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WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

INSIDE

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a-MUSING

They filled Laughing Gas instead of Oxygen, Sir!!!

The joy of inhaling

We watched, concerned, as a familiar car halted in an uncharacteristically wobbly manner, and a friend staggered out.

"What's wrong?"

Clutching his head, he replied: "It's finally happened. A through-the-looking-glass moment. Things are upside down, inside out, back to front, topsy turvy...."

This looked like it could take a while, so we called him to order with a well-administered glass of cold water.

He gasped, then explained.

"I just saw a *happy traffic cop*. A cyclist and an auto almost landed beneath a speeding water tanker which, in turn, narrowly missed eight cars, one bus and a family of four on a two-wheeler with the distinct air of having recently indulged in *masala dosais* and degree coffee. And guess what? The *cop smiled gently and advised everyone to stay calm and breathe slowly through the nose.*"

The mystery was solved.

The cop had obviously had his most recent snort of oxygen.

Ever since oxygen dispensers were placed at traffic junctions, there have been sightings of happy cops. Well, if they put a smile on the faces of our sorely-tried traffic police, dealing as they do with heat, dust, pollution and the sheer abysmal stupidity of road users, then more power to them.

Hurrah for good old oxygen – even if it has to be offered in dispensers, thanks to earnest human efforts to wipe out clean air.

Ranjitha Ashok

Now, sea solar power

Is there an opportunity for Tamil Nadu in this?

More than 300 times what the world now consumes in electricity is available from the solar energy that is constantly stored in the upper layers of the tropical ocean, say the advocates of sea solar power. Is there an opportunity for Tamil Nadu in this? What is significant for the State is that solar energy storage in the tropical ocean takes place throughout the equatorial zone around the world — about 20 degrees north and south of the equator, where most of the world's population lives. This area is also where the greatest increase in demand for new power exists, because population growth is greater in this region and where the standard of living has been rather low, and now more people with more wealth are demanding more electricity.

Sea solar power uses the basic technology known as Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion, or OTEC, which was invented in 1881 by a French scientist, Jacque Arsene D'Arsonval, who was years ahead of his time. Supporters of such technology contend that man-made solar collectors are very expensive to build, require enormous amounts of acreage and do not work at night when advanced societies require electricity around the clock. Contrary to this, there is the ocean, the largest solar collector in the world. It riches can be tapped by OTEC.

To operate a sea solar power plant involves a heat source and a heat sink. The 80°F surface water in tropical oceans serves as the heat source. 3,000 feet below the surface is the heat sink or the cold bottom water, which is 40°F. This temperature difference is sufficient to operate vapour turbines, which drive generators and produce electricity, fresh water as a by product, electricity, with fresh water as a byproduct. This is the OTEC concept.

But while it is true that the ocean's free seawater can supply an infinite amount of energy and produce electricity for most of the world's population, the technical challenge is to design an OTEC plant that is economically efficient or at a reasonable capital cost. Two primary models currently available in the U.S. are a small 10-MW, land-based plant and a large 100-MW floating plantship, the former designed for small

(Continued on Page 2)

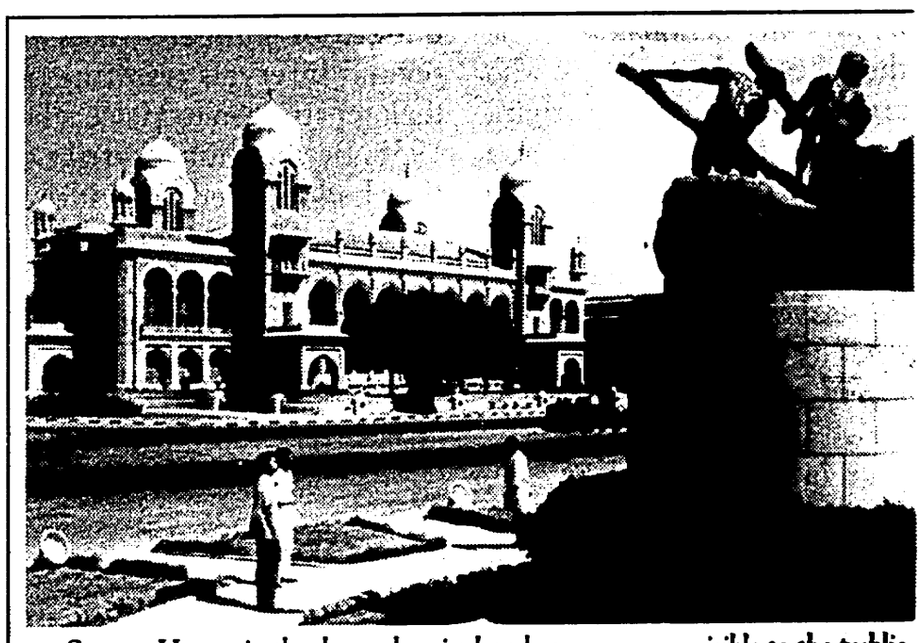
A reminder to our readers

It's going to be a year since *Madras Musings* began being a priced journal, offering readers a special annual subscription rate of Rs.100. With that year coming to an end, it is time to remind subscribers to renew their subscriptions and readers who have not yet sent in their subscriptions to do so.

All subscriptions acknowledged by us from January 1, 2005 and subscriptions that we receive between now and April 16th will be considered as annual subscriptions for the year April 16, 2005 to April 15, 2006, Volume XV. As for those who have sent in their subscriptions between April 16, 2004 and December 15, 2004, please renew your subscriptions as and when they fall due. *Madras Musings*, unfortunately, does not have any staff, but only a couple of part-time volunteers to help and, hence, is in no position to send you reminders.

When sending in your subscription, please send it to Chennai Heritage together with the coupon that appears on page 7, duly filled in, in full. We look forward to an enthusiastic response from readers old and new.

— THE EDITOR



Senate House *in the days when its handsomeness was visible to the public. How soon will we see that handsomeness as strikingly again, wonders reader M.K. Chubby Raj whose album this picture is from.*

Higher education – Problems of growth

India's global prestige until now has been upheld by the competence of the graduates of some of its pre-eminent higher educational institutions, the caliber of research by them and the academic links forged with premier institutions in other countries. Many of the products of the Indian higher education system during the past several decades have won national and international recognition including in the arts, sciences, technology, medicine, law, commerce, administration and so on.

Higher education is increasingly viewed in India as an instrument of upward social mobility and economic security and larger numbers of the population are seeking such opportunity. Together with the growth in numbers, there are also major changes in the disciplinary knowledge base and newer combinations of disciplines. The physical migration of knowledge seekers across the country and abroad is steadily increasing. The presence of foreign higher educational institutions in India is rapidly growing. The scope for open and distance learning through conventional modes is considerably enhanced by the new technologies for e-learning and virtual classes. The flexibility in the configuration of courses and institutions is seamlessly available to learners.

Added to these changes in the academic domain, there are several major socioeconomic changes affecting the higher education sector. These include global economic integration, national economic reforms, changing demographic patterns, increased school enrolment and reduced drop-out rates, social norms favouring women and the weaker sections, increasing environmental consciousness, changing family finances, demands of labour market and so on. The strategy for development of higher education for tomorrow would have to take into account these trends in determining the future directions.

Historical perspective

In India, the University system originated about a century and half ago with the establishment of universities at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Allahabad and Lahore between 1857 and 1902. These were modelled after the British universities of the period. As the nation passed through major political, economic and social changes, there

(Continued on Page 8)

The Andamans and Nicobars

— *A historic perspective*

• Dr. T. SUNDARAMOORTHY takes a look back into the past at two island groups that have been badly affected by the recent tsunami.

