

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Yet another Government-run Museum in city

– *With no creative plans for making it relevant*

The State Government has announced that *Humayun Mahal*, part of historic *Chepaik Palace*, will soon be converted into Independence Day Museum. It will house memorabilia from the freedom struggle, donated by families of various patriots. It will have besides, a gallery for women freedom fighters and one more which will be an interactive site for lesser-known faces from the struggle for Independence. There will also be on display cannon, swords, documents and other objects transferred from various other museums in the State. The Department of Museums is preparing a detailed project report with the

help of a consultant, after the approval of which, the process of release of tenders will begin, followed by execution. Which is all to the good. What about the actual functioning of the museum? Has any thought been given to that?

● by **Sriram V.**

Past experience indicates that this vital, and often more important aspect of a museum will not have been paid any attention to. There are, all over the city, many museums now, ranging from the Government-run entity at Egmore to

smaller displays belonging to the High Court, the Police, the Regional Institute of Ophthalmology, the ASI, the Railways and the San Thome Basilica. On the anvil are a few more including the old Anatomy Block at the Madras Medical College, the Victoria Public Hall, and one more at Ripon Buildings itself. There are besides, many memorials that double up as museums as well, such as the residences of Kamaraj and Subramania Bharathi, and the commemorative buildings including, and around, Gandhi Mandapam. The Government needs to ponder over how

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More loss of green cover: Chennai District Green Committee approves NHAI Port-Maduravoyal Expressway project

The Chennai District Green Committee has approved an application from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to fell roughly 2,200 trees under the scope of its Chennai Port-Maduravoyal Elevated Expressway project. According to media reports, the project will ease the movement of heavy motor vehicles along the route – the current detour runs to nearly 75 kms and takes two hours, which the proposed elevated corridor will cut down to 45 minutes. Operations at Chennai port are expected to gain by an in-

crease in handling capacity and reduction in waiting time. That the project stands to benefit the city is of little argument;

● by **Varsha V.**

what grates is the loss of precious green cover that Chennai can ill afford to deplete.

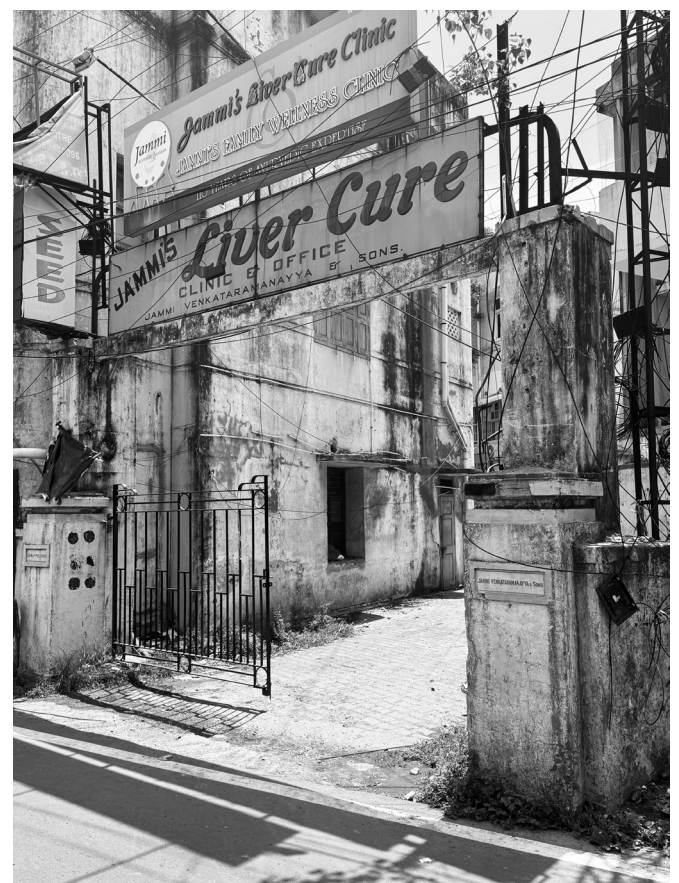
According to a report in the *Times of India* earlier in April, the Chennai Metropolitan Area has suffered a 13.3 per cent loss of vegetation between 2013 and 2022, amounting to a whopping 15.54 sqkm; this

has directly contributed to a 6.53 degree Celsius increase in land surface temperature. As Chennai loses cool pockets of greenery, lakes and marshes to rapid urbanisation, the need is emerging for cohesive, impactful policies that mandate green development. The cope of trees that the project is proposing to cut down is a dense thicket under the Maduravoyal flyover, that – ironically enough – was planted five years ago with funds provided by NHAI under the Green Highways Policy 2015.

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

Another landmark to vanish



Jammi Buildings has changed hands and is slated for demolition. Associated with Jammi's Liver Cure which saved the lives of several infants from the 1930s till the 1970s, it was a landmark in the Mylapore-Royapettah area. It was in every way a tribute to the vision of its founder Jammi Venkataramanayya.

Constructed in 1951, Jammi Buildings is also a tribute to the Art Deco style. The architect (not identified at present) made perfect use of a trapezoid plot to come up with a commercial edifice that allowed fresh air, light, and ease of access. The recent years have not been kind to Jammi Buildings. Ad hoc extensions, lack of uniformity in signage and poor maintenance, all combined to give it a run-down appearance and it was but a question of time before its fate was sealed.

'Why are you lamenting over such an ugly building,' was a comment received on social media. But that ugliness was superficial. A coat of paint, a removal of unwanted additions and uniformity of signage would have restored Jammi Buildings to all its beauty. But in Chennai we have not come to appreciate buildings for anything beyond real estate value. And there are no rewards to owners for preserving heritage.

And so, farewell, Jammi Buildings.

YET ANOTHER GOVERNMENT-RUN MUSEUM IN CITY

(Continued from page 1)

many of these receive footfalls if any, and why the numbers are so few. This exercise needs to be done before any more museums are thought of.

All of these are run on the lines of Government departments. After the initial fanfare of an inauguration, very little thought is given on how to make these attractive for repeated footfalls. How many times will people go to see the same displays, especially in this day and age when much of it is already on social media? If a museum needs to be relevant, it will have to have a mix of stationary and revolving exhibits – the latter being changed every few months. The space will also have to double up as an area for public events. In Mumbai and in Kolkata, this has been the practice for quite some years now and that has resulted in higher footfalls. Museums also need to be looked at from their income-generation point of view. In order to exist, a museum needs to collect revenue by way of sale of tickets and event rentals. The days of opening a museum for free have long gone and if at all the below poverty level people need to

be attracted, free programmes and access can be considered for them. The rest of the people need to pay. Which they will only if what is on display kindles curiosity and interest.

