

INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Standing wheelchair
- Gordon Woodroffe
- Marina/Bharanidharan
- Keith Miller at Chepauk

# MADRAS MUSINGS

www.madrasmusings.com

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

Vol. XXIX No. 19

January 16-31, 2020

## When kolam-s carry a message

Enough and more has been said on the subject of stifling dissent and readers of Madras Musings must be wondering as to whether yet another article on the subject is at all warranted. But even if we were to wish away what is happening elsewhere in the country, and we certainly cannot do that, the recent occurrences in Chennai have taken us by surprise and it is we feel necessary to speak out on what the city stands for.

But for those who are not aware, a brief recap is necessary. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 is the current subject of discussion and enough and more has been written, spoken and shouted about, for and against it. There have been protests of various kinds across the country, some led by

political parties and the majority by activists and students. In Chennai too we have seen some protests though the intensity is a lot less here, which by the way, cannot be construed as assent for the Act. In the midst of all this, some people came

● by The Editor

up with a novel way to register disapproval. They wove the message in to kolam-s – the traditional patterns of rice flour drawn on the threshold of any Hindu household in South India. It was a unique protest and fairly innocuous. But the level of retribution that descended on those who came up with

this idea was inordinate. Eight of them were rounded up, one of whom was denounced as a person with Pakistani leanings – all this in our city where we have prided ourselves on our tolerance.

Chennai has much to be proud of by way of its history of secular thought. This is where inclusion became a way of governance way back in the 1920s, long before Indian independence. This is where a temple's tank is located on land given by Muslims and a cave associated with the Pandavas has been used as a mosque for centuries. Like all settlements in India, we have seen displacements of one community by another, as evident in some of our shrines, but we have accepted these and

(Continued on page 8)

## HERITAGE WATCH

It was in 2010 that the High Court of Madras in a landmark judgement, listed around 400 heritage buildings of Madras, which it deemed worthy of protection. Since then, much time has been wasted by the Government in setting up toothless committees that have done little or nothing. In the meanwhile, a subsequent judgement watered down the original one by interpreting that only the facades of heritage buildings need be protected. But even that has since been given the go by in implementation, with many listed structures in the 2010 judgement vanishing. Beginning with this fortnight, our Heritage Watch column will survey what survives and in what condition, with the judgement of 2010 as its basis.

Our first story concerns the Gordon Woodroffe building, listed in page 84 of the Justice E. Padmanabhan committee report, which was what the 2010 judgement used.



Our OLD is the Gordon Woodroffe building and its adjoining tea shop, featured in Somerset Playne's *Southern India* (1914).

## The Pope and the price of the fish

The raging price of onions reminds us of the saying in Economics that forms the title of this article. Till 1966, Catholics were advised not to eat meat on Fridays, so they ate fish instead. That year the Pope allowed meat on Fridays. The world demand for fish fell and shifted the demand curve downwards. The causes of the rise and fall of prices of food grains, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables are not that remote. They are direct. They are visible. They repeat every year. Our agriculture infrastructure and policy have the effect of penalising higher production. If there is a bumper yield, prices fall so much as to wash away more

● by A Special Correspondent

than the incremental revenue derived from the larger volume. The reverse happens in times of not-so-good monsoons. The tragedy is that while the farmer suffers by the price fall and fails to benefit by the price rise, the intermediaries make a killing in both situations.

Understanding the overall supply-demand and market structure for onions helps diagnose the issues to be addressed to avert periodic price crises. We shall identify each issue and see how it affects adequate and timely availability of onions to consumers, some of whom are in remote parts of the country

and areas difficult in access. Numbers are rounded-off for broad managerial appreciation.

India produces 200 lakh tonnes of onion. Consumption is 170 lakh tonnes. Because of the vastness of the market, it is inevitable that a portion of stock is stranded in warehouses and in transit, unavailable for consumption. With a logistical provision of, say, 15 per cent, the requirement would be 170 lakh tonnes plus 15 per cent, that is, 196 lakh tonnes. Thus, there is enough production to meet demand, but it is touch and go. If there is a bad mon-

(Continued on page 2)

Our NOT SO NEW is a picture taken in 2010 of the same buildings.



Our NEW, by Shantanu Krishnan is the empty space following the demolition of the Gordon Woodroffe building early in 2019. The building to its right is that of the shipping agency JM Baxi, which was built to harmonise with its more imposing neighbour, an architectural sensitivity that is absent in the Chennai of today.

(Please see *Lost Landmarks* on page 4 for more details.)



# The onion tale

(Continued from page 1)

soon or pest attack, a fall of, say, 10 per cent in yields results in a price rise of more than 10 per cent because demand for necessities is stubborn and inelastic to price. Price rises by, say, double the supply contraction, that is, by 20 per cent. The rush to hoard magnifies the rise further. The present area under onion is, therefore, not enough to absorb such shocks although, at first sight, there is an arithmetically adequacy. So, production of more onions must be promoted.

The biggest producing states are Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh accounting for nearly two-thirds of the country's production. The concentration of production area makes distribution a nightmare, often leading to severe shortages amid plenty. So, when more production is incentivised the focus must be on other potential areas to broaden the territorial production base.

Onion is raised in Kharif, late Kharif and Rabi seasons. The Rabi crop accounts for 75 per cent of the total production. This means 150 lakh tonnes out of 200 lakh tonnes arrive, like a tsunami, from end March to May every year. Imagine the disastrous price fall it triggers. When price falls precipitously – often below production cost which is about Rs. 5 per kg – farmers sell for a loss to recover desperately needed cash. That delivers a mortal blow to their desire and ability to raise onion the following season. This has two policy implications. One, there must be a Minimum Support Price but, without a sound procurement mechanism that can match the private agencies' speed of buying and paying cash, it is a dead letter. Two, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and other areas must be encouraged to plant more in the Kharif to smoothen the supply curve, even if this calls for a subsidy. The subsidy would be more than paid back by the benefits of fewer price flares.

India is the second largest producer of onions, a close second to China. It is ironic that we cannot avoid bouts of ridiculously high prices. We inferred that more production must be incentivised combined with territorial and seasonal diversification. Does producing more run the risk of rotting onions, if domestic demand cannot absorb it?

Domestic demand is increasing, fuelled by a growing population and increasing per capita income, the latter having its first effect on demand for better food. The National Horticulture Development Board (NHDB) has already estimated India's onion shortfall at 1.6 lakh tonnes.

