

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

INSIDE

- A clean Marina the priority
- Managing the urban scene
- Behind the sound of music
- Anker of Tranquebar
- The trains of yesteryears

Vol. XII No.11

FREE ISSUE

September 16-30, 2002



You know why no one came to the seminar on "Parking Space in Chennai"?... Because you didn't say it in big, bold letters, "Car Parking Available"!

Watch that space!

In Chennai today, the fate of any proposed outing is decided by One Single Factor.

The answer to the question: "Is it easy to find parking?"

If it's a "Yes", go ahead, get dressed, and take the city by storm.

If the answer is "No", you are probably going to stay home, gazing glumly at the TV, or pretending to read a good book.

People who are willing to brave chaotic traffic and nightmarish roads blench at the thought of finding parking for their vehicles.

Even the importance of one's presence at social occasions pales besides the worry over parking.

"Getting married ... and at that particular *chatram*?" you tell your friend, "Well, I'm happy for you, but I cannot grace the occasion. Where would I leave my car?"

Families with wailing hungry kids raising hell in the back seat drive briskly by certain hotels. They'd rather bear with the noise than face the hazards of trying to find a space to park. And have you seen people trying to quickly slip their vehicles into a parking space even as the earlier arrival is slowly trying to reverse into the spot?

Talking about being viciously competitive!

Every day, new vehicles hit the road, but nobody knows where to park them.

Sorry, Chennai ... you have no choice.

You'd better learn to walk again.

Ranjitha Ashok

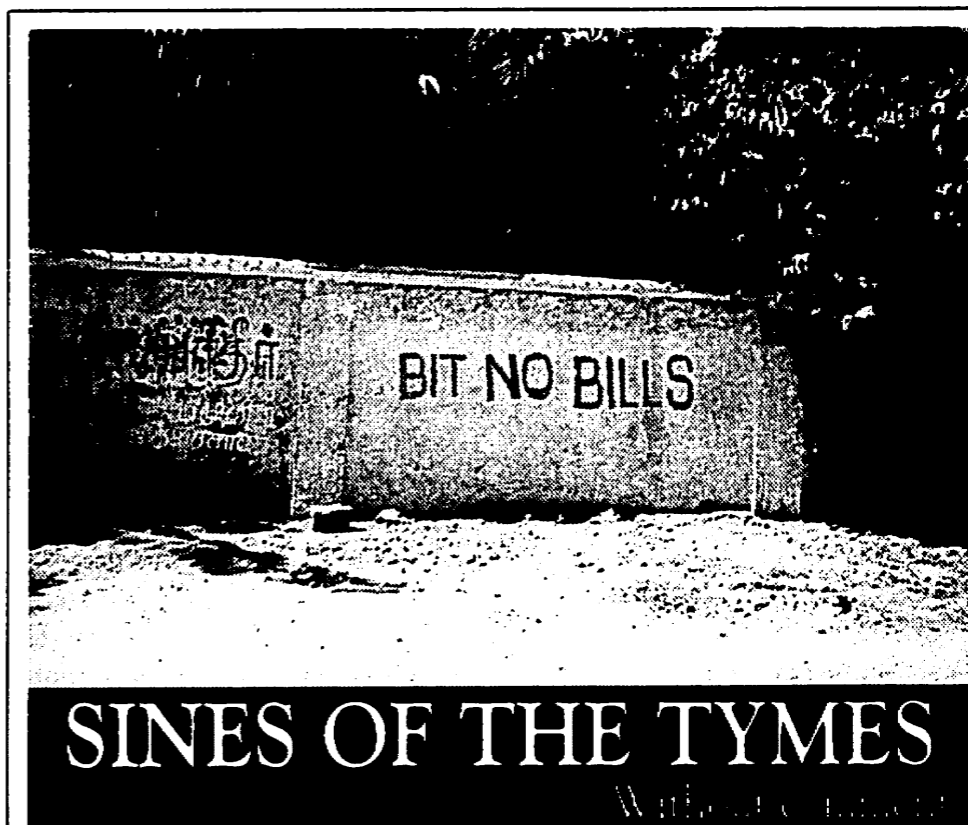
Eco-sensitive areas in need of protection

(By A Special Correspondent)

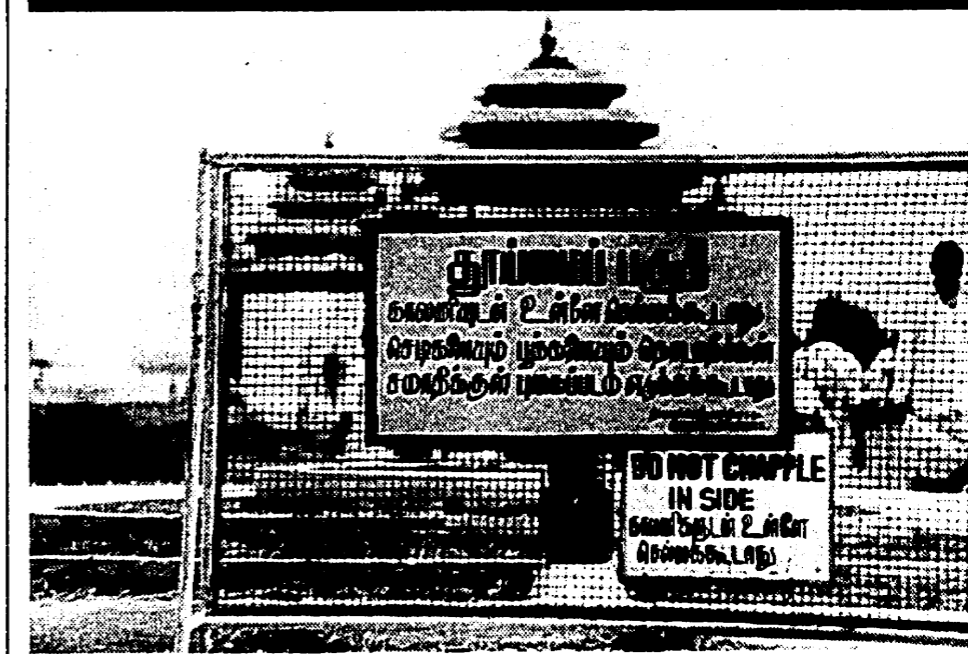
With Government planning to set up a committee to monitor the environment, *Madras Musings* recently asked Prof. P.J. Sanjeeva Raj which he would consider the most environmentally sensitive spots in and around Chennai and which needed urgent conservation and protection. His list is as follows:

- I. Beaches, like the Marina, San Thomé and Besant Nagar Beaches.
(Save them for fisherfolk, the public and turtles).
- II. Beach-Erosion, as at Tiruvotriyur, Koraiuppam and Kovalam.
(Save the beach and the fisherfolk).
- III. Creeks, like the Ennore, Kovalam and Pulicat Creeks.
(Save from sand-bar formation, pollution and fish-kills).
- IV. River-Mouths, like those of the Adyar, Cooum and Kortailiyar.
(Save from siltation and from being cess-pools).

