

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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August 1-15, 2024

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## More chaos on Cathedral Road foretold

– With plans for erstwhile Agri Horticultural Society Gardens

The city administration, and whoever else it is who is responsible for such things never seem to want to let well alone. In the last two months we have highlighted how in the name of development giant towers are coming up near the Central

Station and at the Broadway bus stand. And now it is learnt that there are 'plans' for the Agri-Horticultural Society Gardens. While the overall principle behind what is contemplated is to attract crowds to this green lung, in reality it is

only going to add to the chaos.

As per the latest announcement, the erstwhile Agri-Horticultural Society premises, which the Government took over following a protracted court battle, is to be converted into a major attraction.



The Horticultural Society in happier times.

● by Sriram V.

On the anvil is an overhead bridge connecting the Semmozhi Poonga across the road to this space and the Senganthal Poonga which opens up on Lloyds/VP Raman Road to the rear. The garden itself is to be renamed Kalaingar Centenary Park and if the TN Horticultural Department's request for tender is anything to go by,

(Continued on page 2)

## New cab pick-up point at Chennai airport invites ire from passengers

Earlier this week, news reports emerged about a change in the designated taxi pickup point at Chennai airport for both domestic and international passengers. The new pickup locations have now been shifted from the traditional flagpole area to the second and third floors of the multi-level car park in the Aerohub West building.

Covered ramps have been established to facilitate people to move to the new pickup loca-

● by Varsha V.

tion. The relocation is reportedly intended to ease traffic congestion at the airport exit by consolidating taxi pickups in

a single area, but passengers are discovering that it means walking longer distances to reach their cabs. The inconvenience is particularly felt by individuals and families arriving on international flights, as they have heavy luggage to contend with as well. Reports say that taxi booking apps had already updated the new airport pickup location, but the change

## CHENNAI HERITAGE-MADRAS MUSINGS LECTURE SERIES FOR MADRAS WEEK 2024

We are back with a fresh edition of our *Madras Musings* Lecture Series to commemorate Madras Week. The details are given below and all are welcome. Please note, no prior registration is needed. All programmes are from 6.00 to 7.30 pm (first half hour is for refreshments) unless specified otherwise.

- August 17, Saturday** – *The Forgotten Games of Chennai* – Vinita Sidhartha, Founder, Kreedha. Kreedha Experience Centre, GR Complex Annexe, 408, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai 600035 – 5.00 to 6.00 pm followed by refreshments.
- August 18, Sunday** – *Chennai's Ecology – Drab, Mysterious or Baffling?* Talk by Jayashree Vencatesan. Hanu Reddy Residences, Poes Gardens, Chennai 600 086.
- August 19, Monday** – *The DakshinaChitra experience* – Dr. Deborah Thiagarajan in conversation with Sriram V. The Folly, Amethyst, Whites Road, Chennai 600 014.
- August 20, Tuesday** – *A YouTube Channel for Books* – RJ Anandi in conversation with Sriram V in collaboration with Madras Book Club. The Folly, Amethyst, Whites Road, Chennai 600 014.
- August 21, Wednesday** – *QUEERING MADRAS: highlighting the ways the LGBTQIA+ communities have succeeded in carving out spaces – and live – in this city, and the way forward for inclusion.* Panel discussion with Dr. L. Ramakrishnan, Jaya, Meera Sundararajan and Fred Rogers. Moderated by Jaiveer Johal. Residency Towers, Sir Theyagaroya Road, T Nagar, Chennai 600018 – 6.00 to 8.00 p.m.
- August 22, Thursday** – *Three Olympians of Madras* – Muneer Sait, V Bhaskaran, & Charles Cornelius in conversation with Satyan Bhatt. Auditorium, Surana & Surana International Attorneys, International Law Centre, 61-63 Dr. R.K. Salai, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.
- August 23, Friday** – *Memories of Stage* – Veteran actor 'Kathadi' Ramamurthy in conversation with Karthik Bhatt. Hotel Maris, Cathedral Road, Chennai 600 086.
- August 24, Saturday** – *The Life and Genius of Kannadasan* – Mohan V. Raman. Radisson Blu Hotels & Suites, GRT, 531, Grand Southern Trunk Road, Parangimalai, Pazhavanthangal, Chennai 600 016.
- August 25, Sunday** – *Bahurupi Kamal Haasan's rise in Madras Film Industry* – Talk by K. Hariharan, filmmaker, film historian and author. Event in collaboration with Cinema Rendezvous. Savera, R.K. Salai, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

Events will not be relayed live on social media. There will be no recordings to be put up on YouTube later.

still caused confusion as there was a lack of staff to direct passengers; also, officials have provided 18 battery-operated vehicles to help passengers from the domestic terminal to the Aerohub building, but it was of little help as many were unaware of the switch. Further, people found that the first elevator at the multi-level car park could carry only two peo-

ple at a time, which generated long queues and longer waiting times for both passengers and taxi drivers; though there were additional elevators, the queue persisted due to the lack of guidance. A family from Dubai told the *Times of India* that the experience was especially strenuous given that the group

(Continued on page 2)

## MORE CHAOS ON CATHEDRAL ROAD FORETOLD

(Continued from page 1)

there will soon be waterfalls, a mist pathway, a flower tunnel, a pebble walk, a museum, a fish pond, a giant tower that promises a panoramic view of the city and finally, believe it or not, a zipline to take you across the garden. There are also plans to have a restaurant in what was the Agri Horticultural Society's office building. In short, the garden will be anything but a green space.

