

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

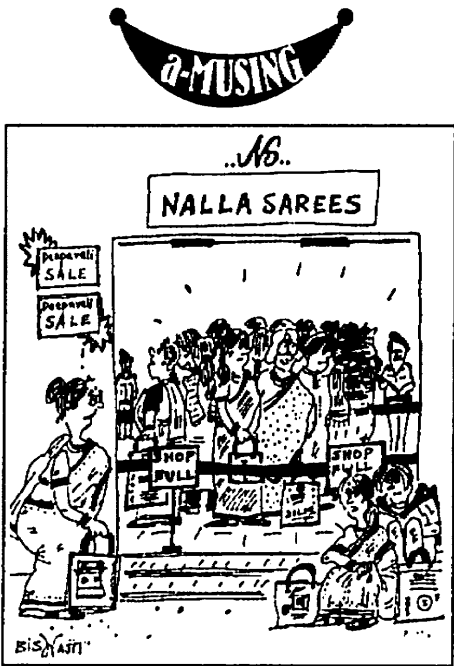
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Vol. XII No.14

FREE ISSUE

November 1-15, 2002



The shop is so crowded, it will be a three stage wait before we get to see a saree!

### The whole six yards

By the time you read this, the last sweet will have been eaten, those crackers that went un-cooperatively phtt tossed away, and spirited arguments of the "why-should-I-come-with-you-to-visit-old-Aunt-Nasty-Tongue?" variety with one's offspring resolved.

All fun times inevitably carry specific under-currents of tension, but the winner of this season's 'Most Harrowing Experience' title has to be - saree shopping. Have you seen what happens to Chennai in the weeks preceding Deepavali? "Unbridled frenzy" just about describes it.

For days, ravaging hordes scour shops, running here for a discount, there for "new arrivals", frantically attempting to be in 15 different areas at the same time - all for the elusive saree that will define this year's festival for them.

The quest involves physical endurance, patience, competitive spirit and grim doggedness. Also willingness to suspend inhibitions temporarily and use elbows and handbags as lethal weapons whenever required. Reaching counters is practically impossible, involving clambering over heads, waving and calling out demands to worn-out salespersons, who become wispy, elusive (sometimes sharp-tongued!) beings whose eyes are hard to catch. And the billing process re-defines the word 'nightmare'.

All for what?

The Big Day arrives; you step out in your brand new acquisition - only to hear that the one shop you decided to skip had the best selection/bargains of the season.

The Universe's naughty sense of humour strikes again.

Ranjitha Ashok

## 'Not so bad' — that's Chennai

(By The Editor)

Chennai, it would appear, is not as bad as we thought our readers might assess it to be. The numerous responses to the question "How liveable is our city?" that we published in *Madras Musings* of October 1st, considered the city only **BELOW AVERAGE**, though there were several parameters which were considered 'poor' and 'very poor'. At the other end of the scale, no one considered Chennai 'excellent' or even 'good' in terms of the parameters listed.

Treating the 1-6 scale in the following terms, 'excellent', 'good', 'average', 'below average', 'poor' and 'very poor' respectively, the best response was on the counts of Economic Opportunities, Hospital/Medical Care, Educational Facilities for Children and Cultural Activities - and even all these were considered only average, with just a few respondents considering the city excellent for Educational Facilities for Children and for Cultural Activities and good for Housing for the Poor and for Feeling Safe and Secure.

On the other hand, the respondents considered the city very poor on the counts of State of the Waterways and Tree Cover. They considered the city poor on far too many counts for comfort, namely, Road and Traffic Conditions, Quality of Drinking Water, Quality of Water, Cleanliness of Public Places, Housing for the Poor, Public Parks/Beaches, Maintenance of Heritage Buildings, Redressal of Complaints, the State Waterways and Tanks, Underground Water, Coastal Environment, and Biodiversity.

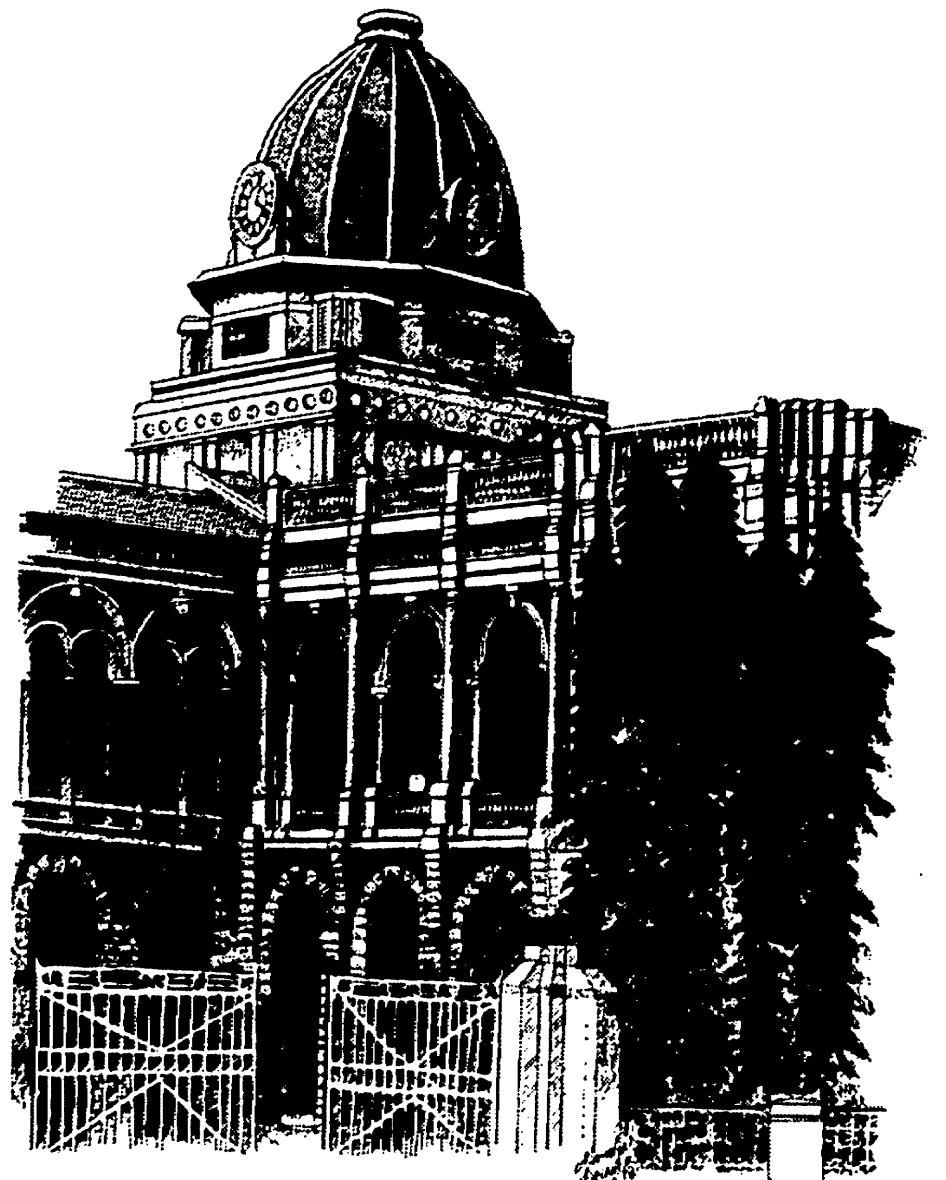
We feel that in calculating the below average rating, there was every possibility of unfair weightage of the responses, since there were several respondents who marked - rather emotionally, we felt - almost everything as poor, with one or two marking **EVERYTHING very poor**.

It would probably be more fair to say that Chennai is an average city where liveability is not particularly good or bad; but where considerable improvement is necessary, particularly in the areas listed as poor and very poor.

The following is the rating of each urban parameter as averaged by us from the reader responses:

| Urban parameters                    | Readers' Assessment |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Economic Opportunities              | 3                   |
| Road and Traffic Conditions         | 5                   |
| Public Transport                    | 4                   |
| Quality of Drinking Water           | 5                   |
| Quality of Water                    | 5                   |
| Solid Waste Collection              | 4                   |
| Landfill Quality                    | 4                   |
| Quality of Breathing Air            | 4                   |
| Cleanliness of Public Places        | 5                   |
| State of Waterways                  | 6                   |
| Housing for the Poor                | 5                   |
| Hospital / Medical Care             | 3                   |
| Educational Facilities for Children | 3                   |
| Playgrounds for Children            | 4                   |
| Public Parks/Beaches                | 5                   |
| Maintenance of Heritage Buildings   | 5                   |
| Cultural Activities                 | 3                   |
| Feeling Safe/Secure                 | 4                   |
| Policing and Public Security        | 4                   |
| Access to Local Government          | 4                   |

(Continued on Page 6)



• This year's greetings cards by Manohar and Mahema Devadoss focus on the domes and towers of Chennai's heritage buildings. Manohar's painstakingly detailed illustrations are of the Golden Jubilee dome of Presidency College, the city's first institution of higher learning (above), and the clock tower of the Central Station. Presidency College was the work of Robert Chisholm, but the dome was built long after his time. The clock tower at Central Station is, however, Robert Chisholm's work belonging to that period when he was influenced by Travancore architecture. The proceeds from the sale of these black & white cards, after costs, will be distributed to various charities. (For more details, Tel:498 2484.)



