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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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Continuing with the "Unauthorised saga"

And so, Chennai has added yet another feather to its crown of buildings that violate permits. The latest is a hospital (can you beat that?), which put up an eight-storey structure right in the middle of the city when it had permission to build only three floors. That was in 2007. Since then, for 12 years, it has continued to use the extra floors it put up, and what is more, had power and water connection to the edifice, thereby making it a fully functional block in the hospital complex. There was the matter of law of course and finally, in its slow fashion, it did catch up with the hospital. Late in May, the High Court ordered the demolition of the extra floors, citing that they compromised the safety of patients and hospital staff. The hospital has since gone on appeal and obtained a stay from the Supreme Court, which body has however said that the unauthorised portion must be vacated within ten days and not put to any use pending disposal of the case. The last chapter is clearly yet to be written.

What is astounding of course is the manner in which the hospital continued to build its floors, knowing fully well that they were not authorised. This is a classic instance of the impunity with which builders and property owners violate planning permissions when it comes to actual construction. That the administration turns a blind eye to such violations

is well known. In the case of the hospital, the Inspector of Lifts for instance had granted permission to operate elevator services only up to the third floor but the hospital went on to extend them to all the remaining (and unauthorised) floors as well. It is astonishing that despite such a gross violation the authorities kept silent. When asked about this the

Additional Advocate General, Tamil Nadu reportedly said that "that the officials could not demolish the unauthorised structures due to a series of ordinances promulgated between

● by The Editor

2007 and 2012, followed by an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act of 1971 in favour of such buildings and



'E.K. Janaki Ammal' – the rose developed by Girija and Viraraghavan in Kodaikanal, in honour of a pioneering scientist. More details on page 5.

consequent government orders issued for regularisation of those constructions".

In short, the Government had through its own contradictory orders managed to allow for such a situation to come to pass.

The entire saga sounds familiar to those who live in the city. It is an open secret that

most high-rise structures violate norms and continue to exist, protected by the builder-bureaucrat-politician nexus or the time taken by law to come to a judgement. The instance of a T Nagar retail showroom that caught fire a year or so ago is

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NEET – Need to prepare for, and not politicise it

● by A Special Correspondent

Much has been written, debated and politicised about NEET and its implications for Tamil Nadu students. The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test is the single threshold for admission to undergraduate MBBS and BDS courses in government and private colleges in the country. Now that the results of the 2019 test are available, it is time to analyse them and take an objective position on how to enable students to realise their aspiration.

The bona fides and purpose of NEET cannot be questioned when it seeks to set up one single common test for eligibility for admission to medical and dental colleges in the whole

country in place of numerous tests of varying standards set by state governments and private institutions often giving room, thereby, for abuse and rigging. Multiplicity of admission criteria does not make for transparency, equity and fairness and is grossly against the interests of students themselves. In the system, as it prevailed, poorer classes were out-bid and the standard of the medical profession got compromised. In the circumstances, the short-sighted populism of agitating for total or selective abolition of NEET must be dismissed as a regressive step.

Education is a subject on the concurrent list, constitutionally allowing the Centre and the States to take decisions, necessarily, in close coordination. Introduction of NEET has led some to see it as a threat to federalism and justify the demand for making Education an exclusive State subject. States having exclusive say would lead to chaotic variations in syllabus in different parts of the country producing doctors of varying standards.

An objection is that NEET would harm the interests of students in the State, and, in particular, those from weaker

sections and rural areas. The problem can be dissected into two parts. First, in Tamil Nadu, selection to medical colleges was by marks under the State Board syllabus which is lower than the CBSE standard. The CBSE syllabus as the basis for NEET, it is said, places State Board students at a disadvantage. This difficulty is valid wherever a syllabus lower than that of CBSE prevails and the affected States are taking steps to bring about parity. Similar reforms may be introduced in the foreseeable future, to make selection to other professional courses also equitable and transparent. Tamil Nadu must, in stages, upgrade the syllabus

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NEET – no need to politicise it

(Continued from page 1)

for the State Board examinations to prepare for such progress. In the interim, a bridge course to coach students for NEET must be institutionalised and regulated.

Of concern is the second part of the problem, which is more challenging – of government-run and aided schools lagging because of poor teacher quality and lack of accountability. Government teachers are adequately compensated and that cannot be the excuse for poor service. Students from the government institutions have not been able to cope with NEET despite coaching. Experts say that coaching cannot add value when students lack grasp of basic concepts. Special attention to enable this is unavailable. Some parents, disregarding the free education in government-run schools, desperately seek admission into private schools paying large fees and capitation, borrowing at high interest rates. Similar is the problem faced by rural students. Both these classes have been unable to meet even the relaxed criteria extended by the State “exercising the right to determine admission policies to medical educational institutions under the government’s policy”. In the circumstances, there is no meeting point between the capacity of these students and the entry standard under NEET. Any amount of relaxing eligibility will not help. NEET is not the villain but it has exposed the poor state of teaching efficiency in government schools. Students of government institutions are not yet ready for the CBSE standard of tests. Mentoring is required to advise these students to be realistic and choose diplomas for technical skills within their reach, at the same time, encouraging only the exceptional ones capable of breaking out of the system to achieve the difficult to take up NEET. Thousands appearing and thousands failing is cruel in its mass effect on young minds leading some to commit the extreme act of suicide.

Tamil Nadu should welcome NEET as part of modernisation of the selection process for admission to professional courses. That 14 lakh students in the country appeared for NEET and 8 lakh have qualified for 6,000 seats in MBBS and BDS shows the magnitude of demand and the need for a transparent selection process. NEET is advantageous in several respects. By avoiding multiplicity of tests for admission NEET reduces the

pressure on students who had to prepare for several tests for the same admission paying multiple entrance fees and travelling to many venues. NEET does not interfere with the reservation system as operated by State governments. Nearly 69 percent of medical seats in Tamil Nadu were in the reserved category but based on Class 12 marks. Now the rankings will be based on NEET scores, reservation remaining at 69 percent. NEET, conducted twice a year, offers two opportunities instead of the earlier single chance a year. NEET allows students to answer in anyone of ten regional languages to help those studying in Indian languages.

To enable students in Tamil Nadu to adjust themselves to the new requirement a one-time exemption from NEET was made applicable only for admission to government medical institutions and the government quota seats in private medical colleges. Having availed of this breather, a total of 1,23,078 students appeared for NEET in 2019 from Tamil Nadu and 59,785 cleared the test. While last year 39.56 percent of the total candidates in the State had cleared the test, in 2019 the percentage has risen to 48.57 percent. The cut-off mark for the open category has also increased this year by 60 marks over 424 for the previous year due to overall increase in performance level. Another encouraging feature is that 1329 students scored more than 550 marks compared to only 81 in 2018. All these are indicative of the effect of coaching programmes to overcome the gap between NEET and State Board standards and of the ability of Tamil Nadu students to adapt to the new system given time and the support. As such, restraint is necessary in misusing an unfortunate incident or two to justify the demand for reversing a reform that is overdue.

