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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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A new reservoir after 76 years

On November 21, 2020, the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, inaugurated the fifth reservoir of the city, located at Thervoy Kandigai in Thiruvallur District. It will have a capacity of one thousand million cubic feet (1 tmcft) and is expected to go a long way in solving the water crises that the city faces in most years. It has taken us 381 years since the founding of the colonial city of Madras that is Chennai, for a fifth storage facility. What is even more significant is that this is the only such reservoir to be built since Independence! We are not certain if that is a record to be proud of.

The last time a reservoir was planned and executed for the city was in the 1940s. It was the brainchild of S. Satyamurti, who was Mayor of Madras in 1939/1940. The

Poondi Reservoir scheme was approved in August 1940 and the foundation stone laid on the 8th of that month. The construction was completed four years later, by when Satyamurti was dead. The storage facility was rather appropriately named Satyamurti Sagar in his memory. With a capacity of 2,573 mcf, it is of course smaller than the new one at Thervoy Kandigai but contrast the time

● by The Editor

taken – the latest addition was mooted in 2012, with actual work gaining momentum only in 2018. The cost incurred has been Rs 380 crores. The population of the city at the time work began at Poondi was 8 lakhs or so. It is now ten times

as much and yet it took us 76 years to build a new facility.

It is not as though nothing has been done in the interim. We have had the Telugu Ganga scheme, we have harnessed the Palar, requisitioned the Veeranam lake and also got the Chempampakkam waterbody to cater to our insatiable thirst. Desalination plants have come up and bear a significant part of our water demand, no matter what the environmental impact and energy costs be. In the interim many photo opportunities have been created by the plastic pots. And we have on occasion had railway wagons bringing us water. A Hollywood star was moved to comment on our situation, when after having suffered floods and a cyclone in two consecutive years, we ended

(Continued on page 2)

Cancer Institute fights the Covid challenge

● As a continuation of last issue's feature on how non-profit healthcare institutions are coping with the pandemic, *Madras Musings* reached out to distinguished oncologist Dr. V. Shanta, Chairman of the Cancer Institute (WIA), Adyar.

The Cancer Institute is perhaps one of the city's most notable medical charities. Dedicated to the cause of providing excellent, affordable care for cancer patients, the institute is equipped with more than 500 beds and a research division as well. Normally, the hospital allocates more than 50 per cent of its beds to the needy, who receive free board-

ing and lodging. In addition, 40 per cent of the patients are treated free of cost while the rest pay a nominal amount. When the pandemic emerged in March, the unprecedented public crisis posed new challenges to the hospital and patients alike.

● by Our Special Correspondent

"There was an increased need for psychosocial support," explains Dr. Shanta. "The patient had to not only bear the fear and panic caused by cancer, but also the pandemic." When the lockdown was enforced, the lack of public transport resulted in patients facing a

delay in treatment stretching to as much as three or four months. This posed an ethical dilemma to the institute – on one hand, they had to shield the patients and their families from the pandemic, but on the other, they had to take a call on how long it is possible to defer treatment. "Early common cancers are curable," said the doctor. "Advanced disease can be controlled and if untreated, will progress to the stage of palliation. Palliative care could not be denied." With patients unable to reach the hospital in the early days of the pandemic, the institute's income took a sharp dip as well – revenues that are crucial to the functioning of a charitable institution.

(Continued on page 2)

OLD AND NEW



Our OLD, taken in 1940, shows the then Mayor of Madras, S. Satyamurti, (1) with Sir Arthur and Lady Hope, at Poondi and (2) walking with Sir Arthur Hope at the Jones Tower, Red Hills. Both the photos, taken probably on August 8, 1940, when the Governor laid the foundation stone for the Poondi reservoir, are from the TV Rangaswami (Ragami) Collection, now with the Roja Muthiah Research Library. It is incredible that despite the huge growth in the city's population, it has taken 76 years for a new reservoir, declared open at Thervoy Kandigai. Our NEW, courtesy *The Hindu*, is a view of the same.



A NEW RESERVOIR

(Continued from page 1)

up being water starved the very next season. And all along we have extracted ground water with no let up.

All of this points to the sheer apathy of the leadership and the failure of the bureaucracy that should be planning for the future. The political class has always been happy to wait for Chennai's water problems (flood and drought) to reach flashpoint and then appear with some firefighting measures, milking the publicity in the process. The bureaucrats have been quite content with pushing paper. Imagine a metropolis reaching a point of going without water. In what way is it commendation worthy to celebrate the arrival of railway wagons of water or tankers careening on the roads

with water brought in from the mofussil? At the other end, it is also a failure of us the people. Even a simple scheme such as rainwater harvesting is met with opposition. It is a well-known fact that most large real estate developments give this the go by. That such a scheme is mandatory for approvals is got around by bribing, or worse, simply putting up a couple of so-called soak pits, with no follow through on the rest of the system. Ultimately, we get what we deserve.

The completion of Thervoy Kandigai is no cause for complacency. With it, Chennai still has storage for one full year only, while our droughts are known to extend beyond that. A few more reservoirs will not hurt and let us hope we don't need to wait another 76 years.

Cancer Institute & Covid

(Continued from page 1)

The situation has reportedly improved with the relaxation of lockdown norms and the availability of inter-state transport – between June and October, the institute has seen a steady pick-up in attendance in both the general and paying wards. But funding remains a challenge. The overall bed strength has gone down by 50 per cent in adherence to Covid guidelines affecting the income levels. Like other medical institutions, the reduction in income is accompanied by an increase in cost. "In general, treatment costs cover the cost of initial diagnosis, treatment type, radiation, chemotherapy, surgery or a combination of the above," said Dr. Shanta, pointing out that cancer treatment is expensive on its own. This is only set to increase further, with the pandemic necessitating the use of RT-PCR testing, protective garments such as PPEs as well as intensive hygiene and sanitation practices prescribed for Covid control. "These may also need additional staff," explained Dr. Shanta.

The Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS) is helpful in alleviating costs, though only to a certain extent – the scheme does not cover the full cost of cancer treatment. Further, the number of patients covered under other forms of medical insurance is also low. Public donations proved to be of great help to the institute in these times. "Support from the people and the families of survivors were of great help," shared Dr. Shanta. The hospital also received generous help from service-oriented individuals, companies and

organisations in procuring PPEs and implementing protective guidelines against the pandemic. "We cannot be adequately thankful to them," said the doctor.

The institute has also taken steps to implement touch-free sanitisation devices. These, under the name of Sukhadaram, were from the Confederation of Indian Industry, Young Indians Group and Greater Chennai Corporation. These were installed at the institute in April. The device allows the foot to operate the soap dispenser and the tap, as well. "Similarly, around 50 foot-operated hand sanitizer stands were kept in strategic places all around the campus for patients, attenders, visitors and staff to disinfect their hands," shared Dr. Shanta.

Speaking of the future, Dr. Shanta pointed out that the pandemic has imposed certain necessities that will change the institute's style of functioning, including treatment. The doctor feels that cancer management can never be as ideal as it was before the pandemic, unless the virus is completely controlled. "We cannot predict how it will impact long-term results," she said. "There will always be a need for compromise in treatment for some reason or the other." Dr. Shanta also feels that the underprivileged will bear the burden more heavily than other sections of society and hopes that major philanthropic organisations and industries continue to participate in cancer control. "The struggle against cancer continues and Cancer Institute (WIA) will continue in its mission," she concluded.

Prescription Friction

The Woman from Madras Musings has many pet peeves. Getting honked at while waiting at a red signal, for instance. (Wo)MMM will never understand what purpose this could possibly serve unless, of course, one is an ambulance, which is seldom the case. Lately, since the pandemic began, (Wo)MMM has had to suffer one of her biggest pet peeves – health myths.

There are some who believe that they are on par with doctors when it comes to identifying and treating garden variety illnesses, based on their years of experience taking all sorts of medicines, *kashayams* and powders for an assortment of ailments. This qualification, (Wo)MMM feels, ought to dissuade them from offering advice to others, but instead it seems to instil in them a mysterious, unshakeable self-confidence. And so, there is much advice from dubious quarters on identifying, preventing and treating the coronavirus, with the result that those less cynical than (Wo)MMM are falling prey to all sorts of strange counsels. Rinse your nose, some say. Stand in the sun, say others. Rinse your nose while

in moderation. But it gets her goat when medicines and supplements enter the picture. Apparently, some feel it is smart to take unprescribed 'preventive' medication against covid. (Wo)MMM feels this makes about as much sense as keeping one's house perpetually wet to prevent a fire. (Wo)MMM recently read an article about a doctor who was left flabbergasted at a patient who had contracted Vitamin D toxicity out of the blue, until it came to light that said patient had been taking the vitamin supplement once a day in the belief that it would prevent covid. According to the article, the recommended dose for the patient was reportedly once a week. It's not just Vitamin D either – according to news reports, pharmacies are seeing increased sales of prescription drugs and even oxygen cylinders. That these get sold without a legitimate prescription is, of course, another problem altogether.

(Wo)MMM can only imagine how hard this situation must be for trained medical professionals. They study hard to bag a college seat amidst intense competition, train for

family installed two bins, one for wet waste and one for dry. But, as (Wo)MMM soon discovered, one must never take things for granted. Some used the red bin for wet waste and the blue bin for dry, while the rest did exactly the opposite. So instead of segregated garbage, the family ended up with divided garbage. (Wo)MMM pounced upon the issue at tea-time, clarifying the matter while luring the family together with *chai* and biscuits. With the message successfully delivered, everyone switched the bins they were using, bringing us all back to square one. Happily, we got it right the next round onwards, thanks to the mater-by-law of the glittering eye – third time's the charm, as they say.

Then there was the process of collection to get used to. As (Wo)MMM understands it, the new vendors collect trash once a day, whistling as they make a pit-stop at each house. The first couple of days, the trash went uncollected. An inquiry with the maid brought forth an indignant complaint – "He comes every morning, stops outside our house and then whistles softly on pur-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

standing in the sun, say the efficient ones. Alternatively, if one were to believe a certain video that (Wo)MMM stumbled upon, steaming is the best way to prevent and cure the coronavirus. There's nothing wrong with steaming, of course, (Wo)MMM finds it quite soothing when she's down with the common cold. However, some have taken to wielding it like a weapon against the coronavirus, aggressively steaming themselves in a manner that reminds (Wo)MMM of the mater preparing vegetable *kootu* for lunch. Similarly, the breathing exercise of *kapal-abhati* is widely touted as an effective preventive measure for covid. There's also a forward which keeps popping up on What's App groups that (Wo)MMM finds particularly aggravating. It is a sort of game that invites people to hold their breath for a certain amount of time, assuring them that if they can achieve this feat, they certainly have not contracted the coronavirus. In (Wo)MMM's opinion, this game was probably designed for the lungs of a blue whale, not a human being. It does nothing but induce panic in people who cannot hold their breath for the monstrous duration the game demands.

(Wo)MMM supposes there's no harm per se in doing most of these things – one feels that a few of these practices are rather healthy

years in general and specialised medical fields and then finally open their practice, with a stethoscope ready at hand waiting to see patients – and then people decide to follow 'free' health advice from friends and family who gather random content from unverifiable social media posts instead of consulting their family doctor.

(Wo)MMM cannot wait for a coronavirus vaccine to hit the market – not only will it help get rid of the virus, but it will also hopefully put an end to the annoying quackery doing the rounds. Until then, however, let's leave the medical advice to the experts, shall we?

Bin Win

A new vendor has taken over the waste collection in a few areas in the city. (Wo)MMM sees their small, white vehicles putt-putting around on a regular basis. They look quite compact compared to the giant garbage trucks that seemed to diligently plan their route so that (Wo)MMM got stuck behind them on her way to wherever she went. (Wo)MMM understands that the new vendor is doing their best to educate citizens on the need to segregate their household garbage. They were certainly successful in (Wo)MMM's own household, where garbage segregation recently graduated from idle talk to real action.

At first, it seemed easy enough to implement. The

pose so that I don't hear!" she burst out. This extraordinary claim was followed up with the collection team who resolved the matter quite easily, striking a friendship with the maid in the process.