# Is there a city less cared for than ours?

The other day, an irate secretary of an association that had something to do with hoardings telephoned *Madras Musings* and rather forcefully expressed his anguish that this journal and its Editor kept demanding a ban on hoardings but did not address the sorry state our roads, water supply and waterways are in. Obviously he does not read *Madras Musings*, which, for the last ten years and more, has focussed on virtually every single parameter considered by U.N. HABITAT as necessary to judge the conditions of liveability in a city. Those international parameters were listed in *Madras Musings* on October 1st and the findings, based on reader responses, are reported today.

According to those responses there is near unanimity on the City paying the least attention to its waterways and tree cover. *Madras Musings* has from almost its first year looked at the way the City has desecrated its waterways — not to mention waterbodies. The former have been converted into drainage and waste disposal channels, their banks in some cases even their beds! — into land for the homeless or the developers, and *Madras Musings* continues to sound off on both. As for tree cover, *Madras Musings* has perhaps not paid as much attention to the planting of new tree cover as would seem necessary, to judge by our readers' responses. But what it has regularly drawn attention to is the vanishing green spaces of the city and endangered tree-rich areas like the Adyar Estuary and the Guindy National Park. Here again, as in the case of most of the waterbodies in the city, it is the developers, and those who have permitted their development, who are to blame. But here too, as in the case of the hoardings, *Madras Musings'* repeated pleas to ban development in certain areas have gone unheeded.

The *Man From Madras Musings* hopes that now that hundreds of readers have added their voice to *Madras Musings'* on these issues that badly affect the quality of life in the city, there will be a response from both Government and its administrators. But *MMM* often wonders whether any of them really cares for the problems of the people in between elections; once elected or appointed there seems to be greater time spent on condemning the losers — who only deserve to be totally ignored — and not on the people who deserve a better deal. Will the gentle reminder on Page 1 of this issue of *Madras Musings* bring about a change of heart and approach and will we see greater attention being paid to pulling Chennai from out of the morass it seems to have got stuck in?

Road nightmares... What surprised *The Man From Madras Musings* in those re-

sponses to the UN HABITAT questionnaire was that readers did not feel that the state of its roads and its shortage of water were what most affected liveability in the City. *MMM* would have put these two counts at the top of his list, particularly as we need not be in the sorry situation we are.

*MMM* in the last few weeks has had reason to do a bit more driving around the City than usual — and this driving has taken *MMM* to several places off his regular beat. With the intermittent rain the City has been having, the deplorable state of the roads *MMM* found was only brought into sharper — and unhappier — focus. Bar some of the main thoroughfares — and even they are not something to be particularly proud of — almost every road leading off them, even in the best parts of the city, is a stretch of danger only made worse by the rains. And all this has been because of the digging and re-digging and still more digging, without ever putting the dug areas — and other affected areas — back into even the condition they were in. Loosely filled earth has not only on occasions trapped vehicles in the trenches but several pedestrians have twisted ankles to show for taking roads for granted as safe! Besides the toll these roads take, there is the slowing down of traffic they are

early days of laning and then carried out sufficiently often to remind users that the rules existed. Now with no enforcement, chaos on the stretch increases day by day.

## ... & water shortage

As for water shortage, let's stop talking about the monsoon and begin to look at what we do with the rain we get. Look at the rainfall figures over several years and you'll find that Chennai has been getting its due annually with only marginal variations. But what we've done is deprive the city of every facility we had to tap that water.

Overbuilding around tanks, clogging the channels to the reservoirs and failing to keep them open, and building on marshlands like Pallikaranai and the Madhavaram-Manali jheel, we've reduced the water table to almost zero. And we continue to get permission to build without too much difficulty.

The *Man from Madras Musings* is delighted to find that Rotary Clubs are trying to revive some of the city's 39 temple tanks, that INTACH-TN and several citizens of Tiruvanniyur are enthusiastically working together to bring to life again the Marundeeswarar Temple Tank, and taking a cue from that operation, the Corporation and the

take pride in it and consider it an integral part of their heritage.

Easier said than done, *MMM* knows, but if it is not done, *MMM* is equally sure we not only will not have 'living' tanks, but the city will have to live with water shortages. Have we got so used to the shortage that readers responding to the 'liveability' questionnaire do not consider it amongst the most serious reasons for Chennai not being high on the liveability index?

## What's the truth?

Union Minister for Environment and Forests T.R. Baalu recently stated that he was disappointed with the progress being made in cleaning up the waterways of Chennai despite his Ministry disbursing more than Rs. 90 crore of the allocated Rs. 500 crore. There is no scarcity of funds, he stated, if the State Government wanted to go full speed ahead with the cleaning operation.

Almost simultaneously, Metrowater says its Chennai City River Conservation Project is now in full swing and that the Ministry has released Rs. 490 crore to the Board for its Rs. 720 crore project, which mainly focusses on sewage interception, diversion and treatment preventing thereby the pollution of the

the Metro in the Buckingham Canal and its huge stations on its banks goes on apace. Does this mean that this 'Cleaning the Waterways' project is going to pay no attention to the Canal in the heart of the city? Is it to be left clogged, ensuring flooding — as happened in Mylapore a couple of years ago — during the next strong monsoon? *MMM* is intrigued why no one talks about what the Metro is doing to this splendid channel in the heart of Chennai? Just as *MMM* is intrigued why the surrounds of Metro stations are a dismal picture of neglect and the service itself has failed to persuade Metropolitan Bus Transport to team with it and use this space. *MMM* wonders whether anyone in authority will let *Madras Musings* know the lowdown on all this.

## Development goals

In case you missed all this, because it gets lost amidst so much other verbiage, *The Man From Madras Musings* repeats the 'Development Goals' the Government has set:

- Per capita income to be doubled by 2010.
- Education for all up to Class 5 by 2005.
- To become the leader in Information Technology in India by 2006 — and "the regional gateway to Asia" (whatever that means).
- To become the leading manufactured goods exporter in India, doubling its export earnings.
- Every village to have electricity (in a power-short state!), a trunk road, telephone and Internet connectivity, a school, clean water and sanitation, a village health worker, and local self-government by 2015.
- The 8 per cent growth targeted at present to be further improved.

Dreaming is free, isn't it? *MMM* wonders what the members of the State Planning Commission had to say about all this. In fact, *MMM* wonders what they have to say about the present state of Tamil Nadu and all the projects hanging fire, urban chaos and decay, and the plethora of rural problems compounded by water and power shortages.

Meanwhile, other planners talk of encouraging horticulture and vineyards, wineries (to make Tamil Nadu the wine capital of India) and more new distilleries, developing multistorey commercial blocks on old tank beds (yes, the Long Tank in Teynampet), much embellishment to promote tourism and a host of other plans. *MMM* wishes them well with their dreams. There's nothing like thinking big. *MMM* would be quite satisfied if the Editor can sustain *Madras Musings* small — and even that's proving difficult these days.

Meanwhile, the building of

MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Munro's companion

Reading about Sir Thomas Munro in *MM*, August 16th, brought back memories of an incident that actually took place in the late 1940s, which was hotly debated at the time but appears somewhat amusing, looking back on it so many years later.

In those days, the British companies brought in young European bachelors to work for them and called them Covenanted Assistants. They generally were put up in a chummary (accommodation in the office building). These young men were sports-addicted and, later in the evenings, spent most of their time in the bars of the clubs they mainly used, the Madras Cricket Club and the Madras Gymkhana Club.

One such young man was Basil Earle who came to Binny's in Madras. He was considered rather brash (although when I knew him many years later he had sobered down). Late one Sunday night he took a wager that he would climb on top of the statue in the Island Grounds and sit on the horse alongside Sir Thomas Munro. All his friends who were drinking in the bar at the time helped him by getting a long ladder. With great difficulty he eventually climbed to the top of the statue and sat along with the Governor. At which point his good friends took away the ladder and went home, leaving Basil with no way to come down. In his inebriated condition it was a wonder he was able to remain on the horse till next morning.

On Monday morning, all the Directors of the British companies had to pass the statue on their way to the office and there was Basil sitting on top of the horse in his black jacket and bow tie unable to come down. Poor Basil, they brought him down finally, but he was sacked and put on the next boat back to London.

A few years later, Basil got a job with Pierce Leslie in Cochin (obviously they did not know of his episode in Madras) and after many years retired from that company.

C.D. Gopinath

"Harbour Gate House"  
44-45, Rajaji Salai  
Chennai 600 001.

### Munro remembered

Sir Thomas Munro (*MM*, August 1st) is interred in St. Mary's Church in Fort St. George. His epitaph reads:

'Sir Thomas Munro was from the earliest period of his career remarkable amongst other men. All those who were associated with him at the commencement of his service, many of whom have since become illustrious in the annals of India and of their country, yielded to him with common consent that pre-eminence which belonged to the ascendancy of his character. The resources of his mind rose superior to every emergency of civil government or military enterprise, and he united to these great qualities an unpretending modesty (that extended sign of innate worth) which courted no applause, and which would have obstructed his advancement had not his transcendent merits in the Cabinet and in the field forced him into public notice and elevated him to the highest office of this Presidency.'

O.A. Edwards  
St. Mary's Church  
Fort St. George  
Chennai 600 001.

### Shifting the capital

Apart from Reader M. Sethuraman's very valid reasons (*MM*, September 1st) for shifting the Administrative Capital from Chennai to Trichy, there are two other factors which should also be taken into consideration. One is the enormous saving in expenditure on travel by people of the heavily-populated southern and western districts. The other is water supply from the Kaveri river which runs very close to the suggested areas.

It is high time a serious movement was started on this issue.

Dr. K.S. Janakarathnam

15, Kamar Street  
Gobichettipalayam 638 452.

### Navi Chennai

Re. the debate which comes up in *MM* from time to time about Chennai having become a nightmare of over-population, scanty water resources, poor sanitation, traffic bedlam etc., where

only the law of survival of the fittest operates, we either think of shifting the capital or inducing shift of a section of the population.

