

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXVII No. 5

June 16-30, 2017

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A disaster waiting to happen

(by The Editor)

It was only a couple of issues ago that we had written about the rot in Chennai's real estate. One of the instances quoted was a fire in a wholly unauthorised structure that continued to remain in occupation despite the authorities sealing it. That incident claimed four lives. The latest episode, though fortunately not causing any deaths, was on a far bigger scale. We allude to the fire in a multistoried garment showroom in T'Nagar.

This is an area that has become a showpiece for con-

struction violations and the above-mentioned structure was no exception. Permission had been granted for just four floors, but the management had merrily added another four. An administration that either did not care, or was in cahoots with the violators, a judiciary that took its own time to come to any conclusive judgement, an owner who was only interested in making money even if it

meant bending all the rules, and a vast horde of shoppers who kept the place going, not in the least bothered that the place had come up in contravention of all ethics – all of them ensured that no action was ever taken. In this lot, it is perhaps the shopper who is to be forgiven, for if he/she is to take the stance of shopping only in buildings that are put up in strict conformance of the law,

then shopping as an activity may have to be abandoned altogether in our city.

The fire raged for two days. Given the way the building was constructed, fire tenders could hardly reach it. Those in the neighbourhood had to be summarily evicted for no fault of theirs beyond the fact that they chose to live next to a partially illegal edifice. Commuters were put to enormous hardship owing to blockage of traffic and the smoke caused distress to many in the area. Over 700 households in T'Nagar were starved of water and close to six lakh litres of this precious commodity were spent on dousing the inferno. The only saving grace, as mentioned earlier, was that nobody died, though some people, especially those in the fire service, did suffer injuries. The fire broke out early in the morning and so there were no shoppers and traffic on the road was also thin.

The aftermath saw the usual blame game being played out. The Minister blamed the owner for violations. The owner admitted that his structure was in contravention of permits, but blamed it on bad advisors. The electricity and water supply departments blamed the courts that had granted stay orders against sealing the structure thereby forcing the departments to supply power and water to this edifice. The courts have not spoken, but if they did, we are sure they would blame the committee of the Chennai Metropolitan Development

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A very rare visitor

One late morning, a year ago, my friend Santharaman rang up to say he had sighted a Brahminy kite – *Haliaeetus indus* – in the skies of Anna Salai. But I did not take it seriously because it had been years since a Brahminy kite was sighted in Chennai. I assumed that he must have mistaken a Black kite for a Brahminy kite. Nevertheless, he was confident. I was even more surprised when he informed me that the kite carried nesting material as well. I had no grounds to believe him. A couple of months ago he called again to say he had sighted the bird in the same area with some nesting material. This time I took him seriously and agreed to take a look.

Around 6.30 am we reached the spot and scanned the skies. Blue rock pigeons and house crows dominated the scene. As the sun ascended, a few Rose-ringed parakeets were seen. Then we saw a few Black kites. We then drove to the Ethiraj Salai as it was near the Cooum River. We thought we might have a better chance of seeing the bird there as Brahminy kites live mainly in coastal regions, estuaries, mangroves, and wetlands, though we knew that Cooum does not support any fish. Time moved on. It was around 10 am and we returned to our original spot. We saw a

(Continued on page 2)

• GARBAGE

How about we citizens doing our bit?

Continuing from last fortnight, when the focus was on our low sanitary rating, I today look at a major contributing factor: Garbage, which daily overflows on to our streets.

It cannot be anyone's case that the ubiquitous piles of garbage are entirely the responsibility of the municipal conservancy agencies. Be it garbage or sewage, at one end is the public agency that has responsibility to manage and deal with them; but it is at the source that much could be achieved to reduce the volume of waste generation and to facilitate easier handling of the load transferred to the public system.

• by A Special Correspondent

Plastic packing material forms a bulk of the material that we throw out. Shunning plastic bags might by itself substantially reduce the volume of garbage. Then, collection could do with smaller-sized receptacles and more number of them to ensure that no bin is outside easy reach. Recycling and re-use of various articles and packing materials and thinking many times before throwing them away would also help reduce the load on the public system.

Clothes and other fancy articles purchased by us are given by stores in large, colourful bags so that when we carry them the brand gets advertised. But their disposal becomes a problem. Perhaps, sellers as a matter of civic duty can make the bags simpler and smaller and less of a disposal problem. Buyers should decline bags difficult to dispose. Newspapers have been converted into carry bags. So why not we start using them instead of plastic?

Enhancing the capacity of the public collection and disposal system is not enough to

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A very rare visitor

(Continued from page 1)

pair of Shikra soaring and then there was a flock of Black kites. We waited for a few more minutes and as it was late for our breakfast, we decided to leave. It was then we saw another flock of Black kites. Using my binoculars I scanned them. Among them one bird stood out. Yes, it was a Brahminy kite. I told my friend that he was right. We both watched the bird as it flew above us and within a few seconds it flew past the road only to disappear behind the buildings. I was surprised.

It was years ago that I had last seen a Brahminy in the heart of Chennai. I remember my mother pointing out the bird and describing it to me when I was a child. She indicated its white head and chestnut body as diagnostic features and also explained its role in the Indian spiritual world. In Tamil they are called *Garuda* or *Semparundhu*. A Brahminy kite has a bright chestnut body with white head, neck, breast and upper belly. Though juveniles resemble Black kites, their rounded tail is a giveaway feature in contrast to the Black kites' forked tail.

This species, which was a common bird in the coastal parts of Chennai, has slowly disappeared. Being feeders of fish, crabs and the like, they are partial to wetlands. Flying low over the water surface or perching on a tree they catch their prey or take away carrion. They build cluttered but compact nests, using sticks, grass and shore debris, usually in a forked branch of large trees, close to water. They restore and reuse the nest for several seasons. The reason for their disappearance from the City is not clear. May be the Adyar River or Pallikaranai Marsh do not support them any more with prey base or they do not find nesting sites in a City which has lost its large trees to skyscrapers and expansion of highways. But for whatever reason, they are now a rarity in Chennai.

Though we sighted the bird in Anna Salai, we were not able to find its nesting site. My friend sighted it again the next day. My friend Brown, a raptor trainer from the U.K. was around at the time. When I told him about the sighting of this species he said he would check.

The next evening, Brown called and informed me that he had spotted the nesting site. It was remarkable news. Being a falconer, he had used his tracking skills to discover the nest. The nest was a shabby structure lined with debris like plastic covers on the terrace of Spencer's Plaza.

I wondered how a single bird could nest and breed. If the bird had to nest, it should have its pair, I argued. We saw only one bird and we did not know whether it was a female or male. Brown speculated that the bird was a male and an aggressive one as well. He had seen it bickering with Black kites. It dominated them by involving in aerial acrobatics.

In general, Brahminy kites are belligerent and have the proven ability to snatch fish from other birds of prey. Therefore, the aggressive nature of the bird may not be an indication of its gender. However, Brown kept visiting the site to monitor its behaviour, more importantly to find if it had a pair. Our search for its mate was futile. It was a solitary bird which might be in search of a pair.

It frequented the area often and Brown said it usually roosted on the terrace of Spencer's Plaza. It was disquieting to see a lonely bird building a nest, probably driven by its instinct, not knowing that there was none of its species in the immediate vicinity. I even wondered if it would cross breed with Black kites, though it was improbable. Nothing of that happened in the next two weeks. It was seen around the area, but was not guarding its nest. We even saw a pair of Blue Rock Pigeons inspecting the nest for their own reasons. The bird had abandoned the nest. It was also time for Brown to leave India. When he left, he requested me to keep track of the bird by visiting the spot.

