

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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Time for ASI to act

A recent visit to St. Mary's in the Fort, a protected national archaeological monument, showed it in a sad state once again. The damp was showing in ugly patches, the colour was fading and the paint — which should never have been used — was peeling. Yet the Church, the first church BUILT by the British outside Europe, was restored by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) less than 20 years ago!

Either the workmanship of the ASI was not satisfactory or its supervision of maintenance has been wanting. Whatever be the case — and we suspect that, during restoration, implementing systems to prevent seepage of damp was never looked at all — the historic church, consecrated in 1680, is looking as

shabby as it was before its 300th birthday. Some immediate action on the part of the ASI is needed to restore it to at least some level of visual comfort.

One of the problems with national monuments such as

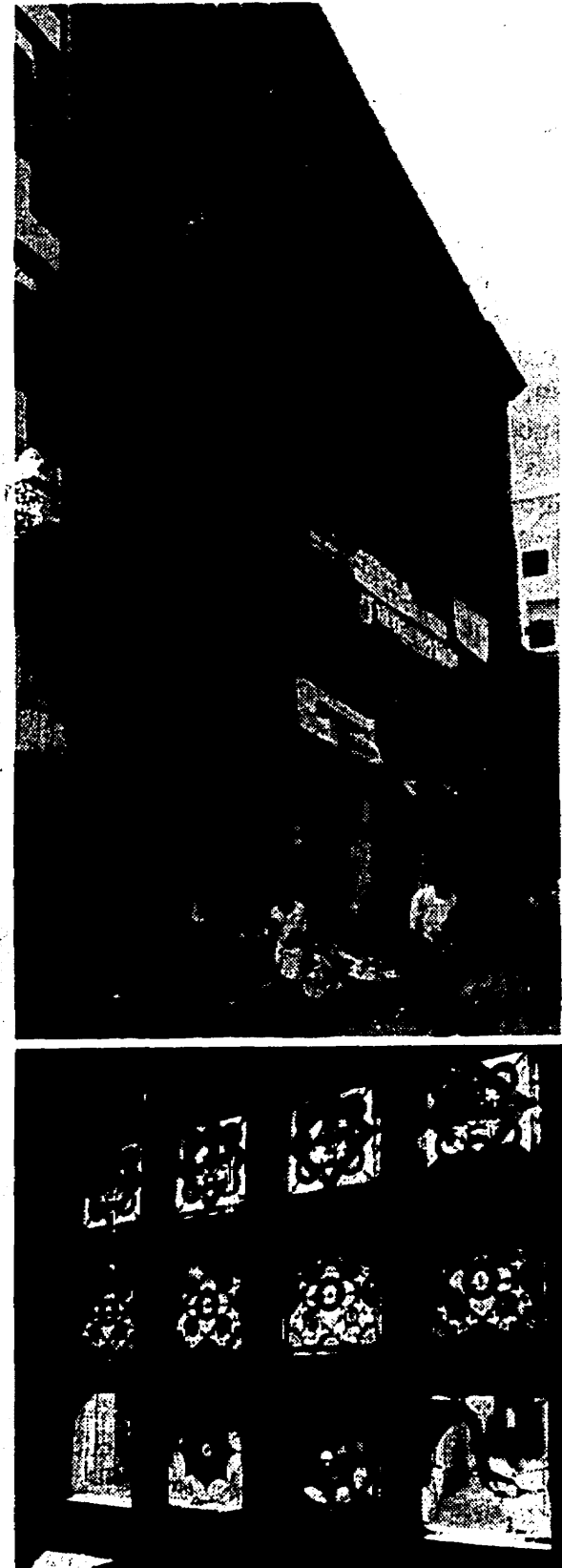
• by The Editor

this is that if the ASI pays no attention to its physical improvement, no one else can. The Church committee cannot do improvements on its own, so raising funds for them is pointless, even if it can — which itself is doubtful, considering the state of several churches, like the Zion Church, which would be on any list of heritage buildings. But there might just be a way.

The Government of India

has a programme, *Madras Musings* learns, whereby funds could be given to it for the restoration by the ASI of specific heritage precincts or buildings, the donor allowed to name what he wants restored and maintained. Now where might the Committee of St. Mary's (no longer the Vestry, please) get such funds from? *Madras Musings* understands there is funding available in Britain for projects overseas involving the restoration of historic buildings built by the British during their golden age. If the St. Mary's Committee, with the blessings of the parent Church of South India, explored these two possibilities further and married them, maybe there'd be some hope of the church getting

(Continued on Page 2)



A good part of the General Post Office was burnt down recently — and we'll let the ashes settle before we have our say. Meanwhile, not far from it is an Indo-Saracenic building of some note that hasn't needed a tragic accident to ruin it. Man has done very well all by himself.

The Shaw Wallace building on Thambu Chetty Street used to be noteworthy for its two huge stained glass panels on the ground floor, both of which have many a pane now broken. The pillared arches along its corridors from ground floor up have also been one of its striking features. With Shaw Wallace having sold the building and the ground floor corridor having become home of sundry shops, rolling shutters, all types of other constructions and a variety of ugly signboards have begun to ruin the ground floor corridor. It will only be a matter of time before the rot will spread.

If only there had been a Heritage Act or even Heritage Regulations in place, it would have been a deterrent to this kind of callous treatment of what deserves to be a listed building.

(Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Crackdown on crackers

— says Toxics Link

Deepavali, the festival of lights, has lost its sanctity and turned into a festival of pollution, noise, crackers, artificially coloured sweets and serious health hazards, says Rajesh Rangarajan, Regional Coordinator of 'Toxics Link', an information clearing house on toxics-related issues in India. On this day, cities turn into gas chambers, as bursting crackers increase toxic fumes and gases like carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, as well as Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM), in the air, he adds.

Rangarajan writes:

'It is not only just we who bear the brunt of air pollution caused by crackers; even trees are not spared. According to Dr. Iqbal Malik of Vatavaran, "scores of crackers that go up in smoke, burden the trees with thick layers of sulphur dust as

well as particulate matter, thereby preventing them from basic functions like breathing". Even the fruits on the trees get blackened due to cracker smoke. Further, senior Meteorological Department officials claim, Deepavali-related pollution has a bearing on the atmospheric temperature. Extensive bursting of crackers may lead to an increase in temperature by as much as two degrees Celsius, especially in densely populated areas, during those two days.

• Deepavali may be over, but there are other festivals and then there's next year... before which we should think about what's been said here.

— THE EDITOR

ological Department officials claim, Deepavali-related pollution has a bearing on the atmospheric temperature. Extensive bursting of crackers may lead to an increase in temperature by as much as two degrees Celsius, especially in densely populated areas, during those two days.

To study the chemical composition, particularly of metallic and non-metallic components of crackers, Toxics Link got some samples of sparklers and flowerpots analysed at the Bombay Natural History Society Laboratory in Mumbai.

The results showed highly toxic metals like cadmium and lead in addition to other metals like copper, manganese, zinc, sodium, magnesium and potassium. Both nitrates and nitrites of a few of these metals were present. In addition, oxides of sulphur in the form of sulphate and phosphorus in the form of phosphate were present in the samples. Four acidic radicals — nitrate, nitrite, phosphate and sulphate — were also detected. Among these, oxides of sulphur, phosphorus and nitrogen are very corrosive and highly acidic

(Continued on Page 7)

If Orissa can, why can't T.N.?

While Tamil Nadu appears to have given up on the Heritage Act, and the Heritage Regulations for Chennai continue to be promised... they're coming, they're coming... and no action can be taken on Heritage Regulations for other cities and towns in the State till the Chennai regulations, the model, are approved, other cities in the country are going ahead with a variety of measures to save their built and natural heritage.

The latest to introduce regulations to help preserve built heritage is the Orissa Government which, by its Building Regulations of September 2000, BANS the construction of multistorey buildings in 17 areas

of its capital, Bhubaneswar. Most of these areas have ancient monuments and temples of archaeological importance. In fact, no construction may take place within 300 metres of any Protected Monument without obtaining prior permission of the Archaeological Survey of India. These regulations will also apply to other archaeological monuments that are declared Protected Monuments from time to time by the Government.

These may not be the most comprehensive protective regulations, but *Madras Musings* sees them as being the first steps in the right direction. If Orissa can do it, why can't Tamil Nadu?

Who remembers agriculture in the State?

