

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Buckingham Canal highs and lows

The water in it may be fairly stagnant at least as far as the city is concerned but, when it comes to news about it, the Buckingham Canal is full for highs and lows. Within the last fortnight we have had heartening and disappointing news – there are plans for its revitalisation and, at the same time, an insensitive public is doing its best to pollute the few surviving pristine portions of the water body.

Late last December the Central Government announced that it was keen to revamp the Canal, in particular the portion that runs between Chennai and Yanam. This declaration was made on the occasion of the opening of the new regional office of the Department of Inland Waterways, located in Vijayawada. It is learnt that a comprehensive survey of the Canal will be taken up at the earliest. It is also understood that the Centre is aware that considerable amount of modernisation of the Canal will have

(By The Editor)

to be undertaken if it is to be made navigable for ferrying passenger and industrial and agricultural produce. At a time when the road network in the country is coming under great strain, the canal can be a viable alternative especially for goods that do not have to be transported very quickly. It is to be noted that the Canal can serve to transport nearly 15 million tonnes of goods along its route. The Centre's survey will cover the three States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry.

Preliminary studies have revealed that encroachments and silting have narrowed the canal considerably along most of its route. Originally planned to be 32 metres wide, it is at many places less than 6 metres. The depth which was to be maintained at 2.5 metres, is less than a metre now. The locks, which at one time maintained

(Also see page 6)

water levels in the canal even during low tides, have mostly disintegrated. In any case these need to be replaced for they were designed for much smaller vessels. But with the Centre pledging Rs. 2000 crore for the revival of inland waterways, all this should not be an issue. What is needed is speedy execution of the whole project. Much will depend on whether the Detailed Project Report is completed as planned by June this year.

And now for the bad news. As is well known, our city has been one of the major contributors to the destruction of this canal. Used as a sewage channel for long, the last nail on its coffin was the construction of the Mass Rapid Transport System on the canal bed. That blocked the waterway for good and destroyed all hopes of its revival. But with the MRTS running only within the old city limits and the canal extending

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The importance of being smart

It is just a fortnight since we brought you the news that a national magazine survey placed Chennai at the top of the chart on the liveability index. We now have the other side of the tale to tell – when it comes to the digital divide. Chennai ranks very low on Internet connectivity and also facilities that are available online.

This finding has come to light following the expiry of the deadline set by the Centre for the States to nominate their smart cities. A national daily based outside of Chennai has some rather depressing statistics

• by A Special
Correspondent

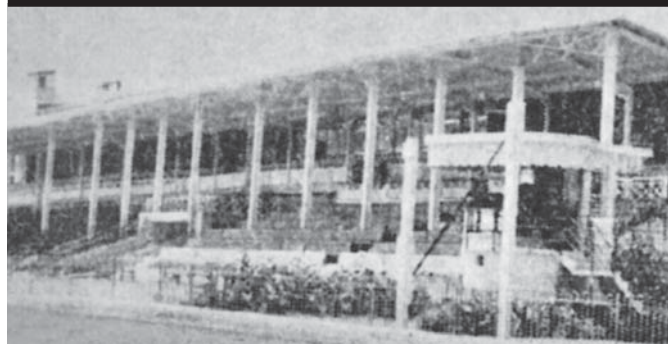
to report – out of 11.64 lakh property owners in the city only 70,000 pay their taxes online, 10 per cent of electricity consumers pay their bills online and out of 7.35 lakh buildings with water connections, just about 60,000 use the online payment facility. The record when it comes to public transport is even worse – out of 3,600 buses plying in Chennai, only 50 have global positioning systems (GPS) installed and out of 1800 bus stops just a handful have

digital signboards that give updated information on bus arrival timings.

Compare this with what is happening in other cities – Bangalore is working overtime to meet its self-imposed deadline of installing GPS in all 6,500 of its buses within this year, Ahmedabad is setting up clusters where free internet connectivity will be available and Delhi police is working wonders on mobile applications for smart phone users – there is an app to report lost property and there is another one for

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Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



● Like many other firsts, Madras also holds the record for the first ever race meet in India. This was in 1780 and held on the Island. But it would appear that Guindy was the area earmarked for racing as early as in 1777 when 81 cawnies of land was taken from the villages of Velacherry and Venkatapuram for the construction of a racecourse.

Almost from 1790 or so the Assembly Rooms on the racecourse were a landmark of the city. William and Thomas Daniell did a painting of the building in 1792. The racecourse stood to the left of the Assembly Rooms, where it still is, and according to the Daniells, "the amusement took place in the cool season, when the ladies of the settlement are invited to a splendid ball." Racing in the early years began at six in the morning and ended by ten so that people could get to work. The sport received a setback during the Mysore Wars and was revived in 1804. Land amounting to 35 cawnies was added facilitating the laying out of a second and smaller track meant for training horses.

It is not clear as to who managed the races in the early years. The Madras Race Club was set up in 1837 and functioned till 1875 when the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII, visited it. It faded thereafter, to be revived in 1887 by Lt. Col. George Moore, President of the Corporation of Madras. A new Madras Race Club came into existence in 1896, taking over the assets and liabilities of the earlier one.

Racing suffered during the First World War but was revived in 1919 thanks to the efforts of the Governor, Lord Willingdon. The Bobbili and Venkatagiri stands were constructed a year later. The Guindy Lodge, built initially for the club Secretary, and now the home of the Madras Race Club proper, came up in 1931.

An article on Guindy by the humorist S.V. Vijayaraghavachariar (SVV) appeared in The Hindu at around the time and this is what it had to say:

"Guindy is the place where races are held at stated seasons of the year. On race days the whole city gets empty and congregates at the course, from HE the Governor of Madras down to Muniammal, the vegetable seller. A racecourse is the most democratic place in the world. It would be nothing surprising if a Secretary to Government should take Muniammal aside and request her to whisper in his ears the name of the winner. And mind you, Muniammal knows the birth, upbringing and idiosyncrasies of every horse that runs in the race even better than the owner himself. It is really staggering what an amount of money passes from the hands of visitors through the small apertures of the ticket-selling windows. Guindy is the bottomless sink into which all the wealth, earned or borrowed in the city, disappears without leaving a trace behind."

