

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Flagging the nuisance of party flag posts

You can see them at every corner. In that sense they are truly democratic for they occupy valuable public space on arterial roads, streets and lanes. We allude to the political party flag posts, which are nothing short of public hazards as they block visibility at junctions. And yet they proliferate chiefly owing to a deadly combination of political clout and lack of administrative will. To add to this are High Court judgements that seem ambivalent at best and confusing at worst.

We do not intend any disrespect to the High Court of Madras but how else do you explain two seemingly contradictory judgements/directives within a week? The first, from the Madurai Bench ordered that all political party flag posts

need to be removed immediately. A few days later, the new political outfit TVK requested permission for erecting a flag post in the Aminjikarai area. The High Court has asked the Corporation to consider the request. This, despite, as per newspaper reports, the civic body citing legal hurdles in granting this permission.

● by Sriram V.

Such confusion is not new. In 2023 a Public Interest Litigation was filed seeking a directive for removal of political flag posts but that was dismissed on the grounds that there already exists a judgement dating to 2019 to the effect

that these need to be removed anyway! Which brings us to the question of what the city administration is doing when it already has clear instructions from the Court since 2019. Why have party flag posts not been removed on that basis and why is a new party asking for permission to erect one?

Looked at objectively, these poles serve no purpose and are nothing but usurpation of public space and demonstration of political power at the local level. They become convenient garbage dumps and venues for unauthorised shops and make-shift kiosks. Often, you can see rival political outfits having flag posts just next to each other. During elections and political

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Rs. 94 crores allocated to restore canals across the city

According to a recent report published in The New Indian Express, the Greater Chennai Corporation has earmarked funds to the tune of Rs. 94.34 crores to renovate neglected canals across the city. The project will cover Verangal Odai canal in Velachery, the SIDCO Industrial Estate canal, the reconstruction of new culverts, raised side walls and fencing. The project is a welcome one, and long awaited by residential communities affected by the derelict canals in their neighbourhoods. Many (for example, the Nandanam Canal) are polluted and choked with debris while others (for example, the canals at Pulianthope and Puli-

yanur) suffer from encroachment. This hinders the free flow of water, causing the canals to overflow during the rainy season and inundate the surrounding areas. A large-scale canal restoration project can

hence go a long way in bolstering the city's flood preparedness, provided it is planned and executed well. Past failures in this regard carry crucial lessons. The Mambalam canal stands as an excellent example. In 2021, the GCC had plans

● by Varsha V.

to create greenery and public recreational facilities along the canal under the Mambalam canal restoration project. The initiative had been proposed as a two-phase scheme, costing Rs. 106 crores that was to be provided from the Smart City reserves. However, the vision never materialised – the project lasted for a few months

HERITAGE WATCH

A Much-Needed Facelift for Museum Theatre



The Museum Theatre is gleaming after its latest restoration. The seats are in perfect working order, the proscenium arch looks as though it was carved yesterday, and the round corridor is a thing of beauty. We bring you a few pictures to show what heritage can look like when spruced up. Sadly, we also add a photo of the latest addition to the Museum complex – an unnecessarily large booking office, completely out of place



and with a giant Pongal pot in the background. The uniformity of the museum complex was marred as it is by the hugely ugly Children's Museum and now, we have this.

before being quite literally washed away by the rains later that year. Conversely, debris from the halted works choked the Mambalam canal, the polluted waters of which – along with overflow from clogged stormwater drains – flooded the neighbourhood and caused much damage to property. The

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FLAGGING THE NUISANCE OF PARTY FLAG POSTS

(Continued from page 1)

occasions these become convenient places from which to hang bunting which after the event become hazards for pedestrians and two-wheelers. They always present a shabby appearance and bring no credit to the city administration.

The Corporation has the power to remove flag posts on its own. But it has very conveniently passed the buck on to the citizenry - you need to complain and prove that a particular flag post is causing a nuisance for action to be taken. Can any Chennai resident imagine the consequences of such a step? You will be forever running from pillar to post and there is also the possibility of harassment from the local politicians. The problem needs to be addressed by political leaders themselves.

