

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Calendar confusion

The month that just went by? It was March, right? Looks-like-cool-days-are-done-it's-getting-nice-and-warm-March? Then, can someone explain the rain? That's right - rain, clouds, lightning - everything you expect year-end ... or thereabouts. Plants and crops looked up at the sky, wondering what's going on. Fauna scratched its collective head, equally puzzled. And someone, somewhere, in charge of such things, looked up ancient tomes, flipping timeless pages, muttering, "Let's see now, that part of the world ... March ... no, no instructions here about organising rain." This wasn't just the odd, playful shower. No, this was the real thing. People planned events happily, telling one another that barring sudden political upheavals or celebrity brouhaha - which always have the worst possible effect on daily life and traffic - this should go through smoothly. And then, it happened. One fat wet drop that landed square on the ground before them. They gazed at it, and then looked up at the sky. "You've got to be kidding," they intoned gloomily. The citizens are stressed out. How do you prepare for the unexpected...or rather, the-shouldn't-be-happening-at-alls? Trying out that new gossamer-y outfit thinking summer's here? Fine, but don't assume the weather will be. Nature seems to be flexing muscles more and more these days. 'Inconvenient truths' piling up?

Ranjitha Ashok

Corporation allocates more for capital projects

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Chennai Corporation's Budget for 2008-09 has allocated Rs.374.5 crore for capital works (roads, bridges, storm-water drains). This is Rs.86.5 crore more than the previous year's allocation. Civic amenities such as the Mint flyover, the Ganesapuram subway and the flyover-cum-underpass on Lattice Bridge Road figure in the new budget. A new auditorium for North Chennai, similar to the Pitti Thyagaraya Chetty Hall in T. Nagar, is to be constructed. Multi-level car parks are to come up on Wallace Garden Road in Nungambakkam and Broadway.

For the first time, neighbourhoods will be recognised for segregating wastes and a cash prize of Rs. 5,000 is promised for the two neighbourhood associations with the best record in this aspect. The two best conservancy inspectors will receive Rs.10,000 each. The Corporation hopes that these motivational schemes will inspire the people to manage waste better.

The mosquito menace by which the city is plagued is planned to be handled by the procurement of hand-held fogging equipment, vehicle-mounted larvicide sprayers and catamarans for spraying larvicides on waterways.

Buoyed by increasing revenues, the Corporation has looked at education, health and welfare schemes in particular in its plans for the coming year.

A budget of Rs. 10 crore is proposed for education. School-toppers from the city's Corporation schools will be given computers as prizes. Corporation school students who score 1000 marks and above in the Higher Secondary and 400 and above in the SSLC will be given

Rs.1000 each. Free bus passes for disabled children and their escorts are planned to give a filip to school attendance. In addition, street children will be accommodated in night shelters and trained at bridge schools before joining the mainstream institutions. Rewards would also be given to the headmaster/headmistress of Corporation schools securing the first three places in the Tenth and Plus Two board exams (three prizes - Rs. 5,000, Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 2,000), Rs. 500 to teachers of subjects in which the students scored centum, Rs. 1,000 to headmaster/headmistress of Corporation schools which secured 90 per cent pass percentage, and Rs. 500 to teachers of subjects in which students secured above 95 per cent. A huge host of computer equipment is expected to be distributed to several Corporation schools.

The Corporation promises to take steps to minimise paper work in house construction. It has recommended to the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority to approve plans for house construction in plots as small as 500 sq ft in

(Continued on page 4)

A green landmark



• Nature enthusiasts can now see a rare spectacle in the gardens of the YWCA on Poonammallee High Road. A grand talipot palm is in its fruiting stage! Blooming is a rare phenomenon, a once-in-a-lifetime event for this palm. This particular tree at the YWCA is of the species *Corypha macropoda*, one of about eight species of the genus *Corypha*, and bears fruit only once during its lifespan.

(Also see page 6)

Will proposed roads affect City's rivers?

(By A Special Correspondent)

Two recent announcements by the Government have put question marks on the future of the city's waterways and whatever little natural life that is left on their banks. The first is the 15 km elevated roadway that is proposed from the Port to Maduravoyal. This was initially planned along the banks of the River Cooum, but now has been shifted so that it comes up on the central portion of Poonamallee High Road between Maduravoyal and Koyambedu. What is significant is that the government press release still states that the road will be along the left bank of the River Cooum.

The project has been proposed to ease the access to the Port and is jointly planned by the Chennai Port Trust and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), with support from the Central and State Governments. The total cost is estimated to be Rs. 1468 crore of which the land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation costs are expected to amount to Rs. 345 crore. The State Government has agreed to reimburse the Port Trust 50% of the land acquisition and resettlement costs. The other half would come from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. The Chennai and Tiruvallur District Collectors, in coordination with the Slum Clearance Board and the PWD, have begun enumeration and assessment of families that will be affected by this. The Slum Clearance Board will be the nodal agency for resettlement and rehabilitation.

All this has raised a question over what is to happen to all the high-sounding plans that had earlier been drawn up for cleaning up the Cooum. If the fate of the Buckingham Canal after the MRTS came up is anything to go by, the proposed move will

spell doom to the Cooum, or whatever is left of it. It is also vital that drainage for the areas abutting the Cooum is planned, as otherwise most of the sewers and stormwater drains empty into it. The proposed road may simply cut off all access or, even worse, alter alignments as was the case with the MRTS which has resulted in the frequent flooding of parts of Mylapore. It is significant that the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board is not part of the proposed venture.

In a related matter, the Finance Budget of the State, presented on March 21, announced that Rs. 2300 crore has been allotted to building a 120 km circular, high-speed transportation corridor all along the river banks of the city. The four- and six-lane roads will pass along the Cooum, the Buckingham Canal, the Adyar and the Mambalam Canals. The NHAI will construct 60 km of this road which will provide major relief to those travelling from central Chennai to Tambaram, the IT Corridor and other places.

Where does all this leave the waterways themselves? Will they be improved to keep pace with the hi-tech roads that are going to come up along their banks? Or will high walls shut them off from the view of those on the roads? Also, what of the Adyar Estuary and the Creek which are ecologically sensitive parts of the city? Has the proposed Adyar Ecological Park been taken into account while planning these roads? It is a cause for concern that the Government does not think that matters affecting city life are subjects for debates among its residents. It is to be hoped that the Government will come out soon with a plan for the roads, which will be put up for discussion.

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Queries sent by e-mail or regular mail will be answered as soon as possible.

— THE EDITOR

Weddings – Vadapalani style

The Man from Madras Musings had, if regular readers of his will recollect, foresworn from going to any wedding conducted in Vadapalani. But last week, circumstances were different. For one, this wedding was on a Sunday and in the morning. Secondly, it was held at the Vadapalani Temple, a shrine MMM had long desired to visit. So off went MMM, his heart ready to face the fate.

Nearing the shrine, the populace increased quite a bit and the proceedings were being directed by a disembodied voice, which was, alas, not that of God, but of a stentorian policewoman safely ensconced in a booth issuing her benedictions through a public address system. Before long, MMM was identified for blessings, in the shape of a tersely worded announcement that if the balding and bespectacled "saar" in white shirt did not move, there were bright chances of his being hauled up before the awful majesty of the law. So MMM moved and soon found himself being sucked into the maelstrom at the entrance of the shrine.

