

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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With your over-efficient 'traffic' messaging, you have diverted the entire traffic into this empty road!

Mixed messages

Now let's understand this.

On the one hand, authorities are clearly against anyone using cell phones while driving.

Very wise.

Cell-phone-chatting-while-driving types are a menace both to themselves and everyone else.

On the other hand, the authorities recently announced that they will be sending SMS-es to all regarding traffic congestion and snarled up roads.

Hmm...

This needs some thinking through, don't you think?

I know what you're going to say: 'No one says that you should check your phone for messages while driving, dummy. Do so while stationary.'

Er...have you met our special brand of people-who-drive-on-our-roads?

They're mostly happy, insouciant creatures, given to sudden impulses and inexplicable thought processes and, quite literally, a law unto themselves.

So you can bet they'll check their phones for messages regarding traffic at the exact point of intersection between several irresistible forces, including themselves – and then argue loud and long over how it was all the fault of those-in-charge who sent messages asking them to watch out when, in fact, they should have been watching out for real and not reading messages asking them to do so.

However, the authorities, indefatigable optimists obviously, prefer to keep the faith – a real challenge.

Like Chennai roads.

Ranjitha Ashok

Where are those water bodies?

(By A Special Correspondent)

For a city that is perennially starved of water, Chennai has paid scant attention to the conservation of this scarce resource. The city was ringed in by as many as 650 water bodies till around two decades ago. Today, a mere fraction survives. Those that do are victims of continued encroachments and poor maintenance. With the city becoming increasingly dependent on sources such as the Krishna River for its water, why does it not pay any attention to the wealth that is in its own backyard?

Greed for land would perhaps be the first reason. It must not be forgotten that, as early as 1921, Madras filled in one of its largest reservoirs, the Long Tank of Mylapore, to create T'Nagar. Those were times when environmental consciousness was not heard of. What is surprising is that these practices continue even today. Thus we have a long history of vanishing lakes and tanks. The Nungambakkam Tank, the Rettai Eri in Vyasarpadi and the Kodungaiyur Tank are but a few instances of what we have lost.

While some were filled in as part of a conscious decision to expand the city's land area, others have died out due to encroachments. The Maduravoyal Lake is only one-fifth of what it was around two decades ago. The Kadaperi Lake in West Tambaram has lost 15 acres in recent years, much of it to a burgeoning colony on its banks. With the continued dumping of garbage, the water body has become more of a cesspool and its degradation has led to the wells in the neighbourhood getting polluted. The lake is now viewed as the cause of the problem and there is a growing body of opin-

ion that it ought to be filled in! It is a sad state of affairs that the civic body in charge remains silent when encroachments and pollution of water resources happen under its very nose. It wakes up when matters can no longer be set right.

Unplanned expansion and the mushrooming of colonies overnight have added to the woes of our lakes and tanks. Chennai is not a city with much of an incline and, therefore, drainage is prone to be poor. Added to this is the lack of planning ahead when it comes to new areas being developed. The drains are invariably put in after the houses and other buildings have come up. With a suitable exit point for the drains not being available in many cases, those in charge of sewer-



Can all water bodies in Chennai be like the Mylapore tank?

age have found it convenient to drain it into neighbouring water bodies. This short-sighted approach has done untold damage.

The sheer apathy when it comes to maintenance of water bodies is another cause for concern. The Kadaperi Lake referred to above was last desilted

in 1914! How can such a lake survive and take in water? Its capacity is bound to reduce over the years and it will cause flooding in the neighbourhood. It is now reliably learnt that desilting of major water bodies will be taken up with funds

(Continued on page 8)

Marina to undergo yet another facelift

The dust has hardly settled on previous regime's prolonged so-called beautification drive at the Marina. The present administration has decided that it can do one better and has announced yet another facelift, at a cost of Rs. 4.84 crore. At a time when the city is facing great challenges on infrastructure, civic hygiene and public health, such cosmetic changes to what is already a well-tended place are most unnecessary. It is clearly indicative of a Corporation that is not thinking out-of-the box.

On the anvil are several new measures none of which can be termed as civic amenities. A giant chessboard for children (who will move the pieces?), a

fountain that can be operated with a clap of hands, a wave-patterned enclosure for the bus terminal at the Anna Square and granite slabs next to each statue, giving a brief history of the person commemorated. The only commendable steps

• By A Special Correspondent

are the raising of the historic pillars on the western side of the road, all of which have sunk below the ground, and a move to relocate the shops on the beachfront. Another noteworthy move is the plan to clean the sand.

The previous regime had initiated and completed a Rs. 25 crore beautification

project all along the 3-km stretch of the Marina. It had brought in viewing galleries, walkways and fountains. After a high-profile inauguration, the new facilities were left with no proper maintenance. Litter abounded the new granite walkways and the fountains, which are hardly appropriate for a water-starved city, did not always work. A commendable addition was the public convenience, but that too now suffers from indifferent maintenance.

That brings us to another issue. The Corporation, no matter which political party is in power, is mostly interested in new projects that involve capital expenditure. These are

(Continued on page 7)

Homes of yore

Bazaar Road is a 'must-do' on my walking tour of Mylapore. After all, it was the road that linked two bustling villages of pre-Madras times.

Triplicane and Mylapore.

Royapettah High Road and San Thomé High Road came much later.

A marketplace kind of road, Bazaar Road still retains the character of yore.

The oil-making mill, the embroidery nooks, the vegetable retailers and the pawnbrokers are some of the longstanding features of this area.

A pit-stop for walkers in this zone was a magnificent house that was owned by a Marwari family.

A single-storey house whose wall at the rear ended at the other street (Arundale Street), it had more than 20 rooms, space enough to accommodate five families. There were four entry points, allowing for privacy and independent access, the design was a mix of Tamil and north Indian style, the tiles for the floor and the wall were imported ones and Belgian mirrors were fitted in the inner rooms of each section.

For visitors, exploring this house was an experience.

And once that was done, we would adjourn to the open space at the rear and be treated to a light breakfast of pongal-vada and coffee. This space was once the venue for meetings by local Congressmen and for social functions of this family.

The building was brought down some years ago after the family members decided to go their own way.

Thankfully, two other similarly designed houses continue to stand on this road.

For the 2012 edition of Madras Week, we have decided that the theme of one project meant for city school students will be on houses of yore in our city.

For some years now, Madras Day has been celebrated on August 22. A day to celebrate the city – its founding, its early days, its heritage, its legacy and its status today.

This has been a voluntary event driven by the people of the city.

Over time, the events have enlarged and hence we now have Madras Week!

This year, Madras Week is to be celebrated from August 19 to 26. And since the event is driven by the people, this is the time for anybody, who heads a group or club, runs a great activity or has been indulging in this city, to plan an event for late August.

Walking tours, exhibition, quizzes and talks, picnic tours, jam sessions, online contests, food fests, green campaigns ... anything that focusses on our city is good enough for Madras Week.

