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MADRAS MUSINGS

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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Way behind in conserving our heritage

Memorials seem to be our priority

● by The Editor

From being a much vaunted city of firsts, Chennai certainly appears to lag right behind everyone else when it comes to heritage conservation. The latest metro to steal a march over it is Kolkata, which is close to completing the restoration of two magnificent structures, both built in the colonial era. What is more, there are creative programmes in place for both the buildings, so that they are kept in continuous use. You just need to compare this with what is happening here in Chennai. Our city has sadly lost it on matters concerning heritage.

The *Currency Building* in Kolkata, constructed in 1833, was a near ruin for years. Its dome had collapsed and there was even a move to demolish it. *Metcalfe Hall*, built in the 1840s, was in relatively better shape but it too faced an uncertain future. Matters came to a head when work began on pulling down the *Currency Building*. The city's Corporation brought in INTACH and a plan was worked out for restoration. The maintenance and restoration was handed over to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which embarked on a painstaking conservation exercise. It is interesting to note that the Superintendent of the ASI at Kolkata was once in service here.

The work is almost complete. The *Currency Building* will now sport a glass roof and an entire wing will be made over

to the National Gallery of Modern Art. As a city that boasts of a thriving art culture, Kolkata could not ask for more.

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Metro stations in Chennai have generously offered space for performances, games etc. making them lively destinations. Now it is art which is finding a place on their walls. (Photo: R. Raja Pandiyan)

Hurdles to deep sea fishing must be recognised, removed

(Continued from last fortnight)

Periodic large offers of catch would depress the market and middlemen are bound to exploit the weak holding capacity of the fisherfolk. There should be a government procuring mechanism with appropriate storage facilities that can offer a minimum support price with freedom to the sellers to avail of better deals outside. Assurance of a market at the end of the voyage at a reasonable price is needed for a minimum period of three years till the new mini-entrepreneurs overcome their initial fears and attain proficiency in their operations.

The Project is meant to stop disputes of fishing rights and remove a major irritant in international relations as soon as possible. It must produce the desired outcome within a couple of years. Speed is the name and soul of the strategy. The 2,000 or so fishermen going

to the Palk Bay must be weaned away speedily. Cochin shipyard is likely to get 56 vessels ready by October. Generally, the delivery period for vessels is said to be about nine months. If several units are ordered at a time with a supplier, he can standardise the parts and the process to shorten the delivery period. Each fisherman, under the present procedure, should

immediately which can be transferred to each enrolling fisherman as and when he completes the financial arrangement. This would save a lot of time and shorten project completion.

The capital cost being still too high for the intended beneficiaries, even after netting it for the subsidy, partnerships should be encouraged. Some

Fisheries Department as the umpire to resolve disputes, if any, arising among partners. In this manner, it is potentially feasible to cover all the 2,000 fishermen at four partners per vessel by procuring 500 vessels within two years.

Deep sea fishing spread over several days is susceptible to risks arising out of vagaries of weather. In the event of loss of life or serious disability of the beneficiary, the successors would become liable to the outstanding dues. The lending institution must cover itself by insuring against such a risk so that the outstanding due gets self-resolved on occurrence of the risk, saving the successor from an unbearable financial burden compounding the tragedy. Another problem relating to insurance is that boat owners tend to neglect the insurance of the vessel and its operators, landing themselves in serious trouble when the risk occurs.

(Continued on page 2)

● by A Special Correspondent

complete the financial obligations and directly order with any of the empanelled builders of his choice. There are currently 17 empanelled suppliers and this number should be doubled. Suppliers like Cochin Shipyard, that have the capacity to take on orders for a large number at a time, must be given priority. The Government must place anticipatory bulk orders for, say, a hundred vessels,

fishermen say that the cost of nets is 20 lakhs and is not provided for in the capital cost of the vessel. This makes the case for partnership even stronger. It is understood that rules allow a maximum of six to combine. The number of partners should be limited so that the share of each is attractive compared to their previous trawler earnings. The sharing format should be on standardised terms, with the

WHY DO WE LAG BEHIND?

(Continued from page 1)

Metcalf Hall, a magnificent pillared edifice, is also undergoing restoration. It had suffered from indifferent maintenance for years, dumped with several books and records. Post restoration, it will be home to an exhibition titled 'From Calcutta to Kolkata'. This will trace the history of the city, from its colonial beginnings to the present day.

On the other hand, what do we have here? There is no functioning municipal body and even when it was, it paid no attention to heritage. The CMDA has been forever dithering on a so-called listing of heritage buildings. An inspired judgement of the High Court of Madras was rendered toothless by a subsequent litigation that also unfortunately emasculated INTACH. The end result is that countless heritage buildings are facing an uncertain future. Several have already been demolished. There is complete indifference and apathy.

Does Chennai not have magnificent *Rajaji Hall* as an answer to Kolkata's *Metcalf Hall*? Why should it be used for storing files from the Agricultural Department? Why should

Senate House be perpetually locked up after a magnificent restoration? Why is the reading room of the Connemara Public Library opened only once a year? These are all instances of good restoration work that has gone to waste owing to lack of creative use of these spaces.