I did go there three times. I sighted the bird one evening a little after five. However, my other two visits did not yield any results. I was not sure if the Brahminy kite had found some mate or for that matter if it would even show up again. Will Chennai see this magnificent raptor again in its skies? A question only nature can answer.

— Picture and text by
T. Murugavel

Dancing Doctors & other Jis

These are times when in the worlds of politics and arts, you can earn brownie points by prefixing people's names with a 'Doctor' and suffixing them with a 'ji'. The latter, incidentally, appears to have penetrated the Tamil lexicon, at least in Madras that is Chennai, for even the most rabid Hindi haters use the 'ji' at all odd moments. Coming back to the similarity between the worlds of arts and politics, it does not end with the Dr and the Ji. Politics is said to be an art and as for art, it is full of politics.

All these profound thoughts came to the mind of *The Man from Madras Musings* when last fortnight he attended a seminar on hundred years of dance or some such topic. MMM is rather vague about it chiefly because the speeches that he heard did not have that theme. It was more a question of a standard presentation that each of these presenters had, which they no doubt flog repeatedly, force-fitting it in some way to suit the topic for which they had been

he had no idea that the time had gone by so quickly. He never could keep track of time, he said, especially when he was speaking. He then promised to wrap up in the next few minutes and spent the next 15 of them in thanking everyone concerned, all of them Dr 'Ji's. The Dr 'Ji's in the audience lapped it all up and when, eventually, after what seemed like an eternity, the speaker waddled off stage, he was greeted with good applause. The Dr 'Ji's were happy that they had been referred to in flattering terms and let MMM tell you that when applying flattery in the arts world you need to do so with a shovel. As to why several others in the audience clapped was something of a mystery to MMM until he came to know that the speaker, or the drone in question, had in him the power to grant fellowships, research grants and an award or two. He was warmly thanked for his erudite and scholarly presentation.

MMM was billed three down, but he realised that

Rationing Body mentioned above. An e-mail arrived shortly thereafter from the organisation, thanking MMM for accepting and stating that as part of the rules, MMM would need submit a detailed article on his theme, which would be included as part of a publication to be released after the seminar. To this MMM sent a reply stating that when he accepted the invitation he was unaware of such a precondition and if this was compulsory he would prefer to be excused from attending the seminar as his time schedule did not permit his taking on the writing of such a detailed paper.

There was complete silence thereafter and MMM assuming that his nomination had been scratched, moved on to other things. But a couple of days before the seminar he got a call from a minion up north which wanted to know as to where MMM's paper was. To this MMM replied that he had already expressed his inability to write one and had bowed out of the programme. The

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

invited. How else can MMM explain the fact that one of the keynote speakers spoke entirely on the scenario in Indian dance in the 2nd Century CE? He remained steadfast to that time period and even at the end of his presentation did not touch on the dance scenario of the last hundred years. If that was not bad enough, his presentation itself comprised images of several closely typed pages being projected on the screen, all of which he insisted on reading out in pitiless detail. In a way that was to the good for the audience could not read a word – the type size was beyond the capacity of the human eye and the only way out would have been to present each member of the audience with a pair of binoculars, the kind that ornithologists use.

If that was bad enough, the speaker in question had quite clearly decided that he was the sole presenter for the day. He had been given twenty minutes, as had everybody else, but he chose to ramble on for an hour. The net result was that the time schedule was shot to pieces. Not that it appeared to matter to anyone except MMM. The audience dozed, glad to be in an air-conditioned room while the temperature outside was like that of any oven set to bake. They would have slept on and the speaker could have droned on, had not the major domo of ceremonies, waking mid-snore, took a startled glance at the clock and announced tea break. The speaker then came out of his trance, declared that

given the way the programme was going he would get his turn somewhere around midnight. He therefore used his cajoling powers and got himself upgraded to speak immediately after the coffee break. And having finished what he had to say, well within the time allotted to him, he chose to depart. The next speaker was scheduled to have a go and the first slide depicted something from the 5th Century BC.

One-way communication

Sorry Chief, *The Man from Madras Musings* is aware of the fact that you do not like the same story or topic to dominate the entire length of this column, but MMM is not yet done with the above seminar. This was organised by one of those Government bodies that have been set up somewhere up north ostensibly for the promotion of Indian culture. And they do so little that they can be said to be In the Cause of Cultural Rationing. And on this occasion, MMM had experience up close of how they work.

The first intimation was through a phone call from a well-known dance personality of our city, a woman of great achievements and erudition. She invited MMM to speak at the seminar and MMM, delighted that such an eminent personage had called him, accepted at once. The danseuse rang off, thanking MMM and telling him that he would soon hear from the

voice became all confused at this and hung up. A day later came another e-mail, asking for MMM's paper and giving him details of the venue of the seminar and what time his speech was, etc. It ended with a request for MMM's paper, which the email sender noted, was not yet received. All this set MMM's teeth on edge and he called the dancer and asked her what was to be done. She suggested that MMM ignore the missives and turn up anyway. Which is what MMM did.

But the organisation has not yet finished with MMM. Two days after the seminar MMM received an email thanking him for participating and reminding him to send in his paper as soon as possible. MMM wonders if not complying could be a non-bailable offence.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings did not know that 94 was a landmark number. Nevertheless, a certain set of people decided to celebrate it as a birthday event for a certain nonagenarian. The message went out that the birthday boy was not to be disturbed. This however, clearly did not apply to the rest of the city, which suffered cut-outs, posters, traffic hold-ups to facilitate VIP movement and more than the usual levels of noise pollution.

— MMM

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

Did a Native Medical School function in Madras in the 1820s?

The English East India Company (EEIC) established the Bengal Medical Service in 1763. EEIC established similar services in Bombay and Madras shortly after. By 1775, a Medical Board in Calcutta and Hospital Boards in Madras and Bombay began administering public hospitals. At this time, practitioners trained in Western medicine were few and far between. The British qualified surgeons working in India trained their 'assistants' for 1-2 years and certified them as capable of practising Western medicine independently.

To enhance numbers of so trained medical practitioners and also to improve the quality of assistants to British-qualified EEIC surgeons, the Native Medical Institution in Calcutta was started in 1824. At the Calcutta Sanskrit College, Ayurveda was taught further to 'some' aspects of Western Medicine. At the Calcutta Madrassa, basics of Western Medicine along with Unani-Tibbi were taught. William Bentinck (Governor General, 1828-1835) was unimpressed by the quality of material taught at the Native Medical Schools, more so with the calibre of the 'graduates'. He was of the strong opinion that the quality of trained personnel was far inferior and that medical education needed to be fully westernised. In 1835, the Native Medical Institution of Calcutta was abolished in 1835.

In this context, I was pleasantly surprised to read a report on a debate at the East India House (London) in the Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature (1826), published from London, which refers to a practice followed in Madras as 'Madras system' in the context of medical instruction to Indians.

The debater (name unavailable) says:

'In May, 1822, the Medical Board represented to the Government, that as considerable difficulty had been experienced in procuring Native Doctors to supply vacancies in the different Regiments, it would be advisable to establish an institution for the purpose of instructing the Natives and qualifying them to fill up the deficiencies; a superintendent be appointed to teach elementary branches of medicine (identified later as Pharmacy, Physic, and Surgery) and to preside generally over their education. Mr. Jameson [Dr. James Jameson, who was the superintendent of Calcutta Eye Infirmary in 1807-1820], the secretary of (Calcutta) Medical Board was appointed superintendent.'

