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MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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June 1-15, 2020

Will COVID deal a blow to densely packed cities?

Time was when planning meant a certain amount of space for every individual – to allow him or her a decent bit of air and light. Then came the idea of tightly packed cities – dense in the core and with suburbs more spatially laid out. In recent years, city planners, architects and builders have been emphasizing vertical development – more and more multi-storeyed buildings. While on the one hand this does put pressure on existing

infrastructure, it has, so planners argue, made for more effective utilization of space and reduces time spent in commute. All very well but then nobody foresaw the arrival of a

● by The Editor

virus that would put paid to the best-laid plans of men (mice have so far escaped).

The world over, the COVID virus has shown a steady pat-

tern. Spreading as it does through droplets, it is the more densely packed areas that have emerged hotspots. New York is perhaps the best example internationally but we have enough and more instances within India too. Mumbai leads the rest, the congestion in the Dharavi slum in particular making it a hotspot. Chennai too has seen its numbers remain high with the more congested zones

(Continued on page 7)

Migrant issue should be calmed before it overwhelms covid control

Interstate migrant workers wanting to be with their families back home in this hour of national pandemic crisis is understandable, but the demand it makes on the country's logistic capacity is a nightmare. It threatens to undermine the nation-wide struggle to overcome the virus.

The disturbing feature is that we do not know how deep the problem is. There is no reliable data broken down to individuals, names, work location, the State to which they belong, date of arrival etc. Strictly speaking, the highest priority for the Government is to assist inter-state migrants

residing temporarily in the host state. Next in priority would be inter-state migrants of long-term residence in the state of adoption – those residing for several years. Without reliable

● by A Special Correspondent

data on hand, it is difficult to determine eligibility and estimate the time and resources needed to accomplish the relocation. State and Central governments are perhaps under greater pressure than is warranted as every migrant, temporary or permanent, wants

to be united with his/her family in a distant place here and now.

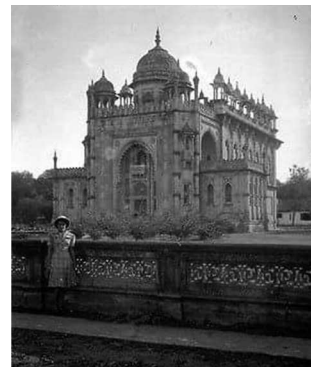
The Census is not very helpful in assessing the number of interstate migrant workers in each State. In the eye of the Census, anyone with a different address from the previous survey is a migrant. That is too broad a definition to be of use for our purpose. The Economic Survey 2016 estimated the aggregate as about 9 million in the country, 92 per cent of them males, moving between states. The growth rate of migrant labour is estimated at 4.5 per cent per year and, therefore, the present inter-state

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

The National Gallery, Egmore

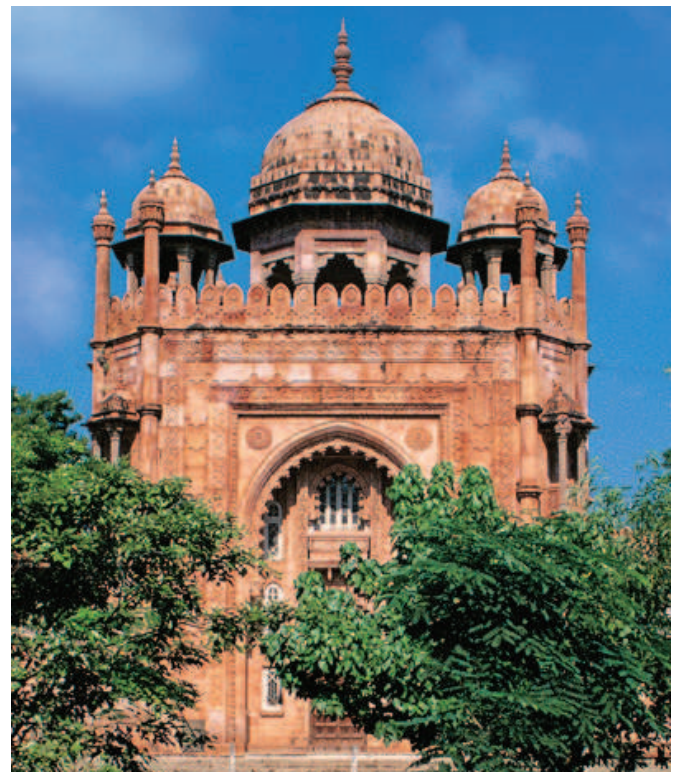
As we are emerging from a lockdown, we thought we will begin it with some positive reporting. Of course, the very word positive has different meanings today, but we being dedicated to heritage, assure you that we mean the word in its old sense. And so we resume our heritage watch with a building that is being splendidly restored.



Envisaged as a memorial to Queen Victoria, this building, whose foundation stone was laid by the then Prince of Wales (later King George V), during his visit in 1905, was designed by Henry Irwin, its façade being modelled on the Bulund Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri. It was completed in 1914 and became home to the Victoria Technical Institute, which functioned from here till 1951 when the structure was designated the

National Gallery and came to house some of the Government Museum's art collection.

By the late 1990s this building was in poor shape. A crack in the dome kept widening which resulted in the structure being emptied and the art collection kept under lock and key elsewhere. The Government woke up to its state in 2008 when rather curiously, it chose to spend money on repairing the compound wall rather than the main building. In 2012, restoration plans were announced and funds released in 2014. We are informed that repair work is nearly complete and that the structure will soon be put to use as a National Gallery. It has been listed as a Grade 1 structure in the Justice Padmanabhan Committee Report.



Dear Readers,

After the disruption of two months owing to the lockdown, we at *Madras Musings* are delighted to be back in print. We trust you are keeping well and wish you all the best in tiding over the present crisis.

– Editor

Migrant issue needs to be calmed

(Continued from page 1)

migrant population may be about 11 million. As for Tamil Nadu, a government-commissioned study estimated inter-state migrants in the State to be "more than a million". So, the national number of inter-state migrants could be 11 million and about 1 million in Tamil Nadu. The Ministry of Home Affairs still quotes the census figure of 4 crore migrants all of which are not inter-state migrants. Apart from speculative omnibus numbers, disaggregated data on different migrant categories seems to be unavailable for prioritisation and planning.

To make the problem manageable, inter-state migrants from neighbouring States could have been isolated and dealt with separately. The pictures in the media of whole families of men, women and children gives the impression that many permanently residing migrants in other States are also in a hurry to "go home" although their families are with them. They can be evacuated easily by shuttle buses dropping them off at the screening centres at or near the border. They could accept a lower priority till general conditions improve, as many seem to have their immediate families with them.

Going by Railway's performance of movement of migrants by *Shramik Specials*, it seems possible to move 1.3 lakhs per day, nationally, allotted among the ten host States as 13,000 per day from each State. It would take three months to take them all home, if those eligible are over one crore. If the number to be moved is 4 crores and if Railways double the offtake – as it is reported at the time of writing – it would still take about six months. It is a major population transfer exercise involving multiple criss-crossings of the sub-continent.

Trains cannot be scheduled till the migrants' home States are ready to receive them after arranging facilities for screening, quarantine and treatment. Their resources are already stretched to the maximum in battling with the virus; they are, understandably, unable to cope with fresh arrivals and the additional number of positive covid cases they may bring along. It is a sensitive situation when they cannot but decline to receive their own kith and kin.

On all sides, we seem to be gridlocked. There is one option worth trying – explain to migrants the severe constraints that make early evacuation impossible, seek their

understanding and patience in waiting for their turn, while offering them safe shelter in fully equipped transit camps as containment zones, within an hour's reach of bus junctions and rail stations. As the season for returning to work would set in even before all are evacuated, offer an incentive to stay on – a bulk sum per adult equivalent to the cost of translocation, including food etc, which is saved by the State. Additionally, those who opt to stay on, should be given a weekly cash allowance till July end or till they are called for work, whichever is later. Migrants agreeing to wait and stay back, must be looked after with compassion, care and concern in these difficult times when they are separated from their near and dear. Staying back must be an attractive, irresistible option in terms of money. This calls for a major public relations exercise with the cooperation of all political parties in both the host and home States. Executed successfully it might substantially reduce the numbers wanting to go home. Explaining the ground realities to the migrants would also wean them away from falling prey to rumours, fake news and malicious instigations.

Temporary transit camps should be installed in a couple of weeks on a war footing, providing facilities – food, shelter, sanitation, water, entertainment, recreation, facility to speak to their homes everyday free of charge and counselling.

It is time that the central government published every week the following state-wise data – number of inter-state migrants, number opting to stay on, net number wanting to go home, number vacated previous week, cumulative number vacated, balance number awaiting return journey. That would show where the transfer pace is lagging and why. It would also show how far we are from the end of the tunnel.

This is not the time to review whether the migrant issue is man-made or god-made or what and who went wrong. Nor is now the occasion to rummage for credit. Corona containment is a matter of national survival and nothing should, or be allowed to, prevail over that objective. Setting aside political differences, all parties must rise to the occasion to resolve the migrant issue, and, thereby, tame the Covid 19 threat. These problems are beyond the scope and capability of any one agency or party. They can be overcome only by collective statesmanship – and should be, before it is too late.

