

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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September 16-30, 2016

Bracing for Civic Body polls

(By The Editor)

Our historic Corporation has seen the end of term of yet another elected council. The dates have not yet been announced for the civic body polls but the present elected body has, after a final three-day session, called it a day. This is certainly a good time to sit back and assess what has been done in the past five years, what could have been done and what needs to be done in the future.

The outgoing council has certainly not covered itself with glory. Much of its time was spent in masterly inactivity and when it did take action, it dealt with humdrum matters—renaming roads and colonies, promoting itself to a higher status by adding the prefix 'greater' to its name, masterminding the proliferation of budget canteens, covering potholes and ruts with an extra layer of tar and rejoicing over the installation of luminescent signboards for street names. It also, like several previous ones, embarked on a wholly unnecessary Marina beautification drive. There was good work done by the departments of education and health and parks were well maintained. But these have historically been well run, no matter which party held sway over the council. The one big initiative has been the effort to reclaim sidewalks, but this battle is not yet won.

We cannot disagree with our Worshipful Mayor when he blamed the citizenry for much of Chennai's ills. A newspaper report has it that on the last day of the council meet he held Chennai residents responsible for non segregation of garbage at source, open defecation, dumping of waste on streets,

construction debris and sewage pollution. Much of what he said was true but the council had five years to set matters right on several of these counts. That we are a truly indifferent lot is and was not unknown when the present incumbents took their oaths. So what prevented the council from taking action? Campaigns could have been launched in the mass media, stringent action could have been taken on defaulters and we could have had some concrete action plan for implementing segregation of waste at source in a phased manner. None of this happened. Why should the civic body just blame the citizenry?

Last year we had one of the most devastating floods that our

(Continued on page 2)



An MG at the vintage car display organised by the Madras Heritage Motoring Club during Madras Week. (Other Madras Week pictures are on pages 7-8.)

Will the Museum see better days?

(By a Special Correspondent)

There is a lot happening at the Government Museum complex at Egmore. The Government had announced that the Bronze, Amaravathi and Zoology galleries would be expanded to permanently display the reserve collection of the museum. The modifications, to cost Rs 80 lakhs, will be completed by December this year and the exhibits that are currently locked up will all see the light of day. This it is claimed, should increase the footfalls at the museum, which is currently one of the principal tourist attractions of the city.

While this is no doubt highly commendable, what is of concern is the background to this

decision. And that hides a malaise that the Government would do well to address. It is the practice among museums across the world to place on display only a percentage of their collection. The rest are kept in vaults to be brought out on a rota basis, thereby ensuring that the exhibits keep changing. This obviates monotony and encourages visitors to return to the museums. Of course, such a rotation policy does not apply to star exhibits, which are kept permanently on display.

The Madras Government Museum too follows the same policy, on paper. In reality however, it has not made changes to its display for over decades. As

a consequence, the artefacts in public view have remained the same while the rest have remained under lock and key for years, being opened up only to curators and research scholars. In short, the museum, for reasons best known to itself, has chosen not to rotate its displays. It is believed that what is in the showcases amounts to just about ten per cent of what the museum really has. The rest is more or less permanently out of bounds.

Rather than finding out why the museum chose not to energise itself by changing displays, the Government has opted to put up everything it has on to the showcases. On the one hand,

this means the priceless collection is at least in public view and therefore unlikely to be misplaced, lost, stolen or damaged. On the other hand, it simply means monotony at a very high level. There is only so much of history that the eye and the mind can absorb while on a visit to museums. How then is such a step likely to increase footfalls?

Ask any resident of Chennai, and more so the school-going children as to whether they ever visited the museum and the chances are you will get either a no or always meant to as an answer. That means the

(Continued on page 9)

Railway rants

You are Chennai-bound. On a train.

It slows down after Perambur. It crawls past Vysarpaadi. It passes Basin Bridge and moves into Chennai Central Station.

What do you see around you, outside the window?

Less of the pleasant, I'm sure we would agree. A polluted, stinking Buckingham Canal. Naked bums behind bushes. Scrubland. Scrubs growing between rail lines. Mounds of paper cups, plastic covers and newspaper sheets.

Welcome to Chennai that is Madras.

This is our city; we cannot hide it behind metal sheets. This is our city: we cannot spray jasmine-juices on the Canal. But surely, if this is the window to a city, something can be done to make the first sights welcoming.

I am taking a train from Bengaluru. I spot a Rail Gallery at the station. It is locked. It is lunch time.

I take the underground pass. On the walls, are what seem to be copies of artworks based on Indian Railways and life on trains and at rail stations.

They are worn out now. Some bear stains of spit. Some are folding in. When they were first fixed on these garish blue walls, they caught our attention. Not everybody who doubled up to Platforms 3 and 6 slowed down to glance at these wonderful visuals.

These visuals may not be of the Garden City but they have a place in a public space which welcomes scores of people every day.

As my train moves out of Bengaluru Central (the re-named name is a mouthful), I sight a long stretch of well-maintained shrubs on the outer front of the platform.

A soothing sight on a bright, sunny afternoon. I wonder if we can do something 'welcoming' outside Chennai Central.

Something that is simple, sustains and marks this city of ours. Perhaps, the least we can do is to keep this entry zone clean and tidy. And build washrooms for the communities who continue to ease themselves between rail tracks and shrubs.

I would also like Southern Railway to invite our young artists to express themselves on Chennai-based themes and paint on the walls of this rail station. Walls that can turn into art spaces and catch the eyes of tourists and travellers. Perhaps, curate a corner on Madras that is Chennai.

Getting state agencies to respond to community-driven collaborations tests our patience and dampens our enthusiasm.

Metro Rail enjoys communicating on its social media pages. But its officers and PR team go cold when we suggest such initiatives.

They want artists to be part of a food-mela-driven promo at Vadapalani when we suggest that they encourage a team of artists to sketch and watercolour scenes that appeal to them on the Koyembedu-Airport line.

These then could find a place inside the trains and on Metro platforms.

Why cannot we replicate this at Chennai Airport?

Its managers spend huge sums installing the dancing Nataraja bronze and talking to Poompuhar to showcase our crafts. Good.

But its managers can also invite the city's artists and photographers to paint or contribute works themed on our city, its colours, life, times...

The gateways to this city must showcase the city.

And involve its creative community.

And people must stop vandalising photos and artworks.

— Vincent D'Souza

CIVIC BODY POLLS

(Continued from page 1)

city has ever seen. A lot of the damage could have been avoided had we stuck to some basic planning and more importantly, the monitoring of what goes on by way of construction and open area encroachment. Our civic body sadly, did not respond the way it ought to have. Apart from making statements that such heavy rainfall had not occurred for over a century (which by the way is not correct) and therefore any civic administration would have been caught unawares, nothing much was done. Relief had to depend on citizen initiatives. The floods are a distant memory now. And in case you did not notice it, the road level outside your house has just risen by a

foot or so. Which means your residence is that much lower than the road. Which means next time it rains...

One significant development in the current tenure has been the State Assembly's decision that the people will no longer directly elect the Mayor. This ensures that the Mayor will not have a fixed tenure for five years and that also means that a non-performing Mayor can be shown the door in the middle of a term. Will such a step bring in more accountability? Will there be a greater emphasis on performance? Only time will tell. But whoever gets elected to that post is likely to have his/her hands full, if they want to make a decisive improvement in our city's quality of life.

More on Madras Week

Those of you who read *Madras Musings* regularly will not believe it but there was a rift within the lute between Chief and the *Man from Madras Musings* just when the Madras Week celebrations reached a crescendo. This rift by the way is an annual feature. And it was followed by another annual feature, namely the Kiss and Make Up, purely on a platonic scale of course. The difference of opinion arose mainly on the way Madras Week is conducted. The Chief is all for it becoming a mass event. Let the food predators prey is the Chief's point of view. Inclusivity is the name of today's game says Chief. MMM on the other hand...but never mind what MMM thinks. For his task is to report factually on what happens around him. And so, carrying on from the last issue, where MMM wrote on Madras Week events, here is MMM, writing on more Madras Week events.

