

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

Vol. XXV No. 20

February 1-15, 2016

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How do we get better air?

Having sufficiently exploited the soil on which we live and depleted the water available, it would appear that air is the next scarce commodity. Early last year, some of the European nations classified a job in India as a hardship posting, chiefly based on air pollution standards.

New Delhi was clearly the worst offender and remains so. The Government there was forced to take the unusual step of enforcing a rule wherein cars with odd-numbered registration would be taken out on certain days with those with even-numbered ones being driven on other days. The Odd-Even rule

as it was called led to much de-
rision and the brief period dur-
ing which it was tested showed
that there was no appreciable
improvement in air quality.

• by The Editor

This, of course, may be because
the time of experimentation
was too short. But it did bring
home a sobering reality – air
pollution is a menace. The
question is, how far is Chennai
behind and what can it do to
improve its air quality?

There is bad news for us. The
National Air Quality Index

(NAQI), launched in April last
year, has shown that Chennai
tops the list in air pollution. It is
just that the nature of contami-
nation is different. Delhi made
it to the news as the most pol-
luted city in the world owing to
the particulate content in its
air, but Chennai, along with
Kanpur and Varanasi, scores on
toxic content owing to gases
such as nitrogen and sulphur
dioxides. The NAQI measures
air pollution in cities and raises
an alert on days that are classi-
fied as severe, very poor or poor
in terms of air quality. Last year,
Chennai had the highest

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Caring a fig for heritage campuses

A 100-year-old institution, plenty of history behind it, some great buildings, a vast tree-filled campus, a location by the beach, the first swimming pool exclusively for women in the city – the list of attractions is seemingly endless. What would have happened had this been in Oxford, Cambridge or any American University? It would have been a campus aspiring to be a star tourist attraction and an institution of national pride. But since this is Chennai, the situation is exactly the opposite.

The college we are referring to is Queen Mary's, the second oldest women's college in South India and the first in Madras city. For years the campus has presented a picture of neglect and the central building and the oldest on site – Capper House

was pulled down after suffering a lack of maintenance. It now appears that if the authorities are to have their way, the rest of the buildings will go the same way. This at least is the impression we get on reading an open

• by A Special Correspondent

letter written by Nithya Balaji, an alumna who was till recently active in the Alumni Association of the College and was one of the co-authors of the college's centenary volume. The letter is published on page 3 in this issue.

The campus of Queen Mary's first became a subject of controversy in the early 2000s

when the State Government decided to take it over and build a new secretariat in its place. This witnessed several protests by the students – past and then studying, and some opposition politicians tried to jump into the fray. What prevented the takeover was the original land donation deed, which clearly forbade use of the property for any purpose other than education. Since then, it would appear, the Government has decided to give up even the barest of maintenance activities at the institution.

Capper House was replaced by a swanky new building, which is vaguely in sympathy with the architecture of other edifices on campus. It now appears that there is a plan afoot

(Continued on page 2)

Know your Fort better



St George's Gate.

• Continuing north from the Wallajah Gate, we walk along the western periphery of Fort St George. There is no name to the street that takes us through. On the right are several barracks, most of them unoccupied and in various stages of collapse. On the left is the massive western wall of the Fort. As you walk by you will not fail to notice a long ramp built on the wall, making its way to the top. This was once used for wheeling the gun carriages up to the ramparts. This is the western face of Fort St. George and on the other side of it you have the massive quadrilateral, St George's Bastion. This is historically significant, for it is one of the few portions of the wall that can really be dated with accuracy. Though no longer visible, H.D. Love has it that on the southern face of this bastion is a stone with a Greek border that bears the following legend:

"Saint George's Bastion, Erected in the Year of Our Lord MDCCCLXXIII, and the Thirteenth Year of the Reign of His Majesty King George III, Under the Auspices of the Hon'ble Alex Wynch, Esqr, Governor. Designed by Lieut. Col. Ross, Chief Engineer."

Ross, it will be remembered, designed much of what we see today inside the Fort. Crossing this bastion, we come to the north-western face of the Fort and this is where we see the next major point of entry/exit – St George's Gate. Unlike its southwestern counterpart – the Wallajah Gate which was (and continues to be) one way right through its history. St George's was always a two-way arch. It was also the only gateway to the Fort that remained open at all hours of the day and night. It probably continues to be that way for its massive doors show no sign of ever having been put to use. Though it was accorded the status of the principal entryway into the Fort, St George's Gate is not as impressive as St Thomas, the Wallajah or the North Gates. Unlike the first two it does not have a road leading up to it, thereby making it lack a vista. Also, it appears to be lower in height and is in reality three tunnels, thereby diminishing the central one of its power to overwhelm. The two flanking tunnels have been closed by grilles of an ugliness that only the Archaeological Survey of India could have designed. Walking down the central bay you can see that the two enclosed bays are only used for dumping rubbish. Like the other gates, St George's is also made of laterite stone with the arch being faced with black granite.

(Continued on page 8)

A fig for our heritage campuses

(Continued from page 1)

somewhere to let all other structures on campus too to fall one by one so that new buildings can replace them. How else can we explain the fact that seemingly structurally sound buildings are being locked up one by one on grounds of safety? Any good conservation architect can demonstrate that none of these buildings deserve to go and perhaps require very small amounts of maintenance to make them habitable once again.

Leaving aside the issues concerning heritage, the problems of basic cleanliness and hygiene on campus appear to be even more. All across the place you can see plastic waste, fallen leaves and unkempt lawns. The erstwhile swimming pool is now a rubbish heap. And yet classes keep going on. From this it would appear that staff and students are seemingly impervious

to their immediate surroundings. The tendency is to blame the Government for everything.

This is of course not a problem that is unique to QMC. Most other historic Government-run institutions present a shabby appearance these days. Historic Presidency College is not much better and by the simple expedient of declaring the institution out of bounds for visitors, has ensured that no pesky photographer can publicise the poor state of the precinct. Victoria Hostel is in an even worse condition leading to protests by students. The solution? No maintenance of existing structures but the building of a new and architecturally incongruous block by the side of the old building!

It is a shame that such apathy towards heritage pervades our educational institutions. How can they inculcate a sense of history in future generations?

HOW DO WE GET BETTER AIR?