On the other hand we have plenty more examples where magnificent structures are languishing with no attempt at restoration – *VP Hall*, *Bharath Insurance Building*, *Gokhale Hall*, the old Mint, the Government Stationery Depot... these are just a few. And within Fort St. George we have many that are nameless but could easily be put to good use. There are many in private hands, including elegant *Pachaiyappa's Hall*, now left to rot.

The problem lies with the State Government, which thinks it is doing the right thing by branding all historic structures in the city as colonial and, therefore, unworthy of restoration. If other cities of India see merit in restoring colonial-era structures, then why not Chennai? Or are memorials on the beach and commemorative arches the only legacy we want to leave behind?

Deep sea fishing

(Continued from page 1)

The bank should insure the asset and include the cost in the interest rate, not leaving this essential safeguard to the owners who take a simplistic view of insurance as an issue of affordability.

Adequacy of subsistence allowance for quantum and duration is a key element in the entire scheme as it has the potential to wean away fisherfolk from the Palk Bay immediately. In fact, it should be extended only upon the undertaking that they would not fish in that area. The sum should be raised, if necessary, to ensure compliance. The subsistence allowance of Rs. 5,000 per family per month for three months extended by the State seems like a token gesture. It should cover a duration needed to complete all enrolment requirements plus the vessel delivery time which would be about nine months.

The project must recognise the counter forces working against the mission objectives. One possible hindrance to the switch over to deep sea fishing is the negative role of private middlemen owning a sizeable percentage of trawlers who have reduced fisherman-owners to labourers. The depleted financial situation of the "sub-

ordinate" fishermen may prevent them from opting for the deep-sea scheme despite its attractive offerings. Additionally, the middlemen lobby could paint the scheme in negative terms to obstruct solutions that affect their interests. To counter this force, the Government's promotion campaign must be credible and loud enough to drown the negative voices.

Considering the multiplicity of issues involved, the Fisheries Department at the district level must act as a single window facilitation centre to handhold and help the applicants to fulfil requirements speedily and without stress.

It is reported officially that the initial response has been encouraging in that 337 fishermen have already applied for joining the scheme and that the Fisheries Department was issuing work orders for 62 of them.

The Government's plan is that 500 boats each will be produced during 2017-18 and 2018-19 and the remaining 1,000 in 2019-20. It is too early to assume that enough has been done to make the scheme a success, and that it would run according to this plan. The hurdles must be recognised and removed to sustain that assumption.

(Concluded)

WhatsApp wonders

The *Man from Madras Musings* rarely writes about social media, chiefly because the Chief does not quite like these things. Neither does MMM, but then unlike the Chief he cannot afford to stay away from them either. There were many occasions when he was sorely tempted to write about the menace that lurks in these so-called aids to social connectivity, but he held back the typing hand and bade it to be still chiefly because he did not know what the Chief would say. But then, out of the blue, in the last issue, what should MMM see but an article on Alexa, the virtual assistant! What ho, said MMM to himself, the Chief is leaping on technology. And so here is this piece on WhatsApp.

It all began as a counter to SMS – remember the short

Tuesday and have yet another deity appended. MMM suffered this for a fortnight and then mustered the courage to send a politely-worded message to musician asking if the nuisance could cease. The reply was prompt – the musician, said the musician, was most sorry. He said he appreciated MMM's problem and would make amends. It was just that he needed two days. Why, asked MMM. The answer was rather sheepish – the musician, said the musician, knew how to add phone numbers to this list, but did not know how to remove them.

There followed two days of agony wherein MMM received more blessings and pictures of Gods. He then made bold to reiterate his request. This time the answer was most apologetic – there had been no progress in identifying the way to remove

hears from insiders that the principal argument put forward in support of this wholly unnecessary renaming was that if Bombay (sorry Mumbai) could rename Victoria Terminus after Chatrapati Shivaji, then why not Chennai do the same with Central. To this, MMM has only one counter – Central was not the name of any colonial King Emperor or Queen Empress. It merely indicated a location.

Why this rush to name the station after Matinee Idol who left us all in deep sorrow over three decades ago? Apparently, the fear among those in power (yes we all know the old adage – uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, even if it be in this instance only half a crown) is that there was considerable loss of face over the fracas leading to the burial at

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

messaging service we once used and for which we charged? WhatsApp was free and so everyone jumped to it. It also allowed for images, audio and video to be sent and so people jumped into it even more. Gone were the days when for the birthday of the Elephant-headed God you worked out a complicated greeting of dots and dashes that was shaped like His trunk. Now you just needed to select a photo of said God from Internet, paste your text and send it to all your relatives, and friends, and acquaintances, and even those you did not know. There was a simpler way out too – just forward someone else's greeting.

There are some people whom MMM knows who in his view do little else other than forward WhatsApp messages. They send flowers and good morning wishes in the morning, audio and video clips during the day, fake news by evening and then good night wishes with more flowers by night. MMM is quite curt with these specimens and by phone calls, messages and emails, has managed to get most of them to stop. And just as he was heaving a sigh of relief, along comes this musician who is more of a teacher today than a performer. MMM believes he has an extensive student following all over the world. MMM and musician were duly introduced and exchanged phone numbers. And that was that.