Since prehistoric times the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been home to Aboriginal tribes. The tribes of the Andaman group of islands are of Negrito origin and comprise the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas and Sentinalese, while the tribes of the Nicobars, who are of the Mongolid origin, comprise the Nicobarese and Shompens. Radiocarbon dating studies of the Great Andamanese and Jarawas reveal that they have inhabited in these islands for over 2000 years.

Claudis Ptolemy first mentioned the presence of these islands in the 2nd Century A.D. Historical studies reveal that there was no attempt to colonise these islands till the end of the 17th Century. The famous Venetian explorer Marco Polo sailed in these island waters in 1293 A.D. The Cholas were aware of the islands, particularly the Nicobar group. It was Rajendra Chola who attacked the Nicobars and annexed them in the latter half of the 13th Century A.D. However, little information is available on the impact this attack had on the islands.

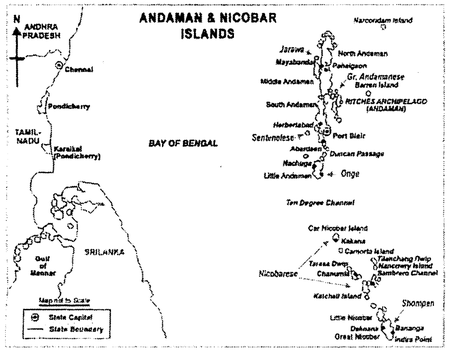
Between 1688 and 1857, many attempts were made to colonise the islands by European powers. The British attempt to colonise the Andaman Islands began in 1789 but it was abandoned in 1796. When they failed to colonise the Andamans, the French, the Danes and the Austrians, in turn, tried to colonise the Nicobar Islands. The second British settlement in the Andaman Islands was established in 1858. Ten years later, in 1869, they established their first settlement in the Nicobar Islands. The Andaman settlement established in 1858 was basically a penal settlement after the Sepoy Revolt.

Dr. James Pattison Walker arrived at Port Blair on March 10, 1858 by the East India Company's steam frigate *Semiramis* with 200 of the sepoys who had been convicted for revolt and established the penal settlement that survived till 1942. It was during the British period that Ross Island (near Port Blair) was developed into a self-equipped township with all facilities required for a British home-from-home.

Between 1942 and 1945 the islands were occupied by the Japanese. The British reoccupied the islands in 1945.

In 1922, the TSS *Maharaja* brought as prisoners to the islands the Moplahs who had participated in the Moplah Rebellion of 1921. These prisoners undertook hunger strikes at regular intervals resulting in their repatriation to Malabar by 1938. Besides hunger strikes, they had rebelled against the British authority, seeking permission to construct homes in the islands and reunite with their families. This was favourably responded to by the authority, leading to the first settlements by mainlanders in the islands. They occupied a few hectares of land and took to agriculture.

The prison settlement led to the growth of population in these islands. The total population of these islands in 1901 was 24,649, of whom 18,138 were living in the Andaman group of islands and 6,511 in Nicobars. The population of both groups increased to 33,768 by 1941, then decreased to 30,971 in 1951 due to the repatriation of convicts to the mainland in 1946. Since the islands were underpopulated, the Government of India resettled refugees from East Bengal there between 1949 and 1952. The population of the islands almost doubled by 1961 (refer Table below). Since 1961, the population had steadily increased and the present population is 3,56,265. The geometric growth of population is because of the influx of settlers over the last three decades from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.



Map: *courtesy* The Hindu.

Census year	Andaman District	Nicobar District	Total
1901	18,138	6,511	24,649
1911	17,641	8, 818	26,459
1921	17,814	9,272	27,086
1931	19,223	10,240	29,463
1941	21,316	12,452	33,768
1951	18,962	12,009	30,971
1961	48,985	14,563	63,548
1971	93,468	21,665	1,15,133
1981	1,58,287	30,454	1,88,741
1991	2,41,453	39,208	2,80,661
2001	3,14,239	42,026	3,56,265

Most of these people have encroached on the revenue land and forestland for their sustenance. Unfortunately, the steps taken by the A&N administration to regularise these illegal and unauthorised encroachments upto 1978 have encouraged further encroachment on Government lands. Studies indicate that these encroachments made on government lands after 1978 are much more than pre-1978. All these unchecked encroachments and other activities of the settlers have degraded the pristine environment of these islands.

Of 572 islands, islets, and rocks, humans inhabit in 36 islands. At the time of writing, only 349 islands, 8,249 sq.km. in extent with 86.9% under forest cover, were clearly visible. The forest cover of the islands, according to the Forest Survey of India, is 92.2%. The main occupations of the settlers include agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, plantations, construction, trade and commerce.

No clear information on the earlier population of the native tribes of these islands is available. However, the tribal population has dwindled and now constitutes only 9.54% of the total population. The steady influx of settlers has led to a startling decrease in the numbers of the tribal populace. The latest census shows that the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas, Sentinalese, Shompens and Nicobarese number 44, 104, 380, 100, 300, and 26,000, respectively.

The settlers have also introduced many plants and animals into these islands. For example, the Giant African snail introduced by the Japanese as a supplement to their diet is considered a pest today. There is a long list of such introductions. The introduction of many species to these islands has contributed to the richness of diversity. Nevertheless, the adverse impact of these has not been completely documented. While we mainlanders have been edging out the natives of the islands in a direct contest for land and other resources, we have been indirectly creating a scenario that may never again be synonymous with the once-pristine magnificence of these islands. — (Courtesy: C.P.R. *Environmental Education Centre's magazine* Eco News.)

NOW, SOLAR SEA POWER

(Continued from page 1)

tropical islands, the latter for continental application, as in India. Both models' operations are fundamentally same, using a reverse refrigeration cycle.

Each plant or model is made up of a series of cycles using heat exchangers (evaporators and condensers), pumps, vapour turbines, compressors and generators. The system is charged with propylene, a working refrigeration fluid. This refrigerant boils at low temperatures (67°F) under pressure of 150 psi. Therefore, the 80°F solar-heated surface water is an ample heat source to cause the propylene to convert from a liquid to a gas or vapour. Warm water pumped through the boilers (heat exchangers) boils the propylene into a vapour, which expands through vapour turbines that drive the generators. Electricity is transmitted to shore from the plantship via underwater cable or directly from the land-based plant to the grid. In order to complete the cycle, cold water (40°F) is pumped up from the lower depths of the ocean. The cold water is used to condense the propylene vapour back into its liquid state and then it is pumped into the boiler to complete the cycle. The above system is a simple Rankine Cycle, which has been around for more than 100 years.

In addition to electricity, large quantities of fresh water can be produced each day as part of the system. A vacuum is pulled on the incoming warm water to remove the oxygen so as to prevent marine growth on the inside of the plant. The water vapour can then be sent across cold heat exchanger surface area where it is condensed into fresh water. This becomes a very valuable by-product or, if desirable, the cycle can be designed to produce only fresh water.

What is special about the Sea Solar Power approach to OTEC is that it is based on low temperature refrigeration principles, and that each of the different turbo-machine elements is very efficient, designed specifically for an OTEC cycle. Furthermore, new advanced heat transfer technology has been developed specifically for an OTEC plant.

