

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- The Editor & Madras Week
- Madras Week blogs
- Tamil film publicity
- Two men of letters



You design whatever you want and however you want, but you know that anyway I'm going to change it a hundred times...!

Building blocks

Buildings are a slightly worried lot these days. Understandable. Picture this.

You were created, even launched, as a symbol, a monument, to the majesty and gravitas of authority.

Then, suddenly, your role gets rewritten.

You are now a supermarket. Bizarre?

And rather upsetting?

"Can you blame us?" demands a gorgeous, yellowing, days-of-the-Raj structure. "I was once a dangerously-close-to-Royalty habitat - and now I'm a large, ungainly, apartment block. I'm confused. Who am I?"

"Stop whining," says a Road. "I went from 'Lady Lord Avenue' to 'Appalam Depot Street' overnight. Do you know what that did to my psyche?"

"Well, things change," you offer, feeling it's time you stood up for your species. "Time marches on, and..."

"We understand change, as in 'Change' with a capital 'C'." The building sighs, "It's the overnight-quick-change that throws us. And you guys do that. Very restless, you are...as a species. Always searching, seeking..."

"Chopping, changing," the Road gloomily adds his bit.

"With the operative word being 'Chop'," the building mumbles, bitterly.

"What next?" these much-trying souls ask, sarcastically. "An old museum forced into mall-hood?"

When one person's 'Change Fest' means another person's ideas being turned inside out, things suffer.

And, inevitably, someone pays... sometimes heavily.

Ranjitha Ashok

Marina's elevated road plans now abandoned

- But is beach permanently safe?

The Tamil Nadu Government has informed the High Court of Madras that it has dropped the idea of building an elevated road along the East Coast Road. The project had faced strong protests from environmental activists and the fisherfolk right from inception. The decision to drop it has, therefore, been widely welcomed. But all this does not in any way ensure that our coastline, certainly among the most beautiful parts of our city, is in anyway secure from developments of a similar nature that may be thought of in future.

The project, if it had been implemented, would have been another of those schemes that are frequently thought of by Government agencies in complete conflict with Nature. Envisaged as a four-lane highway, it was to begin with a ramp from near the Lighthouse, proceed along San Thomé, Foreshore Estate, cut across the Adyar Estuary (where a steel bridge named the Signature Bridge would provide the necessary connection), cross the Theosophical Society, run parallel to Elliot's Beach and, finally, connect with the East Coast Road at Kottivakkam. The entire distance would have been 9.7 km and it would have been a part of the circular transportation corridors that have been planned to ease traffic congestion in the city.

While ostensibly meant to provide for smooth vehicular flow (read, cars only), the project raised several questions. Firstly, it cut off the fishing community's access to the sea and there were rumours that they would be relocated to

other places, some nowhere near the coast. Secondly, it involved work being done at environmental hotspots such as the Theosophical Society, the Adyar Creek and the beachfront, the last also being the nesting spot of the Olive Ridley turtles. Thirdly, there was the question of whether the whole project would finally play into the hands of the real estate lobby, which would begin looking at development along the seafront, a long cherished idea of its members. And, finally, there was the question of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) laws which severely restrict any

(Continued on page 6)



One of the two trees that was saved in Nandanam by two tree-loving women.

Chipko at Nandanam

It dawned just like any other day. The koyals nesting in the tree next door cooed endlessly, urging the world to wake up and get on with life. Squirrels let out startled little squeaks and leaped restlessly from one branch to another with their tails in the air. Dogs, tired after a busy night, curled up for a snooze under the shade of the 50-year-old tree, oblivious of the call of the koyals.

Everyone went on with his routine. Sleepy kids left for school. Office-goers grumbled their way to work.

And then it happened.

A brood of lungi-clad men came with saws and started hacking branches of the tree. My neighbour upstairs saw this happening - as did all the neighbours around. She, along with her daughter, went and protested. They were there to

cut two 50-year-old trees on our street - to make way for a stormwater drain, the men stated. The two women argued that the path of the drain could be curved around the tree. Why cut two lovely, full-grown trees? The men insisted that they had orders to cut the trees and they would do so. Even as they ar-

went to support the two women. In fact, one of our neighbours asked the two women to move away and let the men get on with their work!

When I came back from work that day I saw the mother and daughter sitting by the gate of our building. When I asked them why, they told me the entire story. I promised to support them in case the men came back again.

And they did.

This time, fortunately, on a Saturday morning - when we were all at home. Once again, the two - mother and daughter - were the first to get down and protest. The men were prepared for them. They quickly tied ropes around the tree and were all set to totally uproot the trees forcibly. The mother went and

• by Deepa Ravi

gued, one large branch of the tree collapsed under the tyranny of the saw. The two women persisted, argued, screamed, raved and ranted. Finally, the men gave up and went away threatening to come with greater force some other day. Surprisingly, not a single person from the neighbourhood

(Continued on page 3)

Growing awareness of City's past

Was Madras Day/Week that lasted from August 2nd to September 10th a success? With about 150 events, a few thousand participating, and plenty of Press coverage getting many more to talk about the occasion, it certainly could be considered a success. Particularly noteworthy, and reflecting wider recognition, was that some of the city's newspapers and magazines had special features or supplements and these – and some other publications as well – hosted full page ads wishing Madras that is Chennai a very happy birthday. *The New Indian Express*, in fact, devoted a page every day during the Week to reports of events. All this was another sign of success.

