

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Engineering rot in the State

(By The Editor)

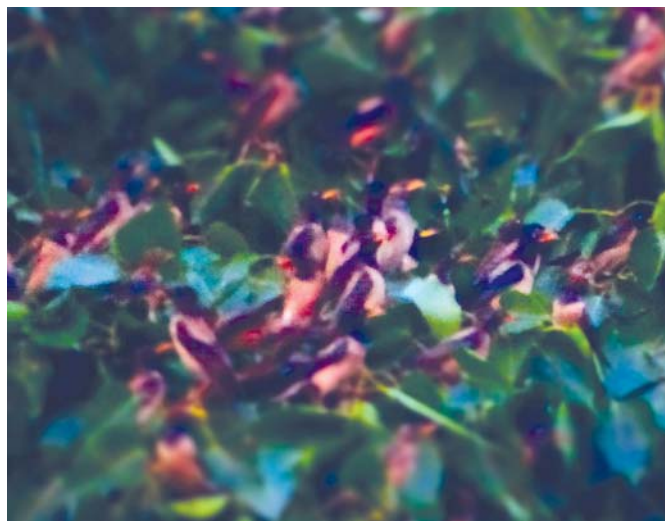
At a time when our State is not in the news for any edifying reason, here is one more statistic to add to the general gloom and doom – Tamil Nadu tops the country when it comes to the number of engineering colleges that have applied for closure. This has been a trend since 2015 when applications to this effect began to be made for the first time. That year the number was 17. Now it is 22. The process is not so simple and permission is yet to be granted to most, but it is indicative of deep rot.

Supply of engineering college seats far outstrips demand in the State. And it is the case in many other States too. Around 275 colleges have applied for closure all over the country. That Tamil Nadu tops this list is perhaps no surprise considering that the State has over 550 engineering colleges in it, a huge number. And there is a history behind this excess.

Ever since the 1980s, when the State threw open engineer-

ing education to the private sector, several promoters entered the field. Barring very few, all the others viewed this as a money-making option. The investment was largely in land and buildings, which is why you invariably saw only those with large landholdings setting up these colleges. As for the other

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Starlings in the Madras sky

• “For ten years I have been in police service here, but not even once have I seen anything like this. I have brought my family, friends and known persons and showed them this. Everybody was stunned. Even my superior officer who goes walking here, after seeing this, instructed us not to make any noise and disturb them.” This was what a police personnel working in this area had to say to me.

He was talking about Rosy Starlings, one among several birds species which migrate from Europe to India due to climate change and non-availability of food. They return home in March or April.

For two months, around 5 pm every day I have seen them flying in groups from Manapakkam, Ramapuram, but I could not find where they were roosting. After continuously following them for a few days, I finally found that they spent their nights in the big banyan and pipal trees in the playground near Police Office Road, next to Guindy-Butt Road.

One evening, I went to see them. At dusk, one small group was coming towards me. Later, it became bigger and bigger; some thousands of Rosy Starlings danced in the sky.

On their arrival, crows, the natives, vacated the banyan and pipal trees like kids who do not want their play area to be occupied by some new group.

I asked the police officer how long they had been here. He said for about two months. That means January and February. Before that...? I suppose till December they were roosting somewhere else around Chennai. Due to Cyclone Vardha in December, their roosting trees may have fallen. Searching for a new place, they may have found these banyan and pipal trees.

A local shopkeeper said that they flew up to Sriperumbudur, some 40 km away, in search of food. Around 6.15 pm, they returned 'home' and seemed to start discussing their day; their calls dominating the entire area till around 10 pm. (Courtesy: Madras Naturalists' Society.)

Text: Chezheyan
Photos: Masilamani Selvam

All in beauty's name!

(By A Special Correspondent)

Chennai residents will be happy to hear once again that, like the Cooum River, the Adyar River is to get a makeover with riverfront development, plugging of sewage outfalls, modular sewage plants, walkways and cycle tracks. The project report “has been readied”, we are told. Particularly heartening is the assurance that encroachments of the river banks at 27 locations will be removed. Promises of riverfront projects on the Adyar and the Cooum have been made in the

past and thousands of crores have been received for this purpose from 1968. But there is very little visible evidence of execution of any plan. Benefits of past piecemeal attempts have lasted for a while and returned to old ways for want of strictly supervised back-up rigour in upkeep and maintenance. At best, we have seen signs of improvements in bits and pieces here and there devoid of total-

ity and a “here-it-is-ready-to-use” kind of delivery which alone makes a difference to citizens' lives.

The latest announcement could have given details of firm start and finish dates. Diagrammatical depiction of the scope of work would have reinforced conviction that the project is an imminent reality and not just a likely occurrence sometime in the misty future. The two riverfronts present unique scope to enhance

(Continued on page 3)

Water for the summer

(By Dr. Felix Ryan – UN water expert)

Ground realities indicate that Chennai will not get adequate water from the Krishna River. The southern parts of Andhra Pradesh abutting Chennai are drought-prone during summer. Andhra has to cater to the requirements of its own people and only then to her neighbour's when possible.

Distillation NOT Desalination

The late President Abdul Kalam and many other scientists world over have repeatedly been saying that humanity has to depend on the sea for water and survival. Indeed, sea water is better than no water and saline agriculture is better than chemical agriculture.

Governments must teach people to help themselves with simple way of distilling sea or saline water. Through several simple ways, people are already converting sea water into safe drinking water on a kitchen scale and as much on a community scale. A large-scale distillation plant is working successfully for the past 25 years in Saudi Arabia, south of Judah.

We should promote distillation which eliminates heavy metals, dissolved salts and toxic waste and not desalination which, by and large, removes only salt molecules and a small percentage of metals, dissolved salts and other impurities. Sea water must be made accessible to people; after all, much of our population lives within 100 km of the coastal belt.

– Dr. F.R.

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

Madras Musings is now on the web at www.madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR

Moreover, the Krishna Water project was conceived more to benefit the dry Telangana region and not the people of Chennai.

It is reported that the official cost of getting water from Neyveli is Rs. 400 per 1,000 litres. However, if overheads, wear and tear of tankers, accident losses, water treatment cost, cost of maintaining the treatment system, loss of water in the pipe lines, evaporation losses and cost of disposing of the silt are taken into account, the real cost of one litre of Metro water transported from Neyveli or Erode will be more than Rs. 2, though officially this water costs one rupee per litre. The truth is far from it.

Even after spending two rupees per litre of water from Neyveli or Erode the quality of water remains far from the standards set by WHO and BIS. There is a need to carry out a realistic appraisal of various knee jerk schemes to deal with the drinking water crisis.

Hong Kong has been one of the most water-deficient countries in the world. Finding that 40 per cent of treated water was being used in toilets and for washing pavements and roads, she introduced the dual system and laid twin water mains – one for treated water and the other for filtered sea water, and solved her water problem to a large extent. Sea water is better than no water. We should study the feasibility of such a project for Chennai.