Only, that was not just that. From the next day, MMM was blessed to receive a benediction from this man each morning. If it was a Monday, the message would read Happy Monday and be accompanied by a picture of a deity. If it was Tuesday, it would say Happy

MMM's number. Would MMM mind if therefore the musician blocked MMM's number as that appeared to be the only way out? Mind? MMM was delighted. That ended the problem and all is well. MMM and musician are at peace. But it still amazes MMM that people add you to random lists without so much as a by-your-leave.

Memorials galore

Now that it has solved all problems facing our State *The Man from Madras Musings* notes that the Government, such as it is, has moved on to matters of greater pith and moment, namely the commemoration of the original matinee idol who founded the party in power. First on the anvil is a commemorative arch that is to come up (where else?) on the Marina. It will in time keep company with other memorial arches on the same stretch – the University 150-year arch, the Legislature Diamond Jubilee arch, the Napier Bridge which is a series of arches, the Anna Memorial that has an arch and the strange two-leaf-turned-upside-down arch that fronts the original memorial to the matinee idol. To what purpose a memorial arch when the leader already has a far-too grandiose and grotesque a memorial in the same place is a matter to ponder over, only for those who are not party to such decisions.

Even more ridiculous is the decision to rename Central Station after matinee idol. It will therefore be Matinee Idol Station pretty soon, keeping company with Former-Prime-Minister-of-India General Hospital, which chugged along for years without that wholly unnecessary prefix. MMM

the beach of the Old Man in the Opposition. It is felt that these acts of renaming and arch building could result in gaining of some lost ground. Be that as it may, our beloved Central will soon join the long list of places, roads, buildings, colleges, schools and other what-have-you that are already named after Matinee Idol.

MMM wondered about the silence of the opposition when it came to this decision. Eternal Youth Leader, thought MMM, would surely have had something to say over this. And then it struck MMM – EYL too has a late-lamented leader to commemorate. He must be earmarking the Egmore Station for this honour, or who knows, the eternally-in-planning-stage international airport that is supposed to be built somewhere. If not anything else, he can surely manage a commemorative arch on the Marina.

Tailpiece

The *Man from Madras Musings* must confess this is not a picture from our beloved airport, which is such a celebrated structure across the whole world. It is from the industrial city down south in our State. Walking out of the airport there MMM could not help clicking this deeply philosophical message.



–MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Well foundations

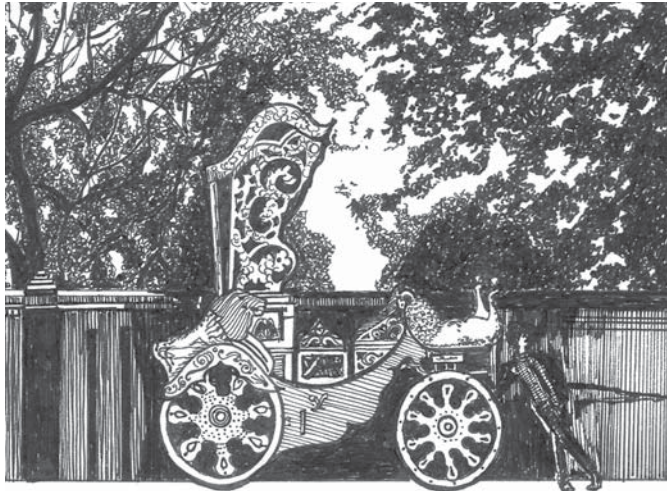
Karthik Bhatt (MM, September 1st) has wondered why the “unique well foundation” of St. Andrew’s Kirk finds no mention in W.T. Munro’s *The Madrasiana*, 1868. But it may be noted that a 1982 publication on St. Andrew’s Kirk contains the following observation. “Almost the whole of Fort St. George is seated on wells in this manner.”

Engineering and architectural historians may well do some homework to find out more about such “edifices of importance along the Coromandel Coast” (so stated in the said note).

Munro’s reference to the Luz Church spot and the “first footing of Christianity in the neighbourhood of Madras” is indubitably apocryphal.

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● Pavithra’s Perspective



Horses and chariots

The first time I crossed it, I couldn’t quite believe my eyes.

A little after I’d embarked on my quest to capture Chennai through miniatures, I was on one of my many visits around the city – and sure enough, once I was past the Chennai Central Station, beyond Ripon Building, Siddique Sarai and the Metro Rail works (with huge cranes looming over me) ... I almost turned away, craning at Victoria Memorial Hall on the right, when something to my left flashed in the corner of my eye.

A horse. Under a shack. Munching placidly on straw. There were streamers flowing down its head and it swished its white tail gently. Nearby stood a couple of other horses, and – a chariot. An honest-to-God chariot, painted in gilt to within an inch of its life. Apparently it was being readied for some sort of public function, for the fluttering streamers and buntings were being given a final polish (and the glitter-papers sticking out smoothed out in vain).