(Continued from page 1)

percentage of severe days – 17.7 and one third of all days fell under either the severe, very poor or poor classifications.

The chief reasons for these are construction dust and emissions from vehicles. Despite the slow-down in the real estate sector, there was considerable construction activity last year in the city. In addition, the metro rail work, that has been going on for over four years now and is likely to extend to another two, has also contributed to this. The latter is, of course, the price we need to pay for getting what is promised to be an effective public transport system that will cut the usage of cars which, along with two wheelers and autos, are the other major pollutants.

Chennai adds 700 cars every day to its roads. With the space remaining the same, the traffic density is only increasing thereby causing the slowing down of traffic. It is a well-known fact that vehicles that idle even while running the ig-

nitiation release the maximum emissions. It therefore stands to reason that the more vehicles there are on the roads, the slower they become and the more they pollute.

An effective public transport system is the only answer to this problem. The Metro may result in this, but it needs to be supported by effective feeder services if it can hope for patronage from the vehicle users. Also it may need to expand its network to reach out to areas in the south of the city, which means more digging and construction. Are we ready for that? The creation of exclusive bus corridors may be a faster alternative. This too needs to be looked into.

Whatever be the answer, the present situation will just not do and it is to be hoped that those in power are studying the matter. At present, Beijing closes down schools and offices on days when air quality falls. We do not want a similar situation here do we, especially when we have enough off days as it is due to the rains?

Make mine music loud

The charismatic leader's centenary is fast approaching and instructions had been given that this ought to be celebrated in a manner befitting his status. *The Man from Madras Musings* assumes that no clear detailing was done as to how the revelry was to unfold. Clearly, money had been handed out and every street corner was to celebrate it the way it felt best.

Those who are regular readers of MMM's outpourings will know that his residence is pretty much the centre of things – drunken brawls, rash driving, road rage, political meetings, wedding bashes – all of them happen just below MMM's window. And so it was with the centenary of the people's hero. Early last Sunday, when milkmen had barely stirred, MMM and those who lived nearby were all woken up to the sound of song hits from the various films in which the man of the masses had acted before he went on to great heights in politics. The volume was a tad too loud but MMM does have a liking for film numbers of a bygone era and so he lent his ear – not that he had a choice anyway.

booth where the personnel said that there was nothing they could do as this was an event sponsored by the ruling party.

What was surprising was that the fiesta did not attract anyone other than the two or three organisers. And there was nothing done other than the playing of the music. At around 8 pm, MMM's good lady declared that she had had enough. Despite MMM's entreaties to the contrary she marched off to the event organisers and demanded that they turn the music off. Rather astonishingly, they complied at once. MMM's good lady returned with a triumphant smile. They were all in a highly 'spirited' condition, she declared, but were willing to take instructions from a lady.

Return of real estate

The Man from Madras Musings was certain that the lull was temporary. He alludes to the brief hiatus in advertisements, brochures, in-your-face pamphlets and direct marketing calls from real estate companies hawking flats and homes in the distant peripheral areas of the city. Beginning last week, MMM noted with a sink-

ing in, residents will have to plan on closing the swimming pool owing to poor maintenance and lack of water, the gym will rust owing to poor usage and the shopping arcade will go bust as everyone will find that the all-purpose shop opposite is just that much better and possibly cheaper? The much-touted lake just opposite will soon be filled in and divided into housing plots, the water returning only when it rains, and fairly heavily at that. The only pure air you get to breathe will be when your neighbour stops cooking heavily spiced food and as for the bird-calls, these can be heard only if they are recorded as a ring-tone on someone's cell phone.

MMM however learns that there is greater awareness about such tall claims now slowly seeping in and so employers are now more caveat than what they were before. Consequently, all these villas, spas and getaways are now marketing themselves rather desperately. MMM finds them calling at all odd hours, and short of nestling in the soap dish, you have them everywhere else – at malls, cinema theatres and, of course, inside newspapers – from where they jump out as

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

However, there were clearly only a few songs with the celebrants below MMM's window and so they played them over and over again. Within a couple of iterations, MMM had enough and hoped that the commemoration would be over by lunchtime. A peek out of MMM's verandah revealed a large portrait of leader, on a small makeshift platform. Potted plants flanked the picture and on either side were giant speakers, connected to a CD player and amplifier that rested on what is known in our city as the fish cart. This struck MMM as rather ironic for it was during revolutionary leader's tenure in power that this excrescence first made its appearance, was challenged in court and was finally banned. A couple of the faithful followers hung around the ensemble, seemingly unaffected by the high decibel levels.

The music ceased by lunchtime and between noon and around 4 pm there was complete silence, allowing MMM to have his afternoon siesta. But given that the picture and the potted plants had not moved, it was clear that the revelry would resume in the evening. And certainly it did. MMM and the neighbours shut their windows and doors to keep out the sound as much as possible. Some made bold to complain to the local police

ing feeling (pun intended) that they were all back, and how!

It appears that price is the now the only criterion and many had begun to pun rather gruesomely on the subject. 'Surprice' said a full page ad in all the leading newspapers and just to show that the company had not given up on its original USPs, there were other messages dotting the page (after all when you take up a full page and have nothing more than pop-eyed model to show, you can write all that you want) – the usual key words were there – vista, one with nature, natural surroundings, away from hustle and bustle etc.

To all this MMM has only one question – when a householder (and by this term MMM means men and women) moves to a metropolis, the least such a person would expect would be hustle and bustle, and the last to be thought of would be vistas, nature (if you exclude those answering its calls on your compound wall) and open space. Then why go about making these claims that can neither be delivered nor be sustained? But that is the way of real estate. MMM is yet to come across a company that does not offer "3 luxurious bhk in gated community complete with swimming pool, shopping arcade and gym."

How would it be on the other hand if these brochures mention that a year after mov-

flyers. Last heard, flats are now being sold at heavy discounts – you can apparently get an extra bedroom thrown in by simply agreeing to sign on the dotted line. Soon they may be willing to furnish the apartments at no extra cost.

Before someone accuses MMM of being an inner city snob who looks down at suburbia, let him also mention that the plight of realtors within Chennai is no better. One desperado has advertised his property and lists among its pluses the fact that it is close to the residences of the present and former Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu!

Tailpiece

The accompanying picture acquires a Germanic feel in the opinion of *The Man from Madras Musings*. Heil Chief!



