

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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# Threat to shrink Lake's buffer zone

(By The Editor)

If a country had a magnificent lake that dates back to the Holocene period, rich in biodiversity and history, what would it do? Protect it? Promote it? Neither, if the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), Government of India, is to be believed. In a startling move, the MOEF has proposed that the buffer zone around Pulicat Lake be reduced from ten to two kilometres! This unexpected blow has environmentalists up in arms.

The move comes following a decision by the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India, to develop Durgarayapatnam (Armagon of Francis Day fame) as a port and shipbuilding centre spread over 5000 acres. The proposed development, notified in September 2013, is expected to take over at least 5 km of protected area in the vicinity of Pulicat. It centres on Tuppiipalem (in Andhra) which happens to be just around 4 km from Pulicat Lake itself.

There are several questions about the sustainability of this port, but the Ministry has decided to go ahead nevertheless. It is to allow for this that the

MOEF has, on January 3, 2014, proposed a restricted Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around Pulicat. This overrides the Andhra Pradesh Government Forest Department proposal for a ten-km ESZ around the Lake. That was mooted in 2007, following a Supreme Court order in 2004, asking for 'shock absorbers' around ecologically sensitive areas. That it has not yet been notified and remains on paper is yet another matter.

The Lake is of vital importance not only to the Tamil Nadu-Andhra region around it but also to international birdlife.

Firstly, around fifty villages, most of whose occupants rely on traditional methods of fishing, depend on it for their livelihood. The building of a port, however world-class it may promise to be, will immediately mean the end of a way of life. It must be pointed out that most of the fisherfolk here practise what is known as the *padu* system of fishing. Known for its ecologically sensitive way of harvesting fish, it is already facing a decline thanks to the setting up of the Ennore Thermal

Power Station, which discharges effluents at elevated temperatures into the Lake.

Secondly, the Lake is a bird sanctuary that has international significance, located as it is on the Eastern Flyway of the Central Asian Flyway, a crucial migratory route. Birds while migrating across the globe, therefore, visit it and some of them are highly endangered species. Tampering with their habitats can spell disaster to some birdlife across the world. It is feared that the proposed port will impact not only the flight pattern of the birds but also the aquatic life in the Lake, which forms an important link in the food chain needed for the birds to survive.

Thirdly, the Lake itself depends on three openings to the sea, the northernmost of which is at Durgarayapatnam. It is the view of conservationists that the port will result in the sealing off of that outlet following construction activities. This

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## Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• This fortnight's building, as it looked 50 years ago, is the Modern Café, which was one of a chain of restaurants begun by K. Seetharama Rao, before he founded the Dasaprakash Hotel on Poonamallee High Road. Modern Café, Mysore (by appointment to HH The Maharajah) was the first. Modern Café, Madras, came next, by the early 1930s. Then followed Modern Hindu Hotel, with two outlets, one each in Mysore and Ootacamund.

The Madras one featured here was on Esplanade Road (now NSC Bose Road). It made its name catering to the lawyers of the High Court. In its heyday, the Modern Café ran a hotel at Hari Nivas, Thambu Chetty Street, and also two other restaurants called Modern Café, one in Egmore and the other at Basin Bridge. Seetharama Rao, whose motto was service, also began the first organised canteen on the Marina, next to the swimming pool, thanks to the encouragement of O. Pulla Reddy, Commissioner of the Corporation of Madras, in the 1940s.

## Heritage is only a facade for Metrorail

• by A Special Correspondent

Barely a month or so after the Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliar (RSRM) Choultry facing Central Station was taken over by Chennai Metrorail Limited (CMRL), rumours are flying thick and fast about what is to happen to the heritage structure. It is reliably learnt that CMRL is contemplating retention of just the frontage of the building and intends to demolish everything else. If this is the truth it is a shame and yet it runs entirely true to the past track record of CMRL.

The land and building comprising the RSRM Choultry

building which can qualify as heritage and the rest can be done away with.

Why are we not surprised? CMRL has used the same logic not once, but four times already. In the first instance it was the taking over of the old Male Asylum Press property just behind the Poompuhar building on Mount Road. It had then argued that the Justice E. Padmanabhan Committee report had included only the front (Poompuhar) in its report and so the rear did not qualify. Later, in the bitter battle that was fought in the take-over of the rear

were handed over to CMRL following the judgement of the High Court of Madras in litigation that went on for almost two years. CMRL had in its plea committed to preserving the heritage structure and it was on this assurance that it was given possession of the property. We at Madras Musings had even then raised doubts on the capability of CMRL to maintain such a structure. Now it is understood that CMRL claims that it is just the façade of the

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Madras Eye



"What's the fun of having a nice, wide ECR road if you don't have important businesses like mine ON it!"

# Looking ahead at an urbanising India

Cities are considered the global face of a country. Looking back, let us remember that ancient civilisation rose and fell with their leading cities. Looking ahead, we must understand that over the next decades of the 21st Century, our cities will continue to grow larger still, and more rapidly too in a technological era. In 1991, India's population was 856 million, 26% urban. In 2013, it is 1300 million people, with 32% of it urban. The projection for 2030 is 1470 million people with 40% living in 6000 cities. With this tectonic shift of population surging into cities for a better life and living, both government and public organisations need to shift gears to cope with the situation. Let us ask ourselves: Is there any planning for an explosive growth of population and cities? After 66 years of Independence, it is time to make an important transition.

Multiple streams of people from rural areas and culture are already intersecting in our cities and towns, and are being swept into its rapidly globalising environment. It is said, "What Indians call cities are mostly half cities and half overcrowded slums", with poor sewerage and sanitation, and illegally tapped electricity and water supply tucked into nooks and corners. Or what Charles Correa aptly described as a "tale of two cities within one". Larger populations with fewer facilities are guaranteed to unleash a swarm of problems and tensions in our environment. City development is often strangled because arcane rules survive; or perhaps because it is lucrative for some people. Only good governance and planning can streamline urbanisation, and transform cities into economic opportunities, with the potential to lift people out of deprivations to a better quality of life. And for gross national progress.

There is an urgent need to build sustainable cities. To refigure their economic and environmental dimensions, to check the heavy footprints on environment, to control pollution and consumption of natural resources, INTACH can now take on a bigger role and contribute to a nation-wide awareness programme on urbanisation. It is well placed to do so with its vast network of 175 Chapters both in cities and towns across the country. For 30 years we have considered ourselves "an army of conscience keepers", the time has come to also become foot soldiers at the forefront of conservation of our cities. INTACH can take another giant leap forward, by enthusing our 'aam' members to become activists to confront unplanned urbanisation.

INTACH invited a few of its long-standing members to give their views on cities.

**Dr. Sarayu Doshi**, Governing Council member, INTACH: I grew up in Mumbai in 1940s and my memories are of a city with a promenade by the sea and beautiful buildings. The crowded areas with bazaars and shops were in the heart of the city while on its periphery – Malabar Hill and Cumbala Hill – were elegant mansions and impressive palaces belonging to rajas and maharajas. The streets were clean and the traffic regulated.

After Independence, the city began to change rapidly. Outside our home in genteel Gamdevi we began to observe a new phenomenon of men sleeping on pavements. During the monsoons, they would sleep in the stairwell of the buildings. They were scruffy and hostile, and would not move from our neighbourhood. We soon realised that they were the first migrants to the city, coming to earn a living. With time, their numbers began to swell, as more and more people came to the city accompanied by their family members. Since they had no place to live in, they occupied footpaths, traffic islands and open playgrounds. At first, they lived under the open sky, later they would stretch a piece of tarpaulin to protect themselves from the weather. Gradually, these makeshift tents became permanent on the city footpaths. These people comprised almost 40-50 per cent of the city's population.

