

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

Vol. XXII No. 1

April 16-30, 2012

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"O, God! It's the 'Metro' attack! Quick, remove our things from our road!"

### Rail-roaded

Poor Chennaiites.

First the power situation; now this – The Great Chennai Re-Route Rumpus.

Look, Chennaiites, a fairly co-operative lot, willingly, even cheerfully, endure the tumult and upheaval caused by value additions like the '...rail based rapid transport system' to the cityscape of their beloved... er...city...

But...

It's hard, okay?

Agreed, all proposed road usage changes are always carefully explained beforehand...

But hey –

There's a huge difference between being given a set of directions, and actually following them.

'Directions' don't tell you that the new you'll-have-to-take-this-right-for-a-while is a narrow strip that clearly resents having greatness thrust upon it.

Or that, with all those one-ways, you'll loop about so much, there's a real possibility you'll go past yourself at some point.

Dwellings in hitherto quiet by-lanes are now learning to say: 'We're on the main road itself, okay, va?'

Current Chennai road-users, stepping out of home, feel a sense of shared experience with their favourite mythical heroes.

Talk about facing the perilous and the unexpected on a daily basis.

In addition, it's summer.

Rumour has it that the average Chennaiite is checking daily horoscope columns more assiduously these days.

Understandable.

When chaos abounds, you turn to the stars for answers.

Ranjitha Ashok

# Can't Mylapore Festival be more people friendly?

(By A Special Correspondent)

The annual festival of the Mylapore Kapaleeswarar Temple has just concluded. It was a grand spectacle, in keeping with what is expected of a tradition that has spanned several centuries. The devout and the curious assembled in the thousands and were not disappointed. It was a gala ten days, except for the woeful inadequacy it exposed – both in terms of civic infrastructure and the sense of civic discipline in the public. This is not the first time this has happened and, as the years advance, the pressure is only building up on what little amenities that are available.

Take, for instance, the traffic. Given that the festival happens each year and its dates are fixed pretty much in advance, surely the city's traffic police can involve themselves in some creative solutions. One of these could be the declaration of the four Mada Streets as 'pedestrian only' zones at least for the ten

days of the festival. Residents with vehicles could be given entry passes, surely not a difficulty in this electronic age, and the rest could be asked to park their vehicles at specific locations and walk the rest of the distance. And for those who cannot walk, the temple, given its substantial income, can even think of running a ferry service comprising the kind of golf carts that are in use at the Madurai Meenakshi temple and also at Central Station. This will work very well, especially if other kinds of traffic are prevented from entering the zone during the festival.

What is happening at present is that the traffic is allowed to flow right through the four streets whenever the deities are not being taken out in procession. What is overlooked is that the festival becomes an occasion when

(Continued on page 8)

## Who knows all about heritage buildings?

(By The Editor)

We heard it said the other day that the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage's Chennai Chapter knows nothing about heritage buildings. That the architects, history and heritage buffs, story-tellers and dilettantes associated with INTACH-Chennai know nothing about heritage buildings. We also heard it said that the experts on the subject were institutions like the Heritage Conservation Committee of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, the Corporation of Chennai, Metrorail, Government Infrastructure organisations, etc. with their complement of bureaucrats, engineers and planners.

Now that it has been stated definitely that those associated with these Government organisations are experts on heritage buildings, may we, and others like us, appeal to them to draw up a Heritage Act worthy of a city of the 21st Century as quickly as possible and have it enacted. To take the first step of drawing up the Act, they won't have to do much. A draft was suggested to the States by a Central Ministry more than a decade ago and it was fine-tuned by various Tamil Nadu bureaucrats at different times, but never seemed close to presentation for enactment. With their expertise attested to, perhaps the present group of bureaucrats, engineers etc. will fine-tune the draft a little more, spell out in one-syllable words what heritage buildings are, and have the Act enacted.

West Bengal has a Heritage Commission Act for the whole State. Mumbai, Kolkata and Hyderabad have legislation protecting identified heritage buildings. Delhi and Bangalore have their Urban Arts Commissions. But why do we want to be like them? We always want to be like that 21st Century city, Singapore. So, perhaps then, this now-certified team of experts should visit Singapore and see what its rigorous Heritage Act has done to areas with Chinese, Malay, Indian and Colonial Heritage. Perhaps they should look at what has been done there being done to George Town, the Mada Streets of Mylapore and Triplicane, Rajaji Salai and the Marina, and several other heritage precincts in Chennai (not to mention elsewhere in Tamil Nadu).

We are quite sure that all those members of INTACH-Chennai who know nothing about heritage buildings will be only too glad if the now-proclaimed experts draw up a Heritage Act – after visiting Singapore – and ensure that it is enacted. And implemented. That's all heritage buffs like your Editor want. And have wanted for over twenty years now.

## George Town needs a master plan

• By A Special Correspondent

The Corporation of Chennai has been making several announcements on major projects. It has promised world-class roads, commissioned feasibility studies for a slew of flyovers, and initiated consolidation of garbage storage in various localities. There is also much noise being made on a unified transport authority for the city. In the midst of all these initiatives, one locality, a local-

ity that is completely different from any other in the city, is sure to be left behind, except perhaps when it comes to garbage disposal. I allude to George Town, the old city.