(Continued on page 8)



SINES OF THE TYMES



Heritage lessons from Mumbai

(By A Special Correspondent)

Mumbai set the lead for the country with its Heritage Regulations five years ago and with its subsequent awareness campaign spearheaded by conservationists like Shyam Chainani, Rahul Mehrotra and Sharada Dwivedi. But in recent months there have appeared some blips that should send a warning to conservationists in other cities planning Heritage Regulations and States intending to introduce Heritage Acts.

One issue is the composition of the Heritage Committee. The most recent committee appointed in Mumbai has NO conservation architects or those with a proven record of heritage conservation on it.

The Committee comprises the former chief secretary and

municipal commissioner as its chairman, an environmentalist, a structural engineer, a city historian, the director of the Prince of Wales Museum, two architects, the chief architect to the state government and a BMC officer not below the rank of chief engineer, who will be the member-secretary.

Members co-opted by the last committee, a researcher-writer, an architect-academician, a conservation architect and a retired urban planner have not been reinducted.

Much to the ire of heritage lovers, conservation architects are again conspicuous by their absence from the committee.

By excluding conservation architects from the committee, the government has contra-

vened its own gazette notification, stipulating that of the two architects on the core committee, one must be a heritage conservation architect and the other an urban design specialist or having experience in conservation architecture. It also says that all co-opted members "must have special knowledge of the subject matter".

The other matter of concern in Mumbai conservation circles is the insurance of heritage buildings. Only a few privately owned heritage structures — notably the Deutsche Bank building (former Tata Palace), Standard Chartered Bank building, ANZ Grindlays building, Bombay House, Hong Kong Bank building and American Express — are well-insured

and well-equipped to deal with fire and other accidents.

However, neither the BMC building nor the GPO, both public institutions and Grade I heritage structures, is insured. Nor is their grand Gothic neighbour, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, nor for that matter the Mumbai University's Rajabai Tower and the Western Railway headquarters. "The country's insurance policy being what it is, it does not allow the insurance of its own buildings, not even those on the heritage lists. It will take another 20 years for government-owned properties to be insured, as in advanced countries," says a Central Railway official.

(Continued on page 8)

More talk on managing the urban scene

Exploring the ecosystem approach to manage the urban environment to improve the health of city dwellers, on the 30-year Canadian experience, was the subject of a two-day workshop held in the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) offices recently.

An overview of related earlier research programmes in Chennai revealed that this fourth largest city in India shows severe signs of environmental stress, with declining air quality, inadequate sewage collection, polluted streams and high noise levels. Some observations:

- Water quality in many stretches of open water in the city has been measured at levels worse than that of raw sewage, and evidence of pathogenic parasites found in organic sludge along their banks.

University, and Research Associate at the McMaster Institute of Environment and Health, did his thesis on 'An Adaptive Ecosystem Approach to Rehabilitation and Management of the Cooum River: Environmental System in Chennai'. I wonder whether any in authority here has studied its suggestions.

Using the ecosystem approach, Dr. Bunch says, a preliminary conceptual model of Environment and Health in Chennai will be used to identify key issues. Key issues identified at the workshop would be followed up over the next few years.

Dr. Rajasekhara Murty, who has been working with Environment Canada for the last 35 years, said in his presentation, "Looking for band-aid solutions to environment problems as and when they arise is ridiculous. In our experience, the Government has provided the

resources and been a facilitator, without any interference in the working or the approach. It involves long-term planning and a lot of hard work. Of the 42 issues we've been addressing in the Golden Horseshoe region — the largest continuous urban region in Canada — for the last ten years, only two have been successfully tackled! Initially, problem identification happens at the local level. Once it gains momentum through public awareness it reaches the Government from where the planning process needs to begin — an optimum combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches."

Related previous investigatory studies have shown that top five reasons for success of the ecosystem approach were:

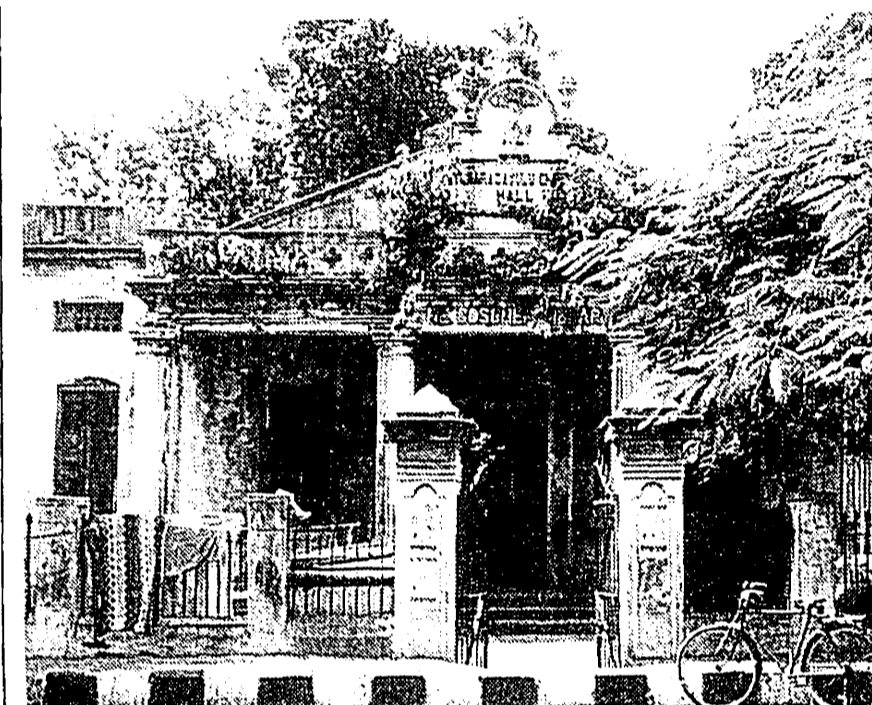
- Participation of diverse stakeholders
- Incorporation of multiple perspectives (scientific, technical, lay)
- Development of innovative interventions
- Clear communication among stakeholders
- The multi- and interdisciplinary nature of the approach.

