

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

INSIDE

- Endangered eco-systems
- The model civil servant
- The midnight murder
- The Loho Theatre
- A college challenged

Vol. XII No. 8

FREE ISSUE

August 1-15, 2002



Now, competition here  
I didn't expect!

### Face off

A wise man once said, "It pays to advertise".

Judging by the number of advertisements that come flying at you from all directions, that idea obviously has many takers.

Watching TV, for instance, is really about viewing advertisements with a few minutes of any particular show thrown in just to keep you from getting up and doing something useful, like reading that over-due library book or getting some exercise.

But, am I being over-sensitive, or is there an aggressive pulling-the-competition-down element in advertisements these days?

Have you seen a couple of soft-drink giants slug it out recently?

A little like people in a running race, trying to win by using ingenious methods like sticking their respective legs out to trip up their competition.

I'm no expert... but isn't it easier to merely run faster?

It isn't just soft drinks manufacturers who are pulling up shirt sleeves, talking out of the sides of their mouths, and generally registering pugnacity. From cooking oil to cars, everyone's in a let's-get-'em mode.

This show of muscle leaves the customer a little confused.

What exactly is the message? Is it that it isn't so much that your product is the best, but that the other guy's is laughably inferior?

So, final choice depends on who has the last word - or so they think.

Ranjitha Ashok

## Old Madras Club(house) under threat

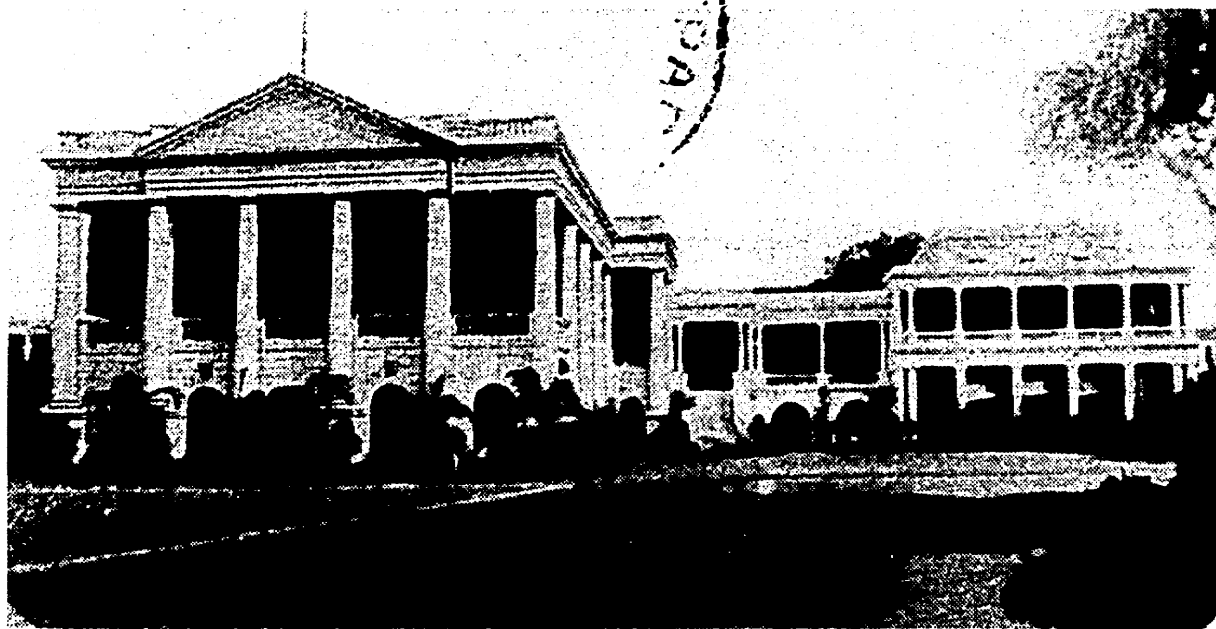
(By A Special Correspondent)

Under threat of demolition is the first home of the Madras Club, whose reputation as 'The Ace of Clubs' was built in these premises in *Express Estate* at the end of Clubhouse Road, off Mount Road. This home was developed around the nucleus of a gardenhouse that the Club acquired shortly before its opening date, May 15, 1832. The gardenhouse had been built in 1809/1810 by J.D. White who had sold it to a Webster who, in turn, sold it to the Club. Considerable major development over the next thirty years, culminating in a major remodelling by Robert Chisholm, the most famous architect of the day, saw the building take in 1867 the handsome Palladian shape it maintains today — even if it remains in derelict condition.

It was in the changed conditions after World War II, with an independent India looming on the horizon and an exodus of its all-White membership, that the Club decided to sell the clubhouse and all the acres it had over the years acquired around it. The huge clubhouse and its vast gardens were sold for Rs.13.5 lakh to Ramnath Goenka in 1946, who allowed the Club to maintain its main facility till it moved into its new clubhouse, near the Sapphire Theatre, in 1948. The first clubhouse was then rented out to the Post Office, and others subsequently, but gradually fell into disuse. And its fall into a dilapidated state was the consequence.

After Ramnath Goenka's death, the property passed into the hands of his daughter-in-law, Saroj Goenka, and since has been painted over and over again for various film 'shoots'. With all this 'misuse' by the film-makers, the deterioration of the building was inevitable.

Nevertheless, architects and engineers with a knowledge of conservation felt certain that the building could be restored. But litigation, among other things, prevented the fruition of restoration plans and the conversion of the magnificent property into a heritage hotel as envisioned by Charles Correa, perhaps the country's leading architect. A couple of years ago, these plans were revived — and welcomed by *Madras Musings* — when a local industrial group teamed with a Singapore group and promised to restore the building as a heritage hotel even more splendid than Singapore's Raffles Hotel, once the pride of a colony and in an independent nation restored as its new pride. Those plans, too, for one reason or another, did



Our OLD comprises two pictures this fortnight, showing two different stages of development of White's Bungalow which became the first home of the Madras Club. The picture on top, from a pre-1867 painting, shows White's Bungalow in the centre but with first storey verandah and ground

### THE OLD...

level portico added to it together with the quarters on the left and the library and billiards room on right. The picture on top shows how Robert Chisholm improved the previous facade with tall pillars supporting a huge

### ... & THE PRESENT

pediment and colonnading around the three sides of the front portion of the building to which had been added on all three sides verandahs on the first floor. Our picture of the PRESENT, taken a couple of years ago, shows the sad state the empty building is in. Even in this view, however, the building looks handsome; but wander through it, and you'll cry to see the dilapidated state film-makers, the elements and neglect have left it in. But don't let that sad state fool you; it can be restored and brought back to a condition where it can be as much a part of the city's pride as Police Headquarters.



(Continued on page 7)



# Dare these eco-systems hope for protection?

For some years now *Madras Musings* has been drawing the attention of the authorities and the public to the threat being posed to two unique eco-systems by Government itself. But a couple of recent reports have had *The Man From Madras Musings* looking at what seems like a silver lining on a distant horizon and hoping that it will not prove a mirage.

As in the case of what is happening in the Adyar Estuary, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has begun to show an interest in the fate of the Pallikarai Marsh. And *MMM* is glad that there is at least one department of Government making its voice heard – though *MMM* is not too optimistic about what will come out of its activism. But the age of miracles is not over and Doubting Thomases like *MMM* would be only too glad to be surprised.

In the case of the Adyar Estuary, the TNPCB has been asking questions about the sand mining in the area and the road-building that's been going on – even if it is claimed to be a temporary road. The questions asked do not appear to have stopped the work. In fact, *MMM* notes that the old Elphinstone Bridge has been affected to an extent by this work. And the CMDA's Heritage Committee should be asking questions about THAT, for it had plans to make that bridge a bird-watchers' promenade. (ED: Also see page 3.)

The latest activity in the Adyar is only a continuation of a variety of similar activities going on in and around the area – with all the departments concerned either abetting them or watching helplessly. Does the TNPCB seriously think that things are going to be any different with respect to what's left of the Pallikarai Marsh? From the time the 40 sq.km. wetland was first touched, *Madras Musings* has been writing about the threat and *MMM* has been crying himself hoarse asking for a halt to all the building activity in the area. But with Central and State Government departments the prime encroachers here, who is going to stop them? Today, the marsh has shrunk to a quarter of its size, and the TNPCB is urging the Centre to declare it a protected area and have it protected by the Forest Department. Isn't that what the Forest Department is supposed to be doing in the Adyar Estuary and the Creek? Has it been able to stop any of the activity there? What makes anyone think it is going to be any different in the Pallikarai marsh area? A Court order might stop it, but the courts were not exactly forthcoming in the Adyar Estuary area – which is one reason for the spirit of unrestrained activity in the estuary area. In these circumstances, only mass movements will make a difference. Anyone out there to get Narmada-like movements going?

