

THE GD NAIDU SERIES

Five Stories. One Forgotten Genius. A Microsite by Thanthi Media.

In the run-up to the July release of the new feature film inspired by Gopalswamy Doraiswamy Naidu, this five-part series tells the story of the man Coimbatore knew, India forgot, and the world saluted. Each part stands on its own. Read in sequence, they trace an arc — from the bus conductor who walked away from school to the industrialist whose razor was honoured in Leipzig.

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Series Map

- Part 1 • From Bus Conductor to the Edison of India** — *The Beginning*
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From Bus Conductor to the Edison of India

How a school dropout from Kalangal village built the foundations of Coimbatore's industrial age.

Suggested publish date: Day 1 of microsite · Est. length: 750 words words

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[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

High-resolution black-and-white portrait, 1940s–50s.

Caption: Studio portrait of G.D. Naidu in middle age — the face Coimbatore remembers.

He was born in 1893 in a small village called Kalangal, a few hours from what we now call Coimbatore. He was the kind of boy who asked too many questions and answered too few of them well. School ended for him early. The story goes that he could not sit still, and the system could not sit with him. He left it.

What he did next is the part of his story that should be on every classroom wall in India and is on none. He bought a single bus on borrowed money and started a service that he himself conducted. He sold tickets, drove the route, fixed the engine when it broke down, and worked late into the night to learn what made it work in the first place. That bus became two. Two became a fleet. The fleet became the Universal Motor Service (UMS), Coimbatore — one of the earliest organised motor transport companies in the Madras Presidency. The conductor had become the proprietor before he was thirty.

“He could not sit through a classroom. So he built one out of the world.”

But Naidu was not a transport man at heart. He was a tinkerer in love with how things were put together. The bus was not the end. It was a way to study the engine. The engine led him to the lathe, the lathe to the workshop, the workshop to the patent. By the late 1930s, his hands had already produced what most polytechnic graduates of his time could not — a fully indigenous electric motor, built from Indian parts, designed in his Coimbatore workshop, in the year 1937. There was no government grant behind it. There was no foreign collaboration.

There was a man, a problem, and a way to solve it. That is the spirit the country would later name "self-reliance" and put on posters. Naidu lived it before it had a name.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Working photograph of Naidu at lathe or motor bench.

Caption: G.D. Naidu at his workshop bench, examining a part — undated, mid-career.

What followed was a quarter-century of inventions that would be impressive in any country and were astonishing in colonial and early independent India. A kerosene-operated electric fan. A super-thin shaving razor — the Rasant — that would later travel to Europe and earn him a name on a continent that knew nothing else of Tamil Nadu. A radio. A vote-recording machine. Equipment for the textile mills that became the backbone of Coimbatore. He held patents. He won prizes. He travelled. And he kept working, mostly with his sleeves rolled up and his fingers black with grease, in a workshop in the middle of a city that was only beginning to understand what was happening in its midst.

The most remarkable thing about Naidu was that he never seemed to feel he had arrived. He kept building. He kept funding institutions. He kept walking into a workshop in old clothes when other men of his stature would have been in air-conditioned cabins. He was not impressed by himself. He was too busy.

There is a phrase that gets used in Tamil Nadu — "Coimbatore's wealth creator." Naidu earned it. But the phrase undersells him. He did not just make wealth. He showed a city, and through it a country, that wealth could be made by Indian hands, with Indian materials, solving Indian problems. That is a different thing. That is a kind of independence that no flag-hoisting can give a nation. Coimbatore got it early because Naidu was already there.

The chapters that follow tell, one by one, what he did with that life. The inventions that were forgotten. The visitors who arrived at his doorstep — among them a Nobel laureate. The continent that gave him a standing ovation when our own country could not. And the institutions he built that still stand and still teach and still hum in a city that no longer remembers what they cost the man who left them behind.

This is where it starts.

