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Scenes from an Indian City



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Reminiscences of a Bangalorean

by Prof. M.N. Srinivas

EARLY YEARS

I moved to Bangalore from Delhi early in May 1972 to help start an institute for research in the social sciences. I have stayed in the city since then. My contacts with Bangalore, however, go back to my childhood, and Bangalore has been a part of my consciousness ever since I can remember. I begin my account of the city with my earliest encounters with it.

My mother's mother lived in Bangalore with her elder daughter, Srirangamma later known as Akkayya, literally, elder sister, who lived in a bungalow on Fifth Road, Chamattappet. (Chamattappet was one of the earliest extensions of the city, even before Basavanagali and Madhavaram.) As long as Grandmother was alive, my mother used to visit Bangalore during the summer holidays but the visits became much less frequent after Grandmother's death. I did accompany my mother on more than one visit but what is tantalising is that I only remember unconnected bits and pieces of events occurring at different points of time. It is like having a few unrelated snapshots, and one has to make the best of them, but to try and make them more coherent than they are, would be to falsify them.

My aunt's bungalow was set in a large compound, the land sloping to the south. In fact, the road occupied the crest of the valley, the house being a few feet lower than the road. I remember a few crotan plants with multi-coloured leaves between the gate and the steps leading to the front verandah. Two rooms flanked the verandah at either end, while the front door led to a large hall which was again flanked by rooms. Between the front part of the house and the kitchen and dining room there was a large yard, running the entire width of the house, and open to the sky. The kitchen was again a few feet lower than the front part, and steps descended from the back of the hall into the yard and kitchen. At

the far end of the compound was the coachman's quarters, and there was also a covered shed for the horse and Victoria. As befitted a high official, my aunt was driven about in a Victoria. (Cars had not yet become common. I recently learnt that in the 1920's only one gentleman in Chamattappet owned a car, and he was an engineer who had retired from service in Bombay Presidency. My aunt eventually graduated to owning a second-hand Ford in which she toured the State on her work.) Apart from the coachman's quarters, I remember a guava tree with plenty of tiny fruits which I used to eat, probably making myself sick in the process. There was a large, hairy white dog called Julie on whose back I used to sit and ride. The dog was the favourite of my cousin Raju, who was a contemporary of my older brother, Gopu. I remember Gopu telling me that Raju used to go in search of the sloughed-off skin of cobras to feed Julie with. He wanted Julie to be the local champion dog which meant that every other dog had to be scared of him—a diet of cobra's skins was believed to make a dog ferocious. (But Julie was so patient with me? I think Raju used to roam the area around Kempambudhi Tank in search of sloughed-off cobra skins.)

Srirangamma ought to have a place in the cultural history of princely Mysore. She, along with her aunt, her father's younger brother's wife, Rukminiamma, were the first two women in South India to become graduates and that was before World War I, when all colleges in princely Mysore were affiliated to the University of Madras. When aunt and niece received their B.A. degrees at the same convocation ceremony in Madras, they were taken in procession by the local gentry, musicians at the head, and the good women of Triplicane waved *stuti* before them, honouring the two who had brought credit to their sex and community. Dyengars were concentrated in Triplicane. I heard this from my mother who was proud of the achievement of her elder sister, and her aunt.

Both Srirangamma and Rukminiamma rose to high positions in the



Government of Mysore. Srirangamma was a high official in the Department of Public Instruction, while Rukminiamma had a long innings as the Principal of Mahatma's College in Mysore. Both married men who supported their wives' careers, and who were content to stay in the wings while their more important spouses occupied the centre of the stage. Both outlived their husbands, and lived to a ripe old age enjoying the respect of the people around them. What is astonishing is that society seems to have accepted without much fuss a revolutionary change of role for women, and their spouses. Feminist historians, please note!

As I said earlier, I have recollections of my grandmother: she was a widow with shaven head, always dressed in a light brown jute sari with an inch-wide red border. Her head was covered by a part of the sari, and someone must have taught me to tense her which I did, and which used to annoy the old lady. I have faint recollections of my aunt's husband who used to shout periodically asking me not to run around the terrace in the hot afternoons while he slept in a room below. I have also recollections of Raju's sisters, Jaya and Padma, more of Padma than of Jaya. But it is all so fragmentary.

