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# MADRAS MESSAGES

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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## Suggestions for Metro Phase II

• by The Editor

With the Metrorail's first phase now fully operational across the city, the organisation in charge, Chennai Metrorail Limited (CMRL), has begun planning on the second phase. Spanning over 119 km across three corridors, this project is expected to go for tendering by June this year. Soil testing is now ongoing in various parts of the city. The enthusiasm for the project is palpable, what with the first phase having shown how it can benefit the public. This is also time to ponder over how this phase can be handled in a more efficient manner than the first.

The initial phase of the Metro, to cover 45 km, faced considerable delays. Work began in 2011 and was slated for completion in 2015 but it is only this year that the network became operational. The cost, estimated at Rs. 14,600 crore ballooned to Rs. 19,000 crore. The second phase is more than double the first in terms of area coverage and is estimated to cost Rs. 69,000 crore. Spanning three corridors – Madhavaram to Sholinganallur, Madhavaram to Chennai Mofussil Bus Terminus (CMBT – Koyambedu), and Lighthouse to Meenakshi College, it will soon see work commencing on the first 52 km which will involve the first two corridors.

A loan agreement with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is already in place and CMRL also has in-principle approval from Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and other institutions. It is believed that with these agreements in place, CMRL will not have to wait for

the Centre to release funds for Phase II.

It is noteworthy that no deadline for the completion of Phase II has been set. With such a huge investment and

with so much of the city's future hanging on it, you would expect a project plan to be rolled out first. It is necessary that this is in place so that, we the public can evaluate how much CMRL has learnt from Phase I. Secondly,

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The Adyar Poonga.

## Adyar Creek – ready & waiting

• by A Special Correspondent

For despondency over lethargic progress of improvements to Chennai, a visit to the Adyar Poonga could be an antidote. Adyar Poonga is the beautiful term that stands for the project to rehabilitate and restore the Adyar Creek, the primary and vibrant estuarine system of our City.

At one time, by the vigorous seasonal inflow into the sea and the natural counter-ingress of sea water into the creek and canals, the mud-flats and secluded islands hosted several species of vegetation, insects, organisms, birds and animals, thriving in grand symphonic synergy in an environment of undisturbed Nature. Aided by the biological attributes of the Adyar estuary, fauna and floral diversity flourished and it became a spawning and nursery ground for varieties of fish. All this was disturbed.

The ruthless urbanisation and consequent emaciation of the river upstream through settlements on its banks, dumping of solid wastes, discharging of industrial effluents and reckless release of untreated sewage by malfunctioning Effluent Treatment Plants sounded the death knell of the Adyar Creek and estuary. An early demonstration of concern over the rapid deterioration and contraction

of the Adyar Creek was in the 1950s, when the Department of Fisheries, Government of Tamil Nadu, set up fish and shrimp farms adjacent to the creek, it was one among the first brackish water shrimp farms in South India. The project could not withstand the onslaught of human recklessness and irresponsibility.

A spirited campaign saw the Consumer Action Group taking the Government to Court for wilfully neglecting the Creek. The judgement forced the Government to act. This resulted in the setting up the Adyar Poonga under the Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust (CRRT) in 2008 with a substantial budget. Initially, 58 acres were released of which 40 acres became the restored creek area. CRRT is responsible for coordinating the resto-

ration of the three river systems of Chennai – the Adyar, the Cooum and the Kosasthalaiyar. Dr. Kalai Arasan, heading this organisation, explains that each of the three rivers has its own behavioural characteristic and the Adyar is the most complex demanding their prior attention.

We asked him whether urban intrusion that had already taken place and the poor river flow, quantitatively and qualitatively, were not insuperable impediments to restoration – both being difficult to overcome and almost irreversible. Exuding confidence, he says that the urban incursion and unauthorised settlements are under control and are not a hurdle to rehabilitation. In evidence, he says, now, CRRT in Adyar commands a creek area of 40 acres of creek plus 350 acres in the estuary.

Pollution-free, copious river flow is necessary for the estuarine eco-system to flourish. The estuary and creek had to be cleared, desilted and got ready to receive the river flow. This has by and large been completed. It was a massive operation of removing the heavily overgrown rogue plants, like *prosopis juliflora* which has obliterated water bodies, desilting and dredging the creek to restore their holding capacity, recreating islands with the silt and dredge, planting, on islands and elsewhere, specially selected varieties of vegetation that thrive in estuarine environment without irrigation or fertilisation, introducing fish species that provide a source of income to fisherfolk in the villages and related measures. The islands provide seclusion for flora and fauna to thrive. In Adyar estuary, around 57,000 mangrove species and 35,000 terrestrial saplings have been planted, removing the invasive species, debris and plastic waste.

Here are some data on the beneficial impact of eco-restoration of the creek by CRRT. Faunal diversity in the Adyar Creek has increased from 273 in 2016-2017 to 331 in 2017-2018. The species of insects – including butterflies



Adyar Poonga before and after restoration.

(Continued on page 2)

## Adyar Creek – ready and waiting

(Continued from page 1)

and dragonflies – has increased from 98 to 155 in the Creek. As many as eight species of molluscs, 13 crabs, 155 insects, 10 fishes, 10 amphibians, 19 reptiles, 105 birds and 16 animals have been recorded in the Adyar eco-park. Migratory birds have also been sighted some with a pronounced preference for the Adyar Creek, over Vedanthangal, because of availability of more food and the seclusion. In 2015, the study by ICAR-Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (CIBA) revealed that the biotic and abiotic indicators of the Creek were within the desirable limit and suited for brackish water aquaculture. CRRT's effort has thus been effective in the estuary ecosystem regaining life.

CRRT has been welcoming and cooperating with agencies and groups capable of contributing expertise – the PWD, Fisheries Department, CIBA, nearby village groups and numerous others. Srinivasapuram, Mallikuppam and Mallimanagar, adjacent to the creek, have been identified as partners in sustainable brackish water aquaculture to supplement livelihood.

The stormwater drain from the surrounding area augments fresh water availability in the Creek. On the other hand, heavy exploitation of groundwater in neighbourhood establishments depresses the water level in the Creek. Flow in the river is weak and of poor quality. Another handicap in maintaining the salinity level in the Creek is the lack of sea water inflow into estuary in summer months because of sand bar formation. Working against such odds CRRT has been successful in reviving the Creek. The budget of Rs. 40 crore has been nearly fully absorbed, spent effectively as even a lay visual inspection of the scenic surroundings demonstrates.

We are cautioned that what is being done is *rehabilitation* of the Creek and estuary as distinct from *restoration*. The aim is that rehabilitation would eventually lead to restoration. Experts in estuarine management say that “restoration in the strictest sense is the return of an ecosystem to an exact pre-existing condition following degradation or disruption.” To restore the ecological structure and function of a damaged estuarine system requires considerable time “depending on the type and severity of the human pressure, the kind of habitat, the geographic location of the impacted system, and other factors.” A time span of 12-15 years is needed for a

restored site to exhibit similar features as a natural reference site.

The result of the present rehabilitation, which has taken ten years, is, by itself, spectacular except that it needs intervention till eventually the eco-system becomes self-supporting. Those of us who travel from Adyar to San Thomé, may remember that some years ago we passed on our left the massive stinking dump yard which has now become the *Poonga*. Today, the brackish mix of freshwater and saltwater hosts diversity of animal and plant life. Submerged aquatic vegetation, or seagrass, in the estuary when the Adyar river is restored would provide breeding and nursery grounds for many species of marine life.

