

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

A Madras Musings  
specialIs this the lost  
Mahabalipuram  
of legend?

See Page 3

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FREE ISSUE

April 16-30, 2002



The computerised mailing list I bought from you is infected.

### Mailing list mayhem

The call goes out.

All citizens with names on mailing lists are to form an Action Group ... the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Names, of particular significance in this day of Junk Mail Blitz.

Who are these people who get our names from god-knows-where, and then proceed to systematically hack them?

Have you seen what they do to names sometimes?

It isn't pretty.

Here's an example.

"Radha Srinivasan". (Please note: This is a fictitious name.)

Now you might think the name is self-explanatory. Not so the powers behind mailing lists.

Stacks of mail arrive addressed to "Mr. Radha Srinivasan", some going so far as to sport an 'Esq'. You also get: "Radha nivas", making the person feel like a building.

There are surreal interpretations, like "Radhas riniva", creating an image of either a musician in a distinctly alternative group, or someone who ought to feel at home on the Starship Enterprise.

Today's world has already transformed us into suspicious, nervous individuals, prone to start violently at sudden noises. The last thing we need is to have our names taken away from us.

Don't these guys know that our names are the immediate jewels of our souls.... sort of?

Someone who steals our names and messes them up makes us poor indeed.

And hopping mad.

Ranjitha Ashok

# State the first to plan food park

(By Jaya Singh)

The Union Government has declared the food processing industry a priority area. Barring very few exceptions, the whole sector is delicensed and is open for automatic approval of upto 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment. Significantly, the Central Government has come out with a scheme for Food Parks, where integrated facilities will be available for the food industry. Permission for twenty food parks in different parts of the country has already been issued.

Tamil Nadu is the first State to respond to this initiative and start a Food Park in the private sector. It is being sited in Virudhunagar, with a financial outlay of nearly Rs. 12 crore, supported by Central Government financial incentives. The State plans to establish one more food park at an estimated project cost of Rs. 20 crore either in Tiruchi or in Kanchipuram.

Agri-export zones have also been planned in Tamil Nadu for the export of grapes in Theni, cashew in Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Sivaganga and Cuddalore Districts, onions in Coimbatore and Dindigul Districts, bananas in Tiruchi and Tirunelveli Districts, mango in Dharmapuri, Theni, Dindigul and Tirunelveli Districts, cut flowers in Dharmapuri, medicinal plants in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli and turmeric in Erode District. Cold storage facilities are being established in Tiruchi, Dindigul, Udumalpet in Coimbatore, Virudhunagar, Vellore, Theni, Chinnamanur, Thalaivasal in Salem District and Tuticorin with a storage capacity of around 14,000 metric tonnes. The agri-export zones would comprise such facilities as common processing units, cold storage, common packaging units, quality control labs and refrigerated trucks.

Tamil Nadu has diverse agro-climatic conditions conducive for producing a wide spectrum of horticultural crop suitable for processing. Kanniyakumari and Theni Districts provide ground for off-season harvesting of mango and grapes. The varied wealth of banana is considerable in the State.

India is witnessing the paradoxical problem of plenty in food and waste. In bridging the farm gate and the dinner plate, there is today, a more promising atmosphere for the processing industry than ever before. (Courtesy: PIB, Chennai.)

## Rampant misuse of domestic LPG

(By A Special Correspondent)

A survey recently conducted by the Centre for Consumer Education, Research, Teaching, Training and Testing (CONCERT) reveals that domestic LPG cylinders are being regularly used by commercial establishments including hotels, restaurants and hospitals. Such misuse of domestic LPG cylinders leads to Government losing a lot of money on each cylinder, says CONCERT.

Responses to enquiries by CONCERT in the marketplace indicated that 20% of the domestic cylinders in the State are diverted to commercial purpose. Considering the millions of cylinders used in the country, this is cause for a huge loss to Government.

CONCERT, pointing out this misuse to Indian Oil and Government Ministries and Departments that should take note of this situation, lists commercial use of LPG domestic cylinders in six places in Arni, in Auroville, in 15 places in Vandavasi and Cheyyar, 7 places in Thiruvannamalai, 3 places in Cuddalore, 11 places in Chidambaram, 10 places in Neyveli town, 14 places in Tindivanam, 24 places in Kallakurichi, 30 places in Erode, 4 places in Tirunelveli and 10 places in Nagercoil. And this was only a sampling.

## Heritage proficiency for Scouts and Guides

(By A Staff Reporter)

The Heritage Education and Conservation Service of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage and the Bharat Scouts and Guides have

teamed together to get Scouts and Guides interested in Heritage.

INTACH has provided the Bharat Scouts and Guides with

a programme and syllabus for Scouts and Guides to acquire a Heritage Proficiency Badge.

To acquire the Heritage Proficiency Badge, scouts and guides will have to become proficient in:

- The main features of Indian Culture
- To identify the various forms of Indian visual and performing arts: architectural styles, sculpture, paintings
- Music and dance traditions, forms of theatre, puppetry, narrative forms, and literature
- Understanding the concept of cultural conservation and the need to protect our cultural diversity
- Role of individuals and scouts and guides in heritage awareness programmes.
- Study a monument in their region
- Play the role of a guide

(Continued on page 9)

## Salt in a teacup

The Federation of Industries and Commercial Associations of the Nilgiris informed the Area Sales Manager of Dandi Salt in Chennai that from March 1st merchants in the Nilgiris would boycott the brand.

It requested its State President, T.Vellaiyyan, to ask various merchant bodies to boycott Dandi salt. It also announced that the merchants would boycott all other products from the same company.

The merchants are upset that the company did not respond to its plea to remove an objectionable sentence in its TV commercial. It relates to an actor playing a doctor in the commercial and advising people to skip a cup of tea and save Rs. 2 on it, which they should spend on Dandi salt.

The merchants contend that at a time when the tea economy is in bad shape, tightening the money flow in the Nilgiris, any attempt to project tea in a bad light should be resisted.

Whether Dandi could prove its claim of improved intelligence among children if they consumed its branded salt is not the question, but to project tea as an avoidable drink is objected to by the merchants. It is not known, however, why the producers of the tea have not shown the same concern over this adverse publicity to tea. Nor is it known what prevents the salt manufacturer from removing the objectionable sentence. — (Courtesy: Industrial Economist.)

P.S. Sundar

# And now they look for transparency!

It was a long and tedious morning. *The Man From Madras Musings* recently spent at the launch of yet another organisation determined to improve the quality of life of the people of Tamil Nadu. This one was called 'Transparency International India — TN Chapter' — and MMM made brief mention of it in this column last fortnight. Today, it's time to take a closer look at the organisation and the occasion.

The average age of those attending would have been over 60. Certainly only one person below 60 was on the dais. But more interesting than this absence of youth was the composition of those present. At least a half of those present, if not more, were retired IAS officers, or senior academics and officials who had been connected with government institutions. MMM wonders whether the light on such subjects as transparency and corruption had suddenly dawned on them only after retirement? If that was not the case, what were they doing about these issues when they were in office? MMM recognised at least a few of this ilk who were anything but easy to deal with when they were in office. They might have been totally honest and upright, but they were equally secretive, unwilling to provide information, and did little to improve service in their organisations — or, at least, had given it up as a bad job, trying to change their staff. Now, what is it they hope to do with TII-TN?

TII is known worldwide for its annual corruption index — which puts India almost at the bottom of the scale. How is TII-TN — or for that matter Fifth Column, CAG, Catalyst and Concert, all of whom put in a token, silent presence on the occasion — going to eradicate corruption? It would have been nice to see the Managing Committee — and the others on the dais — get up and invite others to join them in taking an oath: 'I will not pay a bribe or a service inam to a telephone lineman, an electricity repairman, a municipal assessor or speed money to get something done at the RTO or the Passport Office or elsewhere.' After all, a service inam or speed money is as much a bribe as the big money transactions that are alone described as corruption. So long as we go along with encouraging the smaller transgressions — even when in service and knowing about them — crying 'Foul' loud at various fora is unlikely to have any great effect.

## What then?

*The Man From Madras Musings* is not trying to be a wet blanket, though he has a reputation for being a Doubting Thomas. But Doubting Thomas though he be, he is not a pessimist; if he were, he would not have sustained this column recording losing battles

for over a decade. But it's time that all those seeking to change society for the better put a stop to increasing the number of organisations fighting similar battles, each with a niche where it can call itself king, and get together to strengthen a few existing organisations.

Take that TII-TN meeting the other day. Why did those leading Fifth Column, Catalyst, Concert, CAG and similar organisations not turn up and urge a joint front?

Just a member or two from the committees of the four organisations mentioned turned up, kept silent through the proceedings and many of them left early (though MMM would not blame them for that, given the tediousness of the proceedings). Surely a united front might be a little more meaningful; at least, the same sounds would all be made at one place, in a louder united voice, than at several gatherings of almost the same faces, but with leaderships barely on talking terms with those of other groups, particularly when it comes to action.

That NGOs are necessary, MMM is convinced. Each tackling a small area, a special interest, like old age, particular disabilities, the homeless, deprived children etc., handling just about what it can comfortably do, does ensure a degree of success and a satisfaction of something accomplished. But major issues, like corruption, the more important issue of efficient service by government servants, even heritage, cannot be tackled by individual organisations, no matter how eloquently they speak. A mass movement is what is necessary — and a united front could be a beginning of that. But if individual NGOs with common interests each want to go their own way, is there one strong enough among them to launch a mass movement? MMM can't find one — particularly as all those he knows of seem to be comprised of the same people, those who do not need to be converted, but none strong enough to take on the system head on. Is there a Jayaprakash Narayan around?

And then there was TII-TN's commitment to build "coalitions to strengthen integrity systems in the country". These systems would include, it was announced: — Transparency and accountability in government procurement — An effective auditor general and ombudsperson — A free media and access to official information — A responsible business sector — An independent judiciary, investigators and prosecutors — An elected legislature, with power to hold public officials to account.

## What they said

Monsters at large should not go unchallenged, thundered one of the speakers at the inauguration of the Tamil Nadu Chapter of TII. *The Man From Madras Musings* finds that in recent years not even one challenge has been victorious. On the dais and in the audience, were a couple of people who had led challenges. They didn't even get a hearing when it came to the crunch. What does one do in such circumstances, wonders MMM.

A lawyer on the dais revealed that 25,000 cases of mis-governance are filed in the Madras High Court every year. Eighty per cent were not on grounds of law. What he did not

reveal was what percentage of the complaints got rulings in their favour and what percentage of those rulings were implemented.

One point made that MMM was all in agreement with was the need to completely overhaul the education syllabus and make children more conscious of their civic responsibilities from their first years through their youth. For years, MMM has said that the present syllabuses only turn out technical personnel of one sort or another with a job at the end of it all their concern, not a better society or even a contribution to a better society. What has happened to the teaching of the Humanities in schools and colleges? Subjects like History, Geography, Civics, Nature Study (now Environmentalism, if you please), Moral Science are paid only lip service and the best don't want to go further with any of them. Till they come back in the syllabus as major subjects, so long as Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science rule the roost, organisations like TII-TN will, sadly, make little headway in a society becoming more valueless but more consumerist by the day.

