WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MUSINGS

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Oh, they're only waiting to be seated at your table, but don't let that bother you, Sir...just relax and enjoy your meal!

Guess who's...(sorry!), where we're going for dinner?

Here's a piece of advice to all those who are about to begin constructing new homes: Do not bother building kitchens.

This applies to both individual homes and those that shoot brightly to the sky over the ruins of old buildings, ignoring a couple of small, sad groundbound facts — lack of parking facilities, and depleting water tables.

Seriously, though, don't waste time and creativity trying to carve out unique hearts-ofhomes. A small counter and a couple of shelves will suffice.

For, judging by the crowds that throng our restaurants of all shapes, sizes, cuisines and priceranges, and by the number of food supply outlets that have mushroomed all over, Chennai prefers to dine out these days.

Home cooking might have to be declared an endangered form of social activity, while standing around in restaurants waiting for a table and trying to guilt those who are already dining into hurrying up is becoming common practice.

This movement gained momentum when the last bastion fell. When the generation that traditionally sniffed in contempt at 'outside meals' discovered the joys of fast food, old eating habits collapsed with a final groan. Three generations humbling out of one vehicle, arguing about what to eat is quite a common sight today.

One side effect: Some of that bequeathed kitchenware is starting to look distinctly cobwebby, and appears to have grown roots.

Ranjitha Ashok

Adyar eco-park plans under discussion

(by Sashi Nair)

Dlans for how the sensitive Advar Creek and wetland area should be restored and an 'Adyar eco-park' be created have been submitted to the Corporation of Chennai by a citizens' group comprising representatives of interested NGOs and public-spirited individuals. The group's proposal not only attempts to implement the orders of the Madras High Court (see box on page 2), it also aims at providing a plan developed by the citizens themselves.

"We are basically looking at the coastal ecology, the role of wetlands in a city and the restoration of coastal wetlands. We identified broad contours of how a wetland can be restored. Our plan is not only to restore the ecology but also to raise important questions such as 'Why is it important to protect the area and what can be done to generate urban civic consciousness about such environmental issues'?" a spokesperson of the group told Madras Musings.

Madras Musings understands that a group from Auroville, which has been connected with the Pichadikulam project and which has proven experience in afforestation and conservation of ecology, is to be associated with the proposed Adyar ecopark project and will take note of the citizens' suggestions. "The project is still at a conceptual stage, but we would like the project to be linked with the Adyar Estuary and Adyar River and not be taken up as a quickfix solution," stresses the spokesperson of the citizens'

The restoration, the group's proposal explains, will be an attempt to return a degraded ecosystem to a close approximation

of its former natural potential. The action of restoration is to "return its previous stage, recover its formal state, regain its

(Continued on Page 2)



Adyar Creek — where the eco-park is to be developed. (Photograph by REFLECTIONS.)

Making Chennai a city of gardens

A aking Madras a city of IVI gardens', a headline said in The Hindu of February 29, 1948, reporting the inauguration of the Flower show of the Corporation of Madras at My Ladye's Gardens by K. Chandramouli, Minister for Local Administration, who said, 'Flower shows enable people to develop their sense of beauty and finer sensibilities'. Distressingly, in Madras that is Chennai, My Ladye's Garden itself, leave alone its flower shows, is a distant memory that rarely touches public consciousness in Chen-

(by Shobha Menon)

O.T. Ravindran, a horticulturist in Chennai for the last 60 years, remembers, "My Ladye's Gardens was one of the best designed gardens I've seen-with well laid-out pond, lawns, trees, plants and exhibition areas. Popular every year was the lovely flower show conducted by the Corporation of Madras over four days, competitions for schools etc. A dynamic Vittalnathan, then Garden Superintendent, managed it all efficiently with an even more efficient team of workers."

But does its vanishing mean that Chennai can never be 'a city of gardens'? "It hasn't been known for its public gardens mainly because people here are not so 'garden conscious' as in Bangalore, for instance. Water scarcity has been a major reason. Only a few old institutions with British connections, like the MCC, Madras Club and Race Club, still continue to have garden 'magic'. For most citydwellers, at this point, horticulture is just another way to earn money. Where is the time to see the plant grow and watch the magic of its blooms?" muses Ravindran.

G. Dattatri, former Chief Urban Planner with the CMDA, who moved to Madras early in the 1950s, says, "There is a definite need for such green lungs in crowded Chennai. But appreciation for gardens, I feel, hasn't been much of a part of Chennai's culture. My Ladye's Garden, that began to deteriorate when the Zoo was shifted in the 1970s, need not have been allowed to run to seed thereafter. Like Panagal Park which aroused so much interest when it was opened but came to be neglected once the area became a busy commercial hub. Naturally, anything unused is

(Continued on Page 8)

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

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 (including quoting your Mailing List number). We look forward to an enthusiastic response from readers old and new.

— THE EDITOR

Adyar eco-park plans under discussion

(Continued from page 1)

processes, and repair its damage." When this wetland is restored, it will retain water and release it during drier periods, and protect stream banks and shore lines from erosion.

Restoration as an eco-park will also provide some recreational benefits. It will provide other social, environmental and economic advantages as well and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Adyar River system. But converting the wetland purely into a 'recreational' park will destroy the natural potential of the eco-system, the group cautions.

To develop the Adyar Estuary and Creek into an eco-park, the focus, the group points out, must be on eco-restoration of the estuary, biodiversity restoration in the estuary, and adapting it to environmental education. As components of environmental education, the group suggests that environmental trails, such as an Estuarine Trail, Creek Trail, Mud-flat Trail, Island Trail and the Barmouth Trail with boardwalks and pavement walks, could first be laid out in the park. Watch towers with fixed binoculars, viewing or photographing points along the boardwalks, self-educating panels at strategic points can all also contribute to environmental education. An aquarium and museum for the local flora and fauna could be maintained for education and research.

The Adyar Creek, with its natural attributes as a component of a once-pristine eco-system, the group states, must be seen in the larger context. Especially, as there is still excessive dependence on groundwater as an alternate source, the loss of such a critical natural feature will in the long run destabilise the city.

the only storm-water drainage for the whole of South Chennai. The river originates from the run-off waters from the charge of sewage and industrial paddy fields irrigated by the large Chembarambakkam tank in the Sriperumbudur Taluk. After meandering for about 40 km, it opens into the Bay of

Bengal, just north of the Theosophical Society in Adyar.

The main estuary is about 1.5 km long, from its mouth upto the Thiru Vi Ka Bridge, and the head of the estuary is further up, near the Boat Club. West of the Thiru Vi Ka Bridge, the mud-flats with sparse marshvegetation, fragmented by shallow saline streams, provide the ideal habitats for the rich muddwelling biodiversity, which is the chief food of the water birds. Adjacent to the Boat Club, the estuary is deepest and hence used for boat races.

Ecologically, based on its pattern of fresh and salt water circulation and mixing processes, the Adyar Estuary can be classified as a 'stratified estuary' or a 'salt-wedge estuary', where the dominant tidal influence, which extends to about four kilometres from the mouth. meets the feeble currents of the upstream freshwaters, roughly at the Boat Club.

Despite its small area, the biodiversity of the Adyar Estuary is quite rich. Phytoplankton is represented by at least 30 species, and is rich during the premonsoon season. Zooplankton is rich during monsoon and post-monsoon seasons. The dominance of the cyclopoid species is indicative of its polluted nature. Flora is rich in algal bloom and their periphyton, particularly during the summer

There are about 175 bird species in the Adyar Estuary, of which 73 species are migrants, while 52 breed in the estuary

There are three fishing villages on the northern and southern banks of the Adyar estuarine-mouth, and they fish occasionally in the estuary also.