Full “restoration” of the Adyar estuary is dependent on the restoration of the upper reaches of the river and restoration of water bodies in the river basin to restore a full pollution free inflow. It is a challenge to keep up the estuary and Creek in a condition, till then, to take advantage of the full flowing Adyar. While the river restoration is still under implementation over the next three years or so, flow of polluted water into the estuary would have the effect of negating efforts to revive and maintain the Creek at considerable cost and effort. Therefore, the dumping must be stopped within a few weeks, as of foremost priority, while the rest of the aspects of river restoration takes its time to complete.

The 40 km Adyar River restoration presents many challenges – clearing settlements and constructions on its banks, dredging and most importantly, stopping the dumping of solid wastes, effluents and sewage. The Adyar, unlike the Cooum or the Kosasthalaiyar has a large basin and water bodies in the basin area used to overflow into the Adyar. Many of these have been taken over by legal and illegal constructions and lost forever. The Government is restoring the capacity of the remaining ones to augment the flow through Adyar in the rainy season.

The estuary has no life independent of the river inflow. It is in this context that reports of enormous delays by multiple agencies of the government are of concern. Keeping up the creek and estuary is difficult if a pollution-free flow in Adyar is delayed. If the sixty odd crore spent on the creek is not to go waste, the Adyar restoration must be completed on highest priority and, meanwhile, the dumping stopped with least possible delay.

# The alien tongue

Among the various things that *The Man from Madras Musings* detests is this easy familiarity that leads people to address a person older to them as Uncle or Aunty, as the case maybe, even at the first meeting. And the older MMM gets, the more he dislikes it, for it destroys the image that MMM has of himself as a young man on the threshold of life. Some have said that this is reflective of MMM's inability to accept reality – he is after all at an avuncular age. Others, older than MMM have pointed out the brighter side, at least in their view. At least nobody has as yet referred to MMM as grandpa they say. They little know the truth. Anyway, MMM decided that he had had enough when someone whom he hardly knew sent him a message beginning with Uncle. MMM then called the nephew-presumptive and said that he, MMM, had not been present at his, the nephew's, cradle ceremony and since he, MMM, had also not changed his, the nephew's diapers at a formative stage, it would best if he, the nephew, addresses him, MMM as Mr, or Sir. Message got home and

languages pan India locations. MMM was rather puzzled by the reference to vertical – perhaps they were specialists in Japanese, Korean and other East Asian languages? The peculiar English certainly had hints of the oriental. That this was not the case was proven from the next line, which listed several clients (poor fellows, how they must have suffered). The message also assured MMM that “We have affiliated team working with every vertical enhancing the companies with their social media branding, company Corporate Film Production, Testimonial & Product Video Production in 2D, 3D, Whiteboard and Real Picture.”

MMM's new-found friend then signed off with an “assure you that I will do my very best to help you out with your needs.” She also wanted to know if an f-to-f could be arranged depending on MMM's calendar. It sounded terribly vulgar to MMM and so he decided to ignore the invite. It later transpired that an f-to-f meant a face-to-face meeting. MMM decided that he would rather that these events stuck to the vertical.

passenger from our city (home to firsts in several things, if the Chief is to be believed), was hitting the bottle, or bottles for some enthusiasts were blending their own cocktails. Of solid breakfast they had none. The rest of the guests in the lounge were watching in open-mouthed wonder. It made MMM ponder over whether toppers of the Chennai kind ought to be classified under the genus *Porifera* (sponge) as opposed to *homo-sapiens*.

They were still not done when boarding was announced. Many then had to go to the toilet and by the time they made it to the flight they were highly ‘spiritual’. And in the flight, according to a harried airhostess, they kept asking for more and more. In fact just as the landing announcement was made, one of them made it to the pantry and asked the airhostess if there was time for one more, probably for the road. It was moments like this, said the lady to MMM, that she wished she had opted for the career of a bus conductor. Any such behaviour she said, and the offender could have been bundled out. The pres-

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

thereafter relations have been established at a formal level.

The other piece of familiarity that gets MMM's goat is the tendency to assume that it is all fine to address someone on a first name basis. These are days when MMM gets several emails addressed to plain MMM or even worse MM or horrors, just M! He ignores most of these as they are essentially to solicit some business transaction or the other. But the other day he did pause to read one such message, which claimed it was from someone who is into language services. MMM assumed that this was one of those software languages and so was initially inclined to ignore it. But something made him pause and read the whole email and he must say he was richly rewarded for his labour.

The mail began by saying that the agency was an acknowledged expert in various languages of the spoken kind and said “here I want to introduce my organisation”. They said the sender, who had assumed that she and MMM had been school together, or at least had a friendship that stretched over the age, were an ISO 9000 certified (who isn't?) organisation working ‘from’ past 8 years pan India. Now, How We Can Help You – thus ran the next line.

Our agency translate in all vertical and every kind of documents, in Indian Regional & Foreign Languages, along with that we also give Interpreter service in all

## The liquid kind

*The Man from Madras Musings* has recently been sojourning in faraway lands and as all good things have to eventually come to an end, he made his way back, in time for meeting the next deadline set by the Chief. At the airport of embarkation, as we travellers say, MMM threaded his way past the passengers to the lounge so that he could put his feet up for a while before boarding the flight. He was surprised to find that as though in keeping with his threading, several of his fellow citizens of Madras that is Chennai were weaving in and out of the rows of seats provided. Their sinusoidal movements had MMM quite puzzled. He decided to follow the man who had last sashayed by.

The journey took a while for MMM's quarry kept tarrying at various places apropos of nothing. He steadied himself against passing passengers, chairs and once even against a potted plant. All the while MMM followed rather in the manner of a big game hunter. The chase ended at the refreshments counter where apart from several victuals of the solid variety, liquids of the amber variety were also present. It was then that MMM realised that he was mistaken all along in assuming that breakfast in Chennai or for Chennai-ites in general was of the *idli-dosa* variety and that cocktails if any were usually in the evening hour. The time was 9.00 am or so and every

ence of a bouncer or two on Chennai-bound flights may not be such a bad idea after all.

## Tailpiece

Governments, be they of the State or the Central variety, are in a hurry to conduct as many events as possible. This is apart from showering largesse on farmers, those below the poverty line and other probable voters. The reason, so *The Man from Madras Musings* learns is that once the electoral code of conduct kicks in, there can be no events of this kind. Among the many that our local Government decided to celebrate was the birthday of a former CM. MMM was one of the recipients of an invite to one of these celebrations. The invite, ostensibly to a cultural event, had MMM scanning and then poring over it, to detect where the cultural element was. It had a series of speakers and beyond that nothing. It was large, glossy, with the obligatory photographs and as in the manner of all things Government, reached MMM a day after the event. MMM was not disappointed at this tardiness though. But he did make bold to call one of the organisers as to where the cultural element was. Pat came the answer that it was so necessary to invite all the speakers that there was no time for any cultural programme!

–MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### WP memories

I was happy to read the article on (Wilfred Pereira Private Ltd. WPPL) MM, February 1st issue.