This does not bode well for what was Horticultural Society gardens or Semmozhi Poonga. Both have thus far been green spaces with plenty of trees and minimal intervention. And it will probably be best to leave them that way. Yes, we are aware that we may appear Luddite in our views but given the congestion in that area, all of these plans are retrograde at best. As it is, there is enormous traffic build up at the Anna Flyover junction and this is only going to be added to if all these facilities come up at the gardens. Just a couple of months ago a flower show was held at Semmozhi Poonga and while it proved a major attraction there was complete chaos as far as traffic management was concerned.

And are we to assume that the US Consulate which is

just next door will remain silent if a giant tower comes up alongside? Why, at present there are gun-toting guards posted on the Anna Flyover to ensure nobody stops and takes so much as a look at the Consulate. And the same applies to pedestrians on Anna Salai or Cathedral Road. What if people begin gawking from the tower or while going to and fro on the zipline? Will it not pose a security threat? And as for the zipline itself, is it by definition not meant for much larger expanses with a lot more to see aerially? What does Cathedral Road really have to offer?

Coming to the maintenance aspect too, our administration has not covered itself in glory. There are numerous rockeries and cascades put up at places such as the beach and the May Day Park which are nothing much by way of aesthetics and rarely seem to work. How then are the proposed facilities at the park going to be any different?

In short, these plans are ill-advised at best. The Government ought to focus on keeping spaces such as Semmozhi Poonga and Tholkappiar Poonga as reserves with none of their fancy ideas to be brought into play by way of 'improvement' or 'development'.

## NEW CAB PICK-UP POINT AT CHENNAI AIRPORT INVITES PASSENGERS' IRE

(Continued from page 1)

comprised children and senior citizens; many other travellers have voiced their complaints over the poor communication.

It is true that the Chennai airport exits see congestion. According to a frequent domestic traveller who spoke to *Madras Musings*, the queues at the exit toll booths are sometimes so long that even cars zipping through the airport for quick pick-ups and drops find themselves forced to pay the toll charge for exceeding the free 10-minute time limit. Making matters worse are the dogs, she says; while she hasn't seen them trouble passengers, she has witnessed a couple of dog fights that scared the children and elderly waiting for their vehicles.

The current move is admittedly in line with traffic arrangements at aero hubs like Mumbai and Bengaluru, where taxis have been assigned specific pickup points. There too, passengers walk fairly long distances; but the signage is clear enough, and waiting rooms

with seats are available for those who need to rest their feet or lay down their luggage. It appears that the Chennai airport is giving passengers the short end of the stick, for the near future at least – it has rolled out a rather vexing change that offers little respite or amenities to passengers. The silver lining is that private vehicles are still allowed to pick up passengers from the arrival terminals, and taxis are allowed inside to pick up the elderly or differently-abled.

Chennai airport officials are reportedly making a few arrangements to make the transition better. Taxi counters have been set on the ground floor of the multi-level car park to take bookings and also assist passengers. Work is also underway to add sunshades to open areas, a welcome move. As reported earlier in this column, mobility is a key, unique strength of Chennai airport, particularly among metros. One hopes that the facility works to hold onto this advantage while solutioning for existing problems.

## Traffic Shenanigans

It was sunset, and *The Woman from Madras Musings* was rather enjoying the drive across Adyar bridge when she was distracted by a car cruising alongside. It was the strangest thing. A largish phone (tablet?) had been mounted at eye level, and the screen was playing a TV show, presumably so that entertainment was at hand when navigating a car through bumper-to-bumper traffic became too boring to endure. The TV show happened to be a favourite of *WoMM's*; the lead character is a misanthrope who would have said something rather cutting to the driver if he had broken the fourth wall. Well, what about you, *WoMM*? Did you open your mouth at all? *WoMM* is sorry

who'd been watching the live stream of a drama in progress at a popular sabha in the city. D had itched to ask the fellow why he wouldn't just go to the sabha in person instead of risking his life and everyone else's to watch the damn thing – but, like *WoMM* and the rest of the world, had shied away from the possibility of a bloody nose and had held his tongue.

*WoMM* remembered this incident the very day when the traffic cop stopped her car claiming that the driver had jumped the signal (he hadn't). Such is life.

