

Four pages recalling a celebration

Sriram V's Madras Week Diary

Saturday 20/8/16

Went to the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation to speak on Sir CP in Madras. Saddened to know that thanks to continuous raising of road levels and the floods of last year, water weakened the oldest part of *The Grove*, the historic residence of the family. One part had to be brought down and is being rebuilt.

Went in the afternoon to participate in the Dr. Sir A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar Rolling Trophy Quiz conducted by the Madras Gymkhana Club. Went as part of a team comprising Sharanya Jayakumar, Dr. Navin Jayakumar and Gautam Venkataramani. Went with thousand guilty feelings – is this too heavy weight a team? Ought I to go? And in a Gauravam like twist there was my young son in the Madras Cricket Club team. On going there felt much better as every team had heavy weights. Our team won the trophy.

Sunday 21/8/16

Was at Fort by 6.30. The people rolled up by 6.45 and at 7.00 we were at the gate only to be rather brusquely informed that nobody can be let in till 10.00 am. Heightened security owing to Assembly session was the excuse, this despite a letter permitting us to enter that Vincent D'Souza had been moved heaven and earth to get for us. After some entreaties and requests we were let in and then everything proceeded smoothly.

In the afternoon, Sarada went to participate in Sreemathy Mohan's Golden Furlong of T Nagar, comprising Sundari Silks and RMKV. Apparently the shops had made wonderful arrangements to receive everyone and explain their wares. Snacks were served and there was valet service from one location to another. (How wonderful it would be if we had a battery operated car service within the Fort to take people around.) This combined with Sreemathy's natural exuberance made for a great tour. In many ways, Sreemathy has made possible the involvement of the retail trade in Madras Week. This began last year when she did a Textile Tour of T Nagar during Madras Week 2015.

In the evening off to Hotel Maris for the first of the *Madras Musings* lecture series. This was by Kombai S. Anvar and the topic 'Madras under the Golconda Sultanate'. There was a record turnout and Maris, which is known for its traditional South Indian fare, put out a wonderful menu for its high tea – *vadaï, bonda, poli, kasi halwa*, some species of *bhaji* and great coffee.

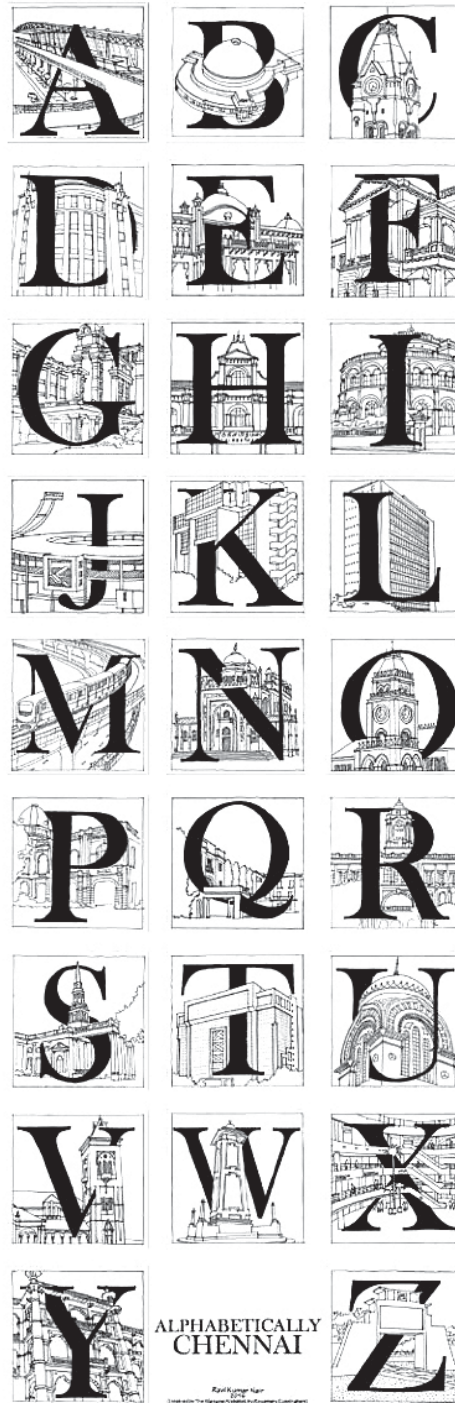
Wednesday 24/8/16

Karthik Bhatt called to say he addressed the Hindustan Chamber of Commerce on the history of Chennai. He was gifted with a toaster. An ideal present for the good Bhatt is shortly to enter the holy state of matrimony. He can now rule out toasters from the gifts list at the bridal shower.

