

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## Changing Chennai for the worse

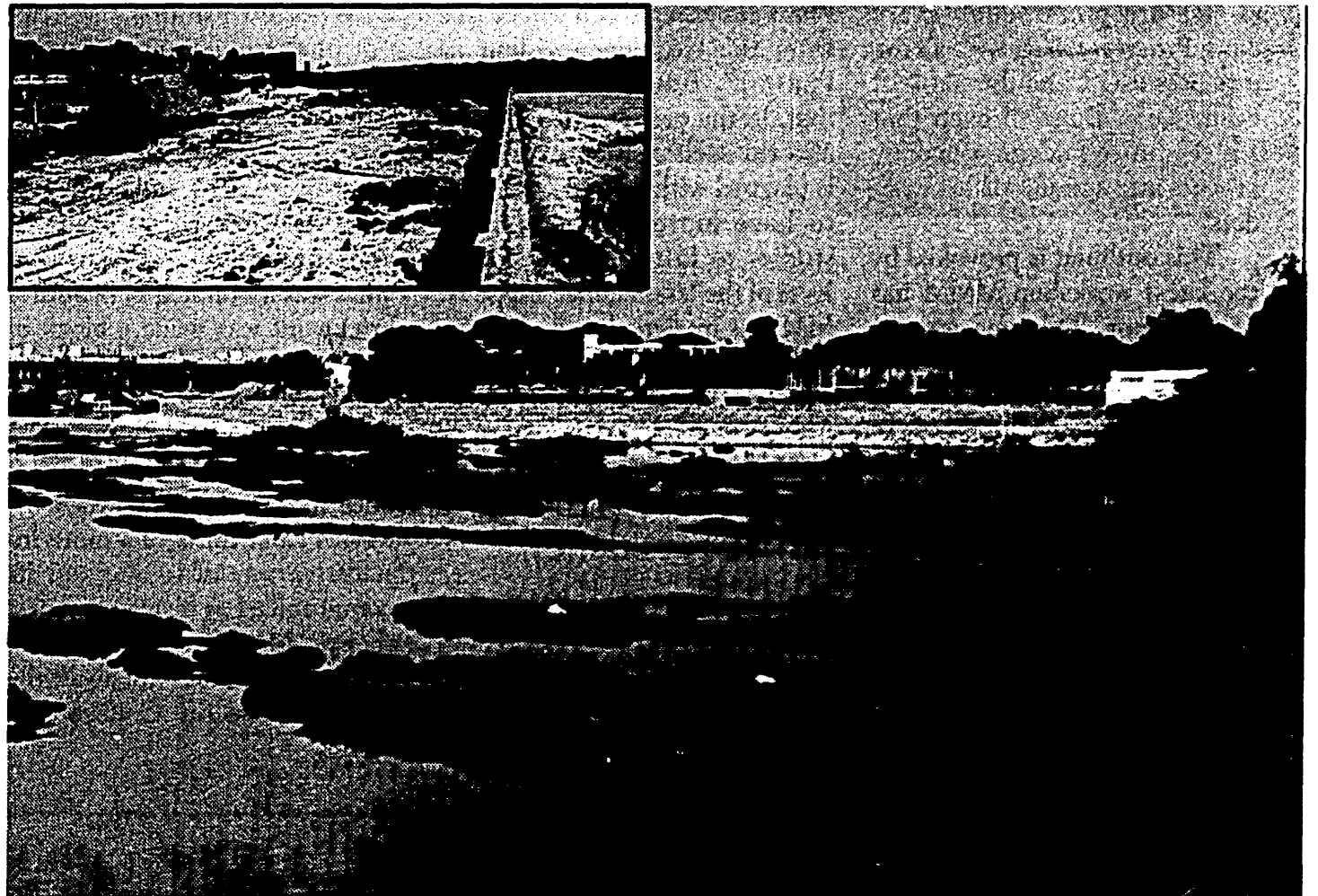
(By The Editor)

There have in recent weeks been several signs and alarming stories indicative of Chennai changing for the worse. The sad signs we must necessarily accept as *fait accomplis* and can only regret the passing away of a little more of the open space the City had. But as for the spate of tales out of school, we only hope they are not true — or the plans that

they foretell are stopped in their tracks.

First the stories that we hope are not true:

- *Ramalayam*, the Travancore palace close to the Dr. Muthulakshmi Park in Adyar, is said to be passing into the hands of developers and multistorey blocks are being talked of. At one time, there was an attempt being made to develop it as a heritage



Quarters being built for Judges and Government Officials on the banks of the Adyar River and a reclaimed part of the shore. Inset is a close-up of the retaining wall, presumably to keep the waters of the Adyar out!

club. It could still be developed as a heritage hotel. Instead, it is being talked of as a site for highrise. What a disaster that will be for the individual-style homes of Padmanabha Nagar.

- In the Boat Club area, *Ben's Gardens*, a substantial part of wooded *Moubray's Gardens* which in its entirety was entrusted to the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, is likely to be given to a developer of another kind on a 99-year lease (to all intents and purposes, a sale). It could be developed as an educational institution, a hospital, a hotel or an ultramodern shopping mall in the midst of all that garden house accommodation around. The shopping mall with luxury accommodation and attendant facilities was a concept that had cropped up earlier when a major international developer had looked at the property, but for one reason or another the plan was dropped. Now the interest is very much local, but is not exactly being welcomed by several in the congregation as well as in the neighbourhood. Meanwhile, negotiations continue, the opposition unheeded — till, no doubt, it loudly seeks a stay.

- Then there's what's happening at the *Cosmopolitan Club*, founded in 1873 as the Indian answer to the exclusive European clubs in Madras and located at this site from 1882. A huge wall has come up before it



Construction continues apace on San Thomé High Road, with *Quibble Island*, once protected forest land, likely to be soon covered with highrise. The building on left is *Metrowater's* overground pumping station for its underground tank here, and next to it are the walls (since hidden by tin sheets) of what is to be another highrise office block.

and trees that shaded its front garden for decades have been cut down. That development is planned, many fear. But it could just be that the club doesn't want its handsome building eyed by the public and is seeking privacy, couldn't it?!

Now for the stories of buildings being raised that will change the landscape of the city:

- Encroaching many, many yards into the Adyar River by reclaiming part of it and also using all of one stretch of a bank to the west of the bridge by the *Theosophical Society* and across the way from *Malar Hospital* is a major housing project that's well under way. We understand that this housing is for judges and senior Government functionaries. We wonder what

the local and national green benches would have to say about such construction. Perhaps the laws have changed about building on reclaimed river beds, river banks, potential sanctuaries and estuary.

- Drive along *San Thomé High Road* which once connected the islands of the estuary of the Adyar and look around. It is now all one land mass, with only a finger of water here and another there to remind you that, once, this whole area was water-rich like these tiny creeks and provided a bounty of birdlife and small fauna to warrant it being considered a possible sanctuary. Just look at the development taking place... an underground water reservoir

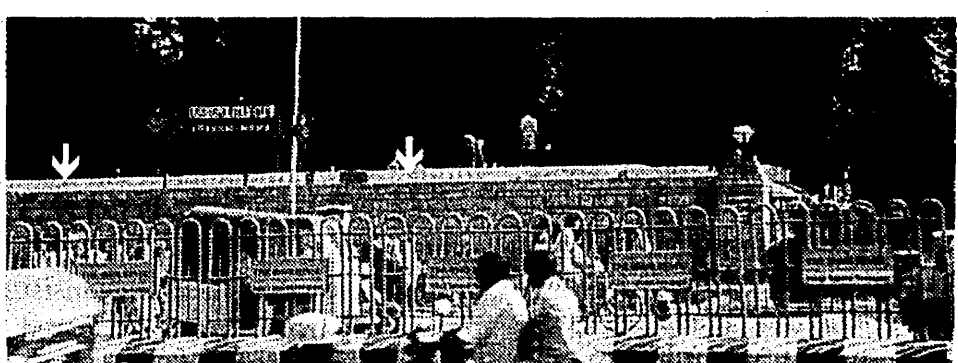
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*Ramalayam* (marked by arrow), once the tree- and garden-surrounded *Travancore Palace*, now said to have been sold to a developer to make way for highrise.



*Ben's Garden* (marked by arrow), surrounded by the woodland of what was once *Moubray's Gardens*, bequeathed in trust in the early 19th Century to the Archdiocese of Mylapore by leading Madras merchant, *John de Monte*. *Madras Musings* understands that negotiations are on for a 99-year lease for institutional development.



The *Cosmopolitan Club's* beautiful tree-shaded front lawn has lost more than one ancient tree to construction (white edge seen over the grey wall) behind stone curtains. Could this be the shape of things to come in the precincts of a heritage building? (All photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

**Madras Musings wishes all its readers  
A Merry Christmas &  
A Very Happy New Year.**

# Rail-road links the urgent need

Another workshop, another study — and the MRTS continues to remain unused, while road transport becomes more chaotic even as all the jawing and head-scratching cogitation goes on. And the sad part of all this is that all this talk gets reported — and the lack of action does not get reported. The *Man From Madras Musings* suggests that newspapers reporting such workshops and study panels feature prominently every day a Progress Chart with all the promises listed, and the status of each, daily. But will even that stir the official decision-making process into action, MMM wonders.

This outburst is provoked by the latest workshop MMM has heard about. This one was on 'Inter-modal transfer facilities at MRTS and suburban railway stations in Chennai'. The workshop made the following splendid resolution:

"There should be a proper integration of rail and road transport modes with provisions for convenient transfer facilities to make the Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) in the city popular."

MMM wonders whether all those at that workshop thereafter ran around shouting 'Eureka!' after making this astounding discovery!

This column can go on and on in this vein for a long time more, listing such world-shattering discoveries. But MMM won't. All MMM has to say is, "Why for the sake of better transport in the city and a more efficient MRTS service all this was not thrashed out in the planning stage itself? Why is it being talked about after one-third of the project is completed and the second-third nearly completed?"

Maybe it's wrong of MMM to think that things like rail-road links, stations in safe places with no road obstructions, plenty of parking place at stations, unified ticketing etc. should have been considered even before a project proposal was made, but then MMM has always thought that PLANNING was all about getting rid of such practical problems that affect the public and perhaps even the project too. MMM just can't imagine how project planning for the MRTS was done without looking at these issues! Surely good planning entails examining such issues, drawing up further plans for contingencies and keeping the plan modular, to add on added capacity if growth is greater than expected. Surely the idea is not to have a workshop to rediscover the wheel — and tell the workshop that a study is being made on how best to go about the rediscovery!

MMM here records that it is already almost a month since it was stated that a study was underway (for how long, not mentioned) and wonders when there'll be a workshop on the study! MMM also wonders how long it will take for the decisions

of the study to be implemented. And he wonders whether after implementation another series of workshops will be held to discover why implementation is not up to the marks expected. With all these studies and workshops before and after them, no wonder it's difficult to get a bureaucrat at any time, particularly when such subjects like heritage are to be discussed.

Anyway, it's nice to know that Phase II of the MRTS will be free from the "lacunae evident in Phase I". But does that mean that, in the process, Phase I will also rid itself of the "lacunae"? It is plagued with or that we'll have to have more workshops and studies to bring Phase I to the level of the less-lacunae Phase II? MMM is intrigued; is a planning link being intended between Phases I and II — and III in the future — even at this state of play?