Everywhere you turn in Tamil Nadu, it's the State's growing industrial muscle that is being talked about. And even industrial growth is generally being talked about only in terms of Information Technology and businesses connected with it. Following the Chief Minister's lead, Industry has become the focus of the attention of politicians and bureaucrats. *The Man From Madras Musings* wonders whether a recent newspaper article brought any of them up short. It might have had to do with Chandrababu Naidu's singular focus in Andhra Pradesh to the exclusion of all else, but it has its lessons for us too, it struck MMM. The article pointed out that Chandrababu Naidu's Andhra might be doing very well on the IT front, but hundreds of other industries had closed down or were in the process of closing down, that there was an enormous pool of industrial labour that was now jobless, and that all sectors of production were suffering from infrastructural shortages.

Tamil Nadu may not be in anywhere near the same plight, but it is time greater attention was paid in the State to the writing on the wall. Some of that writing has already been focussed on by *Madras Musings* in recent months, but MMM would like to here draw attention once more to the need for greater heed to be paid to AGRICULTURE in the State. Tamil Nadu may never have been the State with the best agriculture record, but it was always among the top few. That it has been slipping is a matter of concern, but of greater concern is the fact that its potential in this area, particularly in value-added agricultural produce, is not being exploited at all.

Mushrooms came and went, floriculture arrived and is only a memory now, and horticulture and herb farming have long been talked about but without results commensurate to the space given to the words of politicians and bureaucrats about them. Even traditional produce like rice, millets, vegetables and coconut are not doing nearly as well as they used to. MMM wonders why. If only they were helped to do as well as they could, the crises choking our cities would reduce considerably.

Israeli example

These thoughts were provoked by a set of statistics *The Man From Madras Musings* came across recently in an article urging Tamil Nadu to look at Israel to make the land bloom and revitalise its economy, particularly outside the urban configurations.

While the State has nearly six million hectares of land under cultivation, it also has 2.3 million hectares fallow or in a state of cultivable waste. With a rural workforce of about 18 million, comprising cultivators and agri-

cultural workers in almost equal numbers, the question is how can they ensure a greater output from this handsome land resource and, thereafter, add value to that output. The answer, it is pointed out to MMM, lies in harnessing the State's water wealth. According to the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, harvesting rainwater is the only practical way to meet the country's agricultural and domestic requirements. The Centre says that if, even by using traditional low-cost methods, rainwater is harvested in just five per cent of India's land area, its agricultural and domestic requirements would be met.

For this, however, the CSE says reservoirs must be desilted and deepened, irrigation systems modernised and micro-irrigation systems introduced to bring more area under efficient irrigation. Water management and irrigation to increase the productivity of dry-land needs to be the focus of the Government, says N Mahalingam, the industrial doyen, while advocating the State benefitting from Israeli expertise in these fields.

Comparing Israel and Tamil Nadu, Mahalingam points out some startling discrepancies.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Tamil Nadu has double the per capita cropped area, 0.2 hectare to Israel's 0.1 hectare, and about a little over FOUR times the per capita water availability, 1.28 million litres to 0.3ml, yet its GDP is only \$17 billion to Israel's \$90 billion and per capita income is only \$382 against about \$16,000 (1998 figures)! Israel must obviously be doing something right, after having started from scratch in a desert wilderness. What it does right, and something MMM has long admired, is the way it has made the desert bloom with innovative sprinkler and drip irrigation systems. The result is that Israel is a substantial exporter of fruits, flowers, vegetables and dairy products. And we aren't!

Perhaps one of things we should be talking to Israel about is a suggestion Mahalingam makes. Pointing out that the Kaveri delta receives an average rainfall of 1092mm a year, he states that if all this rainwater is harvested, about 5 million hectares could be brought under assured irrigation. To harvest this water he advocates a canal, 20-50km from the coast and parallel to it, to collect the run-off and convey it to the reservoirs of the rainshadow region of erstwhile Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Madurai districts. MMM doesn't know enough about the subject to comment on the feasibility of the suggestion, but the Israelis would certainly be able to — and also offer cost-effective alternatives. With the workforce

in the southern districts having a long history of commitment to toil in order to scabble a living in these arid areas, MMM rather thinks the Israelis might be the best people to get the best out of them.

If a Tamil Nadu-Israeli tie-up in the agriculture sector is negotiated, MMM thinks the State would go a long way towards agricultural excellence and making agriculture a major income-generator. That could result in the pressure decreasing substantially in the industrial-urban sectors of the State and improving the quality of life overall in Tamil Nadu.

The biotech way

All the new technical jargon seems to be obsessing the Tamil Nadu Government and its leadership; none of them seems to speak in terms of the basics any longer. After IT, Biotechnology is the new buzzword. And though *The Man From Madras Musings* welcomes the State's plans for promoting biotechnology to push Tamil Nadu's medical, agricultural, environmental and industrial sectors into the 21st Century, MMM is inclined

to strike a pessimistic note; if the basics, like infrastructure, particularly water and power, are not attended to first, all the fruits of the biotechnology parks will remain experiments in the parks.

Unclaimed status

How little India values heritage as something requiring more than lip service is to be seen from India not even making a claim with UNESCO's Organisation of World Heritage Cities to list any of its historic cities. And there are many of them, especially as the listing recognises even parts of a city. Varanasi, Fatehpur Sikri, Velha Goa, Jaisalmer, Hampi, Golconda would all qualify. So would Fort St George and the George Town area, the first town from which the Madras of today, grew, the even older San Thomé-Mylapore

Temple area, and Madurai. But no one either in the States or in the Centre wants to make the bid which smaller neighbours have made and been successful with.

Sri Lanka has had Galle, with the old town within the Fort, and Kandy, for purely sentimental reasons, I suppose, listed and Nepal has had ancient Paktan and Bhaktapur and newer Kathmandu recognised. But we appear to have fought shy of such a prestigious listing that would attract a heritage-oriented international tourist crowd — perhaps because we would be unable to offer the care which such recognition would entail, *The Man From Madras Musings* is inclined to think.

India has 21 world heritage sites, 16 of them cultural and five of them natural. But one or two in the past have been de-listed for lack of care and several of the others might not stand a second review, considering the lack of attention being paid to them. As a UNESCO consultant who was recently in India said, "Hampi would certainly rate as a World Heritage City, but at the rate it is being vandalised, that's a rating that might not last long." MMM is convinced that could well be said of Fort St George and its neighbour George Town, judging at the absolute lack of care being paid to both and the irresponsible way the historic Secretariat is being 'decorated'