Desalinating water by the RO method as the Government of Tamil Nadu is doing now in Ramanathapuram is cost-intensive and does not remove heavy metals and dissolved salts. Sea water distillation as done in Saudi Arabia, Arizona or Israel is one of the answers to our drinking water problems. The Rio summit resolved that sea water must be exploited in all possible ways by countries facing drinking water crisis.

This summer, water supply is going to be more acute in Chennai than last summer due to salt, sand and sediments blocking the flow of water inside the water mains and due to inadequate percolation during the recent rains. Only roof water let into open wells will adequately recharge the water table and not the water let into shallow percolation pits.

Off with the red beacon!

DeMo from Dear Delhi (DDD) has spoken. No more red beacons, he declared, and symbolically unscrewed the one on his car, after making sure there were sufficient cameramen around. Several others down the line, including Extremely Precarious Seat, who lives in Chennai, immediately copied this act, of course to the accompaniment of photographers clicking away. It was in fact the news of the day.

DeMo moreover declared that every Indian is a VIP. If that was truly the case, *The Man from Madras Musings* feels the obvious choice would have been to allow every Indian to have a red beacon on his car/vehicle of choice and that includes bullocks. After all, if the Aadhar card is now a must for man and beast, why not allow everyone to have a red beacon also? But, no, rather in the manner in which he demonetised currency, DeMo decided that he had to demote all our exalted leaders and the I Am Superior officers

exalted being within – though banned by law, continues to flourish. Then there is the circular metal plate just above the rear mudguard, which features the State emblem and the designation of the worthy within. MMM has often wondered as to why this metal disc is always positioned at the rear of the vehicle. It was after considerable introspection that he realised that it is ideally positioned – no traffic policeman would want to give chase to such vehicles if they had jumped signals. And, above all, there is the final and most important identifier of a Government vehicle – a rude driver, invariably with a huge moustache, who is trained to recognise just two parts of a car – the accelerator and the horn.

These elements are, after all, still allowed for our VIPs and with these in place, they just have no ground for worry. And as for those who do not have any of these but would still like to break the laws of the road with impunity, MMM is

tion. One of these is the transporting of the dear departed in winding sheets on wheeled stretchers across the road, in the midst of busy traffic. And so this is one junction where the living and the dead compete for moving on, apart from the usual cows and dogs. Despite all this, accidents almost never happen and hold-ups are also comparatively rare.

Everyone keeps moving. Collisions and the occasional skirmishes happen, but these are all viewed as part of the give and take. A few hot words are exchanged and then peace is restored, the traffic moving on. Nobody misses the traffic light and, as for the policeman who is perpetually resting under a shade-giving tree, he is a firm believer in the policy of *laissez faire*. He is, in fact, the first to egg people to keep moving, even those who pause and gaze at the signal, expecting it to come back to life.

All, in short, is well except on the odd day that the signal works. Traffic then begins pil-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

a peg or two by taking off the beacon. The consequence has been that there is a demotivated set of MPs, MLAs, Ministers, Bureaucrats of all ranks, Chairmen of Nationalised Banks, High Court Judges, Panchayat Board Presidents, Chairmen of District Level Cooperatives, Block Development Officers; in short everyone other than the Butcher, the Baker and the Candlestick Maker, who have to now unscrew the red beacons. And they will not even have the satisfaction of a battery of photographers capturing their act for posterity. Only DeMo had that privilege. Even EPS managed only an honourable mention and a postage stamp-sized picture in the media.

MMM, however, advises all of those who only till last week sported a red beacon on their cars to be of good cheer. That beacon may have gone but the other trappings of office remain – the letter G on the number plate to indicate that the vehicle in question cannot be expected to follow any traffic rule and can park anywhere, including the runway of the airport, is just one. Just in case the policemen on duty cannot read English, the G is now tagged on with the Tamil equivalent of A, short for 'Arasu' or Government. The second status symbol – tinted glasses so that the lesser mortals outside cannot see the

happy to dispense sage counsel, free of cost. He advises them to have a paper bearing the message 'On Government Duty, Urgent' pasted on the windscreen. It works like magic. Those who cannot manage a white sheet of paper and a printer can make do with a newspaper page. A scrawled message to above effect with a sketch pen can do wonders.

Do lights matter?

At those who send letters to the editor of a beloved local newspaper are rather fond of writing, *The Man from Madras Musings* would like to know if traffic lights matter at all in our city. MMM writes from personal experience. There is one traffic light en route to the *Madras Musings* office that has never worked in living memory. No, that would not be the absolute truth for it does flicker to life at least once or twice in a year. But it remains dormant for the remaining 363 and a quarter days (and nights).

Now this is a fairly busy intersection with a large hospital that is separated by a busy road from its morgue on one side. There are besides several schools in the vicinity, as are many popular eateries. Traffic swirls around the place night and day. The hospital, founded in 1847 or thereabouts, follows certain practices from incep-

ing up on all sides. Vehicles tend to jump the lights, resulting in accidents, and plenty of heated arguments. Those in two-wheelers shy away sharply on seeing the sheeted dead waiting next to them at the same signal and this adds to the general chaos. And then we have the poor policeman. A working signal means more work for him – he has to ensure vehicles don't jump the signal and those that obey them stay well within the stop line. Based on the time of the day, he has to alter the time duration of the signals in certain directions. And he has to make peace among those arguing, something that he was doing earlier but with far fewer incidents to handle.

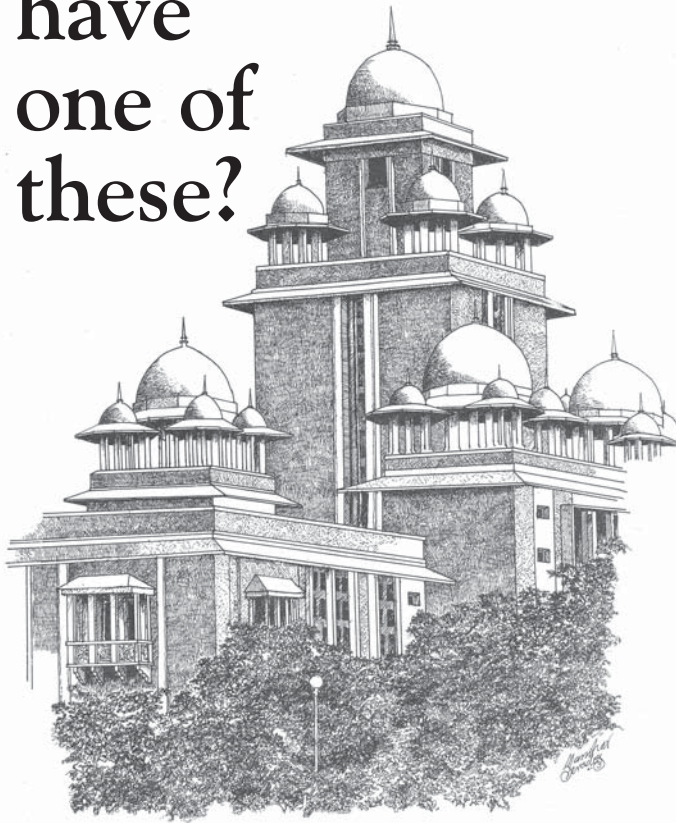
Taken all in all, life without a traffic signal is far easier than when it works. It may be best to have them all removed and leave it to the people of Madras to do what they do best – adjust, and get along with life.

