

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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• Global investors

Can a few cosmetic changes lure them?

The State Government appears serious at long last about conducting its Global Investors' Meet. After two postponements last year, now scheduled for May 23rd and 25th this year, the plan is to garner Rs. 1000 crore in investments within these two days. This may seem ambitious, but in a vastly urbanised and industrialised State this can be achieved provided the planning for the event is right. There are, however, many rumblings at ground level that indicate the usual slap-dash, and last minute efforts are the order of the day. The question is: Are global investors not going to see through it all?

Take for instance the question of city beautification. Can

(By The Editor)

this be done in a matter of two months? And yet that is what the Corporation hopes to achieve. You would have noticed a sudden proliferation of bollards along footpaths and medians. On the anvil are road-sweeping machines and a wall art initiative. The former, incidentally, are to be used only along specific roads – those on which the delegates to the investors' meet will be driving to and from their places of stay. What of the rest of the city? Well, that is not going to be seen by these visitors from overseas, so why bother?

The wall art initiative, good though it is in intention and deserving of encouragement, can

never be a success unless we educate our political class, the cinema world and the Tamil Nadu printing industry that wall spaces are not meant for posters. These are the worst offenders, apart from petty advertisers hawking quack cures. Taking a cue from these role models, the average man on the street has also begun putting up posters, commemorating anything and everything from births and deaths and thereafter to first, second, third and nth anniversaries. Can wall art really make an impact in a city whose populace is so insensitive to it? Let us also not forget that Corporation Councillors, past and present, are themselves not

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A disappointing budget by the Corporation

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Corporation of Chennai has gone through the motions of presenting yet another annual budget. The financial plan has disappointed on many counts – the cut in expenditure on necessary civic infrastructure being the most important issue. What is worse is that the Corporation has not delivered on several plans that were included in last year's budget. That makes for a very poor performance and will definitely have an impact on the quality of life in the city.

Last year we had reviewed the budget in this publication and given it a rating of A. The most commendable features concerned the focus on non-motorised traffic. Pedestrian zones had been planned in

Mylapore, T'Nagar and Chepauk. Granite footpaths were to be laid along 100 bus routes. A seven kilometre cycle lane was to connect Fort St. George to Foreshore Estate, the route going along the Marina. Cycles for these users were to be available on hire at various places en route. The scheme was to be extended along the Metro and MRTS corridors to provide last mile connectivity.

The next praiseworthy inclusion was the scheme to set up 100 new parks and the introduction of rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation in all the parks in the city. Solar energy was to be tapped for public lighting. Public fixtures for civic hygiene were to be washed regularly. The Corporation also

pledged to look into the matter of parking fees and the possibility of collecting a congestion fee in places such as T'Nagar, the money so accruing to be used for civic projects.

Not one of these schemes has seen the light of the day. The only one on which some progress has been made is the laying of footpaths along a handful of arterial roads. According to the Corporation's own admission, 165 of its planned schemes are yet to be acted upon! The civic body's honesty in admitting this is to be commended, but that is not going to take it far.

These worries apart, what is also causing concern is the

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Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• Armenian Street has several interesting buildings to its credit. Some are historical, while others demand attention for being significant works of architecture. One of the few that has both claims to fame is the Oriental Insurance Building.

The anonymous company that owned the property prior to its nationalisation came into existence on May 5, 1874 as the Oriental Government Security Life Assurance Company Limited in Bombay. Its founding fathers were famous men of that city – Cumroodeen Tyabji, JP, Member of the Bombay Corporation and Solicitor was the Chairman; the other Directors were R N Khote, JP, Merchant and Member of the Bombay Corporation; Jehangir Rustomjee Mody, Merchant, and (later Sir); and Pherozeshah M Mehta, Bar-at-Law and later Chairman of the Bombay Municipal Corporation.

The Oriental fared very well in the first decade of its life and kept the pace going thereafter. In Madras, the company operated through its Managing Agents, McDowell & Co, whose handsome offices on Second Line Beach have long since been demolished. By the turn of the century, Oriental decided to have its own branch in Madras, and this came into existence in McDowell's premises on April 1, 1901. It was the first regional office of the company. By 1906, business had grown in Madras Presidency and the firm decided to move into its own premises. A suitable site with an existing building was identified at the intersection of Errabalu Chetty and Armenian Streets and the operations shifted there.

The Company decided to build a new edifice on the site in 1935 and the task of designing it was entrusted to the firm of LM Chitale. What emerged thanks to his conception and care came to be rightfully known as the first building in the city to follow 'modern Indian architecture'. Structurally, it was the first building in the city to be entirely of reinforced concrete with floors, beams, columns and foundation using this medium and the filling in between being done in brick work and cement mortar. It was also the first planned six-storeyed building in the city.

That was an era of edifices with corner entrances. The Law College had shown the way at least three decades earlier. Later, Sir Edwin Lutyens had put this to dramatic effect in New Delhi's circuses, especially at Princes' Place near the Government House where Hyderabad and Baroda Houses had corner entrances along a circular periphery while opening out into the rear in a butterfly pattern. Oriental Building on Armenian Street followed in the same tradition with a dramatic corner entrance and a central tower, thereby allowing for extensive frontage along two streets. In an article written on the occasion of the inauguration of the building in 1936, Chitale was to hope that the other three corners of the intersection would soon have complementary structures thereby making way for a circus, but that was sadly not to be.

An interesting feature of the building is its sunken basement, designed exclusively to house a safe deposit vault. The first of its kind in Madras and the biggest in South India, this came to be occupied by the Kothari-promoted Madras Safe Deposit Co Ltd. In its time, the vault was designed to withstand any form of attack – burglars, fire, flood, earthquake and air raids. The basement was to consume a significant part of the overall concrete usage of 1000 tonnes. Two doors, each weighing six tonnes and specially made by Godrej, led to the vault.

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Can cosmetic changes lure investors?

(Continued from page 1)

above putting up posters and covering walls with political graffiti. The recent arrest of an octogenarian activist who tried to remove banners and posters shows where the sympathies of the administration truly lie.

The powers that be need to realise that, unlike in the past, the world is extremely connected today. With the social media being what it is, no city is really an unknown entity to a newcomer. The investors who come in are likely to be almost thoroughly clued about the real conditions in Chennai. Considering that the Investors' Meet was originally scheduled for 2013, we have had ample time since then to plan a proper event, with the necessary infrastructure in place for it. But we have gone about it in an all too familiar fashion – bringing about cosmetic changes when our core remains as weak as ever. After all, a Dubai that be-

gan working in 2014 to prepare itself for its Global Expo 2020 cannot be very wrong, can it?

There are a couple of other aspects of the Investors' Meet that merit introspection. Firstly, is May really the best time of the year to present our city? Or is it driven by the logic that once you showcase the city at its worst, everything else will appear better anyway? Secondly, the local industrial houses seem to be completely unaware of the event. A casual survey reveals that Chambers of Commerce have not even been involved. Would not a potential investor want to engage with those already present here to assess risks and opportunities? Lastly, given that land prices in Chennai have made investment in large industries completely unviable unless the Government subsidises the purchase, would it not have been better to have showcased a Tier II city such as Coimbatore?

