

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

INSIDE

- Battling modern 'wrongs'
- Save Queen Mary's buildings
- Debate on heritage aid
- A pioneer sabha
- Two talented young sailors

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FREE ISSUE

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Bats in the banyan

While the green cover of Chennai is being stripped, in the name of development, the Theosophical Society still maintains its pristine atmosphere and acts as habitat for a diverse fauna and flora. The most recent denizen to settle in the Society's gardens is the Indian Flying Fox (*Pteropus giganteus*), the largest of the Indian Fruit-eating Bats.

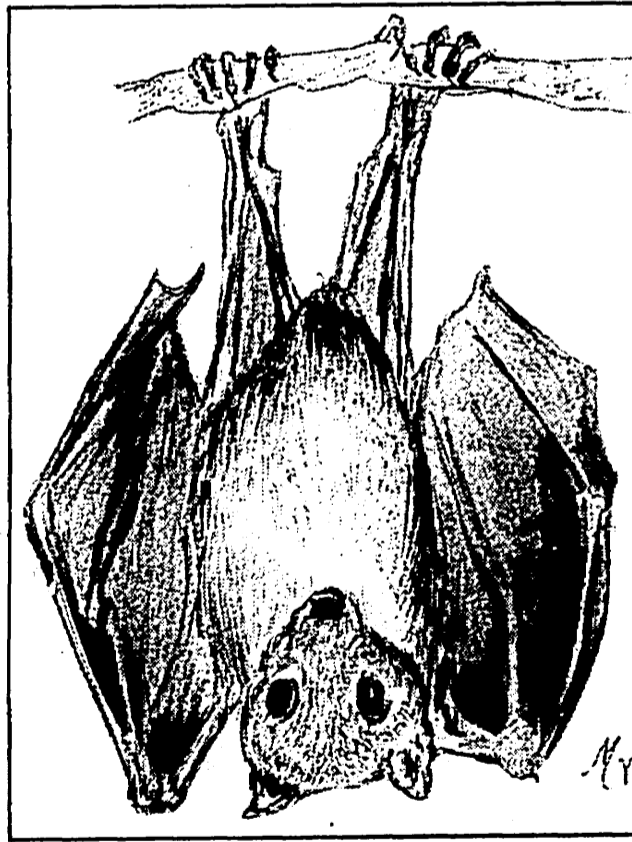
More than 500 Indian Flying Foxes have been seen roosting in one banyan tree (not the Big Banyan), some distance from the main entrance. Cackling, shrieking and fighting with each other for favourite positions, they are quite a sight. It was amazing to see these Flying Foxes in such large numbers in a busy city, as they are normally seen only in trees in villages and forests.

These bats spend their daytime hanging upside down by their feet, on tree branches, fanning themselves with their large wings to keep their body temperature cool. When it is dusk, they start leaving the tree. Around 6.45 in the evening, a handful start to circle the tree and return.

This ritual goes on for some time until it is dark. Then they go for feeding. But their destination is not known. Generally speaking, Flying Foxes feed on a variety of fruits: mango,
(Continued on Page 7)



Fruit-eating bats in a banyan (above) and in close-up, below left (note the head at the bottom of the white patch and the wings). The sketches are by author, T. Murugavel.



Documentation to create heritage awareness

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, Tamil Nadu chapter, and the MEASI Academy of Architecture, New College, recently hosted a unique workshop whose highlight was documentation of heritage competition for students, who came from architectural colleges as far away as Tiruchi. The winners of the first-ever competition of its

type in India were: 1st, Hindustan Engineering College for their work on the Madras Literary Society; 2nd, SRM College of Engineering for the National Art Gallery; and joint 3rd, Bharath Institute of Engineering and Technology for Memorial Hall and a joint MEASI and MGR College of Engineering team for Jeypore House (Queen Mary's College).

(By A Staff Reporter)

The competition, with the dual purpose of providing training to students in heritage conservation as well as laying the foundation for an INTACH data bank of the city's heritage buildings, had 30 students participating in it from eight colleges. The students were divided into teams of three and

assigned to particular buildings in the city considered heritage sites. Each team was expected to measure the building allotted to it, draw detailed plans, sketch its salient features — particularly by way of ornamentation or the way the owners have handled space — photograph it, prepare notes on the building, particularly recording architectural highlights, building tech-

niques, the present state of the building etc., and discuss what ought to be done to conserve the building and put it to best use in the future.

The buildings documented during the competition were: The Madras Literary Society; St. George's School Chapel; Pentland and Jeypore Houses at

(Continued on Page 8)



THE OLD... Our OLD is the Corporation Playground at Mandaveli photographed a few months ago when it was being used as storage space for various public construction activities. A much-used playground by the underprivileged of the area, the regular users found themselves deprived of their recreational facilities by this decision of the Corporation for several months.

Now they've got the grounds back. And our NEW shows it after it had been cleared of all machinery, stores and storage shacks. But though their removal has given the children of the neighbourhood space for physical activity, the state of the ground — especially after a shower of rain — is a disgrace. Ill-maintained grounds like these are a travesty of what playgrounds for the young should be. **...& THE NEW**

Tackling the 'wrongs' of the modern world

Smoking in public, chewing paan and discos are all banned. And the police, at least in the initial days, appeared more vigilant than usual in putting a stop to all these corrupting, health-affecting, polluting and culturally decadent vices. But surely there are far more 'evils' around than these petty misdemeanours to keep an understaffed police fully occupied.

As it is, with the anti-cigarette campaign fairly successful, far fewer people are smoking. Elsewhere, in specific locations, 'No Smoking' is by and large heeded. MMM and many he knows can't honestly say they have been discomfited by smoking in any public place in recent years. And that's true of drinking too. That certainly was not the case a few decades ago, when cinemas and restaurants tended to be in a perpetual haze of smoke. That haze now appears to be engulfing the roads of the city and it is entirely due to smoke-belching vehicles — particularly public transport — industrial pollution and garbage burning. MMM wonders how many 'belching' buses and lorries — particularly Government ones — and how many industries big and small spewing smoke, have been booked by the police. These are offenders far more harmful to the public than individual smokers, so why aren't we booking them in the thousands too?

Chewing paan may, like smoking (are we talking only about cigarettes, or beedis and cheroots too?), be "injurious to the health", but does the present law also look at betel-and-tobacco chewing as an offence? MMM is not particularly concerned about the health-endangering aspects of this ancient habit, very much part of our traditions, but he is certainly worried about the amount of red spit seen not only on the roads but on the walls in offices, particularly Government offices. MMM wonders how many are annually booked for defacing public walls and the public way with betel-spew. Or how many are booked for spreading disease by urinating and defecating on the roads of the city, even if there is a toilet nearby.

As for the discos, MMM doesn't see anything culturally degrading in any of them — certainly the degradation is far less than what is regularly shown in Tamil and other Indian films — but MMM has also heard a number of

tales out of school about some of them, such as gangs of young men turning up and behaving in the most macho fashion, of liquor flowing uncontrolled, particularly after hours, and a number of women cruisers who've led young men into rather dangerous situations. Now if the police were to tackle such unrestrained behaviour, MMM is all for it. But to tackle such law-breaking, closing down places of entertainment is not the answer; sterner and more effective policing of the discos is. Perhaps an insistence that only couples (and let's be clear, a boy and a girl) will be permitted entry, that liquor — if licensed — is served strictly according to the rules, ensuring there is no liquor around, even on tables or in vehicles, after hours, and that well-known cruising women are kept out (and let's make no mistake about it, the police information network anywhere is good and they'll certainly know who the cruisers are) will help such policing.

