

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

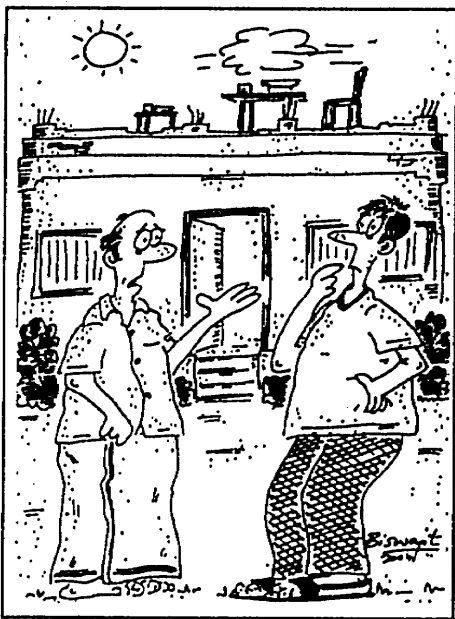
MUSINGS

INSIDE

- A bit of desecration
- Corporation schools' quality
- 125-year-old prediction
- That was Vasan!
- The Kasi Diaries

Vol. XIV No. 9

August 16-31, 2004

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You are right, there **WAS** a first floor, but, you see, corrosion has...

Falling down

Perfect!

The good citizens of Chennai have not only to worry about water shortages, congested roads, being the only ones in the country dealing with the Great Set Top Box Experiment, searing heat, humidity that puts a damper on everything, and pollution — they now have to look at their buildings too in a spirit of fear and distrust.

Certain brainy folks have discovered that Chennai's structures are more prone to corrosion than you would wish, rendering them shaky and, therefore, just a bit undependable.

You know that strange sense of things being a little skewed you've been experiencing? It may not be merely the result of too many late nights.

It isn't only buildings; it is vehicles as well, especially those that haven't received that crucial coat of anti-corrosion paint. Imagine bowling cheerily down Anna Salai in peak traffic, only to have your vehicle collapse around you with a loud and embarrassing clang.

And there's not much you can do about all this, except probably give the Bay of Bengal a dirty look, because it appears this is typical of coastal areas, especially when combined with frenetic industrial and urban activity.

So there you have it.

The next time you make that dramatic exit from your home, don't slam the door. The statement 'roof over one's head' might turn out to be just that, in a rather more drastically literal sense.

Ranjitha Ashok

Temple tanks in sorry state

Only a few are tended

(By A Staff Writer)

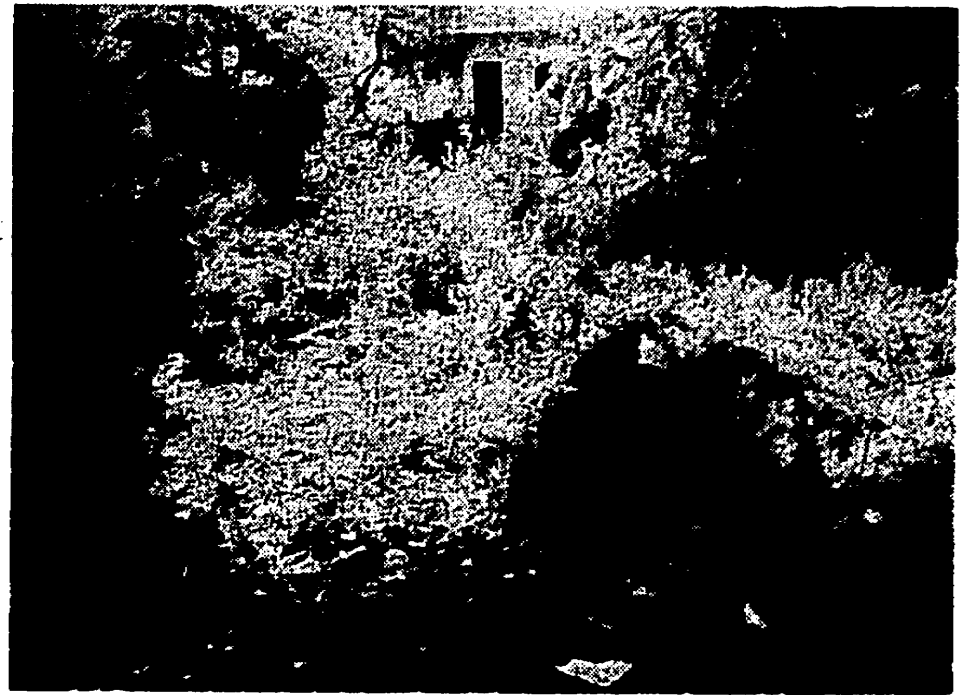
The status of most of the temple tanks in and around Chennai is horrifying, to say the least. The story is the same almost everywhere — of neglect, disuse, being used to dump garbage, seepage of sewage, serving as an open air toilet etc. Fortunately, amidst pictures of gloom, there are also a few symbols of hope. — temple tanks that have been successfully restored, are clean and in use.

This is the picture revealed in *Temple Tanks of Chennai*, a book brought out by the CPR Environmental Education Centre (CPREEC), which looks at 50 identifiable temple tanks in the city. In the introduction to the book, Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Honorary Director, CPREEC, states that the temple tank fulfils one of the three important components of pilgrimage — the *thirtha jalam* (sacred water), the other two being *thirtha sthanam* (sacred place) and *moorti* (deity). However, judging by the state of most of the tanks, you begin to wonder whether people are aware of this aspect at all!

Once, most temples had two or more tanks, one for the worshipper and another for the ritual bath (*abhishekham*) of the deity and for the maintenance of the temple garden. The two-tank system that once existed has now disappeared, Dr. Krishna states. For instance, of the five tanks at the Marundishwarar Temple in Tiruvanmiyur, there is only one functioning tank; one has become a rainwater harvesting structure, another has been encroached upon, a third is a functioning well and the fourth a dried-up well.

In 1883, a tank restoration scheme was launched in Madras on the recommendation of the Famine Commission, writes Dr. Krishna. The detailed hydrological features revealed that the tanks were part of an integral water harvesting system and were

(Continued on Page 2)



The Chengazhuni Pillaiyar Temple tank in Mannady is not better than a bit of jungle (above) while the Kandaswamy Temple tank (below) shows what a tank should be like. (Pictures courtesy: CPREEC, Chennai.)



5S technique to restore temple precinct

The Parthasarathy Swami Temple in Triplicane is to be restored and its surroundings (to the extent accessible and allocated) cleaned up. Plans for this are being drawn in the Rane group of industries and the Hyderabad-based Shingo Institute of Japanese Management.

Temples in South India are usually associated with slippery floors, greasy walls, piles of rotting fruit and flowers amidst which pilgrims struggle to have a *darshan* of their favourite deity. The Government when it plans a renovation that usually ends with the *kumbhabhishekam* uses its favourite material namely granite in cladding all the exposed portions of the

temple, making it not only un-aesthetic but also extremely dangerous for all those who risk slipping on the smooth surface. There has been no conscious effort at harmonising the surroundings of the temple with its

architecture and most of the *agraharam* type houses have given way to hideous monstrosities that offer very little other than so many cubic feet of air for each individual who resides in them.

It is intended to involve the use of the 5S technique in this structured restoration programme.

5S is a Japanese concept of achieving excellence in the workplace at the physical, systems and information levels. The Shingo Institute of Japanese Management believes that the use of these techniques will help the temple in regaining its glory. 5S also focusses on sustainable improvement and the aim of the proposed project is to ensure that whatever improvements are made are sustained. The entire work will be done by volunteers offering service to



Between Sri Parthasarathy Temple, Triplicane, and its tank is unplanned development. (Picture by REFLECTIONS.)

(Continued on Page 2)

Temple tanks in a sorry state

(Continued from page 1)

situated in the basin of one of the four rivers that flowed through the city. Unplanned urbanisation, however, had blocked the stormwater channels that fed the tanks and the water now bypasses the tanks on its way into the sea. Dr. Krishna stresses that an urgent programme is needed to revive Chennai's temple tanks to overcome water shortages and prevent drought. Dr. Krishna stresses that an urgent programme is needed to revive Chennai's temple tanks to overcome water shortages and prevent drought. Dr. Krishna stresses that an urgent programme is needed to revive Chennai's temple tanks to overcome water shortages and prevent drought.

During the survey, the CPREEC team came across, broadly speaking, three kinds of temple tanks — those that were reasonably well maintained and in use, those that were not so well maintained but in use, and those that were badly maintained, either serving as a garbage dump or covered with overgrowth or both. Most of the tanks surveyed belonged to the third category.

