

INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Bookshop on the footpath
- Willingdon statue
- 2 pages of Madras Week
- Remembering TKR

MADRAS MUSINGS

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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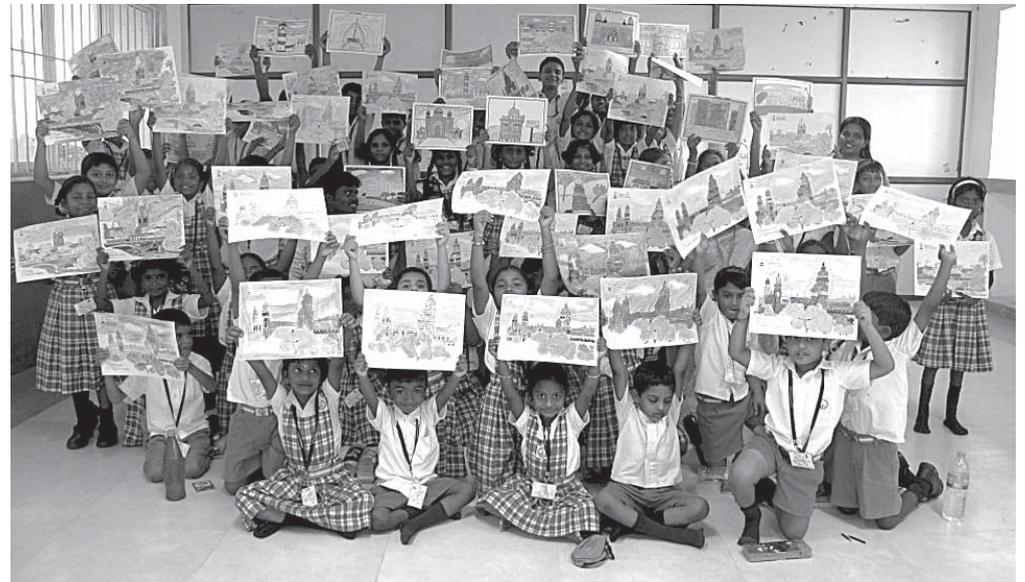
Looking for the Colonial in Madras Week

● by The Editor

Yet another edition of Madras Week has come and gone. We have had the usual chorus of hallelujahs and also an equal number of naysayers who have been predicting for the past 14 years, ever since Madras Week began, that it is all a flash in the pan that will soon peter out. But the strangest of the lot are the ones that keep harping that the events are all a celebration of the colonial period of Madras. Let us do a quick analysis.

Take for instance the eight Madras Musings lecture series that this magazine hosted in collaboration with several ho-

tels, a service apartment chain and a couple of boutique restaurants. We had one programme on contemporary miniatures of heritage buildings in the city, a celebration of the Gaana- the music of North Chennai, a golden jubilee of a hotel that was built AFTER independence, a programme on Hindi films made in Madras (post 1947), the story of a Dubash's will that funds education here and now in Tamil Nadu, the tale of how a bunch of slum children were taken by a city-based NGO earlier this year to Washington DC to participate in a festival of choral music, a



Children from Jagannath Vidyalaya, Kelambakkam, displaying their paintings at the art contest held as part of Madras Week celebrations.

talk on the bronzes and other pre-British era masterpieces at the Madras Museum, and a chronicle of how a nature-loving couple bought a farm outside the city and converted it into a forest. Where among these are we celebrating the colonial rulers?

There were some heritage walks that were admittedly focused on relics of the colonial era – Fort St George was one, the Nawabi trail was another,

you could include a tour of the Theosophical Society as a third. But let us not forget that the Fort is now the seat of our administration, the Nawabs were here before the British and the Theosophists continue practising their faith. How would you classify walks focusing on temples of Velachery, the heritage of our harbour, or tracing the origins of the Dravidian movement? How should we define talks on lesser-known

temples of Chennai or a revival of games people played by taking them to Metro Stations and other public areas?

The next set of whiners have problems with the date for Madras Day and its nomenclature. Madras is much older than August 22, 1639 they say. Nobody has any arguments with that. The city is made of various parts that go much beyond that date. But do we ask for any historical

(Continued on page 2)

Need to make deep sea fishing acceptable

It has taken over forty years to take concrete steps towards resolving the fishing rights dispute between Tamil Nadu fisherfolk and the predominantly Tamil fisherfolk of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Though through an exchange of letters in 1976, India and Sri Lanka agreed to stop fishing in each other's waters, Tamil fishermen, knowing no international borders in eking out a living, have been transgressing international borders, exposing themselves to jail by Sri Lankan authorities. Over the years, hundreds of our fishermen have had to undergo jail sentences causing loss of livelihood and hardship to their

families. Even as we write this, 27 fishermen have been arrested by the Sri Lankan authorities.

The deep-sea fishing project, launched by the Central government in 2017 at the repeated appeals of the State Government, has certainly offered new hope to this vexing issue. It is a bold step involving major capital subsidy to potentially 2,000 fishermen. It seeks to convert a problem into an opportunity by persuading our fisherfolk to take to more sustainable deep-sea fishing. Monies have been released in record time and much energy is in evidence in implementation.

The project is to be imple-

mented jointly by the Central and State governments with 60 per cent capital subsidy (40 from the former and 20 from the latter) towards cost of deep-sea fishing vessels each priced at 80

● by A Special Correspondent

lakhs. The beneficiary is required to provide 10 percent – 8 lakhs and the balance – 24 lakhs – is to be loaned by banks. The value of the project is 1,600 crores.

Conceptually, monetarily and for speed of response, the scheme cannot be faulted; but there is more to taking the horse

to the water. The project has passed from the policy phase to the stage of fine engineering of its features to match ground realities. In terms of value, 1,200 crores may be a small fraction of the state budget but for removing an irritant in our relations with an important neighbour and securing the livelihood and prosperity of our fisherfolk it is of high importance. Failure cannot be afforded.

Fisherfolk till now used to trawling in shallower waters should be prepared to take on what is now a business venture – managing a 80 lakh venture, managing production, pre-processing, storage, pricing,

marketing, loan servicing, worker supervision and money management. That is a big jump. While it is gratifying that technical training sessions are held at different locations, training on business aspects appears neglected and should be corrected.

The new business model is alien to the fisherfolk. They must not only get to know how to manage it but, before committing to it, know its financial implications. The beneficiary is risking 32 lakhs – 8 lakhs as his equity and 24 lakhs as borrowing to repay which he is liable. He should know what he is likely to get out of it and

(Continued on page 2)

Looking for Colonial in Madras Week

(Continued from page 1)

basis for celebrating Mother's Day, Father's Day or for that matter Friendship Day? Social Media is full of Days like that. Those who question Madras Day do not appear to have any problem with those other Days. As for the name, it really makes no difference. Let it be Chennai Day. But let us celebrate the city. It has been our home. It has ranked in the top 52 destinations of the world to travel to. It has a UNESCO Creative City tag. It tops the tourism footfalls in the country and it makes more vehicles than Detroit. If these are not celebration-

worthy features, then what else would be?

