

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

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Why low voter turn-out in City?

The elections are still ongoing in other parts of the country, though by the time you read this issue, the results may well be out. Be that as it may, what has stood out, and rather egregiously at that, has been the low voter turnout in our city. At an average of 61 per cent across the three Lok Sabha constituencies, it was far lower than the State's 71 per cent. It ranked below the country's capital, Delhi (65 per cent), and politically active Kolkata (66 per cent). Is Chennai, the country's cultural capital, also politically or electorally the least sensitive?

Not so, it may appear, if you compare it with two other metros – Bengaluru and Mumbai, both of which saw even lower figures than Chennai, 54 and 55 per cent respectively. What it does indicate, however, is that these three cities have a problem in terms of voting. Since we concern ourselves with Chennai, let us restrict ourselves to looking at why it lagged behind.

Ever since the 1980s, Chennai has recorded low turnouts. The figures have always been marginally higher

for the Assembly elections when compared to the Lok Sabha polls. Thus, the 2011 elections to the State Legislature had a turnout of 73 per cent, almost 12 per cent higher than the current Parliamentary polls. The State wing of the Election Commission, well aware of this, had set itself a target of 80 per cent turnout in

• by A Special Correspondent

the city in the ongoing elections and had worked towards it. Private organisations had come out with advertising campaigns in support. Several celebrities duly paraded before the media with uplifted and inked forefingers. None of it appears to have had the desired effect. Why is this so?

The reasons could be many. Leaving aside the most often cited one – that of sweltering heat (but it is not exactly snowing in other parts of the country, or is it?), let us examine a few others. The first is the changing demography of the

city. Today, Chennai has a far higher percentage of migrant population than it has ever had before. People from all parts of the country have arrived here to work. Several of them have been issued voter cards. But most of them lack a connect with the city. Yes, it is an election for the country and not the local civic body but, still, they might feel that their vote will make no difference. What if it was their own State or hometown? Then they feel it would be another matter altogether. Locals have a similar logic for not voting. One regional party or the other would win anyway. So what difference could it make at the Centre? That may not hold water, as we have had coalitions for quite some time now, in which regional parties have had a big say. Others claim they "are disgusted with the political system". For them, the Election Commission has introduced the NOTA option. With all this and more available, why stay at home and sulk?

Secondly, the campaigning hardly touched the more

(Continued on page 8)

Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• One of the most enduring landmarks of our city, the Connemara began life as the Imperial Hotel, established in 1854 by T. Ruthnavaloo Mudaliar. Located at the intersection of Mount and Binny Roads, it stands on historic land – property of the Nawabs of Arcot which was once rented out to John Binny of the eponymous firm who built his garden house there. The Imperial was succeeded by The Albany in 1886, which in 1890 became the Connemara. The new owners were the brothers P. Cumaraguru and P. Chokalinga Mudelly. The new name was inspired by the then Governor's wife leaving him in high dudgeon over his peccadilloes and staying at the hotel for a week prior to leaving for England. Long thought to be a scurrilous story, that she stayed there has been proven as fact (see Madras Musings May 1-15, 2013), but The Madras Mail reported that it was named after his Lordship.

The Albany became Spencer property in 1890 and was re-christened the Connemara. It was, however, only in 1900 that James Stiven, a Director at Spencer's, began giving serious thought to running the Connemara. Large additions to the property were made, making it one of the best hotels in this part of the world. By the early 1930s, however, there was need for modernising and this was done based on designs from the architects' firm of Jackson and Barker of the city. It was they who gave the hotel its art deco façade which is featured in this photo and which still survives. The construction, by Gannon Dunkerly and Co. Ltd, was completed in 1938. It was only in the 1970s that the next major addition came – an independent block by Geoffrey Bawa and P. Poologasundaram, both from Sri Lanka. By then, Spencer's and the Connemara were largely Indian run.

In 1974, the Spencer's International Hotels Limited, which still owns the Connemara, entered into a management contract with the Taj Group of Hotels, owned by the Tatas. In 1995, the Taj name was prefixed to the Connemara and so it remained till a couple of years back when, as part of a rebranding exercise by the Taj Group, the Connemara became part of the Vivanta range of Taj Hotels.

Confusion on heritage conservation

This article has become almost an anniversary piece, given that it is exactly four years since the High Court of Madras mandated that the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority sets up a Heritage Conservation Committee to formulate policies for the protection of heritage buildings. Since then, the HCC has moved, for, to be fair it has not been idle, but it has achieved very little. And what is worse, it

has created more confusion in its wake than existed before. But that is only to be expected from a body largely peopled by bureaucrats and academicians from Government controlled educational institutions.

There is the matter of listing and notifying heritage buildings. When it was first set up, the HCC took the list of around 400 heritage structures put together by the Justice E Padmanabhan Committee and

• by A Special Correspondent

sent letters to each of the owners stating that they could not demolish (or for that matter do anything else) their property. A couple of years later, it began making a list once again and sent out letters to some of the owners listed in the Justice Padmanabhan Committee report informing them that it

was contemplating inclusion of their properties in a heritage list and asked if they had any objections. This was sent to only about 70 owners. Since the letter did not specify as to what were the benefits or pain points caused by listing their property as a heritage structure, most owners have kept quiet, not knowing what to reply. In the meanwhile, those of the original 400 who received the first letter but not the second are still

awaiting instructions on what can be done with their buildings.

