

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Will it next be a 'Madras Season'?

(By Sriram V., Associate Editor, Madras Musings)

And so, the 375th birthday of Madras that is Chennai has come and gone. What remains is a wonderful memory, a happy recollection of a great week gone by, when several sections of society celebrated the birthday with unprecedented enthusiasm. Truly, Chennai has notched up another first – the only city in the country to celebrate its birthday each year and commemorate its 375th in a most befitting manner.

The team of coordinators is no longer small. This year, we saw the coming of age of the Madras Week celebrations – there were scores of volunteers from every part of the city. Yes, even North Chennai that usually remains aloof organised an event or two. More importantly, each and every event was well attended, thereby

encouraging the organisers and presenters even more. The number of heritage walks in the city and events of a similar nature was a mind-boggling 38, all of them with full participation.

There were three factors that made a key difference to this year's celebration. The first was the participation of the youth. For the first time, Madras Week was not something that attracted only the middle-aged and above. It had gennext in full force, organising, conducting and participating in events exclusively meant for them. It was a spontaneous expression of love for the city. The young also took Madras Week into the world of social media – there were Facebook posts, tweets, blogs and instagram/flickr updates that kept the internet world buzzing. Madras

Week clearly is becoming younger each year and that is a very healthy sign. The presence of the young also ensured that IT companies sat up and took notice.

The second was the way the electronic media took an interest in the celebrations. This has never happened in past years. True, the English media did report on it in the past, but the Tamil TV channels had largely dismissed the event as elitist and being celebrated by a minority of people. This year that was not the case. It was in fact the Tamil channels that took the lead. On August 22nd, most of them had flashing messages on the ticker tape indicating that it was Madras Day. They also had special programmes. The radio channels too

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Madras Week – a people's celebration

(By The Editor)

Over 150 events spread across several locations and organisations of the city have just come to an end. All of these were to commemorate the 375th birthday of our city. The events witnessed full houses and were held with the enthusiastic support of the hospitality industry and the media. If this was not a sure shot success, then what was it? Certainly it was NOT what a Tourism Department official apparently dismissed as a celebration of the 'colonial' in a display of a mindset out of tune with the times.

Consider the facts – much of what went into celebrating Madras Week this year concerned the here and now. There were discussions on business leadership, security of the pen-

insula, civic conservancy and the economy. There were views expressed on the challenges that the city faces in its journey to becoming a world-class metropolis. There were presentations on the lives of several noble residents of the city who went on to make powerful contributions to the world. The current generation, to which the British Raj is something that is only in text books, came out in full strength to participate. Are these expressions of a 'colonial hangover'? What we did was celebrate our city, warts and all.

The same official apparently also said that his department is only mandated to celebrate the ancient Dravidian age, the Sangam era, and the glories of

the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. If that is so, why was this opportunity not taken to highlight the relics of that glorious past, of which there are several in the city itself? Why were special trips not organised to the Pallava cave at Pallavaram, perhaps the first instance of a temple being hewn out of a rock in India? Could not events focussing on the grand temples that dot the city's coastline have been planned? Could the Museum not have been asked to showcase its Bronze Gallery and its magnificent collections of inscriptions? By merely dismissing Madras Week as a Brown Sahib event, the Department of Tour-

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Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• Art Deco is an eclectic style that combines traditional craft motifs with machinery age materials and shapes. Beginning in France in the 1920s, it became popular the world over and lasted till the 1940s. It came somewhat late to India where it is perhaps best associated with cinema theatres. Art Deco arrived in Madras by the late 1930s, with Parry & Co's Dare House, constructed between the late 1930s and early 1940s, being among the first.

With that iconic building dominating the skyline of Esplanade Road/China Bazar Road (now NSC Bose Road), it was but natural that neighbouring structures when built decided to follow the same style. All of these came up on land once occupied by the classical edifices of the Madras Christian College and School, which functioned in this area before shifting to Tambaram and Chetpet from the 1930s. Its buildings were all bought over by finance and insurance companies which functioned in them till the 1950s when they began demolition in order to build new offices in modern style. The sole survivor of the college structures is the Anderson Church. One of the newcomers was the State Bank of Mysore.

The State Bank of Mysore came into existence in 1913 as the Bank of Mysore Limited, established under the patronage of the Maharajah of that princely state, on the advice of Sir M. Visweswarayya. It was, however, only in the 1950s that it opened an office in Madras, purchasing the erstwhile College Hall of Madras Christian College. This was demolished and the new structure came up in pristine Art Deco style. The chief architect was B.R. Manickam, then the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department, Mysore (afterwards Karnataka). Of note is that, he was also later the architect of the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore. Assisting him in the Bank of Mysore building was the firm of C.R. Narayana Rao.

Built with the grey stone with which several of the Bangalore edifices of the period were constructed, the Bank of Mysore building was inaugurated on September 5, 1957 by K. Kamaraj, Chief Minister of Madras, in the presence of S. Nijalingappa, Chief Minister of Mysore. Two years later, the bank was reconstituted as the State Bank of Mysore, becoming a subsidiary of the State Bank of India.

The building continues to be in use and is well maintained, at least from outside, barring a distressing tendency to replace the original windows with plate glass. Along with its neighbours, it presents a uniformity of skyline that is rare in an increasingly cluttered city.

Karnataka plans to protect heritage sites

• The *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, recently reported the following:

The Archaeology, Museums and Heritage Department, Karnataka, has proposed to bring heritage sites in the State under the Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act (KTCPA) for their protection and conservation.

Once the heritage sites are brought under the KTCPA, the urban development authorities, such as the Bangalore Development Authority and the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA), will be able to incorporate these sites in their master plans, which serve as a guide for public and private decision-makers for future development.

This will make the task of protection and preservation of heritage sites easier and effective, Heritage Commissioner C.G. Betsurmth said.

Currently, none of the authorities in the State has any plan for the conservation of heritage sites. The Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage has, therefore, proposed to bring heritage sites, including buildings, heritage precincts and natural features of environmental significance across the State, under the KTCPA.

Currently, the heritage sites come under the Karnataka Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1961.

Comprehensive rules will be framed for the effective implementation of the KTCPA as far as the protection and conservation of heritage sites are concerned.

The urban development authorities already have powers to frame bylaws for heritage conservation under Section 12(f) of the KTCPA. But it can be done only after bringing heritage sites under the Act, he explained.

Besides, it has been proposed to set up district-level heritage conservation committees headed by deputy commissioners of the respective districts to coordinate and oversee implementation of various schemes meant for the conservation of heritage sites. The panel also comprises conservation experts, commissioner of the respective urban development authority and the officials of the Archaeology, Museums and Heritage department.

It has also been proposed to set up a Karnataka heritage task force committee under the chairmanship of the chief minister to steer various conservation and development programmes.

A people's celebration

(Continued from page 1)

ism has passed up a golden opportunity. It could have participated, attracted tourists and ensured that everyone recognised that Chennai could be a destination by itself and not a mere gateway to other locations in South India. In fact, all those wishing celebrations of the Dravidian and anything else, why don't they organise similar celebrations on a **voluntary** basis?

Approaching the matter from another angle, can we deny that the city itself is a colonial creation? The seat of the Government is still in what was the first British possession in the whole of India. Several institutions that our metro swears by, such as the Corporation, the Legislature, the University, the General Hospital and the transport services, to name a few, are all colonial creations. Should we not be abandoning them all and reverting to ancient practices if the pre-British period is all that deserves to be commemorated? Why not shift the capital itself to some ancient

town and when setting it up ensure that no vestige of overseas elements is reflected in it? Let's face it, Madras has been the capital for 67 years AFTER independence as well. There is enough and more to celebrate from that period also.

Madras Week, as we said, is a celebration of our city. It is where we live, earn our money, educate our children and plan our future. It deserves to be rejoiced in and its achievements need to be highlighted to the world. At an age when the smallest of matters are tweeted and broadcast across the globe, why cannot Chennai with its vast record of achievements not stand up and speak of its glories? Even if it does not have an official stamp, as some celebrations in the past, have had, that the people have spoken loud and clear for the celebrations is all that matters. After all, another great Chennai success, the December Music Season, has survived and grown over 87 years without official support. May Madras Week follow suit.

Weak after Madras Week

It is done, Chief! Exactly as you had predicted it would be a celebration worthy of 375 years. Old Mother Madras never had it so good before. Cakes, books, talks, walks, film screenings, exhibitions, quizzes, rides, sails, TV features, news reports, tweets, fb posts, blogs, photo sessions... you name it, we had it. And *The Man from Madras Musings* was happy to see you, Chief, flitting from spot to spot, so to speak, always being greeted by someone who wanted to be photographed with you.

