

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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What next for our City Corporation?

Finally, after much uncertainty, we have a government in place in our state. The majority may not be a comfortable one, but it is very likely that governance will continue under an entirely untested and new political entity, at least for some time. What however it certainly means is that our city's civic body, namely the Greater Chennai Corporation, as also those in other cities in our state, will now have to function under much uncertainty. History has shown us that they work best only when the same party is in power in the state as well as in the council. What then is going to happen to the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) and therefore our city's administration?

The GCC has a history that goes back to 1688. Even within the first decade of its functioning, it was made painfully aware that it was in its best interests to align itself with the powers at Fort Saint George. Thus, when the first mayor,

● by **Sriram V.**

Nathaniel Higginson fell out with the governor Elihu Yale, funding for the corporation was stopped. Matters improved only when Higginson became the governor himself. History has since repeated itself. In the 1950s, when the DMK captured the city's corporation it found itself at loggerheads with

the Congress that was in power in this state. But at that time the mayor's post was essentially apolitical, and also given that the commissioner's post had a lot more power to it than at present, the corporation could still function. In 1967 both state and city aligned and continued till 1973 when the muster roll scandal led to the suspension of the corporation council which was not revoked till 1996.

In recent times, elections to the corporation and particularly that of the mayor's post have been fought only from political standpoints. The city's voting population has also been very canny about this and has made

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Some simple pointers from a common man's wish-list

And so, our state's electorate has delivered a verdict that was most unexpected. After shaping the political discourse for six decades between them, the two Dravidian majors have been dealt a resounding blow by the latest entrant into the space except it was a result that no one, perhaps our new Chief Minister's most die-hard fans and just one exit poll envisaged. Whatever may have been the reasons behind the stunning verdict, the common man has whistled loud and hard for change and so, here we are. Even as we wait to see the new

government's performance and how they tackle issues such as drug menace, economic policy,

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

industrial growth, women's safety, etc., here are some items from a simple wish-list of the common man.

First, it must be acknowledged that the party's election manifesto contains some real good action-points, which if effectively implemented, can

actually make life easier for the common man. Take for instance, the app-based delivery of services such as driving licenses, ration cards, etc., with promise of action against responsible officials in case of any delay in service delivery. It is no secret that user experiences across government departments are harrowing more often than not, with "something extra" required to even get basic services done. Attempts at reforms in these areas have more often than not remained largely on paper and ineffective. In today's AI-led technology driven world, the possibilities to develop solutions that ensure efficient delivery of government

HERITAGE WATCH

The Dead Past gets a New Look

The St Mary's Cemetery on the Island is one of the city's most historic precincts. Located in the curve of the Cooum, this was where the British buried their dead from the 1750s. Many of the colonials who left their mark on the city, and their family members are interred here. Administered by the Church of St Mary's in the Fort, the cemetery has suffered owing to difficulties in watching over such a vast tract of land in a very busy area. In recent years, the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, BACSA, has been doing a lot of restoration work here, in association with Nilesh Thakkar and his Jeernodhar Conservators. The first step has been the creation of a proper walkway around a part of the cemetery. The OLD was taken in 2017 and the NEW, earlier this year.



schemes and make services more user friendly are endless, but it remains to be seen if there is a will to shake-up status quo.

Secondly, can the new government rehaul the functioning

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What next for our City Corporation?

(Continued from page 1)

sure that when a certain party swept to power in the assembly, the same party was voted to the corporation as well, thereby ensuring that its functioning was smooth. This however has had its own disadvantages. The corporation has steadily undermined its role in relation to the city, and most of its major decisions have been taken out of its hands. Even as routine a matter as the renaming of a road is dependent on chief ministerial approval. The mayor has essentially functioned as an extension of the political party in power.

On the odd occasion, when there were opposing parties in power respectively at the state and in the city, much chaos and conflict ensued. The city civic body, dependent as it is increasingly on the state, found its functioning curtailed heavily.

This is exactly the scenario that we are now going to face. Not only is there a new party in power in the assembly, it should also be noted that that party has not one seat on the corporation's council. How is this going to be handled? Much will depend on the maturity that the mayor, her council, the new chief minister, his cabinet and the officers who will be assisting all of them. If they learn to put behind them their political ideologies and work for the city's common good, all will be well.

The term of the present corporation council will expire in 2027. That gives us a year to watch the functioning of the city's administration. More importantly we need to watch the outcome of the corporation's elections. If the same party as is in power in the state is elected, all will be well. But if that does not happen, the city will have difficult times ahead.

Some simple pointers from a common man's wish-list

(Continued from page 1)

of the Right to Information Act portal on an urgent basis? At present, the portal primarily covers only Secretariat-level departments, with the homepage recording that "action is being taken to extend this facility to the Heads of Departments, District Offices and offices down below in a phased manner". In this digital era, physical filing of RTI applications with departments or bodies not covered online does not seem a particularly efficient way of going about things. Enabling online filing will aid greater control and tracking with respect to the trail of communication, which is essential especially with respect to a service aimed at ensuring greater transparency.

Thirdly, can the new government make the state hoarding-free? Hoardings of all kinds have become an integral part of public consciousness, with political ones being most prominent. While the flowery language (with grammar and spellings being casualties) often used provide some comic relief from the humdrum of everyday life, it is undeniable that they end up inconveniencing the public and pose great danger. While the administering of these hoardings comes under the purview of the corporation or local

body, as the case may be, the government can take a policy decision to rid our public spaces of these live dangers. It must be remembered that until recently, our city was free of outdoor hoardings for over fifteen years and surely, it cannot take much to revert to that position. It can also deal a blow to the culture of sycophancy that has become an inevitable marker of the progress of a political career.