A disappointing budget by the Corporation

(Continued from page 1)

Corporation's financial position. 2016 being an election year, it has been decided that property taxes will not be revised. This is a myopic stance, considering that very few property owners really vote in any election, civic or otherwise. The Corporation is, therefore, faced with falling revenues and is resorting to borrowings on a large scale to fulfil its promises. The loan component has increased from Rs. 546 crore the previous year to Rs. 1020 crore in 2015-16. The interest burden has jumped from Rs. 14 crore in 2014-15 to a whopping Rs. 105 crore in the coming year. Given this situation, it is but natural that the civic body is cutting down on all capital expenditure – roads, bridges, lighting, parks and stormwater drains. Now what does a city corporation exist for if it is unable to cater to these needs? And how does

Chennai hope to be an international city if it does not spend on the upkeep of its infrastructure?

Apart from stagnant revenue, the Corporation's finances are in poor shape because it has had to contend with a vastly increased area. The new zones have had to be brought to some level of parity with the older areas of the city and so have swallowed a significant portion of the money available. The slew of welfare schemes, beginning with the canteens, have not done much good to the bottom line either. Lastly, you would have expected that a civic body that confessed in the High Court that many buildings in the city are illegal (George Town alone had 90 per cent illegal structures) would have some significant incomes from fines, wouldn't you? Well, the net fines collected under this head for the year were Rs 1000! That's the way it goes.

Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago

(Continued from page 1)

Each floor above had an entrance hall with access both by stairs and electric lift. The top-most floor was designed as servants' quarters, while the ground floor had a commodious garage, accessed from the north.

The entire structure was noted for its use of materials largely sourced from within India, the flooring in particular being a combination of mosaic and marble. The steel doors and windows, an essential feature of the art-deco style then making its way were fabricated at the historic Beehive Foundry on Broadway, a firm that is still functioning. The Oriental Insurance Building is not as well maintained as it ought to be, but it still catches the eye.

(This article concludes this series. It will be renewed at a later date. A new series will feature in this space from next fortnight.)

– THE EDITOR

When the Sar-s finally met

The Man from Madras Musings has received several emails and messages asking whether the meeting that MMM Sar was to attend with the Government Sar (ref 'Short and Snappy' in MM issue dated March 16th) ever took place. To this MMM is very happy to respond by stating that the meeting did happen, and how!

The meeting was rescheduled to a particular date at 3.00 pm and promptly at 2.45, MMM could be seen, by those who cared to notice, walking up a broad staircase that was spick and span and, what was more, devoid of any posters or billboards praising the ruler of the day. The corners were also free of any betel juice. MMM

As committed by Government Sar the minutes of the meeting were ready for MMM to see via email as he reached his office. From then on, most discussions were over phone and the planned task was completed to the satisfaction of all by the agreed date. The inauguration was a simple matter, Government Sar opining that this being a routine development, there was no reason for any fanfare.

Taken all in all, it was an excellent experience. MMM was delighted by it all and hopes that he will be called in to work on committees with the Government more often in the near future. Government Sar and MMM have also become good friends and the

Rs. 15 for three. But the man on the ground does not recognise anything but a ten-rupee note and multiples.

The other day MMM was guided into a slot by attendant and then asked to pay Rs. 10, which MMM did without a murmur. Returning after a half-hour visit to the temple MMM got into his car and was reversing (with, it must be acknowledged, much guidance from the parking attendant who, from the way he shouted and waved his hands, could have been a coxswain on a boat) when his eye fell on the placard that clearly spelt out the rates. MMM then made bold to ask the attendant for Rs. 5 as he had parked his car in the slot for less than an

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

was asked to present himself at an electronic identification counter that, having checked MMM's retina and made sure that it was indeed he, allowed MMM in.

Having walked ahead, MMM was welcomed by a smiling receptionist who then ushered him into a meeting room where the Government Sar was waiting. The other invitees came in and the meeting began on the dot of three. The Government Sar had read all his notes and no time was wasted on picking up lost and tangled threads. The Government Sar also informed the attendees upfront that the meeting would last exactly thirty minutes by which time he expected everyone to have reached a conclusion on the matter at hand. He also said that the minutes of the meeting would be circulated within an hour of the meeting with clear action points and dates for everyone concerned.

The meeting then proceeded apace, but not before Government Sar requested everyone to keep his/her cell phone on silent mode. His own, he said, he would keep switched off during the meeting so that he was not distracted in any way. Thereafter the only other interruption was a tea lady wheeling in a trolley from which each attendee could select the beverage of his/her choice apart from a snack or two. Government Sar took copious notes, was all eyes and ears and made extremely pertinent observations. A budget was worked out for the task to be done and, being within Government Sar's discretionary powers, it was sanctioned at once. As the clock on Government Sar's desk buzzed the half hour, it was time to shake hands and leave.

former often drops in to pick the brains of the latter and, when he does come, he always drives his car which, incidentally, is sans a revolving red beacon on its hood.

Now, friends, MMM trusts that the above story satisfies you all. Before you move on to the story below, remember that this issue of *Madras Musings* was printed on April 1st. You are advised to use discretion in believing the contents of the above story.

Parking meters

This, unlike the previous one, is a true story. *The Man from Madras Musings* was one of the many innocents who lauded the installation of automated parking meters all along North Mada Street. He hailed it as the coming of a high tech dawn to this international city of ours. Alas! Those meters have, like the proverbial Arabs, long folded their tents and vanished into the dead of the night. Those that remain have ceased functioning. And, so, matters are back to where they started from – a man who claims to be an employee of the Corporation (and to prove it, he wears a faded luminous jacket with the civic body's logo) is now controlling the parking.

Shopkeepers who do not want vehicles in front of their outlets have long since squared him up and so, within the narrow space that is available, there are slots that are out of bounds for the average vehicle. The man does not issue receipts for the fee that he collects and woe betide anyone who has the gumption to ask for one. The rates quoted are arbitrary as well. A placard above the once-upon-a-time space for a parking meter has it that the rates are Rs. 5 for an hour, Rs. 10 for two hours and

hour.

The attendant could not at first believe his ears. Then he looked rather pityingly at MMM for his audacity in asking for a refund. Seeing however that MMM was rather persistent about it, he said that MMM had been away for two hours and so there was no question of any return of money. To this MMM (the honking traffic that was building up notwithstanding) said that he would call a neighbouring vagrant as witness. The vagrant, sensing that he could make money immediately, turned up and nodded.

The attendant knew he was beaten. He paid up grudgingly and muttered under his breath about cheapskates that came in cars and sought accounts for a paltry Rs 5. MMM was not bothered about it and gave the money to the vagrant who went off happily. Well, at least someone benefited from the whole matter.

However, what is sad is that our Corporation, having taken the correct step of mechanising the collection of parking fees, has gone back to such a primitive system that is prone to chronic misuse.

Tailpiece

Heights of numerology, felt *The Man from Madras Musings* on seeing this signboard. Or should he say it was the very depths of it?

– MMM



**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Cousins in Kotagiri

The note on Margaret Cousins' work on our national anthem was informative (MM, March 1st). Being an accomplished concert pianist she is also said to have sometimes broadcast on All India Radio in its early days.