SVV may have felt it was classless but going to the races was considered a social grace in the upper echelons of society till at least the late 1960s. This was also the time when certain well-known figures of Madras society cut a dash at the turf – M.A. Chidambaram (MAC) and the Janab Ravu Janardhana Krishna Ranga Rao, the Zamindar of Chikkavaram, being two such. MAC was to be steward for long and it was at his initiative that classic races were introduced in Madras in the 1950s. In 1953 he united the five race clubs of South India – Madras, Mysore, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Ooty – and formed the Southern India Turf Club which, once again thanks to him, was recognised by the Royal Calcutta Turf Club and the Royal Western India Turf Club. In

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OUR READERS WRITE



Eco-friendly dry toilets

In *Madras Musings*, February 1, 2005, I wrote," says reader K.V.S. Krishna: "The plantation companies in South India have long been providing latrines for workers according to the Plantation Labour Act.

"For example, dry-pit latrines are provided by the management. A later version has a 1.5' to 1.75' bore hole dug manually to a depth of 15' or 20'. On top of this is mounted a cylindrical concrete monobloc latrine which usually has a 36" internal diameter and is 6' high, with the top and bottom concrete slabs fused together. The bottom has an opening aligned to the bore.

"These cylindrical mobile toilets can be refixed, after the bore is filled with sullage, on a new bore within minutes. When the second bore is filled, the first bore can be cleared of night soil (used as manure) and refixed on the same bore hole.

"These cylindrical toilets can be made with just two bags of cement, jally, sand and steel rods for reinforcement. In 1975, they cost Rs. 150 when normal toilets cost Rs. 350-400.

"The dry pit toilets can also be made with Indian-style seats for wet use. The sullage is cleared as in the dry toilet by having two bores, five feet apart, and two drain pipes attached to each of them. However, where contamination of soil is likely, a septic tank can be specially designed to recover the sullage as manure.

"One particular design that I saw years ago was the Chinese model of a mobile toilet meant for rural areas. The toilet is mounted on a plough so as to open a furrow. After use, the toilet is pulled 1.5'-2' forwards so that the faecal matter is covered by fresh soil. Everytime the toilet is used, it is moved forward by about two feet. A family of five can get it to move 12-14 feet a day, or 4,500 feet a year. This system saves water, does not produce sullage but results in field manure and there is no room for groundwater contamination.

"The agricultural engineering departments attached to agriculture colleges can reinvent this mechanism. Obviously, this system can only be used in farms and rural areas."

He now adds:

These cylindrical monobloc concrete latrines can be modified by Industry for use in estates, industry or villages with bore hole or flush-out latrines for Indian style or even Western style system.

Additionally, they can be prefabricated and transported to site and installed within a day or two, even a few hundreds of them at a time.

Each district can have several "Government Controlled Manufacturing" units, so as to reduce cost of transport and cost of each unit.

Fixing 500 million units in a year will not be difficult, but creating a manufacturing base in over 1000 districts or more needs a proper plan, which our engineers can easily do.

Private enterprises too can be encouraged to do this with suitable monitoring. Then there are those special movable toilets mounted on ploughs for farms to convert faecal matter to night soil, a useful way to add organic matter to the soil.

This was implemented during the 1970s in Central Travancore.

K.V.S. Krishna
2A, Parkland Apartments
Kamala Bai Street
T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017

Poster culture

About ten years back the walls along Anna Salai from Nandanam Junction to Golf course were painted beautifully and I used to stand and enjoy their aesthetic beauty. They depicted the rural ambience of Tamil Nadu. Gradually they got washed away by rains and atmospheric pollution. At that point of time the walls of Golf course were permanent urinal spot and people used to stop their bikes and cycles and ease themselves on those spots.

Now these walls have been taken over by the cinema and political posters. The walls along Chamiers Road upto Turnbull flyover have the maximum disfiguration. Cinema stars and political leaders who have joined the Clean India campaign with great fanfare can perhaps do something to bring about a better sense of awareness. This wall poster culture appears to be unique to Tamil Nadu, unlike to other parts.

T. Santhanam
tyagasanth@gmail.com

Pleas against posters

The *Man from Madras Musings* was delighted to see the latest initiative by the Corporation of Chennai. It has put up signboards all along the flyovers, after it has finished painting them a garish green which, incidentally, is said to be the favourite colour of those who matter. These signboards request those who paste posters on public walls to think before they do so, for the flyover has been painted with the money that comes from the taxes paid by those who paste posters. Thus far, the appeal appears to have had its effect, for the flyovers that MMM is familiar with have remained poster-free.

However, MMM does have some differences of opinion with those who came up with this idea for deterring the poster nuisance. Firstly, do those who actually paste posters on walls pay any taxes? Highly unlikely is MMM's view for these are the people who belong to the fringes of society. And so how does the Corporation aim to protect public walls from them? Secondly, do those people who commission these posters pay any taxes? That too is highly debatable. The biggest offenders are the political variety, and



Signboard at a flyover

leading the battle against posters? MMM is certain that the various publishing houses of the city definitely pay their taxes but when it comes to putting up posters their record is not particularly edifying. The latest issues of the vernacular magazines in particular are widely advertised by means of posters and these are to be found everywhere.

Lastly, by putting up this signboard, is the Corporation stating that public property alone is to be spared of posters and private walls can be used with impunity? That is a matter to ponder over. But having said

Once you have climbed to the top, it is best that you tarry a while. This is to let your heart rest and get its beat rate down to normal. Most vehicles pause here anyway, for at a particular spot on the summit, they attain a kind of equilibrium, with the entire chassis poised evenly as on a fulcrum. You can also get a good view of the scenery of the surrounding countryside. But then all good things have to come to an end. You can't stay on for too long anyway for those behind will be coming up and wanting their share of the air at the top. And so you begin the descent. Here again it is advised that all regulations that apply to a roller coaster need to be followed. Expectant mothers, elderly people or those with lumbar or cardiac problems are advised to say their prayers, as also those who are susceptible to motion sickness. The only advantage in coming down is that it is invariably quick and you can always see what lies ahead of you, which is not always the case during the ascent. But there is one thrill that awaits you as you come down. The area beside the speed breaker being at a lower level, a considerable amount of water

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

these are largely men and women from outstation who spend money on posters and cutouts featuring their city-based political top bosses. The posters of the film industry closely follow these. There again, taxes are a sensitive subject. Next come the posters featuring the dear departed. These posters, depicting two weeping eyes around a photo of the deceased, are again sensitive subjects. MMM expects those who order print runs on this theme to be so grief stricken that taxes are perhaps the last topic on their minds. MMM however is not so sure of those posters that are put up to commemorate the first (and second and third and so on) anniversary of the deceased.

