

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Confusion reigns over heritage

Circumventing commitments to conservation focus of all

(By The Editor)

It is now more than two years since the Hon'ble High Court of Madras decreed that a certain number of listed buildings cannot be demolished. It then asked the Government to set up a committee to study the list, add to it if needed and, most importantly, draft a set of heritage legislations to protect and restore these buildings. Since then, however, there has been no action forthcoming from this committee and this has left the property owners to interpret to undertake protection of heritage buildings in their own ways. It is no exaggeration to state that most of them are only looking at creative ways to circumvent the Court directive.

The majority are happy not to demolish their buildings, but they take no steps to preserve or protect them. They are secure in the knowledge that real estate appreciates any way and so all they have to do is simply wait for the buildings to collapse on their own. The owners are not in any way committed to restoring these buildings. The initial (and only) letter sent out by the Heritage Conservation Committee (HCC) has aided these people, for while it clearly states what cannot and should not be done with the heritage structures, it is completely silent on what can and must be done. It is, in other words, a classic example of Government-speak.

There is another category which is also completely hemmed in by the same letter. This pertains to a small group of owners who are eager to take up restoration work but have no idea as to what can be done and do not want to end up on the wrong side of the law. An example of this is the Trust that owns the Madrasa-e-Azam property. Trustees have gone on record that they are eager to restore the building if only advised on how to go about it. But

with the HCC silent on this, they don't know what to do other than watch their beloved edifice crumble.

A third group has chosen to interpret the ruling in a different way. Members of this group are approaching the HCC with assurances that they intend to build an entirely new structure, on the same pattern and design as the old building. This is a laughable idea at most. If the idea is to rebuild to the same design, why not restore the existing structure and make modifications to the interior to suit modern requirements? And if the construction involves doing away with the old building, what is left of heritage even if the new structure is on the same lines? In any case, such promises are only made with an intention to delude the heritage activists. In the past, when *Bentinck's Building* was demolished and *Spencer's* burned down, assurances were given that the new buildings would be on the same lines. What was put up is available for all to see and it is for each to decide on how the promise was honoured.

The HCC thankfully saw through the LIC's plans when it presented a scheme to remodel the *Bharat Insurance Building* with similar assurances. But it may not be so firm when it comes to other buildings, whose owners have approached the HCC with similar plans. Certainly, the rather self-congratulatory statements that came forth from the HCC in the instance of the new Bible

(Continued on page 8)



How do we save the Madrasa-e-Azam, the owners wonder

Chennai lags behind as a liveable city

A recently concluded survey has rated Chennai 150 out of 221 international cities assessed for the quality of life they provide. While that figure may not seem all that bad (after all, we continue to be a developing nation), what is of concern is that, out of five Indian cities included in this survey, Chennai has been ranked fourth, way below Bangalore (which scored the highest among Indian cities – ranking 139), New Delhi and Mumbai. It is some small consolation that Kolkata scored below Chennai. It just goes to show that all is not well with our metropolis and it is not the world-class city that our Government claims it is.

The survey ranked the cities on the basis of 39 factors. In the past years, some of the factors had related to the political and social environment, education and medical facilities and the cultural atmosphere. This year, the study included in its list water, electricity, public transport and other infrastructure facilities and it is generally believed that these have pulled Chennai down.

This should not come as a surprise to those who are concerned with the quality of life in Chennai which is steadily going downhill. For, here are some of

the glaring issues, listed for the benefit of those in charge and who hopefully read this.

Civic hygiene – Surely, this cannot be an international city if its garbage problems regularly make them to the headlines. And when the garbage is collected, it is done in such an un-

• by A Special Correspondent

scientific manner that it beggars all description. Waste may be segregated at source by a few well-meaning individuals and organisations, but it is invariably mixed in collection and then in disposal. Chennai has no scientific solution in place and it would do well to quickly come up with an answer if it hopes to make it to world standards.

Water – One Kapaleeswarar temple tank does not make the city water-surplus. You just need to see the number of ill-maintained public water-bodies and the rampant encroachment that goes on upon or around most of them to come to the conclusion that Chennai has no water policy to speak of. This has proved a rain-deficient year and, thanks to poor implemen-

tation of rainwater harvesting schemes after the initial enthusiasm, we are left with no choice but to look to the sky, water tankers and plastic pots in the coming year.

The public transport – Chennai's most visible symbol of public transport is the autorickshaw. The attitude of the drivers and their tendency to fleece the public with utter disregard for their meters are now spoken about all over the country. We also have Government-run transport services whose individual arms are not in any way connected with each other. A creaking bus service, notorious for its poor maintenance, rash driving and accidents; a suburban train service that operates on a limb; and an MRTS that is in no way connected with any other transport together complete the picture. The Metro Rail is promising much. How that will pan out will need to be seen.

The waterways – Ask any number of outsiders and they will tell you that they know when they are entering Chennai thanks to the odour from the three waterways that criss-cross the city. There are lesser canals as well, all in the same

(Continued on page 3)

The State to blame

Bottlenecks stall power supply

Even while Tamil Nadu is reeling under severe power shortage, it appears bizarre to keep capacity idle. The Kudankulam nuclear plant should have been commissioned three years ago: the Russians delayed it. But, had the State involved itself more closely with its progress, it could have saved a year. By timely and decisive action the State could have reaped the benefit of generating 2000 MW of power for at least a year now. We estimated the cost of delay at Rs. 14.4 crore per day!

Here's another bizarre instance: a 600 MW power generating station of the Tamil Nadu Government at Mettur has remained idle for months. Reason: delay in constructing nine transmission towers through Tirupur to evacuate the power. Recently, the Madras High Court chided the Collector of Tirupur for stalling this project. Experts from the TANGEDCO designed the route of the transmission lines through Tirupur which was accepted by the then Collector. His successor lent credence to the voice of a few farmers who protested over the transmission towers erected through their lands and suggested TANGEDCO re-routes them. The considerate Collector stalled the work. The High Court held that the Collector did not possess the expertise to overrule TANGEDCO and directed that the original route be taken.

The investment of about Rs. 2400 crore could have been recovered through the revenue generated in less than two years!

There is an equally bizarre action on the part of a Thiruvallur District Collector. He ordered a deviation in the route for setting up transmission towers to evacuate power from the 1200 MW North Chennai Thermal Power Station (Stage III). The delay in constructing a 34 km transmission line is the cause behind the inability to commission the power plant for over a year now. TANTRANSCO had appealed to

seek judicial remedy and that involved familiar delays. Justice N. Paul Vasantha Kumar upheld TANTRANSCO's appeal. Thus, in less than a week, the High Court delivered two vital judgments. It is cause for wonder why the Chief Secretary, the Energy Secretary, and the State Planning Commission cannot monitor on a daily basis the progress of major projects so vital to the State.

In 2002, *Industrial Economist (IE)* brought together the chief executives of five large power sector entities, BHEL, L&T-ECC, Neyveli Lignite Corporation, TNEB and the Ennore Port. *IE* convened a meeting under the chairmanship of then Tamil Nadu Minister of

Finance, C. Ponnaiyan. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, then

Deputy Chairman, TN Planning Commission, participated in it. We mooted the idea of creating a consortium of these five entities to construct a 1000 MW power plant at Ennore Port. The chief executives of these five institutions were impressed with the idea involving an equity of Rs. 750 crore to be contributed by them and the balance of around Rs. 2500 crore being taken on loan and sharing the responsibilities amongst themselves. NTPC, however, played spoilsport, offering to contribute 89 per cent along with TNEB (11 per cent) to set up the plant and torpedoed the *IE* plan. Subsequently NTPC and TNEB planned to set up a 1500 MW (3x500 MW) plant at Vallur. This idea was mooted in June 2002. Ten years later, even the first unit of 500 MW has not been commissioned.

Another joint venture that was floated after *IE*'s proposal was to set up a 1000 MW (2x500 MW) plant at Tuticorin jointly by NLC and TNEB. This is still a non-starter. The 1200 MW (2x600 MW) Udangudi power plant, to be set up jointly by BHEL and TNEB, has made little progress over the five years since it was

The sounds of music

It is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness (to someone whom *The Man from Madras Musings* has forgotten) the nearest Chennai ever gets to winter, unless something drastic happens with global warming. It is also the season of music and MMM begins to hum along, except when under the watchful eye of the Chief and the gimlet gaze of She Who Must Be Obeyed who, in mufti, is otherwise MMM's good lady.