Onions are in demand the world over as a necessity that can bear a good price. India finds it difficult to import even small quantities like 20,000 tonnes in times of need. Ironically, India is among the four largest exporters of onions, with 24 lakh tonnes exported in 2016-17 and 14 lakh tonnes in 2017-18.

So, there is plenty of room for increased production. There is no risk. There is only opportunity.

Stop-gap measures of banning export and raiding onion traders have the reverse effect of scaring away future production and trading. Attacking the root causes, not the symptoms, can remedy the situation sustainably. The onion is a staple item but has been treated like a vegetable. Consumers, especially the lower income groups and the poor, are protected in some form or the other with respect to cereals, pulses, cooking medium and fuel. The most indispensable item, onion, is left out of the protection and the watch list. State governments must be involved in demand management of sensitive food items as they are best placed to watch market prices and take pro-active remedial action in a timely manner. Tamil Nadu has one of the more efficient public procurement and distribution organisations in the country to handle demand management.

There is a lesson to learn from another Asian country with similar climatic variances, susceptibility to shortages and consumer pressure – Indonesia. Soybean is Indonesia's onion. It is the staple item of food consumed by the poor and the rich. Any price rise leads to massive street demonstrations. Indonesian rulers are afraid of soybean price rise. President Suharto, powerful as he was, wanted to be kept advised of the daily soybean price, wherever he was. Strong steps were taken to gain self-reliance in soybean although "experts" advised him that import was cheaper from sources of higher productivity. He preferred the higher domestic cost, where production was within his control, to cheaper external sources outside his control.

Onion is a universal vegetable. It has no substitute. It has a longer shelf life compared to other vegetables. It is in demand every day of the year. Onion can be grown in rainfed conditions and in inter-cropping. It is not merely safe to produce more onion but also necessary and desirable given its export potential. The onion is not a problem. It is an opportunity.

# Contrasting between song and dance

Come 31<sup>st</sup> December the curtains come down on the Music Season. To the Man from Madras Musings it always ends the year on a great note. But of late MMM finds that there is more happening post January 1<sup>st</sup>, when the dance festivals begin. MMM of course is not so actively involved with the terpsichorean art but his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed takes an interest in it and so MMM too tags along, on occasion. But there is only so much MMM can take of gazing at the moon, lamenting over non-arrival of beloved, fearing the attacks of bees and pining for union.

Music and dance may be two sides of the same coin but they are in reality two worlds – at least from what MMM sees each year. And in this he is looking chiefly at the audiences. Music attracts a largely elderly crowd, though MMM must admit that the number of youngsters (read 60 and below) is going up with time. Dance has people in their twenties or at most thirties. This was rammed home to MMM when he found that while for many of his acquaintances in the former world, he, MMM, is a mere stripling of 50 or so who has probably heard just a few live concerts of Mrs Melody Sublime, to the latter world he is a venerable old uncle of 50, who can talk about the dance world of the 1980s! In fact many young ballerinas and ballerinos refer to MMM as uncle and he often wonders in private if they speak of him as grandfather or worse, Old Father Time.

And then there is the matter of dress. The average Carnatic Music audience dresses in just about any fashion – crumpled dhoties, ill-fitting t-shirts, sarees wrapped around anyhow and monkey caps/earmuffs are the norm though MMM must admit that many, especially the front row types do strive for sartorial elegance. But if you really wanted to see dernier cri, you need to be at the dance festival. Here all is chic – the best designer wear, eyes made larger with eyeliner, and the most expensive of accessories. Audience talk during dance programme breaks verge around Monaco, Milan, Montmartre and such places while in the music concerts it largely deals with children in San Jose, Houston, Massachusetts and at times the lowly Abu Dubai (wherever that is). In matters of health, the music audience focuses on afflictions such as hernia (spoken of as Hiranya in Madras), bypass and at an unguarded moment even fistulas while the dance audience does not speak on such

topics though it can size up in one glance an uplift, a tuck, an implant or a bariatric surgery. The dance lot focuses on six packs while the music lot invariably carries six bags and more – comprising water bottles, snacks, medication, cell phones (not on silent mode), umbrellas and song books.

To give the dance group further credit, MMM must acknowledge here that they are a pretty disciplined lot. They either stay away in bulk from many performances or attend in full strength and when they do, they stay put right through the performance. The music audience on the other hand, is notorious for its peregrinations, which may be age-related – frequent ambles down the aisles for calls of nature (other calls – from spouse at home, domestic help, children abroad – are attended from

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

the seat even while the performances are in progress, replete with cries of 'haanh? I cannot hear, I am in concert, please speak louder), canteen breaks and general blood circulation breaks. So when it comes to audience discipline full marks to the dance crowd. Sadly, the music lot fails in comparison.

At the canteen, the music audience sticks to the time-tested South Indian recipes. The dance aficionados wonder as to why pastas (whole wheat), cow's milk (organic of course) and juices are not served.

Lastly, MMM must add that the dance festival brings in audiences from all over Chennai, replete with Vice Consuls and diplomatic corps from countries ranging from Ruritania to Lower Mbungo on the Congo. The music audience is chiefly from Mylapore and T. Nagar.

## The rough & ready in Chennai traffic

The Man from Madras Musings was clearly at fault. A fairly lonely country road just on the outskirts of Chennai was where he was driving. Not finding any other vehicle in the vicinity MMM accelerated. But what he was not prepared for was a sharp bend

that came out of nowhere and there in the crook of it, just ahead of MMM's vehicle was a two-wheeler, with a car speeding down on the opposite side.

It was touch and go. MMM swerved to avoid the two-wheeler while the car on the opposite side obligingly moved off track to give MMM maneuvering space. The vehicle then went its way, while MMM realising that he had some explaining to do to the two wheeler driver, slowed down. Sure enough the man rode up and pounded on MMM's side window, which MMM had already rolled down in anticipation. The man glared at MMM and of course mouthed a few expletives. To this MMM said that he was sorry, and it was his fault and that he was glad there had been no casualty.

The man was clearly taken aback. It was like descending a stairway only to find the last step missing. "What do you mean you are sorry?" he yelled. "Do you realise that I could have been killed?"

To this MMM replied that he was aware of the gravity of the potential consequences and he was glad that nothing of the kind had happened. He said he had already said sorry.

