

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

Vol. XXXV No. 2

May 1-15, 2025

### INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- Steering Sivakasi into becoming a 'mini-Japan'
- Murukku, Messi, and Middle School
- Remembering Shihan Hussaini

## Off with the Colonies!

The latest announcement by the State Government has it that the term 'Colony' will be removed from all official records and public parlance as the word is derogatory, 'symbolises oppression and has connotation of untouchability'. At least that is what a report in *The Hindu* dated April 30, 2025 has to say. Other media have some further clarity, namely that the word will no longer be used in connection with Dalit settlements alone. The nobility of the intention behind this decision is indisputable but the actual implementation of it will be fraught with confusion. More importantly, it may be yet another cosmetic change with no effect on ground reality.

The OED has 21 different meanings for the word, but the most common usage pertains to a country or area that is controlled by another country, often far away. In this the term connotes oppression undoubtedly. But the second most common meaning is that of a place where a group of people with shared interests or jobs

live together, apart from other people. In the context of the Government's announcement, this too makes sense, particularly looked at from the Dalit point of view. But in our city, from a very long period of time, the suffix Colony has been used for housing enclaves. To name just a couple – CIT Colony and Aspirans Garden Colony

● by **Sriram V.**

are two places where departed political heavyweights of the party in power resided for long. They did not seem to mind the suffix at all.

While the present announcement may pertain only to Dalit settlements, this conscious exercise of renaming will only bring them to focus and reinforce the very connotation that is supposedly being erased. And as to the others, what is to prevent an over-zealous administration from imposed a blan-

ket ban on the word? What will be the new suffix? Will it be the ubiquitous Nagar? If so, will Srinagar Colony become Srinagar Nagar? And what about those where the Government itself was an active promoter such as Secretariat Colony and Judges Colony?

Whatever be the outcome, in the immediate short term this move is going to spell chaos. We have just got over the Madras/Chennai change and learnt to live with the old number/new number muddle and now this latest has come. Of course, none of this is new to residents of the city.

In the 1970s, it was decided that the suffix Cheri, originally meaning a settlement, and which had later become synonymous with slums, was derogatory. All Cheri-s were renamed Nagars and if above a certain size, Managars. The names changed but the slums remained and continue to remain, slums. Velacheri, which urbanised later, and others

(Continued on page 2)

## Tamil Nadu looks to increase EV charging stations; Chennai to get 100 new ones

A recent announcement reveals that the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) plans to join hands with local bodies and private players to help power the State's electric vehicles by setting up new public charging stations. The charging facilities will be available to the public for a fee, and Chennai is reportedly set to receive 100 charging stations under the plan. The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) is also working to identify strategic locations throughout the city for new charging points.

The Union Government too has tasked power distribution companies with setting up

● by **Varsha V.**

public charging points along national highways. Apart from government bodies, private players are also jumping into the fray. They have helped establish charging stations in high traffic areas such as those with malls and cafes.

The focus on bolstering the number of charging stations has been met with a warm welcome. The number of electric vehicles (EV) in the city is swelling, and studies indicate that a significant portion of new vehicle purchases is likely to be from the electric segment. The trend augurs well for Chennai's green plans – EVs help combat air pollution as they do not contribute to tail-pipe emissions like traditional petrol or diesel automobiles. They're especially useful as a solution to address pollution caused by ever-increasing

(Continued on page 2)

## HERITAGE WATCH

### Hundred Years of Art Deco

OLD



It was on April 29, 1925 that the Paris Exposition formally introduced the Art Deco style to the world. And therefore, this year marks the centenary of the architectural art form. Beginning with this issue, Heritage Watch hopes to cover some of the prominent Art Deco buildings in the city. We had a lot more, particularly cinema theatres and of course Dasaprakash, but they have all vanished leaving not a wrack behind. However, let us celebrate what we have left. The first building we showcase here was also the city's first Art Deco building and also the first structure to have six floors. Designed by architect LM Chitale, Oriental Insurance Building on Armenian Street is still a major landmark though not well-maintained.

Our OLD shows it on the day of its inauguration. The NEW was taken a few years ago during a heritage walk led by your deputy editor.

NEW





## OFF WITH THE COLONIES!

(Continued from page 1)

such as Semmancheri, all historic villages, have been left untouched.

Similarly, in the 1980s, we went through an exercise in removal of caste names from streets. This was with a view to eradicate casteism itself. Nothing could have been more fruitless than that move. It merely removed place associations with great figures and names in history. How else can we explain BN Reddy Road, named after the great filmmaker, becoming Dr. B. Narasimhan

Road? And here again, some streets continue to bear caste suffixes. It was a half-hearted attempt at best, not thought through, and mired in controversy.

What is to be noted is that none of these really changed ground realities. Slums remained slums, caste continues to dominate every aspect of life, including electoral mathematics. The present move to 'uplift' colonies to something else will do nothing to eradicate oppression of depressed classes by their counterparts higher up on the caste scale.

## Tamil Nadu looks to increase EV charging stations

(Continued from page 1)

traffic from both private and commercial vehicles – consider, for instance, the number of bikes plying the streets to cater to just-in-time home deliveries for groceries and other products.

Other Indian cities are also attempting to encourage the shift to EVs, but the transition comes with challenges. Apart from the relatively higher cost of purchasing electric vehicles, charging is an issue. EV riders must keep a keen eye on the distance travelled and the remaining available charge lest the vehicles run out of power. Petrol and diesel bunks are readily available in every neighbourhood, but electric charging stations are comparatively rarer. This, of course, directly restricts usage; for instance, EVs are not generally considered suitable for those who must travel or commute long distances. Public charging stations (PCS) must be shored up to address this issue, which is why the recent efforts in this area are well appreciated. In fact, *The Hindu* reports that new charging stations have already cropped up in neighbourhoods across the city. The TNEB proposal in particular is said to have received interest from non-governmental parties who find attractive the possibility of government aid in land identification and the requisite electricity supply. In a quote to *The New Indian Express*, an official from the TNEB said, "The union government has directed all power distribution companies to ensure the setting up of one common charging station every 25 km along national highways as well as 3 km within city limits. Based on this, we have planned to facilitate setting up PCS near substations." The authorities have already conducted feasibility studies in the past; these will likely come in handy now that there is a renewed focus on the plan.

Multiple recommendations have emerged from urban planners and EV users to bolster this initiative. One such is encouraging large commercial complexes like malls, theatres and office campuses to set up charging points for the use of their patrons. Similarly, it is proposed that building developers are urged to plan for charging stations in new buildings as well as the ones they're helping maintain. Both these suggestions are well thought of, given that the acquisition of land is a key challenge in establishing new PCS. It would also be worthwhile to explore the set-up of charging points at existing petrol or diesel bunks.

