

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Attention-drawing calendar
- A doyen of Philately
- What's in street names?
- What ails TN cricket?

If Chennai is to be a tourist destination...

“Chennai, in the State of Tamil Nadu (and formerly known as Madras), was long considered the gateway to popular South Indian tourist destinations like Kerala but was overlooked as an attraction itself. It is, however, a national cultural capital and home to several dance and music schools like Kalakshetra for dance and the Music Academy for Carnatic South Indian music, which both regularly hold performances around town. There are also historic sites aplenty, including the Kapaleeswarar Temple, built in the name of the Hindu god Shiva. Fresh buzz makes this city especially enticing: Several major hotels including the Park Hyatt have recently opened, and there is a slew of new and trendy clubs, boutiques and restaurants, including Ottimo for excellent pizzas.”

That is the entry in *The New York Times* against Chennai, citing the reasons for it to make it to the annual list of top 52 travel destinations in the world. Our humble Madras that is Chennai rubs shoulders with exotic locales such as Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro. And in case you thought it came in last, here is another surprise – Chennai ranked a healthy 26 and, what's more, was the only city from India. Move over snooty Delhi, moneyed Mumbai, and bump-tious Bengaluru.

Not all the information is accurate as can be seen, after all the Music Academy and Kalakshetra are not itinerant impresarios. But it cannot be denied that Chennai is a national cultural capital – with religious festivals, art shows, literary events, music and dance programmes and, above all, theatre. If only the weather was somewhat pleasanter! But then nothing can be done about that.

Having said that, and having agreed that Chennai admittedly deserves this pat on the back, let us resolve to make it a better city and perhaps aspire to be Number One on the list. And here are some things

● by A Special Correspondent

we could do to make that happen.

- Cut the poster and cutout culture out. Dirty walls and cluttered footpaths do not make for a good city.
- Manage our traffic better. Let us resolve to respect traffic laws, observe lane discipline and give pedestrians their space.
- Be more polite and display less of road rage no matter how tempting it is. And while we are about it, can we honk a little less?
- Can we have more public toilets so that our populace need not relieve themselves in the open. And, yes, can people stop spitting?
- Can we understand that the right to silence is one of the fundamental rights? Can we therefore tone down the television and radio and, more important, avoid high decibel speakers at public spaces? And, in the context, can we avoid shouting while speaking over cell phones?

- Can we recognise that the footpath is a necessity for walking and easy access and therefore cannot be encroached upon?
- Can we, while designing our buildings, respect the neighbours' space and also ensure that those who are otherwise abled can easily gain access to our buildings?
- Can we have a law to protect heritage buildings? After all, one of the reasons that Chennai has made it to the list is the presence of historic places.
- Lastly, Chennai ranked number one on another scale just a few weeks ago – the national garbage creation index. That does not sound good for a city ranking 26th internationally among tourist destinations, does it?

This is just a first cut wish list. We are sure our readers will have a lot more. If all these fall into place, what more can we want in this, our city?

52 places for the traveller in 2014

(according to the New York Times)

Witness a city in transformation, glimpse exotic animals, explore the past and enjoy that beach before the crowds.

1. Cape Town, South Africa
2. Christchurch, New Zealand
3. North Coast, California
4. Albanian Coast
5. Downtown Los Angeles
6. Namibia
7. Ecuador
8. Quang Binh, Vietnam
9. Perth, Australia
10. Rotterdam, the Netherlands
11. Taiwan
12. Frankfurt, Germany
13. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
14. Fernando de Noronha, Brazil
15. Nashville, Tenn.
16. Scotland
17. Calgary, Alberta
18. Ishigaki, Japan
19. Laikipia Plateau, Kenya
20. Yogyakarta, Indonesia
21. Tahoe, Calif.
22. Yorkshire, England
23. Dubai
24. The Vatican
25. Uruguayan Riviera
26. Chennai, India
27. Seychelles
28. Krabi, Thailand
29. Aspen, Colo.
30. Highlands, Iceland
31. Umea, Sweden
32. Xishuangbanna, China
33. Andermatt, Switzerland
34. Indianapolis
35. Mekong River
36. Athens
37. Barahona, Dominican Republic
38. Arctic Circle
39. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
40. Downtown Atlanta
41. Nozawa Onsen, Japan
42. Subotica, Serbia
43. Elsinore, Denmark
44. Cartmel, England
45. Nepal
46. Vienna
47. Siem Reap, Cambodia
48. Varazdin, Croatia
49. St. Petersburg, Fla.
50. Belize
51. New Caledonia
52. Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Is the Metrorail slowing down?

The news from the Chennai Metrorail Limited (CMRL) front is not encouraging. It is now firmly established that the project may be delayed along various stretches by anywhere between three months and over a year. Which means the city will have to wait till 2016 at the least before this much-touted, and much-needed, alternative public transport system becomes functional. The reasons are the usual – the bureaucracy, slowness in execution, and the tender system for selection of vendors without much due-dili-

gence being done at the time of short-listing.

At the time of launch in 2008, it was announced that the elevated sections of the

nancial year of 2014/15. The project was believed to be progressing according to schedule till September last year when the first rumours began surfacing that all was not well.

It is learnt that while work on tracks and viaducts is going on as scheduled, these being contracted out to big names in the world of engineering, the construction of stations, signals and other equipment on the elevated lines will not be

● by A Special Correspondent

project would be completed by mid-2014 and the entire project, including the underground portions, would be operational by the end of the fi-

(Continued on page 2)

Is Metrorail slowing down?

(Continued from page 1)

completed in time. With the rolling stock already in place, Metrorail, it is learnt, is keen on at least doing a test run. But the Commissioner of Railway Safety, whose permission is required, has not agreed to such trials being undertaken without the rest of the equipment being in place.

The problem, it is understood, lies with the contractors responsible for these allied activities. The construction industry is currently undergoing a severe financial crisis and, consequent to this, the contractors who have been entrusted the civil engineering tasks are going through lean times. At least one of these contracting companies has thrown up its hands, stating that payments due to it are in arrears and, therefore, salaries to its staff have remained unpaid for three months. The contractor company has accused CMRL of not settling bills for several additional works undertaken by it and has cited this as the reason for its finance crunch. CMRL has, however, issued show-cause notice to the contractor and is now deliberating on cancelling the contract. If this comes to pass, it means a further delay as a new contractor will have to be identified through the usual process of tendering, subject to all bureaucratic procedures and processes.

Yet another contractor threw up his hands as early as August 2013. This contractor

was the one responsible for the airport line. With repeated delays, CMRL issued notices for lapsed deadlines and, finally, terminated the contract. A new contractor is yet to be identified, five months after work came to a halt.

The latest development concerns the underground stations. The contractor in charge of this had applied as early as 2012 for an extension of 18 months from the original planned completion date of 2015. CMRL it is learnt, has agreed to an extension of ten months, which anyway puts the completion date somewhere in 2016. The reasons given by the contractor include difficulty in tunnelling, delays in land acquisition, and shortage of space, especially in the Mount Road area. None of these is a new problem and surely all of them stared in the face of any contractor who wanted to take up the job. Yet another reason highlighted by the same contractor points at the inept fashion in which our underground utilities are laid. It has become impossible to locate telephone and electrical cables at the places they were originally meant to be, thereby throwing tunnelling work out of gear.

Surely the identification of contractors requires some background checks on their capabilities? Were any technical assessments done before the contracts were awarded? Who is to blame for all this? And why are we, as taxpayers, footing the bill for delays that have been caused by such bungling?

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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 2013-14 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

Fault lines on a flyover

A fortnight ago *The Man from Madras Musings* wrote about the Royapettah clock tower roundabout and many of you of the MM congregation under the pontificate of the Chief were kind enough to express your appreciation. Fifteen days later, MMM once again writes of Royapettah, this time about its flyover. Though glorified by that name, it is nothing but a narrow strip of elevated road with two lanes, one for each direction of traffic. The service lanes below are eternally in a state of being dug up and so have long been given up as useless. Consequently, there is heavy load on the flyover, all the time.

Early one morning, residents who live along the flyover were woken up to a tremendous sound, followed by the sickening noise of crunching metal. It was a collision involving a couple of two-wheelers, both being in the wrong lanes. Fortunately there was no loss of life or limb. After

it involved blocking one lane at a time, and on the blocked lane a series of small metal humps were placed. A barricade was erected at the entrance to the flyover, which further acted as a deterrent to those wanting to take that lane to go across. But did that prevent our two-wheeler friends from hoping that they could reach the other side? They simply began using the lane that was open for traffic from the opposite direction. Whenever they espied a particularly large vehicle coming their way, they would duck into the closed lane, wait for the vehicle to pass and then get back. In effect, a single lane on the flyover was handling two-way traffic. A week later, the up lane was opened and work began on the down lane. The chaos simply shifted from left to right.