What is with the AC remote?

The weather is the absolute pits. As Perhaps Greatest Writer once said, the city is divided into two groups – the first which says it does not mind the heat as much as the humidity and the other which says just the reverse. *The Man from Madras Musings* prefers to belong to a third group that minds both – the heat and the humidity. What amazes MMM is that the temperatures have not been soaring as much as they ought to, but it still feels like living in a furnace. MMM is informed that this is due to what is called the wind chill factor wherein the temperature may be something but it feels like something much worse altogether. Though why this phenomenon should be called wind chill MMM has no idea. Wind roast or wind bake or wind broil may have been more appropriate.

It is in weather like this, and mind you, Chennai has weather like this for much of the year, that thoughts automatically turn towards air conditioning. Oh for a blast of cold air is the general cry. MMM is of course aware that just around thirty years ago, hardly anyone used air conditioners in this city of ours. It was meant for the uber rich. But since then there has been democratisation in several ways and now the AC is pretty much ubiquitous. MMM can claim to have lived through the times when there was no AC except in cinema theatres and top industrialists' offices to a time when it is available in cars and even buses.

In the old days, ACs were made of sturdier fibre. When you needed to cool yourself you operated a lever of sorts to switch on the main power, waited for the stabiliser to kick in and then turned on a rotary switch of some kind. There would be a grinding noise and that meant the AC was working. Soon you were flooded with gushes of cold air and you revived. There were, of course, days when the AC threw out black smoke and you called a mechanic who came, opened the innards of the machine and there you saw all the dirt accumulated from your house or office. Squirrels or rats sometimes made themselves comfortable inside and when they passed on to the great beyond, you were immediately alerted by the smells that wafted.

Compare that with today's AC. All sleek and the innards hidden away discretely somewhere near the rooftop which only the service personnel can access. Today's ACs don't grind and groan and are probably a lot more efficient than those battle tanks of old but their remote controls are something else altogether. MMM is not sure how you handle them, but he is pretty much flummoxed. Firstly, reading those buttons is a task

by itself, especially when you need to adjust the settings after you have switched off the lights and are in bed. Secondly, there are no texts but only symbols and this is where the confusion sets in. How can you distinguish between one snowflake and another and decide which one is larger? And then there are drops – one drop, two drops and sometimes three. What do these stand for? Third – what is the silhouette of a muscular torso supposed to mean? MMM is told that pressing this activates what is known as power chill but he has found that in this heat it only means that power consumption is a lot more for some marginal increase in coolness.

There are other mystic symbols and words – mode is one that MMM never will ever master. He has found that tampering with it usually makes

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

the room feel like a sauna. And then there is 'sleep' – in what way this is supposed make the AC function is something MMM is yet to fathom.

He has therefore come to the conclusion that the AC remote is good for just switching on and switching off the AC. The rest of the settings are best left the way the person who installed the AC set them. It is best not to be to a fool and rush in where even angels fear to tread, especially during summer.

Anticipatory obituaries

The Man from Madras Musings is aware that it is customary for most well-established periodicals and dailies to have prepared obituaries for celebrities, often written by other celebrities. These are kept aside with the view that they can be immediately churned out for print as and when the subject matter of the obituary departs for the great beyond. Some of these tributes can be masterpieces, in their style, construction, analysis of the person and also usage of subtle humour. In this our land, and particularly our city, obituaries are usually hagiographies – woe betide the person who writes anything negative about someone who has just had a tryst with a bucket.

That said, Indians in general and more so those residing in our city simply rejoice in deaths. It is a great social occasion when everyone meets up with everyone else, drinks coffee, makes nasty comments on its quality and then departs for home, after a cursory word or two about the dear

departed and a gloomy shake of the head. The Chennai idea of page 3 is the obituary column of the newspaper. Sometimes we also jump the gun – the person concerned may just be somewhat ill, but we give full rein to our imagination and speculate that death has occurred.

Such was the case last week with a master scientist who resides in our city. Someone else who shares the same name passed away and his relatives put up a news item. A media channel, as is usual with entities of its kind, deciding that it must be the master scientist who had passed on, immediately put out an obituary without any verification (known in Chennai as verivification), no doubt to satisfy that perpetual urge for breaking news. That got social media going and tributes began to be posted. It was quite a while before the media channel took down the offending post (no apologies mind you). The social media posts still remain. And some of them showed MMM how obituaries are often attempts at glorification of the living at the expense of the dead.

"Oh what a great man," said one. "He waved to me when I sat in a pew behind him at an event around seven years ago." Another, and there were several others of the same kind, expressed 'shock' at the passing. Now MMM may sound callous but it is his firm belief that you cannot be shocked, stunned or taken unawares when a nonagenarian passes. If people don't plug it in their nineties then when do you expect them to go? But then this is Chennai. There were others who praised themselves – "He was such a humble man despite his achievements that he immediately recognized my talents, praised me and predicted a bright future for my work." It made MMM wonder as to who had really passed on.

Anyway, master scientist is happily with us and long may he guide us. MMM wonders if he read the tributes and if so, what he thought about them.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings notes that while social/physical distancing has become a fetish of sorts with humans, animals seem to happily be unaware of such things, as is evident from this picture taken during the lockdown.

– MMM



OUR READERS WRITE



• During the lockdown, we at *Madras Musings* were thrilled to find quite a lot of feedback on our website, where we were updating articles every fortnight. We are publishing some of these below:

J.S. Prabhu – An Institution Builder and Patron of Arts

(Vol. XXIX No. 23, March 16-31 2020)

AK says, this is a very well-written article. Rasikas like JSP had a great role in promoting classical music. Patna had a number of such patron-rasikas who established a tradition of inviting the top

musicians and dancers of the country for night-long soirees during Durga Puja. Not only is that tradition lost, even memory of those days, and the contribution of those patrons is lost. Their family members seem to be clueless about the great legacy of their grandparents. I am happy that JSP's role has been archived.

N. Venkatraman says: An inspiring and interesting article and well written too.

In those times and even upto the 60s such personalities could be found among the locals and also the "Pravasi" communities who had settled down in those places. With

changing times, such trends are few and far between. Stalwarts like J.S. Prabhu's memories should be kept alive by spreading and archiving their life and achievements. And continuing the good work in their memory is also very vital and relevant.

Suresh Shanbogue says: Very informative! Interesting to know more about our beloved Prabhu Maama (Uncle) and his contributions to the Society especially SGS Sabha. It is heartening to note great singers like MS, Bhimsen Joshi have sung at SGS Sabha. Thanks to Ashwin for his efforts and *Madras Musings*!

* * *

Remembering P.K. Belliappa

(Vol. XXIX No. 24, April 1-15, 2020)

Srinivasan Radhakrishnan says, P.K. Belliappa was one of the most deserving cricketers who should have played for India. A magnificent wicket keeper and an attacking opening batsman, he was simply a delight to watch. Belliappa and K.R. Rajagopal were an awesome duo who provided firepower at the top of the order. Belliappa may not be with us but his deeds in the cricketing field will live for ever.

* * *

A pharmacy that helped found a Society (Wilfred Pereira's pharmacy)

(MM, Vol. XXVIII No. 20, February 1-15, 2019)

Arun Prasad says: Very interesting article. I was reading about mulberry in Madras and came to this article. Thanks for the interesting account.

Aubrey Gonsalves says: We are looking for Victor & Co pharmaceuticals which was on Mount Road, Madras in the 1930s, own by Victor DeSouza. If you have any information, or guide us to find out about him, we would much appreciate it. Thanks and kind regards.

* * *

An early Cricket club of Madras turns 90

(MM, Vol. XXIX No. 6, July 1-15, 2019)

Srinivasan Radhakrishnan says, Sir, Your site is, as usual, spectacular. Most of the players who played for MRC A and Tamil Nadu were exceptionally skilled cricketers. What is the reason that many TN cricketers could not blossom in International cricket though their capabilities were second to none? The glaring example being Vasudevan who was miles ahead of Ravi Shastri in terms of talent. Looking forward to your thoughts.

* * *

An Air force coach who had mentored Women Cricket

(Vol. XXIX No. 5, June 16-30, 2019)

Srinivasan Radhakrishnan says: Sir, Very sad to hear the demise of P.K. Dharmalingam and V.S. Vijayakumar. Both of them gave their best to their teams. Dharmalingam's contribution as a coach is simply spectacular. He was the guru who trained Kapil Dev to take that magnificent catch of Richards. May their souls rest in peace.

* * *

Chennai's First Trade Centre

(Vol. XXIX No. 1, April 16-30, 2019)

I came to Madras as a 12 year old in 1968. I remember being taken to visit the trade fair site on a tour from school! There was also a Tamil movie with a song picturised in the trade fair tower, the name of which escapes me. Thank you for taking me back half a century.

George Mathew
george.seagull@gmail.com

* * *

The Stars of RK Salai

(Vol. XXIX No. 9, August 16-31, 2019)

I read this article, it was really interesting. One of my uncles, the legendary Dr. T.S. Shetty, lived in E.E. road next to Dr. Radhakrishnan House. A surgeon and physician, he was a family friend and doctor to Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar's family, the AVM family, and other well-known families. He died at an early age and I

was told that the whole road was closed during that time. Anyway, the road has not lost its charm.