I remember a visit to Cabbon Park, walking around clumps of bamboo, and watching the water flowing in the canal, and also a visit to the Museum, and looking at things kept in glass cases. There was also a visit to the house of S.D.S.Iyengar, my mother's maternal uncle's son—a big bungalow set in a big garden with very many potted plants, and sculptures of deities on granite slabs, presumably from a temple, standing at strategic points in the garden. Only after May 1972, when I settled down in Bangalore, did I learn that that bungalow was Chovvilly, now part of the Woodlands Hotel complex. S.D.S.Iyengar, after a distinguished career in the Mysore Electricity Department, moved to Coimbatore as the head of the Pykhara Power Project.

Raju lived in Akkayya's house along with his sisters Jaya and Padma. Their father, M.G.Varadachar, was a lawyer, whose brilliant career was cut short when he was only in his thirties. He fell victim to influenza which came in an epidemic form in 1918-19. Varadachar was my maternal uncle, younger than Akkayya and older than my mother. My mother

was full of stories of his brilliance, wealth, and popularity—they were part of our family's folklore. However, quite recently I came across a brief account about him in a collection of twenty biographical sketches in Kannada, *Jeevite Chintavali* by his friend and admirer, D.V.Gandappa (Kavyalaya, Mysore, 1966), and it is evident from the account that Varadachar was a gifted and unusual person. His fortunes were rising rapidly at the Bar, and there was every chance of his becoming a judge of the Mysore High Court. (In fact, his partner in law practice, C.S.Donowsamy Iyer, rose to become the Chief Justice of the Mysore High Court.)



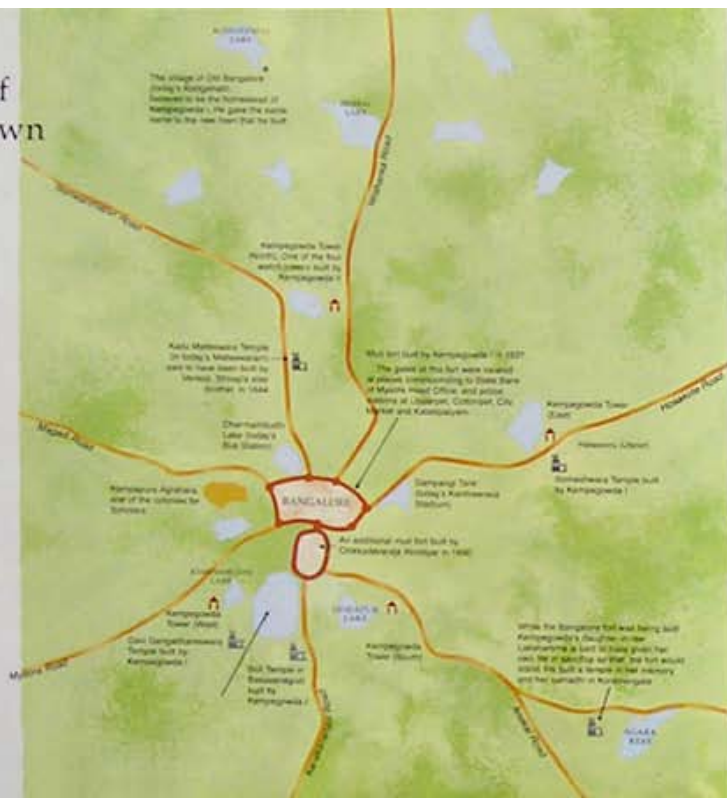
Prof. M.N. Srinivas and his wife Radhika in the garden of their house in Bangalore.
Prof. Srinivas, India's first celebrated social anthropologist, is in a highly weathered print. He is I.R.T. Das Visiting Professor in the National Institute of Advanced Studies and Chairman, Institute for Social & Economic Change. Radhika teaches geography in a leading school in Bangalore.

