

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## CMRL – planning in hindsight

Work on the second phase of the Metrorail is on in full swing. It is understood that the powers that be are very keen that the work should be completed by 2026 when the State Assembly elections are scheduled to take place. If executed satisfactorily by then, everyone can take credit – the State Government for adhering to the deadline and the Centre for releasing funds on time. If the work prolongs then resort can be had to blame games. But what is causing concern at ground level is that there are numerous oversights and faulty assumptions especially where it concerns the smooth flow of traffic. These are likely to flare up soon into perennial hotspots for logjams. And that is forcing the authorities to look for answers that needed to have been thought of before work began.

That all is not well with

what was planned earlier has become manifest in the numerous public consultation meetings that are ongoing with representatives of the ward councillors, officials of the Greater Chennai Corporation

• by **Sriram V.**

and the Chennai Metropolitan Transport Corporation. It has emerged that the initial surveys undertaken, and the first set of diversions unveiled have proved faulty to say the least. And with traffic piling up, new, and pretty drastic plans, are underway. Not all of these are necessarily in consultation with the affected parties, namely property owners whose land may have to be taken over for such schemes to become reality.

The State authorities have announced that areas such as Mylapore, San Thome, Adyar and Anna Nagar where Metrorail work is on will soon have new link roads to ease vehicular congestion. The question is, where are these going to be laid? It is very likely that the victims will be parks, natural features such as the Adyar Creek, and private property owners who for no fault of theirs happen to be in the way of a huge city project. The other question is, what is going to be the cost of acquisition of such land and also the cost of laying those link roads? The third aspect is time. None of these is going to happen overnight. There are bound to be legal tangles and protests which will delay matters. Has CMRL thought through all this?

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## MTC announces fleet expansion, includes a significant portion of e-buses

The Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) plans to increase its fleet strength by a hundred new buses this year, comprising 500 electric buses, 250 low-floor and 250 standard buses. This will include 100 low-floor AC e-buses which will reportedly accommodate 70 passengers and ply 27 routes including 29C (Thiruvanniyur – Perambur), 570 (Kelambakkam-Koyambedu) and 40A (Anna Square-Pattabiram), facilitating the connection of transit centres such as Tambaram, Broadway, Tiruporur

and Chennai Central. The AC e-buses will have batteries with an 8-hour capacity and

• by **A Special Correspondent**

charging depots are planned to be set up at the depots. Each vehicle will reportedly cost an estimated Rs.1.2 crores, and will be operated and maintained entirely by a private supplier soon to be selected by way of a tender.

This is good news for the city, of course. Buses in general are the most affordable, accessible mode of public transport and e-buses bring further benefits to the table – they save on fuel, are less likely to break down and also carry lighter operating costs compared to traditional buses. With zero tailpipe emissions, they are an integral part of green mobility plans. Chennai, in fact, has attempted to transition to e-buses in the past, including those with air-conditioning. After an initial trial run in 2017, the city saw a second three-month test attempt in

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## HERITAGE WATCH

### Syne of the Tymes

NEW



This was the standard heading that the late Chief used whenever he had to publish atrociously spelt English. The first as far as we can remember was a photo by Harry Miller of a wall that carried the message – Do not Uran Hare. All of this came rapidly to mind when your Deputy Editor had to trudge all the way to Nemmeli for an event. But all fatigue vanished when the banner in the accompanying photograph was seen. It was too good to resist taking a picture of. And this is our NEW.

Our OLD, taken in 2011 and featured in our issue of April 1 to 15 that year, is a of a sign at the Mandaiveli MRTS Station.

OLD





# CMRL – PLANNING IN HINDSIGHT

(Continued from page 1)

Any disruptive but eventually beneficial scheme such as Metrorail ought to have been planned right down to the last detail before commencement. And given that we already have the experience of phase I behind us, should we not have been prepared better for phase II? Why then were link roads not planned before work began? Would that not have eased matters and made for smooth progress? There are bound to be no answers to such questions.

With specific reference to the Mylapore-San Thome area where the congestion is very high and is only likely to worsen as the trenches advance towards the most crowded

parts, it is a matter of surprise that CMRL did not consider aligning itself with the existing Mass Rapid Transport System (MRTS). While it is true that the Anna Salai-Royapetah-Mylai link would still have to be established, expense and effort could have been saved on the Mylai-Adyar leg as the MRTS already services it. It would have made perfect sense, for the overhead but underutilised facility already exists. Work on the underground section could have been completely avoided this way.

Taken overall we seem to be in for some major delays in the execution of Metrorail in phase II. The sadder aspect is that this could have been avoided with some foresight based on prior experience.

## MTC announces fleet expansion, includes a significant portion of e-buses

(Continued from page 1)

2019 with e-buses operated by Ashok Leyland on two routes – Chennai Central to Thiruvamiyur and Koyambedu to Broadway. However, these attempts did not bear fruit. Part of the reason why was the lack of expertise in e-mobility – given that the city's fleet is largely comprised of diesel buses, MTC engineers tend to hail from traditional automobile streams. The operation and maintenance of e-buses, on the other hand, demand a deeper understanding of the chemical and electrical science at work in the battery packs. Other challenges in transitioning to e-buses include the lack of charging infrastructure and the heavy initial capital costs, for e-buses are nearly thrice as costlier than diesel buses. There's also the problem of drawing up a feasible financial model – the MTC, for instance, has already come under criticism from some quarters for not earning as much revenue as it purportedly can, and the launch of e-buses in the city will understandably take some time to find solid financial footing.

