

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## What do we do about T'Nagar?

The impasse over what can be done to alleviate congestion in T'Nagar continues with no immediate solution in sight. The Corporation has done an about-turn on its proposal for a multi-level car parking facility adjoining Panagal Park. This is the third time the idea has been proposed and then shelved. All hope is now pinned on a skywalk and improved pedestrian facilities in the area. In the meanwhile, nothing much has been done to tackle the original menace, and the chief reason for the present mess the area finds itself in – illegal constructions. Local residents are, however, relentlessly fighting the issue.

The multi-level parking facility was proposed decades ago and has periodically been revived as and when our civic body feels something ought to

be done at T'Nagar. Twice it made it to the tendering stage but no bidder evinced any interest. This time it has been shelved on the grounds that activists had expressed concern over the impact of the parking lot on the ecology of Panagal Park.

### • by The Editor

Now concerns over ecology have generally never motivated the Government to change its plans. But it emerges in this case that the World Bank, whose funds the Corporation hopes to tap for several of its projects, has laid stringent norms on environmental impact and that has prompted this change of heart. The latest buzz is that the idea has not been shelved entirely and the hunt is on for another location in the vicinity. Finding

that can be tough as this is one of the most congested areas in the city.

The next bright hope appears to be the pedestrianisation of the area. Budgeted at Rs. 83 crore, this 1.4km long, 22 metre wide walkway along Sir Theagaroya Road will encourage the use of non-motorised transport and have public utilities such as toilets. Another ambitious plan is a 600 metre skywalk that will connect the Mambalam Railway Station to the T'Nagar bus depot. Estimated to cost Rs. 22 crore, the idea has been presented at public consultations and work is to begin in four months' time.

But what of the actual issue – the proliferation of illegal constructions that has resulted in the present nightmare? That has been left to the residents of

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## Can garbage problem be sorted out at home?

Any casual visitor to the city will note that it has an overwhelming garbage problem, one that its residents seem to be blind to. The statistics, as we quoted in September last year, were alarming – Chennai generates higher per capita quantity of waste than Kolkata or Delhi. Around 6400 tonnes of rubbish are dumped every day all over the city, and this does not include 9 tonnes of medical waste from the ever burgeoning number of hospitals. There is no reason to think that the scenario has improved since then.

Our Corporation, it would appear, has given up on this issue, as it has on several others. Apart from building enormous collection points at street cor-

ners, all of which collapse within days, it has done precious little. Privatisation of garbage collection continues to remain confined to three zones in the city, 15 years after the idea was first mooted. Not that there is much difference between the way the Corporation or the private operator collects the garbage.

And when collected, the waste does not exactly vanish. The Corporation continues to send it all out to landfills, a practice that is now frowned upon in all developed countries and the 'world class cities' that Chennai wants to ape. Time was when these landfills, at Perungudi and Kodungaiyur, were far removed from city lim-

its. Now, with the metropolis having grown all around them, residents in those areas are protesting vociferously about the dumping. There are online petitions and court cases on this matter and yet the practice continues unabated. The Corporation has no other solution in sight.

What is ironic is that the civic body has not chosen to tackle the problem at its very source – the homes, the shops and the establishments – where the garbage is generated. At present, there are no limits on what any resident or institution of the city can throw out – ranging from personal hygiene prod-

(Continued on page 2)

## Know your Fort better



Detail showing the Sea Gate from an 18th Century engraving of Fort St. George, after paintings by Scott and Lambert.

• To most casual visitors to the Fort today, the principal entrances are the two ornate gates, one for entry and the other for exiting, that flank the great bastion on which the flagstaff stands. These gates, though their granite posts give an impression of a respectable antiquity, are relatively new, dating at the most to the 1930s. The pair is often erroneously referred to as the Sea Gates of the Fort and nothing could be more inaccurate than that.

The original Sea Gates still survive, though they are blocked up and have sunk far below the level of the road. But the observant visitor can still locate them. You need to begin your search standing in front of the great bastion that supports the flagstaff. Walk either to your left or right, keeping a sharp eye on the base of the bastion, as it rises from the moat. You will notice a rectangular archway, blocked up completely but whose original lintel of black granite is still visible. A pair to this is on the other side of the bastion and the two were in their time known as the North and South Sea Gates. Standing in front of them, two things strike you – firstly the road level has risen tremendously since the time these gates were used and secondly, the sea has receded a great distance from the Fort.

The Sea Gate is one feature of the Fort about which there are continuous references from the 1640s. Originally, when the Fort was nothing more than a small enclosure, there was an entrance gate from the eastern side. As the Fort expanded and the original enclosure became *Fort House*, the core of which is hidden inside the Assembly complex, the new outer eastern wall ran parallel to the sea. There was no great bastion then and the rampart was a straight line. An arched gateway was cut into this wall giving easy access to the sea via a sandy strip that was no more than 500 metres in length. This entrance came to be referred to as the Sea Gate. Thus, in its first iteration, it was nothing more than a simple narrow archway.

The outer wall of the Fort was first planned and executed by Agent Henry Greenhill in 1657 or thereabouts and so the first Sea Gate is also attributed to him. In his time it also appears to have been known as the Water Gate for two reasons – the first, its proximity to the sea and the second, because fresh water was delivered from the Fort, for a fee, to ships waiting in Madras Roads.

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# THE T'NAGAR PROBLEM

(Continued from page 1)

the area to fight. The T'Nagar Residents' Welfare Association has submitted a memorandum to the Justice S. Rajeswaran Committee, which has been formed at the instance of the High Court of Madras. Its mandate is to frame guidelines for the implementation of Section 113C of the Tamil Nadu Town and Country Planning Act 2013. This Section pertains to the regularisation, on the payment of a fee, of all violations up to the year 2007.