Tailpiece

The latest on the Aadhar card is that a similar facility has been suggested for cows, ostensibly to control their being smuggled across the border. Now who would have imagined that our plastic-eating bovine was in such demand? *The Man from Madras Musings* wonders if they will get Udder cards.

–MMM

Do you have one of these?



May I request readers of *Madras Musings*, who undoubtedly share my passion for our endearing city, to help me in my search for missing sketches and greeting cards done by me.

Over the last five decades, my love for Madras has been expressed through the drawings I made of the city – from landmark buildings to bungalows to everyday street scenes – until my eyesight faded and left me unable to see the outside world.

My wife Mahema and I created heritage greeting cards in black and white with my drawings and her crisp texts. They became very popular and we gave the sale proceeds to charity.

Now in my evening years, I wish to compile my sketches of Madras and bring it out as a publication, for which Sujatha Shankar, architect and Convenor of INTACH, Chennai Chapter, is writing the text. But I find that many of my sketches and cards, or copies of them, are not with me. Some artworks were bought by friends for their personal collections or for gifts. May I appeal to each of you reading this, to help me locate some of my drawings and greeting cards that may be with you or with others that you may know of. If they can be brought to our attention for inclusion in the book, they will be returned after use. Looking forward to rediscovering my sketches and greeting cards with your help.

Please contact me at: 2498-2484, 98416-94633, mahemano14@gmail.com

or Sujatha Shankar at 98410-71062, 2499-4909, 2499-1696 sujathashankararchitect@gmail.com

– Manohar Devadoss

Editor's Note: Manohar Devadoss is a well-known artist. He has been professionally involved in science, technology and design. He has fought against degenerative eye disease for almost four decades, leaving him almost totally blind. Despite his setbacks, Manohar has remained determined, and, more importantly, curious – traits that have undeniably propelled him in his creative career. He is the author of seven books, including *Multiple Facets of my Madurai* and *From an Artist's Perspective*. He is now working with Sujatha Shankar on a book on Madras.

No parking! It's my space!!

A new kind of lawlessness is afoot on Chennai roads. This has nothing to do with the usual perpetrators of rowdiness on the streets. The offenders here are what we generally call "decent people", the upper middle class, house-owning types.

Consider this scenario. You drive your car down a quiet street, looking for a place to park (a frustrating exercise at the best of times). You are happy when you spot an empty space by the side of a bungalow with no 'No Parking' sign nearby. You slow down and coast along towards this space. When you are near enough you suddenly notice that the space is not really vacant. Someone has placed two rows of rocks (more like concrete blocks from construction sites) on the roadside. There's no way you can park your car there. You wonder if the Chennai Corporation has taken over the spot for some work. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Then, you look at the gate of the bungalow by the side of which you intended to park, and catch the eye of the watchman standing there. He smirks. "You can't park here," he informs you.

"Did you put the stones here?"

He nods. "The owners don't want anyone to park their vehicles here."

"But I am not parking in front of their gate. This is a public road. You can't block it like this! They don't own the road!"

The watchman shrugs. "Talk to the owners. I've been told to put the stones there. And that's all I have done."

As it seems too much trouble to take him up on his challenge, you drive on and find another,

fairly empty street. (By now you are about six streets away from where you really need to go.) Again you find an empty space for parking by the side of a house. As you ease your car into the space, the watchman of the house comes running out and yells, "Madam, you can't park here!"

"Why not? There's no 'No Parking' sign here. I am not parking in front of your gate. What is your problem?"

"I don't know about all that. The owners don't want anyone to park here. They need the space for their own cars."

"This is a public road!" you shout. "You can't tell me not to park here! As for the owners of this house, tell them to park their cars inside their compound!"

The watchman totally ignores your tirade. When he speaks, it is calmly and slowly, as if he is talking to someone deficient on the uptake. "Madam, park elsewhere. It is for your own good that I am saying this," he says in a flat tone.

Suddenly the air is threatening. You think of slashed tyres and smashed head lamps or windshields. You give up and drive on until you find a space to park where the street degenerates into a slum and the residents are a lot more tolerant.

Are the Chennai traffic police even aware that right under their noses Chennai residents are taking over stretches of public road for their personal use?

– Janaki Venkataraman
Janakivenkat@yahoo.com

OUR READERS WRITE



The journal & the doctor

I was delighted by the reference to *Educational Review* (MM, April 17th). My father R. Srinivasa Iyengar was a regular contributor to the journal which came out regularly until its closure.

Yet another educational journal of the time was *Educational India* edited by Prof. M. Venkatarangia, a freedom-fighter and a Professor in Andhra University. His daughter Dr. Shantha Sinha was the first Chairperson of the National Commission for Children.

Also, Dr. Mani's statement (MM, April 17th) that he owed it as a duty to his country which provided him medical education, to return, is heart-warming. If only 10 percent of IIT alumni had chosen to stay and

contribute to the economic and industrial development of the country which subsidised their education heavily, our nation would have been much different from what it is today.

S.S. Rajagopalan
30, Kamarajar Street
Chennai 600 093

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A letter from one of the readers regarding *The Educational Review* brought back nostalgic memories. It was being published from 16, Sunkuvar Chetty Street, Triplicane in a house belonging to Prof. M.R. Sampathkumaran, after the printing machines and associated machines were shifted from its previous location, during 1950-60s. I lived in the same complex during my childhood and had many opportunities to meet and interact with Prof. A.N. Parasuraman of Minerva Tutorials, Prof. Sampathkumaran and other illustrious educationists.

It surely helped me in many ways in my later life.

Gp. Capt. Arunachalam (Retd.)
62, Jal Vayu Vihar
Madambakkam
Chennai 600126

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I read the wonderfully written review of Dr. M.K. Mani's book *Yamaraja's brother* (MM, April 17th) with great reverence. It has brought out the honesty, intelligence and ethics in outlook of a super specialist, Dr. Mani.

He is a strict disciplinarian and a great human. This is well reflected in the last paragraph of the article!

It is sad that such noble qualities are scarcely seen nowadays among current, commercially-oriented medical people.

