

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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I've found out that by exercising your mouth, teeth, jaw, cheeks, throat, you can lose lots of calories... what I mean is, to talk non-stop while eating!

Eat your words?

Food facts, nutrition nuggets, and weight watching. If you can't claim any knowledge or direct experience with regard to any of the above – chances are that you spend most social gatherings in complete silence, possibly chomping away on fried food, submerged in a fog of masochistic defiance and gloom.

Seriously – the world may be burning up on several levels – but general conversation centres primarily on weight issues – Weight lost, Weight regained, and an avalanche of food-centric facts thereof. And Commerce responds at once.

Take departmental stores.

Now, you kind of expect it of those high-end, cater-to-the-Page-3-variety-of-customers types.

But when good old Shop-Around-the-Corner, the guy who used to once ply you with tons of homemade vadam, now talks knowledgeable of 'superfoods', 'nutrient dense', and nutraceuticals, you know civilisation as you knew it has changed forever.

Those who once thought 'Omega-3' was a character in a sci-fi movie, now lecture on probiotics – (something entire generations thrived on in this part of the world without even realising it).

Obviously, there are benefits to healthy eating – but sometimes it feels like we're missing the French Fries of Life for the Bitter Gourd of Appearance.

Well, as in most things, perhaps the Middle Way...?

Ranjitha Ashok

Government offers hope again for Heritage Act

(By The Editor)

The State Government has announced that it is planning to bring in two laws on the heritage protection front, one specifically covering Mamallapuram, which is a recognised World Heritage Site, and the other covering heritage and cultural properties across the State. This is a good development as far as intent is concerned. Much, of course, will depend on how this will translate into reality. This is not the first time that the State has raised hopes of legislation for protecting heritage, only to pass over to what it felt are more pressing issues. Those promises were made as far back as 1999 and, again, in 2002, and then even more recently when Heritage Regulations/Acts were drafted or reviewed.

The latest announcement has it that a Heritage Commission Act is on the anvil which will constitute a body that can advise the State Government on preparing a classification of heritage buildings into various grades. It will also advise local authorities on the developmental rights of such heritage properties. What the Government appears to have overlooked are two aspects:

1. That such a body already exists – namely the Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) constituted by the CMDA in response to the High Court's judgement in 2010 in the case concerning the demolition of *Bharat Insurance Building*. That the Committee, comprised largely by bureaucrats, became a handmaiden of the CMDA is another matter altogether. The State Government will do well not to repeat this mistake and when creating the Heritage Commission it should make it like the Urban Arts Commission of Delhi, a body with independent powers.

2. That the exercise of grading and listing heritage buildings has been done at least a couple of times. The first time was when draft Heritage Regulations/Acts were drawn up by the Town and Country Planning Department teaming

(Continued on page 6)



The plight of pedestrians. (Courtesy: The Hindu.)

The least pedestrian-friendly Indian city: Chennai

A study put together by Clean Air Initiative, a Delhi-based organisation, has show our city to be the least pedestrian-friendly. Chennai has scored even lower than Bangalore and several tier II towns of the country. The study's conclusions appear almost to imply that the pedestrian has little or even zero chance of staying alive on Chennai's roads.

The evaluation was done on the basis of nine parameters, some of which are: motorists' behaviour, grade crossing availability, grade crossing safety, security from crime, availability of walking paths, and disability infrastructure. Chennai managed to score the lowest or second lowest on all counts. Is this a record worthy of a city that claims to be on the road to world-class infrastructure?

Of course, the results of the study ought not to be a surprise for those witnessing the developments in Chennai. Ever since 1996, the city has seen a shrinking, or complete removal, of footpaths. And all road developments have been done keeping in mind the interests of the motorists alone. As a consequence, we have several

flyovers for the building of which we have sacrificed pavements. We also have a series of one-ways, none of which has any zebra crossing. Those wishing to cross these roads on foot do so at their own risk. The statistics speak for themselves – 38 per cent of fatal accidents on Chennai's roads involve pedestrians.

What Chennai needs is a complete makeover of its traffic system. This requires coordina-

walking on a pedestrian crossing. This basically recognises that the pedestrian's rights are foremost on the road. In our city, motorists never stop for pedestrians to cross. If they do, it is because of a traffic signal and even then, they choose to stop on, or even beyond, the pedestrian crossing. The pedestrians have to make their way between the vehicles.

Footpaths and routes for those with disabilities are a must in any world-class city. Chennai has been steadily removing what little it had. Though a tough task, the Government has to bring back footpaths wherever it has done away with them. What is ironic is that even in greenfield developments and new colonies, these are not mandatory. All the new, so-called posh South Chennai areas have come up sans these facilities. And where we have footpaths, these need to be protected from encroachments. They cannot be granted to have become spaces for parking two-wheelers, or for hawkers, wayside shrines and storage areas for nearby construction projects.

(Continued on page 7)

• By A Special Correspondent

tion between many agencies and it also requires communication with, and training of, all stakeholders in the city's roads, of whom the pedestrian is just one. Firstly, all road junctions need zebra crossings, no matter how minor they are. All world-class cities have them and so we need to be no exception. And these have to be painted regularly so that they remain bright and visible. This is no easy task, but, then, it has to be done.

Second, it is mandatory internationally for motorists to stop when they see someone

When will we get all this power?

While Tamil Nadu has been steeped in a power crisis for long, the existing projects in the State have compounded the issue. Adding fuel to the crisis, many of the upcoming projects that would ease the shortage of power are, ironically, yet to take shape.

The State is nearly 4,500 MW short of its requirements as of now. From the wordy duel between the two dominant parties in Tamil Nadu, it can be understood that when the State was 'power surplus', there was no industrial development – and during hectic industrial activity in the subsequent period, no fruitful steps were initiated towards generating more power.

We all know about the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project and the obstacles it has faced. The plant that was ready for commissioning was put on hold for over nine months. Well, there are other projects that too face problems of delay.

One of them is the Udangudi Supercritical Thermal Power Project in Tuticorin District. The Rs. 8,000-crore, 2x800 MW project, which should have been commissioned by 2011, is yet to take off.

Now, the new government, having reviewed the project, has taken the initiative to implement it. The completion of the proposed power plant is expected by 2016-17, with its first unit expected to be commissioned by March 2013. The proposed date of commencement of the project activities at site was last month (April 2012).

Originally, the erstwhile Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) and BHEL had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in October 2007 to implement the project through a joint venture, the Udangudi Power Corporation Ltd. (UPCL). The State Government has now decided to go it all alone. It will fund the project fully.

In the initial stage, it was planned that both joint venture partners would invest 26 per cent each in the equity, and a financial institution or a private partner would bring in the balance stake. But the project did not make any headway except for the partners, TNEB and BHEL, allocating Rs. 32.5 crore each as project funding.