This bringing forward of the cut-off year is widely seen as a ploy to overcome several High Court and Supreme Court judgements that have consistently held that any violation after the one-time amnesty of 1999 cannot be condoned. All such structures would have to

be demolished if the instructions of the Court are to be implemented. This is obviously not in anyone's interest other than probably that of the local residents and, so, it is being given short shrift. Interestingly, the scope of the Committee is yet to be decided and the matter may get referred to Court once again for clarifications.

Those residing in T'Nagar have, however, not lost hope. They have written to the Committee stating that Section 113C ought not to be allowed. They are also demanding punitive action against those who have violated all rules in putting up huge shopping complexes in connivance with officials. Whether their plea will be heard and, more importantly, whether it will have any effect is to be seen.

# Sorting out the garbage issue

(Continued from page 1)

ucts to construction debris. Everything is carted out of private precincts and dumped at street corners near rubbish bins leaving it to the civic body to clear. With the wastes leaving their immediate presence, our citizens are in no way concerned about what happens thereafter.

This has to be put an end to immediately. And if Chennai wants a role model for it, there is always Singapore, which it wants to be a clone of some day. For that matter, have you ever seen any modern international city where residents just throw their rubbish on to the streets? This is what the Corporation needs to control. It has to insist on segregation of waste at source and must insist on it being retained within the premises from where it has to be removed by the civic body at designated times and days.

This will automatically result in two improvements. Firstly, since the garbage will be segregated at source, its disposal will be that much easier. Part of the

reason why Chennai has such a huge problem of waste on its hands is that it is not broken up into smaller manageable components. Secondly, since the rubbish remains on the premises till it is collected, there will automatically be a discipline in controlling it. After all, if a building or office is asked to make space for its waste, it would want to minimise it, would it not? The Corporation can also impose restrictions on the maximum quantity of waste that can be generated by a unit – this can be classified on the basis of the nature of activity – domestic, industrial, shop, establishment, etc. Fines can be imposed in case these limits are exceeded.

Of course, the Corporation has to still find a better solution for the final disposal of waste. But with the above-defined discipline in place, it could find the problem somewhat easier to manage. But will the civic body listen?

– by A Special Correspondent

## MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

THE EDITOR

# The wheels of TANGEDCO

The mills of God, so *The Man from Madras Musings* is informed, grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small. There are some who have expressed the same view about our judicial system, but MMM does not want to get into that controversy. He would, however, like to add a third institution that works the same way and that is our own Tamil Nadu Electricity Board which, for some strange reason, now goes about under an alias – TANGEDCO.

The divine mills were brought rather forcefully to MMM's mind when he was driving down a thoroughfare that is his regular beat. In the past, this was a tree-lined avenue with discreet bungalows tucked away on either side. Since then the trees have come down, while the houses have grown taller and taller and now appear to be tumbling on to the road. What was once a four-lane road is now just two lanes thanks to the number of cars parked on the sides as the buildings inside have no space for them.

All would have still been well had not TANGEDCO muscled in one day to relay

trained acrobat, as they were nothing more than a pole or two. Walking on them was a tough act and beneath was a yawning chasm. One false step and you joined the cables below.

As MMM drove by he noticed considerable action on the road. The secretaries of the various residents' associations were in confabulation with TANGEDCO officials. They wanted to know as to how long they would need to be confined indoors. To this there was no answer. It was most likely that the man in charge of laying cables was not the appropriate authority to reply to such queries. Work proceeded sporadically thereafter. Every aspect of the cable laying was manual to the extreme – the bobbins had to be rolled, the cables unwound and laid, the roads dug and filled in. An army of labourers toiled when they felt like doing it, doing which was seldom, and the work continued for days. The residents took to using public transport and those who could stay indoors did so.

Then came a day when the work was over. True, the road was in a pitiable state, full of mounds and depressions but at

The next call was from another bright young thing, which had clearly done some homework, by way of collecting hearsay. The compound wall was built by the Nawabs of Arcot, it declared, and given that background it said that it wanted a statement from MMM to the effect that the Government was destroying our past. MMM disagreed and said that the compound was not built by the Nawabs and it was of later provenance. To this the voice disagreed and said that it had sources that said that the wall was over three hundred years old. MMM then asked as to why those sources were not speaking up against the demolition. To this the voice remained silent.

A third one was the best. It was a TV crew who made out that they were doing MMM a favour by inviting him to air his views. They also did not listen to anything that MMM said, interrupting continuously with a hiss and a series of okeys that went like this – ssssss yah okokokkkkkkk. MMM, when he could get a word in between, flatly refused to come to the studios to

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

cables. That at least was the official reason given out, though it is MMM's view that this body digs roads just for the fun of it, rather like a British Prime Minister of yore who cut down trees for exercise. To be fair to TANGEDCO, they did give sufficient warning. Enormous steel bobbins, each around 15 feet in diameter, and all of them having electric cables wound around them, were suddenly rolled in and randomly distributed all along the road. They remained there for days on end and the residents of the area soon came to consider them local scenery. Posters were pasted on them, children played around them, and men in urgent need of a tippie or two went behind them. Those wanting to answer calls of nature were more open and used the bobbins as convenient props.