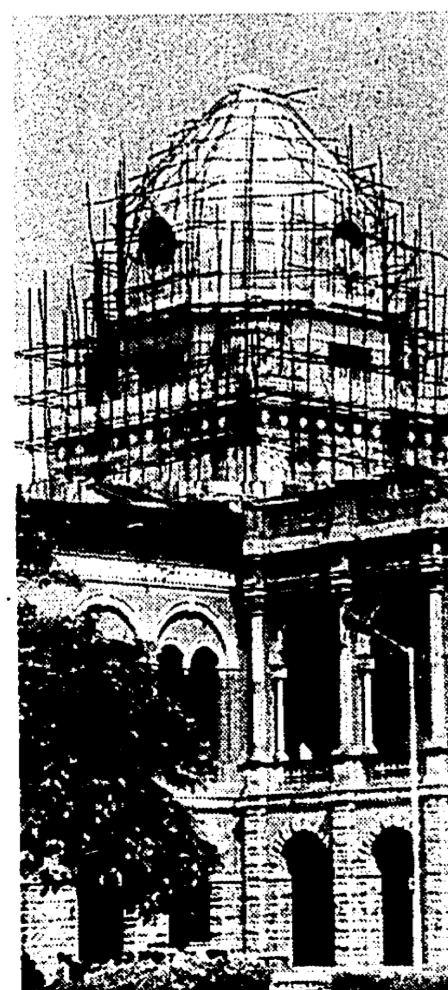
## Art at Presidency

It once had a reputation for being one of the most prestigious colleges in the country for Arts and Science. A recent survey indicated it was getting back that

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

past high reputation. But Presidency College is doing its best to erase that reputation with a red brush and by refusing to find green fingers.

Sometime ago, plans to PAINT the exposed brickwork of a hallowed Chisholm building were reported in *Madras Musings*. It was pointed out at the time how much this was against all principles of heritage and how an institution once famed for its history studies should show the



Painting a raucous pink the dome Robert Chisholm never envisaged when he designed the Presidency College building. (Photograph by RAJIND N. CHRISTY.)

way to the preservation of heritage.

The *Man From Madras Musings* is aware that a newly appointed and sensitive Principal was searching for answers as to how an alternative to the paint brush could be found. MMM is also aware that neither he nor a higher authority in the Education Department, who was informed of the Principal's quest, took the matter further.

Work on painting the exterior of the building that would figure on any Heritage List of the City was stopped while these attempts to find a few answers went on. Then, suddenly one day, the work began again — and the paint brush ensured what was a building of beautiful brickwork was made a block of red that screamed as loud as the pink the dome was painted — following a pattern started a few years ago. For a College that once took its heritage seriously, MMM can't think of a more insensitive way of tossing out its commitment to history and aesthetics. MMM only hopes that the same fate does not await the art collection the College possesses.

The College possesses a fine collection of European, Ajanta, Chinese and Persian art, reproductions though they be. Housed in a corridor of the main building, this was a collection that reflected the College's commitment to aesthetics in other times. Little attention has been paid to the collection in recent years, which was found to be in a sadly neglected state recently by an enterprising young reporter. Many a painting was missing, but many others offered great opportunities for restoration. MMM only hopes that the present process of daubing paint on anything exposed does not extend to these paintings! That instead, they are handed over to professional restorers, like the Museum's restoration cell, with the request that the best possible restoration be done. But once that is done, the collection will need a home where it can hang safe from the attentions of vandals. Can the College today, as in the past, provide it a safe haven?

As for green fingers, MMM wonders whether they are being sought for Presidency's famed cricket ground on the Marina, now an absolute disgrace! Presidency should be ashamed of what has been done to Subbu's pride! But will it do something to erase that shame?

## Showplace at last

The *Man From Madras Musings* is delighted to hear that an exhibition and convention centre for trade fairs is at



Work in progress at the Exhibition and Convention Centre being built in Nandambakkam. Two buildings are expected to be inaugurated in time for the Leather Fair at the end of January 2001. (Photograph by RAJIND N. CHRISTY.)

last to open in Chennai come January. That will make it pretty close to TEN YEARS since *Madras Musings*, in one of its first issues, first pointed out the need for such a centre in Madras.

For years the International Leather Fair had struggled on in Madras with less than international standard facilities. A few other major fairs peeped in but dropped Chennai from their subsequent plans, because

## Family fare

It's amazing the Indian subjects you find specialists from abroad in. Dr. Brian Shoemsmith, of the Communications Department, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia, was in town recently talking about his speciality: Film Censorship in India!

It was a dull, read-from-an-academic-paper presentation that he recently made to a group generally old enough to remember the beginnings of censorship in India and the crazy paths it has since followed. Such an audience provided the opportunity for a lively discussion that, sadly, never materialised.

But there were a couple of points made during the evening that *The Man From Madras Musings* thought worth noting. One saw the film in India opening out halls to a closed society. Gatherings of people, in earlier times often caste-based, now sat together in classless halls and shared the same joys and sorrows depicted on a generally classless screen. It was a medium that played a significant role in helping break down caste barriers.

Another intriguing view was that censorship on grounds of morality ensured the 'safety' of the medium for audiences of all ages. The morality policing helped create a medium meant for the whole family — and enabled the popularity of film to grow as a medium.

Shoemsmith, for his part, made the point that the call for censorship of films in India was first made in Britain and not by the British authorities in India. The old maids in Britain saw greater need for protecting Indian audiences, from striptease and other such activities featured by Western film-makers, than the British authorities in India did and, so, the call for censorship was first made in the House of Commons around 1916.

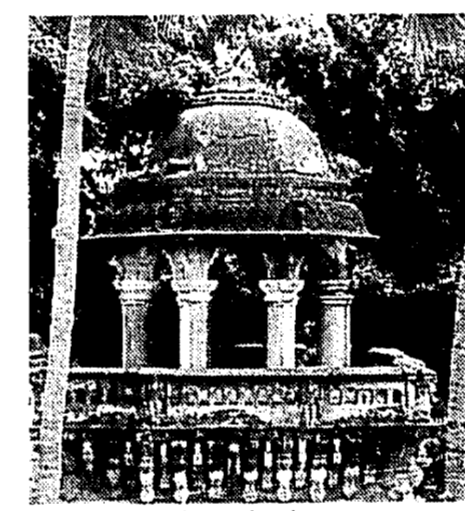
While the discussion provided some interesting questions — though, often, incomplete answers — the talk itself demonstrated once again to MMM how deathly dull academics can be if they insist on reading from a paper peppered with polysyllabic words. Why academics feel that such language is a display of knowledge is beyond MMM's ken.

— MMM

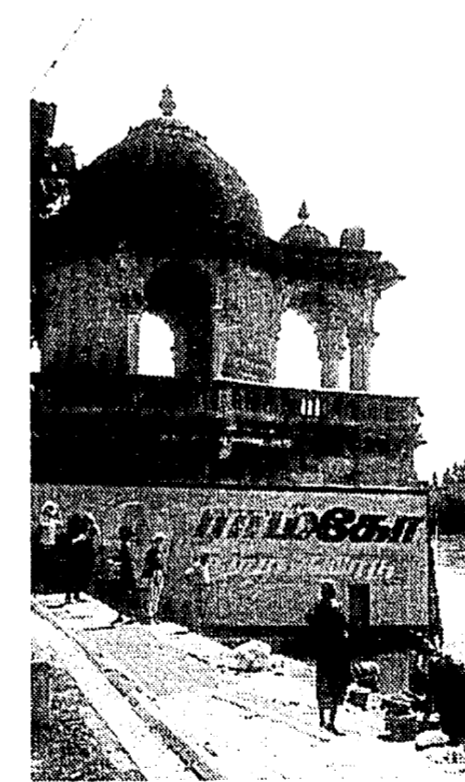
## Heritage Quest

# Peep into T.N.'s Maratha heritage

Mention Thanjavur and most people think 'Chola', for the city's treasure is the great Brihadeeswarar Temple, begun by Chola King Rajaraja in the 10th Century A.D., now a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site. In fact, Thanjavur District, with its flat terrain, fertile soil and abundant water, has been fought over and governed by a succession of rulers; the Vijayanagaras in the 1300s, the Nayaks in the 1500s and the Marathas in the 1700s, to name a few. Each of these rulers added to the Great Temple in their own way and left a trail of other buildings, temples and monuments scattered throughout the district. Today, most of



Orathanal Chattram.



Thiruvaiyaru Chattram.

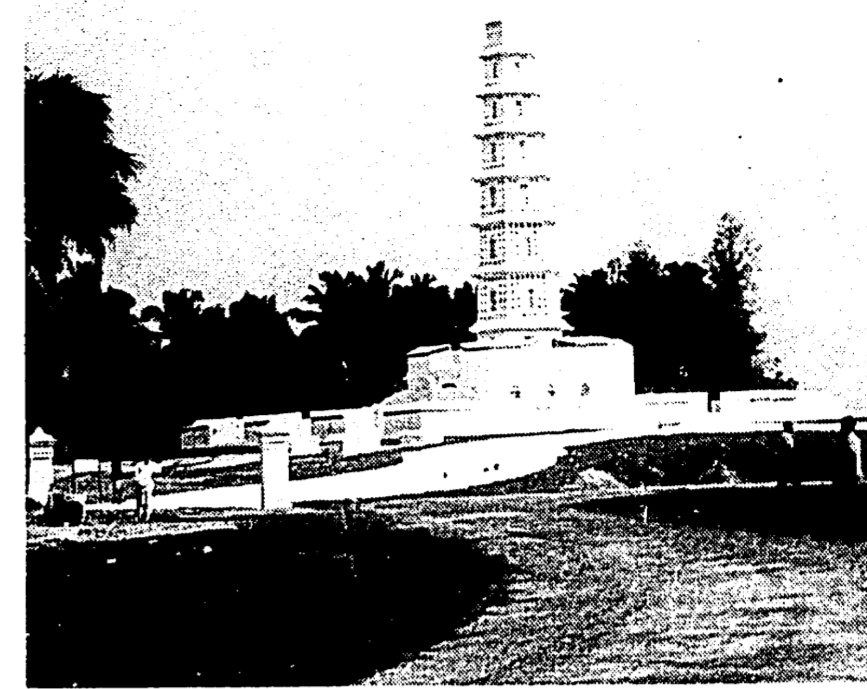
these lesser heritage sites are undocumented and unprotected.

A year ago, Dr. S. Suresh, an archaeologist who has researched the Maratha period in Tamil Nadu, approached the Tamil Nadu Chapter of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), about organising a tour of Maratha heritage sites in Thanjavur district. The Marathas ruled Thanjavur from 1675, when they ousted the Nayaks, to 1855 when, lacking an heir, they were forced to cede to the British. INTACH agreed to

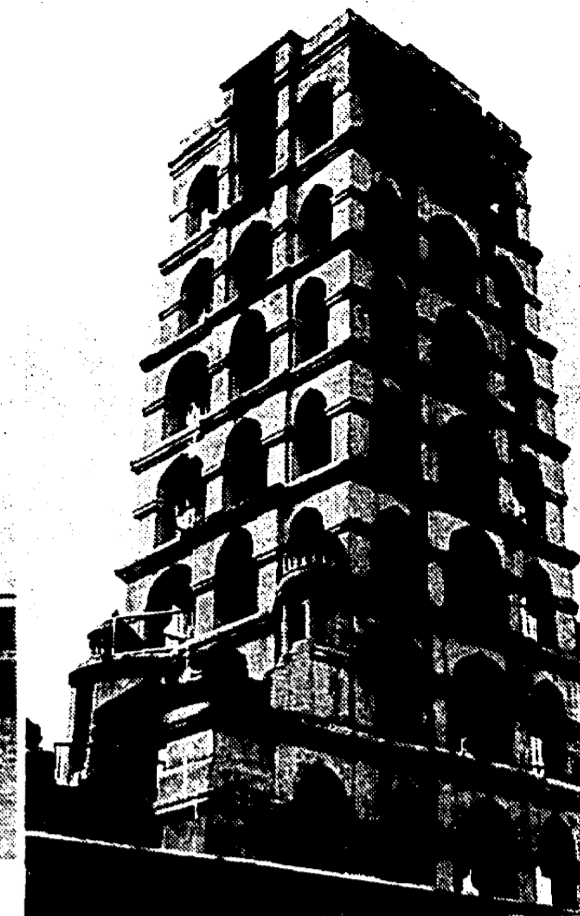
sponsor the trip and 16 history buffs, 6 expatriates and 10 residents of Chennai, signed up for the 3-day tour.

