

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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● SEASON OF DITHER BEGINS

Over New Secretariat and New Airport

The sensational announcements have been done. And they have created the necessary sensations that were expected as well. Anger in a few places, mockery from a few others and genuine concern in a few quarters. All of this would still have been well had there been well thought out reasons behind the decisions. Now that the announcements have been made and the initial reactions have come, what is required is action, and that seems to be lacking. Clearly the emphasis behind the announcements seems to have been more with a view to optics than genuine public interest. The state government is very clearly clueless as to what to do next when it

comes to the new secretariat and the new airport.

Let us begin with the secretariat. That decision at least had all the hallmarks of a spontaneous one. And therefore it would not be appropriate to expect that thought had

● by **Sriram V**

been given to the consequences. But can an elected state government really afford to do anything spontaneously without bothering about the consequences? Surely the advisors to the Chief Minister are aware that there is something called a Master Plan, of which

the third edition is overdue? And something as disruptive as a new secretariat ought to be taken into account in such a document? And what about studies on the load that such a large complex will put on its immediate environment? That no public consultation of any kind was held before the announcement is evident from the recently launched fishermen protests against the Pattinapakkam option. And from the arguments put forward by the fishermen, we can see that they have clearly thought through the impact of the secretariat, something that our Government has failed to do.

(Continued on page 2)

Tackling dengue-proactive measures an urgent need

Amidst all the buzz generated by the never-ending churn of the wheels of political administration, one major development that has not occupied public discourse as much as it should have is slowly making its unwelcome presence felt. We refer to the statewide increase in the number of dengue cases this year, which stands at more than 17000 so far. We are told that the situation is not something to be worried about, as the number of cases has been showing a declining trend over the last three years. Given that the principal reason for the scourge, breeding of mosquitoes in stagnant water, is not something that cannot be surmounted, it is time to take stock of how

much progress has been made in addressing this public health issue in a meaningful manner.

Official data released by the state's Health Department just as this article is being written show figures of 56863 cases in 2023, then 46971 in 2024 and 25585 in 2025. It must be noted here these are at a wide

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

variance from the numbers reported on the portal of the Union Health Ministry's National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases, which has reported figures of 29121, 27378 and 23407 respectively. It has been

clarified that the national portal has taken into account only cases confirmed by NS1/IgM (Non-Structural Protein 1 and Immunoglobulin M) tests and not rapid diagnostic tests, leading to the variance and seeking to portray the higher numbers as a mark of better surveillance and reporting.

Whatever be the reporting yardsticks and the outcome of the number-crunching, it remains an undeniable fact that despite recurring widespread outbreaks on a periodic basis in the last 15 years or so, there has been no substantial change for the good in environmental sanitation, an essential pre-

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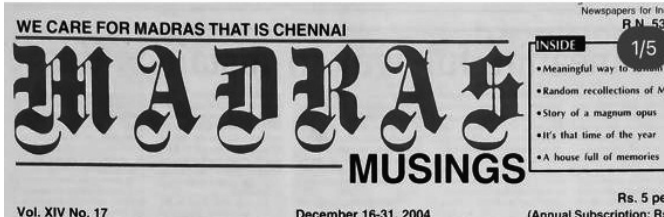
HERITAGE WATCH

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Environmental education challenges

(by Shobha Menon)

Although the recent Supreme Court directive on the inclusion of environmental education in schools has been welcomed by environmentalists, it has raised several questions. A. Shankar, Joint Director, Tamil Nadu Sahitya Akademi, Chennai, says, "It is a commendable move towards holistic and purposeful education." He is correct. In 1986, the Government of India introduced a historic initiative to prepare a national curriculum for environmental education. This was a landmark step towards integrating environmental education into the school system. The curriculum was designed to be age-appropriate and to focus on basic environmental concepts and values. It was intended to be a guide for teachers and to be adapted to local conditions. The curriculum was also designed to be flexible and to allow for the inclusion of local knowledge and practices. The curriculum was also designed to be a guide for teachers and to be adapted to local conditions. The curriculum was also designed to be flexible and to allow for the inclusion of local knowledge and practices.

Let's name him 101010101. With a name like that, he is a bit of a mystery. This is the first of a series of stories from the collection of late Shri. K. Ramakrishna [Shatpadi Ramakrishna] Puttur, KARNATAKA. (Continued on Page 2)

Provide children messages of hope
Teachers, not necessarily biologists or zoologists, first need to be committed to environmental education that is expected to bring about a change in the way we think and act. (Continued on Page 2)

In loving memory of M.S. Subbulakshmi Amma on her birth anniversary, we look back at this rare December 2004 issue of Madras Musings featuring "Fond Recollections," a moving tribute to her legendary musical genius and divine spirit.

THE END OF AN ERA
M.S. Subbulakshmi (1916-2004)
M.S. Subbulakshmi, the legendary Carnatic singer, passed away on September 16, 2004, at the age of 87. She was born on September 16, 1916, in the village of Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She was a member of the famous 'Sena Sadas' and was known for her powerful voice and her devotion to her art. She was a true icon of Indian music and her legacy lives on through her recordings and her influence on the next generation of singers.

Remember - the name has to survive playgrounds, schools, tea-stalls, and in the hearts of the people. (Continued on Page 2)

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SEASON OF DITHER BEGINS

(Continued from page 1)

The latest in this saga is that the Government may be backtracking in the face of the fishermen protests and criticisms from (retired) city planners – that qualification is necessary because those in office never open their mouth and become vocal critics on superannuation after the damage is done.

We now come to the question of a new airport. That the party in power was opposed to the earlier choice of Parandur is not news. The TVK had made its opposition clear even when the announcement of the site was made. But having expressed its disapproval and also declared that if elected it would reverse the decision, it obviously did precious little. A responsible opposition would have even then embarked on alternatives so that it would be prepared in case it is elected to office and has to take a decision. The concept of shadow cabinets is well established in mature democracies and

our State parties ought to be setting an example for the rest of India. On the other hand, what is clear is that the party never expected to win and now that it has, has been left with no option but to reverse the earlier airport decision without pondering over the alternative possibilities. The end result is further delay in a project that is bound to be time consuming even in implementation. In the interim, the present airport is not covering itself in glory with something as routine as a taxi terminal awaiting the pleasure of a VIP to inaugurate it.