You don't have to seek outside help. You don't need to get a nod from anybody. Your club space or your school campus is good enough to be a venue.

The buzz is now shared at the Madras Day space on Facebook and, soon, at the website www.themadrasday.in

As for our young friends in city schools, the info on the 'Explore a Madras House' contest will be made public soon. (Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

– Vincent D'Souza

A big 'Thank You' to 20 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.06.12 and 15.07.12, 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. 50: Aaker Patel; Dr. Yahya

Rs. 100: C.K. Pandarai Pathan; Manuel Aaron; S. Viswanathan

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Rs. 500: R. Shah

Rs. 900: Challa Soma Sundaram; Dr. K.S. Dhathathreyan; Dr. P.S.Venkateswaran; S.S. Radhakrishnan

Plethora of pretexts

The Man from Madras Musings – don't ask him how – suddenly found himself in the middle of a group of expatriates, all of them exchanging notes on doing business in the city. The positive aspects that they listed were many but, among the negatives, it was the tendency of the local employees to go on leave for the flimsiest of reasons that ranked the highest.

What then followed was an exchange of some of the reasons for taking leave. Grandmother's death apparently was the most frequent. And it was a great wonder to those gathered as to how many grandmothers each one possessed on an average. Sister's wedding was another common one and it was only on making the most thorough investigation that it came to light that the 'sister' in question was not even a first cousin. Indians in general, said the executives, spend a lot of time attending family events, time that could be more profitably spent at workplace.

opportunity to take a day off and visit some high cost clinic for the most basic of treatments.

That was not all. The practice of committing suicide or at least unsuccessfully attempting it appears to be at an all-time high in our city. If it were not the employees themselves, it was a relative and that was invariably not the grandmother who in general passes away due to natural causes. The suicide-prone relative or the employee, according to their disgruntled bosses, invariably chooses a Monday morning for his/her attempts. Either way, a full day off is assured, no matter who tried snuffing themselves out.

If such health and well-being (lack of it) related issues are not sufficient, there is a plethora of other reasons. A visit to the child's school merits an understandable day off. But a quest for a passport apparently means several days off. The same applies for building registrations and permits. The annual holiday invariably results in a two or three-day extension of leave as the

MMM always assumed that no issue was an expression used in family trees to indicate that a couple was childless.

Cannot able to – Meaning I was not able to or I could not.

Hope so – Used in place of I think so. A common usage is "He has not come. I hope so he is ill."

Torture – Indicates nagging and a person who tortures is someone who nags.

Blunder-mistake – Meant to be a big mistake as opposed to a small one, which is a bug-mistake.

Self Driving – Not using a chauffeur.

Revert back – As in I will revert back to you. Reply back is also a common expression. Several DJs use it on TV. There is a third option used – feedback. This is usually structured like this – I will feedback you, why don't you feedback him, etc.

Going native – This means going to the village or town of origin. This is also to put into the context of the other question – What is your native?

Temproworry – Temporary Hiranya - Hernia

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

MMM, under the Chief's guidance, had all along assumed that in days past it was the overseas visitor who was prone to ill-health in hot and humid Chennai. Apparently that is not so, at least if the expatriates whom MMM overheard are to be believed. Our local populace, according to them, is prone to a whole host of diseases rather like the Egyptians in the good book who, if you recollect, were visited by the plague. The most common malaise was the headache, an affliction which would not seriously merit a day off. Food poisoning was another and this, as most of those dissecting our staying-away-from-work tendencies felt, was because we ate all the time and overdid the eating each time. This is particularly rampant during the rains and also the wedding season. The foreign bosses were also of the view that, no matter how trivial the illness, we Chennaites or at least a significant percentage of us immediately visit a hospital and there avail of a variety of treatments ranging from administering intravenous drips to traction. In other countries, say these men from across the seas, such simple health issues would be handled with some home remedy. But in Chennai it immediately means an

employee needs to recover from the travails of travel. There are also sections of staff who, according to the plaintive bosses, take a day off each time they return from official visits lasting a day or two. All this led MMM to conclude that a job for these specimens is something that needs to be attended to in intervals between holidays.

Chennai speak

The same gang of expats was also holding forth on some of the common expressions used by those who, at least in their CVs, claim they are fluent in the Queen's lingo. While several of the usual ones such as 'God promise' and co-brother were listed, *The Man from Madras Musings* was surprised to find some of the more frequently heard ones absent. And for the benefit of the uninitiated, MMM lists below as many as ten such frequently heard expressions:

No issues – Meaning no problem or no offence meant.

Tailpiece

What with so many Chennaites travelling abroad and so many foreigners coming to live here, *The Man from Madras Musings* cannot help noticing that our city is changing. Foreign restaurants flaunting exotic dishes are the in-thing. Waiters are forced to learn pronunciation of complicated-sounding dishes and repeat them flawlessly. They are also expected to be knowledgeable about what goes into each of them. MMM was recently at one such place which offered Middle-East dishes. MMM has a weakness for aubergines and decided to try the *Baba Ganoush* which, according to MMM, is our *Baingan-ka-Bartha* served cold. What increased MMM's love for the dish was the waiter turning to him with a bright smile and complimenting him on choosing Babu Ganesh! It made MMM wonder if there is a restaurant specialising in cannibal cuisine as well.

– MMM

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

THE EDITOR

OUR READERS WRITE



Metro Rail woes

The work on Chennai Metro Rail stretch from Koyambedu to Kathipara has nearly been completed briskly. Though the public suffered traffic snarls for a few months, now, however, with the work almost 80% complete, it has come as a relief. The beauty of the stretch was that the contractors used the road median to erect the pillars that carry the rail tracks. This did not entail bringing down the buildings to make way for the pillars, except for a small stretch from Vadapalani to MMDA Colony.

What is causing great inconvenience is the other stretch from Central to Saidapet, the underground track system. This caused shifting of telephone wires, cables and disturbed the sewage canals. In the process certain heritage buildings like Bharat Insurance building and those like Ambassador Hotel and others were damaged. Moreover, the underground drilling would hurt the foundation of various 100-year-old buildings. I wonder if such hardships and inconveniences could not have been avoided.

M. Fazal

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AIR programmes

The article about All India Radio (MM, July 1st) brought me cherished memories of several decades of AIR programmes broadcast those days. I was residing in Royapettah, studying in Wesley High School during 1955-58. My uncle used to take me to

Marina on Saturdays/Sundays. We used to walk from Royapettah to Triplicane via Pycrofts Road. On reaching Marina, after wetting our feet in the sea, we used to sit on the cement benches provided near the loudspeaker at the entrance to the beach to listen to AIR programmes, enjoying music as much as the breeze.