Various attempts have been made to address this problem, but without success. Apparently, the solutions that have been devised so far have not accurately understood the requirements of these slum dwellers. The tenements in highrise buildings constructed as slum redevelopment housing are soon sold by the slum dwellers and they are back on the streets as they prefer to live in their shanties, rather than live the type of life imposed upon them by these housing schemes.

These migrants do not accord a high priority to better living conditions. Their aspirations are directed more towards material goods – a TV, a video player, a computer, flamboyant clothes and accessories. They return to their homes only to sleep at night. Their women and children are used to lying in hovels in the villages and are content to live a tiny place with a TV and other amenities. All of them treat their homes as a place to eat and sleep, spending

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# More on wedding gifts

Last fortnight's tract/diatribe on wedding gifts has had the faithful readership sending in their comments by the dozen. And it has made the task of *The Man from Madras Musings* that much easier when it comes to this fortnight's column. What with the temperatures increasing by the minute and election noises reaching fever pitch, MMM is unable to think and needs all the help he can get.

How could MMM have forgotten the drinking birds, asks a regular correspondent. And MMM recalled with horror that particular excrescence which was at one time a regular on the gifts circuit. It was structured in the form of a large glass goblet that had an amber liquid in it. On either side were two pelicans (or were they storks), completely transparent and with huge stomachs that also had the same amber fluid in them. The birds were for some strange and unexplained reason attired with top hats and their abdomens (by which MMM means those of the birds and not the hats) were hinged to their legs (again the birds' and not the hats'). If you pressed the birds' heads they would begin bobbing up and down into the large goblet giving you the impression that they were quaffing the amber liquid. What this horror had to do with weddings is beyond MMM's comprehension, but then there it was. Scarcely a wedding there was in the city of Madras that did not feature these toying birds.

What about wall clocks, asks another reader. And, yes, MMM doffs his hat in acquiescence. There was a time when wedding guests said it with clocks. Square, triangular, rectangular, circular, pyramidal, they came in all geometric shapes and sizes. Most of them were of a ghastly pink, more or less of the shade seen at the Presidency College dome and at Rajaji Hall, a shade the Chief delights in calling *seenu-muttai* pink. They had all the kinds of tunes (MMM recalls one that chimed Happy Birthday To You every hour). The problem was that each couple got at least twenty of these. You may think that they could pass these on to others, but the clocks were singularly ill-adapted for this. The main reason being the flat front faces on which several of those who gifted them had their own names etched in perpetuity, the more sinister-minded adding the date of the wedding as well. That more or less dashed all chances of giving them away. More evil-minded were those who had a metal plate riveted to the rear, giving the same details – name of giver, date etc. There was no option but to pack the clocks away and hope that time would take care of the eventual destruction of the clock.

The last word on gifts, says

another reader, and MMM agrees with her, is the wooden tower-like object painted in black with two horns on top to make it look like a temple spire. This has a silver disc of a god, or goddess, fixed to the front. There is nothing more useless than this gift apart from the fact that it is uniquely Tamil in its identity. You cannot do anything with it, apart from hammer nails into walls. The sole advantage they have over other gifts is that they are cheap and come in large sizes and so make for an impressive present, especially when packed.

## Glory to a leader great

This election time and anything is campaign material for the political parties concerned. *The Man from Madras Musings* is even now observing from his eyrie the preparations for something as innocuous as the first birthday of a child. The proud father is a party hopeful and is ensuring that the great leader of his party notices his efforts and awards him with a ticket.

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

This man is from what is known as a humble origin. But ever since he hitched his wagon on to a political outfit (and not a major one at that), his status has changed, all glory be to the great leader. His marriage, if you were to believe the posters put up then, was thanks to the great leader. The visuals had the couple posing with an image of the great leader above them with hands raised in blessing. From the hands of the great leader (glory unto the person, in case MMM did not mention it before) emerged a shower of flowers in benediction.

Anyway, the union was blessed, thanks wholly, if the posters put up then were to be believed, to the great leader. The bouncing baby is now one, thanks to glorious leader and celebrations are underway, by grace of glorious leader. It is a girl child; so the father is not

entirely happy, but then he must not forget that when she comes of age (once again because of the great leader), there will be a public celebration, also known as grand turmeric bath in local parlance. One more opportunity to show fealty to the great leader.

The current celebrations began, MMM noticed, with a ceremonial digging of the footpaths all along the way. Flags, cut-outs and buntings have been put up, all of the glorious leader, on poles planted in the holes dug up. When MMM objected, he has been assured that the stones will be replaced, great leader willing, in due course of time. Tube lights, with electricity provided gratis, no doubt from the supply to chez MMM and others in the neighbourhood, have lit up the roads like the way no street light has ever done. It would be a pleasure to drive along with such illumination, but, alas, none in the neighbourhood can pull out any vehicle. The leader's faithful have blocked all entries and exits. Banana stalks in their hundreds have been slaughtered and put up along the way, no doubt an indication of the state of the republic.

Songs praising the great leader are blaring, enough to make the one-year old deaf. But it may be better off that way, for the songs are attacking those opposed to the glorious leader in such cheap terms that the child, if able to hear and absorb, may be corrupted forever, like its father. Talking about father, posters and banners of himself put up all along the route, though of a size smaller than those of the great leader, have been scaring some of the small children who have turned up hoping for cake. The elders appear to have come for other refreshments, for MMM can see several swaying as they leave, some singing hymns in praish (hic) of the leader.

With so much of adoring of the great one, MMM hopes that the celebrant gets a ticket and is successful. For only then can MMM hope for the footpath to be restored to its former state of glory, such as it was, like the great leader.



Tailpiece: Religion, as *The Man from Madras Musings*, knows, is meant to give everyone a high. But this was living proof of it. Haha, what?

– MMM



### Still unoccupied

This refers to the report 'What the law proposes the hawkers...' (MM, February 16th). Another exclusive hawkers' market complex was built in Palavoyal Street, Ayanavaram, at a cost of Rs.1.35 crore and declared open by the former Deputy Chief Minister in September 2010. However, it remains unoccupied till now, even though the eligible hawkers were issued with identity tokens by the Corporation officials. It has come to light that the Hawking Committee headed by Justice A. Ramamurthy is helpless as none of his observations is taken seriously by the administrative machinery even though a deadline has been fixed by him.

As of now, Palavoyal Salai remains a bottleneck blocked by traffic, besides thousands of people, including school and college students, trying to get through to the main bus route on Konnur High Road. Even the police do not regulate vehicular traffic here, including the vans carrying loads of vegetables and other provision items for the hawkers and other shops in the area.

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### Stranded at Pamban

The article on the Indo-Ceylon link and Pamban bridge (MM, February 16th) had me remembering how we es-

aped the wrath of that cyclone in 1964.

We, students of Botany from SV University, were on a botanical tour of the Pamban islands. After three days of hectic work, we packed up our luggage around midnight of December 21, 1964. All was normal. But around 12.30 a.m. or so, there was a sudden gale which increased within minutes. Pamban station was very small and all of us, about 25 in number, including girl students and teachers, were in one small waiting room when, suddenly, the roof flew off.

Our train was about to depart from Pamban at 1.30 a.m. but within no time we were informed that the train was cancelled due to heavy damage to the bridge. We had no place to take shelter in. We ran to a few rail bogies and stayed in them and throughout the night we stayed put as torrential rain beat down on the carriages. After several hours, I think it was about 10 a.m., the next day when the intensity of wind and rain decreased. We saw many trees uprooted, a big concrete nameboard of the station pulled down, and the roof of the stationmaster's room and other small buildings in shambles.