Beginnings of Bangalore Town

Founding of Bangalore in 1537

Kemp Gowda I (1513 - 1569), a local chieftain ruling the Vitahanka province in the Vijayanagara empire, planned to build a fort in today's Bangalore region. Emperor Achalaraya gave him a grant of Hale Bangalore (Kudiphal), Varan, Arava, Halasuru (Uluw), Krappi, Talahosangana, Jigani, Kambalagada, Kanalli, Banasara, Hirasiguda, which together yielded an annual income of 36,000 varaha.

Kemp Gowda I used this income to plan and build the Bangalore town. He laid out inside the fort, Chikpet, Dodpet, Baligpet, Cottogpet and other commercial areas, surrounded for different traders and artisans. These parts continue to be the city's principal commercial areas to this day.



Bangalore's Growth

A garrison town of Chikka Devrajappa Wodeyar, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan; then a British Cantonment; finally the State's Administrative HQ.

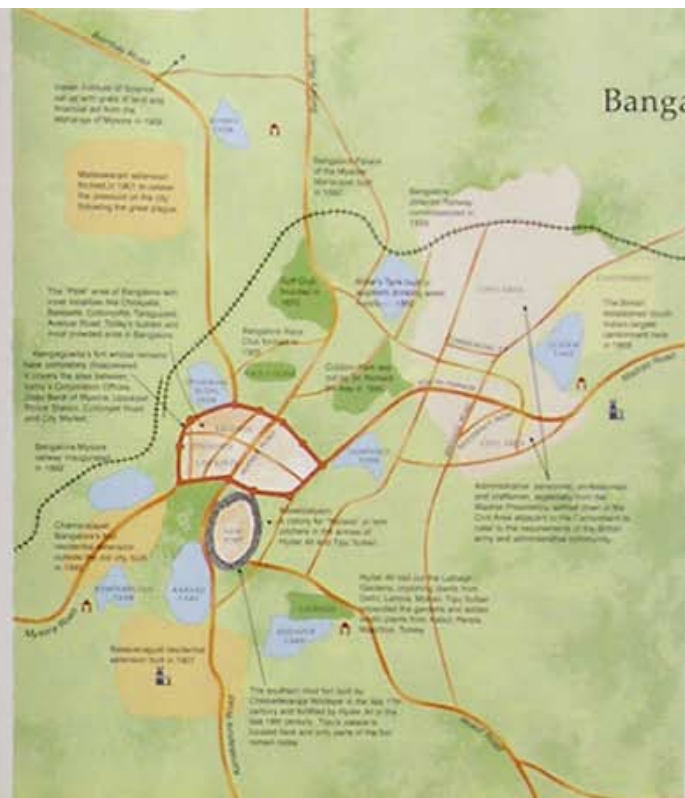
In 1687, the Mughal Subadar of the five Provinces sold Bangalore to King Chikka Devrajappa Wodeyar of Mysore for 3 lakhs rupees.

In 1709, Hyder Ali received Bangalore as a jagir from Chikka Devrajappa Wodeyar II. He fortified the western fort and made Bangalore an army town.

When Tipu Sultan died in the Fourth Mysore war in 1799, the British gave the Kingdom, including Bangalore, back to Krishnaraja Wodeyar III. The British Resident stayed in Bangalore.

In 1831, following requests by Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, the British took over the administration of the Mysore Kingdom.

With the direct rule of the British Commission based in Bangalore, it became the State Administrative HQ. The density of Bangalore thus took a further leap, making it virtually a major city of India and one of the fastest growing in the world.





A good aspect of Bangalore's proximity to the 'kannada' (Kannada) 'kannada' (Kannada) is a common feature in Karnataka. Along the southern coast, the coastline has become long and wide, with many small and large cities, all of which are...



The market stall in Bangalore.



The market stall in Bangalore.



The market stall in Bangalore.



The market stall in Bangalore.



Children in a public playground in the Shantipur area.



Cricket ball cricket in the Shantipur public ground.



A family member in Shantipur.