We met at Tambaram Station one evening and boarded the Rameswaram Express for the overnight journey to Thanjavur. On arrival there in the morning and following breakfast, we headed off to Brihadeeswarar Temple where we spent the entire morning, admiring its stately *vimana*, large Nandi stone carvings, main temple shrines built by later rulers and a small archaeological museum. Lunch was a specially arranged feast of Maratha dishes and signalled that we would now focus on the Marathas for the remainder of our trip.

The Marathas were great patrons of Thanjavur culture. Fittingly then, our first stop was the Saraswathi Mahal Library, located in the Royal Palace compound. Although the library was established during the Nayak reign, it was the Maratha, and specifically Maharaja Serfoji II (1798-1832), who developed it into one of the most important libraries in Asia. It is now a registered society, funded by the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Central Government. Its collection includes unique paper and palm leaf manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu, on such diverse subjects as literature, drama, science, medicine, astrology, religion and philosophy as well as Thanjavur paintings, an eclectic assortment of 17th, 18th and 19th Century European reference works, and archival records of the Maratha raj. We were particularly interested in the library's conservation efforts, which make use of natural pesticides, such as citronella oil, to repel insects and keep the palm leaves from becoming too brittle to handle. Our escort, the head of the Conservation Department, brought out several rare items for us to see, among them the first catalogue of the Library (which was recorded on palm leaves), an antique map of India with parts of what are now Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa as yet uncharted, and a handwritten catalogue of Tipu Sultan's library which was later partially destroyed with his palace in 1799.



Above, Manora tower. On right, Bell Tower, Thanjavur. (All pictures by the author.)



Leaving the Library, we barely had time to climb the 8-storey Arsenal, cleverly built to resemble a *gopuram* from a distance, and catch the sunset over the Royal Palace compound, before our scheduled audience with the descendant of the last Maratha ruler in his private quarters in the Palace.

The next day, we returned to the Palace Compound to climb the 7-storey Sarja Madi bell tower built by King Serfoji II in 1800. The bells are no longer in sight and, unfortunately, in the interest of protecting visitors, the tower now sports very

modern steel railings in each of its graceful arches. We completed our Palace visit in the Maratha Durbar Hall. Sadly neglected, little remains of the fine wooden pillars, tiled floors and richly painted walls. Then, we boarded the bus for the 75-minute drive through the richest of the district's rice growing belt to the seacoast and Manora.

En route, we stopped in Orathanal, to see a chattram, or choultry, one of a network of resthouses built by the Marathas, to provide shelter to travellers along the old pilgrimage

trail to Rameswaram, most no longer in existence or in ruins. This chattram is now partly used as a warehouse and, until three years ago, also housed a school. Our planned 15-minute stop there easily ticked to 45 minutes as we explored the double-storeyed maze of courtyards and photographed its charming wooden and stone figures. We left wondering how much longer this historic chattram would survive.

At Manora, in 1814, right on the beach, the Marathas built an 8-storey fortified pagoda-like

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## Time shift

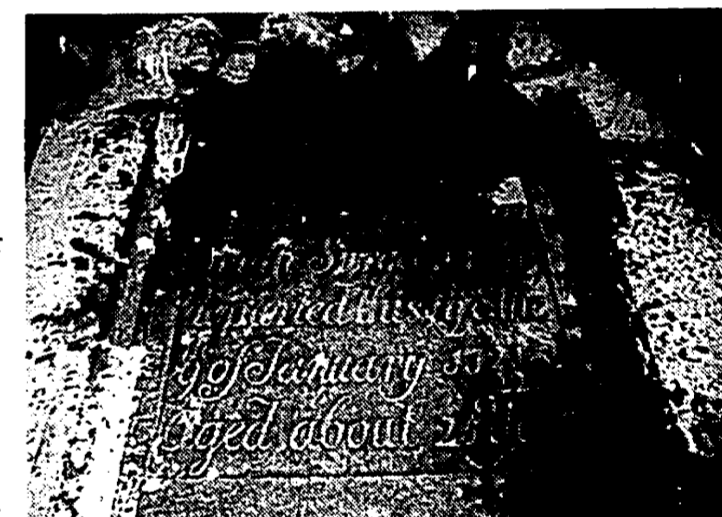
An interest in graveyards is more than just a case of morbid curiosity. For the historian, these memorials not only give us the names of persons they commemorate but more often than not can also tell us about the customs of the times, including attitudes towards death and its causes.

St. Mary's Church inside Fort St. George has several sad memorials revealing how often young British women and their children succumbed to diseases soon after their arrival in South India. Others reveal the deaths of officers by heatstroke (which is not surprising given the unsuitable woollen uniforms they wore) and even, in one case, after an attack by a tiger. One well-known memorial tells of Job Charnock rescuing a widow from *sati* and eventually marrying her himself. Several allude to officers who died only a short while before they were due to retire in Britain. In short, anyone interested in the early days of the British in Madras could benefit by examining memorials inside churches and the tombstones in their graveyards as well as the odd obelisk or monument dotted about the city and its environs.

However, those who have looked at some of the gravestones paving the entrance outside St. Mary's might have been puzzled by one or two of the inscriptions. Below is one example taken at random:

"Here Lies ye Body of William Smith Surgeon who Departed this life the 9th of January 1721/22 Aged about 25 years"

The puzzle lies in the year; what can 1721/22 mean? By chance, I was looking at these inscriptions with a colleague from Calcutta who was as intrigued as I was by the problem and on his return home sent me an extract from Victoria



The tombstone of William Smith Surgeon in the courtyard of St. Mary's in the Fort. Note the 1721/22 inscription, which offered author Utley an opportunity to clear up a mystery. (Photograph by RAJIND N. CHRISTY.)

Glendinnings' book *Jonathan Swift* which explains all:

"Before the reform of the Gregorian Calendar in 1582, the beginning of the Christian year was 25 March, not 1 January. Various Protestant states declined for a long time to make the change. Denmark, The Netherlands and the Protestant German states switched in 1700. England stuck with the old calendar until 1752, thus putting herself out of synch with her European neighbours, and causing later writers to make errors in dating events which took place in the first part of a year; a date given as 17 February 1714 is, to us, 17 February 1715. The custom in *Swift's* lifetime was sometimes to acknowledge the problem by writing, for example, 17 February 1714/15."

So there we have it. A puzzle solved and an episode in history that makes us realise that time is, in one sense, a man-made way of dividing reality and that we should not make assumptions about the past based on the habits of the present. After all, in another context, there was not even one time-zone across Britain until the coming of the railways! Was this also true across India?

Jaspar Utley

# Open Sesame!

— and you are into a labour of love

'Treasure'. What does it signify to most people?

Sunken galleons? Aladdin's cave, filled with gold?

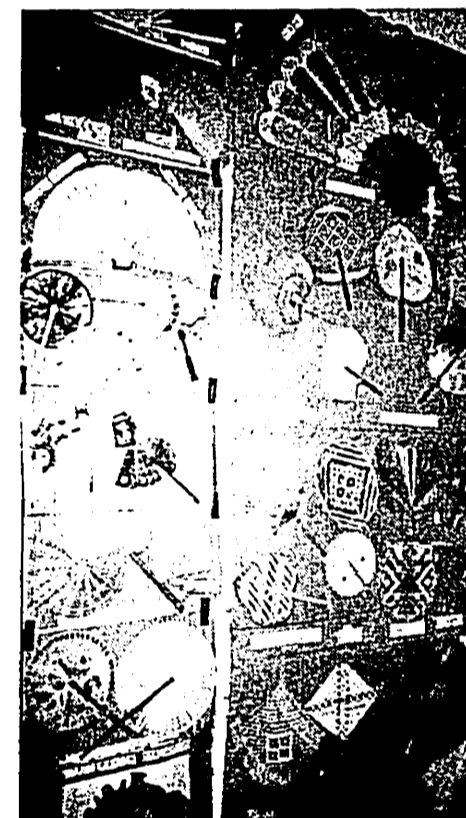
To dedicated collector R.K. Nehru, of 'Hobby World,' T.Nagar, the word 'Treasure' means 'Heritage.' Given his commitment to Heritage, Nehru firmly believes that you have to look at the past in order to understand the present.

Fans, candles, liquor bottles, pencils, rubbers, miniature cars, airplanes, dolls, medals, charts, miniature musical instruments, knives, masks, fruit and vegetable models, currencies, rare commemorative coins, playing cards... the list is endless.

"I could have earned a place for myself in the Guinness Book of Records had I concentrated on one single area," states Nehru. He was never tempted to do so.



Stories of battles.



A variety of fans.



The Nehrus — collectors of knowledge.  
(All pictures by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Value is determined not in terms of money involved. It is seen in the ideas, talent, and the very lifestyle which created each item. Nothing is too trivial for a collection that represents human existence and endeavour.

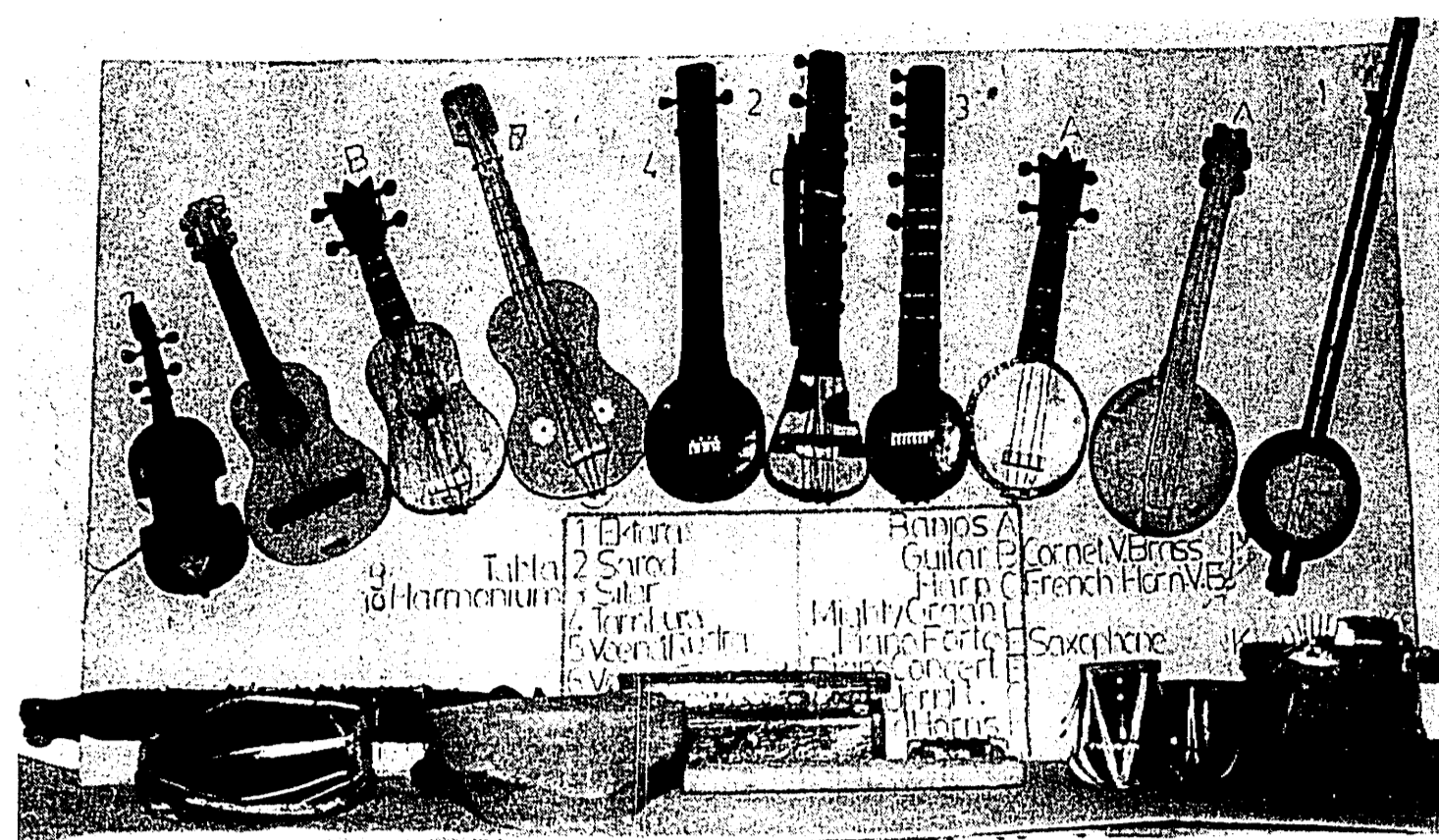
For more than 50 years now, through journeys that have taken him from Kohima to Kanniyakumari, to Singapore, Malaysia and Bali, Nehru has collected... and collected...