Devidas Shetty
devidasshetty@gmail.com

* * *

A doctor to remember (Dr. S. Rangachari)

(Vol. XXVIII No. 15, November 16-30, 2018)

There is a biography in Tamil by the writer Ms. Rajam Krishnan, which has been reprinted after a long time. We will be grateful if someone can translate this book in English.

A.M. Srinivasan
amstvs@yahoo.co.in

* * *

The Anglo-Indian Colonel in the INA

(Vol. XXVIII No. 9, August 16-31, 2018)

Ambassador K.P. Fabian says, I have worked under Ambassador Stracey in Madagascar. He was a good ambassador and a good and generous human being. I do not know where the Stracey family is now. Some had gone to Australia.

Major M Godfrey (retd) Indian Army says, A truly remarkable account for an Anglo Indian (considered in those days pro British). Loyalty to his troops deserted by British officers to the Japanese, channeled him toward the cause of India's fight for independence. He was the only Anglo Indian to do this & reach high office in independent India's IFS. A role model for his community.

• Pavithra's Perspective

Paddler's Paradise



My first ever introduction to the Adyar River was as a wide-eyed nine-year-old, newly arrived in Chennai, still adjusting to a seething city's rhythms as I trundled to school in a bus that bumped over potholes and teetered around curves. A long journey that started at around 6.15 a.m. in Velachery would slowly draw to a close as we approached CIT Nagar – and the beginning of the end was usually the bridge over the River Adyar, which showed a vast expanse of water (vast to eyes that had never seen rivers until that point), not to mention the overpowering smell. It would be years before I lost the sinking feeling I usually associated with school, when I saw the river, and a feeling of awe took over.

An awe that had its roots in history, as I began exploring Chennai in earnest. Naturally, that led me to the Madras Boat Club – and the fact that people actually entered this venerable institution to paddle, row and generally disport themselves in the Adyar River. I was dumbfounded. Until I managed to see it for myself, one day, as two enthusiastic paddlers canoed about in the still waters, Chennai's towers, bridges and residential apartments looming in the distance, their images reflected upon the river's surface, rippling and swaying as the canoe slashed a little further.

In an otherwise chaotic city, this was a picture of peace, serenity and stillness. Something that harked back to a previous age, when British men had been the ones disporting themselves in similar fashion. And I couldn't help but capture it, as you see it.

Description: 3.5" by 5" approximately.

Medium: Black and White Micron Pens; 0.20mm and 0.35mm.

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

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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Birds in my backyard

● The lockdown gave me an opportunity to discover the abundance of bird life around my apartment in Gopalapuram, Chennai.

With stern eyed policemen shooing off even the enthusiastic morning walkers, I was compelled to shift to my building terrace for the regular walks. These not-so-common birds were spotted, in addition to the ubiquitous crows and Pigeons. What a refreshing sight these chirpy, feathered beauties presented!!

—A.S. Diwakar



Black Kite

The Black Kite is a medium-sized raptor (bird of prey). From a distance, it appears almost black, with a light brown bar on the shoulder. The tail is

forked and barred with darker brown. This feature gives the bird its alternative name of Fork-tailed Kite.



Asian Koyel

A large cuckoo, elusive to photograph, keeping to the interior of dense trees in many habitats, even inner cities. Adult males are glossy black with a dull lime-green bill; females and immatures are blackish brown with white dots on the wings and strong streaking on head and throat. Adults have ruby-red eyes. Females lay eggs in the nests of other large birds, including crows, shrikes, and starlings.



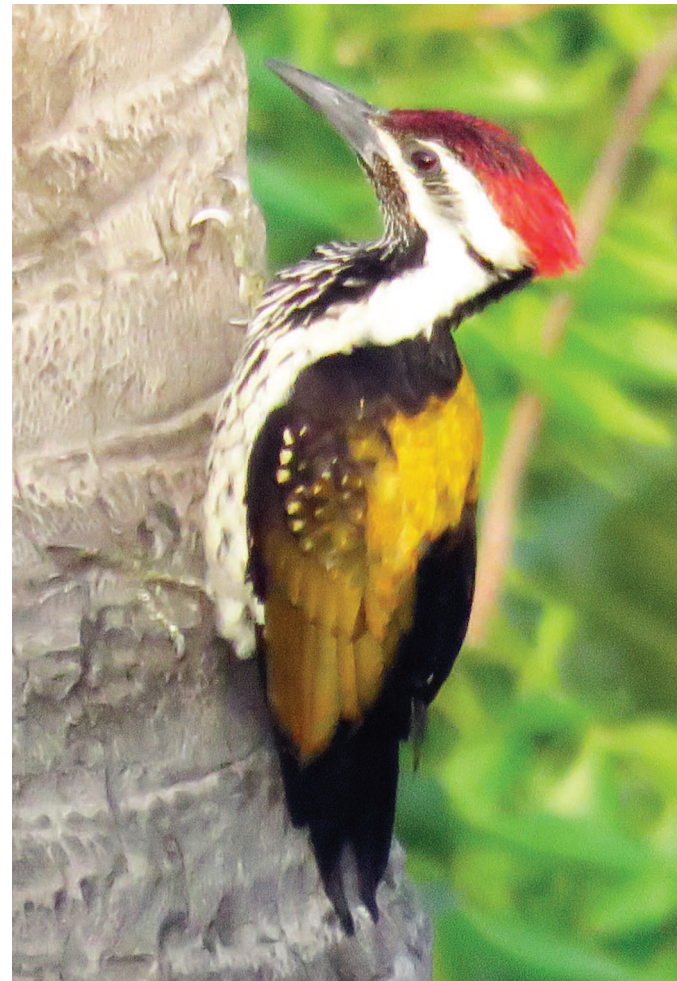
Indian Pond Heron

The Indian pond heron or Paddybird (*Ardeola grayii*) is a small heron, appearing stocky with a short neck, short thick bill and buff-brown back. However its appearance turns distinctive when it takes off with bright white wings.



Mynah

An omnivorous open woodland bird with a strong territorial instinct, the myna has adapted extremely well to urban environments.

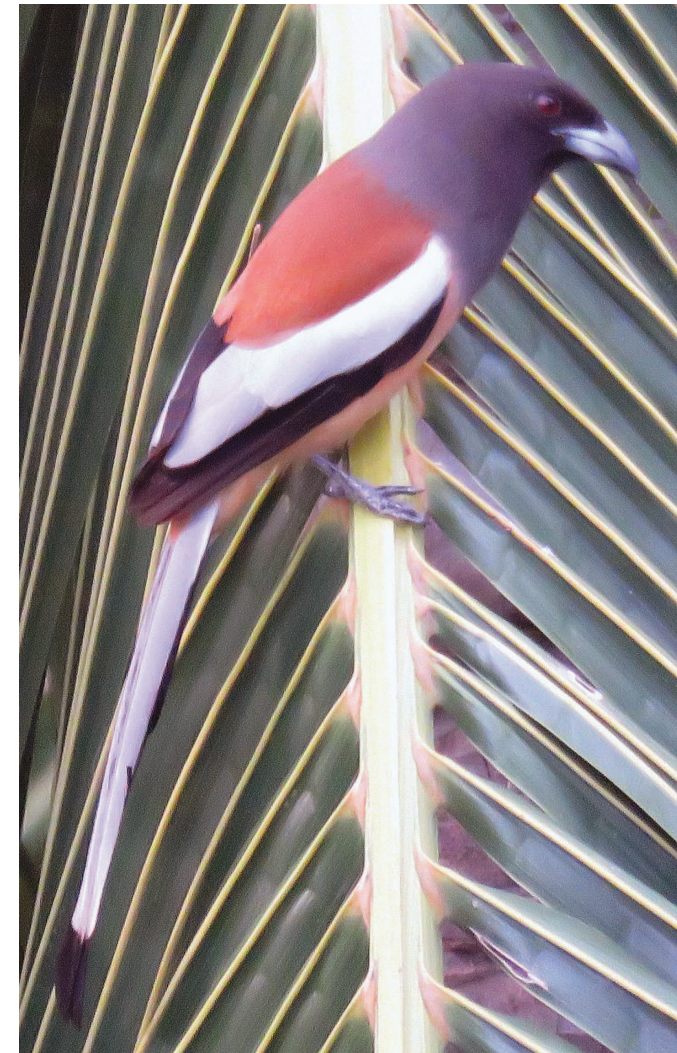


Black-rumped Flameback Woodpeckers aka Lesser Golden-backed Woodpeckers

It is among the few woodpeckers seen in urban areas. Often detected by its loud “ki-ki-ki-ki,” which steadily increases in pace and ends in a trill.

Greater Coucal, colloquially called the Bharadwaj Bird

Bharadwaj Maharishi was believed to have worshipped Lord Vishnu in this bird form and hence the name. Anaichattan, mentioned in Andal's Tiruppavai (Pasuram 7 kISu kISenRu engkuM) is a reference to Bharadwaj bird.