In such a context, the debater further argues that the Madras Presidency operates without a superintendent. The debater strongly verbalises his disappointment on what the extra salary paid to Jameson was costing the Company and

OUR READERS WRITE



Hobart in the Nilgiris

Lord Hobart (MM, June, 1st) was the son of a clergyman who was also the sixth Earl of Buckinghamshire. During his heyday in Britain, Baron Vere Henry was stoutly opposed to the continuance of the Crimean War. Perhaps that was why he was shunted to Constantinople. On arrival in Madras, he became a strong proponent of a proper harbour for Madras.

Though Lord Hobart from the beginning advocated the cause of a better drainage system in Madras, it came to be implemented only posthumously, as noted in the write-up. His rendezvous in the hills was well-known in the annals of the Nilgiris. While in the Nilgiris he stayed at *Fern Hill* (later to become the Mysore Palace). *Government House*, or a separate governor's residence, was unknown in those days. Lord Hobart initiated some "magnificent proposals" in 1874 for beautifying Ooty. The Government staggered by the estimated cost and the difficulty in acquiring grounds about sixty to seventy acres in extent, torpedoed the scheme as "not suitable to the character of the ground". But Hobart Park in Ooty was created in 1875 to honour the late Governor. Even as late as 1908, it was noted as the most beautiful recreation ground in India and the biggest in any hill station in the country. It has disappeared now. Hobart Park in those days was situated on the eastern edge of the present day Racecourse.

The Neilgherry Archery Club was originally started on the site in 1869. It was the fore-runner of the Ooty Gymkhana Club. A polo ground, cricket ground and a nine-hole golf course soon followed. A race-stand was completed in 1898. As the pavilion for the race-stand came to be extended in later years, Hobart Park gradually lost ground. The present day road from Coonoor (where there was also a settlement of the Crimean War Veterans) to Lamb's Rock and Dolphin's Nose was named in memory of Lord Hobart.

Lady Hobart was a highly motivated missionary enthusiast. Mary Catherine Carr, the daughter of a Bishop of Bombay, she married Lord Hobart in 1858. She pioneered the educational mission for native girls at Ooty. The Church of England Zenna Mission greatly promoted these efforts in later times. This work in due course, also launched the famous Mission to the Todas. Its missionary, Catharine Ling, spent 48 years (1886-1932 & 1938-40) with the Todas.

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therefore the Native School administration be run without a designated superintendent following the Madras System. This debate resulted in Jameson's resignation of his position as the superintendent of Calcutta Native Medical School. Peter Breton, who was Jameson's predecessor, took charge again.

This debate raises the question: Did a Native Medical School function in Madras, along with Calcutta and Bombay Native Medical Schools, in the 1820s? The general understanding is that no Native Medical Institution was set up in Madras, although the Madras Ayurvedic College (later the College of Indian Medicine) was, through the efforts of the Mohammed Usman-Srinivasamurti Committee in the 1920s.

It will be interesting to know if a Native Medical Institution functioned in Madras, along with Calcutta and Bombay Institutions, and known otherwise. Moreover, a slim pride laces my mind again, when I read the terms 'Madras System' used by the debater in London in the 1820s, wherein a Madras model gains superiority over what was practised in Bengal.

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DISASTER

(Continued from page 1)

Authority (CMDA) that they had formed to go into the matter. The CMDA said its monitoring committee was quite active – it had met 62 times, with the last meeting a day before the fire. What was not said was that the meeting, like all earlier ones, had partial attendance and was inconclusive. In short, nobody was really to blame. But we did have a four-storey building sprout another four floors and merrily carry on business for several years, cocking a snook at the law. Ours is an administration that believes not in

punitive action, but in regularisation of illegal structures, in exchange for a fee.

All of this has exposed the rot in the entire business of constructing commercial buildings and T'Nagar is the worst of the lot. What is saddening is that no action has ever been taken and probably never will be. In this context, it is worthwhile to note that we wrote an editorial in 2008, when a fire broke out in another illegal structure, next to the present one. We are publishing that below. That building was soon back in business, as we are sure the present one will also be.

Garbage: WE have a role too

(Continued from page 1)

tackle the dirt and toxins generated by an increasingly high-consuming society. It is also complex and capital-intensive, needing massive infrastructure. The strategy of reducing wastages at source – individual households and industrial and other institutional entities could be more impactful, less complicated and productive of dramatic results. As the proportion of people living in apartment complexes increases, it is easier to get collective compliance in garbage management and even to ensure that they convert into compost themselves instead of transferring it to the municipal system. In a different context, it was estimated that the daily generation of sewage was of the order of 675 mld compared to the effective available treatment capacity of 437 mld, an insufficiency in processing capacity of 35 per cent. Reducing wastage at the source by this percentage is achievable by just doing without plastic alone. With this, insufficiencies of treatment capacity and of an underground sewage network can be over-

come without much capital cost.

A recent visitor to New Zealand cites how that country tackles garbage. Households are required to place the waste material, duly segregated, in bags at the gate for the collecting agency to pick them up. Specially marked paper bags for this purpose are issued by the municipality and made available at all stores for a price. A good part of the price goes to the collecting agency through the municipality. Thus, households are made to pay for this service according to the amount of garbage off-loaded by them and private collecting agencies are compensated by the number of bags deposited by them at the collection centre. Such innovative practices are aimed at establishing an accountability link.

Many international hotels have started asking their guests to voluntarily re-use bath towels for a second day and accept change of sheets at lesser frequency – all to save water. At homes, there is much scope for this and similar practices. An exaggerated sense of cleanliness, unconnected with the real need, results in luxurious use of

an increasingly scarce, life-giving material made available to us at practically no cost – that is, water! Dripping pipes, luxurious hose baths to cars every day – a common sight, believe me, in large complexes where water is no one's property – indiscriminate volumes of water for multiple baths every day, excessive use of detergents making recycling more difficult are all taking us towards critical water situations. Pricing water, such as to discourage wasteful use, recycling for garden use and for charging natural aquifers may become inevitable in course of time. Brackish water is used in cities like Singapore and Hong Kong for water closets carried through a separate line. Garbage aside, we as citizens can contribute significantly to save water. This should be possible for us with the God-given sea by our side.

Responsible consumption and adherence to disposal norms in dealing with the aftermath of consumption make the job more manageable for municipal agencies. It is time we concertedly focused on our own roles, for a change, shifting the focus away from the usual targets.

A showcase for Plan violations -

(By A Special Correspondent)

The recent fire in a building belonging to a high profile retail store in crowded Ranganathan Street has brought to light the large-scale regulation violations that have taken place over the years in this area. It lays bare the inability of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) and the local authorities to implement their own regulations. It also poses a big question about the validity of the new proposed Master Plan which is based on more vertical growth in the city, adding only to congestion.

Investigations have revealed that there were no fire safety measures in the building that caught fire. There was no emergency escape and, despite this, staff were allowed to stay during the night in the building.