Entering into conversation with some of those working on the decorations, I discovered that both horses and chariots were indeed available for rent; the public at large wasn’t aware that these were the last remnants of a British Raj era mode of travel. Now run by S. Kumar, President of Chennai Kudhirai Savari Thozhilalargal Nala Sangam – Viduthalai Munnetram, the business had originally been started by his grandfather (who, he claims) was an Englishman by name Francis.

A very quaint sight, and one that brings back a whiff of almost a century ago.

Details about the miniature: Black and White; Pen and Ink. Dimensions: Approximately: 3.5” X 5”.

● Pavithra Srinivasan is a writer, journalist, artist, translator, columnist and an editor and is fascinated with History.

Alwar service

Whenever I came to Chennai, a visit to Alwars (MM, September, 1st) was compulsory. It was more a service than a business. Once I left my wallet in the shop. He found out my address and rang my office in Coimbatore to inform me that it was safe in his hands. In those days you could contact only by booking a call. It would take at least a couple of hours to get the connection. Next day I called on him and defrayed the expenses incurred by him.

The tribute by a nonagerian to a centenarian was touching. Reading about MGR’s last journey, I was given an appointment by him for that day. Coming all the way from Coimbatore, I was shocked to learn about his demise. I was confined to my room at the lodge.

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Karunanidhi too

In the article *The Willingdon Statue on the Island* (MM, September 1st), a mention was made about the unveiling of the statue of K. Kamaraj, even when he was alive and that he defied the widely prevalent superstition that anyone who had a statue erected in his honour when alive, would soon die. I would like to state that like Kamaraj, the DMK leader, M. Karunanidhi too belayed the belief. That Karunanidhi’s statue, which got installed at the inter-junction of Mount Road near Wellington Theatre, was broken to pieces by those who assembled to pay homage to M.G. Ramachandran is another issue.

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Let’s celebrate

Just to let you know that I think the issue of MM (September 1st) is one of the best I have come across in terms of interesting reading material, starting with your *Looking for the Colonial in Madras Week*, which you aptly end with “so let us continue celebrating our Madras, our Chennai, our City year after year”. Couldn’t agree with you more.

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Alive & well

In MM, September 1st, in the write-up on Dr. S. Parthasarathy Iyengar, there is a big bloomer for which I am to blame. The person I have

VINCENT’S JOTTINGS

A ‘Madras Week’ lesson

Every year, for the ‘Madras Day’ season ‘Mylapore Times’ hosts an event for school students.

It is called the ‘Heritage of Chennai’ contest. The idea behind it is to encourage teams to go out of their classroom and study a specific aspect of our city that has a history.

Over the past 14-odd years we have covered many areas – from markets and neighborhoods to streets and places of worship and prayer.

This year, the theme was ‘Natural Heritage’. The theme required extra legwork – a metro does not have rivers and hills, water bodies and forests all over the place. So it took some coaxing and prodding to get as many schools as we could to go that extra mile to sign up for this contest.

One school which wanted some guidance got back to ask for more tips. It is a girls’ school on Anna Salai. The guide, a senior teacher, said that it would not be possible to send three students to far-off places to undertake a study.

So we suggested a section of the Cooum river which is located some 3 kilometers from the school campus. We suggested that the girls and their guide could walk down half kilometre stretch of the river and record what they saw and observed in it and around it.

But there was silence after that conversation. This school’s team did not sign up.

While many other schools chose to present projects on the Cooum river, the choice of a few others held the attention of the judges.

One was on the lake in Korattur. A set of pictures which documented the bird life in this sprawling lake got everybody’s attention when the three students made their presentation in a Power-Point format.

Another theme was on the Pallavaram Hill. Though it has been mined over the past many decades, the hill held its own form of scrub and tree vegetation and the mined depths became reservoirs of water during the monsoon.

The team which chose to explore this area had taken the effort to trek to some extent up this hill that you get to see from the airport.

Another school team chose to study the Adyar River Creek: the vegetation, the fish and the crabs and organisms that thrived in its cleaner zones and the pollutants that destroyed such life.

Overall though, we found that the students had relied on the internet to source material and had not undertaken field study. They had blindly accepted visuals and data which proved to be wrong or mistaken and many knew very little of the city and its environment.

This reflects poorly on our education. Parents and schools are now content to focus on an education that will earn them high marks/ranks and ensure safe passage to higher studies and dream jobs. In doing so, the student community is so badly lacking in basic skills of field study, research, analysis, presentation and communication.

Also, our young people are ignorant of the city and its many facets and lives. Their knowledge and experience is very limited. I am sure they will be excited if they have gurus who can enlighten and guide them.

Take them on city tours, to the museums. Hold talks. Line up projects. All of which can earn marks or credits. But then I don’t think many schools want to do this.

mentioned as having passed away at Sriperumbudur was not HEO Secretary, but its Administrative Officer. The Secretary is alive and well.

As per the old belief, anyone mistakenly mentioned as dead, will live long and healthy and I am sure the secretary will too.

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Tamil edition

As I read through *Madras Musings*, I am surprised you are not making it available in the Tamil language. Most of your articles pay glorious tributes to Tamil writers, leaders

and their contributions. Don’t you think the Tamils in the cities as well as in “*patti thotti*” would be happy to read about their own.

