle the volume of traffic, with the stretch itself allowing only for dropping points. A resident this writer spoke to states that there were requests made to reduce the pavement size and allow one side for parking, which was not addressed. The civic body has promised a smart parking plan and a survey to identify spaces that could be used for parking in the vicinity. It is also worthy of mention that a multi-level parking for the neighborhood, announced in 2024 has not yet taken off.

The stretch has been made one-way, with vehicular traffic being allowed only towards Uthamar Gandhi Salai. It can be said with reasonable certainty that no stretch is truly treated as one-way in our city, as one can witness violations every single day in one part or the other. However, it becomes even more essential that one-way arrangement is strictly enforced in this stretch, where the carriageway has been reduced to allow for the wide pavement space. This one-way arrangement has meant a spillover of traffic on to the surrounding streets, throwing life out of gear for their residents. Complaints of haphazard parking outside residences, sometimes locking

the inhabitants out of their own homes, not to mention the constant honking, has led to disruption of peace in the neighbourhood. Adding to the chaos is the fact that the makeover of the stretch is attracting crowds (read Insta reel makers) well unto the late hours of day, with some eateries being open even past midnight.

In a city where facilities for pedestrians are well, mostly pedestrian, dedicated spaces such as these are a worthy attempt at providing the public a comfortable experience, though they cannot obviate the need for an urgent overhaul of our pedestrian infrastructure. It is however essential that there is a comprehensive plan and strict implementation in place to ensure the real purpose behind it is not lost. We learn that tenders for operating around 10 kiosks are likely to be called for eateries and other wares. Without effective monitoring and enforcement in place, it is only a matter of time before the wide pavements attract unauthorized road-side establishments, as has been evidenced by the T Nagar plaza experience. It is also imperative that there is a constant feedback mechanism for all the stakeholders, especially the residents (many of whom have been around even before the stretch transformed into its current avatar) so that their concerns are effectively addressed.

One for the Archive

Perhaps Greatest Writer (PGW) had a character in his novels who avoided old schoolboy reunions like the plague. The reason he gave was that the last schoolmate he met, though a few years junior, had no teeth and a white beard, and destroyed the image that the PGW character had formed of himself being a young man on the threshold of life. MMM is of the same view not because he fancies himself as a young man but because you never know what your old schoolmate has turned into.

This aspect was brought home rather forcefully to MMM a couple of weeks ago when a classmate of his asked if he could (re)introduce another former classmate to MMM. In a mistaken moment of sentiment MMM agreed and the connections were re-established via whatsapp. After the exchange of a couple of messages MMM got onto other things. But not so the former classmate – within a few hours he had managed to forward missives of many kinds – vid-

instruction to desist from forwarding unwanted messages. And why had it vanished? Because said the friend, he had turned on the feature of disappearing messages. That way he said, he did not store unwanted material on his phone, such as forwards from friends and family! Clearly he did not realise he was part of the same tribe that keeps relentlessly forwarding junk to others.

Further forwards have thankfully stopped but MMM is keeping an eye. At the earliest sign of any further activity of this kind, this friend will be archived permanently. This is a very useful feature in whatsapp – threads archived will not pop up each time there is an update and the sender does not realise that their messages are forever in a limbo. A further extreme measure is blocking the sender.

Singing Away to Oblivion

Talking about blocking senders, has *The Man from*

shortage of memory for software upgrades etc. MMM had to spend time in deleting all of the messages. But even that he was willing to suffer for the sake of the musician who was a genial soul. But came a day when the disciple discovered the joys of emojis and began sending them ad nauseum to everyone. One day it would be a heart, another day a clap and a third day it would be a namaste. But when kissing emojis began making their appearance MMM decided to draw the line. He called the musician and after having spent some time explaining what an emoji was (thankfully he did not have to explain what a kiss was), asked the musician if he could be spared these daily updates.

There was a long silence at the other end. MMM wondered if the musician was offended and was willing to even accept that as long as the nuisance ceased. There was then the sound of a hurried confabulation and the musician once again spoke up. The

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

eos on cinema, political diatribes against those whom he despises and then paeans to his favoured leader. Then came some off-colour jokes, the kind that you laughed at when you were sixteen or so. MMM ignored the flood for the nonce.

But next morning, at 4 am there was the classmate sending a cheery good morning with some flowers attached. This was followed by some corporate report that dealt with India's growth prospects and how the poppet valve industry could benefit. MMM decided enough was enough. And so he replied to the friend asking him to desist as MMM was not interested in any forward of any kind. To this there was no response though MMM could see from the status that the friend was online indeed. There was silence for the rest of the day and MMM assumed that the nuisance had ceased. But he was mistaken. The next morning the phone buzzed again and there was a good morning greeting accompanied by the visual of a deity.

This time MMM was not going to take it lying down. But before that he scrolled up the message history to find that all the previous messages had vanished. And so MMM repeated his request that no further forwards be sent. An apology came in promptly. MMM's earlier message had vanished said the friend and so he had forgotten MMM's

Madras Musings ever told you about this musician who got onto MMM's list of contacts and therefore automatically assumed that MMM would be delighted to receive daily updates from him? This happened a few years ago when whatsapp was in its infancy and was all the rage. This musician had built up quite a following and most of that group was on his WhatsApp list of contacts. Each morning, the man would send a recording – it could be a song, a snippet of a raga exploration and occasionally a thought or two.