Some of those who had urgent construction requirements – extensions, alterations and repairs, or even new buildings – in a heritage precinct, have approached the HCC for permission. It is in this aspect that the HCC has redeemed itself somewhat, for it has studied

(Continued on page 6)

By the way on a one-way

Do you know the Marina Beach? *The Man from Madras Musings* alludes to the sandy strip by the sea that draws the populace in its thousands each evening, especially during summer. Each time MMM looks at it, and that is quite often, he feels like falling on his knees and offering thanks to whatever is that force that has thus far saved this lung from unwanted railway lines, multi-storeyed condominiums for the affluent, and other such encroachments.

But to get back to the point at issue, what MMM wanted to highlight was the populace descending on the place in the thousands, most of it being two-legged as opposed to the two-wheeled, four-wheeled and multi-wheeled varieties. Rather alarmed at this, the police, which largely concerns itself with the vehicular kind, has decreed that a stretch of the road running along the beach be one way. This is the portion between Kannagi (Perfection of Chastity as the pedestal reads, whatever that means) and the Triumph of Labour statues. Vehicles going

leaving just a narrow ridge along the middle on which vehicles need to drive. Walking on eggshells would be an easier task. MMM made enquiries and was told that the road was dug up by an 'appropriate authority' who was also supposed to flatten it out. But the latter task was probably left for the vehicles that are forced to drive along this stretch. MMM could not help reflecting that the various appropriate authorities who govern our lives work in biblical fashion. The activities of one are rarely known to the other, rather like the left and right hands as decreed in the good book.

Unlike the up traffic, the down traffic is delighted with the one way, between the Labour and Kannagi statues that is. Seeing a four-lane road that is devoid of traffic in the opposite direction, vehicles rush headlong, until they come to the chaste lady with the anklet. Here the four-way suddenly becomes a two-way once again, resulting in a huge bottleneck. There is much honking, cursing, swearing, jumping of lanes and other standard behaviour the

keep beeping endlessly, sounding rather hoarse and tired with the strain.

Thereafter is a baggage scanner. This not being an airport where there is a distinction between hand and checked-in baggage, everything from laptop bags to large trunks have to be placed on the conveyor belt leading to the scanner. For some reason, this belt is at a height of three feet, needing enormous effort in lifting and placing the luggage on it. And once again, given our crowds, the scanner is on perpetual duty. Imagine just one scanner for the whole of Central Station! As to who actually checks what the scanner shows is a matter for conjecture. When MMM watched the process, the policeman on duty had a bored look and did not appear to care as to what was being packed in by our passengers. Which is all to the good, for our travellers can pack strange things indeed. A doctor uncle of MMM's once travelled with a human skull, which he was using for an anatomy lecture.

MMM did not have much time for standing and musing

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

towards Fort St George need to turn left at the Perfection of Chastity and go along Triplicane High Road and then turn right along either Victoria Hostel Road or Bells' Road to emerge again on Wallajah Road from where they need to turn right to regain Beach Road in front of the Labour Statue. Those that are going towards lighthouse can go straight down Beach Road between the two statues at breakneck speed. At the statue of the lady with the raised anklet the two-way system resumes again.

An ideal system would have been to have Beach Road as one way throughout, with Mount Road, which is anyway a one-way along large patches thanks to the Metrorail, as the return path. But that is not what our guardians have thought feasible. As to what they hope to achieve by making just one part of Beach Road one way is beyond the comprehension of MMM.

At this point of time, none but the police is happy with the arrangement. The traffic going up towards Fort St George detests making the detour at Kannagi Statue. Victoria Hostel Road, which was possibly designed for horse carriages and broughams, is unable to handle a large volume of vehicles. As for Bells' Road, the Corporation/CMWSSB/TANGEDCO or one of the other diggers have dug up the entire stretch

Chennai driver indulges in. Several make use of the halt to open their doors and spit out that wad of tobacco that has for long been chewed. Add to this the pedestrians who cross just about anywhere other than the earmarked crossings and you have a heady mix. The police, however, as MMM said before, think it has given satisfaction. After all, it is the thought that counts.

Security, Railway style

Last fortnight there was that bomb explosion at Central Station that sadly took a life, following which we have had the usual noises about enhanced security at the station. *The Man from Madras Musings*, who has to travel often, was at the terminal rather recently and was able to feel the full effect of the 'beefed up' (why not 'muttoned up' or 'porked up') security at the place following the explosion.

There is no denying that the Central was designed for an era when light and air were the principal requirements, apart from easy entry and egress from the place. But now, all entry points but two have been cordoned off. A set of policemen guide passengers, senders-off, hangers-on and others to a single entrance. Here a couple of metal detectors looking rather worse for wear need to be passed through. Given the crowds at station, these structures are always on duty and

on uncles with skulls or policemen with bored looks. For his bags were fast emerging on to the other side of the scanner where there was no gentle slope to place the emerging luggage on the floor. A sheer drop of three feet had most of the boxes crashing down and MMM wanted to be on the spot to catch his ere they fell and kissed the place to make it well as the poem goes.

After this check, life pretty much goes on as usual at the station. So much for our security system.

Tailpiece

The Man from Madras Musings wonders if any of his faithful readers noticed it. On the day of the explosion, several news channels carried reports and several had it on the ticker tape as part of their breaking news.

One of the Tamil ones, a channel rather ironically promoted by a group that claims to champion the native language, had it on the ticker with a rather serious blooper. The Tamil word for bomb was by mistake replaced with that of the human posterior. In other words, it said that several were injured following a powerful explosion in the behind. Bum for bomb in short. MMM wondered if that was what was meant by the word 'arson'.