The Principal Investigator of the Canadian-sponsored project, Dr. Martin Bunch, a Senior Fellow at the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York



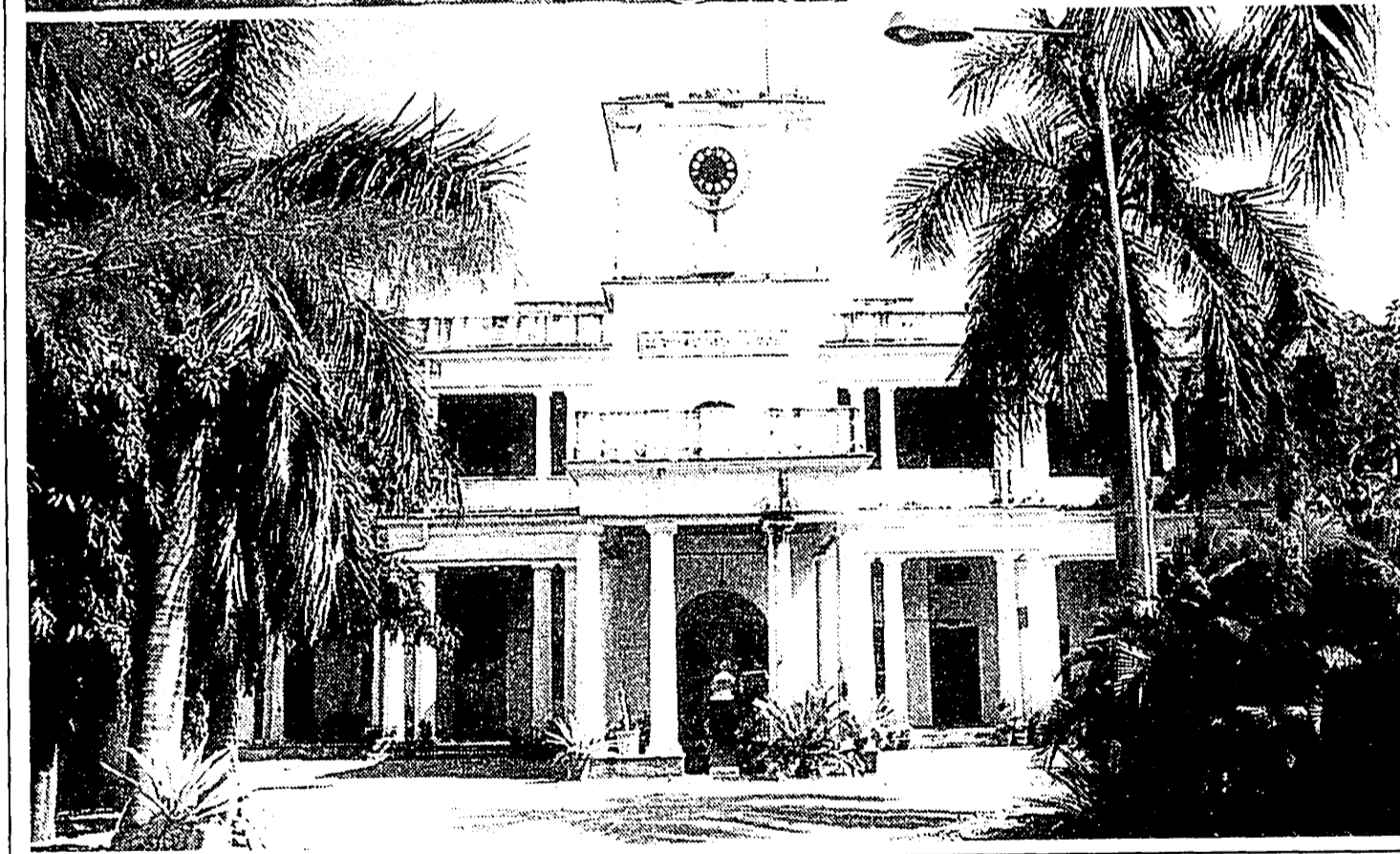
OLD & Decrepit...

Our OLD and the NEW this fortnight takes a different look at the city's buildings. Both the buildings we feature are old but noteworthy. Yet what a difference there is in the way they are being looked after! The picture above is of the Vijayaragavudu Chetty Hall, home of the Lady Goschen Library founded in 1927 which till not so long ago had a collection of 15,000 books. Located near Napier Park (now May Day Park), the library was once a popular venue in Chintadripet for those wanting to catch up with their day's reading. A splendid building in Classical style, together with its



OLD & Alive

neighbours, the similarly styled Zion Church and Sathianathan Memorial Parish Hall, made an eye-catching architectural complex in a bazaar neighbourhood. The Goschen Library is in a sad state today, within and without, with little attention being paid to it (and Nature having free sway). A contrast is the building below, the main block of the Christina Rainy Hospital opened in 1914 in Royapuram. Growing from the work Dr. John Scudder began in 1830, and that Dr. Matilda Macphail formalised in 1888, the hospital was named after a Scottish educator, Christina Rainy, who marshalled support for the institution in Scotland. The focus of a spick and span campus, the main block shows what a little paint, some maintenance even within the framework of a tight budget, and a lot more daily care can do for buildings 90 years old.



The top four barriers to success included:

- Time limitations for project
- Poor jurisdictional or institutional relationships
- Difficulty in conceptualising or modelling human dimensions of the situation
- Lack of support for the approach among all the stakeholders.