There were no efforts taken

to get long-term coal linkage, which is essential to get environmental clearance from the Centre. With the Union Coal Ministry not having passed orders on coal linkage, the Government decided to use imported coal for the project and seek the Environment Ministry's clearance. However, reports now suggest that Government plans to meet 70 per cent of the coal requirements from domestic sources.

Once the project commences, Tamil Nadu will get the entire 1600 MW of power generated. In this regard, UPCL signed a Power Purchase Agreement with the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Ltd (TANGEDCO) in January 2011. The project would also benefit from tax incentives under a 'Mega Power Status'.

The current status of the project is that the Tamil Nadu Government has alienated over 305 ha of Government land for the project and has given administrative sanction for the acquisition of an additional 116 ha of private lands. The State Government has also declared Udangudi a minor port for the captive use of the Udangudi Power Corporation Ltd.

The project is to be developed with super-critical technology to obtain benefits under the Clean Development Mechanism (a CDM Project), and it will have its own captive coal jetty at Udangudi with transportation of coal through a pipe conveyor system to the power plant – a rare phenomenon amongst thermal power projects in India.

But this supply may not be sufficient to meet the growing demand-supply gap. The Tamil Nadu Government has announced power generation projects to the tune of 3800 MW in the 2011-12 Budget. These include 1000 MW LNG-fired power generation, the proposed 660 MW Ennore Thermal Power replacement project, the 1000 MW Vallur Thermal Power Project, jointly executed with the Nuclear Thermal Power Corporation, the 600 MW North Chennai Thermal Power Station Stage-2 project, and the 600 MW Mettur Thermal Power Station Stage-3. These projects are expected to be commissioned between 2012 and 2015.

● by A Special Correspondent

MMM by any other name

Sundays are lean days for Stemples, especially in the mornings. There is hardly anyone at them and it is usually on a Sunday morning that you will find *The Man from Madras Musings* at one or the other of the many historic shrines that Madras that is Chennai is blessed with. And so it was last Sunday. MMM prayed, begged forgiveness for many sins of omission and commission, and thanked That Which Must Be Obeyed for whatever blessings had come his way.

And then it was that MMM realised that what he had actually been suspecting to be a rash of prickly heat on the back was actually MMM's sensitive skin reacting to someone's penetrating gaze. MMM turned back to see a man "with an eye like Mars to threaten and command", looking sharply at MMM. If MMM had had a guilty secret, this eye would have detected it at once or perhaps knew all about it already.

Having peered short-sightedly back at the gazer, MMM walked away only to find that the prickly heat sen-

on nighties which earned him everyone's ire? Was he from the University, deeply resentful of MMM's comments on the photography exhibition? Or was he ...

But having come close, the man's mien changed. He smiled ingratiatingly, though his eye seemed as powerful as ever. MMM took a deep breath. Perhaps this was a fan? Perhaps he would say how much he enjoyed all that MMM wrote?

"Sir, can I ask you a question?" he said.

"By all means," said MMM, now beaming at the man.

"What cologne do you use? It is very good and I have been following you wanting to know the brand."

It was an anticlimax. But then MMM has survived to write this column.

Powerful's power

The Man from Madras Musings, in all his innocence, had assumed that power cuts afflicted kings and commoners alike. But apparently that is not so. MMM got to

may wonder. It is none other than Pennycuick, the man about whom the Chief and several others have been writing, the father of the Mullai-periyar dam. And considering that it was just about a couple of months ago that the Government decided on a memorial, MMM must say it has all been mighty quick.

But what a radio station did was even better. Those of you who read this column will know that MMM, when he does not have to finish a story for the Chief, sometimes tunes in to the radio. And so he did the same day as the Benny Quick story came out. "It is Shakespeare's birthday today," screamed an announcer. There was no way that MMM could verify this, but he did wait to hear what followed. "On this day, we present you a Tamil film song that has English," she said. MMM waited with bated breath. What could this be? It turned out to be *Why this Kolaveri di!*

Where British jogged

The Man from Madras Musings is being consis-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

sation was increasing. Sure enough, the gazer was following. And when MMM stopped, so did he, always maintaining a respectable distance. Man and shadow had reached a fairly secluded corner of the temple where there was hardly anyone. MMM could picture the headlines: "Society scribe done in by stalker" or "Murder comes to MMM" or words to that effect.

It was with a sinking feeling that MMM came to suspect that the man knew MMM's identity. True, the Chief had assured MMM that his true face would always remain a mystery but perhaps information had leaked? Was the man upset about the wretched story that MMM had written a few months ago

It remains to be seen whether this goal will be achieved, given the fact that these projects may not be ready exactly by the dates committed and, even if that happens, the demand may not remain at the current level in a growth-oriented State. But, as of now, Tamil Nadu will turn out to be self-sufficient once these projects become a reality. (Courtesy: *Our Building and Construction*)

know of this while walking along with a few others when the conversation turned towards the timings of the two-hour power cuts in the respective areas which those who were walking came from. And then it transpired that one of those walking was not contributing to the conversation at all. But there came a point when everyone else had given details of his area's power cut timings and this gentleman had to speak up. He turned a bright shade of pink and confessed that he never had any power cuts.

The reaction was varied. Some were plain jealous, while others who were of a more charitable bent of mind wondered if the 'powerful' gent could have his mains hitched to those of a nearby hospital. But that was not the case. Someone in power was living in the neighbourhood and so the area was spared of power cuts. As simple as that!

RIP – English

"Memorial to Benny Quick," read the headline in a leading newspaper of the city, when it chose to announce the laying of the foundation stone for the structure. Now who is Benny Quick, you

tently advised by the Chief that he ought not to be condescending towards those who have no knowledge of history or heritage. "Fight this tendency, MMM," he has warned several times. And it is entirely thanks to this that MMM has taken to spending time with young journalists once again, even going to the extent of tolerating their calling him 'Uncle'.

But they do help in keeping MMM ever smiling. Last week, when one bright specimen called to know if MMM knew anything about the jogging track of the British, MMM was flummoxed. Mystery turned to admiration. Here was this young man who had found something that even the Chief would know nothing about. Did we not need more of his ilk? May his tribe increase, thought MMM. Further enquiries, however, revealed that he was referring to the War Memorial on Island Grounds. Its circular shape, he said, gave him that clue. It reminded MMM of another of the same breed who said that he was pretty sure that the Madras GPO was the residence of the Mughals in this city. It's a pity the Taj Mahal was not built here.

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Traits still common

I enjoyed reading the article on Tambrahms (MM, April 16th). Several traits that have been mentioned in the article still continue to be seen among Tambrahms, despite the sweeping changes. While I agree that the profile of a typical Tambrahm has changed, not much in terms of traits and characteristics has changed from then to now. Some other traits that I've found common among Tambrahms are finishing a meal with *thayir saadam* irrespective of whichever cuisine they are trying out, asking questions about the 'water problems' (*thanni kashtam*) in the area, and the stress on the centum culture/engineering courses/IIT.

