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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

Vol. XXIX No. 9

August 16-31, 2019

The City has already begun celebrating but is it enough?

● by The Editor

The Chief would have been happy. During his time, Madras Day had metamorphosed into Madras Week and later Madras Month. This year, in what seems a fitting tribute to his memory, celebrations began in July itself, what with a couple of organisations declaring that they preferred an early start so that they do not clash with other events during the peak of the celebrations in August. That bit of logic is so similar to what some *sabhas* that observe the Music Season in November itself say in their defence. And so is Madras Week becoming like the December extravaganza? It is still early days but we appear to be well on our way there.

This year too, *Madras Musings* will have its set of eight talks featuring well-known personalities, at some of the prominent hotels in the city. The other regular celebrants are all there too – the Press Institute, the Madras Literary Society, INTACH, Nizhal, the Madras Local History Group, and so many others. The usual complement of walks, exhibitions, book releases and similar programmes are all there. The question is, is this enough?

One of the criticisms often levelled at the Music Season is that it caters to the same audience and at its peak does not have more than 20,000 people at best at the various venues.

Madras Week too appears to be toeing the same line – the same faces be it catalysts or participants and even assuming a total of 150 events and a 100 people in each (a gross exaggeration), not more than 15,000 people at most, which is a ridiculously small figure for a city of this size. How is this celebration to be broad based?

One of the strengths, and weaknesses, of Madras Week is the complete absence of organisers, sponsors or any talk of money. Here it differs markedly from the Music Season. On the one hand it makes for very easy running and allows for spontaneity. On the other it confuses people wanting to celebrate but lacking in direction. They keep coming back to the band of catalysts and that puts enormous pressure on the latter,



Cake-cutting during one of the Madras Week events with staff of Taj Connemara, S. Muthiah, Vincent D'Souza, Mohan Raman and Sashi Nair.

considering that they are at best volunteers with other vocations as their day jobs. The catalysts themselves often end up as bottlenecks.

What is required is for the people wanting to celebrate to understand that they can do anything they want by way of celebration and need not look for approval from the catalysts.

And there are the critics who keep harping on how Madras Week is elitist. To this we have only one counter – we celebrate the way we know best. If there are other ways to do it, which would lead to more people joining in, we would be happy for someone to show us the way. Leading by example is far better than sitting and carping over a situation. If after 93 years the December Music Season

can still be a niche event, so can Madras Week after a mere 15. And we don't want it to be elitist but require some enthusiasts to show us the way.

Actually, a few are already doing that. Vinitha Siddharth's *Kreeda*, which specialises in traditional Indian games is organising contests and the proceeds from these will go towards introducing these sports in Corporation Schools so that a 100 teams can be participating in next year's Madras Week. And Rajith Nair is taking groups of people from South Chennai to Royapuram to show them Avvai Kalai Kazhagam where a museum to Srinivasa Ramanujan functions. Way to go Vinitha and Rajith, and may your tribe increase.

Madras Week – what to expect this year

● by A Special Correspondent

Over hundred programmes, put together by 33 organisations, entities and individuals – that defines Madras Week this year in a nutshell. The Chief, had he been around, would have been delighted to see this kind of a response. And the programmes are for all age groups, and no, we are not just indulging in nostalgia. Much of it celebrates the Chennai of here and now and carefully

also brings to light areas for improvement.

Water, as is to be expected, occupies centre stage with several programmes – panel discussions, walks and talks focusing around it. Will Madras Week come up with some concrete plans and suggestions on how the crisis can be tackled, year

after year? And then there are the plans to bridge the north-south divide. Vincent D'Souza is asking for volunteers to bring school children from North Chennai to south of Fort St George and vice versa. Perhaps the time has come for the same to be done between those residing in the core city and the ones

in the IT corridor and beyond. That too looks like a different Chennai. Will Madras Week be able to make a mark in that new Chennai?

The walks are increasing in number year after year. This time around, the brochure itself indicates 30 of them, and we are sure there are many more private tours that do not seek to advertise. Who would have thought that Chennai

had enough to show around in 30 walks? What is there to see in Chennai beyond the Marina Beach was a common refrain. Those leading heritage walks in the city can give a fitting reply to such comments. How does anyone walk in the Chennai heat was another crib. Well, you just need to see how many people set off on these voyages of discovery to realise that it can be done. May Chennai soon

(Continued on page 2)

What is expected this year?

(Continued from page 1)

have a hundred walks to commemorate Madras Week. Delhi has done it but that was with its several centuries of history. If Chennai can pull it off, it will be a real achievement.

Any event can be termed a success only if it brings in the young. Madras Week has had its dedicated supporters by way of some of the schools in the city. This year promises to have them in strength. There are exhibitions, photo contests, presentations and quizzes, all dedicated to the city. What a corpus of work these will bring out by way of a record of Chennai! One of the most endearing projects is the one by *Mylapore Times*, which is asking school children to take up three old retail outlets in their neighbourhood and document their history. In this time and age, when retail chains and malls are the order of the day, we need to salute these resilient old timers

who have survived to tell their tale.

And in all this we are not including media coverage in conventional and social platforms – those are additional and that is where the real buzz is. The newspapers and television channels are all busy preparing stories on Chennai – documenting areas, institutions and high achievers to give just a few examples. There are solo artistes on social media, putting up nuggets of information about Chennai. Do you follow Karthik Bhatt on Facebook? Do so now is our advice. He has for the past few weeks been showcasing film clips featuring Chennai landmarks. It is a most interesting study.

As always, Chennai Heritage, which brings out *Madras Musings* is putting up eight programmes, one on each day of Madras Week (18th to 25th) and the details are given below. We hope to see you at some, if not all of them. Happy Madras Week!

Chennai Heritage Lectures during Madras Week

August 18

Tulsi Badrinath on *Swami Vivekananda and his 'Madras Boys'*. 6.30 p.m. Chamiers, Chamiers Road. For all Chennai Heritage lectures 1st half hour refreshments, followed by programme.

August 19

Madras Uncensored – behind the phenomenal growth of Tamil stand-up comedy anchored by Vinodhini Vaidyanathan, theatre and film actor with Annamalai L of Tanglish Comedy (@annamalai1111), Jagan Krishnan (@iamjaggenius) and Guru Nicketan (@nicketrnix) on how Tamil stand-up is leading the regional language comedy scene. The Folly, Amethyst, Whites Road. 6.30 p.m.

August 20

S. Sowmya in conversation with Sriram V. on her journey in music. The Park. 6.30 p.m.

August 21

Tribute to Crazy Mohan. Maadhu Balaji in conversation with Baradwaj Rangan. Hanu Reddy Residences, Poes Gardens. 6.30 p.m.

August 22

Muthiah Memorial Event: Panel discussion on Water Management. Speakers: Ranganath N. Krishna, MD/CEO of Grundfos Pumps, Ashok Vardhan Shetty, IAS Retd and Karthikeya Sivasenapathy (Sivasenapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation), moderated by Sushila Ravindranath. Savera. 6.30 p.m.

August 23

Mohan Raman on *M.N. Nambiar, a Centenary Tribute*. Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. 7.00 p.m.

August 24

Keeping Vikatan relevant over time by B. Srinivasan, MD. The Vikatan Group. Residency Towers. 6.30 p.m.

August 25

Vikram Doctor on *Ten Iconic Food Books from Madras*. Radison Blu, Egmore. 6.30 p.m.

Praise the Lord

The *Man from Madras Musings* is well aware that he is laying himself open to attacks of every kind. In particular he knows full well that the first comment would be on whether MMM would ever dare to write in this vein had this been a festival of a minority community. To that MMM has only this to say – he is entitled to comment precisely because he is a member of the majority community. And from what little he has seen of other religions in the country, most events of this kind degenerate into the same kind of chaos as this one. Religion has very little to do with it. It is the nature of the devotees and that is much the same across all faiths.

MMM is alluding to the emergence of the idol of the Lord from the tank in nearby Kanchipuram and the hysteria it has generated. All over the city MMM sees the public divided into two kinds – BC, Before Crush and AD, After Darshan. The

she braved it again, this time with better results. There were others who informed MMM with wonder about terminally pregnant women and mothers with babes in arms who were pushing and jostling their way in. MMM can only wonder at the faith that moves these people.

Rather akin to school admissions, the hunt is on among the BC for VIPs they could cajole into parting with passes. A High Court judge or an IAS officer will be of help, a Minister would be even better. To know a Police Officer at the venue means a sure entry, though an exit is not guaranteed. Being acquainted with a temple priest is a passport to success. There is also a hunt for aged relatives of all kinds. Apparently if you escort the elderly, you can get in quite easily and come out in record time as well. MMM knows of a centenarian of whose age the family has made full use, taking the person along just to ensure darshan.

2. Did Pacchayappa Mudaliar bathe in the Cooum? – Not having been close enough to the old man to hand him his towel when he emerged in the all together from the waters, MMM does not know.

3. Why can we not get back to the good old British days when there was boating on the Cooum? First of all there were no “good old British days” and secondly, there was never any boating on the Cooum until a post-Independence Chief Minister introduced it.

4. What do you think of Madras Bhashai sir? You really want MMM to answer, and if so, can MMM do so by addressing you in some choice Madras Bhashai swear words please?

5. Why was the Long Tank filled to form T Nagar? Considering that it happened a few decades before MMM was born, he has nothing to say.

6. Was Kodambakkam really named Ghoda Baugh

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

BC gang is forever plotting to get hold of a VVIP pass. The AD group, rather in the manner of big-game hunters and some anglers, keeps boasting on how it managed its darshan within minutes and with none of the crush that is being reported in the newspapers. MMM's point is this – if everyone made it through so easily, then why is it that there are persistent reports about how bad the whole process was? Are these rumours being spread by anti-nationals in today's parlance?

To investigate this was MMM's mission and he spoke to a few trusted friends who did make it and survived to tell the tale. Near death experience was the term used by a lady who went in the most exalted category pass. According to her, while the waiting time was not too long, which was not surprising considering that her King and Chief is a VIP, complete chaos reigned inside the venue and there was so much jostling about that she thought she was en route to seeing God in paradise itself. Yet another lady friend went and half way into the queue had a panic attack and needed to be escorted out. After having calmed herself down

The latest trend is to go back there again, this time to see the Lord in standing posture, He having been recumbent for so many days. That means there will be double the present crowds – those that missed the recumbent posture and those that have come back to see the Lord standing up.