A new variety of offenders is the *Sabha* or classical music organisation. MMM is rather puzzled as to what joy the secretary of a *Sabha* gets by putting up posters of artistes which are then chewed by our four-legged brethren or urinated upon by the two-legged variety. But this is a recent trend. MMM doubts if tax is a relevant topic in this industry too. It is notorious for low fees at least on paper by which MMM does not mean poster paper.

What of the media which rightfully speaking ought to be

all that, MMM is of the view that the latest signs are very much an improvement on the old 'Stick No Bills' or 'Those Pasting Posters will be Prosecuted'.

Driving up, and down

The *Man from Madras Musings* has in the past lamented about the state of the speed breakers on our city roads. The lack of standardisation in curve, slope, width and texture has been dealt with in detail. So also has the lack of markings to indicate that a speed breaker is lurking on a particularly dark stretch of road. But before you go on to the next article with a muttered comment about how MMM has lost it and is repeating himself, lend him your eyes a little, for MMM now writes of the new kind of speed breaker that has manifested itself.

MMM is fairly sure that you have come across it. It is broad unlike the earlier ones that were sharply curved. But such is its width that it gives you the feeling that you are climbing up a hill. If you are in a car, everyone is thrown back as the vehicle makes the ascent. If you are on a two-wheeler and you hit the up slope with some speed, chances are that you take off like a rocket and land in the next postal district.

accumulates at the base whenever it rains. You therefore not only descend with a splash, you also liberally douse anyone else who is around. All this for free. To think people were paying through their nose at aqua themed parks for the same kind of experience. Given that ours is a welfare state, it was but to be expected that the powers that be would give us, apart from food, gas, medicine, entertainment and information, some good clean fun also for free.

Once you are on the ground there is no time to relax, for these speed breakers were evidently designed by those who specialised in putting up amusement parks with thrilling rides. More often than not, another of the same kind follows this sort of a speed breaker at a very short distance. Like the animals in Noah's ark, these go about in two and two.

Oh, yes, and before MMM signs off on this story let him warn you. There is still no standardisation on the markings for these speed breakers. Several become evident only when you hit them and your vehicle rises sharply in the air. If you do experience this, it is best to keep your seat belt fastened and pray for freedom from air turbulence.

— MMM

A trail of hope

The opening lines in The Chief's Madras Miscellany column in *The Hindu* Metroplus supplement of December 15, 2014 read: 'When Virginia Jealous speaks to members of the Madras Book Club this evening she might report that amidst all the tall grass in the unkempt St. Mary's Cemetery on The Island she found the tombstones of Adele Florence Nicolson and Lieutenant General Malcolm Nicolson.'

And, as life and luck would have it, that's precisely what travel writer, poet and essayist, Virginia Jealous, announced that evening at the Madras Book Club event.

It's great when Life decides to show off, revealing its ability to evoke that perfect touch of drama that reinforces Human-kind's eternal belief that there are such things as 'special moments'... unscripted, sudden, miraculous even... or just plain fun.

In the past few weeks, much has been written, both here in *Madras Musings* and elsewhere, on Virginia Jealous, her father John Jealous, and the latter's attempts to unearth the story of Raj-days poet 'Laurence Hope', a pseudonym used by Adele Florence Nicolson – yes, we're up to speed on all of that.

Now, your own connect with Laurence Hope is almost non-existent. Almost, because, without having a clue about their origin, you have come across the words: 'Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar...', the opening line of her most famous poem, 'Kashmiri Song'. Except that it was through a character in a P.G. Wodehouse, as he '...sat in the bath tub soaping a meditative foot, and singing, if I remember it correctly, 'Pale Hands I loved beside the Shalimar,...' hardly a deeply revealing introduction.

That evening, the Book Club meet was about Virginia's journey, a daughter's tribute to her father's magnificent obsession, following his trail, tracing the life of Adele Florence Nicolson, aka Laurence Hope.

John Jealous first came to Madras in 1989 on the trail of Laurence Hope, and had, in fact, found her grave, alongside her husband's, during that visit.

Looking back, how did this particular obsession ever begin?

"I went to live in Australia in '83, and my father wasn't really interested in Laurence Hope back then," Virginia Jealous, in a pretty floral kurta, is relaxed, smiling...she's just finished addressing the Madras Book Club. A friend remarks that Virginia reminds her a bit of Meryl Streep. "But, by about the late 80s, he was obsessed with the thought of finding out

more about Laurence Hope. He travelled in the Middle East, I remember, and he became friends with an Indian gentleman, Partha, a friendship that lasted for more than 25 years. I think it was Partha who introduced my parents to the works of writers from India."

Virginia, who is described as someone who 'lives out of a suitcase', has travelled extensively, written guide books for Lonely Planet, and published essays and collections of poetry.

Hidden World, a compilation of her poems which grew out of a three-month Asialink writing residency in India in 2012, was published by Hallowell Press in 2013.

Virginia has presented talks and participated in writers' festivals in India, Singapore and Australia.

Laurence Hope was the 'second love' of her father's life, says Virginia.

Hope's last collection of poems, published by Heinemann, was put together in 1904 in Madras.

Her work dealt with passion, sex, loss, death, longing and for-

worldliness about her; yet her direct, searing gaze must have disconcerted the men around her, used to perhaps very different treatment. Her nickname was 'Violet', thanks to her violet eyes. She wore her hair in fringe bangs, and wore bangles, sarees, and was mostly comfortable reclining, barefoot, on a sofa, while smoking.

She also liked dressing up like a Pathan Boy.

No one knows why she chose this particular pseudonym. But choose she had to, given that it just wasn't okay back then for a woman to write the way she wrote.

Laurence Hope, says Virginia, was "extraordinarily famous" by 1901.

By 1904, she was dead.

The couple, having realised that they were most at home in India, left their only son in England, as was the practice in those times, and settled down near Calicut. Tragedy then struck, with a routine surgery going horribly wrong, resulting in the General's death. Friends in Madras looked after Adele, tried to comfort her. But on 4th

● by Ranjitha Ashok

bidden love. A 1910 review uses the words 'feverish abandon' to describe her writing.

