

Bangalore Bus Route No. 11 in the 1950s



E. R. Ramachandran

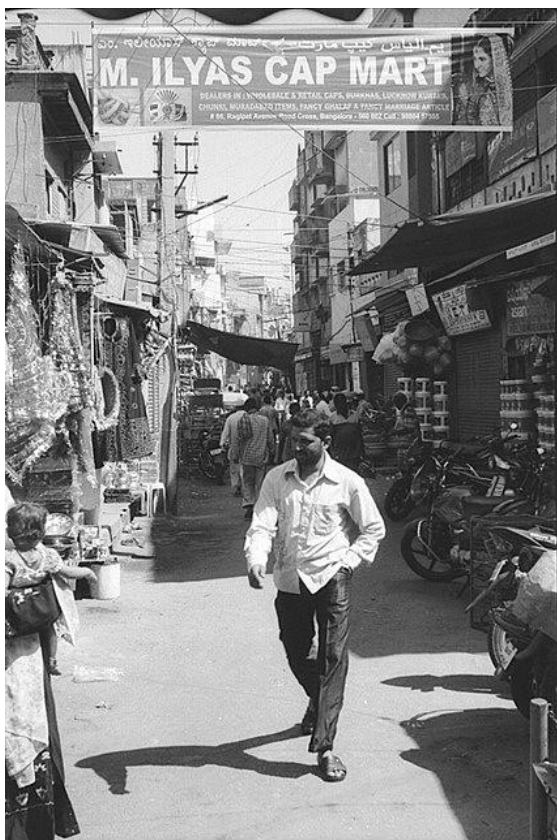
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<http://churumuri.wordpress.com/2008/12/07/once-upon-a-time-in-bangalore-on-route-no-11/>

I remember that in the 1950s and 1960s Bangalore was still a Pensioners' Paradise and very much a sleepy town. It was mostly divided into "City" and "Cantonment" areas, with Basavanagudi and Malleshwaram the best known among its residential areas. Probably R.K. Narayan's famed town, Malgudi, grew from an equal mixture of Malleshwaram and Basavanagudi.

Jayanagar and its famous mosquitoes had not made their debut yet. After mosquitoes, bandicoots literal and metaphorical, appear to have descended on Bangalore to make what it is today.



Bangalore's lifeline: one of the various *petes*

The City Market was really a conglomeration of various *petes*—Chikkapete, Balepete, Tharugupete, Akkipete, Cottonpete—holding the business community. In a way they were the lifeline of the city. *Dandu* or Cantonment ('Contrumentru' as the villagers would call it), where the British had stationed their troops, was still a very far off place for most Bangaloreans; Almost as far as London itself.

One got a fair idea of the City travelling in BTS, or Bangalore Transport Service or in Kannada, a naughty sobriquet, *Bittre Tiruga Sigodilla* (if you miss a bus, it will be eternity till you see the next one). At that time, the only other modes of transport for a common man were the *Jataka Gaadi* (horse - driven covered cart) or *Nataraja* service – local lingo for footing it out.

I have travelled in BTS any number of times to go to Railway station, Congress Exhibitions in Subhash

Nagar or the countless number of cinema halls in one street in Majestic locality, which all Bangaloreans proudly brought for discussion with visitors at the first available opportunity!

The word 'autorickshaw' had yet to enter the lexicon; the contraption was yet to invade our streets.

Those who worked in *Atthara Katcheri* (Office with 18 Government Departments), before the Vidhana Soudha was conceived, or those who worked in the Accountant General's office, mostly walked to their offices. After an early meal around 9 am, chewing Mysore *villedede* with *sughnathi* betel nuts, most of them changed in to their *kuchche panche* and their marriage coat, some wearing the Mysore *peta* as crown, set off to their office holding a tiffin box which contained their afternoon snack: a couple of *idlis* or *uppittu*. Some inhaled *Ambaal Nashya* (snuff) to get a new high as they set off to their office.

The same tiffin bag magically transformed itself to Mysore *mallige* (Jasmine flowers) in the evening along with *badami halwa* for the wife eagerly waiting near the gate. The only change in the office gear was a half-sleeve sweater during winter, and a full-length umbrella, which sometimes doubled as a walking stick during the monsoon and an inhaler fighting common cold.

