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# MADRAS MUSINGS

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## Déjà vu on Tamil Nadu Heritage

Matters have come full circle as far as the State's management of its heritage is concerned. Last week the High Court pulled up the TN Government for its masterly inactivity in this regard and directed it to form a Heritage Commission comprising among others 'historians, archaeologists and anthropologists.' This will be the advisory body to a newly constituted Mamallapuram World Heritage Management Authority. To those of us who have been following the (in)actions of the Government when it comes to heritage, all this sounds dreadfully familiar. After all, this will be the third such Heritage Commission to be formed and like its illustrious predecessors, it will be able to do very little.

But before we go into that, we must bring our readers abreast with what necessitated

this pronouncement by the High Court. A letter to *The Hindu* dated Jan 8, 2015 had lamented about the pitiable condition of a tomb in Kanyakumari district for the renovation of which the 12<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission had allotted Rs 38 lakhs. The question was not the money the correspondent

● by The Editor

wrote, but the sheer inability of the State Archaeology Department (SAD) and the Public Works Department (PWD) to execute such renovation. And given the number of structures under the ASI and the SAD, it is very unlikely that they will be able to pay due attention to any. The Court took suo motu notice of this and following a

public interest litigation that lasted till this year, issued a series of 75 directives to the State Government chiefly concerning temples and other heritage structures.

One among these is the directive regarding the formation of the Heritage Commission. The first such order came from the court in 2010 (eleven years ago) and the Commission came under the purview of the CMDA. Its mandate was to look into the heritage buildings in the city. The body which was so formed was conveniently populated with members from Government departments and institutions run by the state. The only outsider was a lone representative from the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage. The decisions of the commission were

(Continued on page 3)

## Lock, unlock, repeat: Breaking the lockdown cycle

The covid numbers for June indicate a hopeful downward trend. Test positivity rates have dipped across the state and the number of fresh cases is seeing a decline. On June 12, for the first time in months, the number of new cases reported in Chennai dropped below 1,000. The city's recovery rate also rose to 97 per cent, slightly higher than the overall figure for the state. The credit goes to the lockdown, which slowed down transmission by curbing public interaction.

However, a lockdown is a double-edged sword. The barriers that it puts up to restrict

virus transmission also impede socio-economic, educational and cultural activities. According to a *Times of India* report released in May, the then 15-day lockdown was estimated to cost the state around Rs. 2,900 crores. Businesses have also suffered and the most impacted as always are the vulnerable – daily wage earners, migrant workers, neighbourhood vendors and others with little to no financial net. Compounding matters is the price rise that accompanies lockdowns. Consider vegetables, a daily

essential. The last week of May saw the prices shoot up in various localities across the city. In Alwarpet, a kilo of green peas was sold at Rs. 190 while in Tambaram, french beans were priced at Rs. 300 per kg and tomatoes, Rs. 70. Lockdowns are not a sustainable shield against the coronavirus in the long run.

As the administration rolls out what seems to be a gradual relaxation of the lockdown, it's perhaps important to take note

(Continued on page 2)

## HERITAGE WATCH

### Platinum Jubilee of a Venerable Institution

The Vivekananda College is one of the educational landmarks of our city. Its alumni have left their mark in various fields, which apart from their chosen professions has also included politics, theatre, cinema, sport and music. It is a matter of pride for Chennai that this institution celebrates 75 this year. For a more detailed article by Karthik Bhatt on the subject, please turn to pages 4 & 5.

Our OLD, taken from the 1st issue of *Viveka*, the in-house magazine of the college, shows the main block, known as the Nattukottai Nagarathar Vidyalaya, as it was in 1946 on the day of the inauguration – just a single-storied structure. Our second picture, taken in 1948 shows the building in its present shape – of two floors. The low compound wall and a part of the open space within are also visible.

Our NEW (Page 5, bottom picture), taken a couple of days back shows the main gate and the building within. The trees, allowed to grow without pruning, hide the building and as for the compound wall, it has grown higher and higher.



## LEARNING A FEW LESSONS



(Continued from page 1)

of a few lessons that recent events have taught us if we're to break the lockdown cycle.

### 1. Lockdowns are not designed to beat the virus.

Lockdowns do not eradicate the virus – they only slow down transmission by culling opportunities for the virus to spread. Lockdowns are useful as a breathing period for the administration, health sector and public to equip themselves with the resources needed to actually fight the pandemic. But, as we have seen with the second wave, their short-term benefits are wasted when anti-pandemic efforts are slackened.

Hand washing, social distancing, masking and other self-monitory hygiene measures still remain our most effective weapon against the virus. Yet, there are still those who have not adopted these preventive measures even at this stage. It is perhaps worthwhile to understand the reasons why and address their issues, if any. Some countries have enforced punitive measures in order to standardize covid protocols, a tool that perhaps we can consider here, too.

At the end of the day, behavioural change that establishes 'new normal' routines among the public will be a key asset in helping eradicate the pandemic. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has made it quite clear that lockdown relaxations risk being rolled back if preventive measures are not followed. That's as it should be. Such strong messaging must be accompanied by an educational campaign on the importance of proper preventive measures, too.

### 2. Vaccination drive is key

The covid vaccine lowers the chances of contracting the disease and also greatly reduces the virulence of the coronavirus. Ground reports and patient anecdotes suggest that vaccines have enabled people to ride out the infection at home with relatively mild symptoms. Therefore, vaccines are a key weapon in our fight against the virus and the city's vaccination drive is a crucial

program.

The GCC is taking multiple steps to speed up vaccination rates. It is reportedly conducting a survey of residents with hypertension and diabetes in order to identify those who need the vaccine on priority; it is also offering bulk vaccination at doorstep for 45+. In Kovalam, welfare organizations are incentivising the job by offering lucky draws with enticing gifts ranging from free biriyani and phone recharges to gold chains and washing machines. Much is being done to encourage people to avail the vaccination.

Tamil Nadu was reportedly vaccinating around 2 lakh persons a day until a shortage hit in the first week of June. The state stands to receive an additional 4.26L vaccine doses from the Centre to pick up speed.