This time around, however, these challenges seem to have been accounted for in the renewed push for e-buses. The full outsourcing of the operation and maintenance of e-buses to the supplier will address the lack of suitably

skilled manpower. *The Times of India* quotes transport minister S. Sivasankar saying as such – “We neither have expertise in electric mobility nor have training facilities. So, it is better to leave it to the suppliers. We have explained it to the unions, and they have agreed to it.” Another responsibility that will be handed over to the supplier is that of establishing the requisite charging infrastructure. As for the financial hurdles, the government will fund the venture through a loan acquired from German bank kFw; it will also claim the full ticketing revenue from these buses while paying the supplier a fixed fee based on the working hours. Chennai seems to be attempting to implement lessons learnt from past trials.

A successful transition to e-buses can be wonderful for the city. At present, the metro is served by 3,500 buses – a fleet strength that is not nearly enough for its dense population. The optimist, however, will see the need to bolster these numbers as an opportunity to gradually introduce more e-buses and further its agenda of eco-friendly, sustainable transportation. After all, cities such as Pune – which operates one of the largest fleets of electric buses in India – have had success with operating e-buses and report commensurate benefits. Here's hoping that Chennai will catch up soon.

## Train travails

**T**he Man from Madras *Musings* has been on the move in recent times. He has travelled by train, car and flight in the past few days. And of late, he is increasingly surprised by his growing dislike of train travel. Now, before you brand MMM a snob let him assure you that this was his preferred mode till not a few years ago. Perhaps it is age or may be it is just a growing intolerance of filth or an inability to get along with strangers or whatever. But MMM finds himself baulking at the thought of travel, in particular by overnight trains.

Take the Bangalore Mail for instance. In that halcyon era when MMM was a ccc – cherubic child from Calcutta – this train had a certain cache to it. You boarded at the Madras Central and after a leisurely night's journey you got off at Cantonment or City station in Bangalore and in a wondrous early morning chill made your way to your destination. Nowadays the journey has been reduced

challenge. Besides all of this, the berths over the wheel are provided with an extra jerk just to make sure that you are kept awake and can arise on demand.

MMM now comes to the toilets. Why these need to be soaking wet always remains an unsolved mystery. In his most recent journey by the Mail, MMM discovered that one of the four toilets in the AC coach that he was travelling by had a shower provided (why?!). This had overnight leaked throughout and so when MMM opened the door in the morning, there was a lake inside, waiting for him to wade in, which he fortunately did not do. And the other toilet had no lock! Yes, MMM is aware that the railways are terrifically quick these days in responding to messages on social media but as to how many of these really translate into action is another matter.

### Snoring in the Train

**W**e now come to the last and perhaps greatest

co-passengers to sacrifice a lower berth.

The train moved off and with that this man began to snore. It was not of the rhythmic variety that lulls you to sleep. These were of so many different kinds that MMM had to convince himself that there were not several people huddled together in the upper berth. There were short explosions, long whistles, high-pitched wheezes, quite a few barks, and some low moans. In fact there was such a lack of pattern that MMM and the other passengers remained awake in suspense, unsure as to what the next sound would be. And all the while this human mountain of flesh slept on.

By midnight MMM had enough. He got up and gave the sleeper a sharp prod. The man awoke with a start and MMM told him that while he, MMM, was quite sure that the man could not control himself, the rest of the passengers had a problem on their hand. The man was

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

to a mere five hours or so – technology upgrades have shortened the travel time and by the time you have settled down after boarding at PTDMC, shown your ID card to the ticket examiner and had forty winks, people are up and about, declaring that the train has reached KSRBC. That they do this even as the train is arriving at Bangar (formerly Bowring) Pet, with an hour to go for Bangalore, makes it doubly irritating. The return journey is the same, Arakonam fulfilling the same function as Bangarpet.

The coaches are a second irritant. Have you noticed that these new light rakes may be easy on the eye but are terrible on the ear? You hear everything that is being said in the neighbouring cubicle. And considering that most people roar into their phones or watch videos on them in full volume and do so for half the night, you are assured no sleep. And these coaches jolt terribly, making a journey to the toilet in the middle of the night an outing fraught with many dangers. The swaying in the toilet also makes getting on with the task at hand another

challenge in night trains. The snoring co-passenger. The railways of course cannot help on this but we as Indians really need to do something about our spreading waistlines that are most often the cause of this annoying condition. MMM is aware that there are slim beings who cannot help snoring, but these are few in number and deserve our sympathy. Not so the men and women of full habit as MMM believes the expression is, who got that way by just gorging and lounging. These are a travelling menace.

Thus it was that MMM and two others who had to travel back from Bangalore by train found much to their joy that they were all together in a four-berthed AC first class coach. That was until the far-seeing one in the group pointed out that “the fourth random one” could be a snorer. And sure enough he was. One glance at the outsize specimen sprawled out on the upper berth was enough to fill us with dismay. MMM at the same time wondered as to how this person had managed to hoist himself up to the upper berth and not make the usual request to one of his

offended to say the least. He could not help it he said rather rudely but on being confronted by three irate fellow passengers in a small compartment he realised he was in a minority. Matters had reached an impasse when MMM suggested that the man lie down on his side and perhaps that way snore less. This he was agreeable to and with that the snores lessened to an extent, but only somewhat. It was a terrible night, one for which MMM and his co-travellers had paid money.

The next morning, MMM and his friends got off the train, tired and listless. The only positive aspect was the early hour which allowed going home and sleeping for a while. The fat man, MMM noticed, was all bright and energetic as he lowered himself from the train and waddled off. MMM only hopes he tripped over his shoelace on the way home.

### Flowers In, Garbage Out

**L**ast fortnight saw the L Semmozhi Poonga

(Continued on page 3)



## OUR READERS WRITE



### Beautifying the Marina

I read with interest the latest MM newsletter on the above subject.

While we Chennaites would like to beautify and look after the Marina Beach (claimed one of the longest in the world), I think that the overall approach to looking at it has been all wrong. The fundamental lacuna is the failure of all of us including the Corporation and other authorities in terms of our attitude to the beach and looking after its environs.