Apart from the expansion of PCS, the proposal must also include in its scope helping users access these stations better. Ground reports reveal that the current network of charging stations is at a disadvantage from lack of signage as well as poor maintenance. A common complaint from users seeking to charge their vehicles is that either the facilities are not in working condition or that the queues are long. Addressing these issues will not only help the current crop of EV users but will also instil confidence in those hesitant to switch.

Media reports say that as of April 2025, Tamil Nadu has 1,524 public charging stations, with 218 in Chennai. This is far behind other growing Indian cities – Bengaluru alone, for instance, is said to have 4,462 charging stations within the city limits. The scale should not be surprising – after all, EVs are an important piece in the plan for sustainable transportation, and some say that they can well replace fuel-burning vehicles in the not-so-far future. The new initiative then, is crucial to the adoption of EVs. One hopes that it takes quick root in city and state.

## Driving in Chennai – A daily adventure

**T**he *Woman from Madras Musings* does not like to drive these days. It is increasingly stressful to find oneself behind the wheel, what with increasingly congested traffic conditions and shortening tempers. Last month, WMM was stuck in a jam on the way home. It was quite chaotic, for the lane was not particularly wide and open to two-way traffic to boot. So when a bike rode straight into a luxury car up ahead, WMM was only surprised that it hadn't happened sooner. The hood ornament marked the car to be a particularly expensive brand, and the mishap had left ugly dents and scratches on the bottle-green body. WMM's own driver told her in hushed tones that the cost of repairing the damage was bound to be punishing. (WMM has never understood the allure of luxury vehicles. They seem to have consistently terrible mileage and their speed is wasted on crowded city roads. And now it appears that they're fragile and high maintenance too. What, WMM wonders, is the point except to show that one has money to burn?)

While WMM was contemplating the curious appeal of luxury cars, the driver of the vehicle in question – who also appeared to be the owner – stepped out looking positively apoplectic. The bike rider – now stuck in the traffic jam a little further ahead for all his earlier hurry – was forced down from his vehicle and subjected to the car owner's rebuke. It was loud enough for most of the road to hear, and WMM was taken aback at the bitterness of the exchange. She hadn't seen the incident clearly herself and was unable to say who was to blame; but she thought the castigation to which the bike rider was subjected to was hardly befitting a civil society even if the accident was his fault. The car owner unleashed a torrent of swear words and at one point even raised his hand as if to strike. WMM was shocked, and so were the onlookers; she had never seen such a thing on Chennai roads before this instance. But no one stepped in to mollify the parties until the hold up began to cause impatience. A few bike riders near the duo insisted they take their argument off the road and helped clear the way for the other vehicles. Like everyone else, WMM too drove away leaving the pair to argue. The ugliness was disheartening, but what could have been done?

There are also problems when it comes to parking. Recently, WMM and the Better Half had to shop at

Parrys. The B.H. called the store to enquire whether they had parking space. He was promptly told that yes, there was parking space, provided the security guard was intimidated; otherwise, B.H. was sternly warned, the vehicle would be towed away. The security guard, added the service operator before ringing off, could be recognized by his khaki attire and bushy moustache. B.H. found the whole thing suspicious and told WMM as such. Since they were in a bit of a hurry, WMM thought that blind obedience was in order and convinced B.H. to follow the instructions. Sure enough, when the tow truck came B.H.'s car was shown mercy unlike a few other hapless vehicles on the same stretch. Both B.H. and WMM were left feeling mildly uneasy by the whole thing.

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

And then there was the time when WMM came upon someone trying to paste stickers on her car's windshield. She had just come from visiting the Eternals, and managed to prevent the act in time. Other cars, she noted, had not been so lucky. One sedan parked ahead of her car had been plastered mercilessly. The Paster was unrepentant. The cars, it was claimed, had been parked outside the home for 'days together', which the Paster supposed was not 'right to do.' WMM readily supplied the information that her car could not have been parked for more than a few hours (the Eternals, sadly, are quite forthcoming when they feel WMM has overstayed her welcome) and that she planned to drive away in the next instant. The Paster grew silent and hurried away, fists tightly clutching posters and gum – there were a few more cars down the road. WMM found the whole thing questionable, to say the least. The cars were parked neatly away from oncoming traffic and there were no signs prohibiting parking. If a car really had been parked in place for days together, a complaint on the Namma Chennai app could have been a better option to taking matters into hand.

WMM is not sure she enjoys these daily driving adventures. She is planning to take the bus more regularly.

### Walk talk

**T**he *Woman from Madras Musings* came across a post on social media ruing attempts to promote walkability in Indian cities – the plan, the poster said, worked in western

countries because they were blessed with cooler climes; how is it to work in Indian cities which are hot and dusty, particularly the ones in the South? WMM thought that the very question gave the poster away as someone unused to public transport. Commuters who travel every day by bus and train walk to and from stations in the same heat and dust; does the city not owe them good, broad pavements to walk on? Quite a few others on social media raised another point that WMM thought was quite reasonable – it's not just climate that promotes walkability but also tree cover. WMM got to thinking about Chennai, which does have some lovely tree-lined patches that are a pleasure to walk in – Adyar is a good example. Perhaps it is time to press for better pavements and tree cover too.

### Elevator tales

**T**he *Woman from Madras Musings* was visiting friends for dinner. She had just passed through the building gate with the B.H. and a few others when she noticed two dogs at the far end of the car park. One was a golden retriever, a floppy-eared, friendly chap who was wagging his tail so hard that WMM rather thought that he would fly any moment. The other was a tiny dog, a breed that WMM cannot name; but he was so very fluffy and petite that he looked like a doll. Both were excited beyond measure to see the group. Deciding that a warm welcome was in order, they ran towards WMM and Co., causing one of the group – let us call him Victory – to let out a strangled squeak of terror and flee to the elevator. The dogs of course saw the whole thing as be a great game and took after him, tails wagging furiously. By the time WMM and Co. reached the lobby, neither the elevator nor the gang of three were to be seen. It was only upon reaching the terrace when she saw V rooted to the ground, white as a sheet; the dogs were having a free run of the terrace. It transpired that V had tried to hide in the elevator and desperately pressed the button to go up; but the elevator doors were slow in closing, and the dogs joyfully got in with him. He had had a harrowing time, he said, and asked to be made a stiff drink at the earliest.

Curiously enough, all it took were a couple of stiff drinks for V to lose his fear around the friendly beasts. When WMM left the party, he was taking selfies with both.

– WMM



## OUR READERS WRITE



### Feedback on 'The last flight home'

It was refreshing to learn that WMM had witnessed two acts of kindness by fellow passengers during her travel (*Short 'N' Snappy*, MM, April 1st, 2025). It is not quite often that one comes across people who are considerate and willing to help or cooperate with those who travel with them, be it in a flight or in a bus. In the first instance mentioned by WMM, the young man quickly understood the predicament of the couple who were allotted two separate seats and lost no time in sportively obliging the couple by exchanging seats. More often than not, such a smooth settlement does not take place. In the second instance, the girl seated next to WMM in the airline bus had the broad-mindedness to voluntarily share with her the live IPL match on cell phone. The two acts emphasise that the core human desire to help others remains universal, though there are exceptions due to selfishness, pride and prejudices of the persons concerned. The article will go a long way in motivating travellers to be helpful and kind to co-passengers.