— MMM

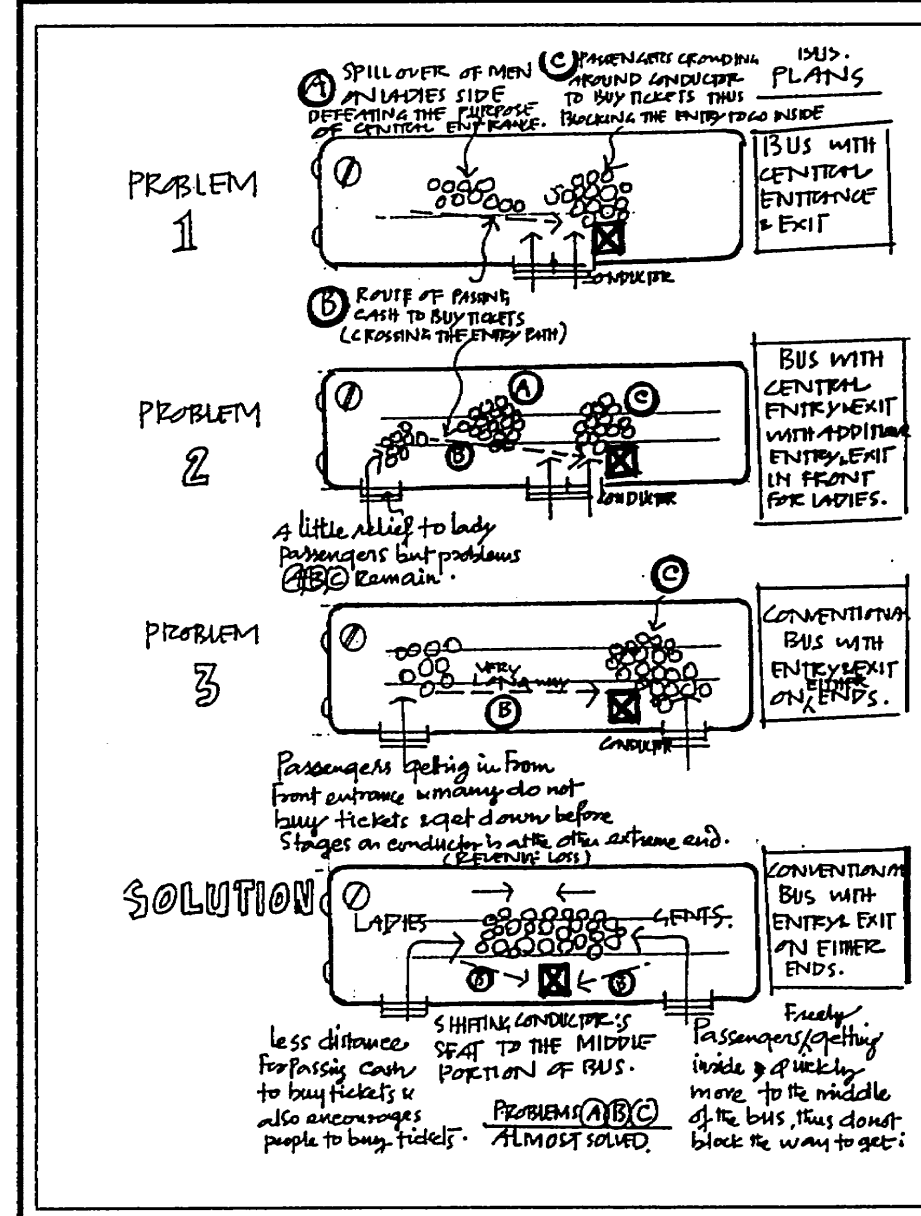
OUR READERS WRITE

A seasoned citizen

The other day, I had been to Luz Corner and was cruising along in my Maruti near the Vinayaka temple trying to find parking space. It was the festival season and the road — both parking and no-parking areas — was full of cars and other vehicles. I spotted a parking space just in front of a 'No Parking' sign, but having been used to taking people and road signs at their word, I waited near the parking sign for some shopping-finally-over car to pull out. The parking lot attendant in uniform with the name badge pinned to his breast-pocket, came running and instructed me to park my car in a place where an enterprising young artist had drawn on the road the portrait of Lord Vishnu with His four hands carrying their allotted symbols. He had placed stones around it to prevent any intruding car from parking there (Note: He had chosen the parking area and not the no-parking one for his divine venture — it seemed that even Vishnu — or only Vishnu? — with his 'wheel' had to abide by the rules of the road!). The attendant had a hurried word with the artist and the latter after some soul-searching descended to remove just enough stones to let me park but at the same time keeping in mind that I was a trespasser. The attendant went his way to attend to other cars in distress.

I could have asked the artist how he could encroach on public space, but didn't. I knew the answer, sorry, the question: "Is this your road?" I could have countered, "Yes, partly, because I pay the road tax", but didn't. I knew he would say, "I too pay the tax", pointing to the traffic cop standing a couple of yards away, watching the goings-on impassively. I got the message without either of us having uttered a word, because I am a seasoned citizen of Chennai, who knows her rights but also knows that some people's wrongs are much more powerful!

My work done, I returned to the car to find the attendant charging me double the Corporation-noti-



fied parking rate. I could have protested, made a noise, made a scene, complained to the traffic police... no, I just said to myself, forget it!

Savithri Chandrasekhar
A-2, Srinivasa Apts.
85/24-D, Greenways Road
Chennai 600 028.

Setting it straight

Presidency College has in its first floor corridor, several copies of the paintings of the great European Renaissance. They were provided by Principal P.F. Fyson out of the income collected from students for such offences as 'absence without leave', 'delays in returning library book' and sundry other offences. These paintings helped students and teachers to make sense of the magnificent achievements of the European Renaissance.

Poor Fyson. He was overlooked when the post of Director of Public Instruction fell vacant, on the technical ground that he had not retired into the Treasury the money collected as fines from students!

A press report, a few weeks earlier, referred to Sir Harold Papworth collecting fines from students joining the Quit India move-

ment and buying the paintings referred to. Sir Harold, on the contrary, allowed a condolence meeting at the College on the passing away of Gandhiji's secretary Mahadeo Desai. He was extremely sympathetic to the students and collected no fines at all. He paid dearly for his close association and consideration of students' feelings being summoned by the then Madras Governor, Sir Arthur Hope, and forced peremptorily to go on leave.

Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, then Dewan of Travancore, appointed Sir Harold as Pro-Vice Chancellor of Travancore University and helped him get his Knighthood too.

S. Ramanathan
Retd. Chief Professor of English
Presidency College
Chennai

A scarce cot

I wonder if anyone can help me to procure one of those light-weight aluminium, foldable, compact cots with 2" or 3" wide nylon tapes. I had obtained one from a shop opposite Hotel Palmgrove some 15 years ago, but the shop seems to have closed down. These cots seem to be scarce in Chennai, but I hear that these types of cots (standard single bed, about 30" wide and 70" long) can be procured in other metros. I shall be grateful for any help.

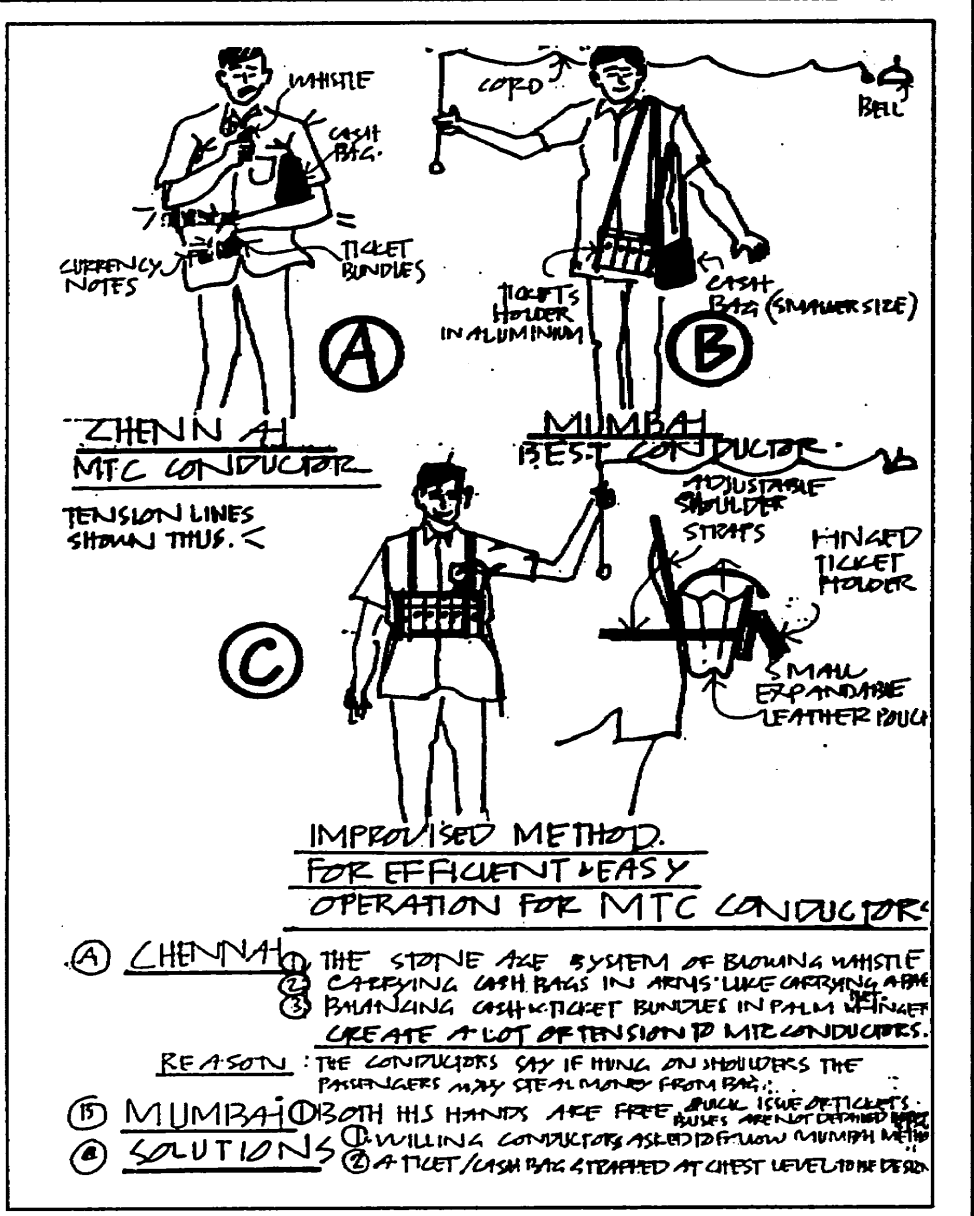
K.P. Mahalingam
6-B, The Peninsula
778, Poonamallee High Road
Chennai 600 010.