When normality returned in the evening we went out to see what had happened. We were stunned to see the twisted rail lines under the bridge, the same place where we had collected some algal samples the evening before. We just could not believe what we saw. Luckily, the girders of the draw bridge were safe and a railway lineman was seen clinging to the girders.

## A hoarse voice in the wilderness

In his book of essays *A Passage to England*, the late Nirad C. Chaudhuri, while describing the difference in behaviour between the friendly, purring cats he met in England and the frightened, hostile, spitting cats he met in India, remarks that each country gets the cats it deserves.

Agreeing totally with this sentiment, I go one step further – each country gets the culture it deserves.

And what is our culture today?

Being a reader of MM practically from Day One, I have followed the strenuous efforts taken by this publication in the cause of preserving our ancient and priceless culture forms – the latest (MM, March 16th) being the issue of despoiling our Marina with grandiose schemes for tourists (whoever they may be).

The question is preserving our culture – for whom?

When we visit a place of historical importance, we decorate it with graffiti and carve our initials and obscene messages thereon.

When we visit a public park or a beach, we litter the place with plastic, cigarette packets, gutka packets, water bottles and just about any rubbish we carry.

We urinate and defecate in public in close proximity to public drinking water taps and open air eateries.

What price the high society, highly perfumed woman sitting next to you in an A/C chair car of a train, bawling endearments to her grandchildren for half an hour at the top of her voice on the cellphone.

What price the man in the berth above you in a sleeper compartment who talks continu-

ously and loudly on his cellphone till 3 a.m.? How about the group of loudly chattering people, who barge into a concert programme one hour late and create a commotion searching for their seats while the performance is on and, after being seated, at once start chatting on their cellphones?

We cry hoarse about escalators not being provided by the authorities and, if they finally are provided, we proceed to jam the machine by dropping all kinds of litter into the works.

There are a thousand other examples of how crass and vulgar we have become as a society.

Let us face it... we have no culture, we have no appreciation of the aesthetics of life.

On a misty morning at Doddabetta peak, there is no reverent silence, no enjoyment of the grand scenery...only lines of tourist cars, vans and buses parked bumper to bumper all belting out the most horrible loud music from their sound systems. And this is considered enjoyment!

Though I take my hat off to MM and others for their untiring efforts in preserving our culture, I am afraid, it is only another hoarse voice in the wilderness.

When we are unaware and indifferent about our culture and, instead, exhibit the worst forms of profanity and vulgarity, how will we appreciate the efforts of those who try and strive to preserve it?

As Nirad Chaudhuri would have said, we only get the culture we deserve.

**S. Rajaram**

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We had no food till some local residents gave us some tea and biscuits. Next day an air drop of food was arranged and we had a better meal. Some students from Gujarat who had ventured to Rameswaram were washed away. This news made our parents lose hope for all of us. The next day, when the weather improved, we were

transported by boat to other side of Pamban and our professor went to the nearby post office to send a telegram to the university about our safe return. If the train had been allowed to leave Pamban station that night we would have been washed away. In fact, by 1.25 a.m. or so the green signal was given and the guard blew his whistle, but

within a few minutes, when the train was moving out slowly, it was stopped. It seemed the station master got a message not to allow the train on the bridge due to the impending cyclone.

**Dr. V. Rajagopal**

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## HERITAGE ONLY A FACADE FOR METRORAIL

(Continued from page 1)

workshops of P Orr & Sons the same logic was applied. It was in vain that the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage offered to come up with alternative alignments and locations of stations. The judgement of the High Court of Madras went in favour of CMRL and the buildings were demolished.

In the case of Bharat Insurance Buildings too, CMRL has taken over all the land on its side claiming that only the building and not its precinct qualifies for preservation. It has demolished everything but the main structure which is in an enfeebled condition already. Lastly, CMRL also demolished a heritage building in the Teachers' College campus claiming that a photograph of the structure in question did not feature in the Justice Padmanabhan report.

At the risk of offending those who decide on the fate of such buildings, we make bold to point out here that this logic of

CMRL's is flawed and it is quoting the Justice Padmanabhan Committee report out of context. That Committee was formed to list buildings and precincts that could not be hidden by outdoor hoardings. It naturally looked at all structures from the point of view of their facades only. It is a different matter that the same report was later accepted as a starting point by the Heritage Conservation Committee of the CMDA and the owners of the buildings listed in it requested to consider their buildings as heritage buildings and not undertake any work on them without the Committee's permission. It was this position that the Committee adopted in the Bharat Insurance Building case. Following that case, the High Court had ordered Government to prevent demolition of all the buildings/precincts listed in the Padmanabhan Committee report. The Heritage Conservation Committee was asked to go into the merits of each case and take action. As to the functioning of that Committee and the

actions it has taken (or the lack of them) we don't need to go into it; suffice it to say that our readers are quite familiar with the subject.

But it is not correct to keep quoting from a report that had to do with the outer appearances of buildings and insist that the rest of the structures do not, therefore, matter. The Court had made it clear that each of these structures was worthy of preservation, according to the grade in which the Padmanabhan Committee had placed it. There can be no question of frontage or rear. If the CMRL is choosing to interpret the report that way, it is making a mockery of the report and the spirit in which it was prepared.

Coming back to the RSRM Choultry, it is necessary to preserve the entire structure. If it is just to remain a sham façade, CMRL may as well demolish the whole edifice and put up one of its buildings on the site. We may tolerate ugliness in the name of modernity, but we don't expect hypocrisy in the name of heritage preservation.

## Buffer zone threatened

(Continued from page 1)

particular mouth is of immense importance, for it is from here that the seawater enters the lake, the openings in Tamil Nadu serving as exits. If this is to be shut off, the lake will be starved of fresh water supply. The impounded water will evaporate in summer, resulting in hypersalinity, which will kill the aquatic life.

Lastly, India is a signatory to the Ramsar Agreement that

aims to protect water bodies. This is "an intergovernmental treaty that embodies the commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of International Importance and to plan for the wise use, or sustainable use, of all of the wetlands in their territories," to quote from its website. To what purpose such agreements if they are not to be implemented at ground level?

(Also see page 5)



**Till April 11:** *Divergent Horizons*, a curated exhibition of contemporary Indian art from the Regional Centre's collection since 1990 (at Lalit Kala Akademi).

**Till April 12:** *Contemporary Miniatures*, an exhibition of paintings, sculptures and drawings by members of the Progressive Painters' Association (P.P.A.), one of the oldest art organisations in India. It was started by late K.C.S. Panicker in 1944. Members of

the P.P.A. include many eminent artists as well as some promising new talents, most of whom reside in Cholamandal Artists' Village (at Cholamandal Centre of Contemporary Art, Injambakkam).

**Till April 28:** *Fortune Teller*, an exhibition of paintings by Dhan Prasad. His paintings explore Telangana men and women in bright colours and in a folk idiom (at DakshinaChitra).

## Drawing with Mano – 2

# Eyes that watched you always

(Continued from last fortnight)

When I was seven we lived in Kottaiyur (in Chettinad), my father had a framed picture of Mahatma Gandhi. My parents told visitors that the speciality of this portrait was that Gandhi looked at the viewer with smiling benevolent eyes, wherever the viewer stood, I stood to stare at the portrait from one side and then walked to the other side of the room. Gandhi's eyes followed me.

An aunt of mine had a framed sepia portrait of Jesus Christ with piercing dark eyes, looking at the viewer. My aunt was an affectionate but fanatically religious person. She warned us children to behave properly even when we were alone, as Christ watched us always. She claimed that the portrait represented what she said.

She would make one of us stand on one side of the picture and another child at the other end of the room. She would ask the first child as to whom Christ was looking at. The child would answer, "Me." She would ask the other child the same question and get the same reply. Then my aunt would go on to say, "See, He is looking at you both at the same time, though you are on the opposite sides of the room. Please know that He watches you wherever you are."