So what, you ask. And MMM can hear most of you muttering that this story ought to have never been allowed in print. MMM has lost it, you

was a gentleman of full habit. If he bulged at all odd spots, his wallet bulged even more. The priest arrived with the plate and the fat man deposited a hundred rupee note on it. MMM, then being a student, merely smiled at the priest. Imagine MMM's surprise when a large garland was placed around his neck, benedictions were sung in full-throated voice and vermilion applied on his forehead. The priest then beamed at the businessman and, pointing at MMM, said that he was extremely happy that he, the businessman, had brought his (the businessman's) son to the temple. "Nothing like beginning our good traditions early, is it not?" asked the priest in chatty vein. He then patted MMM on the head. The businessman was just turning a rather bright shade of purple when MMM decided to leave, garland and all.

That was, as MMM said, several years ago and no doubt

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

trading a couple of filthy abuses, the two who tried to tango but became tangled parted ways. Royapettah went back to its routine.

Such collisions are par for the course. Two-wheeler riders repeatedly find their way blocked by slow-moving vehicles and being the optimists they are, keep trying to move ahead by darting into the lane meant for oncoming vehicles. The major risk here is that of a vehicle suddenly appearing from the opposite side necessitating a sudden zig, which works provided the party of the other part zags in cooperation. The problem occurs when the zig party zags and the zag party also zags or when the zag party zigs and so does the zig party. You get the picture.

In such instances, there is no option but to suffer collisions, rise, check for injuries, and heap choice insults and rebukes on each other. But MMM did say that these two-wheeler users were optimists, did he not? And so despite a number of these zigzag attempts ending up in zigzags and zagzags, there is always the belief that such things happen to others and so why not try and get ahead one more time?

Last fortnight, the authorities embarked on some urgent repair work on the flyover. At the end of the exercise, none, including MMM, was the wiser as to what work was actually done. Whatever it was,

declare, and so has the Chief. But you don't know the end of it as yet.

Last week, a bus made bold to do the same thing. The metal barricade was pushed to a side and bus made the ascent, egged on by passengers, conductor and driver. Halfway up, a metal hump caved in and there was no way the bus could cross. Have you ever seen a bus reverse down a flyover? MMM has, and let him tell you it is not for the faint-hearted.

Mammon worship

These are tough times and *The Man from Madras Musings* being tough gets going – to temples. One of his favourites is the shrine where the Goddess took the form of a peacock to worship the Lord. The priests here are an open book, at least as far as MMM is concerned. A rupee coin on the offertory plate will elicit a pinch of vermilion and a surly look, two rupees a grunt and a pinch of vermilion, five rupees a smile, a flower and a pinch of vermilion, ten rupees a grin, a blessing, and all of the above. Rupees fifty, they say, means a pouch of vermilion. But of that MMM knows not.

What happens when you give a hundred rupees is well known to MMM. This happened several years ago when MMM, then a demure newcomer from Delhi, waited at the altar. Just ahead of him, and blocking most of MMM's view,

the purchasing power of a hundred rupees has drastically come down despite the best efforts of Chief's friend who promised to preserve Bharat Insurance Building and convert it into an art gallery. But be that as it may, the priests too need to make a living and every little bit counts.

That times were bad, however, came home to MMM rather strongly recently when he visited the same temple. At the altar of the Goddess, three priests stood and, somewhat like vendors attracting custom to their wares, were outdoing each other in beckoning devotees. MMM gave his offering to the one who smiled the most, whereupon the others openly cursed their fate and said that the smiling priest had the luck of the devil. Such is life.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings is still chuckling. Apparently, a real estate firm of the city hired an actress as its promoter-model and put up a large hoarding on the outskirts, prominently featuring her face. Under it was the caption, "One thousand satisfied customers." The actress did not participate in the laughter with which this was greeted. Last week, the hoarding was removed.

— MMM



Differing views on trees

Welcome progress

The renovation of pavements on Conran Smith Road, Gopalapuram, started several weeks ago. Work on the project, which took place by fits and starts, has shown some progress, though it's yet to reach finality.

Residents as well as passers-by are now able to walk long stretches on a firm, even surface. The height of the platform is not such that it is daunting. The so-called ramps descending right from the gates of high-rise buildings and shopping outlets are gone, with some level surface made available in the reconstruction. Some of the electric junction boxes that were athwart the pathway have been re-aligned and are alongside the compound walls, parallel to the road. Even where some side roads meet the main road, the raised pavement is there, with ramps created on either side for vehicles to negotiate these junctions.

Though the work is yet to be finished, the renovation project is promising. We trust the concretised surface of the platform won't be dug up all too soon to repair any faulty service lines. To the credit of the authorities, some co-ordinated work with electricity and telephone departments and other service providers appears to have been done.

While the created pavement is indeed a good facility, the utterly thoughtless parking of two-wheelers and cars and other impediments created by humans are worrisome.

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Quality the need

Concrete or bitumen for our roads (MM, January 16th) is not exactly the question. Who lays it, who supervises it, what proportion of bitumen or cement, stones etc. has been used to what thickness, how heavy a roller has been used, are obviously of prime importance. Roads in countries with much heavier rainfall, more heat and more traffic, such as Thailand and Malaysia, don't deteriorate as quickly as our roads do because quality and accountability are the main criteria there.

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I am sorry for the typographical errors of the botanical names (MM, January 16th). However, *Tamarindus indica* is the correct botanical name and not *Tamarindus indicus*, as stated by reader Raman. Prof K.N. Rao, who wrote in *Madras Musings* and the Wikipedia, as well as my reference book titled *Dictionary of Economic Plants in India* (ICAR), indicate concurrence.

Not only are the seeds of the Carol tree (*Erythrina*) not eaten by birds, rodents and squirrels, but its roots damaged the flats main concrete water tank, not once but twice. I wrote about this hoping that our bitter experience will help those who plan to plant trees in and around their flats, or as avenue trees. However reader Raman writes: "If *E. Variegata* pushed its roots into the water reservoir is it the tree's fault? I have not mentioned anything about a water reservoir in my paper. Thirdly, the tree is notorious for its toxicity.

I have also mentioned in my article, in passing, the dangers of growing the Indian Skunk Tree. A few days back I had some visitors and the first thing they said was, "Your flats have a foul odour. Why are your flat owners growing these foul odour trees? Pauline Deborah has written, "The Skunk Tree *Sterculius foetida* is derived from the Latin *Sterculius* meaning 'dung or manure' and *foetida* refers to the foul smell emitted by the tree.

Again, your reader says, "Referring to *P.longifolia* as Asoka is unfortunate. In this connection, I asked a former director of CPCRI (who was its director for 13 years), "Do you know what a Mast Tree is? In Tamil it is known as *nettingam*? He had no answer. But when I asked him, "Do you know what a Asoka tree is? he said, "Oh yes, it is *P.longifolia*. I asked a similar question to an FAO spice expert. He had no answer till I asked him, "Do you know what a Asoka tree is? to which he said it is *P.longifolia*.

Saraca asoca is the Asoka tree and is native to India. It is now grown all over the world. Buddha was said to be born beneath it and, therefore, it is auspicious. Another species, *S. declinata*, native to Java, is also grown in India. However, Wikipedia says, "Other trees are called 'Asoka tree'." A popular tree known as 'false Asoka tree', or even as 'Asoka tree', is *Polyalthia longifolia* and is cultivated to resemble the growth pattern of erect pillar-like Mediterranean cypress trees. It is a popular park and garden tree much used for landscaping in the Indian sub-continent.

The Dispensatory of the United States of America (1918) and other tomes say *Erythrina*, the bark of the Australian species of this genus, *Erythrina broteroi*, is said to contain an alkaloid, *erythrinine*, while the Mexican species, *Erythrina coralloides* DC. bears poisonous seeds in which Altamirano has found *erythroidine*, a powerful paralyzant of the motor system, *erythroresin* and an emetic, coralin and erythric acid. This extract has been suggested as a substitute for curare.

Erythrina is grown all over the world and is not exclusive to India. There are over 130 varieties. *Erythrina Americana* has

cytosine, a psychedelically, but toxic chemical Carol trees. It is listed under 'Food and plants that can be toxic to birds.'

K.V.S. Krishna
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Perhaps readers Krishna (kvskrishna@gmail.com) and Raman (araman@csu.edu.au) would like to continue this discussion directly.

* * *

This is a negative way of looking at trees (MM, January 16th). Any tree will put forward its roots towards a water source. Instead of giving suggestions it is not good to advise NOT to plant a tree.

Erythrina is a legume that enriches the soil and is nectar source for several large and medium birds.

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* * *

Many birds visit the nectar-rich *Erythrina* flowers. Therefore, this is not 'a non-preferred tree' by local fauna. The root issue presented by the writer (MM, January 1st) is a matter of concern. Primarily we have to check the nearness of the tree to the structure. Tree roots do penetrate sumps in some cases. These are very thin feeder roots. The quantity of 100 kg roots penetrating inside a sump only reflects on the poor quality of material used in the construction.