Lastly, a point concerning civility in public discourse. This has been a unique election in our state in the sense that the victorious party made extensive use of social media, especially Instagram and WhatsApp over traditional modes of campaigning to get across their message. An inevitable side effect has been the abysmal fall in the standards of civility in public discourse, which has in any case not been in the pink of health for some time now. But for a party which has promised change, can it educate its die-hard supporters, especially the large chunk of young minds, on the need to maintain dignity while engaging in healthy debate? The leader, who acknowledged the support and role of school-going children in his victory, certainly owes this responsibility to them and their future.

Getting to know Him better

The Man from Madras Musings has been watching with considerable amusement. People who had thus far dismissed Him as a mere actor have now decided that He is perhaps worth cultivating after all. MMM understands that the scramble has begun for getting to know better Him, His nine apostles and those other 108 followers who have been elected along with Him. The question that is most often asked these days in the social circles in which MMM moves is: who knows Him better and whether there can be any access to someone – one who knows someone who in turn knows someone else who knows someone who may be close to the one worth knowing!

After decades of coying up to familiar faces in power, namely *pater familias*, *mater dei*, the eternal youth leader and his son, and Tweedledum and Tweedledee, those who do the coying up are now a puzzled lot. They do not know whom to approach and so they have begun to approach all and sun-

tainty about chief ministers of the 1940s of whose parents' longevity he had no idea.

Sir, will he be the tallest chief minister?

MMM decided that it was time he had some fun. "Not really" he replied, for in his, MMM's view, a certain freedom fighter turned chief minister who led the industrialization of the state and pioneered the noon meal scheme would always remain the tallest.

There was a sharp intake of breath at the other end of the phone.

Ohh Sir! came the exclamation. Can you tell us what that person's height was? MMM decided that it was time to disconnect the call.

Time to breathe!

Did you know that there is a certain rule when elections are in progress that all statues, plaques, portraits, monuments, and other markers unveiled by those in power and who are contesting the ongoing election have to be covered? This is certainly one of those laws which must come under

could also be interpreted to mean the two leaves symbol of that party and so the hands had been bandaged!

Likewise, there is a series of statues of dancers under one of our city flyovers, each of which has been trussed up securely because they had been unveiled by the former chief minister. And then there is a statue to Older Brother who gave us the slogan Duty, Dignity and Discipline, which has been standing at a street intersection in the city for over 40 years. Consider MMM's surprise when walking by it he found that the pedestal had all the memorial plaques on it securely taped over so that nobody could read the name of the person who is memorialised or those who were involved in the unveiling of the statue. It obviously did not occur to those who did the taping that not one of those persons is alive. And so what possible damage can they do?

Even worse are the entrance arches at various public buildings with names of political leaders on them. These

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

dry which includes MMM as well. Thus, it was that MMM suddenly received a breathless call from a leading media house in the national capital. The person at the end of the line seemed to be someone with bronchial trouble given the number of whistles and gasps that were proceeding from the phone. It transpired that the lady was under a tremendous amount of pressure to identify someone from the new party in power and she knew none. She therefore decided that it was MMM uncle who would be able to help. To this, all that uncle MMM could do was to wish her well in avuncular fashion and tell her that he specialized in matters of the past and not that of the future.

That however did not end the matter. Within a day of the announcement that the swearing in would take place after all, came a call saying that they had a series of questions for which they sought MMM's sage responses. The queries and answers were as follows --

Sir, is he the first Christian to take oath as chief minister of your state?

MMM agreed.

Sir, will he be the first chief minister both of whose parents will be alive at the time of his taking the oath of office and secrecy?

To this MMM replied that this may well be true, but he could not answer with cer-

what is known as the daft category. Consider the facts – when the whole state is wallowing in election symbols and campaigns and messages by way of posters, hoardings, reels on social media and public events, what are a few memorial tablets and statues capable of influencing? Has anybody ever thought about this?

This bit of bureaucratic goofiness came to the attention of *The Man from Madras Musings* when he was traveling around in the textile city of our state. He came to a particular park where he saw the statues of People's Crest aka Revolutionary Leader, his older brother, and *Mater Dei*, all standing in line. What was intriguing was that the right hand of all the three leaders, which in the statues were in uplifted position, were wrapped up as though they had suffered an injury of some kind. Inquiries revealed that all three statues had their fingers in the V symbol indicating victory, which

have all cloth or tarpaulin draped over them just sufficient to cover the name in question. The shabbiness of the entire arrangement is to be seen to be believed and makes you wonder as to what kind of an image these institutions are portraying to the public!

Now that the elections are over and we have a government in office, it is high time these bandages and covers are removed. Let our dead political leaders breathe. And let us also hope that when elections happen, in the fullness of time, when the moment is ripe, we will see such outmoded rules being done away with. If statues and plaques are such a social ill as to affect the behaviour of people, then they should not be there at all in the first place, should they? And what a waste of government employees' time – given the effort in first covering everything up and then opening them all up again!

– MMM



Drive On Malairaj!

