When illegal hoardings alone pose a risk

The rainy season is here and with that the Government is gearing itself up for cyclones. As part of a slew of advisories, it has also addressed the issue of large outdoor advertisement hoardings and billboards. It has advised that all illegal hoardings be removed – which is good. But in the same notification it has merely asked all Government agencies to ensure the hoardings on their buildings have obtained necessary licences. Which makes us wonder if only illegal hoardings are likely to be blown down by cyclonic winds and cause damage? And why should there be illegal hoardings? Is the Civic Body not supposed to take action of such stones?

Over the decades, the Corporation was a mute bystander in allowing rampant violations in the erection of hoardings. More than 90 per cent of the city’s outdoor advertisements were supposedly illegal structures. And even among the few that were permitted by the civic body, rent payment was tardy at best. The Corporation proved ineffective in its collection drives. Litigation has been endemic to the industry and even when the Corporation tried to take recourse to law, it was stymied by delays and stays.

The public were the biggest victims of illegal outdoor hoardings. These were erected with no consideration for safety and very often were either distracting or plain obstructions to line of sight at traffic corners and highways. Accidents were caused owing to motorists’ attention being distracted and when there were cyclones there was bound to be a casualty/fatality or two because of improperly secured metal sheets falling on the road. This led to public interest litigations being filed as well. Eventually, the High Court in 1996 decreed that all outdoor hoardings be acquired by the Government. That however did not prevent a further batch of illegal hoardings coming up – with the law enforcement agencies either turning a blind eye or being incapable of taking action. Finally, in 2008, the then DMK government decided to make Chennai city hoarding free. Even then tongues wagged about the reasons behind this seemingly altruistic decision. But what was heartening was that the hoardings were removed. Suddenly the city could breathe, its iconic buildings and greenery emerged, and the sky was visible once more. Chennai has enjoyed this luxury for fifteen years.

(Continued on page 2)

Post-Deepavali AQI better than last year

As is usually the norm, the city’s Air Quality Index (AQI) was scrutinized a day after the Deepavali festivities. Chennai’s AQI – a metric that is an average of 24-hour data - dipped to the ‘poor to very poor category’ in local stations such as Alandur, Arumbakkam, Kodungaiyur, Manali, Royapuram and Velachery. Guidelines derived from national index measures rate an AQI between 0 to 50 as good; 51-100 satisfactory; 101-200 moderate; 200-300 poor; 301-400 very poor and 401-500 severe. Manali recorded the highest index at 327 followed by Velachery (322), Arumbakkam (262) and Alandur (253). A statement from the TNPCB (Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board) said that the dip can be attributed to higher than normal usage of firecrackers and high relative humidity.

(Continued on page 2)
When illegal hoardings alone pose a risk

(Continued from page 1)

The problem of illegal hoardings however just refused to go away, at least in the suburbs. The former Mayor and present Health Minister, M Subramaniam, while in the Opposition even threatened to launch an agitation against these in Saldapet, whereupon action was taken. The present CM, while Mayor was also said to be against hoardings and the way they mar the appearance of Singara Chennai.

Which is why it is all the more surprising that the Corporation, earlier this year, decided to permit outdoor hoardings once again in the city. A Government Order was issued under the Tamil Nadu Urban Local Bodies Act 2022 to this effect. The reason was ostensibly to boost revenue for the cash-starved Greater Chennai Corporation. The actual pressure may well be from elsewhere for it is public knowledge that the business of outdoor hoardings is controlled by vested interests of all political persuasions. The parties who were affected by this decision, namely residents, pedestrians, motorists, etc, expressed horror but that did not cut any ice. And so hoardings made a comeback.

As did illegal hoardings as well, which mean violations and lack of revenue for the Corporation, apart from safety threats to the innocent public. Which is where we began this story if you recollect. Some things never change.