Here are some lines from her poem, *Afridi Love*:

*Some one who took last night his fill of pleasure,
As I took mine at dawn! The knife went home
Straight through his heart! God only knows my rapture
Bathing my chill hands in the warm red foam.*

You can't help thinking this must have raised eyebrows in Edwardian London.

Laurence Hope was born Adele Florence Cory in 1865. Her father was Colonel Arthur Cory, employed in the British Army at Lahore, where he was editor of the Lahore arm of *The Civil and Military Gazette*.

Her sister, Annie Sophie Cory, went on to becoming the author of racy, exotic novels, under the pseudonym 'Victoria Cross(e)'.

This seems to have been a family that created, for its time, an amazingly supportive environment for its rather remarkable daughters.

In her early 20s, Adele met and married the much older Lieutenant General Malcolm Nicolson, well into his 40s. Stationed in India, she appears to have re-defined the term: 'Army wife'. A photograph in Virginia's audio-visual presentation shows a woman with a certain air of remote other-

October 1904, at 4.30 pm she committed suicide, swallowing mercury. A verdict of suicide, 'while insane' was brought in. She was 39.

She was buried in St Mary's, Madras, next to her husband.

While John Jealous, back in '89, had found well-tended graves, Virginia, in 2014, found the going more difficult, and had to search for the graves extensively, with the help of Raja who, by one more of those playful coincidences, happens to be the son of the old caretaker who had once helped her father. She finally found them on the morning of December 15, 2014.... not so well-tended this time.

Virginia admits that her father had died before her own interest in this search peaked. You get the feeling that this search seems to be as much for her father as it is for the long gone poet.

You are told of *Dunmore House*, here in Alwarpet, where Adele and her husband lived briefly. The house no longer exists, and part of the property surrounding it became, decades later, Venus Studios, and is now Venus Colony. You can't help thinking Laurence Hope, given the central motif in her work, would have been amused by the happy aptness of this name.

Virginia followed the trail to Calicut, and found their house, 10km out of town, using a 1995 sketch made by her stepmother.

The name Jealous

Virginia smiles in perfect understanding when you, like a million before you probably, ask about her extremely unusual surname.

"My father spent some time tracing family history, and compiling the family tree," she replies. "He had a theory of how we came by this name, and believed it may have come to England in the 17th century with the Huguenots, who were craftsmen in wood, well known as lattice makers in particular. 'Lattice' in French is 'jalousie', so perhaps the name grew out of a profession, which in time may have morphed into 'Jealous'. It is a good story, isn't it? Better than being given this name because you were a jealous person!!" she laughs.

A search through Wikipedia reveals that slats, or louvers, in windows, called 'Jalousie' in France, not only kept out harsh sunlight, but also the gaze of jealous, prying eyes – la jalousie, probably so named as they permitted one to see without being seen.

The Chief, overhearing this conversation, points out that we use the word 'jaali' here.

The Laurence Hope effect – everything connected with her – seems to lead to further information-seeking quests.

– RA

Recalling certain lines in Laurence Hope's poems, which speak of a lonely place with sunshine and the sea, Veronica says she had to fight back tears while walking around the property, gazing at tiles dating back to more than a century, imagining Laurence Hope walking on them. Tender passion seems to follow the poet, now in the form of graffiti on the old walls, telling of tales of love in the present time: "Arjun loves so-and-so forever...."

Hope's most famous poem: *Kashmiri Song* was set to music around 1902 by Amy Woodforde-Finden, a composer well-known for her ability to link diverse cultures through music, and from then on till 1945, the song was heard in tea houses and parlours, becoming a drawing room standard. The Chief, in his welcome address, recalls hearing the song in London.

Rudolph Valentino has sung it. And now Finden's great-granddaughter sings a modern version.

The years haven't reduced the poignancy of the words. The longing remains, sighing that while love never goes, it can, and does, go horribly wrong.

And Laurence Hope prefers Death to Farewell.

*Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?
Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far,
Before you agonise them in farewell?
I would have rather felt you round my throat,
Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!*

The poem first appeared in Hope's first collection of poems, 'The Garden of Kama (1901)', also known as India's Love Lyrics. The illustrations that accompanied her work were done by people with little or no experience of India, and so were full of stereotypes of what the stay-

at-home British imagined India to be like.

Laurence Hope was the highest selling poet in the early part of the 20th century, in both UK and in USA, the music adding a lease of life to her poetry. Then, in 1945, she disappeared from the scene. The world changed, and she went out of fashion.

Perhaps what keeps the interest going is the fact that so very little is known about her. She has always been a mystery, so theories and rumours abound. Of affairs. Of possible lesbian relationships. Her best known poem had people speculating about a fling with a young, unknown Kashmiri. Somerset Maugham based his story, 'The Colonel's Lady' on her life and work. Over the years, there has been some imaginative writing on her, like 'That Bloody Female Poet (a book before Google)' by Tim Orchard.

Her son, Malcolm, did inherit her effects. With access to early manuscripts, he wrote a play based on his mother's life, 'An Unusual Woman'.

A very reclusive person, Malcolm Nicolson moved to Majorca.

Years later, the BBC tried to make a documentary on the life of Laurence Hope, but with no success. Virginia admits there appears to have been a certain 'Family Silence' firmly in place.

Malcolm died last year – in his 80s. His care-giver, Alejandro, inherited all the documents, with little idea what to do with all the unpublished material he found in boxes in the attic.

Virginia and Alejandro are now in touch with each other.

"I have all the facts without objects, and he had all the objects without the facts."

Virginia plans to go to Majorca. Her father's dream of writing a book on his pet obsession was never fulfilled....

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Mawlynnong – Asia's cleanest village

Mawlynnong, a small village in Meghalaya, was awarded the prestigious tag of 'Cleanest Village in Asia' in 2003 by Discover India magazine. Located at about 90 km from Shillong, the village offers a skywalk for you to take in the beauty as you explore it. According to visitors, you cannot find a single cigarette butt/plastic bag lying around anywhere.– (Source: Flickr).