"Is that MMM?" asked a fairly aged voice. It had the texture of something that had been preserved well in a cask. MMM replied in the affirmative. The voice then went on to say that it was well known in its day to which MMM made some vague noises for the area or should MMM say arena in which the hands and legs attached to the voice had made their name did not excite MMM in the least. Cricket, if not of the six-legged variety, does not appeal to MMM. The voice then asked if it was true that there was a programme celebrating the local lingo in the evening, to be presented by a well-known actor and trainer. MMM said yes. The voice then asked if it was for free to which MMM said yes too. The voice then thanked MMM and said that was good, for it, the voice, and its hands and legs, attended only free events. It then rang off before MMM could ask if the games that the voice, hands and legs played on the field where also open to all. Anyway, the ensemble of voice and limbs duly arrived in the evening and MMM, unable to resist the temptation, introduced the man to the speaker stating that this was the caller who wanted to know if the event of the evening was for free. While the actor/trainer was mightily amused for he gets by in life without an ego, the wielder of the bat (or it could have been ball), was not happy with MMM.

Lots more on Madras Week

Among the many friends that the *Man from Madras Musings* has is a prince among patrons who has a passion for collecting classic cars. These were put up on display at a hotel that belongs to the above prince and MMM was duly

invited. So was the Chief. And so was a grand panjandrum who though tiny of stature, packed enough of an ego to make himself a mountain. MMM was asked to be present by noon and so he did, to find Chief and several others also in attendance. Thereafter everyone remained in attendance for quite a while before panjandrum made his appearance. The story that was given out was that the official in question had arrived on time but had vanished into the vast corridors of the hotel. MMM, and certain members of the Press did not buy that story even for a moment. This man has come late for many events.

MMM's story however is not about the officer in question or the Chief's speech, which dwelt on the cars that he, the Chief, had possessed. MMM was rather struck by the Master of Ceremonies or in this case a Mistress, if that term can be pardoned. Anyway, just to

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

be on the safe side, MMM will refer to her as MC. She was one of those simple souls who evidently thought that asking ladeez und genman to give another round of applaaas every three sentences was all that was needed of an MC. The one thing she had going for her was that she was not of the other two kinds of dreaded MCs – the wisecracking variety or the highly knowledgeable category. This latter variety in particular is deadly for it constitutes itself as an extra speaker on the dais and extends the programme interminably.

To get back to our MC of the day – her introductions of the speakers (Chief, MMM and grand panjandrum in that order) were evidently cribbed from Wikipedia. She was also evidently reading them for the first time for she introduced the Chief as the founder of the Madras Book Cloob. The word club in MMM's view is easily pronounced but here was another school of thought. Or maybe she had a penchant for rhyming verse. But that paled into insignificance when compared to her insistence on the ladeez und genman giving another round of applaaas for everything the Chief did. Thus the Chief sat in his chair and here was the lady saying – he has sat down! Now ladeez und genman, please give him another round of applaaas.

Then came the presentation of the obligatory shawls and bouquets (the latter MMM delights in but as to the former, he is yet to figure out what can be done with them). And here was the woman again – Now ladeez und genman, please give him another round of applaaas. The Chief stood up

to speak and just as he was going to start, there was the MC asking everyone to give him another round of ... This went on, when the Chief sat down, (ladeez und genman, lets have another round of), when he was shawled and flowered, when MMM spoke, when MMM sat down and so on.

The upshot of it all was that by the time the grand panjandrum's turn came, everyone's hands had begun smarting. He was received with deathly silence. Not that it mattered to him at least by the length to which he spoke, reeling off statistics. And then, following a request for a hearty round of applaaas for the national anthem, the event wound to a close. The lunch that followed was superlative and to that MMM would like to add his own round of applaaas.

Still more...

Chennai is a city, Madras is an emotion – so runs a slogan that is regularly fished out each time Madras Week comes. It delights the pro-Madras gang and sets the teeth of the Chennai clique on edge. On a similar vein, Madras Week it appears is also some kind of an emotion. *The Man from Madras Musings* will not be surprised if there are still some events being conducted somewhere in the city. And why not? After all, we do not have any official record of ChenRas (MadNai does not sound nice) being founded on a particular date do we?

And so it was that MMM found himself, long after Madras Week was over, going to deliver a talk at the Temple of the Arts, founded by Auntie. MMM arrived after a long drive in the midst of pouring rain and then having shared an umbrella with a hostess of sorts, reached the venue. Inside was a densely packed throng of students, all sitting cross-legged, the only emotion on their faces, barring two or three, being of a dull resignation. MMM does not blame them. Imagine living in a wooded garden of Eden and the rains coming down heavily. What you then want is to sit in a verandah, enjoy the peace and have a hot cup of tea. You do not want to listen to a bald, bespectacled man going on about Madras.

MMM was duly handed a mic, which no doubt owing to the wet weather and dear Auntie not having bothered much about insulation, gave MMM a nasty shock. You should have seen the laughter that erupted among the audience. MMM put away the mic thereafter and relied on his own voice. The audience returned to its dull sense of resignation. It duly clapped at the end, no doubt out of a sense of relief. Oh by the way, no tea was forthcoming. Auntie, it transpired, was anti tea.

— MMM

Saving the Punjeri inscriptions

More on Tamizh Vaanan

Dr. G. Sundaram's letter on Tamizh Vaanan (MM, August 1st) kindled my own memories of *Kalkandu*. We (my brother and I) were regular readers of the magazine in the late forties/early fifties. The most anticipated feature in the magazine was the mystery thriller serial written by Tamizh Vaanan (TV) himself, called *Marma manidhan* (Mystery man). The story was about a mysterious criminal who used to move around totally covered in a shroud committing various offences including murder. The hero was a private detective by name Shankarlal (rather an odd name for hero of a Tamil story those days!) who assisted a not too bright police inspector called Wahab in the investigations (Shades of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson!). In one of the episodes Shankarlal was shot by *Marma manidhan* (again like Sherlock Holmes Vs. Dr. Moriarty) but due to popular outcry, Shankarlal had to be revived and the series went on. I still remember the last sentence of the final episode in which Shankarlal reveals the identity of *Marma manidhan* to Inspector Wahab "Aaam, *Sreedharan dhan Marma manidhan*" enraar Shankarlal. (In fact Sreedharan is *Marma manidhan*, said Shankarlal)

OUR ADDRESSES

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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 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint appoint you less.

– THE EDITOR



The new projected Punjeri rock with its inscriptions.

The Punjeri inscriptions chiselled on hard (granite) rock in the village of Punjeri (the rocks are locally referred to as Nondi Veerapan Kudiraitthotti) near the world heritage monument township of Mamallapuram, are in the archaic Tamil and Grantha (Pallava) script dating to the 7th Century C.E. This find, excavated in the 1930's, is the oldest relatable inscriptional evidence of those whom scholars now can refer as the artisans who probably worked on the famed monument.

An extract from the book *Inscriptions of the Pallavas* by T.V. Mahalingam, brought out by the Indian Council of Historical Research, records seven personal names, viz. Kevada Peruntaccan (the chief sculptor), Gunamallah, Payyamilippan, Catamukkiyan, Kaliyani, Abhajar of Tiruvorriyur and Kollan Semagan. These are the names of some of the artisans who, in the reign of the Pallava king Paramesvaravarman I, probably worked at the site and form a vital link in deciphering the life and times of the people in the region.

The widening of the East Coast Road, State Highway No.49, caused much concern to heritage lovers, as the inscribed rocks were only a little away from the highway, and any expansion would have certainly jeopardised them and other heritage protection work done in the area. This danger was first brought to the notice of Friends of Heritage Sites (FoHS), by K.T.Gandhirajan, a historian. FOHS brought the danger to the notice of Government officials and sought to save the inscriptions.

At a sculpture exhibition held in March 2015, to revive the Ajanta tradition that later evolved into the Pallava art form, and was aptly called 'Vichitrachitta', a title given to the Pallava king Mahendravarman I, FoHS highlighted the neglected condition of this horse-shoe-shaped rock, covered with foliage and garbage, and the road widening activities on the ECR. FOHS made representations to the Archaeological Survey of India, at both State as well as Central level, and to the Highways Department, bringing to their notice the impending damage to this vital heritage relic in the vicinity of the World Heritage Centre.

I also recall that TV used to humourously refer to himself as Tamizh Vannaan – 'The washerman of Tamil'!