Bangalore looked almost empty during the day as most of the eligible science and engineering graduates or diploma holders, still half asleep, were herded into buses at the unearthly hour of 6.30 in the morning and ferried to far off factories like HAL, HMT, BEL, LRDE, ITI, NGEF, Kirloskar, BEML, etc. It would always remain a mystery whether some of the Zzzzz sounds you heard from the radio and telephone handsets were electric static or snoring sounds from sleep deprived engineers!

The city suddenly perked up in the evening as buses drove away the curfew-like atmosphere by dropping factory-weary legs to trudge home for a cup of steaming coffee and *pakoda*. If a housewife, by any chance, missed this ritual, historians would record that initial scenes of Third World War erupted from her home! Most of Bangaloreans returned to their favourite haunts like *Yagnappana Hotlu* opposite National High School grounds or *Bhattra Hotlu* in Gandhi bazaar for their daily mandatory fix of 'Three-by-Four *Masale*' or 'Two-by-three coffee' in the evenings.

The best way of seeing Bangalore and getting an idea of what was happening in the city in those days was to travel by BTS Route number 11.

On Route 11, the bus started its journey from Gandhi bazaar in Basavanagudi opposite Vidyanarthy Bhavan and took you to Tata Institute (now Indian Institute of Science) on Malleshwaram 18th cross, after eons of time that rolled amidst chatter, sleep and fights over *annas* and *paisas*.



Visitors to Vidyanarthy Bhavan for morning *thindi* (breakfast) would already be waiting for the delicious *masale dose* after eating *rave vade* when the conductor asked the last of the commuters to get in to the bus with a raucous 'Rrrrighhtttt!' The *maanis* (waiters) carried at onetime 20 *dosas* in one hand balancing the plates between arm and elbow and would slide it along one by one to the waiting customer. The delicate balancing still continues till today, and those who would like to taste one of the finest *dosas* ever made and see the exercise can still visit Vidyanarthy Bhavan in Gandhi Bazar. How do you reach Vidyanarthy Bhavan? Wherever you are, just tell the Auto driver: 'Vidyanarthy Bhavan'! After a

jumpy ride, your stomach will be ready for the dish. Always ask for *masal dose* and not plain *dose*! ('e' as in posse.)

The bus, initially coughing and moving in fits and starts would go past the only taxi stand in the City and take its first left turn at K.R. Road and pass through Basavanagudi post office and enter Dr. H. Narasimhaiah's National College circle and stop at diagonal road opposite Dr. Narasimhachar's dispensary.

Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, a Harijan, years ago had walked to the city from his village, Gauribidnaur, seeking education, studied in the National Primary school, went on to graduate in Science, became the Principal of the college after securing a PhD in Nuclear Physics from Ohio University and became Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University. 'H.N.', as he was universally known, remained a bachelor, a true Gandhian, helped poorer students of the college and stayed as their hostel mate even as a Principal! He was my Physics teacher and later became our Principal.

Here in the evenings, Gokhale, a Maharashtrian, sold 'Brain Tonic' – a tangy *kadalekai* (groundnut) concoction with the goods atop his bicycle carrier. The light from his cycle dynamo illuminated the area for you to see what you were eating and for him to check whether he has not been palmed off with *sawakalu kasu* (disfigured coin).

Gokhale claimed that students of the National High School and National College figured in the state rank list (and hence dubbed *kudumis* - bookworms) only because his brain tonic was their staple food!

Everything on route no. 11 had "laidback" stamped on it: the issuance of tickets, getting in and out of the bus, and the bus ride itself.

At the end of Diagonal Road, you entered the sanctum sanctorum of Shettys or *Komatis* of Bangalore, who sold anything and everything that could be sold, from gold to *pakampappu*, *gulpavatte* and *gunthapongalanu*; the first two sweet eatables, and the last one mini masala fried idlis.

The Sajjan Rao temple at Vishveshwarapuram Circle, now like everything abbreviated to V.V. Puram Circle, and choultry by the same name was much sought after for society weddings. The Satyanarayana Temple, adjacent as its name would suggest is a temple dedicated for truthfulness. The way politics or for that matter anything that has turned out, this temple hasn't had much of an impact on the city!

Another choultry, the Kota Kamakshayya choultry also at V.V. Puram circle, was opposite to the best bakery in Bangalore, perhaps in whole of south India.

