

# The Egmore of Yore - A Reverie

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Coming back to India, to Madras, to Egmore, after years of staying abroad, is a thrill which has to be experienced, not explained.

The first surprise is the easy passage through the customs. They almost push you out - Tirumala "Jharugandi" style! The numerous baggage trolleys ensure that you don't have any hassles with the porters. Easy does it. You elbow your way through the milling crowds, wondering why the entire population of Madras has turned up to welcome you. Out at last and after a bumpy ride ... it's Home!

Home! There is a thrill there with nothing to excel it. After re-familiarisation with relations, and getting over the jet-lag, one feels like looking around for old familiar faces. But none is to be seen.

Kichappa is dead (RIP). Raghavachari has migrated to UK. O.S.Ramaswamy has shifted to somewhere in KK Nagar (whatever the abbreviation may mean). Ah! But that pocket dynamo, Seenu Naidu of football fame, now 78, is there. He is now a doddering old gent, afflicted perhaps by some nervous disease and cataract. He is happy beyond words. Talks and talks. Of old days, old names. "Remember those stalwarts of Egmore Recreation Club. The tall Pattabhi, V.Sampath, Manavalan, Devanathan, 'Hobbs' Narasimhan, Taxidermist Doraiswamy...". He goes on and on. Memories flood back of those days in the sporting fields, of the 'Lake' area which, paradoxically, had not a drop of water to boast of. You move on...

Many are those who are gone, but the landmarks are still there. The Arasa Maram near the P2 Police Station, complete with the tiny Vinayagar temple adjacent to it, the Egmore Pharmacy, and the spruced up Lakshminarayana temple adjacent to Chinna Reddy Street. Egmore High Road is now full of shops and tourist cars, and people get crowded out of the pavements.

On the eve of the elections you see Mr.Paruthi Illam Vazhuthi 'walking the walk' along the streets of Egmore and asking for votes (while his rivals went round in cars or jeeps). Any wonder that he won hands down? An M.L.A. from Egmore, a lone A.I.M.L.M. who held the DMK fort, was elevated to the post of Deputy Speaker... an

One is tempted to walk around Egmore and see the old haunts. The familiar name plates are missing... Diwan Bahadur T. Rangachariar, advocates V.N. Sama Rao, J.S.Athaneseus, P.N.Marthandam Pillai (whom Rajaji selected as MLC), V.N.Venkatavaradachariar (his name board is still there though he is gone), Barrister N.Rajagopalan, Justice Somasundaram, Seshagiri Rao Naidu, Doctors T.Gopala Rao and Sunderarajan, Sriramulu Naidu of Duff & Co, P. Chenchiah Adishesha Mudaliar, Susainathan, Namperumal Naidu, and many others. Mr.A.N.Parasuraman of the leonine mien had to shift from Halls Road to Sait Colony. He gave a new dimension and sheen to Egmore's image in education. Journalist Manian and Actor-Producer Balaji are Egmore 'boys' who have made good.

Over the years many landmarks have disappeared or changed hands. Harihara Vilas, where the well-rounded Iyer sold well-rounded potato Bondas for half anna, now houses the Census office (to keep a tab on the hourly increase of our population). Pankaja Lunch Home was another favourite haunt for Egmoreans. Its proprietor, Krishna Iyer, bought an autographed photo of Gandhiji (at one of his prayer meetings in the forties) for Rs.75 and hit the headlines. In those days it was good money.

Things have changed for the better and in some cases for the worse. Nostalgia overcomes one as he recalls the Garuda Uthsavams, the annual volleyball tournaments of Egmore Friends Union Club, Adi Krithigai, the Vinayaka Chaturthi processions and the Members Day at the Jagannatha Bhaktha Sabha.

Yesteryears are no more. Today is here. The today generation is here. But Egmore still has a quaint charm about it. The Egmorean, who is he? One should be pardoned for playing with words and letters. An Egmorean is Ethical to start with, optimistic in the middle, and neighbourly in the end. That's what he is and may his tribe increase!

*(Editor's Note: Hurrah to that! Mr.Vengrai Parthasarathy is leaving India soon, so this may be his last contribution. METRO ORACLE, along with all its readers, wishes him "Bon Voyage", and hopes he will return*