

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

Vol. XXIII No. 18

January 1-15, 2014

**INSIDE**

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Sadir to Bharata Natyam
- The Madras Balloon
- More about trees
- Krishnan's Tamil writings

# Still waiting for a Tree Act

(By The Editor)

The media is full of reports of trees being cut in college campuses across the city. Presidency, Ethiraj, Stella Maris and Stanley Medical Colleges have all reported incidents of tree-felling and these have been received with a sense of outrage by students, teachers and the general public. To be tree-friendly is in human nature and any cutting down of the green cover is met with protests. What is often forgotten is that lopping and pruning of trees is a necessity and if that is done, such wholesale cutting can be avoided. And if care is taken while trees are planted, and this is done according to a plan, such problems need never occur. Unfortunately, most campuses have no such plans in place and the same applies to our Governments as well.

You need to only look at the old photographs of historic buildings in our city to realise that trees were planted to a plan, keeping in mind the façade and vista of the structure they were supposed to frame. This ensured that the edifice was visible and the trees were well spaced, thereby ensuring easy maintenance and protection of both – the buildings and the foliage. This has long been given the go by and it would be no exaggeration to state that most of the so-called green campuses in the city have, in reality, just uncontrolled vegetation. This may be all right in vast precincts such as Madras Christian College, but when such growth is allowed in relatively smaller campuses, it re-

(Continued on page 2)



Tree-felling on a college campus. (Picture courtesy: The Hindu.)

# What does the Metro plan for RSRM Choultry?

The High Court of Madras has cleared the decks for Metro Rail acquiring the historic Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar Choultry that faces the Central Station. With that the legal battle that had raged for over two years has come to an end. The Metro Rail authorities are happy that one of the last hurdles on the congested Poonamallee High Road stretch has been overcome. They have also assured the Court that they will take care of the building and not endanger it in any way. All this is to the good. But it is highly doubtful if

Metro Rail, or any other Government agency, has any constructive idea as to how the structure is to be 'preserved' and, more importantly, put to alternative use if it is to survive.

The track record of Chennai Metro Rail in caring for heritage is abysmal. It has so far only looked at heritage structures as hindrances in the way of greater good – namely public transport. And its sense of accountability towards heritage preservation is at best grudging. When a finial at the Law College collapsed, Metro Rail stoutly denied any responsibility and the dome remains sans finial. When churches along Broadway developed cracks, experts from IIT were rather reluctantly brought in and their suggestions for repair taken up at a snail's speed. When it comes to demolition, Metro Rail has been much faster. A building in the historic Teachers' College campus in Saidapet vanished overnight. This despite the entire campus being listed as a heritage precinct in the Justice Padmanabhan Committee Report. Metro Rail took cover under the claim that the report did not specifically

mention the building that was demolished.

Metro Rail has also consistently refused to believe that heritage structures can be put to alternative use within the framework of providing public transport. It did not heed pleas that the P Orr & Sons workshops could be retained as they were but demolished them in one night, following High Court permission. Similarly, the

and hope that time will take care of the rest.

For the sake of record, the choultry was constructed in 1888 by Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar, philanthropist and businessman. The Government leased the land to a Trust created by him and the same was earmarked for the construction of a rest-house (choultry) for the benefit of passengers who alight at Central Station. The family of Mudaliar remained Trustees till the 1970s when the Trust was assigned to the Official Trustee of the High Court, with one family member becoming a Co-Trustee. One of the clauses for leasing out the land to the Raja and his Trust was that the space would be put to use only as a choultry. With times changing and the necessity for such a facility receding, the building itself became a hotel while the surrounding area was sub-let for other purposes. The structure was listed in the Justice Padmanabhan Committee report of heritage buildings under the 2a category which recognises that it is of aesthetic, cultural and architectural merit. Metro Rail has promised to honour this. Time alone will tell as to what this will translate into.

• by  
**A Special Correspondent**

Lawrence Asylum Press, behind a Poompuhar building, is also to be done away with. Another structure, which stood next to Bharat Insurance Building and functioned for years as a booking office for the Southern Railway, has also been demolished.

Given the above instances, is Metro Rail likely to preserve, protect and put to good use the RSRM Choultry? It will at best leave the building alone, carry out all kinds of other construction activity around the place

Madras Eye



This Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma I can listen to at home, it's the super food at the sabha that drew me to this kutcheri!

## Wanted: An Urban Trees Act

(Continued from page 1)

sults in several long-term problems. Tree roots can cause cracks in buildings, leaves can choke drains leading to water seepage, and branches can damage grilles and windows. This is precisely what has happened in most campuses, where much of the vegetation is due to seeds from bird droppings sprouting at various spots, including on the buildings themselves.

Tree-planting drives have also added to the problem. These are often done for the sake of the publicity they generate. A vast number of saplings are planted, with no long-term plan in place. After the initial hype, the plants are forgotten and those that survive grow by themselves, going wild and adding to the problems of campuses that do not have maintenance staff in any case. The suitability of the plant specimens to Chennai conditions is also overlooked. There was a time when tamarind and neem trees were the most common varieties to be seen in our city. These were hardy and could withstand cyclonic weather as well. But now with exotic trees being the norm, much damage is caused. Varieties such as the gul mohur,

though lovely to look at, are the first to fall in the face of strong winds.

The Government, which through its agencies is responsible for the trees in public areas, is no less a culprit. Here too, alien species have been planted, thereby causing mishaps, especially during the rainy season. And the pruning of trees has been more or less forgotten. This has resulted in wild growth, which often obscures traffic lights and signals. Branches sometimes lean on to the road space, thereby remaining potential for accidents. These could have been avoided had there been a proper action plan for tree planting and, more importantly, maintenance.

It is now over a year since the Government of Tamil Nadu promised an Urban Areas Preservation of Trees Act. Such legislation is already in place in Karnataka, Delhi and Maharashtra. The Act would ensure the creation of a Tree Authority which would create a proper policy for planting and caring for trees. As of now, this idea is on paper and has not moved forward. But with the Heritage Act not having moved beyond legislation stage, is this likely to fare any better?

## Ringling it in with cell-phones

**T**he Man from Madras Musings has, during the past one month, spent many a happy hour at *sabhas* and has come away an enlightened man. This is not merely with reference to music, but also audience behaviour. On the latter, MMM has come to the conclusion that you can make out the various stereotypes based on the cell-phones they carry and their usage.

Among these, the elderly invariably forgets to switch off his/her phone or put it onto silent mode. The instrument rings at the most unexpected moments during concerts, adding to the music in the air. The owner of the phone, thanks to either hearing loss or loss of consciousness owing to this being siesta time, or being lost in the music, is invariably blissfully unaware of the persistent rings. Keeping the eyes closed also means that the per-

son is not able to see the angry looks of everyone around. After a while, someone in the vicinity picks up courage to prod the person into the present and whisper (and at times roar) that the phone is ringing and something ought to be done about it.

Denver, Saratoga or Milwaukee that all is well and that the milk did come and what was that? Oh yes, the medicines arrived and had done wonders for skin itch.

Those who are new to the Carnatic environment, and that includes the Chief who is ever an outsider, will no doubt assume that by now the concert would have ground to a complete halt. But that is where they make their bloomin' error. The music proceeds unimpeded, artistes and audience having decided to 'adjust' (fast becoming our national motto – and a word in the Oxford lexicon – 'jugaad') and go on, leaving Methuselah to his devices.