MMM confined himself to a few select walks, talks and other events, and it is of the quirkiest side of these that he takes pen in hand to write about. And he has strange tales to tell you, Chief, that will make whatever is left of your knotted and combined locks part and stand on end like

events, though for what earthly purpose MMM does not know. May be he plans a parallel event in the underworld. Then there is he of bouncer-build who feeds on everything that is on offer including, in MMM's view, the paper plates and the polystyrene cups. At one event, MMM, not having much else to do, counted the man consuming twenty savouries, fifteen cups of sweets, twelve plates of fritters and six cups of coffee. The man slept soundly during the panel discussion that followed (after six cups of coffee!). The next day saw another panel discussion on food when, during question time, up bounced and bouncer and spoke of how he had seen cockroaches and stones in his food in restaurants and had had to complain about them. MMM wondered if it was because they were not well

to the periphery and there they eked out a precarious living in areas such as Royapuram, Wall Tax Road and Park Town. All this was said with a breezy insouciance that only a politician can bring to a subject that he knows nothing about. If MMM had been on the spot he could have asked the man as to how was it then that most of the streets of George Town were named after Indian dubashes.

MMM also wanted to know as to the veracity of the newspaper archives the ex-MLA had read where it was reported in 1911 that Black Town had been renamed George Town that year. But he had no chance, for, by then, the former MLA had moved on to wax eloquent on the Cooum which, he said, is one of the longest rivers in the country, becoming Buckingham Canal

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

quills on a fretful porpentine, as the Bard put it so wonderfully.

MMM well remembers his column a couple of years ago when he wrote on the freeloaders who descended on the events in droves. He had mentioned about their eating habits, their table manners and their tendency to generally behave like camels – stacking up in their vast interiors enough reserves of food to last till the next Madras Week. That, if you recollect, Chief, got the old magazine into trouble. Several of the freeloaders wrote back saying that it was the organisers' bounden duty to feed them as compensation for their having to listen to the speeches in full. And so MMM will not speak of that lot beyond mentioning that their numbers have dwindled.

Perhaps it is on doctor's advice. But MMM misses some of them, particularly the granny who used to come with three generations of her family. He did notice her on Day One when the hotel served just coffee and tea in a marked manner. She stayed off since then, perhaps assuming that in this depressed economic scenario other hotels may offer just the odd biscuit and glass of water. Though a few venues really gave just that, others more than made up for it and so I hope this Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe (she had so many children she did not know what to do) will be with us in the Madras Weeks to come.

But others were there in full strength. The sleeveless wonder is, of course, a regular now. He laughs uproariously for no particular reason and, of course, surreptitiously records every one of the

done and so he could not eat them.

Yet another event was at a bookshop-cum-boutique-cum-restaurant. One of the honoured guests chose to filch a book from the display and walk away. He was fortunately apprehended after the event and the book retrieved from him. Crime is raising its ugly head during Madras Week, Chief, and if that is not a sure sign of success, then MMM does not know what is.

Tales we hear!

Madras Week also saw several sidekicks of the Chief making it big on the small screen. The actor, the writer/entrepreneur (as he calls himself), and the photographer were all there, rather in the manner of the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker. One of these programmes also had a former Member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly holding forth on the history of the city. The man, who rejoices in the name of the powerful God who wielded the plough, had apparently represented Park Town at one time and, so, considers himself quite an authority. And so he gave all viewers a lesson in history.

It was then that *The Man from Madras Musings* realised that the Chief has all along been hoodwinking us with his version of the history of Madras. The former MLA claimed that the area we know of as Town was in reality two parts – George Town and Black Town. The former, he claimed,

was a white enclave where apartheid was strictly followed. The 'dirty natives', he said, were sent

when in the city! If this be the level of knowledge of our lawmakers, is it any wonder that the Town and the river are in such bad shape?!

At yet another event, an officer from the country's oldest civic body chose to make his speech in song. The burden of the song by a National Poet was whether, after making a beautiful lute, it could be cast into the mud to destroy it. MMM could not help wondering if the song ought not to be adopted by the Corporation as its anthem, for it appeared to be doing to the city exactly what the poet had written about the stringed instrument.

And that brings MMM to another event. A heritage walk in the vicinity of the Sacred Tank of Lilies was about to begin. One of the Chief's acolytes was just clearing his throat prior to leading the tour when a clear-voiced participant asked if the roads to be traversed were 'mucky'. MMM wondered if any thoroughfare in the city was anything else but that.

Tailpiece

Dashed tricky things these tailpieces. *The Man from Madras Musings*, who generally breezes through the rest of this column, always ends up being stumped at this stage. But all is well, for the wedding season, after a brief hiatus, is back. And so are the quirky invitation cards. For a sample, please see below.

– MMM

Yes it's
DUM DUM PEE PEE
Time for us

OUR READERS WRITE



Memories kindled

When I saw and read about the Madras landmarks in MM, August 16th, I remembered the days I worked in the Madras Public Service Commission in the early 1950s. The office functioned in the Bosotto Hotel buildings just after shifting from the *Victory House*.

My colleagues used to tell about the office at *Victory House*. The tram to Parry's from Mylapore used to run on Mount Road, stopping at *Swadesamitran (Victory House)*, Round Tana, Elphinstone theatre, etc.

The MPSC office later shifted to Rutland Gate and from there to its own building at *Government Estate*, near the Kalaivanar Arangam.

Victory House, after it was purchased by VGP, had a showroom for Murphy Radios with a banner showing the famous Murphy Baby.

Thank you for kindling my memories.

L. Chandrasekaran
B17/11
TNHB Flats Bagalur Road
Hosur 635 109

Toilets, now & then

The assertion of reader T. Santhanam (MM, August 1st) that Indian civilisation never had a toilet culture is not quite correct. There is recorded archaeological evidence that pre-Aryan people living along the Indus had public baths, covered drains that most Tamil Nadu towns lack even today, solid waste removal by carts, and piped public water supply.

In the same vein, since toilets are in the news now, highlighted by PM and down, shouldn't organisers of big events such as political party meets, as well as assembles at large religious functions, where lakhs gather, be mandatorily made to provide an adequate number of toilets, even temporary chemical ones? You can't only blame the citizenry for lack of civic sense, if adequate and quickly accessible facilities are not available.

Thousands of Dalit houses across the State have no provision for toilets.

Economists have quantified that India loses billions of dollars each year due to the lack of sanitary facilities, resulting in illnesses, water-borne diseases, loss of workdays etc., not counting our global image.

Dr. Prem Chandran John
prem_john@vsnl.net

Brew & litter

I simply loved Sriram V's boxed item, 'What's brewing for Madras Week?' (MM, July 16th). Exactly. Nothing of note is brewing here. In neighbouring Bangalore, a father and his sons have brewed a single malt whisky called Amruth which has been rated above the best Scotch brands of Scotland! In Chennai, you can come away only with some sub-standard tippie from Tasmac outlets.

Sriram further says, "We still don't find any excitement in North Chennai." But I do. Every time I step on C.S. Mudali Street, I am pleased and excited at the relative cleanli-

ness. In 1961 when I moved into this ancestral house of mine (built in 1931), both sides of the street used to be lined with excrement. Over the years, the heads of the Corporation and our local councillors have ensured that the street is clean and litter-free. Still, I wish the old 'Kuppa thotties' come back so that through the day people dump their rubbish into them and not on the street.

C. G. Prasad
9, C.S. Mudali Street
Kondithope
Chennai 600 079

The law of life

I was born and brought up in Kerala. My first contact with Madras was at age 21 when I came here to take the Combined Civil Services Examination of 1951, held by the UPSC. With little cash on hand, I had to take a room in one of the shady lodges in George Town area. After the exam, I moved in to the city which, for a village boy like me, was intimidatingly big. Tramcars were my favourite means of transport. For a few annas, you could travel long distances.

My next brush with the venerable city was the next year when I was called for interview in the magnificent University building on the Marina. I stayed at the Everest Hotel and had a very disturbed night due to the constant rumbling of the suburban trains, the vibrations of which could be felt in my room.

