

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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The Horrors of Highrise

21 storey building to come up at Broadway

Multimodal transport hubs are the latest in the Government's lexicon. Close on the heels of releasing an artist's impression of the proposed 27 storey Central Tower to be built opposite Central Station (see MM, June 1, 2024), the Government, read Greater Chennai Corporation, has released its plans for a 21 storey building at Broadway, on the land presently occupied by the bus terminus and the Kuralagam building. Touted as a multimodal transport hub, which is exactly what the Central Tower is also described as, this building, it is claimed, will decongest the Broadway area. And as always, there is more to it than that.

The Broadway bus terminus has been a byword for congestion ever since its inception in the 1950s. It began in an informal fashion as such facilities invariably do in India,

without any plan and by the 1960s the Government had to do something about it. Handed over to the M(now C)MDA in the early 1970s, it grew by land acquisition but its fundamental character never changed. There were repeated attempts to modernise and improve it, with several tenders

• by **Sriram V.**

floated for a multilevel parking lot which remained on paper. The latest in the series is the 21-storeyed building. It has been announced that the Government-owned Kuralagam building will be demolished, and the bus terminus shifted to the Island Grounds while the construction takes place.

Is there any multimodal transport facility anywhere



in the world that needs 21 floors? The building it is said

will have, apart from transport connections, parking facilities

for buses, cars and two-wheelers. Which is all to the good. It

(Continued on page 2)

Train travails at Chennai Central signal dire need to solve overcrowding

Earlier this month, news reports emerged of ticketed passengers stranded at Chennai Central railway station. They carried bonafide tickets for seats on a train bound for Howrah, but discovered that unauthorised travellers had occupied their coaches; it is said that people began to board the train even as the railcars were entering the platform so that the sleeper coaches were full by the time they made a stop at the station. According to a report in *The Hindu*, ticketless passengers had not only overrun the reserved coaches but also blocked walkways with their luggage, making it impos-

sible for those who had paid the fare to enter; the TTE (Travelling Ticket Examiner) and other railway staff had been unable to assist at the time, though a Southern Railway

• by **Varsha V.**

spokesperson later told the media that RPF (Railway Protection Force) and Government Railway Police were available to deter unauthorised entry into reserved coaches. The quote runs thus – “We have not received any complaint from passengers on the issue so

far. Had someone flagged the issue, the RPF personnel would have certainly assisted them in boarding the train.” It is to be noted that the Southern Railways soon announced a special unreserved train from Chennai to Santragachi junction at Howrah to address the rush. The service began on June 13.

The above quote from the Southern Railway spokesperson was surprising to read. There have been multiple passenger complaints and news reports about overcrowding in trains, and the latest mishap at Chennai Central is hardly an outlier. Earlier in May this year, the Chennai-Thiruvananthapuram Mail attracted dubious publicity with news

of a large group of unreserved and waitlisted travellers occupying a reserved coach; it was reported that the TTE had tried to evict them in vain, and that RPF personnel were not around. Last November, social media was all a-twitter when a Chennai student posted a video of a shockingly congested sleeper coach on a train bound for Andhra Pradesh; his seat, he said, had been occupied by ticketless passengers and many pieces of baggage. A 2023 piece in *The Times of India* avers that overcrowding in reserved coaches is a persistent problem, and that trains such as the Tamil Nadu Express, Grand Trunk Express and those bound for Andhra Pradesh and West

Bengal are the worst affected. TTEs appear to face difficulties in tackling the problem; not only do they struggle to control the ticketless crowd, but – according to media reports – are in danger of injury in some cases. Overcrowding in trains is a notorious problem, one that authorities cannot deny knowledge of. What is unknown is the Railways' strategy to tackle it – there is a punitive fine for ticketless travel, but the fact that it does not seem to be a deterrent shows that it isn't really a solution.

The issue is quite straightforward. There is a great and rapidly growing demand for

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THE HORRORS OF HIGHRISE

(Continued from page 1)

will also have, and here is the rub, government offices and commercial space to be rented out. While this will no doubt bring rent to our cash-starved Corporation, the question is how is the construction of such a huge building going to reduce congestion? On the other hand, will not so many offices and commercial outlets in one building only increase the ingress and exodus of traffic thereby causing further chaos in what is already a very crowded area? And what about its carbon footprint? From the plans it seems clear that this structure, all steel and glass, will need huge amounts of electricity to keep it cool. Has any thought been given to this aspect?

It is to be noted that this building is going to add commercial space to George Town, when the idea all along has been to reduce them in the area, thereby preventing further overcrowding. Is the Government hoping that offices and commercial entities in the surrounding area will move in? This is unlikely to happen

as the existing spaces are all occupied at very low rents and no businessowner is likely to increase costs by shifting into the high rise.

There are no other high rises anywhere in the vicinity. George Town and the Esplanade are marked by buildings of moderate height. There is still a uniform skyline on the NSC Bose Road front and along the Esplanade. The defining edifices here are the High Court and the Law College buildings. How will such a tall building fit into the general scheme of things? A few years ago, the Government was sensitive enough to agree to the Metro stations in this area being designed in sympathetic style to what is in the vicinity. What has happened to such emancipated thought since then?

Taken overall, this proposed building seems ill advised. It is not so much an attempt at solving traffic and transport challenges as much as it is an attempt at creating real estate out of thin air and profiting from it in the short term, at enormous cost in the long term.



Train travails at Chennai Central

(Continued from page 1)

accommodation on trains, especially in Sleeper and General Class coaches; and when unreserved coaches are packed to the brim, people spill over to reserved coaches to travel. The solution, then, seems rather obvious – add more Sleeper and General Class coaches on trains in high demand, and more trains on routes in high demand. Demand spikes in peak travel seasons like public holidays such as Diwali, or summer holidays can be anticipated, and met with special trains such as the recent service from Chennai Central to Santragachi junction; there appears to be nothing prevent-

ing authorities from planning and announcing these well in advance. A proportionate increase in railway staff must accompany a planned increase in services – as it is, reports suggest that there aren't enough TTEs and RPF personnel for the existing trains.