The Adyar Estuary has been rapidly shrinking in water spread area and depth, due to short-sighted reclamation of The Adyar River serves as land for constructions. Degradation of the quality of water in the Estuary due to colossal upstream pollution by the dispesticides, detergent and biomedical wastes, has been alarming in the recent times, causing declining biodiversity, both in species and populations.

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 - THE EDITOR

'Protected Area' status sought since 1985

In 1985, the World Wildlife Fund-India's Tamil Nadu State Office submitted a proposal to the Tamil Nadu Government seeking the grant of a 'protected area" status to the Adyar Creek and Estuary area, since it was not just an area with excellent estuarine biodiversity and a rare healthy estuarine wetland, but also a haven for several species of birds, including migratory species. However, at the time, it was felt by the State Government that as there was very minimal developmental activity in the area, a "ban on hunting" would suffice. Subsequently, a notification to that effect was ssued under Section 37 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, for a period of five years, which was renewed for further five years. The "ban on hunting" was primarily meant to protect the birds that regularly flocked the estuarine area.

In 1993, the Government of Tamil Nadu decided to construct an auditorium and memorial in nonour of Dr. Ambedkar on the Adyar Creek wetland. The proposed site was a five-acre 'plot' of lowlying land, which formed part of the fragile Adyar Creek. The Consumer Action Group (CAG), Exnora International and the Environmental Society of Madras filed a writ petition before the Madras High Court challenging this decision. In the petition, the petitioners argued that they were opposed to the selection of one of Chennai's few remaining natural heritage and ecologically fragile areas as the site for the proposed construction.

In a landmark judgement protecting wetlands, Justice Kanakaraj of the Madras High Court alowed the construction of the memorial to an extent of only 1.50 acres at one end of the site identified. Importantly, the Court directed the government "to remove the sands spread on the western side of the said five-acre plot and restore the said area to its original position" and restrained the government "from constructing an auditorium or any other type of building" in the area.

Unhappy with this order, the State Government filed an appeal in the Division Bench of the Madras High Court. Pending the writ appeal, the State Government went ahead with the construction of the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial on 0.75 acre and utilised the remaining 0.75 acre for provision of lawns and landscaping.

Around the same time, the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) came up with a proposal to develop the Adyar Creek area into a "wooded area" proposing a budget of Rs. 7.50 crore for developmental work, including various concrete constructions and artificial ponds for poating, etc. After studying the CMDA proposal, CAG wrote to the CMDA stating that if the motive was indeed to protect and conserve the area, the Adyar Estuary and Creek eco-system did not require concrete construction and development to be carried out at such a high cost. As an alternative, CAG suggested that the entire area be declared a "Sanctuary" or "National Park" under the relevant provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and that the area be handed over to the Forest Department. In response, the CMDA withdrew the "wooded area" proposal in April 1997. In Sep-

tember 1997, the CMDA confirmed that they were taking steps to hand over the lands to the Forest Department.

February 16-28, 2005

Around the same time, CAG noticed new construction activity taking place close to the Adyar Estuary. During a massive signature campaign coorganised by CAG, Exnora Naturalists' Club WWF-India, Madras Naturalists Society and Environmental Society of Madras, over 3,000 Chennai residents asked the State Government to declare the area "protected" and voiced strong objections to the repeated destruction of the Adyar Creek and

On a writ petition that followed this signature campaign, the Madras High Court on 13.11.1997 directed the State Department of Environment to consider declaring the sensitive eco-system around the Adyar River, Estuary and Creek as a Sanctuary or National Park under the Wildlife Protection

On 2.4.1998, the State Department of Environment convened a meeting to take steps pursuant to the order of the High Court. The meeting concluded with specific directions being given to different agencies to expedite the declaration of the area as "protected" under the Wildlife Protection

Soon after, the writ appeal filed by the State Government against the order of Justice Kanakaraj in the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial case came up for argument before a Division Bench of the Madras High Court. The High Court by an order dated 16.4.2001 dismissed the appeal filed by the State Government and also directed the State Government to ensure that the order of the single Judge "be followed scrupulously". In other words, the Division Bench upheld the directions to the State Government to "remove the sands spread on the western side of the said five acre plot and restore the said area to its original position... The entire low-lying wetland ...shall be maintained and preserved as low lying wetlands."

The High Court also dismissed the State Government's request for additional land "to plant trees adjacent to the memorial" stating that "if the Government wants to plant trees, they have to raise the level of the ground and thereafter they have to carry out the horticultural activities... The purpose of planting the trees in our view is to have control over the said place, ultimately, the purpose can be changed to their desire."

Since 2001, CAG has made several requests to various Government departments asking if steps are being taken to restore the Adyar Creek and Estuary area to its earlier wetland position. Unfortunately, there has been no response from any of the government departments.

Finally, in August 2004, CAG noticed that some vegetation clearing was being carried out in the Advar Creek area. Seeking informations on the scope of these activities, CAG wrote to the Commissioner, Corporation of Chennai, who confirmed that an 'eco-park' was being developed in the area in conformance with Madras High Court order.

sion.

A big 'Thank You' to 67 of you We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.1.05 and 15.02.05, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, Madras Musings, have already received. We thank all of them for

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We do not have the staff to mail substitute copies, when copies are lost in transmis-

THE EDITOR

More thoughts on the tsunami

February 16-28, 2005

READERS

Tamil, not Telugu

arnatic music lovers are in-

Udebted to V. Sriram for his

5-part series on 'Musical Move-

ments in Madras'. I would, how-

ever, like to point out a small fac-

tual error. In the opening para of

Part 5. (MM, February 1st), it is

stated that the musical composer

Syama Sastry's mothertongue was

Telugu. It was Tamil (vide Prof. R.

Srinivasan's (of Trivandrum) book

Some aspects of Indian culture (pub-

lished by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).

According to the author, Syama

Sastry was a Vadama (Smartha

Iyer) of the northern sect. Syama

Sastry has also composed a few

songs in Tamil. It is true that his

ancestors migrated to Tamil Nadu

from Andhra Pradesh (from

Cumbum in Kurnool District), but

Besant Nagar, Chennai 600 090

T enjoyed Ranjitha Ashok's 'A

Llily's soul in word & picture'

(MM, January 16th). She brought

alive the essence and soul of life in

Madras that is so inaptly renamed

Chennai. What I found most poi-

gnant was to recall how 'bicyclable'

Madras once was. I remember my

bicycle rides back from Vasant

Vihar, the headquarters of the

'Cuddalore Illam', 3, Link Road

Kottur Gardens, Chennai 600 085

A city's soul in word & picture' (MM, January 16th) was a

thought-provoking piece with ex-

As citizens of unique Madras,

we should be really proud of its

many-splendoured achievements

and it is our bounden duty to pre-

Readability,

please

As letters from readers

increase, we are receiving more

and more handwritten letters,

many of them in a hand so small

and illegible or large and scrawled

as to be unreadable. Often this

leads to our discarding a letter,

particularly if some part of it is

If you wish us to consider your

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your letters more favourably by

making them more legible for us.

Many readers also try to fill

Please help us to consider

THE EDITOR

Dear Readers.

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they were Tamil-speaking.

'Bicyclable' Madras

o the views on the tsunami — and after (MM, February 1st), I would like to add the following:

It should be remembered that earthquakes in the ocean-bed are not the sole cause for generating tsunami waves though, generally, tsunamis are generated only by submarine earthquakes registering more than 8 on the Richter scale. Tsunamis can also occur due to volcanic eruptions in the ocean, landslides and perhaps even asteroid impact leading to the displacement of tons of seawater.