The lurking danger

The agonising experience of the passengers on the Chennai-Singapore flight on September 25th, draws attention to the potential danger of air travel across the oceans.

It is evident from the description of the misadventure that the captain was taken by surprise by the 'whirlwind', which sucked the Airbus into the vortex.

To the geologist such atmospheric disturbances over the sea are known as "sea spouts". In a sea spout, the low pressure at the vortex causes the water to rise relative to the pressure. Even marine life



A couple of suggestions for the MTC

The Chennai city bus service operated by the MTC is recognised as one of the best in the country by all. This is a fact.

However, if you ask a person who has lived in all the Metros of India, the Mumbai city bus transport service will be voted as THE best for the following reasons:

- The buses are not detained for the issue of tickets. Thus, they do not create traffic obstructions or waste the precious time of the commuters.
 - Ticket issuing by the conductor is very fast, due to improved methods of handling the cash bag and ticket pouch and for ringing the stop and go bell (using a cord provided).
 - Passengers do not crowd around the conductor to buy tickets, blocking the way of the other passengers getting in and out of the buses.
- A lot of precious fuel and time are saved by following these methods.

- In Chennai**
- The conductor has to balance the cash bag, ticket bundles, whistle and currency notes in both the hands. The speed of issuing tickets is, thus, very much reduced, resulting in much strain and fatigue to him.
 - It is a fact that the conductor cannot move inside a jam-packed bus and issue tickets (a peculiar Chennai situation). It would be ideal if his seat is placed in the middle of the bus along the existing row. Passengers would then move to the middle to buy tickets and would not block the entrances. The conductor would also be able to identify ticketless travellers with ease.
 - The conventional bus with entrances at both ends is the only ideal design for city buses, not the ones with central entries, with the conductor sitting near the entrance and the passengers standing and blocking the entrance to buy tickets.

G.J. Jeyaraj
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can be caught up in the spout and carried up by the wobbling funnel-shaped spout and thrown on the land, resulting in a rain of fish. When such spouts occur on the land, then there may be a rain of fish or frogs, which have been sucked up from ponds and pools. Spouts, unlike tornados, do not move.

These spouts can be likened to the 'eddies' or 'whirlpools', that occur in large swift-flowing rivers, like the Godavari, in flood. When steamships are caught in the vortex, they have to use all their might to extricate themselves.

In the case of the funnel-shaped spouts, the pressure drops from the periphery to the vortex. Hence, an aircraft will plunge downwards, swinging all the time, due to the

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Observing the urban poor

Everywhere in Chennai, you find those urban poor settlements brutally referred to as slums. Dispossessed by unyielding agriculture and betrayed by the monsoons, thousands migrate to urban poor settlements in search of a dreamland that would offer them hope, employment and better quality of life...

Apart from temples, mosques, churches, tombs of leaders and a few natural sites, most heritage sites identified by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Tamil Nadu chapter, are a legacy of the British

miyur, Kalakshetra Colony, Anna Nagar, Besant Nagar and Adyar are the areas where upper middle class and officers live. Triplicane, Mylapore, Thiruvannamipur, Velachery and Alandur are traditional villages caught up within the city. Ethnicity defines Rovapuram, Rovapettah, Pudupet and Thousand Lights as Muslim areas, Sowcarpet and Georgetown as North Indian ones and Perambur and Ambattur as Anglo-Indian settlements. Taramani is emerging as institutional space for the software industry. The rest of the city is

• by M.D. Muthukumaraswamy

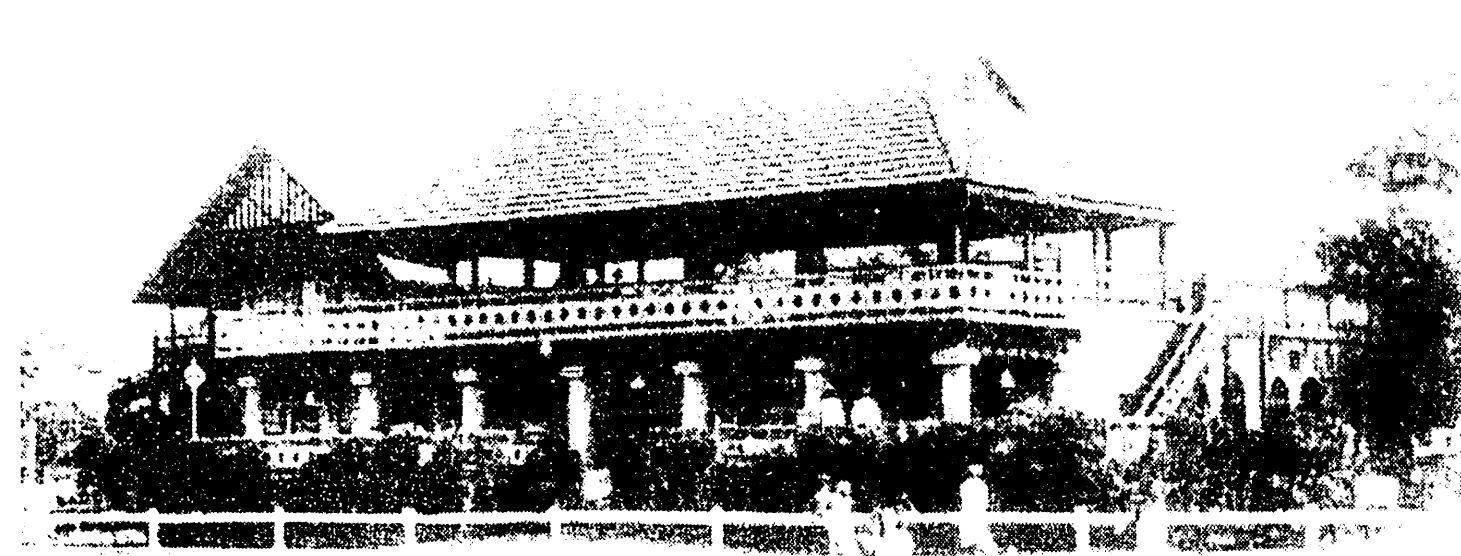
and now have become seats of political, administrative, legal and commercial power. Only *Bharathi Illam*, Ramanujan's house, *Vitthala's Illam* and *Valluvar Kovilam* stand as sites of cultural significance that have emerged from this soil and have stood beyond political affiliation. In Chennai, like in any other post-colonial Indian city, the interpenetration of knowledge and power is mediated through English. It is yet another alienating agent for the urban poor.

Annasalai runs like a central spine through the symbolic organisation of the city, while the perpetually bad-smelling rivers Cooum (including Buckingham Canal) and Adyar run almost invisibly like its political unconscious. A North-South divide allots commerce to the former and culture to the latter both in popular belief and reality. Northern Chennai is the habitat for the city's workforce with Madras Port Trust topping the list.

Real estate economy classifies Boat Club Road, certain parts of Nungambakkam, Kilpauk Garden, Gopalapuram, Poes Garden, Abiramapuram and Raja Annamalaipuram as posh areas. Kottivakkam and East Coast Road are meant for non-resident Indians' farmhouses. Parrys, Poondamalli High Road, Pandy Bazaar, Kovambedu, Anna Salai, Ranganathan Street and Egmore are commercial centres. As popular belief would have it, Kodambakkam and Vadapalani envelope the entire Tamil film industry, whereas Thiruvan-

meant for a large middle class and all areas, including the beaches, are permeated by urban poor settlements. Ordered by class, commerce, power, religion, ethnicity and neutrality Chennai accommodates urban poor settlements as sites of cultural aspirations and economic deprivation...

The expanding city has engulfed many small folk temples that used to be at the borders of villages and you encounter them rather at inappropriate and unexpected places. Avvanar temple near Alandur railway gate is one such example. People of urban poor settlements adopt these anachronistic temples as their own and breathe new life into them. Either by adoption or creation, every settlement owns an Amman temple. A typical Amman temple resembles *Ankalaparameswari* temple of South and North Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu where only the head of the goddess is idolised and worshipped. In most cases the myth is absent and worship patterns are irregular. In the Tamil month of *Adi* (July-August) on Tuesdays and Fridays the people of the settlements offer ritual cooking to the goddesses. On the last Tuesday or Friday a festival is organised in the night. In contrast to the folk celebrations of the classical Hindu temples where all the activities happen in the precincts, these festivals happen by blocking the streets. Preparations for the festivals begin one week in advance. Youths of the settlements collect money from the



THE OLD...