A third option would be to create a new posh locality with all the trimmings, except Ministers' bungalows, so that it scales to the top of the real estate market whereby the real estate value in old Chennai dips a bit. This Navi Chennai could be a larger and posher Anna Nagar. It's quite amazing that prior to the Industrial Fair of 1965 or so, there was no Anna Nagar.

Importantly, Navi Chennai should have a Slum Resistance Board to prevent slums from making their inevitable appearance like festering sores. As it is, there is a thin exodus of genteel people from Chennai, horrified at the general indecency. This seems likely to swell to a flood and thereby decongest Chennai in the same way as people studiously avoid a seat in a bus or train that someone has deserted.

C.G. Prasad  
9, C.S. Mudali Street  
Konditohpe  
Chennai 600 079.

### Railroad musings

Like the initials of former South Indian Railway, which spelt the word 'SIR', or the fact that the M&SMR was the only railway in India which also managed the network of a foreign railway, that too so profitably as to propel it into India's handful of first class railroads — the West of India Portuguese Railway (WIPR) — here are some other railway facts.

The Great Southern of India Railway (GSIR), which was sanctioned by the British Parliament in 1858, linked the east coast port of Negapatnam with the prosperous

inland centre of Trichinopoly when its maiden line was opened on July 15, 1861. Closely following the GSIR, the Indian Tramway Company built a short line from Arconam to Canjeeverum in 1865. Four years later, that Company was renamed the Carnatic Railway.

The Nizam (of Hyderabad) Guaranteed State Railway (NGSR) opened its maiden line between Hyderabad and Wadi in 1874, and went on to build the biggest railway network among British India's princely states.

At the other end of the scale, the shortest railroad was the 8-mile (13 km) Pondicherry Railway Company's line joining Gingee River and Pondicherry. It was inaugurated in 1879; forget that it was but all of a mere 8 miles! That line was eventually merged with the SIR network.

The Mysore State Railway (MSR) opened its first section in 1881. Its Hindupur-Mysore route,

## A citizen's effort

Reader K. Radhakrishnan, 'Rangavilla', 3rd floor, 28, Second Main Road, CIT Colony, Chennai 600 004, writes:

Taking the cue from some news items in *MM* and elsewhere, I have compiled a few TIPS which should be useful in these times of water shortage in Chennai. I printed a few thousand handbills with the message below and distributed them.

*MM* could help spread the message of conserving water further.

- Do not permit servant maids to wash vessels in running tap water. At least, ensure that the tap is not opened fully.
- While they wash clothes manually, arrest the tendency of rinsing clothes with an overflowing bucketful of water plus the tap also open.
- Bathing through shower head is not only convenient but is economical too. Do not shower too long or let the shower run while soaping/rinsing.
- While brushing teeth/shaving/washing hands or face, half turn tap for limited outflow and close tap immediately after use.
- Seek the help of a plumber promptly to attend to leaking taps and excessive discharge in cisterns.
- While washing vehicles, do not use a hosepipe. Ensure water is used only from a bucket.
- If you have the luxury of a garden, prudent use of hose should be practised or, still better, insist on using a water can.
- Last... but not the least, do not hesitate to spend money on a rainwater harvest system, if you have not done so already. The Tamil Nadu Government Ground and Surface Water Resources Data Centre (Phone: 2541526-27) would only be too pleased to assist you. So would your area Metrowater office. If you need more information, please call 4990588.

via Guntakal, was a useful substitute for the Poona-Bangalore trunk line jointly operated by the GIPR and the M&SMR railway companies. The single track line of the Kolar Gold Fields Company was taken over by MSR, along with the Tarikere and Narasimharajapura lines.

Names of other southern India rail lines that come to mind are those of Kulasekharapatnam, Trivellore, Tanjore District Board Line, Cochine Harbour Railway, Bezvada Extension Railway, Dronachellam-Kurnool, Travancore Durbar Line, Kazipet-Balharsha segment, and the French-owned Peralam-Karaikal Railway. Last but not the least, the wonderful Nilgiri-Ootacamaund metre gauge railway still operates the only rack section in the Indian subcontinent. Readers might like to expand this list.

G.D. Patwardhan

11a, Rajaramwadi  
Old 96a, Hill Road  
Bandra (W)  
Mumbai 400 050.

### Our own Kaveri

If rivers can be made to flow in the deserts of Rajasthan, we can certainly have round-the-year flow in the Kaveri with its own catchment areas in Tamil Nadu. The magazine, *New Scientist*, of September 7, 2002, has published an interview with Rajendra Singh, the Magsaysay Award Winner for Community Leadership. He has already become a legend and is called 'River Maker', creating water where none existed. Hundreds of Rajasthan villages have now got water because of his untiring work, going along with nature and making the most out of what it can provide.

I suggest that the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu invite Rajendra Singh to attempt making a pro-

lem-free Kaveri so as to put a stop to the never-ending defensive fight with our neighbour, Karnataka.

K. Sathrugnan

7/4, Kamarajar Road  
Ramakrishna Nagar  
Chennai 600 087.

### Periodical semantics

As desired by Reader Thomas Tharu (*MM*, October 16th), I give below the meanings of the words in which he is interested. These are taken from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1999 edition).

- Bimonthly — Appearing or taking place twice in a month or every two months
  - Biweekly — Appearing or taking place every two weeks or twice a week
  - Biannual — Occurring twice a year
  - Biennial — Taking place every other year
  - Diurnal — Of or during the day-time; daily.
- In view of the above, it seems to be perfectly in order if *Madras Musings* is referred to as a bi-monthly publication.

R.C. Narayanan

T-59B, 32nd Cross Street  
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Chennai 600 090.

