

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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## INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Remembering alma maters
- Ekamra Nivas seminars
- Mylapore festival buzz
- Cholamandal's latest

## How do we cash in on tourism?

As a nation we never had it better as far as our tourism industry is concerned. Foreign tourist arrivals are at an all time high, clocking a figure of 6.97 million in 2013, the latest year for which statistics are available. That corresponds to foreign exchange earnings of \$18.4 billion. It is estimated that the Indian travel and tourism sector will be the second largest employer globally, involving either directly or indirectly 4.04 million people by 2019. The entire industry is currently valued at \$23 billion and is growing at 4 per cent annually. How does Chennai fare in all this and is it capable of going along with the flow?

The city has been in the news for the correct reasons in 2014. It was the only Indian metro to feature in *The New York Times* global list of most desirable destinations to visit in 2014. Closer home, a survey has listed it as the best city to live in on the basis of various counts. And the tourism figures for

2014 are impressive – over 3.9 million foreigners came into Tamil Nadu, the majority making their entry via Chennai. The State still remains the top attraction for overseas tourists. Encouraged by this, the State Tourism Department has claimed that it will soon be unveiling a package to get more tourists to the city and the State.

### • by A Special Correspondent

At the ground level, however, those in the know feel that Chennai still remains a mere gateway, with tourists who land here immediately moving on to other destinations in South India. Poor packaging of what is on offer appears to be the chief issue. For instance, there are no tourist advisory centres strategically located, and the one or two there are, are manned by poorly trained personnel. Those who come plan their tour based

on hearsay and secondary sources, gaining experience as they go along, not all of which is good. Secondly, the tours the Tourism Corporation offers are led by guides who provide little information and less by way of answers. There was a half-hearted attempt a few years ago to set up a hop on, hop off tour of Chennai but that it was planned to fail was quite evident to everyone except the Department of Tourism.

Chennai, like Ahmadabad and Delhi, has a number of precincts that have the potential to become heritage destinations – the Chepauk Palace, the Mylapore tank area, Triplicane, Tiruvottriyur and Fort St George are some of them. All that requires to be done are steps to regulate traffic, provide uniform signage and explanatory plaques, regular cleaning and sanitation and the provision of public toilets. None of these steps requires huge

(Continued on page 2)

## Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• This landmark institution began life in May 1844 as the Government Maternity Hospital. Its first home was near the Egmore railway station, facing the Cooum River. This was thanks to public subscription. The Government met the cost of the staff and the dieting of the patients. The place was run under the supervision of a committee of six medical officers who gave their services free of cost.

In 1847, the Madras Medical College instituted a professorship in Midwifery and the Government appointed the incumbent, Dr. James Shaw, as the Superintendent of the Hospital. Two new wings were added to the old building in 1852 but by the 1870s it was time to move.

Laid out in the shape of a female pelvis, the new structure came up on Pantheon Road, under the guidance of Major General G.G. Gifford, who is commemorated with a block in his name on the campus. The new hospital was completed in 1881 in Egmore and by 1900 had expanded to five blocks with a total of 140 beds. The hospital was to be headed by several noted medical practitioners among whom was Lt. Col. A.M. Branfoot who in March 1886 successfully saw the imprisoned ex-Queen of Burma – Supayalat – through a difficult delivery.

The Maternity Hospital, or MH as it came to be known, was the only

(Continued on page 2)

## Awards for urban mobility – but what's the reality?

A month ago, there was a small news item that may have escaped the attention of many. Our city's Corporation received an award at Urban Mobility India, a conference conducted by the Union Ministry of Urban Development. The award, we learn, was for the civic body's continued efforts to make our roads a comfortable place for pedestrians and non-motorised transport users. That may come as a surprise to many. What is even more surprising is that the Corporation claims to have put this policy into practice on 26 important thoroughfares and is planning to take it up in 29 more.

And so what has really happened to these roads? With the help of city-based organisations that have for long been

fighting for better utilisation of available space, the Corporation has provided continuous and accessible pavements, relocated obstructions such as electrical boxes and garbage bins, created safe cycle paths and streamlined traffic. The new pavements have been designed according to Indian Road Congress standards and are aimed to provide "continuous and unhindered walking" and "reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles." There are photographs to back these claims as well. But a recent visit to some of these places indicates that matters are still in a nascent stage and the Corporation's claim of progress may be premature. In short, its intentions are good, but there is very little to back this by way of action.

The Chennai Corporation is a pioneering civic body in that it adopted a Non Motorised Transport (NMT) policy. This was in 2012 when it was decided that solutions to the road woes of the city would no longer come from flyovers but by sensitively redesigning the city space and enhancing pedestrian

### • by A Staff Reporter

infrastructure. The NMT policy mandates that 60 per cent of a city's transport budget ought to be directed towards walking and cycling initiatives. The policy also aims at zero pedestrian and cyclist death by 2018.

It must be mentioned in this context that Chennai, which once had a high proportion of

non-motorised transport users, has since lost out on this edge, thanks to a completely misplaced emphasis on catering to the comforts of the owners of passenger cars. This despite the fact that cars occupy less than ten per cent of the available road space in the city! The Corporation is largely to be blamed for this. Beginning with 1996, it has worked overtime in reducing pavement space, putting up huge flyovers that have completely altered street topography and not monitoring the illegal takeover of what little space that is left by vendors, political parties and private owners. Now it would appear that all that is set to change.