My personal observation is, if such an interesting, informative newsletter is available in Tamil many would read and feel proud about their people and heritage. Just think who is going to enjoy the poems of Bharati Dasan or the biography of Kannadasan or Shivaji Ganesan however beautifully it is presented in English?

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LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

A home for South Indian entrepreneurship

If Tamil Nadu ever considered labelling a structure as a monument to South Indian entrepreneurship, this building would have been the first candidate. Sadly, there is not even a trace of where *Ramakoti Building* once stood. Documents in the High Court of Madras give its address as 47-51 Irusappa Maistry Street, Rattan Bazaar, Madras. That puts it somewhere at the edge of Evening Bazaar Road. There is not even a photograph of the building.

Ramakoti Building was part of a large swathe of property owned by that doyen among Indian businessmen — Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar. His is a rags to riches story that has been well documented in *Madras Musings*. There is, however, one aspect that deserves highlighting — he was perhaps the first to take over a failing British firm and turn it around. That was D.D. Dymes & Co, of which he was *dubash*. The company was forced to suspend business in 1904, a year after its Managing Partner, Henry Scott, had been elected Chairman of the Madras Chamber of Commerce, the most powerful trades body of South India. Indians were generally not encouraged to become members, not that there were many who wanted to. But in 1905, the Chamber had to make an exception — it invited Ramaswami Mudaliar to become a member, in recognition of all

that he did for Dymes. This was, of course, a small matter for him, for by then he had received the title of Raja, had been knighted and had also served as the first Indian sheriff of Madras.

Mudaliar invested his wealth in real estate. Among his holdings was a series of commercial buildings in Rattan Bazaar. One of these was *Ramakoti Building*. In 1906, when the Arbuthnot Bank collapsed, there was a panic reaction that resulted in confidence in British-run banking establishments of Madras being at an all-time low. As though in response, several prominent Indians of the city decided to band together and set up a bank — The Indian Bank. Prominent among those taking the lead was *vakil*, later Judge and later Member, Governor's Executive Council, V Krishnaswami Iyer. The Bank was formed in March 1907 and opened its doors to the public on August 15, the same year. The first premises were within the offices of the old Parry & Co, the site on which *Dare House* stands today. Within a short while, however, the bank moved to *Ramakoti Building* and operated there till 1909. That year, the erstwhile offices of Arbuthnot & Co, at North Beach (now Rajaji) Road, came up for auction and the Indian Bank purchased the building for Rs 1,35,000. It vacated *Ramakoti Building* thereafter and moved



The probable site of Ramakoti Building.

into its new purchase. Many years later, the Bank demolished the old *Arbuthnot Building* and built a multi-storey structure on the site.

The Bank's occupying the *Ramakoti* premises was to prove useful for the South India Chamber of Commerce (SICC), founded in 1909. This was the Indians' answer to the Madras Chamber and its elitist practices. Such bodies were being set up all over the country, Bengal's Bharat Chamber of Commerce and Bombay's Indian Merchants' Chamber predating the SICC in Madras. Between 1906 and 1909, a number of Indians had got into business — in insurance, car retailing, trading in commodities and retailing piecegoods. All of them were clamouring for a representative body and they did not think the Madras Chamber would do them justice. It is significant that the notice of a meeting to form such a body was printed in Tamil, Telugu and English. The date was May 29, 1909 and the meeting was presided over by Sir Pitty Theagaroya Chetty, later to become a Justice Party leader and also the first Indian President of the Corporation of Madras. The venue was the premises of the Indian Bank at *Ramakoti Building*. Vidya Sagar Pandya, who fulfilled the equivalent of a Chief Executive at the Indian Bank, became the Secretary of the SICC. This trades body was to operate from there, under the wings of the

Indian Bank, till the latter moved to the erstwhile Arbuthnot premises.

The SICC too shifted, first to the offices of H.M. Badsha Sahib & Co, North Beach Road. In 1912, it purchased its own office space on the same road and built a handsome Neo-Gothic edifice named the Indian Chamber Buildings. In 1945, the SICC, largely at the behest of K.V.Al.Rm. Alagappa Chettiar, acquired its present premises on the Esplanade. A new building was built here in 1956.

Ramakoti Building thereafter became home to several retail outlets. The changing face of Rattan Bazaar saw it becoming a location for several jewellers. Among the most famous was the firm of Bapalal's. They moved into *Ramakoti Building* on a long lease in 1938. Ramaswami Mudaliar having passed away in 1911, the premises were inherited by Ramakrishna Mudaliar, adopted son of the former. This lease proved contentious with Mudaliar and Bapalal repeatedly taking the matter to court from 1949 onwards. Judgements were pronounced in 1982! In the interim, the building had changed hands. Its subsequent fate is not known. It may be one of the many buildings that still stand on Rattan Bazaar, its façade completely altered. But in its time it had played home to a pioneering bank "founded for and by natives" and a trade body that represented Indian business interests.

Many girls think their fathers are special, but I can honestly say that mine was a truly remarkable individual. Details of his colourful life and adventures can be found in other publications (such as those written by T.J.S George), as my father, was a well-known journalist of yesteryear, when India had 562 native states, the larger states having their own currency and army. I will narrate only some anecdotes as we go along with my story.