Having been to several *sabhas* and done several things over several years, MMM can be considered an authority on acoustics, or rather what they ought not to be, and, based on his experience, he has classified the audio systems in the various locales under different heads and these he presents to you today. In local parlance, the audio system is usually referred to as the sound system and in this case sound is to be taken as a synonym for noise. The sound system, in 90 per cent of the cases, is also not sound in its general state of well-being.

is usually a desperate search for the soundman who, if you remember is at Tasmac.

THE MUFLER – MMM has never managed to fathom this one, but there are venues where no matter what be the setting, the best the audience can manage with is a sensation of swimming underwater with someone else trying actively to communicate. Whales could take their sonar lessons from these *sabhas*. You know when you are at such a location when, as soon as the curtain goes up, each member of the performing troupe begins looking at side wings and signalling that the volume of his/her respective microphone be increased. It also implies that the volumes of other microphones be set at zero. But looking at the side wings is a futile exercise, for the soundman is awol, but not at the Tasmac but at the *sabha* canteen. The muffler is usually at respectable venues where the soundman would not dream of a tippie while on duty. But tiffin is another matter.

THE ECHO – This is experienced at the ultra-respectable Meccas of music, the kinds that were originally inaugu-

had occasion to speak of the prediction abilities of our weathermen and he is thankful to them that they are ever keeping him supplied with material for this column. The latest was a couple of weeks ago when it was predicted about wet weather. Nothing wrong about that, but the addendum took the cake. It was predicted that it would rain everyday between 11 pm and 3 am. What of the rest of the time and do the clouds follow a time clock? Apparently they do and also apparently, like the garbage disposal men in our city, the clouds are averse to night duty. It never rained and after a week we had an announcement that Chennai was in for a dry spell. Surprise! surprise!

MMM strongly suspects that the lack of rain is due to collusion between Met officials and Corporation/PWD. The latter, no doubt, apprehensive that the city's infrastructure cannot cope with any more rain, must have appealed to the former for ideas. The Met-men then announced rain at night, whereupon the clouds shied away and that was that.

• by S. Viswanathan

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

But now to get on with it.

THE DOG – This is invariably in *sabhas* that are rough-and-ready locations. The budgets are small, the paying audience even smaller and the venue is a convert from a derelict *kalyana mandapam* or old school hall. The best sound system that can be afforded is usually a left-over from political meetings. It is usually a vast assemblage of several speakers, positioned one over the other and all of them with cracked diaphragms. The 'soundman' usually sets the volume to the maximum and then vanishes to the nearest tavern or Tasmac and emerges only when the concert is over. The sound system, therefore, transmits a series of woofing and barking noises right through the concert.

THE SIREN – This is the *sabha* where space is a constraint. The artistes are all positioned thigh-by-knee and yet each of them demands a separate microphone to satisfy his/her ego. These venues are usually located close to a main road with lots of buses plying and so the demand for a separate mike is not entirely unreasonable. But what happens is that each mike detests the others (rather like the members of the arts fraternity) and lets out a deafening wail every five minutes. There

rated by titled nobility and had at least one Maharajah on the founding (but, sadly, not the sounding) board. They specialise in echoes especially during percussion interludes. MMM has often had the sensation that he is attending two concerts simultaneously, one for'ard and the other aft. These are invariably attributed to structural defects and, no matter what the soundman does (and he does his bit), nothing ever changes.

PLAGUED-BY-EXPER-TISE – This is where the soundman fancies himself an expert. And you are left wishing that he would occasionally take off and visit the nearest Tasmac, leaving you to hear the rest of the concert at peace. Such soundmen are minor celebrities in their own way. Artistes fawn on them, all in the hope that the soundman would leave the settings alone. But that is never to be. Right through the concert, the volume levels will keep changing; now a mere whisper, now a deafening shout, now complete silence, now breaking the noise barrier. But MMM has to admit that there is never a dull moment.

Rain Quixote

The *Man from Madras Musings* has in the past

But what of next year is what MMM wonders about. Will it be back to water in tankers and the sight of the ubiquitous plastic *kudam*? What with the power situation, the mounting garbage, the traffic chaos and, now, water scarcity, Chennai is no longer the paradise it once was. But MMM must admit that we have all worked very hard to get it to this state.

Season's greetings

If it is the season of mist (we did go into that a short while ago, did we not?) and it is also the season of goodwill to all. *The Man from Madras Musings* alludes to Christmas. While MMM and, he is sure, all of you have your own ways of celebrating it, the politicians have decided that this is the season to put out posters greeting what they consider yet another vote bank and, therefore, deserves to be kept happy. Consequently several posters have been pasted on walls all around the city. It is a moot point if the owners of those walls feel the same goodwill. But MMM did when he saw one that hailed the mater dei of the State as 'The Celebrity of Minorities'.

On that happy note, have a great 2013.

– MMM

(Continued on page 5)

Greater focus on natural and rural heritage needed

— INTACH

At a recent meeting of INTACH's Natural Heritage Advisory Committee, INTACH's national chairman L.K. Gupta reiterated that natural heritage must increasingly get precedence in national policies, as the country is facing new challenges in environmental conservation and has already suffered considerable damage due to lack of management.

He cited the example of the Ganga project where an amount of \$7.2 billion was spent for cleaning up the river, but this most sacred river of India is still struggling to maintain its purity and its very existence.

An audio-visual presentation on *Issues and Initiatives of Natural Heritage* highlighted the progress made by INTACH in the Bio-geographic zones of India. In all, 258 sacred groves, 910 heritage trees, 74 precincts/landscapes, totalling 1242 natural heritage sites, were documented over the period 2010-2012. The documentation emphasised that natural heritage sites should have one or more attributes, such as physiological elements, natural landscapes, community-based sacred groves, heritage or landmark trees, historic gardens, habitats of endemic species of flora and fauna, bio-diversity rich areas, etc. As collective action is required for constituting a National Data Base, INTACH's Heritage Natural Division also proposes to cover in future agri-history, traditional food crops and cultivars,

alternative medicine systems, etc.

INTACH has already started paying attention to agricultural heritage conservation, with Chapter Convenors having been briefed to take up rural-related projects in their respective regions tapping into a number of Government schemes and funds now available in the rural sector.

While farmers still follow ancient practices in many regions, modern agriculture graduates, trained in the Western agricultural studies, are generally unaware of traditional local practices.

It was also felt that some genetically and agriculturally pure areas should be notified as *Reserves of Agricultural Heritage*. It was suggested that Chapter Convenors/Members working on identification of such groves should keep in touch with local Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) and seek their assistance in protecting such natural heritage sites. It was felt that INTACH should be represented in Government committees on Environment & Forests, Urban Development, Culture and in related agencies.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by endorsing agricultural heritage as an added dimension to conservation of Natural Heritage. He also stated that Convenors have already been advised to include rural heritage in the listing and documentation undertaken in their respective areas. (Courtesy: INTACH *Viraasat*)

Safeguarding intangible heritage

(by Nerupama Y. Modwel, INTACH)

Born of our unique historical and geo-cultural climate, diverse elements of intangible cultural heritage have flourished in India for centuries and passed down orally through generations. This heritage has been crucial in shaping our cultural identity and in imbuing our cultural landscape with colour, vigour and feeling. The continued transmission of all that we value in this heritage is essential for the preservation of our vibrant culture for our children.

While it is heartening that there is growing concern and debate on the disappearance of our oral traditions, there is much that needs to be done for the protection of this vulnerable aspect of our heritage. In the face of a formless monoculture, many cultural practices are in danger of escaping from our living memory altogether. INTACH should focus on the study of languishing or dying art forms, and work towards their revival.

Foremost, we need to garner support for transmission of those elements of endangered living heritage which are of cultural and artistic value, bear historical significance, and are worth preserving. As a first step, it is important to undertake research and documentation to fully understand the nature of these art forms, and look into their current status – leading to an approximation of what interventions and protective measures need to be taken on an urgent basis to help in the formulation of preservation policies.

As a start, perhaps, we can put in place a formal system of protection of intangible heritage. Identification, selection and registration of diverse elements of artistic value could be undertaken to form a national list or registry. This ongoing exercise would bring up high-value intangible heritage, which is on the verge of extinction and needs active government protection.

