

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

EXPERIENCE THE CHARACTER AND CHARMS OF LITTLE INDIA THROUGH NHB'S SHOWCASE OF HERITAGE BUSINESSES

Singapore, 28 January 2022 – In the early 20th century, many businesses sprung up in Little India to cater to the growing Indian population in Singapore. These garland makers, goldsmiths, tailors, and shops selling saris, spices and other provisions from India flourished, and some have even become household names today.

2. The rich experiences of these businesses are being celebrated and documented through the National Heritage Board's (NHB) **Street Corner Heritage Galleries** scheme, which will be launched in the Little India precinct on 28 January 2022, with eight participating heritage businesses.

3. Under this scheme, NHB works closely with interested owners of heritage businesses with at least 30 years of history to co-curate and co-create “mini-museums” at their premises that showcase the history and heritage of their businesses and trades, accompanied by historical documents, photographs, artefacts, etc.

4. *Street Corner Heritage Galleries: Little India* will feature eight heritage businesses in the precinct: Jothi Store and Flower Shop, Ani Mani, Thandapani Co Pte Ltd, SIS Premium Meats, Haniffa Textiles, Ananda Bhavan, Komala Vilas and The Banana Leaf Apolo. (Please refer to **Annex A** for full write-ups of participating businesses).

5. The **Street Corner Heritage Galleries** initiative is part of NHB's ongoing efforts under *Our SG Heritage Plan* to strengthen partnerships with communities, and raise awareness of and foster a deeper appreciation for heritage in everyday spaces. It is a three-year pilot scheme which was first launched with five heritage businesses in the Balestier precinct in March 2020, followed by seven heritage businesses in the Kampong Gelam precinct in April 2021. The scheme will subsequently be rolled out to two other historic precincts – Kreta Ayer/Chinatown and Geylang Serai – by 2023.

6. In a nutshell, the scheme provides curatorial support in terms of research and content development, and funding support for the fabrication of showcases. It also provides funding support for heritage businesses to present programmes such as talks, tours and workshops, and provides them with opportunities to participate in NHB's signature events such as *Singapore Heritage Festival*.

7. Mr Alvin Tan, Deputy Chief Executive (Policy & Community), NHB said: “With the launch of this new batch of galleries, we hope not only to expand our networks of “mini-museums”, but more importantly, to showcase the interesting people and stories behind heritage businesses in Little India and to document how they evolve, thrive and grow over the years to become the household names they are today.”

8 Please refer to **Annex A** for an introduction to the eight *Street Corner Heritage Galleries* in Little India, and **Annex B** for the list of artefacts. *Street Corner Heritage Galleries: Little India* can also be explored on <https://go.gov.sg/schglittleindia>.

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About the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit www.nhb.gov.sg for more information.

Street Corner Heritage Galleries - Little India

1. Household Name for Traditional Essentials



Jothi Store and Flower Shop

1 Campbell Ln, Singapore 209882

Often described as a one-stop shop for everything related to Indian culture and tradition, Jothi Store and Flower Shop is a familiar name to the Indian community in Singapore. The store was established in 1960 as an *ottukadai* (hole in the wall shop) by former compositor and librarian, Murugaia Ramachandra. Named after the founder's daughter, the store started out by selling sundry goods and everyday necessities to the Indian labouring class residing in Little India.