In 1976, during my posting here, I was allotted a Housing Board flat in Besant Nagar which, at that point of time, was considered a place in 'the back of the beyond'. Well-meaning friends advised me against taking the flat. "Ange Yaraavathu povaala?" was their refrain. It was considered a suburb and only those desperately looking for inexpensive accommodation. In the event, I took the flat and have never once regretted the choice.

Back then, we could hear the roar of the waves sitting at home which was about half a kilometre from the sea. In the afternoon, when the sea breeze set in, the ceiling fans were propelled by the breeze breezing its way through our house. A magnificent view of the sea could be had from the terrace. It was true, in some senses, that Besant Nagar was, indeed, a 'forsaken' suburb. Therefore there were very few houses around. Only a solitary branch of a bank served

the area. There were just two bus routes – 21D and 23A. For any shopping other than daily necessities, you had to go to Adyar. But life was unhurried, peaceful, almost bucolic. My suburb was part of Tiruvanmiyur Panchayat where you had to go to deal with government agencies.

Cut to the present times. What a contrast! Besant Nagar is now one of the choicest localities and property prices and rentals are in the top slots in Madras (now Chennai). Traffic is heavy, it is served by many bus routes, there are many banks, ATMs, eateries and what have you. Despite these inroads of 'progress', Besant Nagar continues to be one of the more liveable parts of the city. With a beach attached! Blissfully, there are hardly any highrise buildings. There is a definitive limit beyond which it cannot expand, as it is bounded by sea on one side, and the vast grounds of Kalakshetra and the Theosophical Society on two other sides.

But there is a lamentable downside. I miss the quiet nights when I used to be lulled to sleep, now by the sound of gentle waves, now by the waves roaring in rage. Now, I am jolted out of sleep by the 'vroom' of bikes by insensitive riders and tooting of horns. Also, for most of the day, the thrill of leisurely walks has disappeared and you step out of your house at your risk. But then, again, there still is blissful Elliot's Beach for bracing early morning walks.

You have to take the rough with the smooth. That's the law of life.

G. Sankaran
T 43A, Seventh Avenue
Besant Nagar
Chennai 600 090

Right tree, right name

In my article on the Gangadheeshwarar temple (MM, June 1st), I had mentioned that the 'Purasai' tree is the sacred tree of this temple. Dr. Raman has responded that he is not sure about this and mentions that it could be the 'Vasantakala Mallikai'. The booklet about this temple sold at the office in the temple premises clearly states that the 'Purasai' is the sacred tree. I verified this with the priest of the temple too.

Regarding the name of the

temple, Dr. Raman and reader P.S. Ramamurti (MM, July 16th) have mentioned that it should be Gangadhareshwara and not Gangadheeshwara. While Gangadhareshwara is the correct Sanskrit name, it is called by the locals, and known to most in Chennai, as the Gangadheeshwara temple, which is the name I chose to use in the article as it is the more familiar one.

Dr. Chithra Madhavan
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READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'. Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible. Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

– THE EDITOR

OUR ADDRESSES

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

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

– THE EDITOR

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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

Remembering Burma with love

With many in Madras having strong Burma connections, *Madras to Mandalay*, anchored by Geetha Doctor, was an apt topic for Madras Week. Apart from Indian government servants, mainly from Madras, deputed by the British to serve in Burma, the Nagarathar (Nattukottai Chettiers) went to Burma in the 1820s at the invitation of the British as traders and bankers serving Mr. Everyman. They set up *kitangis* in which they lived and worked, and met the financial needs of farmers, fishermen and wood traders who had no access to banks. The Chettiar community played a crucial role in the economy of Burma as well as in founding schools, building temples, and inviting artistes from South India to perform there.

The evening started with Shylaja Chetlur and her daughter reciting *The King in Exile*, a poem by Rudyard Kipling written in 1890. Thibaw Min, the last Burmese king and his wife Supalaya, were exiled to India when the British annexed Burma in 1886. During a temporary stop before being moved to Ratnagiri, their third daughter, Supalaya, was born there and became 'Madras Supalaya' to all.

Muthiah, speaking of *kitangi*' life, explained how young Chettiar boys were sent there to learn the ropes of business. They started doing all sorts of errands and lowly jobs and as they progressed they "could sleep only after tallying the cash of the day to the last paisa," Muthiah said. One of their abilities was mental maths, including calculating to fractions of 192. The Chettiar agents would meet every day in the Dhandayuthapani Temple and agree on interest rates.

Railway coaches in India were built using Burmese pingado wood, also called iron wood. "Wood was literally floated down the Irrawady River and then to Nagapattinam on the South Indian coast, much of it reaching Chettinad homes that were invariably built using Burma teak," Muthiah narrated. Rice from Burma was a major export to India. So was dhal. "Our sambar has a Burma connect," quipped Geetha Doctor who also spoke of the fabulous rubies of Burma.

M.V. Subbiah, who had recently visited Burma to relive his family connections with the country, spoke in glowing terms about Mandalay city which, he said, was better than even New York. He also described how Chettiar boys aged 11 to 14 joined their family *kitangis* or apprenticed in others to learn the business. Starting as *paiyan* (boy), they became *aduha aalu* or *kamaku pillai* (accountant). They progressed then to *kootali* (business partner), *pangali* (shareholder in business), and *mudalali* (owner).

Visalakshi Ramaswamy, who is into handicrafts, displayed various items of Burmese origin that were and still are part of the households of the Chettiers. Apart from wooden containers for storing rice and wooden *koodais* (woven baskets) for taking items for prayer in a temple, she displayed Moulmein jars and lacquer items. She said that when a Chettiar girl got married, each item given to her new household was written down and the list handed over to her. That's how she came to know of Mandalay *karandi* (spoon) and other items from Burma.

P.V. Krishnamoorthy, a retired Director from All India Radio and Doordarshan, was born in Burma and recalled how the Chettiers helped the Indian community remain true to their roots. Chettiers founded schools where Tamil was taught and brought in able teachers from South India to teach the students, organised the Thai Pooam festival, and hosted Tamil film stars, like S.G. Kittappa and K.B. Sundarambal, and classical vocalists and musicians.

Mystical Mandalay, a pictorial presentation on 'Burma today', by Shylaja Chetlur was shown and a Burmese soup *Khao Sue*, prepared by Chef Rajesh and his team at *The Park*, was served before the audience said goodbye to Burma that's now Myanmar.

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

A Madras Week round... by Venkatesh Krishnamoorthy



The cake with which Vivanta by Taj at Connemara celebrated Madras Day.

The stories that Lloyd's Road tells

Lloyd's Road, named after L.E.C. Lloyd, Commissioner of the Madras Corporation from 1901 to 1905 and then a Secretary to the Government of Madras, connects the Beach to Mount Road in a single stretch. It once had only 60 spacious bungalows, today it is an overcrowded stretch.

This is the road Sriram V. and Mohan Raman chose for a Chennai Heritage Walk during Madras Week.

The walk started from what was once the house of K.P. Viswanatha Iyer, a sub-editor of *The Hindu*, who is remembered for his coverage of the Dandi March. Mohan Raman then traced the origin of Madras *baashai* to Mir Sahib Pet, or Misa Pettai, where comedian Chandrababu once lived. A.V. Raman owned a bungalow at the intersection of Lloyd's Road and Royapettah High Road. A civil and sanitary engineer, he was a close associate of Rajaji and advocated the importance of sanitation, the lack of which had Lloyd always chiding Indians about. It was Raman who gave MGR his first house in the city. MGR, then a fledgling actor in the late 1950s, paid a rent and an additional sum every month as instalment towards the house at 160 Lloyd's Road where he lived and eventually became its owner. After Raman passed away, MGR had an oil portrait of him made, which still survives in AVR's home. AVR's son V.P. Raman, Mohan Raman's father, was a

noted lawyer and accomplished violinist, with political leanings and was a legal adviser to leading actors of yesteryears, including MGR, Sivaji Ganesan, Saroja Devi and lyricist Kannadasan.

The *pithamaga* of Carnatic music, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, and *The Hindu's* famed founder, G. Subramanya Iyer, lived on Lloyd's Road, which also boasts the home of Narayana Iyengar, who made a name as a

film producer. His home was later acquired by the owners of Dadha Pharma. Another MGR property on the road was first *Sama Needhi's* office, then became Nadigar Sangam's office. When MGR founded the AIADMK, it was made the headquarters of the party in 1972.