The word 'collected' has to necessarily stand on its own. Only then can the total picture of the sheer variety and expanse of his collection be conveyed.

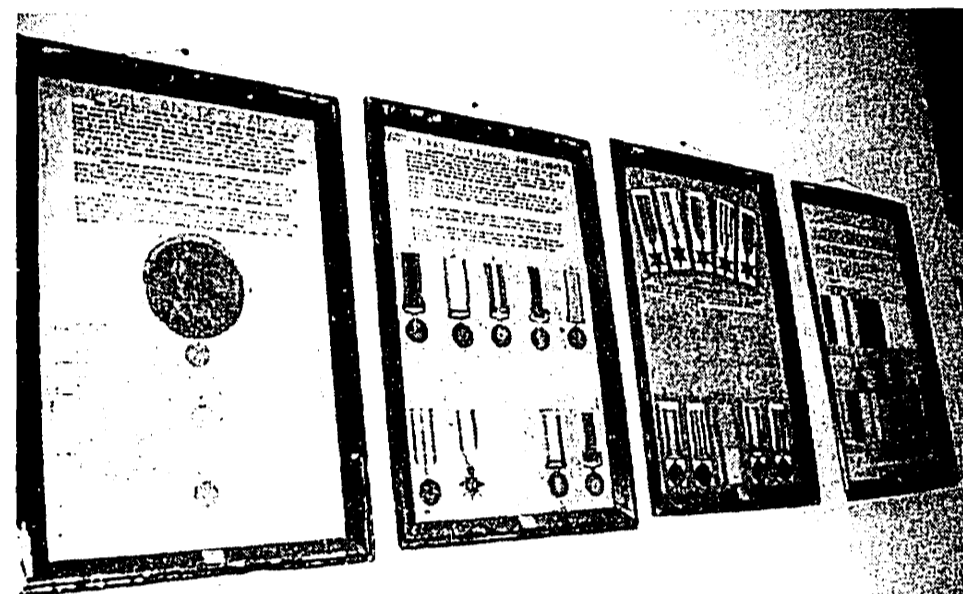
When did it all begin?

His family originally came from Burma. Born in the 20's, this upright, principled member of a fast-dying generation began like most little boys, by collecting coins, soda bottle covers and stamps. As a 10-year old at P.S. High School in Madras, with very little pocket money to hand, he added matchbox labels, blade packets and playing cards to his fast growing collection. (Incidentally, the cards number around 7000 today.)

With employment, things became a little easier, although his salary in the 40's was Rs. 69 a month. He went on to join the



A range of stringed instruments.



A story of medals and decorations.

Indian Railways, retiring in 1983. History has always fascinated him, and during his career he travelled all over the country, seeking, finding, collecting.

Personal expertise has never been an issue for a person interested in Life with a capital 'L'. For example, he knew nothing about music. That did not inhibit him from picking up miniatures of rare musical instruments, both foreign and Indian, some of which are not even in use today. Or from creating charts tracing histories of schools of music.

His collections not merely reflect the march of time, but also question the directions our society takes at times. He has a 'Corruption Corner', complete with appropriate dolls, showing how, from birth to death, corruption is present in every aspect of our lives today.

Some of the dolls in his collection are over 100 years old. The proud owner of a 'Veiled Rebecca' in miniature, he feels that a special thrill lies in knowing that 'I have the only piece of its kind'. Some of the dolls represent forms of work that today's children will probably never see. A 'water-carrier', for example.

"You could say that a glance around my collection provides instant general knowledge," laughs Nehru.

Special mention must be made of his wife, Savithri. A collector of coins and stamps in her youth, she has matched his interest for interest. Having willingly given up a more conventional, probably easier, lifestyle, she has, for years, trav-

elled with him, exploring, searching and finding.

Was it a marriage of two collectors?

"My family also came from Burma," she discloses, and then smiles, "You could say he came in search of me!"

How exactly does this collection work? Do they get tips from people, or do they find things on a random basis, being blessed with an eye for the rare and original?

• by  
**Ranjitha Ashok**

It is a mixture, they reply. While 25% of the collection is through actual purchases, gifts and donations also play a role. The Managing Director of Mohan Meakins donated rare liquor bottles back in 1962. Today, the collection has grown to 500 rare bottles and peg measures. They also sometimes exchange items with other collectors.

Travel, exploratory trips, poking around little lanes and *gullies* yield rich results. "Collectors mustn't be scared to walk", laughs Savithri Nehru.

"I buy things that I know will never come back again, or even be made again," states Nehru.

On their return from Malaysia and Bali, with eight crates of items with them, the Nehrus raised a laugh among the Customs Officials, who couldn't see why anyone would pick up all this "stuff".

Does that happen often? Do people ask "Why?"

Yes, people do wonder why anyone would bother surrounding himself with so much that has no value in the money-sense of the word.

"People have even called this *kuppai* (rubbish)," chuckles Nehru, waving his arms around. "They forget that sometimes the best treasures are found in what appears to be rubbish."

"We are two pensioners", the Nehrus state. "We have enough for ourselves, and so are quite content to invest in our collection."

He once owned a '49 Ford which won a certificate in the Vintage and Classic Car Parade in 1989.

His little flat is filled with his work. Every room, shelf and cupboard has been converted into a mini museum, and given individual names... "Raja Kelkar Gallery", "Salar Jung Gallery", and "Virendra Hegde Gallery".

Each piece is researched, and possesses a write-up. He has rare books — an 1885 Tamil edition of a book on equine medicine, for instance.

A bioscope, a 90-year old sewing machine, and an antique harmonium donated by friend Khadeer Basha share a room, along with the world's largest *kooja*, which was rescued for Rs. 40 from an uncaring owner who was planning to throw it away.

Among his collections of coins and currencies are rare pieces, whose existence surprised even the RBI.

Value lies in the heart of the collector. That explains why exquisite bunches of green grapes complete with vine leaves in jade share shelf space quite naturally with a bunch of grapes in wood.

And stick-on bindis and glass bangles exist side-by-side with ancient masks and folk-art.

Nehru's collection of rare Ganjifa cards requires special attention. He has made up entire charts tracing their history, complete with illustrations of the varieties in existence.

The high points are the charts. These have been painstakingly collected, written up, put together, and are a mine of information, complete with photographs. They cover a range of topics as varied as Chennai city, bridges, clocks,

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# Making Tamil e-savvy

• Tamil is one of the few Asian languages that can be used for domain name registration, thanks to a US-based company (i-dns.net). This service was launched a few months ago, but it is yet to gain popularity and needs sufficient users in Tamil to be of much help.

It was widely held by economists and Internet observers a couple of years ago that English would lose its reign as the language of the Web by the year 2001, giving way to Spanish and Chinese. It has not happened; English continues to dominate, with over 78 per cent of the Web content in the language.

• by  
**Refai Salafis**

In India, Tamil and Hindi are the only languages playing a major role, with the former boasting the highest Web content.

Nearly six months have passed since the third TamilNet conference, a standardisation meet held in Singapore to find ways and means to make Tamil e-savvy, and a flurry of research activities is underway. One of the foremost developments is the word processing technology. Earlier, there were numerous Tamil software programmes that worked independent of each other and would not read text or data in other Tamil

fonts. But with the development of a universal Tamil interface and drivers it is possible now to read all Tamil fonts. Ever since the development of the first conventional Tamil processor in 1983, there have been giant strides in processing technology, especially in the last two years. Word processors with Tamil menu names are also available in the market.

A few of the other technological advancements that will soon be available to the public are OCR (Optical Character Recognition) in Tamil and a universal Tamil Search Engine — a key element in web-enabling the language. Domain name registration in Tamil, standardisation of computer-related terms and English-Tamil transliteration systems are already complete. A couple of months ago, TVS Electronics announced the launch of standardised multi-lingual keyboards and they are now available in the market.

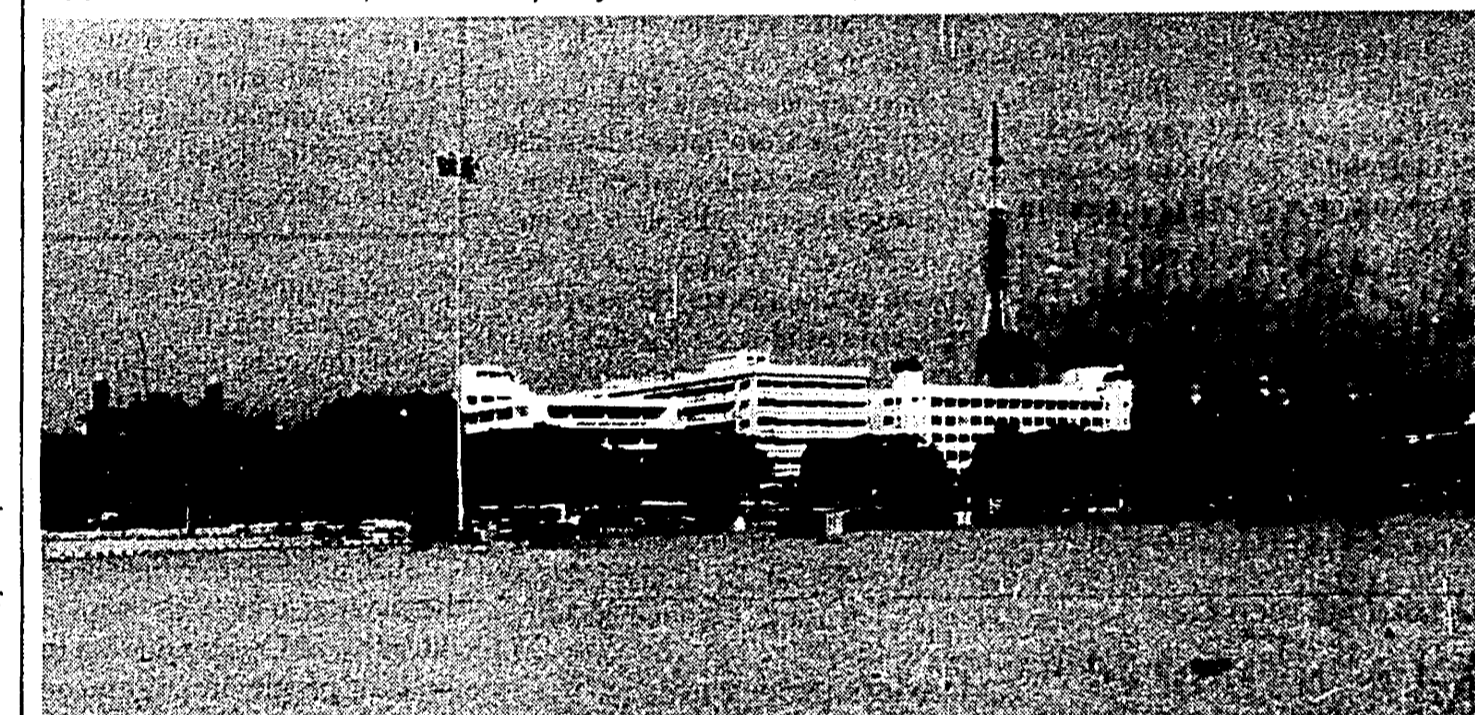
Most of today's computer systems are built to handle one language at a time. However, the rapid growth of the Web has accelerated the push for developing global software. An international language-encoding standard has rapidly become a necessity, so that computers in one language community can 'talk' with those in another language community. That involves the upgrading of all

computer software systems including operating systems, database programmes, Web server programmes, Web publishing tools and browsers. This led to developing a coding scheme, called Unicode, to support the interchange, processing and display of the written texts of the diverse languages of the world. Though Unicode standards have been in use for quite some time, Tamil is a recent entrant



Our OLD is of the grand uncluttered view that Chepauk Palace and Senate House provided from what later (in 1884) became the Marina Beach. Chepauk Palace was built in 1768 and to its right Senate House opened in 1879. This picture from the VINTAGE VIGNETTE's Collection has been used in another of the greeting cards brought out by Vintage Vignettes for the Season.