Gone are the days when children used to throng the spot before the 'radio petti' in the afternoon to listen to the 'Papa Malar' children's programme conducted by Radio Anna! The 'Mazhalaichol' of the kids participating in it greatly attracted the listeners. It had also become a regular feature for elders as well to get ready finishing dinner in time, so as not to miss the 'Vannachudra' drama programme aired during night. These were among the few popular programmes, besides regular news, classical and cine music programmes. The English news bulletins at 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. were never to be missed. The newsreaders' voices are still ringing in my ears, not to mention the popularity of cricket commentaries during Test matches aired by AIR, when kids to elders sat glued to the radio!

AIR became a more popular entertainer in all households, with the introduction of commercial broadcasting *Vividh Bharathi*. The *Binaca Geetmala* became very popular even among the listeners in South India. We miss the glorious moments of legacy of AIR, which cannot be substituted by the present-day TV and FM channels, which are more and more commercialised almost to an intolerable level.

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Subordinate Saars

The Editor's note at the bottom of the above-titled letter (MM, July 16th) refers to locomotive drivers in Indian Railways being referred to as Engine Pilots.

However, once upon a time, the term pilot in Indian Railways had a different meaning.

In the early decades of railway operations in India, generally most routes were of single line traffic system.

Whenever there was disruption in the running of trains due to any obstruction including signal failure / accidents, a railway employee authorised by a

Encourage use of bicycles

In this current climate of environmental focus, more and more people are turning to cycle power. The cycle, once the poor man's transport, is fast becoming a preferred mode of travel in cities across the world. Mumbai has started a bike sharing system taking a cue from cities like Paris and New York. The future of the world lies in going back to the basics, as Amsterdam and other cities in The Netherlands show the way with their unique biking culture. Indian urban centres must take a cue from European countries and develop a cycling culture.

Cycling is about social equity. Apart from being a total energy saver and being pollution-free, it is a symbol of equality. If more persons start using cycles, it will reduce road congestion in commercial areas. Pro-cycling policies can reverse congestion and provide better safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The physical effort of cycling has shown to reduce mental stress and anxiety and improve people's self-confidence and independence. The cost of maintenance is very low and you save on petrol.

Environmental accountability must be made an integral part of corporate values. We are all committed to protecting the environment and enhancing the value of health by focussing on and highlighting the use of eco-friendly approaches which include modes of transportation. Cycling is one initiative that will help create more eco-friendly cities.

Considering the present traffic chaos in urban areas, cycling is a better alternative for transport. The attitude of looking down on people who use bicycles to work has to change. Cycling was once an essential part of the transport system and was very popular. In fact, the bicycle was not just another mode of transport, but represented an entire culture of conveyance and movement. Government must promote bicycle tracks.

Regular cycling improves the health of office-goers who do sedentary jobs. There are hundreds of ordinary Indians who are making a life-style statement by riding this humble vehicle as their preferred mode of

transportation. Metros have seen a tremendous growth in the number of powered two/four wheeler users over the last few years. Bicycles, a vital part of urban mobility in the West, are getting crushed under India's rushing prosperity.

Pollution, congestion, energy conservation, physical efficiency and obesity are the challenges of the time. To come out of these problems use of bicycles is one of the solutions. Bicycles are inexpensive, good for the environment and least likely to cause jams. The added advantage of cycling is it is a good exercise and helps reduce obesity, a serious health problem afflicting almost a third of adult population.

In the West, Governments – local and national – are providing incentives in the form of tax subsidies as well as better infrastructure to encourage bicycle use. Many global cities like Paris, London and Amsterdam provide user-friendly facilities for parking and renting bicycles. For our part, to make a beginning, government/public/private sectors in the country must encourage their employees to use bicycles by offering incentives. The incentives could be in the form of conveyance allowance. Already conveyance allowances are there for those using only powered vehicles. Bicycles should be added to that list.

India is the second largest producer of bicycles. Unfortunately, bicycle use in major Indian cities has steadily declined over the years. Social ranking of bicycles in our society is pathetic. As incomes increase, people move from bicycles to public transport, scooters, motorcycles or cars. Given the connotations of bicycle to social status in India, even when it is the most efficient transport, many do not or are reluctant to use it.

To advance the egalitarian goal of getting more people to take to bicycles in cities, there must be a conscious effort to encourage cyclists. This could be ensured only through government's policies favourable towards cyclists.

S.R.Rajagopal

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station master located nearest to the obstruction spot used to personally escort each train past the obstruction, riding on the foot plate.

Since only the same person was authorised to escort both up and down traffic, there was no possibility of two trains being on a single line section at the same time.

This escort was called a train pilot as his duty was to pilot the train safely past the 'danger point'.

He was not necessarily a driver himself but an authorised escort for a limited purpose only – till such time the obstruction was cleared.

Elaborate rules were laid down as to the duties and responsibilities of such pilots.

The title Engine Driver carries a dignified aura and is a highly respected person in railways.

Nostalgically, the legacy of Indian Railways is a grand old tradition handed down to us by the British who once knew railway operations the best.

S. Rajaram

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Sad truth

In 'The least Pedestrian-friendly Indian city, Chennai' (MM, May 1st), while what you state may be true, in Chennai most pedestrians eschew footpaths and prefer to walk on the road. Likewise, cyclists do not use the cycle path provided in subways but recklessly jostle with two-wheelers and cars. I once visited Cochin and the sight of

pedestrians walking on the footpath and even protesting processionists going strictly in single file amazed me. The real problem is not Chennai being least pedestrian-friendly, but the sad truth is Madras has lost its dignified character and itself become pedestrian.

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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.

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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

Draw up your plans for Madras Week

Madras Week, which started off as Madras Day eight years ago to celebrate the founding of the city on August 22, 1639, has become Madras Fortnight, if not Madras Month. Though Madras Week will be celebrated between the 19th and the 26th of August, the celebrations will begin by the second week of August itself and will carry on till the 31st. For the small band of volunteers who began this concept and now help coordinate the programmes, the response from corporates and public citizens of the city has given enormous satisfaction.

This year, the hotels of the city will, as usual, be enthusiastic participants. Some are venues for talks while others are hosting art and photographic exhibitions besides organising food festivals with Madras cuisine as their theme. Art galleries have also taken to this event in a big way.

The Chennai Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is also planning several competition programmes for schools, such as quizzes, elocution contests and debates with Madras as the focus. *Mylapore Times* too is organising a wide range of events for Madras Week. These include walks, quiz

contests and other programmes. As has been the practice in past years, Chennai Heritage, publishers of *Madras Musings*, will be hosting eight talks at various locations on subjects related to the city. Plenty of heritage walks are also being organised this year. Further details will soon be available at the site www.themadrasday.in

Perhaps indicative of the success of Madras Week as a concept is the number of institutions that have come forward each year to celebrate the city. We are also seeing several IT companies displaying interest. Rotary Clubs are also having several programmes. The celebrations have also spread to the suburbs such as Nanganallur and Tambaram. Private apartment blocks, schools and clubs are planning their own events.