I thought I will bring a couple of points to your attention. (I am not certain whether the Mount Road branch of WPPL was first opened. Because the Vepery branch served as the 'head office' I would imagine that the Vepery branch was the first one. May be the Mount Road branch was opened a little later. But I have no idea of Mount Road showroom. The Vepery office-show room was bang opposite to the Clock Tower, right at the junction of Puraswalakam High Road, Hunter's Road, and Vepery High Road. It used to have a nice front yard-garden with a central water feature, which was non-functional in the late 1950s.)

As a primary school boy, I have accompanied my father for one Xmas-New Year celebration in Mr. Pereira's house. If my memory serves right, WP's house was in a by-lane off Hunter's Road, Vepery. WPPL had more branches across the Madras state than what you have listed: for example, their branches existed in Kodaikanal and Yercaud.

#### Footnote:

From 1962, WPPL was in great financial difficulty.

But the debts incurred by WP led the entire WPPL group to be taken over (not sold to) by Dadha's, who were in partnership with WP's business in later years. WPPL had a manufacturing unit and they launched various products. Their factory used to exist at the far end of Hunter's Road, near Choolai.

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### Nouveau Anglo-Indians

I was fascinated to read about the Pharmacies of Chennai in ye olde days (MM, Feb. 1st).

I remember going to the wedding of one of the Wilfred Pereira girls.

I can't recall her name now, maybe it was Priscilla, or Prudence. She was very tall and good looking. She married a young man called Arthur D'Souza.

He worked at that time at the Bradma Office on Mount Road, opposite the Kwality Restaurant (pronounced K-Wallity) and was a sales representative working under my husband G.C. Doctor.

Arthur, myself and my husband, who was a keen motorist, travelled all across the South in a Dodge car, (pronounced Dod-geh), and had quite an adventurous time of it. In the early 1960s, there were not many others vehicles on the roads so they were quite well main-

tained. We stayed in the most lovely *dak* bungalows that were run by *khansamahs* who would rustle up a country chicken dinner and even produce a pudding out of nothing at all, but inherited skills. Once, staying at Kodaikanal at the guest house that had been the temporary refuge of Sheikh Abdulla who was under house arrest we were treated to a souffle coloured pink with the juice of beetroots. Splendid!

Once Arthur married the Pereira daughter, he became rather posh and eventually migrated to Australia.

As far as I remember, the competition to Wilfred Pereira on Mount Road was from a Pharmacy called Sahib Singhs.

I fully agree with Sujit Pai that I belong to the tribe called Nouveau Anglo-Indian.

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### Astrological advice?

F.V. Arul was noted for his high integrity and peerless investigation. Though he had handled many cases successfully, the Coimbatore Counterfeit Case came as a crowning glory.

G. Krishnan was born rich and was married into an equally rich family. He was well-known as a philanthropist and nobody who sought his favour, returned empty-handed. He was a firm believer in astrology and it was rumoured that his misadventure was due to the advice his astrologer gave him.

In the prison, he was put in charge of the Textile Mill which he modernised with his sound technical knowledge. While many textile mills were making losses, the prison mill made profits. It was rumoured that the day was spent in the jail mill and the night in his sprawling bungalow. He learnt siddha therapy while in jail and when he came out he prescribed siddha medicines to those who sought his advice. I think he never felt remorse for his crime. After coming out of jail, he used to attend marriages. He used to walk majestically into the hall and many guests cringed in their seats. It was said they were the beneficiaries of the counterfeit currency. If only he had distributed the currency in Bombay, Calcutta and Ahmadabad, instead of the weekly shandies of Coimbatore, he might have escaped undetected.

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### We are sorry!

Last fortnight's story on the fake rupee notes had the printer's devil interfering quite a bit. Thus the rupee trail became rupee trial. The error is regretted

– Editor

## Orange brigade dots Chennai roads

The complexion of the Chennai roadscape, especially in the residential areas, has turned orange! Hordes of motorcycles with uniformed delivery persons wearing orange-coloured SWIGGY shirts are busy picking up and delivering food for an ever-hungry market! You will find a cluster not only outside popular restaurants but also near modest eateries; even as they enter the eatery with their ubiquitous smartphones in tow, the delivery counter has already received the order online and is in the process of executing it. The service is thus prompt and competes with offers from pizza outlets like Dominos and Pizza Hut on speedy delivery!

Gone are the days when you could enter a restaurant and place an order with ease at the "Take Away" delivery counter. Today there is a need to compete with the delivery guys from Zomato, Swiggy, Uber Eats and Food Panda (and the tribe is every increasing with exotic names) who are in a tearing hurry.

A new revolution appears to have set in the science and art of food delivery at the doorstep. "Apps" are available and you need to have them downloaded for arriving at quick orders based on an easier spread of choice. 'Happy Hours' are no longer the preserve of Bars! During Happy Hours, Swiggy, Zomato and others of that ilk, offer a lip-smacking variety of small eats like sandwiches, frankies, french fries, customised pizza, *bonda*, *bajji*, cheese toast, cocktail idlies etc. from eateries. Colourful promotion mailers shower laptops, i-pads and smart phones with intermittent notifications that are designed to rouse hunger and excite appetite! I watched with amusement when during a pleasant drinking session with a friend, he ordered snacks which were delivered even before we were getting into the mood for a "repeat".

Open the mail inbox on your system and soon you are transported to the food platforms of Swiggy, Zomato, Uber Eats who infuse fun, laughter, festival schemes and prizes into the Food World. Points, coupons, discounts tally and loyalty programmes create a "fun and exciting" world of their own while orders keep ticking on the side.

Combine this with the freshly recruited brigades of online retail marketing delivering a whole range of goods and services from pins, diapers, vegetables and fresh meat to smart phones, Bose sound dock systems and microwave ovens, and the roadways present a spectacular panorama of economic activity – virtually a playground for the major players like Amazon, Flipkart, Big Bazaar and the courier community (where have all the postmen gone?).

A spate of new systems might have crept into the technology of food catering and distribution, but Chennai has its die-hard players who move about unobtrusively on their mopeds delivering 'Brahmin food items' at moderate cost from 'orthodox caterers' operating from select pockets in Mambalam, Triplicane and Mylapore. The demand for their breakfast, lunch and dinner delivery on a monthly basis continues with unabated regularity. They provide the lifeline for bachelors, staying on their own, elders who are unable to get into the kitchen and cook, and the infirm who depend on them on a long-term basis.

Encouraged by revenue models which generate good margins from supplier and buyer, more exciting prospects are in store for Swiggy, Zomato, Uber Eats and others in their peer group who are in the process of taking the great leap forward through IP issues and mergers. We may look forward to seeing more colourful bikes with attractive containers and bright young uniformed men toting their smartphones and busily plying the good stuff as they tear down the roads. We noticed recently, for the first time, a woman on a bike joining the fraternity, brimming with confidence. Yet another male bastion, a thing of the past?

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## Suggestions for Metro Phase II

(Continued from page 1)

there were several reasons for the delays in the first phase. Chief among these was the difficulty in land acquisition, which also contributed to cost overruns in a significant manner. It is to be hoped that CMRL will have a more scientific system in place for the 800 or so private properties it plans to acquire for Phase II. Another reason for delay was the sudden vanishing of an important vendor who cited tardy payments from CMRL. This, combined with their own parlous finances caused bankruptcy. CMRL will need to vet its vendors in a more professional manner this time. Road cave-ins at various locations were a third cause of delay. While underground drilling is not easy and each such exercise is a new learning experience, it is to be hoped that CMRL will by now have a reasonably good

idea of Chennai's topography and soil to manage this.