Taken overall, the present Government is displaying ineptitude in many ways. While the secretariat can wait, the airport sadly cannot and the city's image is getting tarnished. This magazine does not subscribe to the popular view that we need a glamorous new airport, but what we have is truly a shoddy facility compared to which those in even Tier Two towns are better.

Tackling dengue-proactive measures an urgent need

(Continued from page 1)

condition for controlling the outbreak of the disease. This points to a systemic failure both at an individualistic and a societal level, raising questions of whether there has been any consistent attempt at addressing the issue from a long-term perspective. The civic administration can point to its mass cleaning initiatives including fogging, door to door checks, fining offenders, etc. but all these are more reactive rather than proactive measures.

Research has clarified that the vector responsible for the disease can breed not only in clean water but also in water sprinkled with dust or mud which remains stagnant. At a household level, the conditions which promote breeding necessitates behavioural change and can be addressed only by sustained awareness campaigns. But it also brings into focus the way we deal with another fertile breeding ground, viz., waterlogging on our roads. Despite increased outlays on stormwater drains in the recent past, we have seen sustained waterlogging in various parts of the city following rainfall

episodes. Roads in some part of the city or the other are always under a perpetual state of repair owing to various reasons, and failure to re-lay them properly creates conditions conducive for water to stagnate. Besides dengue, it also exposes the public to issues such as malaria and viral infections. Clogging of drain inlets and waterways with plastic waste and construction debris continues unabated, with no amount of fining proving to be a deterrent.

We are just about a month away from the start of the northeast monsoon, which will bring along conditions conducive for easy spread of the disease. It is time for the administrators to tighten the vigil and ensure that measures are in place to control widespread outbreaks. While things may get easier overall with respect to the management of dengue in the future, with reports stating that the first vaccine maybe available in our country in the first half of 2027, it must be remembered that it cannot obviate a basic necessity for a better quality of life, viz., keeping our surroundings clean. And this is something that is purely in our hands.

Purattasi & the quiet politics of a vegetarian month

Why do millions of Tamil families give up meat every September – and why does it matter more than you think?

Walk into any restaurant in Chennai this week and you will notice something odd. The biriyani counter at your neighbourhood mess is shuttered. The Sunday mutton stall near the temple has vanished. Your colleague at work, the one who photographs every Chicken 65 he orders, is quietly eating curd rice. It is Purattasi – the Tamil month that falls roughly between mid-September and mid-October – and a significant section of Tamil Nadu has gone vegetarian.

The practice is old, widespread, and remarkably under-examined. Ask a grandmother why the family avoids meat in Purattasi, and the answer is usually brief: "It is the month of Perumal." Lord Vishnu, the preserver, is worshipped with particular fervour during this month. Six Saturdays of Purattasi – the Purattasi Sani – are considered especially auspicious for visiting Vishnu temples. Tirupati sees its largest crowds of the year. Srirangam overflows. Even families that are not particularly devout tend to observe the abstinence, treating it less as a religious obligation and more as something one simply does, like not wearing new clothes during Aadi.

But beneath this seemingly straightforward devotional practice lies a web of history, caste, and cultural signalling that tells us more about Tamil society than most textbook chapters on heritage ever will.

A Vaishnavite revival written in diet

The roots of Purattasi vegetarianism are tangled with the Bhakti movement. Between the sixth and ninth centuries, the twelve Alvars – Vaishnavite poet-saints – travelled across South India composing hymns in Tamil that challenged both Vedic Sanskrit exclusivity and the rising influence of Jainism and Buddhism. Their theology was radical in its simplicity: devotion alone, not birth or ritual, could bring one close to God.

Yet over the centuries, this egalitarian impulse calcified into something more complicated. The Vaishnavite tradition became closely associated with Brahminical vegetarianism. To be a "good" Vaishnavite increasingly meant to eat like one. Purattasi, originally a month of heightened prayer, gradually became a month of dietary policing – first within families, then across communities.

By the twentieth century, the practice had spread far beyond Vaishnavite Brahmins. Today, it is observed by Mudaliars, Chettiars, Nadars, Gounders, and a wide cross-section of Tamil Hindu communities. This expansion is itself revealing. In a society where food has always been a caste marker – where who cooks your meal and what that meal contains can place you precisely on a social hierarchy – voluntarily adopting vegetarianism, even temporarily, carries meaning that goes well beyond devotion.

The meat shop shutters: economics of faith

The economic impact of Purattasi is tan-

gible and largely undocumented. Meat shop owners in Chennai report a 40 to 60 percent drop in sales during the month. Chicken farmers in Namakkal, the poultry capital of South India, adjust their production cycles around it. The fishing community along the Marina and in Kasimedu feels the squeeze less – fish occupies an ambiguous position in the vegetarian-non-vegetarian binary, and many families that give up "meat" continue eating fish, a distinction that would puzzle a strict vegetarian but makes perfect cultural sense in Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, the restaurant industry adapts with practised ease. Chains roll out "Purattasi-special menus". Cloud kitchens pivot to paneer and mushroom variants of their bestsellers. The economics of a religious observance, it turns out, is a heritage story in itself – one that connects a seventh-century Alvar's hymn to a 21st century Swiggy notification.

Whatsapp forwards and the new gatekeepers

In recent years, Purattasi has acquired a new dimension. Social media – particularly WhatsApp and Facebook – has turned a household observance into a public performance. Every September, forwards circulate listing the "scientific benefits" of vegetarianism during Purattasi: the alignment of planetary positions, the supposed toxicity of meat during this period, the dubious claim that even animals observe celibacy this month.

These forwards are rarely authored and never cited. But they serve a function. They repackage a caste-inflected religious practice in the language of science and wellness, making it palatable to a generation that might resist overt religious instruction. The grandmother's "it is the month of Perumal" becomes a cousin's "actually, the UV radiation index in September makes non-veg harder to digest." The tradition survives, but its justification has been quietly upgraded.

This is not unique to Purattasi. Across India, traditional practices are being retrofitted with pseudo-scientific explanations – from turmeric in milk to the acoustic properties of temple bells. It is a distinctly modern form of heritage preservation: keep the practice, replace the reason.

What Purattasi actually preserves

Perhaps the most honest thing about Purattasi is what it does not claim to be. Unlike yoga or Ayurveda, it has not been exported, branded, or turned into a lifestyle product. It remains stubbornly local, stubbornly Tamil, and stubbornly resistant to easy explanation.

