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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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A New Secretariat sans any Planning

Will it? Won't it? The suspense over the proposed new secretariat at Pattinapakkam aka Foreshore Estate continues. On the one hand there have been unverified reports over the Government backtracking on the idea given the protest by the fishermen. On the other, the Tamil Nadu Housing Board has begun the process for tenders to demolish 96 of the dilapidated flats in the locality, all of which it owns. This can only be for making space for the new secretariat block. Of course, the TNHB could be planning to build housing units here afresh. But the quick action makes everyone think it is plainly to accede to the Chief Minister's latest hobby horse. Be that as it may, what is more disturbing than all this cloak and dagger attitude is the lack of planning of any kind before the locality was selected for the new secretariat. That none of the statutory agencies was consulted before the announcement was made is shocking and shows how little anyone in power cares about the impact such decisions have on the city's fabric.

● by Sriram V

It was on September 8, 2026 that a GO was issued to the effect that a new secretariat will be constructed spanning 20 lakh square feet on a site area of 25.55 acres at Foreshore Estate. Even then, retired city planners, secure in the knowledge that they were beyond the reach of the Government, criticised the idea. Those in office chose to remain quiet. But we do have an inconvenient tool that no matter how toothless it has been rendered, still manages to deliver on occasion. We allude to the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Queries filed by the Mylai Area All Fishing Villages Panchayat Sabha reveal that the GO has been issued without any forethought or planning. The Public Works Department and the Public (Buildings) Department have reluctantly revealed that no feasibility studies of any kind, or for that matter needs assessment, site selection or cost benefit analysis has been conducted. In short, these two vital departments in the entire exercise were as clueless as we

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A revision in auto-rickshaw fares at last

Introduced in the early 1970s, auto-rickshaws soon became an integral part of the transport grid in Chennai and gained importance owing to the fact that bus connectivity then was still to reach many parts of the city. They became a trusted mode of transport for school children, with "*Auto annas*" growing into childhood idols for many a young user. With increased public usage came an unfortunate side-effect, that of a great sense of dependency on them, which gave rise to a situation where they began to call the shots in terms of the fare demanded for journeys. Soon, the auto-meter became a display-piece of sorts, its existence deemed solely necessary on account of legal requirements, as the rate agreed upon became dependent on the negotiation skills between the driver and passenger.

An attempt at serious reform in fixing the auto fares was made in 2013, when the rate was fixed at Rs 25 for the first 1.8 kms and Rs 12 for every subsequent km of a journey, following repeated representations

● by Karthik Bhatt

by trade unions and consumer organisations on account of rising fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. The euphoria over the entire exercise was however short-lived, as the newly-fitted electronic meters soon went back to being art installations, with the auto drivers complaining that the rising costs of maintenance and general living made it impractical to ply their vehicles at those rates.

Much has changed in the transport scene over the last couple of decades in the city, which have directly impacted auto-rickshaws. The first major challenge came in the mid-1990s, with the advent of call taxis, which offered the same convenience of pickup at one's doorstep, with an added advantage of a pre-fixed rate. Then came the share-autos, which notwithstanding concerns over their legality and apparent lack of safety-norms, enabled passengers to travel long-distances at a fraction compared to the regular autos. Over the last

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HERITAGE WATCH

A Pumping Station completes a century



It is one of those utilities that will never be celebrated. After all, who wants to cut a cake at a pumping station that lifts sewage? But nevertheless, it has to be placed on record that the North Mylapore Pumping Station located on Sullivan's Garden Street/PS Sivaswami Salai is observing its centenary. It is a direct link to JW Madeley's scheme of 1911 which envisaged pumping sewage from various locations in the city to three main stations – Napier's (May Day) Park, Royapuram and Purasawalkam. Work ground to a halt owing to the outbreak of WWI and it was only in 1934 or so that the scheme was completed. The North Mylapore Pumping Station presumably links to Napier's Park. Its architecture, neo-classical complete with a triangular pediment, is redolent of an earlier era. Certainly, today's facilities of such a kind feature more prosaic facades.

The pumping station is hardly visible from the main road, located as it is at a subterranean level. It is also one of the first places to flood in the entire locality, whenever it rains! And that is not saying much about the quality of services offered by the CMWSSB which is the lord and master of this facility.

Our picture was taken in 2013 by Vinay Aravind.

A New Secretariat sans any Planning

(Continued from page 1)

the people were when the announcement was made.

Is this how such a major announcement is made in developed states? It is no wonder that we are equally clueless about that other important project, namely the airport. That at least will involve aviation authorities and so cannot be announced at a whim. But a secretariat unfortunately has nobody else breathing down the government's neck and so nothing can stop arbitrary decisions. Time and again it has been pointed out that Foreshore Estate is subject to sea action (ask the fishermen, they should know) and that the area around is congested with narrow arterial roads. The impact of such a major precinct as a state secretariat in the same locality cannot be imagined.

The silence of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) is shocking to say the least. This lofty body is supposed to be in charge of city master plans. And yet it does not have a say when it comes to something so major as a new secretariat complex in the heart of the city. Time and again we have had Chief Ministers announcing secretariats based on places that take their fancy. None of the earlier ones were subject to any plan aforehand. The present one is no different. Why is it that we as people are subject to such scant regard when it comes to such decisions? At present, all that is holding up the project is the protest by the key stakeholders, namely the fishermen. It is high time responsible citizens join the protest and force the government to look for a new location, subject to feasibility studies.