Because of huge quantities of water required, all the major components have been designed by J. Hilbert Anderson, the founder of Sea Solar Power, to achieve the highest possible practical efficiency. In addition, multiple turbines and multi-stage heat exchangers are used in order to combine these components with each other so as to create the most optimised cycle. The floating plantship is designed to generate 100 MW of net power and 32 million gallons (145 MLD) of fresh water a day. It can also be dedicated to produce only fresh water at the rate of 130 million gallons a day. — (Contact Robert J. Nicholson III at nich2088@aol.com for more information).

OUR READERS WRITE

Citizens' rights

I was dismayed to read Meena Kumar's letter (MM, December 16th). Since when has New York become the yardstick we must all live by? Most residents of New York consider Times Square a blot on their city, and hoardings are confined to specific areas.

Unlike New York, Chennai is not a very well-planned city and hoardings shut out light and air from homes and offices, in addition to being a distraction to an already chronically distracted driving population. If the writer does not understand why the media and NGOs protest against the desecration of an already environmentally overwhelmed Chennai, what hope is there for the future? No doubt, hoardings have a place... But that place should be confined to areas that do not affect Chennai's residents. In addition, advertisers should be prevented from hammering nails into trees and painting slogans on garden walls. The onus should be on the advertiser. The aggrieved should call up the numbers advertising tuitions, discount sales, karate classes, pizza delivery and whatever, and threaten to call the police. Citizens have rights too.

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Sustaining water

This has reference to the articles, 'Is desalination the best solution?' and 'Deepen tanks, harvest rain, stop polluting waterways' (MM, December 1st). Water is life. There are three sources of water – seawater available for desalination, groundwater and spring water. I must say that the first priority should go to desalination, combined with fresh water resources. I must also add that one basic roadblock we have ourselves created is neglecting family planning.

Yes, desalination is indeed costly. I first heard of it, when Kamaraj was the Chief Minister. Attention to quality is essential to derive long-term gains, competitiveness as well as long-term profitability. How much of time and money have we wasted simply discussing the subject?

I have seen desalination plants working in West Asia — a region that has cultural wealth and is considered the cradle of civilisation. For citizens there, cultural heritage means safeguarding the cultural heritage.

Technical solutions alone are not sufficient to achieve a sustainable relationship between water supply and demand. To sustain water, there has to be social responsibility and the ability to manage fresh water resources. Recently, I raised a few points with the Central Water Authority in Chennai and Bhopal when they issued tenders for sinking deep borewells. I received no answer.

The need for water should actually forge relationships between States and bring people together.

Must we simply deepen water tanks and natural lakes without investigating the soil condition? Today, rain harvesting can only be considered an *ad hoc* supplementary source, since the monsoons that provide rain to Tamil Nadu, especially Chennai, are not consistent.

Again, how much water is being wasted due to lack of awareness about conservation and preservation?

Water is part of the environmental management system. Not in water management alone, but also in other issues such as solid waste management, protection of biodiversity, human safety and health care, we have failed miserably. Is the public aware that asthma and other bronchial disorders are closely linked to the incidence and severity of photochemical smog, much of which is attributable to emissions from the engines of transport vehicles? Vehicle pollutants contain a range of substances (classed as air toxic substances) that include carcinogens and compounds affecting the reproductive and neurological systems.

P.J. Joseph
"The Trinity"
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No golden-voiced disciple

People like me were fortunate to listen to the golden-voiced nightingale from 1944. Her music enchanted listeners. No musician has so far given concerts for benefits like MS. In those days — the practice is prevalent even today — top-ranking violin and *mridangam vidwans* would not accompany female artistes. An exception to this was Sangitha Ratna Mysore T. Chowdiah, who readily agreed to accompany the great vocalist. One memorable concert was held to help with the construction of the Kapaleeswarar Temple in 1947, with MS accompanied on the violin by the seven-stringed violin maestro T. Chowdiah, Kalpathy Ramanathan on the *mridangam* and Alangudi Ramachandran on the *ghatam*. The main piece, *Kaana Kankodi Vendum* in *Kambhoji*, is still vivid in the memories of the old timers. The great MS is gone, but her admirers are doubly sad that this may be a bygone era, since she never trained or left any disciples to carry foward her style of music.

Dr. C.V. Subramaniam
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A possible landmark

We lived for some time during the late 1960s in Madurai; a couple of houses ahead was MS' ancestral home, marked by a glass fronted recess in front wall, housing as mini replica of the *veena* her mother was so proficient in. The location: West Hanumanthan Rayan Koil Lane, off West Tower Street very near Meenakshi Temple. I do not know whether it still exists; if so, the Tamil Nadu Government should be moving in the matter to preserve it for posterity.

N. Dharmeshwaran
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Malleswaram, Bangalore 560 003

For preservation

I find Dasavathara sculptures at the joining point of the compound walls of the MAC Cricket Stadium opposite the Government Guest House, at the Wallajah Road-Bells Road corner. This point is used as public urinals.

Take steps to stop this to preserve the sculpture.

M.S. Vembu
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Parking space & wells

This has reference to the excellent front page story 'Harvest run-off from public places' (MM, November 16th). The problem is closely related to some other aspects of urban development such as the construction of multi-storey buildings and the progressive rise in the level of streets and roads (nearly two feet over 40 years).

In the 1950s and 60s, there used to be one open well 9 metre to 10 metre deep for a house of ten people on an average to cater to the general domestic use (other than drinking), whereas today the per capital water demand is three times of what it was in the 1960s.

There is hardly one open well for every 150 people and the demand for water is met by digging deep borewells. Moreover, the open space outside a house is paved with concrete flooring to facilitate vehicle parking. The result is that the rainfall run-off struggles to find its way to the storm water drain and the entire area gets flooded.

The authorities must ensure provision of adequate arrangements for harvesting rainwater from all the open spaces. I suggest that at least one well, shaft or pit of minimum 6 metre depth be sunk for every 100 sq.m. of plot area and that the paved vehicle parking area be restricted to less than 25 per cent of the plot area.

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Environmental education

Though I agree with certain pedagogues that Environmental Education (MM, December 16th) if made exams-oriented, it would be an extra burden, I feel that it must be included in the syllabus because, for one thing, children would learn certain noble human qualities, such as learning to live, give-and-take policies and tolerance.

Whatever be the odds in their lives, they will surely find a way to overcome it and come up well, instead of being half-baked potatoes.

Let them come out and prove what citizenry is.

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The practical approach

Environmental education (MM, December 16th) only means more bookwork for the students. Most schools do not practically interact in the proper environment needed for the young and growing. Beyond the books, students have no time to play various games nor do most schools have a games field nor, for that matter, indoor games or swimming pools. School students no longer go biking or trekking or interact practically with nature. Due to costs, travel around India is rarely done except by affluent schools. There is a need to increase travel concessions to 75% or more.

Environmental studies must include a lot of outdoor excursions, travels, and exposure to India's rich heritage, wildlife sanctuaries, animal parks/zoos, agricultural regions, horticulture farms and even our poor villages to discover what India is. But is such travel possible?

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Re-publish to remember Dr. U.Ve. Sa.

U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer, the Tamil Savant, is well-known to every lover of Tamil for his erudition and the yeoman service he did for the language by way of publishing priceless old literature that would have been lost, being as they were moth-eaten palm leaf manuscripts hidden in far flung village homes.

He spent nearly half a century, travelling tirelessly over long distances by all types of conveyances to search, collect, transcribe, edit and, finally, publish them as books with their original notes by his predecessors as well as his own well-researched notes. The travails he underwent in his passionate pursuit to preserve ancient Tamil literature from extinction have no parallel. But for his single-minded effort, we would have lost many a classic of the Sangam age.