In the late S. Muthiah's household, everyone was a strong character. The Chief may have appeared preoccupied with Pentland, Havelock and others but he never cut himself any slack. Valliammal, his redoubtable wife was a personality in her own right. Suffice it to say that the Chief would have never become the Chief without the woman whom he loved beside him (that Chief, is a quote that you would have recognised at once). And now I come to Malairaj.

He was the Muthiah household chauffeur. For years he ferried Chief and his good lady all around town and to Chettinad and back in a Fiat before they graduated to something more modern, though the Chief always felt the Fiat was better. Malairaj too. My memories are of him sitting on a comfortable wooden bench under the portico, keeping an eye on who came to see the Chief, alerting the Chief on their arrival and generally being at hand.

"Malraj...", – that is how the Chief called him, a nice blend

of Chettinad and Chequers in his voice. And Malairaj would manifest himself. He was very much a social equal, for the Chief was a socialist at heart and treated Malairaj that way. On some occasions, us regulars such as Shobha Menon, Sushiravindranath and I would be entertained by some flaming rows between Malairaj and

● by **Sriram V.**

other domestic help, with Mrs. Muthiah adding to the fire. These were moments to die for, for they were rich in humour, such being the give and take. At such times it was difficult to keep a straight face and carry on discussing Pentland or Havelock with the Chief. But he would remain unconcerned. Such fiery debates usually ended with Malairaj telling us as we emerged that his working in the household was no longer tenable, but we knew that was

all an empty threat. Next day he would be back, the All Clear having blown.

G. Shankar, who does page layout for MM, says Malairaj would on behalf of the Chief visit Lokavani to see the MM issues as they were printed. He would scan them like a hawk and point out print flaws if any.

There came a day when Malairaj had to retire from driving. A new man came (not up to the mark hissed Malairaj to me). But he could not bear to be away from the household he loved and of course, I don't think the Chief or his wife could imagine a time without Malairaj. So he became the man Friday. And after Mrs Muthiah passed away, Malairaj continued at his post for quite some time. I do not recall if he was with the Chief till the end, but he was there when the Chief passed away, and saw him off on his last journey.

Farewell Malairaj. When you meet the Chief tell him Madras misses him.

An ode to a loyal aide-de-camp

It is with great sadness that Ranjani Muthiah and I learned of Malairaj Annan's passing last week. In Muthiah circles, Malairaj was almost as well-known as the chronicler himself. While most knew him as Muthiah's indispensable chauffeur-in-chief, over the



years he had become part of the family and had many avatars – maître d', sous chef par excellence, aide-de-camp, driving instructor, family priest, and advisor in general.

While Malairaj Annan was not educated in the traditional sense, he was a very proud man and worked hard to secure his family's future. As the eldest sibling in his family, he took it upon himself to ensure his brothers had stable jobs.

He also made sure his three children were well-settled. Today, his son heads talent acquisition for a reputed firm and runs a shrimp farm to boot.

Malairaj Annan had many impressive qualities – his resourcefulness, his navigation skills, his green thumb, his ability to quote from Tamil literature at will, his hospitality, his no-nonsense attitude, his pride in whatever he did, and above all, his undying loyalty.

Even after age and deteriorating eyesight led to retirement, Malairaj Annan would drop in to see his beloved Muthu Annan every couple of months. The scooter had graduated from the Lamby to a Honda Activa, but the trademark vibhuthi pattai and giant red pottu remained the same. And he came bearing gifts aplenty – prawns from his son's farm, gigantic drumsticks and the greenest moringa leaves from his garden, and fresh offal to boost Annan's declining blood count.

Annan, they don't make them like you anymore. Rest in Peace.

– Parvathy Muthiah,
daughter of S. Muthiah

Woodlands Drive-In: A Restaurant That Became a City's Memory

Driving along Anna Salai as an old timer from Madras, you instinctively slow down. Not because of traffic. But because memory intervenes. Times when Anna Salai (once known as Mount Road) was punctuated with landmark destinations.

Just the last week I was in Madras and as often it does, memories came cascading down. This time it was at the junction of the Gemini Flyover.

For decades, two landmarks defined this stretch of the city on the busy Mount Road. On one side stood the dream factory -- Gemini Studios. On the other stood a place that nourished the city's social life -- the legendary Woodlands Drive-In. One produced cinema -- home of Kollywood and the pre-Bollywood era. The other produced conversation, community, and countless cups of filter coffee.

For generations of Madras residents, these twin institutions were more than landmarks. They were the emotional geography of the city.

The Birth of an urban icon (1962)

When Woodlands Drive-In opened in 1962, the idea itself was revolutionary.

A vast garden restaurant – where customers could drive in,

park under towering rain trees and dine in the open air -- was unheard of in India at that time. Spread across several acres along Mount Road, the restaurant combined the culinary traditions of Udupi vegetarian cuisine with a relaxed outdoor setting.

Cars rolled through gravel pathways. Families could dine either inside their vehicles or at tables scattered across the leafy grounds. Waiters in spotless uniforms moved briskly between the trees serving idlis, dosas, vadas and steaming tumblers of filter coffee.

Madras embraced it instantly.

Dining out in the 1960s was still a special outing. Woodlands transformed that outing into an experience of leisure.

Why Woodlands captured the soul of Madras

What explains the emotional hold Woodlands had over the city?

It was not opulence. It was not novelty alone.

It was because of accessibility and the atmosphere.

