

INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- The cricket pavilion that Chisholm built
- Connected by Water for Life
- Bedi at Chepauk

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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## Spending on archaeology is fine but what matters is how

The recently unveiled Tamil Nadu budget allotted Rs. 5 crores for scientific excavation at archaeological sites at Sivakalai, Keezhadi and Kodumanal. In addition, there was an allocation of Rs 16.6 crores to the State Archaeology Department. Besides this, there was an announcement that the findings from sites such as Keezhadi would be housed in a 'world-class museum'. All of this is to the good for it shows that the Government, which has for years paid lip service to the causes of history and heritage, apart from instances where political mileage could be milked, has now woken up to its responsibilities of passing on the past to the future. But as to how this money will be

spent remains to be seen. Past track record does not fill us with much confidence.

Even in this recent announcement, there was more emphasis on regional pride than on scientific study. There was plenty of chest thumping on ancient Tamil

● by The Editor

culture – which is right in its own way but should not be at the cost of factual study. Talk of deep-sea excavations at Sangam-era harbours such as Korkai and Azhangankulam is all very well but we only need to see what was done with Kaveripoompattinam or Poompuhar to know what misguided

parochialism can do. Today, apart from a few structures of doubtful architectural merit constructed a few decades back, there is nothing to show the antiquity of the place. Hardly any visitors include it in their itinerary and perhaps rightfully so. And yet this too was once promised to be made a showpiece out of. Last year, the Department of Science and Technology, Govt of India promised to digitally recreate Poompuhar but there has been no action since – perhaps the elections had something to do with the announcement and the subsequent inaction.

As for world-class museums, we have heard enough of that sort of declaration. There is

(Continued on page 2)

## Broader operational strategies may help Koyambedu Market tackle its wastage crisis

Among Asia's largest perishable good markets, the Koyambedu Wholesale Market Complex (KWMC) was in the news last month following reports that traders had dumped unsold stock of vegetables and flowers on the road. Wholesalers pointed to a drop in demand, underlining that apart from other factors, commercial demand from hotels and catering services had dropped by 50 per cent during the pandemic – a figure that is presumably recovering at a slower rate than expected given the volume of wastage. The President of the Koyambedu Market Licensed Merchant's Association S. Chandran said

● by our Special Correspondent

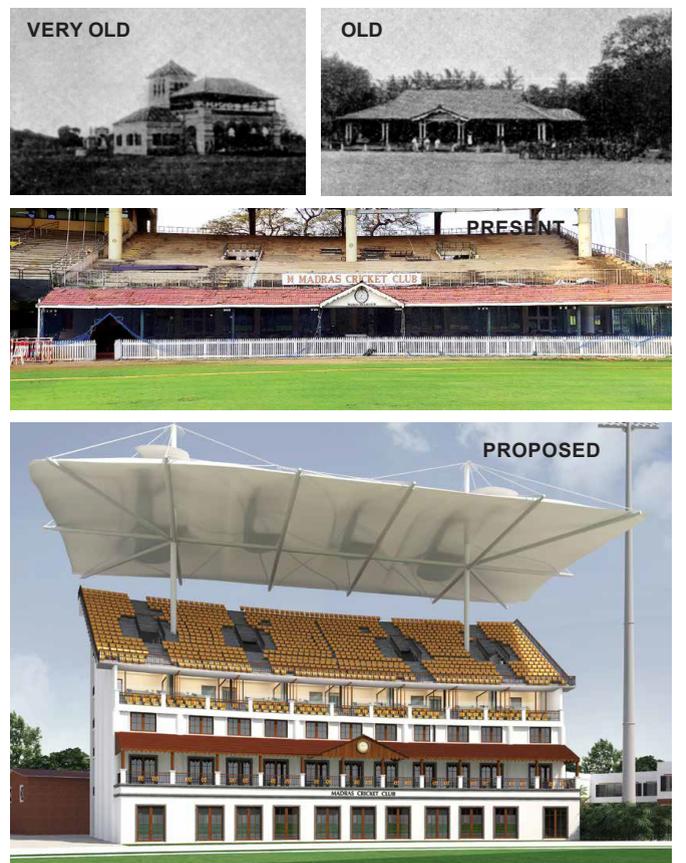
in a quote to *The Hindu*, "We receive the same quantity of products daily. We cannot keep the stock for more than one day as there will be demand for fresh stock." Earlier in May this year, it was reported that the Koyambedu market generated 250 tonnes of vegetable wastage on a daily basis.

A paper published in 2020 states that around 5 to 10 per cent of goods arriving at the KWMC are wasted due to inadequate cold storage facilities even though such a unit was established in the complex as far back as 1994; in fact, a sum

of Rs. 2.14 crores was allocated to renovate the facility in 2018. Different varieties of produce need to be stored at different temperatures but, traders claim, the protocols are not adhered to as required. Spillage, poor transportation, handling and unloading and low-quality packing material are also named as factors leading to wastage at wholesale points. The paper further pointed out that in 2014 alone, Tamil Nadu wrote off fruits and vegetables worth Rs. 8,100 crore. Such a loss affects not only the farmers but stakeholders across the

## HERITAGE WATCH

The Four Homes of the Madras Cricket Club



Tucked away under the massive MA Chidambaram Stadium is the historic Madras Cricket Club which turned 175 this year. During the course of the writing the coffee table book on the institution, your editor thanks to young researcher Karthik Bhatt managed to lay his hands on the golden jubilee brochure of the MCC, released in 1896. With that it is now possible to document each of the clubhouses that the MCC has resided in. (Further details in page 4 under Lost Landmarks).

Our VERY OLD features the first clubhouse, designed by RF Chisholm in 1866 and demolished by 1888. The OLD is its successor, designed by Henry Irwin, which had a long tenure, from 1892 to 1981. The Club is now resident in the building featured in our PRESENT and this is soon slated to make way for a fourth structure that promises to reflect heritage as well. This is the picture marked PROPOSED.

entire supply chain including retailers, consumers and of course, the economy.

It can be argued that KWMC's problems need holistic solutions that ameliorate conditions at the market as well as other points in the supply chain that connect to it. That the cold storage facility at the complex itself needs better maintenance and more capacity is a given. It may also help, as the paper above concluded,

if the administration actively encouraged transportation vehicles to equip themselves with refrigerated carriers that have proper stacking and packing systems. There is a clutch of Indian companies working on innovative decentralised and customised cold storage solutions - it would be worthwhile to understand how wholesale markets like KWMC and their

(Continued on page 2)

# SPENDING ON ARCHAEOLOGY

(Continued from page 1)

not one museum in Tamil Nadu that can even remotely claim to be of that standard and in this we include the much-touted Government Museum at Egmore. There is no consistent policy that can continue across political regimes. The previous Government in power saw a Minister of Culture interacting with captains of industry and virtually cajoling them to adopt parts of the museum. There was great reluctance on their part, and one of them in strict confidence informed *Madras Musings* that in case there was a change of regime all that money would go to waste as the new Government would want to scrap anything associated with the previous one, no matter what the merits of the scheme. That is exactly what has come to pass – all schemes concerning the museum are now in cold storage.

