As summer dawns, the search for water begins and the tanneer pandals also come up. (Courtesy: Mylapore Times. Photograph by Ganesh Natarajan)

Discipline needed at Kapali festival

The ten-day annual festival of the Kapaliwarar Temple has just got over. As in all its previous editions, this year too saw a grand spectacle unfolding, with the deities being brought out twice daily on various mounts. The temple authorities, the volunteers and the police have more or less perfected the routine and it was a pleasure to see the way the entire event was rolled out. Thousands thronged the Mylapore area to witness the processions. It is this people who now need to improve on their behaviour if this celebration is to be really fit for the Gods.

There was a time when tanneer pandals would be set up at various places for the benefit of pilgrims coming in from afar. What with the weather just beginning to hot up in March, these kiosks are necessary for they also dispense cooling refreshments such as water and buttermilk besides offering the weary a place to rest. Such tanneer pandals are also an integral part of Tamil culture, receiving mention in the 12th Century Periya Puranam itself. It is said that Appoorthi Adigal, one of the 63 Nayanmars (Saiavite saints), put up such pandals wherever Appar, one of the senior most in the same canon, went. It is therefore no surprise that tanneer pandals are put up all around Chennai on the 8th day of the Kapali festival when the 63 Nayanmars come out in procession with the Lord.

The question is one of proportion. How many tanneer pandals make for adequate numbers and how many cause an overdose? Currently we appear to be veering sharply towards the latter. Anybody and everybody puts up these kiosks and there are several others who distribute food, water and cold drinks on the move, mobile tanneer pandals as they were. All of these, in the name of charity, cause huge problems of waste, cleanliness and garbage disposal. The Police, to be fair to them, have been very strict this year in issuing permissions for the setting up of tanneer pandals. Except for a few historic ones, no other kiosk was permitted to be set up on the four Madra streets proper. While this did have a salutary effect, the problem merely shifted to the side streets. These narrow lanes, which are unable to even handle routine traffic, became hard-pressed for space when these pandals began blocking them off.

With so much of food being made available, it naturally lost its value as well. Several well-to-do people had evidently decided that this was the day to dine out. Many of these moved around the peripheral streets in two-wheelers and sampled food at the various kiosks. They ate what they liked, packed up some for those at home without any doubt and as for what they did not like, that was simply thrown down and ground underfoot by the thousands who walked by. Add to this the plastic waste of cups, plates and bags you have quite a monumental problem. There is yet another question that begs an answer – buttermilk, water, traditional refreshments such as panakam (a sweet drink) yes, but since when did biscuits and aerated drinks become part of our culture? And why do these have to be distributed?

Lastly, does any category of people in Chennai, other than those below the poverty line really need food for free? In a prosperous city like ours, surely there cannot be so many people desperate for a free meal. It is time those who organise such kiosks think twice before they set out. It is best that the pandals are reduced in number. If the urge to give food is still too strong then it ought to be done at old age homes and hospices that shelter the homeless.

Can MPLAD not be revamped?

The Members of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme was introduced in 1993 to enable MPs to create useful community assets in their constituencies. Currently, each MP is allotted Rs. 5 crores per year, that is, Rs. 25 crores per term which is a substantial sum of public money to be placed at the disposal of an individual.

MPs are expected to recommend projects, based on local needs and the district authority is made responsible for due diligence, approval, selection of implementation agency and execution. The Government of India releases directly to the annual entitlement of Rs. 5 crores in two equal instalments of Rs. 2.5 crores.

From April 2014 to end of July 2018, out of 4,67,144 works recommended by MPs, 4,11,612 works were sanctioned and 3,84,260 works completed. Overall, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are the best performing States. Both have average proposal sizes of Rs. 3.5 crores. Across the nation the utilisation to fund released per cent is over 90 per cent and almost all States have used the funds. That is the statistical picture of the MPLAD scheme performance.

Findings of misuse and unfavourable reviews of the scheme by government’s own organisations give a contrarian picture. Serious doubts of corruption, nepotism and collusion prevail over statistical reports based on completion certificates. Gross violation of the scheme’s guidelines in identification of “projects” that yield personal benefits or of those that exist only on paper but have been certified as completed and irregularities in the selection “suitable” contractors for execution have also come up. (Continued on page 2)
MADRAS MUSINGS
April 1-15, 2019

MPLAD REUMP?

(Continued from page 1)

...over five years is susceptible to misuse.