At this point, MMM has observed that these phone-wielding paters/matras divide themselves into two sub-categories. The first disconnects and then turns around and requests someone to put the

about anything. Owners of these are obsessed with leaving behind evidence for posterity and they capture onto the i-pad/tablet anything and everything – the sky, the earth, the traffic and, when in concerts, the music.

There was a time, MMM remembers, when artistes would strongly object to them. Some used to stop mid-performance to make some stern observations to those attempting to record. But now, it appears, they have given up on such blatant trespass of copyright. The recorder, therefore, does this brazenly. But it is often forgotten that it is an unfortunate distraction for everyone, artiste and audience. The device is held up like a mirror, obscuring the stage from view for several among audience. But all this does not matter to the recorder, who is quite oblivious of the nuisance

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

phone on to silent. The other variety is brazen. He/she tells whoever it is at the other end (the caller from Denver) that he/she is in a concert and would the caller care to listen? Whereupon the phone is kept on for the rest of the concert, with the numbers in the audience now added to by one more, who is there in spirit if not in form. This is a good thing from MMM's point of view, for there will be no more calls till the concert is over.

MMM is aware that by sending this piece in, he is going to be cursed by several readers of this column for his insensitivity to the elderly. Let MMM assure them that he is second to none in his respect for the aged. And he is aware that there are several who are comfortable handling gadgets and this is, therefore, not a generalisation. This piece is on those who are not so savvy and, what is worse, give a damn about it. And they do not mind making nuisances of themselves at music performances. To them MMM addresses this missive and is fully braced to receive brickbats in writing. No cell-phone calls, please.

The procedure as described above is repeated, except that willing hands are happy to help from all around. Someone grabs the bag, others rummage within and soon enough the offending phone is found and thrust into the hands of its owner with the terse remark that it better be silenced. But our senior citizen is made of sterner stuff. He first answers the call, speaks in usual stentorian tone into the instrument, assures whoever is in

caused. He/she continues and ever so often keeps making minor adjustments. All this really means that he/she hardly listened to the performance. MMM is of the view that some of them might not even be aware of the concert in progress, such being their absorption in their gadgetry.

A sub-category among the recorders is even more advanced. This one sneers at the use of something so obvious as a massive i-pad. They instead have a cell-phone that does it all – from recording to photography to texting to tweeting to... Seated next to this kind, you are not disturbed by any sound other than the music, but there is so much going on by your side that it almost gives you the impression that you are with a one-man mobile office. It makes you quite tired just to watch it.

Tailpiece

There have been several concerts that *The Man from Madras Musings* attended, where the audience strength was far exceeded by the number of performers on stage. In MMM's considered view, such concerts could be held in the committee room of the *sabha* and not elsewhere. MMM did air such a thought to one of the big chiefs of the season but it did not go down well. It was the view of that chief (not MMM's Chief) that the music season had a higher purpose as a showcase of art and that everything is not to be looked at from commercial angle. MMM says amen to this.

### The recorders

If that is the tale on those advanced in years, *The Man from Madras Musings* now speaks of those who are advanced in technology. This variety comes armed with not just a cell-phone but also what is known as a tablet. And these are not the tablets you found in the antediluvian's purse but those of an electronic variety onto which you can record just

### 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 post-card space, making reading or editing impossible.

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

– THE EDITOR

### CHENNAI HERITAGE

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

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

● I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to **CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS**, as **subscription** to *Madras Musings* for the year 2013-14.

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

Name : .....

.....

Address: .....

.....

All cheques to 'Chennai Heritage'. DD/Cheque should be sent by Speed Post only.

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



**Syllabus additions?**

'The Striped Terror of Bandipur' is how the late Kenneth Anderson would have described the tiger which was creating panic in and around Bandipur-Nagarhole forests recently, before it was captured.

Anderson, who lived his whole life in Bangalore, was a lover of wildlife and a hunter of man-eating tigers and leopards. He hunted in the forests of the then Mysore, Madras, and Hyderabad States in the early 1920s and 1930s.

His descriptions of the jungles of Coimbatore, Salem, Mysore, the Wynad and Nilgiri forests are masterpieces and show the deep love he had for the Indian jungle and its inhabitants.

Books like *Nine Man-eaters and One Rogue*, *The Call of the Man-eater* and *The Tiger Roars*, make wonderful reading for people of all age groups and can be considered classics.

Speaking for myself, they, along with the books of Jim Corbett, have ingrained in me and my family a deep love for the wildlife and the forests of our country.

There is a wrong impression among armchair naturalists and conservationists that hunters like Anderson and the great Jim Corbett contributed to the destruction of our wildlife.

A few years ago when my daughter was studying in the 12th Standard of the ISC stream, I was delighted to see that the narrative of *The Thak Man-eater* by Jim Corbett was in the English syllabus.

A true tribute to the Great Hunter.

I do wish such a honour could be conferred on the works and writings of Kenneth Anderson also, by including them in the English syllabi of our schools.

**S. Rajaram**  
62/1, Tamarai Flats  
M.E.S. Road  
East Tambaram  
Chennai 600 059

**Some reactions**

The latest *Madras Musings* issue (December 16th) has more than one item for me to react to. I shall be brief:

**1. "Readability Please"**

A pill for the physician. The picture on page 2 (What's this) is not readable.

**2. A Search for Identity**

The give and take of culture is a universal experience. Malaysia, a Federation of Sultanates and a professed Islamic State, has many Hindu customs and usages, apart from the fact that the Bhabasa has drawn from Sanskrit copiously. The Sultans' coronations have many Hindu customs. The orders of the Sultans (Federal and State) are issued in the name of *Paduka*. Government communications carry the slogan "In Paduka's Service". (This used to be the practice when I was posted there.)

**3. Tamil Theatre**

My father was an amateur actor with the group called Government Officials' Party, presided over by C. Ramanujachariar. The party had many talented actors, like Murugesu Mudaliar, and

# A Bharatidasan tribute

With reference to the article on the Buckingham Canal (*MM*, December 1st) the canal had literary immortality conferred on it by Bharatidasan, widely held as the greatest Tamil poet after Bharati.

His poem, (translated below by me) describes his trip to Puducherry in a boat on the canal. Not only does he describe the natural scenes on the way in his own inimitable manner but, true to his wont, expresses his rage and sorrow over the plight of the boatmen.

Those who love and cherish the golden days of the canal may be happy to learn this literary memorial to it.

## The Jaunt to Mahabalipuram

About 15 years ago, at 4 o'clock one evening, several friends and I boarded a boat on the Buckingham Canal and reached Mahabalipuram next morning by 9. The time during the passage passed pleasingly. However, a man striding on the shore, pulling forward the boat, and another pushing the boat from behind with a long pole, was a pitiable sight. This song was composed then, describing that sight and some of the attractive scenery.

— Bharatidasan, 1934

At Chennai, a channel,  
To Puduvai extending,  
In it vessels plying,  
Like comely swans floating,  
Some friends dear and I  
Having embarked on one,  
The boat did leave Chennai,  
The pace fast picking up.