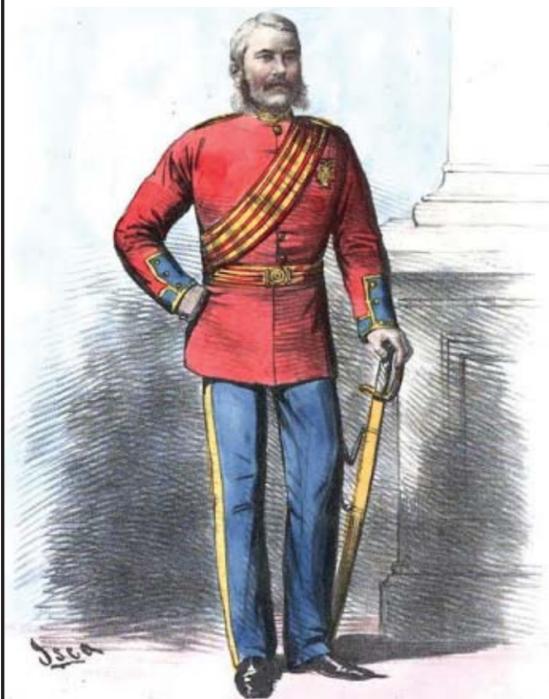
The access to the building is along a narrow road which has become steadily narrower due to encroachments and violations by every building in the neighbourhood. It is impossible for police and fire safety personnel to access any accident site in the vicinity. The fire in question may put out up to

because it happened in the early hours of the morning. Even then, water lories found it impossible to move in, as head cables prevented them from accessing the interior. The absence of water proximity of the building led to the heat to suit in cracks in the building leading to fears of a crumbling. Large and grilles further



CHARIVARI – 2

From Civilian to Police Chief



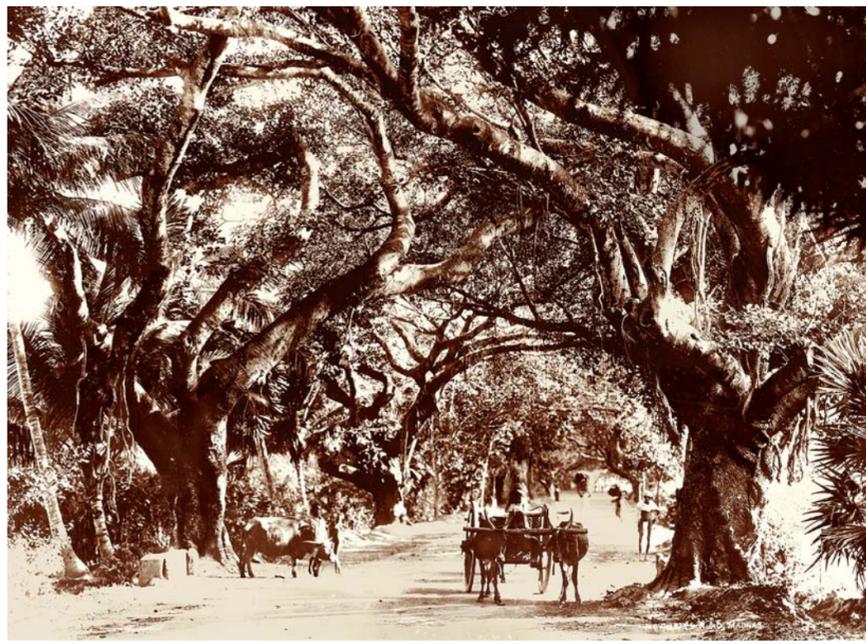
It is today known as the Arignar Anna Poonga but for long it was Robinson Park. The man after whom it was named was Sir William Rose Robinson, KCSI, of the Madras Civil Service. At the time the *Indian Charivari* carried his caricature and profile, he was the acting Governor of Madras, following the sudden death of the incumbent Governor, Lord Hobart (MM, June 1, 2017).

Born on June 28, 1822, Robinson graduated in 1841 from Haileybury College, the institution from where so many of the empire's administrators graduated. He joined the Madras Civil Service in 1842 and according to the *Indian Charivari*, his first assignment was as Assistant Magistrate, Canara. From there he moved up the ladder, becoming in 1856 Acting Magistrate, Malabar. Known to be a hard-working officer, his career may not have risen out of the ordinary had he not been suddenly appointed Inspector General of Police for the whole of Madras Presidency in 1858. He found his true calling and thoroughly remodelled the force, making it the best in India. Reward was swift, for he became Member, Board of Revenue, Madras and Additional Member, Viceroy's Executive Council as Representative for Madras. Thus it was that when Hobart died, he was asked to step in as Governor. His tenure, however, according to *Charivari*, was marked by masterly inactivity.

The assignment was in any case temporary and he handed over charge in December 1875, to the Duke of Buckingham & Chandos. This was apparently not without a pang as *Charivari* would have it, for Robinson had hoped to be officiating Governor when the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, came visiting in December that year. *Charivari* dealt more kindly with his wife, saying she was known for her good works. Born Julia Thomas, she was the daughter of another old Madras hand, James Thomas of the Civil Service.

Robinson was knighted in 1876. Shortly before he left Madras in 1879, Robinson laid the foundation stone for the park that would be named after him. It had a fine botanical garden and a large fernery presented by A. Armoogam Mudaliar. The management of Robinson Park, which still offers a green lung in Washermenpet and Royapuram, was transferred to the Municipality on February 1, 1899. It was in this park that on September 18, 1948, Arignar Anna declared the formation of the DMK. The park is now therefore named after him.

On retirement, Robinson settled in London, near Hyde Park, where he passed away on April 27, 1886.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI
– SRIRAM V

Where have all the avenues gone?

It's a blazing summer with a drought compounding it. Most of Chennai's roads are devoid of any kind of tree cover and with the heat radiating from the sky, the buildings, the roads and the vehicles make for a local version of hell. At a time like this, it is with a pang that I read a report of the Municipal Corporation of Madras, dating to 1868. It has, among other things, a page on how the civic body set about creating tree cover along certain roads in the city, thereby qualifying them as avenues.

The part of Mount Road between Government House (now Periyar) Bridge and Wallajah (presently Quaid-e-Milleth) Bridge was named Napier Avenue and was lined with Peepul Trees. This is the road that cuts right across the Island and its southern edge goes past what was once Napier's (now May Day) Park, which probably explains its name. There are plenty of photographs of the dense foliage that once existed on this road. Today, it is a wide thoroughfare but devoid of trees. Napier was Governor of Madras in the 1860s.

Coleman Avenue was named after J.G. Coleman who was a partner and later sole proprietor of McDowell & Co. At the time this avenue was being created, he was President of the

Municipality of Madras. This stretch was from Parry's Corner to Fort St. George, a space now occupied by the subway that runs parallel to the High Court compound. Coleman Avenue was lined with casuarina trees.

Ladies' Mile is an interesting name and this evidently was at the eastern end of the Island, flanking the Cooum. This was planted with trees of various species. Victoria Avenue, to be lined with jamun trees, is a little difficult to identify, but would appear to have been near here. The document has it that this was the old Wallajah East Esplanade Road, which connected St. Mary's and Wallajah Bridges. But with St. Mary's Bridge itself no longer visible, locating this road would have been well nigh impossible were it not for the indefatigable researches of Hemachandra Rao. He says St. Mary's Bridge took its name from St. Mary's Cemetery on the Island. It ran across the Cooum just next to this burial ground, close to where the Buckingham Canal met the Cooum. This bridge later came to be topped by the Stanley Viaduct and overbridge. According to Rao, vestiges of the old St. Mary's Bridge can still be seen if you are willing to brave the slum that has come up under the Stanley Viaduct. The Eicher Map shows

Burial Ground Road as connecting Quaid-E-Milleth (earlier Wallajah) Bridge and the spot where St. Mary's Bridge once stood. This road too is not accessible now owing to the dense slum that exists on it, but in its time this must have been Victoria Avenue.

