

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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A severe skill/requirement/attitude mismatch?

– *The Govt. seems to be having an HR problem on its hands*

Headlines of the last few weeks seem to indicate that there is a severe manpower issue as far as Tamil Nadu is concerned. On the one hand there is a shortage of people, skilled and otherwise. And on the other we seem to have wasted resources who could be more gainfully employed. We allude to the delay in execution of the Chennai Metrorail Project which has been attributed to lack of availability of labour and also to the hooch tragedy which has sadly claimed many lives. It may not be correct to see a pattern or link between two seemingly diverse events but we have at the same time a huge project held up due to lack of people and we also have an enormous tragedy because people went to seek bliss from a fatal temptation.

CMRL has recently admitted that it faced an enormous

labour crisis due to the elections. While its second phase needed 25,000 people, it was managing with half that strength with much of the workforce having gone back to its places of origin to exercise its franchise. The

● by Sriram V.

statement also has it that while people are trickling back, the present numbers are nowhere near what is required. Though CMRL does not state this explicitly, it seems implied that much of the labour comes from outside Tamil Nadu. The question then arises as to what has happened within the State to its indigenous labour force.

Of course, we have seen a contraction in the past decade or so, when it comes to Tamil

Nadu's supply of people to what can be euphemistically termed support services. It began with Chennai and then gradually spread across the rest of the State – we have been increasingly relying on migrant labour. There are two schools of thought when it comes to explaining what has happened to the local workforce. There is the negative school of thought, often identical with the elitist which opines that those who ought to be working have stopped doing so, given the freebie culture that each political regime only increases. This, combined with Tamil Nadu's drink problem – the State admittedly has one – they say has ruined the workforce for good. The other school of thought has it that with increased literacy, access to

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Study underlines need for city to tackle the Urban Heat Island Effect

A change in Chennai's land-use pattern is driving the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect, says a study Urbanisation Impacts on Heat Island Intensification: Cooling Strategies for Coastal Cities by the Center of Climate Change and Disaster Management at Anna University. Urban Heat Islands (UHIs) emerge when a city experiences temperatures much higher than its rural surroundings due to its relative inability to dissipate heat.

The reasons are multifold and arise largely from the impact of changed landscapes. Urban surfaces like concrete and tar absorb more heat than natural surfaces as they reflect

lesser sunlight; they release the heat at night, causing a spike in temperature. The design of a city has its own impact, too – tall buildings are said to create an 'urban canyon effect'

● by Varsha V.

that blocks wind flow and traps heat near the surface. Of course, activities that generate heat and pollution exacerbate matters as well – emissions from cars, for instance, and industrial emissions generate waste heat and contribute towards the greenhouse effect wherein greater water vapour

or pollutants in the atmosphere trap and amplify heat. This creates a vicious cycle – hotter the climate, greater the demand for energy-intensive cooling; greater the use of such cooling, greater the generation of waste heat, and so on. According to the study from Anna University, Chennai has seen an increase in residential, commercial and industrial areas (reportedly 48.7 per cent in 2017 against 17.7 per cent in 1988) accompanied by a decrease in agricultural lands (19.6 per cent in 2017 against 42.4 per cent in 1988) and forest land. Land surface temperature (LST) studies conducted

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HERITAGE WATCH

A Farewell to Kuralagam?



Last fortnight's article on the proposed 21-storey building to be constructed at Broadway Bus Stand apparently ruffled a few feathers for we got a brusque message on social media that the structure will now be only eight floors which in our view is still bad enough. We hope that whatever is planned, and whatever be its height, will reflect the surrounding architecture.

It is in this context that we feature here Kuralagam, slated for demolition as part of the above construction. We draw attention to how its recessed entrance reflects that of the Law College building just opposite, though a century separates the two. And its height was planned so that it did not overshadow the offices around and in fact blended with them. Can we hope for similar sensitivity?

For the record, Kuralagam, planned as the headquarters of the Khadi and Village Industries Board owed much to the energy of Soundram

Ramachandran the Gandhian who was also head of the KVIB for a while before she went on to become Union Minister. The foundation stone was laid in 1962 and the construction was by the PWD. It was inaugurated on January 14, 1968 by the then Chief Minister, C.N. Annadurai. The plaque however reads that

it was his successor and then PWD Minister, M. Karunanidhi who did the honours. *Madras Information*, the official organ, in its January 1968 issue however has a photograph of Anna doing the honours.

We feature pics of the building as it is now, and those of its inaugural plaque. Pics by Ramanujar Moulana.



A SEVERE SKILL/REQUIREMENT/ATTITUDE MISMATCH?

(Continued from page 1)

better healthcare, and welfare schemes, the State's workforce has moved up the value chain. This combined with a flattening population curve they say, is the prime reason why we don't have locals queuing up for jobs.

Both seem plausible. While we are definitely one of the more prosperous States, there does seem to be a huge unfulfilled demand in services which locals, even those needing jobs urgently, seem to be shying away from. Even the uncertain world of the gig economy seems preferable to the jobs that are on offer in the less glamorous avenues in the service sector. And then there are huge skill disparities. Should the State not be addressing this?

The latest happening, namely the hooch tragedy

throws up a disturbing question. As many as 56 people dead and scores injured owing to the hell brew. And they were all in the wage-earning bracket when it comes to age. Does this not go to reinforce the argument that a populace that ought to be working is wasting itself? We had mentioned earlier that the State has a drinking problem.

A study in 2015 revealed that there were more than one crore alcoholics (those who consumed it everyday) in the lower wage-earning sections of society in the State. The numbers may have only gone up since then. Will the Government wake up to its responsibility of weaning people away to more responsible and constructive activities? And may be add to the skilled workforce?

Need for the city to tackle the Urban Heat Island Effect

(Continued from page 1)

by the GCC show a rising trend in minimum and maximum values over the years – the recorded numbers were 27.12 degree C and 36.62 degree C in 2018; 26.73 and 40.75 in 2020; and 31.66 and 43.45 in 2022 (source: Impact of Urban Vegetation Loss on Urban Heat Islands: A Case Study of Chennai Metropolitan Area, published in the Indian Journal of Science and Technology, Jan 2024.) It is notable that some areas in the city are observed to be significantly hotter than others – particularly, built-up neighbourhoods with fewer green spaces and water bodies.