Chief Town Planner Mr. Anand Ranjana Doss spoke of the importance of participation by individuals as "trustees of the environment", but he admitted that "in the hurly burly of day-to-day activities, looking into environmental aspects is often neglected" and reiterated "the need to resolve conflict of indi-

vidual agendas by adopting a holistic perspective".

Former Urban Planner, G. Dattatri, currently with SUSTAIN (Citizens' initiative for a Sustainable Chennai), said, "It is more important to measure the standard of life through its quality, which is becoming increasingly poor. From the point of view of a civil society, it is our responsibility to bring in a sustainable network where the CMDA, which has the maximum responsibility — and needs a lot of support — will work along with academics, NGOs, professionals and government officials. It is encouraging to see that the CMDA's II Master Plan has provided an opportunity for citizens to participate in decision-making.

Dr. Chandramouli, Director of the Census Bureau, stated that a solid database on 'Slum Demography' would be available for planners by March 2003. It would enable them to develop a structured policy for slums, which are now unauthorised bodies into which the civic authorities cannot or will not enter.

Speaking of 'the tremendous issues' facing an urban development body like the CMDA, its Vice-Chairperson Jayanthi said, "The last ten years had seen a lack of coordinated efforts. The Sustainable Chennai Project as a top-down project failed due to the difficulty of bringing about a common forum. Miraculous changes have happened in

(Continued on page 6)

Anker of Tranquebar

— Artist and Governor

On May 17, 1788, Peter Anker took over as Governor of Tranquebar.

The years in India were in many ways not quite as Anker may have wished. He never managed to amass any wealth; on the contrary, he landed up in relatively great debt. He was ill much of the time and, on several occasions, he asked to be replaced before at last being able to travel home after serving for 18 years.

It was also a lonely life in many ways. "Reading was the means of repelling loneliness. It is amazing to see how people, at least in the upper circles, kept up to date with the literary life of Europe. Governor Anker received books from London, Paris and Copenhagen as soon as they were published," it is recorded. Peter Anker also conducted an extensive correspondence with the Civil Servants in the nearby English colonies. On his financial situation, he wrote, "My principles have not permitted me to amass any wealth, as is customary when one goes to the Indies." Nevertheless it does appear that Peter Anker made sure he was able to live in keeping with his position and to sur-

penses were between 140 and 170 rix-dollars (about £30-35)."

Another thing that the account book reveals is his relationship with a Mrs. Mallard. According to tradition, she was the love of his life, but they never married, it is said, because she was a widow and a Catholic. She went with him from England and her address was the governor's residence at the time of the census in 1790. A number of people believed that she had a little boy from an earlier marriage, but there are few traces of him in the accounts. Mrs. Mallard died in May 1791 after a period of illness and was given an expensive funeral. Anker is reputed to have built a memorial to Mrs. Mallard in India, of which nothing remains today.

The fact that he tried to bring about some order to put an end to the corruption and double bookkeeping in the colony, to a great extent, adversely affected his own fortune. In addition, it cost a lot being governor: "At the end of last September I had the honour of a visit from Lady Clive with both daughters and Francoise; her husband Lord (Edward)



Major General Peter Anker. (Copy by Nils Gude of an old oil canvas.)

The road to Tranquebar

Peter Anker and his younger brother Carsten were taught privately in Moss and acquired an interest in history. As part of their education, and as was usual for the children of the upper class, it was decided that the two brothers Peter and Carsten should travel around Europe with their tutor Andreas Holth. The little group left Moss in August 1760.

Peter Anker was born in July 1744 in Fredrikshald, Denmark, to which his father Erik Anker moved in the spring of

1773 is very unclear, but in 1773 he was appointed consul in Hull in England, a post he held until 1776.

One of Anker's duties as consul was to procure information about new machines and devices that the dawning industrialism utilised. He was instructed to ensure that drawings were obtained of these inventions, which he did. Drawings of the steam engine and so forth were pretty quickly sent to Carsten. The drawings clearly made an impression. Carsten

servants in India were causing him to lead at that time, he saw no solution than to enter into matrimony. He had cast his eyes on a certain Mrs. Vorn...

The worthy Carsten ... proposed to the rich lady on the

poor health is reputed to have been one of the main reasons for his applying to get away from India. Anker felt so exhausted when he arrived in England that the very thought of another post somewhere was unbearable.

farmers or families, who are just a little above the farming class, the outside of which alone has a couple of larger windows than usual, and the inside of which shows the bare wooden walls, not even panelled, but like the lofts painted with oil paints, but 2 rooms thereof with their walls hung with splendid hand-drawings and fine prints, the floors covered with fine, figured carpets and in particular in the innermost of these, the actual workroom a collection of art and books, the like of which in choice and elegance, though not in numbers, one does not easily find outside England. The books are all bound in crimson morocco leather with gilt edges and arranged with English cosiness not on shelves, but lying on sloping tables, whereunder there are again shelves for prints and objets d'art.

"Round about on the furniture, yes even on the floor, there stand arranged Indian antiquities, idols, sacrificial instruments and the like, which the owner collected in his government post and on his other travels."

Dorthea Hysing

(Excerpts from the catalogue of the 'Memories of India' exhibition of Governor Peter Anker's work during his 20 years in Tranquebar, held recently at the University Museum of Cultural Heritage, Oslo, Norway.)

(To be concluded next fortnight)



Tillally, Governor Peter Anker's country residence outside Tranquebar. (Watercolour and gouache by P. ANKER.)

round himself with beautiful and costly objects.

It has been recorded, "Governor Anker had equipped his house with furnishings. This was no cheap affair and it made no small contribution to the debt he had to bear with him throughout his period as governor. The accounts in the Anker family's archives show that in 1788 he took with him to India kitchen utensils and furnishings for no less than £3191..." The rest of his equipment, clothes, hats etc. were on an equivalent scale. Masses of books — a complete little library — he likewise took with him. His monthly housekeeping ex-

Clive is Governor in Madras. She arrived with one hell of a train of officers, civilian officials, cavalry and infantry amounting to about 800 individuals. She stayed for three days and was particularly satisfied with the honour and attention with which she was received." Entertaining of this kind made Anker's financial situation become more and more desperate.