As was another welcome feature, the Coordinators of Madras Week had for some time been wondering whether there was enough spontaneity of what was essentially meant to be a voluntary celebration, or whether many of the events took place only in response to appeals from the Coordinators. This year the happy feature was that several events were organised without the Coordinators even being aware of them. The Yacht Club, College of Engineering alumni, the School of Architecture (Anna University), the Government Museum, the Madras Medical College, Women and Children's Hospital and the Regional Eye Institute, IIT Madras, the Indian Overseas Bank, the Everwin School in Kolathur and the SOS Village in Tambaram were among those who, on their own, organised popular exhibitions, walks and talks. If this spontaneous participation is a sign of things to come, we would think that Madras Week is a period that is getting embedded in the minds of people and will in future generate its own steam.

Walks too were many more in number this year and were, after quizzes, the most popular programmes. If only more volunteers

• The Editor looks back on Madras Day/Week

from different parts of the city came forward to be trained on leading walking groups and keeping them interested in history, Madras Week can develop into a month of walks; there is so much of Madras that's unexplored by all those interested in history. We are sure that those already leading walks will be only too glad to train newcomers. There has been some comment that charging a fee was "restricting" participation in some walks. Participation is in no way restricted, but longer walks need vans and with these walks throwing in breakfast, the fee charged just about covers these expenses. That the charge has not proved restrictive could be seen from the fact that more people took part in a couple of these long 'walks' than in any 'free' walk. The venue needs to be interesting and the storyteller needs to be able to build on that interest for walks to be successful, whether there is a fee or not. One other aspect of the walks this year was the need for police permissions. With many more such walks likely in the future, it would be nice if the police could make permission-granting for heritage walks an across-the-table exercise rather than one that involves due process of red tape. The police officers and men who accompanied some of these walks were among the most interested participants and couldn't believe how much this city had to offer; we're sure, they'd gladly support the case for such walks and encourage instant permissions.

There has also been some concern expressed by a few that there are too many programmes and that clashes of times have depleted audiences. We would think more the merrier, particularly if they are distributed all over town instead of in a central locality. Programmes in different parts of a large city would enable people in each of these parts to participate in locally arranged events instead of having to travel long distances to a core area. For instance, the day-long programmes at Hotel Green Park, Vadapalani, had large audiences – mainly comprising residents of the area and its surroundings. The secret of success of programmes outside the centre of the city lies in the organisers encouraging local audience participation, like *Namma Arcot Road* and *Mylapore Times* do. In fact, more programmes locally supported are what Madras Day/Week should be generating in the years to come.

(Continued on page 8)

An obstacle course faced by the remover of obstacles

'Tis the season of festivals and among the first to be worshipped is the elephant-headed deity who removes obstacles. Like any element of life that wishes to remain *au courant*, worshipping this god has changed with the times. And *The Man from Madras Musings* is left wondering if all change is for the good, especially with respect to this divine being and the mass-based adulation He enjoys.

MMM lamented a year ago on how public worship of this Lord tends to happen at the most inconvenient locations – busy traffic intersections, narrow street corners, and near hospitals and schools. And before anyone pounces on MMM and says that he is elitist as he is prepared to sacrifice tradition for the sake of traffic movement, let him assure one and all that public worship of this deity is not all that much of a tradition and is just about 100 years old, a little younger in fact than the automobile. But that is really not the focus of what MMM has to say. ("Get on with it then," mutters the Chief impatiently.)

Once the pooja is over and the loudspeakers have been silenced, the task that remains is the disposal of the image, which is traditionally done in a waterbody. Now that most lakes in the city have become housing colonies that flood during the rains, and the rivers are all gutters in which no religious-minded person would think of immersing a much-loved idol, the only place left is the sea. And that automatically implies that every image has to be brought to the Marina on an appointed day and at an appointed hour. Or, as is conveniently interpreted, the immersion can happen any time on the appointed day.

And so, the weary police assembles on the Marina to keep a watchful eye on the immersion proceedings. From somewhere around noon, the idols are brought to the beach. As each organiser thinks that he/she/it has to put up the biggest image possible, all of them have to be brought in trucks for immersion. The carbon footprint of this process apart, there are several other obstacles. Firstly, the flyovers offer considerable resistance. Most of the trucks have a difficult time negotiating the space under the flyover and at times there is no option but to partially damage the deity to allow for passage.

Then there are the other road-users who, unfortunately, have to wait while the Lord moves in stately fashion

towards the sea. Those who are conveying him to the waters shout, dance and sometimes also indulge in rather inappropriate and unacceptable gestures especially when they espy a woman driver in the traffic. For some reason, some of the spirited worshippers have chosen to interpret or misinterpret this festival as a variant of another one, usually celebrated in the North with colours. So they throw colour powders as well, much to their own amusement and the discomfort of passers-by. And at times, rival organisers indulge in a race to the sea, with vehicles attempting to overtake each other in a reckless dash to the finish (all puns fully intended).

Almost all the deities MMM noticed sported a uniformly serene expression. MMM imagined that they were

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

looking forward to disturbance-free peace at the bottom of the sea.

Off with their heads

The beach is where everything appears to be happening these days and certainly you will notice from these writings that *The Man from Madras Musings* has been quite frequenting the Marina. Never a dull moment on the seafloor is what MMM finds. One day you find a group of protesters, or ... protesting against the capital punishment awarded to a trio who are convicts in the assassination of a popular national leader several years ago. And then a few days later there was this protest against the protest that protested against the awarding of capital punishment. Go hang yourself appeared to be the motto of the latter group.