But at the end of the day, even if belching buses, betel-juice stained walls and drunken brawls in discos are more serious than cigarette smoking, paan chewing and decadent disco dancing, there are plenty of more serious lapses in law and order as well as major crimes prevalent in the State. Lawless traffic, flouting of civic rules inconveniencing the public, more and more robberies, increasing intimidation, growing violent crime and more frequent killings, are all becoming a matter of concern in the State. And the public would like the police to make them feel safer on these counts than from the 'evils' of cigarettes, paan and dancing. MMM is inclined to think.

Is adaptation ahead?

The word is that, all legal issues sorted out, there's going to be new development in Express Estate, between Anna Salai and White's Road. Once the first home of the Madras Club, the main building here, developed from White's Bungalow and expanded by Robert Chisholm, is a splendid example of the pillared and pedimented Classical style and would be on

every list of Chennai heritage buildings. For years now, there's been talk of this old clubhouse and its quarters and its spacious gardens being developed as a heritage hotel. Charles Correa is even believed to have drawn up plans for such a hotel. But legal issues had kept everything in abeyance.

A few years ago, *The Man From Madras Musings* had heard that the legal stand-off had been resolved and a major Madras industrialist, with Singapore connections too, was planning to take over the property and develop it as a heritage hotel, teaming with Singapore interests that had seen the Raffles Hotel restored and back on the list of the World's Great Hotels. But that talk too died down after a while, no one quite sure whether it was because of legal battles or the right price.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Now MMM hears those same Madras-Singapore interests have resolved all issues and will soon start work here on a major Convention Centre with a supporting hotel. While welcoming the idea, and agreeing there can't be a better site for it in Chennai, MMM only hopes that what is being planned includes RESTORATION and ADAPTATION of the main block and sympathetic construction of any new structures needed, so that they will all develop around the heritage centrepiece. There may be no Heritage Regulations or Heritage Act in place in the State as yet, but there is no reason why the authorities should not insist on such construction and ask for the plans to be vetted by a Heritage Buildings Committee with official and non-official representation.

Madras Musings had a couple of issues ago reported that the Delhi Corporation had listed several buildings within its jurisdiction and notified the public — particularly developers — that no such listed structure "should be demolished, altered, repaired, modified, reconstructed or changed in its facade without the express permission from the Corporation". And this permis-

sion would be given only after a six-man ex-officio committee examined the proposals for what was planned and gave its clearance. There is no reason why the Delhi example can't be followed here while we await Heritage Regulations and Act. And MMM hopes that a start could be made by looking at what is proposed for the old Madras Club buildings in Express Estate.

Threatened buildings

Some weeks ago, this journal had featured the wealth of architectural heritage there was in the sylvan campus of the Regional Ophthalmic Institute and pointed out that these were buildings badly in need of restoration and re-use. This issue of *Madras Musings* features another such campus — Queen Mary's — with every possibility of being as green but with its architectural riches in a sadder state. There are several other such campuses that *The Man From Madras Musings* can think of, like the Teachers' Training College, Saidapet, the University of Madras, the General Hospital, the Museum complex and Government Estate, that could with imaginative restoration, be made showpieces of the Chennai of the 21st Century.

MMM is glad to note that the old students of Queen Mary's have taken the lead in trying to get their old campus restored to what it was. If old teachers from Teachers' Training, old students of the University of Madras, old grads of Madras Medical all showed a similar interest, perhaps we could get something going.

If the old students were generous and collected a substantial amount, matching grants could be sought from the Government, the Centre and the private sector for each project. That, MMM sees, as entirely feasible — but the lead will have to come from the old students or those with a particular interest in these institutions. MMM hopes that such a movement will begin in Chennai in 2002.

Inviting discomfort

The recent invitations had *The Man From Madras Musings* determined to attend the occasions, not particularly

because he was interested in the events announced but more because it was reciprocation of a courtesy to people who had taken the trouble to invite MMM. But when MMM found the first occasion splashed in large advertisements in the newspapers, announcing that all were welcome to hear a speaker virtually made out to be a Moses leading Indian listeners to a promised radical America, MMM decided to give it a miss. From all reports, MMM was wise to do so.

These reports were unanimous that, well before the lengthy introduction and speech, the car park at the venue was full, and that the adjoining flyover ensured little parking nearby and less movement of traffic, a situation that only became worse after the talk. In the auditorium itself, even standing room soon became unavailable and closed circuit television was offered to the crowd in the foyer and at the entrances. Many with invitations stood throughout. The meeting might as well have been held in the open-air 'auditorium' on Marina Beach; it might even have drawn a bigger crowd than what was obviously sought to listen to what commentator after commentator has been saying in almost every Indian publication of note. In this context, MMM can only wonder why special invitations were sent out at all, when what was planned was a public meeting that was to be a free-for-all.

Certainly more meaningful were the invitations to the 'invitees only' film shown on the night before its Deepavali release; they ensured seats, numbered and closely scrutinised at every entry point as they were. But the problem here was entry and exit did not permit cars or parking. Which meant you had to literally fight your way through hordes of fans, policemen and the film's own guards to reach the hall or your car — or any other means of transport. And that was quite an ordeal for most — particularly the long walks it necessitated through unruly crowds.

While thanking both organisers, MMM feels it would be nice in the future if both did not think of such occasions as *tamashas* if they wanted more serious attention paid to them.

— MMM



Capper House where Queen Mary's began, now desecrated and crying for restoration as a bit of Madras Heritage.



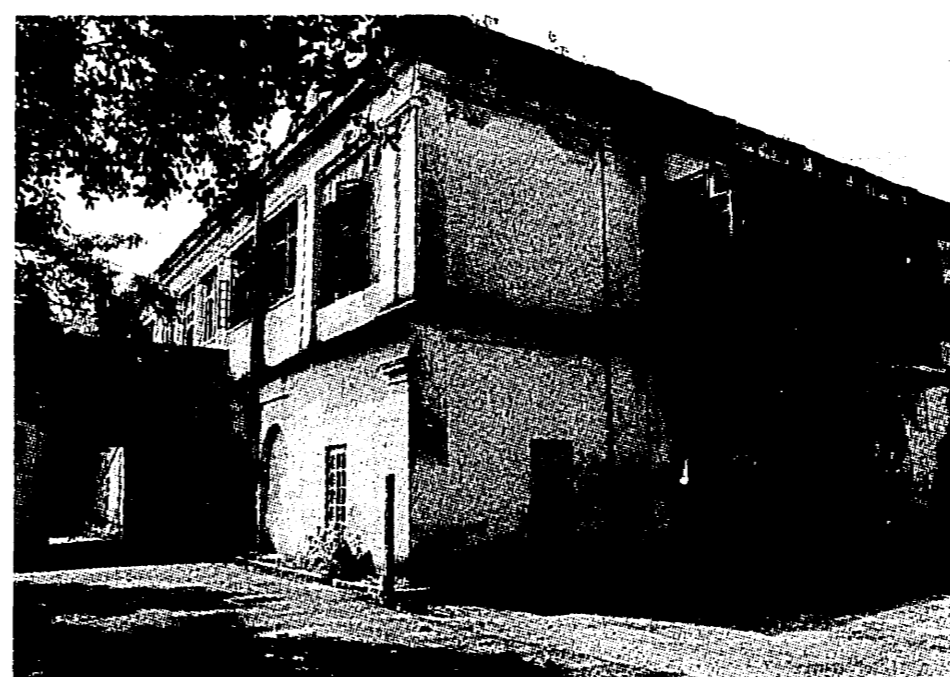
The Lady Penland block of hostels.