Our NEW shows the cluttered view today of the same stretch as seen from about the same place on the beach. Tragic is the fact that Chepauk Palace can no longer be seen from the front, even if you go right up to it; only a rear view is possible these days and even that is being concealed by construction. (Photographs: The OLD from the VINTAGE VIGNETTES Collection, the NEW by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



to this agreement. By conforming to this global standard, it will now be possible to read e-mails in the local language without the aid of additional software. Talks are also underway to develop a Tamil version of the Linux O/S — a popular operating system that is used in the Internet. To top it all, Microsoft will soon be launching a completely Tamilised version of its popular Windows 2000 software.

Meanwhile, research is underway to develop voice recognition and speech synthesis software and other multimedia tools in Tamil. Software for automated translation of Tamil texts to other languages and vice versa and dedicated software for

Tamil businesses are also being developed. Another positive feature that these developments have given rise to is the spurt in quality Tamil software journals — there are at least half a dozen of them. These, it is anticipated, will help students of all strata in the State to become computer literate.

With over 65 million Tamils living in India — and considering the IT growth in the State — and another 10 million in other countries, Tamil offers promising economies of scale for both e-commerce and networking, but it still has to attract international players the way Hindi and Chinese have done.

## A Chinese promotes Tamil Internet

Dr. Tan Tin Wee, Director of the Bioinformatics Centre at the National University of Singapore and an Associate Professor with the University's Biochemistry Department, is the man behind Singapore's Tamil Internet Steering Committee, a project he has been working on since 1998. Tamil is all Greek to him, he does not know many Tamil words, but that has not stopped the only non-Indian adviser on the Committee from using whatever little he knows of the language, whenever he gets the chance.

This lack of fluency in the language has, however, not diluted his commitment to promoting the use of the Tamil Internet.

The 19-member TISC, launched earlier this year, will help the Tamil community in Singapore to be Net-savvy, and speed up the development of multilingual Net content.

The following year, he was part of the team that developed TamilWeb, a font which enabled people to read Tamil on the Net. And in 1997, he took part in TamilNet, an international symposium for Tamil information processing and resources.

Language never proved a problem. He explained, "All the meetings were held in English, and I was involved only in the technical aspects of the projects."

After the formation of the Chinese Internet Steering Committee in 1998, Dr. Tan thought that it would be an excellent idea to have a similar committee for the Tamil community. And that's when he mooted the idea. He has ambitious plans for the committee. "We want to play a leading role in developing the Tamil Internet worldwide. We want to set a good example to other communities and, if possible where appropriate, play a catalytic role in helping other Indian language groups get off the ground when we have the necessary resources." — (Courtesy: <http://www.bic.nus.edu.sg/NEWS/>)

Genevieve Jiang

## Want to muse with MUSINGS?

If you would like to be put on Madras Musings' mailing list, just fill in the form below (use block letters/type) and post it to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt Ltd, 62/63 Greaves Road, CHENNAI-600 006.

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## OUR READERS WRITE



### Making eyes sore

This letter is in the interest of conservation and posterity. Since 1964, I have been going past Presidency College virtually every day. I have always admired the exposed brickwork architecture of the College and every conservationist will agree that this institution is indeed a landmark not only in our city but amongst all educational institutions in our country.

After admiring this landmark for years, it is really sad to see the exposed brickwork being "painted" over. What really should have been done was to steamwash the facade, which is the practice worldwide. Unfortunately, what used to be a relief for sore eyes amongst the horrendous architecture in Madras now makes my eyes sore!

There is still one block left, which has not been touched. May I most humbly suggest that you consider steamwashing this building instead of making it appear like a modern replica.

Rajesh Malhotra

6B, Arunachalam Road

Kotturpuram, Chennai 600 085.

Editor's note: This is a letter addressed to the Principal of Presidency College and copied to Madras Musings.

### Hoardings menace

More than a year ago, the Chennai Corporation announced in the newspapers a ban on hoardings at important locations,

roads, junctions and other places in Chennai. The year was passed without any change. Hoardings continue to be put up and there seems to be no effective action from the Corporation against those who do this. Private and public institutions also do not appear to be cooperating. For example, Church Park Convent on the Mount Road is a prestigious location. One of the places where the Chennai Corporation's ban was meant to be implemented was in front of this school. The school, with all its spaciousness and tree-wealth, is hidden on both its road fronts by hoardings.

The school authorities also do not appear to take interest in following up the matter with the Corporation and ensuring the removal of hoardings around their beautiful school. There are many other places like this in the city.

*Singara Chennai* will be a distant dream if the Corporation does not take effective action when it announces schemes and plans to improve the city's beauty. Public and private institutions should also show an interest and assist the Corporation in taking action against those who take law into their hands. Will they?

S.R. Rajagopal

Triveni House, 1 Floor

57(O.27), Eswaradas Laa St.

Triplicane, Chennai 600 005.

### Lawless processions

The suggestion to ban political processions made by the Justice

## Two more pedestrian issues from an endless list

### A NEW TRAFFIC MENACE

Cyclists have been doing it all along (perhaps with some slight justification), not to mention the official *vahanas* like garbage trucks and police vehicles, for which no laws exist. Of late, it has become fairly routine for powered two-wheelers and, occasionally, autos and bigger vehicles too. What I am referring to is driving on the wrong (i.e. right) side of the road. Many drivers in a hurry now think nothing of coming out of a side lane along the right edge and turning without a pause directly into the oncoming traffic, then moving on until there is a gap in the traffic flow (or median) through which they can swerve into the proper lane.

Waiting at the junction is perhaps seen as a sign of weakness, while turning left and taking the U-turn further on is an option which only some law-abiding citizens may consider. With useable pavements becoming a rarity, people on the road now enjoy the privilege of getting knocked down from any direction. Is anyone thinking of patenting a rear-view mirror for pedestrians?

### ARE MOST MADRASSI MOTORISTS MORONS?

Surely even road users other than pedestrians must get annoyed when they have to contend with a vehicle which is reversing blindly into the road, either out of a gate or from a parking zone. The inevitable disadvantage of the driver's position is often further compounded by dark tinted window glasses (supposedly illegal) or other impediments to a view of the space at the rear. Sometimes there is a de-

crepit securityman giving confused signals or trying to stop the road traffic, and perhaps an audio warning from the reverse gear control, adding to the general cacophony.

As a non-driver of any vehicle, it would seem to me that if motorists can REVERSE INTO their buildings or parking spaces (angular or perpendicular), they can drive straight out with a clear view of the road, without endangering anyone. Or is there some fallacy in this idea?

There is another aspect to the topic of reversing - the victims being those who are forced to face the music. Many of these modern car owners insist on letting everyone within a fifty yard radius know that they have a taste for some item of Western classical music or a Christmas melody or some other famous piece, repeated over and over again if they have to back up a long way. Having to listen to the tune of *Silent Night* twenty times a day ensures that I wouldn't want to hear it again at Christmas. Then there are cars which make some weird, indescribable (computer generated?) noises, or a voice in a far eastern accent repeating ad nauseam "Attention please! This car is packing up". How I wish they all would really. In my opinion, an audio warning for a reversing vehicle can be limited to a two-tone low frequency buzz, which should be heard only in the immediate rear. In fact, if the driver is a responsible sort, no signal is needed at all other than the red light flashing. Wishful thinking, what?

Thomas Tharu

4-A-7 Kasyp

Nehrunagar Fourth Street

Adyar, Chennai 600 020.

Mohan Commission of Enquiry which probed into the action taken against the rally in Tirunelveli by Pudhiya Tamizhagam is a great step forward. The Government should heed it and enact a law to ban such processions with immediate effect.

Such processions curtail not only the liberty of individuals that is guaranteed by the Constitution but thousands of people are also inconvenienced and suffer due to them. No political party has got the right to take out processions blocking entire

stretches of road and preventing others from pursuing their vocations. People who are in a hurry to catch train, plane and hospitals for immediate treatment are also prevented by such processions.

Utter lawlessness, irresponsibility and a "care-a-hoot-for-the-public" attitude by the processionists have become the order of the day, in spite of the Court judgment against bandhs. It is time that the Government wakes up to the situation and protects the interests of the citizen

by banning political processions and rallies, ignoring the champions of freedom of speech and right to agitate etc.

Any such agitation for rights, if necessary, can be done at a place away from the main roads and streets, and without affecting the general public.

C. Lakshmi Narain

Advocate

No. 25(11), Kandappa Achari St

Purasawalkam

Chennai 600 007.

### Suggestions and horrors

A few additional points on stories in MM, November 16th.

At the time of the centenary celebrations of the GPO, *The Hindu* had brought out a colour supplement in which I remember to have read a detailed article about the history of the building by the then Presidency Postmaster (whose name eludes my memory), who seemed to have delved deep into the old records. Perhaps the library of *The Hindu* has this feature which might throw some light on the plan of the building etc., which might come in handy at the time of restoration. The tower in the picture on page 5 (MM) might house a granite spiral staircase leading from ground floor to the first floor, which is the usual feature in such buildings, e.g., S.B.I. Madras Main Branch. Such a staircase (though of cast iron) was inside Victory House on the Mount Road.

\* \* \*

About the Adyar creek: The canal which ran alongside the Canal Bank Road in Mandavelipakkam served as a drain for excess rainwater and was the main source of water supply to the creek. Alas, this important canal has now been filled with garbage and is being converted into a building plot, probably to house the State Transport buildings, with the result that even a little drizzle in the

area inundates entire streets in and around the erstwhile Admiralty Hotel. MMM talks about the horrible condition of the bypass road from Greames Road to Anna Circle. Let him come and see the condition of Canal Bank Road. It is horrible.

\* \* \*

Randor Guy makes us old timers envy the Sri Lankans who were fortunate to see and enjoy all those vintage films. I hope that Chennai will be as fortunate in having such a vintage festival one of these days.

T.M. Sundararaman

No. 19, Nallappan Street

Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

### The mysterious 'caps'

In the write-up on the GPO, Chennai (MM, November 16th), it was stated that the two caps of the building were blown off in the cyclone of 1920. These blown off tops must have been restored subsequently. I used to commute between my residence in Tondiarpet and Madras Christian College School by the Esplanade in the 1930s. As the bus used to ply via First Line Beach Road (what is its name now? Sorry, I cannot recall its new name. So many road names in Chennai have been changed. I am at a loss to recollect which is which!), I remember to have seen the twin pyramidal tops intact.

When my venue of activities shifted to a distant part of Chennai, I lost touch with the area. Years later, when I visited the place again, I was shocked to find the twin towers sans their caps. I was made to understand that they had been dismantled to prevent Japanese warships from using them as a landmark during World War II. These towers were just behind the harbour and would have easily pinpointed the port for easy attack.

