The sorry state of our Fort

(Continued on page 2)

The Mylapore Festival Kolam Competition, 2014, as sent by Mylapore Times (Also see page 8).

The Law proposes the hawkers duly dispose

Everyone was happy with the solution provided, except the hawkers themselves. They were reluctant to move in due to a mistaken belief that shoppers would not bother to come to the complex. It is obvious that not enough time has been spent in counselling the hawkers before the shift. Despite having a good facility, their apprehensions persisted. They have, therefore, begun moving out in large numbers and occupy the sidewalks and service lanes. And it is alleged that the local Corporation officials and the police are turning a blind eye to this development, because it is in their interest that the original chaos continues.

The residents of the area have, however, decided not to accept the situation as it is. They have sent a series of letters to the Corporation asking as to why the orders of the High Court are being violated. These questions have been raised and answers sought under the Right to Information Act. It is barely a month since the opening of the much-touted delayed shopping complex to rehabilitate hawkers from T’Nagar Usman Road. And yet the hawkers are back on the pavement, much to the chagrin of the residents in the locality. The failure of what was praised and, may we also add, much-mooted hendred shopkeepers, to rehabilitate hawkers from T’Nagar Usman Road. And yet the hawkers are back on the pavement, much to the chagrin of the residents in the locality. The failure of what was praised and longed for to rehabilitate hawkers from T’Nagar Usman Road is obvious that despite the best laws

(Continued on page 2)
Mega invitations for mega weddings

The state of our Fort

(Continued from page 1)

off without reason. More consistent is the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which, seated in Clive Building (really Admiralalty House), has a placard at the reception table, which categorically forbids visitors beyond that point. As for its own excellent initiative, 'Clive's Corner', which served as an information centre on one of the Fort's most colourful occupants, this is kept locked all the time.

When it comes to upkeep, it cannot be denied that the areas under the control of the State Government are the worst off. Haphazard parking of vehicles, litter from juice and tea shops and, above all, the continued and seemingly endless renovation of Namakkal Katignar Maligai, the ten storey tower, add to the chaos. Posters on the walls contribute still further to the poor image that the Fort presents. What is the point in putting up signs that warn everyone against littering, when this practice is routinely carried out with impunity by the occupants themselves?

The ASI has put up its standard blue boards at various places declaring that the building alongside is a historic monument and that those caught defacing or damaging it will be fined or punished. But what about the monuments that have already collapsed or are very near to that? What is the purpose in putting up these signs next to Wellesley House, for instance, part of which fell in the 1980s and has remained rubble ever since? There are some other buildings that the ASI is supposed to be forever restoring. One of these, the last house on Snob's Alley, is in the picture above. It is anybody's guess as to what restoration is going on.

As for any information on any of the buildings, just forget it. Barring St Mary's and the Fort Museum, buildings that have their histories inscribed on marble, none of the other structures has any detail. You are expected to walk around and form your own theories as to what each one stood for. As for the ravennas that form the Wallajah and St George's Gates, the space beneath them has been made over for debris. The gates are at least kept clean as they provide access to the Fort Station. But the North Gate perhaps is the worst off, completely littered, with the road leading to it dotted as a bazaar where vendors sell flowers and other things.

If this is the way we present one of the best known monuments of our city, what price the other historic structures?

What the Law proposes...

(Continued from page 1)

to Information (RTI) Act. The reply received is a classic case of bureaucraticese. The responses, and they are the same to all queries, simply have it that, "under RTI Act 2005, reply other than the information on record cannot be furnished", whatever that is supposed to mean.

The T'Nagar Residents' Welfare Association then represented the matter to the Chairman of the Hawking Committee, supporting its claims with photographs of hawking that continues unabated on the streets despite alterations to the Act.

(Continued from page 1)

What matters, seriously, is who is interested in knowing all this, apart from some research scholar in the history of India or architecture? The bride and bridgegroom have other things on their minds, the parents are probably calculating the expense and the guests are interested in the food.

What most of these new belligerent citizens find plausible is the readability. By the time you manage to evade the gold-splattered gods, the ornate borders, and the pasted colour stones if these are not satisfactory, the response is ready. The envelope itself, like the wedding guest in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, beating his breast over what is a joyful occasion.

But what MMM has chosen to ponder over in this missive of half a page is neither the invitation card, nor the invitation letter, nor the return card, nor the gift list, nor the thank you letter, not even the evening menu! MMM is supposed to be forever questioning whatever that is supposed to be beyond that point. As for its own monument, the ASI is supposed to be forever researching whatever that is supposed to be beyond that point. Whether the same, or a similar, answer as was received previously is not one unless it is half the time when invitation cards were in vogue, when having seen an advertisement, you could identify a wedding guest in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, beating his breast over what is a joyful occasion.

