

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Karthik and CGK
- The Subbudu story
- The Academy's rival
- A Season of frenzy

Vol. XXVII No. 18

January 1-15, 2018

Will appreciation of this ▼ be taught in syllabus...

Humanities still get short shrift

(By Our Education Correspondent)

Statistical indicators of the physical and quantitative aspects of the education system show Tamil Nadu in good light in comparison with other States. Sufficiency of infrastructure, however, does not by itself ensure efficacy. Syllabus content and teaching methodologies produce the final impact. The growing number of

(Continued on page 10)



Painted Stork (above), Cormorants (below left) and Pelicans (below right) arrive for the Season at Sholinganallur marshland.



... as well as how to care for this ▼?

Whither heritage conservation?

(By The Editor)

2017 is drawing to a close. We must be thankful that no major heritage structure caught fire or mysteriously collapsed this year. What was on the verge of collapse in December 2016 remains in the same state a year later. But we have had acts of wanton demolition, as happened with Binny's head office. But there is a glimmer of hope and this has manifested itself by way of a Government announcement, earlier this month. And so we end 2017 on a positive note.

Apparently, there is now a Building Centre and Conservation Department within the Public Works Department. And this entity has been entrusted the task of restoring three heritage structures in the city – the Humayun Mahal in

the Chepauk Palace campus, a section of the Government Press located in George Town, and the office of the Deputy Inspector General, Registration Department. All three structures are now in a state of ruin and the Government has announced that it is allocating funds for their restoration. The projects, it is understood, may take over three years before they reach completion.

This is, however, the same Government that suddenly announced that at Madrasa-e-Azam would make way for a wedding hall, thereby clearly indicating it has no consistent policy when it comes to heritage conservation. It also established one fact – any act of protection

(Continued on page 2)



The rusted Munro statue (see page 3). All pictures by Shantanu Krishnan.

Whither heritage?

(Continued from page 1)

or, conversely, demolition, depends of the man/woman on the spot – be it a minister or a bureaucrat. If the person favours protection, the structure will be protected. If not, no. Madrasa-e-Azam has, however, temporarily been granted a reprieve, by the only arm of the State that has so far championed the cause of heritage – the judiciary. A stay has been issued, following a petition challenging the demolition.

It now appears that the Government's track record on conservation is better than what it is when it comes to private properties. And this is where lack of a clear policy or guidelines is hurting. How can a building like Binny's be demolished when Court orders prevent such an occurrence? How can *Leith Castle* be sold to developers as has recently been alleged? How can the Young Men's Indian Association and the Life Insurance Corporation of India cock a snook at the law by not restoring Gokhale Hall and Bharat Insurance (Kardyll) Building respectively when there is a clear directive from the Court? It is because the Government does not implement the law. In all these cases,

there is clear evidence that a private entity or a quasi governmental body (like LIC) can get away with whatever it wants to do. When the Government can on occasion protect buildings that it owns, why cannot it make the private sector do so? Are there other commercial interests involved?

Harking back to the decision to conserve the three buildings listed in the beginning of this article, we would also like to know the modalities of how it is proposed to be done. Will the guidelines be the same as they are for new constructions? Or has the PWD now staff who are qualified to restore heritage structures? If it is the former, it is a cause for concern. Conservation architects have repeatedly raised doubts over the way the Government clubs restoration with modern structures. The two cannot be equated and we need distinct guidelines for each. Does the proposed Building Centre and Conservation Department have the necessary skills? If that is so, we look forward to some really good conservation exercises of which we can justifiably be proud. If not we will have botched attempts as was done in the case of the GPO. Let us, however, hope for the best.

THANK YOU, DONORS

We today, publish donations received with thanks for the period from 01.12.17 till date

– The Editor

Rs. 50: Fazal, M.

Rs. 100: Sivasankaran, A; Thiruvengadam, V

Rs. 250: Yeshwant, R

Rs. 400: Pradeep, B; Kasilingam, M.

Rs. 900: Parthasarathi, R; Uthandaraman, A.

Rs. 1300: Parthasarathy, N.S.

CHENNAI HERITAGE

No. 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014

I am already on your mailing list (Mailing List No.....) / I have just seen *Madras Musings* and would like to receive it hereafter.

● I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to **CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS**, as **subscription to *Madras Musings*** for the year 2017-18.

● As token of my support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, I send Chennai Heritage an additional Rs..... (Rupees.....) Please keep/put me on your mailing list.

Name :

Address:

All cheques to 'Chennai Heritage'. DD/Cheque should be sent by Speed Post only.

Once upon a glorious hall

Despite having the reputation of having been to all nooks and crannies of our city, *The Man from Madras Musings*, who was once famously introduced as a street-walker of the city, had somehow never been to the famed auditorium named after the Congress stalwart and Chief Minister who put our State on the industrial map of India. The opportunity never arose and MMM, while passing by the place on numerous occasions, had often wondered as to how it looked inside.

Last week, during the thick of the Music Season, MMM was invited to participate in an event connected with the release of a book on how Celtic Music had influenced its South

Inside were a set of other invitees, all of them with a resigned air that suggested that they had been around since time began. When MMM entered they all looked up with hope as if expecting a rescue party and when they realised it was only MMM they all went back to staring at the ceiling. The only animated personality was a photographer who relentlessly had every one of the invitees pose for pictures against a blank white wall rather in the manner of a firing squad positioning a sentenced person. And when this was done, he had the invitees grouped in pairs, triads and pentads.

Having waited for more than an hour, MMM decided

bore fruit and the monsoons left after giving us only a portion of their promised bounty. For people like *The Man from Madras Musings* who rejoice in the rain, this was a disappointment. And now Chennai has settled down to its winter, which is around one week of mild weather followed by a couple of months of a reasonable climate.

But the average Chennai-ite, or so MMM realises, takes his cold weather seriously. How else do you explain this proliferation of monkey caps, mufflers, shawls and, above all, earmuffs inspired by wildlife? All of these and more the average Chennai-ite has taken to sporting and MMM will not be surprised if many wear

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Indian classical equivalent. This was held in the venue named after ye olde Chief Minister. MMM was asked by the host, the proud father of the two children who had written the book, to come straight to the green room. It was only on reaching the place that MMM discovered that this space was quite some distance inside the building. A volunteer met MMM at the gate and said he had been deputed to take MMM to the green room. He then asked MMM if he, MMM, knew where the green room was. When MMM replied in the negative, this man was nonplussed. He muttered something under his breath as to how MMM, who claimed to forever be associated with the arts, did not know a simple matter like that. Then having guessed that MMM's hearing, unlike his vision, was quite acute, became all smiles and said apologetically that he, the volunteer, too did not know where the green room was. However a couple of phone calls peppered with colourful language set him on the right direction and he bade MMM to follow.

Rather in the manner of Morgiana in Ali Baba leading the cobbler, the volunteer led MMM through a labyrinth of sorts, all dimly lit. In a way this was all to the good, for MMM could only dimly make out the condition of these spaces. Cobwebs hung low, as if from a horror movie set, the walls felt damp and in many places had water seeping through rather in the manner of a mine shaft and as for the floor, it was littered with props and objects of all kinds. Through all this the volunteer led MMM relentlessly on and eventually fetched up in the green room.

to explore the rest of the auditorium and found it to be in a shocking state. He was eventually summoned to appear on stage and when he did, he found that the chairs were rickety and wobbled even as MMM and other guests positioned themselves. The event, badly organised, in keeping with the rest of the hall, was mercifully brief and MMM came away clutching a shawl, a bouquet and a couple of books that later proved to be full of howlers.

MMM was supposed to speak for a few minutes and was dreading the prospect, what with the venue and the audience proving most uninspiring. It was just as MMM was bracing himself for a summons to the mike that the host came huffing and puffing to MMM and whispered into MMM's ear that the event was considerably behind time and so could MMM please truncate his speech. MMM asked in response as to how much ought to be cut. All of it was the reply, accompanied by a pleading look. MMM agreed wholeheartedly, reflecting internally that this was the only plus point in the whole miserable afternoon.

It was only as he left the stage that he realised that he had no idea as to how to make his way to the exit. He fumbled about for quite a while before what appeared to be a genie out of *Alladin* finally rescued him and helped him leave. Overall, it was an unforgettable experience that MMM hopes he will not have occasion to repeat.

A Winter's Tale

The rains came and terrorised everyone in the city. The prayers of the majority

thick woolly underclothing or flannel. It may not be long before houses in Chennai have a fireplace or two.

The weather may not be cold, but most of Chennai appears to have caught the affliction that goes by the same name. All around the city you hear nothing but sniffles, coughs and sneezes. And when you are in a music concert, you hear all of these around you, in addition to the main musician who, too, invariably has a sore throat owing to over-exposure and strain, what with having to sing multiple concerts in the season.

The Chennai-ite is also proud of his winter. Try making fun of it by stating that it is nothing but mild weather and he springs to its defence. The temperature, says the affronted Chennai-ite, dipped to 24 degrees Celsius or some such freezing point and if that is not winter, the Chennai-ite would like to know what can be called cold weather. Moreover, they say by way of additional proof, the air conditioner had to be switched off. Is that even remotely possible in Chennai? And so, MMM concludes, we are heading for a winter of discontent.

