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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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Should auto sector drive the Union budget?

The Union Budget has just been presented in Parliament and the various measures that it carries are being analysed in detail. One of the interesting aspects of the latter exercise is the way most analysts have approached it from the industry which they represent. Almost all of them feel that it is overall a balanced budget except for their own specific industry which could have done with some more concessions. While we hold no opinion, for or against the budget, for this is not an area of expertise for us, it is worth pondering over

what would have happened had the Finance Minister accepted all the suggestions of each of the industries and provided

● by The Editor

all the concessions they had demanded.

In the chorus of laments the one from the automotive industry is perhaps the loudest. And we are addressing it here as that is a dominant player in our city. The city is one of India's three automotive centres, the other two being Gurugram (Gurgaon

that was) and Pune. There are three important clusters here – Oragadam, Maraimalai Nagar and Sriperumbudur-Irungattukottai. Chennai churns out one car every 20 seconds and one commercial vehicle every one-and-a-half minutes. Last year, the State accounted for 45 per cent of India's vehicle exports and since the Chennai port is the biggest in Tamil Nadu, it would be safe to assume that much of the cargo left from here. However, with export markets not yet shrinking, though flat for over a year now, (Continued on page 8)

Time to end the property tax mess

The Property tax situation in Chennai is an example of how decisions put off for political convenience complicate issues and render them intractable. The rates were not revised for twenty years. When, finally, the government raises it – working out to about a 3 per cent annual increase over the twenty years – there is public outcry over the “large” increase. This increase might still be insufficient to cover the actual cost escalation over the twenty years. Collection efficiency being just about 75 per cent, the proposed rate increase might also not fully translate into revenue.

A recent announcement

● by A Special Correspondent

by the Minister of “rollback of the property tax hike in urban local bodies”, as reported in the papers, conflicts with another report that a Committee would examine the representations and that old rates would prevail till the report is received. This has caused much confusion. Some areas are collecting at old rates and some others insisting on new rates. If it is a rollback, it is a retrograde step, as things are bound to go from bad to worse without adequate funds. The public groups have themselves said that they were “not against

the revision but that it should be ... affordable commensurate with various services provided”. Still, after fifteen months, concerns of taxpayers have not been addressed, explained and settled. Currently, recovery being only 40 per cent of the cost of the existing poor service, the government should have acted with utmost urgency to resolve issues and start getting money into the till. Instead of acting with urgency, it has taken a year to appoint a Committee

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH



Listed as being of Grade 2 a (significant historic, cultural and architectural merit) by the High Court of Madras, D'Angeli's hotel was the site where Spencer's began life as Durrant's in 1863. The space was acquired by

Giocomo D'Angeli and his hotel came up in 1908. Our OLD (top) shows it in all its glory. Our not-so-new (above) is from the 1960s when it was still a hotel and after being Bosotto's became the Airline's Hotel, owned by the *Indian Express* Group. It then suffered several changes of hands and eventually wound up as a warren of shops of which Bata was the most famous. It was demolished two years ago and the site remains empty as of now. Our New was taken while the demolition was in progress.



Property tax mess

(Continued from page 1)

“to examine representations”. This move is tactically inadvisable, as it raises hope of a rate reduction when it can hardly be afforded nor is expected by the public. Moving in the next few months into the fore-shadow of the next state election, the government may not have the political nerve to confirm the rate hike announced sixteen months ago. The Committee appointment is perhaps meant to delay matters till after the election in 2021. Do not be surprised if one-upmanship tempts the opposition party to offer reduction of rates as an election lollipop.

The issues themselves are not so complicated as to need a special Committee. The government could well have resolved them and gone ahead by softening the hike with some changes that do not seriously affect the projected revenue.

One concern was that the rate hike was too large at one go. A hasty promise that the increase would not exceed 50 per cent has muddied the issue. To keep this promise and to secure the intended revenue, government could have announced 50 per cent increase for year one and increases, thereafter, by 10 per cent every half year till the new rate is reached. Distinction between owner occupancy of the property and tenant occupancy is an avoidable nicety giving room for tenants claiming to be of the owner's family. The differentiation is conceptually wrong because the tax is the price for services given irrespective of whether the property is lived in or not and of who lives there, the owner or the tenant.

Collection efficiency is as low as 75 per cent in Chennai and 56 per cent in the Districts. In effect, in Chennai three assesses are paying for the fourth and in Districts, each is paying for another. Free riders get away with it as there is no way of individualised withholding of service for non-payment. To make up for lower collection,

if rates are raised, it amounts to punishing the honest taxpayer! There must be a way of making non-payment unattractive. For example, when properties are sold, a no-arrear certificate from the Corporation authority should be insisted upon as a condition for registering the sale. Electricity lends itself to be individually withheld; under some arrangement between the Corporation and the TNEB this perhaps can be used to enforce timely property tax payment. Citizens should realise that it is in their best interests to pay taxes promptly and then demand service.

How the authorities maintained service all these years, without revising the rate, is no management miracle. It is just that they either did not deliver service or it was shoddy. If good service is extended public may not mind paying, but upon *actually* getting it as there is a trust deficit. After paying, they are not sure they are getting what they have paid for. Closer study might show that hesitation to accept higher tax rates arise out of two factors – one, people have lost trust in government agencies to deliver results as promised and in time. This is true of not just property tax but generally of governance and its reliability to deliver. Property tax is an ideal opportunity to remove this trust deficit. This tax is specific to water, drainage, lighting and scavenging services (the last mentioned is for collection of solid waste but referred to in records by the old expression). It lends itself to a visible linkage of tax, action and benefit. With substantial increase in annual revenue with the new rates, the authorities must spell out a plan of how, in specifics, the funds will be utilised, target dates for each module of the plan and the dates by which each zone would see and feel the benefit.

Compromises on rates and stringency of collection measures to overcome public resistance will only take us back to sub-standard service, unwillingness to pay and more of poor service. As the time-worn cliché goes - in economics there is no free lunch. After convincing the Public that there is a case for adequate cost recovery for a good standard of service, and after resolving grievances, it is time that the government proves that it can create a modern design, high quality of infra structure in quick time. When the larger gush of funds begins, its impact must be seen to be growing every day – *Here is your Tax at Work! We shall deliver It shortly... (Date)!*

Teaching bureaucrats to dance

The Man from Madras Musings is aware that there are people in this world who go out of their way to court the society of bureaucrats. The sound logic is of course that you never know when such friendships can come in handy. MMM on the other hand is rather wary of seeking out the Babus. He prefers to go by the old North Indian dictum – never stand behind a horse or in front of a ruler, you never know what may happen. But in the course of this life MMM has met up with several bureaucrats and become friends with a few too. And he has found them all to be uniformly civil, which being civil servants, he is glad they are.