Tsunami is a new phenomenon in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the worst affected in the recent devastation, and it is quite natural that this region was not prepared to face a calamity of this

The Pacific region, on the other hand, has recorded many submarine earthquakes of high magnitude, generating tsunamis affecting the western coast of the United States of America, Canada, Chile, Taiwan, Japan etc. in the last century. In this region, earthquakes, volcanoes and mountains are concentrated in the plate margins, where two plates collide, split apart or slide past one another. As tsunamis are a common feature in the Pacific region, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre was established in Honolulu, Hawaii, in the

Around 7 per cent of the population lives along the coast. It is necessary to take other constructive measures to reduce the damage to the coast and environment. It is imperative that the coastal regulation rules are strictly followed and no construction or human habitation is allowed for a distance of at least 500 metres from the sea coast. Development disturbs sand dunes leading to beach erosion. An eroded beach front is more prone to the onslaught of tsunami waves. The reduction in the thickness of the sand dunes also reduces the availability of good quality groundwater. There are numerous instances along the East Coast Road and the Old Mahabalipuram Road, where the quality of groundwater depends on the presence or absence of sand dunes. Mangroves and casuarina plantations along the coast act as natural barriers to ocean waves. It was recently reported that the Pichavaram area in Cuddalore District was not affected much due to the presence of mangrove swamps. Shrimp farming in Nagapattinam and Nellore Districts along the coast had also added to the environmental degradation. In the Nagapattinam area, besides the damage to men and material, vast tracts of land have been rendered uncultivable due to the salt water intrusion.

Some sample surveys conducted along the East coast in Chenna on the quality of groundwater in the post-tsunami period have not revealed any marked deterioration in the quality of the water. Detailed surveys may throw more light on this aspect. The quality of groundwater is already undergoing a change for the worse in the Chennai Metropolitan area due to over-exploitation and sewage pollution. This is, however, an altogether different subject for consideration.

The Sri Lankan coast bore the major brunt, saving the Ramanathapuram and Tuticorin coast from major ravage. Otherwise the damage would have been enormous on the Tamil Nadu coast. Hence we have a lot to learn from tsunami effect and take long-term remedial measures to protect the coastal environment. In this context, the proposed exploratory drilling work by ONGC in the Sundarbans National Park, home to a wealth of fauna and flora and the largest mangrove forest in the world, calls for wider debate and introspection on the effects of the drilling and developmental activities on the fragile ecosystem. We can only hope a proper decision is taken by the authorities, keeping in view the lessons learnt from the recent havoc.

K.M. Vedapuri AP100, 12th Street, Second Sector, K.K. Nagar, Chennai 600 078

Post-tsunami suggestions

Theyre all gone now, theres not anything more the sea can do to me. - J.M. Synge in Riders to the Sea. ecember 26, 2004 was the saddest day in recent South Indian

history. The sea did its worst. We must appreciate the numerous spontaneous humanitarian acts of people from all over India and abroad who brought succor to Nagapattinam. But we must also think of the future. Here are some

suggestions: What reduced the force of the waves was mangroves, casuarina trees, coconut palms etc. on the frontline of the sea. Therefore, Government should go ahead with vigorous afforestation on the sea-coast with these species.

Sand dunes on the sea-coast should not be disturbed. (In the present instance, sand dunes saved villages like North/South

Pilgrim centres on the sea-coast, like Velankanni and Nagore, should have dykes built on the seashore to prevent sea erosion and to provide protection from waves. The 2004 tsunami caused the highest death toll in Velankanni, with Pattinacheri, fishermen's hamlets in Nagore, coming next. Nagapattinam also requires sea

Disaster management must be fast. During the recent calamity, two valuable days were lost initially. With all available means of modern communication, better service could have been rendered



A Cuddalore scene after the tsunami. (Picture by R. SOUNDARARAJAN)

in the affected areas. The Army's help could have been sought on Day One itself to tackle the situation. (The decomposed bodies beneath the debris were removed only on succeeding days by municipal sanitary workers from 23 municipalities and by voluntary organisations like Kaviri, Thanjavur. This could have been easily done by the Army earlier.)

• Political parties must sink their differences and extend support to governmental efforts in all such calamities.

 When building new houses for the victims (for which many NGOs have come forward), the provisions of Coastal Regulation Zone Act must be strictly complied with

Owing to its geographical position, Nagapattinam has been the target of many cyclones and now the tsunami. Of the 77 villages on 167 km long sea-coast of Nagapattinam District, 17 were virtually washed away this time, the fisherfolk being the most affected. When a cyclone warning centre was to be established here, the scheme was hijacked elsewhere. The regional tsunami early warning centre now proposed must be set up in Nagapattinam for the benefit of the people in India, Sri Lanka and neighbouring countries.

> R. Soundararajan 1/46, Sivasakti Nagar, Nagapattinam 611 003

The tsunami offers an opportunity

Chobha Menon has taken the right approach (MM, February 1st), by meeting the experts and giving readers their diverse views. The point made by Dr. Paul P. Appasamy as to whether traditional fishing can continue as in the past or modernising the operation is necessary needs in-depth study. What is important is to introduce systems which improve the existing standard of living.

For example, the per capita fish catch (1985-90 Seventh Plan) for Tamil Nadu was 5.57 kg, A.P. 3.2 kg, Orissa 3.24 kg, but Pondicherry stood out at 40 kg. On the West Coast, Kerala recorded 19 kg and interestingly, the Andaman and Nicobar islands stood at 83.3 kg and Lakshadeep at 180 kg. Interestingly, West Bengal marine fish per capita is 1.23 kg but they catch 8 kg. from the freshwaters of Ganga Latest data, it available, could throw more light.

Experts on marine fish production feel that 20 to 25 million tonnes a year should be the ultimate target which India should produce. Achieving even half of this could put India at the top of the world's fishing nations.

It is upto the Government to turn tsunami disaster into an opportunity to improve the living standards of fisherfolk by encouraging mechanised fishing processing and marketing the catch and giving them equity participation. The Asian Development Bank could well provide suitable plans, funding and supervision, if the Government so desires. Abroad, business groups are formed in a community and they are given equity in joint ventures upto 15 to 25%, government having 25 to 50% and the balance held by financial institutions.

K.V.S. Krishna

2A, Parkland Apartments, Kamala Bai Street, T. Nagar, Chennai 17

Musing on Chennai's peril

The sunami tragedy showed how unprepared the State is for catastrophes. The wonder is that even after such a calamity, the Government has not taken note of the Damocles Sword hanging over Chennai. The following facts are staring us in the face and, if ignored, the casualty will be the people's welfare:

1. Underground tension is always increasing because of collision between the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

2. The byproducts of earthquakes in the environs are tsunamis lashing the coast, as we have witnessed.

3. Since 2002, Chennai has been promoted from Zone II to Zone III in the country's seismic map, making it as geologically unstable as

Bhui/Ahmedabad. 4. The buildings of the common folk, especially in old areas like George Town, are particularly vulnerable as they are built side by

side without intervening space on ribbon-narrow streets. 5. The chlorides in the sea air deteriorate the building beams, and sulphates in the soil weaken the foundation over a period of, say,

forty years.

Hence, by way of preventive vigilance, the Chennai Corporation should encourage houseowners to have their buildings, over 50 years old, inspected and recertified regarding fitness for habitation or, it found unsafe, issue sanction for demolition. But what we find in Chennai are "regularisation schemes" in which building owners who have flouted every rule are enabled to ratify the irregularities by paying a hefty fee. It is very sad that moral values have become as decrepit as the buildings themselves.

C.G. Prasad

9, C.S. Mudali Street, Kondithope, Chennai 600 079

MADRAS MUSINGS February 16-28 February 16-28 **MADRAS MUSINGS**

Broken pieces of a glorious past

The Royapuram Railway Station.

member Royapuram best.

The world of travel and **1** transport today is dynamic. gizmo-ridden and submerged in techno-jargon. Yet, somehow, none of this glittering sound and fury can re-create the enigmatic romance of the railway train.

