

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## Marring our Beaches with Marriages

It all depends on perspective. To us, the city's beaches are open lungs, where we can walk, enjoy the air, wet our feet in water and return refreshed. To the fishermen, this is where they earn their living, bringing in the day's catch and then selling it. To the Government beaches are the plaything of an idle hour, a venue where they can try out their harebrained schemes, always with a view to eventually grabbing the space and converting it into prime real estate. The latest idea, to permit weddings in the beaches is one more in a long list.

As per the latest news reports, Tamil Nadu Tourism is pondering over the possibility of opening beaches along the ECR for weddings, for a fee. The amount in question is as low as Rs 10,000, no doubt with a view to making it afford-

able for everyone. The point however is not what strata of society is going to use this. It is the fundamental flawed principle behind the idea. No matter what our economic status be, we in India are known for our capability to generate trash at our events. And what is more,

• by **Sriram V.**

not dispose off it responsibly but let nature take its own course, by which we mean bleaching by sun, washing by rain, blowing by wind and consuming by animals, the rest going to our already bursting landfills. Has whoever it is that came up with this idea even thought of the consequences of what will

happen if the beaches are made available for weddings?

The trash apart, our weddings are known to be noisy. There may be regulations on amplification but given that these are most often given the go by in practice, can we imagine what the noise levels will be? Why should residents around beaches suffer this? We need to add other attendant nuisances – traffic jams, stray animals attracted by food, drunken behaviour, posters congratulating the newlyweds and the picture is complete. And then there is the small matter of the nesting Olive Ridley turtles but we don't expect anyone to bother about them. What matters is that tourists and wedding celebrants in the

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## Is a ropeway at Mahabalipuram a good idea?

What is it with the latest fetish for ropeways over our public spaces? While recent developments with respect to feasibility studies for a ropeway being planned across the Marina caught the eyeballs, there has been some movement on another similar grandiose plan, that of one in Mahabalipuram which was announced in mid-2025. The Chennai Metro Asset Management Limited (CMAML), the body entrusted with the execution of the project has recently awarded the consultancy contract for preparing a Detailed Feasibility Report to a Delhi-based com-

pany. Also covered in the ambit is the preparation for a similar report for a High-Altitude Ropeway Transport System in Kodaikanal.

The announcement of the project seems to in line with other recent initiatives to pro-

• by **Karthik Bhatt**

mote tourism in the heritage town, both by the Union Government and the State Government. In late 2024, the Union Government sanctioned nearly Rs 100 crores for the creation of a Nandavanam Heritage Park, comprising a sprawling garden, an activity and cultural

space and also an open arena for events and gatherings. In July 2025, newspapers reported a 10-year tourism destination master plan by the State Government, involving development of beach circuits, cultural trails, botanical gardens and adventure zones. Last month, an investment of Rs 100 crores for infrastructural development in the region was announced by the State Government during the inauguration of the Tamil Nadu Global Tourism Summit 2026, as well as the setting up of a Special Area Development Authority for Mahabalipuram. The Hon'ble Chief Minister also inaugurated one of the

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## HERITAGE WATCH

### Historic School in a Heritage Campus

The Kesari Higher Secondary School is an institution that is proud of the wonderful heritage building in its campus. Located on Thiru Vi Ka 3rd St, Royapettah, this school has as its home Palm Grove, which was once home to legal luminaries such as LA Govindaraghava Aiyar and S Doraiswami Aiyar.

It was later purchased by the well-known Ayurvedic practitioner Dr KN Kesari for the Royapettah branch of the chain of schools he founded. It is heartening that the school not only maintains the building well but also features it in its publicity material as can be seen in the banner that is hanging outside the gate. At a time when heritage structures in private hands are facing a bleak future owing to real estate enticements, this needs to be commended. Parents too need to appreciate a school building with plenty of natural light and air.



## Marring our Beaches with Marriages

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city should have a new and exciting venue!

This is the latest assault on our beaches. We have already had the memorials, now fortunately contained within the available space. Then we have had the mushrooming of shops, all in the name of catering to the masses – let us not forget that our beaches have been around for centuries and open to all. They are not elitist in any way and our masses did not ask for shops, until these became available. The shops are now a problem that will not go away, requiring legal intervention. What we now have is a fait accompli.

We have then had the Blue Flag fiasco which was most unnecessarily foisted on us.

What was once a large and clean beach is now divided – a paid and therefore presumed to be clean section, certified by the blue flag and the other, for free and therefore unregulated and perforce the repository of all rubbish. Who has created these elitist divides? And we have had the forever ongoing construction and widening of the loop road, against which the fishermen protested. Now, realising that they have to live with it, they have turned it to their advantage – all along the Loop Road are double-storey seafood restaurants, all of them without permit. When everyone else can break the law, why not these people?

The wedding scheme has been protested by local residents. But our beaches need watching over.