While the motives behind the two protests appeared to be diametrically opposed to each other, the *modus operandi* was identical, MMM noticed. Both involved the congregation of the followers of the respective views, complete with placards bearing slogans in support of their respective stances. Then,

after several cups of tea and a desultory holding up of banners, everyone suddenly galvanised into action. The media, particularly the TV cameras, were on their way. As the cameras rolled, fierce expressions were used, slogans shouted and chests beaten. The police, rather like the time when the elephant-headed god was wending His way to sea, kept a watchful eye on the proceedings.

Someone somewhere appeared to have broken some little known law and then all mayhem broke loose. Police vans appeared and everyone courted arrest. The traffic which had slowed down considerably practically ground to a halt. As the faithfuls to the cause boarded the police vans, MMM noticed all of them laughing and joking. Some even waved to the TV crew who were busy filming the event. And so, that was that. Something ventured, something done. Tomorrow is another day – and yet another protest perhaps.

A couple of days later MMM was driving by and noticed a few posters, all of them thanking the top leadership in the State for having "rescinded the capital punishment" awarded by the Court. Heaven knows where such optimism came from, for the State Assembly had only adopted a resolution appealing reconsideration of rejection of clemency petition.. If only life was as simple as all that these protesters and poster designers imagine it to be.

Street for intellectuals

The Chief has often stated that most institutions of modern India have emerged from this city of ours, thereby giving it a kind of intellectual aura that other cities can only aim for in vain. *The Man from Madras Musings* vaguely concurred with this. But this rather tepid acceptance was greatly reinforced when MMM saw this signboard on a historic thoroughfare that once housed the Mint. Now where else can you expect such feast of reason and flow of soul?

– MMM



OUR READERS WRITE



Delhi example

I do not know why Chennai, instead of following the bad example of Bengaluru, does not follow New Delhi where the Metro stations do not hide the numerous heritage buildings (MM, September 1st) and are also done beautifully in the same sandstone blending with the surroundings – in fact, it is difficult to identify them as Metro Stations in Delhi. Perhaps, the indefatigable Delhi Metro Chief, Sridharan, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation, the Urban Arts Commission and others are responsible for this. Even the flyovers are better done in Delhi than in Chennai. The roadside eateries too can be pushed into pre-fabricated kiosk's as in Delhi. *Chennai Heritage* should sensitise the Administration on such matters during 'Madras Week/Month'.

Dr. G. Sundaram, IAS (RTD)

A-601, Dugar Apartments
Keshav Perumalpuram
Greenways Road
Chennai 600 028

'Most original man'

A landmark called Havilland Arch once existed at Srirangapatna (Karnataka). This was the spot from where de Havilland wanted to build a bridge across River Cauvery.

The proposal was received with much incredulity and, hence, was not followed up. However, he is said to have built an experimental arch in his garden at Srirangapatna. de Havilland played a significant role in the British defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799.

de Havilland got married in 1808. His wife Elizabeth died in 1816 at the early age of 35 and is buried in the St. George's Cathedral Cemetery, Madras, which was actually developed by Havilland himself. Her memorial eptipah poignantly states: "... the afflicted husband who was forming it for public use submitted with pious reverence to the inscrutable ways of Providence which thus *made him her protector in death as in life*" (italics mine).

Maj. T. Fiott de Havilland is said to have lived in the building which existed on the site of what became the Madras Record Office. He called his house *Egmore Retreat*. 'Retreat' indeed it was, because the Railways had not till then come into existence in this neighbourhood. After his wife's death, he advertised offering its sale in the *Madras Courier* in 1819.

He has been described as the "most original man of his time." Only Rev. Westcott's observa-

tion should actually be called the testimony of "spite."

Philip Mulley

mugila2000@yahoo.co.in

Adyar Poonga

I refer to your article on the Adyar Poonga (MM, August 1st). School students along with teachers are regularly visiting the Poonga and guided by our officials. Tidal influx from estuary has facilitated and influx being recorded (*sic*). Day to day maintenance work is carried out. Progress of restoration is being monitored. Your report was biased.

Dr. V. Kalaiarasan

Project Officer
Adyar Poonga
Chennai 600 028

Editor's Note: Our story stated what you confirm, namely that only groups of school children are allowed. Our question, 'Why not the public?' remains unanswered.

We talked of stories circulating about suppliers' bills being unpaid. Have these all been paid? There is no mention of this in your letter.

We are glad to have your assurance that "day-to-day maintenance work" is being carried out, but we have seen little of that. We hope the eagle has got its wings back. And we are not told by you what is happening to the Rs.60 crore unspent.

Waste of time

I totally agree with the opinion expressed by Reader A. Raman (MM, August 1st). Recently, I was employed as an English language trainer and resource person at an NGO in Chromepet. English language

skills are viewed by the majority of local students as necessary only for job-oriented purposes. Though they know that English is a world language, they prefer to think in the vernacular Tamil. Hence, endeavouring to teach students to 'think in English' is almost impossible.

There exist in Chennai innumerable small or big 'Spoken English' institutes. They impart only 'functional' language skills, with emphasis on grammar and writing – with absolutely no appreciation of the vast literature in English – and on learning for learning's sake. This is due to the reason that, daily, the students think and talk in their mother tongues, often with crudity. Teaching them to think in English is an utter waste of time.

K. Karunanidhi

'Cuddalore Illam'
Bibliophila Inc
Old No.8, New No.3
Link Street
Chennai 600 085

Missing building

Many are the buildings of Chennai that have found mention in *Madras Musings* as warranting conservation. But I find it surprising that the building that houses P.S. Higher Secondary School, at 215, R.K. Mutt Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600 004, which is nearly 90 years old and exuding old-world charm, has not found a place in the list. I would request you to bestow consideration on this.