If that is the fate of the museum in the capital, those in other locations fare far worse. Their monthly footfalls are in

single digits, not counting the ones in Thanjavur, Madurai, and a couple of other locations. The displays are tacky in the extreme and many have nothing of value. Most deserve to be closed. It is in this context that promised world-class museums need to be evaluated. Truly international museums are not created in five-year tenures. They need to be nurtured over centuries. They need professionals in charge – our bureaucrats serving punishment postings can hardly be qualified as that. And as for design, the PWD cannot be trusted with creating world-class museums.

In conclusion, all we can say is that spending the money is not an issue. What comes out of it will depend on our shedding a parochial mindset that seeks to exaggerate our greatness. Much also depends on how much we are willing to learn from truly international quality facilities across the world. Our guess is neither of these leaps will be made.

# Koyambedu Market wastage crisis

(Continued from page 1)

stakeholders can make use of their products.

The second avenue of curbing wastage seems to lie in collaborating with the retailers – especially large-format grocery stores – and commercial buyers. For instance, they have the potential to be powerful players in generating data around demand forecasting for key perishables, information that can help optimize wholesale supply to markets around the city. Such an approach may also have the added benefit of providing better support to localized markets – more efficient stock allocation can curb transportation costs, allowing the sale of fresher and more affordably priced fruits and vegetables, benefiting local shops and consumers alike. Delivery apps such as Swiggy, Dunzo and Zomato are great (if peripheral) examples of how the larger business community can successfully collaborate with wholesale vendors – by taking on the delivery of fruits and vegetables they allow local shops to expand the radius of their customer base, arguably facilitating the trade of perishables that might have otherwise gone unsold. Similarly, it would also be useful to take a leaf from

the books of new-age ventures that try and minimise food waste by collecting healthy, uneaten food for charities in need; surely, the same can be done for fruits and vegetables too instead of dumping them on the streets.

The third possibility lies in diverting perishables on the clock to better purposes. Take overripe bananas for instance. They don't look particularly appealing – the fruit is mushier than firm and the peel changes to a rather depressing colour. But they still make great banana bread. While such produce may not be the first choice for the average consumer, businesses such as cafes and restaurants can still make good use of them. A system to offer commercial buyers the chance to buy good but ageing produce at a discount can help reduce wastage to a great extent too, provided that quality checks are formulated and followed.

It is high time that KWMC's issue of wastage is recognised as a challenge to Chennai city and not just the market complex itself. Only then will we be able to forge a collaborative solution across the entire supply chain with the potential to benefit not just the KWMC stakeholders but also consumers, charities and local businesses.

# The Eye for Detail

These are days when anything and everything can be ordered off the internet. Indeed, the Government positively encourages us to do so, as part of its fight against Covid. *The Man from Madras Musings*, to whom the Government's word is law, has toed this line and he finds the experience quite pleasurable – no trudging around carrying bags, no wandering aimlessly in aisles as MMM's good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed (SWMBO) makes up her mind on the numerous necessities that go to make chez MMM & SWMBO habitable, and above all no waiting at counters as the person in charge struggles with the teller no matter how electronic it is. On the last named MMM must add here that all departmental stores in Chennai have a resident *anna* or *akka* who is the expert on the teller. This person usually remains hidden somewhere deep in the caverns of the store and emerges only when called for in a hysterical screech. Compared to the ner-

DB: "Yes sir. But can you tell me what your address is?"

MMM: "I just told you that you already have it. Do you want me to repeat it for you?"

DB – "No sir," (in a drawl that seems to suggest that he or she is humouring some half wit) "But can you tell me where exactly it is?"

MMM: "You have no map?"

DB: "Yes sir. And I am now in your locality."

MMM: "Does the address I gave you not mention the street where I live?"

DB: "Yes it does. I just want to know where exactly it is."

MMM: "Where are you now?"

DB: "On my way to your locality sir."

MMM: "But you said you were already here."

DB – "Map says half an hour away sir."

MMM: "Then call me when you are five minutes away."

After half an hour the person is back to calling – he is now in the locality but needs to know the street, which incidentally is already given in

## Will you do it?

Ever since *The Man from Madras Musings* began writing on heritage, he has observed that there is no lack of people who call, lament, shout, and curse that nobody cares for heritage. Ask them as to what they propose to do after that and they withdraw silently. With the proliferation of social media these armchair enthusiasts have only increased in number. The most recent instance of this was a caller from Coimbatore who said he had been seeing what MMM has been doing on video for Chennai and would so love to have a similar one on his city, which he said was full of heritage, all going to the dogs. MMM said that this was a great idea and wished the caller all the best in his endeavour to record for posterity the history of that industrial city. There was a long silence at the other end. MMM thought the man had hung up. And then there was a clearing of the throat. The

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

vous counter person this *anna/akka* is sang froid personified and sets right whatever is troubling the billing system within a few seconds. Glory be to the *akka-s/anna-s* of the supermarkets.

But then as it has happened with countless empires, there comes a time of decline and so it has happened with these brothers and sisters of emporia. They have been replaced in importance by the delivery boys – the ones who in response to the e-orders we generate from the comfort of our homes sally forth to deliver what we want. These are now the new saviours and may their tribe increase.

MMM however has only one complaint. They seem completely incapable of reading addresses for delivery instructions. It would appear that on being asked to go forth and deliver they simply note the locality of the destination and set out. And after that they begin an incessant round of calling the recipient, until he or she answers the phone that is.

MMM has become a veteran in responding to such summons and the conversation goes like this –

Delivery boy: "Sir! There is a package for you."

MMM: "Yes pls, and what do you want?"

DB: "Your address sir."

MMM: "You already have it. I typed it out when I placed the order."

the address. And after a conversation similar to the one given above, the search or hunt zeroes in on the house number which given the old/new (or is it new/old?) convention/confusion, necessitates yet another guided tour. Finally, with the package firmly in hand and the signatures having been done, MMM ponders as to whether it would not have been easier for him to just drive across and pick up the package himself. But that would involve dealing with fumbling counterperson and the rest of it.

caller then piped up that he was actually wanting MMM to do the needful so that he, the caller, could enjoy watching the video. MMM hung up.