Late in life, he was persuaded by Kalki to write his autobiography. It was the first publication of its kind in Tamil and contained vivid details of events that took place around him in the 19th Century. This was serialised in *Ananda Vikatan* by Vasan from 1940 till his passing away in April 1942.

Besides publishing three of the five major Tamil epics after painstaking research from palm leaf manuscripts, Swaminatha Iyer also wrote interesting tales and articles in simple Tamil about what he heard and saw in his lifetime. These came out as small books with various titles. Unfortunately, none of his books, except his autobiography, is now available on sale. We can read them only in public libraries, if at all, and in some select institutions which have preserved his books. In course of time, even these may be lost if we do not make a conscious effort to print them again. Since this may not be a viable undertaking for any publishing house commercially, the State Government or any Tamil-loving philanthropist should take up this task and supply the books to all school and college libraries, besides public libraries, at an affordable price so that they benefit all strata of Tamil lovers. His autobiography should also be re-published, subsidised by the Government or by any other institution, so that everyone can afford to buy it and read about how Tamil society was a century and a half ago.

Dr. U.Ve.Sa's 150th birth anniversary falls on 22.2.2005. We should pay our tribute to Swaminatha Iyer's services to Tamil by not only celebrating it appropriately but also publishing at least some of his work and releasing them on that day. What Bharati did for the renaissance of Tamil, Dr. U.Ve.Sa. did for the preservation of Tamil epics. We should honour that effort.

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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 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

— THE EDITOR

Bringing the Mermaid back to life

● by SNEHA V.

Right in the heart of Chennai, there has been for more than a hundred years, a beautiful pond surrounded by raintrees and acacia. Located in the campus of the Young Women's Christian Association (YMCA), its green-grey surface shimmered in the light as its water teemed *with* life and activity. Pink and white lotuses, butterflies, parakeets, kingfishers, squirrels, frogs and snakes were always to be seen. Young terrapins would burrow their way from the banks of the pond into the water and swim in it. In March 2004, this haven, called the 'Mermaid Pond', went completely dry.

The pond hit the headlines because several terrapins emerged from it, moving in the direction of the road or burying themselves in the sand around the campus. Many of them were crushed to death by trucks coming into the YWCA for construction work. The YWCA authorities, along with activists from People for Animals (PFA), rescued about 287 terrapins and transferred them to the Arignar Anna Zoological Park. They are currently in the moats around various animal enclosures and some are in the natural lake inside the Zoo.

Prof. Samuel Sukumar of the Department of Zoology, Madras Christian College, whose wife Deepthi was the Executive General Secretary of the YWCA during this period, said, "The cause for the drying up of the pond is mainly the increasing number of residential areas around the campus and the need for a large number of borewells. Poor water management and lack of rainfall could also have played a part".

The terrapins, *Melanochelys trijuga*, are mostly aquatic, community dwellers which are completely vegetarian. This species is considered to be on the vulnerable list, the main threats being habitat destruction and large-scale exploitation of eggs and adults for food. What happened to the Mermaid Pond, due to the failure of the monsoon and silt accumulation, is a clear example of habitat destruction.

The Mermaid Pond brings back fond memories to all those associated with the YWCA. They believe that there could have been an underground rivulet that surfaced in the compound. Early records called it a 'waterway', mentioning boat rides during carnival times. Even during the worst droughts in Tamil Nadu, in the early 1950s, there was always clear, sparkling springwater in the far corner, with some life in it. After the very first showers, came the tortoises, fish, frogs, snakes and birds.

In 1970, A.P.K. Roy and Kiruba Roy, a staff member, put into effect the sale and rearing of fish in the pond. With the help of fishermen and the Chetpet Fisheries Department, tilapia, carp, catfish, etc. were reared and sold by the kilo. When, after a few years, it was difficult to find volunteers to supervise the rearing and catching of fish, the fishing and the annual income accruing came to end. Dr. Roy, son of Mr. and Mrs. A.P.K. Roy, who was about ten years old then, says, "We children would build rafts for boating and have a lot of fun, swimming and fishing in the pond. Foreigners visited the YWCA campus, staying in caravans, and used to fish in the pond. I vividly remember the terrapins coming to the banks every evening to feed on the leftovers from the kitchen water that was drained into the pond. They used to scurry back into the pond at the sight of people. Crows were also a menace to these terrapins."

In 1976, when the Diwali Mela was held in the YWCA, the Mermaid Pond was the centre of attraction at dusk. A wharf with a pier jutting into the lake was built, from where fireworks were set ablaze. In the late 1980s, the pond was cleaned and a 'Peace Site' inaugurated on its banks.

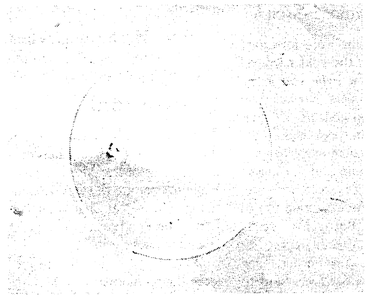
Five years ago, the pond began to deteriorate. An attempt was made to desilt the pond, but it was left unfinished owing to lack of funds.

Gladys Ambat, who retired as General Secretary in 1983, in her book, *More grasps to reach – One hundred years of the Madras YWCA*, recalls the friends of earlier generations referring to "an open patio facing the pond, and live-in staff members and friends sitting there in the evenings, watching the life in the pond". Then adds, "One of the grasps to reach in the new century would be landscaping the lake area and making it a viable YWCA project."

Professor Sunisha of Madras Christian College, who lives in the YWCA hostel, says, "Even a few years ago, we used to sit on the steps leading to the pond and watch the terrapins swim about, sometimes even climbing up onto the last step. We would leave pieces of bread or boiled green gram on the last few steps and wait for the terrapins to come out, slowly and cautiously, to take a bite. I have heard the terrapins move around the campus at night and get back into the pond before dawn. During the period that the pond was drying up, a number of terrapins were found crushed by trucks and other vehicles that used to bring in material for construction work inside the campus. We were very fond of 'Uncle Sam', one of the older terrapins. He was among the ones that got crushed."

Residents of the YWCA are now trying to raise funds to regenerate the pond. 'Save the Pond' T-shirts are being sold and a variety entertainment programme was also held. A car rally and a musical are being planned. All this will take forward the work already started. Jean Augustine, YWCA's Campus Committee Chairperson, says, "The pond has been completely desilted and is filled with clean water. All the terrapins that had buried themselves in the campus are back in the pond. There are even a few baby terrapins. We might even introduce a few ducks. But, we are still waiting for more funds to construct a bund and a walkway around the pond, which can possibly be used by the neighbouring community also, for a fee."

There are many other plans in the offing for the Mermaid Pond – comfortable seats, a small eating area, children's play area, landscaping, etc. Here's is a positive look at eco-restoration. May it succeed.

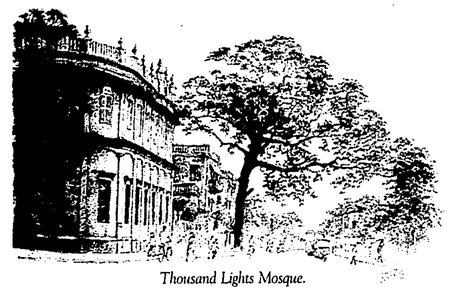


The OLD... ...& The NEW

The Mermaid Pond is a part of the historic lore of the campus of the Young Women's Christian Association on Poonamallee High Road. It apparently predates the life the YWCA brought the campus. Between 1919 and 1921, overlooking the Pond was built St. Margaret's Hostel through the munificence of Sir William Beardsell who founded W.A. Beardsell & Co in the late 19th Century and who was associated with its various changing profiles.

