

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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"We have been asked to walk on the pavement, but where is the pavement?!"

Run. Don't walk

Here's something more to worry about.

A recent survey has discovered that this city is practically a non-starter in the pedestrian safety department.

How dreadful is that?!

Chennai has done poorly on all counts – grade crossing, walkability, crossing safety...

As for average motorist behaviour?

In a word – pits, apparently.

What's worse, no pavements.

Those that exist are hidden cunningly beneath and behind encroachments, land grabbing garbage and garbage bins, informal shopping areas, wires, holes, uneven slabs, and something that looks like rain-water...you don't even want to think of the alternative.

Most pavements do not seem to factor in people in general, let alone the elderly, small children, and the wheelchair-bound.

Some have become little gardens – very pretty, adding that much-needed touch of precious green – but they do push walkers into the road even more, right?

And you cannot get two more mutually opposing concepts than 'Pedestrian Unfriendly' and 'Chennai's Fitness Freaks'.

Statistics, in the habit of presenting horrific facts in the blandest manner possible, give you the number of pedestrians who died simply because of a lack of safe pavements.

And you ask: How many deaths will it take till they know that too many people have died? Sadly, the answer is blowing in the wind...

Ranjitha Ashok

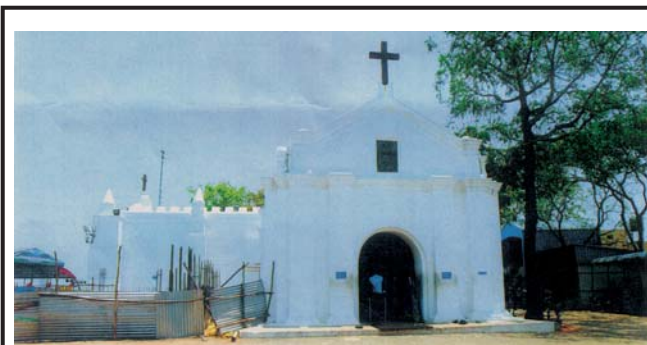
Heritage legislation at last

(By The Editor)

We congratulate the Government for introducing in the Legislature a much-needed heritage conservation Bill that this journal and other heritage lovers have sought from 1999 following a focus on heritage in the City that began in 1977. While welcoming the Bill, we reserve our comments till we study it. Meanwhile, we trust that it offers an indisputable interpretation of heritage and doesn't leave Government to view heritage depending on the exigencies of the moment. This kind of flip-flop attitude has in the past caused, and is due to cause, unless the Heritage Bill stops it, further damage to whatever is left in the city that can be classified as constituting heritage. We thus have an ironic situation where centuries-old monuments and buildings are being neglected while lakhs are being spent, in the name of heritage, on renovating recent structures that are already showing signs of structural weakness.

Take *Rajaji Hall* for instance. The Government had in 2008 announced a restoration package for this heritage structure located inside Government Estate. But then the new Assembly came along and though the restoration proceeded uninterrupted, the Hall was locked up. Last heard, its verandahs were filled with broken furniture from the various offices that were demolished to make

(Continued on page 2)



The historic old church on St. Thomas' Mount.



Quarrying Chamoockite next to the historic church.

What should be done to space beneath flyovers?

That appears to be the heart of the ongoing debate in the city. With land becoming increasingly scarce on what were once broad public thoroughfares, a move to beautify the space beneath flyovers has run into controversy. On the one hand, there is a proposal to aesthetically enhance these spaces and also provide for some long-felt needs of public conveniences there. On the other hand, there is the view that the area ought to be utilised for car parking.

An NGO and a consulting agency have together submitted a proposal for better utilisation of public spaces. The aim is to make the use of roads an aesthetic experience. The idea is to use the space for toilets, cold drink vending stations, an

art show or two and, above all, space for pedestrians to walk on. Steps will be taken to prevent illegal use of the area and preserve it as planned. There will also be spaces for cycle stands, parking facilities for police vehicles and ambulances,

• By A Special Correspondent

and the lighting for these spaces will be through solar power. The Corporation, it is learnt, has agreed to the proposal and plans to implement it on 70 roads and five flyovers.

The State Highways Department, however, begs to disagree. In its view the land below the flyovers belongs to it and, therefore, it is proposing

the fencing off of these areas for its own use. It has even erected offices for its Projects Division below one of the flyovers. Making over these areas for public use will also hinder maintenance work, according to the Department.

A third body of opinion holds the view that the land ought to be given to vendors and small shops. This argument is based on the fact that when flyovers were erected, they took over the sidewalks, traditionally the space on which these traders thrived. While not disputing that the land belongs to the Highways Department, they feel that they ought to be allowed to use it, by way of compensation for what they lost.

(Continued on page 2)

Endangered historic site

The St. Thomas' Mount church is a landmark and heritage site. The Church was built by the Portuguese and, later, improved by the Armenians. It has many inscriptions and tombstones of Armenians and Portuguese. Moreover, it has a number of Tamil inscriptions from centuries ago.

The church authorities are modifying this heritage structure and the Cantonment Board, St. Thomas' Mount, has permitted the church allowing excavation below ground level to a depth of 50x80x50 feet adjacent to the church.

The architectural and structural integrity of this heritage site and heritage building is now in danger.

K. Rameshkumar Secretary

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Legislation at last

(Continued from page 1)

way for the new Assembly. And its interiors were filled with files and papers belonging to some Government departments that have promised to shift them "in due course". After the recent fire at *Chepauk Palace* and given our history of fires breaking out in historic buildings, stuffing *Rajaji Hall* with paper may not be the best of ideas.

Chepauk Palace's fate is still uncertain. It is now more than two months since the three-man committee (whatever be the merits and demerits of its composition) came out with a report that recommended restoration of a mixed kind. While the debate on whether its verdict was correct or wrong can continue, what cannot be denied is that restoration and not demolition was the key recommendation. On the basis of that, the Government ought to have by now moved to inviting tenders, at least for consultancy. But nothing appears to have happened and the skeleton of the palace is exposed to the vagaries of Nature. Why this delay?

The Metrorail is a Juggernaut of a different kind, which regularly appears to find heritage structures and historic parks in its way. They appear to be made for each other and aiding this process of sacrificing the latter for the former is the CMDA which has continuously been coming up with creative interpretations of what constitutes heritage. After the P Orr & Sons episode, it is now the turn of *Bharat Insurance Building*. In response to a letter from INTACH reminding Metrorail that the building's fate is *sub judice* and so no construction can be taken up there, Metrorail has stated that it only proposes construction within the compound and not within the building. It states that in its (and presumably CMDA's)

view, only the building is heritage and *sub judice* and not the compound space. Whoever has heard of such logic before? And what happened to the concept of a heritage precinct and the necessity to prevent modern construction within close quarters of a heritage building?