— MMM

OUR
READERS
WRITE



Unforgettable fare in George Town

The notes on Modern Cafe (MM, April 1st) reminded me of the several vegetarian restaurants in George Town and other areas of Madras city during the 1940s and 1950s.

Modern Cafe, Ramakrishna Lunch Home, Arya Bhavan, Ambi's Cafe, Indra Bhavan, Sankar Cafe, Nehru Cafe, Shanmugananda Cafe, Andhra Mess, North Indian restaurants in Sowcarpet, Udipi Home on Mount Road, Rathna Cafe in Triplicane, Geetha Cafe in T' Nagar were some of them.

Many of the children of the owners of those restaurants were students of Madras Christian College School where I was a student in the 1940s and we often visited these restaurants.

Modern Cafe was owned by W. Seetharama Rao, who later established Dasaprakash Hotel. He was a strict disciplinarian and a God-fearing personality. Rao gave much importance to the quality of food served and the behaviour of the waiters. I have seen him on a number of occasions going around the tables during busy hours and, when a waiter was placing a plate (of dosai or any other item), would suddenly ask the waiter to stop and with a spoon he (Rao) would taste the item and would quickly get angry, and he would call for the chef concerned and scold him in Canarese for the poor quality of the dish and ask him to send another plate with the best quality stuff to the table. If my memory is correct, Modern Cafe was the first hotel to introduce *masala dosai* in Madras City and it was priced at 4 annas. Those days, the *masala* in *masala dosai* would be a finely mixed and mashed gravy of real *masala* ingredients, not like now when it is a watery mixture of potato pieces and onion scrapings. Seetharama Rao was a pioneer in the introduction of Udipi foods.

Rao's nephew U. Anand Rao used to assist him in the management of the restaurant. Seetharama Rao's bungalow on Rajah Annamalai Chettiar Road, Purasawalkam, was the venue for religious discourses held every Friday and I used to attend them.

Most of the Udipi hotels of the time served quality food preceded by an appetiser — *khashayam*!

Ramakrishna Lunch Home was owned by V.R. Ramanatha Ayyar from Travancore. He was just the opposite of K. Seetharama Rao. He was an extrovert. His restaurant was well-managed by a team of able persons. V.R.R. was a prominent personality in Madras. He was the Mayor of the city for a term. He had a very big garden in his sprawling bungalow *Muktha Gardens* on Spur Tank Road, Egmore. He was a member of the executive committee of the Agri-Horticultural Society of Madras. V.R.R.'s elder brother was the history master of the M.C.C. School.

Mani Aiyer of Ramakrishna Lunch Home was in-charge of the first automatic billing machine of the restaurant. After many years' service he left to start his own **Egmore Cafe** opposite Egmore Station. A few buildings away from Egmore Cafe was the **Tourist Home**, a boarding and lodging house owned by Al. Rm. Alagappa Chettiar.

One Shama Bhat from Udipi started a small canteen on Vepery High Road, next to the Madras Veterinary College in the early 1940s. After a few years he moved it to Commander-in-Chief Road, next to the Egmore Post Office. He served very good food.

Those days, we would practise driving from Kilpauk and Purasawalkam to the Marina Beach Road in early mornings and it was always past his restaurant (Pudupet, Harris Road, Chitra Bridge, Casino, Round Tana, Wallajah Road). On our way, we would have coffee at his place and on our way back (by 9.30 a.m or so) we would have breakfast at the **Udipi Hotel**, Round Tana, where the a/c room charge was 2 annas per head,

Later, Shama Bhat constructed a hotel at 1, Halls Road, Egmore, very near his old establishment. His growth was noteworthy; he even established a restaurant in New Delhi also.

Arya Bhavan in Govindappa Naicken Street was established by North Indians and their sweets and dishes made of pure ghee were very popular. An uncle of mine, Madai Dalavoi Kumaraswamy Mudaliar, ran a hotel in Courtalam and during the season, he would get a few chefs from Arya Bhavan to prepare the sweets.

On Govindappa Naicken Street there were many other North Indian sweet stalls. There was also an **Andhra Mess**. Many politicians, like Gopala Reddi, Brahmananda Reddi, and Guntur Narasimha Rao, would visit it. So did we from M.C.C. School.

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More on breweries in India

I found an article on the Internet entitled 'Imperial Hops: how beer travelled the world, especially to Asia' by Jeffrey M. Pilcher (<http://www.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/colloppapers/13pilcher.pdf>), which includes a few references to brewing in Madras (MM, February 1st). Pilcher refers to 'hops', which is a principal component in English beer. (Hops is *Humulus lupulus Cannabaceae*, the plant family which includes *Cannabis* – the hemp and in the brewing industry 'hops' refers to the female flowers of this plant. These are used as a flavouring and stability agent in beer to which they impart a bitter, tangy flavour.)

I quote here from Pilcher with page numbers indicated:

p.5: "Colonial brewers initiated their first efforts in

the cooler climates of the hill stations, and even established experimental hops plantations in Kashmir, although the yields were poor. By the 1880s, a dozen breweries operated in the northwestern province of Punjab, which was also the leading source of malted barley. Beer was also made successfully on a smaller scale at Bangalore, Bombay, Lucknow, and Madras."

pp. 6-7: "Evidence is mixed on the native consumption of beer, either ale or lager. In 1908, Sir George Watt observed: 'Consumption of country-brewed (English) beer and ale by the Natives of India is not important, though in some provinces it is more extensive than in others.' He cited the Punjab and the hill districts around Madras as areas of growing use. That

same year, the colonial government doubled the customs duty on imported beer and other alcohol to discourage Indian subjects from drinking, and perhaps because Germans had captured so much of the market. That Germans alone were importing by this point twice as much beer as the entire colony had downed three decades earlier suggests a growing native market since the European population of India had not increased at a comparable rate."