A revision in auto-rickshaw fares at last

(Continued from page 1)

decade or so, the advent of app-based aggregators has completely shaken up the scene, though of late there are growing concerns over their practices (particularly the tip-based fare, which takes one back to the *meterkku-mela* times) leading to calls for more regulation. Many an auto driver who has registered on these apps, after having enrolled on attractive terms has complained of the stringent financial model increasingly favouring the aggregator over a period of time.

Undoubtedly, the complete lack of regulation over the plying of auto-rickshaws has gone on for too long now. With rash driving and flouting of other safety norms adding to the mix, travelling in an auto-rickshaw is an exercise fraught with danger, though in a lighter vein, colourful exchanges between two vehicles on the road tends to alleviate one's tedium of the journey. One of the main excuses given for the exorbitant fares often quoted for even short distances has been the increased fuel costs. For whatever reason, successive governments have been non-responsive to the calls for revision in fares commensurate to the rising costs though the grapevine has it that many a political functionary has a stake in the entire ecosystem.

The government certainly needs to be commended for biting the bullet at long last and making the revision in the fares. However, it needs to remember that the exercise has to be backed up by strict enforcement to be truly effective. This revision also needs to be complemented by a behavioural change on the part of the drivers. Having been used to operating in a system where it was practically a free run, they now need to acknowledge that one of their main grouses has been addressed and that they cannot afford to hold passengers hostage by their demands any longer. While it is undeniable that they are entitled to financial rewards commensurate to their labour, it has to be subject to a transparent mechanism fair to all stakeholders concerned. That ground has been laid now with this revision and it is time to start playing by the rulebook.

Celebrating Deepavali with Tangedco

Celebrations traditionally associated with the festival of lights began at *chez The Man From Madras Musings* around a fortnight before the event. An electric pillar box that is located just outside the house began letting off sparks at the first sight of rain clouds. Then, as and when it rained, unlike the conventional fireworks, this pillar box began celebrating with renewed strength. It let out long and sustained sparks and then every once in a while exploded as well. These latter were of such force that the entire structure shook and then settled down, only to begin all over again. *MMM* decided to call Tangedco or TNPDCL as it is now known as.

Action was prompt. A posse of technicians arrived, opened the pillar box, poked around in its interior and declared that all was well. The customary reward was given (an insurance for their attending future calls) and they left. *MMM's* cook was not so impressed. He, like Cassandra, declared that the problem would soon resurface. And so it did. After three days of relative quiet, the artillery resumed its fusillade with renewed vigour. TNPDCL was back and with cook making clicking noises in the background, did something else, collected more largesse at which cook began clicking like a clock, and departed.

Once again a ceasefire seemed to have been declared which cook refused to believe in. But there was peace for more than a week and then action resumed a night or two before Deepavali. *MMM* woke from a dream of peace to find the ceiling fans groaning away as though they were in death throes. The room was imbued with a strange halo that seemed to be coming not from an angel of peace seated by *MMM's* bed writing in a book, but from all the lights. They were glowing an angry glow even though the switches were all off. *MMM* rushed out to find the rest of the house alight as well, everywhere with the same dull gleam, rather like in a cat's eye.

Now, *MMM* is an electrical engineer by qualification and so naturally he had no idea as to what was to be done. And even before he could rustle up some sketchy engineering skill, the explosions began. Each one of the light bulbs began going off as though they were a 1000-wallah connected by a string. The first lot went off in perfect sequence and then the rest began bursting sporadically, just like those crackers that break free from the 1000-wallah and burst elsewhere on their own. *MMM* rushed to the fuses and began pulling them out but to no avail. The refrigerator went next and then the TV.

By now all hell had broken loose. Frantic calls were made to TNPDCL and a posse arrived. Having come, it declared that the electric supply was above blame and all was wrong with the voltage stabiliser at *MMM's* home. They departed with due cash, cook now sounding like a kettle on the boil. After a while, the stabiliser man arrived and having taken one look, blamed the electric supply. We had been receiving 440 volts when all we needed was 240 he said and no wonder every bulb had been aglow. This time he summoned the TNPDCL.

A new team came, they saw, and agreed with the stabiliser man. The fault they said was with the junction box. And then they made it appear it was all *MMM's* fault. Had he not complained about the explosions they said, they would have never have meddled with the wires. Having been forced to, they had made changes which resulted in the neutral being cut and as a result *MMM's* house had had a short circuit. It was *MMM's* good luck they said that no fire had broken out. The way they said it all, it was as though they had protected *MMM* from disaster. *MMM* actually began feeling grateful.

The immediate need was to restore power they opined and that was quite easily done – draw a line from the neighbouring muti-storey building's transformer and connect it to *MMM's* house. This was duly done, after the customary shower of gold and they departed.

What about a permanent solution asked *MMM*.

Oh that, came the reply, it will be taken up after Deepavali. *MMM* was left to contend with fused bulbs, blown out airconditioners and burnt refrigerators. And a clucking cook.

It reminded him of Hillaire Belloc's lines – They shook their heads and took their fees, and said there is no cure for this disease.

MMM has Mail

For those of you who have been wondering about the absence of any news from *The Man from Madras Musings* about fan mail for *MM* from abroad, be of good cheer. We continue to receive them and we are glad to know that our readership in China remains as strong as ever. Ms Cheng seems to think that we work very hard and so has recommended that we use something called a Negative Potential Mattress when we sleep. This she says enhances deep sleep quality, improves circulation and helps relieve stress. In case we at *MM* are interested at experiencing it firsthand, she would like to arrange for a demonstration. *MMM* decided not to avail of the offer – the board of directors at Chennai Heritage may not approve.