Lack of fund provision for maintaining and operating the assets created under the scheme and absence of independent verification of project completion are defects in the system that are repairable but not the high susceptibility of the scheme in its present form for misuse. The earmarking of close to Rs. 4,000 crores of MPLAD in the annual Budgets, that is, Rs. 2,000 crores per Parliament duration of five years has assumed the nature of a fixed perk. The longer it continues, the harder will it become indescructible, as it is voted upon by the MPs themselves.

The options are: either abolish the scheme or give it one more chance by revamping and decentralising it to see if its potential benefits are realised in larger measure with lesser risk of misuse. The scheme connects the people's representative with the constituents to understand their needs. It gives the citizens assess the representative's commitment to serve the community and therefore decide on eligibility for re-election. It may generate a healthy competition among political parties to show good results. It creates a meaningful and specific performance indicator as there is no other way to measure legislator's performance.

If the scheme is not to be abolished, it should be decentralised to give it a higher chance of success. It is reported that many MPs are not close to their constituents. The scheme connects the compact area of an MLA's constituency. MLAs are more likely to remain in contact with their constituents without having to make a special effort. They are, therefore, more likely to be familiar with local problems and be more approachable to people face to face. It also provides an opportunity for the Centre to try it out in a decentralised format allocating Rs. 1 crore per MLA per year, entrusting the supervision and monitoring to the State Government.

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Stones in Books

The Man from Madras Musings thinks it was Shake- speare who said, "The eye has laughed in stones and books in running brooks." That could be one way to put you in the frame of mind when MMM was asked recently to release a book commemorating 90 years of the Government of Tamil Nadu. MMM, while preparing for the speech, had a wholly of a time putting together the various experiences it has had in bringing out books and the words of encouragement he has received.

Years ago, MMM sweat-ed himself to the bone and produced a tome of a book, his first. At the end of the book release event, the per- son who had commissioned MMM came back and whispered, "Don't worry, nobody will read it anyway." MMM was quite nonplused and later on, deliberating over it, came to the conclusion that this too was all to the good. After all, if there is no one who is familiar with MMM's name on the cover that should be enough to establish its reader's ignorance of letters. Forget what is inside. Over the years, MMM has arrived at fixed con- clusions on books, especially of the coffee-table variety in the production of which he, MMM, has been particularly fecund. Around 90 per cent of those who get these books run their hands over the cover and then consign the book to some coffee table or the other. MMM is quite happy at the thought of his work sent to dust bins. Of the remaining, around five per cent go through the pages, glancing at the pictures. We now come to the last five per cent and here is the writer on a slippery ice. Two per cent look into the index and scan to see how many times their name appears in the book. If MMM had a police force of 2 percent of such people, all is well and they write letters praising the work. If not, all hell can break loose. Of the remaining, two per cent is really tricky for this is the kind that after searching for its name will scan the entire book to see if they are also featured. If not, all is well. If they are, then a rapacious appetite to know the number of times they feature vis a vis themselves. If the enemy count is higher, the book is shredded. If not, there is scope for some backhanded compliment. The last one per cent is the kind that will actu- ally read the book line by line and send you a list of errata.

Next we come to size and weight of book. MMM strongly recommends that the size be kept small, and the weight just enough for a Chief Guest to pick it up on one hand. Unfortunately, what with leather covers, dust jack- ets, etc., does force a weighty book. A sheet of paper, coffee table books end up weighing quite a bit. There was an event where a book of MMM’s was being weighed by the highest in the land. The work commemorated the cen- tenary of a bank and it did not help that Chief Guest, wanting to be rather dialectic in his English kept referring to the institution as wank and congratulated it on its centenary in wanking. The time came for the book launch and two people arrived on stage laden with MMM’s weighty work. They dumped it in on Chief Guest’s desk and announce that the book was in a state of grace but failed to mention that MMM’s weighty work.

Dust jackets can be quite devious too. On one occasion the Chief Guest held on to it, it was heavy, and happened to slid out and landed with a thud at the Chief Guest’s toes. Chief Guest asked his protege to system resound with strange oats in a native language.

Merry Go Round the Heritage Bush

The High Court of Madras gave the Government of Tamil Nadu a list of heritage buildings in the city that it felt ought to be protected. This list was arrived at by a committee formed by the High Court especially for this purpose. The listing had 214 buildings in each of which one hundred and sixty was one of each structure, its state of preservation and also a sug- gestion as to how they could be protected. The Chief was part of this committee and when he read the report, the document (which is now help- ful on the web) and cribbed from it while the book happily with MMM’s weighty work. The list included two heritage buildings that the two young things had failed to list in their report in the copy that is doing the rounds. MMM recollects when a popular Tamil film in recent years had the title Some Pigeon Missing in the Mid-dle. That would be a good title for this column too.