A poignant wail of an engine whistle in the still of the night in the middle of nowhere, the clang-clang of a train being waved on its way through tiny nameless stations that lie quietly on paths strung between huge cities, the majesty of delicious names like 'Great Indian Peninsula', that bring to mind visions of vast, as yet unexplored, vistas — this is the stuff of fables of old.

Right in the middle of the ever-increasing hustle-bustle that is Chennai is a little chunk of such history and heritage the Royapuram railway station, crumbling and disappearing even as we narrate.

The Royapuram Railway Station, the first station to be built in South India, was declared open by Governor Lord Harris on June 28, 1856. It was the Madras terminus of the first railway line built in South India and linked the capital with Arcot (Wallajhapet) near Ranipet. In his speech, Lord Harris congratulated the Madras Railway Company, its Manager, Major Jenkins, and all who had worked from 1853 on this particular project. Lord Harris looked forward to additional miles of track all the way to the West Coast. Two trains, each with coaches made by Simpson & Co., the leading coach builders of the day, inaugurated the service. One of them carried the Governor and 300 Europeans, for whom a magnificent dinner had been laid out at the end of the line. The other coach, bearing the 'Indian Invitees', as the report delicately puts it, traversed a shorter distance, apparently. The event appears to have been widely covered by the Press, with The Illustrated London News giving graphic descriptions of the inaugural train passing through the arid plains of the Carnatic. Many, who had gathered along the way, cheering and clapping, were seeing a train for the first time. There appears to have been plenty of excitement, and some rather comic moments of panic, with cattle and herdsmen alike fleeing in terror from the fire-

The Royapuram Station is the second major railway station to have been built in the country,

breathing monsters.

and is considered the oldest surviving one. In limited use today, it is frequented by a few suburban trains and a rather bit more freight traffic. Decrepit Ionic pillars in faded yellow-pink look down upon you, still bearing themselves high with pathetic pride — after all, this was a station once described as being "very elegant and most superbly

Railway stations in the past were grand affairs, built to reflect the imperial power of the Raj while keeping in mind the special complexities of the rather diverse nature of the passenger traffic of the time. They essentially symbolised the civic and admin-plex. istrative power of the Empire.

The Maratha and Southern Madras Railway, or "M and SM", succeeded to the ownership of the Madras Railway Company and to its headquarters in Royapuram. It was the M & SM

• by **RANJITHA ASHOK**

that G.S.A. Saldanha, who retired in 1975 as a General Manager, Indian Railways, and Director of Traffic on the Railway Board, joined in 1941. It was in the Royapuram railway station that he spent several years of his

Saldanha disclosed that field training back then meant handson working on every job that the officers would later supervise, and so he's run the gamut of posts, including that of ticket collector and working in cabins with signalmen. Saldanha's first training was in Royapuram, and his first posting in 1943, after training, was as Assistant Traffic Superintendent, also at Royapuram.

His later postings took him all over the country. There is a touch of romance, adventure, and an anticipation of the unexpected to life in the Railways, says Saldanha. He speaks fondly of travelling by coaches and saloons, of his journeys on trolleys, meeting so many people, visiting out-of-the-way places. In his 34year career, he had 17 transfers, but the family felt no strain as all they had to do was "stow stuff away in the wagons and not even pack it". His postings kept bringing him back to Madras, and he retired here.

In Madras he lived in Rostrevor, and in the Haddow's Road complex when he was General Manager, South Zone, but he and his family even today re-

Royapuram station, Saldanha and his daughter, Marina Mathias, look around, trying to spot landmarks. They speak of 'huge gates' to the station that are no longer there.

As we drive up, struggling to

find the right approach into the

"Totally transformed" is their verdict. They point out places where level crossings have now been replaced by flyovers. The surroundings were open ground and you could see the sea. That is no longer possible, as the harbour has crept up, with the docks coming closer, bringing changes to the Royapuram com-Former Dutch palaces, ad-

joining the station, were converted into both housing areas and offices, with residential quarters upstairs and two floors of offices downstairs. Marina recalls living in one of those palaces, and recognises a part of a crumbling ruin as a former home. Nothing remains of the first palace, except mute gashes on the ground, deep furrows that indicate a foundation that once was. The second building, a part of it torn down, is occupied, although in ruins. Marina recalls climbing three flights of particularly steep stairs to reach her home. Her mother often joked that while milk would be delivered thick and pure at the bottom of the staircase, it would become mysteriously watered down by the time it reached its destination three floors up. The stairs are there, but in complete disrepair. All woodwork in the old days was made of 'high cost Burma teak',

they told me. Their home had huge terraces, and the "children would be darkened by the sun by the time they turned in in the evening," laughs Saldanha. Marina recognises areas where other children once lived. "My friend lived here. We used to go to | school together."

There was a huge freight yard that has disappeared now. Saldanha describes how, as traffic demands increased, Royapuram began to lose its importance, even as Central Station gained stature as the premier terminus for the city.

Royapuram gradually became more about freight and suburban trains. As we walk through the remaining building, huge freight trains go by, drawing brightly coloured containers from all over

(Continued on Page 6)

My earliest memory of a MS concert is, I am afraid, knowledged; and her technical competence had always been of rather a matter of shame, to me, a high order. It was as though the I mean. I slept through a large world of Carnatic music woke up part of it. It was 1940 and as a to the realisation that this all-Inschoolboy of twelve, I had been dia figure was also a really great persuaded by my father to listen performer of classical music.

to music concerts in the Rasika

Ranjana Sabha of Mylapore, of

which he was a member. The

ticket was made over to me, we

lived in North Mada Street and

so it became routine to go to the

Sabha. The first concert I went

to was by Semmangudi and soon

thereafter came the performance

of MS. I was still a babe in the

musical wood and I dropped off

halfway through the concert to

be woken up by the stronger

sounds of the tani avartanam!

will never forget the mixture of

kindness and pity in the smile of

the old gentleman sitting next to

In the late 1930s and early

1940s, MS was famous both as a

musician and as an actress. But,

even though she had become a

regular performer in the major

sabha-s, there was a tendency,

among the middle level male

musicians and orthodox music

lovers, to be somewhat conde-

scending about her musical com-

petence. The alienation from the

Music Academy in the wake of

the Tamil Isai movement in 1942

Meera marked a watershed.

Filmed in Tamil in 1945 and in

Hindi in 1947, it catapulted her

to fame at the all-India level. The

association with Gandhiji, the

bhajan-s that had universal ap-

peal — Hari tum haro at the time

of the Mahatma's death and

thereafter — made her a larger

than life figure. The rift with the

I am not suggesting that this

is what helped her to pre-emi-

nence in the Carnatic musical

Academy came to an end.

did not help either.

Remembering M.S.

a great musician

One gets the feeling that today there is greater awareness of her devotional music, subrabhatam, bhajan-s et al. It would, however, be a pity if this were to mask the excellence of her classical music output. Efforts should be made to discover recordings not yet in the public domain whether with AIR or sabha-s or private recorders — and make them available to her countless admirers now grieving her death.

K.V. Ramanathan

fone listens to the early record-Lings of MS (Marakatavadivu), one is struck by a brilliant voice with tremendous ability, but nothing more. She sounds exactly like any other female artiste of the period. But over the four films that she acted, MS appears to have perfected her style. In the early Seva Sadanam, one hears MS more or less as she sang in her classical records. In some of the songs of the film, MS does not modulate her voice at all. In Savitri too she

sings full throated, but in certain

songs, one can hear attempts at

MS emoting through her songs.