### 3. Local bodies need to sustain their fight against the pandemic, with dedicated resources at hand

When the first wave hit the state, multiple measures helped keep it in check, not just lockdowns – fever camps were conducted to facilitate widespread testing; local authorities kept in touch with citizens who had tested positive; sanitization was conducted regularly, too. These grassroots efforts were slackened as the situation improved and the lockdown was withdrawn, with the public returning to life as usual. Then the election happened, crunching local resources further. The circumstances were ripe for a second wave.

Localized efforts to handle the pandemic must be sustained in order to contain spread as well as educate citizens on covid appropriate behaviour. This calls for a dedicated team and resources so that such functions can continue uninterrupted. Experts say that the virus may never really go away but will eventually become more harmless, cropping up as fresh infections in community pockets here and there. It stands to reason that the health department must be sufficiently equipped to monitor and handle it in a sustained manner in order to keep its impact as low as possible.

## To Lockdown or not to Lockdown

The Man from Madras Musings has nothing but sympathy for the head that wears the er... crown (now what did you think MMM meant?) in our state. We all know he had to wait long to be entrusted with the responsibility. Some had even written this as an impossibility. Parallels were drawn with a man in a similar situation in far away England who too has been waiting long. But all has ended well for our prince, though the other one, in water-girt isle has heaven knows how long to wait.

But to get back to our man, he must have all along imagined life to have been one of speeches, meetings, cutting ribbons, laying foundation stones, receiving and sending off visiting dignitaries and then travelling around. Instead, what he has gotten on to is a pandemic-ridden territory, with none of the above exciting things happening. And each weekend he has this momentous decision to take on what is to be done with the lockdown. To open or not to open that is his question, a dilemma which if you remember kept the Prince of Denmark awake several nights.

Mind you, the head that wears the crown has MMM's sympathies. There seems to be no one answer to this question. Our state has so many diverse groups, each having an opinion and though there seem to be only two answers (open or remain locked down), there are fifty shades of grey in what can be allowed in between. Our head must be turning quite grey in whatever is left beneath that crown (once again if you thought of something else that is entirely your imagination).

Take for instance the question of allowing vehicles. MMM is reliably informed that there is a group of owners of high-end German cars in the city that wants the lockdown to end immediately because rats have taken to gnawing the wires in their idle vehicles, this apparently being a problem these cars are particularly prone to. And so, we have these influential men wanting the lockdown to lift at once. Not so enthusiastic are their chauffeurs who have thus far had a paid holiday and want it to continue.

That then is just one conflict of interest. Now take this forward – you have the temperance league people vs the regular TASMAG goers, the parents vs children group, the teachers vs students groups, the small-shop owners vs the mall shop owners, the OTT content providers vs the theatre owners, the society for the continuance of the virtual meets vs those who want to meet in person and so on. And then there is that huge group of home delivery people – the Swiggy and Dunzo men of this city. MMM is not sure if they would like the lockdown to continue. While they have

done a magnificent job rushing products from place to place, MMM thinks they are over-worked and would not mind some easing of the pressure.

There is a conflict everywhere. But MMM is sure that no matter what, everyone would want the lockdown to end and more importantly, the pandemic to go. It is still early days and the next few weeks will really show us how we fare. And let us not forget, this is just a partial opening up. There are going to be plenty more decisions for the top man and MMM is quite sure he will be often lifting his crown, scratching his head, and pondering over whether life in the opposition was not easier. But then, the way he has been begun MMM is quite sure he will do well in this tenure. All the best to him.

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

### Need for a Pied Piper

The Man from Madras Musings has mentioned in the previous passage the rat menace to which high-end German cars in the city are prone. He now takes harp in hand and sings in detail about the problem. Apparently, cars of this kind need to be kept alive and kicking if they are not to be troubled by rats. The heat of the vehicle, and heaven knows that in Chennai anything takes ages to cool, is a sufficient deterrent when these cars are subject to normal use but come a time when they are not, and rats immediately make a beeline to them.

Those in the know inform MMM that this is a design defect, a point which MMM is sure these vehicle manufacturers contest quite hotly. They need to, for if they did it coldly then rats are sure to gnaw at their vitals just as it happened in the Greek myth with Prometheus, only it was a culture that did the job in his case. But to get back to the rat menace, it seems that these cars were designed for entirely rat-free cities. But are German towns really free of rodents? MMM seems to recall a certain Pied Piper had to be called to Hamlyn town standing by the River Weser in Brunswick. It is of course quite likely that the man did such a thorough job of it that there are no rats left. In which case Chennai by the River Cooum in Tamil Nadu ought to extend an invite to this man to make an extended stay here. The German car owners will, so MMM believes, be quite happy to sponsor the visit, for the other option, namely, to have the cars' innards bitten by rats comes with an even more expensive bill. MMM is also given to understand that these car manufacturers offer a rat insurance which by the way is not all that comprehensive.

One of the two high-end car manufacturers offers a mesh that electrocutes rats. The other apparently believes in a policy of live and let live. On prodding they do however offer a mousetrap. Or so MMM is informed.

MMM was discussing this issue with a lady who owns an Audi and he was informed by her that the solution to this menace lies in tobacco. You need to take a few leaves and place them in all the flat portions within the bonnet, these being spots where the rats like to rest at the end of a long working day. Unlike their human counterparts rats it seems do not have any liking for tobacco and stay clear of them. Maybe it is time for our health ministry to place ads in the papers and in other media informing smokers that they are inferior to even the common rats. But that is a side business opportunity into which we need not go just now. Care however needs to be taken not to place too much tobacco inside the vehicle MMM's friend warns. The smell can penetrate the cabin and give everybody a high and that can in turn lead to other side effects.

### Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings, and others at Madras Musings are very flattered at the number of grumbly emails that have come over the non-delivery of the print version of the magazine. While it is nice to feel wanted, we take this opportunity to bring to the notice of these people that there is a pandemic out there and also a lockdown. The latter in particular needs lifting for us to return to print. Till then, they need to visit us at our web site [www.madrasmusings.com](http://www.madrasmusings.com). But not every printing press in the city seems to have shut down. MMM notes that whoever



prints the poster shown above worked overtime for these, always plentiful on our city walls, have now proliferated into a pandemic of their own. Perhaps these are problems to which the human mind turns automatically when under enforced lockdowns.

– MMM

# Luz Corner memories

During the 1960s, schooling at Vidya Mandir Mylapore and walking back to CV Raman Road where home was meant a wonderful time spent soaking in the sights and sounds of hyperactive Luz Corner.

