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By Vijaykumar Duraiarasan

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Madras Artefacts: A Fascinating Time Travel through Mount Road

By Vijaykumar Duraiarasan (<http://www.xplorewithvijay.com/blogs/author/vijay8686/>) / November
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Whether you are born and brought up in Madras or have migrated to earn your living in Chennai, Anna Salai (aka Mount Road) should be no alien to you. But wait, how well do you know about its heritage? Let's travel back in time and dig a bit about some prominent landmark structures in the city! It's a fascinating time travel, back in the times of British era, through the Mount Road.

WHEN COLONIAL BRITISH ERA SHAPED THE PRESENT DAY MOUNT ROAD:

The prominence and popularity of this arterial road can be attributed to the British era when carts, predominantly, occupied the roads for the many benefits of the British East India Company. Dotted with several commercial establishments, Anna Salai is the second most longest road in the city. Have you paused a bit to think what may be the longest road in the city? Take a guess! It's none other than the Poonamalle High Road.



The British were so impressed with the Mughal architecture, that they borrowed the idea of decorative elements from the Indo-Islamic architecture popularly known as Indo-Saracenic style of architecture and implemented it on the several public and government buildings not just in Madras, but across the nation. A majority of these structures feature a dome and spire adorning the top tier! Let's focus on the heritage sites along the stretch of Anna Salai.



AGURCHAND MANSION:



to the Begum of the Arcot family.

Let's begin with an interesting trivia! Did you know that the city's first 100-foot high building exists in Anna Salai? Yes, you read that right! It's a 100-foot building, quite inconsequential in today's modern world! However, back then, the Agurchand Mansions was the the city's first tallest building. In its heydays, the Agurchand Mansions extended from where it stands today all way to the Express Estate towards the eastern side, what is now called the Club House road. Did you manage to identify the building and its current location in the city? The property of Agurchand Mansions exists diagonally opposite to Spencer Plaza and along the lines of the LIC building. History has it that the property of Agurchand Mansions once belonged

ADDISONS AND CO:

I am sure you would have gleamed and admired the row of classic dome shaped window structures adorning the building that was once a striking car showroom in the city. It is currently occupied by the Central Bank of India's regional headquarters. This property belongs to the Addison's, a company that pioneered bicycle imports and later moved over to motorbikes and cars. It was the year 1904, when Addison's became the first company in the then Madras to formally represent a motor car manufacturer.



The company's affinity towards automobiles led to the simultaneous representation of Triumph motor-cycles as well. Addison's enormous success and expanding business necessitated the inauguration of this glorious building.

HIGGINBOTHAMS:

There is no dearth of awesomeness when it comes to heritage sites on the famed Anna Salai. Here comes another trivia! Fairly easy one! What's the country's oldest bookstore called? I hope you have already answered that!



A British librarian, on being ejected out of the ship he was on, found employment with a bookstore run by a group of missionaries. After incurring major losses, the missionaries sold the bookstore at a low rate. The year was 1844 when Higginbothams acquired the bookshop and holds its place among the bibliophiles in the city. The structure of the building has shades of resemblance to the ancient Indo-Saracenic architecture and the rest is history!



BHARAT INSURANCE BUILDING:

The famed Indo-Saracenic style of architecture had its wings spread to several buildings during the the colonial British era. The Bharat Insurance building adjacent to the LIC building is yet another classic heritage structure based on the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture.



Built in 1897, it was a center of commercial activity. However, lack of maintenance severely deteriorated its physical structure and eventually leading to a collapsible state. A series of petitions for a demolition drive and reconstruction of the heritage structure into a multi storied building was stayed by Madras High Court. In the year 2010, much to the delight of heritage lovers, the Madras High Court passed a landmark judgement of its heritage status, thereby putting an end to any type of demolition drive.

LIC BUILDING:

It's time for another trivia! What's the first skyscraper of Chennai? By now, you should have already answered it! The year 1959 gave the city its first skyscraper.

