

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

INSIDE

- New use for old buildings
- Restoring Tranquebar
- A 'first family's' centenary
- Swansong for old hall
- Two pages of letters

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FREE ISSUE

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Our new fairness treatment includes one coat of putty and three coats of white paint!!

## Mirror, Mirror

The city has been suffering from a rash of hoardings for a while now.

The resultant sense of irritation is worsened by the fact that so many of them advertise fairness creams, tempting the sorely-tired citizen to consider going on a rampage.

What is with this constant obsession with fair skin?

You are actually being sold the idea that one ingredient is your passport to everything — from fun evenings with a visibly upwardly mobile crowd and special treatments in hotels, shopping malls, and theatres to a higher intelligence quotient (go figure!), better jobs and relationships — you name it. Life becomes available on your terms... and it is all thanks to The Cream that promises to make you several shades lighter.

As for the claims that are made.

"Fair skin in 4 days," boasts one.

"Ha, we'll do it in 2 days," scoffs another.

A third laughs derisively, and draws: "Overnight, buddy. That's all we need."

And there is a concentrated rush of prospective buyers, waving their money, and dreaming their dreams.

You have to wonder — how can anyone buy into these tales?

These guys, however, know exactly what they are doing.

They too have heard of that old saying:

"There's one born every minute."

Ranjitha Ashok

# Plea for eco-heritage site

*'Develop Kaattupalli as one'*

— Ennore-Pulicat Environmental Protection Forum

Make Kaattupalli Island an Environmental Heritage Site' is the plea of Dr. P.J. Sanjeeva Raj of the Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, the Ennore-Pulicat Environmental Protection Forum, and a leading ecologist.

A proposal to this end has been submitted by him to the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and *Madras Musings* understands that it is being favourably considered. *Madras Musings* hopes that the attention will lead to Kaattupalli Island being saved and developed as a site to be visited by ecologists, environmentalists and eco-tourists from around the world.

*Madras Musings* is happy to publish below excerpts from Prof. Sanjeeva Raj's proposal:

### The proposal

Very few are aware of the uniqueness of the multifaceted ecosystems of Kaattupalli (Ennore) Island on the Coromandel Coast and how fast it is being degraded, almost to a point of total annihilation. This is because of the unsustainable developmental interventions that have come up in its vicinity, and even on the very island itself. Still greater threats are ahead from what has been proposed for the future.

### Environmental heritage

• Vegetation on the island is a rare combination of mangrove (salt-marsh vegetation) beach vegetation, tropical dry evergreen vegetation and freshwater and brackishwater vegetation. There are about 290 species of

plants belonging to 210 genera and 82 families of angiosperms (flowering plants), one pteridophyte and nine aquatic algae, a great biodiversity indeed for so small an island as this. A unique tree is what the locals call in Tamil *Etti maram* (*Diospyros malabaricus*). A tree of the west coast of India, there are, surprisingly, four of these trees on the island, but nowhere else, in the wild, on the whole east coast of India. These four trees are more than 600 years old each. There are several such rare species among the smaller plants on the island.

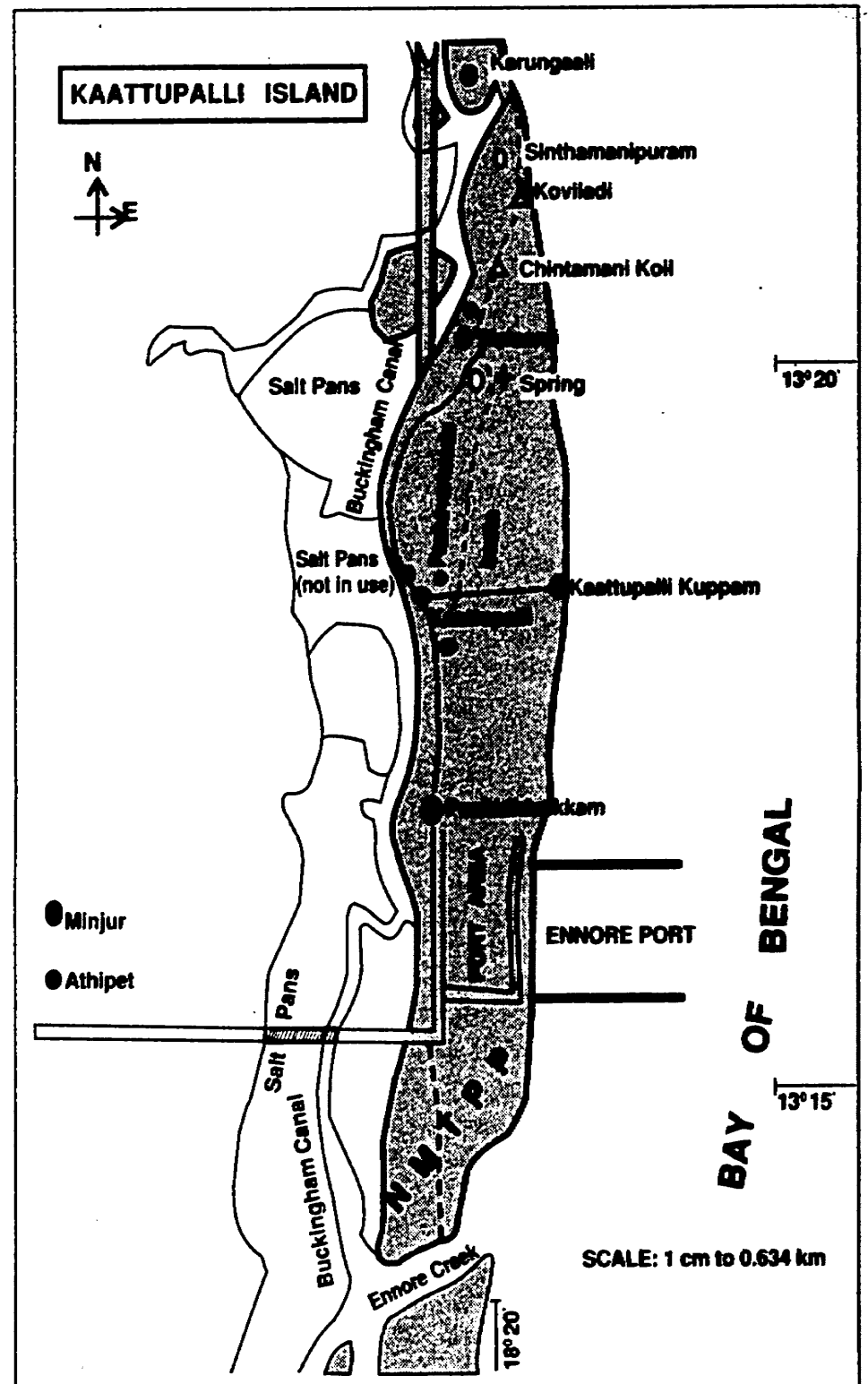
Animals and insects, including butterflies, swarm amidst such diverse vegetation. Scorpions, lizards and snakes are plentiful in the undergrowth of vegetation. Wildlife includes jackals, wild boar, rabbits and jungle cats.

The protected Olive Ridley (sea-turtle) breeds on the Kaattupalli Beach. The backwaters are nurseries for prawn and crab. Water birds used to feed on the open backwaters but they have now deserted the polluted backwaters which provide them no feed.

### Environmental threats

• Developmental interventions in the vicinity of the Island have been the greatest threats in its pristine natural heritage. The location of the Ennore Harbour has been the chief cause of the chain of environmental and human tragedies. Accretion of beach-sand, consequent on any structure, like the port, projecting into the sea, has resulted in the clogging of the Ennore

(Continued on page 10)



## Kaattupalli's geography and topography

• Kaattupalli (Ennore) Island (13° 14' to 13° 21' N and 30° 20' E) extends north, from the Ennore Creek upto the Chintamani and Karungaali villages. It is about 14 to 16 km long, north-south, and about 1.0 to 2.5 km wide, and has an area of about 18 sq.km. On the east, the whole island is bathed by the polluted Bay of Bengal and on the west it is bordered by the even more severely polluted Buckingham Canal, vast stretches of overflowed backwaters (*paraval*) and salt-pans. In the south, there is the Ennore Creek, but it is now separated from the sea by the formation of a sand-bar, far beyond our dredging capacities. In the north, the backwaters at Chintamani, which were open into the sea earlier, were separated about 15 years ago due to the formation of a large sand-bar. However, Kaattupalli is still called an island, although surrounded by polluted waters.

Most of the eastern stretch of the island, adjacent to the sea, is sandy, with a wide beach. Another unique feature of the island is the presence of several sand-dunes, the highest of them about 3000 metres north-south, and about 10 to 12 metres high. The western region of the island is mud and sand, and has the thickest vegetation on the island.

The water-table is rather superficial on the island, so that during the Northeast Monsoon it bubbles up as springs out of the ground. The quality of water is excellent potable water, as good as mineral water.

P.J.S.R.



# What do we do with old buildings?

The threat to the first Madras Club building on Clubhouse Road, reported last fortnight in this journal, once again draws attention to the fact that people in this city do not see heritage buildings as potential money-spinners. In this fortnight's column, *The Man From Madras Musings* offers substantial space for pictures in order to make a couple of points more emphatically.

MMM's picture alongside is of that famous Singapore hotel, Raffles. As Singapore boomed, little attention was paid to it as glittering new towers came up to house what seemed like the hotels of tomorrow. But, then, Singapore put in place some of the toughest heritage laws in the world, which has resulted in much restoration of the island-state's old architecture, much of it a lot younger than Chennai's colonial heritage. And one of the best examples of some splendid restoration is the Raffles Hotel, as is obvious from the picture on this page. Wouldn't those drawing up new plans for the Madras Club's first home like to do something as splendid as Raffles with that magnificent old building? The irony of the plans being drawn up for that property is that there could be a Singapore interest in it — and that interest would have, under Singapore's heritage laws, been forced to restore the Madras property; certainly they would not under those laws have been able to threaten it. It's the lack of heritage laws, or even regulations, in Tamil Nadu that provides them the opportunity to threaten a part of the City's heritage, without even considering whether it couldn't be made as successful as Raffles if only it was restored.

More promising seems the fate of Senate House with Vice-Chancellor Ignacimuthu giving the PWD research wing the go-ahead to restore the building, stating that he would ensure there was no shortage of funds. MMM hopes that enthusiasm is backed by a request for the PWD to work with those familiar with restoration techniques, learning in the process as well as making sure that model restoration is carried out. And as the work proceeds, MMM hopes the Vice-Chancellor will also draw up plans to put the building to good use when restored — or even partially restored — to ensure that it becomes an income earner.