Thus, just by listening to some of

the songs, one can understand

whether the sequence is a happy

or a sad one. What is intriguing

is that Sakuntalai predates Savitri

and yet the attempt at modula-

It is in Sakuntalai that we see

voice modulation.

bigger say in Sakuntalai than in Savitri which was not a home production. Was he responsible for getting MS to modulate her voice and thus convey emotion? The director of Sakuntalai Ellis R. Dungan may have also played a role in getting MS to appreciate the finer nuances of modulating

Certainly, with the arrival of Meera, MS had perfected her technique. Her voice became an

Memories of some

of the Sruti Parivar instrument of the song and took on whatever shades of emotion the song wanted her to portray. Once again the Sadasivam-Dungan combine appears to have worked on it. Whatever be the influences, with the release of Meera, MS was almost the sole female singer who was adept at conveying bhava through song. The 'theatrical/film' influence appears to have played a tremendous role in shaping her music. Also it appears that bhava did not come automatically to MS, as many suggest today. It was a five or six year development which, to give her credit, she internalised and managed to perfect

> Under the Sadasivam baton, the MS concert ceased to be a purely Carnatic kutcheri. There were bhajan-s, sloka-s and even verses in Bengali and Punjabi. MS, therefore, ceased to reflect the influence of one guru; rather. her music was the confluence of many streams... It goes to Sadasivam's credit that these did not overshadow the Carnatic element and yet managed to give a holistic musical experience to

over the years to follow...

away after an MS concert, it was with the satisfaction of listening to an outstanding music performance which was in the Carnatic Next, while orthodox Mylapore may berate me for this, MS' success also owed a lot to her own stage presence. Her sublime beauty and outstanding dress

the listener. When one walked

sense (the circlet of jasmines, the diamonds, the MS blue sarees wrapped demurely around the shoulders and the lovely expressive eyes) had as much to do with her star status as her music. Not for MS the layers of powder, the painted lips and the garish zari bordered sarees. She also did not festoon herself in jewellery unlike the norm that now exists. She aslo did not distort herself in any way when she sang... MS was ethereal like her music. To watch her sing was as much a pleasure as it was to hear her sing...

There have been musicians greater than MS. There have been personalities more charismatic than MS. But why then is MS so special? What is mesmerised millions across the created the MS magic! globe?

Was it her humility, sincerity, graciousness, bounty and serenity which endeared her to one and all? All these were reflected in no small measure in her music. She seemed to be pouring her heart and soul into it, surrendering to the Muse. And as her voice soared, so did her spirit,

and asked her conversationally what she thought about the raucous political rhetoric across the room. I had vaguely expected partisan support for the political stand that Rajaji was vigorously expounding across the room. On the contrary, she turned deeply unhappy and said slowly that she hoped ardently that all this quarrel would end soon and there would be

enveloping the listeners in its composer of the popular Jayati rich pure tones and transporting jayati Bharata Mata, had set the and odukkal and adattal. Even if a them to a world of aesthetic verses of Tirukkural to tune in small matra was missed, he would beauty and forgetfulness where kriti format, with pallavi, slap me. The songs became quite

about her distress over the fact that persons she sound, content and rhythm unobtrusively merged as one. Was it this dissolution or layam which

struck a chord in every heart?

She was almost always immaculately dressed on stage, her entries, exits, her kutcheri-s - all seemed to be well choreographed Sriram.V and fine tuned to perfection. Many were her enviable attributes — a remarkable stage presence, no facial contortions; a one in a million voice, no distortions; and above all a saukhyam, visranti and satvika bhava that pervaded her music and her per-

Thave taught some songs to MS Let me explain the circumstances. I was Music Supervisor at AIR. It wanted to promote Tamil and set about producing new programmes in Tamil. Mayuram Viswanatha Sastri,

Sastri, the then Station Director. invited Viswanatha Sastri to teach them to some artistes he would engage. The latter agreed

to do so. only that, Viswanatha Sastri was appearnace. He was a good friend to me, though. When all the big vidwans backed out, I was called in for the project. I readily Tirukkural songs. He had tuned the verses with many sangati-s

y earliest memory of MS was of listening as a loved and admired should be ranged against of Naboy to the twin record Evari mata in the other in what seemed a life and death battle. Though without any interest in competitive politics, she had an unclouded vision of a public purpose that these heirs to the Gandhian tradition should be jointly serv ing. It was a typically feminine reaction and very indian - the primordial distress of a mother over

> The next occasion I met her personally was in mu sic ciritic Subbudu's flat in Moti Bagh in Delhi. It was an occasion with a few friends and the conversation was very general. Subbulakshmi hardly took any part. In the unlikely event of a person not knowing who she was, he would have taken her for a gracious Iver Mami of the neighbourhood.

The only other occasion that I met her was in 1990s at the small rented house in Nungambakkam to which the Sadasivams had moved after the legend ary Kalki Gardens had been sold. I was part of a team gathering material for a biography of Ramnath Goenka and Sadasivam was an obvious source. She was very much present doing the honours as the hostess, but hardly said a word. Sadasivam was, of course forthcoming with information but a benien smile was her only answer to all attempts to involve her in the

Indulging in a bit of pop sociology, one could perhaps say that the persona that MS had consciously chosen for herself is best exemplified by her total resemblance to a typical Tamil Brahmin housewife at home in gracious domesticity. Her universally acknowledged celebrity status had not touched her a

This was no accident but very much a conscious choice and a life-long quest. Given her early background, it has also been an arduous journey...

Right from the day when she secretly left he home in Madurai for Madras after rejecting the plans that her mother had made for her and eventually found a home - quite accidentally - with Sadasivam there was a clear pattern of a deliberate choice of destiny very different from the one that would not mally have been hers. In many of the perceptions of her life after marriage to Sadasivam, there is a ten dency to approximate their relationship to that be tween Galatea and Pygmalion. But the fact is that fo all the appearance of Sadasivam chartering every dethis apolitical woman who saw politics not as a com- tail of her life, there was nothing that she did that she petitive gladiatorial show but as a shared endeavour would not have done on her own volition. (Courtesv.) in serving the nation. There was nothing put on Stud

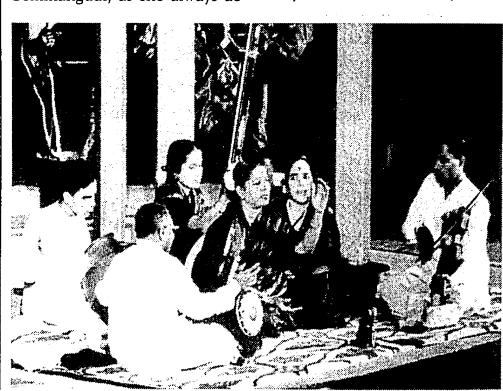
N.S. Jagannathan

anupallavi, and four or five popular. Later DKP also learnt charana-s for each song. G.T. from him.

At that time, Sadasivam called me and wanted me to teach the songs to MS. He would send the car to my office and l would go to their house to teach GNB, Ariyakudi, DKP, MS. She studied everything care-Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iver fully before revealing her opinwere requested to learn these ion. MS listened to me with eyes songs from Viswanatha Sastri, to closed, asking for it again and be broadcast on AIR. All of them again 4 or 5 times. She would lisdeclined as they felt apprehen- ten intently with rapt attention, sive about how Tamil would be she would not sing every phrase accepted in Carnatic music. Not after me, but grasp the whole within. Finally she would sing a this magic of MS which sona. All this together must have a terror as a teacher — he would bit. She was able to pick up the even beat or pinch if the student songs quickly and was also able made a mistake! He was a very to sing them fully. After 5 or 6 stern man, somewhat like Syama days of this, Sadasivam felt that Sastry of my painting in this kind of sedukkal-sudukkal singing would not suit her voice and that they were more suited to male singing. I taught her four Tirukkural-s, but she did not peragreed. I went to his house in form them. It was not used for Mylapore and learnt the broadcasting on the AIR, but she

S. Rajam

(Pictures courtesy: Music Academy.)