A new country that *MM* has added to its growing coverage is Turkey or Turkiye as it calls itself now, which is understandable – no country would want to be named after a bird that Americans stuff and eat in October/November. Anyway that is beside the point. What is of interest is that the email said a party of thirteen (always an ominous number) is coming to India in April next year. They had booked accommodation at the hotel that *Madras Musings* runs said the mail but they could not make the payment. Could *MMM* please click on a link they had appended they asked, so that they could transfer the money. *MMM* of course did not click on the link, though it was news to him that the old paper ran a hotel.

That should have ended the matter but a couple of days later came another mail, this one from a group of seven coming from Scotland. They had had the same problem. *MMM* could not be of help but he wonders if there is indeed a hotel by the name of *Madras Musings*.

– MMM

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

OUR READERS WRITE



Time to gear up Aavin

We are always proud of Aavin – TN's response to Amul of Gujarat. Though not in the scale of reach, size and diversity of Amul, still Aavin carries its own business in an admirable way, satisfying the needs of customers.

But of late, we have heard disturbing news that Aavin milk supplies are getting reduced and that customers have to opt for milk from Andhra and Karnataka dairies, at an increased cost, putting customers to hardship. Further, we thought that the milk products like sweets, paneer, khoa were made by Aavin themselves. Alarming news is being published that Aavin has floated tenders for the supply of such milk products, which means sub-contracting the production itself to various private units! This could be a death knell for Aavin's very own existence!

It is high time that milk production is encouraged, with development of cattle stock and availability of proper grounds for grazing. It is a pity that fertile agricultural lands are sacrificed in the name of industrial development, resulting in the shortage of production of paddy and other agricultural products. Again we are dependent on Andhra and Karnataka for rice availability.

Proper corrective action should be taken immediately to sharply increase agricultural and dairy production so that the future generation does not suffer. Tamil Nadu should become a state exporting agricultural and dairy products and not be an importer.

* * *

It was reported in the press on October 29, 2026 that the state government has declared a holiday on Nov 9 (Monday), the day after Deepavali, for govt. offices, public sector undertakings, schools, colleges and other educational institutions across the state.

Deepavali was on Sunday this year and govt. announced the holiday to let employees and students celebrate the festival. It is also reported that the govt. issued this order after considering representations received from various quarters to relieve employees and students who may need to travel! This last minute announcement caused confusion and uncertainty. Everybody knows that travel bookings have to be made long before. These announcements were being made religiously year after year, at the last minute, and the new regime is no exception.

Cannot the govt. decide these issues well in advance while formulating the list of holidays? It could think well ahead of all these possibilities, at least in future, so that the citizens can plan ahead and enjoy the festivities.

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Rising rice cost

To rein in the rising cost of rice in the open market, the government has introduced sale of two rice varieties at its cooperative stores at Rs. 30 and Rs. 60 per kg respectively. However, the rice costing Rs.30 per kg appears to have not found favour with the public as many feel that this variety of rice is a replica of the one being supplied free of cost at ration shops. This accusation cannot be set aside. It can be seen that several rice card holders (which has risen following the open invitation from the AIADMK to sugar card holders to switch over to rice in order to avail of the freebies) though they have the option to draw both raw and boiled rice as also wheat free of cost, decline it owing to the poor quality. Taking advantage of the situation, the ration shop assistants bill the declined items by the cardholders as if these have been supplied to the rice card holders. Thus, a huge quantity of rice meant for supply under the PDS gets diverted. Such diverted stocks naturally come to the open market after proper curing. No surprises if such diverted stuff resurface and are sold at cost.

The government does not have to resort to selling rice at subsidised rates if only it makes available better quality commodities at the ration shops.

The other day, there was a heated debate in the State Assembly which included the supply of rice at the ration shops. While a few members referred to the rice being supplied at the ration shop as 'cattle feed', a Minister stated that just because something is given free of cost, it should not be construed as unfit for consumption or untouchable or below one's prestige to avail of the same. The Minister went on to add that only when everyone including the Ministers and the Members of the Assembly avail of the free offers including medical services in government hospitals, the general public will get the right message.

Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the government to ensure that anything that is given free, be it services in the hospitals, ration shops or whatever, is second to none and that it is meant not only for the poor but also for the rest. In order to make such services reliable, qualitative, good and dependable, the rulers themselves should set an example by availing of such free services.

V.S. Jayaraman
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Nauseating sewage overflow in Chennai

We celebrated Madras Week with much pride, enthusiasm, recalling the glorious traditions and events of Madras in the past and highlighting the ongoing positive developments, marked by informative talks and lectures by learned historians and social activists. This is as it should be.

After the euphoria of Madras Week celebration, as I sit back and watch the present happenings in Chennai, I am horrified to find frequent media reports about sewage overflow in several places in Chennai city and with helpless local residents expressing anguish. It particularly causes great concern, as media also reports about the prevalence of dengue fever in several locations including in Adyar, North Chennai.

I am seeing the situation face to face now in Kakkan Colony in Besant Nagar. I lived in 4th Cross Street in Besant Nagar (which is adjacent to Kakkan Colony) for over 40 years. I have seen sewage overflow on the street several times in the past but what I see now in Kakkan Colony has become a much more prolonged affair with nauseating smell, putting the residents to deep discomfort.