Sir William not only funded the building of St. Margaret's, but he sited it overlooking tree-shade Mermaid Pond and supervised its building. What the Hostel looked like in its heyday is in the inset in our OLD. The OLD is a more recent picture taken when the Hostel was rebuilt anew on the site of St. Margaret's in 2004 at a time when the Pond had virtually vanished. Our NEW is of the Pond as it is today, after its revival in the last few months. And it's good to see life coming back to it – and the YWCA campus again – in the form of a Freshwater Terrapin (above). (The photographs of the NEW are by T. MURUGAVEL.)

A city's soul in word & picture



Thousand Lights Mosque.

What defines the soul of a city? Landmarks? Streets and by-lanes? Or is the soul of the city like a fine, yet enduring, web, its strands constantly changing in colour and texture, weaving in and out in an infinite ever-growing pattern – of past and present; of dreams once dreamt and those currently realised; the collective experiences, thoughts, words and deeds of people – those who once lived here, those who live here today, and those who have merely passed through...?

It is this search for the soul of Chennai-that-was-and-is-Madras that runs like a thread through the writings in the book *The Unhurried City*, edited by C.S. Lakshmi (Penguin India).

A kaleidoscopic collection of essays, pen-and-ink sketches, poems and short stories by writers who are an intrinsic part of the very fabric of life in this city, the book presents a panoramic experience of life and the art of living it in Chennai.

It is said that each city has its own heartbeat; its individual rhythms. For Chennai/Madras, there can be no single beat, no single note. For its rhythm is found in many places....

In the journeys of those who came to the city over decades to seek their fortune:

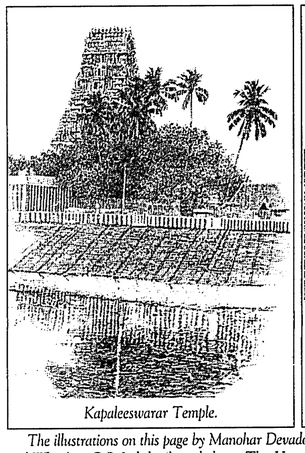
In her introduction, C.S. Lakshmi introduces an impressive list of travellers who came to Madras and made their mark in different worlds, in trade and entrepreneurship, politics, nationalism, music, dance and literature – U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer, Kirubai Satyanadhan, the poet Bharati, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Kovai Ayyamuthu, V.G. Panneerdas, Dr. Tripurasundari, also known as the famous Tamil writer 'Lakshmi' and many others.

Journeys, however, come in many forms, and the city's spirit is equally present in the quiet, often resigned, emotions of many who come here to make lives.

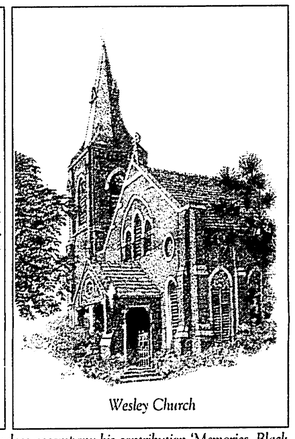
S. Ramakrishnan, in his poignant 'Rooms floating past...', wistfully asks the city to spare one street, a little room for shelter. These wanderers who leave their homes and come to the city to make new ones lead lives filled with yearnings, dealing with unfriendliness, changing fortunes, perhaps even rejection, yet are fired by the need to fulfil their dreams. Their stories contain a sense of tangible pain and wistfulness, with memories of a happier, less complicated time, appears to be getting more distant as the city, and the need to survive in it, engulfs them.

In its roads, waterways, and tiffin:

Ashokamitran, in his essay 'A Half Century of Residence', talks of a Madras once 'bicyclable' (a delectable word), where a bicycle ride becomes a paean to reflection, imagination and philosophising over the talks of J. Krishnamurti. This was a time when boats plied in the heart of the city, and crocodiles visiting Gemini Studios had to be coaxed to relocate elsewhere as there was no Whitaker back then and therefore no crocodile farm. The names of some of the eating places conjure up the aroma of degree coffee, bringing back memories of *masala dosai* outings with parents, harking back to an age of innocence socially speaking – long before curfews and fears of being stopped for drunken driving came into being.



Kapaleeswarar Temple.



Wesley Church

The illustrations on this page by Manohar Devadoss accompany his contribution 'Memories, Black and White', in C.S. Lakshmi's anthology : The Humid City: Writings on Chennai *(Penguin India).*

In its darker side, the underbelly of urban living:

And yet, for many 'Pattinam' was the quintessential big, bad city, and venturing towards it was akin to selling your soul. A.R. Venkatachalapathy speaks of a book that was published as far back as 1907, the *Mathimosa Vilakkam*, by one, Doosi Rajagopala Boopathy, which actually lists the various pitfalls, blackguards, and swindlers lurking in every nook and corner of the city – colourful pictures of false mendicants, doctors claiming miracle cures, alchemists, smooth-talking soothsayers, con-persons collecting money for false charitable causes, and some very innovative varieties of begging, all of which inadvertently help create an unintended picture of colour and life. You can only reflect that the more things change, the more they are the same, and also wish that so much ingenuity had been put to better use. But where's the fun in that? The book identifies specific areas of notoriety, like Aanai Kavuni, Moore Market, Gujilee Bazaar, the Railway station; significantly, areas like Egmore and Mylapore, are notable exceptions, scornful of such excesses.

In its heritage and historic buildings:

When taken-for-granted landmarks are described in a manner that brushes away their formidable antiquity, presenting them in a far younger, more vulnerable form, a certain spice is added to nostalgia. Like when S. Muthiah describes a "small! fortified warehouse called Fort St. George on the three square miles of no man's sand." Chennapatnam or 'Black Town' was established north of the essentially white 'Madraspatnam', so to speak. This area was renamed George Town in 1906 by the then Prince of Wales, later to be crowned George the Vth. Its 850 acres possesses shrines of all faiths – Hindu temples that first appeared from 1640, Jain temples, the 18th century Masjid Mamoor, the Armenian Church, and the Catholic and Protestant churches. A synagogue once existed on Coral Merchant Street.

Chennai's business history is impressive, with names that still stand for a spirit of enterprise – Parry's, Gordon Woodroffe, Shaw Wallance – and the development of the Madras Stock Exchange and the Bank of Madras, which later evolved into the State Bank of India.

In those institutions that best symbolise the city:

No book on Chennai can avoid mention of the leading newspaper, *The Hindu*, with the city's past, the present and the future within 'walking distance of the newspaper', according to Timeri N. Murari. Jawaharlal Nehru's 'old maiden lady', also known as 'Mount Road Mahavishnu', has stood the test of time, changing neither name nor reputation, rock-steady in a swirl of dynamic patterns.

Manohar Devadoss's exquisite pen-and ink drawings, his talent vaulting effortlessly over the growing 'barrier' of blindness, create a sense of awe in the reader, and provide an impeccable source of documentation for the future. The Victorian elegance of Central Station, the Indo-Saracentic blended with Italianate elements of the Presidency College, the impressive *Ripon Building* along with the ethnic majesty of the Kapaleeswarar and Parthasarathy Temples; the sheer beauty of Wesley Church, and the sprawling Thousand Lights mosque complex – all scenes of Madras captured for posterity.