James and Margaret Cousins moved to Kotagiri in the Nilgiris while still being under the patronage of the Maharaja of Travancore. It may be recalled that it was the Maharaja who endorsed James Cousins' conversion to Hinduism in 1937. Between 1939 and 1943, the couple made their home at *Ghat View* in Kotagiri overlooking the main road to the plains. The Maharaja himself had his holiday home a little above *Ghat View*. It was known as the Travancore Palace and during Nehru's time, Sheikh Abdullah, the Lion of Kashmir, was interned there for a short time before he was moved to Kodakanal.

It is on record that Margaret Cousins had made the following remark on her stay in the hills: "My doings at Kotagiri were a mix-up of domesticity, feminism, patriotism, humanism, occultism, nature and music." Her neighbours were certainly not amused by the oddity of the combination of these pursuits. The dabbling of Margaret Cousins, especially into occultism, continued to haunt the house for a long time to come.

James and Margaret Cousins frequented a picnic spot in the 'Longwood Shola' in the upper

reaches of Kotagiri. James Cousins, also a distinguished doyen of the Irish Literary Revival, penned a delightful 82-line poem on the Shola's pristine charm which to this day has been, thankfully, retained. Cousins beautifully rhymes this environment, in part;

"... *Lilts alluring themes for lyrics
Under boughs that richly shed
Nourishment for heart and head
Fancy's fruitage roundly ripened
As the early riser's stipend.*"

Rev. Philip K. Mulley
Anaihatti Road
Kotagiri 643 217

* * *

Propos the article on Tagore, Cousins and the National Anthem (MM, March 1st), my father, M.P. Sarangapani, was in the audience when Tagore sang the English rendering of the future National Anthem. It was published for the first time in *The Madanapalle Magazine*, the college journal, of which M.P. Sarangapani was the Managing Editor and Dr. James Cousins the Editor-in-Chief.

My father was a lifelong journalist, starting with Prakasam's *Swarajya* in the 1920s and ending his career as the Executive Editor of Rajaji's *Swarajya* for almost ten years, retiring in early 1971 when cataract affected his vision. He was 77 at the time and passed away two years later.

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* * *

Reader K.S.S. Seshan in his article on the Indian National Anthem (MM, March 1st) has attributed to Dr. Cousins a comment on the 'second verse' of the anthem which outlines the various religions of India. I recall having had to sing during my school days in 1938 the National Anthem in chorus with other school children. The second verse was sung with great pride. I reproduce from memory the bits and pieces of this verse hereunder:

*"Aaharava Tharavaja Vana-prasthitha Sumitha Bhavadhaya Vani...
Hindu, Bhaudha, Sikha, Jaina, Paarasika, Mussalmana, Christhani
Purva Paschima gaathe...
Thaava Singhaasana Paase*

*Jana Gana Aikyavi Gaayata Jayathe Bharatha Bhagyavi Daatha
Jaya He, Jaya He, Jaya He, Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya He. .." (E&OE)*

This verse was omitted from the National Anthem by the ruling party of the day, for reasons unknown.

Today's rulers should examine the possibility of restoring this verse in the present National Anthem to enhance the value of this beautiful song. This step will cause no offence to any community in India.

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Trichy proclamation

Swarajyamag.com recently published "a declaration of independence you have probably not heard about". This was the text of what was known as the Trichy Proclamation. It was issued by Marudu Pandyan in 1801. The document is a significant historical one, representing one of the earliest organised attempts at evicting the English East India Company from India (*jamboo dweepa* in the proclamation). It was issued by one of the leaders of a loosely organised confederacy of Southern poligars who resented the sudden usurpation of power and authority over the natives by the English.

Here are excerpts from the Trichy Proclamation, copies of which were found on the walls of the Arcot Nawab's palace in Trichy, Srirangam temple and the strategically important Trichy Fort.

"Whoever sees this paper, Read it with Attention.

"His Highness the Nawab Mohammad Ali having foolishly given the Europeans place amongst you is become like a widow. The Europeans violating their faith have deceitfully made the kingdom their own and considering the inhabitants as dogs, accordingly exercise authority over them. There existing no unity and friendship amongst you the above castes, who, not being aware of the duplicity of these Europeans have not only inconsiderately calumniated each other, but have absolutely surrendered the Kingdom to them. In these countries now governed by these low wretches, the inhabitants have become poor and the rice has become vellum (water).

"And although they manifestly suffer, they are still without understanding to discern it. It is certain that the Man must die although he may live a thousand years! And it is as certain that his fame will survive him as long as the Sun and Moon (Shine).

"Therefore it is devised and determined that in

future each shall enjoy his hereditary Rights, namely to His Highness the Nawab Arcot Subah, Vijaya Ramanah Tirumala Nayak the Carnatic, Tanjore the first place and to others their respective kingdoms all to be given to their rightful sovereigns without any violation of faith and national customs. (The Europeans must) confine themselves to a dependent service on the Nawab from which they may expect to derive a real and uninterrupted happiness.

"As the authority of the Europeans will be destroyed, we shall enjoy as in the service of the Nawab, constant happiness without tears. It is therefore recommended that every man in his place and palayam fly to arms and unite together in order to make even the name of the low wretches cease. Then all the poor and the needy will get subsistence.

"But should there be any who like dogs desirous of an easy life, obey the commands of these low wretches, such should be Karoo or cut off. As all know with what subtlety these low wretches, always in unity with each other, have subdued the country!

"Therefore you Brahmins, Kshetriyas Vysyas, Sudras and Musselmen, all who wear whiskers, whether civil or military, serving in the field or elsewhere, and you subedars, jamedars, havildars, nayaks and sepoys in the service of the low wretches and all capable of bearing arms, let them in the first place display their bravery as follows - Wherever you find any of the low wretches destroy them and continue to do so until they are extirpated. Whoever serves the low wretches will never enjoy eternal bliss after death, I know this. Consider and deliberate on it.

"To all living at Srirangam the priests and great people, Marudu Pandyan, prostrates himself at their feet. The Sovereigns made and kept ports, mud bastions, churches and chapels, the above great Rajahs and People by the injustice of the low wretches are now reduced to poverty. So great a people as you are reduced to this State! Grant me your Blessing."

Keeping it clean

Reader P.M. Belliappa is right in his criticism of the proposed 'Nature Trail' by the banks of the polluted Cooum (MM, March 16th). Any expenditure on Cooum, for that matter the Ganga also, will prove to be a total waste unless people are educated on how to keep the natural resources pure and clean.

I had the opportunity to take a Nature Trail by car on the banks of the Karukum Canal which brings water from River Amu Darya to Ashkabad, capital of Turkmenistan. The canal, running over 500 km from near the Afghan border, is kept in pristine pure condition without any pollution. I did not see men bathing or washing their cattle or clothes in the canal. There was a layer of foam to reduce evaporation.

If only our people learn not to chew and spit on the public roads, we will be ready for a transformation.

S.S. Rajagopalan
30, Kamarajar Street
Chennai 600 093.

English corrected

In column 2 para 2 (MM, February 16th), it reads "MMM could not able to do anything". The words "could not" or "cannot" should not be

used with the words "able to". It should be "MMM was not able to do anything."

