

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Freebie Time

The elections have been announced and with it has begun campaigning. There was of course the matter of releasing manifestos and with that having been completed, the finalising of candidates for each constituency is ongoing. Campaigning will begin in right earnest after that. In a sense, this has already begun for no longer are elections based on the merits or demerits of the candidate but on the supreme leader of the party that he/she represents. In that sense, the present CM of West Bengal was not wrong in stating that she is contesting all seats in her state. There is of course a bigger factor – not just in Tamil Nadu but in all states. It is just that TN was probably the precursor – it was here that the art of luring voters became a craft.

There can be many forms of luring. In the early years, there

were simple enticements such as being taken in a party car to the polling booth and then being dropped back. This could be interpreted as educating people about democracy. Then there was the alcohol, biryani packet and cash era – which still continues. And now we are in the

• by Sriram V.

freebie era. It has become the practice for all political parties to promise all kinds of things, ranging from household gadgets to domestic animals and of course cash. It is the last named that has become the subject of intense debate.

A month or so ago, this was the subject of a hearing at the Supreme Court and the apex body came down heav-

ily on the state. The matter pertained to the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited, which happens to be absorbing an annual deficit of Rs 50,000 crores. The State had petitioned against the application of 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Act 2024 which mandated a difference of only 3 per cent between revenue from tariffs and expenditure. The State was reluctant to implement this even partially, as it feared adverse reaction from the public. In effect, electricity itself is a freebie.

The Court however decided to address the larger issue of largesse being handed out, by way of direct account transfers. It questioned as to how revenue-deficit states could manage this, surmising quite correctly that the burden of these freebies

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HERITAGE WATCH

Chengam and Chennai

It was in June 2010 that we had put up photos of Chengam Bazaar in George Town. That was the market as it existed then – not much to look at, and frankly a complete mess. Nevertheless, it was representative of an era past – when purchase of groceries and other food items was done in the open air. The building as can be seen was single-storied and the stalls within were clearly demarcated, with passageways in between. Since then, Chengam Bazaar has vanished, leaving only its name behind. The land on which it stood was probably owned by a trust and they must have negotiated for the stallholders to vacate. A high rise has come up in its place. It may be spanking new, but it is another rent in the fabric that is George Town. It is not clear who gives permission for such tall buildings to be put up in such narrow streets, thereby straining the surrounding infrastructure. But then, that is the way Chennai degrades.

Our OLD is by Sriram V, dating to 2010 and the NEW is by Kalaichelvam Namachivayam, who has sent us an article on the antecedents of the market. The original was in Tamil and we have used Google translate to create the English version, with some edits. Turn to page 7 for the article.

Saving our heritage markers

The euphoria was too good to have lasted. Just as these columns in recent times hailed the work going on in restoring our heritage landmarks comes the disturbing news of a memorial marker of one of the city's most prominent public spaces, the Nageswara Park in Mylapore being in danger.

The story behind the creation of the park has been well-documented. What was once a private pond (*Arathakuttai*) used by the families of Nageswara Rao Pantulu – noted businessman and nationalist, and a few other prominent personalities living in Luz, was filled-up and converted into a park in 1949 by the Corporation of Madras at the initiative

of Durgabai Deshmukh, who was constructing a home for Andhra Mahila Sabha next door. At the entrance of the park, two memorial plaques were put up on pillars, one of which documented the names of the owners of the land who

• by Karthik Bhatt

had donated it to the corporation and the other which contained the details of the opening (it was declared open by late PS Kumaraswamy Raja, Premier of Madras) and the officials of the division.

The tales of woe for the park began with a redevelopment

project being announced mid-last year, at an estimated cost of around Rs 12 crores. The plans included several features such as a redesigned entrance plaza, fountains, badminton courts, interactive spaces, modern seating, etc. While the park was no doubt in need of an overhaul, with the walking spaces in particular needing to be re-laid, why a comprehensive overhaul with artificial beautification elements was deemed necessary is anybody's guess. A significant number of old trees have been felled and the park has lost a good amount of green cover as a part of the ongoing works. But that is not the focus of

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OLD



NEW



FREEBIE TIME

(Continued from page 1)

were being passed on to future generations, at the cost of infrastructure development. The Court however chose not to pass any orders on these observations as it did not want to be seen to be impinging on the executive.

Be that as it may, the Court has brought to light what is a major problem that nobody wants to address. While subsidies by way of cash and kind are definitely in order for those who are economically backward, the present system does not undertake any scientific process for such disbursement. The ration card categorisation, a most porous classification, is often used as the basis, but of late even this has been given the go by. Consequently, money is handed out to just about everyone.

This poses several questions. First, why do those who do not need these gifts have to receive them? Secondly, are we not creating, as the Supreme Court

observed in 2025, a class of people who are forever dependent on handouts? Does this not affect the work culture of a State that was once a byword for the gifting end? Thirdly, where does the gifting end? While household goods, educational benefits and healthcare are without doubt vital and therefore prime cases for subsidy or giving free, what about several other schemes that have no such justification? Are we to be prepared for more and more outlandish gifts in the future?