Even that concept may now be under threat. In a first of its kind (and it is ironic that our city which had many glorious firsts should also be in the forefront of such developments), the National Monuments Authority (NMA) has reportedly ruled that construction of Metrorail can come within 100 metres of the Hynner's Obelisk, popularly called the Yale Monument, in the Law College campus. It has declared that the structure, though more than 300 years old and 'protected' by the ASI, is of less importance and, in view of the importance of Metrorail, permission can be granted for construction within 100 metres of the Monument. All authorities are completely silent on what happened to the neighbouring Powney Vault, which presumably was flattened without any approvals. It would also appear that the NMA's approval was a mere formality, for Metrorail had even two months ago put up barricades within 100 metres of the Yale Monument. What is also baffling is the complete silence of the ASI on this matter. It can only be interpreted that the decision had its full blessings.

Contrast all this with the way in which the *Namakkal Kavignar Building* is being handled. Everyone, from the ASI to the CMDA, is agreed that, though built in the 1980s, it constitutes 'heritage' and deserves restoration! And contrast this further with the fact that 300-year-old structures are not falling down despite fires and neglect, while this building

The crisis of domestics

The Man from Madras Musings was looking forward to going home and eating a well-cooked meal, made by a man from up north. It is quite amazing as to how nowadays most of the domestics are from up north. Wonder what happened to the *ayahs* and the rest from down south. Apparently, what with all the freebies that include television sets, very few feel like working for a living. In short, our State is a land of lotus-eaters who feed on milk and honey. And as for the younger lot, they much prefer working in software companies. Not that MMM is complaining. If they are capable, let them progress. Upward mobility is what counts.

But what MMM cannot tolerate is the variety that has no talent for the desk job and brings loads of expectations and frustrations to what they feel are lesser, or menial, tasks. This variety is hoping to get the salary and perquisites of a white collar job while not bringing even a degree of perfection to the task at hand. And that brings MMM back

the 12th Century that the farmer is not satisfied with farming nor is the beggar with begging. Things haven't changed in all the intervening centuries.

It was not as though MMM had used the vernacular equivalent. It had been in the Queen's English. MMM could not help thinking of the days when MMM's grandparents could get away with referring to each one in their army of servants by even their caste names. MMM was never comfortable with that. But he had never anticipated anyone being upset with his/her professional appellation. The man clearly aspired for better things.

Having perpetrated a crisis, albeit unknowingly, MMM had to make amends. He was reminded of an uncle's advice. "If in a hospital and needing good attention, refer to the nurse as doctor," he said. MMM has now, therefore, drawn up a list of alternative titles for each of the domestics in his ostensible employ (in reality they all swear allegiance by She). The cook will henceforth be Nutritionist. The

apprehended and hauled up before the awful majesty of the law. When questioned he replied that his master lived but two doors away from the politician, and so he thought he could take advantage of the fact that all traffic signals were being ignored by the convoy. A tight slap stopped him in mid-sentence. He had in his nervousness forgotten to include all the honorifics and titles of the VVVVVVVVIP while referring to the person by name. That, in the view of the investigating officer, was a worse crime.

Traffic rules

Waiting for a signal to change to green gave *The Man from Madras Musings* ample time to reflect on the various kinds of vehicle users. The first category never waits at a traffic signal. This is usually the Government vehicle, often a police car. It can also be escorting a law-maker or a bureaucrat. Sometimes it can just be the driver of any one of the above. What is common to them all

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

to the story that he began with.

Even as MMM opened his front door he could guess that something was amiss. The good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed, made it amply clear in word and gesture that the cook had been offended. And it was all MMM's fault. Apparently the previous evening MMM had referred to the cook as a cook within earshot and this had upset the man. He considered the appellation of cook to be a pejorative and did not like to be referred to as one. It all reminded MMM of an old Hindi verse that lamented in

repeatedly needs attention! That's modern heritage construction for you.

maid-of-all-work will go back to the Victorian era and will be an Abigail. The driver will be Pilot.

Games drivers play

Talking of drivers, a couple of friends poured forth their woes to *The Man from Madras Musings*. And ironically both incidents had to do with the convoys of political bigwigs.

The first story involved a driver ferrying two of his master's young children. The car in which they were travelling came into collision with one of the outlying cars in a political bigwig's convoy. Security men promptly surrounded the vehicle but the driver, showing remarkable agility, managed to jump out, leap into a passing auto-rickshaw and vanish to no one knows where. The younger child burst into tears but the older one had the presence of mind to summon his father with a phone call. MMM's friend paid for the damages and all ended well, though what happened to the driver is a bit of a mystery. MMM fully expects to see him at a Formula 1 race pretty soon.

The second story involves a smart alec of a driver who after dropping his master at the airport was in a hurry to return home. On the way he found a convoy of cars escorting one of our VVVVVVVVIPs and decided to tag along. This was soon detected and he was

is their inability to wait. Urgency is their creed, such being the speed with which they push paper to and fro.

The second variety pauses momentarily, looks to see if there are any vehicles coming from the opposite direction and, if there are none, zooms off no matter what be the traffic signal. These are usually the S(pace) U(surping) V(ehicle)s, tourist taxis, buses and such like. The last named, if belonging to a corporate house, often sports a sanctimonious message to the effect that speed governors have been installed and if the driver is caught over-speeding, complaints can be made at a certain number which is never possible to read especially when the vehicle IS over-speeding.

The third variety will wait for most of the duration when the lights are red. Just a few seconds before the green signal they tend to rush off, thereby causing the most havoc as they narrowly miss colliding with vehicles in the opposite direction.

Lastly, you have the lot that waits patiently no matter if there is no other vehicle in sight. They get roundly abused by everyone else, most often by those in vehicles behind. Sometimes the policemen also join in, berating these people for holding up traffic! Such is life.

— MMM

THE SPACE BENEATH FLYOVERS

(Continued from page 1)

And lastly, there are the ubiquitous car and two-wheeler owners who, in the absence of parking space in their own offices and homes, feel these should be made over for the use of parking vehicles.

In short, there is no dearth of opinions on the subject, all of them in conflict with each other.

It may be best that the spaces are handed over for utilitarian purposes, which could be pedestrian usage, public conveniences and parking of ambulances, police vans and private vehicles. Certainly, beautification is the last requirement, especially in a city like ours where the idea of what constitutes beautification is strange, to say the least. Secondly, our

track record of maintaining such 'beautified' spots is not something we can be proud of.

After much fanfare in inaugurating these projects, we rarely tend to them afterwards. What we need is practical planning and then effective implementation. If that gets going, beautification can then follow.

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



The Birmingham way

On a recent visit to Madras I had an opportunity to understand the disappointment noted by S. Viswanathan in his article (MM, April 1st) about the poor state of your rivers and canals.

He is totally correct to illustrate the lost opportunity in not making good use of these facilities. In the case of my home city, Birmingham, the many miles of canals dug over two hundred years ago to provide freight transport capable of industrial revolution fell into total disrepair after World War II. By 1950 they had become just stagnant ditches and were almost impossible to navigate in some cases.

They were ignored by the government departments responsible for them and by the city authorities. Fortunately, a group of boating enthusiasts took it upon themselves to organise working parties and to publicise their work. Bit by bit, the responsible landowners began to realise they were sitting close to a valuable resource and the canals have become features of significance in their own right. The work accelerated when it was realised that buildings with a waterfront or a view of the canals became much more valuable and could generate higher rents.

Some of the incomes from these offices, restaurants and buildings are used to keep the waterways in good condition and free from debris and, so, the towpaths are popular for sight-seers and cyclists.