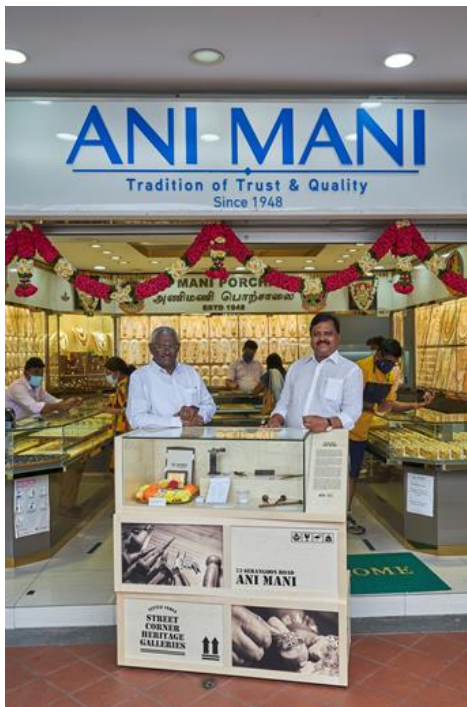
Given the store's proximity to Hindu temples on Serangoon Road, Ramachandra noticed a demand for flower garlands used in religious offerings. A family friend was engaged as a garland maker, and with the help of his brother, Ramachandra worked to meet an ever-growing demand for flowers and religious paraphernalia, and for domestic necessities.

Over time, Jothi Store and Flower Shop gained a reputation for its wide selection of items used in Indian religious ceremonies and rituals. The store also organises its array of prayer and decorative items according to the calendar of religious and cultural festivals observed by the local Indian community. In addition, Jothi Store actively

procures new products to expand the range of everyday items that are sought after by the Indian community.

In 1981, Jothi Store and Flower Shop relocated into part of its present location at 1 Campbell Lane, before expanding and eventually occupying the entire building by 1992. Today, the store is managed by Ramachandra's son, Rajakumar Chandra, who continues to personally serve the throngs of customers who patronise this bustling five-storey emporium in Little India.

2. Jeweller to Brides and Businessmen



Ani Mani

73 Serangoon Rd, Singapore 217978

Ani Mani, which means “to adorn with jewels” in Tamil, has been decking its clientele with traditional Indian ornaments, gold jewellery and gems since 1948. Founders Rathnavelu and his brothers established the *porchalai* (jewellery shop) as they saw potential in the gold trade in Little India. For its customers, Ani Mani is the go-to goldsmith for traditional jewellery such as the *thali* (wedding pendant).

Ani Mani's customers purchase gold jewellery for a myriad of reasons, including as forms of investment, for use in religious ceremonies, and/or as family heirlooms. For the Indian community, the practice of buying gold during the spring festival of Akshaya Tritiya has become more popular as it is believed to be an auspicious day that brings increased wealth and prosperity.

Since its inception, Ani Mani has been renowned for casting the *thali*, a symbolic ornament worn by a bride to mark her marriage. According to South Asian tradition,

each *thali* is customised according to the families' regional and religious specifications. The commissioning of a *thali* is so significant that families typically consult the almanac for auspicious dates and times to order and collect the *thali*. Ani Mani also routinely conducts a prayer session at their in-store altar when Hindu families come to collect their commissioned *thali*.

Besides gold jewellery, Ani Mani is also a purveyor of gemstones, which are traditionally worn among South Asians for luck in business and life. Ani Mani's in-house gemologists pair their customers with the right gemstones based on their birth chart, as every gem is believed to correspond to one of the nine cosmic bodies according to Vedic astrology. Today, Ani Mani is managed by the third-generation descendants of Rathnavelu's family, who continue to craft customised jewellery that hold personal significance to their customers.

3. Keeping it Spicy



Thandapani Co Pte Ltd

124 Dunlop St, Singapore 209443

From turmeric and nutmeg to *sadhakuppai* (a type of cumin seed) and *sajeera* (caraway seeds), spices are common ingredients used to enhance flavour in Asian cooking. Since the 1960s, Thandapani Co has been stocking a wide variety of spices, including those rarely found in local supermarkets, as well as signature house mixes for popular Indian dishes.

Thandapani Co was founded by Sanmugam, who came to Singapore in 1946 and worked at his uncle's shop in Little India, before starting a spice business in Little India

Arcade in the 1960s. Named after Sanmugam's favourite Hindu deity, Thandapani Co focused on selling spices until the 1970s, when it relocated to Campbell Lane and bought over Valli Flour Mills. This enabled Sanmugam to offer spice grinding and spice mixes based on his own recipes, and these recipes have remained popular with home chefs and restaurants in Little India.

