

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXIV No. 6

July 1-15, 2014

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Let's celebrate Madras 375

(By A Special Correspondent)

Madras Week 2014 will be celebrated between the 17th and 24th of August. And the celebrations this year are likely to be even bigger than ever because August 22nd, Madras Day, marks the 375th birthday of the city. Please join the celebrations.

The Week, which started off as Madras Day 11 years ago to celebrate the founding of the city on August 22, 1639, has become virtually a Madras Month judging by the programmes last year. The celebrations this year are, like last year, likely to be spread throughout August and will carry on till the first week of September. For the small band of volunteers who catalysed this celebration and now help coordinate the programmes, the response from corporates, educational institutions and citizens of the city has given enormous satisfaction.

This year, the hotels of the city will, once again, be enthusiastic participants. Some will be venues for talks while others will host art and photographic exhibitions besides organising food festivals with Madras cuisine as their theme. Restaurant chains are also planning to celebrate Madras 375. And art galleries have taken to the event in a big way.

The Murugappa Group's Madras Quiz for schools State-wide is now an annual event and will be the highlight of a Madras quizzing season that's a feature of the Week. The Chennai Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is also planning several competitive programmes for schools and colleges, such as quizzes, elocution contests and

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How long will these banner-free days last?

(By A Special Correspondent)

It seems too good to be true, isn't it? We allude to the fact that the city's pavements, such as what they are, have been completely free of digital banners and hoardings praising our political worthies for the past two weeks. As we are not too

sure as to how long this will last, we entreat everyone to go out and make the maximum use of the open spaces till the hoardings come back. For, return they certainly will – the current spate of removals having taken place only after the High Court

of Madras came down heavily on the administration.

We as a journal have always maintained that this country does not lack good laws. What it needs is the will and discipline to implement them. This stance of ours is more than vindicated in the latest episode in the digital banner/flexboard story. Despite the law expressly forbidding the erection of such hoardings, those who put them up have done so in open defiance.

The procedure for getting permission is rather simple – you need to approach the Chennai Collectorate, which issues the permits provided the applications are accompanied by no-objection certificates from the Corporation. Such an easy process is too much for our lawmakers who otherwise expect the citizenry to spend half its working life filling in the

Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



Strategically located on Mount Road, the Cosmopolitan Club is one of the landmarks of the city. Founded in 1873, it was meant to be a place where Indians and the English could meet on an equal footing unlike the earlier clubs, such as the Madras Club and the Madras Cricket Club, that were only for the whites. The Club was initially at Moore's Gardens, Nungambakkam, and moved to its present location in 1882.

Set in a compound filled with trees, the club building is two-storeyed and is a traditional brick and lime structure. The portico spreads into a verandah that goes all around the building. The best feature of the place is the lobby that is accessed from the verandah. Lined with the best timber of the times, it ends in fluted Corinthian columns that frame a wooden staircase. The first landing has an alcove that hosts a bust of Sir C.V. Kumaraswami Sastry, Justice of the High Court of Madras. The first floor is noteworthy for its wooden-floored hall, a card room and a grand library.

W.S. Krishnaswami Nayudu, Justice of the High Court of Madras in the 1950s, has in his memoirs given us some details of the early days of the Club. Formed on July 27, 1873, the first meeting was presided over by H.S. Cunningham, Advocate-General of the High Court of Madras. He became the first Vice-President, when its President was Justice Holloway. The first Secretary was Captain Tyrell. The Club began with 40 members.

The present property is said to have been the site of Simpson's, coach-builders, or of Thomas Waller's stables. It was bought by the Club through the good offices of Haji Muhammad Abdul Sahib for Rs.17,000. The purchase was funded through the issue of debentures to members.

Though it was meant to be a mixed club, the European element left by 1890. It had always been the convention of the Club to have a retired Judge or Government official as its President. This was first broken in 1882 itself when Mir Humayun Jah Bahadur, a grandson of Tippu Sultan, became President. In later years, other notables, such as Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar and Sir Pitty Theagaroya Chetty, have also been Presidents. The convention of Judges or Officers becoming Presidents has been given up in recent times.

The Club played an important role in the formation of the Justice Party, its founder, Dr. T.M. Nair being noticed by the social elite of the city only after he became a member. It is, therefore, in a way the birthplace of the Dravidian politics of today. During the early years, it was also home to the Egmore lobby of lawyers of the High Court, as opposed to the Mylapore lobby. The Club's platinum jubilee in 1954 was a grand affair, with Justice A.S.P. Ayyar presiding and W.S. Krishnaswami Nayudu preparing the souvenir on behalf of a committee.

It is one of the most popular clubs of the city, known for its South Indian cuisine and its facilities.

Madras Eye



"Not to worry, this is only seasonal; it is a mild case of 'football' fever!"

(Continued on page 6)

Save the City's beaches from project planners

Beach beautification? I really don't understand what these words mean for those who talk of "mega projects". As far as I am concerned, the beach should be left as beach with just sand.

Before commenting about the Rs.50 crore project proposed for facilities for our beaches, a word about what exactly beaches are.

Sandy beaches are a gift of nature which act as a buffer zone between the land and the sea. They help to prevent salt intrusion into the groundwater table. They act as a shock absorber, by reducing the intensity of the waves. Beaches serve as sinks for rainwater, preventing flooding and improving the groundwater table.

Sand dunes are a natural component of sandy beaches and they have been lost from North Chennai to South Chennai (Kottivakkam) due to encroachments by concrete jungles (housing units, other facilities). We still have a few scattered sand dunes between Palavakkam and Mamallapuram.

These sand dunes are the first line of defence against natural disasters such as storms, cyclones and tsunamis. Nearly 12 ft high sand dunes can be seen within the Chennai limits between Injambakkam and Muttukadu. These sand dunes safeguarded the hamlets behind them from the 2004 tsunami. The hamlets which had flattened sand dunes to extend their habitat (encroachment) were washed away by the same tsunami.

The formation of such dunes takes years together and their erosion is prevented by the beach creepers. A coast with sand dunes is very productive and is a biodiversity-rich spot.

Apart from them, sandy beaches are habitat for many burrowing crustaceans and molluscs (coastal organisms) and the beaches of Chennai are a nesting ground for endangered green turtles. These turtles play a role in keeping the marine ecosystem in equilibrium.

If we understand this fragile coastal ecosystem we would not disturb our beaches. Instead, we would be admiring nature's beauty. Already, in the name of development, we are facing beach erosion at both the ends of our city (Kovalam in the south and Ennore in the north). We should not further damage this fragile ecosystem in the name of development.

• by T.D. Babu

The facilities proposed as part of the projects are

1. Yoga & meditation centre

Already the open beach serves as a place suitable for yoga and meditation, to the background of the sounds of waves and the pleasant sea breeze.

Yoga and meditation practice is ideal only during early morning or after dusk. No one will pursue these exercises during mid-day and the rainy season. So no special structure is needed, as is otherwise necessary inside the city where such ambience is not available.

2. Volleyball court

If volleyball has to be played, it should be played only during day time on the sands. You cannot have a cemented floor on the sands. If such facilities are needed, then the more suitable location is the playground and not the 'beach'. Cement flooring will be hazardous to the beach's ecosystem.