OUR READERS WRITE



Disfiguring Chennai

Our politicians, film people, and magazine folks will never let Chennai turn into even a third class Singapore. Politicians with their banners, and posters, and eulogies, disfigure the city walls, with impurity. I have not seen this kind of wall disfiguration anywhere in India.

The politicians, however never forget to promise on make Chennai the most beautiful metropolis. They are promises

waiting to be kept. Though Tamils claim a great cultural heritage and tradition, aesthetics so far as keeping our cities clean and neat is concerned does not find a place in their agenda.

I am appalled that even Carnatic Music has been added to the list of those who believe in disfiguring walls. Things are getting only worse every day. God save Chennai.

T. Santhanam
tyagasanth@gmail.com

The SRR I knew

Having had a life-long fascination with libraries, I found the articles on Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (MM, January 1st and 16th), inspiring me to recall a few meetings I had with Dr SRR.

It is my good fortune that I could meet Dr SRR on many occasions in the late 1960s in Bangalore where I was working with the postal department.

What triggered my urge to get to know him was a small piece of writing that appeared in *Kalki*, the well-known Tamil weekly, around 1965 about Dr S.R. Ranganathan's unique contribution to library science. He was National Research Professor of Library Science at the time and had established the Documentation Research and Training Centre in Bangalore. There he chaired a number of weekly colloquia or large academic seminars. My residence was just a kilometer away from DRTC. Hence it was an easy ten-minute walk for me.

One Wednesday evening I walked into DRTC and found Dr. SRR and about twenty librarians drawn from various parts of the city assembled there. While they were actively discussing a topic I remained silent, as the subject was not familiar to me. Dr SRR's voice was mellifluous and his language was free from jargon. While leaving the hall I smiled at him and he reciprocated. I attended six or seven such seminars in DRTC.

Sometime in 1971 I went to Dr SRR's house with my friend S. Balasundaram, accountant in Head Record Office of Railway Mail Service. A warm welcome was accorded to us by Dr SRR. After exchanging a few pleasantries we invited him to address our friends in Central Services in Bangalore on the important role libraries played in the development of education (as we had already heard giants from Karnataka on different subjects of social relevance). He expressed his inability to do so owing to his failing health. However, he added that he would like to meet our friends and be with them for some time after becoming well again. His wife Sarada was beside him and nodded her head in agreement. Alas, ill luck prevented us from hearing him forever. He breathed his last in 1972.

Dr. S.R. Ranganathan is known for his Five Laws (1931) relating to the library and Colon Classification for information retrieval. These are works *par excellence*. In the library movement there were twelve 'wise men' in the world. They belonged to four different nationalities. Dr SRR is the only Indian among them. His output was tremendous. It includes sixty books and 2000 articles. A votary of scientific methodology, this mathematician-turned librarian will be remembered forever.

R. Soundararajan
1/46, Sivasakti Nagar,
Nagapattinam 611003

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

THE EDITOR

An appeal from an Old Queen Marian

Dear friends and lovers of heritage,

The term "use and abuse" first captured my attention at a workshop on drug abuse!

This made me realise the huge difference in these words in that context.

When I see how the QMC campus continues to be neglected but consistently used for their convenience by the supposed "caretakers" of this college, I feel this is as serious an abuse as the other.

1. This Government-run college is grossly overloaded, 7000 students trying to use the infrastructure meant for possibly 2000. Too many courses, quantity taking over quality.

2. Water problems, lack of toilets, classrooms, lecturers, books, you name it.

3. Over 100-year-old heritage buildings continue to crumble, while the Education Dept. and PWD quietly lock up each room/block as it is declared unsafe (by whom?).

Already the Physics and Chemistry labs, parts of Pentland and Stone Blocks, are sealed.

4. Beach House and Sankaraiyer building which are more than 100 years old were declared out of bounds and allowed to decay, BUT continue to be misused by Police personnel who park their vehicles inside QMC campus on a daily basis and probably disappear into these structures to change/relieve themselves. It reeks like a urinal all the time.

5. Come Republic Day, the southeast corner of the QMC grounds, closest to the Gandhi statue, becomes some VIP stand or Press gallery, with shamiana poles used to build galleries inside the QMC grounds. Workmen, supervisory officials etc use the grounds and, of course, the two ancient buildings as toilets.

6. Come Election time, QMC is counting centre – and all sorts of political party affiliated population plus election officials invade the grounds, use the Golden jubilee hall for counting (casuarina poles make the hall into a chequered barricaded one, never mind the flooring, walls etc.).

7. All this while the users do not pay a single paise towards this take over! Nor did the Railways pay for usurping of land for the MRTS station – behind QMC, which is

called "Lighthouse" rather than after the college they robbed the land from!

8. As for heritage – never mind that the hallowed assembly hall (disfigured by a false ceiling, which has sprung leaks) is showing termite infestation. The wood lined "General" library is also termite infested from the ceiling. There are priceless books still inside old wooden cupboards, but they may crumble on touch (anyone heard of digitalising and documentation?).

9. The marble bust of Queen Mary, a symbol of all the "queens" who passed through this venerable college, is grey with grime, covered with ball point pen signatures of idiotic students who scribble their name on it. This was done by S. Nagappa (senior) the renowned sculptor and artist whose other works are venerated in other parts of the city. This was commissioned by the Raja of Panagal, the then CM?

(I know how much my designer had to work on each of these photographs in the centenary publication – to hide the flaws!)

10. The alumna association collects money to save something... and this has to be shelled out to pay extra to assistants and service staff – who ought to be hired by the state Govt.! Plus of course the current gov. in power will not give permission for any improvement work or maintenance – to be done by the old students.

If we don't do something now, pre election, I doubt if there will be any QMC left to save.

Who is responsible for all this?

The caretakers of this college. The elected party in power. The Director of Education, PWD and whichever organisation who is responsible to protect heritage... It is no use blaming the Principal or staff.

We the public are also guilty due to passive acceptance.

I have stepped out of all committees.

Am free to sign any petition to draw attention to these problems. Please feel free to publish this appeal in any source you feel like, just keep me informed.