The political parties may well be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. TN became a prosperous state thanks to great vision, planning and execution. It fostered a superb ecosystem for growth and therefore revenue. The present culture of borrowing from the future for handing out sops for electoral benefits may be the beginning of the end of the State as we knew it. May better sense prevail.

Saving our heritage markers

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this piece. It is the news of the commemorative plaques being in severe danger of being lost forever that raises questions over how safe are our heritage markers when restoration exercises begin.

As a part of the beautification work, the entrance and the pillars were demolished couple of months ago, with no sign of the plaques whatsoever. An alarm was raised by regular users of the park and heritage enthusiasts. *Mylapore Times*, the neighbourhood newspaper, reported on the matter and also carried a statement from the MLA, who assured that the plaques were safe. That laid matters to rest, but only temporarily, as around a week ago, a reader of the tabloid sent in a photo and a report showing one of the plaques severely damaged, lying discarded amidst the construction debris inside the park (the status of the other plaque is not known). When the matter was again raised with the MLA, he is said to have again assured that the plaque was safe and that it would be fixed when the park re-opened.

While we await the fate of the plaques and their place in the restored park (not with bated breath, for given the

veracity of the MLA's earlier statement on its status, it would require generous doses of optimism to do so), this entire episode throws the spotlight on the need for a SOP of sorts when it comes to dealing with heritage markers during renovation exercises. Readers may recollect the initiative taken by this journal a few years ago to save the Petrus Uscan Plaque by the side of the Maraimalai Adigal bridge in Saidapet. It has since received a fresh lease of life thanks to a realization of its heritage value by all the parties concerned.

While plaques in places such as parks and playgrounds may not enjoy the antiquity of the Uscan Plaque nor its historical significance, it cannot be denied that they are important recorders of events, personalities and local history. When these places come up for restoration, care must be taken to ensure that they are safely removed (if they must be), touched up and placed back once the exercise is over. Before any work is undertaken, it is imperative to make a record of these and sensitize the contractor about them to ensure their safety. We certainly cannot afford to lose heritage to basic things within our control.

OUR
READERS
WRITE



An Epistle to Madras

I heard Cumberbatch reading the letter that won the Dear London competition. It persuaded me to write this to my dear Madras.

Dear Madras,

My wish that 2026 is kind to all of us.

In my earliest memory, you are Madras. So even though you became Chennai, you are still Madras. And what's in a name? You are just as dear. I know of no other city, I have not lived anywhere else, but still I will say you are the best.

In the Black & White era, when the distressed heroine weeping a la Sriranjini came to you with a bundle of whatever in her hands, the camera would show Central Station and Marina beach. And we in the audience knew she has reached you.

You had the first corporation and first medical college and more as Mr. Muthiah told us with pride. But repetitions, like

comparisons, are odorous, so I'll try a different route.

Marina was a silvery stretch, and as school girls we proudly said it was the second-best beach in the world. Now her quality has changed and her length too, because four Chief Ministers are resting in peace there. Can Bombay or Calcutta match this?

To the North Indians, the entire people south of the Vindhya are 'Madrasis' and they also speak 'Madrasi'. At least they were like that. Which other city has this claim to fame?

You are an inclusive doll, really. Take for example the road off which I live – Luz Church Road. Walk westwards from St. Thomas Church and you will pass a mosque, next a Jain temple, then Navasakthi Vinayakar temple and end in Luz Church. You are without parallel.

One of the Apostles came here and not anywhere else, one of the first Azhvars was born a Madras child, and a miracle was performed by a Saivite saint on a daughter of Madras, Poompavai.

You celebrate Arupathu-moovar and Velankanni festival

with equal gusto.

If India was put on the world tennis map and world chess map, it is because of Madrasis.

Your name shines in the first four most important cases that shaped our Constitution. A.K. Gopalan vs State of Madras (detention without trial), Romesh Thapar vs State of Madras (freedom of expression), State of Madras vs V.G. Row (State's power to ban association), and State of Madras vs. Champakam Dorairajan (reservation). You are unmatched, dear.

For you, gaana paattu and keertanams, same same. Indo Saracenic architecture and bright violet houses to align with Vaastu, same same.

"*Soltu vanthiyaa*", someone screams when you step in his way on a busy road. But don't be deceived by that abrasive cry. When my 90-year-old aunt was stuck on the first floor in a drowning Saidapet, it was your children who gently carried her to safety.

I love you Madras, Chennai, Patnam.

Prabha Sridevan
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Between Stone & Sentence: What Chennai's Heritage Taught Me About Writing

Chennai does not rush its history. It layers it. Stand before the ancient carvings at Kapaleeswarar Temple, and you will notice something remarkable — no line is accidental. Every curve of stone has been chiselled with patience. You cannot hurry granite. It yields only to persistence.