As long as the public are not properly educated and even coerced through a "Carrot and Stick Approach," the beach will continue getting dirty and polluted due to sheer public carelessness and apathy. There is no point in deploying all those equipment and technology solutions with mechanical sweepers *et al*; and the ump-teen public initiatives from time to time to periodically clean up the beach through NGOs, school and college students.

What is the point of them all when the very next day, there are hordes of beach visitors who have no compunction of riddling it again with food waste items, plastic bags and with bottles *et al*? And such folks will claim it their right to sully the beach sands again! But where is their responsibility to the well being of the beach?

It is high time the Corporation authorities and along with other well meaning public bodies like NGOs, schools and colleges all evolve an integrated approach to the whole

issue and make building public awareness and bring about an attitudinal change. This is still possible, when we see from another realm of public behaviour how Indore and Surat cities have consistently got top ranks in the National Swachh rankings. Where there is a will, there is a way!

Today, whenever we have outstation guests who want to visit the Marina Beach, I refuse and take them all the way to somewhere beyond on the ECR or even up to Mahabalipuram. The beach situation in Chennai is made even worse when one also sees the Adyar Elliotts Beach which is another eyesore, to say the least!

As a well meaning citizen of Chennai, I only hope that those concerned will find a permanent, positive and sustained solution to our Marina and Elliot's Beaches.

I do hope you will be able to give expression to my views here in your subsequent MM newsletter.

Sashi Rao

ksashirao47@gmail.com

### On Kalikambal temple

The narration of the origins of Kalikambal temple (MM, Feb. 1, 2024) was interesting and "more interesting" was the mention of "here say" sources of the story!

Rev. Philip K. Mulley

Anaihatti Road  
Kotagiri 643217

The error is sincerely regretted.

— The Editor

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

hosting a flower show. *The Man from Madras Musings* attended it and was happiest among the roses, the fuchsias and the rest of the flowers. The only disappointment was that native varieties of flowers were all given the go by – perhaps because they do not remain fresh for long on display. But even then, the organisers could have perhaps rotated indigenous plants just so that people know of them.

The biggest disappointment was the exit from the flower show. This was via a food court of sorts and that was where MMM got to see native behaviour at its best. Paper plates and cups were littered about all over the place. The stench of stale food after the fragrance of flowers was overpowering to the say the least. The place was also a vast bin of sorts for every fallen branch, rotting leaf mould, broken pots and torn fertilizer bags.

And then on emerging from the gate MMM found himself in a narrow alley that connect to Mount Road. This had all the garbage bins of the neighbourhood arranged in some kind of a salute. To MMM, fresh from the flowers, they appeared to be welcoming him back to reality. It was a real pity that the organisers did not think of some other exit and even if that was not possible, made no arrangements to clean the place.

— MMM

## TRACING MADRAS



Today we immerse ourselves in the captivating narrative of Higginbothams on Anna Salai (Mount Road), a cherished sanctuary for book lovers. Founded by Abel Joshua Higginbotham, its tranquil structure adorned with white and brown hues is steeped in centuries of memories. Abel's maritime ventures failed to yield fortune but a stint managing a shop selling the publications of the Wesleyan Missionaries ignited his fervor for books. When the mission ceased operations, Higginbotham seized the opportunity and purchased the remaining stock, establishing the now iconic store under his name in 1844. Though humble in its beginnings, Higginbothams moved into an iconic showroom on Mount Road by 1904. In a similar timeline, it produced its landmark Guide to Madras.

During Abel's tenure as Sheriff of Madras from 1888 to 1889, he involved his son C.H. Higginbotham in the business. The latter took up the reins following Abel's passing in 1891, and under his stewardship, the business expanded, opening stores in other cities such as Bangalore. It was under him that the brand established small stalls at railway stations, a tradition that endures to this day. These stalls birthed a customary travelling tradition, where travelers procure books for their journeys - today, the practice extends to airports, too. Higginbothams changed ownership in 1925 when John Oakshott Robinson of the Spencer's conglomerate acquired the business and merged it with his printing firm. Within these walls now reside numerous rare books, with

a significant section devoted to Indian writers across various genres. Initially celebrated for its publishing ventures, Higginbothams played a vital role in preserving and publishing countless books and issues that might have otherwise slipped into oblivion. One such notable example is the launch of an edition of James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, which went on to achieve international fame.

The architectural marvels of the building remain faithful to their original purpose, with details like fixed windows strategically placed on bustling Mount Road to keep out dust while allowing ample diffused light. Noteworthy are the stained glass accents embedded in circular arches on the facade, and the cupola-like structure adorning the symmetrical beauty, inscribed with '1844.' One can easily tell that the structure was originally designed to house books. Stepping through the ornate double door adorned with oak and glass, visitors are transported into a scene from a romance novel. The checkers-like diagonal arrangement of black and white Italian marble tiles, along with the grand stairway leading to the first floor, captivates the eye. From this vantage point, one can witness a variety of beautiful moments unfold – from a child's inaugural book purchase to couples on dates, buyers seeking the perfect gift, or students browsing for information.

Each visit to the bookstore brings a wave of nostalgia and enchantment that leaves one wanting for more.

— Ar. Aafreen Fathima S.K.  
Ninetyeight.madras



# City Beautiful then, Singara Chennai now

On Dec 3, 1968, the then Mayor of Madras, Velur Narayanan, addressed the Rotary Club of Madras. We reproduce here the report of the event, courtesy Light-house, the weekly bulletin of the Rotary Club of Madras. We leave it to our readers to gauge whether civic conditions have changed (or not) in the city.

— The Editor

Addressing the luncheon meeting on 3rd December 1968, the new Mayor, Madras, Mr. V. Narayanan expressed his firm determination to bring back to Madras city its age-old quality of being “The City beautiful”. Speaking on the topical theme “The City beautiful”, the Worshipful Mayor frankly admitted that Madras city had, in recent years, become thoroughly unclean and spoilt and was

today in a deplorably pathetic condition mainly due to “politicians”. If one political party wanted to launch on a certain programme of improvement, the opposing parties shed “crocodile tears” and roused the passions of the poor people against the implementation of necessary measures.