The one thing new that MMM discovered — at least, new to him — was that the Portuguese system of administration had at least one thing in its favour. It might not have done much for Goa, but a negative note on a file by a bureaucrat could be challenged by the peti-

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tioner and it had to be heard right up the line. Apparently, something of the sort was suggested for India at Independence, but the Civil Service would have none of it. MMM would be delighted to hear from any reader how the Goa system worked and whether it was as successful as it was made out to be that morning.

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— An effective auditor general and ombudsperson  
— A free media and access to official information  
— A responsible business sector  
— An independent judiciary, investigators and prosecutors  
— An elected legislature, with power to hold public officials to account.

Haven't we in this country, in this State, all of them or look-alikes? MMM has always thought we had. But as MMM has always said, we have the world's most comprehensive laws, procedures and systems; we just happen to have the worst implementation of it all. What is TII-TN going to do about all that, considering that most of those who gathered that

morning had been those charged with implementation over the years — and have left us today's legacy?

MMM is all for organisations with such ideals as TII-TN has, but it should be pointed out that in all such organisations there is a crying need to separate the woods from the trees. Ideals — and all the elocution in the world — are not enough when there are monsters out there on the prowl. Are there any among the idealists willing to take on the monsters? As one former administrator in the audience told MMM, most of those with these ideals don't even go out to vote and, if they do and find they have already been voted for, they quietly let sleeping dogs lie.

If that attitude is to change, MMM can see it happening only if a strong coalition of NGOs is formed. Will TII-TN or Fifth Column, CAG, Catalyst or Concert, Exnora or someone else take the lead and call for an all-NGO conference to discuss a coalition?

## One long wait...

He is well over 70 and he decided to go and renew his driving licence himself. For some strange reason, his RTO was right across town, but grumbling all the way, he made it there early one morning to find several others in his age-group already there. Looking at the crowd, he gave up his principles and decided to seek the help of a tout. Some cash transactions and a tea later — the tea bought by the tout! — he was ready for the final steps: cash payments and photography. The time was around 11.30 by now. And that's when the ordeal began for him and his fellow pensioners.

It was pillar to post with a rude 'accountant', who got ruder by the minute, each time he felt one of them needed more documentation or was remiss in tendering what was the correct amount. Eventually came the photography, but the photographer had gone for tea. When he turned up, the picture he'd taken was not one he was happy with. That sorted out, it was again pillar to post to eventually get a little bit of plastic. It was 4.30 p.m. when the narrator left for home. Auto fares, a whole day lost — including neither lunch nor nap nor tea nor walk — several doses of ill-temper that had to be put up with and that initial contribution to the tout's welfare...

"What's going to happen when I have to go for the new number plates," he wondered when he narrated his story to *The Man From Madras Musings*. I may have spent less money than I had been asked for to save the long wait and arrive just for the picture and have the licence delivered at home, but was it worth a wasted day, he wondered.

## ... and another

But that was not the end of his story, now that he had button-

holed MMM. A few days later, he had to go for his visa to the local office of a High Commission. His travel agent felt it was better he went in person, because he was asking for a visa for a rather longer period than normal — and the particular High Commission looked with some suspicion at Indian elders visiting children settled in its country.

So off he went early one morning, entered the barricaded premises and was given a numbered token — which soon revealed that even at that early hour he was way down the queue. Fortunately there was rather comfortable seating in the rather comfortable waiting room, but there he had to sit in strictly serial sequence with respect to the number he had been allotted. Soon he found there were a couple of sergeant-major types out of the Raj bellowing out groups of numbers and ordering the numbers called to 'Hurry up, Hurry up'. He was surprised that they didn't say, "Jaldi, man, Jaldi", but that was no doubt because a bit of the Raj had worn off, said MMM's irritated narrator. That, however, wasn't the end of it; every time a group went in, the SMs would roughly order all those waiting to move up. "I must have moved into empty chairs up the queue half a dozen times. My poor bum! But, seriously, what was the necessity to move and be constantly disturbed when we'd been numbered; surely you could sit anywhere and still answer the numbers? But of course systems are systems for those who invented red tape, aren't they?"

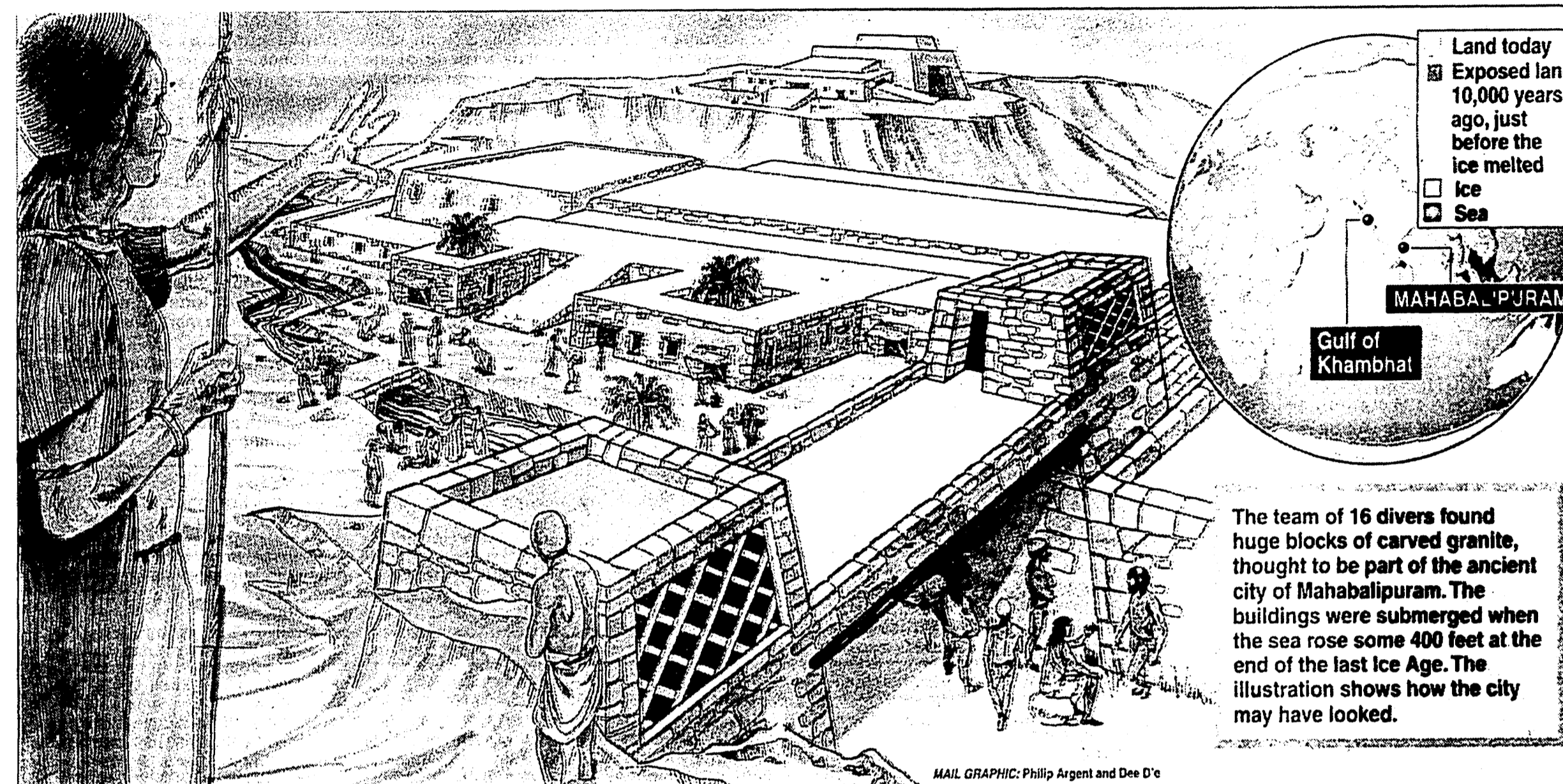
Anyway, by the time MMM's friend's number was called, it was well after 1.30 p.m. Once again no lunch — and no tea either. But the silver lining was "the young lady I eventually got to meet. Businesslike but polite, she smiled me off in a couple of minutes, saying, when I asked her 'Don't you want to see my paper?', 'Well, I suppose I'd better take them.'" To get his passport back, however, he would have had to wait till 4 p.m. — and so he decided to pass on that and get his travel agent to recover it. But it was 3.30 before he made it home for lunch. He did however manage his walk.

Two tales with moments with silver linings, but overall the system, efficiency and manners (or lack of them) tend to browbeat the citizen. And greasing palms means saving a lot of hassle. So to end where MMM started from, isn't it time that NGOs nipping at the heels of corruption began to take big bites into time-consuming systems and inefficient, rude members of it? Even if you get rid of corruption, will we ever rid ourselves of inefficiency, rudeness and feelings of power within whatever kingdoms bureaucrats reign in, no matter how small? That in many ways is the greater problem, MMM feels, because it makes daily life a constant hassle.

— MMM

## Scientists and divers make a major find

# Lost Mahabalipuram?



For centuries, people have told stories of vast sunken ruins beneath the waves. Six hundred ancient myths, collected from every part of the globe, speak of great cities lost in a universal flood thousands of years ago.

Now extraordinary finds are being made that suggest they might be based on truth.

Researchers say they have uncovered tangible remnants of a lost civilisation. Though many believe their claims owe more to Indiana Jones than to science, some in mainstream archaeology are beginning to take notice.

The latest discovery has been made by a team from the Dorset-based Scientific Exploration Society, who were prompted to dive off the coast of Southern India by the myths and traditions of its people.

The story of Mahabalipuram, in the state of Tamil Nadu, was first written about by one J. Goldingham, a British traveller who visited the coastal town in 1798.

At that time, it was known to sailors as the Seven Pagodas. The myths, still repeated by local fishermen and priests, speak of six submerged temples with the seventh still standing on the shore.

The stories also state that a large city once stood there which was so beautiful the gods became jealous and sent a flood that swallowed it in a single day.

## Is this the submerged city of legend?

Monty Halls, the diver who led the SES team, said local people had confirmed the ancient story, pointing to a series of large submerged structures half a mile offshore.

The Britons put together a team of 16 divers with India's National Institute of Oceanography and made a series of exploratory dives early in April.

"We had to crash through the surf to get out there to make our dives," said Halls, revealing details of the mission for the first time. "Not in a million years could we have expected to find what we did."

"We were confronted with something absolutely colossal. Our divers were presented with a series of structures that clearly showed man-made attributes."

Through the gloom and murk of 15 to 20ft of water, the divers could pick out vast blocks of granite. Some were arranged in long, wall-like structures. Others were in rectangular arrangements, suggesting buildings and temples.

None of the team was in any doubt that they were looking at man-made rather than natural features. Many of the blocks

had clearly been carved by ancient stonemasons.