## Endangered island

Just as the Pallikarai Marsh has shrunk mainly by governmental 'development' projects, it is Government again that has been threatening the Kattupalli eco-system north of Madras. First it was with a TIDCO-sponsored petrochemicals 'park' (now that's the latest way of describing harmful development – say 'park' and it immediately becomes 'green!'). Whether the thought of an Environmental Impact Assessment has had the project-planners thinking again, *The Man From Madras Musings* does not know, but *MMM* is glad that the planners are at least having second thoughts about what they had planned. That, however, does not appear to have stopped the Electricity Board from eyeing the area for a third thermal plant, as though the second, already raised here, has not done enough damage to the environment! *MMM* only hopes the TNEB will also, in due course, faced with an EIA, have second thoughts.

Even if the TNEB has second thoughts, there's someone else surely likely to be eyeing the area for industrial development with the expanding harbour so close, unless an alternative eco-friendly

places like Pulicat-Kattupalli, Tranquebar, Mandapam, the beaches on either side of Kanniyakumari, parts of Rameswaram, the Palni Hills and the Anamalais. Those are areas where real eco-tourism can be developed – and if there's a commitment to that, maybe Kattupalli will be saved.

## Marine Park at last?

From 1980, the Tamil Nadu Government has been talking of establishing a Marine Park in Mandapam and setting up tourist facilities in the area. Over 20 years after Government's notification of intent, Government has taken a more concrete step to get work underway on the Gulf of Mannar National Marine Park – a foundation stone has been laid and a seven-year plan announced for the development of the facility.

*The Man From Madras Musings* has heard from many who have visited the waters around the 21 islands that will be part of the park area that much of the coral in the area has been vandalised and that unrestricted fishing, apart from the blasting, has endangered much of the flora and the fauna of the area. *MMM* wonders how much will really be left to attract tourists if the destruction of the habitat continues

servation. *MMM* wonders whether the TNPCB will invite all the other government departments concerned with Marina to work with it and whether this Government team will work with CRAG to clean up the Marina, make it one of the world's best beaches and prevent it from being not only soiled but also built on – which is the plan of at least a couple of other government departments. If the Marina is not only going to be saved but also preserved, it is a job for Government departments, environmentalists, conservationists, NGOs and, above all, the public. Who will take the first step to getting them all together? The TNPCB or CRAG?

Whoever it is, CRAG's appeal – and the TNPCB's – and plans do not deserve to go unheeded. Let's all join together to save the Marina.

## Let's go easy

Two recent news items, if those making the statements were quoted correctly, rather astounded *The Man From Madras Musings*.

In the first instance, a responsible chamber of commerce suggested REDUCTION of regularisation fees and extension of time to those who have broken the law

well be the way the rules of the road are intended to be enforced in the future.

If responsible chambers of commerce and police officers take this kind of attitude to wrongdoing, a city becoming less respectful of law by the year is heading for chaos. Breaking building regulations will lead to a concrete jungle, infrastructural violations will lead only to less and less of the share of the infrastructural pie for each citizen, and traffic on the roads can only become chaotic and each vehicle-driver a law unto himself. *MMM* unfortunately believes that unless discipline is enforced, the obeying of the rules is insisted on, the rule of law not made meaningless through acts of leniency and worse, this city can only continue to slide downhill to an abyss of lawlessness where no rules exist. Doesn't anyone out there want to do something to bring back Chennai to that splendid position Madras once enjoyed as the most disciplined city in the country and one where the law was respected?

## In brief

\* Consumer redressal started out with a lot of fanfare and in the early years of the consumer courts, consumer organisations and affected customers received quick hearings and prompt justice. Government too appeared to view consumer courts with favour and ensured they had presidents and members to function expeditiously. Sadly, that's not the case these days, *The Man From Madras Musings* finds. At present seven of the 24 District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums in the State are headless and ten await appointment of the second member. As these fora each need its President and at least one member to conduct a hearing, the majority of them in the State are unable to proceed with their work. And that is typical of so much government and non-governmental activity around us – the lack of sustainability. When, *MMM* wonders, are we ever going to see the commitment necessary to ensure continuity?

\* Horticulture is a major moneyspinner in Maharashtra and is a substantial earner of foreign exchange. *The Man From Madras Musings* is glad to see the Tamil Nadu Government taking a cue from the Maharashtra government and drawing up plans to make the wasteland in the State home of a horticultural revolution. That revolution will, it is hoped, come about through 1000-acre leases to each corporate interested in diversifying into horticulture and through setting up in each block in the State a horticulture support system or industry. If both plans take off, a horticulture revolution can really make the face of the State change. *MMM* hopes that will truly come about through a bureaucratic commitment not to allow plans to remain on paper.

— MMM

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

scheme is suggested to both the State and Central authorities and they are persuaded to buy it. *MMM* is glad to hear that just such a scheme has been suggested, recommending that the Kattupalli area be made an environmental heritage zone where eco-tourism could be promoted. Some time ago, INTACH-Tamil Nadu was talking about exactly the same thing for Pulicat and its environs and it was suggested at the time that Kattupalli be included in the grand plan to be developed. Little has come of INTACH-TN's initial enthusiasm, with the Dutch who first mooted the idea dropping out when the support required was talked about.

But *MMM* is convinced that a marriage of INTACH's initial plan for Pulicat and the present suggestions for Kattupalli will be exactly what the doctor ordered for eco-friendly tourism to develop in the area. And for that to happen, the State and Central Tourism authorities need to get together and meet those offering these ideas for the development of Kattupalli and Pulicat.

The TNPCB has listed 29 sites for eco-conservation and the development of tourism. Most of those sites are pilgrim destinations and the way pilgrims treat their destinations is anything but eco-friendly, nor does pilgrim traffic swell the coffers as tourism can – even domestic tourism. And to get the tourist, the TNPCB should team with the Tourism Department and look at

at the pace it has been going on these past several years.

Sufficient guards to protect the area, offering alternative means of sustenance to the fisherfolk in the islands and coastal villages of the area, and an education and training programme aimed at getting the residents of the area wanting to protect the biosphere have to be priorities from Day One. Even as the foundation stone is laid, *MMM* wonders whether these plans have been put in place to get underway no sooner the priority of the unveiling of a memorial for posterity is over.

## Changing the Marina

And so the face of the Marina is going to be changed. We're going to make it look like the fabulous beaches that attract thousands abroad! Will you join in the grand endeavour to change the Marina's looks and put its reputation of being the world's second longest toilet behind it?

That's the appeal of the Citizens' Rights Activists' Group, which is backing its plea to the courts for action with an appeal to the public with a striking advertisement that just might be the first of a campaign. *The Man From Madras Musings* is delighted to see this appeal to the public to get together with CRAG and change the Marina.

It is an appeal that comes at a time when the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has earmarked the Marina as one of its 29 sites for environmental con-

servation. *MMM* wonders whether the TNPCB will invite all the other government departments concerned with Marina to work with it and whether this Government team will work with CRAG to clean up the Marina, make it one of the world's best beaches and prevent it from being not only soiled but also built on – which is the plan of at least a couple of other government departments. If the Marina is not only going to be saved but also preserved, it is a job for Government departments, environmentalists, conservationists, NGOs and, above all, the public. Who will take the first step to getting them all together? The TNPCB or CRAG?

Whoever it is, CRAG's appeal – and the TNPCB's – and plans do not deserve to go unheeded. Let's all join together to save the Marina.

What astounds *MMM* is that in the first case a responsible body wants flagrant flouters of the law to be dealt with leniently. As it is, regularisation is a flouting of the law that the Government is encouraging, but to request just nominal penalties is truly to make the whole process meaningless. Go ahead and break the law and we'll plead for you to get a rap across the knuckles – if that – seems to be this chamber of commerce's thinking.

Rather similar is the attitude in the other case. A rule broken is a rule broken – you can't consider the breaking of any rule as blatant or less blatant or inadvertent. The penalty for each breaking of the rule takes into account the seriousness of the nature of the offence; you can't dilute that even further. To make matters worse, it would appear that the breaking of the rules becomes a less serious offence during the office-hour rush, in this officer's view. So there would appear to be degrees and degrees to the breaking of a rule. And if judgement of these degrees is going to become discretionary – don't harass him, harass him less, harass him a bit more, really harass him, could

## OUR READERS WRITE

### 'Tilak Ghat', please

The multifaceted sacrifices, services and the message of the life of Lokamanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) can never be forgotten or ignored. "Swaraj is our birthright and I will have it" is the imperishable message he passed on to all Indians. A member of the great trio, 'Lal, Bal, Pal', he was hailed as 'The Father of Indian Unrest'. Subrahmanya Bharati hailed his services in two beautiful songs *Vazha Tilakan namam* and *Tilaka Munivar Kon*.