Viewing museums differently cannot be done by a government department or an IAS officer. While these can be in charge of the Trust or the vehicle that governs a museum, the actual running needs to be in the hands of a professional curator-cum-chief executive who has to be given targets by way of revenue, footfalls, events and media presence. The city already has a stellar example in DakshinaChitra. This is a privately managed Trust-governed institution running on leased Government land which has emerged as a major attraction in the city. There are events throughout the year and the number of visitors keeps increasing owing to the variety of what is on offer and the manner in which it is displayed. The existing and proposed museums would do well to study what makes DakshinaChitra different before they embark on anything further.

MORE LOSS OF GREEN COVER

(Continued from page 1)

The afforestation initiative cost Rs. 6.64 crores and was carried out by the Forest Department. However, a MoU soon followed between the NHAI and the Forest Department, allowing the former leeway to conduct developmental or road-widening activities on the same land if necessary. The question then – as TD Babu of the NGO Nizhal points out – is this: If further development was anticipated, why plant the trees on this particular patch of land in the first place? Speaking to *The Hindu* about the issue at hand, Mr. Babu said, “In such a case, the Forest Department should have gone for planting shrubs instead of trees. The NHAI should not have allowed the planting of trees in large numbers, especially within the ramp area. The technically sound Forest Department should not have created the dense green cover.”

According to the website of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, the Green Highways Policy aims to ‘strike a balance between highways development and environmental protection.’ This cannot be achieved if there is little commitment to the nurturing and protection of new greenery planted. Media reports have

also carried the response of District Forest Officer V.A. Saravanan, who assures that the NHAI is “ready to provide funds for the trees in a 1:10 ratio.” The issue is not quite about the funds, though. It isn’t easy to replace lost greenery. Nature takes her own course, and afforestation initiatives cost time and effort in addition to money. Compensatory tree planting must include within its scope a sacred obligation to nurture, grow and protect new greenery for the benefit of the city. Anything less reduces the exercise to adhering to the word of law and not its spirit.

Chennai is growing, and growing fast. Of course there’s a need to ramp up infrastructural development. In fact, it can well be argued that civic projects like the above expressway stand to bring environmental benefits in the long run – shorter distances equal lesser polluting emissions, after all. What is missing is a focus on preservation where possible, a factor that doesn’t seem to carry much consideration today. Mitigation of green loss must become a non-negotiable part of urban planning so that green development becomes the cultural norm, not an attribute that can be bartered away via compensations.

Madras Week is here again

It seems as though the previous edition of Madras Week just got over. *The Man from Madras Musings* is yet to recover from it anyway though if you ask him as to what exactly happened then, it is all a blur. And before MMM knows it, here we are again with the next MW just around the corner.

That it is imminent was made more than clear to MMM by the sudden spurt of invitations to address audiences about it. MMM has thus far consistently refused all chiefly because he is tired of parroting the same thing over and over again. The stance he has taken is that he has spoken of all that he knows, his research at present is somewhat deadlocked, and so, as and when he can think of something new he will emerge chrysalis like, and hold forth. But those who call with invites do not give up that easily or take no for an answer.

One of the recent instances was of a lady official from a hoary institution which is pan-India. MMM had addressed the local branch a few years ago and had been gifted a copy of their excellently written history. He was delighted and has remained so especially when he dips into the volume often but he does not fancy yet another copy of the same book. And so when the lady called asking if MMM would address her institution’s local office MMM said he had already done so a few years ago and so they need to look for others, and if needed he was more than willing to supply a list of speakers.

“But sir, that was more than six years ago and since then many officers have been transferred. The new lot will be eager to listen to you and those that are from the older lot will not remember anything anyway. Your speeches are like that sir.”

MMM did not know what to make of that. But he gave his usual spiel of why he does not want to accept any speaking assignments. The lady thought for a while and then came up with a bright idea –

“Sir, why don’t you speak about the history of our institution? About the various locations where it had its offices in the city and about its overall impact on society, its significant incidents, of people who...”

MMM could have sworn that she was reading out of the index of her institution’s history book. He said as

much – that what she was looking for was a complete retelling of the history of her organisation. That needed time and what was more, there was an excellent book of which no doubt she was aware.

“Who reads books except you sir? Which is why I feel that it is an ideal topic. And as for time, you have a month, don’t you? Why don’t you read our book and present on it for the benefit of our staff?”

MMM privately completed that question by adding “and getting one more copy of the book as reward for your efforts?” to it. He was however not for rising to this bait. Having politely made his excuses, MMM hung up.

The Overseas Brigade

This is that time of the year when many of our city people go abroad to spend time with their children and more importantly, grandchildren. And some of them, no

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

doubt stuck in some suburb with very little to do in foreign shores, become writers. Most inflict themselves on WhatsApp groups but a few think that *The Man from Madras Musings* is a better recipient. They serenade him via email, WhatsApp and diverse other messenger services with long, patently boring, and poorly written, tracts. Most end with a request and sometimes even a peremptory order that these could be published in Madras Musings.

MMM does not oblige most of these cases. But two in recent times have impressed him sufficiently enough with their persistence and also tone, to merit being mentioned in these fortnightly despatches of MMM’s. The first is a person who in an introduction, which he sends in every email, describes himself as an expert in everything, from aardvark to Zulus. He then writes about food in Japan, walking in Mexico and skiing in the Alps and signs off with – a writer based in Madras as though that would qualify him to be published in MM. Sadly for him, such topics do not interest ye olde fortnightly.

The second took MMM a while to fathom as to what it

was all about. It transpired on repeated reading to be about one of those men who having gone abroad discovers civilisation and how it is completely absent in the hometown, namely Madras that is Chennai. The message is worthy of reproduction in full –

“My self & my wife now in XYZ USA in my daughter’s house. The small baby after delivery to be taken by a starawler in a car from hospital. Without the strawler in the car, the delivered girl & baby will not be permitted to move.

The strawler to be fixed and it should be verified and certified by the fire service dept I have enclosed the details from the brochure given by the fire service dept. They are doing it free service. Recently my daughter, granddaughter aged 18 months old and myself gone to the fire service dept after fixing an appointment to verify the strawler position. The staff immediately verified and told all ok., but he told me to change the starawlwr as the height of my granddaughter is increased.

Is there any chance in India, like this? While traveling in car all the 4 persons they have to tie seat belt, even if one is not tied, car will not run.”