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Mullaperiar dam

The article by A. Mohanakrishnan, Water Resources Adviser to the Tamil Nadu Government (MM, March 16th) is quite comprehensive. Possible answers were published in *Madras Musings* of January 16-31, 2007. In answer to my suggestions, C. S. Kuppuraj, Chartered Civil Engineer and Consultant, former Chief Engineer, PWD, wrote to me as follows:

"I was delighted to see your valuable suggestion in *Madras Musings* (January 16-31, 2007) regarding Mullaperiar tangle. This is precisely what I suggested as a second plan of compromise in my article dated 21.12.2006.

"A new tunnel with sill at +80 feet and carrying capacity of 3000 cusecs could be constructed (the present tunnel with sill at +104 feet leaves 104 feet of water as dead storage). A new powerhouse with installed capacity of 300 MW can be built (the present powerhouse has 140 MW only).

"If this is done we can assure the Kerala Government that water level in the dam will never exceed +136 feet, which is what they want."

The question arises why not harness more hydroelectric power (300 MW) and secure more water for our irrigation needs and at the same time satisfy all!

The catchment area in Tamil Nadu is 11,400 hectare and in Kerala it is 53,400 hectare, adding to 64,800 hectare. With rainfall in that region being, say, 200 to 300 cm, the total volume of water comes to

Another happy experience

In continuation of the experience of your reader at the RTO's office, Anna Nagar, I too had a good experience recently. I got the forms for the renewal of my driving licence, filled in all the details and got the Medical Fitness Certificate for Rs.60 from the ever available doctor behind the office. The lady scrutiniser came to her seat exactly at 10 am, checked the forms calling the names of persons seated in the queue, and sent the forms inside for the officer to check. They were returned after about 10-15 minutes and I paid the prescribed fee of Rs. 350, got the receipt, pasted half of it on the application form and gave it inside the Elcot room, where the photo of the applicant was taken.

The officer who was seated there said it would take an hour to complete the process and I could go out to attend to any other work and come after an hour. I told him it would be cumbersome to take another round of extra 5 km to come again because of the one-ways recently introduced in Anna Nagar. He acknowledged the hardship in coming again and asked me to be seated on the bench and informed that he would

call me as soon as it was ready. Meanwhile, I gave him the copy of *Madras Musings* wherein the letter of appreciation was published and he was happy to see it and said that they were doing the service to the common public with minimum hardship to them.

A short while later, he himself came to me, asked me to check if the entries on the card were correct, then gave it inside for lamination and I got the renewed licence on hand within an hour in total.

The only hurdle was the path leading to the doctor's 2' x 3' room behind the RTO's office. It was amidst horrible stench with even some dead rats and a lot of plastic covers strewn around. The visitors had to carefully walk over these plastic heaps. The foul stench flowed into the Elcot room and also the officer's room. I asked him how he was sitting amidst the bad stench all day, he said they were taking steps to ensure such wastes are not dumped in future.

V. Chinnaswamy
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Chennai 600106

more than 1,29,600 to 1,94,400 hectare metres, and a great deal drains into the 3200 hectare leased land where the Mullaperiar dam is. While only 140 MW of power is generated with the available water at Lower Camp, a lot of surplus water flows over the spillway into the Periar River. Tamil Nadu has so far successfully drawn 22 tmcft of water (1998) which is 3.59 times the storage of usable water. However, the present proposal would divert an additional 3000 cusecs to generate power of 300 MW and let the additional water go for irrigation in Tamil Nadu, instead of letting it go to the Arabian Sea as at present.

The existing water now irrigates 2.17 lakh acres in the districts of Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram. Of this area, it benefits 60,000 acres with two crops per year. The surplus water that may spill into Tamil Nadu at 3,000 cusecs after generating 300 MW of power could easily support three crops per year in these districts and, maybe, some more dry lands could be converted to wetland. After travelling 247 kilometres, the water reaches the Palk Bay, serving all along the route some 66,000 small farmers.

K.V.S. Krishna
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Disappointed reader

I have been an ardent reader of your fortnightly journal, but do not really know whether there has been any effect at all of the critical articles brought out by you to improve Madras. You need to find a different way to communicate with those concerned with these issues.

In your April 16th issue, both issues raised in the articles published on its first page cannot be solved merely by publishing the articles in your journal.

In the case of the Mylapore

Festival, it would be more appropriate for you to meet the concerned authorities in the Kapaleeswarar Temple and also meet the top brass in the Police Department and bring home to them the manner in which the conducting of the festival could be improved.

As for your article on a master plan for George Town, it will not have any effect at all. I have my office located in the *Catholic Centre* on Armenian Street. Armenian Street, which is about 80 ft wide, has hardly any place even to walk in during any part of a week-day, and especially on every Tuesday and Friday, when the Church feeds the lepers. About 80 per cent of the street is always occupied by cart vendors on the one side, and parked four-wheelers and two-wheelers on the other side. These four-wheelers and two-wheelers all belong to one particular firm. The security guards of this company behave as though the street itself has been bought over by the company!

R. Balasubramanian
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About NSJ

N.S. Jagannathan (MM, April 16th) – NSJ, as he was affectionately called – spent the best part of his eventful journalism career in New Delhi and his retirement years in Bengaluru. My father, A.K. Sethuraman, was his friend and colleague and, thus, I had the privilege of interacting with NSJ right from my school days.

Many people are not aware of his Chennai connection. He is from a leading Chennai-based family. His ancestral house in Adyar was a sprawling heritage structure where he celebrated his sixtieth birthday in 1983. Whether he was in Delhi or Bengaluru, he would invariably travel to Chennai for his holidays to spend time with his ex-

tended family there. I. Mahadevan, former editor of the Tamil daily *Dinamani*, was one of his best professional friends in Chennai.

NSJ's nephew, Dr. Vyas, is a multifaceted personality – a medical practitioner, social worker, voracious reader, thinker and singer. I guess that the email to which NSJ refers in his article was sent to him by none other than Dr. Vyas. Many of NSJ's relatives, including Dr. Vyas, lived in or around Adyar for many years. NSJ's wife Chudamani's elder sister Rukmini Sampath was one of the founder-members of a school that she named Bala Brindivan, which was inaugurated by Rajaji around 1950. This school has now evolved into the Bala Vidya Mandir in Gandhinagar, Adyar.

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Madras Musings now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com. Those who wish to intimate change of address can also do so provided the subscription number is quoted. For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: Madras Musings, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 122, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

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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

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

READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** 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, making reading or editing impossible.

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

– THE EDITOR

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright (in Madras)

Today, if you mention the word 'Tiger' in Chennai, the chances are that most people would assume you were referring to the two-legged variety from across the Palk Strait. But there was a time when our own Madras, or at least its environs, had plenty of the four-legged originals, and not all of them in captivity.

Perhaps the first instance is recorded on the base of the monument to Governor Edward Winter, whose tenure in Madras was in the 1600s. The memorial, which is in St Mary's Church, Battersea, has on its pedestal a carving depicting Winter wrestling with a tiger on the seashore (*Fort St George, Madras* by Mrs. Frank Penny, 1900). This was apparently no hyperbole, for a Latin inscription confirms that it was a true happening in Winter's life.