New disciplines take a little time getting used to – it usually takes a few unforeseen hiccups before one settles down in a new routine. But one supposes that it is worth making the effort to cultivate a good habit. (Wo)MMM wishes the new vendor all the best in instilling good garbage discipline in our city.

Trending

It used to be that milestones meant something – an occasion to remember or commemorate a landmark event, usually after a decade or more. (Wo)MMM finds herself puzzled by the latest social media trend to celebrate the one, two or three-year anniversaries of events, usually contemporary movies or songs. These posts feature a variety of clips and stills, usually accompanied by nostalgic comments hearkening back to the 'good old days' of a whole year or two ago. Even worse are the 6-month 'anniversary' trends – since when were anniversaries reduced to mere months? (Wo)MMM is left wondering if she is growing deeply cynical as she grows older. She hopes not.

–(Wo)MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Jesse Owens' Visit

Jesse Owens had also visited Madras Christian College School, Chetpet during his stay at Madras. The renowned educationist K.Kurivila Jacob happened to be the Headmaster then. The school magazine for 1955-56 contains photographs of this great athlete. I was a student then. I am in possession of this magazine.

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Remembering Muthiah

I am writing to you from Paris to thank you for the pleasure that reading *Madras Musings* gives me.

Madras has always been a special place to me. Between 1974 and 1978, I visited Madras many times and lived in the city for several months. I remember the magazine *Aside*. I read *Madras Discovered*. I was, then, active in the travel industry after having taught history and worked as a journalist.

In 1980, I authored the first travel guide of South India in

French. My "affair" with India is now 47 years old. I met Mr. Muthiah in Madras in 2003. His sister, Mrs. Meenakshi Meyappan was known to me. I went to his house and he gave me several printed copies of *Madras Musings*. I was sorry to find out that he died last year. I loved his writing. I have several of his books in my library: *Madras Discovered*, *At Home in Madras*, *The Spencer Legend*, his book on the Connemara hotel... I guess I am a Muthiah fan. I certainly shared with him a curiosity for the past, a certain nostalgia, a passion for places which have a history.

A year ago, I found your presence on the internet, and I must tell you that it made me extremely happy to see that you are continuing Muthiah's work. I now receive your excellent newsletter.

I still visit Madras regularly.

My last visit to the city was in February 2019. I hope to be back as soon as the sanitary situation allows it... and, maybe, meet you then.

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Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks.
- The Editor

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Architecture and Art



Chandar Seetharaman is a practicing Architect from Alwarpet, Chennai. For the past 36 years, he runs the organisation CS Designs Pvt Ltd. His wife Vidya Chandar is also an Architect.

The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) is the national body of architects with more than 25,000 active members. It plays a major role in promoting the profession of architects by organising and uniting the Indian practitioners in this field and aims to enhance the aesthetic, scientific and practical efficiency of the profession both in practice and education.

This year the IIA NATCON 2020: Transcend was held online on July 11th and 12th. A sketching contest was held calling all members to submit their sketches themed - "Pride of your hometown". Chandar submitted this pencil sketch - "Umbrella Repairman in Mylapore". He was declared the winner under the category - pencil sketch. At our request he sent us the sketch and also two others featuring the Mylapore temple.

Chandar can be contacted at chandar.seetharaman@gmail.com

- The Editor

Curtain-raiser to the Music Season

A collector looks back

I was born in 1939 in Madras to Rajah R.J.K. Ranga Rao, popularly known as the Zamindar of Chikkavaram...

It was a sizzling summer. I have been told. Consequently perhaps. I am still sizzling, now taken up by song-and-dance, now captivated by literature.

Afterwards she would gather us children and recite simple poetry, mostly on Krishna. All would disappear after a few minutes, but not me.



Ranga Rao (standing centre) with his parents and siblings Sridevi, Guruprasad and Mohini.

film songs in Telugu, Hindi and Tamil, in that order. At that age, without any schooling, I had an ear for classical music too but these were limited to songs used for classical dance, mostly in Telugu, but one or two in Tamil and Kannada.

My exposure to classical dance happened when I was four. Bobbili, then in Vizag District and now in Vizianagaram, had a temple to the deity of the royals. Venugopala. A dancer of that temple, Gaddibhuktha Seetharam, was also the court dancer of the Bobbili Estate, whose ruler was my father's elder brother, R.S.R.K. Ranga Rao, the Rajah of Bobbili, at one time the Premier of Madras Presidency.

Due to this connection, Seetharam finishing her duties at the temple, would come every morning to the ladies' quarters of the palace where male children also would be housed till their teen years.

Afterwards she would gather us children and recite simple poetry, mostly on Krishna. All would disappear after a few minutes, but not me. The previous night, I'd have seen her dance in the deity's procession around the palace and ask her about them. Thrilled that a five-year old noticed them well enough to

question her (that was the start of the critic in me), she would explain to the best of her ability. My other exposure to dance was through film, and on stage, when we were in Madras for three summer months.

For some reason, it was the Hindi film that held me with its songs and dances.

Helen, the eternal naiad, the only item girl all of whose dances you could enjoy with your maiden aunt. Not an inch of exposure (She wore body-stockings) nor a single movement aimed below the belt. Apart from socials and fantasies, she danced in mythologicals too.

I am asked frequently when I started my collection (of 42,000 78 rpm records, from 1904 to 1973 when they were discontinued, in 40 national and international languages). I ask them in

by V.A.K. Ranga Rao. The author is a renowned dance critic, film historian and collector of gramophone records.

turn: When did you start learning your mother-tongue?

In the late 1940s I was given Rs. 10 as my weekly pocket money and with it I would purchase two records without fail. I had no idea then that this seed would grow into a banyan tree.

In the early 1970s the manufacture of 78 rpm records was stopped. I bought LPs, EPs, SPs and, a little later, Super-7s but I continued to acquire 78s from second-hand shops. Only those I liked. Then a thought struck me. There were people collecting stamps and rare books apart from match labels and cigarette packs.