Writing, I have discovered, is very similar.

I did not begin writing because I felt particularly gifted. I began because my thoughts felt overcrowded — like a December music season schedule where three concerts clash at the same time and you are left choosing between a varnam and a pallavi. My mind was full, but not orderly.

When I started writing regularly, something unexpected happened. The noise began to arrange itself.

Writing forced me into the present moment. It does not tolerate vague thinking. The minute I try to hide behind big words, the sentence collapses like an overambitious kolam drawn without symmetry. The page is unforgiving but fair. It asks, "What exactly do you mean?"

That question is uncomfortable.

It is much easier to have opinions than to structure them. In conversation, we can escape with enthusiasm. On paper, enthusiasm must stand in line behind clarity. Writing makes you slow down enough to examine whether you actually understand what you are saying.

And that slowing down has helped me immensely.

Consider Fort St. George. Begun in 1640, it was not constructed in a single burst of inspiration. It evolved, layer by layer, brick by brick. Writing, too, is iterative. My first drafts are rarely dignified. They are enthusiastic, slightly dramatic, and in urgent need of discipline. Editing them feels like restoring an old heritage building — carefully removing what is unnecessary while preserving the structure.

There is also something deeply Chennai about the rhythm of revision. If you have ever listened to an alapana during the December season at Madras Music Academy, you will know it does not leap to the crescendo. It explores, returns, and

refines. Writing follows that same arc. You circle an idea, test it, rephrase it, until finally it settles into coherence.

I have also noticed how handwriting sharpens my attention. When I write by hand, distractions reduce. There is no temptation to switch tabs or check notifications. It is just me and the page. The mind engages differently — more steadily, more honestly. Perhaps that is why many great thinkers insisted on writing things down. The physical act anchors thought.

Motivation, I learned, does not arrive grandly like a sabha chief guest. It appears quietly after I begin. Many times I have waited to "feel inspired". Inspiration, however, behaves like a shy Carnatic student — it only sings after regular practice has begun.

As a teacher, this realisation feels urgent. If students lose the habit of writing — truly writing, not merely typing — they risk losing the discipline of structured thought. Writing strengthens working memory, argument building, and self-awareness. It teaches patience in a culture that increasingly celebrates speed.

Chennai's heritage stands today because someone valued slow, deliberate craftsmanship. Whether it is the quiet dignity of the Kapaleeswarar Temple's gopuram or the colonial symmetry of Fort St. George, these structures remind us that endurance is built through process, not haste.

Writing has become that process for me.

It has not made my life dramatic or glamorous. It has made it clearer. It has taught me that before speaking loudly, one must think carefully. Before reacting strongly, one must understand deeply. And before claiming certainty, one must examine one's own assumptions.

Between stone and sentence, Chennai has been my teacher.

And in a city rich with history, I am learning — slowly, patiently — to carve my thoughts with equal care.

— Priyanka Soman

The Man from Madras Musings is on a vacation and his column will resume on his return.

Arupathumoovar – 116 years ago



The procession of the 63 nayanmars.



The Ther festival.

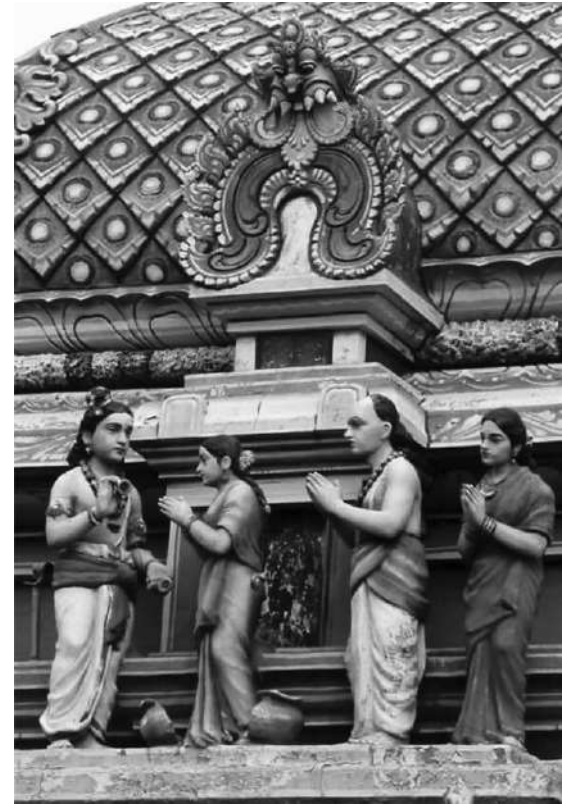
● This article, a depiction of the Arupathumoovar festival from 1910, as seen from the pages of the *Viveka Bodhini* magazine, was originally written in March 2020. Thanks to the COVID outbreak and the announcement of the national lockdown, the festival could not be held that year. This was hosted on this journal's website as the issue could not be printed. We now reproduce the same in print.