During the Independence struggle and for long afterwards, the stretches of the Marina (in and around the present Seerani building) were called *Tilak Ghat* in his memory. Immortal leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Rajendra Babu, Rajaji, Kamaraj, Satyamurti and numerous others have addressed multitudes at the Ghat. The sacred sands were the scene of many great and laudable pronouncements of leaders who knew of nothing except suffering, surrender and sacrifice for national causes.

Unfortunately the memorable name 'Tilak Ghat' was sedulously shunted out and is now forgotten. Indian and Tamil culture condemns ingratitude as the worst crime. The name 'Tilak Ghat' should inspire present and future generations, young and old. 'Seerani Arangam' is an absurd substitute for it. Should stones and cement mortar rob the great leader of the glittering gold his due?

Will the Government of Tamil Nadu, the Corporation and the political parties restore the name 'Tilak Ghat' for official and other purposes in genuine gratitude to the great leader whom the Mandalay Jail shall never forget? May the virgin beauty of the Marina and the sands be restored by removing all avoidable brick and mortar structures. There is only one Marina and if India loses it due to transient considerations, the nation shall be the eternal loser.

N. Rajagopalan  
Chennai 600 020.

### Musings – and its readers

Kannadian-Kennedy and Hamilton-Barbers Bridge reminds me of 'Periphery Road' – the Tamil Nadu Government taking a cue from the Maharashtra government and drawing up plans to make the wasteland in the State home of a horticultural revolution. That revolution will, it is hoped, come about through 1000-acre leases to each corporate interested in diversifying into horticulture and through setting up in each block in the State a horticulture support system or industry. If both plans take off, a horticulture revolution can really make the face of the State change. *MMM* hopes that will truly come about through a bureaucratic commitment not to allow plans to remain on paper.

I am happy to find that issues raised in *Madras Musings* have an echo where it needs.

• The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has acted swiftly on the vandalism being perpetrated in the Adyar estuary. Notices have been issued to the P.W.D., L & T, etc. to stop forthwith the sand removal from the Adyar.

• The Chief Minister's request to FICCI to form a think-tank and a task force on infrastructure is another.

Let all of us associated with *Madras Musings* come together to form a "Chennai First" to make "Singara Chennai" a reality and not merely a political slogan.

M. Subramaniam  
Chennai 600 018.

### Aruvankadu's 'Canadians'

Reference Reader Narayana-Rswami's letter on Kennedy Street (MM, July 1st), such innocuous but hilarious howlers can emanate only from Madras that is Chennai!

I recollect when I joined the Cordite Factory, Aruvankadu (The Nilgiris) in 1960 and was allotted a bachelor accommodation in the Defence Estate, my enquiries regarding milk supply for morning coffee elicited a comforting reply from a senior colleague: "Kannadians will supply good quality milk and in time."

I was not familiar with Kannadigas and the way the word was pronounced (or heard by me), so it sounded like Canadians! I was flabbergasted how people came all the way from Canada to eke out a living by selling milk! The 'mystery' later unfolded to much mirth!

N. Dharmeshwaran  
Guduvanchery 603 202.

### Readers & their addresses!

Due to some readers' requests, you have decided not to publish the postal addresses of the correspondents (MM, July 1st). Every one should have a proper address and when the same is revealed in some form or the other, the readers need not be embarrassed unnecessarily. When a person writes a letter to a newspaper or a magazine, he or she desires to make a point public. When a matter becomes public, what is wrong in publishing their addresses?

I have no objection in any form to my address being made public, as such a gesture brings me many good things in the form of invitations to various functions.

In case of 'importuning' correspondence, I just ignore it!

V.R. Chandran  
Chennai 600 023.

**Editor's Note:** As already stated, no letter will be published unless it is received with the full address of the writer. But we will continue the practice of not publishing the addresses in full for reasons already stated.

### The right step

*Madras Musings* should be congratulated for taking a wise step in the right direction by not publishing the full addresses of writers. This also serves another welcome purpose; it saves space and will enable a couple of more letters to be accommodated.

S. Ganapathiraman  
Chennai 600 086.

### No Addresses, BUT!

I am one of those targets for junk mailers as I frequently write in

• One fine day recently, someone found new use for the Veeranam pipes. *Madras Musings* understands that the use they were to be put for was to connect the sewage pumping station on Greenway's Road with Perungudi. For all we know that might be a laudable object, but did those plans need to involve digging close to the old Elphinstone Bridge across the Adyar and laying the pipes? Surely such action would threaten the bridge which the CMDA's Heritage Committee considers a heritage construction and which it wants to develop as a birdwatchers' platform and a strollers' walkway. The only reason these plans have been held up is because of the hoardings blocking both ends of the bridge. Why those hoardings can't be removed, no one in authority seems to be able to explain. Neither is it likely that they can explain who ordered the trenching and laying of pipes that has been going on, after demolishing



a part of the bridge. Someone, however, appears to have cared for the threat to the bridge and ordered a halt to the work. It is therefore time for the CMDA Heritage Committee to swing into action and not only see that the threat does not raise its head again, but that its own plans to convert the historic bridge into a green walkway gets underway at once.

# Banking on the Adyar

(By A Special Correspondent)

You can and cannot step into the same river twice; the waters are the same, and yet not the same.

Heracitus  
Greek Philosopher

My memories of the Adyar River, flowing in a U-shaped curve around Kotturpuram, are mixed. In the 1970s, the water was a clear blue. There were flocks of river terns, wings tipped black, flying in formation, dipping occasionally into the clear waters for fish. At a point near Suryanagar, there was a ferry-boat, rowing passengers across the river for just 25p. The ferryman was an ancient, weather-beaten man, ebony-skinned as an elephant, named Govindan. I used to take the ferry, stroll across the YMCA grounds, and take a suburban train to Chetput, where Madras

Christian College High School was.

The floods in 1979, and later in 1983, changed all that. I could see, within a few months, gravel-sand bunds being built. These bunds covered the entire banks of the Adyar from Saidapet bridge to a point across the Boat Club. The periodic flooding from the Chembarambakkam Lake (Et) was stopped, but the ferry facility, the bird-life, and the flow of the river also disappeared.

Later, in the early 1990s, there was some discussion on opening up the mouth of the Adyar estuary to the sea. The Oceanography Department of the Indian Institute of Technology was involved in this high-level discussion. I don't know what the outcome was.

Lately, I have observed quar-

rying of river-sand near the Gandhinagar stretch of the Adyar. Huge trucks and excavators belonging to a construction company are used in this task. However, even if deepening and making the river navigable – for pleasure-boating, fishing, or swimming – is the objective this would never be reached. The reason: the lack of flow in the river.

I wonder: can there be a coordinated effort by various departments involved in managing water bodies – for the Adyar river? Can the public-minded citizens, or authorities, form a Central Adyar River Committee to draw long-term plans for this valuable resource? This would be one step from Nostalgia, to Back into the Future.

K. Karunanidhi  
Chennai 600 085.

this section of *Madras Musings*. Withholding the addresses of correspondents of this column is a good move, as it will not give access to dubious solicitors who request money and materials (MM, July 1st).

But a few among them require clarification of what was already written. These people usually enclose postage stamps for a reply. I comply with such requests and ignore others.

Among the latter is one that takes the cake; it was from a person based in the U.S.A. He has sent an impressive pamphlet which states that he is shortly to bring out a volume of 'Who is Who' which will be priced at 295 U.S. dollars. He will be honouring me by including my name in this volume for which he wants me to furnish my biodata. He is prepared to offer me a copy of this volume at a pre-publishing price of a mere 195 U.S. dollars. It is a pity that he does not know that I do not have even an extra couple of paise to rub together in my pocket! As the cliché goes, he is barking up the wrong tree!

This is not a unique experience for me alone. This same or a similar person had approached the late science journalist Harry Miller a few years ago with this kind of proposal. Miller had given vent to his ire in his characteristic manner in the columns of MM.

M. Sethuraman  
Chennai 600 088.

### Hiding a campus

Church Park campus is gradually being marred by mushrooming, sky-high advertising hoardings. Earlier, it was only on Mount Road side. Now it is on the Peters Road side as well. The entire compound of the campus has steadily been hidden by mega advertising hoardings.