Woodlands belonged equally to everyone.

Students from nearby colleges could stretch a single coffee for hours. Middle-class families made it their regular weekend destination. Business leaders qui-

etly conducted informal meetings beneath the trees.

No one rushed diners away like today in restaurants.

In a city known for its understated temperament, Woodlands became Madras' open-air living room.

● by **Mylapore Venkata Shashidhar (Retd) Colonel**

The Glitterati who walked its paths

Despite its democratic charm, Woodlands quietly attracted the powerful and the famous.

Film personalities frequently dropped in after shooting schedules at nearby Gemini Studios. Carnatic musicians ended their concert evenings there. Journalists and writers turned its tables into informal editorial rooms.

Yet the charm of Woodlands lay in how celebrity dissolved into ordinariness.

A famous actor might sit a few tables away from a group of college students. A senior bureaucrat might sip coffee beside a young journalist. A popular singer will greet you across the table with a welcome smile.

Under the rain trees, hierarchy softened.

The Experience was truly unique

What truly set Woodlands Drive-In apart was not only the food — though my memories of dosas, coffee and vanilla ice cream were legendary.

It was the ritual of the experience.

A typical evening began early on for me as a kid when my dad's car turned off Mount Road into this shaded driveway. Instantly, the noise of the city seemed to fade and you were greeted by the tall rain trees.

Waiters appeared almost magically, balancing steel trays with water tumblers and menus.

And then there were the steward, each of them unforgettable characters.

Regular patrons fondly remembered stewards nicknamed "Vajpayee" and "Lalu" -- playful monikers given by loyal customers because their personalities reminded diners of well-known political figures. The nicknames stuck, becoming part of the folklore of the restaurant.

Service was quick but never hurried.

Plates of ghee roast dosa, bowls of sambar, crisp vadas and chutneys arrived in steady succession. Conversations stretched leisurely while children wandered around the garden pathways.

Above everything towered the enormous rain trees, forming a natural canopy that kept the grounds cool even on warm Chennai evenings.

Dining here felt less like visiting a restaurant and more like participating in a city ritual.

When the Landmark fell silent

No institution, however beloved, escapes the pressures of urban change.

I had moved out of Chennai in 1984 only to return on my holidays during my active service days in the Army. Every time I came back to Madras – this landmark was always my pit stop with my family.

Later in the early 2000s, legal disputes surrounding the lease of the land on which Woodlands stood became increasingly complex. After decades of operation, the restaurant found itself entangled in litigation.

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“Call me however what thou wilt. I am who I must be. I call myself Zarathustra.”

The Glossary Named Hobson–Jobson, 1886

This article relates to an 1886-published glossary titled *Hobson-Jobson*, being a glossary of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms; etymological, historical, geographical, and discursive. For convenience, this book will hereafter be referred to in this article as *Hobson-Jobson*, a strange and curious name! To Nietzsche, Zarathustra personified liberation and forthrightness. To Nietzsche, Zarathustra was a brash refuter of social categories radiating self-determination and authenticity; represented a distinct style of thinking, trouncing conventions and traditions; sought a new wave of candour. The subject of the present article, *Hobson-Jobson*, is a catalogue of widely used colloquial words in India in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries that portrays an avant-garde thinking as appropriate in modern social linguistics. *Hobson-Jobson* documents those Indian words first assimilated into spoken English by the British living in India and later in written English using English spellings. *Hobson-Jobson* impresses more as a lexicon that lists Indian words used by the British in India in the referred time. This effort of Yule and Burnell strikes as a brave effort when considered against the language-use puritanism of the British. This becomes all the more significant when the best English was the Queen's English, particularly in the later decades of the 19th century. *Hobson-Jobson* illustrates the defiance of puritanism and fits snugly into the Zarathustra metaphor.

Colloquialism is the informal, more usually spoken than written, communication between equals. Colloquialism implies words and phrases understood by people in particular geographical regions, expressions appreciated by people speaking specific-language dialects, commonly used words that lack focal meaning, and a rapidly changing vocabulary. One unique example of regional colloquialism is the widely used phrase 'gun time' in the present-day Tamil Nadu (earlier, the Presidency of Madras). This phrase means either a punctual person or the punctual start of an event. The

of Anglo-Indian colloquial words and phrases and of kindred terms; etymological, historical, geographical, and discursive. For convenience, this book will hereafter be referred to in this article as *Hobson-Jobson*, a strange and curious name! To Nietzsche, Zarathustra personified liberation and forthrightness. To Nietzsche, Zarathustra was a brash refuter of social categories radiating self-determination and authenticity; represented a distinct style of thinking, trouncing conventions and traditions; sought a new wave of candour. The subject of the present article, *Hobson-Jobson*, is a catalogue of widely used colloquial words in India in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries that portrays an avant-garde thinking as appropriate in modern social linguistics. *Hobson-Jobson* documents those Indian words first assimilated into spoken English by the British living in India and later in written English using English spellings. *Hobson-Jobson* impresses more as a lexicon that lists Indian words used by the British in India in the referred time. This effort of Yule and Burnell strikes as a brave effort when considered against the language-use puritanism of the British. This becomes all the more significant when the best English was the Queen's English, particularly in the later decades of the 19th century. *Hobson-Jobson* illustrates the defiance of puritanism and fits snugly into the Zarathustra metaphor.