Aaron David A.M.
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Editor's Note: We are delighted to find there are readers who go through every line of *Madras Musings*.

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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“The more things change, the more they remain the same,” says a pithy adage. Whenever we refer to the Cooum River in Chennai, we invariably associate it with sewage and foul smell. It is interesting, in this context, to see what was said about the Cooum in 1867 after a spell of heavy rain:

“The abundant rain produced such an overflow of the Cooum that the town was completely flooded in many parts and as no sufficiently capacious store reservoirs exist and the upper part of the river is not dammed, the usual course of letting the fresh waters we so much need to escape into the ocean has to be resorted to with the usual effect, viz. that the stream rushed seawards with such rapidity that the upper waters only escaped, leaving the filthy lower stratum and the solid poured therein, at the bottom of the riverbed. And now we have our nostrils once more assailed with the disgusting odours emitted from one of the greatest cloacae of Madras.”

This comment was made in the context of the proposal made by one Captain Tulloch sent from the U.K. specifically to Madras in 1866 at the bidding of none less than Florence Nightingale, “the Lady with the Lamp”, who never visited India but was largely responsible for Madras getting proper sewerage!

The ‘Dry Latrine’ system then in vogue was one where defecation was done in cemented pits or in buckets from which the solid was removed by human labour in basketloads and whose washings went into the open road storm water drain! When in time it came that people would have to change from the dry latrine to the water closet, it was commended, “Such alteration can only be secured by a stringent law, rendering the committal of nuisances punish-

When sewerage came to Madras

able summarily. There may be some such law existing, for what we know, but, if so, it is a dead law....To trust the present Native Police would be to lean on a bruised reed, for it must be notorious to everyone not affected with the obliquity of vision that the Police peons are generally great sinners in this respect and look upon the drains as public urinaries.”

Nevertheless, sewerage system came to Madras in due course. Captain Tulloch made a thorough study of the problem and planned to “lay 6 inch and 9 inch earthenware pipes of English manufacture with means of flushing and access to the pipes at intervals of 300 ft. The sewage was to be taken to a central spot northwest of the mint and in the neighbourhood of Korrukupp-et.” William Cornish, the then Physician and Sanitary Commissioner of Madras, had raised several objections to this proposal and Capt. Tulloch had responded to his objections by himself playing the devil’s advocate role and clinically examining his proposal in the light of Cornish’s objections which are detailed below:

Objection 1: There are no perennial rivers to supply the water needed for flushing the closets.

Answer: Abundant rain falls every year but in a limited number of days. If enough storages are provided, then there will be more than enough of water needed for it.

Obj 2: Where will the sewage go?

Ans: It is wrong to divert it to the rivers as done in England,

and even in Bombay and Calcutta. It should go to the vast wastelands and fields nearby. Unlike in England, it rains only for a limited number of days here. These farms will thereby get not only water throughout the year but the manure for their crops as well. Such usage was already gaining ground in England too with great benefit. Alternatively, it could be led into the sea.

Obj 3: What about the smell?

Ans: The sewer pipes will be provided with charcoal deodorisers at every 300 ft distance.

Obj 4: The natives are used to defecate in the squatting position. They will not take well



• Florence Nightingale was largely responsible for Madras getting proper sewerage.

to the sitting position in the new system.

Ans: I will design appropriate closets for defecating in the squatting position. (This is indeed an innovation which seems to have gone unrecognised so far.)

Obj 5: The material used for the sewers are such that the liquid part of it will leak into the

earth leaving the solid in the pipe, resulting in blockage in no time.

Ans: I will provide steam pressed bricks set in hydraulic cement and lined throughout with asphalt.

Commenting on the impact on life in Fort St. George made by the “great sewer at the north-east of the Fort”, he said:

“No description can convey to the minds of those who have never lived within the influence of the smell from this sewer, its over-powering offensiveness when the outlet is open.

“It is certainly not pleasant to be awoken in the middle of the night by a frightful sense of suffocation, and a feeling as if there were something unpleasantly thick in the air, and then to have your olfactory organs assailed with a sickening stench, only to be got rid of by closing the doors and windows, setting the punkah vigorously in action, and freely sprinkling the room with Condy’s or McDougall’s fluid with an after-dash of Rimmel’s Toilet vinegar. And it is equally unpleasant to have a little social gathering terminated by one’s guests suddenly calling for eau-de-cologne, plunging noses into their handkerchiefs and hastily ordering their carriages in order to drive away out of range of the dreadful smell. It is fortunate for the residents of the Fort that the ‘unfavourable winds’ blow only for a few days in the year. Those who have suffered from this outfall sewer can sincerely pity their poor fellow citizens compelled by circumstances to reside in such places as Anderson’s Street and Stringer’s Street where the air is impregnated with the same kind of effluvia only in a less concentrated form.”

Capt. Tulloch, therefore, took the precaution of locating the outfall in Korrukupp-et because “it would be under the influence of winds which would carry any smell to the town only for a few days in the year.” He also emphasised the point that “every town in India has an interest in this project” for “if it could be proved that the sewerage of towns could be profitably and safely applied to land in India, an incalculable benefit would be conferred on the whole country.”

While his idea of using the sewage for farming did not seem to have materialised, an alternative system of disposal of excreta was available even then. Called ‘The Poudrette’ or the ‘Earth Closet’, it avoided all use of water and converted the faecal material into manure by depositing it into a drum and adding soil to it after every defecation. This was rejected because of the logistics involved in transporting the manure formed therein from each house to the fields. After the lapse of almost two centuries, this system, now termed the ‘ecosan toilet’ was introduced in a fishing village in Kerala by a Briton again, by name Paul Calvert. This system, which enables the installation of hygienic toilets at very low cost, is very well suited to the rural milieu, as it provides rich manure which can be used by the farmers in their fields. An NGO in Tiruchi, SCOPE, is actively involved in promoting this in rural India and has made considerable progress.

In this system, two drums are placed side by side with provision of a door for emptying its contents and covered with a floor. Defecation is done in one drum through a hole in the floor and the hole kept covered. Some lime or ash is put into the drum after each use. When one drum is full, the second drum is used. By the time the second drum is full, the faecal matter in the first drum is converted into pleasant smelling manure which is removed through the door provided. No water goes into the drum as the urine is led via a slope on the floor to a soil bed on which water-loving plants like cannabis are planted. Washing is done in another hole in the floor and is also led to the same bed. Interestingly, SCOPE has refined the system and has even established how the urine also can be collected and used in the fields as manure. It is stated that the total output of urine from one individual gives enough of urea in a year for an acre of land!

The basic cost of providing the two drums and the floor is very low and privacy above the floor can, depending on the family concerned, vary from a simple *thatti* to a pucca wall with a tiled floor with the sides also tiled! If indeed the eco-san system is utilised widely in rural areas, it will literally result in a major revolution in rural India: The farmer will not only be producing good quality manure for his fields but his family’s health too will improve a lot and dignity will be conferred on its women.

(Summarised by Dr Indukanth S. Ragade from an article which had appeared in the *Madras Journal of Medical Science* in 1867 and traced by Dr. A. Raman.)