MMM tolerated all of it for a while and then began sending messages to the musician that he (MMM) would like to be removed from the list of faithful being blessed each morning with uplifting musical thoughts. None of these messages were acknowledged because the musician in question was not operating the WhatsApp – it had been outsourced to a disciple and rather in the manner of a Kremlin phone, which allegedly had no earpiece, this disciple only sent messages and never bothered with the responses. His not to reason why, etc, as the poem goes.

There was no option but to bear it. Those were days when these audio messages automatically downloaded and occupied memory space, or at least MMM had no idea as to how to prevent this and so his phone began warning him of

problem he explained was that he and his disciple knew only how to send out these updates. The rest of the system was set up by yet another disciple who was now in the United States and so he (the musician) had no idea about how to remove one person from the broadcast. Could MMM please not mind if the messages continued to come?

To this MMM replied that he had a better solution – something that could be managed from his end, but which would necessitate him and the musician conversing only over the old land line in future. That was called blocking said MMM. The musician was most thankful. He was blocked and remains so on MMM's phone till date. And the few conversations that MMM has had with the musician since have been over the landline.

Tailpiece

Do you have an ancestor who played a role in Tamil cinema? If so, be of good cheer – *The Man from Madras Musings* is happy to tell you that you need to merely write a letter to this effect to the Greater Chennai Corporation and they will immediately name a street after your ancestor. Such is Chennai. It may as well be renamed Chollywood.

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Renaming roads

The Greater Chennai Corporation has renamed three Streets in Chennai after three great music personalities such as Tiruchi Loganathan, Sirkazhi Govindarajan and MS Viswanathan.

While this may be an honour conferred upon them, is this act really an honour? Considering the state of various roads in Chennai, one does not think so. With roads riddled with potholes, littered with garbage and with no smooth surface to ride on, naming roads/streets after personalities makes no sense. It is just like installing statues of leaders and allow them to bear the brunt the fury of the nature and remember to wash and give a fresh coat of paint to them only on birth/death anniversaries. If someone refers to the roads as one of the worst and unfit to travel, it badly reflects on the personalities as the roads are named after them.

It is, therefore, better not to tinker with the names of the streets/roads and thus insulate the names from sully.

The best tribute to the personalities, however, shall be to conduct music or such other programmes annually.

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Website Comments

When Tamils made Delhi their Home, amid Struggle and Hope

(Vol. XXXV No. 21, February 16-28, 2026)

What an amazing and accurate account of the lives of Tamils of Delhi in the 1960s and 70s ! It was nostalgic – I felt Swamy was chronicling my own history! I wish he had included Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar in the list of greats who performed in those days – he actually gave a scintillating concert in the Lodi Road branch of DTEA School, and the ‘Thaye Yasoda’ in that concert is still fondly recalled when my mates and I reminisce those happy, if financially very meagre, days. And yes, not only do present day Tamil kids speak Hindi fluently, they are no more the meek lot we were, many of them have local northies for breakfast when it comes to arguments and abuses!

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As a 72 yr old Madrasi brought up in Delhi, I could relate to every word that is articulated so lucidly by the author M K Narayanswamy.

Kudos to his in-depth research, photos, sequencing & flow of his musings. A fellow Palghat man like me could hear him speak in typical Tamizhalam.

My wife's book, *The North Indian Madrasi* (Notion Publications) is a hilarious story of a Tamilian-Punjabi family set in the 1980s, in Delhi.

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She resurrected Table Tennis in TN

(Vol. XXXV No. 8, August 1-15, 2025)

Well said without them no district players could have reached the national level. They paved the way where all districts had a chance to conduct state ranking tournaments. It was only because of Mrs. Tara Murali and Mr. Lakshmanan, players grew interest towards table tennis those days. Not to miss, Diwakar. Thank you for keeping me posted.

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Love, Actually... Begins with a Little Planning

Love, like good idli batter, needs advance preparation. Leave it till the last minute and you may still manage something edible – but it won't quite rise to the occasion.

January may feel too early to talk about Valentine's Day, but February was all about it. In Chennai, romance has learned to coexist with packed weekends, family lunches that stretch into evenings, and the eternal question: "Shall we go out or stay in?" Those who plan early usually win.

Nothing charms quite like someone who says, with calm confidence, "I've already booked a table." Preferably at a place meant for lingering bites, unhurried conversations, and those comfortable silences where neither person feels the need to fill the space. Love, after all, is in the details.

The Shape We All Recognise

We see the heart everywhere in February – on cards, boxes, bakery windows – but rarely pause to ask why love looks the way it does. Historians, being delightfully indecisive, offer several theories.

Some trace it to ivy leaves, long associated with fidelity. Others believe it echoes parts of the human anatomy best left to imagination. One of the more curious theories points to silphium, a now-extinct plant used by the ancient Greeks and Romans as medicine, seasoning, and an early form of birth control. Coins from the period show its seed pod – strikingly heart-shaped.