3. Park

Allowing the natural coastal vegetation itself will serve as a park. But the "Park" mentioned here will not be that. It will have all such components as cement floor, lights, benches and play equipment. These will certainly change the original geographical nature of the location, exposing it to nature's and man-made disasters.

4. Cricket pitch

Why should you have a cricket pitch on the sands of the beach? Everyone knows how a pitch is made. Again, this will be a threat to the habitat of the coastal organisms.

5. Open air art gallery, sculpture studio and open air theatre

These components are a big threat to the present beaches which are facing the threats of urbanisation. We cannot afford to lose the beach for sake of these facilities which could be accommodated elsewhere inside the city.

(Continued on page 7)

Random rants against Madras Musings

"Do you read a fortnightly called *Madras Musings*?" asked the elderly gentleman standing next to *The Man from Madras Musings*. MMM did not choose to answer immediately, for, you see, experience has made him wary about acknowledging this fact. The good old mag, brought out for the past twenty-five years by the Chief is generally well loved but there are certain institutions, bodies and individuals who turn a bilious hue when the publication is mentioned in their presence.

A majority of them are Government servants while they are in office. To them, *Madras Musings* is anti-establishment, activist and quixotic – fighting for impossible things such as pedestrian rights, parks and open spaces, heritage preservation and adherence of buildings to approved plans. They shun the magazine as long as they are in service, gadding about in chauffeured cars with the 'G' number plate and revolving red beacons.

The moment they retire from service, they suddenly discover that the publication is not so bad after all. They then write long letters and even longer articles, most of them about pedestrian rights, parks and open spaces, heritage preservation and adherence of buildings to approved plans and send them in for publication in MM. A common theme in all of them is how they did their best to protect all of the above while they were in service, but how they could do nothing against vested interests. Some of them who know MMM have even gone to the extent of claiming that they recommended the Chief's name for this lotus or that but then "you know how it is". The Chief, MMM suspects, couldn't care less.

But this now-hot, now-cold variety of MM reader is not the one that MMM is wary of. Retirement being the inevitable end to bureaucratic careers, MMM is well aware that this kind will some day come to see the magazine's point of view. The people he has learnt to avoid are those who feel that the magazine ought to carry articles only on those topics that they are interested in.

"These days your paper carries stories only about the 1950s and 1960s," grumbled an elderly gent. "There was a time when you would have articles about the 1750s. What a period that was! Who is interested in stories about hotels that stood till recently?" MMM forebore from asking if the 1750s was when his interlocutor had been young and a man about town. Clearly this subscriber was of the kind that believes that even nostalgia is not what it used to be.

But those that MMM avoids the most are the variety that calls to ask if MMM knows who MMM is. That

may sound philosophical and MMM will make it plainer. "You are associated with *Madras Musings*, are you not?" asked a subscriber once. MMM replied in the affirmative. "Do you know the person who writes under the name of *The Man from Madras Musings*?" was the next question. Those were days when MMM was still young and innocent. And so he replied in the affirmative as well. "You can tell him that he is the most useless writer I have come across. Why does your Editor allow him to waste so much of space that could be put to better use, I wonder," was the response.

The reason why MMM brings all this up is that last fortnight's article on menswear during summer appears to have churned up emotions quite a bit. Many have sent in responses claiming MMM is elit-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

ist and has no right to scoff at drivers and AC mechanics who wear polyester and stink to the high heavens. What is it about articles on apparel that stirs the reading public so much, MMM wonders. It was a year or so ago that MMM wrote on Indian women appearing in public in nightwear and got roundly ticked off by a *Lovely Lady from Lancashire* now settled in Madras.

A dog's business

The Man from Madras Musings who used to run, run and run to places, has over the years slowed down to walk, walk and walk. But in the last month or so, he has been pretty much grounded – a knee is not what it used to be. And so he has had plenty of time to look out of his verandah and see life go by. And sometimes he wishes he did not see what he saw.

Most significant among the sights of this kind is a shuffling gent with a massive paunch and a high-society dog – the kind that has a passport of its own, traces its pedigree to an ancient clan somewhere in the Swiss Alps, and goes to a spa for its nails and hair, not to forget the weekly massage and shampoo as well. The gent, incidentally, is known to hold forth on how organised things are abroad, how clean the roads

are, and how broad the pavements are. He is, in short, of the view that things could be a lot better in 'namma' Chennai.

What would you imagine such a man to be? A pillar of society? The kind that writes letters to newspapers beginning with the lines "Dear Sir, Are you aware?" or "Apropos the article on" etc? In short, a man with a social conscience. And you would not be far wrong. Yet, it is this same person who, while walking his dog, allows the animal to defecate in some of the most strategic spots – a broad bit of surviving pavement where newspaper vendors gather each morning, a tree under which pedestrians rest a while for some respite from the relentless sun, and a sharp corner while turning which people cannot notice the mess on the ground and are likely to step or, even worse, skid on it. And having allowed his dog to do its bit for natural manure, he and the pet move on, the latter sniffing at car tyres, and the former arching his nose and sniffing in disgust at the stench from a nearby garbage dump. In his view the garbage cleaners are not doing their job properly. Let MMM assure you that this pet owner is not alone in this kind of behaviour.

What amazes MMM is that this is the kind of person who travels abroad frequently. If not for anything else, he must have been there to procure his pet. While there, he must have observed that pet-owners carry a cleaning kit when they take the animal for a walk. This comprises a brush, a trowel and a plastic bag. After the dog completes its business, they shovel everything into the bag which is then dropped into the nearest garbage bin. Why can't the so-called educated elite adopt the same practice here? Is public cleanliness and civic sense only for the lower classes and the conservancy worker?

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings took this picture at the Chennai airport. The trolley, placed strategically below the railing, is the latter's sole support. If someone made the mistake of pulling it out, down will come the railing, rather like the tiles in the false ceiling of the terminal which are more down than up.

– MMM



OUR READERS WRITE



The film's name

Bhilai Gopalan in the letter 'Raja & Rahman', (MM, June 16th), has got the name of the film wrong. The song 'Porale Ponnutayee' was picturised by Bharatiraja in *Karuthamma*. Of course, the music was by ARR. The movie was about female infanticide and won many awards.

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Branched tree

I was a resident of Mylapore from 1943 to 1960 (on Luz Church Road) and thereafter of Mambalam (not T' Nagar!). I too have nostalgic memories of Madras that was. There was a huge betel nut farm (*vetthalai thottam*) right across the road from my grandfather's bungalow, which extended upto East Abhiramapuram (Bhaskarapuram). I used to cut across this farm as a short cut to P.S. High School!

All that is another story. Why I write is the reference to 12 or 16 branched coconut trees in Vasu Street (MM, May 16th). I am much involved in water management and have also written a book on it. Varahamihira, the famous author of *Brihath Samhita*, has given a number of natural indicators for detecting water at shallow depths and one of the indicators is a coconut tree which is

branched, forming a y! I have been looking for one for years. I was told that there was one such in the old Vauhini Studios in Kodambakkam. It is amazing to read reader V. Kalidas's statement that there were so many of them at one site. I once went by car from Mangalore to Goa and saw coconut trees all along the route but could not see even one branched tree!