Tailpiece

The season of good cheer is here and *The Man from Madras Musings*, together with his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, wishes you all a great 2018. Last year had ample scope for humour and satire and something tells MMM that the new year will not be any different.

–MMM

•TWO REMEMBERED

Recalling Ponniyin Selvan

The publisher's note

It was in 1996 that Karthik Narayanan suggested we publish *Ponniyin Selvan* in translation in time for the centenary. I thought to myself: five hundred chapters... 2,400 pages? The equivalent of at least ten of the short novels I was editing for Macmillan's Modern Indian Novels project of translations with the support of the MR.AR. Educational Society.

"What's it about?" I asked and, without once breaking stride or fumbling for expression, KN narrated the story of *Ponniyin Selvan* and as he did, I was drawn, like so many thousands before me, to the magic and drama of Kalki, one of the greatest story-tellers of our time.

"Who will translate such a work?" I mused.

"I will," said Karthik with perfect confidence. That was the first step. Then I turned to other practicalities and anything that looked like a mountainous difficulty simply powdered before us.

With the assurance of support by the MR.AR. Educational Society, work on the project began. There followed three years of collaboration on what I call the *Gone with the Wind* of Tamil Nadu. Karthik

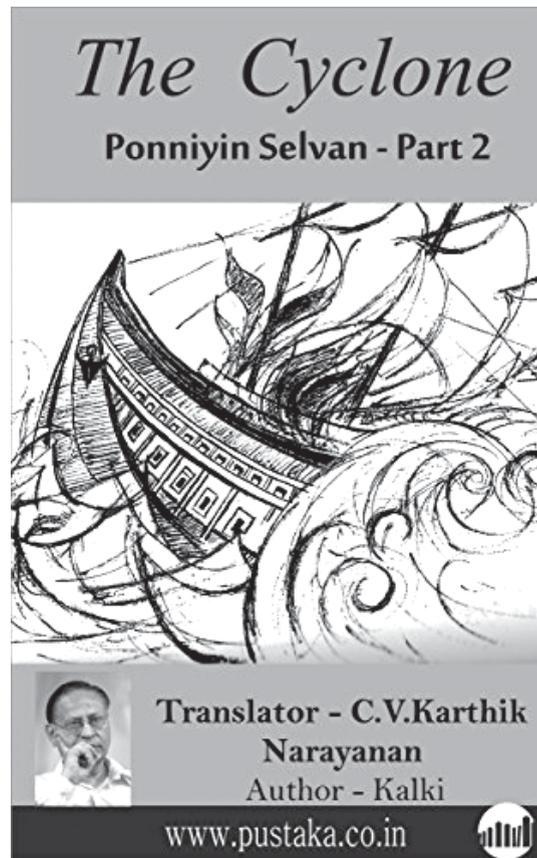
introduced me to Kalki and I can truthfully say that I spent so many happy hours following the fortunes of Vandiyathevan (so like D'Artagnan) that I wondered what I'd do when the work was over.

A year later our celebrated illustrator joined the team and we had endless discussions about what he had to leave out! Once it was known that the translation was underway, not a day went by without a call from a stranger or an enquiry from an acquaintance, "When will it be

● We remember **KARTHIK NARAYANAN** with these notes on the most significant work he did.

ready?" Excerpts published in the *Literary Review* of *The Hindu* spread the news even further and bookshops began to ask when they might place orders.

Karthik freely handed over his scripts for re-workings and revisions and never once hesitated to take a decision when we came unstuck, always and instinctively keeping in Kalki's shadow. A tireless re-writer of his own work, it was he who said that, following the author, (and



though it would sound odd to readers who did not know Tamil) we should use variations of the same name to indicate the attitude and relationship of the speaker to the person referred to. Hence, for example, the different presentations of the same name "Chozhar" and "Chozhan", "Aditha Karikalar" and "Aditha Karikalan", in both cases the first variant being the respectful form of address.

Before I saw the first lot of chapters I thought to myself: Surely, we can abridge some of it, used as I was to the style of serialised novels with the novelist recapping situations and plots and even him/herself as the novel progressed. But to my amazement I found that not a single line this great novelist wrote could be taken out because a hundred pages later (in Kalki's life a few weeks) that

line would hook neatly into some conversation or incident. Perhaps, the most memorable of such lines (not that I tried to take this out!) is Sendhan Amudhan's "She who gave birth to me is a great soul but an unfortunate woman" (ch 23). Two lines later he explains why he thinks she is unfortunate, but readers who know the story will know what a loaded sentence this is because in it lies the secret of Sendhan Amudhan's origin and future.

There were so many small incidents and coincidences connected with the smooth progress of the work that my curiosity about the original grew. When did the first chapter first appear in print? Six months before I was born and in the same year that Ilango, our illustrator was! A few months before our book went to press, a highly motivated local theatre

group, The Magic Lantern, staged a dramatised version of Ponniyin Selvan. Had they known, when they chose the play, that the centenary was two years away? No. They had just thought that the ecstasy of sacrifice that lay at the heart of the novel was a fine note on which to close the 20th Century. Karthik, Ilango, and I talked about very little else. "I think Kalki has decided that the time has come," said Ilango. And so it had.

— Mini Krishnan

The translator's note

It is now widely acknowledged, that Kalki was the first Tamil writer who used the ancient history of famous Tamil dynasties and the region as the background of attractive stories. Ponniyin Selvan, which deals with the life of Rajaraja Chozhan, is the last of the three great novels, the other two being Parthiban Kanavu and Sivakamiyin Sabadam.

The best historical writing requires not only a precise knowledge of the incident or facts that laborious research has collected, but the capacity to weave the matter as so to form a lasting fabric which discloses character and motive. Imagination is thus no less necessary to the writer of novels as it is to a historian. In both cases, it has to be used with restraint and judgement. A novel, which is not true to life, will kill itself. Facts woven round an attractive story are better grasped and remembered than when given as dull narrative of the conventional historical type.

It is this aspect of *Ponniyin Selvan* that fascinates me, when I started reading it in serialised form, ever since it first appeared in Kalki magazine. I used to wait anxiously for the weekly to appear at the doorstep and grab it before the others. It was a voyage of discovery which subsequently made me appreciate the diversity, the richness and depth our culture, tradition, art and religion.

Translating *Ponniyin Selvan* has been a real labour of love. Every time I flinched during the exercise, the impish Vandiyathevan, the conniving Azhwar-kadiyan, the fascinating Nandini, the majestic Kundavai and all the other characters appeared before me enthusing me with their conversation and arguments.

A number of friends expressed concern whether the translation will ring true to the original. At the same time, a lot of them who read the excerpts which appeared in *The Hindu* were quite appreciative. If this translation can reproduce even a minuscule portion of the grandeur of the original. I will feel satisfied.

— Karthik Narayanan

Rebel with a cause

(By K.R.A. Narasiah)

From early in his life C.G.K. Reddy, former Business Manager of *The Hindu* and founder Director of the Research Institute of Newspaper Development, an organisation with which the Press Institute merged. Never had literally. He started his life as a mariner, having joined the Training Ship *Dufferin* as an engineering cadet. On graduation, he was posted as fifth engineer in ss *Chilka*, a vessel belonging to the British India Steam Navigation Company. Along with him was another Cadet navigating officer, Sayeed Shahabuddin. The

ship, was carrying troops, left Calcutta for an unknown destination on January 23, 1942. On March 10th, she altered course due east, heading for Padang, Dutch East Indies (now Indonesian port).

The following passage is from *A Short History of the British India Steam Navigation Company* by Hilary St. George Saunders:

"...the ill-fated *Chilka* (Captain W. Bird), a passenger ship which had been converted into a trooper, was on the way to Padang. . . she never arrived, for on 11th March 1942 she met with a



C.G.K. Reddy can be seen in the second row, fourth from left.

submarine. . .was torpedoed, listed to port and disappeared"

A badly injured Shahabuddin and some others watched from a lifeboat, the ship go down. Four terrible days later they reached Nias Island, 75 miles west of Sumatra. Reddy, fortunately not wounded so badly, reached the

island a few hours later. Learning that Shahabuddin was in an Army hospital, he went to see him. As Shahabuddin says in his autobiography, "The whole of the night he sat on a chair next to my bed, and he was there to help me to turn from one side to another. Reddy wanted to stay with me, but it

(Continued on page 4)



To be considered

The view points expressed in *Madras Musings* (December 16th) will be considered in all seriousness by our Committee.

In essence, the following points were made:

- The syllabus for Social Sciences “has fallen short of expectations – it is just flat wines in old bottles”.
- There is stress on information rather than knowledge.
- “All these subjects – the Humanities as it were – are now clubbed under the subject Social Science, an obvious misnomer.”
- In the 1960s and '70s there was a systematic study of History and Geography. Economics and Civics were not included till the Higher Secondary level.
- The syllabus at primary level is praiseworthy. At the middle level, there is no clarity. The secondary level is the most overloaded.