To the divers' amazement, the submerged ruins covered an area of several square miles.

**● It was barely a couple of paragraphs tucked away insignificantly in a Chennai newspaper in early April. But it caused a splash in the Daily Mail, London, and even though this edition of Madras Musings had gone to press, we thought it a story — be it fantasy, exaggeration or bare facts — of sufficient importance to slip in a loose sheet with the tale in full as told by the Daily Mail's Science Correspondent, JAMES CHAPMAN.**

They captured pictures showing what they believe to be vast ruins rising from the seabed.

"This is plainly a discovery of international importance that demands further exploration and detailed investigation," said Halls.

Nevertheless, Hancock believes both Indian discoveries support his theory that complex civilisations existed many thousands of years earlier than has traditionally been accepted.

Received wisdom is that civilisation began with the Sumerians, whose cities were founded in Mesopotamia — modern Iraq — little more than 5,000 years ago.

But Hancock suggested that great cities existed earlier than 5,000 years ago. He says they were created by the survivors of a former urban civilisation destroyed by great floods. The earlier cities were lost when sea levels rose some 400 feet at the end of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago.

Historian Peter James, for one, is sceptical about Hancock's claims. In the April 11th *New Scientist* magazine, he says evidence to support his theories is 'tenuous' at best.

Hancock admits several years of work at the Mahabalipuram site will be required before the discovery's full significance is gauged.

"Of course, nothing is definitive at this stage," he said. "But I have argued for many years that the world's flood myths deserve to be taken seriously — a view that most Western academics reject."

"Here in Mahabalipuram we have proved the myths right and the academics wrong."

Earlier this year, scientists announced the discovery of another ancient metropolis 120ft under the sea in the Gulf of Khambhat, north-west India, which could be one of the oldest cities known.

Those structures, say experts, resemble those of the ancient Harappan civilisation, which was thought to date back only around 4,000 years.

Although Palaeolithic sites dating back 20,000 years have been found on the west Indian coast, this is the first indication there may be substantial man-made structures as old as 9,000 years.

Fragments of pottery and carved wood are reported to have been dated to around 7,500 BC.

Investigations off the Gulf have been hampered by strong tidal currents. So far, evidence rests on acoustic images and the use of dredging equipment to haul up artefacts.

# The living rocks

If you have visited Mamallapuram even once, you will surely agree that the rock-cut caves and temples stay in your memory long after you have said goodbye to the place. Their fascination is endless. We in India tend to take these things for granted. A historical monument like this elsewhere in the world would have been shown off properly in all its splendour, with appropriate reenactments of the historical situations. We are content to leave our tourists at the mercy of ignorant and scheming guides. (One was heard telling a group of foreign tourists that Karna was one of the five Pandavas!) Here, there is not even a pretence at keeping things clean. The area around the prized Shore Temple is an open toilet. Your nose leads you to the place. Yet you find yourself going back ever so often, if only to feel humbled by the sheer knowledge and technical genius these ancients appeared to have possessed. As we study the rock, bit-by-bit, a fascinating story of India's religious, social and cultural history unfolds.

Sacred man-made caves are a feature of both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Many of them are on a large scale and have survived fairly intact from the time they were built over fifteen centuries ago.

There are two types of rock-cut architecture. One is hollowed like an artificial cave out of a steep cliff and comprises vast chambers. The other is carved downwards into a rocky outcrop and creates architectural features of a sculptural character. The first consists of nothing but internal spaces, the second may altogether lack them. The caves of Elephanta and some of the caves at Ellora

are of the first type, while the most famous of the second are the Seven Pagodas, or *rathas*, sculpted out of the rock at Mamallapuram.

Perhaps the greatest attraction in Mamallapuram is Arjuna's Penance. But not many are aware that there has been a great deal of speculation on the subject of this panel.

Early in the 20th Century, the scholars V. Golouben and G. Joureau-Dubreuil rejected the belief that the figure standing on one leg in an attitude of great penance was Arjuna. They felt that it was Bhagiratha, and that the central cleft

represented the path of the river Ganga as she flowed down the mountains from heaven in response to Bhagiratha's request. A.W. Longhurst, an archaeologist, discovered that the Pallavas had arranged water to cascade down the central cleft from a cistern above to the tank below. All the heavenly beings around appear to be flocking to the central cleft to witness the descent of this most holy of rivers.

**Manasthala recently held an exhibition on Mamallapuram, displaying a collection of artefacts, curios and pictorial information on this treasure-trove of art and culture at Chennai's doorstep. The focus of the exhibition was the drawings of J. PRABHAKAR, who brought a whole new perspective to the sculptures of Mamallapuram, with his series of drawings.**

**The temples at Mamallapuram pose many questions. What prompted the ancient dwellers of this seaside town to leave such indelible marks on the sands of time? This feature, from Manasthala's newsletter, searches for the answers in history and art and attempts to arrive at some answers.**

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To recapitulate the legend: King Sagara, great, great-grandfather of King Bhagiratha, wished to conduct the famous horse sacrifice, the *Asvamedha*.

The sacrificial horse was unchained and allowed to roam at will. The territories where it roamed unchallenged were the ones that acknowledged the sovereignty of the king. Those who challenged it had to fight against the troops that followed the horse and prove their might. How-

ever, the God Indra mischievously stole the horse and tied it up in the underworld, near the hermitage of the great sage Kapila.

The 60,000 sons of King Sagara who went in search of the horse found it grazing in the hermitage and, wrongly assuming that Kapila was the culprit, rushed at him. With one glance from his fiery eyes, the sage re-

was able to persuade Lord Siva to do the needful.

Ganga descended to the earth in two stages. In the first, she fell from heaven into the matted locks of the Lord's hair. Then she flowed in a more controlled fashion from Siva's head down mountains, across plains, into the dry ocean bed and finally down into the underworld.

In the penance panel, we see what is obviously the second stage of Ganga's descent, as she flowed down the Himalayan slopes, watched in adoration by thousands of heavenly beings.

It must have been an awe-inspiring sight to see the water cascading down the central cleft of the panel when there was rain and whenever there was a ceremonial occasion.

An interesting sidelight here is the children's slide cut in the living rock to the immediate right of the Penance panel. Children still enjoy playing on this 1300 years old slide, created by the Pallavas. With the passage of time, the lower portion of the slide has been covered by earth. The slide's full length is approximately three metres. Also cut in the rock are twelve steps leading from the bottom up to the top of the slide. Did the children of that time slide with a splash into the waves? The world's first water amusement thrill!

Permanence is the great advantage of rock-cut architecture. And the transition from wood to stone building materials could only have resulted in what could be described as a petrification of forms; the heritage of the earlier period was transcribed into the new material. Hindu architecture, it should be noted, lacked all knowledge of the arch, vault and dome, for which false vaults made out of criss-crossing roof-beams were substituted.

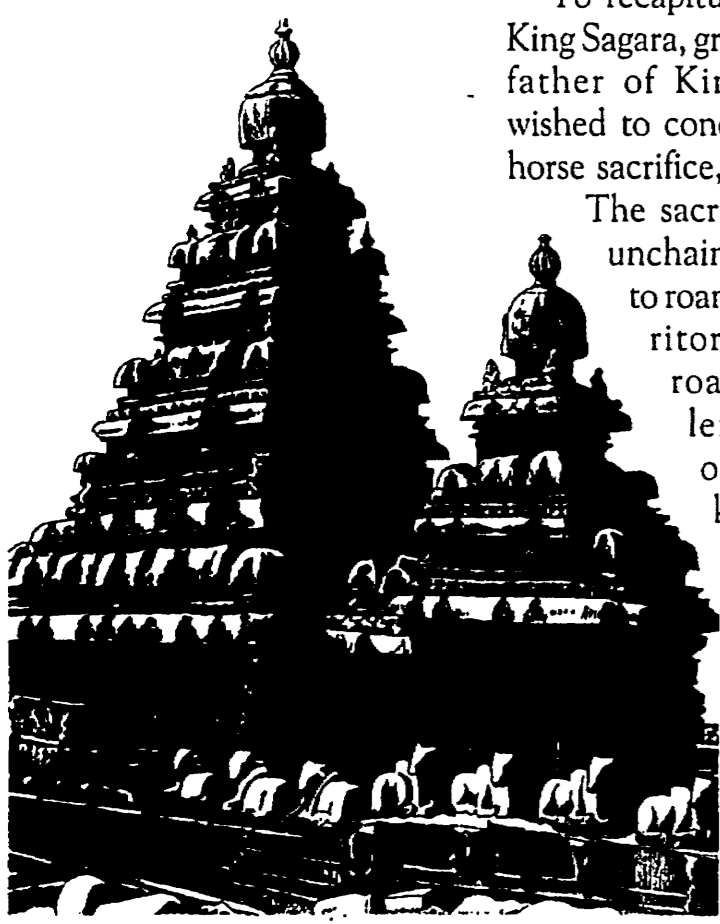
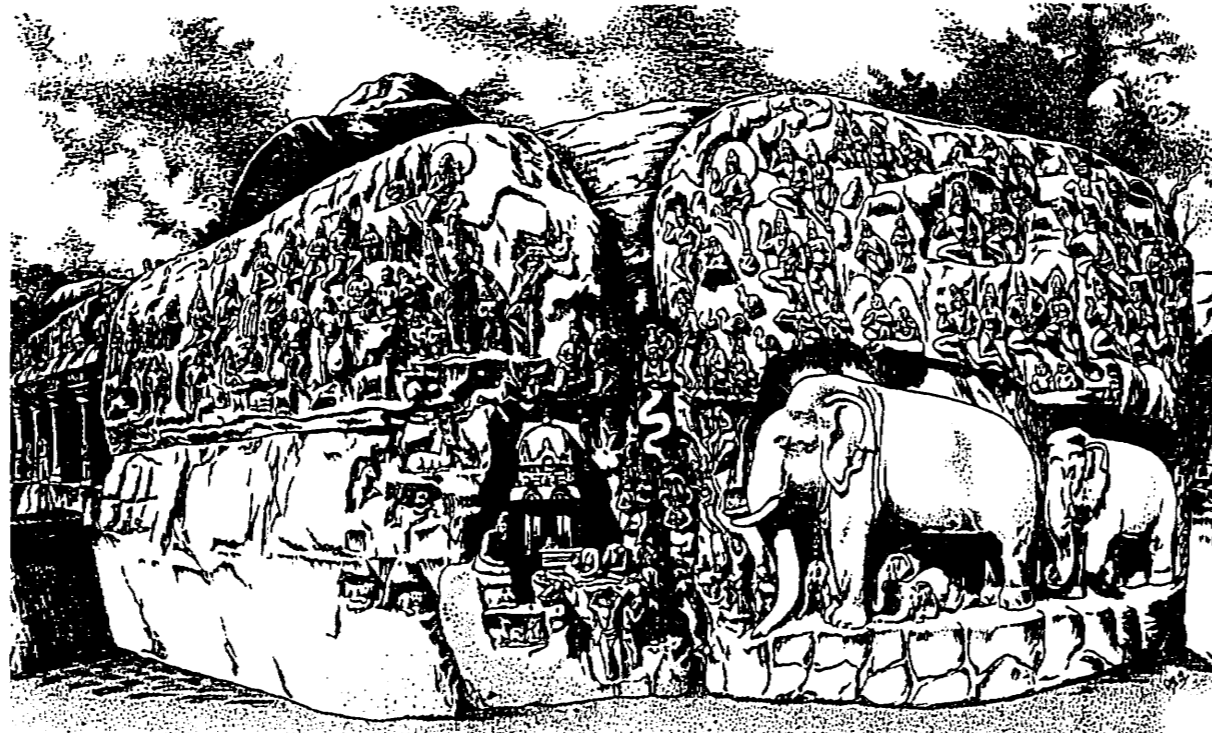
For emblematic reasons, the *rathas* are ornamented, with small-scale models of huts arranged around the entire perimeter of the roof. And each of these miniature huts has its own barrel-vaulted roof, its palm or straw roof carefully depicted in stone. The section of the barrel-vault forms at the end an opening which also served as a window. This tympanum-like motif

is highly significant; it is known as the *kudu* or *chaitya* arch. In many cases, the *kudu* is ornamented with little sculpted figures who appear to be looking out of the arched window.

