

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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With great difficulty I bought tickets all in a sequence... seat numbers 25 to 28 are for this show and 29 to 32 are for the next show!

### Be seated

Movies, plays, performances... Delightful, filled with happy, chattering groups... except for those in charge of Buying the Tickets, easily recognised by their sunken eyes, twitching mouth, et al.

Pity these poor souls, for they are truly scarred and bitter. It's bad enough in a small group. Add more people, and the situation turns into something Stephen King might create on one of his really inspired days.

All designated Ticket-Buyers have learnt to their cost that to assume that a planned group activity will be able to provide a simple answer to the question: "How many?" is being foolishly optimistic.

Not when everyone has to check with his third cousin twice-removed's-neighbour's grandmother's old classmate...

As for choosing by chart, you peer from all sides, mentally conjure up the auditorium and think you've chosen okay - only to find that half your party is in the foyer outside, muttering darkly.

Seat numbers are obviously there just to get you, especially when they refuse to follow simple mathematical rules. Why else would '43' follow '26'?

And then the reckoning. This isn't an issue if you're the tough type, who can do a gravelly-voiced Godfather, and snarl: "No doubt, No show." If you're the shrinking violet type with a distaste of appearing like a bill-collector of old, you're in trouble.

Next time there's a good show in town, point to it, and run like hell.

Ranjitha Ashok

# Madras being malled

– To create a  
21st c. Chennai

(By A Special Correspondent)

Madras is being malled to create the Chennai of the 21st Century. An estimated 25 malls offering 8 million square feet of retailing space are expected to come up in the next three years to add to the one million square feet already in place in the city. An additional three million square feet is planned for the suburbs. Most of these malls are expected to have multiplexes and all of them will have food courts to draw in the crowd and capitalise on the walk-in shopper. What all these malls will do to an already overburdened infra-

structure is a question few developers are turning their attention to.

Curiously the buying public seems to be indifferent to the crush on the roads, the lack of parking space, the needs of pedestrians, and the pressure on water and power.

Madras Musings learns that the following malls are in various stages of development:

**The Allied Mall** (Allied Investments and Housing and Arihant Foundations and Housing): 600,000 sq. ft. of mall-cum-multiplex.

**Ampa Centre I** (Pantaloons



An artist's view of a mall as designed for development in Chennai.

and Ampa Housing Development): 300,000 sq. ft. on Nelson Manickam Road housing shopping space, food courts, seven-screen multiplex, a 20,000 sq. ft. boutique hotel, bar and conference hall and multilevel car park. An **Ampa Centre II**, occupying 400,000 sq. ft. is likely.

**Chennai Central Mall:**

(Kshitij Venture Capital and Srinivasa Shipping & Property Development): A built-up area of 130,000 sq.ft. on Nungambakkam High Road, opposite the Taj Coromandel.

**Coromandel Plaza** (Suryavardhan Estate): 250,000 sq. ft. in Navalur on the Old

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# Alandur shows the way

Till around 2002, Alandur municipality, about 14 km to the south of Chennai and a part of the Chennai Metropolitan Area (CMA), stank all around - of septic tanks that overflowed onto streets and wells full of stagnant sewage. Recently, the same municipality was visited by a team of 24 Sri Lankan bureaucrats - on the World Bank's recommendation - to take a firsthand look at its underground sewerage system, the first of its kind in India! The India Infrastructure Report 2002, brought out by 3iNetwork, a collaborative venture between IDFC, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIT-Kanpur, that delves into various issues of governance, has even cited the Alandur Municipality Sewerage system as a model.

Hailed as "an unique experiment showcasing community involvement and private sector participation", the Alandur Sewerage Project (ASP), in a 19.5 sq.km municipal area, is an innovative attempt at sustainable delivery of urban services in the country. 23,000 households in the municipal area

have paid Rs. 5,000-6,000 each, while a private construction company contributed Rs. 7 crore of its own funds, to bring the Rs. 27-crore sewerage and treatment project to fruition!

It was in 1997 that the Government of Tamil Nadu (GOT) prepared a scheme to cover 12 major urban centres of the State, including Alandur, with improved sanitation services. The other centres were: Salem, Madurai, Coimbatore, Tiru-

● by  
**SHOBHA MENON**

nelveli, Tiruchchirappalli, Pallavaram, Tambaram, Erode, Karur, and Vellore. The ASP was "very much a demand-driven investment", says S. Malathi, then Municipal Administration Secretary, Tamil Nadu, "since the public health advantages in a good sewerage system perceived by the people was so great."