G.S. Subramanian

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Mylapore
Chennai 600 004

CHIPKO AT NANDANAM

(Continued from page 1)

held on to the ropes and refused to allow the men to cut the trees. This was when the rest of us heard the commotion and rushed down. It was a ghastly

sight! The mother had the rope around her waist and was literally being manhandled. At this point we all rushed to the spot and the men had to back off. A heated argument ensued. The

men called the police who came and admonished us for obstructing their work. We stood our ground and said that we wanted a chance to appeal and save the lives of our trees. When the police and the men saw that we had all joined force and they did not have much to defend themselves with, they backed off!

The men went away grumbling that it was just a handful of us protesting and not letting them do their work. To prove them wrong we printed an appeal and collected signatures from all the houses in the vicinity. Around 50 of our neighbours gladly signed the petition. This was then filed in court and we got a legal stay order on the cutting of the trees. Meanwhile, we also contacted Shobha Menon of Nizhal who advised us on what to do next and gave us the right contacts. It really helped.

A few days later, the men resumed work, this time they

started to dig around our trees! There was no more talk of cutting the trees. The work is now almost over and our trees stand proud and tall. The koyals, the squirrels, the crows, the chameleons and the entire ecosystem built around the two trees continue to thrive.

I salute the courage of the mother and daughter who had the gumption to stand their ground against those men and the neighbours who later supported them in this initiative. It certainly goes to prove that when we work together as a community, a lot of good can come out of it.

Deepa Ravi

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

THE EDITOR

CHENNAI HERITAGE

No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014

I am already on your mailing list (Mailing List No.....) / I have just seen *Madras Musings* and would like to receive it hereafter.

● I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to **CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS**, as *subscription to Madras Musings* for the year 2011-12.

● As token of my support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, I send Chennai Heritage an additional Rs..... (Rupees). Please keep / put me on your mailing list.

Name :

Address:

Note: Overseas postage Rs. 550/year extra. Cheques for overseas postage alone payable to M/s. Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd. All other cheques to 'Chennai Heritage'.



Prakriti Foundation presents The Park's New Festival 2011:

September 21: Maya Krishna Rao is one of the very few woman stand-up comedians in India (at the Museum Theatre).

September 22: Choreographer Parijat Desai integrates Indian dance (at the Museum Theatre).

September 23: 15 rappers get together as DNOAX (Desi Number One Artistes X) making Hip Hop a universal phenomenon (at the Park).

September 24: Sandra has a very personal dialogue with Rabindranath Thakur's work, in part in the form of dance, in part as text and in part as video (at the Museum Theatre).

September 25: *Best of Short and Sweet* – A collection of six 10-minute plays (at the Museum Theatre).

Till September 21: Exhibition of paintings by Apet Pramod Mahadev of Maharashtra (at Ayya Art Galleries).

Till September 23: *Celebrations*, an exhibition of paintings by Selva Senthil Kumar, who is deeply drawn to the folk arts and rural culture of Southern India. In 'Celebration' he has captured the joy that he personally experiences every time he sees the *Poikaal Kudirai* dance, in which the dancer, made up like a horse and standing on stilts trots, sways and moves regally (at Art & Soul, ECR).

Till September 25: Dusshera Festival. Folk performers from Bellary will perform Nagari Vadhya and Nandi Kollu. Nandikollu Kunita, a religious dance, is practised usually by the followers of the Veerashaiva community. It is a part of a victory march, performed while holding the 'nandi kolu' aloft. Nagari vadhya is an old percussion instrument.

Lambani women in traditional costumes will be at work and will sell their crafts. And the heritage houses will showcase *Golu* (at DakshinaChitra).

Till September 30: *The Faces of Chennai*, an exhibition by French photographer and co-founder of Trikaya Photos, Yannick Cormier. The exhibition is the result of a three-week-long workshop with a group of French people residing in Chennai and highlights their perceptions of the city and its people.

Till September 30: *Nature and Beyond*, art exhibition by K. Kalaiselvan featuring his recent abstract works done in oil and acrylic on canvas. There will be about 30 works on display (at DakshinaChitra).

Till September 30: Painting exhibition by Yogesh Kasera (at Apparao Galleries).

Till September 30: *Indulgence – An Installation* (at Apparao Galleries).

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period August 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Name the Brazilian football legend who is to coach the Iraqi national team.
2. Name the petroleum giant that has signed an agreement with Russia to explore for oil in the Arctic Ocean in a deal that could grow to \$500 billion over time.
3. Name the hurricane that devastated parts of the Caribbean, the US East Coast and Atlantic Canada a few weeks ago.
4. Which iconic organisation's new CEO is Tim Cook, who took over after its founder-CEO stepped down?
5. How did the Strelley Pool rock formation in Western Australia make paleontological news recently?
6. Which famous century-old waterway, as part of a \$5.25 billion project, is to be expanded in order to double the movement of goods through it?
7. Google's largest acquisition, valued at \$12.5 billion, happened recently. What did it take over?
8. Tony Tan Keng Yam and Yoshihiko Noda are the new President and Prime Minister of which Asian countries?
9. According to a recent Tamil Nadu Government directive, what is to become of the new Assembly-Secretariat complex that now lies abandoned?
10. Following a recent discovery, the planet surrounding a pulsar PSR J1719-1438 is most likely to be made of...?