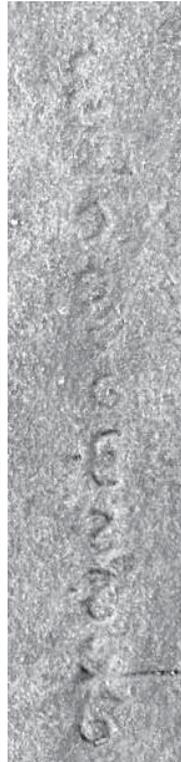
K. Balakesari
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Chennai 600 014

DPI Campus then

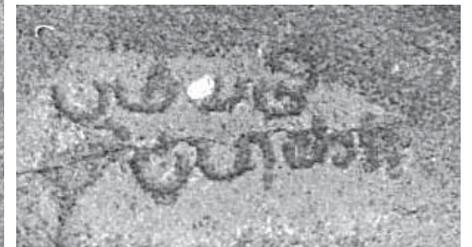
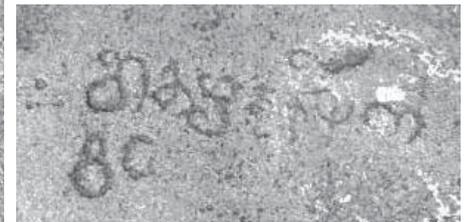
As I read the report about ADPI's Campus, I remembered my first visit there in 1949 as a student of Teachers' College. There used to be a lovely garden in the front and it has disappeared long back to make way for parking of vehicles.

There were three buildings in the huge campus besides the MLS Library Building. Behind the main building was the annex which the correspondent refers as housing UNICEF. The quarters for the DPI was at the far end on the banks of the canal.

When N.D. Sundaravadi-velu became DPI, he preferred to live in his own house. S.V. Chittibapu, the then Joint Director occupied the mansion. When the State Council of Educational Research and Training was established, DPI's quarters became its office, in spite of its unsuitability. The



CHITRA GOPINATH of **FRIENDS OF HERITAGE SITES** writes about the role the group played in helping save the Punjeri inscriptions just west of Mahabalipuram.



Some of the inscriptions.

A few weeks ago, the inscriptions were saved. The Highway has been moved so as not to disturb the site and the ASI has fenced the area. It was a pleasant surprise to see the proactive and forthcoming attitude of the departments involved after a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. We only hope there are better coordinating efforts in future by different governmental bodies, especially around heritage sites.

FoHS is a society working towards creating a social space for heritage enthusiasts, consolidating conservation of ecology in relation to heritage monuments and natural heritage sites by coordinating with government bodies, and working with local communities to enhance their livelihood. It generates awareness programmes to protect sites under threat of vandalism, and engages persons from all walks of life and the media to create a better ambience in and around heritage sites.

This NGO had its genesis in early 2014, when a few friends on a field trip in rural Tamil Nadu observed that there was very little that the local public knew when it came to understanding the value of a heritage monument or a site. There seemed to be scant regard shown to these monuments by the locals and a certain disconnect between those living near a heritage monument site and understanding of heritage per se. This disconnect and ignorance had, over time resulted in little care or value for the heritage around them and was quite often directly responsible for encroachments, vandalism and misuse of a heritage space. This divide, which shocked the group, was uppermost in their mind in wanting to start an organisation that would bridge the gap and bring about a better awareness and understanding of heritage among the locals who are the stakeholders in the upkeep of these monuments.

Acting on this 'FRIENDS of HERITAGE SITES' (FoHS), a society, was found in August 2014 by eight founder members.

– Chithra Gopinath

first new construction in the Campus was the office of the Examination wing of the Department later to become a separate Directorate in 1968. At the far end on the banks of the canal were some old buildings which were rumoured as the barracks of Lord Clive. Now a good number of buildings have come besides a Hindu Temple, a small church and prayer hall. The old world charm has been completely lost. Similar seems to be the fate of DMS Campus.

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Correct location

I would like to point out a small correction in the stretch mentioned about Cathedral Road. Cathedral road stretched from Mount Road (Anna flyover) to Music Academy. There was a round tana at this junction. From that point eastwards upto the erstwhile IG Office (now DGP Office) the road was called Edward Elliotts Road (present Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai) and St. Ebbas school was situated in this stretch and not on Cathedral Road.

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• During her Centenary...

Recalling MS and Tamil Isai

M.S. Subbulakshmi's crusade for Tamil Isai is a near forgotten chapter in her life. MS is remembered as the upholder of tradition, as a meek, unassuming, modest, super-conservative Indian woman of the old school. How interesting then to see MS in the role of a rebel! In the 1930s and 1940s, she found herself in the midst of an aggressive, no-holds-barred, controversy. Mind you, not on the side of Authority and Status Quo, but on the *other side of the fence!* In doing this, she even dared to oppose her own revered gurus and seniors.

Yes, M.S. Subbulakshmi joined the Tamil Isai Movement. Without her leading voice, the movement would have toppled quickly. Her musical satyagraha made a singular contribution, not to a language-driven agitation, but to Carnatic music itself, in a lasting and remarkable way.

MS was banned by the Madras Music Academy for five years, for singing Tamil songs in the major, first section of a concert. The Academy opposed the movement tooth and nail, even passing resolutions against Tamil Isai. After those five years, MS returned to the Academy on her own terms – she would not accept any restrictions of language or content. And the Academy mandarins accepted her on her terms, only because they feared competition from the rival *sangeeta sabha* that her husband Sadasivam was planning to launch. Moreover, they needed her benefit concerts to raise funds to build their own auditorium which now stands on Cathedral Road.

What was this Tamil Isai movement?

In the 1930s and 1940s, Carnatic music concerts consisted almost entirely of Telugu and Sanskrit compositions, and no Tamil song was ever heard in the first and serious half of a concert. In the post-*tani tukkada* segment, a *tevaram* or a *tirup-pugazh* might make a reluctant appearance, quickly smothered by songs from other languages.

A group of people in the Madras Presidency, many of them Tamil litterateurs like T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, along with wealthy music patrons from the Tamil-loving Nagarathar community of music patrons, thought that

their enjoyment of Carnatic music would be enhanced if some songs in the concerts were rendered in their mother tongue. They argued that Tyagaraja who lived in Tamil Nadu, composed in Telugu only because it came naturally to him as his mother tongue. So was it not equally natural to understand the desire in Tamil-born listeners for songs in their own language?

Incredibly, this simple request unleashed a frenzy of objections, acrimonious, even venomous. Their opponents denounced the singing of Tamil songs in the pre-*tani* stage as a sacrilege. Why? Some saw Tamil as a harsh, *kaattumirandi* (barbaric) language. Secondly,

Arul purivai karunai kadale, by Suddhananda Bharati, the nationalist poet and yogi. Listeners went into a trance when MS sang a rousing *viruttam* by Subramania Bharati which asked, "Is there a language as sweet as our Tamil in the entire world?"

MS knew of Subramania Bharati's warning that singing exclusively in a language that the listener did not understand would make Carnatic music lose ground in Tamil Nadu. She often heard Rasikamani T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar insist that neither singer nor listener could experience *rasa* without understanding the lyric.

• by Gowri Ramnarayan

they argued that the poor quality of Tamil compositions would demean Carnatic music.

The Tamils faction did not begin their fight demanding "Tamil only" in concerts. All they wanted was the inclusion of more serious Tamil songs, and only in concerts held in Tamil Nadu. But the Telugu faction feared that giving importance to Tamil songs posed a threat to the Mummoorti, The Trinity. If allowed entry, Tamil *kriti*-s would replace the gems of Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastry. "Down with Tamil!" became their slogan.

It is hilarious to note that the majority of the Tamil song "haters" were not Andhravadus or Kannada folk, but were themselves Tamil born. Many of these listeners knew no Telugu and less Sanskrit, but opposed their mother tongue Tamil on the Carnatic concert platform. The *vidwan*-s would say in robust Thanjavur dialect: "Sing Tyagaraja and you grip every ear. Try Tamil and the concert sags...."

But this myth was easily dispelled. All you had to do was to go to the Devakottai Tamil Isai conference (1941) and hear MS – in midnight blue *vairaoosi* sari with an *arakku* border, her blue jagger diamonds twinkling on ear and nose, jasmine crescent on her bichoda coiffure as fragrant as her *brigas* and *gamakas* – in the Hamsadhwani opener

It was one thing to demand Tamil Isai, but quite another to supply it. There were very few Tamil compositions going around with the finish of a Tyagaraja *kriti* or Syama Sastry *swarajati*.