But can it become a reality? A simple survey would reveal that the Corporation may have

the best intentions, but if it is to implement them successfully, it needs to change the mindset of just about every other stakeholder, including its officials. Pavements have been lost to makeshift car parking thanks to commercial establishments and residential complexes that have come up without any parking spaces planned in them. Who is to blame for this? The CMDA and the Corporation which, after all, are in charge of licensing such construction and monitoring them! Most new buildings are now on high plinths requiring steep slopes for vehicles to enter and exit and the ramps have to perforce extend on to the roads. Why do the buildings have to be

(Continued on page 2)



# TO CASH IN ON TOURISM...

(Continued from page 1)

investment for them to be put into place but, if in place, they can generate considerable returns. Yet, no steps are being taken to harness the potential in any of these locations.

Chennai also uniquely has several cultural seasons – the Music Season in December, the Pongal festivities of various kinds in January (dance, literature, the Mylapore festival and folk arts), the temple festivals in March/April, May/June, August/September and December and the Madras Week celebrations in August. Each one can become a tourist draw if advertised and packaged well. Here too, attendance by foreigners at

present is more by chance than by design.

What is really needed is a tourism master plan that ought to be drawn up for a five-year period. Steps need to be outlined in terms of actions proposed within the overall plan and implemented, keeping tourist potential in mind. It is imperative that the local stakeholders, in terms of shops and establishments, residents and service providers are roped in so that they can see the benefits as well. If all this is done, we see no reason why tourists will not throng Chennai and, more importantly, stay here, without merely flitting in and out of the first city of Modern India.

## Madras Landmarks

(Continued from page 1)

one of its kind in this part of India for several decades. It was in that capacity that it hosted the first All-India Obstetrics and Gynaecological Congress in 1936. The venue was the Museum Theatre and inaugurating it was Dr. Ida Scudder of CMC Vellore, with Dr. Sir A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar in the chair. He was also the first Indian to be the Superintendent of the MH, occupying the post between 1939 and 1942. It was to be 1984, however, before a woman came to head the institution, the first one being Dr. Lokasundari Selvaraj.

A children's ward came up in the hospital in 1949 with 28 beds. In 1963, the Government sanctioned a separate hospital for children and this came up in the Arni House compound. When completed, this became the Government Children's Hospital, with 250 beds.

The hospital became a teaching centre with postgraduate and diploma courses in 1930 under the Madras Medical College. In 1952, it became one of three postgraduate institutes of Madras city, and that marked the beginning of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the MH. Dr. R.K.K. Thampan was the first Director.

The hospital is today a recognised centre of excellence and delivers around 22,000 babies annually.

## URBAN MOBILITY AWARDS

(Continued from page 1)

constructed on high surfaces? Because the road surfaces keep rising in our city! And why do they rise? Because the Corporation does not adhere to road laying norms. These are just two small examples of how the Corporation's own NMT policy

may come a cropper thanks to its own practices.

And so, those who give awards for the civic body's good intentions may have jumped the gun somewhat. If only all of our Corporation's well-meant resolutions made it to action, we would be a virtual heaven on earth.

### OUR ADDRESSES

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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 appoint you less.

– THE EDITOR

# What say the headlights?

As *The Man from Madras Musings* ages (and rather gracefully, as he likes to think), he has difficulties with flashing headlights. A few years ago he would have taken them in his stride but not so any more. A blinding beam, followed by complete darkness and then a blinding beam again, stuns MMM. He then prefers to halt his vehicle when this happens and resumes only when he has regained his bearings.

All this has, however, had MMM do some research on what the headlights actually hope to convey when they are flashed at an oncoming vehicle. MMM learns that in the United Kingdom, rather characteristically, flashing of headlights means nothing more than conveying the information that there is a vehicle somewhere out there. MMM is no wordsmith, but there is something in the way this information is worded that gives you the impression that dimming and brightening the lights in that country is the worst of form. The US equivalent is quite typically encased in legalese and claims that flashing of the lights is permitted by some amendment or the other

4. Out of the way, you titch! These are the large vehicles which are in the opposite lane, heading towards you. They need you to make way for them so that they can proceed unimpeded. And in case you don't move, they can cause you and your vehicle grievous injury.

5. The compulsive flasher – This one has it and so will flash it. By that MMM means that there is no earthly reason for these vehicles to keep flickering their headlights but they will do it just because they have the facility to do so.

All these are just indicative types. If you can identify some people whom you recognised in the above archetypes, or if you can add some more to this list, the credit and responsibility are all yours.

### At the Book Fair

Yet another Chennai Book Fair has come and gone. *The Man from Madras Musings* never misses it and this year too made it there and returned home laden with books, much to the consternation of his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed. The Fair was, as it ought to be, filled with

lurked under the mat even as you took your next step.

Standing at one particular stall, MMM suddenly found the ground giving way under his left foot, which began to go deep into the bowels of the earth. MMM had visions of being rescued using excavating machinery but some kind souls helped and after a couple of heave hos, MMM was back on flat land.

Walking over raised mounds was not much of an issue beyond mild attacks of vertigo here and there, but walking over hollows was a different matter altogether. The sheet beneath bowed under your weight and, as you lifted your foot, rebounded back on your heel with renewed force, making it feel like some third degree torture treatment meted out to worst of the opponents.

That men of books were not stern men of accounts was made amply evident at the Fair. The counters were manned by staff who took ages to add the simplest of totals and oftentimes made serious goofs in adding up. Those who had credit card payment facilities scarcely knew how to operate the machines. Most stalls

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

of that country's constitution which document, as you may be aware, the Americans are rather inordinately proud of. This states that the flashing of headlights has varying messages to convey based on the State of that country you happen to be in.

Coming to our country and, in particular, our beloved city, the records are silent. And so it is left to prophet MMM to interpret our codes. And here they are:

1. Get out of the way, I am going ahead – this is the variety that flashes its headlights into your rear-view mirror. You, therefore, get it up close and right between the eyebrows. Having thus incapacitated you, your predator overtakes you and rushes ahead.

2. I got money, I got money! This variety uses those mammoth cars whose names rhyme with the word gaudy. The lights apparently are never switched off, or cannot be, and so they are forever glaring at you.