But there are some less appealing sides to dealing with them. And one of these is the fact that their time is rarely their own. Chances are that they will call you for a meeting and then when you hotfoot it to their office you find they are nowhere to be seen – a minister or some other higher up has called them away and there is no saying when they will return. You sip regulation tea, eat biscuits (these days munch dry fruits), look up at the ceiling and marvel at the mountains of files that appear to hold up the roofs of these offices. And then, just as you begin assuming you are part of the furniture, along comes bureaucrat, all apologies. It is in the light of this that MMM, especially when he has to meet Babus in the middle and lower orders, stipulates that they come to meet him at his office and not the other way, for then MMM can at least spend his time usefully even as he waits for his visitor to show up.

Thus it was that last week MMM found his cell phone ringing endlessly and almost instinctively knew that someone from Government circles was looking for him. They never cease calling till you answer while when you need them it is usually the reverse – they don't answer till you cease calling them. Anyway there was middle order Babu wanting to have a meeting and so could MMM please call at his office. To this MMM replied courteously that MMM would much prefer the mountain calling on Mahomet and so it was arranged. Babu agreed to call on MMM at an agreed time on a particular date. The anointed hour found MMM all accoutered and waiting but of panjandrum there was not a sign. The clock ticked away and still no Babu. After bounding to and fro like a caged tiger for a while MMM decided to call the man on his cell phone. There was no answer. His secretary, on calling the landline said sir was not in his seat.

After quite a while during which MMM busied himself with other pursuits, there was a call from the Babu. He had been tied up with the Minister and was now on his way to meet MMM. He managed to throw in some breathlessness to indicate his efforts in that direction but that cut no ice with MMM. Rather in the manner of the bow-wielding god addressing his ten-headed foe, MMM asked the Babu to stop where he was and come the next day. There was some gasping and spluttering at the other end but MMM held firm.

This had its effect though. The caller arrived for the rescheduled appointment five minutes ahead of time.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

The Government has got Gmail

The Man from Madras Musings' meeting with the above-mentioned bureaucrat had another aspect of dealing with our Government that MMM has long found puzzling. Not one department, ministry or officer ever uses a Government email ID but invariably asks you to communicate with him/her via some private account. In fact MMM doubts if the Government even has an official email network. Sure enough the man whom MMM met up with handed him two email IDs and both of them were variants of SomeDepartmentOrTheOther@gmail.com.

MMM wondered as to why this was so. It was explained to him that the root cause of all this proliferation of private email accounts is the Government policy of transferring senior Babus at the drop of a hat. Here today gone tomorrow is how most of these departmental heads function though mind you, the rate of rotation is nothing as compared to the time when Mater Dei ruled over us all. Off with their heads was the motto then. Now officials last somewhat longer but still the transfer is always around the corner, at least for some of them. And when the transfer does happen, officials leave without a trace – they clear off taking away the passwords of the official email IDs and the ego of the successors is such that they cannot ask their predecessors for them. And this is where these private email service providers score – a forgot password request can unlock doors and so this is what everyone wants.

That having an email ID

does not in any way mean these bureaucrats read what you send them became evident to MMM when he eventually did send an email to the two IDs given. That they did not bounce like rubber balls was relief enough and indication that the messages had been delivered. But after a couple of days stage wait and not having received a response MMM decided to make bold and call the Babu concerned. No email received was the curt response. How could that be asked MMM, for after all they had not bounced. To this rejoinder the bureaucrat had no answer and promised to check, no doubt by setting up a full-fledged interdepartmental enquiry.

After a couple of days there was a reply – he had not informed his secretary that there would be an email from my account and so no print out was taken for his perusal. That made matters as clear as a pikestaff – secretary babu takes print out of messages from accounts that main babu tells them messages will come from. These are then read and probably a mail will be dictated, which when secretary babu finds time, will be typed and sent to the recipients. All of this means a process of a week or more and as for those of whose email IDs secretary babu has no intimation, they will never ever get a reply, write they ever so wisely.

MMM is right now in more exalted company – his email was searched for and then located. A print out was taken and presented to main babu who has promised MMM a reply in due course. The matter as they say in Government circles, has been taken into file and that by itself is a major achievement.

Tail'f'iece

The Man from Madras Musings was reminded of the Chief when he saw this. How he would have laughed! That way he was Chief and best. On a more prosaic level, it is ironic that for a language that has no equivalent of the letter f, we Tamil speakers manage to bring it in at all odd places – 'f'latform, sti'f'end, etc.



– MMM

Thank you, Donors

We today, publish with thanks donations received for the period upto February 15th.

– The Editor

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OUR READERS WRITE



Double bore

The 1964 test match between India and England covered in the last issue is one which I had the misfortune to attend on

all the five days. We had a group of cricket crazy friends who used to attend all the matches every day.

After purchasing our tickets for the D stand, a lot of plan-

ning went into fixing the menu for lunch, tea and drink intervals and into who will bring each item.

Of course, we had the pleasure of watching Bapu Nadkarni's bowling exploits but we had to endure the most boring partnership between Barrington and Bolus. Their names gave us the opportunity to rename them as BORINGTON and BORUS.

G.V. Raman
Executive Chairman
Shriram Group

More on Cricket

It was memorable cricket at the Corporation Stadium and I shared this article with my friend who gave another piece of information which may also stand as a record for Madras and Cricket.

During this match, most of the English Players had stomach upset and they were not able to field all the eleven on the ground during their bowling session.

There was a request from the English side to spare some of the reserve Indian players to take up fielding and this was conceded by the Indian team, a rare gesture, and at the venue where appreciation never dies for such acts. One of the fielders was Kirpal Singh and he was instrumental in catch out an Indian batsman.

Just recalling school days when the batting side also were fielding.

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The following comment was left on the Facebook page of Madras Musings regarding the sports piece we carried on Nadkarni's world record in Madras.

I watched this Test at the Corporation Stadium in the then Madras. The sheer boredom was at times broken by Barrington stopping play midway to catch hold of a free-floating kite that landed in the ground. Those were days when kite flying was a big sport and "deals" between two or more kite flyers often resulted in one or more kites getting cut by the "manja" thread. Another boredom breaker was the hilarious spectacle of groundstaff chasing dogs that invaded the play area.

How would Thiruvalluvar deal with irritating marketing calls?

"Are you looking for car loans?"

"Car loans?"

"Yes. To buy a car. New or even used."

"Oh, good. I would like to take a loan."

"How much Madam? What car are you planning to buy?"

"Say about 200 crores."

"What? 200 crores!"

"Yes. I am planning to buy a fleet of 10 or 15 imported cars."

"When Madam?"

"As soon as you sanction the loan. I can come even tomorrow to sign the papers."

"What is the repayment plan you want Madam?"

"Oh. Forgot to tell you. I am interested only in non-repayable loans."

"Non-repayable..."

"Yes. That's it."

The line disconnects and I enjoy my morning dose of mirth.