Hiware Bazar – The village of 60 millionaires

Hiware Bazar, in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, has transformed from being a place fraught with issues to being possibly the richest village in India. The sole reason for this fairy-tale change is one man called Popatrao Pavar. He banned all addictive substances to minimise expense and encouraged the villagers to invest in rainwater harvesting, milch cattle, etc. There are a record 60 millionaires in the village and barely any poor. From 168 Below Poverty Line families in 1995, Hiware Bazar now has just three. The villagers continue to strive to see a day when not one person is poor (Source: Hiware Bazar).



Ballia – the village that beat arsenic poisoning with indigenous method

Ballia village of Uttar Pradesh had an itchy problem to deal with. The water that the villagers were drinking contained arsenic, which caused serious skin problems and even physical deformation. What is arsenic, you ask? A harmless element on its own, but when combined with oxygen or water, it turns toxic. Ironically, the village faced the problem after the government introduced many hand-pumps in the area for easy water access. The level at which the hand-pumps were dug led to excessive interaction between arsenic and water. When the villagers realised what had happened, instead of waiting for the government to act on it, they (physically) fixed their old wells and went back to an older, safer time. (Source: The Better India).

Why can't Tamil Nadu villages aim to be like these?

● India, having an agro-based economy, depends the most on its villages for growth. The *gaon* always has a distinct nostalgic charm. But as India becomes urbanised, the villages are, unfortunately, deteriorating. Poverty, lack of education, lack of sanitation, etc. are what we now associate with villages. Tamil Nadu, despite its rating as one of the best States in the country, is no exception to this.

There are, however, increasing examples of villages that are different. These ten villages featured here could even make metros blush. Can't Tamil Nadu villages emulate these, showing examples of rural progress?

– THE EDITOR

(Dr. Y. Ramalinga Sarma sent us this feature which he states was sourced from BABA-MAIL)



Dharnai – First fully solar-powered village

Dharnai, a village in Bihar, beat 30 years of darkness by developing its own solar-powered system for electricity. With the aid of Greenpeace, Dhamai declared itself an energy-independent village last July. Students no longer need to limit their studies to daytime, women no longer limit themselves to stepping out only in the day in this village of 2400 residents. (Source: Greenpeace).



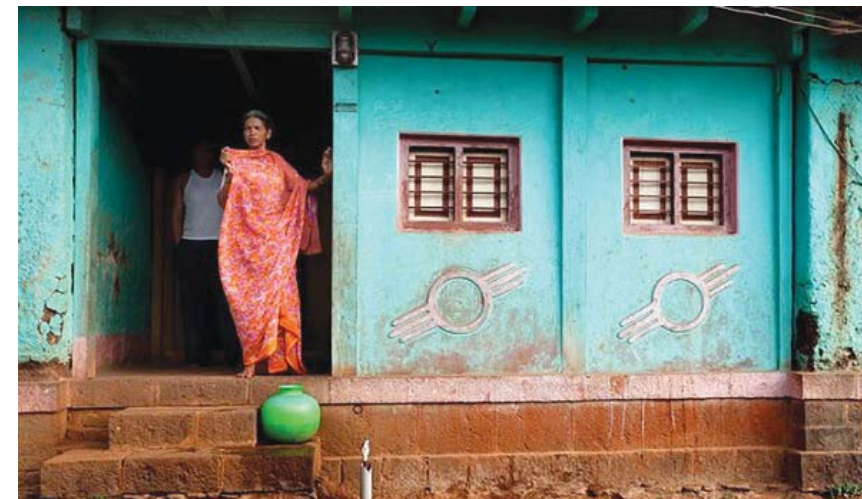
Pothanikkad – The village with a 100% literacy rate

Unsurprisingly, in Kerala, Pothanikkad village was the first in the country to achieve a 100% literacy rate. Not only does the village boast of city-standard high schools, but it also has primary schools and private schools. Guess the number of people the village has educated? Well, according to the 2001 census, there are 17,563 residents living in the village and all of them are considered literate! (Source: Deokothamangalam).



Chappar – a village that distributes sweets when a girl is born

Chappar village in Haryana has a woman Sarpanch. But Neelam is no ordinary Sarpanch. She has made it her life's mission to change the attitude of the villagers towards women, and she has succeeded. Not only do the women of the village not wear the ghunghat any more, but despite Haryana being the State with the lowest girls ratio (an abysmal 877), every newborn in this village, regardless of its sex, is welcomed into the world with sweets and festivities (Source: Youth Connect Mag).



Bekkinakeri – the village that rid itself of open defecation by 'greeting' lota-bearers

Bekkinakeri village in Karnataka has redefined the point of wishing someone a 'Good morning'. Frustrated with the practice of open defecation, the village council attempted to curb it by requesting people not to do so. When that didn't work, they stationed themselves early morning near 'popular' defecation sites and wished every perpetrator a very good morning. The trick worked! Too embarrassed to go on with their business, the openly defecating population has now stopped the practice completely (Source: World Bank).



Punsari – the village with WiFi, CCTVs, AC classrooms and more

Punsari, in Gujarat, puts most metros to shame. Funded by the Indian Government and the village's own funding model, Punsari is no NRI-blessed zone. The village also boasts of a mini-bus commute system and various other facilities. – (Source: Dainik Bhaskar).



Korkrebellur – A village that really loves its birds

Korkrebellur, a small village in Karnataka, believes in the conservation of nature. While most other villages consider birds a nuisance because they harm crops, Korkrebellur boasts of rare species of birds that fly around and don't even mind humans much. The villagers treat their winged compatriots as family and have even created an area for wounded birds to rest and heal. (Source: Flickr).



Shani Shingnapur – A village so safe that people don't need doors

Shani Shingnapur, in Maharashtra, is a village that defies every newspaper report you have ever read. Touted as the safest village in India, this place is known for its lack of doors to houses. Not just that, there is no police station in the village. And Shani Shingnapur has 'broken' another interesting record. The village has now the country's first lockless bank branch (UCO Bank). (Source: Woman Planet).

How the Buckingham Canal was born

In 1800, the Government (the Board of Revenue) was anxious to build a navigable canal from Ennore to Madras by connecting many large and small water bodies, utilising the seasonal river Elambore. Certain people who had a monopoly in the salt trade showed interest, but the Governor was not in favour. However, the project was advertised in the Gazette of December 1801.

A person called Heefke responded to the advertisement and its conditions, which allowed him to collect a reasonable toll for 45 years, apart from enjoying some other privileges from the Government.