Our Chief Minister who gave us the Singara Chennai phrase should pause to consider what his party is doing by way of erecting such flag posts. His closest political rival and immediate predecessor who once famously declared that this city will be another Singapore also needs to ask how many such flag posts exist in that island nation. The party in power at the Centre, which is forever claiming that it will transform our State if voted in needs to ponder over why it needs flag posts. And the other outfits, which profess social uplift need to realise that erecting flag posts are not in any way contributing to that cause. Which brings us to the latest party asking for permission to erect a flag post. If it is indeed full of new ideals, why does it need to toe the hackneyed line of putting up useless flag posts?

Rs. 94 crores allocated to restore canals across the city

(Continued from page 1)

restoration plan was scaled down after the disaster, and the objective was changed from beautification to flood mitigation. There hasn't been much sign of progress until news of the current initiative, which has now reportedly budgeted Rs. 6.5 crores to renovate the Mambalam canal. The case of Siruseri canal is also an example of a failure to launch. The canal's state of disrepair was a direct reason for flooding in areas such as Siruseri and Kazhipattur every rainy season; thus, there were plans to restore the canal from Siruseri Nagar to South Buckingham Canal at an outlay of Rs. 13.76 crores. Tenders were reportedly floated in September 2023, but no work began even a year later from the date reportedly for the want of funds. It is plain that these projects suffered wasteful expenditure and stagnation from poor study and foresight.

Another challenge is most certainly our collective lack of civic sense. For instance, dumping garbage in canals and waterways is illegal but the fact does not appear to be much of a deterrent. The administration has admittedly taken multiple initiatives to solve this widespread issue - for instance in September last year, ahead of the monsoon, the GCC collaborated with a start-up to in-

roduce drone-based real-time monitoring of illegal dumping in 30 km of canals, and collected Rs. 2.5 lakhs in fines from the exercise. The current initiative too plans to install chain-link fencing to combat the problem. However, it is crucial to create awareness and understanding about the implications of dumping, which either appears to be seen as a harmless lapse, or one that has no impact on the perpetrator's quality of life. Buckingham Canal for instance is woefully clogged with waste ranging from garbage to construction debris.

Public consultations can help address the challenges of poor planning as well as poor public awareness. A two-way dialogue will not only help the administration collect data about root problems identified by residents, but will also afford them the opportunity to educate the larger public about the importance of respecting environmental norms. Studies such as the Thiruppugazh Committee report - said to be a well-detailed analysis - should be made public so that the people can learn about the issue. After all, restoring our canals calls for more than a one-time project - to be successful and sustainable, the exercise calls for regular maintenance and care from the civic body as well as the people.

Food for All

The Man from Madras Musings and his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, have been travelling around quite a bit. Butterflies could take their lessons from them when it comes to flitting from place to place. In all of these, as you, our dear readers must have guessed quite a few years ago, it is the good lady who is the visionary and executrix. MMM is just a one-man retinue. In this MMM's good lady scores poorly in comparison to our politicians who have many in their train.

This point came home rather forcibly to MMM when he and his good lady were having breakfast in the restaurant at the hotel where they were staying. This was in ye olde garden city which is these days better known for stagnant traffic. The restaurant was quite full of patrons chomping

younger and smarter, got the whole thing on video. This was the cause of friction for the stills man felt the videographer had stolen a march on him. The leader in the meanwhile went about his business, piling food high on his plate and then attempting a selfie with it all. He nearly came a cropper but then, there were about fifty willing hands and so all was well. The leader posed for a photo with his laden plate and then proceeded to a table allotted to him.

MMM was surprised to find that this was meant for a solitary diner or in this case breakfast. He assumed that the followers were meant to eat at another table but that was not the case. Apparently, it is only in the home state that political leaders expect hotels to feed them and their entourage gratis. In other places they are paragons of

preamble that very often the supposed respondent is clueless as to what is being asked.

Listening to these questions MMM was reminded of those medieval English accounts where the titles would be really long and often contain a precis of the story itself - How ye goode knight so-and-so tilted at ye dragonne and thenne succeeded in winning ye hande of ye faire maiden, etc, etc - you get the picture. At the end of it you could skip the story as you got a good idea as to what it was all about. Here, at the Lit Fest, the questions, if they could be termed as such, were different. For they only succeeded in obfuscation. Consequently, some of the events could accommodate just one query, as these were so verbose and time consuming.