## Is a ropeway at Mahabalipuram a good idea?

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tourism promotion projects, a glow garden, the first of its kind in the state. It is essentially an entertainment hub, comprising an amphitheatre, food kiosks, selfie points, walkways lined with artificial trees and plants, on land belonging to the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation.

Coming to the ropeway, one cannot help but look at this idea with anything other than disbelief. Undoubtedly, facilities such as ropeways and cable cars make for a wonderful experience and greatly aid in boosting tourism potential, besides providing for transportation in terrains where other means are not possible. But surely, some serious introspection is required before even thinking of such an initiative for a UNESCO World Heritage site? While such a project makes sense for a hill-station like Kodaikanal, where a ropeway can offer stunning views of the landscape, what can it possibly offer for Mahabalipuram, where the places of interest are anyway not on any elevation but on the ground? We are told that this cable system is designed to offer visitors a unique panoramic experience of the monuments, but what value addition does this bring?

The entire region is already threatening to be taken over by real estate development in

a huge manner. This journal has expressed in unequivocal terms the perils of unregulated development (see MM, Nov 1-15, 2023) and how it could potentially threaten its status as a UNESCO protected site. It must also be kept in mind that the slew of projects announced to transform the entire area must conform to the CRZ regulations. And we know of the state's abysmal track record with respect to this. While all the enthusiasm and noise with regards to showcasing a jewel of our heritage and improving the tourism experience is welcome, it should be remembered that they are only add-ons and not the centre pieces of the ecosystem, whose sanctity cannot be threatened at any cost. We cannot afford to let them overshadow the grandeur of the place, for it would bring along the huge risk of the place ultimately being treated as just yet another tourist spot, with the focus on the architectural magnificence lost. Projects such as ropeways are completely unnecessary adventures which are best avoided. The tourism experience can certainly be enhanced by instead focusing on 'ground level' issues such as ensuring better roads, addressing parking woes, cleanliness and traffic management.

## Wedding Guest SOPs

Have you ever heard of the Hart of meal enquiring? It is quite a requisite aspect of social etiquette, especially in weddings of the traditional kind. By that *The Man from Madras Musings* means those festivities associated with a marriage where the guests are invited to a sit-down meal, served on a plantain leaf. Such a social grace is not part of the more essential wedding events these days such as the one where hands are anointed with henna or the other one with a musical name where the idea is to make everyone go deaf with loud volume, louder percussion and loudest singing. MMM steers clear of the first as it is essentially a ladies' event and as for the second, he considers it an excrescence of recent import where apart from the noise, the general darkness and strobe lighting can drive anyone with defective vision completely mad. MMM being the kind that is somewhat visually afflicted, he abhors these events. As he does songs that seem to have lyrics comprising only shava, mahive, balleballe and other such traditional Tamil expressions.

It is therefore usually at the

friendships usually do not extend to finding out how many children a person has, what their names, gender, preferred pronouns, etc. are. Beyond extending a benign goodwill to gen-next, MMM goes no further. SWMBO says MMM is terribly self-centred but MMM in this one matter, begs to differ. He simply has no curiosity.

MMM also has another rule – he carries no gifts if the newlyweds are affluent. There is no point in adding another Thanjavur painting, a tray or a set of bed linen to someone's collection that is already brimming with these. Cash is of course out of question and so flowers are the only option. MMM would love to say it with flowers but here SWMBO draws the line – she believes flowers to be a waste. And so MMM considers his presence to be the sole present (apart from SWMBO of course) and goes ahead. His presence is of the yessence – as he has often heard it expressed in this our land.

### The Etiquette of Meal Enquiring

Which brings *The Man from Madras Musings*

and his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed (SWMBO) were in attendance and seeing MMM restless and bored, SWMBO suggested that he better go and have his lunch. And off MMM went, in the company of some friends. But such was the crush at the dining hall door that MMM got separated from his herd and sat in another table squashed in a corner left by some matrons who by their size seemed to be professional wedding attendees and regular diners out. Adding to MMM's discomfiture was the woman next to MMM who had an unfortunate habit of shaking her leg which led to the entire table vibrating and the contents of her leaf gradually moving towards MMM's. But by the quick expedient of building a wall of water bottle, napkin and paper cups, MMM stayed the flood.

It was at this juncture that one of the duchesses that our kind hostess had asked to meal enquire on her behalf, made her appearance. Sashaying down the corridor she paused at near about where MMM was, looked at him momentarily with hauteur and then beamed at the lady next, asking her if everything had come

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

actual wedding or at the formal reception in the evening that you find MMM at his best. Not that it matters, for as MMM reflects often, the bride and groom will definitely tie the knot whether MMM attends or not. Unfortunately for MMM, his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed (SWMBO), believes wedding invites are sacrosanct and need to be honoured at all costs. And so, MMM tags along, avoiding the henna and musical events as far as possible but registering a token presence at the others. And even in these, MMM has some standard operating procedures.