The stretch of shops on Royapettah High Road on the western side began with Shikar Armoury, arms and ammunition dealers, in a niche property owned and run by an eminent royal family. The father, a highly respected person and a leading authority in India on arms, ammunition and ballistics, handed down every subtlety and nuance of that niche sport to his son (with him whom I am in touch with till today, by virtue of the fact that we are both members of the Chennai Rifle Club). Between father and son they took competitive shooting in India to great heights.

BSC footwear was next door, which we presumed was Bata Shoe Company, or so the owner promoted the theory to us. My first pair of Beatle boots was bought from here for about 35 Rupees. I had saved up some thirty rupees in notes and the rest were given to the shopkeeper in coins – I know I shortchanged him and wherever you are Sir, I still owe you a rupee or so. And thank you for letting me leave the shop with a pair of shiny black Beatle Boots, instead of holding me for ransom till I coughed up the balance.

## Tamil Nadu Heritage

(Continued from page 1)

therefore a foregone conclusion. Several heritage buildings were allowed to be demolished and despite the Court giving an exhaustive list of structures to be notified the Commission began a fresh such exercise, to be conducted by history and architecture students of various colleges. This is as far as we know, still a project in progress. In the meanwhile, the Commission sent out a letter to the owners of all the heritage structures listed by the Court, expressly forbidding them from carrying out any repairs, changes or renovations until further notice. Many heritage property owners were delighted. They just neglected the buildings under their control so that they could fall apart thereby necessitating removal and construction of high rise in their place.

Then came the Tamil Nadu Heritage Commission Act of 2012, which called for the formation of a second Heritage Commission, with a mandate that was identical to the first,

Blue Brothers, Opticians, was next door; I should think everyone needing eyeglasses in South Madras had at some point had their spectacles made here. The owner and staff spoke Telugu and it was at a point where my young eyesight was perfect, so all my visits to this shop were with my parents who were the real customers.

Lingan's Photo studio was next door. As a young amateur photographer, I bought Black and White photo film, usually ORWO, the popular East German brand from this family run enterprise. In the mid '90's when I was one among S. Muthiah's photographers for *Madras Musings*, I have had many rolls of film processed and printed here. But I'll get back to Lingan's again soon!

Rangoon Leather works was the adjoining shop – perhaps Burma evacuees – all suitcases

that went bust were fixed here. No real interest for me as I usually had to rush to the next shop as hunger pangs were gaining control over me.

the difference being that it had the entire state and not just Chennai as its territory. Nobody had a clear idea as to what would happen to the first Commission and it continued working (if you could call it that) for a while until the natural inertia of anything to do with the Government caught up with it. It is not clear if it even meets. The second Heritage Commission was never formed as far as we know.

And now we have the third. The mandate is not much different. The Commission should oversee the running of region and district-wise sub committees that will study monuments in their areas and submit proposals to the Government for further action. No repairs, changes or renovations must happen to heritage structures unless this Commission approves of them. It all sounds very impressive on paper. Let us now sit back and watch how much of it translates to action. The history of the past 11 years does not fill us with hope.

For 25 paise I could pause at the Bombay Halwa stall, a shop the size of a cupboard and down a delicious samosa-mint-chutney-and-onion served in a *Dhonnai*. Or, stop at Shanthi Vihar on the opposite side for a plate of Pulao Kurma wishing the snack would never end, the best ever in the world. For a mere 35 paise.

Then there were the maze of obscure pavement stalls selling knick knacks galore. Cheap affordable plastic stuff that were mandatory accessories in every household. Only to afford mere passing glances from me and mindlessly begin homing in towards home.

Take the corner to the right and you'd walk past Mohan Dress Center, our Headquarters for the annual shopping for new clothes because Deepavali came around only once a year. They stocked readymade stuff for boys and till a certain

drinks of which pulpy grape and Badham Kheer were popular favorites. It was traditional to run into thirsty schoolmates at this shop.

India Stores was next door with many an exciting toy or an unaffordable whatever waiting for me inside a gloomy, poorly lit showroom. I bought cricket balls here for Rs.3 and never played with them – didn't want the shine to wear off.

There was Nehru News Mart to one corner that was of no interest to a twelve year old, likewise India Coffee House on the opposite corner. Coffee was for adults. For me, it was junk food followed by more junk food. Ranganathan Studio on Kutchery Road was one more shop to buy B&W film

Back to Lingan's Photo Studio, that was run by a father and his two sons. The shop had a front desk behind which was the darkroom. A narrow flight of stairs inside the shop took you upstairs to the photo

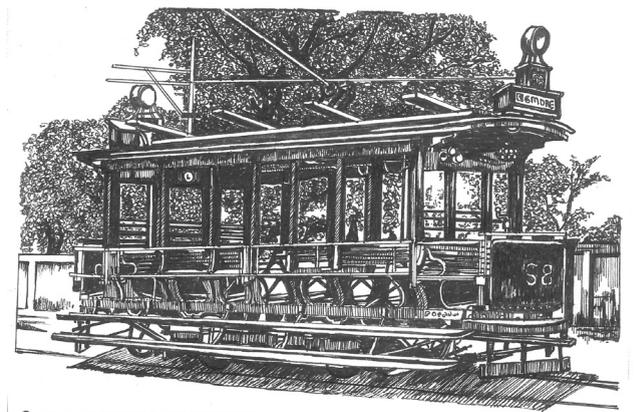
studio. How many graduation photos and pictures of newlyweds this studio must have seen! The chief photographer was the silver haired father who was also a Carnatic/Bhajan singer and on occasions he and his fellow accompanists sat around at the studio and rehearsed for forthcoming recitals. A typical rehearsal that I sat through on one occasion was the father singing from behind his desk, the chorus that included a Ganjira player, stacked themselves at different levels on the staircase and with eyes shut and portraying deep emotion; they performed with gusto to an audience that comprised only me. I remember remaining seated for quite a while until a customer came around and the song ended in a hasty fade out.

Then, as always on school day evenings, I would begin the slow walk back home. Tomorrow was always another Luz Corner evening, full of intrigue.