The rear of Capper House, with tree growth unrestrained.



Capper House, round the corner to the left of the picture on the top of the page, showing the gap left after a portion of the building collapsed a few years ago. A few days after this picture was taken, the roof in the gap also collapsed.



Capper House: the side opposite the picture above.



The Physics and Chemistry blocks of QMC midst unrestrained growth.

Save these buildings

— appeal old Queen Marians

The Old Students' Association of Queen Mary's College, among whom are most of the present faculty members, have written to the Secretary, Higher Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, that they are concerned about the "steady

decline and utter neglect of the (Queen Mary's) vast campus for want of necessary funds and a coordinated effort". They have in their letter drawn the Secretary's attention to the following facts:

Queen Mary's College, a pioneer institution, was started exclusively for women in 1914. It has had a proud record ever since. "Now, we cannot but shed tears at the sorry state of the once princely buildings," the Association writes. "Shedding tears may not serve any purpose. Something solid must be done to save our dying Alma Mater". The Association adds:

"The buildings of the college were built almost a century ago and are in very bad shape today. The flooring, walls, balconies, roofs are all in a dilapidated condition. In fact, a balcony caved in recently. Roots of trees growing near the classrooms have penetrated the walls, causing cracks in them. Many of the walls have given way. Even the doors and windows need replacement. Verandahs and covered passages are in very bad condition. Lack of ventilation, poor electrification and low roofs in rooms like science laboratories also add to the wretched state of the buildings.

"Being heritage buildings, renovation is the crying need of the hour". The Association also states the whole campus looks dirty, stinks and has rubbish strewn all over the vast area where stray dogs, pigs and cattle roam freely. The toilets adjacent to the classrooms are in appalling condition, with insufficient water facilities.



The Sankaran Bungalow where the English Department functions. Seen to the left is the DGP's office.



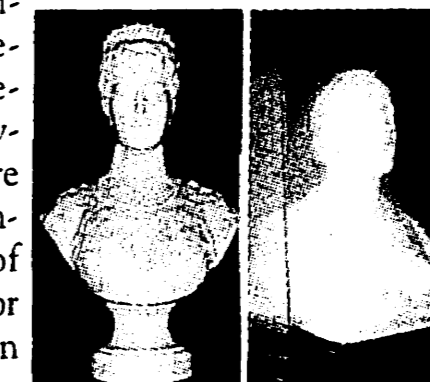
Another bungalow that belonged to Justice Sankara Iyer. Its special feature is its gables and monkey tops (right). This is now used by the Telugu Department.

All this, they suggest, needs to be looked at and attended to on a war footing. Urgent cleaning of the entire campus on a regular basis is necessary. A few modern toilets, with ventilation and adequate water facilities must be constructed. Lot of trees have been felled over the years. Landscaping and planting of flower-bearing trees should be considered".

The letter concludes, "The Government of Tamil Nadu owns both the buildings and the open spaces. We look forward to your implementing the above suggestions by utilising the funds in the Budget. However, we are pleased to inform you that we can join hands with you by arranging benevolent sponsors to help in renovating the campus. A study-group comprising faculty members, old students and members of non-

governmental organisations may be formed to go into the entire renovation work. We are willing to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly in renovating the buildings of the then Queen among Colleges and in bringing back the glory of our prestigious institution."

Editor's Note: *Madras Musings* is delighted to find at least one old students' association willing to do something for its Alma Mater. Alumnae wishing to help in this splendid effort to restore the College's classic period pieces may contact M. Uma Maheshwari (Tel: 620 0405) or Kasturi Eswaran (Tel: 491 6214).



Lady Penland and Miss De La Hay, the Founder-Principal.

DEBATE

What do we consider colonial?

Regarding the point raised by Reader Aarti about colonial heritage building (MM, November 1st), I have a few observations to share with readers:

a. Who built these buildings is the first question that comes to mind. When I 'built' my house, I did not go around laying brick after brick. These colonial buildings do not reflect only colonial ambitions or history, they also reflect the ingenuity of the people who built them. They reflect the Tamil labour, sweat and endeavour, as well as skills, that had gone into building these edifices.

b. Even if we did not want such buildings, we neither have the workmanship nor the technique to build such buildings. Even if some wealthy industrialist wanted to finance the construction of such a building, it may not be possible to reconstruct any of them.

c. Reader Aarti has raised the issue that colonial history is not our heritage. The corollary to that question becomes then what is our heritage? If British colonialism cannot be included in our heritage, then how far back do we go in time? The Muslim invaders also came as colonists, so does that make the Taj Mahal an edifice of colonial ambitions? Some people in our country contend that the Hindutva and the saffron brigade doing just that, going back to pre-Muslim days. If that is the case, where does our heritage start from? Do we then go to early days of the last millennium? Pre-St. Thomas, the apostle of Christ?

Stalwarts of the Dravidian movement contend that the Brahmins are actually outsiders who inflicted themselves on Dravida Nadu several thousand years ago. If we agree to go by that, then do we wipe out all that happened after this supposed invasion by Brahmins?

This leads me to another point - the oldest (intact) building may only be temples and the

like, the oldest amongst them not older than about 6th or 7th Century AD. At least in this part of the country I know of no existent building, which was used for non-religious purposes older than a few hundred years. So the question is, what heritage are we attempting to preserve? There are no pre-colonial buildings available for preservation (the word colonial in this context includes not just the British, but the Muslim invaders and others). And pre-colonial heritage may not exist at all after all these years.

The beauty about our country is the dynamic process by which we have absorbed and assimilated all who came here and made them our own.

If we had remained static and wanted to remain 'pure', outside cultures may have wiped us out. So, Indian culture and heritage do include all who came here and contributed or attempted to take away from this culture.

So let us go ahead and preserve these samples of great Dravidian and Tamil workmanship, which incorporate Mughal design lines and the famous Indo-Saracenic buildings of British architects which grace our skyline.

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A note from the Editor

Some of the points Reader Aarti made have been responded to by Readers Balasubramanian and Raghu Nandan. And we'll go along with substantial parts of their responses. We are glad to see that Reader Aarti is willing to preserve any building - presumably of historic value - if it is "elegant". But to do so, even for "immortal freedom fighters", we can't see our "good engineers and architects" doing it for free. Nor are we as optimistic as Reader Balasubramanian about what *Madras Musings* can do to raise funds for heritage conservation. We've organised several meetings

Leave it to us Indians

I refer to the Editor's Note to my letter in MM, November 1st. Elegant architecture, whether constructed by the British or Indians, should be preserved in the aesthetic interest. But let us look at the symmetry of old buildings in an unbiased way. All buildings in India today, whether built by the British or not, belong to this country. We can renew them to preserve their original architectural elegance, not as a symbol of imperialism. Allowing the British to claim any right to any structure in India only reveals that they still have an indisputable right to them. These edifices are part of our country, so let us not mete out superior

treatment to them as compared to constructions during the pre-British period.