* * *

11. Where on the Chennai-Bangalore National Highway is the State Government planning a Rs. 2,160 crore satellite township?
12. Name the sculptor-architect of marvels like the Thiruvalluvar statue in Kanniayakumari and Valluvar Kottam in Chennai, who passed away recently.
13. In a new scheme recently announced, how much will a State sportsperson get for winning a gold at the (a) Olympics and (b) Asian Games?
14. What will be the area of the expanded Chennai Corporation territory and how many wards and zones would it have?
15. Name the Tamil poet who has been selected for the 2011 Kendria Sahitya Akademi Award for Children's Literature.
16. Which link in the proposed monorail corridor in Chennai will become the world's longest, running 54 km when completed?
17. Name the two Ramon Magsaysay Award winners who at present live in Chennai.
18. 'Kunjamma', as she was fondly called, was awarded the Bharat Ratna. Who was this Madras ikon?
19. What is the name of Shiva in the Thayumanavar shrine in the Rock Fort Temple in Tiruchi?
20. Name the Deputy Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

(Answers on page 8)

Publicising films, then and now

My first exposure to village life was at the age of seven when I went to stay with an uncle, who was an Assistant Station Master at a small station near Gooty on the Bombay-Madras route. It was also my first exposure to a 'touring talkie' where, under a thatched shed, the villagers saw old movies sitting on rickety chairs or simply lying on the ground in front of the screen. There were two shows every evening and every Friday the film was changed.

The publicity for the new film started a few days before release. A bullock cart or a *jutka* pasted over with posters of the film would move slowly around the streets of all the villages nearby. The driver of the cart would make announcements through a portable public address system and an assistant would distribute leaflets on the new film to passers-by and houses along the way. If the touring talkie could afford it, a band would also accompany the cart, playing music to attract crowds. In addition, posters of the new movies, giving show details, would be pasted at all vantage points. Cinema slides featuring the forthcoming movies would also be shown in the 'touring talkies' during breaks.

Resourceful producers subsequently started using imaginative ways to promote their films. S.S. Vasani of Gemini Studios was a giant among them. He was the first to introduce the concept of big banners and hoardings to promote his multi-lingual extravaganza *Chandra-*

lekha. It was also one of the mostly highly publicised movies till then, various media being used. Vasani is considered the father of the giant film hoardings on Mount Road, with which Madras was associated for a long time.

Apart from experimenting with vertical posters for his movie *Gumasthavin Penn*, Vasani also used direct mailing campaign for his movie *Sansar*. For the film *Avvaiyar* he printed special invitation cards with highlights of the film and distributed them door to door; accompanied by a band. It was like an invitation to a wedding and he ensured that the novel idea was written about in all print media, which, of course,

• by
R.V. Rajan*

generated a lot of interest in the movie.

Playing the songs of a film outside or in the foyer of the cinema hall and distribution of song books containing the lyrics of the film's songs were other methods used to publicise a film in the pre-Independence days.

The concept of showing 'trailers' was introduced in the mid-1950s to promote new English films. The idea was quickly adopted by Indian movies. Projecting trailers of a new movie in a Group's cinema theatres and in multiplexes is done even today.

Over the years, the Press has been the primary medium

through which new movies have been promoted. While paid advertisements are common, plenty of stories about a movie and its stars began appearing in the media with the *muhurat* of a movie, generating free editorial publicity. Gossip about the leading pair and tidbits about happenings on and off the shooting floor were used for this purpose. Sometimes even a controversy between the producer and director or a director and the stars was passed on to newspapers and magazines to keep the movie in the news.

More recently, with the advent of music cassettes, an audio launch of the film (tape/CDs containing the songs of the film) held a couple of weeks/months before the actual release of the film at a glittering function has become the launching pad and a regular publicity effort for the movie to follow. Between the audio launch and actual release, stories about the making of the film, and interviews with the stars and the director appear in all the media in an effort to create curiosity about the film. It helps to keep the title of the movie at the top of the mind of potential cinema-goers!

While most producers use time-tested methods to publicise their movies, Kamal Hasan tried an interesting experiment to promote *Virumandi* in 'B' and 'C' markets (semi-urban and rural areas). It was a two-in-one concept aimed at publicising the highlights of the movie and, at the same time,



Kamal Hasan.

fighting the unauthorised DVD menace.

Local cable TV channels, featuring local news and events, are very popular in the districts/mofussil areas across the country. The actor entered into a deal with several cable operators in Tamil Nadu, providing them a 30-minute capsule of a special programme. The capsule featured the highlights, selected sequences, songs etc. at the end of which he would appear on the screen, appealing to the audience to see *Virumandi* in regular theatres and not on a DVD, if they really wanted to enjoy the visual experience of the movie. He supplied such free capsules to the cable operators every week for a fixed period. The cable operators were delighted to get a free programme and would telecast it several times during the week, creating a huge awareness for the film in B and C markets. Even paid publicity would not have got the kind of curiosity and interest that this novel method got for this movie!

Another idea which has caught on in recent times is the concept of promotional tours featuring the director, stars and other important technicians going around big cities, promoting the film through road shows to audiences at theatres screening the film, big malls and even colleges. This helps generate a lot of free editorial publicity in the print media. The impact is greater when the shows are co-sponsored by popular TV channels. Many reality shows are used for this purpose.

In these days of multiple shows in multiplexes, instant communication through Twitter, Facebook and social media has helped create a new form of word-of-mouth publicity, which can make or mar a film's success! There are 'sms kings' who keep 'tweeting' their views to friends even while they are watching a movie! Small budget films with good storylines but limited budgets for publicity have found the social media generating instant and widespread word-of-mouth publicity, helping them hit the bull's-eye in the Box Office!

These seems to be no end to the ways to 'sell' a movie to the public.