Towards the southern way  
As on we did progress,  
All over the surrounding wide  
We spied the sun spray gold.  
Fixing our foreheads bent,  
Gazing at the water clear,  
We rejoiced at the wonder,  
The water – all sky brilliant!

Opening the folio that spoke of  
Zephyr from Sanjeevi mount,  
Some pages of Tamil sweet,  
Having poured, out of love great,  
In the wandering sky and into our ears,  
A comrade did pause.  
Then did the red star  
Us cruelly deceive.

Like a wheel thrown,  
By a bull obstinate sore,  
Transgressing its nasal cord,  
And running into a mire adjacent,  
Did topple the solar round!  
The vast space all around  
Darkness covered! On went the boat.

In the surrounding vast  
A sight we did behold before.  
A palmyra dwarf and a date-palm,  
Drooping, its spathe,  
Speaking words soft,  
Stalk arms leafy entwining,  
Laughter unbounded, did  
The palmyra shower-a-clinking!

Lifting our gaze to the utmost,  
Towards the eastern sky,  
Some light on us did fall,  
The full moon night we noted.  
Where the orbic moon cool?  
We awaited thus its advent.  
Like a king riding a camel  
Appeared the moon by a tree.

O tell! Why the pearly face  
Did turn full rubicund!  
So much anger, O Moon!  
Who up in you did raise?  
Thus we asked and the Moon  
In our hearts retorted, see thou.  
When turn we did and gaze  
Our hearts did throb in pain.

His hands holding the rope,  
we saw a man, pulling the dhow,  
A rope in his hands two,  
We saw a man pulling the dhow.  
Unbearable the sight,  
Along the shore he staggers.  
Back bent, another does,  
Suffering, push the boat huge  
Like a hill, holding a pole  
With one arm, coming behind.

Reaching goodly pleasure, the shore,  
For anyone ever this world over,  
Is by way none but the assistance  
Lent by shoulders strong of toilers.  
Times twenty this declare we.  
The moon, too, its heart rejoicing,  
Did rise, pearly light strewing.

Stood high the lady, Sky,  
A garment of blue round wrapped.  
Orb of night, full white, her seeing,  
And pulling by hand her pearl-string,  
Strewing around, the sides four,  
Heaps of stars bedazzling,  
The Milky Way now fading,  
The shores by morn we reached,  
Mamalla's town, great king.

**Dr. T.R. Suresh**  
Santham Health Centre  
27, Dr Ambedkar Road  
Kodambakkam  
Chennai 600 024

## OUR ADDRESSES

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

*Madras Musings* now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com. Those who wish to intimate change of address can also do so provided the subscription number is quoted. For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: Madras Musings, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006. On editorial matters: The Editor, *Madras Musings*, No. 5, Bhattach Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014.

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

T.N. Pattabhiraman. The female roles were played by men. Their plays used to be stayed in the Museum Theatre, Egmore. One of their most successful and oft-repeated plays was *Nandamaar*.

**T.G. Ramamurthi**  
10, Veerabadran Street  
Nungambakkam  
Chennai 600034

## Pondy Bazaar spirit

Regarding your report on banners blocking roads and pavements (*MM*, December 16th), I recall that the World Bank, a few years ago, remarked that Chennai was a good example of how a city can reduce the area for vehicles and pedestrians!

I hope the Chennai Corporation acts to remove banners in the same spirit as they did good work to remove shops from the pavements of Pondy Bazaar.

Senior citizens like me find it difficult to walk on the roads where VIPs pass through every day because of the banners.

**R.T. Namasivayam**  
namasivayamrt@gmail.com

## • As the annual Festival of Dance begins, a three-part series on the progress from...

# Sadir to Bharata Natyam

It was the Music Academy, Madras, which set its hand to the task of dispelling the cloud of prejudice that hung over the ancient art of Bharata Natya. By refining the performance and issuing an enlightening programme, it has brought the classic Indian dance within intelligent appreciation and thus rescued it from the danger of extinction. The dance now holds a place as an important branch of Sangita. It was largely due to those intimately connected with the executive and academic work of the Academy that the art attained its present wide vogue all over the country.

– The Music Academy's Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1976.

When the Indian National Congress decided to hold its 1927 annual session in Madras during the last week of December, music enthusiasts in Madras, who had already met in 1926 and resolved to establish an institution to foster classical music, wanted to avail of the opportunity to hold an All India Music Conference, the first of its kind in South India. Dr. U. Rama Rao, E. Krishna Iyer and P. Sambamurthy were entrusted with the work of organising the conference. The conference started on December 24th and continued for eight days. At the conclusion of the conference, a significant resolution was passed urging the formation of a permanent institution to promote the cause of music. This was taken a step further when, on January 22, 1928, it was resolved, among other things, that "an Academy of Music be started at Madras". The Music Academy of Madras was inaugurated by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer in August 1928 and it was registered formally under the Societies Registration Act the following year. The Academy started to publish its own quarterly *Journal* from 1930 onwards, and it is thanks to the *Journal of the Music Academy* (JMA) that we get a view of the recent history of Bharata Natyam.

E. Krishna Iyer, one of the Secretaries of the Academy and its driving force in its eventful life of the first decade, was himself a trained musician and dancer. He was eager to introduce the Sadir dance in the Academy's programme but had to bide his time. In the autumn of 1927, the

Council of State in Delhi discussed the motion of a member from Madras for the prevention of dedication of girls as devadasis. The motion was opposed by the then Law Member who held that the existing provisions of the Indian Penal Code were sufficient to deal with the immoral practices that were allegedly a consequence of the devadasi system. In November 1927, the Madras Legislative Council unanimously passed a resolution urging the Madras Government to prepare preventive legislation to stop the devadasi practice. Subsequently, in 1929, the

### • by ARUDRA

Council legislated an amendment to the H.R. & C.E. Act, empowering temple authorities to disenfranchise devadasis from their temple connections and revoke by civil proceedings the manyams (land settlement and privileges) granted to them. In 1930, S. Muthulakshmi Reddy, a doctor and social leader who belonged to a devadasi family, brought a bill in the Council seeking to prohibit the performance of the devadasi dedicatory ceremonies in any Hindu temple. This was the last straw for pro-art progressives.

The Academy, closely watching the developments and, realising the seriousness of the situation, felt that something ought to be done urgently to safeguard the continuity of the classical traditions in dance before the hereditary custodians of Sadir – who belonged to the devadasi community – were forced to give up their role. The Academy took a bold step; on March 15, 1931 it presented on its own platform two dancers known as the Kalyani Daughters. The performance drew only a small crowd, but it was a significant event. It was reported in the Academy's *Journal*, "An entirely new line was struck this year by the Academy commencing its season with a Bharata Natya performance by the Kalyani Daughters of Tanjore. It has almost become a fashion nowadays to condemn the Indian Nautch and look askance at it. In our view this condemnation is least deserved. We are glad that the

performance served as an eye-opener to those who came to witness it. We hope that in the days to come, public opinion will veer round and give unto Abhinayam its proper place." The Academy thereafter continued to encourage the art of dance under its new name, 'Bharata Natyam'.

A controversy broke out at the beginning of December 1932 over the nature of classical dance and the advisability of its revival. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy led the antagonists and E. Krishna Iyer the pro-art protagonists. The English language press made space available for the contro-

versy which helped to open the eyes of the public to the richness of the art of dance. The controversy lasted several weeks.

