

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXIII No. 16

December 1-15, 2023

INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- The River We Lost
- S.S. Badrinath
- Rowing in Tamil Nadu

Does our city need flag posts at every street corner?

For all that the authorities keep chanting Singara Chennai, ground reality is far removed from the idea of the city beautiful. Which world-class metropolis has party flag posts erected at every street corner, sometimes even two or three sharing the same space? These not only impede pedestrian and vehicle movement but also become convenient urinals and rubbish tips. It is high time that the Corporation of Chennai passes a resolution to remove all these excrescences and then makes sure that the police do act. But then, with every political party zealously guarding its flag posts, this is unlikely to happen any time soon. In fact, the police have in a recent instance been subject to attack when they attempted removal of one such flag post.

The offending structure was no ordinary flagstaff. While the

norm is to have ten-foot poles this was a giant 55 feet and erected by the party faithful outside the residence of their leader. The police were ordered to remove it and here we need to note that the alacrity with which this was done was because the said leader is in

● by Sriram V.

the Opposition. Flag posts of the party in power, no matter which one is the incumbent, can never be touched. But be that as it may, when the police attempted to remove the pole, rioting ensued and the crane, hired to remove the flagpole, was damaged. So much for people entering politics to serve society.

In the ensuing case the High Court of Madras understandably came down heavily on

the offending party workers. It chastised them for having rioted and imposed fines on them. There were also some stern remarks from the bench that make for pertinent reading. The judge noted that a 55-foot pole served no purpose as far as visibility is concerned as the most that people can see particularly in a narrow street is a pole that is around 10 feet in height. He also said that a 55-foot pole would mean a five-foot foundation which would cut into drainage lines, electricity cables and other utilities. He also remarked half in jest that the police had done a favour to the political leader by removing the pole as its continued presence would have meant jamming of sewer lines and the backing up of wastewater into the leader's residence!

(Continued on page 2)

Rising trend in street dog menace signals need for urgent action

Last month, 28 residents in Royapuram were attacked by a rabid dog before it was beaten to death. The victims have reportedly been given medical care and administered the first dose of the human anti-rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin. The Corporation collected the addresses of all who were bitten by the animal and are now monitoring their health. They will continue to receive additional doses of the human anti-rabies vaccine to complete the course. As for the street dogs in the locality, the Corporation is observing them

for indications of infection. "After the dog tested positive for rabies, we did a combing operation of the area in ward 49, ward 50 and ward 52 and have

● by Varsha V.

captured 83 dogs and 52 of the dogs have been under observation," said an official to The Hindu. A similar incident surfaced earlier in August as well, with a gated community in Iyyapanthangal reporting that two residents were bitten by a rabid dog within its complex.

In both the incidents at Royapuram and Iyyapanthangal listed above, the people reportedly urged the Corporation to remove the stray dogs from their locality and relocate them. However, they were told that it was not possible and that the animals would be vaccinated and sterilised, instead. In other news reports, five cases of rabies are said to have been detected in Royapuram, Tiruvottiyur, Perungudi and Madhavaram. This rising trend in dog attacks and rabies reports has alarmed residents and

(Continued on page 2)

HERITAGE WATCH

Better days for the GPO



At long last the Department of Posts has decided to embark on restoring the iconic GPO located on First Line Beach/Rajaji Salai. The structure, recognised as being of Grade 1 importance by the High Court of Madras has been languishing for quite a while.



An older view of the GPO which appeared in MM, Vol. XX No. 12, October 1st, 2010.

(Continued on page 3)

Does our city need flag posts at every street corner?

(Continued from page 1)

All of this goes to show how much damage to quality of life can be done by something as minor as a party flag staff. It also shows how little our political workers think of impact before they embark on such ventures. In fact this episode has done nothing to alter the thought process of the party in question – a functionary has announced that he and his cadre would install a hundred flag posts in the next 100 days as a mark of protest! Hopefully, the stern remarks from the bench must have deterred the implementation of such a scheme.

The ruling party has remained silent on the matter chiefly because it cannot claim to be any better when it comes to such flag posts. The Greater Chennai Corporation which gives permission for the erection of poles has also kept quiet because its record is not edifying in this regard. It has proved toothless when it comes to monitoring these flag poles and it is very likely it has no record of which ones are put up after permission and which ones are not. And we keep talking of becoming another Singapore when even removing illegal flag staffs become major political issues.

STREET DOG MENACE

(Continued from page 1)

activists alike, exacerbating the friction between a panicked public and community feeders who take care of the street dogs in their locality. The fear is understandable – rabies is a disease with no specific treatment and is virtually hundred per cent fatal when clinical symptoms appear. The current system is meant to eliminate the risk through regular vaccination and Animal Birth Control (ABC) measures, but implementation, many say, has been poor. Data received by activist Antony Rubin through the RTI Act – and reported by *The News Minute* – reveals that Tamil Nadu reported 3.6 lakh dog bite cases last year, the second highest in India just behind Maharashtra; and there has been no budget allocation for the National Rabies Control Programme from the Union Ministry to several states for the last seven years, including TN. According to Rubin, the new ABC Rules 2023 have made it tough for animal welfare organisations to support measures such as sterilisation; the need of the hour, according to him, is for the State to come up with a policy of its own. There seems to be little room for argument with his opinion, given the worsening state of affairs.

The administration has a lot of work on its hands. To begin with, the GCC does not even have a credible record of the number of stray dogs in the city – while it suggests the number to be around 93,000 based on past data, the actual figure is expected to be much higher. According to media reports, GCC Commissioner J. Radhakrishnan has promised to complete the stray dog cen-

sus within a month or two. The Chennai Corporation is also rolling out measures for mass vaccination, covering roughly one lakh dogs. Seven teams have been put together for the process and volunteers have been invited to support the exercise. Each team will aim to cover 130 stray dogs on a daily basis. The anti-rabies vaccine has already been administered to hundreds of dogs at pet clinics in Thiru Vi Ka Nagar, Nungambakkam, Meenambakkam and Kannamapet.

Work is also reportedly going on to ameliorate the infrastructure necessary to carry out ABC procedures. According to an official comment to the media, the imminent modernisation of animal birth control centres in Pulianthope, Kannamapet, Lloyds Road is expected to boost the number of dogs that are sterilised from 16,000 to 26,000 per year.

It is important to note that the anti-rabies vaccine will make the dogs immune to rabies for at least one year - these vaccines do not last a lifetime. The ABC procedures must be carried out diligently on a regular basis to show results. It is not impossible, even though the scale of the problem is large; it does, however, require dedicated support in terms of resources and execution. Another component to ABC measures that the administration may consider is public awareness – aggression in stray dogs, rabid or otherwise, is made worse by hostile members of the public resorting to violent measures out of fear. Citizens need to learn to share and navigate public spaces with strays – after all, the dogs aren't going anywhere and neither are they.