Over the years, Thandapani Co's customer base has expanded to include Chinese restaurants and Malay families, as spices are widely used across different types of Asian cuisines. The business also supplies spices to Hindu and Buddhist temples, Sikh *gurdwaras* (temples), mosques and welfare homes, which often prepare meals for underserved communities.

Today, Thandapani Co is managed by the second-generation descendants of Sanmugam's family, who have retained the traditional look-and-feel of the shop and continues to offer quality spices to the diverse communities of Little India and beyond.

4. Legacy of a Tekka Butchery



SIS Premium Meats

20 Buffalo Rd, Singapore 219789

For more than 60 years, SIS Premium Meats has been supplying quality meat to customers at Little India. The business was founded by Sinnasamy Irudayasamy, who arrived in Singapore from Tamil Nadu in 1949 to work in a coffee shop and subsequently at a mutton stall. Sinnasamy opened his own mutton stall, named S I Samy, in 1953 in the old Tekka Market.

S I Samy's customer base and reputation grew further when the stall moved in 1982, along with the rest of the market, across the road to the present Tekka Centre. As S I Samy's clients are mainly Hindu and Muslim, the business refrained from stocking beef or pork to respect the dietary requirements of its customers.

In 1983, S I Samy was registered as S I Samy Trading Company Pte Ltd as it expanded into the wholesale distribution of mutton to other wet markets, restaurants and caterers. The company's mutton supplies also diversified and imports arrived from Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and Brazil via ship and air freight.

In 2018, S I Samy was rebranded as SIS Premium Meats. Today, this family-owned business is managed by Sinnasamy's daughter, Joyce Kingsly. As a child, Joyce often accompanied her father at his market stall and watched him interact with customers. When Joyce took over the business in 1995, she broadened the types of products to include chicken and seafood, and offered more services including home delivery.

5. From Street Stall to Textile Empire



Haniffa Textiles

60 Serangoon Rd, Singapore 217967

Noted for its large collection of intricate saris, few might know that Haniffa Textiles first began operations as a small roadside stall along Campbell Lane. The textile business was founded by O. K. Mohammed Haniffa, who arrived in Singapore in 1957 and worked various odd jobs, before starting his own textile business. Within a decade, the business moved from the pavements into a shophouse unit, before finally settling in a building on the same street.

In the beginning, Haniffa sold the lighter Japan-made nylex sari that was popular for everyday use. He also developed a partnership with several major Japanese sari producers and became their sole distributor in Singapore and India. However, as the taste, preferences and spending habits of Singapore Indian women changed, many preferred *pattu* (silk) saris for festive occasions. In response, Haniffa established contacts with distributors across India to meet rising consumer demand.

Over the decades, Haniffa Textiles diversified and expanded its business to keep up with customer needs. It acquired units on Serangoon Road and Dunlop Street, and sold men's garments, dry provisions and kitchenware to cater to the domestic market, as well as luggage bags and gift items for those travelling or returning to South Asia.

Today, Haniffa Textiles has branches in Malaysia and offices in India run by the second generation of the Haniffa family, including the founder's son, Abdul Samad Haniffa, and daughter, Razinah Begum Haniffa. Even as the company grows, the Haniffa name remains synonymous with quality saris for many Singaporean Indian households.

6. A Century-Old Vegetarian Tradition



Ananda Bhavan

58 Serangoon Rd, Singapore 217964

Ananda Bhavan is one of the oldest Indian vegetarian restaurants in Singapore. The restaurant was founded by Kulanthaivelu Muthusamy Kaunder, who, with his brothers, set up the eatery when they came to Singapore in the 1920s.

In the early years, Kulanthaivelu and his family lived on the second floor above the restaurant, and family members took on various roles such as cleaning tables and handling accounts. From its inception, Ananda Bhavan had always served vegetarian

cuisine, starting with rice scooped onto a banana leaf and accompanied with vegetable sides, which made for an affordable meal for labourers in the early decades.