There came a day when TANGEDCO decided that it had aired the cables long enough and they could now be pushed underground. The activity began one night, long after everyone had gone to bed. The next morning the locals found the entire road dug up along the sides. No car could enter or leave any building. Some alert watchmen on duty had hastily erected pedestrian walkways of sorts. But to ford these you had to be in prime physical condition and also a

least the cars could be taken out. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. But the jubilation did not last long. A couple of days later, a group of men from the Chennai Metro Water and Sewerage Board were seen prospecting the area. MMM predicts more action.

### Much ado over a wall

Heritage never had it so good. Hundreds of beautiful buildings, each a work of art, have fallen by the wayside and not one press reporter bothered. But every one of them is deeply concerned about the demolition and replacement with identical design of the compound wall along the Marina. And they have all been calling up *The Man from Madras Musings*.

Is it not shocking, asked one bright thing, that the Government had decided to demolish the wall? MMM remonstrated that it was after all a wall and the Government had begun the process a year ago. What was more, it was replacing the old design with an identical new one and so MMM did not consider this a matter of concern. The voice at the other end was clearly disappointed. It had called MMM to get a byte condemning the whole rebuilding and here was MMM preparing to toady to the Government. The voice went dead.

lament over the compound wall. The voice, having hissed and okayed, then sought to give the story a positive twist. It asked if MMM would give a statement supporting the University of Madras whose Syndicate had refused to give permission for the demolition of their wall as part of the same replacement exercise. To this MMM countered stating that the University could not claim to be a protector of heritage as its own *Senate House* has remained locked and is once again being neglected after an expensive restoration exercise. "*Senate House?* Is that a Roman ruin in our city?" asked the reporter. It was MMM's turn to hang up.

### Tailpiece

The above story does not end there. Yet another TV studio called up *The Man from Madras Musings*. When he firmly refused to be interviewed, the caller asked MMM if he would, instead, consent to speak on the Land Acquisition Bill. When MMM said he knew nothing on the subject, the voice said that did not matter as all that the TV channel needed was someone who could speak loudly.

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



View blocked

The Chennai Corporation should bring down the height of the wall of the old Elphinstone Bridge adjacent to Thiru Vi Ka Bridge across the Adyar River to enable motorists and pedestrians to fully savour the Adyar Creek, the estuary and the Bay of Bengal. Indeed, the view from Thiru Vi Ka Bridge of the early morning sun slowly rising above the sea is spectacular. These are God's gifts to Chennai and I think the Corporation should decrease the height of the wall so that passers-by could catch a glimpse of the river, the creek and the sea.

The Corporation should also reduce the height of the walkway on the bridge; it is too steep for pedestrians to negotiate.

It seems the Corporation has plans to raise the height of parapet walls of the new bridge to prevent suicides. Is the cash-strapped Corporation going to build similar walls along all the 262 bridges and 13 grade separators it maintains in the city?

People wanting to commit suicide can scale any wall. Let this not be an excuse for the authorities to build walls. Railings can be fixed instead, as are in place on the western side of the Adyar bridge.

**Kangayam R. Narasimhan**  
Gandhi Nagar  
(from *Adyar Times*)

Church history

Further to my earlier notings on 'Mylapore Modaliar' (MM, April 1st), here are a few snippets of history of a predecessor of Tane Modaliar.

Prof. George Moraes, a noted authority on the early history of Christianity in India, provides certain fascinating information relating to the antiquity of Christianity in "Meliapor". His research on this subject (1952-1964) makes a reference to one Abidara Modeliar.

Prof. Moraes quotes from one of the three copper plates originally found in the possession of a Portuguese priest,

Fr. Pentado (1552). The second plate (in translation) mentions that "when 1259 years of the era had passed" (i.e. AD 1337) Abidara Modeliar was granted alms for his church and lands as listed, by Bocaraja (Bukka) or his representative based in Chandegiri (Chandragiri). The following places are noted in the copper plate: Paliarkota, Cotur, Palepate, Frivanor, Urur, Cateparede, Catetangul and Perogum Rey as well as a river on the south and on another side the sea separating Meliapor. The geographers of Madras should do some home-work on these sites.

Cotur and the river on the south are easily identifiable. Erosion of the coast was said to have caused depopulation. Most significantly, the ruler was mentioned to have sworn in all the benefits accruing from the grants to Abidara Modeliar so that his church may have them and possess them forever from before a temple called Ampisiviri. It was undoubtedly a perfect secular gesture of the Vijayanagar overlords. But where was this temple situated about seven centuries ago?

To cut a long story short, the association of Mylapore with Apostle Thomas has been well-known for a long time. Reliable early documents have always averred that the Apostle Thomas was commemorated in Mylapore. Most of the remains and bone relics of Apostle Thomas were removed from Mylapore to Edessa (in northern Syria on the Armenian border) in A.D 394. Even long after this time, the united complex which housed the original tomb, church and a monastery was continued to be identified as a "Mausoleum" or *Madrastha* or *Madrasth* in Syriac language. Several West Asian Christian records have consistently maintained this tradition. An Indian chronicler, Henry d' Souza (1972) and a Dutch scholar Martin Gielen (1985) have suggested the derivation of the present-day name Madras to the existence of this long-venenerated site.

We may well concur with the following observation made (1984) by an internationally re-

# Arch separatist turned integrator

With reference to R.V. Rajan's review of the book on Sir C.P. (MM, May 1st), here's an extract from my reminiscences *Fading Footprints* soon to be published:

The National Integration Council in its very first session in January 1962, at Nehru's instance, set up three committees to study and make recommendations on issues which were regarded as of paramount concern for the healthy growth of Indian democracy and the emotional integration of the polyglot polity. Nehru was clear as to what those issues were: Combating communalism, countering regionalist and fissiparous tendencies, and harnessing mass media to these ends.