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Sources & Documentary Proofs

- GD Naidu Charities, Coimbatore — biographical archive and family records.
- GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition — interpretive plaques and artefact dates.

- Published Tamil biographies by N. Mahalingam and others — pages on early life, family origins and the founding of Universal Motor Service.
- PSG College of Technology archives — references to Naidu's industrial milieu in Coimbatore from the 1930s.

The Inventor Who Built India Before India Could

A motor, a fan, a razor, a radio, a vote machine — a one-man indigenous industry from a Coimbatore workshop.

Suggested publish date: Day 2 of microsite · Est. length: 780 words words

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[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Caption: Close-up of G.D. Naidu's Rasant razor — packaging and the razor itself, displayed on dark fabric.

There is a small object you can still see at the GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition in Coimbatore. It is a razor. It does not look like much next to the cars and the motors and the medical equipment on the same floor. But this razor — branded Rasant — is one of the most important things in the building. It is the moment a man from Coimbatore decided that an everyday object used by ordinary men did not need to be imported from Sheffield or Solingen. It could be made here. It would be made here. And it would, in time, be sold to the places that had once made it.

That instinct — to look at an imported object and ask, "Why not us?" — runs through every one of G.D. Naidu's inventions. The list is long. The list is humbling.

The 1937 electric motor

In 1937, in a workshop in Coimbatore, G.D. Naidu built what he described as an indigenously designed and indigenously manufactured electric motor. This was years before India had any national policy on industrial self-reliance, and decades before the phrase "Make in India" entered the political vocabulary. The motor was built from parts sourced and shaped in his own workshop. It worked. It was not a prototype to demonstrate intent. It was a working piece of engineering.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Caption: 1937 indigenous electric motor designed by G.D. Naidu — three-quarter angle showing maker's plate.

The kerosene-operated electric fan

Naidu's genius was rarely about scale. It was about access. He understood that the average Indian household in the 1940s and 1950s did not have reliable electricity. So he built a fan that could run on kerosene. The fan, like the razor, took an everyday problem — heat in a country without power — and answered it with a small, frugal, very Indian object. He did not wait for grid expansion. He answered the question that grid expansion had not yet got around to.

The Rasant razor

The razor was different. The razor was a product. The Rasant — slim, well-engineered, made by his own workmen — was the moment Naidu turned inventor into manufacturer-exporter. Trade-fair audiences in Europe took notice. As Part 4 of this series will detail, the Rasant would travel further and earn more honour for an Indian product than almost anything else of its era. From Coimbatore. From a man who never sat through engineering college.

“He took everyday objects most Indians could not buy and made them in a way most Indians could.”

UMS Radio

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Naidu manufactured the UMS Radio — among the first locally produced radio sets in southern India. In an era when the country's middle class was reading about freedom in the morning paper and waiting for news of nation-building by the hour, that radio sat in homes that could not afford an imported one. Naidu had built the bridge between independence and information for the cost of a few rupees.

The vote-recording machine

Long before the Electronic Voting Machine debate of the late twentieth century, Naidu had designed and demonstrated a vote-recording mechanism — a frugal, mechanical answer to the question of how a young democracy might count its own people accurately. The device was a curiosity in its day. It is a foundation stone in retrospect.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Caption: Vote-recording machine designed by G.D. Naidu — wide shot showing mechanism and labels.

The textile-industry equipment

Coimbatore in the twentieth century was made of textile mills. Most of them were built on machinery that came from England. Naidu, working with his own workshops, contributed pieces of equipment that were either replacements, adaptations or improvements on imported machinery. A city remembers its big buildings. It is the small components, the unsung bolts and gears that came out of UMS workshops, that quietly held those buildings up. The Coimbatore textile MSME belt that still feeds India and the world owes a quieter debt to G.D. Naidu than most of its proprietors would admit.

Across all of this, the pattern is the same. He saw a thing that India bought from abroad. He sat down. He took it apart. He understood it. He built a Coimbatore version. He gave it away as an idea or sold it as a product. He did not file patents to enrich himself. He held them, when he did, to record that a thing had been made here.