Every person connected with the medical field should read his book.

Dr. J. Bhaskaran
bhaskaran_jayaraman@yahoo.co.in

ALL IN BEAUTY'S NAME!

(Continued from page 1)

Chennai's image as a beautiful, citizen-friendly City.

Sewerage plants along the rivers working below efficiency, or not at all, have been discharging untreated waste into the rivers, reducing them into big sewers. Unless this source of contamination and misuse of

the waterways is permanently plugged and kept that way all the time, whatever it costs, the effort and investment on riverfronts would only create a temporary optical effect and make no impact on our city's environment and beauty.

Execution left to bureaucracy, without inputs from architects and environment special-

ists, tends to aim at "complementation" as a formality and ritual. Design aesthetics and consideration for impact on surrounding life and activities are often overlooked. An example is the Chennai Corporation's project to decorate a stretch below the Cathedral Road-Radhakrishnan Salai flyover with a plaza-cum-park for walkers, in granite and

marble. It's reported to be spending much more than what is made available for infrastructure and equipment for its schools and primary health centres. A walker's path at this busy section right opposite the Music Academy and the girls' school on the other side seems out of place. This is an example, we are afraid, of inadequate thinking and

wrong priority. Often, when logic is not visible, it might be there but hidden. You cannot, therefore, blame the popular perception that this bit of window dressing and meaningless beautification is only meant to catch the sight of the VIP traffic that often passes through this stretch.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

The Syrian roof of the Ice House

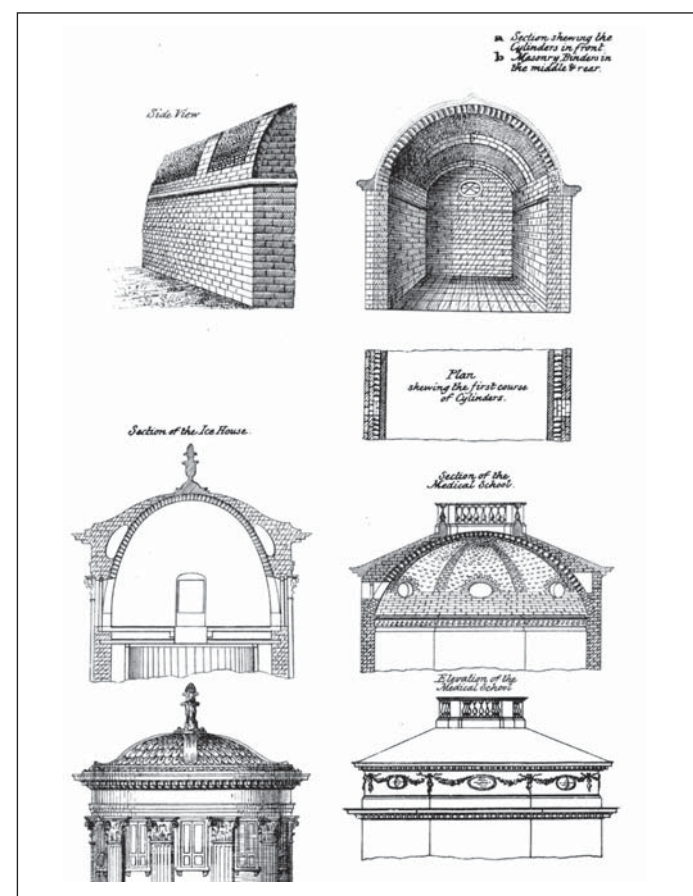
The *Ice House* is a familiar, and, happily for us, living landmark of the city. Constructed in 1838 as a storehouse for the ice being imported from the Tudor Ice Company of the United States, it later became a residence in which capacity it played host to Swami Vivekananda in the 1890s. It has forever been associated with his name. Forgotten now is the fact that the building also played an important role from 1917 to 1922 in the widows' rehabilitation movement begun by Sister Subbalakshmi. It later became a hostel for the B.Ed. course students and in 1963 was named Vivekanandar Illam. In 1997, the Government gave the building on lease to the Ramakrishna Math, for a permanent exhibition on Swami Vivekananda. This lease was extended to 99 years in 2012.

What is forgotten is that the construction of this building was in its time considered path breaking. The storage of ice meant that the structure could not use timber, as it would rot in the prevalent moisture. It was left to the architect Maj. (later Col.) J.J. Underwood of the Madras Engineers to come up with an ingenious solution. He decided to borrow from the techniques used in Syria where domed structures were built without using timber.

Earthenware cylinders, each of around nine inches length, but of tapering diameter, the wider end varying from 5 to 6" and the narrower end 3 to 3½" were made on potter's wheels. The walls were built to their full height and work on the dome began. This was raised with lime mortar to a height of 3 to 3½" with support from a bamboo scaffolding and then the cylinders were laid in a circle, embedding them firmly in the *chunam*/lime. The next circle rested in the gaps between the cylinders of the first curve and so on till the top was reached and this was sealed with one cylinder being forced into the orifice. Liquid *chunam* was spread on the cylinders and, on this, two rows of flat *chunam* tiles were placed. Polished *chunam* was then spread on top of this, thereby completing the first parabolic dome in Madras. The scaffolding was dismantled after time was given for the roof to settle.

It was so sturdy that a dome of 32 feet span was constructed at the Madras Medical School (now College) by Underwood, with excellent results. It is not

certain if that structure still stands. The Syrian roof perfected by Underwood was written eulogistically about by Capt. George Underwood (probably a kins-



Ice House – in its earliest days when the Tudors occupied it.

man) and included in an 1838 issue of the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science* brought out by the Madras Literary Society. It notes that this kind of roof cost half what a traditional Madras terrace did and had the advantage of being proof to vermin and termites. The article also recorded as to how white ants had recently eaten into the organ loft of the St. Mary's Church, necessitating its replacement. A similar problem had broken out at St. George's Cathedral where the teak supports of the organ gallery had been eaten up and, later, the sounding board of the pulpit too gave way. Such problems, it noted, could never happen with a Syrian roof. Strangely enough, despite all these proffered advantages, it was the Madras terrace that proved popular, lasting well into the 1950s as the preferred style. It is not clear if the Syrian roof at the *Ice House* still stands or whether it was done away with in subsequent restorations. If it is still around, it could make for an interesting study, rather like the terracotta wells that Maj.

Thomas Fiott de Havilland used for building the foundations of the St. Andrew's Kirk.

Underwood was constructing two buildings at the same time on the beachfront. The Masonic Temple of the Lodge Perfect Unanimity was coming up under his supervision and was completed along with *Ice House*. That building, now better known as the Directorate General of Police headquarters, has survived too. The Lodge PU, though happy with the design, felt the location was too remote and opted to move to Mount Road, eventually selling its temple on the beach to the police who have been in occupation now for 150 years and more. And like *Ice House* it is also well cared for, though a purist may shudder at the manner in which the restoration has been done in both buildings.