These are valuable points which will be considered by the concerned sub-committees.

There is an unfortunate impression that the syllabi have been drawn up keeping in view competitive exams such as NEET. Far from it. The attempt all along has been to emphasise the fundamentals. I agree with the view that a great deal will depend upon the kind of text books and the capability of teachers.

Regarding the “open letter”, all four points are indeed valuable and will be considered by the Committee.

Dr. M. Anandakrishnan
Chairman
SCERT Syllabus Committee
8/15, Fifth Main Road
Madan Apt.
Kasturibai Nagar, Adyar
Chennai 600 020

Spilt milk

It is indeed interesting to note that *Musings* had time and space to comment on school syllabi! (MM, December 16th).

The views expressed by Muthiah and the two concerned educationists are true and appropriate. Comments are only a day after the fair: it is all cries in the wilderness.

From Std. VI to X, Social Sciences, as a subject is, and has been, a burden to both teachers and students. Besides, it is an ever-increasing subject. The NCERT is responsible for this maul. The SCERTs of the States follow the line.

The NCERT, which had been bringing out quality Geography and History text books for schools till 1986-1987, has shifted stance and is adopting new text book writing technique, plunging the school students in distress.

For the students of CBSE, Social Sciences is a bugbear. Students are trained to give by-heart answers to questions.

There are no fully qualified teachers. Most of the teachers have done only Economics or History in their degree courses. Knowledge of the Social Sci-

ence teachers in Geography is minimal and miserable.

Teachers of Social Sciences in State Board schools in Tamil Nadu have never been taught the Geography and History of Tamil Nadu. No standard book is available in the market on this subject. The SCERT has not taken steps to update the knowledge of the teachers in Geography and History. They depend only on the textbooks published by the Tamil Nadu Text Books Committee. Further, the teachers spend little time in libraries. Hence, their knowledge in Social Sciences is static and confined to text books.

As a result, Humanities have lost ground in school education.

Alas, I join you to cry over the spilt milk.

K.S. Ganapathy

Former Member, Legislative
Council, Tamil Nadu
ganapathyks37@gmail.com

Mere rhetoric

I was surprised to find two pieces concerning Social Studies syllabuses in MM, December 16th. Your comments are worthy of being considered by the committee. But the comments by two unknown teachers are to be discussed in depth.

During British days, the subject was ‘Outlines of the History of England and India and Geography’. When a new curriculum was drafted in 1948, the subject was rechristened as Social Studies and an integrated approach to know the story of human civilisation was suggested.

A statue to save

I write to draw your attention to the condition of the Munro Statue on the Island Grounds. It is covered with rust and in poor state, due to neglect (Picture: Page1). I am informed by the GOC that this is Chennai Corporation’s responsibility, and that it has not budgeted for repairs and maintenance of the statue. I was also informed that the Army is willing to undertake the job, just as it did for the railing around the statue. The estimated cost is around Rs. 2 lakh, which the Army has offered to spend. The Corporation and the Secretariat is unwilling to accept this offer.

I fear, as does the Army, that the civil authorities will only paint the statue over and ruin this heritage asset of Chennai, if it takes up the restoration, unless it commits itself to a heritage expert-monitored restoration.

V.R. Raghavan, Lt. Gen. (Retd.)
genraghavan@yahoo.com

EDITOR’S NOTE: Thomas Munro, beloved in South India wherever he was posted, was considered by Rajaji as the best civilian to have ever worked in the Madras Presidency. Munro was a former Governor of Madras who contributed much to land reforms and education. We hope our Governor of today takes a personal interest in this renewal.

Dates and monarchs should give place to the changes in the life of people. For example, in western Tamil Nadu, Telugu-speaking people can be found from Mettupalayam to Rajapalayam. From where did they come and why has to be taught. It would be found they had migrated from the black cotton soil of Andhra to a similar black cotton soil land. The migration might be due to natural disasters or invasion. Students should be encouraged to ponder over these factors and find answers. Historical and geographical factors contributed to their migration. But this was too high an expectation and the integration of History and Geography never took

place and are taught as separate subjects with only the name changing from Social Studies to Social Science with no scientific thinking of any sort necessary.

In UK, Economics is introduced at school level as a practical subject without any theoretical rigour. Students are asked to find the market prices of different commodities and hypothesise why they change. Unless classrooms get out of examination-oriented teaching and the capabilities of teachers are enriched, no reform would be worthy and meaningful. It would just be rhetoric.

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

A REBEL WITH A CAUSE

(Continued from page 3)

was not possible as he had to accompany the rest of the officers to Goonoongitoli, the capital of Nias Island. Saying goodbye, he told me that if he returned to India before me he would get in touch with my parents in Calcutta and inform them of my position.” Reddy kept his promise. The two kept in touch for years after that. Shahabuddin moved to Pakistan after Partition.

Reddy’s nephew Dr. Amulya Reddy, has produced a monograph, *Lest we forget C.G.K. Reddy* which tells the story of CGK. Incidentally, Amulya’s daughter married into Shahabuddin’s family!

After Reddy and others were rescued and imprisoned by the Japanese, the Japanese planted 19 of them as spies in India. They were all caught and five were hanged for conspiring against the British. CGK was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment.

CGK was to be charged with sedition once again. During the 1975-76 emergency, he was arrested in June, 1976 along with

George Fernandes for working against the state, in what he became known as the *Baroda Dynamite Case*.

The accused were charged with smuggling dynamite to blow up government establishments and railway tracks. The accused were imprisoned in Tihar Jail, Delhi. CGK did not seek help of his uncle, Sir C.R. Reddy, former Vice Chancellor of Andhra University and its architect, who was quite an influential person then.

CGK has written elaborately about this case in his book, *Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy: The Right to Rebel*. In the prologue to the book (1977), when he was selected to join the *Dufferin*, he wanted to get into the Navy, but was rejected as he was marked as a *Gandhian*! While he was in Calcutta prior to joining *Dufferin* he was drawn to Subash Chandra Bose and met him once. When Bose escaped, one of the men arrested for enquiry was CGK Reddy! This was when he was yet in his teens.

When he was rescued by the Japanese after the sinking of the *Chilka*, he was infiltrated into India with the help of the Indian Independence League. The 19-man party entered Teknaf, a small town in Chittagong District, in September 1942. One of them was caught and became a collaborator. All of them were apprehended and were first taken to Red Fort and then to Madras.

Tried for waging war against the king, under the Enemy Agents Ordinance. He was tried with others by Mr. E. Mack, a Sessions judge. The Judge being compassionate person was unwilling to sentence all to death, all of them being youngsters. He sentenced four to death and had others detained till 1945. CGK saw in the early hours August 9, 1943, Satish Bardan, Fouja Singh, Anandan, shouting *Bharath Mata ki Jai* and *Mahathma Gandhi ki Jai* as they went to the hangman’s noose.

The three years in jail gave him some maturity in thought, CGK says. It was during this time that he met Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and became his follower. He went away from politics, but June 26, 1975 transformed him when the Emergency was declared. He got in touch with the underground movement and found himself as an accused in Baroda Dynamite Case. He writes, nearly 30,000 persons were in jail then, which swelled to 150,000. He compares this with 40,000 people in jail at the height of the Quit India movement!

K.M. Mathew of *Malayala Manorama* offered CGK a job in *Malayala Manorama*, after he quit *The Hindu*. Together they established RIND in Madras. PII-RIND Mathews was the chairman.

In his autobiography, *The Eighth Ring*, Mathew talks about CGK and says in the Baroda Dynamite Case, he was the second defendant and had before his arrest had been informed on

the phone that the police were searching the room he was staying in at the Hotel Imperial and concludes CGK was Dynamite in every sense.

CGK’s son C. Rammohan Reddy, who served in Government, wrote in *The Hindu* about CGK’s sufferings during emergency in an article titled *When Friends Disappeared*. As member of Parliament, from Karnataka, Reddy took active part in various discussions involving personal freedom and safety.

Amulya Reddy adds the last note: “He was reading a PG Wodehouse book in the Intensive Care Unit (Vijaya Hospital in Madras) before his operation. On the day he was going in for the major surgery that resulted in death, he asked for a piece of paper and penned his last testament: “I have had the good fortune to enjoy the affection, regard and generosity of friends, relatives and colleagues. These are what made my living worthwhile and have come to my aid in battling some very difficult times.” “May I say Thank you & wish you the best?” He passed away in December 1994.

4-page Margazhi Musings – A special feature

• SUBBUDU

The family's sole calling card

Irrespective of the many bureaucratic positions I have held and the awards I have received, I invariably introduce myself to people by saying, "I am Subbudu's youngest brother" that has opened many doors for me. In fact, all the members of the family exploit their one and only visiting card, "SUBBUDU".

People have asked me why the name Subbudu. Is there a Telugu connection? Well, yes and no! My maternal grandfather was a Tahsildar in the Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. The family was at home with Telugu. When the boy was named Subramaniam, my uncles chose to nickname him Subbudu, in the true Andhra tradition, and the name stuck. When Subbudu's name is mentioned, some pictures of us in Rangoon float in front of me.

