

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Neglect has given way to Restoration But what of Maintenance?

The Hindu recently published a news item that the Public Works Department of the TN Government has finalised a plan to restore six heritage structures in the State at a cost of Rs 67 crores. This has been submitted for formal approval which will most likely be given once the code of conduct imposed by the Election Commission is lifted in June. The projects cover the Kalyan Mahal Chattiram in Thiruvaiyyaru, the Muktabal Chattiram in Orathanadu, the Sivaji Raja building at Thanjavur, a part of Chepauk Palace, the dome of the College of Engineering at Guindy and the Kodumudi Travellers' Bungalow at Erode.

The PWD plans to execute these restoration activities through its Building Centre

and Conservation Division. This is one of the recent additions to the department and considerable investment has gone into training engineers in heritage conservation and restoration. Some commendable projects have been taken up

● by Sriram V.

as well. This is very heartening especially as for decades the State Government's unstated policy when it came to heritage was one of neglect. Beyond the most cursory maintenance, if that, nothing was done at most heritage structures that were outside the purview of the ASI or the HR &CE. All of this is changing in the last few years.

With the number of re-

stored heritage buildings likely to go up in the next decade or so, this is the correct time for the State Government to also ponder over what is to be done with them once the conservation exercise is completed. The present tendency in officialdom is to designate them all as museums than which there can be no greater short-sighted policy. There are all over the State several museums, declared open with much fanfare and then forgotten. These get hardly any footfalls owing to poor publicity, and unimaginative displays. Adding to this tally is certainly not an answer unless there is a revolution of sorts in the Department of Arts and Culture which runs most of the museums.

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Can the discussion move beyond 'Pet Rights' to 'Responsible Pet Ownership?'

Earlier this month, a terrible incident took place: A five-year-old child was mauled by two Rottweilers at a public park in Thousand Lights. The dogs were not leashed, which led to the attack; intervention did not come in time and the child sustained severe injuries to her head. She was hospitalised along with her mother who was also hurt in the attempt to protect her daughter. It is reported that the victims are faring better at the time of this article, though trauma counselling has been recommended to help them cope. The civic body reacted quickly. A case was registered against the owners and the Corporation made

announcements stressing that pet licenses were mandatory. The directive led to a sharp increase in the number of new registrations – pet license ap-

● by Varsha V.

plications rose from 120 to 850, with 2,124 still in process; further, owners have been told to obtain an anti-rabies certificate. A door-to-door survey is reportedly in the wings to ensure that all pets in the city have licenses. State officials also announced instructions that pet owners are to follow – dogs are to be leashed and muz-

zled in public places and should wear collars or shoulder braces; and owners are to bring only one dog to the park at a time. Further, the State government announced what would turn out to be a short-lived ban on twenty-three breeds of foreign and mixed dogs identified to be ferocious and dangerous to humans. (The ban was withdrawn as there exists a similar notification from the Union government – it is reported that it has been stayed by the Madras High Court.)

While there's little to criticise in the direction of the corrective measures, the issue has once again drawn attention to the oft-gaping lacunae that

HERITAGE WATCH

A Pleasure Pavilion in a Pitiful State



To those who may not be aware, Kalyan Mahal is an architectural treasure. Located on the banks of the Cauvery at Thiruvaiyyaru, this was one of the pleasure pavilions of the Maratha rulers of Thanjavur. The series of mansions that dot the riverbank are mentioned in a composition by Tyagaraja as well.

Kalyan Mahal has enormous rooms that overlook the river and there is a domed pavilion which has plaster horses rearing from it, making the entire structure seem like a chariot in motion. Converted in more modern times into a music college and later a girls' hostel, the place has been denied even basic maintenance and is in a pitiable

condition. While it is commendable that the Government is now contemplating restoration, the neglect of decades is a matter of regret and has caused incalculable harm to the structure. When will the Government realise that maintenance is far cheaper and easier than restoration after neglect?

yawn between law and enforcement. The public has long been demanding concrete steps against rising animal menace - the city has seen frequent news of attacks from stray dogs, pet dogs and roaming cattle as well. That it took a truly horrific incident to precipitate action is regrettable. It can also be argued that not much has been achieved in framing clear mandates for responsible pet ownership. Take pet licenses, for instance – while the number of applications is rising, the count

falls miserably short of the actual number of pet dogs in the city, estimated to be closer to 27,000. The GCC itself is said to be expecting the issuance of 20,000 pet licenses in the short-term. Why is there such a large gap? The answer is simple – pet owners currently face no consequences for not having a license. As for the license itself, it is in fact toothless in forcing public safety responsibility onto the owner; all it does is provide the State with a census of the

(Continued on page 2)

Neglect has given way to Restoration

(Continued from page 1)

The Government needs to think out of the box. All of these buildings need to be in continuous use if they are to be maintained well. Of course the CEG or the Travellers' Bungalow or for that matter the Chepauk buildings will continue to be in use but here again, the question is one of how they will be maintained. A casual visit to any of these structures will reveal that it is maintenance and worse, ad hoc additions that are the chief culprits. While handing over these buildings to their end users, the PWD has to insist on a strict maintenance code, and what is more, needs to inspect these structures periodically to make sure that the guidelines are being followed. It is presumed that the Sivaji Raja Building is part of Thanjavur Palace and is therefore in use as well.

The two chattirams pose a bigger challenge. The Kalyan Mahal was used as a music

college and a hostel and a visit a few years ago left this writer wondering as to how anyone could live in such a ruin. The campus ironically was ideal for a college and young minds – by the river, vast open spaces and plenty of ventilation. But it was the maintenance that was pathetic to say the least. The Orathanadu Chattiram has had an even worse history when it comes to maintenance. Wilful neglect is possibly the best description. In both these instances, the Government would do well to see what has been done in places such as Rajasthan and Gujarat with similar structures. They have been very creatively repurposed as event and stay spaces and have become revenue generators so that they can pay for their maintenance.

It is to be hoped that the Government will not stop with restoration but also plan ahead for the buildings' long-term well being.

Can the discussion move beyond 'Pet Rights' to 'Responsible Pet Ownership?'

(Continued from page 1)

number of pet dogs and the status of their vaccination. There is legal relief for victims of serious dog bites or attacks – Section 289 (negligent conduct with respect to an animal) of the Indian Penal Code can attract a fine of one thousand rupees or imprisonment up to six months, or both. But there is little in the way of preventive measures.

Two things can be done at the outset to rectify the situation at hand. First, it may be prudent to identify whether the civic bodies charged with these duties are equipped with commensurate manpower and resources. Take the Rottweilers case, above – the Corporation was meant to take custody of the animal and monitor it for rabies; however, the family has been given permission to take the dogs to their farmhouse in Madurai. They have been directed to send the Corporation photos of the dogs every day to enable monitoring for rabies. It was explained that the leeway was given since the openness and seclusion of farmhouse are in line with protocol; in addition, it is said that the civic body does not have the resources to take such animals in, save the Animal Birth Control shelters. Such lack may well be the reason why pet owners seem to seldom bear

the repercussion of untoward incidents. Second, it would do well to begin planning public spaces for the inclusion of pet animals. By now, it is patently clear that there is a sharp divide between pet owners and those who do not have pets. Instead of forcing compromises on either side, perhaps exploring an equitable bifurcation of public spaces as 'pet-inclusive' and 'pet-exclusive' would be worth the while. This will provide owners with areas to safely take their pets to, such as dog parks; it will also give others the choice of actively choosing pet-free spaces.