There were other aspects to questioning. There was

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

away contentedly, and there was a general buzz of conversation, cooking, clearing of tables and people walking about the buffet. All of a sudden a quiet descended and looking up MMM found everyone gazing at the doorway.

There stood a leader from our state. And in keeping with a man of his stature he was not alone. There was quite an army of fawners and yes men clustering around him. And one glance at them made it clear to MMM that these were not the kind of people you associate with a hotel of this standing. MMM is a snob, particularly when he spends his hard-earned money to stay at upmarket hotels. But he was impressed with one aspect - here was the leader, a paragon of virtue, an uplifter of the downtrodden, a reformer who yearns for the revolution, bringing his people to a venue they would never have an opportunity to otherwise. Deep down within MMM respect rose for the leader. After all, here was a man who practised what he preaches.

The leader bent low to the person manning the desk and was waved in, along with his entourage. He went over to the buffet and began inspecting the dishes on offer. The accompanying sycophants got busy with their cellphones. One clicked stills of the leader sniffing at the porridge, sizing up the fruits, eyeing the idlis, and so on, while another,

good behaviour. They eat by themselves and what is more, make sure the bill is settled. Having taken his seat, the leader waited for a follower to spread a napkin across his lap (O blessed follower, and double blessed napkin and what can MMM say of the good fortune of the knife, fork, plate, coffee cup and juice glass?). He then gave a stately nod and the entourage melted away to the hotel reception. There MMM found them a while later, uploading all that they had recorded onto social media. Leader meanwhile made quite a meal out of his breakfast all the while no doubt pondering over social uplift. MMM is certain that the followers drew sustenance from their leader's well-being. After all, we are told plants manage on just sunlight, water, and some nutrients from the ground and surrounding atmosphere.

Lighter Thoughts at a Lit Fest

The Man from Madras Musings managed to attend quite a few programmes at the recently concluded lit fest. Many of the events were top notch offering much food for thought. The attendance was varied from very good to high with a strong contingent of the young which always make MMM happy. But there is MMM reflects, a tendency of late among the audience to preface their questions to the panellists with such a long

this VIP, and is to be expected, front row, who was an inveterate questioner. Unlike the others he was, in keeping with his name, brief and to the point, but boy, did he have a query on everything from cricket to Carnatic music. And the volunteers, fearful no doubt of passing him over, had to offer the mic first to him. That meant even less opportunities for mere mortals who anyway would have been longwinded. It was with some amusement that MMM watched a speaker answer a query from this VIP. He began by stating, "in matters of cricket, I too am a snob..." thereby implying many things.

Another front row questioner got his comeuppance at the hands of this same speaker who is a top-ranking Carnatic musician. The question was on how to prevent audiences from walking in and out of Carnatic music performances at will. That this questioner had sauntered in fifteen minutes after this programme had begun was on everyone else's mind. And the musician too had evidently noticed it. He replied saying that this was the problem with all free events. Audiences have no sense of responsibility. It was the same everywhere from the Music Academy downwards he said. And herein lay the sting, he said lit fests were no different. Questioner had the grace to grimace.

- MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Thanks MM

As I always do when visiting, I was talking with my 95-year old father about people and places when the topic shifted to Neyveli and our neighbor Venkatachalam, which then led to his younger brother Krishnaswamy (Kitcha) and his wife Gayatri.

Appa commented that Kitcha received the Queen's honors, but didn't recall details. I googled for his name and ended up at this page at *Madras Musings* noting Gayatri's demise. I will later update appa that both Kitcha and Gayatri were recognised with OBE honors.

I then ended up reading a few more entries at *Madras Musings*. Thanks for your efforts to bring to light all things Madras.

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When Milton Friedman visited Anakaputhur

In continuation to the interesting article on Anakaputhur (MM, January 1st, 2025, Economist Milton Friedman visited Anakaputhur during the late 1970s and featured the handloom weavers in his famous TV series – *Free to Choose*. He mentions that Anakaputhur

had more than 3000 handlooms in operation at that time.