– Karthik Bhatt

The annual Brahmotsavam of the Kapaleeswarar temple is just around the corner. The festival has had a long and at times, colourful past; it had been celebrated with funds provided by the Collector of Madras in the early 19th Century and the flag of St. George was ordered to be placed atop the canopies surrounding the temple in order to resolve a dispute between the left hand and right hand castes.

A tradition that has been kept alive since the days when Mylapore was just a village, the Brahmotsavam starts with an offering to the guardian deity Kolavizhi Amman at her shrine, a short distance away. The ten-day festival draws huge crowds, with numbers surging on certain days such as the *Adhikara Nandi* on the third morning, the *Rishabha Vahanam* on the fifth night and the *Ther* procession on the seventh morning of the festival. However, the pinnacle of them all is the *Arupathumoovar* festival on the eighth afternoon, when Lord Shiva comes out in a grand procession, granting darshan to the 63 Nayanmars – the saints of the Shaivite canon. This piece is a description of the festival published in 1910 in *Viveka Bodhini*, the magazine that was being brought out by V. Kuppuswamy Iyer, the founder of the Alliance Company.

The legend of Poompavai is inextricably linked with the Kapaleeswarar temple. Briefly recapped, Sivanesan Chettiar, a wealthy businessman of Mylapore, awaits the arrival of Saint Thirugnanasambandar to offer his daughter Poompavai's hand in marriage to him. In an unfortunate turn of events, she dies of a snake bite and is cremated. Sivanesan Chettiar preserves her ashes in the hope that Thirugnanasambandar can bring her back to life. The Saint arrives from Thiruvottriyur and



Sambandar resurrecting Poompavai, as seen in a frieze atop the Kapali temple gopuram.

invokes the blessings of the Lord by singing a set of verses (known as *Poompavai Pathigam*), at the end of which the girl is resurrected. An overjoyed Sivanesan Chettiar offers her hand in marriage to the Saint, who declines it on the ground that having given her rebirth, he had attained the status of a father to her.

The article gives a detailed description of the enactment of this episode that takes place on the morning of the Arupathumoovar day. The idols of Saint Thirugnanasambandar and Sivanesan Chettiar are brought in procession and kept in the pandals set up respectively on the southern and northern sides of the steps on the western bank of the temple tank. Elaborate abhishekams are performed. Ceremonial offerings for the abhishekam of Thirugnanasambandar and gifts for Poompavai are arranged by the representatives of the Kunnakudi Tiruvannamalai Mutt, which stands on Adam Street.

Preceding the processions of Thirugnanasam-

bandar and Sivanesan Chettiar, a bedecked idol of Poompavai is brought out and placed in a fully covered pandal on the northwest corner of the tank. After their abhishekams, Sivanesan Chettiar and Thirugnanasambandar are decked up in readiness to have darshan of the Lord and are brought near Poompavai's pandal.

The odhuvar of the Kapaleeswarar temple then renders the *Poompavai Pathigam*. It is interesting to note that these verses describe the various festivals being celebrated at the temple, each of them ending with a lament that Poompavai has died without witnessing them. At the end of every verse, arathi is offered to Thirugnanasambandar. When the recital

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A two-page colour photo feature of the current year's festival of the Kapaleeswarar temple is carried on Pages 4 & 5.

A walkabout with Lord Kapali



Lord Chandikeswara. Picture courtesy: Sriram V.



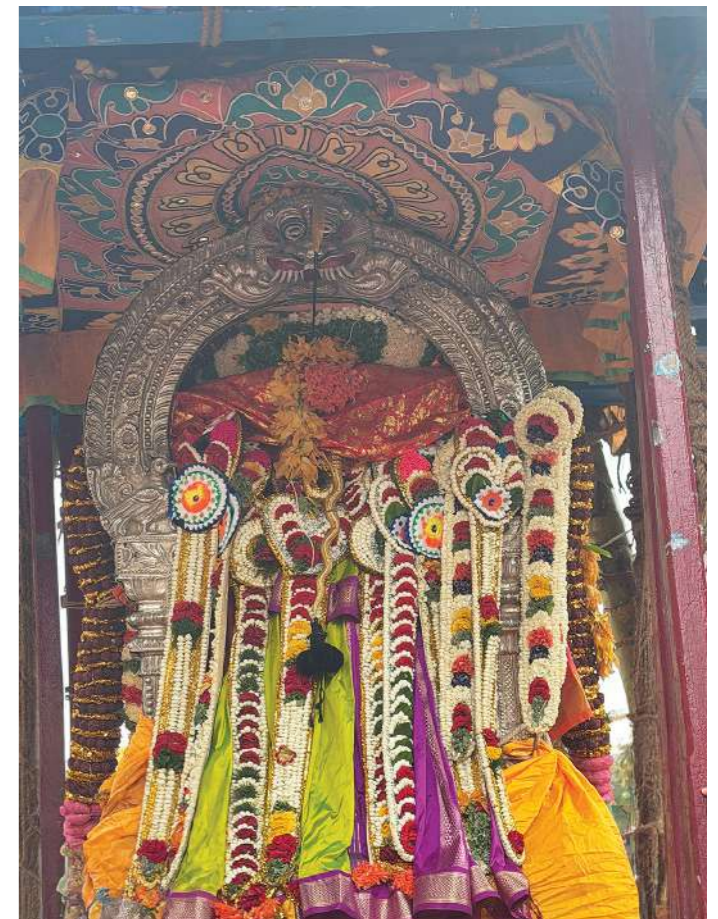
Lord Kapali on the Adhikara Nandi.