"What do you mean sorry?" asked the man once again. "I want an apology." You will have of course realised by now that the word sorry had been spoken in English while much of the dialogue was in local lingo. MMM asked the man as to what the difference was between sorry (in English) and an apology.

"I don't want any lessons in English from you Peter types," roared he. "I want you to realise that what you did was wrong."

MMM said he already had expressed regret only after realizing the error of his ways. Having at this point understood that there was no point in extending this conversation, MMM rolled up his window and drove off, leaving the man shaking a few fists. It later occurred to MMM that the man was really building up for a fight and was quite frustrated that MMM had given in so readily. After all, MMM's behaviour was not in keeping with Chennai's road dharma.

## Tailpiece

A friend sends this of the signboard in the Club House of his residential building. The Man from Madras Musings realizes that in Tamil, the alphabet denoting C and G are the same phonetically.

– MMM

## GLUB HOUSE





## Praise from Vasishtha

Just finished reading *Short 'N' Snappy* by MMM. What riotous fun!

Of course I've never been a fan of MMM. Neither the earlier avatar (may his memory live long) nor the current claimant to that pseudonym. I sincerely feel that both were/are snooty colonial sympathisers who looked down on mere mortals like me and would turn away rather than even give me the time of the day.

Having said that, I have to concede that the new MMM compensates with his great sense of humour.

The Airport story (MM, Vol. XXIX, No. 17) with the final twist in the tale where the security officer gets the coffee in the realm of PGW and GKC. (If you don't understand who they are don't bother to read further please!)

Calling your wife "She who Must Be Obeyed" is a great tradition (occasionally adopted by yours truly in his FB posts) coming down from Rumpole of the Bailey created by John Mortimer. Rumpole, of course takes it from the H. Ryder Haggard novels "She" and "Ayesha".

I am sure MMM would scorn to read this missive and would already be looking down at it with rightful indignation as if it is a disgusting fly alighting unsolicited on his dabara of Filter Kaapi.

Still here is hoping to read more and more of his output...

S. Srikanth

sreesri26166@gmail.com

**Editor's Note:** We are not sure as to what makes reader Srikanth so certain that the previous or the present editor would not give him the time of day. We are not sure if he made an attempt at any time to reach out. But since he has written to us, and since we believe in accepting feedback of all kinds, we are publishing it and also thank him for it.

## More on P. Sabhanayagam

The article *Serving the nation well* by R.V. Rajan, speaks well about the golden period of time when honest politicians ruled the nation. Ironically, the sentence in the concluding para, would change to the present time as follows,

"Officers who have Not compromised have always been forced to face charges later."

Krishnan

Chennai 600 063

\* \* \*

I read with interest the review of the autobiography of P. Sabhanayagam with whom

# ARISE: India's first standing wheelchair by IIT Madras

Arguably the crown jewel of Chennai's educational identity, IIT Madras remains highly respected for its work in academic and research projects. Last year alone, the institute announced multiple breakthroughs that show promise of a better, sustainable future. It developed the world's first iron-ion battery, a low-cost, stable alternative to the present lithium-ion battery; designed an 'agricopter' that helps farmers automate pesticide spraying and keep a tab on crop health with an imaging camera; and devised an AI-based disaster management solution called 'Eye in the Sky' that utilizes drones to collect and analyze data in real time, to give a few examples.

IIT Madras also houses the Rehabilitation Research and Device Development (R2D2) Lab that focuses on research related to human movement, with the aim of designing solutions to support the differently-abled. Headed by Prof. Sujatha Srinivasan of the Department of

Mechanical Engineering, the Lab hit a noteworthy milestone with its maiden product launch in 2019 – it unveiled 'Arise', India's first prototype of a standing wheelchair.

Standing wheelchairs are assistive technology that make life better for users of conventional wheelchairs, who struggle with a host of health problems due to the prolonged seating position they're forced to adopt – poor blood circulation, urinary tract infections, joint

by  
**Varsha Venugopal**

stiffness and pressure sores are common complaints. Standing wheelchairs, therefore, present a significant advantage – by enabling users to stand, it not only mitigates these problems, but also helps strengthen bone density by allowing the legs to bear weight. Apart from physical benefits, standing wheelchairs



'Arise' – India's first prototype of a standing wheelchair.

also improve the user's self-esteem and sense of well-being, thanks to the improved independence of mobility and the opportunity to interact with people at eye-level.

While standing wheelchairs are not new as a concept, Arise is notable as the first indigenously developed standing wheelchair from India. Its biggest strength

is perhaps its novel mechanical design (patented in India) which allows it to be priced modestly unlike its competitors in the market.

Arise is a manual standing wheelchair designed with a hand-operated, linkage-based mechanism to achieve standing functionality. It uses a gas-spring (adjustable to the user's weight) to reduce manual effort and enable a smooth transition to the standing position. The product is built with an interlocking mechanism which acts as a safety feature; it secures the wheelchair in a locked state if the knee block is not in position. With a one-time custom fitting session, users are expected to operate the device as easily as they propel their wheelchairs.

The R2D2 Lab from IIT-M partnered with NGOs, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, individual users and clinicians to test the product, incorporating their inputs to further enhance its design. Rigorous mechanical testing was conducted to ensure that the device is rugged and suitable for outdoor use, even in uneven terrain. Arise has reportedly received positive feedback from initial trials with users who sustained spinal injuries. With commercialization supported by the UK-based foundation Wellcome Trust, Arise will be manufactured and marketed by Phoenix Medical Systems, a company founded by IIT-M alumnus Mr. Sashi Kumar.

Speaking to the future goals of the R2D2 Lab, Prof. Sujatha Srinivasan said, "We have learned a lot during our Arise development journey – the importance of flexible funding focused on impact, the need for a like-minded industry partner and the merit in involving users and the rehabilitation community in the development. We are applying these learnings to our other projects."



From right: Ashok Jhunjhunwala, Institute Professor, IIT-Madras; Sujatha Srinivasan, Founder and Head of TTK Centre for Rehabilitation Research and Device Development; and Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot, watch a demo of the standing wheelchair.

I had some interaction. He formed the One-Man Commission to go into the pay anomalies caused by the Second Pay Commission.