He compared the development of Hong Kong and Japan at that time, under market economy to the controlled economy of India. He illustrated this with the Indian handloom sector, taking Anakaputhur as an example.

The economic woes of Anakaputhur seem to continue even today. I wonder what the illustrious economist's view would be were he to visit again, this equally illustrious centre of weaving.

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Proper pronunciation

I am a regular listener of different FM channels of tamil radio (broadcast over Internet) and a regular watcher of Tamil television programmes.

What depresses me most is the awkward pronunciation of a vast majority of radio and video jockeys (RJs and VJs). These RJs and VJs speak in atrocious speed. Possibly the ability to speak in great speed is the singular criterion for selection as RJs and VJs. Secondly nearly seventy per cent of them cannot say words that include and 'ல', 'ள', 'ன', and 'ண', correctly. The worst of all are the words that include the consonant 'ழ'. In the movie song starting, 'கண்ணுக்கு மை அழகு' Ramaswamy Vairamuthu enchantingly uses a phrase 'தமிழுக்கு 'ழ' அழகு'. Deplorably, most of us in Tamil Nadu kill this letter 'ழ', while saying it. Pathetic. I am not sure how many Tamil teachers in primary and secondary schools, and colleges train learners in pronouncing them in the most

correct manner; we take immense pride as தமிழுக்கு!

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Website Comment

The Madras Literary Society

(Vol. XXXIV No. 19, January 16-31, 2025)

It is rather sad to see the photographs of the MLS, showing so much neglect. Obviously no maintenance or repair. Who would be responsible for keeping the beautiful building and its valuable contents in good order?

I used to visit there as a child in the early 1950s.

Ramu Dorasami
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Stories, Myths, and Conversations – A Study of Trees

The humid Chennai air carried the scent of jasmine and the salty breeze from the Bay of Bengal as I sat on the cool verandah steps of my grandmother's home. She rocked gently on her wooden chair, a rhythmic creaking accompanying her words. "Every tree has a story," she said, her voice rich with nostalgia. "Some carry blessings, others bear curses, but all of them whisper ancient secrets to those who care to listen."

The Cursed Flower: The Tale of the Screw Pine (Thazhampoo)

She leaned closer, lowering her voice, as if revealing an old family secret. "Do you know why the fragrant Thazhampoo is never used in temple worship?" I shook my head, eager to hear more.

"Long ago, there was a dispute between Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu about who was the most powerful. Their quarrel was so fierce that it threatened to disrupt the balance of creation. To end this, Lord Shiva appeared as an endless pillar of divine light and challenged them to find its beginning and end. Vishnu transformed into a boar and dug deep into the earth, while Brahma took the form of a swan and soared into the sky. After searching for eons, Vishnu admitted defeat, but Brahma, desperate to win, encountered a falling Ketki flower and convinced it to lie. He claimed to have found the summit of the divine light.

Lord Shiva, enraged by this deceit, cursed Brahma, de-

claring that he would never be worshipped in temples. As for the poor Ketki flower, its punishment was eternal – never again would it be offered in worship."

I glanced at the Thazhampoo in my grandmother's flower basket, now holding a newfound respect for its untold past.

The Coconut Tree: A Celestial Connection

My grandmother chuckled. "And do you know why coconuts fall from such great heights?"

I laughed. "Gravity?" She shook her head. "Once upon a time, Sage Vishwamitra tried to send King Trishanku to

blossoms. "That is the Konrai, the golden shower tree, the sacred tree of Lord Shiva. There's a temple where this tree blooms all year round, thanks to the presence of a self-manifested Shiva Lingam beneath its shade."

I gazed at the tree, its golden flowers swaying in the breeze, as if acknowledging its divine heritage.

The Jackfruit Chronicles

"In Kerala, the jackfruit is more than just food," she continued, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "They say Kerala even has a chakka anthem! It is the state fruit, and every part of it is

heaven in his mortal body. But the gods refused to accept him. When Trishanku began falling back to Earth, Vishwamitra, in his defiance, used his yogic powers to hold him midair with a celestial pole. Over time, this pole became the coconut tree, and Trishanku's head turned into the coconut fruit."