N. Rama Rao  
1A, Sri Kripa Building  
44, Third Main Road, R.A.Puram  
Chennai 600 028

### Feedback on Tamil Nadu Through My Lens – A Phot Exhibition

I was simply delighted to read the write-up *Tamil Nadu Through My Lens – A Photo Exhibition* (MM April 1st, 2025) for a reason that many may find odd, peculiar or even strongly condemnable. The article mentions 'twenty talented deaf artists' and repeatedly uses the word 'deaf' as opposed to 'hearing impaired.'

'Deaf,' dumb,' and 'blind' are simple one-syllable words that have since been replaced with cumbersome expressions. Ignoramus that I am, I cannot fathom why. The only reason that I can think of is that these words are used in a derogatory manner: "Didn't you hear what I said? Are you deaf?" "Didn't you see the circular on the notice board? Are you blind?"

A day will come when these simple words fade into oblivion. Can you then imagine the scenario? Easy! "Didn't you hear me? Are you hearing impaired?" "Didn't you see the circular on the notice board? Are you visually handicapped?" What then? Are we going to replace these expressions with a new set?

And what would that be? Any guesses? And when the new set begins to be used in a derogatory manner, then what happens? Where will all this lead to?

While on the subject, I must commend the Editor. It is well within his editorial power and privilege to replace 'deaf' with 'hearing impaired' in keeping with the times. But he thought it fit not to do so, displaying some guts.

Let us revert to the simple 'deaf,' dumb,' and 'blind.' Do we have the courage? (Note I said 'revert' and not 'revert back.')

B. Gautham  
137 Wallajah Road  
Chennai 600 002

**Deputy Editor's Note:** We thank Mr. Gautham for his letter, which allows us to share our learnings concerning inclusive vocabulary. The language in this particular article was a conscious choice by the author as it aligned with the wishes of Mr. Srivatsan, who belongs to the community himself. However, this may not be the case for everyone. A good rule of thumb is to understand individual preferences so that respectful dialogue can be fostered. It may also be noted that 'mute' is the not just.

### Name of the upcoming metro station at Anna Flyover/Gemini

I'm writing to you as a life-long resident of Madras that is Chennai and a commuter who traverses Gemini. I wanted to share a small request I had to the CMRL, to consider adding "Gemini" to the provisionally named Anna Flyover metro station.

As an avid-reader and lover of Madras, I am well aware that *Madras Musings* has done quite a lot in documenting and preserving our beloved memories of names such as Gemini itself.

I am very sure that my request resonates with you and would be grateful as a resident of Chennai if the idea could be picked up and shared in your pages. I strongly believe that a note on your letterhead would carry much more weight than any number of scattered messages from individual commuters.

It would truly be a grand sight to see Gemini on an official map, after all, our collective memory as a cinephile town deserves it. Thank you for all that you do in the conservation of our city and community.

Shravan Muthukumar  
Mylapore

# Know your neighbourhood

It is that time of the year when I launch our Journalism Training programme for Neighbourhood teens. *The Mylapore Times* has hosted it for over 25 years now and its contours have changed. With each school education Board having its own examinations and study schedule, hosting a proper 'Basics of Journalism & Writing' camp at our office has been frustrating; so I dropped the plan earlier this year and wanted to sit back and dig into mangoes and jackfruit.

Then came a call from a teen and I revived the programme; hosting it online and over phone, one-on-one, for just 10 days. The first of the eight who have signed up checked in one recent morning, saying it was an auspicious day!

My focus is sharing tips on the basics. Basics which serve everybody well in any academic and professional path. We started with 'Mapping The Neighbourhood' exercise that morning. And I assigned the young girl from a Mylapore school a soft assignment – New Year celebrations at homes in her backyard.

It will get challenging ahead – tag the local MLA and observe what he does day in and day out, jump into the police inspector's jeep on Kutchery Road and chat with him as he does the local rounds, walk with the Urbaser Sumeet staff as they clean our streets and understand their lives and write on the patterns of urban waste and behaviour... and yes, do take a close look at the jackfruits from Panruti sold in the hawker markets of Mylapore and Mandaveli!

Knowing your neighbourhood has to be one of the subjects that schools must include as part of even an extra-curricular calendar.

Our backyards are 'live labs' where the old and the modern co-exists, where real life of all kinds can be felt, observed and recorded.

Walking in public spaces, recording sights, sounds and words, observing and interviewing people, and negotiating tough or trying circumstances are some of the essential and key skills that young people need to learn. I believe journalism offers all this and much more.

There are times when I imagine a scenario where a dozen young people of Mylapore, who study in schools and colleges, take time out and record neighbourhood events and life. Be it on and off the Marina, in the narrow lanes of Mandavelipakkam or inside Pallakumaniyam nagar.

These stories and pictures would present different facets of life which often go unrecorded, un-reported. Like this story that one of our passionate readers shared – of a family of girls who took over the idiyappam business that was managed by their father who passed away. Girls who balance this food business as well as studies.

Vincent D' Souza  
Mylapore Times

## Power & Glory of Madras

- On July 25, 1989, Dr. Raja Ramanna, eminent scientist addressed the Rotary Club of Madras on the Power and Glory of Madras. This tongue-in-cheek talk was reported in the *Lighthouse*, the bulletin of the Rotary Club and we reproduce it here.

"You would have expected an erudite talk on why we should have nuclear power," said Dr. Raja Ramanna, Director, National Institute of Advanced Studies and former Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission. Although such an oration did not materialise Dr. Ramanna, reminiscing on the 'Power of Madras,' proved that he was as adept a humorist-philosopher as he was a scientist.

"Madras was a City I greatly admired," said Dr. Ramanna especially the city of yester years. "For us, Marina, Mylapore, Mowbray's Road, Mambalam meant that we were in a different state of intellectual and financial existence."

And so naturally, said Dr. Ramanna, Madras developed a little arrogance due to its predominance. "And I was surprised when the north showed a contempt for the Madras... I don't know why we were never given the pride of place by the north."

The Tamil Language too, felt Dr. Ramanna, occupied a distinct position then. "Now one is hesitant to say one can speak Tamil."

So much for the power of the Madras Presidency. And the glory? Dr. Ramanna reminisced fondly about the great stalwarts – well – known heroes like C. Rajagopalachari and unsung ones like C.R. Reddy.

So where have all the power and glory gone? And why? The main reason, pointed out Dr. Ramanna was our apathy and cruelty to our own people. Citing the case of Dr. C.V. Raman, the Nobel Laureate he said, "Our ill treatment of a brilliant Scientist made him difficult and schizophrenic."

