

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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## Are we waiting for their collapse?

(By The Editor)

Who is to blame when a heritage building collapses? The Government would have it that the building is responsible in every way for it. Common sense would say that years of negligence, irresponsible additions and alterations, and sheer administrative apathy would be the principal causes. This debate has been revived with renewed vigour following the collapse of the historic and 144-year-old Mairie building in Pondicherry. That is a loss which the Union Territory neighbouring our State will have to now live with, but there are several similarly endangered buildings in Chennai about which our administration seems to be in no hurry to take steps.

The fall of the Mairie has followed a predictable pattern. Years of protests from heritage enthusiasts about its poor maintenance and lack of routine conservation were followed by vague promises by the Government. Official sanction for restoration came in 2010 but no actual work was taken up, the process of tenders taking its own time. In the meantime, the Indian Institute of Technology was asked to assess the structural stability of the building, which it did and certified some portions to be stronger than others. Conservation work began earlier this year, but it was too late, for following torrential rains in November, a major portion of the edifice collapsed. The Union Territory Government immediately authorised the demolition of the edifice, citing risk to people in the vicinity. But after heritage activists protested and submitted petitions, the shell of the ground floor has been allowed to re-



Khalsa Mahal.



Bharat Insurance Building.



Gokhale Hall.



National Art Gallery.

main while what is to be done is being discussed as advised by the Lieutenant Governor.

Bringing down a heritage building is usually executed very quickly at a speed rarely

matched by restoration activities. That is a script played out everywhere in our country, more so in our State. Tamil Nadu and Chennai, in particular, have scores of such instances. Poor maintenance is usually the first indicator that the administration is not interested in protecting a heritage structure. Take the example of the stand-off between the Government and conservationists in the 1980s over *Bentinck's Building*. It was only by emptying the structure and stopping all maintenance that the case for demolition was strengthened. The same holds good for several others – *Chepauk Palace*, *Bharat Insurance Building*, *Gokhale Hall*, the *National Art Gallery* – the list is endless.

And it is not as though we have had no collapses either. *Capper House* in the Queen Mary's College campus was an instance of that. The oldest private building on the beachfront, it fell after being locked up and neglected. *Arthur Wellesley's house* inside Fort St. George now consists mainly of debris and has remained that way for over thirty years! More recently, the *Madrassa e Azam* on Mount Road has lost a wing while everyone quibbles as to what ought to be done.

There are several more instances when it comes to delay in the start of conservation activities. Everyone knows that the dome surmounting the *National Art Gallery* in Egmore has developed a crack that is ever widening. But apart from emptying the building and putting up a warning that it is in an enfeebled state, the

(Continued on page 5)

## Madras Landmarks – 50 years ago



• One of the oldest organisations connected with the automobile in the country, the *Automobile Association of Southern India (AASI)* traces its roots to 1906 when six vehicle owners in the Nilgiris banded together to form a self-help group named the *Nilgiris Automobile Association*. A couple of months later, the *South India Motor Union (SIMU)* was formed in Madras with the same objectives. In the same year, the *Nilgiris* body merged with the *Madras* one, the two by then having a combined membership of 67. The *SIMU* became affiliated to the *Royal Automobile Club of England* in 1910, by which time its membership had grown to 181.

In 1921, with labour trouble spreading to the hills, car owners there got together to form a body that could decisively deal with the demand by chauffeurs for increased wages. This was the *New Nilgiris Motor Owners' Association*. This later became the *Nilgiris Automobile Association*, federated with the *Automobile Association of Great Britain*. This body later merged with the *SIMU*.

In 1930, the *SIMU*, in keeping with similar organisations across the world, changed its name to the *Automobile Association of Southern India*. Its offices in the city appear to have been on *Mount Road* ever since inception. The *Directory of Madras and South India of 1934* gives the address as 1-18, *Mount Road*. It lists *Sir Archibald Campbell, ICS*, as the *President*, *C. Gopala Menon* as the *Vice-President* and *Major F. Church* as *Secretary*. The *Governor of Madras* and the *Maharajah of Mysore* were its patrons. Later, the *Maharajahs of Travancore and Jodhpur* also became patrons. The annual subscription was Rs. 15 for car owners and Rs. 5 for motorcyclists. The Association's general objectives are listed as follows: "Encourage and develop the automobile movement in the *Madras Presidency, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore and Cochin* and other *Native States of Southern India* and to watch, protect and extend the rights and privileges of members and automobile owners generally by all possible means."

The *AASI* was one of the pioneers in printing detailed route maps of *South India*. It was also for several years responsible for furnishing statistics on motor vehicles to the Government. It has since added services such as the issue of international driving licences, assisting in obtaining of local licences, providing help in transfer of ownership of vehicles, releasing vehicles from hypothecation and providing travel information. It also provides assistance in towing vehicles of members, besides liaising with the *Regional Transport Authority*. Most importantly, it campaigns for road safety.

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Madras Musings wishes all its readers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

# Crowd-funding to support social causes?

Mary Kom successfully raised money through crowd funding for her boxing training institute.

"Groups, and even crowds, can be wiser than most and sometimes even all of their members; if they aggregate information," James Surowiecki says in his book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*.

This quote aptly describes what India is witnessing. We are in the midst of a social revolution facilitated by digital networking. The digital network impacts the political, social and economic fabric of the country by influencing the crowd. It provides a platform for like-minded people to discuss their passions and contribute to the cause. The effect is more pronounced in the case of politics. This should percolate to the other spheres of society. A lot of projects could be supported by crowd-funding, without waiting for government money.

Anyone who has taken part in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India campaign) knows about the paucity of dustbins in his locality and its impact on cleanliness. However, expecting the local authorities to increase the number of dustbins overnight is expecting too much. Hence, it would be helpful if the locals independently fund this need. The cost of dustbins would not be more than Rs. 20 per individual if there are around 200 interested donors. That is crowd-funding for you.

Crowd-funding, which came into existence, post the 2008 liquidity crunch, has gained popularity among start-ups, small businesses and voluntary organisations raising money in the United States.

Community crowd-funding is a boon for ideas which are not commercially viable but are important for the group of interested, passionate people. This is relevant as socially productive ideas fail due to lack of funding for being unprofitable. The implementation of these projects would have a multiplier effect on the growth of the economy.

Hypothetically, if Just Dial asks willing individuals to contribute Rupee 1 for every enquiry they make, so as to raise funds for dustbins in their areas, the problem of dustbins could soon be solved.

● by Abhishek Sinha

Community crowd-funding is not all about money, it is also about getting the masses hooked on to new ideas.

Traditionally, the film industry has been able to use crowd-funding. Shyam Benegal in the late 1970s funded his first movie *Manthan* through Rupee 1 invested by members of Gujarat Milk Cooperatives. For movie producers it also makes marketing sense to engage targeted viewers to finance production of the movie.

Geet Sethi, the promoter of Olympic Gold Quest, believes there is a need to bridge the gap between the funding provided by government and the funding required for training. Organisations such as India for Sports are acting as mediums for raising crowd-funds. With sports leagues becoming popular in almost all sports, funds flow would increase for these games.