A couple of measures are reportedly in the planning stages – the Corporation is contemplating levying a fine on unregistered pets, as well as the creation of designated pet spaces. While at it, the administration should also consider educating pet owners for a change instead of the public who have often been exhorted to be 'pet friendly.' The fact of the matter is that affected parties almost never bear ill-will to the animal itself - what grates is the lack of empathy and accountability in their owners. Last year, it was reported that the Department of Urban Development, Uttar Pradesh mandated pet owners to give an undertaking to the local authorities that their pets would not cause public nuisance. Chennai would do well to follow suit.

When Grandaunt voted

The Man from Madras Musings has been writing this column for several years and apart from his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, no other relative of his has ever had so much as a mention in this space. MMM does not like nepotism; to the extent that when the rest of the world referred to the late Chief as Uncle, to MMM he was always Chief. But be that as it may, MMM is happy to introduce you all to his grandmother who is a hundred and is full of beans. And yes, she voted. At the booth. Not for her this voting from home.

And that reminded MMM of grandaunt, several years senior to grandmother and her constant companion for decades

she was so weak she did not know how she could make it to the polling booth.

This would immediately bring forth a barrage of offers from the campaigners. Pattima should not worry about such things they would say. After all, why were they there if they could not help her, they would exclaim. From the party that according to grandmother won freedom she would refuse all offers of help. Her logic was that they having sacrificed much in the past ought not to be burdened with her demands. But the Opposition was a different matter altogether. To them she would be all sweetness and light. And from them she would extract the promise of a car to take her to the booth and bring her back.

Communal Banter

Elections are always divisive and this one perhaps more so. The summer heat is a major contributor in the view of *The Man from Madras Musings*, who himself has on occasion felt Mad from *Madras Musings* and Mad at *Madras Musings* this month. How much worse it must be for these hardworking politicians of ours as they campaign in the heat and dust, and all the while the sun shining relentlessly on them. It is enough to addle anyone's mind and these leaders are no different. In MMM's view no right thinking and cool-headed person would be saying what they say had they not been on the road 24x7.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

before leaving this world some years ago at the age of 99. Grandaunt too loved the elections and the sight of grandmother going to the booth reminded MMM of the times when grandaunt exercised her franchise. She belonged to a generation that had seen the freedom struggle and so for her there was only one party. But she still managed to keep everyone guessing and extract her entertainment from it.

These days voters are asked to log on to a portal to check their allotted polling stations and also get their voter slips. But those days were not like that. Political parties called at home with your voting chits and while handing them over requested you to vote for their candidate. Grandaunt looked forward to these visits and when the campaigners came made it a point to look extra feeble (she was as strong as a horse) and tell them that was most likely the last election she would vote in (she lived to see many more) and even that was doubtful in the extreme as

On election day grandaunt would be ready and waiting at the verandah of the house. A frisson of excitement went through the place as the car appeared and she was ushered into it, the household assembling on the doorstep to see her off. She always made it a point to carry the voter slip given by the Opposition and on entering the booth would promptly discard it and vote for her favourite. And then she made the journey home in the Opposition's car, with a cheeky grin. She had pulled a fast one over those who dared contest against the only party that mattered. And so it happened, election after election.

She had another principle – never to divulge whom she voted for. We guessed it but she never publicly expressed her choice. It was the same with grandmother in this election. Someone asked her as she emerged from the booth as to who got her vote and she admonished the person by wagging her finger at him. It is amazing how that generation cherished its rights. Perhaps because it was hard won.

Unfortunately, the malaise has spread to some followers too, these being of the armchair variety. They believe that they are contributing their bit by spreading communal hate. Chief among this variety is the retired elderly male who is forever trying to buttonhole someone to pour his poisonous views into. This is a nasty version of the Oldest Member in Clubs, so popularised by Perhaps Greatest Writer.

One such individual caught hold MMM at a wedding and rather like the Ancient Mariner, who too did the same to another wedding guest, would not let MMM go. He began nicely enough by complimenting MMM on all he does for MM and by way of keeping history alive. And then he launched into his spiel –

"Are you aware that there is a plaque at the entrance of the Mylapore temple that says St Thomas visited this area in the 2nd century?" he asked.

(Continued on page 3)

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Hoping for restoration

This refers to the two write-ups under the headings, 'Finally, a (Notified) Heritage Act in Place' and 'Short 'N' Snappy', in *Madras Musings* dated May 1st. It was saddening to know from the interesting and informative account of the heritage walk led by MMM, that a prominent heritage building owned by a respectable institution in Adyar was in a state of neglect. It was all the more surprising that the locals did not know who owned the structure. One would hope that the Heritage Commission which is expected to be in place in July, this year, would take up this matter with the institution concerned and get the building refurbished.

N. Rama Rao

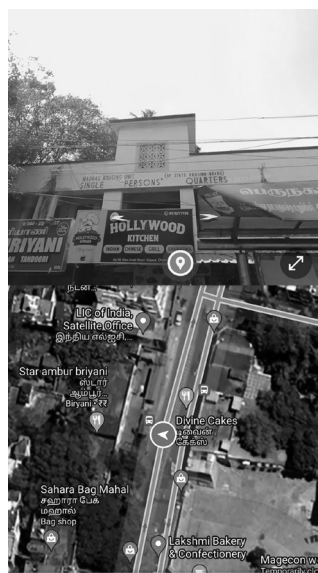
Retired Deputy Registrar General (Census) and UN Census Adviser
1A, Sri Kripa Apartments
44, Third Main Road, R.A. Puram
Chennai 600 028

Madras Housing Unit quarters

Please find attached a picture of the Single Person Quarters by the Madras Housing Unit. Must have been in the 1950's or 60's on New Avadi Road, Kilpauk. This is now a bunch of shops near Hotel Krishna Bhavan.

Thought it was a great initiative by the then Government to have come up with this scheme. Any further info on this would make it an interesting article in *Madras Musings*.

B. Arun Kumar
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Star ambar bryan, Sahara Bag Mahal, Lakshmi Bakery & Confectionery, Mageconw

1942 evacuation

Coimbatore saw a stream of Chennaites during the great exodus of 1942. The much spoken Japanese invasion did not take place. Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri was one of the notable figures who came to Coimbatore. Not willing to idle away his time, Sastri took classes in English Grammar and pronunciation for school teachers. I used to accompany my father to the classes. The job given to me was to open the Webster's Dictionary and show the page where the word written on the blackboard was. This began my lifelong habit of referring to the dictionary. Sastri was a village-mate and classmate of my maternal grandfather. In those days Coimbatore had a salubrious climate. For Chennaites it was a refreshing departure from the heat.