Nithya Balaji
nithinal.balaji677@gmail.com
Former student,
QMC



Till February 5: *A way of grace* – an exhibition of traditional and contemporary art works inspired by Shrinathji and the Nathdwara Culture. Curated with a combination of traditional painting crafts with a soul and contemporary artists whose soul has been moved by the deity and energy of Nathdwara, this collection is an ode to Shrinathji, Krishna as a living child in the haveli. From pichwais and miniature paintings to canvases, this exhibition is an amalgam of the past and present, old and new (at Apparao Galleries).

February 8-15: *Rithambara* – Mahabharata Immersion – An experimental theatre learning programme (at DakshinaChitra).

February 12: *Jus-Fusion* – Kriya, a popular Fusion Band with a reverberating Jugal-Bandhi (at 7.00 p.m., Goethe-Institut).

February 13-16: *Utsavam*. A four-

day immersion of Classical Music, Dance and Theatre (at DakshinaChitra).

February 18: Digital Concert Hall: Claude Debussy: Pelleas et Melisande (semi-staged performance) at 7.00 p.m., Goethe Institut).

Till February 25: *Stories of Architecture* – an exhibition of paintings inspired by architecture by Dhanushkodi, Ritendra Roy, Anjani Reddy, Chelapathi Rao, Lalit Sharma. Artists over the years have used monuments,



buildings, structures and ruins in their work. This collection has been edited giving the curation a direction of "the structures" as primary focus in this collection of works from several artists (at Apparao Galleries).

Till February 28: Photo exhibition: *From Earth to Earth – Devotion and Terracotta offerings in Tamil Nadu* in collaboration with IGNCA SRC. Exhibition curated by Julie Wayne ((at DakshinaChitra).

February 26-March 13: Chennai Photo Biennale (details from Feb. 15 onwards), the first of its kind in the city. It will comprise of several primary public events at partner venues like the Lalit Kala Akademi and several MRTS train stations spread across the city. Art Galleries and Universities are invited to participate and immerse the city in photography over the course of 17 days (Goethe Institut).

Till February 28: Exhibition of paintings by Ashesh Joshi from Auroville (at DakshinaChitra)

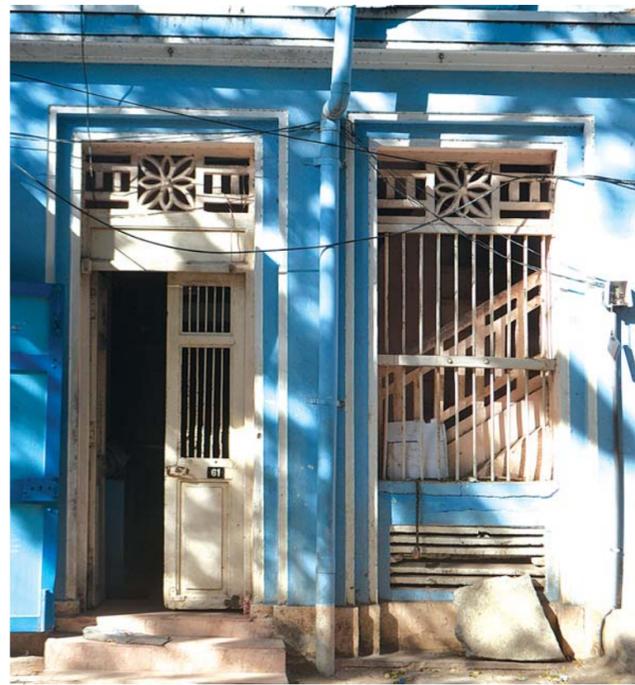
Workshop for Adults
February 20 and 27: Chinese abstract flower vase making) (at DakshinaChitra).

Till March 10: *Vasantha Vizha*, a mela for school children (at DakshinaChitra).

Mylapore's houses become part of its Festival...



This traditional row house belongs to a family who have been caterers for many generations. The house accommodates space for mass cooking spatially through double height ceiling made out of Burma Teak and Mangalore tiles. (Photo by Vinoth Kumar.)



After the Indo-Saracenic, the Art Deco was the next design movement to impact the city. This picture is a small example of how the Art Deco style, unlike the Indo-Saracenic, exhibited geometric motifs used on the facades of homes. (Photo by Uttara Chockalingam.)

As an extension of the annual Mylapore Festival, wholly funded by Sundaram Finance, we decided to focus on the houses in the heart of Mylapore which are over 50 years old – the idea being to make the house-owner feel proud of the fact that he/she owns such a house and should retain it and make an effort to restore/whitewash/repair it and not sell it to a developer.

To make a start, we at the Mylapore Festival joined hands with a young and small firm of

architects based in Adyar – Triple O Studio.

The team for the Mylapore project was headed by Tahaar Zoyab and Anisha.

The young architects and architecture students did the rounds of four streets that border the Mada streets off Sri Kapali Temple, Mylapore, identified the old houses and spoke to the families of the owners about the heritage they possess.

Not all families were forthcoming – they have their own reasons for this attitude but the

team hopes that in course of time, as the project gets known better more house owners will invite the team in.

Just now, a preliminary observation and note-taking of these houses is on. Also, a file full of photos of the facades and some interiors has been compiled.

At the end of Round 1 of this field work, we intend to honour the families who have done their best with maintenance and upkeep. Such will be given a plaque to either fix on their door – this will declare that the house has

been recognised for retaining its vintage construct.

Over time, the team will cover more inner and old areas of Mylapore. Documentation is also taking place.

It is also planned to hold a community meet for owners of old houses and provide professional inputs on how to repair/restore/maintain these properties. Year around activities in this field will be organised by *Mylapore Times*.

– Vincent D'Souza
Mylapore Times



The main features of the agraaharam house are the thinnai and the courtyard. This courtyard, seen through the intricately carved wooden door, is a common shared space between the four families that live here. (Photo by Srikanth K.N.R.)



This 150 year old (approx.) agraaharam house opens to the temple tank, belonging to the temple trust. It houses four families who work for the temple. (Photo by Srikanth K.N.R.)

...and architects begin to speak out on the City

To your guests who show some interest in our city, may I recommend a book: *Madras – The Architectural Heritage* by K. Kalpana and Franck Schiffer.

It is an INTACH publication and costs Rs. 425. And it is a singularly fantastic work that showcases our city.

History, notes, drawings, maps and pictures, zone by zone – the book has them all in its 345 pages. And it encourages you to explore different parts of the city. Or, if you cannot do that, it makes great reading.