By the Renaissance, the heart had found its way into religious art, playing cards, and love poetry. By the 18th and 19th centuries, it had settled comfortably into Valentine's cards, where it continues to perform faithfully.

From Fields to Feelings

Valentine's Day did not begin with chocolates. Its roots lie in Lupercalia, an ancient Roman

festival celebrating fertility and renewal. Over centuries, the rituals softened, the meanings shifted, and the day slowly transformed into what we now recognise – a quieter celebration of companionship.

Chennai Love, Our Way

Love here is often understated. It is shared *sundal* on Marina, extra chutney quietly pushed across the table, waiting patiently while someone finishes a story halfway through. It is walking side by side without rushing, arguing mildly about which coffee tastes better, and agreeing to disagree.

As the saying goes, love does not consist of gazing at each other, but of looking together in the same direction – preferably towards dessert.

Absence sharpens love; presence strengthens it. True love never grows old; it simply becomes more efficient.

Still Speaking in Symbols

The red rose endures. One rose still says "I love you" more clearly than many paragraphs. Hearts remain everywhere – on wrapping paper, cakes, notes tucked into bags. Red and pink flowers continue to do the emotional heavy lifting where words hesitate.

Where there is love, there is no darkness – only the mild anxiety of choosing the right card.

In the End

This Valentine's Day, whether you were sharing a quiet meal, a long walk, or just a cup of coffee that turned into another, remember this: love is rarely dramatic. It lives in planning ahead, noticing small preferences, and showing up — on time.

And sometimes, love simply looks like remembering to book early.

– Priyanka Soman

Chennai Loses a Multifaceted Writer

(Vol. XXXV No. 21, February 16-28, 2026)

Yes, indeed. Geeta Doctor was all that Sushila has described. We have missed her for some time and we shall go on missing her.

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SOP for public gatherings – A need to follow in full spirit

(Vol. XXXV No. 21, February 16-28, 2026)

Without getting into the nitty-gritty of the SOP, it is squarely to be blamed on the crowd. In India we generally lack civic sense, and sheer madness drives people to go to political meetings, religious gatherings and sports celebrations.

Your life is at stake. Why be so crazy about seeing a matinee idol (just giving solatium to the bereaved family members by the political parties or the government is not a solace) who

floated a political party just a year ago and wants to test the waters in the political arena? The gullible people irrespective of age and sex, rushed to see him without bothering about safety, landed in a stampede and ultimately lost their lives in Karur.

During the RCB team's victory celebrations in Bengaluru also the fans were in frenzy mood and didn't bother about their own safety which resulted in stampede, causing death of so many people.

Whatever orders are issued by courts in India may not work unless people discipline themselves.

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Madras Dyslexic Association — A journey to empower dyslexics to go from "can I?" to "I can!"

(Vol. XXXV No. 21, February 16-28, 2026)

Hats off to MDA for their selfless contributions to society. I bought some of the products of these dyslexia children. They have got some special talents.

Honing their skills is a real challenge for the caregivers and teachers. The parents should also come forward to put their children in such centres to give them a good life.

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TN's new Badminton Boy

(Vol. XXXV No. 21, February 16-28, 2026)

I am honoured to see my name mentioned here. The late 1960s and early 1970s were the wonderful memorable days when we played at the Sterling Club and the Anna Stadium near the old Moore Market. I had previously been the Mysore State junior champion beating Prakash Padukone but then IIT took over and I moved to Madras. Memories of Selvaraj, Sugunraj and Usha are still alive although I had lived in Canada for the last 40 years. Well done Ritwick!

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Southern Netherlands operated a factory in Kovalam, near Madras, for 15 years in early 18th Century

East-India Companies

Most of us in Madras (Chennai) will be familiar with 'East-India Company'. Hearing this, I am sure, we will immediately think of the English East-India Company (EEIC) founded in 1600 CE, which totally changed the geo-political complexion of the world. EEIC was a strong, British commercial conglomerate, established long before the concept of corporate companies was known. Thomas Roe and William Hawkins – representing James Charles Stuart, the King of England – met Jahangir (Nur-uddin Mohammad Salim) in Delhi and obtained a *firman* (royal decree) to establish trade posts (= 'factories') in Surat, Ahmedabad, Agra, and Barouch. The singular intent of the EEIC was procuring Indian spices for Britain, although in the next few decades due to poor understanding and co-ordination among the Indian native rulers, gradually EEIC's hold widened and took control of large parts of the then

India through military force, including the use of cannons and gun powder. Their success in winning India was achieved more through cunningness, exploitation, and political manipulations. Critical will it be to remember that there was a *Companhia do commercio da India* (the Portuguese East-India Company, PEIC), a short-lived (1628–1633) commercial enterprise sponsored by the King of Portugal (Philip III, 1578–1621) to protect the trade interests of Portugal in India vis-à-vis that of the Dutch and English in India. The PEIC desired to control

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India as a 'state' of the Iberian Peninsula (Estado da India) but failed; therefore Indian outposts

stiffly challenged the EEIC and its army, particularly during the administration of Joseph, Marquis Duplex in Pondichery. My readers know the remainder.