When I visited the area a few days back, I saw the sewage overflowing, with residents having no alternative other than stepping on the sewage water and the cyclists and two wheeler riders driving on it.

In Kakkan Colony there are more than 50 blocs, with four floors in each bloc where around 1000 people, largely belonging to the lower income group and lower middle income group live. When I spoke to the local residents, they revealed to me that the problem is not only sewage overflow on the road but also mixing of sewage with water supplied by the metro authorities through pipeline. Residents further say that they are forced to buy water for drinking and cooking purposes. In this situation, while the water is supplied by tankers, residents say that it is done only once in two to three days. While the blockage at the manhole point is cleared once in a way, sewage overflow occurs after a few hours again.

It is understood that due to some maintenance work in the nearby area, the water supply line got damaged, causing mixing of sewage with water. It appears that it would take at least another few weeks to set right the conditions.

The ground reality is that the underground water pipelines have been laid several decades ago and most of them have not been replaced. Further, several multi-storeyed residential flats have come up, contributing to increased sewage water generation, much beyond the capacity of the pipeline to carry.

Sewage overflow is one of the worst conditions that can happen in any civilized society. On the one hand, we talk about Swacch Bharat with Government of India spending crores of rupees for the scheme, making people wonder whether sewage overflow is not covered in the Swacch Bharat scheme.

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What about the promises to the public?

The show must go on, but what about the promises?

Tamil Nadu has apparently found a way to make the day begin earlier at least for cinemagoers. With film shows permitted from 6 am, producers can celebrate, fans can rejoice, and theatres can open their doors while most citizens are still contemplating their alarm clocks.

The producer gets an extra show, the star gets extra publicity, and the box office opens for business before the city has quite woken up. But what does the public get, apart from the privilege of watching a film before sunrise?

If the Government's intervention can ensure an early-morning film show, one wonders whether the same urgency could be applied to matters that affect citizens far more directly. Roads, civic amenities, public transport, government hospitals and schools could all do with a little star treatment themselves.

And then there are the promises made to the electorate. While film releases have been given an early-morning slot, are those promises also running ahead of schedule or are some still awaiting release? Perhaps citizens, too, deserve a show: a progress report, a delivery date and, preferably, an ending that does not leave them waiting for a sequel.

This is not an argument against cinema. Tamil Nadu's love for films is legendary, and the industry deserves to flourish. But when facilitating a film's early-morning opening becomes a talking point, it is fair to ask whether governance is getting its priorities right.

One hopes that the speed with which permissions can be considered for the entertainment industry will also be evident when citizens seek solutions to their everyday civic problems.

If the government can arrange a first-day, first-show for cinema, when will citizens get a first-hand account of the promises fulfilled?

The true test of a government is not how early a show can begin, but how promptly its promises reach the people. After all, the real blockbuster should be good governance and unlike a film, it should not require a fan club to applaud!

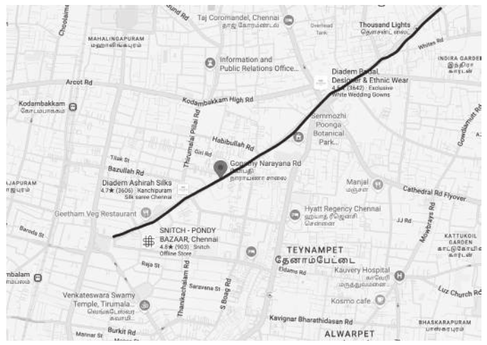
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T. Nagar Series – 3

Sir Gopathy Narayanaswamy Chetti

If the south-east diagonal of the Mambalam Town Planning Scheme connecting it to Mount Road commemorated a distinguished administrator of the Corporation of Madras, its counterpart, the north-east one is named after another legendary personality who had a long association with it, Sir Gopathy Narayanaswamy Chetti.

Born in 1881, Narayanaswamy Chetti hailed from a wealthy family. His father G. Mahadeva Chetti was a leading merchant and a prominent public personality who involved himself in several charitable causes such as running a feeding house in Coral Merchant Street during the great famine of 1876-77. He was a nominated member of the General Department of the Corporation of Madras from the 3rd division. In 1887, he was one of the members of the committee formed to celebrate the golden jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria. He was also an ardent supporter of the Congress party in its formative years.



Not much is known about Narayanaswamy Chetti's formative years or education, but by 1907, he had become a councillor of the Corporation of Madras. This marked the beginning of a distinguished association with the municipal body lasting more than four decades. During this period, he served as a Councillor and an Alderman of the body.

● by
Karthik Bhatt

The high point in this tenure would come with his appointment as the President of the Council in November 1926. Narayanaswamy Chetti was a prominent member of the Justice Party and served as its treasurer at the time of its founding. Between 1930 and 1936, he also served as a member of the Council of State. During his tenure, he was elected a member of the Governing body of the Imperial Council for Agricultural Research (today known as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research).

Narayanaswamy Chetti was involved with several public institutions in various capacities. He served as the chairman of the Victoria Public Hall Trust and was on the Advisory Board of the M&SM Railway. He was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Pasteur Institute in Coonoor and the Association for the Blind. He was the President of the Madras District Educational Council and a member of the Council for Affiliated Colleges in the University of Madras, where he also served on the Senate. He instituted the Gopathy Mahadeva Chetty Gold Medal in the university in memory of his father, awarded to the best student of Economics. Narayanaswamy Chetti was one of the founding members of the Madras Depressed Classes Mission Society and was instrumental in the opening of several night schools and free dispensaries. However, it was the cause of the reform of discharged prisoners that he held closest to his heart.