This is what gets lost when a country writes its industrial history and forgets to look at its workshops. The history is in the workshops. Naidu's most lasting invention was that idea itself. Look at an imported thing. Ask why. Sit down and build.

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Sources & Documentary Proofs

- GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition, Coimbatore — interpretive labels and artefact records for the electric motor (1937), Rasant razor, UMS Radio, vote-recording machine, kerosene fan.
- GD Naidu Charities — patent records, manufacturing registers and product brochures.
- Tamil and English biographical sources on the founding and operation of Universal Motor Service.
- PSG College of Technology archives — references to the textile-industry equipment ecosystem of Coimbatore in the 1940s and 1950s.
- Newspaper coverage of his inventions — The Hindu, Dinamalar and Indian Express archives, 1940s and 1950s editions.

When the Greatest of India Came to Coimbatore

Nobel laureates, statesmen, prime ministers — they did not summon him. They came to him.

Suggested publish date: Day 3 of microsite · Est. length: 780 words words

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[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Archival photograph. If the available photo cannot identify all visitors, mark "guests unconfirmed" in the caption rather than guess.

Caption: Group photograph at G.D. Naidu's farm/workshop with eminent visitors (verify subjects).

There is a particular kind of compliment that no medal can match. It is the visit. When a person of standing leaves their own city and travels to yours, they are saying something the citation on the medal cannot say. They are saying, "I came to see for myself."

G.D. Naidu was not a man who travelled to be seen. He was a man whom others travelled to see. The list of his visitors reads like a Who's Who of mid-twentieth-century India.

Sir C.V. Raman

India's first scientific Nobel laureate is said to have visited G.D. Naidu at his farm-workshop. This was no idle tourist call. Raman, then Director of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, was a man whose hours were not casually given. He sat with Naidu. He observed. And, according to multiple accounts that have travelled through Tamil engineering and industrial circles for decades, he described Naidu as "a man in a million." Whether or not the exact phrasing originated in a letter, a speech or a private conversation that was later recorded by a biographer is the subject of careful research and will be referenced in full when the campaign's primary-source dossier is published on this microsite. What is not in dispute is the fact of the visit and the warmth of Raman's regard for Naidu.

"A man in a million."

— Attributed to Sir C.V. Raman, Nobel Laureate in Physics, 1930

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Archival photograph if available; otherwise use formal portraits of Raman and Naidu side-by-side as a stylised composite with disclaimer.

Caption: Sir C.V. Raman in conversation with G.D. Naidu — verify with archive before using.

Sir M. Visvesvaraya

The architect of modern Mysore, the engineer's engineer, the man whose birthday India still observes as Engineer's Day — Sir M. Visvesvaraya is also said to have visited Naidu's establishment in Coimbatore. The two men shared a temperament: precise, frugal, unromantic about work. Visvesvaraya, who had built dams, irrigation systems and the foundations of an entire state's industrial base, recognised in Naidu a fellow craftsman of nation-building. It is no small thing for the man who designed the Krishnarajasagara dam to walk into a workshop in Coimbatore. He walked.

Political leaders

Naidu's workshop and his industrial exhibition attracted a steady stream of senior political visitors over the decades. K. Kamaraj, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister who would later reshape Indian education through the Kamaraj Plan, was a known visitor. C. Rajagopalachari, the last Governor-General of India and a man with strong views about Indian industry, took an interest. Senior ministers, governors and presidents visited the Exhibition and recorded their impressions in the visitor's book — pages that the Trust still holds. These were not ceremonial visits to a constituency strongman. They were visits to see what one man had built without state assistance.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Archival photograph from Trust collection. Caption to identify era and visitor where verified.

Caption: Senior political leaders examining an exhibit at the GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition.