## Tailpiece

It is of course a speciality of all Governments, running as they do on politics, to present the possible and *The Man from Madras Musings* guesses that our's is not much different. Why else would it put up a signboard just in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue to explain in image and words that we are standing in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue? On that happy note, MMM wishes you a lovely festive season.

– MMM



# Mylapore in time and space!

This is with regard to your report that the Government has decided to demolish all single storied structures that are owned by the temple in Mylapore to make way for structures of two or three floors.

Can valuable historic cores and heritage assets be integrated into an aspirational metropolis without losing their unique identity? Sadly this important aspect of planning lies unanswered in Chennai and many of its heritage precincts (including Triplicane which was in the news earlier) are sought to be destroyed under the guise of modernisation and urbanisation.

Religion was the dominant factor that led to building these wonderous temple structures. The temple then led to the early urban temple towns in its vicinity and greatly influenced the settlement patterns that grew around it. Temples also functioned as the nerve centre for economic activities and trade and thus communities who served and serviced the temple lived in its close proximity. To this day, there remain signs of this pronounced influence that the temple precincts have had on their immediate and early surroundings even as the city or metropolis has enveloped them and as urban planning rules have sought to make them indistinguishable from newer areas of growth.

To quote Dr. M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director – National Folklore Support Centre, “Celebrations at Kapaleeshwarar temple are reminiscent of the folk culture prevalent in the pre-colonial villages that made up Chennai... The Arubathumoovar festival, beginning with a puja to the village goddess and hoisting of a flag, is a reminder that the city has not forgotten its roots of being a collection of villages, being part of a precolonial agrarian order, and being a society of small communities within the larger urban structure. It is an enactment of its talapuranam (site history), assertion of the temple’s relationship with the village deities, and a recognition of its social network of devotees and patrons spread across the villages surrounding Chennai... The sight is a telling visual of the rural folk culture asserting itself over the metropolitan façade of Chennai.”

Even today there is (an unwritten) acknowledgement of people’s sentiments of the role of temples by the local civic administration and special arrangements (including the erection of temporary pandals, pedestrianisation of Mada streets, change in bus routes or providing additional buses, water supply, street cleaning, etc) are made during festivals.

The economic systems of these temple precincts emerged, and still thrive, through activities of and related to, the temple. It is the traditional community around the temple – priests, traders, musicians, flower sellers, small vendors, daily and frequent visitors who are emotionally attached to the temple – that helps define the individuality of the place; if they are displaced, this unique identity will doubtless vanish along with them.

Communities who traditionally are linked to the temple and its traditions will in the short term also find themselves in conflict with the urban dwellers who replace them

through the modernisation and densification that is envisaged. Gentrification will eventually kill the historic and people centric character of the locale.

Your report says that owners will be compensated. Is everything to be assessed only monetarily? Do not lifestyles emerge from housing styles? Are our sensitivities not developed from our visual surroundings? Do we not pause to wonder at the skill of artisans that have put bricks, wood, tiles and plaster together and has stood the test of over hundred years? What of the colour and vibrancy of Mylapore? Are our other senses to be denied and children not to know the scent of flowers, camphor, sandalwood, turmeric and *kumkumam* as they visit the temple? What of the flower sellers and those who sell *archanai* items and of garland makers who make floral decorations each day for the *moolavars* and stone deities inside and different seasonal combinations for the *utsavars* during festival processions – will they have to move out and their products ordered online?

In the case of Mylapore, we have already seen the slow erosion of cultural traditions and domination of materialistic values. If left unchecked through land planning and other measures, commercial growth will soon overwhelm its temple tradition.

Jane Jacob’s description in 1969 of cities as “engines of growth” has been monstrously distorted by international funding agencies and accepted by our governments as “cities

● by Tara Murali

as engines of economic growth”. Economic development has thus been prioritised over cultural needs and created binary opposition between the two. The question has to be asked if this prioritisation will spell the death knell for our heritage settlements.

From 1995, when the Draft of the Second Master Plan for Chennai was put out for public response, individuals and organisations have brought to the notice of the Government and the Planning Authorities of Chennai the need to regard heritage buildings and precincts as cultural assets and to have specific regulations for these areas. What more is required of the public to convince the Government and the Planning Authorities of Chennai that heritage precincts need to be recognised, identified, protected, notified, conserved, restored, upgraded and cherished and not modernised, gentrified, transformed and mutilated? For almost 25 years now this issue lies unresolved and it is likely that no change will be made in the Third Master Plan that is to come out in a couple of years.

Developing Mylapore by demolishing its heritage structures and altering its character, is like replacing all the centuries old metal artisan-made idols with 3D printed “used in space shuttles” Aluminium Alloy statues!

Is anybody listening?

OUR  
READERS  
WRITE



## Remembering Dr. Bala

Imet Dr. Bala V. Balachandran, the J.L. Kellogg Distinguished Professor (Emeritus in Service) of Accounting and Information Management when he was about to receive an award at the ITC Grand.

Prof Bala, as he was known, was the founder, chairman and dean of the Great Lakes Institute of Management in Chennai. In a matter of 10 years, under his stewardship, the school had grown into one of the top management institutions in the country. It received global accreditation from the Association of MBAs (AMBA, UK) in June 2014 for its postgraduate programmes, becoming the youngest business school in India to receive this top international accreditation and one of the youngest globally too.

I was doing a profile for one of my columns. He was avuncular but very sharp and precise when he told me about his journey as a teacher and an academic entrepreneur which began in 1960. He had been with the Kellogg School of Management for more than 4 decades.

Prof Bala began his teaching career in 1960 at the Annamalai University in Tamil Nadu. In 1967, he moved to the University of Dayton and in 1971, to the Carnegie Mellon University, where he taught management courses while working on his doctorate. In 1973, he joined the Kellogg School of Management faculty. His work earned him scholastic honours, awards and fellowships. He provided consultancy and executive education for various companies and governments in the US and across the globe.

Prof Bala was keen on setting up a business school in India which became a distinct possibility after the country opened up in the 90’s. When Manmohan Singh was the finance minister, he wanted IAS officers to be trained by management professors from leading American universities, to deal with foreign investments and MNCs.

Prof Bala was chosen for the assignment.

At the same time, he started toying with the idea of captains of Indian industry joining hands to create a world-class business school in India. He started discussing his ideas with Rajat Gupta, who was his neighbour in Chicago. Gupta thought it was a great idea and started working on the project immediately. He was confident that he could get the support of the Indian government and investments from American and Indian corporations. Dr. Bala was given the task of crafting the business school programme. Prof Bala was generous in his praise for Gupta.

