

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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● Law College's house

Is this building doomed?

The story of the historic Law College building, headquarters of the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Law University, gets more and more messy by the day.

For those who came in late, here is a quick recap: Ever since Chennai Metrorail began drilling work at less than 1.5 feet from the building, conservationists have protested and predicted that the building would crumble. Work went ahead nevertheless and now the PWD has sent a letter to the University demanding the campus be vacated as the structure is in a precarious condition. Before any action could be taken, the students have begun protesting against the move, though with what motive is not very clear. Last heard, the matter has taken a political twist with one of the Opposition parties throwing its weight behind the students. What of the heritage building in the meanwhile? Nobody seems to care about it.

If they had, matters would not have come to such a pass. In the first place, Metrorail ought to have never been per-

mitted to commence drilling so close to the main building. It is reliably learnt that when the Heritage Conservation Committee discussed the matter in 2011, some members did object but they were overruled. Work then began with predictable results. A final first collapsed and Metrorail strenuously denied

● By The Editor

having anything to with it. A couple of months ago, as reported by us, the PWD sent a letter stating that the building is in a very weak condition. It has accused Metrorail of causing the damage and also covering up the signs of stress with some patchwork. Why permit drilling in close proximity and then create a hue and cry about the resultant damage?

Which brings us to the next question. Is the building really weak? We have only the PWD's word for it. While we are not accusing the Department of any wrong assessment, it would be better if some independent

agency such as the IIT was asked to do a study. This is chiefly because the PWD has in the past been very quick in declaring buildings unsafe. For that matter so have the CMDA and the Corporation of Chennai. In many cases, such conclusions have been found to be faulty by independent assessors whose evaluations have been held up by the courts of law. We need to only draw our readers' attention to the DGP building on the Marina, which the PWD certified as worthy of demolition only to have a committee appointed by the High Court overturn it, thereby paving the way for a complete restoration. What if everyone had gone along with the PWD?

We must also keep in mind that the Justice E. Padmanabhan Committee report of 2006 had stated that the condition of the building was good and that the foundations rest on stone concrete, going down to a depth of three metres. We are no experts, but is it likely that such a building could have become

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Wake up, Madras, save our walls

To any casual visitor to our city or a concerned resident of it, one of the biggest eyesores is the plethora of posters disfiguring any and every available surface – compound walls, abandoned vehicles, corrugated sheets, roadside water tanks and rubbish bins – none of which is spared. The administration is largely indifferent to it apart from a few half-hearted notifications to the effect that the practice is undesirable. The

political parties are, of course, the biggest culprits. At a time when the problem appeared to defy a solution, a citizens' initiative to clean up the walls has just begun. This may yet be the best thing that could have happened to our city, but it is still early days yet.

#WakeUpMadras is how the group is identified on social media. And by its own description of itself, it is a coming together of concerned "men,

women, boys and girls." They prefer to remain unidentified, for they claim, and rightly so, that when a name is introduced, a number of other equations – of caste, gender and, in Tamil Nadu, much worse – political slants – can become involved and spoil the initiative. Their first effort is wall art, which they believe is a strong medium for bringing to the fore several social issues. They are also of

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Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



● We regret publishing last fortnight's picture over again above. But this is where it should be and not in this space last fortnight. The picture that should have been there, of the Government Maternity Hospital, appears on Page Three. We regret our carelessness.

– The Editor

* * *

● This is one of those institutions whose comprehensive history probably needs several books. Believe it or not, the history of the Government General Hospital goes back to 1644 or so, and it has been at the present location from 1772! And that is not all. Between those two years the hospital had nine incarnations, making the present one the tenth, or more accurately the eleventh, if you include the reconstruction of 2002!

Since we are dealing with the present location, we will confine our history to the period beginning from 1771 when the then site of the hospital was Armenian Street. The decision to shift had been taken ten years earlier and a new location had been identified – the land on which the Company's Garden House had stood in the 1680s, on the lower slopes of Nari Medu or Hog's Hill (most of today's Central Station and its environs). But no action resulted for a while.

The hospital building was constructed at this site by John Sullivan at a cost of 42,000 pagodas and was formally open to patients from October 5, 1772. The Town Wall had an entrance fronting this and became known as the Hospital Gate from then on. The next major expansion was in 1859 followed by yet another in 1893 and a third in 1928, all of which resulted in the structures that are seen in the photograph above. At the conclusion of that third phase of expansion, Dr. Sir A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, the then Principal of the Madras Medical College, declared that "the Madras General Hospital now presents an inspiring pile of buildings of which Madras may well be proud and which delights the eye of every professional visitor to this city." Over the years, the hospital grew, acquiring its neurology, cardiology and other speciality blocks from the 1960s onwards. The architectural styles of these largely detracted from the dignity of the main buildings that Dr. Mudaliar had praised. The most major reconstruction to date was in 2002 when the two main blocks were pulled down to make way for the modern building seen today. The two chattries or domed structures that flank the entrances and house the statues of Dr. M. Guruswami Mudaliar and Dr. S. Rangachari are the only remnants of the inspiring pile of the 1930s. There are, however, several old structures still standing within the complex, with varying degrees of antiquity. All of them suffer from indifferent maintenance.

The hospital's earlier nomenclature appears to have been Government Hospital and in 1692, Dr. Edward Bulkley was appointed as its head. The next year he performed the first medico-legal autopsy in India when a senior Company official was killed owing to his medicine being prepared in an improperly cleaned dish that previously contained arsenic. Bulkley is also remembered for the first leave certificate on medical grounds, the first injury certificate and, more notoriously, for abetting in a sentenced man feigning illness and moving from the prison to a hospital, this being John Nicks, whose wife was a close friend of Elihu Yale and probably the first woman entrepreneur of Madras. It has since been a frequently used excuse especially by political prisoners! Rather appropriately, Bulkley is buried on land facing the hospital. The large granite tomb, not cared for in any way by the State's Archaeological Survey under whose protection it is supposed to be, is now within the Ordnance Lines that have come up across the hospital.

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Wake up, Madras, save our walls

(Continued from page 1)

the view that the public surfaces are not the domain of the vested political and commercial interests but those of the citizen. The first demonstration of their presence is a graffiti of a dog with its hind leg lifted up. Below that is a message that reads in Tamil, "Are you a dog?", followed by the hashtag of WakeUpMadras. The target audience is obvious – that class of men who think nothing of committing what is euphemistically known as 'nuisance'.