Dadaps are weak trees and are easily blown away by winds. They cannot have a destructive root system unless the tree in question was severely pruned many times over the years, allowing more root proliferation. Planting depth at the initial stages has the foremost effect on future depth of roots and root-related issues. This does not mean that *Erythrina* trees are to be completely avoided in avenue planting. That seems biased. Regarding *Sterculia foetida*, the tree flowers in February-March and matures into a fruit after 11 months. Other trees have the same issue of fruits falling when ripe. The unpleasant odour is only when flowering happens once a year, and that too for a fortnight.

This is a very fast growing tree with equally-distributed branches. It is sturdy and does not fall in a storm even if it reaches great heights. It has graceful foliage, yields itself for nesting, and is maintenance-free.

There are issues with all trees for that matter. People should not treat their own experiences as a matter of policy applicable in general.

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Festivals in changing times

As the Sun moves into the 'Makara' phase, or Capricorn Zodiac, in the astral world, Makara Sankranti celebrations begin in the plains of India. The festival is celebrated under various names and through numerous variations in all parts of the country.

In Tamil Nadu, in its Pongal garb, the festivities are a time of thanksgiving to the Sun God for a rich harvest and an earnest prayer for a bountiful produce in the New year.

In recent years, the Pongal flavour (pun intended) in Chennai has increasingly overtaken the 'Sankranti' aspect. Earlier every home in the city would conduct its own modest pooja to the Sun God with an offering of sweet *pongol* (in a special kind of heavy metal vessel - *vengalam* or bronze *uruli* - to be precise) along with a full-length sugar-cane bamboo and other pooja items. A

mirror would be placed alongside this paraphernalia on the terrace in a vantage position to receive and reflect the full rays of the bright morning sun. As the vessel, bedecked with a fresh turmeric sapling round its neck, brims over with its frothing contents, an idyllic Pongal

cow - decorated with painted horns, baubles and finery - for the usual collection spree!

Of late, there appears to be a quaint urbanisation of Pongal festivities especially in Chennai. Retail outlets and departmental stores are whipping up a new-found euphoria which has re-

changes in the character of festivals, thus adding a boost to the sagging economy.

In the past, the 'Aadi' phase in July was considered inauspicious for acquiring anything for the household or for buying jewels or textiles. The imaginative retailers made capital out of this negative situation by starting the 'Aadi thallupadi' (Aadi discounts) a few years ago. Today, the 'Aadi Season' is no longer considered a low season! On the contrary, Aadi sales generate brisk business!

Akshaya Thrithiya was a low-profile event in the past. Enterprising jewellers in the city, along with World Gold Council, have since many years now given it a new sheen through intensive sales promotion efforts backed by imaginative and persuasive advertising. The movement has gained

• by V. Kalidas

scenario is happily conjured up and it generates triumphant cries of "Pongalo Pongal"!

On the following morning, termed 'Kanu Pongal' (not to be confused with 'Kaanum Pongal'), a variety of rice-mixes is placed on a large leaf on the terrace for birds to feast on - a practice perpetuating a harmonious communion with Nature.

The ubiquitous milkman would come around with his

sulted in heavy shopping activities far beyond what prevailed in the more subdued past! Also, hotels and restaurants are going to town on special Pongal offers and attractive options on eating out and merry-making!

While these social changes are welcome, it is interesting to observe that the advent of high-flying retail outlets, shopping malls and hyper stores has brought about perceptible

(Continued on page 9)

An attention-drawing calendar that focusses on restoration of an ancient mural

The most interesting calendar Madras Musings received this year was one from TNQ Books & Journals (www.tnq.co.in), a publisher of scientific books. The calendar is based on the work by M.V. Bhaskar and his team who are working on a project to restore the murals in a temple in Chengam, Tamil Nadu. The introduction to the calendar narrates the story of the project it is working on: **Reconstructing the Ramayana.**

Each month of this 2014 calendar depicts a scene from the Indian epic Ramayana, as painted on the ceiling of the forecourt of the temple at Chengam, a small historic town that is midway between Chennai and Bengaluru.

The images presented are from the Yuddha Kandam – the Book of War – of the Ramayana. This part of the epic is painted on the central square of the ceiling and it constitutes the only part of the 17th Century murals that survives. The other sections of the Ramayana, painted on the ceiling of the aisles of the forecourt, are lost.

The surviving part of the painted narrative begins with the warrior prince Rama, his brother Lakshmana, and their army of monkeys crossing the ocean to Lanka where they receive assistance from Vibhishana in defeating his elder brother, the ten-headed demon Ravana, who has kidnapped

and taken Rama's wife Sita hostage. The story concludes with Rama's ascent to the throne of Ayodhya, the kingdom from which he has been exiled.

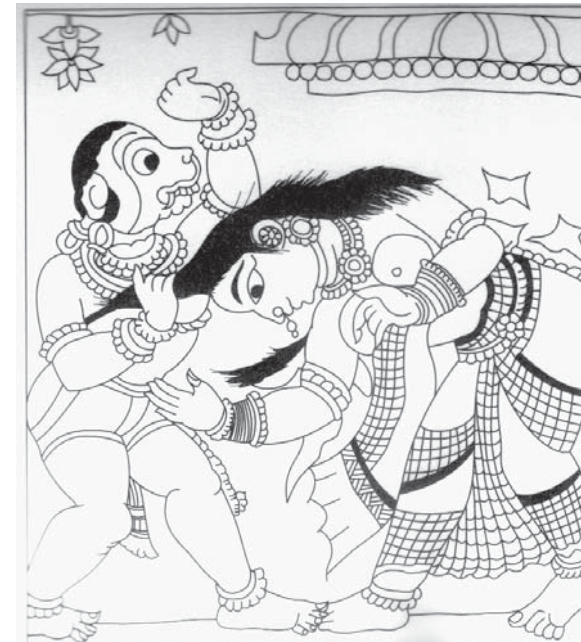
In the three-part folio of each month, the main image is of the original but substantially damaged mural. The translucent overlay is a line drawing that includes the missing parts. An inset on the facing page shows the same drawing in flat colour, as was characteristic of these murals.

The reconstruction effort is a collaboration between the illustrators at TNQ and a traditional painter who is well-versed in the Ramayana narrative. His medium is cloth and he uses a centuries-old resist-dye technique called kalamkari.

The digitisation process started with photographing every section of the mural using an 80-megapixel field camera. The images were then traced both on paper and on a computer using a touchpad and stylus. Both outputs were combined to create the master drawings.

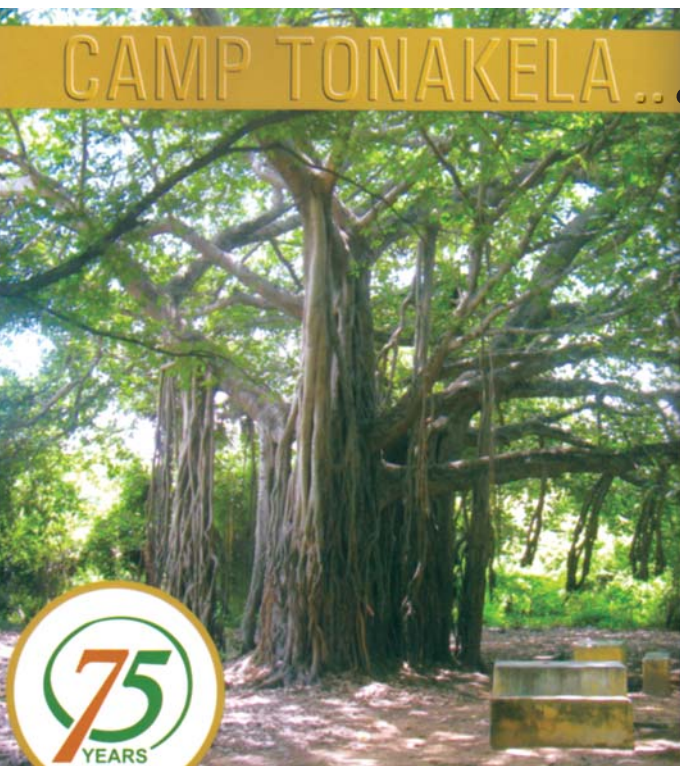
These images represent a part of a three-year project to digitally restore these mural paintings in their entirety.

The progress of the project can be tracked at www.chengammurals.org



Lakshmana and Hanuman look at Rama with shock, as his reunion with Sita turns into a confrontation. Rama doubts Sita's fidelity and refuses to accept her. In response, Sita proposes to 'bathe in fire' – if she is 'pure', the fire god will spare her.