A rare individual

quarrelling children.

early thirties on a HMV player with the large mega-

phone, itself a much fussed about new artefact in

our mofussil home. In all candour, apart from being

vaguely impressed by the sweet voice of an unknown

singer, I cannot remember its impact on me except

in retrospective recall in my latter day admiration

for MS. Along with other young people of those days,

I was more hooked on the legendary duo Kittappa

It was the film Seva Sadanam starring MS that

made the first serious impression on the provincials

of a generation to whom even 'talkies' were a nov-

elty. It was in a malodorous 'tent cinema' that I saw

the film and I remember vividly the first stirrings in

me of a social conscience that the film occasioned.

By the early 1940s, MS had become an icon and

a household name. The decisive moment in her life

as a public figure was the series of concerts she gave

for raising funds for the Kasturba Gandhi Trust.

That was also the moment of her becoming a pan-

Indian celebrity. Since then, the beneficiaries of her

generosity have been legion. (A recent estimate by

Sriram.V, in the website **sangeetham.com** puts her

lifelong contribution to public causes at five crore

rupees against J.R.D. Tata's personal generosity of a

My first meeting with MS was accidental but the

occasion provided me a rare insight into the non-

musical side of her character — her totally

unselfconscious goodness of heart. I had attended a

press conference held by Rajaji in Kalki Gardens dur-

ing his characteristically combative election cam-

paign against Congress rule in the early 1970s. Hav-

ing had my fill of polemics, I noticed MS at some

distance, along with a few others. I walked up to her

amity among warring old friends and comrades.

The political naivete of the observation struck

ne, of course. But I realised at once that here was

and Sundarambal.

rore of rupees.)

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

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

- 1. Who are the new Australian Open singles champions?
- 2. What ruling of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, as regards lineage, did the Supreme Court uphold recently?
- 3. Which NRI has been named Fortune magazine's 'Europe Businessman of the Year'?
- 4. The 60th anniversary of the end of which painful and horrendous happening during World War II was observed in Krakow on January 27th?
- 5. Who is the new National Security Adviser? And who is the new chief or RAW?
- 6. In which temple in Maharashtra did at least 250 people die after a stampede on January 26th? 7. For which social cause did Bill Gates make his single largest donation ever, \$ 750 million, recently?
- 8. Name the two foreigners getting the Padma awards this year. 9. Who recently took over Gillette for a whopping \$ 57 bil-
- 10. Name the world's largestever passenger plane which was unveiled in Toulouse, France, on January 18th.
- 11. What is the pen name of Tamil poet Cho. Viruthachalam? 12. Which was the first cinema hall in Chennai to show Cinemascope films?
- 13. Which bustling place near Mylapore literally means 'pier'? 14. Which is the longest road in George Town? It lies between Wall Tax Road and North Beach
- 15. What 'entertainment' first did Nataraja Mudaliar achieve in Tower House on Miller's Road in Kilpauk in 1916?
- 16. In which two Chennai Corporation hospitals have special wings to facilitate termination of unwanted pregnancies been started?
- 17. During the reign of which king in the 7th Century AD were the Vallam Caves, approximately 2 km from Chengalpattu, sculpt-
- 18. Name the Governor of Madras (1687-1692), after whom a famous educational institution in Connecticut is named, responsible for Fort St. David near Cud-
- dalore? 19. Name the Chennai-based girl who won the Asian junior squash crown in Chennai recently.
- 20. One of the prime accused in the Sankararaman murder case has turned approver. Who is he? (Answers on page 7)

A wildlife 'riot' of cinema

Tt was weekend cinema in Chennai as usual, but very, very different. One minute you were stalking a tiger, the other you were gasping in disbelief, high in the Himalaya, at the majestic sight of the elusive snow leopard. And midst the crackling of popcorn and wafer packets, it was nice to hear the collective chuckles of both children and adults at the gambolling antics of tiger and lion cubs and shrieks of excited kids as they followed the 'King of the Jungle' into his shady haunts.

As Alphonse Roy, ace wildlife cinematographer, said to this packed film audience, "Most of my films are regularly screened in the US or Europe. This is the first time I'm seeing it on the big screen in my own hometown. And it truly is a great feeling!" He was interacting with an appreciative Chen-

How did you get that particular shot?

Did you follow the same animal through the entire filming? How do you identify the animals to follow them at different time intervals?

How long did it take to produce a one-hour film?

Is it dangerous to be working in the wild? How do wild cats react to

amateur photographers? What has been your scariest

experience?

How did you get to where you are now

Abitha Anand, Head, Audience Development and Film Festival Programming Section of Sathyam Cinemas, confirms. "Ever since the first show, we've been deluged with calls from the public to increase the frequency of such interactive film festivals However, logistics entail that

• by SHOBHA MENON

nai audience, post screening of we have similar fests only once two of his internationally acclaimed films, Bandavgarh -India's Temple of the Tiger and The Great Cats of India. While the former is the story of a tiger family in the forest of Bandaygarh, the latter tracks four of India's big cats — the tiger, the sion is free, though passes will Asiatic Lion, leopard and the have to be collected from select elusive snow leopard.

Organised by Sathyam Cinemas and Ecotone, a Chennaibased company specialising in wildlife-related media productions, in collaboration with Odvssey, this is the second show of its kind and a landmark venture in the field of cinema in Chennai. A few months ago, the Sathyam theatre complex was the venue for 'A morning with wildlife filmmakers' when there were screened Nagarhole - Tales from an Indian Jungle, produced and cinematographed by Shekar Dattatri, and Thunder Dragons, produced by Romulus Whittaker for National Geographic, an intimate account of the life of water

"This is a wonderful opportunity to bring people closer to wildlife, and also give such films the credit they deserve," said a senior naturalist in the audi-

The questions fielded by the experts revealed an informed and interested audience, right from the five-year-old who wanted to know 'Were you scared vou might be eaten by a tiger?' to the senior citizen who wished to accompany Alphonse on his next Himalayan trip! Others included:

in three months at this point. These will be the first of a series of such festivals looking to cater to a wider section of audience by screening documentaries/short films and features for various interest groups. Admis-

"We want to make the public experience a 'riot of cinema' By conducting film festivals, showcases, retrospectives of films that are not easily available for the people of Chennai, and creating a ground for direct interaction between the industry and the audience, we aim to increase awareness about alternate films and wildlife films which don't get the place they deserve. The 'extended entertainment' of interacting live with those who make the film happen, is an added attraction," says Abitha.

A morning in Guindy Park

spent a delightful morning in November at the Guindy National Park. I was visiting the park after many years. The weather looked ominous, with dark clouds threatening rain. That did not stop us and we were at the park by 7 a.m. Within a few minutes we were drenched by the heavy showers that lasted just over 30 minutes, though it continued to drizzle for a longer time. The skies finally cleared and it became hot after that.

The forest vegetation looked lush and dense. I could not discern much change over the years. In fact, it had become denser and overgrown in some pockets. The polo ground was not reclaimed by shrubs as once we had feared, and had a typical meadow-like character. To our delight we counted around 20 black bucks. Seven males, including two sub-adults, a dozen does and 2 or 3 fawns. There were several cheetals as well in the park, but not too many on the polo ground.

Elsewhere, we noticed common mongoose, a black-naped hare and several bonnet macagues. There was water in the K.K. tank and we could see new bunds that have been constructed to divert water to the tank. Perhaps the denizens of the park are not the only beneficiaries of this. I am sure the water table in the periphery of the park is better than the rest of the city, thanks to the park.

Bird-life was as good as in the past and we listed 42 species in the five hours we spent in the park. Of course, we had lost a bit of time due to the rain and looking at the vegetation, mammals etc., and so we were not fully concentrating on birds all the time. Yet, this list was comparable with my lists in the past.