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Elevated road plan abandoned

(Continued from page 1)

construction activity along the sea-coast and which gain importance particularly along the East Coast, given its record of rough seas, cyclones and the tsunami of 2004. The Broken Bridge, originally meant to connect San Thomé with Besant Nagar and which later was destroyed by nature's fury, is enough testimony to this.

The elevated road is, of course, not the first among ideas that those in power have hatched to 'utilise' the beachfront. As early as the 1900s, there was a proposal to build a railway line along the beach. This was given up thanks to protests led by that public spirited legal stalwart V. Krishnaswami Aiyar. More recently, we had a scheme for cre-

ating a 'Shanghai-like' seafront, complete with glass-fronted buildings and luxury villas, all to be built on land acquired by displacing the fishermen. This too was given up later. We have also had minor intrusions such as the sudden renovation and additional construction at the Governor's Bungalow on the beach, which went on despite protests. And we have had several schemes for the ostensible beautification of our beaches. The temptation to build on the beachfront is always strong.

In the same context, it is worthwhile pondering over another aspect. While there is jubilation at the Government's decision to withdraw the proposal, a sobering thought may not be out of place - that the withdrawal is part of the ongoing process of rescinding all that

the earlier regime had worked out and if and when there is a change of party in power, we may yet have the elevated road proposal revived.

Which brings us to the thought: Why not have a legislation that will permanently protect our beaches from any such ideas in future? We will do well to look back at what Rajaji had to say on this subject in the 1950s - "It is very dangerous to allow congestion in cities... People must devise some scheme to insure against open spaces being built on and payments should be made to municipalities in order to preserve open spaces. It is not impossible to work out such a scheme if it is thought over carefully." Can we hope that such sage counsel will be heeded?

• TWO MEN OF LETTERS

The Tibetan scholar at the Adyar

Celebrating together its 29th anniversary and the birthday of Sri Ramanujacharya, the Srinivasa Mandiram & Charities (Bangalore) organised a lecture entitled 'Comparative Study of Sacred Books' at Janopakari Doddanna Hall in Bangalore on April 23, 1912. Johan van Manen (1877-1943), Assistant Director of the Adyar Library (Madras), delivered the lecture.

In his talk, he emphasised the need to rise above materialism. He remarked, "Give noble thoughts to a nation and the nation will become noble; on the other hand, feed it only with material thoughts and aspirations and it will be neither spiritually strong nor will it rise beyond the level of materialism." He criticised the superficial study of scriptures as an effort "... merely to become pandits..." The study of scriptures was needed "to enrich our spiritual knowledge," he stressed.

Born in a well-to-do Dutch family, Mari Albert Johan van Manen was attracted by Theosophy at a young age. His contacts with Henry S. Olcott and Annie Besant between 1896 and 1908 kept him interested in Theosophy. From 1904 to 1906 van Manen was the Honorary Secretary of the first Convention of the Federation of European Sections of the Theosophical Society. Writing in the *International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) Newsletter*, Luba Zubvoka notes, "At the age of eighteen he was carried away by the teachings of H.P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical movement... Believing that this movement could instigate Western respect for Asian people as well as enhance their self-esteem, he took to spreading Theosophy in Europe and the Dutch East India [Java]." van Manen knew Sanskrit and Tamil much before he made British-ruled India his permanent home, where he remained for the rest of his life, until his lonely death in 1943.

In 1909, van Manen came to the Theosophical Society [TS] (Adyar, Madras) accompanying Charles W. Leadbeater as his private secretary. During his tenure as the Assistant Director

of the Adyar Library from 1910 to 1916, van Manen "witnessed the discovery and the initial education of the young Jiddu Krishnamurti (JK)." While at Adyar, he studied 'Indian wisdom' from JK's father, Jiddu Naraianiah, a graduate of the University of Madras and a scholar, who held a responsible position with the government.

Writing the concluding note to *My Occult Experiences (The Theosophist, July 1913 issue)*, an 80-page account of van Manen's psychic experiences, Charles Leadbeater speaks highly of van Manen's experiences: "... they clearly show a degree and type of sensitiveness, which is very well worth cultivating, with a view to practical results." In the same note,

• by
M. Ramanathan

Leadbeater expresses "high hopes for the future of the author."

Van Manen detailed his experiences while deciphering the contents, origin, author and the unique character of a solitary leaf of a Tibetan manuscript, found in the collection of the Adyar Library, in an article titled 'A Mysterious Manuscript' that appeared in the January 1911 issue of *The Theosophist*. In the article he had this to say about the collection in the Library's Sanskrit Department: "It already contains over twelve thousand works... a considerable number are unique, not known to exist in any other library, and of which a great number (if not unique) are of great rarity..."

van Manen left TS in 1916 due to his differences with the then President, Annie Besant, over her involvement in Indian politics. He then moved to Darjeeling to study Tibetan texts and culture. From 1918 to 1922 he served as the Librarian of the Imperial Library (now National Library, Calcutta), and during 1923-1939 he was the General Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, and the Editor of its journal. This society, established by Sir William Jones in 1784, was redesignated the



Johan van Manen

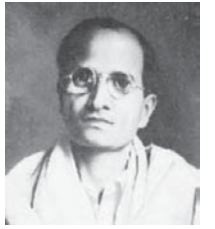
Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal (RASB) during van Manen's term of office.