It is indeed a miracle that two of Underwood's constructions are still standing and well cared for. Not many of his successors, such as Chisholm, Irwin or Stephen have had that kind of luck.

Rambling in our museums (4) ... with N.S. Parthasarathy

A rail journey into the past

The sight of a massive railway locomotive effortlessly hauling a long train of carriages and tooting away in self-adulation never fails to fire the imagination of the young and the old. It is a powerful symbol of sheer energy. Most boys once fantasised that they would one day become engine drivers. It was to relive this urge of my boyhood days that I went to the Chennai Rail Museum in Perambur. It is sited on 6.25 acres of land and offers a large collection of technical and heritage exhibits, models, artefacts and rare photographs tracing the history of the railways and of the Integral Coach Factory (ICF), which was famously described by Nehru as one of the 'Temples of India'.

The entrance to the museum housed the entrance booth in a colourfully painted rail carriage.



Model of a custom-built carriage exported to Sri Lanka.



Working model complete with bridges, crossings, tunnels, stations and signals.

You enter a complex comprising four sections – the Diamond Jubilee Gallery, the Locomotive

and Power Unit Gallery, the Indoor Gallery I and the open-air exhibits, besides the toy train and the children's park. A snack counter with comfortable seating is available for refreshment. The footfall is above 300 a day with surges on holidays. The entrance fee is Rs. 40 which, with an imaginative touch of hospitality, includes a cup of tea or coffee.

The Diamond Jubilee Gallery contains a photographic history of ICF and its milestones – including visits by the who's who of the world – a young Queen Elizabeth, Russia's Brezhnev, the King of Greece, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and many more. ICF is an Indian showcase. On display are models of custom



Actual rail carriage as entrance booth to the Museum.

designed carriages – amazingly close in detail to the real ones – exported to Zambia, Uganda, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Angola, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Tanzania and Nigeria. The evolution of the railway carriage from primitive horse-drawn wagons, open to sky and weather, to the modern luxury compartments and palaces on wheels is vividly presented by models inherent in design, detail and colour to the originals. Among the photographs, the enlarged aerial pictures of the Pamban bridge – one, showing the train crossing and the other, with the bridge open to allow the ship crossing – are impressive.

Standing close to the live rolling stock open-air exhibits of

trains. Many of the older models date back a hundred years or more.

Amidst large sized exhibits, relatively smaller items charm their way into our hearts. Commonly known parts of car or domestic engines that we see day-to-day seem, in the rail engine context, surprisingly gigantic in dimension viewed from point blank range – engine blocks, crankshafts, cam shafts – changing our scale of vision from that of Lilliput to Brobdingnag. It is difficult to resist the charisma of the familiar handheld black coloured signal lamps with red and green plates that we as children loved to see the guard using at nights to convey the stop-start messages to the engine driver. And you cannot ignore



Engine built in 1917 by North British Locomotive Company seen on location.

rare old locos and related repair and rescue equipment is a special experience. An engine built in 1909 by the North British Locomotive Company stands proudly, having steamed its last as late as 1994! The 1935 built Hercules steam crane with a lifting capacity of 35 tons used for rescue in accidents and breakdowns is a real monster. Although not belonging to the rail family, the steam plough, with flat wheels to be able to cope with soft ground, is a giant in dimensions. The museum also exhibits various vintage coaches such as the Ooty and Simla mountain "toy" scale

the wall clock made in 1878 and still working.

The special feature of this museum is that, apart from models and artefacts, it provides interesting tidbits of information about railways. Of the many rare old photographs, the one that stands out is that of the first passenger train in India of 1853, that operated on the Boribunder-Thane line over a distance of 20 miles (34 km now) carrying 400 passengers. Nearer home, senior citizens of Chennai would recall a similar train operating

A VIDWAN OPEN TO ALL MUSIC

As my father and guru Dr. S. Ramanathan's centenary is coming up I have been thinking, talking, and writing about him. Some days ago, discussing a topic with my husband, Dr. Frank Bennett, who was my father's *veena* student, I realised how much Father was interested in jazz.

When he came to teach at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, I joined him. That was the time when Frank and his friend Jeff Fuller, who were Yale University music composition students, travelled 30 miles each way to study the *veena* with Appa. Jeff is a guitar and bass player still living in New Haven, Connecticut, playing around his home and travelling all

over the world performing jazz.

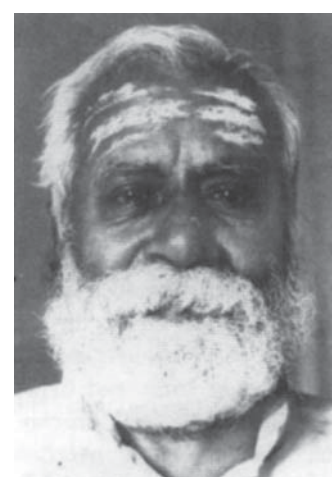
I still remember being amazed that my father, trained intensely in traditional Carnatic music, had the open mind to sing with the Yale Quadrangle Jazz Ensemble. Just before leaving for India after his commitments at Wesleyan, Appa gave a fusion concert with the young jazz musicians, including Jeff Fuller on the guitar, and Frank on the drum set. I very vividly remember that it was the blues, with Appa singing Suddha Dhanyasi *raga* in the *chaturasra jati Ata tala* of 12 beats. Frank very fondly remembers how Father came to the *samam* faster, every time on the dot, while the Western musicians interpreted more freely while arriving at the point.

In September 1986, Appa and mother Gowri came to stay with us in our home for a couple of months in Covina, California. Every evening after I came back from work at the Transamerica Insurance Company we would have a session of 'Jazz Learning'. Frank would play an album of one of his favourite musicians, for instance Louis Armstrong, Monk, or Ray Charles, singing the blues. Frank would explain the basics of the numbers and I remember Appa looking at him with awe and saying that he would give anything to just transfer the 'jazz portion' of Frank's brain to his own.

When I was in Connecticut with Appa, he offered me extraordinary experiences which

could not be obtained anywhere else in the world. He took me to hear Andre Segovia's solo acoustic guitar concert in Hartford, which was memorable because it was a mikeless concert. It was a full house with about a thousand people and Segovia sat at the centre of the stage, plucking on his guitar without any microphone. There was complete silence in the auditorium and he played the most beautiful compositions on that instrument.

The most different concert he took me to was one by the Mahavishnu orchestra. The group leader, John McLaughlin, was Appa's *veena* student. At the McConaughy hall in Wesleyan University, John played for about



Dr. S. Ramanathan

12,000 people and yet was extremely loud. It was one of the concerts I can never forget.