Easier to locate is Cooum Riverside Avenue. This was from Law's Bridge, the pedestrian walkway that connects Chintadripet with E.V.R. Salai just where *Ripon Building* stands, to Government House Gate (which is where the Assembly-turned-Multi-Speciality Hospital now is). Now known as Deputy Mayor Kalamurthy Road, it had portia (*puvarasu*) trees planted on it. The other end of Law's Bridge was at the gates of People's Park, for in 1868 none of the landmarks we know – *VP Hall*, *Ripon Building*, Central Station or Moore Market – existed. The tree-lined avenue there, full of portia trees, extended all along Sydenham's (now Raja Sir M.A. Muthiah Chettiar) Road right up to De Mellow's Road, making it a very long avenue indeed.

Popham's Broadway Avenue, lined with portia and neem trees, is easy to locate though no trace of it survives now. It began at the St. Xavier's

(Continued on page 6)

NOSTALGIA AS HISTORY – 2

Pelathope Days

One of the most entertaining among this group of books is G. Ram Mohan's *Pelathope Days*. Pelathope is a narrow residential street close to Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore and is said to be as old as the temple or even older. Today it looks more or less the same as a hundred years ago, except that it is far more congested. Pelathope gets its name from what was surmised to have been a grove (thoppu) of pala (jack-fruit) trees before the grove made way for houses. Known to be a street full of lawyers, judges and doctors, Pelathope is a sort of microcosm of the world of Mylapore middle class life.

Ram Mohan moved into a house in Pelathope with his family when he was five and left the street only when he was 24. He writes, "The purpose of my writing this book is not one of recording the events of my life. I am well aware that it will not be a matter of interest to anyone. My purpose is to record such of my memories and impressions from my life as would give the reader an idea of what life was like in those days in a typical middle class Hindu family in Madras city." And this he proceeds to do very well indeed, despite the fact that he writes entirely from memory. This simply produced paperback has charming line drawings that complement the chatty, humorous style.

Ram Mohan's family were Telugu-speaking Brahmins and his father, G. Gopalakrishnan, was, what else, a lawyer. After living in various places in Mylapore earlier, and a short stint in Pudukkottai, where they headed when Madras was evacuated, the family moved into a rented home in Pelathope in 1942. They paid a rent of Rs. 40. The family was quite big, four boys and two girls. And as the normal family size in those days was four children, the parents and a couple of grandparents, there were plenty of chil-

dren in the street for Ram Mohan and his siblings to play with. There was a lot of neighbourliness and loneliness was an unknown concept. "We could see the Kapali temple tower from the first floor of our home in Pelathope," Ram Mohan writes. "Now high rise buildings obstruct the view. The temple bells could be heard clearly during the three main pujas of the day... We were parallel to North Mada Street." For a long time Mylapore consisted only of the four Mada Streets around the temple. Pelathope opens off Ramakrishna Mutt road which was earlier known as

Brodie's Road. The street ended in a dead end. All the houses were street houses, packed side by side, but each had its own distinct personality. Their only common feature was that the exterior walls were all lime washed in either white or yellow. The street was also earlier known as Vedanta Desikar Street and was associated with the festival honouring the Vaishnavite saint. Every year the idol of the saint was brought to Pelathope in procession, and the residents offered worship to the idol before it proceeded to the temple beyond Kapali Temple.

The junction where Pelathope meets Ramakrishna Mutt road is a shopping hive today. Ram Mohan writes that even in his time, the place was a commercial area, although not quite so crowded. "For many years, till about the late 1950s, it housed a

● by Janaki Venkataraman

popular Udipi style restaurant which we all referred to as simply Udipi Hotel. It was started by a Kannada family who were residents of Pelathope and they served the usual Udipi fare. The red building housed an eye clinic run by a Dr. R.N. Row. There was also a paan shop at the entrance to the hotel, owned by a Nair and so called Nair Kadai... Then there was a general merchant store at one end of the red building and a barber shop at the other end."

"I still remember and can recall the prices of all items ... we bought at the general merchant's. The remarkable

part is not that the prices were so low then. After all, incomes were also low and money's value was much higher. The remarkable point is that the prices were so stable. During the first fifteen years or more of the period I have covered in this book, the prices and rates for all the items did not change one bit. The price of a cup of coffee in our Udipi hotel was two annas when we moved to Pelathope and about fourteen years later when decimal currency came into being, it was changed to thirteen paise. That was an increase of half a paise, since the exact equivalent of two annas is twelve and a half paises. All the Udipi style restaurants in Madras did it. People wrote angry letters against the 'price rise' to the editors of newspapers complaining that the hoteliers were exploiting the customers under the guise of changing over to decimal coinage. ... I often wonder how the Finance Ministers of that era managed to keep inflation at zero level for years on end. Were there some wizards running the Finance Ministry? Or was it a natural outcome of the overall stability of society itself?"

Most of the shops mentioned by Ram Mohan have now disappeared. But Sathyam Studio, the photo shop and Murthy Pinmen, the laundry, remain there (at the time of writing, 2010).

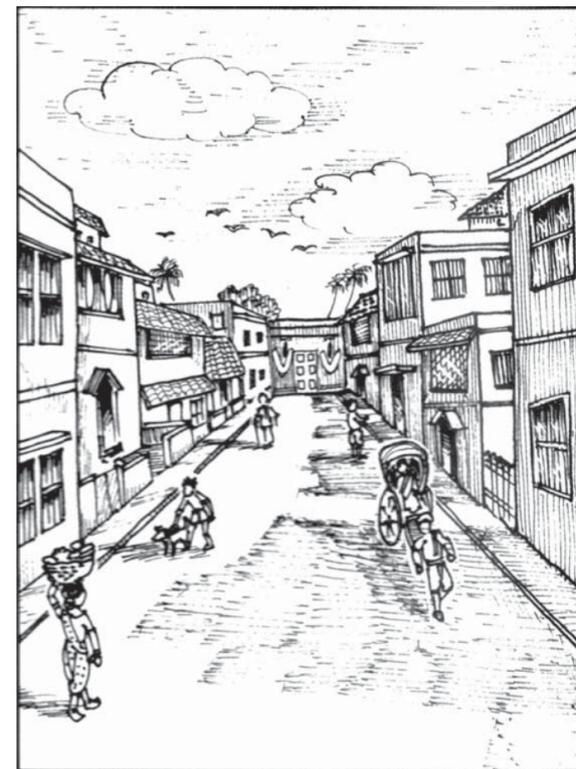
All the children went to the same primary school. After that the boys went to P.S. High School and the girls to Lady Sivaswamy Iyer Girls' School. The primary school might have had a name but as the elderly Brahmin running it had a long,

flowing white beard, it was popularly known only as Dhaadi School. It crammed 50 kids to a class, which had only benches to sit on and no desks and the children wrote on slates held against their bellies. The medium of instruction was Tamil until Form 4. Emphasis was placed on oral learning and committing to memory, whether the children learnt the maxims of Avvaiyar or mathematical tables. "We were trained to do lots of problems by mental arithmetic," Ram Mohan writes. "A typical problem in mental arithmetic set for a fourth standard student would be something like this: 'If 15 palams of sugar costs six annas and nine pies how much would a veesai cost?' Forty Palams were a veesai, twelve paises an anna and sixteen annas a rupee. We did it mentally and arrived at the right answer as one rupee two annas."