There was an Indian Cuckoo just behind the Children's Park gate. The dark stripes underneath and the dark terminal tail band gave away its identity. I have not had many sightings of this bird in Guindy or Chennai. Forest wagtails were everywhere and we had a good look at one bird as it sat on a low branch close to the road There were over 20 yellow wattled lapwings at the polo ground. This bird has unfortunately disappeared from several of its old haunts, no doubt proving vulnerable to the loss of its preferred dry open country habitat around the city. An adult male paradise fly catcher enthralled us with an exquisite display of its long tail feather in flight. Several other migrants were there. So were Blyth's reed and greenish reed warblers, golden orioles, grey drongo and brown flycatchers. There were fewer raptors, perhaps because of the rain. Yet the booted eagles did not disappoint us. We saw several individuals in both dark and light colour phases. A smaller raptor foxed us and we tentatively identified it as a common buzzard bird seen here in earlier times.

Among the local birds we came across were black-headed cuckoo shrike, several golden-backed woodpeckers, a hoopoe, three species of bulbuls, magpies and Indian robins, small minivets, a brain fever bird, several koels, palm swifts and treepies. The grey partridges were silent and we glimpsed only two-birds crossing the road.

We hoped to see some of the rarer birds that turn up here, like chestnut winged cuckoo, ashy minivet, black-crested baza, but were not really disappointed in not seeing them. More visits are needed to locate these rare varieties. I hope that Madras Naturalists' Society members will continue to visit the Guindy National Park on a more regular basis to locate them and also to monitor the bird populations in the park as we used to till the early 1990s.

The park has not changed much and there is much less disturbance inside it. The Forest Department staff must be congratulated on protecting this little patch of wilderness despite all odds, not the least the terrible transformation of natural habitats all over the city and its neighbourhood.

V. Shantharam

BROKEN PIECES OF A GLORIOUS PAST

(Continued from Page 4)

the world. The contemporary winds its way through a piece of neglected past.

station master's room, guards' restrooms, signal cabin and the booking office. The few commuters left struggle against a lack of approach roads, proper shelters, direction and name boards, parking areas and other ills that plague them. Subash Wanle, Station Manager, Royapuram or, rather Rayapuram as it is now spelt, hopes

on a certain stone, clearing the Today, the area houses the dust. Letters begin to surface. Nobody knows what they stand for, but some believe that this was an old Dutch marking mea-

suring the level of the sea. It is time to leave. "I was 24 when I first came here," Saldanha sighs nostalgically glancing at the ruins that sur-

You take a last look around before stepping out of the 'palthat Railway plans to restore ace', at the high roof supported gone.

this heritage building will come by tall pillars, the solid girders through. He escorts us to the now home to pigeons, and you remaining 'palace' and instructs spot forlorn wreaths etched in one of his people to pour water cement high on the yellowing walls, and you reflect for a fleeting instance on the minds that so long ago built this palace. who took the effort to make a place of sturdy practicality designed primarily to enhance Empire-building a little more attractive, more human.

And you walk away thinking that, in the buildings that surround us, we see the years we have lived, and the connections over time with travellers long



■ sioned-UK participation in the India Triennale was Roddy Buchanan, from Scotland work, History Painting, a 35mm film, transferred to DVD. It was shot in Wellington, Tamil Nadu, and Catterick, North Yorkshire, in the summer of 2004 and features newly passed-out soldiers from the Madras Regiment in Tamil Nadu, and their counterparts in the Scottish Infantry Division in Scotland.

February 16-28, 2005

each other, under Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, at the Battle of Assaye. Both regiments still

CHENNAI 600 006.

such exercises.

TION TO your subscriptions.

victory at Assaye is central to result is an intense portrait on a their respective sense of honour heroic scale.

its roots in a particular historical moment, its reach is more contemporary and more complex in ambition. At the beginning of the 19th century it was as true as it still is today that the men recruited to infantry regidrawn from the least Two hundred years ago, in advantaged echelons of society. 1803, the predecessors of these Deprivation and poor prospects young men fought alongside at home are the common experiences that make the army an carry the Assaye colours (feather the men with whom he can feel private soldier.

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contributions

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We are indeed sorry we can no longer remain a free mailer.

The British Council commisturing an elephant), and the the greatest empathy, and the

Confronted by the spectacle Although this new work has of rows of youthful faces, the viewer is bound to interrogate the images for the traces of narratives of place and history. At this level the shared history of the individual regiments is less important than other questions which arise concerning the repments across the globe were resentation of the military. And whereas military portraiture, in common with regimental mythology, has traditionally only preserved the memory of its officers and outstanding heroes, attractive option for these Buchanan's History Painting reyoung men. Buchanan has verses this by focussing on the sought to approach the army via common, usually anonymous,

• by **Caroline Douglas**

Firstly, History Painting crosses over between portraiture and documentary - these are real soldiers, filmed on location at their barracks, wearing the uniform of their regiments. They are not actors, yet they are presented in film on a cinematic scale. We do not recognise them, but there is undeniable emotional charge in the collision between their extreme youth and the already professional thousand-yard stare. 'So these are the guys that are fighting for me?' we say.

Here the work crosses over between documentary and fiction: these soldiers don't look like the men we see in the cinema, on our TV screens or games consoles. The depiction

Answers to Quiz

— The Editor

1. Marat Safin (men) and Serena Williams (women): 2. That a child born out of wedlock will inherit only the father's caste irrespective of the mother's caste: 3 Lakshmi Niwas Mittal; 4. Auschwitz death camps; 5. M.K. Naravanan and P.K. Hormese Tharakan respectively; 6. Kalubai Temple in Mandradevi, 18 km from Wai in Satara District; 7. To the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation; 8. Sir Mark Tully (Padma Bhushan) and Gladys Staines (Padma Shri); 9. Procter & Gamble: 10. Airbus A380.

11. Pudumaipitthan; 12. New Globe; 13. Thannithurai; 14. Mint Street: 15. First studio in South India: 16. Santhome and Pulianthope; 17. Mahendravarman I; 18. Elihu Yale; 19. Joshna Chinanppa; 20. Ravi Subramaniam.

|Something special happened in Chennai...

a performance that was completely devoid of the individual or 'self', a performance that reached artistic highs.

I write about a most natural coming together of excellence in music and dance. Many of us have wondered when we could be a part of this outcome. It happened one recent Saturday evening under a beautiful canopy of stars, with a gentle sea breeze wafting over us and in DakshinaChitra's intimate amphitheatre. A Carnatic mu sic soloist and a Bharata Natyam soloist came together to benefit 'The Banyan'.

Bombay Jayashri Ramnath sang and Leela Samson danced. Seated to the side of the platform, Jayashri greeted her audience and, then, simply closed her eyes and let the music flow from her heart. There was no haste, no frills, just sheer music. Seated to the side, she yet seemed to fill the stage with her presence. Her music was everywhere.

Leela Samson stepped on to the stage, greeted us and then just transfixed us as she let her soul dance. Again, no excess embellish ment, just sheer elegance and grace. Each was in her own world, yet so mentally and aesthetically connected. Jayashri's evocative music and Leela's exquisite visualisation of it is what one remembers. Once in a rare while, you witness a happening, a meeting of the minds hearts and souls of fine artistes and the result is a gift to the audi-

I hope other such skilled artistes will see this as a beautiful example of what is possible when two artistes, in complementary art forms, come together. Being a Chennaiite, I am so happy that this unique "Samarpanam" happened in my city.

Uma Ganesan

of the military and combat is artion of men in uniform. Rather guably as stylised today as it was in the history paintings of the the images, the simplicity of 18th and 19th centuries, except that today we live in a global visual culture where there is often a collapsing of the distance be-

tween fiction and reportage. Through its strict formal structure and the passivity of the men portrayed, History Painting cuts its subjects loose from frameworks of action or other rationalising narratives, and presents them bluntly as what they are. The binary structure of the film, with its pendulum swing up a row of Tamil soldiers and down a row of Scottish soldiers, is visually arresting. Yet, through this technique, it circumvents and subverts the stereotypical presenta-

than reducing the meaning of form acts to convey complexity and humanity. (Courtesy: Connecting, the journal of the British Council.)