There are also some business ideas with social benefits such as Biosense Technologies, a developer of urine analysis application. This Mumbai-based company was able to raise approximately half a million dollars through crowd-funding. There are around 150 projects that have already been funded in India.

Projects, which have social relevance, can also be funded through this source. Case in point is local literacy programmes, which raise the standard of living of the people of a particular community. With increase in employment in the service sector among the rural masses, funding would be relatively easier for development work in rural areas too.

The demographic changes in India are heavily loaded in favour of crowd-funding. The working population is young, and hence disposable incomes for projects that are viewed gainful by the wise crowd are higher. According to the 2012-13 annual report of Infosys, the average age of its employees is approximately 27.5 years, which is ten years younger than the average Microsoft employee in the US.

The social revolution is meaningless without community crowd-funding. A movement, which does not have funding capabilities, is like a toothless tiger. Hence, individuals should join hands to become groups and groups become a crowd to fund ideas for the greater interest of society in India. (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*)

# Lecture Demons

Sweet December is here and so is the Music Season. *The Man from Madras Musings* dons a musical hat during this time much to the distress of the Chief who, rather like Aurangzeb, prefers music to be buried deep. But as this is the time when the Chief lets the Yuletide spirit take over, he overlooks this minor transgression of MMM and forgives and forgets. Come January, Chief and MMM are back to brooding on matters of pith and moment. Ebenezer Scrooge and Bob Cratchit would about sum it up.

An integral part of the Music Season is, of course, the lecture demonstration, when the theoretical aspects of the performing art are discussed with vigour and animation. MMM usually enjoys these as much as he does the actual concerts. But of late he finds a certain pattern emerging in these 'lecdems' as they are called. It is only now that MMM understands what an editor-in-chief-cum-founder of a musical magazine meant when he labelled those who speak on music as 'lecdemons'.

into song. Most of these lecdemons have a lingering feeling that they would have blossomed as concert stars if only the audiences had had some true appreciation of worth. So they make use of this opportunity to give their singing voices an airing. This takes a good twenty minutes. And then comes the time when they look at their watches and exclaim in a shocked fashion, "Oh, is that the time? I got carried away and never noticed. This topic is an ocean and you can never do justice to it in 50 minutes." It always makes MMM wonder as to why the speaker then accepted the lecdem invitation if he/she was of the view that the time given was inadequate.

But to get back to the lecdem. The shock about the passage of time is followed by a beseeching request to the chairperson for ten minutes more. No doubt the ocean requires an hour and not fifty minutes to speak on. The request for extra time is usually denied, chiefly because there is another lecdemon waiting in the wings. That means it is time for the vote of thanks which is basically a repeat of all that was

fluid is phenol which is doled out in kilolitres to keep the place clean.

**THE WATER CONSERVATIONIST** – Deserts could take lessons from this place, it being so dry. There is not a drop of water – in the taps, or the cisterns, or anywhere else. That does not deter our populace from using the toilets and so the entire scatological history of the *sabha* is available at one glance or one whiff.

**THE ALIMENTARY CANAL** – This is structured on the same principle. The canteen is in close proximity to where the toilet is. The idea is that what goes in has to come out anyway. Those who eat do so with a full view of those who have eaten and are going about the post-prandial activities. That does not in any way affect either – the eaters and the defecators carry on merrily.

**THE HERITAGE SITE** – This is truly ancient. The urinal is a longish trough, rather like the kind where horses feed when in stables. Communal activity is chiefly encouraged in these places. As for the

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

As is well known, the golden age of this art was in the 2nd Century BC as is vouched for by some of its audience, who were clearly around even then. MMM, who like everyone else is not growing any younger, certainly agrees when it comes to the lecdems. Most of them keep repeating the same stuff that was churned out for years. Some are one-topic lecdemons – they did a Ph D on it, say, sometime in the 1940s and then dine out on it for ever after.

As for the actual lecdem – it is quite easily done. After all, when you have been speaking on the same stuff for years, it should flow out. It is, however, in content that most of these lecdems suffer terribly from. Almost all speakers waste their time on inanities – thanking the organiser, thanking the committee of experts who sit in the front row, thanking the audiences that sit in the rear rows, thanking the sound man, thanking the person who is operating the laptop, and so on. This takes around ten minutes of the allotted fifty.

Then follows a longish paean to their Guru who is dead and, therefore, is canonised as a saint and an all-knowing expert. This takes up a further 15 minutes. This is generally the cue to launch

said at the start. Then it is time to sidle into the wings, to the sounds of some sporadic applause.

### Swachh sabhas

It is, of course, the era of Swachh Bharat. It has become fashionable for volunteers all over the country to turn out in their Sunday best and wield brooms. One place where this is yet to make itself manifest is the *sabha*. Before you run away with the idea that people are littering or committing public nuisance in *sabhas* let *The Man from Madras Musings* disabuse you of that notion. What he means is that the *sabhas* themselves have set such low standards for their toilets that Swachh Bharat within their premises can only be a pipe dream.

Based on his considerable experience of *sabha* toilets, MMM shares with you a few classifications:

**THE OCEAN OF WORLDLY EXISTENCE** – This is the wettest place on earth, beating even Cherrapunji hollow. The taps leak, the overhead water tanks and cisterns drip and, as for the floor, it is a vast lake of a milky liquid. That last named is not to be confused with the ocean where the Preserver is said to recline on a serpent. This white

WC, it was probably imported in the years before Indian independence. There is an urgent need for repairs, but nobody is bothered, for everyone is occupied with the box office.

**THE OPEN AIR** – This is in reality a toilet in absentia. You are expected to make do with whatever facilities that exist, which are none. So the nearest compound wall beckons most regulars.

It never fails to surprise MMM that most *sabhas* who offer a lavish spread in terms of canteen facilities do not bother so much with the back-end of things. There are some, of course, who offer the very best in this aspect also, but these can be counted on one finger.

### Tailpiece

That Carnatic music has gone to the dogs has been an oft-repeated lament. *The Man from Madras Musings* was greatly surprised to note that this was a sentiment in the 17th Century as well. Does that mean that the best music was in the 2nd Century BC? That is a point to ponder over.

Meanwhile, here is MMM wishing you all the very best in 2015.

– MMM

# Deja vu!

*Uncanny similarities between SEZ Act 2005 and concessions granted to John Company for Madras in 1639*

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are not a new concept, but the scale, speed and socioeconomic ambience with which these are being created are entirely new. Since enactment of the SEZ Act 2005, 300 SEZs have become functional and 560 more approved. While reading about the foundation of Madras (now Chennai) in 1639, and the manner in which the British received a *firman* from the local ruler for grant of land and trading concessions, the similarity with the creation of SEZs raised a feeling of *deja vu*.