•As the trek to the hills begins...

Words from the ‘Father of Nilgiriology’



• Prof. Paul Hockings is the Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, USA. He is also the Adjunct Curator of Anthropology at the Field Museum of Natural History and Editor-in-Chief of *Visual Anthropology*. Prof. Hockings’ has been researching the Nilgiris, particularly the Badagas, since 1962, resulting in a number of authoritative publications including the *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*. Prof. Hockings’ contribution has paved the way for Nilgiri studies being classified today as Nilgiriology. Prof. Hockings was 80 on February 23rd and was felicitated in Ooty by The Nilgiri Documentation Centre. DHARMALINGAM VENUGOPAL of the Nilgiris Documentation Centre has sent us the following text of an e-mail interview he had with Prof. Hockings.

• Why is Nilgiris so fascinating for foreign scholars?

There are several reasons. One is the extreme diversity in such a small area: biological diversity, yes, but also cultural and linguistic diversity. A district of just under 1000 square miles has roughly 17 indigenous groups, plus immigrants from all over South India and a smattering of Europeans too; and speaking a dozen Nilgiri languages plus English, Hindi and the major Dravidian languages.

A second attraction is the scenic beauty of the district, which appeals even to the hard scientist, and always provides a pleasant, healthy environment to be working in.

But perhaps the most attractive feature for scholars, Indian or foreign, is the amount of research work that has already been done here. Nilgiri research in the natural and social sciences stretches back two centuries.

The bibliography of well over 8000 books and articles on Nilgiri topics is unmatched in any other area of South Asia that is of comparable size. This means that no matter what you plan to study there is already a large literature on the subject. That can mean more reading for the serious student, but at the same time it means that he or she does not have to start from scratch in understanding the topic of research. And the range of disciplines for which there is so much literature is itself large: agriculture, anthropology, astronomy, botany, climatology, costume, epidemiology, forestry, geography, geology, history, linguistics, literature, music, plantations, public health, religions, and zoology.

• How significant is Nilgiriology today?

Because of this huge litera-

ture, scholars from numerous countries have often chosen to locate their research in the Nilgiris. One remarkable statistic from this district is the fact that its literature includes over 120 Master’s and Doctoral research theses: again, something that is unmatched in quantity in any other small region of South Asia.

• Is the interest in Nilgiris sustained today by the younger generations?

Younger generations of scholars are still interested in working on the Nilgiri, and do so. There is no obvious falling-off in interest in the community. Younger Badagas are sometimes interested in their community’s history, but sometimes not. Those who have migrated to distant parts are often curious readers of the literature on Badagas, as they haven’t received much common lore from their relatives and want to know more about their culture.

• Is the focus of Nilgiri studies changing?

In the natural sciences, all the latest concerns may be read in today’s research literature, especially in the realm of environmentalism. Since the Badaga community have proved themselves to be forward-looking, and have successfully moved into the Indian middle class through their long-standing emphasis on education and a common desire to adopt urban professions, anthropological studies nowadays tend to view this community as a model for self-motivated development. I certainly hold that view.

• Why have you studied the Badagas for half a century?

The main reason for studying the Badagas, from 1962 onwards, was that the neighbouring Toda and Kota communities were known worldwide through the anthropological work of Rivers,

Emeneau and Mandelbaum, whereas the largest and economically dominant local community, the Badagas, remained in the shadows. Given that there had always been a complex ritual and economic interchange between these three groups, it seemed imperative that the Badagas’ role in it should be documented in detail. The fact that in the late 20th Century Anthony Walker was doing a comprehensive re-study of the Todas made it all the more useful to examine the Badaga case in detail for the first time.

• How do you see the transformation of Badagas over the period?

I have spelled out this transformation fully in my recent book, *So Long a Saga: Four Centuries of Badaga Social History* (Manohar, 2013). The major changes started early in the 20th Century when a few Badagas began going to college, a few others started small tea plantations, and potato farming took off as a profitable commercial enterprise. With Badagas taking up positions in law, administration and teaching, their enhanced position in modern society was assured. The control of population growth through the adoption of family planning practices since the 1970s was another equally important factor in their modernisation.

• How long an existence qualifies a people/group to be called natives?

This has never been determined by social scientists, and perhaps cannot because it depends very much on how the group behaves and what attitudes others develop towards them. In this regard I like to draw a contrast between the English and the Parsis. The English have been in England for about 1500 years and everyone, especially they themselves, consider them



The Sullivan Memorial, Kotagiri, which housed the Nilgiris Documentation Centre.

A threat to heritage

(By A Special Correspondent)

Yet another connection with Tamil Nadu’s heritage appears to, literally, be heading for the dustheap. The Nilgiris History Museum and Documentation Centre (NDC) seems to be facing closure.

Thirty years ago, Dharmalingam Venugopal, a Badaga, heard of John Sullivan. He got interested in the man because he was the founder of a beautiful ‘piece of green’ called Ootacamund or Ooty. Venugopal campaigned for nearly two decades to have a memorial for Sullivan established in the Nilgiris. Finally, it happened in Kotagiri in the Nilgiris where Sullivan had set up camp when he first came to the Blue Mountains in 1819. The ruins of that ancient camp house were rebuilt in 2002, thanks to a sustained campaign and to the Collector at the time, Supriya Sahu. But it remained an empty memorial till 2006 when Venugopal took over its running and converted it into a museum and documentation centre, that became a well-known destination in the Nilgiris.

Now, suddenly, the Museum has to wind up and Venugopal has had to shift the valuable collection into a cramped shed nearby, where he will keep it open as a private museum.

There is no clear reason why the District Administration wanted to evict the NDC from the Sullivan Memorial. The usual reasons of ‘mismanagement of funds’, and ‘lack of maintenance’ of the museum have been given. Venugopal denies all allegations. But whatever the truth, what is necessary is to save the heritage building and ensure its proper development as a heritage centre. Will the Administration or any NGO, to whom it may be handed over, maintain the building in a manner worthy of its significance?

P. Murari, a former IAS officer, once wrote after a visit, “Having served in Tamil Nadu State for over 37 years, it has been my ambition as a senior civil servant to visit the Sullivan Memorial. Sullivan was the discoverer of the Nilgiris. He was also a role model in that he devoted a lot of his energy not only in building up the infrastructure amenities in the district but also ameliorating the lives of the inhabitants including the tribals. My congratulations to Supriya Sahu for having done a great job in creating this evocative and lasting memorial. A truly enjoyable pilgrimage for me and my wife. I understand a project has been submitted for further development of the memorial. I hope that it is sanctioned soon and the Nilgiris Documentation Centre develops into a ‘must see’ place for all visitors to the Nilgiris to get a flavour of the rich cultural history of the district.”

Now that the Documentation Centre has been ousted, its successors have a major responsibility on their hands, a responsibility that can be fulfilled only if there is a commitment to heritage.

as natives there. The Parsis have been in Western India for nearly as long as perhaps 1200-1300 years, yet very many would hold they are not Indian natives and they themselves make no attempt to hide their cultural origins in Persia. The English, in contrast, are unaware of their origin in Schleswig-Holstein. So it is more a matter of attitude than of the actual number of years involved.