My collection is well-arranged. To start with, classical music.... Western, Hindustani and Carnatic; first the instruments, then the vocalists, in alphabetical order. Non-film records alphabetical again, by the language and the artist.

In 1980, my parents decided to go on a pilgrimage to certain places in the north. A whole railway saloon was booked. We had a dhobi, two cooks come

along. And I had two dealwood boxes made to snugly accommodate 78s. My two school-going nephews, Krishna Kumar and Mahesh Kumar, were with us. They helped me in buying and lugging the records back to our compartment. This happened in Calcutta, Benarass, Allahabad, Lucknow and Amritsar but not in Delhi where the prices were high. Our targets were old record dealers and second-hand markets.

One dealer in Allahabad said that all the unsold 78s were stored in the godown and sent us there with two helpers. After swimming through the dust, we found a stack of records, and picked up thirty or forty. As we spent nearly three hours and returned awash with dust, I thought the proprietor would demand a hefty sum. I hesitantly asked him how much. He simply said "Take them!" At that moment I wished him half the 'punya' I gathered in the pilgrimage.

Once before going to Bangalore, I took out advertisements in English, Kannada, Telugu and Urdu dailies, stating that I wanted to buy old 78s, giving my hotel telephone numbers (no cell-phones, 1985). My nephews (the same duo) were studying Engineering there. On their two-wheelers, I would visit the callers' homes, taking along the file containing the particulars of records I already had. I would acquire whatever I did not have. A few would insist that the whole lot should be taken. Some would ask for a high price. I would bargain and bring it down to Rs. 10, which I could afford.

I wrote columns about gramophone records in Telugu, English and supervised translations in Tamil and Kannada. In Screen weekly from Bombay, I wrote a fortnightly column, The Sounds of Music. In the beginning, the space allotted to it was less than half a page. Within a few months, I was given almost a full page. It covered music in almost all Indian languages, old and new.

It helped me and others discover the fact that there were record-collectors all over the country. Most collected records of one language; some specialised in one genre. Others limited their acquisitions to those of a particular singer or music-director.

One happy result was that associations were established to save old-time records, discuss their content, felicitates the veteran artists. One in Bombay and another in Bangalore flourished with monthly and annual meetings.



The royal look - on turning a major.

gories. And the major section, film records, by the language and title of the film.

Speeches by Gandhiji, Nehru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Subhash Chandra Bose, Lord Baden-Powell (founder of the Scout Movement), Benito Mussolini (in Italian). Discs of Bose's INA, songs led by Capt. Laxmi. Recitations of her own poetry by my goddess of verse, Sarojini Devi.

Rare languages? Asian: Nepali, Konkani, Sinhala, Burmese, Badaga, Goan, Chattisgarhi, Christian lyrics and sermons in a dozen tribal languages (Gar etc.) Foreign: English, Italian, Neapolitan, Latin, French, many kinds of Russian and Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, etc.

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The 'new normal' Kutchcheris of Margazhi 2020

In 1965, a ten-year old boy, R. Radhakrishnan, attended Chitti Babu's Veena concert at Sri Rama Samajam in T. Nagar. He was awed by the 'Kuyil' sound that emanated from the veena when Chitti Babu played a Bharathiyar Song. He trotted back home with fascination, and a new thirst for Carnatic music.

R. Jayanthi, a nine-year old girl in 1968 had gone to T.N. Seshagopalan's concert at Tyagaraja Vidwath Samajam in Mylapore. She recalls how she was mesmerised by his gripping voice that day. Only if Jayanthi and Radhakrishnan realised then that they would get married, settle in the US and plan their visits to India to not miss their favourite artistes performing in the Sabhas of Madras.

Margazhi kutchcheris are predominantly donning a virtual garb this year. "I am really happy that organisers have taken that extra step to not miss the Margazhi tradition of kutchcheris, and are providing virtual concerts as a substitute for audiences across the world", says Sudha Raghunathan, the Carnatic star.

The Federation of City Sabhas (FCS) is organising a series of more than 70 virtual concerts from December 15, 2020 to January 15, 2021 via Vimeo, for members. Others can watch it via Kalakendra YouTube channel. "The general public may have to pay around Rs. 3,000 for the entire season to watch the kutchcheris," reveals Harishankar Krishnaswami, the secretary of the FCS which comprises

Brahma Gana Sabha, Ham-sadhvani, Karthik Fine Arts, Narada Gana Sabha, Rasika Ranjani Sabha, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha and Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha. "We planned to do a stage concert in the beginning of 2020 but had to cancel it due to the pandemic. So, we are going virtual this year," confirms Mahesh Venkateswaran, the founder of MadRasana. They have chalked out a six-day programme from December 18 to December 23, 2020. The virtual concerts were recorded in outdoor settings - in Rina's Avenue, ECR and in Kalakshetra. "We want to capture nature, with the birds chirping and the leaves rustling. One of the concerts was even shot in the rain", says Mahesh. Each day, there would be one artiste performing from 6.30 to 9 pm. The season pass is for Rs. 2,600, while the ticket for each concert is Rs. 500.



Above: Abhishek Raghuram and below: Ramakrishnan Murthy.



logging in from overseas, with a season ticket being USD 120. Those who buy a season ticket therefore get 15 concerts for the price of 12. The concerts will be free for viewing by the members of the Music Academy, all of whom will receive a link via email.

Though most of the Sabhas of Madras are going virtual this Margazhi, Bharatiya Vidy Bhavan has resorted to the good old live concerts. "For decades, we have been having live concerts and we didn't want to change

by Padmaja Jayaraman

that. The government has given permission to hold live kutchcheris too", says K.N. Ramaswamy, BVB's director. The concerts will take place at the open-air premises in Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram School, Kilpauk from November 28 to December 19 2020. There would be temperature-checking, hand-sanitisation, and distanced-seating arrangements in the premises. They would even provide masks if the audience are not wearing proper ones. Since the concerts are free, entry will be on a first-come-first-serve basis, with a limit of 200 people in the premises. Drive-in car facilities will also be available, a maximum of fifty cars being allowed.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed kutchery kitchens run by stalwarts like Chellappa, Pattappa, Mount Mani and Arusuvai Natarajan. That was also one of the reasons for attending the concert in person", reminisces Radhakrishnan. Even though the concerts are going mostly virtual, the organisers are planning to revamp the kutchery food

services online. "The caterers will set up multiple stalls all over the city and supply food during the concert duration with the help of apps like Swiggy and Dunzo", says Harishankar. BVB will be giving food packets to the audience consisting of different items at the end of each concert.