The inception of the Canal was thus due to a private enterprise. In 1801, Heefke, with one Basil Cochrane as security, obtained a concession from the Government. He commenced the excavation of a canal, for small craft, from the northwest Blacktown wall through strips of land and shallow backwaters from Madras to Ennore, a distance of 11 miles.

The work was finished in 1806 by Cochrane who, in 1802, had obtained the entire control of the Canal. This portion was named Cochrane's Canal. This canal was soon afterwards extended by him to Pulicat Lake, 25 miles north of Ennore.

The canal remained the property of Cochrane till 1837, when

● Several people have over the years wanted accurate details about the Buckingham Canal. D.H. RAO, who has been delving in the archival records, provides the detailed story of the Buckingham Canal.

he left India, leaving its management to Arbuthnot & Co. It was then taken over by the Government, who paid Cochrane Rs. 14,061 a year till 1847, the date of expiry of his lease. Government then paid him compensation and took over the canal. In 1852, extensive improvements to the existing line of canal and further northward extension were undertaken. In 1854 the first lock was built at Sadayankuppam. By 1857, the canal had been extended to Durgarayapatnam, 69 miles north of Madras. It was then called the East Coast Canal.

At the same time, a new canal was excavated from the Adyar River southwards for a distance of 35 miles from Madras by joining the backwaters along the coast.

By 1876, the North Canal had been extended to Krishnapatnam, 92 miles from Madras. The next year, a fresh impetus was given to extending the canal as a measure of famine relief to the poor, and the canal was extended up to the Pennar River, 114 miles north of Madras. About the same time, the Junction Canal was excavated, within Madras city, to connect the Cooum and Adyar Rivers, the starting points of the North and South Canals respectively. The extension of the canal to the northern limit at Peddaganjam was completed in 1878, and its extension to the southern limit at Marakkanam was completed in 1882. The canal was then renamed the Buckingham Canal.

Soon after the completion of the excavation of the entire canal, it was found that it was fit only for navigation at high tide by small craft. This state of affairs necessitated an entire reconsideration of the design. Between 1883 and 1891, flood gates and diversion canals in some places were added. By the end of 1897, locks had been constructed along the whole length of the Canal, with provision for passing upland drainages across the Canal, so as to retain a surface water level approximating the level of the highest prevailing tide.

When the Canal was completed it was approximately 265 miles (420 km) long.

A chronology

North Canal

1800-02	Preparations for a navigable canal by Government.
1802	Heefke given the work to 'cut' a canal from Ennore to Madras. Work starts from northwest bastion of Black Town wall towards Ennore River.
1806	Reaches Ennore Lake and then Pulicat Lake, 40 km.
1837	Cochrane leaves India, but continues to get lease amount through his agents, Arbuthnot & Co.
1847	Government takes over Canal.

1854	First lock at Sadayankuppam (near Ennore)
1857	Reaches Durgarayapatnam (Armagaon), 112 km.
1876	Reaches Krishnapatnam, 147 km.
1877	Reaches Pennar River (famine period), 182 km.
1878	Reaches Peddaganjam – connecting Krishna-Godavari Canal, 297 km
	Extended upto Cooum River in Madras
	Called "North Canal" – length 315 km (196 miles)

South Canal

1857	A new canal excavated from Adyar River towards Panchavadi and further south, joining large water bodies, 56 km.
1878	Panchavadi to Palar River (Sadras) completed.
1882	Reaches Marakkanam lake, 123 km
1882	Named 'Buckingham Canal'.
1883	Construction of flood gates and diversion canals.
1897	Locks construction.
1900	The whole canal (420 km) becomes navigable. Total length 257 km in Andhra Pradesh and 163 km in Tamil Nadu.
1877	Link canal from Cooum River to Adyar River. Famine period. 8 km.

Buckingham Canal Locks

North Canal

Name of lock/ location	Distance from Madras (miles-furlongs)	Year
Sadayankuppam (near Ennore)	7	1854 (abandoned in 1895)
Ennore lake (south)	10-2	1886
Ennore lake (north)	11-3	1889
Chintamani	19-7	
Pulicat (south)	27-1	
Pulicat (north)		

Locks

Pambli	65-3
Swarnamukhi (south)	75- 2
Swarnamukhi (north)	75- 4
Kandaleru (south)	90-1
Kandaleru (north)	92-5
Kodur (south)	101- 4
Kodur (north)	101-4
Pennar (south)	114-1
Pennar (north)	115-4
Pyderu (south)	123-6
Pyderu (north)	123-7
Isakapalli (south)	125-7
Isakapalli (north)	126-7
Chippaleru (south)	132-6
Chippaleru (north)	132-7
Elikeru (south)	150-6
Elikeru (north)	151-0
Manneru (south)	158-7
Manneru (south)	159-7
Manneru (north)	160-4
Paleru	168-0
Musi	169-7
Mudigondi	183-2
Gundlakamma	187-1
Romperu	194-7 (31 locks)

Link Canal Cooum River – Adyar River

Cooum River – behind uty.	1901
Adyar River – Greenways	
MRTS Station (north)	1884
South Canal	
Adyar river (south)	
(Sadras lock)	5-5
Lattice Bridge	
Covelong (north)	20-0
Covelong (south)	23-0

(Continued on page 8)

Madras Landmarks

(Continued from page 1)

1966 the SITC was broken up when it was felt that Madras and Bangalore could be independently run and the Madras Race Club became a turf authority by itself. It was also under MAC that modernised tote machines were imported from Australia and installed in Madras, a first in the country.

The biggest setback to racing in Madras came in August 1974 when the then State Government through an ordinance banned it on the grounds that speculation over it caused the ruin of common folk. Statues were erected on both sides of the Anna Flyover to commemorate this. But in 1978 the Supreme Court struck down the ordinance. There was a scare in the 1980s when the betting activities were taken over by the Government of Tamil Nadu's Racing Department and talks of a ban resumed. An arbitration panel appointed by the Supreme Court voted in favour of continuing racing and it has since functioned unimpeded. Litigation concerning various aspects of horseracing, however, remains endemic to the Club.

Racing is conducted in Madras mainly from November to March. A smaller monsoon season, ranging from August to October has been recently initiated. Around 540 horses are registered with the Club. The Madras Race Club is also independently a thriving social club with many amenities. Sadly, the original Assembly Rooms, which survived till the 1990s, were demolished despite pleas from heritage conservationists. Imagine destroying what the Daniells once painted!