Some of the badly maintained temple tanks are at the Kashi Vishwanathar Temple in George Town, Chengazhuni Pillaiyar Temple in Mannady, Gangadishwarar Temple in Purasawakkam, Arunachaleswarar Temple in Tondiarpet, Agastishwarar Temple in Valasaravakkam, Dandishwarar Temple in Velachery, Ravishwarar Temple in Vyasarpadi, Kashi Vishwanathar Temple and Parashuramalingeshwarar Temple in Ayanavaram, Adi Kesava Perumal Temple in Mylapore, Ardhanarishwarar Temple in Nanganallur, Tyagarajaswami Temple in Tiruvottriyur, Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Poonamallee, Jagannatha Perumal Temple in Thirumazhisai, Ranganatha Perumal Temple in Thirunee-malai, Thirisoornathar Temple in Thrisoolam, and Agastishwarar Temple in Villivakkam.

Due to encroachments all around, the water channel of the Kashi Vishwanathar Temple tank is blocked. Excessive dumping of debris and garbage along the southeastern part of the tank has resulted in the area being used as car park. The public uses the tank as a dumping ground. The Changazhuni Pillaiyar Temple tank is full of weeds, shrubs and trees. It is now used for performing the 16th day ceremony of the dead. The Gangadishwarar Temple tank is in a sad state with its surrounding area on three sides converted into a shopping complex.

Slum residents have turned the Arunachaleswarar Temple tank into a playground and parking place. Some people use the tank for making coir. *Velikathan* (juliflora) covers the entire tank, making it difficult to even locate it. The water in the Agastishwarar Temple tank is highly polluted due to human misuse, dumping of garbage, debris, plastic bags and bottles. The tank is used as a public lavatory.

The Dandishwarar Temple tank is used as a dumping ground for garbage. It is also used as a public lavatory. The water channel leading to the tank has been cut off because of encroachment. The Ravishwarar Temple tank is filled with mounds of garbage and filth, besides water hyacinth, cypress grass and blue-green algae. The Rotary Club of Madras took up renovation work in the late 1990s but nothing is visible of that effort today.

Due to rapid urbanisation around the Kashi Vishwanathar Temple tank in Ayanavaram, the water inlet and outlet have been sealed and this has resulted in the tank becoming dry. The Parashuramalingeshwarar Temple tank is used for the dumping of garbage, debris and sewage which has led to the tank going dry. The tank continues to receive sewage from the surrounding houses, which has led to the formation of a blanket of water hyacinth over the whole surface.

The Chitra Kulam tank at the Adi Perumal Temple receives sewage from the surrounding shops. It is highly polluted due to human misuse, dumping of garbage, plastic bags and bottles. One corner of the tank is used as a public lavatory. Children play on the tank bed. The Ardhanarishwarar Temple tank till recently was filled with mounds of garbage and water hyacinth. Sewage was let into the tank from the shops surrounding it. The tank, however, has been cleaned up recently.

Both the inlet and outlet of the Tyagarajaswami Temple tank are obstructed by encroachments. Portions of the surrounding wall and steps leading into the tank are damaged. Sewage from adjoining houses and shops is let into the tank. The same is the case with the Swedha Pushkarni tank at the Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple. The tank is a mix of garbage, debris, plastic bags and bottles.

Although the water in the Bhriagu Pushkarni tank at the Jagannatha Perumal Temple looks clean, it is polluted by human activity and the run-off from the adjoining paddy fields. The massive Maanikarnika Tataakam at the Ranganatha Perumal Temple is used for bathing, washing clothes and

dumping garbage. The tank is extremely polluted. Sewage is let into the Thirisoornathar Temple tank from the houses on the banks. Rotting garlands, plastic bags, bottles, oil and garbage are seen. The tank bed is used as an open toilet. Mounds of garbage lie heaped in the southwest corner of the Agaraka Tirtham tank at the Agastishwarar Temple in Villivakkam.

The temple tanks that are better off are the ones in the Kachchaleswarar Temple in George Town, Kurungalishwarar Temple in Koyambedu, Agastishwarar Prasanna Venkatesha Perumal Temple in Nungambakkam, Ekambareswarar Temple in Park Town, Prasanna Venkata Narasimha Perumal Temple in Saidapet, Marundishwarar Temple in Tiruvannamiyur, and Sommiya Damodara Perumal Temple in Villivakkam. But most of them await water.

There are, however, a few temple tanks in Chennai that are still well maintained. They are deep, with well-constructed

steps. Rainwater falling inside the temple premises reaches these tanks, although because of lack of rain, some of the tanks at present do not have water. Even so, the tanks are clean and the underground channels that exist can be used to recharge groundwater. Iron fencing protects a few of these tanks.

The best temple tanks are at the Kalyana Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Kaladipet, Sundareshwarar Temple in Kovur, Vada Nageshwarar Temple in Kundrathur, Krishna Temple in Mannady, Mallikeshwarar Temple in Muthialpet, Madhava Perumal Temple in Mylapore, Arkishwarar Temple in Pammal, Kandaswamy Temple in Park Town, Angala Parameshwari Temple in Royapuram, Othandishwarar Temple in Thirumazhisai, Masilaamanishwarar Temple in Thirumullaivoyal, Kothandaramar Temple in Mambalam, Parthasarathi Temple in Thiruvallikeni, Marundishwarar Temple (chitrakulam) in Tiruvannamiyur, and Palani Andavar Temple in Vadapalani.

proval by the temple authorities.

5S TECHNIQUE TO RESTORE TEMPLE

(Continued from page 1)

the temple. In the process, the volunteers will learn to excel in 5S.

The Shingo Institute's plan hopes to:

- Bring about a high level of cleanliness in the temple premises and the surroundings year-round.
- Create a high level of orderliness so that devotees' movements and activities are well guided and do not affect the beauty of the temple.
- Restore the temple — its physical environment, sculptures and architecture — and bring it back to its original condition.
- All these activities to be carried out according to the rules and regulations (*Paddhati*) prescribed by the *Acharyas* and *Gurus* of the temple.

The proposed work includes the following:

- Elimination of all kinds of accumulated dirt, dust, oil and defects which have crept into these structures over the last few centuries, particularly during the modern period.
- Identification of the means by which the original architectural splendour can be restored.
- Working out ways and means to create orderliness in the movement of devotees and their activities within the temple premises and outside.

The committee will also train a large number of temple staff as well as external volunteers as trainers, who will train the *blakthas* (devotees) and supervise their work so that the progress of the work is smooth and does not affect the normal activities of the temple.

The committee will discuss with agencies, institutions and commercial organisations that have the capability as to how the archaeological structures and monuments could be restored to their original condition. It will take their advice and support and implement their suggestions subject to ap-

proval by the temple authorities.

Towards this end, members of the Shingo Institute, INTACH-Tamil Nadu Chapter and other voluntary organisations met under the chairmanship of L. Ganesh, Director of the Rane Group, at the Parthasarathi Temple on Sunday, August 1, 2004. K.S. Madhavan, Chairman of the Shingo Institute, made a presentation on now the 5S technique would benefit the temple. Sujatha Shankar, representing INTACH-TN, pointed out the necessity for conserving heritage while attempting such activities. It was heartening to see several voluntary agencies coming up with commitments on their time for the project and it was expected that the training of volunteers would begin before the end of August.

The Shingo Institute estimates that six months will be needed from the date of commencement to complete the project. Later, lower level involvement in the form of monitoring, review and appraisal of the status and alerting the temple management to initiate/ implement necessary corrective actions will be instituted.

Here is a welcome move in the right direction for our temples that, thanks to increased human traffic and encroachment, have begun losing their architectural and cultural heritage.

V. Sriram

A big 'Thank You' to 36 of you

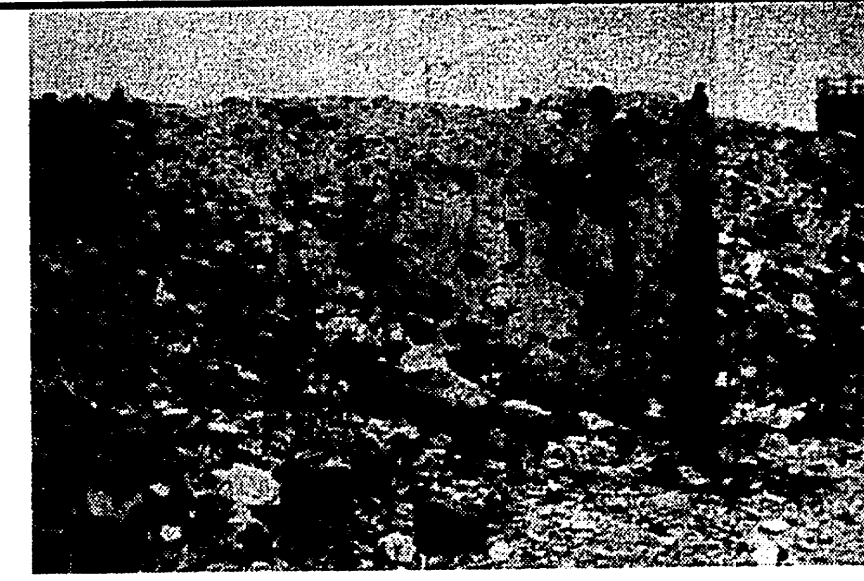
We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.07.04 and 15.08.04, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, *Madras Musings*, have already received. We thank all of them for their support for the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

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Excavation under the Basilica that could endanger the structural safety of a historic heritage building.