• How do you define the Badaga society today?

The Badagas do still have a distinctive culture which sets them apart from those of their

close neighbours, the Todas, Kotas and immigrant groups from the plains. For an anthropologist two features define Badaga society today: use of the Badaga language, and intermarriage only with other Badagas. Thus there can be little argument about whether some particular individual is a Badaga or not.

• Are Badagas natives/tribes/indigenous community?

The term “tribe” was a useful one, universally used by British administrators in India to

(Continued on page 7)

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

ñ THE EDITOR

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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.

ñ THE EDITOR

Quizzin'
with
Ram'n'an

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

1. Why did Leslee Udwin make front page news in the first week of March?

2. What is the significance of the fossil 'Ledi jaw' discovered in Ethiopia recently?

3. Which tech giant has replaced AT&T in the Dow Jones Industrial Average index of stocks?

4. *Dawn* became the first spacecraft to enter a dwarf planet's orbit to begin a 16-month exploration. Name the heavenly body.

5. Who is the latest holder of the Santosh Trophy, the symbol of supremacy in Indian football?

6. In which coveted area in London was a historic bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi unveiled on March 14th?

7. Name Maldives' first democratically-elected President who was sentenced to a 13-year imprisonment by his country's criminal cases court under the anti-terrorism laws.

8. Name the renowned fantasy author and creator of the *Discworld* series who passed away recently.

9. Which Asian legend became the first batsman to score four consecutive ODI centuries?

10. Who has topped the *Forbes'* Global Billionaires 2015 annual list for the 16th time with a net worth of \$79.2 billion?

* * *

11. Where in Tamil Nadu is the Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary?

12. How many zones does the Greater Chennai Police Commissionerate have?

13. After whom has the community college in Puzhal Central Prison, established to offer vocational training courses, been named?

14. By what name was Major Freeman Freeman-Thomas, a former Governor of Madras, better known?

15. Who played the Mahatma in Kamal Haasan's *Hey Ram*?

16. If Azim Jah was the first in 1867, then who is the eighth and present one?

17. Which famous studio was started by Thiruchengodu Ramalingam Sundaram?

18. Which is the birthplace of the iconic religious figure who propounded *Vishishtadvaita*, a sub school of Vedanta?

19. If one of the terminal points of the 472-km-long NH45 is Chennai, then what is the other?
20. Sarsaparilla juice is a common drink served by juice shops throughout the State. What is its Tamil name?

(Answers on page 8)

● A book club in the city is finding its popularity – for whatever reason – being sorely tested at many a meeting by members and non-members. The behaviour of many – particularly those turning up half an hour before the announced time – has inconvenienced several gentler members, forcing one member to write this commentary on how people behave on certain occasions in the city.

I swear I'll take a bullet for my Chennai writer friends – provided it's a blank and I'm wearing the leather jacket that belonged to my maternal aunt – but when I attend their book dos, I have to confess there is a bit of an ulterior motive. While 51 per cent of me goes to cheer them and threaten people with my finger gun into buying several copies of their book, the remaining 49 drooly-tongued, rumble-stomached bit goes for the epic vegetable *bondas* and snow-white coconut chutney (followed by sweet and filter coffee, obviously), that have come to define these soirées.

The preface

I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me begin at the beginning. It has come to be that no book worth its spot lamination by a Chennai writer is considered truly *launched* unless it is launched by the Chennai Literary Forum (CLF). Period. In fact, my own debut book had to be given their helping hand before it became something of a cult classic among my mother-in-law's friends. And no Chennai Literary Forum do is complete without the vegetable *bondas* they serve before the proceedings.

CLF came into being about a quarter century ago. Its original intention was providing the sorely required platform for book lovers, both readers and writers, to meet and ponder over all things literary in our city. And it did. Until a well-meaning five-star hotel came into the picture to support their cause by providing a venue and refreshments at social-friendly rates. Then, right before the horrified eyes of the good folk who began this organisation, CLF grew from a modest half-a-dozen-attendee garage operation, where obscure poets and sporadic writers read tentatively from their oeuvre to a two-fifty-strong gladiatorial affair of octogenarians fighting unto death for the last *bonda* in the confines of an air-conditioned hall as the hapless writer looked on from the dais.

Here are the proceedings of

the last CLF book event I attended.

The build-up

While the script-style font on the invite requested our elegant presence at 6.30 pm, I could read the invisible subtitles quite clearly. If CLF proceedings of late were anything to go by, I knew my presence by 5.30 pm at the very latest – with abdomen guard and Krav Maga defence moves firmly in place – was mandatory. If I hoped to get my hands on even a couple of those deep-fried balls of Tam-Brahm heaven, that is.

● Krishna Shastri Devulapalli

welcomes your comments at letters@scroll.in

As I rushed up the staircase that led to the hall at precisely 5.29, sound effects not dissimilar to the ones in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics of my childhood, signalling the tearing down of fort gates, emanated from upstairs.

At the landing, my worst fears were confirmed. A dementia of senior citizens was pounding steadily on the colonial-style doors of the hall. A spry eighty-year-old, trying to pushing through his contemporaries, paused to clear my doubts.

"I hear it's two varieties of *bonda* today," he yelled to make himself heard over the rhythmic thump-creak-thump-creak of a door fighting for its life. Then, he was gone. Sixteen grandmothers in resplendent Kanjeevarams and flying jasmine followed in his wake through the unhinged doors with surprising agility.

The conflict

The distended lobby area of a moment ago was now emptier than a publisher's promise. If you didn't count the writer of the day, that is. He was still there, getting up and dolefully dusting the footmarks off his new Fabindia *kurta*. Having been there before, I gave him a sympathetic shrug.

He pointed to the large pile of press-fresh copies of his new book. There was a familiar look

Two pages of comment

The rush for bondas

on his face. I wondered where I'd seen it before. Then it came to me: on Kamal Haasan's face in the death-of-his-son scene in *Nayagan*.

"So ... congrats," I said.

"And you are...?" he said.

I told him. Mentioning my name and profession but leaving out the medication I was on because of it.

"And I am?"

"You're ... well... um," I said, trying to look at the invite as discreetly as possible. "So-and-so. Author of such-and-such book."

"Oh, yes ... I remember

who had taken out his dentures and was using them like a stapler.

"*Bonda. Bonda!*" – the only thought in my head.

I was at the counter now, plate in hand. All that separated me from the rapidly disappearing snack was a couple who would've known Rajaraja Chola personally if you combined their ages. I saw a gap between their wrinkly profiles and shoved in my hand triumphantly. *Bondas*, at last!

But the waiter gave me a look and shook his head. Because that's all I had – a hand. No plate. An elf-sized Mama emerged from under my splayed legs with the contraband, gave me the Mylapore version of a Bronx Cheer, covered me in coconut-flavoured spittle and harpooned the last four *bondas* that had my name on them.

The resolution

That night, as I tossed about on my bed, my *bonda*-less belly burbling in protest, the words of the emcee rang in my ears.