The Danish East-India Company (*Det danske Ostindiske Kompagni*) of the Danish empire that included parts of the present-day Norway and northern Germany further to Denmark was established by Christian IV in 1616 as a trade organisation in India, re-established and re-named as the *Asiatisk Kompagni* (Asiatic Company) in 1730. The first trade post was established in Tarangampadi (near Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu) in 1620. The Dutch East-India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) established themselves first in Pulicat (*Paḷhaverkadu*, Fort Geldria, 54 km from Chennai) in 1610, moved to Nagapattinam in 1690. The VOC maintained trading posts in Surat (Western Coast), further to Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

One other East-India Company, by name the Swedish East-India Company (*Svenska Ostindiska Compagniet*) was floated in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1731, which operated minimally in India with factories in Surat and Parangipettai (Porto Novo, Tamil

Nadu) although their major interest lay with China for tea.

Oostendse Compagnie

I am certain that many of the present-generation Chennaites will be surprised to hear that another less-known East-India Company, named the 'General Company established in the Austrian Netherlands for Commerce and Navigation in the Indies' (*Algemene Compagnie gevestigd in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden voor Handel en Navigatie in de Indiën* – Dutch; *Compagnie générale établie dans les Pays-Bas Autrichiens pour le Commerce et la Navigation aux Indes* – French; and shortly 'Ostend Company', 'Oostendse Compagnie') – an Austria-chartered corporate entity from Southern Netherlands (i.e., the present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and some parts of the Netherlands) operated in India for close to 15 years (1715–1732). It held the name the 'Ostend Company', because it was first established in Ostend, a port town (presently, a major port-city) of the Southern Netherlands (Fig. 1). Ostend is presently a part of West Flanders, Belgium.

The Oostendse Compagnie used large sea-crafts for a profitable textile and tea trade with Bengal and China, respectively. Their boats flew a standard featuring a sprawling double-headed eagle in a yellow background with a centrally placed imperial Austrian flag as their company banner. The Oostendse Compagnie's naval fleet included about 20 vessels, most of them heavily armed: e.g., the *Empress Elisabeth* (28 guns) and the *Prince-Eugène* (26 guns). Initially the Oostendse Compagnie sailed light (200–250 t) ships but in later times they used 600 t vessels. Their primary interest lay in Chinese tea – similar to the interests of the Swedish East-India Company – yet the Oostendse Compagnie established factories Bankipur (Bengal) and Cabelon (Kovalam on the Coromandel, close to Madras) to procure Indian products. We understand that the Oostendse Compagnie's factory survived in Bankipur until 1745, but that in Cabelon was shut down earlier.

Why Cabelon

Unverifiable Internet sites indicate that during early days when the Oostendse Compagnie settled in Cabelon, they utilised a pre-existing 'primordial' structure as their factory. What the 'primordial' structure means is unclear. Most likely it must have been a structure similar to what existed in other 18th-century European trading posts in India, most likely crude but protected warehouses and temporary thatch-roof shed accommodation for their staff. Cabelon was a main trading post in 1724–1727. The Cabelon site enabled the Oostendse Compagnie's staff to gain an easy entry into the Indian spice and textile markets.

The principal reason for the choice of Cabelon by the Oostendse Compagnie was its strategic location. Cabelon occurs at about 40 km south of Madras (now, Chennai) then occupied by the Portuguese and English. Cabelon is also reasonably close to Pondichery (c. 130 km), another commercial centre because of the French. The Cabelon landscape, positioned between Madras and Pondichery, in the perception of the administrators' of the Oostendse Compagnie pitched it in a trade stronghold. Further and most likely the Cabelon stretch occupied by them was no man's land, neither claimed by the British towards Madras nor claimed by the French towards Pondichery. Most importantly, being right on the coast, it substantially supported the Oostendse Compagnie's broader goals of engaging in trade with Bengal and South-Asian and South-east Asian nations.

Between 1715 and 1720, several boats sailed from Ostend (Southern Netherlands) to China, Malabar, Coromandel coast (viz., Cabelon), Surat, and Bengal (Bankipur). These expeditions were funded by private companies, other than the Oostendse Compagnie, and owned by Flemish, English, Dutch, and French merchants and bankers. Frequent quarrels among the share-holding merchants and bankers on the profits triggered the formation of Oostendse Compagnie as a renewed effort.

When Streets Come Alive in Kotturpuram

For a few hours in a day, usually towards end January or early February, an entire street in the quiet neighbourhood in Kotturpuram transforms into a carnival – with bright lights, music, food, and games, filled with the chatter of friends and neighbours, and ever-present shoppers buzzing from stall to stall.

The Nawab Garden Residents Welfare Association (NGRWA), a registered and audited organisation, was established 12 years ago, with the aim of getting the residents of Kotturpuram together to address local concerns, and to promote a sense of neighbourhood and community. A primary purpose was to make our neighbourhood a safe, clean and self-sustained place to live in, as we continue our journey to make the locality a zero-waste zone.

Community meetings were held from the very first year, mainly to spread awareness about concepts like composting, wet waste and waste segregation. Talks on sustainability were held, where speakers like the 'Grand Old Lady of Besant Nagar', Kamakshi Subramanian (popu-

larly known as 'Kamakshi Paati') talked about civic issues.