What's in Chennai place names?

Plenty apparently – at least that is what *The Man from Madras Musings* has learnt in recent times. This arises from a series on the various postal identification number (PIN) codes of the city and the broad history behind each locality. The episodes are literally byte sized but the comments received make for interesting reading. It also reinforces MMM's firm belief that we Indians prefer our past to be mythological and not factual. It seems that living in la-la land is what everyone likes.

Given that there is no consensus as yet on how and why we got the names Madras and Chennai, it is only to be expected that even less will be known about the etymology of places within the city and its outskirts. Not so say those who have made it their full-time occupation to come up with tales on how

Rajakilpakkam gets its name from a Pallava king descending from the Madambakkam temple tower to address the masses says yet another message. And as for Anakaputhur, referred to in old texts as Anaikottuputtur the explanation is quite simple – the Pallavas or Cholas constructed a dam on the Adyar (then no doubt a torrential and perennial river rivalling the Ganga) and so it was Anai (Dam) Kattu (constructed) Puttur. Even poor Korattur has not been spared. Apparently it gets its name from the saint Gnanasambanda losing his slippers (koradu) somewhere and finding them at this place and so it became Korattur. And all over the city there are temples being discovered, with names conveniently twisted to explain the etymology of localities. It is no point arguing that these temples came up long

this a long while ago but is throwing it in here for good measure so that this column is educational apart from being time pass. But summonses are what came to mind when MMM's phone rang, and having rung, kept on ringing. Even after the call had died away, the same caller was back, again, and again. Clearly this was a government number for as MMM has so often written in this column, the authorities when they need to reach you are usually relentless. The reverse is true as well – you need to be relentless if you want to reach those in authority.

Having rather perversely allowed the caller to call a certain number of times, MMM decided to call back. And sure enough it was a panjandrum whom MMM knew in a previous incarnation – of the panjandrum

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

and why each area got its name. In this MMM initially tried pointing out that in the absence of inscriptional or documented evidence these stories are just that – stories, but he was met with such virulent opposition that he decided it was best to keep quiet and enjoy a good laugh at some of the so-called explanations given.

Did you know for instance that Sayyid Shah and Jaffer Khan were brothers and so when it came to division of land the elder got Saidapet and the other Jaffer Khan Pet? Before you take a deep breath at that one let MMM assure you that a counter to the origins of Saidapet has come hot off the griddle. What rubbish is all this saar attributing everything to Mohali history says another correspondent. (It took MMM quite a while to realise that Mohali stands for Mughal – the depraved chapter in our past that we are forever trying to erase even as we wear clothes from that era, eat food of that culture and use words in plenty from the language of the time). Saidapet takes its name from Sadayu Varma Pallavan says this person.

There is more to come.

after those places were mentioned in inscriptions for as you know all shrines in and around the city are 2000 years old anyway.

Having received all these pseudo histories MMM made bold to ask every one of the memory keepers as to what the source for their information is. The invariable answer was that they have heard elders in the family say so and when asked to be more specific it is always a grandfather. No doubt, the old man spent his time after retirement in poring over the city map and entertaining himself by spinning yarns on how they came about. MMM too is now rapidly approaching that age though of grandchild there seems no immediate prospect. He has decided to embark on a journey of making up histories, all of which he plans to write down. That way nobody can say there is no factual basis. And MMM's grandchildren, as and when they appear, can make hay.

Summoning MMM

Did you know that the plural of summons is summonses? *The Man from Madras Musings* knew of

that is. The person had since been transferred to yet another department and was now working under So-and-So IAS he said. The utterance of that name was done with a wealth of emotion and many subtle layerings – there was deep reverence, extreme pride at being so close to such an Exalted Highness, patronage that he, the panjandrum was calling MMM on behalf of such a personage, urgency in that he had matters of pith and moment to attend to and so could MMM please be quick etc. It reminded MMM of Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* whenever he spoke of his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

There was a conference the next day said the caller and it was the command of his boss, the above named So-and-So IAS, that MMM come over and address the gathering. "Just come for an hour saar," said the caller. "We want you to entertain us." MMM took a deep breath.

"No," he said.

There was a shocked silence at the other end. The caller could not believe his

(Continued on page 3)

OUR READERS WRITE



Keep at it, MMM

This is with reference to your article in *Madras Musings*, November 16th titled *On bed*. As a septuagenarian I would like to put in a few words.

Many of us above 60 go through Youtube videos only at night and mostly when in bed. So it is only natural to doze off after a while.

This is a natural process. If you notice the hundreds of Youtube videos trying to induce sleep they rely on sound therapy like chanting, sound of waves, rain falling on lakes and so on.

I listen to *upanyasams* on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* by eminent scholars. I used to fall asleep midway and I felt guilty about it. I cleared my doubts with a well known upanyasakar Sri Dushyanth Sridar.

He reassured me saying at least the first half would have been assimilated by my brain and the latter half would envelope the room with good vibrations.

To reassure me, he further stated that even during his discourses he can see people nodding off towards the latter half.

So please do not make any change in your present format. Making it Short and Snappy would lessen the content. We regulars now feel we are gaining some knowledge from your well researched and interesting videos. Since falling asleep is beyond our control we promise to see the latter half the next day or night.

Prema Raman
88 Harrington Road
Chetput, Chennai 600 031

Railway Museum – the reality

This is with reference to your article in *Madras Musings*, October 16th titled *The Chennai Rail Museum at ICF*.

I need to let the public know that the high expectations with which we take our children and grand children are not met in the way the museum is maintained currently.

I was there with my grand children a few weeks back.

I am aghast at the maintenance of the engines and the coaches. If you are not careful, the kids can fall down through the floors of engines and the steel sheets which are jutting out can harm our children.

The working model complex is not working. The engine

model does not exist and it has been taken for repair I was told. In fact this is one of the most exciting features for the children and that it is not in operation is a sad state of affairs and this is not told to the public as we enter the museum.

The toy train which is another highlight is operated only once instead of the two trips earlier. The parks are well maintained and the children enjoy.

The steps and the floors of the engine models need to be set right, so that children do not fall down through the holes.

During my visit I was concerned about the safety of our children, who visit the Museum.

I would want a response from the management on the issues raised, and I would be glad to talk to Hansel to explain these issues. It is clear that there is a lack of checking on the part of ICF.

Suresh Kumar
giftsuresh53@gmail.com

The Corporation Stadium

This is just to write in appreciation of your column on “the forgotten corporation stadium” in the latest issue of *Musings*. It may be forgotten for others but certainly not for me and it brought back a lot of memories. For one thing the first test match I saw was at the venue in January 1961.

Thereafter I saw every Test till 1965 after which the venue for Tests was shifted to Chepauk. Then from 1968 for over a quarter of a century, I covered a lot of football for the newspapers I worked with, besides the Rene Frank International Hockey Tournament, the brainchild of MAM Ramaswami in Dec 75 – Jan 76, the Nehru Gold Cup football tournament in January 1993 after the old stadium gave way to the new and the opening ceremony of the SAF Games in December 1995.

I notice you have also been kind enough to quote me on Nadkarni's feat at the venue. The one little error that has crept in is that it wasn't the 1961-62 Test (which India won to notch up her first series win over England) but the Test against the same opponents two years later when Nadkarni sent down 21 successive maidens (not just maidens) on his way to mesmerizing figures of 32-27-5-0. That was the match

in which Barrington and Bolus bored the spectators to death. Just for the record.

Partab Ramchand
partabramchand@yahoo.com

Website comments

Heritage Watch: Chepauk in Pictures

(Vol. XXXIII No. 14, November 1-15, 2023)

Madras Musings article on “Chepauk in Pictures” under Heritage Watch, brings me nostalgic memories of those youthful days of mine watching cricket matches as a 15 year old. There were no ‘pole and rope’ stands at that time. We used to stand the whole day and watched matches. The Indian Cricket Team did not enjoy recognition as a test playing team thus compelling the authorities to invite overseas teams like, Goddard's Eleven from U.K., West Indies Team etc. One of the matches which took place at the M.C.C. grounds witnessed by me then was between India and West Indies. The Windies team had the famous 3 Ws, Weekes, Worrel and Walcott, the Indian team, captained by Vijay Hazare had, P. Umrigar, G.S. Ramchand to name a few. There was no dearth of excitement despite the physical strain of watching a match standing all day long. To bring back my memories, I would like to mention an incident where the game was played with the utmost sportsman spirit. An aerial shot by Polly Umrigar was caught by Frank Worrel on the boundary line when the batsman was on 99. The umpire's finger went up signaling his dismissal. But Worrel ran to the umpire and told him that he took the catch with his feet just outside the boundary line, thus enabling the batsman to complete his century.

Raj Krishnan
rajkrish@gmail.com

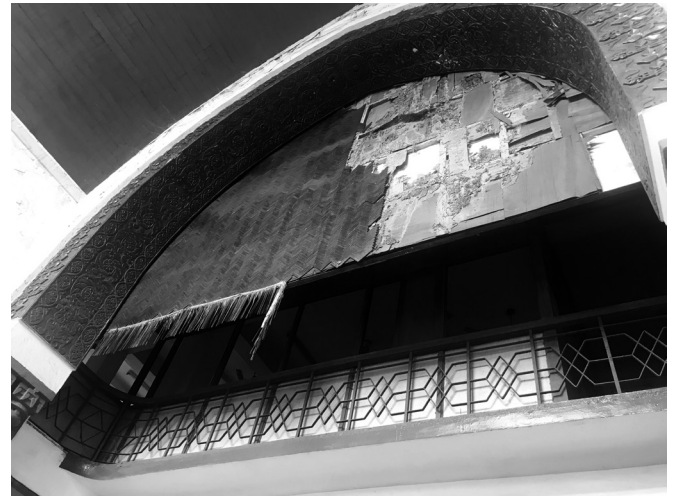
City needs more reservoirs, macro and micro

(Vol. XXXIII No. 14, November 1-15, 2023)

It is frightening to envisage the water wars. It comes to mind everytime I flush copious amounts of water in the closet or western toilet, which seem to have become the standard in India, too.

TK Srinivas Chari
srinivaschar@gmail.com

HERITAGE WATCH



(Continued from page 1)

Designed by Robert Fellowes Chisholm and completed in 1884, it was meant to be the head post and telegraph office, with three floors. The top storey was the residence of the Postmaster General of Madras for long. The red brick structure suffered steady degradation over the years. The iconic Travancore caps it had on its towers went following a cyclone sometime in the 1980s. The building suffered a fire in 2000 and there followed a sham of a restoration that did more damage than good. There was a second roof collapse in 2011.

What saved the building was its being in continuous use. And now the postal authorities have signed an MOU with INTACH Chennai to take up the restoration. This is a very welcome move and the choice of INTACH is an inspired one. We can rest assured that the restoration will be a meaningful exercise bringing lost glory to the building. Our pictures, both of recent vintage show the central block of the GPO and the horrible so-called patchwork that the authorities have done thus far on it. May INTACH lead them to better times.

What's in Chennai place names?

(Continued from page 2)

ears. This puny MMM was defying the mighty So-and-So IAS? There were splutters and gurgles like a car with starting trouble.

“But Saar,” came the cry and MMM could see that a capital letter had been used in place of the small ‘s’ in saar by way of cajoling. “How can this be?”

MMM had to make his meaning plainer – he said he was travelling the next day which he in reality was.

“Can you not cancel it for our So-and-So IAS?” came the plaintive response. MMM had to disabuse the caller of such a notion. Clearly it was news to the man that there are other things in life more important than a summonses from a high up in the world of authority. MMM and panjandrum parted with expressions of regret and MMM rather suspects that he will very likely be written off with disappointment in the despatches.

Tailpiece

That our State is quite prosperous is often brought home to us by our Government. But in the view of *The Man from Madras Musings*, it is brought home even more powerfully by the recent gilding of many of our statues. Swami Vivekananda was the first to turn gold and he was closely followed by Annie Besant and Kannagi. Now the pandemic is spreading and MMM has to say he does not like what he sees. But then, who is MMM in the greater scheme of things?

– MMM

The river we lost

How many rivers does Chennai have? Most people will say just one – the Cooum and sneer even while they say it, as though it is all the river's fault that it is what it is today. To this lot, all of Chennai's rivers and canals go by the name of Cooum. The more knowledgeable ones will say two – the Adyar being the second. A smaller group will include the Kosasthalaiyar which flows to the extreme north and supplies us with water. Besides these there is of course the Buckingham Canal, and along with it a staggering forty-four drain channels that protect the city from flooding during rains. Absent among these is the river we seem to have lost completely – the Elambore.

And yet it was one of the principal reasons for Francis Day zeroing in on Madraspatnam for building Fort St George. In his *Vestiges of Old Madras*, H.D. Love states that an understanding of the position of the Fort is important and begins with the two rivers in its vicinity. "Two streams flowing from the west and north respectively had a common outlet to the sea about a mile south of the village of Madraspatnam," he writes. The first was the Triplicane River, now known as the Cooum which wound (and still does so) around "the villages of Chetput, Nungumbaukum, and Triplicane." Love then goes on to describe the second river – "called the North or Elambore River, (it) flowed parallel to and about a mile distant from the coast, along the west side of Madraspatnam, till it reached the site of the present General Hospital. It then bent sharply to the east, and when near the sea, turned southwards again for about three-quarters of a mile and met the Triplicane River at its outlet." In today's parlance therefore, the river must have come from north to south near where the Central Station is and then turned east, flowed parallel to but south of what is Poonamallee High Road, turned south in parallel to what is now Flag Staff Road and met the Cooum at its mouth.

Love notes that neither the Elambore nor the Cooum could reach the sea except during the rainy season and this is true of the latter even today. "The site chosen for the fort was a point on the surf-bank of sand which lay between the Elambore River and the sea, three quarters of a mile north of the outlet, and just south of the town or village of

Madraspatnam," he writes. The river therefore was an important consideration in the overall scheme. Because it, and the Cooum, could not reach the sea, there was a large backwater and a marsh just south of where the fort would come up. Thus the proposed site had the sea on the east, the Cooum and the marsh on the south, and the Elambore on the west. It can only be presumed that the densely packed villages of Muthialpet and Peddanaickenpet provided the necessary security in the north.

Sometime early in the 17th century, notes Love, a cut was made to link the Elambore and the Cooum at point where the latter turned east and ran parallel to the former, with just about 300 yards (0.27 km) separating the two. He surmises that this was done to equalise the flood levels. That meant the two rivers were now linked at two places – one near where the GH is, and the other at the mouth. This caused the marsh earlier referred

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

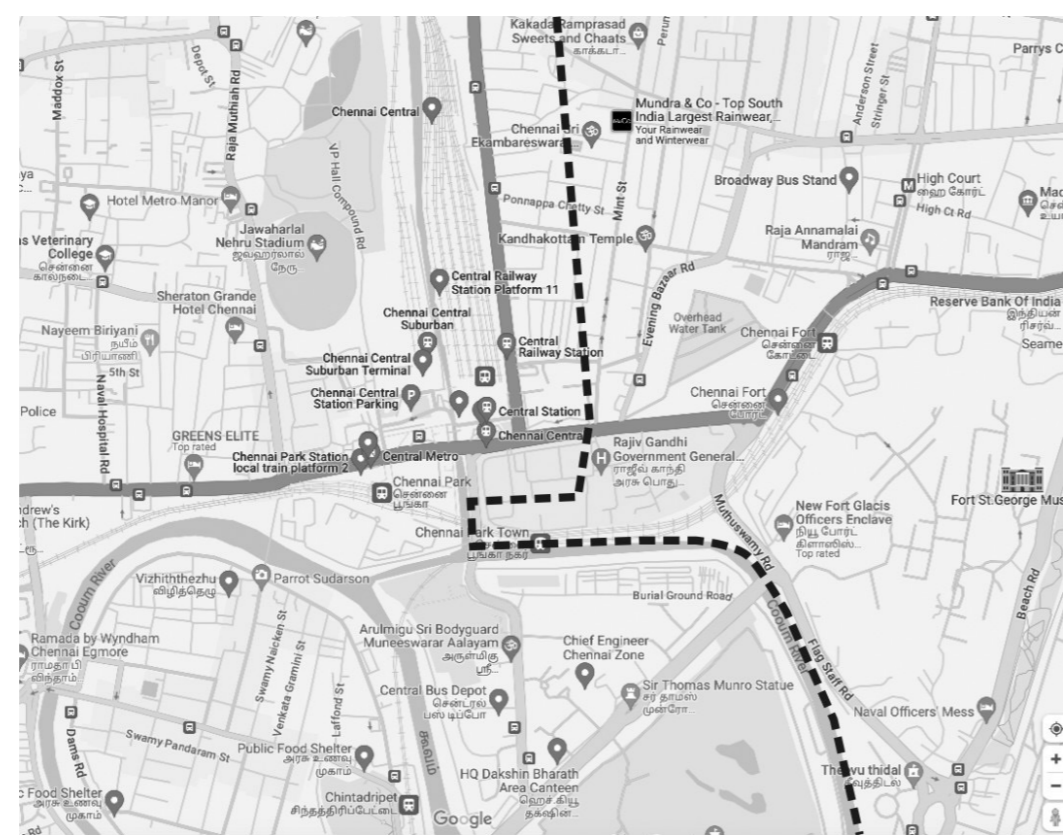
— SRIRAM V

to be surrounded by water on all sides and as early as 1643 it is referred to as the Island, a name that it still enjoys – the Island Grounds are known as Theevu Thidal even now.

In 1675 we read of fresh developments. The Council decided that it would not permit any buildings or gardens on the land between the Great Ditch separating Gentu Town and Pottery's Town and the "River to the Northward." This was marked thereafter for the Washers to "wash, dry or whiten their calicoes," a commodity vital to the company's trade. Love identifies Gentu Town as Madraspatnam and therefore Old Black Town (on the site of which stands the High Court today), while Pottery's Town he says was Comer or Peddanaickenpet. Comer was evidently a corruption of the Hindi kumar or potter. The Great Ditch was therefore what is now NSC Bose Road and in the 17th century it had a canal that "irrigated fields to the northward." This must have clearly been a branch off the Elambore. The space so cleared for the washers in today's parlance marked Mint Street and beyond it, what is

outside today Washermanpet. Elambore River was left undisturbed over much of its course thereafter but the part close to Fort St George would see many changes. The first was in the 1680s when Elihu Yale suggested the river's course be diverted further west, with the land thus acquired being used to extend the fort westwards. This was not done immediately but took place in the 1750s when following the French occupation and subsequent rendition of Madras, the river was diverted. What is interesting is that in the 1740s the fort extended beyond the river, with the waterbody actually flowing within the fort along Charles Street. Even in the 1750s we see a small arm extending into the fort and this seems to have been built over later.

Outside of the fort what was called the Island Bridge was constructed to enable its residents to cross over the Elambore and into the Island. This would later become the Willingdon and still later the Periyar Bridge. In 1721 there were torrential rains and we read of how the water in the Elambore flowed two feet over the bridge causing



The dotted line indicates the rough route of the Elambore River.

extensive damage to it. It was clearly a thriving water body in the season. But the diversion of its course caused some lasting damage for by 1762 it is being referred to as a rivulet, indicating that it was rapidly drying up. But it was still important enough in the 1780s for work to be undertaken to straighten a bend in it close to the Ekambareswara Swami Temple on Mint Street.

Early in the 1800s, Basil Cochrane proposed cutting a canal connecting Pulicat to the northern edge of the city. This was to facilitate the easy movement of timber and other goods to the metropolis. The canal absorbed the Elambore into itself right up to Basin Bridge. The rest of the story is well known – when the Buckingham Canal came to be dug as a famine measure in the 1870s, it linked Cochrane's Canal across the city to South Canal which began near the Adyar and ended at Cuddalore. Thus the Elambore completely lost its identity. The Buckingham Canal, from Pulicat to the Island flows along what was once the Elambore River.

There are plenty of questions that remain unanswered. The

first concerns the names – Elambore and North River. If by Elambore it is Egmore that is meant, that locality is nowhere close to the river. On the other hand, it is the Cooum that flows by Egmore. Of course over the centuries the Elambore may have shifted its course, a feature that is common to all rivers in this area, including the Palar. The fact that the Cooum is referred to as Vriddha Ksheera Nadi (Old Milk River) in native records seems to indicate that the Palar (Milk River) once flowed along this course. And so the Elambore too may have moved. The name North is even more intriguing and as Mr. Muthiah often remarked, "North of what?" – the only explanation can be that the river flowed north to south which may have been an unusual feature in an area where all others moved west to east.

Lastly, no account gives us any idea as to where the Elambore originated. What was its source of water? We have answers for the Cooum and the Adyar but for the Elambore we have no clue. Sometime in its history it was also known as the Palliacate River and that seems to indicate it originated from the Pulicat lagoon. This is also corroborated by its eventual merging with Cochrane's and later Buckingham Canal. But taken overall, the river is still a mystery.

The Joint Sector Days: When a German Giant bit the dust

Tamil Nadu Petroproducts Limited (TPL) is one of those pre-liberalisation projects which came up in Chennai during the height of import substitution times. It was promoted by the fertiliser giant SPIC as a joint venture with Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation to manufacture Linear Alkyl Benzene (LAB), the raw material to manufacture detergents in 1991. As the detergent market was huge and growing, this was considered a sure winner.

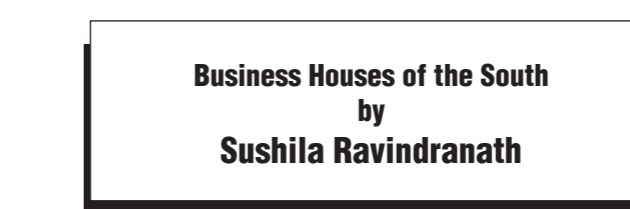
The company did extremely well in its earlier years. It started paying dividends from the very first year and was considered a blue-chip company. Flush with funds, the firm started looking at diversification. Unfortunately, it got caught up in all kinds of controversies. The parent company SPIC was falling out with its partner, the Tamil Nadu government. The company's managing director jumped ship to join its rival, Reliance. (To call Reliance a rival is perhaps laughable as

Reliance's scale of operations was huge; however, TPL did well as there was demand.) The firm also started coming under a great deal of scrutiny – SPIC and TPL were projects from the MGR, Jayalalithaa period and received much government support; but that changed once arch-rival Karunanidhi came back to power.

The controversies began with the appointment of chairmen for the joint sector companies. The new government did not want A.C. Muthiah, who was the chairman of these companies, to continue. He was replaced with a TIDCO-appointed chairman. In spite of all the changes in the top management, the LAB plant continued to do well. However, TPL had to think of new projects to avoid the steep taxation of the times. It tied up with Henkel of Germany for a joint venture to manufacture high-performance, environmentally safe, Zeolite-based detergents. Henkel had globally well-known

brands, which sold very well in the countries it operated in. The investment was around Rs. 60 crores.

By all accounts, it would have been a good project as it also aimed at generating captive consumption of LAB. As it happened, TPL plunged into this project without having any experience in consumer marketing where MNCs like HLL, P&G, and other major competitors had well-established brands of deter-



gents. The reason for taking this step was not illogical. Henkel had globally well-known brands, which did very well in the countries it operated in. However, in India the story was different. To

start with, the plant was set up in Karaikal. It was not a great location for its products to be distributed all over the country. Henkel in Europe was used to outsourcing its manufacturing. It is difficult to understand why it did not follow this method in India. It is said that Henkel wanted to be sure of quality and so it wanted a single plant. To distribute products all over India from Karaikal was not only expensive but was also a logis-

tical nightmare. It ate into the margins. The promoters did not realise that marketing expenses were going to be huge. There were many other blunders as well. The Indian managers had to get approval for everything from Germany. This was time-consuming and quick decisions when required could not be taken. SPIC had no experience in consumer marketing and the German collaborator had no clue about marketing and distribution in India. Henkel wanted to control advertising as well which resulted in some disastrous decisions. A friend in the advertising industry recalls, "They were choosing tanned models not understanding that Indians like fair skin." The story ended with Jyothy Laboratories of Gujarat acquiring Henkel India in 2011 for a measly Rs 685 crore. It took over more than three brands – Henko (detergent), Pril (utensil cleaner) and Margo (soap). Jyothy also absorbed Henkel's accumulated losses of Rs. 600 crore.

Tamil Nadu no longer has a major detergent manufacturer.

The S.R. Ranganathan I knew

It is my good fortune that I could meet Dr. Rao Sahib Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan, the doyen of library science, on many occasions in the late 1960s in Bangalore where I was working with the Railway Mail Service a wing of the postal department. He was undoubtedly the greatest scientist in his field that 20th century India had produced. His steadfast dedication to the subject he had chosen brought to him and his country everlasting glory.

What triggered my urge to get to know him intimately was a small piece of writing that appeared in *Kalki*, a well-known Tamil weekly, around 1965 about Dr. S.R. Ranganathan's unique contribution to library science. It also touched on his personal profile. He had the status of National Research Professor of Library Science at that time. He had established Documentation Research and Training Centre in Bangalore. He was chairing a number of weekly colloquia or large academic seminars in DRTC. My residence was just a kilometer away from DRTC. Hence it was an easy ten-minute walk for me to attend the sessions.

On a Wednesday evening I walked into DRTC. I found a frail charming angelic figure

sitting on a chair. He was none other than Dr. S.R.R. He was wearing a long coat and dhoti. The traditional turban was however absent. There were about twenty librarians drawn from various parts of the city assembled there. While they were actively discussing a topic, I remained silent, as the nuances of the subject were not familiar to me. Dr. S.R.R.'s voice was mellifluous and his language was free from jargon. While leaving the hall I smiled at him and he reciprocated. I attended six or seven such seminars in DRTC.

Sometime in 1971 I went to Dr. S.R.R.'s house with my friend S. Balasundaram, accountant in Head Record Office of the Railway Mail Service. A warm welcome was accorded to us by Dr. S.R.R. After exchanging a few pleasantries we invited him to address our friends in Central Civil Services in Bangalore on the importance of library in society (as we had already heard giants from Karnataka on different subjects of social relevance). He expressed his inability to do so owing to his failing health. However, he added that he would like to meet our friends and be with them for some time after becoming well again. His wife Sarada was beside him and nodded her head in agreement.



Alas, ill luck prevented us from hearing him forever. He breathed his last in 1972.

As one being on the wrong side of eightysix, I recollect from the dim recess of my mind some of his achievements which are at once marvelous and striking. The young Ranganathan attended S.M. Hindu High School at Shiyali (now Sirkali) and passed matriculation in March 1909 in first class despite a serious illness. He joined Madras Christian College where he did his Bachelor's degree in first class in 1913 and then Master's in 1918. It was followed by an LT (Licentiate in Teaching). He worked as Assistant Lecturer in government colleges at Mangalore and Coimbatore before joining the Presidency College, Madras. Soon he became the favourite of students. During this period,

he brought among other things standardisation in test construction.

Ranganathan was appointed librarian of the University of Madras in 1924. The library was functioning in the Museum. Initially he felt it was 'solitary imprisonment' for him, but soon he recovered from the disappointment and tried to make it a heaven. The library was moved to the Senate House building directly facing the sea. This provided a welcome change in him and enlarged his vision of bringing books closer to the general public.

Ranganathan left for the United Kingdom on a study-cum-observation tour in September 1924. He stayed in London for about ten months. He visited almost all the libraries in the city. They made a great impact on him. He was happy to find the role libraries played in the life of people. His immense love for books created a 'social mission' in him and helped him shape the library movement in the Madras Presidency which encompassed a large part of southern India.

The Madras Library Association founded by Ranganathan became a symbol of the library

movement to reach every nook and cranny of the Presidency. Through charts, diagrams and pictures he made efforts to educate the masses in rural India on the importance of reading habit so as to bring about social transformation. The famous 'Mangudi Experiment' (1931) of a travelling library in a bullock cart served the villages around the town for the first time in composite India. It sent waves among the people of our country.

Dr. S.R. Ranganathan is known for his 'five laws' (1931) relating to the library and 'Colon classification' for informational retrieval. These works are par excellence. The Library movement the world over saw twelve 'wise men'. They belonged to four different nationalities. Dr. S.R.R. is the only one Indian among them. His output is tremendous. It includes sixty books and 2,000 articles. A votary of scientific methodology, this mathematician-turned librarian will be remembered forever.

R. Soundararajan
Nagapattinam

N.B : This reminiscent article was written at the request of A. Kovendan, a dedicated librarian in Chennai and ardent admirer of Dr. S.R.R. It is relevant to the Library Week celebrated from November 14-20, 2023.

S.S. Badrinath, a pioneering eye-surgeon of Chennai

On 21 November 2023 Madras lost one of its illustrious and remarkable sons: Dr Sengamedu Srinivas Badrinath (SSB). SSB was born on February 24, 1940 in Triplicane, Madras, to S.V. Srinivasa Rao and Lakshmi Devi. He did his schooling in Pennathur Subramaniam (PS) High School, Mylapore and Sri Ramakrishna Mission High School, T.Nagar. He completed his Intermediate at the Loyola College, and joined the Madras Medical College to complete his M.B.B.S. He pursued his post-graduate study specializing in Ophthalmology at Grassland Hospital, New York University's Post-graduate Medical school and Brooklyn Eye and Ear Infirmary between 1963 and 1968. He was admitted into the Fellowship of Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Boston, after training with Dr. Charles L. Schepens between 1968 and 1970. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (Canada) and a Fellow of the American Board of Medical Specialties in 1969 and 1970, respectively.

In 1978, SSB established the Medical Research Foundation (MRF) in College Road, Chennai, which was blessed by Sri Sri Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. He was the President of Medical Research Foundation, a registered society, a charitable non-profit ophthalmic organization of which Sankara Nethralaya was the hospital wing. Towards the end of his life he served the MRF as the Chairman Emeritus.

SSB was introduced to me by my father D.V. Rama Krishna Rao (The British Council

Library, Madras), when I was 10 years old and in my sixth standard. SSB, a highly skilful vitreo-retinal surgeon treated my grandfather for retinal complications. I vividly remember the day when I asked SSB whether I could volunteer at Sankara Nethralaya during my summer vacation break in 1982. He agreed with an emphatic 'yes', saying, 'you can start from tomorrow'. I began the next day at Sankara Nethralaya as a volunteer either at the reception desk, or helping new patients, or in the pharmacy inventory, or working with the busy secretaries, or undertaking any other errand the Sankara Nethralaya staff assigned me. I fondly remember the inauguration of the Dharmasala building by the then President of India R. Venkataraman, the construction of the Mahyco Block, the founding of the Elite School of Optometry, the Chennai Willingdon Hospital expansion, the birth of Sankara Nethralaya Kolkata, and the subsequent landmark events that helped Sankara Nethralaya expand its footprint in Chennai city and elsewhere over the last four decades of its committed service to India and the world. My relationship with SSB and Sankara Nethralaya warmly and pleasantly continued over the decades and my specific interactions to support the needs of the growing institution morphed into my close association with the Sankara Nethralaya Ophthalmic Mission Trust, USA, which collected funds to assist deserving patients with free-ophthalmic procedures.

What amazed me was SSB's passion in conceptualising



Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

ideas, breathing life into them, and giving them firm shapes. He marshalled support and cooperation from local teams to help execute programmes meticulously. Sheer diligence in raising awareness of the growing needs of the institution and the various facets of the organisation that demanded additional

meeting the needs of rural patients with the surgeons stationed at the base facility in Chennai.

The above are just a few illustrations of the grit and will power of SSB, who sparked with innovation, commitment to quality of work, and sheer

back to the country as a continuously learning and growing institution are the hallmarks of every brick SSB used to build this institution.

Many recognitions were bestowed on this great son of India. To name of few, the Government of India awarded 'Padma Sri' in 1983, 'Padma Bhushan' in 1999, the Medical Council of India recognized him with the Bidhan Chandra Roy National Award in 1991, The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India (ICFAI) recognised him with the 'Life-Time Achievement Award' in 2005, He was a consulting ophthalmologist to the Armed Forces of India and an ex-officio member of the Armed Forces Medical Research Committee. SSB published articles in several leading medical and ophthalmological journals of India and the world.

While we sadly and deeply mourn the passing of SSB, we need to take a moment to honour his incomparable legacy of humility, strong sense of ethics and integrity, service to humanity, passion committed as a karma yogi, noble values in serving the patients, clinical training excellence, nation-centric R&D efforts in eye care, expansion deep into the community care setting and pushing the envelope of science in a passionate and cost-conscious way. SSB is survived by his wife S. B. Vasanthi, also a medical doctor, and sons Seshu Badrinath and Ananth S. Badrinath.

● by Suresh Dalapathy
dalapathy@hotmail.com

financial resources from home and abroad were noteworthy traits of his vision and leadership. SSB enthusiastically and strongly believed that any micro contribution in terms of sweat equity to raise awareness can and will support Sankara Nethralaya and its army of surgeons dedicated to eye care.

SSB would often say that he was just an instrument in that action, when many would support and participate in his cause. That sense of being an instrument gave him immense satisfaction, as these programmes and projects fructified, touched every deserving person, be they within the city of Chennai or in the villages of India. For all of them, surgeons at Sankara Nethralaya travelled in their Mobile Eye Surgical Units (MESU), conducting large-scale eye-screening camps, offering free eyeglasses in their own fit-for-purpose eyeglass dispensing trucks, or even performing cataract eye surgeries. He translated the then fledgling concepts of Tele-Ophthalmology and Tele-Medicine into reality by

tenacity of execution combined with an extreme sense of quality and cost consciousness in a resource-limited setting.

Thus with a deeply engrained personal discipline and



The Maneckjis' bungalow in College Road where Nethralaya commenced operations. Picture from our archives.

high-value principles, SSB lived until his end contributing to national efforts in delivering eye care in India with a 20-20 focus of transforming Sankara Nethralaya into a band of skilled and committed professionals and research capabilities working on disease trends, emerging needs, and healthcare delivery models focused on the overall well-being of every Indian. The deep sense of belief and the vision of the capabilities of what Sankara Nethralaya can give



Dr. Badrinath with one of his patients. Picture from our archives.

Train travails of Senior Citizens

As a child, I loved traveling by train. Which child does not? Window seat? Of course. We were delighted by the ribbons of sunlight that streamed through, and charmed by the vista of a blue sky with fleecy, white clouds that seemed to follow us as we chugged along. We saw emerald green paddy fields with dhoti-clad, turbaned workers tending to them; took in the whiff of cattle that wafted in; marvelled at the sight of water bodies sparkling in the sun; and wondered at houses seemingly scattered at random across the landscape, some painted in gaudy blue, some in green and yet others in orange in what seemed to be a rather spirited competition of colours. All of this coupled with the lush greenery satiated my thirst for the unusual, city-bred girl that I was.

Train travel was the top choice, then. The Madras Mail

— always in demand — was a challenge though; I was terrified of heights, and clambering on top was a definite no-no for me. I cannot forget the four berth first-class compartments! We even had a bathroom all to ourselves. We let down our hair and fully enjoyed the privacy. Our doggies travelled along with us and we played cards, and chatted away to our heart's content, all the while stuffing ourselves with the food that our mother packed for the whole family.

We took to travelling by the then new Brindavan Express to Bangalore, our sister city. The train left early in the morning and reached the destination by lunchtime. It was a pleasure to get out at Bangalore Cantonment Station — which was hardly crowded — and run into

the waiting arms of those who came to receive us. In the wake of the Brindavan Express came several other trains, including a double-decker.

Soon, the choice of trains expanded. The Shatabdi Express — which we loved travelling in — got one a comfortable, well-padded reclining seat, a hot breakfast, and the morning newspaper to boot. We learned to wait near the door as our station was approaching and mastered the art of throwing the luggage on the platform as the train screeched to a halt. We had to literally jump down to alight as the train stopped for only 5 minutes at the Cantonment Station. Oh, the impetuosity of youth!

go exploring. When the time to exit finally does come, I am almost always determined to alight gracefully until I see the challenge that awaits me. Shelf-life structures stand parallel to each other, looking nothing like steps; to get down onto the platform, one needs to shove their heels into a shelf-life space and hope to heaven that some kindly soul will offer their hand or at least soften a fall if it comes. One young thing — a bit obese, to put it kindly — told me that she jumped down and ended up breaking a leg despite being well-padded. The Indian brain is to be marveled at. In our very own backyard, the smart brains at IIT design amazingly innovative tools. Recently, the news-

nothing to hold on to while the towels are a mile away on a rack out of reach. What happens to people who cannot stand for long and who are wobbly on their feet? Seniors and the disabled have as much a right to enjoy life as the younger people. Traveling is daunting as you will never know what discomforts you will encounter. Staying in posh hotels or clubs is not the answer if they cannot provide the basic comforts to senior citizens. Hotels should have senior-friendly rooms for the enterprising older people who enjoy travelling. It would be wise to ensure that all comforts are provided rather than be caught by surprise when it is too late to withdraw.

We proudly claim yesterday's 80s to be today's 60s. That is true of the mind, but alas! The mind does not keep in step with the deteriorating physical body. Today's elders do not wish to be confined at home watching the idiot box and reading the newspaper. They want to be alive, conscious of what is happening around them, and engage in cultural connects, be it a play, a movie, or a classical performance during the kutch-eri season. Rightly so.

I have been impressed by Western concepts each time we travelled overseas. I have watched wheelchair-bound elders move on their own using motorized wheelchairs; always, a ramp is lowered to enable them to alight from the train or bus. A conductor also helps them dock in spaces specially provided for them.

By way of information, the population of those above 60 has been increasing steadily in India since 1961 and the number touched 13.8 crore in 2021. A study by the National Statistical Office (NSO) declares that it is due to the decrease in death rate. Even commercially speaking, the market for senior facilities is expanding as the need grows. The children, especially NRIs, want to see their parents comfortably settled and living their lives to the fullest, even if they are not with them. Call it a guilt trip but they are ready to spend, at least some of them. Senior-friendly design should be part of the planning process, whether one is a builder or the owner of a public space. And if you are a young Turk, do remember that old age will definitely catch up with you one day.

● by Sabita Radhakrishna

You can contribute to CHENNAI HERITAGE

As a token of your support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, you can subscribe to *Madras Musings* — the annual subscription is Rs 100 and we welcome additional donations too to keep us going. You can make your payments to our bank account as below:

**Chennai Heritage
Indian Bank, Alwarpet Branch
CA No. 413158606 IFSC : IDIB000A013**

Please make sure you send an email to Chennaiheritage2017@gmail.com with transfer details so that we can acknowledge receipt.

If you are a new subscriber, you need to send us details of your name and address as well. If you are renewing your subscription make sure you quote your subscription number as reference. This is the number that is on the wrapper of your copy of *Madras Musings*.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to editor@madrasmusings.com

— THE EDITOR

Strange how the onset of twilight years changes one's perception of life. Disability and reduced mobility force us to opt for other modes of travel, or not at all. Today, train journeys are a totally different scenario from the days of my youth. The swanky Vande Bharat beckons with its sleek finish and high speed, and a trip from Chennai to Bangalore takes only 4 hours. The crowd at Madras Central is off-putting, though; and the station demands arduously long walks before one can find one's compartment. I am told that buggies are available, as are wheelchairs so that the long trek is eliminated for the elderly and the disabled. But the biggest challenge of all surfaces after one reaches one's compartment. The train stands way above the platform, and small projections act as steps. We watch as youngsters overtake us and clamber up the "steps" with practiced ease. Too late to withdraw, we hoist ourselves up clutching onto the metal handles embedded in the doorway. We use aids such as stools brought from home and sometimes get the benefit of helping hands as well. Even as we pull ourselves up, we're already worrying about the tedium of getting down at the destination. These days, I give adventures a wide berth. I make no attempt to get out at unscheduled stations and

paper carried an article about a young man not yet out of his teens designing a battery-operated spoon for his uncle affected by Parkinson disease. Would it be so difficult, then, to design steps that will automatically jut out at a lower level when the train stops? Such a solution is no luxury but a necessity. And what about the loo? The train travels at such high speeds that it is nigh impossible to focus on the job. The trip back to one's seat is worse. If you are elderly and cannot put off nature's call for 5 hours, it is advisable to wear diapers. Hail Vande Bharat!

By 2050, the elderly are projected to constitute 20 per cent of the population. We live longer but the quality of accessible living leaves much to be desired. Metroes disregard the needs of the elderly and disabled. Take bathrooms in public spaces, for instance. Train or not, it is an excruciating experience. The commodes are low, and there is nothing in sight for one to hold onto while sitting down or getting up. Fortunately, elderly men are spared this torture. Should it not be mandatory for every theatre or public hall to have at least one bathroom for disabled people? As for the shower in the bathroom, it is a virtual death trap if you are not careful. You are expected to stand and take a shower with

Rowing in Tamil Nadu

It was 150 years ago that the erstwhile state of Madras saw the beginning of a legacy in Rowing, with the birth of the Madras Boat Club at Ennore. With the sport demanding expensive infrastructure – namely boats and unpolluted, expansive water bodies – Rowing was patronized largely by the British community in Madras. It became a competitive sport among Britishers employed at various English companies that organized regattas to pit their rowing prowess against each other. Soon, an Annual Regatta came to be organised by rowing clubs across India and the competition was titled the Amateur Rowing Association of the East. The Madras Boat Club was well-equipped to host the Annual Regatta, which ran on two lanes. The Annual Regatta was the most prestigious event to win in the Indian Rowing scene until the National Championship (run on 4 lanes) was born. The sport continued to develop on a national scale with youth actively flocking to rowing. The State Association for the sport in Tamil Nadu came into being in the mid-70s, with an aim to grow the sport uniformly. This inspired similar developments in Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. These States came together to form the Rowing Federation of India even as the country

prepared to host the first Asian Games in Delhi. Rowing went on to be introduced as one of the sports at the Delhi Asian Games. Sadly, the development of Rowing in Tamil Nadu has not been quite smooth. *Madras Musings* spoke to the President of the Tamil Nadu Amateur Rowing Association, Balaji Maradapa (a rower at the National and International levels himself) and Bhaskar Reddy, a Rowing coach who is taking the lead in nurturing young Rowing talent in TN.

“In Tamil Nadu, there is a lot of Rowing talent at the Sub-Junior level, but hardly any at the Junior and Senior levels. It is possible that this is the case due to a lack of support from the Government for the sport. Rowing has limited access. The cost of the boats, oars and safety equipment such as a follow boat can be quite prohibitory. Additionally, they are all import items and their duty is listed in the luxury items category, making them even more expensive. However, the present Government has promised the Association that it would set up a full-fledged Rowing Centre. The National Federation has also been urging the Central Government to reduce the GST on Rowing equipment,” said Balaji and Bhaskar. There is much improvement to be made regarding the availability of good, basic facilities for Row-

ing. Balaji pointed out that a Rowing Centre at picturesque Kodaikanal Lake – the only high-altitude centre in India – remains shut due to issues between the local club and municipal authorities. Bhaskar added that the State Rowing Association is urging the State Government to re-start the facility, which would give a big boost to Rowing in the State and surrounding districts. The State Association has also identified other suitable Rowing Courses in the outskirts of

● by
V. Venkataramana

Chennai city, and has given several representations to the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDATN). The administrative body has given its assurance that the request would be looked into. The National Federation has also pledged its support for this initiative as it will be ideal to conduct National as well as International Rowing competitions.

Despite a rather bleak current scenario, the world-class Water Sports Centre at the Sri Ramachandra Medical University at Porur shines as a ray of hope. With a dedicated coach in Bhaskar and the implementation of a scientific training program, the Centre

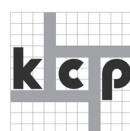


Hyderabad: Prethusha (back row, middle), winner of the Gold medal in Women Singles Scull. With her are Mrs. Rajalaxmi Singh Deo – President of the Rowing Federation of India and Balaji Maradapa – President of Tamil Nadu Amateur Rowing Association.

has already produced a handful of talented rowers representing the State in the Senior National Championships. “We can say that this Centre is the nursery of Rowing in Tamil Nadu,” smiled Balaji. The future of Indian Rowing is “very bright,” said the duo, with as many as 26 states, Army and Navy Sports Control Boards and All-India Universities taking part in the National Championships. As for Tamil Nadu, support from the State Government could propel it to great heights in Rowing. “If the State Government lives up to its avowed objective of focusing on the development of sports infrastructure, then Tamil Nadu can produce

champion rowers,” said Balaji. Some of the TN-based talents in the sport are Jothipandi, Gopi Ananth, Tarun Vikraman, Naveen, Vijay and Rose Meril Mastica. Rose, notably, was the reserve rower in the Indian team at the recently concluded Asian Games in China. In fact, with Coastal Rowing to be introduced at the Los Angeles Olympics, there are chances for Tamil Nadu to emerge at the forefront of the sport. “Tamil Nadu has a long coastline. If we can get Coastal Rowing started in the State with the support of the State Government, we can make a head start and produce champions who can garner international honours,” said the pair.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations



Since 1856,
patently leaders –
A WELLWISHER