Government's proposal for SEZs aims to accelerate economic development by promoting export of goods and services, attracting foreign direct investment (Rs. 1,000 crore was expected by end-2007) and creating employment (500,000 jobs) through providing investors preferential treatment in terms of facilities and taxes. SEZs are deregulated areas within which special concessions are provided to industrial or commercial corporates so that they may flourish unhindered by the laws, rules and regulations that apply in the rest of the country, which are obviously construed as limiting corporate profits. The concessions are provided by the Special Economic Zones Act, 2005. Presumably corporates have had a hand in suggesting and drafting the legislation.

Exemptions from 21 Central Acts dealing with cesses, taxes and duties for products like rubber, oil, tobacco, sugar, tea, salt, mica, coffee, and modifications to the Income Tax Act, and amendments to the Insurance, Banking Regulation and Stamp Acts within SEZs provide concessions and simplify procedures to enhance competi-

• by

Maj. General S.G. Vombatkere, VSM (RETD.)

tiveness and create the necessary 'climate' for profits. The concessions concerning land, labour and rates of taxes, customs duties, etc. may be reduced or exempted altogether.

SEZs are favoured with water and electric power at subsidised rates. Workers cannot form trade unions for collective bargaining for fair wages and better working conditions, and are open to exploitation in 'sweet shops', the corporates thereby maximising profits. Also, the inapplicability of environmental laws within SEZs further enhance corporate profits by 'saving' expenditure on environmental protection.

\* \* \*

Government acquires land for SEZs to the extent required by the corporates that come up with a proposal for investment. Land is acquired (under Land Acquisition Act, 1894) from private owners and compensation is paid at rates determined by Government. Government may provide the land to the corporate at a rate higher than cost of acquisition, and gain revenue at the cost of the farmer. Or it may be sold at a subsidised rate (as in the case of the chemical SEZ at Nandigram in West Bengal), in which case the exchequer pays the difference. Whichever method is adopted, the corporate gains and the farmer or the public loses.

\* \* \*

From ancient times, high authority in any society (chieftain, king, emperor) promulgated edicts favouring particular powerful persons by bestowing property and/or power on them at the pleasure of the ruler, with the quid pro quo of that beneficiary paying tributes to the ruler by extracting taxes from the peasantry. In Moghul times, this was called a *firman*. In a modern democracy, governments pass laws empowering the administrative machinery to execute tasks and projects.

The Constitution of India mandates separation of powers of the executive, legislature and judiciary so that checks and balances are possible, and no one arm of the Constitution can gain undemocratic dominance. But contrarily, the SEZ Act actually integrates the powers of the executive, the elected institutions and the judiciary, in a government-appointed Development Commissioner, who is a bureaucrat, and/or the Developer, who is a business person (a corporate body is also a "person") providing the investment. Being exempted from the burden of laws that apply elsewhere in India, an SEZ is effectively separate from the Indian State in the form of a corporate colony. In this sense, the SEZ Act is not unlike a *firman* on the Government of India, providing corporate economic independence.

\* \* \*

On August 22, 1639, Francis Day of the British East India Company secured a piece of land near the fishing village of

(Continued on page 6)

## Must TV serials be so crude?

As usual MMM has hit the nail on the head with his Short 'N' Snappy take on TV serials (MM, November 16th).

Fully agreeing with him on the ridiculous and wholly farcical ICU scenes, I also would like to comment on the crass and vulgar aspects of almost all serials aired on various channels.

The crudest aspect is the undignified portrayal of women. I am amazed that no women's groups have taken this up and protested; probably they enjoy these scenes themselves.

Scenes where women are kicked, beaten, dragged by the hair and abused profanely are common. Equally common is women being portrayed as cunning, scheming, wicked and evil... be she a mother-in-law or a daughter-in-law or a sister-in-law. There also seems to be no such creature as a slim and svelte mother-in-law in these serials.

The background music is a torture to the ears ... there is scarcely a single dialogue between characters without an insane drummer banging away and screeching violins (keyboards?). Also the yodelling voices in the top keys of the human vocal cord are another torture.

I can't imagine scenes where the household affairs and vociferous arguments between its members are required to be accompanied by jarring background music.

All this mayhem is watched in households in

flats and small houses across the State where the TV is generally the centrepiece of the common living area and hence watched by all the family members, including young susceptible children whose minds will definitely be affected by such crude scenes and dialogues.

With a misguided objective of appealing to women viewers in particular, all women characters are made to weep and sob at the drop of a hat and beat their breasts in sorrow... most reprehensible to watch in the evening when all one wants is a little relaxation after the cares of the day.

I regularly watch an English serial about a Doctor in a hospital called *House M.D.* I am no fanatic of English serials, but this must be watched for the sheer professional and authentic manner in which this has been shot... aesthetically probably the best serial so far seen by me.

The role of Dr. Gregory, *House M.D.*, is played by Hugh Laurie perfectly... he also has portrayed *Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster* earlier.

It is a puzzle to me that such an advanced society as ours seems to enjoy the bizarre scenes in our local language serials. Do we really like all this crudity?

S.Rajaram

62/1, Tamarai Flats, M E S Road  
East Tambaram, Chennai 600 059

## OUR READERS WRITE



However, due to low fuel efficiency and high operational and maintenance costs, the vehicle went into oblivion within a decade of introduction.

It was a sad failure of an in-house design by a renowned company.

Bhilai Gopalan

1/6, Sankara Flats  
1, 6th Cross Street  
Shastri Nagar, Adyar  
Chennai 600 020

### The printer's devil

A printer's devil (MM, November 16th) is really an apprentice in a printing shop.

In England, in the good old days, when he had to perform all sorts of jobs in the shop, there was a superstitious professional belief in the printing industry that an evil devil interfered with good printing work and created slips in spelling just for fun. To rationalise this, the assistant was blamed and vilified as a printer's devil!

N. Dharmeshwaran

Plot 21  
Kumaran Nagar  
Guduvancherry 603 202

**Editor's Note:** As we have stated before, such slips should not be called 'printer's devils' but should be indicated as the work of a printer's devil.

### Mongoose encounters

I read with interest Ahana Lakshmi's article on mongoose (MM, October 16th) because of my own encounters with this interesting animal.

When my wife and I were living in a colony of bungalows in Mehsana, Gujarat, there was fairly good vegetation in the colony although it was certainly an urban setting. We often found the milk in the vessel disappearing, without even a drop left in it. In time, we discovered it was the work of a mongoose and not a cat!

Our second encounter – it was a real encounter – was in the house of the French Consul-General in Pondichery in the late 1960s. When we visited them once, two or three mongoose appeared in the drawing room and rolled over much to our consternation. The Consul-General and his wife assured us they were pets and not to worry!

As the pet-dogs do, they also smelled us and disappeared. But that was the first time I realised

that mongoose could also be pets. The French couple also told us that they were afraid of snakes and had been keeping the mongoose. But I told them that at the place they were living in by the beach, there were no real snakes, but only a lot of human snakes!

Dr. G. Sundaram (IAS, RTD)

Keshav Perumal Puram  
Greenways Road  
Chennai 600 028

### Fantabulus

The reference to Enfield India (MM, October 1st) reminded me of the Company's scooter 'Fantabulus' which was popular in the late 1960s in Bhilai Steel township. Many owners were enamoured with the unique features of the two-wheeler: a sturdy design (118 kg), with a self-starter mechanism (a forerunner of all present-day scooties), a four gear leg-operated system, instead of normal three gears, and clutch handle bar design.