In the 1950-60s after Kulanthaivelu's demise, his brother-in-law Ramasamy took over the restaurant before handing the reins to Kulanthaivelu's wife, Kaliammal. The establishment later came under the management of Kulanthaivelu's sons, M. K. Ramachandra and K. Nadarajan, who introduced automation in the kitchen to improve productivity. Under their management, the restaurant was one of the first in Little India to introduce a self-service ordering model, where customers ordered food at the cashier counter.

Today, Ananda Bhavan is managed by Kulanthaivelu's grandson Viren Ettikan, who took over in 2011. In recent times, Ananda Bhavan has opened more outlets and introduced Jain- and vegan-friendly dishes, as well as novel fusion cuisine. Although Ananda Bhavan is quick to embrace technology and innovation, it remains rooted to its tradition of serving quality vegetarian food to its customers.

7. Family Food Legacy



Komala Vilas

76-78 Serangoon Rd, Singapore 217981

Founded in 1947, generations of patrons have been flocking to Komala Vilas to enjoy its Indian vegetarian food. The restaurant was established by Murugiah Rajoo, who worked at Sri Karuna Vilas, the former restaurant that occupied this unit. When the

owners decided to return to India after World War II, Murugiah bought over the business and renamed the eatery in honour of his boss' wife.

Operating as a family business, Murugiah's family members took on various roles to ensure that the restaurant ran smoothly. Affectionately known as "the lieutenant", his brother Sinnakannu kept the business running, while Murugiah's children and grandchildren learned the trade by working the restaurant floor from an early age. More staff were hired as the business expanded, and Komala Vilas is known to be amongst the first eateries in Little India to employ women in a customer-facing role as cashiers.

In the 1950s, Komala Vilas took over the neighbouring two-storied unit at 78 Serangoon Road, and in the 1970s, it became the first restaurant in Little India to offer an air-conditioned dining area on the second floor. The restaurant also diversified its South Indian menu and in the 1970s, introduced *bhatura* (a Punjabi dish) for the first time.

From the 1990s, Komala Vilas came under the charge of the founder's son, Rajoo Gunasekaran, until 2015, when Murugiah's grandson, Rajakumar Gunasekaran, took over. Since then, the third-generation proprietor has introduced North Indian vegetarian favourites to Komala Vilas' menu, and started Fennel, a modern Indian vegetarian restaurant at 413 River Valley Road.

8. Delicacies on Leaves



The Banana Leaf Apolo

48 Serangoon Rd, Singapore 217959






As its name suggests, The Banana Leaf Apolo is well known for upholding the South Indian tradition of serving food on banana leaves since its establishment in 1974. The restaurant's founder, S. Chellappan, picked up cooking from his father, who was a chef for businessman and philanthropist P. Govindasamy Pillai. Wanting to put his culinary skills to use, Chellappan dipped his hands into the food business with a small thosai stall, before establishing his own restaurant at 24 Cuff Road.


From its inception, The Banana Leaf Apolo has been known for its fish head curry, a locally invented dish that quickly gained popularity amongst diners. Using an undisclosed recipe comprising a secret blend of spices and pineapple, the fruity and savoury curry quickly became a signature dish for the restaurant and attracted both local and international patrons.

The Banana Leaf Apolo relocated to Race Course Road in 1983, and with its growing popularity, quickly expanded from a one-unit restaurant to one that encompasses three units. The restaurant also increased its menu items and introduced North Indian dishes. Riding on its success, it opened another branch at Little India Arcade, and three more in 2020 at Sixth Avenue, Rivervale Mall and Downtown East.





Today, The Banana Leaf Apolo is under the management of Chellappan's son, C. Sankaranathan, who, with his wife S. Rajeswari, also oversees Apollo Sellappas, the departmental store founded by the family in 2008. Despite its growing chain of eateries, the food business remains a family affair, with Rajeswari personally checking on the quality of the eateries' masala mix, and their son, S. Nirmal Raj overseeing the newest branches.