A Madras Corporation Order issued two years ago declared the place around the Church Park as an Advertisement Hoardings Free Area. However, no one bothered to remove the existing boards nor initiate action to curb the rise of new boards. In fact, after the Corporation Notice, instead of the school area becoming advertisement-free area, it has been made fully advertising oriented.

If a notification of the Corporation is not implemented even two years after it was issued, why was it issued, in the first place?

S.R. Rajagopal  
Chennai 600 014.

### Tamil Nadu cricket

How about three teams from these parts? (MM, July 1st), I fully agree with and endorse the writer's plea that Tamil Nadu, which abounds in young talented cricketers, most of whom languish for want of opportunities to play at Ranji Trophy level, should seek to field two teams and Pondicherry one, to meet these needs. The TNCA should take up the cause

with the BCCI and get the necessary approval.

Another regrettable experience is that Tamil Nadu cricketers, even with proven track records, have always got a raw deal from the selectors in the matter of finding places in Test teams. A.G. Ram Singh, V.V. Kumar, T.E. Srinivasan etc. of yesteryears and S. Sriram, Mahesh and Murali Karthik, among the current players, are cases in point. Even those who got chances, like C.D. Gopinath, Kripal Singh, L. Sivaramakrishnan and one of the most prolific scorers in domestic cricket, W.V. Raman, were discarded for no valid reasons after playing a few Tests.

It is time the T.N.C.A. wakes up and fights for its players and also draws plans to make Tamil Nadu the foremost cricketing State in the country.

M.R. Pillai  
Chennai 600 080.

### 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.  
• *Madras Musings* does not accept letters by e-mail.



# A 'Learn from Chennai' thought

Reader Rajeshwari Singh, writing from New Delhi 110 016, says: "We citizens of Chennai often cry ourselves hoarse, especially in the columns of *Madras Musings*, that we are worse off than Mumbai. However, you will be happy to note that those in Mumbai think that we are better off than them, and that they can learn some lessons from us. As proof I enclose a cutting from Mumbai's *Indian Express*, whose large headline screams 'Why can't Mumbai learn from Chennai?'"

Long live Chennai/Madras.

The article by Gouri Shah, dated 30.5.02, reads: The answer to your water shortage might just lie in a simple pipe that runs from your terrace to the ground floor. Taking the cue from the Chennai experiment, the civic authorities in Mumbai will soon make it mandatory for new constructions to include a rainwater harvesting system to tide over the water shortage in the metropolis. A proposal to this effect was passed at a meeting of the civic General Body on May 9th but the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is yet to notify it. *Actionline* spoke to experts to find out whether the Chennai model can be adapted to Mumbai.

When construction activity proliferated to cater to the rising population in Chennai post-1950, the quantum of groundwater tapped increased even as soil available for direct absorption shrank steadily. Consequently, the shallow wells, the main source of water supply, ran dry.

Deeper levels of the soil were tapped and borewells became the next option. Though the quantity of water extracted from borewells was large, it was deemed unfit for drinking. The increasing dependency on treated water supplied by the municipality led to rationing during periods of less rainfall, a problem compounded by basic evaporation from tanks and lakes.

Hence, five years ago, the authorities in the southern city decided to turn to rainwater harvesting. The experiment, pioneered by Alacrity Housing Limited five years ago, has yielded dramatic results. Residents began collecting rainwater from their terraces, from where it was piped to either underground tanks or shallow wells. Also, rainwater falling on paved, open spaces around the buildings was

cars, flushing sewage etc. While making optimum use of rainwater, the system also substantially eases the load on the public water supply system.

"Rainwater harvesting is already being done in some rural areas of Maharashtra but as far as urban areas go, we are still considering the feasibility," says S.D. Thakre, joint secretary, State Water Supply and Sanitation Department.

Experts feel that rainwater harvesting is a viable option for Mumbai though certain issues have to be kept in mind. Says Maria Fernandes, an architect: "It would be a great idea to implement this in Mumbai. However there is the issue of maintaining the tanks." Yatin Patel, also an architect, says: "It does not make sense to waste limited natural resources. And as far as maintenance of the tanks goes, it is a basic process which should not be an issue."

Another concern raised by architects is whether the storage system would have an impact on the building's foundation. Indukanth Ragade of Alacrity says it won't. "Invariably rainwater is diverted to levels deeper than the foundation. And in clayey soils, rainwater harvesting helps keep the clay moist and thereby prevents partition walls from developing cracks."

Vineet Joglekar of Vineet Plan Foundation has a plan for Mumbai. Called Radhika Rajsee Water Scheme, it aims at using borewells to extract water and also replenish groundwater levels with rainwater that has been diverted to the well.

Plumping for rainwater harvesting, which would supplement the 3,000 million litres a day pumped to the city, is Vinod Shekhar, a corporator from Colaba. "I made a proposal to the Corporation on May 9th, the same day it was unanimously passed by the General Body. It will go a long way in improving the water supply situation in Mumbai," he said. However, not everybody is as optimistic as he is. Feels Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Water Supply) M.R. Sohoni: "In a city like Mumbai, which has severe space problems, this concept is not economically or technically feasible".

That, however, posed no problems in Chennai, which also has space constraints. In buildings with small compounds, shallow wells have been sunk and covered with RCC slabs so that there is no restriction in the movement of either people or cars.

## Can't Chennai learn from Mumbai?

• The solution to permanently dug-up roads (MM, May 16th) is simple. Do what Mumbai has done; convert all important roads into concrete. Mumbai has put concrete slabs on about 300 kms of its main roads. Concrete roads are not only extremely longlasting (Marine Drive, built in 1939, is still giving good service), but require no maintenance, provide a smooth ride to road users and, best of all, cannot be dug up. Mumbai has laid large-diameter pipes below all its concrete roads at 50 metre intervals. All utilities (electricity, water, telephone, sewage etc.) have to perforate pass through these pipes. Digging up of roads is banned. Why can't Chennai follow Mumbai's example?

Rajeshwari Singh  
New Delhi 110 016.

channelised into shallow wells instead of allowing it to flow on to the road.

While water from the rooftops is used for drinking and cooking, water harvested from the compound is used in the kitchen and for bathing. The latter is then channelised to a separate tank, where it is purified by natural soil processes, where it also replenishes the groundwater. This water is recycled for other purposes such as gardening, washing



Sir Thomas Munro.

# The civilian whom Rajaji admired

I am in love with Sir Thomas Munro who lived and died two centuries ago. Whenever young Civil Servants came to me for blessings or when I spoke to them in their training school, I advised them to read about Sir Thomas Munro who was an ideal administrator.

Sir Thomas Munro came to India at the age of 19. He spent the rest of his life in India, where he died of cholera when he was 65.

Munro began as a cadet in the army and rose to be Governor of Madras and held that office for six years until his death. He was the great initiator of the peasant-wise settlement of land in India. It is his work in this direction and his indefatigable conferences with the peasants and his just and wise administration that have made his name a legend in South India.

Folklore has many stories about Sir Thomas Munro. These stories, whether true or exaggerated, reflect the people's impression of the man better than any systematic biography can.

Here is a legend which people will not believe but which brings

out Sir Thomas Munro's character as the people of the countryside in India saw it. Legends do not grow out of nothing, but spring from men's impressions and deep-seated beliefs.

There is a small village by name Mantsala in Bellary District on the bank of the Tungabhadra. The village is widely known as containing the tomb of the Madhwa saint Sri Raghavendra Swami. Its annual festival in August is attended by large numbers of pilgrims. Hindu tombs of *Sanyasis* are simple. They are not of any architectural interest. The grant of the landed endowment attached to it is said, in one of the Mackenzie manuscripts, to have been made by Venkanna Pant, the well-known Dewan of Sidi Masand Khan, the Mussalman Governor of Adoni from 1662 to 1687.

A quaint story of Munro is told about the place. The endowment being threatened with resumption, Munro, it is said, came to make enquiries. After removing his boots and taking off his hat, he approached the grave. The spirit of the saint emerged from the tomb and met him.

They conversed together for some time regarding the resumption, but though the saint was visible and audible to Munro, who was himself, the people declare, semi-divine, none of the others who were there could either see him or hear what the spirit spoke. The discussion ended, Munro returned to his tent and quashed the proposal to resume the endowment. Being offered some consecrated rice, he accepted it and had it used in the preparation of his dinner for that day.

