

## Centenarian of the Centenarian Bank

*-Written by Mr A Srinivasan, Former GM and Mr G V Balasubramanian, Former GM  
based on an interview with Mr N Sitaraman)*

A centenarian is a person who lives to or beyond the age of 100 years. The United States currently has the greatest number of known centenarians of any nation with 53,364 according to the 2010 Census, or 17.3 per 100,000 people. In 2010, 82.8% of US centenarians were female. Japan has the second-largest number of centenarians, with an estimated 51,376 as of September 2012, and the highest proportion of centenarians at 34.85 per 100,000 people (Source : Wikipedia). Japan started recording its centenarians in 1963. Where does India stand with regard to Centenarians ?



**N. Sitaraman**

India is at present home to between 11,000 and 20,000 centenarians, according to a Times of India report. What about Chennai ? While no such statistics are available readily, we can proudly say that one among the Indian Bank fraternity is a Centenarian.

Meet Mr N Sitaraman, Centenarian of the Centenarian Bank (The Bank which is 107 years old qualifies to be a centenarian going by the definition of centenarian)

Mr N Sitaraman, a native of Chozhavandhan near Madurai was born on 01.06.1914 in a joint family of 20, as the third child to his parents.. After his school education in his native place, he did his Intermediate Course at Madura College, Madurai. Thereafter he moved to Madras ( as it was called those days) to pursue his B A in Mathematics at Loyola College. On his graduation, he joined the Madras Law College for pursuing his degree in Law.

With about 4 lawyers in the family Mr Sitaraman, though a qualified lawyer, decided to pursue a career in Banking. He joined Indian Bank Ltd at Madurai Main Branch as an unpaid apprentice in the year 1938 at the age of 24. He served the bank as unpaid apprentice for 15 months and thereafter he was designated as Clerk in the pay scale Rs 30 – 2 ½ - 50 – 2 – 76. His S R No is 179. In this scale it will take 8 years to reach a basic of Rs 50 and another 13 years to reach a basic of Rs 76. His take home pay was Rs 50/- and Mr Sitaraman tells us that after meeting his basic needs, he was able to save a sizeable amount. He recalls that Mr M S Jembuswamy Rao was the Branch Manager at Madurai Main Branch when he joined the Bank.

He remained in Madurai Branch for about 20 years. During this period he has worked in all functions of bank and also performed the work of an Internal Auditor. There were no formal promotion process, he

says, and through one letter received from the Head Office he was designated as Officer. That time the Bank had 2 scales – Scale A and Scale B, with Scale B being the junior level. He has served in Madurai for 20 years. During his earlier part of his working in Madurai, he has cleared CAIIB – both parts and was given an allowance of Rs 2/-.

In 1957, the Bank celebrated its Golden Jubilee and Mr Sitaraman brought one old group photo taken



on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebration held at Madurai. That time one Mr Chidambaram Chettiar, a relative of Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar was the Manager of the Branch. Further he remembers that one Mr Lakshmanan, District Judge was the Chief Guest for the function.

During his tenure in Madurai, he recalls of one Mr Kandappan joining the Bank at Madurai Main Branch (must be Mr M S Kandappan, who went on to become Zonal Manager, Chennai and retired during 80s). Mr Sitaraman worked briefly in a Branch of Bank of Azhagapuri which got merged with The Indian Bank Ltd. When transferred to Bombay (present Mumbai) sometime during late 50s or early 60s, Mr Sitaraman was reluctant to migrate and resigned from the services of the Bank. The Bank did not accept his resignation and with a smile, Mr Sitaraman tells that he was given 3 increments of Rs 2.50 each and was transferred to Kovilpatti where he served for about 2 years. After a sabbatical period, Mr Sitaraman was posted as Manager of Theni Branch where he worked for the period 1961-63.

An officer's career is incomplete without serving at Head Office. Mr Sitaraman was transferred from Theni to Head Office and posted to Business Department. Head Office was functioning from Bentincks Building on the North Beach Road and with entrance from Arbutnot Lane (where the present Head Office building is located). Mr Sitaraman's job in the Business Department is to ensure that the credit or loan proposals received from the Branches are in order and wherever required call for additional details and put up to the Superintendent. He in turn places to the Secretary, who is the Chief Executive of the Bank in his time, for sanction. Depending on the quantum of loan, the proposals are sanctioned and powers were delegated to Secretary / Board.

When the Bentincks Building was demolished and new Head Office Building was constructed (to be occupied in 1970), Mr Sitaraman informs about the Bank functioning from Chamber of Commerce Building.

He recollects his contemporaries at Head Office like Mr Gopal Aiyar, Secretary, Mr E Ramakrishnan, Board Secretary, Mr P G Saranyan. He fondly recalls his association with Mr Vallinayagam and Mr A Sankaralingam while serving in the Bank and still maintains contact with Mr Azhagappan, S/o Mr A Sankaralingam (presently serving the Bank in the Inspection Department.). He maintains contact at his advanced age with Mr C R Kalyanasundaram who retired as Chief Manager from the Bank. He recollects his visit to Calcutta when Mr C R Kalyanasundaram was working in Southern Avenue. (When Mr A Srinivasan who came for the meeting with Mr Sitaraman, wanted to call CRK over phone, Mr Sitaraman immediately told his phone number (2474 4742) from his memory)

In his entire service, he wore the traditional dress - Dhoti and shirt. Even during Mr GL's period, he used to come in the same attire which was never objected by GL. Though he did not work with Mr M Gopalakrishnan, former CMD and President, FIBRE, he remembers that Mr MG worked as Manager of E R A Puram Branch.

A long time resident of Triplicane, presently he resides at II Main Road Gandhinagar, Adyar with his brother's granddaughter Mrs Chitra Nagesh. Mr Sitaraman chose to remain a Bachelor. Mrs Chitra Nagesh says that her grandfather goes by walk to nearby places / temples and uses the bus / autorickshaw for travel to other parts of the city with his companion, a walking stick. He maintains his account with Ethiraj Salai (earlier his residence was at Montieth Road) and does his banking transaction at Adyar Branch, thanks to CBS environment. Mr Sitaraman maintains a mirror account of his transactions with the Bank in a note book and in case of any discrepancies, he goes to the Branch and gets it rectified.

He was an avid tennis player and lover of the game. He started playing tennis from his Loyola College days (played badminton during school days at Madurai) and continued playing in Madurai. On getting transferred to Madras, he became a member of T Nagar Social Club with the sole objective of playing tennis. He continued playing tennis upto 82 years. If there is any tennis match telecast, he watches.

He spends his time meeting friends, going to temples and reading Vedic Books. Daily, he reads a few line in Sundara Kantam (Ramayanam). In June 2014, the family celebrated his Kanagabishekam, much against his wishes.

He is happy to see the bank growing in its stature and in terms of business. He is happy that the Bank has not forgotten him. He recollected that Mr Kuppuswamy and Mr TT Natarajan visits him during the new year and extends New Year Greetings and also continues to get the diary / calendar of the Bank. He was overwhelmed by our visit for writing an article for the Souvenir to be brought out by FIBRE coinciding with its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

Having voluntarily retired in 1973 one year before the superannuation, he was not eligible for regular pension which was implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1986. He receives an exgratia of less than Rs 4000/- per month. With very limited desires, positive outlook about life and good habits, he serves as a model for living a contented life happily with available resources.