Next, sample this. "A Detachment of the 1st Battalion of the 15th Regiment lay encamped at a village near Pollevaram hills. On the night of the 28th of December, a royal tiger came into the village and seized a bullock. After gorging on his prey, he retired to a house on the banks of the river, where he took up his quarters. Lieutenant Stuart being informed of it went with a Naig's guard to the place, where they saw the monster stretched in the cottage! They mounted on the roof of the adjoining hut, and by removing the thatch of that where he lay, disturbed him and

of the artillery men managed to aim at him. Injured by what is termed a "fuzli ball", the animal was "much irritated" and, in crossing the Mount, managed to injure two natives, "one of whom is now lingering with lockjaw while the other was not materially hurt." The tiger then crossed to "the outer Mount" where he

where and made off with a young midshipman who was waiting at the table. The officers pursued the animal but when it laid its victim down prior to killing him they dared not shoot for fear of injuring the man instead of the beast. "On a sudden the hand of the midshipman moved lightly across the tawny side of his captor; and as the poor youth had hitherto lain motionless the horror-stricken spectators thought ... this must be the last convulsion before death. The tiger fell 'plomb down' on the earth, and the midshipman leapt forward, waving his bloody dirk in triumph...The youth, it seems, took advantage of his position to draw his dirk, felt deliberately for the brute's heart and thrust his weapon into it, up to the very hilt..." (*The Guide to Knowledge* by W. Pinnock, Vol IV, 1836).

Not so lucky was Captain R.M. Humphreys of Madras. "While hunting a tiger he ascended a tree, and on the tiger attacking one of the men, jumped down, when the infuriated beast sprang upon him and killed him on the spot." (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1835).

By 1878, tigers were considered such a menace in the Presidency (and not just in the city) that there was a reward of Rs. 100 for every tiger shot. Five years earlier, a Captain Caulfield was appointed 'Tiger-Slayer' of Madras Presidency and he applied any method possible from strychnine to shooting. This was a temporary assignment and, assisted by Inspector Mackenzie and A. Wedderburn, he managed to bring down the numbers significantly within the stipulated time period of six months. — *Journal of the Fine Arts*, 1878.

Tigers in captivity too were in Madras's 19th Century news. Apparently, a large tiger was kept in captivity in the "bazaar in Triplicane". Henry Davison Love, in his *Vestiges of Old Madras*, records the testimony of Capt. William Randall recorded during the trial following the strange death of George, Lord Pigot. Randall swore that while he was aide to Amir Ul Umrah, the latter frequently expressed a

desire to do away with Pigot and asked Randall for advice. In reply, Randall, rather facetiously, suggested that the Amir ought to make a present of the tiger in the Triplicane Bazaar to Pigot and "if his Lordship was pleased to be intimate and familiar with the Tyger, he the Tyger, might sometime or other, accomplish the Business so desired." The Amir perhaps did not get the joke for he commented darkly that Comaro, the Dubash of Benfield, "could attend to the task more

Surgeon to the Governor of Madras, on a tiger that was kept at the menagerie in Government Park, Madras. The diagnosis was that the animal died due to "ulceration of the intestine caused by undigested bones of sheep". Was the tiger in Government Park the forerunner of the other tiger which, together with a cheetah, began the Madras Zoo in 1854 at the Pantheon Complex? Clearly, by the late 19th Century, the tigers in the zoo had become a major attraction. "Having seen the tiger of the world at Madras, all the others are but shadows," wrote Andrew Carnegie in 1879 (*Notes of a Trip Around the World*). "Such glaring eyes, burning like immense topazes in his head! His stripes were glossy black and his coat not that sickly tawny colour we are so familiar with but a light fiery brown." Those of us who had occasion to see the animals at the same location (People's Park) a hundred years later had a different view. The moth-eaten tiger was an anatomist's delight, for you could count each of its bones. Today, the tigers are better off at Vandalur.

What chances would a tiger have today if it wandered into Madras? Not much. It would be run over by a lorry or bus before it crossed Pallavaram. Clearly the days of "fuzli balls" are over.

By
Sriram V.

easily" by slipping some poison into Pigot's dinner!

The *Illustrated Magazine of Arts*, London (1854), noted that in Madras it was common for people to "take round a tiger for exhibition, with a sheep or another animal to display its strength upon". This story originally appeared in *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* by Oliver Goldsmith and Others, 1847.

As early as in 1835, the *Calcutta Monthly Journal and Register* had a detailed report on the post mortem done by Dr. Benza,



Tiger hunted by wild dogs (dholes) as illustrated in Samuel Howett & Edward Orme. Published in London 1807. — (Courtesy: Wikipedia.)

he went out! After a few turns, he sprang at the party and settled on the roof close to them, but an instantaneous discharge of two or three firelocks wounded him and he fell to the ground but immediately got up and made a second attempt, when finding his efforts ineffectual, he made off under a pandal adjoining the house he first entered and could not for some time be found..."

The story does not end happily, at least for the tiger. Stuart walked along the edge of the river (most probably the Adyar) and, at a point where the bank rose steeply by 20 feet, the animal sprang at him. Stuart somehow managed to avoid tumbling down the bank and stabbed the tiger with his bayonet. The sepoy accompanying him did the rest and Stuart was warmly mentioned in despatches. The incident is in the *Madras Gazette*, dated February 20, 1802.

The *Literary Panorama* (ed. Charles Taylor) of 1807 reports of how, on the 1st of October that year, "a royal tyger made its appearance in the cantonment at the Mount" in Madras. Given chase by those in the camp, some

was attacked by an "inconsiderate European armed only with a stick" for which he was rewarded by being torn across the face by the paw and severely bitten in the thigh. But he managed to survive. The animal, however, had no chance and received several more "fuzli balls". Its carcass was brought triumphantly into the camp and on being measured its length from nose to tail was 10 feet, and in height it was 5 feet. Last heard, the villagers reported that another tiger "said to be the female associate of the above" was roaming in the vicinity.

Then there's this from *The Old Forest Ranger* by Walter Campbell (1842): "A Madras sepoy was killed some years ago whilst measuring a tiger which had just dropped, apparently dead. The expiring brute struck at him, and fractured his skull by one blow of his tremendous paw."

There is a record in 1812 of a party of officers, out shooting in the vicinity of Madras, who had sat down in the jungle to dine (no doubt in full dinner dress) when a tiger sprang from no-

Birdwatching Notes

Destiny's sightings in Kelambakkam's Little Rann of Kutch

● March 10 & 12, 2012: The terrain at Kelambakkam in mid-March could be compared to that of the Little Rann of Kutch. The water had receded and a part of the mudflats sucked dry like a salty clay desert, a dreadful prequel to our still tense and complaining hamstrings. We inched the kilometre stretch of parched mudflats like crouching tigers looking for those unhidden dragons. The extra-fine sand diligerly mud-bathed us. Worry for our cameras... yes...but the greater worry was the scowls we'd get back at home for getting all dirty.