Inside, it was like Kothwal Chavdi in its heyday. Crowds milled all around and, at first sight, to a dazed MMM, it appeared as though everyone in Madras was getting married to someone else. There were bridegrooms and brides in all shapes and sizes. MMM's invitation had safely omitted to mention that there would be so many weddings taking place at the same time. On showing the invitation to a temple official, MMM was asked to check near the temple tank, and thither he muscled his way through. Near the tank, there were many shrines and each was playing host to a relay race in weddings. Pair after pair waited patiently surrounded by a host of relatives and when their names were announced by a profusely sweating and cursing priest, the betrothed would step up and be pronounced man and wife. This would be accompanied by a scuffle among the relatives of the outgoing bridal party and those coming in. While all this was in progress, video cameramen, separate teams for each wedding, would add to the chaos. MMM was quite amazed that at the end of the day, the bridal couples managed to sort themselves out and the right man got married to the right wife.

MMM had nearly given up finding the wedding which he had come to attend, when a kindly acquaintance led him to the right spot, which was inside the main shrine. Here, too, the same chaos was in progress (if that is the right word). MMM managed to work up a quick smile and thrust the gift enve-

lope in the hands of the bride, even while shaking hands with the groom. And then someone shoved MMM aside as a senior relative had arrived and so the bridal pair had to prostrate before their elder in the narrow space that MMM occupied. Even as MMM fell on several assorted relatives and earned their curses, the bride and groom fell at the feet of an aged uncle and received his blessings. Such is life for you.

His duty done, his toe stubbed and his body feeling a good deal battered, MMM staggered away. It was only at the entrance that MMM remembered that he had forgotten to pray at the sanctum. Anyway, it was too crowded and the Maker probably had not had time to receive MMM. At the *gopuram*, MMM stood for a few minutes to catch his breath,

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

only to be informed by the voice of the policewoman that the "saar" appeared to be slow on the uptake and did he think the entrance was his? It also added that in case slowcoaches wanted to visit the temple at leisure, then any time after 8.30 at night was the best bet and not on weekdays and wedding days. MMM got the message.

Wailing sirens

The other day, *The Man from Madras Musings*, whose search for a permanent home of his own appears to be taking him further and further away from the city, was on his way to see a plot of land in distant Tirumazhisai. It was raining and visibility was poor and as for the road, a dirt track would have scored better. The brochure of the real estate developer claimed that this was a National Highway and MMM thinks that whoever wrote the copy must have done so after a late night. Anyway, even as MMM was bumping along, reasonably at peace with himself, he found the traffic coming to a halt. There was complete gridlock ahead and, to add to the tension in the situation, came the wails of an ambulance right at the back. A heart patient perhaps? A woman in the throes of labour? An accident victim? These were the thoughts of MMM and several others who all made way for the vehicle. All except a bus driver, who refused to move his vehicle.

MMM and others were puzzled and most irritated with the driver and wondered at his insensitivity. By then the wailing vehicle was up front and

then we discovered the reason for the driver's refusal to cooperate. There was no ambulance, it was a vehicle bearing a party flag and from the registration number it appeared to be from the mofussil. This vehicle had been fitted with an ambulance siren and from the grins of those inside, it appeared that they were most amused at the way they had fooled all of us. The bus driver, being at an elevation, had seen that this was no ambulance and had consequently refused to cooperate. But up came a policeman who ensured that sufficient space was created for the politico-ambulance to race ahead, wailing siren and all. The traffic closed in once again and the gridlock continued. The policeman went back to giving his imitation of a statue put up in his honour by his admirers.

MM on email

Chief: I don't know if it was such a good idea getting on the email after all. *The Man from Madras Musings* knows you are all for technology, but in the absence of an email ID, MMM could write any odd thing and get away with it. But now he becomes accountable and not only does the postman knock, he also comes in the e-way. This time with an email from an irate reader, which, at first read, appeared to be in a foreign language. This was its content:

MADRAS MUSINGS DT
FEB 16/29 SHORT AND
SNAPPY

Sir,
In the above mentioned article it is seen that MMM has an impulsion to criticize only government buildings. His putrid remarks about Namakkal Building in the secretariat is immaterial, irrelevant and uncalled for and out of context.

If the building is sticking out like a sore thumb what about the IOB building in Anna Salai, and the entire stretch of OMR FILLED WITH concrete and glazed monsters.

The letter written by a former government official has had MMM quake in his shoes. But then, he would also like to clarify. The only reason why *Namakkal Building* is cited is that it happens to be a monstrosity built in a heritage precinct. How can any government allow such a thing to happen is the question. As for other monstrosities, MMM has been no admirer of theirs, but they are at least not in a zone that should be on the world heritage list. And MMM would also like to add, the maintenance of the *Namakkal Building* being what it is, it anyway stands apart. Trust this clarifies.

— MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Traffic rules on TV

Statistics have shown that Tamil Nadu has the most road accidents in India and most of them are fatal. It all boils down to the fact that we lack 'road-sense' and do not follow the rules of the road. More often than not, a careless mistake results in a family losing its bread-winner.

Some years also, when I was in Saudi Arabia working for a bank, the two Saudi channels used to start their programme by 7.00 p.m. with a focus on better driving sense. From 7.00 to 7.15 p.m. was the 'Traffic Programme' in which an actual accident scene was shown and, through graphics, how the accident occurred was depicted. Finally, the message was how the accident could have been averted, if only the rules (all mentioned) had been followed.

TV is a powerful medium. We have a number of private channels which should take upon themselves the duty of telecasting such useful programmes. Children who watch TV will be benefited by this. When we were children our parents taught us how to cross the road carefully. Nowadays mothers are as ignorant as the children, and we find mothers holding their children on their right while walking – which can always be a risk.

M. Fazal

11, Mosque Street
Hasthinapuram, Chennai 600 064

My grandmother, 'Machi'

I was touched to read what reader Radha Gopalakrishnan had to say about my mother Sarada Devi, daughter of Dr. K.N. Kesari (MM, March 16th).

My mother was the embodiment of patience, love and generosity. It is only natural that she possessed these qualities as she had extraordinary parents, Dr. K.N. Kesari and Madhaviamma.

Madhaviamma – 'Machi' as she was affectionately called by all who knew her – was the solid support behind all the endeavours and achievements of my grandfather. She was a multifaceted and extraordinary person far ahead of her times.

Madhaviamma married Dr. K.N. Kesari cutting across all caste and language barriers. She came from Kerala to Madras, to totally different surroundings, people and situations. She adapted herself remarkably well and at the same time retained her own identity. She was well versed in Ayurveda and, together, my grandfather and she built up Kesari Kuteeram as the premier Ayurvedic centre of that time.

The Kesari Kuteeram business shifted to Westcott Road, Royapettah, in 1937. This became a large establishment with a handsome bungalow in the middle, surrounded by the facilities where the medicines were prepared.

My grandmother was a very capable administrator, having considerable financial and personnel management skills. 'Machi' was an equally good

homemaker. Her culinary skills were renowned. Every evening my grandfather used to host several visitors from all walks of life – one of them was Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – and grandmother saw to it that not a single person left the house without enjoying her snacks and coffee.

I was only eight when 'Machi' passed away in 1955 at the age of 64. But I will always remember the picture of a thin, lithe figure ever walking briskly inside the huge mansion that was Kesari Kuteeram.

Madhavi Ramachandran

203, Peters Road, Gopalapuram
Chennai 600 086

Palm Grove days

The reference to *Palm Grove* in the reminiscences of Dr. Kesari (MM, March 1st) brought back fond memories of my childhood days spent in that "palatial residence".

S. Doraiswami Iyer was my maternal grand-uncle (i.e. Mamathatha). Though we lived in George Town, we, the grandchildren, used to spend our summer vacation in *Palm Grove* – delightful and memorable days indeed!

He had a roaring practice on the original side in the Madras High Court. His office premises at his residence would be teeming with many of his juniors at work (RV, our former President, was one among them!).