The Madras Presidency Discharged Prisoners Aid Society was founded in 1921 with the objective of making efforts to reclaim habitual offenders from a life of crime and enable released prisoners to lead honest and respectable lives. Narayanaswamy Chetti served as its secretary since its inception and dedicated himself to its cause. He helped fund the construction of a home for the Discharged Prisoners Society at Visakhapatnam and the building was named Gopathy Home in his honour. The home for ex-pupils of Certified Schools in Chengelpet was named the Gopathy Narayanaswamy Chetti Home in recognition of his work in the field all over the Madras Presidency. As a member of the Council of State, he passionately argued in favour of improving the condition of jail libraries in all the provinces, having observed their sorry state during the course of his visits to various prisons across the country. He was of the view that libraries played an important role in bringing about a positive change in the inmates. In recognition of his public service, he was awarded the Dewan Bahadur in 1922 and the Kaiser-i-Hind medal in 1926. He was conferred a knighthood in 1945.



Narayanaswami Chetty passed away after a brief illness in October 1948 at his residence in Thyagaraya Nagar. He also had another residence in Santhome, Gopathy Villa. His son G. Janakiram Chetty served as the Mayor of Madras for a short span of six months in 1941. The naming of one of T. Nagar's arterial roads after Narayanaswamy Chetti is a worthy recognition of his services to the Corporation and entirely appropriate, considering his tenure as the body's President came at a time just as the Mambalam Scheme was taking shape. A small street off Bazaar Road near his residence in Santhome also bears his name.

Sriharikota: More Than a Quiz Answer!

It all started when a friend shared details of the upcoming ISRO launch on a group. I immediately thought of another friend who might be willing to make this rather ambitious late-night expedition. One conversation led to another, a few more people joined in, and before we knew it, we had a little expedition on our hands. Fourteen people, three cars and one common destination: Sriharikota!

About four and a half hours on the road. And a rocket launch at 11.51 pm. All after a regular school day and working day. Because, apparently, some things are worth staying up for!

The drive itself deserves a story of its own. Breakneck speeds, an extraordinary number of cow sightings, speed breakers that threatened to send us airborne, wrong turns, and a particularly memorable three rounds around the same flyover. We even managed a nine-minute dinner pit stop, which gave us just enough time to make it to the venue before the parking cut-off. Talk about precision timing! If only all our rocket launches had this kind of road-trip drama leading up to them.

● by
Cauvery Kesavasamy



And then came the moment.

Watching a rocket lift off into the night sky is quite something. There is the anticipation, the countdown, the sudden burst of light, and then that enormous machine slowly but surely making its way upwards. It is difficult to describe the feeling. Goosebumps, adrenaline, disbelief and an almost childlike excitement, all rolled into one.

I had promised myself I wouldn't take videos. There would be hundreds of them anyway, and I wanted to simply be present. But when the moment arrived, I couldn't help myself. The sheer excitement got the better of me. Some moments are perhaps too extraordinary not to want to capture, even when you know no video can quite do them justice.

Somewhere in all that excitement, I found myself thinking of my Appa and Athai. My father spent ten years with ISRO as a scientist. My Athai spent close to forty years there. Growing up, ISRO was not just an organisation we heard about on the news. It was part of our everyday landscape. I remember the rocket models we had at home – the PSLV and GSLV models, little reminders of the fascinating world that my father and aunt were part of. In the early 1990s, these models and the conversations around rockets, launches and space technology were familiar fixtures of my childhood. And that brings me to a rather funny story.

When I was about six, we had a school project that required us to stick pictures of scientists on a chart and label them. I had one of those ready-made sheets with pictures and names of various scientists. I am told – because I have absolutely no recollection of this myself – that I apparently turned to my father and asked: "Appa, you are a scientist at ISRO, right? Then why isn't your picture here?"

My father was apparently pondering how best to explain to a six-year-old that not every scientist gets featured on a school chart when I came up with my own explanation. "Oh wait! They'll put your picture only after you die. No?"

Well. There went the conversation!

This story has been retold so many times over the years that I sometimes feel I almost remember it. My father still recounts it with enormous pride, describing how his little genius had cleverly found a pattern to explain his conspicuous absence from the chart. I suspect he has

(Continued on page 6)

Thiru-Vi-Ka Park and the Hypermarket in the offing

Shenoy Nagar is now a dot on the UAE-based Lulu map with India's first and largest (one lakh sq.ft.) hypermarket within a metro station set up there. What's more, there is a hoarding in the concourse of the Metro announcing the coming of the 'Grace International Mall' too. With that, all apprehensions of residents like me about the massive underground construction – at the cost of nature's bounty, the age-old trees – below the Thiru-Vi-Ka Park has come to pass. The underground complex covering 4.3 lakh sq.ft. area, has 2.1 lakh sq.ft. shopping space and 1.7 lakh sq.ft. parking area for 404 cars and 893 bikes, the *ToI* reported in its edition on July 24, 2022, quoting CMRL officials.

On the inauguration of the hypermarket on October 12, gates of houses near the entrance to the hypermarket were blocked by cars and two-wheelers parked there. The situation has since improved. The Shenoy Nagar Residents Welfare Association petitioned the Chief Minister, Police Commissioner (Traffic) and the CMRL, met the Anna Nagar MLA, GCC Commissioner, the GCC Regional Deputy Commissioner (Central) and Legal personnel at the Lulu Hypermarket for permanent solutions, and lives in hope.