The decisive discussion on the fate and future of dance was held on the sixth day of the sixth annual conference of the Music Academy. The venue was a

special pandal erected for the occasion to the north of Ripon Building in the then People's Park. The pandal could easily accommodate two thousand persons.

On December 28th the conference devoted the whole day to the 'Nautch Question' as it was called by the self-appointed social reformers. Meanwhile, Krishna Iyer gave notice of a resolution dealing with the encouragement of Bharata Natyam. Copies of the resolution had been circulated in advance and the participants were well prepared for the deliberations. G.A. Johnson, Assistant Editor of *The Madras Mail*, who had been invited to the proceedings, wrote a letter that read, in part: "There is a point which has occurred to me in connection with these discussions which I submit might usefully be raised. This refers to the public performances of the 'Nautch' which I understand many reformers wish to discourage. It is reasonable to suppose: (1) That if it is intended to reform the devadasis, they must be



The Kalyani Daughters

given an alternative profession. Public performances of the dance should provide them with lucrative opportunities to display their talents. (2) If the dance is to be free from its less respectable associations, the encouragement of public display appears to be the best way to do it. Private parties tend to encourage the notion of lack of respectability. Public functions, on the other hand, show the dance for what it is. Lack of respectability might best be removed by attendance at these public functions of respectable people."

After the resolution was duly moved and seconded, as many as 16 eminent persons took part in the discussions.

(To be continued)

## The crucial controversy

In 1932, certain social events, in which Nautch was featured, gave rise to a crucial controversy.

The Raja of Bobbili (a principality in the Madras Presidency) became Premier of the Presidency Government. When he assumed office, a public function was organised to felicitate him and it included a Nautch performance. The Raja took it in his stride.

But the Anti-Nautch movement people were enraged. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the staunch leader of the movement who had introduced a bill in the Madras Legislative Council to abolish the devadasi system, shot off angry letters to *The Hindu* and *The Mail* criticising the Premier for associating himself with the Nautch party. Her ire was laced with pain because on the committee of hosts for the celebration were some of her friends who had given their unqualified support to her goals: even if they had not known that Nautch was to be presented, they had not protested or walked out.

Dr. Reddy was upset too that Nautch was performed at another public function, a garden party given in honour of M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, Kumararaja of Chettinad.

The letters published in *The Hindu* drew a response from E. Krishna Iyer and the issue blossomed into a full-fledged controversy.

Krishna Iyer was not against the right kind of reforms. He agreed that dance should not be used to lure clients for immoral purposes. But he wanted the art to be preserved. He noted that 50 years of the Anti-Nautch movement had nearly killed the art

even while failing to eradicate immorality.

In the ensuing debate in the Press, few supported Dr. Reddy, while many sided with Krishna Iyer. Those who wished to save Sadir from extinction came to be identified as Pro-Art.

Suarajya, an English daily edited by T. Prakasam, the Andhra Congress leader, urged that the precious art be separated from the evil association, but added that this would be possible only if an increasing number of votaries of the art imparted to it something of the purity of their own lives. It was a call for girls from 'respectable' families to take up the dance.

Significantly, a cross-section of devadasis voiced their emphatic protest against the Anti-Nautch movement. They argued that, because some devadasis were living immoral lives, all of them should not be condemned as prostitutes and the dance associated with them as evil. They held that the art would die if it was disassociated from their caste. The twin arts of singing and dancing had been their inheritance and they knew how best to preserve their divinity, they asserted.

In the end, E. Krishna Iyer wrote an open letter to the President of the Music Academy of Madras requesting consideration of the matter and necessary action. "I request you to bring the matter to the notice of the music conference for the necessary lead in the matter and action thereon," he wrote. In the event, the Academy brought the matter before its sixth annual conference and it resulted in a historic resolution which, among other things, resulted in the renaming of Sadir as Bharata Natyam.

## • Into the drink off the City's beach, 1851

# The Madras Balloon

Not very long ago there was an account in these pages of early aviators in Madras. If I remember correctly, a hot air balloon was mentioned. On a recent research expedition to Canberra, I came across a journal kept by a certain Alexander Weynton (active 1841-1860) who was Master of the *Orwell*, a passenger clipper for the "Blackwall Line of Packets to London Direct". One of these three journals was serendipitously open at just the right page for me, the display caption reading "Rescue off Madras 20 Oct 1851". Needless to say, I spent a long time examining the exhibit in the dim light, painstakingly deciphering the writing and trying to identify the Madras landmarks in the hazy distance of the accompanying watercolour. With the exception of a few words that were too faded to read or indecipherable due to the dim light in the gallery, I managed to copy the entry on page 184 of Volume 1 of journal three. Where words were indecipherable, I have provided blanks. I saw and have made no attempt to correct spelling errors in order to preserve the original flavour of Weynton's writing. Whatever was not clear is indicated by a question mark.

"Monday 20th. In the afternoon a hot air balloon ascended from Madras. And the machine after attaining a great height met with a different current of air which took the avionant out towards the sea at a rate rather too rapid to be pleasant. By letting the gas escape quietly it settled in the water about 5 miles from the beach. All the ships/boats in the roadstead went to his assistance in this... in the balloon by attending to his side in ... a pleasant predicament then being felt by fall of dark."

The foregoing entry was added at the bottom of the page after an entry was made for Saturday October 30th. At the top of the page appears this entry, obviously written before noon: "Wednesday 22nd. Employed ... for taking in cargo. Received a load of 93 bales cotton, ... turmeric and beeswax."

"Friday 24th. Cleared lower deck for coolies, 150 of which interesting individuals and am going to take to Mauritius, received on board 350 bags of rice for ... 25th to 28th employed it in the same manner. 1500 bags of ... just enough (for?) the (journey?)."

"Thursday Oct 30th. Early in the morning Mrs. P came on board also. Capt. and Mrs. Gitts (?) the (former of child?) but the Capn. the day after he got a phvic (?) (physic?) on other passengers in Mr Griffiths. he came out to Madras in the ship last voyage, and is disgusted with the country. 1 P.M. here that coolies all on board and ship a perfect hold lifted the anchor off the ground, and dropped down, clear of the other shipping waiting

for a start, on doing which we ... pleasing (?) post (?) of British Ensign Union. 30th the captain came on board weighed and ... all said with a ... .. 8 PM Madras light hardly visible bearing N for G.A. "Friday Oct 31st, Squally unsettled weather with rain until daylight when it partially decial (?) ..... car..... d like blackfellows, jabbering and grinning like monkeys."

Alexander Weynton is described as a "colonial-era" English water-colourist and master mariner who was born in London in 1827. He kept a detailed log, in separate journals, of nine voyages to Australia between 1847 and 1860 on merchant ships. The use of the term blackfellows shows that Weynton was familiar with Australian usage: Aborigines were called Blackfellows, and the word has entered the Australian lexicon as Blackfella. Naturally, the whites are called Whitefellas. Australia as an independent country did not exist then – the various states of Modern Australia were colonies of Britain. They united in 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia. This union, incidentally, gave added impetus to the Independence Movement in India.