Addressing the large audience of Rotarians, Mr. Narayanan observed that as the newly elected Mayor of this great city, it was necessary for him – as well as the need of the hour for all concerned – to face hard facts of today’s conditions in the city and rectify them without being afraid of the consequences.

Giving an instance, the Mayor admitted that the Marina with its second best beach in the world had been turned into a vast lavatory and there was no more any pleasure for anyone including High Court judges to take a stroll alongside the waterfront or relax on the velvety sands. Is it wrong if he was

determined to make the Marina a really worthwhile and inviting place for the relaxation of the millions of citizens, he asked amidst loud applauding from the large gathering. “I want to clear the encroachments all along the beach and make it beautiful once again”, he promised.

Mr. Narayanan further assured his audience that he would make determined efforts to remove all obstructions that had come upon the pedestrian pavements in most of the thoroughfares in recent years. Huts, way side temples etc. were all, today obstructing pedestrian traffic. He was not to be misunderstood as either unsympathetic to the poor people who had built huts or to the sentiments of the citizens who were responsible for the temples. He was willing to provide alternate sites for such temples elsewhere. But he would insist on enforcing that platforms and side walks were intended for pedestrians and that the present state of, affairs wherein they were

used for all other purposes except for which they were intended continued no more.

The Mayor disclosed, to his shocked audience, that he had been accused as an athiest for attempting to do this and declared “if my head is to be cut off for this purpose, I am prepared to die. My decision to put an end to this is irreversible.”

The Mayor informed the Rotarians that he had already taken many steps to effectively deal with the difficult and delicate problem of stray animals including cattle, dogs, pigs, etc. all over the place which was a menace to the healthy and orderly life of the citizens in Madras.

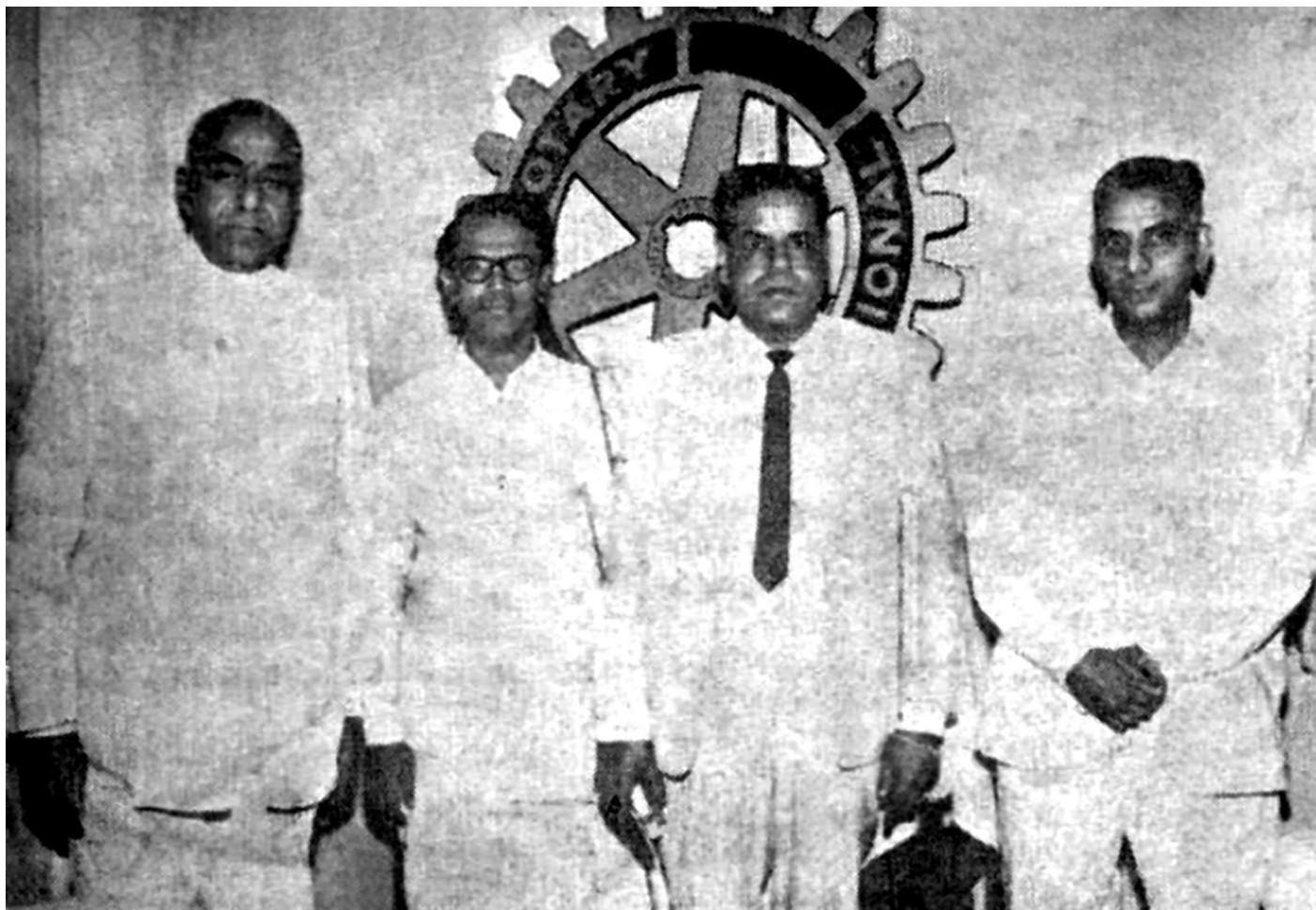
After giving a statistical review of the growing requirements of Madras city during the last 30 years, Mr. Narayanan said that the two big measures, i.e. bringing Cauveri water and cleaning of the Coovum, which had waited for Government’s sanction for the last 20 years, have now been taken up in right earnest by the ruling D.M.K. Government. This gave them hope that an effective and lasting answer to two of the major problems they had faced so far had now been found. They had also to enlarge the drainage system considerably and this would also get his earnest attention.