A trail of hope

(Continued from page 3)

Virginia hopes to complete the task, bringing closure for John Jealous's quest.

The audio-visual presentation ends with an image of Laurence Hope's hands.

The poet also liked to paint, and her hands appear strong, yet sensitive...artistic, creative hands.

John Jealous, says Virginia, was equally fixated on India, and admits she carries a certain 'colonial baggage'. India, for her, is both 'beautiful and terrible'.

"You have so much history and, at the same time, you are barrelling into the future ... visitors have to absorb all of it in one day."

Virginia tells the Madras Book Club: "I was so happy to find the grave today. It was as if she wanted to be found," and adds that while the work of this truly unusual woman was naturally of her time, in her poems East and West did mingle... the twain did meet.

• NOSTALGIA

The birth of Matscience

(Continued from last fortnight)

Almost from the start of his tenure at the University of Madras, Prof. Alladi Ramakrishnan actively participated in several conferences throughout India. At one of the meetings of the Indian Academy of Sciences he presented a talk on his new work on Inverse Probability. Sir C.V. Raman, founder of the Academy, was impressed by the presentation, and so, in 1954, had him proposed for election as Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences. Within a few weeks Father received a letter from Sir Raman informing him of his election as Fellow.

To inspire his students, and to strengthen his own research programme, Ramakrishnan was keen to get eminent physicists from overseas to visit the University of Madras.

In 1954-55, three world famous physicists who were visiting India came to Madras for lectures and spent time at his family home for leisurely and prolonged discussions on modern physics. They were Nobel Laureates P. A. M. Dirac and C. F. Powell, and Sir Mark Oliphant.

In December 1954, Professor Dirac, one of the greatest physicists of the 20th Century, gave a lecture at *Senate House* of the University of Madras. The *Senate House* overflowed and many listeners heard the lecture on loudspeakers while in their cars on the parking lot! Dirac was the first international physicist to visit our family home.

A natural consequence of Father's visit to Australia was Sir Mark Oliphant's acceptance to deliver the Rutherford Memorial Lecture at the University of Madras in early 1955. Professor Oliphant stayed at *Ekamra Nivas* and, being a vegetarian himself, enjoyed the fare offered at our home. Then in December 1955, Nobel Laureate C. F. Powell visited and lectured at the University of Madras.

The visits of Dirac, Oliphant and Powell were the informal beginning of the Theoretical Physics Seminar, although the seminar formally began only in 1959.

* * *

In 1956 Father went on what was to be the first of many

academic trips around the world and it was to prove the most significant and influential trip in his career.

The trip began in February 1956 with a six-week stay at the famous Yukawa Hall in Kyoto, which was the Institute headed by Nobel Laureate Hideki Yukawa. The atmosphere of Yukawa Hall with its steady stream of eminent visiting scientists, and the inspiration they provided to the many young Japanese scientists, greatly influenced Prof. Ramakrishnan. During the speech

bilist, I was only a novice in relativistic quantum mechanics. I wanted to learn from the high powered seminars (at Princeton) rather than go through the grinding mill of graduate courses. My ambition was to be realised a year later when I received from him a gracious invitation."

From Rochester Father went to Boston and then to Chicago to meet the great astrophysicist Chandrasekhar. Although Father had corresponded with Chandrasekhar and had published papers in the *Astrophysic-*

KRISHNASWAMI ALLADI describes the story of the birth of MATSCIENCE, The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, the efforts of his father, Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan, and the role of his Theoretical Physics Seminar in the creation of this Institute in Madras on January 3, 1962.

given by Ramakrishnan some years later at the inauguration of MATSCIENCE, he said: "In the 'domestic' environment of the Yukawa Hall, young Japanese physicists, the hope and pride of their country, just resurrected from the second World War, gathered together in enlightened leisure to discuss the most abstruse problems of modern physics. That strange enchantment... (made me) play with the idea of creating something like the Yukawa Hall in my own home town.

From California, Ramakrishnan flew to Rochester to participate in the High Energy Physics Conference.

There he met Robert Oppenheimer, Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He later wrote in his Diary: "It was during lunch time that a fortuitous incident occurred which altered the course of my scientific career. Since I was a stranger to the group of high energy physicists, I sat alone at a separate table in the cafeteria when Oppenheimer walked in, and with a politeness characteristic of true greatness, asked me whether he could join me for lunch at the table. When he asked me what my future plans were, I took the opportunity to express to him my desire to spend a year at the Institute for Advanced Study. Though I was a seasoned proba-

cal Journal, it was his first meeting with Chandrasekhar. There, at the University, he heard Chandrasekhar's lecture on radiation theory and was struck by his thoroughness in preparing even regular seminar lectures. Chandra, as he was popularly known, took Father to Yerkes Observatory where he worked with a team of observational astronomers to confirm his scientific theories.

This academic tour had a profound effect on Father's career and research, as well as on his PhD students.

* * *

In February 1957, Prof. Ramakrishnan received a letter from Robert Oppenheimer, inviting him to visit the Institute for Advanced Study for the academic year 1957-58. He applied to the Asia Foundation for the travel grant to go to Princeton, and a grant-in-aid to defray his living expenses for the year.

The academic year 1957-58 that Ramakrishnan spent at Princeton was a turning point in his career. He heard over one hundred lectures at seminars at the Institute by the leaders of modern physics on the latest and most important developments. T.D. Lee and C.N. Yang were in residence at the Institute and everyone was excited about their recent sensational discovery of non-conservation of parity and wondered whether



Author with Professor Neils Bohr.

they would win the Nobel Prize, which they did that year.

Einstein, the most celebrated of the members of the Institute, had died in 1955, and so Father did not get an opportunity to meet him. Instead he got to meet Robert Oppenheimer whose presence dominated most of the seminars. In his Diary, Ramakrishnan describes his contact with Oppenheimer at the Institute: "My meeting with Oppenheimer fulfilled my expectations about this legendary figure who dominated not only American science, but influenced the destiny of the world as the architect of the atom bomb. Lean and of medium height, he had an oval head, prominent cheek bones and piercing eyes. He could pick his men while lighting his pipe, each for the appointed task according to his talent and inclination, from a Nobel prizeman to a truck driver. He was magnanimous in providing opportunities for young scientists, and enjoyed discussions at every seminar where his very presence invited impartial criticism..."