Considering the lack of resources at the municipal level, both in financial terms as well as the technical expertise to un-

dertake such infrastructure projects, it was decided by the State asset management company - Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial Services Limited (TNUIFSL) - and the municipal administration of Alandur that the construction of the underground sewerage system, such as the laying of pipes and the construction of the pumping station, would be done on BOQ (Bill of Quantities) basis, and the sewerage treatment plant (STP) on BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) basis. A Hyderabad-based construction company specialising in water and sewage pipelines, IVRC Ltd., bagged the BOT contract and invested Rs 7 crore for the STP at Perungudi, on 20 acres of land given as a grant by the Metrowater Board.

\* \* \*

An agricultural haven till the early 1970s, it was Alandur's proximity to three railway stations and copious water supply that drew many from adjoining Chennai. And then the problems began - for water and drainage disposal. The elected chairman of the

municipality R.S. Bharathi's earlier success had been the sourcing of Palar water for the entire area, also with public funds support. "When I was re-elected in 1996 as Chairman, my promise was to bring in underground drainage systems from Day One. Initially I was apprehensive, since there was at the time no underground drainage system in any municipality in Tamil Nadu (except in a part of Kanchipuram). We went around with a mike, street by street, from 6.30 a.m. onwards sharing/suggesting information with civic associations. Many treated me like a beggar. But patience, and official cooperation, paid off. In strategic corners of localities, exhibited lists of those who paid ensured others would pay! Sometimes the deposit was compulsorily collected from those who came to pay taxes at the municipal office." And resounding support, from a population of 1,45,000, has ensured that of the Rs. 24-crore loan it planned to avail of, the municipality will now need only Rs. 16 crore. An unprec-

(Continued on page 8)

# Facing up to lentil shortage in the U.S.

• I don't know if anyone really cares about the plight of NRIs or everyone thinks it is OK that we pay exorbitant amounts just for a staple! writes VIJAYSREE VENKATRAMAN from Boston, sending *Madras Musings* this piece she contributed to the *Boston Globe*.

\* \* \*

Whether it is spinach *dhal* or *sambhar* or whatever other dish they go into, lentils – also called *dhals* or pulses – feature prominently in the daily menu of most Indian-American families. Open a kitchen cabinet in a typical home and you can probably find a dozen *dhals* of myriad shapes and hues: red *masoor dhal*, green *moong* beans, or yellow *toor dhal*. The pulses are so integral to the cooking, and such an important source of protein, that many families have a few pounds of these staples on hand.

In late June, the Union Commerce Ministry of India put a temporary halt on the international trade of pulses until the end of the year. Two weeks later, it extended the ban upto March 2007. That means that no pulses will be exported from the Indian subcontinent. The ban is supposed to serve as a stopgap measure to ease inflation in the Indian domestic market, where pulses that once cost about 40 cents a pound now sell for 50 cents. Earlier this year, *moong dhal* in India cost about 80 cents per kilo (roughly two pounds); it now costs \$ 1.20.

To understand the nature of the crisis, you have to understand how lentils fit in to the cuisine. Each *dhal* has an important culinary role in traditional dishes. For all Indians, a warm bowl of *dhal* complements the meal, but for vegetarians – in fact, for a substantial percentage of the population, who shun meat for religious reasons – *dhal* is the main source of protein.

The lentil ban puts many people in the Indian-American community in a difficult position. Lavanya Marla, a graduate student at MIT, says, "I use *toor dhal* a lot, so I decided to stock up last week. I bought more than I needed, despite the increase in prices, because the store owner at 'Little India', where I shop, thinks that the prices are likely to go up even further."

Even those in the industry were surprised by the sudden ruling. Large distributors in the United States, like the New York-based 'House of Spices', are now looking for alternative sources to fill the vacuum. Company president R.L. Soni says that containers of pulses that were ready to ship from India were pulled off the docks. Some *dhals* sought by Indian customers are grown in Africa and Thailand, but it will take time to strike deals and start imports from these nations. "The prices of lentils, long overdue for a revision, could stabilise in the next two months once these arrangements are made," Soni says.

In the Boston area, where nearly 45,000 Indians live, the cost of pulses has almost doubled. Since the inventory is moving quickly, Indian grocery stores are rationing supplies. Malik Bokhari, the manager of Waltham's India grocery store, says, "About two in five customers have been over-buying *dhals* since the last month."