He avoids the queue to go and greet the newlyweds and after registering his attendance with the parents of the couple, he usually heads to the food or stages a quiet exit. Experience has taught MMM that it is quite useless spending time in queuing to greet the newlyweds. MMM has reached an age where he invariably knows only the parents and hardly ever the bridal couple. It has also been MMM's experience that the father/mother of the bride/groom, all along on stage relentlessly introducing the guests to the newlyweds, will suddenly vanish from sight just when it is MMM's turn! And MMM will have to introduce himself to the bride and groom – always a nerve-wracking process and he usually has the vaguest of ideas as to whether he is an invitee of the bride's parents or that of the groom. This is largely because MMM's

back to the topic of meal enquiring. This as MMM said, is done when guests are seated at a meal. Friends and relatives of the host family then walk between the lines of tables and chairs and ask the diners if they are being taken care of, or if they need anything. Generally most guests nod back and continue eating but there are some absolute bounders who make a demand or two – asking for a second helping of some dish, or even worse, requesting that a sweet or two be packed for the long journey home. MMM would be hopeless at a task such as meal enquiring. He would never have the nerve to ask anyone if they needed anything for the simple reason that if they did, MMM would have no idea where to get what they wanted.

Which reminds MMM of a cousin's maiden (and probably only) experience of meal enquiring. He sallied forth confidently at lunch and decided to do it with a difference. He memorised the menu and as he meal enquired, he named a specific dish or two and asked the guests if these had been served and whether they would like some more of the same. To a man (and woman), everyone said the dishes had not been served and they would very much like to have some. Puzzled, cousin went to the kitchen to enquire only to have the head cook tell him that what he had memorised was the breakfast menu while what was in progress then was lunch!

But be that as it may, let MMM relate what happened at a recent society wedding. MMM

and if all was well. The lady beamed back and said all was indeed well, not pausing the rattling of the table even for a moment. The duchess then swept her eyes over MMM and then asked the lady if MMM was her doctor husband. This set off MMM on a mental query – did the lady next have husbands in multiple professions as in engineer husband, lawyer husband, etc.? MMM had visions of them being kept in neat docket, to be pulled out when needed.

He awoke from his reverie to find the woman thus asked had hotly denied any connect with MMM (this lack of affection was mutual) and the duchess was now standing before MMM and asking as to how he was related to whom, etc.

To this MMM simply replied he was the husband of SWMBO. The effect was instantaneous. The duchess, thus far the Snow Queen, now became the fairy godmother. She beamed at MMM. "SWMBO's husband! Why sir, you are quite the celebrity. I know of you but as to what you do, I don't know." MMM replied that he too did not know. But he realised, that being the husband of SWMBO was enough. Her Grace then left, after enquiring if MMM was having a good time. The rest of the meal was uneventful barring the rattling of the table.

– MMM

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



**Unexpected response to a petition**

My relative, who is a senior citizen and resides in the Chennai suburbs, received a call recently. The caller who identified himself as a Sub-inspector of Police from a different district in Tamil Nadu, stated that he was calling based on the note he received from the Chief Minister's office in Chennai, regarding a petition that my relative had submitted. The official did not then provide further details. Since my relative was not at home when the call came, he told the official to call later.

The very next day, the official called my relative and informed that he was from the crime branch and that he was making an enquiry. Since the official had not been given any details by the CM's office, he sought to know from my relative as to what the petition was all about.

My relative told him that it was a petition regarding property tax anomalies with the Corporation in his locality. Since he could not get 'relief' from the Corporation, he had submitted the same at the Ungaludan Stalin Scheme camp held in his locality in August 2025, in the fond hope that he would get a favourable resolution. Since there was no communication forthcoming, my relative stepped up the pressure by sending periodical reminders to the CM's office and other officials. At one stage, he stopped sending the reminders as there was no response.

It was, therefore, quite a shock when he received the call, that too from a most unexpected source! The SI was so nice that after getting to know that the petition dealt with property tax, he stated that as it had nothing to do with him, he would close the issue by writing suitably to the CM's office.

Well, why did the CM's office send the communication to a police officer posed in the crime branch, that too at a place afar from the location of my relative, to enquire about the petition which dealt with a property tax? My relative would have felt happy had the call come from the revenue department of the Corporation. Could it be a case of a deliberate attempt at scaring the petitioners who write to the CM's office on genuine issues seeking its help? Or is it a case of unleashing the police on a gullible public to silence them? The action of the CM's office in referring the issue to the police department which has no jurisdiction whatsoever on the matter, seems to smack of an ulterior motive and unbecoming of the functioning of the office.

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**Discipline a must for road users**

I am particularly interested in road users' discipline in our city. I have noticed time and again that our citizens disregard with impunity the traffic signs, lines and signals. This is applicable to road users of all ages, sex and education levels.