Another important and perhaps essential measure is the formulation of heritage regulations that incorporate intangible heritage alongside built heritage, not only at the national level but at the level of local governments where they would have more teeth and maximum impact. This will result in bringing protection and promotional activities to those specific elements of intangible cultural heritage which are of value to a particular region.

At the national level, the Government must assign experts of craft know-how, cultural practices and traditional performing arts to take up identification and taking inventories of intangible heritage in different categories, research on its protection, commission documentation of high-value intangible heritage, as well as conduct surveys and workshops for training as ongoing efforts. It is also crucial to recognise individuals or groups who represent outstanding skills or arts in the field of intangible cultural heritage. While craft technique may be recognised individually, a group performing folk theatre with components of acting, costume and accompanying music would require a collective recognition as an outstanding performance group, and the transmission of their skills would also have to take place as a whole to ensure accuracy and authenticity. This recognition should result in a stipend/subsidy for the further development of their skills and to conduct training workshops for their successors. It should be followed up with a concerted push by the Government in providing all possible help for public performance to promote and broaden understanding of this heritage. Awareness creation and sensitisation at the local level through the media, students, corporates, etc. is most essential. There is a need for many more national and local cultural centres for promotional activities like exhibitions and performances, and for museums dedicated to intangible cultural heritage.

Research and documentation should be another priority. There should be extra emphasis on successor training through regular workshops or training programmes that link schemes of employment and livelihood with the traditional arts and crafts. There should also be recognition of outstanding stakeholders in their respective fields.

While there is greater public awareness of traditional art forms today, it is vital to engage children and young adults in the understanding and appreciation of their cultural roots, with inclusion of heritage studies in the school curriculum. It is ultimately this generation which will save our past for the future. – (Courtesy: INTACH *Viraasat*.)

Chennai lags behind

(Continued from page 1)

condition as the first three. These could be harnessed for some transport if maintained well. But with no visible results after several crores of rupees have been spent, it is a sad state of affairs.

Documentary: *50 Years of Indian Mountaineering Foundation*, followed by interaction with Col. H.S. Chauhan. 5.45 p.m.

January 2: An introduction to *Mountaineering Skills and Photographing in the Himalaya* by J. Ramanan. 6 p.m.

January 3: Talk: *Instincts and Insights of a nature photographer* by K. Ramnath Chandrasekhar. 6 p.m.

January 4: Screening of natural history documentary by Shekar Dattatri. 6 p.m.

January 5: An audio visual *Chadar – The Ice Trail* by J. Ramanan. 6 p.m.

Noise pollution, traffic indiscipline, lack of maintenance of walking areas – These are endemic to all Indian cities and Chennai perhaps ranks no worse than the others. But if the aim is to be an international city, does it not have to rise above these bottlenecks? Where are the concrete and planned efforts towards their improvement? On the other hand, we appear to be sliding in the opposite direction. Political rallies that block traffic, public worship practices blocking roads, and hoardings and cut-outs welcoming political leaders are the order of the day. The ban on defacing city walls with

posters has more or less been forgotten.

So where are we truly international?

If we are not anywhere near any count, then we need to be concerned about how is this ranking going to affect Chennai. For one, multinationals planning to set up base in India use this study. Secondly, hardship allowances for expatriates are calculated keeping such studies in mind. And so, if we are seriously thinking of marketing ourselves, the power situation notwithstanding, we may as well begin with a serious perusal of this survey.

MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at www.madras-musings.com

— THE EDITOR



Till December 25: *Festival of Punjab*, featuring Bhangra, Gidha, Jindua, Luddi, Sammi, Malwai Gidha and Jhoomer performances. Display and sale of *Phulkari, Punjabi jutti, lac bangles*, inlay work on wood and Punjabi cuisine (at DakshinaChitra, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.)

Till December 21: *Tri-butaries*, a painting exhibition by Surekha, Ramesh Nair and Dileep Kumar (at Laburnum & Indigo Galleries, Chilamandal Artists' Village, 9.30 a.m.-6.30 p.m.)

Till December 21: Prakriti Foundation and the Alliance Française of Madras invite you to a painting exhibition – *A Tribute to Dilip Chitre* (at Alliance Française of Madras).

December 24-31: *Rhythms of Life*, an exhibition of sculptures and sketches by Usha Ramachandran (at Lalith Kala Akademi)

December 23: Activity Camp for Children. The camp conducts traditional games, mind mapping treasure hunt, hands on activities such as glass-painting, pottery and T-shirt printing. For details 98417-77779, 2446 2435/2491 8943 (at DakshinaChitra).

January 2-6: *'Mountains of Our Destiny'* – photography exhibition by Mr. J. Ramanan – an architect by profession, a mountaineer and photographer by passion (11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Lalith Kala Akademi).

Events

January 1: Inauguration. 4 p.m.

Documentary: *Save our Sholas*, followed by interaction with Shekar Dattatri. 5 p.m.

The State's Legislative Assembly – 60 years and more



Fort Council Chamber (right, centre) in the 1785 when the first Legislative met in 1861.



Senate House, where the Assembly met in 1937-38.



Banqueting Hall, where the Assembly met in 1938-39.



Home of the Legislature in 1952, later Kalaivanar Arangam.

The Speakers

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. J. Shivashanmugam Pillai | 10. K. Rajaram |
| 2. N. Gopala Menon | 11. P.H. Pandian |
| 3. U. Krishna Rao | 12. M. Tamilkudimagan |
| 4. S. Chellapandian | 13. R. Muthiah |
| 5. Si.Pa. Adithanar | 14. P.T.R. Palanivel Rajan |
| 6. Pulavar K. Govindan | 15. K. Kalimuthu |
| 7. K.A. Mathiazhagan | 16. R. Avudaiappan |
| 8. P. Seenivasan (Acting Speaker) | 17. D. Jayakumar |
| 9. Munu Adhi | 18. P. Dhanapal |

The first Legislature of any kind to be established in Madras was the Madras Legislative Council in 1861. First established as a non-representative advisory body, it saw the introduction of elected members in 1892. The Indian Councils Act, 1909 (under the popularly called 'Minto-Morley Reforms') officially introduced indirect election of members to the Council. In 1919, direct elections were introduced with introduction of Diarchy under the Government of India Act of 1919. Between 1920 and 1937, the Legislative Council was a unicameral legislature for the Madras Presidency. The Government of India Act of 1935 abolished diarchy and created a bicameral legislature in Madras Province. The Legislature consisted of the Governor and two Legislative bodies – a Legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council. The Assembly was the lower house and consisted of 215 members, who were further classified into general members and reserved members representing special communities and interests.

The presiding officer of the Assembly was called the Speaker of the Assembly.

The first Assembly of the Madras Presidency met in the Senate House of Madras University in 1937.

The first Legislative Assembly election for the Presidency was held in February 1937. The Indian National Congress obtained a majority by winning 159 of 215 seats. C Rajagopalachari became the first elected Chief Minister of the Presidency (called the Prime Minister or Premier until 1952) under the provincial autonomy system guaranteed by the Government of India Act of 1935. The first Assembly was constituted in July 1937. Bulusu Sambamurthi and A. Rukmani Lakshminpathi were elected as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively. The first Assembly lasted its term, till February 1943, but the Congress Cabinet resigned in October 1939, protesting against India's participation in World War II. During 1939-46, Madras was under the direct rule of the Governor and no elections were held in 1943 when the Assembly's term expired. The next elections were held only in 1946, when a political compromise was reached between the Congress and the Viceroy, Lord Wavell. The second Assembly of the Presidency was thus constituted in April 1946. The Congress won an absolute majority in the elections



The home of the Legislative Assembly and Secretariat in Fort St. George in the early 2000s.

and again formed the Government. On August 15, 1947, India became independent and the new Indian Constitution came

The Prime & the Chief Ministers

1. P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja
2. C. Rajagopalachari
3. K. Kamaraj
4. M. Bhakthavatsalam
5. C.N. Annadurai
6. V.R. Nedunchezhiyan (Acting)
7. M. Karunanidhi
8. M.G. Ramachandran
9. Janaki Ramchandran
10. J. Jayalalithaa
11. O. Panneerselvam

into effect on January 26, 1950. Madras Presidency became Madras State and the then-existing Assembly and the Government were retained till new elections could be held in 1952.