Lastly, the Mayor made an appeal to all the industrial and commercial institutions in Madras city to come forward and take the responsibility of maintaining traffic island gardens so that may go a long way to contribute to make the city beautiful. He proposed to institute a rotating shield for the best maintained island garden in the city so as to serve as an encouragement to the participants in this important scheme.

Earlier Rtn. P.S. Rajaratnam introduced the distinguished Speaker and Rtn. Past President D.S. Sastri proposed a hearty vote of thanks.



சிங்கார CHENNAI 2.0



# Going Walkabout in Madras

It all began with a walk from Thiruvanniyur to Besant Nagar along the beach shores in early-mid 2023. A year later, we’re hoping that that beginning – which has taken us all over town and more – will one day take us trekking in the Himalayas. A tall order, yes... but what the heck, one lives in hope. Never mind that our first Saturday walkabout along the sandy beaches had us dodging (ugh!) excrement now and again. And in this day and age when two supra VIPs actually took some time off from what must have been heavy duty conferring to sit at the beach in the neighbourhood at Mahabalipuram!

The second week saw my school buddy and I set off to the Tholkappia Poonga. We were not in the least bit disappointed. Dark deep woods, right inside the metropolis! By the way, we laid down three conditions for our walking ventures – avoid crowds, go to unexplored places, and slip in true-blue, legit filter coffee before or after our peregrinations. What constitutes the aforementioned coffee, and where it can be had is another story. Suffice it to say that the following for nammathu kapi (as one brand would have it) is spreading. As the duo grew to a trio, the coffee too grew to include idli-vada-pongal. The latter is an occasional treat. We had literally bumped into a third compatriot at the Eco Park on

our third outing. The Eco Park serves as our fallback when there is not enough time to look further. Likewise, the Tower Park. As for the technicalities, we’re frequenting circuits that cover at least a kilometer. So it’s easy to walk a minimum of 5 km in a day.

We hit pay dirt with our find of the Adyar River trail in Manapakkam, a straight stretch of 2.9 km one way. The walking trail is a narrow rugged path with the turbid waters of the river running on one side and a bit of open space on the other bordered by a compound wall. There’s a semblance of trees and plants with wildflowers on either side. There’s no getting away from the downside of a growing city. At the end of the trail is a landfill but thankfully not stinking. We saw some buffaloes airing themselves in the waters. Perched on the cattle were white birds. Which ones? I plead ignorance. There are birds aplenty if you know where to look is what I understand. There is an Army establishment on the route and the roar of planes overhead indicates an airport nearby. The walk seems fairly popular among the athletic of the neighbourhood residents. During our last visit there we also sighted the Chief Secretary of the Government, the Commissioner of the Corporation, and their entourage.



May Day Park.

Another find is the Sengandhal Poonga which has Gopalapuram on one side and Anna Salai on the other. We discovered to our great surprise that the Horticultural Society grounds next to the St George’s Cathedral is an extension of this park.

The broad Marina walkway along the sands is another spot on our roster. We break one of our conditions pertaining to the crowd but overlook it because we easily cover a distance of 5.5 km walking from Lighthouse to beyond the Marina swimming

a water body in Kolathur. Not recommended in the height of summer where there’s nary a tree around. The Pallikaranai marshland walk we’ve been to takes one along three paths shaped like a T together covering 1 km.

The smallish Kotturpuram Tree Park and Shenoy Nagar Thiru-Vi-Ka Park have us spinning rather than walking. The former is green as green can be. The latter is more of an amusement park these days. Also among finds is a tiny park tucked away in a corner of 15th Main Road in Anna Nagar. Yes, we swirl like dervishes here but we could count the number of other visitors on the fingers of one hand and besides, it is choc-a-bloc with plant life.

On our yet-to-go-to list are the Chitlapakkam Neervanam, St. Thomas Mount, and the Tirusulam Hills.

Beyond the reaches of our city, we did a bit of huffing and puffing up the Sholingur hill temple braving the ever-growing family of monkeys. Our offering to Yoga Narasimha Swamy was appropriated in the wink of an eye by a plucky one. We were the better for it, for my friend’s hands were free to put a big *kumbidu* to the Lord. In the offing is the 14 km walk (*girivalam* or *giri pradakshina*) around Arunachala hill in Tiruvannamalai.

● by  
T.K. Srinivas Chari



Marina Beach.

pool and back. Metro work at one stretch entails walking in a single file.

Another charming pick is the grounds of the Theosophical Society. Extensive and hush-hush. You can get a peep into the Society’s spotless beach. Even here, at one corner, there’s no escape from the repelling sight of plastics that are washed ashore. Entry to walkers is regulated by handing out passes. Far away from TS is the Madhavaram botanical garden. We were turned away here one early morning because we didn’t have passes as it is open to all only later in the morning. No amount of pleading and prodding would move the conscientious watchman. Finally, a phone call from a regular to the watchman at the back gate got us in. We’ve also walked at a still-developing park with a paved path around



# An ode to the Dressing Table

I grew up with the concept of a dressing table. A bedroom was not complete unless it had a dressing table with drawers and a long mirror. If the bedroom was too small to accommodate this invaluable piece of furniture, the dressing table occupied another room attached to the main bedroom which we called dressing room. It also had the old-fashioned coat stand where we hung the clothes we wore for the day, which were eventually sent to wash; this additional comfort was possible only if we had the luxury of space.