I was lucky to be a member of the advisory committee to assist him. The Commission had to go into the representations received from more than 70 departments. Sabhanayagam gave a patient hearing to every representation, chiding

sometimes for inappropriate demands. Sometimes he assisted the persons making representations by suggesting better and alternate solutions. He was patience incarnate and not once did he lose his temper. Every person had complete faith in his fairness. When he was Education Secretary at the Center, I met him and he suggested how we should spell out before the Planning Com-

mission the demands of Tamil Nadu to implement the vocational education programme in Higher Secondary Course, as recommended by the Kothari Commission. The doors of the chambers of the Chief Secretary were always open during his occupancy. It was not air-conditioned in his time.

S.S. Rajagopalan  
30, Kamarajar Street  
Chennai 600093

# A legend in leather, now lost

It was D. Krishnan, formerly of *The Hindu*, who first called me sometime in 2018 and asked if I knew that the Gordon Woodroffe building on First Line Beach/Rajaji Salai had been demolished. I said I had, for it was only some weeks prior to this that leading a heritage walk, I saw a gaping hole where the handsome edifice once stood. Krish asked me how I was so calm about it. There was a time when I would have raged against such acts of vandalism but I have long come to the conclusion that Chennai does not care and so one man's laments are not going to make any difference. In the interests of my own health and longevity, I prefer to turn the other way and document what is lost by way of this column. This way, at least future generations will know of what heritage we once had.

But then, let me get on with the elegy on the Gordon Woodroffe building. Somerset Playne's *Southern India* is my go-to resource for much of the city's

## LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

early corporate history and sure enough, the book did not disappoint. And what's more, it carries a picture of the building in all its glory in 1914. Gordon Woodroffe & Co (GWC for short), was, according to Playne, founded on the same site where the building stood, in 1868, thereby making

its success dependent on keeping out any local development of industries and preventing Indians from getting into business. The company was a pillar of the British-dominated Madras Chamber of Commerce, and its Directors were routinely elected to the post of Chairman

for 150 years of corporate history when the structure was eventually brought down. In 1914, the partners were G.W.P. Woodroffe, W.A. Wiggam, Sir Hugh Stein Fraser and J.F. Simpson. Like most British business houses of Madras of that time, GWC was in the business of export of raw materials and import of finished goods. This was a hugely profitable activ-

ity, its success dependent on keeping out any local development of industries and preventing Indians from getting into business. The company was a pillar of the British-dominated Madras Chamber of Commerce, and its Directors were routinely elected to the post of Chairman

of that body. There was quite a bit of crossholding when it came to shares in other British business houses of the city. Sir Hugh was the brother of Sir Gordon Fraser of Best & Co, and a Director in that entity too. J.F. Simpson (later Sir James), was among the founding fathers of Assocham, the Association of Chambers of Commerce of India. He also served on the board of the Imperial Bank.

As per Playne's note, GWC exported seeds, hides, skins and general produce and imported piece goods (essentially finished garments made of Manchester yarn spun from cotton sent out of the Americas and India, sold at throwaway prices in bulk and which killed the indigenous handloom industry), yarns, kerosene oil, metals and sugar. The export of palmyra was yet another profitable activity for which a cutting, drying and baling facility was set up at Colachel, employing 'several hundred natives'. The palmyra was exported for the manufacture of brushes and made its way to London, Liverpool, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Havre, Hamburg and New York. Within the country, GWC had offices in Bheemuni-patnam, Vishakapatnam, Pondicherry, Kakinada and Cuddalore.

The company also specialised in agency activity. It represented the Clan Line, which despatched

two ships a month from Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool, the Hansa Line which ran steamers to Antwerp, Middlesbrough and New York, and the Wells Line, which operated from Middlesbrough and London. There were, besides, a whole host of insurance companies that GWC represented in India, and it also managed tea and coffee estates.

An advertisement in the Centenary volume of the Madras Chamber of Commerce, dating to 1936, shows not much had changed but there were

expats resisted this and left. Gopinath too quit in 1977, starting off his own business in shipping and making a great name for himself. By the early 1980s, GWC was in the news – its huge landholdings had come to the attention of Manu Chhabria, the corporate raider, who acquired the company through another takeover of his – Shaw Wallace. By 1985, he was the darling of the media, regularly making the news through his endless string of acquisitions, most of which were old British companies with plenty of real estate.

But by the 1990s, the Chhabria mystique had begun to unravel. There was a bitter fallout with his brother Kishore and the financial institutions had begun to complain about mismanagement and asset stripping. Most of Chhabria's acquisitions became sick and GWC was no exception. Within a decade of its acquisition, the company's sales fell by 40 percent. The brothers, with Kishore owing the bigger stake in GWC, slugged it out in Court. It did not help that Manu Chhabria moved out of India in 1995 fearing investigation and never came back, dying in Dubai in 2002. A court judgement said it all when it noted that Manu Chhabria had consistently defrauded the company and acted against its interests. By 2005, GWC was in the news for the sale of its assets. The Pallavaram space was knocked down for Rs. 300 crores by the Emaar Group of Dubai. The land in Maraimalai Nagar was acquired by The Hindu, which moved its printing facilities there.

From the time I began conducting heritage walks in the George Town area, this building of the GWC was more or less an empty shell. Keeping it company was the sloping-roofed tea shop next door, which going by Playne's photo of 1914, was around even then! Both declined more or less together, the tea shop shutting down first and later collapsing, eventually becoming an empty plot. Now it is the turn of the GWC building to go. It is not certain as to who is the present owner and what is going to come up in the space.

What is ironic is that the High Court, in its order concerning heritage buildings had classified the GWC under category 2a – buildings possessing cultural, aesthetic and architectural merit which form an important part of the city's heritage and contribute to the image and identity of the city. That judgement was rendered toothless by subsequent orders and the machinations of the bureaucracy-builder nexus. We are well on our way to becoming a city without image or identity.

# Playwright/novelist/travel writer/cartoonist – Marina remembered

It was with some sorrow that I read the news of the passing of T.S. Sridhar aka Marina aka Bharanidharan. I never met the man but I did know his close relatives. He had not been well for quite some time but in his active years Marina as I always like to think of him, brought joy to countless people through his writings in *Ananda Vikatan* and even more so via the stagings of the plays he serialised in the magazine.



T.S. Sridhar aka Bharanidharan aka Marina.

A first cousin of R.K. Narayan and R.K. Laxman, he was brought up at 1, Vellala Street, Purasawalkam, the same house where Narayan too spent his childhood. Both would immortalize the place, the former in his *Chinna Vayathinile* and the latter in his *My Days*. In later years, this was also the house where cartoonist Gopulu lived. The building has since been torn down and a Saravana Bhavan stands in its place. Sad in many ways but it was useful for me when I did a heritage walk of the area years ago and could finish at a spot with so many literary memories and provide breakfast as well.