The then chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu, saw the potential and offered land and facilities to set up the ISB near Hyderabad. Prof Bala knew Naidu quite well as he had been consulting with his government. When the ISB became functional, Prof Bala took the first class on the first day. The institution had to raise additional funds, which did not happen. The tuition fees had to be raised steeply within three years of inception, which was not acceptable to Prof Bala.

In 2002, he had to undergo quintuple bypass surgery when he was thinking of ending his association with the ISB.

Hid good friend, A. Mahendran – the former CEO and managing director of Godrej Sara Lee – who was attending a management programme at Kellogg, put an idea in the professor’s head. He had suggested that the professor start a management school in Tamil Nadu. After all he was brand Bala who could attract talent and students to make a success out of it.

In spite of his family’s misgivings Prof Bala went ahead. Although J. Jayalalithaa – who was the chief minister of Tamil Nadu then – was most supportive of the project and offered government land at subsidised rates, there were delays in clearing the land. Prof Bala sold his huge house at the upmarket East Coast Road (ECR) in Chennai and raised funds for the institution. Great Lakes was set up in 2004. He told me, “Everyone was worried about the placement prospects of the new school. As it happened, companies such as Infosys and TCS recruited our students on par with their other hires from IIMs and the ISB. The 100% placement record in the very first year attracted even more students.” Great Lakes’ flagship PGPM is now among the top-ranked one-year executive programmes in the country. Its faculty includes many management professors from top American universities who, in fact, are Prof Bala’s friends and colleagues. “My network is my Net worth,” he said.

They don’t make them like him anymore.

Sushila Ravindranath  
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# The Cricket Pavilion that Chisholm built

Though the Madras Cricket Club was established in 1846, it was only in April 1866 that it moved to Chepauk, the location with which it remains associated ever since. Within a month there was talk of building a pavilion for the Club. The design and execution were entrusted to the then top-ranked architect of Madras – Robert Fellowes Chisholm, Consulting Engineer to the Government. Funded through donations, work began, at an estimate of Rs. 2,000. In true Chisholm tradition, and it must be admitted as is the case in most architectural estimates, the actual far overshoot what was budgeted, coming to Rs. 3,700. But donations had gone up too, to Rs 3,100. The balance was quickly made up and a pavilion described as “a little red-brick wood verandahed” was soon ready at the north-west corner – which in today’s terms means the intersection of Wallajah and Bells Roads.

By 1875 a great famine was raging across Madras Presidency. Millions perished and those in the hinterland began migrating to the city where they imagined life was a lot better. The Governor, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos felt something had to be done. He initiated a food for work programme, wherein a canal would be dug across the city, thereby linking the existing North Canal (Pulicat to Basin Bridge) and South Canal (Adyar to Cuddalore). This new waterway, then known as the Junction Canal and later to be named after the Duke, would cut across the city and in the process also go through the cricket ground.

The Committee was most incensed and met on December 19, 1876 to protest the plan to bisect the cricket ground with a canal. A letter was sent to the Government pointing out that the land had been given to the Club and it was the expectation that “their tenure of the Chepauk Ground would not be disturbed,” on which understanding the Committee had not only erected some years ago “a costly and substantial masonry pavilion,” but also expended “from time to time considerable sums in fencing, turfing and otherwise improving the ground.” In the light of this, it was expected that the Government of his Grace the Duke would consider altering the alignment of the proposed Junction Canal.

The Government was not willing to consider any changes to its canal plan – when thousands were starving and needed worthwhile occupation, a few Englishmen complaining about their cricket ground was hardly

to merit any attention. But a part of the Island was temporarily made over to the Club, till such a time that work on the canal was completed. However, *Our Chronicle*, the monthly publication of the 67th (South Hants) Regiment noted that in its edition of January 1877 that “cricket became an impossibility by reason of the destruction of the cricket ground in the interests of canal navigation.”

That the MCC itself was more or less written off is clear from a report in *Allen’s Indian Mail and Register of Intelligence* which in turn quotes from an article in the *Pioneer* dated 1878 – “Madras was formerly a great place, considering the climate, for cricket,” it ran. “But the game has languished sadly.” And yet the very same tract also records the fact that there was plenty of space left in Chepauk even after the canal excavations – “The now melancholy chalet which marks the spot where the Madras Cricket Club once flourished has still sufficient ground in front of it for two or three excellent lawn tennis courts; there is plenty of room to the south of it for a new cricket ground, round which a running path for athletic sports may be carried, and the Spartan band of golf players may there find an ampler and more diversified field for their game than the island round which they now practise. If taken in hand at once the coming NE monsoon ought to be favourable to the undertaking and by January next Madras would possess a charming rendezvous for at least two or three days in a week.” As though in answer to this prayer, work began on staging a return, to Chepauk, from where happily, there has been no dislodging ever since.

The homecoming was effected in 1879, to a changed ground and a larger one at that. Now, the east and western boundaries were the longer sides, as opposed to the earlier north-south axis and that necessitated a new pitch. There was a pond at exactly this location and it was filled in, one of the hundreds of waterbodies that have vanished in the name of development in our city. Its site is still the square for all the pitches that are laid out on the Chepauk Grounds. The Government, probably in a fit of contrition over displacing the Club, now undertook all restoration work on the ground, including planting “hundreds of young croton and foliage plants, in various plots about the place.”

But there were still issues – the Chisholm pavilion remained where it was and it posed challenges in the new east-west align-

