

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS MUSINGS

Vol. XXVI No. 1

April 16-30, 2016

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# The youth reach out to *Madras Musings*

(By The Editor)

As it steps into its 26th year, *Madras Musings* is happy to find that the maximum number of greetings and best wishes for its continued existence has come in on social media – the preserve of the young. This makes us most happy for we believe that by making an impact on the next generation, we have carried forward the concerns over heritage – both built and natural – as well as over our city to the guardians of the future. This by itself is a victory for us.

It was only in the last issue that we made it known that we as a publication have completed 25. Ever since then, we have received countless messages on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter wishing us well. We have published some of these messages elsewhere in this issue (See page 3). We thank every one of these people and promise them that we will live up to their expectations. At the same time, we also express our gratitude to these young people who have dispelled the notion that concerns about heritage and the city are exclusive to the elderly. This is a definite sign of changing times.

Let us take for instance Facebook forums that discuss our city. The Madras Local History Group is perhaps the best known. The focus is chiefly on uploading photographs of our city's past and the volume. The variety that has been dug up from various online and offline sources is simply amazing. This remains one of the busiest groups with uploads happening all times of the day and night. Singara Chennai looks at various places in our city that add colour, vibrancy and beauty. There are other groups that specifically concentrate on waste reduction, environment and water bodies. On the blogging front, there are numerous writers who devote columns to their areas of interest within the city – its arts environment, theatre, temples, and general city his-

(Continued on page 2)



The Mylapore Temple and Tank look beautiful in the picture above. But come closer and this is what you will see (below) behind the railings protecting the tank.

## Can Mylapore become a heritage precinct?

(By A Special Correspondent)

Ask any tourist as to what is the first destination he or she has in mind when they visit our city and the Mylapore Kapaliswarar Temple will most likely be the answer. For most Chennai residents, this ranks high as a place of worship, as evinced by the vast numbers who throng the shrine on a daily basis. On festival days the numbers swell to unmanageable proportions. The shrine is maintained well the year round and has, in the last month, undergone a spectacularly successful consecration.

Several crores are spent on its upkeep and deservedly so. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of its environs, to which the authorities and the general public pay the least attention. The surroundings have degraded terribly over the years.

The cultural quotient of the Mylapore area ranks very high.

No other locality in Madras better symbolises the city's its ethos and heritage. Adding aura is the Mylapore Festival, unique in its design and conduct. During this festival every January, the locality surrounding the temple transforms itself. It becomes a beehive of activity for the thronging crowd, which turns its gaze towards valued memories of the past, having fun alongside. The same is true of the temple's annual festival that takes place in March/April.

The civic amenities around the temple are no match for the crowds. For disaster management during festive times, temporary measures are put in place, with roads leading to the temple blocked and a posse of policemen posted to manage the crowd. Toilets and medical help are woefully inadequate

(Continued on page 2)





# Youth reaches out to MM

(Continued from page 1)

tory. Mention must also be made of people like Ramaswami Nallaperumal and R Shantaram who add a photograph every day to the World Wide Web from our city and have been doing it for years.

The walks and tours are another success story. Gone are the days when Mylapore or Beach Road was the only choice for a heritage walk. Hundreds of routes have been mapped across the city and, on any given day, chances are that a group of volunteers have set out for some unknown spot, making a picnic outing from it. The bulk of these people are young and adventurous.

Which brings us to this oft-quoted opinion of some people that heritage is against progress. If that be so, what would these people have to say about the young people who combine exciting, cutting edge jobs with a passion for searching out the past? These are people who are

as enthusiastic about their work as they are in attending a temple or a beach festival and posting photographs about it on platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest. Are we to assume that all of them are against progress?

These young persons only strengthen our basic philosophy – heritage and progress are not antithetic. They complement each other and while it is necessary to look ahead, this need not be done by wiping out the past. Sadly, our political masters have not yet woken up to this fact. Not one party has even made a mention of heritage conservation in its manifesto for the upcoming elections. Or of how to make Madras a better city. Today's generation demands sensitivity and an all inclusiveness and this can best be demonstrated by adapting heritage to serve current needs as we have maintained all along. The sooner those in power see this, the better for our city.

# What can we do for Mylapore?

(Continued from page 1)

even during normal times. During the annual Arupathumooar festival, tonnes of garbage are produced, and these need to be cleared to make the roads usable for traffic again. The business establishments, ranging from high-end jewellers and restaurants to petty shops selling a variety of series for adults as well as children, have made North Mada Street a commercial hub. The shops put up on the temple tank's periphery obscure its sight at the ground level. Over the years many of these makeshift shops have become permanent. Thus, while the tank and tower make for good emotional appeal, for a good view of either you need to go up the high rise structures that have, sadly, been allowed on the four streets.

Would it not be a good idea to convert the space in the perimeter of the temple into a heritage quarter and call it Temple Square, or Kapali Square, if you will? First, the four Mada Streets should be off limits to motorised vehicles. For the elderly and the disabled, electric cars can be made available for mobility around the streets. Second, hawkers on pavements and petty shops

should be removed from these streets and accommodated at specifically earmarked spaces, making space on the roads available for walkers and cyclists. Third, all the commercial establishments, especially on North and South Mada Streets, need to stop encroaching on the pavements. Fourth, now that the Corporation is in the process of installing mobile toilets around the city, the four Mada Streets need to have at least two in each of them to maintain public hygiene.

A closer view of the temple tank will reveal that it has a promenade on its inner periphery, at least along the south, west and north faces. When first planned, this appears to have been a walkway with ornamental light posts that still survive.

What has since happened is that these paths are cut off by high fences and converted into rubbish tips. Can these not be opened for public use?

It is high time the administration begins thinking of how it can transform Mylapore into a model that other localities such as Triplicane, Tiruvotriyur, Tiruvannamur and Purasawalkam, all built around temples, can follow.

# Down Silver Jubilee Lane

And so, Chief, here we are, on our 25th anniversary. Congratulations to you. As several in the city and elsewhere acknowledge, had it not been for you, we would not have become so conscious of our heritage – or our city. Those in administration, from what *The Man from Madras Musings* understands, also agree to this, only they are rather petulant about it. Their attitude to heritage has always been akin to what Henry II felt about Thomas Becket if you recall. And MMM must say they have been doing a great job of ridding themselves of all heritage buildings. Fortunately, the city is still with no.