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Music bondage

I was one of the lucky few to listen to young John Higgins (MM, June 16th), rendering *Siva Siva ena Radha* in *Panthuvavali* at Thiruvaiyaru Thyagaraja aradhanai in 1965. We gave him a standing ovation. Later, an LP album was released by EMI Columbia in the 1970s.

Young Americans' interest in Carnatic music continued in the 1980s. Like David Reck, inspired by Visva, another young American who came to India to learn *veena* and vocal on a fellowship was Richard Kent Wolf. He stayed in Madurai in 1982-83 and in 1984-85 to learn the *veena* under the guidance of Karaikudi Lakshmi Ammal, and vocal music under the guidance of Kamala Ramamurthy. Wolf now heads the Department of South Asian Music at Howard University and visits India once a year to pursue his interest not

Reminiscing on the 'Oceanic'

The community of netizens, over Facebook and Blogs, has responded to the article on the Oceanic Hotel in last fortnight's *Madras Musings*. Here is a compilation from those responses.

RAJA RAMANATHAN recalls that the Oceanic was the first hotel in the city to have a disco. It was called 'Cyclops'. Rangachari Raghavan says he played music along with Rizwan Sharif and others from his batch at Loyola College one evening in 1973 at 'Cyclops'. EJJI K. UMAMAHESH, however, has a different take on 'Cyclops' – it was hardly a disco, he says, more of a walled-in, badly echoing dance floor. He also adds that it was a now-on, now-off affair and that it paled in comparison to the disco in the basement of the Saffire Theatre. According to him, the heyday of the Oceanic was when a part of Queen Elizabeth's retinue stayed at the hotel when she visited the city. DR. VITHAL RAJAN from Hyderabad says he stayed in the hotel over 50 years ago – "they charged over the top rates, but the food and service paled beside the Connemara." SRIDHAR KRISHNA from Bangalore says a number of Tamil Bond films starring Jaishankar were shot there. R.V. RAJAN says that the second oldest Rotary Club of the city, Madras South, used to meet in the Oceanic before moving elsewhere.

A strong memory for everyone is that during Test matches the Indian team would stay at the Oceanic. RAJA RAMANATHAN recalls going with a cricketer friend to meet Pataudi and

Inderjitsinhji. A more memorable visit was that of USHA and it is best said in her own words:

"I cannot forget Hotel Oceanic! In those days, 50 years back, whenever there was a cricket match, the Indian team stayed here. The visiting team would be in the Connemara. I remember this particular match and a group of five of us cut class (the PT class while in the Tenth, Rosary Matric) and went to Oceanic to see the cricketers. Abbas Ali Baig and Kunderan were my favourites and Wadekar too. We were wearing our PT uniforms... white shirts and divided skirts. There they were, the cricketers, standing in the balcony and we waved at them in all glee... and tried to enter the hotel when this grumpy old watchman asked us to scoot off!!

"Did we? No! We went towards the side and tried to scale the walls, when his back was turned. The cricketers – Kunderan, Jaisimha and a few others – were laughing and cheering us till the watchman got wind of what we were doing and came down heavily upon us and asked us to GET OUT, screaming, 'Dhaavani poadara vayasachu,' aambali pinnaala suththa vekkamaa illai? (You are old enough to wear half sarees. Are you not ashamed to run after men?) He spat venom! And we made a glorious retreat! Aw! Indha vayasula aambala pinnaala suththaama, madisaar kattindappurama suththa mudiuma?" (If we don't run after them now, will we be able to do it when we are in nine-yard sarees) was what I thought. Of course, I didn't have the guts to ask him that."

only in Carnatic music but also in Adivasi folk music.

Long live such Indo-American musical bondage!

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Toe-holds & stirrups

The Governor's Bodyguards' Horses (MM, June 1st) were stabled near Munro's statue (now the bus depot).

Riding lessons were offered for a fee by the authorities and *sowars* used to take the riding lessons. Some of us who availed of this facility had to trot past Munro's statue and the *sowars* used to berate us "Don't look at Munro without stirrups, poor man."

It is "toes up, heels down" and "knee grip trot", I muse again here. The old Hindu *chaturanga sena* boasted *thurangas*, or cavalry. They had ropes which had toe-holds for better stability in the saddle when using their sabres, lances, etc. They used the big toe for grip. Hence "toe hold". This later has developed into the stirrup.

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Note on author

The article on U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer (MM, June 1st) was written by my father, the late S.R. Venkataraman, President, Servants of

India Society. This article was republished in the volume on Swaminatha Iyer's 80th birthday celebrations in 1936 by the Madras Law Journal Press. In March 1906, the Tamilians in Mangalore met at Ullal Raghunathai Memorial Hall under the presidentship of S. Ramachandra Iyer, Professor of Mathematics, Aloysius College, to celebrate the event. This meeting passed three resolutions and requested S.R. Venkataraman to convey them to U.Ve.S.

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The correct name

In my letter (MM, June 1st), I had erred in musing that the name of the violin shop in *Jaya Mansions* was 'Everest Musicals'. Actually, it is 'Violin Crafts'. By chance, I sighted its advertisement in the last page of a paper printed and circulated by musician-scholar 'Dhanaraj' (guru of Ilayaraja) when he read a paper at the 1963 conference of the Music Academy.

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MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

THE EDITOR

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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'The Love Song' remembered

● When I was a teenager growing up in Adyar, then the southernmost suburb of Chennai, I had a special 'hidey hole' where I could read uninterrupted.

Our home, Nanda Kutti, was on Elliot's Beach Road. It was a sprawling, two-storied, flat-roofed house with barred windows and brightly coloured wooden shutters in a large garden. It had a courtyard and an assortment of rooms that became bedrooms, dormitories or family rooms according to the needs of young and old or expanding and contracting families.

The house had an external staircase to the first floor – presumably so that the two levels could be separated for rental and independent living. The stairs were on one side, secluded and hardly used. From the landing half-way up, I could step over the balustrade and make myself comfortable atop a window shade – wide, flat, hidden, cosy with a cushion, a drink, an apple or chilli roasted peanuts, perfect for a girl and her book.

Here I read a story written by my mother. It had been published in Triveni, the literary journal in 1939, a year before I was born. I had found a copy of the story in an almira – that repository of forgotten memorabilia – that all homes seemed to have had in those days. I read it many times in my eyrie because it had seemed so 'romantic'. I knew it wasn't her story as in autobiographical. But even 20-odd years after it was written I could sense that it was pushing the envelope of convention; and it thrilled me, made my skin tingle with pride, that this had been written by my mother! Sadly the almira has long since disappeared, the loose leaves of story seemed to have been lost, debris blown away by the winds of time.

Until I was able to read it again in the digitised archived, copies of Triveni on Google. The date makes it an early Indian short story in English. And almost eighty years later the theme seems, sadly, as relevant today as it was then.