It was in January 1927 that Arthur Gilligan's MCC team arrived in Madras during its tour of India, and a record of that visit compiled by that well-known cricket writer E.A. Swanton is what Madras Musings received from England recently. And one of the treasures we found in it is our OLD, this picture of the Madras Gymkhana pavilion as it was when first built. A second OLD shows how it developed from there to the NEW, which shows all the changes that have been made to that pavilion over the years, only bits of the old now visible in certain parts of it. The Gymkhana was founded in 1885 by the Army as a sports club for the military and other officers of the Government of the Madras Presidency. The two football codes and golf were its major sports. Rugby Football for the Madras Gymkhana Rugby Football Challenge Cup was played from 1900



and watched from the comfort of our OLD, which in the evenings during that 'Rugby Week' saw high spirits and gaiety unbounded. The sport thrived in the Club till 1954 and then faded out. Exports are attempting a revival of it and the Madras Gymkhana, which introduced the game to Madras, will, we hope, do its bit towards making that revival a success — as the Bombay Gymkhana, national champions, has done. (Photographs of the NEW and the copy of the second OLD by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



...& THE NEW

neighbourhood and the passing vehicles.

Most of the money earned through the fund raising effort is spent on putting up a serial bulb figure of the goddess on a scaffolding across the street and lighting up the entire premises with tube lights. If it happens to be a Draupati Amman temple, as in the case of Kovalam, then a *Theru-kothulu* performance is arranged. Nowadays all these performances are replaced by roadside screenings of Tamil devotional films. These festivals are really the public assertions of urban poor of their existence and solidarity.

Life in an urban poor settlement is full of hardships. A typical hut in a settlement consists of kitchen and one room. Radios, television sets and cable connections have found their way in selected houses. Mostly women sleep indoors, but men and children sleep on the streets or open spaces. Asbestos or thatched roofing indicates slightly better dwelling places but in poor places roofing is of plastic sheets or canvas clothes. Plastic pots and stainless steel vessels are the major household

items. Water is a scarce and precious commodity. Kerosene (*Krishna* oil as it is called) eats up a major portion of the household income. Provisioning is done through the public distribution system and a ration card is a precious document. Chennai Corporation's facilities, railway tracks and vacant plots with heavy shrubs are used as public toilets.

Normally life begins at four in the morning and the lucky settlements wake up to the chanting of *Koran* from nearby mosques. Most of them hurry to catch the morning bus service or electric train so that they can transport their goods, like vegetables and flowers, to the marketplace or to bring them to their neighbourhoods. Maids start their work in middle class homes around six in the morning. Construction workers, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, pushcart restaurant owners, hawkers, knife sharpeners, umbrella repairers, cobblers, plastic goods vendors and tea shop assistants have different timings. There are no holidays.

Men are irresponsible and they do not bring home their earnings. Among the men con-

sumption of alcohol is widespread. Schoolgoing children are blessed, as others become wanderers in the streets. Summer is cruel, you have to wait for hours to get a pot of water from the Corporation tap. The monsoon is crueler, as the rains flood the lanes and make the entire settlements unbearably arranged. Government hospitals are the only resorts available for healthcare. Most child births occur in the settlements themselves as yet another household activity. Tuberculosis is a widespread mortal disease.

There is a vibrant physical culture among the youths who eat beef and exercise at the roadside hand bars... Street corner cliques establish themselves at telephone, milk and internet booths, public parks, barber shops, cycle stands, compound walls, carrom playing spots, railway stations and auto stands. These friendships are an important cultural value for the participants and find expressions in the public arena. Several innovations in the spirited Chennai dialect of Tamil occur in these groups, travel to the student population and become

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With Krishnan at Vedanthangal

Vedanthangal is in the Chinglepet District, a little village not shown on the smaller survey maps, some 55 miles from Madras and six by road from the nearest place to which bus or train can take you. And perhaps the oldest bird sanctuary in India lies here.

There is a small seasonal lake here (or a large tank — call it what you like), 74 acres in extent excluding outlying low land. In summer, and till the rains arrive in August or September, the lake-bed is dry — a shallow mud basin with little grass or other small growth on it, but with about 500 *Barringtonia* growing in massed clumps near its middle and singly along the inner edge of its palmyra-topped bund. The trees (all *Barringtonia acutangula*, except for a handful of thin acacias) are mature and stout-boled, with spreading, evergreen crowns, but they are not tall — not much over 20 feet, some not even that high. When the rainfed lake is full, it is about 10 feet deep in the middle and the trunks and lower boughs are submerged, with only the leafy, much-branched crowns showing above the thick green water, in darker green mounds. And thousands of birds come here, to nest in these crowns.

From time immemorial they have nested here, and been effectively protected by the villagers. The motive of these good people in protecting the birds is not wholly altruistic, but I do not believe it is wholly selfish either. The droppings of the mixed assemblage of parent birds, and the rising generations, enrich the lake water, endowing it with manurial potency. It is this water that is used for the neighbouring paddy-fields.

Both the Indian and Madras Wildlife Boards have accorded recognition to Vedanthangal, but it was a sanctuary for centuries before the boards were there, and officially recognised long ago. The records of such official cognisance are interesting.

Late in the eighteenth century Mr. L. Place, Collector of Chinglepet (1796-98) appears to have given an original 'cowle' to the local inhabitants, who asked for official recognition of their age-old 'prescriptive right' to protect the birds against all-comers. This document stated that no birds might be shot or snared in the Vedanthangal tank area.

On 7 January 1858, George G. Tod, Chief Assistant Magis-

trate of the district, renewed the sanction at the request of the villagers, who had lost the original given them by Mr. Place. Mr. Tod's 'cowle' is in rather quaint Tamil and runs as follows:

"Whereas it has been represented that in the Kadappai trees of the lake of your village of Vedanthangal a variety of birds nest and live freely and that the Hon. Placesahab had long ago given you a cowle prohibiting the shooting or capture of these birds, which document has been lost, and whereas you have now asked us to give you another in replacement, this has been issued to you.

Should any persons, Europeans or hunters or such people, come to the lake and attempt to shoot or capture the birds in contravention of the above-mentioned order, show this to them and prevent them from doing so."

• With the season just beginning at Vedanthangal, this article written by M. KRISHNAN in 1956 is just the reminder for a visit to this splendid bird sanctuary. The excerpts are from an article in the collection entitled *Nature's Spokesman* edited by Ramachandra Guha and published by Oxford University Press. It is published here by courtesy of the publishers.

More than three-quarters of a century later this order of 'Todsahab', carefully preserved by the villagers, was produced before another 'Todsahab' for renewal — only, this second saheb chose to spell his name with a double 'd'. On 10 February 1936, Mr. A.H.A. Todd, Collector of Chinglepet, issued an order which says:

"Vedanthangal tank is a birds' sanctuary and has been kept as such by the villagers for over a century. Notice in English and in Tamil in bold characters should be painted on wooden boards and set up at each end of the tank bund. The form of notice to be put up is enclosed. The expenses should be met from office contingencies."

I saw no wooden boards carrying prominent notice when I first visited Vedanthangal in June 1954, nor during four subsequent visits made late last year and early this year. But I saw the lake area dry and birdless, and later water-filled and teeming with nesting birds, and was able to collect sufficient observation material for this note.

Asked to guess how many trees grow in the middle of the

lake, people would be hopelessly out in their estimates. Most would put the figure around 50, the more reckless might even go up to 100. No one who did not know the actual number would think some 300 trees stood there, so closely are they massed and so confluent do their tops run into one another, when seen from the bund. A clump that from the bund looks as if it were made up of two or three trees actually represents 20. I have taken no census of the trees, but on a rough reckoning I made out there were 300 in the middle.

The trees, as I have said, are old. During summer the seedlings that sprout in the shade of their parents are grazed or trampled down by cattle, but I think they would need transplanting to the periphery, some distance away, to develop into vigorous new clumps, even if they are otherwise protected. So



Treesful of birds at Vedanthangal during the Season. (Photograph by S. Theodore Baskaran.)

half-a-dozen random visits) is necessary for any appraisal of the species, numbers, and priorities in a large, mixed heronry, and the nesting habits of the birds...

Common grey-necked crows and Brahminy Kites were very much in evidence over the lake; an occasional bird of prey were also to be seen. In any large nesting colony, a few eggs and nestlings fall into the water while their parents dispute territory, nests may be left unguarded momentarily, and opportunities for scavenging, thieving and fishing are not lacking.

I can give no estimate of numbers. The Little Cormorants, Smaller Egrets, spoonbills, openbills and night herons were the most plentiful. Thousands of birds nest here, and their young survive the bustle and crowding of the breeding enterprise to continue the species, thanks to the protection they enjoy.