Excavated debris, including relics and artefacts, dumped on the shore at the back of the Basilica.



Some damaged artefacts recovered from the debris. How important are they historically? (All pictures by the writer.)

A bit of heritage, excavated and dispersed

Heritage is defined as "those things we want to keep that give us a sense of the past and of our cultural identity, which we want to protect and pass on to future generations". A heritage monument is "something venerated for its enduring historic significance or association with a notable past person or thing." San Thomé Cathedral Basilica fits these definitions to a "T".

The Cathedral's rich heritage of religion, history and culture has been turned on its

head from February-March 2004 when this ancient monument was desecrated. Without any study, consultation or mandatory approvals from any official authorities and without associating any heritage experts, contractors excavated the nave of the Basilica to construct tunnels and a basement. This was in utter disregard of the archaeological treasures lying beneath.

Construction workers engaged by the contractors removed huge quantities of soil,

which contained artefacts and other remains of the Church's rich past, and dumped most of them as debris in the adjoining seashore after being heaped behind the rear wall of the Cathedral for weeks. No inventory or record whatsoever was kept.

The relics of St. Thomas have been moved and installed in a luxurious, air-conditioned underground structure for the exclusive viewing of the wealthy 'foreign tourists' and moneyed local visitors.

Before starting 'repair' works at the Cathedral in May 2003, the church authorities publicly announced they were 'looking to the heavens' for the required Rs. 57 lakh. But within months they seem to have come upon much more than that to build this underground 5-star 'tourist suite'.

There is no explanation about the tearing hurry and secrecy with which the excavation work was carried out without seeking independent expert assistance and keeping an inventory. There is also total

silence as to whether any relics and antiquities, like the "stone slab that had covered the grave of St. Thomas", were found during digging and, if so, what happened to them. The questions all these matters have raised warrant a thorough enquiry to reveal what has really happened at the Basilica.

M.G. Devasahayam
103, Ceebros Bay View
4th Seaward Road
Valmiki Nagar
Chennai 600 041

Lawlessness

In his comment 'Citizen no concern' (MM, August 1st), MMM has rightly said that public service-providers rarely, if ever, function as if the citizen mattered. More often than not, the citizen exists for the rule and not vice-versa.

Many years ago, a Judge of the Allahabad High Court described the police force as the most lawless element in India. But now it appears that lawyers, or at least a section of them, are trying hard to fit that description. I hope that the higher judiciary will not blink, unlike the politicians.

R.V. Chandramouli, I.A.S. (RETD.)
B-2, Ramanalaya
21, I Crescent Park Road
Gandhi Nagar
Adyar
Chennai 600 020

What's VT got?

That was a clarion call, loud and clear, for Fort St. George! (MM, July 16th).

Reversing Musings' poser, may I say that "VT" has changed its name, while the Fort has not! Is that not a sound claim for Heritage, ringing down, till date?

N. Dharmeshwaran
21, II A Cross, SP Extension
Malleshwaram, Bangalore 3

Olympians & anagrams

If my memory is right, the name of the Indian participant in the 1948 Olympics sprint event was E. Phillip, who may have dropped his surname or changed it to Prabhakar.

Among Olympians having roots in Tamil Nadu, mention should have been made of Perumal, who was in the victorious 1952 Hockey team. (He was playing for Tata's

OUR READERS WRITE

Bombay.) But for his decision to go with the Indian cricket team to England, M.J. Gopalan would have been part of the successful 1936 Hockey team that won the Gold in Berlin.

About the formulation of the Pseudonym "அரசு", Randor Guy must have meant acronym and not anagram.

S.P. Sankaranarayanan
F-7, Pritivi Apartments
104, Kali Amman Koil Street
Natesa Nagar, Chennai 600 092.

Two words...

Kumudam's review about Tamil films, referred to in Randor Guy's article (MM, August 1st), reminded me of the journal's review of the film *Sri Valli* starring Sivaji

Ganesan and Padmini and directed by P.R. Ramanna. A full page without any comments, but only the two words 'Om Muruga! Om Muruga!' appeared more than a hundred times. It spoke more than two pages of review.

V. Chinnathambi
H-80, Hudco Colony
Avinashi Road
Peelamedu, Coimbatore 641 004

... & two points

Regarding Randor Guy's article (MM, August 1st) two points need to be made. One, the marketing ability of people behind *Kumudam*'s growth. And secondly, the continuous contribution of 'Punidan' in sending out short stories week after week over the years.

S. Raghavan
Ranga Flats
33 Gangai Amman Koil Street
Valasaravakkam
Chennai 600 087

Other versions

I have heard from others different versions of what Randor Guy stated in his article on *Kumudam* (MM, August 1st). Answers to readers' questions featured in the magazine used to be written entirely by its late editor SAP, and were not 'co-authored'.

A defamation suit was filed against *Kumudam* for its review of the Tamil film *Aasai* (not *Anbu*). Some clarification would be appreciated.

P.K. Visvesvaran
1759/351 Street, Vasanth Colony
18th Main Road, Chennai 600 040

Errata

In my article on Valparai (MM, July 16th), the following points should be noted:

Last para: During Southwest monsoon an annual rainfall of 75 cm to 250 cm is recorded.

To read: During Southwest monsoon (June/September) rainfall of 75 cm to 250 cm is recorded.

Ponstock to read as penstock.

K.V.S. Krishna
2 A, Parkland Apartments
Kamala Bai Street, T. Nagar
Chennai 600 017

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'email' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

— THE EDITOR

Bring back Persian to madrasa

It is shocking to hear that teaching of Persian language, which has been continuously taught for more than 150 years in Government Madrasa-I-Azam, on Anna Salai, has been abolished from this academic year, the only one in Tamil Nadu where Persian was being taught.

The very basis of the establishment of this madrasa by the Nawab of the Carnatic in the 18th Century was to impart Arabic and Persian studies along with Urdu for the children of the Royal family. Later, children from all strata were admitted to the school. In 1853 this school started teaching English, Tamil, Mathematics, Sciences etc. beside Arabic, Persian and Urdu. An advisory committee was formed and the British Administrative Agent, Dr. Edward Balfour, was the Secretary who guided the teaching staff. This was long before the establishment of the D.P.I.

V. Devaraj, the son of Hakeem Veeraswami, was the first Tamil teacher and Lala Makhani Ram the Persian teacher. He was also attached to the Court of the Nawab of Arcot. His Persian couplets, engraved on the pulpit stone of the Big Mosque, Triplicane, demonstrate his mastery over the language. One couplet tells the date of the completion of the construction of the mosque.

The Persian language was the court language of India for about six centuries. In the Chennai Record Office, as well as in the Oriental Manuscripts Library, most of the old documents and rare manuscripts

are in the Persian language. If the study of Persian — a classical and spoken language — is neglected, the reading and translation of works of the past will be difficult. Without going through Persian books and manuscripts, research work in 'Tibb-e-Unani' (Unani Medicine) and 'Taariq-e-Hind' (History of India) cannot be done properly.

The British Government was fully aware of this fact and had established the study of Persian in India. No doubt, due to lack of knowledge and negligence, the language did not attract more students, but closing down this language section is a loss culturally and educationally to the people. In the past, students from Iran joined this school only because Persian (Iranian) language was available in it. Many students of Persian held good Government jobs in foreign countries.

Persian, Sanskrit and Tamil are the ancient classical languages of India and, as such, in every part of our country proper facilities should be made for their study. As a start, the study of the Persian language — with proper facilities to it — at Government Madrasa-I-Azam in Chennai should be revived.

To start an Urdu Academy, a Quaid-e-Millath memorial in the Madrasa campus will also be beneficial for education.

Dr. Syed Mohammed Ibrahim
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Orteri Extension, Vandalur Post. Chennai 600 048

The Man From Madras Musings is on vacation. His column will resume on his return.

The variable quality of Corporation schools

Of the nearly 7,800 students from 65 Corporation schools in Chennai who appeared for the X Board examination this year, only around 5200 passed in all subjects, 67% compared to the Statewide pass percentage of 77.4%. Though this year there has been an overall increase in the average mark scored by students who did make the grade, the learning conditions in Corporation schools throughout the city still leave much to be desired. And investigating the 'results' revealed merely the tip of the iceberg, insofar as learning is concerned.