George Town presents challenges that are not necessarily present in other areas. This entire quarter came up at a time

when electricity, motorised transport, footpaths and modern drains were unheard of. The streets were laid out in a grid pattern and were meant for pedestrians and a few horse carriages. Today, the same roads bear the load of a vast number, and bewilderingly different range, of vehicles, together with

a burgeoning pedestrian population.

If those be the problems with the streets, the homes and offices have challenges as well. They were all meant to be town houses, with no space between them. These were usually two-storied, with the business establishment and warehouse on the ground floor, and residence

(Continued on page 8)

# Why don't the women answer?

You call your local ward councillor on the phone. A male voice answers. The man refuses to hand over the phone to his wife, the councillor.

"You can talk to me, it's alright," he insists.

So why do parties choose to select the wives of local area politicians when it comes to giving tickets and respecting the reservation policy for women in our local bodies like our Corporation Council?

Is the situation so bad that these parties do not have women who have taken part in rallies and agitations or addressed local issues, women who could better qualify for this job?

I was looking for answers at a discussion held at the American Center recently. The United States celebrates Women's History Month each March and among the events was this discussion on 'Women and Politics'.

The panel included former State Minister of the DMK, Dr. Poongothai Aladi Aruna, Bader Sayeed, senior advocate and former AIADMK MLA, Lalitha Kumaramangalam, senior member of the BJP, and Dr. Wendy Singer, Fulbright Nehru senior researcher.

It was a refreshing experience because all the women were outspoken, warm and displayed character.

This was a 'limited' public event and hence the candid nature of their conversation – they could not have said many of the things they said in a public space, much less in their own political space.

The discussion touched on how being in political families helped an aspirant, how party cadres treated and respected women in their midst, what it took to be in, and survive, electoral politics, and how women leaders and colleagues treated each other.

For someone who has followed grassroot politics and electoral systems closely for many years now, much of what was said was not new.

But when I did ask the question about wives of local area politicians being chosen for tickets, there were a few unconvincing replies from the panel.

"Perhaps parties think wives of their local leaders are winnable."

"These women will also be party members, so there is no harm selecting them."

"It's a start, at least a woman has found a space, she will do better as she learns down the line."

Some women ward councillors have got down to business with experience. Some have turned corrupt. Others have remained mum or played puppets.

If the ward community can work alongside, if the women are given skills training, then our neighbourhoods would stand to gain. – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*)

– Vincent D'Souza

## A big 'Thank You' to 41 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16-02-12 to 15-03-12, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, *Madras Musings*, have already received. We thank all of them for their support for the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

– Chennai Heritage

Rs. 100: Janardhan, S.; Chandramouli, AL.; Venkateswaran, MN.; Charu Madhavan; Rangaswamy, M.; Thiagarajan, PS.; Arunachalam, VE.; Srinivasachari, T.; Narasimhan, S.

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Rs.500: Mohan K John; Bhagirathi, S.; Nalli Chinnasami Chetty; Viswanathan, G.; Varadarajan, TR.

Rs. 900: Zarin Mistry

Rs.1000: Mani, MK.

# The politics of a tanneer pandal

*Tanneer pandals* were very much in the news in the last couple of weeks. For, it was the time when the festival of the 63 great devotees of Lord Shiva was celebrated in Mylapore. To *The Man from Madras Musings*, *tanneer pandals* will remain a unique Tamil tradition, though a newspaper did refer to them as refreshment stalls, thereby conjuring up a vision of something on a railway platform with catering by Spencer's in those good old days.

In the days of not so much yore, these *tanneer pandals* were simple affairs. Patrons donated money, a makeshift shelter of thatch was put up, a couple of pots of water were placed in them, and that was that. The more affluent *pandals* had buttermilk and, maybe, *panagam*, that sweet drink made with jaggery. That was the very outer periphery of luxury. To these the faithful flocked, slaked their thirst, and moved on.

But all cannot remain forever well in this Garden of Eden. MMM notices that the politicians have of late discovered that much capital (and what else is the average politician interested in?) can be made out of these *pandals*. Overnight these *pandals* have become participants in squalid vote-grabbing exercises. And how!

From his vantage eyrie MMM could see the *pandals* springing up in street corner after corner. And each of them sported banners with beaming photographs of the leader whose party had sponsored the particular *pandal*. The side walls had cut-outs and the rear had full-length photos of the leader in action. And each of the *pandals* needed formal inaugurations as well.

These followed a well-set routine. From an early hour, high decibel loudspeakers blared out party songs, film-songs involving the leader and announcements to the effect that a pooh-bah from the party was on his/her way to inaugurate the refreshment stall and provide manna in the wilderness to the deserving public. Bawdy dances followed in the bigger venues. Then came a series of speeches by the junior leaders, each in ascending levels of volumes and stridency. Dire fates were predicted for those who dared oppose the beloved leader while milk and honey would be showered on the faithful. The leaders in the opposition were berated in colourful language and aspersions were cast on their conduct in private and public. Moral turpitude was the general theme. MMM wondered as to where the speakers got such intimate details.

The Big 'U' duly rolled up in due course and, by the

simple act of drinking a glass of water, declared the *pandal* open in the name of the leader. The faithfuls were then let in. The bar, in short, was open. Those who preferred liquids were given the drink of their choice and for solid refreshments the sky appeared to be the limit. By the end of the day, the place resembled a Roman orgy of sorts with the 'spiritually' elevated reeling away or simply lying down on the footpaths. The next day the *pandals* bore all the signs of a morning after, with even the structure in some places leaning to one side, with a dissipated look.