These rows of miniature buildings form an image of a celestial city. They represent at times the dwelling place of Lord Siva on Mount Kailash and at times Mount Meru, the mythical mountain of Indian cosmology, wherein dwells Brahma, the Supreme Creator.

Of all the *rathas*, the smallest is the Draupadi *ratha*, dedicated to the Goddess Durga. Square in plan, its roof is a projecting curvilinear structure of four planes, like that of a hut roofed with palm-leaves. The second *ratha*, that of Arjuna, is a fine example of the step-pyramid structure decorated with miniature buildings. The third *ratha*, called the Bhima *ratha*, reproduces the *chaitya* model. It is sculpted in the image of the halls that were used as Buddhist meeting-places. The fourth *ratha*, the Dharmaraja or Yuddhishtira *ratha*, is the largest. It is square in plan, with sides about 10 metres long. Overall, it is a larger-scale version of the Arjuna *ratha*. The fifth *ratha*, the Nakula Sahadeva *ratha*, reproduces the basilican plan with an apsidal end and barrel-vault characteristic of the Buddhist *chaitya*.

Based on a symbolic scheme like that of the square *rathas*, the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram is a transposition of the formula of the monolithic temples, but this time constructed in carefully dressed blocks of granite. Though the temple is dedicated to Lord Siva, there is a secondary temple with a statue of Vishnu. A third smaller temple contains a *lingam* too and opens towards the west. Though eroded by the salt spray, the Shore Temple is one of the great examples of an art that had already attained maturity. And it has an admirable setting, though this has been somewhat altered by the drastic salvage operations undertaken recently by UNESCO in order to distance the temple from the sea and, thus, save its foundations from the washing waves. — (Courtesy: Manasthala Foundation newsletter.)



David Davidar — The publisher as a storyteller - II

## A book rooted in his young reality

(Continued from last fortnight)

The *House of Blue Mangoes* is an exploration into all things that interested David Davidar. Yet he chose a timeframe that isn't his own?

"My close friends were surprised at the contents of my book and its style," he says. "They felt it was very unlike me."

He didn't choose to set it in his own time for two reasons: One, that would have made it autobiographical, and two, the more important reason, the period that he chose had long fascinated him.

"Books take on a life of their own," he says, and talks of how this story took possession of his mind in the early 90s.

It was the turn of the century; the millennium was approaching. The world was in a brittle mood, with a sense of millennium edginess and anticipation. His thoughts turned then to the turn of another century... to 1899. Then, too, there had been anticipation. The world was holding its breath; the winds of change were transforming life.

"The first half of the 20th Century was so very eventful," says Davidar. "The two World Wars, the Independence movement, the caste wars in the country..."

And David Davidar who as a youth had been "an average kind of member of my particular social class", began to feel there were gaps in his knowledge of his past. A typical product of the urban India of the time, he "didn't know, didn't care". He says his life was made up of rock concerts and parties. He does emphasise, however, that there was no sense of "going back to his roots" when he embarked on this book. There never was any confusion about "where he came from"; there was only an acknowledged paucity of information. ("You get impressions of very clear black and white pictures gathered through one's childhood, which now began to demand that they be filled with the right colours.")

"All I knew was what little my history text-books had taught me in school, and even those focussed, as far as my memory went, on the North and the West."

So David Davidar, who has lived outside Tamil Nadu for more than 20 years, began his quest for the essential soul of South India within the frame-

work of his book. That decision taken, what he needed now was a structure. Davidnagar certainly provided a launching pad to what later became Doratapuram, totally different in form and content.

Everything else was created by Davidar alone. Like the caste names — the Andavars, Marudars and the Vedhars. He created them because he "did not wish to add fuel to the caste controversies that have raged for centuries now".

Or like the fictional Chevatnar Neelam itself.

It is then that he tells you a goose-pimple-inducing story of how the tale began to take root.

Davidar did not begin with the character of Solomon Dorai, the patriarch. No, it was the character of Daniel, the slightly less favourite son of Solomon Dorai, who was "this dying old man in a mansion. He was very grumpy. I needed to know why."

Daniel would not leave Davidar alone. "It was like there was this old man who would not die until I told his story," says David Davidar.

"But Daniel isn't real," you point out nervously.

He grins and says that this is the power that your creations have over you. That is how stories are created, through ideas that become entities with life, flesh and blood. "It's very important that you understand this power, and quickly take charge by making sure you have structure. Otherwise the story goes all over the place."

The *House of Blue Mangoes* is ultimately a compression of every idea, every thought, every question that Davidar's ever had. But he left out his Bombay years.

Why? Well, those are the practical rules of fiction: Everything must happen within its time. "The arc was complete," he says, and the story, like his river Chevatnar, did wind to a natural conclusion.

The *House of Blue Mangoes* is a book rich in detail and description, with texture and fragrance. The Blue Mango, the Chevatnar Neelam, possesses a "huge delectable sweetness, overlaid with notes of freshness, lightness, sun and blue."

Where did such a sense of surroundings come from?

"My mother, Sushila Davidar," he replies unhesitatingly. "The letters she wrote should be published as a book," he adds. It

was she who instilled in him this love for stories, both heard and told. Her letters, filled with observations, served to heighten and increase sensitivity to life in the child, David.

For David, it is a "big regret that she didn't live to see the book".

"I did a lot of re-returning," says David Davidar. He visited places of his youth, and got in touch with the images again, the homes, the trees, the smells, even the colour of the soil.

Would he describe himself as a watcher?

"You know, when I told my mother I was thinking of entering the field of journalism, she told me I'd never make it, because I was so unobservant," he smiles.

That's really hard to believe, because right through, you sense the presence of someone watching, a gatherer of the tiny details that enrich life, even as a child.

Like the use of the term "swing-in-swing-out tree", which is really only something a child could have come up with.

by  
RANJITHA ASHOK

This has to be a reference to some childhood memory, you insist.

"There was a swing-in-swing-out tree," he admits, "so maybe I was watching subconsciously," he laughs.

The book carries ample proof of the detailed, painstaking research David Davidar must have done.

"I picked the brains of a siddha expert mercilessly," he offers an example. He also says that his training as a journalist helped him really get into every detail.

The prodigious amount of reading he has done over decades also helped focus attention on details of language and environment. "I was not going to put a foot wrong where that was concerned."

The book also depicts scenes of violence during the freedom struggle, and village group clashes. But there are other acts of violence at a more subtle, insidious level, in the sheer viciousness that flows between people in ordinary, everyday situations. This is when a different kind of blood is shed.

"There is something about the seamier side of the human condition that fascinates me," Davidar confesses.

He also describes himself as

"a true introvert" and claims that, while he likes observing human dynamics, he dislikes being a participant.

"I am not very sociable, so when I am in social situations, I watch people."

"Which brings us back to the watcher," you point out, triumphantly.

He smiles in acknowledgement, but insists: "My mother thought I was no good." In all fairness, he feels that her feeling that way about him had everything to do with his own attitude.

"I would refuse to go out, meet people. I used to sit in my room, listen to music or read."

\* \* \*

For years, Davidar's been on one side of the desk. Now, he knows what it's like to be "on the other side," as it were. What has that experience been like, and what has he learnt along the way?

"It has been a rewarding experience," he says, and goes on to add that his finely honed skills as a publisher and editor over the years certainly helped during the process. Being able to tell a writer "this doesn't work, maybe you should try something else" for more than 15 years helped him too when it was his turn.

Does he feel a little more sympathy towards hapless writers?

"Sympathy, yes, and I can see the writers' point of view and their perspective clearly, but there is also a sense of impatience with writers who are so wedded to their precious texts that they refuse to correct or change anything, or even acknowledge that there is scope for improvement," he says, frankly. He also has little time for writers who "refuse to do their homework".

"People think that just because you can sit down and write 500 words, you can write a book." It doesn't work that way.



You have to have a meticulous work ethic, a structure you are committed to working within and conviction about what you are writing. Only then will your characters bleed... otherwise they are bloodless. And "you should be prepared to listen".

This is where good editors come in. A good editor will get into the writer's skin, look at the text from within, and express his opinions.

He places credit squarely on the shoulders of his team of "brilliant editors". They made the book what it is today, he swears.

"I have no ego with anyone who is giving me considered comment," he says.

In his book, whole chapters disappeared, as did some characters; others changed completely. "When I first began, I wrote 475 pages, of which I kept 30," he says.

His editors "threw out stuff". "They'd tell me I had gone on and on and on in certain sections... and all of it had to go."

But doesn't it break his heart... to throw away his ideas, his creations...? "Not at all," comes the characteristically practical, down-to-earth reply. Everything has to be subordinate to the story. Such an attitude merely reflects security about one's talent, work and a thorough understanding of one's abilities.

How important is idealism to a story?

Idealism is all right as long as it fits the character. But, he warns, an ideological novel is not necessarily a good one. Being didactic through fiction cuts out the basic soul of a novel — which is to tell a story in as stylish, entertaining, informative, and personal a manner as possible.

Would he call the book a "sad" one?

"No, but I am essentially a

(Continued on page 9)

**OUR READERS WRITE**



**Not zero pressure**

It was recently reported that the M.D., Metrowater, had stated that, due to insufficient pressure, water could not be pumped and provided to certain areas. When you are sumping 250 lakh litres of water, the problem is not lack of water, though it may be inadequate. The crux of the problem is lack of pressure. Area engineers plead their helplessness and advise the consumers to be satisfied if they get water from their handpumps.

The streets around the tank are full of stray cattle in the evenings. They roam about to swallow a mouthful of vegetables when the vendor is unwary. When they are driven away, they run about helter-skelter causing panic among the passersby.

Would somebody take a lively interest in these problems of the area around a landmark in Chennai and try to solve them?