3. On Government duty – You can never miss them. They will keep flashing and also continuously hooting at you till you are blinded and deafened and come to a halt. They then charge ahead, carrying their precious personage from one meeting to another. The speed is only on the road. Very little actually happens in the meetings.

people, books and earnest discussions. There are some who have complained to MMM about the crowds and give it as the main reason why they don't go to the Fair. It is MMM's standard response that a Fair is meant to have crowds and so you cannot expect anything else but that at this event as well. To MMM it is gratifying that an event centring on books draws such vast numbers in an era when Cassandras are predicting the end of the printed book as we know of it.

Having said that, MMM would like to draw the attention of the organisers to a few areas that need to improve. Having the Fair at the YMCA Nandanam is a great idea but, surely, some thought can be spared on levelling the exhibition space before laying out the stalls? The land is what geographers call as one of high relief, the topography being full of hills and dales. The organisers had simply laid out metal sheets on this, placed matting on that and erected the stalls. There was consequently no way that you could know what

wrote out the bills manually thereby slowing down the purchase process. And, finally, almost every one of the stalls expected you to come to the Fair with huge bags of loose change.

### Tailpiece

The Pinjrapole is rather a favourite of the Chief's and he writes about it ever so often. *The Man from Madras Musings* was, therefore, delighted to receive an invitation from it for "the inauguration of 14 cows".

Signboards too can always be counted upon to delight MMM. Given that 'c' and 'e' are silent in any case, *The Man from Madras Musings* is not surprised that someone decided to economise on them.

– MMM





**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



**Of toilets & waste**

Reader K.V.S. Krishna's Letter (MM, January 16th) triggered some memories and reflections.

I recall a discussion during a school Geography lesson about a region somewhere in Asia where the peasants would mix the 'night soil' and the soil in the fields with their fingers, knowing its value as manure. It drew mixed reactions and, of course, a lot of sniggers from the well-to-do category of students. The invention of toilets and septic tanks was evidently superfluous for those farmers.

In History lessons we also learnt of Moheniodaro and other early settlements which were considered 'advanced' because the excavations revealed fairly elaborate drainage systems. Such an impression

may be worth reviewing! Our perceptions of dirt and hygiene are perhaps quite artificial or socially conditioned, rather than based on science or logic.

Many of us may be familiar with dwellings where the walls and floors were paved using cow-dung paste, with a fresh coat being applied every year. I have lived in one such, and it wasn't a mud hut! Today's educated lot may consider it unhygienic – may be just because there are commercial interests aggressively promoting our glamorous, sanitised and wasteful lifestyles. There could be alternative views about whether animal or human excretions are 'dirty'.

The first nail in the environment's coffin might very well have been the development of drainage and sewage systems in the urbanisation drive of river

valley civilisations. It has actually encouraged us to 'throw away' things and create waste without suffering any immediate consequences, hence with no concern for where it all goes, except for a few do-gooders today whose voice may never be heard. Organisations like Greenpeace get hounded by governments and corporations for speaking out against toxic wastes.

I am not qualified to offer any practical solutions to the mess in which our so-called civilisation finds itself. Reader KVSK's proposals may work only if there is adequate motivation, incentive and certainty for those who could implement such schemes. In any case they apply only to a fast-dwindling rural environment, and would require both a top-down and bottom-up approach to gain acceptability before even starting.

The situation in towns and cities is a growing nightmare. It hardly makes sense to enforce use of toilets where water and sewage connections are absent or inadequate.

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**A Doordarshan laugh**

I took these pictures on the evening of January 25th. I really didn't think DD could make such huge mistakes. Seeing them the following thoughts struck me:

- Pres. has new panacea for country's woes; physiotherapy.
- Pres. provides the healing touch!
- Modi: Rejuvenate India; Mukherjee: Rejuvenate Indians!

Of course, if this goes viral, there will be many more interesting captions. But are we, as Indians, able to laugh at ourselves?

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**R.K. Laxman as I knew him**

The legendary cartoonist R.K. Laxman is no more. My mind races back to August 1978 when I had the privilege of spending three memorable days with him in Madras.

I was the Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Chapter of the Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) and helped organise a lecture-cum-demonstration by Laxman at the Connemara Hotel. In his typical tongue-in-cheek style, Laxman gave a talk and demonstrated on a drawing board how he visualised politicians.

In his mind, every politician was symbolised by an object which Laxman drew first and then converted it into a cartoon, adding a few strokes from his creative pen. To draw the cartoon of Morarji Desai, he first drew a flower pot and within a few seconds transformed it into a cartoon of Morarjibhai. A water jug became Indira Gandhi. It was amazing, yet looked so simple.

During this visit he also participated in other meetings and media interviews, all of which I had co-ordinated. He also came home one evening for dinner. During the informal get-together I found him very conscious of his celebrity status. He was also as sarcastic and humorous in person as he was in his cartoons. He also talked about the difference between being funny and humorous. He asserted that his cartoons were not funny but tried to be humorous.

At the airport, where I had gone to see him off, he asked me to look at him and framed my figure within his four fingers. I was puzzled and wondered why he did that. A week later, I had the answer in the form of a birthday gift I received by registered post – just two days before my 36<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was a caricature of me with amazing resemblance to his ever popular common man. Though I was not as plumpy then, R.K. Laxman visualised what I would be like in the future. The cartoon showed me dressed in my favourite striped safari suit. It also captured the small



line on my forehead, a reminder of an accident I had when I was six years old. Truly a genius with a fantastic memory and powers of observation.

It was a priceless gift from an all-time great cartoonist. The cartoon not only occupies pride of place in my drawing room but also adorns the cover of my autobiography, *Courage My Companion*, described as an "uncommon autobiography of a common man".