"Ladies and gentlemen, from the next meeting onwards, on account of the *bonda* situation getting somewhat out of hand, we have decided to number them using permitted food colouring. Also, hereinafter, kindly bring your ID cards for all sessions. The hotel has informed us that there will be a slight change in *bonda* distribution. Henceforth, members will have to display their cards. Only then will they be handed a plastic packet containing two *bondas* and a sachet of chutney. There will be no seconds. One stainless steel drumload of coffee is all that will be available to wash down the *bondas*. No more. We request our members not to use fake IDs. Or steal cups and spoons belonging to the hotel out of spite. Or bite unsuspecting staff members ... even with fake teeth. The management has informed us that they are not beyond introducing frisking, bouncers, retinal scans..."

The afterword

My last thought before I succumbed to spasmodic slumber was of the writer. Standing all by himself next to his largely untouched pile of books, swatting away the acrid odour of an in-your-face *bonda* burp from a gassy geriatric. "So, good show, man," I'd said. "You think?" he'd said. "Now all you have to do is wait for the reviews," I'd said. "Good one, man. Good one."

EDITOR'S NOTE: We hear that if identity cards don't work at the CLF, it might be down to tea and Marie biscuits!

WATER

– A crisis that has to be met

March 22nd, World Water Day, has been celebrated every year since 1993 to increase awareness of the importance and need for conservation of water. The focus this year was on “Water and Sustainable Development”.

During the last two decades and more, some of the issues dealt with were: “Water for cities, Water for health, Water for food security, Water and women, Water and sanitation, Water and energy, Groundwater the invisible resource, and Water is everybody’s business”.

Water is critical for the survival of any form of life. In 2010, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution affirming the human right to both safe drinking water and sanitation. In the last decade, though efforts have been made to increase the availability of water, about 750 million people globally do not have access to an improved source of drinking water. Available sources of fresh water which could be exploited are getting depleted and degraded. Experts apprehend that mankind may face a global crisis in the 21st Century. Therefore there is a need to conserve this precious life-giving resource.

It is relevant to examine the water situation in Chennai. It is estimated that the demand in 2026 is likely to be 2,248 MLD (million litres per day) and the availability, taking into account the proposed projects, will be 1,535 MLD, resulting in a shortfall of 713 MLD. Potential intra-state and interstate resources have already been tapped. Augmenting existing reservoir capacity, creation of new storage capacity, desilting of six tanks and deepening of one tank are the proposed projects. A third desalination plant and an additional plant at Nemmeli have also been proposed.

It will no longer be wise to depend on new projects. The best option for all users, agriculture, industry, domestic and institutions, is to conserve, recycle and reuse and implement rainwater harvesting widely, effectively and continuously. These efforts could be strengthened if corporate houses, in addition to in-house conservation measures, also support this as a part of their CSR (corporate social responsibility) programmes.

It is needless to say that citizens have a vital role to play in the implementation of water conservation measures.

The UN Secretary-General’s message is, “To address the many challengers related to water, we must work in a spirit of urgent co-operation, open to new ideas and innovation, and prepared to share the solutions that we all need for the future.” – (Courtesy: *Adyar Times*.)

– S.P. Ambrose

Dates for Your Diary

Till April 9: *Micro Trends*, an exhibition of paintings and sculptures by The Progressive Painters’ Association.

The Progressive Painters’ Association (PPA) is one of the oldest art organisations in India, started by the late K.C.S. Paniker in 1944. Members of the PPA include many eminent artists as well as some promising new talent, most of whom reside in Cholamandal Artists’ village (at Cholamandal Artists’ Village)

Till April 20: Exhibition of collages by M.G. Raffic Ahamed and S.V. Prabhuram. Raffic’s collages are well known for their elaborate and complicated compositions which create surrealist imagery. Prabhuram’s collages reflect heritage themes (at DakshinaChitra).

Till May 23: *Modernist Paradigms, Nativist Leanings*, an exhibition of paintings by M. Senathipathi, one of the founder members of the Cholamandal Artists’ Village, and a veteran whose art practice spans more than 5

decades. His works have the quality of timelessness with the artist having passed into history as one of pioneers who configured the Madras art movement (at Forum Art Gallery).

(Continued from page 5)

describe and census categories of the population that were not embedded in the caste system as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas or Sudras. Tribes tended to have their own territory, often their own language, their own system of leadership, sometimes a distinctive economic base, and certainly a tribal name. All of this helped distinguish a tribe

Does denomination or ethnicity matter?

• This article is not about Madras. But what it has to say is as valid for India, even Madras, as it is for Sri Lanka. The sad times we live in could do with more voices like this one.

– The Editor

I’m not a religious person. I don’t go to church very often. But I was in church one recent Sunday because my beautiful and talented Hindu friend invited me to listen to her choir at an event titled HymnFest – a festival of hymns for brass, organ, choir and congregation. So there I was at the quaint old St. Andrew’s Scots Kirk, Kollupitiya, listening to the powerful voices of a very ethnically mixed choir, including my Hindu friend.

When everyone is dressed in nondescript black, singing in one voice, you don’t see the individuals, you see one unified body with a single thread that binds them together – a love of music and singing. A glance at the names in the programme revealed a Malay (making his debut on Timpani), Burghers, Tamils, Sinhalese, a Colombo Chetty and a few foreigners. Yet little did it matter what their denomination or ethnicity was. No one questioned the appropriateness or their right to be in a church singing hymns to an audience that was equally diverse. There were even some seemingly foreign Muslim ladies in the gathering!

My friend may be a devout Hindu, but she has been singing in choirs all her life, thanks to her open minded parents. She is the youngest of six siblings who were all encouraged to go beyond their cultural and societal boundaries in their quest for hobbies, interests and pastimes.

While I listened to hymn after hymn and observed the ‘congregation’, I marvelled at

how unique and special this country is, for it affords us such a mixed tapestry of citizenship.

Having lived for long periods away from Sri Lanka, the one thing that lures me back time and again is the rich and varied friendships I have here. There are my two Borah friends. One I met through a common social circle and though years may pass with no contact, the bond of friendship is renewed in an instant from the first welcoming hug. The other whom I met during a diploma course in the 1990s, is a sane voice in a mad world and keeps me grounded. My long time ‘Sinhala Buddhist’ friend who calls me her sister and who felt abandoned when I left the country ten years ago, is delighted I am back and has been a source of tremendous



by
Ajita Kadirgamar,
daughter of
Lakshman
Kadirgamar,
former Foreign Minister of
Sri Lanka, who was
assassinated by the LTTE.

support as I readjust to life here. My European friend and former neighbour was born a Catholic but converted to Islam when she married a Sri Lankan and moved here over 30 years ago. We were the kind of neighbours who were in and out of each other’s homes, borrowing eggs, sugar, needle and thread, whatever the need of the day. Her home was our second home. As a young child, my son thought he was a Muslim too, especially during the month of Ramadan when he would rush there to ‘break fast’ with them in the evenings. He loved the *samosas* that uncle would bring from the mosque.

Our lane in fact was a picture book microcosm of a harmonious Sri Lanka, for there were Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim families wall to wall, living and socialising in perfect coexistence. The children would play cricket and basketball, the women would stand around chatting in the evenings, we would visit the homes of newborn babies, and condole when there was a death in the family, food would be shared at festivals and special events. Such joyous times!