Somewhere in his childhood, MMM had read that *tanneer pandals* had originated when Appothi Adigal, one of the 63, had welcomed Appar, another of the same ilk, by constructing them. All MMM can say is that we appear to have come a long way from the time of Appar and Appothi. *Après Appar le deluge*, eh?

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Render unto Caesar...

Remember those twinkling fluorescent strips that flashed at you from the road whenever you drove on the wrong side, which was all too often though it was not your fault. Well, *The Man from Madras Musings* has news for you. They have begun vanishing, one by one. MMM attributed their departure to the fact that the volume of Chennai's traffic was too much for them and so they were wearing out at an alarming rate. But such, it appears, is not the case.

Apparently, there is a group that makes a small packet by removing them, collecting them till they form a respectable quantity and bulk, and then selling them. Though who care to buy them and for what purpose, MMM is at a loss to fathom. The seller, however, gets much-needed cash which he, in turn, showers on the local TASMAR bar

for a tippie or two. It cannot be denied that our brethren lead interesting lives and work hard for a living.

MMM was quite shocked to know about such goings on. Not so MMM's informant who is a sharply observant character. He sees poetic justice in the whole thing. What was provided by the Government is being returned to it, is his view. What is being lost on the turnstile of roadways is being gained on the roundabout of liquor vending.

Ever punctual

There was a time when Chennai worked as per the clock and the more religious followed the *panchangam* or almanac. Good deeds were begun at certain hours, and the inauspicious hour, which followed the formula of Mother Saw Father Wearing The Turban on Sunday, was avoided like the plague. But now *The Man from Madras Musings* observes that everyone works as per the hours of the power cut. Meetings, discussions and outings are planned according to the schedule and the more enterprising ones fix visits to places where they are sure to find power and, more importantly, airconditioning.

And MMM has to hand it to the TNEB. Their word is their bond and they are remarkably punctual when it comes to turning off the power at the main and restoring it after the stipulated two hours. Neither a minute more, nor less. Never a minute earlier nor after. Shylock could have taken his lessons from them. But it makes MMM wonder as to why such meticulousness could not be followed when it came to planning for power capacity and generation.

Tailpiece

That Chennai is a pretty commercial city is known to *The Man from Madras Musings*. But he did not realise that even bachelors and families were available on hire, till he saw the poster announcement reproduced below.

– MMM



**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



**Heritage buildings**

I have been a regular reader of *Madras Musings* for several years and I appreciate your focus on matters of history and heritage. However, I wish to offer some thoughts on heritage conservation which are slightly different from yours (and most other readers). The basic aim of conservation is to preserve buildings and structures as a live record of history for educating and enlightening posterity. Many of them have lost their original value or purpose for which they were built. To elaborate, two or three specimens of Gothic or Indo-Saracenic architecture in Chennai may be preserved. To contend that every heritage structure should be preserved is to insist that all dinosaur skeletons found on the planet should be kept in museums!

There is another, more important, angle, i.e. financial. Some heritage structures happen to be in areas whose real estate value has shot up due to efflux of time. Their owners naturally would like to redevelop the site, by demolishing the heritage structure. The hue and cry regarding the

destruction of heritage buildings is from enthusiasts, who have no financial stake, i.e. they don't stand to lose if the site is prevented from being put to a different use. To fulfil their objective, a fund can be created with donations, which can be used to buy heritage structures.

**S. Subramanian**  
Plot 317, Kamaraj Salai  
Valasaravakkam  
Chennai 600 087

**Metro Rail & Heritage**

It is most disheartening to note that the Metro Rail babus have scant respect for heritage structures. The questions that come to mind are:

1. Many European cities have underground rail networks that pass along and below heritage buildings. These lines were laid much after the heritage buildings were built. When they were able to lay underground lines without damage to structures, why are we unable to plan a route that will skirt such buildings without having to demolish them?

2. New Delhi has many heritage buildings. Not one of them was touched for laying the Metro lines there. If it can be

done in Delhi, why the same cannot be done in Chennai?

It appears that the babus in Chennai Metro Rail have a "don't care" attitude. With such an attitude, we can be certain that the Metro here will be as good as the MRTS.

**C.S. Ananth**  
Neelankarai  
Chennai 600 041

**Senate House**

Your article on the condition of *Senate House* (MM, April 1st) has brought to light the insensitive attitude of authorities towards the heritage structure for whose restoration several crores were spent a few years back. Civil contractors are not competent to undertake jobs of this nature. I do not know whether conservation experts were involved while undertaking the project. In Chennai I do not know of any such professional institution. Experts available with the National Museum Institute, New Delhi, and its alumni would do a perfect job. More importantly, the structure should be put to proper use so that it is living heritage.

**R. Ramamurthy**  
737, Lakshmi Bai Nagar  
New Delhi 110023

\* \* \*

**Senate House – II**

I have passed the psalmists three score and ten to reach four score and ten and have fond memories when, grandly robed, we had our convocation in majestic *Senate House* (MM, April 1st) and took our degrees! I weep to think that it is now an apology for a Museum as well as a storehouse! Soon, it will be in a shambles. Why not have colleges use it for what it was, a grand Convocation Hall?