TAILPIECE

Who says Chennai Police lack a sense of humor? The city police in recent times have chuckled at this poster that is now at various intersections. The genre is somewhat noir, but then you cannot deny that the message is quite clear. For those who cannot read English, it says: "Keep your Bells While Travelling and Pre- vent Your Journey to Heaven.

Mr. R.M. Veerappan Dr. D.B. James S. Surya Narayanan
Rs. 100: R.M. Veerappan, Dr. D.B. James, S. Surya Narayanan
Rs. 200: Krishnamoorthy Subbarathnam, M. Fazal, Jennifer Gwnyue, Mrs. A. Rangan
Rs. 400: Mrs. N. Ramanujan, M.P. Ponnuswamy, T. Ananthanarayanan, M.M. Rajendran, K.S. Srinivasan, N. Vittal
Rs. 900: R. Ravindran
Rs. 1000: Dr. P. Sakti, Mary Alexander, M.V.S. Appa Rao, Vijayalakshmi Varadarajan
Rs. 2500: N.P. Raghavaram
Rs. 2900: A. Jawahar Palaniapan
Rs. 5000: M.P. Ponnu
Rs. 10000: M.M. Rajendran
Is matrimony a monotony?

During early sixties, the private buses I commuted from Poonamallee to Guindy where I boarded the electric train to my college opposite the Madras aerodrome were on the dot. They seldom broke down en route. Only flaw was they raced with one another, as competition was the mantra of free enterprise.

The 9.05 bus I caught daily was driven by Palani. He was a jovial man who would chit chat, cutting risqué jokes with his conductor or the time-keeper. But the moment the Palani sat behind the wheel, a metamorphosis would come over him. He would look grim. One admirable thing was he will not start the bus, the moment the conductor Loghu blew the whistle, or shouted Po, Rights, but wait for few vital seconds, watching keenly a child at the hip may settle down or an old man deposit himself on the seat without falling. Loghu, made me sit near him, adjacent to his seat at the entrance and restricted myself to referring to his short stop in Madras, as an element which has been ignored by professional historians.

Hooker touched Madras en route to Calcutta. His Madras stop is verbalised in the Notes of a tour in the plains of India, the Himala (Himalaya?), and Borneo; being the extracts of private letters of Dr Hooker written during a government botanical mission to those countries (1848, Reeve, Bentham, & Reeve, Reeve), where I boarded the electric train to my college opposite the Madras aerodrome were on the dot. They seldom broke down en route. Only flaw was they raced with one another, as competition was the mantra of free enterprise.

1 Hooker indicates in the cover pages of Flora of British India volumes that he has been associated with various botanists.

2 Yarmouth is a coastal town in Norfolk, at the mouth of the River Yare, east of Norwich.

(Continued on page 7)
Preparing for Antarctica

Dr. Salim Thomas with Indira Gandhi.

Dr. Thomas has been the first citizen of theatre to receive a premiere here but there was only one available. Its shabby condition was matched by its audience and the film was a silver jubilee failure. The opening day at the Theatre was attended by only one hundred spectators and Narasu was put under no obligation to pay damages to Ayyar Productions.

Paragon to the meanwhile was pulled down and a new theatre rose on its site, opening for business under the old name in 1948. It first screened AVM's Veeru, starring Vyjayanthimala and it was a silver jubilee hit. Being just off Mount Road, close to the Ashokan, the name was quite popular. According to actor M. R. Radha among others. The film was a silver jubilee hit. The opening day at the Theatre was attended by only one hundred spectators and Narasu was put under no obligation to pay damages to Ayyar Productions.

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A few weeks ago, when Kamala Harris, an African-American, announced her entry into the 2020 US presidential race, there was a lot of excitement in India, because of her India-Chennai connection.

When she was first sworn in as a Democratic senator from California in 2017, she became only the second African-American woman to serve in the Senate. Kamala was also the first woman elected as District Attorney of San Francisco and the first person of South Asian descent to become Attorney General of California. Those are just a few of her achievements but about her India-Chennai connection.

Kamala’s mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was the daughter of P.V. Gopalan, who has been appointed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Kamala is also the third Indian company with the herb Sarsaparilla? Police, Greater Chennai?