It is reported that Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw is exhorting railway officials to take steps to address the crisis. The attention is long overdue, given that passenger safety is at risk for the ticketed and ticketless alike; surely, this is an agenda item that deserves priority alongside much-touted plans for new superfast express trains, bullet trains and the like.

Newton's Cats

The Man from Madras Musings was reminded of this caption when he recently went to a centre of excellence to give a speech. And let him explain briefly what he means by that reference to the great man of science and his felines. Years ago, when MMM was a mere mmm and also a Cherubic Child of Calcutta he happened to read in his school textbook about how Sir Isaac Newton had two cats, one small and the other large. And when he locked himself in his study, they scratched the door in order to be let in. The man who defined gravity and caused untold anguish to countless mediocre students like MMM thereafter hit upon a bright idea – he would bore a hole in the lower half of the door to allow the animals easy ingress and exit. Only being a scientist he had two holes done – a large one for the large cat and a small one for the small cat. It was a friend who pointed out to him later that the large hole would have done perfectly for the small cat as well. The

in distress. There were hushed consultations about what needed to be done. The audience had by then become restive and resembled the proletariat that starts revolutions. It was probably this that decided the organisers. One of them stepped forward and said that while the Director was on his way the event could go ahead. Another man stepped to the podium, and this was when it was discovered that there was no mic attached to it.

More wringing of hands and then someone came up with a portable mic – the kind that you wear around your head and speak. It was just that none among the faculty had used such a device and they all persisted in holding the mic in their hands. As a consequence everything they said came out in hushed whispers and what with the heat and the noise made by makeshift hand fans, not much could be heard. The speeches however went on interminably and then, finally, when everyone had nearly expired in the heat it was MMM's turn. He opted to wear the mic

ing by the number of phone calls he receives. He does help when possible but draws the line at the inane. One of the latter variety had to do with recreating how Chennai looked in 1995/1996. MMM remarked that this was not so far back in time but the person who called said that was his year of birth and so he did not have a clear idea as to how things were 'back then'. Suppressing an urge to tell him that that was just about when fire was discovered and the wheel invented, MMM asked as to whether the person had ever heard of the Internet.

"Sure," came the answer.

MMM- "And are you aware of YouTube that has hours and hours of videos?"

"Yes, but why...?"

MMM – "Are you aware that there are plenty of clips from Tamil movies of that era on YouTube? Can you not see them?"

The voice at the other end was silent. But MMM got the message – watching those videos takes time while a call to MMM would mean

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

story may well be apocryphal, but MMM can vouch for the fact that it appeared in his textbook.

All of this came flooding into MMM's brain when he entered the centre of excellence. He was there to speak to an invited audience and the invite had been sent out in the name of the Director of the institute. The published programme clearly stated that the Director would address the audience as well. On arrival MMM found the venue, the audience and the rest of the staff but of Director there was not a sign. The building and the meeting hall were all that they ought to be – concrete, steel and glass – the kind that requires air conditioning 24x7 if you have to function in it. It was just that on this particular day, the AC was either turned off or was malfunctioning. With the heat outside being overpowering, the atmosphere inside was like an oven. Men sweated freely while fair ladies fanned themselves. All it needed was a couple of punkahs near the ceiling to take us back to them dark colonial ages.

After a while in the sauna, MMM made bold to ask as to when Ye Director would grace us with his presence. The sooner the event got over the better was MMM's considered view. There was no answer to that and the organisers wrung their hands

and make the most of a bad situation. He could do nothing about the heat, but he at least made himself heard. The audience clapped at the end, more out of relief probably and the expectation of being released into the comparatively mild Chennai summer. And meanwhile, of the Director there was no sign.

The vote of thanks was delivered and then there was lot of pressing invites to stay back for tea. But MMM fled. He does not know if the Director did put in an appearance, but it is MMM's guess that he was informed that the AC had failed and so had wisely opted to stay back in his office. Full marks to him if so.

But it was amazing that a centre of excellence should slip up so badly on the smallest of things.

Help with History

The Man from Madras Musings has reached an age where he looks reasonably old. People rush to open doors for him, and he is asked if he has ever met Gandhi (the Mahatma that is) personally. And apart from that daft query there are several more, often with requests to help recreate a particular time period for a cinematic production. These are days when assistant directors seem to be freely circulating MMM's phone number judg-

getting all the answers in one shot. MMM has over the years become wise to such people. He politely refused to help thereafter. The news obviously went around the Assistant Directors' club. The next call was to ask if MMM would be interested in acting in a film, and after a pause, also help with the historic context. MMM said no and that was that.

Tailpiece

It is daft email time again! After a lull, MMM is getting emails from far and wide – a sign of its burgeoning circulation. The latest is as follows – *We are a research organisation. We are going to launch a social study in 12 blocks of Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu to improve the quality of life of girls and women for which we have a Data Collection Team Required. We heard you provide a team for data collection. Can you give us a team for this study? If you cannot provide teams for this district, then tell us which states and districts where you can give us teams.*

If the next issue is delayed you will know that Editor, Deputy Editor, *The Man from Madras Musings* and the Special Correspondent have all banded together as a Data Collection Team and have gone to Tiruvallur.

–MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Elders remembered

Thanks to the two articles titled 'When Grand aunt voted' by MMM under Short N Snappy, and 'A Grandmother remembered' by V.Vijaysree, the May 16 issue of Madras Musings would serve as a fitting tribute to the wisdom, common sense, and maturity of grandmas and grandaunts of an earlier generation who, though not formally educated, successfully managed the whole gamut of household chores, and also took a lot of pains to discipline their children and grandchildren. Congratulations to the centenarian grandma of MMM who voted at the booth recently with aplomb. His grand aunt's political wisdom was exemplary. The story of the industrious and knowledgeable grandmother of V.Vijaysree has many lessons to be learned by the youth of today. That she preserved food by canning, pickling, drying, etc at a time when refrigerators were unknown, is amazing.