Post-Deepavali AQI better than last year

(Continued from page 1)

the morning and 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the evening. No cracker was to be manufactured or sold that would generate over 125 decibels of sound. With many flouting the norms, police teams led by inspectors actively enforced the rules. 554 cases were reportedly registered. 473 against the illegal hoardings of crackers, 19 for creating excessive noise disturbances, 8 against to the illicit sale of fireworks, 102 calls for assistance in putting out fires; waste from firecrackers and 786. The AQI observed from 6am Sunday to 6am Monday, ranged between 97 and 108. The AQI last year was between 345 and 786.

While this is undeniably an improvement, police data (mentioned above) suggests widespread violation of the timing restrictions. Some of the accidents reported by the media also point to irresponsible use of firecrackers. For instance, a rocket was the cause of a fire break out on the premises of the Sai Baba Temple in Mylapore on Deepavali night; no one was injured, though the event is said to have caused significant material damage.

An incident was reported from the IIT-Madras campus as well — noisy cracker cases caused panic among animals within the campus premises. Four cats run amok into traffic. The animals — a black buck, a spotted deer and a palm civet cat — sustained injuries and were taken to the Besant Memorial Animal Hospital at Besant Nagar. The question arises as to where the current regulations and enforcement as well as public awareness campaigns can improve further. The greater sense of civic responsibility among celebrants. Some events — such as the IIT Madras incident above — suggest that perhaps the rules need to be expanded; many green enthusiasts, for example, have renewed calls for the establishment of ‘no-cracker zones’ to safeguard flora and fauna in protected areas. There is also room to explore norms around the land lady, wanting help with sharing a number over What’s App. (Wo)MM’s landlady, it must be said, is of the innocent sort — she frequently drops in requesting for help with her TV or phone, though (Wo)MM personally feels it is a listening ear that she seeks. The Better Half was at a loss to explain why her (Wo)MM herself rather enjoys her company. So she was quite happy to invite her in for a couple of cookies while the problem was fixed.

Sending a number over What’s App is rather straightforward, and (Wo)MM thought it wouldn’t take too much time. But twenty minutes later, she found herself still trying to locate the number of one Mr. Nagaraj. (Wo)MM tried all variations and browsed through the entire contact list, but Nagaraj proved to be surprisingly elusive. She finally voiced her concern to the landlady. ‘Oh,’ she replied lightly, reaching out for another cookie, ‘I have his number saved as S.’ It turned out to be exactly as she said — his number was saved simply as the letter S, much like the intriguing nickname of some espionage agent in a Graham Greene novel. (Wo)MM took a moment to reflect on the oddity of the choice before forwarding the contact to what must have been a very confused recipient.

As always, it was the Better Half who took the trouble, using her phone to make a call. She has this wonderful quality of making the bizarre sound most reasonable, and this was no exception. ‘Maybe it was S for Snake,’ he offered. ‘Naga-raji.’” (Wo)MM had nothing to say to that. Why not, after all? Why ever not.

Bad ad

I t was a dozy, heavy-eyed Woman from Madras Musings who was suddenly woken up in the back seat by the blare of a horn at a traffic signal. She was jolted awake quickly enough, because what she saw was this:

A cat-and-mouse game of carpools

The Woman from Madras Musings had just put her feet up to enjoy a moment when Mater Bettertern walked in thoughtfully. It transpired that Pater Bettertern had just sent M.B a text message, requesting her to be ready with a flower in her hair in precisely five minutes, for his car was even now waiting to make a turn at the signal less than a minute away. M.B, of course, took that to mean that he was just now packing up at office and would leave the office premises ten minutes later. She floated down on a chair beside (Wo)MM and merrily put up her feet, too. It was a good 20 minutes later that M.B. chose to go down, but she was surprisingly bang on time — she stepped out just as EB was pulling up to the gate.