But be that as it may, MMM would like to join in the chorus of congratulations. On this occasion, MMM would also like to remember, Chief, your own good lady, who always took a keen interest in matters pertaining to *Madras Musings*. She it was, you will recollect, who would always notice when we made a mistake in the issue number of our publication and both you and MMM would tie themselves into knots in response and perspire freely from every pore. And that brings MMM to the quarter million dollar question, Chief: Are you quite sure it is our silver jubilee? No chance of any errors in number? All right, Chief, you can relax, it was only a rhetorical question and one that MMM owed your good lady. We have over the years, after all, been very factual except when it comes to our dates. Remember the time Chief when we published the date of some event in the Dates for Your Diary section as February 30? MMM believes that a group of our faithful readers is still out there somewhere lost in a calendar, trying to locate the venue.

But then again, it feels as though it was only yesterday that all of us embarked on this journey, led by you. In all the thanks that you poured forth, Chief, in the last issue you forgot one significant contributor – namely the postman and his Department of Posts. They too in MMM's view deserve our gratitude, though we have looked askance at their methods of delivery. But it cannot be denied that amidst flood, sunshine and heat, they have borne aloft our MM and ensured it reached its wide readership. Talking about them always makes MMM laugh – for it was they who ensured we made our free magazine into a paid one. And it was rather befitting, Chief, that they flung a rather moth eaten Act, one that pertained to the 1800s, an era that our publication is rather fond of, to tell us that we could not circulate freely! We did change thereafter and our faithful readership did not mind forking out some money.

And so here's to you, Chief, and the beloved publication. May there be Golden, Dia-

mond and Platinum Jubilees and after that centennial, sesquicentennial and quasiquicentennial celebrations. MMM has reached the limit of the words he knows for landmark anniversaries, Chief, but he is sure that *Madras Musings* will last for many years after these as well. And so, ladies and gentlemen, a toast, to our dear Chief and our *Madras Musings*! As these are days when prohibition is being thought of, MMM raises his glass of buttermilk in a toast. Or should he opt for palm toddy? On that happy note, let us proceed to other matters.

## Electoral round-up

Ever since the electoral code of conduct kicked in, every one of our political parties is on its best behaviour. There are no posters or graffiti disfiguring walls and no cut-outs and hoardings line the routes the

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

leaders take to office. Of course, *The Man from Madras Musings* is fairly certain that these people must be sorely missing these eulogies and panegyrics, but then that is the price to pay to have a job that requires a renewal of contract every five years. There is otherwise very little else to complain about these modes of 'gainful' employment.

The police are in full swing checking all cars in the city. MMM too was stopped in a dark thoroughfare and asked to open the boot of his vehicle. MMM's friend, who is of a cheery disposition, asked the force if they would care to take a selfie with MMM and himself to which the lady officer in charge smiled graciously and said that would be done anyway if cash was found in the car. MMM duly opened the boot to find that this was the day when his good lady (also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed) had placed what appeared to be a hundred different bags in the boot, including her handbag. Now MMM's wallet is never known for containing anything more than small change but with his good lady it was an entirely different matter altogether and so it was with a silent prayer that MMM watched the officers search. But the number of bags proved too much of a deterrent and having taken one look at MMM and friend they opted to shut the boot and wave the car on.

There are many hopefuls doing the rounds for a party ticket. So too did a neighbour of MMM's who

happens to be the local Lord Bountiful, practising his charities with an eye on popularity. For several afternoons he set up a water and buttermilk dispensing pavilion that also featured a high decibel music system that belted out songs in praise of the One Great Leader. The thirsty hordes flocked to the pavilion and drank to their fullest. But then when the party list of candidates was published MMM noticed that his neighbour was not on it. The pavilion was taken down and the services dispensed with. MMM presumes that the buttermilk of human kindness had turned sour.

Sour reminds MMM of fermentation and that in turn brings to his mind the stuff that cheers. It appears that all parties in the fray have decided that imposing Prohibition is going to be their chief electoral promise. It looks like the State is all set to go dry no matter who comes to power and by that MMM does not mean the water crisis. MMM wonders what will happen to the vast populace that has come to look upon its daily tippale as a matter of right. Perhaps they will all go on the wagon and once on it will direct it towards the erstwhile French colony that is our neighbour as they did in the past when Prohibition was imposed. MMM is sure there will be lot more material for this column in the months to come.

But if the fluid that oils electoral machinery goes dry, what will aid the digestion of the other electoral offering – biriyani?

## Animal-loving poet

*The Man from Madras Musings* is aware that very few facts are available about our State's sage who gave us three books in ancient time – on duties, piety and love. Even the former Governor of an eastern State who has penned a wonderful book of translations of the poet's work admits that his personal life, and by that MMM means the poet's and not the Governor's, is a closed book. MMM is happy to report that he (poet not Governor) loved animals, as evinced by the accompanying photograph. On that happy note, a Happy Tamil New Year's Day to all. Or is that on January 14th? That depends on who is elected on May 16th.

– MMM





## OUR READERS WRITE



### Wishing MM well – I

Little did I realize that *Madras Musings* is in its 25th year. Great news.

I warmly greet the journal and its dedicated readers and congratulate the Editors on this occasion.

MM has remained committed to honesty and frankness on the one hand and to the past and present (and future?) of Madras, a city and an ex-State [the 'Presidency', I say so because the State is Tamil Nadu at present] of chequered, but fascinating, history.

While subscribing to modesty, MM has encouraged and supported many enthusiastic young women and men of Madras to think about their city and, thus, has served the community as an avenue for them to vocalise their thoughts.

In this process, MM has not only enabled several to greatly improve their communication skills, but also has prevailed as a liberated voice of the region.

I could be listing more of this, since I am proud that I am one of the readers of MM from Day One, and am continuing to enjoy reading it.

I wish the Editors all the best in the future and wish the journal many happy returns of the day.

I also wish that it will continue to serve the people of

Madras (the city and the presidency) with the same gutsy passion and forthrightness that prevails today.

**Dr. Anantanarayanan Raman**  
Charles Sturt University  
Orange, NSW 2800  
Australia

### II

**H**eartiest congratulations on *Madras Musings* completing 25 exciting years. It has always been a refreshing read after weathering the (unavoidable) bulk of pedestrian stuff that is dumped on us by the daily publications!

May Silver Turn to Gold!

**V.Kalidas**  
vkalidas@gmail.com

### III

**T**he 25th anniversary of *Musings*! What an achievement – getting an apathetic city to care about itself!

**Vijaysree Venkatraman**  
Boston

### IV

#### From Twitter

**@kbalakumar:** Congrats and best wishes to all those part of this warm and wonderful venture. #Chennai

**@arianrams:** Wonderful. Wishing many more years...

## A memorable description

• The way the West Indies won the World T20 title left everyone watching the game gasping. The wordsmiths went ga-ga over it. But none more so than a writer in *The Guardian*, London, according to S.R. Madhu who sent us the whole report. It's too long to carry here, but the first paragraphs, published below, will give you a taste of things to come.