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Grandmother remembered

This refers to the beautifully written article "A Grand Mother Remembered" by Vijaysree in your latest issue of *Madras Musings*.

I could very well connect with the article since our mother (who will celebrate her 100th Birthday shortly) is still very active (playing sudoku, writing Rama Rama – the count must now be in lakhs) talking about her school days, games she used to play, the wedding ceremony with our (late) father (the nuptials took place in Karaikal, the then French colony, since child marriage was not allowed in Madras Presidency), how they brought up their 8 children etc.

Every day we talk about different matters and she enjoys sharing whatever she remembers.

We are indeed blessed to have her as our mother.

R. Santhanam
santhanam45@yahoo.com

Stray dogs menace

Whenever a stray dog bites or mauls a person, the issue is highlighted in the press only to fade away with

the passage of time until the next occurrence. The attack on a five-year old boy by two pet Rottweilers is perhaps the most-recent example. The issue was highlighted in MM (May 16-31) and also one of the city's leading dailies thought it fit to devote a full page to the issue. The article states 'rabid stray dog biting 29 people in a gated community in Chennai,' dogs keep barking through the night which makes sleeping difficult' and 'people feel threatened by stray dogs. This has impacted senior citizens who come for morning and evening walks.'

While the problem persists, nothing of significance seems to have been done either by the civic authorities or the public or dog lovers. The article states 'the approach adopted for vaccination and sterilisation of street or community dogs has been haphazard so far in Chennai,' 'the GCC has to overtake the birth cycle.' They (stray dogs) multiply very fast. The only way to go about it is aggressive animal birth control, and civic bodies are supposed to pay Rs. 1,650 per captured and neutered dog but they provide only Rs. 750. This results in a shortage of dog catchers as low wages discourage them.

What can do done to address the issue? Some time ago, one of the city's newspapers published a photo of dog lovers holding pots of water in their hands. This water is meant for stray dogs to quench their thirst during the torrid summer. How thoughtful, kind and compassionate! Kudos to these good-hearted people.

This writer is just curious to know how dog-lovers react when people are attacked and bitten by stray dogs (and also pets). In a very tragic case, stray dogs mauled to death a young boy in Delhi and as if this was not sufficient mauled to death his younger brother a few days later. Do dog-lovers feel any pain, any sadness?

They (dog-lovers) can approach the civic authorities and work with them and extend their assistance. They can guide GCC in the sterilisation and vaccination of stray dogs. They can create a unique dog collar that will identify sterilised dogs. They can set a target (let us say two years) to sterilise all the strays in the city. And most important of

all, they need to raise resources (money) for this task. A tall order? Certainly. However, as the adage goes 'where there is a will, there is a way.'

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More on stray dogs

I have read the article on Pet Dogs by V. Varsha in MM, May 16th. I agree with her that the rules on dog license should be implemented and her ideas on the irresponsible pet parenting in India.

But the problem of dog bites in India is more from stray dogs than pets. I take a Tamil daily and almost every day there is news about stray dogs biting. Most of the victims are children and that too poor of the poorest. There are 6.2 crores of stray dogs in India (The State of Pet Homelessness Index 2021) Till 2001, as per **The Destruction of Stray Pigs, Stray dogs and Monkeys of The Municipal Corporation Act of 1919**, municipalities euthanized stray dogs. Only in 2001 **The Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules** came in. By operating a few dogs in cities, we do not even scratch the problem. It's like trying to empty a vast lake with a bottomless bucket. A pair of dogs can produce 400 in three years and 7000 in seven years.

Unless you operate all the dogs, male and female in one go – an impossible proposition – the scheme is bound to fail. While you operate a few, a thousand others are littering away. India has 81% of all the rabies deaths in the world. This is only recorded deaths.

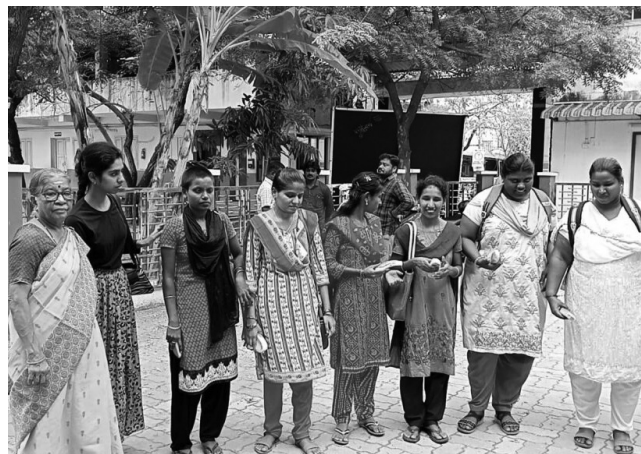
Each year in India, about one million get bitten by rabid dogs and go in for anti-rabies shots. India's estimated need of anti-rabies vaccine for humans is 1500 liters per year. Since all vaccine produced in the 12 centers in India falls short of our requirement, we import the vaccine, from France and Germany. For dogs, anti-rabies vaccine is to be given annually. Can this be done to the millions of strays that are roaming the streets? The issue needs to be examined in detail with experts on dogs from Kennel Clubs, community health experts and virologists, before it gets out of control.

Theodore Baskaran
(author of *The book of Indian Dogs*)

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Visionless they may be but not without vision

For the past nine years, the Tamil Nadu Volleyball Association for the Visually Challenged (TNVBVAVC) has been dedicated to empowering visually challenged individuals. Through organising a variety of events such as volleyball tournaments, quiz competitions, and celebrations for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, TNVBVAVC provides a crucial platform for visually challenged students to showcase their talents and achieve their full potential.



One of the association's most notable initiatives is the TN-PSC Group IV model test program, which has already helped four top performers secure government jobs. Building on this success, TNVBVAVC hosted another model test on May 26, at Vidya Ratna PTS

Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Sastri Nagar, Adyar. The event aims to prepare participants for the upcoming TN-PSC Group IV exam scheduled for June 9.