Dr. S.S. Rajagopalan

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**Website
Comments**

Before we gloat over Bangalore's water shortage...

(Vol. XXXIII No. 24, April 1-15, 2024)

Even if we conserve 40% of the rainfall, it will be copious to meet city demands. The scientific and contour-based storm water drains if properly connected to local tanks can add to the ground water recharges. All new colonies or housing clusters should be mandated to have ponds. Reviving ancient kuttai kulam and creating a network of storing spillovers will be the best. Temple tanks must be regenerated.

Ramesh G
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Going walkabout in Madras

(Vol. XXXIII No. 22, March 1-15, 2024)

Brilliant article, takes me back to my days in Chennai circa 1981 to 1984 plus my sojourn from the army while on annual leave. I hope the authorities take notice and develop Chennai into a world class urban city, replete with parks and trails and water bodies. Meanwhile look forward to many such articles.

Balaji Rangan

Great going Chari!! Keep walking and you will discover lovely places... in and around our lovely city! Explore!

Jyotsna

* * *

So many places to walk in namma Madras! No excuses then. Thank you for taking us along on your walks through your witty narrative.

Pankajavalli S

* * *

Extremely enriching conversations enroute served as fuel besides the camaraderie of the past 50 years together. Super write up Chari! Aptly describes our experiences.

Prasad Narayan Rege

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The Kalikambal Temple and its legends

(Vol. XXXIII No. 20, February 1-15, 2024)

Thanks for setting the record straight! During my annual winter visits to Madras I've always wanted to check out the Kalikambal temple. This time I did along with a visit to the Armenian church. When looking online to guide my visit, I found many of the 'facts' you cite! Your piece has been very helpful in filtering facts from falsehoods.

Bhavani Chandramouli

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Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao – A man of peerless erudition

(Vol. XXXIV No. 2, May 1-15, 2024)

I read the article on Dr Pappu and his association with the Silicon Valley University in California. Just for information the said university has been found out to be a fake institution catering to students from Andhra to enter US on fake degree programs. It has been derecognised.

Vinay Kumar
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Ravichandran Ashwin: Is he Tamil Nadu's best cricketer ever?

(Vol. XXXIV No. 2, May 1-15, 2024)

Superb off spinner, albeit not in the traditional mould. Doesn't get the credit he merits and the chances also. He would be a permanent fixture in any other international team.

Nagarajan S
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* * *

He deserved to lead India, and just like Jaisimha, never got it.

K. Gopal
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B.S. Raghavan – Pre-eminent Civil Servant

(Vol. XXXIV No. 2, May 1-15, 2024)

Nice to know about Mr. B.S. Raghavan. He must have been a sincere civil servant. The author has brought out the man and his character very nicely.

PR Iyer

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Good tidings from Gokhale Hall

(Vol. XXXIV No. 1, April 16-30, 2024)

Upper India Trading company was in the Bharat Insurance Building Ground Floor from 1936 until 1996 – my grandfather used to sit there as the motor parts office.

Vicky Chandok

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Low Voter Turnout – Is it solely due to Voter Apathy?

(Vol. XXXIV No. 2, May 1-15, 2024)

It is a sad issue that the voters turnout is very less every time. Some suggestions:

- 1) Voter card is to be linked.
- 2) Voting should be made easy to all above 60 years.
- 3) Postal ballot should be given to all citizens from 60 years.
- 4) Voting by online may be done.

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Short 'N' Snappy

(Continued from page 2)

MMM said he was aware but added that he had his doubts about happenings that far back in time, and that no matter what be the religion, these can only be classified as legends.

The man was delighted.

"Exactly," he chimed. "I want you to speak to the Chief Minister and get the plaque removed."

MMM asked him as to what made him think he had a hotline to the CM's ear.

"He released a book you wrote," came the answer. "So he must know you well."

MMM opened his mouth to deny this but then realised that it was better that he kept quiet. After all, if the man thought such was MMM's clout, who was MMM to refute it?

The story did not end there. The man then attacked all religions other than his and after a while paused for breath and asked if MMM did not agree. After all, was not MMM a co-religionist?

MMM had heard enough. He said he was not a co-religionist. The man was shocked. How is that possible he asked. MMM said he had converted some time back. Whereupon the guest upped and left leaving MMM to enjoy the wedding. No, MMM has not converted but there was no other way to get rid of that buttonholing bore.

– MMM

Thank you, Donors

We today, publish donations received with thanks for the period January-March 2024.

– The Editor

Rs. 100: Kb. Baskaran, Yugesh R, D.R. Aravamudhan.

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Government Marine Aquarium on the Marina promenade, Madras, established in 1909

In 1905–1906, Edgar Thurston (Superintendent, Madras Museum, 1885–1908) sowed the seeds for a marine aquarium in Madras, because of city's coastal proximity. This effort eventuated as the Madras Marine Aquarium (MMA) in 1909. Directed by the superintendents of Madras Museum during its initial days, the MMA was handed to the Department of Fisheries, Government of Madras, in 1919. Frederick Nicholson, James Hornell and B. Sundara Raj superintended the MMA in 1909–1918, 1918–1924 and 1924–1942 respectively. From 1919, a research thrust was envisaged. Consequently, reasonable research progressed at MMA utilising the organisms held in captivity. With the World War II (1939–1945) threatening India, Madras especially, the MMA was shut down in 1942. It reopened in 1955 but more as a freshwater aquarium, disengaging from its original concept of a marine centre. This article clarifies the pioneering efforts made by Nicholson, Hornell and Sundara Raj in bringing organisms live from sea for the common person of Madras to see, enjoy their colours and forms, and learn from them. Efforts made by Nicholson, Hornell and Sundara Raj instilled a sense of what we today refer to as 'biological diversity' and 'phenotypic variation'. The MMA was the spark that ignited the fire of setting up similar educational-cum-scientific institutions elsewhere in India in later years.

The Marina promenade

The Marina in Madras holds a pride of place in India for its adorable beach – with incessantly rolling blue and silvery waves and a vast expanse of serene and shimmering sand – free to any visitor (Figure 1). What used to be the 'South-Beach Road' and presently Kamarajar Salai – a popular promenade that runs parallel to the shoreline from Fort St George in the north to St. Thomas's Cathedral and beyond in the south – was conceived, planned, and executed by Mountstuart Elphinstone Grant-Duff (1829–1906), Governor of Madras (1881–1886). Grant-Duff christened this stretch as Marina and opened it to the general public of Madras in October 1884.

Many historic institutions, such as the University of Madras (Chepauk campus), Humayun Mahal (the Chepauk Palace of the Nawab of Arcot, 1768–1855),

Presidency College, Marina Cricket Ground, Lady Wenlock Park, Queen Mary's College, All-India Radio, Directorate-General of Police, and the Ice House (presently, Vivekananda House) dot the western edge of the South-Beach Road; no institution of significance either existed in the past or exists presently on the eastern edge of this promenade, except the Madras Marine Aquarium (MMA).