In a month where millions of people quietly change what they eat – not because a doctor told them to, not because an influencer recommended it, but because a cultural rhythm older than most nations asked them to – there is something worth paying attention to. Not as a relic. Not as superstition. But as living heritage: messy, contradictory, and still shaping what is on your plate tonight.

Jaidev A is a Computer Science student at VIT Vellore

Calvin Would Have Loved Madras!

There are books we read as children. Then some books wait patiently for us to become adults before revealing the joke. *Calvin and Hobbes* is one of them.

When I first encountered Calvin, I thought he was simply a wonderfully naughty little boy with an unusually philosophical tiger for a friend. He had grand adventures, invented machines out of cardboard boxes, argued with adults, escaped homework whenever possible and generally behaved as though the world had been created specifically for his entertainment. I loved him immediately.

Years later, I realised something rather alarming. I had grown up. And I now understood Calvin's parents. This is one of the less advertised stages of adulthood.

As children, we look at Calvin and think, *What a brilliant fellow.*

As parents, we look at him and think, *Please don't give my child any ideas.*

And somewhere between the two lies the truth about childhood.

Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* ran from 1985 to 1995, following the adventures of six-year-old Calvin and Hobbes, his stuffed tiger who, depending on whose eyes we see through, is either a toy or very much alive. The strip mixed mischief, imagination and philosophical curiosity in a way that allowed children to laugh at the adventures while adults noticed some of the deeper jokes.

For those of us who grew up in Madras, there was something instantly familiar about Calvin's world. We may not have had his cardboard time machine. We had something better. A terrace.

A terrace in Madras could become practically anything. A cricket ground. A battlefield. A railway station. A secret headquarters. A place to dry clothes while simultaneously conducting an international cricket match around them.

And if the ball landed somewhere it shouldn't, the expedition began. "Don't climb there!" was usually heard from a distance. Naturally, this was not interpreted as an instruction. It was interpreted as background sound.

Madras childhood had its own special form of entertainment. There were bicycles, marbles, cricket bats, comic books, cousins arriving for the holidays

and afternoons that seemed to last forever.

There were no carefully designed activity schedules. Nobody needed to "keep the child engaged". The child was perfectly capable of engaging himself. Usually with something the adults had specifically asked him not to touch!

A cardboard carton could become a fort. A bedsheet could become a tent. A stick could become a sword. A neighbourhood wall could become a perfectly legitimate cricket boundary, provided nobody asked the owner.

And boredom? Boredom was not considered a developmental concern. It was considered an opportunity. You were simply expected to go and find something to do.

● by Priyanka Soman

Calvin would have approved. Perhaps this is why his imagination feels so familiar. He takes the ordinary and turns it into something enormous. A box becomes a spaceship. A school day becomes an epic struggle. A walk outside becomes an expedition.

A Madras child needed no lessons in this. We had already mastered the art.

A visit to Marina Beach, for instance, was never simply a visit to Marina Beach. There was sand. There were waves. There were snacks. There was running. There was the solemn parental instruction not to go too far into the water.

And there was the child calculating, with impressive scientific accuracy, exactly how far "not too far" might actually be.

Parents, meanwhile, developed a remarkable vocabulary: "Come here." "Don't run." "Careful." "Leave that." "Enough." "Did you hear me?"

The last question was largely ceremonial. The child had heard everything. The child had simply decided to proceed differently.

Calvin's parents understand this. They are among the great unsung heroes of the comic strip. They are not villains. They are not perfect. They are simply two adults attempting to raise a six-year-old whose imagination appears to have no closing hours.

For Chennai parents, this is deeply reassuring.

Because we have all encountered Calvin. Perhaps not in exactly the same form. But certainly in the child who cannot find the school notebook despite it being on the table.

The child who remembers at 8.30 p.m. that tomorrow is "special dress day".

The child who announces that a project is due the next morning.

The child who needs chart paper, glue, coloured paper and one very specific shade of glitter immediately.

And when the parent asks, "When did you know about this?" "Last week," comes the innocent answer!

There are moments when parenting requires the patience of a saint, the organisational skills of a railway station master and the reflexes of a goalkeeper.

And then the child smiles.

And somehow, the whole thing is forgiven. That is another thing *Calvin and Hobbes* understands beautifully.

Children can be exhausting without being unlovable. They can be unreasonable without being bad. They can drive adults completely mad and still make them laugh five minutes later.

Perhaps that is why the strip remains so beloved. It does not present childhood as a perfectly behaved little paradise. It presents childhood as it actually is – noisy, imaginative, selfish, curious, dramatic, funny and occasionally covered in something that nobody can identify.

And then there is Hobbes. Every child deserves a Hobbes. Someone who listens to the wild ideas. Someone who enters the game. Someone who understands that a cardboard box may actually be a spaceship and that an ordinary afternoon can become an expedition to another planet.

Most of us had a Hobbes of some kind. Perhaps it was a favourite toy. Perhaps a school friend. Perhaps a cousin who was always ready for the next adventure.

Or perhaps it was simply our own imagination. For many of us who grew up in Madras, childhood had plenty of room for that imagination.

Perhaps the greatest difference between childhood then

and childhood now is not that children have changed.

Children are still children. They still want to play. They still invent worlds. They still ask inconvenient questions. They still have an extraordinary ability to discover the one object in the house they have been specifically told not to touch.

What has changed is the world around them.

Our childhood had more empty spaces. And empty spaces were wonderful things. They gave imagination somewhere to go.

Today, children have schedules, classes, screens, activities and wonderfully organised weekends. And yet give them a cardboard box, a blanket and half an hour of freedom, and Calvin will probably return.

That may be the enduring magic of *Calvin and Hobbes*.

It reminds adults that childhood is not merely a stage we pass through. It is a place we continue to carry.

Sometimes it returns when we see a child turning a chair into a spaceship. Sometimes it returns when we hear an old joke. Sometimes it returns when we find an old comic book. And sometimes it returns when our own child does something completely ridiculous and we suddenly hear ourselves laughing before we can say, "Stop!"

That is when we realise something. We did not leave childhood behind. We merely changed our address.

Once, we were the ones being called home. Now, we are the ones doing the calling.

Once, we were Calvin. Now, somewhat alarmingly, we are Calvin's parents.

And somewhere between shouting "Don't climb that!" and "Come and eat your dinner!" – we discover that we have become the adults we once thought were hopelessly unreasonable.