After being bombarded at all hours of the day by unwanted marketing calls and pleading with the callers in vain not to call me, it dawned on me that these poor women are just earning their living by bothering me. I turned to Thiruvalluvar, who never fails to deliver the right advice in any situation. *Idukkan varungaal naguga* (Laugh when you are beset with problems), he advised.

I took him at his word and now, not a day passes without opportunities for merriment. My only regret is that I am unable to see the expression on my caller's face. The above-mentioned phone call was one of the early exchanges. Another call went thus.

"Are you looking for an alliance Madam? We at Matrimonials can help you."

"Yes. I am looking for one."

"Boy or girl?"

"Boy. Any caste or community is OK. He should have very good educational qualifications, a top-salaried job, should be a good companion and useful around the house."

"For whom Madam? Your daughter?"

"No. For me. I am only 72 years old."

The phone went dead. Here's one last conversation for the road:

"Are you looking for holiday tours in India and abroad? We have very attractive packages."

"Sure. I am interested. We are a group of about fifty."

"Wonderful. We can quote you concessional rates. Where do you want to go?"

"We want to go to Mount Everest. All of us are senior citizens above 70 years."

The caller disconnected.

Now I look forward to these calls for my daily quota of fun. The only crunch is that you need to think on your feet.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

T(Tubectomy). V(Vasectomy). Antony

This has reference to the article on T.V. Antony by Ambrose. T.V. Antony, was an unusual IAS officer. I had the privilege of working with him during my Round Table days in late 70's. As a Special Officer of Chennai Corporation, he was organising scores of Family Planning camps in North Madras. My Table (Madras West Round Table No. 10) had adopted Family Planning as a Project and I was assigned by my club to co-ordinate with Antony and offer any help he wanted.

I remember he would cycle down to my house in Sastri Nagar during his morning constitucionals every other day and instruct me about the FP camp that I must attend that day. His personal touch in whatever he took up, was amazing.

His story about the three dosas and his two sons to emphasise the importance of small family narrated in his accented Tamil became quite popular among his target audience. He would tell them "Once, during breakfast time, when my 4 year old younger son demanded a younger brother, I decided to test him. I told him that while he and his elder brother were getting three dosas each now, when a younger brother came into the family, the six dosas would have to be shared by three kids. When I asked him what would he prefer - three dosas or two dosas and a younger brother - pat came the reply that he would prefer three dosas."

He richly deserved the Padma Bhushan Award that he received in 2004 for his untiring efforts in promoting Family Planning.

Until a few months ago, I would bump into him at the Gandhi Nagar Club, where he would come for a swimming session and visit the Club library where I am a regular. It was always a pleasure interacting with him even in his twilight years. When I would remind him about his reputation as 'T(Tubectomy). V(Vasectomy). Antony' in his hey days he would laugh it off. Antony will be always an 'Unforgettable character' in my life. May his soul rest in peace!

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* * *

More on women doctors

I read with interest the article on Pioneering Women Doctors who established a name for themselves in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Chennai hospitals.

May I add here that an important name that has got missed out is of Dr. A.B. Marikar M.D., who was the Superintendent of Gosha Hospital (presently Kasturba Hospital for Women) at Chepauk; and was also the Director of Medical Education in Tamil Nadu during 1965-70?

She hailed from a progressive Muslim family of Kerala - the Marikars - who believed in educating their womenfolk. In fact, she was the first Muslim woman to become a doctor with an M.D. Degree. The Marikar family was and is a prominent name in Kerala with Marikar Motors selling cars, Marikar Travels with buses in Central Kerala and Marikar Dept. Store in Munnar (Kerala). Dr. Marikar was the eldest of a family of 3 brothers and 3 sisters, and she moved from Vizag to Chennai to pursue MD at MMC. One sister was an advocate and another an educationist.

Dr. Marikar was a strict disciplinarian and it is said that Mr. Kamaraj, the then CM used to stay away from recommending names to her for transfers, for, she would not take any. In my own case, as I knew her through one of my relatives, I approached her to recommend me for a medical seat (she was DME then). She politely told me "You have good marks, if you are destined to become a doctor, you will get a seat - no recommendation please." Such was her honesty and discipline. Gosha Hospital would shudder when she walked in on her inspection rounds. She resided in Montieth Road and was Secy. of Indian Red Cross, T.N. Chapter till her death. Old timers will agree that she was an 'Unsung Heroine' among the famous Women Doctors of Chennai.

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Of Wood Wharves and Firewood Bankshalls

The signboard that you see in the adjoining picture is what triggered off this article. Tiring of going down the same route on the beach each morning, my friend and I walked into the arch that leads from the Marina to the Triplicane Sri Parthasarathi temple via Ayodhya Kuppam (now Nagar). The ancient signboard (is it of wood or concrete?) caught my attention. Old Firewood Bankshall Street is what it reads and that implies there is a new one (there really is one by the way). Both the old and the new, located in the Mattan Kuppam area of Triplicane, are now known as Firewood Bank Streets, the word Bankshall no doubt puzzling the street name signboard makers. But they are in august company – even in the 1930s Bankshall was a forgotten term and these were named Old and New Firewood Bank Stall Streets. The old thoroughfare itself runs for a short distance, parallel to Buckingham Canal. By surviving for so long it brought to mind a whole era gone by, when firewood was such an important aspect of daily life.

challenge and this is where the Buckingham Canal and all the older waterways that eventually merged into it, proved useful. The first of these was Cochrane's Canal, named after Basil Cochrane (1753-1826), who having entered East India Company service at the age of sixteen rose sufficiently enough to practically corner the victualling contracts for the British Navy in and around Madras. Soon his interests spread to other supplies as well and this is how he became interested in getting a canal built from Pulicat to the northern extreme of the city, chiefly to move firewood. He financed it and work began in 1803, ending in 1806. Officially known as Clive's Canal after the then Governor, Edward, the Second Lord Clive, it was known only as Cochrane's locally. The waterway terminated near Basin Bridge at what was known as Wood Wharf, a name that still survives near the northern end of Wall Tax Road. In fact, there are many lanes under the area marked Wood Wharf and all of them end in what was once a boating jetty. Timber and firewood were stored here and later made their way further into the city. This is also the reason why Sydenham's Road and the surrounding areas still remain

While this insatiable appetite did worry some early environmentalists, as catering to it involved felling many forests, the more commercial minded among the East India Company servants began mulling over ways and means of meeting the requirement. Forests in the Presidency were identified and more importantly, the cultivation of casuarina was encouraged, especially in the coastal areas. The area in the vicinity of the Pulicat Lake, to the north of the city, and along what is presently East Coast Road, to the south, became the principal sources of this wood. Moving the logged timber into Madras was the next

the headquarters of the timber business in the city.