Setting into a nice vantage point behind the bund, we watched brown-headed gulls in breeding and non-breeding colours mix with Red and Green Shanks... a solitary Curlew Sandpiper piling on. Whimbrels poked through the sky as all the five terns marked attendance... acrobatic Little Terns, Whiskered Terns in varying plumages, Caspian Terns flashing their orange bills, Gull-billed terns and one solitary Common tern. The noisy Sentinels (Shanks, Lapwings and Stints), though on high alert, surprisingly stayed calm. A flock of little Stints gathered five metres away and shutters raced rapidly. Ooh la la... that ended my rant of not getting them Stints all winter. GK and I walked back to the car (quite unwillingly), hoping either of us would say, "let's stake out a little longer..."

Back in the car, I asked him, 'Did you see that Ruddy Shelduck?' and he went 'Wheeeeeerree?' His eyes popped and jaw hit the floor. It had flown over heads. I had erased 6 out of 8 images that I made of him, as my memory card read full while shooting Stints! I've seen the Ruddy in the Guindy Zoo, but never in the open. So I kept those two shots; little did I know about its uncommonness... and like providence would have it, that's the closest sighting to Chennai!

Now, I really wonder if sightings are by chance or are destined – I tend to lean more towards destiny. The last three months have really surprised me with so many rare and record sightings. But one thing I'm dead sure about is: you see more birds if you sleep with your boots on! And that's what we precisely did...

On Sunday we woke up with our boots on... word was that Ashy Minivets were playing in the gardens of the Theosophical Society. A break to recuperate before their annual exodus to Northern China and around. Thanks to Geetha, that Sunday morning got etched into our memories.

—Murugan Mohan



Black-tailed Godwits

The Adyar Estuary's riches

● April 13, 2012, Adyar Estuary: The evening was quite eventful. Around 1,000 plus waders – mostly a mixed flock of Little Stints and Lesser Sand Plovers. There were about 6 or 7 Lesser Sand Plovers in breeding plumage. Looked quite transformed (with a dazzling white throat and brilliant orange bib below and a bandit-like black mask on the face from which the eyes glittered!) from the drab brown plumage that the birds ordinarily sport.

There were also around twenty or so Black Tailed Godwits of which quite a few were in breeding plumage. The Golden Plovers were also there (around 100 plus) with many of them in breeding plumage.

Apart from these, there were a dozen or so Common Redshanks (spotted and splotched and in breeding plumage again), half a dozen Green Shanks, a lone Curlew (which kept sticking the entire length of its consider-



Crows and Little Egrets

ably long bill into the squelchy mud), around 25-30 Large Egrets, 4 or 5 Little Egrets, one Grey Heron and a lone Dabchick. There were also four Terek Sandpipers on a tiny mound of earth in the middle of the river.

● April 19, 2012, Adyar Estuary: There were around 20 plus Brown Headed Gulls at the estuary. The Lesser Sand Plovers and Little Stints were not around. However, a flock of Pacific

Golden Plovers flew overhead. The crows were all out and harassing the Little Egrets and other birds. It was like an aerial dogfight during wartime! The banks of the river were full of Fiddler Crabs gaily waving their pincers with abandon!

Considering that most of the birds are getting into breeding plumage, it must be presumed that their take-off is imminent.

Text: Geetha Jaikumar
Photographs: Dr. T.P. Alaganantham



Little Tern



Golden Plovers



Fiddler Crab

A post-box out of the past



The other day I came across this photograph which fascinated me most. It was taken by Dr. K. Ramachandiran N, Postmaster-General, Tamil Nadu Circle, for his research programme.

This 100-cm tall, hexagonal letter box is at the Nagercoil Collectorate Post Office. It originally belonged to Travancore Anchal, a postal system maintained by the erstwhile Travancore State. (It may be remembered that the Kanniyakumari District, with Nagercoil as its headquarters, was within the limits of Travancore State till

the reorganisation of states on November 1, 1956.)

Cast in iron, the letter box features prominently the State emblem, the Conch. A pair of smaller conches are seen in the panel below. The words 'Travancore Anchal' are embossed in a smoothly-curving shape at the centre of which is again a conch. (In Malayalam, Anchal means post or mail.)

Two such letter boxes were received in 1984 at the postal museum in the Postal Training Centre, Mysore, where I was working. One of them belonged to Travancore Anchal, and the

other to the Imperial Post. The letter box had the British coat of arms in bold relief just above the mouth of the letter box.

These letter boxes, each weighing about 715 kilograms, could take about 3000 letters and small packets. Both boxes on display in the museum have the words 'Massey & Co, Madras' inscribed on them. (This is, however, absent in the Nagercoil letter-box.) Is there a reader who could throw light on who M/s. Massey & Co were, where their manufacturing unit was located, where their supply network was, etc?

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The prancing Golden Plovers

● April 5 & 6, 2012, Kelambakkam: At seasons bird plumages blossom like floral wonder. Terns in proud, bright bills, Grey Plovers in majestic black bosoms, Lesser Sand Plovers and Kentish Plovers crowned in orange, Little Stints carelessly brushed with red... Kelambakkam was like a blooming garden in paradise.

The mudflats had changed. Imagine an old, worn out tarpaulin that holds small pockets of water after a shower. But it felt like a donut sprinkled with fine sugar!! But nothing

stops me from my lifer that day; a dozen dozing Grey Plovers cuddled up by the edge of a small puddle. As I clicked away in abandon, surprise just stepped in... into the frame that is. A Pacific Golden Plover paraded its golden inscriptions. Together they pranced like horses in a synchronised dance... A memorable image of two plovers sharing screen space!

Text and pictures:
Murugan Mohan

(Courtesy: *Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin*)

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period April 16th to 30th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

- Which ambitious construction recently became the tallest building in New York City, overtaking the Empire State Building?
- UNESCO marked the first-ever 'International Day' for which popular genre of music on April 30th?
- Name the two eminent women nominated to the Rajya Sabha along with Sachin Tendulkar.
- On which river did a ferry capsize recently leading to more than 100 deaths?
- Which iconic vessel is to be rebuilt by Australian billionaire, Clive Palmer, for operations from 2016?
- What ambitious plan was announced recently by Planetary Resources, a company that has among its investors Oscar-winning filmmaker James Cameron and Google co-founder Larry Page?
- Which SAARC country's Prime Minister was found guilty of contempt by his country's Supreme Court but given only a token sentence of imprisonment lasting less than a minute?
- What is India's latest long-range intercontinental ballistic missile successfully launched from Wheeler Island recently?
- On April 27th, one of the most respected sporting team managers, Pep Guardiola, announced that he would step down after his team, the defending champion, exited from his continent's prestigious club competition. Name the club.
- In which Indian city was a 'Right to Pee' campaign, demanding better public toilet facilities for women, launched by NGOs?
- What is the name of the temple referred to as 'Alling's Pagoda' in the East India Company's records?
- Which hotel, now gone, was built by the M.S. Ramaswami Chettiar family in the 1950s near Foreshore Estate?
- In the context of music awards, what distinction did T.V. Subba Rao, T.S. Sabhesha Iyer and M.S. Ramaswamy Iyer have?
- Which 'rich' street in Chennai houses the Madras Progressive Union School, Hindu Theological School (1889) and the Thondaimandalam Thruva Vellalar School?
- Which educational institution came up in the 1940s at the place once called *Palm Grove* on Royapettah High Road?
- How is the freedom fighter Theerthagiri Sarkkari Mandraadiyaar, or Theerthagiri Gounder, better known?
- Which city was the home of the famous Modern Theatres, started by T.R. Sundaram in 1937?
- What is the name of Bala-kumaran's sequel to *Kalki's Ponnaiyan Selvan*?
- Which is the only district in the State to have more than ten taluks? It has eleven.
- How many zeroes are there in the Tamil number 'thollun'?