Doraiswami Iyer held open house and the juniors used to have their lunch and dinner with him on many an occasion. I still remember the day when C. Rajagopalachari, then Pre-

A rare oneness

May I share with your readers the following written by Dr. M. Prema Padmanabhan, Medical Director of the Sankara Nethralaya Medical Research Foundation, in the January 2008 issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order, started by Swami Vivekananda. In an inspiring article, 'Mortal eyes in search of Immortal vision', she wrote in respect of that courageous couple Mano and Mahema Devadoss:

"How rare it is to come across someone who bears his cross with joy. Sometimes fate strikes a hammerblow with malignant force, as it did on a lovely couple whom I have had the good fortune of knowing. Accomplished and talented artists both, they had reached the zenith of their professional lives when tragedy struck a double blow – a traffic accident that left her paralysed and an incurable eye disease that reduced his vision to a tubular field. With no hope of cure for either, their lives seemed to have come to a standstill. But, in a sense they complemented each other even more thereafter, their interdependence becoming their strength, not their weakness. "She has my eyes" he would say. "He has my limbs" would be her rejoinder, capturing the *ardhanari* (half male-half female) concept in their total oneness. I was conscious of my dual responsibility when I operated on her eyes. "Remember, doctor," she said just before I commenced my surgery, "your surgery will have to restore vision for both of us!"

Their house is a home for many – young boys and girls whose education they support, budding artists whose progress they supervise, people from all walks of life besieged by personal problems who seek their counsel, and many others who have just grown addicted to their warmth. He does not see the face he is talking to, but recognises the Lord everywhere. She cannot lift so much as a finger, but embraces all humanity. No longer able to draw and paint, they have made of their lives a work of art-filling the canvas of each day with rich colours of love, laughter, and joy."

Sadly, Mahema Devadoss passed away in March. I have quoted the above as a token of my deepest sympathies to the surviving angel on his saddest bereavement.

K. Vedamurthy

Indiranagar, Adyar, Chennai 600 020

mier of Madras, called on S.D. to prevail upon him to accept his elevation to a High Court judgeship after he had announced his retirement from the legal profession to seek a spiritual life in Pondicherry Ashram.

It was the talk of the town in 1937 when he sold his bungalow and all his possessions and offered the proceeds to the Ashram and settled there to serve Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

His daughter, Kousiki, who married V. Viswanathan, I.C.S., former Governor of Kerala, is a nonagenarian and lives in Delhi.

Cdr. R. Ganapathi (Retd)

116, Defence Officers' Colony
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Beach bungalow

As a resident of Besant Nagar and a regular evening walker on the Besant Nagar beach, I feel unhappy about the construction of a Governor's Bungalow on Elliot's Beach in Besant Nagar.

On the one hand, Chennai Corporation talks about beautifying Elliot's Beach but, at the same time, it keeps its eyes closed to the construction of a concrete building in the name of a Governor's bungalow on the beach. It raises several questions which the Tamil Nadu Governor and Chennai Corporation should answer.

The Governor, as the Head of the State (though ceremo-

nial), should be sensitive to the plight of the thousands of people living in the State who do not have shelter. How would these people view a governor getting Government to spend lakhs of rupees for the construction of a bungalow on the beach for which he has no legitimate need. He has spacious *Raj Bhavan*; is not that space enough for him? Does he really need a bungalow that would remind the citizens about colonial rule when the heads of governments lived in posh conditions unmindful of the conditions of the majority?

At this time, I can only think of Gandhiji who travelled in a third class compartment to share the miseries of the lower income group. The Governor's Bungalow in Elliot's Beach is bound to become a symbol of insensitivity of those in power.

Meanwhile, the Corporation is going ahead with the beautification of Elliot's Beach, spending crores of rupees, unmindful of the views of the public and without providing credible explanation for several aspects of its beautification scheme.

All that we need is that Elliot's Beach be left undisturbed and in its natural state. All that is required from the Chennai Corporation is ensuring that it is kept clean; Nature will take care of its beauty.

N.S. Venkataraman

M 60/1, 4th Cross Street
Besant Nagar
Chennai 600 090

An example, of why we keep repeating the request below:

Readability please

Dear Readers,

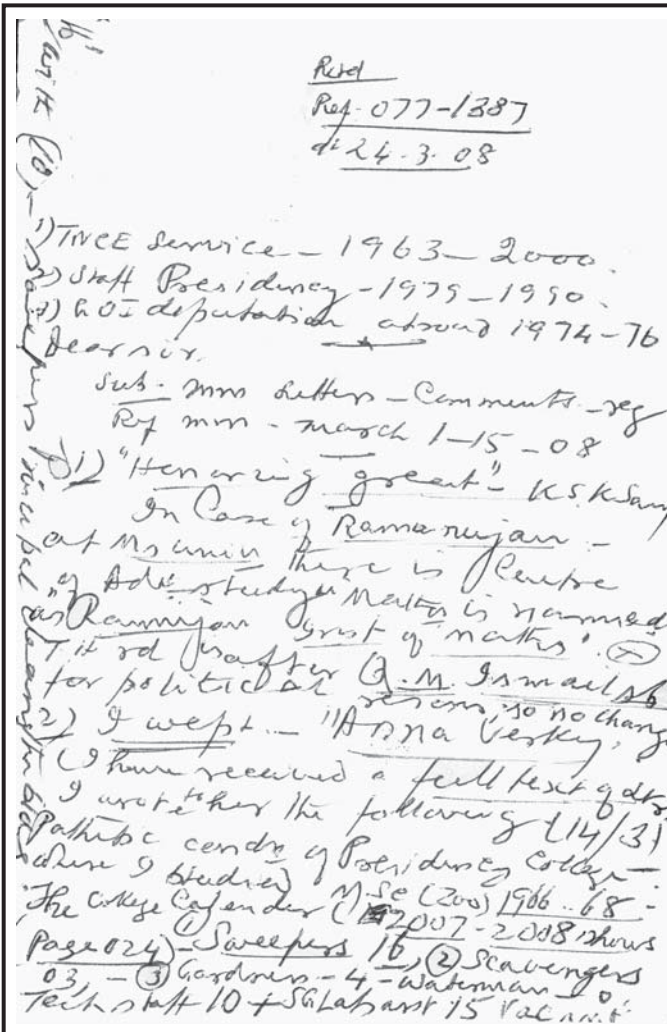
As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **handwritten** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space (as in the case on left), making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

- THE EDITOR



A look around Old Madras

(Continued from last fortnight)

Law & order

Thefts were common. For instance, a fellow would shout that some person had drowned in the Cooum River. When people collected, another fellow would steal money and fountain pens from their pockets and disappear from the scene. The fellow who shouted would announce that he would catch the thief and make his escape.

In Central Station as well as in temples, during festival times, it was common for thieves to snatch chains from children by cutting with scissors. Years ago, in the houses of Komatti people in Govindappa Naicken Street in George Town, thefts were common. Houses were very close to each other and one could easily jump from one house to the other. So thieves could enter many houses easily and they stole the jewellery of women.

After these thefts, iron bars were fitted in all houses in that locality. But then, robbers began entering houses bending the iron bars or by climbing up along the pipeline or by breaking open the locks.

Police advise us to engage a watchman or to entrust the house to neighbours while going out.

Cycle thefts are common in front of offices and coffee hotels. Police advise us to keep the cycles locked. Besides they say they have strengthened the numbers on guard duty.

Places & place names

In olden days, white paper, which came from China, was called China paper and the place where it was sold was called China Bazaar. At present the place is called Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Road. Esplanade is a part of this road. Andhras from Bander Nellore, Kandu and Innamavamallur sold sarees in a locality which came to be known as Bander Street. The street where coins were manufactured (minted) was called Thankasala Street. In 1632, the Mogul Badshah gave the right to the Europeans to mint coins with the figure of the Badshah. That went on for a long time but nowadays the minting of coins is not done on that street.

Nellore Brahmans were well known for their pearl business. They were sent to Madras Harbour from Bander Sriakulam and Kakinada. Near Beach, a street specialised in this business.