Many of the measures to tackle UHIs fall squarely in the domain of civic planning; whether it is the planned increase in urban greenery and open spaces, or the design of wind corridors and energy-efficient neighbourhoods, there is no single entity with greater power to build a heat-resilient city than the civic administration. Singapore's efforts, for instance, are highlighted on the World Bank blog and the three most notable action points all fall under the city administration – (a) the nurturing of urban greenery such that every residence is within a ten-minute walk to a park by 2030; (b) the incentivising of greenery in new developments, especially 'skyrise greening' or the creation of vertical greenery that lessens cooling load; and (c) the use of innovative building materials such as cool paints. Closer home, states like Punjab offer incentives for green buildings such as discounts on FSLs; and last year, efforts to assuage

heat-stressed parts of Mumbai saw the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and Marol Co-op Industrial Estate initiate the development of a 3.2 acre urban forest and nature conservancy park to increase green cover.

To its credit, Tamil Nadu has been quite proactive in its efforts towards the cause. It was just last year in June that the State Government launched the city's first Climate Action Plan (CAP) in alignment with the Paris Agreement, an international treaty on climate change. The six areas of priority identified in the CAP – electrical grid and renewable energy, building energy, sustainable transport, solid waste management, urban flooding and water scarcity, vulnerable populations and health – are all significant in their direct and indirect potential to mitigate the UHI effect. With the goal to adopt an integrated approach to land use and infrastructure planning, the Third Master plan will embed key actions from the Chennai CAP. In a quote to The Hindu referring to the city's plans to mitigate the rising heat, Anshul Mishra, Member Secretary, CMDA said, "Sustainable urban growth is possible. A two-pronged approach – compaction of core city and developing the satellite towns around growth centres or existing small towns – has been taken up by the CMDA, apart from undertaking 26 studies for preparing the Third Master Plan." If successful, Chennai stands to demonstrate that able civic planning can significantly soften the brunt of climate change.

Madras Vignettes: Of Tailors, Tennis Players and Trees

The Tailor

The Woman from Madras Musings is often asked, as women are, about her tailor. This is by no means a tribute to WoMM's sense of fashion; experience suggests that most women are perpetually in search of a better tailor for some reason or the other. WoMM is always happy to refer them to the gentleman who's been stitching her clothes for the past decade. She's not sure if she's ever described him to MM readers; he's certainly worth a mention. The tailor is a youngish chap who almost always turns up in a seven o'clock shadow and wearing a full-sleeved striped shirt. He also carries the faintest whiff – not unpleasant – of biscuits and tea, no matter the time of day. (WoMM once asked the Mater if she thought shops sold biscuit-and-tea perfumes, and was curtly asked to spend her time thinking about more constructive things.) The fellow has a small workshop

he confessed suddenly while folding WoMM's clothes. WoMM goggled at him for a bit. "By mistake?" she asked, to which T said no, not by mistake; the lady came to the workshop complaining that her calls always went unanswered and took his phone away declaring that he didn't really need one. WoMM must have looked quite horrified because T quickly comforted her – that particular customer was actually a very nice person, and he expected to get his phone back at the earliest though he didn't know exactly when.

Tennis Players

Readers may recall that the Woman from Madras Musings likes to play tennis. Last month, WoMM played after a bit of a break. Rain was in the air, so the wind was cool and the clouds overhead were rather dark. It was lovely. The people who play with her are quite nice, too. It takes all sorts to make a tennis community

who is slight of build and quick to laugh. He typically doesn't use his full power on the returns, though WoMM has seen him take a few spectacular wins this way; no, he prefers an elegant game of consistent rallies and intelligent ball placement. M is very light on his feet and covers the court like a bumblebee on engines. M's game is in stark contrast to S, another marker.

The latter's natural game is a relentless attack that delights in finding the most impossible angles in a rally; there's no hope of a counter attack when he has control of the ball, because any such attempt invites a fiercer return. S is rather moody, though. WoMM thinks she can sometimes see his personal fog materializing around him. When this happens, he gives in to a story of dispassion that sticks to the tennis ball and coats the rallies; he hardly moves on the court. For all that, however, his shots remain hard to return because they

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

in a complex in RA Puram – the place overflows with colourful clothes and bits and bobs, and he has somehow contrived to wedge in a sewing machine and a chair for himself. T never refuses last-minute work. WoMM has, on countless occasions, tasked him with jobs carrying outrageous deadlines; he accepts them all and proceeds to miss the finishing date with great cheer and good humour. WoMM has grown to find this game rather comforting in its familiarity. Once, he disappeared for months on end – WoMM simply couldn't catch him, however hard she tried. He dodged her phone calls expertly and somehow managed to slip away when she turned up at the shop. On that particular occasion, he delivered WoMM's stitched clothes to her after roughly three months.

Quite recently, WoMM landed up at the workshop upon discovering that T's phone was not working. She informed him that he's been unreachable for sometime to which he replied that his phone was not with him. "A customer took it away,"

and they're each fun to hang out with. For instance, almost every tennis group has what WoMM calls a Jolly Player. JPs are those who play the game because its fun; they don't mind much if they lose and are generally great sports. WoMM likes to partner with these types when playing doubles, because they're usually the last ones to put pressure about winning. They're in stark contrast to the Serious Players, who enjoy pitting themselves against competition. The Better Half belongs to this ilk, and let WoMM tell you that it is immensely stressful to partner the fellow on the court. It doesn't help that she is in troth to him – he insists on considering every match played together as some test of marital strength. WoMM plays her worst game alongside him. The best people to play with, though, are the professional markers at the sports clubs. They're all wonderful at the game and understand WoMM's skills well enough to give her a good game. It's amazing how each of their games reflects their personalities. Take M, for instance. M is a cheerful, calm chap

come in great, sharp arcs with unpredictable bounce. S is a chatterer when he is good cheer. WoMM almost always ends up begging him to zip it during play, for he says the silliest things and often breaks into atrocious song.

The Tree

The other day, WoMM met a friend at a cafe she frequents. It was the first time she really, truly saw the tree outside the shop. The tree, WoMM found, was quite tall and wide (as to the species, WoMM pleads ignorance) and home to roughly seven thousand parakeets, at a glance. Almost every branch had a pair of birds cooing to each other and locking beaks; the trunk seemed to be full of tiny hollows from which red beaks poked out now and then. A chap was sitting right underneath the tree and saw WoMM gaping openmouthed at the sight. He threw the briefest glance upwards and went back to his phone, completely unaware that he was sitting right beneath a miracle.

– WoMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Another Monstrosity – Nip it in the bud

It is inconceivable even to imagine that the powers that be even are contemplating another monstrosity in the heart of Madras near Central Station (MM, June 16, 2024).

A 27-storeyed structure in the heart of the city amidst with many architectural landmarks. Plenty of blue glass plates etc (are we in Manhattan?) preventing natural flow of sea breeze, without any open windows! On the one hand, we are crying hoarse blaming climate change and global warming and at the same time adding to global warming by installing thousands of tons capacity of air conditioning. We can imagine how much hot air will be blown from these, the single most source of warming is the a/c hot air.

Moreover how many hundreds of trees will be cut, how many hillocks will be plundered, from where we will get sand? In order to prevent future calamities like flooding in the city, stagnant sewage water must be prevented and for free flow of rain water to the water bodies the first priority should be to stop adding further concrete jungles. Already the city has a very high proportion of concrete in its composition.

Let us hope the powers that be drop this ill-conceived monstrosity altogether

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Alternate for bouquets

Should we start the practice of giving vegetables instead of flower bouquet on birthdays or other functions? Because the recipients often leave the bouquets behind. Vegetables, on the other hand, can be consumed. Instead of a rose, you can also give an inexpensive seasonal fruit, such as guava, raw mango, lemon, amla, sapota, etc. The size of the basket can be trimmed according to one's budget. Instead of wrapping the basket with plastic, we can use cotton cloth, which can also be used later. If vegetables are too expensive, we can limit with just one or two. This change will also mark our gratitude and will help improve the economic status of our farmers.

Adopting our indigenous culture is always better than aping the Western customs. This kind of small changes will definitely bring about a revolution in our society.

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Rt Hon'ble V.S. Srinivasa Sastri

The article on V.S. Srinivasa Sastri in your magazine (MM, June 1, 2024) brought back few more incidents of the esteemed Srinivasa Sastri.

During his college days at Kumbakonam, there was a strange incident when he went to class without a shirt as he had got fully drenched in a sudden downpour on the way. When he was fined eight annas for being "without shirt", young Srinivasan with tears in his eyes told principal Bilderbeck, "If I had eight annas I would have bought a new shirt and come". Touched by his words, the principal himself paid the fine and bought him a new shirt.

Forty years later, Sastri, on a visit to London, met his old teacher and Principal in his country home. Bilderbeck threw a party for him and proudly told his assembled friends that his student was now a Privy Councillor. When Sastri's turn came to speak, he took a box he was keeping with him and opened it. He took out the shirt which was presented by Bilderbeck and showed it to all the guests to their great amazement. Such were those great men!!!

Srinivasa Sastri was also the Headmaster of The Hindu High School, Triplicane, my alma mater. He also established TUCS (Triplicane Urban Co-operative Society), a pioneer in the cooperative movement then. The above episode was informed by the Alumni Association of the school about two years back.

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Write-up on Harischandra & Galava Maharishi

I read the write-up on Harischandra & Galava Maharishi (MM, May 1, 2024) with great difficulty due to my age and glasses (my glasses are due for change). I could ap-

Website Comments

Neglect has given way to Restoration, but what of Maintenance?

(Vol. XXXIV No. 3, May 16-31, 2024)

Sriram, you've highlighted the main issue with all these structures that are being restored or built as memorials. Its heartwarming to see the interest in historic structures and the importance being given to restoration but without a clear ongoing/living strategy, they would be dead buildings with no purpose doomed to decay. I drive past many of the existing structures like the Gandhi Mandapam for example during my annual visits. These don't have to be dead structures. Your comment around repurposing them as event spaces or heritage homestays is perfect. With some imagination, Tamil Nadu could become an example of history being brought alive respectfully. Thanks as always for your clear eyed remarks!

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He quietly transformed ICICI from a development bank to a corporate bank

(Vol. XXXIV No. 4, June 1-15, 2024)

His full name was Narayanan Vaghulabharanan.

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Viji, the Turtle Girl from Chennai and other Women in the Wild

(Vol. XXXIV No. 4, June 1-15, 2024)

Loved this piece. And yes, I am buying the book immediately.

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V.S. Srinivasa Sastri down under, 1922

(Vol. XXXIV No. 4, June 1-15, 2024)

I am Rt.Hon. Srinivas's Sastri's brother, Ramaswami. Sastri's granddaughter!! This issue of MM is enlightening to me!

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preciate the task that has been taken for the immense care to provide the many references. Kudos to the writer.

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A remarkable (spider)woman of Madras

Reading Ambika Chandrasekar's 'Viji, the turtle girl ...' (MM, June 1st, 2024) reminded me of another Viji (K. Vijayalakshmi) of Madras, who is doing yeoman service validating traditional Indian-knowledge systems.

After her bachelor's degree from Stella Maris College, her Master's from the University of Delhi in Zoology, she completed her doctorate at the University of Madras, working on the predatory behaviour of spiders, as relevant to biological management in Madras Loyola College, when I was teaching there. And that's how I got to know the creative and original thinking of Viji.

Soon after, she published a handsomely produced, colourfully illustrated slim book on the spiders of Madras, co-writing it with another the wildlife enthusiast of Madras, Preston Ahimaz, published by Cre-A, Madras. I remember this book well because I launched this book decades ago in the World-Wide-Fund for Nature office then located in Nandanam, since the original chief guest Theodore Bhaskaran could not make to the event at the last minute.

The narration about Viji will be incomplete if I don't talk of her life partner – the man behind her – A.V. Balasubramanian ('AVB' to many, but 'Balu' to me), supporting her to achieve what she has remarkably achieved working silently in Madras. Since 1985, Viji and Balu enthusiastically have worked on validating various aspects of indigenous agriculture and made efforts to connect them to current-day practices.



Contributions of Viji-Balu duo to India's rural development are remarkable. Viji was a member of the International TASK force of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM), which was involved in the revision of principles of organic agriculture. She led several projects relating to traditional agriculture and published close to 80 research articles.

Currently, Viji directs the Sempulam Sustainable Solutions, a social enterprise providing end to end solutions on sustainable organic agriculture. A remarkable (spider)woman of Madras, who needs to be thought of with gratitude by us!

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Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks for the period April-May 2024.