Goddess Karpagambal.



Lord Kapali on the Rishaba Vahanam.



The jadais of Goddess Karpagambal.



The ornate silver elephant vahanam.



Crowds awaiting the start of a procession.



The grand temple ther during the procession.

Clockwise from above: From L to R: Isaiganiar, Karaikal Ammayar and Mangayarkarasiar; Poompavai; Sivanesan Chettiar; The real heros during and after the festival – Urbaser Sumeet staff.

Vidya Nagarajan has been a regular at the annual Mylapore Festival as long as she can remember. Except for the picture of Lord Chandikeswara, the rest are from her collection and we thank her for the same.

A megalithic cemetery in the Red Hills recorded in 1858

This commentary pertains to a two-page article, *Memorandum relative to an ancient cemetery situated about 11 miles of NW of Madras* published in the *Madras Journal of Literature & Science*, 1858. This article is unsigned and hence the author is not known, only an end note, 'Madras, 14 August 1858' occurs; presumably it was John Clark, a medical doctor attached to 13th Light Dragoons as a Commissioned Officer and stationed in Madras, who became the Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals in Madras in 1860. This is based on the fact that Clark, while in service in Madras, explored the geology of the then Madras city and nearby districts, and particularly the laterite of the Red Hills, Chennai.

Two remarks made in this article appear worthwhile:

(1) That a slab covering one of the graves was of granite -- 'exotic' to Red Hills -- and not of laterite, the native geological material to this locality. Black granites (dolerite) occur as dykes in Kanchipuram, Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram districts of modern Tamil Nadu.

(2) Finding of human remains and broken pottery in the

'tombs' and in all probability, the writer comments they belong to the period before the introduction of Hinduism, which can be translated as 'megalithic' (2500 BCE-200 CE), 'of iron age' (1200-600 BCE).

The neighbourhood of the erstwhile Madras district, for example, Chengalputtu, Kanchipuram, Tiruporur, Maduranthakam, Thiruvallur include many megalithic cists and cairns either with or without

● by Dr. A. Raman
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stone circles, burial urns, and other pre-historic items.

In 2010, Ashvin Rajagopalan, a megalithic-site enthusiast has spoken about his trip to Tiruporur and the discovery of a stone circle and megalithic cists. In the same article, Ashvin Rajagopalan also speaks of revelations of burial urns and some rare sarcophagi in Chetpet, Perambur, Pallavaram and Saidapet (all within Chennai-city limits) made in the 1800s. Another newspaper report on a megalithic dolmen, estimated 2500 BP, found by

K.T. Gandhirajan (art historian) and Krishna Ramkumar (writer) in Viraraghavapuram, 4-5 kms from Kuvathur towards Maduranthakam, found in 2017 is also available. Smirithi Haricharan (an alumnus of Stella Maris College, Chennai, presently an academic at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore) has made trailblazing findings on the megalithic relics of Sirudavur.

The writer of the 'memorandum relative to an ancient cemetery ...' describes the stone relics he/she found. The writer uses the terms such as 'tombs' and 'apparently of great antiquity' (p. 346), but they have not been convincingly validated. However, the writer supplies two landmarks for the location of the site where he/she spotted these relics: (1) 'About two miles (≈ 3.2 km) west of the Red Hills lake' (presently, the Puzhal lake). (2) Three miles (≈ 4.8 km) NNW of Major-General Farran's bungalow.

Major-General Farran referred here was Charles Farran, born in Dublin, Ireland in 1768 and died in Madras in 1842. He joined the 14th regiment of Native Infantry of the Madras Army in 1790 as a cadet. He