Lastly, we at *Madras Musings* have always been stern critics of the way CMRL dealt with heritage structures. Some have made way for the project, while others are in a precarious state owing to the underground drilling in their vicinity. Will CMRL be more sensitive in Phase II?

Even in Phase I, we did see a progressive warming up to heritage thanks to enthusiasts, activists and the media. Promise was made to rectify damages where incurred and stations were built in some places to reflect the architecture of nearby landmarks. Can this extend now to more affirmative action – ensuring all heritage structures that stand in the route of Phase II will be maintained and, more importantly, put to some good use instead of just being demolished?

## Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks as on date.

– The Editor

Rs. 50: M.R. Ananthanarayanan

Rs. 100: R.P. Jesudasan, J.D. Jambunathan, R. Vaidyanathan, M. Balakrishnan, Dr. K.R. Chidambara Kumarasamy, Lakshmi Narayanan.

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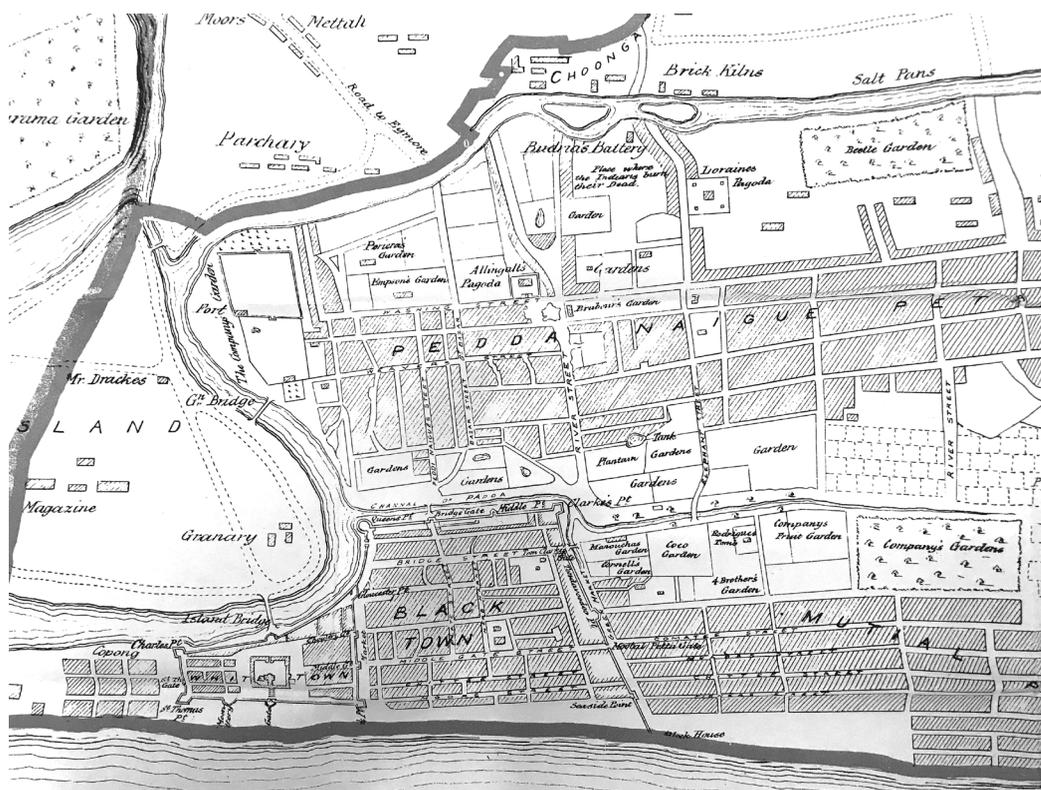
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# When Black Town vanished



## LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

Popular memory today associates present-day George Town with Black Town, and rightfully so. It was following an appeal in 1911 from the residents of Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet, the two halves that made up the then Black Town, that the area was renamed George Town, after the new King Emperor. But this was in a sense new Black Town, recognised as such in the 1750s. Old Black Town, which existed to the immediate north of Fort St. George, is today a mere memory and a very inchoate one at that.

This settlement must have come up at around the same time as the Fort. In fact, in those early years (1644-1648), the small square that later came to form the core of Fort St George was known as the Inner Fort and what lay to its north was Black Town. An earthen wall, constructed by Agent Ivie, enclosed it. This fortification, on the northern side, ran along what is present day China Bazaar (NSC Bose) Road and ended near Broadway (Prakasam Salai). From there the western wall began and extended towards what is now the Esplanade. There were three gates, two in the north wall and one in the western one. This latter, initially known as West Gate, later came to be called the Armenian Bridge Gate.

While in the 1640s there appears to have been no division between the European and native parts of the Fort, this was not the case a decade later. By the 1650s, fortifications isolating the Inner Fort from its outer counterpart were complete and it came to be referred to as Christian Town. Old Black Town, or Gentu Town as it came to be known, was the Outer Fort and remained as it was. An interesting aside is that foxes were regularly seen near its gates. The place also came to be known as Malabar Town from the 1680s and H.D. Love attributes this to the increase in the number of Tamil as opposed to the earlier Telugu, inhabitants.

Old Black Town had quite a few landmarks within itself. The first of these was the temple to Chenna Kesava Perumal, built by Beri Thimmappa shortly after the British arrival in Madras. Also located here was the Company Garden. Envisaged as a lung for the area, construction on it was forbidden at the express orders of Sir William Langhorne in 1675. Encroachments on public space being common then as now, a wall was built all around the garden. Governor Streysham Master, in 1680, added to it by taking down some native houses and including the burial ground of the English (known as the Guava Garden) within

it. He also freed up some parts of the garden for public housing. Around four acres were thus offered for development and on it came up a principal thoroughfare – Garden Street, running north and south. Three alleys branched off it – Garden Lane, Merchants' Street and Merchants' Lane. To the east of Garden Street was Back Lane.

Thomas Salmon came to Madras in 1739. He describes Old Black Town as being inhabited by "Portuguese, Indians, Armenians and a great variety of other people." The precinct was a square, "better than a mile and a half in circumference, being surrounded with a brick wall seventeen feet thick, with bastions at proper distances; it also has a river on the west and a sea on the east; and to the northward a canal is cut from the river to the sea, which serves for a moat on that side." The river was no doubt the Elambore, which flowed where NSC Bose Road now is. Salmon had great praise for the town – "The streets are wide, and trees planted in some of them; and having the sea on one side and the river on the other, there are few towns so pleasantly situated." In sharp contrast however are several other accounts that speak of the crowded and insanitary conditions of the place.

## ● Pavithra's Perspective

### The forgotten King



Every foray into north Chennai revealed a new facet of the city to me, along with delicious tidbits. I'd decided on a modified version of "spirit-travel" to aid me – as in, I decided to let the spirit of Madras guide me to wherever it wished me take me. Perhaps it was everything I'd read about the city subconsciously prodding me, but I kept re-visiting NSC Bose Road, diving into tiny lanes and alleys each time. And though I found plenty to intrigue me, something, I felt, was missing.