– The Editor

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The Stuffed Calf

This series of articles, on Lost Landmarks of Chennai has generally focused on monuments and places of interest that no longer exist. It has also looked back at these with a twinge of regret for what is lost. But not everything in the past was great and worthy of preservation. There were some aspects that went away for the good – indications of what can truly be spoken of as progress. Smallpox does not come to Chennai anymore. Polio is almost eradicated. There are no open drains. In that list of things whose departure is to be celebrated, I would also add the stuffed calf. At least I hope it has truly gone. Certainly, it is no longer visible. But there was a time, at least till the 1980s or so, when a dead calf stuffed with hay was a necessary tool of the trade for all milkmen.

These days, while cows and buffaloes remain a visible presence on many arterial roads and bye lanes, the milkman has all but vanished. Milk comes to us out of sachets and we do not stand witness to the actual milking process any longer. But there was a time when most housing colonies of Madras were woken up to the cries of the milkman announcing his arrival. He tethered his cow to a convenient post and having displayed to the lady of the house his milk can being empty (and not filled with wa-

ter), would sit on his haunches and begin his work. But for the milk to flow you needed the calf on seeing and feeling which, the cow would begin to secrete. It is just that the calf was invariably dead and stuffed with hay.

“With native cows and all the crossbreds, it is the general practice to put the calf to suck before milking,” runs the report of a study done in 1904, and published by the Department of Agriculture, Government of Madras. “In cases where a calf dies, its skin is taken off and stuffed with straw. This is put in front of the cow before milking or

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

the head of the calf rubbed along the belly and the sides.” The above study where milk drawn at random from various sources was tested at the General Hospital, Madras, also noted that it needed to be taken into account that as much as 15 percent of the cows whose output was analysed were milked in the presence of a straw calf.

The study report very smoothly glossed over the truth -the calf rarely died of natural causes. It was invariably killed, particular-

ly if it turned out to be a male. The skin was stuffed with basic taxidermy. The four legs were just sticks and only the most half-witted of cows could have mistaken it for a live calf.

That this was not unique to Madras is evident from *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* by Sir George Wyatt, 1891, wherein he notes this was the practice when it came to milking yaks in Tibet. In autumn the calf was killed for food, and the mother would yield no milk unless given the foot of the calf to lick or a stuffed skin to fondle. That the practice was

looked at from the cow's point of view, it cannot be denied that milkmen, whether from Madras or elsewhere, were driven to this resort owing to sheer economic deprivation. And there is no doubt many were greedy.

It may have been an internationally accepted practice, but it was the stuffed calf of Madras that was spoken of in Parliament. I doubt if its equivalent in any other country has had this honour. Speaking during a debate on the Finance Bill on May 3, 1966, Era Sezhiyan, MP from Perambalur, famously compared socialism to the stuffed calf. “In

Madras we see milkmen putting a hay-stuffed calf before the cow; it is not a real calf; it has no life in it; the calf dies for want of milk and hay is stuffed into it. It is placed before the cow so that they can milk it. In the same way, socialism has become a stuffed calf to be put before the people to get their votes.”

The Madras stuffed calf made its way into the world of writing, and films as well. Foreign visitors were of course the first to notice it and even the Department of Tourism's official publication had articles by them where the stuffed calf did not escape inclusion in articles on Madras. I do not recollect clearly but I think it was R.K. Narayan who said that all children in Madras must imagine that calves are born stuffed. The *Ananda Vikatan* of the 1970s regularly had some humour connected with the dead calf and one that I can still remember is of a buffalo asking another as to why she had stopped giving milk. “My dear,” comes the answer, “the stink from the straw calf is unbearable.”

In the 1959 film *Sahodari*, J.P. Chandrababu plays the role of Ananda Konar, a city-based milkman who migrates to the mofussil. He soon teaches all his fellow professionals the ways of

the bad city. They begin using straw calves to milk their cows. The song ‘Madras Nalla Madras’ (*Anubhavi Raja Anubhavi*, 1967) features comedian Nagesh as a villager who has come to the city. In it he sees a milkman complete with cow and stuffed calf and asks as to when cows began giving birth to calves full of hay, which when lifted do not cry. He then drops the carcass on the road and ceremoniously covers it with his upper cloth, making it a shroud of sorts.

Sometime in the 1970s, Madras began to shift to ‘toned milk’ – the supply was there even earlier but I think this was around the time that the Madhavaram Milk scheme reached critical mass. It had begun in 1954 or so, more to evacuate cattle from the city but that cherished goal was soon abandoned. Milkmen in the city were a solid vote bank and did not think being shifted from here was a good idea. The Madhavaram Milk Co-Operative however was not given up. By 1963 milk in bottles was being supplied, with the cows being housed at the colony itself and the calves hopefully being properly taken care of. As late as 1971, the Madhavaram scheme was capable of supplying milk only to a quarter of the city's population and so local milkmen were still in demand.

It was in 1981 that the greatest change was effected when the Dairy Development Department was taken over by the Tamil Nadu Co-Operative Milk Producers Federation Limited, with the products to be sold from then on under the brand name Aavin (of the cow – a smash hit in terms of branding and proving that Governments do have imagination). Milk from all over the State was procured and a large part of it made its way into the city via Aavin. The days of the milkman with his cow and stuffed calf were over for good.

I asked a few millennials if they had ever seen a stuffed calf. Mercifully they had not. But like R.K. Narayan I wonder if millennials think milk comes out of sachets.



Picture courtesy: Aditi Manavalan.

Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar – an inspiration to all

He was an icon, a colossus, an inspiration in the field of Bharatanatyam. Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar was a multifaceted personality – a dancer, choreographer, musician, composer, academician, mentor, and a guru immersed in Bharatanatyam. He performed and taught for almost eight decades in India and across the globe. He was affectionately called CVC Sir and CVC Anna, but to me he's always “Chandru Mama”.

His parents and my maternal great grandparents were very close family friends in Delhi during British times. The bonding has continued down the next generations and Chandru Mama was my local guardian while I was in the hostel studying at Banaras Hindu University. I would occasionally sit and watch him taking dance classes at the Women's college, but in a year's time he left for Baroda to serve at the MS University. Our ties got further strengthened when he moved to Chennai in the early nineties and became quite an integral part of Natyarangam's activities (the dance wing of the Narada Gana Sabha) of which I am a core committee member. He was the Convener of Natya Sangraham (the three-day residential camp) at Thennangur for almost 20 years, sharing his vast knowledge with generosity and leading by example.