Slowly this business stopped

and prostitutes came to stay there. As the English people used to pass this place, the residents would call out to them and they in reply asked, 'Why do you call?' Gradually that got converted to Odakkalu Street. Anyway, decent people never used to pass that way for obvious reasons.

In Vaikunta Vadyar Street there stayed Vaishnavas who were expert cooks and conducted marriage functions. In those days, if anyone died his bed was given to Brahmans as gift and this was called 'Sayya Danam'. The Brahmin receiving it had to sit with his wife and after doing 'pada puja' had to take the gift. If a person came without his wife, he had to arrange for someone to act as his wife. There were women ready to perform this job. Another custom was that if a person who died had no relatives, people were arranged to weep for the loss and they were paid for it.

In Madras, there were many *agraharams*, such as Kollavari

All the high buildings in Madras were built during my time. The High Court building was erected when I was studying in the Govindappa Naicker High School at the Pachaiappa's College Building. It was built with black stones. Lifts were used to take the stones up. Schoolchildren would watch the lift with amusement. If I felt lazy to attend school or if I had not studied my lessons, I also was in the habit of spending time near the building and you could say it was built under my 'supervision'! The Old High Court was situated in the Collector's office.

The Esplanade Y.M.C.A. was also built at that time. Earlier it was in a flat in front of the High Court. There were classes for book-keeping, shorthand and typewriting. I also joined to study these. When it was shifted to the new building, I joined there and learned exercises and other indoor games. I am still in contact with Y.M.C.A. The Royapettah

• Reminiscences of Dr. K. N. Kesari - III

Agraharam, Krishnappa Naicken Agraharam, Ekamreswara Agraharam, Ravichittu Agraharam and others for Brahmans. Nowadays, these are populated by people other than Brahmans.

Long ago there was a place in Thiruvottiyur High Road noted for dhobis, and it got the name 'Chaklipeta'. Soon, people belonging to all religions settled there and it became an aristocratic locality with fashionable quarters. Sir Pitti Theyagaraya Chetty, who was the first Indian President of the Corporation of Madras and was called the uncrowned King of Madras, Kolla Venkata Kannayya Chetty, Vavilla Ramaswami Sastri who started the printing press and library, lawyer Krishnaswamy Chetty, Mutnuri Adinarayanaya who worked in the Revenue Department, all resided there.

There were buildings of zamindars also. Tanjore Rama Nayudu Garu and his son stayed here. They built an *agraharam* as Telugu Vaishnava pundits were also there. Other great men like Sir Mohammed Usman and his family resided here. Also, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer's father Pattabhirama Iyer, C.V. Ranganatha Sastri and his son Kumaraswamy Sastri lived here. Afterwards, with the introduction of trams and buses, top officials and lawyers settled in Mylapore and it became a rich locality.

Y.M.C.A. is next to my house and I am a member there. I used to go for dance and music performances.

The Railway Audit Office, where the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Audit office building is situated now, was once a park and hence the place came to be known as Park Town. Next to this is the Post Office.

I was a member of the Suguna Vilasa Sabha when the *Ripon Building* was constructed. The old municipal office was in George Town. Where the new National Bank building is located now in Beach was a music school.

The old National Bank was in Armenian Street and the Madras



A 1927 advertisement in Swadesamitran for Lodhra, a product of Kesari Kuteeram.

Bank was in Broadway and both later shifted to new buildings. The Port Office and the new Harbour were built when I was young. We used to go for walks on Saturday and Sunday along the old harbour. In Mount Road, T.R. Tawker & Sons buildings, Spencer and Company, new S.I.R. Station, Beach Station, Moore Market – all these buildings came up (during my time). Before the construction of the Law College, B.L. classes were held in the High Court premises. Classes went on till 10.a.m. Eminent professors were Ramachandra Rao and T.V. Seshagiri Iyer, Venkatarama Chetty and Subramanya Iyer.

Prominent people

Chenna Kesavulu Chetty Garu was my classmate in Sivasankara Pandya School. His father, Venkatavarada Reddy, was a rich man. He was well known to all. He had a pair of white horses and they attracted the attention of each and everyone in the city. He owned the first house in Varada Muthiappan Street, the side shops and many other houses and gardens. He preserved the nine precious stones, 'Navaratnas', in his house. His green stone was purchased by Tawker & Sons for Rs. 15, 000/-. After the death of my friend's father, his business turned to be a loss and my friend was actually in difficulties.

Mandapati Ramakrishnayya was a lucky man. He owned a lot of buildings in Madras. In Aminjikkarai, he had a beautiful house with a nice garden. He often came to this house with his friends. He was a friend of the late Maharaja of Vizianagaram, Ananda Gajapathy.

Dr. Varadappa Nayudu belonged to Brahma Samaj. He was 6 feet tall and stout. He had a long beard. He was a general practitioner who also attended delivery cases. He was like Dr. Rangachari by nature. He attended to poor people free of charge. Instead, he asked them to utilise the amount to buy milk and other things for the patient. He helped students. He was a great and pious man. He founded the orphan house on Tiruvottiyur Road. His medical shop Allbut & Company was at first in Broadway. Now it is in Mount Road.

Dr. Hallar was well known amongst the Komatti people. He was an Anglo-Indian, slim and short. With his short stories (anecdotes), he used to make his patients laugh. He had a Brougham cart with two horses. It could not travel at great speed. He was always busy sitting in the cart and writing. He was the first man to manufacture and sell soda. Hallar soda was as famous as Spencer's soda. He had a shop in Broadway. He died long ago.

(To be continued)

CORPORATION BUDGET

(Continued from page 1)

areas where row houses are permitted. It also aims to introduce a green channel for plan approvals for ordinary buildings in the Corporation area. To ease the property tax payment procedure, the Chennai Corporation plans to introduce online payment of property tax during the year, accept payment using smart phones, set up computerised counters in all the wards in the Corporation to enable the public to pay the property tax, and introduce automated cheque collection facilities.

The civic body has turned its attention to birth and death certificates and made them free of charge. Cremations have been declared free of charge. Special crematoria for pet animals have been planned in Mylapore and Moolakothalam. The number of mortuary vehicles has been increased as have freezer boxes for storage of dead bodies. A specific number of them has been allotted for use free of charge as well.

The projected revenue for the year stood at Rs.1,278.48 crore and the planned expenditure will be Rs.1,279.39 crore. The Cor-

poration has projected an increase in property tax revenues, which grew by 23% in 2007/08 from the previous year, with net collection figures estimated to be Rs. 280 crore, of which Rs. 240 crore has been collected. The figure for 2008/09 is pegged at Rs. 300 crore. It is to be noted, however, that an increase in property tax rates is on the cards.

It is a year of populist budgets overall for obvious reasons and the city's financial plan is no different. It is to be hoped that all these proposed positive steps will translate soon into action.

• Out of the Past

The 'Dadha' of Mylapore-Triplicane

SASI VILAS, on Brodie's Road, is a house no one pays any attention to. But in the early 20th Century, it was an address known to many in Madras. It was the home of Dr. M.C. Nanjunda Rao who was a well-known figure in the city for many reasons.

Born in 1862 near Mysore, he moved to Madras with his parents in the mid-1880s to study medicine. When he passed out, he was appointed an Assistant Professor in the Madras Medical College. He was also the first to be appointed to the post of Chemical Examiner to the Government of Madras. His courage and lofty principles that he became famous for were highlighted when he was not allowed to read a paper on Ayurveda at a seminar; the then Director of Medical Sciences, the European who refused him permission, had termed Ayurveda a barbaric science! Dr. Nanjunda Rao disagreed and quit his post. That he had a large family to maintain and was not above want did not sit heavily on him. He believed in standing up for what he thought was right.