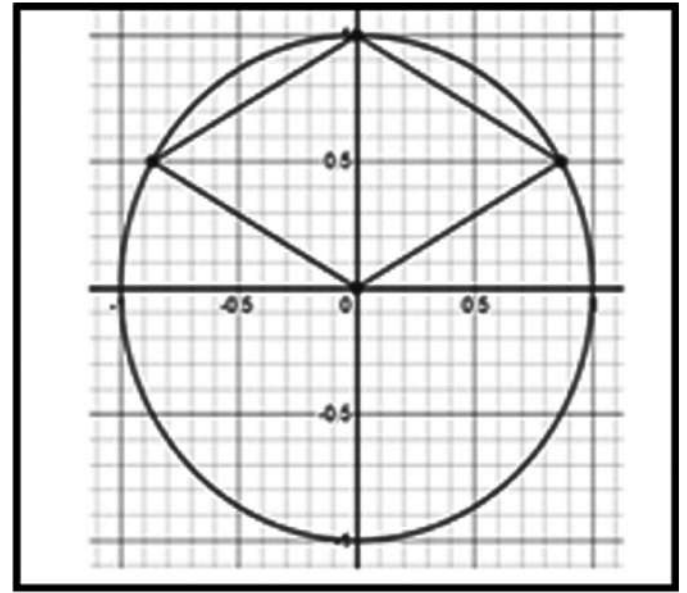


Fig. 1. A parallelogram within a circle (Source: Gary Ward, <https://www.quora.com/Can-a-parallelogram-be-inscribed-in-a-circle>, accessed 5 February 2024).

became a Colonel of the 30th Native Infantry in 1824 and a Major-General in 1837. Madras historian Sriram Venkatakrishnan determines the New Faren's Road in the present-day Perambur-Barracks area as the locality where Charles Farran lived. However, highly likely, Charles Farran occupied owned or rented another property in the Red Hills, about which the author of the memorandum speaks.

The writer of this memorandum refers to previous observations of the same artifacts by Arthur Thomas Cotton of the Madras Engineers. Cotton designed and ran the Red Hills - Chinthadaripettai goods-rail service for transporting laterite for roadworks in Madras in 1837, 16 years before the Boribunder-Thane (Maharashtra) passenger rail service started. The writer of this memorandum indicates:

'They (sic. the stone relics) are situated on a barren plain, a little elevated above the adjoining country, composed of laterite, and partly covered with stunted thorny bushes, few of which are more than two feet (0.61 m) high.'

The following paragraph, reproduced as such here, includes measurements of the observed relics:

'Each tomb consists, rather did consist, of a parallelogram, within a circle. The squares and circles are of various dimensions; the square generally six feet (1.8 m) in length, the breadth of different tombs varying from $2\frac{1}{2}$ (0.8 m) to 4 feet

(1.2 m), the diameter generally 18 feet (5.5 m).'

The above text is hard to interpret; for example, the word 'circle' that included a 'parallelogram' occurs in the first sentence, leaving us confused what could a parallelogram within a circle mean (Fig. 1) and the second-time use of 'circles' refers to what? Absence of an explanatory illustration of what the author saw, which many of the recent-time authors of similar articles include e.g., 6 is distinct in this memorandum.

However, what makes sense is the following two paragraphs:

'The writer of this memorandum saw one of the squares, or graves, partly opened. At about two feet (0.61 m) from the surface appeared a slab, not of laterite, but of granitic stone (an exotic at the Red Hills) corresponding in length and breadth with the size of the square; this slab was not removed, but it has been ascertained from unquestionable authority (a gentleman who witnessed the removal of several of the slabs) that under each slab is found an earthen (earthen) vessel filled with human bones - pieces of the broken pottery lie about the tombs that have been fully opened.'

'There is no appearance of inscriptions on any of the stones; the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages have no tradition regarding the tombs, in all probability, they existed previous to the introduction of Hindooism.'

Arupathumoovar – 116 years ago

(Continued from page 3)

concludes, the curtain covering Poompavai is removed, after which a grand arathi is offered. Following this, the trio has darshan at the sanctum sanctorum before going on to join the Nayanmars, taking their place at the head of the procession. Lord Shiva comes out in full glory and the grand procession starts around 3 p.m. and takes around seven to eight hours to complete. It is interesting to note from this article that the practice of Tiruvalluvar joining the procession along with the Nayanmars has been in place since 1905 or so.

A chat with a priest associated with the temple reveals certain interesting aspects of the enactment of the episode and how it remains almost unchanged till date. Offerings for the abhishekam of Sivanesan

Chettiar are brought by the representatives of his community, who have a mandapam right opposite the Eastern Gopuram of the temple. A rendition of the *Thiruthondar Puranam* narrating the sequence of events up to the arrival of Thirugnana-sambandar in Mylapore precedes the *Poompavai Pathigam*. A pot containing jaggery and covered with cloth represents the urn in which Poompavai's ashes were kept by Sivanesan Chettiar. This is opened at the end of the rendition of the *Poompavai Pathigam* and the jaggery is distributed as prasadam to the gathering.

The article also gives a fascinating description of the crowds and the gaiety surrounding the festival. It estimates a crowd of around four to five lakh people visiting the festival and also notes that vehicular traffic in

Mylapore is stopped by around 2 p.m. It also gives a detailed account of the various charitable activities carried out on that day. It notes that several thaneer pandals are set up around the temple to serve water, buttermilk and *paamakam* to the public, with some of them organising *annadaanam* too. It is interesting to note that the Sivagnanasambandar Thaneer Pandal at Ramakrishna Math was set up in 1860 and continues to be active till date. The public is also served bananas and cucumber to beat the heat. An interesting charity mentioned is the distribution of cow's milk to feed the children who come to the festival. The article also notes that the thaneer pandals continue for a distance of two to three miles, yet another feature that has remained unchanged till date.