During the late night thinnai sessions there, Chandru Mama, while analysing the dance scene, would regale us with interesting anecdotes, sing songs, mimic and crack jokes, sending us into peals of laughter! His easy informality, approachability, and humility would make us forget that we were in the presence of a legend of Bharatanatyam.

He first performed in Natyarangam's first thematic festival

“Vande Mataram”, with wife Jaya in 1997. They included a lovely duet – a “pudu kavithai” by Vairamuthu which Chandru Mama set to music, not an easy proposition. Next he performed a profound solo on the universality of religions for our thematic festival titled “Bharatham Samanvayam” in 1999. His deep and insightful involvement with Varanasi where he lived, learnt and taught for several years, added lustre to the presentation on the holy city in “Kshetra Bharatham”. It was a grand collaboration between dancer Leela Samson, vocalist Bombay Jayashri and resource person CVC Sir in 2007. Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar made a memorable presentation on the Guru-Sishya theme for Natyarangam's “Bandhava Bharatham” in 2012. The final scene is still etched in my mem-

K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, Peria Sarada, and Sarada Hoffman, and in music by eminent musicians like Mysore Vasudevachar, Budalur Krishnamurthy Sastrigal, Mudicondan Venkatarama Iyer and M.D. Ramathanan. Holder of a Masters degree in Botany from the Banaras Hindu University, he began giving dance performances from 1947. It was no cakewalk for him, as those days male dancers were frowned upon, teased and labelled as feminine! But he stood his ground and chose Bharatanatyam over Botany. In 1954, he got selected by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, to go to China as part of a cultural delegation. He continued to perform and teach Bharatanatyam in Banaras.

He moved to MS University, Baroda where he retired as the Dean, Professor and Head of

● by S. Janaki

ory: As the disciple (played by Sibi Sudarshan) finally stepped out after his gurukulavasam with a lamp in hand, and tearfully looked back for a last glimpse of his Guru, there stood Prof. Chandrasekhar tall and stately in his signature style, his hand raised in blessing, with a profound look that told a thousand tales of profound wisdom. That frozen moment actually epitomised all that C.V. Chandrasekhar the person stood for in real life!

Born on 22 May 1935 in Shimla to Rao Sahib V.A.V. Iyer and Kamala, he was number seven among eight siblings. Chandru was among the first few disciples of Kalakshetra trained in Bharatanatyam by Rukmini Devi, Karaikkal Saradambal,

the Department, Faculty of Performing Arts in 1992. He then settled in Chennai with wife Jaya and established the dance school ‘Nrithyasree’. Their daughters, Chitra and Manjari are also accomplished dancers. Well versed in both Carnatic and Hindustani musical genres, he composed the music for all his productions. He has composed *jatisvarams*, *varnams* and *tillanas* which are very popular. His *varnam Yennai marandanalo, ninainthu ninainthu*, written from the nayaka's point of view, is very popular with the gen-next male dancers. He has also created new movements based totally on the basic Bharatanatyam technique. Famous for his perfect araimandi, angasuddham, stamina, subtle abhinaya and excellent choreography, he was an inspiration for every dancer, and a mentor for male dancers. His sartorial tastes were highly aesthetic and impeccable. His dance and life were marked by dignity, decorum, elegance, equanimity and righteousness. He made no compromises, nor did he seek favours.

Greatness sat lightly on him. As one of the leading performers and choreographers of Bharatanatyam, he won laurels nationally and internationally, also representing India in several international festivals. He

served on several committees and government bodies dealing with fine arts. His workshops and lecdeems revealed a wealth of knowledge. His major works of choreography include *Ritu Samharam* and *Meghadutam* of Kalidasa, *Bhoomija (Ramayana)*, *Aparajita (Devi Mahatmyam)*, *Pancha Maha Bhoota*, *Aarohanam*, *Bhramarageet*, and *Kreedha*. He drew inspiration from nature and happenings around him.

He was a recipient of several prestigious awards such as the Padma Bhushan, Sangita Kala Acharya (Music Academy), Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar, Natya Kalanidhi (Abhai), Nriyaya Ratnakara (Cleveland, USA), Nriyaya Choodamani (Sri Krishna Gana Sabha), Nadabrahmam (Narada Gana Sabha), Kalidas Samman from the Madhya Pradesh state government, as well as awards of the States of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Kalaimamani from Tamil Nadu.

He was a stickler for perfection. He believed that the beauty and essence of Indian classical dance lies in its grammar, technique and tradition. He appreciated all genres of classical natyam and respected the special features in different banis of Bharatanatyam. He would say: “There is only good dancing and



Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar receiving the Padma Bhushan award.

bad dancing, and I cannot put up with the latter.” He did not subscribe to sensationalism and change for the sake of change, but felt it should happen organically.

He was a gentleman and a compleat artiste. His depiction of *sringara* was always subtle and divine. I remember his performance with wife Jaya, of the Panchavati scene from the *Ramayana* way back in 1978 during the golden jubilee celebrations of the Indian School of Mines in Dhanbad, Bihar (now Jharkhand). It was such a beautiful, subtle and sensitive portrayal that the entire audience, including the villagers living around the campus, felt that the divine couple Rama and Sita had descended on earth.

When Chandru Mama danced *Natanam Aadinaar*, he filled the space with dynamic grace. His expansive movements, perfect lines, his core never shifting, as well as awards of the States of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Kalaimamani from Tamil Nadu.

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The passing away of veteran Bharatanatyam exponent and guru Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar on June 19, 2024 is an irreparable loss – it is the end of an era. Dance being his very breath, he must now be dancing the *sapta tandava* along with Lord Nataraja Himself.

You Tube Journalism

According to a reputed newspaper, there are over 1 million Tamil YouTubers in India and the numbers will explode to 92 million. Staggering number but not surprising. Which one of us has not been affected by YouTube?

People are doing “research” on YouTube (it used to be internet and Wikipedia) and base their findings after a “concerted” study. It does not occur to them that some news might be fake. Many of them are fake however convincing they might seem. Quick fixes for self-healing and home remedies are lapped up by eager YouTubers, and when the experiments prove they do not help, there is a growing frustration but it does not diminish the thirst to “know” more. The well-meaning friends impose it on unsuspecting groups who are forced to read it and draw their own conclusions.