Weynton's journals are meticulous, encompassing all details of his observations - ship's log, gossip, sketchbook and his personal opinion on all that he saw. His writing is neat and the entries orderly. Nevertheless,

some words are hard to recognise. Although the books are in excellent condition, their corners reveal that the pages have been turned many times, indicating that they were read and re-read. The entry of the Madras balloon is accompanied by a charming watercolour, the size of a postcard, of the ill-fated balloon floating in a forlorn heap off the Marina, its gondola half-sunk. The sky is overcast, even

demonstrate a similar feat. The first manned flight (tethered) was demonstrated by Etienne Mongolfier in October 1783. All rather academic – the Chinese use of small hot air balloons dates back to the Three Kingdoms era between 220 and 280 CE. General Zhuge Liang of the Shu Han kingdom used small airborne lanterns, known as Kong Ming lanterns, for military signalling.

It is hardly surprising that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to make use of heated air to raise a balloon. During the 15th and 16th Centuries, Portugal was at the forefront of technological invention in Europe, particularly maritime technology, building and map-making, and had had contact with China from 1513, when the Portuguese explorer Jorge Alvares arrived in Guangzhao and established trade with China. Incidentally, the relationship, generally but not always cordial as with any political nexus, lasted until 1999 when Macau was amicably returned to China.

Was the balloon that Weynton saw the same one that is claimed to have taken off from Pondicherry and strayed as far as Madras? I have been up in the gondola (basket) of a hot air balloon and I can tell you with the utmost confidence that once you are airborne in that gondola, you are completely and utterly at the mercy of the elements. Whether or not you are religious, you soon understand the idea of 'putting your trust in God'. There is not much else you can do, anyway. But I was too enthralled by the exquisite beauty of floating in eerie silence above an endless carpet of cloud to think about anything, let alone my safety.

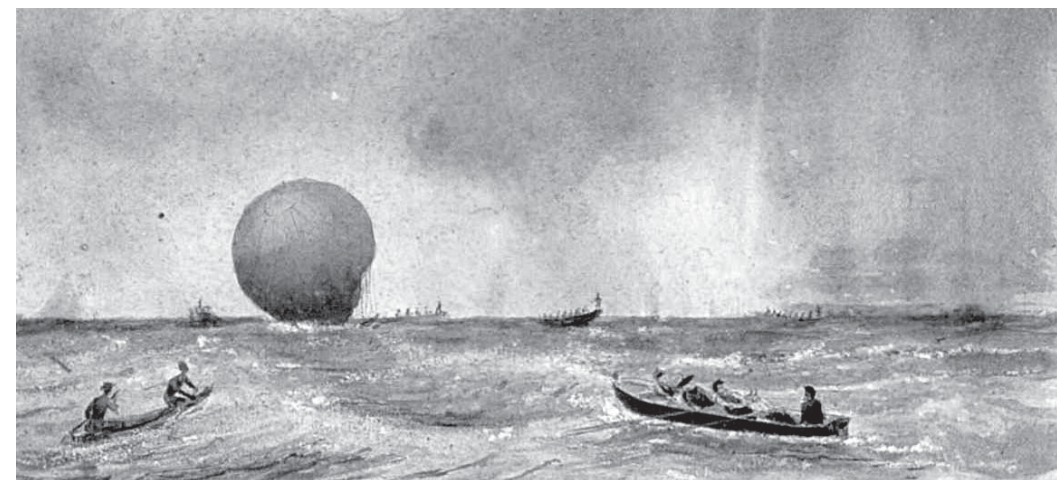
A Melbourne daily newspaper, *The Age*, of May 22, 1861, carried an advertisement notifying the public that "the favourite passenger ship *Orwell*, 1400 tons, A1 at Lloyd's" and "still under the experienced command of Captain Weynton", would sail "POSITIVELY on THURSDAY 13th of June direct for London." Under the description of the first class cabins is the delightful as-

surance that "A milch cow will be placed on board". Weynton was a regular sailor between London and Australia, stopping at ports along the way to load or unload cargo, both human and commercial. Not all ships stopped at Madras between the UK and Australia: they did so only for good commercial or military reason. The more usual port of call was Colombo. In 1851, however, the *Orwell* had good reason to put into Madras and collect turmeric, since it was bound for London via Mauritius, the second-largest of As Ilhas Mascarenhas (the Mascarenhas Islands, named after Dom Pedro Mascarenhas who discovered them in 1507), where an Indian population was growing rapidly once Indian labour was introduced in 1834.

*The Gentleman's Magazine*, July-December 1861 (a copy of which is held at Harvard College Library and my source for the following information) records the death "at sea, on board the *Swiftsure*, aged 33, Capt. Alexander Weynton, late of the ship *Orwell*, son of..." etc. I cannot help thinking how much more we might have been treated to had this man lived longer. Weynton commenced writing his journals in 1851, when he was 24 years old. His journals were organised into two volumes, the first of which contains 71 watercolour sketches and eight issues of a manuscript ship's newspaper "Windsor review", dated August-September 1852. It also includes a list of passengers on the *Windsor*.

But who was this unfortunate Madras balloonist? What was the occasion? What took place in Madras on October 20 in 1851? Or was it a special occasion elsewhere that went a bit too far, so to speak? I wonder what disgusted Mr Griffiths so much that he had to leave Madras after only one season. If only I could get my hands on Griffiths' journal..!

NOTE: Alexander Weynton's journals are part of the "Treasures" section of the Manuscripts Collection held at the National Library of Australia, Canberra.



The Madras Balloon by Alexander Weynton.

### • by Simeon Mascarenhas

forbidding, and serves to emphasise some large Madras buildings shimmering ghost-like in the far gloom. There is little doubt that Weynton was attempting to portray the Chepauk Palace and Fort St. George, but showing true artistic feel, Weynton places the focus on the subject, the hapless balloon. Ships and catamarans dot the water. Weynton obviously had as much talent for painting as he did for observation.

There is a much more to this story than a balloon mishap - it illustrates the extent of shipping and trade that passed through Madras in the mid-19th Century, and emigration from the South of India. Although this journal of Weynton's deals with a sailing from Australia to London, I have uncovered evidence that there was a great deal of trade between Indian and the Australian Colonies in the 19th Century.

There is record of ballooning in Pondicherry – after all, the French began it all. At least that is the popular Anglo/Gallicentric version. The facts are a little different: the first documented balloon flight in Europe was demonstrated by Bartolomeu de Gusmão on August 8, 1709 in Lisbon. He managed to lift a balloon full of hot air about 20 palmos (about 4.5 metres, a palmo being a hand-span of 22 cm) in front of King John V and the Portuguese court. Not until September 19, 1783 did the French brothers Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Etienne Montgolfier

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

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

1. Who was a recipient of the Bharat Ratna who passed away recently?
2. Mary Barra recently became the first female CEO of which major global automotive company?
3. *Beatriz War*, which won the Golden Peacock for Best Film at the 44th International Film Festival of India, is which Asian country's first feature film in its post-colonial period?
4. Who was sworn in for a third time as the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh recently?
5. In a revolutionary decision, which South American country became the first to legalise the growing sale and smoking of marijuana?
6. Who has been named as *Time* magazine's 'Person of the Year'?
7. In a decision that has attracted criticism, the Supreme Court has upheld the primacy of which Section of the IPC banning homosexual activities?
8. Name the veteran actor, best known for his title role in *Lawrence of Arabia*, who passed away recently.
9. How did China's 'Yutu' make space history on December 14th?
10. Which art form conceived by the Manipur king Bhagyachandra Singh in the 18th Century entered UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity recently?