In the Republic of India, the Madras State Legislative Assembly continued to be the lower house in a bicameral legislature. The first election to the Assembly on the basis of universal adult suffrage was held in January 1952. According to the Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies (Madras) Order, 1951, promulgated by President under Sections 6 and 9 of the Representation of People Act, 1950, the Assembly's strength was 375 members elected from 309 constituencies. Out of the 309 constituencies in the undivided Madras State, 66 were two-member constituencies, 62 of which had one seat reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates and four for Scheduled Tribe candidates. The two-

member constituencies were established in accordance with Article 332 of the Indian Constitution.

The voting method and the plurality of electoral formula were defined in the Representation of People Act, 1950. These constituencies were large in size and had greater number of voters (more than 100,000) than general constituencies. Multiple members were elected only in the 1952 and 1957 elections as double member representation was abolished in 1961 by the enactment of Two-Member Constituencies Abolition Act (1961). Of the 375 seats, 143 were from what later became Andhra State, 29 from Malabar, 11 from South Canara (part of present-day Karnataka) and the remaining 190 belonged to the present-day Tamil Nadu.

On October 1, 1953, a separate Andhra State, consisting of the Telugu-speaking areas of the composite Madras State, was formed and the Kannada-speaking area of Bellary District was merged with the then Mysore State. This reduced the strength of the Legislative Assembly to 231. On November 1, 1956, the States Reorganisation Act took effect and consequently the constituencies in the erstwhile Malabar District were merged with the Kerala State. This further reduced the strength to 190.

The Tamil-speaking area of Kerala (present-day Kanniyakumari District) and Shenkottah taluk were added to Madras State. According to the new Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order of 1956, made by the Delimitation Commission of India under provisions of the States

Reorganisation Act of 1956, the strength of the Assembly was increased to 205. The 1957 elections were conducted for these 205 seats. In 1959, as a result of the Andhra Pradesh and Madras (Alteration of Boundaries) Act 1959, one constituency from the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly was allotted to Madras, increasing its Legislative Assembly strength to 206. The 1962 elections were conducted for these 206 seats.

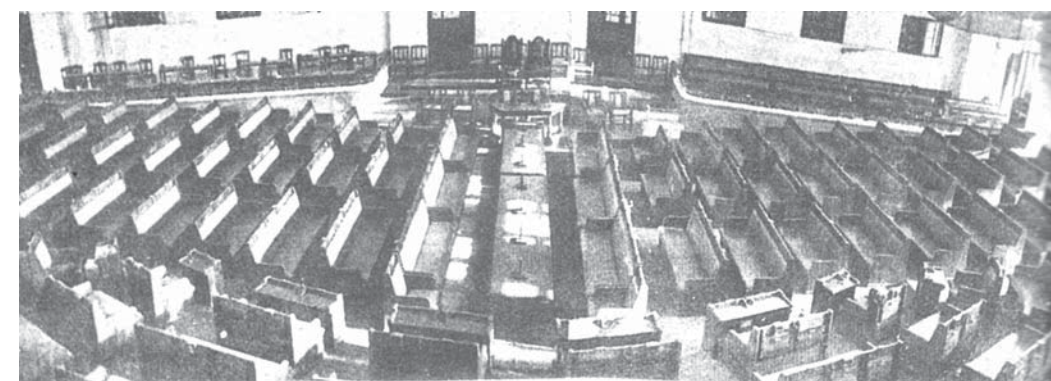
In 1965, the elected strength of the Assembly was increased to 234 under the Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 1965. In addition to 234, the Assembly also has one nominated member representing the Anglo-Indian community. From 1965, the number of members has remained constant.

In 1969, Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu and subsequently the Assembly came to be known as the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council was abolished with effect from November 1, 1986 through an Act of Parliament titled the 'Tamil Nadu Legislative Council (Abolition) Act, 1986.' With the abolition of the Council, the legislature became an unicameral body and remained so for the next 24 years. Of the 14 Assemblies that have been constituted so far, four (the sixth, seventh, ninth and tenth) have been dismissed by the Central Government using Article 356 of the Indian Constitution.

The Legislative Assembly is seated in Fort St. George. Fort St. George has historically been the seat of power of the Government of Tamil Nadu from the founding of the city as

Madraspatnam in 1640. During 1921-37, the precursor to the Assembly, the Madras Legislative Council, met in the Council Chambers within the Fort. Between July 14, 1937 and December 21, 1938, the Assembly met in the Senate House of the University of Madras and between January 27, 1938 and October 26, 1939 in the Banqueting Hall (later renamed Rajaji Hall) in the Government Estate. During 1946-52, it moved back to Fort St. George.

In 1952, the strength of the Assembly rose to 375, after the constitution of the First Assembly, and it was briefly moved into temporary premises in the Gov-

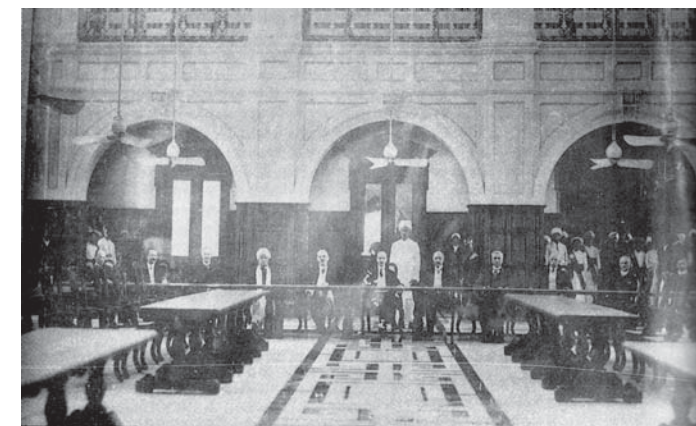


The Assembly Hall in Government Estate in 1952.



The Assembly Hall in Fort St. George in the early 2000s.

ernment Estate Complex. This move was made in March 1952, as the existing Assembly building only had a seating capacity of 260. Then, on May 3, 1952, it moved into a newly constructed Assembly building in the same Estate. The Assembly functioned from the new building (later renamed 'Kalaivanar Arangam') during 1952-56. However, with the reorganisation of States and formation of Andhra, the strength came down to 190 and



The Assembly Hall in Fort St. George in 1911.



The Assembly Hall in Senate House in 1937.

The state to blame – for power shortage

(Continued from page 2)

announced in 2007 and recently the JV was terminated by the State Government.

The 4000MW Ultra Mega Power Plant at Cheyyar got bogged down, initially with environment clearance hurdles and later with land acquisition problems.

The DMK government was in power in Tamil Nadu till May 2011. It also had a sizeable say in the Union Government. It could have succeeded in getting the needed environmental clearances, coal linkages, funding, etc with ease, but failed to do so.

Even while the present Government is demanding higher allocation of power from the Centre, it would do well to look at what is holding up generation of power from within its own domain, and remove the bottlenecks that are preventing the smooth execution of projects already sanctioned.

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

– THE EDITOR

Animal Farm — Version 2

If you are one of those who assumes that anyone who chooses to share her life with Romulus (Rom) Whitaker – herpetologist, wildlife conservationist, founder of the Madras Snake Park, and the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, among other projects – just has to be one of those keen-eyed, explorer-adventurer types, striding about taking on Nature, you might be a little taken aback when you first meet Janaki Lenin. Apparently, intrepid outdoor-divas sometimes come in surprisingly small, petite packages.

Janaki Lenin, whose column, 'My Husband and Other Animals', is a regular feature in *The Hindu*, recently released a compilation of her pieces bearing the same title.

Your first instinct is to get to the back stories and the hows-and-whens involved here. "I grew up right here in RA Puram, in the Chennai of the late 1970s-early 80s – cycling all over a friendly neighbourhood of independent houses with gardens, with hedges you ambled through when you visited – no one bothered using front gates." She smiles, "Now everything is separated by compound walls and highrises. Vertical separation?"

After school, she joined the Film Institute at Taramani. Her father, documentary and other films maker, K.R. Lenin, who had very clear ideas about what constituted 'good cinema' ("He firmly believed anything made after 1945 was rubbish"), was against the choice of profession.