You see, this business of picking people up is always a cat-and-mouse game. Each fully expects to be kept waiting: the pick-upper imagines that the car awkwardly.idling on the sidewalk with a pile-up of irate commuters stuck behind, while the pick-uppee foresees an annoyingly long wait near the gate made worse by humid weather and hungry mosquitoes. So alerts to be at the ready are sent much in advance; and the passenger, much the wiser having been fooled before, pads a generous amount of time to the deadline and instead of hurrying up, slows down. The better half’s friends never fail to amuse (Wo)MM in this regard: more earnest the message, greater the scam. If one of the gang claims to have ‘already crossed’ a certain temple or park, it can be taken for granted that theclaimer is just stepping into the shower. (Wo)MM’s friend seems to have cracked the problem, though. She’s ensured that the husband’s mobile phone has its location-sharing enabled so that she can track his whereabouts online. It does seem to be a neat solution — he’s hardly ever kept waiting and she’s always ready and waiting for him to turn into their lane. (Wo)MM made the suggestion to the Bettternals, but it was curiously turned down. Turns out they like the thrill of the game and keep scores to boot.

What’s in a name?

The Woman from Madras Musings had just found a comfortable spot on the sofa after a series of acrobatics when the bell rang. It was her father. He had just sent M.B. a text: ‘Naga-raji.’” He was fixed.

As always, it was the Better Half who took the trouble, using her phone to make a call. She has this wonderful quality of making the bizarre sound most reasonable, and this was no exception. ‘Maybe it was S for Snake,’ he offered. ‘Naga-raji.’” (Wo)MM had nothing to say to that. Why not, after all? Why ever not.

Bad ad

I t was a dozy, heavy-eyed Woman from Madras Musings who was suddenly woken up in the back seat by the blare of a horn at a traffic signal. She was jolted awake quickly enough, because what she saw was this:

A cat-and-mouse game of carpools

The Woman from Madras Musings had just put her feet up to enjoy a moment when Mater Bettertern walked in thoughtfully. It transpired that Pater Bettertern had just sent M.B a text message, requesting her to be ready with a flower in her hair in precisely five minutes, for his car was even now waiting to make a turn at the signal less than a minute away. M.B, of course, took that to mean that he was just now packing up at office and would leave the office premises ten minutes later. She floated down on a chair beside (Wo)MM and merrily put up her feet, too. It was a good 20 minutes later that M.B. chose to go down, but she was surprisingly bang on time — she stepped out just as EB was pulling up to the gate.

You see, this business of picking people up is always a cat-and-mouse game. Each fully expects to be kept waiting: the pick-upper imagines that the car awkwardly.idling on the sidewalk with a pile-up of irate commuters stuck behind, while the pick-uppee foresees an annoyingly long wait near the gate made worse by humid weather and hungry mosquitoes. So alerts to be at the ready are sent much in advance; and the passenger, much the wiser having been fooled before, pads a generous amount of time to the deadline and instead of hurrying up, slows down. The better half’s friends never fail to amuse (Wo)MM in this regard: more earnest the message, greater the scam. If one of the gang claims to have ‘already crossed’ a certain temple or park, it can be taken for granted that theclaimer is just stepping into the shower. (Wo)MM’s friend seems to have cracked the problem, though. She’s ensured that the husband’s mobile phone has its location-sharing enabled so that she can track his whereabouts online. It does seem to be a neat solution — he’s hardly ever kept waiting and she’s always ready and waiting for him to turn into their lane. (Wo)MM made the suggestion to the Bettternals, but it was curiously turned down. Turns out they like the thrill of the game and keep scores to boot.

What’s in a name?

The Woman from Madras Musings had just found a comfortable spot on the sofa after a series of acrobatics when the bell rang. It was her father. He had just sent M.B. a text: ‘Naga-raji.’” He was fixed.

As always, it was the Better Half who took the trouble, using her phone to make a call. She has this wonderful quality of making the bizarre sound most reasonable, and this was no exception. ‘Maybe it was S for Snake,’ he offered. ‘Naga-raji.’” (Wo)MM had nothing to say to that. Why not, after all? Why ever not.

Bad ad

I t was a dozy, heavy-eyed Woman from Madras Musings who was suddenly woken up in the back seat by the blare of a horn at a traffic signal. She was jolted awake quickly enough, because what she saw was this:
The magnificent Kanakachampa or Muchukunda tree (Pterospermum acerifolium) at the corner of the busy GT corridor in Chennai gave way to the traffic juggernaut over a decade ago. But scientist and tree lover Dr. Mahadeshwara Swamy still thinks about its luxurious bounty of fragrant flowers and swaying branches. Not every big tree or shrub, however, is an obvious casualty of citizens milling around was even aware of the loss. The tree was not replaced by its destroyers, either. Meanwhile, senior citizen Sarala’s relentless quest to source plants from her childhood has been mostly unsuccessful.