### 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.

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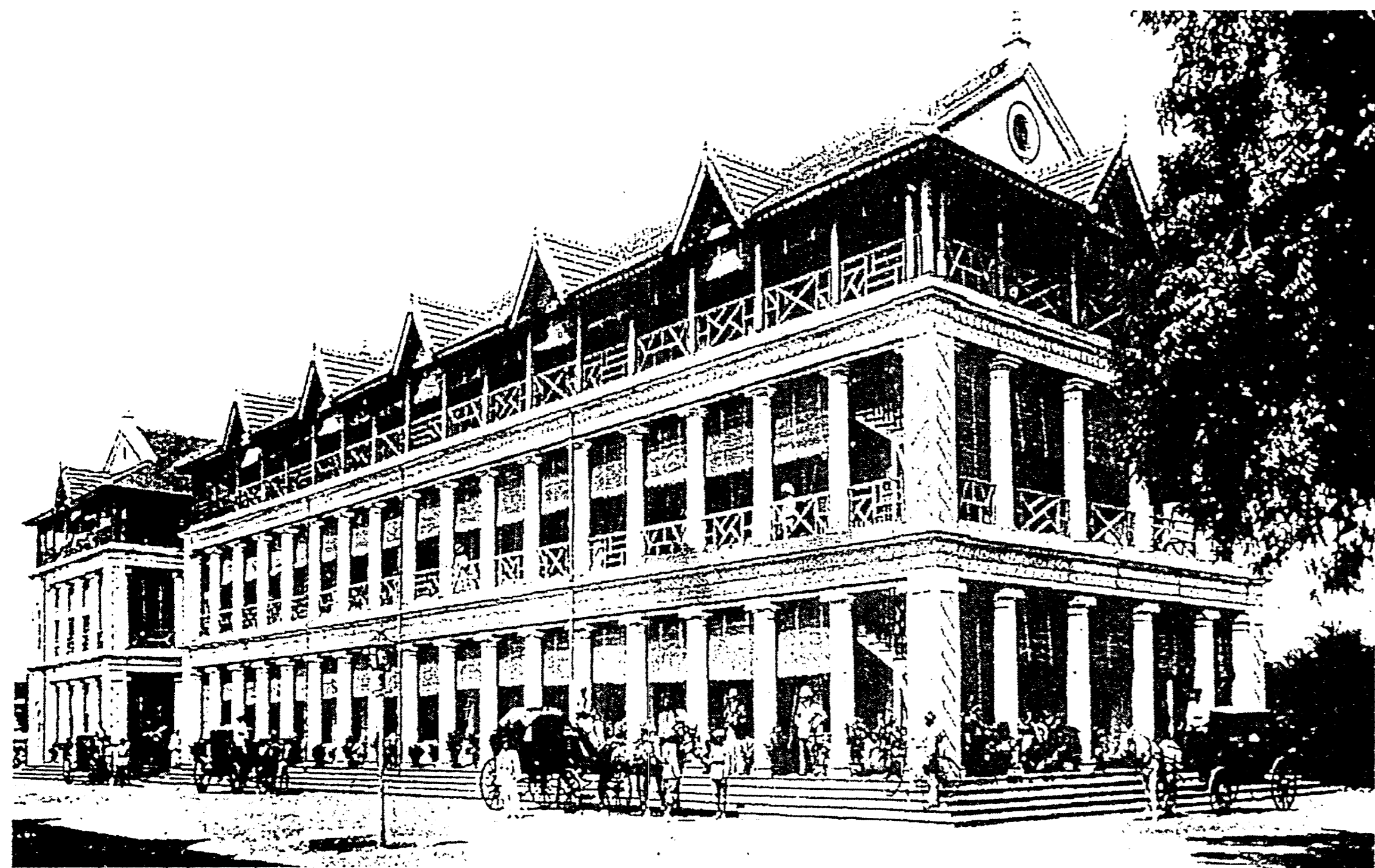
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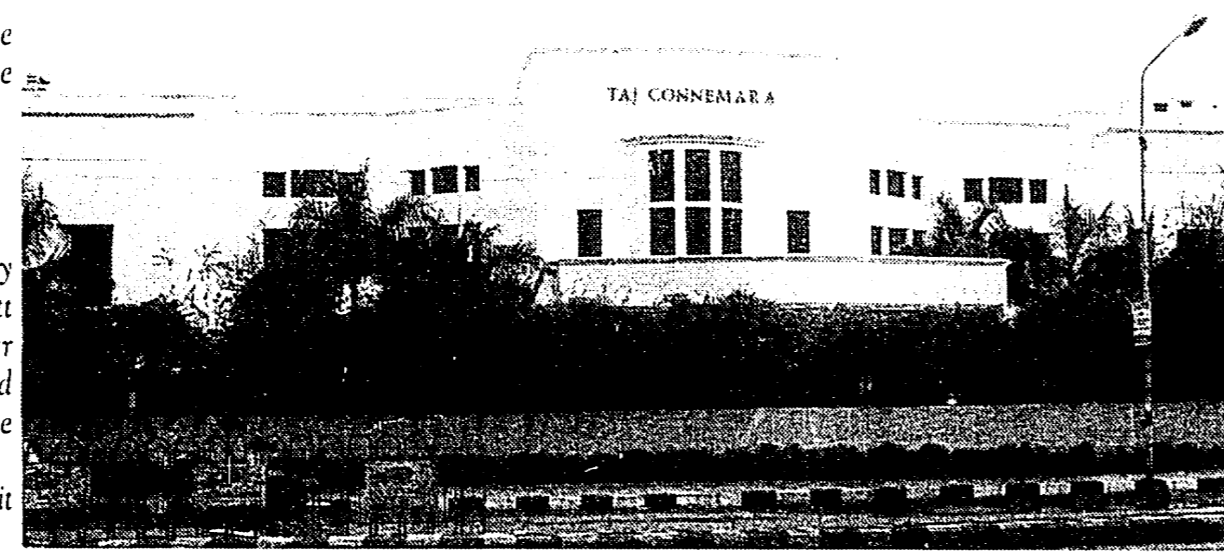
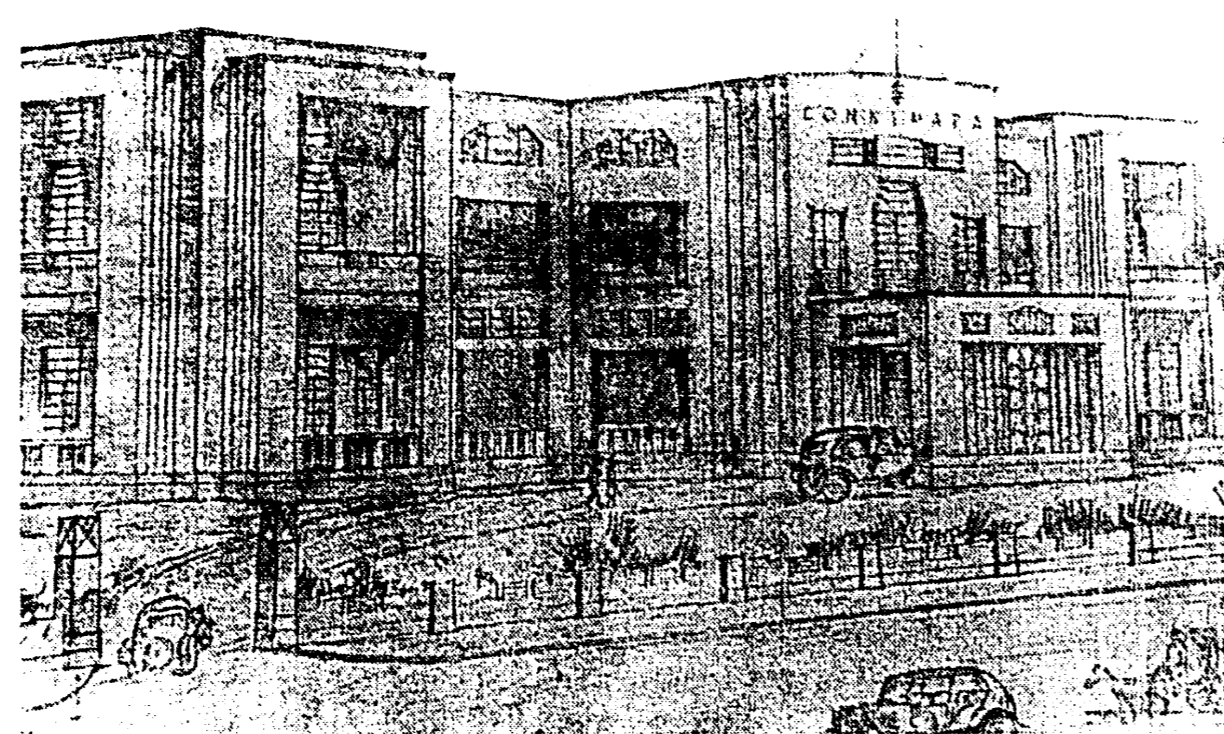


Our OLD this fortnight comprises several pictures, the topmost one a view of what the Connemara Hotel looked like in its earliest days. This picture came to us serendipitously, when a sketch of the building was noticed hanging on the walls of one of the corridors in the Connemara just a few months ago. Enquiries revealed that it was based on a photograph which a visitor to the hotel had presented it some months ago stating that she had found it in Europe. A copy of a copy of the Wiede and Klein photograph (as signed in the original) is the first of our OLDs.

It was the Imperial Hotel, established in 1854 by Ratanavalo Moodelliar in what was probably the house John Binny built, that became the Albany in 1886 and the Connemara in 1890 when Eugene

Oakshott bought the property. Oakshott's partner, James Stiven, managing the Connemara, reconstructed it "in a far more ornate style at a cost of more than half a lakh of rupees" in 1901. The oldest of our OLDs is probably the building John Stiven had constructed. Eugene Oakshott, Chairman of Spencer & Co. and responsible for its early growth as well as its landmark building in Mount Road, left the Connemara to his son John Oakshott who in 1913 sold it to Spencer's. It would appear that Spencer's re-developed the property, because our picture, above left, was what the Connemara looked like before it was re-built in 1934. The old building was pulled down and what was built is seen in the architect's sketch, above right, of what the remodelled Connemara was expected to look like when complete.

Our NEW, on right, is of that re-modelled building as it looks today, not too different from what it was in the 1930s. (Photograph of the NEW by E. PRAKASH.)



...& THE NEW

## IMPROVED MANAGEMENT OF BIOWASTE IN CHENNAI

Since 2000, Consumer Action Group (CAG) has been studying the level of awareness of hospitals and laboratories in Chennai on bio-medical waste management and treatment.

The 2002 study was a follow-up survey to evaluate the change (if any) in hospital waste management since the previous study (2001).

The study showed that the bio-medical waste situation in Chennai has seen major improvements, though sporadic and with exceptions. The main attribute to the changing scenario is the decision to set up a Centralised Waste Treatment Facility (CWTF) for the city's hospitals. In fact, when the actual process of identifying the land and the CWT facility pro-

vider took place in the latter half of 2001, the whole campaign towards better medical waste management and disposal made significant progress.

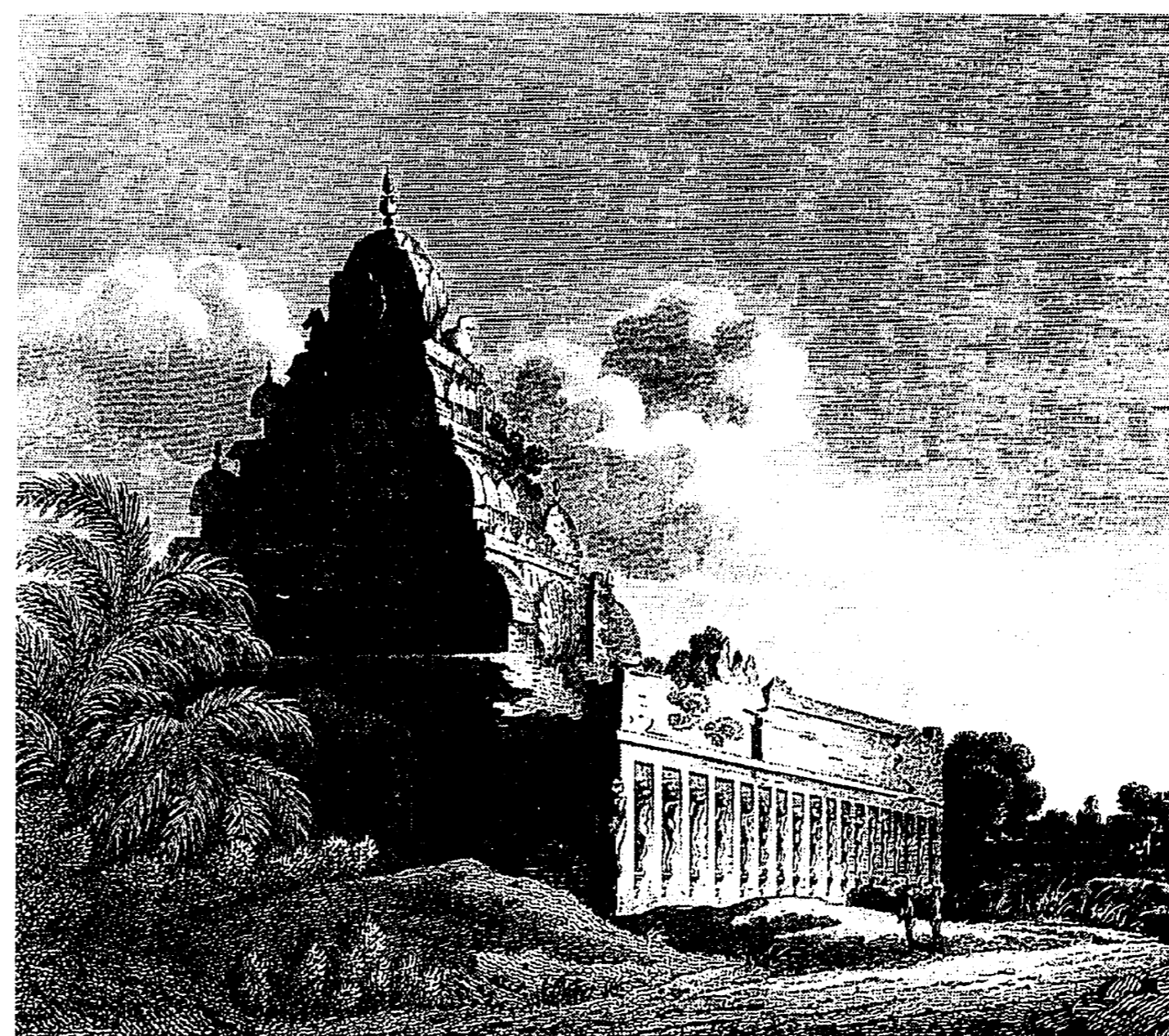
With the CWTF in sight, waste management is getting a face-lift. However, unfortunately, there are still some institutions that are unwilling to make any changes even today and claim that good practices