Until, one afternoon, walking by the congested Flower Bazaar Police station, marveling at the rickshaws, cars, autos, cycles, pedestrians squeezing through the narrow road and the posters randomly plastered across what seemed like a white pedestal amidst a forest of bikes, I looked up – and saw a statue. Clearly British, shrouded in ermine, armed with sceptre and staring stonily into the distance.

I scrambled to discover who this personage might be, and struck pay-dirt almost at once: this was King George V who ascended to the British throne in 1911, and in whose honour this section of Madras, originally referred to derogatorily as Black Town, had been renamed George Town. I read comments that because of who he was, the statue should be removed – but when I saw the king surveying the bikes, cars and milling people, I only felt a sense of pity. For an emperor, he was completely alone. I wanted to capture that sense of isolation. Standing in the bright sun, yet shrouded in shadow.

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.

In the 1740s, Old Black Town became the subject of a Telugu book, fashioned as a dialogue between two Europeans. This was translated by the Danish Mission at Tranquebar into English in 1750. From it we learn that the place had 8,700 houses and 366 streets. As these numbers seem excessive, it is likely that this enumeration included the northward hamlets of Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet.

Rather ironically, Old Black Town was half-demolished even as the book was being printed. Between 1746 and 1749 the French occupied Madras and when the English returned they found "no great change in White Town, but about half the Black Town, the whole of its fortifications, and the Company's Garden House had been demol-

ished." The temple to Chenna Kesava remained undisturbed. By 1756, however, what was left had also to go. The Company decided that it needed a safe open space between itself and the rest of Madras so that there could be a clear line of fire. Old Black Town was swept away and what came up in its place was the vast Esplanade at the boundary of which pillars were erected to mark the limits of New Black Town (present day Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet). One solitary pillar survives outside *Dare House*. Chenna Kesava Perumal made his journey to Devaraja Mudali Street, to be housed in a temple built in the 1770s. If only He condescended to speak, He would have quite a story to tell. His idol is probably the only survivor from Old Black Town.

# Hicky's Bengal Gazette

*A newspaper with controversy's seeds  
in Madras*

It happened in 1769 during Warren Hastings' second voyage to Madras to serve the English East India Company's Council. Aboard *The Duke of Grafton* on which Hastings was sailing there was a young couple, the Baron and Baroness Karl von Imhoff. The Baron, who was a portrait painter of sorts, was travelling with his strikingly attractive 22-year-old wife, Maria Chapuset, a woman of wit and intelligence. The combination was just what was necessary to appeal to the retiring widower Hastings.

A poor sailor, Hastings became progressively ill during the nine-month long voyage. Maria nursed him through it all. Nursing changed to intelligent conversation, and a meeting of minds led to Maria Imhoff becoming Warren Hastings' official hostess aboard the ship.

Once in Madras, Hastings would not only set up house for the Imhoffs but also move in close to them. After ten months in Madras and painting half the settlement, Imhoff wanted to try his luck in Calcutta – and the Council agreed. But Imhoff left his wife and son behind. Hastings would visit them regularly till Maria sailed for Calcutta to join her husband in October 1771. His affair with Maria might have died a natural death, but for the news that was to change his whole life. He was appointed Governor of Bengal.

By February 1772, Hastings was installed in Council House, Calcutta, to begin the most glorious years of his career. But he also regularly visited his property in Alipore, near which the Imhoffs lived. It wasn't long before the couple was once again supported by Hastings and all Calcutta was not only agog at the goings-on but also rife with rumours of bargains the Baron and Governor were trying to strike. Whatever the truth behind the rumours, Calcutta had no doubt about the relationship between the now-designated Governor-General, India's first, and the fashionable Baroness whose quaint English was so charming.

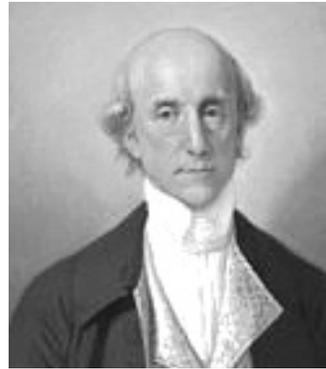
When official news finally reached Calcutta in 1777 that the Baron, who had been summoned to England by the Company, had been granted a divorce in June 1775 on grounds of incompatibility and being "an abandoned conjugal mate", Hastings had all Calcutta in a flap by marrying, on August 8, 1777, Anna Maria Appolonia

Chapuset, the bride being given away by his former schoolmate and the then Chief Justice, Sir Elijah Impey. The Governor-General soon presented to Calcutta society, at a reception, Britain's first First Lady of India, whom all Calcutta thereafter called his 'Governess'. "Beloved Marian" not only held his heart in thrall, but also had a "fixed ascendancy over his mind"! To please Marian was to gain the favour of the Governor-General. But the expression of favour on several occasions bordered on the gross misuse of office.

Calcutta was humming with rumours about all this, but only behind closed doors. And there, behind closed doors, the rumours would have remained, but for the crusading zeal of a man who may be considered modern India's first journalist, a wild Irishman seeking fame and fortune – James Augustus Hicky, the founder of India's first newspaper, *Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, in 1780. Hicky's early stories, snide references to 'the Great Romance', made him no friend of Hastings. And Hicky stoked Hastings' ire with more direct references to corruption and impropriety in the Government. The government versus Hicky battle is the story Andrew Otis tells in *Hicky's Bengal Gazette: The Untold Story of India's First Newspaper*. A pity that the roots of the enmity, the 'Maid Marian', Hastings romance, gets short shrift. Nevertheless, what Otis narrates is a fascinating tale about the beginnings of the politicians versus journalists divide.

\* \* \*

After getting tired of several jobs in England, Hicky had decided to try his luck in India. He reached Calcutta in February



Warren Hastings.



Maria Hastings.

1773. His first job was as a surgeon, prescribing medicines, bleeding patients, and removing abscesses. Later, he borrowed money to begin a business, purchasing a small vessel to trade between Calcutta and Madras. Unfortunately the vessel and the cargo were badly damaged in rough weather during one voyage and Hicky was in deep trouble, unable to return the loan taken from the bankers. And on October 20, 1776, he entered jail for the first time in his life. The bankers had seized everything he had; his ship, his house, even his furniture. Fortunately, Rs. 2,000/- he had given to a trusted friend, helped him put to good use the skills

in printing that he had learned earlier during his peregrinating career. With it he bought types and hired carpenters to make a printing press, smuggling these into jail. He began working from there, printing handbills, advertisements, almanacs, documents for the Supreme Court and even insurance forms. Since prisoners had to pay for their own food and water, it was not uncommon for them to find ways to make money. After many long months, he scraped together a few hundred rupees, enough to order a set of printing supplies from England. He soon got rid of all his debts

● by  
R.V. Rajan  
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and with a lawyer getting him acquitted, he began a business that would improve his life.

While still in jail Hicky had got a contract, his first, with the Company, to print the Army's requirements. He was the only printer in Calcutta at the time. Armed with this experience he sought and got the Army's order for printing the new regulations, which, it was hoped, would set the Army's code of conduct for years to come and prevent the corruption that was flourishing.