I was sitting behind Nehru when he looked around the Vigyan Bhavan conference hall at the dignitaries (who included colossi such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Zakir Hussein, Vikram Sarabhai and other names to conjure with) and himself picked the chairpersons and members of the committees one by one. He made Asoka Mehta the chairperson of the committee on national integration and communalism with A.B.Vajpayee, Indira Gandhi, E.M.S. Namboodripad, Prof. Mujeeb and a couple of others as members. He had no difficulty in choosing Prithvi Raj Kapoor as the chairperson of the committee on mass media with prominent media and film personalities as members. (Incidentally, mark the fact that as early as 1961 Nehru had the farsightedness to put mass media at the centre-stage as an important means of forging a sense of identity as Indians.)

Whom to make the chairperson of the committee to study and recommend measures to deal with regional and separatist movements? With his spectacles hanging precariously at the tip of his nose and an impish smile playing on his lips, and with an exquisite sense of irony, Nehru looked at C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer, and ever so sweetly, asked: "Ramaswami, why don't you chair the committee? You are the fittest person I can think of!" Was it my fancy or was it a fact I cannot tell: There was a giant sucking sound with which this choice was greeted and no wonder.

Someone like CP in today's political culture would have been hounded out of public life, if not physically eliminated. At the minimum he should have been harassed by employing the power of the State in every conceivable manner to crush him. For, he was widely perceived to have worked against the freedom movement by overt and covert means and ratted on the freedom heroes. He also moved earth and heaven for the continuance of British Rule, even to the extent of goading the Chamber of Princes to declare the independence of the princely States. Every schoolboy knew that CP himself led the pack by proclaiming that Travancore would stand forth as an independent entity when the British quit India. I remember asking Lal Bahadur Shastri about the induction of this

staunch separatist into a Council meant to work for integration. Shastri replied: "Nehru strongly believes that the most vital pre-requisite to national integration is emotional integration which is not possible unless present and erstwhile opponents on the political plane were also integrated into his effort."

However that be, plainly startled by Nehru's question, CP squirmed in his seat and looked around perhaps to see whether Nehru meant him or somebody else. To his embarrassment, Nehru repeated his suggestion to which CP quietly submitted. Nehru took particular care to include in this committee headed by CP political heavyweights such as Y.B. Chavan, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Biju Patnaik, Chief Minister of Orissa, B.P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam and K. Kamaraj, Chief Minister of Madras.

Asoka Mehta also was brought in as a member to provide a linkage with his communalism committee.

I serviced all the three committees. When the Chinese invasion of November 1962 took place, the nation rose like one person and the emotional upsurge misled the committees on communalism and mass media into believing that integration had become a reality. They decided to wind up their half-finished task. CP took a more down-to-earth and realistic stand. He wanted to take advantage of the upsurge by performing a coup de grace to preserve India's unity. He called me to his side and asked me to prepare, in consultation with the Law Ministry, a note proposing an amendment to the Constitution whereby all candidates for elections at all levels, all members elected to representative bodies and all Constitutional functionaries would be required to take an oath to uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.

We took it to Nehru to whom CP explained that this deceptively simple amendment would, in effect, outlaw any party or its candidates or its elected members or any Constitutional functionary refusing to take the prescribed oath and thus would serve as a potent antidote against separatist and secessionist tendencies. Nehru immediately saw the point and approved it and the amendment was incorporated in the Constitution. Almost overnight, contrary to the Cassandras (including myself) who thought the DMK would scorch the earth if the amendment was passed, its supremo, C.N. Annadurai, in a spectacular act of statesmanship, prevailed upon his party to delete the demand for an independent Dravida Nadu from its constitution and ordered the candidates and elected representatives of the party to take the oath and live up to it - which they are doing to this day.

This, then, was the lasting bequest of CP, the erstwhile arch separatist who turned integrator, to Indian democracy.

**B.S. Raghavan**  
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## CHENNAI HERITAGE

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nowned church historian (also extremely familiar with India) Bishop Stephen Neill on Mylapore.

"It is probable that a part at least of the indigenous element in the Indian Church belonged originally **not to Kerala** but ... the tradition associating St. Thomas with Mylapore suggests that the first Christianisation of that area goes back to very early times."

**Rev. Philip K. Mulley**  
Anaihatti Road  
Kotagiri 643 217, The Nilgiris

### Dog menace

The stray dog menace in Besant Nagar is increasing

daily and has now reached alarming proportions. Groups of stray dogs can be seen near every dustbin searching for food. They constantly attack each other.

It is difficult for senior citizens and little children to walk in Besant Nagar. Sometimes these dogs chase little children who run when they see the dogs.

Citizens took up the matter with the Corporation officials who stated (on the assurance that their names would not be mentioned) that they are unable to take any action for they are scared of animal rights activists.

All of us are aware of rabies and how dangerous a dog's bite can be. Animal rights activists are also human beings with little children. It is quite possible that they or their children could also be bitten by these stray dogs.

It is high time the Corporation vaccinated these dogs and rehabilitated them elsewhere. We do not have to wait for the dogs to bite people before taking action.

**Prof. V. Chandrasekhar**  
B 12/4, 25th Cross Street  
Besant Nagar  
Chennai 600 090





(Current Affairs questions are from the period April 16th to 30th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Which former Union Finance Minister and veteran BJP leader was recently conferred with the 'Officer of the Legion of Honour' by France?