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Much appreciated

'TAMBRAHMS' (MM, April 16th) was an excellent piece of informative writing on a community. The author was right that behind-the-scene values put forth by Brahmins come out through politicians and bureaucrats even today. Even anti-Brahminists keep Brahmins as their employees to take care of their interests because they have confidence in Brahmins for their integrity and honesty.

I wonder whether the present settlement 'Tambaram' near Chennai relates to Brahmins, Brahmins started living in large numbers in Tambaram when the place was surrounded with paddy fields.

Regarding the 'West Coast Brahmins' (MM, April 16th), the so-called Vadamas still think they are superior to any other sub-sect within the community because of drinking the fresh and holy Cauvery

water. Congratulations to both authors.

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Getting it straight

Sudha Venkataraman (suv2008@gmail.com) writes that she is the author of 'West Coast Brahmins' (MM, April 16th). She adds: The link to my runnersblok blog is incorrect. It should be <http://runnersblok.blogspot.com/2011/12/west-coast-brahmins.html>.

Sudha Venkataraman

EDITOR'S NOTE: We regret the omission of the blogger's name with the article.

Wake-up call

You keep writing ad nauseam about heritage buildings, culture *et al.* But have you ever written about, or cared to find out, the state these so-called old heritage buildings are in? Or why? Take for instance Presidency College. Every time I go there to attend meetings of the alumni association I get emotional. The corners of the staircase have turned red with betel leaf juice. No one is bothered. The teachers never ask the students not to indulge in this sickening habit. Near the library, where we have these meetings, there are cigarette butts on the floor. Have you written about that?

Then, the old Teachers' College at Saidapet. The stately building is hidden from view. When the metro rail work is over, this structure will be pulled down. I can bet on that. Or it will just be totally neglected till we forget its existence.

Did you bother about private buildings that remained idle – at Gemini corner, the old Safire cinema, etc. You keep harping

This letter appeared in *Current Science* (v. 102: p. 1087, 2012) and was forwarded to *Madras Musings* as a contribution to the debate that has taken place in these columns from time to time.

English: The heartbeat of world science

The results of the ACER-PISA test for 2011, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, show the Chinese on the top and the Indians at the last but one position among the South and South East Asian nations. The analysis puts the blame squarely on 'ineffective' English teaching in professional institutions and consequent 'inability' of the students to frame a sentence on their own in English. A cartoon in an English daily, illustrating the article, shows the Indian students sleeping or chatting over a laptop, whereas the Chinese students take pains to learn and practise.

Whether or not English is the international language of science is no more debated. The issue is the assessment of the contribution to science by different linguistic nations vis-a-vis their standards in English, for discussing which *Current Science* has contributed much in the past. With around 400 million people learning English as first language across the world, 350 million people as second language, as in India, and over a billion people learning English as a foreign language, as in China, Russia, Korea or Japan, it is no surprise that more than 60% of research publications are in English, with the rest in vernaculars giving titles, abstracts or parallel translations in English. 'Non-English'

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on Gokhale Hall or the *Bharat Insurance Building*. If some of these heritage buildings had been rebuilt, new edifices would have come up and generated more money. Wake up to realities, at least now.

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Old Mylapore

The Annual Brahmotsavam of Mylapore Temple was recently celebrated with pomp and grandeur. Wesleyan Missionary Elijah Hoole, in his book *Madras, Mysore and South India* published in 1844, described Mylapore as he saw it in 1820, thus:

"The original Hindu town of Mielapoor stands at a short distance from the beach and was never included within the Portuguese Port. It has a large ancient temple of considerable repute; adjoining it is a deep stone built tank, filling a very large quadrangle, where the natives bathe, and from which they supply themselves water. The annual festival of the temple is attended by tens of thousand of worshippers, and is celebrated with barbaric splendour, and at great expense. There is no place within the same distance of Madras where the traveller may see such an assemblage of Yogis, Sanyasins, Tabasis, Pandarams, all the varieties of heathen priests, priestesses and devotees each making an exhibition of his peculiar mode of dress, worship and penance, as in Mielapoor on this occasion. The Brahmans and other heathen inhabitants of

Mielapoor are less accessible to the exertions of the Christian missionary than the inhabitants of the interior generally; On the north side of Mielapoor there are many Mahommedan inhabitants."

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Give it life!

Madras Musings (April 1st) was right in bemoaning the fact that, after all the expensive restoration carried out on the *Senate House* building, it was kept closed for long resulting in its deterioration.

The reason for its non-use is not given. But any building kept in regular use thrives better than one kept closed. *Senate House* could be put to all the uses it was put to in the past, like language classes, lectures, meetings, conferences, convocations, etc.

Being one of the finest buildings of the colonial era, the acme of Indo-Saracenic architecture, it could be opened to the public for guided tours for limited hours during the day and a small fee charged for going round the majestic hall and enjoying its beauty. This would generate some revenue, and the visiting public walking under its canopy would give it back its vibrancy.

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What a Doctor!

We have known Dr. T.J. Cherian (MM, April 1st) from the time he was in Golden

speaking countries are putting a great effort to improve their English-speaking abilities, as English is seen as the 'language of science'.

India, with a different historical background, is almost an English-speaking country with limping standards. In spite of ever-expanding higher education in the country (around 200,000 institutions by the end of the XI Plan period, 2007-2012, including colleges, universities, IITs, IIMs and polytechnics), a steady decline in English standards is being observed.

Thanks to e-mails, chatting, SMS and other computer and cell-phone operations all over the world, scientific English is receiving a further jolt. The inability to comprehend good scientific English and publish good work is not confined to the non-English-speaking countries alone, with researchers from the UK, USA, Canada or Australia no better. The difference between the two groups is rather a matter of quantity or number of grammar and syntactic errors in English writing than in the quality of expression and thematic logistics.

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Rock Railway Hospital, Trichinopoly. He was even then married to the hospital. I still remember when my youngest son, a baby, developed diphtheria at a time when it was fatal for a child under two. He was with us night and day and but for him my son would not be alive today.

At 90, all those of my generation who have known Dr. TJC will not forget him. We followed him from Golden Rock to Perambur Hospital to Vijaya Hospital to Devaki, wherever he went, like Mary had a little lamb!

A distress call to him any time and his advice would put us at rest. He had a rare God-given gift for diagnosis!

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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

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

An exchange of letters

Without Mathuram Bhoothalingam and P.G. Sundararajan having known one another, there would have been no letters between them. Without those letters, there would have been no relationship between them. Without a relationship between them, their knowing one another and writing to each other could have been a thing of no importance or interest.

But that conjunction did occur. Mathuram Bhoothalingam as Krithika and P.G. Sundararajan as Chitti did meet and get to write the letters which K.R.A. Narasiah has with sensitivity double-distilled into a slim book, the size of which belies its strength.