Heavy felling of timber in Sriharikota and other places along the Pulicat soon saw the area being denuded and attention then shifted to the south of the city. Work began on the South Canal in 1852 and was completed in 1857, this waterway linking the Adyar to the mouth of the Palar. This became the secondary source of supply of casuarina to the city. By the 1870s, digging began as a famine relief measure, for linking the north and south canals via the city. This was named after the then Governor, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos and eventually the

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

entire waterway, from Pulicat to the Palar came to be known by that name. The principal residential areas through which the Buckingham Canal wound its way in the city soon had markets coming up along the banks. The most famous among these was of course the Tanneer Thurai (waterside) market in Mylapore (see Lost Landmarks MM Vol. XXVII No. 14, Nov. 1st, 2014) but lesser known was the huge Firewood Bankshall that came up in Triplicane. Also forgotten is the timber yard that existed for long near the Barber's (now Ambedkar) Bridge at the eastern end of Edward Elliot's Road (now S Radhakrishnan Salai), which has since made way for the Citi Centre Mall. Rumour has it that it was either here, or in the coconut grove that existed alongside (now the Police Quarters), that stalwarts of the non-Brahmin movement met for the first time, to found the South Indian Liberation Front aka Justice Party.

It is very likely that the Old Firewood Bankshall Street, by virtue of its name, predates the Buckingham Canal and was a location from where firewood was loaded via catamarans to the waiting ships at Madras Roads. Both old and new are however practically on the bank of the canal.

The heyday for firewood supply to Madras was in the mid 19th century. In 1852, the quantity was as high as 98,000 tonnes (Hugh Cleghorn, *Forests and Gardens of South India*) and yet it is in this same year that *The India Directory* warns that while water is excellent in Madras (!!!) and all sorts of provisions may be had for ships, firewood is scarce. Articles of the period show that not one part of the casuarina was allowed to go waste – the stumps and roots left behind after cutting commanded a price and there was a further informal industry in following the pathways of carts that carried the wood through the city – twigs and slivers that fell off were collected for firewood as well. The demand had by 1882 (Sir Dietrich Brandis – *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration in Madras Presidency*), come down to 63,000 tonnes, of which 47,000 was coming in by water. Industrial requirements for firewood reduced by the early 20th century. Domestic requirements however continued to remain high. By then, a tramway 13 miles long brought timber to the Pulicat Lake from neighbouring villages for onward shipment via the canal.

With areas under cultivation of casuarina not increasing, the

city began facing shortages of firewood by the time of the Second World War. That was when the population in Madras doubled. The Government had to resort to rationing of firewood at one pound per day per capita. A black market immediately came up and flourished. The rationing continued well into the 1950s and beyond. As late as in the 1960s, the Government was lamenting over the dependence on the canal for the supply of firewood and the shortage of this commodity. Kerosene, also a rationed commodity and available since the late 1800s was rapidly becoming an alternative and by the 1960s, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) had arrived on the scene. Typically, domestic households were reluctant to try this new option for a while but it did catch on. The more traditional eateries and larger social gatherings such as weddings continued to use firewood. But by the 1980s, cooking gas had taken over.

With the canal having been defunct since the 1960s, the firewood bankshall lost its meaning as did the other wood depots, especially those that catered for fuel requirements. The storehouses began to be put to other use. In a way it was all to the good, for the city cut its usage of wood, even though it had increased its carbon footprint by way of other forms of pollution. There were some who claimed that food never tasted the same thereafter but these were people who never had to bother about the actual cooking!



A word on Bankshalls

In today's parlance bankshall means nothing. But in the early years of the British empire in India, this was an all important word. The entire trade of the East India Company depended on stocks – of cloth and other articles and these were stored in huge warehouses – known as kidangu-s or pandaga salai-s in Tamil. The Telugu equivalent for kidangu was giddangi and the two, along with the Hindi godaam and the Malay godong probably gave rise to the English word godown. As per HD Love's *Vestiges of Old Madras*, pandaga salai morphed into bankshall. It is a term extensively quoted in Company transactions and eventually made its way from Madras to Calcutta which city even now has a Bankshall Street, and the City Sessions Court there now is known as Bankshall Court.

A pioneering Tamil magazine and its founder

The history of Tamil journalism is a long and interesting one. While the propagation of religion was primarily the focus of early Tamil magazines (the first one being the Tamil Magazine which was brought out by the Religious Tract Society in 1831), it changed over a period of time to serve other objectives such as dissemination of knowledge on literature, science, art, culture etc. The pioneer in this regard was the *Dinavarthamani*, which was founded in 1855 and was edited by Father Percival. This piece is about another such magazine of general interest, the *Viveka Chintamani* which was founded in 1892 by a man who is not much spoken about today for his contribution to the world of Tamil journalism, C.V. Swaminatha Iyer.

He was born in 1863 in Tiruvaiyaru. Nothing much is known about his family except that it had once been a wealthy one whose fortunes had dwindled over a period of time. His father Venkatarama Iyer however ensured that the family circumstances did not stand in the way of his son's education, which was completed at Kumbakonam.

Swaminatha Iyer's tryst with journalism came about quite as a matter of chance. While on a visit to Madras in 1885, he came into contact with G. Subramania Iyer, the proprietor of *The Hindu*, who had started the *Swadesamitran* three years earlier. With the job of running two newspapers proving to be arduous, Subramania Iyer was on the lookout for a person who would take care

of the fledgling *Swadesamitran*. The mantle fell on Swaminatha Iyer, thus marking the beginning of a long journey in the world of journalism. Though Subramania Iyer remained the publisher and editor in name, it was Swaminatha Iyer who ran the show, as several accounts of the life of G. Subramania Iyer and the early years of the *Swadesamitran* record. Swaminatha Iyer's stint at *Swadesamitran* lasted for a decade. This experience came in handy when he went on to bring out the *Viveka Chintamani*.

It was around this time that several associations such as the Triplicane Literary Society and the Madras Hindu Reform Association were founded to promote public discussions and thought on various socio-political issues. In the early 1880s, G. Subramania Iyer and M. Veeraraghavachariar founded the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge on the lines of an eponymous organisation that had been founded in London in 1826. It aimed at the creation of political awareness and knowledge amongst the masses. It however did not last for long as dwindling interest finally led to its closure in the 1890s. The idea did not die, for it served as an inspiration to Swaminatha Iyer to start an organisation on similar lines. Thus, was born the Diffusion of Knowledge Agency on March 1, 1892, its primary objective being promotion of the habit of reading amongst the vast rural population and creating opportunities for learning. In order to carry out its objectives, Swaminatha

Iyer began a monthly magazine, *Viveka Chintamani*, the first issue coming out in May 1892.