The monkeys are unable to interrupt Ravana, so they attack his wife Mandohari. She is seen being disrobed and tortured in the picture. Her cries to Ravana to come to her rescue force him to abandon his fire sacrifice, paving the way for the final confrontation between Rama and Ravana.



Wallace Forgie, a Canadian, came to Madras to work with the Madras chapter of the YMCA as its Secretary. Though he retired in 1936, he stayed on in Madras to devote his life to working with underprivileged youngsters.

Two years after his retirement, Wallace Forgie set up Camp Tonakela. Apparently, Forgie chose the Canadian-Indian name meaning 'NOT FOR SELF' but it also sounds like 'THANUKKU ILLA' in Tamil,

which too means not for self. Food for thought indeed!

Forgie, with his vast experience in outdoor camping, felt that city-folk needed to be encouraged to enjoy camping. In 1946, 15 acres of land was acquired in Avadi by the Camp Tonakela Association. The Camp's objective was, in Forgie's own words, "to provide a well equipped camp site, conduct training in camping and in the leadership of every form of character building activities."

CAMP TONAKELA... that Forgie built

Forgie also had a vision of helping the nearby villagers enhance their skills in gardening, agriculture, handicrafts and cottage industry. Camp Tonakela was to act as the support centre for these villagers who were interested in developing their skills.

Now, in its 75th year, Camp Tonakela continues to enthral nature lovers who enjoy the beauty and mystery it offers. Camp Tonakela offers 15 acres of greenery with lots of trees and shrubs, a small pond and a covered swimming pool, all within its compound. There are 24 tents, adequate sanitation facilities and a kitchen with utensils for the campers to use.

To get to Tonakela, take the New Avadi Road from Poonamalle High Road opposite Pachaiyappa's College. Just after passing the Dunlop factory on New Avadi Road, there is a black topped road on the left near the Ambedkar statue. This road follows the tank bund until a temple is reached outside Aiyappakkam village. Turn right at this point and follow the track north to the camp. The distance by this route is about 20 km from Madras Fort.

The headquarters for the International Camping Fellowship



Wallace Forgie; and the camp he developed.

is at Camp Tawingo in Canada. Camp Tawingo was founded by Jack Pearse, the former director of the YMCA Camp On-da-dawaks operated by the Ottawa YMCA. Apparently, Wally Forgie founded that camp as well. Dissatisfied with their camp location on Black Bay just outside of Ottawa, Wally suddenly one day packed up some gear, got on the train in Ottawa, got off in Pembroke and biked along rough roads, trails and through the bush till he came to a beautiful stand of Red Pine trees on a bluff overlooking a large lake. "Here," said Wally, "we will make a camp!" And he did, founding Camp On-Da-Da-Waks which means 'Men of the Woods' in the Algonquin language. Including its time on Black Bay, this camping operation was recognised as the oldest in Ontario while it ran (until

1967). Camp Tawingo used to send annual donations to Camp Tonakela.

Forgie came to India as part of YMCA outreach but became an admirer of Indian culture and religion which were much more integrated into people's lives. He left the Y and began this mission on his own with support from camps in Canada.

Wally Forgie was "a kindly man with a lot of integrity and a desire to help and uplift persons he worked with and worked for without regard to religion, caste, etc. in the finest tradition of the YMCA," a Canadian collegian writes. Another collegian recalls, "My earliest recollection of Wally Forgie was during one of his visits to Camp On-Da-da-Waks in or about 1959-60. He was particularly fascinated with

(Continued on page 6)

A doyen of Philately

It is not often that we have had among the citizens of Chennai someone who was nationally acclaimed as an authority in his chosen field of interest and who had often served as the 'National Commissioner for India' (something like the captain of an Indian team) at international competitions held in his field in capital cities abroad. One such rare person was Madan Mohan Das, the doyen of philately in Chennai. In his passing away last month at the age of 90, philatelists in Chennai have lost their leader, who had been a source of inspiration and guidance to them for the past 50 years.



Madan Mohan Das

Philately (or 'stamp collection' in layman's terminology) has been often described as the 'king of hobbies and the hobby of kings'. Madan Mohan Das, or 'Madan Bhai' as he was affectionately called by his admirers, was the uncrowned king of philately in Chennai. He was from a Gujarati business family, originally from Surat, that had settled in Tamil Nadu over three centuries ago. The family was initially based in Srirangam and was known for the gifts and endowments made by the family members to the Ranganathaswami temple there. Later, they shifted to Madras and settled in Sowcarpet. Madan Bhai's father was a prosperous shipping agent.

with the Indian Bank in Chennai in 1948. His job took him to Bombay in 1950 which was then, as now, the capital of philately in India. He made friends with the well-known philatelists of that era in Bombay, like J.N. Cooper, R.F. Shroff, R. Wadia and Dhirubhai Mehta. He learnt from them all the subtleties and refinements of 'philately' (as different from mere 'stamp collecting'). He

by G. Ram Mohan

soon developed special thematic collections of his own.

He first developed an interest in collecting stamps known as 'Indian Classics' – a term used to describe early issues of stamps and rare stamps over 150 years old. It was, obviously, very difficult to come across material for such a collection. But Madan Bhai scoured the market with such vigour and enthusiasm that he soon had a sizeable collection of Classics.

Next, he turned his attention to an even more difficult area of collection, known as 'Indian Postal History'. This is a collection of items from the pre-stamp era. They are exotic items like



Image of 1854 Lithograph which Madan Bhai was an expert on.



1873-84 cancellations.

handstruck stamps embossed on sealing wax, wax wafers, handstruck markings applied directly on letters, embossments made on paper and so on. The East India Company, during the latter part of 18th Century and the first half of 19th Century, used such items to serve the same purpose as printed postage stamps, before actual postage stamps came into use in 1854. Here again Madan Bhai succeeded in collecting many of the rarest of rare specimens.

Madan Bhai then took up a deep study of the lithography of early Indian stamps. Lithography is the process of printing stamps using smooth-surfaced metal plates known as dies. In the early days of printing of stamps the dies would be changed as they wore out, and there would be minute variations in stamps from

one die to another. Madan Bhai's expertise in the field was such that he could detect the die of any stamp by studying the minutest details that would not be perceptible to an untrained eye. He collected specimens of various die casts reflecting different variations.

Over the decades, Madan Bhai won many gold medals for his collections of classics, postal history and lithography, at various philatelic competitions held at the State level as well as at the National level. He became the

(Continued on page 6)



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

1. In which Punjab city did India's first and the world's second 'Climate Change Theatre' open recently?
2. How did ISRO make history on January 5th with the launch of the GSLV-D5?
3. Who won the coveted Compton-Miller Medal for being the player of the Ashes series which Australia swept 5-0?
4. Name the start-up that recently became the first Indian entity to be bought by Facebook.
5. Who is the latest male footballer to win the FIFA Ballon d'Or and which legend was given an honorary award?
6. Name Israel's former premier, one of the nation's most influential figures in history, who died on January 11th, seven years after he went into a coma.
7. Which is the only Indian city to feature (at No. 26) in New York Times list of 52 Places to Go in 2014?
8. Which Asian country recently tested out a new hypersonic missile vehicle, dubbed the 'WU-14, that has top speeds of Mach 8 to 12?
9. In which Olympic sport held recently in Patna did Sanil Shetty and Ankita Das win their maiden National singles titles?
10. Which Indian railway station's platform No. 1 has become the world's longest rail platform in the world?

11. Name the Tamil daily that was started in December 1917, with Tiru Vi Ka as its editor, to echo the views of Annie Besant's *New India*.
12. In which locality in Madras were the first experimental railway lines in the sub-continent laid in 1836?
13. Which edifice built, it is believed, by Paul Benfield in the 1760s, considered the first example of the Indo-Saracenic architectural style in the country?
14. What was started in 1925 by Poothoor Vaidyanatha Iyer?
15. After which divine being was Madras first government aircraft christened?
16. From whom did the John Company rent the village of Triplicane in 1676?
17. Which Asian scholar was given the Thiruvalluvar Award recently?
18. Who was hailed as 'Lion of Shencottah' and 'Nataka Chakravarti'?
19. What natural formation in Chennai is spread over about 42,000 square feet and has a canopy circumference of 753 feet?
20. Which medical institution of repute in Chennai was the brainchild of Mary Anne Scharlieb?

(Answers on page 10)

Till February 23: Water Colours by Gayathri (at Dakshina-Chitra).

February 7: Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra on the big screen playing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Piano Concerto in G major No. 17 K.453', and Dimitri Shostakovich's Symphony No.11 in G minor 'The Year 1905'. Anil Srinivasan, the best-known classical pianist in Chennai, will introduce the concert (at Goethe-Institut, at 7.00 p.m., by invitation).

February 7: Mahaphon Clang, Indo-German improvised music with Ramesh Shotham: Percussion, voice; Jan F. Kurth: Voice; Matthias Kurth: Electric Guitar; Demian Kappenstein: Drums, percussion, objects; lutz Streun: Tenor saxophone, Bass clarinet, Electronic effects.