I looked up at the towering coconut tree in our backyard and suddenly felt grateful for not standing directly beneath it.

The Golden Shower Tree of Thiruvanchikulam Mahadevar Temple

My grandmother pointed at a tree adorned with golden

used – from chips to curries to ice creams."

She patted the large jackfruit resting by the kitchen door. "Nothing goes to waste."

The Jamun's Sacred Legacy

Grandmother handed me a ripe jamun fruit. "Did you know Lord Rama survived on these during his exile? And Krishna's complexion is often compared to its deep purple hue."

I popped one into my mouth, savoring its sweet-tart taste, feeling as if I were taking a bite of mythology itself.

The Enlightening Bodhi Tree

"And this, my dear, is the most sacred of them all," she said, showing me an image of the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya. "Under its shade, Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha. This tree symbolizes wisdom, peace, and spiritual awakening."

I traced the veins of a dried Bodhi leaf she had preserved in her book, feeling the weight of centuries in its delicate frame.

The Eternal Amla (Nellikani) of Avvaiyar

"The Amla fruit is known for its longevity," she said. "King Athiyaman once had an eternal Amla and chose to gift it to the poet Avvaiyar, believing her wisdom was more valuable to society than his own life."

I smiled, wondering what modern leaders might learn from such selflessness.

The Treasured Kundumani Seeds

She picked up a handful of small, red Kundumani seeds. "We used to play with these as children," she mused. "They are often used in religious rituals and even as the eyes of Lord Ganesha idols."

I rolled a seed between my fingers, its smoothness familiar, its significance newly realized.

The Haunting Mystery of the Tamarind Tree

Grandmother's tone dropped to a whisper. "And do you know why people fear sleeping under tamarind trees at night?"

I shuddered. "Ghosts?"

"Some say the tree releases toxic vapors after dark," she said with a wink. "But whether fact or folklore, you won't catch me napping under one!"

The Sacred Punnai Tree of Mylapore

"Mylapore gets its name from the Tamil word 'myil,' meaning peacock," she explained. "Lord Shiva, worshipped as Punnaiyananathar, is linked to the Punnai tree here. Its twigs have been used as toothbrushes for centuries."

I ran my fingers over the rough bark of a nearby Punnai tree, marveling at its silent service to humanity.

The Frangipani Tree: A Symbol of Immortality

"This tree is special," she said, pointing at the fragrant Frangipani. "It blooms even after being uprooted, which is why it symbolizes immortality."

I inhaled its sweet scent, realizing how much resilience and beauty nature offers us.

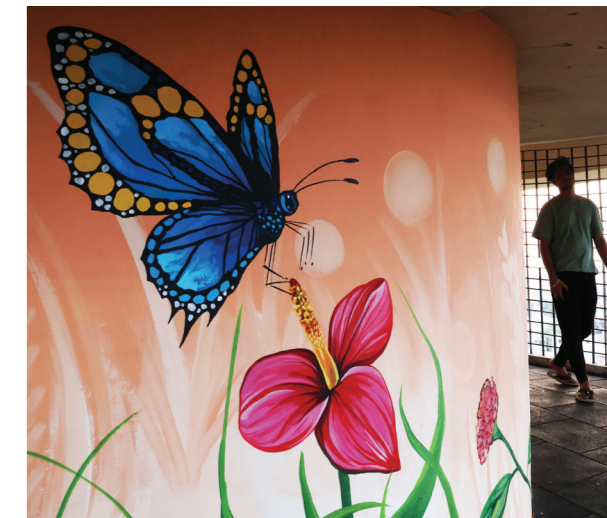
As the evening shadows stretched across the courtyard, I looked around at the trees standing tall and silent, each carrying a story that had traveled through time. My grandmother's voice had woven magic into their branches, and I knew that I would pass these stories on, just as she had passed them to me.

"Remember," she said, placing a gentle hand on my head, "trees are the earth's silent storytellers. All you have to do is listen."

And I did.

● by Priyanka Soman

Story of a City Canvas



Chennai's vibrant street art is a gift to the city, a pretty reminder that art and beauty have their place even in a bustling urban metropolis. It is a point of wonder that these walls of art are left untouched even while other places are covered up with posters or scribbles.