Over the years what residents thought was just 'underground parking' later included an 'underground passenger amenities centre' and has now taken shape as a hypermarket, and a mall is now on the anvil. I counted 40 Lulu signboards on the Park's walls that advertise its wares. Its signage looms larger than that of the 'Thiru-Vi-Ka' Park. My mom-and-pop store heeded the call of local Merchants' Associations and shut shop on August 28 protesting against the big fish in the pond.



● by
T.K. Srinivas Chari

As for the circular Park, old residents of the place cannot live down the fact that it is not what it once was. To recall, on September 29, 2019, *ToI* reported that the Madras High Court had refused to stall construction but directed the state to ensure that the CMRL plants 5,200 trees in the area to make up for the loss of green cover due to the facility. Later, in his letter to the amicus curiae Chevanan Mohan, retired Madras High Court Judge K.P. Sivasubramaniam, a resident of Shenoy Nagar, said the CMRL failed to restore the original glory of the park to which the CMRL admitted that they could not plant deep-rooted trees, *DT Next* reported. "With massive concretisation, it is more of a roof-top garden... My 15-year-old daughter will never know what the park once looked like – 8.8 acres of open land with upwards of 300 well-grown deep-rooted trees," says S. Sivakumar, president of the residents association.

If the Green Line of the underground Metro (commissioned in 2017) passing through here has been a game changer, the renovated Thiru-Vi-Ka Park which opened in 2023 has been a mixed blessing. What could be counted as pluses are the two tableaus of the multi-faceted Thiruvarur Vriddhachalam Kaliyasundaranar after whom the park is named. Thiru-Vi-Ka studied at the Wesley School and Wesley College in Madras in the early 1900s and later taught Tamil at the same institutions. He translated Gandhiji's speeches when the latter toured the state. The Park has basketball, volleyball and badminton courts, two cricket pitches, a skating rink, an open air theatre and Miyawaki forest portions on the periphery among other features.

The minuses. Regular users of the park point to areas that have been cordoned off. One section has been dug up. A question mark hangs over its purpose and raises questions about what happened to the greenery there? For the benefit of the hypermarket, a rest room, conveniently located inside the park, has been shifted making way for a loading bay and a garbage collection point facing the road.

At the main entrance to the Park, food vendors are in full force in the evenings attracting the *makkal* like flies to honey. With vendors and consumers all over the place and their vehicles not far behind, residents living nearby risk being crowded out. This has been the situation since the opening of the park in 2023.

Residents who face mushrooming of small vendors in their streets which are non-vending zones, now have to grapple with the changes expected due to the Pulla Avenue Redevelopment Project. They are studying its blueprint -- obtained by one of the residents after filing a RTI.

The residents' only hope in the face of the recent disruption and onslaught of massive changes, is to unite and make meaningful contributions to the community. Chinni Krishnan, a resident of the area since 2006, persistently posts civic complaints on X. On his runs, he takes pictures of civic deficiencies and reports them. He acknowledges action taken. Acting on the statistic that there were 500 road accident deaths in Chennai city last year (37 per cent involving pedestrians), residents organise a twice-weekly 15-minute Road Safety campaign in two traffic-heavy junctions. They hold up placards like 'Wear Helmet', 'Wear Seat Belt' and 'Slow Down'. This campaign has completed one year. Since 2021, residents have successfully grown more than 25 trees in the neighbourhood. This academic year, volunteers, some of them alumni, have been teaching English thrice a week to the children of the Thiru-Vi-Ka Higher Secondary School which has a history of 70 years.



Higginbothams – A Trip Down Memory Lane



by Dushyant Singh

Ever since we moved from Delhi to Madras I had been wanting to visit the city's legendary bookstore, Higginbothams, as I had already heard a lot of good things about it. So one day my daughter and I landed up there. What immediately struck me about the storied bookstore was its captivating old world charm. The teakwood double-door glass entrance ushered us into a sprawling space teeming with books and history. It was like stepping through a portal into a myriad world redolent of times bygone. It is uncanny how one literally goes from the hustle and bustle of Mount Road/Anna Salai to the peace and warmth of this sanctuary in a few steps via that gorgeous entrance.



Higginbothams is widely considered India's oldest surviving bookstore and an irreplaceable heritage jewel synonymous with the city. Its founder was Abel Joshua Higginbotham, originally a Bible seller and librarian and later the city's sheriff. It has a beautiful white Palladian facade, with 1844, the year it was established, etched right on top, inside the triangular pediment. It shifted to its current location/building in 1904.

I loved its long verandah supported by cast iron pillars which provides a sheltered transition space from the road to the shop. The Mangalore tile roof, high wooden rafter ceiling supported by iron trusses give it an attractive vintage look while being responsible for cool interiors. There are huge stained glass windows on the ground level and the first floor ensuring excellent ventilation. They let in a fair amount of natural light while keeping the outside dust at bay. I found the stained glass windows aesthetically pleasing as they add so much to the colonial era ambience of the building. The stunning black and white chequered diamond floor tiles add that touch of old world charm. Such flooring is so classy and I wonder why it has all but vanished from today's buildings!



I got flashbacks to my own childhood when I used to spend hours in my school library and in my favourite bookshop. Being surrounded by books gave me joy and comfort. The smell of wooden furniture and books suffuse the air. The sense of deja vu got even more heightened as we came across comics like *Asterix*, *Tinkle* and *Amar Chitra Katha* as those were my favourites during my school days. My

(Continued on page 7)

Sriharikota: More Than a Quiz Answer!