Participation is purely a voluntary effort by those wanting to organise programmes during the Week. The role of the informal group of co-coordinators is only to encourage such participation, try to organise publicity for the events, offer advice and, where possible, arrange venues. For any assistance or information, please contact editor@madrasmusings.com.

Madras Musings Heritage Tours to commemorate Madras Week

Saturday 18th August – 6.00 am – Tracing the old fort wall of Madras. Tour by van and foot for two hours, followed by breakfast. Guide: Sriram V. Charges: Rs 600 per head.

Sunday 19th August – 6.30 am – The vanished and surviving theatres of Mount Road. Tour by van and foot for two hours, followed by breakfast. Guide: Mohan V. Raman. Charges: Rs 600 per head.

Saturday 25th August – 6.30 am – The heritage of Alwarpet. Tour by van and foot for two hours, followed by breakfast. Guide: Sriram V. Charges: Rs 600 per head.

Sunday 26th August – 6.30 am – How the harbour developed. Tour by van, foot and boat in collaboration with the Royal Madras Yacht Club, followed by breakfast. Guide: Sriram V. Charges: Rs 850 per head.

Optional: Lunch at the RMYC and a sail boat journey in the sea at Rs 200 extra. Bookings for this walk close on 19th August. Those interested must furnish copy of proof of identity along with payment.

Bookings for all walks to be done by email at editor@madrasmusings.com

Nizhal's Tree Walks

Nizhal celebrates institutional campuses of Madras this August, with tree walks in English and Tamil. Trees in a city are sentinels of history and need to be preserved as part of our heritage. Celebrate these old trees, be it the stately Arjuna tree at the St George's Cathedral, the majestic Baobab at the museum, the spreading Rain Trees of the Little Flower Convent and Queen Mary's or the fragrant Maghizham trees in Kalakshetra.

The walks will last for 90 minutes. The morning walks start at 7.30 am and the evening walks at 4.30 pm. Come with friends and family and re-discover your city!

Date	Venue	Timings / Language	Starting point
August 17th (Friday)	Madras Museum, Egmore	7.30 to 9.00 am (Tamil)	Ticket counter
August 18th (Saturday)	Kalakshetra, Thiruvannmyur	7.30 to 9.00 am (Tamil)	Main entrance
August 18th (Saturday)	St George's Cathedral, Cathedral Road	4.30 to 6.00 pm (English)	Parking lot
August 19th (Sunday)	Queen Mary's College, Marina	7.30 to 9.00 am (Tamil)	Main gate
August 19th (Sunday)	Kalakshetra, Thiruvannmyur	4.30 to 6.00 pm (English)	Main entrance
August 24th (Friday)	Queen Mary's College, Marina	4.30 to 6.00 pm (English)	Main gate
August 25th (Saturday)	St George's Cathedral, Cathedral Road	7.30 to 9.00 am (Tamil)	Parking lot
August 25th (Saturday)	Little Flower Convent, Gemini flyover	4.30 to 6.00 pm (English)	Main gate
August 26th (Sunday)	Little Flower Convent, Gemini flyover	7.30 to 9.00 am (Tamil)	Main gate
August 26th (Sunday)	Madras Museum, Egmore	4.30 to 6.00 pm (English)	Ticket counter

Registrations can also be done online. For more details and to register by phone, please call: 9003011372 between 10 and 6 pm. For further details visit: www.themadrasday.in

(Continued from last fortnight)

On our way to the Indian team, we know of so many of our team-mates, some of whom may have been equally or more talented than those sitting here, who missed out. When I started out, for a young Indian, cricket was the ultimate gamble – all or nothing, no safety nets. No second chances for those without an education or a college degree or second careers. Indian cricket's wealth now means a wider pool of well-paid cricketers even at first-class level.

For those of us who make it to the Indian team, cricket is not merely our livelihood, it is a gift we have been given. Without the game, we would just be average people leading average lives. As Indian cricketers, our sport has given us the chance to do something worthwhile with our lives. How many people could say that?

This is the time Indian cricket should be flowering; we are the world champions in the short game, and over the space of the next 12 months should be involved in a tight contest with Australia, South Africa and England to determine which one of us is the world's strongest Test team.

Yet I believe this is also a time for introspection within our game, not only in India, but all over the world. We have been given some alerts and responding to them quickly is the smart thing to do.

I was surprised a few months ago to see the lack of crowds in an ODI series featuring India. By that I don't mean the lack of full houses, I think it was the sight of empty stands I found somewhat alarming.

India played its first one-day international at home in November 1981, when I was nine. Between then and now India have played 227 ODIs at home; the October five-match series against England was the first time that the grounds have not been full for an ODI featuring the Indian team.

Australia and South Africa played an exciting and thrilling Test series recently and two great Test matches produced some fantastic performances from players of both teams, but were sadly played in front of sparse crowds.

It is not the numbers that Test players need, it is the atmosphere of a Test that every player wants to revel in and draw energy from. My first reaction to the lack of crowds for cricket was that there had been a lot of cricket and so, perhaps, a certain amount of spectator-fatigue. That is too simplistic a view; it's the easy thing to say but might not be the only thing.

Changing face of the game

The India v England ODI series had no context, because the two countries had played each other in four Tests and five ODIs just a few weeks before. When India and West Indies played ODIs a month after that the grounds were full, but this time the matches were played in smaller venues that didn't host too much international cricket. Maybe our clues are all there and we must remain vigilant.

Unlike Australia or England, Indian cricket has never had to compete with other sports for a share of revenues, mind space or crowd attendance at international matches. The lack of crowds may not directly impact on revenues or how important the sport is to Indians, but we do need to accept that there has definitely been a change in temperature over, I think, the last two years.

Whatever the reasons are – maybe it is too much cricket or too little by way of comfort for spectators – the fan has sent us a message and we must listen. This is not mere sentimentality. Empty stands do not make for good television. Bad television can lead to a fall in ratings, the fall in ratings will be felt by media planners and advertisers looking elsewhere.

If that happens, it is hard to see television rights around cricket being as sought after as they have always been in the last 15 years. And where does that leave everyone? I'm not trying to be an economist or doomsday prophet – this is just how I see it.

Let us not be so satisfied with the present with deals and finances in hand that we get blindsided. Everything that has given cricket its power and influence in the world of sports has started from that fan in the stadium. They deserve our respect and let us not take them for granted. Disrespecting fans is disrespecting the game. The fans have stood by our game through everything. When we play, we need to think of them. As players, the balance between competitiveness and fairness can be tough but it must be found.

If we stand up for the game's basic decencies, it will be far easier to tackle its bigger dangers – whether it is finding short cuts to easy money or being lured by the scourge of spot-fixing and contemplating any involvement with the betting industry.

Cricket's financial success means it will face threats from outside the game and keep facing them. The last two decades have proved this over and over again. The internet and modern technology may just end up be-

ing a step ahead of every anti-corruption regulation in place in the game. As players, the one way we can stay ahead for the game is whether we are willing to be monitored and regulated closely.