The persisting failure of students of government-run and aided schools to rise to opportunities is the continuing challenge. This section had only one student scoring more than 400 marks out of 19,680 that took the test compared to 5,634 students from private schools crossing the 400 mark. The problem in government schools calls for urgent reform as it affects the destiny of socially and economically disadvantaged children, presently unable to avail of opportunities because of poor services. NEET is a mirror to the government on the state of the education system.

Matter of life and death

The Man from Madras Musings has often heard those employed in the private sector lamenting about the index-linked pensions that their counterparts in Government service get. The money they say keeps increasing with time, though here MMM does have a counter – it keeps dropping in value anyway. But that cuts no ice with the private sector people, once referred to as boxwallahs.

But MMM does look at both sides and he feels that it is no easy task being a retired Government servant. One of the key objections is the way you have to keep proving to the authorities that you are alive and therefore entitled to your pension. In the early days, this was a simple matter – you sent them a signed declaration by post and they transferred your money. In case you could not sign you affixed your thumb impression. But that latter alternative was misused and so the entire process of self-attestation was rendered null and void. The story is actually quite macabre and at the same time funny. Apparently some retired Gov-

ernment servant claimed his pension for years by sending a letter that bore his thumb impression and the Government duly paid up. It was only when someone in the department did some calculation and came up with the finding that the pensioner ought to be around 135 years old that they did some investigating. They called at the old man’s home to learn that he had long gone but his relatives had had the foresight to cut off his thumb before they cremated/buried him and preserved the said digit in alcohol. On the day of claiming pension they took it out, dried it, used it for what it was meant for and pickled it once again.

That led to the Government passing a new rule – all pensioners had to appear before a designated authority once a year to show that they were alive. Nobody protested, for after all their earnings depended on it. And that brings MMM to the crux of his story. A friend of his, a retired pensioner, travelled abroad for a few months in summer (a very wise decision in MMM’s view for there is no point in staying on in Chennai and baking on a daily basis). He consequently missed his appointment with the appropriate authority to whom he had to prove that he, the pensioner, was alive and well. He returned in September to find that his pension had stopped in June, the month he went abroad. And so he duly fixed an appointment with the appropriate authority, met the functionary and soon thereafter found his pension resumed, but from the month of September only.

What of July and August he wondered. He then decided to meet the appropriate authority once again. Having heard him out, the panjandrum pondered for a few minutes and came up with the appropriate answer – the pensioner had appeared in September and proved that he was alive that month and so had had his pension resumed thereafter. But there was no way of ascertaining if the pensioner was alive in July and August. Which is why the payment was not made. It was in vain that MMM’s friend argued that since he was alive in September he ought to have been alive in July and August as well. The appropriate authority reflected over it and said he saw the logic in the

of the very elderly and also those working in the Government. As regards the old MMM has nothing to say and indeed, he does not wish to criticise either, but as regards the Government callers MMM has plenty to say, the first being they are the kinds who will never answer your call but will keep dialling you when they need to get (at/to) you.

Sure enough, it was a Government caller and all breathless. Between the gasps and pants MMM made out that the lady was all excited because a very senior bureaucrat wanted to get in touch with MMM. The caller sounded overjoyed at the very thought that she, the caller, had been selected by the officer to do this task, and she also managed to suggest that MMM was so lucky that he was being sought out by this member of the Indian Steel Frame. “So-and-So wants to talk to you urgently,” she gushed. “I will give you the personal number and you may please call immediately.”

Now MMM was not having any of that. “If So-and-So wants to speak to

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

ernment servant claimed his pension for years by sending a letter that bore his thumb impression and the Government duly paid up. It was only when someone in the department did some calculation and came up with the finding that the pensioner ought to be around 135 years old that they did some investigating. They called at the old man’s home to learn that he had long gone but his relatives had had the foresight to cut off his thumb before they cremated/buried him and preserved the said digit in alcohol. On the day of claiming pension they took it out, dried it, used it for what it was meant for and pickled it once again.

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argument. But the Government cannot be moved unless there is something in writing. It was therefore decided that MMM’s friend, the pensioner, would give a declaration in writing that he, the pensioner, was alive and well during the period aforementioned, to whit – July and August. This to be done in triplicate, and attested by a gazetted officer.

Government calls

The cell phone rang. The Man from Madras Musings found it was from a number he did not recognise and so let it ring. It is not that MMM does not answer calls from the unknown but it is a policy he follows when he is otherwise occupied. The caller was disconnected after the statutory number of rings and MMM thought that was that. But it was not to be. The caller rang back immediately and MMM ignored it yet again. When the caller called back a third time MMM decided he had better answer it.

Experience has shown MMM that there are only two kinds of callers who keep dialling incessantly – the first comprises those in an emergency and the second the kind that does not know phone etiquette. In this latter category MMM places some

me then it is So-and-So who will have to call,” said MMM and also added, for he did not want to appear discourteous, that So-and-So could call anytime. The caller was rather taken aback but realising that nothing could be done, rang off.

Shortly thereafter the phone rang again, once more from an unknown number. MMM answered to find a new caller, the personal assistant to So-and-So. Madam was busy and so had asked PA to do the needful he said, managing to convey in tone that MMM was truly blessed. MMM asked as to what was it that was needed. “A very important personage from Gujarat is arriving tonight in the city,” hissed the PA, rather a tough task in a sentence with few sibilants. “He has to be taken on a heritage tour of the city first thing in the morning.”

Now this sounded interesting. Could it be one of the two personages that really matter these days MMM wondered. And then the voice went on –

“We have tried all the usual tourist guides in the city and they are all busy. Someone said you are a guide.” MMM hung up.

–MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



80-60-40

80-60-40 – that was what the invitation read, inviting us for a celebration at The Hotel Breeze on the Poonamalle High Road. This was the year 2010, the invitation was from Thiru Muthiah. I could not figure out what this meant until I reached the hotel and asked him. It turned out to be a witty pun, in keeping with his trademark sense of humor - 80 referred to his age, 60 his wife's age and 40 was the number of years they had been married. Thiru Muthiah and his family were great hosts and the guests enjoyed an excellent spread of Chettinad and Sri Lankan food.

I have known Mr. Muthiah for 30 years since my Rotary days in 1989 and my term as the Secretary of the Association of British Scholar.

I invited Mr. Muthiah to a meeting of the Rotary Club of Ambattur at Taj Coromandel, where he highlighted the need for celebrating Madras Day. Those were early days. His voice was virtually the lone one for Madras Day, which was started much later in 2004.