Perhaps that is the real trouble with being six. You eventually grow up.

But thankfully, a small part of you refuses to. It keeps the cardboard box. It remembers the terrace. It misses the endless summer afternoons. It laughs at Hobbes. And every once in a while, when nobody is looking, it still imagines that the box is a spaceship.

Which is probably why Calvin and Hobbes never really left us. They simply waited.

For us to grow up. And understand the joke.

MADRAS QUIZ QUESTIONS

– By Vidya Swaminathan

- Which coffee brand, completing 100 years, began when founder V. Lakshmi Narasimhan served best roasted coffee to British officials on construction duty?
- Which Vepery road gained notoriety after the sensational murder of a journalist in 1944?
- S.S. Vasan of Gemini Studios fame started an English language humour magazine in 1933, which had contributions from famous authors like R.K. Narayan. Name the magazine.
- Atho, a Burmese noodle delicacy shares its space in Chennai's streets with another Burmese noodle dish that is made with rice flour. What is this dish?
- Bearing the term for bite sized snacks in Southeast Asia and the Malay word for coffee in its name, which unique eatery is situated in Chamiers Road of Chennai?
- Who was responsible for the construction of Chenna Kesava Perumal Temple in Sowcarpet after the British destroyed the original temple in George Town?
- In 2017, which Chennai lad became the first Indian car racer to win the BOSS GP Championship (Formula Class)?
- On August 28 of this year, IIT Madras launched a new three-team competitive sport inspired by basketball and designed for high-speed, tactical play. Name this sport.
- Which area near Chennai, recently in the news, has the pincode 631552?
- Which recent announcement of a proposed facility by the CM of Tamil Nadu led actor Ajith Kumar to thank him?

(Answers on page 8)

Website Comments

Heritage Watch: Beach House – A Marker of the Freedom Struggle

(Vol. XXXVI No. 9, August 16-31, 2026)

Several heritage structures such as the Abu Simbel temples in Egypt have been dismantled and rebuilt elsewhere to save them from being demolished to accommodate modern structures such as the Aswan High Dam. Could this have not been done to rescue the Beach House?

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Mahesa Kumara Sharma: Tamil translator lost in the pages of time

The origins and the subsequent journey of our national song *Vande Mataram* have been well-documented. Appearing in noted Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* (1875), it became a clarion call during the nationalist movement, as a prayer to the motherland. The man who undertook the Tamil translation of the novel was M. Kuppuswamy Iyer, or Mahesa Kumara Sharma by which name he was more popularly known. This article is a brief profile of this pioneering Tamil translator of the early 20th century.

Kuppuswamy Iyer was born into a poor family in Mambakkam, a village in North Arcot district. His year of birth is not known. Orphaned at a young age, he was brought up by his father's younger brother, Hanumantha Iyer, who was an expert in Sanskrit. After completing his schooling in Vellore, Kuppuswamy Iyer came to Madras and completed his graduation (though where he studied and what his degree was is not known) and joined work at the Sub-Registrar's Office in Ponneri at a salary of Rs 15 a month. Kuppuswamy Iyer had a flair for languages, and besides learning Sanskrit from his uncle, also managed to become proficient in Telugu. This came in handy when he later joined the Madras Government Translator's Office as a Telugu and Tamil translator. It was around this time that he also came into contact with the Ramakrishna movement (which

had just begun finding its feet in South India) and also the Theosophical Society. He became an ardent disciple of Swami Ramakrishnananda, who had established the Ramakrishna Math in Madras in 1897. Though it is not clear as to how he picked up knowledge of Bengali, it can be reasonably surmised that his association with the Ramakrishna Math and interactions that he may have had with various personalities of the order who visited Madras during the period could have had an influence on him.

In 1904, Kuppuswamy Iyer (who by this time had taken on the *nom-de-plume* of Mahesa Kumara Sharma) compiled a two-part work titled *Sri Ramakrishna*

minatha Iyer (and possibly published in *The Arya* magazine that was being run by him). Around 1905, when the clarion call of “Vande Mataram” had started to resound across the nation with its official adoption by the Indian National Congress as the nationalist salutation to Mother India, Kuppuswamy Iyer, who was then working on a translation of Bankim Chandra's *Chandra Sekhar*, decided to take up the translation of *Anandamath*. Encouraging him to take up the project was G. Subramania Iyer of the *Swadesamitran*.

It is interesting to note from the introduction to the Tamil translation, *Anandamath* had already been translated into Kan-

● by
Karthik Bhatt

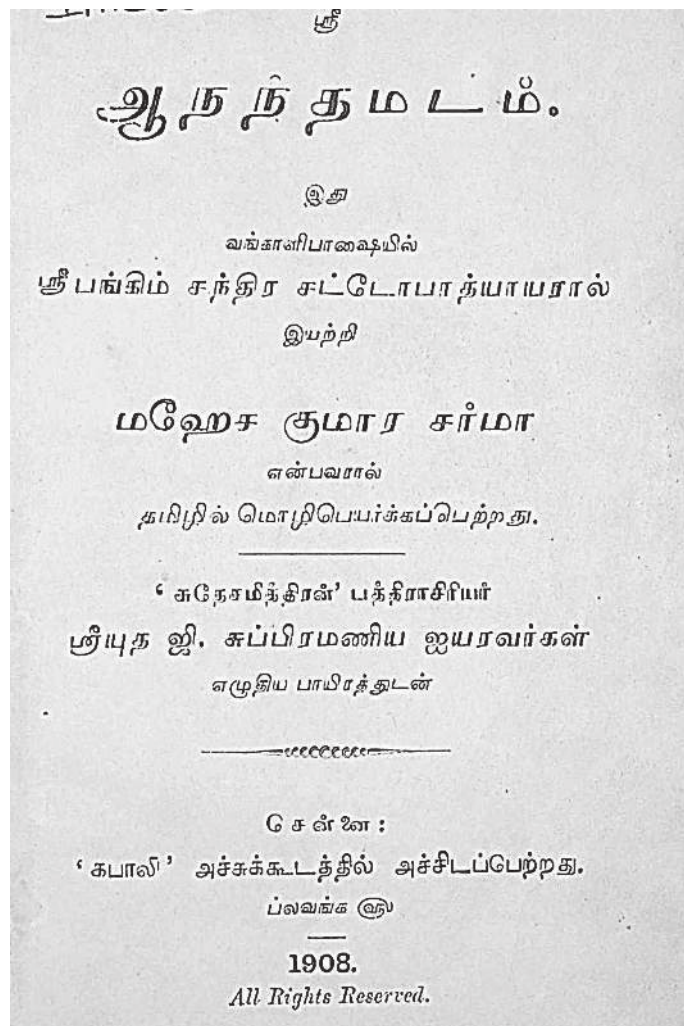
Paramahansa Vijayam, containing the life and teachings of the saint. The English foreword was written by Swami Ramakrishnananda while the Tamil one was written by noted scholar S.M. Natesa Sastri. In 1907, Kuppuswamy Iyer followed it up with a mammoth work titled *Vivekananda Vijayam*, compiled from various sources including *A Short Account of the Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (that had been published from Dhaka), the book *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* and his own interactions with Swami Ramakrishnananda. Along with