will be and need to be adopted only after the facility has actually started operating. Nevertheless, the Indian Medical Association (IMA), the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) and CAG have been urging the healthcare institutions to sign up for the centralised facility.

Overall, in relation to bio-medical waste management in

Chennai city, the three surveys conducted by CAG show that there has been marked improvement in the situation. However, the overall picture does not mean that Chennai is significantly ahead on this front. Finer introspection into individual cases shows that many areas require much more attention.— (Courtesy: CAG Reports.)

Rena Thiagarajan



'Pagoda at Conjevaram' by Henry Salt (February 1804).

• HENRY SALT

## A romantic painter in India

In the last decade of the 18th Century and the first two decades of the 19th Century, many British watercolour painters came to India and made a number of drawings, many of which were later translated into romantic engravings. Amongst them was Henry Salt (1780-1827), whose career sounds magical, even mythical.

Salt is a happy example of a misfit suddenly finding his place in the feudal British society of the early 19th Century. In 1801, he was oppressed with failure. He wanted to be a portrait painter, but his education, temperament and gifts had failed to equip him for the role. As a boy in Litchfield he had been taught by a Mr. Glover, a well-known water-colourist of the day. In 1797, at the age of 17, he went to London and studied with Joseph Farrington, the landscape painter. He thus acquired a certain skill in watercolour landscapes, but had none of the facility for figure drawing shown by his fellow students. Life for him was miserable; he was short of money. As he sat waiting for work, there seemed no outlet for his natural vigour, enquiring mind and zest for life. His restless temperament chafed at the prospect of so slow and unadventurous a career. Suddenly, in a flash, all was changed. A chance encounter with his maternal uncle, the Rev. George Butt, led to his contact with

Lord Valentia (1770-1884), who had been tutored by the clergyman and was with him on the occasion. Salt and Valentia became great friends and during the next two years, the two young men met regularly in London.

By 1801, Lord Valentia had begun to toy with the idea of a visit to India. When Henry Salt heard of this, he asked if he might accompany his Lordship on his proposed tour. Valentia readily agreed and it was decided that Henry Salt should accompany him as his secretary and topographical draughtsman. The two reached Calcutta on January 26, 1803, having embarked on board the East Indiaman *Minerva*, on June 3, 1802, and began a journey which was to last 4½ years. Thus by a sudden quirk of fate, Henry Salt was launched on an adventure that fired his enthusiasm for the picturesque and the exotic and, eventually, led to his becoming a celebrated traveller and collector of antiquities.

Lord Valentia wrote and published in 1809 a voluminous work running into four quarto volumes entitled "Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt, in the years 1802, 1803, 1805 and 1806".

Lord Valentia's birth led to his being received by the great in India, and with treating Salt

as a friend and equal, not as an employee. Salt had access to whatever he wanted to see.

After a short stay in Calcutta, Valentia and Salt began their tour of India, the journeys being performed chiefly by palanquin. Illustrative of the methods of travel in those days, it should be mentioned that Lord Valentia had an escort of the men of a native regiment and his entourage consisted of the following: 39 bearers, 16 *jamadars*, 6 *khidmatgars*, 2 *saises*, 16 men for cooking and taking care of sheep etc., 50 servants with tents and hackerys, 10 men

• V. Sundaram

in charge of the elephants, 28 bearers and 120 *sepoys* and followers, making a grand total of 287.

Lord Valentia, like many 18th Century aristocrats, had broad interests and could discuss politics and foreign affairs with governors, *rajahs* and *nawabs*. With Salt by his side, he could also botanise, hunt for minerals or sea-shells and marvel at picturesque views.

As they toured India, Salt encountered many aspects of the picturesque. In Lucknow, which they visited on their first journey out of Calcutta, Salt drew the majestic Lucknow architecture and its brilliant pageantry. Travelling down the

Ganges from Cawnpore to Calcutta by budgerow, Salt made many sketches of the mosques and temples on the banks of the Ganges at Ghazipur as well as a series of beautiful watercolour washed drawings depicting such well-known landmarks as Kara, Chunar Fort, the Fakir's Rock and the Rajmahal Hills.

In December 1803 they set off for Ceylon, where they spent 3 weeks and saw tropical palm-groves and lush vegetation. They then returned to India, and visited the great temples of the South, proceeding through 'Ramiseram', Tanjore and Mamallapuram to Madras. At Ramnad, Lord Valentia attracted attention by shaking hands with the Rani of Ramnad.

On their way to Madras, Lord Valentia was very pleased to be able to talk to the versatile Raja of Tanjore, Sarfoji, in English; it was an opportunity for some direct communication with an Indian aristocrat, somebody with whom he could mix on an equal footing.

They then visited Mysore and were excited by Seringapatam and the hill forts, so recently the setting for the war against Tipu Sahib. During this time, Salt went off by himself to explore the Cauvery river and draw "The sounding cataract".

In the course of this tour, which even today, with modern transport, would be taxing and ambitious, Salt saw many timeless aspects of India—the storm and lightning of the monsoon, hoary and ancient ruins, fantastic flowers, birds and animals, richly carved temples and a colourful population with flamboyant ceremony and ritual. Here, ready-mixed were all the ingredients for the Romantic Artist. He painted them all.

Lord Valentia gave Salt every opportunity to sketch and his journal abounds in phrases such as "Mr. Salt went first to visit and draw the Seven Pagodas of Mamallapuram. I found at Madras that Mr. Salt had taken several views. I had hired for Mr. Salt 16 palanquin boys for one month. They were to take him about 20 miles a day and give him leisure to draw anything that might be interesting". Lord Valentia was delighted to find that his friend was supplying him with an unbroken watercolour commentary on the picturesque scenes through which they passed.

In the last decade of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century, the cultured classes were gaining a new awareness of natural scenery and many of the Europeans in India whom Salt met on his travels were impressed by his work. The admiration is not surprising, for Henry Salt's drawings were of a quality rarely seen in India. He inevitably saw the country with the eye of his

age. His compositions follow a conventional pattern with a dark and rocky foreground, the middle distance holding the interest. Boldly massed trees often frame the subject, and small dark-skinned forms add that touch of wildness which was so valued at that time. His palette too was the favourite one of his day — grey and brown washes, dull blue and green colours which were considered as giving "harmony". Indeed, in the choice of subject, composition and colour, his drawings are very similar to those of Thomas and William Daniell, who had visited India a few years before. Salt's sketches at their best show a vigour, energy and sensitivity to atmospheric effects.

After their return to England in October 1806, Lord Valentia wanted engravings from Salt's drawings to illustrate his memoirs. Salt had also conceived the idea of publishing coloured engravings from his sketches. He now set to work upon these two projects. The whole of 1807 and 1808 was passed in making drawings from sketches for the engravers, in supervising the engraving and in writing up his own journal, parts of which were incorporated in Lord Valentia's account. Both books were published in 1809. The first three volumes of Lord Valentia's travelogue contain narrative accounts of his voyages and travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt. The fourth volume consists of 24 engraved plates done by Henry Salt of which 12 of them relate to India. These engravings reveal India as seen by an intelligent traveller engaged in a novel grand tour and make an authentic contribution to the English Romantic Tradition in the field of painting.

In the travel accounts of Lord Valentia and Henry Salt we get a vivid glimpse of the sights and sounds of India of the time. We see a sensitive description of the freshness of the mornings, the voluptuousness of the nights, the burning heat of the summer, the suffering from the hot winds, the daily waiting for the rains, the splendour of the thunder storms, the rejoicing at the first showers, the serenity of the post-monsoon period and the delights of the cool season. We also notice a combination of scientific interest in flora and fauna and romantic enthusiasm over landscape, with verbal vignettes celebrating the beauty of mountains and valleys, hills and forests, corn-fields and rivers.

Whenever I turn the pages of the travel accounts of Lord Valentia and Henry Salt, I am often enthralled by the mystery of time, by the mutability of all things, by the inexorable succession of the ages and generations.