Another unique experience was when I got to listen to a Sunday morning choir in a Black church in Hartford. One of my father's *veena* students Bruce Parson, a harpsichord player, took us to listen to the choir. The energy and the faith the group produced were amazing.

But thinking about my childhood, I am not surprised about my father's varied interests, not only in music. He took us to all night *akhandams* of Hindustani concerts in Tiruvallikeni. He exposed us to movie musicals like *My Fair Lady*. He brought us several Western classical music LPs, one of which was the *Flight of the Bumble Bee*, composed by the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Later, in the

1990s when I performed a *veena* concert at Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y., one of my father's friends, Dr. William Skelton, and his son Bruce, requested me to play a *kavadi chindu* in which there was mention of the buzzing bee. It seems many years ago that Appa had compared the *Flight of the Bumble Bee* to the lines 'Vandu kallai undu (the bee... after drinking the nectar)' in the *kavadi chindu*.

He brought so many Hollywood movie scripts from the U.S.A., the very first time he came back, that I swear that was the reason for my interest in writing fiction.

— Geetha Bennett
(an accomplished *vainika*)

(Continued on page 6)

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's questions are from April 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 relate to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.

1. NASA recently announced that Saturn's sixth-largest and Jupiter's fourth-largest moon may be habitable as they have the necessary ingredients required to sustain life. Name them.

2. The US recently dropped the GBU-43 or the MOAB, nicknamed as the 'Mother of All Bombs', over an ISIS complex in Afghanistan. What does MOAB actually expand to?

3. Which Bengaluru-based institution was given its own pin code 560 500 so that letters and mails sent by taxpayers are not lost or reach the facility late?

4. Which Asian Nobel Laureate was on April 10th designated as a 'Messenger of Peace' by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres?

5. The 100th anniversary of the first experiment with Satyagraha by Mahatma Gandhi in India was observed on April 10th. Where did it happen?

6. Which Indian star has been named 'Wisden's Leading Cricketer in the World' for 2016?

7. Akshay Kumar has won the National Award for Best Actor for playing which real-life character?

8. Gilbert Baker, who created an eight-coloured flag which has now become a global symbol for a movement, passed away recently. Which movement?

9. Apart from its five associate banks, which other bank merged with the State Bank of India on April 1st?

10. Which Spanish golfer finally won his first Major, the US Masters, after 74 attempts?

* * *

11. What is the name given to the 5th *praharam*, built by Shiva appearing in the form of Spider, at the Jambukeswarar Temple in Tiruvannaikaval?

12. Which film has won the National Award for the Best Feature Film in Tamil?

13. What national first did K. Prithika Yashini achieve when posted as a Sub-Inspector in Dharmapuri District?

14. Which institution in the State was ranked second best higher secondary educational institution, behind IISc Bengaluru, in the 2017 National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) released by the Union Human Resource Development Ministry?

15. Who suggested the name 'Tamil Isai Sangam' for the cultural body?

16. What is the name of Shiva in the well-known Thyagaraja Temple in Tiruvottriyur?

17. What is the pen name of Viswanathan Subramanian, the well-known bilingual author, critic, translator and columnist?

18. In which famous complex in Kilpauk did Chidamabram Chettiar set up National Movietone in the 1930s-40s?

19. Which publication was launched by Vardarajulu Naidu on September 5, 1932?

20. Which poet, known for his divine compositions, was also called 'Tampiran Thozhan' (Comrade of the Master i.e. Shiva)?

(Answers on page 8)

A community's unforgettable contribution

No story of the Indian railway is complete without reference to the legendary role of the Anglo-Indian community in the growth and reputation of the Indian Railway as a model of efficiency. The Museum could have had a special section on the role of this community.

Anglo-Indians had a commanding presence in train operations and particularly the locomotive foot plate. (Foot plate is the platform for the crew in the cab of a railway engine.) Their pride in workmanship and their devotion to duty was unparalleled.

Every shed had its 'speed king' – a driver who could "coax that little extra out of locomotive and run the trains punctually using every trick of the trade." V. ANAND, former General Manager, Southern Railway, speaks of Andrew Batty who "used to take the

137 Down Trivandrum Express from Villupuram towards Madurai covering the 180 km of the Villupuram-Tiruchchirappalli section in three hours flat." Then, there was Besterwich who brought the train up to Tiruchchirappalli with only one yard *khalasi* who had been given a crash course in firemanship during the firemen's strike.

Another legend was De Monte who "ended his last trip with the hand still on the brake lever, by sheer will power. The moment he stepped out of the foot plate, he collapsed and was declared dead on arrival at the hospital. He was a true railwayman till his last breath." (This note draws liberally from *Anglo-Indians' Contributions to Indian Railways* by V. Anand, 2003)

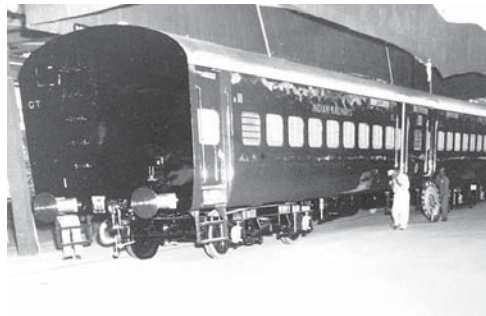
A rail journey into the past

(Continued from page 5)

between Park station and Conjivaram, covering 35 miles (56 km), and the station scenes of tearful farewells and mutual promises of frequent letters through postcards. The busiest station in India, one of the displays says, is Lucknow with 64 trains passing that station every day. Royapuram station in Chennai, commissioned in

1853, is the oldest station to have survived the vicissitudes of time and to remain operative till recently. Royapuram also has the distinction of being India's second oldest line; Royapuram to Arcot (Wallajahpet) opened in 1856.

The day of my visit was a special day for schoolchildren. They seemed to enjoy every moment of the visit, particularly



Photograph of first coach built by the Integral Coach Factory after its inauguration in 1955.



Giant-sized steam plough seen on location.



The 1935 built Hercules steam crane for rescue operations, seen on location. Inset: Details of Hercules crane.

admiring the models and the live rolling stock in the open yard. The running model is a miniature of the railway system, authentic in detail down to level-crossings, bridges, tunnels, stations and signals. A sign said that the running model was not working and was under maintenance. I could share the children's intense disappointment.

The running model seemed to have been under repair for a while; this and the empty glass case meant for souvenirs were the two flaws in an otherwise immaculately managed show. It is hoped that these shortcomings would get corrected soon.

Even in these days of speed and real time communication, travel by rail has not lost its charm. A recent journey by Mangalore Mail First Class AC in a *coupe* travelling along the west coast was an unforgettable experience – getting down at stops for a stretch or for a cup of coffee, ordering meals in the compartment, watching the country-side, the fisherfolk in catamarans, the floating timber, the smoke stacks of tile factories, rivers joining the sea alternating with the backwaters – making the destination and the work waiting there for me irrelevant. The rail journey itself had become my destination.