In all this MMM is quite sure that the feelings of the Lord have not been taken into consideration. Seeing all this commotion MMM will not be surprised if He is looking forward to getting back into the tank.

The Question Bank for Madras Week

Madras Week is back again and each year *The Man from Madras Musings* finds he is asked the same questions in interview after interview. This has resulted in MMM getting increasingly bored with the answers and he therefore has decided to compile the questions that he would like to avoid for all time to come:

1. Don't you think you must lead a campaign to get the city renamed Madras? – No MMM does not intend wasting his time on anything like that. If the name has changed so be it.

after the Nawab's horse stables? No it wasn't and before you ask let MMM assure you that Nungambakkam is not from *Nunga Baugh* and therefore from the Nawab's Nudist Colony.

7. Is it true that Chetpet is named after Namberumal Chetty? Yes sure, only it took on that name around 150 years before the man was born. In the same vein, Avadi is not an acronym for Armoured Vehicles and Defence Industries, as the name figures in records from the 1860s at least, long before armoured vehicles were used.

8. And so this is Madras' 380th birthday? (Yes, yes from Raj apologists and No, no from the others) – Well it is a yes and a no. It is 380 for the colonial city but that is nothing when compared to the age of some the villages that got absorbed into it.

9. People are saying there is no historic basis for 22nd August being declared Madras Day. Comment? Yes sure they are correct. But they don't appear to object to Mother's Day, Father's Day, Friendship Day etc on the basis of the same logic. Why not Madras Day?

And so, until next Madras Week...

–MMM

Appointments and Disappointments – memories of Tamil Nadu’s legendary DGP

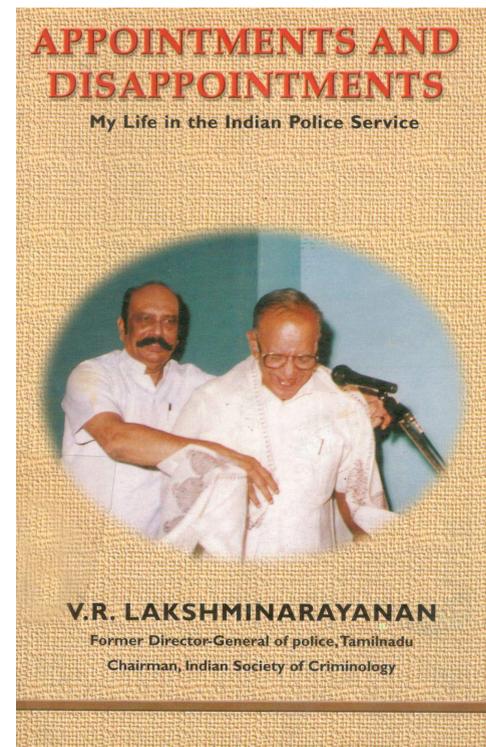
IPS officer V.R. Lakshminarayanan passed away recently. Joining the service in 1951, he rose to become the DGP of the State in 1985, appointed to the post by M.G. Ramachandran from his hospital bed in New York. It was the pinnacle of a glittering and eventful career at both the State and National levels. V.R. Lakshminarayanan’s memoirs ‘Appointments and

Disappointments’ is a fascinating account of his life in the service.

He hailed from a family of lawyers. His father Rama Ayyar had a princely and extensive practice that covered Malabar, the South Canara Districts and Mysore State. Rama Ayyar’s eldest son V.R. Krishna Iyer joined him in practice in 1937 and was on his way to becoming one of the country’s finest legal

minds. It was hence expected that Lakshminarayanan too would join the family practice once he qualified for the Bar. However, driven by “a passionate and platonic idealism to serve the public, to stand on one’s own feet, the glamour of being a member of a premier class I service and the lure of the uniform” as he puts it, he went on to appear for the All India Services exams and passed with flying colours in 1951.

On completing the first phase of training at Mount Abu, Lakshminarayanan was posted to Madurai for practical training. Recounting his first day as a police officer in the State, he mentions his first visit to the imposing Office of the Inspector-General of Police on the Marina (now the Office of the DGP), which he describes as “a most beautiful and well-manicured building, by all means the most splendid police office anywhere in the world”, with “the aura and charm of an ancient castle of a bygone age”. (His fascination for the building



The cover of V.R. Lakshminarayanan’s memoirs *Appointments and Disappointments*.

national stage came during his stint at the Central Bureau of Investigation, where, as its Joint Director in 1977, he executed the arrest of Indira Gandhi in a corruption case. He describes the event as being “an unedifying feat” and probably considered it somewhat ironic as he had previously received two medals from her for meritorious service. Recalling the incident, Lakshminarayanan says that he had insisted that no handcuffs be used, though the former Prime Minister had asked him as to where they were. She had also been allowed to take along her personal attendant as matter of courtesy.

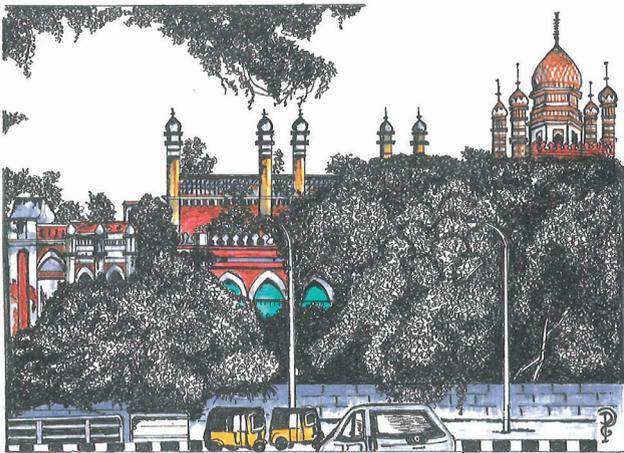
for several successful ventures in the future. Several interesting anecdotes pepper the narrative in Lakshminarayanan’s memoirs. Written with a fine sense of humour, charmingly self-deprecatory at times, they bring to light the varied circumstances and challenges that face public servants in the line of duty. One amusing incident worth recounting is the way the bundobust was handled when the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, the spiritual and secular heads of Tibet respectively, visited Madras at the same time as guests of the Government of India. The dictum was that they had to be treated absolutely the same, though they lived under separate roofs. With their respective followers on the lookout for any favoured attention to the other, in addition to China watching out for any offense to their ‘Marxist protégé’ (the Panchen Lama), it was a diplomatic disaster waiting to happen, one that he says would have advanced the “Border war by a few years”.

Lakshminarayanan’s tenure as DGP began in January 1985. Though it was a short one, it was marked by several internal and external initiatives aimed at creating a better work environment. He strongly believed that a Police Chief had to be a Public Relations Expert, as it was the public’s goodwill that was their biggest strength. He organised initiatives such as police-public sport meets to build rapport with the public. He also addressed several gatherings, including students, in a manner empathetic to their difficulties. He was accessible to every officer and saw to it that their grievances were redressed by him to the greatest extent possible. Even after retirement, he continued to mentor several policemen.

His passing truly marks the end of an era.

● Pavithra’s Perspective

Jewel in the Crown



The first time I attempted to find Chepauk Palace, my driver and I drove in endless circles around Victoria Hostel Road, finally coming to a stop behind a dignified red-brick structure. “Madam, I asked everyone, and this is the palace,” my driver informed me, flinging out his hand with a flourish.

In front of my dismayed eyes stretched a long clothesline, hung with underwear.

This, I felt, could not possibly be the Chepauk Palace. It may no longer be the fantastic creation dreamed up by Paul Benfield, embellished with awe-inspiring cupolas, arches, curlicues and columns, and no longer the much-vaunted residence of the Nawabs of Arcot – but I defied any palace, old or new, to greet me with underwear.

I spent the next three years hunting the area in vain, looking for the holy grail it seemed, spurred on by historical and eyewitness accounts, but never finding it. So mythical seemed this historical structure that I despaired of ever seeing it – and my disappointment worsened each time some heritage enthusiast exulted that he or she had glimpsed its glory and walked in its hallowed grounds.

They say that once you’ve given up on what you seek, it seeks you. And one day, as I was rumbling along Wallajah road, returning to the beach, I stopped at a traffic signal. My bored eyes drifted above the tree-line – above the flyover – and landed on a turret. And there, in front of my dazed, unbelieving eyes, rose the top of Chepauk Palace, a glorious façade of red, white and ochre, set off by the rich green of trees.

Although I eventually did visit Chepauk Palace, its first view was what held me in thrall – which I’ve presented through this miniature. Happy Madras Week!

Description: 3.5” by 5” approximately
Medium: Steadtler Fineliners, colour.

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

● by Karthik Bhatt

would last till the end of his life – in a late 2018 interview with this writer, he recounted how he rushed to the premises to check on the state of the building on the day of the tsunami!). Following the training at Madurai, he was posted to Chingleput as Assistant Superintendent of Police and thus began his illustrious journey.

In his career, Lakshminarayanan had several stints at the national level. His first one was in 1954, when he was sent on deputation to the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi. A few years later, he was posted in the Special Police Establishment where he became ‘one of the midwives’ of the Central Bureau of Investigation which was setup in 1963. His tenure with the CBI lasted for seventeen years and would see him rise almost to the top rank. Following the reorganisation of the Bureau and the subsequent creation of the Economic Offences Wing, he was appointed its Deputy Inspector General.

His biggest moment on the

However, the return of the Congress government in 1980 saw several changes in the corridors of power, and the CBI was no exception. The top post would elude Lakshminarayanan, who returned to Tamil Nadu as the Inspector-General of Police, Planning. This would mark the beginning of his ascent to the top post of DGP five years later.

Lakshminarayanan considered his stint with the Tamil Nadu Police Housing Corporation as one of the most satisfying ones in his career, as it presented him with the opportunity to help the constabulary. The organisation was setup in 1981 to build houses for retired and retiring policemen. The project was the first of its kind in the country when he was appointed its Managing Director and later, Chairman. Its first project, the construction of around 800 houses with bio-gas facilities in Trichy, was completed at a commendably low cost of approx. Rs.75 per square feet and paved the way

The Stars of RK Salai (sorry Edward Elliots Road)

I usually write this series avoiding the personal pronoun but this episode requires it. I have recently moved residence from R.A. Puram, where the family roosted for decades, to Mylapore, where the family roosted for decades earlier. And the process of shifting no matter how well planned, was chaotic in the extreme with socks and shoes being separated from their respective pairs, some beloved objects d'art vanishing (sadly forever) and whatever was made of glass arriving in broking condition. Among the last-named were some treasured clocks and that meant I had to contact my good friend 'Clock' Srinivasan.