**R. Gurusubramaniam**  
3B, 1 Floor, 89, Adam Street  
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

**Affected residents**

Though the East Coast Road has become smoother, safer (?) and better regulated (?), residents like me who live in the East Coast Road (we live at Muttukadu and use only 3 km of the Toll Road) are paying Rs. 90/- a day for two cars that need water to come to the city — one that I bring to work and the other that my wife travels in to pick up our 6-year-old daughter from school.

I wonder how the residents and members of the Senior Citizens Resort, the Cheshire Home, the Scripture Union, Crenio etc., which are social welfare organisations and have senior citizens, manage?

In a country like ours, where cities are bursting with population, Government should be encouraging people to move outside the city. This will help to distribute the load on the environment and natural resources like drinking water, sanitation disposal, clean air etc. Unfortunately, this procedure of collecting toll from residents is going to turn potentially caring citizens away.

We moved here almost 10 years ago with the idea of helping decongest the city and set an example to other people to move out of the city. Must we pay for this?

Will Government please do something immediately to stop this harassment of the residents of the ECR by issuing residents permit at no cost to the residents? This, I am

**M. Susikaran**  
14, First Street  
Nandanam Extension  
Chennai 600 035.

**Neglected landmark**

The Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapore is a showpiece, but it's tank is dry and urchins use it as a playground.

told, is the procedure adopted in other countries where the residents have no alternative route to go back home!

**N.N. Currimbhoy**  
2/157, Karrikattu Kuppan  
Muttukadu Village, Chennai 112.

**The missing sparrows – I**

When I was young there were innumerable instances of sparrows building nests in the beams and in the fan covers of our house. I even remember rehabilitating some young ones whenever they fell and making nest in shoeboxes for them.

Nowadays, I must admit, they are not to be seen (MM, March 16th). But when I went to Kothawal-chavadi to get vegetables recently, I was surprised to see many of them competing with humans and bovines alike. Wish we can get them back in our buildings.

Also notice that crow population has increased considerably. This can be another reason for sparrows being displaced.

**Padmini Badri**  
15/4, New Fort Glacis  
Island Grounds, Chennai 600 009.

**The missing sparrows – II**

Anna Institute of Management, a state government-sponsored management training institute, functions in Kanchi, a heritage building, on Greenways Road. In this building, we have lots of sparrows and the chirping of the sparrows eases the stresses of a working day and creates a wonderful environment for effective human interaction so necessary in a training programme.

**Dr. T.A. Sivasubramaniam**  
Anna Institute of Management  
"Kanchi"  
36, P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja Salai  
(Greenways Road), Chennai 28.

**The missing sparrows – III**

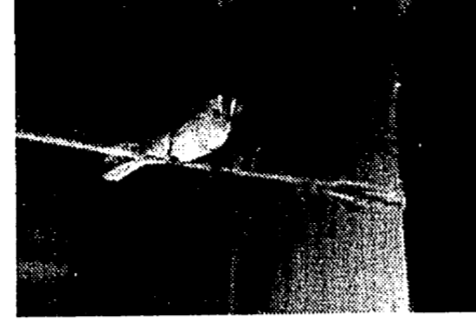
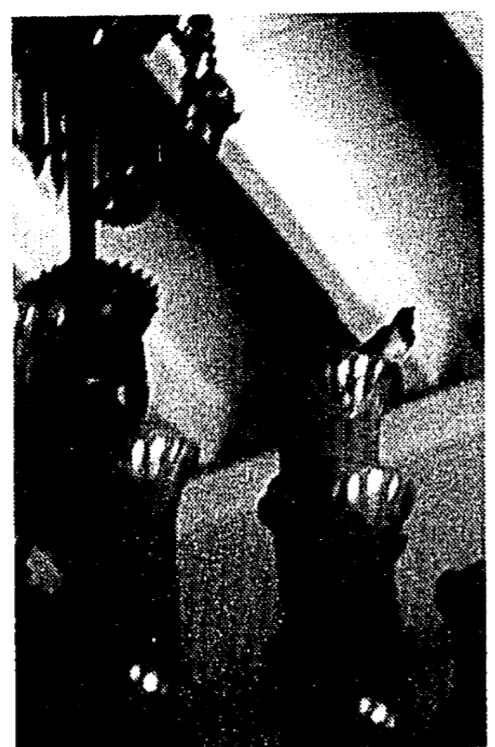
As an ardent bird lover, I am happy to inform your readers that I have noticed small flocks of the house sparrows (MM, March 16th) in our area — Gopalapuram.

In fact, a few years ago, when we were in an apartment behind the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Office, sparrows used to regularly nest in the narrow space above the hot-water geyser in our bathroom. Later, we put up a wooden box close to the ceiling in the corner of our rear verandah, and the same family of sparrows soon took a fancy to these new quarters and moved into them. From then on we noticed baby sparrows being hatched, raised and taken out by the parent birds from this permanent home we had put up for them.

Thereafter we moved to another area and lost track of this family of sparrows which had shared our home for many years.

But I would like to inform readers that sparrows can be seen in fairly large numbers in Gopalapuram. Even if you do not get to see them, you can hear them chirping throughout the day in the area. I wish more readers will inform MM about sightings of house sparrows in their respective areas in Chennai.

**K.J.E. Vijayakumar**  
4-A, Madhuvan Apartments  
199-200, Lloyds Road  
Gopalapuram, Chennai 600 086.



*• A reader sent us these photographs taken in the Mylapore-Alwarpet area (with his apologies for the quality of the photography) and points out that the sparrows still seem to be around — though not in the numbers that there once were. Now that we've seen the house sparrow in Chennai once again, this correspondence is brought to an end with these pictures and today's letters.*

**The missing sparrows – IV**

Does the younger generation know what a sparrow is? Does the older generation remember? Driven by urban light, this diminutive creature has made its exit, well almost. A few naughty sparrows can still be seen in the city. But I disagree with the Madras Naturalists' Society (MM, March 16th) that these birds can be seen in Mylapore. Alwarpet and Mylapore are the areas where I usually 'hang out' and I haven't seen any sparrows in these areas.

However, I had seen sparrows in two other areas: At Beach Station, opposite TIAM House (corporate office of the Murugappa Group) about four or five years ago and at Ellis Road/Mount Road near Anna Statue about two years ago.

**B. Gautham**  
137 (122 Old), Wallajah Road  
Chennai 600 002.

**The missing sparrows – V**

The Madras Naturalists' Society writes that the following members have reported sightings: Abbas F. Gheerwala, who resides in a busy Parrys area, says that the house sparrows are seen in large numbers opposite his house and he attributes this rich sighting to the location of the grain and vegetables market very close to his house and about 10 house sparrows are regularly observed by M. Chandrasekaran, at MRC Nagar, near Foreshore Estate; The Society has also heard of regular sightings in Kodambakkam and in large numbers near a grocery shop in Ashok Nagar, and K. Ramachandran, a member from Rajapalayam, however, reports a declining sparrow population in towns such as Tenkasi, Tirunelveli, Madurai, Pollachi, Palakkad and Trichur.

**That name change**

With reference to Reader M.R. Pillai's contention (MM,

There are still people in Chennai who lived through the floods in the Gardens who will have very interesting stories to tell. One colleague arranged boats from the Boat Club to get us food. These boats came into the houses (the ground floor was under several feet of water) and up to the staircases. Some woke up in the middle of the night to see their cots floating and rowed themselves to the two-storied bungalows. This was one time the servants shared the food, the bedrooms and the bathrooms with their employers. Since the power station had shut down, there was no water in the upstairs bathrooms despite all the flooding. We used buckets to carry water upstairs. Christine Scott's 11 Buckingham Gardens was occupied by a British couple, the Brittens, in the 1950s.

**R. Ramakrishnan**  
Darpana  
17A, Crescent Avenue  
Ksavaperumal Puram  
Chennai 600 028.

**Binny nostalgia**

The Past & Present photos in MM, March 16th, took me back to 1951 or so when, as a small boy, I once accompanied my father and his assistant in a roomy Hudson on their annual pilgrimage on New Year's Day, carrying an enormous Harrison's Cake, a few dozen apples and some bouquets to greet the Dorai at one of the Buckingham Gardens bungalows. We were stockists and retailers of Binny fabrics in our shop at Broadway, hence the annual visit.

Those days there was no Terylene or Terycotton and curious names like Poplin, Lustlin, Gaberdene, Tussore and something which sounded like a saint getting duped, viz seersucker, held sway.

Film personalities used to drop in for the Binny materials at our shop. I vividly remember the Gatothogjan of Maya Bazaar, S.V. Ranga Rao sans the crown and mace, of course, pleasantly chatting with my father while the admiring staff parcelled his purchases. Kaadhai Mammam Gemini Ganesh used to drop by to meet a friend two shops away from ours — on a motorcycle! I guess, as an old Hindi song goes, "Guzra Huwa Zamana, Aaha Nahin Dubara" (the past will never return).

**C.G. Prasad**  
9, C.S. Muddi Street  
Kondithope  
Chennai 600 079.

**Never again?**

The photograph of the flood level indicator in Buckingham Gardens brought a flood of memories in me. Yes, I know the exact date now. I must have been four years old then,

**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.

**Water to Save Chennai ... from the Coleroon**

The Government of Tamil Nadu proposes to tap water from Veeranam Tank which itself gets its supply from the river Coleroon from Lower Anicut. This proposal, as it is, will not be a successful one, as during the summer months, March to June, the Veeranam lake itself will not get supply from Coleroon. It is also very difficult to increase the storage of the lake.

The scheme, however, can be made successful if the water is drawn directly from the River Coleroon near Kumarachi in the Coleroon left bank (north bank)

below Lower Anicut. For this purpose, the proposed canal or pipeline should be extended upward from Veeranam Tank to Coleroon left bank river bed in Kumarachi village.

The River Coleroon has continuous sweet springwater flow in plenty throughout the year below Lower Anicut upto its infall into the Bay of Bengal. This water has been going waste into the Bengal all these years. If this sweet water is tapped directly from the Coleroon River instead of from Veeranam Tank, Chennai's water problem will vanish.

To fill Veeranam Tank through Vadavar Canal from Lower Anicut, it is necessary to have the front water level above 10 feet or so, which is very difficult, even impossible, to maintain, during summer. For this purpose, about 5000 cusecs of water would have to be drawn from Mettur Reservoir during summer and this would deplete the storage of Mettur Reservoir considerably, resulting in late opening for next year's delta irrigation during June.

By extending the drinking water canal or pipeline above

Veeranam Tank upto the Coleroon river bed at Kumarachi village, there will be the following advantages:

- The sweet spring flows of the River Coleroon below Lower Anicut could be better utilised to alleviate the thirst of Chennaites permanently.
- This water, going waste for the past so many years, will be used instead of being wasted.
- The prestressed RCC pipes already procured for the Veeranam Project and now lying unused can be put to use before they perish.