In the process, we realised that we need to bring in an element of fun to get residents to participate.

And thus, the annual carnival came into being. This event involves all the residents in the seven roads that make up this locality, with a total of around 350 homes, including apartments. The participants range in age from babies in strollers to super senior citizens, not forgetting the various pet dogs who often accompany their owner-par-

ents, clearly curious about these strange goings-on among their human families.

The carnival, offering music, games for children, and of course, the various food and artifact stalls, draws everyone and cookies, we now have a stage in the middle of the street, with our seniors and children entertaining the community with music; while other residents, many of them youngsters, showcase their talent in baking and in

● by Subhashini Raja & Chandra Prabhakar



making wonderful home décor accessories, including pottery. Our neighbourhood restaurants generously offer their support, selling their specialities, and residents are only too happy to sample everything. We have a number of committed NGOs in our locality, and it has been a regular practice with us to ensure they have stalls which showcase the impressive work done by them. We also hold kolam competitions and other sports events for the staff in every home and encourage them to participate in the event.

This year was particularly special – we had none other than Chennai's historian V Sriram

give us a fascinating talk about the history of Kotturpuram, presenting nuggets of information which even long-term residents had been unaware of. The evening was also made special by singer Karthik Kumar, a differently abled young man, who gave us a melodious rendering of vintage Hindi and Tamil songs.

Our neighbourhood children's choir displayed their musical talent as well.

The carnival has now become a gala event and promises to grow bigger and merrier year after year, fostering a much-needed sense of community and belonging.

(Continued on page 8)



Fig. 1. Southern Netherlands (= the Austrian Netherlands), c. 1786. The coastal town of Ostend (blue arrow). (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_Netherlands_map_003.jpg)

Gone with the Wind

by Sushila Ravindranath

When I started writing for the magazine I worked for in Chennai way back in the 1980s people used to wonder how long I would last. The reason was, very few businessmen were willing to talk to the media. They did not want to draw attention to themselves. The city and the state were seen as arch conservative and growth averse. As I have said again and again over the years, this was far from the truth. Let me write about some of the interesting companies of those times.

Not that all of them did well, but they tried.

Today wind energy is taken for granted in Tamil Nadu as many units have come up on the coastal belt. One of them was NEPC (Natural Energy Processing Company) which thought big. In 1986, two cousins in their early twenties, Madhusudhan and Rajkumar, thought of non-conventional energy for power-starved Tamil Nadu. This was still a comparatively little known concept.

They started attending seminars and symposiums to understand non-conventional energy sources. They subscribed to journals dealing with the subject. They zeroed in on wind energy and found the western part of Tamil Nadu an ideal location.

The first product manufactured by the company was a windmill capable of pumping water which was developed by the government of India's Department of Non Conventional Energy. Perennial powercuts and spiraling diesel prices made this product attractive to farmers. The marketing team used to visit the panchayats all over the country to introduce this windmill. Originally it was meant only for the farmers. They in-

stalled machines on credit and the NEPC windmills became popular.

The cousins decided to harness this technology to the power sector as well. They tied up with MICON of Denmark, a world leader in this product. In 1989, it got its first order for six machines from Gujarat. It took up the job and got it done within six months without a hitch. It did a major project for Tamil Nadu as well. With the MICON tie up, the company's turnover zoomed up to Rs 50 crore by the 90's on a capital of Rs 5 crore, which was very respectable for those days.

NEPC was the first company in the private sector to commercialise wind energy. It was also the first company to do so

in Asia. It set up six turbines in Sivakasi. Many orders followed. It started doing every project on a turnkey basis. Its windmills were designed to withstand adverse wind conditions, high temperatures, tropical climate, high humidity and corrosion.

The company identified the correct spot to set up the windmill for its customers, erected the wind towers and turbines, maintaining and transferring the power to the grid. There were no shortage of orders.

It was a good time for wind energy business. The cost of production was low, only 40 paise per unit, there were exemptions on sales and excise tax and many such concessions making a lot of companies jump into this business.

NEPC did not anticipate competition. They really thought growth will be unending. The owners imagined themselves to be Ambanis of Tamil Nadu and ended up making many mistakes.

To start with, the company went into all kinds of diversifications which were capital intensive businesses in which they had no experience. After liberalisation, anybody could start an airline and NEPC launched NEPC Airlines, which was a disaster almost from the beginning. They started a television channel which never took off. They took over all kinds of businesses they fancied.

What they did not anticipate was that the government was going to withdraw all the concessions they gave to wind power sector. NEPC thought the good times will never end.

That was a major blunder. The state felt that having helped set up the wind power business and put it on its feet it was time it withdrew. Having grown entirely on government concessions, NEPC went broke and officially wound down in 2011.

The State's Growth Factors

Tamil Nadu has successfully integrated rapid industrialisation with strong welfare and sustainability initiatives, demonstrating an inclusive development strategy. This approach has positioned the state as a role model for high growth without compromising social outcomes.