– Editor

### “Swinging for the hills, reaching the stars

Wonderfully devastating, hideously marvellous, beautifully grotesque, savagely delightful, the final moments of the Twenty20 World Cup were ludicrously, inconceivably, awesomely dramatic. The final's finale was undeniably vicious but also, for all that, gorgeous, like standing in front of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* when it suddenly develops arms and fists and clobbers your helpless self about the head, leaving you dazed and bewildered, dribbling senselessly on the floor, wracked simultaneously by pain and – weirdly, unfathomably – exhilaration.

Beyond boggling at the cool-headed brutality of Carlos Brathwaite's batting and its possible effect on the psyche of Ben Stokes, this more than anything was an opportunity to genuflect before the glory of sport. It would have been a memorable, dramatic match even if, as had seemed likely when Stokes and Eoin Morgan stood in deep discussion near the bowler's mark following Chris Jordan's excellent penultimate over, West Indies had batted out the final deliveries and fallen just short of their moderate target. But this match was not destined just to be admired. There was another twist to come, the twist of a serrated knife.”

# Why change the name of Madras High Court?

**T**he Centre last year had announced that it wanted to change the name of the Madras High Court to Chennai High Court, and it is learnt that the Government may introduce legislation in Parliament soon to achieve this objective. The reason most widely proffered (as was done when changing the name of the city from Madras to Chennai in 1996) is that the names have to be de-anglicised. But by changing the name to Chennai we may not be doing that at all.

The Centre, therefore, before placing the bill in Parliament would do well to refer to certain key issues to a select committee and examine the following aspects. Beginning with the historical reference to the region, there is enough prima facie records to establish that the area where Francis Day and Andrew Cogan landed was called “Medraspattam”. The renaming was done at the insistence of the native chieftain Damarla Venkatapathy Nayak, who sold the British a strip of land owned. Nayak is believed to have extracted a promise that the British town should be named after his father Damal Chennappa Nayak. Hence the settlement that grew around Fort St George came to be called Chennaipattinam.

This theory gains greater acceptance when we peruse the “firman” (a written permission granted by an appropriate authority) granted by Damarla Venkatapathy Nayak to Francis Day where Medraspatam is clearly mentioned as the land where the British were allowed to settle. The grant was mentioned in the book called *The English Factories in India (1618-1699)*. Three original and the copies of the grant are also preserved in the India Office at London and are referred to by C S Srinivasachari, Professor at Annamalai University in his book *History of City of Madras* published in 1939.

In another recent discovery, epigraphists S Rajvelu and Y Subbarayalu, while editing a book on the Vijayanagar inscriptions published by ICHR, observed that Medraspattam was a small port that existed north of latter day Fort St George before the 19th Century. Evidence to support this assertion lies in an inscription found in Penneswaramadam on the banks of the Pennar to the south of Kaveripattinam.

Therefore in changing Madras to Chennai we do not appear to be paying homage to any aspect of our cultural legacy.

**N.L. Rajah**  
(Advocate, Madras High Court)

**@tweets\_cs:** Congratulations. Wishing many many more years of *Madras Musings*.

**@R\_Ajay\_:** Heartiest congratulations!! Absolutely love your work. Got to know so much about Madras here.

**@Venkav4:** Congratulations *Madras Musings*! Appealing to every generation, you are a wonderful publication.

**@fabwrite:** Congrats!! That's one fortnightly I look forward to!!

**@rangamav:** Greetings from a dedicated reader of long standing

**@Eramurukan:** Many Happy returns. *Madras Musings* is a movement now. You are in for the longest haul

**@ramprakash:** Congrats sir. Learn so much about the city we love from you.

**@DilliChat:** Congratulations on the milestone to the founders and the team of #*MadrasMusings*.

**@catchhema:** A fortnightly tabloid that everyone reads at home eagerly. 25 yrs & going strong. Kudos MM team.

**@kayvenkatesh:** Happy Birthday, *Madras Musings*! Dad used to work in Rane Madras (supporter) & he used to bring home always.

**@BrianStoddart:** Fantastic stuff for all fans of Madras, including me

**@Ammu\_Maanu:** Congrats, Sir, keep it up for many more years.... Best wishes for that

**@brahmmajoshi:** My favourite mag. My fav writer. Congrats! Keep the Madras flag high.

**@Glasgowlee:** Congratulations! Wishing *MM* many more years of Madras news and views.

**@bharathnat:** Pat-a-pat- a-pat on our shoulders.. you are the leaders .

**@sarojsridhar:** Congratulations. Look forward to the next 25.

**@nancygandhi:** Hard to believe! I hope there will be many more.

#### From Facebook

**Stuart B Campbell:** I still keep in touch with Madras that is Chennai from afar. Congrats and here's to another 25 years!

**Shivakumar Raman:** Your contributions are amazing. Congratulations! Wishing you 50 more years of Madras Musings!

**Chandra Padmanabhan:** Congrats to Muthiah and Sriram! In the earlier days I also had a column!

**Sachin Anand:** All the best. I used to wait for *Madras Musings* when it was launched and in fact am preserving those copies and am still continuing.

#### From sriramv.wordpress.com

**Arvind Ram Kumar:** Thanks to *Madras Musings* aficionados for their tremendous effort in keeping *Madras Musings* alive all these years.... Happy silver jubilee.

**kaushik55:** Yes, it is truly a joyous anniversary that warms the heart of the Chennai-vaasi. Let us say Jai Hind to that!

**Fred Fisher** (Perth, Western Australia): Congratulations on your Silver Anniversary! Well done! I have enjoyed reading (most of) your musings that have kept me

in touch with my former home. Keep up your good work in hustling the authorities for a better Chennai (Madras).

**M.G. Swaminathan:** Congrats on the landmark achieved!

**Malikarjunan C:** All the best to team *Madras Musings*. May the Almighty bless you with long life. stay young and live.

**prismprblog:** Congrats. Fabulous achievement.

## OUR ADDRESSES

For matters regarding subscriptions, donations, non-receipt of receipts etc.: CHENNAI HERITAGE, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 14.

*Madras Musings* now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com. Those who wish to intimate change of address can also do so provided the subscription number is quoted. For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: Madras Musings, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006. On editorial matters: The Editor, *Madras Musings*, No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014.