Let's face it – Madras Week is a celebration of the city. Rather than finding ways and means of criticising it and predicting its demise, it is high time people responded to it positively. It is a day/week/fortnight/month when positive energy is spread. There is no politics in it and money/commerce does not play any role. In short it is a sure formula for increasing everyone's happiness quotient. So let us continue celebrating our Madras, our Chennai, our city, year after year.

Making deep sea fishing acceptable

(Continued from page 1)

whether it compensates his additional effort and risk adequately. As fishing in deep waters is susceptible to monsoon on the eastern coast of peninsular India, productive voyages may be limited to a few months of the year. Allowing for this, the yield during the remaining fishing periods must be high enough to justify the investment. This should be demonstrated to the target audience. The suggestion here is that the potential beneficiary must be given a financial "one page" easy-to-understand profile – showing operating expenses per voyage, likely catch per voyage, likely money realisation for the catch, likely number of voyages in a year, the monthly EMI to be met, the sum he must set apart for repair and replacements and the surplus that would be his. He should not be allowed to leap into the unknown.

Some fear that they cannot furnish collateral security to get the bank loan. If as our enquiries show that banks will not seek any collateral other than perhaps the vessel itself, this preferential treatment should be made widely known.

It is too much to expect the fishermen to handle the sophisticated operation of monetising an existing asset, not any longer needed by him, and paying up their share of the capital cost for the deep-sea deal. When hundreds of boatmen are in the market to sell their boats, the price offered would be forced down by ruthless middlemen. Simultaneously, the pressure to conclude the new deal paying 8 lakhs would also mount. To save them from these pressures, government must undertake

the responsibility, through its agencies or by privatising it, to buy-back the boats and auction them – treating the boats taken over as payment towards the beneficiary's equity. A standard price per boat can be fixed for the buy-back allowing the fishermen the option to take any better deal outside. This procedure would make disposal easier and speed up enrolment. Waiting for hundreds of individual negotiations to fructify may delay the scheme by years.

Unlike the earlier operation, for deep-sea fishing, running a heavy vessel with cold storage etc. for several days on the seas, there are operating expenses to be incurred before getting the fruits thereof. Where is this recoverable money to come from? Such advance outgo is required voyage after voyage. A continuous rotating capital for operating expenses is as important as the capital support for the vessel. Without operating support, the high-value asset will lie idle or would be sublet to an intermediary, reducing the intended beneficiary to the status of a worker in his own vessel. Working capital is best given by the same bank that gives him the term loan for a better hold on the borrower and to offer him a single window facility. The working capital must cover the waiting period for a good price and should not cease immediately upon catch. No separate security should be demanded other than the stored catch. At present, there seems to be no arrangement for working capital. This shortcoming could become a major impediment and must be rectified immediately.

(To be concluded next fortnight)

MMM gets email

Madras Week is over. Or is it? *The Man from Madras Musings* has his doubts for there is no sign of the programmes abating. MMM is still getting invites for breakfasts, lunches and dinners where he is expected to hold forth on Madras, Madras Week, Madras Month and so on. At the end of all that eating, MMM is quite certain that there will be enough of him for two or three MMMs.

With that MMM draws a curtain over his speaking and eating engagements and goes on to deal with another subject – a heritage walk that he conducted at Fort St. George. It was a free tour, with prior registration being mandatory, this to be done by email. There was a record turnout both for registration and actual participation. Now why should the

thereby indicating that a very diffident voice was at the other end. It eventually mustered enough courage and asked if it was MMM speaking. On being replied to in the affirmative the voice went silent thereby indicating that whoever it was at the other end was mulling over the matter. MMM was just about to hang up when the voice, having revived, enquired if this was the MMM who did walks. MMM said yes. There was a dead silence again. But this time MMM did not hang up and was duly rewarded. The voice, said the voice, was in possession of a pamphlet that said MMM was conducting a heritage walk between 7.00 and 9.00 am at Fort St George on a particular day and it was for free. It wanted some clarifications it said. MMM asked it to proceed, wondering if it was

It was in pessimistic vein that MMM confided his troubles to his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed. Having mulled over it, she came up with what was a winner – get the hotels to hand over pre-served plates to the attendees she said. The idea came to her on day 5 of Madras Week this year. Day 4 had in particular been very bad, with Owl managing to balance eight gulab jamuns, seven paneer pakodas and six sandwiches on a small tiffin plate.

The good lady's plan was implemented on Day 6 and it went like a dream. The foragers were baffled. They withdrew into a shell and remained morose throughout the presentation. The next day saw them in reduced

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

registration numbers not be the same as those who landed up you may well ask. But MMM's experience has been that for free walks, the enthusiasm to actually turn up for the event, especially on a Sunday morning, is nowhere near the excitement displayed at the time of registering. In short, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. It was however gratifying that such was not the case in this instance.

MMM enjoyed taking the people around. But what gave him greater joy and much mirth, was reading the registration emails. Firstly, there was the title – variously written as Fort George walk, St. George Fort walk, George Town walk and in one instance – just George walk. One email just said Fort St. George Resignation. And then the mail contents – I am a group of one ran a particular email. Yet another had MMM puzzling for long over it. In fact, you will not be far wrong in assuming that the riddle is yet to be resolved, for it went thus – Please refer the flooring details as entry details for the Fort George Walk.

Some others decided that this was the best opportunity to display their writing skills. There were whole paragraphs describing all their other social engagements and how this Fort Walk clashed with it and so could MMM please consider doing it again on some other date? Kindly advise admission and registration procedure went yet another, when all of that was already provided in the announcement itself. But what took the cake was a phone call. The whole conversation lasted 15 minutes or so and MMM will just give you a précis.

MMM having answered the call heard several false starts

about toilet facilities at the Fort. But no, the voice had other queries – was it true it asked that MMM was conducting a walk at Fort St George on a particular date between 7.00 and 9.00 am? MMM said yes whereupon the voice said it was glad for it had read as much in the pamphlet but was wanting to make sure. It then asked MMM if it was likely to rain on the day of the walk. MMM said he did not know. How hot would it be if it did not rain asked the voice, at which point MMM hung up. Incidentally it did drizzle just before the walk and an overcast sky made for a very comfortable walking tour.

Mass feeding

As you are well aware, *Madras Musings* celebrates Madras Week by organising eight lectures, all open to the public and each held at a different upmarket locale in the city. The hotels and boutique restaurants give their venues gratis and out of the kindness of their heart also provide refreshments for free to everyone who attends. But this has over the years begun to attract a certain variety of free-loader who thinks that he/she has to stock up during Madras Week in the manner of camels to see them through till August next year.

The Man from Madras Musings has been at his wits end on how to deal with these pests. He is thinking in particular of Vulture, Owl, Raccoon, Jackal and Woolly-Headed Mammoth, all of whom go wild on seeing a buffet spread. Woolly-Headed Mammoth in particular has begun to pack things away in a bag to take home, no doubt to see him through the long Madras winters.

numbers. But the event on Day 8 was at a hotel known for its cuisine. And so they were back in full strength. This time they decided that after polishing off a preserved plate they could stand in the queue once more. But MMM was too quick for them. Having noticed that they had already tanked up he made bold to ask them not to crowd around the tea service and take their seats. This was not to the liking of Bald-Headed Eagle, which vented its ire on MMM for not being hospitable. If this was the way MMM continued to behave said Eagle, it had no option other than to boycott Madras Week celebrations it said. It had, it said, been a keen supporter from day one, year one, but now there was a niggardly spirit that was creeping up that was completely deplorable. In the midst of all this, MMM saw out of the corner of his eye that Mammoth had managed to salt away some food in a plastic bag. The last word in the epic battle of MMM vs the foragers is yet clearly yet to be written.