I attribute these indulgences to the colonial influence my father absorbed, as did other upper middle class families in his time. They looked up to anything British by way of décor or dressing with great admiration. My father dressed for the evening in a light coat, full sleeved-shirt, and a muffler. Shoes and socks were a must, and he wore a hat when he went out, and wielded a cane even though he did not need it, because it was fashionable and very 'propah' when he drove to his clinic to treat his patients or made house calls. He wore ties whenever occasion demanded it.

My mother, who ran the clinic alongside with my father,

supervised the humungous list of diets and part of the admin. She had no time to indulge herself in gazing at a mirror, for she led a frenetic pace all day. She tried to talk father out of getting a dressing table but he would not listen to her. Dressing tables in our home consisted of an elongated horizontal mini cupboard which housed drawers on both sides. The top was flat, and my mother, artistic to the core bought "Duchess sets" from VTI which were embroidered, to place on the table top. These had one centre piece and two smaller pieces of delicate fabric, exquisite and oval in shape, to be placed on either side of the centre piece. My mother would often make them herself, embroider, and attach lace which she crocheted or edge them with tatting lace which she had worked.

On these embroidered pieces stood little jars of cream, combs, and hair brushes and each had to be pretty enough to be displayed. The drawers contained odds and ends, like the doilies which were used to replace the ones which were soiled. The drawers also housed boxes which held hairpins, hair-clips, rubber bands and other paraphernalia. Whatever was placed on the dressing table

was indeed well crafted, and we children never touched them. In the centre of the dresser rose a tall full length mirror fixed on to the back. The dressing table occupied pride of place in a corner usually opposite the bed and against a wall. Some of the fashionable women had three mirrors so that they could view themselves from all angles. And an upholstered dressing table stool completed the picture.

My father insisted on a full-length mirror as he believed that whatever we wore had to be carefully draped and the mirror would mock us if we did not. Sarees had to be pleated prop-

'necessities' like cots, and of course the ubiquitous steel almirah, usually a Godrej to keep our silk clothes and jewellery. The word 'dowry' was taboo in our household, and any family with an eligible boy who raised this topic would be politely shown the door.

The furniture we acquired from our maternal home was made of teak or rosewood and our in-laws were either tickled pink or aghast that the dressing table was part of the furniture which accompanied us to our new home. Strange that we took the dressing table for granted till we visited other

elegant dressing table, gently massaging cream on to their faces. They sat in comfort, while they took pains with their make up and brushing their hair. "See? When Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner could sit before a dresser and prettify themselves, why not you girls?"

Much later the designs grew simpler and most popular was the Chippendale style. It was during the 19th century that revivalist styles were embraced. With Elizabethan, Gothic, and colonial revivals straying into the late 19th century, the dressing table became part of the bedroom suite.

Tradition continues, and every one of the bedrooms in our home has a dressing table. I found it disconcerting when none of the guests who used the bedrooms used the dressing table as it was meant to be used. They instead kept an amazing collection of things on it, like half-read books, keys, TV and AC remotes etc. They preferred to dress up in the bathroom which had a cabinet to house their cosmetics and a mirror stuck in front so it served the purpose.

I pleaded with my guests to use the dressing table but it fell on deaf ears. Over the years, when even my granddaughters stayed away from the dressing table, I wondered why I even bothered to place one in each room. I could have placed bookshelves instead! So, I decided to give away the one in my mother's room, knowing full well that she would turn in her grave if she knew my intentions. The dressing table is, alas, a redundant piece of furniture.

At least I thought it was until a month ago when Catherine Zeta Jones visited my place along with her husband Michael Douglas and their children. After lunch I took them to the room where I had my ancient sari collection exhibited for the day, and where I could explain their origins with a power point presentation.

"Look," said Catherine excitedly to her daughter, "she has a dressing table!" I looked at her in amazement, and she explained how fond of dressing tables she was, and that she made it a point to use them in her home and was delighted to find one in a Chennai home! She wondered why they had become obsolete now!

I found my resolution slowly crumbling. A voice said "Not now, not now!" The dressing table stays. Especially after Catherine cast her spell on it.

by Sabita Radhakrishna

erly and the pallu thrown over the chest and the end tucked in as was the custom those days. The mirror also told you that you had gained pounds, and it was an incentive to get back into shape.

When we girls got married we were each presented a dressing table along with the other

homes and found it missing.

It was only during the early part of the 20th century that the luxurious dressing tables came into vogue, and it was a modern concept of good living carrying the badge of glamour. Hollywood films of the early 1920s showed our much-loved star heroines sitting before the

## The Blackboard: A space for expression and exploration

Priyanka Soman is an educator who has inherited her passion for teaching children from her mother, a teacher herself. She has ten years of experience working with children in Junior, Middle, and Senior School and has been working at The School, KFI, for the past seven years. Priyanka has a strong affinity for Krishnamurti's teachings, which has fostered a curiosity to observe and explore her environments. Apart from an interest in music, she enjoys bird watching, studying trees, collecting Hot Wheels

cars, and reading Ruskin Bond books. As an educator, she believes one must understand that children learn from the different spaces that are designed for them. At school, such spaces allow children freedom of expression and pave the way for true exploration and learning to take place continuously. This article describes different perspectives of one such unique space – the blackboard.

### The Past and The Present

My grandfather said that he used, in the 1920s and 50s, a writing slate to do his school work upon. The teacher would write words or number operations on the slate and to write on it, he would use a thin pencil stick called the balpam, made of calcium carbonate. The balpam was shaped such that it was easy to hold and write on the slate, which he would place on his lap. However, school teachers today use a bigger writing

board called the chalkboard or the blackboard.