In its devotion to the world of movies:

How can any book dedicated to Chennai ignore one of its most dominant forces – The world of cinema? S. Theodore Baskaran traces the history of cinema in Madras, which began here within two years of its invention in Europe. Till the 1960s, this city was the main production centre for all the four Southern languages in India. Drama companies paved the way for cinema, with the early 'bioscope' and 'kinema' shows moving from various parts of the city towards organsed cinema theatres. These theatres broke through conventions and wronght a reworking of social distinctions. In 1934, the first sound studio of South India, Srinivasa Cinetone, was constructed. And here's an interesting little nugget of information. In 1921, W. Evans, a cinema expert, was sent by the Government of Great Britain, to study and file a report on Indian cinema. With eerie foresight, his report carries the note that this medium could at some point in the future be used for political propaganda!

In its music:

'*Ghana*, the songs from the slums of Chennai', brings alive the rhythm of the city as expressed by migrant labourers, condemned to endlessly toil and spin, dealing with constant crises over food, lifestyle rituals, even systems of faith and values. For them, drugs are commonplace; hunger comes second place to seeing a movie; being branded as criminals and viewed with suspicion is a way of life – elements that have served to create a form of music that symbolises the very identity of Chennai's slums, documenting the lives of the marginalised. According to V. Arasu, *Ghana* songs evolved mainly as songs sung during funeral rites, often accompanied by liquor or ganja. Over the years, hundreds of songs have emerged; many singers have made names for themselves as specialists in this genre. These songs now are a rich source of material to study urbanisation and migration of people. Today, *Ghana* finds a place in modern Tamil cinema music.

In its sports:

Cricket – yet another heartbeat. Ramachandra Guha speaks of turbans, cricket, 'kudumis' and 'namams' in Triplicane, and traces the history of the stalwarts of cricket in Chinnai – M.J. Gopalan, C.R. Rangachari, G. Parthasarathi, S. Venkataraghavan and K. Srikkanth, to name but a few, along with the founding family of cricket, the Buchi Babu Naidu clan and its famous scion, C. Ramaswami, and the 'Tamil speaking Sardar', A.G. Ram Singh, and his two sons A.G. Kripal Singh and A.G. Milkha Singh.

(Continued on Page 7)

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

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

1. Where did the earthquake that triggered the killer tsunami on December 26th have its epicentre?
2. Name the cricketer, the first Indian to score centuries in both innings of a Test and also the captain of India's first official Test triumph, who passed away recently
3. What important decision on civil aviation was taken on December 29th?
4. What scientific first did a kitten, Little Nicky, achieve in the U.S. recently?
5. Who retained the men's National 'A' chess title recently?
6. The arrest of the CEO of which web-portal in an obscene MMS case caused much furore recently?
7. Who is FIFA's World Player of the Year for 2004?
8. Who has been named *Time* magazine's 'Person of the Year' for 2004?
9. Where in India was an 110 foot replica of the Eiffel Tower, made of 30 metric tonnes of steel, inaugurated on December 18th?
10. Which eminent TV journalist's debut feature is titled *Kaya Taran*?

* * *

11. Which place in Tamil Nadu was the worst hit during the recent tsunami?
12. What two Gods does the famed twin-temple Shore Temple in Mamallapuram enshrine?
13. Who recently became the first Tamil Nadu batsman to notch up 6000 runs in Ranji Trophy cricket?
14. Who has won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Tamil for 2004 and for which work?
15. Which famous cultural institution of Chennai was inaugurated at the YMCA building in Esplanade on August 18, 1928?
16. Which Chennai building's original name was 'The Funnels'?
17. Thanks to the City Improvement Trust, the old Government Cattle Farm in Chennai is now called...?
18. The money from the sale of *India House* on Radhakrishnan Salai to S.S. Vasan laid the foundation for which educational institution in Chennai?
19. Arumuga Navalar is credited for putting into print in 1860 which great Tamil literary work for the first time ?
20. In which area in Chennai can you pick up automobile parts of all kinds?

(Answers on page 7)

Bringing Natyam out of the closet

Musical Movements in Madras — IV

The first years of the 20th Century witnessed the spread of English education in South India and with it came new ideas of morality that were popular in Victorian and post-Victorian England. The Devadasi post-tradition came under attack as it was considered a euphemism for prostitution.

The practice of dedicating girls to temples had been an age-old tradition in South India. The women were considered to be the custodians of the arts and, during the reigns of powerful kings, were well looked after by the state. Over the years, with the decline of the princely states, support for the devadasis was wanting and many took to living with patrons who provided them the much-needed financial security. Soon, an entire community (later called the Isai Vellalar) came into existence, with the women taking to music and dance and the men to percussion, *nagaswaram* and *nattuvangam* (teaching and conducting dance). There were several strong devadasi lineages such as those of Veena Dhanammal (with a traced ancestry of eight generations of devadasis), Kanchipuram Dhanakoti Ammal (five generations) and Veena Shanmukhavadivu (four generations). These families boasted of several rare song and dance numbers in their repertoire, which they jealously guarded.

The first blow against the 'nautch girls'(as they were termed by the British) came in 1893, when *The Hindu* began a campaign against them. It held that nautch performances appealed to the baser instincts and condemned the practice of such programmes being held when dignitaries visited the Madras Presidency. The paper appealed to the Governor and the Viceroy to stop attending nautch parties. The Hindu Social Reform Association presented a memorandum to the Governor to this effect. This was, however, turned down. But *The Hindu* continued undaunted and, in April 1894, published an article condemning the holding of a nautch performance at the residence of Dewan Bahadur Venkaswamy Row in Mylapore. It criticised the Bar Association of Tanjore's decision to organise a nautch party in 1898 for the entertainment of the Governor. These moves, however, had a very limited effect and nautch continued unabated.

In 1927, the Council of State in Delhi debated the motion of a Madras member that sought a ban on the practice of dedicating girls to temples as devadasis. The Law Member opposed the move and it was dismissed. But the same year, the Madras Legislative Council passed a resolution recommending that the local government consider legislating against the devadasis. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act was amended in 1929 in order to enable temples to divest the devadasis of their roles and also to take back the *manyam* lands given them. Several women and their families were fored on to the streets. The wealthy patrons who saw the Government's attitude abandoned the women in haste, bringing further financial ruin on most of them. The devadasis now decided to fight back. Under the leadership of Bangalore Nagarathnammal, they banded together to form the Association of Devasasis of Madras Presidency to project their case, but this was to no avail. Ranged against them was Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy, a leading medical practitioner of Madras, who was the daughter of Chandramma, a devadasi of Pudukottai. She was also a member of the Madras Legislature and tabled a motion in the Assembly demanding the banning of dance performances in temples. The Bill led to a bitter fight in the columns of the *The Hindu*. There were also debates elsewhere between the pro-art and the anti-nautch lobbies.

The Music Academy, led by E. Krishna Iyer, its dynamic secretary, decided to protest against the Bill. And it did it in style. Deciding that if the ancient dance form was to be saved, it must be rescued from closeted performances, the Academy organised a public performance of *Sadir* (as it was then known). This first-ever public performance was by the Kalyani daughters on March 15, 1931. On January 31, 1932, the Academy organised a dance performance by Mylapore Gowri Ammal. These events helped to showcase the beauty of the dance to the general public and stemmed the tide of disapproval. On December 28, 1932, the Academy's Experts Committee debated the "Nautch Question", It received unexpected support from G.A. Johnson, then Assistant Editor of the *Madras Mail*, who wrote a letter to Tiger Varadachariar (who was the President of that year's Annual Conference of the Music Academy), stating that if nautch was to be reformed, then the devadasis ought to be trained in alternate professions and that the best way to gather support for the dance form was to get the public to see it.