(Continued from page 5)

conveniently overlooked the rather morbid logic behind my conclusion! It makes me laugh every time I think of it. And now, decades later, here I was, standing at Sriharikota, watching an actual rocket launch into space.

For most of my life, Sriharikota was simply a quiz answer. "Where does ISRO launch its rockets from?" Sriharikota! A name I knew, a place I had heard about countless times, and a facility that had been part of my childhood conversations, albeit from a distance.

But today, I can proudly say that I have actually been there. I have stood there, watched a live launch and felt the ground beneath me hold its breath as a rocket took off into the night sky.

And perhaps the most beautiful part was realising how life has come a full circle. From a little girl wondering why her father's picture wasn't on a chart of scientists to an adult standing at one of India's most remarkable scientific landmarks, watching the very work that had shaped so much of her childhood take flight.

Appa and Athai, I wish you could have been standing there with us. What a night. What a memory. And what a privilege to have witnessed a little bit of history in the making!

Some road trips are about the destination. Some are about the company. And some give you a spectacular reminder of just how wonderfully life can come full circle.

This one managed all three.

Higginbothams

daughter picked up the comics gleefully. Suddenly, I felt that I had aged while those cartoons were exactly like before. I also realised that it was like passing the torch where she could enjoy hearty laughs reading the same books which had regaled me decades ago.

Time flies and in what feels like the blink of an eye, decades have rushed past you. It seems like yesterday, when as a child, I used to go to Rathi's Bookshop in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, to buy comics during my vacations. It was an annual cycle. You see, we kids used to spend summer holidays at our maternal grandparent's home. To fill those long and lethargic days of the late 1980s in a mofussil desert town, when there used to be nothing much to keep us kids occupied, we regularly went to our favourite bookshop to buy comics like *Tinkle, Archie, Amar Chitra Katha, Asterix, Phantom,* etc. It was situated on an overbridge and had a typical Chittar stone (a local sandstone) facade and had a distinct smell of books which I vividly remember to this day. That shop was a source of happiness and solace as we used to pick up our quota only to finish it quickly for another trip to replenish our stock, and so it went on. Such carefree days they were. And, how strange that after ages, I felt the same tug at my heartstrings when I set foot in Higginbothams. A full circle moment for me. And just like that Jodhpur, my past, and Madras, my present, got linked together with the sweet thread of nostalgia.

I have a personal library filled with books collected over the years. Some I won in quiz competitions, others in essay writing events and lots from those vacations to my grandparent's home. Now I see my kids enjoying those books which fills me with pride and joy. I believe that this is the best legacy I can bequeath to them. My visit to this landmark Chennai bookshop let loose a flood of reminiscences which gladdened my heart. Whenever I pass it, while driving down Mount Road, it puts a smile on my face as if it were an old pal waving to me.



Murugan Bhai

● by
V. Venkataramana

My friend Abdul often spoke of his visits to Palani, the abode of Murugan, the Tamil deity symbolizing simple living and high thinking. Still, it never occurred to me that he was a devotee of the lord of the hills. I put it down to his great love of nature and travel, his concern for the ecology of the hills, constantly under threat from mindless development. I was more than a bit surprised, therefore, when one day, he expressed his disappointment at his inability to place his wedding invitation card at the lord's feet at the Palani temple.

"Somehow, I couldn't get the card ready in time. I, however, promised to bring my wife on my next visit, provided, of course, that I could persuade her to visit a Hindu temple," he told me, to my growing surprise. Abdul had always been fascinated by the mythology of Subrahmanya, he explained. There was nothing unusual about his interest either. Back in his hometown, there is much intermingling between the two communities, who not only respect each other, but also participate in each other's festivals to an extent. During the annual temple chariot festival, the honour of being the first to pull the car is by tradition reserved for the head of the Muslim community.

It was his wife Salma's turn to spring a surprise, soon after the wedding, just when Abdul was about to broach the subject of the promised temple visit to her, knowing that she was a devout Muslim. "I have a confession to make," she said, "My father has vowed that he will take me to the Tiruchendur Murugan temple after my wedding, even if you won't consent to go there with us. Do you think, you could accompany me just this once?" Abdul was thrilled. He was quite convinced that it was Providence that had brought him and Salma together. And to think that he had been so reluctant to get married, that too through the old-fashioned route of arranged marriages! Abdul reminded me of an old conversation we had had on my own religious beliefs or lack of them. I had told him I was no great temple-goer, though I sometimes enjoyed visiting old, not so wealthy temples that attracted few devotees. Listening to my wife sing a couple of songs before the sanctum on those occasions had been an elevating experience, I had told him, may be because of the spirit of surrender in which these offerings were made, embellished as they were by the superb acoustics that invariably featured these temples. I had described how moved I had been by the tears that ran down the cheeks of a priest as he listened to her rendering of *Varadarajamupasmahe*, a song in praise of the daily object of his puja. Abdul told his new bride how lucky he thought he had been to marry someone with such a wonderful, eclectic outlook as hers.

"But I also expressed my one regret in my happiest hour," he told me, "I told her how much I regretted not being able to listen to her sing at a temple." Salma's reply stunned him: "Oh, I have learnt Carnatic music. I haven't sung for years, but I'd love to take lessons again, practise hard, and sing for you one day at the Tiruchendur temple," she assured him.