MMM did not reply. However as we all know, cars do have safety belts for all seats in India as well. It is a different matter as to whether most people remember to wear them. MMM however is not aware of any variety of car which does not run if passengers ‘are not tied in place’. It smacks of bondage and such other things we need not go into. As for the strawler/starawlwr/starawler, MMM realised after quite a while that it meant a stroller. MMM wonders if the person who sent the email is that law abiding in India.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings is feeling grateful. The June that has just gone by and the July that is in progress seem to be the coolest in living memory in this city of ours. It is on the other hand quite normal to be roasted during this month. MMM realises it is quite a few epochs away from the snowfall he has hopes of in Chennai but every step is that much closer to that eventual goal.

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Pondicherry, the film *Galatta Kalyanam* and the IITF 1968

I wanted to see *Galatta Kalyanam* when a TV Channel was showing it two days ago because Sivaji Ganesan and Jayalalithaa were in the lead with a host of actors like Manorama, Cho and others. There was a beautiful song in the film shot at the International Fair in 1968 at Anna Nagar with the Visveswarayya Tower dominating. The Tower is still there! But much to my disappointment, the channel, cut out the song which to me was the soul of this film, as it was shot entirely at the Trade Fare grounds. I was disappointed not to see the pavilions, particularly that of Pondicherry. But, luckily, I could retrieve the song from a post on Facebook!



IITF in *Galatta Kalyanam*

When I was posted to Pondicherry in 1967 as Development Secretary-cum-Collector from the highly industrialised Gujarat, the Government naturally expected me to change the essentially agricultural face of Pondicherry. The Union Territory then had four composite textile mills and a sugar mill. Other than this, there was no industry worth the name, particularly small industries providing widespread employment.

The Chief Minister and I used to meet the French Ambassador. We also called on GoI Ordnance Factory heads with a view to locate one in Pondy. A Free Port was also being talked about then. Finally, we met the National Small Industries Corporation and they suggested an Industries Intensive Campaign in Pondy and the GoI Secretary, Industries, himself came down. Many small scale industries were established this way.

Meanwhile, the International Fair was announced in Madras. When I mooted the idea of participation because Pondy was already "a window to France", it was accepted by the Chambers of Commerce, the Aurobindo Ashram who had their own small industries and many other units. They all made our participation possible. The International Trade Fair was inaugurated by the then CM of Tamil Nadu, C.N. Annadurai. Pondy's Lieutenant Governor, S.L. Silam, who was earlier Speaker of the Bombay Legislative Assembly, graced the occasion and the Pondy pavilion appeared, although briefly, in *Galatta Kalyanam*.

When I convened the first meeting for our participation at 3 pm on a Tuesday, nobody turned up. They started trickling in



IITF in *Galatta Kalyanam*

at 4:30 pm, and one and all chided me for convening such an important meeting during Rahukalam! I trust such attitudes have changed now!

(Many other interesting details about Pondy are in my autobiography).

Dr. G. Sundaram, IAS (Retd)
drgsundaram@yahoo.com

The Horrors of Highrise

Saw your editorial "The Horrors of Highrise". I highlight a frequent problem we face in many highrises after construction. Owners, of an independent portion or a flat in a multi-storeyed apartment building, after a period, get an urge to renovate.

Not sensing the problems they may pose to the other occupants, they begin the work. As days pass by, suggestions from the other members of the family-young and old- pour in. The renovation bug grows bigger and bites the owner-his purse and otherwise. Breaking down existing walls result in dust and broken stones. There is noise pollution as well. The owner turns a deaf ear to appeals from neighbours, as he is totally involved in his project of renovation.

Renovation is necessary, but it has to be limited in a flat. Renovation could be total in a separate building. There too, neighbour's convenience has to be kept in view by containing noise and dust by barriers and not working during nights.

Moreover, harmony is disturbed because the total-renovator of a flat does not live there. A partial renovator causes less nuisance because his programme is limited, and not total, unlike the big renovator. Any resident in a multi-storeyed flat should have some 'sense and sensibility' and not resort to such horrors!

Lakshmi Sundaram

Website Comments

Heritage Watch: A Farewell to Kuralagam?

(Vol. XXXIV No. 6, July 1-15, 2024)

Kuralagam and Ezhilagam on Kamarajar Salai were constructed around the same time in late 1960s and stood as landmark buildings of that era. The Navarathri Kolu doll sale in Kuralagam every year will be missing henceforth. Don't know whether that area can withstand the pressure of a 21 storey building and the traffic that may emanate from its occupants. A rethink on the government side is required

Parantharami Mani
swamy1961@yahoo.co.in

ROKA amazes international delegations with its efforts in solid waste management in Chennai

The Urban Ocean programme, run jointly by Ocean Conservancy, Resilient Cities Network and The Circulate Initiative, is actively combating plastic pollution using a blend of upstream and downstream strategies. They collaborate with stakeholders from diverse sectors including construction, technology, education, environmental management, and the informal waste sector.

During the Urban Ocean Conclave, held from June 18 to 20, delegates from countries as far as Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, Thailand and Indonesia participated, apart from domestic representation from Karnataka, Mumbai, Pune and Surat. On June 18, the event was graced by Supriya Sahu, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary (Environment Climate Change & Forests). She explained the various efforts taken by the government of Tamil Nadu to protect the environment: Green cover mission, Coastal mission, Climate change mission, Wetlands mission etc.

On June 19, Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner, Dr. J. Radhakrishnan, IAS, appreciated the efforts of the Urban Ocean programme and stated that such summits were essential to brainstorm and come up with ideas to combat plastic pollution.

On both days, experts shared their experiences and the possible way forward. The key highlight was, however, the pilot visit to the neighbourhood of Kasturba Nagar, held on June 20.

Residents of Kasturba Nagar Association (ROKA) has collaborated effectively with Okapi Research and Advisory (IIT Madras incubated) to spearhead comprehensive waste management initiatives, through the We Segregate Project. Together, they have implemented innovative strategies to promote sustainability and environmental responsibility within the community. Their partnership not only addresses waste management challenges but also educates residents on the importance of recycling and reducing their carbon footprint. By fostering community engagement and leveraging expertise from these organisations, ROKA continues to make significant strides in creating a cleaner and greener environment for all residents of Kasturba Nagar.

After a short introductory video highlighting the local area, providing context for the visit, the visitors explored the locality to understand its sustainable waste management practices. The visit aimed to foster knowledge exchange and inspire similar initiatives in different urban settings facing similar challenges.

The delegation got to see the different types of lane composters installed in the locality. Visitors were impressed by the meticulous maintenance of the composters and the collaborative efforts of the community. Their enthusiasm stemmed from observing how these methods effectively managed organic waste, fostering admiration for the cooperative spirit and dedication to sustainable practices within the vicinity. They also visited several apartments in the neighbourhood to experience a terrace kitchen garden and understand effective techniques to implement source segregation.



