

# Tamil Nadu InFocus

THE HINDU

## NUGGETS OF HISTORY

### English batsman Colin Cowdrey's link to Tamil Nadu

R. Ashwin is the first from Tamil Nadu to join the list of those who have played 100 matches in Test cricket. English cricketer Colin Cowdrey, the first person to reach this milestone, was born in Dooty. In his autobiography, he recounts his training with a local, Kishan, whom he calls his "methodical coach" in cricket and golf.

### Wife of a missionary who worked for the uplift of Indian women

During the British rule, Eliza Caldwell, wife of London Missionary Society's Robert Caldwell, was among those who worked for the uplift of women. She followed in her mother's footsteps. After marrying Robert at Nagercoil in Travancore, she moved to Idaiyangudi in Tirunelveli and worked towards women's education.

### When the Congress lost in its bastion in 1977 after Emergency

The voters in Vilavancode, which was in the news after its MLA S. Vijayadharani switched from the Congress to the BJP recently, had rejected the Congress in 1977 after the Emergency. Until then, the party had won every election since 1962. While it secured over 50% of the vote in 1962, 1967 and 1971, it could hardly touch 5% in 1977.

### A Navy veteran who opposed Kudankulam nuclear power project

Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas, former Chief of the Naval Staff and Ramon Magsaysay awardee, who passed away last week, opposed nuclear weapons and adopted a cautious approach towards nuclear power. He was among those who petitioned against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project in October 2011.

### Ramanathapuram was infamous for its water scarcity in the past

Ramanathapuram was infamous for water scarcity in the past. Assembly records show the exodus of people from Paramakudi and Mudukulathur to Thanjavur in the late 1950s because of famine. In 2004, Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav compared the landscape to that of a Rajasthan desert. (Contributed by R. Sri Venkatesh.)

## A doyen of the Criminal Bar who played a vital role in women's education in Madras

V.L. Ethiraj, born in 1890, was a successful lawyer. He appeared in several famous and infamous cases in a career spanning over four decades. In 1944, he donated ₹10 lakh towards establishing a women's college in Madras, now known as Ethiraj College for Women. Today, the college and the road it stands on testify to the jurist's legacy.

R. Sri Venkatesh

If Anna Salai in Chennai and halfway through a kilometre-long busy stretch stands a college with a 75-year-old legacy. This women's college shares a part of its name with the stretch too. The name is that of a barrister and philanthropist, the first Indian public prosecutor of the Madras High Court, and the founder of Ethiraj College for Women (ECW). Vellore Lakshmanaswamy Ethiraj was born in 1890. His life was a long series of happy events and can only motivate young lawyers, as Suresh Balakrishnan, lawyer and author of *Earldley Norton: A Biography*, outlines in his other book *Famous Judges and Lawyers of Madras*. Ethiraj's personality and the ideals he upheld were behind his triumphs in a field once dominated by British lawyers. "He was a humble man who held his mind boldly, and was held in high esteem by those around him. He always presented a sense of fairness in his actions. He had a way of life and treated people with respect," says V.M. Muralidharan, chairman, ECW, and great-grandnephew of Ethiraj, recalling the stories he has heard about the barrister.

### 'A prudent decision'

In 1909, aged 19, Ethiraj discontinued his education at the Presidency College in Madras to pursue law in England. On November 23, 1913, he enrolled in the Madras Bar as an advocate under senior advocate S. Swaminathan. Ethiraj rose to stardom when he forayed into criminal law and took up cases of rape and murder that many advocates of the time shunned. "This turned out to be a prudent decision in his career," Mr. Balakrishnan says in his book.

A report by late lawyer and columnist Madabhushi Rangadorai, popularly known as Randor Guy, in *The Hindu* dated July 29, 1990, highlights Ethiraj's skills of advocacy. "He looked



A singular achievement: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unveiled the statue of V.L. Ethiraj at Ethiraj College for Women on September 20, 1973. AKHILA EASWARAN

for a loose brick in the prosecution to demolish it. He relied on human psychology and studied judges as thoroughly as he did the case files." In fact, Ethiraj, as Mr. Balakrishnan says quoting his juniors, adopted a persuasive approach towards his cases as opposed to pompous arguments. He was not known to speak for long but would rather cut to the chase. "My father used to say he [Ethiraj] used to prepare for hours and hours, even for a mere 10-minute argument. That helped him piece the narratives together; he knew the right set of blocks or the one particular block to crack, to get through," says Mr. Muralidharan.

### Ethiraj adopted a persuasive approach towards his cases. He was not known to speak for long but would rather cut to the chase

In a career spanning over four decades, Ethiraj had appeared in several famous and infamous cases. The most well-known of them is the Lakshminathan murder case trial in 1945, in which M. K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar and N.S. Krishnan — leading stars of the Tamil cinema — were among the accused. Ethiraj had appeared for them and got them acquitted in 1947. The 'Mud Lamp case' in 1929 showcased his stellar attention to detail: he deduced that there was no sufficient illumination during the time of murder. This resulted in the acquittal of the accused. For the Kakinada conspiracy case of 1937, he was offered a hefty fee, which he used to buy a Bentley car. In the Kadambur case of 1920, he assisted Swaminathan and was able to get the acquittal of the Kadambur Zamindar's son charged with the murder of Clement De La Haye, the principal of Newington House, a college in Madras.