"I keep asking this question," said Dr. Ramanna, "Why must we be so rude and harsh?" Even telephone instruments (the ones with pre-recorded wait messages), he felt, sounded rude. Dr. Ramanna also made a mention of the declining education system, which defies the laws of Thermodynamics to allow the students to score 101 out of 100!

It requires a messiah, nay more than one, said Dr. Ramanna, to change such apathetic attitudes. And that is the reason, he said, why he chose not to speak about nuclear power. "For even if I'm supplying nuclear power, I wonder if it'll reach you!"



# Number 22, South Beach Road – A May Day remembrance

● In less than 80 years what must have once been a prominent precinct on the beach front, has vanished without a trace. I allude to the residence of M. Singaravelu or to use the way he is presently referred to – M. Singaravelar. For purposes of convenience, I will use the former as that is how he is written of by his biographers. I allude to the book *Singaravelu, First Communist in South India*, by K. Murugesan and C.S. Subramanyan, published by People's Publishing House, Delhi, in 1975.

It is apparent that even in 1975, the authors could not get a clear picture of what the house was like. From their writings

later obtained his FA at the Madras Christian College, then in George Town, and his BA at the Presidency College, which must have been just a hop, skip and jump from home. Rather late in life, when he was in his forties, he qualified as a lawyer and set up practice in 1907.

His lawyer's chambers seem to have been in Broadway but there is no doubt that many seeking justice must have beaten a track to his home as well. Very early in his practice he became a success and specialised in cases concerning the oppressed. And at least from 1918, labour cases too came within his ambit. For it was as a labour leader that he

at a public meeting on the beach, Singaravelu formally consigned his lawyer's gown to the flames in response to Gandhi's call that courts dominated by British laws ought to be boycotted.

His procession in Madras following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre brought him to the notice of the police. The British establishment watched him and his residence for the comings and goings of revolutionaries. And then, when in 1921 he organised a succession hartal against the visit of the Prince of Wales, he became a marked man.

On May 1, 1923, Singaravelu formed the Kisaan Labour Party, one of the early outfits in India



Comrade M. SINGARAVELU

Singaravelu was no longer an active participant thereafter but he was a mentor to many. His early friends had it is said included Subramania Bharathi. In later years he was close to Periyar EV Ramaswami Naicker though the two differed in their attitude to British rule. Singaravelu believed that differences such as caste and creed had to be sorted out by Indians as an independent nation and so British rule was not needed. This fundamental divergence however did not sour their friendship, and he wrote frequently for Periyar's *Kudiarasu*. He was also a regular contributor to *The Hindu* and was a close friend of Kasturi Ranga Iyengar. A young leader he mentored was Pa Jeevanandam whom he assisted in the setting up of the Congress Socialist Party.

Afflicted by paralysis in the 1940s, Singaravelu remained

increasingly homebound, surrounded by books. It was at home that he passed away in 1946. It is said that he is buried at the family burial plot in Royapuram. What happened to 22, South Beach Road thereafter is a mystery. In recent years there was a suit instituted in the High Court alleging that the then British Government had taken over the property and given it to the Lady Willingdon Institute. But this was disproved as it was made clear through documents that the property was owned by the PWD and had been acquired through formal process of law.

Singaravelu however remains a deeply venerated figure and there are statues for him as also roads in his honour. Napier's Park was renamed in 1996 as May Day Park and in a sense, it commemorates him too.

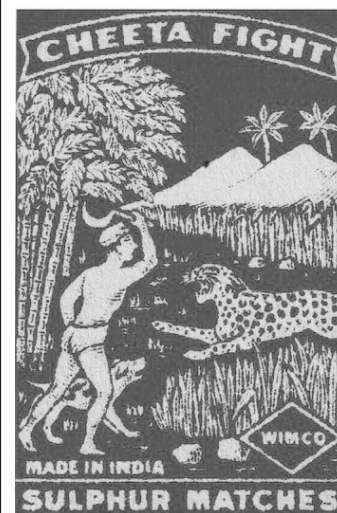
# Ayya and Shanmugam, who steered Sivakasi into becoming a 'mini-Japan'

In 1900-1910, at least eight match factories existed in India: three in Bombay Presidency, two in Central Provinces, one in Kashmir, and two in Bengal Presidency. A few newer factories came about in different parts of India shortly after. One prominent name in match manufacture in India is the Western-India Match Company (WIMCO) established in Ambernath (Thane district) in 1917 by Svenska Tändsticks AB (Sweden), which commenced industrial-scale, bulk production of matches in 1923. In later years, WIMCO came under the management of ITC Limited, Calcutta. Many Madras residents cannot forget Cheeta Fight matches produced and marketed by WIMCO.

WIMCO established a factory in Tiruvottiyur in the 1920s, which survived until 2010 and the area is known even today as 'Wimco Nagar'. Cheeta Fight matches are produced today by ITC.

Until 1914, import from Japan met nearly 50 per cent of India's match needs, whereas that from Sweden met about 30 per cent. With the start of World War I, import of European matches stopped, allowing the Japanese to monopolise the Indian-match market. The Indian-match manufacturers struggled to deal with the Japanese monopoly. It is at this time P(alaniappan) Ayya Nadar (hereafter Ayya) and his older cousin A(rumugam) Shanmuga Nadar (hereafter Shanmugam) kickstarted match and fireworks industry in Sivakasi in the mid-1920s. This was the tiny spark that triggered Sivakasi to grow as a major economic hub of India.

Ayya was born to Palaniappan-Nagammal couple in Siv-



An early label of WIMCO's Cheeta Fight match.



Palaniappan Ayya Nadar  
(Courtesy: Dr C. Ashok, Ayya Nadar-Janaki Ammal College, Sivakasi)

akasi on 17 March 1905. He studied up to school-final class at Sivakasi Hindu Nadar Victoria High School (presently, Sivakasi Hindu Nadar Victoria Higher Secondary School). He died in 1982. Shanmugam was born to Arumugam-Annamalai Ammal couple in Sivakasi on 28 November 1903. He also had studied up to school-final class at Sivakasi Hindu Nadar Victoria High School, Sivakasi. He died in 1963. In the early decades of the 20th Century, Calcutta included small-level match factories operating with semi-mechanical Japanese machines. One P. Chinna Nadar of Sivakasi, a close relative of Ayya and Shanmugam, prompted both them to learn about match production and the commercial potential it had. Led by the conviction that match production would offer a prosperous life, the 17-year-old Ayya and 19-year-old Shanmugam arrived in Calcutta in 1922. They joined as workers in a small-level match production unit in Calcutta. They learnt about match sticks and their production. During their work time in Calcutta, they were placed in the packaging section, which deprived them from learning the art of making match sticks. However, they accidentally tumbled on a record book that included details of the chemicals and their quantities required for making matches. From this book, both Ayya and Shanmugam learnt about the composition of the burnable material used in matchsticks. They are supposed to have 'trained' with one Purna Chandra Ray, a chemical engineer-entrepreneur in Calcutta and who had previously trained in match production in Germany.