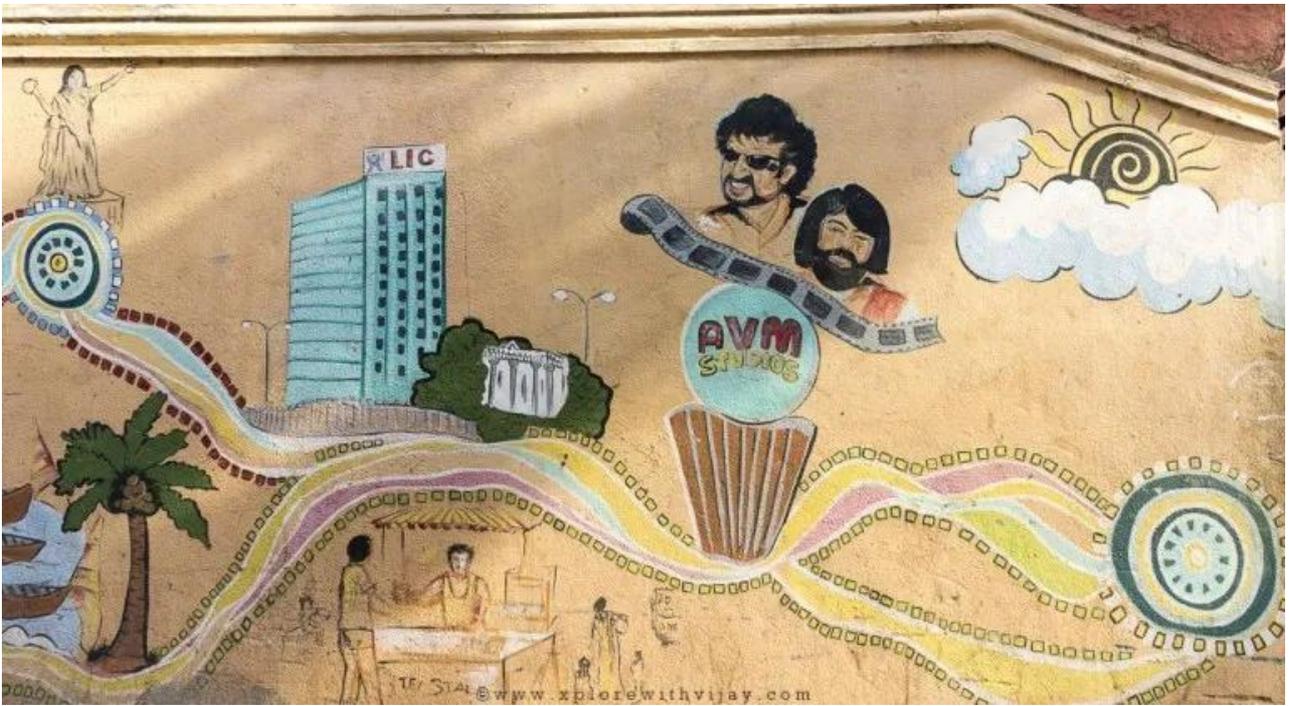


At 177 feet tall, the 14-story building housing the Life Insurance Corporation of India was the first skyscraper built in the city. The status of first skyscraper of Madras was held by LIC building for about 35 years, until the Hyatt Regency took over sometime in mid 90s. Nevertheless, the LIC building continues to awe passerby!

BOOTHA PERUMAL ROAD:



Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Anna Salai is a tiny and quiet agraharam like locality. Boothaperumal Koil Street is a small locality behind the Poombuhar building on Anna Salai. It was surprising to see narrow lanes with the walls lending an artistic gallery. The houses resembled the typical agraharam style. This place is sure to cater to your Insta ready photographs.



Photowalks are a wonderful events in that you come across many different people and a chance to interact, learn and discuss ideas. This event invoked memories of my early days in photography. I had a chance to meet one of my long time contact and friend – Karthik Rajagopal (<https://www.facebook.com/KarthikRajagopaal>). He is a full time professional wedding photographer and it was great spending time with him along the walk.