Frankly I think the forwards from YouTube and what they find newsworthy are such a waste of time. One friend who is strongly opposed to this said it is an insult to our intelligence when old news is recycled and produced in what's app groups, and more so when paper clippings are photographed and sent. “Don't we read the newspapers, don't we watch news?” she asked. I merely shrugged my shoulders as it is the present time-pass for most of us where even reading has taken a back seat. Some are self-appointed journalists, and deem it their

duty to inform the various groups they are part of, describing happenings and funny situations, and health advice, and the ones who receive these forwards read them out of a sense of duty!

It is not that I keep off WhatsApp myself. In this day and age of instant communication it is the quickest way of reaching people who are alert and who watch their notifications all the time. I use it extensively for work and delegating responsibilities to our members who keep our organisation aloft.

So much time is spent in answering every single WhatsApp message lest you be accused of indifference and not responding the way you should. Life has changed for me after WhatsApp came into existence. Messages go back and forth and much of the time during the day and sometimes into the night. We get impatient with those who do not read messages intended for them and feel let down if those dear blue ticks do not appear which indicate that your message has been read. Alas the good old email is neglected, and I am guilty of it too, more so when you get about 60 to 80 odd mails a day and it all piles up if you don't delete them as fast as they appear. You have to wade through the pile of messages before you come across an important one.

What I love on YouTube is the collection of old songs be it

any language. And not to forget the recipes whether I try them or not and the tutorials on art, painting, knitting or crocheting, and of course there lies a second chance to watch an old movie whose orbit you have come out of, and which beckons to you once more. Movies like *Manthan* which created waves recently after a new polished digitalised version was shown

article. The memorable visits to Connemara Library, browsing through old dusty pages of British gazettes and papers to catch a stray vital piece of information on whatever subject you are writing about are hard to forget. The lady in white was always at hand, pulling out the books I needed, and what a joy of discovery to look at the carved furniture in the Li-

me aloft. Occasionally I would venture to their library which shifted to Injambakkam if only to meet Indu my library friend who would make my search easier.

Today the youngsters contact experts who are friendly, interview them over the phone and that's where the resource matter lies. No need to visit, just a zoom meet and you can gather all the information you need. The youngsters have it easy and the publications seldom question the authenticity of the information in the article. And they claim importantly they have done their “research”. And if you are generous enough to share the material with them, you are oft quoted wrongly and you wonder why you even bothered to talk to them. Well, old habits die hard. After the initial wooing, coaxing information out of you, telling you that it would help in writing their thesis etc., once their work is complete you may be sure you will never hear from them again!

Tomorrow if there is an explosion and the communication route goes full circle which does not seem possible right now, I would be happy, to address those envelopes neatly, stick stamps on them and post them. Post them? When I requested my maid to post a letter on her way home, she blatantly confessed she did not know the existence of a post box or a post office, but that's another story!

● by Sabitha Radhakrishna

at Cannes. I am hoping it will be on Netflix or Prime, and it would be rewarding to watch a young Smita Patil, Girish Karnad and Naseeruddin Shah.

I look at my library of precious books many of them out of print. First step to downsize is offering my cookbooks to the girls in my family. They look at me with disdain. “Ammma who wants cookbooks? They are obsolete. You type one ingredient and a host of recipes appear on YouTube, such wonderful ones.” I resist the urge to remind them that I have written 5 cookbooks myself and all are selling well. Nursing a deflated ego, I wonder which library would accept my collection of books.

As a journalist of 40 years standing, my research and those of my colleagues would mean visiting libraries to write a single

library and gawk at the exquisite stained glass that is part of the ancient grandeur of the building! I used to borrow books that I could take home, and there seemed time for them despite my crowded schedule.

I would, as a member be granted entry into the over-century old Theosophical Society Library, to unearth some more gems of written history whilst scripting for national documentaries on Doordarshan, TV. My biggest regret in life is not knowing Sanskrit or to read Tamil fluently as that would have been a great asset in research.

When Madras Craft Foundation housed its library in Besant Nagar, I would spend hours searching for what seemed like treasures. Seek and ye shall find was what kept

Welcoming a missing person

It was a tale fit for the silver screen that played out in real life. A man who went missing 28 years ago as a young lad was reunited with his family, who couldn't believe that the brother they had given up for dead was actually alive! The unkempt-looking man, wearing dirty clothes, came to the notice of Udavum Karangal functionaries when he turned up to

collect the free food being distributed to pavement dwellers under the NGO's Food Sharing Project on March 9. He was found to be mentally unsound, and social workers brought him to the Shantivanam Home at Thiruverkadu, Chennai.

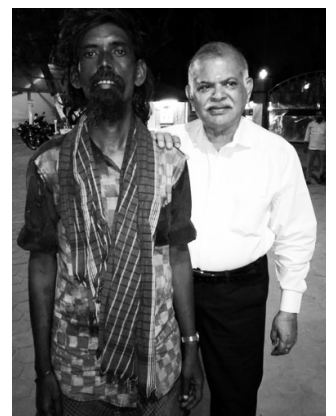
After a bath and shave, some food and clean clothes, the man revealed that his name was Kumar. This seemed to be

borne out by a tattoo on his hand, along with another name, ‘Samuthra’. But Kumar was uncooperative and kept trying to escape from the home. He was kept under medical supervision, and his case was entrusted to an expert in reuniting missing persons with their families. The expert gleaned the information that Kumar was from Vellore, but could not trace his relatives

there. Then, a chance remark led to establishing contact with the owner of a business named Sun Mobiles in Vaniyambadi – and the man was able to give details of Kumar's family.

On hearing the astonishing news that Kumar had been found, his five siblings – two older brothers, two older sisters and a younger one – immediately rushed to the Udavum Karangal home in Chennai. The family told the Udavum Karangal officials Kumar's backstory – he had left home at the age of 17 to work in a small hotel in Chintadripet, Chennai, in 1996. His relatives said he had fallen in love with a girl, who may have been called Samuthra, the name tattooed on his hand. They said either the girl cheated on him, or he decided he didn't like his job. One day, he walked out of the hotel and hadn't been seen since.

Kumar was reunited with his grateful siblings in the presence of S. Vidyaakar, founder-secretary, Udavum Karangal, and



Kumar, when he was brought to Udavum Karangal, with Vidyaakar.