Before my father left for his trip to London, the Maharaja of Patiala had promised that he would start a newspaper with my father as editor on his return. Part of the deal was that my father would help the Maharaja secure a 21-gun salute, which was the highest honour accorded to a person. At that time, the Maharaja was only allowed a 19-gun salute. My father who knew prominent people such as L.F. Rushbrook Williams, CBE, FRSA, succeeded in getting the honour approved for the Maharaja. Alas, by the time my father returned to the shores of Bombay, the Maharaja had fallen very ill and did not live to enjoy the honour. The promise to start a newspaper also remained unfulfilled because of the successor's refusal for want of a written agreement. I remember only a few lines of the famous article, or rather letter, to the Maharaja, which my father wrote, expressing his disappointment: "Let it not be said that there arose a Pharaoh who knew not a Joseph!" My father was referring to the story in the *Bible* about Joseph, where the Pharaoh of Egypt recognised the faithfulness of his slave and rewarded him.

Maharajas gave importance to journalists and the press, lest anything adverse be published about them. Journalists were quite often invited for an audience and so it was that the Nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan, once invited my father in 1931, or perhaps 1932. Thrilled by the invitation, he went to the King Koti Palace in Hyderabad to meet him. Once there, he was first led by the *dharwan* to a room and was asked to wait. After some time, he was ushered into a beautiful palatial room that was dimly lit. He couldn't see anybody. All of a sudden, a resonant voice hailed him and said, "Mr. Joseph, are you looking for the Nizam? Well, here I am." The

My days with Father — Pothan Joseph

Nizam, bejewelled and seated on a throne, extended his hand. It was customary for those granted an audience to present the Nizam with a *nazar*, usually a gold coin. My father felt embarrassed, as he had forgotten to bring the *nazar*. "Don't worry if you have not brought the *nazar*. I will excuse you. I know you are a journalist," the Nizam said and gave him a timepiece, which remained on my father's table till he passed away!

* * *

Father at one time was editing a fiercely nationalist paper called *Indian National Herald*, now defunct. He was poor at managing finances and so he asked Sarojini Naidu to join him. He made her the chairperson of the board, believing that a

home early and asked me to get ready. He was going to take me to see Gandhiji, who was at that time staying in the Bhangi Colony in Delhi. There was a cottage specially built for him. Sarojini Naidu very often stayed with him in Bhangi Colony. My father warned me that there would be many people around Gandhiji and that I was not to rush or draw closer to talk to him. But I bided my time! As we drew closer and Gandhiji saw us, he gave us a warm smile! He was busy spinning on his *charkha* and talking to people around him. We waited patiently. At the stroke of five, he rose, and picked up a long bamboo pole that helped him take long strides. He beckoned me and put his arms around me, and said, "When you grow up I want you

Hindustan Times as well. That's how Shankar and his family moved to Delhi, and his cartoons when incorporated into the publication, were a great success.

A telephone connection was a luxury in those days. My father was not very fond of telephone conversations; he would rather have people meet him in person. He did not like making or receiving business calls; instead, he would telephone from the office to ask my brother to sing a hymn to him over the telephone, like 'Abide with Me'. In one of his daily columns 'Over a Cup of Tea', which became a must-read among the populace and followed him to most of the newspapers, he once wrote: "Jaiboy, my son, you are a wonderful lad, always a joy and never a cad."

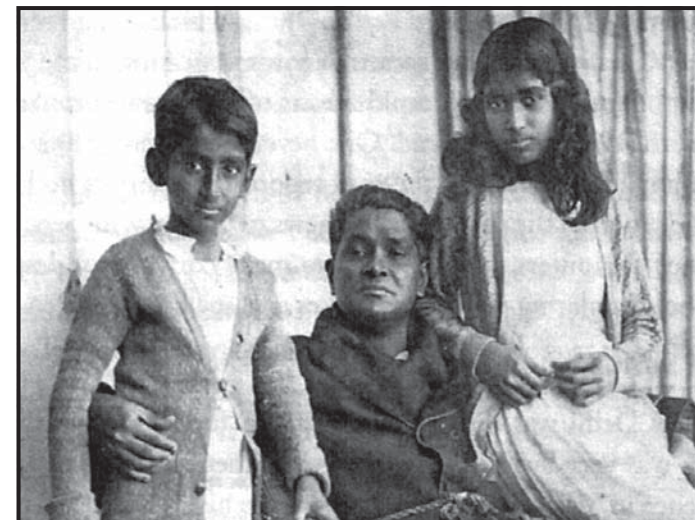
* * *

During the war years, Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister of England and he was well known for his 'V' for victory sign. Miss Myers, a thorough British woman, with the help of some students, gathered a lot of seashells, big and small, and had a huge 'V' sign made on the front lawn of Queen Mary's College. One night, during the Quit India movement, some of us came out late at night and broke it all up! Miss Myers was furious but could not pinpoint the culprits! The shells had to be gathered up and thrown away!

My father left the *Indian Express* after a short period of uncertainty and moved to Calcutta to join the *Star of India*, a Muslim League paper sponsored by the Ispahani group.