Dressed in spotless white *panche* (dothi) and banians with sleeves, the staff of V.B. Bakery looked as if they were running about on skates taking and fetching orders for *chakkuli*, *kodu-bale*, vegetable "puffs", *om* biscuit, *kharada kadale kayi*, 'Congress' *kadale kayi* and 'Badam *Haalu*' in a jiffy. V.B. Bakery's stuff was made for the Gods who, I suspect, had descended on Bangalore not only for this but also for the weather, the *doses*, and *mallige*.

Next, after passing Modern Hotel and New Modern hotels, both two hundred meters apart with just 'New' added to one of them where the whiff of SKC – *sweetu*, *khara*, coffee – hit your nostrils. The bus stop was opposite Minerva talkies, which in those days mostly showed Tamil pictures and wore a culturally superior hat with Bengali movies and that too only Satyajit Ray on Sunday mornings!

I suspect most Bangaloreans got introduced to *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar* – and *roso gulla* – only through Minerva Cinema.

A 200 meters dash from Minerva on a dingy lane took you to Mavalli Tiffin Rooms which morphed into MTR, as one of the best eateries in town. MTR was one of the few restaurants in India where you waited in a couple of waiting Rooms and gradually graduated to tour Table! Early morning walkers queue up outside after their morning constitutional in the nearby *Lal Baugh* for their Rava Idli, ghee, chutney and wash it down with filter coffee served in silver cups!

Today, MTR, an international brand amongst restaurants, has created a niche for itself amongst students who go to USA for advanced studies. Living a forced exile from homes, the students cook for themselves

using MTR *Rasam* and *Sambhar* powder along with MTR *Dhidir* (instant) Uppittu, and Bisi Bele Bhat. Most of them end up as good cooks apart from doing well in their profession and can always spring a surprise for a future spouse by cooking a dish or two on their own!

After Minerva, the next stop was another theatre *Bharath*, which took you to the world of *Spartacus* and *Robe*. Only *Bharath* and *Vijalakshmi* in *Chikkapete* showed English movies in the ‘City’ side of Bangalore.

Next came *Shivaji* theatre, the abode of Tamil films with a statue of Shivaji, the warrior, riding a horse on the top of the building.

Kannada films were almost nonexistent or a rarity those days. Except for an occasional *Bedara Kannappa*, *Sadarama*, *Ratnagiri Rahasya* (the song [Amara Madhura Prema](#) was a craze then) or *School Master*, it was Shivaji Ganesan and M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) who ruled the silver screen. For a Shivaji Ganesan film, taking two or three handkerchiefs was mandatory because he made you cry in buckets after the interval, while an MGR film was all about romancing Saroja Devi on a full moon night or chasing villain Nambiar on a horseback in a dark black or deep scarlet outfit.

‘*Gemini*’ Ganesan arrived around the same time after quitting as a chemistry lecturer but established ‘instant’ chemistry with top heroines of the day!

Then the bus entered Puttanna Shetty Town Hall, a marvellous building where most major State functions and felicitations took place.

Kengal Hanumanthaiah, former Chief Minister of the then Mysore State was often seen here before he started planning the construction of Vidhana Soudha. When Kengal used convicts from nearby Bangalore Jail to do the cumbersome job of breaking stones into *jelli*, the story goes, one of them slapped Kengal when he came for his daily rounds!

‘MS’ (M.S. Subbulakshmi) sang many of her *kutchheris* in Town Hall, as did “Flute” Mahalingam (Mali) accompanied by Mysore T. Chowdiah on violin. G.N. Balasubramanyam, Lalgudi Jayaraman, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ustad Bismillah Khan are some of the luminaries who had performed here.

Several buildings well-known today, like Ravindra Kalakshetra, had not come up yet, but the United Mission high school, with a very large playground, was there. Even the nearby Canara Bank Head office came up much later.

After crossing Silver Jubilee Park Road and Narasimha Raja Road, the bus would hem and haw climbing the slope towards George Oaks building opposite Bangalore Corporation office and enter Cenotaph Memorial, which was pulled down when some local patriots thought it reminded them of the days of our slavery to British.

Kempe Gowda (1510 – 1570 CE), a chieftain, founded Bangalore in 1537. His statue stands opposite the Bangalore Municipal Corporation which is now called *Bruhat* Bangalore Municipal Corporation (BBMP) signifying Greater Bangalore.