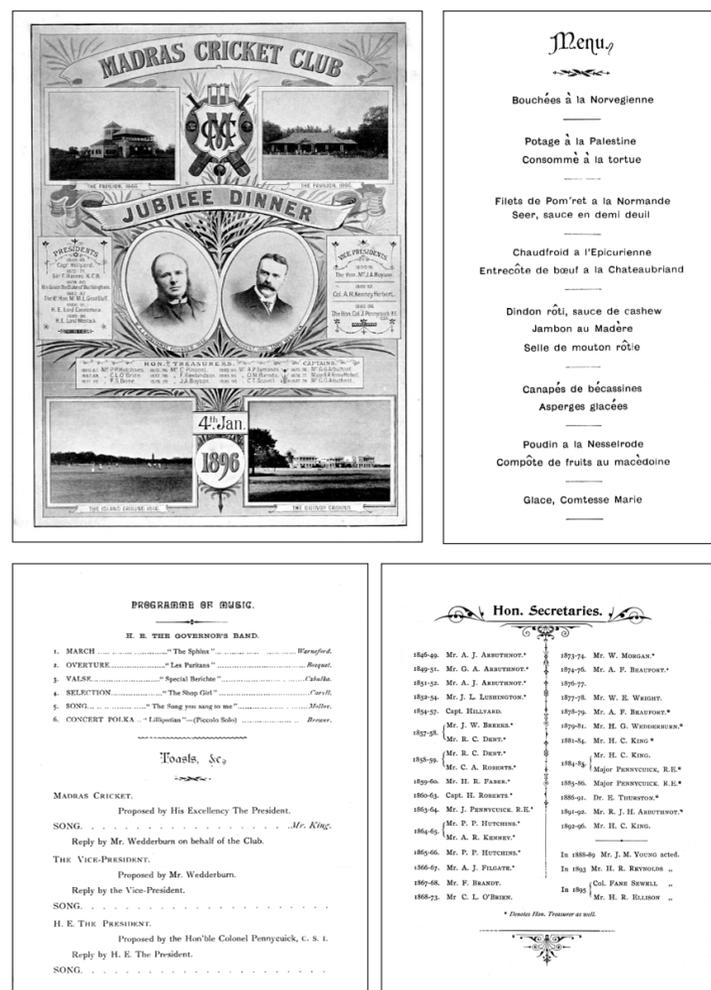
ment of the pitch. As it faced the south, the pavilion now caught the morning and evening sun, the glare being quite unbearable. And then in 1888 came a huge cyclone that battered the structure, making it unusable. A debate began immediately thereafter on what was to be done and eventually, it was decided that a new pavilion had to be built, with proper alignment to the new pitch. The old Chisholm pavilion was “sold for Rs 600” and work on the new structure began. This was designed by Henry Irwin. Like its predecessor, the Irwin pavilion too would one day vanish, though it had a very long tenure of almost ninety years. Unlike the Irwin pavilion however, no photographs of Chisholm’s pavilion at Chepauk were thought to have survived.

During much of 2020, Karthik Bhatt, Ranjitha Ashok and I worked on a 175th year commemorative volume for the MCC. The hunt for any pictures of the Chisholm pavilion was

resumed and it was then that Karthik suggested that given that Lt. Col. J. Pennyquick, he of the Mullaiperiyar dam, had much to do with the club in its first 50 years, there would be some find or the other, tucked away among his papers. There followed a search for Pennyquick’s descendants, in which we were greatly helped by Santhana Beer Oli, who runs the John Pennyquick Charitable Trust in Theni. Eventually contact was made with Mark McConnell, a descendant of Col Pennyquick and he sent us the MCC’s golden jubilee brochure, dated 1896. We could not believe our eyes for there in it was a photo of the hitherto unseen Chisholm pavilion. The document also set right the record as regards the past Presidents and Secretaries of the Club.

It would be safe to say that till the discovery of the Golden Jubilee brochure of the MCC, none in living memory had any idea of how the first pavilion

of the club, designed by Robert Fellowes Chisholm looked. Now we know, and we can see that it has several design elements that this master architect delighted in. The tower at the rear, which almost certainly enclosed the staircase, is a shortened version of the one at Victoria Public Hall. The arches on the ground floor, each capped with a brow of exposed brick, is an element that features in practically every building that Chisholm built. The hipped roof, which can be seen in the first floor and also over the shorter wing on the side, is also quite reminiscent of Victoria Public Hall. Evidently, when Chisholm hit upon a good design, he made use of it in more than one building. The photo also lays to rest another mystery – the repeated accounts that we read of ladies assembling on the first floor of the Club to witness matches. In the absence of two levels in the second pavilion designed by Irwin, we always wondered. Now we know.



## LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

# Chitira Bharathi – a visual documentation on Subramania Bharathi

September 12 marked the death centenary of one of the greatest poets of the country, Subramania Bharathi. His fiery writings evoked the nationalistic spirit amongst the masses and greatly inspired them in the cause of independence. Several biographies and commentaries on his works have been published after his lifetime, of which *Chitira Bharathi*, a visual documentation brought out in 1957 by journalist R.A. Padmanabhan stands out as a unique tribute.



The story behind the making of the book makes for interesting reading. Padmanabhan, who be-

gan his career with the *Ananda Vikatan* magazine says that the seeds were sown when he first came across a photograph of Subramania Bharathi in 1934, which had been given by S.R. Subramaniam of Pondicherry. It had caught the attention of Kalki Krishnamurthy, who had asked him to make multiple copies of it, which was then used by various other magazines. Padmanabhan left *Ananda Vikatan* soon after and joined the *Jaya Bharathi* newspaper as the editor of its weekly. It was here that he came across a significant portion of material relating to Bharathi, which truly set him off on a journey to document the poet’s life.

● by  
Karthik Bhatt

Working in *Jaya Bharathi* as assistant editors were two people who had interacted with the poet, Venkata Arya and K. Sadagopan. Venkata Arya had worked with Bharathi in *India*, the magazine run by the family of Mandyam Srinivasachariar, while Sadagopan was a resident of Triplicane who had moved closely with him. One day, Padmanabhan came across a bunch of papers in office with the name



The office of India at Broadway.

of Venkata Arya marked on it while trying to save documents and files from rain. Venkata Arya had gone on medical leave and hence Padmanabhan had kept them aside to return them when he re-joined duty. This however did not happen as Venkata Arya passed away soon after. Padmanabhan says that to his surprise, on opening the bundle, he found old issues of the *India* magazine from Pondicherry, from where it was published after being shifted from Triplicane. Having read articles by writers like Va.Ra, Akoor Ananthachari and Parali Nellaippar on Bharathi and interacted with Mandyam Srinivasachariar over these few years, Padmanabhan decided to visit Pondicherry to delve deeper into the life of the poet. That opportunity would present itself in 1938, when he joined *Hindustan*, the Tamil magazine run by M.S. Kamath of the *Sunday Times*.

Padmanabhan pitched the idea of a project to collect material and photos on the life of Bharathi and bring it out in the form of a special souvenir. Kamath, who had great reverence for the poet readily agreed and Padmanabhan set off to Pondicherry armed with his camera and accompanied by the official photographer of the magazine, U.N. Singh. Prior to leaving for Pondicherry, Padmanabhan met Kulavai Kannan, a disciple of Bharathi who lived in Triplicane, from whom he learnt of many of the poet’s friends.