Soon after the first rains, some time in October, the birds start arriving in small flocks, and rainfall being normal, they keep coming till January! The nesting species do not descend on the lake full strength, in sky-obscuring flights, but arrive in small successive flocks. Many of these start breeding at once, colonising some tree of their choice before the next flight reaches Vedanthangal, so that once breeding has commenced, young at various stages of development may be found at any inspection. The position, however, is not quite so simple for while some species (and possibly flocks) arrive ready to breed, others are not in breeding condition on arrival, and may take their time nesting.

Breeding goes on for almost five months, from November to March, and many of the birds raise more than one clutch. They nest here, as they do elsewhere, in mixed companies. However, there is a tendency for birds of a feather to keep together in locating their nests, one part of a tree-top being largely utilised by one species, another part by some other species...

Paddy fields around and

sheets of water not too far away provide the parent birds with feeding grounds, a most important factor in the communal breeding of water-birds, for the quick-growing young have insatiable appetites. This, the shade provided by the *Barringtonia* foliage (even the young of most diurnal birds cannot stand the sun) and, more than all, the protection they enjoy are what make the birds arrive here in such numbers, soon after the rains. The great Madurantakam Lake is only a few furlongs away, there are minor sheets of water close by, and I observed egrets and ibises feeding in paddy fields eight miles from Vedanthangal, a negligible distance to a bird.

However, the potentialities of Vedanthangal Lake itself as a feeding ground appear to have been overlooked by observers. On the village side the water is shallow and merges into cultivation — flocks of egrets and spoonbills, and paddy-birds, may be seen feeding here all day. Cormorants and darters fish in the lake, though from time to time the former sally out to feeding grounds and return to their nests in large, thick, quick-winged flocks. I saw openbills prodding the shallows at Vedanthangal, not far from their nests, and from the manner in which they threw up their necks and gulped, every now and then, the occupation seemed rewarding. Undoubtedly the regular feeding grounds of the nesting species lie outside the lake, but the water below their nests, rich in algae and aquatic insects and other small fry, is not a larder despised.

Vedanthangal is one of the most picturesque and interesting breeding grounds of water-birds in our country. A naturalist can spend a lifetime here, profitably observing the local avian life, but even to the layman the lake during the nesting season is fascinating, the compact field of observation, the teeming colonies in the water, the constant passage of birds to and fro, and the rural setting combining to capture and hold his eye. It is perhaps just as well that the sanctuary is off the beaten track, but it deserves to

(Continued on Page 6)

How scientists can affect a crocodile's love life

The laid-back croc he swung his tail
Slowly, from side to side
And cruised the waters of Amarvel
Enjoying the lazy ride

He thought of this, he thought of that
He pondered Death and Life
He thought of old friends, both thin and fat
And some who'd taken a wife...

Ah! There, thought the croc, is a thought
That I should really pursue
I'm a teenager now; it's time I sought
The love of a sweetheart true

This croc of ours was the sort of beast
Who, once a thought had struck
Liked to act at once, or at least
Make up a plan of attack

So he hauled his scales upon the bank
And waited for the ladies to come
How lovely he looked! — all sleek and dank
While his heart did loudly drum

A full hour he lay there, in a debonair pose
Making sure his tail was straight
His head held high, well aligned with his toes
And oh, he could hardly wait

Would she, wouldn't she, where were those girls?
This posing was really a pain
Then suddenly, in the middle of watery swirls
He detected a scaly mane

What a beautiful reptile, every scale in place
And a sparkle in her eye
Our man was mesmerised by her face
She was perfect as bandicoot pie

She knew the young bachelor was watching
And did a splashy turn
Every scale and scute on her body tingling
With delight, from hull to stern

Our man he slid into the lake
And followed her with devotion
After some moments of intense heartache
He started a conversation

"Quite honestly lady I never did
see
A Jacobson's Organ so fine!
Your dorsal scutes so dazzle me
And how your occipitals shine!"

He saw she was pleased as mongoose pie
And began to plan the wedding
When oh, just when Bliss was nigh
Fate dealt him a horrible drubbing

Her smile was quickly and suddenly gone
When she saw his silver tag
"So you're one of THOSE!" she said in a tone
That made our friend's heart sag

"Er — "he said, "it's the survey tag —
The crocodile census, you know.
It's actually an honour, it's no great drag
And really, it hardly doth show"

She hurried from him with a snub-nosed scowl
Eyebrows arched in scorn
"Let me explain!" our man did howl
Oh, he wished he had never been born

This unrequited love kept our friend in pain
Nor food nor drink enlivened him
Until finally, Bliss came again
And filled him to the brim

Another lady swam by and with a sniff
Said, "Oh, are you one of THOSE?"
What an honour to even get a whiff
Of the wonders that Science knows!

"I've heard of this project to study our ways
By the aliens who live on land
I can hardly avert my avid gaze
From that lovely tag on your hand."

Now quickly he struck an attractive pose
And well, it worked out fine
The wedding guests ate buffalo toes
And pate of porcupine

Ten months later or maybe six
Nine eggs did noisily hatch
From a nest constructed with leaves and sticks
And as a croc parent no-one could match

Our ecstatic friend...
For he ferried the youngsters in his jaws
And found them crawly food
But sometimes he cuffed them, mainly because
They were just a tiny bit rude.



(Courtesy: Indian
Review of Books)
Zai Whitaker

Eating out in third space

Used to be a time when your daily routine was to wake up, sip a cup of coffee, read the paper, pack your lunch to go to office or college or school, return home, watch a bit of TV and go to bed. Good old sleepy Chennai — ho hum!

Say goodbye to all that. Today, the buzzword is the 3rd Space. Chennaiites have woken up to the fact that there's much more to life than just office and home. The 3rd Space has come into being. Coffee bars, Internet parlours, Pool parlours, Bowling alleys, Gym, Aerobic and Tai Chi classes, Dance schools, Clubs, Food courts, Discos, Beach houses have all become acceptable to hang out for a few hours before returning home.

In fact, fashion houses have begun to design clothes for the 3rd Space. And it's not just the adults and teenagers; lots of kids also chill out at places like Planet Yumm, Red E Food Court, Pizza Hut and Qwikys. But you need to be able to have spare cash (and lots of it. A cup of coffee could cost you 30 bucks at some coffee bars).

So what do you do if you are the Common Man? The answer is head for the beach. Here you not only can join in a game of beach volleyball, dip your toes in the water, play a game of mid-night cricket but also savour fast foods from Chaats to Chinese from kiosks with names like Sea Angel, Chennai Chinese and On The Beach

I did a quick round of some of these fast food places and here's my list of your best value for money:

- Start behind Kannagi Statue where you'll find Lakshmi selling some of the best Fried Fish in town for Rs.10 a fish. It's better to take the fish home and heat it up first though!
- Go to Amman Wines on Bells Road and next door you'll get hot Idlis and Fish Curry for Rs.7 a plate. The cook is called 'Master' by all and serves up a mean Nethili Fry. Don't mind if he sneezes into your food. And if you are lucky you could be entertained by a lookalike MGR — cap, dark glasses and all, with beer bottle in hand, who frequents the place.
- For Rs.8 you can get the best Podimas (a sort of spicy scrambled egg) at Chennai Fast Foods behind Pachaiyappa's College. They also do an excellent Chilli Beef.
- Another great fast food joint for Fried Rice is behind the Ashok Nagar Pillar. Just follow the great aroma and you'll find it!
- Go to Panagal Park after 8 p.m. and a host of fast food vans will cater to you. You'll find people who roll up in Mercs to cycle rickshaws dining out.

If you are squeamish about eating roadside food, go to Kim Ling in Anna Nagar (just after the Kilpauk Cemetery). This small hole in the wall Chinese food joint serves great Indian Chinese at prices that won't make you go broke. Try their *Chicken Winglets* (Rs.38).

Eating out has come to stay — from Chettinad to Korean, *Dosa to Romali Roti, Quail to Rabbit, Pizza to Paya* — Chennai has it all.

Bon Appetit!

Mithran Devanesen

KRISHNAN AT VEDANTHANGAL

(Contd. from page 5)

be much wider known than it is now. Used to a village within a furlong, the birds can take no fright, or other harm, from being observed. Unfortunately, though they are safe on their nesting ground, they are ruthlessly shot all around, when they set out to find food for themselves and their young. The

Madras Government, interested in the sanctuary, will no doubt devise means to prevent such cruel slaughter. Vedanthangal can do much to stimulate a now apathetic public interest in our bird life, and I hope that more and more people will get to know of its charms and that it will soon develop into a centre of national and international interest.