Hopefully, #WakeUpMadras will be allowed to peacefully exist and carry on publicising our social ills. However, this group is not alone. There are others such as Labs, which is another such initiative. The students of the Stella Maris College have now begun decorating their rather long frontage with some wonderful art. The Corporation, as we have seen, has also chipped in with some forceful messages on its flyovers where it has asked those who paste posters to think twice before doing so, for the walls have been painted with the taxpayers' money. This appears to have had the desired result, for the pillars and walls of flyovers have remained free of posters.

And so are the days when we had to cover our walls with

paintings of our deities or paste glazed tiles bearing their images to prevent any kind of misuse a thing of the past? Not really, for old habits die hard and political parties, private advertisers, magazines and film companies think nothing of disfiguring the walls of our city. But these citizen initiatives appear to have stalled them to an extent.

It may come as a surprise to many that Tamil Nadu was one of the first States to enact legislation preventing the disfiguring of public and private wall spaces. The Tamil Nadu Open Spaces (prevention of disfigurement) Act was passed in 1959! But it has remained only on paper, with the law enforcers turning a blind eye to its violation. In the last decade, at least one political party when in power, began an initiative of getting artists to paint murals depicting our State's history and culture on the walls. This was a praiseworthy though short-lived effort, for a change in regime saw the plan being abandoned and the posters returning to the walls.

Ultimately, any law is effective if the citizens take to it. Similarly, it is for the citizens to protect their public wall spaces. Which is why initiatives such as #WakeUpMadras will hopefully deliver results in the long run.

Madras Landmarks

(Continued from page 1)

While the hospital's move to this location in 1772 is fairly well recorded, the presence of a medallion near the Superintendent's office stating 'Hospital founded in 1753' is intriguing. This is a plaque commemorating an earlier shift and which moved along with the hospital to its present site. It was only in 1842 that the G in the name began to stand for General when the facility became open to Indians. The hospital became a wholly civilian institution in 1899.

The GH takes pride in Col C Donovan's discovery in 1903 of the organism that caused the dreaded Kala Azar. By the time the news was transmitted to England, the organism had also been identified by Dr Leishman, leading to Donovan having to share the honours. The bacteria was, therefore, named Leishman Donovanii. But, the organism was most probably isolated by Donovan at the Royapettah Hospital of which he was in charge at the time of the discovery. Not so well known is Dr. W J Niblock, who documented in India the first successful gastrojejunostomy for gastric outlet obstruction due to peptic ulcer at the GH on March 2, 1905. He is also the one who wrote the widely quoted article on "Epidemiology of cancer in India" as early as 1902. Niblock's work on gastroenterology was to be brought to public notice by Dr N Rangabhashyam in 1975 when under his guidance the GH acquired a gastroenterology department. It is not clear if Ronald Ross worked at the GH or elsewhere in Madras during his short tenure here but his close associate John Maitland worked at the GH and did pioneering work on filariasis. He became Senior Surgeon at the hospital in 1896, holding the post till his death in 1908.

The GH was headed by a Superintendent from 1858 onwards, the first incumbent being Lt Col William Evans of the Indian Medical Service. The first Indian to hold that post was Lt Col M N Choudhri IMS. The post of Dean of the Government General Hospital and Medical College, Madras, was created in 1950, with the first occupant being Dr. R V Rajam.

A busy hospital today, the GH has the same problems that face all Government-run health facilities – bureaucracy, overcrowding and a perpetual battle in which facilities are forever in a process of being geared up to face an ever-increasing demand. But this is where the not so privileged can readily go for medical treatment, confident that their illnesses can be attended to at a fraction of what it will cost at a private hospital. To them it is always the GH, irrespective of whatever be its present official name, necessitated by political consideration/or convenience about a decade ago.

Confusion & pedagogy

The Man from Madras Musings was rudely woken up from his reverie by the phone ringing. Who could be calling at this early hour, MMM wondered. Perhaps the Chief over that mix-up with the photographs in the last issue? But the voice was that of a female who appeared to be all agog with some information. In fact, she had evidently begun speaking even before MMM had answered the call. It was only after some time that MMM managed to register what she was saying. It appeared that sometime in the dim past, of which MMM had no recollection, the lady had invited him to come to her college to speak at a function and the event was on that day. MMM rather feebly protested that he had received no

digested that, MMM was introduced to another gentleman who, MMM learnt, was a respected figure in historical circles and was scheduled to speak after MMM. This half had not been told unto MMM, felt MMM, as the Queen of Sheba said on meeting Solomon, but a closer scrutiny of the invitation's email print-out revealed that it had all along been there. MMM assumed that the learned professor would speak for ten minutes like MMM but this hope was soon dashed to the ground for, the don having enquired from MMM as to how long he was to speak, curved his lips in a scornful smile at the mere ten minutes and said with mournful pride that he, a learned professor, was scheduled to harangue for a good 45 minutes.

else that MMM has quite forgotten.

He had a presentation that was in essence every word of his speech and this played on in the background. MMM, whose vision is not of the very best, decided to spend his time usefully by treating the power point presentation as a sort of eye test, trying his best to read all the words as they passed everyone by. MMM also occasionally stole a glance at the audience. A group of girls at a far corner were giggling away. Two teachers dozed off and their heads nodded in unison. MMM waited to see if they would collide and was soon rewarded for his penance. The commotion caused by the two of them knocking their heads and waking up caused a few others to stir. And all the while

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

communication since the day of the call, but the caller was quite firm that she had sent an email. MMM made bold to ask her as to when it was sent and then got to know that it was just a minute or two before the phone call.

Not wishing to disappoint the caller, especially after she had given MMM a terrific build up ("Sir, I am a great fan of yours, I read everything you write") and realising that it involved speaking to the students for about ten minutes on history, MMM agreed and duly presented himself at the college at the appointed hour. MMM does not know about your experience but, being a veteran speaker at many colleges and schools, MMM realises that all of them have one thing in common – the security at the gate is never informed about a guest coming into the institution. MMM is usually stopped at the gate and asked a million questions. He is told to fend for parking space and then, asking as to where the event is taking place, is usually waved onwards with a vague gesture. MMM then wanders around the campus like the lonely cloud that floats on o'er vales and hills till he comes upon a crowd, a host of giggling students. This campus was no different and it was only after asking several students, teachers and others that MMM located the place where he was to speak.

The preliminary meeting was all that MMM could wish for. The teacher who had invited him gushed and showered encomiums on MMM whereupon MMM blushed and tried to look modest. He was asked whether he would have tea or coffee and when MMM asked for black tea sans sugar he was served milky coffee with enough sweetness in it to fill a confectioner's order for the day. Having

There was nothing that could be done (or, as they say in Chennai, MMM could not able to do anything) other than grin and bear it and so off everyone went to the auditorium, the gushing lady, the blushing MMM and the knowledgeable pedagogue.