My two elder sisters Rajeswari and Pattammal were attending their music lesson

with Krishnamurti Bhagavatar. Subbudu, barely eight or nine, was sitting beside the Bhagavatar, listening intently, keeping *talam* on his lap and, like a jack-in-the-box, pointing out small lapses in my sisters' singing. That day, Subbudu the critic was born.

To test the boy's ability, one day, the Bhagavatar sang a line

• by
P.V. Krishnamoorthy

(The author, who is 96 years old, held top positions in All India Radio and was the first Director General of Doordarshan)

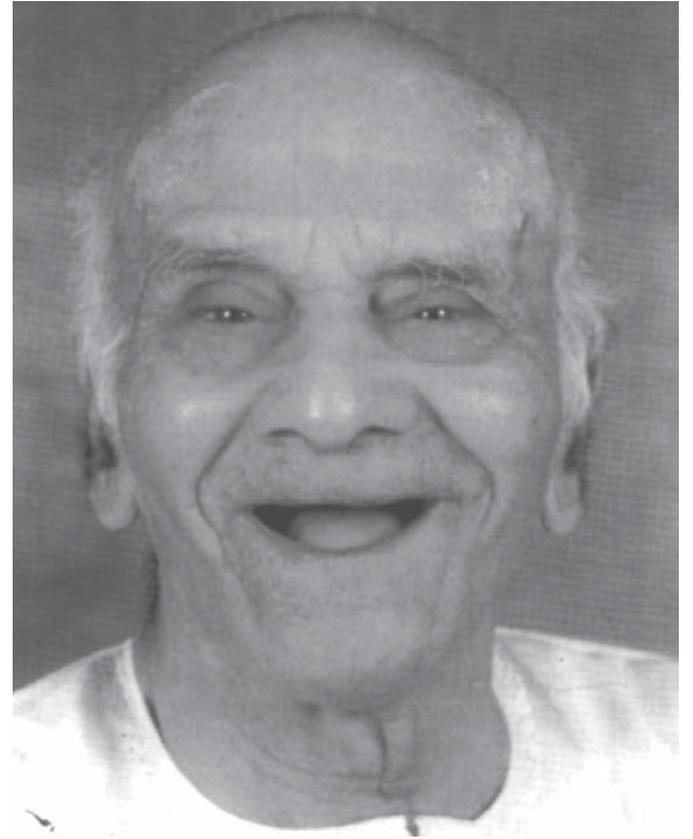
from a *keertana* and asked Subbudu to sing it in *solfa* notes. To the teacher's surprise Subbudu reeled out the *swaras*. The next day the Bhagavatar asked my father if he could

adopt Subbudu as his *sisya* and make him a full-fledged musician. My father politely declined, saying that music would always remain his hobby.

This picture takes me to 47th Street East Rangoon. The cosmopolitan city of Rangoon was known for its variety of street hawkers. There was this late evening Burmese hawker selling fried peanuts singing: *Maybay salo paasiyan, Maybay salo paasay*, or words to that effect!

Our young ventriloquist, Subbudu, repeated his cry accurately and the hawker was surprised and startled. This went on for some days and, finally, one evening, the hawker spotted Subbudu and chased him up to our door. My mother had a hard time explaining to him that it was a mere childish prank. She also had to buy some peanuts to pacify him!

Mimicry came naturally to Subbudu. Even as a child he



used to imitate birdsong, animal sounds and even the sounds of musical instruments. One day he tried to imitate the trumpeting of elephants and unfortunately forgot to close his ears which resulted in his hearing a ringing sound in his head for a long time!

Acting was in his blood. There was no drama without his playing an important role, espe-

cially a comic one. Playing Hanuman was his forté. He needed no special make-up to play the monkey god. He contorted his face, nobody knows how, and lo and behold, there stood Hanuman!

There was one problem while acting with him. He would suddenly start ad-libbing his own dialogue and his co-actor Ramamurthy (my immediate elder brother) on the stage, would wait endlessly for his cue lines, which never came. The prompter would be tearing his hair in confusion. But the audience would thoroughly enjoy his interventions. Vengusami Iyer, the director, would tell my brother: "Subbudu, you are at liberty to insert your own lines, which the audience seem to enjoy, but for God's sake get back to your cue lines!"

Even as a youngster Subbudu wrote plays like *Prahlada* and *Seeta Kalyanam* to be staged at home with household furniture as props and sarees as curtains. Subbudu played an important role in the musical activities in Rangoon. He was there at the wharf to receive artists visiting from India and spent most of his time with them, attending to their basic needs and creature comforts. For one concert by Muthiah Bhagavatar, the accompanist fell ill and Subbudu volunteered to accompany him on the harmonium. Although reluctant, the *vidwan* agreed and Subbudu was even paid a sum of Rs. 50 in appreciation.

The Subbudu story

• Sometimes in the mid-nineties, B.M. Sundaram interviewed Subbudu. The remarks in the interview bring out Subbudu as he was – aggressive and hard hitting. Modesty obviously did not rank high in Subbudu's list of virtues.

My father's uncle, Mosur Subramania Iyer, asked my father to come to Rangoon, where making a livelihood was easier. So, my parents moved to Rangoon in 1902. I was born on March 27, 1917, in Manali near Chennai.

My father was a strict disciplinarian. He forbade me from becoming a professional musician. If I went out, I had to return home at night, however late the hour. Another reason was that I enjoyed commenting upon the music of others whenever opportunity arose. Hence I did not entertain the idea of becoming a performer. Perhaps it was the second reason that was responsible for my becoming a critic.

I did not, and do not, have an interest in watching sports – be it cricket or any other game, direct or on the TV. I cannot play cards. I read books by famous authors and great scholars. That's all. I used to write short articles for my school magazine.

I didn't want to become a music critic. It came about by accident. Gottuvadyam Narayana Iyengar came to Rangoon around 1936. I then wrote a short article for *Ananda Vikatan*, under the caption *Kalai Kappalerugiradu*, in which I made a reference to the local *vidwan-s* – "Ulloor kizhanganal irukkumpozhudu Narayana Iyengarin tenisai manadukku perum inbam tandadu" (There are many local oldies, but Narayana Iyengar's honey-like music gave great pleasure to the listeners). This landed me in trouble. Some among the 'local oldies' approached lawyers to issue a legal notice to me. Luckily the sensible lawyers turned them down saying "It is a general view. He has not mentioned anybody by name. So, even if you sue him you won't win". I got seven rupees and eight annas from the magazine as remuneration for my first music review. I was 19 at that time.

In March 1942, most of us Indians evacuated Rangoon...We walked and walked – 484 miles – and reached Cherrapunji in a month and 22 days. All through the trek we drew our strength from *nama sankeertanam*. After stopping at a camp near Cherrapunji, we continued our journey until we reached Simla. My family settled there. I again plunged into music and drama.

My second music review was despatched from Simla. It was about a music recital by Sattur A.G. Subramaniam. He was, no doubt, a good *vidwan*. But he went on repeating the first line of the song *Nee irangayenil ad nauseam*. So in my review I remarked that it was akin to coaxing a monkey sitting on a tree to come down! I ended it with the line "This *adhika prasangam* (impertinence) may please be excused". But Kalki, after publishing it in *Kalki* magazine, wrote to me "Adhika prasangam baley jor! *Todaravum*." (Impertinence excellent! Continue.) From then on, I reviewed music programmes of artists visiting Simla. After about three years in Simla, I got a job in the Accountant General's office in Delhi.

V.K. Narayana Menon was the Station Director of AIR Delhi. He was regularly writing music reviews for *The Statesman*. When he was transferred to Madras, he asked me to do the job, after introducing me to the Editor of *The Statesman*. I was really nervous, for I was not good at English. But Menon dispelled my diffidence and worry. The Editor of *Statesman* also called me to suggest that I write reviews. At last I agreed and continued to write for 47 years! I started in 1950 and my first music review published in *The Statesman* was on M.L. Vasanthakumari's performance. I like her music very much, it had plenty of imagination, which most of the present day front-rankers are lacking in. However, I didn't fail to comment that she should take care of *sruti* alignment. "Let her not follow her master in this aspect." MLV didn't mind but appreciated my objective suggestion.

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued on page 8)

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

• JAGANNATHA BHAKTHA SABHA

The Academy's rival, firm, but helpful

Today it is barely remembered, but in its time, the Jagannatha Bhaktha Sabha was an organisation to contend with in the world of fine arts. Writing about it in connection with its 15th anniversary celebrations in 1933 (which therefore indicates that the Sabha was founded in 1918), Dr. V. Raghavan said that it was comparable to the Music Academy in many respects. That, coming from a pillar of the latter organisation, was quite a compliment.