Tailpiece

The Police, so it seems, celebrated Madras Day in style. Or at least they gave us a gift for posterity that has *The Man from Madras Musings* still chuckling. On that day they filed an FIR against a political leader for unruly behaviour. The document stated that he had created a ruckus under the statue of Marilyn Monroe, which stood on the Island. They meant Sir Thomas Munro of course. Being an equestrian statue, Lady Godiva would have perhaps been more appropriate.

–MMM

The day MGR died

Chennai shut down quite completely on August 8, 2018, the day after former Chief Minister Karunanidhi died. No shop, office, factory or school was open, nothing moved on the roads. No one had to compel any one to shut shop.

This reminds me of my experience when then Chief Minister MGR died on December 24, 1987. The death occurred early morning. I was not aware of it when I took a flight to Madurai. I was scheduled to take a taxi from there to Kanyakumari to interview the fishermen community there for a UN fisheries project, which I served as Information Officer.

It was when I got into the plane that I learned that MGR had died. "There's nothing you can do in Madurai," fellow passengers told me. True enough, Madurai airport was at a standstill. Taxi drivers laughed when I said I needed a drive to Kanyakumari. "We can't operate even within Madurai," they said.

No cell phones those days. Indian Airlines didn't allow me to use their phone – but did so after some cajoling and pleading. I called my office and was advised to fly back to Chennai immediately. But the first available flight was only next morning.

I persuaded a cycle rickshaw at the airport to take me to a hotel nearby. It was a nondescript hotel with the most basic facilities. The only thing I could do in my hotel room was read.

Around lunch time, I hailed a cycle rickshaw for a trip to a good restaurant for a bite. The cycle rickshaw driver haggled. "You know the situation. I'll be risking my life to take you anywhere. I'll do it for your sake.

But you must pay me Rs 100." Okay, I said.

The rickshaw had gone just a few yards, when the driver let out a curse. A gang of loud-talking roughs was advancing toward us, quite menacingly. The driver did what was most prudent. He stopped the rickshaw, got down and fled!

The gang came up, its ringleader stared at me, I returned the stare.

"Where is the rickshaw-karan?" he asked. "He ran away on seeing you," I replied.

"Find him, he must be around," the ring-leader told his henchmen. True enough, the rickshaw guy was crouching in a lane nearby. Two henchmen dragged him, quaking and quivering, to the ringleader.

Ringleader: What happened to you? Aren't you ashamed of abandoning your rickshaw and running away? Did you think of your passenger?

Rickshawman: No, Ayya, I just went to the lane to relieve myself.

Ringleader: That's all? Do you know the big news?

Rickshawman: Yes Sir, *Puratchi Thalavar* is no more.

Ringleader: Then why are you working? Do you want us to beat you black and blue?

The rickshaw guy turned out to be quite smart at thinking on his feet. He came up with "Saar has come all the way from Madras to pray at the Meenakshi temple. Since he mentioned God, I decided to do an act of service. In fact, you check with Saar, I told him I would not take a single pie from him."

Ringleader: Ok, we are getting into your rickshaw. Drop

Saar at the temple. Then take us where we want to go.

I was dropped at the temple – for an unscheduled encounter with Goddess Meenakshi. Friends of mine later were unanimous that the Goddess had taught me a lesson – I should have planned to visit the temple before doing anything else.

After *darshan* at the temple, I was reluctant to risk another cycle-rickshaw experience. I walked back to my hotel – hungry and tired. Peanuts from a roadside vendor, bananas from another vendor, were life-savers. The vendors were careful to conceal their wares under a piece of cloth.

I was reminded of a staff discussion the previous week at my office. A few colleagues grumbled that at remote fishing villages in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, also in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where our project helped fisher communities, there was nothing to eat all day, and they had to fast. My Swedish boss responded sweetly "Most of us overeat most of the time. We should grab every opportunity to fast and get back to shape."

And that's what I did. Fortunately, a taxi was available next morning for the airport. It was the airhostess in the Madurai-Madras flight who broke my fast by offering me a cup of coffee.

After the Madurai experience, I decided I would make sure that before I travelled anywhere, all VIPs who mattered in Tamil Nadu were in good health.

More than 30 years later, when Karunanidhi died, I prudently stayed home.

– S.R. Madhu

VINCENT'S JOTTINGS

Madras Week, then & now

The first day of August.

Ruminations.

Many many years ago, when the 'Madras Day' idea came to life; the idea that city historian S. Muthiah kept tossing about and friend Sasi Nair and I said, "Time to roll this Chief"

An idea that was simple – celebrate the city – its history, its people, its institutions. In simple ways. And voluntarily.

My enthusiasm flowed from the exciting experience of having curated, by then a few editions of the annual Mylapore Festival – which began as a *Margazhi* season kolam contest held at the playground of Lady Sivaswamy School.

And what a significant launch that 'Madras Day' was.

A 7 a.m. Walk inside Fort St. George, followed by daylong events at the grand Rajaji Hall, *Government Estate* (for many years in the 60s and 70s our playground in the backyard of our neighbourhood).

Much to our surprise, people kept streaming in all through the day, and that night we had the families of the *dubash* who is said to have brokered the 'Fort land deal' between the English and the region's chieftain.

Over these years, 'Madras Day' has evolved, expanded, veered and blossomed. It has also been sniggered at, challenged, debated. . . that's the way it has to be! But it now has a life of its own.

I call it a work in progress.

Because the way it works is fascinating for someone who is into it but also steps away from it.

All that a bunch of us, calling ourselves catalysts do is to send out a hundred-odd e-mails to people we believe are interested in the city and love to do things. That sets the ball rolling.

Simple things happen – as they have this season.

The promoter of two restaurants wants to gift Madras postcards to his diners that they can post to friends. A foodie wonders why she does not locate any Food Walks on our calendar and then volunteers to curate one in her neighbourhood.

The Madras Local History Group hosts a series of talks – cinema-politics, Kannadasan and trees are themes. And an architect who takes a paper on 'Urban Chennai' for students at a premier architecture school is arranging a lecture and a Walk for the young ones.

I am not going to list 'achievements'. Or make claims.

Madras Day/Chennai Dhinam is a celebration.

And if you have to express it any which way – a city of ours that is unique, a people so colourful – do it this month.

On your Tees, in your FB posts and pictures, in your conversation, in the way you live and work and unwind in this city.

Be proud. Why mumble and grumble ever too often?

Say it – Namma Chennai. My Madras.

And here – www.themadrasday.in – you will find all the events for August. – (Courtesy: *The Mylapore Times.*)

More Madras Week information on pages 7 and 8.

A 150-year-old book on Madras

From India's Digital Archives

– Karthik Bhatt

● The Digital Library of India (DLI) project, an initiative of the Central Government, aims at digitising significant artistic, literary and scientific works and making them available over the Internet for education and research. Begun in 2000 by the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India and later taken over by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, it has to date scanned nearly 5.5 lakh books, predominantly in Indian languages.