Madras Musings met Mr. Sindhu Raam the founder of Care and Welfare, an NGO that is currently driving a civic project to make beautiful paintings on public walls free of cost. "We paint in schools, villages, slums... wherever we get walls [to work on] we are ready to turn it into art," said Mr Raam.

He says that the project is aimed at beautifying the city while also creating awareness about various social themes. The volunteers paint all sorts of subjects as part of their work, from mandalas and portraits to doodles.

- Thamayandhi R



What's up? What's up?

In the last few decades the housing scene in Chennai (that was previously Madras) has changed a lot. Individual houses, or row of houses surrounded by a patch of garden, an occasional standalone building with 4/6/8 flats have now given way to multi-story apartment complexes, many in newer developing suburbs. Appreciating real estate prices, decrepit state of old homes, congestion, urbanization, etc, has made people fan out to these so-called gated communities with the hope that there is help in numbers, safety in numbers,unity in numbers??

A gated community could be a motley collection of homes within a compound with a gate and a watchman, or an apartment complex with a state-of-the-art app on residents' devices tracking every movement into and out of the complex. So the 'bagadoor' of bygone days is now replaced by a sentry, or sentry and a smart app.

My discussion with several friends from different gated communities has led me to conclude that the basic issues everywhere are generally the same. Almost all of these complexes have the same squabbles over the same petty issues – with the residents roughly divided pro and against. You have warring factions like – owners and tenants, young parents versus retired seniors, pet parents versus those who fear anything on fours...you get the picture right?

Whatever be the differences – all residents are united in their expectations from those

managing the society affairs: Fort Knox kind of security for their homes, armed commando guards against intruders, yet doorstep delivery round the clock for their online orders, potable water from every spout (even toilet cistern not exempt), backup power at all times, a complex free from rodents, primates, mosquitoes and termites (read 3D isolation – terrestrial, aerial and subterranean) and calamity proof-even natural – which now has become a yearly routine.

Most gated community resident's association have a forum, a communication app, that allows residents to voice their grouses and concerns, give their opinions, solicited or otherwise, when issues crop up, and those in charge take note of them. Sometimes this free flow of communication from the cosy confines of the apartment living rooms, leads to digital wars and has to be tackled efficiently by the administrator. They must do a fine balancing act when requests are made for voices of playing children to be muffled, or barking pets to be muzzled, or sedately walking seniors not to be ruffled!

Every society has members with certain characteristic behaviours, which come out in the chat forums – some of which are given below:

The Instigator: Any random passing comment by someone in the forum will be repeated, heckled by him till a few respond, then some more, and soon many have joined sides and there is a war of words – sometimes very heated, causing



the administrator to intervene.

The Fence Sitter: Will observe the trend of the discussions for some time, and then joins the leading side. He may have total amnesia and switch sides when the same issue is discussed some other time.

cannot prevent people from feeding stray animals. (With the growing tribe of animal lovers – this is now common knowledge.)

The Remote Operator: Is not affected by the day-to-day issues as she is generally away

the start of the Tamil Chithirai month in April, or the Gregorian calendar.

Forward Finger First: Owes allegiance to several chat groups and takes the last line "share with as many groups as you can" in letter and spirit. Censured several times but old habits die hard.

The Oldest Resident: Unlike the Oldest Member in PG Wodehouse's golf stories, this one doesn't have the foggiest when his memory is jogged to recollect some key factors when he first moved in. 'Well it could be this... or err it maybe that also....' Such people, with due respect, are best escorted to hoist the national flag, with the hope of inculcating patriotic fervour among the youth.

The Holier than Thou: She will apologise profusely for any disturbance caused when a couple of nails are hammered in her apartment, or she will thank effusively for mundane tasks done by service personnel.... you get the inkling of her persona right??

The Science Experts: Yes, we must promote 'the scientific temper' of our fellow residents. However, this group is known at times to give bizarre and unchallenged 'scientific' explanations for cracks in the building, water leakage, side effects of treated water, etc. These members had a field day during the Covid era.

So the above is a microcosm of a residents' society.