Never studious by nature but always inclined to literary pursuits (his father was man of letters who brought out a magazine, wrote plays and film scripts and was an authority on Kamba Ramayanam), with a sharp eye for the humorous in anything, Marina was meant for the world of journalism. Beginning life as a not-very-gifted cartoonist, he took to his true calling, writing and in that capacity joined the *Ananda Vikatan*, which he served

improved my speaking skills and also realised the importance of humour. Together, we laughed and wept over *Thani Kudittaniam* (Kamu – the hypochondriac stay-at-home sister-in-law – what a character), *Nathanar Kalagam*, *Oor Vambu* (perhaps his finest and which had a spurned wife Kalamamba Mami as the main character), *Kaal Katu* and *Mapillai Murukku*. I did not enjoy his later work *Adavadi Ammakammu* to the same extent. To me from a quintessential Tambrahm world, every character struck a chord – ranging from the old man who is forever stating that he would one day take a suitcase and leave, to the Ammanji about whom nobody really knew how he was related. We had all these and more in any joint family Tambrahm household of those days. Marina taught us to laugh at ourselves and also held up a mirror to our way of life.

● by The Editor

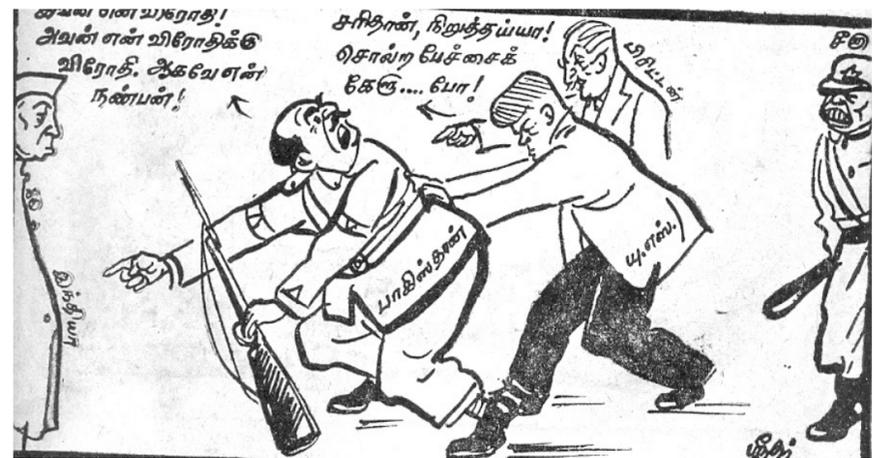
As Marina he first wrote *Vadapalanaiyil Valmiki*, a novella that looked at the creator of the *Ramayana* returning to this world and seeing for himself as to how his works are interpreted. He encounters politicians, Harikatha exponents, the Mylapore aristocracy, common people and a milkman whose life he eventually transforms. The story had plenty of what eventually became Marina hallmarks – Brahminic satire, exposing of hypocrisy and plenty to ponder over. A precious possession of mine is a bound volume of the serialised version of this work. Yet another prize I cherish is a copy of his *Chinna Vayathinile*, gifted by his nephew and writer, VSV.



Marina's memoirs of his childhood, with sketches by Gopulu.

Many of these plays made it to stage and I can still recall Poornam Viswanathan acting as the athimber in *Thani Kudittaniam*. This play later became a film with Cho playing Athimber and KR Vijaya as Kamu. And there was his other avataram – as Bharanidharan. In that capacity he travelled to various shrines and wrote of his experiences. In an era when there was no Wikipedia, he was our go to resource for temples. Others who fulfilled the same role were Anandi and To Mu. Bhaskara Tondaiman in *Kalki*. All three wrote in more or less the same style. I was later gifted a complete set of Tondaiman's works and on reading them I have been quite struck by the similarities. But Marina was special. He travelled widely and wrote prolifically on the subject of temples. He later penned a full series on the shrines sung

he took you through his father's sudden illness, death and the break-up of the family. Taken all in all, he was a great man, who left his impress on the world of writing.



Sridhar's cartoon on Indo-Pak relations – 1962.



The first instalment of Vadapalanaiyil Valmiki, dating to 1966.

on by Muthuswami Dikshitar, which is a highly emotional work. When my friends Ravindra Narayanan and Sridhar wrote a series titled *The Eternal Pilgrim* on Dikshitar, this was an important source for reference. Of course, Marina assumed that all songs now fathered on Dikshitar were his but then who are we to comment on that?



Bharanidharan's book on Dikshitar.

His *Chinna Vayathinile* was perhaps his finest work where he dwelt on the joys and sorrows of growing up in Purasawalkam. It brought to life the entire area in all its colour. Every page made you laugh out loud and then most unexpectedly the concluding sections made you weep as



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

1. On December 17, which former Asian head of State was sentenced to death in absentia on treason charges stemming from his imposition of a state of emergency in 2007?
2. On December 27, which European nation's government announced the effective January 2020 it will officially stop using a popular moniker for the country and only use its official name?
3. In a daring escape, which former CEO of an auto giant, facing trial for financial wrongdoings, fled from Japan to Lebanon?
4. Which 'leader' apologised for slapping away a woman while greeting the faithful after a New Year's Eve liturgy?
5. In a deal that would create the world's fourth-largest automaker, Fiat Chrysler said it had agreed to terms of a merger with which company?
6. On December 30, the Government of India launched the CEIR (Central Equipment Identify Register) portal for what purpose?
7. On December 31, who was appointed India's first Chief of Defence Staff?
8. Who recently became the first Indian to win the women's World rapid chess title emulating Viswanathan Anand achieved among men?
9. Gujarat farmlands were recently attacked by huge swarms of which insect that emerged from Sudan and Eritrea in the coast of Red Sea?
10. Which State has topped in the Big State category in the new Good Governance Index?