This book was gifted to me at a recent event of the local chapter of the Indian Institute of Architects. I have a copy, having known architect Kalpana, who has done some great work in our city. But I was happy to get a new copy.

The IIA event and the invitation were a surprise.

For many years, this body of professionals has kept to itself. Tugs and hints to get it to play a bigger role have been ignored.

But I now sense that city architects are ready to come out.

The event featured a talk and then a discussion I was part of. The theme before us was:

'Reimagining Chennai: Continuity and Change'.

Architect Durganand Balsavar was the moderator and through the next 20 minutes all of us spoke our mind on our city and how we look at it and what we can do in our own ways.

It looks now that the architects' community is keen to play a role in our city. Already, seniors are mentoring students on projects that relate to Chennai.

A few professionals are working with the city's civic body on local projects. And the core team is thinking about forming a think tank,

multi-disciplinary in composition. A body which will look at issues of the city.

This is good news. I just hope they will keep their feet on the ground, work with reality.

A few years ago, when Chennai Corporation decided to 'beautify' the Marina, from the harbour end to Tiruvanniyur, a few architects presented some fabulous drawings. Little was local. Much was decorative and fancy – this fitted well with the multi-crore budget for this project.

A few residents challenged the plan for Elliott's Beach. They got the civic body to hold public consultations. We got the plans posted on the beach and asked for feedback. And we held up the laws of the land.

The beach is sand and water. Not walking paths, fancy spotlights, lawns and tiled pathways. Let Elliott's Beach be what it should be, we said.

After weeks of the campaign, Chennai Corporation dropped its plan for this part of the beach and spent the crores on 'beautifying' the rest.

Architects must be 'local'. Their professional inputs will help. And they must play a role in public projects.

Maybe, we should discuss the grand Central Plaza?

– Vincent D'Souza's
Jottings

Madras Checks

– A historic fabric

Handlooms have been part of the rhythm of life in India and belong to an industry which is second only to agriculture. Indian textiles have created turning points in history. Gandhiji "cremated" foreign fabric in an act of defiance, collecting them from sophisticated Indians who wanted to be on the same page as the British. It drained the British coffers and marked the beginning of the end of colonial rule.

Again, it was handlooms that moved Francis Day into choosing Madras as the new British settlement. He was impressed with Madras "being the only place for paintings, and a great store of longcloth and morrees."

He was, of course, referring to hand block-printed chintz, and morrees was blue cotton cloth. On his return from a tour of the Coromandel Coast, he was showed around by the local Naik, Damarla Venkatadri. Day met merchants, painters and weavers, examined a variety of fabrics and what impressed him was the price, as cloth was 15 per cent cheaper than that at Armagaon (Durgarayapatnam) about 35 miles north of Pulicat. Calico was in great demand, but that which was produced at Armagaon was of poor quality so a new settlement had to be found. Francis Day decided on the new settlement... Madraspatnam. The rest is history. As historian Sriram once said, "Madras was founded not for spices and gold but for cloth."

Woven in 60x40 handloom, with variations in stripes or solid squares, the fabric is known by many different names: Madras Checks, real Madras Handkerchief, George cloth and Guinea cloth, Bleeding Madras. Call it what you will, but this simply designed fabric still continues to excite wearers.

Woven in 60x40 handloom, with variations in stripes or solid squares, the fabric is known by many different names: Madras Checks, real Madras Handkerchief, George cloth and Guinea cloth, Bleeding Madras. Call it what you will, but this simply designed fabric still continues to excite wearers.

Textile scholar Jasleen Dhamija suggests that plaid handlooms existed in southern Andhra Pradesh and Madras hundreds of years before the British.



Madras Checks – much sought after in West Africa.

Why Bleeding Madras? Every time it is washed the colour bleeds and it assumes a new avatar without looking faded or dull. The warp was generally dyed in indigo and turmeric used for yellow. And the indigo base combined with yellow produced green that ran on the weft when soaked in water creating new shades and solid colours.

The RMHK (Real Madras Handkerchief) was a term coined by British merchants to describe the 8-metre long, 36 inches wide bolts of fabric which could be cut into three square kerchiefs. It was a successful ploy which



Madras Checks always in fashion.

helped exporters evade taxes as it was bales of fabric which entered London. It was in 1800s that plaids came into fashion, and it is believed that the patterns were copied from the tartan plaids of the Scottish regiments that were in Southern India in the 1800s. It is also said that the tartan craze began with the visit of King George IV to Scotland in 1822.

Textile scholar Jasleen Dhamija suggests that plaid handlooms existed in southern Andhra Pradesh and Madras hundreds of years before the British.



Madras in cotton from 1866 Harris Museum.

ish arrived. She points to the 16th Century Portuguese records which describe the popularity of the checked scarves, or rumaals, among the Haj pilgrims, claiming that these rumaals originated in Masulipatnam, and were woven as ritual textiles for cleaning the faces of the temple deities prior to the Persian and Arab traders who took them back to Mecca.

Trade routes carried the plaid cloth into West Africa where Madras was used mainly for turbans and, later, became a totemic commodity among the Kalabari tribe in the Niger delta. Design scholar Sandra Lee tells us that the Madras checks arrived via the Portuguese maritime trade routes. By the 18th Century, the fabric was a valued commodity in the trans-Atlantic slave trade well into the nineteenth century.

The Madras handkerchief was exported to London where it would be auctioned to traders who used it as an item for barter for slaves in West Africa. RMKH reached the Caribbean and South America where it was used as headscarves among black women.