Rufous treepie

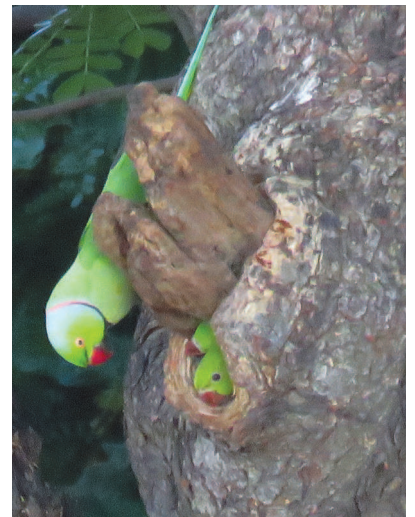
The rufous treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) is a member of the crow family, Corvidae. It is long tailed and has loud musical calls making it very conspicuous.



Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*).

This is a song bird, popular for its nest made of leaves “sewn” together and immortalized by Rudyard Kipling as Darzee in his Jungle Book.

Although shy birds that are usually hidden within vegetation, their loud calls are familiar and give away their presence. They are distinctive in having a long upright tail, greenish upper body plumage and rust coloured forehead and crown.



Indian Ringneck Parrot

Males have a black neck ring and a pink nape band. Females and young birds lack the neck rings or display shadow-like pale to dark grey neck-rings.

One year after

It seems as though it was only yesterday that we at *Madras Musings* bade farewell to our founder, S. Muthiah. The Chief, as he was known to those who worked closely with him, held this publication close to his heart and it was his dearest wish that it should flourish even after he had gone. We are happy that we have striven to do just that.

Had he been around the Chief would have been happy to see that support for *Madras Musings* continues unabated – the corporate sponsors see value in continuing the publication, the subscribers add their mite to this and we keep getting requests for being added to the mailing list, this despite it being almost seven years since we first made it to the web. The Chief would have also been happy to note that his flock of contributors remains intact and keeps supplying articles

for publication. We express our thanks to regulars such as N.S. Parthasarathy, Pavithra Srinivasan, Karthik Bhatt, Ranjitha Ashok, Geeta Doctor, Dr. A. Raman, Vincent D'Souza, Sashi Nair, V. Ramnarayan, Partab Ramchand, Dr. Chithra Madhavan and R.V. Rajan among others. And we also express our thanks to the Chennai Willingdon Corporate Foundation that takes care of the accounting and administrative nitty-gritties, Mot Juste Communication Services Pvt. Ltd., that has been doing the page layouts and the web updates, and of course Lokavani, our printers in whose offices *Madras Musings* took birth. It is a team comprising all these individuals and institutions that brings out *Madras Musings* without fail, fortnight after fortnight. Above all, we would be failing in our duty if we did not thank those readers

who regularly communicate with us – a pat on the back here, a kick in the rear there, all of it well deserved and keeping us on the move all the time.

Of course, this a strange period that we are going through – the whole world in some form of lockdown and we

● by
The Editor

in India in one that is even more stringent, rightly so given the nature of the pandemic that is ravaging almost all continents. Even someone as particular as the Chief would have understood the sheer impossibility of bringing out a print edition of his beloved publication under such circumstances. He would of course have, in his inimitable style, drawn an immediate

parallel with something similar that happened in the history of our city, sometime in our distant past. Why don't you do a piece on it he would have asked one of us, expecting us to rustle up the story in a jiffy. He had all the facts at his fingertips and thought we were similarly gifted.

This pause is a good time to reflect on the legacy of the Chief's. Why and how does a niche publication like *Madras Musings* remain so relevant and popular? It is in its unique composition, all of it fashioned by the Chief, that the periodical holds relevance. It forever seeks to bring to life forgotten nuggets of the city's historical past. It re-establishes their relevance in today's context and it engenders a pride in the many achievements that Chennai (oops, sorry Chief, Madras) has to its credit. To many,



S. Muthiah.

Madras Musings is a connect to a world gone by and a way of life that once was. To the official establishment *Madras Musings* may be a bit of a thorn, forever reminding it of what it can do better. We trust that they do appreciate our fairness in anything we criticise their functioning about. In keeping these core values intact, we believe we are true to the Chief's vision. On this first anniversary of his passing, we renew our promise to him to keep *Madras Musings* coming out, fortnight after fortnight.

Musings in Lockdown

You have a roof over your head. Food on your table. So – no victimhood, yes? There's a growing list of terms to describe The Virus. 'The Indiscriminator' should probably be somewhere on top, given the way it has brushed aside any human-imagined ring of protection. The maniacal cackle, "You were taught again and again - no one is beyond reach," is resounding around the world. "You didn't listen. So now you know... thanks to me."

Shared humanity is shared vulnerability, shared learning. As is admitting that your mind is a very strange creature, simultaneously capable of intense concern over cooking oil and utter despair over the epic suffering evident all over the world. It is devastating. You ask yourself, how did we allow all this to happen?

Then – hullo! Someone just ate the last apple. They didn't even think to ask you if you wanted a piece, knowing full well that no one is making grocery lists any time soon. It's a pattern. Earlier, no one noticed if you skipped a helping because there was just enough for the others around the table, all with their beaks open, while you...

Stop. No. Wrong path to take.

There's a constant battle within, a white wolf/black wolf emotional seesaw. When the near and dear are always close by, words and phrases like 'berserk', 'running amok', and 'losing it' suddenly loom large and menacing. And just as you are counting your stars thinking that at least you don't have to deal with the young and the fractious in your house, the following dialogue takes place:

"That's my charger."

"No, it isn't."

"Yes, it is."

"No, it isn't."

"Why can't you use the old one?"

"Why don't you?"

"Because you ate the last apple."

Okay, you have to assume that some kind of reasoning is happening here and accept that second childhood can crop up suddenly, even in those who can still remember who partnered whom in *Amar Akbar Anthony*. Crazy times. You've been drowning in a sea of forwards on your phone for weeks now, and you remember the words in one of them. (Was it yesterday, the day before, or last week? It's becoming hard to tell.) Anyway, it said that it felt like you had gone to sleep in one world and woken up in another – a completely different one. True. There's a new era notation in town. BC – Before Corona, as opposed to the bleakly hopeful AC – After Corona. Has it sunk in, how much life has changed, and will change from now on?

● by
Ranjitha Ashok

So many everyday elements taken for granted are now forever suspect. Milk packets, parcels, gates, handles, doorknobs, switches, spoons, ladles, table-tops, remotes, banisters, lift buttons, escalator handrails, familiar everyday supplies and comforts. The new normal is the question, 'Who touched this item last?' In a world where brown-paper packages tied up with string have lost their innocence, will we view even those who are an integral part of our everyday lives with suspicion? No more 'hands touching, hands reaching out...' as the man once sang?

Will even the simplest invitation require the recent travel history of everyone involved? Will you pause before the doorbell at a friend's house, wondering if it's safe to touch? Will you find yourself taking a hasty step back when even someone you see every day, sneezes?

Weddings are being conducted over video calls; funerals are being witnessed over them. Will this teach us that we don't need to gather together anymore?

On the other hand, in a matter of weeks, people are able to see mountain ranges 200 km away, while statues and monuments stand clearly etched against a brilliantly blue and very clear sky. People are breathing fresher air; rivers run free, no longer choked with toxic foam. Deer stroll down people-less roads, peacocks land on roofs and the air is full of birdsong. Will we remember these lessons learned under such horrific, tragic circumstances?

As you stare at a little mound of potatoes, wondering how many different ways you can stretch it, your eyes are drawn to a photograph of a huddle of desperate travellers. In the center, a little boy sits on his father's shoulders. The child's eyes look straight into the camera. At you. Your blood freezes. Those huge, steady eyes are filled with questions – questions we adults no longer have answers to. So, being human means sharing failure as well. We have collectively betrayed him...and all children everywhere.

Perhaps it's not so much about waking up to a different world, as it is about humankind crawling through a long dark tunnel towards a new dawn and a whole new way of living.

I need to make lists again. Maybe this time around, they should be about what we need to do when (yes, let's say 'when', not 'if'...) the New Age of AC arrives.

The battle of Tiruvottriyur – I

Gifts for the Great Mogul

The Battle of Adyar fought between the English and the French in 1746 is one of the most talked about skirmishes in the history of our city – which, according to colonial historians, established for the first time the supremacy of European-trained armies over native forces. However, a lesser known battle was fought three decades earlier in Trivetore (Tiruvottriyur), when the East India Company had a face off with the forces of Sadatullah Khan, Nawab of Arcot to establish the right granted to them by the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar. This article traces the struggle of the Company to retain possession of Tiruvottriyur and four other villages.

The origins of the right of the East India Company to the village of Tiruvottriyur dates to the time of Governor Thomas Pitt, who in 1708 petitioned Shah Alam (Bahadur Shah I), Aurangzeb's successor for the grant of Mylapore and Tiruvottriyur. That Shah Alam's High Steward Ziauddin Khan was a friend of Governor Pitt probably played a great role in the Emperor considering this petition favourably. (It is also interesting to note that in order to keep the relationship with Ziauddin Khan on steady ground, the Council in Madras resolved to make certain presents to his wife who resided in Santhome. On another occasion, when Pitt learns that she is in need of money, he promises to arrange for a loan of five hundred pagodas by getting a merchant to sign a bond for the amount!) In September 1708, the East India Company received a grant for five villages, Trivetore (Tiruvottriyur), Lingambauca (Nungambakkam), Vasalavada (adjacent to Perambur, probably Vyasarpady), Catawauk (Kathivakkam) and Satangadu (Sathangadu) through the Nawab of Arcot, Daud Khan as a free gift.