"His intellectual interests ranged from theoretical physics to Hindu philosophy, and in Rabi's estimate he understood the whole structure of physics with absolute clarity....It was said that he had two passions – physics and the desert! He found the one in the other when at the age of forty he was

called upon to undertake at Los Alamos a task unprecedented in its objective, undefined in its scope, unpredictable in its consequences – the creation of the atom bomb. It was a leap into the uncharted future of mankind and he achieved it with the pragmatism of an American and the vision of a universalist. Tormented by moral ambiguities, he found his haven at the Institute for Advanced Study, the environment to which he belonged..."

The one year in Princeton exposed Ramakrishnan to the revolutionary developments in elementary particle physics, and the opportunity to hear about these developments in seminars delivered by the makers of modern physics. In addition, he had also the opportunity to visit other centres of learning and make further new contacts that helped his own research programme and the career of his students.

In April 1958 after having been infected with the seminar spirit at the Institute for Advanced Study, Father returned to India full of visions to create in Madras a centre for advanced learning that would have the spirit of Princeton. This dream that began in Fall 1958 and became a reality four years later through the Theoretical Physics Seminar that he conducted at *Ekamra Nivas*.

(To be continued)

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Till February 6: *Layers of perception and difficulties of some realities* – an exhibition of paintings by Sanjeeva Rao (at Appa Rao Galleries).

Till January 30: *All that lies beneath the surface* – an exhibition of mixed media works featuring Manish Nai (at Bergamo, Khader Nawaz Khan Road).

January 21-30: *The Urban Story* – an exhibition of photographs by Deidi Von Schaeuwen and George K. Both artists explore, in the medium of photography, two different aspects of the urban city. George looks at an

abandoned furniture factory as a political aspect of social outcasts and Deidi on the other hand explores the hidden agenda of politics in a series of scaffoldings as a metaphor (at Appa Rao Infinity).

January 17-18: *Street Food Fest and Garden Show.* The Friends of DakshinaChitra and the living museum at Muttukadu in Chennai together present their annual fundraiser. *Upma-pesarattu* (upma stuffed pesarattu), *sannas* with gravy, Mangalorean idlis with veg/non-veg accompaniments, Burma noodles – South Indianised noodles – and many more food items will be on display. Rare and exotic plants (*Petunias*, *Gerberas*, *Adeniums* as well as Bonsai of *Casuarinas* and *Ficus* nurtured by professional green thumbs will take centre-stage.

For more details on the Street Food Festival contact 98841 20150, on the Garden Show contact 9677029265 (Dakshina-Chitra, 11am to 5pm).

Till January 20: Exhibition by Arts Management Students on *Temples of South India* (at DakshinaChitra).

Till January 28: *Spectrum of expressions* – an exhibition of paintings featuring works of Eleena Banik and S. Natraj. Both artists are expressive. While Eleena

The importance of being smart

(Continued from page 1)

users to alert the nearest police station when in danger. Hyderabad, which is in many ways the pioneer among smart cities in India, has expanded its *e-seva* portal which it launched way back in 2006, to encompass all transactions with the public on civic amenities and services.

Internationally, it is accepted that for a city to be defined as smart, it needs to use information and communication technology to

- make physical infrastructure more efficient thereby making the socio-cultural environment much stronger;
- learn, adapt and innovate and therefore respond much faster to changing circumstances;

explores an inward journey in her expressionistic work, Natraj uses wit, humour and absolute fantasy in his tableaux.

Till January 30: *Myth narrative and the story* – an exhibition of paintings featuring Alexis Kersey, Amit Ambalal, Ketna Patel, Redappa Naidu, Suryakant Lokhande and Umashankar Pathak (Apparao Galleries @ the Leela Palace).

Till January 31: Exhibition of paintings and drawings by G. Ramana. His style is distinct, mostly depicting rural folk or musicians and all aspects celebrating life. His black and white drawings are well known for their strength and simplicity and his paintings have few primary colours filling in complicated and defined lines filling every bit of the canvas (at DakshinaChitra).

- engage effectively with local people in local governance and decision by use of open processes and e-processes;
- make use of creative industries, community and social networks to achieve these aims.

Does Chennai fit into any of these? Sadly, the answer has to be no. There is no consistent policy for such a development to happen. Take, for instance, the project of fitting GPS on city buses. This was launched with much fanfare and funding from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission a few years ago. A change of government was enough to ensure that the entire process was mothballed. Such shortsighted thinking is making sure that our city lags behind when all others are marching ahead.

At a time when it is considered 'unsmart' to be queuing up at counters to do tasks that can be accomplished at the click of a button, it is time for Chennai to wake up. It is certainly a waste of human resources to have people go from government department to department to get their work done. What is needed is a policy statement to make Chennai smart and then having a Chief Technology Officer for the entire city whose task it will be to get it moving quickly on the digital highway.

Most American cities have one as does London. Singapore too has created this post. What is the point in claiming to be working on becoming world class when the building blocks for such a status are yet to be in place?

Buckingham Canal Chronology

(Continued from page 6)

Edaiyur (north)	36-2
Edaiyur (south)	36-3
Pudupatnam (north)	41-0
Pudupatnam (south)	41-4
Palar (north)	43-5
Palar (south)	44-5
Palar (south)	46-2
Voyalur (double locks)	
Kaddalur (double locks)	
Kadambakkam (double locks)	

BUCKINGHAM CANAL HOPES

(Continued from page 1)

far beyond that, it was always felt that the rest of it stood a fair chance for rejuvenation. But with the city now growing rapidly, it is seen that the same malpractices are in full swing in the new parts also.

Large apartment complexes and commercial establishments have begun doing what they were always good at – discharging untreated effluent and sewage into the canal. The waterway is shrinking rapidly and is quite likely to end up the way it has in the rest of the city. From there to building on it is but the

next step. This is also being aided by the dumping of garbage along its banks. Rather ironically, this narrowing of the canal has come about after the State Government has spent a considerable amount of money in widening it to 100 metres along a distance of almost 13 km.

To what purpose will the Central Government efforts to give the canal a new life be if the local populace works consistently against it? Is it not in our nature to be socially conscious? It is high time residents of Chennai woke up to their responsibilities.

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