It comprised 32 pages and had articles on a variety of topics such as science, moral instruction for students, current affairs etc. As early as the second issue, it had a page exclusively for children, probably the first magazine to do so. It also had a separate section for women. The periodical notched up several significant achievements, particularly in the field of Tamil fiction to its credit. It serialised *Kamalambal Charithram* by the young B.R. Rajam Aiyar, perhaps only the third novel in Tamil. The story ran for two years, between February 1893 and January 1895. The following year, it was brought out as

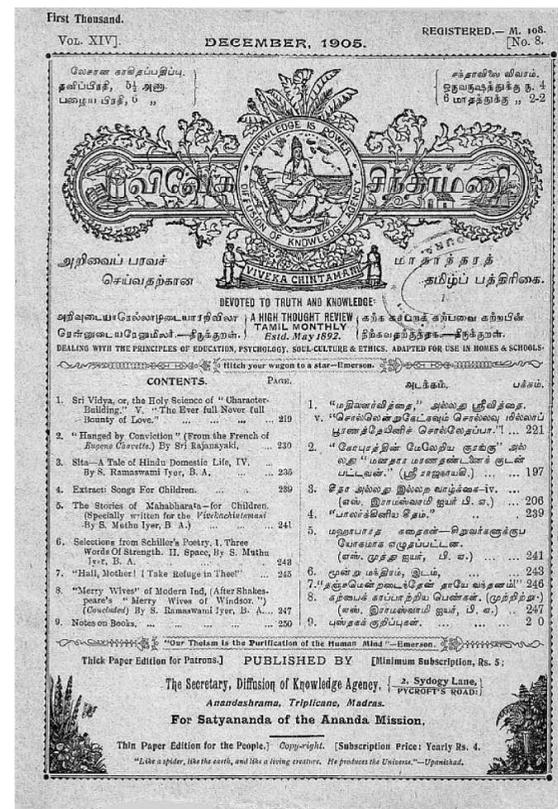
● by
Karthik Bhatt

a book by C.V. Swaminatha Iyer. *Viveka Chintamani* serialised the early episodes of A. Madhavi-ah's work *Savithri Charithram* in 1895, before it was stopped abruptly for reasons unknown. The magazine would later carry his work *Muthumeenakshi*. It also carried book reviews and short stories of authors such as Milton, Rabindranath Tagore, etc, translated into Tamil.

Viveka Chintamani also actively promoted the study of the Tamil language. It ran several articles on its literary and grammatical aspects. 'Parithimaar Kalaingar' V.G. Surayanarayana Sastriar wrote a series on the life of many Tamil poets, which was released as a compilation titled *Tamilppulavar Charithram* after his death in 1903.

Very interestingly, the magazine came in two editions, a thick paper one for 'schools, patrons, reading rooms and circulating libraries' and a thin paper one for the masses. The office, which was in Sydoji Lane, Triplicane was shifted the Swaminatha Iyer's residence Lalitalaya in Adam Street in Mylapore around 1908 or so.

C.V. Swaminatha Iyer was a man of several other interesting facets. He was a highly spiritual personality. An active practitioner of Kundalini Yoga, he was also a Srividya Upasaka, who took as is demanded in that cult, a name for its practice – Satyananda. He founded



the Ananda Mission in 1903 in Chidambaram, whose aim was the 'propagation of Truth and Knowledge as the way to Health, Happiness and Life through self-help, self-control and self-culture'. It sought to work for the 'uplift of humanity by uplifting of human thought above the considerations of the lower self'. He believed staunchly in the sovereignty of the rule of the King Emperor and led the initiative to appeal for the re-naming of Black Town as George Town following the Royal visit of 1905. The name change was announced the following year. His ardent support for the sovereign however did not stand in the way of his taking an active part in the proceedings of the case that followed the Arbuthnot Bank crash in 1906. He had lost nearly Rs 20,000 in this debacle. It was following his petition that Justice H.T. Boddam, a preference shareholder of Arbuthnot Industrials Limited, one of Arbuthnot & Co's main assets (and therefore an interested party), recused himself as the Insolvency Commissioner.

Approaching the age of sixty, Swaminatha Iyer handed over *Viveka Chintamani* to his elder son, Sadanand soon after the completion of its Silver Jubilee

year in 1917. It did not last much longer, winding up in the 1920s. Sadanand was however on his way to becoming a legend in his own right in the field of journalism. He founded the nationalistic Free Press Journal Agency in Bombay and ran the eponymous paper in the 1930s. He bought the *Indian Express* from Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu in 1933 and ran it for a while, before it was taken over by Ramnath Goenka. He was also one of the seven founding shareholders of the Press Trust of India. Swaminatha Iyer's younger son, Dr. S. Natarajan (more popularly known by his pen name, Najan) too would carry on his father's legacy. A renowned Srividya Upasaka, he wrote more than 100 books in his lifetime on diverse topics.

Lalitalaya's tryst with journalism continues till date, with Dr. Natarajan's son running a publishing unit from the redeveloped premises.

Acknowledgements:

Various issues of *Viveka Chintamani*.
Indhiya Vidyalalaku Mundhaiya Tamizh Idahzhagal, (Part 1), E. Sundaramoorthy and Arasu M.R., International Institute of Tamil Studies, 1998.



The plaque Lalitalaya, which stands outside 39, Adam Street.

Nani Palkhivala in Madras – III

(Continued from
last fortnight)

Tamil Version of 'Constitution and the Common Man'

The Palkhivala-Rajaji speeches at Bertram Hall and the Cho- Palkhivala event at Abbotsbury had generated considerable interest among local politicians from the ruling party in the State. The name 'Cho' always made them nervous. Palkhivala, arguing in the Supreme Court in the marathon Kesavananda Bharati case to safeguard our Fundamental Rights, was also very much in the news. The media was covering the case on a day to day basis. I thought, "Why not have the article in English by Palkhivala called 'Constitution and the Common Man' translated in Tamil and have it distributed among MLAs and others to create an awareness about the Constitution in peril?". I suggested this to M.R. Pai, Secretary of the Forum of Free Enterprise and my boss in Bombay. He agreed to my suggestion. I then got in touch with T.V. Balasubramaniam, a close friend and who was earlier commissioned by Forum to translate some English articles on economic issues for the Tamil press. He was an excellent translator. Considering the passion of local politicians for their language and alliterations, I suggested to him that the title in Tamil should be alliterative and catchy. Before I could wink, he came out with the title *Arasiyal Sasanamum Appavi Kudimagalum* (Tamil for the English title 'Constitution and the Common Man'). The booklets were printed and distributed among members of the Tamilnadu Legislative Assembly and a few others. Then I felt that it should reach people beyond Madras.

A.G. Venkatachari of *Dinamani*, a Tamil daily, with whom I used to travel every day by bus from Mylapore to Mount Road (Arts College) suggested that we put a news item in *Dinamani* about the booklet announcing that it would be sent free of cost to those who respond with a post card mentioning their addresses. This, he said, would take Palkhivala's voice across the State. Discerning readers from all over the State responded, asking for copies. G.K. Sundaram, eminent industrialist in Coimbatore, asked for some copies. We had printed 500 copies and distributed them all. I have another interesting memory concerning this booklet.