Mahaphon Clang is a young German group that teams here with internationally renowned percussionist Ramesh Shotham. Each concert will be unique: the music will be composed and rearranged by the musicians on stage, in interaction with city, audience and space. The music is inspired by classical South Indian and up-to-date improvised music by Free Jazz, European avant-garde and Indian popular music styles, such as Tamil Pop, Bhangra (Punjabi) Beat, Bollywood, as well as Dubstep, Funk and many others (at Goethe-Institut, at 7.30 p.m.).

February 8-16: Glass sculpting by Anjali Srinivasan (at Dakshina-Chitra).

Doyen of Philately

(Continued from page 5)

best known name among the philatelists of Chennai.

In 1956 he, along with his younger brother Balakrishna Das, gathered together a group of enthusiastic philatelists of Chennai and formed the South India Philatelists' Association (SIPA). His old friend Varadaraja Chettiar joined him in the founding of SIPA. The first meeting of the six founding members was held in a church in Broadway on December 30, 1956 with, literally, the blessings of the pastor of the church.

In 1980, SIPA started publishing a bi-monthly newsletter on philately called the *SIPA Bulletin*. Madan Bhai headed SIPA and was editor of the *Bulletin* for many decades. SIPA is an active body today with nearly 650 members from all over India. It continues to actively serve the interests of philatelists. The members meet regularly on the second Sunday of every month at the exhibition hall of Anna Salai Post Office. The *SIPA Bulletin* is now published as a quarterly.

Madan Bhai served on the Philatelic Committee of the Government of India for some

February 12: A *King's Journey*, a puppet show. German puppet theatre company Handgemenge tells the story of a king who is forced to go on a hazardous voyage. He is faced with a number of strange problems for which he finds equally unusual solutions. A *King's Journey* is a shadow play that uses innovative lighting techniques to create a universe of surreal landscapes and encounters (at Dakshina-Chitra).

February 13: *Rhythm Is It*, with Viola Mokrosch and Rhapsody, a children's concert organised by Goethe-Institut.

February 26-March 10: Paintings by Dakshinamurthy (at Dakshina-Chitra).

February 28-March 9: *Puppet Festival 2014*. Three groups – Calcutta Puppet Theatre, Tripura Puppet Theatre and Ramakrishna Kottabommalattam – will hold performances for visitors. The groups will also hold a workshop that will focus on developing creativity and improving folk media skills (at Dakshina-Chitra).

March 14: Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra on the big screen featuring Johannes Brahms 'Symphony No.3 in F major'; Georg Friedrich Haas: Premiere of a work commissioned by the Berliner Philharmoniker Foundation together with the Carne-

years. He also served on a number of occasions as a member of the jury charged with judging the entries at national level philatelic exhibitions. He was selected twice as the philatelic National Commissioner for India in which capacity he represented India and presented the Indian entries at two international philatelic exhibitions – one held in Bangkok in 1993, and the other held in Seoul in 2004.

Philatelists of Chennai owe a deep sense of gratitude to Madan Bhai for two other great services he rendered them. The first was that he was instrumental in getting a special counter established at the Anna Salai Post Office for philatelic items. The counter is housed in the old Electric Theatre hall and has facilities for philatelists to sit and browse through the materials available for sale before making their purchases. The second was that he was the force behind the allotment of a hall at the same Post Office for the display of collections of local philatelists. He could achieve both these objectives thanks to the active cooperation and assistance of many dynamic Chief Postmasters-General.



gie Hall, New York; and Claude Debussy's 'La Mer'. Anil Srinivasan, Chennai's best-known classical pianist, will introduce the concert (at Goethe-Institut, at 7 p. m., by invitation).

* * *

February 8-16: *Art Chennai Festival*. Some of the events are listed below:

February 8: Auction preview of Modern and Contemporary Indian Art (at Hyatt Regency, between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.).

February 9 onwards: Raghu Rai's *India*, a photo exhibition (at Gallery Veda on OMR).

Curiouser and Curiouser by the Karuppu Art Collective (at Cholamandal Artists' Village).

February 10: *Reflections on Grace*: International Photo Fest (till February 23 at IIT Madras).

Parvathi Nayar's show *The Ambiguity of Landscapes* (till March 12 at Gallery Veda).

February 11: *Role Models & Power Relations*, a photography exhibition (till February 16 at Elliot's Beach).

Signals, Signposts, Voyages from the Madras Movement (till February 28 at Sarala's Art Centre).

A camp that Forgie built

(Continued from page 4)

the many pine cones scattered about the camp property and was quite intent on taking a number of them back to Madras. The other thing I recall is the very large and lit cigar he had stuffed in the side of his mouth."

The Murugappa group has long been associated with Camp Tonakela. It was in the early 1950s that Slater of Tube Products of India, Avadi, and his wife helped to run the medical centre at the Camp.

For decades, TI Cycles and Tube Products utilised a camp site for official get-togethers and meetings. The workers' union

February 12: Vintage Vignettes, a retrospective exhibition on Chennai (till February 16 at Marina Beach).

February 13: *Intallation – Shop Lifting* by Mithu Sen (till February 26 at Express Avenue).

Bright Noise, an art exhibition (till March 8 at Lalit Kala Akademi).

February 14: *Art Assemblage*, an exhibition of visiting galleries (at Arts and Soul)

Discussions at the Hyatt Regency:

The Future of Tradition (2-3.30 p.m.)

The Future of the Museum (3.45- 5.15 p.m.)

February 15: *Deep (skin) Skin Deep* (at Park Hyatt from 5.30 p.m. onwards)

Discussions at the Hyatt Regency:

The Future of the City (10 a.m.-11.30 a.m.)

The Future of Painting (11.45 a.m.-1.15 p.m.)

The Future of Art (2 p.m.-3.30 p.m.)

* * *

Workshops at DakshinaChitra (For details: 98417 77779)

For adults

February 8-9: Macrame Wall Hangings.

February 20-21: Glass sculpting

February 23: Saree draping

For children (8-14 years)

February 25: String Art – puppets made with jute coir.

also used to make use of this facility, which they still do. Four generations of Chandhoks of the Upper India Group have been associated with the running of Camp Tonakela.

In a month, nowadays, over 1200 campers, 800 picnickers and 1000 swimmers use the Camp's facilities. Day-to-day expenses are met by the income from camps, picnics and swimming. Capital expenditure has to come from donations. (Compiled from commemorative souvenir *Camp Tonekela 1938-2013*.)

Note: For more information contact the Director (Tel: 72000 58476) or the Camp (Tel:2655 0261).

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Saviour of a dance in distress

Some persons fight for the right causes, win battles, ensure that their achievements yield benefits to society, shine in well-deserved limelight, but then disappear into the shadows of time, leaving succeeding generations hardly aware of their place in history. E. Krishna Iyer was such a fighter, victor and luminary who is now a half-forgotten man. He played a decisive role in the renaissance of Tamil Nadu's classical dance and its transformation from Sadir (aka *Dasiattam*) to Bharata Natyam.

Krishna Iyer was born on August 9, 1897 in a village in Tirunelveli District. The eighth of 14 children, he was given in adoption to a land-owning middle-class family in Kallidai-kurichi, a village in the same district.

The terrain, tradition and the time in which a person is brought up foster latent talent and aptitudes. Kallidai-kurichi where E. Krishna Iyer (E.K.) was brought up was once called the 'Brahmin Chettinadu' by a wisecracking Alladi Krishna-swamy Iyer, presumably because it was noted as much for its considerable number of rich families with large tracts of land or engaged in hundi business and handloom cloth trade as for its orthodox and traditional culture. Every summer, its rich families conducted a number of marriage functions. In those times, marriages used to be celebrated over four days. And no wedding of a wealthy family was complete without high class music and a dance performance. E.K. grew up in such an atmosphere and from a young age acquired a taste for music and dance.

Krishna Iyer joined Madras Christian College in 1914. Then he studied in the Trivandrum and Madras Law Colleges. While he was at the Law College hostel in Trivandrum, an amateur dramatic institution requested him to play one of the leading female roles in their to-be-staged play, his looks and considerable musical talent displayed in college having been noticed. The play was Sambanda Mudaliar's *Sarangadhara* and the role was that of Ratnangi. Some days after the play was staged, he was pleasantly surprised to read good comments about his histrionic talent in the local press.

Spurred by the achievement, E.K. decided to undertake systematic musical training. He studied with a couple of violin

vidwans in Trivandrum and Chennai. He also started to attend all music concerts of note and absorb the finer points.

E.K. took his law degree in 1921 and apprenticed with M. Patanjali Sastri, who later became a judge of the Madras High Court and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. After being called to the Bar in 1922, E.K. developed a good practice both on the original side and the appellate side of the Madras High Court.