No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the e-mail approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

ñ THE EDITOR





This panoramic view shows on the right the 'ashram' and today a small temple with its tops now painted yellow astride a rocky ridge on a small hillock with the dominating presence of Nandi Hills in the centre, and the Nandi valley with the villages mentioned towards the left of the frame.

# The Swamiji of the Nandi Hills

On a train journey back to Bangalore from Thanjavur recently, one of my fellow passengers, overhearing that I live in the Nandi Hills area north of Bangalore and conduct curated heritage walks in the foothills, asked me if I knew about the curious case of Omkar Swamy and his 'ashram' in the area. I wasn't very enthusiastic about entering into another tale of a 'godman', most likely a rather forgettable one, and so replied that while I knew of the existence of the man and his 'ashram', I had no knowledge of, nor particular interest in, him. My fellow passenger, however, ploughed on and I, politely, listened. What followed, however, kept me enthralled and led me to further research. This is what I found.

In 1919, an ascetic calling himself 'Sri Sadguru Omkar', or 'Omkar Swamy' to the locals, set himself up in a small ashram which he built in the serene and verdant foothills of Nandi Hills, 60 or so kilometres north of Bangalore, just off the Bellary-Hyderabad national highway. Nestling in a scraggy outcrop between the towering Nandi Hills

on one side, and the lower subsidiary hills on the other (in particular, Chandragiri), the ashram overlooked the Nandi Valley and the villages of Sultanpet and Nandi. It was located on the western fringes of the former.



The best shot of the Swamiji's picture considering the angle through a shuttered door and the poor lighting.

In front of this small and rather nondescript structure, under a makeshift metal sheeting roof and some vegetation, held up by four granite pillars, is a simple grave coloured red, having just a headstone and no other ornaments. The headstone states (translated from the Kannada):

"Here lies the revolutionary who fought for Indian Independence, Shri Omkar Swamiji, Death: 4th March 1978, Sultanpete."

The ashram itself is a pretty picture, a single storey building with a thatched verandah running almost all the way around it, well maintained, although unfortunately shut and locked when I visited. Between the tomb and the ashram building is a rather deep and rocky crevice ending in a pond. The entire complex, set some distance up the hillside, and accessible by a flight of granite steps, is a pretty and welcoming sight, what with several large trees around.

Peering through the locked door, I managed to take a photograph of the Swamiji himself, seen in later years. The entire compound housing these structures is well cared for. I learnt that the generosity, support and active assistance of some of the locals in the village of Sultanpet made this possible.

A revolutionary swamiji, who ostensibly fought for Indian Independence, living as an ascetic for close to six decades in the beautiful and quiet foothills of Nandi Hills, far from any of the centres of protest and action, nothing could be more intriguing. Nor could these titbits of information gleaned from the physical structures, be more enticing for me to ferret the story out. (Editor's Note: This story has already been told in *Madras Musings*, so is repeated here only in abbreviated form.)

On July 17, 1911, the Collec-



The headstone.

tor and District Magistrate of Tinnevely, Robert William d'Escourt Ashe, I.C.S., was shot dead at point blank range when the train in which he and his family were travelling had stopped at Maniyachi train junction.

The assassin, Vanchinathan Aiyar from Shencottah, then in the princely state of Travancore, jumped off train, ran into a lavatory on the platform and shot himself through the mouth using the same revolver he had used to assassinate Collector Ashe. This was the first overtly violent act of resistance against the British

● by  
Siddharth Raja

in southern India in the 20th Century.

Vanchinathan Aiyar had a letter on his body that hinted at a political conspiracy behind the murder. Not long afterwards, 14 men were charged with various offences ranging from murder to waging war against the King Emperor of India, and criminal conspiracy. This group of alleged conspirators was a motley crew of farmers, cooks, merchants, a grocer, a lawyer's clerk, a schoolmaster and even a pot-vendor! The chief conspirator was a Brahmin youth of 21, a journalist, a fiery patriot and person of considerable persuasive skills and charm, called Neelakanta, *alias* Brahmachari.

Since the victim was a senior ICS officer, the trial was posted for the High Court of Madras by the District and Sessions judge, Alfred Tampoe ICS, a Ceylon Tamil. After a long-drawn out court battle of 93 days, Chief Justice Sir Arnold White and Judge Ayling found the conspirators

guilty of the conspiracy to murder, while Justice C. Sankaran Nair, concluding that murder had not been legally proved, held that only the charges of waging war against the King had been established against the chief conspirator, Neelakanta Brahmachari. He was sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment. The other accused were sentenced to various terms of lesser imprisonment.

In prison, Neelakanta Brahmachari drew close to the judge who had first tried him, and who had decided to transfer the case for trial to the Madras High Court, Judge Alfred Tampoe. Neelakanta, born in Erukkoor in Tanjore District, had some education. He was drawn to revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh and moved to Pondicherry where he published a Tamil magazine, *Suryodaya*, which was subsequently banned by the British.

While serving his sentence, Brahmachari had time to examine his life, and concluded that violence was not the way to salvation. He also, jointly with Judge Tampoe, wrote from prison a detailed history of the underground political movement in South India. In recognition of this contribution, a remission of his sentence was granted. After his release from jail in 1919, Neelakanta Aiyar become a changed man, a reformed individual, more inclined to non-violence to achieve political aims. He called himself Omkarnath Swami and sought solace in the world of religion and philosophy.

Judge Tampoe visited him often in the "ashram on the till-top" and they held long philosophical discussions. Judge Tampoe and he become friends, no one quite sure who was the guru, who was the shishya.

# .A LOOK AT THREE MADRAS ARTISTS

## Nandagopal in Delhi...

Art Alive Gallery New Delhi, has been presenting "The Metaphysical Edge of Sculpture" – a solo exhibition of S. Nandagopal's sculptures. Sunaina Anand, Director of the Gallery, writes "Nandagopal's contribution to the art world is unparalleled. At this exhibition, the artist, in a departure from his previous array of works in brass and silver-plated sculptures, has brought in colour in a very distinctive manner. His innovative use of colour lends itself to forms and figures that emerge in the process of a creative synthesis of the past and the present.

Nandagopal is one of the few sculptors continuing the tradition of frontality and linearity in sculpture, one of the defining characteristics of the Madras Movement in contemporary Indian Art.