“Chengam Market” in Chennai

In Chennai, the street housing the Government Press – located near the Vallalar Nagar bus terminus – is named Nattu Pillaiyar Koil Street. A specific building situated on this street is known as “Chengam Market”. A neighbouring street is also referred to as “Chengam Bazaar Street”.

Many years ago, several families migrated from Tiruvannamalai, Chengam, or surrounding areas, settling in the major cities of that era – namely Madras, Bangalore, and Bombay. Those who arrived in Madras in this manner chose to reside near Broadway, in what was, and is, a bustling and densely populated locality. It is highly probable that the building now known as “Chengam Market” was originally established to cater to the daily necessities of these settlers.

In those days, this building housed distinct shops dedicated to various commodities: flowers, fruits, vegetables, greens,

groceries, fish, eggs, mutton, and chicken. For the non-vegetarian food enthusiasts of that era – particularly those residing in areas like Seven Wells, Chintadripet, and Saidapet – this market stood out as an indispensable and unique destination.

Much like how the name “Senganmal” evolved into Sengamma and subsequently Chengam, this Chengam Market has also undergone several

linguistic transformations over time. It was variously referred to as Chengam Kadai Market, Chengathan Kadai Market, and eventually Chennakadai Market. Today, locals point out this specific building only if one explicitly asks for the location of Chennangadai Mar-

ket! Furthermore, it was once a common practice among the people of Madras – specifically the older generation residing in Saidapet – to remark to anyone speaking in a loud or boisterous manner: “Why are you speaking like a woman from Chennangadai Market?”

Currently, as this locality has become predominantly inhabited by communities with a preference for vegetarianism, one can observe that the meat shops

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that once defined the area have gradually transformed into vegetable stalls. Until a few years ago, this building stood in a dilapidated state, having lost its structural integrity. While a few vegetable stalls, tailoring shops, and frame-making workshops occupied parts of the premises,

the remaining area served as a residential space for the local inhabitants. However, it has now been transformed into a four-storey structure, radiating with renewed brilliance.



Located on the very same street, adjacent to the Chengam Market, stands a building that has undergone a series of transformations: originally an Annamalaiyar Mutt, it later became a wedding hall, and today, it serves as a private storage facility. Inside this structure, an

inscription dated 1840 can be found, bearing the name “P.V. Narayanasamy Mudaliar Wedding Hall”.

Observing the proximity of this hall to the Arulmigu Arunachaleswarar Temple – dedicated to the deities enshrined in Tiruvannamalai and bearing the names of the Lord and Goddess – one is led to view the “Chengam Market” as a symbolic link connecting Tiruvannamalai, Chengam, and Chennai.

Permission

● by **Cauvery Kesavasamy**
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Cauvery sent us this article to time with Women’s Day but as she herself observed, everyday is women’s day. And so even though it is a little late, we are publishing this.

– The Editor

Sharing something I wrote for Women’s Day. April is here so it may be a tad late, but I also believe every day is Women’s Day. So it may not be all that late either!

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

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

– THE EDITOR

I am very good at finishing things.
Emails. Deadlines. Lunch boxes. Arguments in my head.
I am less skilled at sitting down without earning it.

Rest has always felt like something I have to qualify for. As though somewhere, someone is checking whether I’ve done enough to deserve stillness.

Even leisure must multitask.
If I watch something, I’m making a to-do list.
If I sit down, I answer messages.
If I pause, I justify it.

For years, I didn’t dislike myself.
I just negotiated myself.

Adjusted tone.
Lowered volume.
Apologised quickly.
Made jokes about my own flaws before anyone else could.

Now, as I’m pushing into my forties – not quite there, but close enough to see it – something has shifted.

The urgency has softened.
The need to impress has thinned out.

And I’ve started noticing her.
My daughter.
Watching.
We’ll look at old college photos and she’ll say, “Ma, you’re so pretty.”

Not *you were*.
You are.

And I’ll begin, out of habit – “Yes, when I was thinner...”
She stops me.
“Stop it, Ma. You’re beautiful. It doesn’t matter if you’re thin or not.”
She says it firmly. Like she’s correcting a grammar mistake.

And I smile – not because she thinks I’m pretty.
But because she knows what kindness is.
And she knows how to use it.

When I bump into something and apologise instantly, she says, every time,
“You don’t have to apologise, Ma. It was an accident.”
So now, I don’t comment on my double chin.
I don’t hesitate to ask for the plus size if that’s what fits.
I don’t let passive remarks slide off my back -- I question them. Calmly. Clearly.
Because my thirteen-year-old must know that questions are part of our rights.