● by Rags Raghavan

## ● Pavithra's Perspective

### The Rattle and the Blare



*I've never seen a tram in my life.*

*Not directly, that is. I've seen them rattling along lines in movies and glimpsed static pictures in magazines. I've also read plenty of references in novels by the inimitable SVV, who describes tram-travel in Mylapore with all the fondness and mild annoyance of one who takes them for granted. Other veteran writers like Ashokamithran and Sivasankari too, have written plenty – and then there was the movie Madraspattinam which brought trams to life, at least on the silver-screen. All these made me long for a taste of the past but the best I could do was produce these windy carriages on a miniature scale from an ancient photograph. Which made me appreciate trams even more, those quaint, seemingly frail yet oddly sturdy mechanical horses.*

*Trams may have been bidden a bitter farewell in 1953, but at least they live on in literature, celluloid and best of all, the leaves of memory.*

Description: 3.5" by 5" approximately  
Medium: Black and White Micron Pens; 0.20mm and 0.35mm.

# Seventy-five years of a landmark

The Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, Mylapore is today one of the city's most prominent educational institutions. Founded in 1946, it has played an important role in imparting what Swami Vivekananda termed as 'man-making, character building education'. It has the distinction of producing several illustrious alumni who have reached great heights in diverse fields ranging from bureaucracy to fine arts. This article is a brief tribute to this hallowed institution which completes 75 years of existence this month.

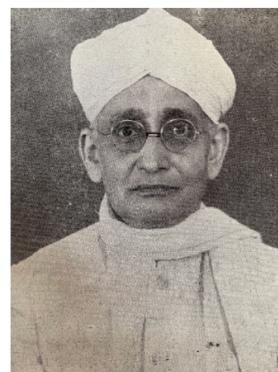
The Vivekananda College was the product of the collective wisdom and resolve of several public-spirited personalities and legal luminaries such as Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, T.R. Venkatarama Sastri, Sir V.T. Krishnamachariar, Sir N. Gopalaswamy Iyengar and M. Subbaraya Iyer. They desired to establish a college where admission would be open to all based solely on merit without any distinction of caste or community. A number of meetings were held during August and September 1945 and it was decided to appeal to the public for donations. It was also decided to hand over the management of the proposed institution to the Ramakrishna Mission, which was already an established name in the field of education and social service. The Mission readily agreed to the proposal.

In C. Ramanujachariar, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Students Home in Mylapore, the cause found a worthy ally. With the able support of Dr. Sir A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras, affiliation was secured and the college came into existence. Besides the aforementioned luminaries, the first Governing Body of the institution also included barrister V.L. Ethiraj, Justice N. Chandrasekara Iyer and the Chief Justice P.V. Rajamannar. The ex-officio members of the Governing Body comprised the President of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras, the Principal of the College and a nominee of the University of Madras. The first Principal of the College was D.S. Sarma, noted educationist and professor of English who had retired from Government service in 1938 and served as Principal of the Pachaiyappa's College until 1941. Swami Kailasananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Math in Madras became the first President of the Management Committee.

On Akshaya Tritiya Day in May 1946, a portrait of Sri Ra-



Swami Kailasananda – first President.

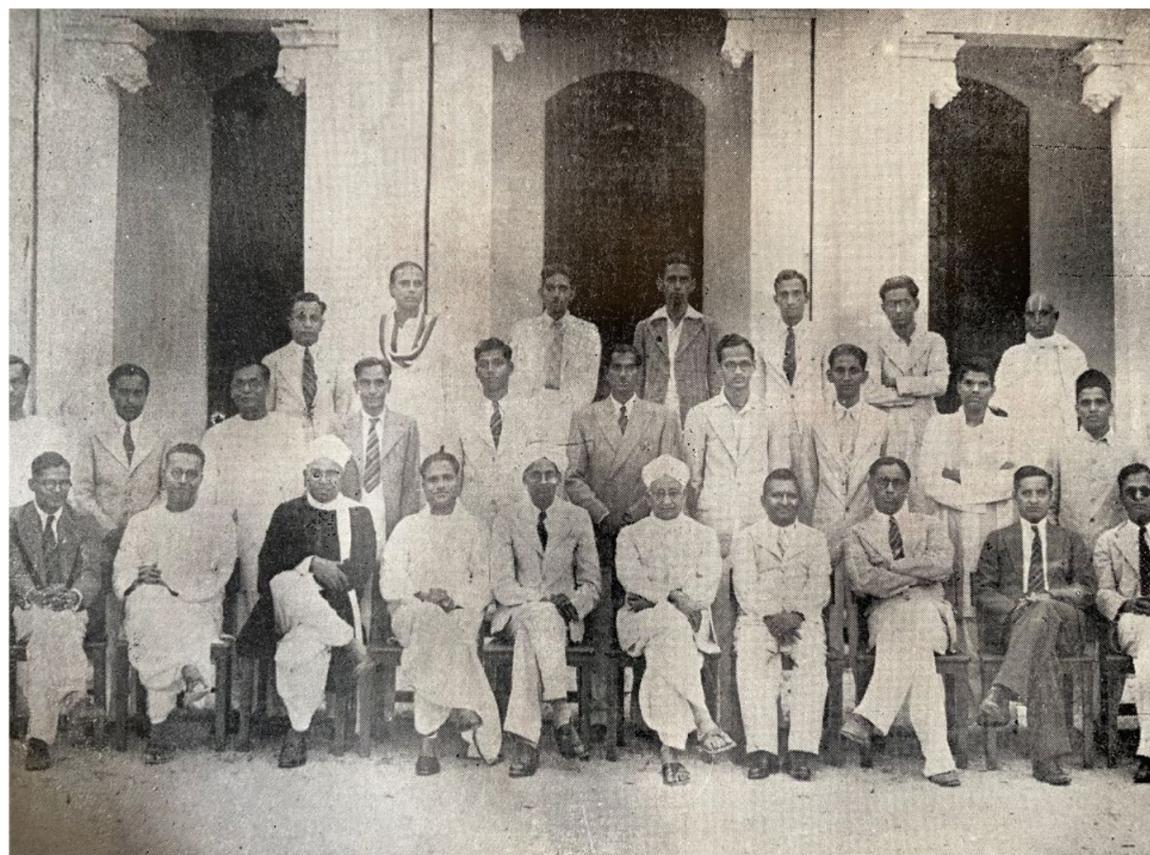


D.S. Sarma, first Principal.