After eight months of stay in Calcutta, Ayya and Shanmugam returned to Sivakasi. Shortly after they jointly established the first match-production unit



Arumugam Shanmuga Nadar  
(Courtesy: Dr Rengasai Murugan, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai)

under the banner 'South-India Lucifer Match Industry' (SILMI) in Sivakasi in 1923. They imported a machine from Germany to automate the process. Ayya and Shanmugam soon realised that mechanised production required high-quality wood material – a dear commodity at that time. Influenced by Mohandas K. Gandhi's call encouraging the development of cottage industries in the 1920s, both Ayya

● by Dr. A. Raman  
anant@raman.id.au

and Shanmugam shifted to labour-intensive, non-mechanised production of matches after 18 months of their return from Calcutta. They recognised the strengths of re-developing their production unit as a cottage-industry unit rather than a mechanised industry, because of the easy availability of human power in Sivakasi and its neighbourhood. They attempted producing colour matches, because the processes of making non-colour and colour matches were not far different in terms of either materials or cost. Ayya established the 'anil' brand and Shanmugam established the 'crow' brand match-production units. These efforts laid the first brick in the foundation for Sivakasi's growth. SILMI produced the less-safe sulphur matches from 1923, and 'safety' matches in 1932.

The similarity in processes in matchstick and firecracker manufacture prompted Ayya and Shanmugam to travel again to Calcutta in 1930 to learn about firecracker production. The first firecracker unit, developed as a cottage industry came into existence in Sivakasi, which enabled cost-efficient production of firecrackers in India. The Government of India regulated the import of raw materials needed

for the production of explosives, a little earlier and during World War II, which facilitated the economic growth of Sivakasi.

Easy access to the wood of choice from the neighbouring princely state of Travancore (presently southern Kerala) provided an ideal environment for match-stick production in Sivakasi. Geographically Sivakasi (7 km<sup>2</sup>) is a near-flat inland town with Tuticorin (presently Thoothukudi) as its nearest sea port (c. 100 km; today Thoothukudi includes an airport). Sivakasi's consistent hot and dry weather through the year, day temperature between 25 and 40°C, scant rainfall (80 cm/y), and an average RH of 75% were ideally suitable for match and firecracker industries. Another key advantage was the easy availability of 'cheap' human labour. The yearly production of fire crackers is around 50,000t and the industry monetary value turnover is approximated around Rs. 6,000 crores.

The technical and commercial know-how developed by Ayya and Shanmugam in Sivakasi enthused many local residents to take to match production, which further encouraged nearly all of them to indulge in firecracker-production as well, developing their firecracker units as ancillary divisions of matchstick production units. Until 1930, the colourful labels pasted on match boxes and firecracker packs came from Bombay. An enterprising K. S. A. Arunagiri Nadar (1899–1961) established the first printing unit — the National Lithographic Press — in Sivakasi, initiating high-quality lithography. One other memorable name in Sivakasi's print sector was S. Kaliappa Nadar, who established the Sivakasi Industrial Printing Works in 1937, paving the way for the colour-offset printing. The NLP and SIPW together changed the overall complexion of offset printing in India — a highly developed and diverse industry today that meets the needs of production of spectacular calendars, multi-colour brochures and product flyers, and even high-security products such as stationery used in banking and other financial industries, not only fully catering to needs of India and but in other Asian countries as well. The printing units founded by N. R. K. Rajarathna Nadar and Arunagiri Nadar are to be remembered with gratitude at this point. Today Sivakasi boasts of about 450 off-

set and flexographic printeries. More than 50,000 workers are employed in printing industries alone in Sivakasi. The Sivakasi Institute of Printing Technology (established in 1977) by the Sivakasi Master Printers' Association (established in 1948) trains people in modern printing technology. The printing industry in Sivakasi alone is Rs. 10,000 million/y worth, which responds to more than 60 per cent India's colour-offset printing needs.

With India's Independence in 1947, the matchbox and firecracker industry in Sivakasi and neighbouring dry districts of the present Tamil Nadu have grown substantially. However, the Sivakasi match industry went through a rough economic patch in the mid-1960s because of an intense scarcity of raw materials, particularly red phosphorus, further complicated by recession and economic crisis in India in the 1960s, resulting in unemployment. Rajnikant Devidas Shroff of the United Phosphorus Limited (presently UniPhos), Bandra, Bombay, established a warehouse to store and distribute red phosphorus in Sivakasi in 1971. Rajnikant Shroff's action went a long way in solving the paucity of red phosphorus in this region and facilitated it to bounce back. Close to 3,500 production units producing matches are fully operational today in Sivakasi and neighbourhood. Nearly 30,000 persons are directly employed. The market for safety matches is presently prosperous, growing at the rate of 10%/y.

Sivakasi has propelled itself to remain a self-reliant, industrial town producing large quantities of fireworks and matches; offset and lithographic printing is flourishing adding another layer of shine. Sivakasi contributes to nearly 90% of the total production of firecrackers in India and is a major supplier to the rest of the world: for that matter, it — a small town in interior Tamil Nadu — competes aggressively with China — the premier producer of firecrackers. Sivakasi contributes about 70% of the safety matches in India, fetching a gross revenue of c. Rs 30,000 m/a. As a single town, Sivakasi provides the greatest revenue to the state of Tamil Nadu and Government of India, further to ensuring nearly 100% employment. It is claimed that the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, referred to Sivakasi as 'mini-Japan' for the enterprise and enthusiasm it demonstrated in economic growth in the 1960s.

## LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

it appears that it was more an enclave where members of the extended family lived. They also state that the property was vested in a trust which administered it. Singaravelu himself was one of the trustees though he was not happy being one, vexed as he was with the litigious nature of some of his relatives. He in fact purchased property in Thiruvanniyur and often set out in a bullock cart from Beach Road, to spend extended periods of time in blissful solitude. Whether this was in Neelangarai is not clear but there is even today a warren of several cross streets in that area named after him. It also houses a fish market.

The family belonged to the fishing community and was among the leaders in it. Modern imagery of fishing villages and communities has reduced them to a set of huts and slums but it is clear that the leading families were wealthy as was Singaravelu's. His father Venkatachala Chettiar was more into the business of fish than in actual fishing. Their residence, close to the fishing hamlets of Parthasarathy Kuppam and Ayodhya Kuppam by the Marina, was a large one. It was from here that young Singaravelu, born in 1860, must have set out for the Hindu High School in Thiruvallikeni. He

established himself. But even prior to that, he had become enamoured of Buddhism and saw it as a religion that downtrodden Hindus could take to. In this he was following the line taken by Iyatheethas Pandithar and was a forerunner of Dr BR Ambedkar. He became a member of the Maha Bodhi Society headquartered in the then Ceylon. What is more important is that his residence on Beach Road became the Madras office. None other than the multifaceted personality Thiru Vi Kalyanasundara Mudaliar would recall this detail.