The Kalyani daughters.

The Academy moved and passed these suggestions as its resolution with as many as 16 members supporting it. These included such eminent personalities as Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar, the well known exponent, C.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the music critic, Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, Professor of History at the Madras University, M.S. Ramaswami Iyer, musicologist, Dewan Bahadur N. Pattabhirama Rao Pantulu, former Dewan of Cochin and father of Rukmini Lakshmipathy, and C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar. It was decided to rename the art form, at the instance of E. Krishna Iyer, as Bharata Natyam.

From 1933, the Academy began organising a series of dance performances, by Balasaraswati, the Kalyani Daughters and Varalakshmi and Saranayaki. The 1933 conference saw further support for the dance form with K. Ponniah Pillai, noted musician and a descendant of the Tanjore Quartet who had contributed immensely to the dance repertoire, becoming its President. That year's conference was noteworthy for its marked emphasis on dance as opposed to music. Between 1933 and 1936, the Academy held more and more dance performances. By 1936, women outside the devadasi community, such as Rukmini Arundale, Lakshmi Sastry, Balachandra and Kalanidhi Narayanan (nee Ganapathi), took to the art and the Academy could take satisfaction in seeing its efforts bearing fruit.

The Academy also represented to the HR & CE Board that it take steps to ensure that *Tevaram*, *Vaishnava Prabandhams*, *Nagaswaram* and Bharata Natyam be continued to be offered as part of daily rituals in temples. The Board acquiesced and ensured the continuance of all forms barring the dance, whose ban from temples was well on its way to becoming law.

With the upper castes taking to dance, the future of Bharata Natyam became secure. But the traditional dance community was left embittered and frustrated. The suceeding generations of the community took great care to hide their past and prevented senior members from teaching their songs and dance pieces to those who wanted to learn them. There was a general feeling of having been let down by the upper castes. The social stigma was hard to bear and soon the entire community of Isai Vellalars exited from classical music and dance. Those who remained were relegated to playing minor roles. The aitinautch movement, thus, marked the beginning of the alienation of a large section of society from classical arts. The next division was to occur within the rank of patrons themselves on the issue of language.

Sriram V.

A big 'Thank You' to 19 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.12.04 and 15.1.05, 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.

— CHENNAI HERITAGE

Rs. 25 : Rajaraman, S; Rs. 50 : Narayanan Swamy V; Thomas J. June; Rs.100 : Krishnamachari, T; Mallikarjunan, M; Panchapagesan, V; Ranganathan, K.V; Shankaran, Vidhya, M.S; Srinivasan, S; Susikaran, M; Unni, Rajani; Rs.150 : Srinivasan, D; Rs.200 : Chenchiah, Rajkumar; Mohandas, Mallika; Raghunathan, T.M; Sankaran, G.; Rs.400 : Diraviam, Leila; Seshadri, P.S (Ahmedabad); Vidya, N;

A city's soul in word & picture

(Continued from page 5)

In its classical arts:

Chennai traditionally comes alive in December, the month of 'Marghazhi', when 'The Season' begins, or as Vaasanthi describes it 'God's own Season'. The city sways and vibrates to the music and dance of a pantheon of talent and achievement. The *sabhas* overflow with *rasikas*; not just the Mylapore *Maamis* and *Maamas* at that; the NRI *rasika* is conspicuous by his presence. The crowd the city attracts is growing larger each year. The December tradition was begun in the 1920s by the Music Academy. By the 1940s, there were at least eight *sabhas*; their numbers are legion today. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a brief lull, but any fear that Carnatic music would become an icon of the past was soon allayed in 1985, with the formation of the Youth Association for Classical Music, when a band of young musicians floated the idea that classical music could be fun and youth-oriented. Vijay Siva, Unni Krishnan, T.M. Krishna, Sanjay Subramanian, Bombay Jaishree are among the young luminaries. A savvy crowd, with global vision and panache, yet with strong uncompromising adherences to tradition, they succeeded in making tradition contemporary.

In its literature:

Chennai/Madras is a city of many firsts – the first trade union in India in 1918, the first May Day celebrations in 1923.

And India's first English city magazine, *Aside*, established in 1977, was the brainchild of Abraham Eraly, former history lecturer in Madras Chistian College. *Aside* was described as a magazine that had the guts not to take itself too seriously, and to acknowledge the irony of its own existence, according to writer Janaki Venkataraman. The very name, said Eraly, conveyed its essence – that of a commentator from the sidelines. He drew inspiration from magazines like the *New Yorker*, bringing in a quality that was part news, part literature, with a rather whimsical non-structured approach to choosing its content. Khushwant Singh predicted it would fold in six months – it lasted 20 years, closing in 1997.

The section on poetry evokes the spirit of the city with images and insights. The stone trees of Balakumaran that spring up even as entire jungle of trees are felled; the posters, cloying, sycophantic, informative, that cover the walls of the city; the gritty sand of the Marina Beach, marketplaces, railway stations, cooking smells that identify ethnic groups, and a city that demarcates areas with cold precision, leaving little room for humanity within. The collection of short stories describes the minutiae within the lives in the city, but it is these little moments that convey the city's essence in a manner that a whole tome of dry research can never hope to accomplish.

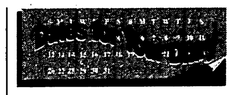
Schizophrenic Chennai

This, then, is Chennai. A city of contrasts, contradictions, the rituals from another era nestling comfortably with the more contemporary 'rituals' of growing urbanisation and globalisation. "The city is schizophrenic", avers C.S. Lakshmi.

And, perhaps, it is. For this is the city where Kalakhestra and Kodambakkam co-exist peacefully; as do Carnatic music and film songs; where a certain natural reticence, even shyness, is contrasted by huge statues, hoardings and cut-outs; where roads flood during the monsoon, while multi-hued plastic pots form colourful snake-like queues in the summer; where passionate literature of crystal-pure classicism is appreciated as much as over-the-top dialogues in movies. The list of contrasting images is infinite.

You, perhaps, have to then conclude that while "Chennai" is the 'given' name (to use local parlance), the city's soul is still "Madras".

Ranjitha Ashok



Till January 30: An exhibition of Paintings by Ravi K. (At DakshinaChitra, Muttukadu.)

Jan. 19: *Isle Awhile – Olive Juice.* An evening featuring a collection of music from the British Isles that has enriched the world of music. Olive Juice was born in 1997. Vijji Cheyyur is on the lead guitar and keyboard. An eighth grader in classical guitar from Trinity College, London, he has been on stage since he was eleven and was the first in Chennai to integrate sequenced music with a live band in performance. Donan Murray, on guitar and vocals, has been a musician with a history of rock, pop and funk bands. At present he is involved in producing experimental music with 'Oikyotaan', a global music band based in Chennai. Anuradha Cheyyur is the lead vocalist. She has been singing for over 15 years and has been the lead vocalist with several bands in Chennai and Delhi. Olive Juice will be joined for this conert by the inimitable Keith Peters on the bass guitar and Rahul Gopal on drums and percussion. And, perhaps, a guest artiste on the flute and the sax. What a combo! (At the British Council.)