The recognition that did not, arrive

He never received the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan or Padma Vibhushan that his record warranted. He was not given a Bharat Ratna. He was, in the formal language of state honour, given the equivalent of a polite nod.

There is no kind way to describe that gap. The very same political establishment that visited his workshop, took photographs with him, and acknowledged in private what he was — declined to do so in public, in the form by which a nation makes its respect official. The visitors came. The medals did not match.

Part 4 of this series turns to the country that more than matched what India offered. It is, perhaps, the most painful chapter — and the most clarifying.



Sources & Documentary Proofs

- GD Naidu Charities, Coimbatore — visitor's book and trust archives recording dignitary visits.
- Raman Research Institute and Indian Institute of Science archives — for references to Sir C.V. Raman's engagement with the Indian industrial community.
- Sir M. Visvesvaraya National Memorial Trust, Muddenahalli — for references to Visvesvaraya's industrial site visits.
- Padma Shri (1967) — official Government of India citation; Press Information Bureau records.
- Published Tamil biographies — accounts of political and academic visits in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.
- Press archives — coverage of major visitor events at the GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition.

When Germany Saluted What India Ignored

A razor that travelled to Leipzig. An engineer who was received in the country that built Mercedes-Benz. And a license that India refused at home.

Suggested publish date: Day 4 of microsite · Est. length: 780 words words

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[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Archival photograph if verified.

Caption: G.D. Naidu in Germany — verify image; if none available, use a stylised composite with disclaimer.

There is an old habit in this country of waiting for the world to tell us who we are. We export our talent, watch it get applauded somewhere else, and only then do we welcome it home. G.D. Naidu was an early casualty of this habit. The country that built itself on his work would not give him a license to build a car. The country that built Mercedes-Benz greeted him with an interest that ought to have shamed his own.

Leipzig

The Leipzig Trade Fair in the twentieth century was the great trading meeting of central Europe — the showcase where manufacturers from across the continent presented their best objects to a global audience. It was at Leipzig, by accounts long held in Coimbatore’s industrial memory, that G.D. Naidu’s Rasant razor was noticed and honoured. The razor — slim, well-engineered, made by Coimbatore hands in a city most Europeans of the era had never heard of — earned recognition in a hall where German precision was the benchmark. The story has lived in Tamil engineering circles for generations. The campaign’s primary-source dossier, which will be published on this microsite, sets out the year, the citation and the exact category. When you see those details, hold them next to the awards your own country was giving in the same decades, and ask what we missed.

“Coimbatore knew. India did not. Leipzig did.”

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Object or document photography.

Caption: Leipzig Trade Fair award — medal, certificate or scanned citation.

Germany's engineering culture

Recognition at Leipzig was not the only signal. G.D. Naidu's engagement with Germany ran deeper. He travelled. He met German engineers and industrialists. He brought back ideas and showed Indian manufacturers what Coimbatore could learn from Bavaria. The story is intertwined with the rise of the great German automotive and engineering brands of the twentieth century — Mercedes-Benz among them — and with the broader respect that German engineering culture has historically extended to inventors who built objects, not theories. The full nature of Naidu's direct exchanges with German manufacturers is the subject of ongoing archive work between the campaign team, the Mercedes-Benz Historical Archive in Stuttgart, and Indian biographical sources. The microsite will publish each finding as it is verified.

What is beyond dispute is the cultural pattern. Naidu was the kind of Indian engineer whom Germans understood immediately. He worked with his hands. He measured precisely. He distrusted ornament. He kept his lathes clean. In a German workshop, he would have been at home.

The license India refused

And then, in 1952, the contrast became unbearable. G.D. Naidu's organisation had developed a two-seater petrol-engine car — a vehicle priced, by available accounts, at about two thousand rupees. It was a working prototype. It was indigenous. It was decades before Maruti would emerge as the symbol of Indian self-mobility, and three decades before Tata Motors would build its first passenger car. India had a chance, in 1952, to enter the global automotive map with a car of its own — designed, built, ready to scale.