S. Bhoothalingam was not interested in diminishing or abridging Mathuram Bhoothalingam's sensibility. On the contrary, he was a truly modern and emancipated man in frank admiration, even awe, of his gifted wife. But a flask, even when transparently self-abnegating as the protector and preserver of the temperature of its content, is a flask. It contains, it holds, it secures. But it does not, indeed it cannot, permit the substance within to take a shape other than its own. Whence arises the need for a pseudonym. When women use them, they gain the joy of an independent identity.

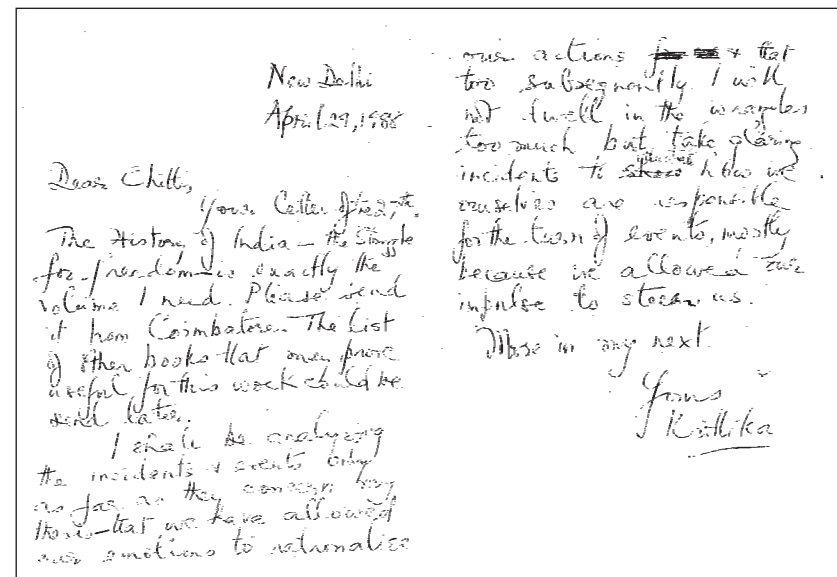
Krithika is, if anything, independent. Independent in what she chooses to think of and independent in what and how she chooses to write upon.

But hers is not the independence of vagrancy. It is the independence of one who has a ticket in her hand, an open ticket, with destinations unmarked. She travels, she does not lurch. And in her letters to Chitti, she journeys with a companion with an identical travel document. How delicious, how altogether delectable, to travel with someone who becomes a friend on the journey, with no worries of excess baggage on one's hand or left-luggage to be collected on return, only conversation, recollection, and banter!

And yet the letters between Krithika and Chitti are not light. They are not chat. They are not 'side-stuff'. They are about the times, about people, about what is being written, thought, said. They do not seek the other's corroboration, though they sometimes seem to revel in approval. They do not seek to impress, though they sometimes seem to like having that effect. They also

are not meant for posterity though I suspect they are being written in the knowledge that they are going into some little box or cabinet, some table-drawer or old trunk where they will be excavated from in a lonely hour, by a lonely lamp, for a lonely read when no one else is looking.

* * *



The first question that came to me was: Were Krithika and Chitti in love?

But no, no such luck.

Then, the next question that came to me was: Were Krithika and Chitti into some joint confessional?

Again, no luck.

Were they seeking shoulders to lean on, perhaps even to cry on?

No. They were utterly self-possessed.

Are they the Karuthamma and Pareekutti of Thakazhi's Chemmeen?

No!

And then I realised I was missing the whole point of the letters. I was trying to find the predictable and the trite in what was altogether different, fresh and autonomous. I was trying to find the stereo-typical in what was original.

Unless Narasiah has edited out things which belonged to the world of privileged communication, there is no indication that Eros hides somewhere between the lines of these letters. If Eros does, that would be good for Eros. If Eros does not, it matters not.

Letters from a man to another man, from a woman to another woman would raise no eyebrows. But letters, a whole series of them, stretching over more than four decades from – and let me speak as if I am seated in a

temple's courtyard in Chennai – letters from a married lady to a married gentleman... *sollungasaar, adhu sariyaa?* They have to raise not just eyebrows but hackles. This is a reflection on us, our limitations. Two individuals are, above all, individuals. Whether they are man and woman, married or otherwise, has to be beside the point, especially when



Krithika



Chitti

emotional trust. And that relationship of trust is at a discount today.

* * *

There is another reason why this volume is so precious. Letters are becoming an endangered species of writing. With the emergence of the e-mail and the SMS, letters, hand-written and 'proper' letters, are a rarity.

Imagine today's young generation producing a Krithika and Chitti fifty years from now. They will have acute observations to make, no doubt. They will have points of view that are both interesting and valuable. But will they have the

language, the expression? Will they have the feel for communication?

Krithika says in one letter to Chitti: "My four days in Madras seem a dream now. Not so our long morning drives; I still feel the sands of Mahabalipuram beating against my cheeks...." That would perhaps be rendered on SMS like this: "Hey Chits... 4 dez Mds total dream, yar. But thoz morn drives! Awsum... M'pur sands biting me mug... wow".

But believe me, if the Krithika and Chitti of 2052 are true descendants in spirit of our Krithika and Chitti, I would say their SMS correspondence would be a good read. Let us not be prudish.

Letters written in a relationship of trust are, therefore, a precious transaction which, when one is given the chance to read with legitimacy, is a privileged experience.

* * *

Chitti comes through the pages of this volume as a man of firm views, assessments and even predispositions. In other words, as a man who would have been a delight to know and a trouble to disagree with. In his letters to Krithika he is obviously seeking and discovering one he can exchange his thoughts with, almost as if in an exercise of self-nourishment.

Every serious relationship compensates for a lack in other relationships. *Oravu enradu saadarana vishayam illai. Puhaiyil than unuvungal vasikkam.*

The more undefined relationship, the more it is likely to be secure, provided others do not interfere with it. Defined relationships can also be secure, but rather like contracts entered into in faith and sustained in perseverance.

Chitti and Krithika reposed trust in one another's sensibility, discretion and restraint in a relationship that did not suffer owing to lack of conventional typifications.

Their correspondence is, therefore, not just about their times, but about all that which is refined, restrained and redemptive about human relationships.

(Excerpted from Gopal Krishna Gandhi's address after releasing *Lettered Dialogue*, compiled by K.R.A. Narasiah and published by Palaniappa Brothers.)

AN OLD BOY'S ADVICE

Before I came to Madras Christian College (MCC) for my university education, I was greatly privileged to study at Lawrence School, Lovedale. It is a boarding school with a military bias whose excellent headmaster in my time was K.I. Thomas, who went on to found 'Sishya' in Chennai. The school, like MCC, was set in 800 acres of forest and at 6500 feet above sea level. It was founded in 1858.

When I joined MCC, the Principal was Rev.J.R. Macphail, who taught me English. He was followed by Dr Chandran Devanesan, the first Indian to hold the post. He did this with great drive, distinction and panache.