Intensive research carried out in Bengaluru on understanding the different spaces within the city – streets, parks, lakes, home gardens, slums and sacred spaces – revealed that its biodiversity patterns are shaped by the preferences of people for specific type of vegetation, which in turn attracts certain kinds of animal and insect species. Such data is unavailable for any other Indian city.

Landscape horticulturist P. Hariesh says, “When I began my career over 30 years ago, the choice of plants was limited. It could be either Hibiscus or Ixora in home gardens and the sourcing of plants was only twice a year. Existing varieties adopted well, and there were totally only about 40 to 50 varieties of trees and shrubs. Now more exotic varieties are being brought in. Since people need more change, we choose species that are least attacked by pest and disease, that do not need much care, and are ‘easy to maintain’. The indigenous Hibiscus (Hibiscus rosa sinensis) is often disturbed by the mealy bug and appears to be on its way out. So also the pinwheel flower (Tabernaemontana divaricata), which is likely to attract the leaf folding pest. Once, the most popular avenue trees were the Rain Tree, Gul Mohur and Tamarind. Now roads have shrunk. So small or ‘thin’ trees, such as the Red Cordia and other hybrid varieties are being chosen. Trouble-free, low maintenance, ‘least-watering’ is the new mantra!”

Ecosystem goods and services, often shortened to ecosystem services (ES), are the benefits that humans receive from nature. Sadly, we are not always conscious of the links between the surrounding environment and our well-being. Many of the decisions we make, from the development of community infrastructure, to the management of land surrounding our communities, impact the provision of ES. These are services that produce the many life-sustaining benefits we receive from nature – clean air and water, fertile soil for crop production, pollination, and flood control. Though these services are important to environmental and human health and well-being, they are mostly taken for granted.

Veteran botanist and academician Dr P. Dayananand, rules, “As the population in cities continually increased, foisted onto unsuspecting customers who cannot differentiate between a herb or a shrub. Grassy lawns ‘fit better’ into aesthetics compared to biodiverse gardens! The rapidity of change just spills over into the bewilderment imposition of choice.

Ecologist and ethnobotanist Dr. P. Arumugam says, “Our indigenous flora facilitate healthier and wealthier ecosystems! When we replace (knowingly or unknowingly) the natural and indigenous flora of our region with exotic species, we facilitate a dangerous imbalance in our environment that struggles to accommodate alien plant species. If the tiny micro organisms in the soil (that help to recycle nutrients into simple molecules) stop ‘working’ for a few weeks, all life as we know it will disappear. Unfortunately, research in these areas is lacking. Soil research on impact of exotics is crucial. Awareness needs to be spread in local languages so the message is translated into effective action.”

Cities have a wide enough range of social complexities and challenges. Does allowing them to impose on urban nature come naturally to us, or are we allowing our inhibitions and conveniences to engineer a more unsafe future? Can we choose to impact the present in sustainable ways, even if we cannot make any sense at this point?

The patterns and impacts of change that snowball into every city’s environmental moments decide the composition of green cover and the urban commons. The importance of nature has changed in people’s perceptions. But is it that the average citizen just feels helpless to make a difference or that they do not care?

And so, the primary question remains: Can each of us do something to heal our cities? In spite of all the experts and research papers and theories, the sensitive greening of a city might just depend on a tsunami of diligent citizen action. From each beautiful, sensitive, green mind!

by Shobha Menon

The silk saga had its humble beginnings in 1923 and opened its door to the current store in the 1940s with the establishment of Nalli Silks, which went on to become an un rivaled hub for all things silk.

The iconic Art Deco architecture stands as a nostalgic portal to the past, inviting us to walk through its doorway, where the only noticable changes are in the form of electrical fittings and the subtle evolution of the shop’s motto over the years.

Nalli Silks claims that each silk saree is a distinct masterpiece, guaranteeing no two pieces are ever identical.