Opposition, she discloses, invariably makes her more determined to follow that particular path.

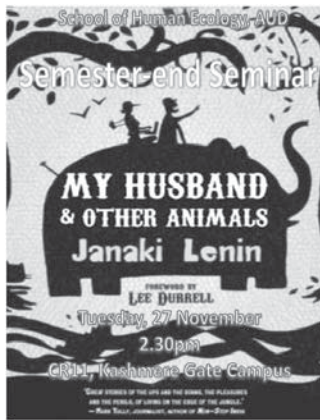
As it turned out, the Film Institute was not a very pleasant experience, with everything being distinctly "geared towards Kodambakkam." She did, however, complete her course in editing, and became a freelancer, making corporate and advertisement films. "I worked out of different studios. My work went from Lalgudi Jayaraman to films on mixies and transformers."

After a while, she decided that the "only way I was going to do anything creative was by



Janaki Lenin.

becoming a director myself." While scouting for subjects, she heard of a group called SAMP, which was doing a film on snakes, planned to increase awareness among people. "I thought this was a good idea."



The cover of Janaki's book.

And, obviously, if you are going to do a film on snakes, whom do you meet? Rom Whitaker.

"I was not interested in making the usual fact-driven documentary, but in making one which included people's views and reactions to snakes that run the gamut from worship to utter fear and revulsion."

You're about to ask her whether this was the moment, when she cuts you short by grinning: "Rom 'palmed me off to Harry Miller.'"

A little later, she happened to visit another set, where her friend was working alongside Rom on a film about rats. "She told me to drop by and hang out with her. I did, and there was Rom."

Inevitable next question: Was she always interested in Nature, in everything people normally associate with words like 'conservationist', 'naturalist'?

"I didn't even know Nature existed. Forests were remote. I was city-bred through and through. Nature for me was my garden and backyard. I'd never been on treks...all of it came

later, and I learnt everything from Rom."

She did know she'd always share him with Nature, right? "The suspicion was there," she grins.

Being with Rom meant, no, not candle-lit dinners, but being in the camps all the time. "The first time he took me camping, it was to Agumbe, the wettest place possible. It was like being flung into the deep end of a pool. I remember thinking 'I don't want to be here.'"

Did Rom ever take advantage of her initial inexperience with Nature?

"Absolutely. Like we'd cook fish for lunch, and I wouldn't have noticed anyone going to the market. So I'd wonder where the fish had come from, and Rom would say that a school of flying fish had come winging by, and that he had caught a few as they whizzed past, and that's how we were having fish for lunch. I was naïve enough to believe him. I now justify this by saying it was such a new world for me back then. Doesn't happen so much now."

Rom and she made good partners work-wise. "We formed a company called Draco Films. It was then that I began to put in hours of research. You have to get all your facts meticulously right before you can pitch your ideas to anyone, typically TV channels like *National Geographic* and *Discovery*. There is a very rigorous vetting process, with a team of fact-checkers."

While this helped build her knowledge base, Rom was, of course, her in-house 'ready reckoner'. "He even knew more than what had been published."

She is now no longer making films, she writes her column and works on other writing projects.

You are puzzled by the ease of the transition, though. How can a self-confessed, city-bred girl step out of comfort zone so quickly?

A liberal, non-traditional upbringing, perhaps?

"Yes, you could say that. I didn't grow up with too many dos and don'ts. That's probably why I found easy to adapt to a totally different life. But aren't all women like that?" she suddenly asks.

Yes, but this is a bit different, right?

For one thing, most women don't have 'in-laws' so heavily



Fun with the 'Dude'

There are a host of fun facts that surround Rom Whitaker. The 'dude' or 'my man', as she sometimes calls him, has had quite a Life – with a capital 'L'. He is a colour-blind, a fact he dismisses with a laugh, but is able to find brown and green snakes with greater speed than most people. Janaki explains: "He trusts shapes, not colours."

He is able to trace his ancestry back to 839 A.D, with 'Whitaker' apparently derived from 'de Quitacre'. Rom, nicknamed 'Breezy' by his family, is also a 'cuss word expert' apparently, and in 'several languages', including Pashto. (You can't help thinking that given the unpredictable nature of his favourite creatures, the opportunities to brush up that particular skill must be infinite.)

New York-born Rom has "always felt Indian" and, years ago, traded in his American citizenship for an Indian passport. Rom's stepfather is Rama Chattopadhyaya, so that makes Kamaladevi, his step-grandmother, and Harindranath his 'Granddaddy' – who rescued the child Rom from a rather miserable school experience, and also once wrote a lovely poem 'For Gale and Breezy', describing Rom as a scamp, who is so full of life that he is lit from inside, it would seem, 'without the help of long, electric wires!'.

endowed with teeth, fur, claws and poison sacs... (I saw that look. Dear Reader, and I know what you are thinking!).

"My father made us think for ourselves. If I had questions, he'd say: 'Look it up. Nobody taught me to judge anything as wrong. "I have no 'icky' quotient." So, yes, city girls can learn to share eesal rice with the Iru... much to the latter's amusement.

The Whitakers live on a farm 10 km from Chengalpattu, in the midst of scattered hamlets. "My life is a bit like a nature science class...but we do have other interests, like reading and music. I read everything I can get. Rom listens to rock 'n roll; I listen to Carnatic and Hindustani. We try to come to Chennai during the music season. Now, after more than twenty years, I am a visitor to the city. The drive back tends to neutralise any fun element – it really has to be worth our while to make that trip. I'd love to be able to teleport into the city."

What do Rom and Janaki do for 'ordinary' fun? "Oh, that's hard to answer. We have our own definition of 'fun'. Friends? We do have some close friends, but we are both very asocial people...it's easier to talk to a snake," she laughs.

Does she ever get scared for Rom? Her book speaks of times when things have got danger-

ous. "Yes, all the time. I trust he will be careful, and am thankful when he gets home safe. What else can I do?"

Janaki's domestic issues are a little different from merely running out of veggies and milk, you imagine. "Well, we have staff who are used to our lives. Otherwise, yes, it is a problem. Forget urbanities, even people from around the area can't handle our lives, or working in our home. They come, see our place, and flee within a month! They say it's a jungle!"

Yes, this particular 'Amma and Aiyya' are a bit different, given that, over the years, their ideas of domestic pets are just that little but unusual. Janaki admits that kitchen utensils sometimes share space with garlic...and tree frogs, In her book, she has an exact count of the number of tree frogs she had to once coax out of the house – 289.

Janaki calls herself 'a dyed-in-the-wool city slicker', but adds that "saying 'yes' to every opportunity was like opening a door to a possibility – adventure." There is after all "plenty of time later to wallow in your comfort zone..." So, grab every new experience, is her approach.

You hear her anguish when her "45-kg gorgeous German Shepherd, Karadi" died in 2006,

(Continued on page 9)

Our quizmaster V.V. Ramanan is on a quizzing round. His column will resume on his return.

– The Editor

Two pages for the Season of Lightness and Good Cheer!

APROPOS...

(Or the art of writing
Letters to the Editor)



“The report of my death was highly exaggerated,” said a probably apocryphal letter to the editor by Mark Twain. Unfortunately, access to such correspondence from such eminent sources is not easy even in today’s world of Google. Among the great men of the 20th Century, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was one political leader who did not hesitate to write to newspapers when he was not writing for them or publishing them himself.

A telling example of his audacious prose based on the high moral ground was his letter dated October 25, 1894 to the *Times of Natal*, which had carried a contemptuously worded editorial titled ‘Rammysammy’.

Gandhi wrote: “You would not allow the Indian or the native the precious privilege (of voting) under any circumstances, because they have a dark skin. You would look at the exterior only. So long as the skin is white it would not matter to you whether it conceals beneath it poison or nectar. To you the lip-prayer of the Phari-see, because he is one, is more acceptable than the sincere repentance of the publican, and this, I presume, you would call Christianity.”

‘Hardy perennials’ would be a perfect description of those sterling men – and occasional women – who have made it their life’s mission to write letters beginning, “Dear Sir, Apropos the article on the Anna Hazare movement in your Op-Ed page by XYZ.”

The magazines are the place to go if you want interesting even controversial fare. *Outlook* and *Tehelka* are Indian magazines that seem to attract the most entertaining debates in the Letters column, and that may be because their editors do not mind publishing letters critical of them and their magazines.