these, his translations of the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and also other famous Bengali literary figures would make him one of the pioneers in the world of Tamil translation.

In his introduction to the translation of *Anandamath*, Kuppuswamy Iyer states that his tryst with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's works started with translations of his short stories *Radharani* and *Hiranmayee* into Tamil at the instance of T.A. Swa-

English, Telugu besides German and French before Tamil. Kuppuswamy Iyer also mentions that a Sanskrit translation of *Anandamath* was being undertaken around the same time, by Sri Saila Thathachariar of Kanchipuram, who had also translated a few other works of Bankim Chandra such as *Durgesanandini* and *Jugalanguriya*. Kuppuswamy Iyer counted Subramania Bharati amongst his close friends and it is now well documented that the nationalist poet provided the Tamil translation of *Vande Mataram* that appeared in *Anandamath*. But a less-known fact that Kuppuswamy Iyer states is that Bharati also translated into Tamil a few verses from Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* that appeared in the original version. Bharati held Kuppuswamy Iyer in great respect and also acknowledges their friendship in the introduction of his work *Gnanaratham*. G. Subramania Iyer wrote a foreword to the translation of *Anandamath*, which was printed at the Kapali Press in Madras and came out in 1908.

In 1910, Kuppuswamy Iyer suffered a personal setback, with the demise of his wife Lakshmiammal. Their union had produced three children, a girl and two boys. The elder of the boys was named Nalinaksha Kumara Sharma, while the younger one was Rajeevaksha Kumara Shar-



ma. Records available online seem to state that Nalinaksha had his early education at the Muthialpet Boys School, which meant presumably the family were residents of George Town. Kuppuswamy Iyer married Balasundari Devi a short while later. With young children and a wife to take care of, Kuppuswamy Iyer shifted to Singapore along with his family in 1914 and took up a job as Dubash at the Magistrate's Court and later the Supreme Court. His literary journey continued, as he kept sending articles to various magazines that he had been associated with during his Madras days, such as *Chintamani*, *Viveka Bodhini*, *Bala Bharati* and *Lokopakari*. In 1916, his work *Valmiki Vijayam*, a translation of Hara Prasad Shastri's *Balmikir Joy* was brought out by V.V.S. Aiyar's Kamba Nilayam.

Around 1921-22, he translated Swami Vivekananda's famous essay in Bengali, *Barthaman Bharat* as *Varthamana Bharatam*, which was also brought out by Kamba Nilayam. Between September 1924 and December 1926, he

translated noted educationist Aswini Kumara Dutta's philosophical work *Bhaktiyoga* which was published in *Lokopakari*.

Kuppuswamy passed away on September 23, 1929 at his residence in Singapore. For a man of such literary accomplishments, he remains an enigma. In an obituary note published in the *Viveka Bodhini*, writer Guhapriyai expresses hope that someone who knew him would write about his life. The state of affairs may have well continued, but for the publication of the serialised articles of *Bhaktiyoga* in the form of a book in 1949, wherein a brief profile of Kuppuswamy Iyer appears (and based on which this piece has been compiled). The book was published as a tribute by Nalinaksha Kumara Sharma, who was a successful doctor, working at the Government Hospital in Johor Bahru in Malaysia. It was edited by V.K. Ramanathan, an advocate and was brought out by the Sakthi Press.

Mahesa Kumara Sarma.

A Heartwarming Slice of Chennai: from the Page to the Stage

As I was taking in the events and reading stories about Madras Day, I couldn't help but recall a refreshing play I had enjoyed watching in the last week of June at the Museum Theatre in Chennai. It captured an interesting slice of life in urban Chennai and would have fitted in really well as part of the Madras-Chennai celebrations! It brought the residents of an apartment in Chennai – described in a book, to life.

In Hema Sukumar's debut novel, *Minor Disturbances at Grand Life Apartments*, Chennai is far more than a backdrop; it is a living, breathing protagonist. Set within a middle-class residential block under threat from encroaching property developers, the novel offers an exploration of “Chennai-ness” and what it means to be one with the city. The novel recently leaped from the page to the stage when theatre director Nikhila Kesavan

brought the book to life through her original stage adaptation for The Madras Players. Fittingly performed at Chennai's historic Museum Theatre in Egmore, the play intentionally utilized a minimalist set to keep the focus purely on the intimate conversations and humour of the tenants, brilliantly capturing the book's deep sense of home and belonging.

The story and play expertly navigated the liminal space between the nostalgia of old Madras and the bustling, concrete reality of modern Chennai. They served as a heartfelt tribute to a city that holds fast to its roots while hurtling toward the future, captured through the everyday lives of its residents.

At the heart of this celebration is the physical space of the Grand Life Apartments itself. Amidst the heat, traffic, and pollution of the expanding metropolis, the apartment block's



Anaivarum 2: A celebration of inclusivity, heritage and the many ways of seeing Madras

Anaivarum 2: Echoes of Existence curated by Madras Photo Bloggers and Deaf Artists NFT Collective, in collaboration with namveedunamoonamkadhahai, Higginbothams, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan and Rotary Club of Chennai Crown from 28 to 30 August at different venues, brought together deaf communities through exhibitions, photography, community stories, visual vernacular, Indian sign language poetry, music and heritage-based storytelling. Thirupurasundari Sevel (architect planner, researcher, educator, storyteller and head of Nam veedu Nam oor Nam kadhahai) tells us it was a unique way of “celebrating the Inclusivity, Heritage and the Many Ways of Seeing Madras”.