At the Tiruchendur temple, Abdul who performed an archanai as he had done many times before, sidestepped the priest's usual question as he always did, by saying, "Please do it in Swami's (the lord's) name." But this time, the priest insisted on full disclosure of the names of the beneficiaries of the archanai! "Abdul and Salma," my friend said and then added their parents' names as well, fearful that the priest might take umbrage. Nothing of the sort happened, and the priest listened with a straight face. And after doing the puja, he blessed both of them, extracting an assurance that they would come back with their baby next time.

(A true story with names changed)

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– THE EDITOR

Chennai Sportsperson shining as Administrator

These are happy days for Chennai's sports – especially the months of September and October 2026. Besides the fact that some of its international class sportspersons have performed creditably in big competitions and brought home a clutch of gold, silver and bronze medals, Chennai's sporting personalities have also been proving their mettle as sports administrators in the disciplines in which they had glittered.

To briefly recall the history, we have had yesteryear cricketer S. Venkataraghavan (Venkat), a world class off-spinner of his times, turning into administrator and serving as the Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA), going on to become one of the best international umpires in cricket. His state teammate from Chennai, K. Bharat Reddy, who was also a former India Team wicketkeeper and batsman, later emulated Venkat as TNCA Secretary.

In chess, the sport for which Chennai is rightly referred to as the cradle of talent, India's first International Master (IM) and a former national champion Manuel Aaron proved his talent as an administrator also in the Tamil Nadu Chess Association (TNCA) for a number of years. So did another Chennai chess talent V. Kameswaran, who became India's first International Arbiter and later served as an administrator in the state association. Presently, the most iconic chess talent from Chennai, the internationally renowned five times world champion Viswanathan Anand, has after his semi-retirement, been serving on the international chess administrating body FIDE since 1985. On September 26, 2026 Anand was elected as Deputy President of FIDE alongside FIDE President Timur Turlov.

A couple of years ago, the next big talent from Chennai in tennis after maestro Ramanathan Krishnan, to be an icon in the international arena, Vijay Amritraj became the Secretary of his home base Tamil Nadu Tennis Association (TNTA) and is trying to restore to the state its status of being the cradle of Indian tennis. Similarly, the fledgling sport of carrom has had multiple national champion Bangaru Babu, who singlehandedly endeavoured as an administrator in the state and national federations to make carrom an internationally competitive sport.

Balaji Mardappa

The aforesaid are the most significant sports personalities who excelled as administrators too. And now, although not in the same league as a performing talent in the popular aquatic sport of rowing, Chennai's Balaji Mardappa, has been proving his talent as an administrator by endeavouring to make Chennai, Tamil Nadu and India more prominent on the international rowing map as the president of the Rowing Federation of India (RFI). He was elected Vice President of the Asian Rowing

● by V. Venkataramana

Federation (ARF) at the Asian Rowing Congress during the recently concluded Nagoya Asian Games. Balaji took to the sport of Rowing in 1988 at the national level after giving up cricket, in which also he was a first class sportsperson albeit at the Club level. He had also served on the Executive Committee of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA), besides owning a League Club. He became a coach in rowing in 1993.

Balaji has laid out a road map for further development of rowing sport in Asian countries in which it has been a rich tradition for long. He aims to put it on the medal list in big international competitions, including the Olympics. In his interview with *Madras Musings* he states that "Asian countries are way behind the European nations. The culture of rowing is different in Europe where they have hundreds of clubs and a long rowing season; this is because they have access to clean river and lakes. As for availability of equipment, except for China no other country in Asia manufactures rowing boats. Even in China the oars are imported."

According to Balaji, "Indian rowing centres around the services, whereas in the superpower countries the universities and club rowing form the backbone. For example, in Chennai there was the Anna University Rowing Club which is now defunct. In schools and colleges rowing is not looked upon as a sport but as a pleasure pastime in hill stations! We need to start work at the bottom. The Rowing Federation of India is starting work at the grassroots level by constituting coaches clinics and development committees to hunt for talent."

Balaji is happy that the Government of India and SAI are supporting rowing in a big way. This year the Indian men's team got to train at Hezewinkel, Belgium alongside the NZ team. Men and women were at the World Cup 3 in Lucerne, Switzerland. The men's team rowed at the World Championships in Amsterdam. He reiterates that racing exposure at the top level is a must: "Thanks to SAI our boys and girls got it this time. For the first time in the fifty years of RFI history our Men Lw 2x rowed in the WC finals and finished fourth – they were unlucky to have missed out on a medal."

Balaji opines that with lightweight rowing gone at the Olympics, the Asian countries need to catch up with their western counterparts. The leading countries in Asia are China, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Middle East.

Taling about women's rowing in India, Balaji says, "With JSW signing a partnership with RFI, women's rowing is moving in the right direction.



In the years to come we can hope to see the Indian women rowers move up the ladder and perform well. The current Indian women's team is one of the best India has ever had. We recently won two bronzes at the Asia Cup. The Women's 4 rowed in the finals at the Asian Games. They have had a long stint in Australia and Europe and the exposure has helped them gain lots of positives." He adds that LA RFI is coming out with an elaborate plan. "We are planning to train in NZ and Australia. Both the countries are super powers in rowing. RFI is into talks with their counterparts in these countries towards a positive collaboration. We shall also train in Europe and race there. The 2027 WC is at Swizerland which is a qualifier for LA. Apart from this, we can also have a go at the Asia-Oceania qualification regatta." Women have never qualified for the Olympics from India in this sport, but on a positive note Balaji Mardappa is hopeful of both women and men qualifying this time.

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