Then the bus would cross the Police Commissioner’s office.

The commissioner, lucky fellow, had his residence right opposite his office! Yet when he drove in his car to his office in style, the police constables gave a guard of honour for him standing on either side of the gangway. This happened every day and a sizeable crowd collected to watch the glorious ceremony!

At the Government Engineering College (which became University College of Engineering and finally University Visvesvaraya College of Engineering – UVCE) bus stop, those who took the bus to *Attara Kaccheri* of the government would get down and loosen up their stiff limbs as also the students of Jayachamarajendra Occupational Institute, which was started by Sir M. Visvesvaraya from his lifetime earnings. Sir. M. Visvesvaraya, a Civil Engineer par excellence, Statesman, Administrator, Dewan of

Mysore helped modernise the State under the Maharajas of Mysore, was knighted by the British and later conferred India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna by the Government of India.

While cycling to my engineering college, UVCE , I would see the bus coming to our college stop having taken off from Vidyarthi Bhavan!

Those who started their trek to office after chewing betelnut could be seen wiping their forehead walking past the bus stop to their offices, a bit tired after their long still unfinished walk!

Those who wanted to stroll down to Cubbon Park would also get down there. If it was a Sunday, they would go with their family to listen to the various orchestras, which played old Hindi songs.

When the new Legislature building was completed, and named Vidhana Soudha, almost all government offices were shifted there. Hanumanthiah, the Chief Minister under whose supervision it was built, in a moment of inspiration got this etched at the entrance to the building: *Sarkaarada kelasa, devara kelasa* (Government's work is God's work).

Even now both God and the staff of Vidhana Soudha are partners involved in the unfinished task!

At the next the bus stop at Maharani's College, the young and old woke up and cranked their necks to have a look at the sari-clad demure beauties getting down. Mount Carmel's, which became the hep, hip girls' college, came much later. The hockey stars, the Britto sisters, most of Bangalore's athletes came from Mount Carmel's College close to Cantonment Railway Station. Shantha Rangaswamy from Maharani's College captained India's women's cricket team.

In the excitement of the Maharani's bus stop, I almost forgot we took the bus an hour back in Gandhi *bazaar* which now picked up some nerve and speed, drove past Central College to the Law College stop.

Behind Central College were the Central College grounds which hosted all international cricket matches as well as Ranji Trophy matches. It was here that a ball from the fearsome fast bowler Roy Gilchrist hit A.S. Krishnaswamy on his chest and flew off to the boundary.

India's famous cricket player, Col C.K. Naidu played here when he was past 70, along with his brother C.S. Naidu and so did Lala Amarnath.

Central Colleges grounds was the place all the Test cricketers from Mysore/ Karnataka cut their teeth playing State 'B' Ramachandra Rao shield, Rohington Baria Cup for Universities, and finally the Ranji Trophy.

In the history of Indian cricket, very rarely or it has never happened, one player refusing to play for India and accompany the team to West Indies because his much revered and admired colleague was not picked in the team. This is precisely what happened when speedster G. Kasturirangan (presently a member of the KSCA governing body) refused to join the team as his team-mate L.T. Adishesh was not selected in the team).

Along with Varadaraj, L.T. Subbu, Balaji Srinivasan (who played in an 'unofficial' Test for India) and later with B.S. Chandrashekar, Erapalli Prasanna, G.R. Vishwanath, Syed Kirmani, Kunjumani V.Subramanyam, Karnataka was a formidable Ranji team. Anil Kumble, Javagal Srinath, Venkatesh Prasad, Rahul Dravid and Sunil Joshi are some of the Cricketers who have played for the country

When our bus took a left to enter Majestic area, you wished you had eyes, like ears on both sides of your head.

The only place in India, perhaps, anywhere for that matter, where so many movie houses once stood cheek by jowl.

Prabhat, Sagar, States, Kempe Gowda, Himalaya, Majestic, Geetha, Jai Hind, Alankar, Kalpana and Majestic theatres starting from Mysore Bank dotted the Majestic area, where most Hindi movies would be screened, quite a few of them completing their silver jubilees.

The bus disgorged people going to the City Railway Station – there was no bus station there at that time! The empty space between Majestic Bus Stop and Railway Station was Subhash Nagar Grounds, which was used mainly for political speeches by likes of Jawaharlal Nehru, Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan.