I suggest that we institute a Madras Muthiah Memorial (MMM) Oration in Thiru Muthiah's honor. We could have an oration on his birthday or during Madras Month during which he inspired us all by organising talks by eminent professionals from different fields every year.

Professor Dr. N. Pandiyan
Professor and Head of the Department of Andrology and Reproductive Medicine, Chettinad Super Speciality Hospital

A friend of MNS

In the passing away of Mr. Muthiah, the nature lovers of Chennai (that is Madras) have lost a great friend and well-wisher. He was very keen that the natural heritage of Chennai be preserved for posterity. Towards this, he would unhesitatingly publish many of the natural history articles pertaining to the flora and fauna of Chennai, whether they be original articles or those which have been published in *Black-buck*, a journal of the Madras Naturalists' Society that has a rather limited readership compared to MM. Several of our members are indebted to him for getting a wider publicity for their nature conservation efforts. A couple of weeks after the publishing, an honorarium would promptly be received by the writer.

Mr. Muthiah was very much concerned about the preservation of the Pallikarainai marsh. MM has several articles published about it and what little of the marsh that has been finally preserved is in no less measure due to the awareness created by people like Mr. Muthiah. He had a sympathetic ear to civic problems created by the stray dog menace and presented the views of both the dog lovers and critics. I recall many pieces in MM which put forth views on the problem of crows and feral pigeons that keep multiplying along with the human population. Articles on the avenue trees of Chennai and past botany of Chennai and Tamil Nadu always found a place in MM. The preservation and maintenance of the various gardens of Chennai were also highlighted.

We, the members of Madras Naturalists' Society, gratefully acknowledge Mr. Muthiah's significant efforts in preserving our nature heritage and thank him from the bottom of our hearts. We will miss him.

Dr. A. Rajaram
Madras Naturalists Society

**Continuing the
"unauthorised saga"**

(Continued from page 1)

another case in point. Several of its floors were unauthorised and when it caught fire, they had to be demolished. Within a few months a newer and taller structure was in place, despite protests from several neighbouring residents. The construction was finally permitted by a court of law on a technicality and it continues to flourish.

Why is it that we have any building norms, statutory au-

thorities and permits when our sole aim appears to be to profit from building activities, irrespective of the impact they have on public welfare? It is time builders and those who rent/occupy such structures realise that by violating in some way or the other, they are robbing someone else of their right to land, air, water and sky. There are also several safety norms that are violated, which can threaten life at large. And there is also the question of what kind of a city we are leaving behind for future generations.

● Pavithra's Perspective

The Palace of books



This palace opens its ornate doors only once a year, for a limited number of days – usually coinciding with World Book Day, which is April 23 (also St. George's Day on which Chennai's Fort St. George reached completion) – when the average citizen can step through hushed corridors and into a large, ancient chamber of books. The columns are huge; their arches delicately decorated with swirls and curls that make you gasp in wonder.

The books are old, so old, harking back to an era of wasp-shaped evening coats, watches on long chains, cambric dresses and dove-grey gloves.

But there's magic here as well: the magic of entering Aladdin's cave, of discovering treasures; of marvelling at a cornice or the startlingly colourful shadows thrown by stained glass windows; of admiring the knowledge gathered here since 1896, in a library named after Lord Connemara.

The colours made me want to draw at once – but for the first time since I began miniature work, I was hesitant. How on earth was I ever going to bring out the wonderfully intricate designs, or the sheer richness of the décor? But the difficulty of the work was itself a challenge, and I set about it, albeit in slightly bigger format. I'd like to think it worked.

Description: 7.5" by 5" approximately
Medium: Steadtler Fineliners, colour.

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

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
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22	23	24	25			
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Dates for Your Diary



June 23: Hanu Reddy Mango Tourism is organising 'The Great Mango Festival 2019' on June 9, 16 and 23 from 6.30 am to 12.30 pm at Hanu Reddy Raghava Farms located at Othivakkam, on the outskirts of Chennai.

The participants will get an opportunity to walk through the farm and sit down for breakfast at one of the longest table (156 ft). "Our aim is to provide exposure to local varieties of mangoes, and at the same time enrich our visitors with a farm experience at Hanu Reddy Raghava Farms. The event will have a host of activities including bull-ock cart rides, traditional games by Kreedaa, ploughing, a nature walk by Story Trails, pottery and more. There will be a variety of homemade and organic Mango related products for sale. This is our contribution to eco-tourism, celebrating nature and understanding the importance of organic farming practices," says Nirupama Reddy, co-founder.

June 23: Storytelling for kids by Karadi Tales.

Join Karadi Tales at Odyssey, Adyar for a storytelling event by award-winning children's writer Srividhya Venkat on June 15, 11 am to 12 noon.

The story of *The Clever Tailor* will be enacted with props in an interactive way. Get ready to find out how beloved tailor Rupa Ram manages to share a precious gift with his whole family. While the event is suitable for children aged 4-8, anyone who loves a good story is welcome!

Back with our regular email id

Our regular email id – editor@madrasmusings.com is back. Readers can write in their comments on this email id.

– Editor

Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks for the period upto May end.

– The Editor

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A Congress stronghold

A news item in the *Swadesamitran* dated December 22, 1940 informs us that the property named Blacker's Gardens had become the office of the Tamil Nad Congress Committee the previous month. "This is a historic structure," says the write up accompanying the photograph of the garden bungalow. "It was constructed by Lt Col. Blacker in 1806. He had joined the Madras Army in 1797. He participated in the Maratha wars and wrote copiously on them. In those days, the Europeans loved garden houses. The proximity of this property to Lord Cornwallis' cenotaph was yet another reason for his choice. Until the laying out of Luz Church and Edward Elliotts Roads, the powerful and famous would congregate in this area in the evenings. The popularity of the beach is more of a recent phenomenon."

HD Love and his Vestiges of Old Madras, which were clearly the sources for the above tract, give some further details. Lt. Col. Valentine Blacker obtained a grant of nine acres of land on Mount Road in 1806. By 1813, he was Quarter Master General of the Madras Army. It appears from Love that there was an unfounded theory doing the rounds that this was the garden house that Arthur Wellesley had occupied while serving here in the 1790s. Love discredits the story by citing that the land was given for the first time only in 1806. Blacker moved to Calcutta as the Surveyor General of India in 1823. He died in that city in 1826 and is buried at the South Park Street Cemetery.