Even if it means giving up a little bit of freedom of movement and privacy. If it means undergoing dope tests, let us never say no. If it means undergoing lie-detector tests, let us understand the technology, what purpose it serves and accept it. Now lie-detectors are by no means perfect but they could actually help the innocent clear their names. Similarly, we should not object to having our finances scrutinised if that is what is required.

When the first anti-corruption measures were put into place, we did moan a little bit about being discredited and depositing our cell phones with the manager. But now we must treat it like we do airport security because we know it is for our own good and our own security.

● Extracts from Bradman Oration speech delivered by Rahul Dravid.

Players should be ready to give up a little personal space and personal comfort for this game, which has given us so much. If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.

Other sports have borrowed from cricket's anti-corruption measures to set up their own ethical governance programmes and we must take pride in belonging to a sport that is professional and progressive.

One of the biggest challenges that the game must respond to today, I believe, is charting out a clear road map for the three formats. We now realise that the sport's three formats cannot be played in equal numbers – that will only throw scheduling and the true development of players completely off gear.

There is a place for all three formats, though this is the only sport I can think of which has three versions. Cricket must treasure this originality. These three versions require different skills, skills that have evolved, grown, changed over the last four decades, one impacting on the other.

Test cricket is the gold standard, it is the form the players want to play. The 50-over game is the one that has kept cricket's revenues alive for more than three decades now. Twenty20 has come upon us and it is the

format people, the fans, want to see.

Cricket must find a middle path, it must scale down this mad merry-go-round that teams and players find themselves in: heading off for two-Test tours and seven-match ODI series with a few Twenty20s thrown in.

Test cricket deserves to be protected, it is what the world's best know they will be judged by. Where I come from, nation versus nation is what got people interested in cricket in the first place. When I hear the news that a country is playing without some of its best players, I always wonder what do their fans think?

People may not be able to turn up to watch Test cricket but everyone follows the scores. We may not fill 65,000 capacity stadiums for Test matches, but we must actively fight to get as many as we can in, to create a Test match environment that the players and the fans feed off. Anything but the sight of Tests played on empty grounds. For

that, we have got to play Test cricket that people can watch.

I don't think day-night Tests or a Test championship should be dismissed.

In March of last year I played a day-night first-class game in Abu Dhabi for the MCC and my experience from that was that day-night Test is an idea seriously worth exploring. There may be some challenges in places where there is dew but the visibility and durability of the pink cricket ball was not an issue.

Similarly, a Test championship, with every team and player driving themselves to be winners of a sought-after title, seems like it would have a context to every game.

Keeping Tests alive may mean different innovations in different countries – maybe taking it to smaller cities, playing it in grounds with smaller capacities like New Zealand has thought of doing, maybe reviving some old venues in the West Indies, like the old Recreation Ground in Antigua.

When I was around seven years old, I remember my father taking a Friday off so that we could watch three days of Test cricket together. On occasions he couldn't, I would accompany one of his friends, just to soak in a day of Test cricket and watch the drama slowly unfold.

What we have to do is find a way to ensure that Test matches fit into 21st century life, through timing, environments and the venues they are held in. I am still convinced it can be done, even in our fast-moving world with a short attention span. We will often get told that Test matches don't make financial sense, but no one ever fell in love with Test cricket because he wanted to be a businessman. Not everything of value comes at a price.

There is a proposal doing the rounds about scrapping the 50-over game completely. I am not sure I agree with that – I certainly know that the 50-over game helped us innovate strokes in our batting which we were then able to take into Test matches. We all know that the 50-over game has been responsible for improving fielding standards all over the world.

The future may well lie in playing one-day internationals centred around ICC events, like the Champions Trophy and the World Cups. This would ensure that all 50-over matches would build up for those tournaments.

That will cut back the number of one-day internationals played every year but at least those matches will have context. Since about, I think, 1985 people have been saying that there is too much meaningless one-day cricket. Maybe it's finally time to do something about it.

The Twenty20 game as we know has as many critics as it has supporters in the public. Given that an acceptable strike rate in T20 these days is about 120, I should probably complain about it the most. The crowd and revenue numbers, though, tell us that if we don't handle Twenty 20 correctly, we may well have more and more private players

stepping in to offer not just slices of pie, but maybe even bigger pies themselves.

The best role for Twenty20 is that of a domestic competition through official leagues, which will make it financially attractive for cricketers. That could also keep cricket viable in countries where it fights for space and attention.

Because the game is bigger than us all, we must think way ahead of how it stands today. Where do we want it to be in the year 2020? Or, say, in 2027, when it will be 150 years since the first Test match was played. If you think about it, cricket has been with us longer than the modern motor car, it existed before modern air travel took off.

As much as cricket's revenues are important to its growth, its traditions and its vibrancy are a necessary part of its progress in the future. We shouldn't let either go because we played too much of one format and too little of the other.

In every cricketer there lies a competitor who hates losing and, yes, winning matters. But it is not the only thing that matters when you play cricket. How it is played is as important for every member of every team because every game we play leaves a footprint in cricket's history. We must never forget that.

What we do as professionals is easily carried over into the amateur game, in every way – batting, bowling, fielding, appealing, celebration, dissent, argument. In the players of 2027, we will see a reflection of this time and of ourselves and it had better not annoy or anguish us, 50-year-olds.

As the game's custodians, it is important we are not tempted by the short-term gains of the backward step. We can be remembered for being the generation that could take the giant stride. – (Courtesy: COMPASS)

(Concluded)

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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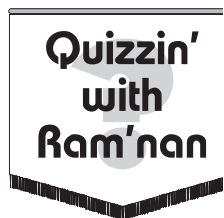
An ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION of just Rs.100 covers only a part of our costs. Corporate support and YOUR support will continue to be essential for Chennai Heritage and *Madras Musings* to play a greater role in creating awareness about the city, its heritage and its environment. We therefore look forward to your sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep *Madras Musings* going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2009-10 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions.

– The Editor



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

1. On July 1st, which Spaniard became the first footballer to score in two UEFA European Championship Finals and who also won the Golden Boot?

2. Which pharma giant recently settled the largest healthcare fraud case in the US history for \$3 billion?

3. Name the tallest building in Europe, standing 309.6 metres, which was inaugurated recently in London.

4. Which two players' record did Roger Federer emulate by winning his seventh singles title at Wimbledon recently?

5. Which world record-breaking cricketer was forced to end his career after sustaining an eye injury during his team's tour of England?

6. Which former Prime Minister of a European country has been appointed the UN special envoy for global education?

7. In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court has declared which tribe's forest habitat in Andaman Island and a 5-km area around it as "no go" zone for tourists or any other persons?

8. Where in India will be set up Asia's first Category-I institute of UNESCO, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development?