Madras Marine Aquarium

The MMA started on a modest scale on the Marina promenade in October 1909, intended as an entertainment-education precinct. James Hornell, Director of the Department of Fisheries, Madras Presidency, has the following to say, about MMA in 1922:

'This aquarium has the distinction of being the only one on the Asiatic mainland; indeed, except for the ephemeral ones erected from time to time in Japan, it may be claimed as the first attempt of its kind east of Suez. It was designed by Mr. E. Thurston during the last years of his tenure in the post of Superintendent of the Madras Museum; the present writer well remembers discussing the arrangement of the tanks



Above: Figure 3. Frederick Nicholson (source: <https://www.fisheries.tn.gov.in/History>). Below: Figure 4. James Hornell (source: <http://microscopist.net/SinelHornell.html>).



Figure 1. The Marina in Madras, from the roof of the southern extension of the erstwhile Chepauk Palace showing Madras-Presidency College (arrow; tower sans P. fucata tower), early 1920s. Photo by Klein and Peyerl, Madras (previously Wiele and Peyerl). Source: <https://www.past-india.com/photos-items/the-marina-beach>

with him, and giving what advice lay in his power, little thinking that the whirligig of time would bring him the responsible charge of its superintendence. It was erected by the Madras Government primarily with a view to give the public an opportunity to learn something of the wonderful wealth of life in the sea at their doors, and partly to afford facilities for studying of the habits of marine animals.'

By the late 1980s – early 1990s, signs of degeneration and deterioration were showing up for little-known reasons. The 2004 tsunami drove the final nail in the coffin of MMA. The present article chronicles MMA's life and the science it promoted in its halcyon days.

The names Frederic Nicholson, James Hornell and B. Sundara Raj feature prominently in the chronicles of MMA. Frederick Augustus Nicholson (1846–1936) of the Indian Civil Service (Figure 3), previously the Collector of Madras district, was deputed as the Fisheries Officer in 1905. Given that the presidency of Madras comprised (and continues to in the state of Tamil Nadu) a c. 1100 km coastline and extensive practice of fisheries including pearl and chank harvesting, Nicholson was given a dictate to develop fisheries benefitting the economy of Madras presidency. Nicholson proposed the creation of a 'Bureau of Fisheries (BoF)' aiming at increasing fish production, promoting fish-based industries, and improving the socio-economic conditions of the fisherfolk. In 1907, the BoF eventuated, which, in fact, pioneered professional fisheries management throughout India. Nicholson took over as the Honorary Director of BoF and served until 1918. James Hornell (1865–1949) (Figure 4) first arrived in Colombo from the UK in 1902 to execute a feasibility

study of pearl fishery in the Gulf of Mannar endowed with ample populations of the pearl-yielding *Pinctada radiata* and *P. fucata* (Mollusca: Pteriidae) for the Government of Ceylon. He was appointed as 'Marine Assistant' in the newly established Madras BoF by Nicholson in 1906. Following Nicholson's retirement in 1918, Hornell succeeded and served the BoF until 1924. Hornell passionately pursued marine science and classified the sociology of the fisherfolk of the Tamizh land, e.g. their social life and their boats (catamarans and masulas). After 1924, he was a consultant to Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1863–1939) to develop marine and freshwater fisheries in the state of Baroda (Vadodara). Hornell wrote scores of scientific articles and monographs.

Between 1909 and 1919, the MMA was superintended by John Robert Henderson, Superintendent of Madras Government Museum, after Edgar Thurston. The MMA was handed over to the new Department of Fisheries, Madras Presidency – evolved from the BoF – in 1919. When designed, the MMA was contemplated as an aquarium to exhibit only marine organisms, with provisions made for circulating the closely available seawater. Plans for a marine aquarium in Madras were drawn by Edgar Thurston in 1905–1906 with the following objects: (i) an aquarium exhibiting marine vertebrates was necessary because Madras occurs on the coast of the Bay of Bengal (BoB), (ii) the BoB and coast contributed significantly to the economy of Madras, and (iii) the residents of Madras need to see and know the organisms that contributed to the economic development of the region.

The comprehensive and monumental 7-volume *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* by Thurston, assisted by Kadambi Rangachari is a glorious memorial to India's complex Anthropology. Thurston also wrote books on metallurgy, geography and economic products of southern India (for details, see the University of Pennsylvania's archives: <https://online-books.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookup-name?key=Thurston>, accessed on 28 December 2023). With Arthur Oliver Villiers Russell's (the Second Baron of Amphill (1869–1935), Governor of Madras (1900–1904)) support, Thurston led a committee consisting of A. G. Bourne, J.R. Henderson, P.F. Fyson, K. Ramunni Menon and W. Molesworth exploring the establishment of MMA. The Thurston Committee was fully conscious that the intended marine aquarium was the first of its kind between Italy in the west and the Philippines in the east, and therefore, any available European model for a marine aquarium would not work, given that Madras is tropical. The Thurston Committee foresaw myriad problems – both administrative and financial. However, they overcame them.

The MMA was opened to the public on 21 October 1909. A modest brick structure on the

intended for committee meetings and storing materials and furniture. The store room also housed a mechanical aerator.

The other live displays included locally available species of cuttlefish (Sepiidae), Holothuriidae (Holothuroidea; possibly, *Holothuria nobilis*), a few species of the Decapoda, such as *Clibanarius infraspinus* (hermit-crab, Diogenidae), *Scylla serrata* (orange mud crab, Portunidae), *Panulirus homarus* (spiny lobster, Palinuridae) and *Peneaus indicus* (the Indian prawn, Penaeidae).

In the Fisheries department report for 1911–1912 – published in 1918 – Nicholson indicates that the MMA required re-building and expansion. He says:

'At the instance of Government, the Fisheries department submitted to government a scheme and plan drawn up by Hornell as an Aquarium expert, for the erection at Madras of a suitable Marine Aquarium (to replace the present very small but very popular one) and Marine Biological Institution: a special committee was appointed to consider the question and reported to Government strongly in favour

● by
Anantanarayanan Raman

of the scheme including not only an aquarium worthy of the country and its position as the only one between Naples and the Philippines, but a place of biological research and instruction, a source of supply of biological supply for use in educational institutions and for study by savants all over the world, and a suitable home for the Fisheries department which would, in turn, greatly strengthen its position and enhance its usefulness. Hornell also suggested the foundation of a research fellowship in fishery investigations tenable by graduates of the Madras University in connection with the economic work of the proposed institution, a suggestion which was warmly supported by the committee.'

However, in his annual report, Nicholson clarifies that the government had agreed, in principle, to add laboratories and offices for new staff with the refurbished MMA by 1919, thus developing it as the state-of-the-art 'Fisheries Biological Station'. However, due to financial exigencies, that proposal was deferred, with no date stipulated.