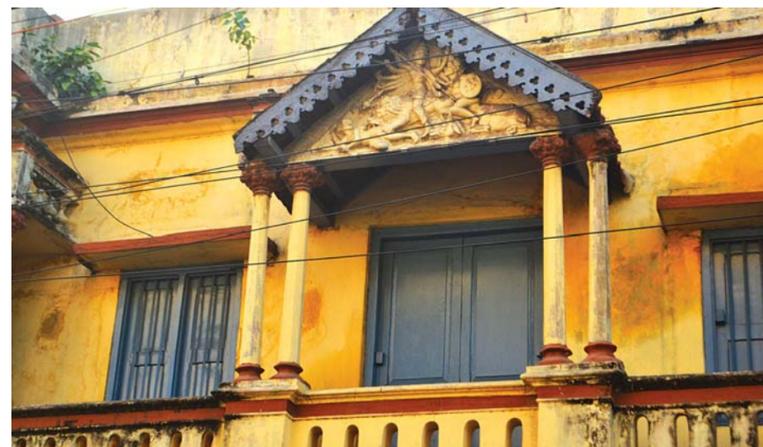
At the turn of the 20th Century, two European companies, A. Brunnschweller & Co. and Coles Son & Co., dominated the RMKH trade. The cloth was shipped through Manchester and London and auctioned to the trading firms. A.B& Co. opened an office in Madras in 1907 bypassing London altogether. Indian firms began to enter the arena, and the first traders were Sindhis.

For 400 years, the Kalabari, a small group of Ijo ethnic people in Nigeria, have been trading in the RMKH. The community was fused, as it were, with Indian textiles in daily and ceremonial life. Anthropologists Eisher and Erekosima explain that Madras fabric has a special presence in Kalabari life and is a symbol of a person's journey from the womb to the tomb. Kalabaris call the fabric *Injiri*. It is part of the ceremony of the veneration of life,

(Continued on page 7)



An example of an early 20th Century row house in Mylapore with a projecting upper floor and balcony with sloped roof and decorative wood work. This kind of architecture was probably an influence from North Indian residents who settled here. (Photo by Uttara Chockalingam.)



This particular balcony has an influence of the colonial architecture brought by the British (the style of the columns), while exhibiting motifs of Hindu gods and goddesses on the gable. (Photo by Uttara Chockalingam.)



(Current Affairs questions are from the period January 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. What is special about SBI's branch 'SBI InCube' in Bengaluru?
 2. Who won a record fifth FIFA Ballon d'Or recently?
 3. Which South Indian State has become the first in the country to introduce compulsory gender education at the graduate level?
 4. Name the two-time Chief Minister of J & K and a former Union Home Minister who passed away on January 7th.
 5. What monumental 116-year-old cricketer record did 15-year-old Pranav Dhanawade of Mumbai smash recently?
 6. For what domestic safety was a national-level helpline, 1906, inaugurated on January 1st?
 7. Which 1983 World Cup winner was awarded the prestigious Col. C.K. Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award in early January?
 8. Effective January 1st, the declaration of PAN is mandatory for all transactions, regardless of the mode of payment, in excess of which amount?
 9. Which country did the Indian football team beat to clinch the SAFF Cup for the seventh time?
 10. Name the Air Force Station in Punjab that witnessed a major terrorist attack resulting in the death of many Services personnel.
- ***
11. What freak natural calamity happened on the beach between Kallamozhi and Manapad in Thoothukudi District on January 12?
 12. What century-old institution is located at 383, Konnur High Road in Perambur?
 13. Which street in Fort St. George was also dubbed 'Snob's Alley'?
 14. Which great king was said to have visited the Kalikambal Temple on Thambu Chetty Street on October 16, 1677?
 15. Who wrote the *Arutpa Orumaiyudan ninadu malar adi*, a favourite among Carnatic musicians?
 16. Which *vidwan* was given the title 'Akhila Ulaga Nagaswara Eka Chakradhipati'?
 17. Name the German missionary for whom a beautiful marble monument was erected in St. Mary's Church inside Fort St. George with a 43-line epitaph.
 18. Name the two Tamil Nadu cities chosen as part of the National-level 'Hriday' (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana) initiative.
 19. In which year was the Madras Army established by the Company?
 20. Why is November 4, 1934 an historic day in the annals of sport in the metropolis?

(Answers on page 8)

A '2-in-1' school for homeless children

A very interesting experiment is going on at the Chennai Middle School in Damodarapuram, Besant Nagar, Chennai. An experiment which is proving to be a solution to twin problems faced by the Corporation: getting students for the many Corporation schools where enrolment is dwindling alarmingly, and to taking some action on an order of the Supreme Court which has made it the duty of the civic body to provide shelter and care for homeless children.

To help them deal with this challenge, the Chennai Corporation decided to rope in the services of 'Montfort Siragugal', a unit of the well known NGO, Montfort Trust, run by the Montfort Brothers with its headquarters in Rome. Under this scheme, the NGO not only helps the Corporation identify deserving homeless children but also looks after them in a hostel located within the school premises.

Most of the students currently on the roll are rag pickers, who are footloose orphans or whose parents are leading wayward lives, not being able to look after their children. Some of these parents also use the children to earn additional income for the family. Many of these children who get a taste of money early in life are drug addicts and are prone to becoming criminals. While some girls are forced into prostitution at a young age, even the boys are not spared from sexual abuse.

The unique feature of this experiment is that the students are made to stay in the school, which provides them with comfortable and dignified living conditions. Conceptualised as the Chennai Corporation's Care and Protection Centre for

children, the shelter home is located inside the school, in a couple of unused class rooms converted into dormitory type living quarters – with separate arrangements for boys and girls. The children are given free clothes and other daily necessities including three meals a day. Each child is provided a separate cot with the accompanying bed linen. While the Corporation pays for all the expenses, the NGO manages the scheme with the help of its team of volunteers.

According to Victoria, a teacher in the school, the experiment was started in August 2013 with just 11 students. Today there are 63 students, both boys and girls, aged between 5 and 16 living in the hostel and attending classes from 1st to 8th standard in the school located inside the complex and run by the Corporation. The children



they soon settle down to the routine and realise that the school is opening up a whole new world for them.

While the children are being taken care of, the parents of such children are also counseled about the importance of education in their children's lives. Regular parent/teacher interaction takes place where the parents see for themselves,

start a life of their own.

According to Kesavan, Sanitary Officer in the Corporation who is associated with the 'Shelter Home' project, the Damodarapuram school experiment was rated as one of the best 'Shelter Homes for Children' run in any State in the country by a team of officials from the Department of National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), who visited Chennai recently. Encouraged by the success of the Damodarapuram school, the Corporation has plans to start 31 more such Centres in Chennai. For better control, each centre will have only 30 students and may be run by a team of dedicated Corporation staff.

It is heartening to see the children, many of them very bright, pulled into a system which offers them hopes of a brighter future.