The 'Punch the Plastic' (PTP) initiative was implemented as the plastic component of the We Segregate Project. The concept involves installing sharp curved hooks on apartment walls specifically designed to collect low-grade single-use plastic waste. "It is a challenge for each household to collect sufficient quantities of such plastics and give it to an aggregator. With the PTP initiative, we can collect in bulk and give it directly to the aggregators," highlighted P. Saranya, Treasurer of ROKA. – (Courtesy: *Adyar Times*.)

History of recording climate change on the Coromandel Coast*

Climate change is a burning issue today. Everyone attributes losses – economic and otherwise – to the unpredictable, inconsistent behaviour of climate presently. However, the predominant, present-day thinking that climate change is a recent-time geophysical phenomenon is incorrect. A 19th-century Irish physicist John Tyndall first recognised and scientifically explained climate-change patterns in 1861. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, we – humans – understood that the industrial emissions, such as CO₂, CO, CH₄, N₂O (the greenhouse gases) alter earth's energy balance. Such an alteration eventually affects the climate. Therefore, what is correct is that we – Homo sapiens – are fully responsible for the accelerated rate of change in climate, especially in the last century, because of vigorous industrialisation. Alternate theories explaining climate change exist; one is the 'solar-variability theory' advanced by Milutin Milankovitch (1879–1958) of Dalj on the Danube in 1911. Milankovitch related climate to the seasonal and latitudinal variations of solar radiation on the earth. Our interest in understanding climate change and its negative impacts on the human society has quadrupled from the 1990s, although in actuality, we never want to concede that we are the primary cause for the accelerated rate of changes in climate and its patterns, especially from the mid-twentieth century.

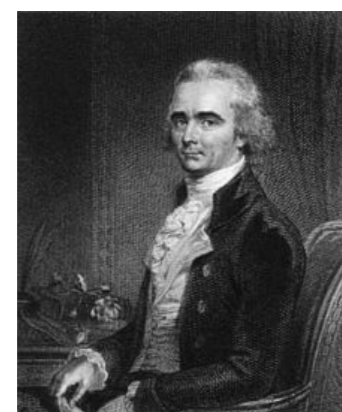
S. Jeyaseela Stephen (hereafter 'S.J.S.', Institute of Indo-European Studies, Pondicherry) is known for his books on the history of the Coromandel. The term Coromandel is the Portuguese corruption of the Tamil word Chola-andalam that refers to the c. 20,000 km land area in the peninsular India, bordered by the Utkal Plains in the north, Bay of Bengal in the east, the Eastern Ghats in the west, and Kanyakumari in the south. In this book, S.J.S. treats a landscape wider than that described above and even parts of the Deccan plateau (e.g., Mysore) as the Coromandel.

Ancient Indians perceived climate as an adjunct of forest

health. For instance, Kautilya in Pataliputra speaks of forest health and climate in *Arthashastra*, verse 7.12.7. The *Aranyakas*, a class of ancient-Indian scriptures, speak of deep philosophical thoughts linked to nature, treating forests as the appreciable manifestation of the Divine. The *Aranyakas* aver forests and climate as interconnected essentials in the overall scheme of the organic world. Frederick Ricketts Hemingway, Collector of Thanjavur in the 1900s, alludes to a severe famine there because of the failure of rains as reported in Sekkizhar's poetic account, the *Thiruthondar Puranam*.

Explanation of plant transpiration and translocation by Stephen Hales of Kent, England (1677–1761) in 1726 and Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau of Paris, France (1700–1782) in 1758 first clarified tree-climate relationships and the pivotal role trees play in influencing water cycle. This explanation changed the scientific understanding of climate. The Europeans who came into India in the mid-Seventeenth Century linked climate and its vagaries to two other phenomena: (1) droughts and famines; (2) epidemics of unknown aetiology. In effect, the European missionaries and medical doctors living in the 18th Century Coromandel recorded weather for the above two reasons. A Danish–Halle missionary Johann Ernst Geister – then residing in San Thomé – maintained weather records pertaining to every day, monthly, and seasonal wind movements and rainfall, using rudimentary devices, such as a weather vane.

William Roxburgh (1751–1815) – a medical doctor at-



William Roxburgh. Picture courtesy: Wikipedia.

tached to the English East-India Company in Madras – is one key name in the Coromandel's weather records, although he is better known as a botanist. At that time, the miasma theory (earlier proposed by Hippocrates, the Second (4th century BCE)) attributed a relationship between weather and human health; the miasma theory prevailed as the explanation of infectious diseases caused by microbes until the end of the 19th century. The miasma theory suggested that diseases are produced due to unhealthy or polluted vapors rising from the ground, or from decomposed material. Today, we know that microbial human pathogens are air-borne; therefore, the miasma theory, after all, was correct. This was another reason, why climate patterns were searched in the Coromandel. Roxburgh gathered weather data from the time he arrived in Madras in the 1770s. While at Nagapattinam and Samarlakota, Roxburgh measured weather three times a day using the then popular Jesse Ramsden® weather-measuring devices. Based on the measurements made over several consecutive years, Roxburgh forecasted the drought that eventuated in 1789. Roxburgh incidentally speaks of a 'cyclic pattern' in droughts in peninsular India. Worthwhile, however, it is to note that Indians recognised a cyclic pattern in the incidence of famines in the 14th and 15th Centuries – much before Roxburgh – as a 12-year famine cycle.

Towards the end of the late 18th Century, the Europeans living in the Coromandel valued forests as the key for sound economic performance of their colonies, particularly India. Scientific management of natural forests along the coasts of Malabar and South Canara of the Madras Presidency was planned and surveys were launched. Additionally, documentation of the famines of 1769–1770, 1876–1878, 1896–1897, and 1899–1902, that resulted in the death of millions of humans and cattle were carried out. Consequently the influencing monsoon patterns, and those of climate, were recorded by the British administrators. In that context, the climate-related works done



Edward Balfour. Picture courtesy: Wikipedia.

and comments made by Francis Buchanan (1762–1829) and Edward Balfour (1813–1889) during their stay in the Coromandel, unfortunately, are starkly missing in this book.

Francis Buchanan – a Scottish medical doctor of the Bengal-Medical Establishment – was to survey agriculture, minerals, and the manufacturing activity in the Madras Presidency. Buchanan recorded weather patterns, seasons, and forests in this survey made in 1800–1801. Buchanan's *A Journey from Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar* (1807) includes multiple remarks on the weather of the Coromandel. One remark is that rainfall levels had steadily deteriorated in the 1790s compared with those of previous decades.