(Answers on page 7)

The historical legacy...

All records have it as the Periyar project, but it is commonly called the Mullai Periyar Dam, as it represents the combined storage of the Mullai and Periyar Rivers which converged to become the Mullai Periyar.

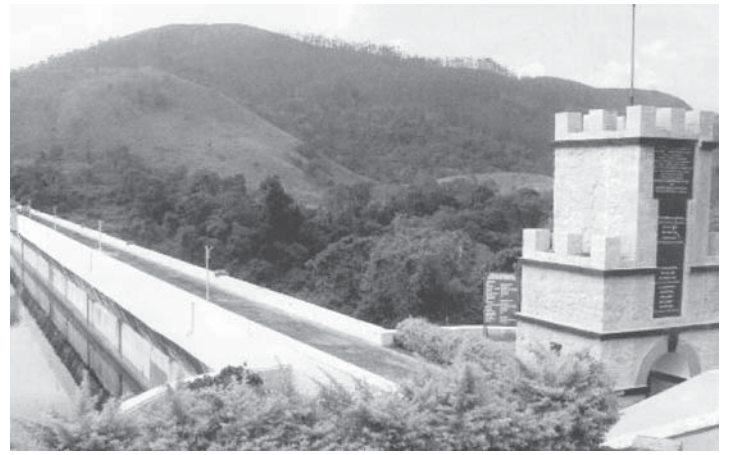
The dam and reservoir are in Kerala but, through a lease deed of 1886, the rights of ownership control and property are vested with Tamil Nadu.

The Periyar rises on Sivagiri (6000 ft.) hill in Tamil Nadu. After traversing 48 km South to North it joins the Mullai running in a North-South course. The Mullai Periyar then turns 90° westwards, and 11 km from there is the dam (at 2700 ft.).

Cement was not manufactured in India when the dam was being built and it was, therefore, imported in wooden casks from England. All drawings of the project carry notations demarcating areas where masonry was done with cement mortar and where concrete was used as cement concrete.

The possession, ownership and property rights of the dam and reservoir, as well as the water available therein, were transferred to Tamil Nadu (then Madras) through the 1886 agreement by the Maharaja of Travancore. The dam has since then been operated and controlled by Tamil Nadu PWD. The 1886 agreement was not in dispute for 116 years (2002). A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in February 2006 found the matter in favour of Tamil Nadu and dismissed the review petition. Later, in March 2006, Kerala introduced a countervailing provision in its Irrigation and Water Resources Act, 2003. This introduction by Kerala awaits the judgement of a five-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court as these lines are written.

From 1958 Kerala had been unhappy with the lease rental and the Rs. 300 crore accruing to Tamil Nadu from fishing and tourism rights. When Tamil Nadu wanted to go in for a hydroelectric power plant, the request was denied by Kerala. When the matter was arbitrated, the two technical arbitrators, each representing one side, gave a split verdict. The third arbitrator and umpire, a High Court Judge of the Calcutta High Court, ruled in favour of Kerala. Instead of going on appeal to the Madras High Court, Tamil Nadu handed over the Rs. 300 cr. fishing and tourism money to Kerala and agreed to pay royalty for the water used in hydro-power generation. The understanding reached in 1970 was incorporated as a supplementary corollary and in continuation of the 1886 agreement. Next, in 1979, Kerala raised



... of an engineering marvel

concerns about the safety of the Mullai Periyar dam. Tamil Nadu, in consultation with Kerala and the Central Water Commission, the statutory authority for dams in India, agreed to carry out an extensive retrofit of the dam. This was done with the understanding that as an interim measure the water level would be reduced to 136

The Brar Committee, appointed by the Government of India, and the Mittal Committee, appointed by the Supreme Court, have found the concerns about the dam's safety baseless. Further, the three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in February 2006 has held that the retrofitted dam is absolutely safe and sound.

water level at Mullai Periyar dam to 142 ft. Then, after physical check and review of the dam at this stage, steps be taken to raise the water level up to full reservoir level of 152 ft if everything is in order.

Now that the Supreme Court-appointed Empowered Committee of 2010, after extensive checks and tests, has reported back to the Supreme Court that the Mullai Periyar Dam is in good condition, Kerala should accept the fact and let the Mullai Periyar continue to function as it did before 1979. In the same vein, subject to the statutory clearances involved, Tamil Nadu should not oppose Kerala's desire to construct a new dam of its own 1300 ft. downstream of the existing Mullai Periyar Dam. As will be clear from the explanation that follows, by doing so, Kerala or Tamil Nadu would have no reason in future to have fears about the existing Mullai Periyar Dam.

- The 160 ft. high Mullai Periyar Dam has been found safe and sound for 152 ft. water. On constructing the new dam, the 90 ft. high water downstream of the Mullai Periyar Dam would act as a buttress and side support, which would make the dam even safer. Any seismic or other natural force impact, including that of water storage in the Mullai Periyar Dam up to 152 ft. height, would be limited to its top 70 ft. height and technically would not be a matter of any consequence.
- Kerala gives to Tamil Nadu 600 mn.m³ water/year through the Mullai Periyar which irrigates 2.17 lakh acres, provides drinking water to 60 lakh people, livelihood for 12.5 lakh farmers and generates 140 MW power (water storage at F.R.L. 152 ft.) with gross benefit of Rs. 660 cr./year.
- Tamil Nadu is scheduled to give 266 MW of power from the Kudankulam Atomic Power Plant and 260 MW low cost thermal power from the Neyveli Lignite Corpora-

● The Mullai Periyar dam and Engineer Mohanakrishnan are invaluable assets of Tamil Nadu. Indeed, he is an icon for all of us engineers. However, his article in *Madras Musings* (March 16th) did raise some questions. In this follow-up to his article, I offer a different perspective. I also stress the need for Tamil Nadu and Kerala to show wisdom and move towards the future, rather than being held hostage to the ghosts of the past.

Prof. M. Subramaniam
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ft. and, after retrofit, it would be raised again to full reservoir level of 152 ft.

On completion of the retrofit, Kerala refused to accept the raising of the water level again. The matter went up to the Supreme Court and the Court appointed the Mittal Committee of experts to go into the technical issues of safety, etc. and report back. A three-judge Supreme Court Bench, headed by the Chief Justice of India, accepted the expert committee findings, rejected the contentions of Kerala and ruled in favour of Tamil Nadu. It then dismissed the review petition also.

Kerala now wants the present Mullai Periyar Dam demolished and to construct a new dam 1300 feet. downstream. However, no physical water flow would be possible to Tamil Nadu from the new dam, as its top is 14 ft. below the bed level of the present intake channel which takes the water forward to the tunnel.

The detailed project report repeatedly states that Tamil Nadu has no riparian rights and water, if any, will be subject to availability.