A vibrant art exhibition featuring 12 deaf artists, each reflecting Chennai through their own unique artistic perspective, was part of the Madras Week celebrations; it was displayed at Alliance Francaise for a day and at Higginbothams for three days. Through different artistic



warm, lush gardens serve as an urban sanctuary. They are a testament to the old-world charm of Chennai, where shaded courtyards and blooming jasmine once defined the landscape before the aggressive rise of luxury high-rises. This green haven cultivates a profound sense of community. When power cuts, a quintessential hallmark of Chennai summers, plunge the city into darkness, the residents don't isolate themselves. Instead, the outages draw them out together onto their balconies and into the

dian, in Nikhila's world) chef who impulsively moves to India to escape his past, and keeps dipping into the pages of “Cook and See”! Any talk of food in Chennai is incomplete without an ode to Filter Coffee. In Hema Sukumar's view, it is not just a morn-



● by G. Ganesan

gardens, turning minor disturbances into moments of shared humanity. Tamil proverbs and sayings, converted into English, peppering the dialogues were delivered with timing and panache which brought the house down every time!

Chennai is inextricable from its culinary heritage, and the book leans into this with joyous abandon. It is drenched in the sensory experiences of South Indian cuisine, viewed both through the comforting familiarity of the local residents and the awe-struck palate of Jason, a heartbroken British (or Cana-

ing beverage but the social glue of the apartments and grounds the characters in a shared, daily ritual that pays no heed to their differences in age, background or feeling.

Where this work truly shines is in its refusal to rely on tired, exoticized tropes, actively avoiding a sanitized or “Karan Joharized” portrayal of India. The evolution of Madras into modern Chennai is portrayed with refreshing honesty. Yes, there is the beauty of traditional Carnatic music softly playing from a window and the pious morning religious offerings. But there is also the gritty reality

the city and the creativity of the deaf community.

A panel discussion, reading and performances were also staged exploring the experience

of the city through a deaf perspective.

Sign language interpretation was organised throughout the event, ensuring a more inclusive experience for everyone.



An American company that was the largest private employer in Madras

For Madras, now Chennai, 1994 and 1995 were special years. Two reputable American corporations – Ford Motors and Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) – made a beeline to set up operations in the city. While the Ford story is well known, what's more fascinating is Dun & Bradstreet's long association with the city.

Sometime in 1993, D&B decided to establish technology development centres in the Asia-Pacific region to harness the rich talent available at scale in this part of the world. Its intent was to establish centres in Russia, China and India and scale them. While nothing substantial came out of its Russia and China experiments, its centre in India – which went on to become Cognizant Technology Solutions (Cognizant) – came up in Chennai. This was largely due to the joint efforts

of two business doyens, Kumar Mahadeva, the then Chairman of D&B in India and China, and Lakshmi Narayanan, who joined the fledgling company from Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and rooted for Chennai with ambassadorial passion.

Why did I call the 170-year-old D&B “reputable” even though it is not a household name either in the U.S. or in India? It is for two fascinating reasons.

First, four of D&B's employees went on to become Presidents of the United States, a rare feat for any company globally. Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses Grant, Grover Cleveland and William McKinley worked with D&B as credit reporters, evaluators and analysts before they rose to the White House. It is an interesting coincidence that the current President of the United States, Donald

Trump, is only the second in the nation's rich history, after Grover Cleveland, to serve two non-consecutive terms. Equally interesting is the nugget that, in his inaugural address, Trump referenced only one past President: William McKinley!

Second, the companies in D&B's fold were global leaders in their respective industries. Examples include Moody's in sovereign and corporate credit rating, Gartner in technology research and advisory, Nielsen Media Research in media measurement, AC Nielsen in consumer market research, and IMS Health in health and clinical research and insights.

Cognizant was no different. Within a few years of its founding, Cognizant became the fastest-growing technology services company, serving a significant number of Global 2000 companies. Importantly,

in the past three decades since its founding, it has employed more than one million people globally – largely in India and the U.S.

In the past decade, Cognizant emerged as the second-largest private sector employer in India, after TCS. Cognizant, today, has over 350,000 full-time employees globally, over 250,000 of whom are in India. With over 80,000 of them in Chennai and Coimbatore, Cognizant for a long time was the largest single-company employer in Tamil Nadu until it was overtaken by TCS. Importantly, about 40 to 50 percent of its workforce in Chennai and Coimbatore are women.

At a time when Madras is celebrating its 387th anniversary and America its 250th anniversary, it is fascinating to recollect the deep relationship between



Lakshmi Narayanan.

the two that helped create Cognizant, which today is not only the second-largest private employer in Chennai but also one of the Top 20 private employers among US-headquartered companies.

–**Ramkumar Ramamoorthy**
former Chairman and MD,
Cognizant India

Charles Goschen: a man who never gave up

This is the story of a much-travelled Englishman my family and I knew, someone who visited us on and off during the 1990s. He was in his thirties then, handsome, well-read and articulate, prone to acts of kindness towards all around him.

My early memories of Charles Goschen are of those of an unusually tall man, almost doubling up with mirth at the recollection of an incident at the Chennai secretariat. This was several years ago. Charles had gone to Fort St. George in search of records of his great-uncle Lord Goschen, who had been Governor of Madras. Unimpressed by his curiosity, the clerk at the counter had told him not to waste her time with frivolous requests.

Charles was at the time writing a novel, one of three he wrote, I was to learn later, but never published. He moved to Pondicherry to continue his work there, but was still an occasional visitor at home.

Smiling, laughing, easygoing, a great fan of the cartoon serial *The Simpsons*, which he enjoyed in the company of my son, then about ten years old, Charles was equally at home discussing Montessori with my school-marm sister-in-law, film criticism with my journalist wife, or cricket with me and my son.

He was a sensitive listener and we knew that underneath that cheerful exterior was a heart that cared for the underprivileged of the world. If he found India hugely amusing – there were always little incidents to have a roaring laugh about – he also had great admiration for the resilience and smiling ways of her poor.

I did not know then that Charles Goschen had fought the ravages of epilepsy since boyhood. His sister Caroline wrote to us: “Charles was born on 17 August 1958 in Rhodesia. My parents farmed just outside a small town called Rusape and Charles and I had a magical childhood with lots of animals, space and freedom.”

Until 15, life had been a song for Charles. He had joined High School in Salisbury a year ahead of his age group. According to his father: “He achieved record distinctions at O level. At that time people were saying that it wasn't fair that Charles had everything, looks, brains and charm.”