For all its high sounding name, the JBS was at heart a simple *sabha*. It operated from the verandah of *Veda Vilas*, the residence of Rao Bahadur T. Rangachariar, located on Egmore High Road. The prime mover was Rangachariar's son, R. Venkatachari aka Muthanna, a powerful personality in the world of music notwithstanding certain physical disabilities. A close associate was the vitriolic music scholar, writer and veena player R. Rangaramanuja Iyengar. Muthanna was the founder and in his acidic memoirs titled *Musings of a Musician*, Rangaramanuja Iyengar writes of how the two met. Iyengar had taken up a job at the MCtM School in Purasawalkam and had just then moved from Mannargudi to Madras. He had come to attend a concert at the JBS when Muthanna, who had earlier met him at Mannargudi, welcomed him and declared that he was

henceforth his partner in running the *sabha*.

All performances were held on the same verandah. Those were days when Egmore High Road had hardly any traffic and the garden of *Veda Vilas* was vast enough to ensure that external noises did not penetrate the verandah. The JBS took its roles and responsibilities very seriously. It "existed for helping struggling members of the music profession, for employing and encouraging all deserving musicians and Bhagavatars without any idea of saving for itself." Simplicity and dedication to the arts was its ideal. That did not mean it diluted its standards in music. Making a name at the JBS was very difficult and careers took off if the JBS audience approved.

Among those who made their debuts as performing artistes at the JBS were the sisters Brinda, Muktha and Abhiramasundari. The *mridangam* exponents Palghat Mani Iyer and Palani Subramania Pillai were introduced to Madras audiences here, as were the vocalist duo, the Alathoor Brothers. M. Balamuralikrishna came to Madras in 1941 at the invitation of JBS and his concert here was reviewed in glowing terms by critic Kalki Krishnamurthy. Two years later, *mridangist* Vellore Ramabhadran had his debut on the same verandah.

A regular in the audience was the chit fund magnate of

George Town, Jalatarangam Ramaniah Chetty, and if the music pleased him the artistes were sure of being given a gold medal or two, on the spot. Other illustrious members included Dewah Bahadur K.S. Ramaswami Sastrigal, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the publisher G.A. Natesan and the manager of Orient Longman's — W. Doraiswami Iyengar.

Concerts at the JBS began and ended on time and no performance was ever held up for any reason. Thus it was that during a *Harikatha* concert of C. Banni Bai, one of the daughters of the house who was attending the performance, went into labour. She was immediately ushered in even as the *Harikatha* continued. A short while later someone came out to announce that it was a girl. The child was named Rajalakshmi and we know of her today as Mrs Y.G. Parthasarathy. Through all that drama the *Harikatha* had gone on, and ended on time.

The JBS, as was said earlier, believed in helping musicians who it felt were deserving of its kindness. The composer Papanasam Sivan was a major beneficiary. The first compilation of his songs was published by JBS and released in 1934. A purse was put together by the members and given to Sivan on the same occasion. The publicity-averse Veena Dhanam was coaxed to perform at the JBS on a couple of occasions. When S.



R. Rangaramanuja Iyengar.



Muthanna.

Satyamurti felt it was time that the first non-Devadasi woman performer — C. Saraswati Bai — was honoured, he approached the Madras University Syndicate suggesting her portrait be unveiled. When no satisfactory answer was forthcoming, it was to the JBS he turned. The *sabha* rose to the occasion and organised a grand event in 1939. A souvenir compiling articles on the lady was brought out and the portrait was unveiled in the 1940s. The JBS associated itself with two other noble causes. Thanks largely to Rangaramanuja Iyengar, it helped Madras Lalithangi, the mother of M.L. Vasanthakumari, bring out a book of Purandara Dasa songs. It also helped Rangaramanuja Iyengar bring out his compilation of Tyagaraja songs titled *Kritimanimalai*, in time for the composer's death centenary in 1947.

The JBS was a tad haughty too. Thus it was that it resented the Music Academy's strong-arm tactics. When the latter organisation suggested a federation of city-based *sabha*s, the JBS was more than willing. But when the Academy said that such a body ought to recognise it as the leader with all other *sabha*s being subservient to it, the JBS withdrew at once, Muthanna firmly stating that in his eyes all organisations were

equal, including the Academy! That ended the federation and it would take years to become reality, long after the demise of the JBS. The *sabha* also did not join the December Music Season rat race. It held its festival in August, to coincide with *Janmashtami*. Titled the Sri Jayanti series, it attracted the best performers in the field. Ariyakkudi, Chembai, Musiri, Semmangudi, M.S. Subbulakshmi... you name them and they had all sung for the JBS.

That such an organisation so wedded to the arts did not survive comes as something of a surprise. Or perhaps it is not so surprising after all — the *Sabha* after all did not believe in saving anything for itself. It was in a way quixotic. With Muthanna growing old and passing away, the JBS could not meet at *Veda Vilas*. It later shifted to a school in Egmore and held concerts there for a while. But with Rangaramanuja Iyengar too ageing and moving to Bombay to live with his daughter, JBS faded away. Today a few letterheads are all that survive of the *Sabha*. *Veda Vilas* is now a compound with several houses in it, all built by the descendants of T. Rangachariar.

Today a *sabha* functioning in an open-air location with no artificial amplification can only be imagined.



The Margazhi and Village Festival 2017-18 at DakshinaChitra has been tailor-made to suit the festive mood, offering the rich and varied folk art forms of South India.

December 27-31: *Therukoothu* (Tamil Nadu) by Sri Thanthoniamman Therukoothu Nadaga Sabha led by D. Elumalai.

January 1: *Thappattam* (Tamil Nadu) by Asathaladi Tharathappatta Isaikuzhu from Thiruvannamalai district. *Thappattam* is also known as *Paraiattam* and features single-sided drums played by the dancers while they perform.

January 3-7: *Thira Poothan* (Kerala) by Raman Smaraka Thira Poothan Kali Sangam. A ritualistic art form in which people dance in costumes.

January 10-16: Pongal celebrations featuring folk dances such as *Karagattam*, *Mayilattam* and *Poikkaalkuthirai attam* by Thanjai G. Raju and his troupe.

January 17-21: *Pattada Kunitha/Pata Kunitha* by Daiyah Janapada Kalavidaru (Karnataka).

January 24-28: *Dappu* a group dance by Bharathi Kala Samithi, (Andhra Pradesh).

* * *

Till January 11: *Margazhi Musings*, an art exhibition featuring the work of A.V. Ilango, Biswajit Balasubramanian, Chandra Morkonda, D. Sashikant, Lakshmi Srinath, Manisha Raju, Ramesh Gorjala, Shalini Biswajit, and Thejomaye Menon. On view will be: Lord Ganesha, a sculpture assembled from plumbing parts by Shalini Biswajit, paintings of Andal by A.V. Ilango and Manisha Raju, interpretations of Vishnu by Ramesh Gorjala, Shalini Biswajit, Thejomaye Menon, photographs of *idli, dosa, vada* by D. Shashikanth, Biswajit's cartoons of the *sabha* scene and dance, and Lakshmi Srinath's collection of sarees with *margazhi poo* motif (at Forum Art Gallery).

January 7-31: *Chettinad Thilai Vaasal* — an exhibition of line

drawings by K.G. Narendra Babu (at DakshinaChitra).

Till January 31: *Crystal Dreams*, an art exhibition by Olaf Van Cleef (at DakshinaChitra.)

January 7: Apparao Galleries Outreach presents a Destination Lecture in a day trip to The Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram by Prof. Madhusudhan Kalaiichelvan. Departure at 5 a.m. and return approximately at 9 p.m. Lunch will be prepared by a Temple Dikshitar to stimulate the offering to the main deity. For details: 9841022477, 7358526183, events@apparaoart.com

January 7: Apparao Galleries Outreach presents a Destination Lecture in a day trip to The Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram by Prof. Madhusudhan Kalaiichelvan. Departure at 5 a.m. and return approximately at 9

p.m. Lunch will be prepared by a Temple Dikshitar to stimulate the offering to the main deity.

* * *

DakshinaChitra Workshops Children (Age group 10-14)

January 6: Worli printing on T-shirt. Resource person: Prabhu.

January 27: Wheel pottery; Resource person: Palani.

February 17: Miniature fridge magnet making. Age group: 10-14 years; Resource person: Rekha. Contact: Lakshmi: 98417 77779.

* * *

Adults

January 7: Handmade soap and Creme making. Resource person: Kanchana

* * *

Ceramic Workshops

January 6, 7 & 13: Ceramic Bon-sai Pots

A Season of frenzy

It's been another December music frenzy with several organisations conducting music and dance programmes totalling to some thousands. The "Season" these days begins even in November due to dearth of auditoria, but the frenzy has been at its zenith from mid-December. Unlike a decade ago,

Many artists have their annual sojourn ahead. So, what is the outcome of this overkill?

A sense of ennui seems to hit the artists, audience and critics. Many of the reasonably known names perform in all these festivals. When they perform so often it becomes mechanical and lacks involvement. Perhaps

ing artists need to have an alternate career as being a full-time musician or dancer is not economically viable, which also possibly does not leave them much time to practise.

(Sartorial concerns too take up considerable time especially among women artists, so that they need to plan and place orders well in time for the December season.)