Justice Somayya, who was a junior to the legal luminary Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, owned a spacious bungalow which, after

Catching up with the chroniclers of Madras

One of the first authors of a general title for East West Publishers when they moved to Madras, S. Muthiah, the chronicler of Madras, is fondly called by different names. Biswanath Ghosh calls him 'The Madras Man' in his *Tamarind City*. Senior journalist Sushila Ravindranaath called him 'The Mad Man of Madras'. And to Sriram V., who teams with him at *Madras Musings*, he is 'The Chief'.

After Gautam Padmanabhan, CEO of Westland, welcomed the audience. Muthiah spoke fondly of Gautam's parents K.S. and Chandra Padmanabhan – who when they moved to Madras welcomed his *Madras Discovered*, then 160-pages long and now 575 pages in extent, as their first general title to be published in the city. The association has continued with East West over the last 25 years and more. Muthiah also recalled the original manuscripts being typed over

change of ownership, is now the Hema Malini Kalayana Mandapam. It was slightly off this road that gatherings of intellectuals took place under the auspices of the Lakshmipuram Young Men's Association (LYMA), founded by Gopalasamy Iyengar.

The house of Kothamangalam Subbu, the well-known script writer of Tamil films, still survives on the road. *Lalitha Sadan*, a vast 18,000 sq. ft property owned by the *dubashes* of Best and Company in its heyday, Ramaswamy and Lakshmana Swamy Iyer, was acquired by Indian Bank as the bank was the principal lender to the *dubashes* whose stock had dwindled to the extent that it necessitated the house being auctioned. The Indian Bank is now headquartered here.

In a small lane off Lloyd's Road lived T.K. Shanmugam, doyen of Tamil drama, who was called 'Avvai' Shanmugam because of the flourish with which he played the role of Avvaiyar. His son T.S. Kalaivanan still lives here. The property of V.T. Krishnamacharya, Dewan of Baroda, member of the Constituent Assembly and, later, of the Planning Commission, is today the headquarters of the Khadi Village and Industries Commission. His son, V.K. Thirumalacharya, a maverick lawyer and a close friend of K. Kamaraj, "sold it to Khadi for a song," according to Sriram, because of his friendship with Kamaraj. Eswari Lending Library started off as a waste-paper shop and second-hand bookstore. Its owner Palani, having acquired a significant amount of books in the course of the business, started the lending library.

and over again by his late wife Valli who had chided him for not doing something with all the material he had collected during his researches in India and abroad and which were occupying two shelves of her cupboard. Out of his scrapbooks, the rich wealth of information in notes, and his passion for the city, have been born many books over the years, and he will be completing 40 books by the end of the year, most of them on the city.

Muthiah retains his fondness for Ceylon where he was a successful journalist and is considered something of an authority on its ethnicity and events there from the late 1930s to the late 1960s that shaped the island's destiny. He came to Madras in 1968 when he discovered that several people in early Madras, who went on to fame, fortune and notoriety, while charting a course that made Madras the first city of Modern India, he was on his way

It's all about celebrating our City

Lots of people keep asking me what Madras Day is all about and why we need to celebrate it.

Others want to know why we choose August 22 as the Day and what event is associated with it.

A few others wonder why we should celebrate Madras Day. A Tamil Nadu Tourism officer was quoted as saying that people who now celebrate Madras Day celebrate 'colonial history' and that the State celebrates Sangam and Dravidian heritage.

This is indeed shocking but I guess it comes from a person who lives in a small world of his own.

Madras Day is all about celebrating our city. It can be its history and heritage, it can be about its cinema and performing arts. It can be about its landmarks and its leaders. It can be about its food and the people who make and offer that food.

It can also be about its autorickshaw drivers and the filter-coffee drinking public.

It is also certainly a Day to laugh at our foibles and weaknesses, to celebrate our successes and to dream of better drains.

Some jottings by Vincent D'Souza

It is certainly not a season to drool at just colonial buildings and discard the *veshti* for a seat at a high table.

Interestingly, the Madras celebration is slowly moving away from passe events and is growing on to some rooted projects.

We appreciate one such effort – the Association of Geography teachers in the city who sought to educate a group of taxi and auto drivers on less known landmarks of the city and to encourage them to ferry tourists to these places.

This is a great idea. Tourists today want to go beyond the Museum and the Marina and Mylapore. They want to snack at local food joints, walk down busling local markets and stroll inside heritage temples. And drivers who are trained are just the kind the city needs today. They are the ones who can showcase the city.

Also welcome was the start made by at least four neighbourhood groups who are on to social history projects – collecting pictures and wedding cards, shooting pictures of old shops and landmarks, cleaning 35mm film shot locally and mapping the area...and asking seniors to tell stories of life in the early days of the colony.

There is much serious work that has begun in our city. Best done by its people on their own.

* * *

Jazz musician Frank Dubier is a legend in his own right. He may be living his twilight years now but the man has left his mark at concert halls and clubs across the country.

When he is in the mood to rewind, this musician, whose mother provided the musical score to silent movies screened at the Old Elphinstone Theatre on Mount Road, has great stories to tell.

And one is about how the music-trained boys of St. Patrick's School, Adyar, were so talented that they got jobs in the English military bands and in the Governor's band in Madras.

The school across the Adyar, raised in Elphinstone Park, a property of about 160 acres with a large building, was bought in July 1885 to serve as a home for boys who were transferred from a campus in George Town.

During Madras Week, when Ranjit Balan from Besant Nagar called me, he was thinking aloud on how he could get his 'old school', St. Patrick's, featured in the media.

"Create a Heritage Walk in your campus," I told him, Yes, there are some interesting nooks on this Gandhi Nagar campus and all that Ranjit had to do was to collect as many stories as he could and design the Walk.

The catalysts of Madras Week have from the start encouraged bubbly people to curate small events that focus on the city. And hold them even in their backyard.

Walks, at any time of the year, are a way to discover and appreciate your city

* * *

Giridhar Ramachandran is a doctoral student at IIT-Madras. Can we introduce people to the variety of special interest communities and hobby groups in one place and make it a physical thing? Giridhar wrote, responding to an invitation to broaden the Madras Week celebrations to go beyond talks and walks on all things heritage.

Yes, there are bikers who do the Madras-Pondy drive every now and then on the ECR, the cyclists who pack in some interesting spots into their monthly rides. There are the photographers who curate a Photo Walk every month. The Beach CookOut group is said to meet on the Kottivakkam shore.

You will find most of them online. But Giridhar suggests that a *mela* of all such groups at one single place be held to make it a warm and valuable meet-up for people seeking a new life and who would like to do something different next year during Madras Week. One suggestion has been Chennai Heritage Drive, Teams get a list of 50-odd less-known landmarks which they need to visit and document and those who tote the largest number through the day get prizes – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*.)

to becoming *The Madras Man*. That also led him to becoming a leader of the heritage conservation movement.

To the critics who feel heritage conservation means preserving only colonial heritage, the Madras Man says the buildings that survive from olde Madras are memorials to the beginnings of institutions which are now part and parcel of modern India.

(Continued from page 1)

channels too participated with great gusto. A couple of them had events for the whole day, with one of them presenting programmes by children.

They say that the best way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Perhaps the route to a city's affection is also the same. For the first time, we had restaurant chains and hotels putting up special food events on a mega

Sriram V, another chronicler of the city, particularly of the post-1900 city, spoke on the occasion about 'Books on Madras'. The path Sriram has followed into Madras history is different from Muthiah's. Starting with his passion for Carnatic music and its history, he was "destined" to meet The Madras Man and, now, they are a team two decades old. Encouraged by the Chief, he went about delving

Next, a 'Madras Season'?

scale. At a much smaller but no less significant level were the neighbourhood food walks, creating a new niche among tours around the city. Perhaps it is time that the retail trade too looks at Madras Week on lines of the Dubai Shopping Festival. We hope that this will happen next year so that the celebrations scale yet another level.

This was also the first year that Madras Week went international. The beginning was made in Malaysia thanks to the Indian High Commissioner there, T.S. Tirumurthy.

A photo exhibition was organised and this was very well received. With this we may soon find Madras Week being celebrated in other countries as

voracious digesting of various sources of information, including the novels and personal recordings of Tamil writers; he felicitously combines the archival sources in English with the lesser known local accounts.

The highlight of the evening for many, however, was Joint Commissioner Anand Kumar bursting into a song, a Bharati song.

well. After all, there is no dearth of people from this city among the Indian diaspora.

As this story goes to press, there is no sign of the celebrations winding down. There are exhibitions, talks, walks, quizzes and marathons still to be held, the last event happening sometime in mid-September. Whoever branded it Madras Day will now have to probably consider calling it the Madras Season.