Stage shocks

The audience was a group of bored students who had apparently been suffering a two-day symposium on the same subject. They looked as prepared as MMM to make a quick dash for it had they not been restrained by attendance rules.

The programme began with the gushing lady introducing MMM and the other guest. "We have in our midst the great NNN," she declared. And then proceeded to read out a bio data that MMM was fairly certain belonged to NNN whoever that was but certainly not he. It was only halfway through it that MMM realised it was an old profile of his, something that was at least ten years old when MMM was a mere mmm. After that wound its way to an end, MMM got onto the mike and held forth for ten minutes, returning to his seat to thunderous applause, no doubt owing to his having been brief.

Then came the turn of the main speaker. And listening to him, MMM realised as to why history was such an unpopular subject. Beginning with a simple statement that he would hold forth on the post-orientalist subaltern colonial approach to history or something that sounded like that, the speaker went on to dwell at length on post-empiricism, post-structuralism and the linguistic turn. He then waxed eloquent on epistemological violence where truth is power and thundered about bourgeois Indian nationalism which, he said, had elided from something to something

the professor spoke on about the empiricists and the structuralists. Having exhausted that he said he had set the stage for the present-day situation and then spoke on something called the Cambridge school for a few minutes. And then, just as he appeared to be all set to go on for the entire afternoon, he suddenly finished and sat down. The result was stunning. The audience, realising that freedom was nigh, clapped uproariously.

Driving home, MMM could not help wondering if any of the students had taken back anything worthwhile by way of history from the talk. MMM is not blaming the professor who spoke, but he belonged to a different strata altogether, that of senior dons at a high table discussing matters of pith and moment. It was hardly the kind of speech that would inspire students to take to a career in history.

The only one who appeared pleased was the gushing lady. She had achieved the task of conducting a two-day workshop. Certificates were given and everybody went home happy.

Tailpiece

Back home, *The Man from Madras Musings* declared that he would rather not attend another college event if he could help it. To this his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, said rather tartly that all MMM had to do was to write about it in his column and his wishes would be fulfilled. She also said something about not having any friends ever since MMM began writing 'that dratted column' but MMM opted not to hear that. Trust the good lady to come up with a solution.

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Teachers remembered

The February 1st issue of MM brought me some sweet memories. Prof. Ignatius Absolam whom Justice S. Mohan remembers was also my professor (no, he was a lecturer, only Presidency College had professors). He was known for his immaculate sartorial discipline, baritone voice, reading of poetry with modulation and his love for students.

I was privileged to attend some lectures of Prof. Alladi Ramakrishnan. At one of the meetings, his wife presented a dance performance. Minister C. Subramaniam was instrumental in founding of several institutions of excellence. the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Taramani, being one of them. His passion for providing higher education through Tamil medium saw many standard works in different subjects being translated and published. If that had been pursued with the same fervour, education would have reached great heights. Once convinced of the efficacy of any project, CS would pursue it till it was successfully launched.

Dr. A.R. Irrawathi was a teacher totally devoted to her subject and when she was Professor of Geography in M.K. University, she took great pains to identify the Kadamba tree mentioned in Sangam classics and developed a Kadamba forest with great passion. She took me around when I was there for a seminar. Alas, the forest was done away with to make way for concrete structures.

Dr. S.S. Rajagopalan
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The Canal & famine

The chronological data given by D.H. Rao (MM,

January 16th) as to when all the extensions of the Buckingham Canal were made has great significance, especially after Government took charge of the canal and its development as it seems to be correlated with famines on the east coast of India. Famines have been a recurrent feature in the Indian subcontinent, numerically the deadliest peak having been reached in late 18th and early 19th Century with as huge as 60 million deaths.

During 1877-78, the Madras Presidency suffered a terrible famine with more than six million people perishing. The Duke of Buckingham, the then Governor, ordered 'famine relief work'. For this, the unfinished canal stretching up to 5 miles between Adyar and Cooum Rivers came in handy and the work was executed in record time by funding Rs. 3 million.

However, it should be recalled with deep anguish that the British exported 1 to 1.25 million tons of rice and some wheat during 1872-78, while some 10 million people died here due to lack of food in those famine years.

K.V.S. Krishna
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Proposal for rejuvenation

The waterways in and around Chennai, such as the Cooum and Buckingham Canal (MM, January 16th), not only provided beauty, boons and benefits like labour, and additional facilities for movement of men and material, but also helped improve groundwater level, whether the City suffered a drought or not.

The Canal once witnessed hundreds of people moving on full moon nights to Mahabalipuram and such locations on excursions and religious trips. It has now become a place discarded for all worthy

purposes and stands relegated to be used for committing open nuisance. A dirty sight, indeed!

In the early part of the last century, the Cooum once experienced unprecedented heavy floods and Mount Road opposite Wallajah Junction turned into a river with water flowing upto 8 feet height during some days. It could always happen again.

Maintenance of these waterways under strict supervision should be taken care of and undertaken by the Government. The waterways lend beauty to the city and are of great utility.

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Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



● This is the picture that should have appeared on page 1 last fortnight. It is of the Government Maternity Hospital (Hospital for Women and Children) and NOT of the Government General Hospital.

– The Editor

When RKL had rivals exchanging cartoons

During my long tenure in Mumbai as Head of Business for the western region of *The Hindu*, I had the opportunity of striking a pleasant and memorable acquaintance with R K Laxman, the cartoonist non pareil of *The Times of India*, courtesy N. Ram. Occasionally I enjoyed a drink with him at some get-togethers. Humour seemed to flow naturally from every syllable he spoke!

When RKL won the prestigious Raymon Magsasay Award in 1984, the entire media, it seemed, wanted an interview with him. My editorial colleagues too had been trying in vain to get in touch with him. It was then that, out of the blue, came a call to me from our Editor-in-Chief, G. Kasturi, that I should do an interview with RKL for *The Hindu*. Apart from the other major centres in the South, *The Hindu* had a special niche in Mysore, the home of RKL! Kasturi made it clear that he wanted a crisp as well as insightful interview and that I should not indulge in *vallavallappu* (Tamil for 'rambling') copy!

At first thrilled but later a little slowed down by trepidation, I barged into the great cartoonist's cabin at the home of 'The Old Lady of Boribunder' and sought an interview. After a little hesitation he agreed despite his tight schedule but suggested that we meet at his home in the evening, but with the following caveat: "No pen, no pencil, no pad, a short chat and, of course, I shall offer you a couple of rounds of Scotch." The kind person that he was, he gave me a good part of an hour and some interesting insights into his persona.

Presumably pleased with the copy, Kasturi upgraded the proposed back-page box item into an op-ed story and had our own cartoonist do a brilliant sketch of the Common Man drawing a portrait of RKL, flashing an enigmatic smile (see illustration)! It was published in *The Hindu* of August 12, 1984.