\* \* \*

11. What is the Tamil term for a 'Kangaroo Court', commonly practised in many places in the State?
12. Name the present Commissioner of Chennai Corporation.
13. Who led the British forces in the victorious Battle of Wandiwash in 1760?
14. What is the common name for *Borassus flabellifer*, the State tree of Tamil Nadu?
15. Which is the last and 32nd District of Tamil Nadu?
16. Whose motto is *Swadharme Nidhanam Shreyaha* (It is a glory to die doing one's duty)?
17. In the context of the State's roads, what is SH-1?
18. Which Nayanmar was also called Tirunalaipovar?
19. What was inaugurated when Lord Hardinge "unlocked the doors in the presence of a large and fashionable gathering, amid a flourish of trumpets" on November 26, 1913?
20. What would CORH-1, IR-64, Bhavani or Ponmani (CR-1009) mean to an agriculturist in the State?

(Answers on page 8)

# A further look at our trees

Adding to the article based on 'Trees of Chennai' by Prof. K.N.Rao (Madras Musings, December 1st issue), here is further information on a few popular trees of Chennai as well as of India.

## Neem (*Azardicta indica*)

Its bitter principles were once making headlines as a possible cure for AIDS. India has an estimated 14 million trees, yielding 450,000 tonnes of seeds with 20% neem oil. Neem-based insecticides have toxicological effects on over 300 types of insects. Its oil is said to be effective in the treatment of leprosy and skin diseases, and its leaves are used for treatment of wounds. After extraction of the bitter fraction, the oil is also used in making soap. Azadiractin, a chemical constituent, has insect-repellent properties. The main component of the oil is nimbidin which is very bitter and is used for making several pharmaceutical products. In Tamil Nadu and other States in India, forest departments grow neem on a plantation scale.

## Coral tree (*Erithrina*)

The Coral tree, commonly seen in all parts of Chennai with its lovely red flowers, is quite an experience. There are six species of *Erithrina* popular in India. The spiny variety is used as a standard for growing pepper, and the smooth barked variety used to be grown as shade trees in tea plantations. The seeds are never consumed by birds or animals. They contain hypophorine, a tetanising alkaloid, a very rare toxic chemical, that is more poisonous. The Mexican variety has a powerful chemical yielding that even paralyses the motor system. The extract is a substitute for curare, used to poison the tips of arrows of South American Indian tribes.

Coral trees, or *dadaps* as they are called in the planting districts, are gross feeders.

We had one of them 20-25 feet away from our flats' concrete water tank which had a concrete cover. In about five years, its roots cracked the tank's sides. When we started the repair work, we collected some 20 kg of invasive roots from inside the tank. After the repairs, I wanted our Association to fell the tree so that the

problem will not repeat. Tree sympathisers stopped us from doing that. Four years later, it became a giant tree and this time it cracked the concrete cover of the tank besides the sides, causing bigger damage. More than 100 kg of its roots were found inside the tank. The Association spent Rs. 25,000 to repair the tank and those who had objected to the removal of the tree now agreed to the felling of the tree, which yielded more than a truck load of wood. So this is not an eco-friendly tree for animals or human beings. Chennai should think of making a list of non-eco-friendly trees. Another such tree is the Indian Skunk tree, *Sterculai foetide*, also called the hill coconut. Its pods when dry open fall on people's heads and the tree should not be grown near flats where cars are parked or even as avenue trees.

## Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*)

The tamarind is a very useful and popular avenue tree. Its unripe fruit is a rich source of

tartaric acid which is used extensively in various foods, chemical and pharmaceutical industries and in Indian medicines. The pulp is also used in dyeing and tanning, and to polish and clean metalware and utensils. The timber is used to make agricultural implements and furniture.

It was recently reported that cleft grafting of tamarind brought the tree to yield in four years instead of as long as twenty years.

## Mast tree (Asoka tree) (*Poliethia longifolia*)

A lovely tree, it belongs to the *Anonaceae* family which includes the custard apple (*sitaphal*). It derives its name from its very straight and tall high quality main mint that is used as a mast for ships. It is a misnomer to call it the Asoka tree. Another species, *P. fragrana* is grown to make billiards cues and cricket stumps. Its bark is used to treat scorpion bites. *P. longifolia* is a very attractive avenue tree and



Mast (Asoka) tree.

when planted closely in double rows the trees can make a tall green screen. This can reduce noise levels affecting residences close to main roads and also reduce pollution levels.

These trees host lac insects in North India.

There are six species of *Annona* in India. The powdered leaves and seeds of *A. squamosa* (*Sitaphal*) possess insecticidal properties. Similarly, the seed oil of *A. reticulata*, (*Ramphal*), grown in Northeast India and

The wood is very good for making furniture.

## Mango (*Mangifera indica*)

India has 10.7 million hectare under mango cultivation with Andhra Pradesh having 19.27 per cent of it, West Bengal having 22.31 per cent and Tamil Nadu 5.18 per cent. The productivity is 12, 8 and 6 tons/hectare respectively, with India's average at 8.12 tons/hectare. I have seen wild Mango in the Western Ghat forests. Its fruit is just a seed covered with skin.

There is one huge mango tree near Chandigarh which seems to hold the world record. The tree has a trunk with a girth of 32 feet and branches up to 80 feet long and 12 feet in circumference. It covers an area of 2700 square yards and yields 37,000 lbs (16,760 kg), possibly a world record for any given fruit tree!

There are over 1000 varieties of Mango, but grafting them gives the standard varieties in various regions of India and the world.

Almost all Indian varieties of mango are mono-embryonic. Seedlings raised from them are not true to the mother tree and need to be grafted to the scion of suitable variety.

(To be concluded)

• by K.V.S. Krishna

South India, is used as an insecticide.

## Mahogany tree (*Swietinea mahagoni*)

There is a lovely avenue of these trees in the Theosophical Society, Adyar. During the golden jubilee of the Society in 1925, each tree was labelled with the name of each member country of the Society and sand from the respective countries was symbolically strewn around the tree by the delegate from the country associated with it. There is also one tree in the Chennai Museum campus, much taller and bigger and older, looking great in shape.

## 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](http://www.madrasmusings.com)

THE EDITOR

# M. Krishnan and his Tamil writings

When Krishnan began writing in his mid-twenties, he naturally wrote in Tamil. *Perunkulam House* on Edward Eliot's Road in Madras, where he grew up, was the meeting point for Tamil literary giants of the day. U.Ve. Swaminatha Ayer, Kathiresa Chettiar, Rajaji and Ragavaiyangar, to mention only a few luminaries among them, came by to meet and converse with Krishnan's father, Madhaviah (1872-1925). Madhaviah, a government servant, had taken voluntary retirement at fifty to set up a small press in his house and devote himself wholly to literary pursuits. A pioneer of modern Tamil prose and author of the second published Tamil novel - *Padmavathi Charithram* (1898) - he edited and published two magazines, *Panchamirtham* and *Thamizhar Nesan*. His writings - he wrote prolifically in English and in Tamil - were laced with humour and sarcasm, qualities that were to be a notable feature of Krishnan's own work in the future. Madhaviah was known for his iconoclastic ideas and strong opposition to orthodoxy. This explains why he and his works have been neglected and allowed to slip into obscurity, but that's another story. Krishnan grew up in this ambience in his formative years.