Madras Musings, the heritage fortnightly, seems to fare rather better than its national coun-

terparts in that it has a loyal base of correspondents with strong, often sound, views on everything from the hygiene hazards of the city to the heritage value of all manner of relics of a bygone era. Here are some examples:

Fidelity to Madras

I refer to the reminder to Union Finance Minister about his promise to save the Bharat Insurance Building (MM, August 16th). It should be child’s play for the FM to get the LIC Chairman to preserve the building because he is the LIC Chairman’s boss. There are, however, other priorities.

The FM has to first tackle the economy which has become as moribund as the building. Besides, he has other promises to keep and files to go (shall we say scams to investigate?) before he sleeps. Plus, he has to step gingerly because Subramanian Swamy is snapping at his heels. He certainly has a lot on his plate.

A lurking danger is LIC quietly borrowing a couple of bulldozers from Metrorail and reducing the building to rubble overnight.

C.G. Prasad

(A *Madras Musings* veteran
of well over a decade)

* * *

An old issue of the same magazine reveals a rather sentimental streak in its readers: their concern for the vanishing sparrow. Here are some edited samples from the correspondence the subject evoked.

The vanishing sparrows

When I was young there were innumerable instances of sparrows building nests in the beams and in the fan covers of our house. I remember rehabilitating some young ones whenever they fell and making nests in shoeboxes for them.

Nowadays, I must admit, they are not to be seen. But when I went to Kothavalchavadi recently, I was surprised to

see many of them competing with humans and bovines alike.

Padmini Badri

* * *

Anna Institute of Management, a State Government sponsored management training institute, functions in *Kanchi*, a heritage building in Greenways Road. In this building we have lots of sparrows and the chirping of the sparrows eases the stresses of a working day and creates a wonderful environment for effective human interaction so necessary in a training programme.

Dr. T.A.

Sivasubramaniam

* * *

Does the younger generation know what a sparrow is? Does the older generation remember? Driven by urban blight, this di-

● by **V. Ramnarayan**

minutive creature has made its exit – well, almost. But I disagree with the claim by Madras Naturalists’ Society that these birds can be seen in Mylapore.

However, I saw sparrows in two other areas. At Beach Station, opposite *TIAM House*, about four or five years ago and at Ellis’ Road/Mount Road near Anna Statue about two years ago.

B. Gautham

* * *

Birds have always been a formidable attraction to letters-to-the-editor writers. *The Times*, London, even came up with a book of letters to the Editor collected over a hundred years. The sighting of the first cuckoo and the first nightingale of spring was a joy that English men and women loved to share with their fellow readers of *The Times* or *The Telegraph*, though the urge to get there first could not be ruled out.

Septuagenarian Duncan Rayner is one fierce competitor. He told a newspaper reporter that he was at his computer by 8.30 am most of the days, scanning the paper for topics to write about. “You have to be quick to get your oar in,” he says. “You know that there are other people making very similar points.”

One famous letters-to-the-editor writer, Keith Flett, belongs to the Beard Liberation Front, “a campaigning organisation, a vehicle for exposing the smooth-faced absurdities of the New Labour world.” Flett reckons on an average success rate of just five per cent; and he has had some 1,000 letters published.

Roland Tyrrell, Deputy Letters Editor at *The Independent*, who rations Keith to just four outings a year, said, “The really annoying thing about Keith Flett is that he writes such a good letter.”

Robert Warner, a semi-retired management consultant, has been a constant pain in the neck with his obsessive ways of letter writing, but his wife, Anne, took her revenge, when she wrote to *The Telegraph*: “Please stop publishing letters

When I was a child, the school day began with prayer. But you can’t stop progress.

Peter Homer

* * *

Waking up terror experts

SIR “It’s a wake-up call”. That’s what politicians say after every terrorist outrage. So who are these security experts who need to be woken up on a regular basis? Are they all teenagers who can’t bear to get out of bed before three in the afternoon?

Jim Dawes

* * *

Tanned Tony

SIR – I don’t believe you should judge a man by the colour of his skin, but in the case of Tony Blair I’ll make an exception.

Ralph Berry

* * *

Sporting figures

SIR – Whose idea was it to stage the World Cup during the cricket season?

Mary E Rudd

* * *

According to the editor of *The Telegraph*, the only certainty in this business is that the correspondence will keep pouring in. “Letters to the Editor” column offers a coherent, carefully edited space – a kind of daily competition, if you will – that exhibits the best of what our readers are thinking. They are seldom shy of sharing these thoughts, writing from their offices, from holiday – even, in one instance, from the bath. One correspondent suggested that ‘we run a separate letters page for emails sent after pub closing time.’

Great magazines like *The New Yorker* and *The Economist* invariably publish letters to the editor of high quality, but they are often on very serious issues and rightly so. It is the newspapers that can provide space for the whimsical, the angry, the downright playful varieties of letters on subjects as varied as international politics and rain-water harvesting. Will our dailies consider giving the reader a chance to flex his creative muscles, to coin an oxymoron? (Courtesy: *Matrix*, journal of the Sanmar Group)

Madras Musings wishes all its readers a very Happy New Year.

Driving – the Indian way...

• Found on the net, this article was written by a visiting expert from Baan, Netherlands, who spent two years in Hyderabad.

For the benefit of every Tom, Dick and Harry visiting India and daring to drive on Indian roads, I offer a few hints for survival. They are applicable to every place in India except Bihar, where life outside a vehicle is only marginally safer.

(Indian 'road rules' broadly operate within the domain of 'Karma' where you do your 'best' and leave the 'rest' to your insurance company.)

The hints are as follows:

Do we drive on the left or right of the road?

The answer is "both". Basically you start on the left of the road, unless it is occupied. In that case, go to the right, unless that is also occupied. Then proceed by occupying the next available gap, as in chess. Just trust your instincts, ascertain the direction, and proceed. Adherence to road rules leads to much misery and occasional fatality.

Most drivers don't drive, but just aim their vehicles in the intended direction. (Don't you get discouraged or underestimate yourself. The other driv-

ers are not in any better position either!)

Don't stop at pedestrian crossings just because some fool wants to cross the road. You may do so only if you enjoy being bumped in the back. Pedestrians have been strictly instructed to cross only when traffic is moving slowly or has come to a dead stop because some minister is in town. Still, some idiot may try to wade across but, then, let us not talk ill of the dead.

Blowing your horn is not a sign of protest or bad manners, as in some countries. We horn to express joy, resentment, frustration, romance and bare lust (two brisk blasts), or just to mobilise a dozing cow in the middle of the bazaar.

Keep informative books in the glove compartment. You may read them during traffic jams, while awaiting the Chief

Minister's motorcade or the rainwaters to recede.

Occasionally you might see what looks like an UFO with blinking coloured lights and weird sounds emanating from within. This is an illuminated bus, full of happy pilgrims singing *bhajans*. These pilgrims go at breakneck speed, seeking contact with the Almighty, and often meeting with success.

Autorickshaw (Baby Taxi): The result of a collision between a rickshaw and an automobile, this three-wheeled vehicle works on an external combustion engine that runs on a mixture of kerosene oil and reosote. This triangular vehicle carries iron rods, gas cylinders or passengers three times its weight and dimension, at an unspecified fare. After careful geometric calculations, children are folded and packed into these autorickshaws until some children in the periphery are not in contact with the vehicle at all. Then, their school bags are pushed into the microscopic gaps all round, so that those minor collisions with other vehicles on the road cause no permanent damage.

Of course, the peripheral children are charged half the fare and also learn Newton's laws of motion en route to school. Autorickshaw drivers follow the road rules depicted in the film *Ben Hur*, and are licensed to irritate.

Mopeds: The moped looks like an oil tin on wheels and makes a noise like an electric shaver. It runs 30 miles on a teaspoon of petrol and travels at break-bottom speed. As the sides of the road are too rough for a ride, the moped drivers tend to drive in the middle of the road; they would rather drive under heavier vehicles instead of around them and are often "mopped" off the tarmac.