There were tables up to sixteen to be learnt normally and then by reverse. There were also the fraction tables – for three-quarters, half, quarter, one-eighth and one-sixteenth upto one-sixty fourth. "In those days I could tell you at a pinch that a hundred times one-sixteenth is six and a quarter and seven hundred times one-eighths is eighty seven and a half," Ram Mohan recalls proudly.

Life in Dhaadi School also exposed the children to the poverty of other children who could not afford to pay even the meagre fees and were malnourished,

(Continued on page 7)



Wordless Gopulu



● The late Gopulu during his Ananda Vikatan days had a series of wordless jokes that brought about loud laughter. These were brought out as a book, in 2005, and a copy was recently sent to me by Charukesi. We are pleased to publish these cartoons for a new generation of Madrasis. – THE EDITOR





Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's questions are from May 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 relate to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.

1. What image will appear on the new Re. 1 currency note that the RBI is planning to bring back into circulation?
2. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation's new nation-wide campaign to promote toilet use and freedom from open defecation across the villages of the country is called?
3. Of which prestigious National-level cultural award is Satyabrata Rout the latest recipient?
4. Name the controversial 'supercop', credited with rooting out militancy in Punjab, and a former head of the Indian Hockey Federation who passed away recently.
5. According to an amendment by the National nodal body, what is the time period till when an entity will be considered a Start-Up?
6. Name the world-famous circus that came to a close after 146 years on May 21st.
7. Name the British actor who played James Bond between 1973 and 1985 and who passed away recently.
8. Name the famous feature of Mount Everest which collapsed as a result of the 2015 earthquake has been confirmed. The collapse makes the world's highest peak even more dangerous for climbers.
9. *The Square* by Ruben Ostlund won the Palme d'Or for the best picture at which celebrated film festival recently?
10. BSNL recently inked agreements with which popular social media portal and wallet to popularise the internet and its value added services among its customers?

* * *

11. Name the actress who played the title role in SS Vasan's *Miss Malini* and her more famous daughter, a National Award-winner and a Rajiya Sabha member.
12. In the context of Chennai cuisine, which famous eating place was started by Triloknath Gupta in the late 1940s?
13. Another film question. By what screen name was P.K. Nagalingam known, a name he got because of his physique?
14. Name the 210-year-old church on Davidson Street in George Town that is said to have a chair belonging to the Tamil scholar and linguist Bishop Robert Caldwell.
15. Name the 'infamously famous' journalist with whom would one associate the journals *Hindu Nesan* and *Cinema Thoothu*.
16. What was the poetic name of Nawab Ghulam Ghouse Khan Bahadur, the last Nawab of the Carnatic, after whom an institution on Mount Road is named?
17. Name the rarely played lute-like stringed instrument that looks like the *veena* sans the frets and on which *thalam* can be played by striking two bamboo sticks.
18. In 1887, Raja Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, was the first Indian to hold which public appointment in Madras?
19. Name the pioneering city magazine started by Sita and Abraham Eraly in November 1977 that called itself 'A Magazine of Madras'?
20. Name the first Indian studio-backed film to be made exclusively for the Internet that premiered in April 2014.

(Answers on page 8)

90+ and still going strong

A three-fold commitment



Dr. M.S. Swaminathan

Acclaimed by *Time* magazine as one of the twenty most influential Asians of the 20th Century and by the United Nations as "a living legend who will go into the annals of history as a world scientist of rare distinction," Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan is the Founder and Chairman of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Taramani.

"In my nineties, I'm even more concerned with the unfinished challenges facing the country in the areas of food production, distribution and malnutrition. I feel satisfied about what has been done but also recognise what has not been done. Does the inevitable loss of memory that accompanies old age help sweep under the carpet what you don't want to accept?" he smiles disarmingly. "This is in fact a time when my considerable experience in life helps me judge people better," he smiles mis-

chievously. He has often been 'accused' of being too trusting!

"I wake up by 6 am, each day, whatever time I go to bed. Morning routines included a brisk 45 minute walk, till last year. Currently, I'm only able to do some physical exercises, because I have a problem with my knee and therefore am unsteady without my walking stick. By 8.30 am, I am at the Foundation office! But over

• by
Shobha Menon

the last year, it has been delayed by half hour. It's 9 am now," he sighs rather wistfully.

"Coming early to work means I can go around the rooms and catch up with the early bird students and staff and check on the cleanliness of the toilets too. 9 am to 1 pm is

work at office and student meetings. The latter are always challenging and interesting!" He goes on, "These days I leave for home in the afternoon so I can lunch with my wife, who is currently challenged by a medical issue. And I have gotten into the 'bad' habit of resting between 2 and 3 pm... not at all good!"

3.30 pm to 5.30 pm is when he writes his papers or works on books and also reads up on new developments in the field of Genetics. "As much as I can, I continue to seek ways to contribute towards awareness on scientific issues and concerns. To keep abreast with social media, I have a Twitter account and my students tell me that 2 lakh people access it! Good ways of communication, scientific modes of communication, sharing the correct information at the correct time... all these are important. 'Share whatever

I know, in the best possible way', is my rule."

Keeping in touch with students, the new generation of leaders, is an important part of Dr. MSS's life. "My last Ph.D. student submitted her thesis only a few weeks ago, and I have guided over 100 till date! I very much enjoy guiding students on scientific thought processes. Never about right or wrong, but just sharing what my experiences have been. Being able to look at the wrongs and finding how best to make them right is an amazing skill to develop! Non-verbal communication can be an important aspect!"

Leisure time has always included Carnatic music and classical dance performances. "I have always been a fan of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and now T.M. Krishna, also dancer Alarmel Valli. Television time is rare, generally only programmes on the Discovery Channel or news channels. These days, not much in the news anyway," he adds wryly. For about half hour or so before going to bed, he reads books by Ramana Maharishi or Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Dr. MSS still continues to travel extensively, in spite of the need to use a walking stick, or a wheelchair to board aircraft! In June, he travels to the McGill University in Canada for his next honorary doctorate, another of the many that line his office. On February 18, 2016, he received the first Bharat Krushi Ratna Man Patra, the highest award in the field of agriculture from the farmers of India. On December 14, 2013, he received the Greatest Global Living Legend award. It was from President Pranab Mukherjee and NDTV... The awards are innumerable!

"The older you get the more you are able to perceive the misconceptions you harbour – about people or technologies. Issues of concern must be dealt with in a holistic manner, not by compartmentalising, because most problems are multidimensional – social, economic and environmental. My projects focus on being 'Pro Poor, Pro Nature, Pro Women.' His next award is to be given for Outstanding Leadership by the Women's Economic Forum.

(Continued on page 8)

The missing avenues

(Continued from page 4)

Parchery and ran via Monegar Choultry Road to Tondiarpet. Mount Road Avenue ran on Mount Road, from Government House (Periyar) Bridge to Neil's Statue, which stood at the Spencer's Junction. This also had different kinds of trees planted on it. On the opposite side, from Waller's Stables (now space occupied by Christ Church, the Cosmopolitan and S.V.S. Clubs and much else) to General Patter's Road ran the Club Avenue, which had redwood and acacia trees on it. This stretch ended at the Madras Club, which was on property now occupied by the Express Avenue Mall.