Laxman's common man?

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**MADRAS MUSINGS  
ON THE WEB**

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

THE EDITOR

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# 'The gang of five'

It is a matter of immense pride to us octogenarians that our alma mater, Queen Mary's College (QMC) is a centurion this year and that we are alive to be a part of the celebrations.

So what's there to gloat over a college's century? One that's going to seed, that has unkempt grounds overgrown with weeds, dirty corridors and forlorn-looking buildings presenting a poor picture of itself.

But to the two of us, it once meant a window to the world, freedom from the four walls of home, if you remember the ethos of those times, 65 years ago. Our nation had first shaken itself free of British rule and talk of women's emancipation was in the air.

Queen Mary's College was born on July 14, 1914 (incidentally, Bastille Day, and the year of commencement of the Great War), thanks to the indefatigable attempts of Dorothy De la Hey, the founder and first Prin-

500 metres away, there was no need for ceiling fans. Frankly, I don't remember if we had any. There was just one toilet for the five to six hundred girls. Not much different from now! Taps without water was the norm even then. We shunned the toilet. Water for washing and drinking was from just one tap, with the girls jostling around to get it. There was no culture of everyone carrying a water bottle.

A lunch box was a common sight; it could not be avoided. But we did not carry too many books. Yes, looking back, how carefree student life was then, leisurely and weightless.

We were the first women in our families to get degrees, but more than that what we still cherish are the great friendships that last to this day. The two of us met on the first day in college and have been inseparable ever since. We caught up with Kamala Kasturi straight from the wedding hall with flowers in her



From left to right: Vijaya Subramanian, Shanta Sundari Brahmam, Shanta Ramaswamy, Rajathi Sarat and Kamala Kasturi

for discipline and decorum. After her there was Vijaya Koman, a graceful personality who left soon to make way for a Ms. Lakshmi.

As for the lecturers, we wonder whether there are such dedicated teachers nowadays to guide the students. Ahalya Bai, who taught Shakespeare, actually acted out the scenes. History lecturer Kalyani Kutti Amma in a traditional Malayalam *mundu*, Achayya looking elegant in a Coorgi saree, Krishna who insisted on the students reading aloud the English text in class, and Vinaya Bai (who had just one lung) are all etched in our memories. Ms. Thomas of the English Department looked so majestic that you avoided colliding with her. For Sanskrit students, it was the simple Devaki Menon who, blushing, skipped many pages of *Kumara Sambha-*

*vam*, making us curious as to the contents of those pages. However, students were assured that no questions would be asked in the exam from the skipped portions! Our Librarian (we forgot the name) never failed to amuse us, always dressed in Conjeevaram silks with *zari* borders, as if coming straight from a wedding! Dr. Irawathy (later Principal) of the Geography Department and Rajamani of the Tamil section had rooms which were next to our B.A. classrooms, giving us no chance for any sort of revelry – a silence zone.

In the first or second year of our Intermediate, a college carnival was proposed on the lines of the annual YMCA carnivals. Though initially she disliked the idea, Dr. Ramamoorthy later yielded to the pleas of students and staff alike to have some

week-end fun. Memory being somewhat hazy about an event which took place six decades back, I only recollect the fete ending in chaos due to some mischief-mongers and boys from neighbouring colleges. Needless to say, the red-faced Principal cancelled the event and chastised everyone, forbidding us to talk or mention it ever, a vow kept until now!

A more recent incident that was the talk of the town was a spirited defence organised by the old students' association to fend off the State Government's efforts to take over QMC land for a new TN Secretariat. Later, dilapidated *Capper House*, where it all started, was replaced with a new building. But a pond that fronted the old building is no longer there, nor are the fish it hosted which kept a watchful eye on the girls!

## Tea with Anna at Presidency... and other memories

Gone are those Halcyon Days, Back in 1945, I came to join Presidency College. What impressed me most at first sight was the grandeur of the imposing structure and the lovely garden. A sense of awe struck me. Those days, the students of Presidency College were called 'Princes of Presidency'. To join such a great institution was a matter of pride for me.

I joined as a student of Chemistry. Prof. M.E. Duraisamy of the Chemistry Department was a strict disciplinarian. In contrast, the then Asst. Prof. B. Ramachandra Pai, was soft-spoken and endeared himself to everyone. The English Professor Milgnatius Absalom, known for his sartorial discipline, was invariably clad in white suit with a red kerchief protruding from his pocket. He was an impressive figure whose lectures were inspiring. When he taught Shakespeare, he was almost acting on stage, personifying each character.

The famous Marina Ground is where we played entertaining cricket. It encouraged an excellent sporting spirit. It so happened that in one match the batsman, a star player, hit the ball straight towards me at mid-on at great speed. The ball hit my stomach, but I grasped it. Lo! The star batsman was out. The excruciating pain in my stomach did not bother me at the time, but for three days, I suffered hell. Hot water fermentation was the only remedy in those days.

We spent happy days in Victoria Hostel. What lovely food we had. The *mysorepak* would melt on your tongue. I gratefully remember Nagaraj Rao, the Head Cook (Vegetarian A-Section). He was the prime speaker at almost all Hostel Day functions. His perfect English was a surprise to all VIPs. Students from other colleges came

to Victoria Hostel to enjoy lunches and dinners at the nominal price of eight annas a plate.

What fine friends we had! A galaxy of names simmers in the sauce of my memory. In later life, all of them happened to adorn very high posts. The late B. Mithreyan from Thanjavur was my closest friend. He became a Deputy Auditor General, Government of India. I always enjoyed his witticisms. T.V. Rajeswar, the former Governor of West Bengal and Sikkim, was a 'prima donna'. No wonder he became Governor. Sathia Dev was a close friend of mine. He became a Judge of the High Court. Likewise, Sivasubramaniam, an embodiment of patience.