### READABILITY PLEASE

#### Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable. If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space

between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'. Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible. Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

– THE EDITOR

# Sowing the seeds of freedom

In 1857/58, after the Great Revolt, the British Crown took over the governing of India, a country then of 200 million people, scores of languages, seven different religions, a caste system, child marriage and some 500 mini-kingdoms ruled by Rajahs and Nawabs. It was to this country that Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian aristocrat, and Colonel H.S. Olcott from the US came in 1879 to set up the world headquarters of the International Theosophical Society.

In 1851, 20-year-old Helena Petrovna Blavatsky met Mahatma Morya. Her life was never to be the same again. Her later travels took her to Canada, U.S.A., Mexico, India, Java, Tibet and South America (1851-58). Blavatsky by the time she came to India had been widely exposed to various cultures and in Tibet her occult powers greatly improved. She wrote several spiritual books (*Secret Doctrine*, etc.) and, in July 1878, was the first Russian to get American citizenship.

Col. Olcott was 23 years old when he gained international renown for a model scientific agriculture farm he had developed in 1855. He was co-founder of the Westchester Farm School, New York. At 26, he travelled to Europe on an agricultural assignment. Subsequently, he became Correspondent of *Mark Lane Express* (London), Agriculture Editor of the *New York Tribune*, and published his second and third books on agriculture.

As a reporter in 1859 he was present at the hanging of John Brown, the campaigner against slavery. Olcott joined the Northern Army. After the American Civil War, Olcott was appointed member of a commission to assist in the investigation of this tragedy. Later he was drafted as Special Commissioner by the War and Navy Departments to investigate corruption in the armed services.

In 1868, Olcott was admitted to the Bar and practised till 1878.

In 1874 he met Blavatsky while both were visiting the Eddy farm in Vermont. His interest in the spiritualist movement and his budding relationship with Blavatsky helped to foster his development of spiritual philosophy.

Blavatsky and Olcott founded the Theosophical Society and he was elected founding President of the Society on November 17, 1875.

The two of them arrived in Bombay in February 1879. The

first thing he did upon disembarking from their ship was to stoop down to kiss the granite step in an instinctive act of devotion. Then, both went on a tour of North India.

One of the first persons they met on that tour was Allan Octavian Hume of the Bengal Civil Service who had arrived in India in 1849 as a 20-year-old. He was to serve as Secretary to the Government of India in 1870-79. The Great Revolt of 1857 made a strong impression on him. Hume authored *Awakening*. He feared yet another and more terrible uprising and wanted to ensure that India gained self-government without violence and bloodshed. Hume

and stated the essential unity of all religions and the universal brotherhood of man. He became a Theosophist. This set him free to devote his time and energy to the cause of Indian nationalism.

In 1880, over a period of 60 days, Olcott and Blavatsky went on their first tour of Ceylon and during that trip they took *Pansil* at the Ramanya Nikaya to formally accept the Buddhist faith.

One night during their second tour of North India, Blavatsky and Olcott were invited by the Humes to dinner. When Blavatsky asked if anyone wanted something, Mrs. Hume said that she would like to have an old family jewel that she had not seen for a "long time". This,

**• K.V.S. KRISHNA writes: "The International Headquarters of The Theosophical Society has been functioning from Adyar from December 19, 1882.**

**"A study of Col. H.S. Olcott's Old Diary Leaves (6 volumes, 2500 pages) was undertaken by K. Ravi Menon and me for our book South of the Adyar River, brought out for the centenary year of Olcott's passing away (2007). 'Sowing Seeds of Freedom' is an article based on that 140-page study."**

told the newly arrived Viceroy Northbrook in 1872 that the British were not loved in India and warned, "A studied and invariable disregard, if not actually contempt, for the opinions and feelings of our subjects is at present the leading characteristic of our government in every branch of the administration."

Hume, impressed by Blavatsky and Olcott, was more than willing to assist the Theosophical movement to spread its message. Olcott lectured to a huge crowd in December 1879 on 'Theosophy and its relations to India', followed by an address by Hume. A.P. Sinnett, another early friend of Blavatsky and Olcott, was the editor of *The Pioneer*, Allahabad, and several contributions from Olcott and Blavatsky were published in it until *The Theosophist* magazine was started on October 1, 1879. Sinnett became a Theosophist that year.

Over the years the British Government did not appreciate Hume, resulting in him being demoted by the time he was 50 years old. This coincided with the emergence of the Theosophical movement in India. Hume, after having met Olcott and Blavatsky at Sinnett's residence, was most attracted by Theosophy's tenets which propagated



A.O. Hume.

told them that "their future home was found" and they settled there in December that year.

In Madras, Olcott started several schools for Harijans and in 1884 he formed the Aryan League of Honour for teenage boys, as well as a number of boys' clubs and societies. Educationist Dr. Kewal Motwani writes in a biographical sketch of Olcott, "As a result of his fervent appeal to the patriotic instincts of the people, seventeen of those delegates were present at the annual Convention of the Theosophical Society. In 1884, the Indian National Union was formed which changed to the Indian National Congress the following year 'to serve the motherland'." Strictly speaking, Olcott was the father of the Indian National Congress, though that title has been given to A.O. Hume.

Certainly, in this historical movement, Hume provided perfect leadership. He had the time and tremendous energy to execute his duties, and he had the necessary contacts as well as organisational skills and the support of Indian leaders. With the tacit support of the new Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, Hume made a political pilgrimage covering the whole of India, enlisted 70 delegates who, till then, had not met each other and inaugurated the first Indian National Congress (INC) on December 28-30, 1885. Hume did not occupy the highest position at the INC but continued till 1901 to be the General Secretary of the Party. Lord Dufferin soon sensed that Hume was helping the INC to become a national party which intended India to become a free country.

The Congress decided to hold its annual conference in Madras on December 27, 1894. The Theosophical Convention traditionally took place from December 27th. However, knowing that all its members were also members of the INC, the Theosophical Convention was held four days earlier so that its members could attend both the conferences. This is further evidence of how closely the Society was related to the freedom movement.

Adela married Colonel Malcolm Hassels Nicolson in April 1889 in Karachi. He was 46 years old, she was 24, virtually half his age! Was 'Violet', as she was called by friends, destined to follow the traditional path of the British Army wife, horses, parties, ayahs and so on? No. In 1897, when Violet was in a prestigious position as the General's wife, a fellow officer's wife in

(To be concluded)

# Laurence Hope – A life of mystery

• Virginia Jealous was recently in Madras on the trail first blazed by her father John Jealous in 1989, when he was in search of the story of a woman who was to become the obsession of his life as he pieced together her story during several subsequent visits to Madras and other parts of India for a book that didn't get written; he passed away before he got to it. Now his daughter Virginia, a poet and a travel writer, hopes to write a book on her father's journey as well as on the woman who was the second great love of his life, Laurence Hope. Here in brief is the story of Adela Florence Nicolson whom the world knew as Laurence Hope.