I personally believe that though the roads are far from being ideal, with the plethora of potholes, dividers, speed bumps, they are what we have. It is our intelligent use of the roads which will ensure safe and secure journeys for all the citizens every day.

The disregard for the use of safety devices like the ORS (Occupant restraining system a.k.a seat belt), is a specific case to be understood. Though the four-wheelers today are equipped with warning tones if the belts are not buckled, these are being ridiculed by a host of drivers who engage the belt before sitting in the vehicle. As a result, the warning is silenced, but the occupant is far from safe. It seems that the rule is to be followed only if the police force is in sight. This attitude is to be strictly avoided and unless the car owners/occupiers take the onus of the importance of their lives in their hands, no number of laws and rules can help us.

Discipline is to be instilled in the populace from an early age, yet despite the efforts of the police, this compliance is far from satisfactory.

Two-wheeler riders and pedestrians are from another planet, it seems, if one is to observe them using the city roads. Riders, with an apology of 'helmet wearing', sans buckle or worse still with helmets on their laps or handles, are a common sight at every road or lane. They disregard traffic signboards, flout every known rule time and again, and their families will have to pay the price whenever an accident takes place. Discipline on the roads is the mantra which needs to be instilled in the minds of the two-wheeler riders, day in and day out.

The traffic scene is indeed in urgent need of attention, where fines and challans alone may not solve the problem; discipline and a value for one's life might work.

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# An Evening in VP Hall

It was exciting to see the print edition of *Madras Musing's* first issue this year wholly devoted to the Victoria Public Hall. It gleefully proclaimed 'The City gets back its Town Hall' on Page 1. The rest of the page had a visual of the red-tiled facade of the building. The centrespread was filled with pictures too. The story of the VP Hall and the stories around it filled up the rest of the pages. So, my wife and I were doubly pleased to go there to participate in an event this March 13th. Thanks to Trump's America and Israel going to war with Iran and the city agog with news of a run on the petrol bunks, we took the Metro to the venue. Frankly with the Metro station at about 200 feet from my place and likewise the Central Metro about 200 feet (if you take the right exit) from the venue, it made perfect sense not to use private transport just for two. Emerging from the Metro, we were directed by a woman fruit vendor to the Hall via the adjacent Ripon Buildings. To put it in context, VPH was opened in 1888 and Ripon Buildings in 1913. If it was a pleasure to bounce along the broad pavements lined with tree saplings to the venue, the grounds of the VP Hall were a revelation – clean and green all round and the exterior lit up. Standing there afforded a view of Madras Central inaugurated in 1873 and the much recent MMC building where the Madras Central Prison once existed. Incidentally, the old prison was opened in 1837. I was not able to identify, a mosque-like white building opposite the VPH and a red-tiled small structure diagonally opposite the Hall. (These are respectively *Siddique Serai* and the *Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar Choultry* – The Editor.)

Under the aegis of Past Forward, and sponsored by HCL Concerts with Coromandel International as the associate sponsor, Madras' historian and chronicler Sriram V (aided by an AV presentation) accompanied on the stage by singer Bharat Sundar (on cues from the speaker, he masterfully eased into song) and Vigneswar on the keyboard took us through the eras of Theatre to Talkies with lots of references to the Victoria Hall itself and its links with Suguna Vilasa Sabha. A passionate story-teller, Sriram shared lots of info on the topic of the evening including on many notables of yesteryear chiefly Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar.

Jyothi Sethupathi, the great grand-daughter of Namperumal Chetty (he built VPH) was present on

March 13 and was introduced to the audience by Sriram. Of note, the performing space where the event happened hosted its first play in 1891 which lasted six hours ending at 3.30 a.m. Past Forward is going to curate more events at VPH during the coming year.

T.K. Srinivas Chari



# Theosophical Society, Adyar – An oasis of brotherhood and tranquility

I visited Adyar's International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society (TS Adyar) on October 1, 2025, which was Annie Besant's birth anniversary. She was their second president from 1907-1933. A special talk was delivered by Tim Boyd, President of TS Adyar, to commemorate the occasion. The campus remains out of bounds for visitors otherwise and is only opened to the general public on special occasions. Naturally, whatever is forbidden holds a special attraction, so I fully utilised this opportunity to immerse myself in its verdant tropical paradise. I went on an exploratory walk checking out various landmarks of the stunning campus (area of 250 acres) which is a heady combination of nature and heritage monuments.

Going back in time, this organisation came into being in 1875 in New York. Madame Helena Blavatsky, Col Henry Olcott (Founder President until 1907) and others were its founding members. It has three aims of universal brotherhood, comparative study of religions/philosophies and to explore powers latent in men/nature.