Quizzin'
with
Ram'n'an

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

1. How did the Indian-origin mathematician Manjul Bhargava of Princeton University make news recently?

2. The World Health Organisation has sanctioned the use of experimental drug ZMapp to tackle which Global Health Emergency?

3. The new airline venture between Tata-Singapore Airlines (SIA) is named...?

4. On August 6th, *Rosetta* became the first ever spacecraft to reach which type of heavenly body after a journey of more than 10 years and 6.4 billion km through deep space?

5. On August 5th, the artwork *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* was unveiled in the Tower of London to commemorate the centenary of...?

6. What museum was inaugurated in New Delhi on August 1st by President Pranab Mukherjee on the occasion of his completing his second year in office?

7. Who emulated badminton stars Prakash Padukone and Syed Modi's feat on August 3rd? And what feat?

8. Which former diplomat and minister's work, *One Life is Not Enough: An Autobiography*, recently created waves?

9. Name the world-famous, Oscar-winning comic actor and producer who committed suicide on August 11th.

10. The centenary of which fantastic engineering feat was celebrated in the Americas on August 15th?

* * *

11. Name the three Chettiar siblings who have all been Mayors of Madras.

12. One of the earliest businesses of the city was a tannery set up in 1805 at *Leith Castle* in San Thomé. Who set it up?

13. The Parish Venkatachala Iyer Street in George Town was the first to receive which now-common sanitary provision?

14. Which iconic portrait of a legendary Tamilian was created by Bhashyam (aka Arya)?

15. From which fruit does the Chennai area with the pin code 600058 get its name?

16. Which Somerset Maugham work is said to be based on the suicide of one Adela Nicholson in Alwarpet?

17. Which composer's Symphony No. 13, composed in 1958, is called the 'Madras Symphony'?

18. Which architect of repute built Lawrence School, Lovedale, and the Nilgiris Library?

19. Which pioneering actress was called 'Cinema Rani'?

20. What record does the Carnatic music song *Natakadi Vidyalu*, composed by Ramaswami Dikshitar, hold?

(Answers on page 10)

What if Lally had won in 1761?

That's a famous thought inspired by S. Muthiah, who had once wondered as to what if the temperamental Frenchman of Irish origin, Comte de Lally, had succeeded in defeating the English in 1761 with his last brilliant throw as he burst out of a beleaguered Pondicherry. If only he had succeeded on that fateful day, this article would have been telling you, in French, that Lally was France's greatest general!

Who then was this fascinating character who has his name inscribed on the Arc de Triomph



Comte de Lally of Tollendal

in Paris and has his name remembered in a street in Pondicherry?

Thomas-Arthur de Lally, Baron de Tollendal, a general in the French army, was sent to India during the Seven Years War that broke out in 1756 between England and France. He belonged to a distinguished family, the O'Mullallys, one of the old noble families of Ireland. His father, Gerard Lally, fled to France following the Treaty of Limerick, together with his de-throned Catholic king, James II. In time he became the colonel of the regiment of Dillon. Later, he married Anne de Bressac, who was from an aristocratic French family. To them was born Thomas-Arthur in 1702.

Following the French military custom of the time, he joined his father's regiment as a private. When he was seven years old, his father brought him a Captain's uniform of Dillon's Regiment – and a commission! 'The boy loved to parade wearing his uniform, but his father was determined that he should not hold his commission without being given a taste of actual service. Lally, therefore, started spending his holidays with his father in the French camp. At nine, he was present at the siege and capture of Geronaso – to "smell the gun powder," as his father said. Three years later, he mounted guard in the trenches at Barcelona. He was then packed off to college after this

"holiday recreation". And there he proved a good student.

His father's influence having inspired in Thomas-Arthur an intense hatred of the English, he joined the Irish Brigade in 1718 but, when made Captain, moved to the regiment of Dillon. There he planned a Jacobite uprising, to restore the Stuart Kings to their throne and challenge the House of Hanover. His plans never materialised, but he made a name for himself on the battlefields of Europe. By 1749 he was a Major-General and a Hero of France.

For seven years after the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1749) that concluded the last war, Europe remained at peace. But soon hostilities ensued again between France and England over their rival claims in North America. In June 1756 war was finally declared and France decided to send a force to the East. Despite differences of opinion over giving Lally independent charge, Lally was



Lally in Pondicherry.

set sail in May 1757 and, after a long and tedious voyage, disembarked in Pondicherry at the end of April 1758. The voyage had taken almost a year thanks to d'Aché's doubts and capriciousness. The English squadron which had sailed three months later reached the Coromandel Coast at the same time.

The authorities in Pondicherry ordered a gun salute in Lally's honour. By some strange

lower castes. For the lack of money, he kept castigating the Pondicherry officials. He refused to hide his feelings and expressed himself freely in words that people did not forgive or forget. He was, thus, detested by the natives and the Europeans alike in Pondicherry.

Madras was ideally the next target and Lally would have probably succeeded if it had not been for the lack of finance and the unwillingness of d'Aché to launch an attack on the English fleet stationed between Madras and Pondicherry. So, Lally decided to attack Tanjore on the advice of a Jesuit priest.

He marched south with a large force, short of transport, ammunition and food. With the men starving, they plundered a temple but found only paddy. Then, at Tiruvallur, he mistook six Brahmins for spies and had them attached to cannons and blown. Then when he was ready for an assault, news arrived that Karaikal was in danger from the English. Lally changed course to take on the besiegers. In Karaikal, he resolved to besiege Madras. But once again he was let down by d'Aché. When the French fleet was worsted in a skirmish with the English, d'Aché sailed for Mauritius in early September.

Undaunted by being left without sea power, Lally continued to make plans to attack Madras. He recalled the Marquis of Bussy from the Deccan, advanced money from his own pocket to meet the expenses of the army, and set off for Madras.

Lally and his troops arrived on the outskirts of Madras on December 14th and quickly occupied Black Town, but after that things went from bad to worse. Desertions multiplied because the soldiers were not paid. There was hardly any food and Lally, instead of being a hero to his men, became a hated

(Continued on page 9)

• From a paper presented during Madras Week by Sumitra Muthukumar

promoted Lieutenant General and sent to Pondicherry, as much to take on the British as to purge the Pondicherry government of the rampant corruption that prevailed there.

The French Government promised Lally the equivalent of 6 million pounds and three thousand men. But from the very beginning he was doomed to disappointment. He had requested a single command over land and sea and wanted his own man as his engineer and financial controller. The Government did not accede to any of his requests.

The fleet was given to Count d'Aché, a man who would turn out to be Lally's nemesis. D'Aché was a good sailor, but opinionated and intractable. He was also a man of extreme caution and would ultimately paralyse Lally. For his as engineer and financial controller, Lally was given a person who was technically sound but not a man of combat. Finally, of the promised money, only 4 million pounds were given. Lally, determined to be made a Marshal of France, went ahead despite these shortcomings.

After many false starts, Lally

mischance, the guns set apart for firing the salute were loaded with live ammunition. Five shots went through the *Comte de Provence* with Lally on board and this was immediately regarded as a bad omen by the sailors who were by nature extremely superstitious.

The news on the ground was also not encouraging. Chandernagore and Mahé had fallen to the English. Nevertheless, Lally, eager for action after months of enforced inactivity, ignored the fact that de Leyritt, the Governor of Pondicherry, could give him neither information nor any financial assistance, and marched to Cuddalore where he invested Fort St. David and took it on June 2nd without Aché's support.

Though this first expedition had been successful, Lally, with his hasty temper and sharp tongue, had managed to antagonise everyone. Impatient with the practice of the caste system – for him it was just an excuse to escape from doing work and he had Brahmins carry on their heads loads of materials that then were forbidden to touch. They were also teamed with the men of the

Celebrating Madras Week – in colour



A wish for the City

A small, experimental stall behind the Gandhi statue on the Marina was put up by volunteers. People were invited to tie a wish for the city on its birthday. This is an idea should multiply next year; let's say, similar stalls at 10 or 12 locations across the city. Contact: www.themadrasday.in



Singing for the City

August 16th was a pleasant Saturday evening and those who frequent the Natesan Park in T'Nagar were in for a pleasant experience! The members of the Madras Youth Choir had gathered there to celebrate the 375th year of the founding of Madras in a unique manner. The children's choir and the senior choir presented songs of social relevance, human values, civic sense, environmental awareness and patriotism and enthralled the audience with their music and the strong messages the songs conveyed.