The only Tamil compositions in *rakti ragas* which had *azhuttam*, depth, and *ghanam*, weight, belonged to a genre that was then confined to women singers. And though *vidwan*-s trekked to Georgetown to hear Veena Dhanammal and were awed by the musicianship of her daughters and grand-daughters, few men could rise to the challenge of singing a ripe *padam*. Also, few men wanted to give it a try as they disdained their *sringara* content and *devadasi* associations.

It must also be admitted that, unlike Kshetrappa's lyrical verses, Tamil *padam*-s mostly had pedestrian *sahitya*, often downright *kocchai* – vulgar, the lyric often absurdly out of sync with the noble music.

So MS found that opting for Tamil Isai also meant exploration and discovery. She had to develop a brand new repertoire of compositions with dignity in thought, emotion, language and *raga*. She began to spend whole days in searching, learning, polishing, fine-tuning a wide range of concert-worthy compositions. After all Tamil Isai's goal was to prove that Tamil could go beyond mere *bhajanai*, it



could be as euphonious as *sundara* Telugu, its content as uplifting as a Tyagaraja *kriti*.

Not easy! But since her partnership with Sadasivam had widened her world, she had writers and connoisseurs to suggest new lyrics. Kalki quickly wrote a song for her with *niraval* possibilities – *Vandadum solai tanile*. With TKC's advice, some very special songs were brought to the Bharata Natyam stage for the first time.

Why did so many experts and heavyweights see the demand for Tamil *sahitya* as a death knell for Carnatic music? The Music Academy stalwarts even tried to pass rules to stop the new disease – "Tamil *vyadhi*". The *Hindu* wrote leaders condemning the Tamil demand. You wonder how all these people could have been so deaf and blind to Papanasam Sivan, lovingly called Tamil Tyagayya. Sivan's compositions strengthened Tamil Isai immeasurably, especially as he was so prolific and offered such a fantastic choice of *raga* and theme.

Sivan composed enchanting songs for the only four films in which M.S. Subbulakshmi acted between 1939 and 1947. Some of them have become part of the Carnatic music treasury.

Funnily enough, in espousing the Tamil Isai cause Sadasivam, Kalki and MS found themselves in an unexpected political dilemma. Affiliated to the Indian National Congress and devoted to the Mahatma's ideals, on the Tamil Isai cause alone they found themselves on the same side as Justice Party stalwarts like Raja Sir Anna-

malai Chettiar and Shanmugam Chetty who favoured British rule in India. Worse, the pro-Telugu faction was mostly sympathetic to the Congress.

Even more strangely, no one found this alliance-switch in and for a cultural cause, strange or unethical. Can India today boast of such ruthless honesty?

Tamil Isai, however, continued to suffer from scarcity of songs. Kalki attends Annamalai University's three-day Tamil Isai conference hoping that Tamil only concerts would have unearthed a huge variety of Tamil compositions. But his glum guide tells him that he heard the same songs in every concert; moreover, most *vidwan*-s mangled the words beyond linguistic identification!

An opponent taunts Kalki, "Why do you need new *kriti*-s? Why not simply chant *Tevaram* and *Tiruvachakam*?" The contempt is evident as these songs were innocent of classical *kriti* ornamentations. Almost as a reply, the MS concert at the Tamil Isai Vizha featured Manickavachakar's exquisite devotional verse as the main piece. The question was, could this short lyric accommodate panoramic classicism?

Despite his misgivings about Tamil Isai, guru Semmangudi came to the rescue and set the piece in a Sankarabharanam – rivalling *Saroja dala netri* or *Swararaga sudha* in grandeur. And in this piece MS absolutely outdid herself. (Courtesy: *Sruti*)

• Remembering MS

A concert that led to a loss



It was a grand concept: to commemorate the centenary of M.S. Subbulakshmi, to set up a chair in her name at an American university and also to raise resources for expanding the charitable activities of Sankara Nethralaya (SN). But poor execution resulted, unfortunately in a substantial deficit.

The music icon A.R. Rahman was presented as the second Indian music maestro to perform at the UN. He graciously offered to perform free of cost. But his omnibus orchestra cost the sponsors a huge sum.

On August 15th, as part of the 70th Independence Day celebrations, they performed at the United Nations' sprawling auditorium. Thanks to the Indian Mission at the UN, around 1600 enjoyed the performance of this Oscar-winning musical icon of India. Sankara Nethralaya (SN) jointly presented the concert with the UN. Rahman rendered several of his popular songs from Tamil and Hindi films, his evocative *Vande Mataram*, *Jai Ho* and also a few Sufi music compositions. The immortal compositions of the Kanchi Paramacharya, *Maitreem Bajatha*, and Rajaji's *Kurari Onrum Illai* were rendered by the grand-niece of Dr S.S. Badrinath, Chairman-Emeritus, Sankara Nethralaya, who conceived this grand programme to commemorate the centenary of music maestro M.S. Subbulakshmi (MS) as well as her landmark concert at the UN 50 years ago in 1966.

During my visit to the US in June I heard impressive plans about this celebration. The Sankara Nethralaya Ophthalmic Mission Trust (SN OM Trust), headed by Dr. K.S. Vasan and based in Houston, had ambitious plans: to present, apart from Rahman, musicians Sudha Raghunathan and Bombay Jayashree for a series of concerts spread across six cities culminating at the UN on October 2nd (Jayashree later withdrew and the UN would not present Sudha at a UN-sponsored concert) and Zubin Mehta with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at the Lin-

coln Centre in New York on November 5th.

The objective was to reach out to the prosperous Indian diaspora in the US, providing the NRIs soulful music as well as to raise resources for SN. Letters were sent to prospective donors requesting sponsorships of eye surgeries at SN. The good work of SN has been known in the US. SN OM Trust has already been raising resources from the NRIs.

The prospect of a second musician from India presenting a concert at UN after 50 years was, of course, exciting. However, sadly, there was a stark contrast between the two. For the MS concert, the initiative was taken by the then UN Chef de Cabinet, C V Narasimhan,

composers and on MS and her music accompanists, down to the minutest detail.

Media in the US and in India provided extensive publicity to this landmark event. The concert was broadcast extensively and received wide acclaim.

I was struck by the stark contrast: Rahman's concert was jointly presented by the UN and SN. There was the absence of senior bureaucrats from South India at the UN or the Indian Embassy, familiar with Carnatic music or MS's works. Surprisingly, communication with the

There was also the absence of prominent NRIs who are glittering business icons in the US, many of them from South India, familiar with MS and Rahman: Indira Nooyi, Chandrika Tandon, Sundar Pichai, Satya Nadella and scores of celebrities in academe and the medical profession. Leaders like Bill Gates and Bill Clinton with vast interests in India, friendly Senators and Congressmen could have lent their weight. The UN Secretary General Ban-ki-Moon was absent. All this led to less being collected and more spent.

I also felt disappointed that a great opportunity to present Rahman to thousands of music lovers in and around New York should have been missed. Like

presenting Rahman in another concert at a prominent public place like Central Park in New York, offering his music thousands of music lovers.

Another thought: I remember MS and Sadasivam providing hundreds of benefit performances to support a vast range of social causes. It used to be a standard feature in the Tamil weekly *Kalki* (promoted by Sadasivam, MS and R Krishnamurthy) the notices mentioning *MS udavum sangeetha kutcheri* (MS rendering a benefit performance) to help raise fund for numerous social causes. Rahman can emulate MS in such an *udavum sangeetha kutcheri* for SN. (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*)

• by S. Viswanathan

ics. It was sponsored by the UN with its full involvement. Narasimhan was well-versed in music, an ardent fan of MS and learnt it under maestros like Musiri Subramania Iyer and MS. He ensured the presence of UN Secretary General U Thant as well as that of hundreds of other luminaries.

The other plus factor was the brilliant leadership of MS's husband T. Sadasivam in planning, publicising and presenting the concert with elan. With meticulous care TS-MS planned the concert with a rich repertoire of compositions. The Kanchi Paramacharya specially composed *Maitreem Bajatha* on world peace. This became an hit and a household song in the South. Rajaji composed another English song in Western music set to tune by that maestro Handel Manuel. There was a rich variety of compositions including those from the great composers of Carnatic music – Thyagarajar, Muthuswami Dikshithar, Shyama Sastri and Purandara Dasar, besides a *Meera Bhajan* in Hindi.