They felt that from India ancient wisdom had gone out to the world through Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina faiths so the international headquarter was to be located in India. After landing in 1878 in Bombay, Olcott is said to have bent down to worship the soil of the ancient land of India. For a few years they traveled across India giving lectures

on Theosophy and finally landed in Madras.

At first glance, in 1882, of the palatial colonial country home, then called the Huddleston Gardens, on the banks of Adyar river, Col Olcott said, "we knew our future home had been found". Madame Blavatsky, in letters to her aunt describing the place, said, "it's wonderful here, what air, what nights and gazing over an ocean sparkling and shoreless, as if alive". And that is how TS Adyar found its new home in the lap of natural abundance, on the banks of a sparkling river and overlooking the vast expanse of sea.

Col Olcott (who converted to Buddhism) did a lot to preserve ancient Buddhist and Sanskrit texts, scrolls and palm leaf manuscripts. Earlier this library was part of the main headquarter building but soon it got too small for the burgeoning collection. So, in 1967, the foundation stone of the new library was laid and it now houses some of the rarest treasures in a temperature

● by Dushyant Singh

and humidity controlled environment.

Annie Besant, after she took over as president in 1907, went about acquiring a lot of land around the original 27 acres of



Headquarters building of TS Adyar.



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years old. It is a landmark of Chennai, a true example of priceless heritage. The main trunk fell in a storm in 1989 but the widespread canopy of subsidiary trunks is a sight to behold for nature lovers. It occupies an area of 40,000 square feet. I also spotted huge Cannon Ball trees. They are called Nagalingam or Sivalingam flower trees because of the distinctive shape of its flowers which look like hooded Naga over a lingam.

Olcott, in 1905, got imposing temple pillars (trilithons) transported from the ruined Vijaynagar era fort temple at Krishnagiri and installed them at five locations here as he wanted such religious iconography to find a respectable place instead of an abandoned location.

After the Annie Besant talk, I had an opportunity to meet Tim Boyd, President TS Adyar, and we spoke about how Indic religious thoughts and ancient spirituality were the magnets that pulled the founding members to India and then to Madras, which is now Chennai. TS celebrated its 150th Foundation Day a few months back with an international convention which highlighted the continued importance of TS Adyar as a 'Flaming Centre', as Besant said, radiating power of wisdom and compassion across the world.



Adyar Ala Maram or Adyar Bodhi Tree.



Vijaynagar era trilithons with religious deities.



Olcott Bungalow at TS Adyar.



The Nagalingam/Sivalingam flower of Cannon Ball tree.



The Founders – Madame Blavatsky and Col Henry Olcott.



The Hall of Unity.

Huddleston Gardens, to multiply the size of a campus befitting its international stature. She also acquired what is now called the Olcott Bungalow, once one of the private residences of the Nawab of Arcot and his zenana (ladies quarters). This bungalow also was home to the famous Maria Montessori, of the eponymous Montessori style of education, for a couple of years around 1939, as she conducted classes for children from across India.

Olcott used to swim in the adjoining Adyar river and one day he noticed local children splashing about aimlessly instead of going to school. On interacting with them he came to know that they were not allowed into the schools as they were of lower caste. That prompted him to start Olcott School, a free school for the poor and marginalized children where they got two meals a day which was a huge success. This was a forerunner of the current mid-day meal scheme of the government.

TS Adyar is also home to India's second largest Banyan tree which is said to be about 500

# Swami Vivekananda in Madras

This article is based on the book *Holy Mother*, Swamiji and Direct Disciples at Madras, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

The receptions to Swami Vivekananda on his first visit to Madras early in 1893 and four years later in February 1897 could not have been more different. On his first visit, he met Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya, then assistant to the Accountant General of Madras, while travelling on foot near Rameswaram. At Manmatha's invitation, Vivekananda journeyed to Madras and stayed at his house in St. Thome. Vivekananda was seen as a 'travel-worn sannyasi', 'wandering sannyasi', even as a 'beggarly sannyasi'. He was known by the name Sachchidananda. Before reaching Madras in January 1893, he had meditated on the 'last bit of Indian Rock' in Kanyakumari towards the end of December 1892 and resolved to dedicate his life to the country.

In 1897, on his return from the West after making history at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, people gathered in large numbers at the Egmore station. He was received in a horse carriage. At one point, the horses were unharnessed and the carriage pulled by students. Seventeen arches were erected in his honour and he was hailed as the 'Harbinger of peace', 'Prince of men' and 'The Venerable Vivekananda'.

He was put up in Castle Kernan (now Vivekanandar Illam), the palatial residence of Biligiri Iyengar, a prominent advocate.