## Remembering their century-old alma maters



Capper House where QMC started.

## The War – and 'Quit India'

At 93, memories keep flood- ing back of Queen Mary's College (QMC) as it celebrates its centenary. The years I remember are from 1937 to 1942, momentous years with World War II raging and the freedom struggle and Quit India movement gathering strength.

Queen Mary's College for women had as its neighbour Presidency College for men and women. The only other women's college at the time was Women's Christian College (WCC). Students who graduated from Queen Mary's and who wished to

pursue postgraduate or honours studies could stay in Queen Mary's Hostel. There was a college bus which would take them in the morning and bring them back in the evening. The bus would also take us to various matches, like basketball, tennis, etc., we used to play against WCC and bring us back. We would sing all the way and back the refrain "Queen Marians never die, never die, they only fade away."

As you entered the gates of QMC the first building was

*Capper House* where the College started. The three main buildings on the right were *Pentland*, *Jey-pore* and *Stone*. The ground floor of *Capper House* had classrooms, which had galleries where the students sat while the professor, sitting in a chair with a table in front of her on a small platform, delivered her lecture. There was a well-equipped library, a central hall with a stage on which plays were performed and where we held debates. We also had some small prayer rooms for different denominations. These were maintained by the students.

There was a Music Association which had an orchestra with 25 *veenas*. Music was one of the subjects you could take for your B.A. The ground floor central area had cane tables and chairs where students could receive visitors with prior permission given by their parents. The Principal had her quarters in the central portion on the first floor of *Pentland*. On either side there were double rooms for students, two to a room. Grace Soans and E.K. Padma shared a room facing the sea. Sathyabhama Reddy and I had the one behind.

It was the first time all of us were staying in a hostel. I could have been a day student, as my parents were staying in Madras, but my father insisted that I stay in the hostel to become independent and enjoy life. Looking back, they were the most wonderful years! To the left of *Capper House* there was group of single-storey buildings, except for one which had a first floor. The members of the staff stayed in these buildings. In the same complex was a small swimming pool. I am told it is no longer in use and is a rubbish dump!

The canteen had four sections. The European section, where spoons, forks and knives were used, was on the first floor of *Capper House*. The vegetarian section was on the ground floor and food was served on banana leaves there. The non-vegetarian and Brahmin sections were in a separate building.

During the years we were there, Miss Myers was the Principal. When the Japanese joined the War, the College, which was fully painted white and a beautiful sight, could be seen from far, especially from planes flying high. So orders came from Government to paint it gray so that it would not be easily visible! The windowpanes were covered with gray paper! The military had few anti-aircraft guns. So all along the Marina beach, coconut palm trunks, cut to a particular size and painted black, were placed slanting in the hope that planes flying above would take them for anti-aircraft guns and keep away! Blackout was observed. Ditches were dug behind the college.

One person on each floor was armed with a torch. She was the air raid warden. To prepare for an emergency we had mock air raids. Miss Myers used to sound a siren at an unearthly hour and the student warden with the torch would lead us down the stairs to jump into the ditches and wait till the all clear was sounded by Miss Myers. We then went back to our rooms.

Miss Myers decided to hold a War Fund Fete to collect money

for the soldiers. The entire area in front of the college and also the lawn in front was made use of to house all types of stalls – lucky dip, throwing the arrow, selling clothes, eatables, coffee and cold drinks. Miss Myers encouraged us to set up whatever stall we liked, provided it made money!

In front of *Capper House* there was a pond with a fountain in the centre. Grace and I got permission to use the pond. Our stall was called "Ringing the duck".

We bought four ducks from Moore Market and put them in the pond. We got some bamboo rings. Grace held the rings aloft, while I ran around shouting, "Four annas, three tries, double the money or the Duck." I used to be known as "gun throat"! To our delight we lost only two ducks and collected a lot of money. Miss Myers was very happy.

With Japan joining the War the situation was getting worse. We students had to learn First Aid and Home Nursing. Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan used to come and take classes for us. She was so beautiful that instead of concentrating on how to tie a bandage we were lost in wonder

gazing at her! Soon she left for Singapore and then joined Subhas Bose's Indian National Army. From then onwards she was known as Captain Lakshmi.

At the same time the struggle for freedom was being relentlessly pursued by Gandhiji and the Congress party. Gandhiji launched his 'Quit India' movement. Miss Myers with the cooperation of a few students made a huge "V" sign with seashells on the front lawn.

Some of us got together with iron pricks and hammers when lights were out, dug up the "V" sign and scattered it. Next morning, when Miss Myers saw what had happened, she was furious. She did make an effort to put it together again, but it didn't work. She never discovered the 'patriots'. Some of us who were "Quit India" enthusiasts cut classes and were seen on the streets in front of the Egmore Chief Presidency Magistrate's court shouting "Inquilab Zindabad". A few got arrested, my cousin Maya among them. They were all taken to the 'Penitentiary', where they were kept before being sent to various jails! This building was on the Marina and we went and visited our

● by **Shantha Ramaswami & Vijaya Subramaniam**

● by **Anna Varki**

● by **Justice S. Mohan**

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued on page 8)



# Seminars at *Ekamra Nivas*

(Continued from  
last fortnight)

In June 1958, a few of the new students in the MSc course started attending Father's seminars at home. By July, Father was regularly giving seminars at home. All this was in addition to his lectures for the MSc course at Madras University where he was Reader in Physics. Many new students attended these seminars at his home, but the University took no cognisance of Father's efforts. At that time, Madras University, led by Vice-Chancellor, Sir A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, decided to open an extension centre in Madurai, and asked Father to shift to Madurai to start the Physics Department there. Several decades later, this extension centre became the Madurai University.