### Big Brother strikes again

*The Woman from Madras Musings* has, she thinks,

when BB called. B.H later described his voice as 'trembling with a sort of breathless excitement.' It transpired that BB was drinking tea at the corner shop and enjoying a chat with the teamster when he spied B.H's car taking a left turn just down the road. Knowing that B.H was at dinner at the very moment, BB concluded that the car was being robbed; he ran after the vehicle and, managing to overtake it in spectacular fashion, leapt in front of the driver and slammed his palms on the hood. (The car, *WoMM* was later glad to hear, was going slowly enough to accommodate this burst of heroism.) The driver – in truth a chap from the service center who was merely attempting to

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

to say that she did not; the last thing she wanted was to make a scene in public. Everyone else seemed to be of the same vein, too – people peered in curiously, drew a sharp breath at the audacity once they understood what was happening, and then satisfied themselves with the occasional side-eyed glare. *WoMM* was hoping that the traffic policeman down the road would chastise the driver, but alas! The car drove past him and disappeared at a bend ahead.

*WoMM* recalled that the law had once (quite correctly, too) chastised a friend for checking messages on the go, and wondered aloud how the policeman hadn't noticed this flagrant violation. The good driver pointed out that the perpetrator was a young woman, and sensing an aura of great outrage, quickly explained that policemen were disinclined to stop members of the gentler sex. *WoMM* disagreed. She'd been asked – on many an occasion, in fact – to blow into a breathalyser under suspicion of being tipsy when she was merely admiring the view outside. D diplomatically refrained from responding to the fact but did admit that this seemed to be a new trend amongst drivers; many, men and women alike, are multitasking with their phones while driving. He claims to have caught people watching movies and even attending video calls at the wheel. The worst of them all, he said, had been a chap

made mention of the watchman in her flat – a.k.a Big Brother. He has grown to play a prominent role in *WoMM's* life. The man is bestowed with a work ethic that would bring tears to the eye of any HR manager worth his (or her) salt – not only does BB keep a keen watch over the premises, he also makes regular phone calls to ensure that the residents under his care are hale and healthy. BB calls the Better Half twice a day without fail to make sure that meals are had on time and the day's exercise has been attended to. He also dishes out key information to B.H about what time the maid came, whether *WoMM* had any visitors, his personal opinion of the guy who cleans the car and so on and so forth. Woe to the delivery chap who has to drop off a parcel at *WoMM's* house – he is put through an elaborate interrogation before entry, and even then BB lingers at the stairs during the delivery process, with a baleful glint in his eye. Things have come to such a pass that these poor fellows now fairly throw the parcels at *WoMM* as soon as she opens the door and then run away as fast as they can. *WoMM* once asked BB who exactly checks the guest register he intimidates people into signing. Turns out that no one reads it, but BB does it anyway to strike fear into hearts that may otherwise be tempted to do evil.

The other day, *WoMM* and the B.H were having dinner at a nice restaurant by the beach

return the car and had gotten lost on the way – was properly startled. It was at this juncture that BB had called B.H triumphantly, claiming that the thief was even now blinking at him like a fox caught in the chicken coop.

It took some explaining to make BB understand that the circumstances were innocent, after all; BB wasn't quite prepared to relinquish his moment of valour. B.H assured him that he was extraordinary nevertheless, and his act of gallantry was wonderful indeed. The service fellow agreed fervently, adding it damn near gave him a heart attack. BB was suitably gratified and made friends with the driver, allowing him to park the car in its proper place in the garage. He still made him sign the guest register, though.

### Trending

*The Woman from Madras Musings* came across a fairly viral tweet which described 'the ideal woman.' An accompanying collage had photos of an Indian sportswoman doing different activities. According to the person who posted the tweet, the ideal woman is one who (a) can use a sewing machine; (b) wears 'decent' clothes; (c) is religious; and (d) makes the nation proud by winning a bronze at the Olympics. *WoMM* thanked the stars for B.H. and decided she's had enough internet for the day.

– *WoMM*

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



## The Dog Dilemma: To Feed or Not to Feed

In Chennai, it is not unusual to witness packs of dogs, day or night, snarling along the streets. According to the Greater Chennai Corporation's census, the number of canines increased from 57,366 in 2018 to an estimated 1.2 lakh. And these are the figures obtained by counting only the sterilized ones. Stray dogs whose bark is just as nasty as their bite are taking over the city streets; they also breed out of control. But feeding them is another common practice among the city dwellers, and it also seems to work, as it deters bites. Nevertheless, a lot of them genuinely take pleasure in feeding them.

Most people would agree that the relationship between a human and a dog is special. It's intriguing to learn about the underlying molecular mechanism, though, which allows two creatures from different orders to create an affinity through the flooding of their blood with oxytocin — the hormone that promotes positive emotions like happiness and trust. Research has shown that dog gazing raises oxytocin levels in owners, which in turn causes the owner to respond filially, which raises the concentration of oxytocin in dogs.