An avant garde festival

Now in its third year, 'The Other Festival', an avant garde arts event organised by Anita Ratnam (Arangham Trust) and Ranvir Shah (Prakriti Foundation), will begin on December 1, and continue for a week at The Museum Theatre, Chennai. The festival will offer a panorama of performances in music, dance, theatre and installation art by talented artists from India, the USA, UK, France and Malaysia.

Each evening, The Other Festival will see short performances by talented new entrants as well as full-length premieres by celebrated icons. The Festival opens with Jaimini Pathak (Mumbai), presenting an intriguing play on social issues. From Britain comes dancer Akram Khan, offering India premiere of his work. Other artists who will perform are Veenapani Chawla (Pondicherry) with a premiere of her new theatre production, and Ramli Ibrahim (Malaysia), presenting a challenging evening of contemporary dance and theatre.

Canada's celebrated Peter Chin, a multidisciplinary artist, will offer his unique installation work. The Auroville Music Group, Auroville, will feature Indian artists as well as an international group of artistes from Italy, Spain, and UK, in an exciting blend of Jazz and Indian percussion. Aruna Sayeeram (Mumbai) and Domnique Vellard (France), who come together in a symbolic cross-cultural passage creating a Musical Dialogue, will conclude the 7-day festival with a music concert.

For more details/season donor passes/Friends of The Other Festival passes, contact the organisers at Arangham's Chennai office at 852 4917 / 435 2123.

A.S.R.

NOSTALGIA

Pattanam Podi, sheer bliss!

A few days ago my attention was drawn to a news item in an obscure place in one of the leading newspapers of Chennai. This filler in effect said that a few residents of the Mint area in Chennai had surrounded a snuff manufacturing company protesting against the obnoxious fumes emanating from the unit that were making breathing difficult for them. The owner promised to shift the manufacturing unit elsewhere, whereupon the crowd dispersed.

I remember a time when the manufacturers of snuff put Madras on the tobacco map of India. Madras was then the main centre for snuff manufacture. Along with the trade name, snuff manufacturers would add the words "Madras snuff" or "Pattanam Podi" to emphasise its place of origin and, therefore, quality. The business was quite profitable to judge from the ostentatious way the snuff barons lived in palatial residences they erected in places like Washermanpet, Tondiarpet and Royapuram.

Almost all the manufacturing units were situated on the Tiruvottiyur High Road (T.H. Road), starting from the northern end of Mint Street and reaching Tiruvottiyur what was a sleepy little temple village in those days. The T.H. Road area was sparsely populated. Houses disappeared beyond Thyagaraya Chetty Hindu Secondary School — now metamorphosed into Thyagaraya College — giving place to extensive coconut groves, in several of which were snuff manufacturing units. The coconut groves served no honourable commerce; they were cultivated only for the extraction of that intoxication brew, toddy. As you moved along the road, there was a faint

stench of fermenting toddy in the air. And as you approached a snuff manufacturing unit, a whiff of roasting tobacco could be detected. This soon increased in strength, smarting your eyes and irritating your throat. You gasped for breath, coughing incessantly until you moved far from the unit when it almost became normal. But, not quite! The smell increased again as you approached the next such unit!

Two types of snuffs were manufactured. One was the mild, gold-coloured stuff sniffed mostly by people in fashionable circles. This was known as 'Officer's Snuff'. The other was the darker 'Neippodi', the snuff addict's manna. In those days there used to be at least one snuff shop in each shopping area. These exclusive snuff shops were usually bare except for two stoneware jars with large bodies and narrow necks that stood as centrepieces. The jars were specially designed and produced by Parry & Co. in Ranipet. The mouth of the jar was closed with a solid wooden stopper in which a long spindled iron spoon was fitted. The aroma of the snuff was, thus, prevented from dissipating. The snuff was directly dispensed into the buyer's snuff box. If the buyer did not have any receptacle, it would be put in a fold of a dried flattened banana leaf stalk, the "Podimattai".

The snuff box was an important appurtenance of a snuff addict. It also indicated the status of its owner. The one made of horn was the most popular. It was also made in German silver, sterling silver and gold. Rich zamindars and maharajas owned gold boxes encrusted with precious stones. The Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad has an impressive collection of snuff

boxes of various sizes, shapes and material.

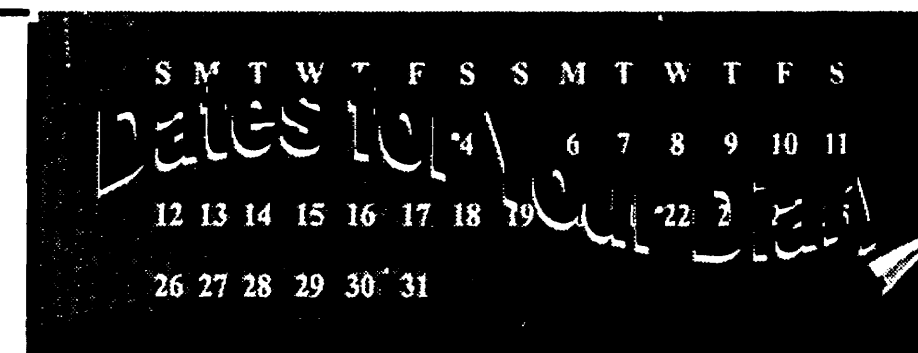
The right place to keep the snuff box was to tuck it in the hip folds of the dhoti. A snuffer was usually a generous cosmopolitan. He would offer a pinch to anyone for the mere asking. He would not shy from accepting a pinch from even a perfect stranger, when he ran short of stock. How do you identify a snuffer? That's easy! His nostrils would have become wider and his nose would be enlarged due to constant sniffing of snuff. Then again, there would be tell-tale particles on the nose and he would emanate a faint snuff smell.

Taking snuff was itself a ceremony. The snuffer would take a pinch from the box with the tips of his thumb and index finger. He might hold it there for a while as he attended to other tasks like reading or talking to his friends. When the urge finally overwhelmed him he'd stuff the pinch into each nostril in turn. When all the powder had been inhaled, he would take out a small kerchief. Holding the opposite corners of this in his hands, he would leisurely polish his nose. The snuffer was at the peak of bliss!

The kerchief used by the snuffer needs mention. It was usually of chequered, dark coloured handloom cloth — poor cousin of the once famous "Madras kerchief" introduced by the East India Company to the West in a bygone era.

Scented chewing tobacco competed with snuff, but no manufacturer of repute set up shop in Madras. It had to be imported from far-off places like Sivapuri, Dindigul, Tiruvapur and Vedaranyam, etc.

M. Sethuraman



November 4 and 5: Workshop on Kutch Embroidery. (at DakshinaChitra).

November 3-13: An exhibition of Paintings by Bijon Chowdhury. (at Artworld, Ganeshpuram).

November 25 and 26: Workshop on Tie & Dye. (at DakshinaChitra).



A painting by Bijon Chowdhury.

CRACKDOWN ON CRACKERS

(Contd. from page 1)

while carbon monoxide, one of the oxides of carbon, is an extremely poisonous gas whose presence cannot be detected by our sensory system as it is odourless. Carbon monoxide combines more than 200 times as readily as oxygen, so that low concentration levels have adverse health effects. Exposure to 100 ppm results in headache and reduced mental acuity. The effects are more pronounced in people with heart, lung or central nervous system diseases. The mode of entry of these oxides is through inhalation. In contact with moisture within the respiratory passage (from nostrils to the lungs), these oxides combine to form acids of sulphur, phosphorus and nitrogen.

While consumers are exposed to the chemicals in the crackers only during the festival, the workers, the majority of whom are children, are the worst affected, since they are exposed to these chemicals continuously throughout the year. They come in contact with salts of metals and oxides of non-metals such as sulphur and phosphorus, which act as fuels,

oxidising and colouring agents. Heavy metals such as cadmium and lead are not required by the body and even in small quantities, they can disrupt the normal functioning of the humans.

Apart from being a toxic industry, firecrackers are a potential fire hazard and the risk is increased manifold during Deepavali time. In 1998, the number of fire accidents in Chennai alone was 146 and in 1999 it was 106 (inclusive of 2 large slums). Rockets are the primary reasons for such accidents and should be banned.

Considering these adverse effects, crackers should be avoided and festivals should be celebrated in the true spirit by lighting lamps or candles.

Toxics Link has been set up with the objective of facilitating greater access to scientific and other information for NGOs and grassroots activists fighting toxic pollution in their region. It has offices in New Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. In Chennai, Toxics Link has tied up with CAG in order to establish a wide network. It may be contacted at 4460387 or e-mail at tlchennai@vsnl.net.