– Rajashree Bhaskaran

A song for the City

The Madras Song a tribute to the memories and magic of Madras. It was launched by the Murugappa Group to celebrate Madras 375. Catch up with the song on YouTube Channel - <https://www.youtube.com/MurugappaGroup>



Walk and taste

There were several food walks during Madras Week – and every participant tasted the food items at every stop. The stop seen below was in Mint Street.



Discovering Anna Nagar

Thirupura Sundari Sevel, an architect-planner by profession initiated a project to study and map the history of the **first planned layout** of Madras City. Although Anna Nagar may not have a centuries-old heritage like Madras, it is certain that a few decades from now Anna Nagar too will have heritage to cherish.

Some little-known facts about Anna Nagar

- The area was a barren land and was chosen to hold the India International Trade and Industries Fair (IITIF) in 1968.
- Various pavilions were erected as complete concrete structures and semi-permanent ones.
- The parking lot for vehicles was where Kandasamy Naidu College is situated now.
- Shuttle buses were operated to the fair pavilions from the parking lot.
- The Tower Club is located in the building that was the Kerala Pavilion (with lots of modifications).
- The Tower inaugurated in 1968 gave a panoramic view of Madras city; the Tower has a cycle track which was later closed for cycle movement (as scooters were going up and down as pleasure rides).
- The Park around the Tower was developed in stages in later times.
- Residential plots were sold at Rs 2000-3000 with a 75 per cent Government subsidy to build houses to promote the layout initially, since very few takers were there for this area that was without facilities like schools, hospitals, markets, etc.
- Government officials being the first to be allotted plots, the area is populated largely by government officials.
- The first blocks of houses were built opposite Tower Park (which is now W-Block).



The T-shirt of the Anna Nagar Social History Group which organised contests for the young and old to help them 'discover' their locality.

- The Ayyanar Statue in W-Block, just past the Dr. Visvesvaraya Tower Park Arch, was built during the second World Tamil Conference during the Chief Ministership of C.N. Annadurai.
- The Blue Star bus stop in 2nd Avenue is just an incidental name without any history/landmarks behind it as buses stopped here and there was a small shop by it with the name Blue Star.

– D. Mohandas

Connemara creates nooks of its history

The lobby of Vivanta by Taj Connemara had a surprise for people who were not frequent visitors to the place. In a corner, the wall has been turned into a gallery of historical photos of the hotel and people associated with it. Alongside is a set of two colonial-styled chairs and centre table, with a marble top. There is also a book with a few pages tracing the hotel's history. A smart executive then led me to another part of the lobby where a set of 12 photos of the halls and rooms of the vintage hotel are displayed. More is being planned – a walkthrough for interested guests who will be offered some wine and given a quick history of the Connemara. Other institutions, a century and more old, would do well to emulate this.

– Vincent D' Souza

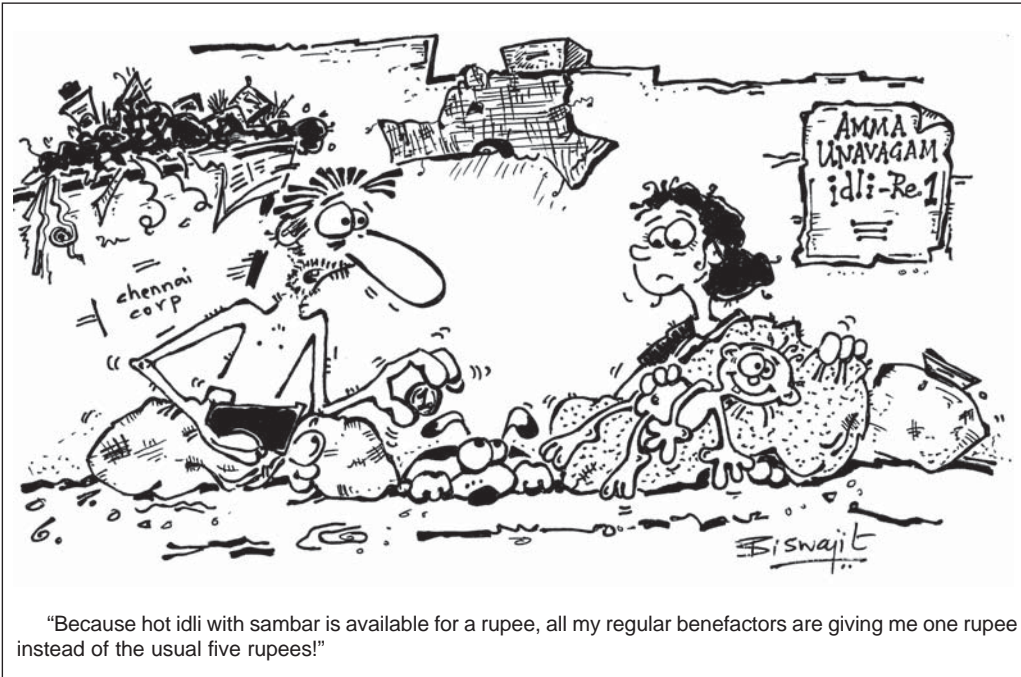
A laugh a day in our MADras!



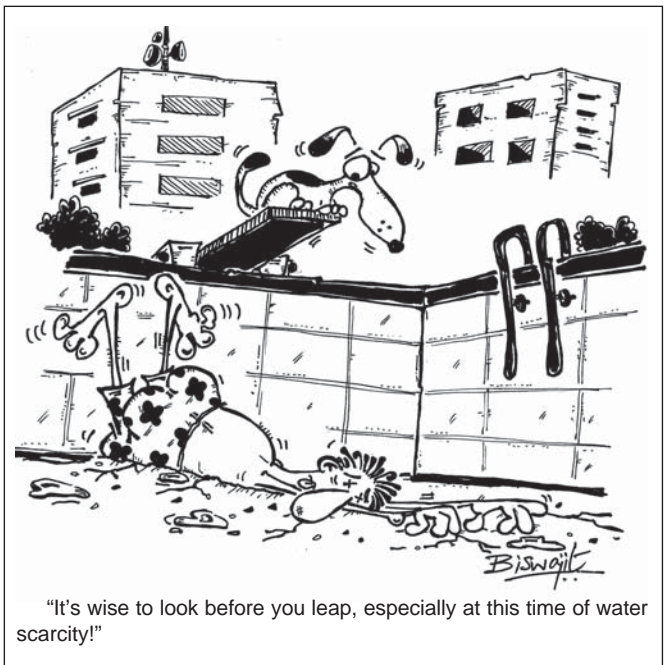
The centrepiece at Biswajit Balasubramanian's exhibition, MADras, where the cartoons on this page were among those on display.



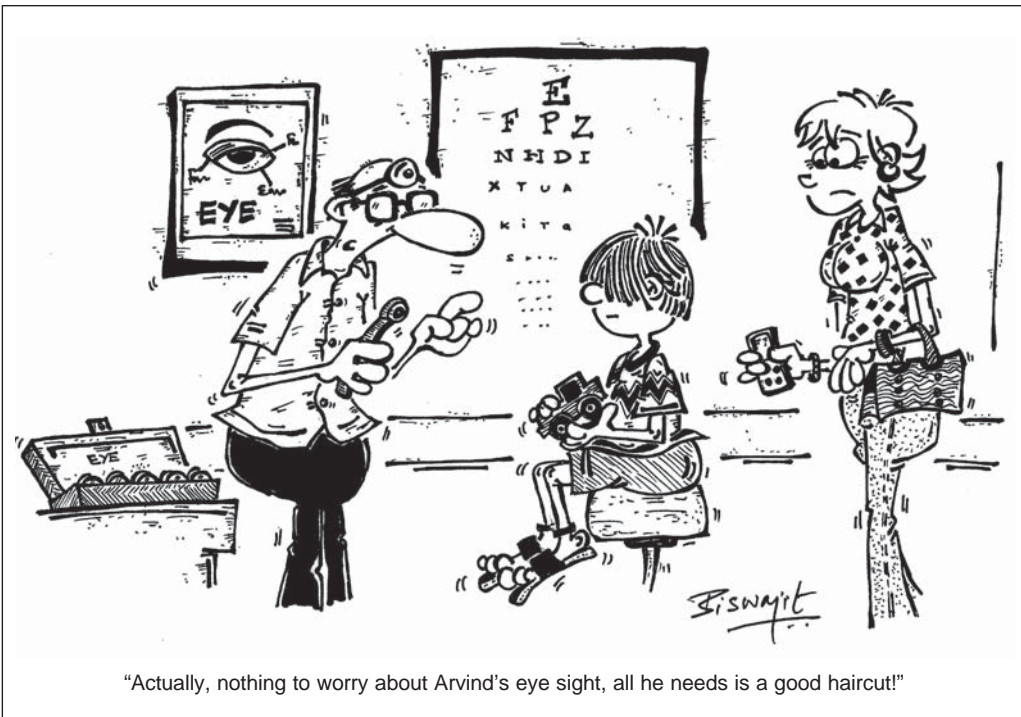
"Appa, how come Madras gets to celebrate its birthday for one full month and I only for one day?"