9. Name the lake, located over 18,000 feet above sea level in Sikkim, that has been declared the highest located lake in the country and the sixth in the world.

10. What is the name of the recently launched USAID-FICCI initiative to fund innovators?

* * *

11. Who produced and helmed the classic movie *Avvaiyar*?

12. Where is the Dr. Guruswamy Bridge in Chennai?

13. Which famous bridge was a 'two-leaf Scherzer rolling lift bridge' and built by Head, Wrightson & Co. Ltd?

14. Name the Governor of Madras who built the Kalyana Varadaraja Perumal Temple reportedly for a dubash.

15. If Tranquebar is Tharangabadi, then what is Porto Novo?

16. In which Chennai temple is Lord Shiva depicted as a Lingam mounted on a turtle depicting Mahavishnu?

17. What was the original name of Azeem Bagh?

18. In 1887, Raja Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar became the first Indian to occupy which post in Madras?

19. In which educational institution in Chennai is the Fyson Clock?

20. If the 'New Black Town' came up in the villages of Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet, where was the 'Old' one?

(Answers on page 8)

Ravi Varma's heroines come alive on stage

It all started with a phone call from Aravinth Kumarasamy, Managing and Creative Director, Apsaras Arts, Singapore, explaining to me the concept of his upcoming venture. He asked me if I could be the guest choreographer for *Heroines* of Raja Ravi Varma. The concept was exciting and I readily accepted. It was only much later that the magnitude of the production and the implication of my decision slowly dawned on me. I knew little about Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), the painter from the princely state of Travancore, who achieved recognition for his depiction of scenes from the epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Besides, it would be no easy task to bring out the essence of his intense paintings through dance. The choreography had to be expressive, subtle and elegant – yet had to convey to the public the tales of Raja Ravi Varma's heroines.

In Singapore, I felt I had sprouted a dozen extra hands with the likes of Aravinth Kumarasamy and Neila Sathyalingam, Founder and Artistic Director of Apsaras Arts, who, with their kind, hospitable nature and reassuring words, made a molehill of the mountain in front of me.

The music for the production was almost ready by the

time I came into the picture. Aravinth had chosen songs that would be apt to bring out the soul of the paintings. And we had with us some of Singapore's best dancers.

Raja Ravi Varma's paintings are possibly the best examples of the fusion of Indian traditions with the techniques of European art. The dance too was a blend of cultures and an amalgam of emotions.

The heroines we concentrated on were Seeta, Bhoomadevi, Damayanti, Radha, Sakuntala and Yasoda, as de-

● by
Ravichander

picted in 14 well-known paintings by Ravi Varma. Known for their beauty, his heroines were personifications of passion, whose lives were filled with romance, love and tragedy. It was necessary to present the characters in a way the audience could understand and relate to the theme.

We first took up Bhoomadevi, a not-so-common theme in Bharatanatyam. The story of Bhoomadevi and Seeta had to be viewed as a conversation between a mother and a daughter

and not as a far-fetched mythological tale. The story was about Seeta's anger, disappointment, rejection and resultant renunciation of her love for Lord Rama and her outpouring to her mother. This developed into an emotional scene. The final output had many in the audience in tears.

Next we worked on Ravi Varma's beautiful painting of Yasoda with baby Krishna. Pretending to be Yasoda and playing with young Madhumitha who played baby Krishna is something that is still close to my heart. The child was an absolute showstealer, playing her part with confidence and panache. We used compositions of Papanasam Sivan and Purandaradasa to convey the bond between mother and son. The simultaneous narration and depiction of emotions on stage, quite novel, vied with each other to capture the attention of the audience.

Our next heroine was Damayanti – it was the first time I was working on this theme. It was based on Ravi Varma's famous picture of the beautiful Damayanti and the golden swan. An interesting portion was when the swan teaches Damayanti to dance. This posed a challenge as both the characters were played by the same dancer. I must say it



Seema and Theepan as Radha and Krishna.

was Roshini Pillai's poise, elegance and grace and the complementing steps that made this part a visual treat.

Radha-Krishna is a common theme in Indian dance. I felt that as a choreographer I must think out of the box and present something unique and memorable. I must say Seema and Theepan did justice to their roles and touched many a heart. The production ended with a special *tillana* depicting the epic heroine Sakuntala, highlighting man's relationship with mother Nature.

I sat back and watched how the heroines of Raja Ravi Varma brought to life through the medium of dance, mesmerised by the intricate, breathtaking costumes, passionate and soulful dance and the overwhelming response of the audience comprising Indians, Chinese, Sri Lankans, Malaysians and Singaporeans. We hope to cast the same magic in Chennai one day. – (Courtesy: *Sruti*.)

(The author is a senior Bharata Natyam dancer, teacher and organiser, running Kala Pradarshini.)

A cityscape and a chronicle

Tamarind City: Where Modern India Began – Bishwanath Ghosh (Tranquebar, Rs. 295).

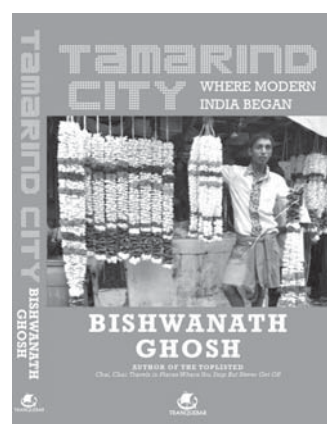
"It's the marriage between tradition and transformation that makes Chennai unique..." writes Bishwanath Ghosh in the first chapter of his travelogue-cum-cityscape. He then goes on to justify that line by painting with words a portrait of a city where "modern India began." Switching smoothly between personal encounters and historical facts and figures, Ghosh brings alive the pulsating life in a metropolis that may have embraced technology but is still comfortable with its hoary past and traditional idiosyncrasies. Even as Ghosh weaves his way through forgotten by-lanes and stops to stare at unique processions, this Kanpur-bred Kolkatan uncannily lends history a modern touch, making the book an en-

joyable journey of discovery. Take the story about Robert Clive. I remember studying (or rather learning by rote) about him and that unforgettable Battle of Plassey just a day before my exams. And promptly forgot all about him once I passed that examination! But here is Ghosh who brings Clive alive for me all over again, not only by giving me lots more information about the man and the times he lived in, but also making him much more human!

As Ghosh sits in the deserted Royapuram railway station and talks about its hoary past, you can imagine a time when life was simple, and surely less stress-free. A time when people, carrying luggage that included tall tiffin boxes filled with sweets and savouries, looked forward to a train journey. If his meeting with play-

wright Gnani is an eye-opener, so is his encounter with Sundararajan of Triplicane. The meeting with Saroja Devi reveals a Madras that was. The yesteryear actor recalls the city of those days with clarity and it lends a fresh dimension to the city.