It would appear that Blacker's Gardens in Teynampet changed hands after his departure to Calcutta or his subsequent death. There are no details as to who owned the property thereafter but we do know that the vast precinct was resided in by senior Government officials and in the 1920s came to be occupied by Sir Henry Cornish, Judge of the High Court of Madras, not to be confused with a journalist of the same name who ran the *Madras Times*. The property was at the eastern end of the Long Tank and therefore made for an ideal location for viewing the races organised by the Boat Club, which had then not yet moved to the Adyar. Beginning from 1875, competitive rowing events were held at the Tank until 1904, the distance being from 'Cathedral Corner to Sydapet.' The Regatta was of course the most important

event and there would be 200 to 300 people present, including the Governor and his lady, with music, dancing and refreshments to follow. By 1920, boating on the Tank had ceased, the water being drained to make way for T Nagar but *Blacker's Garden* remained a stately residence. *The Swadesamitran* photo depicts a rusticated and arched ground floor, a dominant curved central bay in the first floor, balco-

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI — SRIRAM V

nies covered by terracotta-tiled shades, a covered passageway and statuary. The top floor has an arched pediment.

By the 1930s, the Congress party was a powerful organisation. It was acquiring property in cities of India, these being funded by prominent industrialists and public donations. In 1935, at the time of the golden jubilee of the party, the Tamil Nad Congress Committee resolved to buy property of its own. The search began and received a powerful boost when C Rajagopalachari became the Premier of Madras Province that year. As per an account on the internet, which has the year completely wrong, Blacker's Garden was more or less purchased by the well-known doctor TS Duraiswami Iyer when Rajaji approached him to give it up for the Congress. This may be true for the doctor was a prominent practitioner in the Mambalam area and the eponymous subway there is named after him. Anyway, the Congress Committee purchased Blacker's Garden for a sum of Rs 80,000 in 1940 and moved in by early December that year. It is not clear who sold it, the purchaser being the Tamil Nad Congress Committee Charitable Trust.

The site became the venue for the famous Khadi and Swadeshi exhibitions of the Congress Party, held each December. The party also conducted a Carnatic Music festival at the same time, much to the distress of the Music Academy, which felt threatened. Ticket sales were good. The space was also let out for events and exhibitions organised by others and came to be known as Congress Grounds. As many musical and theatrical performances happened here, an amphitheatre too came up, though this was



THEN...

Our *Then* is Blacker's Garden, a colonial bungalow, dating to 1806 and photographed in 1940. Our *Now*, is Kamaraj Bhavan, the shopping complex built on the same site in 1950 and whose graceful facade was designed to curve along the contours of Mount Road. We only wish it was better maintained, with uniform signage, some cleaning up, and a coat of paint.



& ...NOW

a temporary structure. During events, the age-old trees on the campus would be put to good use as supports for serial lights.

The Avadi Session of the Congress party in 1955 caused a major shakeup to the old-world charm of Congress Grounds. The redoubtable Ramnath Goenka of *The Indian Express* fame was in charge of money and also a key man in the arrangements. Though everyone had nothing but praise for the way the event was conducted, Ramnath Goenka, for reasons best known to himself, refused to submit accounts. Kamaraj was highly incensed but there was nothing to be done. In the event, there was a surplus and Goenka, who understood real estate like nobody else, suggested that a commercial complex be built on Congress Grounds. That probably necessitated the demolition of the old garden house that stood on the property. The new building, named Teynampet Congress House, has around 200 shops on three floors, the rents of which brought

income to the party. The rest of the open space continues to be let out for events though its popularity as a venue has come down quite a bit chiefly owing to disruptions caused by the Metro. Now with the underground line becoming operational, the precinct may once again be in demand.

The open area came to be known as Kamaraj Thidal. It was on one part of this space that Kamaraj Memorial Hall/Arangam came to be built in 1991. Meant to seat 1,500 people, it has now become a very popular venue though architecturally it is at best a mediocre construction, a far cry from the striking building that Blacker's Garden probably was. How many in the Congress would actually be aware of the property's history today is open to question. But that they certainly are aware of its commercial value is quite clear from the plans that keep doing the rounds of bringing down the old commercial complex and putting up a high-rise on the site.

A pioneer botanist – a path-breaker in horticulture

Many of you may not have heard of the scientist E.K. Janaki Ammal. But if you are a plant breeder interested in the genetics of plants, their chromosome numbers and their ploidy (the number of complete sets of chromosomes in a cell – diploid refers to 2 sets of chromosomes, triploid, 3 and so on) in order to make meaningful crosses, you will certainly recognise her name. E.K. Janaki Ammal, along with C.D. Darlington, is the author of *Chromosome Atlas of All Cultivated Plants*, a Bible among plant scientists. She dedicated her life to the study of countless plant species, solving their genetic codes. Her work is widely considered to be a seminal contribution to the field of Botany and she was awarded the Padma Shri in 1977.

Born in 1897 in Thalassery, Kerala, E.K. Janaki Ammal was a brilliant cytogeneticist who battled great odds to achieve outstanding success in her field – she was an Indian woman of mixed heritage belonging to the

● by
Girija and
M.S.Viraraghavan

so called 'low' caste of Ezhavas of Kerala and had an English grandfather who was a judge in British India.

Her judge father encouraged her to study and she made him proud – she acquired first a Bachelor's and then a Master's degree in Botany from Presidency College Madras in 1921, fol-

lowed by a Barbour scholarship for another Master's degree at the University of Michigan USA in 1925. In 1931, Michigan University conferred on her an honorary doctorate (DSc. Honoris Causa) – to this day, she remains one of the very few Asian women to have had this honour.

Janaki Ammal chose a life of scholarship over marriage, unheard of in those times. She taught in Chennai and Trivandrum for some years before being chosen by Nobel laureate Sir C.V.Raman as a Research Fellow to study sugarcane in the newly established Indian Academy of Sciences. She made path-breaking strides at the Academy by developing hybrid sugarcane varieties that were not only well-suited to Indian climes but that also produced sweeter sugar.

But prevailing gender and caste discrimination disgusted her, and she left for England to join the famous John Innes Institute in Norwich as a cytologist. She worked there between 1940 and 1945, braving wartime bombings on a daily basis – she would dive under the beds during raids and report to work in the morning, sweeping broken glass and debris in the office. Impressed by her tenacity, the Royal Horticultural Society invited her to join them in their gardens at Wisley near Kew. It was here that she met many world famous plant scientists, including the biologist Dr. C.D. Darlington, who would become her friend, mentor and later, co-author. At Wisley, she worked on the plant magnolia and planted many in the gardens. They still flower



E.K. Janaki Ammal.

A rose for E.K. Janaki Ammal

In May 1966, Viru & I bought a copy of her seminal work, the 'Chromosome Atlas of Cultivated Plants', when Viru was attempting rose breeding for the first time. He had wanted to focus on rose species native to India, and the book was essential reading to understand the ploidy of different rose species. Viru continues to refer to Janaki Ammal's book even today, as he breeds other plants like rhododendrons, magnolias and the Himalayan blue poppy (meconopsis). We've had to rebind the book as the pages were coming apart with frequent use!