The book featured in this issue, *The Madrasiana* (W.T. Munro, 1868) turns 150 this year. It is an interesting compilation of all things significant in the Madras of its time.

W.T. Munro was the pseudonym of Rev. William Taylor, a missionary and orientalist who

played an important role in the analysis and cataloguing of the Mackenzie Manuscripts in the 1830s. Some of his other works include a memoir of the Amaravati sculptures titled *On the Elliot Marbles* and *A Memoir of the First Centenary of the Earliest Protestant Mission at Madras*

marking the centenary of the Vepery Mission.

The *Madrasiana* is divided into four parts. The first contains brief profiles of the churches and chapels in the city while the second deals with the history of public places and monuments such as The Pantheon, The Mint, *Banqueting Hall*, *Brodie's Castle*, the *Cenotaph*, etc. Part 3 is titled *Archaeological Notes* and contains Taylor/Munro's writings on topics of philosophy and theology while the last section is a miscellaneous collection.

Parts 1 and 2 contain vivid descriptions of the various structures as they stood then and the stories behind their origins. For instance, he writes

that the St. George's Cathedral was constructed as a church primarily for the aristocracy or the "big wigs of Madras" as he called them, as other churches were mostly out of bounds for them, though not officially. The site chosen was suitable, being "as central as possible to the residences of those for whose use it was principally intended", alluding to the owners of the grand garden houses on the Choultry Plain. He hails its pillars and the portico, which was then a novelty in Madras. Writing of the Luz Church, he alludes to the well-known legend of a light coming to the rescue of Portuguese sailors caught in the rough seas and guiding them to the spot where the

church now stands and says that it is the first footing of Christianity in the neighbourhood of Madras. As regards the St. Andrews Kirk, which came up on the site known as "Ellis's Cutcherry" Munro strangely makes no mention of the unique well foundation, while he dwells long on acoustical issues it was faced with thanks to the steep dome and calls it the "worst in Madras as to the essential point of hearing"!

Amongst the many interesting descriptions of the various public spaces is that of The Pantheon, which has a history dating to the 1770s, when it was the residence of a civil servant. In the 1790s, it served as the

(Continued on page 6)

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

The Willingdon statue on the Island

His was an unparalleled rise in the British aristocracy, equalled only by an unmatched tenure of Government Houses all over the British Empire and its dominions. In the history of colonialism, no other person had a career akin to that of Freeman Freeman-Thomas, 1st Marquis of Willingdon. It was not as though he was a spectacularly brilliant administrator. It was just that he was tenacious enough to hang on, and was aided and abetted by a pushy spouse who knew when and where to apply pressure to make things happen.

Born in 1866 as plain Freeman Thomas, he was from a relatively middle-class background. His mother made it possible for him to study at Eton and Cambridge where his sporting talents came to the fore. He then enlisted in the army and was given the rank of Captain, later rising to Major. The turning point came when he married Marie, the daughter of Baron (later Earl) Brassey, a colonial administrator. Freeman Thomas

became Freeman Freeman-Thomas by deed poll, the first step in upward mobility. He became ADC to his father-in-law in 1897, when the latter was appointed Governor of Victoria, Australia. Returning in 1900 he joined the Liberal Party and served as a middling MP for ten years. In 1910, he was made Baron Willingdon of Ratton and the next year, appointed Lord-in-Waiting to King George V. The monarch it was said, found Willingdon to be the best tennis partner he ever had.

There was no looking back thereafter. In 1913, Willingdon became Governor of Bombay and at the end of that tenure, Governor of Madras. On returning to England in 1924, he was elevated as Viscount Willingdon. His rule in India had seen him try and contain the freedom movement with an iron hand. Two years after his return home, Willingdon was made an Earl and appointed Governor General of Canada. In 1931, he became Viceroy of India and on

retirement, was made a Marquis. He died in 1941. Some said he was exhausted by his wife, who lived well into the 1960s.

The Willingdons were very open in showering favours on prominent Indians who took their fancy. Lawyers who played tennis with His Excellency became Judges. His interference in matters concerning cricket was well known. There were rumours of some financial deals with Indian businessmen as well. The country may not have liked this man but to British administrators he and his wife were all that was ideal. India was liberally dotted with several places, parks and institutions named after the Willingdons by the time they left. In Madras and Delhi the adulation took the form of a statue. The latter, after Willingdon had retired as Viceroy, was done by Sir W. Reid Dick, while the former, executed in 1930, was a bronze entrusted to M.S. Nagappa, by then fast emerging as a talented sculptor.

It was a remarkable likeness. The statue depicted a standing Willingdon, one arm on his hip while the other carried an Earl's coronet. On him were his various decorations, including the Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India. One foot was extended, almost as though he was just going to walk off the pedestal. In terms of animation, this was a far better statue than the one that New Delhi got. That was in marble and the Viceroy appeared to have caught some of the Raj's coming gloom. It was described as "all right" by one critic while others felt it was "over lifelike", "overdressed and heavily betassled."

The Madras statue was placed on a baroque pedestal at the entrance to the Gymkhana Club. It was unveiled there by the then Governor, Sir George Stanley in 1930. The Hindu felt that Willingdon did not deserve a statue and criticised the idea. In keeping with the Viceroy's fondness for perpetuating his memory with place names, the Government House Bridge, also known as St George's, and which connected his statue to the Government Estate across the

Coom, came to be known as Willingdon Bridge. It is today named after Periyar.

Willingdon remained safely on his perch outside the Gymkhana well after Independence. There were however rumblings about a colonial administrator being allowed to remain in the open. In August 1957, there surfaced a plot to use electric bombs to blast the Willingdon and Munro statues, both on the Island. The Chief Minister, K. Kamaraj was informed by a letter of this plan, which also said that it was unthinkable that statues of Englishmen should remain standing when the centenary of the First War of Independence was being observed. Members of the Forward Bloc were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. Willingdon's statue was immediately removed and sent for safekeeping to the Fort Museum, where it still remains, in close proximity to the giant one of Lord Cornwallis. The pedestal stayed behind on the Island. Also spared was the statue of Sir Thomas Munro, chiefly because he was an enlightened administrator who sympathised with Indians.

In 1961, the Congress Party decided to honour K. Kamaraj, with a bronze statue. It was unthinkable till then that a living Indian could be so honoured. The statue, also by Nagappa, was placed on Willingdon's erstwhile pedestal. Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, overcoming his dislike of honouring the living with statues, came to Madras to unveil it. The ceremony took place on October 9, 1961. Like Willingdon, Kamaraj too has one hand on his hip, but he is of course far simply dressed. Kamaraj lived on till 1975, belying the superstition that anyone who had a statue erected in his honour would soon die. Not so lucky was Kamaraj's successor C.N. Annadurai who passed away within a year of his statue being unveiled at the Round Tana, Mount Road. People attributed his death to the statue. Forgotten was the fact that Kamaraj was alive and well, with a statue for him having come up much earlier.



(Note: The Chief has ruled that 'Alexa' needs an explanation, especially for the rotary-dial telephone generation.)