Munro's sense of fairness is brought out in his memorandum on the opening of trade with India in February 1813. His clear understanding of Indian conditions and sense of fairness to Indian interests are brought out in this memorandum:

"In India, almost every article which the inhabitants require is made cheaper and better than in Europe. Among these are cotton and silk manufactured, leather, paper, domestic utensils of brass and iron and implements of agriculture. Their coarse woollens, though bad, always keep their ground, due to their cheapness.

Their finer camlets are warmer and more lasting than ours.

"For centuries, India had carried on a maritime trade with other countries but was not induced to import new articles from them. Yet the people suffer from no absolute prejudice. Their prejudices extend only to intoxicating liquors and certain prohibited kinds of food. In dress and every kind of dissipation but drinking, they are at least our equals. To increase the exports to India, the purchasing capacity of Indians should be improved and their special tastes studied by the manufacturers. The purchasing capacity could be improved by the lightening of taxes. When we relinquish the barbarous system of annual settlements, when we make over the lands either on very long leases or in perpetuity to the present occupants, and when we have convinced them, by making no assessments above the fixed rent, for a series of years that they are actually proprietors of the soil, we shall see a demand for European articles of which we have at present no conception."

Munro disapproved the unfair tariff which Indian goods

exported to England were subjected to, by heavier duties than English goods sent to India.

"India is the country that has been worst used in the new arrangement. All her products ought undoubtedly to be imported freely into England upon paying the same duties, and no more, which English products pay in India. When I see what is done in Parliament against India, I think I am reading about Edward III and the Flemings".

As we read these extracts from Sir Thomas Munro's memorandum, we in India realise that in some respects we were more truly independent in those days than now when we are politically independent and are a republic indebted in thousands of crores of rupees to America, Britain, Germany, Russia and Japan.

India is free from British control now. But the respect and friendship between India and Britain is a lasting bond. Sir Thomas Munro contributed not a little to this two centuries ago when the British were establishing themselves in India, by his honest and conscientious discharge of the duties entrusted to

him and by his humanitarian and broad understanding free from prejudices of any kind.

In a minute of December 31, 1824, Sir Thomas Munro wrote:

"What is to be the final result of all our arrangements on the character of the people? Is it to be raised or is it to be lowered? Are we to be satisfied with merely securing power and protecting the inhabitants, leaving them to sink gradually in character lower than at present; or are we to endeavour to raise their character and to render them worthy of filling higher situation in the management of their country and of devising plans for its improvement? It ought undoubtedly to be our aim to raise the minds of the Indian people and to take care of that, whenever our connection with India might cease, it did not appear that the only fruit of our dominion there had been to leave the people more abject and less able to govern themselves than when we found them."

(Courtesy: Nandini,  
'Voice for the Deprived')

# The case of the midnight screams

His client had been sentenced to die by hanging in a few weeks. The highest court of appeal for British India, the Privy Council, was some 6000 miles away, in London. That was the age of slow sea travel. To make matters worse, that faraway court was on vacation. All seemed lost. But he was not the kind of lawyer who would take 'no' for an answer. In an unprecedented move he sent a cable to a firm of friendly solicitors in London. It was no ordinary cable. It stunned the staff of the Madras City Telegraph Office with its length! It included the entire judgements of three High Court judges in Madras, the memo of appeal, including the grounds of appeal, and the petition. It has been said that it was the longest telegram ever sent from Madras.

The London solicitor was as astonished as the Telegraph Office, but acting with a rare sense of justice he rushed to France where Lord Haldane, the Law Lord to be approached was on vacation and submitted the appeal to this Lordship at a holiday resort. Not for a moment did Lord Haldane object to his vaca-

tion being interrupted. He accepted the papers and at once rang up the Secretary of State for India in London, Lord Crewe, requesting him to stay the hanging in Madras of the appellant-accused pending the hearing of the appeal. Lord Crewe responded favourably to the request and the condemned prisoner got a fresh lease of life.

That lawyer of rare perseverance and push was Dr. S. Swaminadhan, one of the giants of the Madras Bar, a master of criminal law, and his client was a wealthy, influential and powerful landholder, a *mirasdar* of Poondi, a fertile village in the Tanjore District. Vaidyanatha Pillai was accused of murdering his daughter-in-law and 'The Poondi Murder Case' was a 'cause celebre' circa 1912!

Vaidyanatha Pillai was in his fifties and, not one after another, as one would expect, belonging to an age and culture when a man could take as many wives as he could, the only restraining factor being the weight of his purse, he had three wives. One of them was his own niece, the daughter of his elder sister,

Muttachi. That wife died in childbirth leaving a son named Ayyasami. Vaidyanatha Pillai had two sons by his wife Kanthimathi, who survived the other two wives. The second wife died after presenting him with a daughter named Thangababu.

Motherless Ayyasami was brought up by his paternal uncle Sami Thevan, a man of some means but not as rich as his brother. He was the village *munsif* of Sembiamangalam, a mile from Poondi. The two brothers were not on good terms, the village *munsif* being envious of Vaidyanatha who, as a child, had been given in adoption to a wealthy family.

As Ayyasami grew up, he began to show signs of abnormal behaviour, including maniacal violence on occasions, which he appeared to have inherited from his maternal uncle. Despite his mental instability, he married in 1906 Dhanabhagam, a girl from a wealthy family from nearby Orattur. Dhanam as she was called was intelligent and also worldly-wise. Not surprisingly, she took control of her husband and he was only too happy to let her run his life.

Soon after the wedding Dhanam clashed with her in-laws, especially Thangababu, who was married as a ten-year-old to her elder brother. He died leaving a pre-teen virgin widow. Thangababu grew into a buxom beauty who, after returning to her parental home in Poondi, led a carefree life, finding joy wherever she could.

Thangababu's amorous activity led several times to certain

## • A RANDOR GUY true crime narration

biological consequences and on every such occasion she was packed off to Madras for the needful to be done. Why did Vaidyanatha keep silent to such conduct by his daughter? The rural folk whispered it was because the father himself was one of the men in the messy widow's life. Malicious gossip? Nobody could know for certain, but Dhanam believed it and clashed with Thangababu often. Not surprisingly the family members did not take kindly to Dhanam; the daughter-in-law did not know her place, they felt. There were

also other reasons for them not to take kindly to Dhanam.

Ayyasami was a spendthrift and when his father refused him money, he resorted to borrowing. After all, he was a wealthy *mirasdar*'s son, wasn't he? And as a son he had a share in his father's huge estate, hadn't he? Such ideas were dinned into his head by his wife. She also hinted often enough that he should demand a partition of the family estate and walk out of the family mansion that was ridden with immorality. Vaidyanatha hated his daughter-in-law for all this.

As Ayyasami's debts began to snowball, Vaidyanatha published public notices, drafted by a lawyer, stating that Vaidyanatha was not, and would not be, responsible for his son Ayyasami's debts, past, present, and future too, for three reasons. The property was his self-earned and so Ayyasami had no right by birth to claim a share under Hindu Law. Secondly, Ayyasami had always been treated by Sami Thevan as his own son and brought up as such. Thirdly, he was not of sound mind and, therefore, not responsible for his deeds and debts!

As a result of the notices, the

misunderstanding touched a new high and Ayyasami and Dhanam left the Poondi mansion to live in Orattur with her parents. Ayyasami hit back against his father by filing a criminal complaint charging Vaidyanatha with rioting, wrongful confinement, and trying to extract from him a release deed giving up all his claims to his father's estate. The case came up for hearing in May 1906 and was dismissed as baseless.

Years passed and Ayyasami's condition only became worse and he became more violent.

Dhanam, in the circumstances, tried to return to Poondi. After protracted discussions and mediation, Vaidyanatha, finally, in 1911 decided to let bygones be bygones. Terms of reconciliation were discussed for weeks and eventually Ayyasami, Dhanam and their two children returned to the Poondi family mansion. There were conditions, of course, agreed by all concerned. One was that all should live amicably for a specified time, two, in course of time there would be a partition of the estate, and three, a bitter pill for Vaidyanatha, Thangababu

should leave the house and live elsewhere!

On Deepavali day, October 20, 1911, the fond father invited his dear daughter home. After the euphoria of the festival was over, trouble surfaced again. Dhanam and Thangababu clashed in a screaming, screeching session that went on late into the night. Eventually everyone retired for the night.

Vaidyanatha, Kanthimathi, and Ayyasami's little daughter slept in an airy hall, while Dhanam, her husband and her other child slept in a smaller hall in another part of the mansion. Vaidyanatha's sister Muttachi slept in a passage nearby. Around 2 a.m. Muttachi heard — or, so she said later — a woman scream and cry from the next room "...Ayyo ayyayoo... he is killing me... beating me...". Recognising the voice as Dhanam's, she rushed in and, to her horror, saw Ayyasami standing — or sitting, as she said later — with a bloody *arwal*, on the cot in which Dhanam lay dead, her body marked with bloody wounds.