Father was very upset at being asked to shift to Madurai, but agreed to do so. In his diary he recorded his reactions to this assignment in Madurai: "What really pained me was that the University took no cognisance of the valuable experience I gained at Princeton, where I had heard over 150 seminars by world-famous physicists, and I wanted to initiate work in high energy physics in a university which had among its alumni Raman, Ramanujan, and Chandrasekhar. The only reward for my enthusiasm was the modest compliment of banishing me as a professor to an extension centre. I found no alternative but to accept the professorship, since otherwise someone else would be appointed and would later wangle a transfer to Madras above my head."

Ramakrishnan moved to Madurai and settled there without his family, but visited Madras frequently to be with them, and also to supervise his students who were in the MSc class. He wrote in his diary: "The University extension centre in Madurai was a mere

name. It had neither buildings nor a library. It had neither body nor soul. The ill-furnished and crowded rooms at the colleges where I was asked to teach had a depressing effect since I had just returned after spending a year at the Institute for Advanced Study..."

An interesting opportunity arose unexpectedly. Ramakrishnan was invited to serve on a National Committee for Hindi terms in the physical sciences. Even though he did not know Hindi, he accepted the assignment because he could stop in Madras en route to Delhi for the frequent committee meetings. He adds in his diary: "I knew that money was available in India for such committees even though funds were denied for symposia and lectures! This would give me

give lectures on their work. It was a great experience for them to speak in the dominating presence of Sir Raman in the front row!

\* \* \*

In 1959 Father was holding his regular MSc Physics classes in a room in *Senate House* and conducting his informal but advanced seminars at home. Since these seminars had become a regular feature supplementing the MSc course, he decided to formalise the practice in March 1959 and called the programme the 'Theoretical Physics Seminar'. V. Devanathan, one of his most dedicated MSc students, was made the Secretary of the Seminar. It was decided to invite eminent scientists visiting or travelling through India to speak at the Seminar.

The first visitors after the

**KRISHNASWAMI ALLADI describes the story of the birth of MATSCIENCE, the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, the efforts of his father, Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan, and the role of his Theoretical Physics Seminar in the creation of this Institute in Madras on January 3, 1962.**

greater freedom of movement and the possibility of contact with higher authorities in Delhi whose attention I could draw to my vision and efforts in Madras." He also found it convenient that Madras University allowed him to conduct the MSc course in theoretical physics in Madras (it was for the first batch) during specific periods of the academic year 1958-59.

It was while in Madurai that Prof. Ramakrishnan wrote to Sir C.V. Raman offering to organise a session on stochastic processes at the Indian Academy of Sciences meeting in Baroda in December 1958. Sir Raman agreed to the request, but suggested that the lectures should be of wide appeal and emphasise the relationship between theory and experiment. Father was able to take several of his research students to the Baroda meeting and have them

formal launch of the Theoretical Physics Seminar were Professor Ziro Koba, whom father had met during his visit to Yukawa Hall in 1956, and Dr. Kotani. Professor and Mrs. Kotani stayed at *Ekamra Nivas* and therefore had leisurely discussions with Father and his students. In addition to exposing his students to lectures by foreign visitors at the Seminar, Prof. Ramakrishnan also took his students regularly to participate and lecture in conferences and summer schools which were held in various parts of India. After a Summer School on Theoretical Physics held in Mussoorie in June 1959, to which he took four students, he wrote, "The moving spirit of the summer school was Satyen Bose, the doyen of theoretical physics in India, and very sympathetic to the aspirations of the young scientific community. He was more interested in stimulating creative thought than in expository talks at the conference... In my speech I exhorted that the Mussoorie spirit should pervade Indian science in due course."

In August, Father received an invitation from the University Grants Commission to serve on an Expert Committee to recommend proposals for the advancement of mathematical sciences in India. It was indeed ironic to be appointed to this Committee when his efforts to initiate advanced physics in



Ekamra Nivas.

Madras were ignored by the University!

\* \* \*

A turning point in Prof. Ramakrishnan's life was his unexpected meeting with C. Subramaniam in October 1959 and the Minister's visit to the *Ekamra Nivas* shortly thereafter to meet the students of the Seminar. Recalling the meeting Prof. Ramakrishnan wrote, "During the Dasara season of 1959, I received an invitation to an international gathering of African and Asian students at Woodlands Hotel with C. Subramaniam as their Chief Guest. He was then the Minister for Education and Finance in the Madras Government. I knew of him and had met him in New Delhi during the momentous days of the Constituent Assembly when he was a blackhaired young Congressman who came to have discussions with my father (Sir Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyengar). But I did not know him personally. I did not feel enthusiastic about going to the meeting since I felt that he may not have a real interest in higher education or creative science. So, that evening I decided to go and relax at the Marina beach with my wife Lalitha. As the car was about to take a turn towards the beach, she suggested that we should respond to the invitation and attend the meeting for at least half an hour, to which I consented most unwillingly.

"At the meeting, one of the topics that came up for discussion was about racial prejudice and how these students should tackle this in India... When I was asked to give my views, I stressed that racial prejudice or prejudice in any form is best tackled by demonstration of good performance. Such snobbery exists even in the realm of science and in many professions. When my father started his legal profession (in Madras), he was warned that it would be difficult to succeed unless one had tasted the waters of the Cauvery. But within seven years, with hard work and dedication, he became the unrivalled leader of the Madras Bar and had several juniors who hailed from the banks of that famous river! Similarly, in modern physics, while it was generally agreed that Europe was the seat of science and culture, with the efforts of Oppenheimer and the new generation of scientists, the centre of grav-

ity shifted to the United States.