According to Wikipedia, Alexa, a virtual assistant developed by Amazon, is a wireless speaker and voice command device with integrated artificial intelligence, capable of voice interaction, music playback, setting alarms, providing weather, traffic, sports, news, and other real-time information....and much, much more.[2] Alexa can also be used as a home automation system.

Still going 'Huh?' Understandable.)

'Virtual Assistant'.

That's the buzz. That's what's a-happenin'.

If you felt a vague sense of déjà vu with that line, then clearly, you are of a vintage for whom the presence of a 'virtual assistant' will feel like an old science fiction short story you read decades ago has come alive.

And you are not too sure how you feel about this yet-another-tech-marvel.

There you are, self-consciously dipping a very tentative toe into the 'taking selfies' whirlpool, (and making a complete hash of it – how come you never realised that one side of your face is higher than the other?!), when along comes this creature whom you can talk to....and she talks back!!!

And so politely.

She is just yea-high, as they say, less than 10" tall.

Her name is Alexa, and this 'virtual assistant' apparently knows Everything.

She tells you what time it is;

Alexa, we need to talk...

she plays music for you; she's efficient with alerts and reminders; she can tell you the weather as it is at the moment in any part of the world; she can answer all 'G K' questions, and she can work your house for you.

You have to admit – this technology is pretty...er... 'Amazing'. (You see what I did there?) The tech-savvies have taken to her with ease and nonchalance. But for the rest of us, that moment when you first 'instruct' her can prove nerve-wracking.

A bit like being at one of those science exhibitions your school used to drag you to, where you filed past various exhibits and prayed fervently your teacher would not choose you to operate something, or "ask-a-question, child....yes, you, standing there giggling with your friends....PAY ATTENTION!!"

This 'virtual assistant's' voice is calm, gentle - and very female. There is a distinctly demure touch to the manner in which she answers every question and is so willing to multi-task at your command, so much so you begin to wonder if there's something a touch sexist about this?

Apparently, her creators researched, studied, analysed and concluded that most people, of all age groups, respond positively to a soft female voice...especially one, you guess, that gives off those all-knowing vibes, promising to soothe your brow and be the eternal ministering angel.

You find yourself thinking that's a bit of a surprising stereotype for this century. (And also, incidentally, that it's a good thing they never met your Grand

Aunt Chalk-screaming-across-the-blackboard, who could give a piercing train whistle a run for its money, reducing it to tears in a second.)

Wait, you are told. The creators have picked up on this whiff of criticism, and a more varied, keeping-up-with-these-delicate-politically-correct-times list of voice options is apparently now being offered.

Very wise.

It seems simple, doesn't it? Ask – and ye shall receive all the answers you seek.

Not really.

Don't run away with the idea that it's just about tossing questions at an inert object, which has no other duty but to obey

● by
Ranjitha Ashok

your command – a bit like a genie released from a magic lamp.

There are lessons to be learnt, as with everything else tech-related these days,

the crucial one being: 'How to phrase your question'.

Especially in a three-pronged interaction which includes you, the 'assistant', and your grandchild.

"Doe-a-deer", the little one demands.

"Sing Doe-a-deer." you in turn command.

'She' answers sweetly that she can't, and offers you a palliative dose of a few lines.

"Doe-a-deer", you repeat, tension rising as your grandchild steadily loses faith in you.

Nopedoesn't work.

Then, realisation dawns, and you pronounce: "Play Do-Re-Mi"

And Maria dances into the room, while your grandchild rewards you with a grin and a hug. See? You have to get the question just right.

It gets even more exciting and unpredictable when you command music closer home. Song titles get lost in translation, with the 'assistant' politely pointing out that she doesn't '...know what you mean'.

Tempers can then get a bit frayed, and feelings wounded, especially if you are insecure enough to feel that your articu-

lation is being judged.

If your grandchild asks you to play a favourite nursery rhyme, make sure you get the first line right.

You really don't want to get into a stop-start argument with the virtual world, and you can't run amok with a hard-bound children's book, forgetting which era you are now in. Spanking, even what your old teacher used to call 'non-living beings', is no longer allowed.

If your grandchild sweetly lisps: 'Again, pleathe...', think long and hard.

Because if you say "Loop" (with slightly self-conscious pride at being so familiar with current jargon), you just might rue the

whose residents all along thought dinner tonight was basically of the 'born again' variety.

You also have to hope that your particular 'assistant' isn't the one with the glitches. 'She' is programmed to 'crack jokes' too, apparently, but you've heard stories of some of them eerily breaking into unexplained, completely unprovoked, laughter – an image so blood-curdling, you quietly tip-toe right past that out-of-Stephen-King scene.

Of course, such an expanse of skill-based choices can bring out the clown in some people.

Which perhaps explains why you thought it a bright idea to ask 'the assistant' what wine goes best with thavir saadam, grinning Cheshirely in the process, only to turn around and find your son gazing at you in a pained, pitying manner, while your daughter-in-law, being kinder, pretended she hadn't noticed your slight lapse from dignity.

If you are the sort who hyperventilates at smart phones, how are you supposed to deal with 'smart homes', under the thumb of the 'assistant'?

Imagine this. Both generations of children have left for the day...it is peaceful, quiet....but you are scared to pull that foot-rest closer to put your feet up. What if that noise is in itself a trigger, and the next thing you know you are in the middle of an episode of Law and Order?

So much to know, learn, keep up with – and remember. Huge challenges for Vintage-ers.

"I don't know what you mean," the 'virtual assistant' often says, somehow conveying the message that the fault lies with the questioner, not the questionee.

Well, a whole bunch of us don't know what most things mean, or how they work, anymore.

From Madras to Singapore for the INA

(Continued from last fortnight)

Accounts of his life in the INA hierarchy during the Bose days are scarce (his family considered him lost or dead!) and Eric agrees: *It was at this stage that Cyril played a prominent part as its Adjutant-General. We never questioned him about his motives, for as a family we respected each other's personal privacy, and what notes he left behind about his INA days were only brief and purely descriptive.* He rose through the ranks to become a colonel. Dr. R.M. Kasliwal, who was Netaji's physician states, *Stracey was a smart Anglo-Indian officer, a staunch nationalist, who joined the INA and became the Adjutant General and Quarter Master General with a rank as Colonel. He was a great organiser and a good friend and he*

and I shared a bungalow in Singapore. Stracey met Bose a few times and interacted with him personally.

Two incidents relate to Stracey in the INA, one indirectly and one directly. The first is the case of M.K. Durrani, an Indian POW who later turned out to be a British agent. Durrani was implicated in manipulating the newly trained spies from the Penang spy schools (they were trained and inserted in India by submarines, but as it turned out, they gave themselves up to the British, influenced by Durrani's covert actions) and were eventually caught. Bose who was furious with this, sentenced Durrani to death. Dr. Kasliwal and a few other Indians asked Bose to show some mercy and, finally, Bose agreed that Durrani's life would

be spared if he confessed and provided details of his mission. Durrani was arrested in 1944 and tortured. Some British investigators felt that Stracey and Kasliwal knew about this and perhaps condoned it (the case at the Red Fort involving them was

● by
Manmadhan Ullathil
Maddy's Ramblings

dropped due to political reasons) as it was under Stracey's watch. But, the Bidadari camp where Durrani was interred was administered by others.