Radhakrishnan's uncle, 82-year-old R. Vanchinathan goes crazy over Carnatic music concerts. But he is not tech savvy enough to operate a gadget and watch a virtual kutchery. To help senior Rasika-s like him to watch

come to the back-stage and give me feedback; some even comment that my saree looks good." But it was not a bed full of thorns for the performers, there were some 'roses' too. "One good thing is you could schedule and reschedule [virtual concerts]. For live concerts, the schedule is usually made one year prior. In this virtual world, it is a lot more flexible. So we can easily change the date. Suppose we say that the co-artists are not available on Monday, then the organisers would ask us to come on Tuesday,



Sudha Raghunathan. All pictures courtesy: MadRasana.

the virtual concerts, MadRasana has partnered with an elderly-care service centre, Prayojana, which will offer technical support via phone or in person.

It has been a different experience for performers too. Most of their concerts were recorded prior to the Season, which will be aired on the scheduled dates. Sudha Raghunathan shares her 'major missings': "It was like celebrating Diwali without crackers. The interaction between the audience and us was missing. The energy we create for the rasika-s is given back by them in the form of applause or standing ovations. Some rasika-s

which won't be possible in the case of live concerts," remarks singer Sandeep Narayan.

The duration of virtual kutchcheris is going to be shrunk to two hours, in contrast to the three-hour live kutchcheris. According to Harishankar, although the virtual kutchcheris would be of the same format as the live ones, the number of items would be lesser in a vocal concert. "In a Harikatha, it consists of a story, with little music intermittently used. It doesn't matter if the concert is for three hours or two hours. I have to speak on the

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Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's first 10 questions are on current affairs and next on natural wonders and phenomena.

1. Who are the partners of Oxford and Pfizer involved in developing a COVID-19 vaccine?
2. Apart from Virat Kohli, which Indian has been nominated for the coveted ICC Men's Player of the Decade Award?
3. The largest trade agreement was recently agreed upon by the member states of ASEAN and its free trade agreement (FTA) partners (excluding India). What is it called?
4. Name the Dadasaheb Phalke award-winning thespian, who acted in 14 Satyajit Ray films and passed away recently.
5. According to Bloomberg Billionaires Index, who has become the world's second-richest person, overtaking Bill Gates, and now just behind Jeff Bezos?
6. What number should subscribers prefix for making calls from landlines to mobile phones within the country with the DoT asking telcos to make the arrangements by January 1 to implement the new system?
7. To which city did the new Air India One-B777 aircraft carrying President Ram Nath Kovind make its first flight on November 24?
8. Name the Harry Potter star who by posting a picture with her/his daughter on Instagram broke Sir David Attenborough's record for being the person to accrue a million followers in the shortest time.
9. Whose record did Lewis Hamilton equal by winning his seventh Formula One World title?
10. Fast-food giant McDonald's has said it would sell a line of plant-based meat alternatives in 2021. What will it be called?
* * *
11. Which country suggested the name Nivar for the cyclone that hit us recently?
12. Which natural feature has the lowest elevation and is the lowest body of water on the surface of the Earth?
13. The Mercalli and Moment Magnitude are two of the three commonly used scales to measure what phenomena? What is the most famous one?
14. Which is the highest mountain outside of Asia (at 189th) measuring 6,961m?
15. Volutus, Asperitas, Fluctus are all types of which natural formation?
16. In the context of volcanoes, what is the basic difference between a crater and a caldera?
17. The deepest known point in the Earth's seabed hydrosphere (the oceans), with a depth of 10,902 to 10,929m, is named after a sea-going vessel. What is it called?
18. The five great North American lakes can be remembered with the mnemonic HOMES. Name them.
19. What is unusual about the names Dal lake, Sahara desert and Mississippi river?
20. Which beautiful, sweeping phenomena are a result of magnetic storms caused by solar winds?

(Answers on page 8)

• THE BHARATI DEBATE

Understanding Bharati – differing perceptions

There were two ideological groups in Tamil writing during the 1930s, vertically divided in their perceptions of Literature, Culture and Fine Arts. Though they had mutual friendship, they were quite bitter in expressing their concerns in writing. The avant garde *Manikkodi* group was interested in modern writing in simple readable Tamil while the *Ananda Vikatan* group was more into popular and escapist forms of writing. Kalki was dominating the latter group as his storytelling capacity and usage of Tamil language was very well received by the common Tamil reader. At that point of time he was emerging as the most popular writer and was also responsible for increasing the reader base of *Ananda Vikatan* manyfold. The *Swadesamitran*, a popular and liberal daily then provided a common platform for the groups to publicly discuss the issues especially when their differences peaked. *Manikkodi* swore by Subramania Bharati while Kalki Krishnamurthy held his own opinions about the poet.

Unfortunately, Bharati suffered from penury throughout his life, though he always was very large at heart. His most productive years, at Pondicherry, were also spent under testing conditions. Later when he returned to the then Madras, he continued in the same state but unlike Thomas Gray's writing "Chill penury repressed their noble rage and froze the genial current of their soul" the unquenched fire in Bharati was always alive and lit many others' imagination as well. When he passed away on September 11, 1921, S. Satyamurti wrote, "Had he been born in England he would have been the poet laureate and been adored by his race. Had he been born in any other free country, he would have risen to such heights of eminence that he would have lived longer and enriched his language and race more than he was able to do here. Had he been born even in Bengal, he would have been a Rabin-dranath Tagore. Those who know his poems will know I am indulging in no exaggeration. But born in India and in Tamil India, Subramania Bharati had to spend the best part of an all too short life in exile from those who were near and dear to him. No wonder that he pined and

suffered and has gone to a premature grave. So long, however, as the Tamil language lives, and there is a spark of patriotism in Tamil India, Subramania Bharati's songs will live."