"This speech of mine impressed Subramaniam so much that he asked me to meet him at his official residence, *Coomm House*. I wasted no time and emphasised to him the need for providing suitable opportunities to the band of theoretical physicists working with me. I invited him to dinner at my house to which he readily responded. It was at that dinner he suddenly asked me to explain what I meant by suitable opportunities for creative science. I told him plainly that it was something like the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton." The Minister asked for a note on how the new institute could be launched. During the years 1960 and '61, several world-famous scientists spoke at the Theoretical Physics Seminar and Minister C. Subramaniam came to *Ekamra Nivas* on many occasions to meet the visiting scientists and have discussions with them over dinner.

\* \* \*

The years 1960 and 1961 were packed with the lectures of many world-famous physicists and mathematicians at the Seminar. The year started with the visits of physicist Abdus Salam of Imperial College, London, and Niels Bohr, both of which had a profound influence on the creation of MATSCIENCE and on Father's career.

Professor Salam spent a few days in *Ekamra Nivas* and at his two-hour lecture there he was thrilled to find such an eager and enthusiastic audience. Following dinner he relaxed with the students on the lawns of *Ekamra Nivas*. Father presented Salam with a portrait of Lord Krishna which he graciously accepted. In return, Father expressed his thanks by attending *Namas* with Prof. Salam at a mosque in Madras!

Salam's visit was immediately followed by that of Nobel Laureate Niels Bohr who was in India in January 1960 as the guest of Prime Minister Nehru. Professor Bohr accepted Father's invitation to visit *Ekamra Nivas* and meet the students of the Seminar. He was staying at *Government House*, but agreed to have dinner at *Ekamra Nivas* and spend a leisurely evening with the students. Father later wrote in his diary: "It was flattering that Professor Bohr and his wife

(Continued on page 8)



C. Subramaniam at Ekamra Nivas with Prof. Ramakrishnan.





Clockwise from above: A street full of kolam-s; Krishnan Thoothu, a play by Arulmigu Srimandaveli Amman Nadaga Mandram; and folk dances by students from Queen Mary's College... a part of the buzz at the Mylapore Festival.

A street festival has a life of its own. The annual Sundaram Finance Mylapore Festival's 2015 edition (January 8th to 11th) had more of these elements than ever before.

The back-to-back performances of a medley of folk dances by a team of students from Queen Mary's College, and the *kattai-koothu* recitals by the Arulmigu Srimandaveli Amman Nadaga Mandram, Cheyyar Taluk, Thiruvannamalai, lent that unique colour.

The festival, the only one of its kind in the city, always hosts events in the streets and lanes that run off from the Sri Kapali Temple zone precincts in Mylapore. Each street is themed – craft, food, home products, *kolam*, live performances. The idea behind this curation is to treat the zone as a religion-cultural-heritage space and set the festival in it.

## A festival with a life of its own

(By A Special Correspondent)

Besides the street performances, the weekend *kolam* contests this year turned out to be *Kolam Displays* – the 90 *kolams* designed by the participants were protected, the floodlights switched on them and the east end of North Mada Street turned into something of a live art installation.

By doing this, visitors who came in later in the evening could enjoy the *kolam*-s. This has enthused the Festival Curator to consider hosting a late evening *kolam* contest in the

same area and build a food and performance zone here.

This year, the five Heritage Walks/Tours got a huge response. The leaders were Cycling Yogis, Sriram V., Chithra Madhavan, Sridhar Venkataraman and T. Sundari.

If Sriram led his group of 60 people to what were once villages in this area, Sridhar showed foodies the snack joints that thrive here, while architect Sundari focussed on local architecture as the group walked

around the temple zone, and Chithra Madhavan put the spotlight on four ancient temples on the other side of Kutchery Road.

As always, the Food Street was packed on all four evenings of the fest. This year, the stall promoters were asked not to cook snacks on the spot – but their mouth-watering dishes sold out by 10 p.m.

This year, a small Organic Food Bazaar was created on Pichu Pillai Street. It allowed people to sample the

stuff and interact with the stallholders.

The Fest also launched a public petition – asking the City Traffic Police to consider making the three Mada Streets 'one way' and to create a 'walk only' zone for certain hours on the weekend. (You can sign this online petition if you support this issue at <http://bit.ly/Mylapore-Mada-Streets-Petition>.)

The Mylapore Festival has been the trigger for a few local community initiatives. One such is the 'mike-less' concert in the park, a series that was first launched by this Festival.

Hopefully, the call for changes in the Mada Streets' traffic system, aimed at improving the condition of this heritage zone gets a positive nod from the Police and the Chennai Corporation.

(Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

## Cholamandal's latest addition

Cholamandal, started in 1965, is an Artists' Village situated on an eight-acre plot of land 8 km south of Adyar on Muttukadu Road by the sea. Thirty painters and sculptors of talent have acquired land for themselves in order to be able to work in comparative peace. Cholamandal stands for the rehabilitation of the creative artist as an equal participant in society, self-employed and independent. Here the artist paints or sculpts through the major part of the day and applies himself to a congenial art-craft during leisure hours to supplement, if necessary, his income from the sale of paintings and sculptures. Cholamandal is perhaps the first of its kind anywhere in the world. It is administered by an annually elected council of members. In the last few years, cholamandal has been adding facilities to its campus.

On February 1, 2009, the Cholamandal Centre for Contemporary Art was inaugurated. It consists of the K.C.S. Paniker Museum of the Madras Movement, two commercial airconditioned galleries, Labernum and Indigo, and an open-air international sculpture park surrounding the complex.

It has two guest houses of 400 sq.ft. each available on rent and a garden restaurant amidst which is located "Shiraz", a 30-seater airconditioned café with Persian and Mediterranean cuisine.

The latest addition at Cholamandal Artists' Village is the Cholamandal Cultural Centre (in picture) inaugurated on January 7, 2015. It is a state-of-the-art international Artists' Residency and a space for cultural exchange programmes.