Notes on the influence exercised by trees on the climate of a country is an informative article by Edward Green Balfour (1849), who was the Surgeon-General in Madras in the 1870s. In this article, Balfour speaks eloquently on the relevance of trees in retaining atmospheric moisture. He valued the relevance of water in human health, influenced by the thoughts of Joseph Priestley (English Chemist, 1733–1804), who had previously argued that the physiology of trees was critical for sound human health. Balfour relates to water as a finite material and its valuable role in water cycle in his 1849 article. Balfour was logical and expedient to deal with the problems concerning natural forests as a public-health issue.

S.J.S. indicates 'Gibson Balfour and Cleghorn' in p. 181, wherein the absence of a comma separating 'Gibson' and 'Balfour'

confused me. In addition, 'Gibson' is indexed (p. 211) as 'Balfour, Gibson', suggesting Gibson as Balfour's first name. Actually the Balfour referred by S.J.S. is 'George Balfour', the older brother of Edward Green Balfour. George Balfour (1809–1894) was a decorated soldier of the Madras Artillery and an active member of the Royal Geographical Society. Both George and Edward held identical views on climate. Edward Balfour's efforts towards conservation measures of Indian forests cannot be gainsaid. The Gibson indicated by S.J.S. is Alexander Gibson (1800–1867), who trained as a medical doctor in Scotland and superintended the Dapuri Botanic Garden in Poona (presently the Empress Botanic Garden) between 1838

and 1867. The missionary–botanist Reverend Nicholas Alexander Dalzell (1817–1877) and Gibson together published the *Flora of Bombay* (Dalzell and Gibson 1861). Medical doctor Hugh Francis Clarke Cleghorn's (1820–1895) role as a forester and his observations on the climate of in the 19th-century Madras presidency are presently well documented.

The History of the Climate Change on the Coromandel Coast includes seven chapters: (i) Historical Setting; (ii) Waterscapes: rainfall in Tamil country; (iii) Famine and drought in Tamil society; (iv) Storms and cyclones of Tamil littoral and the Europeans; (v) Hazards of sea, land and water, floods, tsunamis and earthquakes; (vi) Study of temperature and atmospheric pressure technology transfer from Europe to Tamil Coast; (vii) Concluding remarks. Chapters 2, 3, and 5 relate to climate of the 9th–19th Centuries, whereas the 4th to the 17th–19th centuries, and the 6th to the 18th–Nineteenth centuries. Three appendices occur in unnumbered pages at the end.

Appendix I supplies data pertaining to monthly and annual rainfall in the Coromandel in 1871–1900. Appendix II lists the years of famine as per the Tamil calendrical system and matching years as per the Gregorian calendrical system from 852 to 1866. Appendix III supplies the flood years, similar to calendrical details as in Appendix II.

The *Historical Setting* chapter provides the background for this book, which could have been tighter and crisper. The first paragraph (p. 13) explains the methods used to organise historical geography by integrating spatial and temporal data, reconstructing details, mostly, from inscriptions.

S.J.S. rationalises the intent of this book as a discourse on the

includes hewn-stone faces along its steep slopes. Non-Coromandel examples of such *anaikattus* occur in pages 25–26: S.J.S. also speaks of a dam built at the confluence of Kollidam and Vadavaru rivers (Kaveri tributaries) by the Madras engineer Arthur Thomas Cotton in the 1830s. This chapter also includes brief details on lakes, their management, canals, channels, water tanks and sluices, wells, water rights and disputes that existed before the start of the Vijayanagara rule in the Coromandel in the 15th–16th centuries, and water management during the rule of Madurai and Thanjavur Nayakas. Pages 35–59 include archived data about water management during the administration by the Nayakas of Madurai and the

speaks of the functionality of the improvised rain gauge in his memorandum submitted to the Government at Fort St. George. The Bayley article includes details of his proposal made to the government along with a line sketch of the gauge and a review of that proposal by John Thomas Smith, Chief Engineer, Fort St. George and Madras Mint Master (1839–1855). Smith endorses Bayley's proposal offering a few minor modifications. He especially suggests to the Government to obtain six of Bayley's improvised devices first and check their consistency in performance at the Madras Observatory. After that trial, which was successful, Charles Edward Faber (Chief Engineer, Fort St. George) approved the production of 180

and 13th centuries, synchronising those years with the Gregorian-calendar years (Table 3.1, p. 69). In page 70, S.J.S. alludes to slavery (bonded labour) as a social offshoot of droughts and famines. The term 'slavery' needs to be understood as a complex social phenomenon of interdependency and hierarchy in the Ancient and Middle-Age Southern India. It needs to be contextualised that every societal member was regulated by a level of inter-dependency and division of labour to forming a well-knit social fabric.

Some persons, in some instances, may have been 'enslaved' – in its true meaning – but the paradox is that such persons also become prominently visible as temple patrons in a few other, concurrent-time inscriptions. Women committed to temple service (*Devadasis*) also performed societally high activities, such as *sadir* in temple halls. The reality of serfdom in the Middle-Age south-eastern India, especially in connection with what was probably the use of bonded labour in rice cultivation, from the 13th Century onwards, is suggested only in inscriptions, whereas in the Hindu religious literature, the same phenomenon is presented differently, as expression of devotion. S.J.S. uses several Tamil terms such as *iraiyili* with no explanation for a non-Tamil reader. The usage 'iraiyili tax' (page 71, line 13) was confusing to me. The term *iraiyili* is the compound noun combining *irai* (tax) and *yil* (exempt from). Therefore *iraiyili* refers to that farmland that is exempt from any tax. Therefore *iraiyili tax* is an oxymoron.

In pages 79–82, he clarifies how famines and consequent starvation troubled local residents and how that led to large-scale conversions to Christianity. His remark (pages 80–81):

The missionaries received liberal donations from France to carry on with their work during famine. Indeed, sometime such activities were held up due to (the) shortage of money flowing from Europe. ... These details illustrate the role of the missionaries during famine who brought about conversions in a peaceful and persuasive manner by offering necessary materials and psychological

assistance voluntarily to needy and helpless Hindus, especially the untouchables. One can also really appreciate the help rendered by them. Conversions also diminished considerably after the famine. The missionaries were, thus, undoubtedly a strong source of physical and psychological comfort to the needy during famines.