Unlike certain people who can be very reluctant about disclosing the source of their treasures, I am an open book. I was introduced to 'Clock' Srinivasan by actor Mohan Raman, who also is an open book. Mohan collects clocks and they tick noisily all over his lovely house. The man who ensures that they tick away in perfect health is Srinivasan. When my humble collection of three clocks (a Junghans, a Seth Thomas and a Tudor) began to have mysterious ailments it was to Srinivasan I turned and he worked wonders. The Srinivasan system I noticed involves, apart from a thorough knowledge of dials, levers, springs, needles, jewels and such things, a comforting bedside manner. He caresses the clocks, coos to them and while probing their innards, does so in the manner of a trained surgeon. The clocks respond well to his treatment and have run for years.

The shift however, proved traumatic. The Junghans recovered by itself but not so the Tudor, which had a seizure at 5.30 pm one day and remained paralysed ever since. As for the Seth Thomas, the glass casing of its dial had splintered. And so the call went to Srinivasan. He promised to land up after calling within a couple of days. I explained to him that I had moved from R.A. Puram to R.K. Salai, Mylapore. Where was that asked Srinivasan. I explained that I meant Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai to which his reply was Oh, did I mean Edward Elliots Road? I was somewhat taken aback, for I had not heard that name in a few years. I said yes and then proceeded to explain where precisely I lived.

Srinivasan cut me short and said that he would land up near the residence of the Travancore

Sisters – Lalitha-Padmi (for some reason, old timers rarely add Ragini to the list) and call me. Once again I hesitated, for I did not want to tell the old man that the house which he referred to, had long gone, having made way for a commercial building. A similar announcement had had a devastating effect on an uncle a few years earlier, when he came from the US on a holiday. "What! Lalitha-Padmi's house is no more?" he had said and sunk into a deep gloom. A day prior to his departure we drove down RK Salai to the place

for the Rajahs of Sivaganga, it was owned by C. Rajam, the founder of the Madras Institute of Technology who later sold it to S.S. Vasan. The movie mogul was in need of a house, what with his wanting to gift *Sudarsan*, his then residence on the same road, to his daughter. Today both *Gemini House* and *Sudarsan* are gone, the former making way for the gloomy Acropolis, a glass and concrete structure that towers over the road and the latter now an empty plot awaiting development.

Srinivasan duly arrived at

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

where the house stood. He got out, sighed deeply, walked disconsolately to and fro and then we drove back home in silence. Till date I do not know as to what was achieved.

Anyway, the day of Srinivasan's ministering to my clocks duly arrived and he called at 9.00 am. "I am just driving past S.S. Vasan's house," he announced.

Did he notice that the house was no longer there I wondered? Old *Gemini House*, formerly *India House*, was such a thing of beauty. Said to have been built

what was once Lalitha-Padmi's home and called me from there. The sisters, along with other sibling Ragini, owned considerable property on EE Road and the IX Street that ran perpendicular to it. A few years ago, Lakshmi Sundaram, a long time resident of the same area had written an article for *Madras Musings* about the star sisters and their homes, now all gone. A pictorial archive of the sisters while living here survives in author Betsy Woodman's blog (www.betsywoodman.com). The American had accompanied her parents



S.S. Vasan, wife Pattammal and son Balasubramaniam at the terrace of Gemini House. Picture courtesy: Ananda Vikatan.

to Madras when her father was posted at the US consulate here in the 1950s. They had lived next door to the Travancore Sisters and formed a lifelong friendship. During those times, EE Road was a vast empty stretch leading to the beach, with deep-set bungalows on both sides. A star like Lalitha could cycle home from Gemini Studios without being noticed or mobbed and she did so on several occasions.

All this and more came to mind as I waited at my door for Srinivasan to come. He reminded me of my uncle when he said mournfully that Lalitha-Padmi's house was no longer there, as also M.L. Vasanthakumari's, the singer living opposite the stars, at the corner of IX Street. Her house was called *Vidyashankar*, named as a portmanteau after her two children – Sri Vidya and Shankar Raman. It was MLV's close friendship with the Travancore Sisters, and she sang playback for countless songs of theirs, which resulted in Sri Vidya taking to dance and later, films.

"The metal grilles on Padmi's house were so special," said Srinivasan with a shake of his head. "Oh by the way sir, why did you not tell me you lived just behind E.V. Saroja's house? I would have arrived here much faster." The great lawyer T.R. Venkatarama Sastry owned a huge plot of land on what eventually became RK Salai, III Street. Four bungalows – *Srinivas*, *Srivatsa*, *Sadhana* and *Kaustubha* – stood in it. Of these, *Sadhana* still survives, as

the Clark's School for the Deaf. It was *Kaustubha* that E.V. Saroja owned later. I wanted to ask Srinivasan if he did not notice the multi-storeyed building that had come on Saroja's plot after it had served time as *Yogalakshmi Kalyana Mandapam*. But then I decided not to wake him up from his world and bring him into reality. We went indoors discussing dials, jewels, levers, springs, needles and other such matters.

Remembering Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy (1925-2019).

Full of laughter and of love

She was as mercurial as the monsoon winds and as life giving.

Mrs. Y.G.P. as she was known to the generations of her students and their parents has been remembered with affectionate tributes and heartfelt gratitude by celebrities and entrepreneurial professionals.

It might take a village to create a child as the well-known title of a book goes. But it takes a Mrs. YGP to create a new generation of well-rounded individuals growing up post-Independence

This is not a fable about a smithy and a tree, but about a most colourful bird we have in Chennai and its relation to a fast-growing tree. In the course of this article, we will get to know about both and discover where the twain meet.

The most flamboyant bird in our city is undoubtedly the crimson-breasted barbet or the Coppersmith, though it is less common than another colourful bird, the rose-ringed parakeet (*Pachaiikkili*). The Coppersmith barbet is small and rather unobtrusive among the green leaves it frequents but many would have heard its call 'thuk....thuk....thuk....', like the sound made by coppersmiths of yesteryear beating copper into shape. The Coppersmiths' only vocalisation, this sound can be heard regularly in the mornings, evenings and sometimes even throughout the hottest hours of the day, especially if the bird is looking for a mate. The volume and tempo of the calls may vary but the sound is such a unique characteristic that it is easily attributed to the bird. It bursts forth from within the leafy branches of trees or at times from an exposed tip, but it is often difficult to spot the caller - the bird is a natural ventriloquist. If you manage to see the calling bird through a pair of binoculars, the throat can be seen to expand and contract while the bird turns its head in different directions, though the beak may or may not be open. This could be the reason why we find it difficult to place its call.

This barbet seems to have adapted well to our city. In my part of Chennai, they were absent when we came more than

twenty-five years ago but at present, they are quite common. Once I saw as many as eight sitting on the top branches of the Tulip tree as if they were at an official meeting. It seems to prefer the Tulip tree (*Spathodea campanulata*) for nesting as I have spotted them mostly on this tree - we have about twenty Tulip trees in our complex. The wood is soft even when green, and it has many branches of the correct size and length for the bird to carve out its nest. Sometimes the branches die as a result of previous nest building activity and that makes it more attractive for making new nests if the tree limb is long enough. The entrance is 3 to 3.5cm in diameter and it enlarges to a width of 6-7cm and reaches a depth of 18-20cm. The barbet carves out a fresh nest for each breeding season. On searching the internet, I found that barbets the world over find the trees of the *Spathodea* family very suitable to nest in. Earlier, I had reservations about this fast-growing tree planted all over the city as it affords convenient junctions for the crows also to procreate and multiply. But over the years, I have found that the Tulip tree has much to be said in favour of it.

The flowers are very attractive and carry a lot of nectar. It

The Coppersmith and the Tulip Tree

is even called the Squirt tree as squeezing the flower bud at the correct stage gives a shower of nectar. Mynas, bulbuls and parakeets visit it very often during the flowering season. The pollen in the long pistils get attached to the head and breast of the feeders and gets cross pollinated when the birds go to another flower. The rose-ringed parakeets and palm squirrels break open the seed pods and feed on the packed seeds. I have noticed this behaviour only in the past few years, so it may be a recent adaptation. The Tulip tree has also survived the few cyclones we have had in the past twenty-five years. The leaves of the tree and weaker branches are blown away by the initial winds and when the strong breeze arrives, it doesn't harm the main trunk. Our trees are not more than a foot thick but stand over three stories high with the leaf canopy above the terrace. Maybe a combination of factors has protected them from succumbing to the cyclones despite the soft wood, such as minimal canopy, proximity of tall buildings, strong roots etc. The only drawback I find is that the trijunctions of branches provide great sites for crow nests as I pointed out earlier. If only we can improve our waste collection practices by implementing



Above: The Coppersmith barbet. Left: The flower of the Tulip tree - a rich source of nectar.

segregation, covering trash bins, consciously stop giving handouts to crows etc., we can prevent crows and street dogs from using them as food sources, reducing their nuisance proliferation. Perhaps we can then plant more Tulip trees to enable our colourful Coppersmiths to increase in numbers!

(*Spathodea campanulata* has also been called African Tulip because of its origins in Africa, but Dr. H. Santapau in his book *Common Trees* prefers to name it the Tulip tree.)

Rajaram

C2 29, 4th Seaward Road
Valmiki Nagar
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years. He loved his teachers and because he became known as the "Whizz of Quizz" quite enjoyed his role as the Mrs. YGP's star Parsi student. Inevitably there was a denouement. My Mother met Mrs. YGP at a musical event at Bharat Kalachar and told her how much she appreciated what the school was doing for her grandson.

"Vikram Doctor? Your grandson? I thought he was a Parsi." Thus was the truth out. From that moment onwards he had to join the Suryanamaskar devotees. In the process, he too joined the YGP devotees in a relationship that lasted long after he left the school. The friends he made there are still amongst those to whom he feels the closest bond.

Arjun Mukerjee another student from Sishya, was more rebellious than Vikram. Perhaps being a Bengali, he tried his best to break the unwritten imposed at the PSBB and became a hero for the other boys as the unofficial rebel at PSBB.

genuinely apprehensive by the "Thought Police" and its methods of harvesting minds.