Adela 'Violet' Florence Nicolson's story starts with her father Arthur Cory, an army man who arrived in India in January 1849. He married Fanny



Was this Durnmore House?

Griffin and Isabel were their eldest daughter. Even though they lived in Lahore, Adela Florence was born in England in 1865, near Bristol. Annie Sophie, the younger daughter, was born in 1868. After retirement in 1877, Cory joined the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore and in time became its Editor. When he returned to London, Rudyard Kipling succeeded him. Just before her father's retirement from the *Civil and Military Gazette* around 1882, the 16-year-old Adela returned to Lahore after completing her education in England.

Adela married Colonel Malcolm Hassels Nicolson in April 1889 in Karachi. He was 46 years old, she was 24, virtually half his age! Was 'Violet', as she was called by friends, destined to follow the traditional path of the British Army wife, horses, parties, ayahs and so on? No. In 1897, when Violet was in a prestigious position as the General's wife, a fellow officer's wife in

Mhow wrote, "A tiny fair very strange woman, vilely and impossibly clothed. I always found her rather interesting, though of course everyone mocks at her, and I can't help doing it myself... sometimes at the really absurd figure she makes." Another writer wrote in 1909, "Mrs. Nicolson loved to dispense hospitality to her chosen friends. She was of a peculiar, unconventional nature, which is reflected in her poetry, and only those who were of the same mind appealed to her. She loved the world of books, occult science, and strongly sympathised with the Mohammedans. Those friends chosen for their brilliancy of mind more than for their material wealth found in her a warm, ardent, generous friend, extremely unconventional in her views, and a woman not at all fond of social gaiety in the usual acceptation of the term."

republished every year for many years.

After retirement, the couple briefly visited North Africa and then London, where they were drawn into literary circles. But London and Africa were not to the liking of the two people who had spent their entire life in India and, so, soon enough, in 1904, the couple left London (after leaving their son in London) in order to settle in the then sleepy Calicut. They found a bungalow on the hilltop overlooking the river at Feroke, a few miles out of town.

The Nicolsons lived very happily for six months in a place they stated was paradise. Adela's poetry writing continued. She loved Malabar and wrote a lot about the land and its people. But as most people agree, her poetry was a reflection of those

national' biography of her wrote, "His widow was taken in by friends, the Stewarts, and for two months she stayed with them at Durnmore House (a property they were renting from Eardley Norton, the noted barrister and champion of the Indian right to self-determination). On October 4, 1904, when her final book of poetry was completed, Laurence Hope confided to a friend in London her intention of exercising her own 'right' to follow her husband, entrusted the letter to Sir Norman Stewart whose return to England was imminent, retired to her room and took poison. It was an English equivalent of sati, and fittingly her last poems were published posthumously, under the title Indian Love. Finally, and after her death, the poems were published in her own name." Some say that Adela did this following a bout of acute depression. She was buried, like her husband, in St. Mary's cemetery. Her only son, Malcolm Josceline Nicolson, subsequently edited her poems.

In her book *Indian Love*, she started with a poem dedicated to her departed husband. In the poem she said,

*Small joy was I to thee; before we met*

*Sorrow had left thee all too sad to save.*

*Useless my love – as vain as this regret*

*That pours my hopeless life across thy grave.*

This controversial poem addressed to her husband and a number of swirling rumours kept Hope in the limelight even after her death. While one of the rumours was based on her relationship with an Indian prince, the second was about her purported lesbian relationship with Amy Finden, a composer, and third, without any real basis, about her numerous affairs with all kinds of people. Let's take a cursory look at them.

Somerset Maugham's short story *The Colonel's lady* is loosely based on Adela Nicolson. In fact, it is a story where the Colonel discovers all of a sudden that his wife has become a successful writer and hears of a much talked about story about an affair with a younger man. Eventually, after much soul searching and discussions with his solicitor, he concludes that he should do nothing and should ignore it as, after all, he himself had had an affair in London.

E.C. Keissling writing for the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1968 stated that Adela was in love with a local prince and as that would upset the English, they used to meet



Malcolm Nicolson and Adela Florence Nicolson.



in secret with him dressed as a commoner and she as a dancing girl. One day, he was caught and threatened by his father the Raja. So he broke off the relationship. Nicolson heard about this while "recovering from malaria" and the news hastened his death!

Others said that after Adela returned to India the poems expressed Adela's lesbian love for

**From 'Maddy's Ramblings' – a blog by Manmadhan Ullattil**

Amy Woodforde-Finden. It appears Amy wrote to Laurence

stating that she had been trying out some of the songs and wanted approval. Laurence agreed and asked if they could

meet – the rumour is that they did meet and they fell instantly

and passionately in love, and embarked on a brief, intense affair

before returning to their respective husbands as propriety demanded.

Amy was known as a prolific composer of 'eastern ditties', which effectively captured the mood and morals of the period.

But many believe that the two never met. Before this rumour heated up, Adela shifted

to Madras and that effectively killed the rumour.

And now we come to Madhavi Kutty's comment about the boatman. If you read this poem

*Surface rights* written by Adela while in Calicut, you can see the intensity and the passion in the

poetry which Kamala Das would, of course, have analysed through her writer's eyes. Adela writes in

*Surface rights: Drifting, drifting along the River, Under the light of a wan low moon, Steady, the paddles; Boatman, steady ...*

*Why should we reach the sea so soon?*

*Sweet are thy ways and thy strange caresses,*

*That sears as flame, and exult as wine.*

*But I care only for that wild moment*

*When my soul arises and reaches thine.*

Perhaps she met him while going to or travelling in Malabar in a boat. A clue comes from a

letter from Nilambur dated May 1904. She writes: *We came here*

*twenty-two miles through the jungle. The jungle was the jungle,*

*but the hill climate was chilly, and there was a lot of grey in the sky,*

*but here it is hot, it is India again. Do you know the name of Clogstoun?*

*The tomb of Lt. Samuel Robert Clogstoun (actually of 23rd Regiment), who was drowned in*

*1843 in the river here at nineteen, 'generous, high-spirited, and full of*

*promise,' as the officers of his regiment (the 21st Madras Infantry) have it, is here. The tomb was in a*

*scrub jungle and almost covered. I washed the stone clean last evening*

*and wondered if there were any of his people anywhere.*

*This place is perfect. I only wish one had a thousand years to live, as there are so many things one will have to leave undone.*

At the age of 39, it was a tragic decision to swallow a horrible chemical that burns your mouth, lips, gullet and innards as it hastens your departure from this world. Why the torturous decision? Was it guilt or a sacrifice to her husband, or for her lover prince or Amy or, for that matter, the boatman? It's a question that will never be answered.

## Are we waiting for their collapse?

(Continued from page 1)

Government did nothing for years. Funds for restoration were promised two years ago and released a year back. And yet no action has taken place. *Chepauk Palace* has remained a burnt shell for over three years now, with no activity on the premises.