2. What was 'Operation Maitri' that was undertaken in the latter half of April?

3. Marathi litterateur Bhalchandra Nemade is the 50th recipient of which coveted award?

4. Which European country has topped the World Happiness Report 2015, published by a UN agency, where India is placed 117th among 158 countries?

5. Dr. Vivek Murthy has become the highest ranking Indian-American in the Obama Administration. To what post has he been appointed?

6. The Indian Navy's new stealth destroyer, the largest destroyer commissioned in India, was launched on April 20th. After which Indian naval port-city is it named?

7. Which high-profile Indian cricketer is to set up 'Chisel', a chain of gyms and fitness centres, with an investment of Rs. 90 crore?

8. Name the first human-made object to go into orbit around Mercury which recently crashed into the planet after a successful four-year mission.

9. Name the high-profile MP who was recently unanimously elected the new general secretary of the CPI(M).

10. Who is the only Indian woman in *Time* magazine's latest list of '100 Most Influential People'?

\* \* \*

11. Name the Rajya Sabha MP from Tamil Nadu who was responsible for the passing of the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill recently.

12. What is the Indian Railways' newly-launched mobile app for paperless unreserved ticketing for commuters in the Egmore and Tambaram suburban sections in Chennai called?

13. The 375th birthday of which landmark Chennai edifice was celebrated on April 23rd?

14. Which place in Chennai opened its doors to worshippers 200 years ago, on April 30, 1815?

15. Which 18th Century Governor of Madras was responsible for developing the Esplanade, building the new Black Town and proposed the tax that gave Wall Tax Road its name?

16. Which Danish settlement was sold to the English for 1,125,000 Rigsdaler?

17. Name the American all-rounder who played for Madras in Ranji Trophy matches in the 1940s and was in the list of all-time Madras XI compiled for the MCC's 150th anniversary?

18. With which film-making legend would you associate Pragati Pictures?

19. Another on films. Which 1954 production was the first songless, danceless Tamil feature film?

20. What is the full name of the pioneering woman author-composer-editor known by her initials VaiMuKo?

(Answers on page 7)

## ● An occasional column by a British freelance writer on her eight years in Madras

It is 2006, Madras is hitting the IT boom, and it is evolving into Chennai. The streets look like Swiss cheese, full of holes. Deep cavernous pits being filled with concrete dot the fabric of the city. Buildings are mushrooming in a forest of scaffolding. Despite this, I cannot find a house to live in!

The ruthless sun beats down and in the glaring light of midday I sit in traffic jams feverishly searching for a house. Hot and frustrated, I look at newly built apartments where the cement is still wet. They are dreary dark spaces filled with acres of marble flooring, and views of building sites.

In desperation I settle on a house in the leafy Boat Club area. When I see in the contract that the landlord plans to live with us, his wife to be our cook, I change my mind. We all need some privacy in this overpopulated city.

Time is running out, but time, I soon learn, means nothing to an Indian. There is a word for it, "kal". It means today, tomorrow, yesterday and the day after tomorrow. To a Westerner it means learning the art of patience.

We can only stay at The Madras Club for three weeks, so this temporary haven with its rolling lawns, and the thwack of tennis balls breaking the silence, is coming to an end. My "Sir" is busy setting up his new office in Nungambakam so I have to keep searching alone.

But in India the unexpected often happens. I make a friend, she knows of a house in Kotturpuram.

This is a lush, green area just over the bridge that spans the River Adyar. Forty years ago it was the countryside, an unfashionable agricultural area, but Mr. Raja, predicting the expansion of the city, built a home here in the 1960s. Today mansions have sprung up along the streets and sports cars, parked behind high security gates, have taken the place of bullock carts. A few streets away children run barefoot among the increasing building sites, and an elderly woman sifts through the piles of rubbish on the street corner.

Mr. Raja is planning to house all his close relatives in a purpose-built block of flats, and rent out the old family home. These strong family values are a completely alien concept to us Westerners as we try to distance ourselves from our siblings as soon as they come of age! We are invited to meet the Raja clan and see if they like us and our credentials!

This is the 21st Century and in a country that is booming in the world economy. But to our amazement we have to conduct the interview at an auspicious time on an auspicious day. In India, the supernatural and natural forces are intertwined, it seems the supernatural is contained in everyone and everything. This



# Settling in

differs from our Western Judeo-Christian religion, which divides the natural and supernatural into separate categories. It seems that even to the well-educated, the evil eye exists and our fate is in the hands of the Gods. What's more, there are religious specialists who ensure that all is correct with the lunar cycle. Politicians in every party take astrology seriously and stay in line with the celestial positions of the planets, believing that this affects the rise and fall of their personal fortunes. Faith is a large part of the Indian psyche and propitiating the Gods, it appears, is a must do!

In the coming years this will cause me untold frustration as I am told not to have my hair cut on a certain day, not to pluck flowers at night, to wear red underwear for good luck (this might be sensible in the very likely event of a car crash) and even one time having a bucket of water thrown over me by my cook who presumed I had touched a dead body at a funeral!

Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness adhere in reference to certain events, births, weddings, and obviously doing a property deal! Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are auspicious. Saturdays are very bad and you should never start a trip on a Tuesday! The following Sunday, at four 'o'clock, we are seated in a formal sitting room being scrutinised by all the members of the Raja clan. It seems that the Gods have smiled upon us as a week later we move into our handsome new home.

*Seetama* (named after Mr. Raja's daughter) is a large white villa with a beautiful garden. It had ten airconditioning units, miles of polished marble and not a stick of furniture.