We were eager to know more about Janaki Ammal. Her astonishing and remarkable story left us wonderstruck and we wished we had known her before she died in 1984. She had no immediate family as she was unmarried, but she did have many nieces and nephews. Little of her papers and personal effects remain, but fortunately, many of her academic papers are still available at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

We strongly felt that this remarkable woman scientist had not been given the recognition she deserved – after all, her groundbreaking work continues to be referenced by scientists all over the world today. We decided to honour her by naming a rose after her, like we had done in the past for Sir

George Watt, Sir Henry Collett and Frank Kingdon Ward (all of whom discovered *Rosa Gigantea* in the wild), Leschenault de la Tour (who discovered *R. Leschenaultiana*, a rose native to the Western Ghats) and other dear friends across the world.

We first needed to get in touch with a relation of Janaki Ammal, to request permission. We had help from our good friend Dr. Henry Noltie of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. He is a confirmed Indophile specialising in the histories of British Indian botanists – he has written the biographies of Robert Wight (the East India Company surgeon who was more of a botanist in the 1800's), and Hugh Cleghorn (India's first Inspector General of Forests). Dr. Henry directed us to Dr Vinita Damodaran, Janaki Ammal's great niece, currently the Head of the Department of South Asian History in the University of Sussex, U.K.

Henry knew Dr. Vinita well. He had accompanied her on a visit to the Botanical Survey of India, in 2016, helping her set up the Kew exhibition on the botanical explorations conducted by Joseph Dalton Hooker in India. She in turn helped set up a new gallery on Botanical History, showcasing the sketches, research activities, letters, photographs etc of Janaki Ammal, 'a pioneer woman botanist of the country who laid a base-line of botanical research of BSI'. This exhibition is active even today - when we attended the January 2017 Kolkata National Rose Convention, we took time off to visit the lovely, old high-ceilinged BSI Headquarters on Sudder Street and spent time with Janaki Ammal. The museum is beautifully preserved and well worth a visit. An entire floor of the building displayed the exhibition on Janaki Ammal, with many photographs, facsimiles of her correspondence and her work papers. What an extraordinary woman she was!

We wrote to Dr. Vinita, explaining that we had a *Rosa clinophylla* seedling which we had tested for many years, and which flourished well and continuously, and could we have her permission to name this rose for her great aunt? We also wrote that the rose was a medium-dark, rich yellow hue, which we thought was a fitting tribute to Janaki who reportedly wore saris only of this colour. Pat came her reply: she was delighted that Janaki Ammal was being recognised in this manner. The hybrid is a true-blue Indian signature species and we're naming it 'E.K. Janaki Ammal'.

For those interested, the parentage of this rose is: *Landora* x [*Montezuma* x {*Little Darling* x (*R.clinophylla* x *R.bracteata*)}] It has been classified as a *Grandiflora*, yellow blend color, fragrant, a tall growing shrub, disease resistant and continuous flowering. We have shared the material of this rose with the Botanical Survey of India, John Innes Institute and the Royal Horticultural Society so that they can flower in their gardens as a perennial tribute to Janaki Ammal's work.

Girija and M.S.Viraraghavan



From left to right: M.S. Viraraghavan and Girija Viraraghavan with Dr. Vinita Damodaran in Pondicherry.

today, including one named after her – *Magnolia Kobus* 'Janaki Ammal'.

Serendipitously, on a flight home to India in 1948, she met the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was so impressed by her that he invited her to return and head the newly-formed Botanical Survey of India (BSI). She agreed and reorganised the office in Calcutta in the 1950s. Her interest in biodiversity and ecology took her to remote parts of the country. She collected numerous indigenous plants, many of medicinal value, as well as folklore and tribal knowledge systems, incorporating them into the work of the BSI.

An environmentalist, she actively protested against harm-

ful dams and hydroelectric projects, such as the Silent Valley in Kerala. She worked at the Atomic Energy Station in Trombay and lectured at international symposiums. Post-retirement, she became Emeritus Scientist in the Centre for Advanced Botany in the Madras University at Maduravoyal, Chennai.

Janaki Ammal led an ascetic life, focused entirely on her work. She died in 1984 at age 87. In recognition of her peerless contributions to Botany, the Government of India has instituted scholarships in her name. The John Innes Institute in the UK also offers aid for students from developing countries under its E.K. Janaki Ammal Scholarship program.

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

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

1. What record has Biju Janta Dal's Chandrani Murmu set as far this Lok Sabha elections go?
 2. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has for the first time recognised which syndrome, associated with workplace stress, as a medical condition?
 3. Name the Nobel-winning physicist, credited with discovering and classifying subatomic particles and giving quarks their name, who passed away recently.
 4. Which place in MP was recently included in the tentative list of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) World Heritage Sites?
 5. Which Indian airline recently became the fourth operator to have a fleet of 100 aircraft?
 6. Name the Indian Space Research Organisation's new private entity set up to aid transfer to technology, that was officially inaugurated in Bengaluru on May 25.
 7. Name the Austrian Formula One legend who won three titles and was subject of the film 'Rush', who passed away recently?
 8. On World Metrology Day on May 20, India adopted a global resolution to redefine which four base units?
 9. Name the outdoor version and three-member format of badminton that was launched by the Badminton World Federation recently.
 10. Name the world-famous architect, creator of the pyramids in the Louvre and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, who passed away on May 16.
- * * *
11. Name the famous actor-playwright, known for his quick wit and clever wordplay, who passed away on June 10.
 12. Which Tamil literary magnum opus has characters like Arulmozhi, Kundhavai, Nandhini, Poonkuzhali?
 13. Name the current Commissioner of Chennai Police.
 14. Who is going to be DMK's leader in the present Lok Sabha?
 15. Arguing over the recitation of which composition did Thenkalai and Vadakalai Iyengars come to blows in Kancheepuram on May 26?
 16. What were the terminal points of North Beach that ran parallel to First Line Beach?
 17. The Singaravelar Maligai, the office of the Collector of Chennai, is built on the site which edifice?
 18. Odakkal Street in North Madras was infamously famous for which activity?
 19. Which famous playback singer of yesteryear was the brother-in-law of Kalaignar Karunanidhi?
 20. The MGR-starrer *Kalankarai Vilakkam* was based on which Hitchcock classic?

(Answers on page 8)

From 'Kuberar' to crook

● by T. Dorai Raj, Inspector of Police, Crime Branch CID, Madras

On 11th January, 1963 when K.V. Rangiah Chettiar of Coimbatore – a man of unusual calibre and resourceful optimism – known to the public as a possible inheritor of several coffee and tea estates worth millions, who called himself "Kuberar" was convicted and sentenced to three years Rigorous Imprisonment for using a forged document as genuine and nineteen months, R.I. for cheating, in the Court of the Second Additional Sessions Judge in S.C. 171/62, it looked incredible but it was a fact.