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'gun time' phrase has been in vogue in Tamil Nadu from the early decades of the 19th century, which arose from the firing of empty shots from a cannon in Fort St. George, sharp at 12 noon and 8.00 p.m. every day, when time devices were unknown. Other examples of regional colloquialism used India-wide are 'forenoon', 'prepone', and 'thrice': forenoon and prepone used as opposed to 'afternoon' and 'postpone', respectively; 'thrice' used as a natural extension of frequency-adverbs 'once' and 'twice'. Such a distinct phraseology exclusive to present-day India is strange because standard English dictionaries list 'forenoon', 'prepone', and 'thrice' as archaic and suggest the use of 'morning', 'to advance', and 'three times' instead.

George Bernard Shaw, English dramatist and satirist, explored the power of language in high and low British society of the early 20th-century in *Pygmalion*, wherein Henry Higgins, a professional linguist and a high-society gentleman, trains Eliza Doolittle, a London-slum dweller, to use King's English in everyday conversations instead of the cockney to which she was used. Today, colloquial English, as a language genre, is receiving attention from professional linguists for diverse reasons. They argue that colloquialism (not only in English, but also in other languages, enhances authenticity and relatability, reveals personal identity and culture, and enriches literature. Remembering the extensive use of colloquial English by Charles Dickens (19th century) and Stephen King (b. 1947) in creative works is not out of place at this point. In addition, while rationalising the evolution of colloquialism, both as a progressing and progressive-language genre, communication sociologists consider colloquialism a powerful and an effective-language tool in casual communications, since it builds positive connectivity between people. Colloquialisms and slang in different languages, including English, imply the way people communicate in real society.

In fact, colloquial communications strongly influence the quality of interactions between people, reflecting sensitivities and experiences. Because social reality is catalysed and energised by human communication and interactions, individuals recognise colloquial communications as real mainly because of repeated use over time. What is critical here is to recognise that 'new' meanings for extant words evolve due to changing styles and dimensions of social interactions and are influenced by multimedia. For illustrative examples, see the website of the Oxford University Press. An inevitable social advancement is that meanings for evolved words get altered as we humans experience reflective processes within ourselves and others. Different meanings that words can bear on different people are based on perceptions that gradually get internalized by the 'circuit of culture' that includes representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation.

The line of distinction between colloquialism and slang is thin. 'Slang' is 'an informal nonstandard vocabulary composed typically of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech', whereas 'colloquial' is more specific to a language 'that is most suited to informal conversation, and it ultimately garners an additional, disparaging implication of a style that seems highly informal for either a specific or a specific situation'. Yet many linguists consider slang a subset of colloquialism.

Against such a context of colloquialism and slang, the present article refers to a late-19th century glossary, compiled by Henry Yule and Arthur Burnell, published in 1886 (Fig.1), that stands apart by its intents and contents from other similar works of 19th-century English. I felt compelled to share details of the *Hobson-Jobson* in this forum because when I spoke about this glossary to a few professional English teachers in India, many of them responded in surprise. As said before, the

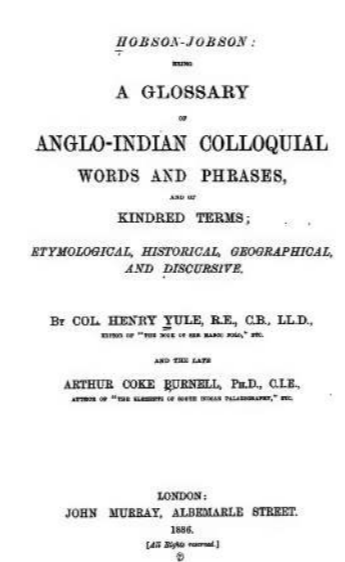


Figure 1. Cover page of *Hobson-Jobson* (1886, 1st edition).

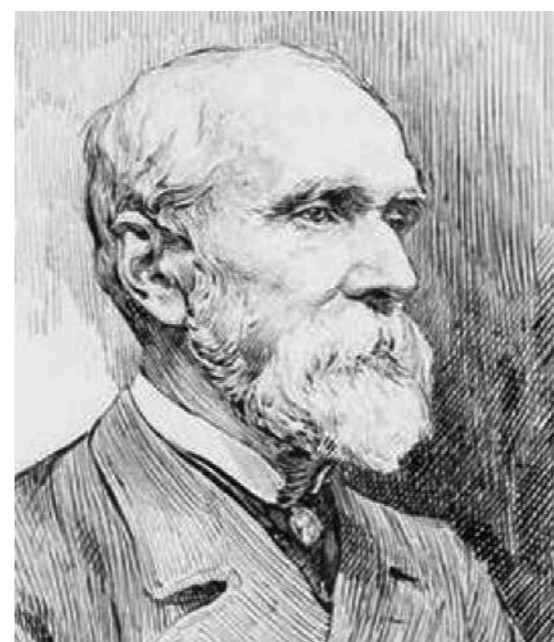
Hobson-Jobson, to me, is a valiant attempt that contextualizes and validates colloquialism in the English language by formally cataloguing the then prevalent loan and assimilated words from

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Indian languages in the 19th century. Standard British dictionaries of English (e.g., *Oxford English Dictionary*) list words that have been added by migrant communities into Britain in the last few decades, and linguists consider such a development as positive, since they have added value to the English language and its consequent enrichment of vocabulary. Danica Salazar (lexicographer, Oxford Language Unit and World English Editor, Oxford University Press) says in *The Guardian*, 'It is only when we share ownership of English, and embrace the language in all its diversity, that it can truly be a gift that everyone can benefit from'.