THE STORY

I shall tell you why I have no relations visiting me, even though my parents and brothers and sisters are all alive and well-to-do. I am the eldest among the daughters, and so was to be sacrificed on the altar of neighbours' gossip. How? Well, by attempting to marry me to someone when everybody knew I loved another who also loved me. If the man I loved was in any way unworthy, then, of course, I might have bowed down to the dictates of my parents. But he was educated, cultured, and able to support a wife and family. The only objection my parents had to him was that he was not of my own sub-sect. As if that could in any way detract from his worth! Religion no doubt must pervade our daily life; but these differences that exist only in the bigoted pedant's mind – how could they mar our life or make us less religious?

I had graduated and felt an added responsibility and tried not to go against the wishes of my parents. Because then the neighbours with uneducated daughters would have pointed at me, and said, "That is the result of educating girls!" As if education that makes us live more fully, and enables us to enjoy and suffer with equal intensity, should doom us to a face with a perpetual mask in the household of a man we did not love! Some might have preferred the mask, but I did not, and so here I am, cut off from all the family, as a rotten branch is cut off and the trunk tarred to resist further corruption. Only, I did not fall down and dry up, but have sprouted amidst newer and freer surroundings, and can hold my head high amongst the best of people. I have my self-respect, without

which life would have been a burden too heavy to bear, for my life might have ended as so many end it by drowning or by setting fire to oneself. And the papers would have published an account of how so-and-so, in the best of health and spirits, slipped by accident into the well while drawing water, or how, while cooking, the saree caught fire, and, before she could be rescued, she was so badly burnt that she died a few hours later! You read of such things daily, but do you ever question the statements? Who knows how many of them are real accidents and how many are staged to end a life that is bereft of every ray of happiness – a life that is trained to cling to an un-understanding man and so cannot get out of its tangles.

Well, so there it was. I wanted to marry one and my parents wanted me to marry anyone else, but belonging to our sect. All my pleadings were of no avail. I even said that I would, if they did not like the man of my choice, forever remain un-married, earn a living and help in maintaining the family as any bachelor might do. No, they would not listen. "Our eldest daughter to remain unmarried! How can the others be married before you? People will ask us why you are not married, and how can we tell them that you want to marry outside our caste? The shame of it! And what other reason can we give? No, no, the very telling will ruin the chances of the other girls getting married. And who will give their daughters in marriage to our sons hereafter? No, you are the eldest, and you **must** be married, and married so very respectably that no one can point his finger at us or put obstacles in the way of the others getting decently married."

PAGES FROM THE PAST

frightened me. Where could I go? And where could I live? I who had never left the shelter of my parents' roof! I had not even stayed in a boarding house. Listlessly I sat and tried to read novels, but they were too full of romance to cheer me now, and so I turned to the newspapers, and there staring me in the face was an advertisement: "Wanted a lady graduate in English for D. V. School. State age, experience, and pay expected. Write to Secretary, Delhi." On the spur of the moment I took up paper and pen and answered the advertisement, stating my age, my inexperience, and my terms – that I would accept any pay. In the excitement of the moment I dressed to go out, and posted the letter with my own hand. The sound of the falling envelope in the pillar-post brought me with a start to the

to the man I was marrying. I remembered the advertisement that I had answered. If I got that job, could I leave my parents and get away? Why not? I was bound to suffer in the beginning, but so would I, if I married to please my parents. I could not choose between the two. Both were new experiences and I had no one to guide me.

The days that followed were very difficult ones. The love-song of the film had caught the public fancy. Young children were singing it, older girls were revelling in the record, and the matrons were humming it too. To escape the sad haunting melody of it at home, I would take a walk, and there the music would steal round the corners of the wall from somebody's house, and even in the gardens the children stopped their play to listen to one of them singing it.

Meanwhile the day of the marriage was very near. Two days more! Letters of congratulation were already pouring in. Why do people always congratulate you on these occasions? Can they guarantee happiness? But among these was a letter from the school offering me Rs. 50 and free board and lodging. And they said my frankness in admitting my inexperience was what attracted me to them! Now what was I to do? Perhaps nothing. I must go through with the marriage. It was too late to back out. So I tore the letter.

I was expected to leave for my husband's place immediately after the marriage, and so my mother worried me to pack my things and keep them ready. So I started packing. I put all the most necessary things in one small box, and put all the other paraphernalia in bigger boxes. While seated resting, I was turning over the pages of the Railway Guide that had been left there by my father after looking up the train for my departure with my husband. Idly I looked up the train-timings for Delhi – the place where I was offered a post and could not accept. There was a train starting at 6.30 p.m! The bridegroom's party was to arrive at 6 p.m.

It was now 5.30 p.m. A gorgeously decorated car with a band had gone to fetch the bridegroom. I was dressed ordinarily at the moment as there was still a lot of time for the actual marriage ceremony, which was to be preceded by a garden party. All the people were gathered in front of the house waiting to receive the marriage procession as soon as it turned into our street. And as I

(Continued on page 7)

The wisdom of a preface

● When the Association of British Scholars began work a few years ago on its *Madras-Chennai – A 400-year Record of the First City of Modern India*, two of whose three volumes have come out, with the third expected to be released early next year, its avowed intention was to capsule the history of 50-plus activities in the city, like Medicare, Education, Art etc., so that students and researchers could develop detailed findings on each subject. The ABS had hoped that the set of volumes would go into school, college and public libraries apart from those of individuals interested in Madras. That hasn't quite happened, to the disappointment of both the ABS as well as the publishers, Palaniappa Brothers. It may yet happen – and if it does, it will provide the foundation that scholars need to develop a greater fund of knowledge about the city.

These thoughts occurred to me the other day when, as Editor of the Madras series, I happened to read the preface of one of the earliest and most significant collections of information on India. The first edition of the *Cyclopaedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia – Commercial, Industrial and Scientific* – came out in 1857. It was edited by Edward Balfour, surgeon, Madras Army, and printed at the Scottish Press in Madras. Twentyeight years later, its third edition was published in THREE volumes by Bernard Quaritch in London, by which time Balfour was described in detail as an author, founder of the Madras Muhammadan Library, the Government Central Museum, Madras, and of the Mysore Museum, Bangalore. Much additional information had been added by Balfour, who in this edition, was acknowledged as the author. Balfour was one of the most distinguished Britons to serve in India. But there has been no bigger contribution to India that he has made than this *Cyclopaedia* which has been the basis for much knowledge about India – and the neighbouring countries it has influenced – being generated in considerable detail. And that is what Balfour's first Preface had hoped for – as had the ABS's hope about 125 years later.

That preface of Balfour's to the first edition is a classic – and is, so, published below.

– The Editor

* * *

THE PREFACE

Whilst we find books of reference in most departments of Science and Literature in connection with European countries daily becoming cheaper and more abundant, those who investigate or seek for information regarding the resources of British India, or any of the scientific and economic subjects connected with Eastern countries, still meet with much difficulty and hindrance, owing to the necessity of consulting numerous authors whose works are scarce or costly. And as some inquirers are without the pecuniary means of procuring all the requisite books and journals, or find it impossible to procure them at any cost, whilst others want leisure or opportunity for such extensive research, it is evident that progress in these branches of knowledge would be greatly facilitated by collecting and condensing this widely dispersed information, thereby enabling future inquirers to gain some acquaintance with the results of the investigations made by the many diligent and laborious individuals, who have devoted a great portion of their time to collecting information over the vast area of Southern Asia.