We had received a request for 50 copies from a town called Sethiathope claiming that it was

for distribution among members of some 'Youth Group'. I sent the copies gladly. When a request came again from the same town but from a different address, I found the handwriting on the card to be identical to the first letter! In the next few days two more identical requests came from the same town for multiple copies! I did not respond, suspecting that this could be a ruse to get the booklets free of cost and sell it as waste paper, which would perhaps be used by some peanut vendor to wrap and sell his roasted product!

Forum's Chennai Centre during the Emergency

When Palkhivala returned Indra Gandhi's brief and withdrew from appearing for her, some organisations he was associated with came under Government scrutiny. The Chennai centre of the Forum of Free Enterprise was one of them. We got a letter from the Government stating that the Forum office should maintain an 'Employees Attendance Register' and that it should be kept ready for scrutiny whenever required. In the Chennai centre, I was the only or 'all-in-one' employee! I showed the letter to our Chairman 'Chitra' S. Narayanaswamy and told him that I will keep a register in his office and will come in and sign every day and he can initial the same once a week. He merely chuckled and said nothing in reply. We got another Circular stating certain 'dos and don'ts' while arranging lectures/speeches, which included the conditions that we should not criticize the Emergency, the President, P.M., Governor, etc. I was rather perturbed by the 'etc.', and told our Chairman that anything from loud laughter to a sneeze or a cough or an applause at the wrong place during a lecture or speech could be construed as criticism and we might get into trouble under the 'etc.' clause! After communicating with the Bombay office, we decided to not arrange public events but occasional classes on Economic Theory for student members of the Forum at Srinivasa Sastri hall, Mylapore, addressed by my economics mentor Prof. S. Radhakrishnan. Thanks to the Government of Tamilnadu's stand on Emergency we were able to have some semblance of activity. We were also able to get some underground material on what was going on in the Supreme Court where Palkhivala was passionately arguing for our rights during those black days. We also had that material circulated among like-minded people, including Cho.

In more recent years, at a book release function in which L.K. Advani was the chief guest, Cho called out 'Hello Forum Gopal' when he saw me. I was elated that he recognised me after so many years. That book release event happened a few decades after my Forum days when I was known to many people as 'Forum Gopal'. The occasion brought back pleasant memories from the seventies, especially the speech at Abbotsbury.

Other speeches

While Palkhivala's budget speeches and lectures on topics falling broadly under the head of economics were held under the auspices of the Forum of Free Enterprise, speeches under other topics were usually held

● by
T.S. Gopal

under the auspices of other well-known organisations such as, for example, The Servants of India Society which arranged the Bertram Hall speech in 1971. As I had arranged his speeches under the Forum's auspices on many occasions, the other institutions and associations would usually seek my assistance, especially to communicate with him, while making arrangements for their events.

A Speech on the Supersession of Judges in 1973

In 1973, Palkhivala gave a speech in Madras on 'Supreme Court and Judicial Independence' at the Congress grounds in Teynampet under the auspices of the Triplicane Cultural Academy. The subject-matter of the speech was the supersession of three senior Supreme Court judges. He was deeply concerned and the book *A Judiciary Made to Measure* he had edited was already making waves. M. R. Pai called me from Bombay and asked if the Triplicane Cultural Academy would hold the event in Madras. I communicated their assent to him. Just as a speech by Palkhivala invariably exceeded the expectation of the audience, the strength of the audience invariably exceeded the expectation of the organisers. The Academy was faced with the question of selecting a suitable venue for this event because, by this time in the seventies, a speech by Palkhivala was what a film star-studded event is today for the masses! On the day of the speech, thousands of chairs were placed in Congress grounds but they proved inadequate to accommodate the vast crowd that actually assembled. More number of



A view of the crowd gathered outside Abbotsbury to listen to Nani Palkhivala.

Palkhivala's fans than expected had gathered at the venue and a good number of them spilled out to the open grounds beyond the chairs.

K. Subba Rao, former Chief Justice of India, presided. Eminent legal minds, including Gopalswami Aiyangar, were present. Narayanaswamy Mudaliar, State Minister for Law, who sat in the front row, was pleased that he had arrived quite early because he escaped the ordeal of wading his way through the crowd that gathered later. So large was the assembled crowd that, before Palkhivala's arrival, clouds of dust rose from the ground due to the rushing of thousands of pairs of feet. I wished and hoped that he did not wear the immaculate white attire characteristic of him because I was certain that it would get quite dirty before he ascended the stage. But he did not depart from his usual habit and arrived at the venue in spotless white. Nonetheless, to my relief, I noticed that the dust had settled down by then. He paddled his way to the stage through the swarming sea of eager faces. Attired in the white that had fortunately escaped the dust, he held the audience spellbound by a speech filled with trenchant observations on the topic. On this occasion the humour and wittiness that were usually present in his speeches were absent because the topic was a grave one. An exceptional moment when he infused his observations with appropriate witticism was when he said that if the Government succeeded with its Machiavellian idea then there would be more "looking forward" judges than "forward looking" judges. Every member of the audience heard the speech in rapt attention.

The reports of that speech in *The Hindu* and *The Mail* (now defunct but for several decades since the British times one of the leading dailies in Madras) carefully preserved by the Triplicane Cultural Academy enable me to share some more details. It was a 90 minutes speech on 12th May 1973. Palkhivala said that a committed judiciary is a contradiction in terms and added, "It is like a boiling ice cream. Either he is committed or he is a judge in the true sense of the term. He cannot be both." He replied point by point to the arguments raised by H. R. Gokhale, Union Law Minister, and Mohan Kumaramangalam, Union Steel Minister, in support of the Government's decision to appoint A. N. Ray as Chief Justice of India superseding three senior judges. He said he could not imagine a greater damage done to the cause of freedom than by the promulgation of what he described as the "Kumaramangalam doctrine" that the executive was entitled to have judges of its choice, whose qualification would consist in the fact that they were committed to the philosophy of the ruling party. He said that the Government's action was a "severe blow and lasting damage to the democratic character of our Constitution much more than complete and total deletion of the whole chapter on fundamental rights enshrined in it." Later, he warned, "If judges began to uphold the philosophy of the ruling party India would cease to remain as one nation. They would then only witness disintegration of the country." Subba Rao, who presided, said that they were witnessing a conflict between democratic forces and totalitarian forces.

(To be concluded
next fortnight)

The Madras answer to marble

(Continued from
last fortnight)

An incredible input Smith – the builder of the second light-house – is the translation of Louis-Joseph Vicat's *Résumé des Connaissances Positives Actuelles sur les Qualités, le Choix et la Convenance Réciproque des Matériaux Propres à la Fabrication des Mortiers et Ciments Calcaires suivi de Notes et Tableaux d'Expériences Justificatives* (1828, l'Imprimerie de Firmin Didot, Paris, pp. 149) into English (Smith 1837, Fig. 6). The translation includes notes and comments on Madras chûnnam, based on experiments he made while stationed in Madras.