At Pondicherry, Padmanabhan was taken on a tour of various places associated with Bharathi by V. Venugopal Naicker, whose mother Ammakanu had interacted closely with the

poet. He was also introduced to many of Bharathi’s friends such as N. Subramania Iyer, Arumugam Chettiar and Raja Bahadur. All these interactions were greatly beneficial and added several pieces of memorabilia to the documentation. For instance, Subramania Iyer gave a copy of Bharathi’s work in English, *The Fox with the Golden Tail*. The photos and information gathered at Pondicherry were brought out as a *Bharathi Malar*, which was well received. The success spurred them to bring out a similar publication for the next three years as well, with additional information and photographs adding incremental value to each edition.

Padmanabhan says that the next major point of this journey was an exhibition on the life of Bharathi setup with the memorabilia gathered, which was organised by the Bharathiar Sangam at the Hindi Prachar Sabha in September 1953. The exhibition was a grand success and opened up further sources to collect information and documentation. Repeat exhibitions were held in December that year at the Congress Exhibition in Madras and at the Annamalai Nagar conference of the All-India Writers Association the following year. The USIS Library hosted the exhibition in September 1954 on the occasion of Bharathi’s death anniversary. It was then that the idea of a book that would be a visual documentation of the poet’s life took shape.

Over the next three years, Padmanabhan travelled to various places associated with Bharathi across South India such as Ettayapuram, Kadayam and Madurai and met several people who had interacted to collect more mem-

orabilia. The visits were greatly beneficial as Padmanabhan says that he was able to gather twice as much photographs and material than what had been exhibited. Memorabilia in the form of handwritten notes of the poet, works thought to be lost and hitherto unknown ones were all gathered from various sources.

The first edition of the book, published by Amudha Nilayam was released on the occasion of Subramania Bharathi’s 76<sup>th</sup> birthday as per the Hindu calendar, November 24, 1957. Mandyam Srinivasachariar wrote the foreword to the book, recalling his close association with the poet.

The book comprised 183 photos divided into various segments of Bharathi’s life. Padmanabhan says that in order to make it a documentation that was as authentic as possible, a deliberate decision was taken to include only original photos and avoid any representative images and also to use as many pictures as possible from the poet’s time.

The book is a veritable treasure trove, full of wonderful images such as Bharathi’s first ever published work, *Thanimai Irakkam* published in 1904 in *Vivekabhanu* magazine, the old offices of *Swadesamitran* on Armenian street and of *India* on Broadway where he worked, a pamphlet published by him titled *Engal Congress Yathirai* on the happenings of the Surat Session in 1907 and the several friends who helped him in Pondicherry.

R.A. Padmanabhan lived to the grand old age of 96 and passed away in 2014. His seminal work lives on in the form of a recent edition of *Chitira Bharathi* being brought out by Kalachuvadu publications in 2006.



Hindustan Bank building, Armenian Street, once the headquarters of Swadesamitran.

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's first 10 questions are on current affairs and the next 10 are on James Bond.

- Which spice in Tamil Nadu recently got a Geographical Indication Tag as it is known for its rich aromatic oil content?
  - According to a whistle-blower, internal research had shown which Facebook-owned app is detrimental to many teenagers' mental health?
  - Name the first-ever vaccine developed for any parasitic disease that was recently approved by WHO for use to combat Malaria.
  - Abdulrazak Gurnah, the first Black writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 28 years, is from which African country?
  - A Russian feature film *The Challenge* is set to make history for what out-of-the-world feat?
  - Which tech giant recently launched a household robot 'Astro' that can check on people, pets, or security?
  - Which country ended European champion Italy's 37-match winning run, the longest unbeaten streak in the history of men's international football?
  - Tata Sons has won the bid to takeover Air India, that had its genesis in Tata Airlines started by the group in which year?
  - Indian hockey players recently swept FIH Stars Awards. Who were named the FIH Player of the Year in the men's and women's categories respectively?
  - According to 'Forbes India Rich List 2021', Mukesh Ambani (\$92.7 billion) remains the wealthiest Indian for the 14th year in a row. Who are second and third?
- \*\*\*
- What is the importance of the book *Birds of the West Indies* to the James Bond lore?
  - Which was the first of the 12 Bond novels that Fleming wrote?
  - Excluding spoofs, who apart from Sean Connery, Roger Moore and Daniel Craig, have played 007?
  - Who composed the evergreen James Bond theme?
  - Which film gets its title from a WWII operation that Fleming set up to undermine a German invasion of Spain?
  - In which Bond flick did Indian tennis great Vijay Amritraj play the spy's friend?
  - In which film does the villain want to make all the world's crops and livestock infertile?
  - What is common to David Somerset, Klaus Hergesheimer, James St. John Smythe and Dr. Mikhail Arkov?
  - Which famous author, known for his children's books, scripted 'You Only Live Twice'?
  - Name the one film where Bond's boss M doesn't appear at all.

(Answers on page 8)

# Connected by Water for Life

On 22nd of September, 2021, the villagers of Kumudimoolai, a non-descript village in Cuddalore district, got together to celebrate the 90th birthday of legendary writer, Ashokamitran. They placed "pori and kadalai", on a plantain leaf, decorated his image with garlands, and took turns to offer flowers. Most of them had not even heard his name or knew anything about his writing until 2019. How then did he become an icon of reverence for the village?

It all began when friend and fellow heritage enthusiast Ravishankar, eldest son of Ashokamitran after following the work that my organisation – Sanitation First – did in providing vulnerable communities with safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services – offered to build a toilet for Jaishankar, a surgical amputee in Kundiyamallur village. Jaishankar had severe gangrene formation on one foot due to

built for him with ramp and handrails, he was immensely happy to see him eating well and looking healthy and happy. While returning to Chennai after the visit, Ravi mentioned his desire to revive a water body in memory of his late father.

Ashokamitran had moved to Chennai in 1952 when the newly formed T'Nagar and West Mambalam were experiencing acute water shortage. The daily ordeals middle class women underwent to secure water for their households made him write the famous novel *Thanneer* in the early 70s. Ravi mentioned that his father had always made sure that water was saved, consumed respon-



Ashokamitran's family and others paying their tributes.

in reviving and rejuvenating traditional water bodies, and so

Paravanar river is stored in the overhead tank and used for drinking and cooking, but for all other needs, the village was dependent on the Pillayar Koil Kulam. When the waters ran dry during summer or during power cuts, this water was also used for drinking and cooking.

But the tank was in bad shape. The retaining walls had fallen and the steps were broken. The inlet and outlet were broken and passage clogged, making the water sluggish. The depth of the tank was less than 2 metres and there was a lot of seepage due to the poor retaining structure. We felt renovation and restoration of this tank would help to recharge the water resources and enhance the eco-system in the village and having worked with the community over the last decade, were confident they would take care of the tank responsibly.