My avocations while employed in India, more particularly in the past seven years, have rendered necessary for me a collection of books of reference relating to India and the East, somewhat more numerous and varied in character than private individuals generally possess; whilst my employment as Secretary to the Madras Central Committees for the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Madras Exhibition of 1855, the Universal Exhibition held in Paris in 1855, and the Madras Exhibition of 1857, combined with my duties (since 1851), as the Officer in charge of the Government Central Museum, have brought under my notice a rare variety of Eastern products and subjects of interest; and thinking that, before quitting the countries in which I have dwelt for nearly a quarter of a century, I might with advantage leave to my successors in a portable form, the notes made on the products of the East that have come under my notice, combined with an abstract of the useful information respecting them contained in my books, I have been led to show the results in the present shape.

A work of this aim and character might doubtless fully occupy the life-time of several men of varied attainments; and this *Cyclopaedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia* may therefore be regarded only as a first attempt towards the kind of book the want of which has been long and generally felt. But although fully conscious of its incompleteness in many respects, yet, I trust it may still be received, with all imperfections and omissions, as a

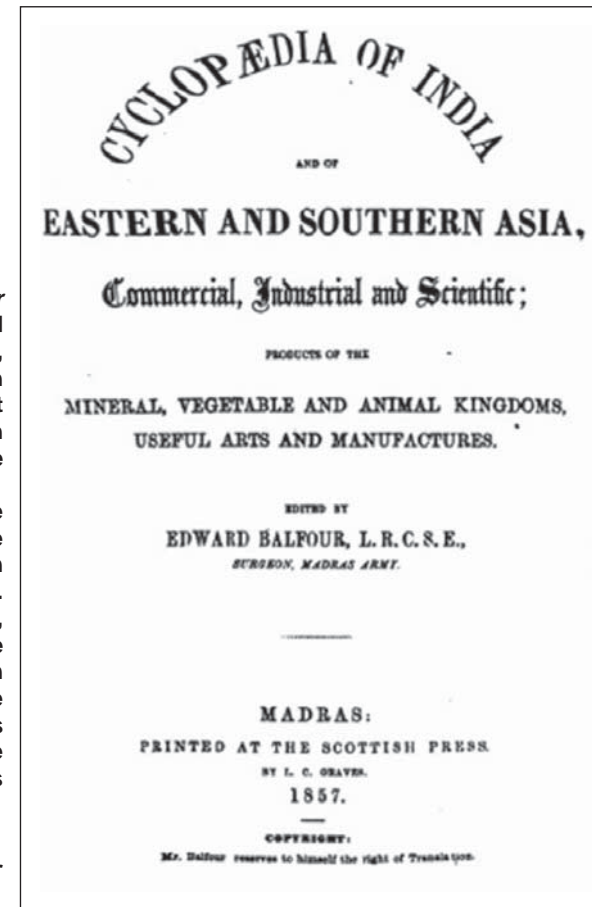
useful and opportune addition to Asiatic Literature at least by those who recognise the justness of the saying of Emmerson, that "the thing done avails, and not what is said about it: and that an original sentence, or a step forward, is worth more than all the censures"¹ which may be made by such as are disposed to find fault, or who would demand in a work of this kind a degree of perfection unattainable on a first trial.

The book is merely a novelty in form, the matter it contains being as old as our first possessions in India: it is simply a compilation of the facts and scientific knowledge, which authors and inquirers have been amassing and communicating since then, to one another and the public. But, "in our time, the higher walks of literature have been so long and so often trodden, that whatever any individual may undertake, it is scarcely possible to keep out of the footsteps of some of his precursors"²; and this *Cyclopaedia* I therefore avow to be but an endeavour to make generally available, in a condensed form, the information acquired by those who have in any way investigated the natural or manufactured products of Southern Asia, or have at any time made its arts or natural history the subjects of inquiry. Some of those whose writings I have made use of have long since gone to their account, but many a labourer yet alive may find the result of his labours embodied here; and I have done this freely, because even those from whose writings I have most largely drawn, will acknowledge that the quaint old lines of Chaucer³ still apply with full force; viz. that,

*"Out of the old fields, as men sayeth,
Cometh all this new corn fro' yeare to yeare
So out of old books, in good faith,
Cometh all this new Science that men lere."*

Indeed, I have rather sought to collect and condense accurate and well ascertained facts, than to present novelties; for originality is but too often unconscious or undetected imitation. Byron, years ago, remarked that all pretensions to it are ridiculous; and a wiser one than Byron has told us, that 'there is nothing new under the sun.' But if there be nothing absolutely new in this work, I hope it may yet be found to contain much which to many was unknown before; and which want of books, leisure, or opportunity, may have debarred them from learning.

The *Cyclopaedia* is not intended to comprise the whole science of Botany, nor that of Medicine, or Zoology; nor to instruct in all the matters useful in Commerce or the Arts; but, whether examined for information or amusement, the botanist, the medical practitioner, the natural-



The title page of the first edition.

ist, and the merchant, may perhaps each find something in it, which, from his engagements, he did not know before, or though once knowing may he have again forgotten. In both cases, the work may prove useful, since old thoughts are often like old clothes; put away for a time, they become apparently new by brushing up. It would have been better, perhaps, had a work of this kind been undertaken years ago, or even now were it made the joint effort of several persons: indeed, to render it in any way complete, would call for the resources at the command of a Government rather than of individuals; but we cannot have everything at the time we wish, nor in the way we wish, and it is better to have someone undertake it and do it the best way he can, **now**, than to postpone it to some further indefinite period.

With a view therefore of laying a foundation as a starting point for future inquirers I now make the commencement of a work, towards which I hope to receive from many quarters aid and support as I proceed: being thereby enabled either to produce future enlarged and improved editions of the work myself – placing it, as I hope, within the reach of all – or seeing that task taken up hereafter by younger men, with more time and opportunity than are now before me. A dinner of fragments is often said to be the best dinner; and in the same way, there are few minds but might furnish some instruction and entertainment, from their scraps, or odds and ends of knowledge. Those who cannot weave a uniform web, may at least produce a piece of patchwork⁴; and any items of information sent to me will be very acceptable.

There is another difficulty which inquirers in this country have had to meet and struggle with; I allude to the many languages and dialects in use in India and Eastern Asia, and consequently the variety of scientific, national, or even local names, by which the same thing is known. The only means of overcoming this difficulty was to frame a copious Index of contents; for Pope has well said that.

*Index Learning turns no student pale,
Yet holds the eel of Science by the tail.*

This Indexing will add to the bulk of the book, but greatly also to its value as a work of reference; and will be carefully completed.

¹ *English Traits.*

² *Salad for the Social.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Guesses at Truth.*

Quizzin'
with
Ram'n'an

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

1. On June 2nd, who became the first Chief Minister of India's newest and 29th State?
2. Who won the Orange and Purple Caps in the latest edition of the IPL that concluded with Kolkata Knight Riders winning for the second time?
3. Apple's new programming language for iOS and OS X development is called...?
4. What is the much-talked-about 'European Reassurance Initiative' announced by US President Barack Obama recently?
5. June 6th marked the 70th anniversary of the largest sea-borne invasion in history and one of the major turning points of World War II. What was it?
6. Who recently became the first man to win nine titles in one Grand Slam tennis championship?
7. Reuven Rivlin is the President-elect of which influential Asian nation?
8. Who dethroned two-time defending champion Miami Heat to win the NBA Finals recently?
9. Name the English actor, the only person to win three Best Actor Oscars, who was recently knighted for his services to the world of drama.
10. Name the new CEO and MD of tech giant Infosys.