ENGINEERING ROT

(Continued from page 1)

aspects – an enlightened few went in for high quality equipment and facilities. Most settled for organising a fleet of college buses to ferry the students to the remote locations where the colleges were and left the rest to chance. The money they raked in, through capitation and regular fees, was considerable. Several promoters went on to finance other businesses from the income earned!

The results have been visible for some time now. The quality of students turned out by these colleges is sub par and on-campus placement percentages have been falling alarmingly. Moreover, with Tamil Nadu being one of the most urbanised States of the country, there is increasing awareness about alternative professional courses. Gone are the days when engi-

neering, medicine and CA were the only three 'respectable' options. Add to this the fact that increased earnings in many middle class families means parents are willing to send their children abroad for even undergraduate courses. The costs may seem daunting, but the child is at least assured of a good education, appears to be the popular view.

Given all this, around 50 per cent of the total number of engineering college seats in Tamil Nadu have been going vacant in the last two years. It is also rumoured that the demonetisation exercise and the consequent clampdown on transactions in cash have meant difficulties in the handling of capitation fees. The land on which several of these institutions have come up is now seen to be better off being used for real es-

tate development. Of course, many of these colleges are founded by so-called charitable trusts and that restricts their manoeuvrability when it comes to developing the land commercially. But we are quite certain that the financial brains that first saw opportunity in commercially exploiting technical education will somehow find a way.

It is worthwhile pointing out that *Madras Musings* in its issue of June 16, 2014 had written about the falling quality of engineering students, for which the colleges were to blame. It had also highlighted the fact that as many as 80,000 seats had gone unfilled that year in engineering colleges. We guess we can say we did see this coming, but there is very little satisfaction in such a prediction coming true.

90+ and still going strong – 1

**Over sixty years
volunteering
medicare**

Just mention 'Dr. MKS' in and around busy T.'Nagar, and anybody will direct you to this very popular doctor's home in one of its quiet residential neighbourhoods, nondescript Moosa Street. Not surprising at all! His yeoman service to patients across all cross-sections has been available in the area for over sixty years now!

When people ask, "At this age, how is it you can still operate without your hands shaking?" he answers, "Certain aspects of age seem not to affect me... maybe because of the charity I do. And I certainly don't feel 90! Maybe others too feel reluctant to say I am?" he muses, with a characteristic twinkle in his eye.

"My association with government hospitals and public service is like my life breath! I was born in a government hospital in Guntur, worked as a student and P.G. in another government hospital, and continued as honorary surgeon in one more!" says this former student of Stanley Medical College, whose internship there was followed by stints at the Government Royapettah Hospital, his 'parent', as honorary surgeon. "I could complete my medical studies only with financial help from a relative, and across all the years of my practice I have ensured that my service should reach the common man who cannot afford to pay much for treatment", he says.



● Physician and Surgeon, Dr. M.K. Srinivasan, started his medical career in 1951, and still continues to practise and operate too! He has to his credit over 60 years of voluntary service at the Public Health Centre, West Mambalam, and has been its Medical Director for over 15 years.

"In my younger days, working 18 hours a day was the norm, beginning at 4 am, and ending by midnight. Now, I have the prerogative of waking

tients till 2 pm. 3 pm to 5 pm is rest time, then 6 pm to 9 pm I am in my clinic. 'Normal food' is what I enjoy, but always less food and more vegetables! And I usually only think of food when there is no work." Only natural that he has no hypertension and no diabetes, because 'Service before Self' is a motto that spurs him on!

As someone who started practising medicine when Penicillin was the only available antibiotic, he believes in constant learning, every day and every moment. "I take care to see that I keep abreast with scientific advancement. When I was a student, we depended heavily on physical examination of the patient and asked a lot of questions before a diagnosis. In my practice today too, I focus on being a 'generalist' first, and then only a specialist. The 'referral syndrome' is too common these days," he feels.

"Involvement and Dedication are the best foundations. I

● A new series by Shobha Menon

up by 6 am and taking a two hour nap in the afternoon! There is a wonderful attraction to hospital work that keeps me going. The day I do not connect with a hospital atmosphere, I feel very restless!

"After my morning routines and light breakfast, I see pa-

often remember a nurse at the Public Health Centre who would personally sweep away cobwebs on the roof because she wanted her ward to be clean! I too follow this principle... there can be no work that is *infra dig*, if you want to be really involved and sincere." When Dr. MKS operates on a patient, he has never had qualms about simpler activities like dressing wounds! Among the very few who was closely associated with West Mambalam's Public Health Centre's founder, the late Mr. M.C. Subrahmanyam, he has never charged any fees for his services, including surgeries, and returns all funds that come in through him back to the Centre! He has also tutored many eminent juniors.

Regularly invited to talks on medical concepts and subjects, he reiterates to younger colleagues, "Do your duty for duty's sake and the money will come, surely.

"When I started out, gruelling hours meant even my children needed to take a token to meet me. Routines are

News from INTACH

Studying the rivers

INTACH, WWF, SANDRP, Toxic Links, Peace Institute and *Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan* joined hands to conserve India's rivers. For last three years, academics and activists from the various States have reported on the status of rivers in their States. An evolving *River Health Methodology* was drawn up on the basis of several parameters to classify India's rivers or river stretches red (critical), pink (threatened), and blue (pristine/safe). The parameters provide a holistic assessment in terms of flow, water quality, biodiversity assessment, floodplains, interventions such as dams/barrages, groundwater, catchment characteristics, cultural aspects, livelihoods. As against this the official agencies only provide some data on water quality which is woefully inadequate to assess river health.

The massive exercise was carried out by dedicated river activists and academicians making a tremendous efforts in a short span of four months. The reports are based on their work, secondary data and field observations. In due course these reports will be regularly updated.

Officially, India has 14 major rivers, 42 medium rivers and 55 minor rivers; with the first and second order streams, whether perennial, seasonal or

ephemeral, running into thousands. It is clear that India's arteries and lifelines – its riverscapes – are being flogged almost to death by 'development'. There are a few 'blue' stretches mostly confined to remote areas and head water stretches. This is due to flow obstructions affecting longitudinal connectivity; excessive abstraction; pollution inflows; diminished base flows; bed and catchment area mining; and floodplain embankment and encroachments affecting lateral and vertical connectivity.