When I joined PUC in 1958 and stayed in St Thomas's Hall, I took to college like duck to water, as I had the great advantage of coming from an excellent boarding school environment at Lovedale. I was confident and, as you can see, I am big in stature and quite capable of looking after myself, so no one dared

• Perambur Railway Hospital

A remarkable journey to excellence

(Continued from last fortnight)

A 1993 souvenir echoes APRH's philosophy, "...to provide comprehensive health care to the patients, upgrade the technical knowledge of the doctors and provide the necessary equipment needed for a high quality of service to the beneficiaries." In this connection, a 2003 record notes: "Till date, over 40,000 cardiac catheterisations and about 9000 interventions have been performed."

The first telemedicine network in Indian Railways connected RH Trichy to PRH in 2004 under the late Dr. G.C. Raju, then Medical Director. The PRH's Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery is also considered a pioneering institute for laser surgeries.

Dr. K.A. Abraham was the first qualified cardiologist to join PRH. That was in August 1978. He came from the Christian Medical College, Vellore, and during his next 25 years at PRH, he streamlined and standardised



Dr. K.A. Abraham

many processes in the development of the institution. He remembers driving down from Vellore in his old Fiat car, to be given a two-room apartment on the campus and Rs.2200 salary per month. He further recalls, "The PRH was at first just a 'Sick and Fit' Hospital. In the 1950s some order came about under Dr. E. Somasekhar, a surgeon and the first Southern Railway Chief Medical Officer (1951-1954). He introduced rules for the Railway Medical Department and put the Railway Hospitals on the map! Thereafter came Dr. P.A. Menon (1957-1966), an excellent surgeon and good administrator, who strengthened the hospital structure. Then came Dr. TJC who was CMO from February 1977 to August



The proposed new hospital complex.

1978 and brought the team together!"

Instrumental in contributing several improvements to the infrastructure and facilities not only at the Perambur hospital but also at other railway hospitals in the Southern region, Dr. Abraham was also responsible for making the hospital's Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery Department a teaching centre from 1984, training students for the Diplomate of National Board of Examinations. Soon after, it came to be recognised for training in many other specialities like Ob Gyn, Orthopaedics, ENT and so on. A record of that period notes, "From barely a couple of surgeries a week in 1978, the hospital has become a leading referral centre. The cardiology wing with its 110 beds performs 2,500 procedures, besides 1,000 open-heart surgeries, in a year."

Dr. K.R. Balakrishnan, who

currently heads FORTIS Malar's Cardio Vascular Care Unit, was around 30 years old when he first landed at PRH in the late 1980s. He recalls nostalgically, "As ADMO, I was allotted a house next to the hospital, and when it rained anywhere, it poured inside! The nearest life was in Dasaprakash, Kellys or Noor Hotel near the Ayanavaram bus stand. What luxury we experienced, with six free railway travel passes and a salary of Rs. 1100, which we never needed to spend on anything! When Dr. TJC went to the US on work, I headed the Unit. We had patients from across India, mainly from the Eastern, Northern and South Eastern Railways. It was truly a great example of how a public institution can work by trusting young people and giving them the responsibility of making an efficient service.

"I remember how our first

computer was looked at with great suspicion, and the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Mehrotra, going around promising people, 'If you let me keep the computer in your room, we will help aircondition it.' I agreed and so learnt G Basic and DW Basic, and that knowledge helped me design a new heart valve for which I have a US patent!" adds Dr. Balakrishnan.

Dr. Balakrishnan also has fond memories of the hospital canteen, the ICF Club where they played tennis or badminton every evening, jogging around the Perambur Stadium, and travelling by Bus No. 35 to Egmore. Every year, between December 23rd and 31st and also from May 15th to June 1st the Cardiac Unit was closed. "We had our best family holidays then. Wherever we went, there was a Railway guesthouse and free travel, and often a TT or station manager or ground staff would come up to us and greet me because our team would have operated on one of his family members. Those were great days, and I miss them very much!" he sighs rather emotionally. Today there are a few more cardiac surgery centres in different zones in Indian Railways, but the Southern Railway cardiac surgery unit in Perambur is recognised for its low mortality rate and its dedicated patient care.

Though the hospital itself has kept pace with advances in the medical fields, the existing building is unable to cope. A new Southern Railway Headquarters Hospital was envisaged in 2005 and sanctioned, with a total built-up area of approximately 500,000 sq ft. The nine-storied new complex would be a well-equipped state-of-the-art building, with Rs.1.5 crore computer-based navigation orthopaedic surgery equipment.

The incumbent Medical Director Dr. Kannan, a paediatrician with PRH since 1991, speaks proudly of the new developments to be. "Very soon, the new 600-plus bed hospital will come up at an estimated cost of Rs.110 crore. The existing hospital premises and the proposed new hospital complex will be available for establishing the Railway Medical College. With basic specialities in 15 disciplines and super-specialities in three disciplines, the hospital is sought out for post-graduate training. It's amazing how the early small unit at the PRH has metamorphosed!"

Truly, it has been a remarkable journey!

– Shobha Menon
(Concluded)



Given by Dr. Paul Sabapathy, CBE, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of the West Midlands

make me go through the indignities of ragging which was common at the time. Also coming from an English medium school used to military discipline, combined with my self-confidence, was a great advantage.

St. Thomas's Hall was a friendly place with an excellent warden in Prof. M.A. Thangaraj, who went on to be Principal of American College, Madurai.

After my PUC, I did my B.Sc. Physics which was a great mistake on my part, as I did not enjoy the subject. I, however,

greatly enjoyed my subsidiary subjects and was an active participant in extracurricular activities, including quiz, debating, athletics, NCC and table tennis.

However, the highlight of my time at MCC was being Prime Minister of St Thomas's Hall in 1962-63. It was a great experience which moulded me in developing leadership and teamwork skills, honed my communi-

cation and organisational skills, and focussed on excellence. Organising a Hall Day successfully takes some doing.

The night was an outstanding success. Unfortunately one of my hall-mates, a university hockey player, got drunk and started pulling the fairy lights decorating the Hall. Fearing electrocution a few of us had to restrain him and I took a cold shower with him in my suit, to get him sober, which we successfully did.

* * *

What did I learn from my time at MCC? The importance of working as a team, the ability to communicate, and lead by example, and the need to get things done. MCC greatly increased my self-confidence and self-belief. It was at MCC that I realised the importance of focussing on quality and being the best.

I also learned that to do well you had to enjoy what you did. It is a mistake made by many students and parents chasing the money and the prestige of being a doctor or an IAS Officer rather than doing what they love doing. So when I changed from Physics to Business Studies, which I enjoyed, success followed.

What is my vision for the future for MCC? My vision is that MCC will become an educational institution of excellence by providing students with the highest quality educational experience to enable each student to achieve his/her full potential, to become highly educated, responsible citizens committed to bettering themselves, their families

and their fellow Indian citizens, by acting with honesty, integrity, objectivity, efficiency and in a selfless manner whilst striving to be the best themselves.