In December that year, Pitt received a communication stating that the Moghul emperor was yet to receive the presents normally given to him on accession to the throne, with suggestions as to what 'Curiosities' they could be made up of. Pitt lost no time in acting on this. The very next month, in the course of a detailed communication he wrote back stating that many of the presents had been procured and requested that an order be issued to all 'Nabobs and Governors' to guard the presents in the course

of their journey, as the threat of robberies was real. The communication also requested that the Company be vested with proprietary rights of the five villages.

News reached Pitt that the Emperor was at Golconda and hence it was decided that the Company immediately send the gifts to Masulipatnam for onward despatch to him. The matter was urgent, as Pitt wanted the Company's gifts, which were of 'considerable value' to reach the Emperor before those of the Dutch. A retinue comprising the Reverend George Lewis, a 'very worthy, sober, ingenious man', John Berlu, the Madras Council's Secretary, Chief Merchant Serappa and some native functionaries, fifty peons, seventy servants and six hundred coolies left with the gifts for Masulipatnam, where they remained for some time as the Emperor had left Golconda for Delhi by then.

Pitt retired from office in 1709 and was succeeded by William Fraser. Daud Khan demanded the return of the five villages and Fraser decided to buy him over with presents. It was resolved by the Council to send him a present in 'such rarities as are procurable not exceeding six hundred and fifty pagodas.' A tentative list of articles was decided upon, which included 400 bottles of

liquor. In December that year, the gifts, the value of which was estimated at 878 pagodas were sent under a custody of 29 coolies. This settled matters for a short while, for not only was the demand dropped, Daud Khan also gave in addition forty acres of ground at the Mount for a house and a garden. However, this was to prove an all too brief respite for the Company, as Daud Khan renewed his demand shortly thereafter. By 1711, these five villages went back to the custody of the Native Government, now under Sadatullah Khan.

In the meantime, the original consignment of Pitt's pres-

• by
Karthik Bhatt

ents, now reduced in bulk and in value (According to H.D. Love, the six elephants had been sold off in Madras and Fort St. George being short of cash had sent the large gold bowl and two cups weighing upwards of 138 ounces to the mint to be coined into pagodas) was sent from Masulipatnam to Bengal and kept under the custody of the President and Council there. In Delhi, things were churning with the death of Shah Alam in 1712. After a brief stint by Jahandar Shah,

Farrukhsiyar ascended the Mughal throne. The Council in Bengal thus sent Pitt's gifts to Farrukhsiyar in 1717, concluding a journey of the consignment that had started nearly a decade earlier and was now being received by a completely different recipient. In February 1717, Farrukhsiyar issued three *firman*s for Madras, Bengal and Surat. These authorised the respective Councils and its Presidents to exercise certain rights and privileges, besides confirming their old rights. The East India Company thus got back the five villages that were under the Native Government.

The news of the grant of the *firman* was received with great joy. The document was received from Bengal on July 21st and three days later, it was proclaimed to the inhabitants of Madras in a grand ceremony. The *firman* lay in the Governor's palanquin at the Fort Gate with the Mayor, Aldermen and all the city officers gathering. The Secretary on the orders of the Governor Joseph Collett, read out the contents of the *firman* in English and was followed by the Chief Dubash who did the same in Urdu and Telugu. The palanquin then left in a grand procession attended by the Mayor, Aldermen and the city officers and with accompany-



Governor Thomas Pitt.

ing music to the St. Thomas Gate, where the *firman* was read out by the Registrar. The ceremony was repeated at the Sea and Middle Gates. From the Middle Gate, it was carried through Black Town with a grand retinue comprising the Pedda Naik and his Tal-liars, one Company of English Guards, the Chief Dubash and the native merchants, to the accompaniment of 'country music' and trumpets. The procession made its way to the Attapollum Gate in Black Town, where the Chief Dubash read out the proclamation. The ceremony was repeated at the Tom Clark Gate (which opened on to China Bazaar Road, opposite Broadway) and Bridge Foot Gate (just outside the north-west glacis of the Fort, near the apex of the angle between Walajah Road and Fraser Bridge Road), after which it returned to the Fort.

A massive display of firing accompanied the entire ceremony. As soon as the *firman* was read out before the Governor at the Fort Gate, a salute of 151 guns was opened up at the St. Thomas Bastion which proceeded in a full circle westward before coming back to it. It then continued round the walls of Black Town. The opening up of fire at St Thomas Bastion was the cue for the ships at Madras Roads to begin firing, with the Commander of the 'Marlborough' taking the lead. Further gun salutes were undertaken when the Governor raised toasts to the respective health of Farrukhsiyar, King George and the Company. The day ended with a feast for the soldiers with spirits flowing freely and a bonfire at night, when the native merchants set off a grand display of fireworks on the Island.

As the festivities concluded on a grand note, trouble lay awaiting the Company in the form of Sadatullah Khan.

(To be continued
next fortnight)

Will COVID deal a blow to densely packed cities?

(Continued from page 1)

such as Royapuram, Tondiarpet, Kodambakkam and Teynampet providing perfect locales for the virus to proliferate. A week back, the Corporation of Chennai began an exercise to relocate some of the people in these areas with a view to decongest the localities and bring down the viral load. It is not clear as to how this panned out and as to what the response was.

This brings us back to the whole issue of spatial layouts of city areas. While urbanisation by its very definition does mean a certain degree of congestion, packing people in with no consideration other than logistics is hardly a solution. This has been highlighted time and again during times of disasters such as fires, water scarcity and floods. Now we are faced with something that is life threatening.

Whether we like it or not, there was some sound common sense in the way planning was done earlier – set offs, open spaces, plenty of ventilation and physical distancing between residential units. Call us elitist for such a point of view but it is time there was a revival of discussion on how to incorporate these features into urban life.

Perhaps it is time to call a halt to unbounded development. Has the lockdown not shown us that quality of ambient air improves with less pollution? Has Chennai reached a point where it needs to see a tradeoff between rampant growth and a healthy life for its citizens? Perhaps it is time to say thus far and no further for Chennai and whatever growth needs to happen has to be in satellite cities and also in towns further in the hinterland? Should we press for a reconsid-

eration of repeated relaxation of fsi and an uncontrolled mixing of zones until there is no difference between residential and business districts? May be the time has come.

Sadly for us, such being the builder-bureaucrat-politician nexus, once the COVID fear abates, we will go back to just the way we were before it all began. It will once again be seminars on urban redesign, advertisements for gated communities, a largely unorganized labour sector that depends on migrants in huge numbers and encroachments on public spaces. A sure indicator of this is the way planning has been going on the proposed skywalk in T Nagar, even during the lockdown – a forced solution to overcome the chaos caused by unplanned development. Somehow we never will learn will we?

Muthu, the unforgettable

Through the incredible number of books and columns he authored, his espousing of numerous public causes, as founder of many institutions and as founder-editor of a highly respected journal, S. Muthiah had acquired a vast circle of friends and admirers. Even after a year of his passing away, they talk of him at every gathering. His signal contribution in several fields was one of the reasons for his iconic stature in public esteem. This fortnightly journal and the annual Madras Week celebration are standing tributes to this man who has become synonymous with Chennai.

Though a person of few words, seeming to believe that one should speak only to improve upon silence, he was an engaging conversationalist and yet always open to hearing other's experiences. To those who walked with him it was a flattering feeling to be in the company of such a willing listener. For Muthu, the evening walk along the Adyar bank was never to be missed for learning about people and events. After the walk on the Madras Club terrace overlooking the river, he lorded over a select group that, rather irreverently, came to be hailed as the "veranda mafia". An eminent doctor, a cricket's statesman, an industrialist, a *pithamaha* among the Indian sahibs of the East India Company's successor English companies and a relatively younger

management consultant completed the group's arsenal of talent and experience. They discussed the problems of all fields of activity and found instant solutions. Muthu was socially very active and it was a rare evening when he had no speech to make, no event to preside over or no party to be a part of. He never missed them. This close touch with a cross section of society gave him a deep understanding of people that must have honed his ability to tell a human story with great elan.