Their dedication to the trade is evident from the fact that during the Second World War Nalli Silks was the only shop open to sell silk sarees in Chennai. Everyone else either closed their shops or moved to other locations.

The magic is not only in silks but also in the experience of strolling down the corridors of this iconic art deco structure, crafted with expertise and style.

Nalli is synonymous with being the premier choice for silk sarees, a tradition passed down through generations. I am truly a avid fan of their magical craftsmanship with the Nalli sarees recently handed down to me by my grandmother. It definitely incites me to go buy a piece of my own soon.

Imagine sitting on wooden benches that have witnessed decades of stories, having coffee, and wondering if my ancestors once savoured a similar moment at Nalli Silks while enjoying a day of shopping.

In the digital age, Nalli Silks continues to captivate hearts, of patrons in search of timeless pieces. I am certainly looking forward to visit soon.

— Ar. Aastreen Fathima S.K.

A cat-and-mouse game of carpools

(Continued from page 2)
The Forgotten Corporation Stadium

It is still a looming presence behind Rajipon Buildings enroute Fort. But who was the Jowhar Ulhid Nizam Agra Corporation Stadium and what are the events that are held there? There is Nehru Indoor Stadium constructed in more recent times on the same premises which serve better, but the old and large, open-air venue is hardy ever used. And not as much history. It has in recent years moved to the city because it is one of five stadia in the city to be upgraded at an estimated expense of Rs 25 crores. Let us get to know of its past.

The brainchild of J.P. Lushon, ICS, who was the Commissioner of Madras Corporation in the years leading to Independence, the Corporation Stadium was built on land carved out of Central Station, Moore Market, Victoria Public Hall, Lovedale, Fort Market Buildings, Completed in 1936, it could accommodate 12,000 spectators on ‘earthen galleries supported by cementing walls, tank walls, etc. The central area in the Stadium consists of six cricket pitches with football and hockey fields on either side and a cricket track 12 feet wide, surrounded for holding of sports like running races, hurdle races, cycle races, field races, etc.

It was cricket that made the stadium the pride of Madras; the Madras Cricket Club (MCC) was the logical choice to manage it. Though it was a member of the Madras (later Tamil Nadu) Cricket Association (MCA), other constituents of that body, namely the cricket clubs in the city and state, had to apply to the MCA for permission to hold matches at Chepauk. And this was not easy or to get. Following Independence, the MCA renamed the MCCA’s stronghold on Chepauk and rightfully so. With the completion of the Corporation Stadium then was open on all sides and put up a match only after a considerable wash-out period. But shortly thereafter, the MCA decided to abandon Chepauk and move to the Corporation Stadium in 1953. The former, the MCCA would not return to Chepauk for eleven long years. The pavilion was erected. The noted journalist N.S. Ramaswami, while Chepauk has been synonymous with cricket in Madras. A notable galaxy of cricketers has trod the Chepauk field. It was here that the public prosecutor and advocate, the debonair Valentine, the scholarly Swatantra Verity, McCartney with his old confidence to show. Only one Test match, that against the disreputable Borington and Borus by the English in 1949, to devote her life to education. As a matter of fact, throughout her past students, colleagues, neighbours too.

B. Besant, an integral part of the cricketing society of Madras, had started a cricket academy in 1889. The premises were rented from the Madras Club in George Town. Besant used to stay in the club house and let the academy use the room. After Besant left, the academy continued to function in the premises for quite a while. In 1890, B. Besant sold the premises to the Madras Club. The club, however, did not accept the premises and then sold them to the Government. The Government then sold them to the Madras Cricket Club (MCC), which had a building on the site. The MCC then built the stadium, which was opened on 23 March 1927. The first Test match was played between England and the newly formed Australian team on 26 March 1927, with England winning by an innings and 4 runs. The stadium was named after Lord Kitchener, who had been Prime Minister of India from 1905 to 1908.

The stadium was first used for a cricket match in 1927, when England toured India. The stadium has since hosted numerous high-profile cricket matches, including Test matches and One-Day Internationals. It has also been used for football matches and more recently, Twenty20 cricket matches.