### A Roleplay

When I was a girl, I had a place in the corner of my house where I spent most of my time. It was a cozy nook with a rectangular board hanging on the wall. I've always known that to be a teacher was my calling, though no one else seemed to think it a good idea at that time; my mother laughed when I told her I was going to become a teacher before conceding that I did have good penmanship and could be a school teacher after all. After that, I enjoyed talking about what I was going to do. I talked a lot. I talked for about an hour at a stretch about my favourite topic. I talked with my head held high and straight, observant of the things around me. Sometimes I simply stared into space, daydreaming. I would be at the blackboard for two, three hours at a time and appear in the kitchen tired, dusty, and hungry, always with the same question on my lips. When, I asked my mother,

would I become a teacher? What a wonderful age that is for one to be. For me, it served as a gateway through which I stepped from childhood into adulthood. I am glad I remember it so well and can bring it back to life in a classroom. It must be the ambiance, I think,

by  
Priyanka Soman

of this little space that I cherished so very much.

### A Space to Scribble

When I first entered a Middle School classroom, I found many children near the blackboard, each doing different things. Two were writing numbers from right to left and left to right in a sequence. One was drawing geometric patterns on the board squares, creating a plethora of rectangles and triangles. Two boys were playing tic tac toe with plus and minus

(Continued on page 7)



# Sport in Old Madras

**Any time you want to get a good laugh out of the antics of the British in Madras, Dodwell is the answer. Here he is, holding forth on what constituted sport in 17th and 18th century Madras.**

– The Editor

In a country where Englishmen had horses, there was naturally hunting, though it were after no nobler an animal than the jackal. The first reference to this has been thought a letter of 1776 asking for a yearly draft of couple of hounds for the “Madras Hunting Society.” But jack-hunting was certainly followed twenty years earlier. In the Mayor’s Court papers of 1753 is a horse-dealing case, in which the seller demands specific performance of the contract, while the buyer claimed to have bought the horse under warranty of soundness. The horse in question, it appears from the evidence, was that

ridden by Pigot on an occasion celebrated by Orme, when in 1751 Pigot and Clive saved themselves from a body of the enemy by the superior speed of their animals. When the plaintiff recalled this incident as a proof of the goodness of the horse, the defendant rejoined that that was before it “was sprained by Mr. Pigot in a fox-chase.” Hunting saddles occur frequently in the inventories; there are four for instance in 1768; and I think that hunting though perhaps in a rough and ready form, was popular round Madras. In 1791 Roebuck writes to a Calcutta friend:

“Will you excuse me troubling you with a trifling commission, which is to procure for me any number of half-bred hounds, from one couple to six couple. They are dogs bred in this country from the Europe fox-hound and a half-bred country dog, and they live better than the Europe hounds ... The dogs are for the Madras Hunt, and I have undertaken to procure them. The fleetest they

are the better, as our present dogs are very fast ...”

Roebuck must have been reckoned a doggy man, for only a couple of years later I find him ordering two pointers from Pondicherry for a friend in Bombay. The jack was coursed as well as hunted. Watts escaped from Murshidabad just before Plassey on the pretext of a coursing match; and leashes of greyhounds occur in the Madras inventories. Even in the nineteenth century Sir William Denison got some rattling good gallops when he got near enough to the jack to slip a greyhound.

The origins of racing at Madras are as obscure as those of hunting. I expect many scratch races were run long before the sport was in any way organized. The Fort St George orderly book of 1773 contains the first reference known to me. Colonel Lang there announces that not more than half the officers off duty can be allowed to be absent at one time to attend the races at the Mount; but in order that “they may partake of the diversions day and day about, and for the convenience of such as have not accommodations at the Mount, the gates will

be ordered to be opened every morning at 4.0’ clock”.

The earliest-mentioned form of field-sport, however, was none of these, but hawking. So early as 1654 the Agent, as the first governors of the Fort were called, went hawking by the Mount. In 1771 Warren Hastings, during his short stay upon the Coast, did the same. Captain Fletcher had sent him a present of hawks from Ongole, which Hastings thus acknowledged:

“I return you many thanks for your genteel present. ... I have been twice abroad with the hawks, and hope I may find an inducement in them to use the exercise of a morning ride, which I much want. They seem to be well trained, and the chief man, as well as his bird, very intelligent and expert in their respective professions. The only difficulty is to meet with game for them. The Carnatic yields none but kites, crows, and paddy-birds. The two former will not be caught, and the latter are hardly worth catching. These however afford me sufficient entertainment”.

To big game I find hardly a reference. Not for lack of game.

After the Second Mysore War the Carnatic was teeming with tigers, and no doubt many an officer in the up-country garrisons went after them, either on elephants, which were common enough too in the south in those days, or with his muzzle-loader on foot. The records of shikar belong almost entirely to the nineteenth century.

However, among the stray references is one that I wish to mention, for it introduces as well the concluding topic of this chapter. In 1794 Captain Alexander Macpherson and Mr. Dawson Logan were stationed at Ambur, in hilly, jungly country where you could easily flush a brace of tiger before breakfast. They were out shooting together, and got on the track of an animal which Macpherson said was a tiger. Logan denied it, and that with so much heat and persistence that the other was at last obliged to inquire the meaning of his behaviour. A duel followed, in which Logan was shot. And if there are few records of shooting tigers, there are plenty of shooting men.

It is very natural, for the manners of the age with doubt often exceeded. 400 was reckoned an average for a serviceable animal. – Extracted from *The Nabobs of Madras* by Henry Dodwell, 1926

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– THE EDITOR

## THE BLACKBOARD

(Continued from page 6)

symbols; both were observing the board in silence, exploring all the possibilities. Sounds of sputtering broke out, intermingled with squeaks. Arjun came up to me and asked, ‘What is this supposed to be?’ He was pointing to a design that he had been putting all effort into for the past ten minutes. All I could see was a lot of lines, loops, and squiggles all over the place. It was fun to examine.

### Invite

Certain practices have become an integral part of the system. During a long assembly, a walk from the main gate could give you all the information you sought - the welcome board or notice board would contain data such as the name, place, and time of an event. It is at these places that the blackboard becomes an active participant, guiding and inviting people to school. It stands in a corner, against a tree or in the middle of a pathway, directing people to different places with arrows pointing East, West, North, or South.