The model test is designed to not only assess the participants' knowledge but also to identify areas that need improvement, ensuring that the visually challenged youth receive proper training necessary for success in competitive exams. Such preparation is crucial for achieving greater economic independence. Approximately 100 participants, 100 scribes, and 20 volunteers took part in the event.

The event is supported by NGOs such as Right Turn Organisation and Malarungal Foundation, which are assisting with the arrangement of scribes and volunteers. The event was coordinated by Mr Palanisamy and his team, along with Ms Subhashini.

TNVBVC remains committed to creating opportunities and providing support for visually challenged individuals, helping them to overcome challenges and succeed in various aspects of life.

The event was very successful thanks to the Management of Vidya Rathna Matriculation Higher Secondary School, who offered their premises for free along with catering arrangements for the participants. Subbalakshmi Aiyer, aged 76 years, represented the school and ensured that everything went in order.

Proud to see many youngsters from Bank of America and TCS act as scribes, not minding their weekend. Let's pray that these differently-abled men and women break all barriers to be very successful in their mission to live with dignity and become a part of state machinery. Contact Palanisamy at 98402 03539 and Subhashini at 98409 41648. — (Courtesy: *Adyar Times*.)

The Club remembered by a Gate

That the Madras Club is located in the Boat Club area is well known. It is also equally well known that the Club, founded in 1832 operated for more than a century in what was known thereafter as Express Estates in Mount Road, the road leading to the premises being known even now as Club House Road. The Club, faced with a dwindling membership post-Independence chiefly owing to its whites-only policy, had to sell the space and move to the opposite side of Mount Road, to a property that is marked today by Khivraj Motors and the compound of the erstwhile Safire Theatre. But the wolf was relentless in its pursuit and the only option was to move again, to merge this time with the Adyar Club, another whites-only institution that operated from Mowbray's Cupola

by the Adyar River at the end of what was once Mowbray's and is now TTK Road. This amalgamation was effected in April 1963. With that the Madras Club subsumed into itself the Adyar Club. However, the road leading out from TTK Salai/Chamier's Road intersection to the Madras Club is even now known as Adyar Club Gate Road. Memories die slowly in Madras and this article gives a brief history of the Adyar Club that is remembered only in a road name.

The principal source for this article is a slim booklet – *A Short History of Mowbray's Cupola* by John Malvenan, written in 1968 and published by the Ma-

u)bray's Cupola then stood in the middle of 120 acres and all of this was rented to the Club by the Diocese of Mylapore, which owned the property thanks to the merchant John De'Monte's bequest. The rent was Rs 300 per month, which as per Malvenan could be 'considered moderate'. The boundaries were Boat Club Road, Chamier's Road, Turnbull's Road and the river.

The Club formally began on January 3, 1891 with an At Home for its members. It offered boating, rifle shooting, clock golf, lawn tennis and dance. A billiards table was added shortly thereafter. By 1892, the vast grounds were put to use as a golf



Mowbray's Cupola. From our Archives.

The Club was known for the quality of its entertainment, and it rose to its zenith in January 1922 when the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII and still later the Duke of Windsor came during the course of his disastrous India tour. Gandhi made sure that the prince was met with protests everywhere he went and in Madras the Governor, Lord Willingdon was anxious to make the best out of what was a bad show from the start. The Club pulled out all stops and presented a memorable evening on January 16, which elicited a letter of thanks from the Governor. The Willingdons themselves were given a warm send off in 1924 with a ball, the banyan tree fronting the Club, which still survives, being the centre stage.

The lascar's of the Boat Club. And the sheer variety of equestrian events is mindboggling. What for instance is a Madras Pagal Gymkhana? There were horse shows and a pony gymkhana and for a while there was even a demand for a polo ground.

The entertainments offered and the attendance by members peaked each Friday evening. Contrary to what can be expected of a club in general, the Adyar Club fell silent on Sundays, out of deference to the Church which owned the property. Negotiations for extension of lease took place at periodic intervals and the rents kept rising. At one stage in the 1930s, the Diocese was willing to sell the place to the Adyar Club but the latter demurred and a major opportunity was lost. Notwithstanding that it did not own the space, the Adyar Club kept investing in facilities. The Club was ventilated by punkahs and illuminated by gaslights until electricity came, not without some grumbling at the expense, in 1911. Much of what we now recognise as standard features of the Madras Club building evidently came about during the Adyar Club's ownership. The portico acquired its present dimensions owing to the necessity of accommodating cars. Kitchen and toilets, as well as wash rooms were built where none existed before and the verandah was extended to its present size. The black and white marble flooring at the entrance was laid as early as in 1904.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

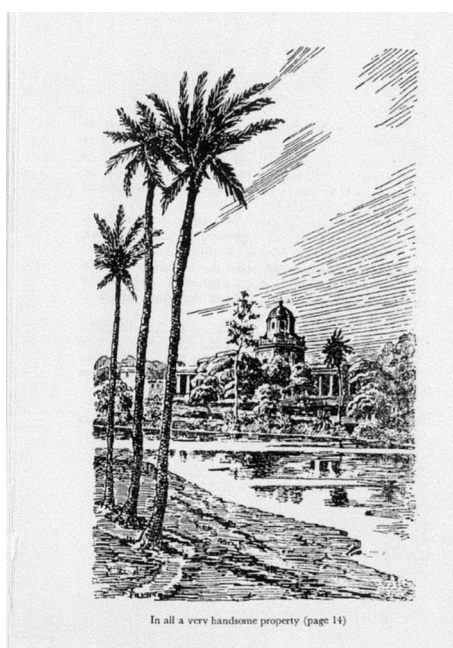
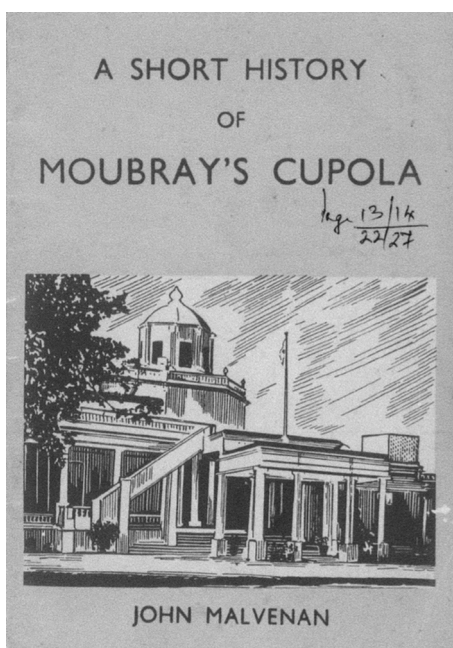
dras Club. The text is accompanied by a few sketches by the noted architect HF Prynne of the firm of Prynne Abbott and Davis, which later became Pithavadian and Partners. Another artist whose sketches feature in the book is a Mrs JF Boase. It is clear from the text that Malvenan was an expatriate working for one of the British business houses of Madras but I am yet to fathom where.