**... & from the Kaveri**

To tap the Kaveri water at Hogenekal for Chennai is also a scheme to be considered. This is the shortest route to bring Kaveri water to Chennai (via Vellore). This scheme will solve not only Chennai's thirst but also the unending Kaveri water dispute.

During 1960s the Karnataka government requested the Government of Tamil Nadu to give its consent to construct a hydel reservoir across the Kaveri at Hogenekal within Karnataka's borders. But Tamil Nadu refused consent. Karnataka then constructed reservoirs in Lakshmana Thirtha, Hemavathi, Harangi and Kabini rivers, all tributaries

of the Kaveri in Karnataka. These tributaries contribute the bulk of the water to the River Kaveri during the Southwest Monsoon. Due to the construction of reservoirs, the contribution from these rivers into the River Kaveri is dwindling, and the inflow into the Mettur Dam has become problematic every year.

According to the original Hogenekal Project proposed during the 1960s, the Karnataka Government assured a full reservoir level of 120 feet at Mettur Dam on June 1st every year.

Even today, Tamil Nadu can accept the construction of a Hogenekal Reservoir within their state limits, provided they agree

to give a full reservoir level of 120 feet at Mettur Dam on June 1st every year and also allow not less than 10,000 cusecs daily below the proposed reservoir into the Kaveri.

The following are the advantages for Tamil Nadu:

- The Chennai water supply scheme can be executed early, since this is the shortest route from the River Kaveri to Chennai. It will also be possible to give drinking water to Vellore en route.
- The never-ending problem of the Kaveri River water dispute will come to an end.
- The Kaveri Delta area will get unfailing irrigation supply

throughout the year and a major portion of Delta area can be converted into triple crop lands with bumper harvest during each crop period. — It will be possible to produce Hydel Power from the Mettur Tunnel Powerhouse and Dam Powerhouse during most months of every year. This will reduce the production cost of power considerably and also reduce power cuts in Tamil Nadu.

**R. Subramanian**  
43, Varun Nivas,  
Telephone Colony  
II Main Road,  
Adambakkam  
Chennai 600 088.

**Summer House site – II**

Reader K.S. Krishnaswamy's letter on 'Ramanujan's Abode' (MM, February 16th) brought him these responses on Summer House in Triplicane.

V.K. Krishnamachari writes: I was a resident of Triplicane till 1953 and lived in Sami Pillai Street. Summer House was situated exactly opposite my house. My house number was 7 and my father, the late Dr. K. Vedantham, practised as a doctor in that street for 57 years (1918-75).

My uncle was also a great Mathematician who knew Ramanujan very well from Kumbakonam days. I do not know whether Summer House still exists, but if I remember the door number was 32 or so. Many great names in that street come to mind.

To mention a few: Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Shastri Dr. P.S. Lokanathan My uncle Prof. K.S. Patrachariar Prof. S.R. Ranganathan, Father of Indian Library Science Prof. G.A. Srinivasan T.R. Mahalingam, the flute genius G.N. Balasubramanian (GNB)

V. Gurusami writes: Summer House is to be found in Swami Pillai Street (likely to be abbreviated to Swami Street after removal of caste tags). This street is just opposite the Kellett Church (old Kellett Hall). Kellett Hall is in Bandi Venkatesan Street.

I spent my school and college days at a house (old number 27) in Swami Pillai Street between 1945

living at Komaleeswarampet (behind Chitra Talkies). My mother used to say that she felt a bit of moisture at first while sleeping in the verandah on a mat and very soon the place was filled with water which, she woke up to find, was a flood.

I distinctly remember my uncle's son carrying me in the evening on his shoulders and wading through waist deep water to reach near Casino Theatre. We were given a lift in a car by a good samaritan there and went to our aunt's place at C.N.K. Road in Triplicane.

Earlier, we had taken asylum on the first floor of our neighbour. Some rice bags were spoilt in the flood. Cooum in flood is now probably, a dream and might never reach the same level as it did in October 1943.

**Dr. R.K. Natarajan**  
23, Kalyanapuram Street  
Choolaimedu  
Chennai 600 094.

**Summer House site – I**

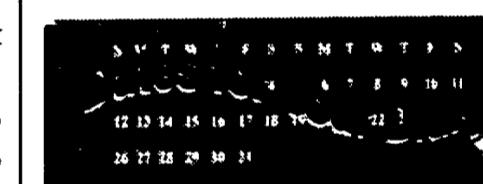
My father who is close to 101 years and who was a resident of Triplicane from 1924 to 1976, informs me that 'Summer House' (MM, February 1st) existed at the junction of Thope Street and Sami Pillai Street in Triplicane and that he had also stayed there for a few months. That was around 1926.

**T.K. Gopalakrishnan**  
2-K, Gowry Chitra Gardens  
88/4, Arcot Road  
Vadapalani  
Chennai 600 026.

and 1952. Summer House was just behind the house where I lived.

Even in those far off late Forties, it was just a crumbling mortar house, sprawling, without electricity. It was a 'lodging' for bachelor employees, self-employed persons and one or two students.

U. Ramakrishnan writes: While my son was residing at S.M.V. Koil Street in Triplicane, he asked me to visit the house of great mathematician Ramajunan near Parthasarathy temple. One day I went with him. There is a hotel on the right side corner of the temple, viz. Gopalakrishnan Hotel. There is Hanumantharayankoil Street near the hotel. In that street, there is an old building. I have seen a faded board fixed on the wall. The letters are faded, but I could decipher that "great Mathematician Ramanujan lived in this house".



From April 16: A group exhibition of artists from Bombay – Dutta Bansode, Anand Panchal, Sunil Padwal and Surendra Jagatap. (At the Apparao Gallery.)

From April 21: Group show of paintings by various artists such as Munendra and Rupa Raj Bongshi, Dhandekar and Preeti from Mumbai. (At Artworld.)

April 27: Dakshina Chitra in association with The Company Theatre will present Alterities – New Continents. This spectacle concert, the brainchild of a French composer, Manuel Aguilar, was created in residency at Jaisalmer, as a confluence of cultures and artistic expressions of Indian, Senegalese, Algerian, Hispanic and French musicians. (At DakshinaChitra.)

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**A different experience**

An anonymous writer referring to MMM's comment in Short 'N' Snappy (MM, March 16th) writes:

Our experience has been quite the opposite. Here is a used Prepaid Auto / Taxi Service Voucher which shows how easy it is to get an auto at Bangalore Railway Station. Couldn't this system be implemented at Chennai's Central Station / Main Bus Depots?

Welcome to Bangalore

Pre-paid Auto/Taxi Service

Joint venture between the Govt. Railway Police and Auto-Taxi Drivers Association

□ Bangalore City Railway Station □ Cantonment Railway Station

Receipt No.	Vehicle No.	Driver's Name	Date	Time
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Destination/Km	METTUR			8.00
Fare	Rs. 50.00	Baggage Charges	Rs. 00	Service Charges
			Rs. 1.00	Total
				52.00

• 24-hour helpline number  
• Keep the Voucher with you at all times  
• Do not use the Voucher for services not specified in the conditions  
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Should you have any grievances please call the 24-hour Railway Police Control Room at 2871491 or the Superintendent's Office at 28791491

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### Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Current affairs questions are from the period March 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

- Who smashed the fastest double century, off just 153 balls, in Tests, on March 16th?
- Natasha Singh, who was found dead in strange circumstances, was the daughter-in-law of which prominent Congress leader?
- Name the British actor, an Oscar-winner for playing 'Gandhi', who was knighted recently.
- How did a school dropout, but a computer whiz, from Pondicherry achieve infamy recently?
- What distinction did Halle Berry achieve at the Oscars?
- One more on the Oscars. Which film beat *Lagaan* to the Best Foreign Film honours?
- Which place in India will soon have Asia's longest ropeway?
- To pass which contentious Bill was an historic joint session of Parliament convened on March 26th?
- Alexander Dumas, the author of *The Three Musketeers*, is to receive France's highest posthumous honour. What?
- Name the eight-time National badminton champion and one of India's all-time best players who called it a day recently.

- What vehicles were banned from the city's arterial roads effective March 16th?
- Which famous temple went online on March 20th?
- Name the legendary stationery maker, known for its Hoe & Co. diaries and Kohinor pencils, which shut shop recently.
- Name the Chancellor of Avinashalingam Deemed University and a Padma Shri recipient who died recently.
- Which Chennai-based scientist is to head the Nobel Prize-winning Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs?
- Name the DMK and TMC candidates elected to the Rajya Sabha from the State.
- What is the cost of 'order copies' as fixed by the Madras HC on March 18th?
- Where in the State is an Agriculture Export Zone for cut flowers coming up?
- One for the cinema buffs. What is Rajinikanth's next film, launched with great fanfare?
- What is the special feature of the East Coast Road between 22/3 and 135/5 km which came into effect on March 24th?

(Answers on page 10)

### 150 years ago

## Asia's first railway

The Railway Age dawned in Asia at 3.35 p.m. on Saturday, April 16, 1853, when the inaugural train of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIP) chugged out of then Bombay's Borebunder station on its historic run to Tannah (Thane). The 20-mile (32 km) route had a branch from Dadar to Mahim.

Following what began 150 years ago, eight more railways were built in Asia, all of them in India. The second was the Madras (Royapuram) to Wallajah (Arcot) line. The first railway in Asia outside India was inaugurated in the former Dutch East Indies (present Indonesia) in 1864. It ran between Semarang and Tanggung.

The architect and father of India's basic railway network was James Andrew Brown Ramsay, better remembered by his title: Lord Dalhousie. Governor General of India in 1848-1856, he wrote a mammoth Minute in 1853, which is preserved in the National Archives, New Delhi. He wrote in it, "Great tracts are teeming with produce they cannot dispose of. Others are scantily bearing what they would carry in abundance, if only it could be conveyed whither it is needed. England is calling aloud for the cotton which India does already produce... and would produce sufficient in quality and plentiful in quantity if only there were provided the fitting means of conveyance for it from distant plains to the several ports adapted for its shipment. Every increase of facilities for trade has been attended... with an increased demand for articles of European produce in the most distant markets of India. Ships from every port of the world crowd our ports in search of produce which we have, or could obtain in the interior, but which at present we cannot profitably fetch to them; and new markets are opening to us on this side of the globe, under circumstances which defy the foresight of the wisest to estimate their probable value or calculate their future extent."

When the foregoing is examined in the context of what early railways achieved in the West, a glaring contradiction comes to light.

The introduction of public steam railways in Europe (beginning with England in 1825) changed forever the pace and quality of life. The creation of the steam locomotive (1804) in England was a great inventive effort of the early industrial pioneers and was part of the development of land transport and industrialisation in general. Those moves brought about the change from a feudal and agricultural society to a democratic and industrial one. The locomotive was for many perhaps the first real fruit of the Industrial Revolution (England, about 1760), the first concrete evidence that the new technology could be used to serve the general public as well as impose upon it the hardships of factory labour. A product of industrialisation, it stimulated in its turn the fast-growing new industries whose requirements had led to its birth.