M. Subbaraya Iyer, Secretary.

makrishna was consecrated at the Ramakrishna Math and installed in the main hall of the college building, which came to be situated in what was known as the Nattukottai Nagarathar Vidyashala. This building had served as the High School section of the Ramakrishna Mission Students Home, which had shifted to Uthiramerur during the war.



The staff in the first year of the College.

On June 21, 1946 a puja marked the founding of the institution, after which C. Ramanujachariar rang the college bell to announce its opening. In a function held on July 1, Dr. Sir S. Radhakrishnan dedicated the college to the public, after which classes started. The response to the notice calling for applications had been tremendous, with more than 1,200 applying for a sanctioned strength of 350 students. 339 students were admitted and the college began its journey. The courses offered were Intermediate, B.A. Economics and Geography, B.Sc. Chemistry and Mathematics and B.Com. Over the next few years, affiliation was also obtained for additional courses such as B.A. Honours in Economics and B.Sc. Statistics. By 1957-58, the college had also started offering post graduate courses (MA programmes) in Economics, Philosophy and Mathematics. The student strength had also risen five-fold, to nearly 1,600.

The infrastructure of the college was steadily built over the years, with an open-air theatre constructed with a grant of the Central Government in the 1950s and hostel buildings constructed to house students in need of accommodation.

Additional blocks were also constructed to meet the expanding requirements brought about by the introduction of new courses. A library with an impressive collection of books was also developed. The seeds were sown with the donation of around 4,000 books by the Students Home, which was augmented by the donation of around 2,000 books, four book shelves and two revolving book cases from the estate of Sir P.S. Sivaswamy Iyer. It is interesting to note that as early as its inception, the college library subscribed to 14 foreign and 16 Indian periodicals, thereby ensuring that the students had a wide body of knowledge at their disposal.

The Silver Jubilee of the college was celebrated in a grand 3-day function in September 1971, with the President of India V.V. Giri participating in the events. In 1974, the college added an Evening section to meet the growing demand for certain courses of study such as Computer Science and Commerce. In 2003-04, the college was accredited by NAAC, New Delhi for the first time and has been re-accredited ever since. The following year, the college was granted autonomous status by the UGC for all its undergrad-

● by Karthik Bhatt



Pamit Jawaharlal Nehru addresses the College on July 26, 1948.

uate and post graduate programs, upto M.Phil.

The college has been served by several illustrious faculty members over the years such as Prof. C. Jagannathachariar (HOD, Tamil), Prof Dayanidhi Reddiar (Commerce), T.R. Raghava Sastri and N. Sundaram Iyer (both mathematics). Right from its inception, the college placed immense emphasis on the importance of religious instruction on a broad non-sectarian basis. Weekly prayer sessions and lectures on religious topics by prominent people were an integral part of its routine. Extra-curricular activities were encouraged, with the NCC and Social Service League being very popular. By the end of the first decade of its existence, the College had ten student associations such as the College Union, the Indian Languages Association, the Science Association and the Fine Arts Society which conducted regular activities. Over time, these expanded to include the NSS, Youth Red Cross and the Rotaract Wings, all of which have undertaken a wide range of social activities.

Participation in sports was also actively encouraged, with the college boasting of a rich cricketing tradition. The Vivekananda team was a dominant force at the inter-collegiate level for a long time. Several alumni of the college such as V.



Front view of Ramakrishna Mission Students Home in Mylapore. Picture courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Sivaramakrishnan, U. Prabhakara Rao, T.E. Srinivasan and V.V. Kumar would go on to become Ranji Trophy and national cricketers. The baton has been carried

on in recent years by the likes of M. Vijay and Abhinav Mukund. The college boasts of an excellent cricket ground which is in regular use for league cricket

matches till date.

The college's tryst with fine arts, especially Tamil theatre is well-known. A group of students across various disciplines in the mid-1950s, whose friendship blossomed over their love for theatre, founded a group named the Young Men Fine Arts, which was later rechristened as the Viveka Fine Arts. Several members of the troupe such as Neelu, Ambi, Jaishankar and Kathadi Ramamurthy would go on to become well-known names in the world of cinema and theatre over the next few decades. The troupe later became synonymous with Cho Ramaswamy. In the 1970s, the theatre tradition continued with the humourist Crazy Mohan writing skits for his brother Madhu Balaji's team in the college. A little-known cultural connection of the college is that it played host to several performances during the formative years of the Mylapore Fine Arts Club that was established in 1951. The Club responded by organising fund raisers in aid of its benefactor.

The college's illustrious alumni include the likes of Y.V. Reddy (former RBI Governor), E.S.L. Narasimhan (former Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh), noted columnist S. Gurumurthy, T.S. Tirumurthi (India's serving Ambassador to the UN), Justice V. Ramasubramaniam, former CBI director R.K. Raghavan and renowned vocalist Sanjay Subrahmanyam.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the college in its journey has truly embodied Swami Vivekananda's philosophy on education, which he defined 'as the process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased and intellect sharpened'.

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The first issue of Viveka – the college magazine.



The college's present view.

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Raman's first 10 questions are on current affairs and the next 10 are on The Adventures of Tintin.

1. Who recently became the eighth in line to the British throne?
  2. Which US billionaire has announced that he and his brother will make a spaceflight on July 20?
  3. What Greek alphabet has been given to the variant of the coronavirus first detected in India?
  4. What material did British sculptor Joe Rush use to create 'Mount Recyclemore' depicting the seven nations' leaders at the recent summit in Cornwall?
  5. Apart from Tamil Nadu, which two States were in the top three for highest student enrolment as per the recently released All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20?
  6. The UN Security Council recently approved Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a second term. Of which European nation was he a former Prime Minister?
  7. The Interpol-led Operation Pangea XIV recently shut down more than one lakh weblinks. What type of links?
  8. To study which planet has NASA announced missions called DAVINCI+ and VERITAS to be launched between 2028-2030?
  9. T.M. Kallianan Gounder, the last surviving member of which elite group of people at the time of Independence, passed away at the age of 101 in Thiruchengode recently?
  10. From which Caribbean island was the fugitive jeweler Mehul Choksi arrested recently?
- \*\*\*
11. How did Herge, the author of Tintin, get his pen name?
  12. What is the contribution of Palle Huld, a Danish actor and writer, to the Tintin legend?
  13. Which was the first Tintin adventure, appearing as a series in *Le Petit Vingtieme* from January 1929?
  14. What sets apart *Tintin and the Mystery of the Golden Fleece* and *Tintin and the Blue Oranges* from the other works?
  15. Can you name the butcher, Castafiore's maid, and the name of Jolyon Wagg's insurance company?
  16. Going by English versions of the books, name the Asterix book which is also part of the title of a Tintin adventure?
  17. In which adventure does Tintin come to Delhi and see Qutub Minar among other places?
  18. What is Captain Haddock's preferred brand of whiskey?
  19. What physical feature helps one differentiate the similar-looking Thomson and Thompson?
  20. Name the unfinished 24th and final volume of The Adventures of Tintin.