It was in 1918 that the first labour union of India — the Madras Labour Union, was formed. The prime movers were of course Selvapathi Chettiar and G Ramaniyulu Naidu but there were several others who played key roles — Annie Besant, GS Arundale, BP Wadia, Thiru Vi Ka and Singaravelu. This was primarily a body to demand better workers' rights at the Binny Mills but immediately thereafter, a whole host of other labour unions was formed in the city, in most of which Singaravelu had a role to play. He headed some of them too. It was also around this time that Gandhi began coming to Madras and Singaravelu became a member of the Congress. In 1921, not far from his residence,

that had Communist leanings. The first meeting, held on the same day, was at the High Court Beach but from August the same year, he made it a practice to hold worker meets at the Napier's Park, at the northern end of Mount Road. This was a thoroughfare then with many industrial establishments and large employers, with many of them having unionised workers. In 1925, the KLP was formally merged with the Communist Party of India, whose first conference was presided over by Singaravelu the same year at Kanpur.

As a reward, his residence was thoroughly searched for seditious material by the police. Though nothing was found, he was charged with treason as part manujulu Naidu but there were several others who played key roles — Annie Besant, GS Arundale, BP Wadia, Thiru Vi Ka and Singaravelu. This was primarily a body to demand better workers' rights at the Binny Mills but immediately thereafter, a whole host of other labour unions was formed in the city, in most of which Singaravelu had a role to play. He headed some of them too. It was also around this time that Gandhi began coming to Madras and Singaravelu became a member of the Congress. In 1921, not far from his residence,



# Murukku, Messi, and Middle School: Lessons on relationships in a Chennai Classroom

Over the past six years, I've had the joy (and occasional chaos) of working closely with middle school students in Chennai. This city, with its blend of tradition and traffic, has been the backdrop for some of the most memorable chapters of my teaching journey. And middle school? It's a phase like no other – full of changes, drama, emotions, and unexpected wisdom. As a teacher, I've often found myself reflecting on how deeply relationships shape their self-esteem, choices, and sense of belonging. So, I thought I'd share my journey of understanding what healthy relationships mean to Chennai's tweens – and how we adults can support them through this wild and wonderful stage.

Children, no matter where they are, carry a built-in need to feel connected. But here in Chennai, where the word *Akka* or *Anna* carries so much more than just respect – it's often affection, trust, even a lifeline – those connections have a unique depth. The relationships they form at this stage influence how they see themselves, how they treat others, and how they bounce back from challenges. When I first started teaching, I knew relationships mattered – but I had no idea how much.

In those early days, working in a school tucked away in a quiet Chennai neighbourhood filled with coconut trees, the scent of *sambhar* wafting from the canteen, and kolam-s decorating the school entrance – I made a deliberate effort to be approachable and open. I wanted students to know they could talk to me about anything, whether it was about missing homework or a missing sharpener. I relied on small gestures: smiling, making eye contact, and truly listening. I still remember something a senior teacher told me: "When a child speaks – about anything, even a lost eraser – give them your full attention." Her advice stuck with me. I learned quickly that with middle schoolers, body language says far more than words, and fairness is sacred. Treating every student with respect, even when they've just launched a paper plane in the middle of a serious lesson on the water cycle, became my mantra.

Ah, and then there was the name game. Let's just say, I've never been great with names – but in a class where there were five Krithikas and three Aarav-s, it became critical. I invented all sorts of tricks – rhyming names with local landmarks, using stickers, even

turning names into songs. It helped build bonds and gave me some authority. Of course, there were still awkward moments: like confidently calling out "Vignesh!" and hearing, "Akka, I'm Vishal." Close, but no idol.

As I got to know my students better, I made it a point to learn about their interests during one-on-one chats or while walking around during

● by  
Priyanka Soman

group activities. I found out who trained for *silambam* after school, who sang *bhajans* at the temple, and who had memorised every single line from the Tamil-dubbed Harry Potter movies. These little details became bridges – openings for connection and trust. I even overheard one group argue passionately about whether Messi could beat up Ronaldo. The debate got so intense, I nearly turned it into a courtroom drama titled *The Case of the Century*, with me as judge, gavel and all.

Somewhere along the way, storytelling became my secret weapon. I began sharing funny

tales about my dog, my daughter, and even my auto rides to school. One day, I told them how my daughter chewed up my science lesson plan. A student, very seriously, asked if I'd tried positive reinforcement. Out-teached by a twelve-year-old from Madambakkam.

Modelling behaviour became a quiet but powerful practice. I showed them how to pass the box of crayons or share the single working geometry compass without starting a war. I set boundaries too – not just classroom rules like "no phones" or "don't eat *murukku* during group work," but emotional boundaries. I introduced classroom norms and reinforced them gently. But nothing – and I mean nothing – prepared me for their innocent faces when asking for extra free time. I'm convinced some of them could lead peace negotiations at the UN.

But boundaries also meant helping students understand their own limits – and the limits of others. During circle time (often under the whirling fan and a soundtrack of distant street vendors yelling "sundal!"), we explored big questions:

"How does it affect me when

I let someone speak to me however they want?"

"What happens if I never stand up for myself?"

"When friends fight, should I take sides?"

These conversations sparked laughter, reflection, and unexpected maturity. One student firmly said, "If two people fight, call them for tiffin at your table. Idli and chutney fix everything." Honestly, not the worst advice I've heard.

What I've come to realise – what Chennai's spirited, sensitive, sharp middle schoolers have taught me – is that we adults don't need to have all the answers. Their relationships are dynamic and messy and unpredictable. The best thing we can do is to keep listening, keep asking gentle questions, and most of all – keep growing with them.

I remind my students – and myself – that relationships take work. But they're always worth it. The conversations we have today, the respect we show, and the empathy we model – they shape the adults these children will become. Whether we're 12 or 37, in school or on an MRTS train, it's those connections that carry us through.

## A Short Cut to Comfort – Renting Equipment

As statistics go, Chennai has an ageing population problem and the number is exponentially rising. The overriding concerns are lack of facilities for the elderly, and rising costs, making it impossible to afford the equipment for improved quality of life, with the limited income the elderly have to contend with. Consequently, with reduced mobility which affects most in the seventies and above, the elders choose to stay in the comfort of their homes which spell security and the familiar zone syndrome. This morphs into an insular life without distractions, and gradually leads to depression – which, when left as it is, can quickly mutate into clinical depression which is harder to treat.

Bridging the gap between ownership and availability, stores like Old is Gold which stock accessories for the elderly, have opened Rent a Cure facility for their customers. This enables them to rent equipment rather than own an accessory which is prohibitively expensive.