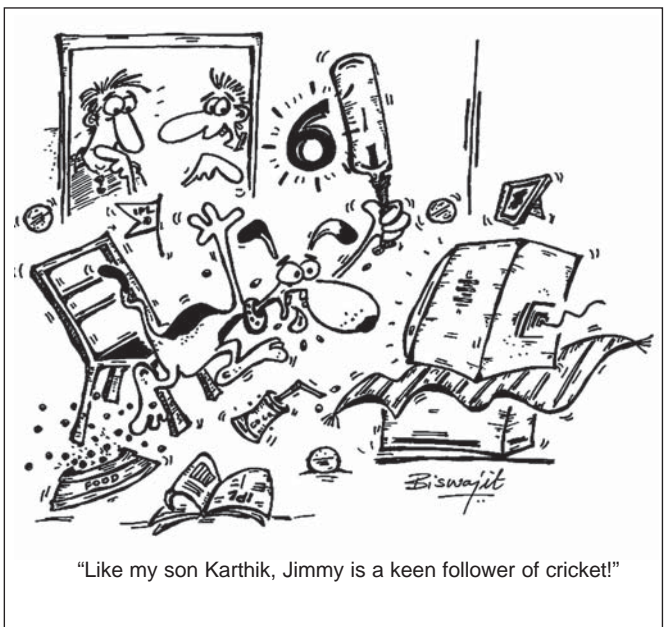
"Because hot idli with sambar is available for a rupee, all my regular benefactors are giving me one rupee instead of the usual five rupees!"



"It's wise to look before you leap, especially at this time of water scarcity!"



"Actually, nothing to worry about Arvind's eye sight, all he needs is a good haircut!"



"Like my son Karthik, Jimmy is a keen follower of cricket!"

Etched in copper

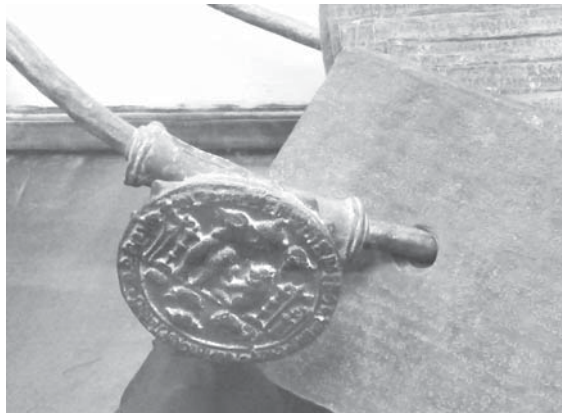
Inscriptions etched on stone seen on the walls and pillars of temples are well-known. Similar epigraphs etched on sheets of copper are not that well known. The newly refurbished section of copper plate inscriptions inside the Stone Sculpture Gallery of the Madras Museum in Egmore has on display many of these rare inscriptions issued by important dynasties of South India. These are part of a 600-plus collection. Written in different scripts and many languages, these epigraphs range in date from the 3rd Century CE to recent times.

What exactly is the content of these copper plate inscriptions? They usually mention grants of villages or plots of cultivable lands to private individuals or public institutions by kings. Names of monarchs, their achievements, officials, queens, princes, places, dates and much, much more can be gleaned from these priceless etchings on copper which are a mine of information for historians and archaeologists. Many of them even have the name of the poet who composed the verses and also the name of the engraver. They were given to the donees as documentary proof of the donation. Luckily, most of these inscriptions have

been edited and translated by scholars and their contents made known to the academic world. These copper plates, usually rectangular in shape, have round holes near the margin to allow a circular copper ring to pass through to which is attached the seal of the dynasty which issued the inscription.

The earliest copper plate on display, dated approximately to the 4th Century CE, belongs to the Pallava dynasty. As in the case of many of these copper plate epigraphs, this was discovered quite by accident in 1899 while a field was being ploughed near Maidavolu village in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. The language of this donative epigraph is Prakrit and the script is the southern Brahmi. The bull emblem of the Pallavas adorns the elliptical seal on the copper ring of these plates.

It is the Chola copper plate grants that take one's breath



Chola copper plate inscriptions (11th Century AD) with the Chola Seal.



Pallava copper-plate inscription.

away. All of them are bi-lingual, the first part composed in Sanskrit and etched in the Grantha script and the second portion in Tamil. One of the best-known in the fields of history and archaeology is the large Thiruvallangadu copper plate inscrip-

• by
Dr. Chithra Madhavan

tion discovered in Thiruvallangadu near Arakonam. It consists of 31 large plates strung on a ring to which is attached a seal showing the Chola emblem of the tiger and many other symbols alongside proclaiming the greatness of the Imperial House of the Cholas, totally weighing 92 kg.

Even bigger than the Thiruvallangadu plates is the huge

and heavy Karandai copper plate charter (1019 CE) unearthed in a field in Puttur village, Thanjavur District. It consists of 57 plates and a massive ring with the Chola seal, weighing in all approximately 111 kg. Both the Thiruvallangadu and Karandai copper plates date to the reign of the illustrious Rajendra Chola I who ascended the Chola throne in 1014 CE – exactly one thousand years ago today.

Occupying centre stage in the gallery is the enormous Thiruvindalur copper plate grant, the biggest, heaviest and lengthiest in India thus far discovered. Any onlooker would marvel at its sheer size and bulk! Dated 1058 CE, it is of the time of Rajendra Chola II. This inscription, comprising 85 rectangular copper plates, each plate uniformly 44 cm in length and 21 cm in breadth, was discov-

ered accidentally in May 2010 at a depth of twelve feet in a trench along with many ancient bronze images when the Kailasanatha temple in Thiruvindalur village (near Mayiladuthurai) was being renovated. Needless to say, the plates too are bound by a copper ring with Chola seal, which are intact after nearly 1000 years. The weight is an unbelievable 150 kg.

Copper plates of the Chera dynasty (11th-12th century CE), Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagara (16th century CE), Pandyas (16th century CE), Nayak rulers of Madurai (17th century CE), Setupati Raja of Ramnad (17th century CE) and even one of the British period of the 19th century can be seen here. The last mentioned records a settlement made by a

(Continued on page 10)

What if Lally had won in 1761?

(Continued from page 6)

commander. Progress was also hindered by the incompetency of the engineer de Durre who took ages to open up a breach in the right place. This was finally done and the assault was planned for the following day. At daybreak, English ships were sighted in the Bay to the dismay of Lally and he was forced to raise the siege and return to Pondicherry.

In Pondicherry, the news of his failure caused rejoicing, he was so hated.

In the meantime, Conflans, who had replaced Bussy in the north, suffered total defeat and capitulated to the English. The local Subedar, Salabat Jung, greatly discouraged, immediately signed a treaty with the English and refused any help to the French. Lally's last hope depended on the return of the fleet from Mauritius. D'Aché did in fact return, but stayed for just two days. He landed a small contingent of men and gave some money and sailed away never to return to the Indian seas.

Meanwhile, the English

received reinforcements led by Sir Eyre Coote. On November 19th Wandiwash was taken by the English army. To counter this, Lally resolved to retake Wandiwash. Lally divided his army into two. Placing himself at the head of one part of it, he marched to Conjeevaram, plundered the town for provisions for the army and moved on to Tripatore the next day. On getting this news, Coote immediately rushed to Conjeevaram, which was the effect Lally had hoped to obtain. Leaving Bussy behind in Tripatore, Lally marched on Wandiwash.

The plan was bold and feasible and if well executed bore all the marks of success. The idea was to take the town surrounding the fort and attempt a breach before the English came back. But Durre with his usual dilatory ways took more than a week to make the breach and establish a battery, by which time the English were back.