The epilepsy started when he was 15 as petit mal and affected his work, though he passed his A levels ahead of his friends. After a year's National Service, he went to the University of Cape Town to do civil engineering. The grand mal

seizures started there and he had to leave.

He joined a firm of stockbrokers in Johannesburg but a seizure he suffered on the trading floor made him quit. He also had two minor car accidents and decided he could not drive and risk other people's lives.

Charles decided to try a completely different climate in the West Indies, beginning his novel writing efforts there. He taught English in Ecuador and started a fund there for a native girl's heart surgery, with

his decision to move to Srinagar, I was surprised because I had always believed him to be a south Indian at heart, though an Englishman by birth, born and brought up in Zimbabwe. It was much later that I learnt that Kashmir indeed had been his window to India when he first visited there with a friend years ago.

This second visit to the valley was to prove momentous. After seeing a cow's carcass floating on the Dal Lake, Charles launched what has now

All this resulted in a noticeable improvement in the ecology of the lake by 1998, and Green Kashmir drew much media attention. BBC has telecast programmes on the project and several newspaper articles have been published on it.

1999 was a bad year for Charles. On a visit to South Africa, he had taken his internationally known winemaker brother John's wife and children to the beach, when they received news of John's death by electrocution. Six months later, his mother died.

His epilepsy once again went out of control. A bout of malaria in South Africa was followed by a broken leg while back in Kashmir.

When Charles went to South Africa to recuperate, his father took him to an old family doctor and soon his epilepsy was responding to treatment. He started swimming regularly to strengthen his injured leg.

On the morning of January 31, 2000, Charles Goschen was found dead in a swimming pool. “John's wife said at his memorial service that she thought of him as being a travelling man and that he was just off on another one of his travels,” writes Caroline. That is how most of his friends would like to think of Charles Goschen's passing.

● by V. Ramnarayan

a considerable donation of his own. He trekked to the source of the Amazon, to the southernmost tip of South America, and generally did a great deal of travelling. “I think during this part of his life he abandoned thoughts of money-making,” says his father.

According to his sister, “Charles' life was a constant roller coaster of thinking he could control his epilepsy, followed by times when nothing he did made any difference and he had seizure after seizure. But he never gave up.”

When Charles announced

become famous as the Green Kashmir movement, beginning with distributing wicker baskets to shopkeepers for them to deposit their rubbish. He also wrote a regular column “Environment Watch” in the local newspaper, gave talks to school children and generally raised the level of awareness about pollution.

The “Green Kashmir Conservation Trust”, which Charles set up, received a grant from the local government, with which he extended the scheme, using shikaras to collect rubbish from other houseboats and other parts of the city.

Pets in the City

My fawn-coloured Lab was born in Feb 2012. Ageing faster than me, she is 86 human years today. Like we thought of our aged mothers, my wife and I think of her as a venerable old lady who needs special attention. She just about manages to move about herself. While she doesn't go for walks, she eats well. I remember it was out of the blue one evening that my 16-year-old daughter brought her – a gift from a friend, to our house as a 50-day-old pup. Even as she came home, she was given a name. There is some affinity between dogs and names ending with 'y' – so, ours was Fizzy. We were not great dog lovers but, frolicking all over the place, Fizzy unabashedly loved us. In time, we came to love her and give her access to most of the house.

Our second pet was a product of the infamous puppy mills.

A black with patches of white Basset Hound, we bought her from a shop in Arumbakkam. I remember her frantically scurrying out of a cage into our lives. If Fizzy was predictable, Cleo was quite a character. Slightly taller than a Dachshund, she seemed longer too. She had silky smooth long and drooping ears and solemn red eyes as if she had experienced it all. She got a measure of Fizzy and teased her no end. She loved bounding in open spaces. For all her verve, her life took a tragic turn when one summer she had a seizure – first mistaken for a heat stroke. But when it continued the year round, we knew it was something serious. The seizures were taking the life out of her and making us miserable. She lived for nine years and in the last three years, once in a couple of months, she went through a series of seven to eight seizures in the space of two days. There was little we could do by way of treatment. At one point, our vet hinted that we could put her down but, god bless her, she passed away on her own on my father's death anniversary.

Ragini of Anna Nagar has two indoor cats – Fritz who is six-and-a-half years old and Crust six years old. The two came into her life during the pandemic. Contrary to the impression that cats keep to themselves, Fritz and Crust are quite communicative and

interactive in different ways. Fritz demands to be petted nonstop. Crust doesn't want to be petted but is happy just sitting in her lap. Ragini feels they instinctively know when she is leaving home and miss her. As soon as she is back, they follow her everywhere. At bedtime they are sure to curl up with her. Cats spell happiness for Ragini and vice versa.

To get a vet's point of view of pets in the city, I quizzed Dr. Sathya Priya, a veterinary surgeon who practises in Anna Nagar East. "I see a much stronger emotional bond between people and their animals today than I did when I was a PG student at Madras Veterinary College five years ago. More and more people genuinely see their dogs and cats as family. We've had people tell us that they want to experience caring for a dog before they have children. But there is still a long way to go when it comes to understanding their behavioural, medical and emotional needs," is what she said.

Her biggest challenge is knowing that sometimes she cannot help an animal in the way she wants to. Despite growing awareness, there are still

and Toto, and a dog – Kufri. The four cats at her clinic are its unofficial mascots. Her clinic supports around 20-25 dogs and about 10 cats including their feeding and medical care. I asked her how she landed up as a vet. "As a child, I was quite an introvert. My first dog was my best friend, and animals were always where I felt the most comfortable and understood. I remember taking my dog to a veterinarian and suddenly thinking – this is what I could do, spend my life around animals and care for them," recalls Sathya.

About the Madras Veterinary College (established on October 1, 1903) where she did her Master's in Surgery and Radiology, she said the exposure to a large and varied caseload, advanced equipment, medicines and a busy teaching hospital environment gave her an entirely different clinical experience. She graduated from the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Veterinary Education and Research in Pondicherry. Sathya's



Sai with a rescued Rat snake.

months with no separation anxiety for either of us. Says Sai, "My idea of Home Boarding was to ensure pets stay healthy and happy even after going back home. We started with a 'No Kennel No Leash' concept where pets can enjoy their stay without missing their home. They are served healthy, hygienic home cooked meals and allowed free movement around the house. Keeping this in mind we made sure that we take in just two or three dogs at a time to give our complete attention to them. So space constraint was never a problem.