Nowadays there are many stores selling furniture but in 2006 I struggled to find anything that I needed. I did not know where to start looking. For two weeks I looked for a bed, with no success. This, it transpired, was confusion over terminology, as I should have been looking for a "cot".

Visits to "Lifestyle" became a daily fixture as I made the tedious acquisition of cups, plates and cutlery that took twice as long to wrap and "bill" as they did to choose. This was an unfamiliar and exasperating world.

One full week we waited on for the delivery of a sofa. Night after night we refused invitations in case we missed the delivery.

"Madam, this sofa is very definitely going to be with you tomorrow and if not possible today then the next day for sure it will be there."

India is a good place to learn patience. A week later we were sitting on the floor eating a cold supper and drinking miniature bottles of wine from an airline that our smuggler was dealing with, when the doorbell rang. Our eyes lit up at the sight of two men delivering our sofa.

The enormous sofa and two chairs finally emerged from a sea of bubble wrap and were set upright. We watched in amazement as slowly but surely every leg of the sofa fell off and it lurched drunkenly to one side before collapsing completely.

"No problem Sir, madam, no problem, only needing some glue," said the sweating delivery boys who had already received their tip and had no intention of taking the beast back.

My "Sir" who was by now desperate to sit on anything except a cold marble floor said, "As long as we don't move it, it should be alright." "Take them back, I want my money back," I screamed.

Along with superstition I learned another side of India

that week. No Indian likes to be the bearer of bad news. A problem is not a problem. If conflict can be avoided, somehow everything will sort itself out – and, strangely, it does!

I lost that battle. The sofa is still with us today, ten years later, with the legs glued on. Another lesson I have learned is that in India much more can be achieved with a smile than with a rant.

How can a Westerner learn to curb his or her natural impatience? For me it is only with time and constant exposure to the placid nature of the Tamil people. Perhaps the key to the gentle temperament of the Tamils lies in the Hindu religion and acceptance of what the Gods have apportioned to them?

I don't know, but over the last ten years I have noticed that this is beginning to change. Perhaps it is the silicon surge and subsequent sudden wealth that has produced a new level of discontent? The disadvantaged certainly seem to have more sense of entitlement; understandably they do want a bite of the cherry. Even the Madras Club, with its legacy of British bureaucracy, has moved from interminable "chits" to a card payment system. I am all for progress, but my impression is that it is often accompanied by impatience; certainly this is true in the West.

More than half of India's current population is younger than twenty-five which makes me wonder how shopping for furniture will be done in the future. I suspect it will be online and delivered the next day. There will be much less personal interaction. Of course, there is still every possibility that the sofa legs will fall off, there just may not be anyone to scream at, they will have left it on the doorstep and rushed impatiently to the next job.



Till May 31: Art exhibition by Thyagarajan (at Dakshina-Chitra).

Till May 31: Art exhibition by K.K. Segar (at DakshinaChitra).

Till May 30: *Waiting for Eternity*, an exhibition of paintings by Sanjeeva Rao and Sundarraju (at Sandy's, Cenotaph Road, and Sandy's, Nungambakkam).

Till June 30: *Baramasa*, an exhibition of contemporary artists exploring the moods inspired by different seasons (at Apparao Galleries, Nungambakkam and The Leela Palace).

Till June 30: *The Art of Chess*, an exhibition of chess sets created by contemporary artists (at Apparao Galleries).

Till June 30: Paintings by Raja (at DakshinaChitra).

June 5-29: Art exhibition by N.S. Manohar, Kumbakonam (at DakshinaChitra).

May-June: Photography/art exhibition by Gita (at Dakshina-Chitra).

DakshinaChitra workshops

For Adults:

May 30-31: Chikankari Embroidery

June 6-7: Kasuti Embroidery

For Children:

May 20-23: 4-day Studio Pottery (8-14 yrs)

June 13: Stencil-making and T-Shirt Printing (8-14 yrs)

## • NOSTALGIA



Denniston commentating at a Ranji Trophy match.

# Meet Denny

— A cricketer from when cricket was different

(By V. Pattabhiraman)

It is said that cricket suffers from two kinds of fools — those who think that it holds the empire together (before 1947, of course) and those who think it isn't worth a tramp's boots. There is, however, a third lot of God's chosen few, who believe that cricket is just fun and must be enjoyed as such. To this happy fold belonged a truly noble soul, the late Sir Robert D. Denniston — just plain 'Denny' to his thousands of admirers — a man who rose from a Junior Assistant in the firm of Best & Co. of First Line Beach, to the coveted position of its Chairman and Managing Director in the fullness of time.

Judged by any standard, Sir Robert, one of the most immaculate of cricketers, a player of rare charm, and a doyen of cricketers and, above all, a great sportsman and a good friend and companion to several, belonged to an age when Scotch Whisky cost only 3s 6d per bottle and England basked in the pride of an empire. The most widely known picture of Denniston is the reproduction of a man, with a pipe in his mouth, with a solar topi energetically talking of cricket under the sun.

This article was written in 1975 for a special issue of Best & Co's house journal, *Crest*.

He was Number 1 in the batting order with Shattock for the MCC, and was the only exponent of lob bowling, who used to earn a crop of wickets with his clever slows. When he got a wicket, within 120 seconds he had consoled the departed, talked to both umpires and his captain and most of the fielders, done up a shoe lace, greeted the new victim and measured his short run again. Yet when you met him sharing the triumphs and failures and the fuss, you found a calm and philosophical citizen with a decided weakness for cocktails, in high company. Yes, temperament is a funny thing, nearly as funny as Groucho Marx.