A psychoanalyst would be hard put to find anything in his early life which would indicate that one day he would be a swindler of a rare type. His upbringing was as ordinary as that of any child of the low-income group brought up between two world wars. His paternal uncle, Veeri Chettiar and his wife Nagammal were residing at Kothagiri running a small business. They had a son Velusami and two daughters Nanjammal and Lakshmiammal. Towards the end of the World War I, Velusami died leaving his wife and no other male member to fulfil the great debt to his parents on their death. Being devout Hindus, in order to make sure that their happiness in the next world was not denied to them, Veeri Chettiar and his wife Nagammal adopted Rangiah as their son under a registered deed in 1923. They had three houses. They were also bequeathed under a registered will in 1923 itself. Rangiah got one house and the two daughters one each respectively. Veeri Chettiar died in 1928. Not long afterwards Rangiah sold away the house bequeathed to him and settled down in Coimbatore.

Soon his scheming dormant brain started blossoming. The two houses bequeathed to the two daughters of Veeri Chettiar were constantly kindling his greed. Therefore, he preferred a complaint for trespass against his adoptive mother and sisters in the Court of the Joint Magistrate, Coonur in C.C. 97/1929. Though the case was acquitted, yet, when it was under trial he managed to prepare a document purporting to be the unregistered 'Will' left by the deceased Veeri Chettiar on the eve of his death and sent it by post to the Court of Joint Magistrate, Coonur as though it was sent by his adoptive mother Nagammal. When it reached the Court, it was kept with the case records as an unmarked document.

After a lapse of few years, he applied for and obtained a certified copy of the document from the Court of the Joint Magistrate, Coonur in 1942. In effect the seal of the Court affixed to the Certified Copy, provided a halo of sanctity and authenticity to what was a mere product of pure imagination. However, when one went through it, the impression created would be that late Veeri Chettiar was indeed a multi-millionaire owning several hundreds of acres of flourishing Coffee and Tea estates, many buildings and cash deposited with the Government and banks and that he bequeathed them to the enjoyment of his adopted son Rangiah after the death of his wife Nagammal. She died in 1947.

An opportunity now presented itself and Rangiah was not slow to seize it. He filed a petition in O.P. 17 of 1949 in the Court of Subordinate Judge, Coimbatore, for the issue of a succession certificate in respect of a sum of Rs.1000/- said to be in deposit with a Mahajana Bank. In support of his claim, he filed the certified copy of the so-called unregistered will obtained from the Joint Magistrate, Coonur. Clever as he was, he did not require the Court to decide the genuineness of the so-called unregistered will but only pressed for the succession certificate. However, strange it maybe he did succeed in obtaining a succession certificate.

Being now armed with a genuine registered adoption deed, a certified copy of a bogus unregistered Will, and a succession certificate granted by a competent Judicial Court, he addressed the Collector of Nilgris to direct the Revenue officers at Coonur and Kothagiri to point out to him the boundaries of the various estates mentioned in the unregistered bogus Will and also to furnish him the original of the unregistered Will. By the time, the case records in C.C. 97/1929 were destroyed due to the efflux of time and finding that there was no possibility of verifying the certified copy with the original, and also to furnish him the original itself, the Collector informed Rangiah that the records had been destroyed due to efflux of time.

That was the reply which was wanted by him to achieve his purpose and when he got it, he addressed the Governor of Madras complaining against the unhelpful attitude of the Revenue officials and claiming a compensation of Rs. 3 lakhs. The Law Department of

Madras which deals with the petitions informed him by a letter dated 21-11-1951 that it was open to him to work out his rights in a Court of Law. This made him lie low for some time.

In 1954, he again gathered his wits and prepared himself for further efforts. He applied to the Law Department to furnish him a certified copy of their reply dated 21-11-1951 on the pretext that he had lost the letter. Accordingly, it was furnished to him by post.

Early in 1955, he acknowledged it by a letter with which was found enclosed a copy of a petition alleged to have been sent to the Collector of Nilgris wherein he had mentioned deliberately that all the original documents relating to his claims were with the Law Department, Government of Madras. To substantiate his assertion, he even quoted a reference number of the Law Department.

The subtle and surreptitious method adopted to draw the Law Department into the picture was easily discerned and detected. The reference number quoted in the petition was found to be the one allotted to the correspondence relating to the grant of the certified copy and there was no original documents with them either. Consequently, the Assistant Secretary, Law Department promptly informed him in letter No. 35/55-1, dated 11-1-1955 that the original documents alleged were not with the Law Department. The letter was short and straight containing neatly executed typed matter with enough and a trifle more space between the end of the last sentence and the signature of the Assistant Secretary. This was exactly what he desired and he got it unasked.

He was not the person to let any chance slip from his hold. He also knew that modern scientific inventions were as serviceable to illegitimate purposes as they were for legitimate causes. He sought the help of a typist, who is now no more, and with the aid of a typewriter having identical types, he made him type in the intervening space between the end of the last sentence and signature of the Assistant Secretary, the following meaningful sentence.

"However, on production of the original documents, the deposit amount of Rs. 13, 75, 923-11-6 may be transferred to your name."

He did not stop there. He took photostat copies of the letter so forged utilising the

services of a professional photographer. For all practical purposes it looked genuine with the State emblem and other symbols of a letter emanating from the Government promising to deliver a huge sum on mere production of original documents. The endorsement of the Collector of Nilgris that the original documents were destroyed due to efflux of time came in handy and he utilised it to the great advantage for his inability to produce the original documents. As he was already in possession of a certified copy of the forged will and a succession certificate issued by the Sub Court, Coimbatore, what then could prevent him from calling himself a "KUBERAR" or a multi-millionaire in modern usage? He did call himself a Kuberar and announced to the World as such through the media of the Press. Had he only hesitated for a while he would have been easily disposed of as one of several psychoneurotics, talking through his hat.

But he did not hesitate. A consummate swindler he was. Soon, he took the necessary bold steps for the realisation of his dream of becoming a multi-millionaire. He also knew that human cupidity in one form or the other was the most vulnerable point for attack and he did attack and exploit it to his great advantage. His victims were not ordinary unsophisticated persons but learned Lawyers, prosperous business-men and wealthy landlords who knew that bearing very well. Neatly dressed in the manner and style befitting the person of a "Kuberar" fallen on evil days and displaying a feigned trait of nobility, he presented himself with his four weapons of documents in his armoury and threw up attractive offers. One main offer was to invite them to claim the promised sum of Rs. 13,75,923-11-6 from the Law Department, Government of Madras on the basis of the photostat copy of the letter bearing No.35/55-1, dated 11-1-55 signed by the Assistant Secretary telling them that they were free to spend up to Rs.1,75,932-11-6 for achieving their object and when realised they could take away the amount earmarked for expenditure and share the balance of Rs.12 lakhs equally. To several of his lawyers he had also promised buildings, house sites and estates. There was also a rider to it, and that was that they entered into a written agreement not only to achieve the said purpose on the above

(Continued on page 7)

TRIBUTES

Adieu to an Architect

Chennai has become poorer with the loss of one more pillar of Chennai Society. S.L. Chitale, popularly known as 'Krish' to his legion of friends and well-wishers, succumbed to Cancer on 20th May, 2019. He was 87. The second generation of the well-known architectural firm, Chitale & Son, Krish was known not only for path breaking designs for buildings but also for his architectural ethics. Between 1952 and 2003, the year Krish handed over the mantle to his son Kapil Chitale, he was actively involved in designing landmark buildings in South India and also gaining reputation as a socially committed human being, who worked relentlessly for the uplift of the downtrodden and needy. This article is all about his beliefs as an architect.