Interestingly, the Adyar Club was born in the Madras Club. That was in October 1890, when a few members of the latter institution, chafing no doubt under its strict rules and regulations, decided to form a 'country club in beautiful surroundings'. The patron was Lord Connemara, then Governor of Madras. The *Madras Mail* carried details of the formation of the Club, for which entrance fees were Rs 24 if paid before October 21 or Rs 50 if paid thereafter, with monthly fees of Rs 3. Mow(or was it

course, the layout being planned by Justice FH Wilkinson. This was one of the biggest attractions of the Club and survived till 1947, when financial compulsions necessitated return of surplus land to the Church, which then sold it all for commercial development, after obtaining due permission from the High Court of Madras.

That the Adyar Club was a more relaxed place when compared to the Madras Club is evident from some of its activities. There was rowing, from the steps by the river all the way to Elliotts Beach where members could bathe and return. At what is now Nandanam stood the Kennels of the Madras Hunt which comprised many members of the Adyar Club. There was a standing arrangement for the serving of coffee at the Kennels each morning to members of the Adyar Club who exercised the hounds. A *chokra* called Fatty brought the beverage over.

Unlike the Madras Club this was a place where ladies were welcome and we read of facilities being built for them – a ladies' toilet, a croquet lawn and a bicycle track. Sports facilities in general kept improving – tennis and squash courts coming up on the grounds. Dance being an important feature, the Club invested in a ball room, which survives to date in the Madras Club. It is interesting to read of some of the entertainments, including a River Concert where the stage was set on a float to which performers were rowed by



Fragile Jasmine – With a Core of Steel

That was the image that flashed through your mind within minutes of meeting Jaya Krishnaswamy, special educator and founder of the Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (MNC). This was over a decade ago, when MNC was set to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. You were among those who had been given an opportunity to contribute to the event – a true honour.

Jaya Krishnaswamy was the spirit, the quintessential mother figure, at MNC's core.

Over multiple meetings and conversations while gathering material for a commemorative book, the soft-spoken, gentle Jaya Krishnaswamy spoke of the road that had led her to MNC.

Career-wise, she had been a schoolteacher in 'a mainstream school' as she put it. Always committed even then to a pursuit of knowledge, she decided to do an extra course to 'further my qualifications', and as Fate would have it, chose the field of Special Education, which 'opened my eyes to this whole new world of challenges and disabilities.'

When her husband, Air Vice-Marshal (Retd) V. Krishnaswamy, popularly known as AVMVK, retired, they moved to Chennai, where he joined the Indchem Research and Development Laboratory, part of the Chennai-based Sanmar Group of Companies, as Advisor.

At first, N Kumar of the Sanmar Group requested Jaya Krishnaswamy to help them with their Sankara School. But she wished to go beyond mainstream schools. That's when the idea of MNC was born. The seed for this project was sown by Wing Commander Jain, a colleague of V. Krishnaswamy's, who suggested

the field of mental retardation during a discussion on the possibilities of using technology in the area of special needs, an idea that was welcomed enthusiastically by both AVMVK and Jaya, although they were, according to her, 'completely clueless over how to take this forward'.

Undeterred, they, along with their friend Wing Commander Jain, decided to go ahead, and set about gathering information.

'This was 1987... even computers were very primitive. The three of us – my husband, Commander Jain and I – had no training of any kind. All we had was our own imagination.'

There were endless visits to libraries, poring over books on developmental paediatrics, and Jaya welcomed every bit of information as 'a profound learning experience'.

Prof P Jeyachandran, Clini-

Indian child-rearing practices in mind.

The process of creating the programme took nearly 19 revisions, as Jaya Krishnaswamy and her team went deeper and deeper into studying and understanding how children develop, through every stage and layer of the learning processes between parent and child. What most children do instinctively becomes a taught skill, a learnt one, in the case of special children.

'I lived the experience', was how she described this stage in the growth of MNC.

V Krishnaswamy, Jaya, and Prof. P Jeyachandran, along with this inter-disciplinary team of experts, developed 'Upanayan', meaning 'leading along', the indigenous early intervention training programme for special children.

Throughout, V Krishnas-



Mrs. Jaya Krishnaswamy received the Best Social Worker Award in the field of Disability in 2012 from the J. Jayalalithaa, the then Honble. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

● by Ranjitha Ashok

ing grew, while the feeling of isolation lessened.

Another remarkable change over the years - the number of fathers who became part of the process, and soon whole families. Fathers learnt that their support of their wives is crucial and essential.

Jaya Krishnaswamy and her team helped create an entirely new approach and philosophy.

With characteristic humility, Jaya, throughout the conversations, always gave everyone involved all credit. Her most-used personal pronouns were 'we', and 'us', never the self-absorbed 'I'. She gave unstinting praise to N Kumar's contributions, his generosity in making as many avenues as possible available to them. 'His people, at all times, were instructed to see to our needs, down to the minutest details.'

In the words of his brother, the late N Sankar, Chairman, The Sanmar Group, 'Kumar took a technical initiative, and transformed it into a social cause.'

In turn, for Mr N Kumar, while Mr Krishnaswamy was the force behind this project, Jaya brought immense knowledge, and was, from the beginning, the fulcrum. Both, for him, symbolised the best of qualities like honesty and discipline.