Very few attended Bharati's funeral that was financially (a mere Rs. 50/-) supported by the trusted family friend, Duraiswamy Iyer. At the brief funeral function, Chakkarai Chettiar, Krishnswamy Sharma and Ramachandra Aiyar paid tributes in Tamil while Surendranath Arya spoke in Telugu. The pyre was lit by Harihara Sharma, a distant relative, and as the mortal remains were consumed, the fire he lit in the minds of the people continued to glow.

It was the *Manikkodi* group that had been propagating Bharati and his writings and

Quoting Va. Raa's views P. Sri. Acharya, a respected writer, writing under the name of Nelli Nesan, disputed them in *Dinamani Bharati Malar* 1935, and declared that Bharati was a good but not great poet. N. Pichamurthi and Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan contesting this statement wrote in *Dinamani* asking as to what was the yardstick to say someone was a great poet.

On November 3, 1935, in its Letters to the Editor column, *Ananda Vikatan* edited by Kalki Krishnamurthy, carried a letter supposedly written by "Student of Literature" (later it was revealed that it was Kalki himself!) in which a question was raised as to whether what was said by someone in Karikudi (the name of Va. Raa was omitted) was correct, as the correspondent felt it was



questioning if he had read at all any poetry of English authors.

As a reply to Kalki's note, Va. Raa followed up with a detailed essay titled Bharati and literary review in the *Swadesamithran* on 30-11-1935 explaining why he had said so, mentioning in the passing Leo Tolstoy in a different context. Kalki replied in the same journal in an article titled Bharati and literary criticism on 7-12-1935, not only opposing Va. Raa's views but also adding that if Tolstoy had been shown the poem Vallippattu of Bharati, he would have suggested that all works of Bharati should be burnt. Kalki thought Bharati's Vallippattu was highly erotic. He added that Va. Raa himself had appreciated Prometheus Unbound by P.B. Shelly. Va. Raa in his rejoinder said, if at all Bharati's books had to be burnt let the fire from heaven do it (suggesting from the contents of Shelly's poem in which fire is brought from heaven) and not because of him!

In the meanwhile Va. Raa wrote from Colombo to Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan (original available in 4 pages) lamenting that no one seems to have objected to Kalki's statement that Bharati was a good but not great poet. It was then that Chitti and Ku. Pa. Ra, wrote long articles questioning Kalki's statement and the contents were later published under the title *Kannan en kavi* by Sangu Ganesan in 1937. In spite of differences of opinion, Kalki, Va. Raa and Chitti respected each other well and when Va. Ra passed away on August 23, 1951, Kalki was present at the cremation and paid rich tributes to Va. Raa.

Kalki in the 1940s became a great admirer of Bharati and

• K.R.A. Narasiah

nearly a decade and half later in 1935, a public debate about him took place where the dramatic personae were, Va. Raa, Kalki R. Krishnamurthy, Chitti Sundararajan and Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan.

Va. Ramaswami Aiyangar, (Va. Raa), was a close associate and a great admirer of Bharati and was with him in the then Pondicherry and was the poet's first biographer. When Va. Raa, wrote his novel *Sundari* in simple Tamil, it became a path-breaker since he highlighted the ordeals of a Hindu widow. It also revealed the idealist and social reformer in him. After editing *Swatantram*, a weekly from Tanjore, he joined Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu to run the Tamil journal *Thamizh Nadu*. After being with *Manikkodi* for a while, he joined *Veera Kesari*, a daily from Colombo, in October 1934 as desired by V. O. Chidambaram Pillai. A literary tremor was caused when in an article titled Three days with Va. Raa, N. Ramarathnam, in the *Manikkodi*, (August, 1934), reported what Va. Raa seems to have stated during one of his speeches: "I have read the great poets of English, Shelly and Shakespeare, and India's Nobel Laureate Tagore, but I can say that all the writings of them put together will not equal a line of what Bharati had written."

The editor (again Kalki himself) responded to the letter in the same issue and column thus: "The name of the person was also given. I have omitted the name purposely, as I think he could not have said so." Continuing, he wrote "If someone had said so, it should be understood that this person does not have any idea about either literature or poetry. It is possible to conclude that he is an illiterate (Nirakshara kukshi). It is doubtful if he has read Shelly, Tagore and Shakespeare and if he has, probably he has not understood them. It is also doubtful, if he has understood even Bharati properly."

Va. Raa was known for his depth of knowledge in poetry both in English and Tamil (he had picked up Bengali also while in Pondicherry). When in 1930 he served a prison term, he wrote a 20-page article between October 6 and 11, titled *What is Poetry?* mentioning his name with a suffix – V. Ramaswami Ayyangar – convict number 1557, and dedicated it to the friendly and helpful Jail Superintendent David Abernathy Greenwood, who helped Va. Raa with all the books that he needed. This was a fact that was known to all and especially to Kalki. So, it was rather painful for Va Raa to see Kalki calling him an illiterate and

(Continued on page 7)

S. Ramakrishnan – modern Tamil publisher

“A well-educated Tamil household,” S. Ramakrishnan said, “will happily spend fifty rupees on an English paperback but will not think of buying a Tamil book. As they are the ones with the money, this severely limits our markets. Then we face competition from other Tamil publishers – particularly from what are known as monthly novels. They are printed on the cheapest possible paper and sell for only two rupees. It is difficult to wean people away from them, and from the same sort of romantic and sensational stories brought out in serial form in Tamil magazines.”

Ramakrishnan, the founder of the courageous publishing house, Cre-A, died on Nov 17, 2020 at the age of 75, another victim to the Covid-19 pandemic. In a conversation with BBC’s Mark Tully, which the veteran journalist records in the bestseller *No Full Stops in India*, Ramakrishnan had spoken of the challenges he had faced when he ventured into the world of Tamil publishing in the early 1970s.