Do all these instances point to a sincere effort in restoration? Most emphatically not. The unexplained tardiness in the passage of a Heritage Act and the setting up of a toothless Heritage Conservation Committee also show that protection of our past is not considered a serious matter. Unless that awareness comes about, we will continue losing out on heritage.

# The Red Hills Railway

## – India's first railroad

The Indian Railways history site says 'railways were first introduced to India in the year 1853 from Bombay to Thane'. This site should read: **the first passenger rail line** was introduced in 1853. But gladly, and pleasantly surprisingly, the website 'Transport in Chennai' refers to the Red Hills Rail Road, about which I write here.

I read the details about the Red Hills Rail Road in a blog by Simon Darvill who emphatically indicates that Madras had the earliest rail road in India: the 'Red Hills Rail Road' ('Red Hills Railway'), introduced in 1836. Darvill writes:

"Like many early railways it was built for the carriage of minerals, in this case granite for road building work in Madras. In all the references found to the line, there is no mention of the gauge of the line, but it can probably be concluded that given that railways themselves were in their infancy and the majority that had been built at that point were standard gauge (1435mm), the line was always intended to be operated by animal power but... at least two but possibly three locomotives were used on the line on an experimental basis. Equally

unknown is what was used as rolling stock, possibly road carts on rail wheels."

This rail line did not transport humans, but minerals and rocks. The starting point was Chintadripet, which Darvill refers to quoting a news item in *The Conservative*, (May 6, 1836), which was quoted in the *Asiatic Journal* (November 1836). This effort, Darvill indicates, was an 'experiment' in Madras. To supplement this, he further quotes from the *Madras Gazette* (May 4, 1836):

"A small piece of railway has been laid down near the Chintadrapettah Bridge, which is worth the inspection of the good people of Madras who have not visited England since railways have been common. To show how little labour is required on a road of this description, a cart is placed

upon the rails, loaded with stones, which is easily moved up a slightly inclined plane by one hand from where it returns by its own weight from the place it was first propelled."

The line was built and opened by 1837. *The Asiatic Journal* (August 1837) reported:

### • 'Pages from History' by DR. A. RAMAN

Charles Sturt University  
Orange, New South Wales,  
Australia,  
ARaman@csu.edu.au

"The temporary Red Hills Railroad has already been completed though for a time rendered useless in consequence of a portion of the embankment of the canal having given way where the railroad joins on it, requiring in consequence the former to be carried

on somewhat further. The temporary railroad has cost the Government 50,000 rupees. It extends from the Red Hills to the canal, a distance of about three miles and a half, and is qualified only to bear a weight of about a ton and a half. To be made a permanent structure, that is by exchanging the wooden for iron-stone or laterite supports, it will cost 14 or 15 lakhs rupees more."

Independent of Darvill's annotations on the Red Hills Rail Road – the pioneering effort of railway in India – I found another notation in the *Calcutta Monthly Journal & General Register of Occurrences* (1837) identical to the above quoted remark.

S. Srinivasachari in his *History of the City of Madras* (1939) provides some additional details on this ignored in-

formation. The following has been paraphrased from Srinivasachari: On July 8, 1845, a Madras Railway Company was formed in London to construct a rail line from Madras to Arcot (technically Wallajahnagar, today referred to as Wallajahpet). This company succeeded an older one of the same name established in 1749 but which never got down to business. It successfully ran its first train from Royapuram to Arcot on July 1, 1856. Major Thomas Pears had earlier surveyed the land and offered a proposal in 1851 for a trunk railway from Madras to Minnal, after which the course of the line was to be guided by the nature of the country. Pears suggested that the railway should be routed from Arcot and Vellore through Minnal and Sholinghur to Palmanair and then onwards via Bangalore to Bellary and Bombay, with a branch to Ambur and Vaniyambadi. It was decided that the line from Madras to Minnal was to be constructed as an experiment. The first sod was turned on June 9, 1853.

I wish that the Indian Railways immediately corrects the notation in its history page.

## SEZs 2005 & Madras 1639

(Continued from page 3)

Madraspatam (that was later called Madras) through a *firman* granted by Damerla Venkatadri, a Nayak of the Vijayanagar Kingdom. The land was used to construct Fort St. George that became a seat of power for expansion of British trade, the political power arising from which resulted in India becoming a British colony.

From the choice of words in the *firman* that gave trading rights and concessions to the English, it appears that Day drafted the document. It appears that, besides wanting commerce to flourish in his territory, the Nayak wanted to utilise English ships to import horses from Persia, and also have a place of refuge from hostile neighbours in a contingency. It was the Nayak's *firman* that led to construction of Fort St. George for the purpose of "peaceful prosecution of commerce from a place of safety". It is further stated that in order to encourage the English to conduct their trade, "they were given the privilege of bringing the goods and sending them

out customs-free, and of providing themselves with supplies for themselves and their sea-going ships duty-free from the country.

The Nayak granted land and permission to build the fort according to the needs and design of the British based upon Day's "great hopes by reason of our promises often made unto him", thereby indicating that Day already had considerable influence over the Nayak because of favours that the British had done, or some gold that was paid to the Nayak. The Nayak goes on to agree to advance the cost of construction on the understanding that the British would repay the cost when they took possession of the fort. Later, "to make more full expression of our affection to the English nation", the Nayak sanctions to the British "full power and authority to govern and dispose of the Government of Madraspatam for the term and space of two years", and goes on to offer them trade concessions.

Out-doing himself in his generosity, the Nayak grants that "whatsoever provisions the English shall buy in my Country, either for their fort or ships, they shall not be liable to pay any custom or duties for the same", and that "whatsoever goods or merchandise the English Company shall either import or export ...", shall "... for ever after, be custom free." In relation to other traders, the English obtain most-favoured-nation status in the *firman* when he grants that for any goods which the English may bring to or through the Nayak's country, the English "shall pay half the duties that other merchants pay, whether they buy or sell the said commodities either in my Dominions or in those of any other Nague whatsoever." The Nayak gives even further scope to the British to set up their own economic system, saying, "the said English Company shall perpetually enjoy the privileges of mintage without paying any dues or duties whatsoever."

The Nayak guaranteed the quality and honesty of the merchants or craftsmen whom the English might employ, and in the event that such persons "fail in their performance", the Nayak would "make good to the English all such sums of money as shall remain on their accounts, or else deliver them their persons, if they shall be found in any part of my territories". Thus, the Nayak underwrites losses that the English may incur due to his citizens' non-performance and, abjectly surrendering his right to rule over his own subjects, even hands over defaulters to the English.

There is an uncanny similarity between the SEZ Act 2005 in granting land, concessions and privileges to corporates for SEZs, with the *firman* granted by the local ruler to the British on August 22, 1639 for land and concessions to establish a trading post in Madras.

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– THE EDITOR

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THE EDITOR

# A 2500-year-old 'industrial estate'

It is a long, tiring journey to Kodumanal, a tiny village in western Tamil Nadu a place virtually unheard of until archaeologists recently unearthed a 2500-year-old industrial estate there.