It was after resigning that he took to private practice. Soon, he became popular with many zamindars and rajahs. Among them were the Maharajah of Mysore, his old benefactor, the Rajah of Venkatagiri and the Zamindar of Kattuputhur. He was affectionately known as the 'Dadha' of Triplicane and Mylapore. He took up residence in *Sasi Vilas* on Brodie's Road (the present RK Mutt Road). He also became very friendly with Madame Blavatsky, Col. Olcott, Leadbeater and Goodwin of the Theosophical Society. He was also a good friend of Annie Besant with whom he soon fell out over the famous case of custody of J. Krishnamurthy and his brother. But he treated Madame Blavatsky during her last days and she presented him with a Syrian painting on a gold plate of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Nanjunda Rao was an ardent nationalist and he helped Subramania Bharati as he planned to get away to Pondichery when he was wanted by the Government. Bharati, who used to move about only at night in various disguises, was given asylum by Dr. Nanjunda Rao in one of the cottages in his spacious garden. One night, about a week after Bharati's arrival, the police woke up Dr. Nanjunda Rao and, after



Dr. M.C. Nanjunda Rao

apologising for causing him inconvenience at that hour, told him that they thought that Subramania Bharati was hiding there. Dr. Nanjunda Rao sent them away, telling them that Bharati was not there. The police had to leave as they could not but respect his word, particularly as he was treating many of their families. As soon as they went, Dr. Nanjunda Rao planned Bharati's escape to Pondicherry. The Buckingham Canal, which was just a stone's throw from their house, had boats carrying merchandise upto Pondicherry. Dr. Nanjunda Rao bargained with a boatman to take Subramania Bharati, who was dressed as a fakir, to Pondicherry. He also sent his trusted servant, one Raman Nair, along with Bharati to make sure that he reached Pondicherry safely. Nair returned the next evening to report on the successful escape.

Dr. Nanjunda Rao became friends with Dr. Bipin Chandra Pal when he visited Madras. Dr. Pal gave a series of lectures on the *Gita* at Dr. Nanjunda Rao's house. It was this friendship that got him in the bad books of the Government, who considered Pal a revolutionary.

The *Sasi Vilas* and a nearby bungalow *Grace Lodge* (now no longer standing) had seen many luminaries in the past. Swami Vivekananda, before his tour to America in 1893, visited *Sasi Vilas* and met the Doctor there. Another important event that took place in this house was the marriage of Dr. Sarojini Naidu to Dr. Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu. This marriage caused quite a furore in those days.

Dr. Nanjunda Rao was a great philanthropist. He was closely associated with the Ramakrishna

Math in Madras, to which he gave one of his houses in Keshavaperumal Street to start the Ramakrishna Mission Students Home in 1905. Later, the Home moved to one of his houses in Kutcheri Road, *Chamundi Vihar*. Along with Alasinga Perumal, Dr. Nanjunda Rao was instrumental in publishing *Prabudhha Bharata* (Awakened India) from Madras from 1896 till 1898. It is the oldest English journal of its kind in India and is currently being published from Mayawati in the Himalaya. In a letter from England to Dr. Nanjunda Rao, Swami Vivekananda promised to help the journal by getting subscribers for it from there.

Dr. Nanjunda Rao was greatly loved by the public. He opened the M.C.N. Eclectic Dispensary for the poor in Triplicane, selling medicines there at very nominal prices. An example of his liberal attitude was when he went to the Harijan quarters near

• by KARTHIK A. BHATT

his place to treat his sick coachman Kandan for typhoid and brought him home to recuperate in one of the cottages in his garden. Needless to say, the Brahmin community was much chagrined. Another incident highlighted the confidence people had in him. The clergy of the San Thome Church wanted to close the narrow public passage between the Church and the Bishop's house as, according to them, the movement of people in this passage disturbed the peace of the Church and the Bishop's house. They enlisted the help of the police and barricaded the passage. The people took up the matter with Dr. Nanjunda Rao. After consulting his good friends Kasturiranga Iyengar of *The Hindu*, Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer and C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, he decided to organise a peaceful protest. The residents of Mylapore collected in large numbers for the march led by Dr. Nanjunda Rao, Kasturiranga Iyengar, A. Rangaswami Iyengar (then editor of the *Swadesamitran* and later of *The Hindu*) and several other prominent persons.

The police and the clergy had to yield in the face of such strong moral pressure and the barricade



A view of Sasi Vilas on Brodie's Road (now RK Mutt Road).

was removed and passage made possible again.

A deeply religious person, Dr. Nanjunda Rao found his spiritual guru in a simple Brahmin woman, Sakkarai Ammal. He built a temple for her at Thiruvanniyur and endowed much land for her benefit. The temple was recently renovated. He studied Tamil at an advanced age to better appreciate the glory of *Thevaram* and *Thirupavai*. He also contributed considerably towards the renovation of the Saint Thiruvalluvar temple in Mylapore, in whose compound he built a temple for Vasuki Ammal, wife of Saint Thiruvalluvar.

On arrival in Rishikesh, on his way to the sacred shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath, he found that the Government of Gharwal had suddenly banned entry of pilgrims to the shrines. He petitioned the Commissioner of Gharwal to remove the ban, for which no reasons had been disclosed. When there was no response, he enlisted the support of the pilgrims and the Gharwali porters, whose livelihood de-

ended upon the inflow of pilgrims, in a peaceful protest. The Commissioner of Gharwal had to hastily withdraw the ban in the face of this protest. Dr. Rao walked the distance to the shrines, not heeding the advice of a few doctor friends in Madras who had warned him against it as it would further damage his dilated heart. This left him very weak and he returned to Madras an emaciated figure. After his return, he went about organising a trip to Rameswaram, said to be necessary to reap full benefits of a trip to Badrinath. His doctor friends were against this too. However, he insisted on making the journey. Soon after his return from Rameswaram, he passed away. The high esteem that he was held in by the public was demonstrated by the thousands who attended his funeral in 1921.

Acknowledgements: *Glorious Years* – A brief life-sketch by Damodar Rao, grandson of Dr. Nanjunda Rao; Ashok, great grandson of Dr. Nanjunda Rao, who lives in *Sasi Vilas*.



April 4-6: Human Rights: 60 Years and Way to Go – Conference-unconference films. A three-part event: In the conference it will focus on people and organisations which have successfully advanced human rights in different areas. The un-conference will offer a digital platform for young people who express their concerns and opinions on human rights in a globalised world. The third part will be a series of short human rights films from Germany and India.

A Goethe-Institut contest in 2007 developed from the question: 'What is a "human rights film"?' Films about oppression and bondage or, on the contrary, about people fighting for their rights, emancipation and solidarity, have existed since almost the beginning of film-making. However, the "human rights film" genre did not emerge until the 1990s. At that time, globally interlinked human rights movements recognised the

meaning and importance of visual images for their ends. Ever since, film has been an important instrument in human rights education. (At Max Mueller Bhavan, Chennai.)

Till April 19: Sapling Exhibition, composing 30 messages — photographs of tree saplings with captions that hope to inspire people across the world to plant trees and heal the earth. All tree saplings used in the campaign are native to India and an indicator of the trees that can be planted (at Alliance Francaise).

Till April 20: *Indian Princes and Parisian Jewellers*, a photography exhibition that depicts jewellery designed by renowned houses in France for members of Indian Royalty belonging to the various princely states. There are also films that accompany the exhibition that will be screened in conjunction with the exhibition (at Government Museum).

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Who was the Player of the second Commonwealth Bank series Final which helped India triumph?

2. How is the second Monday in March observed in Commonwealth countries?

3. Name Saturn's second largest moon around which rings have been identified, making it possibly the first moon with rings.

4. Name the disgraced multiple Olympic champion who began her prison sentence after being convicted for steroid use and involvement in drug fraud.