Comparing the difference between the style of designing buildings during his and his father's time, he had said, "in my father's time the emphasis was on symmetry and grandeur. But the buildings that I have designed are all different because I believe good design implies change. You cannot see a Chitale stamp in my buildings. Each one will be different. Besides, I pay a lot of attention to wind directions and how to make the best use of natural light. Much before green buildings became a hot topic Krish was already following some of the basic principles of green designs.



S.L. Chitale.

Krish also believed that every building should have its own identity created by simple and expressive architecture corresponding to its specific functions and location. Kothari Building on Nungambakkam High Road was one of the first buildings in Chennai, which used sun control louvers. In Tarapore Tower, another landmark building on Anna Salai he used solid fireproof walls between individual shops, so that any conflagration could be contained.

Krish was also known for his desire for the preservation of heritage in the city. He once said, "I am a die-hard believer in conserving heritage buildings. I have made sure that whenever we renovate such buildings, we respect them for what they are because they are our history". Among the many heritage preservation projects that he was involved in,

renovation of the Library and District Boardroom of the Freemasons Hall, Egmore. Two other edifices that bear proof of Krish's passion for heritage were the HSBC Building (Rajaji Salai) & Standard Chartered Bank (Armenian Street). Only the interiors were redesigned to suit the requirements of modern offices. One of the recent projects of the company where effort was taken to retain heritage values is the 100 years old ELSONS Garments located next to India Silk House on Anna Salai.

Krish never compromised on his work. On Vastu he told a client, -- 'I don't believe in it. Yes, we must respect tradition; but it was an ancient science based on knowledge and technology of that time. Some of it is not relevant today because we have changed, our lifestyle has changed and so also our cities.'

● by R.V. Rajan

According to his son Kapil, in later years he began relenting and accommodating clients' requests to design buildings which were Vastu compliant.

When someone asked him how his design incorporated sustainability, he retorted, "that is a lot of hogwash floated by people who don't understand architecture. What do you think they teach us in architecture schools? Building Taj Mahals and India Gates?"

For all his tough exterior he was a kind person who went out of his way to help friends in need. He used his resources & contacts to dream of big projects which would benefit the

themselves over the plays albeit in different situations, a la Wodehouse, but the end result would be the same, providing the audience an evening of healthy and clean humour and give them a temporary respite from the humdrum of their daily life.

If Tamil theatre gave him his first identity, it was his journey in cinema that took him to a wider audience. His foray into cinema came about when the legendary director K. Balachander adapted his famous play Marriage Made in a Saloon into a full-fledged movie, *Poikkal Kudhirai*. It marked renowned lyricist Vaali's acting debut, where he essayed the role played by Crazy Mohan in the stage version.

It is however his ventures with Kamal Hassan that Crazy Mohan is best known for today. Their collaboration gave Tamil cinema some its best comedies in recent times such as *Michael*

(Continued on page 8)



The auditorium of the Shri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, designed by SL Chitale in the 1970s.

society. Many that he worked on were devoted to needy children.

"I have always been interested in any project connected with children, probably because of the difficult childhood I had. Having lost my mother early and with a father very busy in his successful career, I know what it means to miss parental love in the growing years," said Krish in an interview to a magazine.

Krish's total involvement in several voluntary organisations helped him gain the reputation of a social activist with a difference. A true believer in the 'Service Above Self' motto of the Rotary movement, Krish

contributed his professional expertise as an architect free for all the projects he was involved in. All the voluntary organisations he worked for, including the Masonic Lodge, have been beneficiaries of Krish's huge network of friends abroad. For his sustained and dedicated service he got several awards from several organizations including the prestigious RI 3230 Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008 from Rotary International.

The world of architecture will surely miss a doyen who contributed so much to preserving its values. Chennai will no doubt miss a noble soul.

May his soul rest in peace!

Coimbatore's 'Kuberar'

(Continued from page 6)

terms but also that the expenses including the reasonable maintenance charges of the "Kuberar" were met by those who accepted the offer.

Several lawyers and members of the public entered into such agreement one after the other and parted with large amounts in providing financial aid to the Kuberar under the genuine hope that they would realise the amount from the Law Department and could become millionaires overnight, because there was nothing in the documents to suspect his version. Whenever a lawyer or other person suspected him it was invariably after he had spent fairly a large sum on the sponsor and that was just sufficient for him to cancel the agreement and engage another lawyer forthwith on the ground that he had not taken sufficient measures to realise the amount from the Government. This game went on, month after month, in spite of the fact that as early as 1956, a leading advocate of Madras whom he engaged for claiming the amount from the Government, came to know the truth and informed him that there was no amount with the Law Department and his claim was untenable. As no lawyer or member of the public came forward with a

complaint probably fearing loss of reputation for entering into a fraudulent agreement, he carried on his operations successfully and even gained the boldness to file a suit against the Government in the Judicial Court at Coimbatore.

On a reference received from the Law Department, his activities were checked and on the complaint of Sri. V.N.D. Sundararajan of Salem whom he had similarly cheated to the extent of Rs.7,000 a case in Coimbatore Town East, Cr.No. 384/61 u/s. 420, 467, 471 IPC was registered and investigated.

Investigation disclosed that Veeri Chetty never owned the properties mentioned in the unregistered so-called "Will" and several of the tea and coffee estates were non-existing. Even though he was ably defended, he was found guilty and sentenced to a maximum period of 3 years R.I. on the 11th day of January, 1963, the Judge commending the work done by the investigating officer. His efforts to have it quashed on appeal in the Court of Sessions, Coimbatore and on revision in the High Court of Madras were futile and he is now safely behind the bars probably hatching better schemes for becoming a Kuberar in reality. — reproduced from *The Madras Police Journal*, October-December 1966.

'Crazy' comedian of stage plays and movies

The death of one of Tamil theatre's most renowned humourists, 'Crazy' Mohan truly marks the end of an era. Born in 1952, Mohan had his early education at the Raja Muthiah and P.S. High Schools before going on to acquire an engineering degree from the College of Engineering, Guindy in 1973. The writing bug caught on quite early, for he was a successful writer even when in college, winning an award for his first skit, *The Great Bank Robbery* in an inter-collegiate competition. Interestingly, the award was handed over by a man who would nearly fifteen years later propel him beyond the realm of theatre Kamal Hassan. The early success spurred him to write scripts for his brother Balaji's troupe at Vivekananda College.