Satisfied with what had been published in *The Hindu* (though he did not say so in as many words), RKL promised to do a sketch for one of my articles at a later date.

When the great moment arrived and I had done a piece titled 'Changing Media Spawn New Social Values', I called on him with the script and reminded him of his promise. He smiled and his sketch landed on my office desk the very next evening with the following lines written in his characteristic style: "Here is a piece done with



mischievous abandon! It shows Zee TV, CNN, BBC and, of course, DD as the dithering victim" (see illustration).



That a *Times of India* celebrity should do a sketch for a *Hindu* staffer for his article in *The Hindu* speaks volumes of the magnanimity of the great RKL. His act transcended and took no cognisance of inter-media rivalry!

Of such humility is greatness made.

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CHENNAI HERITAGE

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

● I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to **CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS**, as **subscription to *Madras Musings*** for the year 2014-15.

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

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

The emigrants' friend

The Australian Consulate-General, Chennai, a year ago honoured Sister Mary Theodore of MITHRA, whom many called 'the Mother Theresa of South India' for her work with the disabled. But the old records reveal an earlier Australia-Madras connection in the field of social work. Caroline Chisholm, celebrated as Australia's pioneer in the field of immigration reform and humanitarian work, particularly women's welfare, carried out her first social work in Madras.

Arriving in Madras in 1833 as a 25-year-old bride of Archibald Chisholm, a Captain in the Madras Army, Caroline was struck by the boisterous environment of the barracks which she felt was detrimental to the upbringing of the young daughters of the soldiers. She also felt the need for an institution to educate the girls in practical knowledge in addition to academics, which would help them in successfully running a home. So was born the Female School of Industry for daughters of European soldiers.

The Memoirs of Mrs. Chisholm, written in 1852 by Eneas Mackenzie, gives us insights into the functioning of the School.

The chief object of the institution was to "enable such European Soldiers as may feel disposed to remove their children from the Barracks and Putchery Lines(!)". A house was procured in Black Town, where the children were instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework and domestic management. Religious instruction and moral conduct were given special attention.

The rules of the institution reflect the strict regimen that was followed. The students were to "get up at an hour so as to be able to take some recreation in the cool of the morning, either on the Beach or on the Esplanade" and had to assemble for prayers and meals at the ringing of the bells. They were not allowed to go into the Bazaar. Male visitors were strictly prohibited, unless specially sanctioned by one of the managers. A child withdrawn from the School was not eligible for re-admission. The girls "ran" the school themselves, with various committees being formed amongst them for the day-to-day activities.

their conduct, as "children learn more from example than precept and are generally close and faithful imitators of those they reside with."

The School caught the attention of Sir Frederick Adams, the Governor of Madras, who subscribed 20 pounds towards the cause. In a matter of just five days, Rs.2000 was collected.

In 1838, Captain Chisholm's health compelled him to leave Madras for a change of climate. This meant the end of Caroline Chisholm's association with the School that she had founded. Along with their two children, Archibald Jr and William (born 1836 and 1837 respectively), the



An Australian postage stamp remembering Caroline Chisholm.

couple moved to Sydney, where Caroline began the next phase of her remarkable career.

Concerned by the poor state in which immigrants landed in Australia, Caroline began an Emigrants Home in Sydney against all financial odds. Enlisting the help of the Press, she advertised her cause and help began to flow in. She also managed to get an interview with the Governor, Sir George Gipps, who had "heard all sorts of stories about the wild schemes of Mrs. Chisholm." He was instantly floored by her work and soon official help too was forthcoming. Caroline was so involved in her endeavour that when Archibald rejoined his home regiment in

Colonisation Loan Society, which aided easy immigration from England.

Caroline fell ill in 1855 and with her husband and four children, she moved to Victoria. The family finally relocated to London in 1866, where she spent the rest of her life. It was a difficult period, with the strain of all the hectic travel and social life taking a toll on her. She passed away in 1877 in Kensington West and was buried in her home town in Northamptonshire.

She may have died forgotten in England, but Australia did not forget her contribution to the cause of immigration and service to the society. In 1967, she became the first woman other than



Caroline Chisholm, the emigrants' friend.

1840, she stayed back with their children in Australia to continue her work. She travelled far and wide into the interior parts of the country with batches of immigrant girls and placed them under the care and guidance of the families of settlers. Archibald rejoined her in 1845 and in 1846 they set sail for England.

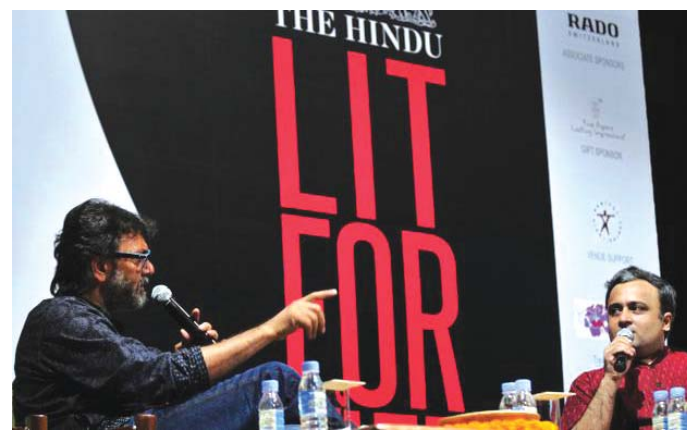
Her work in relation to the colony did not cease despite her relocation to England. Thanks to her continuous petitioning, the Government, at its own cost, reunited two shiploads of children left behind in England with their parents in Australia. Another of her achievements was the establishment of the Family

— Karthik Bhatt

Youth make Lit-for-Life vibrant

(By A Staff Reporter)

To me, December is always the best time to be in Chennai and that is thanks to the Music Season. For the past few years, January too has been very exciting, in part because of The Hindu's Literary aka Lit For Life (LFL) Festival. The two cannot be compared, of course. The



music season lasts much longer and is spread over several venues. The LFL is for three action-filled days at the Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Auditorium and an open air pavilion, both located in the Lady Andal School campus.

If there is one single element that distinguishes the LFL from the music season, however, it is the presence of the youth in large numbers at the former. They make for a vibrant atmosphere, be they volunteers or members of the audience. Of course, the LFL has the familiar faces that can be seen at all cultural events in the city, with one exception who is a fixture at all such programmes all over the world and who made it to the LFL as well, but that person shall be nameless.