If I’m tired, I say it.
“I’m tired today. Can you fill my cup?”

And when I see she is tired, I ask,
“How can I fill your cup today?”

These are not loud teaching moments.

There are no speeches.
No dramatic declarations.

Just small corrections.
Small permissions.
Small shifts in posture.

And then –
She is not memorising my words.
She is studying my permission.

So now, when I sit down in the afternoon light and do nothing at all,
when I let a chore wait,
when I say, “I’m tired,” without explaining –

I am not being indulgent.
I am rewriting something.
Not just for me.

But for the girl who is learning, quietly,
what a woman is allowed to be.

Veteran sports writer Thyagarajan passes away

S. Thyagarajan, a veteran sports journalist who was best known for his hockey writings, passed away on March 23, 2026 in Chennai. He was 85. He is survived by his wife and two daughters. For over 50 years, Thyagarajan served *The Hindu* with distinction. During this period, he covered six Olympics and nine Asian Games, apart from several international hockey events featuring India. Known for his crisp writing laced with words and phrases that brought out the essence of the matches to the tiniest details, Thyagu, as he was popularly known, or Mr T (a name the famous British hockey journalist, Pat Rowley, gave him!) carved a niche for himself in the field of sports journalism. It's not that hockey alone was his forte; his dispatches from Olympics and Asian Games on athletics and other disciplines were a treat.

What stood out about Thyagu was his humble nature, dedication and his helping attitude. As Anand Philar, a senior journalist, stated in the obituary he had written for the Sports Journalist Federation of India website, Thyagu was a

firm believer in the principle of First In and First Out at the press box. At a time when harsh deadlines would be a huge hurdle, Thyagu would easily cross it. And often, while others would be in the final stage of their dispatches, he would nod to all indicating that not only was he done with his reports for the day, but also was off to his hotel room! Commitment and professionalism: Thyagu was a super example of this.

Although Thyagu began his career with *The Indian Express* in 1961, within a year he moved to *The Hindu* which he served till the end, leaving behind a treasure that will long remain an inspiration for generations of journalists. What was particularly noteworthy about his long association with sports was the way in which he dealt with players and officials – with a touch of care and understanding. That explains why Thyagu was held in such high esteem by all in the field of sports.

Olympians Munir Sait (India's goalkeeper at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics) and V. Baskaran (Indian captain

when India won gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympics) have a flood of memories of this suave hockey writer. Munir, who is well into his eighties, recalls: "Thyagu and I used to be room-mates whenever we were at major hockey events. What I liked about him was his discipline, thoroughness and his gentle nature. Keen to keep himself abreast of all the latest hockey rules, he would

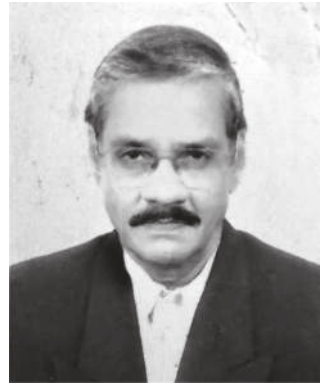
● by
S.R. Suryanarayanan

frequently keep in touch with me during my tenure in the FIH committee. I always had a great regard for him. What to say, just two days before he passed away, he had sent me Eid greetings, to which I had replied. Now I can't imagine he is no longer with us. A great gentleman."

Baskaran says he has known Thyagu from his days in inter-collegiate hockey competitions where he was a regular. "Later we were together during the Olympics and Asian

Games. I have always admired his crisp descriptions and understanding of the game. When I had taken up coaching of the Indian national team, Thyagu would come up with some pointed suggestions which I thought were quite implementable and I used to accept them. To me, he had donned the role of a 'super coach' at that time. Thyagu was very popular and what endeared him to all was his free-going nature. After matches, while relaxing, Thyagu would regale us with sports anecdotes or sing old Tamil film songs – he was a good singer!" Truly it is shocking to realise that Thyagu will not be there any more to discuss hockey matters. We will miss him immensely," says Baskaran as he signs off.

Apart from his writing skills, Thyagu was also known for his administrative acumen. He headed the Media Commission of the Asian Hockey Federation; was the Chairman of the Field Hockey Commission in the AIPS from 1998 to 2006; and a member of the erstwhile Communication Committee of the International Hockey Federation (FIH). He was also



S. Thyagarajan, picture courtesy: The Hindu.

the President of the Sports Journalists Federation of India (SJFI) from 1996 to 1998.

For me personally, Thyagu was always my guru, guide and friend. As a fledgling sports journalist with the PTI in the 1980s, I had the opportunity to observe him at work at major national championships – mainly badminton and athletics – and I always consider that as a phase of my education. Later, I became his colleague in *The Hindu* and had the benefit of his guidance. Indeed, in his passing, an era in sports journalism has ended. Rest in peace Sir.

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