During Smith's time in Madras, extensive stretches of magnesite were discovered in the Chalk Hills, Salem and Tiruchirapalli. The estimates were that magnesite was available plentifully. Measures were already in place to explore these landscapes for use as a 'cement' source. Benjamin Heyne (1770–1819), a medical doctor and a noted botanist of India, first discovered the availability of magnesite in the Chalk Hills in the early decades of the 19th Century (Blanford 1865). In 1825, Alexander Macleod of the Madras Army established the hydraulic properties of magnesian limestone found

in Salem region and brought that finding to Madras government's attention. The magnesite cement (Sorel Cement) of Salem magnesite was considered of superior quality (Cotton 1839). This material came into extensive use in India after John Smith experimentally verified its efficiency in construction work (Smith 1837).

Smith (1837) provides extensive scientific remarks on the physical, chemical, and engineering aspects of chûnnam used in Madras. The following paragraph refers to some of his key remarks.

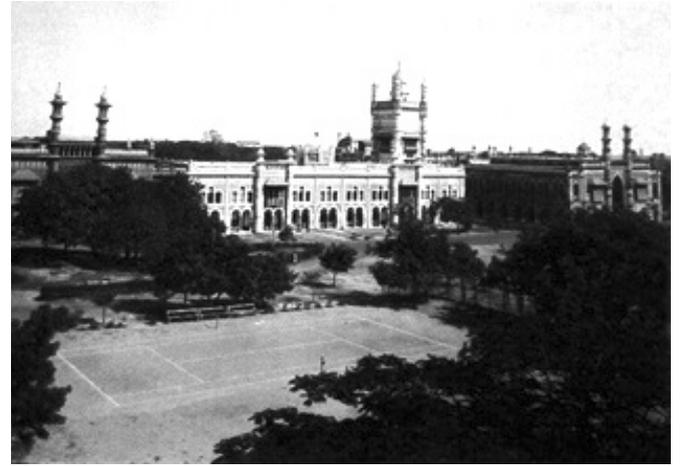
"Three coats were usually applied. The first coat of 1–1.5 cm thickness, intended as wall plaster, involved the application of a mixture of seashell lime and sand, tempered with jaggery solution. On drying, the second, prepared as a thinner solution was applied with the mixture of well-sieved, powdered seashell lime and fine-white sand. The second and the third coats of chûnnam usually did not include the addition of jaggery solution, because its dull-brownness was considered to tarnish the whiteness of the applied chûnnam-wash. The third, usually the last, coat was polished. The third coat chûnnam was prepared with extreme care. Only the whitest seashells with a small proportion of white sand were used. The compo-

nents intended for the third coat were ground in a circular, granite-base channel in which a massive stone roller rolled grinding the chûnnam ingredients to a uniformly smooth, creamy paste. In a bushel (c. 27 kg) of this paste, a dozen eggs, half a pound (0.227 kg) of ghee (clarified butter), and some freshly curdled yoghurt (quantity not specified) were added. To this composite, some of the master masons (maistry) added 110–225 g of balapong (soap-stone, steatite, metamorphic talc-schist), which ensured brilliance of the final coat. However, every master mason had a recipe of his own. The essential ingredients, in addition to the lime and sand, were the albumen of eggs and the ghee. Sometimes an oil (not identified) was used instead of ghee. The final coat was always thin, and was applied usually before the second was fully dry.

● by
Dr. A. Raman

Because of the dilution and thinness, the third coat dried quickly. The washed walls were then scrubbed using the smooth surface of a hand-held block of either balapong or agate. This procedure was done for several hours followed by wiping with a soft cotton fabric."

In the 'Memorandum of experiments upon the influence of jaggery in chunam' published (1839), Smith describes his experiments to establish the validity of using jaggery solution as a tempering agent while making the Madras chûnnam. He made six trials of mixing the mortar with (i) plain water, (ii) fresh-lime solution, (iii) ¼lb (113 g) of jaggery mixed in 1 gallon (3.78 L) of limewater, (iv) ½lb (227 g) of jaggery mixed in 1 gallon (3.78 L) of limewater, (v) 1 lb (453 g) of jaggery mixed in 1 gallon (3.78 L) of limewater, and (vi) 2 lbs (907 g) of jaggery mixed in 1 gallon (3.78 L) of limewater. He concludes that the use of jaggery as an additive to the chûnnam mortar is of special advantage, especially at the first hardening. He concludes that the jaggery is a highly useful material that acts as an efficient cohesive material in achieving a superior level of compaction of the chûnnam mortar, by enhancing the combining affinity of the lime. The proportion of jaggery used is



The Humayun Mahal.

indicated by Smith as follows (p. 129): 'no less than 10–20 lbs (4.53–9.07 kg) of jaggery per parrah² (of chûnnam mortar) is necessary'. On the cohesive property of jaggery he says (p. 129):

'The reason is, that the improvement made in the cohesion of the cement (mortar) depending only on the quantity of jaggery (jaggery) which remains within it after drying, must obviously be determined by the degree of saturation of the fluid of admixture, which regulates the quantity of the sugar which is left behind on desiccation'.

Conclusion

The remark that repeatedly occurs in the literature on Madras chûnnam is its marble-like finish. Almost every European, who had occasion to see and feel the chûnnam work in Madras consistently admired for its finished quality. Indeed, chûnnam was used in other parts of India for ages. However, the Madras chûnnam was considered marvellous. The Madras chûnnam was the material of choice in building works in Singapore of the Straits Settlements in the early- and mid-19th Century.

The above narrative brings to light some of the ignored, forgotten details of the plastering materials used in the 18th and 19th century Tamizh country, which impress as a giant leap in construction work, further to impressive sculpture work done using different rock materials. The Airawateswara temple, 4 km south-west of Kumbakonam, built by Raja II (1146–1172 AD) of the later Çola Dynasty will be one example. Another example is the main deity (mûlavar) of ananta-sayana Mahā Vishnu in Sri Ranganāthā temple, Srirangam, near Tiruchirapalli, which is not made of granite as in temples dedicated to Mahā Déva (Siva) in southern India, but of stucco — a unique com-

ination of chûnnam and baked bricks, plastered with a specially prepared balm (Tailam) consisting of musk, camphor, honey, jaggery, and sandal. That apart, for human residences, they used sophisticated technology in making the chûnnam and using that in the most appropriate manner.

Today, many construction engineers and architects debate on the validity and utility of using lime mortar embellished with plant fibres and plant extracts and supplemented by traditional practice of grinding.