The fact is that not only in many other parts of the world,

but in other parts of India too, heritage properties have been restored and made money-spinners or, at least, put to gainful use. Old palaces and mansions have been converted into successful heritage hotels, restaurants and conference centres. In Chennai itself, with minimal restoration, Kiran Rao has converted *Sundar Mahal*, where once the Jeypore princes stayed, into a successful shop, restaurant and performance and meeting centre. The old Electric Theatre in the Anna Salai Post Office precincts is now the city's Philatelic Bureau and exhibition hall. The bulk of the Buchi Babu's mansion has become high-tech office space in the hands of a publishing house with roots in Oxford. Another old mansion, this one off Kasturi Ranga Iyengar Road, has been converted into the atelier of a French tapestry-maker. And Higginbotham's remains a model of restoration and fruitful use.

It is tragic that others do not see such opportunities in heritage buildings and think that there's money only in steel, concrete and glass highrise.



The restored Raffles Hotel, Singapore — a glowing testimony to restoration.

have been straightened out. But there are three which could do with some rather urgent straight-

ening. MMM's pictures accompanying this piece are file pictures taken some months ago and MMM is not sure whether these have been since straightened or still await straightening, but they do show the kinds of bends that still exist on this inviting highway. And what they show needs rectification if the ECR invitation is to mean a still happier ride.

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

### Highway curves

It's a while since *The Man From Madras Musings* has been on the East Coast Road — and the intervening period has made it a driving experience that even MMM's foreign visitors enjoyed. The surface is good, the tree cover promises to come up, the telephone helplines look mod and the toll booth is not only smart but is backed by quick service. With work beginning on getting the same kind of road to link up with the Taramani road in the city, Guindy to Pondicherry could become a dream drive within the next couple of years.

It however needs a couple of things done to make it even better. One of them is a couple of 'pit stops' — especially keeping in mind those travelling with children or the aged. American style stops the oil companies are developing with fuel, toilet, restaurant and playground facilities, one on the left and one on the right, about midway would be welcome, felt MMM's guests.

Causing more serious concerns were three rather severe bends that taken at high speed could be dangerous. MMM understands that a couple of others

Once you pass Pondicherry and head into Thanjavur District, the roads not only become terrible, broken up and potholed in several stretches, but the signposting is also some of the worst in Tamil Nadu, with hardly a sign at crucial junctions; you have to guess where to turn off and then confirm or be disillusioned only when you spot a milestone some way after the turn. Particularly bad was the stretch from Sirkazhi to Tarangambadi. And with restoration underway in Tarangambadi (Tranquebar) and the possibility of it being developed as a heritage-cum-beach resort, doing up this road — better still the Pondicherry-Cuddalore-Chidambaram-Sirkazhi-Tarangambadi road — should be a priority, making it of a class with the Thanjavur-Pudukkottai road — another fine drive. The good news was that

the city, cause all the coastal villages on either side of it to burgeon and affect the coastal zone worse than anything else.

MMM once more urges the Government to think of moving to the banks of the Kaveri to somewhere between Thanjavur and Madurai and leave Madras to commerce.

### In brief

It was a welcome idea of the Southern Railway, offering a small — though, by and large, select — part of the public a ride in a train powered by a steam engine to commemorate the Railways' 150th anniversary. But why was the ride so short, just from Chennai to Tiruvallur? Couldn't the original route — the second in the country — have been re-enacted, from Royapuram to Wallajah Road (near Arcot)? The Western Railway did that with the first route, making the journey from Bombay to Thane, and what a success it made of it too, with publicity ensuring a crowd to see the train chug along. Why doesn't Southern Railway consider doing such a Royapuram-Wallajah Road journey on weekends, using steam engines and renovated old carriages and throwing in an excursion to Arcot as well? MMM feels it could prove quite an attraction in these jaded times of ours.

Once again there's talk of an Indo-Sri Lanka road and rail link, a new Adam's Bridge, this time Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Tyrone Fernando informing a Chennai audience that the Prime Ministers of both countries were keen on the idea and had agreed to look at a plan for what would be a \$500 million project. *The Man From Madras Musings* wonders how this plan would sell with India's resurrected commitment for the Sethusamudram project? Would the planned bridge be one that would open to let ships through, or is it an either/or proposition, MMM wonders.

— MMM



The kinds of curves that need straightening out on the East Coast Road.

# A start with restoration at Tranquebar

A "little piece of Denmark" on the southeast coast of India is undergoing a renaissance.

Tarangambadi, on the poetically-named Coromandel Coast in the State of Tamil Nadu, is today a sleepy village with a wonderful beach. But less than 200 years ago it was a major trading post for perhaps Europe's most overlooked colonial power — the Danes.

• by CHARLES HAVILAND BBC, reporting from Tamil Nadu

Known historically as Tranquebar, the settlement still boasts a magnificent 17th Century fort, churches, orderly streets and old governors' buildings, all constructed along Danish lines hundreds of years ago.

They have long been in a state of severe dilapidation.

But now, thanks to the efforts of a small group of Danish volunteers, the southern wing of Fort Dansborg has been restored.

The Tamil Nadu and Indian Governments have followed suit and carefully renovated the old gateway into the town, known as the Land Gate.

"It's amazing," says Poul Petersen, who heads the Danish group that initiated the renovation project. "If you go to a small Danish harbour village, it's just the same atmosphere. It's like a piece of Denmark here in India!"

The Coromandel Coast is dotted with fortresses dating from the age of early European trade in Asia. The Portuguese, Dutch, French and British all left a mark here. As early as 1620, a Danish admiral, Ove Gedde, signed a treaty with the ruler of Thanjavur, which enabled him to build Tranquebar, 120 kilometres (75 miles) away — principally to import spices such as pepper into Denmark.

After it was sold to the British in 1845, Tranquebar fell into disuse and has been largely overlooked by travellers until today.

But some people have been keeping an eye on it. "I've been waiting for this moment since 1956," says Thomas, a history lover who lives in Thanjavur. "I'm a happy man today. I'm 74

**What He Said**

What could my mother be to yours? What kin is my father to yours anyway? And how did you and I meet ever? But in love Our hearts have mingled like red earth and pouring rain.

சொ. யாழ்ப்பாணம் வரதா கிழவரை  
மொகன்தய நுந்நெய்யு செம்புழைந்த செவீர்  
யாழ்ப்பாணம் மொகன்தய நுந்நெய்யு  
செம்புழைந்த செவீர்  
வெட்டிலை நெஞ்சுந் தாங்கலை தனவே.

Translated by A.K. Ramanujan  
© Poems on the Underground

# Tamil, balm for London underground

There's rarely been much to inspire the creative mind on the London underground. But, thanks to the British Council, in association with a few other enlightened bodies, these dark journeys beneath the surface have, for some years now, been touched with a few rays of light.

'Poems on the Underground' selects short poems and snippets of verse for underground compartments to give the weary commuter or the slightly bewildered tourist an oasis of thought and reflection.

So it is that in this, the 15th anniversary year of 'Poems on the Underground', an ancient Tamil text is speeding its daily journey beneath Leicester Square and Oxford Circus, Notting Hill Gate and Tottenham Court Road.

This 2,000-year-old Tamil poem is the first Indian poem to help draw passengers from their stupor and to lift their eyes from the crush. The poem, *What He Said*, is by the Sangam age poet Cempulapayanir and has been translated by A.K. Ramanujan.

years old, and I want to see all the monuments in Tranquebar restored before my death."

Fort Dansborg was one of Denmark's biggest forts — second only to a much more famous one, Kronborg in the town of Elsinore, the inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Economically, too, Tranquebar was more valuable to the Danes than their much bigger and far colder colony of Greenland.

Tarangambadi today is peaceful but poverty-stricken. Most of the people of the village

and its hinterland depend on agriculture, and crops are constantly threatened by severe water shortages.

Sudeep Jain, the Collector of the District, believes the restoration of Tranquebar could offer new hope for the future.

With its virgin beach, Danish monuments and also an ancient Hindu temple, he believes there is great potential for tourism and local income-generation. Local views have been highly positive to the idea of tourism development.

The Indian Government has recently said it will fund the renovation of the rest of the fort. The Queen of Denmark has also made a donation.

The restoration work so far has been done remarkably quickly — within the space of a few months. It may be difficult to sustain this momentum. But the Indian and Danish collaborators on the project, now firm friends, are aiming high.

They want to get Tranquebar recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site — like *Hamlet's* castle.

# Why the Brits don't drink Indian tea

*Because we don't spend more on this poor man's drink*

None of the cockneys could guide me to the Tea Board office during my stay in London a few months ago. Reason: the Board's office does not have a nameboard! Nor does it actively promote Indian tea in the local marketplace.

The Board's office is located on one of the floors of the India

House, the office of the Indian High Commissioner. Visitors are subjected to the same formalities as if entering the High Commissioner's office and hence the feeling that the Board is just an extension of the Indian bureaucracy and not a promotion wing. There is no place in the office to conduct meetings and, so, public relations activi-

ties do not take place. The Board is unable even to give a good cup of tea to visitors, let alone show samples of the various varieties of tea grown in India.

An IAS officer is the director of tea promotion (DTP), but his hands are tied; he has no staff support and only a limited expense authority of £74. He has to seek permission from Headquarters in Kolkata and the Commerce Ministry in New Delhi, spending a lot of time and money in the process, if he were to spend more than this sum. Worse, the Government of India wants him to employ only a contingency staff on a low salary with a technical break every three months. So, there is neither loyalty nor continuity in the staff.

As for the Board's budget, the sum given is grossly inadequate. It has no money for publicity or product or logo promotion or the development of

market intelligence. It is spending less than one per cent of its total budget on holding buyer-seller meets and other events. The only major campaign it does is in-house promotion at Harrods, and that absorbs nearly half its total budget. For all this, Harrods is not the place where an average Englishman buys tea; the price is much too high, making most of the Indian varieties forbidding.

In addition, the Board is conspicuously absent at all the right places. It did not participate in the world's largest food ingredient exhibition, FI Europe 2001, held in London last winter, nor at Wimbledon or at Lord's.

The UK market is much too important for the Indian tea industry to ignore in this fashion. On the one hand, it is the world's second largest importer, with a high per capita consumption of 27 kg, growing at an annual rate of one per

cent. For another, the market has been showing a tilt towards Indian tea despite the ineffective promotion.