Talking to Mr. Ganeshan one of the earliest users of this facility, and with personal

experience one realizes the importance of simple but innovative aids which improve the quality of life for the elderly. Take the example of the Stair Climber which has been in use over the years. "It is estimated over 100 persons have used the Stair Climber from Rent-a-Cure Services," say Prithvi and Jayashree, owners of Old is Gold store.

"Stair climbing need not be daunting any more," says Ganeshan, who had used the Stair Climber to take his aged father who has impaired mobility to the registration office which was in the first floor of a building with no lift. In India where scant regard is shown for the physically challenged, one experiences a feeling of despair when your presence is needed at a venue where there is no access for the disabled.

The mandate required was to sign documents and register. You face this situation at every corner. You must personally put your thumb imprint if you want to collect your rations. You have to go to the office which arranges for delivery of gas cylinders to "connect your gas with your Adhaar card". You

face an impasse as the promise of sending a rep home does not materialise. Banking which has now gone online, still requires your presence. While private banks have a relationship manager who comes home at a call, nationalised banks are left far behind and instead of wasting time making calls which are seldom answered, you literally drag yourself to visit the local branch. The route is equally daunting. Broken sidewalks, uneven ground throughout the stretch and yes, sometimes a climb, and without a hand rail.

● by  
Sabita Radhakrishna

For Ganesh, what seemed like an impossible situation was solved with Rent-a-Cure using the motorised Stair Climber. The whole journey was smooth, comfortable and safe. The cost was a fraction of the choice of completing the formalities at his residence.

"Having started with an exclusive store for senior citizens there was a gap for those requir-

ing short-term use of products such as patient beds, wheelchairs, etc. We also felt the need to find a solution for persons seeking solutions but who were unsure if a particular model would work. Rental offers the solution for both short-term requirement & checking out products in the most cost-effective way," says Jayashree.

Other products available under the Rent-a-Cure Services, are Patient Care Furniture, such as medical beds, both manual and automatic, air beds, bubble and tubular mattresses, bed tables, patient cabinets, patient transfer chairs which move the patient from the bed to the washroom or elsewhere in a hammock-like attachment.

Other mobility products for hire include walking sticks, walkers, rollators, (an advanced version of the walker), wheelchairs both manual and motorized, and respiratory aids such as oxygen machines, nebulizers and suction apparatus. Exercisers like pedal exerciser and treadmills are also available on hire.

Unlike most companies Rent-a-Cure allows short du-

ration hire and this is defined according to category. For instance, cots are available for a minimum period of 10 days and wheelchairs are available per day. Rentals for short term use are not expensive. A cot costing around 18,000/- will cost around Rs. 1600/- per month.

Hiring companies are particular about maintenance and refurbish stock. When a product is beyond repair and worn out, it is discarded. A high level of hygiene is maintained without compromise even if it has to be built into the cost.

Air bed mattress and regular mattress are cleaned using steam cleaners that ensure sanitisation as well as removing all forms of dirt that can accumulate. Further such surfaces are cleaned with germicides to make them clean & hygienic. Mattresses are carefully checked and often discarded, replacing them with new.

The Adyar branch of the Old is Gold Store will service patients in R.A. Puram, Kottur, Mandavelli, Mylapore, Royapettah, Thiruvannamiyur, Guindy, Velachery, OMR and ECR.

# The many incredible worlds of Shihan Hussaini

He was a karate guru, an archery expert, an actor, a painter and sculptor, a weird person who had performed incredible feats of daredevilry. Shihan Hussaini's death from blood cancer at the age of 60 on March 24, 2025, in Chennai, shocked thousands of his fans and disciples.

I would like to tell readers about something perhaps not widely known – Hussaini's flair as an orator. Members of the Rotary Club of Madras South recall their meeting with him in July 2019, when he gave us one of the most extraordinary talks we had heard.

We expected something offbeat, but what hit us was a cyclone. He didn't need a mike, his booming voice would have blasted its sound system.

It was an oratorical display of energy, positivity, drama, satire, hyperbole. And action! He got the audience to clap, to sing, to answer rhetorical questions. He had brought biggish gleaming equipment – a large steel arrow apparatus weighing 50 kg, a big winding bow, and a bulls-eye target complex. He came with a retinue of five archery students led by the strikingly tall and stunning Kamana. She and another student, Mahima, gave the audience an effortless archery exercise of power and grace.

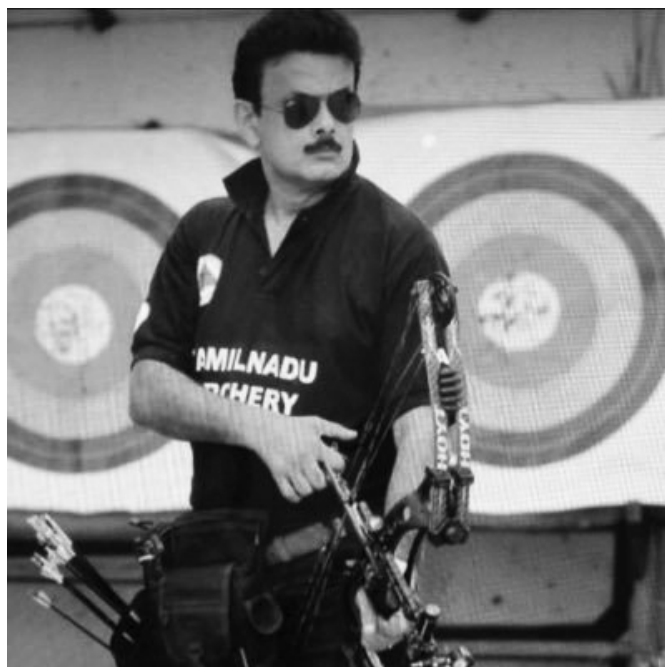
Hussaini said his ambition was to get a Tamil Nadu archer to win an Olympic gold medal. He was confident that either Kamana or Mahima or both could do it.

## Death-defying acts

Modesty wasn't one of Hussaini's vices. His topic was archery, but he told us about the power of the human spirit, which his own death-defying acts had demonstrated.

For example, he once got himself doused with 140 litres of petrol; then Walter Davaram himself, DG of Police and an admirer of Hussaini, set him aflame. (Earlier, the Commissioner of Police had actually refused permission for the event.) Hussaini became a ball of fire for half a minute before he stepped out, almost un-injured. The prestigious Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* frontpaged the event with a photograph.

Hussaini could smash a rock of ice with his forehead. The first time he attempted this, he failed. It was his head that bled, the ice remained intact. So he made the task tougher – several rocks of ice, not one, and the forehead triumphed! He got four cobras to attack and bite him in front of an audience of a few thousands.



married her despite opposition on religious grounds from both his family and Anita's. After marriage, she felt let down by his all-consuming passion for karate and archery and adven-

family," she said. "Give me just two or three more years", he said. She was upset. She said she would leave Chennai to pursue a PhD. But he soon got a divorce notice from her. He was heart-broken but didn't contest the divorce. Anita was in tears at the divorce court. "We remained friends," said Hussaini. Anita joined in the homage and mourning for Hussaini after his death. "My family now consists of my dog Peanut, four parrots and a cat," he said. He had a brother and two sisters, both of whom were abroad, in Australia and the US respectively.