S. Nandagopal.

Nandagopal himself states, "My sculpture is not fully three-dimensional. But nor is it a relief to be placed against a wall. The gamut of Indian sculpture is really bas-relief. The great 'Arjuna's Penance', the world's largest bas-relief, never for a moment makes you wish it were a sculpture in the round. The necessity never arises. Nor is the great Nataraja idol a three-dimensional sculpture in that sense. It has a certain frontal as-

pect that does not make you in the least curious to see what lies at the back. I remember once the critic Josef James referred to my sculpture as a sort of skin removed from a three dimensional sculpture and laid flat on one plane. That may be exactly what my sculpture is all about. The figure, however, can never cease to attract me and frankly I can never think otherwise. It is strange that, when anyone is confronted with an abstract sculpture, he hasn't much to say by way of criticism. But when faced with a figurative one, he immediately comments on the nose being too long or the eyes being wonky, and so on. This is because he is faced with himself. He recognises all the imperfections. I do believe that man will always be man's greatest subject."



## ... and Narasimhalu & Udhayakumar in Madras

K. Narasimhalu and R. Udhayakumar are very special artists who recently held a very special exhibition.

K Narasimhalu (40 years) is a man who was affected by Cerebral Palsy in childhood. He cannot walk and talk properly. Unable to use his hands, he manages to do everything deftly with his

two feet. He is mobile by pushing himself on a wheeled wooden board. He was a topper in Class X and XII. He has accomplished basic computer application in HTML, operating the keys/mouse using his feet/toes! Despite all disorders he has taken life as a challenge and uses his legs to do all his work, right from



K. Narasimhalu and R. Udhayakumar.

beaten and filtered is he able to drink it. Yet he creates magic with his brush.

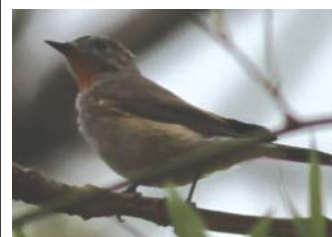
The 10-day long charity art show and sale was organised by the HeART BEAT Foundation, a family trust of V S Ramana, a professional in Advertising, PR, Communications and CSR, now with L&T.

HeART BEAT Foundation has so far held three such shows in Chennai and Pondicherry and been able to raise Rs. 6.50 lakhs – 100 per cent of the earnings through art sale go only to benefit the needs of the specially-abled artists.

"My appeal to art lovers, architects, interior designers and corporates in Chennai is that, while there will be a large space on your walls for the works of master artists, at homes and in offices, please do consider a good portion of this kind to deservingly support such specially-abled artists. These would embellish the decor, enhance their esteem – and this is CSR as well," says Ramana. – (Courtesy: HeART BEAT Foundation.)

## Rare sightings at Guindy Park

Two rare sightings at Guindy National Park in March, by Vikas Madhav, were the Taiga Flycatcher (top) and Lesser Whitethroat (bottom).



Taiga Flycatcher.



Lesser Whitethroat.

Harrier (Wintering), Montagu's Harrier (Wintering), Shikra (Breeding resident), White-eyed Buzzard (Breeding resident) Indian Spotted Eagle (Breeding resident), and Bonelli's Eagle (Summer visitor). Courtesy: Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin).

### Raptor watch

A raptor watch hotspot is Theneri, 55kms from the city, off the Bangalore Highway. Of the twenty commonly seen raptor species in and around Chennai, 16 have been spotted here in the last 2-3 years. They are: Common Kestrel (Wintering), Red-necked Falcon (Breeding resident), Peregrine Falcon (F.P. calidus-Wintering), Shaheen Falcon (F.P. peregrinator – Summer visitor), Black-winged Kite (Breeding resident), Black Kite (Resident), Osprey (Wintering), Oriental Honey Buzzard (Resident), Short-toed Snake Eagle (Resident), Eurasian Marsh Harrier (Wintering), Pallid Harrier (Wintering), Shikra (Breeding resident), White-eyed Buzzard (Breeding resident) Indian Spotted Eagle (Breeding resident), and Bonelli's Eagle (Summer visitor). Courtesy: Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin).

knitting to eating, drinking, operating the computer, hand embroidery and the cell phone as well.

Three of his 40-foot embroidered works each took him 18 painstaking months.

Udhayakumar (41) has had a life that is an inspirational journey of Art .... and a fight against Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). His paintings are inspired by his imagination and dreams. Udhayakumar developed his artistic ideas and concept by watching art/culture on television. He has challenged life, not succumbing to the ailment which made his whole body static.

He was born a normal child. At 10 months he was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), an ailment that affects the neurons of the spinal cord and brain stem. It slowly arrested his whole bodily movement. However he completed his sec-

ondary schooling and was awarded the best student prize for receiving high marks in Board exams. His parents and teachers discovered his inclination towards painting/art when he was in his second grade. He discontinued his studies after the 10th due to his ailment and, since then, painting has been his only passion. At the age of seven, he participated in an exhibition organised by the Victoria Technical Institute in 1982. Since then, he has conducted several solo exhibitions. His staple diet for years has been steamed rice and vegetables; only when

### 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](http://www.madrasmusings.com)

THE EDITOR

The ashram that's a temple today and the headstone on the tomb before it.



### Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Asia's largest and first of its kind optical telescope ARIES was unveiled at Devasthal in Uttarakhand recently. The A in the acronym ARIES stands for which scientist-mathematician?
2. Htin Kyaw is the first elected civilian (non-military) President of which of India's neighbours that was had 53 years of military rule?
3. Which Russian Grand Master has earned the right to challenge Magnus Carlsen for the world title after winning the FIDE World Chess Candidates tournament in Moscow recently?
4. Which number has been approved by the Telecom Commission as the single emergency number for India, similar to 911 (USA) and 999 (UK)?
5. Who are the latest winners of the National Awards for Best Actor and Actress?
6. Name India's first indigenous rotavirus vaccine, to combat infant mortality due to diarrhoea, launched by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare recently.
7. Which Chief Minister is the sole Indian in the list of the world's 50 greatest leaders ranked by *Fortune* magazine?
8. Name the Dutch football legend, a pioneering exponent of 'Total Football', who lost his battle with cancer recently.
9. Which reserve in Tamil Nadu-Kerala has become the 10th Indian biosphere Reserve to be included in UNESCO's World Network of biosphere Reserves?
10. Name the British mathematician famous for solving Fermat's Last Theorem, who is the winner of the prestigious 2016 Abel Prize.