Quizzin'  
with  
Raminan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period September 16 to 30, 2002. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Tamil Nadu and Chennai.)

1. Researchers have successfully sequenced the gene codes for the parasite and the carrier of which global killer disease?
2. Name the two Indians who figure in *Fortune* magazine's '50 Most Influential Women in International Business'.
3. What far-reaching judgment as regards temple administration did the Supreme Court give recently?
4. Name the gold-medal winning Indian athlete who tested positive for dope at the Asian Games recently.
5. Who has been awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize?
6. Which prestigious global award was presented to Mata Amritanandamayi in Geneva recently?
7. Which world-renowned American educational institution has put many of its top courses in the open domain of the Internet?
8. On which island, where, did a blast kill more than 180 people leaving the world shocked?
9. The book *To Be or Not To Be*, written by Khalid Mohammed, looks at the life of which superstar? (Hint: He celebrated his 60th birthday on October 11th.)
10. Which Indian director of an English film won a special jury award at the 33rd International Film Festival in New Delhi recently?

11. Who were three eminent Tamil leaders whose statues were unveiled by the President in Parliament House on October 1st?
12. The first-ever book in Tamil, authored by M. Sridharan, IFS, to teach which Asian language was released in Hong Kong recently?
13. Name the superfast express which will run for three months between Chennai and Madurai, starting October 2nd.
14. What stringent ordinance, based on religious grounds, did the State Government come up with on October 5th?
15. A simple one. Where did Tamil film artistes stage a much-publicised protest on the Kaveri issue on October 12th?
16. What institution, started in 1832, is at present located in *Moubray's Gardens* in Chennai?
17. Name the well-known publishing house, located near the Mylapore Tank, which is celebrating its 100th birthday.
18. What are the terminal points of the 'Tirukkural Express' flagged off on October 14th?
19. Name 'the story of Tamil Nadu cricket' written by V. Ramnarayan and released recently.
20. Which well-known cricket writers from this part of the world wrote under the names 'Cardusian' and 'Caviane' respectively.

(Answers on page 8)

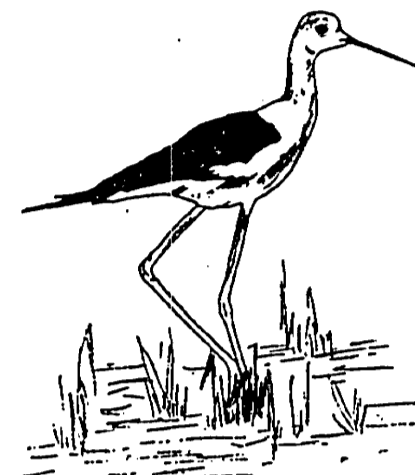
## Wading birds at Adyar

To watch wading birds, few spots are better than tidal mud flats and creeks. Of all bird habitats, mud flats have the heaviest concentration of birds during the season. The unobstructed view that you command of such spots makes bird-watching delightful. In Madras, the Adyar, between Elphinstone Bridge and the sea, flanked by Chettinad Palace and the Theosophical Society, is one such spot. If the Guindy Deer Park is a place for flycatchers, this part of Adyar is a waders' paradise.

The pedestrian catwalk on the side of the bridge is the best point to watch these birds from, though your watching is interrupted by the vibration caused by vehicles passing over the bridge. The ideal time is late afternoon, when the tide is at its lowest and a vast area of the riverbed is bared, inviting a host of waders to feed on molluscs, tiny crabs and numerous other aquatic small life that a tidal mud flat has to offer. The sun is behind you and shines on the mud flat producing the best possible lighting conditions to watch the waders.

Pond herons are here throughout the year, content to remain completely camou-

flaged. Sparklingly white, little egrets pace sedately along the edge of the water and break the monotony of the grey landscape by flying across. Resident birds like red-wattled lapwings are also seen frequently. During the migratory season, from October right up to March, this spot teems with thousands of winter



Black-winged stilt.

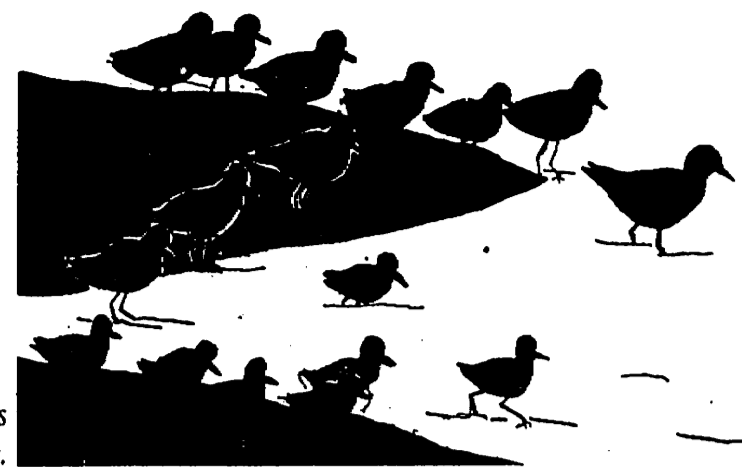
visitors like sandpipers, stilts and shanks.

Among them, the most picturesque and predominant bird is the black-winged stilt. A flock of 40 to 50 birds standing motionless at the edge, like so many cardboard cutouts, is a common sight. Now and then a stilt would take a few steps lifting its ridiculously long pink legs clear off the water, probe the soft, squelchy earth with its long bill and resume its posture again. At times, its whole body

is submerged and only the conical rump sticks out of the water surface. Its white body and black wings set it off from the other dull-coloured waders.

This migratory stilt is widely distributed in Tamil Nadu. It can be spotted in all the lakes during the season, even if there is no other water fowl. They leave the Adyar mud flats by the middle of April when their breeding season begins. A group of Bombay bird-watchers spotted some nests of these stilts around Powai lake.

The handsome red-wattled lapwing, a resident plover, is seen in the small islet at the middle of the mud flats. This islet appears to be an ideal nesting ground for these birds. Its call "Did-he-do-it" can often be heard in this area, piercing the silence of the moonlit night. This bird is the first to warn the others in a feeding ground should any sportsman approach the spot with dark designs. It is with good reason that the villager has named this bird *Aal Kaati Kuruvi*. The small yellow-legged bird that sports a single black ring across the chest is the little ringed plover. It runs in



Sandpipers at Adyar.

short spurts, neck drawn tightly between the wings.

Sandpipers and shanks outnumber all the other birds here. The Common Sandpiper and the less gregarious spotted sandpipers run about, shaking their short tails vigorously up and down. When alarmed, often by a wading fisherman, they rise in one great flock and fly around, banking and wheeling in great unison, and with remarkable swiftness, in a fantastic display of aerobatics. The little stint, another winter visitor, comes all the way from Eastern Europe and leaves along with the other sandpipers by the end of March. These birds, collectively referred to as 'Ullan' in Tamil, are netted in large numbers and sold as table birds.

Birds like the sandpiper and shank are the trickiest to differentiate and identify. This is what makes a bird-watching session at Adyar fascinating and challenging. If you can spot one wader from the other here, you can consider yourself as having arrived. — (Courtesy, *The Hindu*, 1.7.73, before the Thiru Vi Ka Bridge was built.)

S. Theodore Baskaran

## Bird-watching with the MNS

The Madras Naturalists' Society reports:

The Velachery marshes are teeming with migrant birds.

On a recent trip to the Gudur tank, members observed Greater Flamingo (6), Painted Stork (150), Grey Pelican (30), Spoonbill (5), Golden Plover (50+), Grey Heron (5) and Dabchik.

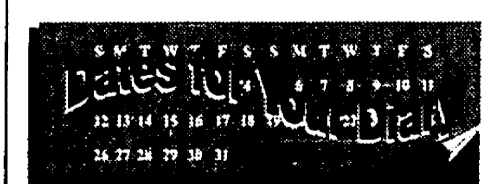
On a field trip to Manamboli, near Valparai, members observed 35 Lion-Tailed Macaques near Pudukottam Estate. "Busy as they were eating guavas, they totally ignored passers-by. Apparently they can be seen regularly." Among the birds native to the Western Ghats,

they saw the Southern Treepie and Malabar Grey Hornbill. While walking on the Varagaliyur jungle road they spotted many birds, which can only be seen in the forests. Gold-fronted Chloropsis, Ruby-throated Bulbul, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Jungle Owlet, Lorikeet and, among the raptors, Crested-serpent Eagle, Crested Hawk Eagle and Grey Fishing Eagle were among 78 species recorded on this trip.

Nilgiri Langur and Indian Giant Squirrel were regularly seen. But the Flying Squirrels seen gliding from one tree to another was an unforgettable sight.

Courses Offered: Visual Art Appreciation, a history of Western Art from Greco-Roman to Impressionism, and Temple Art and Architecture - A Historical Perspective.

For details: Geeta Vasudevan, Tel: 4915913 between 1-6 p.m. E-mail: drgeetav@yahoo.co.in Venue: 22/A, Prince Arcade, Cathedral Road, Chennai.



November 9-December 18: Hayagriva Study Circle announces the second in the series of courses on 4 Saturdays and 4 Sundays, 2-hour lectures. Open to all adults.

## Naturalists plan to mark Silver Jubilee

(By A Staff Reporter)

The Madras Naturalists' Society completes 25 years of existence this year. The executive committee of the MNS is considering the following ways to commemorate the occasion:

- Bringing out publications on - Nature spots in and around Chennai - Birds of Velachery marshes - Nature writings pertaining to Tamil Nadu - A bird book of Chennai and environs.
- A get-together of past and present members combined with a bird watching trip.
- Involvement of schoolchildren in the celebrations - quiz competitions, painting contests, puppetry shows on Nature / Conservation.
- One-day seminar to focus attention on eco-issues in Chennai and its surroundings.