11. Which animal?

12. Which city won the prize for the cleanest Indian city for the 2019 Awards on March 6?

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Anonymous telephone callers

by F. V. Arul, I.P., Deputy Inspector General of Police, C.I.D. & Railways
(later IG of Police, Government of Tamil Nadu).

I just as there are Peeping Toms there is also a class of being, happily too rare, who apparently finds a certain amount of gratification by indulging in lewd talk with members of the opposite sex, taking cowardly refuge behind a telephone. These perverted people apparently think that by taking advantage of this modern means of communication they can escape detection. They are, however, unaware of the advance of science which now makes it possible for them to be apprehended flagrante delicto. The scientific means of such detection are the police control room and the two-way radio communication system installed in Police patrol cars.

Let us take a look at two cases of such anonymous telephone callers who persistently rang up lady subscribers and outraged their modesty by their indecent talk. In the first case, a Dr. (Miss) Sakuntala of Madras City lodged a complaint that a certain person, who refused to divulge his telephone number or his real identity but whose voice she could recognise, was repeatedly telephoning her at intervals of four to five days in the evenings between 7-9 p.m. and in the evenings between 9-10 p.m. making indecent overtures to her as well as to her sister who is a lecturer in the Queen Mary’s College, Madras. As it was clear that the only offence that could be made out was one under section 509 I.P.C., which is non-cognisable, no case was actually registered on receipt of the complaint.

However, steps were taken by the police to detect the offender while in the very act of committing the offence so that advantage could be taken of section 155 (2) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the Commissioner of Police, Madras, being competent to issue orders to register and investigate such cases.

The steps that were taken to achieve this result were as follows:

The Executive Engineer of the Madras Telephone Department was contacted and approached the situation. He was asked to instruct his staff to keep a watch on the telephone number of Sakuntala particularly during the hours 7-8 a.m. and 9-10 p.m. to find out from which telephone number such calls were received. By such watch it was soon ascertained that the anonymous caller was using the public telephone booth located in front of the High Court buildings, Esplanade, Madras. A parallel connection to the lady doctor’s telephone was then drawn to an ex-directory telephone in the Police Control Room at Egmore, Madras. The control room is the nerve-centre of a system of telephone as well as a two-way radio communication which controls the operation in various parts of Madras City of a fleet of wireless patrol cars.

For the purpose of this case one patrol car was disguised in the nature of a “Q” car, as used by Scotland Yard and ordered to patrol in the vicinity of the public telephone booth opposite the High Court buildings during the hours referred to above.

A week after or so the anonymous caller resumed his cowardly activities and a radio message was immediately flashed from the Control Room to the “Q” car which rushed to the spot but found that the anonymous caller had rung off and had left the booth. Two more unsuccessful attempts were made in the course of the next ten days. Lack of success was due to the fact that the converse situation engaged by the anonymous caller was very brief. The lady doctor was therefore contacted and briefed that she should draw the anonymous caller into a conversation even though he interlocutor used some very filthy language so that the police could have a minute or two to rush up to the spot and catch her tormentor red-handed.

Accordingly, the lady doctor feigned interest in the conversation the next time, the anonymous caller rang her number and this time the “Q” car got up to the telephone booth on receiving the wireless message from the Control Room. The Police Sergeant of the “Q” car gently opened the door of the telephone booth so as not to disturb the miscreant, snatched the receiver from him and announced his identity to the lady doctor who was still on the line. The latter was naturally overjoyed at the success of the operation and expressed her thanks profusely.

The accused was one K.P. Rajaram, aged 22, who was employed as clerk in the Government Co-operative Engineering Workshop, Madras. He was prosecuted under section 509 I.P.C., in the Court of the IV Presidency Magistrate, who in convicting and sentencing him to pay a fine of Rs. 200 observed that the accused had doubtless committed an anti-social act and that the police had acted cleverly in detecting him.

A reading of the conversation between the accused and the lady doctor was made by the telephone operator at the telephone board in the Telephone House which was duly filed during the trial and was admitted as evidence. Incidentally, the accused, a married young man was dismissed from service after his conviction.

Some six months later there was another complaint from one Mr. Zinna that an unknown person was frequently telephoning his residence during the night hours and it was a matter of insult and was insulting his wife by making the most indecent suggestions to her.