Current Science (November 1938) under *Science Notes* briefly refers to van Manen's paper titled *Recent Exploration in Tibet*, which was read at a meeting of the RASB. In this, van Manen said, "In the last decade exploration has been very active. Geographically the work done may be roughly grouped into exploration (1) in the West, mainly around Kashmir, (2) in the South, the great Himalayan peaks, (3) in the East, the countries West of China, and (4) in Central Tibet, the few visits to Lhasa and other places. The exploration is chiefly of geological, alpinistic, geographical, botanical, zoological, anthropological, linguistic or historical nature, according to the special interest of the travellers."

Apart from his study of Indian languages, driven by his interest in Buddhism, Tibetan culture, and linguistics, van Manen built up, over the years, an extensive collection of Tibetan manuscripts and block-prints, Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings, and southern Indian Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscripts (*olai*). His collections are now preserved in the Kern Institute and the National Museum of Ethnology (Leiden, The Netherlands). Saraju Rath, researching the palm-leaf manuscript bundles preserved in the library at Kern Institute, Leiden University, indicates that van Manen collected "South Indian manuscripts while he was stationed in Calcutta through a contact established during his stay in Madras."

Van Manen was in 1930 conferred the Order of the Honourable Companion of the British Empire, the highest distinction that could be conferred on a non-British subject in British India. The Kern Institute (Leiden) published in 1989 a biography of van Manen, *The Dutch Orientalist Johan Van Manen, His Life and Work*, written by Peter Richardus.

A writer ahead of his time



Among the *avant garde* writers of Tamil in the mid-1930s, one of the foremost was K.P. Rajagopalan of Kumbakonam. Known as Ku Pa Raa, he wrote for *Manikkodi*, a Madras magazine started by Stalin Srinivasan (about which subject I had written earlier in these columns).

Ku Pa Raa got cataract of the eye at an early age and lost his Government job (he was a revenue inspector) because of this shortcoming! Chitti says, "During those days of near blindness, he produced some of his best stories." Once, during those hard days, Chitti visited him and found that Ku Pa Raa, who had almost lost his sight, could still imagine the scenes that he had earlier seen from his window, and recited in his melodious voice the lines from Keats:

*Magic casements opening in the foam,
Of perilous seas in the fairey lands
forlorn...*

As N. Pichamurthy used to say, Ku Pa Raa always had a notebook with him in which he noted down the poems of the great English poets. He was a graduate in English literature and had mastered Telugu, Sanskrit and Bengali. He studied Bengali to understand Rabindranath Tagore better! In fact, he translated three Bengali novels, *Durgesanandini*, *Devichoudarani* and *Hiranmayi*.

He brought in a new style of writing in Tamil and wrote in that style as many as 79 short stories, a novel, 8 dramas and 21 poems, all between 1934 and 1944.

As he dictated, his sister Ku Pa Sethu Ammal would take his words down. She lived a long life of penury. (She had assisted in writing dialogue for a film in 1943, *Krishna Bakthi*, in which P.U. Chinnappa and T.R. Rajakumari had acted.)

Later, Dr. Mahalingam of Trichinopoly cured Ku Pa Raa's sight through surgery, but the writer could not get back his job, even in spite of the intercession of T. Prakasam who was then the Revenue Minister! But, as Thomas Gray put it, "Chill penury did not repress his noble rage"; he continued to write. He worked as editor of a magazine *Gramma Uzhiyan* published from Uraiyur, by Thiriloka Sitaram.

Ku Pa Sethu Ammal kept all the 9 pies (3/4 anna) postcards addressed to and received by Ku Pa Raa tied like the Leiden copper plates! And with some other letters they were handed over to Chitti before his death; these were kept in a cardboard box and later came into my possession. In the bunch, I came across some rare letters written by leading persons of the age!

Known as literary twins, Pichamurthy and Ku Pa Raa came to Madras for a livelihood. Both were Telugus but were very good in Tamil; joining Chitti, who was the only one having a job then, they tried to eke out a living. When Chitti was posted as a teacher in Ponneri, Ku Pa Raa was promised Rs. 50 a month by Sangu Ganesan who was trying to run a journal, *Swatantra Sangu*. Ku Pa Raa's *gotram* was Bharadwaja, which in Tamil was *karichchan (Decrurus macrocerus)* and he wrote under that name as well.

While editing *Manikkodi*, Ku Pa Raa had to leave due to a difference of opinion with T. S.

Chockalingam, the publisher. On the advice of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Ku Pa Raa accepted the editorship of *Veerakesari*, a Colombo Tamil newspaper, and moved to Ceylon.

As he found living hard in Madras on his return, Ku Pa Raa shifted to Kumbakonam, where he tried to run a bookshop called Marumalarchi Nilayam. There were many people who came and read the books available in the shop, but none to buy! On the other hand, he was constantly under pressure to repay debts and a letter written in English by a later well-known Tamil and English critic (dated 27-2-1943) says, "I hope you will remember your promise and clear my dues at least now, making no more excuses. I would thank you if you will so arrange that this mercenary relation of yours does not any longer persist. The total amount due from you is Rs 50/- capital + Rs 7/- interest + Rs 6/- for one copy of *Kambaramayanam* supplied. Rupees Sixtythree and Annas eight. . ." (I am not disclosing the name of the letter-writer for obvious reason.)

To add to Ku Pa Raa's misery, a letter was received from

(Continued on page 8)

An occasional series
on Tamil writing from
Madras in the 1930s.

Growing awareness of City's past

(Continued from page 2)

This is true in the case of exhibitions too. We've heard it said that after the crowd present at the inauguration there were hardly any visitors during the rest of the duration. This is true of almost any of the usual exhibitions, even those in art galleries. The solution in the case of Madras Week exhibitions is what the Association of British Scholars did for their exhibition (of maps); they invited a dozen or so schools to look around and, thus, had several score students every day learning from the exhibits. Spending some energy not only on organising events but also on drumming up audiences, would seem to be the way to go; once you get a reputation for putting up interesting events, a crowd will respond to that reputation.