For Hicky it was a huge order. He borrowed money for the project, hired staff, and added equipment. But unfortunately the order was given to him without the knowledge of the Governor General and Hicky found himself in trouble. He began to think of other ways to make money. He felt that he could be much more than a job printer; someone who could provide society with a useful service by printing a newspaper.

Hicky began posting notices all over the city promising to revolutionise news reporting in India. While Indians traditionally got their news from friends and contacts, Europeans had been reliant on newspapers which came from Europe and America, arriving on ships many months after they had been published. He promised his newspaper would act as a community bulletin board, where everyone could post and reply to advertisements. His proposal came at a perfect time as news was in great demand in Calcutta because of the ongoing wars in three continents which had disrupted trade. Merchants needed to know which shipping routes were open and travelers needed to know when it was safe to sail. Hicky would provide this information. As the first journalist in India he would have a monopoly over news.

Hicky was, at the same time, aware of the dangers of printing a newspaper. In his early life in London's printing industry he had seen journalists punished and jailed for what they published. He promised to avoid party politics and scandal that had doomed so many other journalists. In his proposal for his newspaper he promised "rigid adherence to Truth and Facts" and a commitment to not print anything that could "possibly convey the smallest offence to any single individual."

*Hicky's Bengal Gazette*, the first newspaper in Asia, came out on January 29, 1780. Hicky soon realised that his promise to stay away from politics would be harder to keep than it was to write.

(To be concluded  
next fortnight)

# The Pethidine gang and the *visha oosi* case

● by F.V. Arul, IP

It all started with the sudden disappearance of Thaika Thambi of Kilakarai of Ramanathapuram District, from the lodging house in which he was staying in Madras City on October 24, 1972. He was carrying with him a sum of Rs. 10,000 at the time of his disappearance. A worried father-in-law lodged a complaint with the Seven Wells Police Station in Madras City, which was duly registered and investigated. As no clues could be obtained, the investigation was not pursued.

The case was transferred to the Crime Branch, CID in January 1973. It was ascertained by the CID officers that the missing Thaika Thambi was often seen in the company of one Mohammed Thambi. The latter was eventually traced at Kilakarai and on being interrogated, he revealed the fact that he had been introduced by one Kadar to some "Custom Officers" and a "peon" in the last week of October, 1972 and they had promised to give him a good reward if he would point out persons engaged in gold smuggling. Mohammed Thambi used to earn his living by selling conches and he was naturally excited at the prospect of earning a handsome reward from the so-called Custom Officers. He was aware of the fact that his friend, Thaika Thambi, was indulging in the smuggling of gold and that he had planned to go to Bangalore in the last week of October, 1972, for that purpose. He therefore took Kadar along with him to the Central Railway Station at Madras and pointed out Thaika Thambi as he boarded the train and that was the last seen of Thaika Thambi.

The CID investigating officers rightly figured that the so called "Custom Officers" were not genuine and they lost no time in tracking them down. The first of the bogus Custom Officers to be picked up was Vaitheeswaran. He hailed from a well-to-do family and was running a pharmacy in George Town, Madras. He was an apothecary of some distinction, but he pandered to the drug addiction of cine artists by providing them pethidine injections. In the course of his business, he came into contact with one Dawood who was involved in the sale of smuggled articles. Vaitheeswaran ran into financial difficulties and he readily accepted the suggestion of Dawood that they could amass wealth by stripping persons of unaccounted gold or black money by posing as Customs Officers.

Vaitheeswaran then got into touch with his friends Parthasarathy, Venugopal, and Ayub Khan and persuaded them to join him in executing these plans. Ayub Khan, in turn, persuaded Jaffarulla, a room boy in Hotel-de-Broadway in Madras City, to point out persons staying in his hotel who were carrying gold or black money. Majeed, another servant of the same hotel, teamed up with the gang. These two hotel servants located one such person on the night of October 19, 1970. He was Vadivelan Chettiar of Siruvayal in Ramanathapuram District who had come to stay in Hotel-de-Broadway with a cash of Rs.1,50,000 being the proceeds of what is popularly known as "compensatory payment racket" or what in other words is violation of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act. Having obtained this information from the hotel servants, Vaitheeswaran and his gang descended on Vadivelan Chettiar, posed as Custom Officers and took him away by force in a taxi driven by one Gopal in the pretext of taking him to their office for interrogation. En route, Vadivelan Chettiar was forced to swallow an excessive dosage of sleeping pills brought by Vaitheeswaran from his pharmacy. Vadivelan Chettiar soon became unconscious and he was thrown out of the taxi in Senni village after being divested of his wrist watch and cash.

The hapless victim was discovered by some villagers in the early hours of the following morning and was removed to Chingleput Medical College hospital, where he expired two days later without regaining consciousness. Vaitheeswaran, Parthasarathy, Venugopal and Ayub Khan got the lion's share of the booty amounting to Rs. 30,000 each while Dawood, Gopal and Majeed were given a smaller share. The Chingleput police registered a case of suspicious death and managed to establish the identity of the deceased from a tailor's label found on his shirt collar, but they could not trace the culprits.

Emboldened by these early successes, the murderous gang actively pursued their career of crime. The next victim was Sahul Hameed of Malaysia, who came to Madras in March, 1971 to visit his relations. He carried with him a sum of Rs. 55,000 and strangely enough,

he stayed in Hotel-de-Broadway too. The two hotel servants carried this information to the leader of the gang who summoned his accomplices and picked up Sahul Hameed. They took him by force in a car to an air-conditioned cottage attached to one of the premier hotels in Madras City. They posed as Custom Officers and told Sahul Hameed that they would administer truth serum to him in order to ascertain the true origin of his money. So, saying, they administered heavy doses of pethidine which soon rendered Sahul Hameed unconscious. Thereafter, he was put in a car driven by one

## ● Some famous crimes recorded in various Tamil Nadu police journals.

Lakshmanan and was taken to Nagaripet in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. They relieved him of his watch and cash and hung him on a way-side tree, as though he had committed suicide.

Vaitheeswaran and his associates celebrated their success by lavish spending, and this came to the notice of one Dakshinamurthy who was known to Venugopal and who happened to be an informant of the Customs Department. Dakshinamurthy promptly informed the Custom Officers that he suspected that Venugopal was indulging in gold smuggling. The Customs Officers for their part made a quick search of Venugopal's house and though they did not recover any smuggled gold, they seized a written statement of Vadivelan Chettiar which had been recorded by the gang, when they had posed as Custom Officers. This statement proved to be of immense value during the trial of the case as it proved beyond all doubt that Vadivelan Chettiar had been in the company of the accused.

Venugopal deduced the fact that Dakshinamurthy had betrayed him to the Customs Department. Dakshinamurthy, therefore, became a marked man and in July 1971, Venugopal induced Dakshinamurthy to accompany him on a pleasure trip to Bangalore in a car driven by Vaitheeswaran and Parthasarathy by turn. Gopal, Ayub Khan and Lashkmanan followed in two other cars. En

route, near Chittoor, Parthasarathy and Venugopal administered fatal blows to Dakshinamurthy to which he succumbed. They then stripped him naked, threw him under a culvert, poured petrol on his body and set fire to it. Dakshinamurthy's father lodged a complaint in North Beach Police Station in Madras about his missing son but the investigation by the North Beach Police was not fruitful.