Machine-made, mass-pro-

duced, goods meant standard quality at affordable prices. This fuelled the demand for raw material and the resultant high production called for aggressive marketing. In addition, the railways offered speedy and comfortable travel at cheap tariffs as compared to earlier horse-drawn stage coaches. As in all trades, men exchanged jobs in search of promotion and better living conditions, and inevitably they took with them a good deal of know-how from previous firms. In such a manner is invention cross-fertilised.

In striking contrast to the developments in Europe described above, was the performance of railways in India during the second half of the 19th Century. They were perfect role models of typical colonial railways that were to be established in the rest of Asia and, later, in Africa. Far from encouraging the setting up of new industries, the railways sounded the death

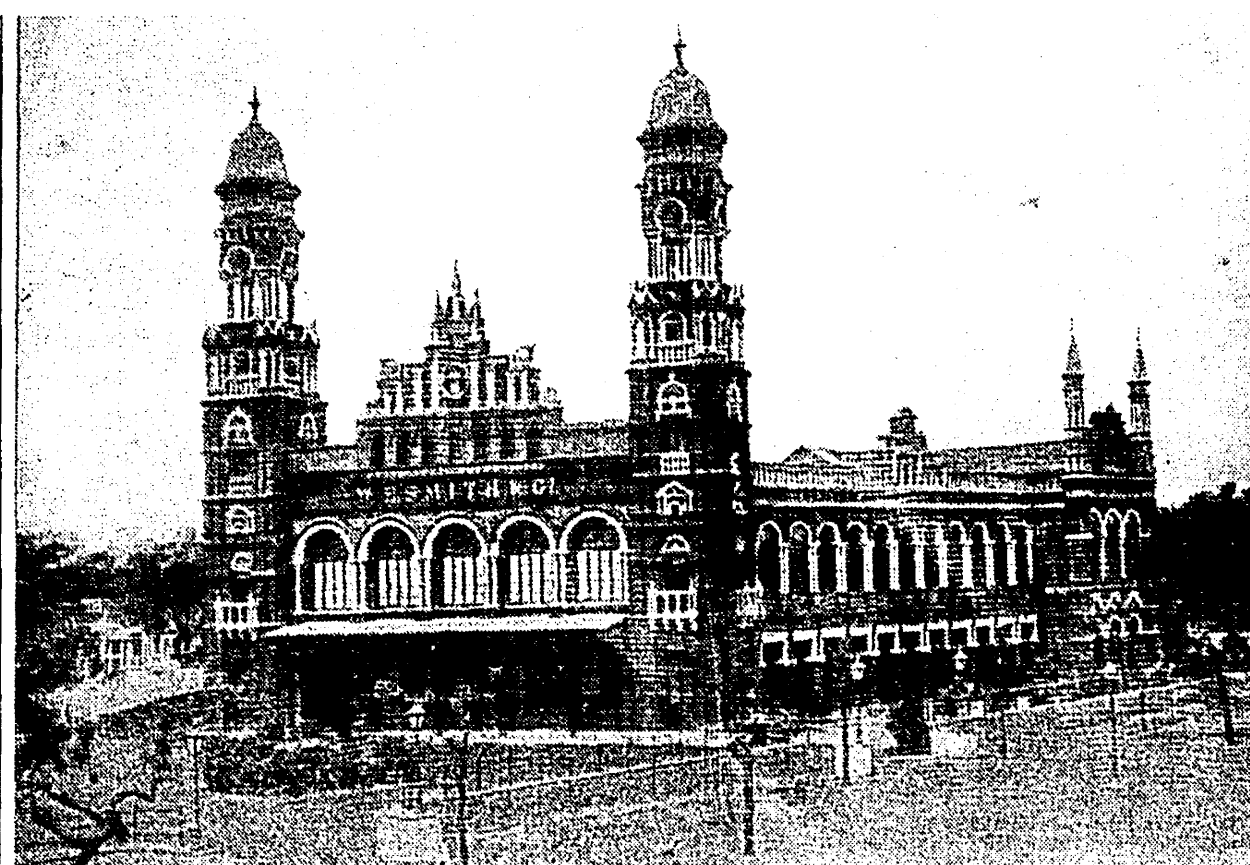
knell of India's cottage industries. Their two-fold brief was to collect raw produce from the hinterland of exporting ports and transport it to those ports for shipment to the United Kingdom, where it was turned into mass-produced and, therefore, cheap goods. When these machine-made goods were imported by India, its railway network distributed them into the markets spread over the vast country. Indeed, Lord Dalhousie's plan had succeeded beyond his expectations!

Even the very construction of railway lines in India sustained British industry in more than one way. Initially, almost every input, with the exception of perhaps labour and bricks/stoned, was imported from Britain. Ian J. Kerr, Professor of History at the University of Manitoba, Canada, has collated some revealing statistics in this regard. For example, Indian railway construction during the

ten years 1853-1863 added some 4,000 route km to the country's railway route length, plus there were additional lengths of lines in different states of completion. During that period, "3571 ships from the United Kingdom brought 2,764,781 tons of railway material — rails, sleepers, locomotives, etc., valued at £15,128,856" to India. Further, "Each mile of railway built in India through the 1860s required, on an average, a separate ship carrying some 600 tons of material from Britain."

By the close of 1873, there was 9,166 route km of railway operating in India, plus lines in various stages of construction. The corresponding figures for the ensuing 10-year period were 16,809 in 1883, some 29,700 in 1893 and 43,372 in 1903. The enormity of this construction project is staggering. Equally mind-boggling is the extent and

(Continued on page 10)



Our OLD is an archival picture of what is now called the Bharath (Insurance) Building but which, at the time this photograph was taken, had been built as the Kardyl Building. Designed by J.H. Stephens for W.E. Smith & Co. Ltd., in 1894, it was inaugurated in 1897, when it was described as "a palatial structure... one of the sights of the city... ten times the size of those which were occupied originally". With its trapezoidal facade, unequal on the parallel sides, and equal on the angled sides, and 100-foot towers, it made, for many years, "a far greater show than any other commercial building on Mount Road". Sadly, in its neglected state today, it presents a sorry sight — but, curiously, because of its design — Indo-Saracenic in style — it attracts the immediate attention of newcomers to the city and anyone with an interest in architecture.

Smith & Co., the leading pharmacists in the city from the 1870s to the 1920s, had the building planned with a magnificent 60' x 40' showroom, consultancy rooms for doctors and dentists, quarters for the Company's assistants, even a café and beer bar, and manufacturing space. A garden in front and along the sides (barely seen in the picture) added a touch of green but ensured the building's appearance was not hidden.

Our NEW is really another OLD, but is a view of the PRESENT. When Bharath Insurance bought the property in 1934, from Spencer's who had taken it over from Smith's in 1925, they built in that triangular garden space in front of the art deco building that was named the Bharath Insurance Building. The new building effectively hid the main entrance to Kardyl Building — and with that there was less attention paid to the older building. But it is attention that this bit of striking architecture calls for. Will it ever get it from its present owners, the cash-flush Life Insurance Corporation of India?



Waterlogging in the campus of the Vidyodaya schools.

# Go green with josh

A few months ago, Ford India announced the winners of the Ford Conservation & Environmental Grant (C & E) Programme in an awards ceremony held at IIT, Madras. Dr. Palanichami, Secretary, Environment & Forest Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, presented the grant to five winners — two in the adult and three in the youth categories.

A grant of Rs. 15 lakh was to be distributed among the winners to support projects that would "help in the preservation of their local environment, heritage and natural resources" and also recognise "deserving individuals and organisations committed to environmental protection and conservation".

In the inter-school 'Go

coir medium in the double concentric ring model (the outer is metal and the inner wire mesh), the waste is added and the process facilitated by tubes provided for aeration. Organic manure can be removed every thirty days as compared to the usual 90-day period", the students explained. Their teacher-guide added, "During the implementation, we intend putting up 40 bins (ten within the school campus, and the others in apartments and hotels nearby) as well as ensure regular maintenance of the bins by student volunteers. The bulk of biodegradable waste will be collected from the hotels, through an arrangement with the local Exnora group. Now, we need to focus on how to carry out the

pendent on the Government for potable water and, in the long run, prove a model for other schools to follow."

The third schools' winner was a project to proliferate vermiculture through community participation and it was submitted by Nithyla Rosalynn and L. Shubakara of the CSI Ewart School. The project aims at spreading awareness about vermiculture among students, leading to its implementation at the school and in students' homes. It is intended to spread this awareness through the community in a gradual, but sustained manner both through information empowerment and tie-ups with professionals like landscape architects.

Two months after the announcement of the awards, the students say, "The demonstration bin and vermicompost pits in the school have aroused a lot of interest among students, teachers and gardeners. Many have implemented the ideas in their homes. The gardeners, who were earlier burning the wastes, use the vermicompost pits as a hygienic, useful and easy method of disposal of organic waste. And we are able to use good quality compost for manuring the school garden."

In the adult category from the 250 applications, two winners were selected — the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust's project on reptile preservation, titled 'Integrated Environment Education', and the Wildlife Society of Orissa's sea turtle conservation project, 'Operation Kachhapa'.

The Conservation and Environment Grants, now spread worldwide, were initiated by the parent Ford Motor Company in Europe twenty years ago, and are said to have made a difference to "11,000 individuals and 40,000 projects". Their initiative in India began last year in Delhi, and this year in Chennai through inviting schools to 'Go Green with Josh'. Grants are awarded once a year, and all applications are reviewed by an independent panel of experts against the following parameters — usefulness and practicability, track record, originality, relevance to Indian contexts, replicability and long-term impact. Just shows that 'eco-industry' is catching on, in very many ways. And there is still some hope for the earth, if there are people who care!

Shobha Menon



Waterlogging in the campus of the Vidyodaya schools.

Green with Josh' campaign, 40 schools in Chennai were invited to participate. From these, 18 were chosen initially and then three short-listed for the awards. One of the winners, the Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan Senior Secondary, K.K. Nagar, is to implement a project on vermicomposting. Student representatives Meenakshisundaram and Ayshwarya Subramaniam presented a modified version of a vermicomposting bin, and to implement the project the school has received a grant of Rs. 60,000. "In this model, the common problems of water-logging and predation of earthworms are avoided. With an innovative

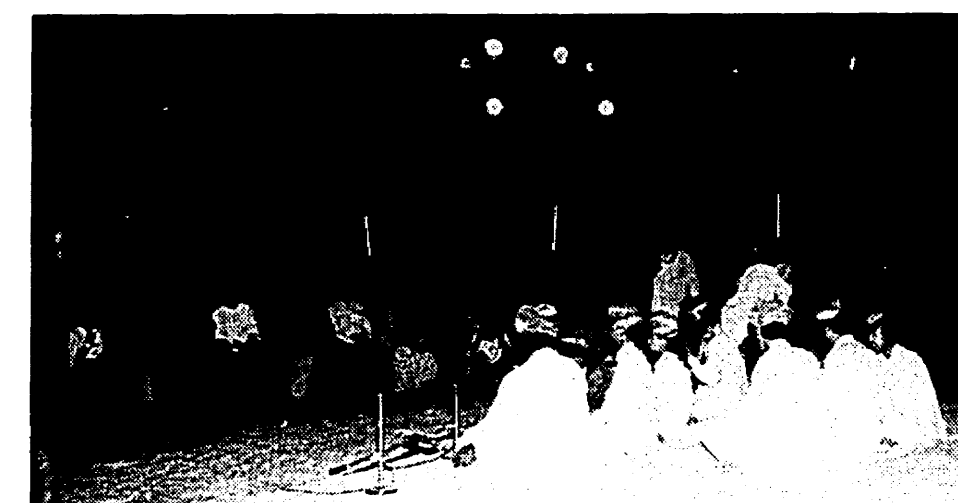
exercise in a sustainable manner."