In 1798, Anker put his debts at somewhere between 40 and 50 thousand rix-dollars. In order to save himself and to be in a position to return home to a life in Norway, more carefree than the troubled life his civil

governor's behalf — but she turned him down.

Carsten continued the hunt for a suitable marriage candidate, and wrote to Peter in 1799: "Now for your information I must recommend Miss Rumohr for my dear brother's best." But nothing came of this too.

Eventually, Peter Anker relinquished his post in October 1805 and sailed from Tranquebar on February 7, 1806. In July he arrived in England and stayed there until the spring of 1807 when he travelled to Norway. The reason why he postponed his return to Norway was his reduced state of health. His

commissioners were not keen on his relinquishing the post of governor, and not until July 10, 1807 was he granted retirement on full pension. Yet in complete contradiction to what he had expected, he was to have a long life, and it was not necessary to give up either titles or orders.

In Norway, Peter Anker settled on the farm at Oraker. A newspaper article published in 1826 gives an impression of what Peter Anker's residence was like:

"Just imagine an ordinary Norwegian country building such as they are inhabited in their hundreds by well-to-do

Quizzin' with Ram'n'an

(Current affairs questions are from the period August 16th to 31st, 2002. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Fill in the blank with the appropriate number: Bhairon Singh Shekawat is the Vice-President of India.
2. Who is this year's winner of the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award?
3. Which eminent lawyer is heading the 7-member Kashmir Committee that visited the State on the eve of the elections?
4. Name the 'King of Rock n' Roll', whose 25th death anniversary was observed on August 16th.
5. Name the Indian batswoman who scored 214 to set a world record for the highest individual score in a Test innings.
6. What feat did chess player Sergey Karjakin of the Ukraine achieve recently?
7. To what important Constitutional post has former Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary P. Shankar been appointed?
8. Name the Shiv Sena MP, who recently quit as Union Minister for Power.
9. Name the former Karnataka Minister kidnapped by Veerappan.
10. Where was the U.N. Earth Summit held recently?

11. Concerned about ancient sculptures what ban has been enforced by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department?

12. What Indian first is the Tamil film *Muthamidalama* claiming credit to?

13. What is the other terminal point (one being Chennai) of the 'Jan Shatabdi Express' flagged off on August 27th?

14. In Ashokmitran's latest book *My Years with Boss*, which Tamil film legend is referred to as 'The Boss'?

15. What does a red sticker, pasted on Chennai city's hoardings by the Corporation, indicate?

16. Name the Tamil scholar who won the 1985 Sahitya Akademi Award for *Kambam Puthiya Parvai* and who passed away recently.

17. Name the State Minister who was asked to resign following his participation in a macabre temple ritual.

18. Another on the same theme as above. For what 'slip-up' was the Minister for Rural Industries, R. Vilwanathan, relieved of his portfolio?

19. What is now housed at *Monbray's Cipola* by the Adyar?

20. Which famous industrialist is credited with founding the Indian Overseas Bank?

(Answers on page 7)

Those behind the sound of music

While the music season is yet to start, the makers of musical instruments, especially percussion instruments, are busier than ever, striving to succeed in what is essentially a niche market.

The brothers Fernand, Sebastin and Sengol belong to a family of traditional *mridangam* (*mrid* plus *angam* — animal organ, meaning an object made out of organs of an animal) makers, who are passing on to their children the knowledge they learnt from their forefathers.

A. Dhas, son of Sebastin, says that he's the fifth generation of *mridangam* craftsmen in his family. He runs a *mridangam* repair shop tucked away in a corner of Veeraperumal Koil Street in Mylapore. This enthusiastic craftsman has even visited the US to teach music students the art of *mridangam*-making.

These traditional *mridangam* craftsmen have long been established in Veeraperumal Koil Street, Apparsamy Koil Street and Mathala Narayanan Street of Mylapore. Quaintly, pictures of the Virgin Mary adorn the walls of these shops that make the accompaniment to what is essentially 'Hindu Music' as Carnatic music could well be considered. But here, devotion to a sublime craft dominates over the mundane. Caste and religion lose their significance in the triumph of sustained effort to perfect a technical skill.

The legendary Palghat Mani Iyer was a regular client of Fernand's family. His relationship with Fernand was so close that he gave the *mridangam*-maker the sandalpaste garland given to him in Mumbai as a gesture of gratitude. He even gifted a piece of land in Thanjavur to Fernand.

On a technical level, "the correct tightening of braces and the rigid stiffening of the skin covering are essential to produce the right sound," explains A. Dhas. His present customers include Karaikudi Mani, Palghat Raghu and Thanjavur Ramdoss. Each shop has its own set of 'vidwans' who are regular customers. C. Varadhan, for example, has superb *mridangam* exponents like Vellore Ramabhadran and Thiruvavur Bhaktavatsalam as customers.

The outer shell of the *mridangam* comes from the wood of the Panruti Jak-fruit

tree and the leather from the tanneries of Chennai. Occasionally, the wood of the *Kondrai* tree is used for the shell. To make the right head drum skin (*valam thalai* — right head), goatskin is placed between two layers of cowhide and in the centre of the *valam thalai*, a combination of *kittangal* stone and rice powder is pasted. For the left head drum skin (*idam thalai*), two layers of buffalo-hide and a layer of goatskin are used. This provides a balanced bass and tenor sound when the *mridangam* is played.

While standard sizes of *mridangams* today are 22 to 24 inches, some *vidwans*, like Palghat Mani Iyer, have experimented with a 26-inch instrument. Instruments with a length of 18-inches are called 'baby *mridangams*'. This baby *mridangam* carries a price of Rs. 2,200, while the standard size 22" and 24" ones are priced at Rs. 3,500 and Rs. 4,500 each.

While current trends of high-tech and modernisation are wiping out entire crafts and the families practising them, it is indeed gratifying to see Fernand, Sebastin, Sengol and others in Mylapore keep this sublime craft alive.