When it seemed inevitable that my son, Vikram had to join the PSBB after a short stint at Sishya, I stayed away from meeting the person I had been told would be the redoubtable Mrs. YGP. I had already been dismayed by the cramped cor-

band went, charmed her with his professional chatter and Vikram was duly installed.

Whether because of the strange surname, or whether due to some dubious attempt to mislead the Staff at PSBB, for the first year, Vikram managed to pass off as a Parsi boy. This allowed him to bunk the daily prayers, the various seasonal pujas and any other efforts to inculcate what Mrs. YGP believed was the bedrock of her mission as an educationist. That is to inspire a way of life that would both be culturally and ethically Hindu. Being essentially what people call as 'swot' Vikram enjoyed both the challenge of competing with his peers who came with all the rigor of what for better terms I shall have to call a typical "TamBrahm" upbringing and some of the extra-curricular activities that the School encouraged in its later

poration yellow painted building the tiny cemented courtyard at the centre of the U-shaped classrooms that served as both open air auditorium and sports arena, not to mention the regimented buzz of the electronic announcements being made military style. Instead, my hus-

letting students discover themselves through a process of total freedom. It sounds foolishly idealistic now. Perhaps in the years after the Two World Wars in Europe the idea of bootstrapping young minds into a rigid curriculum appeared cruel. It was a movement against too much rigid control by parents, by educational systems, but more oppressively by the State. Long before 1984 and many years before the now completely normal presence of the electronic media in all our lives, some of us were

To continue on a more personal note, as a Sixties parent, I had been influenced by the ideas of A.S. Neill, the founder of a movement that believed in



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

1. As per the recently passed Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2019, for how many years can a Muslim individual practicing instant triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) be jailed?
 2. Who recently became the first cricketer in history to smash 1000 runs and take 100 wickets in Twenty20 Internationals?
 3. On July 28, Egan Bernal became the first from the southern hemisphere to win which coveted annual sporting event?
 4. In recognition of this Bharat Ratna's contribution to "the culture of peace and freedom", the United Nations passed a resolution declaring July 18 as what day?
 5. Which year has the PM set as a target to eradicate Tuberculosis (TB) in India against the global deadline of 2030?
 6. Name the lunar orbiter and rover that was launched as part of Chandrayaan-2 on July 22.
 7. Which southern Indian State became the first in India to reserve 75% private jobs for locals?
 8. Name the recently-elected equivalent of Narendra Modi in the UK?
 9. What unfortunate dubious first has the Scaly-Foot snail achieved?
 10. Name the 1,000-year-old Shiva Temple in Sialkot city of Pakistan, which sealed for last 72 years, was recently re-opened for devotees.
- * * *
11. Who has been chosen for the coveted 'Sangita Kalanidhi' Award this year?
 12. Name the yesteryear actor & cousin of the renowned educationist Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy.
 13. The famous lamps from which town have been given a GI tag?
 14. Who is the only TN Governor to have served two terms in office?
 15. Name the CMs from the State to have won the Bharat Ratna.
 16. For which herbivore was the Vallanadu sanctuary in Tuticorin created?
 17. Who wrote the Tamil lyrics to the famous 'Kalyana Samayal Saadhnam'?
 18. Whose statue originally stood on the pedestal where K. Kamaraj's statue now stands outside the Gymkhana Club?
 19. Which region in Nilgiris recorded the wettest 24 hours ever to be seen in the State, breaking a 76-year record?
 20. Which bustling area in Chennai started as the West Madras Neighbourhood Scheme?

(Answers on page 12)

From Bihar to Chennai, and back global

(Continued from last fortnight)

Italian, Spanish, Thai and the many 'Chinese' restaurants are no threat to the local cuisine. Idli, Dosai, Vada, Upma, Utthapam etc. have gained global popularity. Just now they are the most popular non-local dish even in my village in Bihar. Pizza is yet to reach there, but idli and dosai frequently appear on our tables, and upma and utthapam are no strange names even there. Besides, no one has ever come to grief because of overeating idli-dosa. You cannot overeat idli-dosa. They are digested as soon as they are eaten. Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), a Bihari, asked for idlis as soon as he was allowed anything substantial after a surgery at Seattle. Idli hit the headlines it always deserved.

Tamil cuisine in chutney and pickles has also gained global popularity. Unlike in Andhra and Telangana, chilly is certainly not oppressive here. Chettinad food at times transgresses the redline, but then no culture caters only to the meek, and none but the brave deserve the 'fare'! Chilly has been at the crest of India's spicy culture, though some may say that this honour should go to pepper, which goes best only with *bishi bela bath*, popular only with those that speak Tamil in English accent.

Chilly, the crown jewel of *desi* cuisine, has reached perfection in its Tamil edition. Imagine eating Idly with a pepper-chutney, or curd-rice, *thaiyar saadam*, without fried pickle! You may as well eat sambhar without salt. Chennai may not have the hottest chilly in the world, yet no one has used it better. Chilly is used here in different hues, from green, as in *kothamalli chutney*, mildly hot; to fried brown, as with *thayir saadhnam*, hot but not hostile on tongue; or blood red, as in *Vengaayam chutney* – fit only for the brave. In Chennai, chilli can be fried, boiled, shredded, or powdered before it appears on your plate. Telangana has it only in take-it-or-leave-it formats, like arranged marriages! Chilly, by the Buckingham Canal, goes like a love-affair in old MGR films – there are songs, dances, flirting and courting in an unhurried pace to culmination in some tastefully decorated *kalyan mandapam* resonating with at least three *naadaswaram* and one *thavil* going together. You could dance or dream with chilly soaked in curd, then dried and fried before landing on your tongue!

But just as the British are yet to make up their mind concerning chilly, they like it in no dish except *vindaloo*, which they must have on Saturday evenings, so that they can stay home on Sunday. Tamil cuisine is slightly confused with onion-garlic. Chennai can be best classified as pro- and anti-onion. Street after street can be marked as onion-eating and non-eating, non-*piyaajii* or *piyaajii*, using the Hindi name of its lovely shade of colour. Tenants and brides are selected accordingly. I can never apologise adequately to a colleague who turned up at every party organised by me, and ate only *thayir saadhnam*. I learnt too late that he could eat nothing else since they all had onion!

But onion or no onion, *Dosai-Idli* restaurants have business as usual. At lunch, you may have to wait for a vacant table at places like Woodlands, Mylapore; Sangeetha, Adyar; Saravana Bhavan, T Nagar or Cathedral Road, or even at new joints like Murugan Idli. The joint in the garden opposite American Consulate on the Cathedral Road, the drive-in Woodlands, was a popular place. Most cooks there were from Palaghat or Udupi. After a seminar at the American Consulate, my good friend Elango brought me here one day. Until then, I had not even imagined that a broom could also be a kitchen tool, but that is how oil was spread upon the metre-long *Dosa* pan here, with a broom. How creative and how practical! This was customised mass production. And guests had the option of eating inside on a table, or taking their order out and eating under any tree in that orchard of the unusual size literally in the heart of the city. Alas, it is history now. Its stone could as well read: **'Here rests the memory of brooms that produced poetry on pans of steel'!**

J.P. reminds me of how names are shrunk, especially in Chennai. It may not be easy to call someone Sadasivan Thirunalvelli Balasubramaniam. By the time you finish, you forget why you called him. So use S.T.B, or S.B, T.B instead! Thus you have C.R for Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari, TTK for Thattai Thiruvellore Krishnamachari etc. Names of places are also abbreviated in Chennai. You have K.K Nagar, J.J Nagar, and, in the heart of the city, T.Nagar for Theyagaraya Nagar. Mostly only curious outsiders know this name of this almost 1 sq.km

shopping area that sells everything from *puu*, flower, and *kathrikaai*, brinjal, to diamonds. It receives more customers than any other retail market in the world, and it takes more than money to buy there – it takes the art of navigating through 50 per cent of the population of Canada drawn in 1 sq.km! Buy one take three, 70 per cent discount for regular customers, shopping vouchers, etc. attract more customers of the real sort. T.Nagar has produced more and better marketing ideas than Philip Kotler, the marketing guru of B schools! Though under-recognised, it has produced more literature than any other sq.km., composed by those that became martyrs waiting for their wives and shopping bags to emerge from Nalli's, Pothy's and Saravana Stores! T.Nagar deserves an epic by itself!!

● by Shreesh Chaudhary
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One evening with our five year old grandson, my wife and I were going to a wedding in Chetpet. It was a long way from Taramani. The boy was bored, as boys without Cartoon Network, internet or *kurkure* naturally are; so while here, I told our grandson that we were now crossing T. Nagar, soon we would be in Chetpet. And then I asked him if he understood what T. Nagar meant. He said yes, but did this place also have a chocolate nagar, he asked! He was not being sarcastic, he was just suggesting if the grandfather would gather some courage and halt for a minute by one of the many wayside kiosks there!

I do not think Kolkata has a C.R.D Avenue, for Chittranjan Das Avenue, or Patna has a D.R.P Marg for Deshratna Rajendra Prasad Marg, or an L.N.J.P Marg for a Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Marg, or... But Tamil ingenuity and instinct to innovate has other manifestations best seen in the way they chop and use their own long names in pronounceable chunks. So a Balasubramani could become Bala, Balu, Subbu or Mani. Srinivasan could become Srini or Srinu; following rise in traffic between Chennai and New York, P.M. Krishnamurthi is not just P.M.K, he is also Krish now! And Subbu is changing into Subs, rhyming with cubes! But then there may be more than one Balu or one Sreenu/Sreeni or Krish in any group. We had two Balus in our office, they

were both fair and tall, their wives were called Laxmi, their sons were called Gopal, etc. But Tamil genius had an answer-one was Typist Balu, the other was Draughtsman Balu. Maximizing returns on investment is part of the Tamil genius.

Tamil speakers know that their names are long and difficult for others to pronounce. Not all can manage Sezhian and Tenmozhi. But they do not mind mispronunciation by others. Devaki showed unfathomable levels of generosity in forgiving our German colleague who kept calling her as divaki, rhyming with lucky, just as the British could not be kept away from the Himalaya, the Ganges, etc. Newscasters in Delhi regularly play havoc with Tamil names, rendering Jayalalitha with an aspiration. But friends in Chennai do not mind; as long as Jayalalitha is not rendered as Sasikala, they understand and forgive.