The second event was the construction of the Shaheed Smarak, or INA martyr's monument in Singapore, where INA officers and contractors led by

Stracey built a marble memorial on Connaught Drive, an obelisk 25 feet high, honouring the INA personnel who died. As is quoted often, Stracey, produced a number of models for the memorial. Bose approved one of the models and asked Stracey if he would be able to complete a sea-facing structure before the British forces landed in Singapore. He built it in a record three weeks, racing against time to finish it before the Allied forces retook Singapore in 1945. The words inscribed were the motto of the INA: Unity (Etihaad), Faith (Itmad) and Sacrifice (Kurban). The monument was built on the Esplanade just before the Japanese surrender.

As soon as British troops reoccupied Singapore in early September 1945, they blew it up.

Stracey had this to say about the Japanese and the INA. The Japanese found in the Indian army POW's a very useful weapon to help them achieve what they were setting out to do: the greater co-prosperity sphere of Asia. They were of course very tactful and they always quoted Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian freedom movement under the great and recognised leaders. He implies that on the ground, where it mattered, the Japanese never really treated the INA as equals and that Mohan Singh was perhaps right in breaking up the first INA.

As Adjutant and Quarter Master General, Stracey, then reporting to Gen. Kiani in the INA, was also responsible for coordinating the INA surrender to the British. By this time, Col.

Stracey was, in British parlance, a JIFF (Japanese Indian or Japanese inspired fifth column). After the British had routed the INA and the Japanese, their task was to round up the JIFFs and prosecute them to the extent possible.

Coincidentally, Cyril's brother Eric was at that time partly responsible for interrogation of JIFF suspects! He explains, *By a twist of fate, I myself was engaged towards the end of the war with security intelligence at our Main Forward Interrogation Centre in East Bengal, where there was a large camp for INA prisoners captured during the fighting in Burma. Though Cyril was flown direct to Delhi from Singapore, and so did not pass through my hands as a prisoner as did some of the other INA*

(Continued on page 9)



Lord Willingdon statue, now in the Fort Museum

The bookshop on the footpath

For several decades Alwar and Ramnath Goenka exist in the same location. The Book Shop located on the among others. Thousands of where it has been for the last 60 years, pavement next to Mylapore students who could not afford, albeit smaller in size and Club on Luz Church road has to buy new text books made a better organised with books arranged synonymous with old and beeline to Alwar's book shop ranged on shelves donated by rare, and the more common buy what they wanted. I think, well-wisher. While at the peak place school and college, books there would not be any serious of its popularity it had over a Readers from not only across reader in Chennai who has not one lakh books, today it has Chennai but also from other visited Alwar Book shop someone only about 20,000.

parts of the country came visit-time or the other in his/her life- In the last six decades the shop has suffered closure many Gill, the former CEC who pur- Who is this Alwar? Is he still times because of its encounter chased books worth over Rs. 1,000 during one of his officialing? My search for the answer or nature in the form of rains visits to Chennai. Avid readers, led me to Alwar's second and storms. Every time, Alwar well known writers, popular daughter Ammu's home in would be devastated but stars of the tinsel world, politi- Nacchhiyappa Street in bounce back with steely resolve

singlehandedly for several years, seriously fell ill due to an until Ramanan, known to all accident at home in 2012 and the customers as Iyer, joined after uncle Ramanan's passing him. A Tam-brahm, the latter away, my mother ran the shop used to run an old-books shop with my sister Julie and I helped in Moore Market which he lost ing out. Unfortunately my in the fire that destroyed the mother also passed away in whole heritage structure. January this year (2018), Ramanan, who was paid a regu suddenly leaving the responsi- lar salary by Alwar assisted him bility of running the shop to my in his business for over 30 years sister and I which we have to do until he passed away in 2013 n addition to looking after our due to cancer. own families. Z



The Alwar book shop at present.

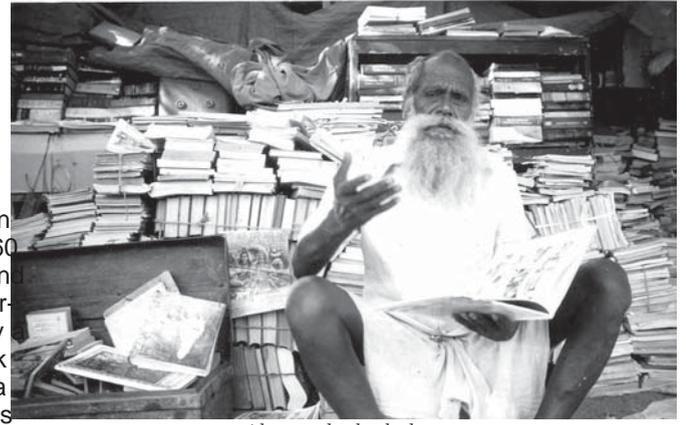
cians and professionals were Mylapore where I found that 94 to serve his loyal customers, regular customers of Alwar year-old Alwar is still alive but This was possible with the help Book shop. The famous names not kicking. Both his vision and of sympathetic Mylaporeans who were patrons included hearing are impaired. I could and other well-wishers. Arignar Anna, Alladi Krishna- only communicate with him Alwar's story is one of pas- swamy Iyer, C.P. Ramaswami through Ammu. The shop still sion, perseverance and sheer grit. Born in Vilupuram, he came to Madras in the late 1940s as a teenager with dreams of making it big in the film world. Unfortunately he only got to perform as an extra. He had to do odd jobs to earn a living. Fate had its own plans for his future. When his uncle with whom he was staying passed away, the responsibility of running the small bookshop, fell on his young Alwar's shoulders. He took to the business like the proverbial duck to the water. He was educated enough to read the titles to help him group them subject wise. The first shop which he started in 1952 was located outside the Suguna Vilasa Sabha and he later shifted opposite the old Kamadhenu theatre. He never moved from there.

Alwar remembers that the first set of books he received was from the owner of Amrutanjani Pain Balm factory, located close to his shop. This was followed by donations from other well-wishers. He also went around door to door to collect discarded text and other books from homes across the city and from wastepaper merchants for a price. He ran the shop

150-year-old book on Madras

(Continued from page 5) of the Chenna Basaveswara Kala Gnanam by a poet named Chennappa and a few others. Works, which prophesy the coming of a messiah to restore dharma. This legend seems to have been strong enough to merit a separate writeup on his arrival and characteristics in the Madras Times. Two notable articles in Part 4 are the ones dealing with an account of three old Madras newspapers, the Madras Courier, the Madras Gazette and the Government Gazette, one on the Harbour project. Writing about the last, Munro details the challenges of the Madras coast including the constant threats of inundation. He gives instances of encroachments of the sea (such as the drowning of the Bulwark in 1820-22) and hopes that the entire project would receive careful consideration. Seven years from the publication of this book, the foundation stone for the harbour as we know of it today was laid. Thankfully, it still functions.

By far the most interesting article in Part 3 is the one prophesying the arrival of Veera Bhoga Vasanta Raya, said to be the Kalki Avatar. Munro writes



Alwar at his book shop.