MMA (1919–1942)

Reports of BoF made by Nicholson in 1918 and by Hornell in 1922 – the successive Directors of the BoF and the renamed Department of Fisheries, Madras – say that the MMA was well received by the Madras public. Highly likely, a revised stand by the Government of Madras should have occurred, details of which are not available. Incidentally and curiously, in 1919, the scope and mission of MMA were revised. A new goal was set: the MMA was to investigate the life histories of 'edible' fishes and oysters so that their stocking and breeding in monitored conditions could be achieved; consequently, the MMA should become a stocking-breeding facility. What Nicholson perceived as the 'Fisheries Biological Station' took a different shape. Hornell says:

'The project for a marine aquarium and marine biological station advanced to the production of architect's plans, in the preparation for which Mr. Hornell's expert assistance was sought and given. Apart from the need for purely scientific research, there are many practical problems presenting themselves for enquiry, such as for instance, the life history of food fishes, the organisms they feed upon, and of their enemies, the examination of various marine products, and so forth. For such purposes, as well as for research by savants and students, and for the provision of specimens of marine life for scientific and educational purposes, the new institution, with its laboratories, library, and museum, will be most valuable while providing in the aquarium proper a means of popular and most interesting instruction.'

Hornell argued to the government that the MMA needs to be a centre of active research as well. Consequently, the Government of Madras considered enabling MMA with modern laboratories. Another effort by Hornell, after Nicholson's previous vain bid, also did not materialise sooner. However, a later report by Hornell's successor B. Sundara Raj includes a remark that research was activated with the use of Steam Trawler *Lady Goschen* (operational in 1927–1930) and on three newly established on-shore stations at West Hill (Calicut, presently Kozhikode, Kerala), Krusadai Island (Tamil Nadu) and Visakapatnam (Andhra Pradesh). Notably these are feathers in the cap of the Department of Fisheries and not that of MMA per se.

The launch of *Guide to Madras Marine Aquarium* (28 pages) in 1919 was a milestone in the memoirs of MMA. This guide included biological, common-English and vernacular names of exhibited organisms, further to brief biological and economic notes. A reference to the fifth-enlarged edition of this guide (45 pages), 1923, is available (https://books.google.com.au/books/about/Guide_to_the_Madras_Marine_Aquarium_Fifth.html, accessed on 2 January 2024). The restored aquarium included a new set of electric lighting, displaying the tanks better, especially after twilight. Hornell remarks that the captive fishes expressed 'perfect tolerance' to artificial lighting, irrespective of the brilliance. The refurbished MMA attracted more visitors – despite the fee – evidenced by visitor numbers: 96,957 in 1918–1919 and 163,517 in 1919–1920.

The water-aeration mechanism in the tanks was improved to perform dually: the inflow of filtered seawater was regulated from a high-level storage reservoir; an air compressor delivered air at the bottom of every tank. But it was impossible to regulate aeration suiting the varying constitutional susceptibilities of every type of fish displayed in MMA. Consequently, some of them suffered the 'gas-eye' disease because excess oxygen induced the eye-ball to protrude. Hornell comments that the protruding eyeballs attracted predation by co-occurring predatory fishes.

All the fish displayed were from the sea in Madras's neighbourhood. The exhibits were diverse, yet representative of those common on the Madras coast. Many, such as *Tenulosa iisha* (hilsa, *Dorosomatidae*), various Clupeidae (sardines, *Clupeiformes*) and Scombridae (mackerels, *Scombriformes*) were delicate to withstand handling and transport. A few others were either unattractive or bulky for exhibition. So they were not displayed. Hornell adds that taxa representing lower forms of marine life, such as the colourful and spectacular Nudibranchia and Euopisthobranchia (Gastropoda) commonly displayed in the European aquaria, did not exist in MMA. He regrets that the gaudy Ocypodidae (ghost and fiddler crabs, *Brachyura*), exquisite Palinuridae (spiny, rock lobsters, *Pleocyemata*), huge Penaeidae (shrimps, prawns, *Penaeoidea*) endowed with long antennae, purple and canary-yellow Holothuroidea (sea cucumbers, *Echinozoa*), crimson Oreasteridae (the cushion starfishes, *Echinodermata*), blue Porpitiidae (blue-buttons, *Hydrozoa*), violet Siphonophorae

(Hydrozoa) and the Janthinidae (violet-sea snails, *Gastropoda*) available in Pamban and Tuticorin of Madras presidency could not be exhibited in MMA for reasons of distance and transport-cost, and lack of space.

James Hornell's guide to MMA (1921)

This section has been derived from the *Madras marine aquarium* of 1921, published in the Madras Fisheries Department Bulletin.

The preface to this guide (referred to as 'handbook' as well) explains the logistics Hornell had followed. But his note reads strangely for two reasons: (i) Hornell compares fish behaviour with human behaviour and (ii) for the kind of language he has used. That note is reproduced below as such:

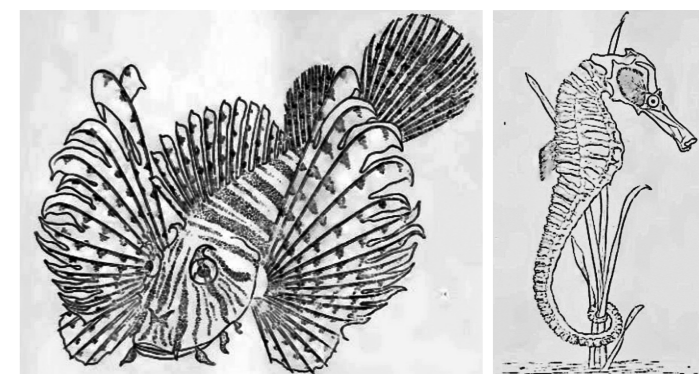
'An aquarium handbook cannot describe the creatures living in the tanks in the precise order of their relationship to one another, as found in a text book on zoology. Of necessity many types are missing, either because they do not occur in Madras seas or because of difficulties in bringing safely to the shore or maintaining health when placed in the tanks. Active and delicate fishes of the sardine and mackerel families are particularly difficult to keep alive in captivity. Another source of trouble in placing fishes in their proper order in the tanks lies in the mental and moral attitude of certain species towards their fellows. As with men, there are fishes with a predatory instinct highly developed; many are unabashed cannibals; others are of a nagging and bullying disposition, never happy except when teasing and snapping at others; another set revel in combats with their own or related species. It requires a large experience of the varying characters of the different kinds to know how to arrange happy families in each tank; sometimes, individuals

of the same species have to be kept apart to prevent quarrels and bloodshed. Hence, the following notes cannot be arranged strictly in zoological order.'

Hornell also provides brief details of the displayed fishes. He has included 25 India-ink illustrations of select species. He acknowledges M. Ramaswami Nayudu and K.R. Samuel, his assistants at MMA, for preparing illustrations used in this guide (e.g. Figure 5).