OBSERVING THE URBAN POOR

(Contd. from page 4)

standard ways of speaking throughout the city...
* * *

A funeral procession is a folklore event in itself. Decorated with mounds of flowers, the body is taken in a pushcart surrounded by grieving relatives. All the way through the procession, men dance in front of the pushcarts to the accompaniment of drums. Characterised by retrogressive steps, pelvic thrusts, and lewd facial expressions in the context of overwhelming grief, these funeral dances may be seen as rebellious and liminal manifestation of imposed marginalisation.

Quizzin' with Ram'nan
Quiz master V. V. Raman is out of town. His fortnightly quiz will be resumed on his return.

These dances share generic resemblances to *Gana pattu* performances organised on the death of a leader of a few violent settlements. Usually these performances start late in the night on the 16th day after the death of the leader. *Gana pattu* is sung in a melancholic but high-pitched voice. The melody stays the same and gives the song a meditative quality. The songs reflect on the impermanence of human life through metaphors. The songs weave the dead leader's heroic deeds that landed him in jail, brought women and earned the sympathy of the local populace...

Among the fisherfolk of Ayothikuppam and Injambakkam, another kind of *Gana pattu* exists, but without the dance performance. The fisherfolk *Gana* share its tune, tone, theme and philosophical orientation with the other *Gana*, but

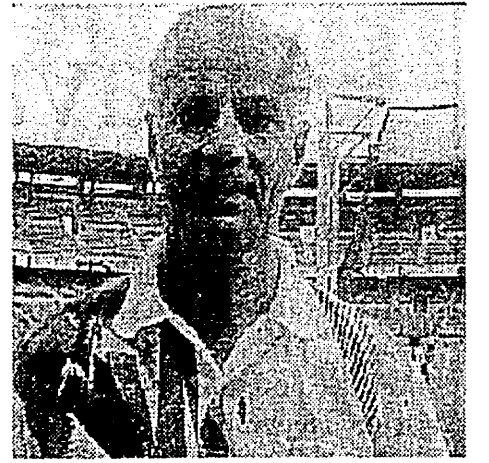
its content is from the sea faring-life. In the mid Eighties *Gana Pattu* became popular with the college students and a few Tamil film directors. Nowadays the tunes of *Gana* are imitated in Tamil film songs and are becoming popular over the Tamil-speaking world.

The rebellious vitality of *Gana pattu* is however on the decline as the urban poor settlements are becoming more and more passive. With the middle class and the urban poor now meeting in several mediating spaces, such as households, beaches, public transport, temples and movie houses, there has been a percolation of middle class values of passivity that has contributed towards the decline. In fact, inter-caste marriages and elopements among the urban poor are on the decline, compared to the mid-Eighties and the majority

now opt for safe arranged marriages.

The English essayist G.K. Chesterton dreamed of a tree that devoured birds nesting on its branches and when Spring came put out feathers instead of leaves. Perhaps the city of Chennai is one such tree... — (Courtesy: Indian Folklore.)

The Dronacharya from Madras



Ken Bosen

Academic year 1955-'56: the first Pre-University batch at Loyola College collected its marksheets.

My scores were good, but only to figure on a list of reserves for a professional course. The lack of an extracurricular activity as back-up was a handicap. The impression was confirmed, when a couple of classmates who were a shade lower on aggregates, earned support through being on a college sport team.

So, thankfully, I now state, I returned to Loyola for a science degree.

Then, there was a compulsion to be part of the elite congregation, those cricketers, hockey players, footballers, athletes, boxers who chin-wagged before classes started and during breaks or slipped out for movie bunks.

I was an ardent cricket fan but no player. That was the year when Loyola, headed by A.G. Milkha Singh and P.K. Belliappa, had few slots for even a good school cricketer on the 'B' team.

I remembered that I had won a 'B' Division Triple Jump (known as Hop, Step & Jump at the time), in my final school year.

"Give it a try," whispered the good angel who sits on the right shoulder.

"Don't be foolish," cautioned the bad chap from the left.

I resolved to be foolish and approached a well-known athletics coach in the city.

"I want your help to train for athletics," I requested.

"What event?"

"Hop, Step & Jump."

"How far can you jump?"

"37 feet."

"When you can do 47 feet come to me."

The brush-off lowered my confidence till friends told me that the national Javelin champion, Ken Bosen, was coaching school and college athletes at the Doveton Corrie School grounds. When I got there, I was shuffling two steps back for each step forward, but I caught his attention.

"Can I be of help?" he asked.

After hearing my petition and without enquiring about my distance, he directed me to show what I could do. "Your coordination is good. Come tomorrow and I will give you a work-out," he said at the end of the trials.

To be favoured with a 'schedule', handwritten by a top athlete-turned coach was inspiration itself!

Season I found me in the Loyola team. Season II won me a University team berth. Season III secured me State representation. More important was the distance gain and time cut: 37' to 46' 10½" in the HS&J, from a miserable 16' in Long Jump to 21' 10", and 10.9 sec from a suspect 13 sec 100m. Not enough for national ranking, but a demonstration of what training under Ken Bosen could do. A mutual interest in Track and Field, discussions and analysis eventually converted a sound trainee-

coach relationship into a great personal friendship... all to my benefit.

* * *

Ken Bosen's schooldays were shared between Doveton Corrie Boys (Madras) and Stanes (Coimbatore). Though he was champion athlete as a school-boy in the very late 40's, early 50's, he was more prominent as a quick bowler. After excelling in various athletic events — high jump, hurdles and even trying the decathlon, he settled for throwing the javelin. Bosen was India's javelin hope at the time of the II Asian Games, but meningitis and a relapse brought his career to an end —

● by
A J de Souza

he was only 27 — and turned him to coaching. He had in 1955 set the national record of 62.36m (about 208 feet) and looked a good prospect for a medal.

Deputed by the Indian Railways, with whom he spent nearly a decade as a coach, to the first NIS Athletics course, Ken Bosen was outstanding, a First Class First. Patiala invited him to join the faculty. He also studied in the U.S. and East Germany.

Between tutoring Track and Field coaches, he was continuously involved in national coaching camps. While he had ability to handle all athletic events, he became an authority in the most difficult group, viz.,

the Throws and his signature event became the intricate Hammer Throw.

We assess a coach if he has one or two trainees who dominate the national or Asian scene. In some cases, strokes of luck make a coach famous because he "happens" on these one or two talented athletes.

I would prefer to evaluate a coach on the margin of improvement he brings about in his training bunch... like Coach Bosen did to me and my contemporaries.

We need battalions of such coaches if our nation of a billion is to win an Olympic Athletics medal.

In the last decade I have heard whispers, "But how many athletes has Bosen PRODUCED?"

I counter: "Enough and more."

He brought about huge improvement in so many aspirants, like yours truly. Numerous national campers were polished through his assistance. He has educated coaches passing through the NS NIS to prepare athletes today. By direct and indirect avenues, he has produced enough and more athletes, I repeat!

Besides being popularly accepted by athletes, Ken Bosen had the academic grasp to have held the Chief Coach (Athletics) post at the NS NIS — a professorial duty. His ability to expound athletics in practice, theory and administration brought him assignments, under the International Amateur

Athletic Federation to South and East Asian countries.

When Kenneth O. Bosen was listed for Athletics, along with two coaches in other disciplines, as a Dronacharya, 2000, the Athletics fraternity rejoiced.

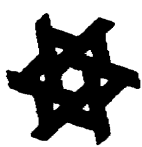
"At last! Better late than never!", we chorused. Though this National Award was instituted five years ago, he missed out till this year while apparent "juniors" were named. In his stoical way he commented that the delay spelt advantage, as the award value appreciated since inception!

That was not a humorous remark.

Ken Bosen retired as Chief Coach (Athletics) NS NIS about eight years ago. He had two terms as National Coach. But has not given up involvement with coaching, organisation and administration. The Sports Authority of India has contracted him till 2002 to train women hammer throwers in the hope that this new event for women will have an Indian athlete or two on the podium when medals are presented for the event at the next Asiad.

Ken Bosen has translated his experience, knowledge and coaching and teaching skills into productive writing. He is the author of several papers and books, published abroad as well as in India; he had twice won the National Award for Sports Literature: 1972 — *Training without Straining*; 1977 — *The Complete Guide to Pole Vaulting*.

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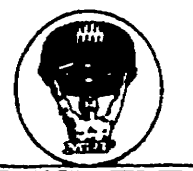
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