Growth in GDP

According to the RBI's latest handbook of statistics on Indian states, Tamil Nadu's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current prices increased from Rs 26.88 lakh crore in 2023-24 to Rs 31.19 lakh crore in 2024-25, registering a robust growth of 16 per cent, the fastest among major Indian states. Over the last three years, the state has consistently recorded high growth rates. Between 2021-22 and 2024-25, Tamil Nadu's GSDP expanded by Rs 10.46 lakh crore, the second-highest absolute increase after Maharashtra (Rs 13.88 lakh crore). This sustained performance reflects a development model anchored in diversified industrialisation, strong service-sector expansion and continuous investments in human capital.

Manufacturing-led Growth

Tamil Nadu is a major industrial powerhouse, with the third-largest manufacturing GSDP in the country after

Maharashtra and Gujarat. In 2024-25, real manufacturing GSDP grew by an impressive 14.74 per cent, more than three times the all-India average of 4.5 per cent. Manufacturing alone accounted for 28 per cent of the state's overall real GSDP growth of 11.2 per cent.

Over the four-year period from 2021-22 to 2024-25, Tamil Nadu emerged as the fastest-growing manufacturing state, recording the highest average real growth rate of 9.38 per cent. Jharkhand (8.77 per cent) and Karnataka (8.73 per cent) followed, highlighting a widening divergence in manufacturing performance across states.

The state has emerged as a logistics hub and in recent years, as a key centre for India's defence and aerospace industries. This has reduced vulnerability to sector-specific shocks and ensured greater stability across economic cycles.

The state ranks first nationally in the number of factories (40,121), employing around 25 lakh factory workers, and third in the MSME sector, with over 39 lakh Udyam-registered enterprises. The construction sector has also supported growth, registering real growth of 15.93 per cent in 2023-24 and 11.56 per cent in 2024-25.

Strong Services Sector

Services account for 53.6 per cent of Tamil Nadu's Gross

Value Added (GVA) and have maintained strong momentum. In 2024-25, the sector recorded double-digit growth of 11.3 per cent, compared to 7.47 per cent in 2023-24. Growth accelerated across several sub-sectors: real estate rose from 7.33 per cent to 12.42 per cent; public administration from 5.81 per cent to 14.2 per cent; transport, storage and communication from 6.58 per cent to 11.29 per cent; and miscellaneous services from 11.85 per cent to 12.49 per cent.

Human Capital Strength

Tamil Nadu possesses the largest network of technical institutions in India, numbering 955 in 2024-25. This provides a steady supply of skilled and semi-skilled labour for both manufacturing and services. The state is also investing in research parks, incubation centres and innovation clusters to promote a technology-driven, knowledge-based economy supported by progressive industrial and export policies. Given the dominance of labour-intensive industries and services, Tamil Nadu attracts substantial migrant labour from other states, underscoring its capacity to generate employment across skill levels.

Exports, Infrastructure and Energy

Tamil Nadu ranks first in the

export preparedness index and consistently leads exports of electronics, textiles and leather products, while ranking second in engineering exports. Overall merchandise exports nearly doubled from USD 26.15 billion in 2020-21 to USD 52.07 billion in 2024-25, placing the state third nationally.

Recognised as the Detroit of India, Tamil Nadu is a major automobile hub and a pioneer in renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power. Installed power capacity has expanded significantly strengthening infrastructure readiness.

Every district in the state is now covered under one or more industrial corridor projects, making it the only state with such comprehensive industrial integration.

Investment Climate and FDI

Tamil Nadu ranks fifth among Indian states in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Annual inflows increased from USD 2169 million in 2022-23 to USD 3681 million in 2024-25, reflecting effective investment promotion. Since 2021, the state has signed 1173 MoUs, committing investments of Rs 12.19 trillion and employment potential of 35.48 lakh. Investment promotion visits by

the Chief Minister to the US, UK and Germany in 2024-25 alone secured commitments worth Rs 23,000 crore, with nearly 80 per cent reportedly under various stages of implementation.

Rising Incomes, Consumption and Balanced Regional Development

Per capita income increased from Rs 2.71 lakh in 2021-22 to Rs 4.04 lakh in 2024-25, far outpacing the all-India increase. Importantly, Tamil Nadu exhibits relatively balanced regional development. Even districts with lower per capita incomes like Thiruvavur, Villupuram, Perambalur and Ariyalur exceed those of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

Fiscal Strength and Growth Outlook

Fiscal management has remained prudent. The fiscal deficit is projected to decline to 3 per cent of GSDP in 2025-26, while the debt-GSDP ratio has fallen from 27 per cent in 2021-22 to 26 per cent in 2024-25. A simple linear forecast, based on the last four-year real growth performance, suggests around 12 per cent growth in 2025-26.

— Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*

Under the spell of Kamala

It was the year 1957 when I first watched Kamala's dance in a wedding concert at Calicut. I was swept away by the sheer beauty and joy of my first encounter, which was like a darshan. I had been learning Bharatanatyam and was familiar with the fundamentals of *nritta* and *abhinaya*. This was like immersing in Shakespeare and the romantic poets immediately after learning the rudiments of the language from Wren & Martin.