This guide includes details of 44 species of Actinopterygii (ray-finned fishes), 16 of Arthropoda (animals with jointed legs), three of Chondrichthyes (cartilaginous fishes), two of Cnidaria (jellyfish), one of Asteroidea (sea stars), and two of Mollusca (a large group that includes a variety of snails, slugs, clams, and squids). As an example, I provide details about *Hippocampus kuda* (the sea horse, Syngnathidae: Hippocampinae) to illustrate Hornell's style of presentation in this guide. He indicates that *H. kuda* is commonly seen in Madras seas. This is an 'interesting' organism, he says, more because of the quaintness in shape than any curious behaviour in its habits, as he had seen in the aquarium tank: 'usually he [Hornell uses the gender pronoun 'he'] rests quietly and apparently very observant, if we may judge by the quick movements of the eyes'; to anchor himself securely, he twists the end of his thin tail around a weed or a twig of a sea-fan (Cnidaria: Gorgoniidae) keeping his body vertical (Figure 6). The pipe fishes (Syngnathidae: Syngnathinae), close allies of the Hippocampinae, were also maintained in the same tank. Males in both Hippocampinae and Syngnathinae store eggs laid by this mate in a long fold of the skin along each side of the body – which Hornell refers to as 'incubatory pouches', presently 'brood pouches'. Hornell remarks that one male *H. kuda* opened 'his'

(Continued on page 6)



Left: Figure 5. *Pterois russellii* (Russell's scorpion-fish, Scorpaenidae). Right: figure 6: *Hippocampus* (*H. kuda?*, Syngnathidae).

A Grandmother remembered

“Don’t come too close,” our normally affectionate grandmother would beseech us. (*mela padadhey, mela padadhey* was the refrain in Tamil.) Once she had showered, no one, not even a toddler, could touch her till she had finished her morning prayers. She followed these rules of ritual purity, which had been handed down to her as a teen bride, till disease robbed her of memories.

When Patti died, earlier this year, at the age of 96, she had been suffering from dementia for nearly a decade. A kindly South Indian grandmother, she wore a pair of asymmetrical nose rings favored by women of her generation. She looked elegant even in her everyday white-dotted *sungudi saris*: a standout and a stereotypical Patti at the same time.

All Pattis are good cooks, aren’t they? Mine made classic *paal payasam* and delicious instant mango pickle. When those 2-minute noodles first appeared on the market, she said, “Maggi is just plumper *semiya*,” and proceeded to make a slithery *upma* of it. Patti had her own “tastemaker,” a signature blend of spice powders for many dishes. With cardamom and only smidgeons of saffron, nutmeg, or tricky green camphor, she also conjured up a variety of sweets for our birthdays.

Patti’s birthday, which fell on Children’s Day, was easy enough to remember, but we know precious little about her childhood which came to an end in 1942. When Singapore, a British bastion, fell to Japanese forces in World War II, Patti’s family in Nemmeli received visitors. It was her paternal aunt and her brood from Madras. An official order had encouraged residents of the

city, who were not essential to its functioning, to leave immediately. Even the eldest of Patti’s visiting cousins, a 16-year-old, was about as non-essential as they come, and so they left for the countryside.

By the time the authorities declared Madras safe again, my grandmother was married to this teenager. In the city, her cousins went back to studying. The aunt-cum-mother-in-law trained Patti in the skills needed to run a household. In independent India, the family moved up in the world and their home would earn a reputation for hospitality. House guests staying for varying lengths of time, including young women who enrolled in colleges, could rely on Patti for hot meals and a kind word. Patti, with her pleasant smile, served daily visitors excellent coffee.

Good coffee begins with good quality milk. “The milkman comes with the cow at 4.30 in the morning. Someone must watch him otherwise he will add water,” says the elderly woman in the R.K. Narayan novel *The Painter of Signs*. Having taken care of her nephew for many years, she is now about to leave for Benares. The protagonist, the painter, realizes that if his milk and curd had been pure and creamy all along, it was thanks to the invisible labor of this widowed aunt. She had stood beside the cow at dawn, watching the milk pail to make sure the milk remained undiluted.

The aunt tells the nephew she has stocked gingelly oil for at least six months, but he must see to it that the lid of the jar is taken off for a few minutes, once a week, so the oil doesn’t turn rancid. He must ensure that insects don’t get in

when the lid is open. And she asks him to air the pickles and preserves at least once in ten days. There was enough stock of dried vegetables to last him for two years.

“Don’t waste any of it,” the industrious aunt tells him before embarking on her journey. Our industrious Patti thought similarly. Forget all the prayers, fasting, and other rituals they observed, a strict zero-waste policy seems to have been the true guiding mantra of women of that era. They were into sustainability long before it became fashionable.

The physical and emotional labor put in by the women in charge of feeding a multi-generation family in those days boggles the mind. They also did a ton of non-culinary work ranging from everyday chores to whatever needed to be done to secure the family’s future. Patti had very little leisure.

In the little downtime she had, a younger Patti crocheted

to me, the very best keepsake. Some memories came rushing back. I recalled that Patti, the mother of six, had learned the English alphabet through a Tamil-English correspondence course. When her children left home, she wrote to them in chatty Tamil, printing just the address in English in her neat hand. How my mother looked forward to those thin blue inland letters, filled with news about family!

At some point Patti seems to have gotten into the habit of organising the letters she received, along with cherished photographs and newspaper clippings, into an archive of her own. A picture of my mother, her eldest, in her graduation robes. A full-page article about her youngest daughter’s boutique. An invite to a granddaughter’s Bharatnatyam debut. Letters from me, and my brother, as graduate students in the United States. My condolence letter when Patti’s

clearly, she saw her ten grandchildren as individuals, though she treated each of us the same. If she had a favorite, we did not know it.

Patti’s best qualities – kindness and patience – we took them for granted, and as for the smaller things about her, mostly, we never thought to ask. A first-person account of a different way of life is now lost to me. I am left with no idea of the times, the people, or the place that shaped her. I have never been to Nemmeli. How did Patti see the changing world?

What was Patti’s first phone call like? When Patti briefly set up a home of her own, what was it like to hear her aunt-cum-mother-in-law’s instructions through this instrument? One evening, in recent years, when I held up the smart phone for a selfie, and asked her to smile, she responded with, “Who smiles without a reason?” This, for some reason, made me grin. And the laughter must have been infectious because Patti began to grin. Soon, we were like a pair of giggly American preteens inside a photobooth at the mall. And I caught a fleeting glimpse of pre-dementia Patti.

In a Peanuts cartoon strip, the usually crabby character, Lucy tells her class about her grandmother who used to work for the defense plant during World War II. When the men enlisted to fight, there were gaping holes in the industrial labor force, and women stepped in to fill the gap. The bandanna-clad fictitious character called Rosie the Riveter became a powerful recruitment tool and an American cultural icon.

These women were expected

(Continued on page 7)

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cute purses, drew floral-geometrical kolams or did delicate needlework. Middle-aged Patti would doze off in the middle of browsing through some Tamil weekly. Overall, she did not seem to have a lot of time and energy for reading.