Our disregard for heritage is appalling. Everywhere else you travel, there is an effort to preserve, but not in Madras.

**Anna Varki**  
1-D, 'Rosamere'  
18, Harrington Road  
Chennai 600 031

**More identities**

'Perambur's pacesetter' was an excellent article and brought back many happy memories.

I joined the Southern Railway Hospital in March 1958 as a young doctor fresh out of training. Not long after I joined the Hospital, the Maternity Ward was opened. I was one of the two doctors in charge of the Maternity Ward and Women's Surgical Ward.

It was my privilege to work closely with Dr. T.J. Cherian during the few years I worked in the Railways before I left it to go abroad.

I can identify three of the doctors in the 1966 picture taken of the doctors in Southern Railway Hospital.



**Till June 15:** A solo show of Sophie Jo's paintings. Her brilliantly coloured works are inspired by everyday life that she captures with a sense of humour (at Apparao Galleries).

**April 18-April 30:** Art exhibition by Candapanne (at DakshinaChitra).

**April 20:** *Check it Out:* Nee-reekshan Dance Academy's second annual dance show (at Kamarajar Arangam). Contact: 2434 9040.

**April 22:** Boy with a Suitcase a play presented by Ranga Shankara Bangalore and Schnawwl Theatre Mannheim (at Sir Mutha Venkatasubbarao Hall)

**DakshinaChitra Workshops**

**For Children**

**April 28-29 & May 12-13:** One-day Activity Camp

**May 11:** Junk Art

**May 18:** Traditional games

**May 25:** Pottery & Clay Modelling

**For Adults**

**1. April 21-22:** Residential Photography

**2. May 2-6:** Table Mat Weaving

**3. May 2-12:** Studio Pottery

**4. May 25-27:** Glass Fusing (jewellery)

**5. June 8-10:** Kalamkari + Kalahasti visit

**For details: 98417 77779**

**May, June & July:** Sakti Burman Retrospective, a travelling show by Apparao Gallery on Sakti Burman, a well-known contemporary artist who was born in India and lives in France. There will be over 100 paintings, water colours, drawings and lithographs (at DakshinaChitra).

**May 3-May 30:** Photography exhibition by Poochi Venkat and his students on 'Flora and Fauna' (at DakshinaChitra).

**June 1-June 17:** Paintings and Sculpture by Shanthi (at DakshinaChitra).

**June 20-June 30:** Puppets of South India from the DakshinaChitra Collection (at DakshinaChitra).

Seated Left to Right are No. 6 Dr. Ramachandran, No. 7 Dr. T.B. Rao, and No. 8 Dr. N. Govindaraj.

**Dr. Vimala Ramakrishnan**  
1658, Cardinal Drive  
Munster IN 46321  
U.S.A.

**Phone phonetics**

In Chennai some people pronounce 'pronunciation' as 'pronounciation' and spell it wrongly to boot. To transcribe what a Chennaiite speaks is tough and proper nouns especially are a painful nightmare.

In 1985 I worked as private secretary to the boss in a Bank. I was given the job of recording the RSVPs for one of the Bank's invitations for the elite. The phone rang and a man (himself a private secretary) said that a Reverend Sundakka will be attending the function. I asked him three times, "Reverend, who?" because it sounded like the Tamil name of vegetable. When I asked him for the spelling, he lost his temper and shouted at me.

Later he put his shirt back on and spelt the name. It read Rev. Sundar Clarke!

**C.G. Prasad**  
9, C.S. Mudali Street  
Kondithope, Chennai 600 079

**Can you help me?**

INTACH, Kodaikanal, is publishing a coffee table book on the architectural and natural heritage of Kodaikanal

– its houses, their occupants, the forests and wildlife. The special focus is 1920-1980.

If anyone can help by way of memories, photos, they will be examined and gratefully acknowledged if used.

Those interested can contact pradeepandanusha@gmail.com

**Pradeep Chakravarthy**

**READABILITY PLEASE**

**Dear Readers,**

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

**– THE EDITOR**

**OUR ADDRESSES**

For matters regarding subscriptions, donations, non-receipt of receipts etc.: CHENNAI HERITAGE, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 14.

*Madras Musings* now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com. Those who wish to intimate change of address can also do so provided the subscription number is quoted. For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: Madras Musings, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

On editorial matters: The Editor, Madras Musings, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