Before the commencement of work, the villagers were brought together and an agreement was achieved between members of different communities that they will work together towards the common objective. The community offered their

(Continued on page 7)

### Padmapriya Baskaran

Chief Executive  
Sanitation First  
[www.sanitationfirstindia.org](http://www.sanitationfirstindia.org)



A plaque remembering Ashokamitran.

poor medical care and had difficulty in moving. During the day, he would not eat so that he did not have to move alone to a secluded spot to relieve himself. When Ravi met Jaishankar a few months after a toilet was

sibly and never wasted. He felt reviving a water body and making sure the users did the same would probably be the right tribute to him.

Sanitation First has long been working with communities

the search began for the right tank. Kumudimoolai was the first to come to our mind, since the organisation had worked there for long on water conservation and sustainable sanitation. The village has over 350 ecosan toilets (urine diverting dry toilets, that convert human waste into soil enriching compost). It was the first village in Cuddalore district to be declared open defecation free owing to these ecosan toilets. They save over a lakh litres of water every day from being flushed down. Sanitation First has also built a 60,000 litre-overhead tank and toilet blocks in the middle and primary schools.

The panchayat with over 450 families has close to 2,000 people who are dependent on the waters of the Neyveli mines for agriculture. Water from the



Above, right and opposite: the restoration activity at the Kumudimoolai tank.



# The Ola scooters

● The integrated Ola electric scooter manufacturing facility spread over 500 acres at Hosur, Tamil Nadu will house production areas for batteries, motors, paint shop, welding, general assembly and finished goods as well as two supplier parks. The plant will have its own test track.

The description of Ola's electric scooter project by promoter Bhavish Aggarwal is so impressive: a capacity of 10 million electric scooters. A single, completely automated plant. Great resort to artificial intelligence (AI). Swedish industrial giant ABB providing a tech system with over 3,000 robots and automated guide vehicles. Siemens' Digital Enterprise software to optimise factory layout. Investment of Rs 2,400 crore.

Aggarwal has been working at great speed. The MoU was signed in December 2020 and the land was taken possession within weeks. Production targeted to commence mid 2021.

Ola acquired Netherland's Etergo company last year. Etergo's electric scooter is powered by a swappable high-energy-density battery and claims to be capable of running 240 km on a single charge.

The promoters have attract-

ed handsome support from Ratan Tata, Pawan Munjal (Hero MotoCorp), Hyundai and Kia Motors and SoftBank of Japan among others.

### For Global markets too!

The present Indian market for all types of two-wheelers is around 20 million. Hero Motors alone accounts for a capacity of nearly 10 million in its five plants and there are other strong producers like Bajaj Auto, TVS Motors, Hon-

● by  
**S. Viswanathan**

da, Yamaha, Suzuki, Enfield... Ola is racing ahead to build an initial capacity of two million and expand to full capacity in quick time. Aggarwal seems to be confident of his Hosur plant emerging the largest centre of production not just for India but also export markets spread from Australia and New Zealand to Europe. He firmly believes that the demand for sophisticated personal vehicles would grow across the globe including in the developed countries.

### From shared mobility back to personal vehicle

Until a decade ago the stress was on shared mobility. Large ride companies like Uber, Ola, the Chinese giant Didi Chuxing weaned aspirations for owning personal vehicles. The Covid pandemic that saw a steep fall in demand for shared rides, is reviving interest in personal mobility. The timing thus appears opportune. Ola ride share had a meteoric rise. But the company has not made profits on its operations and has been riding on phenomenal valuations. Both Uber and Ola have suffered the Covid-19 lockdowns and reportedly lost around 35,000 vehicles from their fleets since September 2020 due to the inability of drivers to repay their monthly instalments on vehicles purchased on loans.

Ola posted a loss of Rs. 2,592.93 crore in FY19. According to a report, around 95 per cent of Ola's 33,000 leased vehicles were lying unused. Ola and Uber, encouraged drivers to purchase vehicles through loans; they no longer have the capacity to earn the income for loan repayments.

### Ill timed foray into Britain, Australia...

Ola launched ride-sharing operations in the UK and Australia with great fanfare. But these have been huge failures: operations were banned in London. Even within India the several thousand small entrepreneurs who invested in the Ola franchise are in distress. They were attracted earlier by the very liberal incentives offered by Ola. The company seems to have been reckless in offering incentives as high as Rs 500 per ride for attracting auto drivers/owners into its fold. A few of these recorded earnings of even a lakh of rupees a month for a while! Understandably, this was not sustainable.

### Sceptics and supporters aplenty

There is, therefore, some scepticism on similar ambitions built around on the electric two-wheeler. Maintaining growth at high levels based on exotic market valuations is tough to sustain. But optimists point to investors like SoftBank and Tencent with mountains of money willing to bet on the



success of a couple of ventures risking outright losses in 8 out of 10.

Others point to the meteoric rise of Elon Musk and his electric car Tesla. When plans on the concept of electric vehicle/car was announced by Musk, top auto giants across the globe, General Motors, Ford, Volkswagen... were not enthused.

There was little progress on the EV concept at these companies. Yet Tesla proved an outstanding success. And Musk had the last laugh. His technology concepts extended to space travel and other exotic frontiers. Valuations were again phenomenally high.

Such concepts based on IT are a big departure from conventional brick and mortar ideas.

Aggarwal's Ola Scooter can be a game changer. How will it impact the existing two-wheeler manufacturers? – (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*, June 2021).

# Connected by Water for Life

(Continued from page 6)

contribution by clearing all the garbage and encroachments around the tank. The inlet and outlet were first repaired, and the depth of the tank deepened to three meters. The wall on the northern side, closer to the houses and worst affected, was reinforced in 2019 and the steps reconstructed in a senior-citizen friendly manner.

This portion was inaugurated by Ashokamitran's family in September 2019 when a copy of *Thanneer* was provided to the Kumudimoolai library which has since inspired several villagers, particularly the youth to understand his literary work and passion for water conservation better.