\*\*\*

11. The brother of veena maestro S. Balachandrar is known for the most-famous artistic representation of the trinity of Carnatic music. Name him.
12. What literary first is attributed to Krupabai Sathianadhan in whose name the University of Madras instituted a medal for the best female matriculation candidate in English?
13. What more famous production house came upon the site of Meenakshi Cinetone on the banks of the Adyar?
14. Which famous Tamil stars made their debut in the hit flick *Pavalkodi* in 1934?
15. For which place does the M in the name of the famous 'Ma Po Si' (M.P. Sivagnanam) stand for?
16. For which Navagraha deity is the Kailasanathar Temple in Thingalur known for?
17. Which political figure is given the credit for suggesting the brand name 'Aavin'?
18. What was the christened name of the recently-deceased polymath whose nom-de-plumes included Marina and Bharanidharan?
19. The bus stops on Devanathan Street in Mandaveli and Luz Church Road were at one time 'named' after which famous musicians?
20. By what more famous name is the waterbody Vrddha Kshira Nadi (Old River of Milk) known?

(Answers on page 8)

# Awakened India – A forgotten magazine from Madras

*Prabuddha Bharata*, the official organ of the Ramakrishna Order is probably India's oldest spiritual magazine, in continuous publication since 1898. Its origin however dates to two years earlier, when its predecessor *Awakened India* was being brought out from our city by a few ardent devotees of Swami Vivekananda. This piece is a brief profile of the short-lived magazine and its illustrious editor for its entire duration, B.R. Rajam Iyer.

Swami Vivekananda's close association with our city and the role played by its citizens in ensuring his visit to the Parliament of World Religions in 1893 is a well-documented one. Foremost amongst them was M.C. Alasinga Perumal, who was instrumental in introducing the monk to the people of Madras by first organising his lecture at the Triplicane Literary Society. Swami Vivekananda was greatly appreciative of the work done by the Madras Boys, as he fondly referred to the group of people from the city who spared no effort in ensuring his visit to America.

The Parliament of World Religions heralded the birth of a star. His legendary opening line in the Conference and the reaction of the audience provided the spark for igniting his work of propagating the ideals of Indian philosophy and religion and set the tone for a series of lectures across the country. With his popularity growing in the West, the time was ripe for spreading the word of Vedanta and carrying the message of our scriptures to the masses in our country. Swami Vivekananda wrote to Alasinga Perumal on the need to start a journal on 'Vedantic Lines' and thus was born the *Brahmavadin*, its first issue coming out in September 1895.

*Prabuddha Bharata* or *Awakened India* had its genesis in an idea that yet another of Swami Vivekananda's close disciples in Madras Dr. M.C. Nanjunda Rao had proposed and had written to him about, that of starting a magazine for the youngsters. In his reply dated April 14, 1896 Swami Vivekananda welcomed the idea and exhorted him to make 'it independent, following the same lines as the *Brahmavadin*, only making the style and matter much more popular' and avoiding 'all attempts to make the journal scholarly'. The name of the magazine was chosen by Swami Vivekananda himself.

The prospectus published in the first issue that came out in July 1896 bemoaned the

materialism that held sway in the country as a result of 'the one-sided Western education given in schools and colleges' and viewed this publication as an attempt to remedy the state of affairs. It sought to be a supplement to the *Brahmavadin* inasmuch as it sought to do 'for students, young men and others what it was already doing for the more advanced classes.' The prospectus was signed by P. Aiyasami, B.V. Kameswara Iyer, G.G. Narasimhacharya (a relative of Alasinga Perumal) and B.R. Rajam Iyer. The subscription was fixed at a nominal rate of Rs 1-8. As per annum inclusive of postage to ensure that magazine reached a wide base. The mantle of editing the magazine fell on B.R. Rajam Iyer, who was making then rapid strides in the world of writing.

Born in 1872 in Batlagundu, Rajam Iyer had had his early education in Madurai, before coming to Madras and graduating from the Madras Christian College in 1889. He then joined the Law College but did not finish his course, for it was around this time that his interest in Lit-

In 1894, Rajam Iyer set about his quest for the Ultimate Truth as propagated by the Hindu philosophy – that of finding Ananda or Infinite Happiness. After travelling from place to place in search of a guide who could show him the path, he came back to Madras at the end of 1895, where a big responsibility awaited him. He wrote an essay for the *Brahmavadin* in one of its early issues which caught the attention of Alasinga Perumal, who sought him out when *Awakened India* was being organised.

Rajam Iyer poured his heart and soul in the pages of *Awakened India*. Writing under the pseudonyms of T.C. Natarajan, M. Ranganatha Sastri, A Recluse and Nobody-knows-who, he wrote on several aspects of Vedanta, while at the same time ensuring that the content was kept simple. His interpretation of Vedanta was found to be a unique one. He almost single-handedly ran the magazine, for he wrote every article save for the Contributions and Extracts columns. All this, while recovering from an acute attack



An issue of *Awakened India* dating to March 1897.

last only for two years, for the editorial of the June 1898 issue read 'Farewell'. Rajam Iyer had passed away a month earlier owing to an attack of Bright's Disease, leaving behind his parents and a young wife. With a sudden void that was hard to fill, it was decided to close the magazine.

The magazine however was resurrected two months later as the *Prabuddha Bharata* by the Ramakrishna Mission which had just been established as an institution. Its offices were moved to the Advaita Ashrama in Mayawati near Almora in the Himalayas, a place that had been bought by Captain J.J. Sevier and his wife, two of Swami Vivekananda's foremost western disciples.

Rajam Iyer's writings in the *Awakened India* were subsequently brought in the form of a collection titled *Rambles in Vedanta*.

## Acknowledgements:

1. Various issues of *Prabuddha Bharatha*, Advaita Ashrama.

● by  
Karthik Bhatt

erature started taking wings. He greatly revelled in the works of its masters such as Shakespeare, Byron, Keats and George Elliott and was particularly influenced by Shelley and Wordsworth. His interest was not confined to English Literature, for he also delved deep into the works of Thayumanavar and Kamban, whom he considered to be the greatest poet in the world.

1892 was an important year in Rajam Iyer's life. It was when the public first took note of his scholarliness, following the publication of his critical review of Kachikalambakam, a Tamil poem by Professor Ranganatha Mudaliar in the Christian College Magazine. It was also the year the *Viveka Chintamani*, a Tamil monthly magazine edited by C.V. Swaminatha Iyer first came out. The magazine would serialize his only work *Aabathukidamama Abavaadham* or *Kamalambal Charithram* as it is popularly known today. It is credited with being the second novel written in Tamil, after *Prathapa Mudaliar Charithram* by Vedanayagam Pillai. (It is very likely the third novel, for the second was once again a Vedanayagam Pillai creation – *Sugunambal Charittiram*, published in 1887 – Editor).

of intestinal obstruction that almost killed him in October 1896.