Binny's Avenue was where Binny's Road is, leading from Neil's Statue (Spencer's Junction) to Commander-in-Chief Bridge. Neem trees were planted here. From this bridge ran Marshall's Road (now Rukmini Lakshmipathy Salai). This had neem and portia trees lining it all the way along the Cooum, space occupied by the Rajarathinam Stadium, the walls of the eye hospital and up to Harris (now Adithanar) Road. From Harris

Road began Lang's Avenue (now Lang's Garden Road), which ran along the Cooum. This had portia and neem trees. Spur Tank Avenue was from the Mounted Police barracks to Munro's Bridge. The former is in Adithanar Road and the only thoroughfare connecting it to any bridge is Pantheon Road as it ends at present day College Bridge. This must have once been known as Munro's Bridge and the road to it was planted with neem trees, as were several stretches along Purasawalkam High Road, which came to be known as Purasawalkam Avenue.

Coranaeswarar Covil Road, named Barber's Bridge Avenue, was as the name suggests in Mylapore, leading to the famed Hamilton/Barber's and now Ambedkar Bridge. This road, lined then with portia trees, is now known as Paripurna Vinayakar Koil Street. Pycroft's Avenue, leading from Bell's (now Babu Jagjivan Ram) Road to the Beach (where Kannagi Statue now is), had redwood trees. Bell's Road itself came to be called Bell's Avenue, with redwood trees planted on it. Neem

trees lined Wallajah Road from Round Tana (where Anna Statue now stands) to Chepauk Palace and the stretch was called Alexandra Avenue, after Victoria's daughter-in-law and future Queen of England. Along the Beach, connecting the old Fort glaxis via Napier's Bridge to the space now occupied by the *samadhi*-s was Band Practice Road. Lined with portia trees, this became South Beach Avenue.

The peepul and casuarina failed to take root wherever planted and on their failing, were replaced with neem and portia trees. It is noteworthy that no alien species were planted anywhere. The total cost came to Rs. 3,037, as 11 p 11. This was funded by revenue from grazing contracts on the esplanades and on roadsides, sale of hay and clippings of trees. The money earned from these activities was Rs. 4,527 as 10 p 10. The Municipality thus made a neat profit from the whole project. Those were innocent times.

It would be interesting to walk along these stretches and see if any old trees of those species are still standing.

The back story

– How Ambattur Industrial Estate became a reality

Ambattur Industrial Estate was the second industrial estate to come up in the State of Madras (the first being the Guindy Industrial Estate). It is the largest among the industrial estates in South-east Asia, spreading over an area of a little over 1,300 acres and having more than 1,800 units. This industrial estate, which became functional in 1964, boasts of a large number of automobile components manufacturers, which, in fact, forced one of the largest truck manufacturers in the country, Tata Engineering & Locomotive Co. Ltd., to open a procurement centre in Madras to facilitate their purchases and interaction with suppliers. The presence of so many auto components producers was the prime reason for several international car producers to set up manufacturing units in and around Madras.

The architect behind this successful industrial contribution was R. Venkataraman, former President of India, when he was the State's Industries Minister for over ten years. He had first promoted the Guindy Industrial Estate in 1958 – the first of its kind in India – and it became an instant success. He began to think of building on this success.

The State unit of the Congress Party decided to host the A.I.C.C. session in Madras in 1955 and to hold it at Avadi. It expected around 3,000 delegates to attend and arrangements had to be made for their accommodation and food close to the venue. It also expected over 30,000 persons to attend the public meetings on each of the

two days when all-India leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel participated. There were no roads or infrastructure of any kind and the whole area was totally barren land. Every arrangement had to be made from scratch. The State Government took up the task of laying a motorable road to connect the venue from the city and clear the wild shrubbery in the vast area

● by
N. Venkateshwaran

where the present Ambattur Estate is situated. The plan was to put up tents to accommodate the delegates and have a common kitchen to serve food to all of them. The plans included getting steam ovens, which were introduced for the first time, to prepare hot *idli*-s for all on a massive scale. For the stay of the Prime Minister and other VVIPs, facilities were put up at Perambur which included a railway siding from Perambur Railway station to take the guests directly to their place of stay.

The then Chief Minister of the State, K. Kamaraj asked Venkataraman: "Venkatarama, you are using public money on a massive scale for a Party session. Will not the public question you tomorrow on this?" To which R.V. replied that the place where the delegates were being housed would be made into an industrial estate to house a little over 1,000 units employing around one lakh people, for which Kamaraj wondered where he was going to find the entrepreneurs. R.V.

told him that he was very confident that, given the right kind of facilities and working climate, the place would get filled up in no time and the State would be forced to build more industrial estates at various centres. He went on to explain that the place where the VIPs would be staying could be used for building an extension to the nearby Integral Coach Factory and that he had already discussed this with the Railway Minister N. Gopalaswamy Iyengar, so the Railway siding would not go a waste. The ICF's furnishing factory later would come up here. He also explained that he had asked T.S. Krishna of the TVS Group to purchase the Padi lake area to put up manufacturing units for automobile components, assuring him of help to get the required licences from the Centre. He was also requesting T.T. Krishnamachari, the then Com-



Left to right: R. Venkataraman, K. Kamaraj and M. Bhakthavatsalam looking at a model of the Ambattur Industrial Estate at its inauguration on July 3, 1965.

merce Minister, to persuade Dunlop, who was thinking of a second unit, to put it in Ambattur. The Murugappa group had agreed to set a cycle manufacturing unit at Avadi. These industrial units would amply justify the expenditure on the roads and other infrastructure, he was confident.

The Avadi session was a thumping success. It was a historical event in the annals of the Congress party, where the resolution that India would follow a "socialistic pattern of society"

was unanimously adopted. The highlight of the session was the presence of Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Accompanying him was Nikolai Bulganin, the then president of the Soviet Union. They coincided their visit to India in order to be present at the Avadi Session and more than 50,000 people – much more than what the organisers expected – thronged the venue, unmindful of the incessant drizzle and slushy ground.

PELATHOPE DAYS

(Continued from page 5)

as well as to the dark side of schooling, corporal punishment and poorly paid teachers.

Ram Mohan's father later bought the house they rented. Firewood was the primary fuel used for cooking. So every house had a 'lumber room' where the firewood was stacked. The wood attracted scorpions which now and then dropped down. "Their sting was extremely painful. They were slow movers and when one was sighted there would be an alarm raised. It was the duty of any adult male present to beat it to death with the nearest available weapon – usually a stick or a piece of firewood. There was an occasion when Chandi (my elder brother) was the one who sighted a scorpion. 'Scorpion! Scorpion!' he screamed. 'Call some man!' He was 21 then!"

There is a chapter dedicated to the *kudumi* (tuft) and the urgency to get rid of it in an Anglicised world. Ram Mohan's maternal grandfather loved his *kudumi* but was forced to get rid of it after it began to embarrass him in front of his British bosses. As a matter of courtesy, he had to, in their presence, remove the tightly starched and tied turban within which he concealed his *kudumi*. The mo-

ment he did that, his *kudumi* would come cascading down.