● by Shobha Sriram

According to the Animal Birth Control program of the Indian government, dogs belong on the streets. Its attempts to restrict rabies by vaccination and manage the dog population through sterilization, though, have been thwarted by unscientific methods and other practical difficulties. Such an approach presupposes that dogs are naturally suited for living on the streets but ignores the fact that dogs have evolved over time to adapt both behaviorally and biologically to the shifting socioeconomic and cultural environments of humans. Dogs on the streets are a sign of irresponsibility, but to excuse their situation is nothing less than cruelty on the part of humans. As a sign of compassion and accountability, Gandhiji supported removing dogs from the streets: 'It is the indiscriminate and thoughtless charity that has to be resisted,' he had once stated. In addition to the requirement for canine welfare, there is also a civic duty to consider the welfare of people and the necessity of removing dogs from public spaces in order to provide a healthy living environment for people.

A revolutionary ethical perspective was presented by Mahatma Gandhi a century ago, and there is currently a critical mass of scientific knowledge accessible to bring about this paradigm shift. He promoted a municipal bylaw in 1926 that gave the government the authority to 'destroy unowned dogs.' This viewpoint, which was expressed almost a century ago, is more urgent than ever and is still relevant today.

Not only do 'strays' pose a risk to human health and biodiversity, but their abandonment also raises ethical questions. Their name — street dogs — already suggests that they have been abandoned. According to an Indian eco-ethology study, stray dogs prefer to give birth closer to human settlements. Dogs' behavior demonstrates their history of domestication. The dog is a household animal that has been neglected nevertheless. In today's urban environments, dogs that wander freely and without owners are an annoyance and serve no ecological value. Perhaps it is necessary to emphasize the necessity for responsible pet ownership and efficient population management techniques in order to remove dogs from the streets, rather than advocating for the peaceful coexistence of ownerless dogs in contemporary human cultures.

Can dogs be used in a productive way? Dogs are capable of performing a variety of tasks, such as serving as support dogs, drug detection and bomb detection dogs, and so on, thanks to their highly developed cognitive and social communication abilities. Furthermore, dogs' significance as pets increases due to their capacity to create strong emotional relationships with people. Gainfully placing dogs in any of these roles, however, needs to be viewed programmatically;

### A lament for Kuralagam

Let me first appreciate the great work done by your team in gathering all the facts about Madras of yesteryears and publishing it so that we can work for its betterment.

Born and brought up in Chennai, I really enjoy all the articles of OLD MADRAS. The issue of July 1-15, 2024 carried an article about Kuralagam and it really struck me hard to see the plight of the stately building — an abode of handmade toys, articles, furniture and several handloom weaves. Aavin booth sans Kuralagam stands nullified.

The umpteen visits during my childhood gush back to my inward eye, thanks to you. Like what is said in the article the new building would definitely be an eyesore.

Arasi S.

Associate Professor & H.O.D.  
PG & Research Department of  
English, Pachaiyappa's College,  
Chennai 600 030

### Concern about high rise horrors

I am writing to share my concerns about the problems with high-rise buildings in our city. Overcrowding, safety issues, and poor infrastructure are some of the major problems. Many high-rise buildings are too crowded, and there are not enough resources like water and electricity. Safety measures are often lacking, which is dangerous during emergencies like fire and earthquake. Implementing rescue operations during these times might be complex. Living in such high rise buildings may tend people to isolate themselves due to lack of communal spaces available. To add, the mental health of the residents tend to get affected due to the very limited outdoor spaces and absence of physical activities by them. The surrounding infrastructure is also not good enough to support the increased population, leading to traffic jams and other issues. The authorities need to improve planning, enforce safety rules, and upgrade infrastructure to make high-rise living safe and comfortable.

this calls for new laws governing pet ownership and the reorientation of social norms to foster accountability for all canines. The problem of stray dogs is complicated, posing practical, ethical, and legal difficulties, and so a significant shift in perspective is needed.

## THE MADRAS QUIZ 2024

The Madras Quiz 2024 will be organised on Sunday, August 18, 2024 at MMA Auditorium, Pathari Road, off Anna Salai from 2.30 pm onwards by ace quizmaster Dr. Sumanth C. Raman. Organised by Murugappa Group. Prizes worth Rs. 50,000!

Bring a friend, form a team, and win exciting prizes!

Special prizes for top-performing school, senior citizens and women-only teams.

Teams of two members can participate in this quiz.

This is a free, open quiz. All are welcome.

Thank you for highlighting this issue.

Neha

No.41, Victory Avenue  
Thirumullaivoyal  
Chennai 600 062

### About 'The stuffed calf'

I have just finished reading your lovely article 'The stuffed calf'. It sent me down memory lane and for a few min-

utes I was behaving differently. My wife seeing my joyful face told me that I looked twenty years younger. I am seventy two now. I profusely thank you for sharing such a delightful experience. It reminded me of my grandma and her cow and the milkman who disturbed our sleep even before daybreak.