January 20-24: Workshop for illustrators conducted by Christian Cailleaux, a French illustrator. He has conducted workshops on illustration at the Alliance Francaise in about 15 countries in Africa (at Alliance Francaise).

Jan. 21 and 22: *Workshop on Art Appreciation* — a 2-day workshop on appreciation of art by Indran, art critic. (At the British Council.)

Jan. 24: Matmatah, one of the leading rock bands in France. Their Celtic origins inspire their music (At IIT's *Saarang Festival.*)

Jan. 28: Jean-Claude Perrier, a literary journalist with *Livres-Hebdo* and *Figaro*, and author of 15 books, will present his latest book: *André Malraux et la tentation de l'Inde* published by Gallimard. (At Alliance Francaise, 6.30 p.m.)

Jan. 29-Feb. 12: An exhibition showcasing select etchings and paintings of Siddhartha Ghosh. (At Forum Art Gallery.)

February 1-March 10: *Vasantha Vizha* and Children's Mela at DakshinaChitra. It will host new activities, exciting demonstrations and games, in addition to many other traditional activities, like *Puliattam*, *Silambuattam*, *Snake Charmer*, *Boom Boom Madu*, *Children's Theatre*, *Bullock Cart Ride*, *Sandhai* (a village market) and a guided tour around the centre.

Answers to Quiz

1. Just northwest of Banda Aceh on the island of Sumatra; 2. Vijay Samuel Hazare; 3. Indian private airlines, with 5 years' experience, can operate on all international routes except to the Gulf countries; 4. It's the first cloned-to-order pet sold and cost about Rs. 22 lakh; 5. S.S. Ganguly; 6. Avnish Bajaj of Baazee.com; 7. Brazil and Barcelona's Ronaldinho; 8. The U.S. President, George W. Bush; 9. Nicco Park, Kolkata; 10. Sashi Kumar.

* * *

11. Nagapattinam; 12. Somaskanda and a reclining Vishnu; 13. S. Sarath; 14. Tamilanban for *Vanakkam Valluva*; 15. The Music Academy; 16. Satyamurthy Bhavan; 17. Nandanam Extension; 18. Madras Institute of Technology; 19. *Thirukkural*; 20. Pudupet.

HIGHER EDUCATION – PROBLEMS OF GROWTH

(Continued from page 1)

have been several reviews of the university system – especially after Independence – and many significant observations and recommendations to strengthen the system have been made.

At present we have about 265 university level institutions (excluding many operating as universities under notification by some State Governments) and about 13,150 colleges. But there are many nagging concerns about their roles and performance. Many of our universities and colleges of repute have lost their pre-eminent positions. Some are oscillating between precarious limits. Only a few manage to maintain their status and dignity in an environment of complex socioeconomic pressures and worldwide changes in approaches to the educational processes. It has therefore become necessary to identify those attributes which distinguish a first-rate institution from a mediocre one.

Socioeconomic relations

The interrelationships between economic and social development and educational attainments are well recognised. The state of evolution of the knowledge and skill base is highly dependent on the opportunity for higher levels of education. Hence it is imperative to recognise the development links of the educational chain from kindergarten to university (and note) the considerable differentials in the development of the higher education system among different States and regions of India.

The total enrolments as well as the enrolment of women in the higher education system as a proportion of the population of each State in India show considerable differentials among the States and regions indicating the comparatively serious shortfalls in the educational opportunities in many States. These differentials are also attributed to the extent of urbanisation of the States as well as the proportion of the population below the poverty line. Generally, the States with higher enrolment in universities and colleges are those with higher ratios of urban population and lower percentage of population below poverty line.

Viewed in the light of per capita income, most States that show above-average enrolment are also those with per capita incomes above the national average. But some with lower-than-national average per capita have better enrolment than the national average, indicating the importance given by them to higher education, while many States with higher-than-national per capita income show significantly lower levels of enrolment indicating lower priority for university and college education in these states.

Growth pattern

For nearly four decades after Independence, the higher education system registered only a moderate growth rate. The growth was characterised by the expansion of the intake capacity of the existing institutions and opening of only a few new colleges and universities. These were mostly institutions fully or substantially funded by the governments of the States or the Centre. This was the period when the scope for career opportunities in the private sector was severely limited.

Since the late 1950s deliberate efforts were undertaken to provide higher education of much wider relevance compatible with the global trends in education, keeping in view the future needs of the country in the public as well as private sectors. In the latter half of this phase many new disciplines were started for the anticipated needs. Many graduates went abroad for higher studies and some returned with advance qualifications to engage in teaching and research or to participate in some of the new technological ventures, such as space and atomic energy.

In response to the growing demand for technical education during the 1980s and 1990s, there was a much higher growth rate in the number of technical institutions and in their intake capacities than the previous four decades. Since the governments were not able to meet this demand, the private sector investments were permitted in self-financing mode. The increase in demand arose as a result of higher enrolments in the high schools and the aspirations of increasing number of first generation learners for higher education as a means of upward social mobility and economic security.

These institutions functioned essentially under the conventional curricular structure, though many new disciplines were introduced in response to the emerging demands. For academic purposes, these were affiliated to various general universities or to the specially constituted Technological Universities in some states. At the same time the institutions started earlier by state governments languished for want of adequate funds for development of facilities or filling of vacancies of the teaching staff and their quality deteriorated rapidly, in spite of the overwhelming preferences of the students for government institutions, partly for their affordability and historical reputation. The initiation of the accreditation system by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) helped to introduce quality dimensions to many of these institutions.

The non-availability of adequate number of competent teaching staff began to emerge as a serious problem greatly undermining the quality of education. This alone should have alerted the policy makers to undertake a serious introspection of the policies for the growth and quality of academic institutions. On the other hand, the situation was allowed to escalate in an uncontrolled fashion with much steeper increase in the number of institutions and their intake capacities under many untenable considerations. The number of new engineering colleges increased from 838 in 2001 to 1265 in 2003. Of a total intake capacity of about 3,00,000 in 2003 in engineering colleges of India, the southern region alone, consisting of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Goa, has 1,39,527. The next largest are in Southwest and Western regions.

A serious implication of this growth relates to unfilled capacity in these institutions. Due to the proliferation of engineering colleges there is a sharp decrease in the number of students seeking admission to polytechnics, which are facing survival problems. The aggravation of the unemployment situation for trained technical manpower has serious social and economic implications. As a result of high unemployment levels, many graduates tend to accept lower paid jobs incompatible with their qualifications. The engineering jobs tend to be undervalued. Many students from India, disenchanted with the present state of technical education, its access and quality, have started enrolling in programmes offered by several foreign institutions in India or abroad at considerable cost, even though many such programmes are far inferior to the ones offered by some of our better government or self-financing colleges.

The unplanned growth in engineering colleges has led to poor performance of students in the university examinations. The performance of students from the various engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu illustrates this phenomenon.

Only five colleges in 2003-4 had a pass percentage better than 70%, 43 had a pass record between 50 and 70%, 97 between 30 and 50% and the remainder, 84, had less than 30% passes.

In order to prevent such dismal situation it will be necessary for the Universities concerned in co-operation with the AICTE to put the engineering colleges with less than 30% pass rate on probation and deny any request form them for additional intake. If their performance does not improve at least to the level of the average pass rate of the concerned university within two years, they should be advised that their approval by AICTE and affiliation to the university would be withdrawn. Such regulation are urgently needed. — (Courtesy: *Business Mandate*, the journal of the Madras Management Association)

(To be concluded)

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