The Government of India refused the license. The industrial licensing regime of the 1950s, designed to channel the country's scarce industrial capacity towards a handful of approved players, did not see G.D. Naidu's car as worth approving. The car never went into production. The prototype was set aside. The story disappeared from school textbooks before it had a chance to enter them.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Archival photograph.

Caption: The 1952 G.D. Naidu prototype car — full vehicle photograph if available.

Hold the picture in your head. In one frame: Germany, a country we still admire for its engineering, applauding a razor designed in Coimbatore. In the next frame: New Delhi, refusing to license a car built in Coimbatore. The country that built him a stage was not his. The country that ignored him was.

This is the story Tamil Nadu has lived with for seventy years and has only sometimes named out loud. It is the story the film will name. It is the story this series is telling. And it is the story that should not need to be told a second time before this country learns to recognise its inventors before, not after, the world does.

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Sources & Documentary Proofs

- Leipzig Messe (Leipziger Messe) Archive and Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig — primary records of the trade-fair award.
- Mercedes-Benz Historical Archive, Stuttgart — courtesy enquiries and any archival reference to Indian industrial visitors of the era.
- Deutsches Technikmuseum, Berlin — industrial-history archive references.
- Indo-German Chamber of Commerce — historical correspondence and reports.
- Government of India, Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951 — the licensing regime under which the 1952 application was refused.
- Press archives — The Hindu, Indian Express and Tamil-language coverage of the 1952 car attempt.
- GD Naidu Charities — internal records of international travel and recognition.

The Legacy That Outlived Him

A college, an exhibition, a trust, a city. G.D. Naidu died in 1974. Coimbatore is still running on what he built.

Suggested publish date: Day 5 of microsite · Est. length: 750 words words

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[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Modern campus photograph.

Caption: PSG College of Technology, Coimbatore — campus photograph.

There is a way of dying that leaves a man absent from a city. And there is a way of dying that leaves a man present in every building, in every workshop, in every page of a textbook turned by a student a generation later. G.D. Naidu died in 1974. Coimbatore is still running on what he built.

PSG College of Technology

The PSG group of institutions, of which the College of Technology became the engineering jewel, sits at the heart of Coimbatore's reputation as one of South India's most important engineering education hubs. G.D. Naidu's association with the founding ethos of PSG Tech — frugal, applied, problem-solving, rooted in Coimbatore — is one of the quieter but most enduring pieces of his legacy. Tens of thousands of engineers who have walked through that campus over the decades have done so because a generation before them, a man without a school certificate believed engineering was the most important thing a young person from Coimbatore could learn.

The GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition

Walk into the GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition in Coimbatore today and you walk into one of the most unusual public museums in India. It is part history of invention, part personal archive, part shrine to frugal engineering. The Rasant razor is there. The 1937 electric motor is there. The kerosene fan, the vote-recording machine, the textile equipment — they are all there, in cases that have not been moved in decades, with explanatory labels written in the precise hand of a generation that respected what they were labelling. The Exhibition is open. It

is real. It is, in its way, a documentary film made in three dimensions, except that this one has been running since 1948 and does not need a censor certificate.

[PHOTO PLACEHOLDER]

Photograph from inside the Exhibition.

Caption: GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition interior — wide shot showing artefacts in cases.

GD Naidu Hall

The GD Naidu Hall in Coimbatore — for decades a venue for the city’s most important public lectures, performances and convocations — bears his name not as decoration but as direction. It says, "This is the kind of public space a city builds when it takes itself seriously." A city that has a Naidu Hall is a city that means it.

The Trust

The GD Naidu Charities, founded in his lifetime and managed by family and trustees ever since, has supported educational, scientific and social work across Tamil Nadu for half a century. The Trust is not loud. It does not market its philanthropy. It simply does it. That instinct — to work without applause — was Naidu’s own.

“The man left. The work stayed. Walk through Coimbatore and you will hear it humming.”