My interest in providing these details is that someone in Madras may want to follow the social history guided by this beverage.

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The creature on Westcott Road

My photograph is of an exotic being that inhabits Westcott Road in Royapettah. It is not what you think it is. For the past two years (yes, two years) and more, my wife and I have been observing, during our morning walks at the crack of dawn, this creature evolve in all its glory. It presently resides on the stretch of pavement/road between a commercial complex, *Bhattad Tower*, and the Wesley/Meston College compound alongside Westcott Road, right opposite a popular theatre.

Not being zoologist or biologist, I have tentatively named it *Copula telefisicus royapettalis* because of what it looks like rather than what it actually is. It resembles a coiled snake with both ends suspended from adjacent masts. No head is visible; neither are any eyes nor mouth visible. I m not sure if the creature belongs to the family of reptiles or invertebrates.

Its most fascinating characteristic is the ability to change its position. One day it lies majestically on the road adjacent to the pavement, the next day it rests at an angle of 45 degrees in a reclining pose, resting its body against the edge of the pavement. The day after, it lies prone on the pavement, as seen in the photograph. All this on one of the busiest roads in Chennai.

It appears to ingest whatever nutrients it requires through a process of osmosis. *Copula royapettalis* has adapted superbly to its environment and seems comfortable, be it sun, rain, cyclone or garbage. It also seems to be harmless to humans, considering that it lives on a very busy thoroughfare with heavy pedestrian traffic.

Another remarkable thing, and this is important, is that the creature seems to be at a crucial stage in its evolution. As you may be aware, millions of years ago when our ancestors, the apes, left the tree tops to move around on *terra firma*, the first steps were taken towards the evolution of the two-legged *homo erectus* and *homo sapiens*. I dare say that *Copula royapettalis* is similarly at a critical stage in its evolution, having left its usual perch atop a pole or a mast to move freely on the ground.

And to think that about a year ago, I had mistaken



this exotic creature for a coil of TV cable and sent a complaint to the Corporation! How foolish of me. On the other hand, it redounds to the credit of all the Corporation staff and supervisors who have recognised its true value and left it alone. (Even petty thieves, it seems, have given it a wide berth.) I am writing this specially to recommend a suitable reward for all Corporation staff who have carefully nurtured this creature for more than two years.

Recently in a survey conducted by *The New York Times*, Chennai that was Madras has been ranked 26th amongst 52 of the world's most desirable destinations to be visited. I am sure *Copula royapettalis* will be a big draw for tourists, particularly from the West, who can never hope to see such exotic creatures on their drab, sanitised roads and walkways. It is a perfect example of peaceful co-existence between the 3 Cs – Creature, Citizen and Civic officials! All the more reason for you to ensure that *Copula royapettalis* is well protected. The Corporation may also like to check if members of this species inhabit other areas of the city.

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Is this Singara Chennai?

During the last month I walked some distance and met many people in and around Chennai and saw many slums. Above are a couple of pictures of what I saw near Palmgrove Hotel.

Only when we change this scenario, will we see Singara Chennai.

Prabhakar J
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Vanishing grove

Though my subject is Mathematics, I was a Founder-life member of the Association of Geography Teachers' Association of India (MM April 16th). I hosted one of its annual conferences in Coimbatore when the respected trio mentioned by you, Dr. A.R. Irrawathy, Visharadha Hoon and M.P. Rajagopal, were the key persons conducting the proceedings.

MPR was an able administrator who brought out the monthly journal regularly. I came in contact with Dr. Irrawathy when I was associated with the Distance Education Programme of M.K. University. She identified the Kadamba

tree mentioned in Sangam literature and developed the Kadamba Vanam in the varsity campus. Alas, vice-chancellors thought that land was for constructing buildings and not for growing trees and the Kadamba Vanam disappeared. Dr. Irrawathy's passion for her subject was legendary.

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Worthy practice

I was greatly interested to know from reader S. Krishna's letter (MM, May 1st) that there is, in his locality, a man who collects the poo of his

pet dog in a newspaper and deposits it in a garbage bin everytime he walks with his pet.

In the USA, it is a criminal offence not to do so. It is for this purpose that everyone who walks his/her pet dog over there always carries a plastic bag. It is indeed commendable that at least one person in Chennai follows this practice in the interests of a clean environment. Is it too much to expect others to follow this creditable practice?

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CHENNAI HERITAGE

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

1. Name the two former Popes canonised on April 27th by Pope Francis in an unprecedented ceremony at the Vatican.

2. Following one of the biggest controversies in a global sport, the National Basketball Association has decided to ban Donald Sterling for life after a recording of strong racist comments made by him surfaced. Of which team is he the owner?

3. According to a recent World Bank report called the International Comparison Program, India has displaced Japan to become the world's third biggest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. Which are the top two?

4. Name the new Chief Justice of India.

5. The Indian arm of which globally famous confectionery company recently changed its name to Mondelez India Foods?

6. In a move that has disappointed many, the European Union has imposed a temporary ban on import of which famous variety of fruit from India?