At present, India is exporting around 20 million kg of tea worth £33 million. There is a definite scope to increase the sale of PF and PD grades of CTC tea for which India is looking for buyers. UK imports around 150 million kg tea annually, with Kenya supplying 43 per cent. The English look to India only when the supplies from Kenya dry up. If the Tea Board is to face the challenge, it should be completely upgraded. It should be adequately staffed, duly empowered and encouraged to create a brand equity for Indian tea. It should be the information centre on Indian tea varieties and be able to conduct frequent buyer-seller meets. — (Courtesy: *Industrial Economist*)

P.S. Sundar

**Want to muse with MUSINGS?**

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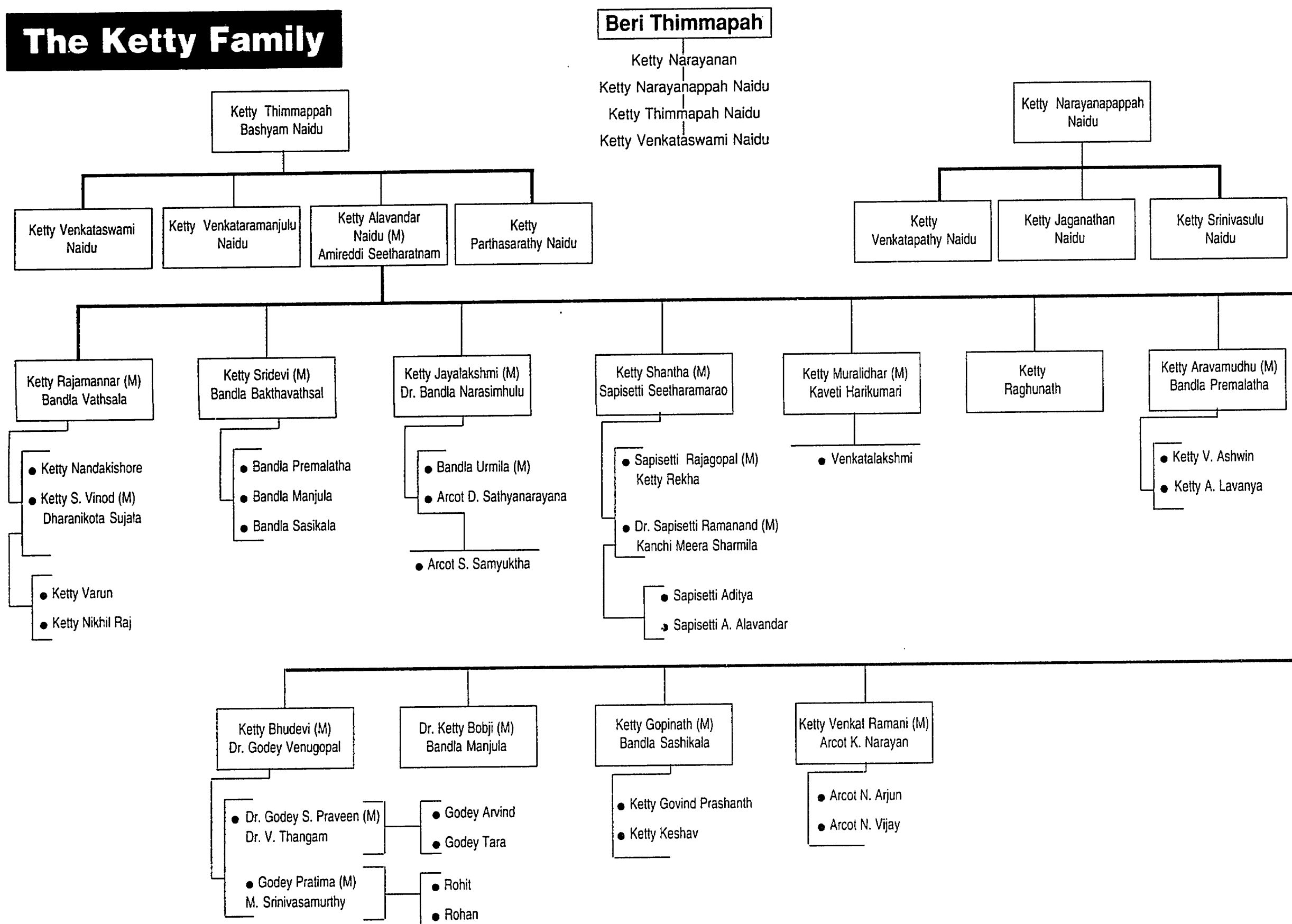
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## The Ketty Family



## A centenary in the 'first family'

It was in the early 17th Century that Beri Thimmappah and his grandson Ketty Narayanappah migrated to Chennapatnam (Madras) from Palacole in present Andhra Pradesh after negotiating for a piece of land to be leased to the East India Company. On this land, Fort St. George came up and it was from the Fort that

Madras grew. Thimmappah's family did business with the East India Company in indigo, textiles etc. and grew from strength to strength.

Beri Thimmappah's great great grandsons, Ketty Thimmappah Bashyam Naidu and Ketty Narayanappah Naidu, founded in 1894 Appah

& Co to trade wholesale in chillies and spices. Later, they diversified into other products, including pharmaceuticals.

The family built several choultries and patronised various Vaishnavite temples. Beri Thimmappah was a founder of the Chenna Malleswara and Chenna Kesavaperumal Temples, origi-



The Bashyam Naidu Park in Kilpauk ... and a close-up of the Bashyam Naidu statue, on right.



A picture of the late Alavandar Naidu with one of his great-great-grandsons.

nally built just outside Fort St. George. Beri Thimmappah's was indeed the First Family of 'Chennapatnam'.

It was in this family that Ketty Alavandar Naidu was born on August 14, 1902, the third son of Ketty Thimmappah Bashyam Naidu. After graduation, he and his cousin K. Venkatapathy Naidu established in 1928 the Pharmaceuticals/Chemists Department of Appah & Co. The family began to be referred to popularly as the 'Appah Family'.

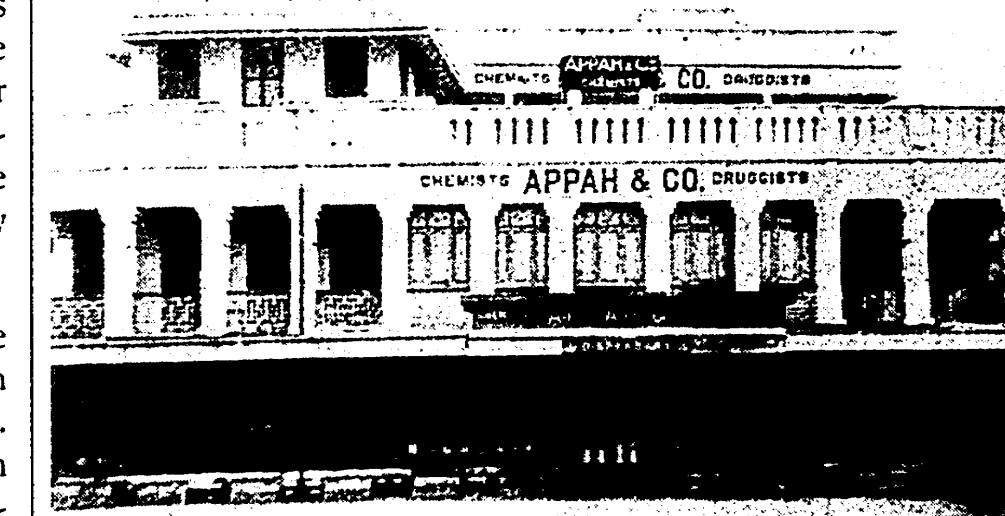
His eldest brother, K. Venkataswami Naidu, a staunch follower of Gandhiji, was active in politics and held high offices as Mayor of Madras, President of T.T.D., Minister in Rajaji's Cabinet in 1952-54, etc. His older brother, K. Venkataramanjulu Naidu, efficiently managed the affairs of the nearly 100-member Hindu undivided family and managed all the religious duties of the family. His son, Dr. K.V. Ranganathan, was the first doctor in the family, a

forerunner of several more in the years to come. The youngest brother was K. Parthasarathy Naidu. Their cousins (sons of K. Narayanappah Naidu) participated in all family affairs.

Alavandar Naidu married Amireddi Seetharatnam on May 9, 1930. She was from a remote village in Andhra Pradesh, but got acclimatised quickly to life in an urban HUF. They had seven sons and four daughters. The sons became engineers, chartered accountants, doctors, company executives etc. and were successful in their professions. His eldest son, K. Rajamannar, was the first engineer in the family. His daughters too married professionals.

Alavandar Naidu died on October 2, 1977 but his wife Seetharatnam remains the Grand Old Lady and his grandchildren have excelled as doctors, engineers and in the fine arts, particularly in Bharata Natyam.

**K. Bakthavatsal**



Appah & Co., chemists and druggists on NSC Bose Road. In its heyday it was one of the leading pharmacists of Madras.

## The case of the midnight murder - 2

(Continued from last fortnight)

The morning after Dhanam's body had been found, Vaidyanatha sent his men to call Sami Thevan, and to inform Dhanam's family in Orattur, who were told, on the mirasdar's instructions, that Dhanam had died of cholera!

When a Police Sub-Inspector arrived, he found Dhanam's body on the cot, with her feet resting on a stool. The face was turned upwards, slightly to the right. The head rested on a pillow on the bench. The eyes were closed and the mouth was shut. The hair was loose, wet with blood. The body seemed to be in peace.

There were injuries on the left side of the body and on the chest and above. None at all on the right nor below the chest. The police officer also noticed cuts and puncture wounds, one very deep on the left side of the neck, and also on the face and upper lip, left ear and upper regions of the chest. In all, there were thirteen injuries and there was blood everywhere, all suggesting that the killing had been done with maniacal fury.

There was a white cloth stained with blood lying on the floor near the cot. It was the garment worn by Ayyasami when he went to bed hours earlier. How did it reach the floor? How was it that Ayyasami was sitting on the bed wearing a reddish cloth? Who changed it?

The murder weapon, the *aruvai*, was found on the floor in a corner of the hall with blood on it.

The police officer had a strange and disturbing feeling. The body, its position... the feet on the stool. It all seemed too orderly, all neatly arranged. And the bed showed no signs of struggle; the bed-linen was not disturbed. Was the killing done elsewhere and the body brought to the bed and neatly laid out? Who could have done it? Could one man do all that?

The officer examined everyone in the house. Later, when the Thasildar, an official with magisterial powers, questioned Ayyasami about the murder, he remained silent but pointed to his father. He did not elaborate further.