The magazine was a great success for it gathered around 1,500 subscribers right at the beginning, which grew to 4,500 by the end of the first year, making it one of the most widely circulated journals of its time. The euphoria would however

## Readability please

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more hand written letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a post-card space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

– THE EDITOR

# Nani Palkhivala in Madras

I moved from Bombay to Madras, as those cities were then called, in 1967 as Assistant Secretary of the Forum of Free Enterprise's Madras centre. I have fond recollections of making arrangements for Nani Palkhivala's budget speeches for many years in Madras. Our city was close to his heart. If Bombay was the commercial capital, he maintained that Madras was the intellectual capital of India.

Many interesting memories of Palkhivala and the Madras of those days crowd my mind as I look back across a few decades. In the nineteen seventies, Madras had a number of shaded avenues and street houses; apartments were mostly unknown. Residents of the city had more time at their disposal. The city reverberated with public speeches of eminent personalities addressing cerebrally alert audiences. I have always maintained that when it came to a perspicacious crowd for a cricket match or a speech by Palkhivala, Madras was unsurpassed. I have pleasant recollections of seeing people walking on far less crowded streets, after attending a music concert or a stage drama or a speech by Palkhivala. These memories also bring back images of people who were so moved by his speech that while walking back from the venue to their respective places they would fervently discuss the many points he had raised that evening. Such conversations sowed many seeds of friendship, which grew stronger and withstood the test of time among those who were total strangers until then.

I also recall my volunteers at the Forum of Free Enterprise – volunteers who helped me out in arranging Palkhivala's speeches in Madras – forming teams for different events and becoming great friends and who kept in touch with each other for many, many years. They were young collegians and students of the Chartered Accountancy course who never failed to respond enthusiastically whenever I asked them to assist me in making arrangements for a speech by Palkhivala and at the venue during the event. I consider it a privilege to have been part of an energetic group of public spirited men devoted to causes in the interest of the common man, including Veeraraghavan of Mylapore Academy and the Parthasarathy-Narasimhan duo, who even now are quite active, at the Triplicane Cultural Academy.

## A Speech in 1966

As far as my recollection goes, the first time Palkhivala spoke under the Forum's auspices in Madras was in January



● **Who does not remember Palkhivala? This brilliant lawyer had many facets to his personality – a champion of civil liberties, a great orator whose budget speeches were famous, a donor for deserving causes and a man of letters. Madras had a special relationship with him, for between 1966 and 2000 he not only came here numerous times but also delivered several thought-provoking speeches. In this, Palkhivala's birth centenary year, T.S. Gopal, who in his capacity as Secretary of the Forum of Free Enterprise handled much of the logistics for many of his visits, has penned a booklet titled Down Memory Lane, which recalls many memorable incidents associated with the former in this city. We are serialising it in Madras Musings, kind courtesy T.S. Gopal. It is also our tribute to a great Indian – Editor**

1966, a year before I moved to the city; I was on a visit to Madras when I attended this speech. The event took place at the famous Gokhale Hall and it attracted an audience of four hundred. The next time he gave a speech in Madras was in 1969, under the auspices of the Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, at the Grove in Teynampet. That event attracted a crowd of about seven hundred.

## A budget speech in 1970

Realising that those venues were inadequate to accommodate the vast crowds, I chose the famous R.R. Sabha Hall in Mylapore as the venue for his budget speech in 1970. That was the first time when I was associated with arranging his speech in Madras. The R.R. Sabha Hall had a capacity of about a thousand. If the earlier venues were too small, my boss at the Forum of Free Enterprise

portion of these reminiscences. Dr. P. S. Lokanathan, the eminent economist, presided. The stature and popularity of the speaker was such that even this venue proved inadequate. The crowd overflowed the hall and filled the corridors and passages!

## Popularity in Madras

By the mid-seventies, Palkhivala's popularity had grown by leaps and bounds, owing mainly to his relentless championing of the common man's cause and the landmark constitutional cases he had fought, the most popular of which was the Fundamental Rights Case. This meant that larger venues had to be found for his speeches as years rolled on. For many years those events were held in Abbotsbury (where there is now a hotel and a mall) in Teynampet, and the crowds that gathered

speech he gave on the 24th and 25th amendments of the Constitution at Bertram Hall, Loyola College, in 1971. Presided by Rajaji (C. Rajagopalachari), that speech was held under the auspices of The Servants of India Society. To me, the occasion was a dream that came true. After the speech under the auspices of the Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation in 1969, I told Palkhivala that he deserved a larger audience and some day his speech must be presided by Rajaji'. He was exhilarated by the thought and wondered if it might happen. It happened two years later!

In 1971, the news of Rajaji presiding over his speech attracted a huge number of people, including party workers, from near and afar. Thousands thronged the venue and the surging audience spilled out to the lawns. Even so distin-

● by  
T.S. Gopal

there invariably numbered between three and five thousands! When even Abbotsbury proved small, they were held in Congress Grounds in Teynampet. On one occasion the crowd numbered about eight thousand! As his popularity grew, I felt that from R.R. Sabha, it was but a natural progression to Abbotsbury and Congress grounds. Making arrangements for his speeches was always a great experience and I learnt much from every occasion. I ceased to be the Assistant Secretary and formally associated with the Forum in 1977. In later times, Palkhivala's speeches were held in the Ramakrishna School grounds in T. Nagar and in the Centenary auditorium of the Madras University. Although I was not formally associated with arranging his speeches in the nineteen eighties, I was still actively involved in the planning and making the necessary arrangements. Among the many memories I have of Palkhivala in Madras, I recall a speech by him held at Rajeswari Kalyana Mandapam in Mylapore sometime in the nineteen seventies. It was held under the auspices of an NGO called 'Roof for the Roofless', and I distinctly remember that the dais was placed at such an angle that no pillar obstructed the view of the speaker from anywhere in the hall or from the open space outside.

## A Speech at Bertram Hall in 1971

Another event that stands out in my memory was the

guished an attendee as Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar could not enter the hall but he was happy to hear the speech sitting near a pillar outside. The turnout was so large that day that after the event a great number of people wanting to return to their respective places formed a long queue at the nearby Nungambakkam railway station. To various destinations until the Fort and Beach stations at one end and Tambaram station at another, there was a great demand for tickets. I had jocularly warned the station master about this; it was hardly surprising that the railway station ran out of ticket cards that day!