(Answers on page 8)

# The Music Academy loses a patron

In the passing of C. Ramakrishna, Bar-at-Law and more popularly known as the Chunampet Zamindar, the Music Academy has lost a true friend. A patron member of many years standing, he always made it a point to attend as many concerts as he could during the December Music Season. He also took his role as a member very seriously, ensuring he voted each time there was an election and also making sure he attended the AGMs even during non-election years. A true representative of the old guard, to whom institution memberships were matters of great responsibility.

I would however like to pay my tributes to him by remembering a couple of incidents concerning the old man, which took place at the Academy. The first was when I was introduced to him and must have been in the early 2000s. It was a fairly full house for an artiste I don't recall. The concert was below par but it was still early stages and so the audience stayed put. Seated in one row on the ground floor were my mentor K.V. Ramanathan,

his daughter Jayshree (alas both now departed) and Mr. Ramakrishna. I was just a row behind. Just before the concert started, we were introduced by KVR. Anyway, as the music progressed, Mr. Ramakrishna, not held in thrall by the musician, opened a copy of *The Economist* and began reading it. After a while he got up and made his way down the row, the canteen being his destination. He was man of impressive

● by  
Sriram V

bulk and so his exit involved considerable manoeuvring by those seated alongside and it was only when he was near the door that he realised that he had left the magazine on his seat. He signalled to KVR that he would be back and was gone.

*The Economist* is a staid magazine but on the page which was lying open was a depiction of Adam and Eve. That prompted some titters from those in the seats around.

KVR opted to leave the page as it was and pretended to be engrossed in the music. Mr. Ramakrishna eventually returned and as before nudged and prodded those in his row before reaching his seat. KVR whispered to him that in his absence the magazine had caused considerable interest. Whereupon Mr. Ramakrishna in a powerful voice said, "Well at least there was something to hold audience attention."

Even after he grew frail and moved with great difficulty, Mr. Ramakrishna never missed the December season. On three separate occasions he suffered something of a blackout when he was in the Academy. On the first, he just stood up, forgetting where he was, and those around him had to help him. Dr Pappu Venugopala Rao and I helped him with his footwear and took him to the exit from where an attendant took charge of him. On the remaining two occasions he was walking in the corridor and suddenly lost balance. In what was a remarkable coincidence, my friend VK Shankar was around and helped him each

● Two pages of  
TRIBUTES



time. I once gently suggested to Mr Ramakrishna that he ought to have his attendant with him at all times. He agreed and a man came along after that. "Don't worry," he beamed at me. "I am not going to die in row B of the Academy."

Mr Ramakrishna never hesitated to ask people around about the raga being performed or the song being sung. His view on music was simple – he liked to listen. In my view people of this kind are the best rasikas. When I got the news of his passing I messaged Shankar who lives in the US. "What a pity," he replied. "Had I been around maybe he would have survived." But then Mr Ramakrishna did not pass away in his seat at the Academy. These are sad times when we see old friends whom we took for granted vanishing one by one.

## Remembering Mambazha Thatha

C RAMAKRISHNA (CR) graduated in law from the Cambridge University. He evolved as a senior lawyer at the Madras High Court. He argued cases with passion, deep involvement and masterly logic with copious quotations from case laws.

He was widely known as Mambazha Thatha for his intense involvement in the development of orchards, especially mangoes. The several thousand fruit trees in his sprawling orchards at Chunampet and Vennangupattu were tended on the advice of experts from Maharashtra; this constantly improved the quality and quantity of yields. Hundreds of old mango trees were culled/upgraded to popular varieties. The orchards produce close to 30 exotic/popular varieties.

CR was also known for his mango philanthropy and diplomacy: he used to gift hundreds of well-packed, rich varieties of mangoes to friends, orphanages, hospitals...

He belonged to the lineage of wealthy landowners of Chunampet. Under his care villages around Chunampet underwent

tremendous transformation. CR liberally funded new buildings and upgraded facilities at the government school in Vennangupattu and motivated the teachers to excel through interactions. He invited diabetologist Dr. V. Mohan and skin specialist Dr. Murugusundaram to set up quality medical facilities at Illedu. He gifted land to the National Agro Foundation

● by  
S. Viswanathan

founded by C. Subramaniam for its R&D centre.

CR set apart large acreage of land for an arboretum at Yerrangadu as a monumental bequeath. He availed the expertise of naturalist K.P. Geethakrishnan (former Finance Secretary and former Executive Director-IMF) and Vijayan-Lalitha of the Salim Ali Foundation. Developed over five years, today it has over 500 species of trees raised with saplings brought from across the country. The names of trees are clearly written in Tamil, English and Latin.



Deeply religious, CR renovated and improved the Siva and Vishnu temples for which his family was the traditional trustee. CR constructed a new Vinayaka temple at Vennangupattu on the Pudukcherry-Chennai highway with passion and dedication.

A perfectionist, CR looked for beauty and elegance in his creations – be it his iconic buildings in Anna Salai or the farm houses in the villages.

CR had great thirst for acquisition of knowledge. Even at a ripe old age, he regularly attended the weekly lectures

of Swami Paramatmananda at the Sankara Hall, Chetpet, and learned Sanskrit and Tirukkural with enthusiasm. In later years he also developed a great taste for Carnatic music and was a familiar attendee at Music Academy's annual concerts. His library had a rich collection with hundreds of books on law. He invited litterateurs and famous lawyers from Britain, the US and India for special lectures at the High Court.