Davies of English Heritage believes that his organisation could operate commercially in places such as India (MM, November 16th). What does "commercially" mean? Does he intend that the British come here and collect entry fees from Indians for viewing Indian buildings in India, under the pretext of maintaining such buildings? The Editor feels that the house occupied by Clive must be preserved. Pray, why? Is this imperialist part of our heritage? Do we show any eagerness to preserve the dwellings occupied by those immortal souls who

laid down their lives in winning freedom for us? And let the Editor make it clear why he says "... build new structures that in no time creak?" Why such pessimism? Does he feel that there is a dearth of good engineers and architects in India? The collapse of a few bridges constructed by unscrupulous Indian politicians in no way represents Indian architecture. Let us remember that Indians are inferior to none and all we need is more unity and optimism to achieve the best.

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Let's raise our own fund

I am neither appreciative of the approach of Reader Aarti nor with the reply of the Editor (MM, November 1st).

History cannot be wiped out by neglecting heritage buildings. It will be the first step towards Talibanism. If the logic of Reader Aarti is accepted, the Taj Mahal, Qutab Minar, Red Fort, Fort St. George and many more historic buildings should not be maintained.

If her thrust is that to maintain heritage buildings in our country, we should not send round the hat to organisations in other countries, I am totally with her. However, for any technological assistance in restoring these heritage buildings, we might need to approach some organisations outside the country.

The Editor's reply gives an impression that we either allow the heritage buildings decay and then disappear or get funds from outside organisations to restore them.

A third alternative is that we should first create an awareness amongst the educated and affluent classes regarding the need

and necessity for restoring and maintaining heritage buildings. This we owe as a national duty and homage to our history and culture of yesteryears. In an ancient country like ours, we have very many old buildings. We should not categorise a building as a heritage one only by its age. Then every stable used for housing horses will claim to be a heritage building. A building besides its age must have architectural beauty or historical importance to be eligible to be called a heritage building.

My suggestion is that *Madras Musings* take the initiative to set up a state level, broad-based, Heritage Maintenance Trust. Its membership should be widely drawn from industrialists, leading professionals, representatives from industrial associations etc. The Trust should collect the corpus fund for the Trust. Seventyfive per cent of the accrued interest amount should be spent for fulfilling the objectives of the Trust. The balance 25 per cent of the accrued interest should be added on to the corpus fund. This will ensure automatic augmentation of the corpus fund.

The fund should be collected by voluntary contribution. Every public limited company should be persuaded to make a contribution of one rupee per Rs. 10,000 of its net profit as its annual contribution. The Trust may also have ordinary members, who may subscribe not less than Rs. 1000 every year. There could be public collections through hundis, on a National Heritage Day, as in the case of flag days. Every restaurant, departmental store etc. may have a sealed box for collecting contributions from the patrons to those places. It should not be difficult to obtain 80-G exemption from the Income Tax authorities.

I have no doubt that in a short time a corpus fund of a few crores could be built up, as awareness of heritage buildings builds up and the good work done by the Trust is rightly perceived by the general public.

I would reiterate that *Madras Musings* should take the initiative and convene a meeting of leading citizens to assess whether the scheme - with or without modification - is feasible or only Utopian.

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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.

OUR READERS WRITE

Our history too

Reference Ms. Aarti's diatribe (MM, November 1st) against the Moghuls and the English (MM, November 1st), history cannot be wished away or erased. Can we sneer at a kingdom which had built one of the nine wonders of the world? Or at one who made the entire country one administrative unit, connected well by rail, road and air, a common language, and governmental network?

Madras Musings is only advocating restoration of the majestic structures that belong to particular slices of history, not necessarily to Englishmen, their culture, etc.

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The Mumbai example

With reference to MMM's grouse against Chennai drivers in his September 16th column, if it is any consolation, the motorists in Delhi are as bad, if not worse, where non-adherence to road rules is concerned. But you do not have to go all the way to Singapore to find disciplined driving. Just hop on to IC-971 to Santa Cruz and take a taxi to Nariman Point. You will be astonished and delighted at what you see. No red light jumping; no driving the wrong lane; no trying to jump the queue. I wonder just what it is that makes Mumbaiers such good drivers, so unlike Delhiwalas and Chennaiवास.

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Trapping water

The steps to be taken for rain-water harvesting (RWH) have been amply explained and demonstrated by Metrowater officials. But, of the thousands of flats in the city, how many have RWH? Not even 10% have complied, I would say. The CMDA/Metrowater should organise a door-to-door survey of the flats in and around the metropolis to assess the results of their painstaking efforts and enforce RWH compulsorily.

There is, however, something else the Metrowater officials should look at. The stormwater drains throughout the city carry the precious rainwater to the Cooum, Adyar and to the sea ultimately. If only Metrowater is serious about RWH, it can put 12" dia auger holes down to a depth of 20' at an interval of 100 yards inside the drains and fill the holes with brick jelly. Above the holes, a circular wall can be constructed inside the stormwater drains so that mud will not close the holes. This will definitely take the flowing water deep into the ground and the percolation will ultimately recharge the groundwater.

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Will Corporation act?

MMM's paragraph on the 'Mayor's Agenda' (MM, November 1st) highlights the importance of a people's agenda and I hope that the re-elected Mayor will take note of it. MMM's suggestion that the Mayor should spend some time incognito to inspect the road conditions and civic needs in the city is a welcome one and I hope that the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor will do so, noting for themselves the pathetic condition in which roads are in a metropolitan and capital city today?

Recently, when I came from Sriperumbudur to the city by car, there was not even 15 feet in a stretch without potholes and broken surfaces.

There must be a law that blacklists and bars contractors whose road-laying deteriorates badly within six months. In fact, a few lakhs of rupees should be collected as deposit, to be returned only after it is found that the road surface has not deter-

Similar obligation must be imposed on the other road-diggers - as in the case of MES and telephone line layers - who dig the roads indiscriminately causing difficulties to road users. It should be the duty of the road-diggers to cover the holes with good material to make the roads roadworthy again.

Another aspect is that enforcement of road discipline by the police is wanting. It is a pity that the police in fact turn a blind eye to traffic violations by every type of vehicle on the road. Road signs like 'Use Subways', 'No U turn', 'Stop at the stop line', 'No free left turn' etc. are deliberately disobeyed by the vehicle-users because there is a total lack of enforcement by the police authorities with no fear of consequences.

The Mayor, who once observed that there is "No need for platforms as people do not walk on platforms", must revise his opinion and it is the obligation of the Chennai Corporation and the persons in charge of it, to provide platforms on both sides of the roads with sufficient width free from potholes, pits and obstructions, to enable people to walk safely without risking their lives by walking in the middle of the road.

The Chennai Corporation, with elected representatives of both major political parties, should look at

Such comfort!

As propos Reader B.S. Doraiswamy's letter (MM, October 1st) on paying for comfort, some thoughts:

— Platform tickets have always been there from time immemorial. For the good reason that only bonafide platform-users need them. They also help the Railways to identify ticketless travellers. No one grudges paying for them except a stray individual here or there.

— The purpose of platform tickets is not to fund maintenance or good sanitation as argued. That is taken care of by regular increases in travel fares. In fact, it is one of the main reasons advocated by Railway budget-making ministers.

— Most important, these palliative arguments in favour of "paying for comfort" should not stop with good concepts and intentions. I invite Reader Doraiswamy and his friends to visit the canteen in front of Higginbotham's at Central Station and take a look at the wash basins there. In the beginning, there were three of them in excellent condition. Now, two of them have been covered with a slab, leaving only one for use by the many people who visit the canteen. Naturally, it is inadequate and therefore re-

mains nauseatingly dirty and slimy.