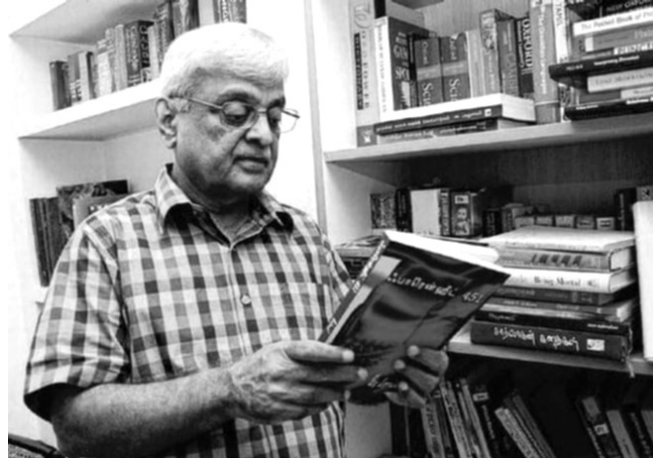
Ramakrishnan was a highly paid executive at an ad agency before he forayed into Tamil publishing. A member of the English-speaking elite of Tamil Nadu, he was determined to give Tamil readers well-produced, high quality books in terms of both form and content. “We wanted to do in Tamil what has not been done before. We have to extend the language so

people can express themselves,” he told Tully.

A health-care manual translated into Tamil would sell but of its practical utility, but what about books on film or art criticism? How do you bring impractical, but enriching, thoughts and words into people’s consciousness, so it becomes part of their everyday reality? Experts say birding is a gateway to greater environmental awareness, but there was no field guide to birds in Tamil. Such things mattered to Ramakrishnan, whose decision to enter the publishing world was an ideological, not a commercial one.

● by
**Vijaysree
Venkatraman**

Quite literally, he brought modern words into the Tamil lexicon. He will be best remembered as the author of Cre-A’s contemporary Tamil dictionary. Bilingual journalist Kavitha Muralidharan, who often comes up with exquisite pen portraits of luminaries from the Tamil literature, reported in the online magazine *Scroll* that even as Ramakrishnan battled COVID-19 in a government hospital, he was concerned about releasing the third edition of the dictionary, as per schedule, on November



Cre-A Ramakrishnan. Courtesy: The Hindu.

13. He managed to keep that commitment.

Ramakrishnan who encouraged translators of world classics and contemporary literature to do their best work, also nurtured local writers. Many Tamil writers who were used to benign neglect, were shocked at first when he pored over the manuscript and suggested revisions. Soon, they realized that he just wanted their work to shine, be the best it could be. Ramakrishnan would work on the layout with his small team, and send the work of literature, into the world, with tastefully chosen artwork cover art.

Two years ago, when I first met Ramakrishnan at his office in Tirunvanmiyur, I had with me a glossy version of Dilip Kumar’s *Ramavum Umavum*. Gently, he prised the paperback out of my hands and gave me the Cre-A edition with surreal art on the cover. Ramakrishnan was ex-

tremely proud of his protégé’s success. Earlier this year, Dilip’s short story from the same book, *The Clerk’s Story*, was made into a feature film, *Nasir*, and it won a prestigious international award. Ramakrishnan sent me the link to the online screening.

Before Dilip Kumar became a renowned writer, he worked in the Cre-A office-cum-showroom. It was located in Royapettah, above a paint shop, and not too far from Pilot theatre. Renowned authors used to drop in, as did people from the world of theater, art, and academia. The atmosphere was very vibrant, Dilip recalls. There would be a collective pondering and exploration of things that help enrich, and sustain, a person’s inner life. The topic could be anything – poetry, painting, philosophy, music, education – depending on the visiting person’s field of interest.

Ramakrishnan knew well

people may not always read the books they buy from cover to cover. Still, the impact of good books is subtle and subliminal, and it was very important to have them within reach, and to be open to their influence, he had said some years ago in an interview with a Tamil radio station in Australia. He also encouraged readers who were ready to get started. When I claimed I was a language orphan – because I had not studied my mother tongue in school – Ramakrishnan pulled out a book from the shelf and asked me to read out a few lines. He gave me a collection of short stories by Imayam, so I could practice my Tamil reading. Someday, I hope to read the author-publisher Ramakrishnan’s short stories as well.

Tributes to Ramakrishnan will continue to pour in, but I think it will be hard to beat this one, again from the *Scroll* article by Muralidharan. It was from Israeli scholar David Shulman, writer of the comprehensive work, *Tamil, A Biography*. “Every language, and especially an ancient and noble language like Tamil, needs some extraordinary persons to care for it, heal its wounds, and reveal its richness. Ramakrishnan was such a person.”

Shulman goes on to add: “For half a century he was the living heart of modern Tamil. He discovered and published the finest writers, meticulously edited their works, published major works of Tamil scholarship, translated foreign classics into Tamil, and also produced the finest dictionary available for any modern South Asian language. He was a man of impeccable taste, one of the rarest of human virtues. He was a great and loving friend. All those who love Tamil will mourn this terrible loss.”

THE BHARATI DEBATE

(Continued from page 6)

took the initiative of building the Manimandapam at Ettayapuram in October 1947 and asked Rajaji, then Governor of West Bengal, to declare it open. Again, it was Chitti, as a member of the AIR team, as desired by G.T. Sastri then the AIR Trichy Station Director, who covered the function from Ettayapuram. Chitti did not want to attend as there was no love lost between him and Kalki. Besides Chitti was also hurt as not only Va. Raa but also the living family members of Bharati were not even invited for the function. But as an official he had to go along with Sastri. Knowing that Chitti would not like to be a guest of

Kalki group, Sastri arranged for Chitti’s accommodation in Kovilpatti.

Chitti travelled to the spot of the function where the AIR engineers were recording M.S. Subbulakshmi followed by Dandapanai Desigar in a sound proof room.

It was a little late at night and the Mandapam opening function was the next morning. Since a sizable crowd was present and as it started raining Kalki was worried. He asked a police officer who was already tired and worried if he could ask the public to disperse. This question irritated the officer who shot back, “What do you want me to do? You only wrote in all papers for the people to at-

tend and now you are asking me to do a difficult job. Later you are the people who would write saying that the police acted mercilessly...” At his wits end, Kalki came into the adjacent recording room with the senior police officer in tow and asked Chitti if he could reason with the man. Chitti saw the uncomfortable position Kalki was in and took command of the situation and calmed the official down. Chitti later said “I was feeling sorry for Kalki as it happened in front of someone who was not on great terms with him.”