The team at *Kalki* and musicologists worked diligently to produce rich background material on the compositions, their

numerous Tamil Sangams, Telugu Associations and Kannada Koota were poor. These South Indian communities are prosperous sections of the US society, educationally and culturally strong and their members occupy senior positions and leadership in industry, government, academe and professions. They form the creamy layer of American society.

The UN programme precluded pricing tickets for admission. The seating provided for 2000, half of these reserved for the UN. Rahman required a large stage, specially built with hi-tech gizmos that demanded extra space and considerable cost. This devoured in the process some 400 seats. The 800 seats made available to SN needed to go to traditional donors which further curtailed the scope for fresh donations.

Rahman may have offered his services free. But there was heavy expenditure incurred on his 80-strong orchestra and singers by way of cost of airfare, stay in star hotels for four nights, local transportation and food. The large stage, lighting, acoustics and other paraphernalia demanded another large sum.

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

1. In an innovative first, the Union Government has signed a MoU with Amar Chitra Katha to publish and distribute a comic book on which of its ambitious initiative?

2. President Barack Obama recently gave assent for the creation of the largest ecologically protected area on the planet (582,578 square miles of land) when he expanded the Papahānaumokuākea national marine monument. In which US State is it?

3. Which Indian's London Olympics bronze medal was recently upgraded to silver?

4. Name the four athletes decorated with the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna on August 29.

5. Name the Indian-origin former Singapore President, who held that office from 1999 to 2011, who passed away recently aged 92.

6. Which Indian actor has been chosen for the prestigious Chevalier de L'Ordre Arts et Lettres?

7. The maiden flight of the world's longest aircraft (92m long) happened in Bedfordshire on August 17. Name it.

8. President Pranab Mukherjee recently launched AIR's Akashvani Maitree to showcase the culture and heritage of which neighbouring nation?

9. With a view to create a global-size bank, SBI has approved the merger of its five associate banks and which other bank with itself?

10. Laljibhai Patel, a diamond baron and from Surat recently set a world record for a suit by paying a whopping Rs 4.31 crores. Who made news last year by wearing this suit?

* * *

11. On Harris Road (Adithanar Salai) in Pudupet, there is a rundown market in the peerae name of Robert Bourke. How is he known to us?

12. When Madras was elevated to a Presidency in 1684, the person who took charge is famous worldwide in academic circles. Name him.

13. Which star-daughter/wife, a resident of Chennai, has been made an 'United Nations Women's Advocate for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India'?

14. Name the new DGP of Tamil Nadu.

15. In which coastal stretch in the city is the Corporation planning to plant 2000 three to five feet tall palm trees to reduce the impact of natural calamities and soil erosion?

16. Which bustling area of Chennai was once called Jinachintamani Chaturvedimangalam?

17. If it is 100 for police and 108 for ambulance service, what does 104 cater?

18. How did the Periyavadagampatti village in Salem district make sporting headlines recently?

19. The English got the grant for which three villages in Madras from Aurangzeb in 1693?

20. Why is October 12, 1785 a significant date in the history of Madras journalism?

(Answers on page 10)

The Jesuits and Dhyana Ashram

Jesuit history in Madras began in 1545. But who are the Jesuits? The Jesuits are the members of the Society of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, in Spain, in 1540. Ignatius, a soldier was wounded fighting the French. It is said that when he was convalescing he read a book *The Golden Legend* in Spanish (*Aurea Legenda* or *Legenda Sanctorum*), a christianised version of the Buddhist legend. Now parallels are being drawn between Buddhist and Ignatian spirituality.

The first Jesuit to arrive in India was Francis Xavier and the Jesuit connection with Madras begins in 1545, when Francis Xavier visited Madras and stayed in San Thomé for four months with Fr. Gaspar Coelho, a Portuguese priest. As Xavier himself says, he came here to pray at the tomb of St. Thomas to get guidance for his further course of action, as to where he should proceed next. His biographer Schurhammer records details of his stay in San Thomé and the conversation he had with the Portuguese priest.

At the request of the local people, Francis Xavier sent Fr. Alphonso Cyprian, a Jesuit, to Mylapore in 1547. He stayed at the San Thomé Church with another priest working for the Portuguese community. Then, when the new church was built within the walls of San Thome fort in 1575, two Jesuits well-versed in Tamil and Telugu served the local community.

As the Christian population grew, a new church was built by the Portuguese outside the Fort. This church was dedicated to Madre-de-Deus (Mother of God) and was blessed by Fr. Alessandro Valignano S.J. on September 8, 1576.

The Church of Madre de Deus was rebuilt and extended to reach the Periya Palli Street, on the eastern side. There is a tradition that Roberto de Nobili came and spent his last days here (1648-1656) and lies buried "somewhere in the area." A college was also started by the Jesuits under the patronage of the King of Vijayanagar. This was probably located at the present site of Bon Secours Convent in San Thomé'.

* * *

A major event in the history of the Jesuits was their suppression in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV under political pressure.

The Order was restored in 1814 by Pope Pius VII. It survived during the period in Russia, since Catherine the Great refused to promulgate the edict of the Pope in Russia.

These events took place in Europe, but the Madras Government records mention the event. Frank Penny in his book *The Church in Madras* records: "In 1764 the Jesuits were expelled from France and their property was confiscated. By the same law it became illegal equally to exist in Pondicherry. It was well-known on the coast that the Jesuits had deposited 20,000 pagodas with the Fort



The old Madre-de-Deus Church.

reads as follows: "Our Lady of Guidance Church speaks:

"I was formerly known as the church of St. Lazarus. I was built by the Jesuits (Cf. Fr. Rebeiro). I was built up as a chapel in 1581. Manuel Madra and his mother extended me. Bishop A.X. Texeira dug the foundation to rebuild me and I was renovated in 1928. Sacred

Ribeiro, who styles himself repeatedly a Jesuit, though apparently he was not a Jesuit. They contained likewise autobiographical musings and instructions about coconut-gardening, by the same Padre, who was in charge of Madre de Deus from February 1839 to May 1853, when he died".

Fr. Hosten investigated practically every inscription on the tombstones of the Mylapore area (386 in all), in the churches and on the statues. At the end of the chapter on the inscriptions he says that "not to swell unduly the size and expense of this volume we [with]hold over about 200 comparatively modern inscriptions, mostly in English, from the General Cemetery of Quibble Island". The inscriptions are in Arabic, Armenian, Latin, Greek, Portuguese, Sanskrit and Tamil.

* * *

In 1952, when the two dioceses were amalgamated as the Madras-Mylapore Diocese, Archbishop Louis Mathias, a Salesian, SDB, invited the Jesuits to look after the spiritual welfare of the diocese giving the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. This was the beginning of the Dhyana Ashram community (25, Madha Church Road, San Thomé) developed around the Madre de Deus church. Some of the better known Jesuits who worked in this centre were Frs. Albert Muthumalai, Claude Krishnamurthy, and Lawrence Sundaram.

In the place of the old church, a new church was built and blessed on February 11, 1999. What was rescued from the old church were the altar piece in wood and an old statue of Mother Mary in stone which is kept outside, which looks like the Black Madonna, but it is not, since the Black Madonna usually is presented together with the Child Jesus. It must be of local origin, if you observe the head crown, which is unusual in the Western tradition of Mother Mary.

(To be concluded)

● by Dr. Anand Amaladss

St. George Government for the benefit of their China Mission. That was confiscated. The Madras Council appealed to the directors at Pondicherry what they should do with them. The French Ministry put aside this question." But when the Pope abolished the Society of Jesus, the Madras Government had to deal with the property of the Jesuits in their territory.

There were two aged priests living in the Church of Madre de Deus, outside the walls of the St. Thomas Shrine. The Bishop of Mylapore (Frey Bernard) wrote to the Governor on May 15, 1775, "If your Honour should judge that the above-mentioned French fathers should remain with the administration of the Parish house, the Garden and also that I should not read in the Church to anyone of my flock the Bull which I have received of the Total extinction of the Religious Order denominated of the Society of Jesus, I should readily thereby comply..." The Portuguese priests took over the Madre de Deus Church.

At the time, the chapel of Our Lady of Guidance (now known as the St. Lazarus Church situated opposite Fore-shore Estate) as well as the Chapel of Visitation (situated on St. Mary's Road) were attached to the Madre de Deus Church as its sub-stations.