7. Name the pension and life insurance scheme, recognised by the Indian Government, for Indian workers on temporary work permit in 17 Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries, that was launched in the UAE recently.

8. For what superlative record has a tiny Californian mite, *Paratartarotomus macropalpis*, been recognised?

9. In a news item that made the front pages, 43-year-old Polo passed away recently in the Mysore zoo. What type of animal was Polo and what unique status did it have in the country?

10. Name the Nobel laureate, the author of the epic novels *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, who passed away recently.

* * *

11. Which place of worship, the only one of its kind in Chennai, was built in the early 1950s on land gifted by Maharani Vidyawati Devi, the Rani of Vizianagaram?

12. What is now located at the spot where the well-known Soundarya Nursery, started by P.S. Swaminatha Iyer, was?

13. Which eminent man of arts is credited with helping initiate the 'Madras Movement' in the 1960s?

14. How many Shiva shrines are referred to as '*paadal Petra sthalams*' because of their being sung about by the Nayanmars?

15. One of the founding fathers of the Communist Party of India, a man from Madras, organised the first ever celebration of May Day in the country. Who was he?

16. Which eminent Chennai resident was the first player from the South to win the national tennis title way back in 1953?

17. Which 60-year-old publishing house of repute was started by Y. Thirunavukkarasu Chettiar to publish Tamil literature?

18. Who founded the Tanjore Mahratta dynasty?

19. In December 1936, Ramaswami Srinivasa Sarma was the first Indian journalist to be accorded which British honour?

20. In 1785, the Government of Madras appointed the 'Father of Indian ophiology' as the Company's first 'Botanist and Naturalist' in the Carnatic. How is his name remembered today in the natural world?

(Answers on page 7)

Two pages on European settlements pre-dating Madras

The forgotten harbour

Durgarayapatnam, or Durgarayapatnam, at the northern tip of the Pulicat Lake (at present a subject of controversy – MM, April 1st), is a village in Gudur Taluk, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh. It was an English East India Company settlement for 14 years (1625-1639) and was founded by the same Francis Day who was, in 1639, to be a co-founder of Madraspatnam or Chennapatnam.

In 1625, Francis Day and three other Englishmen, sent out from Masulipatam to establish a new foothold for trade, landed at Durgarayapatnam and sent for the leaders of the village, Gurava Naidu, the headman, and Patnaswamula Arumugam Mudaliyar, the accountant, and told them that they wished to buy a piece of land to build a fort. Arumugam Mudaliyar wanted to know how much land was needed. Thereupon, the Englishmen landed a cannon and fired a shot in a westerly direction and said, "as much land as this shot has traversed!" (a criterion, perhaps, based on the necessity to ward off an enemy attack). The land belonged to Venkatagadi Raja, who was persuaded by Gurava Naidu and Arumugam Mudaliyar to allow the strangers to occupy a spot called Chenva Kuppam. The English built a small fort there and, in gratitude to Arumugam Mudaliyar, who had assisted them in all the transactions, called the place Armagon!

Durgarayapatnam was at the time a small coastal village of

• **Madras celebrates its 375th birthday on August 22nd this year. Responsible for that birth to a great extent was Francis Day who was the Factor at Armagon (Durgarayapatnam). P.J. SANJEEVA RAJ offers a note on this forgotten village where the English East India Company established a factory before the founding of Madras.**

about 2500 people with no commercial activities, but with casuarina groves and salt-pans. It was highly malarial. The Armagon factory was equipped with 12 cannons and staffed with 23 English merchants and soldiers.

More significant than the founding of Armagon in 1625 was the English discovery of an excellent site for a natural harbour near Armagon. During the early 19th Century, Vice-Admiral Henry Blackwood chartered an underwater shoal (sand bank or sand bar) about six miles from Armagon and called it the Armagon Shoal. The shoal is about 10 miles long, north to south, with still (calm) waters within the shoal, about nine fathoms deep, "a practicable harbour," as Blackwood adjudged. It was later called the Blackwood Harbour. Another narrow but detached shoal about 2.5 miles long, with a depth of 10-11 m, lies close to the northern tip of the Armagon Shoal. Blackwood recorded even the reversal of coastal monsoonal currents within the shoal. Shoals in coastal waters, like coral reefs, attract rich biodiversity and fisheries. Prior to the construction of the breakwaters for the Madras Harbour, it was much debated whether to develop the

Blackwood Harbour itself, in lieu of where the Madras Harbour was established.

About seven miles south of Armagon is the deserted coastal village, Monapalem, where a lighthouse was constructed in 1853, beaming once in 20 seconds and visible upto 14 miles away. It was renovated several times but, between 1928 and 1938, it was totally closed con-

sequent to a malarial epidemic that, strangely, killed one lighthouse keeper after another!

However, ports and harbours are not normally known to pollute any inland water bodies unless there are some effluent or waterways connecting them. If only such ecologically sensitive zones (ESZs), like the Pulicat Lake, are protected from any polluting industry in the special economic zone (SEZ) of the proposed port, Development and Environment can learn to coexist and even flourish harmoniously and symbiotically as commendable models of Sustainable Development.

CONFUSION ON CONSERVATION

(Continued from page 1)

the plans carefully and in many cases withheld permission. In other instances, the go-ahead has been given with some suggested alterations to ensure harmony with neighbouring structures. Thereafter, the HCC has failed once again, for it has not monitored the new constructions or alterations carried out after its permission, so as to check if the owners have deviated from the approved plan (and many have). This is, of course, a common failing with the CMDA and its monitoring agency, the Corporation of Chennai. Both are known to agonise and dither over plan permissions but once these are granted, they never monitor the actual construction, which is why there are so many plan violations in the city. The HCC, being a creation of the CMDA, is not different from its parent.