Leaning Tower of Passes(?): Most bus passengers are given free passes and during rush hours there is absolute mayhem. There are passengers hanging off other passengers, who in turn hang off the railings and the overloaded bus leans dangerously, defying laws of gravity but obeying laws of surface tension. As drivers get paid for overload (so many rupees per kg of passenger), no questions are ever asked. Steer clear of these buses by a width of three passengers.

One-way street: These boards are put up by traffic people to add some humour in their otherwise drab lives. Don't stick to the literal meaning and proceed in one direction. In metaphysical terms, it means that you cannot proceed in two directions at once. So drive, as you like, in reverse throughout,

CONFUSION REIGNS...

(Continued from page 1)

Society Building does not make us feel confident. The Society demolished its heritage structure and the HCC was left with no choice but to approve the new design which, on the basis of an arched façade, claims to be on the lines of the earlier structure. The only aspect on which the HCC had its way was to limit the height of the building to that of the neighbouring Memorial Hall. We should probably have to be thankful for that.

There is one last variety. Chiefly comprising religious establishments (barring the Bible

Society, we guess), this group is going ahead with whatever it feels is right. It is cashing in on the probably correct surmise that the Government will do nothing to fan religious passions by interfering.

All this can be avoided if the HCC focusses on its mandate of drafting heritage laws quickly and recommending them to the Government. With a Bill already pending on the same subject, the suggestions can surely be added and legislated upon if only the Government had the will. That way, we can save our heritage in reality rather than pay lip service to the cause.

Animal Farm – Version 2

(Continued from page 6)

mauled by a leopard. Given that there is a very violent side to Nature, does Rom's unique outlook make him accepting of Nature's ways?

"Yes, Rom has no issue with death; a nature lover's emotional perspective is different. I was far more emotionally invested initially."

The book gives you loads of information in tantalising bitezone (no pun intended) portions. Like, did you know that a crocodile is easier to handle than a King Cobra, and is as easy to train as a dog? Pintu (a mind-boggling cute name for what most people would consider a scary creature) learnt by merely watching others being trained, while 'Ally', 'whose brain is the size of a walnut,' is a star pupil.

You hope you never find yourself attempting to outrun a slightly irritable elephant, but if you should, "never run in a straight line". You learn of the truly scary 'toxo', the rat-cat parasite that messes with human brains; that some people believe 'beating and scolding' trees can make them grow; and that snakes are "supremely civilised creatures", with a very clear idea of territory.

Janaki obviously has an intensely curious mind, so the book is also liberally sprinkled with some non-animal-oriented facts, like the origin of words like 'seersucker', 'mithridatization', and even 'sambhar'.

(Certainly not – go buy the book and look it up. As well all she has to say about the world of Nature.)

if you are the fussy type. Lest I should sound hypercritical; I must add a positive point too. Rash and fast driving in residential areas has been prevented by providing 'speed breakers'; two for each house. This mound, incidentally, covers the water and drainage pipes for that residence and is left unattended for easy identification by the Corporation authorities, should they want to recover the pipe for year-end accounting.

Night driving on Indian roads can be an exhilarating experience (for those with the mental make-up of Ghenghis Khan).

In a way, it is like playing

Russian roulette, because you do not know who amongst the drivers is 'loaded'. What looks like premature dawn on the horizon turns out to be a truck attempting to break a speed record. On encountering it, just pull partly into the field adjoining the road until the 'phenomenon' passes. Our roads do not have shoulders, only occasional boulders.

Do not blink your lights expecting reciprocation. The only 'dim thing' in the truck is the driver, and with the peg of illicit arrack (alcohol) he has had at the last stop, his total cerebral

(Continued on page 9)

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From promoter of consumerism to consumer activist – Part II

Committed to crusading for consumer rights

(Continued from last fortnight)

When I asked R. Desikan what made him transform himself from being an active promoter of consumerism in the country to becoming a consumer activist, he narrated these two incidents:

In 1977, when the country was still reeling under Emergency rule and any form of criticism against the Government would earn its wrath and a guaranteed place in jail, he wrote a long letter to Indira Gandhi about the travails of the consumer in India, highlighting the importance of passing the Consumer Protection Act. Not only did Indira Gandhi respond to his letter, but she also gave him an audience to hear his views on the matter! This incident taught him the importance of voicing an opinion when faced with problems, instead of living with them. However, his fight against establishments producing sub-standard products or providing shoddy services can be traced back to a personal episode involving a new Ambassador car which he had bought. When the car gave him serious trouble, even during the warranty period, he went to the car dealer who had sold him the car. The indifferent attitude of the dealer who had the audacity to tell him that he had no choice but to live with the defective vehicle, forced Desikan to take up cudgels and fight for the cause of the consumer. Those were the days of a seller's

market, where manufacturers got away with producing poor quality products.

By this time his over-ambitious publishing project ran into a serious financial crunch and he decided to close the unit and sell the title of *Mangayar Malar* alone to another friend who, in turn, sold it to the *Kalki* magazine group. However, Desikan continued running a printing press for *South Madras News*. After trying out a couple of other businesses, he decided to cease all business activities and concentrate fully on consumer activism.

* * *

His experience with the SMN Consumer Protection

• By R.V. Rajan

Council led him to take an active interest in the Federation of Consumer Organisations in Tamil Nadu (FEDCOT). He became Chairman of the organisation and during the six years that he was involved with FEDCOT, he helped the membership grow from 12 organisations to 260 organisations and the turnover increase from a few thousand rupees to Rs. 75 lakhs, through grants and subsidies from donor agencies.

Desikan's work at FEDCOT was noticed by people in Tamil Nadu and he became a name to reckon with in the world of

Consumer Activism. He was now keen to play an active role in promoting awareness about consumer rights and responsibilities at the national level. His first foray was Concert (Centre for Education, Research testing and Training) which established the first-ever fuel testing laboratory run by an NGO in Chennai, and has been publishing reports based on comparative testing of products commonly used by consumers. Concert has also developed an adulteration detection kit and trained over 2500 women in Tamil Nadu to use it.

Along with stalwarts like B.S. Raghavan (IAS RTD), K. Ravindran IPS, Dr. S. Krishnaswamy, and N.L. Rajah

he started an NGO called The Catalyst Trust with the objective of bridging the gap between grassroots people (*aam-aadmi*) and government establishments. 'Catalyst' is also active in championing electoral reforms and already has 207 regional Citizen Centres and publishes a monthly journal in the regional languages. 'Catalyst' has been very active in promoting voter awareness in a big way, with aggressive media campaigns. According to Desikan, it helped add 1.2 million new voters during the 2004 election.

The flagship organisation of the group, Consumers Association of India (CAI), was started in 2001, with Desikan, the late Yegnarman and Krishnakumar as Founder Trustees. Today, the Board of Trustees of CAI includes some well-known names, like N. Gopalaswami, former CEC of India.

During the last eleven years of its existence, CAI has helped over 10,000 consumers get redressal for their problems with Governments or erring corporates; 98 per cent of these cases were resolved without any legal intervention. The persistent efforts of CAI resulted in RBI passing a rule by which banks are now calculating the interest due to Savings Bank account holders on a daily basis instead of the earlier periodicity which had been unfavourable to bank customers. This is help-



CAI trustee R. Desikan seen with secretary general G. Rajan (right), Rajiv Aggarwal, Secretary, Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs and T.T. Srinivasaraghavan (left), managing director, Sundaram Finance Ltd, display the consumer guides of Consumers Association of India, in Chennai. —(Courtesy: The Hindu)

ing millions of customers across the country get better earnings. CAI has also been working closely with self-help groups in Tamil Nadu, training them to be more aware of their rights and responsibilities as consumers. A few of them have also become Consumer Activists. In recent years, CAI has been working closely with schools and colleges, trying to sow the seeds of consumer awareness in young minds. CAI has published a number of guides useful to consumers and every member gets a free copy of its bi-monthly called *Consumers Digest*. With some major projects assigned by the Government to CAI, it has come to be recognised as one of the top two consumer organisations in the country.

* * *

Desikan had a major health crisis in 2006. When doctors had given up hope, he had a miraculous recovery. After spending a couple of months in the hospital and later recouping at home for a couple of more

months, Desikan was back in action with greater vigour and energy to do what he is passionate about – fighting for the hapless Indian consumer!

When I asked him why in spite of poor health he continues to push himself beyond his endurance limits, he said, "I feel very happy when people who have benefited from CAI come to thank me. More than any award, it is this spontaneous appreciation from the common people that is keeping me going. I am happy that I am able to make some difference to their lives."