Muthu was a good listener because he believed that everyone had something to say

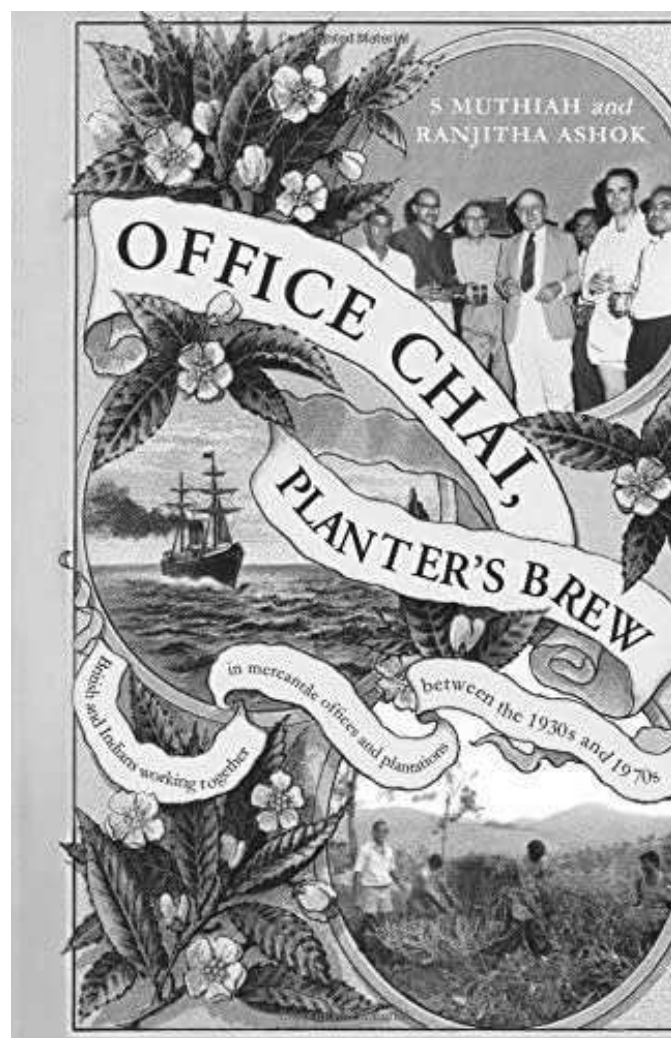
contacts, he identified over forty Indian "boxwallahs" and had their experiences and insights recorded. As editor of the book which was launched in a record time of twenty four months, he wrote its *Introduction* which itself is a masterpiece. It surveyed the management scene in the English days, highlighting its unique features, in one magnificent sweep reflecting his understanding of organisational issues. Since then, several of the contributors to the book have, sadly, passed away. Muthu proved to be right in his haste. The book titled *Office Chai, Planter's Brew* would easily rank as a significant contribution

● by N.S. Parthasarathy

that could not but touch some of his wide range of interests. It was in one of these walking conversations that he decided that there was need for a book on organisational culture and management styles in India during the British days. The last few Englishmen lingered on till the late sixties marking the end of an era. Muthu sensed an urgency to work on this project because Indians, who had worked with Englishmen and succeeded them in the fifties and sixties to senior positions in large corporations, were in their eighties posing a risk of their reminiscences being lost forever. With enormous energy, and using his

from Muthu to literature on management studies in India. Works of senior managers of those days are available but are autobiographically oriented, whereas Muthu's book focused on practices, cultures, systems, structures and on how the English responded to the new challenges and opportunities in a free India.

Muthu encouraged his friends to write their experiences. He believed that everyone had a story to tell and quite a few good ones at that. He told those in whom he saw some writing aptitude or who had an interesting story to tell to "just write 500 words a day". And



writing was his own passion. When he was not physically at it, he was thinking of the theme for the next *Hindu* weekly column or the next book project or of the title for the work he had completed. An apt title often took days to emerge to match a writing that had already been finished. To him, the title must sum up the content, evoke reader-interest and yet be pithily short. He would have considered and rejected several alternatives before the final selection.

The restless inner being in him was constantly in search of new subjects that would be of interest to the reading public. In his last months, one that fired his imagination was the story of Binny's. He was even toying with possible titles – *The Rise and Fall of the Binny Empire* was one. Binny was one of the largest companies in the country, located in Madras, that is Chennai, employing tens of thousands. The Chennai location of this institutional story was a factor that explains, in retrospect, his wanting to write about it. In his last days, he did nurse a feeling of disappointment that he could not put things together to do it.

Overtaken by illness, he was working simultaneously on two important book projects.

He carried on, regardless, from his hospital bed. He completed one, his last hurrah, and very nearly finished the other. The one completed was launched a few weeks after his demise. It was the history of sports in Tamil Nadu, commissioned by the Tamil Nadu Olympic Association.

It seemed that the circle was being completed. Muthu started out, over sixty years ago, as a sports journalist in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. He now worked from his bed to complete a sports book as if he was in a race with Time to join the end to the beginning into an eternal circle that subsumes the illusive beginnings and ends. He, indeed, ended up producing a monumental work on the history of over forty sports in the State that nurtured him in his last forty years. This book is bound to motivate children telling them about the State's achievers and some with their rags-to-riches stories. He called it *Tamil Nadu's Quest for Gold*. In his time, Muthu had accomplished much in terms of subject range, excellence of writing and sheer quantity of "Guinness-tic" proportion. The last launched book, the subject of which was very much after his heart, marked the grand end of his own Quest.

All Hail 38C!

Yesterday, I went to Chembur to stock up on coffee powder before somebody decides good old Ganapathi Stores is a global CV hotspot and proactively closes it for a month. BSTS, I thought – Better Safe Than Sorry!

A very enterprising Dharavi fellow – I love their ingenuity and business sense! – had hit upon a huge business opportunity in face masks. He had converted his stock of female undergarments into makeshift face masks, complete with adjustable straps, padding, underwiring and the works! I guess the workers had been busy stitching on faux Victoria's Secret labels until the smart owner whacked them on the head and swore at them in Tamil (*Arivu-irukaada!*).

So now the good Chembur hawkers have the typical white, black and skin colour hosiery material bras hanging on display, but with a single cup. When I first saw them, I thought it was positively weird until the penny dropped, and I ended up doubling over in tears of laughter. Take this, you stupid coronavirus – we may

● by
Bharathi Rajaram

not have an N95 mask, but we have other weapons in sizes 32B, 34C, 36A, 38C and more!

Just when the puzzled hawker and other passers-by were helping me up from my fits of laughter, I spotted one temple priest on his two-wheeler, wearing an exquisitely form-fitted

underwired 38C cup on his face. It was such a perfectly snug fit! The hilariously erotic image of our Venerable Srinivasa Iyer Gurukkal going around town reciting Vishnu Sahasra Namam with his face ensconced in a Victoria's Secret 38C was too much for me. I broke into fits of laughter again!

I returned home and narrated this story on the What's App group I share with my Chennai school friends. One poor chap, a father of two, asked, "Hey what is a 38C?" A wag from the US replied with a straight face, "Dei, 38C is that bus route from Vivekananda House to Thiruvika Nagar daa!" And we all went into peals of laughter again.

Only humour can save us from this coronavirus insanity. All hail 38C!

When Arcot nobility lived in Black Town

The name Mahfuz Khan Deorhi (Devadi in local parlance) does not strike a bell any longer.

It is now known as Mofuzkhan Garden Street, in George Town. That such a place existed first came to my notice from *En Suyacharitai* (My Autobiography) of Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, written in 1963. The book begins with the childhood of his father Pammal Vijayaranga Mudaliar, wherein the son writes that Pammal Sr first studied in a school that was located in Mahfuz Khan Deorhi, which was in reality a large garden, with the residence of Mahfuz Khan in it.

Now where was this precinct? Sambanda Mudaliar very helpfully gives all the details – it was on one side of Acharappan Street in George Town, which is where the ancestral home of the Pammal family was and still is. Between Vijayaranga Mudaliar and his son Sambandam, there was continuous occupation of that house from at least 1830 to 1964, which must be a record of sorts. But let us get back to the story of Mahfuz Khan Deorhi.

“My father while young studied in a wayside school located in Mahfuz Khan Deorhi and he later related to me a funny incident that happened then. This was on one side of the street where I live now and it was a garden in the 1830s. It was customary for Mahfuz Khan, the owner, to come once in a while to this garden, travelling this distance in a palanquin. Once when he was crossing the school, the students made a huge clamour and he stopped to enquire. The teacher, on being summoned by this aristocratic personage became nervous and said that the boys were excited on seeing him and hence cheering. The delighted noble immediately ordered that the boys should be given the day off. The students therefore made it a practice of cheering loudly whenever Mahfuz Khan came that way.”

Now this must have been in the 1830s or 1840s, when Pammal Sr. was a young boy. However, there are records of such a garden house being in existence from the 1760s at least thereby tracing the origins of this property to an earlier Mahfuz Khan, eldest son of Anwaruddin, the Nawab of the Carnatic between 1744 and 1749. Nowadays Mahfuz Khan is chiefly remembered for the grossly over-exaggerated Battle of Adyar where he suffered defeat at the hands of the French. It is often said that this was the

one confrontation that decisively established the superiority of the European army, whose sepoys were disciplined enough to vanquish a huge force under Mahfuz Khan. The numbers quoted are usually 300 under the French versus 10,000 under Mahfuz Khan, the battle happening near Quibble Island in San Thomé. Reality, it appears, was not so simple.

The diaries of the dubash Ananda Ranga Pillai depict this to be a mere skirmish. Moreover, there appears to be a conflict on dates as well. H.D. Love has it that the battle happened on October 24, 1746 at San Thomé. It is interesting to note however that in Ananda Ranga Pillai's diaries, there is



The entrance to what was once the Deorhi of Mahfuz Khan.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

no mention of an encounter on that date. And it would not be correct to assume that there was a time lag in receipt of letters at Pondicherry. In fact, even on October 29th, Dupleix in Pondicherry received M. D'Espremenil who was stationed in Madras and there is no mention of such a momentous victory if it indeed was so great.