Henry Yule and Arthur Burnell

Henry Yule (1820–1889) was an engineer, a geographer, and an orientalist from Scotland. After training in the Royal School of Military Engineering



Left: Henry Yule and right: Arthur Burnell.



in Chatham, Kent, he joined the Bengal Military-Engineering Corps in 1840. He worked in the Khasia-s (presently, North-eastern India) initially and in Cal-

cutta later. Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) was a pre-eminent Sanskrit scholar, with a penchant for southern-Indian languages and literature. During formative years, he was influenced by Michael Viggo Fausbøll, a Danish Orientalist and a Pali-Prakrit and Sanskrit-language specialist. In 1860, Burnell worked in Tanjore in the Presidency of Madras. Further to the *Handbook of South Indian Paleography* (1874), his other literary works include translations of many Sanskrit texts and chapters. He wrote commentaries on High Tamil and on Tamil poetry.

A second edition of the *Hobson-Jobson* appeared in the early decades of the 20th century through the efforts of William Crooke (1848–1923), a civil servant in the State of Oudh (presently, North-eastern Uttar Pradesh) and an orientalist. In this edition of the *Hobson-Jobson*, Crooke added a handful of new

entries and quotations, further correcting some etymological explanations. Indian reprints of Crooke's edition of the *Hobson-Jobson*, printed by the Oxford University Press India and Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi), are presently available.

Currently, the term 'Anglo-Indian' refers to descendants of mixed ancestry in India, British on the one hand and Indian on the other. But until 1911, Anglo-Indian meant only the British living in India. Before 1911, descendants of European-Indian lineage were either 'Eurasians' or 'Indo-Britons' and not 'Anglo-Indians'. When the Constitution of India was promulgated in 1950, Article 366 (2) explained an Anglo-Indian as a person of European-Indian descent, a citizen of India, and a habitual resident. This explanation offered a special political status and valid representation to Anglo-Indians (previously European-Indians, Eurasians, Indo-Britons) as citizens of India, which was later modified with the 104th amendment, 2019. Presently, the term 'Anglo-Indian' refers to people of mixed, i.e., European-Indian descent with a wider scope than

what was implied in 1950. The first edition of the *Hobson-Jobson* appeared in 1886, with the preparatory work by Yule and Burnell starting in 1872. The 1872–1886 timespan adequately clarifies that 'Anglo-Indian' used by Yule and Burnell in the first edition of *Hobson-Jobson* meant the British residents in India. Consequently, we understand that the *Hobson-Jobson* records colloquial English words and other assimilated foreign-language words used commonly by the British residing in India.

create shortcuts by employing Indian words, mostly of north-Indian origin, but anglicised phonetically.'

The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1975) speaks of the *Hobson-Jobson*:

'the vocabulary, consisting of Anglicised Hindi or other Indian words, developed by British subjects in civil and military service in India: also called *Hobson-Jobson*'.

Yule and Burnell (p. 319) explain the unusual phrase 'Hobson-Jobson' as that derived from the Arabic-wail cry "Ya Hasan, ya Hosain" of the Shia Muslims in British India during the Mu-

harram mourning of the martyrdom of Hasan and Hosain, grandsons of Prophet Mohammed. Yule and Burnell (1886) clarify that the call "Ya Hasan, ya Hosain", misheard as "Hossein-Gosseen" by British soldiers in India, over time gradually turned slangy as 'Hossy-Gossy' and 'Hossein-Jossen', ultimately settling as 'Hobson-Jobson'. Strangely, many of the late 19th century English authors saw both this book and the title as coarse and uncouth. Technically, *Hobson-Jobson* falls into the linguistic phenomenon described as 'ablaut reduplication'.

(To be concluded next fortnight)

Woodlands Drive-In: A Restaurant That Became a City's Memory

(Continued from page 3)

Finally, in 2008, the gates were declared closed. When my brother broke this news to me while I was posted in a far-off Punjab border, I felt a deep pang in my heart. For old residents of Madras like me, the closure felt deeply personal.

The garden falling quiet. Empty gravel driveways. Disappearance of the hum of conversations that once filled the evening air and probably the Madras connect itself.

Today, Mount Road has evolved into a modern Anna Salai. Yet something intangible has vanished.

Why the Nostalgia Endures

Why does Woodlands continue to occupy such a powerful place in the memory of the city?

Because it was woven into everyday life.

Many Madras residents would fondly recall their first restaurant outing there. Others remember post-exam celebrations, political debates, their Chepauk outings, family reunions, or quiet evenings over filter coffee.

Woodlands did something remarkable. It turned a restaurant into a civic memory.

For over four decades, it offered the city a space where people from

every walk of life could gather without pretension.

Glorious Reflections

Cities inevitably reinvent themselves. Madras transformed into Chennai. Mount Road became Anna Salai. New glass buildings replaced older institutions. Yet memories have their own stubborn permanence.

Every old timer from Madras, like me who passes this stretch of road, still remembers the twin markers that once defined it -- Gemini Studios and Woodlands Drive-In.

And perhaps that enduring nostalgia explains why the spirit of Woodlands has never completely faded from public memory. After years of absence, the iconic restaurant has now found new life in a revived avatar in Arumbakkam, a few years back in 2024, rekindling memories of that legendary drive-in experience.