Individuals or institutions wanting to extend help can do so by sponsoring extracurricular activities in the school or even offering special meals for children on special occasions. Anyone interested in making the lives of the children happier can contact Kesavan on 7200013144, or Victoria 86082 68780.

● by R.V. Rajan

rvrajan42@gmail.com

passing out of 8th standard are sent to other schools nearby or to schools run by the Montfort Trust.

The children are encouraged to participate in a whole lot of individual and group activities. Extra-curricular activities include exposure to arts and crafts, computers and other skills. Group activities include participation in sports, dance and drama programmes, elocution competitions, debates, poetry sessions, English speaking classes, etc.

Though the children, in the initial stages, find it difficult to adjust to the new environment where they have less freedom,

progress made by their children. Many wayward parents also change their own lifestyle to give a new life to their children. The constant effort of the NGO is to try and reintegrate the children with their family so that they continue to grow under parental care. The orphans among the children are taken care of by the Trust and sent to other Homes run by it where grown up children are given shelter and their educational needs taken care of. If some children show lack of interest in pursuing higher studies, then they are sent to Vocational Training Centres where they learn skills with which they can



Saying it like he felt it

— Baburao Patel of filmindia

● *The Patels of filmindia* – Sidharth Bhatia – Indus Source Books, PO Box No. 6194, Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006 – Price Rs. 2000.

For about 25 years, from 1935 to 1960, *filmindia* was the most influential and dreaded English-language film journal focussed almost entirely on Bombay-made Indian movies. The editor, who often filled the entire journal from cover to cover, was Baburao Patel (1904-1984) who did not make a secret of his being a school drop-out but learnt to write English with demoniac vigour. His being a dropout was, however, a nagging pain to him! He would have been the only example of a film journalist who built a mansion on Pali Hill, Bombay. And he had the leading film stars and producers serving refreshments and ice-cream to one another.

Baburao Patel claimed Gujarati roots and had strong views on what all made for public good. Politics was one way he could influence the flow of things statutorily and in the 1957 General Elections, he stood on a Jan Sangh ticket, and was probably the only Indian electoral candidate whose sole identity rested with films seeking to claim a Parliamentary seat by the ballot. He wrote a long explanation on why he lost the election. He stood unsuccessfully again in the 1962 elections for Gujarat, then still the homeland of Gandhi and the Congress, the political party the



Baburao Patel and Sushila Rani.

Mahatma nurtured. Baburao didn't fare badly but he persisted in his attempt to get into the Parliament and he succeeded in 1967. He was quite a thorn in Parliament's flesh but his term was cut short when Indira Gandhi split the Congress Party and dissolved the House in 1971, calling for fresh elections. Baburao was outwitted and he lost to a mighty combination of contenders. During the Emergency, his parody of press censorship was an editorial, a long essay on the benefits of vegetarianism. But that did not prevent his being thrown into prison. He could not cope with the physical aspects of prison life since he was nearing eighty and the ultimate humiliation came when he, to be released from prison, had to tender an apology.

It took more than 30 years for a kind of biography to be published of a man who, when he was alive and active, was known and admired by millions not only in India but in Hollywood circles with whom he carried a running battle for their filmic misrepresentation of anything Indian. He was threatened by some religious groups but his target was not the religion but the way the new neighbour always kept up an air of uncertainty and tension. Many of his friends were Muslims, foremost being producer Mehboob Khan and actor Dilip Kumar.

Baburao literally chased and made a much younger girl his second wife. Sushila Rani was a Saraswat Brahmin and a post-graduate lawyer while Baburao was a school-dropout Vanjara, another name for the nomadic Banjaras. Sushila Rani was also an accomplished singer and by nature self-effacing. While Baburao allowed her to share some amount of editorial work, he was against her giving public performances. It was a contradiction because as part of his wooing her, he made a film titled *Draupadi* casting Sushila Rani as Draupadi. The film was a success. It was a ruse, for, after marriage, Sushila Rani didn't participate in films.

Baburao was a staunch friend and well-wisher of Mehboob, Dilip Kumar, Madhubala and S.S.Vasan. (When Madhubala felt she needed to speak English with some fluency, Baburao put her on to Sushila Rani.) His reviews of their films were extravagantly favourable and he would often mention Mehboob taking time to pray five times a day. He persuaded Dilip Kumar to act in Vasan's *Insaniyat*. Baburao went to Tirupati and then visited

MADRAS CHECKS

(Continued from page 5)

so much so that the brides of West Africa, the Gold Coast and Ghana sought to have their gowns tailored from Madras Checks in the early 18th and 19th Centuries.

Madras checks cloth forms an integral part of the funeral ceremony for the Kalabaris, and the cloths used for this purpose are called *ede deis*, when the walls and ceilings of the room are lavishly decorated. The cloths are preserved and loaned to others who would need them. The family status is assessed by the number, type and age of these cloths.

In contemporary use, Madras checks, thanks to the preppy world's love for the unusual and to brilliant marketing, have become a mark of affluence. Imitation plaids, machine-made, were manufactured in Japan, Switzerland, England and France.

In the 1960s the popularity of Madras checks peaked. In the Nigerian market, handloom checks were still imported under the name of Real Madras Handkerchief. In the 1970s, Nigeria imposed a ban against a variety of goods due to political instability and the market

for import of RMKH collapsed.

Bleeding Madras was made popular by Capt C.P. Nair, founder of the Leela Group. In the 1950s, Capt Nair showed an American exporter a fabric which was woven in Chennai for South Africa using natural dyes, and one which would run and change form after every wash. The exporter ordered 10,000 yards and the cloth was tailored into stylish garments and sold at Brooks Brothers, New York

The exporter threatened to sue Capt Nair when the fabric really bled, and Nair pointed out that he had warned him earlier. When the editor of *Seventeen Magazine* ran a story on Bleeding Madras, the first order was that of a million yards. They were woven all over Tamil Nadu, and then in Andhra Pradesh.

Resuscitating the market for handloom from Madras would mean bringing in the textile's cultural history and re-introducing it to the place that gave birth to it, not in another form like sarees or lungis but as a fashion fabric which would find its niche in a global luxury market place.