During the December season, many *sabha*-s conduct around five or six concerts a day. Naturally the attendance is poor; particularly during the mid-day slots set aside for aspirants, the listeners are either at lunch or enjoying their siesta in



SARATHY / SAMUDRI ARCHIVES

lights, make-up, etc. The concert could just be an addition to their bio-data to hopefully enable them to get a chance the next Season. If they manage to get their fellow students, colleagues, some friends and family to attend, they would be

automatic involuntary action after every item these days irrespective of whether the musician rendered the *raga*, *kriti*, and *tala* properly; these seem immaterial. Many in the audience are busily looking into the programme books to decide which programme and canteen to visit next!

Even during the year, the many regular monthly concerts have led to supply far exceeding the demand – considering the number of *sabha*-s organising concerts and the number of aspiring or even established artists. You cannot also blame the audience for leaving early as they face problems of transport, traffic and security on the way back home, even though the so-called night concerts end latest by 10 p.m., unlike in the past when they would go on till midnight.

As for the critics, they seem to be as bored as the audience with the often stale music and this is reflected in their reviews which too turn out to be equally stale. Many of them see hesitant to mention anything critical when it concerns a popular artist. Mridanga artists, however, have a valid grievance that critics do not mention anything about them except that they provide percussion support. But the truth is that majority of the critics don't know much about *tala* and how it is manipulated. A workshop to improve the critics' knowledge about percussion details might be a good idea.

I also wonder how the organisers manage it financially with the hall rents, rising maintenance costs, the sound system (which is often an excuse, with the volume chasing people away), particularly when most of the concerts are free. Artists may get a pittance as remuneration compared to the effort they need to put in to learn and practise the art; perhaps that is why their presentations are lacklustre. In order to kindle audience interest, new ideas are being tried out, such as thematic narrations by a speaker with compositions sung by a musician – but these too are becoming rather routine affairs. And, of course, there are *jugalbandi*-s with some unusual combinations to attract the audience which wants novelty. –

(Continued on page 8)



SARATHY / SAMUDRI ARCHIVES

music and dance series are now held throughout the year – we have the Ramanavami festival, the mid-year series, Gokulashtami series, Navaratri festival, NRI festivals, the youth festivals and what have you.

they do not even have the time to learn new *kriti*-s! It must, however, be admitted that some musicians do have the capacity to make a decent job of it, but the efforts of many others are rather sad. A majority of aspir-

the air-conditioned comfort of the auditorium. How would the musician on stage feel, this in spite of having to pay to get a chance. It is worse for dancers who need to spend a considerable sum for the orchestra,

The Margazhi music blend

There is something ineffable about the month of Margazhi. The great poetess Andal refers to Margazhi as a month devoted to spiritual pursuits. Lyricist nonpareil Kannadasan describes the heroine as the Margazhi amongst months in one of his evergreen songs! It straddles the mid-December and mid-January period, when there is a precious nip in the air in a city better known for its 'hot, hotter, hottest' climate!

How does the Margazhi Magic work in Madras? A kind of spiritual catharsis sets in, in what is known in the native almanac as the month of Dhanur. The orthodox home is up at 4 am; *rangoli* (*kolam*) designs using rice flour are drawn in front of the main entrance, *nagaswaram* music is played on the radio or any other device which these days includes the smart-phone, I-pad and I-pod with the boom box placed at any random spot in the house! After coffee and *Suprabatham*, the visit to the neighbourhood temple is mandatory, where the *Oduvar* beckons the neighbourhood to join in the

morning *darshan* and prayers. The ancient Tamil scriptures that include *Thiruppavai*, *Thinuembavai*, *Tirupugazh* etc., cast an ethereal spell over the temple precincts even as the faithful shrouded in moth-eaten woolen shawls, ear-muffs and stoles shuffle across in a blur of movement in the inky pre-dawn darkness.

Hark! the gentle clang of cymbals (*jalra*) and the beats of the *dholak* or *mridangam* from across the Mada Street (or the streets that skirt any temple) announce the approaching footsteps of a *bhajan* group singing the Praise of the Almighty in the form of *Abhang* (devotional compositions of the Warkari saints of Maharashtra like Jnaneswar, Namdev, Tukaram), *Namasamkirtanam* (devotional) and *Dasar-nama* (songs from Purnandara Das and his *parampara*.) The group or groups gather momentum as the day breaks while the good samaritans from the homes lining the streets stand with steaming cups of coffee to warm the cockles of the singers' hearts, so to speak.

As the yellow disc of the Sun

comes into full view after playing hide and seek with the fog and cloud, the daily pilgrims wend their way to some of the *sabha*-s that will be beaming out full-throated *bhajans*-s from highly acclaimed groups. It will not be too long before a hypnotic spell causes many of the devotees to start clapping their hands and gradually begin to dance in a trance.

The music component of the 'Season' on which the *idée fixe* rests, takes over around 8 am with lec-dems at a couple of high-end *sabha*-s that amply demonstrate the science and art of this great tradition. From 10 am till the end of the day even the cobble-stones on every street would seem to reverberate with music as the innumerable *sabha*-s bend over backwards to run a tight schedule of concerts by the neophyte, the over-the-hill veterans and the highly popular ones (prime time of the evening) regardless of how thin or good is the audience! Temporarily withering under the overkill of music, the *sabha*-hoppers will soon bestir themselves with a strong dose of 'degree' coffee and make a bee-

line to yet another auditorium for a different brand of music.

Just as the audience is indulging in a frenzy of *sabha* hopping, the musicians too keep up their schedule with the large number of *sabha*-s dotting almost every other corner of the city, their vocal chords showing strains of a relentless beating!

Does the music pall? To prevent any form of cloying, eateries and canteens are placed strategically outside the auditoria to entertain the palate too! Time for all votaries of Carnatic Music to dig into a huge variety of snacks made as deliciously as at home (as they announce at every opportunity in the Press and on social media).

A lot of buzz and excitement is added to the scenario with the huge influx of NRIs who make it their Annual Yatra, visit home and temple and renew contact with their roots in their 'native place'. Their presence certainly adds an impetus to the local economy in terms of sales of a whole range of items from dresses for *Bharata Natyam* back home in the Big Apple to

(Continued on page 8)

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



The family's sole calling card

(Continued from page 5)

Subbudu and, we, his brothers were pioneers in introducing Indian music on Rangoon Radio as early as 1936. Tamil Drama troupes also visited Rangoon and Subbudu spent much time with them.

Subbudu used to write short pieces for *The Rangoon Times* in English, for which he was paid Rs. 2 per piece. He sent some items in Tamil to *Ananda Vikatan* but his name was not

mentioned. Even as a student he won the coveted gold medal for scoring the highest marks in Tamil in the matriculation examination.

Subbudu was spiritually inclined right from his younger days. He would walk five miles up and down to visit a Hanuman temple in Rangoon every Saturday. When he shifted to a suburb, Bauktaw, he organised regular Saturday *bhajan*-s and *nagar oorvolam*-s in Margazhi and *akhanda nama*

japa for 24 hours. Even during the hazardous trek from Burma, he chanted *Rama Lakshmana Janaki jai bolo Hanumanaki* to keep the morale of the trekking party up. He was indeed a spiritual force for the entire community.

Once a friend asked me if I was ever personally embarrassed by Subbudu's writings. One incident is deeply etched in my memory. My boss in All India Radio and his guru, a *veena* maestro, went to

Margazhi music blend

(Continued from page 5)

joss sticks and *puja* material, not to mention enough snacks from Grand Snacks, Suswad etc., to last a few months! *Kurtas* from Fab India, silks from Kancheepuram and arty items from Arts and Craft Expositions compete for the greenbacks.

The annual visit, combined with Christmas holidays, also gives an opportunity for the brood of the NRIs to pick up extra tips personally from the

gurus who have been teaching them Carnatic Music on Skype. Of course, further progress is made when the gurus follow them to Yankeeland for the Cleveland festival and other concerts planned from the East to Bayside!

This magic does not last an eternity. It soon fades out; the city's problems with water and power will soon surface and cry for attention. The heat will return with renewed vigour, but not before Santa Claus makes his annual visit on his sledge and offers goodies to wide-eyed children in their make-believe world. The churches flaunt quaint cribs and chime merrily for Christmas and New Year.



SARATHY/SAMUDRARCHIVES

Plum cakes and wine will take over the palate and canticles and carols will soothe the "fevered brow" as night falls and cools the atmosphere. The Star of David will shine brightly from many a household for at least a fortnight, assuring humanity that despite niggling problems the sweet tenor of Life will hold good forever.

V. Kalidas
(vkalidas@gmail.com)

The Subbudu story

(Continued from page 5)

I was regularly writing for *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki*. In fact, *Kalki* made me its reporting representative in Delhi. At the same time, I was writing for *Idhayam Pesugiradu* and *Dinamani* also. My music reviews were 'piecemeal' affairs.