With the co-operation of the telephone department, it was soon ascertained that the anonymous caller was using the telephone of the Madras Medical College Hostel. On further watch, it was found that this caller was annoying several ladies whose names were found in the Telephone Directory. Similar incidents as in the previous case were made and with the cooperation of Mrs. Zinna, who was asked to prolong the conversation however distressful it was, the anonymous caller was soon apprehended.

The accused in this case was one T. Lawrence, a telephone boy of the Medical College Hostel. He was prosecuted in the Court of the VII Presidency Magistrate. He was duly convicted and sentenced to four months R.I.

Wide publicity was given to these cases in the press which apparently had a salutary effect for there have been no such complaints since.

This article was written in 1955.

HOOKER’S SOJOURN IN MADRAS

During his short stay in Madras, Hooker collected his impressions with a short, crisp note written in Calcutta on January 20, 1848:

“Here I am on the banks of the Hooghly at last, with our excellent friend Wallich’s pet, the H.E.I.C. Botanic Garden, looking me full in the face from the side of the river opposite to where I now am.”

It will be interesting to know if Hooker had signed in the visitor’s book at the Madras Agri-Horticultural Society and if that has been preserved.
Supplying chlorinated water to the City

(Continued from page 4)

his tenure in the Corporation and short accounts of his interactions with various influential personalities of his times are the best ones in the book.

Madras, he writes was a "costly city to administer, its size out of proportion to all population". The Madras Corporation, he says "was poor with an income of about 280000 pounds per annum" and that it had to "sit dharma at the gates of the Government for grant-in-aid". The revenues were derived mainly from a house-tax of 18% on rental values and included taxes for water and drainage services. The licence department was yet another source of income, where money was raised by "sale of permission to break the law". Reading his accounts of street encroachments, it is striking to see how little things have changed over the years!

It was during Molony's tenure as President of the Corporation that the residents of the city were supplied with chlorinated water for the first time. This was essential as filtrated and unfiltered water were mixed to cater to the growing needs of the population. The resultant mixture was christened by Sir P. Rajagopalachar, Member of Government in charge of Local Administration as the "Molony's Mixture".

His encounters with Sir Pitty Thevagaryya Chetty, who in 1921 became the first Indian President of the Madras Corporation make for delightful reading. Calling him the "Nestor amongst his fellow Councillors", Molony says that Thevagaryya "opposed everything that was new, for at the bottom of his soul there was, I think, a suspicion that nothing less than 200 years old could possibly be safe or praiseworthy". He however accords him great respect as an absolutely honest man who loved the honour and dignity of the Corporation. Writing of his encounters with Annie Besant, he says that for "no one could help liking an old lady so vivacious, so witty, so good humoured and so obviously sincere" but goes on to add that she never looked before she leaped and that "not only did she leap into trouble herself, but she occasionally dragged others after her".

The book is a must read as a fascinating account of life in South India in the early years of the twentieth century, written with a healthy dose of humour and a great eye for detail.

Answers to Quiz


It is one of the busiest thoroughfares of Chennai – this junction which leads to Kodambakkam, while roads to the right and left lead to the Lake area, Nungambakkam, and T Nagar respectively. It is the focal-point where residents split off to several of Chennai’s green centres. Cars, bikes and buses blast by in a haze of smoke, while autos and cycles power on precariously amidst automobile giants. A motoring hotpot, a literal traffic circus where insane driving skills have to be juggled (despite the ubiquitous traffic-lights) with barely-restrained road-rage, interspersed with expert telepathic knowledge about who is going to turn where, why and precisely when. Despite the beautiful Valluvar Kottam looming just to the side, not a moment can be spent in its contemplation – lest you be run over by an irate auto, its driver spluttering in righteous indignation.

But here again, you’ll find another of Chennai’s hallmarks: where art co-exists with autos; where pots jostle in friendly fashion with pedestrians, plodding bullock-carts and fashion-forward vehicles. Come Pongal season (and even otherwise), you’ll find sudden shops erupting along the platform, full of bright white pots painted with the most colourful patterns. Men and women engaged in beautifying this most necessary element of the Harvest Festival. Adding a dash of gaiety to an established custom; their own unique, modern spin on this most necessary element of the Harvest Festival. Adding a dash of gaiety to an established custom; their own unique, modern spin on this most necessary element of the Harvest Festival. A motoring hotspot, a literal traffic circus where insane driving skills have to be juggled (despite the ubiquitous traffic-lights) with barely-restrained road-rage, interspersed with expert telepathic knowledge about who is going to turn where, why and precisely when.