Raja Purushothaman  
rajbusybee@gmail.com

## Caught in the airport during the Microsoft outage

A handwritten pass, a personal touch  
A manual board, where journeys clutch  
A checklist marked, with careful eye  
The old-time charm, of a bygone sky

The scribble of a name, a flight to claim  
A paper ticket, with a manual fame  
No digital screens, to guide the way  
Just a human hand, to start the day

The airport's pulse, a slower beat  
Where travel's thrill, is a more gentle treat  
The rustle of paper, the creak of a gate  
A nostalgic charm, that's simply great

The smell of ink, the touch of paper thin  
A tangible ticket, where memories begin  
A keepsake to treasure, long after the flight  
A handwritten pass, a nostalgic delight

But, oh wait...  
A travel day, meant to bring delight  
Turned into chaos, a stressful sight  
Delays and lines, a frustrating test  
The manual boards, a slow reveal

A handwritten pass, a tedious feel  
The checklist marked, with anxious eye  
A sense of dread, as time went by  
Why now, of all days, must this occur?

A travel day, turned into a blur  
A sense of panic, a feeling of woe  
A journey's start, marred by stress  
But still we persevere, through trials and strife

And find a way, to make it through life  
For even in chaos, there's a glimmer of light  
A chance to learn, and make it through the night

But then ? How many of you traveled with a manual boarding pass?  
Adding it to my memory box!

– Thirupurasundari Sevel

# Madras in Movies

Mahalakshmi Somasundar is an architect and artist who works with watercolour, digital art. She was born and brought up in Chennai and it's safe to say the city and its layered history is her muse in most of her personal projects. She posts regularly on her Instagram handle mahaxarts with art inspired by Chennai's history, Kollywood and Tamil Culture.

Her fascination for Chennai started back in college where she studied architecture and had a course centered on the city and its history and development. She found herself dumb-struck learning that the city in which she had lived and studied had so many layers of history – most unknown and swept under the rug. This fascination slowly led her to find facets in the city that were unknown and had intriguing tales to tell.

*Movies in Madras* is a one such series where she illustrates stills from Tamil cinema with historically salient buildings and landmarks in the frame. The idea is to bring the places in the background to the fore and share stories and facts about them. This pursuit captures places forever, giving us glimpses of structures that don't exist anymore.



Ripon Building in Indian.



Senate House in Aayudha Ezhuthu.



CEG in Nayakan.



Chettinad Palace in Aadhavan.



Ramalayan Palace in Muthu.



Bank of Madras building seen from a train in Alaipayudhe.

# The Battle for Ashok Leyland



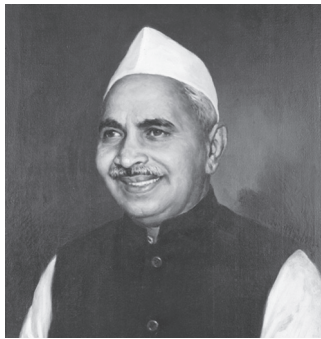
Ashok Leyland is the second largest manufacturer of trucks and buses in the country. The first is Tata Motors. This is a position both companies have maintained for decades. Ashok Leyland is Chennai's pride and Tata Motors is Pune based.

It is now difficult to imagine that Ashok Leyland was a British Company till the mid 80's. The parent company in the UK fell on bad times and wanted to get rid of its Indian subsidiary. Consequently Ashok Leyland, Chennai got caught up in an exciting take-over battle. Rahul Bajaj was a very keen contender. As the Bajaj group was already a leader in the two-wheeler industry, this would have been a good acquisition for them. Everyone thought it was a done deal.

However there were other strong contenders as well. The Hindujas, who were big time traders based in London wanted to enter India and also manufacturing. They did not want to start small. They saw Leyland as a perfect fit for their ambitions. Cummins USA and the

Chhabrias who were takeover kings during that period were also contenders.

There were three rounds of bidding. The UK-based Hindujas emerged winners. Rahul Bajaj was a graceful loser although he was seen as a front runner from the beginning. The Hindujas offered £30 million and outbid others. Imagine acquiring Ashok Leyland for 30 million pounds. At that time there was much discussion going on about whether the Hindujas had acquired the company for a song or had overpaid. As we can see now, it was a steal for them and for Bajaj it would



Shri Parmanand Deepchand Hinduja, Founder – Hinduja Group.

have been a difficult amount to raise. The original shareholders may have preferred Bajaj, but according to the British laws, a public limited company had to go to the highest bidder.

In those days there was much discussion going on about whether the four-wheeler market would ever grow. Consequently, several people asked if the Hindujas had made a mistake. They had in reality taken a calculated risk.

trucks meant a fat premium on the vehicles. It was time to go in for a massive expansion. The decision was to increase its capacity of 12,500 vehicles to 40,000 vehicles.