The trip from Chennai to this inland village is in three stages: eight-hour bus ride to Erode (district headquarters), two-hour bus ride to Kangeyam (small town in the textile district of Tirupur), and a final bus ride to Kodumanal.

The last leg is the most interesting. At first the rickety bus passes farmland and pretty houses but then the surroundings grow barren. There is only the occasional coconut tree. It is hard to believe that this area once held a thriving town. Modern Kodumanal has just around 1000 people making a living breeding cattle and working in the nearby textile town of Tirupur.

At the archaeological site near Kodumanal, even at 8 am the sun is merciless. Approaching the arid excavation area, you hear the sounds of digging and of instructions being yelled to the scores of archaeology students busy at the site excavation.

K. Rajan, professor and head of the Department of History of Pondicherry University, leads the team. Rajan is in his early 50s. He stands in the heat talking to the students gathered around. Today is the last day of this dig at Kodumanal.

Kodumanal, Rajan explains, was a manufacturing and trading centre in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. It is mentioned as such in the Sangam literature of classical Tamil (circa 300 BCE-300 CE). The settlement, which would have accommodated several thousand people in its heyday, appears to have been abandoned after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE.

Archaeologists arrived in Kodumanal in 1961, when V.N. Srinivasa Desikan of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) led the first dig.

In 1980, a second trial excavation was carried out by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department.

More digs were executed in 1985, 1989 and 1990 by the Departments of Epigraphy and Archaeology of Tamil University, along with the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of Madras University, and the State Archaeology Department.

However, not much was found. Between 1985 and 1990,

of the time. This tells us, says Rajan, that Kodumanal had cultural and trade connects with the North.

Hard, slow work led to these exciting discoveries. Rajan has been involved in excavating this site since 1984. The last excavation was in 1990. For this year's dig, the professor managed to raise Rs.3.5 lakh from the ASI and the Central Institute of Classical Tamil.

From the trenches have emerged fascinating and beautiful artifacts. Among the more decorative items are semi-finished bangles and bracelets made from beryl, a crystalline mineral. Some of these stones

## ● by A Special Correspondent

the archaeologists laid 40 trenches but collected only 170 inscribed potsherds (pottery fragments).

In 2012, the pattern was broken, and Rajan's team struck gold. They laid four trenches and collected as many as 130 inscribed potsherds.

V.P. Yatheesh Kumar, a Ph.D student of archaeology from Pondicherry University worked at Kodumanal for two months. He said, "I have worked in four different sites since 2005. In those areas, finding one script itself was a big thing. Here, in one site, we found 130."

Kumar and another student found two large pots, one of which bore a Tamil-Brahmi inscription in tall letters reading "Samban Sumanan" – a name. The pot was 4 feet tall, says Kumar, and was used to store water. Nearly all the newly unearthed inscriptions, in fact, were personal names; a few also referred to the trade done by the individuals named.

The words on the pots are in Prakrit, a north Indian language

are so pure that they were colourless. One find is a tiger-shaped object made of copper, about 15cm long. It was studded with carnelians, sapphires and diamonds. Old quartz stones and broken beads of sapphire, beryl, agate, carnelian, amethyst, lapis lazuli, garnet, soapstone and quartz are strewn across the village.

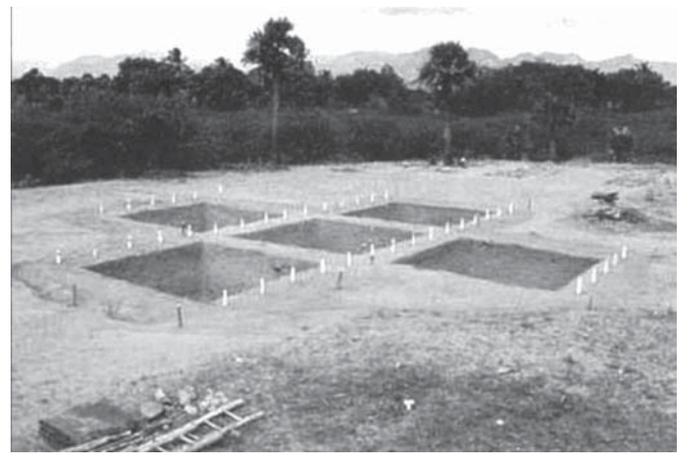
In one memorable case, the archaeologists found 2220 carnelian beads in a single grave. This may be the first instance of its kind in India, Rajan says.

There are sources of sapphire, beryl and quartz near Kodumanal, but carnelian, agate and lapis lazuli came from different sources as far away as Gujarat, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The ancient economy was global.

The finds show that workshops for cutting and shaping precious gems, for making semi-precious stone beads and also, incidentally, for shell-cutting, were there in Kodumanal more than 2300 years ago.

But the workers' technical skills did not begin and end with gem-making. They also worked with iron and steel. In fact, ancient sources of iron ore have been found in and around Chennimalai hill, 15 km to the east.

There was, the archaeologists say, "constant movement of foreign traders between Chennimalai, where there were iron ore deposits, and Kodumanal where the ore was processed" and from where finished items were exported. In Kodumanal itself, Rajan's team found pieces of a crucible furnace. Such furnaces can withstand heat up to 1300°C, well over the melting point of cast iron. This find has been confirmed, Rajan says, by Sharada Srinivasan of



Excavations at Kodumanal.

the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, who has examined the crucible.

Kodumanal was one of the earliest wootz steel centres of the world. Wootz steel, a form of carbon steel, was a prized, highly durable speciality of ancient India, and much sought-after in the West.

In Roman literature, there are references to the import of steel from the Chera country, or South India. References to wootz steel in Sangam literature indicate that Roman Egypt imported its finest steel from here. The rust-free ancient iron pillar still standing near the Qutub Minar in Delhi is said to be made of iron from this region.

Kodumanal is not far from Tirupur, the textile hub of modern India. Ancient Kodumanal also manufactured textiles. A number of terracotta cotton spindles, pierced through the centre with an iron rod, have been unearthed here. Incredibly, a well-preserved piece of actual cotton has been found. It is believed to be 2200 years old.

More proof of Kodumanal's trade links comes in the form of Roman coins, dug up in hoards as well as single pieces. The town lay on a trade route frequented by Roman merchants, who came to buy beryl, quartz and other stones.

Goods to be exported to the West were carried by road to the Chera port of Muziris (Pattinam) on the west coast near Thrissur, and then went by ship. Goods for Southeast Asia were carried east to Karur, capital of the Chera kingdom, then to Poompuhar near the mouth of the Kaveri, and then overseas.

Judging by the trade pattern, and as is suggested by finds of beryl jewellery in eastern Europe and elsewhere, Kodumanal's exports went a long way.

Although Kodumanal is on the Noyyal, a tributary of the Kaveri, the river was not used for shipping. The Noyyal is shallow, rocky and has strong currents, so the trade route followed its banks.

Rajan's findings suggest that only about half of the Kodumanal site, which is about 40

acres in all, was inhabited in ancient times. The other half is a huge burial ground. The archaeologists have opened over 180 graves.