After the post-mortem and inquest, Ayyasami was arrested for the murder. Now for the first time he spoke and stated his innocence. The culprits were his father, Kanthimathi, Thangababu, Vaidyanatha's sons Somu and Kalyanam, and some servants. They killed his wife. The first blow was struck by Vaidyanatha with the *aruvai*. Others took him (Ayyasami) to another room, while Dhanam was carried to the backyard. Later, the body was brought to the bed and he too was shifted back and placed near the body.

The First Class Magistrate at Mannargudi at the committal proceedings took the view that Ayyasami was not — and could not be — the culprit; the killing could not have been done by a single person. And he then discharged Ayyasami. To the surprise of many he ordered the arrest of Vaidyanatha. The police also arrested Kanthimathi, Thangababu and some farm hands. Somu and Kalyanam, however, vanished and could not be traced.

The police traced a labourer, Thyagan, who claimed that he

knew all about the murder having been a participant. He was made an approver. He said that he and his brother were the killers and they had acted under the instructions of Vaidyanatha, killing Dhanam in the backyard of the mansion under a sweet-lime tree, in the presence of their master. He repeated what followed, as already narrated by Ayyasami.

The trial in the District and Sessions Court, Tanjore, attracted wide attention. Pam-

phlets of songs and poems describing the misdeeds of Vaidyanatha in the past were printed and circulated all over the district. Incest, rape, murder, sadistic beatings and other gruesome deeds all found mention in the booklets.

R. Satagopachariar, one of the top criminal lawyers of Madras Province, defended the first accused, Vaidyanatha. Eardley Norton, that leading lawyer of Madras, described 'Satagopa' as

“a silver-tongued orator, and a past master in the art of Queen Elizabethan oratory!”

Col. Hassel Wright, the senior medical officer, was called as an expert witness for the Defence. He felt that the injury on the neck of the victim, the most serious of them all, would have rendered the victim unconscious. The position of the body and injuries being on the left showed that the killer was on the right. The number of injuries suggested

his evidence that his brother seemed over-anxious to cremate the body and offered Ayyasami a bribe of Rs. 30,000 to agree to the cremation. It was a sizeable fortune in that era! But the son had refused. In their community, bodies are buried and never cremated.

The assessors returned a verdict of guilty against the accused. (In the districts during the Raj, the members of the jury were known as assessors.) The Sessions Judge accepted their verdict and awarded the death sentence to Vaidyanatha, and lesser punishments to the other accused.

\* \* \*

Vaidyanatha filed an appeal against the conviction in the Madras High Court and engaged Dr. S. Swaminadhan to lead R. Satagopachariar and defend his case. A Bench consisting of Justice Bakewell and Justice Sadasiva Iyer heard the appeal during the first week of June 1912. C. F. Napier, a British Barrister practising in Madras, appeared for the Crown-respondent.

Dr. Swaminadhan, then at the height of his fame, raised many points to prove that his client was innocent. Vaidyanatha had a defective right arm, the consequence of a wrongly set bone fracture in the past, which prevented him from lifting it. So he could not have cut the victim, as claimed by Ayyasami. Besides, the nature and number of wounds on the body proved that the attack was the handiwork of a maniac, like Ayyasami.

Justice Bakewell was not convinced by the defence case, and in a lengthy judgement confirmed the death sentence. Justice Sadasiva Iyer disagreed with his 'learned brother', wrote a separate judgement and acquitted the accused. In view of the difference in judicial opinion, the appeal was referred to a third judge, Justice C. Sankaran Nair. He heard both sides, agreed with Justice Bakewell and confirmed the death sentence on Vaidyanatha.

It was then that Dr. Swaminadhan created legal history in Madras when he sent the 'marathon cable' to the London solicitor.

(Concluded)



## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

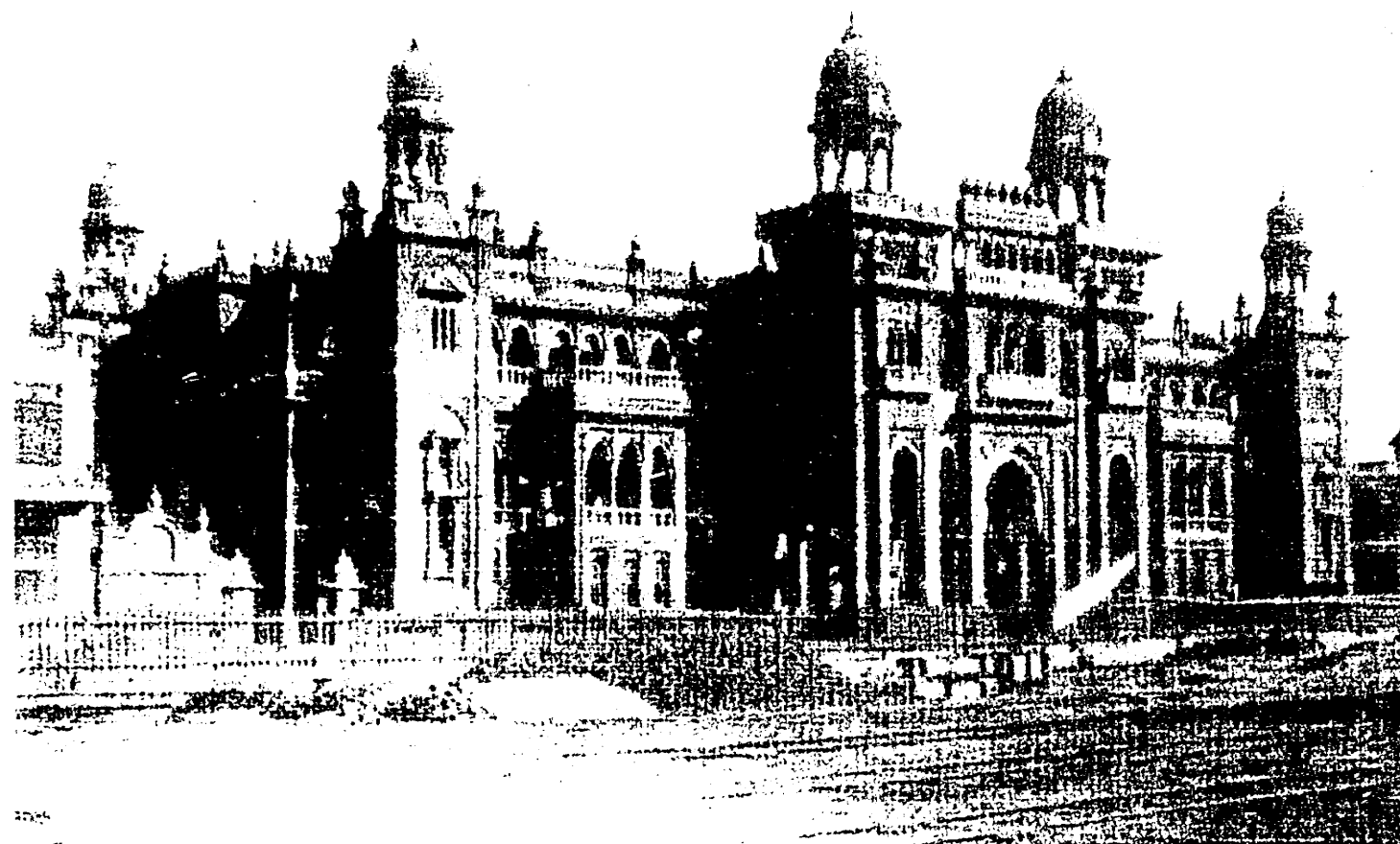
(Current affairs questions are from the period July 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Simple one to beginwith. Who won Wisden's 'Spirit of Cricket' Award recently?
2. Who is the new CMD of the country's largest business empire, Reliance Industries?
3. Which Indian brand is Boris Becker endorsing?
4. Who is to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury?
5. Who are the winners of the 'Best Actor' and 'Best Actress' National Awards?
6. Where in the former Soviet Union did an SU-27 jet plough into onlookers at an air show, killing 66 people?
7. With which prestigious continental award has Indian activist Sandeep Pandey been honoured?
8. Who won his fourth consecutive Tour de France cycle race crown recently?
9. Which Hindi film matinee idol is in trouble because of his alleged links with the Bombay underworld mafia?
10. Who was the last Vice-President, before Krishan Kant, to die in harness?

\* \* \*

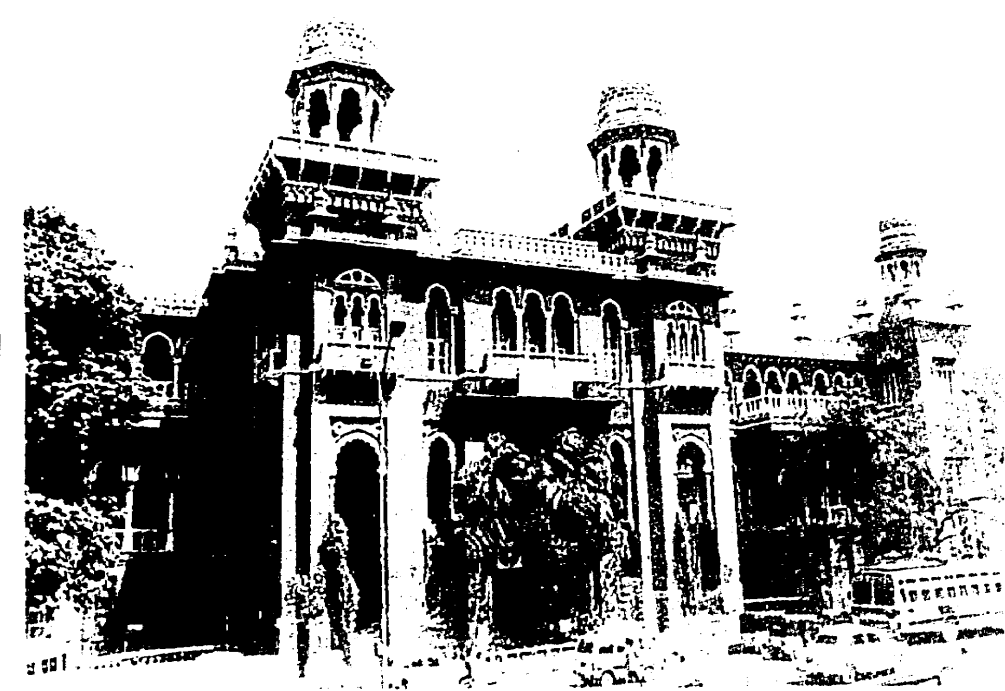
11. Which party-leader made a demand for the bifurcation of Tamil Nadu at a rally in Uthiramerur on July 18th, leading to condemnation from the ruling party?
12. Where in Salem is a permanent helipad being built for use?
13. Where, near Chennai, has a special court been established to try POTA detenus?
14. Name the director who won the 'Best Director' national award for the film *Oonikkal Nooniper*.
15. History. Name the first Indian governor to live in Raj Bhavan, Chennai.
16. If T. Prakasam was the first Chief Minister of Madras State, who was the second?
17. The Cooum and Adyar are both fed by what river?
18. How many Lok Sabha seats does the State have?
19. The eminent mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan attributed his mathematical skills to which deity?
20. Which Tamil businessman is credited with having pioneered hire-purchase schemes for retail goods and shoppers in the country?