Mispronunciation of names, actually, is mutual. Not many Tamils are famous for pronouncing or writing non-Tamil names properly. Many north-Indians in Chennai have difficulty finding *poori*, the deep-fried wheat flour bread, in *boori*; or *paratha* in *baroda*, or *barotta*, etc. But they manage and move on. What leaves them annoyed is when they find 'Pawan' written as 'Baban', meaning vomit in Hindi; or "Gupta" written as "Kutta", meaning dog in Hindi – not a very respected animal for most. Gupta came from Jharkhand to Chennai decades ago, with only heart within and God above. But Chennai treated him kindly, and he now goes catering upto Bangalore and Coimbatore, has a house, a vehicle, staff and wife and children now, the last attending expensive schools and colleges in Chennai. But he was in a murderous mood recently when he saw that his voter card read "Manoj Kutta". It took him some time to reconcile to the fact that this card would be used only once in five years, if he had nothing else to do that day, and only he would know what else it meant and he could keep it safely away!

Errors are not tolerated on wedding cards, mostly bi-lingual now. Here, every word from *Ramajayam* or *kotisuuryasamaprabhaah* to B.Tech (Comp. Sc., IIT-Madras) must be printed correctly, exactly as specified by the family. Wedding is a big industry in Chennai. From cards to return gifts, there are

(Continued on page 11)



MADRAS WEEK '19

August 18 to August 25

Updated till August 12th

August 17-18, 2019

Exhibitions: Anna Nagar Exhibition: *Panels on History of Anna Nagar* by Ar.Thirupurasundari, Anna Nagar Social History Group, Nam veedu, Nam oor, Nam Kadhai. *Household Heritage Display* by Mr. Venkatraman Prabakaran and Ar. Sivagamasundari T. Time : 10:00 am to 6:00 pm. Venue: Joy of Books, Anna Nagar (JBAN), T 88, 5th Main Road, Anna Nagar, Chennai 600 040. For details, registrations and other enquiries: phone : 00-91-9444253532. Email: annanagarshg@gmail.com.

August 17, 2019

Heritage Walk: *Naduvakkalai to Anna Nagar* (the Tower Park – Ayyapan temple side entrance) organised by Nam veedu, Nam oor, Nam Kadhai. 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. For further details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com; phone: 00-91-9444253532

Heritage walks/tours: *George Town Chronicles* – Audio Tour. Organised by Urban Design Collective. From 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. Start and ends at the Chennai Beach Station. Fee: Rs. 500 per person. To register, visit <https://tinyurl.com/urbanaudiotour>

Talk: Veteran actor M.N. Nambiar – by Dipak Nambiar. 11.00 a.m. Organised by Madras Literary Society. Venue: Madras Literary Society, DPI Campus, College Road, Nungambakkam. Entry Fee: Free for MLS Members, Non-members: Rs.100. For details: 28279666, 9444 253 532

Walk: *Butterfly watching with Mahil:* A walk for children aged 6+, at the Kotturpuram Tree Park from 10 a.m.– 11 a.m. To register call 9445028067. Organised by Nizhal.

Nature Walk: *Butterfly Walk at Adyar Poonga* – organised by Madras Naturalists' Society. Reporting Time: 2.15 p.m. Group Size: 25. Please bring along binoculars and cameras. For confirmation email: Vijay at gopivkumar58@gmail.com. Confirmation strictly on first-come basis. Car parking, entrance and camera fees payable as per poonga rules.

Walk: *Marina Scrolls.* Organised by Urban Design Collective. From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Starts at Napier Bridge and ends at Marina Lighthouse. Fee: Rs. 500 per person (including visit to the lighthouse). To register, visit <https://tinyurl.com/urbanaudiotour>

Talk: *Sounds of Madras – an auditory experience* by School of Indian Film Music. 3.00 p.m. Organised by Madras Literary Society. Venue: Madras Literary Society, DPI Campus, College Road, Nungambakkam. For details: 28279666, 9444 253 532. Entry Fee: Free for MLS Members, Non-members: Rs.100.

Quiz: on Madras/Chennai to be conducted by a senior citizen. Open to all senior citizens in the respective areas. No registration required. Organised by Dignity Foundation. Venue: Thiruvanmiyur Theneer Arangam. No: 1 & 2, Kokila Dwani, No: 4 (Old: 33), Balakrishna Road, Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai 600 041. Time: 4 p.m.

Talk: *Statues, stories and scandals:* Venkatesh Ramakrishnan. ARKAY Convention Centre. Organised by Madras Local History Group. 5.30 p.m.

Book Launch: *Be the Book* by Padmini Viswanathan and Aparna Kamakshi. Special Guests: Sriram V. (Writer and Entrepreneur), Seetha Ravi (Kalki) at Odyssey, Adyar, 6.30 p.m.

Talk: *Devan-highlighting humour in Madras:* Jayaraman Raghunathan. ARKAY Convention Centre. Organised by Madras Local History Group. 6.45 p.m.

Competition: Social History of Anna Nagar through Power point/Scrapbook. **Make your Social history album/Scrap book. Age: 8-16 (individual) Submission: on or before August 15th 2019;** Event will be held on August 17, 2019.

Start with a 4 generation family tree (minimum), add pictures, plan of your house (before and now), write stories, add function invitations, postcards, sketches etc. – and how your family moved to Anna Nagar, when? Why? How your family history is related to Anna Nagar. For further details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com; phone: 00-91-9444253532

Competition: Video or Power Point Presentation.

Age: 15 and above; No of persons: 2 to 5. Submission: On or before August 15, 2019

How did your family move to Anna Nagar, when? why? How is your family history related to Anna Nagar?

Prizes will be distributed and selected works will be displayed and felicitated in the Anna Nagar Social history exhibition, which is to be conducted in August (once you register for the event the venue details will be communicated).

For further details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com ; phone : 00-91-9444253532

August 18, 2019

Tour: *Wanderlust's Manimangalam Lake Safari.* A collaborative effort by Wanderlust Travel Lounge in Saveria and The Environmental Foundation of India. The morning trip is inclusive of travel from Hotel Saveria and back with breakfast and an edutaining talk by environmental activist Arun Krishnamoorthy. Rs. 1500 per head. 6 a.m. Organised by Saveria Hotel. Enquiry: 99628 12663 & 95148 95141 / Email: wanderlust.saveria@gmail.com

Nature Walk: *Kelambakkam Backwaters* – organised by Madras Naturalists' Society. Reporting Time: 6.30 a.m. Reporting place: Bridge on OMR-ECR Link Road at Kelambakkam. Group Size: 25. Please bring along binoculars & cameras. For confirmation email Vijay at gopivkumar58@gmail.com. Confirmation strictly on first-come basis.

Tour: Royal Madras Yacht Club – led by K.R.A. Narasiah, Historian and Writer. An opportunity to walk inside the harbour and see the heritage sites with experts. Time: 6.30-8.30 a.m. Mail to: rmycheritagewalkandsail@gmail.com mentioning the date, number of participants, name of each participant, sex, age, govt-issued ID Aadhar or driving licence attached with the mail for passes to be issued for entry into the harbour. Charges: Rs. 1200 per head inclusive of GST. Limited registrations on first come first serve basis.

Tree Walk: Anna Nagar Tower Park from 8-9 a.m. To register call 9445028067. Organised by Nizhal.

Exhibition: *Vintage Bicycles exhibition.* The second edition of the Vintage Bicycle Exhibition is back and this time with more attractions. Other than vintage brands including Raleigh, Humber, Rudge, Phillips, BSA, Hercules, Robinhood, Paratrooper bicycles of Second World War period on special display is the Pierce Bicycle of early 1900's. Also in the exhibits are varieties of Vintage bicycle lamps (oil, kerosene, candle models), dynamos, saddle bags, bicycle licenses, manuals, bell and tricycles. Contact: Ramanujar Moulana: 9884023123.

Food Walk: *Triplicane Food Walk.* Organiser: Sridhar Venkataraman (97909 57208), @foodwalkchennai (Twitter). Starting point: Entrance of Parthasarathy Temple (near Tank). 5-7 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: Tulsi Badrinath on *Swami Vivekananda and his 'Madras Boys'*. 6. 30 p.m. Chamiers, Chamiers Road. All Chennai Heritage lectures are planned with refreshments being served for the first half hour, followed by the actual programme which will be for 45 mins followed by Q&A.

Exhibition & Talk: Heritage Car Display, Exhibition and Talk at Ramachandra Convention Hall, Thiruvanmiyur. Organised by INTACH, Chennai Chapter.

Competition: *Quiz on Anna Nagar.* Registration: before August 15, 2019. For further details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com; phone : 00-91-9444253532.

Competition: Drawing Competition – Junior Level/ Senior Level (Age 2 to 5, 6 to 11, 11 and above). (Topic on the spot). Registration: before August 15, 2019 and will be held on August 18, 2019. For further details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com; phone: 00-91-9444253532.

August 19, 2019

Presentation: *Medicare History of Madras* by Sriram V. Organised by Press Institute of India. Venue: Press Institute of India Conference Hall, II Main Road, Taramani, CPT Campus, Chennai 600 113 (behind M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and adjacent to the Asian College of Journalism). For details contact: 9042231343. Refreshments: 4:30 pm and the programme starts at 5 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: *Madras Uncensored – behind the phenomenal growth of Tamil stand-up comedy* anchored by Vinodhini Vaidyanathan, theatre and film actor and with Annamalai L of Tanglish Comedy (@annamalai1111), Jagan Krishnan (@iamjaggenius) and Guru Nicketan (@nicketronix) on how Tamil stand-up is leading the regional language comedy scene. The Folly, Amethyst, Whites Road. 6.30 p.m.

August 20, 2019

Exhibition: Inauguration of photo exhibition and remembering late Mr. S. Muthiah. Organised by the Consulate General of the United States of America. 1-2 p.m. By invitation.

Quiz: on Madras/Chennai to be conducted by a senior citizen. Open to all senior citizens in the respective areas. No registration required. Organised by Dignity Foundation. Venue: Anna Nagar Theneer Arangam. No. 132 (Old No: 52), AK block, 7th Main Road, Anna Nagar, Chennai 600 040. Time: 4 p.m.

Presentation: *Siva Temples of Mylapore* by Chithra Madhavan. Organised by Press Institute of India. For details contact: 9042231343. Venue: Press Institute of India. Refreshments: 4:30 pm and the programme starts at 5 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: S. Sowmya in conversation with Sriram V. on her journey in music. The Park. 6.30 p.m.