The next year he was invited to join the Suguna Vilas Sabha, the premier theatrical group of the time, which was led by P. Sambanda Mudaliar, the architect of modern Tamil theatre. According to Mudaliar,



E. Krishna Iyer.

E.K., besides being an actor of ability, was also a male-dancer whose performances were noteworthy.

E.K. was inspired to become a dancer by the example of one Rangavadevelu of the Suguna Vilas Sabha who was the first male dancer to don and perform in female costumes. E.K. got his chance to take on this new role when he was chosen to act the part of Malavika in Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*. The part required him to act, sing as well as dance. In preparation for the dance sequences, he learnt Sadir from a celebrated dancer, Madurantakam Jagadambal.

Learning about the dancing talents of E.K., the great *natya-charya*, A.P. Natesa Iyer, who was well-known for his teaching of solo Sadir, besides Bhagavata Mela and Harikatha Kalakshepam, offered to train the young man systematically in Sadir. E.K. was only too happy to acquire such a master who was known popularly as 'Abhinayam' Natesa Iyer. When the training was over, Natesa Iyer had one request, namely that E.K. should spread the art and restore its dignity.

E.K. had a well-proportioned and supple body. This aided him to obtain distinction as a dancer and he made his mark quickly. But all his performances were benefit shows in aid of charitable causes or institutions. At one place the audience would not leave the hall when the show was over till E.K. removed his wig as they had been betting among themselves on whether the dancer was a man or a woman. E.K. who was in the prime of his youth danced exactly like a traditional female dancer and there was good reason for the betting to take place.

Even from the first years of the Music Academy, E.K. was eager to introduce dance in its programmes. T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, who later became a judge of the Supreme Court, has recalled how he and most of the other members of the Academy opposed E.K.'s attempts.

But, although very eager, E.K. was not impatient and he bided his time, awaiting a suitable opportunity. When he was incarcerated for political activity, the Academy in its *Journal* reported the event and said: "By his enforced absence, the Academy has been very greatly handicapped in its activities and the histrionic world, wherein Mr. Krishna Iyer had made a name, has had a sudden gloom cast over it. It is however some consolation to us to learn that the Government of Madras has thought fit to recommend him to be placed in the 'A' class (of prisoners) and that he will be back amidst us in November."

E.K. did not idle his time away while in prison. He met many a leader there and tried to convince them of the need to revive the art of dance. Most of them agreed with him.

In 1932, after E.K. fought a crucial battle in the Press with Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the staunch Anti-Nautch leader, he moved and succeeded in getting approval for his resolution at the sixth annual conference of the Music Academy for renaming the dance known till then as Sadir, *Dasiattam*, etc. as Bharata Natyam. This small step of the Academy would later turn out to have been a great leap for the most outstanding classical dance of India.

In the early 1930s, E.K. started yet another facet of his career and became a music and dance critic as well. His reviews were published in various

periodicals. Khasa Subba Rao, a founder-editor of *Swatantra* which later became *Swarajya*, has pointed out that when E.K. took up this new line, there were no readymade technical terms in English for use in dealing with Indian arts. E.K. had to improvise a new vocabulary to do justice to his assignments. The public and artistes alike thought that E.K. was an impartial critic.

As one of the Secretaries of the Academy, E.K. invited Rukmini Devi to attend a dance recital of Meenakshisundaram Pillai's disciples on New Year's Day, 1935. He was no stranger to the 'Adyar amma'. She remembered his coming to the school founded by her husband Arundale and Dr. Annie Besant and teaching Bharatiar's songs to the students. After seeing the dance, Rukmini Devi decided to learn the art herself. According to her, she consulted E.K. and he showed great interest in her desire to learn the art. Pandanallur Muthiah Pillai, son of Meenakshisundaram, had recorded that his father was reluctant to accept Rukmini



E. Krishna Iyer as Malavika.

necessary. For example, he felt that the listening public was getting turned away by elaborate exhibitions of punditry. He argued for the eschewal of pedantry and the reduction of the time given to the all-too-elaborate *ragam-tanam-pallavi* in *kutcheris*. In fact, he argued the case for limiting the typical *kutcheri* to three hours. His proposals triggered a fierce debate in the columns of *The Hindu* in 1929.

E.K. was involved next in the controversy over Tamil Isai. On the seventh day of the 1931 conference of the Music Academy there was a discussion on the language of music lyrics. T.V. Subba Rao, an Academy stalwart, moved a resolution with the following text:

"This conference of the Experts of the Music Academy, Madras, is emphatically of opinion that it should be the aim of all the musicians and lovers of music to preserve and maintain the highest standard of classical Carnatic music and so no consideration of the language should be imported so as to lower or impair that standard."

E.K. was for a resolution that would reconcile the opposing points of view expressed in the debate. He was for encouraging compositions in neglected languages without prejudice to classical standards. His suggestion was not accepted and the official resolution was approved by the house with only one member dissenting.

E.K. belonged to the social-section of the Indian National Congress and his concern was always for the cultural welfare of the common people. That was the reason why, in his later endeavours, he concentrated on reforming Bhagavata Mela and rescuing the folk heritage. But even then he did not forsake Bharata Natyam.

In the eventful life E.K. received many honours, awards, titles and tributes. The best compliment received was from Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, his one-time opponent. Sending a

● by Arudra

Devi as a disciple but E.K. prevailed upon him to do so. E.K. was the happiest man when the great guru agreed, inasmuch as a new convert to his faith could learn from the best tutor there was. E.K. considered Rukmini Devi's success important since she could win friends and influence other people with her passionate advocacy and example. Since she was already a well-known personality and was connected with the prestigious institution of the Theosophical Society, she could, he reasoned, bring the desired respectability to the dance.

In 1936, E.K. did another great service to Bharata Natyam. He was, at that time, also the correspondent of the Teachers' College of Music started by the Music Academy. He arranged for Kattumannargudi Muthukumara Pillai, a first-rate master of the authentic dance tradition, to teach there.

E.K.'s passionate interest in preserving and promoting dance was not, however, an exclusive preoccupation. He was a keen student of trends in classical music and devoted his attention also to introducing reforms when he felt they were

(Continued on page 8)

A great romance cut short

(Continued from
last fortnight)

Destiny disengaged Kittappa from the winning scenario of Kannaiah's company and catapulted him into Colombo in the early months of 1926. A dusky southern maiden of 18 called Sundarambal had been making waves there, bowling over people with her powerful singing and assertive personality. The expectation was that Kittappa would prove a powerful foil for her, something that seemed to have proved elusive in her career till then. Sundarambal had been warned not to pair with Kittappa; he was too overwhelming a presence and her singing would pale before Kittappa's. And Kittappa himself, for his part, was asked not to act with an upstart actress whose attempts to find a male foil had led to audiences hooting the actors out.

Both seemed to have brushed aside the warnings, for one fine morning Kittappa turned up at Sundarambal's residence in Colombo. Even as Sundarambal's mother Balambal announced the arrival of a 'royal personality' to Sundarambal, Kittappa walked in and sat down by her side. What temerity to enter a woman's bedroom and then to seat himself on her bed, thought Sundarambal. But Kittappa wasn't allowing her time to react. He said that he needed rehearsals with her. Sundarambal replied that there was no need for rehearsals. "My songs are of a different kind," Kittappa remonstrated. "I will manage," said Sundarambal, holding her own. "You will be deceived," replied Kittappa. "Let's see who is," retorted Sundarambal. One does not know what Kittappa's reaction was to this first meeting, but we have Sundarambal's. She was bowled over, she felt her *gandharva* had sought her out. "What a handsome mien! What clarity of speech," she exulted.

They were a hit with audiences from the word go. Unlike the panoply of special effects and picturesque scenes that Kannaiah marshalled, the Kittappa-Sundarambal stage plays were like 'special' dramas which gave importance to star actors and their sterling performances rather than stagecraft and visual grandeur. They complemented each other musically, with Kittappa's high pitched singing (in scale G or even A) easily matched by Sundarambal. If Kittappa sang like a maestro, Sundarambal had the self-confidence to cross swords with him with her ringing voice and clear diction. The chemistry,

that resulted when the duo sparred verbally with retorts and repartee, endeared these special dramas to the fans. The audience lapped up the live thrills of their extempore conversational combat.

Their relationship had gone to its next stage too. One day, Kittappa had arrived at Sundarambal's home and declared his love for her. Sundarambal was in love with him, too. He was 20 and she was 18. After she extracted that most predictable promise – that he would never ever leave her – they were said to have married quietly in a temple ceremony at Mayuram in the beginning of 1927. She was soon pregnant, and insisted in letters she wrote to Kittappa that he must make arrangements for the *valaikappu* ritual (bangle ceremony for expectant mothers). But Kittappa was no-

• by Vamanan

where in sight when she gave birth to a male child and not even after the baby died ten days later. Sundarambal knew that he had been married with great fanfare in 1924 to 11-year-old Kittammal, daughter of a mirasdar of Tirunelveli, at a gala function held in the huge bungalow of Paramanandadas Chotadas in Tondiarpet. Sundarambal knew she was the other woman, but such was her adoration of Kittappa and her knowledge that he too loved her deeply that she was prepared to make generous allowances to him.