Kamala struck an immediate friendship with my mother Ananthalakshmi Sadagopan, an acclaimed musician and visited our home the very next day. Thereupon grew my infatuation with her unique art which made me eventually write her first biography for the *Sruti* magazine in 1988. She invited my mother to sing for her on her tour of Ceylon in 1969. We spent a week in Madras to learn the new songs we had to sing for her and her sister Rhadha. Kamala sang all the songs as my

mother notated and taught me. Her rehearsals would last about four to five hours at a stretch with her Guru and orchestra. Swamimalai SK Rajaratnam and Kallidaikurichi KR Radhakrishnan sang for the first half with *alarippu*, *jatisvaram*, *sabdam* and *varnam*. Amma and I took over for the second half, including the short dance dramas of *Andal* and *Aichiyar Kuravai* choreographed by her Guru, the lion among natyacharyas, the Natya Kala Kesari Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai. The male duo would return for the *tillana*.

Some of the songs we sang for her were Oothukadu Venkata Subbier's *Paal vadiyum mugam*, Bharathi's *Teeratha vilaiyaattu pillai*, Kalki's *Malai pozhudimile*, *Natanam aadinar*, Papanasam Sivan's *Ka va va*, etc. These were some of the songs introduced to the Bharatanatyam repertoire by her Guru. Unlike today when dancers are forced to do the entire concert lasting about 90 minutes in the same

sweat soaked costume, Kamala and Rhadha changed costumes several times with the backstage help of their versatile mother Rajam. Every entry on stage brought forth a gasp of admiration as they stood in the spotlight at the entry point from the wings. Rhadha was transformed into a mischievous Krishna or a vivacious Kurathi in a matter of minutes under the expert hands of her mother. There was no time lapse between items except for the 15 minutes interval. The total duration would be between two-and-a-half hours to three hours. And the audience stayed till the *mangalam* and hovered around to meet the dancers. They performed to packed auditoriums at all the venues in Ceylon.

During the December season, Kamala performed at Music Academy, Tamil Isai Sangam and Indian Fine Arts Society, each a houseful show year after year. People stood in a queue at 6 am at the Music Academy to buy tickets for Kamala's concert that evening. Remaining at the top for four decades, Kamala was synonymous with

the language and verses to them.

When N. Pattabhi Ram, editor of *Sruti* asked whether I would do a profile of Kamala, I took it up with joy. She was happy to talk, recounting her early memories from the time when she was a three-year-old. For an artist of her eminence, she had a pitifully small

collection of photographs, mostly black and white, haphazardly stored in envelopes and in a couple of old albums. Hardly any pamphlets or programme notices. "For a while my father tried keeping a record of my programmes and photos, but then he gave up when the



in their special Deepavali issues would send a reporter who knew nothing about the art or the artist!

As new and younger dancers entered the field of Bharatanatyam, Kamala sensed that she was being sidelined. There had always been a lobby that tried to describe her dance and her Guru's tradition as neo classic in a derogatory sense. One could find a parallel with the advent of GN Balasubramaniam in the field of Carnatic music. Some critics and opinion makers of those days did not know what to make of the phenomenon and tried to put him down until the GNB bani established itself and became the inspiration for future generations.

As long as Kamala was performing in India, all criticism against the Vazhuvoor bani, were rendered invalid. Her art was her vindication. Once she migrated to USA and many of her disciples moved to other Gurus, her name was slowly getting forgotten. She did come back a couple of times and perform with the same verve and vigour. Once after her performance at the auditorium of the Academy, I found several dancers in clusters sharing their awe and admiration of this legend whom they were witnessing for the first time. A senior dancer pronounced "Kamala is an all-time great."

So she was, enriching the art which was her life's breath. To her rasikas the greatest regret is that there is no recording of her performances at her prime. To them it was a boon and a blessing to have been her contemporary. The aura of her era will hold them in its spell for a lifetime.

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– THE EDITOR

● by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

Bharatanatyam. She carried her art to all parts of India and all over the globe.

Around 1967 I witnessed Kamala performing the entire *Ramayana* as solo presentation, to Svati Thirunal's *Bhavayami Raghuramam*. She just swept the audience off their feet. Many were in tears. The entire panorama of characters appeared in the twinkling of an eye and lived and breathed on the stage. This was choreographed by Kamala soon after she had parted ways with her Guru and it turned out to be a landmark innovation as the first solo Bharatanatyam dance drama. Leela Venkataraman who spoke on the occasion extolled the pristine purity of Kamala's art and described it in superlatives.

I continued my acquaintance with her after I settled down in Madras in 1969 and had occasions when I sang for a couple of her performances. Her search for new compositions remained fresh as ever. I found her teaching the theory of Bharatanatyam to her students, which was a new practice. She had also appointed a Sanskrit pundit to teach

programmes became too many," she said. She gave details of her performances, memorable events, bitter experiences and tried to recollect her vast repertoire. Over a period of two years, I interviewed more than a hundred people, her musicians, friends, relatives, other dancers, rasikas, etc. Invariably their faces would light up when I mentioned her name and they poured forth all their experiences with her and their admiration for her art. "An article on Kamala? A whole book can be written about her" was the spontaneous reaction of her Guru Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai.