## 'NOT SO BAD' - THAT'S CHENNAI

(Continued from Page 1)

| Urban parameters                             | Readers' Assessment |
|--|---------------------|
| Redressal of Complaints                      | 5                   |
| Government Disaster Response                 | 4                   |
| Availability of Development Information      | 4                   |
| NGO Collective Action on City-level Issues   | 4                   |
| Conformity of Citizens to Legal Requirements | 4                   |
| Honesty/Trust among People                   | 4                   |
| Care of Environmental Resources              |                     |
| Wetlands                                     | 4                   |
| Waterways & Tanks                            | 5                   |
| Underground Water                            | 5                   |
| Tree Cover                                   | 6                   |
| Coastal Environment                          | 5                   |
| Biodiversity                                 | 5                   |
| Conservation of Energy                       | 4                   |

## Jeeves among the Maharajahs

• This year is the centenary of the first publication of a novel by P.G. Wodehouse, *The Pothunters*. It is an anniversary that is certain to be more celebrated in India than in Britain. Shashi Tharoor, whose first novel, *Riot*, was published to acclaim last year, reflects on the Indian passion for this master of English caricature.

It was at the Hay-on-Wye Festival of Literature a few years ago that I realised with horror how low the fortunes of P.G. Wodehouse had sunk in his native land. I was on stage for a panel discussion on the works of the Master when the moderator, a gifted and suave young impresario, began the proceedings by asking innocently, "So how do you pronounce it? Is it Woad-house or Wood-house?"

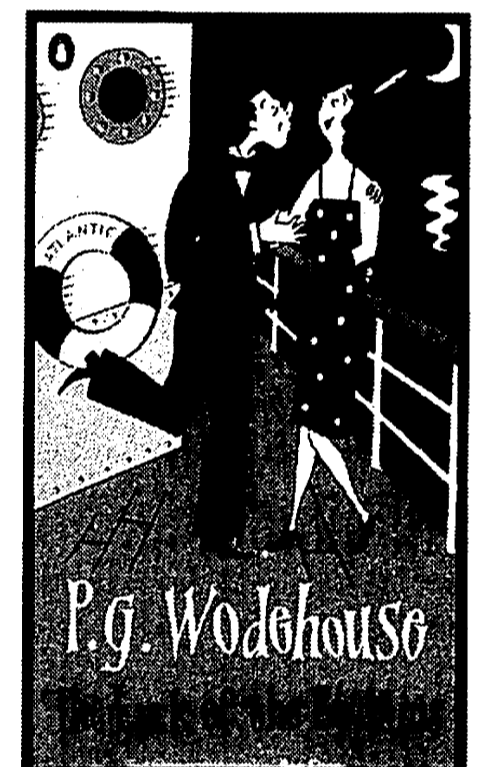
Woadhouse? You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather, except that Wodehouse himself would have disdained the cliché instead, describing my expression as, perhaps, that of one who "had swallowed an east wind" (*Carry on, Jeeves*, 1925). The fact was that a luminary at the premier book event in the British Isles had no idea how to pronounce the name of the man I regarded as the finest English writer since Shakespeare. I spent the rest of the panel discussion looking (to echo a description of Bertie Wooster's Uncle Tom) like a pterodactyl with a secret sorrow.

My dismay had Indian roots. Like many of my compatriots, I had discovered Wodehouse young and pursued my delight across the 95 volumes of the oeuvre, savouring book after book, as if the pleasure would never end. When All India Radio announced, one sunny afternoon in February 1975, that Wodehouse had died, I felt a cloud of darkness settle over me. The newly (and belatedly) knighted Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, creator of Jeeves and of the prize pig, the Empress of Blandings, was in his 94th year, but his death still came as a shock. Every English-language newspaper in India carried it on its front page; the articles and letters that were published in the following days about his life and work would have filled volumes.

For months before his death, I had procrastinated over a letter to Wodehouse. It was a collegian's fan letter, made special by being written on the letterhead (complete with curly-tailed pig) of the Wodehouse Society of St Stephen's College, Delhi University. Ours was then the only Wodehouse Society in the world, and I was its president, a distinction I prized over all others in an active and eclectic extra-curricular life.

The Wodehouse Society ran mimicry and comic speech contests, published an underground rag called *Spice* (whose misprints were deliberate) and organised the annual Lord Ickenham Memorial Practical Joke Week, the bane of all at college who took themselves too seriously.

The loss was personal, but it was also widely shared: P. G. Wodehouse is by far the most popular English-language writer in India, his readership exceeding that of Agatha Christie or John Grisham. His erudite butlers, absent-minded earls and silly-ass aristocrats, out to pinch policemen's helmets on boat race night or perform convo-



luted acts of petty larceny at the behest of tyrannical aunts, are familiar to, and beloved by, most educated Indians. I cannot think of an Indian family I know that does not have at least one Wodehouse book on its shelves, and most have several. In a country where most people's earning capacity has not kept up with inflation and book-borrowing is part of the culture, libraries stock multiple copies of each Wodehouse title. At the British Council libraries in the major Indian cities, demand for Wodehouse outstrips that for any other author.

In the 27 years since his death much has changed in India, but Wodehouse still commands the heights. His works are sold on railway station platforms and airport bookstalls alongside the latest bestsellers. In 1988, Doordarshan broadcast a 10-part Hindi adaptation of his 1923 classic, *Leave it to Psmith*, with the Shropshire castle to the Earl of Emsworth becoming the Rajasthani palace of an indolent Maharaja. The series was a disaster: Wode-

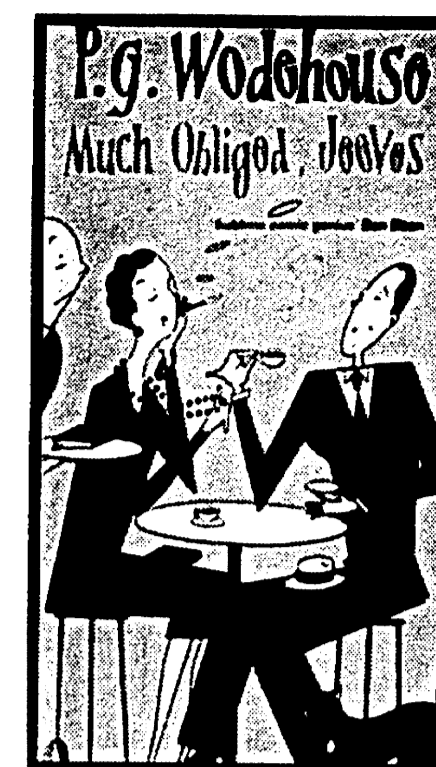
house purists were appalled by the changes, and the TV audience discovered that English humour does not translate too well into Hindi. Indian quiz contests continue to feature



questions about Wodehouse's books but, alas, reports from St Stephen's College tell me that the Wodehouse Society is now defunct, having fallen into disrepute when one of its practical joke weeks went awry (it appears to have involved underwear flying at half-mast from the flagpole).

Many are astonished at the extent of Wodehouse's popularity in India, particularly when, elsewhere in the English-speaking world, he is no longer much read. Americans know Wodehouse from reruns of earlier TV versions of his short stories but these have a limited audience. *The Washington Post* some years ago noted that Wodehouse "seems to have lost his general audience and become mainly a cult author savoured by connoisseurs for his prose artistry". That is increasingly true in England and the rest of the Commonwealth, but not in India. While no English-language writer can truly be said to have a 'mass' following in India, where only 2% of the population reads English, Wodehouse has maintained a general rather than a cult audience among the Anglophone minority: unlike others who have enjoyed fleeting success, he has never gone out of fashion. This bewilders those who think that nothing could be further removed from Indian life, with its poverty and political intensity, than the cheerful silly escapades of Wodehouse's decadent Edwardian Young Men in Spats.

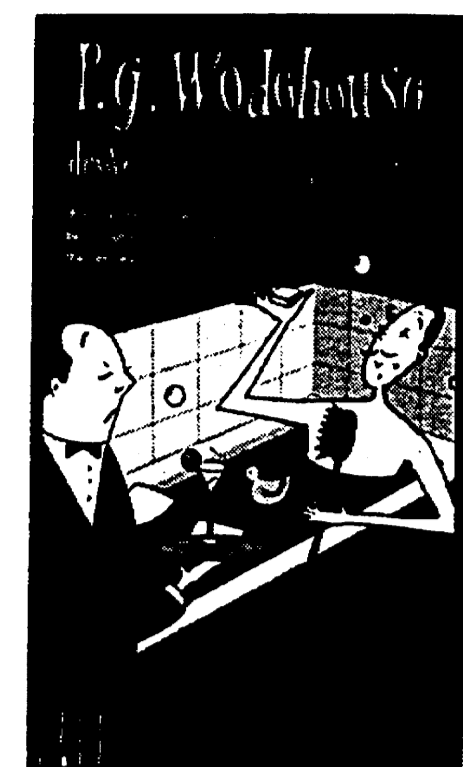
Some have seen in



Wodehouse's popularity a lingering nostalgia for the Raj. Nonsense, of course. Wodehouse is loved by Indians who loathe Kipling and detest the Raj and all its works. Indeed, despite a brief stint in a Hong Kong bank, Wodehouse had no colonial connection himself, and the Raj is largely absent from his books. If anything, Wodehouse is one British writer whom Indian nationalists could admire without fear of political incorrectness. My former mother-in-law, the daughter of an Indian nationalist politician, remembers introducing Britain's last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, to the works of Wodehouse in 1948. It was typical that the symbol of the British Empire had not read the "quintessentially English" Wodehouse but that the Indian freedom-fighter had.