In his demise Chennai has lost one of its most colourful personalities. — (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*.)

# Remembering versatile educationist, scientist, teacher, writer...

FOR OVER SIX decades Dr. M. Anandkrishnan (MA) strode the field of education like a colossus: he made rich contributions as a scientist, teacher, administrator and one who shaped policies from the elementary to the highest levels. Not just for Tamil Nadu or India, he extended his expertise to diverse countries as far away as Brazil.

MA had vast global experience since he obtained his PhD from the University of Minnesota, USA in 1960. He was Professor of Civil Engineering at IIT-Kanpur and later served as its Chairman/ Board of Governors for over a decade.

MA was the first Science Counselor at the Embassy of India, Washington DC and later served United Nations Centre for S&T. He was Chairman of several academic bodies such as Science City, Tamil Nadu State Science and Technology Centre, Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS)...

During 1990-97 MA was an adviser on science and technology for Brazil. He used to host informal dinners in Chennai for the Brazilian Ambassador. In one such meeting I got a

detailed exposure to this large South American country and its rich resources.

## Single-Window System for Engineering Admissions

MA's stewardship at Anna University for two terms could be considered a high point of this university. The single-window system for engineering college admissions is one of his most important contributions. MA opened up the university for participation by a wide cross section of specialists from different professions. The regular discussion programmes in the university's conference hall used to throw a lot of light on current and emerging issues.

I have had the privilege of close interactions with MA for three decades. When IE was incorporated as a public limited company, MA readily agreed to be a Director. For over a decade he was a member of the board of directors. He participated in the several initiatives of IE during that period – in public lectures, the Forum Beyond Books, the Agriculture Consultancy Management Foundation – and freely gave his time and advice. He also presided

over the IE Business Excellence award function in 1996 addressed by Dr. Manmohan Singh.

MA had written numerous articles for IE on issues concerning education. In an article on NEET exams he stated: "the level of higher secondary syllabi of most state boards is far below that of the CBSE. NEET will be instrumental in remedying this lacuna. NEET is fresh air in the polluted atmosphere of admission scandals."

● by  
S. Viswanathan

MA was critical of the manner of selection of vice chancellors of universities in Tamil Nadu. In an article on VCs, he wrote: "thanks to the various scams and corruption charges in several state universities in Tamil Nadu over the last 15 years, there is total loss of credibility over the appointment process of vice-chancellors. There were charges of corruption, caste favouritism, political influence and nepotism.

"The candidate chosen for the vice-chancellor's post

should be a distinguished academician with a minimum teaching experience of 25 years as a professor or its equivalent at a reputed research or administrative organisation," MA said.

## In-laws and Outlaws...

At the 150th year celebration of the Madras University Dr. MA was asked: "when can an Indian university/academy/institution gain the reputation of a Caltech/Princeton or MIT?" His answer was poignant: "in a system where appointments of vice chancellors were directed by political leaders and when university vice chancellors are the sons/daughters and daughters-in-law of the promoters/proprietors and most of whom are politicians or small-time businessmen, how can this happen?"

MA was not in agreement with the sidelining of merit in the caste-based reservation policy of Tamil Nadu. When the state increased reservation to 69 per cent he, along with senior advocate K. Vijayan, took bold to oppose this through court intervention. I remember the proponents



man-handling them on their way to the airport.

As the Vice Chairman of the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (TANSCHE) MA has made phenomenal contribution to expand computer education, standardising and simplifying the usages in Tamil.

It's hard to imagine another versatile educationist like MA. One of his lasting contributions related to the reform of school education of Tamil Nadu which upgraded the syllabus right from the elementary school. — (Courtesy: Industrial Economist.)

## The Indian connection with *My Octopus Teacher*

Why should Chennai celebrate the success of the movie *My Octopus Teacher*, which was adjudged the best documentary feature at the 2021 Academy Awards? Because the wife of its South African maker, the naturalist extraordinaire Craig Foster, has a Tamil name and a Chennai connection like Kamala Harris, the US Vice President? True, Swati Thiagarajan is indeed Foster's wife, and she is indeed Tamil, but her Chennai connection is much stronger than that. She was born here and went to Sishya School at Adyar until she moved to Rishi Valley School, where her father, too, had studied. Her parents Usha and Tyagarajan – a son of T. Sadasivam and M.S. Subbulakshmi – live in Chennai.

Swati has been described as "an outstanding environmental journalist" by Prannoy Roy, founder of NDTV, where, as Environment Editor, she produced and anchored the iconic, long-running series *Born Wild* (also the name of her first book).

It is while growing up in Chennai that Swati developed and nurtured her love of animals and birds, guided by

her father and his late friend Siddharth Buch whose guided tour of the campus of the Theosophical Society and the Adyar estuary laid the foundation for her lifelong love of nature and her fierce commitment to conservation. Buch belonged to a distinguished family originally from Kutch, Gujarat, that intermarried and seamlessly integrated into the Madras way of life. He taught Swati to appreciate the living world around her and made her aware at quite a young age that man is "just another piece in this wonderful jigsaw that makes our planet," not the centre of the universe.

As a child, Swati believed that birds and animals could and did reach out to her pleading for help, often leading to her bringing home birds and tending to their injuries. It was hardly surprising then that in 2012, already a young veteran of her wildlife series *Born Wild*, she directed *The Animal Communicator*, a documentary film featuring conservationist Anna Breytenbach, whose unusual work is based on the conviction that animals can communicate across species, even with humans.

She was an avid bird watcher learning to identify birds amidst the rich diversity of fauna in the Theosophical Society. Regular visits to the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and the Guindy National Park provided the initial impetus for her growth into the wildlife expert she has eventually become.

In an interview to a journalist, Swati once recalled her moment of epiphany when she

● by  
Ramnarayan V.

realised her deep connection with nature and what was to become her mission in life, that of becoming an eco-warrior, on a wind-swept, wave-drenched evening on the beach with 'Uncle Siddharth' and her father Kannan – as Tyagarajan is known at home – who excitedly proclaimed how strongly he had been influenced by J Krishnamurti's philosophy of living in harmony with nature.