5. The European Space Agency's first ever Automated Transfer Vehicle launched recently as a resupply ship to the ISS is named after which famous French writer?

6. Name the four Indians in the *Forbes* Top 10 list of Billionaires.

7. If it is Mohammad Hamid Ansari for the world's second most populous nation, who is it who was elected recently for the most populous nation?

8. Hyderabad's futuristic airport was inaugurated on March 14 amidst protests. It was built in a public-private partnership. What is its name?

9. Name the Indian who admitted he had gone into Pakistan "on duty" to spy for the Indian Military Intelligence. He returned recently after spending 35 years in Pakistan jails.

10. Which Chennai-based newspaper's correspondent is to head the newly constituted Media Advisory Committee of the Rajya Sabha?

11. Name the lone AIADMK candidate for the Rajya Sabha in the latest list of nominations.

12. Where is the headquarters of the PMK?

13. Which film actors are the brand ambassadors for the Chennai Super Kings?

14. Which varsity recently became the first to declare its campus tobacco-free?

15. Name the temple in the George Town area of Chennai that was visited by Chatrapati Shivaji on October 3, 1677.

16. This person from Tamil Nadu, who had been awarded the Bharat Ratna, passed away on Gandhiji's birthday in 1975. Who?

17. 'Tamilarasu', 'Tupleks', 'Kirukkan' and 'Kindalkaran' were amongst the various pseudonyms used by which poet-writer?

18. The composition of 20 hymns by Manickavasagar at the Tiruvannamalai Arunachaleswarar temple is called...

19. Name the two New Zealanders in the Chennai Super Kings squad.

20. Which is the smallest (in terms of number of seats) amongst the six screens in the Sathyam Cinema complex in Chennai?

(Answers on page 8)

AVM shows the way – to shooting on location

AVM, who had been in low key after *Nandakumar*, surfaced on the film horizon in 1940 with a packaged comedy, a three-in-one, *Vayaadi... Poli Panchaali... Yes Yes!* The success of the five-in-one comedy *Sirikkadhey* (an odd name for a comedy!) was very much in his mind and he felt he should follow suit. So he sent for his creative man, A. T. Krishnaswamy, who was hibernating in his village, Ammur.

ATK had a natural flair for humour and comedy. ATK was rather weak in 'story formation', but brilliant in adaptation and dialogue writing. He was delighted when AVM told him of his plan and at once narrated a ribald tale he had heard in his village about a saucy woman who took five lovers and played one against the other. AVM liked it and that risqué yarn became *Poli Panchaali* (Panchaali was Draupadi, the wife of all five Pandavas). Yes, Yes was all about a fraud who went round

cheating folks, using a man painted black posing as an African prince who said 'yes yes' in reply to anything he was asked! These two shorts were written and directed by ATK, while the third one *Vayaadi*, about a shrew and her henpecked husband, was done by a famed Bombay director, Nandlal

Round the City's
old studios with
RANDOR GUY

Jaswantlal, who had come to Madras to direct *Kamadhenu* for K. Subramanyam's brother, Viswanathan, Baby Saroja's father.

In *Vayaadi*, the shrew's role was played by a girl from Royapuram called Clara. Rechristened 'Chandra' for the movie, this teenager showed promise. In later years, as 'Madhuri Devi', shapely and



The first Madras Club (on Mount Road)

sexy, she blossomed into a successful heroine. She also turned a producer, which only brought her misery and misfortune. Unfortunately, she developed a reputation for being a difficult artiste and slowly faded, then became deeply religious attending Mass every day. She lived for some years in anonymity in San Thomé, shunning contact with the world around her and passed away a few years ago.

In an innovative move, AVM got permission to shoot in sprawling Club House, off Mount Road (it was the premises of the Madras Club, then exclusively for 'Whites Only', and later the home of *The Indian Express*), and when he shot on actual locations in buildings in the complex without erecting sets, he was anticipating location-shooting by almost thirty-odd years.

Next, AVM moved his unit bag and baggage to Adyar to another sprawling building called

Admiralty House. A lovely building with an impressive flight of steps, tall pillars and high ceilings, it had been the palace of the Vizianagaram zamindari family. AVM got it on a low rent and his Pragathi Pictures functioned in it until the threat of a Japanese invasion in 1942 forced him to shift to his hometown, Karaikudi.

Nandlal Jaswantlal did not want his name credited as director of his contribution and the name 'Kannan' (a synonym of Nandlal – Lord Krishna) appeared in the credits. He was an able technician and his style of taking short takes – his close-ups were hardly more than 8 feet – was something of a novelty then in Tamil cinema with its lengthy takes, stagy compositions and static camera.

At Pragathi, he produced films like *Sabapathy* (1941) and *Sri Valli* (1945), both huge money-spinners. *Sabapathy*, a farcical comedy, was based on a series of farces by one of the founding fathers of modern Tamil drama, Pammal Sambandam Mudaliar. A. T. Krishnaswamy, a noted writer-director then working for AVM, scripted and directed it. It proved highly popular and skyrocketed hero T. R. Ramachandran, a saucer-eyed Eddie Cantor look-alike comedian, to fame and stardom. *Sri Valli*, a familiar folkmyth tale of Muruga, son of Lord Shiva, was a bigger success. The singer-actor T. R. Mahalingam and slim and charming Kumari Rukmini in lead roles became stars. The film established AVM firmly on the ladder as a successful filmmaker.

T.R. Ramachandran was one of the artistes Pragathi had on its monthly rolls. Others included T. V. Sethuraman, a comedian quite popular for a while, Poorani, saucy and seductive, and Kali N. Ratnam. Of them, Ramachandran alone in later years played hero and proved quite a draw. But at the time, he was drawing the princely salary of Rs. 35 a month from Pragathi!

Ramachandran was from a Madhwa Brahmin family in Trichy district. Right from boyhood he had no interest in studies and was delighted in playing truant from school. He gave up school after the fifth standard.

A rare palm ... and a rarer spectacle!

Corypha macropoda is more common along the east coast of India. It is the tallest of the talipot palms. It might have originated in the Andamans, feels well known botanist Dr. Dayanandan, who describes the inflorescence of this tree as 'the largest in the world'. In 1967, he and Dr. Lockwood wrote in *The Hindu* about a fruiting tree near Kanchipuram. Remembers Dr. Dayanandan, "We collected three seeds from this tree. Two plants raised from these are now growing in the Madras Christian College campus. One of them near the Women's Hostel is really tall, and when it flowers we will know the precise age of flowering of *C. macropoda*!" The number of years it takes before the tree flowers is not well documented, but is estimated to range from 40-70 years.

He also recollects two such trees in bloom near a pond next to the Pallavaram Railway Station sometime in 1984. "One was just sending out a flowering stalk and the other was full of bloom. Months later, just before

the seeds fruits ripened, one of these fell in a severe cyclonic storm, prematurely ending a life that for decades had prepared itself for this grand reproductive event!"

"On the way to Wallajabad, about three months ago, a group of students and I saw a couple of talipot palms that were in fruit, with the seeds already germinating below. Maybe in another 50-60 years we can see a

● by
SHOBHA MENON

similar spectacle there. We've noticed that the local communities revere these palms and treat them with awe. Maybe because they are so rare!" he feels.

Another and more celebrated species is the *Corypha umbraculifera*, more common in Southeast Asia. It has seven horticultural varieties and is often cultivated in gardens. A 1910 photo of the Talipot Palm Avenue (*umbraculifera* here, and planted by the British) in the Royal Botanical Gardens,

Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, used to be featured in postcards of Sri Lanka before 1947. A news report many years later spoke of the awesome spectacle of all the palms coming into bloom at the same time!