Then there is the story told about the *kudumi* of the famous cricketer, M.J. Gopalan. "I can't vouch for its truth: but it is an interesting story," writes Ram Mohan. Gopalan, from an orthodox Ayyangar family of Triplicane, sported a big *kudumi*. "He would conveniently tuck his *kudumi* under his solar hat when batting or fielding; but trouble came when he bowled. He had to necessarily remove his hat to bowl. The exposed *kudumi* proved to be his undoing. When he was selected to play against a touring England team in the 1930s, the English batsmen initially found his bowling unplayable... then one batsman found a way out of the problem. When Gopalan bent his bowling arm sharply at the shoulder (to bowl his 'mystery' delivery) that sharply bent arm would expose his *kudumi* and cause it to drop and unfurl. That was too obvious a sign for the batsman to miss and Gopalan lost his vital surprise element... "Take off the tuft Gopala, and I will take you in the test team," Vizzy (the captain) is said to have told Gopalan.

"Gopalan refused and was dropped from the test team after being given just one chance."

The book recounts how festivals were celebrated in

Pelathope and how socially complicated weddings were, how women slowly came out of stifling protectionism and got educated, how rooted the children were in their own cultures while at the same time trying to understand the rest of the world through magazines and books; of the ten-day Kapali temple festival (that was banned for six years from 1940 to 1945 on account of World War II. It was considered a security risk as the bright lights of the nightly festivities could attract air raids). Ram Mohan talks of the stifling orthodox practices of the households, the superstitions that ruled their lives, street cricket and the excitement of going to Chepauk for the real matches, and of the warmth and joy of growing up in a big joint family. "I am no psychologist but I strongly believe this: growing up in a home with a large number of sisters and brothers, and interacting with boy and girl cousins, gives a youngster, boy or girl, a much healthier attitude towards the opposite sex from early on in life. Boys in those days, I feel, imbibed a sense of respect for femininity from early on."

Pelathope Days is nostalgia at its best and most entertaining. (Published by Akshaya Publications, Alwarpet.)
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Mother's cricketing passion

As the Champion's Trophy tournament gets underway, I recall Mother who had, just after World War II, started reading about cricket, got passionate about it within a year, and became an armchair critic of not only the game, but the leading players of that era too.

Mother, Padmini Varma, had cricket-crazy nephews from erstwhile Cochin State, who were studying in Madras colleges like Presidency, Guindy, MIT etc. She being their *de facto* local guardian, found herself listening with them to the cricket commentaries on All India Radio (AIR) as well as BBC and Radio Australia (particularly when India toured England, Australia and the West Indies) and being tutored in the game.

Pretty soon, it was Don, Stan (Macabe), Len (Hutton), Walter (Hammond), Fred (Trueman), the 3Ws etc., who

became household names and were bandied about at lunch, tea and dinner, particularly during weekends. It also included visits to Chepauk to watch from the MCC Members' Enclosure visiting teams.

However, by the time the New Zealand team came to India in 1955, Test matches had shifted to the Corporation Stadium, much to her disappointment. Chepauk, with its trees,

Mankad, the innings victory thereafter making it doubly sweet. The Palmtreeallah (Polly Umrigar was so named after his six-hitting exploits in the Caribbean) became her second favourite Indian player. Dattu Phadkar remained her all-time favourite in that era.

By now her reading habits were not confined to *The Hindu* or *Sport and Pastime* alone, but had extended to *Indian Cricket*

wickets to fall. That apart, when the commentary was on, our tea, lunch and dinner (over-seas tests) timings were always in sync with the matches, so much so that even the staff knew when to set the table and get the food piping hot!!!

During Test matches in Madras, we would have guests, mainly relatives from Bangalore, Cochin etc., who would be billeted under Mother's supervision in different houses and all of them would have to assemble at our place on Anderson Road from where, after breakfast, we took buses or went by car to Moore Market from where we would proceed to the G & H stands in Corporation Stadium. My parents and uncles would all have tickets for the Terrace stand, so they would come much later. Come lunchtime, however, we would all assemble at the SIAA Club where our car was parked, father Ravi Varma being a member.

Between mouthfuls, Mother and others would talk animatedly about what had happened in the game and that stopped only when lunch was over and we got back to our designated seats looked after most diligently by our neighbours, who were then duly rewarded with snacks (when the vendors came by with their baskets) at our cost, since they had ensured nobody else encroached our designated bench. The bonhomie at these times, and during the matches, had to be seen to be believed. In those five days, apart from the rest day, we would become bosom pals and, if lucky, meet them again when the next Test surfaced.

Remembered by Krishnadas Varma

verdant surroundings and temporary wooden stands had been a joy to behold, compared to this concrete stadium. The shift, however, did not deter her interest, and the Terrace stand became her favourite after the world record opening partnership of 413 by Roy and

Field Annual which Dicky Rutnagar brought out. The statistics were memorised and she startled many a cricket fan she came across at not only the ground, but at parties as well. S.K. Gurunathan, the then Sports Editor of *The Hindu*, was a close family friend and through him she gleaned even more details about Indian and visiting players and, as if it was, first-hand knowledge, she spread the word whenever the opportunity arose.

When India played at say Bombay or Calcutta, she would be glued to the radio, which became her personal fiefdom. If India was batting, she would stay put in her chair and expect everybody else to remain where they were. She was so superstitious, she felt that if an Indian wicket fell, it was because someone had shifted places. Bowlers or fielders of opposing teams never got the credit, but if a Gupte or Mankad dismissed a batsman, she would be overjoyed and start praying even more vigorously for many more

threefold – what can I do for humanity to overcome malnutrition and hunger, what can I do for my family members, and what can I do for my larger extended family of over 300-strong scholars and scientists! Whatever I have been able to achieve, I owe it to my wife and companion, Mina. Married 65 years now, we have three wonderful daughters. I am blessed to have such a supportive family."

Exceptional about this legend is his childlike enthusiasm. And yes, I got his personal 'Thank You' mail even before I reached home!

STILL GOING STRONG

(Continued from page 6)

"My continued interests in the fields of overcoming malnutrition in the country, and the technological empowerment of women, keep me motivated and active, and passing on ideas to policy makers. Getting older garners more admirers but also more 'adversaries'. I try to take note of objective criticism to learn, other criticism I have learnt to ignore.

"Each day I thank God for giving me the opportunity to give back and for helping me make the best use of myself

Dates for Your Diary



Till June 28: *Heavenly Bodies*, a photo exhibition by C.P. Satyajit (at DakshinaChitra).

Till June 30: *Hidden Faces of Venice*, a photo exhibition by Melanie Chagneau (at DakshinaChitra).

The entire programme, including lunch, was coordinated with nary a hitch by Mother. Her passion only increased her efficiency.

This flashback has been to underline the fact that India hardly won Tests as frequently as we do now and I have tried to imagine what my Mother would feel with the recent team performing as it has been.

Answers to Quiz

1. Sagar Samrat oil exploration rig, 2. 'Darwaza Bandh', 3. Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar, the highest Indian recognition given to practising artists, 4. K.P.S. Gill, 5. Not completed seven years from the date of its incorporation/registration, 6. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, 7. Roger Moore, 8. The 'Hillary Step', 9. Cannes, 10. Facebook and MobiKwik

* * *

11. Pushpavalli and Rekha, 12. Ratna Café, 13. Raja Sandow, 14. William Charles church, 15. C.N. Lakshmikanthan, 16. Azam (after whom the Madrasa-I-Azam is named), 17. 'Geth', 18. Sheriff, 19. *Aside*, 20. AVM's *Idhuvum Kadandhu Pogum*.

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