Meanwhile, relatives on both sides wanted them apart. Misunderstandings grew, with Kittappa suspecting Sundarambal's loyalty and Sundarambal asking him to desist from his flippant charges lest the skies cleave and shower brimstone on him! But the two got together in a few years and toured the South to stunning effect. Together, they helped the national cause. The salt satyagraha and civil disobedience movement had caught the imagination of the people and Kittappa contributed in many ways to it.

Other developments in Kittappa's personal life seemed to have queered the pitch for him. The death of his mother Mee-nakshi, to whom he had been very closely attached, affected him deeply. Even before he could get over the loss, Appadurai Iyer, his eldest brother, died. Appadurai had been a

father figure to Kittappa who looked up to him. It was said that it was Appadurai who kept Kittappa away from that most common failing of stage actors of the day – booze. With Appadurai's death, Kittappa was left to look after himself. There was no one to look up to.

Despite not going to school, Kittappa was no uneducated stage actor of his time. He had learnt to speak, read and write Tamil, Telugu and English. He had such a powerful memory that one look at a lyric was enough for him to memorise it. His power to absorb music was uncanny. He was no lotus eater but a strapping young man raring to go. He cycled, swam, played cricket and football, and was a dashing driver of automobiles. He made tons of money, but never touched a wad of notes. He would have others spend it for him, never asking for accounts. He was no credulous fool though, and could see through deceit easily. He was generous to the members of his large family, and his house in Shencottah was more or less a dining hall open to all. He treated his servants like friends. How did a man of such values and character fall prey to alcohol?

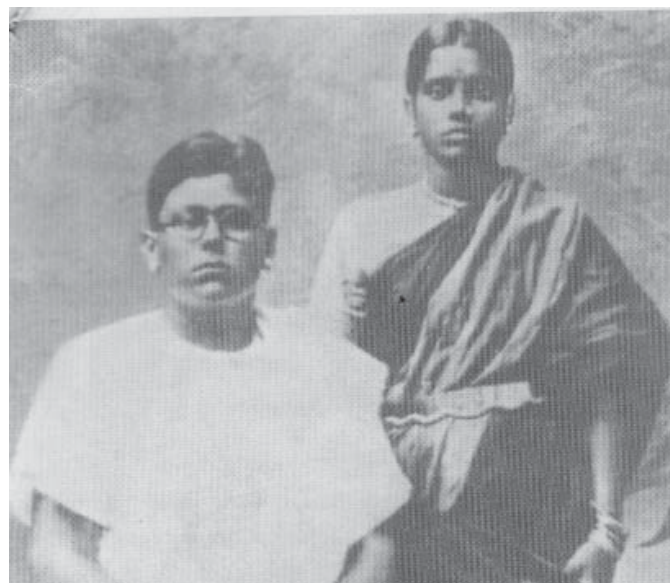
Kittappa it seemed, needed to imbibe spirits for his spirited singing. He was said to keep a jug of hot water fortified with liquor and make a clean swipe of it before launching into a high pitched *Amma Ravamma* or *Evarani*, his entry song. Given the charged atmosphere of the stage, it seemed quite the natural thing to do. But for a man who was swinging between two women and was trying to beat back the angst of losing

Saviour of a dance in distress

(Continued from page 7)

message for his 61st birthday celebration, she said that E.K. had been devoted to a worthy cause and had done a great service to the South Indian art of Bharata Natyam by regenerating and restoring it to its original purity and dignity. She noted that it had become a popular art not only in every household but also in all educational institutions.

Ironically, however, E.K.'s influence in the Academy waned



S.G. Kittappa with K.B. Sundarambal.

two people who had mattered the most to him, alcohol proved to be the black hole to nowhere, the path perhaps to the fulfilment of a death wish. Devious individuals posing as friends hastened his undoing to line their own pockets.

Towards the summer of 1933, the sunshine seemed to be going out of Kittappa's career. He had swollen feet and yellow eyes, signs of cirrhosis of the liver. X-rays indicated that Kittappa's stomach was severely inflamed and his liver had shrunk. He was treated continuously for two months – in a bungalow he rented in Mylapore – and showed signs of recovery. Then he went back all of a sudden to Shencottah with his erstwhile friends, then to his wife's place in Tirunelveli and from there to the first floor of Chandra Vilas, a hotel in the town. He had had a relapse of his addiction. By the time he returned home to Shencottah, he was a changed man and had thoroughly lost his zest for life. It wasn't long before he passed away. As he lived in the *agraharam*, he was cremated the same day. K.B. Sundarambal, who took his ashes to Kasi, donned the garb of a widow and announced that she would act with no other man on stage henceforth. Such was her loyalty to Kittappa whom she en-

dearingly called '*Enga aathukkarar*' (the man of my house, husband).

As his legacy, S.G. Kittappa left behind the fascinating story of a heavenly minstrel who held listeners in thrall with his magical music for an eternal moment, and a cluster of lovely recordings, a rainbow of songs. This treasure trove of music might never have been a possibility had Orr's Columbia not pulled off a recording coup in its competition with HMV. It was almost the fag end of Kittappa's short but cataclysmically eventful life, and future generations can only bless their stars that the gramophone medium won a race that celluloid lost. A movie planned to be made with Kittappa and Sundarambal in 1933 never took off. (Courtesy: *Srutii*)

(Concluded)

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– THE EDITOR

Brewing, breweries and Brewery Road

While in Madras recently, staying in my house on Brewery Road in the postal zone Shenoy Nagar, I had some time to investigate the source of its name. There are one or two breweries in the outskirts of the city (e.g. Valasaravakkam), but there is none anywhere near Brewery Road.

Brewery Road connects Shenoy Nagar and Anna Nagar (the Anna Arch Road). It extends westward from West Club Road in Shenoy Nagar. Curiously, it is one of those rare roads that forks into two, along its western extension, both arms bearing the name Brewery Road. A few older residents in

• 'Pages from History'
by DR. A. RAMAN
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1913. The managing agents were McDowell & Co. Limited, Second Line Beach. The brewery's first concern was a copious supply of pure water and this was achieved after 14 months of search. No fewer than 14 bores were sunk; a well of 18 foot diameter was constructed, and 6000 gallons (about 26,000 L) of water per hour obtained. The Government analyst certified that this well water was pure.

Leishman was born in 1850, and he married Mercy Mary Abraham, who was born in Bellary in 1867. The Leishman-Mary Abraham marriage took place in Ooty in 1886. They had three girls (Louisa, b. Ootacamund, 1887; Muriel, b. Vepery, 1894; Daisy, b. Vepery, 1895). The Leishmans lived in Vepery, it would appear, from the 1890s.

I do not think the 18' wide well exists today. But Usha Madan told me that parts of the beer factory building still survive on Brewery Road, although it is now used as a residence. I could not visit this building to take a photograph.



Front view of the B.B.B. Brewery Company Limited in Brewery Road, Amanjikarai. Bullock carts carting hogshhead.

the area suggested that the road is thus named because it forks – Tamil name *pirital* – since, when written in Tamil, 'pa' and 'ba' are hard to distinguish! That's an explanation for us to chuckle over.

I interviewed a long-time resident of the area, Usha Madan, who was born and has lived there for long. Usha was clear that Brewery Road got its name because of a beer factory. She recalled seeing beer barrels carted from here in bullock-drawn carts. I would place Usha's description in the late 1950s-early 1960s.

There were several breweries in the Madras Presidency. The Castle Brewery was set up in the Nilgiris in 1857. So was the Nilgiris Brewery Company. The British Brewing Corporation in Madras (1902) catered to the elite of Madras, whereas the Bangalore Brewery Company supplied beer for the army units stationed in Pune and Bangalore from 1885.

The B.B.B. Brewery Company Limited, an offshoot of British Beer Breweries Limited of London, was established in

The brewery was constructed to a design by George Adlam & Sons, Bristol, with facilities to expand, when needed. Sole rights were secured to use the yeast species *Saccharomyces thermantitonus*. This yeast species was specifically selected for fermentation in the brewery because it could tolerate the heat of Madras. A qualified English chemist and a brewer and 40-odd workers were employed. The brewery produced some fine quality liquor using Scottish malt and Kent hops. Pilsener, a light beer, was made from Bavarian hops and Bohemian malt. The overall supervision of this brewery was by W. B. Prosser in the beginning.