* "A history painting' is one which has a serious narrative, or includes exemplars of actions which are intended to have didactic overtones. In this sense the word history relates to the Italian istoria, meaning narrative or story (and not the accurate or documentary description of actual events) History paintings are often large in scale. Their subjects can be taken from the Bible, from mythology or other forms of secular literature, from historical events; or they can be allegories. Noble themes are seen as being particularly worthy of depiction. - From the Glossary of Terms, National Gallery, London website.

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 Concervation 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. .. contribution to the restoration and maintenance of Senate House. Kindly acknowledge receipt.

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Making a city of gardens

(Continued from Page 1)

often vandalised and misused. But there is a spark of hope for the city today, because of the fitness culture that is coming back and pushing parks into the forefront for lack of other open spaces. Like the Nageswara Park in Luz and the Natarajan Park on Venkatanarayana Road which have been revived."

A Corporation official laments, "Except in the major parks, appointing personnel in every roadside park is not feasible. And wherever there is no official representative, the public generally misuse the park. Below the TTK Flyover, we'd planted a variety of colourful shade-loving plants. Now, all of them have disappeared, two or three plants missing every morning! Outside Raj Bhavan, we'd planted an ornamental species, that too vanished the next morning. So much for public consciousness! We find passers-by casually removing the growing tips of young trees just because 'they feel like it'. And this happens every time the sapling tries to grow!"

In this context, Sabina Narayan, a resident of Harrington Road for the last 30 years, feels, "The Corporation does need to appoint someone to take charge in public parks, but the community also needs to pitch in, wherever relevant. In the Harrington Road Park, a person appointed by the residents' association works in tandem with the Corporation worker in charge to ensure better maintenance and security." "This arrangement, however, can work in public parks within residential colonies and not in solely public places, where a Corporation worker has to take charge and needs a lot of coop-

eration from the public," points out a Corporation official.

Right now, a 'decentralisation' has happened, with zonal offices given charge of greening their respective areas. There have been a lot of positive changes - officers involved are more proactive, and the city benefits overall. Easier execution and maintenance has been possible. But others say, "Already the zonal offices have too many things to do. How well are they going to take to an added 'burden'? Things will just go from bad to worse."

"Besides the 88 parks already notified, 62 new parks will soon be added. We plant trees along the roadside not only to green the city, but also to purify the entire atmosphere. We've many beautiful visions and plans to beautify Chennai, even to include flowering plants along walkways wherever possible. We only request that people understand that the Corporation is trying to do its bit to beautify 'their city'. The least you can do is not to interrupt this beautification process either by vandalising, or by allowing others to vandalise what's been created," emphasises a worried Corporation official.

As part of Corporation of Chennai's recent efforts to make Madras that is Chennai a 'City of Gardens', here are some heartening facts. The parks and roadside parks developed (and maintained well, according to reports from a few residents) by the Corporation of Chennai during the period 2001-2004

Year	Parks	Roadside
		parks
2001-2002	1	5
2002-2003	29	1
2003-2004	48	42

Recently developed parks include the Sriramulu Park in Zone II, Tirumalai Park in Zone III, Jawahar Nagar II Circular Road Park in Zone IV, Harrington Road Park in Zone V, Independence Day Park in Zone VII, and the Dharma Park in Zone VIII.

Sabina says, "A few years ago, an open space on Harrington Road adjoining a huge department store was designated as a park, but regressed into a dumping ground slowly for want of attention. Two years ago, residents reclaimed the area by bringing it to the notice of the Corporation officials and, following it up, 25% of this artistic, now transformed, park's ambience is purely due to residents' efforts and private sponsors, but 75% is due to landscaping and maintenance by Corporation officials!"

Says a school teacher from the Nungambakkam Boys' Corporation School, of the Independence Day Park (established in 1947, but neglected for long) that is nearby, "Even a few months ago, the whole area was used as a dumping ground and frequented only by shady characters. Yesterday, I was amazed to see so many men and women enjoying the beautiful green park's ambience during their evening walk."

"We can definitely maintain the parks in Chennai as lovely public spaces. More than huge amounts of money spent on them, they only need a little care and maintenance. And that little sense of being with nature, by all concerned. If the community wants this to happens, it surely will," says Ravindran sounding a positive



From February 18: Exhibition of the paintings of Sohan Qadri. (At Apparao Galleries.)

February 19 and 20: Perchance to Dream, a collage of extracts of Shakespearean plays staged by the Footsbarn Travelling Theatre, UK. (At YMCA Grounds, Nandanam.)

February 20: The Madras Naturalists' Society's one day trip to Vedanthangal is open to the public on first come first served basis, restricted to 35 persons. The bus leave from 'The School', KFI, Damodar Gardens, Besant Avenue, Adyar, at 7 am. Cost on sharing basis and will work out to approximately Rs. 150 per 2 persons. Participants should bring their own packed lunch. Contact Sundaramoorthy at 94441 63914.)

February 20: Susheela Raman in a Carnatic and Blues-based con-

The music of Salt Rain, Susheela's first album, was a collaborative endeavour between Susheela, Sam Mills and a network of people with whom they have performed.

Born in London to South Indian parents, she moved to Australia where she grew up singing South Indian classical music. As a teenager, she branched into more Blues-based music. To bring the two streams together, she came to India in 1995 to study with Shruti Sadolikar, Hindustani vocalist.

Back in England in 1997, she worked with Mills who had made a record a called Real Sugar with Bengali singer Paban Das Baul. This record inspired Susheela because it enabled Indian music to be expressed to a new audience. Susheela and Mills spent three years developing Salt Rain. They discovered new ways to adapt the Carnatic songs she had sung, particularly the work of Tyagaraja and Dikshitar.

The concert in Chennai will include Susheela Raman with Sam Mills on guitar; Aref Durvesh on tabla: Hilaire Hega Penda on bass with percussion by

Djanuno Dabo. (At the YMCA Grounds, Nandanam, 7.00 p.m.) From February 21: Exhibition of the work of S.N. Venkataraman. (At Vinyasa Art Gallery.)

February 21-27: Ganesha, an exhibition by Jerome Mesnager, a Parisian wall artist. He will also conduct a workshop with children.

From February 22: The Japanese Consulate-General displays an exhibition of kites from Japan. (At Lalit Kala Akademi.)

February 25: The Madras Players presents Mercy, written by Sivasankari, directed by Mithran Devanesen and performed by P.C. Ramakrishna. (At 7.00 p.m., Museum Theatre.)

February 25: Alumnae of The Sacred Heart Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Madras, Church Park hold their annual get-together, an evening of fun, entertainment and nostalgia with their families. (At 5.30 p.m., at the school sports field.)

Sacred Heart is celebrating its centenary in 2009. Efforts are being made to trace alumnae so that before the centenary year a directory of the alumnae could be put together. Please e-mail names of alumnae to shaacp@ yahoo.com.

February 26: Beuroshna an intercultural dialogue between music and musicians; flamenco (popular music from Spain) and carnatic music, guitar and mridangam, voice and carnatic violin. Beuroshna includes Nacho Corral, musicologist, guitar player and composer, M.T. Jayan, master in mridangam, professor of Sanskrit, and Belem Cantos, graphic artist, photographer and a singer who writes lyrics about her experiences in India. (At Alliance Française.)

Till March 2: Emerging Reds, an exhibition of the work of Louis Van Marissing. (At the Alliance Francaise)

March 1-6: Made in Germany: Architecture and Ecology, an exhibition showcasing contemporary German architectural projects that preserve the environment to the greatest degree feasible. Along with the exhibition by the Goethe Institute will be a Symposium (on the 5th) on environment-friendly architecture. (At DakshinaChitra.)

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