Ghosh captures those little images that complete the portrait of the city of contrasts – the caste mark and its significance, a fortune teller on the Marina, the classical music scene, the tsunami and its aftermath, a transgender who smacks of confidence, a top sexologist, a jasmine seller near a temple, the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial... His reporter's instincts are there for the reader to see at every juncture. He roams the city by day and by night returns to delve into its past, to probe its psyche and just present interesting, often intriguing, pic-



tures. Sometimes witty, sometimes sardonic, but insightful and evocative, the biography of Madras that is Chennai is one happy read.

Just one point: Wish there were some photographs of old Madras (people and places), and, maybe, some rough maps!

– Savitha Gautam

The day Dara Singh was arrested

● **Veteran world-renowned wrestler-turned Bollywood actor Dara Singh passed away recently. This article remembers the adulation he received in Madras.**

The sad news of the death of Dara Singh, the great wrestler and movie/TV actor, recently brings back to my mind unforgettable memories of his visits to Madras in the 1950s.

Dara Singh was introduced to Madras in 1953 as the all-in-wrestling 'Champion of India'. The title in Urdu, 'Rustam-e-Hind', was not used in Madras. Till then our generation had no idea whatsoever of the sport called wrestling. Our fathers and uncles used to sometimes speak of Gama and Harbans Singh as great wrestlers of the pre-World War II era, but the names did not mean anything to us.

We knew of boxing, of course. Joe Louis, Jersey Joe Walcott, Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson were among the famous champions on the world arena. Earlier, we had our local Madras-based boxing heroes too – like M.K. Muthu, Franklin Melino and 'Tiger' Natteri ('Terry' to his fans). Then, unfortunately, one evening at the Salt Cotaurs stadium, Terry, in what must have been a fierce and bloody contest, knocked his opponent Arunachalam dead with one powerful punch to the head. That tragic event completely obliterated the popularity of professional boxing in the city. Madras had no stomach for a bloody sport.

It was at that juncture that some sports enthusiasts-cum-entrepreneurs brought all-in-wrestling sport to the city. Here was a form of fighting sport that was blood-free. A whole host of international professional teams of wrestlers were brought to stage a series of bouts to thrill the Madras spectators. Great international champions landed in our city, amongst whom were: King Kong, 'Champion of South East Asia', Sergei Orloff, 'the Russian Bear', Ali Riza Bay, the Egyptian champion with the 'guillotine chops', Jeji Goldstein, 'Champion of Palestine', Wong Bok Lee, 'Champion of China' and Zebisky, 'Champion of Poland'.

And, then, there was the great Dara Singh, who stole our hearts.

The venue for the fights was a temporary stadium put up at the YMCA grounds in Royapettah. There would be three

matches every evening, with the entire programme lasting about an hour and a half. Fights were always one on one. They were arranged in all possible combinations. There was no classification of wrestlers according to weights, nor was it organised as a tournament. There was no league system with point counts, nor any system of elimination of the losers. The idea was just to stage a series of matches.

But there were various external factors that made the fights very exciting. There would be fights between two fierce wrestlers who had declared themselves sworn enemies. The

"Dara Singh, the Champion of India, enters the ring from the blue corner", the master of ceremonies would announce grandly.

And then there he would be, tall and erect, a dashing figure dressed in a long robe of rich brocade reaching down to his ankles, looking like a Maharajah. A satin sash, a loose turban with a feather pattern at one end would resemble the crown and the other end hanging like a tail at the back of his head. He would come running, and jump into the ring floating over the ropes in the manner of a pole-vaulter clearing the bar. He would land neatly on his

city – ranging from the aristocrats of T'Nagar and Adyar to the middle class of Mylapore and Triplicane and the working class of Choolai and Royapuram. The only difference was that whereas those known to be educated called him 'Dara Singh', he was 'Tara Singh' to the crowds who thronged from north Madras. He was *Namma Tara Singh* (our Tara Singh) to the people who felt possessive about him – or even *Namma Tara Singh paityan* (our boy Tara Singh) to those who felt themselves very close to their hero.

Publicity for the fights and announcement of programmes were mostly through wall posters and advertisements in the daily newspapers. The newspapers themselves did not give any news of the bouts or of the results thereof. Apparently, the editors had decided that it was all a put-up show and not newsworthy. But we the fans did not think so; and we desperately wanted news of the results of each day's bouts. There was no way of knowing the results unless you attended the matches in person. And not many could afford the cost of attending the fights every day. Sometimes one would get news of the results passed on by word of mouth. But that could be quite a few days after the event, and not always true and reliable. It was all very frustrating.

Then one morning, quite by accident, I discovered that there was among the regular daily visitors to our street one man who attended the matches every day without fail.



Dara Singh.

It was our milkman. One morning I heard him discussing the results of previous day's wrestling bouts with one of his assistants. *Namma Tara Singh paityan* had beaten King Kong – that was the news. I was thrilled to get the news first hand and he gave me all the minutest details. I could not have asked for more. From that day I invariably spent some time with him every morning getting news of the previous day's fights. *Namma Tara Singh* kept winning one fight after another, and our milkman was only too happy to review the fights for me.

Then one morning it was all very different. He was sitting in silence outside our house on the roadside near one of his cows. His face was drawn and bore a sad look. I could sense that something had gone wrong.

"Tara Singh has been arrested!", he said.

I picked up the newspaper with trembling hands and instinctively turned to the sports page thinking that was where the news would be.

Not finding any such news in sports columns I turned to the front page.

And there it was. 'TARA SINGH ARRESTED', it proclaimed. Yes, Master Tara Singh, the well-known fire brand Akali leader of that era had been arrested while leading a *dharna* outside the Parliament.

– G. Ram Mohan

audience would take sides. There would be challenges thrown by them in public, to be settled only in the ring. There would be disputed decisions to be resolved only by refights. Mysterious masked fighters would appear unannounced, beat up a champion fighter to a pulp and just vanish – all these spontaneously added to the thrills of the fights.

Crowds thronged Royapettah. Some of the wrestlers were favourites with the crowds, and some were intensely hated. King Kong was the ill-tempered, foul-playing giant of a fighter who was hated the most. Ali Riza Bay and Jeji Goldstein were the gentlemen fighters whom the audience liked. But, by far the most loved, the darling of the crowds, was our own Dara Singh! He was a powerful fighter who always played fair and fought strictly according to the rules. It was a delight to watch him, right from the moment he stepped out of the dressing room into the arena.

feet. He would be all smiles oozing confidence, and would remove the turban with a flourish. Then he would take off the robe to expose a glorious, sculpted body – all rippling muscles with not an ounce of fat. The all-male audience would go mad, clapping, whistling, screaming. If there were women in the audience some would doubtless have swooned!

Dara Singh fought neat. He was extremely clever in the way he attacked the opponent. He would trick his opponent into letting him get into the position he wanted, and then grip him in a deadly hold that would have the opponent writhing in pain. He would trip the opponent, make him fall, and then hold him down in a 'body press' up to a count of ten. Another way of knocking out his opponent was to bodily lift him, spin him around, make him dizzy and then drop him in a heap. Dara Singh won most of his fights.