At least six of Madhaviah's children, including Krishnan's elder brother Ananthanarayanan who retired as Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, wrote fiction. I came across a collection, *Mummila* (1944), which had short stories by all six siblings, including two by Krishnan.

Krishnan (1912-1996) started writing in the 1930s, when he was working in Madras and later at the Durbar of the princely state of Sandur in Karnataka. After Independence, spurning an offer to be inducted into government service, Krishnan decided to make a living through writing and photography. Only then did he switch to writing in English. Several writers of his generation were bilingual, having studied in the Tamil medium, including R.K. Narayan who had also started his writing career in Tamil.

The Tamil journal *Silpasri*, which boasted of contributions by all the eminent writers of the day - including Vaiyapuri Pillai and Ra. Pi. Sethupillai - pro-



M. Krishnan.

vided space for Krishnan's work. His early attempts at writing were short stories under the name Ma. Krishnan and occasionally under a pseudonym - 'Kannan'. Krishnan also penned literary essays and an occasional piece on natural history. His short stories of the time transcended the barriers of caste-based culture and had a natural history backdrop, and had much to do with racing pigeons, dogs, and the like. His

in his scheme of things is clearly evident in Krishnan's writings. In fact, in a piece describing his trip to Palani hill temple, he declares himself an agnostic. He was a naturalist to the core, who believed that the laws of nature held the universe together. He would have agreed with fellow naturalist David Attenborough who said, "I think the way life on Earth develops is far more wonderful and astonishing than the account given in Genesis." He once told me that he was more impressed by the quick sprint of a squirrel than a fighter-jet breaking the sound barrier. Krishnan's approach to the world of nature was shaped by this awe of nature's richness and variety. One such piece titled 'Mazhaikalam' (the Monsoon) stands out in my memory.

One of his best pieces was, by common consensus among his readers, 'Nayakkancheri Naigal' (the Dogs of Nayakan Cheri (1950). From the description, the setting appears to be Sandur; Krishnan goes on to describe the behaviour of dogs of

## • by S. Theodore Baskaran

protagonists were common folk: Kandasamy the washerman, or Fakramid the butcher.

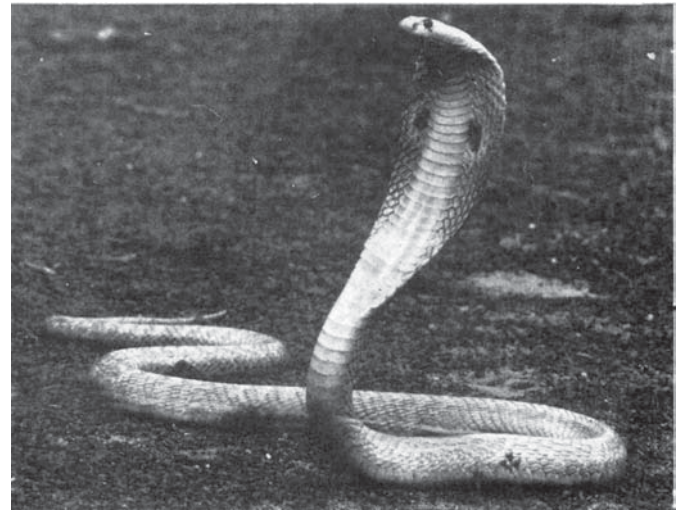
Ki.Va. Jagannathan, the editor of *Kalaimagal*, a monthly, persuaded Krishnan to write on wildlife in Tamil, and a series of his articles were published. Later, he wrote for the popular *Kalki* magazine too. Krishnan began to write about conservation and wildlife at a time when there was little awareness on these subjects among readers in India, much less among Tamil readers. For ten years, till 1957, he wrote regularly in Tamil on natural history: birds, animals and natural phenomena such as rain. Each piece was also illustrated with a line drawing by him, which captured the spirit of the subject with a minimum of strokes. Krishnan, who had worked in the School of Arts and Crafts in Madras for some time, was an impressive artist. His drawings also enriched some short stories and articles by other writers, which appeared in *Silpasri*. He signed them 'Z', the pen name he used for his contributions to *The Hindu*.

That worships, rituals and astrology did not have a place

this *cheri* graphically. The style can be compared to James Thurber or P.G. Wodehouse. Krishnan was a PGW aficionado and both authors were fond of dogs. Describing a dog getting ready for a fight, Krishnan writes: "It growled like a rain cloud."

Krishnan also had excellent grounding in classical Tamil literature. He would quote with ease from works such as *Kalिंगathuparani* or *Puranamooru*. He published a number of essays of literary criticism in Tamil. His translation of a poem from the Sangam anthology (circa 2-4 CE) is evidence of his deep empathy with that genre. The poet is away from home in Madurai; as he sights a pair of white storks flying northwards, he addresses them with a message to his wife. In capturing the spirit of a Sangam poem, Krishnan can be compared only to A.K. Ramanujam. Here it is:

O stork, O stork, O red-legged stork  
With coral-red beak, sharp tapered  
Like the split tuber of the sprouting palmyra,  
Should you and your spouse turn northward



A King Cobra photographed by M. Krishnan.

From sojourning at the southern Waters of Kanyakumari,  
Halt at the tank of my village Sathimutham  
And there to seek out my wife,

In our wet-walled drip-thatched abode,  
Listening to the gecko's whinnying voice

For augury of my return  
and tell her that you saw this wretch in Madurai, city of our Pandya king,  
Grown thin with no clothes against the north-wind's bite

Hugging his torso with his arms,  
Clasping his body with his up-raised legs,  
Barely existing, like the snake within its basket.

Krishnan translated his friend Thi. Janakiraman's famous novel *Amma Vandhal* into English under the title *Appu's Mother*. It was serialised in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and later published in book form. Krishnan wrote poetry though he never published his poems. I came across one of his poems in the Visitor's Book at *Angler's Hut* in Grass Hills, in the Anamalai range of the Western Ghats. The caretaker, Thangavelu, unaware that he was talking to a wildlife expert, had told Krishnan that there were four kinds of tigers in the area and described their distinct patterns of behaviour. This inspired Krishnan to write a *Venba*, a classical Tamil quatrain.

A large number of magazines and hundreds of books are published every year, but writings on natural history are rare in contemporary Tamil magazines and dailies which publish very little on the subject. Even in the scanty news coverage that appears on wildlife, there is confusion over nomenclature, words and phrases dealing with creatures and habitats. As a special terminology for the subject has not been developed, there is practically no discourse on the concepts and ideas of conservation. 'Green' literature is simply absent.

Tamil writings of Krishnan on wildlife should be seen in

such a background to appreciate their value. Krishnan drew heavily from the body of traditional knowledge on wildlife. Written in the first person, most of his pieces are based on his own experiences and observations. He used traditional Tamil names for birds, mammals and plants, which are slipping out of the language due to disuse. The best examples of such writing are the entries on birds with his illustrations for each. He wrote for the Tamil encyclopaedia, the ten-volume *Kalaikalanjyam* (1954). Retrieving the traditional nomenclature and phrases relating to wildlife will enrich contemporary Tamil and this should facilitate a much-needed discourse on the whole issue of conservation.