In 2015, the stadium hosted the semi-final of the ICC Cricket World Cup, with Australia defeating New Zealand by 6 wickets. The stadium has also hosted matches in the Indian Premier League (IPL), with several teams playing their home matches there.

In 2016, the stadium underwent a major renovation, with the construction of a new stand and improvements to the existing facilities. The stadium has a capacity of 35,000 spectators and has been used for international cricket matches and domestic cricket matches, including the Zimbabwean cricket team, which played its first Test match in Africa there in 2016.

As the stadium has aged, it is being considered for an upgrade. The upgrading process is expected to be completed by 2022, with the stadium being renovated to meet modern standards and provide a better experience for spectators.

The stadium is an integral part of the cultural and sporting heritage of Chennai and continues to be a key venue for cricket matches and other events.
Hayavadana – a story woven around mythical and mystic ideas

It was satisfying to see that after a long spell, due to various reasons including the pandemic, the theatre group of Queen Mary's College presented a play in English on Oct. 12, 13 and 14 at the college auditorium.

It was again heartening to note that the play chosen was Girish Karnad's Hayavadana; directed by Dr. Naga Radhika, who, as an Australia-India Council Fellow, having got the fellowship for her doctoral thesis on 'Aboriginal Women's Theatre', has studied theatre art, inspired by professor (late) Pitamber himself designed and made costumes and created the artwork, like those of the head of Hayavadana and the portrait of Goddess Kali. I found the students, especially those who played the roles of the three central characters, Devadatta, Kapila and Padmini, able to exhibit a wide range of emotions convincingly – from flirtatious desire to jealousy to the devastation on the loss of a loved one to quiet resignation.

Written by Girish Karnad, Hayavadana tells the story of two friends, Devadatta and Kapila who are in love. Devadatta, an intelligent person and the other, a muscular Kapila. Padmini is married to the intelligent man but has affection for Kapila, much to the dismay of her husband, and this eventually turns unbearable when the intelligent man beheads himself. Kapila blames himself for this tragedy and beheads himself as well. Padmini prays to Goddess Kali who asks Padmini to fix the heads back so that they can be made alive again. Padmini in her excitement mixes up the wrong heads. Significantly the play starts with the narrator, a Bhagavata, praying to God Lord Ganesa who himself has an elephant’s head! The actor who donned the role as the Bhagavatha, the narrator, did a perfect job of it. The play ends with Hayavadana becoming a whole horse instead of a whole human being.

It was a difficult task that the college had undertaken as the characters of the play are all half complete and seeking to be complete and perfect. The characters and their feelings are to be understood before taking the roles and this is where the departmental head and the director need to be congratulated, as, to the viewer it appeared that the actors merged with the characters and understood the psychology of wanting to be someone other than what one is.

Dr. Radhika in the centre.

Here and below, two scenes from the play.
IN LOVE WITH LOVEDALE – A LIFE DEDICATED TO CHILDREN

(Continued from page 5)

“From all our classmates, if there is one teacher that we have an absolute fondness for, it is Mrs. Enos.”

Priti Krishna, Class of 1987 remembers her well, “She not only taught my batch, she also taught my mother and both my brothers.” Priya Thyagarajan, Class of 1983, first met her in 1974 as an eight-year-old, and her English language diction made a huge impression on Priya’s professional life.

History in the Making

To go back in history, on being presented the King’s (UK) Colours and accorded royal patronage in 1922, the name of the school was changed in 1925 to the Lawrence Memorial Royal Military School. The school was then handed over to the civilian authorities of the Government of India in 1949.

A momentous event during Ma Enos’ time was 6 September 1949 – Founder’s Day; when the Union Jack and India’s tricolour flags were draped on the drums, and then only the Indian flag was raised, replacing the earlier British flag. The Governor of Madras and other dignitaries graced this grand occasion. Subsequently the name of the school was changed to The Lawrence School, as it is known today. The Founder’s Day was later moved to 14 May for administrative reasons.

Some unique aspects of this boarding school at the time were the beautifully maintained gardens by the students, which were given prizes once a year. Also, the boys practised at the rifle range – a sport that was removed from most boardings schools by the 1980s. The school’s hospital also operated an “outpatient” facility for the village folk and other residents of Lovedale in those days. These practices were discontinued later on.

Mr. K.I. Thomas joined as Principal/Headmaster in 1950 and made a huge difference to the school in many ways until 1971. Secularism was practiced and religious services were held every weekend for the Christians, Hindus, Muslims, and even the Parsis. Mrs. Thomas, the Headmaster’s wife, played an active role as well and initiated the Ladies’ Club. They met once a month, cooked for each other, and learned to sew, knit or play croquet. This helped build camaraderie among the women staff and alleviate monotony. But sadly, this club too died a natural death once Mrs. Thomas left.

Ma Enos fondly remembers the days when one could buy a vegetarian puff, a meat/egg/veg sandwich, some French fries, and a cup of tea for less than one rupee at the tuck shop in school! A gracious Anglo-Indian middle-aged lady, Mrs Barnett, ran the tuck shop and the local Boughton Bakery – a place for relaxation in her tea rooms. Sadly, no more though.

Mr. Thomas encouraged Ma Enos to attend a “Handwriting and Dramatics” workshop, so that she could coach the students for the many plays produced for the Founder’s Day celebrations. The children worked hard and prepared well, with several weeks devoted to preparing costumes and stage-sets. Prem Rao fondly remembers the play “Robinhood” while he was in prep school in the early 1960s!

Ma Enos remembers that children soon began traveling home by train along with “escorts” or staff deputed for this task. It was quite organized – a week earlier there was a Mock Train Parade at the Top Flats (sports ground in the school), where placards were held by the staff with the names of the destination stations. Children lined up in front of their station’s name and followed the escort to the train. The Headmaster “acted” as the Station Master, announcing the train’s arrival. On the actual departure day, food, extra money, and a First Aid kit were carried for the journeys and attendance taken. During the journeys, children sang songs, including the Lawrencian school song, and sometimes pinched wares from the station vendors along the way – this led to them being called “Lovedale monkeys”!

She misses the Lovedale old – with the beautiful gardens, wild raspberries and hill guavas, and of course the lake, which unfortunately is just a stream now, with the marshlands taking over. After retirement in 1981, she continued her contribution to the education sector and set up the Angelica coaching school in Lovedale, also a feeder school to Lawrence School, with her husband’s (Valentine) help. Mr Enos’ family were well-known musicians, while their children – Tina and Marcel, also studied in Lawrence School. Marcel went on to become a teacher and headed the St. Joseph’s College of Education in Mysore, while Tina went on to a career in advertising in Ogilvy and Mather.

In 2021, as per Prem Rao – an ex-student from the school, Ma Enos was “100 not out”. Many old students turned up in Lovedale in August 2021 to wish her personally, while birthday wishes poured in from different parts of the world. Says Dennis Johnson, Class of 2018 – I can’t even remember what I had for lunch yesterday, but she remembers what she had for tea in 1949!

Ma Enos remarks, “A dedicated teacher’s job is a thankless one, they say; but in reminiscence, I see that almost all the children who have passed through my hands, are doing well for themselves – That is thankfulness itself! I have given the cream of my life to Lawrence School, working hard with determination, taking the rough with the smooth in my stride, and trusting in my daily prayers to the Good Lord for strength.”

“One important aspect of her personality, that was instilled in both students and family, was being fiercely independent and keeping her mind occupied at all times (colouring, the daily crossword, Sudoku, or her favourite-Solitaire) in addition to her deep faith, has been key to her richly blessed life of almost 102 years,” says Tina, her daughter. – Courtesy: Anglos in the Wind.
TT in TN: A precarious state of affairs

Dronacharya Srinivasa Rao is a national level Table Tennis coach whose academy – set up decades ago at the Nehru Stadium complex in Chennai – has been producing State as well as National level talent in the sport. That India’s paddlers have been undergoing a transformation in skill is a fact, going by the performance of our top-ranked paddlers, at least at the Asian level. Time was when such probability was rather low, despite the fact that the sport has a rooted tradition in the country with the states of Maharashtra, Bengal, and Tamil Nadu at the forefront.

Burgeoning talent over the years has kept the sport thriving, such as Gautam Dewan, Jagannath (TN), V. Chandrasekar (TN); he would have risen to greater heights but for a medical mishap in the early ’80s), Olympian S. Raman (TN) and Kamlesh Mehta, once India’s highest ranked paddler on the world stage. A few of these players continued to work for the development of the sport after their heyday, setting up academies and producing fresh talent for India. This practice has played a major role in establishing knowledgeable coaches in the field.

Bengal and Tamil Nadu are currently leading the nation in ‘ping pong’ development, reckons Mr. Srinivasa Rao in an interview for Madras Musings. “What began decades ago as just a recreational activity and part of one’s physical fitness regimen [sic], has now blossomed into a sport of skill,” he explains.

Srinivasa Rao, also the father of India’s top paddler Sharath Kamal, is concerned about what he terms ‘slowing development’ in Tamil Nadu, especially at the district level. “The fact remains that even in India, TT has been a popular sport in our schools, colleges, and even offices with one or two tables serving the purpose. Professionally, it was not popular for many years. The lack of infrastructure and other facilities such as a sufficient number of tables, good lighting, and wooden or synthetic courts has been the basic problem for interested youth to progress from the skill of just keeping the ball in play, as it were. But with a gradual spurt in the development of the sport, even a few Asian nations like China, Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, spilled over to India and increased Indian players’ participation in international matches significantly. Tamil Nadu too has produced good Indian players from time to time.”

He continued, “The real revolution came when former national champion Chetan P. Baboor stayed in Sweden for more than 6 years and played leagues over there. This club culture has enhanced the general standard of our paddlers also. It was further fillip when Baboor defeated a then world champion Lee Guling of China at the Qatar Open Ranking tournament.”

This trend was kept alive by another national champion, Achanta Sharath Kamal, my son. He trained in Sweden for 2 years, Spain for 5 years and Germany for the past 8 years. He has become the first Indian ever to rise to world ranking 31. Now many Indian players are playing leagues across the world, and are exposed to taking on global talent. Our players have started winning against much higher world rankers; those like Satyam, Harneeth Desai, and Amalraj worked their way up to be among the top 100 players in the world. Many other talented Indian players are also in the world ranking list,” explained Rao, adding, “Another impetus to this development was India winning 2 bronze medals in the Asian at Indonesia a few years ago. This win has come 60 years after table tennis first came India.” This is happily the case with the country’s TT sports women as well. Led by Manika Batra, they have also attained good world rankings and have been rising to performing on the global stage.

The scenario has changed a lot. The Government of India as well as State Governments are encouraging the sport by providing good facilities and financial support. “In addition, the Government of India and the State Governments have also been encouraging players through cash incentives for winning medals in international events,” said Rao. But he is worried. Tamil Nadu is doing well within Indian TT, but fresh talent showing promise in the global arena has not been showing up. Matters are worse in the women’s section. “Only Shyamini has been in the spotlight in the sub junior, junior and now senior levels,” he pointed out. According to Mr Rao the next line up of prospective national talent for Tamil Nadu could be Priyesh, Abhinand and Bala Murugan, who have been playing well since the sub junior and junior level.

A compelling reason for the dull scenario in the women’s section is the affordability of the sport, due to rising cost of infrastructure such as tables, racquets and other necessary equipment. This is in spite of the availability of facilities such as sponsorship and State government support, at least in Chennai city. There is also the problem of parents not encouraging their daughters to pursue a full career as a player.

The situation is worse in the (TN) Districts, as Rao puts it. A strong reason is less support from the state government especially for increasing infrastructure equally in all districts, although TT is a popular sporting activity there. Besides, the number of competitive tournaments are greater in Chennai city vis a vis the Districts. “Presently, the sport is thriving only in a few Districts like Madurai, Erode, Coimbatore and Salem, thanks to the presence of more clubs and coaches” said a worried Rao. “Youngsters in the Districts who have the basic talent in TT don’t know what to do to further their skill.”