Film screening: *The Story of Madras... Chennai. The First City of Modern India* with narration by late Mr. S. Muthiah and direction by Sujatha Shankar. Duration: 55 minutes. Open to all. Alliance Française, Nungambakkam. 7.00 .pm.

Multimedia Presentation Contest for City Schools. This contest encourages city school students to explore Chennai's heritage and present the topic given to you in multi-media form. This contest has been held for the past 16 years. This event is supported by *Mylapore Times* and South India National Association (SINA), Luz. **Theme for 2019: Old stories of our neighbourhood.**

Guidelines: Choose three old shops (at least over 30/40 years in business) in your area which all have their own history and places in your area. Study the families who set them up, the old styles of business and marketing, the generational changes in each shop and their management and the old looks, character that remain. Take classy photos, make notes, talk to people in the know. Then, put it down in a snappy Power Point Presentation for the 'live' Contest. E-mail to – themadrasday@gmail.com – and get the okay from us BEFORE YOU START work on the project.

The contest is open to school children studying in classes 8 to 12. A school can send only one team. Each team MUST have 3 members and all 3 members must take turns to make this one presentation.

Tips:

1. Ask your school teacher-adviser to seek the approval of your theme from the organisers.
2. We look for multi-media rich projects so make sure your project has all features in it. Focus to be on heritage/histories.
3. The Power Point presentation must have only key points and visuals. Not packed with info. (On each slide, you must have a maximum of just 3 lines, each line 5 words only).
4. At the contest venue, your team of 3 students will take turns at the mike to present the project using the PP. You can use your notes for reference as you speak. The presentation in PowerPoint on the approved theme will have to be done by all the three participants. It can be done in English or in Thamizh or a mix!
5. The duration of the complete presentation – PowerPoint and Oral – should not exceed 10 minutes. Participants should be prepared to answer on-the-spot questions from the judges.
6. The PowerPoint presentation NEED NOT BE submitted to the organisers. The team should retain a copy of your project on a pen-drive or copy it to an electronic device and bring it to the venue of the contest. The organiser will provide a PC and a projector at the venue to help you make your presentation.
7. The contest is open to first 20 teams to register on first-come-first-serve basis.
8. **The contest will take place on Aug.20, Tuesday from 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. with a 30 mins. lunch break** (you need to bring your lunch!). Venue: Srinivasa Sastri Hall, Luz, Mylapore. (Report at 9 am to download your PP onto our PC)
9. The best THREE presentations will be awarded TROPHIES, gifts and certificates. All participants will be given certificates. The prizes will be given at about 3.30 pm.
10. Prizes will be awarded based on quality of research / quality of visuals and points / presentation format and answers to the questions posed by the judges.

August 21-31, 2019

Exhibition: *Exhibition on World War II and Madras:* by Venkatesh Ramakrishnan. The exhibition will be open from 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. on all days except Sundays. On August 31, Valedictory and talk by Venkatesh Ramakrishnan from 11 am. to 12.30 p.m. Venue: Madras Literary Society, DPI Campus, College Road, Nungambakkam. Entry Fee: Free for MLS Members, Non-members – Rs.100. For details: 28279666, 9444 253 532.

August 21, 2019

Quiz: on Madras/Chennai to be conducted by a senior citizen. Open to all senior citizens in the respective areas. No registration required. Organised by Dignity Foundation. Venue: Abiramapuram Theneer Arangam. Sundra Vilas, 54, 3rd Street, Abiramapuram, Chennai 600 018. Time: 4 p.m.

Quiz: *Madras and a slice of its sporting and film history* – conducted by Partab Ramchand. Organised by Press Institute of India. For details contact: 9042231343. Venue: Press Institute of India. Refreshments: 4:30 p.m. and the programme starts at 5 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: *Tribute to Crazy Mohan*. Maadhu Balaji in conversation with Baradwaj Rangan. Hanu Reddy Residences, Poes Gardens. 6.30 p.m.

August 22, 2019

Film: Screening of *The Anglo-Indians of Madras* – Case Study Pallavaram. Directed by Richard O'Connor and Harry MacLure. Cinematography by Nicholas Moses. Organised by Press Institute of India. For details contact: 9042231343. Venue: Press Institute of India. Refreshments: 4:30 p.m. and the programme starts at 5 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: *Muthiah Memorial Event: Panel discussion on Water Management*. Speakers: Ranganath N. Krishna, MD/CEO of Grundfos Pumps, Ashok Vardhan Shetty, IAS Retd and Karthikeya Sivasenapathy (Sivasenapathy Kangayam Cattle Research Foundation), moderated by Sushila Ravindranath. Savera. 6.30 p.m.

August 23, 2019

Lec-dem: *Thamizhisai in Christianity* by Nivedita Louis and Jasmine Wilson. Organised by Press Institute of India. For details contact: 9042231343. Venue: Press Institute of India. Refreshments: 4:30 p.m. and the programme starts at 5 p.m.

Talk: *Lokavidya – the route to employment, dignity, and regular income for all* by Amit Basole at Asian College of Journalism, Taramani. Organised by INTACH, Chennai Chapter. 5.30 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: Mohan Raman on *M.N. Nambiar, a Centenary Tribute*. Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. 7.00 p.m.

August 24, 2019

Talk: *Women in Sports in Madras – Golf* a talk by Jayashree Bharath. 10.00 a.m. Organised by Madras Literary Society. Venue: Madras Literary Society, DPI Campus, College Road, Nungambakkam. Entry Fee: Free for MLS Members, Non-members: Rs.100. For details: 28279666, 9444 253 532.

Heritage Walk: Be part of a unique heritage walk that takes you on a journey through the culture, art and history of South India with Kathai, Kalai, Parampariyam Walks at VR Chennai, Anna Nagar. Discover tales that have shaped South India, from the legends of the great dynasties of yore to the stories of the modern metropolis of Chennai, through installations, murals and more, which have been showcased at VR Chennai. Join historian Sriram V as he takes you on this unique journey with the Kathai, Kalai, Parampariyam Walks. 11.30 a.m. VR Chennai, Anna Nagar. For bookings <https://bit.ly/2Xwnm2c>.

Quiz: Madrasafactinam – an XQuizIt Madras Special quiz programme. Fundazone, Kasi Arcade, T. Nagar. 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Organized by XQuizit. Contact details: +91 9677116337 (Mahesh) +91 9841270711 (Arvind).

Talk: *History of the Buckingham Canal Project*: by K.R.A. Narasiah. 11.30 a.m. Organised by Madras Literary Society. Venue: Madras Literary Society, DPI Campus, College Road, Nungambakkam. Entry Fee: Free for MLS Members, Non-members: Rs.100. For details: 28279666, 9444 253 532.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: *Keeping Vikatan relevant over time* by B. Srinivasan, MD. The Vikatan Group. Residency Towers. 6.30 p.m.

Aug. 25, 2019

Heritage Walks / Tours: *Arcot Nawabs's trail in Triplicane and Mylapore*. Tour conducted by Kombai S Anwar (by van). To register: Call 94440 77171 or mail kaniyanheritage@gmail.com. The Nawabs of Arcot moved to Madras in the 1760s and built their palace at Chepauk,

thereby influencing the development around that area. Beginning from the *Chepauk Palace*, the walk takes you through the various monuments in and around Triplicane and Mylapore area associated with the Walajah Nawabs. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Assemble at: Wallajah Road entrance of Madras University, opposite to Statue of Labour, Marina Beach. Fee: Rs 800/- (includes Breakfast)

Heritage Walk: Dhenupurishwarar Temple, Madambakkam near Tambaram led by Dr. Chitra Madhavan. Organised by INTACH, Chennai Chapter. 6 a.m.

Tour: Royal Madras Yacht Club – led by Capt. Vivek Shanbhag. An opportunity to walk inside the harbour and see the heritage sites with experts. Time: 6.30 -8.30 a.m. Mail to: rmycheritagewalkandsail@gmail.com mentioning the event date, number of participants, name of each participant, sex, age, govt-issued ID Aadhar or driving licence attached with the mail for passes to be issued for entry into harbour. Charges Rs 1200 per head inclusive of GST. Limited registrations on first come first serve basis

Photowalk: *Photowalk for Children:* The First line and the bylanes of Parrys. Organised by YOCEE.in. The walk is led by N. Ramaswamy, Chennai Daily Photo & Chennai Photowalk. For children of 10 years and above. Parents can accompany, but kids have to do the clicking. Bring your own camera (any type). Carry your water bottle and dress easy. Start and end point: Dare House, Parrys Corner. Walk along the art deco buildings of the past and get to click parts of history and experience walking on the bylanes of the otherwise busy Parrys Corner. Register with Revathi at 9840544629 (SMS/Whatsap). Open to only first 25 registrations.

Walk: *The 10th Annual Living Statues of Marina Beach*. Organised by the Chennai Storytelling Association. At each statue – Kannagi, NSC Bose, Thiruvalluvar, George Pope, Bharathidasan, and Avvaiyar – there would be brief dramatic enactment of the character portrayed by that statue (in English and Tamil). The scripts in English are at: <http://storytellinginstitute.org/28.html>. Walk participants are also invited to recite, or read aloud, poetry by the poets: Thiruvalluvar, George Pope, Bharathidasan and Avvaiyar (in Tamil and in English translation).

Assemble at The Kannagi Statue on the Marina Beach, opposite to Bharathi Salai. To register: 9884728412. suriyalakshmi@icloud.com. Time: 7.30 a.m. onward (approximately to 8.30 a.m.)

Tour: *Observation Race at Chennai Snake Park*. Organised by the Madras Naturalists' Society in association with the Chennai Snake Park Trust. Reporting time: 6.15 a.m. Reporting place: Car park outside Chennai Snake Park, Sardar Patel Road. Group Size: 30. Children between the ages of 10 and 14. Children must carry School Id Card For confirmation email Vijay at gopivkumar58@gmail.com. Confirmation strictly on first-come basis. Car parking, entrance and camera fees payable as per Snake Park Rules.