Like anywhere else, a benefit or convenience once given cannot be rescinded. So the communication app remains in the hands of the residents, at will to make their expectations known. The elected office bearers try their best... someone has to do the job right??

With so much participation in matters of trivia you would expect a good number to turn up at notified meetings to vote on important matters... well in most cases the quorum is barely met...notwithstanding the tea and snacks served!

P.S. Pronouns are used for convenience – they are not gender specific.

● by Sujatha Chandramouli

The Peacekeeper: This one periodically requests people to make peace and keep harmony in the community. When tempers run high, nobody is listening!

The Bystander: Not a word or comment, but I seriously suspect this one is LOL reading the discussions.

The Legal-Eagle: Will give inane one-liners. Example: The law gives every child the right to play, (Yes – but what does the law have to say when the javelin stops one inch short of my nose??) or As per law, you

for six months at a stretch, but will be an active commentator as she has time on her hands. Worse she will extol the effective handling of issues in the society where she resides, it may be the Far East or Further West!

The Secular Club: Celebrating anything that has a religious flavour is anathema to them. With the result in our society, we celebrate only the two national days. The new year eve celebrations have stopped as they are still debating which day is 'New Year' - the Thiruvalluvar day in January, or

Indian rope trick

One of the performing arts of India that baffled me and kept me in total disbelief, was what was often quoted by the Europeans as the Indian Rope Trick. During the act, the performer throws a rope into the air and it stays stuck in vertical position and a boy climbs it. I have not seen it performed but have read a lot about it. In the early 1930s this was a topic of great interest and as *The Hindu* said "The Indian Rope Trick was and even now a perennial topic of discussion in the Indian and Foreign press."

As quoted by paper reports, this magic trick seemed to have been performed in and around India during the 19th century. It is also described as "the world's greatest illusion" that involves a magician, a length of rope, and one or more boy assistants.

Some historians say that this

was a hoax perpetrated in 1890 by John Wilkie of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper. Magic historian Peter Lamont has argued that there are no accurate references to the trick predating 1890, and later, magic performances of the trick were inspired by Wilkie's account.

Though now we don't see or hear of this trick, anymore, there has been much written about it in the early thirties. A reader, (quoted from *A Hundred years of The Hindu*) N. Naryanan from Madras wrote on January 7, 1933. "I was one who witnessed the rope trick actually performed before several thousands of spectators opposite the Crawford Market in Bombay in May 1928. We saw the trick performed successfully and there was a dispute among the audience whether the trick did really happen and

within a few minutes a movie cameraman was called in and the performance took place while the scene was shot. We saw the trick once over but the very next day when the film depicting the performance was shown we found that the rope as soon it was thrown up simply came down and was lying on the ground, while the boy who

climbed was merely tugging at the air. What we actually saw was not proved by the camera and on reference to the fakir of this strange phenomenon we found that the whole of the audience was mesmerised in a mass." The magicians admit there is a thing called mass mes-

● by
K.R.A. Narasiah

merism wherein people actually see, hear and feel certain things that actually do not take place.

Another reader from Sussex England, Lt. Col. Ralph Nicholson, wrote on January 30, that he was in agreement with a previous correspondent in his belief that the rope trick was a genuine feat performed in India "despite the efforts of some Europeans to deny its existence".

The correspondence on this subject was started in *The Hindu* by a letter from a reader who criticised the view expressed by Sir Eric Dennison Ross, the orientalist, that the rope trick was a myth. V. Rangacharya, the correspondent, quoted an account by Dr. Heasoldt in the *Orient Review* of the performance of the rope trick by a sadhu in Baroda. Dr. Heasoldt said he saw the miraculous feat on four different occasions.

Annual service at the Armenian Church



Every year, I fall in love with this church all over again. Luz church in Chennai was built by the Portuguese in C16. In a city with many fine churches, this isn't the oldest, the largest, the most elaborate, or the most sacred. But it has charm in abundance, and serenity – and some really interesting gravestones, a few in Armenian script.

A real privilege today to be invited to the annual service at Chennai's exquisite, eighteenth century Armenian Church on (of course) Armenian Street in George town.. Armenians were once one of the main trading communities across Asia. Some of their churches survive - in Kolkata, Dhaka, Yangon and Mumbai and a few other ports and cities – but the community has all but gone.