K. Karunanidhi

The Telugu contribution

In his recent lecture on 'The contribution of Telugu-speaking people to the culture of South India', Dr. Pappu Venugopala Rao, Director (Programs) of the American Institute of Indian Science, appeared to stop with the 16th Century.

More recent contributions, like the linguistic states, received no mention.

Tracing the history of the Telugu language, Dr. Rao described Tamil and Telugu as being Proto-Dravidian languages with origins 5000 years ago. Telugu, though Dravidian in origin, was Sanskrit in development and therefore served as a bridge. Reciting from the *Yajur Veda* and the *Upanishads*, he cited the differences in pronunciation between the North and South and pointed out that the mastery of pronunciation possessed by Telugu scholars led to their being sought to perform the Vedic rituals.

Discussing Andhra sculpture and temple architecture, with illustrations ranging from the 2nd Century BC Amaravati stupas to the 13th Century Siva temples, he narrated how, during the Satavahana and Ikshvaku dynasties, Saivism replaced Buddhism as the predominant religion and the Smarthic practice of worshipping five deities, Siva, Vishnu, Devi, Surya and Ganapati, came to be practised widely, their profuse representation in temple architecture and icons following thereafter. The Kauchi and Mamallapuram sculptures of the 6th Century, like the Kailasanatha temple and the Shore Temples, were a consequence of this fine expression of Greco-Gandhara fusion of styles. The Pallavas themselves, according to Dr. Rao, originated from Andhra, from Palanadu.

The greatest contribution of the Andhras has, however, been in music, dance and drama, stated Dr. Rao. He spoke of the contribution of Annamacharya, Narayana Theertha, Sadasiva Brahmendram and Sidhendra Yogi, the father of Kuchipudi. Annamacharya composed more than 30,000 songs and inscribed them in copper plates which were kept in safe custody at Tirupati. His *mudra* was 'Venkateswara'. Unfortunately only 14,000 songs are now available, the remaining copper plates having been melted for vessels. Annamacharya was the genius who divided the structure of a song into *pallavi* and *charanam*.

According to Dr. Rao, songs composed in Telugu by 15 musicologists who lived between the 13th and 18th Centuries are also common for the three other languages of the South. *Yaksha Gana*, the popular drama and dance form used by Thiagaraja in his *Prahlada Charitram*, originated in Andhra, added Dr. Rao.

Indeed, a rich heritage of contribution to art, culture and religion. But what after that?

C.V. Karthik Narayanan

MANAGING THE URBAN SCENE

(Continued from page 4)

places like Shanghai and Bangkok. We can bring about miracles too, but working within our own parameters. Mere paperwork is ineffective. There is a strong need for a Government Management Plan which would look at coordination after encouraging an open dialogue and exchange of ideas."

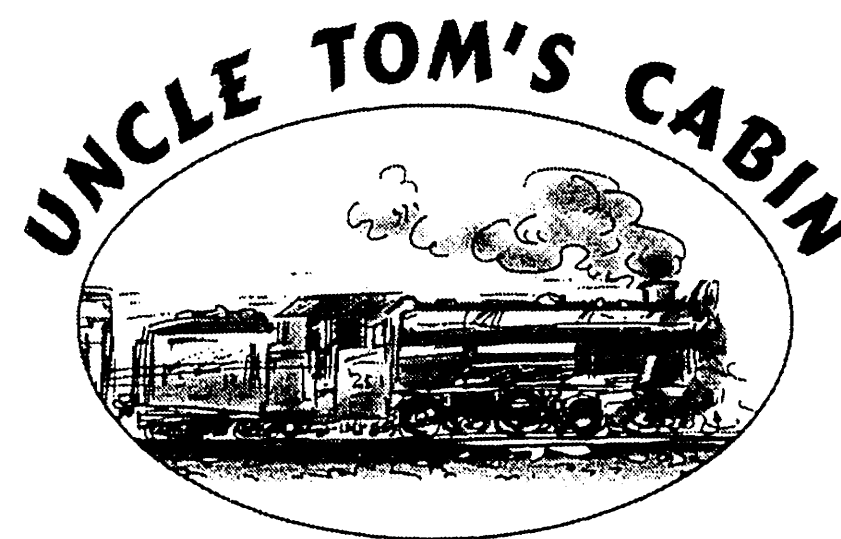
Post-workshop, Dr. Bunch felt, "Jurisdictional fragmentation and prevailing institutional rigidity are, I feel, the major hurdles. And, of course, the lack of meaningful public participation which has no support from the institutional mechanism. Major institutional changes are needed to effectively manage public environments. So are newer mechanisms that can effectively manage the innumerable constraints and challenges in today's environment. Mere awareness campaigns are not enough. Compre-

hensive programmes need to be adopted at high levels that can build mechanisms for cooperation and coordination among agencies and the public. Together with our Indian collaborators, the University of Madras, we'll be developing mechanisms so that concerned stakeholders can effectively participate and make a difference to the Chennai environment."

However, Dr. Murty confides, "I've been trying to introduce this approach in Bangalore, where I am from, for the last ten years, but with only marginal success. The problem lies in the prevailing blinkered mindset, which encourages compartmentalised thinking. It is sad to see people caught in a technological fix, an euphoria of development and technology, a phase where, say, Canada was thirty years ago. In India, environmental agendas have not become important enough to topple governments. And, of course, there's a lot of bureau-

cratic red tape. A combination where scientific experts are subservient to bureaucrats who are shuffled so fast they have to become 'instant experts', along with politicians who don't want to plan long-term, is a very destructive mix. India has excellent resources within the country itself. Developing in-house capacities and expertise, along with interdepartmental government cooperation, will definitely pave the way."

With the projected ideals of decentralised decision-making, projects defined by natural boundaries (rather than artificial/political ones) and institutions working collaboratively but led by a single local initiative, ecosystem planning is all about choosing and planning a desirable future. How effective the recent workshop was, will be seen by how soon the ecosystem approach will figure in high-level planning decisions in Chennai.



Vignettes from the 150-year railway saga

The trains of yesteryears

Prior to World War II, the only reliable transport in India was by rail. Madras had two systems of Railways. The metre gauge system with its terminal at Egmore was managed by South Indian Railway Company (S.I.R.). This was known as "Chinna Rail". A broad gauge system with its terminal at Madras Central was managed by The Madras & Southern Mahratta Railway Company (M. & S.M.R.). This was known as "Peria Rail".