There are three inscriptions on the wall of the Church of our Lady of Guidance. One of them

Congregation of Rites by its Rescript dated 26.2.1954 decreed that I should in future be known as "Nossa Senhora de Guia", (Our Lady of Guidance).

"I have a sister Church in Shibpur (Bengal) known as Our Lady of Guidance Church."

It has been said that the site occupied by the East India Company had been colonised by fisherfolk from the Parish of Madre de Deus and the emigrant fisherfolk called their village by the name of their Parish. The name was eventually corrupted to 'Madras'. Glyn Barlow in his book *The Story of Madras* comments. "The origin of the name Madras is uncertain and the explanation is at any rate interesting and not unlikely to be true."

* * *

Fr. Henry Hosten (1873-1935), who wrote *Antiquities from San Thomé and Mylapore* (1924, 1936) writes, "Madre de Deus having been for two centuries under the management of the Jesuits, I made a special study in 1921 of its three oldest Baptism Registers... By means of these Registers I determined the incumbents and the time of their incumbency from January 1789 to May 1853. The oldest marriage register goes from Nov. 27, 1819 to Nov.7, 1883; the oldest register of burials from July 12, 1818 to December 28, 1885.

"These registers contained also some valuable historical notes by Padre Mariano Luis

Two pages recalling a celebration

Sriram V's Madras Week Diary

Aug 27, 2016

In the evening we had R. Mohan speaking on *Cricket in Chennai*, as part of the *Madras Musings* lecture series. This was at Hanu Reddy Residences, Poes Gardens. The talk was very good, the venue phenomenal. I never knew that such an excellent set of serviced apartments existed in this area. The auditorium was top class.

Probably because of the forbidding address or because it was not a five-star hotel, the freeloaders were conspicuous by their absence. I had, of course, called the hosts and asked them to tone the food down to a minimum.

R. Mohan had all his facts at his fingertips. There was lots of humour. Among those we had at the event was Mrityunjaya Singh, grandson of Vizzy of Vizianagaram, and so he was the obvious choice to present our memento to the speaker.

Aug 28, 2016

This was a killer of a day. Three events, all involving change of wardrobe, it being a horribly muggy day. There was, besides, no afternoon nap, which means the week will be crabby.

In the morning went to Tag Centre, for the release of Randor Guy's book, *Memories of Madras*. He is one my mentors, one of the four Rs, the others being S. Rajam, K.V. Ramanathan and V.A.K. Ranga Rao. Sadly, two are no more and I miss them. Besides these, there is of course the Mega M – S. Muthiah.

Randor Guy and I have been great friends since the time I heard him first speak on the lawyers of Mylapore at the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation sometime in 1996. A man with a wicked sense of humour, he has imparted much info on Chennai to me, a lot of it unprintable. Now I don't get to see or speak to



him as often as I would like to. He spoke at the book release and had the audience in splits. The old fire still lingers.

Went to the new Hotel Turyaa on OMR at lunchtime where my friend Ranjit Pratap, celebrated Madras Week helping with a display of vintage and classic cars organised by the Madras Heritage Motoring Club. The exhibits were great. The Chief and I spoke on the occasion, he on some lesser known cars of the city, including his Lanchester, and I on the companies that grew to become industrial houses from beginnings in car trade. There are plenty of that kind in Chennai – Simpson's, Addison's, Rane, TVS and UCAL being some. Even Ranjit's Rayala Corporation began as Rajagopal Motor Works, started by his grandfather. Got to know of several more from interactions at lunch with the knowledgeable and passionate audience. There could have been a better MC. She kept referring to S. Muthiah as Subbiah Muthiah and me as Venkatakrishnan Sriram (I realise that Wikipedia is responsible for this) and also said the Chief founded the Madras Book Club, whatever that is. She also wanted the audience to give a round of applaas for every sneeze, burp and whatever else.

Back home at 3.30, it was time to get on with some work and then, ho, to The Park for the last (yippee) of the *Madras Musings* lectures for the year. T.N. Venkatesh, IAS and MD of Co-optex had us all eating out of his hands with his brilliant presentation on the company. The staff had taken pains to study the venue two days earlier and so made good use of the space to display their wares, including some rare pieces – Kodaligaruppur sarees worn by Thanjavur royalty, Muppagam sarees worn by *devadasi*-s, the *sadir* saree worn at dance performances, a brocade shawl that was a duplicate of what was gifted to Leonid Brezhnev and several others.

This being the last of the lectures, the freeloaders had to stock up for the rest of year and so their behaviour was at its worst. Much grabbing, snatching, pushing, shoving and per-

How do we celebrate Madras Week

● How do you celebrate a city? With pomp and zero rules. Everyone does it his or her own way. And this year, this translated into a plethora of varied events. There were walks for the differently-abled, play themes for the elderly, storytelling sessions for children and more. There was even a talk on temples in Vietnam, which seemed like an unusual topic. SRIRAM V. explained, "We did wonder about it, but then S. Muthiah made a point: this is the place from where temple building went across the seas – the Cholas left from Tamil Nadu and introduced the Hindu culture to places like Indonesia and Vietnam. So, in a way, it is also a celebration of Madras."

Under the gopuram

We visit temples, but how many of us notice the inscriptions on the walls? At the Marundeeswarar Temple, the workings of the Chola administration, like tax collection, are detailed. There is much to discover, says Pradeep Chakravarthy, a history buff who runs Mystical Palmyra, a portal that organises heritage tours. "Did you know there was a thriving Jain population in Tiruvanniyur back then?"

There were also games like *aadu puli aattam* etched on the floor of the temple and his group learnt how to play them, with some help from Kreed Games' Vineetha Siddhartha.



Traditional games at Ashwita Bistro, organised by Kreed.

Kanchipuram because it has the Varadaraja Perumal Temple and the Ekambareswarar Temple. The houses also still retain the old flavour, with *thinnai* and *thalvaram*," she said.

Port of call

For the last five years, on one day of the year, the general public has the freedom to amble through much protected Chennai Port Trust. That is when Sriram V conducts his heritage walk. "When the harbour's construction began in 1875, it was classified as one of the greatest challenges man faced against nature. It's a story of hard work, sacrifice, foresight, politics and more," he says. He urged his group to spot surviving symbols (like the foundation stone), related how the port helped mathematician S Ramanujan, and how it even featured in the slave trade.

Forgotten paths

Architect Thirupurasundari Sevel didn't understand why heritage buffs never highlighted suburbs like Anna Nagar, when it also has a lot of history. So her organisation, Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai, conducted walks in "neglected" parts such as the narrow lanes of Aminjikarai. "Did you know it's also called Mini

Hit the water

Last year's floods brought the sorry state of our marshlands into focus. While government action is a matter of debate, the Madras Naturalists' Society is continuing with its efforts to spread awareness. It conducted walks to the Perumbakkam Tank and the Kelambakkam backwaters. "It focused on how these water bodies sustain vibrant eco-systems, recharge the water table and help prevent floods," G. Vijay Kumar, its Secretary stated.

British footprints

You'll find plenty on the British in Madras on Wikipedia and in books. But there's something to be said about the information being presented to you as stories. Vijay Kamalakar, the founder of Storytrails, led two walks that talked about the British and how their rule impacted the city. "Stories are an interesting way to look at

(Continued on page 8)

haps groping as well. A.S. Diwakar was lucky to get a glass of water. Tulsi Badrinath had coffee spilt on her saree and I think that was the nearest she got to the food. The Owl, who is also known as the Camp One, tried to snatch a cup from a passing waiter and in

the process nearly upset all the crockery the man was carrying. Had I not been there to hold the lot, *Madras Musings* would have had a hefty damages bill. The man who has a crush on Sushi took a selfie with her on the sly.

Veteran journalist S. Viswanathan of *Industrial Economist* did the honours by presenting our music-loving Venkatesh a book on Semmangudi. After the talk many wanted to take photos with the speaker. I asked him if he can make as passionate a presentation on say cement as he did on Co-optex. He merely smiled but I think he can. There is no limit when you have a passion for excellence. May there be more of his kind.

And so, ladies and gen'men, lets conclude with a round of applaas!



A Madras Week thought

Events are aplenty now and they overlap. But little can be done to draw a calendar because the events are planned by volunteers according to the time and space they can mark/spare for Madras Week.