(To be concluded)

## Want to muse with MUSINGS?

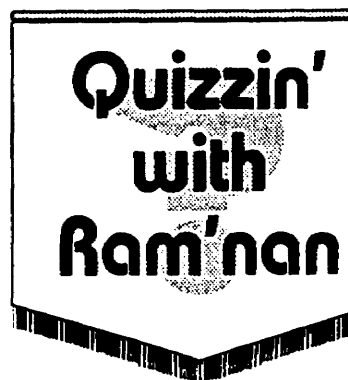
If you would like to be put on *Madras Musings*' mailing list, just fill in the form below (use block letters/type) and post it to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt Ltd, 62/63 Greames Road, CHENNAI-600 006.

Name .....

Address .....

Note: Overseas postage Rs 450/year. Cheques payable to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press.





(Current affairs questions are from the period July 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Whom did India's Mahesh Bhupathi partner while claiming the mixed doubles title at Wimbledon this year?
2. Why was Kanwal Sibal, I.F.S., in the news recently?
3. What is the new nomenclature for what was hitherto the 'Defence Ministry' of India?
4. On July 2nd, who became the first balloonist to fly solo around the world?
5. According to FIFA announcement on July 2nd, who received the 'Golden Ball' for being the 'Best Player' of the World Cup?
6. Which Hindi filmstar is the new Union Cabinet Minister for Health?
7. Name the Vice-President of Afghanistan (one of three) who was assassinated on July 6th.
8. What was witnessed on July 6th for the first time in the 18 years of the Wimbledon tennis championships?
9. Name the legendary chairman of Reliance Industries who breathed his last on July 6th.
10. Name the two IPS officers who have won the prestigious 'Queen's Award for Innovation in Police Training and Development'.

11. The first ever woman Mayor in India was a Mayor of the Chennai Corporation. Name her.
12. Once John Binny lived in this house on the Choultry Plain that is now the site of a hotel. Which one?
13. Where did the MDMK leader Vaiko make a 'pro-LTTE' speech prompting the State to arrest him under POTA?
14. One on business. With which Singapore firm has TIDEL signed a MoU for a second IT park in Chennai?
15. Name the new mobile phone service provider in Chennai.
16. Who bought K. Subrahmanyam's Motion Picture Producers' Combines Studio on Mount Road in 1940 and what was it re-christened as?
17. Which magnificent edifice, named after a British Viceroy and very much in the news now, did Loganatha Mudaliar build?
18. 'Akash Ganga', the first of its kind in the country, was inaugurated in the city recently. What is it?
19. Name the university in Puttur, which had the dubious distinction of being blacklisted as 'fake' by the UGC recently.
20. Name the eminent woman Carnatic vocalist and Sangeeta Kalandi awardee who passed away on July 12th.

(Answers on page 7)

## Nostalgia

# The Loho Theatre

First, there is the preview, or the trial show, which usually takes place on a Wednesday. The majority of the inmates of the hostel treat this event with a marked apathy, not only because they are denied access to the theatre, but because they feel that their sense of curiosity would be blunted if they attempted to peep in and, thus, with it, would be killed all their joy of seeing something new, whole and unique on Friday night. But there are the experts — the film friends — who have gained much experience from the cinema houses of the wide world; they have the uncanny faculty of predicting the nature of the film by hearing snatches of the incidental music. This minor event is for them as thrilling and pre-occupying as the unravelling of a mystery. They cock an ear, as they pass along the quadrangle, to catch the music and the noises which float down from the theatre above. The whine of the aeroplane may indicate a war picture; the growl of the lion, something else; and music of an emotional quality something which the aforesaid experts alone can tell. But more often these experiments with the ear-drums prove futile.

If we want to see the Loyola Hostel with its lid off we have but to take a peep into the Loho Theatre on a Friday night. Perhaps this statement needs elucidation. The point is that on Friday night Loyola Hostel students pack themselves into the Loho Theatre and behave like a set of raving surrealists. On Friday night the topmost storey of our alma mater is turned into a theatre as if by the magic touch of a fairy. The Loho Theatre, it must be admitted, is something of an anti-climax, but, nonetheless, it has its own fascination. It is a classroom turned inside out. Teacher and desks have been whisked off and we face about with backs impudently turned to the lecturer's platform. Perhaps, this transformation itself explains why students are in a state of perpetual merriment on cinema day.

Let us pay a visit to the theatre in question. We are already late, for we can never be early. Soon after a hurried dinner, the enthusiasts make a beeline for the theatre and fill it chock-a-block. When the slower and less enthusiastic patron arrives, he finds that the theatre is packed from floor to ceiling but he can nevertheless squeeze in and find a place at the sides. The air is thick with cat-calls, shouts and voices raised in loud talk. The shadowy profiles of would-be

actors are flashed on the screen with the aid of torchlights. Profiles worthy of John Barrymore and Robert Taylors! The whole atmosphere is charged with protons that bombard the blood and release the soul for the unexpected.

But soon after the customary ringing of the bell, the lights fade and darkness prevails, exterminated by the red glow of slumbering cigarettes. Life emerges on the screen in the form of the Silly Symphonies and the News. What shouts rend the air when the leaders of

• by  
**JAIBOY JOSEPH**

the nation appear on the screen! Shouts that would hardly be tolerated in any other theatre for obvious reasons! After some time comes, inevitably, the film proper. The list of credits is audibly read and relished.

Surprisingly, the audience becomes highly critical and alert. There are two things that a Loho audience will not stand. One is black villainy and the other prolonged sentimentality. If our hero is going to be plugged from behind, he is fore-warned against the villain by loud shouts of 'Go easy', 'There is a man behind you', or something to that effect. An audible expression of sympathy is heard when our hero's motorcar turns

turtle on the speedway. It cannot be said that the audience of Loho Theatre is lacking in bowls of compassion. The second thing the audience will not stand is for the hero to sun himself on the beach and make love for a prolonged period especially if the enemy is, so to say, knocking at the door. Any such indulgence on his part would be greeted by cynical boos, shouts and quips. But when the hero finally wins through after perilous adventures, bouquets in the form of wild yells of glee are thrown at him. Whoopee! The film is over and all scurry back to their beds to sleep.

This account is in no sense a reflection on the poor taste of the audience. Psychologically we are on the fringe of the subconscious. This Friday cinema is a necessary 'ritual' to work off all the inhibitions and repressed passions of the week. The ego of the student imprisoned by class books for a whole week finds a congenial atmosphere in the Loho Theatre to revolt. In fact, some among us come to the theatre mainly to barrack, laugh and make merry. All the pent up steam is released on Friday night. This helps to strengthen and clear the mind, to enable it to function properly in the matters of life and study throughout the coming week.

Our audience is seriously detached while viewing the film. When other theatres disgorge their contents and hosts of little Errol Flynns and Gary Coopers

Recently I came across an old 1947 issue of *The Loyola* to which annual I had, during my last year, written about a unique Loyola institution called the *Loho Theatre*.

The Loyola College hostel was the only college hostel in Madras which had a 35 mm projector in those days and the college screened Hollywood movies every Friday as part of the recreation provided for hostelites.

Loyola in those days had a number of teachers who were Jesuit priests from abroad.

One of them operated the projector or was in charge. I had a para in the article stating the Wednesday preview was among other things a censor show when most scenes of smooching were cut out because, according to the priest, "this kind of thing will corrupt the boys." The para was deleted in the process of editing.

J.J.

pour out — in other words, they vainly imagine themselves to be as heroic and wonderful as the people in the films they have just seen — strangely enough, in the Loho Theatre this overwhelming and disastrous influence of the celluloid is absent. This unusual psychological phenomenon is a persistent fact, difficult to explain.

Soon the week-end is over and the weekdays follow. Wednesday comes with its preview and we are accustomed to wonder whether last Friday's picture was a vision or a waking dream. Much water has flowed under the bridges of the Coom but we are not the worse for it. For Wednesday's preview all ways promises something good in store for us on Friday night.

# Learner at large

Many years ago, my husband tried to teach me driving; weeks later, the attempt ended in a spectacular display of chauvinism on the Marina. I was at the wheel, driving carefully down the half-empty road and he asked me to STOP the car. He must have quite forgotten that he'd actually never taught me that particular procedure, and so I lifted my left foot and pressed down on the middle pedal, remembering that he'd told me that. But the brake! However, I quite forgot to remove my right foot from the accelerator... You may imagine the result! But, imagine this too. He SLAPPED me on my left knee! (He has always denied it was a slap, claims it was a tap and I do confess that tap hurt my dignity more than me.) I got out and vowed to myself that I WOULD learn and I would teach him a lesson! But I would not let him give me any more lessons. Our neigh-

bour's driver was recruited to do the job... and, despite language difficulties, I was doing very well indeed.