The Boat Mail

S.I.R.'s star train was the Madras Dhanushkodi Express, also known as the Indo-Ceylon Express and Boat Mail. Since the submergence of Dhanushkodi in 1966 due to a severe storm, this train is now terminated at Rameswaram and has been renamed as Chennai-Rameswaram Express.

In its heyday, the train left Egmore at 7.30 p.m. and reached Dhanushkodi by about midday on the next day. At Dhanushkodi Jetty a steamer waited to ferry passengers across the Palk Strait to Talaimannar in Ceylon. Two ships, the *Irwin* and the *Goschen*, owned by S.I.R. were used for this. From Talaimannar, passengers took the night express train to reach Colombo.

There was heavy passenger traffic between India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) by this route, mainly Indian labours for Ceylon's tea gardens. Since both India and Ceylon were under British rule, there were no formalities to be fulfilled for such migrant movement. The route was also used to carry mail and freight.

These facts justify Madras Dhanushkodi Express being called Indo-Ceylon Express. Terming it a Mail train is also acceptable. But why a "Boat Mail"? Was that because of the ferry? Not by a long shot! An ocean liner is referred as a 'boat' for short. How is an ocean liner relevant to an Indian train?

In those days, the British administrators, service personnel, businessmen and others would do a stint of two or three years and then go 'Home' on long leave of four to six months, known as 'furlough' or 'home leave'. 'To catch the boat', as the saying went, Bombay would have been the preferred port, but the ships to and from Bombay carried a mixed load of passengers and goods and did not offer the best of passages. For the liners calling at Colombo, the Australia-England route was the preferred way of

going 'home' or returning. Thus, the Madras-Dhanushkodi Express got the name "Boat Mail"!

The M. & S.M.R. trains

Most of the M. & S.M.R. mails and expresses started from or arrived at Central Station in the late evening or early night. Unlike Egmore, which was frequented mostly by Tamil-speaking passengers, Central was thronged by people from different parts of India. From 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., the station was like the tower of Babel. With the departure of the Madras-Nellore passenger train at about midnight, the station attained some semblance of calm. This train maintained indifferent timings and was patronised by a host of motley ticketless passengers. Hence the public called it the "Bairagi Special" or "Dongabandi" which in Telugu means 'thief train'!

After this, till the arrival of incoming trains in the early morning hours, there was a lull, when an army of cleaners descended on the station to make it spick and span for the day ahead.

Perhaps the best known of the trains from Central was the Bombay Express. The train started from Central at 8.30 a.m. and passed through the hottest part of the then composite Madras Presidency to reach its destination in the evening of next day.

The midday meals station for this train was Cudappah, which has the dubious distinction of being the hottest place in the Presidency. This station had three refreshment rooms. The Vegetarian Refreshment Room (VRR) and the Non-Vegetarian Refreshment Room (NVR) were departmentally managed. The Western R.R., favoured by Europeans and Anglo-Indians, was on contract with Spencers. First and Second Class passengers could order a meal to be served in their carriage itself, while the crowded Inter and Third Class passengers had to go to the refreshment rooms for their meals. Reservations for these crowded classes were unknown in those days.

At Cudappah, VRR had a spacious dining hall which could seat nearly 500 lunchers at a time. As soon as the train came to a halt, the passengers rushed to the dining room, to be served with robotic precision and speed. If a diner harried longer at his *sambar* course, *rasam* would be poured over it! Within the scheduled forty minutes or so two batches would

have been served. Five minutes before the departure of the train, a bell would sound in the dining hall for all passengers to board the train. The guard of the train would come there and drag all slow eaters to the train, after which the train would steam out.

At Cudappah, both up and down expresses arrived at about the same time. The train to arrive first was received on the platform line of the station. The other had to wait at the outer signal until lunch was completed and the first train was ready to start. Only then would the second train be received into the station.

To beat the midday heat, various methods were used in these trains.

At every important station, a "waterman" was available who walked along the halted train with a bucket of cold water and a brass *lota*. Any passenger could ask for this water to quench his thirst. In those days, Spencer's manufactured aerated soft drinks which were equal, if not superior, to any of the soft drinks sold under international brands today. They were a lot cheaper too. In every fast day train, there would be a vendor of the company travelling in each eight-seater compartment. He stocked it with crates of soft drinks of which he had a good sale, and blocks of ice.

Upper class passengers could order a block of ice to cool the compartment. A zinc-lined tray with big block of ice would be kept on the floor between berths. With all doors and shutters closed and the ceiling fans directed against this ice block, it quickly cooled the compartment, although an angry sun raged outside relentlessly.

M. Sethuraman

Answers to Quiz

1. 12th; 2. Abhinav Bindra; 3. Ram Jethmalani; 4. Elvis Presley; 5. Mithali Raj; 6. Became the world's youngest Grandmaster (at the age of 12 years, 7 months and 2 days); 7. Central Vigilance Commissioner; 8. Suresh Prabhu; 9. H. Nagappa; 10. Johannesburg.

11. Banning 'sandblasting' to clean the statues; 12. First digital film made for theatres; 13. Vijayawada; 14. S.S. Vasam; 15. That the hoarding is 'unauthorised'; 16. A.S. Gnanambandan; 17. C. Durairaj; 18. For referring to Jayalithaa as 'former Chief Minister'; 19. Madras Club; 20. M.Ct.M. Chidambaram Chettiyar

Protection of eco-sensitive areas

(Continued from page 1)