— Let us forget about the revenue from platform tickets - is this not a basic facility that should be provided to fare-paying passengers? If the men at the top who formulate these concepts with good intentions and spend initial money only come down once in a way to take a look at these things (in disguise!), they could salvage the Railways from ignominy to some extent.

— Finally, the 3-rupee fare is an unimaginative figure only a bureaucrat would think of. Two rupees was okay, and we could have waited for some more years to make it FIVE, when the rupee value gets eroded to such a level. Three rupees? There is no three rupee coin or note, and so, there is always a hassle over 'change'.

The silent public ought to have an outlet to express their "discomforts and complaints". A big box created for these can be cleared and scrutinised daily by a separate cell not connected to the department and its bureaucracy.

A. Ramakrishnan
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riorated badly over a specified period of time. As of now, no contractor seems to be interested in laying roads with proper bitumen; he concentrates only on making money. If such deposits are collected, they could be used to repair the roads without the State being at the mercy of the contractors. Such provision exists even now when sanction of building plans is sought from the CMDA.

the interest of the people and concentrate on making Singara Chennai a reality, instead of pulling down each other for political reasons.

C. Lakshmi Narain
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Chennai 600 007.

Transferable right and neighbours

In MM, October 16th, you published a photo of a high-rise or, rather, a 'medium-rise' coming up adjacent to Higginbotham's. No doubt, the building mars the beauty of Higginbotham's, a heritage building. But, for this reason, are we to prevent (which would be the case if we have a Heritage Act) neighbours of heritage properties from developing their plots? Is such a restriction not unfair and unreasonable, especially in an urban area? Are their rights not violated? Are we to deprive them of a potential source of income that could be huge? These issues are also applicable to owners of heritage buildings who may wish to pull down their buildings and put up a multi-storied structure.

Here we must note that in an urban area like Madras, the po-

tential income of a property owner - be it a heritage building or a neighbouring building or any property, for that matter - could be several lakhs of rupees a year, maybe even more. Is it fair to deprive property owners of such huge amounts so that the rest of us, especially heritage lovers, can enjoy the beauty of these buildings?

It is perhaps to address this issue that the proposed Heritage Act, if my understanding is correct, provides for transferable FSI rights. The purpose of this letter is to ascertain whether such transferable FSI rights will accrue also to the neighbours (since their hands are also tied). Otherwise it isn't fair.

B. Gautham
137, Wallajah Road
Chennai 600 002.

Railway fare, once

Your journey into the past of the Railways was incomplete without mention of the excellent Railway Catering Service.

In the 1950s, the Railways ensured very good quality, quantity and most of all hygienic food at an inexpensive price. Passengers used to eagerly look forward to the VR at Cuddappah, Gooty, Guntakal, Samalkot, Vijayawada (Bezawada), and, in the South, Mayavaram, Trichy, Erode etc.

Breakfasts booked in advance (comprising two *vadas*, four *idlis*, a pot-coffee or milk in jugs along with coffee decoctions, sugar cubes etc. costing just 10 annas) were served inside the First Class compartments. Lunch cost Rs. 1.25 and was served with a sweet and hill banana in the compartment in a large-sized tiffin carrier, water in *kooja* and a large plantain leaf. The passenger could eat his meal at leisure and the carrier, *kooja* etc., would be removed by the VRR personnel at a different station.

Prestigious trains like the Calcutta Mail, Bombay Mail, Grand Trunk Express, Indo-Ceylon Express etc. used to have Spencer's catering cars for the convenience of upper class passengers who wanted Western fare.

In those days, Railways maintained strict punctuality and a per-

son could boast that his watch kept Railway Time! Will anyone believe it now?

T.M. Sundaraman
19, Nallappan St
Mylapore
Chennai 600 004.

Are you interested?

Chennai Think Tank takes up issues concerning the betterment of society. Ideas generated by us are circulated to policy makers, people of eminence, research organisations, lobbying bodies, pressure groups and the media. We have been providing this service totally free of cost.

In our two years of existence, we have worked in areas relating to Education, Health, Traffic Management, Public Transport Management, Water Management, improving Public Services, Anti-Corruption, Anti-Hijacking Measures, Child Development Bill and the Competition Bill.

We are planning to expand our activities. Those interested in joining us may contact me at 4403559 or 4423883, citi@sify.com

Paul Prathap Jayaraj
(Chairman
Chennai Think Tank)
No. 4, 25th Cross Street
Indira Nagar
Chennai 600 020.

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A pioneer still holds its ground



Last fortnight I mentioned that the Mylapore Sangeetha Sabha's demise was partly due to the rise of the RR Sabha in Sundareswarar Street. The RR Sabha, a one time premier institution, still retains, I was glad to find, its dignity and identity.

The *sabha* was founded in 1929 by three wealthy patrons, A.K. Ramachandra Iyer, owner of the Midland Theatre, M Loganatha Mudaliar, industrialist, and K. Natesa Iyer, hosiery merchant. Ramachandra Iyer, the most colourful and forceful personality of them, is said to have kept a leopard as his pet. Old Vidya Mandir students may remember a palatial bungalow to the left of the Primary Section, called *Kumara Vijayam*. This was his family residence, where A.K. Ranganatha Iyer, his elder brother, a brick manufacturing tycoon, used to live.

The initial programmes of the Sabha were held in the Vanniyar School, Nadu Street, where the Mylapore Sangeetha Sabha too organised its programmes. Later, the venue shifted to the National Girls High School, Sundareswarar Street. This school is now the Lady Sivaswami Iyer Girls School, an institution from which most Mylapore girls graduated till recently.

Sundareswarar Street is so named because the entire street and properties once belonged to the Kovvur Sundareswarar Temple. Kovvur Sundaresa Mudaliar was a dubash of the East India Company and, at his invitation, Tyagaraja visited Madras and composed five songs on the Kovvur deities.

Within a year of its inception, the RR Sabha negotiated with the temple and purchased seven grounds of land opposite the school. This is where the auditorium came up. A year or so later, A.K. Ramachandra Iyer and his friends fell out, leading to the locking up of the

Quizzing with Ramanan is missing this fortnight as its compiler, V.V. Ramanan, was busy being Quizmaster elsewhere. The feature will be resumed in our next issue.

Sabha. The matter came before the City Magistrate's Court in 1931 and the verdict ordered the lock to be broken. A young lawyer who played a significant role in this was S. Narasinga Rao, whose family owned the Balaji Nagar areas of Royapettah. S.N. Rao then became an active member of the Sabha and was one of the forces behind its success. His son Sanjeeva Rao was then associated with the Sabha till a few years ago.

Significantly, the Hall was used by the Music Academy during its early days of wandering, when the citadel on TTK

• A series for the Season by V. Sriram (in consultation with Sanjeeva Rao)

Road was a distant prospect. Another strange fact is that the logos of the Music Academy and the RR Sabha are identical. The publicity material of the Music Academy for 1943 and 1944 declared that the programmes for the Season would be held in the "spacious premises" of the Sundareswarar Hall. Considering that the previous years' programmes were held in the Senate Hall, this does not bear much scrutiny!