His first full-fledged work as a Tamil stage writer was *Crazy Thieves* in Palavakkam for S.Ve Sekhar's troupe, Natakapriya

in 1976. This play also gave him the moniker with which he would be readily identified for the rest of his life, Crazy. Three years later, Crazy Creations was founded by Mohan, Balaji and a group of friends. Till date, the troupe has staged more than 6500 shows in both India and abroad.

One of the biggest factors behind Crazy Mohan's success was his style of writing and the relatability of the characters, who were representative of a typical middle-class family. He would often credit his upbringing in a huge joint family as an inspiration for his writing style. He was a worthy successor to one of his idols, writer Marina (C.V. Sridhar), whose works created a simple *Tambrahm* world full of characters whose quirkiness would spread cheer and joy with their mannerisms and interactions with others. The characters would repeat

An Air force coach who had mentored Women Cricket

There has been terrible news recently for cricket followers. Popular Tamil Nadu coach PK. Dharmalingam, former Karnataka all-rounder V.S. Vijayakumar and young cricket writer Siddhanta Patnaik, have all left us almost at the same time. Two of these, Dharma and Vijay, were good friends of mine. An aggressive opening batsman and new ball bowler, Vijayakumar was replaced in the Karnataka team by Roger Binny who went on to represent India with some distinction. With Dharmalingam, I had a long and happy association, first as a young admirer of his all-round skills, and later as a colleague, when he came to coach the TVS and Alwarpet CC cricket teams of which I was a senior member. We were often roommates on our cricket tours, usually within

Tamil Nadu, and I found him a pleasant, considerate companion, neat and clean in the way he kept the room and his personal belongings. He was a soft spoken man with a keen interest in the game of cricket, wherever it was played.

I first met Dharma in the 1960s, when he was playing for Indian Air Force, Tambaram in the Chennai league. A short service commission recruit in the forces, he was a successful all rounder for the Services XI in the Ranji Trophy, leading to his eventual selection for a place in the North Zone squad in the Duleep Trophy. His exploits in the league and in first class cricket were quite sensational, and he regularly hit the headlines with several good bowling performances and dazzling innings. So it was that

when I first met him at a mutual friend's wedding reception one evening, I was completely taken aback by his slim, compact physique of medium height and his gentle demeanour and ready smile, for I had expected a tough, towering airforce man.

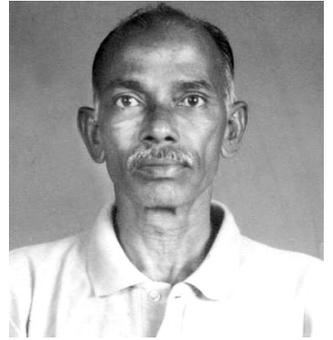
Dharma then took a special release from the armed forces and returned to his home state, joining India Cements at San-

● by
V. Ramnarayan

karnagar, Tirunelveli, and playing for Jolly Rovers CC in the Madras league as a key member of a champion outfit. His nicely controlled, flighted legspin was a useful aspect of his game, his batting was positive and attacking, and his fielding and throwing were a sight for sore eyes.

It was as a coach that Dharma made a valuable contribution to cricket. An NIS (National Institute of Sports) accredited coach, he made a mark as a Tamil Nadu state coach at numerous levels. He also assisted the chief coach at the international level, during Test matches and conditioning camps. A great friend and well-wisher, he certainly was, but he unwittingly knocked me out of contention during one of these camps when a flat catch at express speed from his bat at fielding practice dislocated my finger.

Dharma also conducted his own private coaching programmes, mainly for school-boy cricketers, generally at the Sishya School ground at Adyar. Hundreds of his wards went on to play excellent cricket at the league, state and even national levels. Some of them like W.V. Raman and L. Sivaramakrishnan, he coached at Grand Prix CC, in the 1980s, eventually coming over to TVS group-backed Alwarpet CC, where, along with my hugely talented teammates, I experienced the pleasure of his company, qui-



PK. Dharmalingam. (Courtesy: The Hindu.)

et encouragement, and strict discipline. We went on to win a few titles including the prestigious Hindu Trophy and MCC Dyanora Cup.

Dharma's outstanding achievement as a coach was perhaps his work with women's cricket as arguably the first leading cricketer in India to don that role. Many Indian women cricketers owe their success to his mentorship.

Dharmalingam had a few health issues in the last decade of his life, but his was an invariably cheerful presence at every cricket get-together of that period. He will be sorely missed.

THE 'CRAZY' MAN OF MANY PARTS

(Continued from page 7)

Madana Kama Rajan, Sathi Leelavathi, Avvai Shanmugi, Kadhala Kadhala and Panchathanthiram. The high TRP ratings these movies draw even to this day are a testimony to his prolific humour-writing.

Two facets of his life that were overshadowed by his brilliance as a scriptwriter and playwright were his paintings and his prolific work as a writer of *venbas*. A keen student of Tamil literature right from his college days, he composed *venbas* on several divine subjects. The ones on Lord Krishna,

which would be accompanied by a sketch by renowned cartoonist Keshav were much anticipated and widely shared on social media on a daily basis. According to his family, Crazy Mohan wrote even the night before his demise and composed fifteen verses on Lord Krishna. A collection titled *Ramanayanam*, written on the life of the great saint Ramana Maharishi were recently set to tune and performed by Gayathri Girish.

Despite travelling abroad for theatre performances several times (including more than 150 shows in USA alone), Crazy

Mohan's heart lay in Madras and more specifically in Mylapore. In his typical fashion, he would often remark that he felt homesick even if he went to West Mambalam!

At 67, his untimely demise leaves a huge void in the lives of countless Tamil theatre and cinema lovers. In a fitting tribute to his far-reaching impact, amongst those who had gathered to pay their last respects were several fans, whose only association with him was through his art. The Tamil art scene is poorer for his passing.

—Karthik Bhatt

Answers to Quiz

1. Youngest elected candidate in the history of Lok Sabha at 25 years, 11 months and 8 days, 2. Burnout, 3. Murray Gell-Mann, 4. The town of Orchha, 5. Spice Jet, 6. NewSpace India Limited, 7. Niki Lauda, 8. kilogramme, kelvin, mole and ampere, 9. AirBadminton and Triples, 10. I.M. Pei.

* * *

11. 'Crazy' Mohan, 12. *Ponniyin Selvan*, 13. A.K. Viswanathan, 14. T.R. Baalu, 15. *Naalayira Divya Prabandham*, 16. Fort to Royapuram, 17. *Bentinck's Building*, 18. It was the city's well-known red light area, 19. C.S. Jayaraman, 20. 'Vertigo'

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