His writings can be classified into three categories - literary essays, fiction, and articles on natural history. Tamil prose style of the 1950s, of which Krishnan's was one of the best examples, was in many ways much more functional and workmanlike than it is today. The emphasis was on communication, exact and unambiguous, and on concepts or information. Its beauty and appeal lay in its simplicity and directness. The writer did not project himself, but only the idea being conveyed. This is strikingly evident when you peruse articles on science subjects by Pe.Na. Appusamy, a contemporary of Krishnan. Appusamy did not struggle to explain a scientific concept; he did it with such ease and effect. The period in which Krishnan wrote prolifically in Tamil, the 1940s and 50s, was in many ways the golden era of Tamil prose. Other writers like Narana Duraikannan, Swaminatha Sarma and Pe. Thooran were also active. Krishnan's own standards in prose were exacting and uncompromising. This was one reason why he took a dim view of *Kalki's* work.

In the Tamil literary scene, this was the season of redemp-

(Continued on page 8)



**Till January 18:** *1x1 of a kind*, an exhibition of paintings and sculptures in small format by the Progressive Painters' Association (PPA), one of the oldest art organisations in India. It was started by late K.C. Panicker in 1944. The artists include many eminent ones and also some promising new talents most of whom reside in Cholamandal Artists' Village (at Forum Art Gallery).

**Till January 18:** *Idhu Chennai da*, an exhibition on popular culture of Chennai by Arts Management Students (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till January 20:** Exhibition of paintings of Yusuf Arakkal (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till January 25:** *Journey in Solitude*, solo exhibition of Yusuf Arakkal (at DakshinaChitra).

**January 22-February 3:** Group show on Kerala murals by Naveen, Sunil Kumar and

Baburaj (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till January 31:** Margazhi Village Festival 2014 (at Dakshina-Chitra) with the following performances of South India folk art forms:

**Till January 6:** *Chittimela* performance by Kumariya and troupe, Karnataka. Chittimela is a traditional folk orchestra popular in the southern parts of Karnataka. The main performer plays folk melodies on an instrument known as *mukhaveena* and is supported by drums and cymbals, and singers and dancers.

**January 8-13:** *Oppana* and *Thiruvathirakali* performance by Folkland from Kerala. Thiruvathirakali is a popular dance of Kerala performed by women on festive occasions. Oppana is a folkdance form performed traditionally in the Muslim community of Kerala to entertain the bride on her marriage eve.

**January 14-20:** Pongal Festival with *Mayilattam* and *Kavagam* by Raju and Troupe. The Harvest Festival will be celebrated with folk dances such as above.

**January 22-27:** *Lambani dance* by Visvakarma and troupe from Hyderabad. Lambani is a folk dance by tribal women who bedeck themselves in colourful costumes and jewellery. In this dance, the females dance in tune with the male drummers to offer homage to their Lord for a good harvest.

**January 29-31:** *Thappattam* performance by Adhi Vishnu and troupe. In this dance form, a person acts both as the dancer and the instrumentalist. The name thappattam comes from per-

## Headlines & tailpieces

• Not quite Madras, but "when sub-editors nod" it is always good for a laugh, says an anonymous reader who sent this in:

*Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife and Daughter – Dead giveaway!*

*Police begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers – Now that's taking things a bit far!*

*Panda Mating Fails: Veterinarian Takes Over – What a guy!*

*Cold Snap Linked To Temperatures – Who would have thought!*

*Miners Refuse To Work After Death – No-good-for-nothin' lazy so-and-sos!*

*Juvenile Court To Try Shooting Defendant – See if that works any better than a fair trial!*

*War Dims Hope For Peace – Can see where it might have that effect!*

*If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile – You think?*

*Something Went Wrong In Jet Crash, Experts Say – Guess again!*

*London Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide – They sure are on to something!*

*Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges – You mean there's something stronger than duct tape?*

*New Study Of Obesity Looks For Larger Test Group – Weren't they fat enough?*

*Man Struck By Lightning: Faces Battery Charge – He probably IS the battery charge!*

## M. Krishnan and his Tamil writings

(Continued from page 7)

tion. In the realm of fiction, Pudumaipithan's writings have been redeemed and his genius is now being recognised. Simi-

cussion instrument, *Tappu*, that the players beat on as they sing and dance.

Performance timings are 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

### Workshops at DakshinaChitra

For children

**January 25:** Wheel & Coil pottery.

For adults

**January 11-12:** Photography

**January 25:** Numismatics

larly, the essays of Iyothia Dasar, rationalist and reformist, have been salvaged and published in two volumes. Mayilalai Seeni Venkatasami's contribution to understanding the history of Tamils has been acknowledged and his works have been nationalised recently. Madhavia has now earned a special place in the social history of the Tamils, thanks to scholars like Raj Gowthaman (see his *Aa. Madhaiah 1872-1925 Vazhuvum Padaipum*, Tamil, 1999). Krishnan's writings on natural history, his fiction and literary criticism await their turn. I consider his writings on natural history particularly important because very few write in Tamil on wildlife

and nature. In the contemporary Tamil scene the external world seems to go completely unnoticed. Krishnan believed that the identity of a country is not made of just people, but by its mountains, rivers, lakes, forests and all creatures that lie there, and his writings reflected this belief. In his words, this is what constitutes the quiddity of a country.

Krishnan's last work was a novel in Tamil. Described by him as a thriller, *Kathiresan Chettiyarin Kathal* was published posthumously in 1996. Krishnan had done the cover illustration himself, a seated man with a Kombai dog by his side.

(I am thankful to Indumathi, wife of Krishnan, for talking to me about Krishnan and his work.)

**NOTE:** This article first appeared in the now defunct *Indian Review of Books*, December 2000.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Nelson Mandela; 2. General Motors; 3. East Timor; 4. Dr. Raman Singh; 5. Uruguay; 6. Pope Francis; 7. Section 377; 8. Peter O'Toole; 9. It became only the third ever robotic rover to make a soft landing on the Moon; 10. Sankirtana.

\* \* \*

11. Oor Panchayat; 12. Vikram Kapoor; 13. Sir Eyre Coote; 14. Asian Palm or Sugar Palm; 15. Tiruppur; 16. Madras Regiment; 17. Chennai-Ennore Expressway Road; 18. Nandanar; 19. Ripon Building; 20. They are all paddy varieties.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations



Amalgamations Group



ASHOK LEYLAND  
ENGINEERING YOUR TOMORROWS

**Bata**

Bata India Limited



Brakes India Limited



Go Placidly



F.L. Smidth Limited

THE HINDU  
The Hindu  
Group of Publications



LARSEN & TOUBRO

It's all about Imagineering



NIPPO



Rane Group



SAINT-GOBAIN  
The future of glass. Since 1665.



SUNDARAM FINANCE  
Enduring values. New age thinking.



Sundram Fasteners  
Limited



TAJ  
Hotels Resorts  
and Palaces



TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES



TVS MOTOR COMPANY



UCAL AUTO  
PRIVATE LIMITED



YAMAHA  
MUSIC SQUARE

Since 1856,  
patently leaders  
— A WELLWISHER