An ad-man, journalist, printer, publisher, a pioneer of ideas, a visionary with tremendous energy and enthusiasm – more than all these descriptions of Desikan, what people will always remember him is for his role as a crusader for consumer rights.

(Concluded)

Feedback welcome on 9840392082 or rvrajan42@gmail.com

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If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep Madras Musings going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to Madras Musings for 2012-13 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of Madras Musings, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions.

– The Editor

Driving – the Indian way...

(Continued from page 8)

functions add up to little more than a naught. Truck drivers are the James Bonds of India, and are licensed to kill.

Often you may encounter a single powerful beam of light about six feet above the ground. This is not a super motorbike, but a truck approaching you with a single light on, usually the left one. It could be the right one, but never get too close to investigate. You may prove your point posthumously. Of course, all this occurs at night, on the trunk roads/highways. During daytime, the trucks are more visible, except that the drivers will never show any signal. (You

must watch for the absent signals; they are the greater threats).

You will often observe that the cleaner who sits next to the driver will project his hand and wave hysterically. [This is definitely not to be construed as a signal for a left turn. The waving is just a statement of physical relief on a hot day.]

If, after all this, you still want to drive in India, take your driving lessons between 8 pm and 8 am – when the police have gone home and the citizen is then free to enjoy the 'FREEDOM OF SPEED' enshrined in our Constitution.

Having said all this, isn't it amazing that the accident rates and related deaths are less in India compared to US or other countries????

The Mother of all Music Seasons

On December 22, 1885, M.E. (later Sir Mountstuart Elphinstone) Grant-Duff, Governor of Madras, attended a performance of "native Indian" music. That was at the Pachaiyappa's Hall, China Bazaar (now NSC Bose) Road. A veritable who's who of the city had assembled there that evening at 4.30. The Madras Branch of the Poona Gayan Samaj organised the event. They may not have realised it, but it really marked the beginning of the *sabha* culture in this city and, therefore, of the Music Season as well.

The event was delayed by 15 minutes as the gubernatorial party took its time to arrive. Grant-Duff was a last minute stand-in for Lord Reay, Governor of Bombay, who was then visiting the Madras Presidency. The Poona Gayan Samaj established in 1874 was an influential body in the world of fine arts in Reay's territory. Its hard-working secretary Bulwunt Trimbeck Sahasrabudhe had managed to get the Europeans interested in the Samaj, which had done some serious work in getting Indian music to be understood by Westerners.

In 1883, the Madras branch of the Gayan Samaj was inaugurated on August 18th. Calling itself an Oriental Philharmonic Society, it was inaugurated by Sir Charles Turner, Chief Justice of the High Court of Madras. After a long speech by Sir Charles, "four native musicians then ascended the platform with their instruments, which consisted of two violins, the *vina*, the *tamboor*, the *sarbat*

and a drum, and played a few airs." (*The Madras Mail*, August 20th).

Thereafter, the Madras branch began organising music performances. The first of these happened on January 21, 1884 at *Lakshmi Vilas*, the Luz residence of (later Sir) V. Bhashyam Iyengar. This was attended by Sir Frederick Roberts (later Lord Roberts of Kandahar), the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army. A sprinkling of local worthies including several Indian businessmen was also

• by Sriram V.

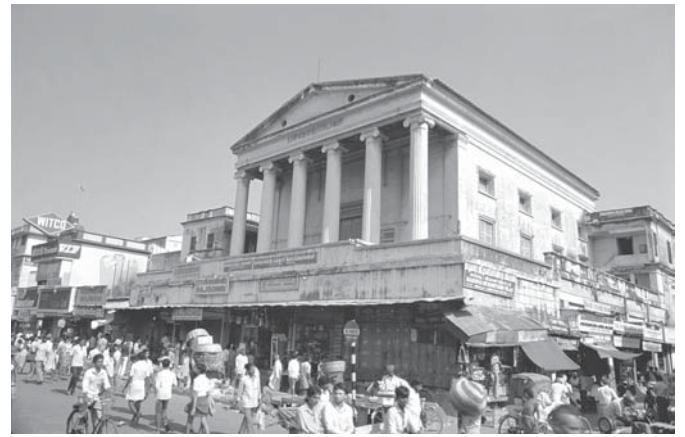
present. "The musical fare provided was particularly interesting," wrote *The Madras Mail* on the 22nd. "In addition to performances by professional musicians like Messrs Shankar Row and T Singara Charlu, and distinguished amateurs like Professor Sheshigiri Sastri, vocal and instrumental expositions of high merit were given by various pupils of the schools. One little boy in particular excited great enthusiasm by his brilliant performance on the violin."

The next meeting was in November that year, which took place at the Pachaiyappa's Hall. Sir Charles Turner presided and Sahasrabudhe read the annual report. The branch had made commendable progress in the intervening year. Prince Alfred, the Duke of Connaught (the Queen's younger son), had consented to be its patron and shortly there-

after the Maharajahs of Mysore and Vizianagaram and a Princess of Tanjore had added themselves to the list. Scholars such as Capt. C.R. Day and Suryanarayana Sastry Pandit (Parithimal Kavignar) had enrolled as members. Ten entertainment meetings had been held and the Samaj had received as a gift a manuscript copy of the *Sangita Ratnakara*, one of the earliest treatises on Indian music. Two schools for teaching music had been begun, one in Triplicane and the other in George Town. The students comprised "government servants, graduates, undergraduates and others prosecuting their studies in schools and colleges." The students were fifty in number and the instruction was by T. Singaracharlu and his brother. They published a series of textbooks for the schools, all of which are landmark publications in the world of Carnatic music even today.

The meeting witnessed a performance by a B.N. Natekar playing on the "the *bin*, the *satar* and the *sraotha*" (probably *veena*, *sitar* and *sarod*). This was much applauded and the event concluded with the National Anthem sung in Sanskrit (a version of *God Save The Queen?*) by "Papaya Sundra Iyer, Singara Charlu and his brother."

Which then brings us to the event from where we started, the performance on December 21, 1885. Lord Reay could not make it at the last minute owing to his being unwell. Grant-Duff, accompanied by Lady Reay, officiated. Sir T. Muthu-



The Pachaiyappa's Hall, China Bazaar.

swami Iyer, Judge of the High Court, read a paper on Hindu music. This was reported in full in the *Madras Times* the next day. What is of greater interest is the musical programme that followed and very little sense can be made of it today. From what can be understood, several artistes came forward and performed individual *ragas*. The list reads as follows:

CR Krishna Row, TA Murthei Iyer and M Seshachella Naidu – Vocal (*ragamika* or a chain of *ragas*, viz-Pratab-Chintamani, Abhaj and Poorna Chandrika).

N Shanker Row – Vocal (Kalanithi)

N Visvanatha Row – Instrumental (Khaffe)

B Soonder Iyer – Vocal (Athana)

Venkat Ramaya – Vocal (Kalyanee)

Messrs Singara Charlu & Brother – Instrumental (Kuntal Varalee)

Professor Shashagiri Shastri MA and his brother Mr Venkatesa Shastri – Instrumental (Yinjotu Eishmanohari)

Back home in *Government House*, Grant-Duff updated his journal which would later be published as *Notes from a Diary, Kept Chiefly in Southern India*. And this is what he had to say:

"With Lady Reay to an entertainment, given by a Society for the encouragement of Indian music. The songs and other performances said to me just nothing at all. More interesting was an address by Muttusami Iyer. In contrasting our music with theirs, he remarked: The dominant factor in the Hindu system is melody, and that in the European system is harmony.

Lady Reay repeated to me a saying of Kinglake's, when he had been listening for some time to the *zither*: I like that music; it is almost as good as none at all."

So much for Grant-Duff's understanding. The Gayan Samaj, however, kept at it. In 1887 it changed its name thanks to the Maharajah of Vizianagaram to The Madras Jubilee Gayan Samaj in commemoration of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. It faded away in the 1890s but not before laying down certain powerful precedents – explaining to a largely Occidental audience the nuances of Indian music, the setting up of schools to propagate the art, getting aspiring artistes to perform to an invited audience and, finally, getting a Chief Guest who had no feel for the art to inaugurate its events!

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