The tree species has been said to be in existence since the time of the Buddha. In Kandyan times, the enormous leaves reaching a height of 10m were used to make tents by sewing a couple of leaves together. "One single leaf being so broad and large, that it will cover some fifteen or twenty men, and keep them dry when it rains," wrote Robert Knox.

Talipot leaves were used to produce fine, ultralong-lasting solid parchments called *Ola* in Sri Lanka and India as early as 500 BC. Young talipot leaves were boiled, dried in the sun, exposed to dew, smoothed and stretched. The treated leaves were then engraved with writing using a steel stylus to cut in the characters. The engraved leaf was smeared with ink made of a resin blended with finely

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued on page 8)

75 – and still going strong

The Madras University's Music Department

The Department of Indian Music, University of Madras, completed its 75th year recently. It was established in 1932.

Eight years earlier, music was introduced in the University's curriculum after a meeting of musicians, presided over by Harikesanallur L. Muthiah Bhagavata, was held in the Nagappa Chetty Pillayar Vasanta Mandapam on Triplicane's Big Street. A resolution was passed urging the University to include music among the optional subjects for the Intermediate examination.

Sir R. Venkataratnam, the then Vice-Chancellor, deeply interested in music, set up a committee to draft a syllabus and its recommendations were revised by a second committee. Both had P. Sambamoorthy as a member. The professional musicians of Madras protested against the move to impart music training through the University as they feared a threat to their own income from tuitions. Nevertheless, music was introduced as an optional subject in the Intermediate Course.

Taking "steps to open a separate faculty of music in Universities" was one of the many objectives of the All India Music Conference of 1927 in Madras. The Music Academy, which was born out of this event, naturally carried forward the same ideal. Thanks to its efforts, Queen Mary's College became, in 1928, the first institution to begin a course in music with P. Sambamoorthy as lecturer. Thirteen students were admitted to the course. The first Intermediate examination was held in 1930.

Dr. U. Rama Rau, President of the Music Academy, Madras, during his welcome address at the inauguration of the Annual Conference in December 1930,

lauded the University's efforts. But S. Sathyamurthy, then a Vice-President of the Academy, was not impressed. Proposing a vote of thanks at the end of the inauguration, he said, "The Madras University has done what a conservative and slow-moving body can be expected to do in these days and has made music an optional subject for study for the Intermediate course." He also noted that music had been introduced in the Travancore Maharaja's Girls' College, then affiliated to the Madras University. He hoped that the University of Madras would soon introduce a degree course in music.

Perhaps acceding to this, the University introduced the B.A. degree course in music the same year with Queen Mary's College receiving affiliation for the two-

● by
SRIRAM V.

year course. Those who had sat for the Intermediate examination in July 1930 and passed were allowed to join the degree course.

The steps taken by the University did not meet with universal approbation. The Music Academy was not in agreement with the composition of the committees that drafted and revised the syllabus. In 1931 the President said, "If Vidwans' services are requisitioned for the preparation of syllabuses (sic) and for teaching the same, it is certain that Music has a great future before it."

In his vote of thanks, C.S. Ayyar was even more direct and hard hitting. "I refer to the suggestion, viz. the association of Vidwans, the real present-day keepers of the traditional art, with the University in the matter of teaching music. If I read that suggestion aright, it is but a mild protest against the recent

ways of the University. Let us see, for instance, who sit in its Expert Board of Indian Music Studies — self-appointed members of the Syndicate, who probably only nod to sweet music like children, in preference to people like our worthy Editor (of the Academy's *Music Journal*) Mr. T.V. Subba Rao, B.A., B.L., whose musical knowledge is of the highest order commanding the admiration of our savants, or it contains shams — like myself — with no depth of knowledge of the art, but only a smattering of it, picked up when music was taught to their sisters or children at their homes for the marriage market."

The University that year had funded P. Sambamoorthy's visit to Germany to study advanced music there. This too came in for attack by C.S. Ayyar. He said, "The Mylapore Vidwat Sangeeta Sabha protested against the resources of the University being spent, not to say wasted, at the present juncture, in sending an Indian student abroad for the study of Western Music. But the University did not pay heed to it."

C.S. Ayyar went on to say, "The University will shortly appoint a Professor of Vocal Music on about Rs.300 per mensem and I sincerely hope that it will not, in its unwisdom, choose a graduate in Physics or one in Law, with not even a working knowledge of the art, but will choose a savant who has laboured a whole life-time under the Guruparamparya system for the sake of music."

The Music Academy had stolen a march over the University that year by setting up its Teachers' College of Music. C.S. Ayyar commented, "I am sure the Music Academy can show to the Government Colleges and to the University how things ought to be done. For the



Vidwan Tiger Varadachariar

Teachers' College of Music, recently started, we have appointed Vidwan Tiger Varadachariar. We have started even before the University could think of such an idea."

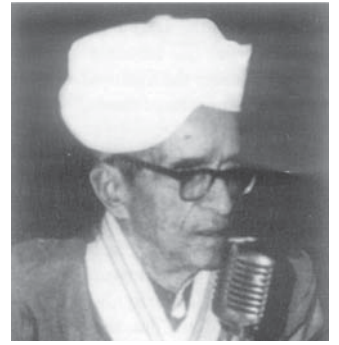
But when in August the University announced its faculty for the department, it had its revenge on the Music Academy and C.S. Ayyar, for who should be appointed as Chief Lecturer but Tiger Varadachariar himself! The Music Academy gave in with good grace and appointed Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavata as Principal of the Teachers' College of Music.

Classes started on August 26, 1932 at 5 pm in the Syndicate Room of *Senate House*. After a few days, the Department shifted to *Limbdi Gardens*, Royapettah (a place not identifiable today), where it was to function for a few years before returning to the Chepauk campus.

Under the benign and enlightening guidance of Tiger, the Department flourished. Scholars such as M.S. Ramaswami Iyer and P. Sambamoorthy were often invited to give talks on the history and theory of music.

In 1937, Tiger stepped down to head the Music College at the Annamalai University in Chidambaram. P. Sambamoorthy succeeded him as Lecturer and Head of the Department. He was to continue, becoming Reader, till his retirement in 1961.

The research activities of the Department saw the first M. Litt. being awarded to Ms. L. Isaac on the subject of Ancient Tamil Music in 1940. She would, later in 1957, join the Department as Lecturer-cum-Research Assistant.



P. Sambamoorthy

The first Ph.D. was awarded in 1962 to M.R. Alamelu for her thesis on musical instruments depicted in the sculptures of South Indian temples.

When Sambamoorthy retired in 1961, Isaac became the Head of the Department. S. Seetha, today known for her monumental work *Tanjore as a Seat of Music* during the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, for which she was awarded her doctorate in 1968, joined the Department in 1963. She became Professor in 1976 and was Head of the Department till her retirement in 1991.

Dr. S.A.K. Durga, a well-known expert on ethnomusicology, served in the Department from 1976. She was later appointed and continues to be Professor Emeritus in the Department of Music. She is also the Director of the Centre for Ethnomusicology, Chennai.

Yet another well-known personality in the field of music academics, Dr. M.B. Vedavalli, whose thesis, and later book, *Mysore as a Seat of Music*, is a scholarly work, served the Department from 1976. She was Head of the Department from 1991 to 1995.

She was succeeded by Dr. N. Ramanathan, today one of the most respected figures in the field of musicology. He joined the Department in 1978, became Professor in 1990 and was Head of the Department till his retirement in 2003.

In 1998, when the departments in the University were classified under Schools, the Department was placed under the School of Fine and Performing Arts of which Dr. N. Ramanathan became the first Chairperson. He was succeeded by Dr. Prameela Gurumurthy who, after her path-breaking Ph.D. thesis, *Kalakshepa, A Study*, joined the Department in 1984 and now occupies the post of President, Chairperson, School of Fine and Performing Arts.