A cross section of pass percentages:

XII Std (CHSS)	
78%	Market St, Perambur
74%	Tiruvanmiyur
74%	Alwarpet
38%	Patel Nagar, Tondiarpet
47%	Ayanavaram
42%	Taramani
X Std (CHSS)	
100%	MGR Nagar
98%	Irusappa Gramani Street, Triplicane
35%	Anjaneya Nagar, Near Stanley
41%	Carial Bank, R.A.Puram
15%	Kalyanapuram, Vyasarparadi
15%	Goyyathope, Pudupet

A senior official in the Corporation's Education Department feels, "Generally, schools in South Chennai — where the surrounding environment is of better standard — perform better than those in the North. Even teachers think a posting in North Chennai is like a punishment transfer. The sad fact is that North Chennai schools desperately need attention. In coastal areas and fishermen localities the situation is even worse. This is a complex issue that needs careful and sensitive handling." Says a senior teacher, "In the XII Std, students do better because they're more confident since they've already faced a Board exam. At X Std level, we cannot ensure a set standard since they come from various schools."

But at the Corporation Higher Secondary School

(CHSS) in Taramani, the X Std pass percentage is 80, while that of XII Std is only 42. A Science group combination is offered, but there's no PG Assistant. There are neither enough classrooms nor laboratory facilities nor adequate numbers of qualified teachers (not even a staff room). A thatched shed on the first floor houses four classes that cannot function during gales or rain. "As the only school in the locality, and that too in a developing area, many children join at the XI Std stage, and most are from the lower middle class. Most of the children are first generation learners from very poor backgrounds, so they want an education that helps them come up in life. And here we aren't even providing them a very basic education! Leave alone the pathetic nature of the facilities. Till last year there was only one toilet for all 1400 boys and girls (now there are two). In many classrooms the children can't even sit on the ground, the flooring has big, gaping, jagged holes. This year we planned to introduce Computer Science, but there is no room. 75% of parents don't come for meetings with teachers to discuss about their children. And for many children it is natural to miss class if it is 'Ration' day, or miss afternoon sessions on 'water' days," a teacher confides.

At the Corporation High School, Goyyathope, the X Std passes were only 14%. Of the 60 children who wrote the X Std exam, 17 have failed, mainly in Social Science. The reason being there are not adequate qualified teachers to handle high school level and not enough room to even house individual classes. Sometimes two separate sections have to occupy the same room, facing different directions (that are determined by the strategically positioned blackboards) with different teachers handling different subjects!

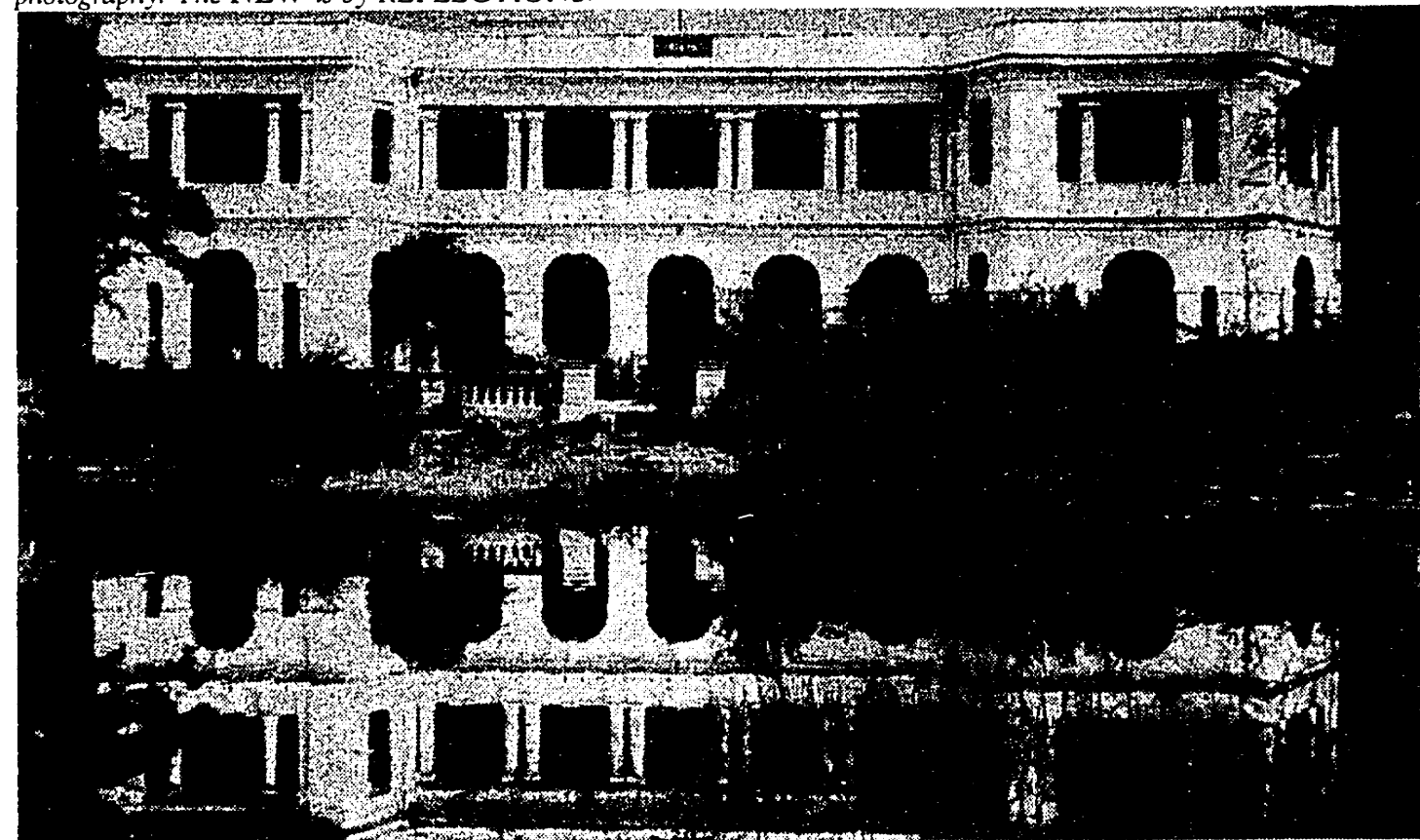
The CHSS at Rottler's Street, Purasawalkam, which has 85% passes in the XII Std exams, but only 67% in the X Std, presents a different picture. The school is neatly maintained, and efficiently managed by a well motivated teaching team who've set up makeshift labs in empty classrooms (and pride themselves on ensuring neat toilets for children with a shift cleaning system in place).



Our OLD is of St. Margaret's Hostel, the first building to be built after the YWCA took possession of its campus, Clive Gardens, Poonammallee High Road, in 1906. St. Margaret's was inaugurated in December 1921 to provide paying guest accommodation for young working women. The hostel, built in art-deco style, was made possible thanks to the generous contribution of Sir William Beardsell, the founder of W.A. Beardsell & Company in 1887, which became Mettur Beardsell Ltd. Over the years, additions and repairs were made. But the fate of the hostel had "outlived its usefulness" when the then President of the YWCA felt the hostel had "outlived its usefulness" and a "modern streamlined structured" should take its place. That has now come to pass.

Proper maintenance and restoration by architects with conservation backgrounds could have kept St. Margaret's Hostel going for many more years, but with the thinking as it was in the 1970s, the NEW was inevitable and, a couple of weeks ago, St. Margaret's in its new avatar was opened. Glimpses of the past are visible in the arches and pillars of a handsome building, but it lacks the warmth of the OLD. And the pond in front is no longer what it was.

The picture of the OLD, courtesy the YWCA, could well have been taken by Sir William Beardsell whose hobby was photography. The NEW is by REFLECTIONS.



The Headmistress attributes it to "full cooperation from the teachers, who have taken special interest by working even on holidays to take special classes. In Maths, we've centum results

● by
SHOBHA MENON

for the past three years. Without a PG Assistant to take Commerce and Accountancy classes, our Drawing Assistant (a Commerce graduate) pitched in to ensure centum results in this group. Only children who don't get admission in the cluster of Aided, Anglo-Indian, and Matriculation schools apply here (75% are from the lower middle class and below). Teacher vacancies are not filled for long, so we appoint temporary teachers from PTA Funds. But cooperation from parents is lacking. I wouldn't say we have the best facilities, but we've learnt to make the best use of the available resources."