(Answers on page 10)



Our OLD this fortnight is yet another picture from that old collection that serendipitously came Madras Musings' way. The picture, taken shortly after the building was built in the late 1890s, is of the headquarters of the Bank of Madras, established in 1843 with the amalgamation of the Madras Bank (1680s), Carnatic Bank (1788), Bank of Madras (1795) and the Asiatic Bank (1804). The splendid headquarters building, on a site acquired on South Beach Road for Rs. 1 lakh in 1895, is to a design by Col. Samuel Jacob, but adapted by Henry Irwin and built by that great builder, Namberumal Chetty, for Rs. 3 lakh.

In 1921, the Bank of Madras merged with the Banks of Bengal and Bombay to become the Imperial Bank of India and since 1955 it's called the State Bank of India. The Madras building served with these changes as the Southern Regional Headquarters of the Bank, but, with a new regional office built as a neighbour, it became the main branch of the SBI in Madras.



Our NEW shows the building as it is today, not changed very much when seen from outside. But what has changed is the magnificent interior which once had a palatial, marble-floored banking hall. The ornate woodwork, the embellishments in brick, granite and wood, and the 1200 stained glass panels are hardly visible. Here is an interior crying for restoration. A rather similar hall in the Commemorative Library is being restored; this deserves the same consideration. And if it is successfully restored, it would easily be the branch office the State Bank would be proudest of.

— Friends for the Needy, Kathirvedu Village, Puzhal, which runs a rehabilitation programme for the poor who are mentally ill and which needs a workshop building for the mentally ill.

— Social Welfare Centre for Weaker Sections, which works towards the rehabilitation of the mentally ill, retarded, handicapped and socially oppressed such as commercial sex workers and sanitary workers. Support is for an auto for transport.

— ICDS Anganwadi Centre, which needs a new centre for the education of children of poor families. Support is for a new Anganwadi building.

— Spastics Support Society, which rehabilitates spastic children. Support is for vocational rehabilitation projects.

September 28-29: The 70th South Indian Music Conference and Festival. Music competitions in vocal and instrumental (Violin, Veena and Mridangam) will be held under the auspices of the Indian Fine Arts Society. For details apply to the Society, Devi Arthant, Flat No. 16, 1st Floor, No. 15-16, Dr. Nair Road, T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017.

— The YMCA College of Physical Education's, Project Physical Education for the Blind, involving teacher training.

## Dates for Your Diary

From August 22 till 28: Paintings by the Kerala-based artist T. Kaladaran (at Vinyasa).

From August 23 till 30: A group show of paintings by artists from all over India (at Artworld).

August 20: Meeting of the Culture Café Writers' Circle (at the British Council, at 6.30 p.m.).

August 22: The Magic Lantern presents *The Government Inspector*, a comedy adapted from the original by Nikolai Gogol and directed by Rajiv Krishnan (at the Museum Theatre, at 6.30 p.m.).

August 26: A *Voice Recital*, a joint effort by Stephan Loges (Bari-tone) and Natasha Loges (Piano) (at the Museum Theatre, at 6.30 p.m.).

August 28: Launch of *A Corner of a Foreign Field* by Ramachandra Guha, with the author reading excerpts from the book (at the British Council, at 6.30 p.m.).

August 30: Creating different types of Ganeshas (at Dakshina-Chitra).

September 1: The Sixth Annual Citizens' Run will start from Gandhi Mandapam at 4 p.m. and conclude at the Gandhi Statue on the Marina Beach.

The target of the Run this year is around Rs. 12 lakh, to be collected as usual through donations, sponsorship of banners and purchase of T-shirts to be worn during the Run. The cost of a T-shirt is Rs. 100/- and T-shirts are available at the Citizens' Run Trust Office, 10, Raja Krishna Road, Teynampet, Tel: 4330164.

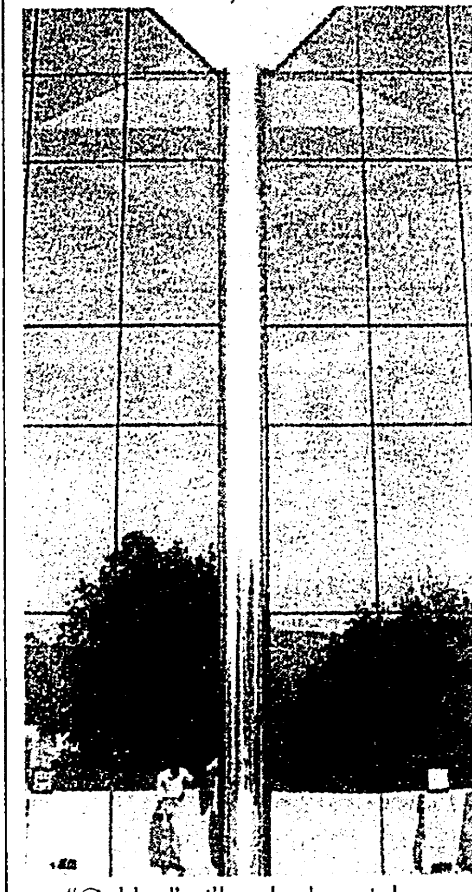
The Citizens' Run Trust will this year support:

## 'Golden' pillar that's stainless

At the newly-built Surabi International hotel in Vellore, five pillars have been clad in gold-coloured stainless steel in No. 8 finish. In what may be the first such instance in India, the central pillar has been clad in gold-coloured stainless steel in No. 8 finish. The other four pillars have been clad in No. 4 finish, chromium colour. The diameter of the pillars is 300 mm and they measure 6 metres in height.

The gold-coloured stainless steel sheets, supplied with double coating of OPC (one-side plastic coating which is removed after the fabrication work is completed), were procured from Thailand. About 300 kg of stainless steel sheets of one mm thickness were used for cladding the five pillars.

The owner of the hotel had initially decided on using aluminium composite panels, but was later convinced by the fabricators to use gold-coated stainless steel sheets, in spite of the higher price (Courtesy — Stainless India.)



"Golden" pillar that's stainless.

## Two wetlands studied

The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SAICON), Coimbatore, through its Regional Coordinating agency Care Earth, Chennai, had recently requested Madras Naturalists' Society to study two important wetlands in Madras — Pallikarai and Chembarambakkam. There are 30 wetlands identified in Tamil Nadu. The project involved the following:

- Collection of fish samples to study aquatic contamination
- Preparing an inventory of birds, fishes and aquatic plants
- Mapping of wetlands and collection of socio-economic data.

The report is now available and provides valuable insights into what is threatened in these wetlands — (Courtesy: MNS Bulletin).

# Swansong for an old hall

As the buses laboriously turn the T'Nagar roundabout, the passengers, at least those interested in fine arts, and those whose attention is not diverted by the necessity of having to hold on for dear life, may notice that a familiar landmark is missing. Vani Mahal, for long one of the major homes of the performing arts in Chennai, has been pulled down.

Before the activists for the preservation of cultural heritage in Chennai are up in arms, let me assure them that the hall has not gone away forever. Neither has it been pulled down to make way for a block of flats or a supermarket complex. It is being reconstructed with better facilities that include a mini-hall and airconditioning.

### • V. SRIRAM

(with inputs from S. Parthasarathy) remembers Vani Mahal's beginnings.

The Sabha and the hall owe their existence to Chittoor V. Nagaiah, the popular filmstar of the 1940s, who later switched to playing character roles. He was a great music lover; he also sang well. He had co-starred with M.S. Subbulakshmi in *Meera* in 1944. That year, returning home one rainy night, he saw a few people huddled around a bus shelter. He stopped his car to find out where they were going and they informed him that they were residents of Mambalam and had come to attend a music concert in Mylapore and were waiting for a bus to take them home. Not only did Nagaiah give them a lift in his car, he also decided there and then that an auditorium in T'Nagar was a must.

He banded together like-minded people of the T'Nagar / West Mambalam area of which he was also a resident and formed the Tyaga Brahma Gana Sabha. The name is characteristic of Nagaiah, for he was a great devotee of Tyagaraja, a composer, and was to produce, direct and act in the lead role in *Tyagaiah* in 1946. He also donated much of the proceeds from the film for building a choultry in Tiruvaiyaru. Other promoters of the Sabha included Dr. V. Rama Iyengar

Burma Shell, S. Soundararajan of Tamilnadu Talkies, S. Ramaswamy Naidu, later Mayor of Madras, Dr. P.B. Annagarachariar, a leading doctor of the area and also a Municipal Councillor, and Lady Venkatasubba Rao, social worker and wife of Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao, Judge.

The first programme was held at the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha premises and it was a dance performance by Gopinath and Thangamani who later migrated to Calcutta and became the high priests of South Indian culture there. It was decided that programmes would be held on two days in a month, covering a full weekend if possible.

The enthusiastic response from the local residents encouraged the promoters to plan ambitiously and they decided to build a hall for their programmes. Negotiations were successful for the acquisition of 10 grounds of space on long-term lease from T.A. Rangachary, the eminent lawyer. The foundation was laid in 1945 and construction was handled by V. Ganapathy Iyer, architect, under the supervision of Dr. Annagarachariar himself. Dr. Annagarachariar ran a successful pharmacy called Vani Pharmacy in the vicinity (where Ratna Stores stands today). It was decided to use the same name for the hall, particularly as Vani was another name for Saraswathi, Goddess of the Arts. So Vani Mahal it became.

The building was declared open on November 18, 1945 by Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, then Dewan of Travancore State, in the presence of M. Chandrashekhara Iyer, Justice of Madras High Court. The inaugural concert was by Ariyakkudi T. Ramaniya Iyengar, accompanied by Papa K.S. Venkataramaiah on the violin and Palghat T.S. Mani Iyer on the mridangam.