My father was not for partition of the country but he believed that there was a case for the Muslims. He left the *Star of India*, and when Jinnah offered him the editorship of the *Dawn*, he accepted the offer without hesitation. His answer to anyone who questioned him about his switch of loyalty from the nationalist camp to the Muslim League camp headed by Jinnah was that journalists were hacks who did someone else's bidding. As far as he was concerned, joining the *Dawn* was like a lawyer who argued for whatever brief was in front of him.

My father then received a letter from Gandhiji. It read "My dear Pothan, why have you left us? I am a poor man. I need to read what you write, so don't fail



The author and her brother with their father, Pothan Joseph.

A tribute to Pothan Joseph

Pothan Joseph wrote in a style that any contemporary journalist or writer might envy. There was a biblical simplicity and elegance in his writing. Though his sentences were not necessarily short he did not indulge in verbiage.

Above all, what distinguishes his writing from that of his eminent contemporaries was that he had wit. In an age when solemnity was the motto of the journalists and editors, Pothan Joseph brought laughter into the limelight. There was a strong satirical element (with Malayali flavour) in him and he could never be pompous. If anything, he was self-deprecatory in his estimation of himself or his profession.

Unlike other stalwarts, Joseph cared for his fellow journalists who were very often underpaid and told that "journalism is a mission". The hypocrisy of this high-mindedness showed in the fact that salary of the editors who professed this was often 20 or 30 times those of the reporters and sub-editors.

Joseph's famous column "Over a Cup of Tea" was a sensation in Delhi. Stylish and sophisticated, it was popular with the ruling class of the time as well as with the general reader. More than just pleasant morning reading, it was also a collector of mores and an Irish keeper of national moods. New in range of appeal and degree of impact. According to TJS George there has been nothing like this in journalism. The column ran steadily for 40 years in the *Hindustan Times*, then *Indian Express* and finally the *Deccan Herald*.

Pothan Joseph was a bohemian. He mixed with high society as comfortably as with people lower down the social scale. Though he knew the powerful, his genuine sympathies were with the lowly.

— Abu Abraham

to send me a copy of *Dawn*. — Mohandas Gandhi". This letter too has unfortunately not been preserved, something I regret strongly! We have lost most of these memorabilia, because my father never believed in preserving anything! He once said: "a rolling stone has no need for any moss".

My father felt that many things said by Jinnah for the cause of Muslims were not adequately publicised. In fact, the national newspapers never published whatever topic Jinnah spoke on! My father knew Jinnah from his days in the *Bombay Chronicle*, when Jinnah was a practising lawyer and a Congressman!

* * *

One night, my father woke me up: "Get up and take this down. Ba has passed away." (Ba

was Gandhiji's wife). I was really very sleepy and asked him if he had got a message from the office.

During those days, messages from the Reuters and the Associated Press came on the teleprinter of the office and, if urgent, were sent to the house. His reply was, "No, don't waste any time!" He had a premonition and decided to write accordingly. So, I reluctantly got up and wrote what he dictated — an obituary on Ba — and as he was dictating the content, a message came from the office that his premonition was right: Ba was no more! Next day, the early morning edition of *Dawn* was the only paper carrying the news of Ba's passing away, along with my father's obituary. Jinnah had not raised any objection or query to its publication!

Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks for the period upto September 11th.

— The Editor

Rs. 100: V.R. Raghavan; Dr. C.T.A. Balraj; S. Anandalakshmy

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Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

Our Museum's wealth

Nolamba sculptures of the Museum

(Quizmaster V.V. Raman's questions are from August 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 relate to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Name the West Bengal athlete who became first Indian to win a Heptathlon gold in the Asian Games.
2. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently unveiled details of its first indigenous human space mission to be launched in 2022. What is it dubbed as?
3. Google's recent project to allow Indian vernacular news publishers to get their content online and expand the reach of Indian content is called?
4. What first does the European Space Agency's recently launched satellite 'Aeolus' claim to be?
5. On August 24th, which industrial behemoth became the first Indian company to cross the Rs. 8 lakh crore (\$114 billion) market cap?
6. Which Indian was ranked seventh on Forbes list of highest earning women sportspersons in the world (between June 2017 and June 2018) with \$8.5 million?
7. Name the former UN Secretary-General from Africa and a Nobel Laureate who passed away recently.
8. In which African country was the 11th World Hindi Conference held recently?
9. Which Bharat Ratna awardee passed away recently?
10. Recently, a team of international researchers, including Indians, decoded the genome of the world's most widely cultivated crop. Which crop?

11. Which famous sweet and savouries shop chain was started by N.K. Mahadeva Iyer in 1948?
12. What do the initials K.V. stand for in the name of the legendary music composer K.V. Mahadevan?
13. Which Chennai college had its genesis as the Madras Preparatory School in 1840?
14. Name the paper established by G. Parameswaran Pillai that became Gandhi's platform to write about the grievances of Indians in South Africa.
15. Which building in Chennai, at the time of its construction the tallest in India, was to be named 'United India Building' by the industrialist who conceived it?
16. Who suggested the imagery on the Chennai Corporation flag which has the Pandiya, Chola and Chera symbols of fish, tiger and bow?
17. How did the house of Bulusu Sambamurthy in Mylapore make news in the last quarter of 1952, having an impact on the geography of India?
18. Robert Bourke was the Governor of Madras between 1886 and 1890. What is his peerage name which is more famous?
19. Which college is considered Madras's first women's college?
20. Name the Kannadasan-produced 1957 film on the Maruthu Pandiya brothers.