Alwar lived on the pavement adjacent to the shop and would not sleep the whole night guarding his shop from petty thieves. Looking at his plight, Sadagopan, a local Corporator, arranged for his marriage with Mary, a Christian. Thanks to her association with an NGO connected with the local Church, Mary had working knowledge of written and spoken English. This helped in his business. Alwar was in his mid forties and Mary was several years younger. In spite of the age difference Mary proved to be a devoted wife, not only actively helping her husband in his business but also blessing him with four daughters, all born in the makeshift living accommodation on the pavement. His daughter recalls, "All four sisters were brought up on the pavement. My father was so involved with running the shop, that he never thought of having a proper home for the family. It was only in 1999 when we daughters had reached marriageable ages, that we moved to a modest rental accommodation in Mylapore. My father, however, continued to live in the shop at nights. We owe a lot to our mother as she ensured all of us got basic education and were married off in due course to respectable grooms. After my father tell!

by
R.V. Rajan
rvrajan42@gmail.com

Ammu is proud that her father has got recognition from several voluntary agencies for his service to society by way of providing quality secondhand books and being a "Treasure house of secondhand books". Among them is the "Thanthai Periyar Award" that was conferred on Alwar a few years ago.

Alwar, though incapacitated insists on being taken to the shop at least once a week where he spends a couple of hours sitting in his favourite chair lost in thoughts and oblivious to the goings on around him. According to Ammu, thanks to availability of books online, the market for the old textbooks, which was the most profitable business, has shrunk drastically. Though there is some demand for books of fiction, it cannot make up for the loss of revenue from the sale of old textbooks.

Will Alwar's book shop, made popular only by word of mouth and which has survived so many disasters in six decades, survive the latest attack by technology? Only time can grooms. After my father tell!

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



Dr. S. Parthasarathy Iyengar.

I know a person who has drunk life to the lees and is still around at 102 defying death: Dr. S. Parthasarathy Iyengar, the father of Indian documentation.

He is the first director of the newly founded Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre. A member of the Hindu Educational Organisation, he heads the managing committee of one of the schools run by it. He is an active mentor of the Ranganathan Centre for Information Studies.

He is a disciple and devotee of S.R. Ranganathan, the father of Indian library science, the enunciator of the famous five laws of library science, the founder and first librarian of the Madras University Library and prime mover behind the National Library. (Ranganathan is not celebrated in India, there's no portrait of him anywhere in India, but the Library of the US Congress, the world's largest and most famous library, has his statue at its entrance. How will this country

100+ and still going strong

go forward with this kind of contempt for greatness?)

Back to Parthasarathy Iyengar. He is also the chairman of the trust of a Rama temple in Ayodhya and truly religiously

provided by the Muslims of the locality who also join in the pulling of the chariot. Incredible, isn't it?

Parthasarathy Iyengar is the first to arrive at meetings, par-

rathy Iyengar. Our HEO secretary passed away at Sriperumbudur, and I as its president sent my condolences from home, but Parthasarathy Iyengar at 102 drove all the way, one-and-a-half hours each way, to convey his condolences personally and stayed until the body was taken out.

There was a celebration of the 90th birthday of Dr. M. Anandakrishnan at Hyatt Regency, which went on for three hours. Parthasarathy Iyengar came 15 minutes ahead of the meeting, even before Anandakrishnan's own sons turned up, and sat right until the end, avidly listening to all the speeches.

I asked Parthasarathy Iyengar the other day what his BP and blood sugar readings were. He guffawed and said he hadn't taken any readings for decades!!

He lives right close to the Parthasarathy Temple, Thiruvallikkeni. What a man! When comes such another? Go, mark him well, and take his blessings.

● On the occasion of Madras Day, here's a profile of a remarkable Chennai-ite, 102 years old, written by one who is no less remarkable – B.S. RAGHAVAN, who at 92, is active as a writer, social activist, columnist and public speaker.

attends its *urchavams* and chariot-pulling festivals. He travels by train for two-and-a-half days (I think) each way to Ayodhya, and stays in the room attached to the temple. He tells me that all the garlands, incense etc. for the deity are devotedly

participates so vigorously and questioningly that all of us have to be on our toes, and goes about as if he is 18. He does not accept "lifts" in others' cars and insists on being independent. At 92, I hesitate to accept engagements or travel out, but not Parthasa-

From Madras to Singapore for the INA

(Continued from page 5)

officers after Japan surrendered, I had access to his file and classification before that, followed his later INA career up to the time he was retaken, and was personally the subject of considerable interest to my Intelligence colleagues.

Stracey was taken to Delhi in January 1946 and together with a number of others put on trial. It is a long and convoluted story but proof was hard to come by, much of the documentation had been destroyed or lost and several communities pressure on the administration to disband the INA trials. Most of the INA officers were dismissed from service or demobbed. Colonel Prem Sahgal, Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, and Major General Shah

Nawaz Khan were court-martialed. Many others were charged for torture and murder or abetment of murder. These trials attracted huge publicity, and public sympathy for the defendants, who were considered patriots of India and fought for the freedom of India, ran high. Outcry over the grounds of the trial, as well as a general emerging unease and unrest within the British, ultimately forced Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck to commute the sentences of the three defendants in the first trial.

Cyril was dismissed from the army and upon release from the Red Fort, worked for a year as Secretary of the INA Relief and Rehabilitation Committee in New Delhi, which proved of

help to many refugees during the large-scale carnage at the time of partition. It was during the trials and this work that Cyril caught the eye of Nehru who impressed with the officer and his bearing, stated that he could provide him a job in the Indian Foreign Service IFS.

Perusing the Nehru papers, I came across substantial correspondence between Stracey and Nehru during the 1946-48 period. Nehru mentions him to Patel, about Stracey's request to archive all collected INA material, of Stracey's request to induct all INA officers for training in the IMA (Nehru replied that that would not be advisable as they were over age, but that he would recommend to Patel and Baldev Singh that they be appointed into State forces). He was involved with the refugee relief operations connected with the disasters of Partition. Stracey was also the secretary of the goodwill mission to Ethiopia under Ammu Swaminathan (Lakshmi Menon's mother).

Stracey repaid his debts to his family and friends from the back-pay he received after the war for his army services and POW period, and he even had a little extra. He himself accepted, Nehru gifted a marble fragment, a part of the demolished INA monument which read 'Subhas Ch' after the dust had settled and India was free. This was retrieved by a local Indian in Singapore. What happened to it later, is not known.

As promised, Nehru gave him a position in the IFS where

Cyril did very well. His diplomatic career spanned postings in Karachi, Bonn, Jakarta, as Consul-General at San Francisco, First Secretary at Washington and Chancellor in Paris, finishing with spells as Ambassador to Finland and Madagascar. Reports mention him as being considered a 'most eligible bachelor' while in San Francisco and also of his amusing complaints about his lodgings and landlady while in Washington DC.

Eric and Cyril had purchased a small retirement home *Charleston* in Coonoor, to which Cyril moved after retirement from the IFS. He continued with philanthropic work and was an active member of the Coonoor branch of the AIS. His 78 rpm records, his piano and his garden gave him the solace he sought.