**– THE EDITOR**

**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.madras musings.com](http://www.madras musings.com)

**THE EDITOR**



Quizzin' with Ram'nan

# The great debate of the 1930s

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

1. Off whose bowling did Sachin Tendulkar get his 100th international century on March 16th?
2. In which European capital was the world's largest *Titanic* attraction opened recently as a centennial tribute to the legendary ship?
3. Name the Railway Minister, forced to resign by his party's leadership because he had raised the fares in the annual budget.
4. Name the vessel in which James Cameron made his solo descent to the Challenger Deep, the deepest point on earth.
5. According to the recent controversial revelation by the COAS, Gen. V.K. Singh, how much, and for what purpose, was he offered a bribe?
6. The high-profile BRICS summit was held in New Delhi at the end of March. Which countries comprise BRICS?
7. Jim Yong Kim has been nominated by the U.S. President Barack Obama to head which global financial organisation?
8. Name the landlocked African country, famous for the place called Timbuktu, that saw a coup on March 22nd-23rd.
9. Who won the first race of the 2012 Formula One season on March 18th in Australia?
10. According to recently released data, India's poverty level has fallen sharply from 37.2% in 2004-05. What is the figure now?
11. Lt. Col. Douglas Muir Reid is considered the prime mover behind which institution in Fort St. George?
12. *Championing Enterprise* by historian Sriram V. is a book to commemorate the 175th anniversary of which 'commercial/financial' body?
13. What were *Guzili Paattu*?
14. What noble service has the family of Sabhapati Achari been rendering for the last 152 years in Mylapore during the Arupathu Moovar festival?
15. Name the first Indian to get a beach-fronted statue on the Marina.
16. Which film classic features the famous dialogue, uttered by the queen-mother, *Poruthathu podhum, pongi ezhu, maganey*?
17. 'Kondalathi' and 'Semparundhu' are the Tamil names for which birds?
18. Which European clergyman is considered the first to translate and print the New Testament in Tamil?
19. Name the Englishman who wrote the four-volume *Vestiges of Old Madras* in 1913, considered a fantastic reference for Madrasphiles.
20. In terms of size/area, where does Tamil Nadu rank among the States of India?

(Answers on page 8)

**M**anikkodi first appeared on September 17, 1933. It folded in 1939. Though it existed less than six years, it made quite an impact. When K. Srinivasan appointed Va Raa its editor, T.S. Chokkalingam, who had been managing the publication, had problems with Va Raa within a year. Va Raa left Madras and went to Thirupazhanam, his native town. It was at this time that *Virakesari*, a popular Tamil newspaper published from Colombo, was looking for an editor. Its publisher had asked V.O. Chidambaram Pillai to recommend a suitable person. VOC wrote to Va Raa in May 1935 asking him to help the publisher in Colombo, 'a generous person and a nice man', by taking over the journal. When Va Raa reached Colombo, his brother-in-law found him a place to stay, which was a room that he himself was sharing with Sivapadasundaram.

In an August 1934, issue of *Swadesamitran*, there was an essay by one R. Ramarathnam, *Three days with Va Raa*, which was to stir up a hornet's nest. In the article, the author said that

• by  
**K.R.A. Narasiah**

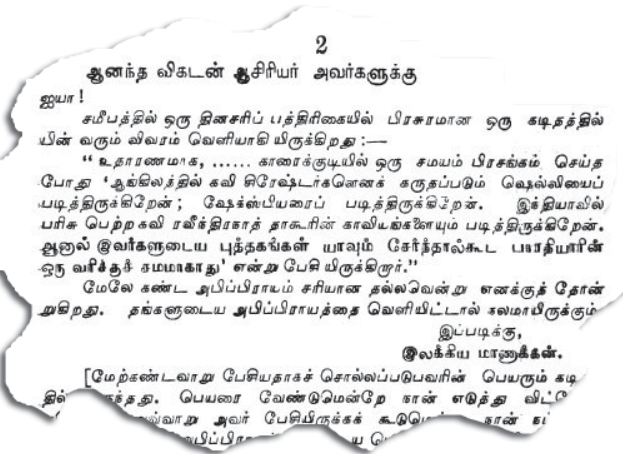
in Coimbatore, at a meeting organised by freedom fighters, "Va Raa had roared that Shelley, Tagore and Shakespeare put together will not equal a line of Bharati." The story was repeated by *Virakesari* in its issue of September 11, 1935.

*Dinamani* brought out a special issue to commemorate Bharati Day in September 1935. In it, writing under the pseudonym, 'Nellainesan', P. Sri Acharya, a writer of repute, questioned this statement of Va Raa by saying that, while Bharati was a good poet, he could not be described as a great poet. This evoked furious retorts from both N. Pichumurthi and K.P. Rajagopalan, known then as the literary twins of Madras, who asked what was the yardstick for a great poet.

The real mischief was started by Kalki (R. Krishnamurthi, the then editor of Vasani's *Ananda Vikatan*, later editor of *Kalki*) who in the *Vikatan* issue dated November 3, 1935 published a

seemingly innocuous question from a reader, quoting the statement of Va Raa and asking if what he said was right. It was signed as being from 'A Literary Student'. To this question, the editor replied that the statement was wrong and if such a statement had been made by someone he should be termed a *nirathcharakutchi* – an illiterate.

The *Manikkodi* writers were furious with this statement by Kalki, who had himself asked the question and answered it.

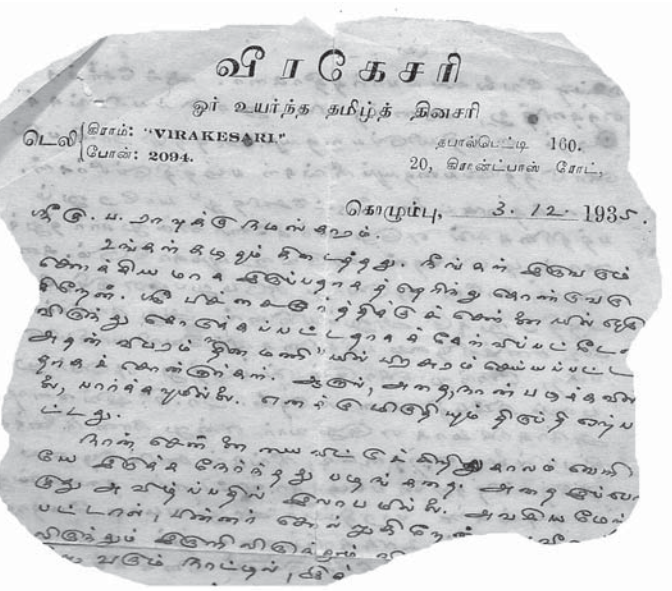


The innocuous question raised in the *Ananda Vikatan* of 3.11.1935.