How readily he comes to the mind's eye! Having known him for several years, I am in the happy position of being able to recall

# The Madrassi Englishman

To Robert Denniston, "Cricket was his religion and Madras Cricket Club his Church". He was truly loved and respected both as a player (a solid opening batsman, a good fielder, an "excellent" captain and a surprisingly successful underarm bowler, after injury forced him to change his bowling style) and as a man not only by his fellow Europeans, but also by Indians in Madras sports and business circles. As K. Balaraman of *The Hindu*, later to become one of its most eminent journalists, wrote, saying 'Vale' to his friend Denny, "If all Englishmen were Dennistons, there would have been no 'Quit India'."

Balaraman spoke of Denniston's wit and sally, Denniston the humourist, Denny who was Oriental in his hospitality and Denny the true blue democrat. Balaraman also wrote of the Madras Cricket Club member who was so passionately fond of sport that he had no time for marriage. And Balaraman wrote of his love affair with Cricket:

"As an exponent of the art of Cricket, Denny certainly did not hit the heights, but on his day he could (as an opening batsman) break any bowler's heart. I have seen him out-stonewall Stonewall Jackson. He was not quite popular in batting circles with his slow legbreaks and later when he took to underarm bowling many batsmen considered it 'underhand'. In fact, he became quite hateful with his low creepers and many a batsman who came to scoff became his prey. "Denny's love of Cricket verged on the sentimental. He wrote and spoke about it with great felicity. His articles and radio commentaries glamorised the game and bathed it in a suffusion of romance. Indubitably a

master of both the written and spoken word...

"It was typically Dennyish that he did good by stealth. He was the patron saint of many struggling clubs and struggling players. I was connected with one such club."

What Balaraman did not mention was that Denniston was one of the first Europeans to turn out for Indian clubs. In 1929-30 he turned out for little-known Emmanuel Club with not a player of note in the team. Then, in 1935-36, he was playing for a first division club, a team

### ● Excerpted from *The Spirit of Chepauk*

that had won the League championship, Minerva Cricket Club. He was also an enthusiastic member of the Eccentrics Cricket Club founded by A.F.W. Dixon to bring Indian and European cricketers closer together.

P.N. Sundaresan, a journalist who was a fair cricketer, once wrote that batsmen did not relish Denniston's underarm lobs. "From personal experience of playing those lobs I can say one had to gather all his strength to strike them, but (would) still (be) uncertain that the hit would not sail into the hands of half a dozen fielders posted strategically on the leg-side."

A story that was once legendary at The Madras Cricket Club relates that during a match Denniston kept making faces at C.P. Johnstone, his captain, while fielding, wanting to get into the thick of the action. But when he was put on to bowl, Rangachari the bowler of all people hit him for 2 sixes and 3 fours! As he finished his over, Denniston turned to Johnstone with a furious face

and crisply stated, "WRONG END"! All who were near burst out laughing, while Johnstone struggled to keep a straight face befitting a captain wedded to discipline.

Denny, whom Chari remembers "as having a heart as warm as his face was sunny" had a fine collection of sports books and would gladly lend them to any Indian interested in sport. Getting them back never worried him. He was, it is stated, the first in Madras to broadcast 'running commentaries' on cricket matches.

Denniston arrived in India as a 21-year-old in 1911 to work for Best & Co. When he left India in 1946, he was a Knight (1942) and had retired as head of the Company. A bachelor all his life, he lived most of his years at the Madras Club. Despite his close association with the elitist Madras Club and his Presidentship of two 'Europeans only' institutions, Denniston was probably the Englishman with the largest number of Indian friends. As he said just before his departure, "I was born an Englishman but I was brought up a Madarasi. I'll keep coming back, but the only snag is I can't keep on travelling at the company's expense." Sadly, he never came back. Within a few months of arriving in England, he died — and Madras sport was left only with memories of his contribution to several games. Today, few remember even that.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Yashwant Sinha; 2. Indian Army's rescue and aid mission to Nepal in the aftermath of the deadly earthquake; 3. Jnanpith Award; 4. Switzerland; 5. US Surgeon General; 6. Visakhapatnam; 7. Virat Kohli; 8. Messenger; 9. Sitaram Yechury; 10. Chanda Kochhar of ICICI.

\* \* \*

11. Tiruchi Siva of the DMK; 12. utsonmobile; 13. Fort St. George; 14. St. George's Cathedral; 15. George Pigot; 16. Tranquebar; 17. Frederick Fales Richardson; 18. A.V. Meiyappan; 19. *Andha Naal*; 20. Vai. Mu. Kothainayaki.

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— THE EDITOR

several anecdotes about him. Denny was quite a capable commentator on cricket as well as hockey. But he was rather painfully slow, both in his narrative and speech. Once, when broadcasting a Ranji Trophy match in the late 1930s at Chepauk, his commentary sparked a telegram by none other than Arthur Dixon, yet another cricket addict, reading thus: "Remove Denniston stop Replace by anybody." And on another occasion, at the opening ceremony of the sports shop of A.G. Ram Singh, the famous Madras all-rounder, he said, "Gentlemen, I have great pleasure in declaring open the sports firm of A.G. Ram Singh and Sons, Un-Ltd."

In 1944 when the B. Subramaniam Memorial Nets were declared open by the then Governor of Madras, Sir Arthur Hope, the Committee had decided that His Excellency was to receive the first ball off the bowling of Denny, who remarked that the whole proceeding would provide a great laugh and hoped in all sincerity that the batsman would be fit enough to play the ball after his brief sojourn at the MCC bar! He would always refer to the late Dr. P. Subbaroyan, the well-known cricket administrator, as the "synthetic doctor and the walking Wisden". It was a remark showing a fine sense of humour and deep appreciation of the man's real worth.