Around this time, our 4-year-old son needed his tonsils removed and the surgery was done by Dr. V.S. Subramaniam in his hospital on Montieth Road in Egmore. Dr. Subramaniam was a very special person, arguably one of the most eminent E & T surgeons in South Asia, kind, urbane, humorous... and, of course, very busy. But never too busy to spend time reassuring patients and anxious parents.

Unni was discharged from Lempert Hospital the same day and was doing well at home, enjoying the liberal quantities of ice cream, recommended by Dr. Subramaniam. On the morning of the fourth day, however, he had, what I imagined was a haemorrhage; we had no telephone, my husband, and every-

one else too were at work, and

my friend, the neighbour's driver was not to be seen. What else could I do?

Raman Nair, the cook, was instructed to carry Unni and sit in the back of the car and off we set for Egmore. Straight down Lloyd's Road, onto Royapettah High Road and across Mount Road near the Spencer's junction. A turn to the right on Binny's Road and in no time we arrived at the hospital... I drove inside and parked perfectly in the correct spot! You can have no idea how impressed I was with myself... after all, this was my first time alone at the wheel and it was quite a distance from home, all this together with my concern for our son. Dr. Subramaniam saw us quickly and assured me that all was well.

Raman Nair again carried Unni to the car and I sat at the wheel, turning the key in the ignition... and then I stopped! I

(Continued on page 7)

# Overall restoration the challenge

Not many people in Chennai at this point in time know much of the chequered history of the ancient, Chisholm-designed building of the Government College of Arts on Poonamallee High Road. But as the original Madras School of Fine Art, it once held pride of place as the first school of art constituted in India, indeed, in Asia, and made a significant and substantial contribution to the development of contemporary art in India through generations of artists. Lately, however, it has been in the news more often than not for its problems. And these have been about either lack of funding, the indifferent attitudes of the powers-that-be, the sorry state of its stately buildings or the quality of its education.

But the present batch of students in the College, trying to breathe the new life into it, recently took time off to celebrate the onset of summer with creative colour and music in a cultural extravaganza called 'Vannacharal'. It was an event that happened after much lobbying by the student body, who have slowly but surely realised the need for taking matters into their own hands, literally. Organised groups of students set the stage by a week-long clearing of the muck on the campus (even reclaiming a long-hidden volleyball court), sweeping and cleaning, repairing lights, and painting the facade of the buildings.

Says Rukmini, an enthusiastic member of the recently formed 10-member core Student Committee, "Backed by the entire student community, we are trying to put things back on rail, however slow and long drawn out the process might be. That we managed to convince the authorities to let us look for sponsors and organise a show of this nature for the first time in the College's history is a victory of sorts. But it is sad that the College has deteriorated to such a sorry state from its much talked about earlier glory."

Established in 1850 as the School of Arts by Dr.

Alexander Hunter at Broadway, it was founded to train industrial draftsmen. In 1852, the constitution of a committee to discuss the future of art education in India led to its being transformed as the Government School of Industrial Design. Artists and industrial design experts from England were invited to teach the rudiments of design and fundamentals of art at the school. It was E.B. Halwell who encouraged the study of India's own fine art traditions. The Madras School of Art absorbed new ideas and under the Western influence, live model sketches, clay modelling, watercolour painting and oil on canvas were introduced. The dynamic D.P. Roy Chowdhury, who was a brilliant student of the college, went on to become its first-ever Indian Principal. It was during the tenure of his worthy successor K.C.S. Panicker (who took over in 1957) that the Madras School was upgraded as a college.

• by **SHOBHA MENON**

At this point of time, however, it looks as though the cobwebs aren't just in the ancient

rooms and corridors. An agitated student says, "Our syllabus hasn't been updated for years; there is no relevance between what we need to learn and what we are taught. And the teaching quality needs improvements with the faculty themselves needing to upgrade their skills. We have no exposure to visiting professors who could provide different insights. There are no organised trips from the College even to art galleries within the city. Students are expected to fend for themselves, but when 75% of the stu-

dent community comes from districts like Thanjavur, Madurai and Tiruchi, they find it very difficult. Why can't everything be more structured and organised?"

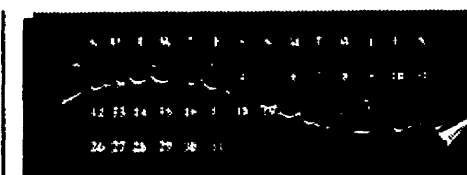
The College Museum, which again has only been heard of by the students and "always kept locked" (for around the last ten years), is believed to be a treasurehouse of ancient books on Architecture, Religion and Design and many rare works of art, Chola bronzes, Chinese ceramic pieces, photographs and palm leaf manuscripts. A recent proposal is to hand over charge of this to the Department of Museums, but the students are protesting against the move.

The Metalworks and Woodworks division was closed down around six years ago. The staff in the Ceramics and Textile Design divisions have had no work for the last 10 years. It is only natural that a senior teacher in the college and well known sculptor, C. Dakshinamurthy (who joined in 1960 as a student, and went on to teach for the last 38 years), speaks

nostalgically of the days gone by. "All that I am now, I owe to this institution. I started out learning painting, but I taught students ceramics and am known in art circles as a sculptor. That was how multidimensional our education and training were. The days when K.C.S. Panicker was the Director were a golden period in the history of the college. Run with an exemplary professionalism, its main aim was to encourage a craft-oriented culture. Can you believe that almost all the designs that originated in that period came from the College of Arts and Crafts (as it was known then) — even the designs of bricks used in Moore Market, the Museum and the Madras University? The current deterioration is mainly due to an apathetic management and haphazard allocation of available funds."

Dakshinamurthy continues, "Now is the time for students to take the initiative, and make their own intelligent moves, with sincerity and honesty. We need a proactive management that encourages multidimensional opportunities and experiences, to facilitate interaction and ongoing collaboration with leading corporate and design houses. An environment that inculcates and nurtures a bonding and affinity for art and creation needs to be lovingly tended. How else can you expect artists to 'talk' with even clay and stone?"

An overall restoration is therefore needed, and decidedly on many fronts. How to go about the multi-pronged restoration needs much thought, and more planning. While some students felt "Maybe we could form a 'Trust of art appreciators



Till August 5: 'Vasanthakalam', an exhibition-cum-auction of a wide range of paintings, sculptures and graphics by leading contemporary artists in aid of Vasantham (School for Mentally Retarded, Mogappair). Over 100 artists are exhibiting (at Amethyst).

August 7-20: An exhibition of paintings by Srinivasachari (at Apparao Galleries).

August 15-18: 'Madras Coin Society' coins exhibition (at NCK Hall, Lions Hall, D.G. Vaishnav College campus, Poonamallee High Road, Arumbakkam).

August 26: A Voice Recital by Stephan Loges, Baritone, with Natasha Loges, Piano. The programme includes Schubert, Brahms, Wolf and Schumann. Loges, a winner of the 1999 Wigmore Hall International Song Competition, was born in Dresden, completed the opera course in June 1999 at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. Made his Carnegie Hall debut in the Brahms "Ein deutsches Requiem" and sang "The Messiah" and Bach's "St. John Passion" with Peter Schreier. He is accompanied on the piano by his wife Natasha, originally from Bangalore, trained in piano at the Guildhall School. (At 6.30 pm, Museum Theatre.)

who would participate in the management of the College and help us tide over the present hurdles", a well-known heritage enthusiast questioned, "Can't the students team with a group of eminent alumni and other leading artists to raise a nucleus of a restoration fund? And if this was matched by Government, the private sector might well respond favourably as well. Restoration could then begin, with the students themselves and others from the School of Architecture playing participatory roles working with PWD engineers, contractors and experienced conservationists." The possibility of sweeping changes in the College's future now depends heavily on the student fraternity's enterprise.

# LEARNER AT LARGE

(Continued from page 6)

had never learned how to reverse the car! My lessons had been confined to driving down Chandra Baugh Avenue, turning right into Edward Elliotts Road and turning again right into Judge Jambulinga Street, then right and left, back to C B Avenue... and I was super at doing that. But now what? There was no one in the hospital driveway, so I went to the reception and asked for Dr. Subramaniam's lovely secretary Sunitha... "Please, can you help me to reverse?" "Sorry, I don't drive", and she disappeared to look for help, coming back, to

my chagrin, with Dr. Subramaniam in tow!