Kerala's objections are on two counts: the first is the safety of the dam and the second is the dam being more than 100 years old.

The dam's age of 100+ years is a non-issue since, of India's 5150 operational dams, 145 are more than 100 years old (rank of Mullai Periyar is 38), ten are more than 300 years, two more than 1000 years and one, Kallannai, more than 2000 years old.

A dam's life cycle is governed and determined not by age but by its maintenance and upkeep. China has many 1000-year-old masonry dams still functional and operational. Around the world there are 70 Roman dams more than 2000 years old, still functional. The Mullai Periyar's unique construction concept, design and work method adopted are those of a Roman dam, with stone masonry in Roman lime mortar and Roman lime concrete, the only difference being that instead of volcanic ash in both of them, the Indian equivalent of powdered, half burnt clay tiles (*surkhi*) was used in Mullai Periyar dam.

In recent times, three 100-year-plus globally famous dams, the Roosevelt (USA), Joix (France) and Upper Glendoval (UK), have been retrofitted like the Mullai Periyar and made as good as new.

Tamil Nadu wants Kerala to accept the Supreme Court judgment and the orders of February 2006 and allow raising the

(Continued on page 7)

English Theatre returns

Chennai's claims to the title of 'Cultural capital of India' has only meant that it has been the stronghold of Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam. It is a city of *sabha-s* – private organisations conducting monthly and annual festivals of classical music and dance. The past saw the *sabha-s* promoting Tamil drama on a large scale – mainly mythological spectacles, 'social drama' and plain farce. English theatre has rarely been part of mainstream Chennai culture.

In the last ten years, English theatre has made its presence felt strongly and insistently, with theatre groups mushrooming everywhere. Old groups have been rejuvenated or have reinvented themselves in new directions.

Not every group has any particular aim beyond the staging of plays, or ideas of developing a character of its own. "Perform or die" could well be the motto of most theatre groups in the city. It is not unusual to see young people trying to patch up and mount a play of sorts, with nothing but enthusiasm to carry them through.

A new kind of English theatre came to Chennai with the professed goal of entertainment entrepreneurship when 'Evam' (2003) devised market strategies to promote its packed shows. Young people began to find live theatre a cool place to be in. Chennai watched with surprise as Evam (with a core team of paid professionals) found ample sponsorship, developing activities including event management, HR training models, and corporate shows.

With the advantage of being headed by an actor/director

who is also an expert in lighting and set design (Michael Muthu), 'Boardwalkers' have cashed in on these technical strengths and event management.

Meanwhile, 'The Madras Players', said to be India's oldest amateur English theatre group, celebrated its golden jubilee (2005). This group produced, even premiered, some of the famous New Wave Indian plays in the 1960s-70s, in addition to its regular fare of Shakespeare and Pinter. A remarkable change came with the declaration of 2000 as the 'Year of the Chennai Playwright'. Since then, The Madras Players have found a different kind of

Freddy Koikaran's ('Stage-fright') advertisement says it all: "Theatre, Music and more! Yup, that's right! Hey, even if you're just the 'spectating' type, join us!" Since 2001 Ajit Chitturi has been organising readings with newcomers, in the homes of senior theatre persons, or at youth-friendly venues like the Ashvita Gallery.

While Neil Simon draws full house, many groups have started looking for that "spicy *desi* touch". But plays "we can relate to" are hard to come by.

Rajiv Krishnan ('Perch'), and V. Balakrishnan ('Theatre Nisha') have tried to push the envelope in different ways.

● by Gowri Ramnarayan

energy and focus in staging Indian plays – original and translated scripts – welcoming collaborations with other groups, encouraging new writing in English. That is how the oldest amateur company joined the youngest group, the Landing Stage, to showcase an enormously successful *Swami and Friends*, an adaptation of R.K. Narayan's debut masterpiece.

Landing Stage itself attracts a large number of stage-struck young people through multifold theatre-related activities, widening the circle of actors and theatre-goers.

Every group knows the importance of offering live theatre exposure to young audiences. Krishna Kumar's 'Masquerade' has produced most of Chennai's actors, including Kartik Kumar and Nikhila Kesavan. His *natak* competitions (sadly defunct) galvanised colleges into competitions with prizes for play, script and sets/lighting.

With his commitment to long-term rehearsals and attention to detail, Rajiv has been able to create sustained work of quality in content and form.

Crossing boundaries has been a major impetus for Balakrishnan, whose plays and workshops in schools, colleges and corporate centres have expanded the reach for such ventures.

Dhritiman Chatterji of Satyajit Ray films fame collaborated with me, a journalist-musician-playwright, to launch 'JustUs Repertory'. We tried to shape its distinct character by melding classical music and dance with contemporary English theatre, struggling to find beauty and values in a world of mounting violence.

As good as it gets? So it sounds. But while Chennai theatre has come up with fine productions, every group is faced with disheartening problems. Sponsorship is always never



P.C. Ramakrishna



Freddy Koikaran



Michael Muthu

enough, though groups have found creative ways of doing more with less.

The real problems lie elsewhere. The lack of rigorous, multi-pronged, years-long training is evident in every department of theatre craft. Most groups work with actors of different levels – from professionals to debuting college students – resulting in unevenness. There is little sense of 'repertory', actors float in and out, and from one group to another, with no guide or mentor to give them purpose and direction. Barring a few, the interest seems to be on performance rather than achieving in-depth, nuanced excellence. On the technical side too, sound and light are often manned by untrained newcomers who do not stick on long enough to gain experience.

A major problem is the lack of good theatres like Mumbai's Prithvi Theatre and Bangalore's Ranga Shankara. Imagine what a boon it would be to have a theatre space in Chennai, with two halls to seat 600 and 200 persons, equipped with a good (if not state-of-the-art) lighting and sound system, specially designed for mikeless productions! Not to forget the friendly café, theatre bookshop and, yes, parking space. Theatre standards will rise by leaps and bounds. And if theatre offers a professional quality and sustained variety, the same Chennaiites, often blamed for lack of interest or discernment in drama, may become as theatre-friendly as Mumbaikars, Kolkatans, or Bangaloreans.

Another problem is that everyone is forced to script and adapt texts for the stage. The

absence of sustained playwriting workshops – like Mumbai's annual Writer's Bloc (by Rage, in collaboration with the Royal Court Theatre) which helps aspiring playwrights by actually staging what they write – is keenly felt.

And yet, English theatre in Chennai is alive now as it never was before, with a growing audience eager to experience the live medium. They are accessed through generous previews in every English daily, while Email and Facebook have opened even wider portals. Interestingly, this ticket-buying theatre audience is far more disciplined than those at *sabha* events. The mobile phone remains a menace, but there is no sauntering in and out at will or exodus part-way as at Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam recitals. – (Courtesy: *Sruti*).

The historic legacy

(Continued from page 6)

tion generation. The gross cost benefit to Kerala will be Rs 1913 cr. Tamil Nadu also sends medicines, vegetables, milk, meat on hoof, sand etc. (water equivalent of 1700 mn. m³/year) as also a monetary contribution of Rs. 300.20 cr./year towards Mullai Periyar waters.