After Sishya and Rishi Valley, Swati went to Jamia Islamia from where she graduated. Joining NDTV in 1997, she three years later pitched the

idea of a series on wildlife, which led to *Born Wild*, made by an all-woman team. Swati was the script writer, director, and presenter of the show, which ran for 15 years.

Now based in Cape Town, South Africa (and New Delhi), Swati is a core team member of the Sea Change Project co-founded by Foster, besides continuing to contribute to NDTV. She was the production manager for *My Octopus Teacher*, which featured Craig and his diving experiences in the kelp forest of False Bay, off the western shore of South Africa, where he visited one particular octopus every day for months. Besides the Oscar, the film also won at BAFTA, the Wildscreen Award presented by the World Wide Fund for Nature and at the Jackson Wild Festival for 2020.

To trace the beginnings of *My Octopus*, Craig had been feeling totally burnt out following a succession of documentary projects. He thought he did not want to hold a camera again, and tried to find release in diving and communion with nature. He went diving every day with no plan to wield his camera. That is when he found



Swati with Co-director Pippa Ehrlich and Craig Foster. Courtesy: The Hindu.

his "octopus teacher," and decided to visit his new friend every day. Breaking his earlier resolve, he shot every day, and discussed the day's footage regularly with Swati. Once he realised a full blown documentary was underway, he decided to engage a co-photographer in Roger Horrocks as he was himself going to be the human protagonist of the film. For the same reason, while he directed all his earlier documentaries, he decided this time to bring in director Pippa Ehrlich, and

(Continued on page 8)

# The pinnacle for an Indian Tennis player

● July marks exactly 60 years since Ramanathan Krishnan last made it to the men's singles semifinals at Wimbledon. Since then only Vijay Amritraj (twice) and Ramesh Krishnan have made it to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon. So it remains very much the pinnacle of achievement for an Indian tennis player.

Exactly 60 years ago Ramanathan Krishnan entered the men's singles semifinals for a second successive year at Wimbledon. It remains the benchmark and though Vijay Amritraj (in 1973 and 1981) and Ramesh Krishnan (1986) made it to the quarterfinals no Indian player has emulated the pioneering great's feat.

In 1961 Krishnan was acknowledged to be one of the finest players in the game. Besides being a semifinalist at Wimbledon in 1960 he had guided India to the Davis Cup inter-zone final in 1956 and 1959. For the second succes-

sive year he was seeded No 7 at Wimbledon. He had a smooth start getting the better of Frenchman Francois Jauffret and Marty Reissen of the USA in the first two rounds in straight sets. He had a tougher time in the third round before getting the better of Italy's O Sirola in four sets and then took his appointed place in the quarterfinals defeating Antonio Palafox of Mexico also in four sets.

This brought Krishnan face to face with Roy Emerson of Australia, the No 4 seed. The fleet footed Aussie had been in splendid form having dropped only one set in four matches till then and was installed the favourite. But the skilful Indian could do little wrong on this day and wrapped up the match in straight sets 6-1, 6-4, 6-4. Historian Duncan Macaulay noted: "Most surprisingly Krishnan beat Emerson with ease. This was one of best matches Krishnan ever played at Wimbledon. He turned

Emerson's speed to his own advantage and directed his shots with a magical caress to those parts of the court where Emerson wasn't." What a quaint description of Krishnan the touch artist? Little wonder that he was hailed by the British press as "Ranji with a racket".

Predictably excitement in India was at fever pitch. Could Krishnan better his achieve-

● by  
Partab Ramchand

ment of the previous year and enter the final or even win the title? But his challenge came to an anti climactic end with another Australian the second seeded Rod Laver getting the better of him 6-2, 8-6, 6-2. Laver one of the all time greats was by this time approaching his peak and his devastating service, smashing and volleying were altogether too much

for the more artistic but softer game of Krishnan.

Krishnan appeared to have a realistic chance of emulating the feat the following year. He was seeded No 4 just behind the three Australians Laver, Emerson and Neale Fraser the 1960 champion, confirming his rising stature in the game. Unfortunately he was forced to default to John Fraser, brother of Neale in the third round because of an ankle injury. As luck would have it John Fraser made it to the semifinals where he went down to unseeded Martin Mulligan. Had everything gone his way it was on the cards that Krishnan would have defeated Mulligan and got to the final which was again won by Laver. But that was not to be.

Krishnan never made a serious challenge thereafter. He lost to Emerson in the fourth round in 1963 in straight sets when he was unseeded. His compatriot Jaideep Mukherjea made it to the fourth round on



four occasions – 1963, 1964, 1966 and 1973. But it was only Vijay Amritraj and Ramesh Krishnan who came closest to emulating Krishnan's feat.

## MY OCTOPUS TEACHER

(Continued from page 7)

co-director James Reed. The rest is history.

If scripting and directing documentaries plus her involvement in *Octopus* have given Swati remarkable creative satisfaction, interviewing Sir David Attenborough for NDTV just before he turned 90 was among the great moments of her career. Excerpts are car-

ried by Swati's book *Born Wild* (2017) published by Bloomsbury. Sir David's never-say-die spirit despite all the obstacles industrialised society keeps placing in the path of conservation gave Swati fresh hope and encouragement to pursue her work with undiminished zeal.

The response to *My Octopus Teacher* has been phenomenal, with men, women and children of all ages from around the

world expressing their joy at its success, the deep emotional connection they experienced with the subject of the movie making it truly memorable. Little did Craig Foster and his team anticipate such universal acclaim when they started work on the project. And Swati has indeed made Chennai proud.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Lilibet Diana, the Duke (Harry) and Duchess of Sussex (Meghan)'s daughter, 2. Jeff Bezos, 3. Delta, 4. Electronic waste, 5. Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, 6. Portugal, 7. Those offering/selling fake and illicit medicines and medical products, 8. Venus, 9. The Constituent Assembly, 10. Dominica.

\*\*\*

11. Reversed the initials (RG) of his given name Georges Remi, 12. He is believed to be the inspiration for our hero, 13. Tintin in the Land of the Soviets, 14. They live-action Tintin films made in the 1960s, 15. Cutts, Irma and Rock Bottom Insurance Company, 16. Black Gold, 17. Tintin in Tibet, 18. Loch Lomond, 19. Thompson's moustache is neatly trimmed, whilst Thomson's has a twirl, 20. Tintin and Alph-Art.

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