Soon after this incident, Ayub Khan managed to get friendly with Kadar who had previously been employed by a notorious smuggler and operator of the compensatory payment racket. He introduced Venugopal and Parthasarathy to Kadar as "Customs Officers" and promised handsome rewards if he gave good information about gold smuggling, black money and allied matters. Kadar was able to point out one Buhari Thambi of Kayalpatnam who was about to entrain by the Rameswaram Express at Tambaram Railway Station in October 1971. Buhari Thambi had a tidy sum of Rs. 55,000 in his possession. Thereupon Parthasarathy, Venugopal and Vaitheeswaran posed as Custom Officers, accosted Buhari Thambi and took him away forcibly in a car. On the way, he was administered heavy doses of pethidine and after he had collapsed, he was stripped naked and abandoned near Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh. The loot was shared by Vaitheeswaran, Venugopal, Parthasarathy, Ayub Khan and Kannan, while Kadar was given a "Customs reward" of Rs. 10,000 for having pointed out Buhari Thambi.

The next victim was Sadak Ibrahim of Kayalpatnam of Ramanathapuram District who was born and brought up in Sri Lanka and had been deported sometime later. He became an important link in the compensatory payment racket and was spotted by Kadar in January, 1972 while he was carrying a sum of Rs. 60,000 and was about to board a bus at Egmore in Madras city. As usual, Parthasarathy and Venugopal posed as "Customs Officers" and took him away in a car driven by Vaitheeswaran. Once again, "truth serum" in the form of pethidine was administered by force and the victim was strangled to death with a fan belt after he became unconscious. Thereafter, he was stripped naked and his body was set on fire after pouring petrol on it at a spot near the foot of the Palmaneri hills in Andhra Pradesh. The booty was shared



F.V. Arul.

by the assassins and Kadar once again got a good amount of money as "Customs reward".

In October, 1972, Kadar introduced the members of the gang to Mohammed Thambi as "Customs Officers". The latter gave the information that Thaika Thambi, a gold smuggler, was going to Bangalore, Kannan was assigned the task of shadowing Thaika Thambi while other members of the gang left for Bangalore by car. The gang trailed the movements of Thaika Thambi in Bangalore for a period of two days and when he was waiting to board a bus with 23 gold biscuits in his jacket, he was accosted by the gang, put into a car and driven away.

The usual modus operandi of administering pethidine injection was resorted to and the victim soon collapsed. The body was abandoned in a pond near Mohili Venkatagiri and the ruthless criminals shared the gold biscuits among themselves.

These startling details were revealed by Vaitheeswaran in the course of an intensive interrogation by the CID officers, who lost no time in laying their hands on Parthasarathy, Dawood, Gopalan, Lakshmanan, Ayub Khan, Kannan and Majeed. Venugopal surrendered before the Sub Magistrate at Krishnagiri in Dharampuri District and gave a voluntary judicial confession.

The investigation took the Officers-in-charge of it to various places in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Visits were also made to Malaysia and Sri Lanka where valuable pieces of evidence pertaining to finger prints, photographs, etc., of some of the victims were collected. Properties in the form of currency, gold biscuits, jewellery, silver articles, clothes and cars to the value of about Rs. 3 lakh were recovered from the possession of the accused persons after a very painstaking and thorough investigation.

Doctors M.N. Ganapathy and S. Janaki, Professors of Forensic Medicine, Madras Medical College, Chandrasekaran, Additional Director of the Tamil Nadu Forensic Science and Chemical Laboratory

(Continued on page 8)

**From India's Digital Archives**  
 – Karthik Bhatt

# Supplementing a sports need

● 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 twelfth edition of cricket's most awaited annual extravaganza, the Indian Premier League gets underway this month. With Chennai Super Kings starting as defending champions, it is but appropriate that the subject of this piece is one of the country's earliest sporting magazines that was published from our city, *Sport and Pastime*.

*The Hindu*, founded in 1878 by six young men initially as a means to serve as the voice of Indian opinion and shape political discourse grew to become one of the country's leading newspapers within a short span overcoming several challenges. Though its principal focus remained unchanged, it expanded over a period of time by adding a variety of columns by having its own foreign correspondents and also entering

into special arrangements to print content published elsewhere. A Literary Supplement was added in 1927, while the main paper added columns on women's welfare and education and a weekly trade and industry review from abroad. Cartoons became a regular feature when in 1936, the paper obtained the All India copyright for the cartoons of David Low.

One of the most popular additions was the sports page, which made its debut under the care of K. Gopalan, the younger son of Kasturiranga Iyengar. Amongst the world-renowned contributors who featured in the page were the likes of Neville Cardus, C.G. Macartney, Jack Hobbs, Rene Lacoste and W.T. Tilden. Joining the list of illustrious contributors and becoming one of the country's finest sports commentators

was S.K. Gurunathan, who joined the paper in the advertising department in 1928 and, a decade later, shifted to the sports section. Special arrangements were made to cover the overseas visits of the national hockey and cricket teams. Racing was yet another sport which was prominently featured.

With the coverage of sports becoming more extensive over a period of time, a magazine dedicated to it was the next step and thus was born *Sport and Pastime* in 1947. It was the brainchild of G Kasturi, K Gopalan's son, who had joined the paper in 1944. It was the first magazine in the country dedicated to sports and came as a boon for the sporting fraternity in the newly independent nation.

Flipping through the issues available online, it is not difficult to fathom the reasons behind its immense popularity. While it was majorly sport centric (cricket contributing a lion's share) it had sections dedicated to hobbies such as stamp collecting and photography and films. A striking feature was the large-size photographs that accompanied the columns. Apart from sporting action at the national and international levels, the sporting scene in our city too was given good coverage. While it is interesting to read the magazine's coverage of the early exploits of several legends such as Sunil Gavaskar, its seminal contribution is in its capturing the career of several others who are mostly forgotten today. The legendary contributors to *The Hindu* featured in the columns of *Sport and Pastime* too. Kasturi's love for sport and cricket in particular was immense and he was instrumental in instituting the S&P Trophy for the limited overs format of the game.

Reviews of films and stage plays mainly from South India were featured under a column titled "South Indian Stage and Screen" by T.M. Ramachandran, well-known film critic. Film festivals were given good coverage. Bollywood and Bengali movies too were featured courtesy special correspondents. Women's Corner dealing with various career, health and welfare issues concerning them was yet another regular feature in the magazine and was written by noted educationist Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy under the pseudonym Rashmi.

With a variety of content that appealed to every member of the family lined up every week, *Sport and Pastime* looked set for a long haul. However, its career came to a grinding halt in 1968 thanks to labour issues in *The Hindu*. A successor of sorts, the *Sportstar* was launched in 1978 as a sport only magazine and continues the legacy to this day.

# A look at the new Tamil Nadu school curriculum

● The learning outcome approach indicates curricular expectations: on what each child should know, be able to do and the disposition that should be acquired. Learning outcomes for each class help the teachers direct their teaching-learning in the desired manner.

For ten years, students appearing for Plus 2 examinations were misled into believing that it is enough to prepare from a handbook containing a set of questions prepared. The Plus 2 examinations carried questions only from the guide. The students ended up with very high scores without gaining the fundamental knowledge in any subject. Consequently, they failed in national level competitive examinations and in the first semester examinations of the institutions they managed to get admitted.