Possibly my memory is playing tricks. Will some knowledgeable

reader give readers the correct picture?

M. Sethuraman

"Sankrithi"

6/16, Mahalakshmi Nagar

II Cross Street, Adambakkam

Chennai 600 088.

### For easier cleaning

The problems arising out of the unsanitary conditions in the Mambalam Canal (M.C.) have been highlighted in the press. The Mambalam and Nandanam canals (N.C.) were two independent stormwater drains. Both drains were dry except when there was rain. For

some reason, Metrowater diverted part of the flow of water from M.C. through the N.C. some ten years back. Meanwhile, sewage and sillage overflowed into the M.C., and from the M.C. into the N.C., resulting in unsanitary conditions in both the canals.

The Government has grandiose schemes for the total improvement of the water courses in Chennai. Intercepting sewers to collect the sewage flowing in the water courses is only a part of the project. The intercepting sewers for each water course can be split into several components and the intercepting sewers along the M.C. should be laid in the first

instance, as this is the smallest component. Then, all the sewage now flowing in the M.C. will be carried only by the intercepting sewers and not the Canal. The intercepting sewers could be connected to the Metrowater sewers, wherever feasible, or carried to the pumping stations in the area. The canals will then be dry except when there is rain.

A large area of the city extending from Nungambakkam to the outfall of M.C. and N.C. will benefit. The mosquito nuisance and odour nuisance will be less. The cleaning of the bed of the canals will be easier.

This work needs to be taken up without waiting for sanction from the funding agencies.

M. Susikaran

8, First Street

Nandanam Extension

Chennai 600 035.

It was proposed to connect Mahanadhi with the Kaveri across the Godavari, Krishna and Pennar. This would, it was estimated, cost about Rs. 50,000 crore but it would irrigate about 3.25 crore acres and could be executed in a span of 15 years. Udayamoorthy and Mahalingam suggested an easy method to raise the money needed. The beneficiaries (farmers) from the four river basins would share the cost because the arid land would be converted into irrigated lands and if there was any fiscal shortage, the World Bank would help those who helped themselves.

May we hope that golden period materialises.

Planning Commission Chairman, attended by experts of the Water Resources Commission, has promised to execute the scheme with the Centre's concurrence.

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May we hope that golden period materialises.

May we hope that golden period materialises.

Interlinking rivers  
Lalgudi G. Kanakasabai  
President  
Cauvery Delta Farmers' Association  
Lalgudi  
Tiruchirappalli District.

### Trees of summer

A couple of years ago, trees were planted by the Corporation on Ellior's Beach Road with a lot of fanfare and publicity. They were planted just before the advent of summer and perished during summer. Only half a dozen trees managed to survive. Last year, a sweet shop of Adyar (Krishna Sweets) planted a number of trees. All that remains are the tree guards proclaiming the name of the shop. Not a single tree survived.

We read every day that the Forest Department is planting a lot of saplings all over Chennai. But not a single sapling has been planted on Ellior's Beach Road. Are they waiting for summer?

V. Chandrashekhar  
B 12/4, 25th Cross Street  
Besant Nagar  
Chennai 600 090.

## An anecdotal lesson or two from Krishnan

The feature on M. Krishnan (MM, October 16th) provided me an opportunity to recall the two occasions in 1986 I met him at his residence in Edward Elliott's Road. The first opportunity was when one of my distant relatives, who is married into Krishnan's family, invited me to meet Krishnan. The second time, I took C.R. Nagendra and S. Sadanand, avid biologists from the University of Mysore, to meet him. Nagendra and Sadanand told me after the meeting that I could not have provided them a better and more productive time in Madras.

Krishnan's enthusiasm for natural history was undoubtedly inspired by the Fysons. But Krishnan had warmth toward me because I was a student of the late B.G.L. Swamy who strode like a colossus in the Madras collegiate service and in Indian botany from the early 50s to the late 70s. Krishnan spoke warmly of Swamy and narrated how much he gained from Swamy's botanical brilliance. In return, Krishnan taught spoken Tamil to Swamy, who was from Basavangudi, a suburb of Bangalore.

Two anecdotes related by Krishnan at these meetings are still fresh in my memory. They offer examples of his extraordinary quick wit and modesty.

When I asked Krishnan why he did not take to the legal profession, like many of his sibs in spite of having a law degree, he laughed and told me, "When the British cavalry recruited horses, they used to make them jump several hawthorn bushes, say, of two or three feet in overall height, without touching them. It was a test of endurance and stamina. Many of the sprightly horses would jump over six feet to cross the first few, soon get tired, and quit. A few clever ones would just jump high enough to get over them, not expending their energy like the sprightly ones, and complete the test successfully. I belong to the second category."

When Krishnan was asked to review a biological encyclopaedia (plants or natural ecosystems, I cannot remember) by *The Statesman* of Calcutta, he was unhappy with the tree examples, representing subtropical climate zones, that were provided in the encyclopaedia. He wrote to the editor wondering if he provided better examples, would the editor be interested in publishing them in

the next edition. When the editor agreed he went to his native village in Tirunelveli to shoot a few pictures of the majestic *Terminalia arjuna* trees, which grew there in plenty. He travelled to the village by the Tirunelveli Express, then took a bus and travelled the final stretch by bullock cart. The cartman was a boy of 13. Krishnan was initially worried riding in the cart, but soon found his 'driver' an enjoyable companion who was hilarious yet spoke a lot of sense. Krishnan was using a tripod-held Hasselblad and 120mm B&W film for what he planned to 'shoot'. He set up the tripod and positioned his camera at the top of a village tank and focussed on the trees on the other side of the tank. He spent 3 to 4 hours trying to capture the best angle and position from this point. As he was about to click, he realised, to his dismay, that an electric cable was passing alongside the canopy of the trees. He simply sank on the steps not knowing what to do.

When the cart boy came to him and asked "Ennachu, Sir?", Krishnan was frustrated and snapped at him, "Poia vettippayale". But the boy would not give up; he pestered Krishnan till he explained the tragedy that had befallen him. The boy promptly said at the end of the narration, "Sir, you are sitting on the top step of the village tank. If you look at the trees from one of the lower steps, that electric cable will disappear, won't it?" Krishnan's eyes were full of tears as he narrated. He then started repositioning his camera on a lower step and taking the excellent pictures which appeared in the next edition of the encyclopaedia.

Like Harry Miller of Madras, Krishnan was another giant who knew much more biology than most of us who claim to know everything as professors of biology today.

Dr. A. Raman

Sustainable Land Management

Faculty of Rural Management

The University of Sydney

PO Box 883

Orange NSW 2800

Australia.

## Reducing the travails of MTC travels

I fully agree with some of the points of G.J. Jeyaraj in his suggestions to MTC (MM, November 1st). Fifteen years ago, the Madras city bus service was considered by all 'the best' in the country. Farewise too it was very cheap at the time!

In those days, people would walk even more than 3 km, but nowadays no one is willing to walk even a short distance. Everyone wants to go by bus or auto. Hence, overcrowding in buses is unavoidable.

May I suggest a few more points to the MTC to regain its lost reputation of being "THE BEST"!

- In a crowded bus, especially during peak hours, it is practically impossible for a conductor to move from place to place inside the bus to issue the tickets. Hence a "double conductor" system should be introduced during peak hours to ease the situation. This system is already in force in Trichy, Madurai, etc.
- In order to minimise the existing ticket denominations, the number of fare stages may be reduced to a maximum of three or four covering a distance of 15 km, thereby speeding up issue of tickets.
- Booths could be installed at bus stops and tickets issued instead of by conductors inside the bus. The conductors would have less work to do and could act as ticket inspectors.
- Finally, if the Transport Ministry of the Tamil Nadu Government comes forward to permit willing private bus operators, according to Government norms, a definite improvement in service will take place.

Why not MTC try out these suggestions?

S. Rajan

5/3, V.O.C Street

Devaraj Nagar, Saligramam

Chennai 600 093.

\* \* \*

Reader G.J. Jeyaraj (MM, November 1st) considers Mumbai bus transport run by BEST (Bombay Electric Suburban Transport) the "BEST". But it must be pointed out that in Mumbai, most of its citizens depend upon its lifeline - the train services which run efficiently and with clockwork precision by Western and Central Railways, notwithstanding the heavy rush. Moreover in a city like Mumbai, where people lead mechanical lives, it makes good sense to travel by train considering all aspects. In view of this, only a few travel by BEST. As a result BEST buses are less crowded and that makes a conductor's job much easier.

The situation in Chennai is quite different. As most Chennaites prefer travelling by MTC buses, it carries passengers double its capacity, necessitating conductors to detain buses, in order to complete issue of tickets during peak hours. The MTC authorities should, therefore, consider either deploying more buses or additional hands to ease the situation during peak hours.

Incidentally the pick pockets menace is on the rise in MTC buses with increasing crowds.

V.S. Jayaraman

31, Motilal Street

Chennai 600 017.

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Questions 1 to 9 are from the period November 16th to 30th. Questions 10 to 12 pertain to Chennai. Questions 13 to 20 relate to Tamil Nadu.)

- Who are the recipients of the coveted Gandhi Peace Prize for 2000?
- Who is the new Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission?
- Name the party launched by Ram Vilas Paswan.
- An invitation to the White House — *At Home with History* is a book about the famous edifice by...?
- Which Indian is playing the role of both Rosencrantz and the First Player in Peter Brook's *Hamlet*?
- The Laerdal Tunnel, of length 24.5 km, is the world's longest highway tunnel. What are its terminal points?
- Who has been named the IAAF's 'Athletes of the Year'?
- Name the new association formed by top football clubs of the country.
- Which UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bengal did the Railways' Minister dedicate to the world on November 26th?

\* \* \*

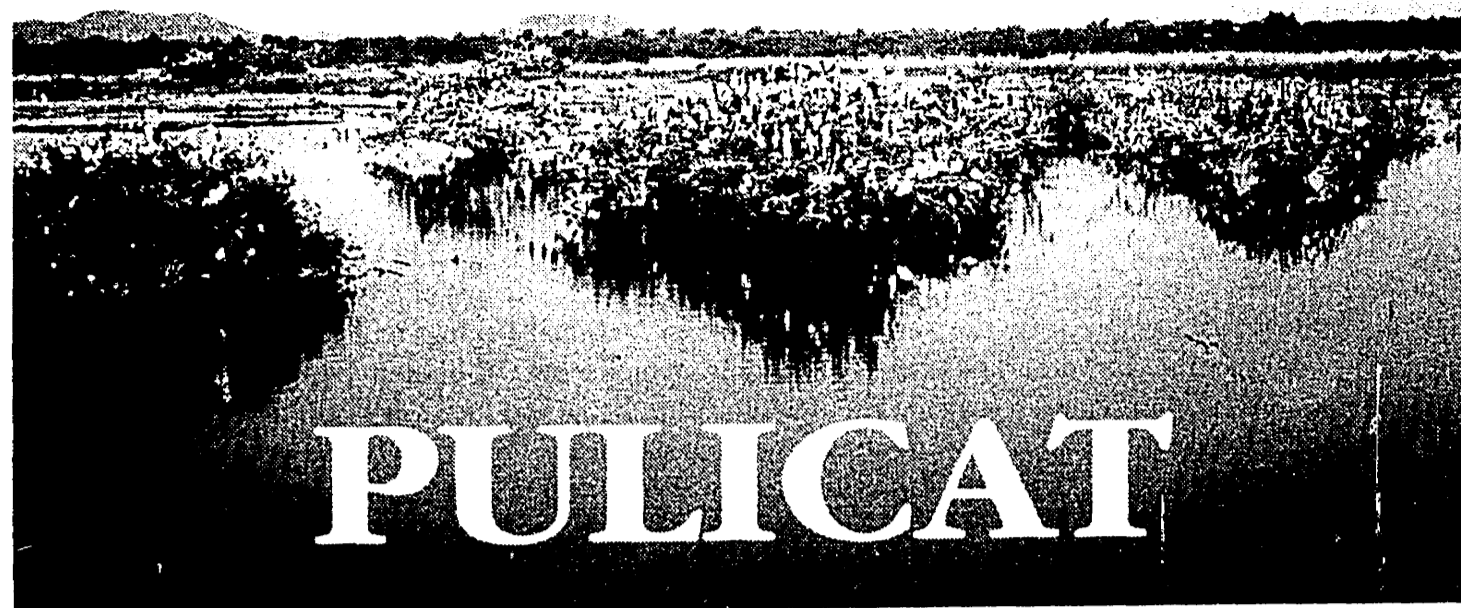
- Which Chennai-based playwright has written *The Lizard Waltz*?
- Where near Chennai was a Biotechnology Park for Women inaugurated on November 24th?
- Which eminent Chennai-based scientist was given the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 1999?