Some suggest that it is time the events are spread across August.

Perhaps, audio recording all talks, and posting them online would help 'broadcast' the talks since many of them are on interesting themes.

The Vysarpadi fest

There were small efforts that popped up across the city this year. Like the talk on 'Sterling Road Histories' hosted by two women who have lived long years in that area.

They even got a senior Railway family, who live in a colonial bungalow on the Railways' sprawling property on this road in Nungambakkam, to interact with them.

These bungalows are bound to go some day soon, unless there is a quiet campaign that reaches the Union Railway Minister, to save them and restore them and give them a new life.

The big effort was in the north Madras area of Vysarpadi where a few people joined hands with volunteers and social workers and linked up with other city groups to highlight the good things of life there.

The community had thought of this event to showcase the plus points of

Vysarpadi which is often in the news for gore, crime, scandals and gangs.

The events may have been small and simple, but they launched what could be an annual Vysarpadi Celebration.

Sadly though, this year too there were very few events in north Chennai.

Smart Chennai

United Ways Chennai had 130 schools of the city doing some amazing work, pondering and giving us a way forward to solve the City's problems.

Wish the City Mayor and the Councillors were there to pick some inputs and answer their questions on a better upkeep of the city.

Time these boys and girls practised a lot of what they projected and got their families to follow. – (Photos: Ramana Varakur Srinivasan.)



The participants of 'Smart Chennai'.

Controversies & cheap jibes

Controversies have enveloped the Madras Day process from the time the idea was floated.

Are you pro-British? Are you saying the area we call Madras/Chennai did not exist before 1639?

Are you celebrating white men who took Indian blood and suck us to this day?

Why not Chennai 2000 Plus?

The last mentioned is an idea circulated by a senior journalist who seems to run a Trust – Chennai 2000 Plus.

Debates are always welcome.

As long as they are civil and don't cross unwritten borders.

Sadly, many who blow hot and cold have not even celebrated the city in some way.

Now, there are people who are hitting below the belt. Mails are being sent to newspapers and people casting aspersions on the 'catalysts', calling the name of Jesus and Good Friday into arguments filling in the mail boxes.

– Vincent D'Souza



Veera Santhanam with film maker Gita.



Sir Sivaswamy Kalalaya School NSS celebrate Madras Week with a campaign for a better Madras.

CELEBRATING MADRAS WEEK

the social histories behind buildings and monuments as these were built by real people, driven by human emotions," he said, explaining his two walks, first from the Gandhi statue on Marina Beach to the War Memorial, and the second from Beach Station to the Fort.

Blooms and trunks

The lofty trees that line our roads are often overlooked, unless it's noon and we need the shade. But Nizhal, the organisation that promotes 'tree culture' in urban spaces, made sure we don't forget them or how fast they are disappearing. This year, their walks focused on landmark trees, "old (some over 90 years) and rare trees that are irreplaceable," according to Shobha Menon, one of the Trustees. At the Kotturpuram Tree Park, a dump yard that Nizhal converted into a forest, children who volunteered led the walk, while Shobha led the walk at

Nandanam where "plant artist" O.P. Ravindran lived. "He planted some rare trees, like the Ashoka and the Purasu (Flame of the Forest), and I focused on them and stories about him," she adds.

Word power

Cinema isn't just about his trionics; language is key, too. And one of the interesting elements of Tamil cinema is its use of Madras bhashai. "This is the slang spoken in the city, one which has evolved over the years and includes a number of words from other languages, like Hindi, Telugu, Urdu and Sanskrit," according to actor V. Mohan Raman, who focused on this unique language in his talk this year. He traced its origin and how actors and comedians used it in films, right from the 1930s to today. Raman feels that an actor who has mastered the art of Madras bhashai is Kamal Haasan. "In Vasool Raja MBBS, he used it flawlessly."

Through her eyes

Dancer Chandralekha's connection with Chennai was a long one, but arts editor Sadanand Menon condensed it in his talk, focusing on two aspects. "He presented a poem she wrote between 1968-69, on Madras and how it influenced her. It has since been published in a book called *Rainbow on the Roadside*.

He then got more anecdotal – talking about her coming to the city, learning Bharat Natyam and her experiences while living here (from 1950-2006). "She chose to settle down here because she always said this city lets you be," says Menon, adding "The dancer is still relevant today and her mantra – to be true to yourself – affected all those who met her". He also recalled that she was an enthusiastic Scrabble player. "If there was a Scrabble world championship, she'd win". – (Adapted from an *Indian Express* report.)



A walk along the Marina with storytrail.



S. Anwar and walkers during a heritage walk at Amir Mahal.

Madras madness in 20th Century US

If I were to create an Ivy-inspired urban myth, I would spin a tale of how the first Yale man to wear a Madras shirt was old Elihu himself and how Madras money built Yale.

"While no one knows why preppies are so attracted to Madras," *Esquire* once wrote, "it is a matter of record that Elihu Yale was once Governor in Madras and included five bolts of the fabric in his initial endowment to the University." This story was first told in a 1960 Hathaway shirt advertisement and was the product of David Ogilvy and his minions of Mad Men. An overly investigative personality might wonder if these five bolts are the ones described as "five pieces of plain muslin" in the 'History of Yale' provided by The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Connecticut.

Journeying back to the turn of the century, Madras in plain and striped varieties was known to the American customer. The 1897 Sears Roebuck & Company catalog list Madras shirts for sale, and the *New York Times* in November 1919 reported a Madras shirt shortage.

Esquire reports that Madras first appears in the fashion pages in 1937, noting swim trunks being seen in South Hampton, Long Island, and Newport, Rhode Island. Madras was definitely known to the New Haven haberdashers of the time, who sold it as resort wear. One example is Madras swim trunks sold at J. Press in 1939. It has been widely believed that Americans visiting the British West Indies at the time brought back this look.

As a resort wear phenomenon, some of the credit can be given to the Bermuda Athletic Association, which invited Ivy League rugby teams to a tournament in 1935. The pilgrimage became so popular that charter

flights for students would be booked and advertised in the student newspapers. The students returned to campus with new wardrobe items and a taste for island revelry. *Life* magazine predicted in 1948 that students accustomed to coming down over break would return again for their honeymoons.

Instrumental in the spread of resort wear were the island outfitters: stores like Trimmingham's, Smith's and the English Sports Shop. These places were the source for proper Bermudas, Shetland

● Contributed by **CHRISTOPHER SHARP** to the magazine *Ivy Style* in 2011 and sent to *Madras Musings* recently by a reader living abroad.

sweaters and everything Madras. The resort trend fueled an interest in Madras through the postwar 1940s. A glimpse at the future 1950s Madras scene appeared in the December 5, 1949 issue of *Life Magazine*. In that issue they feature Robert Smith in East Hampton wearing a plaid Madras shirt, and a bare-chested, pipesmoking Pierre S. du Pont III sporting a pair of plaid Madras swim trunks on Fisher Island.

Madras would continue to make its rise in the 1950s. The fledgling *Gentry* magazine would feature Madras swim trunks in 1952. The summer 1953 issue features the Madras blazer. The editors write "Cotton Madras from India, the multicolor plaid-patterned fabric with a faded look, popular in sports shirts and swim trunks, now makes its appearance in another hot-weather item. It was introduced and immedi-

ately accepted in Palm Beach this winter." The photos and accompanying text feature Ivy League jackets, three-button and "worn without shoulder pads." *Life Magazine* also featured a couple wearing Madras in 1955, and *Sports Illustrated* would feature Madras in 1956, 1958 and 1960.

Robert Ruark, sportsman and author of the evocative Southern work *The Old Man and the Boy*, wrote in his syndicated column in 1960, "My Madras shirts and shorts are guaranteed to 'bleed,' another Madison Avenue dramatization of simple color instability, such as may be found in any ordinary shirt with no press agent." Ruark may have been sanguine in regard to his bleeding Madras, but the American market on the whole had to be sold on it.

Ellerton Jeette, president of Hathaway shirts, had been anonymously making white Madras shirts for years. It was on a visit to London he noticed a bespoke shirtmaker cutting shirts out of plaid Madras. This tartan-inspired fabric is believed to have its roots in the 19th-century Raj in India, when local weavers incorporated colonial patterns.