Sai learnt to be compassionate from his father V.S. Chandrashekar who rescued injured cats, dogs, squirrels and birds. His mother smears Sai Baba's udi on her pets. He was part of the campaign to trap, neuter and release the clowder of cats in the Kapaleeswarar temple in 2018. He helps in giving a respectful send-off to many of the community strays, making sure they are buried or cremated properly. He was a hardware and networking engineer with Scope International and Sutherland before he decided to quit and start Happy Paws.

Sowbhagyalakshmi Srirama Bharathi who manages the Sri Sadagopan Thirunarayana Swamy Divya Prabandha pathasala in Jalladianpettai, has her growing number of cows to tend. She believes they have a sixth sense that supposedly only humans have. When bothered by mosquitos in the evening, they moo till she rushes to light the anti-mosquito incense in the goshala. They are alert to the visitors. Even newly-born calves recognise Sowbhagyalakshmi and reciprocate her love and affection.

To end on a lighter vein, I share these lines from the *Reader's Digest*: With a dog, you feed him, you give him plenty of affection, you take him for walks and he thinks, 'Wow, this guy must be a god.' With a cat, you feed him, you love him, you care for him and he thinks, 'Wow, I must be a god.'



Dr Sathya with her clinic's resident cat Jaws.

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– THE EDITOR

by Srinivas Chari

many animals who fall through the cracks – abandonment, abuse, irresponsible breeding, and animals living in situations where their needs simply are not understood. "For me, that helplessness is much harder than the long hours or the pressures of running a practice. Because when you care deeply about what you do, the work itself is rarely the difficult part, the difficult part is knowing that sometimes what you do isn't enough," she says.

Sathya and her husband have three cats – Atticus, Saya

favourite quote comes from Jane Goodall: "You cannot share your life with a dog or a cat and not know perfectly well that animals have personalities and minds and feelings."

Eshita's love for animals and flair for photography motivated her to become a 'pet photographer' in 2013. Having done shoots of dogs, cats, a hamster, birds and horses (at The Farm in OMR), she learnt to be patient, strike up a connection with the pets, sense the energy and go with the flow. Not being able to direct or stage the shoot, moments were made on the spot. "Pets are always their true selves," she says. I remember Fizzy enjoying her shoot with Eshita when the latter had just made a beginning.

In February 2025, when we had to visit New Zealand and so board Fizzy, not satisfied with the kennels we inspected, we zeroed in on Sai Kiran in Manapakkam. A soft-spoken person who exudes trust, we left Fizzy under his care and took off for three-and-a-half



Sai's Mother with Haibibi and Fizzy.

Shore Temple Classic enthralls lovers of Surfing sport

The historic Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) Shore Temple sea arena was the centre stage for some high voltage 'sprayful' action as it once again played host to another edition of the very competitive World Surf League (WSL) Qualifying Series from August 12-16, 2026. It was five days of world class surfing in the

country's first ever Pro Junior event, breaking along a lengthy right hand sandbar beside the Mahabalipuram Shore Temple. The waves offered a mix of open-face sections suited to powerful rail surfing, progressive airs and, on the right swell. Mahabalipuram has been showcasing the growing surf sport in India especially in

Tamil Nadu. This time too the event was held in partnership with Tamil Nadu Surfing Association (TSA) and Surfing Federation of India (SFI), and supported by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) plus the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu, according to SFI President Arun Vasu.

The prime objective of playing host to such competitions was to increase the popularity and patronage to this sport,

ship Tour events.

According to WSL Tour Director Ty Sorati, the commitment of SFI and TNSA to conduct this event was proof enough of their commitment to the popularisation and growth of the surfing sport in India.

The recent Shore Temple Classic QS 2000 and Pro Junior events featured Men's and Women's competitions in two Divisions: the WSL QS 2000 which offers Asia Region ranking points for the Qualifying Series and the Pro Junior and Junior Qualifying Series (JQS). Top performers on the Asia Region Rankings advance to the Challenger Series and then to the Championship Tour – the pinnacle of professional surfing.

About 1000 international level surfers from 12 countries in Asia competed for honours taking on the Indian challengers with the Men's QS 2000 fielding 64 surfers, the Women's QS 2000 fielding 32 surfers, Men's Pro Junior (JQS) 32 surfers, and Women's Pro Junior (JQS) competition having 24 surfers.

However, it was a disappointment for the young Indian participants what with the talented surfers of Japan sweeping as many as four titles in QS 2000 and Pro Junior titles for Men and Women. In the very closely contested Men's QS 2000 competition, Japan's Ikko Watanabe edged out his com-

patriot Tenshi Iwami by a 0.33 points difference; Watanabe scoring an outstanding 17.10 and Iwami 16.77 points. The Women's Q 2000 Final had Japan's Miral Ikeda edge out Thailand's Isabel Higgs – the former scoring 14.00 points and the latter 12.40 points.

The Pro Junior Men's Final saw another Japanese surfer Yuma Nagasawa defeating compatriot Ren Okano scoring 14.17 points against his rival's 13.00. In the Women's Pro Junior competition Hinata Shimizu (Japan) was crowned champion with the best score of 14.23 points against Hinano Shimizu's effort of 12.23 points. Thailand's Isabel Higgs was placed third and another Japanese Taro Takal finished in fourth position.

Such events open up opportunities for Indian surfers to gain experience and compete with top international talent in surfing.

• by
V. Venkataramana

what with the younger generation showing great enthusiasm for surfing. It was also to help the rising talents in this sport to earn ranking points, and gain experience competing against their counterparts in other parts of the world.

When the Qualifying Series of the World Surf League was first hosted by India in 2023 at Mahabalipuram, it was an important debut for surfing sport reflecting India's aspiration to enter the international arena. The hosting of this event for a second time would go a long way in realising the ambition of conducting four other WSL events in the country, and enabling India's talents in this sport to compete in the Challenger Series and Champion-



Japan's Ikko Watanabe. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

Answers to Quiz

1. Narasu's coffee
2. General Collins Road
3. Merry Magazine
4. Mohinga
5. Kueh & Kopi
6. Manali Muthukrishna Mudaliar
7. Mahaveer Raghunathan
8. Phi ball
9. Parandur
10. Motor Sports City

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