The hall, built according to the norms of the day, was open on the sides to let in fresh air and also diminish echo. Seating capacity was 750 on the ground floor and 100 in the balcony. Initially, cane and metal chairs were used. Later, a part of the hall had permanent seats. Patrons could become life members for a fee of Rs.100. They were, however, few in number. The majority of the audience comprised local residents who purchased tickets priced at 12 annas, Re 1 and Rs. 1.50. The hall, being almost one of its kind

in that area, became a popular venue, not only for music programmes but also for Hari-katha expositions, dance and drama. The Sabha, in turn, increased the number of programmes in a month from two to four.

Among the musicians, the hall has played host to almost



every important name in the field. S. Parthasarathy, one of the long-standing office-bearers, remembers that N.C. Vasanthakokilam's performances were invariably attended by D.K. Pattammal. Flautist T.R. Mahalingam claimed it was his favourite venue, despite the fact that, once, he failed to turn up for a performance. So did that maverick T.N. Rajarathinam Pillai, the *nagaswara vidwan*.

In *Harikatha*, too, the hall has seen and heard the best. Kripananda Variyar gave discourses on the *Mahabharatham* here. In fact, the *Harikatha* tradition is so strongly ingrained here that for the past 25 years, *upanyasams* are an integral feature of the annual programmes and in the month of *Margazhi* (Dec/Jan), special expositions of the *Tiruppavai* are conducted every day in the morning from 7.00 to 8.30.

Dance programmes by the best were also regularly held and the Sabha is justifiably proud of the fact that the first performance of Waheeda Rehman, later to become a Hindi film star, was held here. She was paid Rs. 50! The present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalithaa, also gave one of her earliest dance performances here under the banner of Oriental Dances.



Vani Mahal a few weeks ago... getting ready to make way for the new. The old is remembered in the plaque, below.

The peregrinating Indian Fine Arts Society used the hall for many years for their programmes in December. It was only in the late 1970s that, when the IFAS moved to the nearby Sankardass Auditorium, the Tyaga Brahma Gana Sabha began conducting its own annual festival in December.

Programmes are now held throughout the day in December in the usual pattern of free concerts by upcoming artistes in the morning and ticket performances by the senior *vidwans* in the evening. The Sabha was the first to give Mandolin U. Shrinivas a senior slot as far back as the early 80s. In 2000, the Sabha instituted annual awards, conferring the title Vani Kala Sudhakara.

For the past decade or so, it was clear that the hall had seen better times. It became stifling without airconditioning. Increasing traffic noise resulted in doors having to be fixed, and then they had to be opened to keep the heat down, letting in all the noise of busy T' Nagar. Parking was a major issue. The seats had become old and the mosquitoes in the hall were famous even in a city that is infested with them. Some of the younger generation artistes even referred to the place as a 'Bhoot Bungalow'. The time had come to pull the old structure down and make arrangements for better facilities. That is what the Sabha is now doing, hoping to complete the task before October. Programmes are now held in rented premises at the German Hall. The new plan will, however, not solve parking space problems. But that is not unique to this Sabha.

So, phoenix like, the Sabha will rise again, with a new look. I only wish that the exterior, with its stucco image of Saraswathi in the best Ravi Varma tradition, is kept unchanged. But we ought to be thankful that the Sabha and the hall have survived all these years and hope that the future will be bright and full of success.

With such popularity all through the year, the Sabha would never have programmes during the December season.



## OUR READERS WRITE

### Saving Senate House

It is heartening to note that *Senate House* is at last to be renovated. Even in the 60s it was in need of upkeep. We used to have our German diploma classes conducted there. We wrote our M.Sc. and diploma examinations there under the fancy fans, while having a beautiful view of the sea and enjoying the cool breeze. We also used to get our S.S.L.C. (matriculation) language textbooks of the University from a room in the *Senate House*. I have heard it was a venue for the Music Academy's annual concerts.

I remember Dr. G.N. Ramachandran once telling an audience about a unique feature there — a pentagon shaped stained glass or trellis? I wish it is preserved.

The Madras University took pains to maintain the architecture by constructing the centenary building on the same pattern as the old building. The first rocco to mar the Marina front was the annexure to the PWD building. Dr M. Krishnan once lamented about this.

R.K. Natarajan  
Chennai 600 094.

### English heritage

Jaspar Utley's reference to Celts, Saxons and Normans (MM, July 16th) is something which the English themselves always had trouble with in the past. It is all very well to classify English as a self-selected identity and not as a race or religion — as long as the old families continue to decline and there is an absentee aristocracy, otherwise the Englishman's reluctance to accept social change is as stubborn as Ulster's foolhardiness.

Who can forget Gerrard Winstanley and Thomas Paine and the Diggers? Why, what's wrong with the name Saxe-Coburg Gotha? Is it not true that Anglo-Saxons are ethnic Germans? It is a fact that antiquity in England would not bear looking into. May be this is the reason behind the collective amnesia of the English. Jaspar Utley would have done well if he had restricted to writing about heritage protection in India.

Refai Salafis  
Chennai 600 102.

### Bibliophiles both

I found the article 'Three Outstanding Scribes' by K.Wadhwaney (MM, July 16th) fascinating, the more so because I came to know all three of the journalists described when I joined *The Hindu* as a trainee-subeditor in late 1947.

N.S. Ramaswami had, besides his passion for cricket, a love of English literature and history. Meeting him after an interval of 30 years on my return from Bombay to Madras in 1982, I learnt he had authored several books. He invited me home and among the things that charmed me most was his wonderful collection of books. He presented me with the latest among his

works, which was the *Political History of the Carnatic under the Nawabs*.

The other senior subeditor with a big book collection was N.R. Bhuvarahan who, besides his interest in literature and politics, was a keen lover of Carnatic music. When I was in the features section of PTI-Reuters in Bombay, the World Conference on Pacifism was held in India and I was required to do a background article. I was looking for Aldous Huxley's *Encyclopaedia of Pacifism* and it was not traceable in the Asiatic or Sassoon Libraries in Bombay. I wrote to Bhuvarahan, who promptly fished out a copy of the book from his library and mailed it to me.

Jaiboy Joseph  
Chennai 600 031.

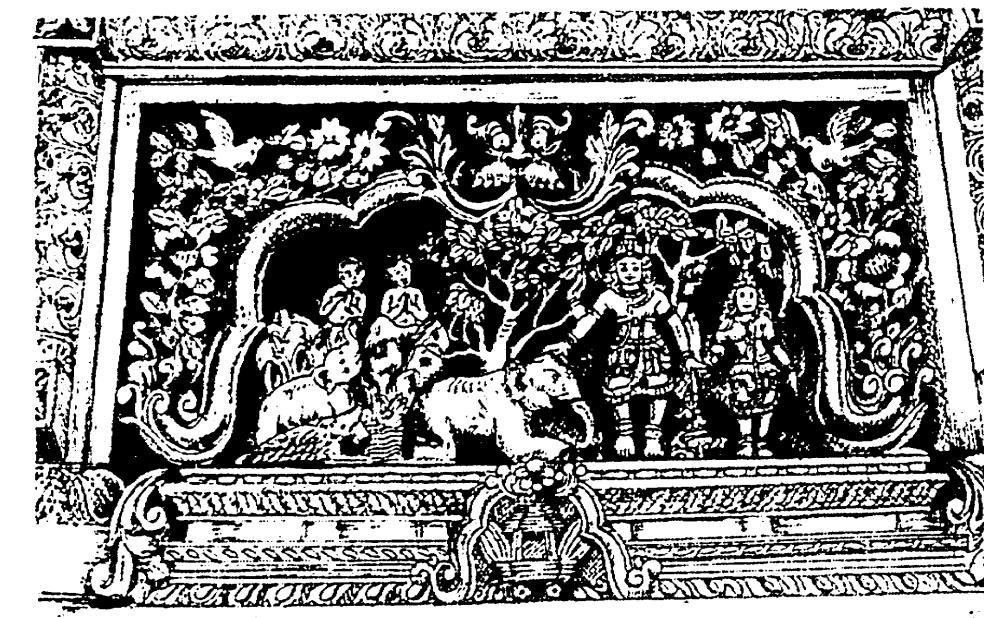
### One team enough

When Ram Singh bowled the first ball in the Madras-Mysore match and helped the State win its inaugural Ranji Trophy tie, there was great hope. But for two sweet wins in the finals, one in the early 1950s and then in the late 1980s, nothing has been achieved. Then what is the use of having Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore teams (MM, May 1st)? It is better to have one strong side rather than a cluster of ordinary sides.

C. K. Subramaniam  
Vashi-400 703.

### Free the left-turns

With most of the city's arterial and main roads turned into 'one-way-zones', it is beyond anyone's comprehension why we are not allowed a 'Free Left-turn'



### Doors as art

The articles by T.S. Nagarajan and K.R. Santhanakrishnan (MM, June 16th) on the traditional epistle of our doors made me recollect the days when I used to marvel at such exquisite carvings. Many houses in towns like Pondicherry, Cuddalore, Chidambaram, Karaikal, Nagapattinam, Karaikudi, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram have excellent carvings on the doors. These decorations were made by the dextrous hands of our skilled craftsmen on fine teak (heavy durable timber) mostly got from Burma (now Myanmar). I wonder if anyone has attempted a detailed study of the invaluable architrave which may one day be part of our national heritage. (Incidentally, the word 'door' is cognate with 'dwaram' in Sanskrit and, therefore, I suggest that the study may be called 'dwara-ramya shastra' or 'decorative art on doors'.)

on several major intersections in the city.

Much choking of roads is caused at traffic signals or junctions, due to the absence of a 'free left-turn'.

I am quite sure that by introducing 'free left-turns' everywhere, even on a trial, not only will bottlenecks at all signals be decongested and traffic snarls minimised, but there will also be a reduction in corruption.

Hemant M. Nahar  
Chennai 600 017.