MNC, and Jaya Krishnaswamy's work as CEO, soon achieved international recognition. Jaya and her team placed MNC on the world map, with

organisations like the UN and WHO inviting Jaya all over the world to speak at conferences.

Through Jaya's gentle yet firm resolve and guidance, MNC has proved a unifying force in the lives of exceptional children. To MNC's core team goes all the credit of changing mind-sets, of encouraging parents to tap into their own reserve of courage, of bringing them face to face with their own heroic abilities, enabling them to face every challenge with dignity.

Jaya Krishnaswamy dedicated her life to the cause of special needs, bringing her formidable intellect, her thirst for knowledge and constant improvement, and the full weight of her compassion and steely determination to her chosen field, all of it tempered with gentleness and empathy. There was something about her that brought out the best in everyone around her. The bar was set high, albeit in the least aggressive manner – yet no one was willing to run the risk of falling short.

While she will be missed intensely by everyone connected with her life, she has left behind an enduring legacy, and her work will live on.

Footnote: When the commemorative book on the Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children, titled *A World of Difference*, was published in 2014, there was clearly only one title that worked for the chapter on Jaya Krishnaswamy.



India NGO Awards in Small Category for their demonstration of best practices of impact, scalability and replicability, innovation and sustainability in their programmes, and in creative and successful resource mobilisation in 2012-13.

cal Research Psychologist, recognised country wide as being foremost in his field of Special Education, proved an invaluable source of learning and support.

Early intervention became the focus, leading to the creation of a home-based programme targeting the age-group 0-6, involving physiotherapists, occupational therapists, special educators and psychologists, focussing on motor skills, language, and social interaction, with complete emphasis on parental involvement.

This was an 'Indianised' version of the Wisconsin-based 'Portage Project', keeping traditional

wamy was Jaya's pillar of strength and support, a true friend, philosopher and guide, with a vision of MNC becoming a model centre in the area of early intervention, earning nation-wide recognition.

The Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children was established in 1989.

'It was Dr. P. Jeyachandran who used the term 'Exceptional Children', she recalled. 'The children come to us... but it is the parents we train.'

Awareness and understand-

A poet who can also sing – Isaikavi Ramanan

A person capable of applying his attention simultaneously to many activities is referred to as an Ashtavadhani. The title would certainly fit T.A. Venkateswaran, popularly known as Isaikavi Ramanan, who has enriched the world of performing arts with his talents as a thinker, writer, poet, actor, speaker, singer, photographer and performer.

I first met Ramanan at a Madras Book Club meeting where he was in conversation with a professor from Pondicherry on his book about Mahakavi Bharathi's life in Pondy. Ramanan was very articulate and impressed me with not only his knowledge of Bharathi but also his impeccable English. I came to know that he is a bilingual writer and speaker. From being a successful corporate honcho to a popular performer on the stage, Ramanan has come a long way in 20 years. He turned 70 on 30th March this year. I decided to explore his reinvention story for the readers of *Madras Musings*.

* * *

Ramanan's late father, Sri T.V. Anantaramaseshan was a scholar in English and Sanskrit. An M.A. (Hons) with a gold medal from the Presidency College, Madras, he taught Economics at Loyola College (1954 – 63) before he joined *The Hindu* as Assistant Editor, where he worked for 23 years. Later he was associated with the evening paper *News Today*. An expert in temple sculpture and architecture, he was instrumental in conducting 25 *Kumbhabhishekams* (temple consecrations). He composed 27 *Suprabhatams* (prayers for awakening the divine in the morning) on deities from Kanyakumari to Jageshwar. It is no wonder Ramanan has spiritualism in his blood. Ramanan also has imbibed the zest for life and enthusiasm from his 95 year old mother Savithri, who now lives with him.

Sandwiched between four sisters, three elder and one younger, all of whom were gifted singers, Ramanan had to be musical. However, only his youngest sister pursued a career in singing.

While in Ramakrishna Mission Boys High School, Bazlullah Road, in Chennai where he completed his SSLC, he used to participate in literary competitions. The first time he ever received a prize was when he was in his third or fourth class for singing Bharathi's *Vellai Thamarai*. He fondly remembers receiving two volumes of Aesop's fables (in Tamil) from Parali Su Nellaippar,

Bharathi's close associate.

Recalling his student days Ramanan says, "For a poor student to whom even simple arithmetic was a horrible nightmare, studying Commerce in A.M. Jain College, Meenambakkam, was nothing less than a disaster. Most of my class hours were spent under the trees, penning poems or winning prizes in debates, oratorical competitions, essay writing, mono acting, recitation and so on. I was the Secretary of the Commerce Association once and Fine Arts Association later during which time, I could invite Kannadasan to our college" His tryst with Kannadasan and his songs probably started from that time.

Ramanan says that he never had any academic dreams, though he was always a dreamer. While poetry enticed him on one side, he was a natural mind watcher too. There is a vision that has stayed with him since he was 10 or so – that of an angler with a brown hat, reclining on a tree, facing a jungle brook, watching the flow of water silently.

* * *

He joined *The Hindu* on October 1, 1977 as a Sales Representative in Chennai. When he became a Sales Officer he had to travel a lot, going on tour for three weeks a month. Apart from his travels, whenever he was in HQ, he was the official typist for the Circulation Department, worked for several nights in the packing and dispatch section and distributed newspaper in the early hours. Life was tough. The brighter side was that he saw a lot of movies, visited several temples and picked up working knowledge of Kannada and Telugu.

In 1989, he was promoted as Regional Manager, Visakhapatnam where he launched the Vizag edition. As a Regional Manager, he won several awards for achieving sales targets and also for his impressive presentations at the company's annual conferences. Managers chosen for other regions used to be sent to Vizag for training.

Ramanan says, "I was instrumental in introducing an important software system for the Advertising department. I also played a big part in opening up *The Hindu* for regional and local advertisements such as front page solos, ear panels, local supplements etc."