After Patti had passed on, the items she had diligently collected over a lifetime were divided among the appropriate relatives. On that occasion, when I was handed a thin sheaf of articles I had written for *The Hindu*, I burst into tears. The fact that Patti had cared to save my writing over the years was,

nonagenarian mother had died in Nemmeli. (Clearly, longevity runs in the family.) And there was more. I am yet to find out what she saved from/of my aunt, a graduate of the College of Engineering, Guindy, and another aunt who was as outspoken as Patti was quiet.

Even at first glance, Patti’s curation tells a story. Women of her generation had little opportunity to study or participate in life outside their homes. So, she was delighted that her daughters were educated, and even happier when the world acknowledged their work. And

GOVERNMENT MARINE AQUARIUM ON THE MARINA PROMENADE

(Continued from page 5)

incubatory pouch on a day early in December 1920 and released a little more than 200 fry, miniatures of himself but only less than 4 mm in overall length.

The MMA carried out basic biological investigations on some organisms in captivity. For example, one S.T. Moses, identified as ‘sub-assistant-in-charge of MMA’, investigated the anatomy of *Notarchus* (*N. indicus*–?, the sea hare, *Mollusca: Aplysiidae*) and published results. Moses of MMA also clarified the habits of the *Parathelphusa* (the paddy-cutting crabs, *Crustacea: Gecarcinidae*) based on a request from the Department of Agriculture, Government of Madras. Details of two other publications

by Moses, one on the anatomy of *Turbinella pyrum* (*Turbinellidae*) and the second on the anatomy and life-history of *Ostrea madrasensis* (*Mollusca: Ostreidae*) are available. Birthing in captivity by *Narcine timlei* (the Indian electric ray; *Narcinidae*) and *Narke dipterygia* (previously *Astrape dipterygia*; the numbray; *Narkidae*), and *Hydrophis cyanocinctus* (previously *Distira cyanocinctus*; the annulated sea snake; *Elapidae*) occurred in MMA in August 1926, which Sundara Raj announced in an issue of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. This note includes brief details of the behaviour of both the mother and offspring soon and a little after parturition.

MMA (1942 and after)

Due to reasons attributed to World War II and anticipating the Japanese attack on Madras, the MMA was shut down in 1942. It was reopened in August 1955, but more as a freshwater aquarium than a marine aquarium, as intended in 1909. A news item in a popular newspaper indicates that the sea horse (*H. kuda*) was bred in captivity in July 1986 (<https://www.the-hindu.com/news/cities/chennai/Plans-afoot-to-revive-aquarium-at-Marina/article1442-6600.ece>, dated 17 June 2016, accessed on 27 December 2023). My efforts to verify this claim from published papers proved in vain; nor Lipton et al. of the Vizhinjam Research

Centre of the Central Marine Fisheries and Research Institute speak of any successful captive breeding effort of *H. kuda* made in MMA in their article on captive breeding and nursery rearing of *H. kuda* in India. But we know that biologists at the MMA developed appropriate protocols for *ex situ* culturing of *Crassostrea madrasensis* (previously *Ostrea madrasensis*, the Indian backwater oyster, the edible-Indian oyster; *Ostreidae*). This work carried out at the MMA in the early 1920s established that *C. madrasensis* fatten and breed only in low salinity, whereas *Ostrea edulis* (the European-edible oyster, a.k.a. the Colchester native oyster, mud oyster) grow well in high salinity.

Bernd Brunner – who presently writes on science for popular readership – has documented the history of marine aquaria in *The Ocean at Home: An Illustrated History of the Aquarium*. In this book, Brunner speaks of contemporary approaches to building and maintaining marine aquaria, from homes to walk-through oceanaria. In India, close to 20 aquaria presently exist in different cities (https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_aquaria_in_India, accessed on 1 January 2024). Against these present-day developments, I am thoroughly convinced that the MMA has stood magnificently as a pioneer for Indian aquaria, be it marine or freshwater.

Pride in your heritage – A Bengaluru story

A lonely slab in a thick bush – ignored for nearly a hundred years, until Udayakumar came searching for it. The Kannada inscription on this slab had been recorded by B.L. Rice, a British archaeologist a century ago. The inscription stated that a king had gifted village as an agraphara (brahmadeya), during a solar eclipse, about six hundred years ago. B.L. Rice recorded this inscription in *Epigraphica Carnatica*, Volume 9, in 1909, with the name of a farmer, and that this slab stood at the edge of his field. Farmer and field had vanished, replaced by small lanes, a few houses and a school.

With only the name of the village, Gongadipura, Udayakumar drove to the village, on the outskirts of Bengaluru, hoping to spot the slab. A Bengaluru resident for several generations, an IIT Madras alumnus, who had worked for Tata and General Electric, Udayakumar



Gongadipura slab among the bushes.

was bitten by the history bug a few years ago. He found the slab with the inscription, unrecognized, abandoned, covered with weeds. He thought perhaps the school headmaster may know some people who could clear the shrubbery around the inscription. The headmaster merely observed that the village was a kugramam – a tiny village of no consequence or claim to fame.

“On the contrary, it has great claim to fame,” responded Udayakumar. “A school or col-

lege flourished here. Brahmins learnt the *Vedas*, *Dharma Shastras*, and probably sciences like astronomy, since the inscription mentions on this slab I am looking for mentions a solar eclipse.”

Perhaps the bemused expression of the headmaster unfamiliar with archaeology inspired him to try a different track. “What do you think of Bangalore University, very near your village?”

It was the correct prod. The headmaster beamed with pride,

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“What a big university sir! Such great scholars have studied there. The whole city is proud of it, naturally,” he retorted.

“Would you call Bengaluru with this university an insignificant village?” Udayakumar pursued.

The headmaster was shocked out of his senses. “Sir, what are you saying?”

“The government and great philanthropists must have endowed the university with large donations and grants, right? And they would have had a foundation slab with the names of the donors and the inauguration date, don’t you think?”

“Of course, sir, naturally.”

“Well consider this. Five hundred years before Bengaluru University, an educational

institution was founded here, on the orders of a king. And this slab I am looking for has the proof. It is evidence that people of learning lived in Bengaluru that long ago. Can you help me save this slab?”

The inspired headmaster made enquiries, mustered all help he could, and they found the slab forlorn among the bushes. A bulldozer was brought in to clear the bushes. The village became a hubbub of curiosity. The inscription was read again by experts. The villagers proudly realized their heritage as the location of very, very old school in the Bengaluru area. The streets were adorned with banners and bunting and bore a festive look. The slab was honoured with garlands. An eager mother brought her infant child and traced his fingers lovingly on the letters the slab; a Vijayadasami tradition called aksharaabhyasam, where a child’s finger is traced in rice to teach him or her the first letter of the alphabet. The proud headmaster takes a photo of this touching scene and sends it to Udayakumar.