Pages 84–88 speak of how the grain scarcity was managed by the English-East-India Company in Fort St. George. This section refers to an early form of public-distribution system and employment for the able-bodied managed by the Board of Revenue and the Public-Works Department, respectively. An intense famine described as the Great-Indian Famine hit India in 1875–1878. A series of crop failures in various parts of India led to starvation and spread of epidemics, resulting in human death toll in millions by 1899–1900 (Fieldhouse 1996). Pages 87–88 include details of Report of the Indian Famine Commission (Starchey et al., 1880) signed by the members of the commission: Richard Strachey, James Caird (Scottish Agriculturist), Henry Stewart Cunningham (Advocate-General in Madras), Henry E. Sullivan (Madras Civil Service), James Braithwaite Peile (Bombay Civil Service).

Overall, S.J.S. has made a sincere effort to document many pertinent details, although many gaps and weaknesses exist, some of which have been highlighted in this review. Importantly I felt that a clear synthesis was absent. The major strength of S.J.S.'s *History of the Climate Change on the Coromandel Coast* is its comprehensive list of references, which should be useful to many a scientist and science historian of southern India, and perhaps elsewhere, who would be enthusiastic on exploring historical details of climate and its patterns of change in southern India.

* *History of the climate change on the Coromandel Coast (Ninth–Nineteenth Centuries)* by S. Jeyaseela Stephen, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2023, Pages 217, INR 4,099.

• by Anantanarayanan Raman

Anantanarayanan.Raman@csiro.au; araman@csu.edu.au

The Esplanade(s) of Madras

The Esplanade today is a short stretch of road going south from NSC Bose Road and ending at the intersection of Sir T. Muthuswami Aiyar and North Fort Roads. It is architecturally a magnificent mile for it has the Raja Annamalai Manram, the South India Chamber of Commerce Building, Madras (now Chennai) House which was once Burma Shell Headquarters, the United India Insurance (now LIC) Building and Kuralagam. On the opposite side is the compound wall of the Law College, with the Yale Monument inside it. But a century or so ago, this alone was not the Esplanade. There was a Western Esplanade, a Northern Esplanade, a Benfield Esplanade, a Fort Esplanade, a Hospital Esplanade, an Evening Bazaar Esplanade and a Monument Esplanade. The history of these stretches is confusing to say the least and is made worse by the fact that those names and indeed those spaces do not exist any longer. This article is an attempt at unravelling our city's long-lost Esplanades.

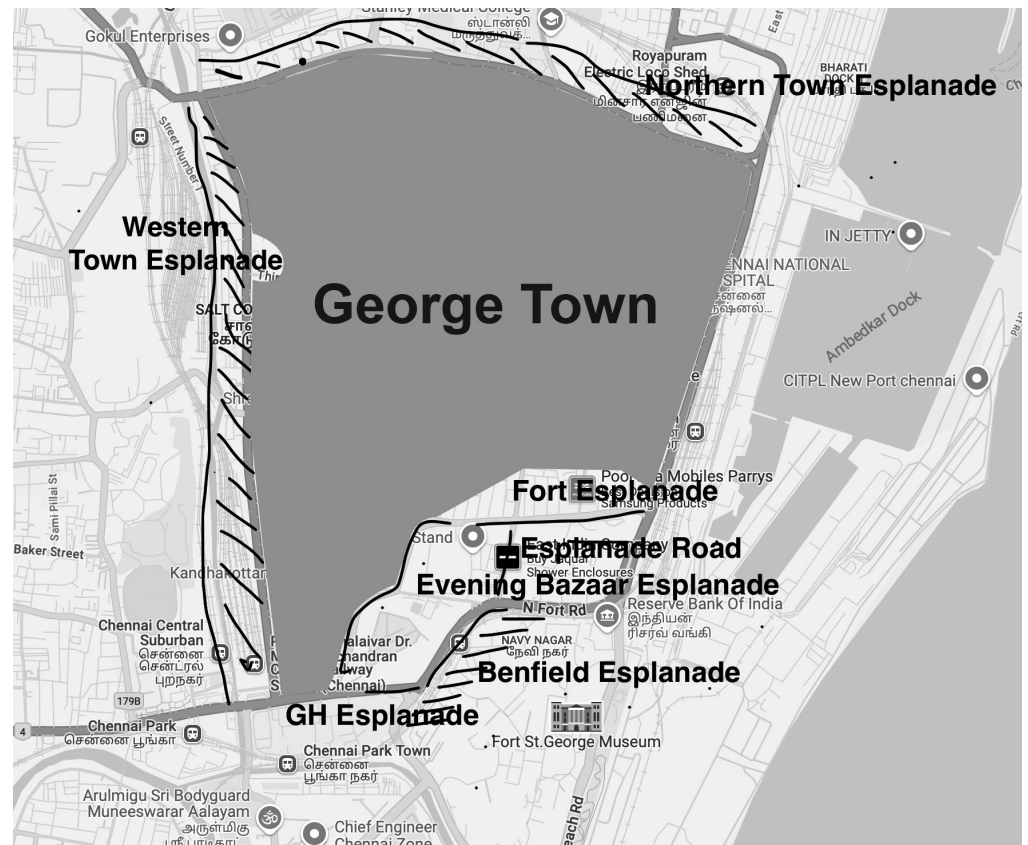
The Oxford English dictionary defines the Esplanade as a long, open, level area, typically beside the sea, along which people may walk for pleasure. It is also an open, level space separating a fortress from a town. Though Madras, and in particular George Town is very much by the sea, it is in the context of the second meaning that we need to look at our Esplanades. There were two significant decisions of the East India Company that gave rise to them.

The first of these concerned the demolition of old Black Town in the 1750s and encouraging those evicted to settle in Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet, both of which became new Black Town (and from 1905 known as George Town). Old Black Town as we know, huddled by the side of the northern boundary of Fort St George and when it was emptied, the vast open space left behind became the Fort Esplanade. As is well known, a series of boundary

pillars was erected in 1773 on the northern side of this area, to indicate that construction was forbidden to the south of it. Of these, the sole remnant is the pillar standing in the shadow of *Dare House* and tended to by the Murugappa Group. The road that came up between the pillars and Fort Esplanade was named Esplanade Road. It was also referred to as China Bazaar Road, both names being used at least till 1939. It was only in 1946 that this became NSC Bose Road. Interestingly, until the 1880s, it was also known as Popham's Esplanade, owing to Popham's Broadway (now Prakasam Salai) intersecting with it. Evening Bazaar Road leads off China Bazaar Road even today to the General Hospital and it would be reasonable to assume that this was the Evening Bazaar Esplanade.