We also heard some that some efforts did not receive any coverage in the Press. With so many events, the media undoubtedly has to pick and choose what it thinks is most newsworthy, given that it can feature only two or three events a day. Constrained by space they are likely to give many an event a miss. But event organisers should ask themselves whether they are organising events for publicity or they want to create more awareness about

the rich heritage of Madras amongst the participants in their events. On the other hand, with Madras Week becoming virtually a Madras Month, the Press could do a bit more for events organised outside the core Week, even while being selective.

But at the end of it all, the one incident that remained with us was of four or five men in their late 30s-early 40s, men who hardly looked the heritage-caring type, buttonholing us at the end of the week-long Chennai Heritage-Freemasons' sight and sound performances and telling us, "What fine performances. Even the Freemasons' lectures were interesting. We attended all seven shows and now wonder why the hall was not full every day." It's unknowns like those in this group who keep our faith alive that Madras Week will generate its own crowds in the years to come, that it will grow year by year and create a greater heritage awareness in the city. That such awareness is growing was attested to by the numbers that signed the appeal to the Chief Minister asking for a Heritage Act. Many waited in a queue after each event to sign the appeal instead of rushing off. People do care about their heritage, they made it obvious. We do hope the Chief Minister feels the same way when the appeal reaches her.

A writer ahead of his time

(Continued from page 7)

the Newsprint Controller to stop publication of *Grama Oozhiyan*, as the journal was indulging in freedom movement propaganda!

Ku Pa Raa was called a man ahead of his times. In everything, he was ahead of his time, including death! Born in 1902, he passed away on April 27, 1944 when he was just 42! Even death came so suddenly that no one was prepared for it. A common friend of the three writers Ku Pa Raa, T. Janakiraman and Narayanaswami, V.R. Rajagopalan (who was editing a journal from Tiruchi called *Kalamohini*) was getting married. The friends attended the marriage and, while returning, Ku Pa Raa developed a severe pain in the leg. Dr. Mahalingam, the eye doctor, took them all in his car to Tiruchi hospital where a surgeon, Sharma, diagnosed the ailment as advanced stage of gangrene. He was angry with the patient for having ignored the disease. He spoke rather harshly and Dr. Mahalingam admonished the surgeon for being harsh with a patient. The surgeon suggested amputation of the member as the only cure. But Ku Pa Raa did not want to go through the surgery. "I don't want to undergo surgery. Please get me a glass of water from the Cauvery," he is said to have pleaded. After drinking the water he wanted to return home. The doctor drove them all to Ku Pa Raa's place.

But he did not live to reach home! The one ahead of his time was ahead in death as well!

— K.R.A. Narasiah

TALKING THROUGH MADRAS WEEK

(Continued from page 5)

Retribution came at P.C. Ramakrishna's talk at the Madras Gymkhana Club. The talk was wonderful with PC, in his usual way, making a perfect presentation on the history of English Theatre in the city. But for some reason (and here I may have been at fault, or was it divine will?), there were no 'refreshments' on offer. The foodies were disappointed, to say the least, but bore it with stiff upper lip. To give them credit, they stayed on for the presentation and not one asked about the absent victuals.

* * *

Answers to Quiz

1. Zico; 2. Exxon Mobil; 3. Irene; 4. Apple, Inc.; 5. A team of Australian and British geologists have discovered fossilised, single-cell organisms that scientists say are the oldest known fossils on earth; 6. Panama Canal; 7. Motorola's mobility business; 8. Singapore and Japan, respectively; 9. A multi-super-speciality hospital-cum-medical college; 10. Diamond.

* * *

11. Thirumazhisai; 12. Ganapati Sthapati; 13. Rs. 2 crore and Rs. 50 lakh respectively; 14. 426 sq km with 200 wards spread across 15 zones; 15. M.L. Thangappa; 16. Vandalur and Puzhal; 17. Dr. V. Shanta and Dr. M.S. Swaminathan; 18. M.S. Subbulakshmi; 19. Matrubhuteswarar; 20. P. Dhanapal.

I vaguely knew about the Royal Madras Yacht Club (RMYC) and discovered this year that the Club's annexe stands at an impossibly beautiful location – land's end, where the Cooum flows into the Bay of Bengal, just off the Napier Bridge and behind Flagstaff House. I arrived there to join an ocean-based two-way celebration – of Madras Week and 101 years of the RMYC.

This was the first time I had been inside the harbour. I was, therefore, blessed to be able to see the creation of Sir Francis Spring (the RMYC was also his baby) and the place where S. Ramanujan, the great mathematician, first worked. On display in the Club building were newspaper clippings, trophies and photographs dating back to the 1930s.

The sail formed the Club's members setting off in various sailing craft (of which there was a bewildering array of terms and terminologies) and the guests going more sedately in a motorboat. The sea was smooth according to the veterans, but to us landlubbers it appeared rough enough. We were able to see several landmark buildings from the sea, a view usually not possible unless you fly. What was tragic, however, is that the sea front along First Line Beach and much of North Beach Road (along Fort St George) is completely devoid of any land view, thanks to a whole lot of ugly port buildings that have come up. The mind boggled as to what a huge tourism potential was missed. Imagine what a European capital or, for that matter, a Dubai or a Shanghai would have done with it.

Posted by Sriram V.

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