The rain trees may be different now and so is Madras, rather Chennai.

But somewhere in Chennai today, a steaming tumbler of filter coffee still carries the unmistakable echo of old Madras.

And in that aroma lives the enduring legacy of Woodlands Drive-In.

Trees of Madras

It's that time of the year in town when the Copperpod trees, also known as Yellow Flame tree, are aglow. I don't just see the flowers on the trees, they carpet my neighbourhood roads. Just ahead, I perk up to see a burst of bougainvillea in its most common colour-magenta. The Raintree outside my dwelling has unusual flowers, partly pink, on its crown as I see from my terrace. These flowers burnished by the sun, turn dark brown and then fall. The Frangipani tree in our apartment imperceptibly sheds its especially soft flowers tempting one to pick them up and, outside my neighbour's house, I catch sight of the Golden Shower or Konrai tree in full bloom. I know that its flowers are offered to Lord Krishna on Vishu (April 15 this year) when Malayalis celebrate their new year. This April 14, on the Tamil *Varusha Pirappu*, the tiny flowers of the neem tree went into the *manga pachadi* – a

raw mango jam, made at my place; prepares us to take the bitter with the sweet with the sour.

If the season of flowers is here, fruits follow in their wake. The watermelons are the first to reach the streets, ready for consumption in crescent-shaped slices and sought after by two-wheeler commuters and pedestrians pausing for a respite from the hot sun. While the cantaloupes (*mulam pazham*) and musk melons (*kimi*) are of

will savour as many varieties as I can and learn to tell my Imam Pasands from my Javvadhus. On April 21 I made my first purchase of the Sendura from a pushcart stationed on my cycle route to the temple. The vendor wasn't boasting when she said that they would taste like *mithai*. However, I was disappointed; not all the pieces turned out that good! No point having set the bar high with the season just started, right? A week later, one morning,

by Srinivas Chari

passing interest to me, what I eagerly looked forward to is the arrival of the much-vaunted king of them all, the mango. 'Mampazham' more like it! I make a promise to myself that I

we asked for the large Imam Pasand aka Himayat mangoes being vended on the streets in a tricycle. We were told to let it ripen for a day. In the grip of a mood for mangoes, I didn't



think twice about picking up a kilo of Alphonso or Hapus at the nearby Pazhamudir Nilayam that evening at 365 rupees a kilo! The next day, we promptly cut an Imam Pasand and were delighted to see it ripe and ready but postponed eating it until it was chilled. Well worth the wait of a day and a half. Later, I set to work on the smaller Hapus. My taste buds told me not for nothing did it enjoy the reputation of the king of mangoes. Sweet and flavourful! On May 10, giving in to the temptation of buying a kilo of the exotic-sounding and looking ready-to-eat Javvadu, I found it not as tasty as I had fancied. Reading that 'Banganapalli is the king of slices and Alphonso rules the pulp,' I am reminded of little tussles at family meals over *kadhuppu* or *kottai*. The Rumani also called Apple Rumani, which has a small seed, lots of pulp and is easily identifiable, arrives well into the season and Neelam at the fag end. There are more like Malgova, Peethar, Dasherri (from UP) and Rasalu to name a few. I have heard from vendors that the mangoes from the groves near the city's Madhavaram Milk

Colony are special. Mangoes from Thathachariyar's orchard in Srirangam are also talked about highly. There is also the Hanu Reddy farm near Guduvanchery which has a festival around the mango this time of the year. Taking the sting off the heat of a Madras summer is the pleasure of gorging on the fruit and its preparations. Even as the summer gets unbearable, the quality of mangoes arriving in the markets gets better. The season is also about indulging in *mukkani* – a blend of mango, jackfruit and banana marinated in honey.

The palmyra fruit or *nungu* (ice apple) has its place under the Summer Sun. I sought out a man who had brought the fruit from Marvathoor. A dozen for 100 rupees. Peeling the jelly-like inside portion of the fruit is a sticky and slippery business but worth the effort if you want to stay hydrated – the water content of an ice apple is 92-94 per cent. India has the highest number of palmyra trees in the world and around 60 per cent of them are in Tamil Nadu. And, yes, the palmyra is the state tree.



A rich haul of trophies for Madras Boat Club

Madras Boat Club (MBC) is the second oldest rowing club in India. Founded in 1867, in the early days the Club moved between the Ennore Creek and the Long Tank till it settled on the banks of the Adyar river. Today the Club has a mix of age groups on the water – 12 to 80 years old. Many members row for the pleasure of it, others as a regular workout/fitness regime while some train to compete for the Club and for the state. On its rolls are many champions like Sumana Narayanan the versatile Captain of Boats, Asian Games medallist James Joseph, and Siddharth Sunil.

Talking to *Madras Musings*, Sumana Narayanan provides an overview about the various activities of MBC. Two marquee events are part of MBC's annual calendar. One is the ARAE-FEARA Regatta (Amateur Rowing Association of

the East-Far Eastern Amateur Rowing Association) which brings clubs across Asia together. Some of the founding clubs include Madras, Calcutta, and Rangoon! The second marquee event is the Madras-Colombo Regatta between MBC and Colombo Rowing Club, Sri Lanka. More than a century old

tradition, Mad-Col is a fiercely fought contest alternately hosted by the two clubs."