He was the founder and general secretary of the Archery Association of Tamil Nadu.

(Continued on page 8)

● by S.R. Madhu

On another occasion, he let 101 cars ride over his hands. Result: half a dozen fractures. With the same fractured hands, he cracked several hundred tiles and bricks. Blood poured from his hands. He then did a portrait in blood of then Chief Minister Jayalalitha. "This was not an act of sycophancy," says Hussaini, "just my tribute to her courageous spirit". The CM met him the next day and urged him to desist from such dangerous acts.

But in 2015, Jayalalitha was in jail, and Hussaini came up with another feat – self-crucifixion – perhaps to coax the Gods to help his idol. He got himself hung on a cross, and disciples pounded 6-inch nails to his hands and feet. A medical team from the Ramachandra Hospital found that he was fairly normal after the ordeal. But his crazy act of self-flagellation seemed to have pleased the Gods. Jayalalitha was not merely set free, she was CM again!

Hussaini became a household name, but there was tragedy at home. He had wooed and won Anita, a Hindu girl and a lecturer in psychology. He had

ture. "I used to leave the house early in the morning before she was up, and would return late after she had retired for the night", recalled Hussaini. After seven years of married life, she urged him to go easy on his passions and spend time at home. "We must settle and begin a



Hussaini getting ready to be crucified.



Hussaini receives a memento from RC Madras South.

## You can contribute to CHENNAI HERITAGE

As a token of your support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, you can subscribe to *Madras Musings* – the annual subscription is Rs 100 and we welcome additional donations too to keep us going. You can make your payments to our bank account as below:

**Chennai Heritage**  
Indian Bank, Alwarpet Branch  
CA No. 413158606 IFSC : IDIB000A013

Please make sure you send an email to [Chennaiheritage2017@gmail.com](mailto:Chennaiheritage2017@gmail.com) with transfer details so that we can acknowledge receipt.

If you are a new subscriber, you need to send us details of your name and address as well. If you are renewing your subscription make sure you quote your subscription number as reference. This is the number that is on the wrapper of your copy of *Madras Musings*.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to [editor@madrasmusings.com](mailto:editor@madrasmusings.com)

– THE EDITOR



# LOOKING BACK AT SHIHAN HUSSAINI

## SHIHAN HUSSAINI



**The HU Mission Continues...  
The Legend Lives On!**

grees in social work, sculpture and painting. Visiting the US on a Rotary programme, he expressed interest in learning karate, and was advised that Japan was the home of karate. He visited Japan 13 times to learn and master this martial art. He was trained personally by the founder of Taekwondo, Gen Choi Hong Hi, and the chief of World Isshinryu, Soke Kichiro Shimabuku. He achieved the rare feat of an advanced 5th degree black belt both in Taekwondo and Karate at the same time,

In time, Hussaini became synonymous with karate in India. He set up 554 karate schools in seven countries, trained more than 300,000 students, created 2300 black belt instructors and several champions.

### The Actor

During the 1980s, Hussaini was a much-in-demand actor. He made his acting debut in K. Balachander's romantic drama *Punnagai Mannan*, where he played a Sri Lankan dancer. Thereby hangs a tale. Hussaini tried several times to contact Balachander for an acting role

but couldn't get to meet him. He then called Balachander on the phone, and said he was a sculptor, he wanted to do a sculpture of the great director. Balachander asked Hussaini to meet him. They had several sessions together. Incredibly, Hussaini had zero experience as sculptor then, but he took practical lessons from a famous sculptor – one each before every session with Balachander! True to his penchant for succeeding in the impossible, he managed a sculpture that pleased Balachander. Hussaini then phoned the director and old him "Here's a confession. I have no experience as a sculptor at all. I merely acted like one. If you think I did a decent job as actor, give me a role." Balachander was amazed at Hussaini's audacity and gave him a role in *Punnagai Mannan*.

Hussaini later acted in Rajinikanth's *Velaikaran* (1987) and in films starring Vijayakanth, Karthik, Sarath Kumar and Khushboo. He was often the villain, a powerful bad man and a karate expert to boot. But in 1997, he played the hero in the film *My India*.

His last on-screen appearance was in *Badri*, where he played Vijay's fitness coach. He decided to stop acting mainly because his disciples did not like to see him get bashed up by heroes – whom he could have

beaten to pulp if he wanted to. Balachander told him "Don't take it to heart. In movies, it's the hero who has to succeed." But Hussaini decided to move on.

### The end

Hussaini's death-defying adventures had led to several crises in the past – such as a stroke, a knee replacement surgery, a few other surgeries. He had shaken them off. But in March this year, he was diagnosed with blood cancer – specifically, with a rare condition called aplastic anemia. He was coughing and vomiting blood. He would need two bottles of blood and an infusion of platelets every day to stay alive, he said, and this too would be possible only for a few days. A bone marrow transplant could help only people below 40. But he was positive as ever and spoke with remarkable clarity and vigour in "his last video". "A warrior like myself can't be tamed because death looms", he asserted. He asked "Isn't it a blessing for someone to know he is going to die, so that he can make arrangements necessary?". He thanked deputy chief minister Udayanidhi Stalin for a donation of Rs 5 lakhs. He appealed to Udayanidhi and his father Stalin to allot some land for archery training so that his disciples could

pursue their talent and win for Tamil Nadu a prestigious Olympic gold medal. He pointed out that the place where his students had practised for many years – the MGR-Janaki college in Adyar – was no longer available.

His loyal students Kamana and Mahima were with him on the night of March 25. They helped feed him. Doctors told the girls to leave the ICU, they would be called when necessary.

They received a call at 1 a.m. Through the glass window, they saw a team of nurses trying to administer CPR one by one to the dying warrior, and being frustrated by the lack of response. Fifteen minutes later, a doctor told them, "Sorry, we couldn't save him".

Hussaini's body was taken to his office in Kalakshetra Colony, where his fans paid homage till the evening. It was then taken to Madurai. A huge crowd took part in the funeral procession,

The man who embodied raw power, strength and energy, who wowed one and all with his expertise in karate and archery, died at the relatively young age of 60. One can be sure that in Heaven, he will entertain the Gods, and perhaps challenge Arjuna to an archery contest.

(Continued from page 7)

He trained more than 7,000 disciples in archery, some of whom won national and international recognition. He promoted the art in 32 districts of Tamil Nadu, and sent several to Switzerland and Korea for advanced training.

### His career evolution and karate

Hussaini was born in Madurai. His father was a professor of history and deeply interested in sports. Hussaini graduated in zoology from the American College, Madurai, later acquired master's de-

**Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations**



Since 1856,  
patently leaders –  
A WELLWISHER