The actual confrontation as per Ranga Pillai was on November 2nd 1746. The description tallies with that of Love but most interestingly, it would appear that the French were no less disorganized than the Arcot troops. There was complete miscommunication between their commandants who were dispersed at various places – the Fort, the Egmore Redoubt, the Company Gardens and near the Nungambakkam tank. They had been instructed to be on the defensive and not attack and so had loaded most guns with just powder and no shot. But when the water supply to the Fort was cut, M. La Tour who was near the Captains Gardens had to act. He ordered fire and on hearing this, the various French units across the city assumed battle had begun and fired too. This caused panic in the Arcot army and Mahfuz Khan fled from near the Nungambakkam tank where he had camped. There is no mention of any battle near the Adyar. What is even more interesting is that after such a so-called momentous defeat, Madame Jean Dupleix felt it necessary to

send rich gifts to Mahfuz Khan. Clearly, the latter remained a force to reckon with.

Being the elder son of Nawab Anwaruddin it was expected that Mahfuz Khan would succeed him but was not to be. It was the younger, Mohammed Ali, who became the Nawab of the Carnatic, after many battles quite well known, in 1755. The victorious British made Mahfuz Khan the renter of Madurai, on the condition that he paid an annual tribute of fifteen lakhs, to be divided between them and the Nawab. Of course, the usual history repeated itself – he came into conflict with the palayakkarars and with Yusuf Khan, the commandant of Madurai who is even now commemorated in Kansamettu (Khan Sahib Mettu) Street in that town. After many rebellions and with the English wanting him out, Mahfuz Khan eventually settled in Madras in 1759, and lived probably in Mahfuz Khan Deorhi.

He appears to have been of a restless spirit. A year later, he was petitioning his brother Mohammed Ali (Nawab Wallajah) for Rs 100,000 to fund his pilgrimage to Mecca. This was given, along with an escort, on his signing a bond. A few days later he was back; he had used up much of the money in settling his creditors and so could he have Rs 5,000 more? Wallajah gave him double that and saw him off. Having gone up to Chittoor he however returned. In 1767, he entered into treaty with Hyder Ali and went off to Madurai. The fur-

ious British had him captured and brought back. He was entrusted to Wallajah who kept him prisoner, but well provided for, till his death. This again was probably at the Deorhi.

There is a brief description of what H.D. Love claims is the house of Mahfuz Khan, dating to 1765. This is by Jemima Kindersley wife of a captain in the EIC's army – “A short distance from the town is a small elegant house and garden where the Nabob of Arcot sometimes resides; the heat of the climate admits of an open, airy stile of building which is pleasing to the eye; a roof supported with pillars is more elegant than a wall with windows and doors; besides the rooms being unencumbered with chimnies makes it more easy to lay them out in uniformity...” (spellings as in original).

Love bases his assumption that this is Mahfuz Khan's house on the fact that the Chepauk Palace was yet to be built. But let us not forget that by 1765, the Nawab of Arcot was in residence in Madras too, most likely at Deorhi Sardar ul Mulk Dilawar Jung Bahadur, which is present day Devadi Street in Mylapore. This could well be a description of that house, which too has vanished.

There is no record of when Mahfuz Khan died but the noble that Pammal Sr saw was probably a descendant. Now for another interesting connect that George Town has with Arcot nobility – Buddi Street, which is parallel to

Mahfuz Khan Deorhi. This was once Budda Sahib Street and probably takes its name from Bade Sahib aka Zain-ul-Abdin one of the brothers of Chanda Sahib and therefore a nephew of Nawab Anwaruddin. He had requested the EIC to provide for a town house in Madras for his family en route their pilgrimage to Mecca. This was probably where they lived. Bade Sahib's wife, who was a resident of Pondicherry, he having left her there for safety during the Maratha siege of Trichy in the 1740s, is frequently mentioned by Ananda Ranga Pillai. There are conflicting accounts about Bade Sahib's end – most state that he was killed by the Marathas in 1741 and they sent his body with due honours to Chanda Sahib who was holed up in Trichy, berating him for sacrificing so brave a man. The news of his death was duly conveyed to his wife in Pondicherry and there was widespread mourning. Two days later, news arrived that he was only seriously injured. But he fades from history thereafter.

Both Mahfuz Khan Garden and Budda Sahib Streets end at the Madrasa-e-Islamia, which is very likely the place where the original Deorhi Mahfuz Khan was. Acharappan Street too ends there. The school, most likely a successor to where Pammal Sr studied, even now has its address as MK Garden – in Chennai everything can be reduced to two, or at most three, initials.

Madras Cricket, in the 1890s

— by an Anglo Indian

I have often heard the question asked, in fact, I have myself often put it — “Why does *Cricket* have so little about Indian cricket in general, and almost nothing of Madras Cricket in particular?” — The real reason, I suppose, is that no one out here has quite sufficient energy to write and tell you anything about what happens; so being a firm believer of “the better the day the better the deed” theory, I will this Christmas Day indite you a few lines, which if they do nothing else may act as an example to others better qualified than myself to give the information.

Cricket in Madras, it is unnecessary to inform *Cricket* readers, or, at any rate, those of them who remember the results of the matches played by Lord Hawke's Team in this Presidency three years ago, is of by no means indifferent quality in the better class matches. Madras, indeed, at the present time could probably place as strong an all-round team in the field as either Bombay, Bengal, the North-West, or Central Provinces, to say nothing of Burma,

between whom (not forgetting Ceylon and Singapore) we may in a few years time see a similar competition to that now waged by the Australasian colonies for Lord Sheffield's trophy.

The last occasion when a representative Madras Presidency team took the field was just a year ago, when a strong team went up to Bombay to tackle the Bombay Presidency and the Parsis, through in neither case did the cricketers from the South prove successful. Excuses, though, were justifiably made for their then comparatively indifferent show. As besides the fatigues of the journey proving too much for one or two members of the team, who owing to circumstances could not get a proper amount of rest before going into the field to play, the best bowler on the side cut his hand so badly as to be practically unable to bowl, while two of the other invalids were his chief understudies in the bowling department. This year, however, it was confidently anticipated that, whether Lord Hawke's team come to Madras or not, the Christmas

holidays would at least produce a couple of interesting matches with Bombay and the Parsis, and preparations for both these were practically complete, and the team to represent Madras actually discussed in the principal cricket organ of the Presidency, when, like a bolt from the blue, it was announced that the Bombay authorities could not see their way to send a team as one of their best men

Madras this Christmas was indispensable, and asking for the whole, or a portion of their expenses — an almost inconceivable piece of meanness for the representatives of the richest of all Indian communities to be guilty of. This led to the second match being off, as the Madras people very rightly declined to be the first to introduce an entirely new feature into Indian cricket, and efforts were then

er this is arranged this season or not, it will not be long delayed, as signs are not wanting that the native college could even now put such a team into the field as would take a really good Presidency eleven all its time to dispose of, there being at Bangalore just now a particularly fine batsman of the name of Jayaram, who, so good judges tell me, might speedily develop into a Ranjitsinhji, given the opportunities, while some of the bowlers at the Madras Presidency College would take their part in the best of *Cricket*. As yet, though, unfortunately there exists nothing in the way of combination between native schools and cricket clubs, but this once given they will prove a hard nut for the best to crack, and with a Governor of Madras, such as Lord Harris of Bombay, the cricket prospects of the so-called “benighted” Presidency would be unexceptionable. Lord Wenlock, the present man, who retires so shortly in favour of Sir Arthur Havelock, has never taken the keen

● **Editor's note:** We reproduce this article that appeared in the magazine *Cricket, a Weekly Record of the Game*, in its issue of Jan 30, 1896. We thank Vikram Raghavan, a friend and admirer of Mr. S. Muthiah's for sending us this link.

could not play. That, at least, is the generally accepted reason given for this disgraceful breach of cricket faith, and it would be hard to find a feebler one. Scarcely had the indignation at this news subsided, when it was whispered that the Parsis were taking advantage of the belief that their presence at

made to get a team over from Ceylon, but without avail, so that a very interesting point as to how the places in the Madras Presidency team would be filled remains in abeyance. There has, however, been some talk of a fully representative Presidency eleven taking the field against a Madras native team, but wheth-

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Cricket at Chepauk, dating to the 1890s.

The Vanished 'Gentleman' of the Road — remembering the Madras Tram

The accompanying photograph of a tram car of the long defunct Madras Tramways Company that wound up its operations in the early nineteen fifties is remarkable for the diverse memories that it evokes of a bygone era. The photograph, so the editor of *Madras Musings* informs me, is part of what is now known as the Hensley and Bond Collection, at the University of Chicago. It is part of several pictures taken by Glenn S. Hensley and Frank Bond, both US servicemen posted in India during the Second World War. How it came my (or rather my brother Dr. K. Radhakrishnan's) way is a story for another day. The tram car featured in the photograph is rather special for me and our family as it carries an advertisement

for Lodhra, the flagship product of the ayurvedic medicine manufacturing establishment Kesari Kuteeram founded by my grandfather Dr. K.N. Kesari 120 years ago. The ad reads "Lodhra for Ladies' Health and Happiness".

There were also trams carrying ads for the other medicines such as Amrita and Arka which, along with Lodhra made up what used to be known in those days as Kesari's Three Gems. In fact, with its speed not exceeding about 20 miles per hour and ambling along the important thoroughfares of the city offering high visibility, the tram was a popular medium for publicity for a variety of products. I can recall Amrutanjana, Raja Snow, and Margo Soap, to name a few.