To remedy this malaise and to revamp the school curriculum, the government of Tamil Nadu constituted a ten-member committee headed by me. Our task was to change the entire syllabus from Class 1 to 12 keeping in view the demands of time and changes happening in various fields. We met with hundreds of teachers covering all the 32 districts of Tamil Nadu. The teachers had come prepared with several valuable suggestions. We studied the practices in 15 countries to see the best features for adoption.

A significant step in designing the curriculum was to adopt the 'learning-outcome' approach. It indicates curricular expectations: on what each child should know, be able to do and the disposition that should be acquired over a period of time. This helps the teachers to direct their teaching in the desired manner and make parents responsible for ensuring quality education. If learning-outcome is satisfactory, it will eliminate the deficiencies pointed by The Annual Status of Education Report such as only 44 per cent of Grade 8 students could solve a Grade 4 level division problem and only 75 per cent can read Grade 2 level texts.

The learning-outcome can be conveniently assessed using Quick Response (QR) codes. At the end of each lesson, the Quick Response (QR) code is provided to test the understanding of the reading by the student. The QR code can be scanned by the student in the mobile device. The QR code will lead to the multiple choice question (MCQ) tests. MCQ tests are programmed in such

a way that the student will move to the next level only if he answered the previous level. The tests will have questions in order of lower order thinking, middle order thinking and higher order thinking. The question papers for Plus 1 and Plus 2 will have a weight for all three types of thinking order. Around 45 per cent of questions will be based on lower order thinking, about 30 to 35 per cent on middle order thinking and 20 to 25 per cent on higher order thinking skills. If the student has issues with the basic understanding of the lesson, then they will be asked to go back and re-read the lesson.

The self-evaluation is in addition to the multiple choice questions that are provided at the end of every book to help the students who are preparing for the competitive examinations including NEET and JEE. Irrespective of the medium of instruction, the students will gain equivalent competency.

The State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) has brought out new textbooks for classes I, VI, IX, and XI. The books for other classes will be brought out in stages. The innovative changes in the textbooks and evaluation pattern are mainly due to the efforts of M. Udhayachandran, former School Education Secretary assisted by Dr. Arivoli, Director, SCERT and his team. The efforts of the committee have resulted in a significant change in the attitudes of students and parents. – (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*.)

– Dr. M. Anandakrishnan

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– THE EDITOR

# Bringing the beach alive

On a breezy Sunday evening at Besant Nagar Beach, stars twinkled. Sparks flew from the embers of corn sellers' coal stoves. Close to the Urur Olcott fishing village, near the end of the beach, festivities were on as part of the Chennai Kalai Thiru Vizha. The Casteless Collective, a Tamil band was warming up the medium-sized crowd with its unique blend of *gaana*, rap, and independent music.

They sang of the travails of men doomed to clean the city's

sewers, who sometimes died in the process. (You can keep that compensation money, I'd rather have a living dad, thank you, they sang.) There were verses in the praise of the architect of the Indian constitution who lay down the legal framework for an egalitarian society (founding father of the country, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar). They spoke of the angst of those who dreamt of a casteless society but were forced to use the caste card to get ahead under a "quota" system in education and employment. (The takeaway was stop feeling guilty, this is what it takes to end centuries

of oppression.)

Let's face this – this is not your average person's Sunday evening entertainment. But the beats were rousing, the music was woeful and witty, and the words got you thinking. The collective, which was conceptualised by film director, Pa. Ranjith, gave its first public performance early last year. My favourite song of the evening was based on this idea: Hey, it is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and why are we still singing about caste? The group pretends to agree with the privileged person who thinks caste has been eradicated and then proceeds to list the many ways in which caste-based discrimination is alive even in our capital city. Time to take those blinkers off.

As we were just waking up to this social truth, another bit of reality hit us. The group started singing about Modi Mastan, a



The beach concert. Photograph by Raja Pandiyan.

term used in conversational Tamil as a shorthand for a mystical fraudster. Was he a real person or was he a character in a piece of fiction? Maybe city historians will unearth this piece of information for us. In any case, the song was set to the tune of Nagoor Mastan by Gaana Pazhani. Even before we knew where these verses were leading us, cops stepped up and asked the group to switch to another song. As it happened, this new song had a peppier

beat. Led by the man behind the event, T.M. Krishna, the crowd began dancing to the music. They calmly dispersed soon after. The next day, the papers reported that the song about "Modi" was stopped midway because it may have been about Prime Minister Narendra Modi. That bit of over reaction was unexpected, but we do live in intensely political times.

At the beach, the acoustics were not great but that was not the point of the concert. The heartfelt lyrics of The Casteless Collective had left their mark. The band has interesting things to say about some topics we would rather not think of. That evening, they had performed soon after much-in-the-news Chinmayi Sripadha had finished crooning a few of her hit songs from the movies. Recently, she had taken on a powerful man in the film industry but there was no visit from the goon squad to break up the proceedings at this very public venue. Instead, a few people mobbed her for selfies. Things went off without a hitch – more or less.

I am glad I went to the beach that evening. I had stepped out of my comfort zone and learned something about myself and the city I called my hometown.

– V. Vijaysree

## The visha oosi case

(Continued from page 6)

and the Directors of the Finger Print Bureaux at Madras and Hyderabad rendered invaluable assistance in establishing the identity of the victims, as well as the manner in which they were murdered. Venugopal became an approver and a charge-sheet was filed in Court in October, 1973 against the eight members of the gang for conspiracy, abduction, robbery and murder.

The trial, commenced in June 1974 in the Court of Sessions during which 263 witnesses were examined, 672 exhibits were filed, and 1087 material objects were marked. The cases were defended by

a team of eminent lawyers. S. Vijayarangam, Additional Sessions Judge, Madras who tried the case found the accused guilty under Sections 120 (b), 364, 328, 392 and 303 of the Indian Penal Code. He sentenced Vaitheeswaran, Parthasarathy, Lakshmanan and Kannan to death and awarded life sentence to Dawood, Ayub Khan, Majeed and Gopal.

While pronouncing the judgement, the Sessions Judge paid a tribute to the painstaking and thorough investigation by the Officers of the Crime Branch, CID, Tamil Nadu.

The Madras High Court confirmed the death imposed on the accused T.V. Vaith-

eeswaran, C.R. Parthasarathy, Lakshmanan and Kannan. However, on appeal, the life sentence awarded to the accused Dawood, Ayub Khan was reduced to 7 years' R.I. In respect of the accused Majeed and C.M. Gopal alias Gopalakrishnan, the sentence was reduced to 5 years' and 2 years' R.I. respectively. The Hon'ble High Court also placed on record its appreciation of painstaking investigation conducted by the CB CID.

To eradicate themselves from the gallows, the condemned prisoners petitioned for presidential clemency. As no decision was communicated to them, the condemned prisoners

filed writ petitions invoking Article 32 of Constitution of India as a last resort. The Supreme Court upheld their appeal and observed that "We find no impediment in holding that dehumanising factor of prolonged delay in the execution of a sentence of death has the constitutional guarantee that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. The appropriate relief in such a case is to vacate the sentence of death". Accordingly, the sentence of death awarded to these four murderers was commuted to life sentence. – (Courtesy: *The Tamil Nadu Police Journal*.)

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