### Names & addresses...

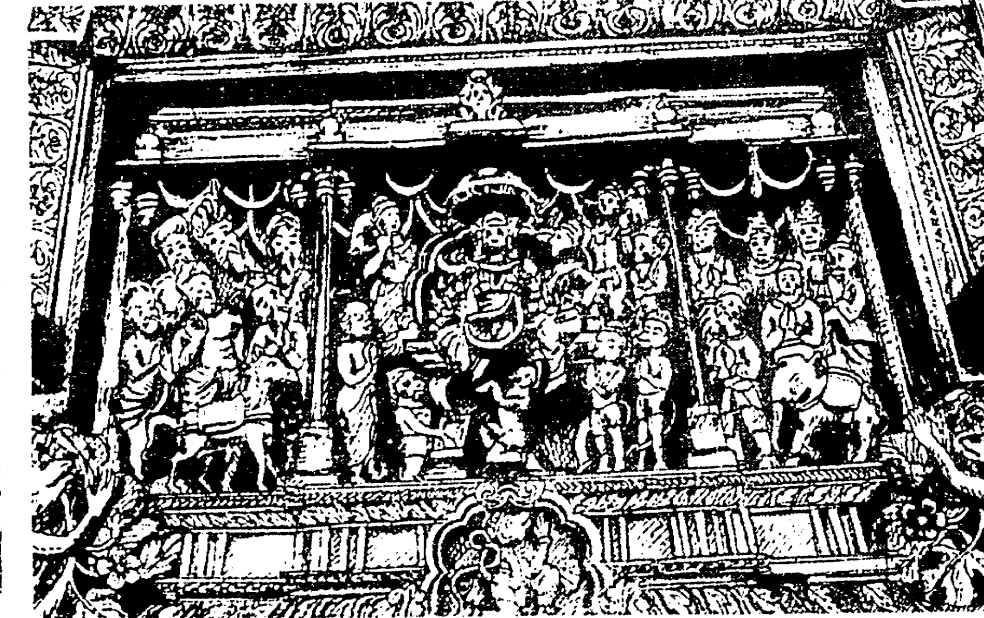
May this not be viewed as *Shakespeare*!! It is recorded that Ought to be in the Guinness Book thanks to the Cooum,

When I wrote about Abhiramapuram II Street transformed into Sir C.P. Ramaswami Road (MM, April 1st), I overlooked the presence of a Sir C.P. Ramaswami Street in Abhiramapuram; the 'Engagements' column in *The Hindu* reminded me of it recently.

A rare instance of duplication and that too in the same locality, a "Shakespearean situation", shall I say!

The Chennaites' (Madras) has a different national connotation!) innate, proverbial penchant for playing with names cuts across languages; the curious but unwary end up with a hearty guffaw at their expense: Barber's Bridge, Saambar Train through Kennedy Street!

The 'Mini-body cart' shortened to 'Minbody cart', lengthened to 'Meen body' taken as a Tamil word and abridged cutting to 'Fish cart'! What an etymological evolution by



Returning to the subject, Mysore city offers astonishing specimens of excellent door carvings. I am enclosing a copy each of two foreshortenings done by my artist-friend A. Narayana (above). Of a dozen or so carvings on the doors of *Karanji Mansion* — a palatial building once owned by the royal family of Mysore and now housing the regional Postal Training Centre — in Nazarbada, Mysore. These two rectangular recesses above doors will give an idea of what the whole of it is like. Each carving depicts scenes from Hindu mythology. These carvings are unparalleled in craftsmanship and loveliness.

If only a serious study coupled with documentation of these hidden treasures is undertaken, it will give an additional fillip to the world of fine arts, aside from giving an opportunity to people to appreciate a great cultural and artistic legacy.

R. Soundararajan  
Nagapattinam 611 002.

# Two pages of letters

## Goodbye, Chennai!

The gates of destiny have been opened,  
Something quite incredible has happened.  
To AIIMS, New Delhi, I am bound,  
It'll be six months before I come around.

"So what," did you say; "Why all the fuss?  
As if with your teeth you've pulled a bus?"  
Well, in the past eleven long years you see,  
Chennai has really, truly grown on me.

Yes, Chennai, which to me is still Madras,  
Where vitamin D abounds and water is scarce,  
Where *pattas* is 'tapas' and cheese is 'sees'  
And advertisement hoardings edge out the trees.

Chennai, the land of *vetha kolambu* and *appalam*,  
Which ought to be in the Guinness Book thanks to the  
Cooum,  
Now teeming with internet cafes and pizza joints,  
And not to forget the omnipresent 'oyins', i.e., wines!

With a statue-filled Marina and lovely sea breezes,  
Dustbins that turn out to be Veeranam pipe pieces,  
No end of 'Bhavans' where one can get A 'meals'  
And PTC buses that require but two wheels.

Pollution, traffic jams and razor-thin flyovers,  
Pondy Bazaar, Parry's and ever-changing phone numbers,  
Manholes without covers and roads owned by buffaloes,  
Summer nights with powercuts and hordes of mosquitoes.

So, that's Chennai in a nutshell...  
Not a Utopia, sometimes a mini-hell.  
But frog-in-a-well me is going to end this bit of verse,  
With the statement that Delhi is probably much worse!

Divya Seshadri  
Chennai 600 040.

design! But the vehicle is a horror on wheels.

I have to sadly round up this letter as a RIP for the Virtual MM Readers Club I mooted (MM, April 16th) now that readers cannot be accessed.

However, in the interregnum, I had interesting and instructive cor-

respondence with readers T.M. Sundararaman, P.A. Ranganathan, Thomas Tharu, Er. Ragade, Er. Susikaran, Dr. H.D. Singh, to mention a few. Cannot junk mail just be thrown away, instead of our getting into bunkers?

N. Dharmeshwaran  
Guduvancherry 603 202.

### 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.

## OUR READERS WRITE

### Traffic conductor

I have it on hearsay that the Chennai Police have approached one of the city's leading exponents of classical dance to teach the right gestures to the traffic constables so that manual traffic signalling becomes a thing of beauty and a joy for the time being at least.

If this is so, I wonder whether anyone remembers a traffic constable at the junction of Radhakrishnan Salai and Mowbray's Road near Music Academy in the Seventies, whose signalling was verily a close second to Zubin Mehta's exertions at the Philharmonic Orchestra. A friend of mine was so enthralled, he drove right up to the dramatically gesticulating cop and read the name plate on his shirt which said 'Ayyanan'. Ayyanna, wherever you are, history is repeating itself.

C.G. Prasad  
Chennai 600 079.

### Railways and nicknames

Adding to Reader Anna Varki's very interesting recollections (MM, May 1st), I would like to recall that the Cutch State Railway (CSR) was popularly referred to by the citizens of that then princely state as *Cuchy Sadel Rekad* (in Gujarati, *sadel* stood for rotten and *rekado* was a small wooden two-wheel bullock cart!).

In shipping too we had some interesting nicknames and as an old seafarer I remember the famous British flag, *Elleman Line*, whose Chairman's initials were JRE. To us

seafarers, JRE stood for John Robs Everybody.

Shashikant Buch  
Chennai 600 090.

### Ill-omens at dawn

After a strenuous journey, arriving in the early morning at a railway station in Chennai is nightmarish.

For the smallest piece of luggage, and the shortest journey, porters and autorickshaw/taxi wallahs demand astronomical figures; at times, more than the amount spent for the entire journey. Those wanting to start the day on a positive note are completely put out and, instead, see themselves staring at bad-omens. Heated bargaining is a common sight.

Is there no redemption for this? Can not the heads of the respective associations look into this and relieve railway passengers of this early morning misery?

Anant V. Prabhu  
Chennai 600 008.

### Polluted Kilpauk

Pollution is there everywhere in Chennai, but Kilpauk is rated as the most polluted. Our colony once upon a time was so clean; in fact, those who initially built houses or got allotments from City Improvement Trust were considered to have poor taste as we were close to the cemetery but even the cemetery was clean. Today, it is full of plastic bags and paper strewn all over. People come with bouquets and flowers wrapped in plastic and just throw them around. With a few showers, it becomes a disgusting sight!

Attempts were made by some good souls to keep a container at the entrance for people to put their bags in. Sadly, these containers dis-

# The tales the plant names tell

Reader V.E. Arunachalam's *Letter History in food* (MM, May 16th) prompted me to share the following information which I imagine may interest at least some of your readers.

As long as I taught in Madras, one of my interests was tracking the native plant species of southern India. In that context, I found vernacular names (Tamil and Malayalam) helpful. The premise was that every native plant has a vernacular (Tamil/Malayalam) name; however, when plants did not have a direct relevance to humans, either useful or harmful, such plants got labelled simply as *kaattuchedi*. In other words, I realised that a majority of the plants introduced from different parts of the world, irrespective of the reason of introduction, never gained a vernacular name. Some did, but rarely; examples of such plants would be the portia tree (*Thespesia populnea*) called *poo-arasu* and the china-rose (*Hibiscus rosa-chinensis*) called *chem-paruthi*. In the case of both these exotics, Tamil names seem to have arisen simply because of the striking similarity to something we had already known. Leaves of the *poo-arasu* closely resemble those of the native arasu (*Ficus religiosa*; peepal), and hence the name

deriving from *pookkum arasu*; the *arasu* that flowers! Likewise, *chem-paruthi* should have reminded someone of *paruthi* (cotton; species of *Gossypium*), but the flowers were uniquely red, so *chem-paruthi*. In Malayalam, groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*) is called *kappal-andi*. Because we had known *andi* or *andi-paruppu* (cashew; *Anacardium occidentale*) previously groundnut, when it arrived in the porters of Kerala, was quickly compared to cashew (again a reasonable similarity in appearance) and was readily called the *kappal-andi*, meaning the 'cashew' that arrived by boat.

Culturally also, plants have specific references and usage. As Arunachalam points out, certain plant organs are banned in specific ceremonies (e.g. *sraddha*) in culinary preparations, a significant example being chillies (*Capsicum annuum*) replaced by the native black pepper (*Piper nigrum*). Orthodox temple priests in southern India never used to accept the flowers of 'foreign' plants when offered to the deity. One common example being *Turukka Saamandi* (*Tagetes sp.*). Unfortunately, it got an unsavoury Tamil name, probably because of its arrival into India from Turkey (*Thurukki* in

Tamil) via Afghanistan, especially during the Moghul empire. But its rejection is wholly because it does not belong to India and, therefore, to Indian culture.

Arunachalam's comment on the origins of *puli* (tamarind; *Tamarindus indica*) is debatable. The biological name *Tamarindus indica* was developed from the Arabic name *tamar-al-hind* which, in translation, means 'date of India'. In fact, the biological name *Tamarindus indica* is, amusingly, tautological, 'date of India of India'. This name does indicate that the Arabs knew the tamarind as a product of India; however, I must agree that the epicentre of *Tamarindus indica* is being discussed. What points favourably to the supposed origin of *Tamarindus indica* in Africa is that in Nagercoil and Marthandam regions of Kanniyakumari District, rural people use a species of *Garcinia*, locally known as *katum-puli*. To clarify Arunachalam's reference to cocunut (*Cocos nucifera*): its epicentre is the Malay peninsula.

