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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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A Kolkata example for Town Hall

• by The Editor

For the past few years, we at *Madras Musings* have been hearing of plans to restore Victoria Public Hall, better known as Town Hall, and bring back to it the life it enjoyed in the days of Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, Srinivasa Sastri and a galaxy of other theatre personalities and orators. But nothing seems to be happening, those plans unable to inch forward for a number of reasons.

Some time ago, INTACH Tamil Nadu was asked to submit a restoration plan, but the wherewithal necessary for the work to be done has not been forthcoming and so no plans have materialised. All that's being talked of now is a plan to unclutter the hawking area that appears to be on VPH Trust property.

Why the Trust is unable to proceed with its plans for restoration, *Madras Musings* is not clear about, but there do appear some differences of opinion between the Trust and the Corporation of Chennai which has, over the years, played some role in the Trust. Surely, it's time to sort out those differences and restore one of the City's landmark buildings where once theatre, oratory, and a variety of entertainments flourished.

In this connection, the decision to give Kolkata's famed Star Theatre a new life is something for all concerned with the VPH to consider. *Madras Musings* does not say that the Kolkata way is the route Chennai should follow, but Kolkata's recognition of the Star as part of its cultural heritage is something Chennai should see in the Town Hall, too. Few institutions have contributed more to Tamil theatre than it has. It is in this light that we publish below a story on what's being planned in Kolkata. Written for *The Week* by Tapash Ganguly, the story states:

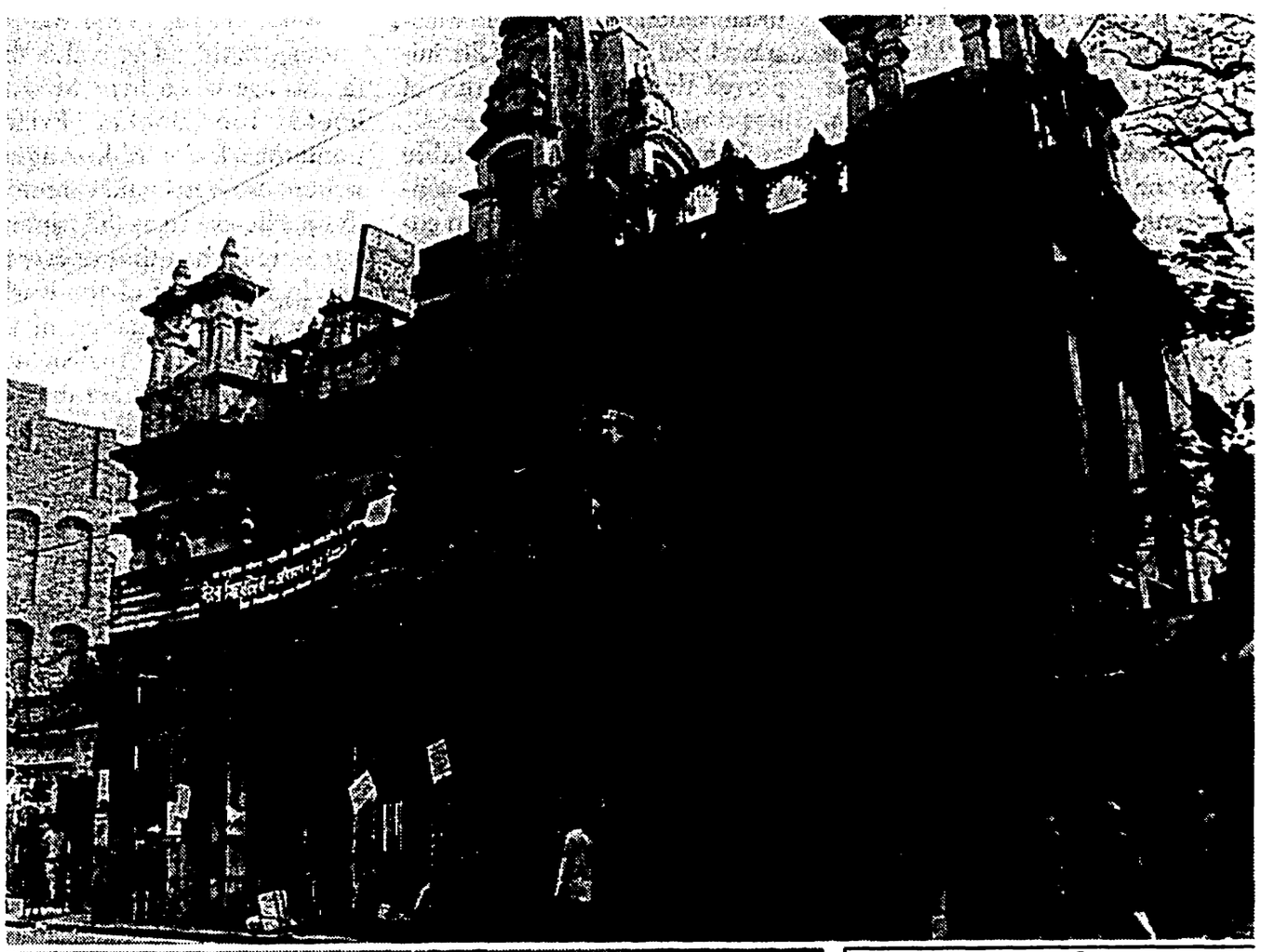
'A midnight fire just before the Durga Puja of 1991 brought the curtains down on Star Theatre, 'The Globe' of Kolkata. It also marked the beginning of the end of a 108-year-old tradition of Bengali theatre. From 14 theatres staging plays three times a week in the early Nineties, now it is down to a couple staging sporadic shows.

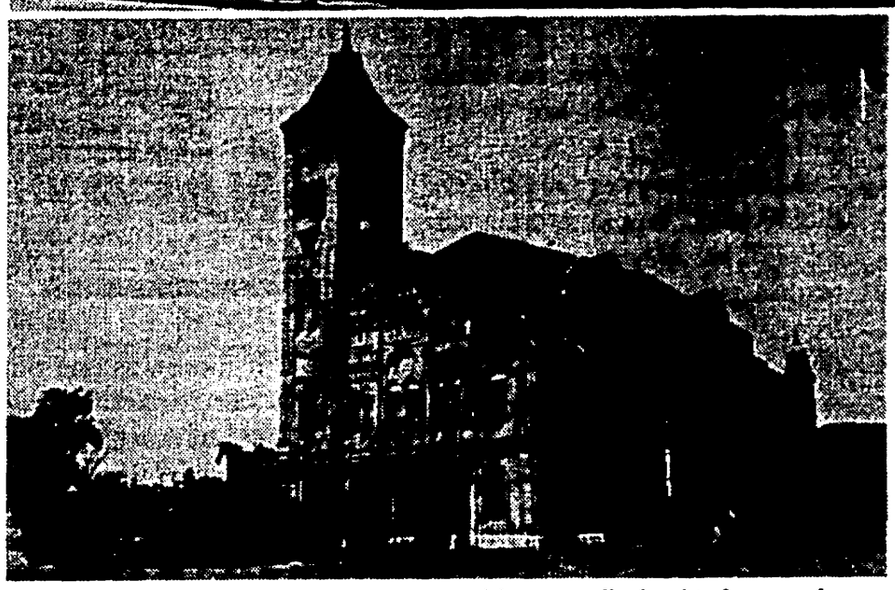
But the footlights may shine once again thanks to Kolkata Mayor Subrata Mukherjee. The Corporation has decided to acquire Star as a heritage building. "We won't allow Calcutta theatre to die," he said. "We will try our best to revive it."

Mukherjee's acquisition plan follows a dispute between the owners of Star and Allahabad Bank. "I gave the parties four months to settle the dispute amicably," said Mukherjee. "But when I found they could not, we decided to acquire the property under the Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act. Star is not just a theatre hall, it is part of the Bengali cultural heritage."

Ganesh Mukherji, 73, professor of drama at Rabindra Bharati University and owner of theatre hall Rangana, supports the mayor wholeheartedly. "We have been moving from pillar to post in the last decade to revive Star and other stages. We met Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya who also holds the culture portfolio and former chief minister Jyoti Basu. But nothing happened," he said.

Mukherjee, who is the first Trinamool Congress mayor of Kolkata, is, however, more upbeat. "As mayor, my aim is to revitalise the theatre. I hope Kolkata won't fail me."'