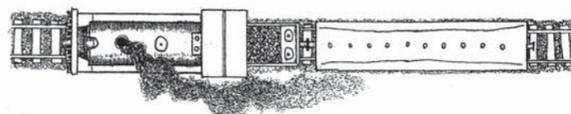
Surprisingly, the frontal view of the steam engine train that I had drawn, gave me the insight – a few years later – something that should

the details of the street behind him. I could figure out that the vanishing point was at the centre and the eye level of this point – if my memory is right – was below the comedian's shoulder level. The curtain, of course, gave an illusion of space behind the 'street performer'.

\* \* \*

One day, standing above it, I watched an engine go by right under my nose – with just one blast of hot air hitting my face. I became quite excited with a simple idea that struck me. When I reached home, I made a drawing of an engine and a carriage, as seen from the sketch below.

At that time, I did not know that I had done a simple 'plan view', not unlike that of a routine engineering drawing but without measurements. I had no idea that in later life I would be involved in designing and creating countless engineering drawings. The following morning in school, I showed my sketch to my classmates. They looked blank. When I told them that it was a railway engine and enthusiastically pointed out the chimney, the roof of the driver's cabin and the like, my fellow students remained unimpressed and



unconvinced. I explained to them that how an object would be represented in a drawing depended upon the position from which it was looked at. I told them that a gramophone record seen sideways would appear like a line. So a straight line could represent a gramophone record too. This example was a strategic error on my part. While verbally describing an aspect which was not readily understood by listeners, you should never choose an example which would be even more incomprehensible.

My classmates burst out laughing. All this took place while the teacher was conducting a class. One of the students snatched the drawing from me, took it straight to the teacher and asked him what it was. The teacher did not have the foggiest idea. Another student told the teacher that I had drawn a straight line and called it a gramophone record. Yet another said that I claimed that what I had drawn was a railway engine. Smiling with amusement, the teacher observed that I said such things because I was loony. The teacher had confirmed what the students had suspected all along. And I suffered this nickname for a year or so.

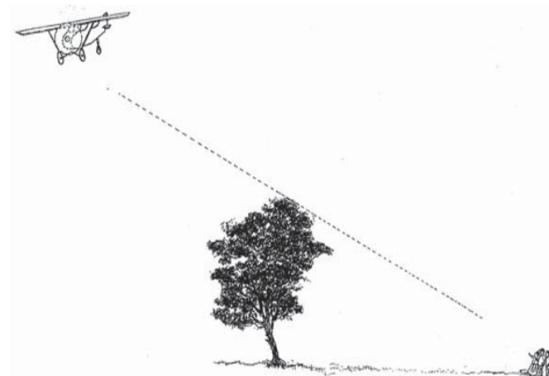
\* \* \*

I was born in Goripalayam in Madurai in 1936. In the late 1930s, hardly any plane at all flew over this town. However, in the early 1940s, during World War II, an occasional plane, or even a small group of them, would fly over Madurai. At such times, men, women and children would rush out of their houses, pointing at the sky and shout excitedly, "Aeroplane, aeroplane."

In the early 1940s, while in my first years in school, we heard one morning an ear-splitting roar, liberally sprinkled with equally loud sputtering sounds. All the children and teachers rushed out of the 'open' classrooms to see what was up. Suddenly and briefly, we saw a plane flying very low. It was obviously in trouble. It seemed that the plane might even crash somewhere nearby. For the first

time we children saw a plane flying so very low. Some of them claimed that the plane flew so low that it touched the top of a tree which was not far away and was in full view.

It seemed so, yet somehow I knew that though the plane was not high in the sky, it did fly at a level distinctly higher than that of the tree top. Besides, I sort of felt – even 'knew' – that the plane was farther away from the tree. I could see that the plane did not touch the tree top because the third dimension was in play although, of course, at that time I had never heard of 'three dimension' or 3D or stereo vision.



\* \* \*

By 1975, I lost the vision in my right eye and became a 'one-eyed Jack', so to speak. Even with one eye, a person can see objects that are close somewhat three-dimensionally. If you see an object at 15 cm and another at 20 cm, then the lens within the eye will increase or decrease its power accordingly. So, you would have a stereo effect somewhat vaguely. But I could not even enjoy this aspect, because due to a cataract the biological lens in my left eye was removed in the early 1980s, without a clear plastic intraocular lens. Since then I have been seeing the world – to the extent I could see – only two-dimensionally. It seems to me that it is not at all inappropriate for such a person to write about perspective drawings which are two-dimensional.

\* \* \*

A temple with its tower at the foot of a hill is not an uncommon sight in Tamil Nadu. Alagar Temple, north of Madurai, with its *gopuram* (tower), for instance, is very near the base of the forested Alagar Hill, as you can see from my picture.

Again, Murugan Temple, south of Madurai, has its tower north of the monolithic hillock, Thirupparamkunram. Many long *mandapams* (spacious halls) lead you to the sanctum which is carved right into the virgin rock of the hillock. From the point of view of perspective, you can make very interesting observations relating to the pair – a temple tower and its backdrop of a hill.

When I was a schoolboy, well before nondescript, characterless, shanty houses cropped up here and there north of the hill, you could have a clear unobstructed view of this hill and the relatively smaller Muruga Temple tower from half-a-kilometre away or more. As you approach the temple, the image of both grew larger, but that of the tower grew more significantly so that, after a stage, its image would be higher than that of the hill. Now, at close range, strangely – perhaps not so strangely – you would perceive the hill to be smaller.

\* \* \*

A south-facing street house in Goods Shed Street in Madurai had a spiral staircase right on the pavement, leading directly to the first floor. Spiral staircases are used as great 'space savers', but they do have a beauty of their own. As a schoolboy, whenever I happened to go by this house, I chose to walk on the opposite pavement so that I could have an overall view of it and its spiral stairway and enjoy its simple beauty.

One day, on a whim, I began running up and down the spiral steps as fast as I could. When I ran up, I suddenly saw a woman at the top of the staircase looking down at me sternly. I stopped short. She advised me not to run madly down the spiral. My head could spin and if I tripped, I might badly hurt myself in the narrow, sharply twisting stairway. She was not really angry with me for my intrusion into her space, she was only concerned that I should not injure myself because of my rashness. That was the typical Madurai of my boyhood.

At that time, of course, I had not thought of the problems posed by the perspective of an open spiral staircase. (I later did and drew a picture of the house.)

(To be concluded)

# Social life of the Dutch at Pulicat

(By P.J. Sanjeeva Raj)

The Dutch East India Company, formed in 1602, arrived at Pulicat in 1606 and stayed there till 1690, establishing a flourishing maritime trade with the Southeast Asian countries. Pulicat Lake, as a natural harbour, was their international seaport. Tapan Raychaudhuri, in his *Jan Company in Coromandel*, his doctoral dissertation to the University of Oxford, published in 1962, devoted the last chapter to the administration and social life of the Dutch at Pulicat. This article is a summary of that chapter. His aim in portraying their social life, he said, was "to give a glimpse of the complex human reality, interwoven with primarily economic efforts."