This year, Bengal Rowing Club in Kolkata hosted the 82nd ARAE-FEARA Regatta 2026. Madras Boat Club sent a strong contingent of student and masters (above 30 years) and returned with medals in



Gold and Silver medallists of Masters events at ARAE.



On the ergometer – rowing machine. Bottom photo, extreme right – Sumana Narayanan keeping an eye on the competitions



State Championship, double scull.

● by
S. Janaki

ment is a testament to the club's depth, dedication, teamwork, and enduring rowing culture – Onwards and upwards!" says Sumana with pride.

the rowers who delivered exceptional results across Open, Masters, Super Masters, and Grand Super Masters categories, bringing home an impressive haul of gold, silver and bronze medals. "This achieve-

Talking about Kolkata and Chennai waters, Gayathree Krishna, one of the members of the rowing team which struck gold, says "The Bengal Rowing Club is known for its highly

(Continued on page 8)

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– THE EDITOR

AI as an Enabler of Growth

At a recent summit on how Tamil Nadu could become a USD 1 trillion economy, the following views on AI were expressed:

Sudha Ramen, IFS, Member Secretary, State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu, described how rather than replacing jobs, AI is reshaping them, creating an urgent need for continuous upskilling and reskilling. Tamil Nadu is proactively positioning itself for this transition. She highlighted quantum computing and quantum technologies as future growth engines for the state. The State Planning Commission has already constituted a working group to formulate a quantum strategy, signalling that Tamil Nadu's technology ambitions go well beyond short-term gains.

Ben John, Vice President, Microsoft AI, USA, stressed that AI is not a substitute for human intelligence but an augmentation, pointing out the vast energy and resource gap between machine training and human cognition. He also highlighted that AI remains underutilised in critical sectors such as scientific research, drug discovery, agriculture and healthcare. In pharmaceuticals

alone, AI has the potential to dramatically reduce development costs and timelines.

Subbu Palaniappan, Global Head of Growth, Amazon Prime, USA, added that the future belongs to domain experts who combine subject knowledge with AI fluency. Automation will shift humans into higher-value roles, even as repetitive tasks are increasingly handled by machines.

The panel also addressed the mismatch between traditional education systems and the needs of an AI-driven economy. This can be done by enhancing collaboration between industry and academia, formulating hands-on learning models and developing critical thinking and judgment among students. Speakers also highlighted AI's growing role across sectors. From AI-enabled farming platforms in West Africa to drug discovery, chip design and next-generation computing, the consensus was that deep technology will be a key driver of competitiveness and exports in the coming decade.

Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*, February 2026.

A rich haul of trophies for Madras Boat Club

competitive crews, and their familiarity with home waters at Rabindra Sarobar gave them a clear edge. Wind conditions there often make the water choppy, demanding strong balance and quick blade control. In contrast, rowing on the Adyar River involves brackish water conditions, which behave differently – typically with less abrupt chop but more current variation and density differences. Adapting between these environments requires technical adjustments in rhythm, blade entry, and stability.” The MBC team evidently struck the right balance!

Sumana Narayanan explains the gamut of categories that one can participate in the sport. “Rowing and sailing competitions are called “Regatta”. This has two components – one, the races on the water in different categories of boats,

ages, and of course for men and women. And two, on the rowing machine or ergometer (gender and age categories are specified).”

“Rowing is done in narrow fiberglass racing shells that require not just physical strength but also finesse to be in sync with the boat and cut through the water efficiently. Then there are two types of rowing – sculling and sweep. Sculling is when each person in the boat has two oars. Single sculls are boats with just one person, and there are double and quadruple sculls as well.”

“Sweep rowing is when each person has only one oar, so there have to be at least two people in the boat to balance it out. Sweep boats include pairs, fours, and eights. These may be coxed or coxless, referring to the presence of the coxswain (or cox) who controls



Children from the CSR programme who medalled at the State Championship.

the rudder, steers the boat and commands the crew. Rowing requires synchrony among the crew. It is a full body workout, with a particular emphasis on the legs, followed by the core and back and then the arms. Mental strength is also a key.”

At MBC, in addition to the inter-club events, the dedicated rowers get to row for the state of Tamil Nadu at the national events organized by the Rowing Federation of India (RFI). There are also state level events held through the state body called TARA (Tamilnadu Amateur Rowing Association). In January 2026, in collaboration with TARA, MBC hosted the Asmita Rowing League,

which is part of a Khelo India programme for women. About 40 girls participated in the event; of these 10-12 are part of a CSR programme launched in June last year by MBC with the Greater Chennai Corporation schools, and funded by a company that wishes to remain anonymous. It was a first time competitive rowing experience for these girls.

A month later, in February, TARA and MBC collaborated again to hold the 5th State Rowing Championships at MBC. This had events for boys, girls, masters and super masters. And the 15 children (including about four boys) from the CSR programme par-

ticipated, and some of them had podium finishes as well. Many of them train for the Sub Junior (under 13 and under 15) Nationals in the hope of representing and winning laurels for Tamil Nadu.

Sailing towards its 160th year, the Madras Boat Club now boasts of an excellent rooftop swimming pool, guest rooms, gym, billiards room and a pickle ball court. From cherished annual traditions to informal gatherings, MBC creates an environment that fosters lasting friendships among its members even as it maintains a successful record of team spirit and excellence in competitions.



Boys single scull medallists at State Championship.

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