\* \* \*

11. Who is this resident of Chennai who has been awarded the Padma Bhushan, who has been recognised by the *Guinness Book of World Records* for singing the most number of songs in Indian languages?
12. Which film has taken the honours for Best Feature Film in Tamil, Best Supporting Actor and Best Editing in the recently-announced National Film Awards?
13. Of the three main docks in Chennai Port, two are named after persons who have been conferred with Bharat Ratna. Name both.
14. What happened to the Madras Sailing Club, founded by Sir Francis Spring, in June 1933?
15. Dhananjayan's *A Creator with Midas Touch* is a documentary on which veteran screenwriter and producer?
16. Which Sahitya Akademi award winning Tamil writer has said that his recently-released third novel, *Asthinapuram* would be his last?
17. Which century-old luxury hotel in Chennai has rooms named Wallajah, Arcot and Binny?
18. What first, in terms of governance of Madras, did Sir Thiruvalluvar Vijayaraghavacharya achieve 100 years ago?
19. Al. M. Muthukaruppan Chettiar of Devakottai was in 1963 the first-ever winner of which coveted annual trophy?
20. Muhammed Abdul Ali is the eighth and present one. What is his title?

(Answers on page 8)

# The Ryans & Rajaji

## Pioneers of Prohibition

Rajaji was born in Thorapalli Agraharam near Hosur in Krishnagiri District in his family house. It was from here that he launched the prohibition of alcohol movement throughout the Salem District in 1938 during British rule. On his request, the Government created a new post and posted J.C. Ryan, Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies at the time, as Special Development Officer to implement Rajaji's prohibition policy and programmes to rehabilitate toddy tappers and ex-addicts. This brought Ryan close to Rajaji, who, at the time, was only an advocate though a prominent Congress politician.

Ryan's work was to wean alcoholics and habitual drinkers from their unsocial, uneconomic and unhealthy habit and rehabilitate them in gainful employment by promoting cooperative milk supply societies and societies for groundnut and tapioca growers, jaggery makers, handloom weavers and so on. He had to organise social gatherings and entertainment programmes, including sports events, musical concerts, magic shows and dance programmes. He was given a big staff and artists to carry out these programmes which included



J.C. Ryan with Rajaji.

Madras as Chief Minister after having been Governor-General of Madras, I was a college student. Father remained his right-hand man and Rajaji nicknamed him 'Pandit' and often referred to him, even at public meetings, as 'Pandit'.

While in Salem, Father was given the 'Rao Sahib' title and, later, when he became the chief of the Prohibition movement in

opened in several big cities of India and in many foreign countries – London, New York, Singapore and elsewhere.

When Father met Rajaji to give him the invitation for the wedding of my brother, Leo, Rajaji thanked him, read the card and said, "I will say a few words", which Father did not expect. He thanked him and made the necessary arrangements.

The wedding was in the Loyola College chapel and it was the very first wedding held there. Governor Sri Prakasa was

given a special seat in the sanctuary. The reception was in the adjoining *Bertram Hall*. While Father was waiting for Rajaji in the porch, the Chief Secretary, Ramunni Menon, and the Chief Justice arrived. As Father led them into the reception hall, he told me, "Son, watch out, Rajaji may arrive any time." When he arrived I opened the door of the car and introduced myself and turned and there was Father standing behind me. Rajaji was taken to the main table where the bridal couple, some secretaries to Government, both from the ICS and IAS, and judges were seated.

Rajaji spoke for ten minutes on his association with the family of Ryans and blessed the married couple. The bridegroom, my brother, was at that time working as a manager in the Buckingham and Carnatic mills. He thanked Rajaji for his toast and blessings.

Prohibition was lifted by Chief Minister Karunanidhi on August 30, 1971, even though Rajaji met him in person at his residence and pleaded with him not to lift Prohibition. MGR allowed the sale of liquor when he took over as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Now, in 2015/16 politicians are again talking about bringing back Prohibition, which has become tool in their hands to win the votes of women who are the main victims of alcohol.

● by F.A. Ryan

talks on the evils of alcohol by film stars, reformed addicts, social workers and prominent men and women.

In connection with his work, Ryan had to meet Rajaji several times in his village near Hosur, travelling from Salem in his second-hand Ford with a canvas top, driven by his faithful driver, Jaganathan. There were occasions when he took his family with him to give them an outing, dropped them at the big travellers' bungalow at Hosur, and then went on to meet Rajaji.

I was seven years old then, when on one occasion I was asked to stay in the car and Father went in. Rajaji saw me beside the car playing marbles with the driver and he called me in and gave me biscuits and a banana. That was the first time I met Rajaji, not realising at that young age what a great man I was meeting. Thereafter, I had the chance to meet him on two other occasions.

My father and mother used to talk very highly of Rajaji, who did not interest me. I took him for a villager who spoke fluent English. I vaguely remember his family home.

When Rajaji returned to

Madras State, he was given the 'Rao Bahadur' title. Shortly after Independence, Father was promoted over six of his seniors, all Joint Registrars of Co-operative Societies, and selected for the Indian Administrative Services about four months before the IAS examinations were introduced. Thus, he became the very first IAS officer of India and the only IAS officer with two British titles.

Ryan and Rajaji became so close that Rajaji used to phone him now and again between 9.00 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. My brother, sister or I used to answer his calls and connect him to Father.

One day, butler Arokiam was talking on the phone and laughing aloud when I pulled the phone from his hand and found that Rajaji was talking. I apologised to Rajaji and rushed to get Father.

Mother too used to meet Rajaji during functions or meetings in Salem and in Madras thereafter. One of the occasions was the opening ceremony of Handloom Houses and the All India Handloom Export Marketing Society, which was founded by Father. Soon, thereafter, Handloom Houses were

## CHENNAI HERITAGE

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# Rameswaram's links with Sri Lanka

Pamban Island, Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi (MM, November 2015) have been close to my heart ever since I used to travel between Egmore railway station and Colombo several times annually between 1939 and 1945, when I was 6 to 11 years old. We used to marvel at the scale model of the steamer *S.S. Elgin* or *S.S. Hardinge*, kept in a glass case at Egmore. We would embark on the Boat Mail in the evening and reach Pamban Bridge by the next afternoon. It was quite an experience going across the bridge, with heavy winds blowing through the train from the sea on either side of it! After stopping at Pamban, it used to go to Dhanushkodi station. Then it would reverse to Dhanushkodi Pier, so that the heavy railway engine did not have to go onto the pier.

Seeing the photo in MM, February 16, 2014, I recollected how we would step down from the coach onto the pier and straight onto the steamer, since there were two tracks to suit the side of the pier the ship was berthed at. It was indeed an engineering marvel – inaugurated on February 24, 1914.