At the CIT Nagar CHSS, this is the 14th year the X Std has 100% pass results (all 48 passed, with 15 of them scoring above 400/500), but the XII Std

managed only 54%. Probably because, as one teacher felt, "Teachers of the X Std are more experienced than those in the XII (who've been employed through the PTA — and get lower salaries — because the actual postings haven't been filled for years)". But X Std teachers confess to finding it very difficult because children are not filtered according to their achievement levels (85% passes in every class is the suggested minimum since this year). Many a time, a child who's expected to write essays in the X Std. English paper may not even know how to read a sentence in the prescribed textbook. "A lot of hard work from teachers is involved round the year. Intensive classes are held months before the final exam. Parents are not very cooperative, and we have come across children who feel 'My father has political connections, so no one can tell me what to do'. But right now, we need English teachers who are fluent in spoken English from the VI Std onwards. Also counsellors who can motivate children in their personal lives", says another teacher.

At the Canal Bank CHSS, X Std results were 41% (last year it was 36%), 64 children taking the exam (of these only 12 boys and 14 girls passed in all subjects). "Evaluation of papers needs to be more lenient. Several children have failed in Social Studies this year. Many children have failed in certain subjects merely for want of one mark. Pass mark till the IX in most Corporation schools is 25/100 (in some cases it is even taken as 10/100). When they come to the X, how are they expected to suddenly be able to score 35? Considering that it is so much harder, because we admit even children who've failed three years in succession in a private school", says a teacher.

Says another Headmistress, "Most of the boys and girls work after school and return home late at night. Of 150 students in the high school, only the parents of 10 turn up for parent meetings (and even this only after teachers go to each of their homes and cajole them to attend). One mother cursed me because her family went hungry every day I held a special class

(Continued on Page 8)

A prescient satire written 125 years ago

When George Orwell published 1984 in the mid-1940s, it was an instant best-seller. A hundred years earlier, in 1883, a book titled *India in 1983* was published and became very popular in India and England at the time. During a visit to the British Museum Library in London some time ago, I had the good fortune of reading this book, whose author intended to remain anonymous. Written in the nature of a gripping political satire, he foretold the granting of independence to India by England in 1983. What is interesting historically is that this book forecasting Indian independence was published two years before the founding of the Indian National Congress in December 1885.

He prophesied with remarkable accuracy the various reform schemes which would become stepping stones on the road to India's freedom in 1983. The only weak point of the books was his optimism that British rule would last in India till 1983! The book also depicted humorously the chaotic conditions in Parliament that would be formed in India after independence, if the dreams of the Indian national leaders were to come true in the fullness of time.

Lord Ripon was the Viceroy of India in 1883. He was known for his liberal attitude towards Indians and their aspirations. When Ilbert, the Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, brought forward a Bill which provided for the trial of Englishmen by Indian judges, there was a great outcry against the introduction of the Bill from British trading and commercial interests in India. All the local vernacular newspapers were vehemently in favour of the Ilbert Bill. It was in such a charged atmosphere that *India in 1983* was published.

The book created a sensation in Britain and India and unprecedented consternation in official circles in Calcutta. In view of the author's official position, the book was published anonymously, but many at that time guessed correctly who had written it. It was T. Harte-Davies, of the Indian Civil Service, a man of versatile talents, and who was the District Judge of Karachi in 1883. He was an accomplished pianist and a talented linguist — he knew French, German, Italian and Russian, in addition to three Indian languages. He was a frequent contributor to *The*

Pioneer, a leading newspaper of the time. Upon his retirement in the late 1880s, he returned to England only to plunge into active politics there. He was elected an M.P. for Hackney in 1895. He was also an active member of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress. He was an enthusiastic champion of the political aspirations of the Indians. He was a close associate of Hume and Wedderburn of the Indian National Congress.

In *India in 1983* Harte-Davies described the departure of the British from India in 1983 in the following words:

It was a still and broiling day in April 1983 when the last vessel sailed out of Bombay harbour with the English troops on board. The vast bay, which for a month before had been crowded with huge transports and resounded with the rattle of shipping cargo and stores, was now deserted, except for the picturesque native boats and the Mail Steamer which was to convey the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Governors of Madras and Bombay from the shores of India.

Caricaturing the unruly Parliament that was going to be established after independence, led by President Babu Joy Kissen Chunder Sen, Harte-Davies said: *He ...cleared his throat, expectorated, and finally rose and burst into a flood of eloquence.*

"Gentlemen, fellow-countrymen, shall I not say fellow-members of Parliament and Romans, lend me your ears. This is the proudest moment of my life, my vita, ars longa, vita brevis, as the poet says, when I see before me your physiognomies and visages all full of constitutional transformation; indeed, I am as it were in a hurly-burly, and say to myself, I am now in a more noble position than Washington was in USA in 1782; in a stronger position than Cicero, when he stirred up his fellow-citizens to make war on the Carthagians; all this I say in this princely house and more, sitting on its own bottom, and controlling the Financial, Judicial, Revenue, Secret, General, Political, Educational and Public Works Departments of the Government of India." (Thunderous applause greeted the President.)

"And now," continued the orator warming to his work, *"is there a man with a dead soul who has never to himself said, my foot*

is on my native heath, and when I look and see the country where my ancestors bled, and which they won by the sword — when I see the fertile plains watered by the rolling Ganges, in the middle of which this best Parliament sits in Calcutta, then I think my bosom beats with patriotic exhilaration; I am proud of my countrymen who have built up this lofty fabric of constitutional magnificence, and who, I think, will continue to do pretty well. For we are the advanced thinkers, and we show things to others, and nobody shows nothing to us. We are the heirs of the ancient wisdom of Aryavarta, we are the sons of the Bengal, which has conquered India, we are

An
Independence
Day
feature by
V. SUNDARAM

the B.As of the Calcutta University, superior to all the gentlemen educated at Oxford and Cambridge... Let us then go on blazes in the course of civilisation and progress, and guided by the teaching of theology, psychology, geology, physiology, doxology and sociology and all the other sciences that Pax Britannica can boast of. We can now confront the unmitigated myrmidons of despotism, and say to the adversaries of freedom and jurisprudence, you be blowed!" (cries of 'Shabash', 'bohuth acha' and rapturous applause).

In the above description, we can see the typical imperial insouciance of an average Englishman in late Victorian England. The opinionated, self-centred, haughty and arrogant English civil servants in the closing years of the 19th century never imagined that India would throw up in the next thirty years masters of the English language — both written and spoken — like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, Srinivasa Sastri, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. They could never have imagined that the first Prime Minister of independent India would come out with his world-famous *Tryst with destiny* speech.

At the same time, we are wonderstruck by the prescient understanding of Harte-Davies about the functioning of Parliament that was going to come to

India after independence. He anticipated the unruly incidents and behaviour of Members of Parliament in these words: *"The next instant every man in the assembly was on his feetsoon an unseemly wrangling began, and such exclamations as, "you shut up", "you have got no locus yataudi", "chup raho", "thum beff cufe ho" and the like, were heard through the din. At last they began to make uncomplimentary remarks concerning the moral character of the female members of each other's families and finally matters went so far that all the members stood up shouting raucously with clenched fists with an attitude of self-defence, which they accomplished by presenting their stomachs to the front before the House. The President of the House tried in vain without success to interfere and rang his bell to command silence."*

The tragedy and comedy of post-independent India is that many of our legislators have succeeded in giving cubic content to these words of Harte-Davies.

All round corruption in public administration, swindling of public funds, jobbery and nepotism, very much part of India today, were also graphically foreseen by T. Harte-Davies:

"Matters at all levels of government were arranged orientally, and at the bottom of the native character there is a profound sympathy with oriental methods of administration. It was now perfectly certain that the larger part of the funds would stick to the palms of the members of the parliamentary committee, that their relatives and friends would compose the entire administrative staff, that no contract would be given unless a handsome commission was paid to the President and Secretary, and that any works that were constructed would be exclusively adapted to the improvement of the private property of the President and Members of Parliament. All this was thoroughly understood, and the feeling it aroused was not one of indignation, but a simple and unquenchable desire to participate in the spoils. After all, was it not better that the public money should go in this way than that it should be spent by an English Sahib on his eccentric notions of protected drinking water-supply, vaccination and the like? In a native Government, with a native Board fully loaded with native members and having unlimited control over the funds, whose proceedings every native could understand, there would be a better administrative set-up in the total ab-

sence of the unsympathetic and incorruptible Englishman whose actions had long been acknowledged to be unbearably incalculable. In the new native situation there would be a responsive administrative body, which could be touched with the normal human feeling of one's infirmities... which could lend an ear to the uncle who wanted employment for his nephew, to the poor man with a large family who had six brothers-in-law and thirty-six cousins all desiring Government appointments... which could sympathise with the fraudulent contractor, with the dishonest builder and in whose bosom the swindling overseers of PWD could find a congenial haven of rest not unaccompanied by handsome profit... The souls of all these innocent and worthy men were rejoiced, the public money was gladly divided and if no improvements were carried out, it was probably because the Native Boards and Native Committees knew what no Englishman had ever been able to grasp that, as a rule, the native inhabitants of Hindustan by the sheer force of habit for centuries prefer going along a bad road to going along a good one."