Kumar (centre) is reunited with his family after 28 years. His five siblings rushed to Udavum Karangal's Shantivanam Home when they knew he had been found. Photos: Udavum Karangal.

other officials of the NGO. He was given free supply of psychiatric medicines for a month and his family was advised to continue his treatment for at least a year, and to see that he was never left alone at any point. That's one more success story in Udavum Karangal's rescue, rehabilitation and reuniting mission.— (Courtesy: Grassroots – A Journal of the Press Institute of India.)

Madras Employment Exchange

The Employment Exchanges have for long been the life-line for many aspirants seeking employment with government departments and agencies. The year 2024 marks the 80th since the establishment of the first such organisation in Madras.

The origins of the Employment Exchange in the Madras Presidency date to the closing years of the Second World War. The scarcity of skilled workers for the war industries prompted the opening of the first Employment Exchange in Madras on January 4, 1944. It was an adjunct to the National Services Labour Tribunal, Madras which administered technical training for service with army units or in factories doing war work. The duties of this Employment Exchange were two-fold. The first was to serve as a platform to bring together job seekers and job givers and the second, to increase the suitability of the workers by giving them training in technical and vocational trades. It was realised at the time of its inception that the ex-servicemen would be the ones mostly in need of employment assistance and hence for the first couple of years of its existence, the services were restricted to them.

The Employment Exchange planned and executed several cooperative societies for the benefit of the ex-servicemen as

a part of the post-war development schemes. These were primarily land colonies, workshops (engineering, metal and timber) and transport societies. The administration of these schemes was later transferred to the Cooperative Department. As a part of the training schemes, the Resettlement and Employment Organisation (under which the Employment Exchange was originally constituted), took over a number of training centres that had been constituted by the National Services Labour Tribunal to train recruits for various branches of the defence forces. In the Madras region, there were 32 such centres,

abled functioned at Jalahalli, Bengaluru.

With the close of the war, the Employment Exchange was expanded into a full-fledged Regional Employment Office in August 1945. Gradually, the categories of people served by the Employment Exchange was expanded to cover discharged government employees, backward class etc. and from April 1, 1948, it was thrown open to all classes of citizens. The area of operations too expanded, as district employment offices and sub-regional employment offices came up in places such as Vellore, Coimbatore, Trichy, Vishakapatnam etc. The first

● by Karthik A Bhatt

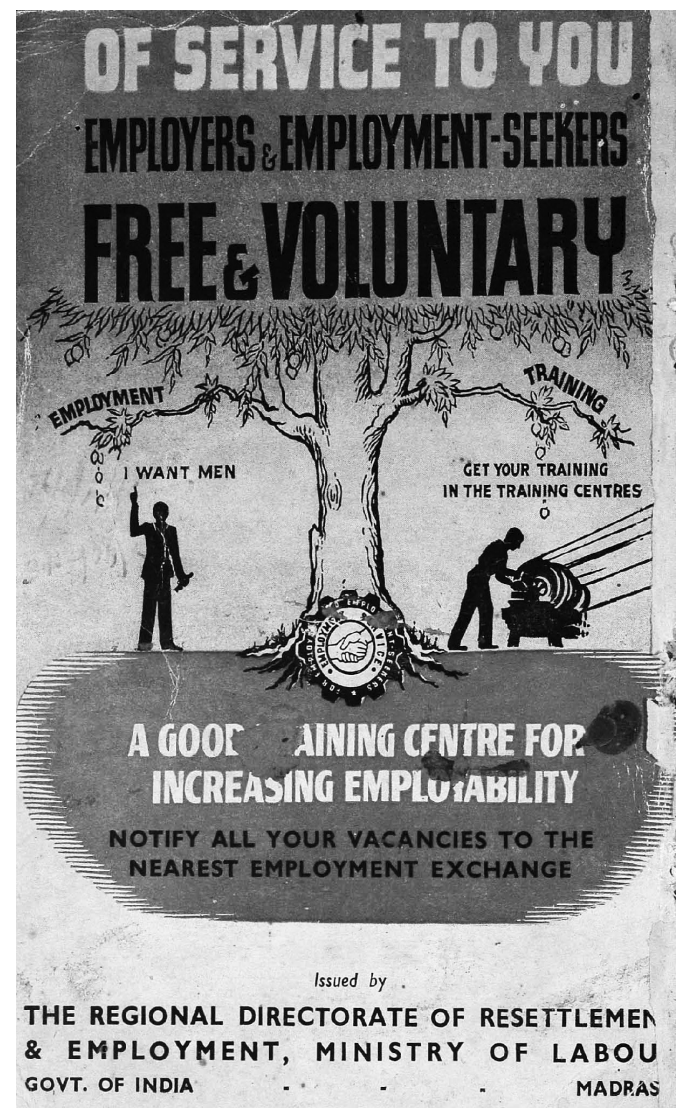
which included the ones set up by the Corporation of Madras, College of Engineering, Guindy, the Instrument Mechanics Training Centre at T. Nagar and the Chengalvaraya Naicker Training Institute, Vepery in the city and other private and government schools elsewhere. The training was imparted in trades such as bricklaying, boiler making, carpentry, painting and decoration, plumbing, electrical works etc. A special training centre for the war-dis-

Regional Director of the Employment Exchange was V Ramakrishna, ICS. Those who served as the Directors in the early years include T. Bhaskara Rao, ICS (who succeeded V. Ramakrishna), C.K. Vijayaraghavan, ICS (IG of Police) and V.N. Kudva, ICS.

In 1954, the Shiva Rao Committee Report recommended that the 'day-to-day administration of the Exchanges should be handed over to the States, with the Central Government being responsible for laying down the policy and standards and for coordination and supervision of the work of the Employment Exchanges'. This recommendation was accepted at the Labour Ministers Conference of all States held at Hyderabad in 1955 and in November 1956 the day-to-day administration and control was transferred to the State Governments.

In the 1970s, the Employment Exchange became the major recruitment platform for vacancies that did not fall under the purview of the Tamil Nadu Public Services Commission. It also became mandatory for all institutions that received financial assistance from the government or quasi-government institutions to fill their vacancies only through the exchanges. Other forms of recruitment such as through advertisements could be adopted only after obtaining prior sanction of the government or a non-availability certificate from the exchange.