In later years, soon after World War II, Tata Airlines with its Dakota once flew me from Colombo via Trichinopoly to Madras, due to bad weather near Jaffna. From my window seat, I could see Adam's Bridge from the air. That impression is still in my mind's eye. All this journeying had long kept Rameswaram in memory.

\*\*\*

While I was working in plantations near Vandiperiar in the 1970s, I visited Rameswaram with my family and friends. We left one morning from Kerala and travelled to Rameswaram. There was no road link those days and we had to park our cars on the mainland at Mandapam, take a train to Pamban railway station and then hire two jutkas to go to Rameswaram temple. The waters of Palk Bay have no waves except gentle ripples. All of us could wade through the shallow waters for over 100 to 200 metres, take several dips, come to the shore, change our clothes and get to the temple, which adjoins the shore.

Rameswaram temple's sanctum sanctorum was built by Parakrama Bahu I, the ruler of Sri Lanka from 1153-1188 AD. He obviously travelled with his soldiers, craftsmen, technicians, worshippers and pilgrims on the land route, Adam's Bridge be-



Koneswaram Temple, Ravana worshipping Shiva, with the sea in the background. Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

tween Mannar and Rameswaram. Parakrama Bahu, the all powerful king of Sri Lanka, was also considered a sage. He named his royal palace 'Palace of God Indira'. Further, being a Shiva Baktha, a 11th Century temple known as *Vanam Madevi*



The famed thousand pillared corridor of Rameswaram Temple.

*Iswaram*, named after Rajaraja I, the Chola conqueror, who established his capital at Polonnaruwa, was preserved here during Parakrama Bahu's reign. Other Hindu temples were also cared for. One of his wives had the name Subhadra.

The philosophy of the king was "let not even one drop of water reach the sea without serving man", a view similar to that of Chola King Karikalan, who built the anicut (what is now called The Great Anicut) across the River Kaveri in the 2nd Century CE and which was remodelled by the British in 1804. It used to irrigate nearly 70,000 acres, but now irrigates over a million acres. This is considered one of the oldest water regulators still in use in the world.

Similarly, Jayaweera, King of

Jaffna (1380-1410) and his dynasty till 1624, organised black granite stones to make pillars and other ornamentation on site near Trincomalee and then transported them by ship to Rameswaram temple. How many ships would have had to be commissioned and how many skilled artisans would have had to be employed and how many people would have been needed to create and load and unload all this work, including 1212 pillars, is mind boggling.

The Jaffna kingdoms (1215-1624) contributed to Rameswaram for 400 years and were known as *Setukavalar*, meaning custodians of the temple. Setu was used in their coins as well as their inscriptions. The ancestors of the King Aryachakravarthi dynasty that ruled Jaffna belonged to a Brahmin priest class of the Pasupathi sect of Rameswaram temple.

In 1795, Rameswaram came under English East India Company governance.

\*\*\*

Sri Lanka is home to five abodes of Lord Shiva which are known as *Pancha Ishwaram*. All of them are located along or near the coastline. They are Naguleswaram, Katheeswaram, Konneswaram, Tondeswaram and Munneswaram and are not considered among the 275 temples that are revered as the greatest Shiva shrines of India and Sri Lanka.

**Naguleswaram** temple is near Kankesanthurai in Jaffna, close to the Indian Ocean. **Ketheeswaran** temple is in Mannar District, in northwest Sri Lanka. Its antiquity dates from 300 BCE to 1300 CE. It was maintained by Pallava and later Chola dynasties, but was

Pancha Iswaram locations in Sri Lanka.

largely destroyed by the Portuguese in 1575 and rebuilt at the original site in 1903. The site is considered an 'Buried City'. Nearby is *Tirukut Ishwaram*, one of the most famous of all Saivite shrines of the pre-Christian era. Excavations have uncovered ancient Saivite images and Roman coins which bear evidence of the age and repute of the port

has undergone metamorphosis into Trincomalee. The temple is located on a steep cliff of black granite rock, with the sea some 350 feet below.

One pillar from the great pagoda still stands on top of Swami Rock, which is also called 'Lover's Leap' or 'Ravana's Cleft'.

The significance of this temple is that it is dedicated to Ravana. The temple has his 10-headed image and there is also a standing statue of Ravana facing the land, worshipping Shiva. There is also here a huge statue of Shiva in a sitting posture, as Ravana was a worshiper and a great devotee of Shiva.

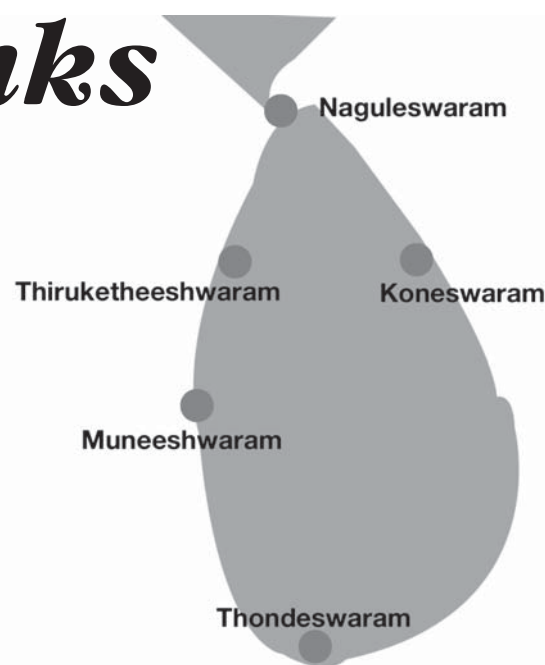
The Tanavaram temple complex is in Matara, near Galle, and was designed in Kerala and built in Pallava style. The central shrine is dedicated to Vishnu. Other shrines include ones for Ganesha, Murugan, Kannagi and Shiva. This shrine is venerated as the southernmost of the five *Ishwaram*-s. The principal deity was known as *Chandra Moul Eswaram*, that is "Lord Shiva wearing the moon", and was popularly called **Tondeeswaram**.

**Munneswaram** temple has been in existence from 1000 CE. This temple complex dedicated to Shiva is a collection of five temples, including a Buddhist temple. All these are located in Puttalam District, in Munneswaram village, on the west coast. It is said that Lord Rama worshiped Shiva here, after his victorious war against Ravana, King of Sri Lanka. The place is also a centre for the Kali cult.

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There has been recent revival of a plan to link Dhanushkodi and Sri Lanka by road at a cost \$5.19 billion. If the road materialises, it will be a boon to pilgrims. There are many Hindu pilgrim centres in Sri Lanka that Indians from all parts of the country would like to visit.