When MMM asked as to why the caller of the previous day could not have taken down this information, there was a stunned silence at the other end as though nobody had ever thought of informing you. A couple of days later, when MMM was out earning his bread, the reply was a fourth call. The caller, this time a stenographic male voice, wanted to know "at least two previous landmarks" near MMM's house. When asked why, the voice said it was on its way to call on MMM and was lost all the way because MMM's house stood but could not locate the building. When MMM replied that he was not at home just then, the voice was disappointed. Meeting MMM was apparently the ambition of a lifetime for the voice and by not being at home, MMM had clearly broken the rules. When MMM asked rather tautly if the voice expected MMM to be at home all hours, the voice was flank off without an explanation.

The last straw was the fifth caller. This one after having cheerfully wished MMM a 'very good morning' asked MMM if he was sure of all the facts that he had furnished in the application form. It then said, the voice, was bound by rules to get verbal confirmation from MMM. MMM replied that the voice was out earning his bread, and the voice was rather non-plussed. MMM's reply was that the voice then had clearly broken the rules. MMM then moved on to what would happen to the tinsel, the gilt edgings, the tassels and the pasted colour stones if these were unceremoniously dumped in sacks, hauled about by postmen and then pushed into desk drawers. And woe betides anybody's guess as to what restoration is going on.

The printing process was not one unless it is half the time when invitations used to be made by gimlet-eyed detectives who can identify a potential fraudster with ease. But the process of verification (or verifivation as MMM is so ham-handed that the voice sometimes has any detail. You are expected to walk around and form your own theories as to what each one stood for. As for the ravennas that form the Wallajah and St George's Gates, the space beneath them has been made over for debris. The gates are at least kept clean as they provide access to the Fort Station. But the North Gate perhaps is the worst off, completely littered, with the road leading to it dotted as a bazaar where vendors sell flowers and other things. The whole thing has become hugely complicated now. Then there is the issue of whether it is not one unless it is half the size of a window, as thick as a telephone directory and is worn in by a stammerer's tongue. What would happen to the tinsel, the gilt edgings, the tassels and the pasted colour stones if these were unceremoniously dumped in sacks, hauled about by postmen and then pushed into desk drawers. The initial rigdges.

These extra large cards, with theirprinted invitations (MMM understands that the technical term for these irre- dents things is 'bling'), when opened up, take up each one colour coded for a particular auxiliary event, all of them adjuncts to the wedding proper. If this is not enough, some cards have a book explaining most unnecessarily the entire process of the wed- dings, Seriously, who is interested in knowing all this, apart from some research scholar in the history of India or architecture? The bride and bridgegroom have other things on their minds, the parents are probably calculating the expense and the guests are interested in the food.

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Unabating auto menace

A side from the points stated in the article 'If Chennai is to be a tourist destination' (MM, February 1st), an important point which needs mentioning is the fleecing by auto drivers. Even after fixing the revised auto meters, complaints of over-charging are abundant. When drivers take even veteran locals for a 'ride', you can very well imagine the fate of newcomers.

It was recently reported that a person from Assam who came to Chennai for medical treatment was charged Rs. 1300 from Central Station to Thousands Lights, a distance of 6 kilometres, by an inhuman auto driver. When the visitor objected to the demand, he was threatened with dire consequences. Following the very bitter experience, the visitor was threatened never to visit Chennai again.

In order to tourism in Chennai, the authorities must first and foremost discipline the auto drivers. The gateways like railway stations and airports must be ‘sanitised’ and monitored by the authorities so as to ensure that the auto drivers behave properly.

When will we ever become quality conscious?

On January 16th we had wondered whether concrete roads were the answer to our road conditions. On February 1st, a reader wrote about the quality of these roads. Here, readers can see for themselves the sad lack of quality to be found in newly laid concrete roads in the city.

Correct usage?

In the article on Concrete roads (MM, January 16th) the Latin expression ‘et al’ is used. I wonder whether et al can be used for other than people, in place of ete.

Chambers dictionary does define et al as referring to people and things. However, The Good Word Guide edited by Martin H. Manser from Bloomsbury says as under: “It is an abbreviation of et alii and means – and other people’. It is used particularly in writings of a formal technical nature to indicate the omission of other names.