Heritage Walks / Tours: *Trace Origin of Madras*. The 7th Annual TRACE ORIGIN OF MADRAS heritage-cum-ecology walk at Pazhaverkadu, Tiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu. This full-day event gives you an understanding of history and the land where the history of modern India started. From 7.00 a.m., from Loyola ICAM College gate, Mahalingapuram Main Road, Chennai. Donor pass: Rs. 1100/- Inclusive of AC-Bus trip, copy of research paper, lunch, water, and coffee with biscuits. Walk conducted by Xavier Benedict, Architect and Academician. More details and registration at <https://www.aarde.in/events/trace-origin-of-madras>.

Heritage Walk: *Breakfast with the Parsis, in Royapuram*. Organised by Rajith Nair of The Traveling Gecko. A unique visit to some Parsi properties at Royapuram along with an overview of the Community's history and heritage, led by community members. A sumptuous Parsi breakfast, courtesy: Tehnaz and Darius Bahadurji, will bring forth the community's love for good food and their generous hospitality. Registration: Max. 30. Last date for registration: August 21, 2019. Please send an email to rajith.bala@gmail.com. 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Meeting/Drop-off Point: Light House, Marina. In case you plan to arrange your own transport you can come directly to the Zoroastrian Temple Agiyari, West Madha Church St, Panaimarathotti, Pudumanaikuppam, Royapuram,

by 8:00 a.m. Charges: For those availing transportation arranged by us there will be a nominal charge per person to cover costs. There are NO charges for breakfast. Please share your meal preference: Vegetarian / Non-vegetarian.

Tree-Sure Hunt: How much do you know about trees? A tree-hunt for children (and adults) above 10 years, at the Kotturpuram Tree Park, from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. To register call 9445028067. Organised by Nizhal.

Quiz: *The Madras Open Quiz 2019* conducted by Quiz master Dr. Sumanth C Raman. Organised by Murugappa Group. Teams of two participants. No age limit. No prior registration. Exciting prizes and gift hampers for audience rounds. From 2.00 p.m. onwards. Venue: Madras Management Association, New no 240, Pathari Road, Off Anna Salai. Call: 044-25306595 / 25306350

Walk: *The Chetties of Chetpet and other stories* led by Sriram V. starts at 4.00 p.m. at Harrington Road/Village Road intersection. Prior registration is required at walks@chennaipastforward.com. Charges: Rs. 900 per person. Walk ends with a high tea.

Food Walk: Purasawalkam Food Walk. Organiser: Sridhar Venkataraman (97909 57208), @foodwalkchennai (Twitter) Starting point: Kakada Ramprasad, Ormes Road, Kilpauk. 5-7 p.m.

Talk: Chennai Heritage Lecture: Vikram Doctor on *Ten Iconic Food Books from Madras*. Radison Blu, Egmore. 6.30 p.m.

Till Aug 31, 2019

Food Fest: Savour the good old times with *Flashback Madras* – a food fest featuring heritage delicacies like Thavalai Vadai, Ellumichai Aval, Muparappu Vadai and more. Radisson Blu, Egmore. 3 p.m. - 7 p.m. For reservations, call 2231 0101.

Aug. 31, 2019

Walk: Rukmini Lakshmipathi Road (Marshalls Road) walk led by Sudha Umashanker. Starts at 7 a.m. To register contact 9840247624. Organised by Storycorner at Bookmine. Meeting point outside Raja Muthiah Hall.

Presentation: *Memorabilia of the English Nabobs and Madras* by Dr. Swapna Sathish. She is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Stella Maris College, Chennai, teaching art history and design for the past 18 years. She has served as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Association of British Scholars, Chennai chapter. This presentation focuses on the art and artifacts from the homes of the British 'nabobs' with a predominantly Madras connection, considering whether it was the intrinsic value of the objects that engendered these collections, an element of nostalgia or mere showmanship. The link between home and empire can be seen visually in the artefacts that were brought back. These 'nabobs' were in effect literally bringing home a piece of India, thus creating material proof of empire as part of the nation. Time: 11.00 a.m. (Tea 10.30 a.m.). Venue: QIAMS, #82, Sterling Road (Opposite to Loyola College, near Nungambakkam Railway Station). For details call: 044 4858 1896.

Heritage Walk: Fort St. George led by Sriram V. starts at 3.30 p.m. at Fort gate. Prior registration is required at walks@chennaipastforward.com. Charges: Rs. 900 per person.

Heritage Walk: *Experiencing the community dwellings of Triplicane* organised by Nam veedu, Nam oor, Nam Kadhai. 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Starting point: Pezhalwar street and temple junction – next to the temple car. For details, registrations and other enquiries email: annanagarshg@gmail.com ; phone : 00-91-9444253532

Food Walk: Mylapore Food Walk. Organiser: Sridhar Venkataraman (97909 57208), @foodwalkchennai (Twitter) Starting point: Indian Bank, NW corner of Mylapore Tank. 5-7 p.m.

Till Sep. 1, 2019

Exhibitions: *Celebrating Chennai Authors:* Grand display of books by over 200 authors from Chennai. Total number of authors from Chennai: 215. Number of titles: 500. Special Offer: 10% Off on purchase of any

two books. 15% Off on purchase of any three or more books. Odyssey – Adyar Store, No 45 and 47, First Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai 600020. Ph: 24453191. Odyssey – Thiruvanmiyur Store, SHIVANI, 40, East Coast Road, Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai 600 041. Ph: 42037799

September 1, 2019

Walk: George Town walk led by Sudha Umashanker. Starts at 7 a.m. To register contact 9840247624. Organised by Storycorner at Bookmine. Meeting point outside Dare House, Parrys Corner

September 7, 2019

Quiz: *Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz 2019* by Quiz Master Dr. Navin Jayakumar. This quiz is for school children from classes 5 to 12 and will be in English. Each team must have 3 members from the same school. Organised by Murugappa Group. **Last day to register: Tuesday, 3rd September, 2019.** Venue: Kamaraj Arangam, No 498, Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai 600006. Reporting time to the venue is 1 p.m. For details contact: 95000 11238, 96000 05932.

Competitions

Exhibition: *Shoot Madras 2019*, annual photographic contest conducted by Photographic Society of Madras. The contest, divided into three themes – Theme 1: Men/Women at Work@ Madras. Theme 2: Festivals of Madras. Theme 3: Water bodies of Madas. The contest is open to public as well as its members. The contest guidelines are available in <http://www.photomadrass.org/shoot-madrass-2019.php>. One participant can send a maximum of three pictures per theme. Entries should not be emailed to any other ID. Photos on CD or as prints are not accepted. The winning entries will be displayed in an Exhibition, the details of which will be announced later. Entries may be sent to shootmadrass.psm@gmail.com via <https://www.wetransfer.com> before 12.00 noon on August 15, 2019. Prize winning entries will be announced later.

* * *

Madras Week celebrations at Asan Memorial Senior Secondary School

The Asan Memorial Senior Secondary School is planning will be celebrating the Madras Day by bringing out the present water crisis faced by the Chennaites due to our own misuse of nature's bounty through the exhibits put up by the students dealing with the lakes that have vanished or are ill-maintained due to human encroachment, pollution and negligence.

The students will be displaying exhibits about what the lakes used to be like and its present state. There will be a skit in Tamil, a dance, a poem read in both Tamil and Malayalam, Speech in English, Tamil and Malayalam to highlight the mistakes made by human negligence and carelessness that future generation ought to be wary of and avoid at all costs.

The school plans to adopt an Eri which can be revived. A rally will be held to bring an awareness of the water bodies which have become extinct and to prevent further deterioration.

* * *

Kreeda, the organisation that revives traditional games, would like to invite you to a special Traditional Games Competition to Celebrate Madras Week. The games involved in the competition are those that were played in Madras through the ages.

We at Kreeda have always taken great efforts to take our traditional games to all sections of the population. Every year, during Madras Week, Kreeda has been identifying and playing games that are a part of the colourful history of this city and conducting events across various venues.

This year, in addition to this competition, we are also working to make these games available to government schools across the city. The registration fee of the event will fund 3 sets of games for underprivileged children in a government school. Kreeda will conduct workshops in a minimum of 100 schools through the year starting this Madras Week and culminating Madras Week 2020. So, your participation in the Traditional Games Competition to Celebrate Madras Week not only will provide you a day of fun and games but also help take games to underprivileged children and bring a smile to their face. So do register for the Competition. Let us Kreeda together! You can go online and check all details and register if interested at www.kreedagames.com

* * *

St. Andrew's Kirk, now a heritage church has a rich 200 year history. It's construction began in 1818 and was consecrated three years later in 2021. The East India Company wanted this for worship by the Scottish community in the city, then called Madras. A Minister of the Church of Scotland was sent as similar churches were built in the then presidencies of Bengal and Bombay as well. Kirk, a Scottish word means church and this church is popularly called "St. Andrew's Kirk". Next year The Kirk would turn 200 since dedication of the church. The Kirk welcomes heritage enthusiasts, visitors and those seeking spiritual nourishment to visit the church for a guided tour on prior appointment from 24 August, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. or from 4-5:30 p.m. every Saturday. Those interested could kindly speak to Mr. Naveen at the church office on 9841930802 or the Presbyter, Rev. Isaac Johnson on 9841175614.

A PIONEERING EDUCATIONIST

(Continued from page 5)

As he writes:
 “Sishya was terrible in its own elitist way, but PSBB was a rude shock with its Brahmanical Hindu culture and regressive atmosphere.”

“YGP hated me and liked me.” Her complete shock when my mother said “yes” when YGP asked her if she knew that I smoked was worth witnessing. YGP was expecting my mum to slap me and faint and pray to the gods to save my soul.

Her expression when I pointed out that there were no “No smoking” signs in school, so technically there was nothing to stop me from lighting up anywhere. The signs came up soon after.

I was the only one at that time who stood up to her, and placed arguments before her which were based on logic. I think she liked my spunk, and my rebellion was an amusing change for her. I did not like her too much because of her draconian attitude and her love of Hindu culture and rituals. I did bring a twinkle to her eye a few times with my insouciance. I think we would have actually gotten along well if we “hung out” after I finished college and started working.”

Arjun Mukerjee is now an award-winning film-maker in Mumbai. He went to meet Mrs. YGP at her home when he was in the City last time. Maybe, he did not actually smoke in her presence, but it was a very cordial meeting.

* * *

It’s when I ask my daughter Meenakshi that I get a more balanced view of the Iron Lady as she was also known outside of the school and her extraordinarily ability to nurture students into being a better version of themselves.