With COVID applying the brakes on the rest of the renovation for over a year, we decided

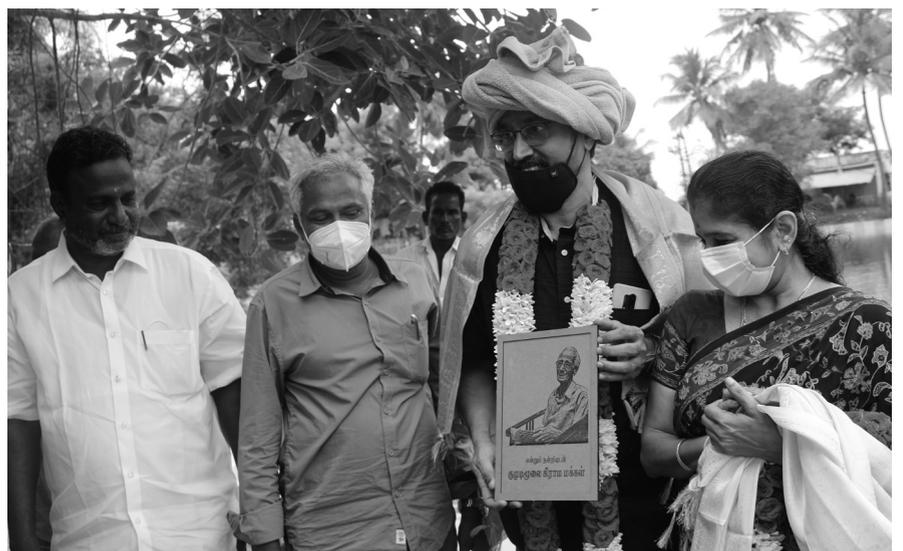
to complete it fully in 2021 with Ravi's consent. The west and eastern walls were completed with additional steps and ramps and the southern side which was more or less intact was reinforced. The entire structure was painted and when the tank filled to capacity, it was a matter of joy and pride to watch. The construction of walls was done with RCC instead of the original concrete slab structure,

which had a limited life span.

Between 2019 and 2021, the tank became a haven for those who had to stay indoors because of the pandemic. Senior citizens and children came to the tank to study or rest and this prompted us to provide cement benches on two sides and these have since, never been left empty.

Ravi plans to provide tuition services and a telescope at the local school and it is so heart-

warming that this bond has been created between Ashokamitran's family and the village through "Thanneer" (Water), as witnessed by the birthday celebrations and we at Sanitation First, do hope this is an inspiration to several others to come forward to rejuvenate water bodies and reduce reliance on underground water sources.



Ravishankar seen with the villagers along with his father's epic novel *Thanneer*.

# When Bedi spun his web at Chepauk

On the occasion of his 75th birthday on September 25 it is worth recalling that one of Bishen Singh Bedi's favourite venues was Chepauk. Like his three other famed contemporaries S. Venkataraghavan, Erapalli Prasanna and B.S. Chandrasekhar, Bedi too spun his web around international batsmen in Tests at the MA Chidambaram stadium and finished with 31 wickets. In fact he figured in most Tests – six

– at this ground as compared to Prasanna and Chandrasekhar who each played five and Venkat who played four.

It was as an unassuming 20-year-old lad playing in only his second Test – he had made his debut in the previous game at Calcutta – that Bedi played his first match at Chepauk in January 1967. West Indies were then the leading side in the world and they had some of the finest stroke players in the

game in Conrad Hunte, Rohan Kanhai, Basil Butcher, Seymour Nurse, Clive Lloyd and the incomparable Gary Sobers. While they were impatient to play their strokes here was this youngster who bowled slow left arm spinners with the ball seemingly taking an eternity to reach the batsmen. He took only one wicket in the first innings but was in his element in the second taking four for 81 and having the famed batting line-up in all sorts of trouble as they attempted to get 322 in 295 minutes for victory. He took the wickets of opener Robin Bynoe, Kanhai, Nurse and

In the 70s Bedi figured prominently in three successive Indian victories at Chepauk. In January 1973 the England batsmen found it difficult to negotiate his classical deliveries and Bedi had match figures of six for 104 from 73 overs to help shape along with Prasanna and Chandra India's four-wicket victory. This was the time when Bedi came on as early as the third over of the innings as India's opening bowlers were Eknath Solkar and Sunil Gavaskar the first time around and Solkar and MAK Pataudi in the second. The Indian new ball pairing was pathetic putting that much more pressure on the spinners.

In January 1975 Bedi had match figures of six for 69 as India defeated West Indies by 100 runs where he again shared the spoils with Prasanna and Chandra. Bedi enjoyed his best game at Chepauk two years later against New Zealand. By now the Indian captain he had nine for 70 in the match outshining Chandra and Venkat as

India won by 216 runs. But just a month and a half later during the same 1976-77 season he was presiding over a 200-run defeat at the hands of England. However he did attain an important personal landmark becoming the first Indian bowler to take 200 wickets in Test matches during the game with a match haul of four wickets. That the landmark victim was England captain Tony Greig was the icing on the cake.

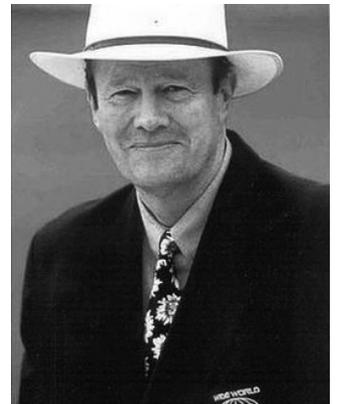


Bishen Singh Bedi in action.

● by  
**Partab Ramchand**

Lloyd and along with Prasanna seemed to be bowling India to a famous victory. But they were thwarted by Sobers and Charlie Griffith – the latter playing more with his pad than with the bat – and West Indies closed at 270 for seven.

Three years later Bedi along with Prasanna was the leading Indian spin bowler and in the first innings he kept the strong Australian batting line-up – Bill Lawry, Keith Stackpole, Ian Chappell, Doug Walters, Paul Sheahan and Ian Redpath – on a leash even though he took only one wicket. Thereafter he was indisposed and his role was limited as India lost by 77 runs.



England Captain Tony Greig, the 200th victim of Bedi.

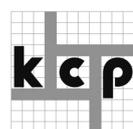
## Answers to Quiz

1. Kanniyakumari Cloves, 2. Instagram, 3. Mosquirix (made by Glaxo SmithKline), 4. Tanzania, 5. First feature film to be shot on board the ISS. The film's lead actress and director recently flew to the ISS, 6. Amazon, 7. Spain, 8. 1932 as Tata Airlines, 9. Harmanpreet Singh and Gurjit Kaur, 10. Gautam Adani (\$74.8b) and Shiv Nadar (\$31b).

\*\*\*

11. Ian Fleming 'borrowed' the name of his hero from the author of that book, 12. *Casino Royale*, 13. George Lazenby, Timothy Dalton, and Pierce Brosnan, 14. Monty Norman, 15. *Golden Eye*, 16. *Octopussy*, 17. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 18. Some of the aliases used by James Bond across various movies, 19. Roald Dahl, 20. *For Your Eyes Only*.

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