# The War – and ‘Quit India’

(Continued from page 5)

friends who had been arrested. We could view them through a small window which had iron bars covered with a net.

Miss Myers was finding it difficult to control the students who cut classes. She just signed the register and left. All she could do was to issue an ultimatum that gates would be locked by 6 p.m. The next step was to close the College except for those appearing for the final exams. We who were appearing for our public exams had a problem with having no lights to study. Lights were switched off by 9 p.m. Only the passage lights and bathroom lights were kept on, covered with gray paper. It was a problem for those of us appearing for the exam to study. So what we did was to get flasks full of coffee from the canteen before it closed, take our books and armed with flasks of coffee settled down to study in the passages, something we were not supposed to do.

Around midnight or later we would suddenly hear loud footsteps stomping! We gathered our books and fled to our rooms! We knew it was our benevolent principal making enough noise to give us time to escape. Being caught meant the end of our studies.

\* \* \*

I finished my Master's at Presidency in English language and Literature. It was during the time when Professor Aiyappan Pillai was the Head of the Department. There would be pin-drop silence when he entered the class in his flowing black gown. After our time, the Queen Mary's College hostel was meant only for those studying in Queen Mary's College and not for those who wished to study in Presidency. They were no longer allowed to stay there as authorities felt it disturbed the discipline and functioning of the college. A separate hostel was established for those going to Presidency College.

# Seminars at Ekamra Nivas

(Continued from page 6)

stayed on until midnight in spite of repeated reminders from the official aide to get back to *Government House*. Mrs. Bohr, a gracious woman of great charm and elegance, kept a watchful eye to prevent her husband from putting his burning pipe into his coat pocket! We could not believe that such a great physicist, engrossed in his own thoughts who, along with Einstein, set in motion the atomic age, could evince interest in a group of stripling physicists in a far off country. He did so in a generous measure at a press interview at the airport which was reported in *The Hindu* as follows:

*Asked about the place mathematics should occupy in the pursuit of theoretical physics, the professor said that in Bombay and in Madras efforts were being made for the promotion of knowledge of physics which demanded new mathematical methods and the training of young people to be able fruitfully to contribute to such work. Wonderful work was being*

*done in the field of theoretical physics by Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan of the Madras University.*

"He seems to have mentioned this to the Prime Minister when he met him before leaving India."

Prof. Ramakrishnan, not long afterwards, received a communication from the Prime Minister's Office asking for further information about his efforts in Madras. It was to take nearly two years before this interest from the Prime

Minister's Office would lead to the creation of MAT-SCIENCE.

With the endorsement given by Professor Bohr, Father wrote to the Vice-Chancellor that it would be impossible for him to continue the assignment in Madurai. He had received an invitation to visit the University of Berne, Switzerland, for two months. In the same letter, he requested the Vice-Chancellor for two months' leave to visit Europe. The University sanctioned the leave and reluctantly agreed to relieve him of the assignment in Madurai, stating that he should return to Madras after the Swiss assignment and serve as "Professor without portfolio".

(To be continued)

## Dates for Your Diary

**Till February 28:** *Bodhisatva*, Zen Buddhist drawings, by Bodhiselvam. Also exhibition of oil paintings on temples of Tamil Nadu by K. Ravee. His work features temple images and sculptures. (at Dakshina-Chitra).

**February 6-28:** *Unheard Melodies*, an exhibition of photographs by Mala Mukerjee (at Apparao Infinity, Nungambakkam).

**February 12:** Contemporary dance, *The Past* by Constanza Macras. Constanza is one of the most renowned choreographers of Germany. She integrates dancers, actors & musicians, combines text, live music, dance & video. Passes: Goethe Institut (Venkatasubba Rao Hall, 7.00 p.m.).

**February 14-15:** DAM Fest – a unique festival of creativity in collaboration with NIFT, Chennai (at DakshinaChitra).

**February 14:** Theatre for Children, *Ha zwei oohh! H2O* by Helios Theatre, Hamm. Passes: Goethe Institut (at Spaces, Besant Nagar, 12.00 p.m. & 4.30 p.m.).

**February 15:** Jazz concert by Madras Special – New Generation. Percussionist Ramesh Shotham and his rhythm *tour de force* Madras Special pay tribute to Mariano, a famous American jazz alto saxophonist. In the 1970s he settled in Cologne/Germany, where he died in 2009. He was known for his use of the *nadaswaram* (at Goethe Institut 7.30 p.m.).

# TEA WITH ANNA AT PRESIDENCY

(Continued from page 5)

One more incident. I was the Vice-President of the Tamil Association. Ananthanayaki, later a Congress MLA, was the Secretary. The President, Teeka Ram, was an ardent Dravida Kazhagam man. He had invited, without our knowledge and even without the permission of Viswanatha Iyer, Head of the Department of Tamil, the DK leader Annadurai. On the morning of the function, the invitation was shown to Prof. Viswanatha Iyer. He was reduced to shivers. He called me and asked, "Mohan, what is this? This is a Government college. How can he invite a DK leader like Annadurai? If he makes a speech criticising Government, there will not only be embarrassment and several problems may arise, but I will be in the soup."

During tea, prior to the meeting, I whispered to Anna about the fear of the Tamil Professor. Being a thorough gentleman, Anna said, "I am aware this is a Government college and the position of the Tamil Professor. I will not cause the slightest embarrassment to anyone, have no fear." I felt assured. Later, I asked what his topic would be. He said "Fear". Anna's speech lasted an hour and fifteen minutes. It was like torrential rain during summer. The speech was about the fear that pre-historic men had for thunder and lightning. They thought they were due to curses. The early men propitiated a form of God to appease God's anger. No wonder the speech held us spellbound. (Courtesy: TCC Digest)

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