The adverse impacts are submergence of fertile lands and forests; loss of livelihoods; destruction of biodiversity in coastal areas, mangroves and salt water intrusion in deltas; and decline in groundwater, agro-productivity, power generation, etc. resulting in climate changes as well. Similarly little work has been done on river biodiversity and ecology preventing the impact of these aspects on the river debate or in factoring in climate change impacts. It has led to even intrastate conflicts such as in Andhra, Telangana and Maharashtra. The National Heritage Division of INTACH has proposed several *Emergent Recommendations* such as dams on the main-stem and the tributaries be mandated to ensure environmental flow into the respective channels; re-vegetation in the catchment; removal of anicuts on the main-stem as well as tributaries; polluting influences (industries, mining, cities) to be brought under control; better riverine research in particular their biodiversity; safeguarding the integrity of wildlife areas, setting up pollution control boards; River Basin Authorities/organisations for better management; vegetative regeneration of river banks, no mechanisation permitted in sand removal and Sand Mining Holidays in selected degraded river stretches; regular monitoring of the health of the rivers catchment vegetation as well as its faunal biodiversity by the Department of Environment/Forests/Fisheries. There are a few urgent measures that need to be instituted.

lighter now. But even today, even if I am indisposed, I don't like to turn away a patient. Work never kills a man," he laughs.

A patron of the Chakra Vinayagar Temple in the neighbourhood, he conducts all festivals and meetings at his own cost. "I enjoy reading (and re-reading!) literature of different religions, and regularly conduct religious discourses on a variety of subjects at various forums. I see great similarities between the tenets of Islam and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

"It is important to keep learning in every area you can associate with. And absolutely no harm in accepting that you do not know. Often, my daughter reminds me, that 'I do not know, what I do not know'! And now I am determined to move ahead with my next goal... to do a laparoscopic surgery! I have to first study and practise the technique and then help patients, while I can still operate!" Dr. MKS's eyes shine with anticipative excitement.

The Principal Director of the NHD, Manu Bhatnagar points out, "If we do not change course immediately and set about conserving our rivers, then soon perennial rivers will become seasonal, seasonal rivers will become ephemeral whilst ephemeral ones will simply disappear from the map." (Courtesy: Virasat, the INTACH journal.)

(Continued on page 8)

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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25 years livening up inter-club tennis

The Annual Day of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association is an occasion for camaraderie where old-timers go down memory lane and the young look forward excitedly to receiving awards. Yes, awards are distributed, meaningful speeches are made and the ambience is warm and cordial. This year, there were additional features, it being the silver jubilee year of the Sanmar Group's sponsorship of the TNTA Tennis League for clubs. So we had, in addition to the awards presented, the addresses made by various officials and the felicitation of dignitaries, a wide ranging discussion of various aspects of tennis in the State and the reasons why the city enjoys an exalted status in the country

as far as the sport is concerned.

The most touching moment during the evening was the loud cheers that greeted 89-year-old P.S. Seshadri as he stepped onto the dais to receive his memento. Seshadri, a popular and respected figure in tennis circles, had taken part in the inaugural event of the TNTA Inter-Club League, 66 years ago.

The League has been a fertile ground for bringing together the young and the old, the aspiring and the experienced. It is in this event that a youngster gets a first-hand understanding of the pressures of team competition, though tennis is often termed as an 'individual' game. The young get to learn the use of various tactics and the nuances of doubles play. It is often

his or her first chance to play with a senior player as a partner in a genuine competition and be recognised as a player of stature.

Sanmar came on board as sponsors in 1992 when Group chairman N. Sankar was TNTA President. Speaking about how

● by
Partab Ramchand

the sponsorship came about, Sankar recalled, "The League was actually pretty well run since the 1950s, so when I was TNTA President, the then Secretary, V.K. Parthasarathy, proposed to liven up the League and I was happy to do my bit. We started with small prize

money but it brought in a sense of playing for something."

According to N. Kumar, Sankar's brother and vice chairman of the Sanmar Group, the idea of sponsoring the League was to get the clubs to be more active and professional. Indeed, the brothers have themselves played in the League even before their Group came on board as the title sponsor.

The level of competition in the League is high, according to Hiten Joshi, CEO of the TNTA, who added that another advantage of the tournament is that the association with a club gives players a proper place to train when not playing in tournaments.

The fact that the TNTA Inter-Club League has grown from 50 players to 516 from 43

teams belonging to 23 clubs spread over six zones with relegation and promotion, is evidence of its growing popularity. The League also has two Veterans' events (45 plus and 60 plus) and a Women's League, though women can be part of the regular League too. And what started with prize money of Rs. 40,000 now runs to a total of Rs. 3.5 lakhs.

It may surprise many to know that almost all Davis Cup players from Madras have participated in the League at some time in their careers. As juniors, the Amritraj brothers, Anand, Vijay and Ashok played for Madras Gymkhana Club, Ramesh Krishnan and his cousin Shankar Krishnan played for Mandavallipakkam Club, S. Vasudevan and Udaya Kumar played for Egmore Tennis Club while Rabi Venkatesan played for MCC. Somdev represented Nungambakkam Tennis Club. Years ago Asif Ismail, Gaurav Natekar and Vishal Uppul who were in Madras at the time were also seen in action in the League. The Fed Cup players Sai Jayalakshmi and Rushmi Chakravarthy have also played for their respective Clubs.

News from INTACH (continued)

Potted plants for clean air

Indoor plants are natural air purifiers as they generated more oxygen than other plants, and are easy to maintain. Certain plants combined with the micro-organisms in their soil kill indoor air pollutants. Money plants wrapped around moss stick work best inside the house even in ambient light and no sunlight. Areca Palms and Peace Lily need a little air circulation and ambient light, and watering once or twice a week to keep homes air fresh. Sprayed with lemon grass, neem or essential oils, they may keep insects and bugs away.

A housewife Aanchai Oswal in Delhi placed 36 indoor plants in different corners of her home as she found the air purifier did not protect the entire area of her house. She planted Areca Palm plants that filter indoor air pollutants like toluene and xylene. Snake Plants in bathrooms to remove carbon monoxide, monoxide, chloroform, etc. Ivy Plants in rooms as a natural way of removing toxic agents from the air. Aloe Vera, Spider and other



Bamboo Palm:
Natural humidifier



Spider Plant
Removes Carbon Monoxide



Aloe Vera: Clears Carcinogens

species help to generally cleanse the air in homes, she says. Terracotta or clay pots stain floors, Ceramic, fibre and even plastic pots work well with indoor plants. (Courtesy: Virasat, The INTACH journal)

Answers to Quiz

1. Enceladus and Europa, 2. Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, 3. Income Tax Department's Central Processing Centre (CPC), 4. Malala Yousafzai, 5. Champaran in Bihar, 6. Virat Kohli, 7. Kawas Manekshaw Nanavati, 8. The LGBT movement, 9. Bharatiya Mahila Bank, 10. Sergio Garcia.

* * *

11. 'Thiruneettan thirumathil', 12. Joker, 13. She became India's first-ever transgender person to become a police official, 14. IIT Madras, 15. Rajaji, 16. Adipuriswara, 17. Charukesi, 18. Kushaldoss Gardens, 19. The Indian Express, 20. Sundarar.

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