Lastly, the HCC is nowhere near formulating a policy for heritage conservation. All across the city there are owners

of small heritage houses and office spaces who would gladly preserve what they have if only there was a clear-cut directive, together with some incentives and, perhaps, some financial assistance. This is not coming forth. It is an indication of how much our civic bodies have slipped when you consider that, over eighty years ago, the Corporation embarked on just such a novel scheme to have residents install latrines with flushes inside their houses. Finding that several would like to have them fitted but lacked money, the Corporation came forward to assist, doing the needful by way of installation and collecting the payment over a set of monthly instalments. It is not clear as to why such a scheme cannot be thought out for heritage buildings as well.

What is really lacking is out-of-the-box thinking. If the HCC is going to remain the way it is, there is very little that can be achieved. And we will keep losing out on heritage.



May 24: Music concert by Anahita Ravindran and Apoorva Ravindran (at Apparao Galleries).

Till May 30: Exhibition of paintings by J. Anthony Raj and M. Ramu (at DakshinaChitra).

May 31: Adult workshop: Paper Quilling Jewellery (at DakshinaChitra).

Till May 31: Exhibition of paintings by Veerasanthanam as part of International Museum Day titled *Museum collections make connections*. An artist and social activist, Veerasanthanam's paintings aim to preserve and communicate with the past, in contemporary times. His paintings depict stories from mythology, traditional art forms and murals from our temples, and allow the present generation to comprehend their origins and history (at DakshinaChitra).

Till May 31: @/Cropped/no U-

turn, an exhibition of mixed media works by N. Ramachandran (at Apparao Galleries).

Till May 31: *A Time to Dream*, exhibitions of art works by Farham Mujib (at Sandy's, Cenotaph Road), and by Pradeep Nerurkar (at Sandy's, Nungambakkam).

Till June 5: *Godhuli*, an exhibition of the living traditions of the art of pichwai (at the Leela Galleria).

June 4-30: Art exhibition by Brijesh Devareddy (at DakshinaChitra).

June 5-30: Photographs by Kushboo Bharti – art in public spaces of Jaipur (at DakshinaChitra).

DakshinaChitra Workshops

Workshop for adults

May 17&18: Kerala Mural on duppatta

May 31: Paper quilling jewellery.

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– THE EDITOR

El mundo es un paliacate

All right, all right, I admit to speakers of Spanish that I have taken a small liberty with the use of the word 'paliacate', but it is a perfectly legitimate switch that should be brought into general use once again. Once again? Yes, once again. Read on.

The title of this article is much closer to the truth than the saying in current use in Spanish-speaking North, Central and South America: *el mundo es un pañuelo*, or 'the world is a handkerchief.' But not any old handkerchief. A *pañuelo* is the Spanish word for a bandana, but it is called by some, even today, a *paliacate*. There is, however, a difference between a *pañuelo* and a *paliacate*: while a *pañuelo* is generally worn on the head, a *paliacate* is tied around the throat. A *paliacate* is a large, brightly-coloured scarf, usually square and used around the neck. If you are thinking that this word has a connection with our charming little Pulicat a few kilometres north of Madras, you are on the right track. It originated there. The world is a handkerchief; that is to say, it's a small world.

In July 1993, *Madras Musings* published an article I wrote on Pulicat. No doubt you will find it in the archives. At that time I was looking for vestiges of the much-publicised Dutch presence – and found none beyond the graves in the New Cemetery, the one that everyone sees on arrival in the village. No fort, no buildings, no Dutch words in Tamil – nothing tangible. In December last year, I went back to Pulicat, this time looking for the *lungis* and other clothes that were famous throughout the world – and introduced to not only Europe but also to the far-flung Indonesian islands, Japan and China by the extensive inter-oceanic trade of the Portuguese based in Pulicat with its superb lagoon – about 100 years before the Dutch had heard of the place. Incidentally, as in all Portuguese trading posts, the vast majority of the Portuguese population consisted of 'Eurindians', a term I have used for over 30 years instead of the ridiculously narrow term 'Anglo'-Indian.

But back to the *pañuelo*. Several, if not most, of the words that the English language has for the various kinds of cloth that were exported from India, Japan and China are English approximations of the Portuguese pronunciation of these words, e.g. *pintado*, meaning painted. In the late 15th Century and early 16th Century, fashions were rather different from what they are today. Head scarves and 'neckerchiefs' (how many of you have heard that word?) were much in demand, so as to keep the head or throat warm, or to add colour

to drab European clothes that were made from flax or wool, or simply to cut a dashing figure. Flax is off-white, and sheep don't come in fancy colours. European dyers generally did not have the spectacular success that their Indian counterparts had with fixing colour, thanks to the vivid colours found in Indian plants, like madder, and the use of special mordants, chemical agents that 'fix' dye. To illustrate my point, it is best to quote from a publication of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney:

"Between 1600 and 1800 India dominated the world market as an exporter of textiles. Indian mordant-dyed, hand-painted, cotton fabrics known as chintz were admired for their brilliant colours. Unlike contemporary European and English fabrics, which were handpainted and block printed, Indian textiles used dyes that were not fugitive."

Tecidos pintados (te-SEE-dooosh pin-THA-dhoosh, Port.),



All hand-spun, hand-woven and hand-painted, with the highest degree of artistry, their colours still impressive after 200 years.