Harte-Davies went on to give a hilarious description of the official and public reaction in England at the goings-on after independence:

"Such were the pleasing features which distinguished the closing days of the year 1983. The English newspapers congratulated the British Government on its foresight in declining to interfere in the affairs of alien races, and on having finally decided, after two hundred years of iniquitous possession, to allow India to stew in her own native juice."

I have been both angered and saddened by the observations of the English author. Many of the unsavoury things portrayed by him have become true and come to plague post-independent India nearly forty years earlier than he predicted. Growing indiscipline everywhere and at all levels of society and Government, erosion of cultural, ethical, moral and religious values, ever-rising tide of communalism, regionalism, casteism and linguistic chauvinism, corruption eating into the vitals of national life, lack of inspiring leadership and, finally, a mounting wave of violence in all parts of India — these and other disturbing factors have raised doubts in many responsible quarters in India and abroad about the very future of India as a nation.

It ill-behoves us as a nation, after 57 years of independence, to prove the caricature of T. Harte-Davies done in 1883 right in letter and spirit in the India of 2004. It is time Responsible and Accountable Parliamentary Democracy became a way of life in India.

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

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

- The Supreme Court on July 19th asked the Government to disburse relief amount of Rs. 1503 crores, lying with the RBI, as humanitarian compensation for which disaster that happened nearly 20 years ago?
- The birth centenary of one of India's best known visionaries and industrialists was celebrated on July 29th. Name this person who was awarded the Bharat Ratna.
- A simple one. Which Union Minister was forced to go into hiding and to quit after an arrest warrant against him for a 1975 murder case?
- Who won the world's most prestigious race, the *Tour De France*, for the sixth consecutive time, recently?
- Name the new Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
- Why were Antaryami, Sukhdesh Singh and Tilka Raj the centre of world attention since July 21st?
- Name the popular comedian of such films as *Padosan* and *Kumbara Baap*, and father of pop singer Lucky Ali, who passed away recently.
- Which Indian film personality has been conferred the award of Honorary Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)?
- On which private sector bank was a moratorium placed recently and with which bank is it going to be merged?
- The largest ever IPO by a private company in India opened on July 29th and closed on August 5th. Name this business organisation.

- A sad one to start this section with. Name the Kumbakonam school whose nursery section caught fire, leading to deaths of more than 90 children on July 16th.
- Name the saree store which claims to have weaved the world's longest silk saree, measuring 121 metres in length.
- On the above lines, what is the design theme running through this superb red creation?
- Where in Chennai would you find a 'Red Fort' which is all of 98 years old?
- What is the 'Madras Bulls' in Chennai?
- Where exactly in the State was a Bench of the Madras High Court inaugurated on July 24th?
- To whom is the twin temple in Flower Bazaar, originally built elsewhere by Beri Thimmappa, dedicated?
- Aarthi Mangala has been chosen from Tamil Nadu for a silver medal in the National Child Awards for Exceptional Excellence instituted by the Union HRD Ministry. What is her field of achievement?
- Which team in Chennai's Senior Division cricket league is sponsored by Godrej Sara Lee and has roped in Test opener Sadagopan Ramesh?
- Bohi, Applankulam and Kathankulam are the three main tanks and water resources for which national space in the heart of the city?

(Answers on page 7)

That was Vasan!

He was hailed as 'the Cecil H.B. deMille of India'. Indeed, he was the first movie mogul of the country. Spectacle, grandeur, and opulence, he was the first film-maker in this part of the world, to invest such qualities into mere celluloid. This year, we mark his birth centenary.

Writer, journalist, adman, magazine publisher, film distributor, studio-owner, film-maker, and producer, that was S.S. Vasan, who created film history with his mega motion pictures and his Gemini Studio in Madras was — and is — a household name. A Gemini film release was treated as a cultural

A Centenary feature by RANDOLPH GUY

event and the familiar Gemini Twins blowing the bugles ("When the bugles blow, there's a good show!" so ran the motto) was a stamp of quality, clean, wholesome, family entertainment and money's worth.

Lavish in production, splashing money in promoting, packaging and publicising a picture, he was a pioneer in Indian cinema. 'Be wise and advertise!' he had a character speak in his film *Miss Malini* (1947), giving expression to one of his personal beliefs. And he showed what could be achieved with punchy publicity.

He had a flair for story-telling and when he had no more than two coppers to rub against each other, he wrote, published and sold the thin books of tales himself, often hawking them himself. Later, he told his stories in his Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan* and still later on celluloid. The medium might be different, but Vasan's message was the same: "Tell that tale! Entertain!"

Entertainment was the keynote of all the Vasan films. A Gemini picture whether directed by Vasan or only produced by him had certain characteristics. Tastefully choreographed dances... lilting songs... comic interludes carefully woven into the main fabric of the story... lavishly mounted sets... exquisite costumes... some kind of non-filmic enter-

tainment like a circus or dance-drama. Vasan rarely made films without these elements.

Vasan considered the average movie-goer his only critic. Often, he scrapped scenes shot at enormous cost and re-shot them, all merely because somebody, whatever be his age, status or qualification, pointed out an error. During the making of *Bahut Din Huye* (a Hindi remake of the early Telugu Gemini box-office success *Balanagamma*), a huge expensive set had been erected and scenes featuring the villain, a lustful magician and the chaste heroine were being 'shot'. A light-boy pointed out an error to a friend and Vasan overheard it! A vital point which went against the concept of the story! Vasan, without batting an eyelid, packed up the shooting and ordered the entire footage to be scrapped. That was not all. He told his creative men to re-do the script in the light of the boy's remark and shot it all once again. And he handsomely rewarded the boy. That was Vasan!

Vasan held previews of his films long before their release for a variety of audiences, consisting of his staff, their families and his friends from many walks of life. He obtained their opinions in writing and, later, sat for long hours reading them and then did not hesitate to change a scene if he was convinced of the correctness of the comment. He once showed a Hindi film he had completed to a group of Hindi-speaking merchants in Madras. It was the remake of a successful Tamil film, but the Hindi version had a prominent character actor (Rehman) playing a role not so prominent. A suggestion made by a viewer was that the role was too small and the actor had not been properly exploited! Vasan ordered a re-write of the screenplay, the actor's role was expanded and more scenes added. The bewildered Bombay actor was flown to Madras and new scenes were shot. Of course the scenes had to be re-edited, fresh background music scored, the various soundtracks re-mixed and fresh prints taken! But the film clicked in a big way. That was Vasan!

He was making a Tamil film built around capital-labour relations (it was the re-make of his Hindi film *Paigham*, 1959). The film had no title and was referred to as 'Gemini Production Number so-and-so', the multi-member Gemini creative team could not think of a title accept-



S.S. Vasan

His march to success

Thiruthuraiipoondi Subramania Srinivasan (better known as S.S. Vasan) was born on January 16, 1904 in Thanjavur District into a Brahmin family of modest means. His father died when Vasan was only four. His mother, Valambal, refused to be the typical Brahmin widow of the early years of the 20th Century. Well read, despite having no formal schooling, and well-versed in Sanskrit and Tamil classics, epics and religious lore, she instilled in her son a lasting love for literature, learning and ancient Indian culture. Dreaming of a secure future for him, she migrated to Madras, the provincial capital. But the roads of Madras were not exactly paved with gold. Indeed life in the city was harsh, but she spared no effort to educate her only child.

The early poverty and suffering taught Vasan many valuable lessons in life, like humility, optimism and a coolness of mind to handle any crisis in life. It stood him in good stead in later life.

Valambal wanted her son to get a B.A. degree, a passport in those times to a safe and secure 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. desk job in a government department or 'European' firm. However, lack of resources prevented Vasan from graduating. He decided to earn a living. Innovative and enter-

prising, he chose a new field for the times, selling advertising space. It was a precarious way of making a living at a time when publications were scarce. However, Vasan became a one-man ad agency. With flair for writing, he offered his stories to the few Tamil publications then in existence for which he also canvassed ads. To get business he travelled widely, constantly on the go from town to town.

Besides his ad business, Vasan started an equally novel business for the day, Mail Order selling. He did well enough to wish he had a publication of his own. Soon, he purchased a shaky humour-based monthly for rupees two hundred (25 rupees for each letter of its name!). Working hard, he built it up into a weekly and soon the weekly scaled and became the best selling Tamil weekly, *Ananda Vikatan*, still running successfully after nearly 80 years.

That was not all. Vasan, with his penchant for taking risks, developed an interest in horse-racing and soon he was a successful punter. Ere long, he was flushed with funds and he entered the world of movies as a distributor-financier promoting 'Gemini Pictures Circuit'. From distribution to production it was but a short leap ahead and in 1941 he bought a studio in the heart of the city on Mount Road, in a 'court auction' and re-named it Gemini Studios. The rest, as the saying goes, is history!