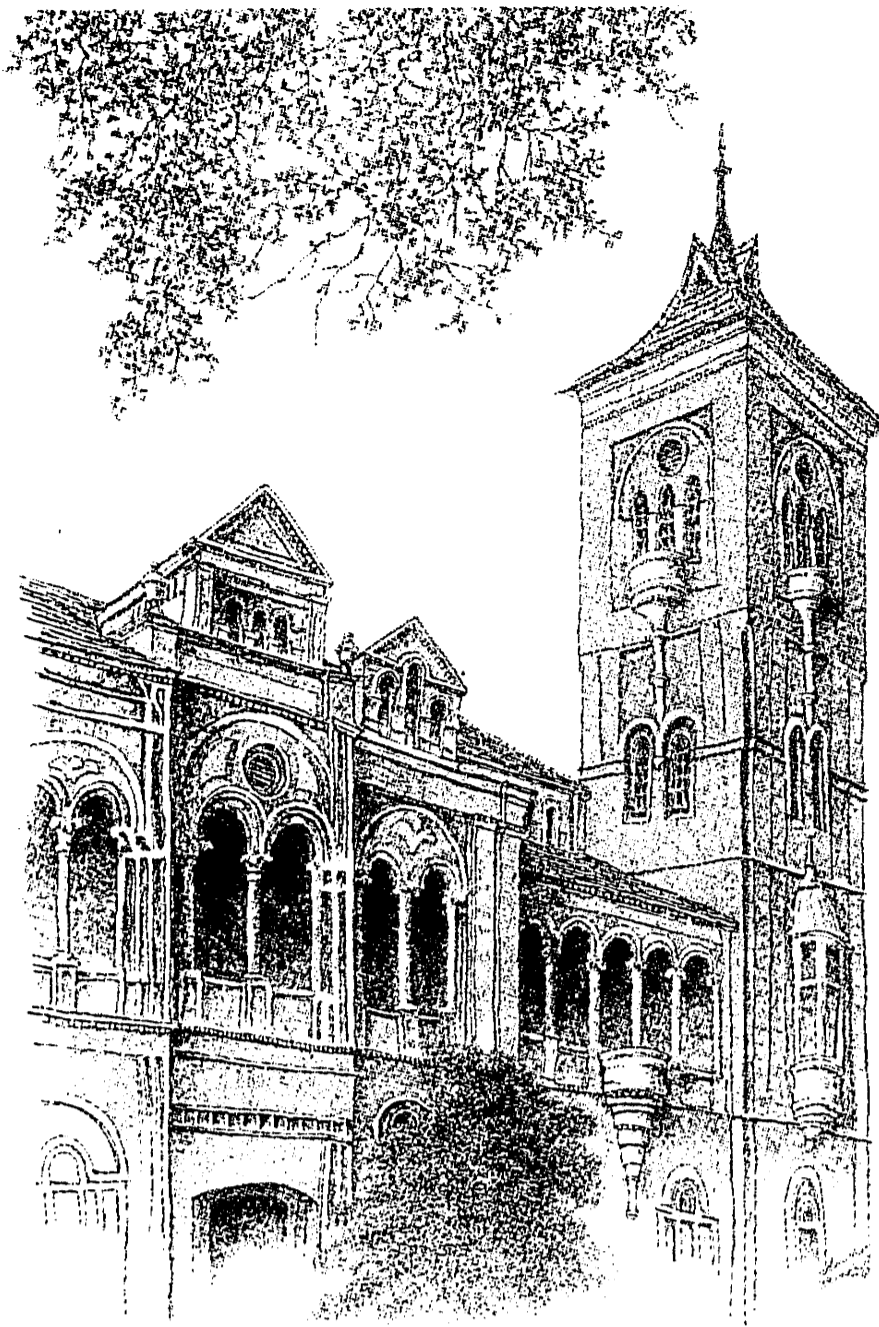
The Sabha was home to all the greats of the time. Musiri, Ariyakkudi, GNB, Semman-gudi, Chembai, MS, MLV, DKP, T.N. Rajarathnam Pillai, Mali, Palghat Mani Iyer, all performed here. It was here that a violin concert by Flute Mali was once organised and well publicised. A large crowd came, but Mali did not. It does not warrant thinking about the aftermath. A similar incident occurred with another known maverick, T.N. Rajarathnam Pillai, the *nadaswaram* wizard. But the Sabha, wiser perhaps with past experience, served a legal notice on him. A chastened TNR duly agreed to perform on another day. Violin maestro T.N. Krishnan, in his speech of acceptance of *Sangeeta Kalamidhi* title from the Music Academy in 1980, gratefully remembered the RR Sabha

for the opportunity it gave him to accompany Flute Mali when he was an aspiring violinist.

In 1958, major renovations were completed and the new hall, as we see it now, was inaugurated by Justice P.V. Rajamannar, Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, on September 26th that year. A plaque at the Sabha commemorates the event. The committee that year had a number of legal luminaries, including *Sangeeta Kalamidhi* T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, K. Raja Iyer (S.N. Rao's senior), M. Subbaraya Iyer (co-founder of the Vidya Mandir School) and G. Jagadeesa Iyer. The architect/contractor, one Mr. Chitnis, was a Maharashtrian who had also delivered a concert of Carnatic vocal music at the Sabha! The layout of the Hall was the master plan for other halls, such as the Mylapore Fine Arts and the Vani Mahal. An unchanging icon has been the Krishna statue in the garden, that has survived since 1930. Every aspect, from the 'box office', the toilets to the green rooms are classic 1950s in style.

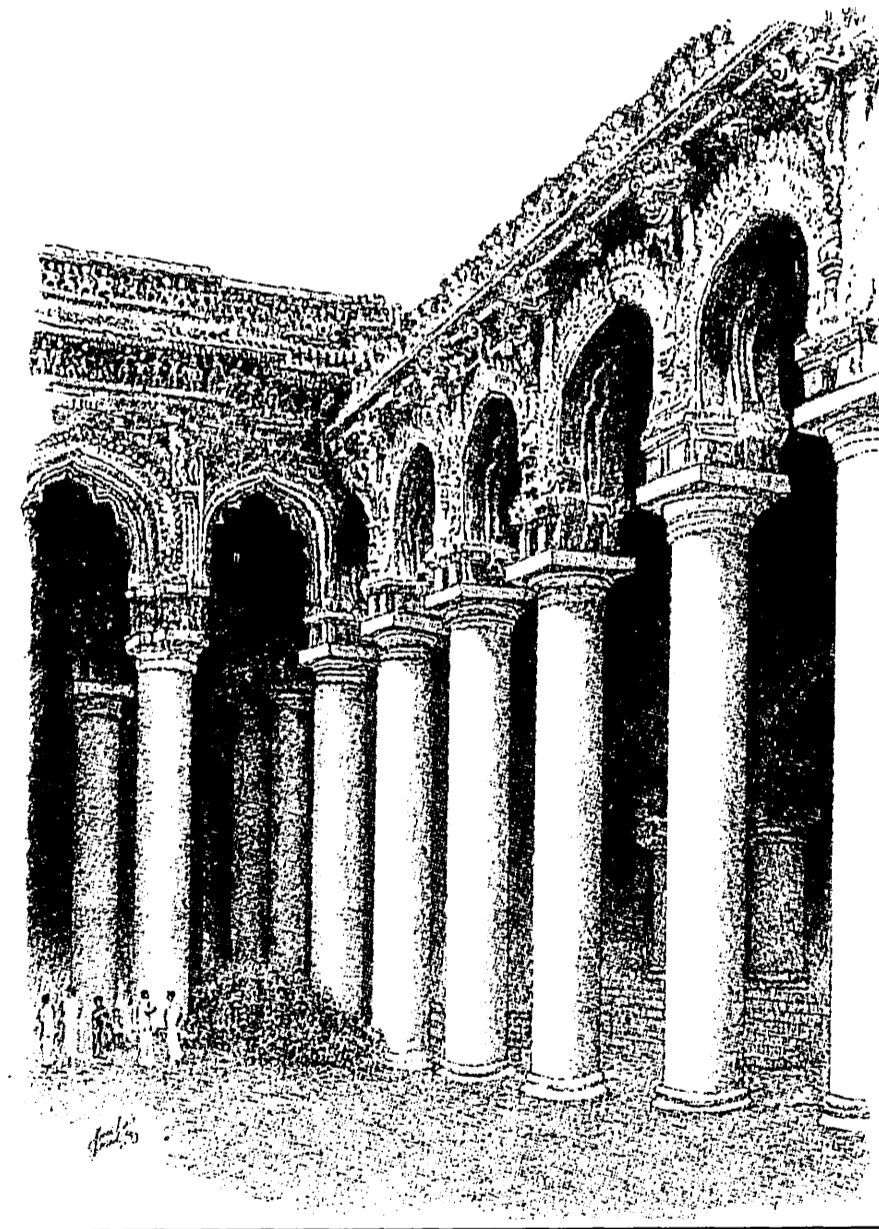
The street is a peaceful haven compared to the hurly-burly of the Mada Streets. External sounds rarely creep into the Sabha, a blessing till date, considering that there is no airconditioning and the doors are kept open during performances. The Hall can accommodate 750 people on the main level, with 50 additional seats in a quaint 'balcony'. The Hall still has a frieze on top of the stage with gods and goddesses in Ravi Varna style. The chairs are all old, but quite comfortable. These were what were used by patrons such as Setu Parvati Bai, C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Maharajah of Mysore, the Maharajah of Bhavanagar, Sir A.L. Mudaliar and others. A Hall full of memories, indeed.