Perhaps it was because the event coincided with the Pongal holidays this year, or perhaps the event has acquired a critical mass of an audience thanks to its consistent quality of programmes over the years, the attendance was at an all-time high for almost all the events. Even the post-lunch and late evening slots had full houses. In terms of the number of events, well, any *sabha* would have been proud of the statistics – 44 sessions, 94 panelists from six countries, workshops and performances. What made the difference was the presence of over 2000 people at each session – no *sabha* can match that on all days of its festival.

Understandably so, the issue concerning Perumal Murugan

dominated the festival. His absence was sorely felt, but there was no way out of that once he had announced his withdrawal from the world of letters. But the palpable sense of empathy with him made up for his staying away to an extent. The festival opened with a resolution passed on the

matter. Tabled by N Ram, Chairman of Kasturi & Sons Limited, it stated that "Literature and society become poorer every time the forces of intimidation and censorship are allowed to prevail against the forces of creative utterance." It called upon "State and Central authorities, political parties, and civil society to respect and protect freedom of expression as an inalienable fundamental right." The controversy over Perumal Murugan's *Madhubagan* was in fact to be brought up in various panel discussions right through the festival.

The sheer variety of events in the festival showed the range that the world of books encompasses – there were programmes on fiction, travel, politics, gender, history, biography, freedom of expression, language, cinema, theatre and culinary skills, to name but a few. There was even a session on skincare which, according to those who attended, was a phenomenal success, with Dr. Sharad Paul having everyone eating out of his hands. (Some in the audience were not above asking for some free treatment in the question-and-answer session!)

I could not make it to as many sessions as I would have liked to, but here are a few that I went to and which I found particularly impressive:

'Feminine form – the site of violence', the participants being Justice Prabha Sridevan, Ramesh Gopalakrishnan, Ammu Joseph and U. Vasuki



So much still to write about Madras

As part of *The Hindu's* Lit for Life festival, Dr. A. R. Venkatachalapathy and Sriram V. participated in a session discussing 'Writings on Chennai'. The discussion, presented to a near full house, centred chiefly on the way the city has been presented in writings over the centuries.

The speakers agreed that Madras has been lucky as far as documented history since 1639 is concerned. We have had J Talboys Wheeler (*Madras in the Olden Time*), HD Love (*Vestiges of Old Madras*) and S. Muthiah (several works, of which *Madras Rediscovered* is the most popular) who between them have covered over three centuries. But what is interesting is that there is still much more to be done. Both Calcutta and Delhi, for instance, have benefited from a plethora of subaltern studies with the former city even having a detailed street-wise history.

Despite having been a bit of a backwater for most of the British era, what is surprising is the number of interesting tales that keep cropping up in the history of the city. The early skirmishes between Protestant Madras and Catholic San Thomé were highlighted by Sriram in this context and he narrated a tale of how a chaplain from the Fort was kidnapped by the Portuguese when he set out for an evening walk. Agent Greenhill of the East India Company retaliated by apprehending a Catholic priest of San Thomé and had him confined to Fort St George. But such were the fortifications that the prisoner managed to scale them and escape. Not so lucky was the British chaplain who was sent off to Goa to face the Inquisition and came back many years later.

Dr. Venkatachalapathy in turn spoke of how the tramways of Madras would be an excellent documentation of the city's history. In this context he narrated a couple of anecdotes. The first concerned the patriot VO Chidambaram Pillai's meeting with Gandhi. In the letter that he wrote to the latter, Pillai stated that he could come only by tram to meet him and then fixed the time accordingly. It is an indication, said Dr Venkatachalapathy, of how much Pillai had come down in life. A man who once operated ships and threatened British hegemony was reduced to travelling by tram. In the context of the trams, Dr Venkatachalapathy also narrated the circumstances in which the Poonamalle High Road shed of the tramways was transformed into Periyar Thidal. It was in the 1950s when the tramways were wound up and the sheds were being auctioned. Periyar, who always had difficulty in finding a suitable public space for his

workshops, none of which I could attend. Besides the stalls selling books, there was a new initiative by way of Author TV, a channel that focusses on men and women of letters. This team interviewed authors on their work and what was very impressive was the way the anchor managed to ask pertinent questions to each writer, based on his or her work. Yet another first in the LFL series was a heritage walk I conducted in the Madras Literary Society campus, where the content had entirely to do with books.

As for the browsing and sluicing, it was of the highest order with a series of food stalls catering to everyone's tastes. 'Vivekananda coffee', though it is not known if that great man subscribed to that beverage, was in particular demand. The authors' lounge provided a private space where panellists could come together before the event and work out the nuances of their

programmes. It also provided a space to network in, as was evident from the regular at international festivals referred to above who managed to gatecrash and network like a spider, this despite not having any scheduled event at the lit fest. But let us leave that aside.

speeches, given their fiery content, decided on the advice of friends to buy a part of the shed space. He then converted it into a public arena, granting permission for anyone and everyone to use it, including those who wanted to hold meetings there to condemn his rationalist outlook!

Sriram then spoke of how the medical history of Madras would be another suitable subject. He narrated in brief the life of Mary Ann Dacomb Scharlieb, the first qualified woman doctor of Madras who later became one of the earliest women MDs of the world. In 1885, she, at the express desire of Queen Victoria, began the Royal Victoria Caste and Gosha Hospital, which later moved to Triplicane. Today it is the Kasturba Gandhi Hospital and is doing pioneering work in women's health. If Dr Scharlieb was to rewrite the fate of several women through her medical practice, she was to inadvertently play an important role in another aspect – widow rehabilitation. This came about thanks to her employing the forceps for perhaps the first time in the city, to help in the birth of a baby girl. Such was the force applied that it left a couple of depressions in the skull which remained right through the delivered baby's life. That girl would grow up to be Sister R S Subbalakshmi!

The conversation then veered towards press freedom and the freedom of expression. In this context, Dr Venkatachalapathy spoke of how the Madras Dramatic Performance Act of 1954 was legislated to suppress just one man – M R Radha. He, of course, was not in any way deterred by it and he fought it tooth and nail, first by demanding that the notices sent to him be in Tamil and not English, and later by stating that everyone who came to his plays thoroughly enjoyed them and so those who did not like them or considered them offensive were best advised to stay away!

Radha was not the first to be suppressed. One of the earliest instances of the Indian Penal Code being used for suppressing a book on grounds of obscenity was in 1910 when Bangalore Nagarathamma published Muddu Palani's 17th Century erotic classic, *Radhika Santwanamu*. After Sriram had finished narrating the tale behind this, Dr Venkatachalapathy took up the thread and spoke of how even chapbooks were suppressed the same way for seditious content. Both speakers agreed that the content in many of these cheap publications were important sources of the city's history. The topics largely centred on murders, dacoities and other sensations but there were others such as the *People's Park Vazhi Nadai Chindu* that traces the route from George Town to Mylapore in the early 1900s. Sriram then disclosed as to how he has walked the entire stretch as depicted in the *chindu* and during the four-hour journey discovered that a large part of what was described in the song was still standing!