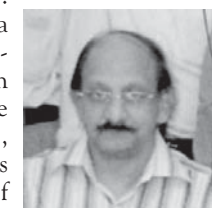
How can this be achieved? I make a few suggestions for the future:

- By outstanding leadership from the top, with leaders chosen on merit, with no place for politics. The golden standard being selfless outstanding leaders like the Rev. Miller, Boyd and Devanesan. This in no way implies that the current Principal was not chosen on merit. The responsibility for recruiting, nurturing and retaining outstanding leaders rests with the Board.

- By recruiting, motivating and retaining the best teachers and researchers of any creed. This will be enabled by human resource development practices which reward excellence and do not accept mediocrity.

- Enable students to be highly sought after by employers by inculcating in them high moral and ethical values combined with

(Continued on page 6)



Dr. Kannan



(Current Affairs questions are from the period April 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. The 100th anniversary of which celebrated maritime disaster was observed on April 14th-15th?

2. Among much media attention, a Pakistani scientist, incarcerated in Ajmer, was granted bail by the Supreme Court of India recently. His name?

3. On April 12th, two powerful earthquakes struck the coast of Sumatra, creating tremors in India too. Of which Asian nation is Sumatra a part?

4. Who was re-elected as General Secretary of the CPI (M) for a third consecutive term at the party's congress in Kozhikode recently?

5. The 30th anniversary of which war between an European country and a South American nation was observed recently?

6. Which celebrated writer's first adult novel will be called *The Casual Vacancy*?

7. Another book question. British writer William Boyd has been asked to write a new novel which will feature which iconic hero who battles the world's evil forces?

8. At which U.S. airport was Shah Rukh Khan recently detained by authorities, leading to a diplomatic issue?

9. Which famous tech company affirmed its status as the world's most valuable company after breaching the \$600 billion mark in market valuation?

10. Instagram, the popular photo sharing application, has been snapped up by which popular online giant for \$1 billion?

* * *

11. What is the anglicised name of the fort town called Sadurangapatnam?

12. In which town, synonymous with a famous literary work, can you pass through road-arches named after Ilango Adigal, Kovalan and Manimekalai, among others?

13. How many *kuzhis* are there in the traditional version of 'Pallanguzhi'?

14. Which famed jewellers had their showroom at *Shankar's Building* (or *Diamond House*) on the Esplanade in Chennai before Hotel Saravana Bhavan occupied the premises in the 1990s?

15. Who wrote the *Poompavai Pathigam*?

16. On what *vahana* do Kapaleeswarar and Karapagambal ride after their wedding on the tenth day of the annual festival in Panguni?

17. Name the famed builder who tended to the ailing Srinivasa Ramanujan on his return to Madras in 1919.

18. What is the claim to fame of Nathamuni and Govindu after whom streets are named in T Nagar in Chennai?

19. Which Chennai theatre was the first to get a wide screen – way back in the 1960s?

20. Paul Benfield, a 18th Century EIC engineer, is credited with first showcasing Indo-Saracenic architecture to the world with which building in Chennai?

(Answers on page 8)

METERPODU

– A work in progress

Once upon a time, auto-rickshaws in the city had functioning meters, so the legend goes.

Asking auto-drivers to turn on that boxy contraption today is like committing a small crime. The unrevised, State-fixed fare is blatantly unfair to these men (only a few of them these days) in khaki. But pay the arbitrary sum they demand and, chances are that it won't be fair to you in the long run. What gives?

A tech-savvy NRI, recently returned to his home town, decided to do something about this. Crowd-sourcing, a form of distributed problem solving, could be the answer. "I figured that the only way to get some parity is if a whole bunch of us decided that we were only going to pay Rs. x and not Rs. y that the drivers demanded," says Ananthanarayanan K. Subramanian (Anantha, for short).

He explains the psychology behind the crowd-sourcing tool *Meterpodu*. "So let's say an autodriver demands Rs. 50 to go from T Nagar to Saidapet from 10 consecutive commuters. Each of them refuses and counter-quotes a sum of Rs. 40. The 11th commuter is likely to be quoted a fare of Rs. 40, since the driver doesn't want to price himself out of the market."

Anantha teamed up with a friend, Mayur Narasimhan, and designed a system to collect fare data, process the numbers, and provide commuters useful information. If you key in two locations, the system looks up Google Maps and calculates the distance between them. It arrives at the official fare based on the fare chart. The driver may not take the same route, but this a good enough approximation.

What users actually pay on the ground is very different, of course. "Users can contribute these fares for various routes



logging in via Twitter, Facebook or Gmail," says Mayur. Their input goes into a data base that computes the average fare. Now, with that number in hand, every user can hope to drive a decent bargain with any auto-driver in the city.

How is Meterpodu faring?

The new tool got good press. "A lot of people began polling the system to find out fares," says Anantha. "The fare formula the system uses is dated circa 2007, which is when the government last revised fares. So it will quote average fares that are a lot less than what is being demanded on the roads." The number can only lead to angst that the auto-drivers aren't plying according to the government-set fares, says Mayur.

Meterpodu enjoyed an initial wave of popularity. Nobody likes to be fleeced and the auto-driver is a convenient villain in a farce of a transport system. "We don't have anything against auto-drivers," Anantha hastens to clarify. "Most of them rent the rickshaws they drive and are forced to do what they do because their owners squeeze them."

The lull that came later is harder to explain. While *Meterpodu* costs commuters nothing, everyone stands to gain once it reaches its potential. Yet, few contribute fares. Usually, crowd-sourcing involves some form of gratification, but here the user gets no instant reward.

Still, is that the hold-up? "May be it is our mistake that we haven't stressed it enough, but the whole point is for folks to contribute fares to the system and build up a database of fares," says a bemused Anantha. So, right now, the system is missing a vital piece.

To make *Meterpodu* an effective tool, the first order of business would be to drive more fare contributions into the system. There are tweaks in the works. Currently, it is a smartphone application, but its creators plan to release an SMS-based version for non-smartphones users.

Thanks to technology, and individual initiative, we have a handy tool to set fair prices for routes all over the city. Collectively, we may be able to resolve an issue that had us haggling and hand-wringing in the past.

– Vijaysree Venkatraman

Keep Meterpodu ticking

1. Go to www.meterpodu.in. It has a very straightforward interface.
2. Look up fares for your destination. If the government fare comes up, it means no user has contributed a fare for that route yet. Otherwise, you get an average fare as well. And that is your bargaining chip.
3. If you are a Facebook user or a Gmail user, *Meterpodu* lets you submit fares. The credentialing is necessary to prevent random submissions from people or bots.
4. You can also query @meterpodu, or contribute to it, via your Twitter account.
5. *Meterpodu* lets you look up fares for free. But if you never contribute fares, there may be precious little to draw from at some point.