However, the nuts spread to India, crossing the oceanic barriers, and the species established itself in peninsular India long ago. Some people attribute the name Kerala to 'coconuts';

'khera', however, means water and the word Kerala arises out of an abundance of water and wetlands. In fact, the native plant *Alstonia scholaris* (*ezhu-ilai palai*, seven-leaf palai) is known as *khera* in South Canara and North Malabar, because it generally prefers to grow along sub-soil water lodgements. The rural people of South Canara and North Malabar use *Alstonia scholaris* as an easy indicator to locate water source before digging wells.

I worked closely with Professor K.P. Aravaanan (KPA) who was then the head of the Department of Tamil in Loyola College (late 1980s?) (who subsequently became the Vice-Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University in Tirunelveli). Because KPA came from Nagercoil, we could discuss vernacular nomenclature of plants in both Tamil and Malayalam effectively. Interest in studying plants influencing Tamil culture was our common meeting point. He was a great source of inspiration to me. I do not know where KPA is at present.

I must add a word about the wonderful work that is being done in the plant conservation context by Professor P. Dayanandan and his associates in Madras. I am not sure how



A road that's a T ... but which garbage and indiscriminate parking make inaccessible.

# Living with the stench

We have been functioning as printers from 62/63 (New No. 122) Greams Road, Chennai 600 006 for about 25 years. This is at the end of a T-shaped lane off the main Greams Road. Once, this cul-de-sac was a splendid locality, without any noise or pollution. There are many Government and private institutions in this complex. They include:

Audit General of India, Food Corporation of India, Hindustan Computers Ltd. (HCL), Industrial and Technical Consultancy Organisation of TN Ltd.

(ITCOT Ltd.), Exquisite Exports Ltd., United India Insurance Co. Ltd., The Tamil Nadu Industrial Corpn Ltd., IDBI, Tariff Advisory Committee Madras Regional Office, Pallavan Transport Consultancy Services Ltd., Tamil Nadu Transport Development Finance Corpn Ltd., Hi Tech Share Registry P. Ltd., National Insurance Company Ltd., Madras Research Centre of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.

All of us today suffer with the junction of the T being used as a

common dumping ground for packing materials, the remains of eatables, disposable cups from nearby canteens and paper from all the offices. This has become a nightmare for all of us. Street dogs, flies, crows have a field day on the road covered with garbage and customers complain about the stink generating from the dump.

If only each office dumps its garbage in its own premises, it will prevent the present nuisance, which the Corporation decides only to look at at long intervals and even then, never completes cleaning the place.

The second complaint of customers is about our road itself. This is in very bad shape with lots of potholes. It is badly encroached on by stalls and hapless pedestrians. Vehicles of all types are parked on both sides of the road. And it is a nightmare for vehicles to negotiate it, especially if there is traffic in both directions. When can all of us here expect some relief?

C.O. Varghese  
Director  
Lokavani-Hall Mark  
Press Private Limited  
Chennai 600 006.

appeared, despite there being a watchman, and a Committee in charge!

A bill has been passed banning plastics. Laws and bills don't have any meaning unless there is follow-up. Garbage is dumped anywhere. Sweepers who were regular every morning are rarely to be seen. The

lorry comes once in a way, meanwhile there is fly-past of plastics, plastic bags and paper! The only solution is door-to-door collection, for which extra payment could be collected.

We have a storm drain, which is now a latrine and garbage dump. If it is not cleared the mosquitoes

have a field day. My neighbour and I phoned the Corporation Health Officer. He told us to contact Zone 5. We went full of hopes and met the officer who said, 'tomorrow'. Tomorrow has yet to come — and his telephone is out of order.

Anna Varki  
Chennai 600 010.

many citizens of Madras are aware of the efforts of Dayanandan et al. to create a mini-arboretum in the Madras Christian College campus. Every high school and college student interested in the heritage of southern India must visit this arboretum to know more about the natural heritage of the region.

So much of the plant life of Madras is wonderful, although much of the glorious spots have been lost due to intense urbanisation. One of the awful victims is the present location of the drive-in restaurant at Gemini Circle, which was probably the first (royal) botanical garden in India, created by Dr William Roxburgh! Anyone interested further in this should consult the only reliable source, *History of Botany in India* by L.D. Burkill (1950?). If my memory serves me right, only the botany departmental library of Presidency College has copies of the book. I will be more than happy if a more reliable historical study of such gardens in Madras could be done by someone interested, before we will lose all of them and for ever.

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(Continued from page 1)

Creek which is south of the Ennore Port. The accretion is massive, beyond our dredging capacities.

Beach-erosion, north of the port, is slowly taking its toll between the Koraikuppam and Sattankuppam villages, with serious threats to the whole geography of the Pulicat Lake.

Because the Ennore Creek is closed to the sea, the North Chennai Thermal Power Station (NCTPS), which was earlier discharging its warm effluents into the sea through the Ennore Creek, is now forced to discharge them into the Buckingham Canal, which flows northwards, unfortunately, into the vast and ancient Pulicat Lake, killing all biodiversity and fisheries and depriving the poor fisherfolk of their livelihood.

The hot slurry from the NCTPS discharged into the sea earlier, has driven away the breeding sea-turtles from the Kaattupalli Beach. Also, the rich fisheries at the Ennore and Pulicat Shoals, at about the five-fathom depth, are depleted.

Local fisherfolk who get into such polluted waters are developing skin-rashes. Birds too have deserted such polluted wa-

ters because of the absence of their food organisms.

#### Future threats

• At a "Public Hearing" in May 2000, in the presence of the District Collector of Thiruvallur, the public vehemently opposed the move to establish the petrochemical park on Kaattupalli Island. This proposal may have been dropped as a consequence, but the Electricity Board is said to be planning a thermal power station to be located on Kaattupalli Island, north of Ennore Port. Even if coal or diesel of low sulphur-content is used as fuel, the effluents, unless fully treated and discharged through pipelines into the offshore waters (beyond 50 metres depth), are not going to be environmental-friendly. The very fact that a piece of precious natural heritage gets occupied by a power plant is itself a major threat to the balanced and harmonious ecosystem and biodiversity of such a site and would lead to loss of a valuable ecology.

#### Its importance

• Along the whole of the Coro-

mandel Coast, both north and south of Chennai, we cannot find a better vegetated or more kaleidoscopic 'environmental and biodiversity hotspot' than Kaattupalli Island. The island, just 40 km from Chennai, is nature's gift for students of Chennai City who can study all the four Conventions signed at the Earth Summit, 1992, namely, Biodiversity, Pollution, International Waters and Climate Change, in one small island. The adjacent Pulicat Lake is being considered as a "Ramsar Site" for International Protection.

For the public of Chennai too it can prove an excellent sport for a week-end's picnicking, for trekking in the woods of Kaattupalli, for an ecological education along "environmental trails", and for aquatic sports like sailing, para-sailing, yatching, boating and game-fishing etc.

Chintaamani at the northern end is an ideal spot for eco-tourism, with eco-friendly tourist facility such as camping sites, camping tents and cottages made available to tourists.

If the seawater is kept clean, free of discharged pollutants, the Kaattupalli Beach would be ideal to ease the congestion on Chennai's beaches, particularly on festival days like *Kaanum Pongal*, and New Year's Eve. Tourist buses could ply upto Kaattupalli or even to Chintaamani or even farther north, to Pulicat Lake-mouth. Boats could even come to ply to Chin-

taamani along the Buckingham Canal, from Chennai.

An outdoor aquarium for all five species of sea-turtles can be organised. If the sand-bar at Chintaamani is opened, there would be an outlet to the sea which would increase biodiversity and fisheries.

#### The suggestions

• Some proposals from the Ennore-Pulicat Environmental Protection Forum (EPEPF):

1. The villages of the six hamlets on the island to be involved in the eco-development project.
2. An afforestation programme focussing on trees for food, fodder, fuelwood, fibre and fertiliser for the economic development of the local people.
3. Sand-dune (desert) vegetation to be promoted on the unique sand-dunes to check wind-erosion.
4. Buckingham Canal to be dredged so that eco- and biodiversity restoration programmes in backwaters could be started. After massive dredging to open sea mouth at Chintaamani, fisheries and eco-tourism to be promoted at Chintaamani.
5. Cage-culture and pen-culture of prawns and crabs and crab-fattening in backwaters to be taught to locals for supplementary income-generation.
6. Artificial reefs to be deployed in inshore waters to promote biodiversity and

fisheries for traditional fisherman as well as for game-fishing, for eco-tourists.

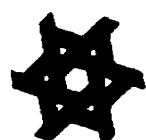
7. Eco-tourism to be promoted at Chintaamani.
8. Sea-turtle conservation programme, involving turtle-walks, turtle hatcheries on the beach and juvenile release into the sea, to be organised.
9. A Field Research Station for Ecology and Biodiversity could be founded on the Kaattupalli Island for colleges in Chennai and foreign researchers.
10. Eco-development of Kaattupalli Island would be a joint effort, both by the people (members of EPEPF) and by the following departments of the Government of Tamil Nadu: The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, The Forest Department, Tourism Department, the PWD, the Backward Class, Scheduled Caste and Women's Development Corporations, the Fisheries Department, the Revenue Department, the Transport Department, the Information and Publicity Department and, above all, the District Collector of Tiruvallur District. The Chief Executive of this eco-development project could be the Chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board. Conventionally, any Pollution Control Board is basically concerned with the abatement of pollution externalities, rather a negative approach. But here is an opportunity where a Pollution Control Board can show its mission in promoting the positive aspects of an ecosystem. This is an instance of saving and preserving God's gift.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Gundappa Vishwanath;
2. Mukesh D. Ambani;
3. Siyaram's;
4. Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams;
5. Murali (actor) and Shobana & Tabu (actress);
6. Kiev, Ukraine;
7. Ramon Magsaysay Award;
8. Lance Armstrong;
9. Sanjay Dutt;
10. A googly. He was the first.
11. S. Ramadoss of the PMK;
12. Football ground of the Government Arts College (Men);
13. Poonamallee;
14. B. Lenin;
15. Maharaj Sri Krishna Kumarsinghi Bhavasinghi;
16. O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar;
17. Cortellier;
18. 39;
19. The deity at Namakkal;
20. V.G. Panneerdas.

\* \* \*

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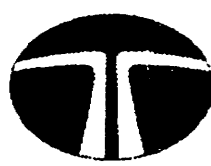
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