On a recent visit to Bengaluru, I had half a day free and Udayakumar invited me to visit Mythic Society and his inscriptions lab. This is where he narrated this story to me. The Mythic Society in Bengaluru was founded in 1904 by a Britisher, Daly, and some enthusiastic Indians, when Bengaluru

was primarily a British cantonment. The founders wanted to write an Indian version of history and not have it written only by foreigners.

A few years ago, Udayakumar learnt about an inscription in a ninth century temple in Begur, a suburb on the far outskirts, which mentioned Bengaluru. Now this contradicted the popular fable, that Kempe Gowda a fifteenth century Kannadiga had founded the city. Suddenly Bengaluru went from being the Silicon Valley of India, with some fabled five hundred year history, into ancient history more than thousand years old. What other surprises awaited the heritage enthusiast with a curiosity for unearthing the truth?

He went to work creating a map of all recorded inscriptions in Bangalore. About one thousand inscriptions are recorded, of which 175 are within the city wards, but they have been able to find only about 110 still intact. These are of varying eras, and chiefly in three different languages, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. The diversity of Bengaluru didn’t begin with Independence or the British era, even that is a thousand years old, quips Udayakumar.

One such inscription is on a veeragallu, or hero stone. Such hero stones record the memory of some valorous hero who died fighting bandits or wild animals and protecting the village. People offer annual worship to such hero stones. One such hero stone, neglected in a ditch, covered with betel leaf stains, was rescued from being paved over. When dug up it revealed an inscription in the portion under the ground that mentioned Perbolal – which means Big Town in Kannada. The script is of the eighth century and is the oldest inscription in Bengaluru. The name Perbolal has morphed over time to Hebbal, the current name of the place.

An awareness campaign, and printing several mementos for sale to heritage enthusiasts, led to some fund raising; the funds were used to build a mandapa in the traditional style and now house the Perbolal inscription.

Udayakumar has built a team, which has created software to scan and photograph all the available inscriptions, allow sophisticated 3D rendering, mark the locations on Google maps, create letter maps of the ancient letters and so on.

As a Madras resident, living in Puliur, the ancient name of Kodambakkam, I could not resist admiration and a little jealousy at these efforts. Hopefully we can replicate it in Chennai also.



Udayakumar with replica of Begur inscription.

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– THE EDITOR

A Grandmother remembered

(Continued from page 6)

to leave their jobs after the war ended. Those who stayed were paid less than their male peers, but men could no longer claim that women were unfit for jobs outside the home. The women had proved their worth. In the post-war era, more women entered the workforce. Rosie the Riveter, in effect, turned the tide for American women.

Talk to your grandmother, ask her questions, and “you’ll find out she knows more than peanut butter cookies,” says Lucy, who had just discovered that her grandmother was a wartime riveter and the employee of a telephone company after the war. “My grandmother helped to make this country great,” she declares, and demands applause from the class.

Perhaps some of our grandmothers too went to jail, heeding Mahatma Gandhi’s call to women to participate in India’s freedom struggle. Managing everything at home, while the men participated in the free-

dom struggle was no less valiant a thing to do. We simply don’t know much about the personal histories of our grandmothers, and how they adapted to difficult situations.

In our fair city, few streets are named after women who resided there. Even the tradition of naming grandchildren after a Patti has all but ended. Who wants to saddle their daughter with an old-fashioned name from the epics? Our own family may never see another Savithri again.

Through Lucy, the cartoonist Charles Schulz was reminding us, self-absorbed grandchildren of the world to be more curious about the contribution of women to twentieth century society.

If your Patti is still around, do ask her questions. Even if your grandmother was not a historical figure, you will, no doubt, be surprised and delighted by what you learn about her. With any luck, you could catch a fleeting glimpse of your Patti as a little girl.

Saurav Ghosal calls time on his professional career

All good things must come to an end! Finally, it has for Indian squash. The leading light of the sport in India, Saurav Ghosal has decided to call time on his professional career. At age 37 years it must have made him realise that the rigors of professional squash are not anymore easy to handle. Indeed, these have been the thoughts that must have crossed his mind ever since the last Asian Games held in Hangzhou.

Ghosal had long discussions with the Federation and to that extent he had given a hint that it would not be long before he bows out from the competitive arena, at least the professional circuit. As the former national coach and currently the Secretary General of the Squash Rackets Federation of India, Cyrus Poncha put it, "Saurav had worries about injuries. He is the type who believes in being fully fit for the occasion and entering the court to make an impression. That is why he had made a mark in the professional circuit, even being in the top 10 at one time. Not for him the idea of playing and sliding down the ranking list. He has always been that kind of a player, a fighter and great performer," said Poncha of his one time pupil.

How time flies! It seemed just the other day that Saurav,

as a 15-year old had shifted base from Kolkata to Chennai to build on his squash career at the Indian Squash Academy. It was a little past the turn of the millennium and the launch of the Squash Academy, a brainchild of the then Secretary General of SRFI, Mr. N. Ramachandran had come with a view to giving squash a boost in India. Saurav, Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal Karthik were among the early trainees of this much publicised Academy. Famed coach Maj S. Maniam from Malaysia with an able assistant in Poncha were given the responsibility of writing a new chapter for Indian squash. For sure, things

● by
S.R. Suryanarayan

began to happen and the reason was this trio and Saurav in particular. A bundle of energy and ever keen to be on the court, Saurav caught the eye and proved a delight for the Coaches. The young talent did not take long to sprout into a formidable player and the results began to come in. From winning the prestigious British junior Open U-19 to the Asian championship title much later, Saurav proved his



Saurav Ghosal. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

mettle stage by stage. He had the distinction of winning the country's first individual medal, a bronze, in the Commonwealth Games. This came in 2022. Reaching the quarterfinal in the World championship is another first for an Indian. Perhaps the most celebrated effort of his came in the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon when he guided the Indian team to a gold medal finish, an unprecedented achievement that saw such flow of emotions. Later India and Saurav were to repeat that in the 2022 Asiad in Hangzhou, China. Another distinction was winning the World mixed doubles title in partnership with Dipika in Glasgow in 2022.

Add to all this were his 13

national championship titles and the true worth of Saurav can be judged. Interestingly all his national championship titles had come in his career as a player representing Tamil Nadu. Indeed, Chennai has been something special for this squash icon. Aside from his playing career, his personal life too! For, his wife Diya, incidentally Dipika's sister, is Chennai-based.

Coming out of the professional circuit does not put a full stop to his playing career. Saurav has expressed his desire to take part in the World team championship later this year in Hong Kong. Yes, the 2026 Asian Games and Commonwealth Games still remain attractive and since he and

Dipika have a formidable record in doubles, the attraction is even more.

The ace player is keen but as he realistically saw it, everything depended on how ready he would be for all that. Then again he does not also want to lose sight of the 2028 Olympics to be hosted by USA where squash is to make its debut! Saurav would be 41 then! Only time will tell if this stubborn player with great competitive spirit can still retain fitness and the magic he had been famous for. For now, as Poncha would admit, this great player's absence will truly be felt but on the positive side, his achievements will remain an inspiration for the next generation players.

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