There are three types of graves: pot, urn and chamber stone burials. The last is for people of high status, and in these graves the archaeologists have found gold and other items.

A few of the big tombs are surmounted by stone megaliths (though some 300 megalithic tombs in different grades have been found in the region). The archaeologists have also recovered three skeletons, two female and one male.

One that may be typical is of a person buried with legs crossed, a large stone under one knee and a gold ring in the hand. As Rajan explains, this tells us about the dead person's profession. It was jewellery workers who sat in this position with a stone under a knee, to work the precious stones.

The cists, or chamber burials, come in three varieties depending on orientation, the number of connected chambers and layout. The cists are covered by individual caps-tones.

The number and variety of the tombs and graves tell us what the rest of the site already makes clear: at its peak this was a prosperous place, with many residents, whose pride in their work, which was organised on an industrial scale, reflected the strong worldwide demand for it.

There is still a large historical treasure trove of material to be unearthed. According to Rajan, it will take another ten years to complete the excavation.

Not only does this excavation bring to light the rich industrial and cultural past of this region, and reveal to us an important chapter in India's economic history, it also offers the people of Kodumanal a better future.

Roads are being laid, drinking water and electricity are being provided. The young from Kodumanal have started going to school and college and some have been inspired to learn history. (Courtesy: Tamil Chamber of Commerce Digest).



K. Rajan (right), Professor, Department of History, Pondicherry University, cleaning the grooved stone in one of the trenches at Kodumanal in Erode District.



### DakshinaChitra Children's workshop:

**December 20:** Pyrography – Wood painting, 8-14 years.

**December 27:** Decoupage, 7-14 years.

**December 28:** Activity Camp, 8-14 years.

**December 24-29:** Folk performance by John Peter and troupe as part of the Marghazhi festival will feature *Thappattam*, *Kolattam*, *Kummi* and *Oyilattam*. A display of crafts from Tamil Nadu (at DakshinaChitra).

**December 28:** Theatre performance by Snuffs Puppet-Australia (at DakshinaChitra, 3.00 p.m)

**December 20-January 20:** Exhibition by Arts Management students on *Temples of South India* (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till December 31:** Photo exhibition by Rekha Vijayashankar on Art and Culture of Tamil Nadu (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till December 21:** *Himachal Fest*. The festival aims to bring together the rich and diverse traditions of Himachal culture, highlighting the dance forms and



crafts of the State. Highlights: Colourful folk performances including *Mahasu Nati*, *Gaddi Nati* and *Churahi dance* (11 am to 1 pm and 3 pm to 5 pm) and sale of Himachal crafts, including handmade textiles and jewellery (at DakshinaChitra).

**Till December 30:** Group show titled *Scaffold* by Shinod Akkaraparambil, Vijay Pichumani, and Sujeeth Kumar Sreekandan (at DakshinaChitra).



## Forthcoming bird count events

The Madras Naturalists' Society announces the following events for early 2015:

**Asian waterbird count 2015** – January 4-25, 2015  
Briefing Session and Field Training for Volunteers for the Count will be held at 6.30 a.m. on Sunday, December 28, 2014 at Perumbakkam Tank, enroute to Sholinganallur from the Medavakkam Junction.

Like last year, there will be 3 Zones:

**Zone 1:** Chennai South – covering Sholinganallur/Perumbakkam Marsh, Muttukaud Backwaters, Kelambakkam Backwaters, Thayyur Lake, Siruthavur Lake, Manamathy Lake, Mudaliarkuppam & Cheyyur Backwaters and Pallikaranai Marsh.

**Zone 2:** Chennai West – covering Chembarambakkam Lake, Amarambedu Lake, Manimangalam Lake, Pillaipakkam Lake, Sriperumbudur Tank,

Thenneri Tank, Nayapakkam & Vallarpuram Lakes, Gudapakkam Lake and Kaveripakkam Lake.

**Zone 3:** Chennai Southwest & North – covering Adyar Estuary, IIT Campus, Poondi Lake, Pazhaverkadu & Annamalaichery Backwaters, Chengalpattu Lake, Mamandur Lake and Vedanthangal & Karikkili Bird Sanctuaries.

**Pongal Bird Count 2015** – January 15 to 18, 2015  
On any or all of these dates, birds from anywhere, any number of times in a day, but for a minimum of 15 minutes each time.

**Chennai Bird Race 2015** – Sunday, January 25, 2015  
The 8th Edition of the Chennai Bird Race will take place on Sunday, January 25, 2015.

## 62nd Annual Kalakshetra Art Festival

December 29-31, 2014

**December 20:** *Andal Charitharam* by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 21:** *Bharata Natyam* by Urmila Sathyanarayanan (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 22:** *Bharata Natyam* by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 23:** *Black White and Grey: Shades of the Feminine Divine*. A special mythology and music presentation by Devdutt Pattanaik, author and mythologist, with Anil Srinivasan, classical pianist (10.30 a.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

*Harikatha* by Vishaka Hari (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam).

**December 24:** Carnatic vocal by Dr. Panthula Rama (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 25:** *Buddha Avatharam*, by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 26:** Sattriya dance by

Dr. Menaka P.P. Bora and Indira P.P. Bora (5 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

*Stories in a Song*, a musical collage of theatre, literature and history conceived by Shubha Mudgal and directed by Sunil Shanbag (6.30 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 27:** *Mohiniattam* by Gopika Varma (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

Hindustani vocal by Madhup Mudgal (7.30 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 28:** *Chitra Veena* by Ravi Kiran (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

*Bharata Natyam* by Mavin

Khoo (7.30 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 29:** *Sabari Moksham* by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 30:** *Choodamani Pradanam* by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 31:** *Maha Pattabhishekam* by Kalakshetra Foundation (6 p.m. at Rukmini Arangam, Kalakshetra).

**December 20-31:** Kalakshetra offers its exclusive guided Heritage Walk, *Pradakshina*, at 8.30 a.m. on all days. Prior booking required. Call 24524546 or 24521169.



## Madras Landmarks

(Continued from page 1)

The AASI's office on Mount Road, the number changing to 38A in the 1950s, was a small art-deco building in a fairly large compound. A petrol bunk occupied the front and this was a landmark of the city for long. It was here that the concept of motor sports in South India originated – a race between Rex Strong and K. Varugis, from Chesney Hall on Commander In Chief Road to Catholic Centre, Armenian Street being the catalyst. M.A. Chidambaram, who was then Chairman of the AASI, felt that it would be better if motor sports had a body of its own and, thus, was born the Madras Motor Sports Club in 1954.

Chidambaram was to have a long stint as Chairman of the AASI. In the 1980s, he felt that the organisation's land on Mount Road could be put to good commercial use. The AASI shifted temporarily to Rayala Towers while its own building was pulled down to make way for a well designed commercial structure – the AASI Complex, with P.T. Krishnan as the architect. The American Express Bank funded most of the construction and thereby came to lease a large part of the building. The AASI retains a floor for its own use, but passers-by mostly identified the building with the Bank. The AASI today has 14 branches all over South India and over 20,000 members.

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