Fort Esplanade, by its very definition, followed the contours of the Fort. It comprised an enormous parcel of land,

bounded by what is today NSC Bose Road on the North, Evening Bazaar Road on the West, North Fort Road on the South and Rajaji Salai on the East. Within it today we have an astonishing collection of institutions and their buildings – the High Court, the Law College, the edifices on Esplanade Road listed earlier, the Broadway Bus Terminus, the Madras United Club, the Madras Medical College hostels, the Government Dental College and the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission. It is interesting to reflect that until the 1880s, there was nothing here barring the Yale Monument aka Hynmer's Obelisk and its neighbour, the now-vanished Powney family vault. It is no wonder therefore that the road that cut across the Esplanade by the Hynmer



LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

Obelisk came to be known as the Monument Esplanade. It was also known as Western Esplanade until the 1940s, as it runs along the western face of the fort.

If these Esplanades came about due to the decision to clear Old Black Town, another set came up owing to the scheme in the 1760s of building a protective wall around new Black Town. HD Love in his *Vestiges of Old Madras* refers to these as the Town Esplanades. The initial plans were ambitious – it was to be a sturdy barrier with seven gates but in the event only the western and northern portions came to be built. The west wall was along what is now Walltax Road/VO Chidambaranar Salai (as is well known the name itself came about because of the decision to fund the wall through a tax on residents) and the north wall along what is Old Jail Road/Ebrahim Sahib Salai. Old jail itself is because the north wall proved a convenient prison site and even today a part of it survives in the shape of a raised park, known as *Madi Poonga*. There is also a North Curtain street facing this, which is hardly known except to locals and indefatigable explorers.

Outside both the western and northern walls, ground was cleared for a width of six hundred yards (1800 feet/ half a kilometre) to provide a clear

line of fire and these became the Northern and Western Esplanades of the Town. By the 19th century, with all threats of war having receded, these spaces were eyed for development. The southern half of Western Esplanade became the People's Park and the northern half was made into Salt Cotours. It is interesting to note that many of the historic buildings that came to be built on People's Park are actually standing on what was once Western Esplanade.

Northern Esplanade was absorbed into Royapuram and today houses the Stanley Medical College and much of the Railway establishment there, including the historic station. It is significant to note that just as in the case of the Fort Esplanade, there was a line of boundary pillars here as well, the last survivors of which were found a decade ago in the Washermanpet Police Station and a jewellery shop!

We now come to the Benfield Esplanade and this is rather tricky to identify. The Administration Report of the Corporation of Madras dating to 1901/1902 states that a new road, "named Moore's Road was opened across Benfield Esplanade, connecting Fraser's Road near Popham's Esplanade with the General Hospital Road near Memorial Hall at the cost of the South Indian Railway, owing to the great inconve-

nience felt by the public by the constant locking of the gates at the level crossing on Benfield Esplanade and General Hospital Road". This seems to have been a short-lived thoroughfare for street directories of the 1930s do not make any mention of Moore's Road here and the SIR level crossing is back in full force. However, it can be seen that the General Hospital Road was a short stretch of what is Periyar EVR Road, leading from the Fort to GH. Even today the name survives and this was probably the General Hospital Esplanade.

Benfield Esplanade was a nearby open expanse, named after that notoriously corrupt contractor Paul Benfield. In today's terms it would mean much of Fort Station and the surrounding areas. What is today Sir T. Muthuswami Iyer Road was once known as Benfield's Road. Muthuswami Bridge was constructed to allow easy access of traffic and prevent stoppages owing to the railway lines that run below it. The Fort's Wallajah Gate opens on to this road and thus Benfield's Road became Walajah Road as well. There were therefore two Walajah Roads in the city – the one on the Esplanade, which is now lost and the other in Triplicane which still survives. Most of us who research this city have equated the latter with Benfield Road and we could not have been more wrong. Paul Benfield, in life, in death, and after seems to have caused a lot of confusion.



Chennai House and United India building on Esplanade.

Look at me... Now!

Click.

A picture of a sambar-vadai. Message: 'Enjoying the world's most delicious vadai ...doesn't everything taste better when eaten with friends question mark-question mark-exclamation-exclamation-heart-heart-heart.'

Everyone is smiling into the camera, and you notice the sambar vadai is smirking too.

And why not? It's just won the world championship.

Click.

A foot encased in blingy footwear. Message: 'All set for my cousin's mehendi!'

Okay – first point: You can't help thinking that that one foot alone can probably light up a stadium, and secondly: The owner of that foot is a complete stranger, and now there's a mysterious 'cousin'? But hey, somewhere out there is a mehendi. Have fun – whoever you are.

Click.

A cat on its back soaking in sunshine. Message: *A loaf of bread, a jug of wine and thou beside me.*

Huh? Not quite sure Mr. Khayyam had a cat-in-the-sun in mind when that was written. Dr. Seuss, maybe. But a 12th century Persian poet? Bit of a stretch, pic-sharer.

A stylised ceramic dish filled

with steaming rasam, shot from all angles. Message: *Homely so yummy.*

And look at this montage... this person is drinking coffee looking to her right, looking to her left, standing up striking an attitude, sitting down striking an attitude, looking straight at the camera, now over her shoulder holding cup in extended hand, now climbing up the stairs, now down the stairs, all the while drinking coffee, drinking coffee, drinking coffee...dear God, seriously?

What next?

100 photos that show the hundred stages of paint drying?

● by Ranjitha Ashok

And macro photography? Really? Do we need an enlarged shot of a human eye with no other claim to fame other than that the owner wanted to 'share'?

Or one showcasing pani-puri guzzling?

Now, pani-puri is sinfully delicious, but let's face it...even a Miss Universe can't quite pull off those stretch-the-mouth-as-wide-as-possible-pop-chomp-and-don't-let-the-pani-squirt-

out-of-your-mouth-and-land-on-your-chin-or-on-anyone-else demands that dish makes.

Question: Where does this need to share every breath you take, every move you make come from? (with due apologies to a certain rock band)

Click. Click. Click.

No moment of everyday life is too mundane to be photographed...and shared.

Old nursery rhymes play in your head in a creepy, sinister loop:

"This is the way we brush our teeth

This is the way we comb our hair

This is the way we wear our deliberately casual footwear, walk down the road, buy potatoes, drink a glass of water...

This is the way we live our lives in a laaargge glass bowl..."

And it isn't just about living – voluntarily – in a glass bowl. It's entire lives in a permanent state of bubbling-over fizz on parade.

'Bestest', 'most fantastic', 'amazing', 'thrilling' ...don't these people ever get tired of being a particularly brilliant shade of 'Rani-pink' all the live-long day?

This isn't just a human problem.

This click and share culture has made mannequins of everyone...and everything.

Members of other species, and even inmates of the inanimate world, have gone all posey and cutesy on us.

