

Celebrating Mylapore (By Geetha Iyengar)



(Pictures Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

There is a charisma about Mylapore. That charisma was highlighted more than ever when the Sundaram Finance Mylapore Festival in January turned the spotlight on such many-splendoured features like music(classical and folk), Bharata Natyam, traditional games like Pallankuzhi, Therukoothu (street theatre), and creative and intricate *kolam*-s. Encouraged by Sundaram Finance, organiser Vincent D'Souza of *Mylapore Times* and coordinator Revathi spared no efforts to make residents feel proud to be Mylaporeans while using local open spaces, getting locals to participate and involving children in every aspect of the four-day fest. In its infancy, nearly ten years ago, the festival began by turning the spotlight on the art of *kolam* but it has gradually grown to encompass many other avenues of creativity, resulting this year in 65 events, 1000 participants and 20 locations.

Every part of Mylapore was a hub of activity. Nageswara Rao Park reverberated to the sounds of Carnatic music concerts by the young. It also hosted painting and art contests for them and a chess tournament and workshops



that made children the stars of the shows. A traditional game like Pallankuzhi was unearthed from Grandma's treasure chest and developed into a competition. Even in an age when there are online games and malls with their gizmos, it soon became apparent that Pallankuzhi could hold a candle to modern sports.

The signature event of the festival on the last two afternoons brought out the creativity of many Mylaporeans who had until then hidden their talent under a bushel. The show-stopper was the Sound and Light show that was presented for the first time at the 16-pillared mantapam of the Sri Kapali Temple. 45 children, all students of Padmashree Vidyalaya, led by guru Sujatha Mohan, enacted the story of Mylapore and its many facets. Narration was by Sasi Rekha, while the music was scored by K.S.R. Aniruddha. The lilting cadence of the *Geetham* sung in chorus made the presentation memorable.

There was something for everyone. Foodies had their fill at 'Food Street'. Knick knacks from the Narikuravas and T-shirts and mugs specially designed for the Festival were available in several places and the Therukoothu performance over four nights held a niche audience spellbound.



Mylapore with its cultural riches deserves this and much more. Mylapore would be more of a jewel to showcase if the Mada Streets were made one-way throughout the year and the narrow Pichu Pillai Street, which is used on *pradosham* days, is made a "walk only" zone. If the area around the Temple is declared a Heritage precinct as is done in many Western countries where they try to preserve the ethos of an area, it would make a very telling statement.

Hopefully, that will happen one day.