To top it all, the house next to me functioned as a Montessori. For nearly a decade it was home to children from every community and walk of life.

All of this is in stark contrast to the few friendships I developed in the US. For instance, my first friend there, a Greek Orthodox American on a spiritual quest, once said she should not even be friends with me because I was not a “church-going Christian.” We remained friends even though she moved to another State, but this comment always bothered me. Was religion a deciding factor in friendship? This was an alien concept to me.

Meanwhile the Sri Lankan model of neighbourliness can never be replicated elsewhere. Though I did associate with one neighbour in the US, through a shared interest in gardening (there were no fences separating our properties), and invited them over a few times over the years, never once did they reciprocate.

Friendships aside, when I look at professional and other relationships I realise that here too the diversity is plainly evident even though it is not a conscious choice. My dentist is Muslim, my doctor is Sinhalese and my lawyers are Tamil. Do we not select them for their professionalism and expertise first and foremost? Dr. Lakshman Weerasena, whom I have known for nearly 30 years now, speaks English, Sinhala and Tamil and with equal ease. He will speak to a patient in the language he or she is comfortable in and whether prince or pauper he or she will receive his expert prognosis with equal care and concern. This man is the true essence of a real Sri Lankan whom I hold in the highest esteem.

Never, never have I questioned the multi-ethnic, multi-communal make-up of this country. It is and will always be what makes this island unique. Shame on those who think otherwise.

Words from the ‘Father of Nilgiriology’

from a caste. But quite recently anthropologists have been abandoning the use of the word “tribe” in India for the equally ambiguous phrase “indigenous community” – ambiguous, as I have stated, because it is unclear how “native” any particular group is. This, however, is the term I would now use to identify the Badaga community. Two centuries ago Badagas were already telling inquisitive visitors that their ancestors had

come from a small block of villages just to the northeast of Nanjangud after the Vijayanagar Empire broke up. There were even a few Badagas in Melkunda in 1603 who spoke to a Jesuit visitor, Fr. Fenicio, in Kannada, and gave their name as Badegas, “northerners”. Since that crucial move Badagas have embedded themselves totally in the larger Nilgiri society, becoming like a tribe among tribes.

December 2014. The air was filled with excitement as the cultural season breezed in, but it breezed out quietly without any ripples. No new prodigies surfaced nor were there any 'Oh, you really missed it' kind of performances. The season was a blend of some good, some bad, some mediocre.

For me, the mood for the season set in with an invitation to attend an international conference on Bharat Natyam in Singapore. Realisation dawned on me, while listening to the informative sessions, that not only has Bharat Natyam become a global art form but the issues and problems that dancers have to contend with – be it future directions, funding issues, or dwindling audiences – are the same in either Chennai or Singapore. This brought me back to the dance conferences of Chennai. Dancers whom these conferences target are conspicuously absent and the regular *rasika* is not motivated enough to come because the short sessions, packed one after another, leave no time for either the speakers to present their concepts or for interactive discussions on issues. They cater to the speakers, critics and NRI artistes, and also to those who find it the most opportune time to network and be seen at these venues. Artistes must understand that a lecture demon-



A curate's egg of a dance season

stration is meant to highlight salient features of the subject and not use it as a platform to present mini-performances. The scenario is bleak and organisers need to address the issues.

Dancers today have to contend with the fact that the audience for dance is dwindling. Artistes too find little time or inclination to attend their fellows' performances. This leads to a narcissistic obsession, as the dancer fails to see beyond herself, and is seldom able to evoke *rasanubhava* in the *rasika*, who is therefore not motivated to watch performances. To compound this problem comes the staging of dance performances during the afternoon lunchtime

siesta slot! This may satisfy the organiser's obligation to placate the dancers who seem to be happy with this gesture, as they have been accommodated during the season! With just a handful of friends and relatives in the audience, it does not augur well for the art itself.

However, all is not bleak and there were some memorable programmes. Alarmel Valli's performance to recorded music was a refreshing change from her routine and captivated the interest of the audience. The couple from Bangalore – Sri-dhar and Anuradha – proved that the sheer quality of dance without resorting to gimmicks, which would dilute the art, can still move the finest among the *rasika*-s, who could look at it with a critical eye. The Nrityagram ensemble was flawless as usual with fine coordination and presentation, but the serious *rasikas* (though smaller in number may be) wanted more than the expected precision, sans the predictability. Srikanth and Aswathy's production reiterated the strength and future of the younger generation, striving to maintain the high standards of the classical idiom.

The need to reach out to a large audience base and the demand from organisers for novelty has led to a new development – of using multimedia images for dance. As a visual artist, I welcome the move of interspersing other media into the known art form. Visual artists keep abreast of changing times, some learn new ideas and weave them into their own thoughts to

• by
V.V. Ramani

spell out a new idiom. However, it is pertinent that artistes seeking these mergers must be conversant with new trends and spend sufficient time understanding, digesting and then incorporating them into their new scheme of things. It is important to understand that one art does not encroach into the space of another. In Malavika Sarukkai's solo production *Vamatara*, the intensity and nuances of the artist's *abhinaya*, which was very refined, were distracted by the continuous play of a large screen projecting constantly moving images. While the

dance and multimedia were by themselves captivating visually, it was the coming together of these two streams that created the discord.

On the other hand, Krithika Subramaniam's *Swapnam* was an example of the good use of multimedia, which was the strong point of the production. Interestingly, the *abhinaya* portions carried only coloured lights to form the backdrop, in order to set the mood, and moving images were cleverly juxtaposed to fit in to the scenes accordingly to enhance the imagery. So innovation by itself need not be scoffed at, it only needs to be used judiciously.

Aharya is an important factor in dance and some dancers need to take a relook at their costumes. In the age of cloning, where dancers try to mimic established divas, they must also realise that style is so different from fashion. Just as each artiste finds his or her own artistic expression, it is equally imperative for dancers not to ape the trend but to discover their own aesthetic answers to make it holistic. Otherwise there is a fear of the dancer losing her identity as she disappears behind the many masks that she has created for herself over the years.

And so the season goes on uninterrupted; we are left with some good memories that make it worth the while. We could complain endlessly about the state of stage backdrops, costumes, green rooms, lack of performance slots for the really talented... yet year after year, every *rasika*, every critic and every artiste waits eagerly for the promise that the next Margazhi season will bring. (The author V.V. Ramani is an artiste, designer and writer) – (Courtesy: *Sruiti*)

Answers to Quiz

1. She is the director of the controversial documentary *India's Daughter*; 2. Anthropologists are claiming it to be the oldest and from one of the very first humans; 3. Apple; 4. Ceres; 5. Services; 6. Parliament Square; 7. Mohamed Nasheed; 8. Terry Pratchett; 9. Kumar Sangakkara, 10. Bill Gates.

* * *

11. Srivilliputhur; 12. Four; 13. Mahatma Gandhi; 14. Lord Willingdon; 15. Naseeruddin Shah; 16. Muhammad Abdul Ali, the Prince of Arcot; 17. Modern Theatres in Salem; 18. Sriperumbudur is the birthplace of Sri Ramanuja; 19. Theni, 20. Nannaari juice.

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