Sruti carried her profile in two issues and released the first one at the Landmark bookstore. Ramiah Pillai came eagerly despite his advanced age. As we were ascending the stairs from the basement shop after the function, a young girl rushed in and introduced herself as the reporter from a famous Tamil weekly. I stayed behind to give her some highlights. "Who is Kamala? Was she a film star?" queried the greenhorn. It came as a rude shock to me that the magazine which carried Kamala's dance photos year after year

Madras Cricket – Home and Away in the 19th Century

“This match was commenced on the Chepauk ground yesterday morning. The Madras Captain won this toss and elected to send in his team. The first few wickets fell rapidly but a good stand was effected by Mr GG Arbuthnot and Mr Walter Morgan, who with those that followed, managed to pull the total up to 96 before the ninth wicket fell (one being absent). Bangalore then went in. The first few men played well, and rapidly ran the score up to the Madras total, but the “tail” went to pieces, and the last wicket fell one run only ahead of Madras.

The match will be resumed tomorrow at 11.30 am sharp. At 4 pm the Volunteer Band will commence playing and the Committee of the Club informs us that the Pavilion (upstairs) will be thrown open for the use of the ladies.”

That one report, dating to 1875 has so many threads to offer to a historian. GG Arbuthnot was the last of the clan to be in Madras. He rose to head his family's eponymous business house, became the Chairman of the Madras Chamber of Commerce, the President of the Madras Club and was knighted but his career here ended in ignominy. Speculations of all kinds led to his firm crashing in 1906, carrying

with it thousands of investors, including Sir Arthur Lawley, Governor of Madras and President of the MCC, who had to declare insolvency. Sir George G Arbuthnot was sentenced to imprisonment for two years, after serving which he departed for England. With that ended the Arbuthnot connection with Madras and also of course the MCC.

Apart from Bangalore, Madras met teams from ‘mofussil’ areas such as the Kolar Gold Fields, Trichinopoly, and the plantation districts. The first inter-state match, perhaps even India's ‘first first-class game’ was against the Calcutta Cricket Club in 1864. H Linton ‘Head Assistant Collector, Godavari District’, was the first captain of the MCC on this wider stage of representative cricket. The players had names like Hutchins, Brandt and Brecks; some were Oxford Blues, and they held posts like Assistant Head Collector from Cuddapah, or Judge from ‘Cumbaconum’, or the Agent from Ganjam. Some interesting details of this first inter-Presidency match can be had from the memoirs of Sir Philip Hutchins, who was then Private Secretary to the Governor Sir William Denison. The idea of such a match had come from JW Brecks, later to

• by
Sriram V

be immortalised with a school in his name at Ootacamund. Lady Denison was going to Calcutta by steamer to join her husband who was then officiating as Governor General and it was decided that the cricket team would travel with her and other ladies, taking in H Linton and Francis (afterwards Justice) Brandt at Machilipatnam. However, when the women learnt that a battery of artillery, with gunpowder in the baggage was also to board the steamer, they refused to travel and so the cricket team had the boat to itself. Putting a team together was not easy (it never would be at the MCC), for according to Hutchins, “at the last moment, Plumer, our best batsman and a lob bowl-

er, refused to go. At my wits' end I had to wire to several other men to take his place. I remember I had to use my Private Secretary's authority to get messages through at Christmas but in the end we had to complete the team as best as we could.” The Plumer referred to was Charles George, who was in the civil service. He had made his debut in first class cricket playing for the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1860.

They reached early in January to find the Calcutta team in a state of unpreparedness and when the match was held, “it ended decidedly in our favour for in each innings we led by a substantial number of runs. It is worth noting that while all our eleven were Government servants, civil or military, the majority of the Calcutta team belonged to what used to be known as the ‘interloping community’.” By that Hutchins

meant the entrepreneurs and boxwallahs, who were always considered inferior to those in the establishment. And though he may not have liked it, the MCC too eventually saw increasing membership from the ranks of those in commerce.

The powers-that-be in Madras were delighted at the outcome of the match for as Hutchins noted, some of them had been away from their desks for quite a while and yet nobody appeared to take note. “One was Judge at my old Court at Vellore. His Court must have been without a Judge for over a fortnight, but neither Government nor the High Court raised any objection. Doubtless they were all pleased at our winning the match.”

Extracted from the book
175, Not Out! 175 years of the Madras Cricket Club

SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS FACTORY IN KOVALAM

(Continued from page 4)

ban gradually took full effect in 1731, closing the Oostendse Compagnie for good: therefore, the Cabelon and Bankipur posts were shut down.

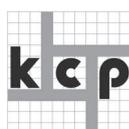
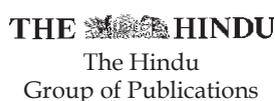
Conclusion

Tragically little is known

about the Oostendse Compagnie in India, especially their operations in Cabelon (Kovalam), matching with what how little we know of the Swedish East-India Company and its operations in Parangipettai. We need to explore the details more to know whether any remnants of these companies

occur in Kovalam and Parangipettai. Exciting and fascinating research opportunities for young amateur and professional historians lie buried in the context of the trade efforts of Oostendse Compagnie and Swedish East-India Company in Kovalam and Parangipettai, respectively.

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