\* \* \*

- Which century-old institution in North Arcot was founded as a one-bed clinic on January 1, 1900?
- Who has been chosen for the State Government's Ambedkar Award for 2000?
- Which appetiser's name is an adaptation of its Tamil name?
- If it is Kavithalaya for K. Balachander, whom is it for Rajkamal Films International?
- What is the popular sobriquet for the Velankanni Church?
- In the context of the topography of Tamil Nadu, what kind of features are Palakkad and Shencottah?
- He passed away recently, this famous cricketer born at Putumala, Ooty. Who?
- Who started the popular magazine *Ananda Vikatan*?

(Answers on Page 9)

# The birds of



## PULICAT

The bird wealth of Nelapattu.

As winter sets in, migrant water birds from distant northern lands have been arriving at their ancestral breeding sites in South India. Most such sites have been traditionally protected by local farming peasants, who look forward to the arrival of these birds to their village irrigation tanks, as 'deities' that bring good luck to their paddy crops. Ironically, what these migrant birds give back to the farmers in turn is their excreta (guano), which dissolves in the tank water and supplies nutrients to paddy fields. The birds also devour insects that are paddy pests. Paddy yield, with bird guano but without any other conventional organic or chemical fertilisers, goes up at least by 25%, thus saving the soils, crops and money for the farmers.

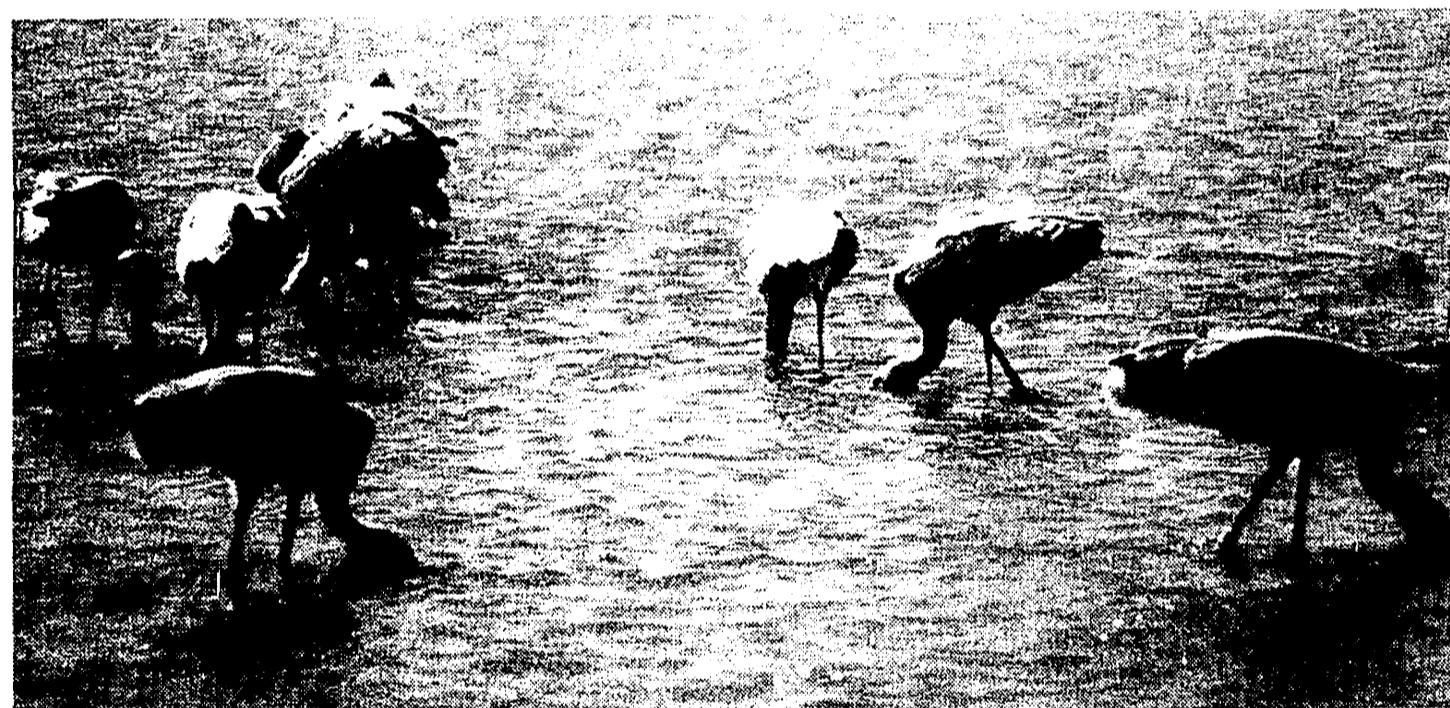
Two such traditional breeding sites of water birds near Chennai are the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary south of Chennai, and the Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh, north of Chennai. They are both identical as well as comparable water bird breeding sanctuaries, the former depending on freshwater feeding sites, the latter on a brackish water feeding site. Less well known are the following bird sanctuaries:

### PULICAT

Pulicat Bird Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh is chiefly a feeding sanctuary for water birds. It is best seen from Sullurpet, about 85 km north of Chennai on NH5 (Nellore Road). At Sullurpet, if you get on to the 14 km-long, Sullurpet-Sriharikota road, between the 8th and the 12th km, near Atakanitippa, on either side of the road, on the vast Pulicat Lake, you can see a variety of birds feeding in kaleidoscopic association in the lake, from December to February. Most spectacularly, about 10,000-15,000 flamingoes and flocks of pelicans, painted storks, openbills, white ibises, cormorants, egrets, grey herons, pintails, spotbills, shovellers and teal, about 50 different species, totalling about 60,000 birds, can be seen in panoramic views,



Nesting pelicans at Nelapattu.



Painted storks feeding at Pulicat. (All photographs by ODD W. JACOBSEN.)

justifying Pulicat Lake as a "Ramsar Site" for international protection. Early mornings, preferably before 10.00, and late evening, after 4.00, are good times, to watch them feeding in the lake, with some birds standing in water as sentinels, watching for any approaching predators.

These birds keep feeding close to working fishermen and farmers, may be to snatch a fish or an insect that escapes them, but certainly demonstrating mutual harmony. The arrival of the rains is a determining factor for the arrival of these birds. If the rains fail or get delayed or are scanty in any one year, it certainly tells upon the arrival, diversity, breeding and population of these birds. Openbills are the earliest to arrive. They come as scouts, before the rains, hover over the lake or sanctuaries, without alighting. Only if there is enough water and food do they beckon the other birds to land.

### NELAPATTU

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, a breeding sanctuary for birds, is about 95 km north of Chennai and about 80 km south of Nellore, on NH5. Close to the village Doravaari Sathram, you have to go 1.5 km east to reach this sanctuary which is chiefly located in two irrigation tanks that have a total waterspread of about 82.56 hectares. As at Vedanthangal, it is the Indian Oak (*Barringtonia acutangula*) trees on which a variety of birds nest and breed at Nelapattu. Along the edges of the sanctuary, on the tank bunds, there are babul (*Acacia nilotica*) trees on which the latecomers nest.

Nelapattu Sanctuary is basically a pelicanry, with about 1500 pelicans breeding. During the 1984 cyclone, which crossed the coast at Sullurpet, there was mass mortality of pelicans in this sanctuary.

Colonial nesting, each species nesting at a particular level on the trees, their elaborate

breeding behavioural patterns, equitable feeding of nestlings, feeding chronologies of each species of birds and protection of nestlings, are some of the things to watch at this sanctuary.

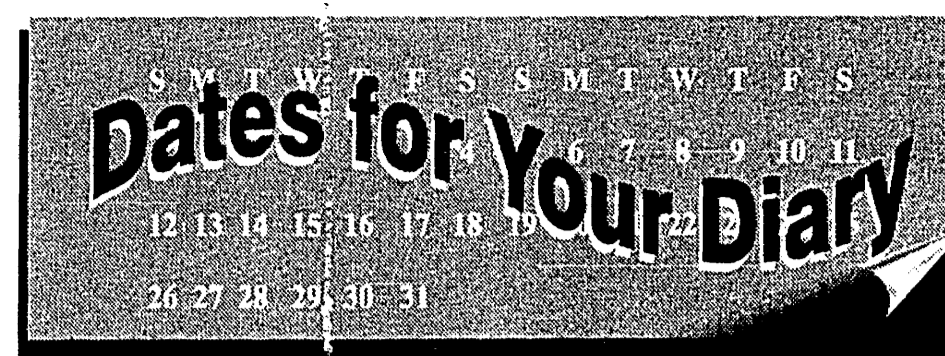
### VEDURUPATTU AND BODILINGAALAPAADU

At 91 km from Chennai on NH5, if you turn left at the village Nemilimitta Agraharam and go about 8 km, there is the agricultural village of Vedurupattu, where on common trees and on rooftops, about 40 to 50 painted storks nest and breed, usually exclusively, but with a few cormorants, egrets and spoonbills occasionally.

Also at 67 km from Chennai on the same NH5, a 50 metre right turn to the village Bodilingaalapaadu leads to a withered banyan tree, with about 30 grey herons and some cormorants habitually nesting and breeding. Unfortunately, they are victims of the gypsy catapults.

### THREATS

The common property of the water birds of all these four bird sanctuaries, so close to each other, is the vast Pulicat Lake, their chief feeding ground. But



One of C.L.D. Gupta's drawings that will be seen at the British Council exhibition.

December: Srishti, run by Tara Tea, is situated in the hills of Munnar. This is a self-help project for the less privileged members of their community. Srishti supports Atulya (a hand made paper unit), Aranya (a nature dye unit) and Dare — Development Activities in Rehabilitation Education, to enable these people to help themselves. Members of these units will be exhibiting their wares. (At DakshinaChitra.)

December: Create exquisite terracotta patterns by Master Potter Ramu Velar, learn Tamil Nadu folk dances and join the Treasure Hunt for children 8-14. (All weekends at DakshinaChitra.)

Till December 31: 'The Family 3', an exhibition of paintings featuring the works of Sakti Burman, his daughter Maya Burman and his niece Jayashree Burman. (At Apparao Galleries.)

December 19-21: 'Queen of the Coromandel', an exhibition of

drawings that tell the story of Chennai, The Queen of the Coromandel. Early this year, Chennai chronicler S. Muthiah published his latest book on the City, *Queen of the Coromandel*. The absorbing text was complemented by the delicate drawings of C.L.D. Gupta, which are the focus of this exhibition. (At the British Council.)

December 23: Workshop on 'Herbal Home Remedies'. (At DakshinaChitra, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

December 24: Kolam workshop (at DakshinaChitra, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Till mid-January: Vintage Vignettes exhibition of photographs of old Madras (1890s-1920s). (At DakshinaChitra.)

January 6: Supper theatre featuring *The Birds have not come to Vedanthangal this Year*, a play by Mohan Narayan, directed by Anita Khanzadian. (At DakshinaChitra. Tickets 4918943/4462435.)

## OPEN SESAME!

(Continued from page 4)

pens, saints, transport, astrology, dance forms, calendars... even whiskers and beads!

The Nehrus take part in exhibitions and displays... but admit it is a strain, taking things to and fro, and making sure that the rare and precious items are safe.

The next question obviously is: "What happens next?"

Ideally, the collection deserves a place that provides proper display and is run professionally.

They hope that a patron will come forward to give them both space and the means to display this collection, backed by care and organisation. This will enable people, particularly children, to view with ease and access the wealth of information that lies within those walls.

### CONSERVATION

The Wildlife Division of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has been managing these sanctuaries since 1976.

P.J. Sanjeeva Raj  
Odd W. Jacobsen

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## The needle & the 4 most obedient students

Have you heard the story of the needle and the four most obedient students? I was taught in my third or fourth standard Tamil lesson.

There were four most obedient students in a class. One day, the teacher wanted a needle to be brought to his house. All the four students wanted to serve their master. But how could all four carry a tiny two-inch long needle? They hit upon a novel idea of fixing the needle in a log and all four carrying the log to the master. It is irrelevant the needle was intact in the log when they reached the master. At that young age I could not believe that absurdity could be stretched to such levels, but now, after sixty years, when I drive through Besant Avenue

daily I am often reminded of this story. Why?

Besant Avenue cuts across the Theosophical Gardens which has a lot of tropical trees. A hoarding in the Raj Bhavan gardens used to proclaim it as the largest oxygen factory. Theosophical Gardens could lay equal claim to this title. In such a thickly wooded environment, less than half a dozen trees stand as death posts in the middle of a widened portion of the road endangering the safety of road users. 'Friends of Trees' have prevented Corporation officials from cutting down those trees. Should 'save the tree campaign' degenerate to such a level as to prevent officials from performing a 'safety first' duty? The four trees in Besant Avenue flanked

by the Theosophical Gardens full of tropical trees are just like that needle in a log. I find the action of 'Friends of Trees' in this instance tarnishes their laudable actions elsewhere. Their behaviour is like that of the four most obedient students.

But Besant Avenue is a small issue compared to East Coast Road. Environmentalists virtually stalled the realignment of the road in the dangerously curved locations. The heavy death toll on this road, I understand from media reports, forced to rethink on this and necessary flattening out of the curves is being planned.

Will the four trees in the Besant Avenue have their obituary sung in honour of safety?

D. Srinivasan

## Maratha heritage

(Continued from page 3)

monument to "commemorate the triumph of the British arms and the downfall of Bonaparte". The usual explanation is that the monument celebrates Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. But, as the historians among us pointed out, Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo took place in 1815. What took place in 1814 was Napoleon's abdication of the throne and exile to Elba. To the British far away in South India, Napoleon's exile must have seemed final. It wasn't, of course; he was back the following year and only then was defeated at Waterloo and exiled for good to remote St. Helena. But in 1814, the Marathas, with still fresh memories of being buffeted by the British and the French during their continual battles for supremacy in South India, seized on the news of Napoleon's exile to Elba as a chance to demonstrate their allegiance to the victors in that struggle, the British, and so built the oddly placed monument.

Back in Thanjavur, we visited the Kamakshi Agraharam, a street lined with traditional Brahmin houses, and stepped inside one home to see the room where Shyama Shastri (1762-1827), one of three key figures in the development of Carnatic music, composed and played over 200 years ago.

On our last day, we drove to Thiruvaiyaru, the town best known for its association with Thyagaraja (1767-1847), another of the key figures in Carnatic music, who lived there 150 years ago. We crossed four rivers en route, the last, the holy Kaveri, on which the town of Thiruvaiyaru is sited, and along which stand several Maratha-period buildings. Once in town, we visited the Thyagaraja House, now a museum, where the musician lived and composed many of his most famous works. We also stopped at the

Kalyana Mahal Chatthiram, another of the Maratha resthouses which is now in use as a girls' school and hostel. This chatthiram is situated picturesquely right on the Kaveri, its ghats and steps being used today for bathing, washing clothes, grazing animals and drying spices and cowdung parties. As at the Orathanad chatthiram, we spent much longer than expected, wandering through halls and courtyards, the women in the group permitted freer movement than the men in deference to Sunday bathing, and being treated to an impromptu veena recital in one

Pat Alter

## Changing Chennai

(Continued from page 1)

that's suddenly become an overground office block, paving the way for other highrises in the area, both residential and commercial, and more coming up. The sanctuary idea is forgotten, the protected reserve sign is a few hundred yards from all this activity and so can be ignored, and prime open space that served as an invaluable lung can be developed as yet another unplanned highrise township that will in the next five years become not much better than a slum. But then, maybe we at *Madras Musings* got it all wrong and it will remain one of the best addresses in town but only a bit crowded.

These are stories connected only with a few major projects we've heard about that will change the face of the city in the next five years. There are scores of smaller projects we could record. But the sum total of it all is that no one in this city is concerned with town planning or development to a plan. It's a free-for-all for developers of every kind, the educated and the uneducated, those who care for the environment and those who don't. The loser is Chennai — but as one bright young thing told me, "Uncle there must be change." So be it — or is there a little bit of sense around to say change must be done wisely and well — and provide the city a modicum of lake?

## Answers to Quiz

- Nelson Mandela and Gramscen Bank of Bangladesh; 2. Dr. Anil Kakodkar; 3. Janshakthi; 4. Hillary Clinton; 5. Naseeruddin Shah; 6. Oslo and Bergen in Norway; 7. The Czech Republic's Jan Zeleny and U.S.'s Marion Jones; 8. Indian Premier Football Association; 9. Darjeeling Hill Railway.
- Chetan Shah; 11. Siruseri; 12. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan
- The CMC in Vellore, founded by Ida Scudder; 14. The former minister, N. Rajangam; 15. Mulligatanny soup (*melagu thanni* = pepper water); 16. Kamal Hasan; 17. Lourdes of the East; 18. The two major gaps in the long chain of hills that border western Tamil Nadu; 19. Sir Michael Colin Cowdrey; 20. S.S. Vasam of Gemini Films fame.

● With Gilligan in Madras

# Partying, racing and shooting

(Continued from last fortnight)

## Madras Diary

(kept by whom is not clear)

### Monday, 17th January

The M.C.C. team arrived at Madras on S.S. *Ethiopia* at 11.30 a.m. Among those who gathered to greet them were several Europeans and Dr. P. Subbarayan and Messrs. M. Venkataramanjulu and P. Yoganathan. "It really is an excellent spot", wrote Mervyn to his brother Evelyn (23rd January). Bob Wyatt and he were collected by their hosts, the McIvers. "Rather trying, to share," he wrote. "It's not too bad, but after the fourth day he discovered his toothbrush was in my dressing room!"

After tiffin they were taken to see the aquarium, which caused Mervyn to declare that he had never seen such extraordinary fish.

"In the evening we all went along to the Adyar Club for a dance before dinner. It really is a delightful club, on the river. We had a large party and met most of the form, which at Madras is quite good. Mostly Roman Catholics. After the dance we went to the Madras Club, and dined at home at 9.00 p.m."

### Tuesday, 18th January

First day of the two day match against an Indian XI.

That evening they dined at home, and then went off to the Race Hunt Ball, held on the Guindy Race Course in the open.

"A most delightful place," he wrote. "As we sat out in the boxes, I was still too sore to dance, and sat out quite a number. Free champagne all the time."

It was 4.30 a.m. before they made tracks for bed.

### Wednesday, 19th January

That morning Mervyn did not feel too well. (Hung over, I wouldn't doubt! EWS.) So he stayed at home until the afternoon. In the evening they all attended one of the first official functions in their honour, dining at *Government House* as guests of His Excellency the Governor of Madras, Viscount Goschen. "A splendid fellow," Mervyn observed. "He fixed for Guy Earle and myself to go out on his snipe shoot".

### Thursday, 20th January

Guy and Mervyn left Madras at 6.00 a.m., to go shooting with "a fellow called Wilson, who was a good shot", and they were in position for the first drive at 7.30 a.m. "It was quite the most amusing shooting I have ever done. We drove scrub jungle about fifteen feet high all day, never saw a bit of water all day, except in the distance. The snipe find the paddy too warm at this time of year after the crops have been taken off, so they lie up in the dry jungle during the day.

"His Excellency has had the jungle cut into rides, and it is just like covert shooting, only with snipe instead of pheasant. (We were told) there was a panther in one of the beats, but

luckily he did not come anywhere near us. I was shooting with a borrowed gun, but it killed over a long way. We killed 58½ couple, of which I got 19½ couple with 104 shots. As a matter of fact, it was fairly easy, as there was a little or no wind. Guy shot very well, too. In the last drive we bagged ten without the loss of a single shot.

"*Government House* provided the lunch and the coolies, so all together it was a delightful day. The only trouble was that the ice in the ice-box melted by noon, so we had to shoot on warm beer. You have no idea how hot it was. Poor Guy nearly sweated to death."

At 4.45 p.m. there was a garden party at *Government House*. Arthur Gilligan and Maj. Chichester-Constable were the only two members of the team to attend.

### Friday, 21st January

Mervyn repaired to the Club for a game of billiards. "I am slowly improving at the game. Soon I will be able to beat you," he warned his brother.

In the evening they all went to the Adyar Club Ball, and dined with a Mrs. Partridge in a party of eighteen. Mervyn took a Mrs. Pullan in to dinner, and sat between her and a Miss Moore, a very pretty Irish girl who was playing in the Amateur Dramatic Society's show. "I danced five dances with her," he noted. "Nearly a record for me!"

Mrs. Pullan seemed a very decent sort, and quite young.



Garden party at *Government House*. Arthur Gilligan and Major Chichester-Constable arriving.

He simply could not think who she reminded him of, so when he asked her who she had been before she was married, she said she had been a Miss Judd. Her brother, Jack Judd, had been one of his best friends at Cambridge, and he knew him from Eton, where he had been at Hill House. The dance ended at about 2.30 a.m.

### Saturday, 22nd January

The day was spent at the Races. "We all lunched with the Stewards, and a damned good lunch it was, too. All imported in cold storage from England. Good old beef - pheasant - salmon - and even what out here is a treat - English butter!" he wrote. "The Races were quite successful. I went carefully, and was about 25 Rupees up. I would have been a good winner, but the last horse came unstruck. We had a 5 Rupee sweepstake at lunch on the last race. I drew the favourite, but he never showed up at all!"

Bob Wyatt was to build upon his meetings with Sir Murray Coutts-Trotter, who had been at the *Government House* dinner, and they formed a lifelong friendship, "His fair-haired daughter Pru was a distinct asset at the Races, as she forecast every winner on the card," as Gerald Pawle wrote in "R.E.S. Wyatt - *Fighting Cricketer*".

In the evening they had a small dinner party, to which Miss Moore and another girl came. They then went to another show. "*How's That*", in which the team were all made to go up on stage. "A damned amusing business, but it had to be done". There was a very clever cricket scene, with the stage done out in red and yellow, as were the Pierrot costumes. "Looked quite nice." Mrs. H.P. Ward, the wife of the cricket organiser, was the star performer.

### Sunday, 23rd January

Mervyn was up in time for early service at the church, which was 25 minutes' walk from the bungalow. "Quite a nice service," he noted. "But very empty".

### Monday, 24th January

Mervyn went "tramping the country", again with Guy Earle. Mervyn shot 64 snipe, and a partridge, with 180 shots in a high wind and with the birds flying high. Guy got 39 snipe and a hare. Apparently, this was a record shoot for two guns. "Magnificent fun," wrote Mervyn.

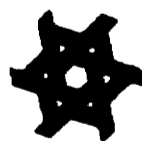
Farewell dinner given by the Chief Minister.

### Tuesday, 25th January

8.40 p.m. Leave Madras.

(To be concluded)

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