List of Artefacts
1. Jothi Store and Flower Shop

No.	Image	Caption
1		<p>This is Jothi Store's iconic blue carrier bag and it features a printed design that has been used since the 1970s.</p>
2		<p>Bark fibres from banana trees, such as these, are traditionally used to tie flower garlands.</p>
3		<p>Betel leaves and shaved betel nuts were consumed in the past as a popular snack. Today, they are given out as traditional gifts, and are also used in Hindu religious rituals.</p>
4		<p>This set comprising yellow or turmeric-coated string, vermilion powder and turmeric powder is commonly given to female guests at Hindu ceremonies and religious rituals.</p>
5		<p>Traditionally used by South Asian communities, this clay oil lamp can still be found in Hindu homes, and it is routinely lit during festivals and religious ceremonies.</p>


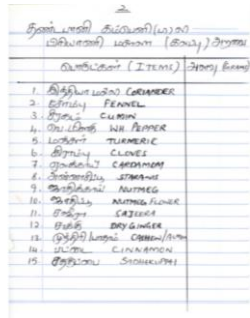



6		These colourful plastic bangles are typically bought for children or given out as gifts for attendees of traditional or religious ceremonies.
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2. Ani Mani






No.	Image	Caption
1		This goldsmith torch is used to melt gold fragments held in this ceramic melting dish. The gold is then remoulded and shaped into the desired jewellery design.
2		This pair of callipers is used for the accurate measuring of jewellery pieces or facets of gemstones.
3		This metal draw plate features holes of different sizes. Gold is drawn through the holes to form wires of various diameters.
4		These small handheld files are used to shape and smoothen delicate components of jewellery such as links and clasps.

5		These fine chisels (or burins) are used together with a hammer to etch designs and/or form depressions into gold jewellery. The hammer is also used for shaping heated gold.
6		These tiny needles are commonly used to pierce the earlobes of young children, and goldsmiths traditionally perform this procedure at a ceremony in their customer's home.
7		This tray is prepared by Ani Mani when presenting auspicious jewellery, such as the <i>thali</i> (wedding pendant), to customers at the in-store altar for blessings. The <i>thali</i> is usually presented together with fruit, flowers, <i>kumkum</i> (vermilion) powder, turmeric, betel leaves, and a gold-plated picture of deities.
8	 	<p>Left: This is a set of <i>navaratnas</i> ("nine gems" in Sanskrit), in which each gemstone corresponds to a cosmic body and a number in Indian numerology.</p> <p>Right: This notepad lists the gemstones and their corresponding cosmic body and sacred number. Using numerology, jewellers calculate a person's corporal and life path numbers from their date of birth to select the most suitable gemstone.</p>






3. Thandapani Co Pte Ltd


No.	Image	Caption
1		This photograph taken in 1986 shows Thandapani Co's storefront at its former location at 16 Campbell Lane.
2		This is a handwritten ingredient list for Thandapani Co's famous house mix, "Thandapani Briyani Masala". It features ground coriander seeds, fennel seeds, and cumin seeds.
3		This metal scoop is used for spooning ground powders and dried spices into smaller packs. Spices are often packed in small quantities to prevent moisture from collecting.
4		This paper bag is used by Thandapani Co to store freshly ground spices. Paper bags are preferred over plastic ones as the latter tends to trap heat, and the scent of plastic will ruin the spice's flavour.
5		The spices in this container are commonly used in Indian cooking. From the top left are cinnamon, turmeric, dried ginger, and from bottom left are star anise, cardamom and clove.