(Answers on page 8)

It is perhaps likely that ninety nine percent of the visitors to the Stone Sculpture Gallery of the Madras Museum have never heard of the Nolamba Dynasty. Why blame them when our History text books do not ever mention this name? But those interested in the heritage and culture of India, especially of South India must remember the contributions of this dynasty, particularly to the spheres of architecture and sculpture, which is quite spectacular.

The Nolambas ruled from the 8th to the 12th centuries C.E. over an area traditionally called Nolambavadi which extended over south-east Karnataka and parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. A small section in the Madras Museum is dedicated to the artefacts from select areas under their jurisdiction which belong to 900-1000 A.D. Altogether there are about six carvings which bear the workmanship of the sculptors of the Nolamba era. The most eye-catching is a broken stone slab which has three sections with three sculptures respectively.

The plaque placed next to it by the Museum mentions that it is from Hemavati in Anantpur District, Andhra Pradesh. Incidentally, Hemavati was the capital of the Nolambas and this thick slab must have once formed a part of the ceiling of a temple there. These sculptures represent three of the Dikpalakas or guardians of the eight directions popular in sculpture and painting in temples across India and are represented here along with their respective vahanas accompanied by attendants.

Two sculptures of Siva and Parvati (Uma Maheshwara),

flanking a Nataraja, are seen in this section. One of these, from Hemavati, Anantpur District, Andhra Pradesh is of Siva seen in a seated posture with the left leg on the right one and depicted with four hands, the upper two holding the trident and a snake. The lower right hand holds a fruit and the left hand encircles Parvati who is seated next to and leaning on Siva. In the left hand this Goddess holds a flower while the right hand rests on Siva's thigh. While the matted hair of Siva is clearly

● by
Chithra Madhavan

seen as though it is a crown (*jata-makuta*), Parvati's hairstyle is very elaborate. Modern day jewellers could take a cue or two from the exquisite pieces of jewellery such as necklaces, earrings, armlets and bangles which both the deities wear. A small sculpture of Nandi is seen on the pedestal at the base of the sculpture. Another Uma Maheshwara, very similar in execution, is from Penukonda, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh.

The Nataraja carving in-between the two Uma Maheshwara sculptures is also noteworthy as the sculptor who chiselled obviously wanted it to be different from others of this form of Siva he had seen. Here, the viewer sees the dancer's back although the face of Nataraja is turned towards them. One foot is on the back of Apasmara purusha, the creature crouched on the pedestal, which has much symbolism

attached to it. On either side of the apasmara purusha are two musicians, accompanying Natesha's dance. Unfortunately the left side of the back slab on which this image is carved has been broken and so are two of Siva's hands.

A sculpture of Vinadhara Dakshinamurti from Hemavai is on display on one side of this small section. Sadly, it is badly mutilated, with three of the four arms and a left leg broken. Even in its damaged state, it is clear that the sculptor had done a remarkably good job of carving an image of the Siva as the deity of knowledge, playing on the vina, although this musical instrument was also damaged and is not seen now. The earnest student of art history will not miss the tilt of the body to the right and the beatific smile, as though the Divine musician is enjoying his own music. Even though this sculpture is much mutilated, the effort of its creator to adorn the deity with various ornaments, each minutely chiselled cannot but be praised.

One more Nolamba image in this gallery, also from Hemavati, is that of a well-carved Surya, seen as the Sun God is supposed to be according to the rules of iconography. Standing absolutely straight, this deity's two arms are now broken but should have once been seen bent at the elbow at waist level and holding the stalks of lotuses in his hands. The mandatory halo around the head is also there but unfortunately the features of the face have been worn smooth, possibly because of weathering.



Vinadhara Dakshinamurti.

All the sculptures of the Nolambas in the Madras Museum are either slightly or badly mutilated, but clearly reflect the glory of the artistic endeavour of the Nolamba times. Visitors to the gallery need to pay more attention to them.



September 21-23: South Indian Puppet Festival 2018. This festival presents the varied arts of *Katta Bommalaatam*, *Tholpaavai-koothu* and *Gombeyaata* from a diverse set of artistes and troupes specially invited from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka - (at DakshinaChitra 11 a.m. -5 p.m.)



Till September 29: Painting exhibition by Dhinakara Sundar titled *Padma*. Dhinakara Sunder is an alumnus of the Government College of fine arts. Over the years he has come about with his unique style of paintings on lotus leaves, hidden and revealed through his colours. He has many solo and group exhibitions to his credit and has exhibited in major galleries in India and Japan - (at DakshinaChitra, 10 a.m.-6p.m.)

Workshops
9th September: Palm leaf Ganesha workshop for adults.
9th September: Terracotta Ganesha for children.