As the Music Department looks towards its centenary it is best to remember what vidwan Balamuralikrishna said when he inaugurated the 75th anniversary celebration. While commending the great work it had done in disseminating musical knowledge and encouraging research, he felt that it was high time stellar performing artistes also came out of the University. — (Courtesy: *Sruti*)

A RARE PALM...

(Continued from page 6)

powdered charcoal. The *Mahavamsa*, a historical chronicle of Sri Lanka, and all other ancient books were written on these treated, cut and loosely bound palm-leaf parchments. In Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens, Bengaluru, a few trees are reported to have been in bloom last year.

Some talipot trees (*Corypha elata*) have been used as a source of toddy, sugar, starch, vinegar etc. During World

War I, the seeds of the species *Corypha umbraculifera* were used to make buttons.

Talipot palms produce about 12 million creamy yellowish flowers, which yield more than 500 kg of seeds. The flowering is also considered by many as a symbol of good luck. The slow-growing tree is also planted in botanical gardens and other landmarks to record the age of the place.

The talipot palm can grow to enormous heights during its life-

time, as high as 82 feet (25 metres); it becomes even taller when in bloom. It grows a large stalk at its top, between 20 and 26 feet (6-8 metres) long, which produces smaller branches carrying millions of flowers. The stalk, branches, and flowers of the talipot palm, known jointly as an inflorescence, are the largest of any plant in the world.

The plant needs around 50 to 60 years for its flowers to bloom. Flowering lasts about

three months. Once the talipot palm has flowered, it takes a year for the fruit to develop; it eventually produces thousands of round yellow-green fruit, 3-4 cm diameter, each of which contains a single seed. After the fruit appears, the talipot palm dies.

Talipot palms are found in large numbers in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka. **Common name:** Talipot Palm, Bajarbattu (Hindi), Sritalam (Telugu), Tali (Bengali), Talipot (Marathi), Kudappana (Malayalam), Kudaippanai (Tamil). **Family:** Araceae (palm family).

A new life for OUR museum?

(by Shobha Menon)

The Government Museum, Egmore, is one of the oldest museums in India. Notable is its Bronze Gallery, one of the best in the world. In its 46 galleries there are relics from the 2nd century AD Buddhist site at Amaravathi, prehistoric exhibits from the Stone and Iron Ages, exquisite carvings, a large collection of South Indian musical instruments and jewellery, and several other specimens of anthropological interest. It has had the privilege of initiating the first Philatelic Gallery in India. But other than the occasional student groups and visitors from home and abroad, it is little visited.

Over the years, a general passivity seemed to have set in, though the educational activities of the Museum started "as early as 1870 AD through popular lecture programmes under which scholars were periodically invited to deliver lectures on topics of public interest for the benefit of town people and students," and "other educational programmes such as special training courses on taxonomy and museology for teachers, gallery lectures for students and teachers, and publication of

monographs and bulletins for the museum exhibits were introduced". Fortunately, a reappraisal of the function of the Museum and its curators has been done and a major relook at ongoing activities and programmes within the Museum is happening to woo citizens of Chennai. Says Dr. Shanthini Kapoor, currently Special Commissioner, Museums, "Our goal is to entice people across generations to become involved with activities at the Museum and, in the process, fall in love with their own Museum!"

Says Uma Maheswari, Education Officer, "Know your Museum Workshops' are being periodically organised for teachers, around themes relevant to current trends in education and interest. The most recent one on 'Corals' had good response. Mobile galleries that can be borrowed by the schools/colleges for a week or so for the benefit of students are also being arranged." Each of the 11 sections in the Museum now vies with the other to plan interesting workshops and lectures.

In the 1960s, the creation of additional guide posts for the Museum had made it possible to

The Museum story

• The Government Museum (or the Central Museum as it should be called) began in the first floor of the College of Fort St. George, which was in the campus of what is now the Director of Public Instruction's offices, on College Road. It opened in 1851 with 1100 geological specimens presented to it by the Madras Literary Society. The previous year, Dr. Edward Green Balfour, the first Superintendent of the Museum and Chairman of the Committee of the Madras Literary Society, had stated that "the basis on which the Museum was established was so broad that whatever in creation was sent, a use and place would be found for it."

By August 1853, the Museum had 19,830 specimens, and though only twenty months old could "bear a comparison with the long-established Museum of the Bengal Asiatic Society in Calcutta." With the building in a decaying condition, it was shifted in December 1854 to the Pantheon. Before the end of the century, the Museum's scope covered other fields such as Archaeology, Ethnology, Pre-history and Natural History.

The Museum building, designed by Henry Irwin, was formally inaugurated on December 5, 1896 by Sir Arthur Elibank Havelock, the then Governor.

provide a Guide Service for visitors every day at prescribed times. But one reason cited for the Museum's waning in popularity in the decades that followed has been the shortage of trained guides. It is now planned to recruit new guides and train the existing guards too in effective guiding. Visitors too have increased in the last few years, with museum revenue up ten-fold. During the Pongal break this year, a lakh of visitors visited the Museum!

Popular lectures are now regularly held at the Museum as are photo exhibitions, puppet shows and painting competitions. This summer, the Curators are planning a month-long workshop with different sec-

tions. Walkers too are encouraged on the campus (between 6 am and 7.30 am), by making entry free. A few months ago, a 'Tree Walk' was held in the Museum campus by 'Nizhal' and more such 'Walks' are planned shortly.

Shortly to be introduced is the concept of Friends of the Museum (above 18 years old), who will be trained as volunteer guides. A bookshop, curio corner, canteen, etc. will soon be started (though a vision of teenagers hanging out at the Museum campus does seem rather far-fetched!). "There's certainly no harm in livening up the proceedings!" smiles Kapoor.

Answers to Quiz:

1. Praveen Kumar; 2. Commonwealth Day; 3. Rhea; 4. Marion Jones; 5. Jules Verne; 6. L.N. Mittal, the Ambani siblings and K.P. Singh; 7. Xi Jinping; 8. Rajiv Gandhi International Airport at Shamshabad; 9. Kashmir Singh; 10. The Hindu.

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11. N. Balaganga; 12. Thailapuram, Tindivanam; 13. 'Ilaya Thalpathi' Vijay and Nayantara; 14. Anna University; 15. Kalikambal temple; 16. K. Kamaraj; 17. Bharatidasan; 18. Tiruvempavaai; 19. Jacob Oram and Stephen Fleming; 20. Studio 5.

AVM shows the way

(Continued from page 6)

He had a good singing voice, but avoided his music teacher too. At last, his exasperated father, a struggling contractor, asked his son what he wished to do in life and the boy replied that he wanted to go on stage. The poor parent was shocked by his son's choice of profession but, left with no option, he took him to Trichy and had him admitted in a 'Boys Company', Madurai Bala Mohana Ranjitha Sabha. At first, the 14-year-old was given only female 'walk-on' roles. After six months of 'walking on' for free, he was paid the grand sum of one rupee a month! Slowly the roles got better, particularly in comedies, and so too his salary. But as the quantum increased actual payments dwindled and, while the troupe was camping in the gold-mining town of Kolar, the owner vanished in the night leaving the boys in the lurch, penniless in a strange town. Some of the seniors in the group, like M. R. Radha, also left looking for greener pastures, and Ramachandran and the others left behind had to sing and dance in the streets of a strange town for their food.

Then, a stranger turned up and agreed to manage them. But he had no funds. So Ramachandran and his hungry fellows played all roles in their own torn clothes and the audience had the interesting but tough exercise of identifying the characters (and their sex) only from their dialogue! Both Rama and Seetha, Murugan and Valli had shirts and dhotis on and similar hair-dos! Indeed, a book waits to be written about these 'Boys' Companies' and their impact on Tamil culture and cinema.



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