FRIENDSHIPS ARE PRECIOUS:

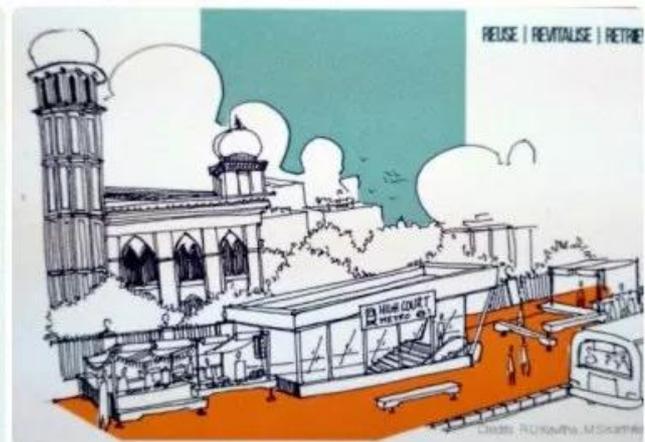
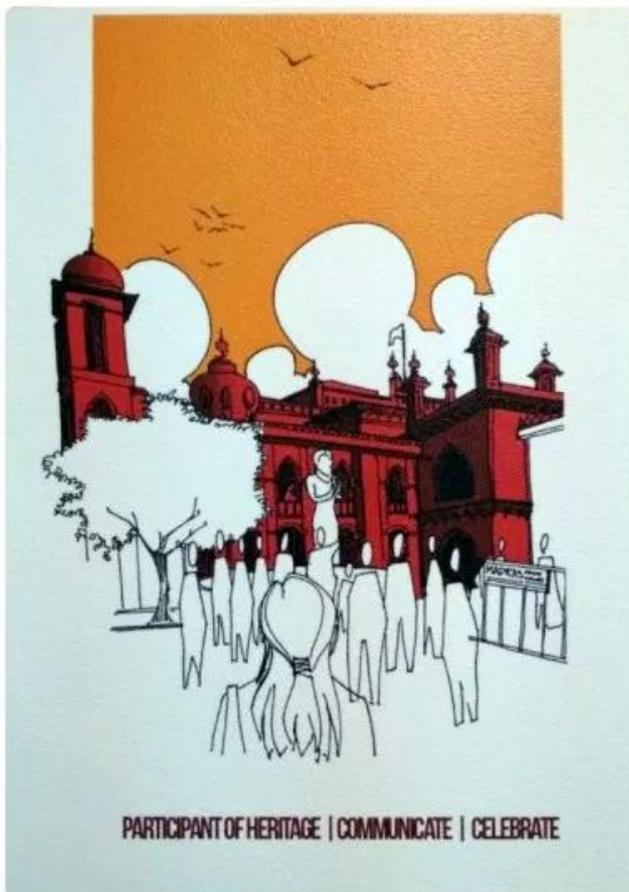
Meeting someone new that shares similar interests and being humble is a gift! I happen to meet a budding entrepreneur – Mohamed. A calm personality that he is and we got going in no time! His is a startup and I can already see some lovely contents on his website. Check them out at here (<https://adipozhi.wordpress.com>).



THE HOSTS FOR THIS EVENT:

Many thanks to Madras Photo Bloggers (<https://www.facebook.com/madrasphotobloggers/>) and Madras Inherited (<https://www.facebook.com/MInherited/>) for coming together to host this wonderful Photowalk enumerating the hidden legacy behind the heritage buildings in Chennai. The takeaways/gifts in the form of postcards are a collector's delight!

EYE-CATCHING POSTCARDS DESCRIBING THE CITY OF CHENNAI:



The heritage sites mentioned in this article are only a handful of information and there are many others across the city. Do join again with me for another fascinating historical facts on heritage sites of namma Chennai!