Another winner was the 'Rainwater harvesting' project of the Vidyodaya Schools — a fall-out of the acute water crisis faced by the school in spite of water-logging of the campus during rains. The schools have received a Rs. 77,000 grant, which will be utilised for harvesting rainwater through systematically planned terrace drainpipes and recharge pits. Student volunteers say, "With 2200 students and a 200-strong staff, our schools are situated on a 13½-acre plot where there is ample scope for harvesting rainwater. We intend to make ourselves self-sufficient and less de-

### HERITAGE PROFICIENCY FOR SCOUTS & GUIDES

(Continued from page 1)

- Individual activities for cultural education
  - Keeping a diary about the city in which they live
  - Quiz programmes with cultural themes
  - Collecting information on poets, scholars, artists and crafts of the region
  - Preparing a small school museum with collection made by the scouts and guides.
- and take other children or their parent around a monument
- Adopt a monument and care for it
- List buildings in their region
- Inform the local authority of damage/problems to the cultural heritage of the region studied.



A folk performance in the Museum grounds.

## A celebration of folklore

For almost a fortnight in March, Chennai was the venue for the discerning folklore enthusiast. Organised by the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), in association with the Ford Foundation, the NFSC Folk Festival 2002 was conceived "to celebrate the Museum's 150th anniversary and the Ford Foundation's 50th year in India", and to persuade people "to discover modernity through artistic traditions."

In the Centenary Hall of the Museum, I saw Rajasthani performers one evening enact the quaint Phad performance (in which large-scale horizontal paintings on cloth are used to portray the epic lives of local hero-gods Pabuji and Devji worshipped as the incarnations of Vishnu), while at the newly constructed open-air theatre, the colourful and vibrant Maharashtrian Tamasha played to a motley group of viewers (who, in spite of the mosquitoes, seemed to enjoy both the performance as well as the tantalising fried groundnuts).

Ten genres of folk paintings were properly curated, labelled and exhibited in eight galleries in the city. The 'Meet the Artists' sessions at the art galleries were truly absorbing. According to C. Subramanian, a Kalamkari artist from Kalahasti, "The more art becomes popular, the more artisans seem to get exploited by unscrupulous middlemen. Such interactive workshops and whole-hearted support from organisations like the NFSC will go a long way in contributing to the true artisan's welfare."

Lakshmi Krishnamurthy, an expert on Thanjavur paintings, felt, "It is amazing to unravel the underlying unifying thread among all these many Indian styles of painting. You never cease to marvel at the beauty of it all."

Kuldeep Kothari, Co-ordinator, Rupayan Sansthan, Rajasthan Institute of Folklore, felt, "For these traditional performers, this Festival has been a process of growth and learning. Feedback from audiences across the country can only improve your art."

The NFSC Folk Festival 2002 was definitely an experience — both for art lovers in Chennai as well as the participating artists. Offering artistic collaboration and exchange, it was an opportunity for the folk artists and art enthusiasts to learn from each other, facilitating cultural exchanges and fuelling creative processes. According to the Director of the NFSC, M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, "The festival was enthusiastically supported by the people of Chennai from all walks of life". — S.M.

## A BOOK ROOTED IN YOUNG REALITY

(Continued from page 5)

gloomy person," he says with candour, so there is a sense of melancholy.

All the characters, be it Solomon Dorai, Daniel, or Aaron, are convinced about what they are doing, but at no point are they really in control as they think.

Does the character Kannan represent the "browning" of India — the person best equipped to take over the Joe Wilson mantle, with characteristics intact, with only the skin colour changing?

"Yes, but he too does get diverted from his purpose... like all the others," Davidar points out.

Nobody ever really knows whether one is going to succeed or fail, and yet this doesn't affect one's actions in any way. Ultimately, some factor within propels these characters to their own doom.

It is the old "I can't go on; I will go on" feeling.

This is fiction rooted in young David's reality, and his need for answers, to create a solid setting of the South India of many decades ago. In the end, you realise the River Chevathar is not just a fictional river; it is a vehicle, flowing, picking up and never stopping until the journey is done, gathering images of a world that has gone, and yet one that carries the reasons and answers for the present. As the many-hued wheels of life turn, no one, big and influential, small and ordinary, dreamers and entrepreneurs alike, loners or those surrounded by family... no one is left untouched or undamaged.

The fictional river Chevathar knows this.

And that makes it real.

(Concluded)

# Time to improve T.N. Cricket

This year, the Tamil Nadu team lost its Ranji match against the Railways in the quarter-final round of the knock-out stage. Surely that's food for thought.

In years past, the selection for the State team used to be solely based on the players' performances in the league matches, the prestigious Varsity matches and the Buchi Babu tournament. But thanks to the intense rivalries among the leading corporate houses in the city, the accent appears to have shifted to winning the Palayampatti Shield, with players from outside the State at the cost of local talent, which naturally stunts the growth of cricketers in the State.

It is incumbent on the TNCA to have completed more than half of the first division matches (5) well ahead of the

beginning of the Ranji matches, especially as the performances of the players in these matches should serve as a yardstick for selection. This will also serve as a promising conduit for the junior selection well in time before December at the latest. What is now happening is a rush of a few First Division matches immediately after the commencement of the season in July itself (nearly 5 matches) and the rest

a lot for cricket, points out that the money spent by the TNCA and industrialists of Tamil Nadu sponsoring cricket in Madras put together is more than the total money spent on the promotion of cricket by all the other States together in the country! But what has Tamil Nadu got out of it?

With all the focus on the First Division, Lower Division City League Teams are totally

• by S.R. JAGANNATHAN

in fits and starts from January upto sometimes even March. What is the earthly use of those matches when performances of the existing cricketers or any new finds will not help their growth or entry into any representative matches?

An industrialist who spends

neglected. There are 48 league teams in the 5th division, 36 in the 4th division and 24 teams each in the 3rd and 2nd divisions. 132 teams play only 11 league matches each. What is the encouragement given by the TNCA to all these teams. Are 11 one-day matches enough?

What are we doing for the promising players in these Lower Division league teams?

Even a good performance is not noticed by the media. Some Club Secretaries inform the press late about the matches and even the league scores are not published. Lower Division league matches are posted at far off places and it is really an ordeal for the players to turn up in time. In the 1950s and earlier years, matches would start by 10.30 a.m., with permission occasionally to start late by 11 a.m.

Why doesn't the TNCA form a talent-finding committee by requesting knowledgeable cricketers of yesteryears like M.G. Bhavanarayan, M. Srinivasan, T. Doraippan, Kedar-nath and R. Chandrasekar, to watch Lower Division matches and simply inform the TNCA that X or Y from a Lower Division team has a good future and deserves encouragement? Such recommended players should be given separate net practice and their names published in the media to encourage them.

All the 5th and 4th Division teams, numbering 84 clubs, should unite together and see

that TNCA considers their difficulties and supplies them with two good cricket bats and kit at subsidised price and further requirements at cost price. The expenditure for the TNCA would not be much, but the Association would be fulfilling an obligation.

The TNCA should pick two or three teams from all the talented youngsters in the Lower Divisions and arrange one-day matches against one of the four First Division teams, thus encouraging the young cricketers and allowing them to learn against superior opposition.

The full State team should also play as a team against leading First Division teams before the Ranji Season begins. The M.J. Gopalan Trophy match too should be played only after Pongal in January, to avoid bad weather spoiling the matches scheduled. It is time the TNCA took cricketing steps to bring the Ranji Trophy to the State. — (Courtesy: Straight Bat)

## Answers to Quiz

1. Nathan Astle of New Zealand; 2. Natwar Singh; 3. Ben Kingsley; 4. He became the first offender in the country in a cyber crime case, for e-mail spamming; 5. The first Black performer to receive the Best Actress Oscar; 6. *No Man's Land* from Bosnia; 7. Gulmarg, as part of the Gulmarg Gondola Project; 8. The Bill on POTO; 9. A place in 'The Pantheon' in Paris; 10. Madhumita Bisht.

\* \* \*

11. 'Slow-moving' vehicles, like cycle rickshaws, fish carts etc.; 12. Meenakshi temple ([www.madurai-meenakshi.org](http://www.madurai-meenakshi.org)); 13. V. Perumal Chetty and Sons; 14. Rajammal Devadas; 15. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan; 16. R. Shanmugasundaram and G.K. Vasan; 17. Rs. 35; 18. Dharmapuri District; 19. Baba; 20. It became a 'Tollway'.

## ASIA'S FIRST RAILWAY

(Continued from page 8) the variety of industry in Britain which Indian railway construction sustained. India's railway route kilometrage peaked at 69,392 in 1937, then dropped to 66,091 in 1938 on the separation of administration of Burma (Myanmar), contracted slightly to 65,203 on the eve of Partition in 1947, then lost 10,522 to Pakistan (West and East) and stands today at about 64,000. The silver-lining to this encapsulated history is the fact that the country is today almost self-sufficient in railway inputs.

More nuggets of interesting

railway history, culled by Dr. J.N. Westwood, are: In 1870, nine-tenths of railway employees were Indian, but none occupied high or responsible positions. By 1910, of the 800-odd higher administrative posts in the State railways, only 47 were held by Indians. By 1868, of the 50,000 holders of Indian Railway shares, hardly 400 were Indians; there would have been more if it had been made possible to transfer such shares in India as well as in the United Kingdom. In 1921, the Government of India, together with small lengths of track attribut-

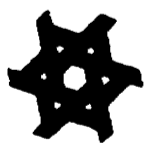
able to provincial or local governments, owned 43,300 route km of railway but worked only 14,300; the Princely States owned 7,000 route km and worked 4,700; while private companies owned only 9,200 route km but operated the largest chunk, namely 40,000. Of the companies which looked after running Government-owned lines, all had their headquarters in London, whereas of the companies which ran privately-owned railway lines, most were domiciled in India.

After 1947, the railways of Independent India were

grouped under a common identity, namely Indian Government Railways (IGR) for a short period of time. The first regrouping of the lines during the early 1950s produced six zonal railways, of which Central Railways was formed by the merger of the entire network of the GIP with those of the Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway and the Scindia State Railway. As successor of Asia's first railway route, Central Railway sports an appropriate logo, namely 'Pioneers and Leaders'.

G.D. Patwardhan

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