Indeed, it is precisely the lack of politics in Wodehouse's writing, or indeed of any other social or philosophic content, that made what Waugh called his "idyllic world" so free of the trappings of Englishness, quintessential or otherwise. Unlike almost any other writer, Wodehouse does not require his readers to identify with any of his characters: they are stock figures, almost theatrical archetypes whose carefully plotted exits and entrances you follow because they are amusing, not because you are actually meant to care about them. Whereas other English novelists burdened their readers with the specificities of their characters' lives and circumstances, Wodehouse's existed in a never-never land that was almost as unreal to his English readers as to his Indian ones. Indian readers were able to enjoy Wodehouse free of the anxiety of allegiance; for all its droll particularities, the world he created, from London's Drones Club to the village of Matcham Scratchings, was a world of the imagination, to which Indians required no visa.

But they did need a passport, and that was the English language. English was undoubtedly Britain's most valuable and enduring legacy to India, and educated Indians, a famously polyglot people, rapidly learned and delighted in it — both for



itself, and as a means to various ends. These ends were both political (for Indians turned the language of the imperialists into the language of nationalism) and pleasurable (for the language granted access to a wider world of ideas and entertainments). It was only natural that Indians would enjoy a writer who used language as Wodehouse did, playing with its rich storehouse of classical precedents, mockingly subverting the very canons colonialism had taught Indians they were supposed to venerate. "He groaned slightly and winced, like Prometheus watching his vulture dropping in for lunch." Or: "The butler was looking nervous, like Macbeth interviewing Lady Macbeth after one of her visits to the spare room."

A large part of Wodehouse's appeal to Indians certainly lies in the uniqueness of his style, which inveigled us into a sort of conspiracy of universalism: his humour was inclusive, for his mock-serious generalisations were, of course, as absurd to those he was ostensibly writing about as to us. "Like so many substantial citizens of America, he had married young and kept on marrying, springing from blonde to blonde like the cham-ois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag." My own favourites stretch the possibilities of the language in unexpected ways: "She has more curves than a scenic railway"; "I turned him down like a bedspread"; and the much-quoted, "If not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted".

This insidious but good-humoured subversion of the language, conducted with straight-faced aplomb, appeals most of all to a people who have acquired English, but rebel against its heritage. The colonial connection left strange patterns on the minds of the connected. Wodehouse's is a world we can share with the English on equal terms, because they are just as surprised by its enchantments. At this 100th anniversary of the publication of his first book, *The Pothunters*, perhaps that is as good an argument as any for a long-overdue Wodehouse revival in England. (Courtesy: *Connecting*, the Journal of the British Council.)

# Recalling TN's great cricketing past

Tamil Nadu cricket has an ethos, a culture, a tradition all its own. Some of the finest cricketers in the country, not to mention some of the leading administrators, have come from the State. But Tamil Nadu cricket is much more than just Venkatraghavan and Srikanth, Chidambaram and Sriraman. It also has its share of unforgettable cricketing characters and humorous anecdotes, a rich history and the hallowed Chepauk turf. Chennai boasts of a senior division league that is the best organised and most lucrative in the country, one that attracts even leading Indian stars. All this and much more is covered in some detail in 'Mosquitos and other Jolly Rovers' subtitled 'The Story of Tamil Nadu Cricket', by Venkatraman Ramnarayan which was released by Indian vice-captain Rahul Dravid during the second Test match against the West Indies.

Few would be better qualified to write on such a subject than Ramnarayan. In fact, he would also be qualified to write a book on Hyderabad cricket (which he plans) for he has had a pitch in both camps, as it were. Born and brought up in Madras, he had his education and played his early cricket in the city for Young Men's Association and Alwarpet CC. As an off spinner, he was both accurate and penetrative but, unable to play for Madras, which had Venkatraghavan at the time, he moved to Hyderabad, playing for the State Bank of India, with whom he was employed. He represented Hyderabad from

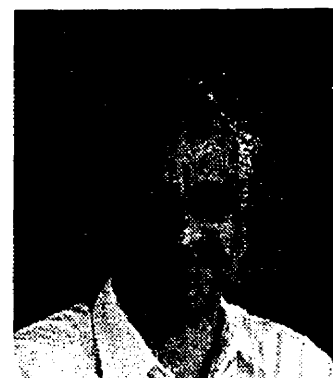
1975-76 to 1979-80, playing alongside such well-known and charismatic figures like the Nawab of Pataudi, ML Jaisimha, Abbas Ali Baig and Syed Abid Ali and carved a niche for himself as one of its main wicket-takers. I remember how he bowled out a formidable Bombay batting outfit taking 7 for 68 on the first day of the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal at the Wankhede Stadium in 1975-76. He was soon playing in the Duleep Trophy and Deodhar Trophy tournaments and by 1977-78 was good enough to make it to the list of 29 probables selected for the tour of Australia that winter. He didn't quite make the cut, but continued to represent the State and Zone with some success.

After his first class career came to an end in the early 1980s, Ramnarayan came back to Madras and played club cricket for Alwarpet CC and, then, Globe Trotters till 1990. Once his playing days were over, writing on the game became an obvious choice. Coming from a journalistic background - his uncle P.N. Sundareshan was for many years the cricket correspondent of *The Hindu* and Indian correspondent for *Wisden Almanac* - Ramnarayan's first foray into journalism was actually in 1968, when he joined *The Indian Express's* sports desk. A desire to further his education and his cricket career took him away from the profession and, though he did not return to it full time, writing on the game was always going to be his forte. Command over the English language and

his experience of having played the game at the first class level meant that his copy hardly merited any editing, as I discovered in my position as Senior Editor for *CricInfo* of which he was a columnist. He wrote with style and panache, had an eye for the uncommon detail, contributed to various newspapers and magazines and, when internet journalism made its bow a few years ago, wrote a popular column for *Chennaionline*, not unexpectedly titled *Curd-rice Cricket*.

You could, however, always sense that he had something more ambitious up his sleeve and when I first heard in 1999 that he was starting work on a book on Tamil Nadu cricket, I was not surprised. And backed by Chemplast Sanmar Limited, "in the interests of preserving and promoting the spirit of Tamil Nadu cricket," as the blurb in the book says, Ramnarayan commenced research on what was obviously going to be a magnum opus. Knowing him personally for years - in fact I succeeded him in *The Indian Express* sports desk in 1968 when he left - I was sure that Ramnarayan would not settle for second best but would work hard to bring out an authentic account of Tamil Nadu cricket over the years.

After going through the book, it is obvious that Ramnarayan has adroitly balanced the story and history of the game in the State. Nothing about what might be called first class cricket has been left unrecorded, from the first days of competitive cricket in the State.



V. Ramnarayan.

More to the point, the book narrates amusing anecdotes that abound in Tamil Nadu cricket, made famous by some of the colourful characters the State has produced. Thus, the best chapters are 'Romance of Tamil Nadu cricket' and 'View from the Gallery', in which Ramnarayan captures the unique spirit of the game in the State. Of particular note in the former chapter is Chennai's inimitable cricket dialect, everything from 'Arai Kozhi' to 'Over gaaji'. In both these chapters he has done well in also including some of the best writings about cricket in the State by such eminent local writers as S.K. Gurunathan, N.S. Ramaswami, P.N. Sundareshan, K.V. Ramnathan and Rajan Bala.

And what a pleasure it is to relive some of these unforgettable incidents starring some of the most loveable characters associated with Tamil Nadu cricket! To name but two, 'Don' Rangan and K.S. Kannan. The latter was, of course, well known for his fractured English and it is said that his classic

phrases like 'give me the ball to him' and 'both of you three pad up' are doing the rounds even in the USA. It is a pity that Kannan is today remembered more for his mixed metaphors than his ability as a player and a coach. As for Rangan, he was a single-minded, cricket-crazy promoter of the game, who had no scruples when it came to winning a match. As Ramnarayan writes, "If ever a match could be fixed in favour of his team winning it, I am sure he would have fixed it with knobs on, so badly did he want to win every single game that he ever played. Not once but several times did Rangan steal a march over his rival captain for, even as the coin came down, he swooped down on it and with a bright smile, told him, "bad luck, we bat". He is even credited with possessing a collection of coins whose heads and tails you could not tell apart!

Madras cricket was fun. It also produced a stream of great cricketers who have left the game in Tamil Nadu a great tradition, which Ramnarayan helps his readers, cricketers and fans alike, recall.

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Partab Ramchand

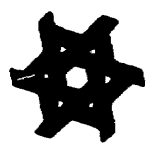
## Answers to Quiz

1. Malaria; 2. Vidya Chhabria (Jumbo Group) and Naina Lal Kidwai (HSBC Securities); 3. That Brahmins do not have a monopoly over performing pujas in temples; 4. Sunita Rani; 5. The former US President, Jimmy Carter; 6. Gandhi-King award for non-violence; 7. Massachusetts Institute of Technology; 8. Denpasar; 9. Amitabh Bachchan; 10. Revathy for *Mitr-My Friend*.

11. C.N. Annadurai, S. Satyamurthi and Muthuramalinga Thevar; 12. Chinese; 13. Kudal Super Fast Special; 14. An ordinance banning religious conversions either 'by force, allurement or fraudulent means'; 15. Neyveli; 16. Madras Club; 17. Alliance Company; 18. Kanyakumari to Hazrat Nizamuddin; 19. *Mosquitos and other Jolly Rovers*; 20. N.S. Ramaswami and K.V. Ramnathan.

\* \* \*

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