● Kerala's net benefit accrual from Tamil Nadu is Rs. 2053 cr. and net water equivalent transfer by way of produce is 1080 mn. m³.

Kerala and Tamil Nadu have equally benefited through the generations of goodwill arising out of the Mullai Periyar Dam and should accept it as their common historical legacy.

Answers to Quiz

1. One World Trade Center coming up on the site of the destroyed WTC; 2. Jazz; 3. Actress Rekha and industrialist Anu Agha; 4. Brahmputra; 5. *Titanic*; 6. Mining asteroids for precious metals; 7. Pakistan's Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani; 8. Agni-V; 9. Barcelona; 10. Mumbai.

11. Ekambareswaraswami Temple on Mint Street; 12. The Oceanic; 13. They were the first winners of the Sangita Kalanidhi titles (in 1929); 14. Mint Street; 15. Kesari High School; 16. Dheeran Chinnamalai; 17. Salem; 18. *Udayar*; 19. Tirunelveli; 20. Nine zeroes (1,00,00,00,000 or 100 crore).

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 Rs. 50: Chandrasekaran K.P.; Ballal C.B.L.; Rajan S.

To watch Tendulkar bat is to be constantly bowled over by sheer mastery of technique punctuated by extravagant stroke play. Laxman is the consummate artist who makes your spirit soar with the effortless-ness of his caressing blade. Ganguly sometimes stunned you with the sheer effrontery of his offside magic. But to me, watching Rahul Dravid bat is to live and die with him, as if a brother or a son were at the crease. I have never been able to be a detached spectator during his innings, big and small, at his fluent best or during his rare moments of doubt and uncertainty. I contain my excitement, my elation, with considerable difficulty when he is on song, but I stop watching when he is scratching around apparently beset by self-doubt, as he did towards the very end of his distinguished career.

As a first class cricketer, I stopped watching cricket for a while after my playing days. The continuing exploits of the greats of the day including a few from India – Gavaskar and Viswanath, Amarnath and Vengsarkar – and the advent of Kapil Dev were the magnets that recharged my love affair with cricket. With no disrespect to the many splendid cricketers of the Kapil Dev generation, however, it was the so-called Fab Four and their contemporaries who revived the dying flame of the romance of cricket all over again for me.

How many of us knew back in 1996 that Ganguly and Dravid who made splendid debuts in England would go on to attain great heights in world cricket? (Would their progress have been slower had they debuted in Australia or South Africa?) Before the tour began, many believed that Ganguly was in the Indian squad because he was Jagmohan Dalmiya's boy, and self-proclaimed ex-

perts found Dravid's backlift inadequate for Test cricket.

Though Ganguly's batting in England was a revelation, converting the skeptic in me, Dravid's batting, backlift and all had been something I had admired from Day 1, even before he made his Test debut. I was already familiar with his boy-next-door demeanour and low-key profile, and so it did not surprise me that his first two innings of 95 and 84 were not accompanied by histrionics.

The critics were not yet convinced of his ability at the highest level, but his 148 and 81 in the third Test at Johannesburg against a pace attack that comprised Allan Donald at his quickest, Shaun Pollock, Brian McMillan and Lance Klusener, proved that here was an Indian batsman who took pride in scoring overseas. The backlift worked! While in this game, he narrowly missed his first century-in-each-innings, he sacrificed at least one similar opportunity by throwing his second innings wicket away in pursuit of team objectives. He did achieve the feat twice, including 190 and 103 not out against New Zealand.

Though he never struck you as a natural athlete, Dravid obviously worked extremely hard at his fitness. His is a rare case of a player who did not look older in his last Test than he did in his first, and I am reasonably sure he weighs the same today as he did in 1996. His physical fitness seems to have improved over the years, though we learn he is prone to dehydration – unsurprisingly so, judging by the sheer volume of sweat that tends to pour from

DRAVID

– He fought the good battle every time



Rahul Dravid.

his every pore while he is batting. Add to this his grim expression, and you can easily mistake his concentration for anxiety. Nothing could be farther from the truth, for he strides to the crease with purpose and determination but also confidence in his own ability to weather any storm. Much as Dravid may liken cricket to a game (as he did in his brilliant

• by
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Don Bradman oration), he fought the good battle every time he took guard for India or, for that matter, Karnataka or his club side.

His poise in his easy stance was only matched by the sureness of his footwork, going forward or backward. I wonder if either he or Tendulkar has found his equal in front foot play against genuine pace, especially in defence. In addition to his ability to drive so elegantly on the offside and to pick the gap in the midwicket region, Dravid must be among the fiercest cutters as well as the most nimble pullers in the game. And though he tends to

make substantial room to cut balls turning into him, I wonder if he has ever been out while doing so. He did seem to have a problem in moving his left foot too far forward to the offside resulting in the occasional catch to the inside or lbw.

On the last tour of England, we first saw him make some serious adjustments to his technique – or so it seemed – trying to play beside the ball rather than get right behind it to negotiate short pitched bowling in particular, just as his Karnataka senior GR Viswanath did against the West Indies' battery of fast bowlers of his era. Was it this very adjustment that proved Dravid's undoing on the subsequent Australian tour, when he was regularly bowled by Ben Hilfenhaus? Viswanath was a true artist with the bat, while Dravid was more of a master craftsman. The one common character trait they shared was their unselfishness.

Rarely did we see a substantial innings from Viswanath (or Dravid) unless his team required one from him. But unlike GRV, who played many a match-winning knock, but also occasionally seemed to squander his wicket, Dravid ensured the safety of his team long after crossing a personal milestone or denying himself one.

As captain, he did not ask of his players anything he was not prepared to do in the team's cause, including opening the innings unperturbed by fear of failure. He did that under other captains too, as he did as late as the last England tour, keeping wicket as well when Dhoni decided to bowl. His heroic acceptance of the wicketkeeper's job

in 73 ODIs and his 200 catches in Tests – with almost the same number in ODIs – make him one of the all-rounders of Indian cricket.

Two incidents I happened to witness at close quarters in Chennai revealed glimpses of Dravid's qualities of head and heart to me. The first was during one of his appearances for India Cements in a local match when, impressed by the close catching ability of a senior first class cricketer, he not only consulted him but actually tried out some of his catching methods. This when he already enjoyed reputation as one of the world's better slip fielders.

The second was during a book release event in the midst of a Test match he was playing in Chennai in 2002. Some nine speakers preceded him at the launch; as the star of the evening, he was naturally saved for the end. He mixed freely with the guests and, after sitting patiently through the long speeches, gave a thoughtful talk himself. And it was obvious from his remarks that he had actually read parts of the book in the midst of Test match duty! That he has a nice, quietly self-deprecatory sense of humour was quite evident from the Bradman oration.

Just to prove that he is human, Dravid once made an angry fist towards someone in the pavilion after completing a one-day hundred. If I was shocked by that gesture so atypical of him, another, somewhat different, image of him is permanently etched in my mind – his joyous celebration after India won the Adelaide Test in December 2003. Dravid's contribution was 233 and 72 not out. That was Rahul Dravid at his very best – a cricketer who derived great pride from performing with intensity even in hostile conditions away from home. – (Courtesy: *Straight Bat*).

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