* Similar findings have been recorded by Jones, Bernstein, et al. Alternately, it is sometimes used informally in ironic or humorous contexts: * Here comes Bill et al. It should not be used in ordinary writing or in speech, and should be used only when a list is specific and does not start with for example or such as.”

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I hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd. S. MUTHIAH (Publisher)
A Tipping and a Reverend Too!

There are at least two more instances in the early history of Madras, of domestic slaves being killed by their employers. The first was Mrs. John Tipping (a long line of Tipping in Madras that culminated in James Matheson Tipping whose son, Allan is said to be the father of modern computing), who in 1786 had a Coffee-pot in her house. A young boy, known as Dossie, she called “into painful prominence, being intended for competitive work in her house” and eventually, he was “deemed fit to constitute You Governor of our Town and Forts of Madras.” It is not known if he had a court case or if the boy was sold to another master. The second was the Rev. St. John Browne, who in 1755 was appointed Parish of St. Mary’s by the Court of Directors without waiting for the Intermediate of London. Browne was described as being a “pall at a distance of two hundred feet.” The same material was left for use at the fort and it was not known if the dog had been killed in a terror. The dog was “sent overboard” by the same material. The same ground was “kept by the Governor and his Council” which in turn passed on to St. Stephen’s Church (afterwards the first Earl of Nottingham), then Solicitor General for India, to the Privy Council. The English had a right to try such crimes, taking its powers from the Charter of 1661 issued by Charles II.

The South Indian Railway (SIR) made a major depot at Madras, and the station was opened on May 9, 1913, described as a “bridge to Rameswaram island.” The SIR made a despatched a survey party to span the Pamban Pass. The railway extension follows for about 21 miles apart near a structure and shallow and continued to be stepped into position on the rock sand and got as far as Dhanushkodi only to find his further progress barred, but so the story goes – a causeway known as the Scherzer Bridge. According to mythology, Rama, King of the South Indian Railway (CGR) agreed to construct a 67-mile branch railway track from Madras to South Africa on its main line to Talamancan on Mannar Island. On the Indian side, the Madurai-Mandapam railway was to be extended across the Pamban Pass by a causeway to Rashmangal island north of Mannar, and the sandy islands, and got as far as Dhanushkodi only to find his further progress barred, but – so the story goes – a causeway known as the Scherzer Bridge. According to mythology, Rama, King of the South Indian Railway (SIR), to cross the sea and reach Rameswaram island the second was the Rev. St. John Browne, who in 1755 was appointed Parish of St. Mary’s by the Court of Directors without waiting for the Intermediate of London. The second was the Rev. St. John Browne, who in 1755 was appointed Parish of St. Mary’s by the Court of Directors without waiting for the Intermediate of London. It seems the same ground was passed on to St. Stephen’s Church (afterwards the first Earl of Nottingham), then Solicitor General for India, to the Privy Council. The English had a right to try such crimes, taking its powers from the Charter of 1661 issued by Charles II.

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Tales from history
to degree coffee

At first glance, the title of Nirmala Lakshman's new book, Degree Coffee by the Yard, seemed like some kind of literary device. However, on further reading, I found a whole chapter devoted to the much loved brew which Tamilians expertly turn into posterity the work of coffee. Needless to say, this is one of the lighter chapters in this brief biography of Madras.

In this ‘biography’, Lakshman weaves personal anecdotes about the city of her childhood and the city where she grew up in the 1960s and 70s, with a chronic of historical and sociological facts about a city that has changed over the years to what it is today. It is a story that begins with finding among excavations in the Pallavaram area a hand axe (the first discovery of an Old Stone Age tool in the Indian Subcontinent) by British and album of the year at the annual Grammy Awards recently?

The book, a part of an Aleph online edition. She also emphasises that though Chennai, like all other cities, has an enormous appetite for cricket, it stands out by displaying a rare knowledge of the game and a sense of appreciation for home and opposition teams alike. She recalls “the response from the crowd when Pakistan dared to take a lap of honour (after winning a match) in Madras, to thank them in 1999. The crowd greeted and cheered and gave them a standing ovation.”

Lakshman may conclude by asking the question ‘Is home the outer world, the neighbourhood (Alwarpet in her case) or the inner world, our aspirations?’ but she has already answered it earlier when she observed: “A sense of community, mutual dependence and a common dream that the city is the answer to our dreams and is the glue that holds the city’s many layers together.”

The book, a part of an Aleph series on Indian cities, will strike an enjoyable note with many a reader who knows Madras that is Chennai, but is an all too brief introduction to it others.

The Mistress & The Maid

(Continued from page 4)

The jury went into a huddle again and after a short while, Justice Hale declared that the accused was not guilty. As this was contrary to all expectations, the Court thought he had made a mistake and asked the accused himself. When he repeated that Ascentia was not guilty, the Court then asked the members of the jury, and they agreed with the foreman. With that Ascentia Dawes was set free and passed from the pages of history forever.

The case of Rex vs Dawes, however, set a precedent. The Governor and Council, in their letter to London on April 15, 1669, laments that the case had come to such a conclusion because ‘we found ourselves at a loss in several things, for want of Instructions, having no man understanding the Laws and formalities of them to in-struct us...’ This was to mark the beginning of a process of judicial reform in Madras which, after several stages, culminated in the formation of the High Courts of Judicature in 1862. It also saw the upgrading of the post of Agent of Madras to that of Governor, who remained the executive head till 1947. The note from the King’s Counsel on how the trial was to proceed was to serve for years as the basis on which the EIC settled cases in its possessions in India.

What was not new then, and continues even now, are conflicts over the treatment of domestics.

THE EDITOR

MADRAS MUSINGS

February 16-28, 2014

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 early days of Koothu-P-Pattarai

It was a fashion in the early 1970s to drop names like Che Guevara and Pablo Neruda to make yourself sound more ‘cool’ and progressive. It was a kind of branding in a soft form. In recent times, Koothu-P-Pattarai has become a sort of brand for modern theatre. It is a phenomenon that has always intrigued me. After these days make it a point to declare their association with Koothu-P-Pattarai or their training there. I am indeed happy about the publicity it garners, but it amuses me when I reflect on its beginnings.

It was sometime in 1976-77 that Na. Muthuswamy, supported by ‘Pragnai’ Rangarajan (aka Veerachamy), was crusading for Terukoothu with the cooperation of Cre-A Ramakrishnan. Their immediate task was to mobilise resources to rehabilitate Terukoothu, second, to work towards gaining acceptability for Terukoothu in the ‘cultural space’ of Chennai; third, to persuade Purisai Kannappa Sambandham to return to his village and lead whatever he could from his father Purisai Kannappa Thambiran instead of driving an authoriscow in Madras for his livelihood. Na. Muthuswamy and Cre-A Ramakrishnan provided the financial cushion for Sambandham during that period.

Pattarai in 1977 through a pamphlet entitled ‘I was sharing a room in a narrow bylane in Karolbagh, New Delhi. The pamphlet was an appeal for donations to support the activities of Koothu-P-Pattarai in reviving Terukoothu. There was no indication that the organisations were also involved in contemporary theatre activities.

This was the time when Venkat Swaminathan, in his writings, was highlighting the lack of initiatives for new experiments in the field of theatre. Literature in general, and in the field of theatre and cinema in particular in Tamil Nadu. In his book Paululiyum Vaachcharam (Desert and Oasis), he laments the Tamil environment that lacked the urge to improve its quality in artistic expressions, and the lack of will to strive to be at par with works presented in other regions of India and abroad. He was also critical of the lethargy of Tamils in making efforts to expand their inventive ness in artistic expression.

His observations were the result of his exposure to varied works of art (fine arts and performing arts) facilitated by his living in Delhi for nearly four decades. He used to express similar sentiments at the meetings of the Delhi Tamil Writers’ Association.

Venkat Swaminathan introduced me to the plays of the National School of Drama presented at NSD’s small indoor auditorium and at the Purana Qila. There were plenty of programmes at other venues too. Street plays were staged in the university area or in Connaught Place. As I had lived in the ‘sabha culture’ as a resident of Trivandrum for over 20 years, my exposure in Delhi convinced me that there was truth in Venkat Swaminathan’s concern. I too began to feel that we had not moved any further in the field of theatre and cinema, compared to the works of people from West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka and even the works from a small State like Manipur were simply overwhelming. Most people working in the field of theatre in Tamil Nadu do not make sincere efforts to know what is happening the world over. Stagnation by itself is not a problem but not being aware of it should definitely be a matter of concern.

I returned to Madras in 1978 and found the theatre scenario by and large unchanged. The Street Plays of Gnani and ‘Veedhi’ Ramaswamy were the only new additions. Dr. Rajendran was part of the Veedhi Natakaiyakam. He went on to qualify from NSD, where he is now Director-Research. During this time, Na. Muthuswamy’s Naarkalikkarar was translated by Alfred Franklin and staged by students of Guindy Engineering College. This was also the time Na. Muthuswamy was working on a modern theatre repertory. C. Manavendranath and P. Krishnamoorthy to work together. Krishnamoorthy, an artist from the College of Fine Arts, Madras, is one of the early entrants in cinema as an art director. I too joined the group.