So no *paliacate lungis* in Pulicat, but in far-off Mexico you can go to a textile shop and ask for a *paliacate* and not be thought mad. It is made entirely by machines, however, and probably in China.

• by Simeon Mascarenhas

or hand-painted cotton textiles, were soon the rage from Japan to England, although it was not until the mid-1600s that a direct trade between India and England developed. Until the early 1600s, most imports were controlled by the Portuguese, until the Dutch, English, and French joined the competition.

In vain did I search in Pulicat for *paliacate lungis* during my recent visit. Long before my arrival in Pulicat, I had written to my friend, the parish priest of the Catholic church of Our Lady of Glory, asking him to locate shops where these famous *lungis* could be bought. "No luck," he said. "I have asked around, but production of these *lungis* was stopped some years ago." I was sorely disappointed as I have deep admiration and love for traditional Indian textiles. Some of the examples I have seen in major museums of the world are so exquisite as to defy description.

Ask any Mexican about José María Morelos e Pavón and the answer you get will always include a reference to his *paliacate*; he was never portrayed without it. Morelos (1765-1815) was a Mexican Roman Catholic priest who one day informed his superiors that they should find a replacement for him since he was joining the Revolution. He led the Mexican War of Independence against Spain and was such a brilliant strategist and commander that Napoleon said of him, "With two men like Morelos, I could conquer the world." Morelos was of mixed racial heritage – African, native Mexican, and Spanish – and it was cool, brilliant, fearless men like him that imperial powers feared: in his first nine months in the Revolution, he achieved 22 victories, annihilating the armies of three Spanish royalist leaders. No doubt, he wore his *paliacate* into all battles.

So a square piece of cloth from sleepy Pulicat went round the world and became a national emblem in Mexico. It is also

immortalised, along with other fabulous fabrics, in a classic French novel, *Paul et Virginie*, by

Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, published in 1788. The story is set in Mauritius, then under French control and called the Ile de France. Saint-Pierre's story attacked the deeply-divided social classes of France only a year before the French Revolution. I have reproduced the original words because Saint-Pierre's tremendous powers of description are best relished in his native French. For those who do not read French, I provide a translation:

"Cependant le bruit s'étant répandu dans l'île que la fortune avait visité ces rochers, on y vit grimper des marchands de toute espèce. Ils déploierent, au milieu de ces pauvres cabanes, les plus riches étoffes de l'Inde: de superbes basins de Goudelour, des mouchoirs de Paliacate de Mazulipatan, des mouselines de Dacca, unies, rayées, brodees, transparentes comme le jour, des baftas de Surate d'un si beau blanc, des chittes de toutes couleurs et des plus rares, a fond sable et a rameaux verts. Ils deroulerent de magnifiques étoffes de soie de la Chine, des lampas decoupees a jour, des damas d'un blanc satine, d'autres d'un vert de prairie, d'aures d'un rouge a eblouir; des taffetas roses, des satins a pleine main, des pekinksmoell comme le drap, des nankins blancs et jaunes, et jusqu'a des pagnes de Madagascar."

"While the news that good fortune had come to these shores spread across the island, merchants of all kinds were seen clambering over the rocks. Among their simple huts they spread the richest fabrics of India: superb basins of Cuddalore, kerchiefs of Paliacate and Masulipatan, muslins from Dacca, plain, striped, embroi-

dered, as transparent as day, exquisite white baftas from Surat, the rarest of chintzes in all colours, with green branches on a buff-coloured background. They unfurled the magnificent silk fabrics of China, lampas cut from daylight, white satin damask, others green as a meadow, or a glowing red; pink taffetas, handfuls of satins, pekings as soft as wool, nankins white and yellow, and even pagnes from Madagascar.* A pagne is a short, knee-length wrap, rather like a mid-length lungi, worn by men in Madagascar.

Basins, *paliacates*, muslins, baftas, chintzes, lampas, damask, taffetas, satins, pekings and nankins: what a bewildering array! Saint-Pierre has the ability to produce a picture bursting with colour and vitality, but it is the sheer range of fabrics, so many from the Coromandel Coast, that impresses.

A square of gaily printed cloth from sleepy Pulicat went round the world and entered the lexicon of at least four international languages, Portuguese, Spanish, English and French, in that order – but is forgotten in its birthplace. It is time to re-introduce it as a fashion item in India – but please let the weavers and dyers use their skills once again.

I can think of no better way to end this article than to quote a post that I found on a blog:

"Look: El mundo es un pañuelo = it's a small world; El mundo es pañuelo! Paseando por un callejonde Madras me tropece conel doctor que me opero hace dos meses. (It's a small world! Strolling along an alleyway in Madras, I bumped into the doctor who had operated on me two months earlier.)"

The Argentinian writer was answering a question from the USA. The world really is a *paliacate*.

* English translation by Simeon Mascarenhas.

Answers to Quiz

1. John XXIII and John Paul II; 2. Los Angeles Clippers; 3. USA and China; 4. Rajendra Mal Lodha; 5. Cadbury India Ltd.; 6. Alphonso mangoes; 7. Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY); 8. It has been recorded to be the fastest running animal ever found, with a speed equivalent to a person running roughly 1300 miles per hour; 9. It was the only gorilla in the country; 10. Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

* * *

11. The Gurudwara in T'Nagar; 12. The Polygon on Mount Road; 13. K.C.S. Panicker; 14. 275; 15. Malayapuram Singaravelu Chettiar; 16. Ramanathan Krishnan; 17. Vanathi Pathippakam; 18. Chatrapati Shivaji's half-brother Venkoji; 19. Knighthood (by Edward VIII); 20. Dr. Patrick Russell of 'Russell's Viper' fame.