From 1941, until August 26, 1969, when he passed away, Vasan enjoyed a uniquely successful innings in Indian cinema, earning a permanent seat in its Hall of Fame. His phenomenal success in Hindi cinema is almost unparalleled to this day.

R.G.

able to the 'Boss'. Finally Vasan invited his other employees to suggest a title for the movie. An avalanche of entries poured in! An office boy sent in as many as 2500 titles written in a notebook! Vasan read them all and one suggestion *Irumbu Thirai* ('Iron Curtain') met with his nod from the list of 2500 titles! The office-boy was handsomely rewarded by the 'Boss' who also hosted a reception in his honour! That was Vasan!

His films like *Chandralekha* (1948, Tamil and Hindi, director, Vasan)... *Mangamma Sabatham* (1943, Tamil, director, Acharya)... *Apoorva Sahotharargal* (1949, Tamil, Acharya)... *Miss Malini* (1947, Tamil, Kothamangalam Subbu)... *Avvaiyar* (1953, Subbu)... *Vanjikottai Valiban* (1958, Tamil, Vasan)... *Paigham* (1959, Hindi, Vasan)... *Gungath* (1960,

Ramanand Sagar)... *Gharana* (1958, Vasan)... *Grihasthi* (1964, Kishore Sahu) and others have all left an indelible imprint on Indian cinema.

Chandralekha, Vasan's first directorial venture, after being producer for seven successful years, is considered his finest work. Though many have contributed to the excellence of the film, it was Vasan who gave it the shine, sheen, shape and final form. With this film he created an Indian cinema history at many levels and in many ways. The most important feature of his trial-blazing success was his taking a Hindi film made in South India to the rest of the nation. Vasan was the first South Indian filmmaker to break the fortress walls of Hindi cinema. Indeed, he was the man who put Madras on the movie map of India. That was Vasan!

A multi-faceted personality's diary

The diaries of N.D. Varadachariar, or Kasi as he was known to his family and friends, are not new to the readers of *Madras Musings*. Excerpts from these diaries were published in these columns along with an introduction by the Editor relating the tale of how the personal jottings became public.

Kasi, born in 1903 and educated at Presidency College and, later, Madras Law College, was truly a multifaceted personality. He was witness to a series of events concerning the administrative, political, legal, cultural and artistic scene in South India. More importantly, he began from 1916 maintaining a diary in which he jotted down his observations on whatever was happening around him. Many of these notes are first-hand eyewitness accounts to

some of the stirring happenings in the India of those years.

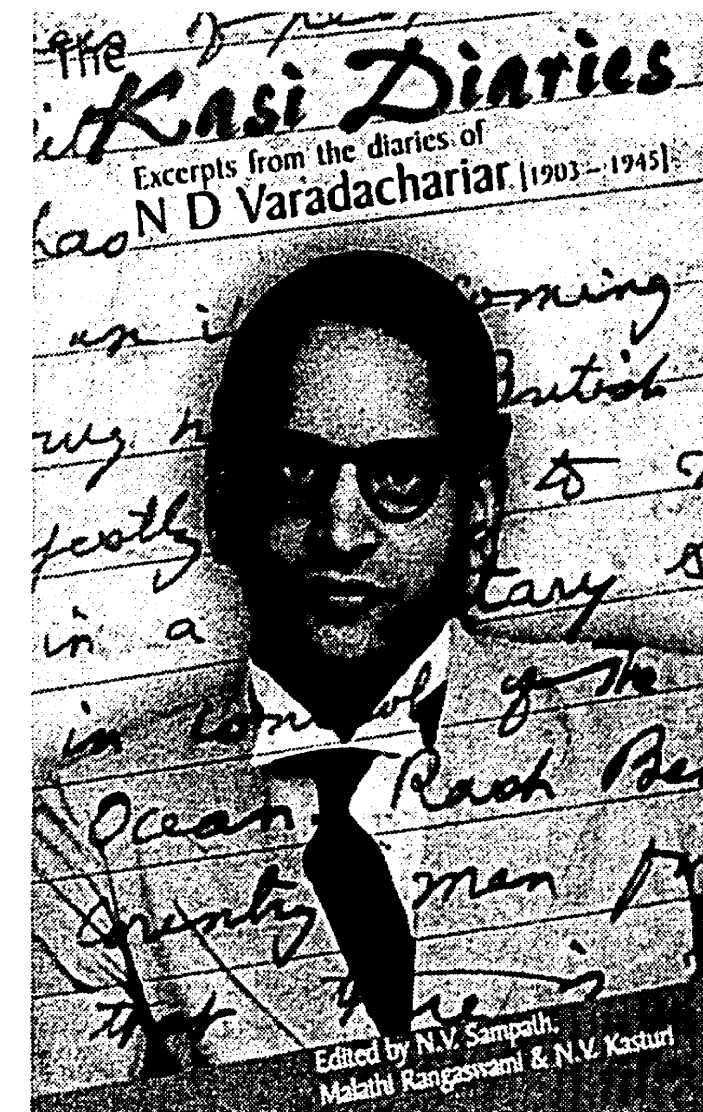
Being the nephew of C. Vijayaraghavachariar, the "grand old man" of the Congress, he naturally became a Congressman in the years when the party was making history with its struggle for freedom. Thus, we see him attending the Congress session in Nagpur (December 1920) where he comes into close proximity with the great leaders of the period, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Patel and Chittaranjan Das. On his way back, he shares a compartment with Kasturba Gandhi and her son Devdas (later to become C. Rajagopalachari's son-in-law) and says that they had an interesting conversation. Varadachariar did not always agree with the policies of the Congress and he has some

acidic remarks about Gandhi (on the Gandhi-Irwin pact), Nehru (on his decision to go abroad when the war clouds were gathering in 1938) and Netaji Subhas Bose (on the leadership crisis immediately after Bose won the election for Congress president).

Varadachariar began taking a great interest in the possible role of the Princely States of India in a proposed Federation. This was thanks to his close association with Sriman Srinivasa Iyengar who, in fact, referred to Varadachariar as his States' secretary. This resulted in Varadachariar touring several of the Northern States, such as Baroda, Alwar and Udaipur, when the States began seriously thinking about constitutional set-ups in their respective areas. He, however, remarks in diaries that the Princes were all pompous fellows completely out of touch with reality. In his professional career too he made a mark, gaining the nickname 'Emden' when he helped some Chettiar families with profound legal advice.

In the arts field, Varadachariar was a front row witness to all the happenings of the day, attending several concerts, plays and films with such close friends as T.T. Krishnamachari, S.Y. Krishnaswami and Sir R.K. Shanmukham Chetty. He was to become a close associate of Veena Dhanammal and his entries, particularly during the period leading to her terminal illness and death, make moving reading. During the Tamizh Isai crisis, Varadachariar faithfully jots down all the happenings, but wisely refrains from taking sides, given that on one side was his close friend TTK and on the other Shanmukham Chetty.

Varadachariar obviously enjoyed Hollywood films and he is



The cover of the book.

complimentary about almost all the films he saw during the period of the diaries. He is, however, quite scathing in his comments on Indian films and the tendency to overact that generally existed then. He pans even the well-known *Thyaga Bhoomi* as the fifth rate film.

Varadachariar is at his best during the World War II years, noting down the day-to-day happenings faithfully and providing a daily picture upto the final defeat of the Axis powers. But by then he was declining in health himself. Among the last entries is one where he thanks God that he was allowed to live through such an exciting period. One would like to say Amen to that, for if he had died earlier than he did, posterity would have been poorer by a wonderful first person account of all that happened. Varadachariar died in 1945.

His wife, Seetha, who is his niece and who, happily, is today

with us at 92 years, is a remarkable personality in her own right. Daughter of famed lawyer N.S. Ramaswami Iyengar of Coimbatore, she was in her own way witness to several stirring events, with her father's house being the venue for discussions among prominent nationalist leaders between 1919 and 1926. The house also played host to Annie Besant when she was interned and Ramaswami Iyengar named it *Besant House* to commemorate the event. Varadachariar's mother-in-law was prominent in Coimbatore society and was a lover of literature and translated Bhavabhuti's *Malati Madhava* into Tamil from the original Sanskrit.

Extracts from the diaries were compiled and edited as a book by Kasi's three surviving children, N.V. Sampath, Malathi Rangaswami and N.V. Kasturi, which was recently released by Seethamma.

V. Sriram

Senate House Conservation Fund

The Senate House Restoration and Management Trust appeals to all alumni of the University of Madras and heritage lovers everywhere to contribute to the Senate House Conservation Fund which the Trust is managing for the purpose of restoring Senate House to its old glory by December 2005 and maintaining it thereafter in the same condition.