Battle was inevitable. Lally hastened to draw up his men in a single line. Seizing an opportune moment he decided to charge with his cavalry. To his

utter dismay not a single man followed him. When he finally induced a group to charge, the delay had given the English the time to set up their canons and the cavalry fell back, leaving the General alone in the field. Lally then galloped towards the infantry in the centre. Eager for action and regardless of the fire which was rained upon them, the French column advanced and broke a part of the English line. The unbroken part of the English line quickly formed up on its flank and soon there was one to one combat. At this time occurred a most unfortunate incident. Lally's pivotal position was on the extreme left and was supported by an entrenchment on the other side. By sheer mischance, an English cannon-ball landed in the entrenchment causing an explosion and the troops were forced to run abandoning their guns. The entrenchment was immediately taken by the English.

By May 1, 1760 the French were confined to the limits of Pondicherry and the place was invested by land and by sea. But what could a single man do against a whole town? The en-

emies were within the walls of Pondicherry and not without. But Lally battled on.

He planned one last bold stroke to rid himself of the besieging enemy. His plan was that while his right column surprised the English from the front, the left column stationed on the other side of the river Ariankuppam should cross and attack the enemy from its rear. Inexplicably, the left column, instead of attacking from the rear, came between the assaulting column and the town and the sandwich could not be completed. There was nothing to stop Coote from pressing the French against the walls of Pondicherry.

Pondicherry surrendered unconditionally on January 16, 1761. Lally was sent to Madras and then on to England as a prisoner-of-war. In London, he came to hear of the terrible things that were being said about him in France and asked to be released on parole. On his return he found that all of France had been stirred to its depths by the loss of the French Indies. The entire Council of Pondicherry, all the employees

of the French East India Company, and literally every man who had lived in Pondicherry had contrived to stir up feeling against Lally. The public bayed for his blood. He was accused of treason and speculation and tyrannical administration.

In the face of this public outcry, Lally was advised to escape when he could. But so completely did he believe in his innocence that he refused and said he was prepared to face all charges before the tribunals. He voluntarily surrendered himself and was imprisoned in the Bastille. The trial lasted three long years and Lally was refused an advocate since it was a charge of treason. As reward for 55 years of service he was convicted of betraying the interests of the King and sentenced to death. On May 9, 1766 he was put in a dung cart, gagged and ignominiously led to the scaffold. The public clapped till the end.

Years later, Lally's son Trophime-Gerard, assisted by Voltaire, got the case reopened. Louis XVI, eager to show a spirit of reform, set aside the 1766 decree and, in effect, exonerated Lally.

A bird that changed a canal's course

In 1836, T.C. Jerdon, a 25-year-old surgeon, arrived in the Madras Presidency. After training at the General Hospital, he was sent to treat troops battling insurgency in a district nearly half-way to the Calcutta Presidency. Once that was quelled, he joined his cavalry regiment as medical officer and served in various parts of India in a three decade long career. But why do we care about yet another employee of the East India Company, even if he had died insolvent at the end of his service?

Here's a reason: At least a few species of plants, animals and birds of the Indian subcontinent are named in his honour. Among them are the Indian violet (*Jerdonia indica*), the Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus jer-*

doni) and the Anchor Catfish (*Hara jerdoni*). But one cryptic bird, endemic to the Eastern Ghats, popularly known as Jerdon's Courser, has to be the most famous of creatures named after him.

For a quiet bird, it has seen plenty of drama. In 1848, the curator of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Edward Blyth, declared *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*, a species new to science based on Jerdon's specimen. By the turn of the 19th century, this bird was declared extinct. So, when it was unexpectedly sighted in 1986 there was much rejoicing. The Indian government promptly put its image on a Re 1 postage stamp. It was also given a place to call home, the Sri Lankamalleshwara Sanctuary in Andhra

Pradesh, but its travails didn't end there.

A threat loomed over the bird's habitat in the form of the Telugu Ganga project under which interlinked canals would carry water from a reservoir in Andhra Pradesh to our ever-parched city. This would have passed through the courser's home, so that route was avoided. Researchers then showed that the bird's range, though narrow, extended well beyond the sanctuary. So, in 2008, the Supreme Court ordered the drawing up of an alternative route for the canal and this was a victory for the conservationists. Grazing, logging, and quarrying are persistent threats to the bird's habitat. There are less than four hundred Jerdon's Coursers left on the planet. The last time someone officially sighted one was in 2009.

In the early 19th Century, this courser was not critically endangered like it is now, but the bird must've been elusive just the same. The nocturnal bird hides in the shade of the scrub during the day, but Jerdon procured the bird, and described its call for posterity. As a student at the University of Edinburgh, he had belonged to the Plinian Society (Charles Darwin himself had been a member), an association of young naturalists, a students-only club that met weekly, critiqued papers, took trips to the countryside, collected and identified specimens using rules of taxonomy. That training paid off, when Jerdon came to a country, most of whose flora and fauna had not been documented systematically. Since



T.C. Jerdon's...

... Courser



there was no single collective account of the birds, he began recording the ones he saw and heard in the Eastern Ghats and the Deccan. This formed the basis of his first book *A Catalogue of the Birds of the Peninsula of India*. After four years of such fieldwork, plus official duties, he went on leave of absence to the Nilgiris, where he got married at the age of thirty to Flora Macleod, who had an interest in botanical art.

His next stop was Nellore, where he served as Civil Surgeon. Here, Jerdon drew on the knowledge of the aboriginal Yanadis to catalogue reptiles and more avifauna. Later, ants and fish were objects of his study, but he never lost sight of his beloved birds. He observed them at his own expense and made sketches or hired a local draftsman for the job. Expeditions into the jungle and commissioning illustrations cost money. The good doctor's finances were never in order, creditors harassed him, but he

seems to have taken it in his stride. Once, when he served in Tellicherry, a bailiff from Madras came to arrest him, and the story goes that the man was sent back with a specimen of a rare monkey (*Presbytis Johnii*) – a live one at that!

Rejoining the army with the rank of Surgeon, Jerdon did active military duty till the end of 1857. By then, the amateur naturalist's fame had spread. His services were transferred to the Government of India on special duty to prepare major works on Indian natural history. In *Birds of India*, he described 1,008 species spread over the length and breadth of the country, which he traversed and re-traversed during the course of this work. On one of his excursions into the jungles of Assam, he caught fever. After convalescing, he returned to England in 1870, where he died two years later leaving a wealth of drawings and specimens of tropical plants, birds and animals.

Jerdon had laid the groundwork for other naturalists in India. For zoologists going out into the field, his reasonably priced books served as the starting point. A.O. Hume, 'Father of Indian Ornithology' and a founder of the Indian National Congress, too acknowledges this debt in *My Scrapbook or Rough Notes on Indian Zoology and Ornithology*, which he dedicates to Edward Blyth and Dr. T. C. Jerdon, and calls himself their pupil.

He hoped that this book published in 1869 would form a "nucleus round which future observation may crystallise" and also that others would help him "fill in many of the woeful blanks remaining in the record." They did. They still do.

And so science marches on.
– Vijaysree Venkatraman

ETCHED IN COPPER

(Continued from page 9)

committee of three members, namely Andrew Scott, Collector of Guntur, John Read, Collector of Masulipatnam, and I.L. Caldwell, Superintendent of Tank Repairs, regarding distribution of water from some channels of the River Kistna (Krishna) to the villages of Bapatla and Chukur (Cherukuru). The copper plates are secured by a ring, the ends of which, interestingly, have a figure of Ganesha!

Such an array of ancient copper plate inscriptions is rare to see. I wonder how many in Chennai even know about this gallery?

Answers to Quiz

1. He was awarded the prestigious 'Fields Medal'; 2. Ebola virus; 3. Vistara; 4. Comet; 5. World War I. It's a garden of ceramic poppy flowers; 6. An AV museum chronicling the history and treasures of the highest office of the country; 7. P. Kashyap, by winning the men's singles gold at the CWG; 8. Natwar Singh; 9. Robin Williams; 10. Inauguration of the Panama Canal.

* * *

11. M.A. Muthiah Chettiar, M. Ramanathan Chettiar and M.A. Chidambaram; 12. Thomas Parry; 13. Underground sewage; 14. Subramania Bharati; 15. Fig (or Athi). The area is Athipet; 16. *The Colonel's Lady*; 17. Henry Cowell; 18. Robert Chisholm; 19. T.P. Rajalakshmi; 20. Longest song, set to 108 ragas and talas.

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