However poetry never left him. It provided the psychological relief and also the fillip to his enthusiasm for work.

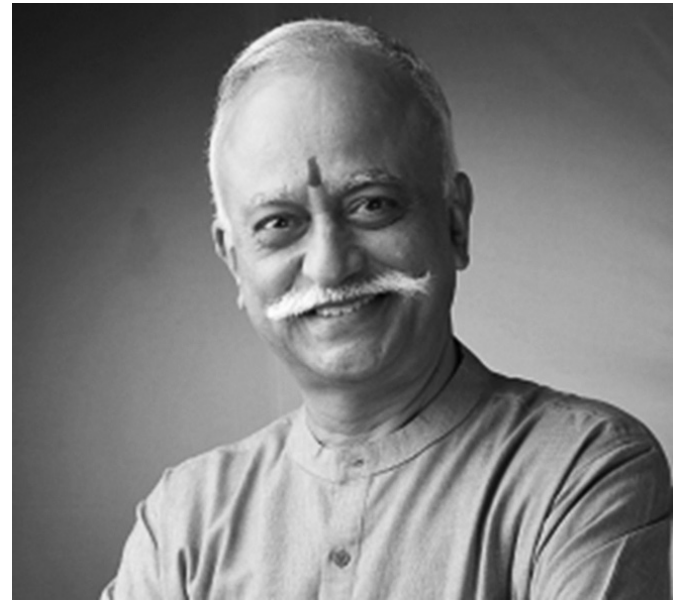
What makes him invoke Goddess Parashakthi and his guru in most of his talks? What

was the trigger that made him quit his job and get fully involved in creative pursuits?

Ramanan says, "I was in my ninth class when Sri Ma Vi Raghavan, our Tamil teacher recited a poem of Bharathi's. Something hit me. Though I did not understand even the basic meaning, I was overwhelmed. It was in 1971 October that I started writing poems and a few years later, I started composing songs. Sometime between 1974 and 1976, on a sunny afternoon, I had a strange momentary experience. I had a vision of Bharathi and Ma Kali and I felt as though something invaded my consciousness. Parasakthi and Bharathi entered me together I should say. She is a palpable, living reality to me."

His quest for Truth, took him to several gurus until he found the right one in Satguru Sri K. Sivananda Murty of Bheemunipatnam near Vizag who took him on several pilgrimages. Ramanan has so far visited the Himalayas 36 times.

"If I can say that my life is over and my living continues, I owe it all to my guru. He cured my psychological injuries through his love, taught me the real history of this great nation,



Isaikavi Ramanan.

Over the years he has addressed members of literary or cultural associations, music sabhas, students of MBA or engineering, school children, parents and corporates. The topics are diverse too: *Thirukkural*, Bharatiar, Kannadasan's film songs, spiritual discourses. And self-improvement topics such as communication skills, positive attitude, personal management and conflict management.

K. Balachandar titled *Sigaram* for which he interacted closely with K. Balachander for six to eight months.

"Since I refused to accept money from him for the biography, Balachandar invited me to act in a serial directed by him. During the shootings he always insisted that I should be given a chair beside him. Till the end, he addressed me as Ramanan Sir despite my protests," says Ramanan.

His other publications include 12 books of his poems, 19 books of his essays. He has also translated three books from English to Tamil and one from Tamil to English.

Ramanan has also been an actor on stage as well as on the small screen. He has participated in over 1,400 television programmes. The only movie in which he played a good role did not see the light of day. He has acted in four serials.

As regards theatre, he acted in a small role in the English play *Free Outgoing* by Crea-Shakthi Dushi, directed by Mahesh Dattani. In Tamil theatre, it was SBS Raman who invited him to write a play based on his father's (Sri S. Balachander) famous movie *Andha Naal* and also play the lead role in it.

Ramanan has also written and acted as Bharathi in the play *Bharathi Yaar* which has been staged in several cities in India and abroad.

Ramanan says, "Playing the role of the Mahakavi who died when he was hardly 39 at 70 is indeed challenging." He is also acting as Bharathi in a serial produced by Krishnaswamy Associates, currently being aired on Doordarshan in Tamil.

One of his most popular programmes in recent years sponsored by Krishna Sweets and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

(Continued on page 7)

● by R.V. Rajan

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made me understand the depth of our dharma and granted several deep spiritual experiences."

"As the inner call was getting louder and as I realized that my slogging in a career was not worth all that martyrdom, I quit my job on 30th March 2005 with nothing else in my hand."

Ramanan was 51 years old when he launched his new life as a performer. In the last 19 years his fan base has widened to not only within India but has also spread across the world. Because as a public speaker Ramanan provokes, stimulates and entertains – no matter whether the topic is literature, music, cinema, theatre, spirituality or culture. Ramanan's voice rings out with bell-like clarity, every syllable distinct.

"I am more a talker than a speaker," says Ramanan. "My talks are different, the audience do not feel any distance between them and me." The talks are different also because he frequently bursts into songs – or into flowery lyric or infectious rhyme, His style is conversational, his tone is positive, he has a light witty touch. The audience is kept in good humour and glued to its seats.

Reflections in a lost 'Garden of Paradise' on a Chennai Sunday morning...

A month or so back, I stumbled upon my own 'garden of paradise'. At the crack of dawn and literally in my own backyard. So here I am, with a book, of verse, a flask of filter 'kapee', And thou (well, actually my dachshund Planet) beside me, And this (indeed) is paradise now"!!

And no, I do not, refer to the 'Garden of Paradise' brilliantly woven into my recently acquired *Qum Carpet*, or the *Charbagh* garden of Islamic aesthetics, but to my randomly planted flowering – tree and plant-filled 15 ft by 10 ft "Jugaad" garden in my South Chennai home which seemingly morphs overnight into a seasonal paradisiacal garden:

perfumed, carpeted with exotic blooms, filled with mesmerizing music and...

But let me begin at the beginning as all stories and gardens do, and as a riposte to doubting Thomas friends; who think my stories of garden paradise in Chennai to be a part of my summer madness. So here goes.....