We, in the MCA, were desirous in 1945 of placing an order for a full size white cricket sight screen from Best's, but did not

(Continued on page 8)



Babblers preening.

White-headed Babbler.  
(Photographs: S. Jayasankar)

## Learn from Babblers

William Wordsworth, the champion Nature poet, advises: *Let Nature be your teacher, One impulse from a vernal wood May teach you more of man, Of moral evil and of good, Than all the sages can.*

Babblers are gregarious little birds found in our scrub-jungles and wooded gardens, living an exemplary communal life. I lived with these fascinating White-headed or Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*) for 40 years in the serene scrub-jungle campus of Madras Christian College in Tambaram. This species of babblers is endemic only to southern India and Sri Lanka. They are social birds that live and move in small flocks of 6-10 birds and, hence, they are called popularly in English the 'Seven Sisters', and in Hindi the *Saath Bhai*, the Seven Brothers.

Babblers are early risers and they go about as a team in the morning, on routine foraging trips, flying or gliding from tree to tree, within their territory. Only when they are assured of high security do they alight on the ground and hop about to rummage in the dried leaf-litter

for insects and worms and share a community meal. As they move round, they keep on chirping or squeaking constantly in a kind of a gossipy social communication or bonding within the team. One or two of the team keep a watch silently from a higher branch, taking turns as sentinels or patrols. On sighting a predator, such as a cat, mongoose, snake, dog or even a human on the ground, or an overhead raptor bird, they give a shrill alarm-call, to enable all the feeding birds to fly to the nearest perching site.

Babblers love to feed symbiotically in the company of the common Five-Striped Palm Squirrels which, when they trot along a white ant-infested branch, call babblers to wait right underneath on the ground to pick up any white ants that may drop from the tables of these squirrels on the tree. Strangely, babblers and squirrels have identical alarm-calls, so that either of them noticing an intruder first warns all the others.

Babblers are used to taking a relaxed siesta in the afternoons, when they preen (groom) each other, pick body-lice, or socialise or bond in their sisterhood.

Later in the afternoon, they enjoy community games, chasing each other on the ground around the base of a large tree-trunk, or engaging themselves in mock fights. Babblers can even feign death, when cornered by a predator. Finally, at the end of the day, the whole family may participate in a water-bath or mud-bath before going to an early bed.

At night, each flock roosts at a secure site, but keeps changing the site, like VIPs, for secrecy and security. While roosting, they squat crouched and huddled, side by side, one against the other, despite their sentinels keeping guard, in turns, from a higher branch on the same tree or bush.

Babblers have a uniquely altruistic communal or cooperative breeding practice, wherein two or three couples of the same team join to construct a common nest, pool together their eggs, all in one nest, incubate, feed the nestlings and also guard the nest, all in turns. The young fledglings are the common property of the sisterhood. They are taken round by the team on their foraging rounds and in field training.

## MEET DENNY

(Continued from page 7)

mention this to Sir Robart. The Assistant Manager in charge of 'sundries' regretted his inability to make a screen according to our specifications. When the matter was brought to the notice of Sir Robert, he remarked that nothing was impossible at Best's, a trading concern, and when the final article was made and delivered (it lasted us for a full seven seasons braving rain and sun), Sir Robert, with his engaging smile, said that there was nothing to pay! What great magnanimity! Since then, all our needs were met only by Best's for many years.

At the suggestion of Sir Robert, schoolboys were admitted free at Chepauk at 4 p.m. on the last day of every Ranji Trophy match. In a match in which Madras won, thanks to some lion-hearted bowling by Ram Singh, the boys made a mad rush to garland the hero and, in doing so, damaged quite a number of flower pots and the grass bed. A bill was promptly sent by the MCC to the MCA for Rs. 200/- and Denny, learning about this, sent a cheque for the amount to the MCC with his best compliments.

He organised a good deal of club cricket under the banner of the Eccentrics Cricket Club. It was a pleasure and honour to play for this club those days. Denny staged matches regularly with the Vellore Police, the Ganjam Gypsies and several Ceylon teams.

He took all which cricket in its bounty had to give, and being its natural intermediary, he handed the gift to the crowd. And how they loved him! With his briar pipe, he was a very popular figure. His sweet smile, his encouraging words and his various acts of kindness will remain happy memories for many. I once asked him if he would choose the same life if he had to do it again. Prompt came his reply: "Oh, yes, indeed. You see, the friendships I cultivated, the places I saw and the many happy memories of this great game, it was really wonderful and lovely."

Babblers are so altruistic that they may even consciously incubate the eggs of some parasitic birds like the Pied Crested Cuckoo and the Common Hawk Cuckoo, which lay their eggs stealthily in a babbler nest. Such alien eggs are also hatched, fledglings fed and taken round on their foraging rounds, along with the babbler fledglings, till the parasitic orphans voluntarily desert the foster parents.

Babblers may be shy and timid birds, but their orphaned fledglings can be reared, domestically, or they get so used to foster human parents as to beg for food and to follow them in and

out of the house. Even if the hand-reared fledglings join their biological parent flock ultimately, they would still continue to visit a foster parent's garden on routine foraging rounds, to have water- or mud-baths and even roost in the yard every night.

As Wordsworth rightly advises us:

*What else on social behaviour can even any sage preach or practise.*

*More profoundly than these lowly babblers in nature can?*

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