* * *

11. On which famous painter's death did Subramania Bharati pay this tribute "The master's light has lit the palaces of kings and the huts of the poor bringing delight to all"?
12. Which famous Chennai-based institution's first office was located in the dispensary of Dr. U. Rama Rau at 323 Thambu Chetty Street?
13. Which eminent son of the soil wrote 'On the mechanical theory of vibrations of musical instruments of the violin family'?
14. Where in Chennai are you dining if the theme was all Mona Lisa with various interpretations of the famed painting on its walls?
15. What natural wonder is located on Schwarz Avenue in Huddleston Gardens, Adyar?
16. Which famous 'lost' hotel in the metropolis was built in 1954 by M.S. Ramaswami Chettiar of Mahalakshmi Films?
17. Name the octogenarian, Madras-born theoretical physicist, a co-discoverer of the Higgs mechanism and Higgs boson, who was knighted recently.
18. What is Venkatesh Ramakrishnan's sequel to Kalki's *Sivakamiyin Sabadam* called?
19. Where in the city can you see an Ashoka Pillar, unveiled in 1948 by the then Mayor Dr. U. Krishna Rau?
20. In which Mylapore temple is Sukra (Venus) said to have regained his eyesight after being blinded by the Vamana avatar of Vishnu?

(Answers on page 7)

ESSAY

The romance of the postcard

Some time ago the entire media sang the dirge of the telegram! As this sentiment weighed heavily with me too, I made a final visit to the

Mylapore Telegraph Office on Kutchery Road and followed it up with a swift round of some of the post offices in Kilpauk, Mount Road, Mandaveli and Mylapore wondering how long the hallowed institution of the post office would be relevant in the context of the recent technological explosion in communication. That the post office plays an important role in society cannot be questioned, however reluctant one may be to sing its praises! Not for nothing did the British create heritage buildings for the GPO in Chennai, Calcutta and Bombay!

Today we notice some desperate attempts at adding a fresh coat of the famous red to post offices, though most still bring back memories of that familiar musty odour, crumbling furniture and blotches of glue that made a mess of the space meant for pasting stamps, writing letters and filling up forms. But INDIA POST, post office savings banking, and Speed-post have added a contemporary twist to the post office.

Regardless of the negative connotations that mark the

atmosphere in the post office, there is still the ubiquitous postcard about which much can be said.

Much before the gates of the World Wide Web of the Internet were progressively thrown open to us, before mobile phones turned our art of

• by V. Kalidas
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communication into SMSs, Twitter reduced our eloquence to 140-byte tweets, Facebook restricted our predilections to Like and Unlike, and What's App introduced a new lexicon into our idiom, the postcard was the star player in establishing contact between relatives, friends, siblings and acquaintances.

Along with the above changes sweeping our lifestyle, the art of letter-writing also seems to be on the wane. In the good old days, it bonded people together – parents, siblings, friends, acquaintances – regardless of where they were

stationed or occupied. Those little homilies and personal touches packed into postcards, in fact, portrayed the sign of the times and how people warmed up to each other.

The elder children in a family would usually play the role of an amanuensis taking down dictation from their parents and reading out the contents of the replies to them. The innocent pleasure that they displayed when lending their ears to the contents of the postcards was something to be seen to be believed...

Parents eagerly waiting at the doorstep to greet the all-important postman was yet another occasion to savour. The capped and uniformed postman would puff up in importance as he surveyed the anxious faces and pulled out a sheaf of letters and postcards from his worn-out, weather-beaten bag. It was as if he was pulling out some long-lost bounty from the Heavens! The bell ringing on his cycle was the harbinger of 'Good News'!

The bespectacled patriarch would clear his throat and after some preliminary discussions on the domestic front and struggle

with his rusted spectacles hanging precariously on the bridge of his nose (thanks to a thread wound round his ears), he would get set to write his letter on a yellowed postcard. Every centimetre of the card, including the space on top of the stamp, would be utilised to exercise his calligraphic art! The long treasured Parker, Sheaffer, Waterman or Doric pen with its quaint nib would invariably run out of ink. Unable to open the barrel of the pen, he would shakily open an old Ink-bottle (remember the brand "Quink"?!) and gently dip his pen into the bottom and begin his letter-writing exercise. He would wake up early in the morning and write letters on postcards to all his near and dear ones and update them on recent family happenings. Whenever he missed the last postal clearance of the day, one of the youngsters would be assigned the task of catching up with the Mobile Post Office Van in Mylapore, Mount Road or Central Station as it made its way to unburden its contents into the last Mail Train leaving Madras.

Another quaint custom of those days involved the tagging of all postcards and sundry bits of paper on a mounted long metal wire and bunching them according to the month and year of writing! The stored postcards served as archives to be dipped into whenever the need arose at a later date.

It is unfortunate that these simple pleasures of communication are lost on us today, thanks to modern means of "touching base" which are stark to the extent of being impersonal.

The pleasures of expectation and eager anticipation no longer exist in the current humdrum of our lives. Gone with the art of letter-writing are many a nuance of communication that brought a smile to our lips, a lump in the throat, a choke in the chest, a tear to the eyes or a dimple to a romantic cheek! Nothing is left to imagination any more!

You wonder whether generation-next will have the time and patience for long-drawn-out methods of communication, but, if truth be told, even we are beginning to find the electronic means of interacting more convenient and user-friendly!

How long banner-free?

(Continued from page 1)

most complicated forms and following the most elaborate procedures. What is happening in reality is that those wanting to put up these flexboards and banners simply go ahead, relying on official apathy and, if needed, political clout to do the rest. As per law, even permitted banners need to be removed after three days. In reality they are taken off only when new ones are put up in their place.

The administration has chosen to watch silently. When questioned, officers have taken protection behind the usual excuse – of not having sufficient manpower to monitor these illegal obstructions and remove them. This despite the fact that arterial roads down which most of officialdom travels are the worst affected in terms of the numbers of such hoardings. Even the spaces outside police headquarters and the Corporation offices have not been

spared. How much effort would it have taken to check these violations?

That this usual excuse was never a valid one became more than evident when the Court cracked the whip. Matters came to a head on June 11th, when it was brought to the notice of the First Bench that, despite its ruling in 2011 prohibiting the erection of digital banners without prior permission, most political parties were merrily continuing to do so. The Court summoned the Advocate General to present the Government's point of view. After hearing the matter out, the Court gave time till the end of day for removal of all banners failing which it said that it would be compelled to issue contempt notices to the Collector of Chennai, the Commissioner of the Corporation, the Police Commissioner, and the Assistant Commissioner.

That appears to have promptly ensured that sufficient

manpower became magically available. Scores of banners were removed and carted away. The city has since remained free of these eyesores though it is fairly clear that they intend to return, given that most of the casuarina scaffoldings meant for them continue to remain where they were. Several of them have begun sporting banners that are ostensibly carrying messages on public welfare – rainwater harvesting being a favoured subject. No matter what information these banners carry, there is no denying that they are political in intent, nuisances and also potential hazards that need to be removed in full.