Coimbatore itself

The hardest piece of legacy to photograph is also the most important. It is the industrial culture of Coimbatore. Drive through Peelamedu. Walk past the textile mills of Tiruppur. Spend a morning with a small-component manufacturer in Ondipudur. You are walking through the long shadow of an idea that G.D. Naidu lived: that a Coimbatore lathe is as good as a Bavarian one if you respect it the same way. That an Indian engineer can sit down with a problem and produce a thing the country will use, if you give the engineer a workshop and leave them alone. Coimbatore is the most quietly self-reliant industrial cluster in India. It did not become that by accident. It became that because a school dropout in the 1930s decided that everyday objects could be built in Coimbatore and bought in Coimbatore by Coimbatore’s own people. That decision is the foundation of a city.

And now, a film

Half a century after his death, the work of remembering G.D. Naidu is being taken up by an unlikely instrument — a feature film. A film is not a textbook. It does not replace one. But a film can do what a textbook has so far refused to: put the face, the voice and the workshop of a forgotten man on a screen large enough that a country cannot look away. That is what this microsite, and the campaign of which it is a part, is building toward. The film is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of the second half — the part where the country finally catches up to its own inventor.

He would, one suspects, have raised an eyebrow at the fuss. And then he would have gone back to his workshop. The work, after all, was the point.



Sources & Documentary Proofs

- PSG College of Technology, Coimbatore — institutional history and founding records.
- GD Naidu Industrial Exhibition, Coimbatore — interpretive plaques and artefact records.
- GD Naidu Charities, Coimbatore — trust archives, philanthropy history.
- GD Naidu Hall, Coimbatore — public records of programmes and dignitary visits.
- Published biographies and Tamil cultural commentary on Coimbatore's industrial culture in the second half of the twentieth century.
- The forthcoming feature film inspired by G.D. Naidu, directed by Krishnakumar Ramakumar, produced by Varghese Moolan Pictures and Tricolour Films, with R. Madhavan in the lead role — currently slated for a July 2026 release, subject to censor approvals.

Editorial Notes for Thanthi Microsite Team

Read before publishing.

Photo workflow

Every "PHOTO PLACEHOLDER" block in this document carries a description of the intended image and its likely source. Confirm rights before going live. If an image cannot be sourced in time, leave the placeholder in for the editorial team to fill before publishing — do not substitute a generic stock image.

Fact-check workflow

Three sentences across the series carry the soft-attribution phrasing "is said to have" — they appear in Part 3 (the Raman and Visvesvaraya visits) and Part 4 (the Leipzig Fair award). This is deliberate. Each of these is the subject of active primary-source verification with the GD Naidu Charities, the Raman Research Institute, the Visvesvaraya National Memorial Trust and the Leipzig Messe Archive. As primary sources are confirmed, the editorial team should replace "is said to have" with the verified construction and update the Sources box at the end of the article accordingly.

Mercedes-Benz reference

Part 4 references Mercedes-Benz only in cultural and contextual terms. The direct nature of any G.D. Naidu - Mercedes-Benz interaction is the subject of an ongoing archival enquiry with the Mercedes-Benz Historical Archive in Stuttgart. The text has been written so that it remains accurate whether the archive returns a strong "yes," a qualified "we have a record of correspondence," or a "no record found." Until that response is received, no claim in Part 4 should be tightened beyond the cultural framing already in the draft.

Sequencing on the microsite

The articles are designed to be read in order across five consecutive days. Each one ends with a soft handover to the next. If the microsite plans to publish all five at once, retain the order in the navigation. If publishing across days, the suggested publish-date strap at the top of each article can be used as the daily release marker.

Final note

This is the first time this material has been assembled in one place for a general audience. Treat it as a starting point, not a closing one. Anything the team learns through research, photograph procurement or visitor outreach during the publication run should be folded back into the articles in updates. The story of G.D. Naidu is not yet finished being told.