People of those days were definitely made of better material and had their own beliefs and stood by them come what may!

A COLLECTOR LOOKS BACK

(Continued from page 4)

In those days Sur Singar Sansad of Bombay was giving two awards annually to film music. One to the song that the unbiased committee considered the most classical, and the second to the film which contained most classically oriented songs. One year, impressed by the score created by Vijayabhaskar in *Malayamarutha* (1986, Kannada), I sent a cassette of it to the Sansad. When it won the award that year in the second category. I celebrated it by going up the local St. Thomas Mount and offering prayers. I was and remain a Hindu, but all my three schools were Christian, institutions – Good Shepherd in Madras, Bishop Cottons in

Bangalore and Madras Christian College School, Madras. Somehow I associate thanksgiving with Christianity!

What else with my records now? Waiting for an individual/institution to acquire this wealth, along with nearly a thousand books (English, Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi, Kannada, Bengali, Asamese and Gujarati) on showbiz people, and do one thing I could not do; make it accessible to listeners and researchers.

This collection of 42,000 is the largest collection in the world of 78 rpm records, even if the local media refuse to acknowledge it.

(Excerpted from an article in *Sruti*)

86 years ago at Chepauk...

It was a match watched among others by three young cricket fans who went on to become well known writers on the game. This was November 4, 1934 and nearly four decades later as a rookie sports journalist I sat with rapt attention listening to them as they at separate times related the events of that remarkable game. The match in question was the first-ever Ranji Trophy game between Madras and Mysore at Chepauk and the three spectators were P.N. Sundaresan, N.S. Ramaswami and K.N. Prabhu.

Besides being historic it is also remarkable in that it was over in a day. That was the start of the Ranji Trophy which over the years became the premier national competition. It is important to remember that at the time the Quadrangular tournament in which the participants were the Europeans, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Parsees was the premier domestic competition in what was then undivided India.

Despite its immense popularity it was felt that a tournament involving the various provinces in the land was also needed and thus was born the Ranji Trophy. Within a decade the Ranji Trophy became the prestigious domestic tournament with the abolition of the Pentangular (which the Quadrangular had become in 1937 with the participation of another team – The Rest) in 1945 with Mahatma Gandhi agitating against it because of its communal character.

Anthony de Mello then the secretary of the BCCI and one of its founding members recalls in his memoirs: "It was with trepidation that I submitted my proposal of the Ranji trophy for the national championship of India to the august gathering and also laid before the meeting in Simla an artists' drawing of the proposed trophy a Grecian urn two feet high with a lid the handle of which represented Father Time. Even I was not prepared for what followed. The Maharajah of Patiala jumped up when I was scarcely halfway through my brief proposal. The pine scented air appeared immediately electrified. In deep tones charged with emotion His Highness claimed the honour and privilege of perpetuating the name of the great Ranji who had passed away only the year before. He offered to present a gold cup of the magnificent design submitted by me and valued at 500 pounds. To be called the Ranji Trophy it was to be competed for annually by the provincial cricket associations of India."

It is not for nothing that Madras has earned this aura of being a hallowed venue. In 1961 the first Duleep Trophy match was held at the Nehru stadium and 12 years later the first Deodhar Trophy limited overs game was played at Chepauk. But it is the staging of the inaugural Ranji Trophy game 86 years ago that has given the city its special status as far as Indian cricket is concerned. Tied Test II and

it being the scene of several international records being set here all came later. It was the significant event of November 4, 1934 that set the ball rolling.

The match scheduled for three days was over in one involving just about 5½ hours of play. To M.J. Gopalan went the honour of bowling the first ball. The pitch had been affected by heavy overnight rain and conditions were far from ideal for playing. But as Ramaswami told me "the cricketers were very

Swift is the right way to explain the dramatic events as they unfolded for on the rain-affected surface left arm spinner A.G. Ram Singh took six for 19 as Mysore were shot out for 48. With off spinner M.G. Vijayarathi later well known as a Test umpire reveling in the conditions in bagging six for 23 Madras fared only a little better but they managed to get 130. But this was good enough to win by an innings and 23 runs

with Mysore being bundled out twice in a day the second time around for 59. Ram Singh continued to be unplayable bagging five for 16 this time supported by Gopalan who had three for 20 and C.P. Johnstone (two for 10). Incidentally both teams were captained by Englishmen for while Johnstone led Madras, M.S. Teversham was the Mysore captain though the majority of players were Indians.

● by
Partab Ramchand

keen on playing despite the wet field aware that it was a historic occasion." And as Sundaresan recalled: "It was with little hope of there being play that many of us reached Chepauk in the morning but we were swept away by the swift sequence of events."



A.G. Ram Singh.

The 'new normal' Kutcheris of Margazhi 2020

(Continued from page 5)

topic in the given time", says Harikatha artiste, Dushyanth Sridhar.

Sudha urges rasika-s to have a mindset to accept the fact that, even though it is virtual, efforts are being taken to organise kutcheris. They need

to optimise their enjoyment of the concert. They have to formally sit, and not cook or do something while listening to the kutcheri; that will take away the special flavour of watching a concert. They have to create the concert ambience in the comfort of their homes."

Answers to Quiz

1. AstraZeneca and BioNTech respectively, 2. R. Ashwin, 3. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), 4. Soumitra Chatterjee, 5. Elon Musk of Tesla, 6. 0, 7. Chennai, 8. Rupert 'Ron Weasley' Grint, 9. Michael Schumacher, 10. McPlant.

* * *

11. Iran, 12. Dead Sea, 13. Earthquakes and Richter, 14. Aconcagua, 15. Clouds, 16. Craters are formed by the outward explosion of rocks, while calderas are formed by the inward collapse of a volcano, 17. Challenger Deep (after HMS Challenger), 18. Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior, 19. They are all tautological names i.e. the given name means the natural feature in a language of that region, 20. Auroras seen at the poles.

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