Va Raa sent a long write-up which was published in *Swadesamitran* on November 30, 1935, under the title *Bharati and Literary Review*. He followed this essay with a four-page letter dated December 3, 1935 to Ku Pa Rajagopalan in Madras, which is fortunately available to us now in the original. In this letter, Va Raa asks Ku Pa Raa and his friends to do something about this, as otherwise Bharati's name as a great poet would be decried by the likes of Kalki.

But Kalki did not stop there. He answered Va Raa with another long essay in the very next issue of *Swadesamitran*, in which he used rather harsh words against Va Raa. He titled the essay *Bharati and Literary Criticism*.

This debate by now had split the Tamil literary world into two. Some of the younger writers were rather harsh on Kalki. The reason was a particular statement made by Kalki in his article that while Bharati could be termed as a good Tamil national poet, he could not be equated with the likes of Tagore, Shelley and others. He went so far as to say that if Tolstoy had seen the poem of Bharati about *Valli* (considered



Va Raa's letter dated 3.12.1935 to Ku Pa Rajagopalan.

erotic by some, like Kalki), Tolstoy would have set aflame all works of Bharati. Kalki wondered how Va Raa could say that Bharati was greater than

cared less for Phyrri Phalanx and more for Phyrri Dance. Tamil grammar is a typical example of the tail wagging the dog!"

In fact, when Kalki had started writing long before he joined *Vikatan*, he used to go to K. Srinivasan's house in T' Nagar, where Va Raa was then staying, to show Va Raa the articles he had written. Kalki then considered it a great honour to be appreciated by Va Raa. What made the young *Manikkodi* writers furious was the fact that the same Kalki was later referring to Va Raa as an illiterate! N. Chidambarasubramanian in *Dinamani* on February 8, 1936, and V. Ananthakrishnan in *Dinamani* on February 17th, wrote more balanced articles while B.S. Ramayya on December 13, 1935, and Ilango van (the famous dialogue writer of Tamil cinema) on December 21, 1935 condemned Kalki in strong words.

Va Raa replied in the *Swadesamitran* issue dated December 14, 1935, "If Bharati's works have to be burnt, let it not happen due to me; at least let the divine fire brought by Prometheus be used."

The debate was known for its content. Chitti argued forcefully as to how Bharati was not known to the world outside as none of his writings had been analysed by any till then. Ku Pa Raa brought out the best in Bharati. In fact, both these writers were known for their knowledge. Kalki later built the memorial for Bharati in Ettayapuram; rather a late penance!

(It was mere serendipity that when Chitti's daughter was clearing her house while moving to another address, she found a box full of old letters collected by her father and wanted me to have a look at them. Chitti's son Visveswaran brought the cardboard box and I found all the original letters of Va Raa. And many other documents – real collector's booty – some of which I have been happy to share with readers here.)

Part from the branches of the Bank of Baroda and the presence of several Gujarati merchants in Madras, there is little to suggest a further connection with the erstwhile State of Baroda, one of the only five princely States entitled to a 21-gun salute. Yet connection there is, albeit a rather sinister one. A ruler of Baroda, Malhar Rao Gaekwad, was a guest of the Madras Presidency Government in the late 19th Century. Perhaps it is due to the circumstances of his residence here that reference to this interesting episode has been quietly dropped.

In 1870, Khande Rao, Gaekwad of Baroda, died without leaving a male child, and the *gaddi* (Indian rulers were forbidden to use the term 'throne' or use **arched** crowns on their letterheads) passed to his brother, Malhar Rao, who was at that time in prison for trying to dethrone Kande Rao. Malhar Rao was released and proclaimed Maharaja.

He was smarting from his imprisonment and determined to wreak vengeance upon the supporters of his predecessors. He was a tyrant and an extravagant spendthrift. He commissioned cannon in solid gold and silver, and had woven a huge carpet of pearls and semi-precious stones. He imposed exorbitant taxes on his hapless subjects and his sensual appetites were unfettered.

Annuities to members of the Gaekwad family were not paid. The Queen-Dowager, Jamna Bai, went to Poona to protest against the behaviour of the Gaekwad. The British Resident in Baroda, Colonel Phayre, asked for formal complaints so that an inquiry might be instituted. A Commission under the Presidency of Colonel Meade made certain recommendations to the Gaekwad, urging him to restore order in the State and desist from ill-treatment of his subjects. They were ignored.