The photo features the longer version of the tram cars that were in service those days with the sides painted grey and the ends painted red and grey. These larger cars plied on the arterial routes such as Parry's Corner or Custom House to Mylapore. The shorter version covered the more crowded areas such as Triplicane. The

● by
K. Balakesari

photo appears to be a posed one taken probably at or near a terminal depot considering the relaxed pose of the person seen chatting with the staff on the car and the proximity of a structure visible in the background. The three staff seem immensely pleased to pose with a white sahib.

The photo also shows some typical features of the Madras tram. In the front can be seen the control stand with the regulator handle which the driver moved in a horizontal circular arc to control the speed of the tram. The thin rod visible at the top rear background carried the cable transmitting the power from the overhead contact wire to the electric traction motors underneath the car. Each car had two such rods, one for each direction. Unlike the pantograph on the electric trains with a broad metal strip making con-



The Madras Tram.

tact with the overhead contact wire, in trams, a pulley at the end of the rod was the point of contact with the overhead wire. The grooved pulley rolled along the wire as the tram moved. The upward pressure exerted by the spring-loaded rod guided the pulley along the wire. The rod with the pulley swivelled at rakish angles as the tram negotiated sharp curves on the roads. At night, the sparks that

emanated from the pulley as it went over junction points on the contact wire were a typical sight, and they were accompanied by a crackling sound.

The electric tram was a popular and affordable means of public transport. Despite its noisy presence, with the typical whirring sound of the accelerating motors, the tram

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The tram lines that passed through Westcott Road, Royapettah, June 1951.

P.G. Wodehouse writes to P.G. Sundarajan

● KRA Narasiah recalls the time when the celebrated humorist wrote to P.G. Sundarajan aka Chitti, well-known *littérateur* of Madras.

The late P.G. Sundarajan, known popularly as Chitti, joined a circulating library in 1935 when he was just 25 years old. In those days, circulating libraries were popular as people could read all the books and journals they wanted to for a modest subscription fee. As a consultant, it was Chitti's job to select the titles to purchase for the library. He chose this line of work as he could also read all the books and magazines that he loved. In the process, he purchased all the books of

P.G. Wodehouse, who quickly became his favourite author. He also came up with the idea of launching an English journal, which he volunteered to edit, to boost the library's popularity. The library owner Thanikachalam (who was also the sole distributor of *The Hindu* in

the Royal Family of England. Fortunately, Chitti's friend Dhandapani was in charge of the art section at *The Hindu* at that time, and he gave Chitti a picture of the Princess from his collection. Chitti published this picture as the cover of the first issue of *Marina*. Thanikachalam

● by K.R.A. Narasiah

Madras) was highly impressed as the new journal *Marina* gained popularity among his clients. In fact, the name *Marina* was suggested by Chitti, after the Princess Marina of Greece who had, at that time, married into

had some apprehension about publishing such a picture in a commercial journal, fearing objection from the government. But Chitti was not bothered. On the contrary, he was quite excited as he felt that the pic-

ture would be of great topical interest. *The Madras Mail* favourably reviewed the first issue and wrote, "The standard of language found in this magazine is much better than that of other English journals of Madras." During a session in the provincial legislative assembly, a member objected to another member browsing through *Marina*, and that incident brought some added fame to *Marina*, too.

In the very first issue of *Marina*, Chitti had written a well-researched article about P.G. Wodehouse's sense of humour, which was appreciated by many learned citizens. Thrilled, Chitti sent a copy of the journal to P.G. Wodehouse

at his London address, along with a letter containing a request for an autographed photograph as a keepsake. Chitti's friends thought that a busy and popular author like P.G. Wodehouse would not even read Chitti's letter.

Lo and behold! Camping then in Paris, P.G. Wodehouse wrote a response dated January 18, 1936, saying, "Thank you so much for sending me the magazine. I thought your article most excellent and I shall always keep it. I am sorry I have run out of photographs. I have a book of short stories appearing soon and I hope to get to work on a new novel before long. Best wishes."

Chitti used to say that he carried this postcard in his shirt pocket in such away that it was clearly visible to others! In later years, Chitti used to say that the only thing common between both of them were the initials of their names.

A look at Madras Cricket

(Continued from page 10)

practical interest in cricket that might have been expected from an old Quidnunc and I.Z. player, but then early in his career as Governor of Madras, Mr. Labouchere, in *Truth*, suggested that the famine-struck millions

of Madras were left to die without the gubernatorial care while H.E. was disporting himself with his staff at cricket! A gross perversion of the facts even for *Truth*, but sufficient to put rather a damper on Lord Wenlock's cricket, and, in fact, except for an occasional game at Ootaca-

mund, when Government has been away at the Hills, he has never played, making his first appearance in a match at Madras itself last week. However, I must not run on like this, but may mention just a few names of the best men now available in Madras to show that I have

not been speaking without the book in what I said about a good team being procurable.

The most recent player at home of those now out here is H.C. King, who was in the Marlborough Eleven the same year as A.G. Steel. That he is still fairly useful may be gathered from the fact that, when last in England he was considered good enough to play for M.C.C. and Ground v. Yorkshire at Scarborough, though sad to say he did not there shine, at any rate with the bat. Another comparative oldster is R.J.H. Arbuthnot, who has played for Kent on occasion when in England: while still another of the "Old Brigade" who can be counted on to field and catch with the best of 'em, besides being as good a bat as ever, is H.G. Wedderburn, who was nearly, if not quite, an Oxford Blue some quarter of a century ago. All these are household words in Madras cricket, though possibly they would all have to give way to younger men of whom H. Reynolds as an all-rounder, is perhaps entitled to first place. He will be well remembered about London as a cricketer, as for Kensington Park a few years ago, he both made runs and took wickets, a trick he still possesses. Bob Thomas, I know, wanted him for Middlesex one season, but he could not get away. Then another good all-rounder is H.R. Ellison, a nephew, I believe, of that good old cricketer, the Yorkshire President. He never did much while at Cambridge, but now would undoubtedly be chosen

before a good many of the men who wore a cricket blue at the time he was in residence. If I go on like this, though, I shall be trespassing on the functions of the Selection Committee, should that body be called into existence in the near future, besides which it would be invidious to make anything approaching a list of representative Madras cricketers without more time than I can give to the subject even on Christmas day. So I will content myself to referring the more curious to the reports of the matches being played this week at Madras, which – despite the behavior of the Bombay and Parsi cricketers ("chuckers" they have only too justly been termed) – has from a cricket point of view been a very busy time.

Mention of Madras cricket would be quite incomplete at this time without any reference to the departure in a few days from Madras and India of Colonel Pennycuik, R.E., who has played the game out here for over 30 years with a vigour that is still unabated, as proved by the fact that in every one of those thirty seasons he has, I believe, always got his 100 wickets, besides taking part in every match (when he has been out in India) that has taken place between Madras and Bangalore.

In conclusion, let me wish all your readers a happy cricket season for 1896, with lots of runs and wickets like that we now have here on the Madras Ground, hard as nails, true as a billiard table and quick as lightning.

The vanished 'Gentleman' of the road

(Continued from page 11)

exuded a feeling of friendliness and tranquillity in contrast to its more unruly and polluting fellow traveller of the road, the transport bus. After all, with its limited speed and fixed paths, pedestrians had no fear of getting run over and could boldly cross the road in the face of an approaching tram, unlike a transport bus which even in those days was a potential killer. I have never heard of a tram running over a pedestrian or causing a serious accident. The tram never overtook another vehicle. It remained content to move on its "predestined grooves". And since it generated enough noise in motion, it announced its presence by clanging bells instead of honking a horn. Perhaps the most passenger-friendly feature of the tram was the low floor height that made it easily accessible to the old and the young, man woman or child. Truly, a gentleman on Madras roads! By the time the service was eventually closed in April 1953, the net-

work had extended to about 26 km and carried 125,000 passengers every day.

The second photograph, which is from our family album, shows the two pairs of tram lines that passed through Westcott Road, Royapettah, in front of our house. These lines linked Mylapore in the south with Custom House/Parry's Corner in the north, passing through Mount Road. There is no doubt about the date of this photograph. It was taken in June 1951, during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Kesari Kuteeram (founded in 1900). The building visible in the rear was the front portion of the northern annexe of the old Kesari Kuteeram complex which temporarily housed the Madras Music Academy during the early forties. And behind that (not visible) in the adjoining compound was the men's hostel of the Meston (teacher's) Training College, where today the commercial complex Bhattad Tower (the current editorial office of *Madras Musings*) stands. The ground floor of the hostel was

the residence of the principal of the college. Another interesting fact – the neem tree visible in the foreground to the left of the parked car outside the gate still stands, about the only remnant of those days!

Trams have inspired limricks, the five-line nonsense verse. The one below is of 1905 vintage:

*There was a young man who said
"Damn!*

*I perceive with regret that I am
But a creature that moves
In predestinate grooves
I'm not even a bus, I'm a tram."*

Several years later someone penned a rejoinder which went like this:

*Young man you should stay your
complaint,*

*For the grooves that you call a
constraint*

*Are there to contrive
That you learn to survive;
Trams arrive, buses may or they
mayn't."*

So the slow-moving trams also conveyed a profound message!

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