Cheques should be made out to the Senate House Conservation Account and sent to the Registrar, University of Madras, Chennai 600 005. Contributions are eligible for benefits under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act.

Dear Registrar,
I am pleased, to enclose a cheque for Rs. as my contribution to the restoration and maintenance of Senate House. Kindly acknowledge receipt.

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

I am an alumna/alumnus/heritage lover and wish the project all success. My college was

Date: Signature:

Subscriptions and contributions

As readers are already aware — and hundreds have responded positively — we have no other alternative but to price *Madras Musings*. From April 16th (Volume XIV, No. 1), *Madras Musings* has been priced at Rs. 5 a copy. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Rs. 100/-. Please make out your cheque only to 'CHENNAI HERITAGE' and send it, together with the COUPON BELOW, to CHENNAI HERITAGE, 260-A, TTK ROAD, CHENNAI 600 018 or C/O LOKAVANI-HALL, MARK PRESS PVT. LTD., 122, GREEMES ROAD, CHENNAI 600 006.

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If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep *Madras Musings* going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs. 500, we will treat Rs. 100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2004-5 and the remaining Rs. 400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions. We are indeed sorry we can no longer remain a free mailer.

— The Editor

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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Answers to Quiz

1. The Bhopal gas tragedy; 2. J.R.D. Tata; 3. Shibu Soren; 4. Lance Armstrong; 5. K. Rahman Khan; 6. They were the three Indians among seven taken hostage by an Iraqi militant group; 7. Mehmood; 8. Om Puri; 9. Global Trust Bank, which is now merged with the Oriental Bank of Commerce; 10. Tata Consultancy Services.

11. Saraswathi English Medium School; 12. RmKV; 13. The Mahabalipuram shore temple complex; 14. In Madras Medical College campus. It houses the anatomy block; 15. A Royal Enfield bike riders' club; 16. Ulagneri near Madurai; 17. Chenna Kesava Perumal and Mallikeswarar; 18. Music and magic; 19. Mambalam Mosquitoes; 20. Guindy National Park.

The quality of Corporation schools

(Continued from page 4)

for the X Std (her son worked at a bakery every evening till 11 p.m. to provide for them). Many students who stop attending classes two months before the Board exam, will faithfully appear for the exam because a X Std. 'Fail' certificate can serve as a 'passport' for some job."

But U. Saranya, of the Saidapet Girls' Higher Secondary School, who scored 482/500 (her father is a tailor and she wants to be a heart specialist), says, "When you say 'Corporation School' people assume the quality of education is very poor, but in our school the coaching is super." Topper Thammeem Ansarlya, who scored 488/500 (her father repairs stoves for a living) and aspires to become an IAS officer, says, "Our teachers spared no effort to help each student do well". Their school XII Std results — 311 students appeared, with 85% passes. In the X Std, 356 appeared, 65% passed. Says the HM, "With not much cooperation from parents (60-70% of whom are from middle class backgrounds), more motivating and counselling is needed, and teachers have to struggle a lot at the High School level. Regarding filtering at lower levels, the issue is if you detain more, the dropout rate increases. But High School teachers can't simply pass the blame on to the teaching at lower levels. They need to work together and bring about a positive change."

"Local Councillors in their zeal to improve amenities in their area merrily go on an upgrading trip changing Middle Schools to High Schools, and High Schools to Higher Sec-

ondary level. But nobody has either an inkling of the facilities needed because of the upgrading, or even the kind of teachers needed. What's the point in appointing HMs without an adequate complement (the requisite number of qualified teachers and supporting staff - for a High School it is a HM, 3 B.Ts, a Tamil Pundit, a Physical Education Teacher and a Record clerk). So here we have situations where a secondary grade teacher is asked to take on the duties of a non-existent BT, and if they don't 'perform' according to the expectations (in the form of 'good' results), they are issued a memo. Many times there is discrepancy in treatment of schools themselves. Some schools get better facilities than others. Is this a fair system?" says another Head.

"We need to move to a society which doesn't feel, 'If this is a Corporation school the results will not be good'. If application forms are free, the standard of education is also considered 'poor'. Why have we allowed this to happen? That the education standard has come down because teachers are not doing their bit is a common view in society. But there are many exceptions. We need to get over such blaming tendencies, because even teachers' motivation levels can get affected," says a retired teacher.

Another senior Headmistress laments, "Why can't AEOs circulate a mandatory record of all Corporation school results to all HMs in their zones, for individual schools to know where they stand and use the information to step forward? The fact is the authorities feel illiteracy shouldn't increase,



Till August 22: Onam celebration, with the rhythm of folk performances by troupes from Kerala. Also Kerala delicacies at the restaurant. (At DakshinaChitra).

Till August 21: ESSENCE, the best works of Dhinakara Sundar, S. Ganesh, K. Jayachander, Karuna Sesh (photographs), Krishnaswamy, Raghava K.K., G. Simon (photographs), Supriya Naren and Thota Tharani. (At Ashvita.)



A photograph by Karuna Sesh.

From August 20: Works of artists like Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpana Caur, Jogen Chowdhury Manjeet Bawa, Jayshree Burman, Jehangir Sabavala, Baiju Parthan, etc. will be on display. (At Apparao Gallery.)

From August 21 : Group show by S.A.V. Elanchezhian and V. Sivakumar. (At Vinayasa.)

August 21: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, TULIR and ASHRAYA present Pinki

Virani's Bitter Chocolate, the well acclaimed solo theatre by Lushin Dubey of New Delhi, directed by Arvind Guar. (At Museum Theatre, 7.00 p.m.)

August 22: Mohiniattam and folk dances of Kerala by Gopika Varma and troupe. The performance will be followed by a Kerala dinner. For information: 24462435. (At DakshinaChitra, 7.00 p.m.)

August 22: Coconut shell craft workshop. Expert resource persons will guide the children. For details: 24462435 or 98414 23149. (At DakshinaChitra.)

August 22: Workshop by artists from Kashmir on mixed media. (At Mukti.)

August 23-31: The Colour of Silence, a multimedia installation, including photographs and a video, by Frederic Pollet.

Pollet has developed a unique style, combining all the techniques of art from painting to video, from photography to sculpture, including live performance. The present exhibition results from "a residence of creation" in Delhi and Pondicherry in October 2003. (At Alliance Francaise.)

From August 24: The four-day Citi Bank Dance Festival. (At Kalakshetra Auditorium.)

From August 25 : An exhibition of mixed media by artists from Kashmir. (At Prakrit.)

August 27: Mirror (Kannadi) (Work in Progress) by Venkatesh Chakravarthy and performed by Pritham K. Chakravarthy, is a one-woman performance. The narrative outlines the life of a young, lower middle class woman, of contemporary times, who commits suicide at the peak of her fame and stardom, and that of the protagonist of the narrative, a female star of a bygone era, a person who enters the film industry when the Devadasi system is abolished. Chakravarthy, is an independent filmmaker and film critic. Pritham is an independent researcher, playwright, director, performer, film critic and activist from Chennai. (At Alliance Francaise, 7.00.p.m.)

August 28 and 29: Workshop on Story-telling by Martine Quentric-Seguy.

Martine Quentric-Seguy, born in France and travelled a lot especially in Asia, was a professional psychologist, but is now a professional storyteller. She will share her experience of writing short stories, living and telling them, with the participants. (At Alliance Francaise, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Till August 30: Janaka Art Studio, Auroville, presents 'SYNERGY' an exhibition featuring the work of Auroville and South Indian artists. (At Chhotabhai Centre.)

dropout rates shouldn't increase, even a couple of grace marks shouldn't be given, BUT results should be GOOD. Currently it is the teacher's problem, neither the student's nor the parent's!" Suggestions from HMs and teachers include filtering at the IX level by the HM and the class teachers and doing away with the X Boards. "At least there is continuity for these children till then; they are more mature when they appear for the XII and they can make better-informed career choices. And what about prescribing more child-friendly textbooks? Those they use now are so unimaginative and boring, no

child would like to even read through one. And decisions like teaching Phonetics in Spoken English, though commendable in the long run, need to be examined carefully before being introduced at all levels," a teacher says.

"The acute sense of frustration can be overpowering. We have children who're promoted to the IX Std but cannot carry out a basic division of a fraction like 2/3. Can you imagine how difficult it is to make them score enough even to pass? There is also the problem of strict evaluation by language teachers in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu (where standards are

higher, parents are middle class but more supportive). While here in Chennai, with so many slums and so much poverty, the background of the children is heartrending. It's wonderful if the results are good, but who is to blame if they are poor — the children, their parents, the teachers or the society?" wonders a High School teacher.

The questions are many, and so are the problems. And, sadly, it is the children who are affected the most. Only one thing is clear, that every answer provided will only reflect on the State's priority towards quality education for the overwhelming majority of its child population.

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