### Organize

It has become routine for

Adhya to take a piece of chalk from the teacher’s table and write the class timetable for the day on the blackboard. She cannot reach the top of the board and uses a chowki for the purpose. From the top to the bottom, she adds one row after the other and finishes the entire structure for the day. In the end, she adds the people who are not present in class on that day. She also enjoys highlighting the games period with a different colour and in bold, giving a special callout to her classmates. One morning, I walked into class after breakfast and found, to my surprise, that the details on the board were missing. I asked her why the timetable was not up on the board that day. She said, “Well, I am bored today, Akka. Can someone from our class take on board duty today?” I turned to the class to ask for volunteers. The next minute, ten hands shot up in the air. All of them wanted to display their skills in organizing the space.

### Create Curiosity

A board in a Senior School classroom is quite different. Students are formally seated in a chair and a table, with twenty-eight to thirty students

facing in one direction towards the blackboard. In my chemistry classes - the subject I take for this section - I use the blackboard to write chemical equations. These equations are sometimes balanced, sometimes not. When a student looks at the question, they try to solve it in a Eureka moment. Each one tries to make sure that the equations are copied in the right order. Each one rolls their eyes in interest and curiosity while thinking about the solutions to these questions.

### The Blackboard I Know

I have observed that this space always helps the child to interact and express emotions. It can be reused several times for different purposes and influences the minds of young children. It’s expanding acceptance has always been fascinating to me. The modern world allows room for many visual aids to present students with information. But I find that the blackboard – an integrated design in schools – contributes continuously to the process of learning and fosters a growing curiosity, expression, and spirit of exploration.



# Chennai Challenger underscores the need for more international-level competitions in the sport

That Chennai, nay Tamil Nadu, is seen as the cradle of Indian tennis is common knowledge: from R. Krishnan and the Amritraj brothers Vijay and Anand to Ramesh Krishnan (R. Krishnan's son), the city has brought the best of Indian tennis to the world stage. Among the country's first female talent in the sport, Lakshmi Mahadevan, is from Chennai, too. Why, the post-Amritraj era saw Calcutta-born Leander Paes and his famous doubles partner Mahesh Bhupathi evolve at the Britannia Amritraj Academy in Chennai. All these players honed their tennis skills by playing regularly in tournaments at home and abroad, notably participating in competitions conducted by the World Tennis Association in their formative years before rising to play in ATP tour matches. The fact is that the flow of talent in the State has not thinned; it is, however, a pity that international-level competitions on home soil – matches that give homegrown talent crucial exposure – have been few and far between. This shortcoming has arguably delayed the full blossoming of young talent despite relentless efforts by the

Tamil Nadu Tennis Association and the National Association to stage international-class competitions at home.

Things appeared rosy for flourishing talents as long as the only ATP World Tour Men's Tennis Tournament in South Asia was conducted in Chennai from 1995 to 2017. After that, the only world-level competitions to be staged in Chennai's world-class tennis stadium have been the WTA Futures and the Chennai Open ATP Challenger Tournament. This year it was played from February 5 to 11 with a sprinkling of upcoming Indian and international players in singles and doubles competitions. The prize money on offer was USD 133,250 alongside 100 ranking points. As many as 13 Indian players participated in the tournament, with three in the singles draw and ten in the doubles. Eleven other Indians were in the qualifying rounds. Also competing was Sumit Nagal, who came into the limelight when he won a set off Roger Federer in the Grand Slam Australian Open in 2023. Sumit began the tournament with the world rank of 121 in the men's singles cohort and went on to beat Italy's

top-seeded Luca Nardi to clinch the title, winning in straight sets 6-1, 6-4 after a tense baseline duel, especially in the second set. This was also Nagal's fifth Challenger title, one that enabled him to break into the top 100 of the ATP men's singles ranking – the first Indian player to do so in the last five years and the tenth in history.

Other prominent foreign players in the singles draw included Aussie and former top 20 player Bernard Tomic, who fell to Nardi in the pre-quarter-finals. Tomic was also a former

Maineni won the Doubles title. They beat fellow Indians Nikit Poonacha and Rithvik Bollepalli. The Doubles main draw had 16 teams in the fray. The field was led by the top seeds Sriram Balaaji and the German Andre Begemann and the all-Indian duo Nikit Poonacha and Rithvik Bollepalli. Japan's Kaito Uesugi and Toshihide Matsui and the German pair of Mark Waller and Schnaitter were the other two formidable pairs. But they bowed out in the semi-finals to the Indian pairs.

Regarding the opportunity to host more international tennis tournaments in the city, TNTA CEO Hiten Joshi – a former player and coach himself – says that “everyone in Chennai's tennis fraternity is keen to get an international level competition here. But at the moment there are no tournaments available.” He also points out that Vijay Amritraj, the current President of the TNTA and a former tennis icon from the city, has been working tirelessly to realise



Sumit Nagal. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

this goal. Vijay Amritraj agrees that there is a pressing need to stage more WTA and ATP competitions for the benefit of upcoming Indian talents; the onus, he says, is on him to talk to ATP and WTO to allot more Challengers as well as tournaments for the benefit of female talent from the city, given that the Tamil Nadu government has extended all assistance for the development of tennis in Chennai. The sport, according to him, needs to reach more rural areas, which will encourage more kids to take to the game. “They [WTA and ATP] will not be doing us a favour,” remarks Vijay, pointing out that 50 per cent of the overseas players who play in Chennai say that they would like to return.

● by  
**V. Venkataramana**

Wimbledon quarter-finalist, and winner of an ITF M25 event in Chennai recently. Among significant players who participated were Stepano Neapolitan, Orio Roca Batalla, and Maks Kasnikowski. The two other prominent Indians in the fray in the singles main draw were the Davis Cuppers Ramkumar Ramanathan and Mukundan. India's Ramkumar Ramanathan and Saketh

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