My reviews were not always welcome. If I pointed out mistakes, which musician or dancer would welcome it? I can't help my reviews being pungent. When you state facts, no one appreciates it. But the public welcomed my reviews. I have made a name in this field, I have my own style and I take pride in it. When I write something, it is easily understood by the common man, which would otherwise be impossible. It is a pleasure for me – you may call it 'sadistic pleasure' – but I don't care! I write what I feel. I have gained in experience by listening to great masters in the field of music and dance. It has taught me a lot more than what the present day artists know. Wherever there is a slip I point it out. If the music doesn't touch my heart, I don't hesitate to say so. But writing such reviews was never a bed of roses for me. Many times, it has brought unwarranted trouble.

I am more proud of my style than the content of my reviews. It is my way of writing that attracts the reader. Once *Kalki* told me, "The readers should forget the music and the musicians reviewed, but should talk about your writing." I follow that and have been successful in my field. I was born in *Vrichika* (Scorpio) *lagna*, and

it is but natural that my style of writing would be similar to a scorpion's sting. The papers for which I write have not curtailed my freedom in any way.

I don't agree that I raise some artists to great heights and bring down others. Even if it is so, it is never intentional. I go by the stock delivered by them. The artists themselves are not consistent in their performances. If they are good, I say so and if the same artists, on other occasions, are not good, I say so too. This shows that I am unprejudiced.

Nobody has ever come to me with any presents in order to get a favourable review. I don't expect any such thing. I am far from even entertaining any idea of taking bribes. That's why artists are really scared of me and avoid me.

As for the complaint that I leave a concert in the middle without sitting through it, I never remain in one place for long. I do not enumerate the songs rendered by the artist, for I am not an AIR announcer! If the artist is not in a position to satisfy my ears while I am in the hall, how could his or her performance suddenly become good after I leave the hall? I get out, whenever I want to do so. I never note down the items rendered on a piece of paper or in a diary. Everything is recorded in my memory. The essence, if any, is reviewed.

Yes, I have made an indelible mark in this field. Otherwise, how could you expect the papers to pay me airfare, provide good board and lodging, arrange an assistant with a typewriter, besides paying me sumptuously! They have high regard for me and my writing. (Courtesy: *Sruti*)

Germany, where they recorded with M.G. Ramachandran a *veena* duet with a local gramophone company. On its release, the recording was reviewed by a German critic who was so magnanimous in praise that he wrote that if he was ever banished to a lonely Robinson Crusoe island he would like to take the *veena* duet recording with him. Next day Subbudu wrote in his column that he would request the critic to ensure that he took not one copy but all the copies of the recording! No wonder I was playing hide and seek with my boss for the next few days.

People have asked me how it was for two brothers to work for the same cultural clientele. My reply has been that there was no clash of interests. My job in the media was to seek the cooperation of artists almost "*kaala thottu vela vaanganam*" (to touch their feet to get the work done), while Subbudu's job was "*kaala varanam*" (to pull the rug from under their feet) if they faltered.

Yes, Subbudu was the universally known music and dance critic, but the human side of this man is not well known. He was not one of those fair weather friends. On the contrary, he would be the first to report at your doorstep when you were in urgent need of help.

We in the family can never ever forget how he voluntarily gave up his collegiate education when there was a financial crisis in the family. He took up a job in the Imperial Bank to keep the kitchen fires burning. One of his most significant contributions to society was when Bihar was struck by its worst earthquake in history. Subbudu immediately organised help in the streets of East Rangoon and went from door to door collecting rice and dal, and hundreds of bags of these were sent immediately to Bihar by a cargo company free of cost. This occasion brought out the organisational, innovative and leadership qualities of young Subbudu. He demonstrated that talent, to be meaningful, had to be harnessed to serve humanity.

When we talk of Subbudu we cannot forget his alter ego – Chandra his wife. What a woman! She was a mother not only to her three children but to Subbudu also. He needed her motherly touch to soothe his nerves. She was a terrific hostess. Her home was always a full house. Was there an *akshaya patram* in her kitchen?

To sum it all up: Subbudu was made in Rangoon, chiselled in Delhi and sold in Madras! – (Courtesy: *Sruti*)



1. Which South American nation recently launched a cryptocurrency called 'Petro' to circumvent US-led financial sanctions?
 2. Name the youngest of the famous Kapoor brothers and a Dadasaheb Phalke Awardee who passed away recently.
 3. Who has been chosen for *Time* magazine's 'Person of the Year' for 2017?
 4. Who won the Ballon D'Or award for the fifth time, equalling Lionel Messi's record?
 5. Which mega religious Indian event has been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity?
 6. American scientists have proved the existence of a new form of matter which was first theorised almost fifty years ago. What is it called?
 7. On December 1st, which emperor, the first in two centuries in his country, made a declaration that he would abdicate his throne on April 30, 2019?
 8. On December 6, Donald Trump made a statement to recognise which city as capital of Israel, leading to political debates globally and a veto by the UN Security Council later?
 9. A colony of cave-dwelling horseshoe bats in China's Yunnan province have been identified as the source for which outbreak in the early 2000s that killed more than 770 people across 37 countries?
 10. On December 14th, the Walt Disney Company announced its intent to acquire a large portion of which iconic studio group for \$52.4 billion, pending regulatory approval?
- * * *
11. What first is attributed to Dr. Abraham Pandithar's 'Sangita Vidya Mahajana Sangam'?
 12. In which theatre was *Keechaka Vadham*, considered the first Tamil film, released?
 13. Which business house was founded by K.R. Sundaram Iyer and his nephew Easwara Iyer?
 14. Enclosed within Anna Salai and Graeme's Road, this person has nine streets named after him. Who?
 15. Which simple dance form, involving no instruments, can be of varieties like *Poonthatti*, *Deepa*, *Kulavai* or *Mulaipari*?
 16. How many *prakaram-s* and *gopuram-s* does the Srirangam temple have?
 17. Which Madras theatre complex had a discotheque, 'Nine Gems', and a restaurant called 'Navaratna'?
 18. Which Bharat Ratna awardee chose the name 'Tamil Isai Sangam'?
 19. For what reason was M.S. Subbulakshmi banned for five years by the Music Academy?
 20. With which musical genius would you associate 'Melharmony', a synthesis of the Eastern and Western schools of music which relies on compositions based on orchestration?
- (Answers on page 10)

The religious wave in Madras

If you happen to visit Madras these days, you are very likely to gather the impression that the city – and perhaps the rest of the South as well – is currently under the influence of a religious wave. On any fine morning, open the city edition of a newspaper and cast but a cursory glance at the engagements column: a long list of "discourses" virtually crowd out other mundane items such as a Chamber of Commerce meeting or a symposium on the ethics of India joining the nuclear race. Enter one of our ever-popular "coffee clubs" and, while you wait patiently for a plate of steaming *idli-s*, gods and goddesses all around smile down at you benignly from the varnished splendour of new calendars. Or step out into the sun, and from the roadside, popular film actors and actresses, emulating popular heroes and heroines of mythology, fix you with magnetic eyes from the garish expanse of giant-size posters.

These diverse – if also at times perverse – manifestations of religious fervour are perhaps not altogether irrelevant to the times we live in. Current events constantly remind us that the world has indeed advanced well into the dark age of Kali. And the reinstatement of Dharma being everybody's concern (or at least, we are told, it ought to be), you must not really grumble that commercialism has entered the field or religion – or is it vice versa? – and that spiritualism is being brought down to the common man with the simplicity of, say, ten easy lessons!

I am not being quite fair, of course, when I bracket the religious discourses with the calendars and posters. In most cases, these are conducted with the utmost dignity and sincerity. You do not have to be deeply religious to enjoy – or even profit from – a learned exposition on the role of *bhakti* in day-to-day life, or a not-so-learned, but more lively, discussion on the significance of Karma Yoga in the context of the new budget. You need not also be put off by the possibility that at such functions you run across a couple of dissipated film artistes or a few allegedly corrupt politicians. Their presence does not necessarily detract from the

solemnity of the occasion – nor does it in any way unsettle the faith of the truly devout. The world is but Maya, and it is surely too much to expect that all who seek redemption can have the privilege of starting out with a clean conscience.

Religion has, of course, already made inroads into Tamil Nadu politics. Quite a few political leaders down South

These diverse – if also at times perverse – manifestations of religious fervour are perhaps not altogether irrelevant to the times we live in. Current events constantly remind us that the world has indeed advanced well into the dark age of Kali.

nowadays quote the *Purana-s* as facilely and unctuously as they quote the Constitution. And it is common knowledge that a new and totally ingenious interpretation of the *Ramayana* accuses the noble descendants of Raghu of having secretly harboured expansionist schemes. By the same token, the killing of Bali was given the ugly tinge of a political murder and Vibhishana was looked upon as the mythological equivalent of a timid but unscrupulous Leader of the Opposition. As for Ravana himself, he emerged far less black than we had foolishly supposed him to be – indeed a much-misunderstood hero, a rather sad and solitary figure, addicted perhaps to a few startling vices but otherwise quite a match for Rama in statesmanship and worldly wisdom. ("After all," quipped a local wag, "ten heads are surely better than one!") Neither history nor legend leaves us room to speculate whether an attempt was made in those days to impose the official language of Ayodhya on the innocent citizens of Kishkindha.