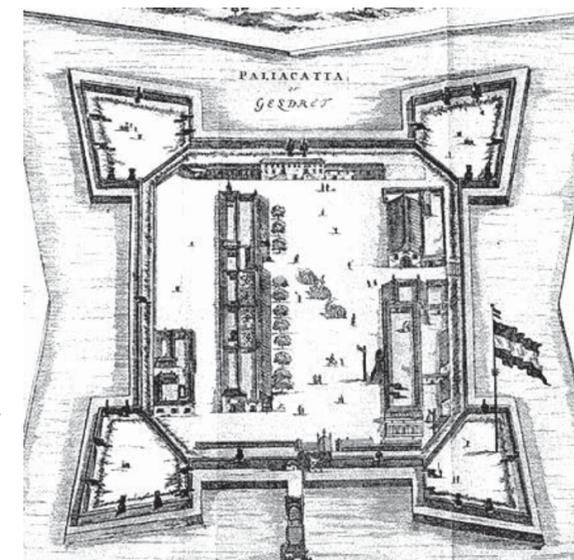
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Within seven years of their arrival at Pulicat, the first achievement of the Dutch was to construct Fort Geldria, which some criticised as being one "maintained at great expense, but to little profit!"

All the top administrators, like the Governor, chief factors, factors, miscellaneous employees like surgeons, a priest, and a school teacher, who needed high security, were all accommodated within the fort. A garrison of Dutch and Indian soldiers also was maintained under a captain within Fort Geldria.

Private Dutch housing colonies, despite constraints, came up in the Pulicat town. Nearly one-quarter of the town was inhabited by the Dutch, perhaps the present Big Street, across the main road, in front (south) of the Dutch fort. This was necessitated because widows and children of the deceased Dutch employees, besides the retired Dutch employees of the Company, were allowed to stay on in Pulicat. Also, with marriages of the Dutch to local women increasing, there was a need for such settlements outside the fort. Huge private houses were built in the Dutch style in Pulicat, and there was even an avenue with three parallel rows of trees. The company had a 'club house' in the middle of a garden on the outskirts of the town, to which the factors used to retire in times of extreme heat.

The Dutch on the Coromandel adopted some of Indian practices, like gargling their mouths after every meal, chewing betel leaves, and taking a siesta. Their usual drink at midday and in the afternoons was a mixture of water, beer and sugar, boiled together. Occasionally, some Spanish wine or rum was added. Shiraz wine from Persia and Indian arak were also popular. Tea-drinking was a habit by the Dutch developed in India, and they preferred Chinese tea.



Fort Geldria.

Dutch women, more than the men, were said to be fond of tea, but boiled it with sugar-candy. Green tea leaves were used as salad on board Dutch ships.

The company's policy of permitting mixed marriages was adopted in 1614, but the only condition laid down was that the prospective local bride must first accept Christianity before marriage to a Dutchman. In 1614 itself, a number of Dutch soldiers got married to Indian women. Then, in 1622, when the practice of keeping Indian concubines was prohibited by order of Batavia (Djakartha, today) their headquarters, 38 Dutch men got married to their Indian mistresses at Pulicat in one day, and the Governor himself arranged a grand wedding feast to celebrate the nuptials.

The policy of Dutch-Indian mixed marriages was highly commended by the then Governor, Wemmer van Berchem, who wrote, "This is the only means where we must hold and maintain our power in India, as the Portuguese have done before us." Married Dutch soldiers were treated with special favour by the company, and were allowed to live inside the fort, at least during the rainy season. In the latter decades of the 17th Century, a large proportion of the population at the Pulicat Town consisted of mestizos and castizos (quadroons), who were all the children of such mixed Dutch-Indian marriages. Women from a particular caste, "Thiola" (not traceable today), were said to frequently marry the Dutch men at Pulicat. Coromandel, in the opinion of a Dutch Governor, "was more a prey to Bacchus and Venus (wine and women), than any other place, in India!"

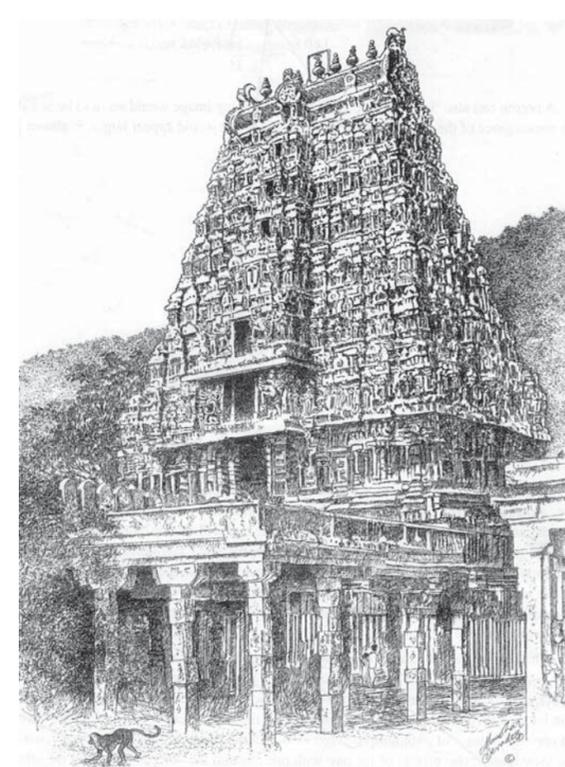
Marriages between Dutch men and Dutch women were

also not infrequent in Pulicat. Coromandel factors were a very good marriage market for Dutch maidens. In 1615, six girls for Holland stopped over at Pulicat, on their way to Batavia, but five of them got engaged to local Dutch employees. Such Dutch employees married to Dutch women were given an additional monetary allowance but, unfortunately, soon after they received such an allowance, they got rid of their wives! Hence, in 1619, the then Governor, Hans de Haze recommended that only a few selective Dutch-Dutch marriages should be allowed in Pulicat in the future.

There was a small church within Fort Geldria, and a Dutch minister (priest) used to preach there every day. As the Portuguese language was widely understood, he preached both in Dutch as well as in Portuguese. The priest conducted burial services in the Dutch cemetery. Some clergymen worked hard to spread the Protestant faith to the Catholic Christians of San Thomé and baptised 40 of their children in 1615-1616. Some clergy took an interest in the Tamil language and in Hindu mythology and wrote about them.

The Dutch maintained an excellent rapport with the Indian rulers, chiefly as a strategy for success in their trade and, hence, the Dutch were treated cordially when they visited the nayaks to whom they took presents brought from Europe. In turn, when dignitaries like Qutub Shah of Masulipatam visited Pulicat in 1676, the Dutch organised a pleasure trip for him to go to sea in a special boat with a throne on it! They organised songs and music and even a mock battle at sea for his

(Continued on page 6)



Quizzin'  
with  
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Who was voted the 'Cricketer of the Generation' by an eminent 50-member jury at the recent ESPN Cricinfo Awards?
2. Which Indian airline recently signed a deal worth \$4.4 billion with Boeing for the supply of 42 Next Generation 737 MAX8 aircraft?
3. Which Northeastern State recently won its first Santosh Trophy, the symbol of supremacy in the national football championship?
4. Who has regained the top spot as the world's richest billionaire, with a net worth of \$76 billion, according to *Forbes* magazine's annual list?
5. How many districts will there be in the new State of Telangana?
6. Which film won the most statuettes, a total of seven, at this year's Oscars ceremony?
7. India-born scientist, Dr. Anil Jain has built 'Phantom', the world's first 3D model of which element of the human body?
8. Which former Union Minister of Defence and Finance recently released his book *India at Risk - Mistakes, Misconceptions and Misadventures of Security Policy*, on 60 years of Indian security issues?
9. Who has been chosen for the prestigious International Gandhi Peace Prize for 2013?
10. Irish fruit firm Fyffes and U.S. rival Chiquita recently agreed to combine, in an all-stock deal, valued at about \$1.07 billion, to create the world's largest company for which common fruit?  
\* \* \*
11. Which venerable Madras institution was in 1970 given an award by UNESCO for the outstanding work it had done in the eradication of small-pox by producing the Freeze Dried Smallpox Vaccine?
12. Name the two Tamilians who were awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1998.
13. What was started in Madras by Harry Crowe Buck in 1920?
14. Which road in Nungambakam is named after a civil surgeon, who in 1789 established a nopalry in the present-day Nandanam-Saidapet area?
15. What became of the garden measuring 840 x 500 yards, that Governor Collet gave Sunku Rama, after Governor Pitt decided to take it over?
16. In which district is the Palani Murugan temple?
17. What is the present name of the college that started out as Madras Women's College with an intake of 33 students?
18. What was famous film-maker K. Subrahmanyam forced to sell to S.S. Vasan for Rs. 86,427-11-9, because of financial problems?
19. Which 'institution' was inaugurated on September 27, 1947 at St. George's Cathedral?
20. A simple one to finish. How many domes are there in the Thousand Lights Mosque?