I brooded quite a bit over the way the food vanished yesterday at the Crowne Plaza, the 80/20 rule being enforced – 20 per cent of the attendees hogged 80 per cent of the food and if I am not mistaken the plates and forks as well. I then came up with a strategy to handle the food riots this evening as and when they break out.

In the afternoon went to the beach to try the *Indian Express* bus ride. Came away unimpressed. The bus was shabby to begin with. It was hot inside and so I clambered to the open deck. Several others were there, including an MC who decided to make it the most cheapo event possible. There were too many hangers-on from the bus company, the newspaper and an eatery, all talking on cell phones and shouting instructions to each other. The obligatory Sri Krishna sweets packet and a bottle of water was given to us and the bus lurched off down the Marina service road. Half way past the Gandhi statue it reversed and came back to starting point. Nobody had a clue as to what was going on. I got off at the Gandhi statue and communed with the Mahatma for a while (he is my all time hero) and then drove off, a sadly disappointed but wiser man. It's a pity that such a good idea as that bus ride should have come unstuck in the execution.

In the evening went to Chamiers for Sadanand Menon's talk. The place was bursting at the seams even at 6.00 pm. By 6.30 it was getting fuller. I then put my food regulation plan into action. Having announced that refreshments were served I stationed myself with the serving staff and kept an eagle eye on how much each of the freeloaders was having. The Vulture tried his best to get a second cutlet but was quelled by a single look. The Gorilla for some reason abstained from eating. I guess all that hogging at the Crowne Plaza must have affected his stomach. Not so young as he was once, I suppose. In his heyday he could polish off high teas on all eight days with a rare élan and be none the worse for it. The camp one made eyes at me but to no avail. (See Short 'N' Snappy for more details.)



These posters on Chennai are by Ravi Nair, architect. In case anyone is interested, they may contact him at: ravinaair@yahoo.co.in or +91 98410 99944.



Showing the banners

The Inner Wheel Clubs of Madras circulated 12 banners to eight schools and then displayed them at Nageswara Rao Park during Madras Week.

Members were present during peak usage hours distributing sweets to visitors and telling them more about Madras. The response was encouraging. There were people doing spot jogging while reading the banners, people taking photographs for their children (and they were asked to bring their children – and many did).

Sushi Nataraj
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Some warm words

Former chief urban planner Arockia Doss calls me. To say how happy he is to see Madras Day flower and go places. He says he likes the fact that so many people are involved. And hopes it impacts on the city's major issues and projects. Doss was one of the bosses at CMDA and tried to accomplish a few things. Now retired and recovering from a painful spinal problem, he keeps a tab on the city from his bed.

It's encouraging when senior people appreciate the process called Madras Day.

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Buhari's & samosas

At Mount Road some one mentioned Buhari's and its mutton samosas on the sidelines of a recent Madras Week event. That is when I got to know that the famed samosas were being sold at all Buhari's outlets (there are lots of them now and mostly doing well).

But you had to get there by 4 p.m. I was driving past one in Adyar and it was 3.45 p.m. So we stopped by and picked up a pack - cost Rs. 65.

I recall the times in the 1970s when we gobbled them up at Buhari's on Mount Road – they were sold at 10 paise a piece, crunchy ones and filled to the edges with mutton. They are still tasty.

I had thought of hosting a Mount Road Walk this 2016 season. When I do it I start at *The Hindu* office gates and end at Buhari's or LIC. There are loads of stories here.

Vincent D'Souza

Love that place!

My love for Nungambakkam Railway Station and Sterling Road is increasing day by day. So much to look back: Loyola College, the interior roads off Sterling Road, and how Nelson Manickam Road subway was built in 1983!

Saranya Narayan and Usha Variyath Kumar unravelled the heritage of tree-laden Sterling Road which leads to Tank Bund Road and further to Nungambakkam Railway Station and beyond. People, institutions and memories were delightful fodder for this presentation.

Hitesh



Rao's one-man show

● One man who single-mindedly celebrates the city is civil engineer and philatelist D. Hemchandra Rao. He does all he can to design and produce a Special Postal Cover every Madras Day, keen to mark the day for posterity.

Often, Rao has to debate with the Postal Dept. and raise monies to do this.

This year, his cover is themed on the first lighthouse in Madras – atop a merchant exchange inside the Fort which is 220 years old this year.

Rao also released a set of My Stamps on the city's four lighthouses – great stuff for collectors.

You should get hold of a cover or a stamp. The cover costs Rs.70. Contact Rao at 98408 70172



Selfies during the Heritage Walk at High Court organised by INTACH, Chennai.