The man in the street, admittedly, is far less subtle or even blasé than the politician, and he is being constantly exposed to religion with all the devastating force that crude commercialism can muster. Mythological themes have always proved money-spinning charms for our film producers. I am told that as a box-office draw, they rank second only to sex. But the cinema

K.P. Balaji (1926-76) died in an air crash in Bombay. From Kathakali in Kerala, he moved to *Marg*, that cultural journal in Bombay. Joining *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, he was with it from 1954 to 1961. He then got into advertising with S.H. Benson's and rose to be one of its Directors. His son, K.P. Karunakaran, settled in Australia, put together a collection of his writings and published them as a commemoration of his father's 40th death anniversary. Over the next few issues, we publish a few of Balaji's Madras-focused articles that appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly* in 1964-65.



TODAY'S ARTICLE IS ON RELIGIOUS FERVOUR IN MADRAS.

being such a potent mass medium, it is only fair that it should be used to bring religion of a kind to the common man. We must not be too critical, but must try to cultivate the habit of looking at the brighter side of things. We all know that the average film-

would be evolved for, say, *Anasaktiyoga*?) The discourses are reported – pardon the pun – most religiously. They are normally given a place of honour on the back page, away, you presume, from such mundane things as ministerial corruption or a distant and pointless war in Viet Nam. Much imagination is displayed in giving punchy headlines to Puranic episodes, and apparently no effort is spared to give them a contemporary significance. While I give no credence to the claim of a friend of mine (he remembers a headline: "Adjournment motion in Ayodhya – Bharata's return creates stir"). I have often been startled out of my morning sleepiness by a purely coincidental juxtaposition of headlines in adjacent columns: "Keep away from politics – Krishna's advice to Arjuna" or "Student agitators lathi-charged – The triumph of Karma". At least once I have seen Lord Krishna credited with this simple and pithy statement: "Honesty is the best policy!"

I have no doubt that this "publicity" for religion is well-intentioned and serves a good purpose. It is certainly not out of place in these times when a person has to buy a ticket (devotees often complain about malpractices at the booking office) or stand in a queue to have *darshan* of your favourite deity. It is not unusual nowadays to see a *devasthanam* advertising special *pooja-s* and rituals in the newspapers. (Buy three *kotiarchana-s* and save 15% – or an offer to that effect, perhaps slightly differently worded, reminded me the other day of a popular slogan for an economy size toothpaste pack!) But, of course, if elsewhere in India, Ganesa can be represented wearing a Gandhi cap, or a waterproof wristwatch, we in Madras cannot also object if a picture of Siva and Parvati carries under it a bold caption: "Viswanath & Co. Ltd., Provision Merchants – 100% pure gingelly oil our specialty."

Perhaps even Ravi Varma would only have smiled indulgently at it!

Humanities still get short shrift

(Continued from page 1)

unemployable graduates, instances of their having to take up lesser positions unrelated to their qualifications, and Tamil Nadu students finding it difficult to compete in all-India eligibility tests expose the qualitative weaknesses of the State's education system. To meet this challenge, the Government a few months ago set up a committee to work with the State Council for Educational and Research Training and come up with a new syllabus for Higher Secondary Schools.

The new syllabus, claims SCERT, is "a more holistic one that aids real life." The syllabus for the first time has included an exclusive position paper on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and elaborated its importance in the current scenario. ICT has been introduced at the primary level itself, so that learning is not confined to textbooks but extended at the teaching access to the internet, introducing students to technology as part of the curriculum. Subject to availability of qualified teachers for this module, it is a welcome step and it is of practical significance in "real life", provided students are made aware that the information they will find from these sources will not always be the most accurate.

Like familiarity with the computer and the internet, a working knowledge of English has become an overarching necessity, besides knowledge of focused subjects. Knowledge of subjects without communication skills is today inadequate for employability. If the medium of instruction in secondary stage continues to be Tamil, students in professional courses will need to be taught technical contents in Tamil, but they are faced with

instructions in English and find it difficult to cope. Consequently, when they graduate, the students have a poor grasp of the subject and low ability to express in English. Upon graduation, this group is left with paper degrees that cannot fetch jobs. Specialised training to high school teachers to teach Communicative English and getting the students accustomed to the medium of learning professional subjects being English, are essential to keep pace with the needs of 'real life'. A library with language and English books should be mandatory and children must be encouraged to read books as regular habit rather than rely on the internet. Knowledge of English and of an additional Indian language is an ideal qualification to avail of a larger pool of opportunities beyond State boundaries.

SCERT says that importance has been given to vocational training in subjects such as agriculture, textile technology, nursing, arts like music and drawing, and even sewing. "We've designed it keeping in mind the market standards." Whatever that may mean, the concept should be commended (though it can be asked why not mechanical, auto or electrical engineering, or even plumbing and carpentry?) as it is a practical approach. It enables, to a degree, the system to sort out students of different aptitudes and learning capabilities and sending some to vocational training after basic schooling and training, the others with higher learning capabilities to graduation and professional degrees. It avoids subjecting all, indiscriminately, to a one-size-fits-all type of educational content. It makes more effective use of available resources. It opens earning opportunities according to capacity and aptitude.

SCERT says that there has been a ten per cent increase in content, perhaps with a view to bring the State syllabus in line with requirements of competitive standards of NEERT etc. This is long overdue and must be commended. It should not, however, remain a dead letter without adequately trained teachers to handle the higher standards. The introduction of higher content must be incremental and must begin in doses from the primary stages so that students are not confronted with an abrupt rise in standard at a late stage. Many teachers stress the need for concomitant changes in the evaluation and examination patterns. According to P. Saravanamurugan, a teacher from Coimbatore, what set our old State syllabus a notch lower than CBSE is "the reduced relative prevalence of analytical and application-based questioning patterns."

The most important correction in syllabus should have been bringing about a better balance between Sciences and Humanities. The revised State School syllabus for Social Science by the State Council of Educational and Research Training (SCERT) has been the subject of criticism by experienced educationists. Instead of trying to bring about a better balance, the syllabus for Social Science, heavy and overburdened in terms of content, is hardly changed at all from the previous syllabus. It lumps History, Geography, Environment, Economics and Civics into one general subject, making it unfocused and tiresome for students and virtually impossible, for teachers to complete the course in time except to offer facts to be learned by rote.

Under cover of Current Issues, political overtones and caste/gender biases tend to

infiltrate into the syllabus and these are of no use to students except to give them a dismal view of our social surroundings. Burdensome and irrelevant contents lead to mindless rote to secure minimum marks needed to avoid failure; they do not serve the basic purpose of developing thinking capabilities, critical faculties and well-rounded personalities.

According to experienced teachers what is lacking under Social Science is any attempt to develop in the student a holistic view of the eco-system, natural resources, landscapes, climatology and natural cycles and preservation of heritage. Ideally, History, Geography, and Environment should be taught as special subjects by teachers qualified in such subjects. Heritage, environmental and civic issues should be taught for putting them into practice and not just to pass exams. The heritage and environment of the students' domicile must be made known to them, sowing in their minds the seeds of curiosity that would lead them spontaneously to inquire into the nature of the wider world around them.

Moral instruction as part of the syllabus in the olden days has fallen a victim to the drive for "secularism". Vijaya Murthy, an educationist of fifty years' standing and having taught students in Tamil Nadu

and of mixed cultures in Singapore, is of the view that Humanities are given insufficient weightage in the curriculum. Lumping an odd mixture of subjects under one group as Social Studies does not add substantive value but results in its completion as a mere ritual. She adds that subjects like History, Geography and Environment should be taught separately by qualified teachers. Value Education should cover Ethics, Heritage, Civics. According to her, although there is provision for Value Education in the current syllabus, it is hardly pursued with any enthusiasm. Handling this subject also requires special training of teachers who should be able to pose open-ended issues to children so that they are not handed information, but taught to think for themselves, discover values. She offers teacher training in Value Education free of cost.

The Stanford Humanities Center puts forward the case for Humanities in Education in the following succinct terms: "Through exploration of the humanities we learn how to think creatively and critically, to reason, and to ask questions... these skills allow us to gain new insights into everything from poetry and paintings to business models and politics."

Will the SCERT give our children the opportunity?

Answers to Quiz

1. Venezuela; 2. Shashi Kapoor; 3. 'The silence breakers', mostly women who highlighted sexual harassment; 4. Cristiano Ronaldo; 5. Kumbh Mela; 6. Excitonium; 7. Emperor Akihito of Japan; 8. Jerusalem; 9. The deadly 2002-04 SARS virus outbreak; 10. 21st Century Fox.

11. Held from May 27, 2012, it is considered the first organised Carnatic music conference in the State; 12. Elphinstone; 13. Easun Group; 14. Aziz Ul Mulik; 15. Kummi; 16. Seven and 21 respectively; 17. Safire; 18. Rajaji; 19. Singing Tamil songs in the first section of a concert; 20. The latest Sangita Kalanidhi, Ravikiran.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations