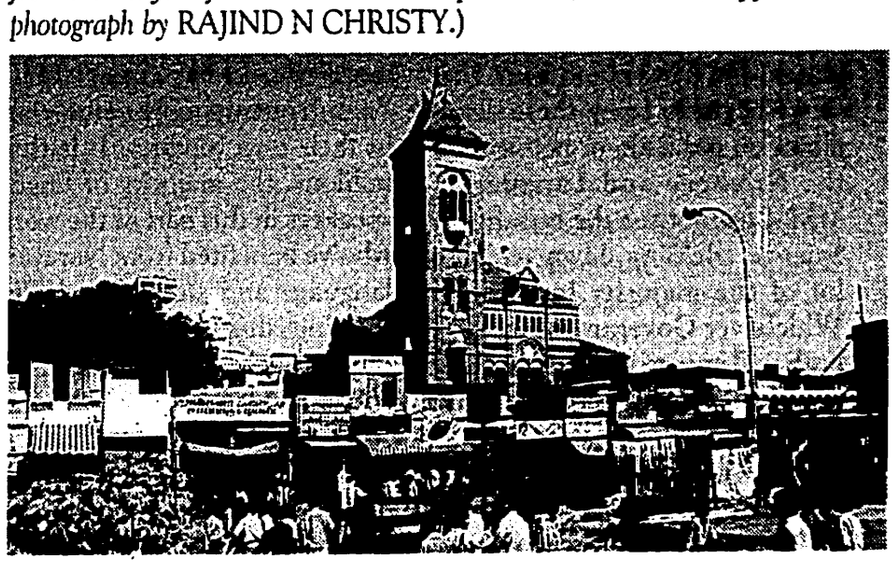




Our OLD comprises two pictures — and, unusually for this feature, the one on top is NOT from Chennai; it is the Star Theatre, Kolkata, once considered 'The Globe' of Calcutta. Abandoned and derelict today, its restoration and revival is a distinct possibility with a stage-loving Mayor wanting to bring back theatre to this century-and-more-old heritage building. Madras Musings hopes that the Trust that owns Chennai's Victoria Public Hall, better known as the Town Hall, will with the cooperation of the Mayor of the city take a cue from this and bring life back to the city's once-famed entertainment venue by restoring it in 2001.

THE OLD... ***...& THE NEW***

The second of the OLD pictures shows Madras's Town Hall in the spacious setting of People's Park circa 1910. Our NEW shows the exterior still intact, but hidden by an untidy pavement 'bazaar'; what it doesn't show is the shambles the hall is inside. Restoration of that interior and attention to the exterior could well help Chennai take local theatre a step ahead of Calcutta if only the Trust receives the cooperation it seeks from the Mayor of Chennai and his Corporation. (Town Hall, copy and NEW photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



Presidency rated the tops

(By A Special Correspondent)

With Presidency College, Chennai, figuring in the top four among India's colleges in Arts, Science and Commerce in the annual Gallup poll of academicians conducted by *India Today*, this correspondent's overall rating — which *India Today* does not do — puts Presidency College, Chennai, on top, Loyola, Chennai, 5th and Madras Christian College a joint 7th with Sri Ram College of Commerce and Lady Sri Ram College, both of Delhi and both of which do not offer a science stream. The others in this correspondent's top ten include St. Xavier's, Kolkata, 2nd; Presidency College, Kolkata, which does not offer Commerce, 3rd; St. Xavier's Mumbai, 4th; St. Stephen's, Delhi, 6th, and Fergusson, Pune, 10th, the last two mentioned also among those not offering Commerce.

Presidency, Chennai, has achieved its rating by topping the colleges in Science, coming third in Commerce and fourth in Arts. Its achievement in the Science stream is remarkable,

(Continued on Page 6)

After vox populi... Can we get down to brass tacks?

Vox populi has spoken... and whether the educated, the moralists and know-what's-good-for-the-public NGOs like it or not, that voice has clearly indicated that corruption and misdemeanours in high places are non-issues in the people's minds; non-performance, particularly in meeting the people's needs, is THE issue. And they want those needs met yesterday, otherwise they'll be ready to change sides again.

Typical of the public's attitude is the story *The Man From Madras Musings* heard the other day from a villager come to town. There's *still* no money circulation in the village, prices of land and commodities have still not gone up and we *still* have no surpluses, he complained. There was no point explaining that the Government had nothing to do with money circulation in the market nor with ensuring higher land or commodity prices; the worldwide recession would have to go away for things to improve. But the world is not the villager's oyster; he wants performance in his village and that performance is seen in how his lot is bettered. If he does not see it within weeks of his vote, his mind begins to think of the need for change.

The performance the villager expects is, curiously, in many of the areas that *Madras Musings* focusses on, not the closure of discos, the arrest of political figures, the transfers of officials or the raking up of new fiscal misdemeanours. The priority of the villager is very much what in more sophisticated electorates has been portrayed as "What's in it for me, Jack?" In those electorates it might be higher wages and greater comforts; in the Indian village it is better housing, more water and power, the assistance needed to improve agricultural production and get better prices for it, the provision of schools and hospitals with greater facilities and better manpower and, in the improved conditions of the last 35 years, the need to bring urban centres with their opportunities closer to the villages, providing new avenues of employment for the young.

Need for change

In an exchange with the Editor the other day, *MMM* was glad to hear of the considerable interest shown by readers in *Madras Musings*' lead story of May 16th. Solar energy more than computers is what rural Tamil Nadu needs, most felt. How soon will that rural dream come true, many wondered. Others referred to the opportunities corporatised horticulture will provide villagers, another story this journal had highlighted. Desilting and restoring tanks, canals and other waterbodies and not smothering them with construction is another aspect *Madras Musings* has focussed on often enough as it has on the need to stem power transmission losses. Another thing that needs to be looked at is better and safer storage of rural produce as well as their transport to markets, both urban and rural.

Essential though all these are, as essential, *MMM* feels, is the need to completely revamp healthcare delivery and education not only in rural areas but throughout the State. By offering quality healthcare and education in rural nodes and by offering agriculture and rural industry greater opportunities, the rush to urban areas can be stemmed, urbanisation be made more widespread and the quality of life improved through the ensuring of less congestion by these means.

While getting affordable medicare in rural areas is essential, it is equally necessary to ensure that it is provided by doctors willing to settle in such areas in the manner the pioneers at Vellore had done. Changing the mindset of would-be doctors is something medical education — as well as Governments that encourage high-cost medical education — needs to address. Even more essential is the need to revamp the kind of education being provided today, *MMM* has long felt and this journal has often pointed out. When, *MMM* has long wondered, are we going to create a pride in our State and country, through education, instead of creating job-seekers for the urban and international markets? When are we going to produce young men and women who will ask themselves not what their State or country can offer them but what they can do for both?

Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Computers and their spin-offs are all necessary, but the world's leading nations produce from their educational institutions far more students from the Arts stream than the Science — and are the better for it. What we need, *MMM* has said often enough, is more History being taught to make us more heritage-conscious, more Geography being taught to make us more resource-conscious, more Civics and Administration taught to make us better administrators, more Ecology and Environment taught to make us want to protect the natural conditions we live in, more Civic Sense taught to increase our responsibility towards our fellow citizens and the state ... and *MMM* can go on in this vein on subjects so necessary for a better education but to which even lip service is only barely paid. We produce an unimaginably high number of doctorates in Tamil, but hardly any, in any language, in the disciplines *MMM* has mentioned. Until we begin to bring these disciplines on par with, or better than the Sciences and Languages, *MMM* cannot see the benefits of Science trickling down and the lot of the majority improving. Whichever Government ensures both will ensure itself longer rule than just a term of office.

Saying it simply

Rabindranath Tagore may have pioneered what is now called Indo-Anglian writing and won a Nobel Prize for it, but it was a triumvirate in the Thirties who offered that school of writing to a wider audience. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan offered Indian writing in English at its best through their fiction. That none of them was awarded the Prize Tagore was, was one of the disappointments the Indian world of letters has had to live with over the last six decades.

What *The Man From Madras Musings* finds sadder still is that in this age when hype MAKES books and Booker Prizes, numerous lesser Indo-Anglian writers are very much more in the public eye than the triumvirate were in their time or ever after. In fact, most of those who bandy about the names of the most hyped Indian-Anglian literary figures of today are unlikely to have even read those splendid efforts of the Thirties and Forties that broke the ground for the Indian Novel but did not remain the examples for the writers of the Eighties and Nineties to follow.

It would not surprise *MMM* to find many of those writers now hogging the headlines and review spaces with their cerebral outpourings wondering what there was to the writing of R.K.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Narayan. If there was one thing to it that was remarkable, as it was pointed out at what was not a condolence meeting recently but a celebration of the opportunities and the enjoyment R.K.N. gave his readers, it was the simplicity of his language and narration. It was also a down-to-earthness of content, a narration of the life and times of his brother Laxman's Common Man. It was in totality a simplicity that that evening was compared with Mark Twain's but which to *MMM* has always been the quintessence of good writing: the ability to convey clearly to the LARGEST NUMBER with even a nodding acquaintance with a language what you want to say in that language. The Rushdies, the Ghoshes, the Roys write for an elite minority and don't care a damn about the many millions more who know a modicum of English but are more comfortable in their own tongues. It is those millions, the majority of English speakers in this part of the world, who've benefited from Narayan's language and storytelling. That the English-speakers of the subcontinent's elitist world and those abroad have enjoyed his writing was the bonus that took Narayan into the international class and had many hoping he'd get at least a Nobel nomination.

More than such a nomination, however, what is significant is that his writing is likely to survive for decades more, long after that of the headline-hoggers of today is forgotten, for he'll ever be a part of worthy Indian English writing rather than what has been glamorised as Indo-Anglian writing. That would leave him with the reputation of being a more important contributor to Indian writing in English than the present crowd. And there are likely to be many who will agree with that view which was the consensus that evening. Simplicity, lucidity, clarity, dignity and brevity will remain for all time the basic lessons of good writing that Narayan offered would-be writers — and readers could only benefit from them.

What numbers reveal

The preliminary numbers of Census 2001 are in and *The Man From Madras Musings* is on the whole happy with the Tamil Nadu figures. A decadal population growth of 11 per cent is bettered only by Kerala's 9 per cent but what is of significance is that while both States have shown a declining decadal growth since 1971, the faster decline could well put Tamil Nadu ahead of Kerala on this count come 2011.

Also a matter of some satisfaction is the growth in literacy rates. Overall it has improved from 63 per cent to 73 per cent, over the decade 1991-2001, but significantly the female literacy rate has improved better than the male – 51 per cent to 65 per cent as against 74 per cent to 84 per cent. But while the improvement in female literacy rates is something to be welcomed, *MMM* feels that there is reason for concern over female literacy in such districts as Dharmapuri (the worst), Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Salem, Namakkal, Erode, Dindigul, Karur, Perambalur, and Ariyalur — all less than 60 per cent, with Dharmapuri less than 50 per cent.

Another area of concern is the female-male sex ratio — 986. This may be a marginal improvement over the period 1971-1991, but it is below the 992 of 1961, which was the end of a slide from the figure of 1044 in 1901. Salem and Dharmapuri are the districts worst off in this respect, with, surprisingly, Chennai and Coimbatore not much better. On the positive side, 15 of the 30 districts have a better female to male ratio in 2001 compared to only five in 1991.

But while the population growth has been declining, it is not a happy sign that density has been increasing, from 429 in 1991 to the current 478. This is well above the national average of 324 and is a pointer to the need to bring down population growth to zero level.

One final point was made by a Professor of Anthropology with whom *MMM* was discussing the latest Census figures. He suggested looking at the average size of households, figures *MMM* has still not been able to lay his hands on. These figures would reveal a scenario to be concerned about, the anthropologist stated, pointing out, "Though social scientists (and others) have been shouting from rooftops for quite sometime as to how, due to industrialisation, urbanisation and westernisation, the family (in India) is breaking up and getting smaller, right from the first census, over a hundred years ago, to this date, there has hardly been any drastic change in the average size of the household. It has always hovered around five. Moreover, it may surprise many, the average size of the household has increased in most cities, including Madras (for instance from 1981 to 1991). And I PREDICT that this trend will be reflected also in the 2001 census."

The small family norm has still to become the norm in India, it would seem obvious. But has it at least caught up with Tamil Nadu, wonders *MMM*.

Incongruous note

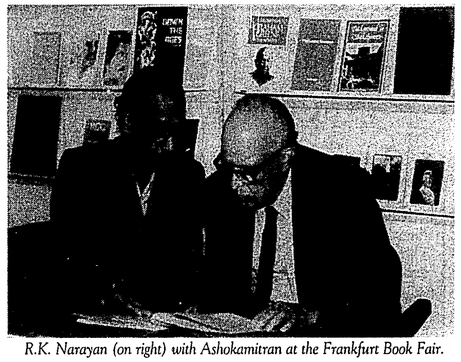
Striking *The Man From Madras Musings* as rather incongruous was the photographic exhibition that the Archaeological Survey of India (South Zone) mounted in the Fort Museum recently to mark India's first 'Museum Day'. The incongruity lay in the choice of pictures for the venue the exhibition was held in.

The Fort Museum is housed in an old East India Company building, one of the oldest British buildings in the South, and it houses, appropriately, the story of the Company in Madras and other parts of South India. In other words, it is a museum that records the beginning of the Age of Empire. Yet, there were only a couple of photographs of that age at the exhibition: of restoration work by the ASI at the Dutch Fort in Sadras, a picture of St. Mary's in the Fort and another of the Fort Exchange building that became in the post-Independence years the Fort Museum. The rest of the pictures were devoted to the ASI's work in Gingee and Mamallapuram, Kancheepuram and Ariyalur, Pudukottai and Villupuram.

Much of this work is commendable, to judge from the pictures, but a colonial building devoted to colonial history was hardly the place to display these vestiges of South India's historic past. The ASI's work in St. Mary's in the Fort, in the Connemara Library, certainly in Sadras Fort and at similar sites would have warranted display here, not the bulk of what was exhibited.

MMM wishes when exhibitions such as these are mounted, there is a greater sense of place in choosing the venue, rather than choosing a venue as a matter of convenience. Alternatively, the pictures selected should suit the historicity of the venue. Either way, a little more thought going into exhibitions would be a nice thing.

MMM



R.K. Narayan (on right) with Ashokamitran at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

Friends

● by Ashokamitran

I was seven when I read *Swamy and Friends* serialised in *Ananda Vikatan*. While the rest of the issue was in cheerless newsprint, the four pages of each instalment of *Swamy* were printed on pink-coloured paper. Perhaps it was to give the idea that it could be read as a children's story. Two years later, *Dark Room* was serialised in *Ananda Vikatan*. Again, a different kind of paper was used for the novel.

Both stories seemed to be about me and my family. Though there was a footnote to say they were translations of the original in English by one 'R.K. Narayanaswamy', I could not imagine they could have been written in any language other than Tamil — they were Tamil stories of Tamil people. That was one of my early literary discoveries and Narayan became an inspiration to me in attempting to get the reader absorbed in the writing and not in the language in which the story is written. Narayan could have been equally effective in Tamil or Kannada if he had chosen to write in either or both languages.

When I joined Gemini Studios in 1952, I felt thrilled that one of my colleagues would be a brother of Narayan. Ramachandran and I became good friends and through him I met all his brothers, nephews, uncles, brother-in-law and quite a number of his relations and friends. Irrespective of the degree of worldly circumstances of the different people, the cohesiveness of the family was a sheer joy to see. All the brothers loved people and loved to talk. All of them had a strikingly original sense of humour. Ramachandran is a gifted writer and artist and the manner in which he managed the likeness of the most featureless faces with a minimum of lines was remarkable.

In 1956, with the States about to be reorganised, it was rumoured that that year's Dassara would be the last for Mysore. Ramachandran, two other colleagues and I went to Mysore, stood crushed in the train for the entire 300 miles. We stayed in the house where Narayan and his brothers lived. They just couldn't believe that we could be so foolish as to visit Mysore during Dassara. It rained cats and dogs, to use a clichè, but to me the trip was a most memorable one. We roamed the streets of Mysore as Narayan's characters would have done and, at the art gallery, I saw Ravi Varma's originals for the first time.

When Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* came out in 1957, I felt I should render it in Tamil. The author's consent was a matter of seconds, but when I sat down to translate the novel, I could not get beyond the first sentence. The novel was subsequently translated into Tamil by a cousin of Narayan's, the celebrated Baranidharan.

The next year, Narayan went to the United States and people on the other side of Atlantic were far more responsive to Narayan's art than their older cousins, the English. Now Narayan had become a world writer. He wrote *The Guide* which won the first Sahitya Akademi Award for English. Pearl Buck, Dev Anand and his brother Vijay Anand undertook with great earnestness to make *Guide* into a film in English and Hindi. I saw both versions and thought the team had done very good work — those were the days when there was no art cinema, no parallel cinema — but Narayan didn't like both the versions. Some years later, his *Financial Expert* was made into a Kannada film under the title *Banker Margayya*. It was quite good but not as lively as *Guide*. That was a full twenty years after *Guide* and Narayan did not have a harsh word for *Margayya*.

For a month in 1983, I was in Mysore at C.D. Narasimhaiah's ashram *Dhyanyaloka*. Another Tamil writer Kandasamy was also a fellow at *Dhyanyaloka* and Narayan was greatly impressed by him. I dined a couple of times at Narayan's place and all of us had a star-breakfast in the then brand new Dasaprakash Paradise. Not long afterwards Narayan and I were together in Frankfurt as Indian participants at the Book Fair. The Fair, we agreed, was meaningfully called Messe. On the very first day of the Fair, Anita Desai was caught in an insubordinate lift in her 50-storey hotel and she left for home immediately in a state of understandable shock.

As long as Narayan stayed in T. Nagar, we saw each other once in two months or so. Then he moved to Alwarpet. Dom Moraes was in Madras for a couple of days and he wanted to see Narayan. All I did was to give him the telephone number of S. Krishnan who excelled in writing some very perceptive introductions to the recent omnibus volumes of Narayan's work.

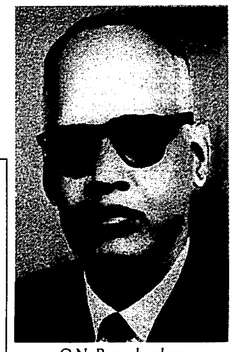
It was Star News which announced to viewers that the 94-year-old Narayan was in hospital for respiratory complications. The channel gave a day-by-day account of the condition of the world-renowned author. A hospital is as much an uncompromising tyrant as the human body. I had seen Narayan in the best of days, cheerful, extremely sharp and attentive, full of laughter. I prayed that Providence should not put him to protracted suffering. Anywhere else, the passing away of a writer of Narayan's stature would have been a solemn occasion for the government. Here it went virtually unnoticed.

A 'Nobel Class' scientist

Gopalasamudram Narayana Iyer Ramachandran, who passed away a month ago, was described by his admirers as one of the most brilliant Indian scientists of this century, a 'Nobel Class' scientist, according to *Frontline*. He was to many scientists "the father of molecular biophysics in India," pioneer in that field in this country even as the subject was beginning to take shape in the West.

A tribute in *The Hindu* by D. Balasubramaniam had this to say: "When a man comes out with one original idea he is called brilliant. When he comes out with two, he is thought to be extraordinary, but when he comes out with three independent and original ideas, he is thought to be a genius. Einstein, Newton, Pauling and Crick are some examples. I would like to believe that GNR belonged to this class."

GNR made several important discoveries in molecular biophysics, especially in the study of protein struccures, at a time when very little was known about them. His formulation of the rules for describing conformations of polypeptides, polysaccharides, and polynucleotides was responsible for initiating a new field of study on the conformations of macromolecules. He left a permanent imprint in the field, the "Ramachandran phi-psi-plot" or simply the "Ramachandran plot", a standard description of protein structures in every modern publication.



G.N. Ramachandran

An important discovery by Ramachandran was the triple-helical structure of collagen, a connective tissue protein, one of the more abundant mammalian proteins in the world. Remarkably, the structure of collagen he proposed over four decades ago has survived the scrutiny of numerous experiments.

Ramachandran was an innovator in several other important areas of molecular biophysics, including X-ray crystallography, and three-dimensional image reconstructions of electron microscopic images.

He started the departments of Molecular Biophysics in the University of Madras and later at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.

Ramachandran began his scientific career as a student of Sir C.V. Raman, the first Indian Nobel Laureate in Physics, and went to Cambridge, England, to study in the laboratory of yet another Nobel Laureate, Sir William Lawrence Bragg. On his return to India, Ramachandran was appointed an assistant professor in the Department of Physics at the Indian Institute of Science.

There he started research in X-ray crystallography, a tradition that continues to this day. After a few years he moved to the University of Madras where he became, at 30, one of the youngest professors in the newly created Department of Physics. There he built one of the finest programmes devoted to molecular biophysics.

Several years later he returned to the Indian Institute of Science and started one of the best departments of molecular biophysics in India.

Ramachandran had a wide range of other interests, from Indian philosophy and classical music to artificial intelligence and yoga. His favourite topic was *Syaad Nyaaya*, "the doctrine of may be," an age-old system in Jain philosophy. According to this system, any logical statement has more than two truth-values: it may be true, it may be false, or it may be doubtful.

In a remarkable series of papers, GNR interpreted the philosophical ideas of *Syaad Nyaaya* in a mathematical form which he called the "Boolean vector matrix formulation". In his opinion, the ideas expressed in these papers have potential applications in the field of artificial intelligence.

Most of Ramachandran's major scientific contributions were made against heavy odds, at a time when scientific research and creativity had a low priority in India.

According to one tribute, "The country had just achieved its Independence from British rule and was trying to solve more immediate problems associated with building a new nation and improving the living standards of its enormous population. Despite such conditions, Ramachandran was able to inspire a large number of young people, first in Madras and later in Bangalore, to take up careers in science. Many of these students have gone on to successful careers in science and made significant contributions to various aspects of biophysics throughout the world...

"In addition to being a highly creative scientist, Ramachandran is a man of very high integrity and moral principles... He is a truly patriotic Indian with an abiding love for his country. He had numerous and lucrative opportunities to pursue his

(Continued on Page 7)

OUR READERS WRITE

The missing sparrows

Where have they flown, (MM, May 1st) is what most of us have been wondering these last 3-4 years. Until then, the 'house sparrow' used to build nests behind pictures hung on walls in homes or in the upper cup of a ceiling fan or in the attic etc. When the eggs hatched, we used to be very careful not to switch on the fan lest we injure the fledglings.

It was usual for a sparrow to look at its own image in the mirror and keep pecking at it.

Many mornings you could see many hundreds of them take off from large trees, chirping loudly.

All these are lost for ever. Soon we may have to look for a sparrow (no more 'house' sparrow) in a zoo and not in a home.

We used to see scissor-tailed swallows, some mynahs etc. These too have not been seen for the last 3-4 years.

Many scintillating songs have been written on the *chittu kuruvi* and Bharati extolled the *chittu kuruvi*'s 'free' flights.

To many they would seem flights of fancy. That they were real, only some of us know.

Dr. K.S. Srinivasan
1253, 66th Street
Korattur, Chennai 600 080.

Still hope

I am delighted to inform Prof. Ismail (MM, May 1st) that all is not lost yet! When we moved into our newly built home 14 years ago, we were gifted an almost life-sized terracotta horse's head. Just the right thing to put on the wall of the courtyard. Shortly afterwards, a pair of house sparrows built a nest inside the head... they use the ears to enter. Since then it has never been unoccupied; we have seen generations of baby birds being fed and taught to fly. They are as much a part of our household as visiting grandchildren, who are enchanted by the presence of these tiny creatures flying over their heads from one courtyard to the other.

Woe betide me if I fail to get up much after sunrise. The birds will sit on the window sill and chirp till I am awake and put uncooked rice grains on the ground for their breakfast.

We know how fortunate and privileged we are to have these increasingly rare birds living in our home.

Radha Gopalakrishnan
26/2 Arundale Beach Road
Kalakshetra Colony
Chennai 600 090.

Royapuram memories

The picture of the Madras Railway Office in Royapuram (MM, May 1st) facing the sea stirred my memories of olden days. In the Thirties of the last century, I used to as a schoolboy commute by bus between my home in Tondiarpet and Madras Christian College School at Parry's Corner. In the mornings, as the bus turned into North Beach Road, I used to alert myself to watch the twin blessings of Madras. One, the blue green sea was on one side, on the other was the formidable pale yellow edifice of the Railway Office. Both used to sparkle, drenched as they were in the tropical morning sun. In my childish innocence, I used to imagine that both were indestructible and would last for ever. Alas! How wrong I was! The wide sea has been mutilated to form an ore loading quay, while the Railway building has been subjected to the wrecker's hammer.

I remember an incident when the building was being pulled down. Its pillars were not entirely of brick and mortar. They had two parts — a core and a rind. The rind was of brick and mortar, which formed a sort of veneer for cosmetic purpose. The real load bearer was the core which was of wood. In this case, the wooden portion was of solid virgin teak wood. The wreckers found that the wood was well preserved by its outer shield and each beam could fetch several thousand rupees. The Railways woke up and claimed ownership of these beams saying whatever was found hidden inside was a sort of treasure trove on which the wreckers could not lay any claim. The contractor countered that the wood supporting a structure is a building material and cannot form a hidden treasure by any stretch of imagination. The contractor's argument sustained and he stood to gain considerably in the deal.

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In lighter vein

The feature on the Railways in MM, May 1st, brought back to mind a joke in my schooldays in the 50s.

With S.S.L.C. Exams held in March and September, it was common to taunt dullards by calling out to them "MSM, SIR" (i.e. March September March, Success Impossible Retire), punning on Madras & Southern Mahratta Railway and South Indian Railways!

N. Dharmeshwaran
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Looking back

These days we hear of match fixing in cricket and all the hullaballoo about it in the newspapers. What a fall from the good old times!

It is nice to have a flashback to the Forties at the Madras Cricket Club grounds at Chepauk during the Ranji Trophy cricket season, when speed merchant Rangachari and ace spinner Ram Singh represented TNCA. We did not have the massive stadium at Chepauk then and temporary stands used to be erected, with considerable open ground left uncovered for those who could not afford the luxuries of the stands and who had lean purses or no purse at all... but they all used to throng the grounds with their flags, bugles and drums making a racket and dancing whenever a four was scored or a sixer hit or a prize wicket taken.

We can recollect the enthusiasm of the cricketing public when the Australian Services team under the captaincy of Hassett with the speed bowler Keith Miller made a brief halt in Madras and played at Chepauk. What a thrill the young and the old alike had witnessing that game. Those were the days when tickets were easily available at the counter and we could take it easy and walk along the Canal Road to come to the ground in a relaxed manner. We watched the game sitting on terra-firma eating groundnuts or *thengai-mangai-pattani chundal* sold by vendors. In those days, we did not have the luxury of ice-creams available within the ground. How we used to enjoy those simple eats!

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The common man's contempt

It is with considerable sadness that I noted that the meet organised by the Forum for Adyar Civic Exnoras (FACE) to discuss Voter Rights, Duties and Actions in Shastri Nagar drew a very poor response with just 15 persons turning up.

While feeling sad about such response, I must confess that I'm not surprised at the type of response. But instead of calling the poor turnout as indifference, we should attribute the reasons to the average common man lacking confidence, not only in politicians and bureaucrats, but also in the intelligentsia and social thinkers. In the last few years, the common man has been developing a sense of contempt for such persons in society.

In today's mood, many persons may not even offer a cup of coffee to such persons visiting their residences to talk about national problems and social matters.

The differences between Mahatma Gandhi in pre-independence days and several of his followers and the politicians and social thinkers of today is with regard to their personal stake in social work. Obvisouly, several citizens think that the hallmark of a responsible man in public service is that he should be willing to sacrifice his personal comforts, income and wealth and should be willing to go out of his way to help those in distress in practical ways. While conceding that social workers are far superior to others who are indifferent to the social problems, it is still necessary that social workers should be far more convincing to ensure that they are heard.

On the other hand, what we see is several politicians and former IAS officers making public lectures about poverty and distress conditions, while they themselves live in airconditioned comfort. Several social workers today, unfortunately, are retired bureaucrats, women from rich families with surplus time and professional social workers for whom social service is a source of livelihood.

One aspect that is conspicuous about most of them is that they are very good speakers who can interpret a variety of subjects in a brilliant manner. They also suffer from some sort of superiority complex, that they are born to guide and advise, while others are meant to listen to them.

The disillusioned common man is no more impressed with such social workers and so-called intelligentsia whom they view only as another group with vested interests, though they may be different from the class of politicians.

It is imperative that everyone who wants to reform the society should be willing to make personal sacrifices and set personal examples. Mere speech-makers and essay-writers do not contribute to solutions for the problems of India. The common man seems to understand this aspect very well now. His contempt is too obvious to be ignored.

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Verse and worse

Can we hope to see a further contribution from Padmini Natarajan, or any other reader with poetic/musical inclinations, on "Where Has All the Water Gone?"

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Endless queue

On May 10th, I went to Central Station at 6.00 a.m. to send off my brother who was going by Brindavan Express to Bangalore. When I went to purchase a platform ticket, I was shocked to see a queue of scores of persons waiting to buy platform tickets. There was only one counter open to sell these tickets.

Many in the queue were unable to accompany the passengers they had come to see off. When I questioned the counter clerk, he coolly told me to make a complaint to higher authorities if I wanted. I went in search of the Station Master. He was not in his seat. I next went to the Passenger Care Counter-in-charge who directed me to go to the Station Manager. He too was not in his seat.

The station authorities must provide several counters and a special counter for women to purchase platform tickets without inconvenience. It should not be a time-consuming exercise, inconveniencing an honest citizen who wants to abide by the law.

Alternatively, the Railways should provide Automatic Platform Ticket Vending Machines at suitable places enabling a visitor to insert coin of suitable denomination and get his/her platform ticket, just like the weighing machine and ATM in banks.

It is time the Railways realise the value of the time of passengers and the public, instead of making them wait in long queues.

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Understanding heritage

Reader Dharmeshwaran has captured and presented the essence of heritage in letter and spirit in *Madras Musings*.

Heritage is what we inherit as heirs. Are we heirs of our overseas conquistadors? These structures are at best regrettable remnants/relics or repugnant reminders of our pitiable past.

All the same, Reader Dharmeshwaran has not, be it carefully noted, suggested "bamianising" these. All that he says is if Time takes its toll, allow it, instead of rushing to shed tears and re-build.

Also that we should take this as an opportunity to implant in our soil our own creations as true heritage that posterity will cherish and preserve. A pragmatic, non-fanatic and peaceful approach.

I admit that only now I have understood what Heritage is and what is not. Thank you, Reader Dharmeshwaran!

D. Natesan
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A broader view

It is very difficult to digest the views expressed by Reader N. Dharmeshwaran (MM, May 1st). Oxford Dictionary defines 'heritage' as 'a nation's historic buildings, monuments, regarded worthy of preservation'. Foreign rulers were fought for our independence and self rule. But who can wish away history? Any good thing left behind by the foreign rulers are worthy of preservation. By the same token should we dispense with the Railways, Judiciary, Telecommunication system etc., which are vestiges of the British?

It does not seem proper to take a very narrow view. Any monument or building and other noteworthy landmarks, be they by foreign rulers or Indian monarchs, are worthy of preservation. Let us not commit the same mistake that is being done by the Talibans of Afghanistan

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Blame the user

There is no use blaming the corrupting chat lines for what we do. An individual should accept responsibility for his or her actions. Besides, he or she must look before leaping.

Admitted that some of these telephone chat lines are peddling piffle, it's too much to ask that the service be banned totally. There are ever so many corrupting influences in this WWW (whole wide world, for me). To introduce ban on them will be an endless affair.

C. Kesi
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Encroachments galore

The comparatively new residential area Anna Nagar has seen such progress as may defy comparison with any other part of the city. Near the central round tana is the Kandaswami Arts College which is in the process of getting a facelift, and a new boundary wall has come up on its perimeter. The commercial value of the footpath is not lost on the residents and I am sure that in the not too distant future, it will sport Burma Bazaar type establishments. The road towards the Anna arch is mute testimony to this blatant commercialisation. How can such encroachments be prevented? The hapless footpath will be ever grateful if it is left alone for walking on.

I live in eternal hope.

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Pollution uncontrolled

My sister lives in Radhanagar, Chromepet. There is a tannery behind her house. The tannery's effluents are let into the open behind her house. When the effluent dries, during summer, the stench is unbearable. During the monsoon, the effluents get mixed up with rainwater and pollute the wellwater, making it undrinkable.

My sister, suffering from chronic asthma and skin disorder, has been fighting a lone battle for the past 25 years. She had given umpteen representations to the authorities, but they have been of no avail. She had wanted to meet the Chairman, Pollution Control Board on several occasions, but had been constantly put off by subordinates.

In most government offices certain days are set apart for members of the public to meet the higher-ups. This does not seem to be followed in the Pollution Control Board.

If this state of affairs is allowed to continue, the Pollution Control Board will have to be re-christened the **Uncontrollably Polluted Board.**

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Saving water

This has reference to the fountain episode in MM, May 1st (I now see why it's called SHORT 'N' SNAPPY — He snaps at you; you snap back) as well as to 'Chennai's water woes' and wish to add my ha'pennyworth.

Like the sight of a rich householder hosing his garden path and porch in full view of slum dwellers and have-nots (who wait half the night for one plastic pot of water) thereby raising their hackles, fountains in water-starved Chennai may be giving the wrong signals but would be glorious in the monsoon aftermath. Moreover these fountains cater to our feathered friends, and so may be condoned.

Along with the fight against AIDS, the water problem should be tackled by distributing free condoms and toilet paper to the slums and tenements by, say, some of our NGOs.

In fact, if all Chennaiites use toilet paper, several lakh litres of water now literally going down the drain can be conserved.

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The port that brought a railway building down

It was pointed out in *MM*, May 1st, that of the three 19th Century buildings existing on the Royapuram Railway Station Yard, one appears to have been pulled down in the early Seventies.

The Madras Port constructed a deep drafted outer harbour immediately north of the existing original harbour during 1967-73 to cater to the needs of a six million tonnes per year ore export venture and the import requirements of crude oil for the Madras Refineries. In the process of constructing the outer harbour, the dredged sand was made use of for the reclamation of about 86 acres of land area on the western side along the Royapuram sea face upto Cassomode Bay further north. The southern part of the reclamation was east of the Royapuram Station Yard with a stretch of the North Beach Railway Terminus Road between the Royapuram Station Yard and the sea front.

For an annual export throughput of six million tonnes, the iron ore from Bellary-Hospet area had to be handled in Jumbo rakes of 2500 tonne payload by powerful double WDM2 diesel locomotives. Every day seven rakes on an average were to be hauled in and seven empty rakes had to be despatched from the Madras Outer Harbour to the mineheads.

To receive the ore trains, unload the ore by mechanical wagon tippers and stack about half a million tonnes of the ore, a good part of the land reclaimed from the sea was used for locating the Railway sidings and spacious ore plots. The movement of the ore rakes was along the route Guntakkal, Arkonam and Royapuram station with a short final link between Royapuram and Outer Harbour.

To establish the last short link, the Railways had to demolish one of the buildings referred to in *Madras Musings*. The entire Royapuram Yard was already cluttered with lines serving the Madras Port (Old Harbour), Madras Beach Station and northern lines system leading to Gummidipoondi. Hence the alignment of tracks leading to the Outer Harbour had to be designed under tight conditions. There was no scope for choosing any alternative, as the areas surrounding Royapuram Station were densely habitated and crisscrossed by heavily trafficked roads. In the absence of scope for a viable alternative, it was not possible to save from demolition the 120-year-old building.

As a field officer of the Madras Port, during 1967-76, I had off and on strayed into the Royapuram Station Yard. All those buildings, though built of generous proportions, were of the "brickwork and lime mortar, lime plastered walls and colour washed with lime with yellow ochre added" variety. Due to the proximity of the sea with its saline atmosphere the walls had deteriorated, plaster had peeled off extensively and colour wash had disappeared. In the light of the dilapidated conditions and seedy looks of structures none thought in terms of making efforts to preserve the 1850 vintage buildings.

In view of the location which involved the heaviest rail traffic with its constant vibration and the salt laden atmosphere of the area, "the Railways in my opinion rightly decided to pull down the large building adjacent to the Royapuram Station to make way for the establishment of the rail link to the ore plots of the Outer Harbour. I concur with the decision of the Railways, on considerations of "commercial development" and "doubtful success" of attempts towards "preservation" of a weak building of 19th Century grandeur.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Reader Ranganathan's explanation for the pulling down of one of the Railways' old buildings in the Royapuram Station Yard is appreciated and is a welcome footnote to railway history. But we can't say that we agree with his reasoning and more particularly his views that attempts to preserve "a weak building of 19th Century grandeur" would prove a "doubtful success". We refer him to the Police Headquarters (DGP) Building, parts of which are older than the building pulled down. The restoration here is by no means "a doubtful success"; indeed, it is one of the 'prides' of the city! Those old brick and lime mortar buildings will survive better and longer than any modern construction as ill-treated.

'The South, first in rail transportation'

Your heading, 'From Madras Rly. to Southern Rly.' (MM, May 1st), though imaginative, could have reflected reality, with a heading such as the above, for the first proposal to introduce railways in India was made in Southern India in 1831-1832.

It was at the behest of a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, which was specially sent from Westminster to study the deplorable state of communication and commerce prevailing in the Presidency of Madras at the time, that the idea of crossing the whole peninsula from sea to sea was mooted by the Committee as one of the means of improving the situation. The Committee recommended to the British Parliament that a set of canals and railways be built from coast to coast, to serve as a trans-peninsular artery of commerce. The line contemplated was to be about 150 miles (about 240 km) in length and was to run along the river Cauvery from Cauverypattam to Caroor. In the event, no such railway was ever constructed. But the proposal was not abandoned; it was kept on hold, so to speak, and the matter was handed over to the Royal Engineering Corps for study and recommendations.

Capt. A.P. Cotton (R.E.), who carried out the study, came out with his report in 1836. He advocated the desirability of railroads in India and their superiority over other means of communication, including canals. The railway route conceived by him was to connect Madras and Bombay by a railway running some 862 miles (about 1390 km) via Wallajahnagore, Arcot, Nellore, Bangalore, Bellary and Poona. That too remained a still born brainchild, but the proposal made in 1841 by Mr. (later Sir) Rowland Macdonald Stephenson (nephew of the legendary George Stephenson) to lay a railway from Calcutta to Delhi eventually reached fruition on August 15, 1854, to become the second railway in not only British India, but indeed in Asia.

When the railway scheme approved by prominent citizens of Bombay at a meeting in the Town Hall on April 19, 1845 became reality on April 16, 1853, with the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company's inaugural train chugging out of Boribunder Station in Bombay at 3.35 p.m., the Railway Age dawned in Asia. The actual 'first run' had, however, been made on November 18, 1852, when the Directors of the G.I.P. Railway Company travelled from Bombay to Tannah (Thane) and back, by a train which was hauled by a steam engine christened after the Governor of the Presidency of Bombay, Lord Falkland.

However, neither of these two runs by steam traction represents the first puff of the 'Iron Horse' on Asian soil. That honour goes to the locomotive named 'Thomason' which began working on December 22, 1851 during the construction of the Solani aqueduct 90 miles (some 145 km) north-east of Delhi. That locomotive had been hauled from "???? port to Delhi" via the Grand Trunk Road, employing elephants. If the starting port was Calcutta, I have not succeeded in finding out where the elephant drawn 'train' joined the G.T. Road; but, if the locomotive 'Thomason' had landed in Madras — a probability not to be discarded off-hand — railway history could be re-written, even though for just a short paragraph!

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For more about the writer, see Page 8.

PLEASE NOTE

- All letters for The Editor's attention should be addressed to The Editor, c/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.
- All business correspondence should be addressed to The Director, Chennai Heritage,260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018.

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Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Questions 1 to 9 are from the period May 1 to 15. Questions 10 to 12 pertain to Chennai. Questions 13 to 20 relate to Tamil Nadu.)

1. Name India's first electric car, launched on Technology Day, May 11th.
2. Which State was given a 'Special Category' status recently, the eleventh State in the country to be given it?
3. What has the Union Cabinet declared the current year (starting April 23rd) as?
4. What first did the couple Vijay and Arundhati Raul of Rourkela achieve on TV recently?
5. Name the nation's largest-ever War Games in 13 years spread over five days, conducted in Rajasthan from May 5th.
6. Name the venerated mosque in Damascus, where the tomb of St. John the Baptist, was visited by the Pope during his high profile visit to Syria recently.
7. Name the popular Hindi film star who was recently arrested for possessing cocaine.
8. What world titles did Wang Liqin and Wang Nan win at Osaka recently?
9. Name the 'Great Train Robber', a cult figure in his own way, who returned to England recently to face trial some 35 years after the sensational crime.

* * *

10. Of which European country is Arvind Gopinath the new Honorary Consul in Chennai?
11. Name the four educational institutions that were used as vote-counting centres for Chennai District.
12. What new bridge over the river Kortalaiyar, built on a BOT basis on NH-5, was thrown open to the public recently?

* * *

13. Which political party had its genesis in Royapuram in 1949?
14. Which writer was given the coveted ninth Saraswathi Samman in New Delhi on May 3rd?
15. Where, near Coonoor, is the Cordite Factory located?
16. Which is the highest peak in the Nilgiris?
17. Which Tamil Nadu government corporation won the prestigious HUDCO Award for housing for 2000-01?
18. What new surveillance system, the first in the country, did the Chengalpattu Range Police install recently?
19. Which district saw the highest polling percentage in the recent Assembly elections?
20. Another election question. Who triumphed in the State's biggest constituency, Villivakkam?

(Answers on Page 7)

A Wellington commemoration

The graduation of two US military officers from the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington gave us just the excuse we were looking for to head for the hills. Remembering our pleasant stay last year in Coonoor, we settled ourselves there again and 'commuted' to Wellington for the graduation formalities.

Although the DSSC graduation is normally a private celebration for the officers and their spouses, we requested permission to attend, because this year, 2001, marks 50 years of US participation in the DSSC programme. The first US Army officer, Lt. Col. J.C. Mataxis graduated from DSSC in 1951. We were joined by the US Embassy Defense Attache, Col. Don Zedler, and the Defense Cooperation Attache, Maj. Rick White, himself a DSSC graduate in 1995.

To mark the special occasion, Col. Zedler presented to DSSC Commandant, Lt. Gen. P.P.S. Bindra, a framed crossed sword and scabbard, thanking the DSSC for 50 years of training US military officers. The US Department of Defense nominates two mid-level military officers each year — one from the Army and one from either the Navy or Air Force, on a rotating basis. This year's graduates were US Army Capt. Patrick Kelley and US Air Force Maj. Jeff Swegel.

To further sweeten the occasion, we were delighted to witness the award for best dissertation conferred on Capt. Kelley, the first foreign officer ever to win the award, for his study of the *Arthashastra* and its relevance for international politics. We were intrigued by the name of one of the other awards conferred at the ceremony — the Scudder Medal. The Scudder name is well known in other American contexts in South India and this association could be an interesting thread to follow.

The DSSC was set up in India in 1905 in Deolali as the Army Staff College. In 1907, it was moved to Quetta and is still functioning there as a Pakistan military training facility. In 1947, the Indian Army established the DSSC in Wellington and by 1950 it was serving officers of all Indian services, as well as those from friendly foreign countries. This year's graduating class consisted of 425 officers, including 33 foreign officers.

Wellington, of course, is of historical interest, being home to the Madras Regimental Centre. Construction of the Wellington barracks began in 1852 and was completed in 1860. Another block was added in 1876. The Madras Regiment is over 250 years old and is the oldest regiment in the Indian Army.

The MRC houses a fascinating museum, with maps and accounts of the regiment's illustrious campaigns, captured battle standards, portraits and photographs of officers and troops, artillery and communications equipment, sports awards and cases of archival material. We wished that some of the early bound volumes and a handsome hand-tooled leather photo album from Raja Deen Dayal Studios could be displayed open, highlighting a few interesting documents and photographs. We were particularly taken with the maps and narrative extolling the exploits of the Chola navy, as well as the detailed descriptions of the Madras Regiment's role in the Mysore and Maratha wars.

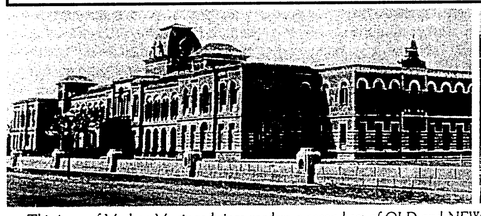
If you would like to visit the MRC museum and barracks, please note that permission should be arranged in advance.

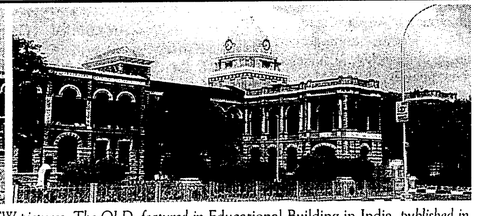
EDITOR'S NOTE: The students of the Defence Services Staff College are officers who get in after a highly competitive written examination. Over 90 per cent of the Generals, Admirals and Air Marshals of the Indian services have been graduates of this tri-service institution.

The research and dissertation at the College now reflect an approach which is distinctly contemporary and have an Indian perspective. The graduation ceremony is held in the Tri-Service auditorium, built in memory of the first Param Vir Chakra recipients from the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The 33 foreign officers in the recent graduating class were from as many as 23 countries, including Vietnam, Seychelles, Kirgyzstan, Palestine, Oman, Czech Republic, Botswana, Nigeria, Bhutan, Bangladesh, U.K. and U.S.A. After a stint at the College, many foreign officers have risen to guide the destinies of their countries. One such is the Nigerian President who paid a visit to the College last year and recorded in the visitor's book that the College had changed the course of his life.

● by Bernie and Pat Alter





This issue of Madras Musings *brings readers a second set of OLD and NEW pictures. The OLD, featured in* Educational Building in India, *published in 1911 by the Superintendent, Government Printing, Calcutta, shows Presidency College circa 1910 with the rather squat tower and cupola Robert Chisholm had designed for it. Our NEW focusses on the cupola that was substancially changed in 1940, seventy years after the Chisholm building opened its doors. The new dome was created to mark the centenary of the founding of the institution.* (Copy and NEW photograph by RAJIND N. CHRISTY).

(Continued from Page 1)

Presidency tops

coming first as it did in every parameter polled, namely, academic input, reputation, student care, curriculum, infrastructure, admission norms and job placement. In Arts too it was in the top five in every parameter except reputation and in Commerce it was student care that was its only parameter not in the top five.

Loyola, Chennai, ranked 2nd in Science also had straight seconds in all parameters. Sixth in the Arts stream, it failed to get into the first five in student care, infrastructure and admission norms. And it did not figure in the Top Ten in the Commerce rankings, though it figured in the Chennai top five: Presidency, MCC, Stella Maris, Loyola and Queen Mary's.

The third Chennai College in the Top Ten, Madras Christian was 9th in Arts and Science and 4th in Commerce. Citywise, it was third to Presidency and Loyola in Arts and Science and ahead of Stella Maris and Queen Mary's in Arts and Meenakshi and Stella in Science.

Stella Maris, with the best record amongst the women's colleges in the City, was ranked 9th nationally in the Commerce stream, with a particularly high ranking in job placements in this discipline.

In the professional streams, Chennai fared nowhere near as well. Sad was the fact that it didn't figure in the Top Ten Law Colleges nationally and had only IIT, Madras, in the Top Ten Engineering Colleges, a joint third behind Kharagpur and Kanpur. Wonder what happened to Anna University or the College of Engineering, Guindy. As for Medical Colleges, CMC Vellore — the only Tamil Nadu college outside Chennai to figure in any of the lists — was ranked 7th among the Top Ten, and Madras Medical 9th. JIPMER, Pondicherry, was 6th, with a high student care rating. The only other Tamil Nadu college to be listed among the high rankers in any discipline was Vivekananda College.

Of Presidency College and Loyola, *India Today*'s Arun Ram writes:

'The second college to be set up by the British in India, Presidency College, Chennai, looks every inch a heritage institution. Age is beginning to tell on its 160 year-old building, but its academic excellence is unwithered. The science departments were a hub of quality research during the time C.V. Raman studied here. They still are. Says Principal Dr. T.R. Balakrishnan: "On an average, the college produces 50 PhDs a year." Not surprising when 200 out of 250 faculty members are PhD holders.

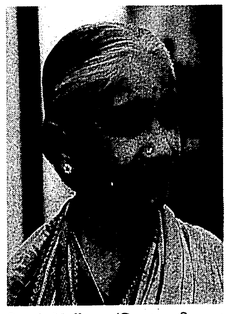
The 125-year-old Chemistry Department was instrumental in manufacturing TNT during World War II. "The production plant in the cellar, now corroded, has many war tales to tell," remarks V. Kannappan, a Chemistry Professor. Presidency's chemistry labs have contributed to heads as much as warheads. Amrutanjan balm was formulated here in the 1960s.

The academic excellence of Presidency stands in stark contrast to its apparent woes like paucity of funds for the upkeep of the colossal buildings and the poor economic background of its students. Perhaps it is the will to excel in challenging circumstances that makes the college click. Last year, too, Presidency students came first in all the science subjects in Tamil Nadu. Presidency College is an example of the fact that quality education need not cost the moon.

Presidency's nearest rival has a lot in common with it. Loyola, another Chennai college, was started in July 1925 by a group of Jesuits. "We put equal emphasis on all-round development of the student," says Principal Fr. Joseph Xavier. Loyola has made computer education compulsory for all its students. Social work is also part of the Loyola student's campus life.

Specialised research institutes which are a part of Loyola include the Entomology Research Institute and the Loyola Institute of Frontier Energy.'

A dancer dedicated to teaching



Sarada Hoffman. (Courtesy: Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.)

Sarada Hoffman with a garlanded Rukmini Devi.

Every student of Kalakshetra between 1945 and 1996 came under the influence of Sarada Hoffman, who recently received the Rukmini Devi Award for Excellence conferred by the Centre for Contemporary Culture. She is the teacher who is said to have imbibed in fullest measure all that Kalakshetra founder Rukmini Devi Arundale knew and conceived of in Bharata Natyam and who gladly passed it on to her students. For over fifty years, this soft-spoken but strong-willed woman has served her guru's cause with self-effacing dedication, striking a major blow for the continuance of the *guru-sishya parampara*.

Sarada was hardly 14 when she decided to stay on at Kalakshetra to assist Rukmini Devi Arundale, even though her theosophist parents were moving to Madurai to set up home there. Her grandfather, Mahadeva Sastri, had been the librarian at the Adyar Library during Annie Besant's time and her father Krishnan the first Indian headmaster of the Olcott School. The family had lived in the Theosophical Society for two generations.

Awestruck by Rukmini Devi's dancing from childhood, Sarada started dance lessons with her idol on her tenth birthday, just as her mentor had promised her four years earlier when she had asked to be taught dance. In 1943, when barely 14, Sarada had her *arangetram*, but in the absence of Minakshisundaram Pillai and Chockalingam Pillai, dance stalwarts whom Rukmini Devi had collected around herself in her mission to bring Bharata Natyam to the world, it was also when she made up her mind to stay and help Atthai (as Rukmini Devi was known to all her students) with the classes in the absence of the veteran teachers. With her parents' blessings, the teenager made that momentous decision, and started teaching students by the time she was 16, though she had to wait till she attained majority to be officially appointed to the staff.

During the next couple of decades, Sarada repeatedly turned down dancing engagements outside Kalakshetra because she always gave her teaching first priority. According to some of her long-time associates and admirers, "she dedicated her life to Kalakshetra with no expectation of any reward or benefit." She remembers how she turned down an invitation to dance in Russia as part of a Government of India initiative, because she felt she was needed at Kalakshetra, especially at that time – 1956 – as Atthai was still convalescing from a major illness. It was Rukmini Devi who insisted that she make the trip saying, "This is also part of your work. You must take Bharata Natyam to other parts of the world."

Sarada's students were often older than her, especially in the early years. Those were times when everyone at Kalakshetra worked with a sense of mission, enjoying their work together. The atmosphere was that of one happy family. Though there were differences of opinion among the staff, they did not affect the smooth running of the institution because all the members shared a sense of belonging.

Peter Hoffman, a young US Air Force pilot and the son of Paul Hoffman, the Director-General of the UN Development Programme, was interested in spiritualism and vegetarianism. He met Rukmini Devi at the Chicago Convention of the Theosophical Society in 1949. He was so impressed by her lecture, he walked up to her and asked her, "Can I come to India and help you in your work?"

Rukmini Devi, a formidable personality by now, gave Peter a trial and after he had accompanied her on a lecture tour of America and Europe, helping her in a variety of ways, approved his coming to India. Once in India, he was a tireless helper, totally devoted to Rukmini Devi and her work, chauffeuring her, doing secretarial work, accompanying her on her travels. Though Peter and Sarada met soon after his arrival in India, it was only in 1960 that they married. She never once used Peter Hoffman's proximity to Rukmini Devi to better her lot and remained content being a teacher — in itself an invaluable contribution to Kalakshetra.

Sarada absorbed everything Rukmini Devi taught, so that she could pass it on to her students. The creative person that she was, Rukmini Devi could not be expected to have the immense patience a teacher needs with fallible students. It was Sarada, with her quiet determination, who spent hours and days with the students, until she was satisfied they had learnt to dance the way Atthai would want them to, with no compromises in technique or emotional content.

Known to be a tough, demanding teacher, Sarada Hoffman says simply that the dance demands great rigour. There was nothing unreasonable in expecting her students to reach for excellence and perfection.

Though she never acquired a conventional college degree, Sarada Hoffman's education at Kalakshetra for her diploma included four languages — Tamil, English, Sanskrit and Telugu — Dramatic Art, Stagecraft, Lighting, Painting, Crafts, Voice Production, Music Appreciation and Art History. Most of the classes were of a high standard. Sarada remembers the world-famous poet Dr. Norman Cousins, who taught at Kalakshetra tell her once, "You have to rise up. I won't go down," when she complained that his classes were "too difficult".

As a teacher, Sarada too expected her pupils to reach up, but she took the trouble of giving them a helping hand in their strenuous ascent. She was as tough on herself as she was on them. And for years, the results were there to see in the outstanding dance-drama productions of Kalakshetra.

Significantly, what Sarada Hoffman remembers most about Rukmini Devi the teacher is her concern for those not blessed with talent or good looks. "I don't care if none of you wants to come for the exam, I'll be there to watch her dance," she would tell teachers, stressing the importance of the confidence-building impact of dance on such a person.

In 1994, Sarada Haffman belatedly received wider recognition, when the Sangeet Natak Akademi honoured her. Now further recognition has come the way of this dedicated teacher.

● by V. Ramnarayan

A 'NOBEL CLASS' SCIENTIST

(Continued from Page 3)

research career in many leading universities in the Western world, but he decided to stay in India, fight the bureaucracy, carry out his research interests, and inspire many young Indian students...

"His life has been one of varied experiences punctuated by ups and downs, success and failure, as is the case with many other famous scientists of our times. Ramachandran suffered serious psychiatric problems during most of his adult life. Fortunately they did not impact on his scientific creativity or productivity; it simply added a new dimension to his life. In spite of all that, he put India on the map of molecular biophysics. Clearly, Ramachandran belongs to the same league as some of the most famous Indian scientists of this century, for example, Sir C.V. Raman, M.N. Saha or S.N. Bose (of Bose-Einstein statistics fame). Clearly his contributions in the field of biophysics are of the Nobel Prize calibre".

A significant decision in GNR's career was made in 1971, when he chose to accept an invitation by Drs. Satish Dhawan and S. Ramaseshan to join the IISc, Bangalore, rather than stay back in a Madras University sans Dr. A.L. Mudaliar, who had quit the University after a long reign. According to P. Balaram and S. Ramaseshan, writing in *Frontline*, his move "was catalysed by the deteriorating academic atmosphere of the University. Ramachandran's two decades at Madras University clearly showed that the highest levels of research could be practised within our university system. ("It was here that vice-chancellors with vision such as A.L. Mudaliar and neighbours with ready help such as Nayudamma of CLRI become vital," said Balasubramaniam.) His departure signalled an impending change. We have all watched with varying degrees of helplessness the steady decay of university science in India over the last three decades."

The tragedy – from the University's point of view as much as the scientist's – of Ramachandran's exit from Madras University was that he left in a huff, when the rule books were thrown at him by an uncaring administration, following Mudaliar's retirement and the consequent collapse of GNR's anchor.

Such an indictment of our university system and the environment for research in India is nothing new, in an era of overall deterioration of standards in all spheres of life, particularly academic life, amidst the largely consumerist euphoria that globalisation and liberalisation have brought in. In such an ethos, when will we see the next Ramachandran or (C.V.) Raman or (K.S.) Krishnan in the Indian scientific universe?

V. Ramnarayan

Answers to Quiz

1. Reva; 2. Uttaranchal; 3. Year of Books; 4. Became the first couple and the second winner of Rs. 1 crore on the popular *Kaun Banega Crorepathi* quiz programme; 5. Poorna Vijay; 6. Omayyad Mosque; 7. Fardeen Khan; 8. The men's and women's singles crowns at the world table tennis championships; 9. Ronnie **Biggs**.

* * *

10. Norway; 11. Loyola College, Anna University, Queen Mary's College and Presidency College; 12. The Karanodai Bridge.

* * *

13. DMK; 14. Indira Parthasarathy; 15. Aruvankadu; 16. Doddabetta Peak; 17. Tamil Nadu Police Housing Corporation; 18. An 'online vehicle tracking system'; 19. Ariyalur (68.9%); 20. Film Star D. Napoleon of the DMK.

Calling the old boys

It was in 1951 that N.Kannayiram, R.B.Alaganan and C.D.Gopinath were invited to join the European-dominated Madras Cricket Club. In 1955, Kannayiram became the first Indian to captain the Club's cricket team. That same year, Balu Alaganan led Madras (as Tamil Nadu then was) to its maiden Ranji Trophy championship. Both Kannayiram and Alaganan learnt their cricket in Ceylon schools. Perumal of the Education Department and K.R.N. (Ravi) Menon were others who played good cricket in Madras after school cricket in Ceylon. And there may well be many more from the old Madras Presidency who played their first serious cricket in Ceylon schools.

● by The Corner Flag

In the years between the Wars, many from the Presidency either lived in Ceylon and sent their children to local schools or sent their children from here to the Island's public schools which, taking leaves out of the English public school's manual, had established an enviable reputation. Royal and St.Thomas' and Ananda in Colombo, Trinity and Kingswood in Kandy, Richmond in Galle were among the 'Colleges', as Sri Lanka still calls them, favoured by Indian parents.

Apart from the names already mentioned, several boys from the P.T.Rajan family – including Palanivel Rajan, *The Corner Flag* believes – and the eye specialist Baboo Rajendran went to colleges in Ceylon. But these are only a few names that Gopi Nair, well-known in English theatre circles, and *The Corner Flag* recalled when we met at a recent lecture and began talking about our days at Royal. I wonder how many other old boys from Ceylon schools there are in Madras, mused Gopi. And girls, *The Corner Flag* added, girls from Ladies' and Bishop's, Visakha and St.Bridget's and several other girls' colleges.

It was at that point that Gopi suggested, why don't we try to get the lot together and form a Ceylon Old Students' Association. He volunteered to field calls and messages from those interested in meeting to discuss such an association. Gopi Nair may be contacted at New 59 (old 16) Ormes Road, Kilpauk, Madras 600 010; Tel: 6424986, 6423016, 6411977.

A few days later there was a similar thought from Pradeep Chakravarthy who sought help to enable "our tribe to increase". An alumnus of the London School of Economics, he and a fellow-alumnus, Vivek Harinarain would like LSE alumni to contact them to discuss the possibility of starting a Madras Chapter of the LSE Alumni Association. Harinarain may be contacted on Cell: 98410-70652, Off.:8571210, Res.: 4872988 and Chakravarthy at Off.: 8293565, Res.: 8281429/ 8214929, e-mail: pradeep@vsnl.com.

Romanced by the railways

One railway historian described it as an incurable but non-fatal infection," chuckles G.D. Patwardhan who, for lack of an appropriate medical tag, terms his condition 'railway disease'. "That is precisely the case with me." The septuagenarian has been in the grip of this particular affliction for almost 50 years.

Indeed, Patwardhan exhibits all the classic symptoms. He spends vast amounts of time and money on books with titles such as *Steam on the Veld* and *Couplings to the Khyber*. He holds forth irrepressibly on the Chaman Fruit Special and Frontier Mail. And every subject — from Falkland Road to butter chicken — eventually leads back to his beloved railways.

"Different people contract different strains of the infection," explains Patwardhan. "There are the nuts and bolts types who know every technical detail. Then there are the passionate travellers. And, finally, there are the history buffs like me."

Patwardhan is better known than most of his locomotive-loony tribe because, ever so often, he writes an erudite missive to a newspaper. Over the last 15 years, hundreds of his compositions have imparted morsels of railway lore through the 'Letters to the Editor' columns.

"Sir, In the 1840s, when the introduction of the railways in India was debated in the British Parliament, directors of the East India Company were far from enthusiastic. Their skepticism is seen in the despatch which catalogues the adverse effects of 'a vertical sun', rain, insects, 'the destructive effects of spontaneous vegetation upon brickwork' and the lack of trustworthy personnel," states one of Patwardhan's letters to *The Times of India* before tracing the birth of the 75 private railways in the country and their subsequent nationalisation.

Discourses another, "The first electric railway engine in India, the 'Sir Leslie Wilson', was one of a batch of ten locomotives built by Swiss Locomotive and Machine Works, Winterthur, on the pattern of their 'Krokodil' engines, meant for the difficult route through the St Gotthard Pass."

Despite his inexhaustible fund of train trivia, Patwardhan is not a 'railway man' or even a compulsive traveller. After graduating from Sydenham College, he slipped into the humdrum life of a textile mill executive. But the railways captured his imagination. When he was in his 20s, he bought his first encyclopaedia on trains. Soon, city bookstores knew him well enough to call up the minute they got a new bogey-or-boiler book. "The railway PROs, too, allowed me access to their libraries," recalls Patwardhan. "Also, various locomotive manufacturers flooded me with brochures and pamphlets."

As the stacks of books grew, so did Patwardhan's esoteric information. "One day, after my retirement, I saw a letter in an eveninger by a lady who had spotted an engine with the 'Sir Lesley Wilson' plaque," recalls Patwardhan. "I responded, explaining that Sir Lesley Wilson, Governor of the Bombay Presidency, had inaugurated railway electrification in British India on February 3, 1925."

The letter was carried and Patwardhan found that there was, indeed, an audience for his track-and-timetable talk. Today, his old-style bungalow, tucked away in a Bandra wadi, is an inevitable stop for architecture students, journalists and historians. Patwardhan regales them with unexpected titbits.

"It is a great mystery that Lord Falkland, who was the Governor of Bombay in 1853, actually shunned the inauguration of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway — the first railway in all of Asia — by departing for the hills hours before the ceremony," he says suddenly, in the midst of conversation about his son. "Curiously, his lady attended the function. I wonder..." What he wonders, however, the discreet gentleman will not divulge. But he does, occasionally, dabble with the naughty, especially if it furthers the cause of railway history. Which is why Patwardhan was so delighted with a letter that appeared in a 1901 issue of a South Indian newspaper.

'I am arrive by passenger train at Ahmedpore station and my belly is too much swelling with jack fruit. I am therefore went to the privy. Just as I am doing the nuisance, that guard making whistle blow for train to go off and I am running with brass pot in one hand and dhotie in the next when I am fall over. I am get leaved at Ahmedpore station. This too much bad, if passenger go to make @+**@+, that dam guard no wait train five minutes for him.'

Patwardhan beams gleefully, "It gives us so much insight into train travel in those days".

And why is it so important to catalogue railway history and trivia? "A century ago, the railways did to the world what Internet has done today," says Patwardhan. "Maybe they didn't shrink the world to a global village, but they did make cross-fertilisation of ideas possible. And even today, they continue to fascinate us. I am convinced that even in this day of jets and the Internet, there are very few people who remain unmoved by the romance of the railways". – (SHABNAM MINWALLA writing in *The Times of India*).

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