The hearty welcome and massive celebrations went to show that the people of Madras were seeing Swami Vivekananda as one of their own. He had established his mettle as a 'remarkable English-speaking sannyasi' and 'great Sadhu' among the educated men here

● by  
**TK Srinivas Chari**

during his earlier visit in 1893. It was here that the decision to send him to the Parliament of Religions had gathered momentum and funds collected for his passage to America. One of the first to meet Vivekananda at Manmatha's house in 1893 was G.G. Narasimhachari. He was to become a devoted disciple, working along with Alasinga Perumal and other band of devotees to raise funds to send Vivekananda abroad and also later help bring out *Brahmavadin*, the magazine started in Madras in 1895 by Alasinga Perumal. Vivekananda visited the house of Sir S. Subramania Iyer, Judge of the Madras High Court and later first Indian Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. He was popularly

called the 'Grand Old Man of South India'. Apart from the meetings with many admirers in Manmatha's house from 4 to 10 p.m., he delivered several talks at the Triplicane Literary Society. As he became more popular, word spread to Hyderabad and he was invited there. He visited that city and returned to Madras by the end of February 1893.

Prior to his departure to Hyderabad, he had, accompanied by Manmatha Nath and Alasinga Perumal, visited a place near Kumbakonam to meet Govinda Chetti, an 'exorcist', to relieve himself of mental disturbances due to bad dreams about his mother. Back in Madras, he received news that his mother was well. He also received the blessings of Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, for his plan to visit America. But for an invitation from the Maharaja of Khetri to go there, he would have left the country from Madras. Eventually, he left for America from Bombay on 31st May 1893.

In 1897, on his return from America, Swami Vivekananda stayed here for nine days from

February 6-14. Several addresses of welcome were presented to him. At the one on February 7 evening at Victoria Public Hall, the cheering crowd outside forced Vivekananda to climb into the coachman's seat of the carriage and talk to them. He gave six public lectures.

The Chennai Math has been celebrating the Vivekananda Navaratri (February 6-14) at Vivekanandar Illam on the beach, commemorating Swami Vivekananda's stay there.

Vivekananda's third and final visit to Madras aboard the SS Golconda on his way to America in June 1899 was not to be. Indian passengers aboard the steamer were not allowed to disembark in Madras as it was from Calcutta, a city that had been infected by plague. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who came to Madras in March 1897 and established the Math here, and others came in boats alongside the Golconda and spoke to Vivekananda. Fruits, flowers and other offerings were passed on to Vivekananda and he gave Swami Ramakrishnananda some Ganga water. Known for his piety and devotion towards Vivekananda, Ramakrishnananda asked his boatman to do a pradakshina of the steamer.

No less important than Vivekananda's visits to Madras was the visit of Sri Sarada Devi also called Holy Mother. On the eve of her arrival on February 10, 1911, *The Hindu* carried her lengthy profile. She and her party of 12 arrived by train from Berhampore in Orissa. To have her visit the Madras Math at Mylapore, which had been established in 1907, was a dream come true for Swami Ramakrishnananda. In his eyes, Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi were one and the same. After the Master's passing, she was the Sangha Janani, Mother of the Order.

Three motor cars were arranged to take Sarada Devi



Sri Sarada Devi.

and her party from the Egmore Station to Mylapore. Swami Ramakrishnananda was seen wiping the heated up seat of the car with his wet scarf. It was the first time that the Holy Mother was travelling in a car. She was put up in a house called 'Sundara Vilas' opposite the Math. Swami Ramakrishnananda sent for vegetables from Bangalore and appalam from Trivandrum for Sri Sarada Devi.

During her stay, many eager devotees met her and exchanged greetings. Her saintliness overcame the language barrier and she even gave *mantra diksha* to some.

From Madras, the Holy Mother visited Rameswaram and Madurai and later Bangalore. She left Madras for Rajahmundry on April 1, 1911 en route to Calcutta.

Other than Vivekananda and Ramakrishnananda, nine direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited Madras on different occasions. Swami Shivananda, the second president of the Ramakrishna Order, first visited Madras in late 1893 and met with Swami Vivekananda's followers in the city. During his fifth visit in 1926, he established Sri Ramakrishna Math in Ooty.

Swami Brahmananda, the first president of the Order, known as the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, visited thrice. He laid the foundation stone for the new Math building in Madras (present day old temple) on August 4, 1916.



A group photo taken in 1897, in Ice House, by Mr. Mudaliar. Sitting on Chair (left to right): Tarapada (a monk from another Order), Swami Shivananda, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Sadananda. Standing (left to right): Unidentified, Mrs. Seethamma (wife of Ramaswamy Iyengar), Thangammal (eldest daughter of Ramaswamy Iyengar), Alasinga Perumal, J.J. Godwin, M.N. Banerjee and three unidentified devotees and Ramaswamy Iyengar (younger brother of Biligiri Iyengar). Front row (left to right) (second): Biligiri Iyengar, (fourth): M.C. Nanjunda Rao.

# A Rasam-Saathamadhu Love Story

When I married my Iyengar husband, I thought I had prepared for the cultural differences between us. But the real learning began in the kitchen and sometimes, at the temple.