It is 5-ish in the morning and as I grumpily open the door to take in our milk sachets, I am assailed, enveloped and perfume-surrounded by what appears to be air drenched in the fragrance of a hundred flowers! The scented air is all pervasive, intense, magical. I take deep breaths – do I smell whiffs of the 'nithyamalli' growing wild in my "jugaad" garden further

down, a hint of the sweet-smelling temple tree and Rangoon creeper blossoms draped over my garden wall or the intensely fragrant flowers falling from my neighbour's Millingtonia tree? I walk towards my "Jugaad" garden with the perfumed air growing heavier and more

● by
Pushpa Chari

heady – and suddenly stop in wonder. The whole garden space is transformed into a carpet of yellow-gold *Peltorum* flowers, steadily dropping from the *Peltorum* tree like gentle rain on the ground below! And up above is the enchantment of the dawn-breaking eastern sky painted in shades of glorious pink, through which the sun's rays struggle to emerge. Truly a Van Gogh moment. Or my garden of paradise moment?

But wait, there is more to complete the picture: the rising chorus of birdsong in a crescendo of crows, sparrows, seven sisters, koels, and more belting out their own individual morning 'raagas'. The deafening birdsong orchestra fills the air and the heart, giving that perfect musical touch to my garden of paradise. Birds fly everywhere making music, and yes, my favourite avians, a pair of rose-ringed woodpeckers, join in the orchestra with their 'knock on wood' drumming while the butterflies come dancing in ...



Caught in the grip of the mood and the moment I sit down to meditate and fall gradually into deep, sound sleep.

To be shaken awake by my phone's 8 o'clock alarm bells ringing. Cruelly, persistently. Well, time to bid farewell to sleep and alas, to my 'garden of paradise' too. It seems to have vanished in the hour while I slept. The perfume in the air has

faded, the birdsong a memory, the flower carpet curled up at the edges in the glare of sunlight – and the birds and butterflies have flown away.

But tomorrow is another day, another morning. And I'm sure my 'garden of paradise' will come visiting again a few more times till the scorching summer ends my garden trsyts. Till next spring then...



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Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to editor@madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR

ISAIKAVI RAMANAN

(Continued from page 6)

is *Kalangalil Avan Vasantham*, a series on songs of Kannadasan which has already seen over 100 shows in six years.

Ramanan has received over 45 awards and recognitions in the last 19 years since he started his new innings as a performer. The prestigious Kalaimamani Award from Tamil Nadu government for the year 2018 was bestowed on him in 2019.

Ramanan says, "I value all of them but the title "Isaikkavi" is the one I cherish most as it has become part of my name. It is

special because it was not given by any organisation but by my friend Mahesh Krishnan who presented me a memento with the inscription "Isaikkavi", after a talk in English I gave in Los Angeles in 2006."

Anuradha is the woman behind the successful Ramanan for the last 43 years. He calls her his guardian angel.

"She also has a flair for languages and is very fluent in Tamil, English, Hindi, Telugu and to some extent in Marathi, Kannada and Malayalam too. A thoroughly no-nonsense person, I have never suffered from

boredom in married life, thanks to her company" says Ramanan.

The couple is blessed with twins, Anand and Vikram. Anand lives in Boston with his wife Priya and children Shivsundar and Aadhya. Vikram lives in Madurai with his wife Deepthi and son Kumara Seshan. The sons and daughters-in-law sing well. So do Kumara Seshan and Aadhya who have started learning music.

A blessed family indeed!

"A happy, noisy family!" says Ramanan. "I am not special in any way but very fortunate in every way".

Nethra, the champion sailor from Chennai

Citius, Altius, Fortius (Swift-Cer, Higher, Stronger) is the motto of the Olympic Games, the sports arena that every ambitious sportsperson aims to compete in. The previous edition – the Tokyo Olympics – saw four young sailors from India winning accolades for their skill, if not medals. It is a mark of pride for Chennai that the city's own Nethra Kumanan, member of the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association (TNSA) will participate in the forthcoming Paris Olympics.

The achievement comes after her impressive performance at The Last Chance regatta held at Hyeres, where she competed fiercely in the ILCA 6 class of boat. Nethra

showcased her skill, determination and unwavering resolve throughout the regatta, and her exceptional sailing process enabled her to clinch a fifth place finish, and secured her the vital third spot allocated to countries in the Emerging Nations Program (ENP), which includes India. The remarkable feat not only guaranteed India's participation in the Paris Olympics, but also etched Nethra's name in the annals of the sport.

The upcoming Paris Olympics will mark Nethra's second consecutive qualification to participate. *Madras Musings* spoke to the athlete about her incredible journey.

Her introduction to sailing began when she joined TNSA and the annual summer sailing camp in 2011, when she was 14 years old; the very next year, Nethra participated in her first Nationals. Years of dedicated training followed, and her first qualification for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics marked a historic moment for Indian sailing as she became the first Indian woman to achieve this milestone in the ILCA 6 class. It must be noted that though she is an established sailor,



● by
V. Venkataramana

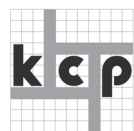
Nethra is no pushover in academics – she holds a degree in BE Mechanical Engineering from SRM University, where she is also pursuing her MBA.

Between 2018 and 2024, Nethra has bagged medals in the Canadian Olympic Sailing Week competition; the Mapfre

Euromed Regatta; the Regatta de Carnival; the Asian Open Laser Championship; the Europa Cup; the World Sailing Championship; the Abu Dhabi Open Regatta; the Gran Canaria NY Regatta; Hempel World Series Miami, Asian Games 2022 and many, many more. Now, as she prepares to face her second Olympics qualification, Nethra is re-affirming her strong position in this

popular water sport. She is confident, she says, that she will do well at the Paris Olympics; but she appears modest about her chances of bringing home a medal. "It is a grand stage, the Paris Olympics. I will strive to bring glory to the nation, but right now I'm aiming to finish among the top 16 or 20 in the final results" she shares, adding that she will soon be leaving for Spain for three months of training.

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