The manner in which the administration turned a blind eye all along only to swing into action when threatened with punishment does it no credit. Would it be fair to expect that all routine administrative matters will be acted on only if there is fear of an adverse court order?

Vignettes of Chennai

If *Ice Boys in Bell Bottoms* was an adolescent Gopi's life and times in the 1970s' Madras (see MM, August 16, 2012), Krishna Shastri Devulapalli's second book *Jump Cut* is the racy story of a US-based son, Satyajit Ray, flying to Chennai to be with his father, a gentlemanly screenplay writer who is literally heart-broken and lying forlorn in hospital all because of filmmaker Raja Rajan who fancies himself to be a prima donna but in the eyes of Ray is a louse who picked the brains of his dear father, associate director T.K. Raman. *Jump Cut*, a film editing term, is set in a dog-eat-dog Kollywood. But not all the characters are hopeless cases. One of the production companies in the novel, B.K. Reddy Films, is shown as being not only honest but successful as well. In fact, the villain of the piece gets his comeuppance because of the minor characters who help Ray fight the morally just battle.

Right from page 1 of the book, Krishna writes and draws nice vignettes of Chennai. The prologue of the story starts off in a cinema hall where "the hall goes black without warning. No slow fadeout of lights like Satyam or Devi." Chapter 1 moves to the present with Ray on his flight back from San José to Chennai looking out of his neighbour's window and reflecting over the changes wrought in the skyline over the years from the time he saw Chennai on his first flight to it five years before. Whether it is Madras or Chennai, the one constant that is captured aptly is when Krishna writes about the flight landing at the Anna Interna-

tional Airport (many generations would have forgotten that once upon a time the airport was synonymous with the word Meenambakkam) and describes "a fat man, sweat pouring down his face..." The weather, of course.

Indicative of the fact that Chennai is expanding in all directions, there is one character who commutes to the city from Arakkonam. To be sure, there is also mention of a Karpagam Avenue where the old Madras

references to the PSBB Schools, to the mass heroes Ajith, Surya and Vijay, and to the then ruling chief minister M. Karuna-nidhi. The ghee is Aavin, the papers *the Times*, *Express* and *Hindu*, the beach, Kottivak-kam, the sweet shop, Adyar Mitthai Ghar (take-off on Shree Mitthai), the photocopy shop Students Xerox and even the crematorium, the one in Besant Nagar. Straight out of an everyday city street scene is the reference to some of our demonstrative funeral processions.

Offering a nice counterpoint to the now pervasive Hindi taglines in advertisements, Krishna's characters mouth the local lingo, as like when in the wee hours of the morning the auto driver says, "Engay, Saar,

• by
T.K. Srinivasa Chari

still lives with the trees holding fort and a Bauhaus-style apartment complex overlooking a forest in the middle of the city, an allusion to the Theosophical Society grounds?

The description of a variety of cars like a Mercedes, BMW and a Maruti Swift parked in the compound of a beach house is suggestive of not only the present Chennai but of it also being one of the auto hubs of the country.

Again reading the depiction of a scene in a hospital, you are reminded of another face this city has, that of the 'Mecca of healthcare.' The characters are portrayed making a visit to the Life Smile Hospital, "the best in the city which had managed to woo the best medical talent available." Of course, in the book there is no fairy tale ending as far as the hospital scene goes.

There are straightforward

Untime, Saar", and "Enna Saar" when the auto putters along the East Coast Road. When Ray tries to take the help of a lawyer to seek justice for blatant copyright abuse, the lawyer's rejoinder is in Tenglish: "Copyaav-dhu, Rightaa-vadhu..." and in another scenario, "Oh, IT-va Super" so on. Even correct Tamil is thrown in when the watchman of Sai Nivas Apartments in Alwarpet actually calls Ray a 'kirukku' (jerk) when he goes there at 2 in the morning. Of course, reflecting the reality in our metro today, there are also watchmen who speak Hindi.

Writing more about the book would give away the twists and turns of the plot. Suffice to say that *Jump Cut* is not only an enjoyable paean of a son to his father but of a cinephile to his craft. A most suitable story for our very own film industry which will soon complete a century.

'THE LOVE SONG' REMEMBERED

(Continued from page 4)

sat there with a sorrow too deep for tears, I heard the band strike up the same tune of the love-song that had hurt me most. The bridegroom's party had evidently turned the corner. And in a panic I decided to run away. Where to? Yes... Why not? I would take the job offered me. I took my small box and cautiously went out by the backdoor to the carriage stand, and getting into one, went to

the station, and buying a 3rd class ticket started for Delhi.

No one missed me in the house till I was wanted when I had to be dressed for the marriage ceremony. And by that time I was far away. When I reached Delhi, I wrote home, and the reply I got from my mother was in such language as no mother ever wrote to a daughter.

And that is why no one visits me. But I am happy.

Save the City's beaches

(Continued from page 2)

On what basis has the Corporation approved this project?

Is this project approved by the Environment Department and Coastal Regulation Authority?

We should not spend public money to kill sandy beaches and create coastal disasters.

Already, the reduced beach stretch is facing a lot of stress due to garbage, dumping of rubble on the sands, and all kinds of solid and liquid waste pollution. Hamlets do not have proper sewerage system. Every hamlet has let its sewage drain into the open sand, creating a health hazard and degrading the coastal ecosystem.

Let us join hands to save the beaches and to protect the wealth of the oceans and the coastal lands from natural and man-made disasters. – (Courtesy: *Adyar Times*.)

Answers to Quiz

1. Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao of Telengana; 2. Robin Uthappa and Mohit Sharma; 3. Swift; 4. It is a \$1billion fund to increase US military deployments in Europe; 5. The D-Day landings at Normandy; 6. Rafael Nadal at Roland Garros; 7. Israel; 8. San Antonio Spurs; 9. Sir Daniel Day-Lewis; 10. Vishal Sikka.

* * *

11. Raja Ravi Varma; 12. The Music Academy; 13. Nobel Laureate C.V. Raman; 14. Dario's; 15. The 'Adyar Aalamaram'; 16. Oceanic in Santhome; 17. Sir Thomas Walter Bannerman Kibble; 18. Kanchiyin Tarakai; 19. My Lady's Garden; 20. Velleeswaran Koil.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

• Since Volume XIV, No.1 (April 16, 2003), Madras Musings has been priced at Rs.5 a copy. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Rs.100/-. Please make out your cheque only to CHENNAI HERITAGE and send it, together with the COUPON, to CHENNAI HERITAGE, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014 or C/O LOKAVANI SOUTHERN PRINTERS PVT. LTD., 62/63, GREAMES ROAD, CHENNAI 600 006.

An ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION of just Rs.100 covers only a part of our costs. Corporate support and YOUR support will continue to be essential for Chennai Heritage and Madras Musings to play a greater role in creating awareness about the city, its heritage and its environment. We therefore look forward to your sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep Madras Musings going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to Madras Musings for 2013-14 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of Madras Musings, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions.