Gentleman that he was he did not raise his eyes to the sky, but simply got in the car and drove it out onto the street. He did express concern about my ability to make it home and I assured him I would be fine... as long as I did not have to reverse. He put his arm around me and said, "Go slowly"...

I never did tell him that I actually went round the island at the Ashoka Hotel corner at least three times before I found my way on to Montieth Road. But we did get home and my next few driving lessons were all on reversing.

All this happened in the days that saw little traffic on the roads; on Saturday afternoons and Sundays it was possible to zip down Mount Road from Gemini Circle to Round Tana and never having to slow down. Today, I'd be minced... but thanks to the dear doctor I'm still here and not too bad a driver, or certainly better than most on our miserable roads. Even trusted by my husband... who, I hasten to add, is not a wife-beater, but like, as I suspect, most men, worries about his precious car.

Radha G.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Elena Likhovetseva; 2. He is the new Foreign Secretary; 3. Integrated Headquarters of Defence; 4. Steve Fossett of United States; 5. Oliver Kahn of Germany; 6. Shatrughan Sinha; 7. Haji Abdul Qadir; 8. Two sisters meeting in the Ladies' final. Serena beat Venus Williams in it; 9. Dhirubhai Ambani; 10. K. Radhakrishnan and Pradeep Philip (both from the Tamil Nadu cadre).

11. Tara Cheria; 12. Hotel Connemara; 13. Tirumangalam; 14. Ascendas; 15. Hutch; 16. S.S. Vasan and he renamed it Gemini Studios; 17. Ripon Building; 18. A rain centre having all types of RWH systems under one roof; 19. DDB Sanskrit University; 20. Mani Krishnaswamy.



"Selling toys is certainly not child's play. You have to address — and impress — three individual minds with three different attitudes," says Funskool India chief executive Raphael Kuriyan.

"While the customer is the child and the mother is the executor of the child's wishes, it is the father who holds the purse strings," he says. "Apart from bargaining with the toy-seller, the father strikes a deal with his child, that s/he will secure good marks in school exams, before parting with his money."

Divya Raganathan, a tenth standard student, smiles: "That's true; I had to face such situations several times". And, of course, the mother cannot be ignored. "If you have to sell babies' toys, it is she who has to be targeted," says Kuriyan.

Funskool is a 60:40 joint venture (with a Rs. 4-crore equity-base) between the Chennai-based tyre major MRF and Hasbro International, the world's largest toy manufacturer. Funskool, which has a turnover of Rs. 45 crore, used to import moulds for making toys for the domestic market earlier, but recently it reversed that trend.

Competing with several companies in China and other markets, Funskool developed a mould for the 'Action Hero' toy, one of Hasbro International's fast-moving children's fancies. "When major Indian toy players are importing the product, we are exporting it to the global market," says a beaming Kuriyan.

An engineering graduate and a business management postgraduate, Kuriyan is arguably the most experienced person in the domestic toys industry. Recently he spoke about his company's future plans and other issues pertaining to the industry. Excerpts:

**What is this industry's domestic market size? And at what rate does it grow?**

The industry is dominated by small-scale units, so it is difficult to give you an exact figure. Based on the market feedback, I would conservatively estimate the market size to be in the region of Rs. 500 crore. There are others who estimate it at Rs. 1,000 crore. Talking about Funskool, our sales and profit grew by 20 per cent during 2001-02, while exports went up by 30 per cent.

**How is Funskool planning to cater to Hasbro International's global market needs?**

We have designed two toy moulds for Hasbro's popular toy range, 'Action Man', a \$800-million brand. We did this after obtaining the concept from our foreign partner. Competing with us were Hasbro's partners in other countries like China. Hasbro will need at least 5 lakh pieces of each toy and we will stamp them out with our moulds. This is the first time that an Indian company has designed a mould for toys and exported them.

As you know, toys and dolls do not possess a strict geometric shape; they have lots of moving parts, thus complicating the mould designing. The standard procedures of mould-making do not apply in our industry.

We started exports in 1995, assembling imported components and taking advantage of cheaper labour. Going up fast in the value chain, we started to import moulds to manufacture and export toys. With the cost of moulds increasing constantly, we decided to design the moulds ourselves with concepts

borrowed from our collaborator. Our next step is to make toys for international markets with our own concepts.

**What are the market dynamics of this industry?**

The product lifecycle is short — one to three years. Every year, we launch at least 50 products. Over the last 14 years, we have produced around 600 products and of them just 250 are alive today. The Indian market is vastly different from that

• by  
**V. JAGANNATHAN**

overseas, where toys are bought as a child development aid; they are considered as equivalents to books. Toys, I would say, provide lots of content for child development.

But in India the scene is different. Content and quality are the major drawbacks here. The bad quality of local toys — blame our unorganised small players — not only spoils our market but the child's mental development. Toys should be rugged, to withstand handling by a child. But toys made by small players crumble fast because of bad quality inputs. Unfortunately, even educated elders blame the children, instead of blaming the manufacturers for selling bad quality toys.

**You mentioned the short product lifecycle. Is it possible to resurrect an old game or toy to address a new generation?**

Resurrection or regeneration of old games and toys generally does not work. On the other hand, we alter the content of an old toy/game and relaunch it.

The new concepts in toys, like GI Joe, Action Man, Batman and others, are foreign. Why can't we initiate well-known Indian concepts — say, images of Arjuna, Duryodana, Karna...?

I always face this question. For any child — Indian or foreign — a toy is just a toy. There is no need to differentiate between an Indian and a foreign concept. Having said that, we do design or modify some games to reflect the Indianness in them. For example, we have cricket games, which are more relevant to India. Some of the games we import are slightly modified to suit Indian interests. For instance, we slightly Indianised 'Monopoly'.

But we want to keep away from selling mythological toys to avoid any controversies. For instance, if I make Duryodana, somebody might raise an objection about the size of the doll. Once, a customs official held back our import of Batman dolls on the ground that it is an animal image and falls under the 'restricted list'.

**How do you design your games and toys?**

We have three sources — our collaborator, in-house development, and buying ideas and concepts from individuals. In the latter case, we pay royalty to the game inventor. One of our popular games, cricket, was conceptualised by a young boy some years ago and we still pay him royalty.

**Which are the segments you are going to focus on in the future?**

In the board games category, we have a wide range of products. We came up with lots of

content in board games. Next year, we will be focussing on war games for boys. The other major line is a toy that kindles the child's creativity. We have 'Playdoh', a clay-modelling toy. We also have a major presence in the pre-school children toys segment. Now we are building up strength in the girl child area. Here we hope to play the price game — our doll 'Sindy' is competitively priced.

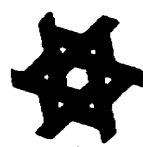
**China has started exporting a slew of toys to India. How serious is the Chinese threat?**

The toys that are currently imported do not have much content, and we don't face any threat. Most importers are first-timers and they discard toy imports due to poor margins. Generally, imports increase the domestic price points, and they are actually good for us. Chinese products may be a threat in the future, when toys with good content are imported. But even then, my margins will not be affected, as my cost of production is very low.

**What is your view about the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board's (TNPCB) campaign saying that toys made from PVC are dangerous for children? Safety of toys is one of the issues that has assumed importance now.**

There are international quality standards for toys. We are working with the Indian Government to evolve such standards here. The Bureau of Indian Standards has drafted a standard for toy manufacturers, but meeting them is not compulsory. Apart from the durability factor, quality in toys means being non-toxic and non-injurious to children. As for the TNPCB's move against toys made of PVC, my view is that the campaign is an ill-advised one. (Courtesy: www.domain-b.com)

**Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations:**



**Amalgamations Group**

**APCOM**

**Apcom Computers Ltd.**



**Ashok Leyland**



**India Cements Ltd.**

**KASTURI &  
SONS  
LTD.**

**LOKAVANI  
HALLMARK PRESS  
PVT. LTD.**



**MURUGAPPA  
GROUP**

**Rane**

**Rane Group**

**SAINT-GOBAIN**  
The future of glass. Since 1665.

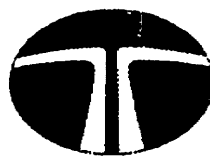
The  
**SANMAR**  
Group



**Sundaram Finance  
Limited**



**Sundram Fasteners  
Limited**



**TATA  
TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES**



**Thiru Arooran  
Sugars Ltd**

**TVS-SUZUKI**

**TVS Suzuki  
Ltd.**