In 1984, after a convertible bond issue, Ashok Leyland's foreign shareholding came down to 39.4 percent. The anticipated market expansion did not happen and seemed to pose a threat to the company. Even by 1981, the bottom had



R.J. Shahaney. From our archives.

## Business Houses of the South by Sushila Ravindranath

Ashok Leyland was seen as a jewel in the crown of its ailing parent British Leyland. The company enjoyed a continuous but sedate growth in the first 25 years of its existence. In the late 70's things seem to be looking up for the company. The signals were just right. An expanding market and a long waiting list for Ashok Leyland

fallen out of the commercial vehicles market in the country. It was never quite restored in the 80's. Although in the early 80's the market for commercial vehicles was supposed to bloom, it did not happen. By 1987, sales were stagnant.

The company was forced to curtail expansion and was stopped at 20,000 vehicles

instead of the planned 43,000. Things were incredibly tight in those pre-liberalisation days. The downturn in the commercial vehicles market went on and on. In 1986, selling 40,000 vehicles seemed a distant dream. To add to the company's problems, there were steep cost escalations which could not be recovered from customers.

R.J. Shahaney the managing director and his team put in yeoman efforts to prevent the company making losses. There have always been comparisons between Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland. Industry sources have felt that Ashok Leyland has been more tightly run.

When the Hindujas finally managed to squeak through Bajaj and some multinational contenders and acquire the company, Rahul Bajaj graciously said, "I am happy that the Hindujas have got the deal. It is good to know that an Indian rather than a foreigner succeeded. It could augur well for India and its heavy vehicle industry."

He was prophetic. The Hindujas left the running of the company to Ram J. Shahaney, who was then managing director and after him to R. Seshasayee. Ashok Leyland has not looked back since.



R. Seshasayee. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

## Abiding Grace

● **Remembering Gayatri Krishnaswamy (1936-2024)** Long time President of the Madras Players. And Ex. British Council with her late husband K. Krishnaswamy.

This is a trumpet solo for Gayatri Krishnaswami, the long-time President of the Madras Players. She has taken her final bow at the age of 87- alone – but leaving behind a whole orchestra of diverse symphonies.

In the last two years, Gayatri was bereft of the love of her life, Kiccha, or K. Krishnaswamy as everyone knew him. Together they were a team. You might imagine them as a pair of tandem cyclists trailing the flags of the arts and literature at the British Council, while also enabling young Indian artists, dancers, choreographers and playwrights to experience first hand what experiments were being made in late mid-century U.K. They operated a two way traffic exchange that was



Gayatri Krishnaswamy (Grace).

to earn them both individual OBEs (Order of the British Empire). But for those who witnessed at least a few of the 240 theatre productions from the mid 1960s there can be no medals, only memories of glittering performances by some of the most charismatic individuals each tempered to perfection by an extraordinary company of friends.

As observed by P.C. Ramakrishna, a legend now in various fields of the theatre world, in the book *Bring down the House Lights – 50 years*

of the Madras Players written and compiled by him: "Grace (known as Gayatri) and Krishnaswami (Kiccha to his friends) were both working with the British Council. Grace was in charge of the programmes and cultural affairs, while Kiccha was the boss of finance... One of the earliest members of the Madras Players, she structured and organised several programmes and collaborations with The Council – short plays, readings, poetry sessions, workshops on theatre, plus major British plays, presented by us in association with the Council. She coordinated the bringing down to India of eminent theatre directors to conduct workshops, leading to productions of plays in Madras." (Page 55).

In her capacity as President of the Madras Players, Gayatri wrote a brief history of the group, including a quote from Girish Karnad, who was then a fledgling member.

To include a small excerpt from the Introduction: "The Madras Players, which celebrated its golden jubilee in 2005, is the oldest English theatre group in India. We started out as a group of young theatre enthusiasts, mostly students, who were members of a play-reading

● by  
Geeta Doctor

group established by the British Council to promote English language theatre. Our early efforts were confined to Shakespeare and classic British and American plays. We then went on to present contemporary plays.

In the late sixties and early seventies, we attempted English translations of works by Indian playwrights. These plays were successful and well received by our audiences because of their relevance. Between 1963

(Continued on page 7)

● OUT OF PRINT – AN OCCASIONAL SERIES BY KARTHIK A BHATT

# A Madras magazine devoted to Commerce and Industry

July 1, 2024 marks the completion of seventy-five years of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, the apex body governing the accounting and audit profession in the country. It is hence appropriate that the magazine featured in this edition of *Out of Print* is one that was run by a pioneering auditor from Madras.