“She had a commanding presence. She could light up any room the moment she walked in. It was not just the way she dressed which was always perfect with a dark coloured South Indian saree with interesting necklaces and bangles, not necessarily gold, the large tikka that she wore on her forehead, with flowers neatly tucked in her bun. It was her eyes that always seemed to be able to look at you with a smile, even if she was angry. To look at you and see you.”

Meenakshi also remembers an occasion when she was compering a program that gave awards to all the students in the

upper classes who had done well academically. Though, she was the announcer, she knew with a small sigh that she was not on the list of awardees. Imagine then her surprise, when Mrs. YGP sitting behind her quietly took out Two Hundred rupees, had one of her assistants put in in an envelope and award it to Meenakshi for being “the Outstanding Student on the Duke of Edinburgh program” that had taken some of the PSBB students on an epic adventure trail to the Australian wilds.

“Before every public exam we would have to touch her feet and seek her blessing. I did not consider this as being Brahmanical or anything like that. On the contrary, she would always put a sacred thread around my neck before every major event, as though to seek the protection of a larger force than what I could imagine. Touching her feet made me realize that there is something in that gesture that makes you feel both humble and privileged. It was like being in the aura of someone far greater than anything that we as students could only learn from her.”

Icon, or iconoclast, there will be not another Mrs. YGP for a long time to come.



First known as Rajalakshmi, she was the grand-daughter of Dewan Bahadur T.Ran-gachari.

She had a series of first in her life. She was the first woman diploma holder in the State. She joined the *Madras Mail*, newspaper as a journalist.

After her marriage to Y.G. Parthasarathy, a civil servant and theatre personality a new dimension was added to her life. She was a part of the ferment taking place in the City with its emphasis on Tamil film, drama, music and

journalism amongst writers and artists.

She joined *The Hindu*, writing under her name as ‘Rashmi’. She also contributed pieces on women’s issues for *Kumudam*.

She began to realize that the options for a proper school education for children in the City was dominated by a colonial Westernized mindset. It was to change this that she started with a small two-room school in a building that her students will recognize today as the original nucleus of what has become the Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan (PSBB). It was named after the wife of one of the early donors.

The school had 13 students, amongst whom two of them were Mrs. YGP’s own sons.

Prior to starting the school, Mrs. YGP had secured a B.Ed. from the Mysore University. A Master’s degree in history from the Madras University.

Her Doctoral thesis was on Sri Ramanuja, 11th Century sage and philosopher.

As noted in a biographical excerpt from the PSSB write-up; “In today’s world, where socio-economic disparities serve to deepen the chasms in society, it is particularly relevant that Mrs. YGP has chosen to focus the high voltage beam on a sage and preacher who sought to unite the society on the basis of love and bhakti and lead it to the common goal of moksha. The universality of his message and humaneness of his method makes sri ramanuja as much a sage for the new millennium as he was of the old.”

Bharat Kalachar a venue for the performing arts was started under her tutelage.

Mrs. Y.G.P. received a Padma Shri in 2010 in recognition for her contribution as a pioneering educationist.

– G.D.

FROM BIHAR TO CHENNAI

(Continued from page 6)

a thousand things to be purchased and gifted. Halls are

booked months in advance and some can accommodate ten thousand people – all talking,

eating, arguing, chatting, singing, listening, sleeping in spite of the *nadaswaram* amplified by Bose speakers. *Kalyan mandapas* in Chennai prove to the world that Indians know how to wait in a queue. They may be fidgety in Frankfurt or edgy at Heathrow, but will easily wait an hour or two for their moment with the lucky couple when they will give an envelope or a box, smile and be photographed.

During the wedding season, halls are booked by the hour. So receptions are organized before the wedding and invitation cards specify hours within which photography, gift-giving, wedding meals and musical performances happen. And everyone obliges. There can be no better evidence of the managerial talent of a traditional community. I think somebody was not wrong when he observed that Tamil Nadu could overtake Japan in ten years flat, only if it were not in India. Unlike the rest of India, there is no ‘corruption’ here – rates are fixed for everything, from *darshan* of the deity to the burning of the dead body at the crematorium.

It is called *bakshiish* here, just as the British ordained it - you play your part, we do ours, and business goes on. That is why Nokia and Ford and Hyundai are not in Patna or in Gorakhpur.

But more than anything else, more than the scarcity of groundwater and plentiful air, rising levels of pollution and increasingly difficult traffic, one misses Chennai for its orderliness. In all my nearly three decades there, I witnessed only one street fight. Unlike many places elsewhere, buses, on this count, are disappointing in Chennai – you hardly ever witness any

conversation there. Auto-rickshaws, to some extent, give you something to talk about. I can, however, recall one instance where it promised to be a memorable event, at Saidapet fish market. My wife was scared and wanted to leave. I said no, wait, it feels so much like home after so many years. But nothing happened – even while threatening each other, the parties retreated.

Unfortunately, like everything else, all good things come to an end. So, bye, good old Chennai!

(Concluded)

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– The Editor

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Yesteryear's Chennai's Champion of Women's Tennis

Lakshmi Mahadevan is prominent among the women champions who adorned the tennis scene of Madras in the 1950s to the 1970s. She's turns 80 this August.

Persuaded by her good friend Shilu Ranganathan, she started playing tennis at the new courts of Gandhi Nagar Ladies Club in 1954 at the age of 15. She soon realised she had found her true calling. Regular practice sessions ensued in this club and later in Presidency College, which she joined in 1956. In her own words: "The first tennis tournament I played was in Gandhi Nagar Ladies Club in 1956 and I was runner-up in the Ladies Singles. I was thrilled when I received a small cup from the then CM of Madras, Kamaraj Nadar. I still have and treasure that trophy."

Her tennis took an upswing in 1957, when she became a trainee of coach extraordinaire T.K. Ramanathan, father of the legendary R. Krishnan. He helped her streamline and refine her game, without disturbing her natural style. By 1959, she had blossomed into a fine player with a flair for competition. Her game was built around a strong forehand and she was ready to take on the best in Madras. As a member of the Madras University team, she played a key role in bringing home the All-India Inter-University trophy in 1959. The following year, she won her first Open title in the Madras State Championships held at the Gymkhana Club, defeating

the holding champion Dr Indira Sambasivam. She thus became the No.1 of Madras, and her sustained dominance in city tournaments kept her at the top for the next several years.

Seeking more challenging competition and encouraged by her well-wishers, notably (late) M.V.G. Appa Rao, Lakshmi decided to spread her wings. She played in the Ceylon Nationals in 1963 and was runner-up, losing to the Ceylon No.1 Ranjini Jayasurya. Her moment of glory arrived when she participated in the Asian championships on grass courts in Calcutta in January 1964. Unseeded and unknown, she was far from being the favourite. She ended up causing one of the biggest upsets in Indian Women's tennis by winning the Ladies Singles title, beating the top seed Mrs. Mills of England in straight sets and becoming the first Indian to win the Ladies title in the Asian Championships. She continued her winning streak at the Ceylon Nationals in Colombo, All-India Hard Court in Hyderabad, Western India Championships, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu State Championships, amongst others.

As a team player, she was a member of the Tamil Nadu State team which reached the finals of the 1964 Inter-State Championships in Pune, ultimately losing to Maharashtra. Her overall performance fetched her top-ranking status in India in 1964. The following year, she lost in the finals of the Asian Championships to Nir-

upama Mankad of Maharashtra, and also in the semi-finals of the Nationals. Yet she was ranked No.2 in the country thanks to her impressive performance in other tournaments, especially on hard courts.

Lakshmi then took an 8-year break for medical reasons but made a comeback in 1975, when she captained the Tamil Nadu women's team in the Inter-State Championships in Guwahati. They lost in the finals.

At the Guwahati airport, she had a chance meeting with the well-known journalist and editor of the popular magazine *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Kushwant Singh. He chatted with her for some time, express-

● by
V.K. Parthasarathy

ing his desire to challenge her to a friendly singles match in his club in New Delhi when she next went there. He gave her his phone number and address. As it happened, she found herself in Delhi shortly after the incident and duly called him. He fixed the game at the Delhi Gymkhana Club. When she got there, she was taken aback to see that so many people had gathered to witness the one-set match, and that he had fixed the conditions of play, giving Lakshmi a minus 30 handicap. Despite his age, he turned out to be a very good player and she had to dig deep to come out victorious. Later, to her surprise, there was a big article

on the match in his magazine, along with her photo!

In the same year, at the Tamil Nadu State Tournament held at the Madras Gymkhana Club, she won the Ladies Singles title, but her tennis career gradually tapered off. Lakshmi continued to play the game in clubs with her usual gusto and purely for pleasure. Meanwhile, she was inducted into the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association initially as a Councillor and later as a Vice President, and she served in this capacity for ten years until 2018.

Reminiscing about her tennis, Lakshmi remarked that Indian women mostly played in white salwar-kameezes or even saris, and that tennis in those days used to be great fun, played in a spirit of warm camaraderie. The players were expected to play for honour, not monetary gains; prize money in most tournaments was as low as Rs.25 for the winner if no trophy was awarded, but trophies were often made of pure silver. Players representing the State were generally given First or Second Class train tickets with Railway



concessions and a modest, insufficient allowance.

She instituted two annual cash awards, one in the name of her mother Mrs. Nagamani Mahadevan for the Best Lady Player of the Year, and another in the name of her husband S. Muthukrishnan for the Best Boys Player of the year. Through her efforts, she got sponsors for the Inter-Club League tournaments exclusively for Ladies Doubles and Mixed Doubles.

Lakshmi's racquet is now silent, but her love for tennis is loud and clear.

Answers to Quiz

1. Three years, 2. Australia's Ellyse Perry, 3. Tour de France, 4. Nelson Mandela International Day, 5. 2025, 6. Pragyan and Vikram, 7. Andhra Pradesh, 8. Boris Johnson, 9. It is the first-ever species endangered due to deep-sea mining, 10. Shawala Teja Singh Temple.

* * *

11. Vocalist S.Sowmya, 12. K. Balajee, 13. Nachiarkoil, 14. S.S. Barnala, 15. C. Rajagopalachari (1954), K. Kamaraj (1976) and M. G. Ramachandran (1988), 16. Blackbuck, 17. Thanjai Ramiah Das, 18. Freeman Freeman-Thomas, 1st Marquis of Willingdon, 19. Avalanche, 20. Anna Nagar.

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