It started innocently enough one afternoon when we were mixing rice and curry for lunch. I was gently fluffing the rice with my fingers and remarked, "Pesayaradhu makes it perfect, don't you think?"

"Pesayaradhu?" he repeated, with mock horror, as though I'd committed some culinary sin. "You mean *pisiyaradhu*!"

"No, I mean *pesayaradhu*," I said firmly, holding up my curry-stained fingers for emphasis. "It's what you do when you mix rice. You *pesay*."

He smirked. "No, you *pisiy*. That's the correct term."

"*Pisiy*?" I laughed. "That sounds like something a baby would say when they're learning to talk!"

"Exactly," he retorted. "And it still works better than *pesay* that sounds like you're negotiating with the rice."

"Oh, and *pisiy* sounds like you're asking the rice to beg for mercy?" I shot back, unable to stop laughing.

He grinned triumphantly, as though the debate had been settled in his favour. "You Iyers always overthink. We Iyengars just get it right the first time."

"Is that so?" I asked, mockingly raising an eyebrow. "Tell me, what's the Iyengar way of adding oil to a pan?"

Without missing a beat, he said, "We *yennai kuthu*."

I froze. "Kuthu? You stab oil into the pan?"

"Not stab," he said patiently, as though explaining something profound. "It's more like placing it deliberately. Precise. Controlled."

● by Cauvery Kesavasamy

"Precise?" I repeated. "You're pouring oil, not launching a space shuttle!"

He laughed. "Iyengar oil has discipline. Iyer oil is... freestyle."

I shook my head, chuckling. "Freestyle oil wins every time. It doesn't need a lecture to do its job!"

Our temple visits were no less entertaining. On our first visit together, I was in my usual mode, folding my hands in quick, reverent namaskarams every few minutes. My husband, on the other hand, stood perfectly still, arms relaxed by his sides.

"Aren't you going to do a namaskaram?" I whispered.

"I am," he replied. "I'm *sevichufying*."

"*Sevichufying*?" I repeated, squinting at him. "You're not even folding your hands. What exactly are you doing?"

"Listening," he said with a serene expression. "It's what we Iyengars do. We listen. No unnecessary movements."

I stared at him, then at the priest, then back at him. "That's it? Just standing there is *sevichufying*?"

He nodded, clearly proud of his stillness. "It's more spiritual this way. You Iyers are so dramatic with all your namaskarams. Looks like you're doing aerobics."

I burst out laughing. "At least we're engaged! You're just pretending to meditate while your mind wanders to what's for dinner."

He shook his head, pretending to be offended. "You should try it sometime. It's very dignified."

"Oh, I'll stick to my dramatic aerobics, thank you very much!" I said, folding my hands yet again. "At least the gods know I'm paying attention."

One evening, as I was laddling steaming rasam into a bowl, my husband sniffed the air and said, "Ah, *saathamadhu* smells good today."

I froze mid-ladle and turned to him. "*Saathamadhu*? This is rasam."

He raised an eyebrow. "Same thing."

"Same thing?" I gasped, clutching the ladle like a weapon. "Rasam is tangy, spicy, and lively. *Saathamadhu* is... watered-down *daal* with a personality crisis!"

He chuckled. "*Saathamadhu* is soulful, soothing, and refined. Rasam is chaos in a bowl."

"Oh, please! *Saathamadhu* is just rasam that's given up on life!"

He grinned, unbothered by my dramatics. "Call it what you want. It still tastes better my way."

"Your way?" I laughed. "This is my rasam. If it tastes good, it's because it's not *saathamadhu*!"

We ended up laughing so much that neither of us cared what it was called. Though I did add an extra dash of spice -- just to prove my rasam had more character.

Despite our teasing, there was something heartwarming about discovering these little differences. Like the time he suggested making *karamedhu* with *vaazhakkai* for dinner. I nodded confidently, thinking it was something exotic, until I realized he was talking about what we Iyers call curry or *kaai* at my parents' place!

When I pointed this out, he rolled his eyes. "You call it curry,



we call it *karamedhu*. Big deal."

"It is a big deal," I said, feigning indignation. "*Poriyal* sounds delicious. *Karamedhu* sounds like a battle plan."

"Which is why it tastes better," he quipped, earning a playful swat on the arm.

Over time, these small quirks stopped being differences and became inside jokes. He'll now use "pesay" instead of "pisiy" just to make me laugh, and I've started teasing him about his "oil precision" whenever he cooks.

Through it all -- whether it was *karamedhu* versus *poriyal*, *sevikkaradhu* versus namaskaram, or the ongoing rice-mixing debate -- we found ways to celebrate each other's quirks. It's these moments of laughter, ribbing, and shared meals that remind me how much joy there is in bridging the gap between two worlds.