As seen in an earlier issue of this fortnightly (Nov 16-30, 2022), one of the lesser talked about aspects of Madras is its contribution to the development of commercial education. It has been home to several stalwarts from the accounting and audit profession, one of whom was Narasimham. Hailing from the village of Podalada in the Razole Taluk in Godavari district, Narasimham had his early education at the Raja Chellayamma Rao High School, Pithapuram, wherefrom he matriculated in 1904. He then joined the Public Works Department and worked in the Northern Circars for about five years, before quitting and joining the Davar's College of Commerce in Bombay. He received commercial instruction and training at this institution for over one year and passed the final exams of the Central Association of Accountants, London and was later elected a Fellow of the institution. He setup practice as a public accountant and auditor in Madras in 1911. His clientele included several Estates, Joint



G. Narasimham.

Stock Companies, Banks and Devasthanams of temples such as Tirumala and Tirupathi and those administered by the Madras Devasthanam Committee.

Narasimham was driven by a desire to work for the encouragement of Indian Industries and Commerce. In 1917, he began the Bureau of Commerce and Industries, with a view to supply information to persons interested in trade and industries. The objects of the Bureau included establishing a library and reading room, creating openings for the employment of capital and labour and introducing enterprises to capitalists for potential investment opportunities. The idea of such an organization came in for praise from the likes of R.W. Davies and C.A. Innes, both of whom had served as Director of Industries, Government of Madras.

The Bureau had two other important objectives. The first was to start a journal, which led to the founding of the *Commerce and Industries* magazine.

The first issue of the magazine came out in July 1919. It was described a monthly journal "for the promotion of Indian Commerce, Industries and Material Progress." A single copy was priced at Re 1, with subscriptions available at Rs 10 per annum for subscribers in India, Burma and Ceylon and Rs 12 per annum elsewhere. It was published by Narasimham himself, from his premises at No 5, Mount Road, Madras. A short while later, the magazine metamorphosed into a fortnightly bulletin.

A perusal of a few issues of the magazine reflects a wide number of topics covered. Sector specific articles such as handloom weaving in Madras, the paper pulp industry, the soap industry in India, the sugar industry etc are a regular feature. It had sections dedicated to motor transport, agriculture, research and inventions, foreign trade, and finance, where developments in the respective fields were discussed. Interestingly,

it also reported on proceedings of meetings of Madras based organisations such as the South Indian Chamber of Commerce, the United India Life Assurance company, and the Madras Stock Exchange (whose opening is covered in detail).

The other important objective of the Bureau of Commerce and Industries was the establishment of a commercial museum in Madras. The concept was not a novelty, for similar establishments existed in Calcutta (where it was run by the Government) and Bombay (a private enterprise). Narasimham proposed that the one to be established by the Bureau be run as a private enterprise. Its functions would include exhibition of samples of indigenous and foreign products, raw materials, tools and designs, demonstrations of manufacturing processes, sale of articles and maintaining an enquiry department to supply information pertaining to trade.

Narasimham estimated that the cost of setting up the museum at a central location like Mount Road would be Rs 2 Lakhs. Interestingly, two years later, in August 1919, the Government of Madras published a letter from the Director of Industries regarding the establishment of such an organisation pursuant to the industrial policy laid out in the report on Indian Constitutional Reforms.

Nothing is known today about the progress of the *Commerce and Industries* magazine, or Narasimham's idea of establishing a commercial museum. It is however interesting to note that in August 1939, a good two decades after these ideations, an industrial museum was indeed established in Madras. This was the Central Industrial Museum, which was run under the auspices of the Madras Industries Association. Its location was where Narasimham had envisaged his Bureau's Museum to be, in Mount Road.

## ABIDING GRACE

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and 1970, Girish Karnad was working in Madras and was an active member of our group as an actor, director and translator. To quote him – "In those seven years (with The Madras Players) I was involved with some twenty plays – by Pinter, Williams, Shaw, Beckett – and I learnt how language needs to be used on stage: the rhythm, the pacing, the allowances for breath and movement, the pause, the pitching. We also staged some translations by Sartre, Pirandello, Chekhov and so on, and quite diligently compared different versions before deciding on any one. This was excellent training and I asked myself why I couldn't translate my own plays."

When they first came to the City they were known as the Adiyappa Sisters, Grace and Ida from Bangalore. They carried with them the elegance of their Coorg heritage. Ida taught English at the Queen Mary's College at a time when the English Department under the extraordinarily charismatic Head, Lucy Thomas presided over a menagerie of exceptionally gifted young teachers. This was probably true of the other

Colleges in the City in the Sixties. There was a tremendous sharing of ideas and fresh experiences from places as different as Kalakshetra for dance as theatre, the Cholamandal Artists village, the Weavers Service Centre, and in time at what became "Spaces" with Chandralekha, the dancer-choreographer. They may have existed as small tribal groups each with a leading personality, but there was also a cross-fertilization between the tribes.

Looking back through the pages of Ramakrishna's book it's also obvious that it was a time when a sorority of women led the charge. One has only to look at the table of contents in Ram's book. Ammu Mathew is introduced as "The Queen Bee"; but there were also Yamuna, Bhagyam, Vishalam and Lakshmi paired here with her husband S.V. Krishnamurthy as "The First Couple". Gayatri's role was to be the hummingbird dipping her beak into these disparate groups and ensuring that the honey would be there for others to share.