This recruitment policy ran into rough weather in a writ petition filed in the Madras High Court in 2010, challenging the filling up of vacancies of village assistants only through the Employment Exchange, without inviting applications from all



eligible persons of the general public. The Court quashed the recruitment process and ordered that advertisements had to be called for in all leading newspapers and other media setting out eligibility criteria such as educational qualifications, age limit etc and also the setting up of a selection committee. The Director of Employment and Training preferred an appeal against the order, which was dismissed.

According to recent newspaper reports, the number of people registering with the

employment exchanges (which stood at around 64 Lakhs as of October 2023) has seen a steady decline over the last decade or so, with the above order being considered to be one of the watershed moments in its history.

Despite its challenges today and questions about its relevance in an era of digital transformation and online job platforms, it is worth remembering that what started off as a war-time creation provided at least a couple of generations with a secure future.



Long queues are a common sight in front of the counters at Puducherry Employment Exchange for registration and renewal. Picture Credit: The Hindu.

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Dear Readers,

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

– THE EDITOR

An amazing journey in squash for Srikanth Seshadri

As fairy tales go this has to be one of the finest in Indian squash. This dates back to the turn of this millenium when the sport of squash in India got a next generation play facility in the form of the Indian Squash Academy (now called Indian squash and triathlon academy) in Chennai. Srikanth Seshadri, a club-level squash player then having heard of the new world class facility was keen to shift his 10-year-old son from tennis to squash. That must have been around 2005 but an actual visit to the facility virtually floored him and what is more, he developed a desire to be part of the working group there.

Noted Malaysian coach, Maj S. Maniam was incharge then with Cyrus Poncha, the then national coach (now Secretary General, Squash Rackets Federation of India) was also there. Then there was Rajiv Reddy, who went on to become a world referee. On top of it all was the belief that Mr. N. Ramachandran, currently the Patron of SRFI (he was the Secretary-General then) had in him. As it happened, they encouraged him, tried him in coaching activities but decided he would be better off in refereeing considering his nature, his stern attitude, inquisitive-

ness and fine verbal communication skills in English.

Before he knew what, Seshadri had taken to refereeing like a fish to water. By 2007 he had begun to officiate international matches. Four years later, he had progressed to world referee status. More than a decade later now, Seshadri has risen to a level where no Indian has! The native from Kangayam, a town in Tirupur district became the first Asian, let alone an Indian, to officiate a final of a world championship. Seshadri had this honour when he refereed the women's final in the recently held championship in Cairo.

Talk of players rising from the Academy and there were atleast three who had done the institution and the country proud and here was a non-professional squash player, as he put it, who could make it to the top in Refereeing. "I am a pure-bred Referee from the ISA", as he proudly put it.

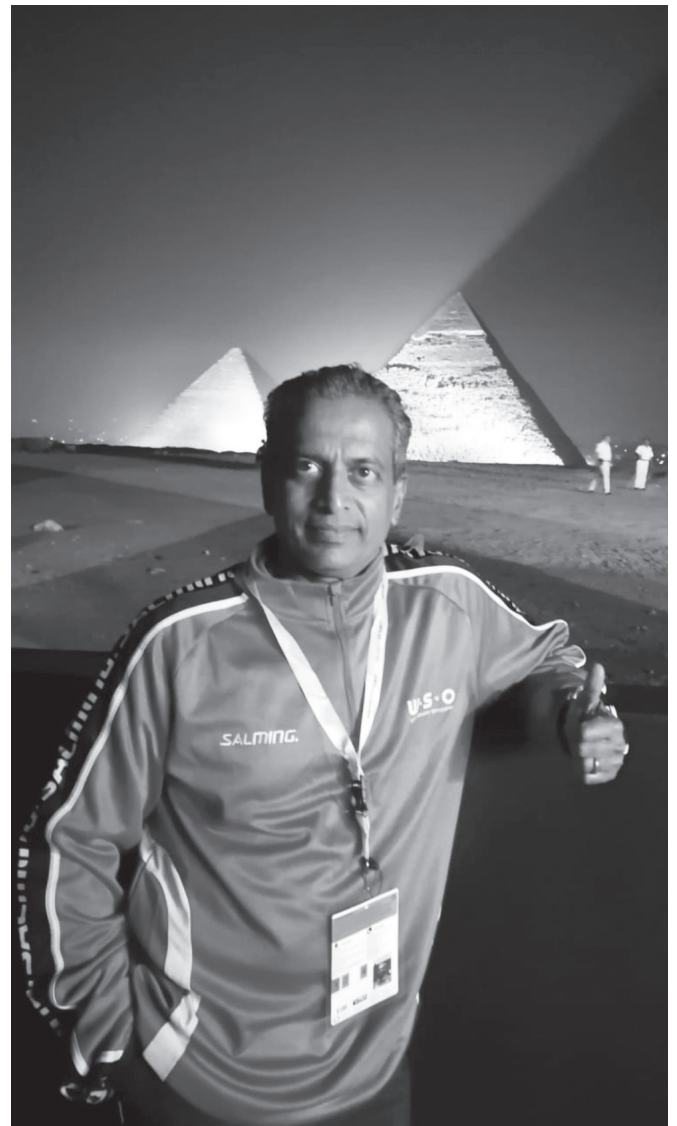
Amazing has been the journey of Seshadri and what stood out was it was never planned. It just came his way and now after having officiated in the National championship, Asian games, Commonwealth Games and World championship he still wonders how it all came about. Just destiny! And for all

his dedicated work it was not as though he never earned recognition. In 2018 he was awarded the Chief Minister's trophy for the best Referee across all sports. Besides, he is now the Director of Referees in SRFI, Deputy Director in the Asian Squash Federation and one of the five members on the WSF Rules Commission. What used to be a frequent hop between Kangayam, his native town and Chennai once for this Engineer turned businessman, Seshadri

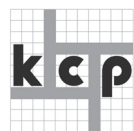
● by
S.R. Suryanarayan

now regularly goes globe-trotting wherever squash calls!

So how does he see the future? The articulate official was clear, "nothing particular. I never dreamt I would come this far. So I am leaving to squash to decide where more I should go!" In another four years time USA would be ready to host the next Olympics and squash is making its debut there. Will Seshadri have the distinction to be there? The man is clear "if it is willed I will be there but I am not nursing any dream. Let things happen its own way," quipped Seshadri in all humility.



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