HOPE FOR HERITAGE ACT

(Continued from page 1)

with INTACH in 1999 and then by the CMDA and INTACH in 2002. The second time was when the Justice Padmanabhan Committee was put together by the High Court in connection with a case on outdoor hoardings. The report of that Committee, of which INTACH was also a member, formed the basis of the 2010 judgement referred to above which resulted in the formation of the HCC.

Even before that, INTACH had drawn up its own list for the City's municipal limits. What needs now to be looked at is a fine tuning of these lists into one comprehensive list and then identifying heritage buildings in Greater Chennai and elsewhere in the State.

The decision to include the entire State within the ambit of the proposed Heritage Commission is commendable. So far, the heritage movement has been fairly dormant in most towns of the State, resulting in large-scale desecration and wrecking of heritage sites which are not protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. It is imperative that the legislation constituting the Commission is passed at the earliest. What is even more important is that the Commission should work quickly in getting its list of heritage sites together and ensuring that the list is notified with the

passage of a Heritage Act. Only then can we have some legal protection for heritage buildings and sites.

Readers of *Madras Musings* need hardly be reminded that the draft of a Heritage Act, at least for the city of Madras, was completed as far back as 1999 and had it been adopted then we would not be a city minus buildings such as *Gandhi Illam*, *Capper House*, the erstwhile Madras Club building on Express Estates, and *Government House*. *Chepauk Palace* may not

have been consumed by fire. And *Bharat Insurance Building* would not be facing an uncertain future. However, with Queen Mary's College being threatened in 2003, the draft regulations were quietly forgotten. Since then there have been attempts at revival in fits and starts but nothing concrete has emerged. All this despite the fact that there is a groundswell of public opinion in favour of a Heritage Act. What is needed is quick action.

An Old Boy's advice

(Continued from page 5)

developing their intellectual, communication, teamwork, leadership and enquiry skills with an ability and work ethic to apply their theoretical knowledge to solving practical problems.

- Use new technology to make best use of student and lecturer contact time to explain rather than dictating notes.

- Run the college on business principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and investing to save, so surpluses can be generated to invest in improving equipment or buildings to improve student experience.

- Know which courses cover their cost, so efficiencies can be made.

- Ensure all lecturers have a teaching qualification.

- Explore introducing subjects like Finance, Law, Banking, Pharmacy and Pharmacology which have links with existing subjects like Commerce and Chemistry.

- Improve student employability by considering teaching subjects like Mandarin, Portuguese, and presentational skills. Also set up an Advisory Management Board for each subject with outside experts and employers who can advise on how students can meet employers' needs.

In all this I am talking with 17 years' experience in higher education in the UK, including seven years as Chairman of Birmingham City University which has 23,000 students.

The economist as a Shakespearean scholar

There has been many an Englishman who loved India and worked tirelessly for its people and preservation of its cultural heritage. While the story of the lay adventurer or missionary who had fought in India's freedom struggle has been only too well documented, the contributions of academicians like Gilbert Slater, Edgar Thurston and Kathleen Gough have all but vanished from public memory. Most of the aforesaid individuals spent only a few years of their lives in India, but their impact on Indological studies has been immense.

While Thurston lived in India at the turn of the 20th Century and Gough arrived shortly after the Dominion of India had been inaugurated, Slater arrived in Madras during the Great War when British rule in India was at its zenith and yet there were signs – like the emergence of the Home Rule League – that its demise was not far off. Born in Plymouth, England, on August 27, 1864 in a middle-class family, Slater had his education in England and graduated in economics from the University of Cambridge. He worked as a lecturer at Balliol House and Toynbee Hall and was Principal of Ruskin College from 1909 to 1915. During this time, he was active in the British Labour Movement and supported union representation in the college's administration. When the Great War broke out, the college shut down leaving Slater jobless. Fortunately, after a short wait, Slater was offered the newly-created economics chair at the Madras University



Dr. Gilbert Slater

and he set sail for India after spending a few days trying to familiarise himself with the Tamil language.

Slater served as Professor of Economics at the University of Madras from 1915 to 1921. Dissatisfied with the college textbooks which were based on the economic conditions prevailing in developed countries and, at the same time, convinced that villages formed the lifeline of India, Slater encouraged his students to conduct a detailed survey of their native villages in the Madras Presidency. He instructed his students to gather information on decadal population variations, land ownership, cost of land cultivation, occupations of the people and the income and expenditure of individual families. The survey – the results of which were published in 1918 as the book *Some South Indian Villages* – covered districts as diverse and far apart as North Arcot and Malabar and Ramnad and Kistna. These villages, numbering eleven in all, later became popularly known as 'Slater villages' and were resurveyed from time to time, some as late as 2008. The methodology pioneered by Slater was adopted by Marxist

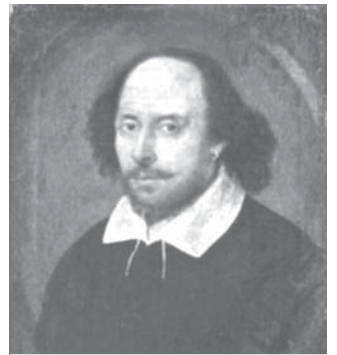
economists of the 1970s and came to be known as the 'Slater tradition'.

Slater's contribution to Indian economics is significant. He presided over the Annual Conference of the Indian Economic Association held in Allahabad in 1920. One of Slater's distinguished pupils was Sir M. Ct. Muthiah Chettiar of the MCt family who founded United India Life Insurance and whose more popular son M.Ct.M. Chidambaram Chettiar would later found the Indian Overseas Bank and Travancore Rayons Limited. Slater also wrote a foreword to L.C. Jain's book, *Indigenous Banking in India*. In 2009, the University of Madras published a set of essays on Indian rural economy and dedicated them to Slater's memory.

mostly on economics – about four of which are related to India. (In his 1924 book *The Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture*, Slater suggests an Egyptian origin for South Indian Brahmins even while accepting the prevalent Mediterranean race theory for other South Indian people.)

Slater strongly supported the retention of English as the medium of instruction in the Madras Presidency. In *The Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture*, he prophesied the destruction of local vernaculars if Hindustani or any other Indian language was made the medium of instruction

"All India labours under a very serious disadvantage because the language which is the medium of all higher instruction is different from the lan-



A birthday feature

reached with the disappearance of the Dravidian vernaculars."

Today, apart from a few economic historians and heritage buffs, Slater remains largely forgotten.