Dr Venkatachalapathy related how the chapbooks survived despite being printed on cheap paper. When the information contained in them were no longer current, they were bound together and sold as compilations. These were painstakingly bought by the Government, which seriously studied them for harmful content and then filed them away. Several of these are in British archives now, though the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai also has a good selection. Both speakers suggested that researchers should go through these in detail to unearth more nuggets on Chennai.

The time allotted for the talk being just about 20 minutes, it ended even before it began. A ten-minute question-answer session followed wherein many reminisced about the city they had grown up with and how it had changed. Perhaps that too would make for a good history!

— By A Special Correspondent

stated South Indian hospitality to its best.

The Hindu's Lit For Life event may not have been the largest or the most high profile of its kind, but it was in every way a wonderful gift from the city's best-known newspaper to Madras that is Chennai. And given that this is a metropolis of book lovers (where else do you have a Book Club that meets with such regularity?), it had the audience that made the effort worth the while. May the festival continue in the years to come and become a part of the city's social calendar.

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

Plans, once, for rail-canal link

Reader D.H. RAO, continuing his research on the history of the Buckingham Canal, recently sent us material he found on the Red Hills Railway (MM, December 16th). Four items of government correspondence he found are appended below together with a note about the project.

With reference to my letter of the 28th March last, and to the orders of government, appended (5th April 1836) to it, directing that the estimate for the Rail Road from Red Hills and Mount to Madras shall be prepared under the orders of the Military Board. I am directed by the Board of Revenue to forward the enclosed letters dated (11th May 1836), relative to the same subject which have been received from Captain Cotton. The Board considers that officer's suggestion regarding Cocharane's Canal, particularly deserving of attention.

I have –
A Ross, Major
Inspector General
of Civil Estimates

* * *

From
Captain Cotton

To

The Inspector General of Civil Estimates

Sir

In my letter respecting the construction of rail road in the immediate vicinity of Madras, I omitted to mention, that I have considered it highly desirable, that, if possible, the management of Cocharane's Canal, should be in the hands of the Government.

If all the works for the carriage of supplies into Madras were under the care of Government, a general scheme could be drawn-up, for the collection of tolls on each by which, the greatest results of which the works are capable might be obtained. But if the same are in the hands of Government and same in those of private individuals, there must of necessity be such a clashing of

interests as will greatly tend to diminish the advantages, otherwise, obtainable from one or other of these works.

The amount of net revenue of the canal, I understand, has been, of late, some where about 15,000 rupees a year, and I have reason to believe that the owners would make over the 'work' to government, upon government undertaking to them an annual sum, which is about 6 years hence...

* * *

To

The Secretary to Government,
Public Department

No. 14

From the Secretary to the Military Board

Sir,

I have the honor by order of the Military Board to forward Captain Cotton's report, on progress of the work on the Red Hills Rail Road and Canal.

I have the honor to be –
Sir,

You're most obedient servant

H. Moberly

Fort St. George
29th December 1836

Secretary to
Military Board

* * *

To

The Secretary to the Military Board
Fort St. George

Sir,

I have the honor to forward the following statement of work done since my last report, I beg the board will be pleased to excuse my neglect to report last week.

During the week ending the 17th, very little progress was made on account of showers of rain. The contract people did not come to work for several days, and found that there was so little work done by the daily coolies, which there was rain about, that I thought it better not to employ them.

Para 5. The bridge over the canal has been commenced and one of the beams to support the platform of 16 feet long has been cast. I find that they can be cast cheaper than teak, beams could be procured. Colonel Monteith's furnance for the use of charcoal will be completed in a few days. Since charcoal for it of the best quality has been prepared by the sappers.... The different parts of from 20 to 40 carriages are made.

I have –

A.J. Cotton

Captain Engineers

Red Hills
27th December 1836

In charge of the
Red Hill Rail Road

* * *

1836 NOTE

Captain Cotton, a civil engineer with the 3rd Division, was entrusted with building a rail road from Red Hills quarry to Cocharane's canal, near the Basin. The idea was to transport laterite stones needed for the road works in Madras Presidency much faster, till the Canal, and thereafter by boats, to the respective sites.

Captain Cotton is in charge of the Red Hill Railway Road and a proposed canal, which is to be connected to the Cocharane Canal near the Basin. He is trying to use cast iron beams instead of teak wood beams for the small bridges. He cast these beams in furnace, where good quality charcoal is used.

He's now chasing lighthouses



D.H. Rao

My friend D. Hemachandra Rao, just 76, has been on the road for some time now, having set off with a driver in his enduring Ford from his home in Virugambakkam.

His odyssey is to check out every lighthouse in the country – new, old, dilapidated and ghostly. As I write, Rao must be zipping into West Bengal, to visit the last of the beacons that guide ships and boats in the Bay of Bengal. (P.S. He on Tuesday the 10th told *Madras Musings* that he was back in Madras after further having seen the lighthouses in West Bengal.)

One weekend, I joined Rao at Visakhapatnam late evening – he had clocked over 1750 kms and thought it fit to head to the hotel bar, order whiskey and then polish off a plate of fish and chips. Over drinks he had loads of stories to share till the call came from our host – engineer Krishna Rao who is in charge of the lighthouse atop Dolphin's Nose.

In the misty night, we raced to the top, left behind a sprawling Naval Colony and paused for good in the lighthouse campus. These structures have a life of their own and, often, they seem eerie as they flash a light every few seconds and let the moonlight bathe the black and white stripes in the cold of a January night.

From the balcony of the quarters that stood below the light, we enjoyed Visakhapatnam's own necklace of lights.

Krishna Rao, who is to retire in a few months, comes from a family of lighthouse men. His grandfather travelled to Burma and served in a Light House. His father followed, employed by the Indian Government – serving at lighthouses raised by the British and overseeing the building of new ones.

"Will your son also get in?"

"I have only daughters!"

Besides stories, Hemachandra Rao will come back with loads of material – postal covers with visuals of lighthouses and unique stamps bearing a local postal cancellation, photos of installations and geography yet to be shot and bits of memorabilia.

I wonder how a city can showcase the works of such men and women. – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*)

– Vincent D' Souza

Is Law College building doomed?