In and around Chennai, there are perhaps four or five

Armenian, or part-Armenian households. The attendance at today's service – including visitors and well-wishers – was about thirty.

The Armenian Orthodox priest at today's ceremony came over from Kolkata (Calcutta), where the community is a little bigger. So too did the two altar boys, and four young women, three of whom sang very tenderly throughout the two-hour service; they are students at Kolkata's historic Armenian College.

● by
Andrew Whitehead



One longstanding member of the Chennai congregation came over, with his young son, from Bangalore. An Australian Armenian family visiting Chennai also swelled the congregation.

Most of the tiny number of Armenians in the city are not from long established Indian Armenian families, but are married to South Indians whom they met in Armenia.

And then there were well-wishers like me – it's the second time I've been able to attend

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– THE EDITOR



All pictures in this article have been reproduced from Andrew Whitehead's Blog.

Athletics at 87!

What does age have to do with it? This may sound like a preposterous question to a general audience. But not when K. Subramanian is around! The 87-year-old noted athletics coach based in the city truly believes in the adage that age is just a number, and for good reason too. At this age, Subbu – or Subbu Sir as he is affectionately known to his wards – still actively indulges in his passion, which is athletics. He coaches and has over the years nurtured several leading athletes like the 1982 Asian Games triple jump bronze medalist S. Balasubramaniam, SAF Games long jump silver medalist P.M. Rosily, and former India cricketer Susan Itticheria (now Susan Pallikal, mother of the squash ace Dipika Pallikal) among others.

Incredibly, Subbu doesn't just coach but also joins his wards in exercises like high jumps, triple jumps and running. He also makes it a point to compete – not on a small scale or local level, but in the international arena. Only last month, Subbu took part in the World Master Athletics Championship held in Gothenburg, Sweden and came back with 4 medals – Gold in the 4 x 400m Relay, Silvers in Triple Jump

and 200m Hurdles and Bronze in the 4 x 100m Relay in the 85 years and above category. He has been active in veteran sports for a long time, in fact – his first venture was back in 1983 when he took part in the World Veteran's Meet held in Puerto Rico, following which he participated in many Asian and World championship meets. He may be clearing just 1 metre in High Jump and

● by
S.R. Suryanarayan

a little over 6 metres in Triple Jump but the numbers are striking considering his age.

How does he maintain this level of efficiency? Simple, he says. "I joined ICF decades back, and have never stopped athletics training since then. In a way, jumping and running have become second nature to me." The practice continues. He later associated himself as a coach with the Don Bosco Athletics Club. Where he lives in Ayanavaram, he is a source of inspiration to many people for his steady and speedy morning walks. Such is his confidence that once in recent times when he had suffered

an injury to his knee, a doctor had advised him to avoid all stressors and take more rest considering his age. Subbu just walked away to an acupuncture specialist, received care to the pain and resumed training. The Gothenburg meet had come thereafter!

The only problem he had faced was one of finance. Raising a sum of roughly three lakhs (which is what he spent for the Sweden trip) was not easy. With no support from the government, Subbu and the many others who had accompanied him to Sweden had to pay their own way. Yet, his enthusiasm remains undimmed. Subbu says he looks forward to a future where he hopes to do even better.



ANNUAL SERVICE AT THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

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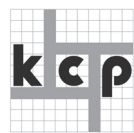
this annual service, which is so very important to the community. The church is in its own grounds. It is small but serene. The most striking visual aspect is the separate belltower, which has a set of six bells all dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and two of them cast in London.

Today, the bells chimed to mark the opening of the service. As well as the singing, there was lots of incense. Full members of the church took communion and we were all give the opportunity to kiss the cross and the Bible. The priest delivered his sermon in Armenian and English. After the communion service, there was

a short requiem service at the grave of Harutyun Shmavonian. He was a priest who in 1794 published the first ever periodical in the Armenian language. He died in what was then Madras in 1824.

After that there was a chance to chat, to eat very tasty Armenian pastries and of course to take the all important group photograph.

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