The place is still held in great veneration by artistes. Madurai Sri G.S. Mani refused payment once, saying that it was a privilege to sing on a stage where all the maestros had performed. K.J. Sarasa, the danseuse, once said that while renovations to the stage were needed, the same material must be reused as it held so many memories for her. Recently, a young *vidwan*, who had to hurriedly finish a concert due to personal reasons, did not accept payment for his performance as he felt that he had not done full justice to the place and the audience. The accounts records show a payment made to him and in the opposite entry it is squared up as a concert sponsored by the same artiste!



More from Manohar

Manohar Devadoss, who does exquisite pen-and-ink drawings — particularly of old buildings and temples — even while he battles with a serious vision problem, has this year designed four cards and we feature two of them: Victoria Public Hall (above) and the Thirumalai Nayak Palace. Mahema, his wife, has as usual prepared the text, giving the historic background. The entire sale proceeds of the cards (after deducting the expenses) are donated by the Devadosses to service-minded institutions like SPASTN, INTACH and Sankara Nethralaya.



Today, the Hall looks as though it has seen better days. The building is old and though well maintained is in need of renovation. Water seeps through the stage and in many other places during the rainy season. The Sabha lost many of its old records and photographs owing to the dampness and seepage. Gone are the photographs of the *vidwans* and *vidushis* which used to hang on the wall near the two-wheeler park. A solitary photograph of M.L. Vasanthakumari now hangs in the office

area. An application for Rs. 15 lakh is pending with the Government of India. The Sabha will match the amount and it is estimated that Rs. 30 lakh will do the job.

The Sabha holds concerts during the music season, from December 20th to January 3rd. Before that, Kartik Fine Arts uses the Hall for its programmes.

The Sabha is a must for those who value simple surroundings, good music and lots of memories.



From Sadir to Bharata Natyam

It's December in Chennai... and everybody is naturally talking of Bharata Natyam. There is a host of contemporary voices, talking of adapting the form to current tastes. But if what appears regularly on the stage these days is Bharata Natyam, perhaps the practice and craft of the hereditary community of teachers/dancers should be called by another name. 'Sadir', one of the older names for Bharata Natyam comes to mind. The antidote to the present proliferation of 'contemporary' performances may be a good, strong dose of history, and of Sadir.

This is what Tapasya Kala Sampradaya hopes to provide through a two-day seminar and performance event at the Krishna Gana Sabha, Mahara-japuram Santhanam Road, T. Nagar, on December 10th and 11th. It is an attempt to stir up a debate about authenticity, meaning and relevance of Sadir/Bharata Natyam by looking at the present practice through the eyes of traditional teachers who have for many generations been associated with temple *sampradayams*.

Teachers from four families that have made it their lifelong endeavour to sustain the cosmic perspective on Sadir will present their points of view on the relationship between their art and their world, with the focus on the temple as a centre of social, religious and artistic experience. There will be dance demonstrations trying to recap-



ture the styles, attitudes and techniques they will talk about. Scholars associated with Tapasya will review the salient features of the traditional presentations and discuss their relevance to the current dance scenario. Each of the demonstrations will be followed by free and open discussions, in which the audience is invited to participate fully. A panel discussion will add to the opportunity for comment and reflection.

Among the dances presented will be traditional *kautuwams* (hymns in praise of various deities); items from the *margam* (the traditional stage repertoire); and the 19th Century dance-dramas *Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuruvanji* and *Tyagesar Kuruvanji*. The seminar will close with an open forum and the screening of a one-hour documentary film, prepared by Tapasya, on the four Isai Vellalar traditions covered by the seminar.

The traditions represented at the seminar will include:

- The Thanjavur/Pandanallur *bani*, with Subbaraya Pillai, Gopalakrishnan Pillai and K. Chandrasekar;
- Veena Dhanam's and T. Balasaraswati's *paramparai*, with T. Viswanathan, Aniruddha Knight and others;

- The Tirugokarnam *paramparai* with Ulaganatha Pillai and Abhirami; and
- Tiruvavur Kamalam's *paramparai*, with P.R. Tilagam.

Tapasya Kala Sampradaya is an alliance of dance-gurus, dancers and research scholars bound by a common concern to preserve Isai Vellalar traditions of Bharata Natyam. It rejects many current trends in the field of classical dance, in particular the modernisation of the form that starts with a disavowal of its history. A reevaluation of the traditional alternative, it feels, is one of the few things that will keep Bharata Natyam practice from sliding towards complete meaninglessness.

Towards this goal, Tapasya teaches dance the hereditary way, stages performances by the staff, students and other exponents of traditional styles, and is committed to research and documentation projects intended to help preserve the Isai Vellalar heritage. Tapasya draws its inspiration from the legacy of the late Guru Thanjavur K.P. Kittappa Pillai, descendant of the Thanjavur Quartet.

The Crafts and Communities of Chennai

• The drawings featured here are from Mylapore Times, a neighbourhood newspaper, which publishes a calendar for the second time. Mylapore Times' calendars focus on a theme. Last year, it was 'Life in Mylapore'. This year the focus is on the 'Crafts and Communities' of Chennai. The six sheets celebrate gifted people who bravely carry forward a tradition despite the odds. They are the people who create wonders out of bamboo and clay, textiles and paper and metal. The clay doll-makers of Kosapet, the basketmakers of Purasawalkam, Thiruvanniyur's Narikuravas, who make chains of beads, the kite-makers of Old Washermanpet, the makers of window blinds in Alwarpet, and the Muslims' shops of Triplicane that sell accessories for Muslim weddings and festivals, all truly a part of Chennai, feature in this calendar, sketched and designed by E. Amalare. Priced at Rs. 75, it is available from Shop No. 27, Corporation Shopping Complex, No. 77, C.P. Ramaswamy Road, Alwarpet.