(Answers on page 8)

## Two pages of book views

# A people's person, this film-maker

While the world may know Nagi Reddi as a cineaste through Vijaya Vahuni studios and Vijaya Productions, a publisher of the multilingual children's magazine *Chandamama* and founder of the Vijaya Group of Hospitals, he himself says, "When I receive an award, or when people congratulate me for a certain success, I remember a scene in a film by Charlie Chaplin. Standing by the roadside, he suddenly finds the passers-by offering him spontaneous salutes. Greatly surprised, he returns the salutes with warm smiles, but soon grows suspicious about it and looks around. Lo and behold, behind stood a majestic statue of Abraham Lincoln! Well, in Chaplin's case what was behind him was visible to others but not visible to him. In my case what is behind me is visible to me though not visible to others. Behind every so-called success of mine is the action and dedication of so many of my lieutenants, collaborators and workers. Like the varied colours making a rainbow, they made my career whatever it is worth." The subtext running through the book, *Many Shades Make a Rainbow: Reminiscences of B. Nagi Reddi*, is that he was first and last a people's person.

Nagi, or Reddiar, as he was fondly addressed by his contemporaries, never failed to credit every guiding light in his life, be it his kind-hearted mother, Erukamma who, he remembers, let birds feed on harvested grain; tutor Ramaraju, who taught him to recite the *Bhagavatam*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; and Narasimha

Naidu who taught him the English alphabet when he moved from Pottipadu village in Kadapa taluk to Madras; or his 'foster mother' who took care of him during his stay in Rangoon and later helped him recover debts at Haththuram, a village near Karachi; his elder brother B.N. Reddi who launched Rohini Pictures (*Gruhalakshmi*, 1938) and Vahuni Productions (*Vande Mataram*, 1939); and his dear friend and associate of 35 years A.V. Subba Rao who wrote under the name of Chakrapani; MGR with whom he produced and directed films and whose motivation resulted in the founding of the Vijaya Hospitals; and his life partner Seshamma who once refused his gift of a piece of jewellery and, instead, asked him to invest it in his printing press.

Nagi Reddi's father Narasimha Reddi started a wholesale

headed the Salt Satyagraha in Madras, he went back to his village and spent the money his father gave him spinning khadi. At the age of 18, he cut his teeth in business sailing to Rangoon with a consignment of onions. Returning to Madras after a year or two, he involved himself in his father's business and his brother's film production. He launched the publicity of the film *Sumangali* in Madras city in 1940 and during the film's release at Paragon Theatre tackled blackmarketeers with his group of 50-odd workers, and then redeployed the anti-socials to distribute handbills. His idea of making in Bangalore a 40-feet-high cutout of Anjaneya back in 1942 to publicise the film *Bhakta Pothana* made it a box-office hit.

Nagi Reddi's first film production was the Telugu *Shavukaru* released in April 1950 un-

• by T.K. Srinivasa Chari

and export business in Madras in 1916 when Nagi was four years old and was living with his maternal grandparents in Pottipadu. Later, Nagi Reddi came to Madras and studied in Muthialpet High School in Govindappa Naicken Street before he dropped out to join his father's business. As a student, he was interested in participating in the freedom struggle. He recalls having sold a paper called *Sudandira Changu* (Freedom Conch) on the Marina. Then, around the time T. Prakasam, Panthulu and Durgabai Deshmukh spear-

headed Vijaya Productions, started by him and Chakrapani and made in Vahuni Studios in Vadapalani. The studio built on an expanse of 10 acres grew in stature and came to be known as the largest in Southeast Asia. To recover money lent out to Moola Narayanasamy, Nagi Reddi took over from him as the Managing Director of the Vahuni Productions. He also helped Narayanasamy with funds to build the Vahuni Studio which the Nagi Reddi-Chakrapani duo took on lease.

His film creations along with Chakrapani included scores



made in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi. While story, screenplay and production were Chakrapani's department, Nagi Reddi took charge of marketing and business promotion. Their films included *Pathala Bhairavi* (1951 - Telugu, Tamil), *Missamma* (1955 - Tamil, Telugu), *Kadan Vaangi Kalyanam* (Tamil - 1959), *Gundamma Katha* (1962 - Telugu), *Manithan Maaravillai* (1962 - Tamil), *Maduve Maadi Nodu* (1963 - Kannada), *Enga Veetu Pillai* (1965 - Tamil) and *Ram aur Shyam* (1967 - Hindi). Vijaya Productions also made films along with other companies, notably Devar Films and Kerala Pictures.

Two popular actor-politicians who enjoyed a demigod status, MGR and NTR, were both close to Nagi Reddi whose films helped them gain popularity which later translated into votes. Founder of the Telugu Desam Party, NTR acted in about 20 films produced by Vijaya Productions, including many mythological films. The 1969 film *Nam Naadu* with MGR and Jayalalitha had political overtones and showed MGR winning elections. Nagi Reddi and MGR went to Mekala theatre to watch the people's reactions. When the viewers wanted one of the scenes to be replayed, an emotional MGR, hugged Nagi and said, "O Reddiar! I have received the people's acceptance." Their friendship continued even after MGR became Chief Minister. Nagi Reddi was appointed a member on the advisory panel of the Government's noon meal scheme. When the Vijaya Health Centre came up, a Dr. MGR memorial arch was constructed on the premises.

A winner of the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke award in 1987, Nagi Reddi was president of the Film Federation of India for two terms, president of the South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce for three terms, chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam Board and president of the All India Master Printers' Federation for three terms. He passed away on February 25, 2004 at the age of 91. The book, edited and published by his son Viswam, has more than 100 black and white pictures.

## THE DUTCH AT PULICAT

(Continued from page 5)

entertainment. The king seemed to have attended a church service in Fort Geldria and showed great respect for the Bible.

Local rulers used to gift some villages to the Company. Following the local procedures, the Company, in turn, used to collect five-eighths of the crops as taxes, either in coin or in grain. Annual capitation tax was payable by everybody, excepting the Brahmins and prostitutes! Even in those days, the Northeast monsoon every year, and the periodic but severe and extended famines, as the one of 1630, were a great handicap for living, tax collection, navigation, trade and communications for the Dutch traders.

The Indian partners in the Dutch textile trade gave the Company the right to arrest and punish any local weavers or painters who failed to carry out their contracts.

A Council of Justice for the coast was created by the Dutch headquarters in Batavia and it was vested with powers to judge and punish erring Company employees. Accordingly, the Coromandel government had powers of life and death over Company employees, and there have been some verdicts for execution pronounced by this Council of Justice. Increasing illegal trade and other forms of corruption in Pulicat forced the Company to appoint a Superintendent in 1684, with extraordinary powers of supervision,

enquiry and punishment. Corruption was so rampant that even a clergyman was recalled to Holland for his scandalous ways of life in Pulicat. Another priest was sent back to Batavia.