As a result of the strained relationship between the Gaekwad and Col. Phayre, the latter was replaced by Col. Sir Lewis Pelly, who was appointed Special Agent and Agent to the Governor-General. On the eve of Col. Phayre's departure, an



Doveton House

# The Baroda connection

attempt was made to poison him with arsenic. It was alleged that the Maharaja was the instigator. A Commission, headed by Sir Richard Couch, Chief Justice of Bengal, began an inquiry into the matter. In the meantime, the Maharaja was relieved of his duties and placed under arrest. A State record gives the following account of the inquiry:

"The three English Members of the Commission came to the conclusion that an attempt to poison Colonel Phayre had been instigated by Malhar Rao, while the three Indian Members did not consider him guilty. It was finally decided, as stated in a Proclamation issued in 1875, that the Maharaja must be deposed, not because the British Government has assumed that the result of the inquiry has been to prove the truth of the imputation against His Highness, but because, having regard to all the circumstances relating to the affairs of Baroda from the accession of His Highness Malhar Rao, his notorious misconduct, his gross misgovernment of the State, and his evident incapacity to carry into effect necessary reforms, the step was imperatively called for."

The three Indian members were the Maharajas of Gwalior and Jaipur, and one Dinkar Rao. Sgt. Ballantine, who was paid a lakh of rupees, defended his client, the Maharaja, successfully. This was a sensitive case, and the Government of India had to act very carefully. It must be said that, by all accounts, Malhar Rao was an inept ruler whose actions were not in the best interests of the State of Baroda.

● by Simeon Mascarenhas

In accordance with this resolution, Malhar Rao was at once exiled to Madras in 1875, where he lived under the surveillance of a British officer until his death in 1882. He was under house arrest in *Doveton House*\*, now the main building of Women's Christian College on College Road, Nungambakkam. Malhar Rao had a room built for himself on the Madras terraced roof of *Doveton House*, where he

spent much of his time enjoying the breezes. The room still survives.

The British Government then authorised Her Highness Jamna Bai, the widow of H.H. Khande Rao, to adopt a successor to inherit the power and wealth of her late husband. Other sources claim that Jamna Bai took the initiative when she moved the British Government to depose the tyrant Malhar Rao. She summoned clan leaders to Baroda, and hopeful candidates were asked to explain their suitability for the position. The choice fell upon thirteen-year-old Gopal Rao, son of Kashi Rao, the third son of Pilaji Rao Gaekwad, the founder of the State of Baroda in 1721. On May 27, 1875, Jamna Bai adopted him according to Hindu *shastras*. On ascending the throne, his name was changed to Sayyaji Rao. He was given an impeccable education in State affairs and management, and invested with ruling powers by His Excellency Sir James Ferguson, Governor of Bombay.

Sayyaji Rao proved to be a most able ruler, far-sighted and benevolent. Most of Baroda's public institutions were inaugu-

rated by him. He wasted no time in selling off Malhar Rao's gold and silver cannon, together with part of the enormous carpet of pearls (only the large central medallion survives), to fund educational institutions. During the ceremony in Delhi on January 1, 1877, when Queen Victoria assumed the title of 'Empress of India', Sayyaji Rao was invested with the title of 'Farzandi-i-Khas-i-Daulat-i-Inglishia', or 'Favoured son of the British Empire'. In 1880, Sayyaji Rao married a princess of the House of Tanjore. That is not as surprising as it may seem: the Houses of Baroda and Tanjore were of Maratha origin.

\* Lt Gen John Doveton, who first arrived in Madras in 1783 and died in 1847, was the soldier who looked after Tipu Sultan's two sons when they were held hostage by Cornwallis in Madras. Doveton, who got on well with Indians, is said to have surrounded himself with a colony of Brahmins when he lived here. *Doveton House*, the second European house amidst the paddy fields of Nungambakkam, was built before 1798, probably by a Benjamin Roebuck; it still has the city's tallest porch! Doveton, who died in it, acquired the house around 1837 from a Linghi Chetty. He left it to one of his Brahmin families who took the name Doveton as part of their name. In 1875, the then Gaekwad of Baroda was interned in this house for his role in the attempt on the life of the British Resident in his State; he built himself an airy room on the top, which still survives, and a bandstand and monkey house which don't. The house reverted to Government occupancy after this episode and, in 1893, it became the home of Sir Ralph Benson, a judge of the High Court. He left Madras in 1913. In 1914, the Indian National Congress sessions were held in the compound. And then it was a hostel for a while. Women's Christian College, with 41 students and seven lecturers, moved into *Doveton House* in May 1916, the building and 11-acre campus having been bought for Rs. 63,000 with a Rockefeller contribution.

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## FOCUS ON CARDIAC CARE

(Continued from page 5)

for plastic surgery, and Varanasi for oncology. For railway employees the facilities are available sans a price tag; outsiders are treated at a very reasonable cost.

By 1978, twin Operation Theatres with 20 beds with post-operation wards for cardiac patients were in place. All speciality departments were functional and the bed strength went up to 505. In January

1980, the first modern Cardiac Cath Lab was set up. The hospital was recognised by the National Board of Exams for Post-graduate Training in 1984, when the late Dr. Y.N. Mehrotra was the Chief Medical Officer. Dr. J.S.N. Murthy, its first candidate, was in 1988 also able to bring the Higher Education Link Scheme (HELS), a three-year academic programme, between Southern Railway Hospital and London University, with the help of Prof. Glennis

Haworth, the late S.N. Kumar and Kartar Singh of the British Council, Dr. P. Srinivasan of the Jeevan Blood Bank, and with the support of the Railway administration.