(Tob e concluded)
The Mylapore Fest

- The open space inside Lady Sivashwamy School was a riot of colours on all four days. This was the arts contest space. The judges were chosen from the audience. The children didn’t really care about the toffees that were distributed by the volunteers; each one only wanted a prize!

- Young singers seated on a galley at the Sivaswamy Rao Park this year let the music swirl. Some bright voices, some still sleepy. Misty mornings, but the mosquitoes didn’t seem to spare anyone.

- It is a challenge to run a festival of this magnitude in open space. Artists reaching the venue on time, the props that need to be brought in, all depend on the traffic and the criss-crossing of many in the audience. You need to literally float in the crowd to reach backstage. This was the story of the Krishna image that couldn’t reach the stage for the Thiruvadadi Kali dance by artistes from Kerala.

- The band of 55 young artistes in the dance drama Sura Samharam had travelled from Virugambakkam. These shine of guru Sheela Unnikrishnan just smiled and went about touching up their make-up, after squeezing into a small house. Partly renovated with glossy tiles, the house of Venkataraman played host to the artistes on all days of the Festival. Suseethram of Kanchi Weaver’s State House was another gracious host to performers who needed some privacy.

- The Festival realises that people want to compete in games, irrespective of their age. There was the chess contest at Nageswara Rao Park and Dayakattam and Palankuzhi at Lady Sivashwamy School. A surprise fun event was the ‘Karambu kadi’ contest held at the devakodi. The sugarcane stick had to be peeled using hands and teeth! Seven rounds of five participants each took part in the event. And still there were people waiting for their chance.

- The Kolam contest, the Festival’s flagship event, continued to receive huge participation. Foreigners also took part; an Aurovillian won a prize and so did two men. The Fest team was not sure if children of this generation could draw kolam. But two dozen plus children who participated in the kolam contest proved the organisers wrong. The kolam area in front of the eastern gopuram looked beautiful with children in traditional attire drawing kolam.

- Three hosts treated guests to elai sappad. Lakshmi of Devadasi Street and Jayashree of Kesava Perumal West Street were not new to the concept; they had hosted elai sappad last year too. For Padma Sanka ras, this was a new experience.

- When C.A. Raja’s Pranavam put the stage for the vintage film music concert, the audience sat glued to their seats. Many sang along, some danced; a couple was in tears and enjoyed the rewind, talking of the days they had seen MGR films for 40 pause!

- The Tank Street was a bazaar zone teeming with shoppers. Pitchu Pillai Street had space for students from the College of Fine Arts, led by Saktivel, and the Chennai Weekend Artists. The organisers have a dream: to make this an exclusive Art Street.

- Who could think that the mandapam leading to the theer can be a place for performance? When the lights were turned 180 degrees and beamed on the mandapam, the audience too turned their chairs towards it. Young dancer Sumitra Subramani danced to music by young singer J.B. Keerthana.

- The exhibition – ‘100 years of Indian Cinema’ – on the first floor of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan could be set up only a little late. The display boards didn’t arrive on time. The team of collegians working on the project conceived by director A.L. Venky was more than happy to later see a steady stream of visitors. But they were disappointed by an unknown fan of MGR, who kept taking away the pictures of the legend they had put up!

- The idea of having a small snacks kiosk at the tank was to sell traditional snacks like puri, kezakattai and vegetable poli. They made it ‘no onion-no garlic’ on Vaikunta Ekadasi day. Idea worked.

- The food street was packed. Unmanageable on Sunday. From the traditional dosa to Mangalore kadubus, kokuzakattai and North Indian snacks on offer, the foodies had their full.

- The venue for the two-weekend talks was Lady Sivashwamy School. Pradeep Chakravarty moved to a classroom when he found the curious Dayakattam players still playing in the hall. The listeners attending his talk on Devadasi took over the chairs, benches and desks!

- Ram Mohan spoke about his great days in Palathepp in Mylapore.

- Shivamanda Hegde and his 15-member Yakshagana troupe gave two back-to-back shows. Photographers shot hundreds of pictures of the artists doing the make-up and getting into their costumes in the mandapam.

- While Srim S. v. strolled down Kutcheri Road taking along two dozen people with him and sharing stories, Ramana’s team cycled down the Mylapore area. The Cycling Yogis had ten Americans who were here to attend a yoga camp. And for the foodies filled up on Sridhar’s well-planned Food Walk – from Rayar’s Mess to Janal bajji kadi. (Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

Answers to Quiz