ESSAY

Chennai, a far cry from Madras

Jack Trout, the eminent Brand Management guru and co-author of *Positioning*, when addressing a group of marketing professionals a few years ago in Chennai, minced no words when he thundered: "Your city fathers can do what they want with names, but this city will always be remembered as Madras! The image is indelible."

Having migrated to Madras over six decades ago from Calcutta, those words ring truer now than ever before. To the impressionable mind at the time, it seemed that the city's outer limits were Perambur, Parry's Corner, Aminjikarai and Adyar! Huge expanses stared us in the face when we drove out of the city beyond Adyar to Mahabalipuram. The green fields, the sleepy bovine herds and the shepherds grazing their sheep, have all drifted into oblivion! The words of the popular song 'Where have all the flowers gone' by Pete Seeger keep haunting me as I enjoy the luxury of a retired life.

While pursuing this line of nostalgia over an expansive beer-laden lunch, our wizened old gang decided to drive down to Kilpauk, where we had spent our young and innocent days for a quick look! What a shocking experience it was to find that this patch of green had now morphed into a concrete jungle! We were unable to find many of the grounds where we had played cricket and hockey – from beyond Taylor's Road through Kilpauk Garden Road, Orme's Road, Balfour Road, Kelly's and beyond to Doveton Corrie.

Once a proud resident of Professor Subramaniam Street, abutting Vasu Street, which

flaunted the famous 12 (or 16?) branched coconut tree in the Soora compound, I was taken aback by the cluster of buildings here – this compound now houses the Ega Theatre in the foreground on Poonamallee High Road. The famed coconut tree is now a memory – not even traceable amidst the crumbling collection of sepia-toned images that I have in my fading collection. We still remember the famous Soora persona, heavily burdened with dust-covered files getting down from the Route No.15 bus from High Court and trudging into his huge estate. Did Uncle Scrooge, as we fondly called him, have to suffer this bumpy ride clutching his huge property, so to speak? It all seemed so ephemeral now.

At the other end of Professor Subramaniam Street, be-

yond the high walls, once stood the famous Citadel Studio and our minds went hurtling down time to conjure up images of dark and handsome knights on their white steeds rescuing damsels in distress and then bursting into song and cavorting

• by V. Kalidas
(vkalidas@gmail.com)

round a fountain during the shooting! "Hey, come off it, old boy," says a friend rudely shaking me out of my reverie, "What you see in front is a huge cement-and-mortar beehive better known as RBI Staff Quarters."

It is heartening to learn that the City Fathers are trying to recreate the beautiful lakes that once stretched along the rail-

way tracks from Chetput to almost upto Egmore. In between were playgrounds which provided budding cricketers the chance to show off their prowess during the make-believe 'Test Matches'.

I vividly recall the bus-rides with elders to 'Town' for all kinds of shopping from textiles to jewellery. After the shopping spree, it was time for hot snacks and *badam halva* at Anand Bhavan (or Arya Bhavan?). The scenario changed, with T'Nagar taking over as one of the densest shopping centres in the world in terms of turnover per square foot; our shopping activities too shifted focus accordingly. Today, the retail axis – both high-end and general – is gradually moving into Cathedral Road, Alwarpet and Mylapore.

The changing face of Kilpauk is but a representative microcosm of the changing face of this 'Urbis' which today competes on an equal footing with the other three Metros while fending off competition from Bangalore and Hyderabad through its own largesse of pubs and lounge bars and the newly branded 'Biryani' which dons its own 'talappakattu' and takes on a challenge from the Hyderabad 'Paradise'.

Dining out at multicuisine restaurants – flaunting Chettinad, Japanese, Thai, Mexican, Korean and Lebanese cuisine – and chomping at pizza parlours has wiped out memories of Jaffars' and Dasaprakash. Yet, Rayars' and Karpagam Mess have their own loyal following! There is a strong 'Madras' element in Chennai which can never be wiped out as history will bear out!

Anna Nagar, the OMR and ECR, offering a mix of novel real estate, entertainment and IT technology, have added muscle to Greater Chennai; the city wears a new complexion.

WHY LOW VOTER TURN-OUT IN CITY?

(Continued from page 1)

upmarket areas of the city. Most of these localities have multi-storied buildings and the party workers could not go door to door, by which we mean calling on each residential unit in a building. Residents feel that this might be indicative of the indifference of the contesting parties/candidates as far as their votes are concerned. But there is another side to it. Political workers can rarely gain entry into gated communities and residential complexes. They

would have to leave their pamphlets with the security personnel with the hope that they would be distributed. Officials of the Election Commission had to face the same problem when it came to distribution of booth slips. As a consequence, very few registered voters, several of them first time voters, had any idea as to which polling booth they had to go to.

Lastly, the new number-old number confusion with which we have lived for over six years now has played havoc with the voter lists. The Government it-

self is responsible for this mess, having encouraged the continued usage of both. It is high time we switched to one or the other.

Perhaps it is time we changed the methods of reaching out to voters? Do we need

to contact voters through e-mails? On social media? Whatever it is, it is time to debate, at a macro-level, on the process itself and, at a micro-level, on the necessity to declare a paid holiday when many people don't go to vote.

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.madrasmusings.com

THE EDITOR

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