So, when people ask me how I adjusted as an Iyer girl married to an Iyengar, I tell them: "You *vidu* some love, *kuthu* a little humour, and everything falls into place."

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– THE EDITOR

# Sport in IIT Madras

IIT Madras added yet another trophy to its ever-growing list of General Championship trophies during the 58th Inter-IIT Sports Meet, 2025. The event was co-hosted by three IITs: IIT Madras, IIT Tirupati, and IIT Hyderabad. Currently, IIT Madras holds the most wins among all IITs, with 25 wins since the inception of the prestigious tournament. The concept for this sports tournament was conceived by a student from IIT Bombay. The idea evolved into a fullfledged competition, now known as the Inter-IIT Sports Meet.

The First Inter-IIT Sports Meet was held at IIT Bombay in 1961. IIT Kharagpur, the first IIT to be established, emerged as the inaugural championship winner. According to the Annual Report of IIT Madras, 1961, IIT Madras distinguished itself in several events, including hammer throw, long and triple jump, table tennis, as well as the 100 metres and 200 metres sprints. They also did well in the relay events. IIT Madras's cultural activities were judged the best that year.

IIT Kharagpur dominated the first three years in the Inter-IIT Sports Meet. They won the meets in 1961, 1963, and 1964. The 1962 Meet was possibly cancelled due to the Sino-Indo War. The 1963 meet was held at IIT Kharagpur, and

the 1964 meet was held at IIT Madras.

At the 1964 Inter-IIT Sports Meet, IIT Kharagpur successfully defended its title with a hat trick of victories. The event has been recorded in the first issue of the Alumni Association magazine *Pradeep* in an article by B. S. Sudhir Chandra, a student of IIT Madras.

The 1964 Meet marked the inauguration of the stadium by the chief guest, Mansoor Ali Khan, the Nawab of Pataudi. Khan was the captain of the Indian Cricket Team at the time. The first Registrar of IIT Madras, R. Natarajan, states in an interview that he invited the Nawab to IIT Madras as the chief guest. It appears that Khan stayed three days in the Guest House at IIT Madras. Upon Khan's request, Natarajan and the captain even went to watch a Hollywood film in the city during the short period of time during which Khan was at IIT Madras. Natarajan adds that when he asked Khan to stay on campus for a few more days, the latter replied on a lighter note, saying that the Institute Guest House butler Gopal was capable of ruining Khan's cricket career by pampering him with his delicious food.

One of the lesser-known facts about the Third Inter-IIT Sports Meet was that an IIT radio station was set up in the

stadium. The Registrar, R. Natarajan, interviewed Mansoor Ali Khan. There was also a running commentary on the events on a daily basis. B.S. Sudhir Chandra includes this tidbit of information in his article in *Pradeep*.

The following year, the 1965 Inter-IIT Sports Meet was not held due to the Indo-Pakistan War.

IIT Madras was unable to clinch a championship for almost a decade. It was during the Eighth Inter-IIT Sports Meet, in 1970, that IIT Madras won its first championship. The meet was held at IIT Madras. A detailed report of the event was published in *Campastimes* (February 1971).

The remaining three IITs (Bombay, Kharagpur, and Delhi) shared 24 points each. This victory marked the beginning of a golden decade for IIT Madras. They went on to win all the championships in that decade, establishing themselves as a top contender in the Inter-IIT Sports Meets for years to come.

In the same *Campastimes* issue (February 1971), an article titled 'A Letter from KGP' provides an account of IIT Kharagpur student Nandini Nityananda's experience at the Inter-IIT Meet. She emphasised how the meet was dominated by IIT Kharagpur over the last few years and even



went on to suggest that IIT Madras would not be champions for long, "Well done and cuddle those trophies as much as you want. We will be back for them next year." Her statement, bold and confident as it was, did not bear fruit for another 16 years. IIT Madras went on to win all the meets in the decade, and it was not until 1986 that IIT Kharagpur finally won another championship.

The 1971 Inter-IIT Sports Meet was cancelled due to the Indo-Pakistan war. The 10 IIT Madras victories were therefore won over 11 years.

Interestingly, an issue of *Spectator* dated November 9, 1981 notes that there were talks of splitting the Inter-IIT into simultaneous meets where each IIT would host some games by rotation. This idea was apparently mooted be-

cause contingents with common players would be affected. The article claims that the idea for the split came out of the desire to put an end to IIT Madras' winning streak.

IIT Madras' run in the 1970s has not been matched by any other IIT thus far. The 17 January 1982 edition of *Spectator* documents the end of the historic decennial run. The *Spectator* issue was titled 'Madras Dethroned', a dramatic title to the Inter-IIT Sports Meet held in 1981 at Kharagpur. Can IIT Madras pull yet another flawless decade of victories in sports? Only time will tell.

*Excerpts from Glass Panels – Heritage Centre, IIT Madras, January 2026.*

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