Raychaudhuri sums up, "The administrative organisation... and the social life of the Dutch community had hardly any impact on the society or economics of the (Indian) region. They were significant only so far as they provided the immediate social and administrative framework for a unit of commercial expansion, in an alien setting." The Dutch had to be highly adaptive to the host country, chiefly for the sole objective of economic success in international trade.

# Founder of Indian forest conservancy

Prior to British rule in India, forest conservation was not a matter of serious concern. But with British rule there was unprecedented pressure on our forests for commercial exploitation. At one stage, the indiscriminate exploitation led to a denudation of forests that caused silting of rivers and poor flow of water, leading to famine. Among the East India Company surgeons were a few persons sensitive about the environment. They were ardent nature lovers who showed keen interest in preservation of natural wealth. Among them Dr. Hugh Cleghorn stands out as a practical forester who was responsible for starting and organising a new department.

Cleghorn was born in Madras in 1820. His father, Peter Cleghorn, was a Registrar of the Supreme Court of Madras. Hugh Cleghorn had his education in St. Andrew's University, Scotland, where his papers are available. He took his medical degree from the University of Edinburgh. His first posting was in 1842 to the Madras Hospital, where he acquainted himself with tropical diseases.

While accompanying the troops, he had the opportunity to visit forests in the southern region and he acquired a sound knowledge about them.

When he was posted to

Shimoga in Mysore State, he observed the wasteful practice of shifting cultivation in forest areas. He took this unhealthy practice up with the Commissioner. As a result, shifting cultivation was banned in the State. This step taken by him was the first in the preservation of forests in India.

While he was in the Mysore Commission, the strenuous work in the difficult terrain affected his health within a few years of his landing in India. He had to sail back to Britain, and he reached after surviving a ship

● **Dr. H.F.C. Cleghorn, Founder of Forest Conservancy in India, by S. Subbarayalu, I.F.S. (Rtd.) was recently released in Chennai. Here he narrates Cleghorn's story in brief.**

wreck. While he was in Britain, he took up at the appropriate forums there the serious issue of unscrupulous felling of forests in India. The matter was paid close attention to by the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS). Dr. Cleghorn was asked to give a detailed report on the issue. His report was emphatic and stressed the need for a separate department to scientifically manage India's forests. His recommendation was the first of its kind in the British Empire. On his return to Madras, Cleghorn was posted as Profes-

sor in Botany and Materia Medica at the Madras Medical College.

There was an acute shortage of timber supply at the time and the Governor called for a meeting at which Cleghorn was entrusted with the task of finding the timber. He grabbed the opportunity and stressed the point that formation of a separate department would help to ensure a systematic management of forests and ensure a constant supply of timber. A separate department was formed in 1856 for the Madras Presidency and

Dr. Cleghorn was posted as Conservator of Forests, his tenure as a military surgeon coming to an end. Once the department was formed, he recruited suitable dedicated persons to man it. R.H. Beddome was one of those drafted by him from military service as Assistant Conservator of Forests. He proved an excellent naturalist, who authored many books.

Dr. Cleghorn managed the forests scientifically and raised many plantations for fuel and timber. When tea plantations were being raised on a large scale, he wrote to the Collector

of Coimbatore to ensure that such plantations were not allowed to be developed on the higher slopes in the interest of preservation of the pristine natural forests. In the Nilgiris, he took special steps to protect the valuable sholas from where the streams originated. He introduced many economically important species. He was also associated with the formation of the botanical gardens in Lal Bagh, Bangalore, Ooty and Coonoor. These gardens were designed by him and he instituted work on them.

In 1861 he was requested to prepare a report on the formation of a forest department for the Punjab and based on it the department was formed. Dr. Brandis was appointed the first Inspector General of Forests there. In coordination with Cleghorn, the I.G. of Forests, worked on a report for forest conservation in India and also for State level management. For his pioneering work, Dr. Cleghorn was conferred the coveted title 'The Founder of Forest Conservancy in India' by the Government of India. He retired in 1869 and returned to Scotland. In retirement, he got an exclusive course in Forestry included in the syllabus of the University of Edinburgh. He also got involved in the selection of personnel for the Indian Forest Service.

The Cleghorn papers preserved in St. Andrew's University gave me many leads to explore. There were letters from a bookseller in Edinburgh and, in one of them, he sympathises with Dr. Cleghorn on the loss



Dr. Hugh Cleghorn.

of his books in a fire in 1852. On further enquiry, I gathered that there was indeed a fire in his apartment in Broadway which destroyed all his belongings. All his books on Forestry, Botany and other subjects were destroyed, but they were later replaced and his valuable collection is in the Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Another letter by his father revealed that the ship *Sutlej* in which Hugh Cleghorn was travelling back home was wrecked and he was stranded at the Cape of Good Hope. This led me to a newspaper wherein full details of the wreck were available. He used to help many; one of them was Dr. Palaniandy who was in military service. He helped him to go to Britain and guided him in his medical courses. He helped him with finance also, which was later repaid. Above all these qualities, he was true to his profession and proved himself a very good and popular doctor.

Anyone in India interested in the environment would shudder to think about the fate of our forests and the environment today, if it were not for the likes of Dr. Hugh Cleghorn.

## 3 fascinating journeys

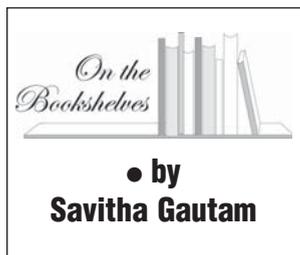
This column is all about journeys. One person's soul-searching mission is as interesting as another's quest for history. Read on...

*If it's Monday it Must be Madurai: A Conducted Tour of India* – Srinath Perur (Penguin, Rs. 499).

There is nothing more exciting than taking off on a trip. I for one love to travel to places which are not on the tourist maps. And that's why Srinath's book sounds like a fun. This delightful travelogue is an account of ten tours conducted in various parts of the country. While it provides a panoramic view of India's tourist locations and that of travellers and their experiences, it also paints a vivid portrait of a vibrant, ever-changing nation where life throbs despite its traditionalism. Also, this is like an update on travel as a form of entertainment today. Bus-loads of people, clad in shorts, loafers, hats and dark glasses, a Canon or Nikon swinging around the neck, alighting from buses, clicking away and getting back are common sights in many places. Srinath, who is Banga-

lore-based, captures such imagery with realism and humour.

This book gives you a hint on what it is like to travel for adventure, lust and God. It's peppered with rich, funny and wonderful experiences. Sample



this...Imagine hanging on to the back of a camel in the Thar or rediscovering music on the trail of the saint-poet Kabir or crossing root bridges near Cherrapunji.

Funny, yet factual, here is a lively read when you have a long journey to undertake.

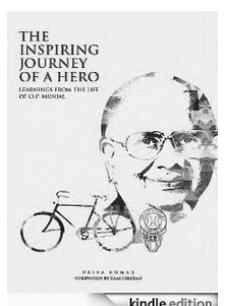
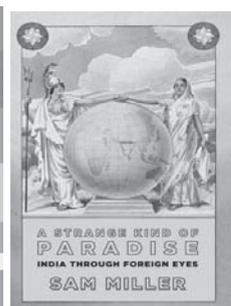
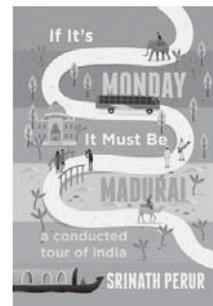
*The Inspiring Journey of a Hero: Learnings from the Life*

of O.P. Munjal – Priya Kumar with foreword by Ram Charan (Penguin, Rs. 399).