Your dog now feels injured if you don't click him at least 57 times a day.

"What? Suddenly I am not 'shweet' enough for you?" he growls, indicating with a dramatic gesture that he needs to see his pet psychiatrist at once. (And that's just another photo op, isn't it?)

As for cats – don't even start.

You walk past one sunning itself on your garden wall, (and you know how cats are...they'll sneer at you in your own home like you are the trespasser), and this cat, who was all along just flopping on the wall in a bindaas, boneless manner, suddenly straightens up and tries to look about ten times cuter than it actually is.



A side-table, in a deep sulk because pictures of her 'so-nov' look have yet to be posted, moves away in a marked manner, which explains why your tumbler of steaming hot filter coffee fell mysteriously to the floor yesterday. Your latest outfit tries to whack you in the face with a sleeve, reminding you that it is still waiting to appear on that famous sharing-platform-you-must-be-seen-on-24/7.

Just landed after a long flight? Well, you'd better look picture-perfect. How else will your 'Airport-Look' get a million likes? (And that's another thing – as if Life isn't competitive enough, the human race has devised one more reason to feel shortchanged.)

Ordered a fancy drink? Click.

Tried a new dish? Click.

Holidaying somewhere exotic? Or not – preferring to go all understated and spartan? Click.

At home, everyday-fare is now refusing to come to the table unless they are dressed up all fancy-like, and all cell phones are ready to click.

"We want to be called something nice too," they demand, "Like 'soul food' or 'nurture-als'...and while you're at it, please look up the dictionary. 'Homely' doesn't always mean what you think it does."

Even babies arrive all photo-friendly these days.

As for Nature – She defines beauty anyway, but these days is quick to feel injured if she isn't being clicked at all the time. And if Nature is a touch disgruntled? Trouble with a capital 'T'.

Now don't get the wrong idea.

No one's being a crusty luddite of a curmudgeon here.

(And yes, everyone knows 'Click' no longer applies in this particular context, but hey, it's just symbolic, ok? And yes, a simple solution is to just shut your eyes and ears to all this din. Agreed.)

Agreed too that there's lots of good stuff out there – fun, serious, thought-provoking, informative, life-lesson-y ... lovely to share – great to look at.

It's the obsessive, relentless 'I exist therefore I click and share' school of thought that can get a bit much at times. (So please put away those sticks and stones, thank you.)

Click, click, click – camouflages the tick-tock-tick-tock of your life, doesn't it?

You take your cell phone out of your bag to make a call.

Wait a minute.

Did that 10-month-old just lean out of its stroller and wink at you?

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– THE EDITOR

When Olympians blessed a Madras stadium

● Now that the Olympics are just around the corner, we showcase a stadium in the city whose inauguration was blessed by three Olympians.

It was in 1889 that the Madras Government constructed the Pudupet Reserve Police Lines – a series of quarters for the constabulary, at a cost of Rs 31,336. The land fronting it became the Pudupet Maidan. During the plague outbreak of 1900 it was used as an open-air hospital but at all other times it was given over to the police. The Governor invariably inspected the police parade here and this was where the police personnel exercised, rode, practised drill and participated in parade rehearsals.

In 1919, the then First Lady of Madras, Lady Willingdon gave Rs 5,000 for the establishment of a Madras City Police Sports Club at the Pudupet Maidan. The building was complete in 1925 and declared open by Lady Willingdon.

With police sports meets becoming sporadic in the 1930s and Vellore being the location as and when they were held, it was only in 1954 that plans once again gained ground for a police stadium. As a result of the decision taken by the Inspector General of Police the Annual State Police Sports of 1954 was held in Madras for the first time ever. That meant a cinder track had to be prepared at the Pudupet Maidan. This was done by the police

themselves by October. For this purpose a huge depression measuring about 100 yards by 50 yards on the southern end of the ground was first filled and levelled up. It was an immense task which was, however, tackled efficiently and speedily by the officers and men of the City Police. That it was well done was proved by the fact that despite heavy rains the level of the track remained unaffected.

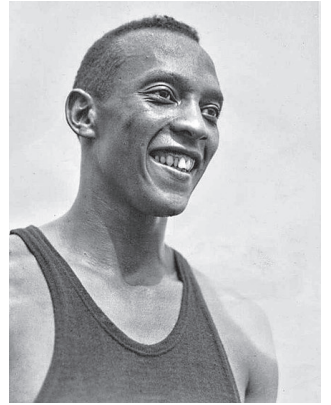
The track was inaugurated by the Rev Bob Richards, World Olympic Pole-Vaulting Champion. He cut a tape and then ran on the track, accompanied by applause from the spectators. At the end of his run he complimented the police on preparing “one of the fastest tracks in India.”

A little prior to this, Richards also delivered a talk at the City Police Recreation Club. And it is best we quote from Arul himself –

“A little earlier Reverend Bob Richards, who has been humorously described as the parson who is trying to jump to heaven on his own efforts, gave a most enlightening talk on athletics in the City Police Recreation Club. He said that one of the most important things for men and women to learn in sport is to discipline

desires; such discipline would give them the power to live a clean life. Secondly, sports taught the principle of hard work. He himself had put in 8000 hours of pole vaulting since the time he began jumping as a boy of 12. He believed in the saying that “Genius is 99 per cent perspiration and 1 per cent inspiration”. Thirdly, he called upon all athletes to have faith in themselves. Even though the so-called experts had told him that he lacked the height, strength and speed to jump even 14 feet he had by faith in himself jumped 15 feet 43/4 inches to create a new world olympic record. He concluded his address with an inspiring appeal to athletes to rely on The Power greater than their own.”

The Annual State Police Sports Meet began on October 17th but was dogged by bad weather right through, resulting in many postponements of events. It was only by mid-December that all competitions concluded. It was at the valedictory that talk turned towards a stadium, chiefly propelled by the then IG – VR Rajarathinam. Work began thereafter and the City Police Stadium was complete by 1957. By the early 1970s, the stadium



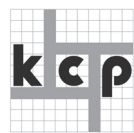
Jesse Owens. Picture courtesy: Wikipedia.

was named after the IGP who mooted and pushed for its construction – V.R. Rajarathinam.

Even while work was in progress, the cinder track notched up further claims to fame – in 1955, Jesse Owens and Bob Mathias ran on it as well. Owens is of course too well known to need an introduction here. Robert Bruce (Bob) Mathias was an American decathlete and won two gold medals at the decathlon, one each in the 1948 and 1952 Summer Olympics. He later took to politics and served for four terms as a Republican in the House of Representatives. – Reproduced from *Kaaval, A History of the Tamil Nadu Police*, by Sriram V.



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