K.V.S. Krishna





### Dates for Your Diary

**Till April 10:** *Distant Views-Vibrant Hues* by Madhukar Maithani. Landscapes in vivid jewel-like colours in semi abstract forms on large dramatic canvases – (at Apparao Galleries).

**Till April 25:** *Colour-Space-Action*, an exhibition of paintings by John Tun Sein – (at Apparao Galleries, The Leela Palace).

**Till April 25:** *Chennaivasi*, an exhibition of paintings by S. Kumar. The artists has captured the essence of the look of the temple-goers in and around the temple – (at Apparao Infinity, Chennai) For details, please call: 99410 12388, 9686112078

**Till April 28:** *The World According to Bhavna* by Bhavna Sonawane. For fantasy landscapes are filled with a magical positive energy (at Apparao Galleries).

**Till April 30:** *Stories of Architecture*, an exhibition of paintings inspired by architecture featuring Dhanush Kodi, Ritendra Roy, Anjani Reddy, Chelapathy Rao, and Lalit Sharma. "The Structure" is the primary focus in this collection of works from selected artists (at Sandy's, Cenotaph Road).

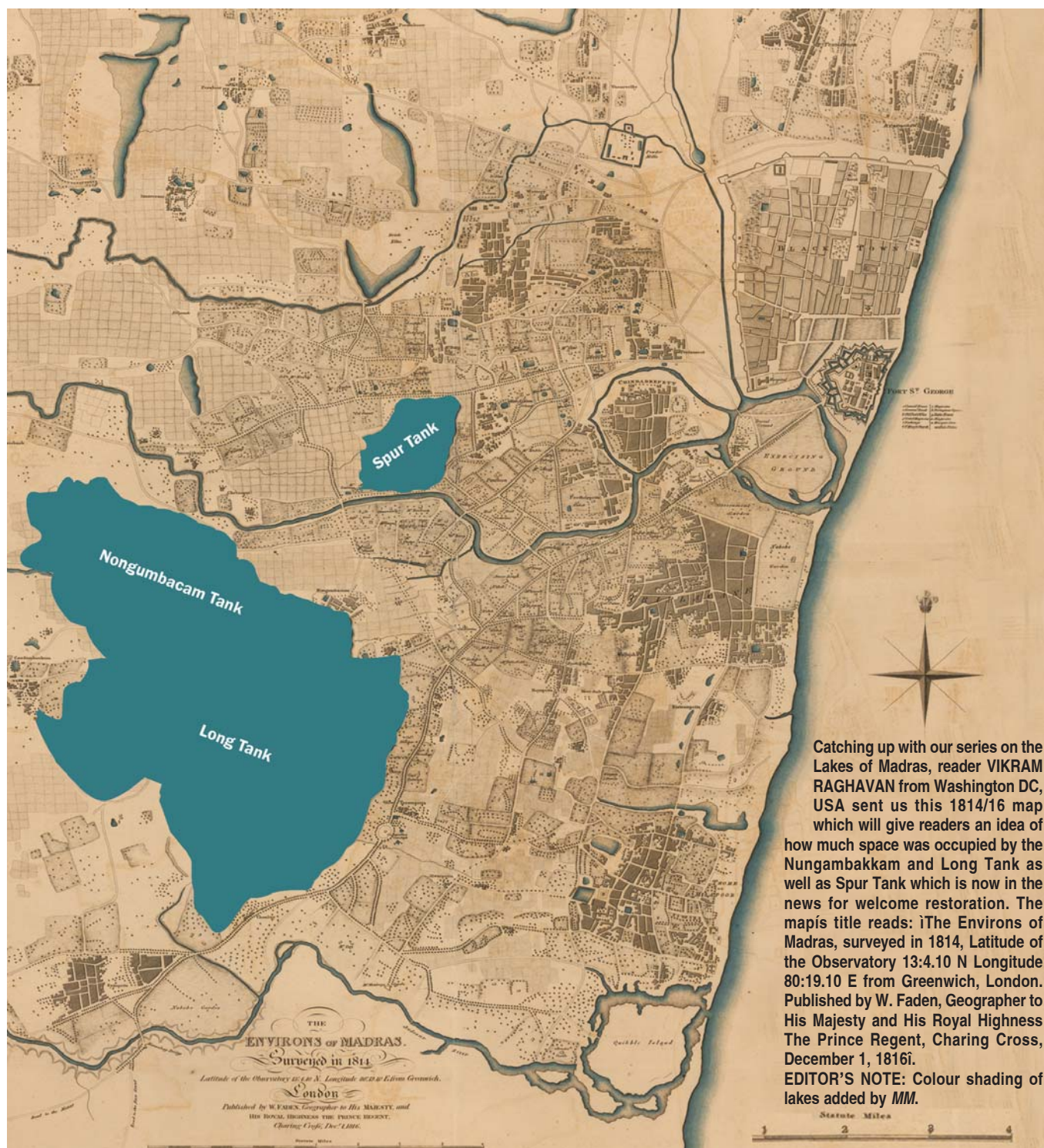
### Answers to Quiz

1. Aryabhatta; 2. Myanmar; 3. Sergey Karjakin; 4. 112; 5. Amitabh Bachchan (*Piku*) and Kangana Ranaut (*Tanu Weds Manu Returns*); 6. Rotavac; 7. Arvind Kejriwal; 8. Johan Cruyff; 9. Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve; 10. Andrew Wiles.

\* \* \*

11. P. Susheela; 12. Visaranai; 13. Jawahar (after Pandit Nehru) and Ambedkar; 14. It became the Royal Madras Yacht Club; 15. Panchu Arunachalam; 16. R.N. Joe D'Cruz; 17. Connemara; 18. First Indian full-time President of the city's Corporation; 19. The Indian Trust Invitation Cup; 20. Prince of Arcot.

# The lakes we once had



Catching up with our series on the Lakes of Madras, reader VIKRAM RAGHAVAN from Washington DC, USA sent us this 1814/16 map which will give readers an idea of how much space was occupied by the Nungambakkam and Long Tank as well as Spur Tank which is now in the news for welcome restoration. The map's title reads: 'The Environs of Madras, surveyed in 1814, Latitude of the Observatory 13:4.10 N Longitude 80:19.10 E from Greenwich, London. Published by W. Faden, Geographer to His Majesty and His Royal Highness The Prince Regent, Charing Cross, December 1, 1816. EDITOR'S NOTE: Colour shading of lakes added by MM.

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