(Continued from page 1)

weak in a matter of eight years? The vibrations caused by the Metro, of course, need to be taken into consideration but is it a case of the PWD being very quick in condemning the building? Next, even assuming that the building is weak, what exactly does the PWD propose to do about it? It has in the past few years done nothing about similar structures in an 'enfeebled condition' beyond putting up notice boards all around them. If that is all that it plans to do with the Law College, is it perhaps not better to keep it in use thereby allowing for routine maintenance, which will also be cut off once the building is shut down?

At this stage, rumours are also flying thick and fast that Chennai Metrorail is in need of land in the area to put up stations. There is, of course, probably no truth in this but it only adds to the uncertainty. In the meanwhile, watch this space for fresh developments.



Till February 28: *Temple architecture* – an exhibition of paintings by K. Ravee (at Dakshina-Chitra).

Till February 28: *The Dictum of Dreams and Desires*, an exhibition of paintings by Alexis Kersey (at Bergamo, Khader Nawaz Khan Road).

Till February 28: *Unbound, Line that Traverses Elements*, an exhibition of drawings of the script in a representational form by Chantal Jumel (at Apparao Galleries).

Till February 28: *Unheard Melodies*, an exhibition of photographs by Mala Mukherjee (at Apparao Infinity).

Till February 28: *Impersonations Impersonating Enacting Icons*,



Mala Mukherjee's work.

Gandhi/MGR an exhibition of photographs by Cop Shiva (at The Leela Palace).

Till February 28: *Unfurling the Visual*, an exhibition of paintings by Neeta Gajam and Rajesh Patil (at Sandy's Cenotaph Road and Sandy's Nungambakkam).

February 24: *An Enemy of the people*, a play by Henrik Ibsen adapted by Florian Borchmeyer, directed by Thomas Ostermeier for Schaubuhne Berlin.

Dr. Stockmann discovers that the source of drinking and spa water is riddled with dangerous industrial effluence. He wants to publish the findings and demands the city council re-route the water pipes. Influential citizens and local journalists promise support. However, his brother Peter, the mayor, raises some serious concerns: The economic prosperity of the spa town will be threatened. Suddenly the support for Stockmann from policymakers begins to wane. They seek a cover-up. But Stockmann insists on transparency. For him the affair has ceased to be about the polluted health spa, his target is society as a whole (at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Hall, 7 p.m. (Passes from Goethe-Institut.)

The day a Prime Minister heard out students

(Continued from last fortnight)

The trip to Europe in 1960 was just as significant as Prof. Ramakrishnan's round-the-world tour of 1956 because of its influence on the Theoretical Physics Seminar and the creation of MATSCIENCE.

But in Madras, the "Professor without portfolio" was not given an office. He was permitted to lecture in the German classroom. His address was "Professor of Physics, c/o the German classroom"! This did not deter him since he could spend more time at *Ekamra Nivas* and attend the Theoretical Physics Seminar and invite scientists to lecture there.

He also resumed the MSc classes at Madras University with a course on Nuclear Physics.

In January 1961, Prof. Ramakrishnan received an invitation from Delhi to be a full-time member of the Hindi Language Commission. But he could not serve on it full-time, so he accepted to be a part-time member in order to visit Delhi to feel the pulse of academic decisions being made in the capital. In the end, it was not the adminis-

trative set-up in Delhi that came to his support, but the Prime Minister and the Madras Minister of Education C. Subramaniam.

trative set-up in Delhi that came to his support, but the Prime Minister and the Madras Minister of Education C. Subramaniam.

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.

trative set-up in Delhi that came to his support, but the Prime Minister and the Madras Minister of Education C. Subramaniam.

In March that year, the Mathematics Review Committee of the University Grants Commission, of which Father was a member, submitted its report on the development of Mathematics. While other members of the Committee recommended the creation of advanced centre **within** universities, Father insisted that there should be provision for creating institutions **outside** universities. He wrote in his diary: "Though my dissent was not formally included in the report, it turned out to be prophetic by the creation of MATSCIENCE at the end of the year."

In June, C. Subramaniam was leaving for the United States. Father called on him a day before his departure, and CS showed considerable interest in starting a new institute. Father suggested that in the United States, CS should meet a few leading scientists and get their opinion about the Theoretical Physics Seminar and the need for a new institute in Madras. When the Minister returned from his US tour in August, he conveyed to Father the positive impressions about the Theoretical Physics Seminar

that were expressed by the eminent scientists he met. These impressions reaffirmed the desire of Subramaniam to start an institute along the lines suggested by Prof. Ramakrishnan.

There was a leading foreign scientist or mathematician visiting Madras almost every year at this time and Father had them address the Seminar, interact with students and do radio talks as he believed it was important to inform the public at large about the developments in science. He also took them to meet the Vice-Chancellor.

In September, Maurice Shapiro of Princeton, after his talk at the Seminar, met the Vice-Chancellor and also met Minister Subramaniam that evening. Shapiro told C. Subramaniam that watching the students at work at *Ekamra Nivas* "reminded him of the manner in which scientists gathered around Oppenheimer at Los Alamos!" That was high tribute and made a great impression on Subramaniam. Shapiro went on to suggest that the students should meet the Prime Minister of India. This comment made Subramaniam write to Jawaharlal Nehru suggesting such a meeting.

On September 30, 1961, Father received a telegram from C. Subramaniam in Delhi saying that the Prime Minister was willing to meet the members of the Theoretical Physics Seminar on October 8th in Madras. The meeting was at the *Raj Bhavan*. Prof. Ramakrishnan and his wife were invited to the official dinner with the Prime Minister. The meeting with the students was at 9:30 p.m. after the dinner. C. Subramaniam was present both at the dinner



Prime Minister Nehru meets the Theoretical Physics Seminar students. To his right are Prof. Alladi Ramakrishnan and Education Minister C. Subramaniam.

and at the meeting. At the end of the meeting Nehru asked Prof. Ramakrishnan only one question: "Are you really convinced that we should have an Institute of the kind you are insisting upon?" Naturally the answer was an emphatic 'yes'. Father was then asked by CS to send a formal proposal which he would discuss with the Prime Minister. C. Subramaniam wrote in his autobiography *The Hand of Destiny*:

"Ramakrishnan mentioned to me that for the purpose of encouraging young talent in theoretical physics and mathematics, a new institution was necessary. At that time the entire research work in mathematics and theoretical physics was done only in the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) in Bombay under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission (both headed by Dr. Homi Bhabha). Ramakrishnan emphasised the need for another institute so that there might be some competition... instead of one institute monopolising the entire research work. But another institute could be started only with the concurrence of the Atomic Energy Commission and the Government of India..."

"Jawaharlal was greatly impressed by the enthusiasm shown by the students (of Professor Ramakrishnan)... and in particular to see four girls among the students. When the students told him that they needed an institution for the development of theoretical physics and mathematics, he asked me to examine the proposal and put up a note for his consideration. Ramakrishnan prepared a note for the purpose and I sent it to the Prime Minister."