There was only one problem with the shirts when first introduced: They were rejected by the American public. Customers claimed that they bled and faded in the sun. Returns mounted and disaster loomed, so Jeette took his problem to master advertising man David Ogilvy.

It was in 1951 that Ogilvy brought the sleepy New England shirt company to national attention by introducing an eye-patched icon dubbed "The man in the Hathaway shirt." Jeette was looking for another stroke of advertising genius, and told Ogilvy that the vegetable dyes in Madras naturally faded. "Then why not say so?" replied Ogilvy.

At that moment Madras' chief flaw became its most prized virtue. Over the years the Madison Avenue spin machine churned out promises like "Hathaway guarantees that your shirts will fade in the wash," and "Magical things happen to this shirt when you wash it." Upping the ante, bleeding and fading were said to provide "good breeding and maturity," something unseen in mass-produced fabric. Madras left to its natural course would produce a shirt "marvelously muted" and "dustily well-bred."

ative programmes for people of all ages. They have transformed their spaces into vibrant and interactive centres. Their web sites are up to date and many have mobile applications to highlight what they have. There are even sleepovers for school children at some museums. When was the last time our museum launched a drive to attract more visitors to its premises? Probably never. It is high time the museum changed its style of working and became more responsive to the requirements of visitors and those wanting to learn.

BETTER DAYS FOR THE MUSEUM?

(Continued from page 1)

Government museum means very little to the locals. As for visitors from overseas, it is always the bronze gallery that is the biggest draw. They come here probably once in a lifetime, unless they are serious researchers. This means the museum authorities and the Government are neglecting the potential that the local population has by way of being attracted to the museum.

World over, museums are faced with the challenge of remaining relevant. They have responded by launching cre-

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"Unfaded Madras garments are as rare as a pair of clean white bucks on a college campus," reported *The Evening Independent* on July 26, 1960. In the same year an anonymous storekeeper reported, "So far as my customers are concerned, the sooner the Madras fades the better they like it." It seemed the Ogilvy strategy worked and the first half decade of the 1960s would see Madras reach mass popularity.

In January 1960, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the hottest thing in menswear was Madras shirts and sports jackets. *Esquire's* fashion director O E Schoeffler continued the drum beat in 1963, trumpeting Madras as "bigger than ever." He notes that Madras was still being used for sports shirts, jackets, shorts and swimwear, but the new trend was for Madras ties, belts, hats, watch bands, vests, wallets, tobacco pouches, cigarette cases and shaving kits. A UPI story from July 1965 reports that Madras sales were strong in the summer of 1964, "carried through the winter in the form of pile-lined Madras parkas and long sleeves sports shirts and picked up steam this summer." The big sellers in the summer of '65: walk shorts, sports shirts, three-button sportcoats and slacks. UPI also noted that patchwork jackets, which first appeared in Palm Beach a decade earlier, were "gaining ground."

All good trends, however, must come to end. Madras would eventually use colourfast dyes – to the delight of Middle America mothers. America would go through a counterculture and see a rise in the popularity of workwear, and Madras would retreat back to the college shops to be discovered again by the preppy crowd of the late '70s.

The curmudgeons among us will say we have once again reached Madras saturation. I look around today and the shorts seem too long, too loud, and they always seem to be paired with t-shirts. I get the feeling that the youths that wear Madras today are the same sort that would be provoked to violence by the mere sight of it 30 years ago. At those moments I console myself with thoughts of a simpler time when you always wanted to have at least one friend who wore Madras trousers because he always knew where the best parties were.

And when I need an extra bit of levity, I think of Early Shiply, retired clown and publicity man for Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus. When the circus came to New Haven in the Spring of 1960, Shiply took one look at the students and quipped to the *Yale Daily News*, "If you see clowns one day wearing blue serge suits, it's because you college kids are stealing our trademark with your Madras outfits."

• Recalling...

The day India upset Brazil

In a long and eventful career in professional sports reporting, stretching more than 40 years, it is difficult to pinpoint one or two major highlights. I however have no doubt as to the two most memorable events I have witnessed. Pride of place goes to Tied Test II played in the cauldron that was the MA Chidambaram stadium in September 1986. You cannot ignore the tremendous historical aspect of the game, particularly when it could be pointed out that nearly 1200 Tests have been played since then and there has never been another tied Test. Second on the list has to be India's comeback victory over Brazil in the Davis Cup World Group play-off tie in Chennai in 2010 when the home team turned a 0-2 deficit into a 3-2 triumph.

This is a feat that not many teams have achieved in Davis Cup history and you must remember that the competition has been played since 1900. The fact that it was the first time that India were achieving the feat since playing in the tournament for the first time in 1921 emphasises the historical aspect of the incredible turnaround. Also it must be said that the result was unexpected, for Brazil arrived as favourites. The only thing that India had going for it was home advantage and an almost sure point in the doubles. But still, two of the four singles

had to be won and this seemed a tall order going by the rankings.

Brazil's two top players were Thomaz Bellucci (ranked No 28) and Ricardo Mello (81). Against that, India's two singles players were Somdev Devvarman (98) and Rohan Bopanna (476). It is true that rankings can mean little when it comes to Davis Cup play, as indeed Leander Paes had proved again and again with incredible victories over players ranked much higher than him. But here the difference in numbers seemed too much to make up.

• by Partab Ramchand

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When Brazil, thanks to victories by Ricardo Mello over Devvarman and Thomaz Bellucci over Bopanna, took a 2-0 lead at the end of the first day's singles it did appear that India's bid to make it back to the prestigious World Group had suffered a severe and irretrievable setback. In the glorious days of the Krishnans and the Amritrajs, India were always placed among the elite teams and in fact had made it to the Davis Cup final in 1966, 1974 and 1987. In the new millennium, however, with Paes concentrating on his successful doubles career, the challenge in singles

play was fragile with the result that India continued to languish for long in the Asia/Oceania qualifying stage.

The fightback started the second day with the well established and highly successful duo of Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi winning the doubles easily in straight sets against Bruno Soares and Marcelo Melo. That however was the expected result, with the sixth ranked Paes and seventh ranked Bhupathi always tipped to defeat opponents ranked 35 and 38 respectively. However, with Brazil needing to win only one of the two reverse singles to stay in the World Group, the odds still favoured the visitors. But there was a perceptible change in the mood when the players took the court at the Nungambakkam Stadium on Sunday, September 19th. With the win in the doubles the initiative seemed to have changed hands and the large crowd present somehow sensed that there were going to see something special. After all, other teams had come from 0-2 behind to win in Davis Cup play so why not India?

An inspired Devvarman lived up to his reputation as the country's leading singles player and was leading Bellucci in the first of the reverse singles 7-6, 4-0 when the latter retired following an injury. It was now 2-2 and everything hinged on the tie between Bopanna and



Ricardo Mello. By now the near capacity crowd was on its feet, cheering and screaming for every point won by the Indian. Poor Mello must have felt that he was not only taking on Bopanna but thousands of others as well. A supremely confident Bopanna made nonsense of the rankings on his way to a 6-3, 7-6, 6-3 victory to spark off scenes of jubilation.

The sight of the Indian squad along with non-playing Shiv Prakash Mishra taking a victory lap around the stadium with the tricolour fluttering behind them will always be one to cherish. India were back in the World Group and the amazing turnaround made it one of the greatest moments in Indian tennis – nay, Indian sport.

Answers to Quiz

1. Swachh Bharat campaign, 2. Hawaii, 3. Yogeshwar Dutt, 4. P.V. Sindhu (badminton), Sakshi Malik (wrestling), Dipa Karmakar (gymnastics) and Jitu Rai (shooting), 5. S.R. Nathan, 6. Kamal Hasan, 7. Airlander 10, 8. Bangladesh, 9. Bharatiya Mahila Bank (BMB), 10. PM Narendra Modi sported this monogrammed apparel.

* * *

11. Baron Connemara, 12. Elihu Yale, 13. Aishwarya Dhanush, the daughter of Rajinikanth, 14. T.K. Rajendran, 15. Lighthouse to Pattinapakkam, 16. Velacheri, 17. Information on medical counselling and institutons, 18. Rio Paralympics high jump gold medallist Thangavelu Mariyappan hails from that place, 19. Egmore, Purasawalkam, and Tondiarpet, 20. The city's earliest newspaper 'Madras Courier' was first published on that date.

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