Eric's retelling of his brother's last days is sad and poignant. Cyril lived on at "Charleston" until his death in November 1988, enjoying his music and his books, but keeping much to himself. Apart from a bachelor friend or two, his only company was a Marwari family, the *Simrathmulls*, who lived nearby. They were generous and open-hearted friends – husband, wife and five bright sons, who had him over for dinner every Sunday night and ran errands for him. (He did not keep a car in his later years and did not like going down to the bazaar in person). As a humorous sidelight, when their business ran into trouble, Cyril helped them with a loan which they duly repaid – a strange case of an Anglo-

Indian, a member of a notoriously prodigal community not known for its wealth, lending money to one whose people constituted the traditional bankers and money-lenders of the north! When Cyril had a sudden and fatal heart attack, it was they who rushed him to hospital and later helped carry his coffin in a last gesture of friendship.

Eric had by then retired from his IPS position in Madras and moved to Australia. In 1989, he returned to India to sell *Charleston* and with that the last link the Straceys had to India was broken. A few educational scholarships and the Stracey Memorial School in Bangalore provide faint memories of that family.

While Cyril states, I decided that I will join the INA, this thing has become a reality and why should not an Anglo-Indian be part of it as well? Eric explains it differently. In Cyril's case, predilection would have been reinforced by the pressure of his regimental peers. He was not the sort of person mindlessly to follow the natural course expected of Anglo-Indians and side automatically with the British, nor would he have wanted to incur the sneers and contempt of his other Indian colleagues for a member of a community they already regarded as lackeys of the Raj. It was these factors rather than any special feeling of nationalism that would have moved him to join the INA along with most of the other Indian officers of his battalion.

(Concluded)

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To Sir, with love

The T.K. Ramanathan award for the best tennis player of the year was presented to Prajnesh Gunneswaran at the recent Annual Day of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association. This must have kindled nostalgic memories in TKR's students who took the initiative to institute this award in the early nineties. The father of the legendary R Krishnan was known for his love for tennis and competition, old-world values, singlemindedness and innovative approach.

TKR was first a tennis player and later became a coach. As a player, he excelled in regional tennis, reaching top ranking both in Madras Presidency and in Delhi in the 1930s and 1940s respectively. He was also ranked No. 7 at the national level. While in Delhi, he was so popular a tennis player that the Viceroy would send his car to pick him up for a game of tennis, much to the awe of the neighbourhood!

After his seven-year stint in Delhi as a government servant, he returned in 1948 to his native Tenkasi where he focused on his son Krishnan who was showing great promise as a tennis player. In 1950 he moved to Madras to further Krishnan's education and tennis. He also built a house (Ram Nivas) to which he added a tennis court, and installed floodlights later (1954).

According to Krishnan, his father was a self-taught player and coach. Bill (William) Tilden's book "A-Z of Tennis" was his guiding light. It enabled him to develop his own game through intensive application

and practice. He also brought into the game his theories based on physics and mathematics, which served to expand his range of shots and angled placements. "The shortest distance between two points is the straight line connecting them". Using this axiom in tennis, he explained that the ball hit at the top of its bounce flat and firm with a short back-swing would travel faster to the disadvantage of the opponent. Both Krishnan and Ramesh Krishnan used this shot to their advantage even against top players.

TKR laid emphasis on the combination of coaching, physical training and competition; used in the right proportion, they had a synergetic effect. Krishnan attributes all his early victories (he won the Stanley Cup as a school boy in 1950, the National Championship in January 1954 and the Wimbledon Junior Championship also in 1954) to his father's coaching alone. His rapid rise thereafter came largely through competition. TKR also played a key role in shaping his grandson Ramesh to win the Wimbledon Junior Championship in 1979. His other grandson, Shankar also benefitted from his coaching to the point of playing for India in a Davis Cup tie.

When Krishnan began to play in tournaments across the globe as a seasoned player, TKR had time to train others individually, both morning and evening at his house. His knowledge, experience and a fund of common sense, combined with strong communicative skills, made him a singularly

effective coach. He was a hard taskmaster with a benign touch, which made the learning process thoroughly enjoyable. The author of this article was fortunate to be one of his trainees. Sir, as they addressed him, would stand on the middle service line a few feet away from the net, with a large basket containing around 50 balls which he fed to each and every trainee. The 30-minute workout covered all aspects of the game, including foot-work, back-swing, follow-through, economy of movement, etc., and was quite exhausting.

● by
V.K. Parthasarathy

Coaching was not however just sweat and toil, there were many light-hearted moments. On Sunday mornings, after the session, TKR took the trainees to Rayar Café in Kutcheri Road and treated them to exquisite idlis. When Krishnan's letters came from abroad, TKR would read to the trainees the information on the tournaments in which Krishnan had participated, the players he had met and other tennis-related news. They also got to see the champion in action, interact with him and even play with him whenever he came home.

Although cinema was not Sir's cup of tea, as he felt it had a corrupting influence on youngsters, the trainees were thunderstruck when one fine afternoon, he organised a visit to the Globe cinema hall which

was showing a popular Marilyn Monroe film. He quickly clarified that the visit was to see the Indian News Review which was showing excerpts of a tennis match between Krishnan and Prichant in the India-Belgium Davis Cup tie. As soon as the Review was over, the trainees, to their disappointment, were marched out of the theatre!

TKR closely followed his trainees' performance when they participated in tournaments. When they won, he was pleased and when they lost, he analysed the reasons for the defeat and outlined fresh strategies. The author as a Vivekananda College student was to play in the finals of the College tournament against his professor TB Balagopal, an effective and skilled veteran who was a well-known past champion of Madras Presidency. In the pre-match briefing, TKR advised his trainee not to fall into the trap of pitching his wits against the opponent, known for his spins and uncanny placements. "Don't use your brains. Instead rely on your legs and return every ball so as to wear him out". This ploy was indeed successful!

Among the earliest trainees were (late) S Amrithalingam, and his brother SK Sundaramurthy, a keen participant in club, local and state tournaments. Lakshmi Mahadevan progressed to win the Asian, All-India Hard-Court and Ceylon Championships in 1963, achieving No. 1 ranking in women's tennis. She continued to play competitive tennis for many more years, winning many laurels. Her sister Sharada played for Madras University. Leading industrialists of today, N Sankar and N Srinivasan combined to win the

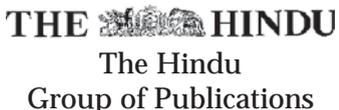


T.K. Ramanathan.

Erskine Cup as the best Doubles team in Madras University. Sankar continued to be a regular participant in City league and Club matches. His younger brother Kumar played for Madras University and continued to participate for many years in Club tournaments. The author himself won the Stanley Cup and the Erskine Cup, captained the Madras University and State teams and participated in many state and national tournaments in India, and also in Ceylon and Pakistan. Many of the trainees are keen tennis supporters today.

TK Ramanathan passed away in 1990 at the age of 80, leaving behind a rich legacy. To perpetuate his memory, N Sankar, taking the lead, proposed that the trainees found an endowment named after their Coach. The corpus would be used to give an annual monetary award to the best player of the year, in consultation with Tamil Nadu Tennis Association. Later, for practical reasons, the corpus was transferred to the TNTA to be used for the same purpose.

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