Dara Singh's admirers came from all classes from all over the

Marina to undergo yet another facelift

(Continued from page 1)

announced with fanfare and when completed they also have lavish inaugurations. But the continued maintenance of these facilities is never thought of. The consequence is that they become useless and are then condemned. A new capital project is then envisaged and the chain continues. It is rather surprising that a civic body that invariably claims to be short of resources for routine maintenance is always able to have funds for capital expenses.

Throughout the city, we have glaring instances of poor upkeep. Pot-holed roads, unusable footpaths, trees that need pruning, lights that don't work, drains that overflow and litter that keeps accumulating. Why

is money not being spent on these aspects? Is it because routine maintenance work does not involve laying foundation stones, commemorative plaques and photo opportunities?

Lastly, how many more beautifications does the Marina need? It has a good pedestrian walkway, it has statuary neatly laid out, there is regulated parking, there is public seating and there are conveniences. What more does a public space need? Can we in anyway improve what is already a beautiful handiwork of nature? And is Chennai rather like the fabled stag which focussed only on its antlers and neglected its legs, making too much of a fuss over the beach to the neglect of other things?

The return of the Redvented Bulbul

In the early 1950s we lived in Banganapalli in Andhra Pradesh, a small Muslim Principality where the famous Banganapalli mangoes were grown first. The Muslims there were fond of keeping birds as pets for the table and for sport. Birds were regularly sold to them by the bird catchers for the table and sport.

In our house, we kept a Redvented Bulbul which is found almost throughout India. There are two other species of Bulbuls in India which have somewhat restricted distribution in North India. We also kept a few White-throated Munias. They are cute little birds which can be easily tamed.

Fried Bengalgram was powdered and mixed with water and made into small balls to feed the Redvented Bulbuls. The Munias were fed with pearl-millet grain. With their small and powerful beaks they removed the outer layer and ate the grain. In Banganapalli,

Munias were known as *Piddi* in Urdu. The birds were not kept in cages. A loop of string was slipped under their wings and they were put on a peg. One Redvented Bulbul constructed a nest on a sapota tree which was 15 feet tall in our garden in Tuticorin.

The Redvented Bulbul is a pugnacious bird and a favourite with fanciers for Bulbul fights. Two tamed Redvented Bulbuls were released in a room and were fed alternately with rounded balls of fried Bengalgram. Each bird would think the other was a competitor for food and would hold the head of the perceived opponent with its claws till the other bird was vanquished and driven away.

Munias can be released after being tamed. On being released, they fly away and sit on a tall tree. When somebody puts pearl-millet on the palm and waves up and down with the sound *ol-ol* the bird comes down from the tree and lands

on the hand of the person! Birds have telescopic eyes due to the presence of a small structure known as pecten in their eyes. With this they can focus on small objects even from a long distance. Eagles flying at great height can clearly see a snake or a rat on the ground.

As small children we were having these two birds as pets in our house. At one time all of us were down with malaria. Banganapalli was notorious for malaria in those days. My mother told that these captive birds were cursing us all the time and, therefore, we were down with fever. She suggested that we should release the birds from captivity. When we released the birds, true to her word, the fever left us!

After many days, during one stormy night we heard the sound of a bird fluttering in the store room. We did not get up to see what it was as there was no electricity in that place. Next day we found our bulbul which was released by us earlier lying dead behind a trunk. It was really a wonder to us as to how the bird located our house among the large number of houses even on a dark and stormy night.

The bulbul would seem to have instincts like the racing pigeons. They have iron oxide particles on the upper part of their beaks which help them to sense the earth's magnetic field like a compass! Animals and birds kept in captivity, but when released into the wild, are unable to stand the rigours of nature and compete with other animals in the wild and ultimately perish.

D.B. James

Where are those water bodies?

(Continued from page 1)

from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. But it is worthwhile pointing out that this is not the first time that funds have been earmarked for rejuvenating water bodies. The end result has invariably not been achieved.

The last great initiative that was taken up was the rainwater harvesting scheme. It was made compulsory in all buildings in the 1990s. It bore fruit and perhaps the best example of its success was the filling up of the Kapaleeswarar Temple tank in Mylapore. Since then, however,

the enthusiasm has waned and it is doubtful if the scheme is being implemented with diligence. The drying up of all temple tanks in Mylapore, barring the Kapaleeswarar Temple tank is an indicator of this.

Can we afford to be indifferent to our water bodies? And can we be continuously dependent on external sources whose generosity cannot always be taken for granted, especially in years of drought such as this one? It is time Chennai became a responsible city and showed it by giving its lakes, ponds and tanks a new life.



New Clubs: Apparao Galleries announces the launch of three new clubs to create a platform for lovers of art and culture, film enthusiasts and textile collectors. The **Film Club** will gather once a month at Apparao Galleries.

The focus will be on screening films that you will neither find in the big theatres nor buy on the street. They will be movies about art and artistes from all over the world, independent films, old and new classics and the like. This will be more than just a film club, they are aiming for it to be a platform for film enthusiasts and film lovers to gather, discuss, educate themselves and be exposed to the wonder that is cinema.

The **Epic and History Club** has been conceived with an aim to offer its members different perspectives of myths, legends, epics and history. Speakers who have agreed to talk in the coming months are Gurcharan Das, Ashok Banker and Papu Venagopal Rao.

The **Textile Club** invites you to join their yarn club to weave together your passion and love

for textiles. The aim is to bring together textile lovers, collectors, designers and anyone with an interest in and love for textiles to explore collections and talk to people who make a difference in textile industries around the world.

August 4-5 & 8: Patta painting workshop for Adults. DakshinaChitra is organising a two-day and one-day workshop on Patta painting during August 4-5, 2012 and August 8, 2012 respectively.

Radha Chitrakar – Patta scroll painting artist from West Bengal will handle the workshop. The scroll paintings have traditional themes like puranas and folklore, and social themes and events that reflect her perspective and reflection on life. This traditional scroll art form is unique in that the artist also sings along while displaying the scroll and its contents that narrate a story. The scrolls are done in traditional style using only the vegetable dyes.

For information and registration : 98417-77779, 24462435 / 24918943.

Answers to Quiz

1. Fernando Torres; 2. GlaxoSmithKline; 3. The Shard;
4. William Renshaw and Pete Sampras; 5. Mark Boucher;
6. UK's Gordon Brown; 7. Jarawas; 8. New Delhi; 9. Cho-Lhamu;
10. 'Millenium Alliance'.

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11. S.S. Vasan and Kothamangalam Subbu; 12. In Chetpet;
13. The Pamban Bridge; 14. Joseph Collet; 15. Parangipettai;
16. Kachaleeswarar Temple; 17. Mackay's Gardens; 18. Sheriff;
19. Presidency College; 20. On what is now the High Court-Law College campus.

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