- V. **River-Beds**, like those of Arni, Kortailiyar and Palar. (Save from illegal sand-mining).
- VI. **Drinking Water Sources**, like Red Hills, Sholavaram and Poondi Reservoirs. (Save their catchment areas from human interference).
- VII. **Waterways**, like the Cooum, Adyar and the Buckingham Canal. (Save from pollution and slums, and develop for orchards, navigation and fisheries).
- VIII. **Lakes**, like the Pulicat and Chembarambakkam, and Chengalpattu lakes. (Save from pollution, develop fisheries).
- IX. **Wetlands**, like the Adyar, Pallikaranai Swamp and Chembarambakkam Lake. (Save from pollution, develop fisheries and promote bird-life).
- X. **Scrub jungle and Wildlife**, as in the Guindy Park, IIT campus, Theosophical Society campus, Madras Christian College campus and Kaattupalli Island. (Promote afforestation, wildlife and nature studies).
- XI. **Hillocks**, like the St. Thomas' Mount, Pallavaram Hills, Tambaram and Vandalur Hills. (Promote afforestation, wildlife and tourism).
- XII. **Industrial complexes**, like the Manali-Ennore Industrial Complex, and Madras Atomic Power Plant. (Save from hazardous chemicals, radiation hazards to the city).
- XIII. **Solid waste disposal spots**, like the Perungudi and Kodungaiyur dumping sites, Biomedical dumping sites. (Save from pollution and public health hazards).
- XIV. **Airport**. (Save the lawns and runways from raptor birds which cause bird-hit hazards to aircraft).



From September: The Hayagriva Study Circle for Adults who wish to enhance their knowledge profile without the hassle of formal admission and exams. On the lines of **Learning in Retirement** courses offered by Universities in the West. Limited admission. The courses will be of 8-10 lectures over a month and will be as varied as 'Understanding Archaeology', 'Gardening'. For details: Telephone 491 5913.

September and October: 'Artist of the Month': P. Sridhar, a recipient of the Lenin Museum award from Moscow in 1988 and Mother Teresa award in 1994 (at Max Mueller Bhavan).

September and October: 'Studio Pottery', a certificate course conducted by Kaveri Bharath, a talented potter trained in Pondicherry under Ray Meeker. The second stage, from 18th to 21st September, will introduce the importance of firing and resist work.

The advanced stages will be conducted from 2nd to 6th October and again from 23rd to 27th October. This will include an introduction to wheel work, centring and pull-up. The final stage will deal with the finer aspects of wheel work, shaping of pots and application of slips and glazes. (At DakshinaChitra, Telephone 491 8943/446 2435 for details.)

Till September 20: 'Finding the Centre at the Margins', an exhibition of art by Muralidharan, Rm. Palaniappan, C. Douglas, Ravinder Reddy, Valsan Kolleri, Krishnamachari Bose, A. Balasubrahmaniam, Ravikumar Kashi, G.R. Iranna, Jitish Kallat, Natraj Sharma, Shibu Natesan, Babu Eshwar Prasad and Harshavardhana (at Apparao Galleries).

Till September 20: Pammal Sambandam Mudaliar's *Chandrahari*, presented by Koothu-p-Pattarai Trust in its mini-theatre on the first floor of Plot 84, 3/399, 9th Street, Sri Venkateswara Nagar, Kottivakkam. Daily at 6.30 p.m. Seating limited to 25 persons. For bookings, telephone 4510302 or 4511821.

Till September 25: A photo exhibit, "After September 11: Images from Ground Zero", featuring photographs by Joel Meyerowitz (at Artworld, Ganeshpuram 3rd Street, off Cenotaph Road).

September 20 and 21: Paper-Mache Mask making (at DakshinaChitra, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.).

September 21: 'French Nightingale', the fifth singing competition organised in India by the French Embassy-Cultural Service and open to 16 to 25 years old. The first five winners at national level will win a trip to France (at Alliance Francaise, 3.00 p.m.).

From September 22: Inaugural exhibition of the new venue of the gallery. Participating artists include Achutan Kudallur, Yusuf Arakkal and Manu Parekh (at Forum Art Gallery).

From September 22: Exhibition of paintings by Mani Krishnan Nair (at Vinyasa).

September 22: The Sixth Annual Citizens' Run will start from Queen Mary's College at 4 p.m. go to the War Memorial, then back to Gandhi Statue on the Marina.

The target of the Run this year is around Rs. 12 lakh, to be collected as usual through donations, sponsorship of banners and sale of T-shirts to be

Reviving the craft of Chettinad plaster

The M.R.M.RM Cultural Foundation, which is intent on reviving the dying crafts of Chettinad, like basket- and saree-weaving, recently organised a workshop for masons on the techniques of the famous Chettinad egg-plaster (Madras plaster). But in the belief that documentation without training masons would not be effective in reviving the craft, the workshop was held for modern masons. Ponniah Kothanar, assisted by Mookiah (master craftsman), demonstrated the plastering technique.

Once used in every house built in Chettinad, today, there is hardly anyone with the know-how except for a few elderly masons. The Foundation identified Ponniah Kothanar, a traditional mason, and documented this plastering technique.

The Foundation, headed by Visalakshi Ramaswamy, would be willing to organise similar workshops for those interested if there are sufficient numbers. Contact (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) Tele/fax 044-4361498. Email: vvisalamb@vsnl.com

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.

From September 25: Exhibition of paintings by women artists (at Artworld).

October 5: Doll making workshop (at DakshinaChitra).

October 5-13: *Dussehra* and *Navaratri* festivals will be celebrated at DakshinaChitra. Nobody does Golu better than DakshinaChitra.

HERITAGE LESSONS FROM MUMBAI

(Continued from page 1)

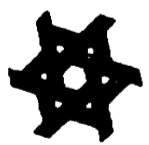
The Prince of Wales Museum — the Indo-Saracenic GPO's twin, designed by John Begg's pupil and associate George Wittet — is one of the few heritage buildings in Mumbai that is insured against fire. "But for a ludicrous sum: Rs.86 lakh," a director reveals. This works out to less than Rs.1,000 per antiquity. The mu-

seum, however, has installed safety measures like smoke detectors, fire alarms and sprinklers.

The five-storey Eruchshaw building, which was among the three listed buildings on D.N. Road that burnt down in August 1994, was insured for a measly five lakh rupees. Engineers believe that the government should set up an expert team to survey heritage build-

ings for both structural strength and electrical faults. "The heritage committee and conservation groups should actively take up this issue. Also, the Indian Heritage Society should examine unglamorous but vital issues like wiring and safety precautions, while deciding on subsequent urban heritage awards," suggests a former chief fire officer. — (Courtesy: *Times of India*.)

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 MOTOR COMPANY