(To be continued  
next fortnight)

## Thank you, Donors

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

– The Editor

Rs. 1250: N.S. Parthasarathy

Rs. 1000: Lata Ramaseshan

Rs. 900: R. Parthasarathy,  
Sharadha Purushotam

Rs. 750: Dr A Raman

Rs. 500: R. Rajagopal, P.K.  
Parameswaran

Rs. 400: Surya Narayan Sinha,  
P.S. Subrahmanian

Rs. 200: B. Subramaniam

Rs. 50: C. Sasikala

# When Keith Miller played at Chepauk

Before Garfield Sobers took over the title in the sixties, it was Keith Ross Miller who was acknowledged as the greatest all rounder of all time. With an enviable record of 2,958 runs with seven centuries at an average of 36.97 and 170 wickets at 22.97 apiece with seven five wicket hauls and one ten wicket haul in 55 Tests the sobriquet certainly fitted the Australian. The finest series of his Test career which stretched from 1946 to 1956 was the one in the West Indies in 1955 when he got three hundreds in the five Tests besides picking up 20 wickets. Only Sobers has notched up a similar feat. As Richie Benaud said in his tribute when Miller passed away in 2004 "Miller



Keith Miller – the dynamic all-rounder.

put back into place with an imperious flick of his forefinger Miller was an engaging, gregarious personality who loved the good things of life. Wisden in its tribute when he passed away noted: "Little wonder women wanted to be with him and men wanted to be him."

Syed Mushtaq Ali himself a handsome personality with a swashbuckling game to match and with an inimitable hold over the crowds wrote highly of Miller's multi faceted personality in his autobiography *Crick-et Delightful*. The two played against each other during the visit of the Australian Services team to India in 1945 and

● by  
**Partab Ramchand**

Mushtaq notes: "The match was memorable for me since here I first met Keith Miller and took a fancy for him immediately. His cricket, his personality, his gait, his stance, his run up, his throw and release of the ball and his beaming face – all had tremendous appeal. Later we became good friends and he remains one of my favourite cricketers." Miller in fact wrote the foreword to the book that was released in 1967.

Cricket fans in Madras were fortunate to see Miller in action in two matches towards the end of the tour – against South Zone and in the third and final 'Test'. Miller did not set Chepauk afire in either game. In the first match he was out for 0 and 8 and picked up one for eight and three for

19 and in the unofficial 'Test' which India won by six wickets he was out for 2 and 7 and had figures of two for 60 and no wicket for 11. And cricket fans in India were unlucky in that they just missed seeing Miller in action in an official Test. Arriving in the sub continent following their tour of England in 1956 the Australians played a one-off Test against Pakistan in Karachi which Miller played. It proved to be his last Test. Two days after the match ended the Australians were playing the first Test of the

1956-57 series against India in Madras. But Miller was missing from the line-up having already announced his retirement.

Old timers who had the good fortune of seeing Miller at Chepauk even if for a very short time often recalled for years with a glint in their eye their association with the debonair personality who bestrode the cricketing stage like a colossus for a decade. The handsome tributes paid to him on his death in 2004 brought out both the great sportsman and the colourful character.

## Message from kolam-s

(Continued from page 1)

moved on. So can we not accept dissent also as part of life and deal with it through discussions, debates and dialogue instead of making the State's law-enforcing machinery descend on a few individuals? What hope does the latter have against the former and is it at all warranted?

That Chennai is a city with a fierce pride all of its own is well known. Which was the metro that protested against income tax in the 1860s? Where was there a movement to remove the statue of a hated colonizer even in the 1930s (and we succeeded in it by the way)? Where was language pride an issue that merited defending even in the 1930s and once again in the 1960s? Which city was the heartland of a separatist movement in the 1940s and which was given up in the

1960s? Where was federalism as a concept for governing India first mooted? True, much of all this has acquired political colour and posturing over the years but that Chennai has been in the vanguard of free thought cannot be denied.

The protests by way of Kolam-s are to be treated similarly. It is a colourful and highly artistic way of showing disagreement, one that becomes a city that is part of UNESCO's cultural network. And it is a peaceful form of protest. So how can it merit such draconian action as rounding up people? Such strongarm tactics do not form part of our ethos. And if by indulging in it the law thought it could coerce people into obedience, then it was a remarkable error in judgement about Chennai's people.

### Answers to quiz

1. Former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf, 2. The Netherlands said it will stop using Holland as a name, 3. Carlos Ghosn, former chairman of Nissan, 4. Pope Francis, 5. France's PSA, the maker of Peugeot and Citroën cars, 6. To address theft, security and other concerns concerning mobile phones, 7. The outgoing Army chief Bipin Rawat, 8. Koneru Humpy, 9. Locusts, 10. Tamil Nadu.

\*\*\*

11. S. Rajam, 12. The first woman novelist from India, 13. Sathya Studios, 14. M.K. Thyagaraja Bhagavathar and S.D. Subbulakshmi, 15. Mylai, 16. Soma or the moon, 17. M. Karunanidhi, 18. TS Sridhar, 19. Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Madurai Mani Iyer, 20. Cooum.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations

 Amalgations Group	 <b>ASHOK LEYLAND</b> Aapki Jeet. Hamari Jeet.	 <b>Bata</b> Bata India Limited	 <b>Brakes India Private Limited</b>	
 <b>CHATNATH TRUST</b>	 <b>FLSMIDTH</b> F.L. Smidth Limited	 <b>THE HINDU</b> The Hindu Group of Publications	 <b>K SUGAR AND IND COR</b>	 <b>LOKAVANI</b>
 <b>murugappa</b>	 <b>NIPPO</b>	 <b>Rane</b> Rane Group	 <b>RAYALA GROUP</b>	 <b>SAINT-GOBAIN</b> The future of glass. Since 1665.
 <b>SANMAR</b>	 <b>SUNDARAM FINANCE</b> Enduring values. New age thinking.	 <b>TVS</b> Sundram Fasteners Limited	 <b>TAJ</b> Hotels Resorts and Palaces	 <b>TAKE</b> Enabling Business Efficiencies
 <b>TATA</b> TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES	 <b>TVS</b> TVS MOTOR COMPANY	Since 1856, patently leaders — A WELLWISHER		