Food Walk organised by Sridhar V. at West Mambalam.



Marshall's Road, Egmore, walk led by Sudha Umashanker.



The walking experience

● This year, there were over thirty Walks during Madras Week, which only indicates that many more people are willing to research and curate walks, at least at this time of the year.

The city, though, does not have volunteers who offer Walks through the year, so tourists do not get to see the less known, or the other, side of the city.

The positive side about the Walks has been that many young people (see above) have been signing up to explore parts of the city.

And educational too – a young bunch of architects have curated their themed walks that explore Mylapore, which predates the city and is struggling to retain its old houses.



Tiripura Sundari (extreme left) of Nam Oor, Nam Veedu, Nam Kadhai and the group of walkers she led through the lanes of Aminjikarai.

● You do not need history-rich places to base a Walk on. Anything that reveals the area, the city, the town to curious people can make for an immersive tour.

So I wish we had more Walks in Chennai and more people who volunteer to research and curate Walks.

In recent times, this is happening. In small measure though.

Foodie Sridhar V. has curated half-a-dozen Food Walks. He not only takes people on Walks (he does not charge guests but you must pay for what you order and eat!) but also maps them so tourists and you and I can pick up the map and make your way to the food joints in Sowcarpet and in Mylapore.

Sreemathy Mohan continue her series on showcasing the textiles destinations in our city. The second in the series took place during Madras Week 2016.

Another Walk enthusiast, Kishore has shown interest in curating a Walk in Gandhi Nagar. In the past, senior residents of this area have hosted Walks in this area but only for a particular cause.

Kishore's interest was triggered by an old Gandhi Nagar layout map that was published on social media. We have chatted about recording social history here but I also hope he can curate a Walk.

We need to have at least 20 people who specialise in Walks in various parts of our city. More so in areas like Perambur and Royapuram, Vepery and Pallavaram.

Then, we will be able to showcase the less-known side of our city to people who want to know more about our histories.

– Vincent D'Souza



Textile Walk of T. Nagar: led by Sreemathy Mohan which included Pothys, RMKV and Sundari Silks.

Chennai authors and children get Odyssey space



On left, Odyssey's 'Author of Chennai' display at its entrance and, above, a children's drawing competition that it organised in progress.

Odyssey bookshop's Ashwin has done a great service for city-based writers. He showcased their books that are still in print at his Gandhi Nagar store during Madras Week.

And you could hear the 'oohs' and 'aahs' that the authors kept uttering at this promotion.

At a prominent space in the store, the tables occupied some 30 odd titles. Ashwin also offered a cloth bag that featured the covers of these books to shoppers who bought two books by Chennai authors.

And on some evenings, young writers were present chatting about their work.

Odyssey's Madras Week-long programmes included many events for children too.



An exhibition on Tirukkural by architect M. Dhanasekaran which was organised by Madras Literary Society... and a couple of the exhibits.



The youth choir reaches out



The Madras Youth Choir performed for Madras Week at Prathyasha, a home for HIV infected children run by Mellow Circle Choir. MYC taught the children a song Poo Vaenuma, which they performed.

An antiquarian and his trams

On the last day of a special exhibition on the trams of Madras, Winston Henry, antiquarian, is a busy man. He's showing people around an his exhibition but doesn't hesitate to answer a call from anyone interested in his collection. Chirpily, he begins to explain his tryst with trams in his nine years of collecting.

Buildings were done, books were done – it was time to find a new subject of study. "Old books held the key to photographs, maps and clippings of newspapers," he says. Access isn't easy, but Winston has an easy leg in thanks to years of collecting and running his heritage establishment – the W&H Book Search that houses 10,000 books.

Madras was, in 1895, the first in the country to have an electric tram system.



Above: A tram opposite the High Court, 1935. Top: A tram dating to 1940. Insert: A tram ticket stub from 1940. Pictures courtesy: Winston Henry.



Age no bar to knowing your trees

Nizhal – Friends of Trees organised several Tree Walks this year. In these two pictures, young volunteer Harshita is seen providing information about a Purasai tree during one of the walks.

Storytelling on the Marina and at the Saveria

The former with the Story Telling Institute and the latter with Jeeva Raghunath



The Asan Memorial School exhibition featuring the Keralites of Chennai.



Pictures from two of the many contests during Madras Week – above winners of the Multimedia Presentation Contest for City Schools conducted by Mylapore Times and, below, the winners of the INTACH Quiz.



The Armenians of Chennai, an exhibition at the Russian Cultural Centre during Madras Week.