By 1990 a new Cath Lab was in place including facilities like DSA, laser surgical unit, and video endoscopy. Two more new Cath Labs have since been added. The department is currently headed by Dr. Sriram Rajagopal.

(To be concluded)

# IT NEEDS TO BE MORE PEOPLE-FRIENDLY

(Continued from page 1)

vendors of traditional wares such as pottery, woodcraft and metalwork, display and sell them on the footpaths and the streets. This further constricts the already narrow streets and makes the movement of traffic all the more difficult. The erecting of temporary pavilions to shelter the deities all along the processional route further compounds the problem. The best solution would be to suspend all traffic movements for ten days. It will only enhance the festive feel. But, if this cannot be implemented, can we at least declare the four streets to be 'no horn' zones during the festival. There are some drivers who hoot even at the deities, hoping that the procession would speed up!

One of the most endearing features of this festival is the *tanneer pandal*, or refreshment stall, which is put up to dispense water and some eatables to those who visit the festival. These being times of relative prosperity, these *pandals* have rapidly increased in number. They have also begun distributing all kinds of cooked prepara-

tions. Political parties have also jumped in, no matter what be their outlook on religion. As a consequence, there is a surplus of food available. The visiting public simply grabs at everything that is offered and then just discards what it does not want. This leads to an enormous waste of food, all of which lies about on the road and gets trampled upon. The Corporation increases the frequency of cleaning up during the ten days, but when the litter is thrown about with no consideration or thought for cleanliness, there is very little that can be done even with frequent cleaning up. What is needed is a larger number of temporary dustbins and strict instructions to those who man the *tanneer pandals* that they will be responsible for the cleanliness in their vicinity.

Would it be too much to expect temporary public conveniences? These are not all that much of a novelty, for during the Tamil Conference in Coimbatore a few years ago, public hygiene was maintained by pressing into service these portable units that provide complete privacy, are easy to



This is the Bommai Chattiram on South Mada Street, all decked up for the Mylapore Festival...



... But this is what many areas in the Mada Streets are like during the Festival.

clean and transport. Surely, Chennai can take a leaf out of Coimbatore's book? It is indeed a sorry sight to see men relieving themselves along a proces-

sional route down which deities are being brought.

That said, it is congratulations to the temple authorities, the police and the Corporation

for successfully handling what is increasingly a logistic challenge. But given that cleanliness is said to be next to godliness, can we hope for both?

## Master plan for George Town?

(Continued from page 1)

on the upper floor. Ventilation was largely through skylights and open courtyards and verandahs. This sensitive fabric has begun to come apart when permission to build according to the norms of the rest of the city is being extended to structures in George Town as well. Several buildings have risen to many floors, putting the entire neighbourhood under severe stress in terms of infrastructure and quality of life. The Government itself has led the way with the police quarters on Broadway becoming multi-storeyed. There are problems of illegal structures as well. With ownership rights of several old buildings being hazy at best, there have seen unplanned constructions by tenants, adding to the chaos. What George Town needs is strict governance of construction permits and emphasis on safety norms.

Traffic in George Town follows a complicated set of one-

ways. These are observed more in the breach, which only adds to the confusion. There are no checks on the number of vehicles plying inside the area or as to where they are parked. The Loane Park, for instance, became a truck parking facility through the simple act of usurpation. It took the Government ages to retrieve the Park and restore it. What is needed is a recognition that George Town has a severe shortage of space and, so, parking in the area needs to be at a punitive premium. Travelling by foot needs to be encouraged and mass-parking facilities need to be organised on the outskirts of George Town. It is not as though space is not available for this. Land can be taken from the Seven Wells Pumping Station, the Salt Cotours Goods Shed and from the Esplanade Bus Terminus for this purpose.

There is much talk about decongesting George Town by encouraging the wholesale businesses to move out. While the debate is on as to whether this

will destroy George Town's traditional character, what is overlooked is that such shifts are rarely accomplished in full. Thus, vegetable vendors are still around in the Kotwal Chavadi area, flower sellers remain on Badrian Street, the chemicals people in Mannadi and the hardware merchants on Anderson Street. This, years after alternative locations have been proposed. And, very often, the shifting of one trade sees the vacated place being occupied by others with alacrity, thereby negating the entire effort.

What is urgently needed is a separate master plan for George Town. This needs to be a plan that recognises George Town's special character – its multi-ethnic population, its traditional ways of business, its narrow spaces, and the necessity to preserve its heritage, even while improving the lot of its people. Ahmadabad has already done this in its Walled City and is reaping the benefit of increased tourism as well. Can Chennai not do the same?

### Answers to Quiz

1. Shakib Al Hasan; 2. Belfast; 3. Dinesh Trivedi of TMC; 4. *Deepsea Challenger*; 5. Rs. 14 crore for clearing a 'sub-standard' procurement order of trucks; 6. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; 7. The World Bank; 8. Mali; 9. Jenson Button; 10. 29.8% of its population.

\* \* \*

11. The Fort Museum; 12. Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry; 13. Songs printed on cheap paper and distributed at street corners in Madras for people to hum; 14. Running a *Tanneer Pandal*; 15. V. Krishnaswami Iyer; 16. *Manohara*; 17. Hoopoe and the Brahminy Kite; 18. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg; 19. Col. Henry Davison Love; 20. Eleventh.

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