It was to take two more months for the Prime Minister to give a nod for the creation of a new institute.

The great astrophysicist Subrahmanyam Chandrasekhar came to Madras in November to give a series of lectures at Madras University. When Father invited him to *Ekamra*

Nivas he jokingly insisted that he would visit only if he would be treated to a typical South Indian style plantain leaf dinner, which of course was no problem. Chandrasekhar gave a two-hour lecture at *Ekamra Nivas*, wearing his typical full suit. He visited *Ekamra Nivas* again a few days later to listen to the theoretical physics group and have discussions with them. Two days later, there was a South Indian dinner for Chandrasekhar and his wife at *Ekamra Nivas* and all the students were invited to join. He then changed into a *dhoti* to enjoy the plantain leaf dinner! He visited *Ekamra Nivas* again a few days later, and gave a three-hour lecture. It is said of Chandrasekhar that his commitment to lecture to dedicated

students was so great, that he would make an hour-long trip from Yerkes Observatory to the University of Chicago to lecture to a class of just two students – T.D. Lee and C.N. Yang; that effort was to prove well worth it, because both these students won the Nobel Prize a few years later! Chandrasekhar's dedication to talk to eager and talented students was demonstrated by his many visits to *Ekamra Nivas* for lectures and discussions.

After a dinner at *Ekamra Nivas* early in December, Minister Subramaniam indicated to Father that things were moving favourably in Delhi for establishing a Maths-Science institute in Madras.

(To be concluded)

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

Sd. ANU VARGHESE
(Publisher)

• NOSTALGIA

'PT, my daily bus at Lawder's Gate'

I have in the past written in these columns about the medical doctor James Lawder and the Lawder's Gate bus stop in Purasawalkam (Raja Annamalai Chettiar Road-Gangadareswara Koil Street junction). One childhood memory of this bus stop that has been haunting me since recently has been the bright-red bus bearing number 20 which touched Lawder's Gate bus stop, while plying between Broadway and Villivakkam.

The earliest buses for public use in Madras were pressed into service by the Madras Tramways Corporation in 1925. This service folded up for various reasons in 1928. Small private bus companies operated until May 1947, when the State nationalised within-city bus operations. All State-run buses were identically blue, at first, red later, and green still later. Route 20, run by a private bus company – the Presidency Transport Private Limited (PT Limited) – which transported Purasawalkam residents to George Town via Madras Central Station was an exception.

Bus Route 20 was special to me then, because this bus was strikingly different from the State-run buses, such as Route 16 plying between Kelly's Corner and Mount Road (terminating at Casino and Gaiety Cinemas) and Route 22 running between Kelly's Corner



Mohammad Sulaiman

and Triplicane (terminating at Pycroft's Road-Marina Beach junction, next to Presidency College), which were the other two bus lines that touched Lawder's Gate bus stop. The minimum fare in Government buses was 10 paise, whereas in Route 20 the fare was cheaper: 7 paise. The tickets issued in Route 20 were distinctly different from those issued on Routes 16 and 22. If my memory serves right, this route operated as a private line until the 1970s.

PT Limited and the City Motor Service were the pioneering bus companies in Madras. The Route 20 buses, run by PT Limited, were unique in many ways. They were Fargo buses, whereas the State service plied either Bedfords or Ashok Leylands. The passenger seating used to be different in the two services. The State buses had two rows of similar seats, each meant to seat two, arranged in two columns separated by a median aisle, whereas the Route 20 buses had an asymmetrical seat-

ing arrangement. As a passenger entered from the rear end, rows of longish seats were provided on the right, each meant to accommodate three passengers, although, invariably, four would squeeze in, and a long single seat that ran parallel to the left wall of the bus from the driver's end to the rear of the bus. A narrow, hard-to-walk-through aisle ran between the left seat facing windows on the right and the other seats facing the back of the driver and the engine compartment. Being not an automobile engineer, I

• by
Dr. Anantanarayanan Raman
araman@csu.edu.au

cannot describe all this in greater detail. As a non-Government bus, Route 20 terminated in George Town at the private bus parking lot, viz. the *Pookkadai* (Flower Bazaar), popularly known as the Broadway Bus Terminus, whereas the Government-run buses terminated at Parry's Corner.

The rest of the story presented here pertains to the company PT Limited, which ran buses from Broadway to several suburban towns. Meherunnissa Baig, Farahatullah Baig, and Sajid Sikander Mohammed supplied me details of PT Lim-



A Madras bus of yesteryears, shown here for representational purpose only. (Courtesy: Vintage Vignettes.)

ited and its founder-director, the late Mohammad Sulaiman.

Mohammad Sulaiman was born to Mohammad Shaik Dawood in Madras on July 15, 1890. Although he did not complete his schooling, he was sharp. His strengths were a keen power of observation and an unending enthusiasm to learn new skills. Subsequent to a dispute with his family, he went to Bombay to pursue new opportunities. At Bombay, he was sheltered by a well-meaning Marwari couple, who owned a motor-car repair and service garage. He worked there and got trained to be a mechanic. After 15 years in Bombay he returned to Madras and set up a bus body building workshop. He built not only bodies of motor vehicles, but also excellent social contacts. Sulaiman decided to start a transport-bus company and started PT Limited, partnering three friends, Fernandes, Sankaran Nair, and Ramanajulu Naidu.

Sulaiman managed the day-to-day affairs of PT Limited as the Managing Director and ran the Company. The depot of PT Limited buses was on Mount Road, where the Devi Group of cinema theatres is at present. At the peak of operations, 22 buses plied along various routes from Madras. Among the different routes, Broadway-Chin-

gleput and Broadway-Pallavaram routes were the most popular.

PT Limited earned a reputation of being an efficient and reliable bus service. It employed 60 people. Sulaiman also took great care of the welfare of the workers of the Company.

PT Limited was the first bus company in Madras to introduce route numbers for buses. For example, the route numbers 1, 2, 6, 7, 13, 20, 20A, 25, 25B, were launched by PT Limited as city bus routes. In recognition of Sulaiman's service to development of, public transport in Madras, he was decorated with a medal by the then Minister for Transport of the Government of Madras.

On a block of land in Royapettah, which belonged to him, New College came up in the 1950s.

Sulaiman was a self-made person, who believed only in hard work, honesty, and integrity. He readily helped those in need. Sulaiman never discriminated among those who came to him seeking help and support; none ever returned empty handed.

He married Jeelani Bee. Sikandar Mohammad and Meherunnissa (later Meherunnissa Baig) were his children. He passed away on October 13, 1965.

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