BATS IN THE BANYAN

(Continued from page 1)

banana, fig, guava, neem etc. This group might be getting its seed in and around Adyar. But Fruit-Eating Bats are known to travel several kilometres in search of food. They do not use echolocation, like other bats for navigation. Instead, they use their excellent sense of sight, smell and hearing.

In most countries, Flying Foxes are considered as pests and farmers do kill them to save

their orchards. But, in South India, Flying Foxes are associated with village deity Munniswaran, who is believed to dwell around the tree where the bats roost. The villagers believe that they will earn the wrath of God if they do not protect the bats.

Nonetheless, the population of Flying Foxes is getting reduced drastically due to hunting and habitat destruction. It is very likely that these bats may have been forced to leave their original roosting place due to

possible destruction of trees there and hence adopt the Theosophical Society as their new home. Or could this uncommon occurrence be due to the serene, verdant atmosphere of the Society that has induced these bats to accept this banyan tree as their new home?

T. Murugavel
Trust for Restoration of Ecology and Environment
12, First Cross Street
VP Colony
Chennai 600 023.

All set to leave for Mumbai to take part in the first 420 Sailboat Category Nationals scheduled for December 11-15 are two Chennai girls, Niloufer Jamal, 16, a student of Good Shepherd Convent, and Rohini Rau, 15, studying in Chettinadu Vidyashram. Their performance will be watched closely by Yachting fans in Chennai, for if they become national champions, which they hope to, they will be in contention for selection as the official women's team to the Asian Games to be held in Pusan, South Korea, in September 2002.

Yachting circles in Chennai are already abuzz with excitement. This is possibly the strongest combination ever to be sent by Chennai in the women's category. A first has already been achieved – both Jamal and Rau will be the youngest competitors at the Nationals in the 420 Sailboat Category.



Niloufer Jamal

Jamal was only five years old when she began sailing in the Water Wag Class (the wag is a large wooden sailing boat for two, especially popular among sailors in the middle-age group). She moved to the Optimist Class at the age of ten. (The Optimist is a smaller, single-sail, single-handed boat, widely used all over the country, especially by youth.) After that, there was no looking back.

Jamal represented India in the Optimist Class at the Asian Games in Bangkok in 1998 and at the Irish Open Championship the next year. In 2000, she took part in the World Championship in Spain, amongst 264

Two hoping for a fair wind



Rohini Rau

participants from 60 countries. Next, it was the UK Open in Plymouth and the Asian Sailing Championships in Singapore and South Korea.

In the Laser Radial (a high-performance boat) Category at a competition in Hyderabad this year, Jamal stood first. "The competitions have been a great experience for me, specially meeting sailors from all over the world at international meets and hearing new ideas and theories on the sport," says Jamal.

Rau started sailing the Water Wag at the age of 12. She graduated to the Optimist the following year. Although she was selected for the Asian

Optimist Sailing Championship in Singapore, she could not represent the country because she was underage. But she took part in the Laser Radial Class at the Asia Pacific Championship in Hyderabad this year.

Sailing, or yachting, is slowly gaining popularity in India. There are sailing clubs in Chennai, Mumbai, Goa and Hyderabad. The Army has set up clubs in Pune and Chilka, in Orissa. The Royal Madras Yacht Club, established in 1911, has, today, over 100 active members, including several young enthusiasts. Munna Jamal gives members coaching, fitness training and safety drills.

Membership for students costs just Rs. 50 a month.

"I almost grew up at the Club; my parents, uncles and cousins are all interested in the sport," says Niloufer, adding, "For students, especially, the Club is very encouraging, with its nominal fee."

However, for those who wish to take up the sport more seriously, sailing can be a very expensive affair. For example, the cost of a boat, rig, sail, life jacket, etc. works out to upwards of Rs. 2 lakh for the 420 sailboat. "If you are serious about the sport, it is best to have your own boat. Damages do occur and maintenance is essential. Before a race, the boat has to be done up, like applying water paper at the bottom to help it move faster. All this involves a lot of expenditure," says Rau.

Jamal and Rau have been friends for years. It was Munna Jamal, their coach, who came up with the idea of the girls teaming together because he felt theirs would be a combination difficult to beat. Of the two, Jamal is the more experienced. She was a single-handed sailor until recently, when she switched to doubles, training with a friend. But in Mumbai, she will team with Rau for the first time in competition.

The Royal Madras Yacht Club, 420 Class Association of India, and the Yachting Association of India have together set the course for the Chennai girls. Sponsorship from Ramco Systems, Madras Cements, TI Cycles and the Murugappa Group have given Jamal and Rau an excellent opportunity to become national champions, be chosen to train in Malaysia and Australia for the Pusan Games, and even represent India at the Games. But now, like never before, they will together have to generate their own power if they are to open a whole new chapter in Indian sailing.

HERITAGE AWARENESS

(Continued from page 1)

Queen Mary's College; Madarasa-I-Azam; the National Art Gallery, Madras Medical College; Memorial Hall; Higginbotham's; and the Philatelic Bureau. It was good to see the spontaneity with which permission was given by the owners, particularly a Government department or two.

INTACH-TN plans to continue the exercise and hopes that other owners of possible heritage buildings will, on their own, invite it in the future to send teams of students to document their buildings. The way ancient buildings are vanishing or are crumbling, due to development or lack of maintenance, these might be the only records left of the buildings, seeing that the original plans of most of

them have gone walkabout. Such permission will also help the students become more aware of heritage buildings wherever they are, the need to document them and how they can go about playing a role in restoring and preserving such buildings.

As one student said, at the end of the first day's introductory lectures and slide presentations, "Why doesn't INTACH get all the colleges offering architecture and civil engineering to offer building conservation courses as part of the core syllabus? At present, it is only an elective in a college or two, and with most of us having little inking about the subject, as it is barely introduced to us, few opt for it, not knowing what to expect." INTACH's response was that it would be only too glad to

help if asked. The question itself indicated that some progress had been made in that introductory session in getting the young interested in the old.

At the valedictory function, the brief comments made by team leaders on the experience indicated that the project's purpose had been achieved. Remarks ranged from "We did not know such buildings existed in Madras" to "We were amazed by the high quality of design and construction" and "We enjoyed almost a mystical experience communing with the building". But the most telling comment, and one echoed by many of the participants, was, "We felt like weeping at the state the building was in". Perhaps reading these lines, it's just possible the owners of some of these buildings might seek help and advice

from qualified conservationists and educated students.

The prize-winners, Vidhi Gupta, Menaka Rao and Ashwin Mathew of Hindustan Engineering, Prabhavathi, Vilasini and Vivek of SRM, S. Balaji, K. Karthikeyan and Thamizharivu of Bharat Engineering and N. Nazia Begum and Babjee of MGR and Asifa of MEASI, will participate in an all-found heritage tour on one of the circuits INTACH-TN has recently been promoting by taking small groups, led by an archeologist-historian, on such excursions in Tamil Nadu as a Chola tour, a Pandya tour and a Mahratta tour. The winners might well get around to doing some documentation along the way, if they got hooked on the wealth of architectural treasure this State has.

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