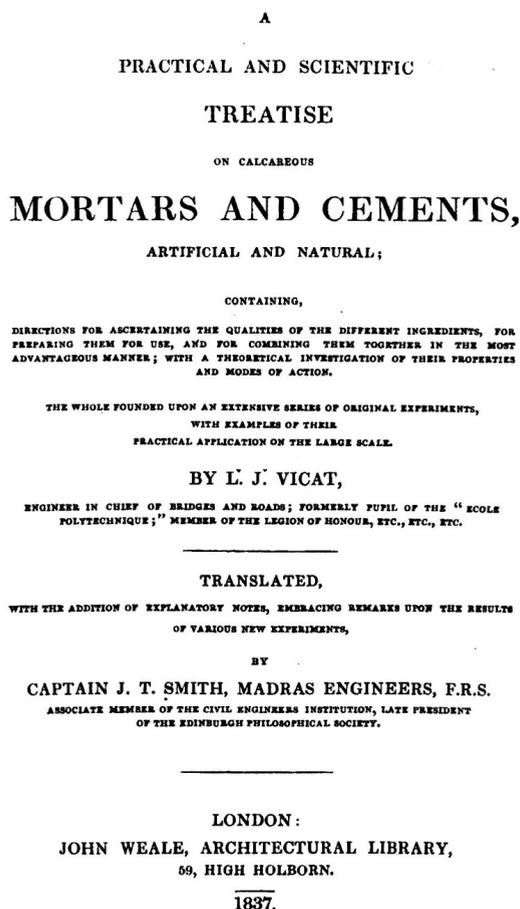
The chief engineer of the Public Works Department of Government of Tamil Nadu, referring to the restoration of an iconic building in Madras city — the Hûmayûn Mahal — remarked in *The Hindu* dated 21 September 2019:

'We are planning to use bulls to churn lime mortar instead of a mixer, for better compressive strength and long-lasting life. We found that structures built with lime mortar achieved more strength as they grew older, compared to concrete buildings that gained strength only up to 50-60 years.'

1. Joseph Louis Vicat (1786–1861) an engineer in Paris published extensively on the suitability of various limestones for the production of lime. He found that a mortar with hydraulic properties should include lime and either silica or alumina. He invented the method of testing the hydraulic properties of mortar, using the Vicat needle, which measured the setting time of mortars, used even today.

2. Parrah (read as 'parā') was a capacity measure widely used in South Malabar until recent times. One para equalled approximately 40 lbs of the measured item (Galletti et al., 1911, p. 42).

(Concluded)



Cover page of the translated edition of Louis Joseph Vicat's book by J.T. Smith (1837).

When India notched up her first Test victory

By February 1952 India had been playing Test cricket for almost 20 years and had still to notch up her first victory. The country had played just 24 Tests in India, England and Australia with no international cricket being played during World War II and of those India had lost 12 and drawn 12.

The arrival of the England team in India for the 1951-52 season appeared to give India their best chance to break their cricketing duck for the tourists were not at full strength. Many leading players like Len Hutton, Alec Bedser, Godfrey Evans, Denis Compton, Trevor Bailey, Peter May and Jim Laker did not make the trip and it was a sort of second string England side that landed in this country.

And yet at the end of the fourth Test of the five-match series India were 0-1 down. After the first three Tests were drawn, England won a low scoring game in a battle of spin bowlers at Kanpur by eight wickets wrapping up the game in three days.

In a desperate measure to win the final Test at Madras the selectors made as many as five changes. Out went Vijay Manjrekar, CS Nayudu, Nana Joshi, Polly Umrigar and Sadhu Shinde and in came Mushtaq Ali, RV Divecha, P Sen, Lala Amarnath and CD Gopinath. However as luck would have it Hemu Adhikari broke his wrist in a fall on the eve of the match and Umrigar was reinstated.

This forced change was to have a major impact on the game but in the meantime England winning the toss on the opening day of the Test (February 6) scored 224 for five at stumps on the first day. Shortly after play ended came the news that King George VI had passed away in London. Consequently the rest day was advanced to the following day and play resumed on February 8. Vinoo Mankad took little time in wrapping up the England innings. The left arm spinner took all the remaining five wickets to finish with the mesmeric figures of eight for 55 as England were restricted to a total of 266, Jack Robertson top scoring with 77.

● by
Partab Ramchand

The batsmen then built upon the great work done by Mankad. Opener Pankaj Roy scored 111 – his second hundred of the series - while veterans Mushtaq Ali, Amarnath, skipper Hazare and Mankad all came up with valuable contributions. Still on the morning of the third day India were 216 for five and a vital stage in the match had been reached. Now however India started taking control and the main architect was the man who made the final XI at the last minute. Umrigar making the most of the opportunity went on to get



Vinoo Mankad.

a commanding unbeaten 130 – the first of his 12 hundreds for India. He had successive

partnerships of 104 runs for the sixth wicket and 93 runs for the seventh wicket with Dattu Phadkar (61) and Gopinath (35) respectively and so quickly had the runs been scored that Hazare was able to declare the innings closed at 457 for seven shortly before stumps on the third day. With two days left India were 191 runs ahead and were in a winning position.

India did not falter and wrapped up the game by an innings and eight runs with a day to spare. England were bowled out for 183 with Rob-

ertson again top scoring with 56. Mankad again was among the wickets, his four for 53 giving him match figures of 12 for 108. This time however he had to share the honours with off spinner Ghulam Ahmed who was no less unplayable finishing with four for 77 and finally India had registered their maiden Test victory at their 25th attempt. It was a historic day, February 10, 1952 a day to rejoice and there were congratulations and celebrations all around. It certainly was till then the greatest day in Indian cricket.

Union budget and the auto sector

(Continued from page 1)

the worry is more the near-total collapse domestically. That is pinching Chennai, for apart from the end products it churns out, it also makes around 33 per cent of India's auto parts.

The automotive sector has expressed its disappointment over lack of concessions to it. But the question as to what exactly is the concession that is likely to spur demand remains unanswered and indeed, there can be no correct reply to this. The slowdown is largely due to very weak consumer sentiment and that can only be rectified if banks are induced to loosen their purse strings and lend. But with bad loans and NPAs hogging the news on a daily

basis it is unlikely that banks will lend all that easily. It must also not be forgotten that it is the non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) that lend the most money for vehicle purchases and with that industry in more or less a shambles owing to successive governments alternating between no and excessive controls, not much joy is forthcoming from there.

We next come to the number of technical norms that automobiles (and here we include two-wheelers) have been facing mandated upgrades in. Each one poses a challenge in terms of sales for earlier models and this causes backlogs of inventory to pile up. The other major challenge is the way the Government appears to be pushing

the electric vehicle agenda. While there is no denying that EVs are the way of the future there has to be consultation with industry. The Government suddenly declared that it expects three-wheelers to go electric by 2023 and two-wheelers by 2025. There is however no road map on how this is to be achieved but it immediately sank buyer interest as people think that EVs are just around the corner and so purchases can be postponed.

Overall, the auto sector needs to look elsewhere and not at concessions. It will be good if it did not view the present problem in isolation but in conjunction with other challenges facing the economy.

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