He had also appeared in the Emmanuel Sekaran murder case, in which Forward Bloc leader U. Muthuramalinga Thevar was among those arrested. He asked the court that Thevar be provided with a chair, drawing applause from the visitors. As a defence lawyer, he had appeared in the Kallakudi railway station renaming demonstration case, in which DMK stalwart and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi was an accused. "The city remembers him as a great lawyer. He is a doyen of the Criminal Bar. The High Court judges held him in high regard. He was a great public prosecutor who always informed the court about the good and bad points of the case. With an ever-pleasant

demeanour and gentle, persuasive arguments, he is reputed to have had a phenomenal capacity to get the court to see his point of view even in very difficult matters. That was his hallmark," says N.L. Rajah, a senior advocate of the Madras High Court. "The law was very traditional those days. There were only three segments — criminal, civil and company law. He possessed phenomenal skill in his domain," says M.S. Krishnan, another senior advocate of the High Court, recalling conversations among his peers on Ethiraj.

### Towards philanthropy

In 1944, Ethiraj donated ₹10 lakh for establishing a women's college in Madras. It was opened in 1948. It was among the first few women's colleges in Madras. Asked whether it was a planned decision, Mr. Muralidharan says, "There is no certain answer to that. All that he had saved he decided to dedicate to one particular cause. Had he wished, he could have donated the amount to different causes, but he did not. Around 1948, he started giving more time to the college than his profession. He had also given away the title deeds of two bungalows for the college."

However, persuading parents to enrol their wards was extremely difficult in the initial few years, says Mr. Muralidharan. "But today, what he [Ethiraj] had invested in has blossomed. From just about 95 students in the first year, we have over 7,800 students now. So he would have done this with a sense of purpose."

Besides, Ethiraj was a pious man and donated to temples, recalls Mr. Muralidharan. Interestingly, he was a student of former President S. Radhakrishnan when he studied at the Presidency College. He died of cancer on August 18, 1960. As part of his 100th year commemoration in 1989, the Commander-in-Chief Road was renamed as Ethiraj Salai by Karunanidhi. Today, the college and the road testify to his legacy.

were detected near the positive area during the



Former West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi inaugurating the administrative block at Ethiraj College for Women on Thursday. Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan is also seen. M. SRINATH

## 'Women must have autonomy to exercise their right in marriage'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Women should have the autonomy to exercise their right in marriage, said Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former Governor of West Bengal. He talked about age of consent, dowry prohibition, and domestic violence while speaking at the valedictory function of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Ethiraj College for Women on Thursday.

Mr. Gandhi urged all students, girls especially, to read the Sarda Act or the Age of Consent Act and the Prohibition of Dowry Act. "I want autonomy to mean the right of a daughter in the family to tell the prospective in-laws [that there would be no marriage] if the dowry suggestion is not withdrawn," he said.

The vigorous advertisements for gold put "pressure that is crushing" on middle-class and lower middle-class homes, Mr. Gandhi said, adding that, "I would like all the girls studying in this college and elsewhere to say, 'gold is

beautiful except when it becomes a pressure'."

Minister for Information Technology and Digital Services Palanivel Thiaga Rajan congratulated the college's board for earmarking funds for scholarships, and said the college had followed the lead of universities in the U.S., which admit students based on merit and fund their education.

College chairman V.M. Muralidharan announced that the institution had established a scholarship fund of ₹7.5 crore. The money would be dedicated "to supporting the academic and sporting aspirations of deserving students."

He said the fund aimed to reaffirm the board's commitment to ensuring that financial constraints never stand in the way of education and opportunity.

On the occasion, a five-storey building to house the administrative offices and smart classrooms on the college premises was commissioned.



# College sets up ₹7.5cr scholarship fund

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ramesh Shankar R

**Chennai:** As part of its 75th year valedictory celebrations, Ethiraj College for Women has set up a ₹7.5 crore scholarship fund to support students facing financial constraints.

The college inaugurated a new administrative block on Thursday. At the function, former West Bengal governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi said, "This college must play a role in retrieving the institution of marriage from the great agony of domestic violence."

"The fund is a reaffirmation of our commitment to ensure that financial constraints never stand in the way of education and opportunity," said V M Muralidharan, chairman, Ethiraj College Trust, at the 75th year valedictory celebrations.



**ON THE DAIS:** Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former governor of West Bengal, and Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, minister for IT, at Ethiraj College for Women on Thursday

Tamil Nadu IT minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan batted for elite institutions in the state. "However, the elite should not decide based on exclusiveness. The demand and supply cannot be the basis for elite institutions. It's the quality of work, level of intellectual access should be the basis," he said.