Sabita Radhakrishnan

Madras. Probably because he was told it was unique, he wrote a devastating account of Balasaraswati's dance. He said "it was like a baby elephant rolling its eyes." It was also one occasion when he let Sushila Rani sing. It was at the prestigious Music Academy, Madras, for a late evening programme of the annual music festival. (I attended her concert. In those days, North Indian classical music and solo instrumental performances were reserved for the late evening and Ravi Shankar would break his playing at midnight to say "I wish you all A Happy New Year.")

Baburao's sons by his earlier marriage didn't match their father in his resourcefulness and command of expression and Sushila Rani lost her interest to carry on with her husband's journal after his death. She was an artist and not one who relished controversies. She had none to call her own child – Baburao had undergone vasectomy before he married her – but she was proud of Baburao's journals (in 1960, Baburao made *filmindia* into *Mother India*) and preserved them with diligence and reverence.

Baburao was undisputedly the most loved and feared journalist as long as he confined himself to films. His reviews of

films weren't to be taken at face value and yet they were a delight to read. His inventiveness with English language, his original similes – once he commended the acting of an actress but also added "she was beginning to look like an inverted shuttle-cock" – were unmatched not only in film journalism but Indian journalism as a whole. The vigour with which he wrote his column *Bombay Calling* was a sheer delight even if one didn't know whom Baburao was referring to. Many readers believed his 'Question-Answer' section of his magazine was among the best of such columns carried by any journal in any part of the world. If 'New Yorker' had a 'Talk of the Town,' *filmindia* had 'Bombay Calling.' As part of 'Bombay Calling,' he ran a veiled gossip column with a subtitle 'You'll hardly believe.'

Sidharth Bhatia has succeeded in making his biography of the Patels into a coffee-table book. He had the advantage of co-operation from Sushila Rani who allowed him to go through the entire collection of the journal. The book has an interesting foreword by actor Aamir Khan.

— Ashokamitran
Thyagarajan

ashoka_mitran@yahoo.co.in

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KNOW YOUR FORT BETTER

(Continued from page 1)

On the other side of the tunnel you emerge into a road that bends sharply and leads to the St George's Ravelin that has the outer gate. That leads you to Fort Station and from there on to Old Black or George Town. A bridge, known variously as Triplicane and St George's, also connected this gate to The Island and from there to Mount Road. It must, however, be remembered that the present St George's Gate is not older than the 1770s. The older one, that stood between the Lawrence and Pigot bastions, was on the western face of the Fort, diametrically opposite the flagstaff and the Sea Gates. A road connected the eastern face of the Fort to the west and this was known as St George's Street. Today it is much truncated – it runs from Parade Square to the western end of the Fort to a point between the Wallajah

and St George's Bastions. There is no exit there, the St George's Gate now being to the right, on the north-western wall of the Fort.

What happened to the Laurence and Pigot bastions? When did they get replaced by the Wallajah and St George's bastions? When did the West Gate become a northwestern gate while still retaining its old name? All of these changes were based on Col. Ross' designs. And the way they came about has much to say about the location of the old St George's or West Gate. It was the closest to Black Town and during the French siege of Madras, led by Lally in 1758, this was the area that saw the most action.

Early in the morning of December 14th, Lally led his troops via Vepery and Vyasarpadi and encircled Black Town where systematic plundering began almost immediately. 'Thousands of natives

then fled from their houses to the glacis, and implored for admittance to the Fort, but were refused.' It is clear that this must have been at St George's Gate. Col. (later General) William Draper, on receiving reports that the 'French soldiers were getting gloriously drunk with arrack' resolved to make a sally before they could recover. A crack regiment of 500 men

● by **Sriram V.**

and two field pieces emerged from St George's Gate and marched into Devaraja Mudali Street where pitched fighting broke out. The British troops soon retreated and then followed a two month long series of skirmishes, culminating in the departure of the French in February 1759.

Once the siege was lifted a debate began on strengthening the western face of the Fort.

Various plans were submitted, but it was left to Col. Patrick Ross who arrived in Madras in 1770 and was to leave the city only in 1803! Ross devoted much of his time to the reconstruction of the Fort into the shape that we know it today. It transformed from being a half decagon into semi octagon, the principal change being on the western face where he created the St George's Bastion and reduced the number of faces on that front from three to two.

There are some fascinating accounts of processions down St George's Gate. It would appear the visiting Indian nobility were received here, the Sea Gate being reserved for Governors and Governors-General. A report dating to 1801 is on the arrival of His Excellency Meer Allum Bahadur, ambassador of His Highness, the Subahdar of the Deccan, and his son Meer Dowran. Troops were drawn out in parade and the visitors were received at 7.00 am at St George's Gate by William Petrie (he of the Madras Observatory

fame) and E Fallowfield, both Members of the Council. Seventeen guns were fired and the nobles, together with 'their numerous train', were taken to *Admiralty House*, where they were received by Lord Clive.

Like the Wallajah Gate, the St George's Gate too was accessed from outside by a wooden drawbridge, till well into the 20th Century. This has now given way to a macadamised road. By the 1920s, this gate had become the most frequented entrance, perhaps because it led to Poonamallee High Road where stood several public amenities including *Ripon Building*, the General Hospital, People's Park, Moore Market, *VP Hall* and the Central Station.

Today, St George's Gate remains as busy as ever with vehicles and pedestrians fighting for space under the tunnel. If you feel adventurous enough, do climb over the Outer Gate, for a panoramic view of the old Fort glacis and some very green parts of Madras.

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We look forward to all readers of Madras Musings, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions.

ñ The Editor

Answers to Quiz:

1. It is the first dedicated specialised branch for start-ups; 2. Lionel Messi; 3. Telangana; 4. Mufti Mohammed Sayeed; 5. He scored an unbeaten 1009 runs in 329 balls; 6. It's a emergency response number for LPG consumers to seek help in case of a gas leakage; 7. S.M.H. Kirmani; 8. Rs. 2 lakh; 9. Afghanistan; 10. Pathankot.

11. 45, short-finned pilot whales were washed ashore and died beaching; 12. The Madras Pinjrapole; 13. St. Thomas Street; 14. Chatrapathi Shivaji; 15. Ramalinga Swamigal; 16. T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai; 17. Rev. Fr. Christian Fredrick Schwartz; 18. Kanchipuram and Velankanni; 19. 1757; 20. It was on this day, Madras beat Mysore in a day in the first-ever Ranji Trophy match.

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ñ THE EDITOR

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