However, unlike in India, in England, Slater is a well-known figure to a small but influential circle of Shakespearean scholars. His 1931 book *Seven Shakespeares* is a must-read for students of alternative authorship theories of Shakespeare's works. In the book, Slater claims that the plays believed to have been written by Shakespeare were actually penned by seven different authors in different times. The seven, according to Slater, were Francis Bacon, the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe, the 5th Earl of Rutland, Mary Sidney of Pembroke, the explorer Sir Walter Raleigh who founded Virginia, the Elizabethan army officer Sir William Stanley and Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Slater suggests that all of Shakespeare's plays may have been authored as part of England's propaganda against its 16th Century rival, Spain, and their authorship was attributed to William Shakespeare in order to hide the real identities of their creators. Slater, thus, hints at the presence of a large and well-organised conspiracy, and at the head of the conspiracy, he places the Earl of Oxford – the ringleader, who was instrumental in convincing Shakespeare to lend his name. While there have been many who have questioned the authenticity of Shakespeare's works, Slater was one of only three to suggest a "group theory" of authorship, the others being Harold Johnson (who, in 1910, attributed Shakespeare's works to a bunch of Jesuits) and H.T.S. Forrest (who, in his 1923 book *The Five Authors of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, proposes that Shakespeare's sonnets could have been written by five different people, thereby pioneering a theory which Slater probably built upon).

A portrait unveiled by the former Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu, Prof. K. Anbazhagan, at the campus of the University of Madras, on January 22, 2009, is the only monument in the city dedicated to Slater.

● by K. Ravichander
ravirustam84@gmail.com

Slater was nominated to the Madras Legislative Council in November 1921. In the Council, Slater was one of the government's well-known "yes men" along with the likes of Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar and Sir Muhammad Usman and was the target of constant brickbats from the Indian National Congress benches. Slater's stint as member of the Council was brief and insignificant, but for his proposal for the adoption of a common script for the whole Presidency.

Slater sailed for England in 1923, but returned a few years later as Labour Commissioner for the Presidency. He went back to England again in the late-1920s, this time never to return. Slater died in his home in England on March 8, 1938.

During his lifetime, Slater wrote more than a dozen books,

guage of the home. For the present, Dravida suffers least. On the average a student of the Madras University saves about a year, as compared with students of other Indian universities, in the time necessarily spent in the preliminary study of English before beginning his chosen course of study. But, on the other hand, the development of Bengali, Hindi or Urdu into an efficient medium for scientific and general education is a much more hopeful proposition than the modernising of any Dravidian language to attain the same result. Northern India can reasonably hope to make one of its vernaculars the literary and scientific organ of between two and three hundred million people; unification of the language of the masses with the language of the learned in South India is most likely to be

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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Far from pedestrian friendly

(Continued from page 1)

Lastly, at the same time, we need to recognise that the pedestrian is no paragon of virtue in our city. Jaywalking is rampant and, let us face it, most of the concrete medians in the city are witness to pedestrians jumping over them to cross roads at what appear to them to be the most convenient spots in terms of distance but certainly not in

terms of safety. Elsewhere, in some cities, pedestrians practise road discipline, too. We need to educate our people on this.

All this requires a great will, greater coordination and an enormous effort. What we are witnessing on the roads is a culmination of several years of apathy. But it is never too late to make a start in a new direction.

A Chola temple near Tambaram

One among the numerous monuments under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India in and around Chennai is the historic Dhenupurishwarar temple in Madambakkam, close to Tambaram. It is a temple dating back to Chola times and much enlarged in the subsequent Vijayanagara era. Walking into the temple is like going back in time.

The entrance is through a half-completed *gopuram* of Vijayanagara workmanship. Most visitors hurrying in and out of this monument miss seeing the intricate carvings on the sides and the ceiling of this entrance gateway. If we stood and looked, it would be our mute tribute to the unnamed artisans of the 15-16th Centuries who sculpted such minute designs and figures on the hard granite ceiling more than twenty feet high. Passing through this *gopuram*, you see a multi-pillared *mandapam* in which each stone pillar is studded with many superb sculptures of deities.

It is interesting to know that the most ancient inscription in Madambakkam was not found in the temple, but dug out from the backyard of a house of one of the residents of the village. This stone slab, already damaged when discovered, has an inscription in the Tamil language and script of the Chola times (10th Century C.E.). It records a grant of land for Siva, the presiding deity of this temple, known in those days as Sittreri Mahadeva.

Walking through the inner circumambulatory passage of



Entrance to Dhenupurishwarar Temple, Madambakkam.

the temple around the apsidal-shaped main sanctum is a delight for historians, archaeologists and heritage-enthusiasts since there are numerous epigraphs to be seen on the north, south and west outer walls of the shrine. Neatly etched in Tamil script of the Chola and Vijayanagara times, these records, which register donations of land, livestock and other details, are a mine of information for understanding the past. The Chola epigraphs here are dated to the kings of the 13th Century C.E., like Kulottunga III and Rajaraja III. Of Vijayanagara times, there are a number of inscriptions of Emperor Mallikarjuna (15th Century C.E.) whose lithic records have also been found in

Tirumullaivayil and Kunnattur and also of Sadasiva Raya (16th Century C.E.), during whose reign the sack of the glorious city of Vijayanagara (present-day Hampi) took place. In Chennai, an inscription of the time of this emperor is found in the Parthasarathi temple in Tiruvallikeni.

Going around the sanctum for Goddess Parvati, enshrined here as Dhenukambal, is equally rewarding as there are records on the walls belonging to the reign of the illustrious emperor Jatavarman Sundara Pandya (1251-1268 C.E.), inscribed in the 13th Century Tamil letters. It was this heroic monarch who transformed the Pandyan kingdom into an empire of which the territory now known as Chennai was a part.

Madambakkam was known in the Chola days as Ulaguyyavanda-Chola-Chaturvedimangalam. It was situated in the ancient territorial sub-division of Nedukundra-Nadu, in Puliur-kottam aka Kulottunga-Chola-Valanadu, a sub-division of Jayamkonda-Chola-mandalam. The fact that Madambakkam was also known



A view of the Mandapa at Dhenupurishwarar Temple, Madambakkam.



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).

Till May 30: Macro World, a photography exhibition of flora and fauna by Poochi Venkat and his students: Flora and Fauna (at DakshinaChitra).

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).

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

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

DakshinaChitra Workshops For children

May 11: Junk Art

May 18: Traditional games

May 25: Pottery & Clay Modelling

For adults

Till May 6: Table Mat Weaving

Till May 12: Studio Pottery

May 25-27: Glass Fusing (jewellery)

June 8-10: Kalamkari + Kalahasti visit

For details: 98417 77779

Answers to Quiz

1. Sinking of the *Titanic*; 2. Dr. Khalil Chisty; 3. Indonesia; 4. Prakash Karat; 5. Falklands War; 6. J.K. Rowling; 7. James Bond; 8. White Plains; 9. Apple; 10. Facebook.

* * *

11. Sadras; 12. Poompuhar; 13. Fourteen; 14. Surajmal's; 15. Sambandar; 16. Ravana *vahana*; 17. Thatikonda Namberumal Chetty; 18. They were workers who were killed when laying drain pipes in the area; 19. Pilot; 20. Chepauk Palace.

— Chithra Madhavan

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