Thomas Leishman, a Scot, purchasing the five breweries located in different parts of the Madras Presidency, formed the United Breweries Limited [UBL], which was first registered at 17 Armenian Street on March 15, 1915. UBL's bullock carts transporting casks, known as 'hogshhead', of beer, became a familiar sight on the roads of Madras and beyond, after locally-brewed beer and lager became popular in the early 20th Century.

In the 1910s, central Madras's outer limits stopped at Kilpauk, and Amanjikarai was in the outskirts. Water availability and distance from populated areas (where would linger the 'foul' smell that emanates from breweries because of fermentation) would have been reasons for selecting this site for the brewery.

Festivals in changing times

(Continued on page 3)

tremendous momentum and cash registers merrily ring during Akshaya Thrithiya just as their Mumbai peers swing in with the mood of Danteras during Diwali.

Having long been associated (until a couple of years ago) with the Marketing Department of a major newspaper, I can vouch for how St. Valentine's Day fever in February, whipped up through the media,

What's there in a name?

(by Radha Padmanabhan)

Names of Chennai streets have long fascinated me. It is quite well known that Kennedy Street (next to St. Isabel's Hospital) was originally known as Kannadiga Street. Long ago, Kannadigas lived in this street and they were mostly buttermilk sellers, carrying pots of butter milk on their heads with a kind of blanket round them to protect them from early morning cold. Poor President Kennedy had nothing to do with this street.

The English gave their names to many roads in Chennai. Some of them may have been renamed. The English, I must say, do have rather funny surnames. Don't expect to buy flowers on Flowers Road (Kilpauk), or bread and cakes on Baker's Road, Hunter's Road has nothing to do with hunting and Coats Road (T'Nagar) has nothing to do with the sale of coats. If you are in search of a cook you will not find one on Cook's Road (Ayanavaram), and if you want to buy some timber you will be disappointed if you go to Wood's Road. And there is a Powder Mill Road in Grey Nagar and a Karuneeswarar Pagoda Street in Mylapore. Austin Flowers, George Baker, James R. Coats, an engineer in the Corporation of Madras, and Mr. Hunter lent their names to these roads and streets.

Some intriguing queries: Did Brick Kiln Road have a kiln at one time? And who was Nancy of Nancy Street, Purasawalkam? How did Dooming Street (Santhome) get its name? Santhome is famous for its Cathedral but Dooming reminds us of Doomsday. Porche's Road is a misspelling for Portuguese Road!

I live on Eldam's Road and was always amused to read the road's name in Tamil which reads as Yeldams Road. Imagine my surprise when I found that the Tamil spelling was the right one and the road should be spelled Yeldam's Road named after Mr. Yeldam, Mayor of Madras in 1801!

A word about the streets of Chennai; they are named after people, some of them long departed from this world. The streets are so filthy, full of garbage and rubble that the people after whom they have been named must be turning in their graves. I wish the descendants would honour the memory of the dead by getting the streets cleaned regularly. As for those living, after whom the streets have been named, I would be ashamed to have one named after me.

What's in a name? A street would smell as foul even if called by any other name.

P.S. This article is written with an apology to Sriram V. for his very well researched article in *Madras Musings* about Madras Street names.

into an enormous ten-day community festival with huge images being taken in ostentatious processions on the last day of the festival and immersed in the sea with much fanfare as is being done in Mumbai or Pune! A far cry indeed from the days when the small Pillaiyar (Lord Ganesh) image made of clay would be immersed in the well located in the rear of your house or in a nearby river without much ado and in silent reverence!

With a rapidly increasing urbanisation and a paradigm shift in society's mores, festivals too have begun to reflect the vast change, perhaps all for the good of the economy.

has generated enormous 'branding' activities on the eating-out, gift-giving and greetings cards sectors in an otherwise laid-back city traditionally known for its more inhibited ways of life!

Colourful supplements in the newspapers and attractive TV commercials from jewellers have given a new thrust to Varalakshmi *Nombu* too in recent times!

What was an individual household Vinayaka Chaturthi in the past has today grown

What is it that ails Tamil Nadu cricket?

"It's probably the water," the visiting speaker, tongue-in-cheek and politically incorrect, said. "Maybe Tamil Nadu will start winning the Ranji Trophy once it receives enough Kaveri water," he added in response to my question why the State was unable to translate talent into performance despite handsome support from corporates and the cricket administration.

The occasion was the launch of my book on Tamil Nadu cricket in 2002. Nothing much has changed since. In fact, the last two seasons have been disastrous, with the State team failing to qualify for the knock-out rounds of the tournament.

Tamil Nadu last won the national championship in 1987-88, and that was only its second title since the tournament began in 1934. Of talent there seems no shortage in the State, and sportspersons below the international level have never had it better anywhere, at least in the subcontinent. In Chennai, a cricketer good enough to compete in the first division of the TNCA league is assured of livelihood security of a high order, excellent training and practice facilities, qualified coaches and physical trainers devoted to individual teams, and a system-

atic process of talent identification and promotion.

Coaches have come and gone, and captains and team members have been hand-picked and nurtured at the State level, the senior league matches are played over three days, there is no shortage of the shorter format games either, inclusion in the Chennai Super Kings has bred a new avatar of cricketer, confident, innovative and introduced to winning ways by a dynamic captain – yet the Ranji Trophy remains elusive as ever for the State.

Many reasons have been cited, ranging from complacency and the result of being pampered to the lack of the killer instinct endemic to a laidback lifestyle that does not require a young player to commute miles by packed train to daily net practice. One theory floating around suggests that the trouble lies with the lack of consistency in selection, excessive chopping and changing of

the personnel on the field and off it. "I have watched Tamil Nadu in Ranji cricket for over 15 years, and it never plays the same eleven for two consecutive matches," claims a supporter who has given up hope. Some critics accuse Tamil Nadu cricketers of arrogance, of being

• by
V. Ramnarayan

strangers to the team ethic of successful sides. This year, the State captain has himself deplored the lack of commitment of his men, in a newspaper article.

The worrisome aspect of the recent debacle has been that Tamil Nadu's worst performances came at home, on wickets tailored to suit its players. The team consistently failed to exploit conditions expected to suit its team. For example, visitors performed better on turning tracks than our own spinners.

True, Tamil Nadu missed the services of its ace spinner R. Ashwin, who was away doing national duty, but what of the other slow bowlers? Did their lack of experience prove their undoing? Was the captain, once a champion pace bowler, known for his fighting spirit and ability to turn matches around, the weak link in the attack? Or, as one keen observer of the

State team's fortunes believes, is the race for the Palayampatti Shield for the TNCA league, with doctored wickets – flat ones against strong opponents and nasty turners against weak ones – responsible for the State team's lack of preparedness beyond local skirmishes? Another observer squarely blames the regular failure of the team's leading batsmen at crucial junctures for Tamil Nadu's poor show.

One critic wonders whether the unseemly rivalries in the local league blind both players and their patrons to the need for cohesion and team spirit when the same players turn out for Tamil Nadu. Going further, yet another long-time cricket watcher insists that Tamil Nadu always lacked the mental qualities needed to win on the national stage, that most of its representatives are paper tigers, happiest when the stakes are low. He rues the very culture here that celebrates individualists and ignores team men.

Do we need to make radical changes in the structure of local cricket to bind the players into a fighting unit? Is there a way we can ensure that the State's best talents play together more often, even outside the Ranji Trophy arena, than at present? One solution would be the de-corporatisation of the local league by whatever means the administration has at its disposal and fielding two State teams – as in the Buchi Babu tournament – in the senior

division league, so that the same 12 are together in each of those two sides for the duration of the league season. The other ten teams can be made up of players drawn from the existing teams backed by companies, with a ceiling of four players from any one business house. This way, the home team advantage will be taken out of the equation, and the matches can be more evenly fought.

This plan is naturally fraught with the risk of running into all manner of challenges and will need a major overhaul of mindsets and structures. It may even be dismissed outright as naïve and impractical. The grim fact is that Tamil Nadu cricket needs drastic remedies for its chronic ills which have only ensured that it has won the Ranji Trophy just two times in the history of the championship. My proposal can at least be the starting point for experts to sit together and draw up a master plan with the singular objective of triumph in the Ranji Trophy. Such a plan is long overdue, for nowhere else in Indian sport has so much been invested by so many in one game with so little to show for it.

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

Answers to Quiz

1. Kapurthala; 2. It marked the first successful flight of an Indian cryogenic engine; 3. Mitchell Johnson; 4. Little Eye Labs; 5. Cristiano Ronaldo and Pele; 6. Ariel Sharon; 7. Chennai; 8. China; 9. Table tennis; 10. Gorakhpur.

11. *Desabhaktam*; 12. Chintadripet; 13. Chepauk Palace; 14. *Ananda Vikatan*; 15. Hanuman; 16. Sultan of Golconda; 17. Taiwanese poet Yushi; 18. S.G. Kittappa; 19. Adyar banyan tree; 20. Kasturba Gandhi Hospital for Women in Triplicane.

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