It was in Subhash Nagar grounds that “Master” Hirannaiyya first staged his famous play *Lanchavathara*, lampooning corruption in politics. During the inauguration of the play, Hirannaiyya told the audience that the livelihood of the actors depended on those who came in after buying tickets, and not on the front row dignitaries who were invitees. J.B. Mallaradhyia, Director of Public Instruction, who was the chief guest got up, walked to the counter and bought a ticket for himself and re-entered the theatre!

From here the bus developed wings as it were, flew past Ananda Rao circle, Sheshadripuram High School, Central Theatre, and entered the citadel of Malleshwaram.

At Malleshwaram circle, it took a left and after taking a right turn at Margosa road (on its return journey the bus took the parallel Sampige Road) started its journey towards Tata Institute going past Malleshwaram Tiffin Rooms, where people waited for their Mysore *masale*, and the Ganapathy temple at 8th Cross Road.

By the time the bus entered 16th Cross Road, most of the commuters had left the bus. Because of the steep gradient, the bus behaved as if it was going up Nandi hills making noise as if drilling was going on some hundred places in the vicinity, with the conductor holding the bar with both hands with a prayer on his lips.

At the 17th Cross Road, students of Malleshwaram School got down with a stoop, looking couple of inches shorter since they boarded the bus. Then the bus went for its home stretch to the Tata Institute, which came about because of the foresight and visionary of Jamshedjee Tata, who thought India should produce its own scientists and chose Bangalore instead of Bombay to set up the Institute. It was only recently we learnt that Swami Vivekananda met Jamshedji in the ship that sailed to USA, and Vivekananda was the inspiration for Tata to set up the Institute in India.

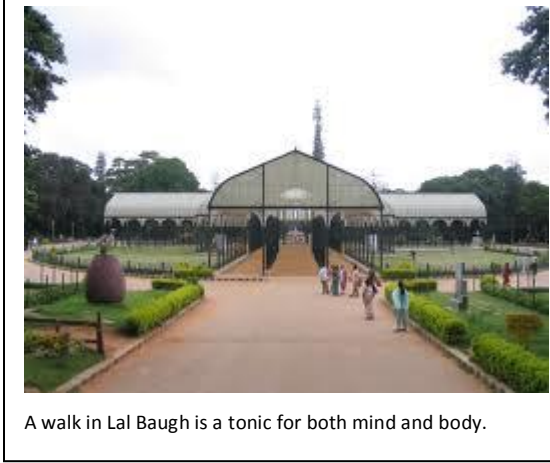
Nobel Laureate Sir C.V. Raman started his own Institute, Raman Research Institute, after his differences with Tata Institute.

After a short break for Coffee and *Ganesha Beedi*, the Conductor would give a shout of ‘Rrrrighttt’ and the journey back would start.

Bangalore of those days was a place filled with fewer people but one had a lot of choices to choose from for entertainment.

Like a Binny vs Blues football match; a Mirza Shield cricket match between Bangalore Cricketers and Bangalore United Cricket Club, BUCC; a Hockey match between Madras Engineering Group, MEG vs. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, HAL at Sullivan hockey Grounds; MTR vs. Vidyarthi Bhavan *dosa*; City Institute Ramanavami Celebrations vs Seshadripuram Sangeetha Sabha....

If nothing else, one could take a walk down South Parade on Mahatma Gandhi Road – MG Road and for a cup of filter coffee in the India Coffee House or at the junction down the road and walk on Brigade Road to Rex Theatre for the latest movie...



A walk in Lal Baugh is a tonic for both mind and body.

half of century.❖

Lalbagh vs Cubbon Park; *Aa Naa Kru* vs *Tha Raa Su* for Kannada Novels, G.P. Rajaratnam vs Beechi, but P. Kalinga Rao stood alone with his rarer Kannada songs like ‘*Yaru hithavaru ninge ee moovarolage*’ and ‘*Baariyya Beladingale*’, songs that praised nature.

Bangalore has grown beyond the wildest dreams of its founder Kempe Gowda. Countless newer localities like Koramangala, J.P. Nagar, Sanjay Nagar, Banashankari, which have dotted the city, are all grandchildren of Basavanagudi and Malleshwaram. If you want to get the original flavour of Bangalore, you have to walk around these two places which will take you back by more than

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