4. SIS Premium Meats





No.	Image	Caption
1		<p>This photograph from the 1970s shows the stall's old sign board at Tekka Centre, which carries the founder's name in English and Tamil.</p>
2		<p>This photograph shows Sinnasamy Irudayasamy standing in front of his market stall in the newly built Tekka Centre in 1982.</p>
3		<p>This photograph, taken in 2003, shows slaughtered livestock packed in stockings or sleeves before they were exported to Singapore. Today, most meat are exported in containers instead.</p>
4		<p>These hooks were used to hang lamb meat at the front of the market stall.</p>
5		<p>These iron meat cleavers were used by Sinnasamy Irudayasamy in the 1990s. Weighing about 1.5kg each, the hefty weight of the cleaver makes it ideal for slicing through flesh and bone.</p>

5. Haniffa Textiles






No	Image	Caption
1		This photograph taken in 1962 shows founder O. K. Mohammed Haniffa (pictured in the centre) standing by his roadside stall at Campbell Lane.
2		This photograph shows the interior of Haniffa Textiles when it was at 8 Campbell Lane. Unstitched fabric was sold on the shop's ground floor while more elaborate saris were sold on the second floor.
3		This pair of tailor's scissors is used to cut fabric and/or trim frayed edges. Its hefty weight and long blades make it a sturdy tool for cutting large pieces of cloth needed for saris.
4		Yard sticks are used in sari shops to measure the length of a sari, which is typically sold at six yards or 5.5 metres per sari.
5		This is a Japan-made nylex sari which was especially popular in the 1970-80s. It is typically produced and distributed in large rolls, from which customisable lengths would be cut on order.



6		Indian-made silk saris such as these are popular today for their attractive patterns which vary from region to region, and Kanchipuram- and Banares-made silk saris are especially valued by brides.
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6. Ananda Bhavan




No.	Image	Caption
1		This photograph from the 1970s shows Ananda Bhavan when it was at Ellison Building, and includes second generation proprietors, K. Nadarajan (third from left) and M. K. Ramachandra behind the cashier's counter on the right.
2		These chits were issued to customers before Ananda Bhavan introduced its self-service ordering system. Back then, customers would bring the chit to the cashier's counter for payment and the chits issued for the day would then be collected on a spike for accounting.
3		This table number stand is part of Ananda Bhavan's self-service ordering system. After ordering at the counter, customers would place the stand on their table to help servers identify where to bring the prepared orders.
4		This spatula is used to prepare <i>thosai</i> . Its thin edge and broad flat surface make it best suited for flipping, folding and lifting the thinly-spread <i>thosai</i> .

7. Komala Vilas

No	Image	Caption
1		This photograph from the 1960s shows a group posing in front of Komala Vilas, which had by then expanded to two units with seating on both the lower and upper floors.
2		This milk curdler is used to churn milk to make curds for the preparation of lassi (a yoghurt drink).
3		This is a stainless-steel Indian-style coffee filter. Hot water is poured onto the coffee powder in the topmost compartment and the filtered coffee is collected at the bottom.
4		This flat-lipped steel tumbler is used for serving South Indian-style filter coffee. The coffee is then poured into the wider and shorter cup to cool.
5		This mould with a distinct flower pattern is used for making <i>palkova</i> , a popular sweet made from evaporating full cream milk.

6		This steel plate is used to serve tiffin items (typically light savoury dishes made from rice flour like idli, <i>thosai</i> and <i>vada</i>) and has sections for chutney (spicy condiment) and sambar (lentil stew).
7		This photograph shows a typical South Indian vegetarian rice meal, which offers several varieties of stewed and stir-fried vegetables, lentil curry, pickles and a sweet dish.

8. The Banana Leaf Apolo

No	Image	Caption
1		Copper serving ware such as these are used to help distribute heat throughout a dish or to keep drinks cool, as copper is an excellent conductor of heat.
2		This clay pot, which helps to retain heat, is used by the restaurant to prepare and serve fish head curry.
3		This pair of serving buckets and ladle are used to serve curries and/or vegetable dishes.

4		<p>The restaurant's signature dish, fish head curry, is distinctive for its use of pineapple. The dish is usually enjoyed with rice and side dishes served on a banana leaf.</p>
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