Here is another journey of an Indian whose vision changed Independent India in more ways than one. When O.P. Munjal started Hero Cycles in 1956, fuelled by meagre resources and an insatiable ambition, he did so with the sole intention of making India more mobile. He did it – and how!

His vision was to create an inexpensive and effective mode of transport for a post-independence nation on the move. Today, it's common knowledge that Hero Cycles went on to become the world's largest bicycle manufacturer.

This book chronicles the life and times of O.P. Munjal through anecdotes from his professional and personal life. He proved that a people-focussed management style could be superior to the process-driven systems of the West. The book is a result of extensive conversa-



tions with Munjal, Hero employees, dealers and family members.

Priya takes you on a rollercoaster ride as seen through the lens of a visionary with the soul of a poet.

*A Strange Kind of Paradise* – Sam Miller (Rs. 599).

Down the ages, much of India's history has come to be recorded thanks to the thoughtful writings of foreign travellers. Fa'hien, Ibn Batuta, Vasco Da Gama, Marco Polo... their first-person accounts of life in an ancient country that was filled with riches have paved the way for both societal dogmas and cultural rendezvous.

In this fascinating book, Miller features many foreign chroniclers, exposes a few of

their fantasies, and dismisses long-held stereotypes about race, identity and migration. He examines how the ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese, Arabs, Africans, Europeans and Americans imagined India. There are also accounts by the more recent travellers, like Mark Twain, E.M. Forster, Allen Ginsberg, the Beatles and Steve Jobs. Interspersed between these tales is Miller's own story of his 25-year-long love affair with India.

This spellbinding 2,500-year-long journey through history, culture and society, does not just fascinate but is also a wonderful academic and scholarly record. And, yes, there are many, many moments when you burst out laughing!

Take this journey, it's worth it!

# Looking ahead at urbanising India

(Continued from page 2)

most of the time out on the streets. Town planners have to take into consideration the needs and aspirations of the slum dwellers and think of alternative creative solutions to solve their problems and those of the city.

**Pankaj Joshi**, Ex. Director UDRI: Cities have come to be seen as economic engines, enablers of social and intellectual collaboration, and hence the preferred residence for much of the world's population. Unfortunately, in cities around the world – and especially in India – better economic conditions have not translated into a better quality of life. Today, in Indian cities, there is scarcity of every service integral to a better quality of life... Sadly, the singular pursuit of framing the city's development in economic numbers ignores these aspects. A Development Plan has to reframe afresh as a city for its people and their aspirations for a better life – a life that has affordable housing, open space, quality health care and education, accessible public transportation and safety for women and children.

**Dr. Manjiri Kamat**, Associate Professor of History: Cities in India, like the rest of the world, are undergoing a rapid transformation... Some cities have a heritage that dates back to pre-colonial times while the port cities of Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai rose to prominence during the British Raj. New urban agglomerations like Hyderabad, Bengaluru and many others have arisen in the era of globalisation. The principal challenge for urban planners and policy makers is to develop urban spaces in a more holistic manner so as to safeguard the built heritage and promote development with sensitivity for environment. Above all, the stakeholders who are the urban inhabitants must find a voice in shaping the city of the future.

To me, an ideal city should be remembered for its Equality, Adequate Infrastructure, Sense of Belonging, Sense of Place... Why are European cities so beautiful? The central cores with their plazas and gardens are carefully nurtured and preserved. We must ensure that our core areas are similarly restored and revitalised.

**Charles Correa**: Architect: The British did not build Bombay – Indians did. The ini-

tiative and energy was ours – and the urban context was structured by the British. What is grotesque today is to see all that invaluable initiative and energy running amuck. So 20-storey buildings in Parel are being constructed just 10 feet apart – creating a world without hope for the occupants. A world in which future generations of Indians will be condemned to live.

There is nothing wrong in building for profit – London was constructed by private developers sub-dividing the old aristocratic estates. This is what created Belgravia, Mayfair, Regent's Park, and so forth. The crucial difference was that these developers building within parameters clearly defined by the authorities, viz. roads, parks, schools, hospitals, etc.

Speak to any American, and they will bemoan devastation of their cities. Development in their downtown areas in the early 20th Century led to a dearth of essential social amenities – which drove families out into the suburbs, leaving behind an urban battlefield, as in the Bronx, Cleveland and Detroit. This does not happen in Paris, London, or Vienna. Why? Because European cities have never allowed FSI to rise higher than their per capita standards for social amenities.

Raising FSI does not help a city – it destroys it. Look at Manhattan today – the only families left are very rich whites and very poor blacks. And from this polarisation follows much else: distrust, violence, crime – which leads to Gated Communities – that escalate the confrontation into a real battle: Them vs. Us. For centuries our cities, like Kolkata and Bombay,

have existed with great inequalities – but the *maidans* and other public spaces were always shared by rich and poor alike. This common ground was the essential safety valve that let it all co-exist. Lose it – and the city goes the way of Johannesburg, Nairobi and Sao Paolo. Is this what we want our cities to become?

I believe in the cities of India. They are our future. Like the wheat fields of the Punjab, and the coal fields of Bihar, they are a crucial part of our national wealth. For our urban centres nurture the skills that we need to develop our nation: Doctors, engineers, nurses, lawyers – these are all urban skills. Then again, they are Engines of Economic Growth – properly managed, they would generate the funds needed not only for their own development, but for the hinterland around (as in the case of Hong Kong and South China). Lastly, they are Places of Hope – for millions and millions of the have-nots of our society, perhaps their only path to a better future.

**Tasneem Mehta**, Vice Chairman, INTACH: By 2015, three of the world's 17 megacities will be in India. There will be 34 cities of more than 1.5 million people and 50 per cent of India's population will live in these cities. The most rapid growth however, will happen in tier-II cities such as Ahmaddabad, Hyderabad... We are at the threshold of an important moment of transformation. This is an opportunity to define ourselves through creative solutions that do not clone worn out ideas.

What is an ideal city? I

would insist on green spaces – lots of it, like Central Park in New York or Hyde Park in London. The French President recently invited famous architects to rethink Paris as a post-Kyoto city. One of France's most eminent architects proposed that all traffic should be routed underground and a large green swathe should connect Paris. Another architect would like to create a checkerboard of built and green spaces so that almost every building or complex faces a green area. If I could wave a wand and transform our cities, I would invite the most innovative architects in the world to design these cities but I would insist that each city's cultural heritage must be privileged along with the building of distinctive contemporary spaces.

**Manu Bhatnagar**: Already five states are more than 50 per cent urbanised. The pressure on resources, habitats and biodiversity will be tremendous and sustainability will be a key issue. The human dominated landscape needs to be re-visualised so that human habitats are interspersed with natural habitats, ecological services areas, local nature reserves and corridors in a seamless mosaic.

**K.T. Ravindran**: Many of the principles that are emerging in new city designs can be seen embedded in the pre-industrial cities. The lesson that India's old cities hold for the crisis in modern cities is not a romanticised notion of historic formalism. They are sound principles towards which new cities have to inevitably move. – (Courtesy: *Virasat*, the journal of INTACH)

## Answers to Quiz

1. Sachin Tendulkar; 2. SpiceJet; 3. Mizoram; 4. Bill Gates; 5. Ten districts, along with Hyderabad; 6. *Gravity*; 7. Fingerprint; 8. Jaswant Singh; 9. The noted Gandhian and environmentalist, Chandi Prasad Bhatt; 10. Banana.

11. The King Institute at Adyar; 12. M.S. Subbulakshmi and C. Subramaniam; 13. YMCA College of Physical Education; 14. Dr. James Anderson; 15. It was developed as Chintadripet; 16. Dindigul; 17. Queen Mary's College; 18. The property on which Gemini Studios came up; 19. Church of South India; 20. Five.

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