I may be forgiven for including a small vignette of my own participation in a playlet by Anton Chekov called *The Proposal* with Tamby Kadambavanam

and Ashok Nehru in 1965, at the Gymkhana Club.

If however I could single out one production that was epic it has to be *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad directed by Yamuna Somasundaram as she was known then in 1991. It not only brought into focus Karnad's skill as a playwright able to introduce philosophical themes of the mind-body dichotomy, with its blend of folk, myth and Western Existentialism, but under Yamuna's direction produced a palate of visual delight in its use of costumes, music and dance, and the freeing of space through lighting techniques that were revolutionary at the time.

In the theatre with its evanescent delights, Gayatri Krishnaswamy exuded a singular grace and we can only salute her memory.

(This tribute would not have been possible but for the very generous inputs by Gopi Nair, who became a part of the Madras Players in 1977, by V.V. Subramanian who with Kiccha's family members was with Gayatri through her last days and from the excerpts borrowed from P.C. Ramakrishna's book. My thanks to them. GD)

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– THE EDITOR

# Forgotten Olympians: Sharon Ply Honors Five Field-Hockey Champions who excelled in past Olympics

On a surprisingly pleasant, and what some unadulterated Chennaites like myself would even describe as 'practically chilling,' Tuesday morning in July (16.7.24), three senior Olympians – Vasudevan Baskaran, Charles Cornelius, and Muneer Sait – gathered at GRT Grand, T. Nagar, to share insights from their illustrious careers with the press. The event, titled *Forgotten Olympians*, was organised by Sharon Ply as part of their '#iamstrongest Awards' series to celebrate the contributions of these doyens and their fellow Olympians, Victor John Philips and Krishnamurthy Perumal.

The theme of this year's event is particularly appropriate. With all eyes on Paris for the 2024 Summer Olympics, now seems the most opportune moment to venerate these legends. In a conversation with *Madras Musings*, Mr. Charles Cornelius shared what it meant to participate in the Olympics back in the seventies and how the experience unfolded.

Hailing from a defence family with an unshakable penchant for sports in Punjab, although Tamil by ethnicity, Charles Cornelius naturally took to athletics very early in

life. One of his early coaches suggested he takes up field hockey, as the sport enjoyed particular appreciation in Punjab. Charles soon proved his strength as a right forward and quickly qualified for the state and national teams. He eventually secured a position in the Punjab Police too.

In 1972, Charles geared up to represent India in field hockey at the Munich Olympics. By this time, following the assistance of his coach, he became a professional goalkeeper, although admittedly he wasn't excited about it at first. While the Olympics have always been an extravagant spectacle garnering global attention and enthusiasm, the affair seemed then fairly modest compared to the unparalleled phenomenon it has become today. Even the flight tickets to Germany had to be arranged by a senior in the Police Department, who raised funds in-house. For Charles, who had only travelled third-class in railways with his peers for matches within the country, this certainly seemed like an upgrade.

"In Punjab, you are someone only if you won gold. Anything less than that wasn't considered worthy of cele-



Charles Cornelius, Vasudevan Baskaran and Muneer Sait. Picture courtesy: Sharon Ply.

bration," remarked Charles. The expectations were high, so was the pressure. It was a particularly tough year for India, as its opponents (Paki-

by  
**S. Lakshman**

stan, West Germany, and the Netherlands) were, at least, equally capable. In a particularly gruelling match with Pakistan, India emerged victorious. India bagged bronze that year in field hockey. Though it didn't win gold, it was still a momentous year for India. Still, it was quite hard for Charles to face the folks back in Punjab after his return since they were

disappointed with him for not winning gold.

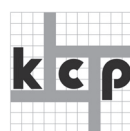
Charles won silver in the Hockey World Cup the following year and has led a remarkable career as a goalkeeping trainer.

As the Olympic mania defines the zeitgeist at the current moment, as we follow, with bated breath, the happenings of the Paris Olympics, what are some of Charles' anticipations? Well, it's truly anybody's game, he mentions. Everyone is greatly qualified. Plus, the times have changed (for good, mostly). Every expense of the Olympians is wonderfully sponsored, unlike during Charles's time. Also, some aspects of the core nature of the game itself have undergone alterations over

the years. For instance, what would have been considered a foul back then, like lifting the ball and passing or turning away from the goalkeeper while feinting to deceive them, have now become accepted as a part of mainstream hockey. So, Charles reveals, it has become harder to judge the match using the standards he held sacred throughout his career.

While technically hockey is the national sport of India, the fact that it is nowhere close, in participation or engagement, to cricket or football is worth bemoaning. Every school must make hockey compulsory. We can't afford to waste any more time, and the mandate must be published immediately, feels Charles.

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