– The Editor

Let's celebrate Madras 375

(Continued from page 1)

debates with Madras as the focus. *Mylapore Times*, the Press Institute of India, the Roja Muthiah Research Library, *Anglos in the Wind*, United Way of Chennai, Nizhal, the Australian Consulate-General and the Goethe-Institut too are organising a wide range of events for Madras Week. And local groups in Vadapalani, Kodambakkam, Royapuram, Kilpauk and Anna Nagar are planning a variety of events. These include walks, quiz contests and other programmes. As has been the practice in past years, Chennai Heritage, publishers of *Madras Musings*, will be hosting eight talks at various locations on subjects related to the city. It will also lead several heritage walks in the city during the Week, as will several individuals.

Perhaps indicative of the success of Madras Week as a means of creating an awareness about the City and its heritage is the fact that more and more institutions are coming forward each year to celebrate the city. Several IT companies organised programmes last

year and are planning to do more this year. So have several Clubs and Rotary Clubs. The celebrations have also spread to the suburbs such as Tiruvanmiyur, Nanganallur and Tambaram. Private apartment blocks and various societies are planning their own events. The Coordinators look forward to several more participants this year. What is heartening is the number of emails we have received from several individuals wanting to be volunteers for the Week. We will soon get in touch with each of them individually.

Participation is purely a VOLUNTARY effort by those wanting to organise programmes during the Week. The role of the informal group of coordinators is only to encourage such participation, try to organise publicity for the events, offer advice and, where possible, arrange venues. This is a first call for individuals/groups/institutions who wish voluntarily to celebrate the founding of this city to join in. For any assistance or information please contact: editor@madrasmusings.com or themadrasday@gmail.com or info@prism-india.com.

The Chandhoks of Chennai – 2

Organising Indian motor sports

(Continued from last fortnight)

Indu Chandhok, 83 years old, is the second son of Indersain (Madras Musings, June 16th) and the present patriarch of the Chennai-based Chandhok family. A portly old man who is eternally 'young at heart', Indu is a multifaceted personality. Apart from carrying on the automobile spare parts business of the family, Indu is better known in Chennai society for his active involvement in several community and voluntary organisations like the Punjab Association, the DAV School, Camp Tonakela, Rotary, Freemasonry and 41 Clubs of India, an association of ex-Round Tablers, whose international President he became.

Indu, however, is best known for his long and enduring contribution to the growth of motor sports in the country. His involvement with motor sports for the last sixty years has rightly earned him the reputation of being the Godfather of Motor Sports in India!

In college, studies did not interest Indu as much as sport. He was an active sportsman right from his schooldays. His interest in cricket led him to start the 'Youngster's Cricket Club' along with his elder brother, Bharat Bhushan, an engineer who moved to the USA.

Indu's tryst with motor sports started with his participation in a car rally from Madras to Mahabalipuram in 1955, driving a Triumph Mayflower

car. He won the first prize! Since then he has been hooked on to motor sports.

When I asked him the difference between a car rally and car race, he explained, "A car rally is held on public roads from one place to another whereas a car race is held on a specially prepared race track covering several laps."

Motor sports, which included both rallies and races, first started in Calcutta and then spread to Bangalore before reaching Madras. In the early

• by R.V. Rajan

1950s, motor sports was a part of the activities of the Automobile Association of India. It was in 1953, during industrialist M.A. Chidambaram's tenure as Chairman of the Association, that motor sports in Madras was separated from the Association.

In 1954, the Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) was registered under the Societies Act. It had C.M. Donner as President, K.Varughese as Hon. Secretary, and K.V. Srinivasan as Hon. Treasurer. The energetic Indu Chandhok was roped in as the Secretary of the Club in 1956, which position he held till 1961.

Indu remembers that the first All India Race Meet was conducted in Madras on February 17, 1959 with M.A. Chidambaram as Race Committee Chairman. The successful meet, which was held at the Sholavaram airstrip, was to become an

annual feature, eagerly looked forward to by motor sports enthusiasts not only in India but also from neighbouring countries. Bharat, Indu's elder brother, undertook the difficult task of mobilising 100 volunteers to help as time-keepers and lap-recorders. There were several other stalwarts who contributed to the success of each event.

Among the many spectators who patronised the sport and was Chief Guest on a couple of occasions was MGR, erstwhile Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Invariably, it was left to Indu to look after him.

"I used to converse in my broken Tamil, while MGR would respond in his pidgin English. It was fun!" says Indu. At the awards function in the evening, when MGR was Chief Guest, he would speak in Tamil and CT (Chidambaram) would translate the speech into English.

Indu Chandhok was to be at the helm of the organising committee for the next 18 years. When I asked Indu why he chose February for the event, he replied, "In the initial years the races were held in December or early January. But the group from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which was an important participant in the race, found it difficult to get to Madras in time, as the ferry service was closed from November to the second week of January. To accommodate the strong contingent from Ceylon, the event was shifted to the first Sunday of February.



Bharat Indu Chandhok... and seen here with CT after another successful race meet at Sholavaram.



Since then it has been always held in February!"

Though motor racing in India had become synonymous with Sholavaram, a major problem with the Indian Air Force, which owned land, forced the MMSC to look for alternative arrangements. A search committee with K.V. Srinivasan, Indu Chandhok and a few others identified 300 acres of land at Irungattukottai near Sriperumbudur where a state-of-the-art track was laid and the annual races conducted from 1989. The 'Panch Pandavas' – Gopal Madhavan, Jayendra Patel, Anil Bhatia, C. Prabhakar and Indu Chandhok – along with S. Muthukrishnan were responsible for making the racing facility at Irungattukottai a reality.

The founders of the Club also thought it fit to form a trust to hold all Club properties. With K.V. Srinivasan and Indu Chandhok as founder trustees, three life trustees and six other trustees, the trust was registered in 1987. Indu Chandhok continues as an active Founder Trustee of the Trust even today.

The annual race meet now attracts teams from not only cities in India and the neighbouring countries but also from other countries in the West. To bring fair play to competition, Indu mooted the idea of forming an all-India body called the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India. It had K.V. Srinivasan as the first chairman and Ajaypath Singhania as the

President. Suresh Kumar of Calcutta, L.G. Ramamurthy of Coimbatore, A.D. Jayaraman of Bangalore, and Indu Chandhok from Madras were the other signatories to the creation of this body.

"From the word go we decided to have FMSCI set up a separate independent judiciary system, with eminent jurists and lawyers giving their consent to serve. A national appeals tribunal was created to which any disputes could be referred. The post of President was initially rotated between North, South, East and West but this was changed to having a strong working President. It is a pity that the independent body was sidelined by the later Presidents of FMSCI and councillors of the Association became members of the Tribunal."

Today, apart from guiding the destiny of motor sports in India as the longest surviving trustee, Indu is involved in Wallace Sports and Research Foundation, a joint initiative with his son Vicky Chandhok. WSR helps aspiring motor sports drivers to train and participate in races.

While Indu got out of active racing long ago, his interest in the sports continues because of his son Vicky Chandhok and now his grandson Karun Chandhok, who have made a mark in the world of motor sports. They continue to keep the Chandhok family flag flying high on the race track.

(To be continued)

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