"Right now, the price of gram flours has gone up, and eventually products made from pulses, such as *papads* and *mithais*, will also be affected by the price increase," says Sarabjeet Babla of the family-owned Shalimar India Food & Spices in Cambridge. Although warm *dhal* is a staple for all Indian meals, South Indian food is particularly pulse-heavy. *Urad dhal*, used in making *dosais*, *adais*, and *uthappams*, and *toor dhal* for the accompanying gravy-like *sambhar*, are fast disappearing from shelves.

The 'Dakshin' restaurant in Framingham has increased the price of its popular weekend buffet by \$2 (it now costs \$12), though the items on the regular menu remain unaffected. Owner Rajan Viswanathan says that the restaurant is making an effort to put innovative dishes on the buffet table – like *chilli-idli* – an Indo-Chinese variation on the regular lentil-and-rice dumpling, which uses bell peppers, onions, and soy sauce. This allows cooks to economise on the *urad dhal*. "The *sambhar* will be runny if we try to lower the amount of *dhal* in it, so that is hardly a solution," says the restaurateur, who is unwilling to compromise on the quality of his food.

Even bloggers are in on the act. "It is going to be difficult for me as a lentil addict, but still I support the Indian Government's decision," says Indira Singari of Boardman, Ohio, who writes the food blog *Mahanandi* ([www.nandyala.org/mahanandi](http://www.nandyala.org/mahanandi)). Singari is optimistic that Indian wholesalers will soon make arrangements with other lentil-exporting nations. "I think of this as a chance to explore other cuisines and find vegetarian goodness in them," she says.

Less modern cooks might disagree.

# An election of battles

*The Man from Madras Musings* has always wondered as to why elections were always referred to as battles. Now, having been a fringe witness to one and having heard of several more, he is suitably informed.

It was only in the last issue of *Madras Musings* that MMM had commented on the methods adopted for campaigning. Perhaps that ought to have prepared him for what would follow. For, on election day, all norms of decency were thrown to the winds and Madras that is Chennai experienced what usually happens "up north about which we know little" (to quote from the popular tele-serial 'Yes, Minister'). Accounts of violence, booth capturing, bogus voting and intimidation of innocent voters poured in and made MMM wonder about the validity of the WHOLE process throughout the city.

MMM had a personal brush himself with these happenings when he was peacefully driving down a road in south Chennai

## Raining on heritage

The monsoons have come and the rains promise to be plentiful. *The Man from Madras Musings*, who is given to periodically brooding over the fate of the *Kardyll*, or *Bharat Insurance, Building*, is worried. A few months have passed since the LIC began the demolition of the building before its action was stayed by the Madras High Court. The few days of demolition prior to the stay did away with most of the building's roof and now the whole structure is open to the sky. If the rains are going to be as plentiful as they were last year, this building is likely to be severely threatened. MMM hopes that some action will be taken soon to protect the structure.

## Lightning strikes

The other night lightning struck the four-storeyed building next to the bungalow in which *The Man from Madras Musings* lives. A light metal

hood who, by 6.00 p.m. each day for a couple of days thereafter, began suffering from withdrawal symptoms. However, relief arrived within a few days with no loss in continuity for the serial-watchers, given the glacial pace at which our serials move.

## 'Neath the flyovers

*The Man from Madras Musings* supposed that the spaces beneath flyovers were ideal for providing public parking facilities. In fact, the space beneath the Radhakrishnan Road/Cathedral Road flyover was being used for this purpose till a few months ago. The one on Peter's Road is put to good use by a popular eatery which, having come to a commercial arrangement with the Corporation, not only provides parking space for its patrons but also maintains the area well.

But MMM notices that many of these areas are being

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

and approached a traffic signal where the lights were just changing to green. MMM was moving towards the crossroads when, all of a sudden, a larger type of passenger vehicle usually associated with political parties swung in from the left and, having sent a couple of motorcyclists careening into a ditch, zoomed down the wrong side of the road and vanished in the direction of Mount Road. All at breakneck speed, of course. Since such vehicles rarely ply alone, soon an entire convoy followed and some had men with various stages of injury. Apparently as part of the electoral process turned battle, these men had armed themselves and laid siege to a booth. There had been a skirmish along the banks of the Adyar (in a re-enactment of history) and, in a short but pitched battle, the other side had laid down arms whereupon the victors had plundered the conquered area, namely the booth, and had made off with the booty.

MMM understands the passion that the candidates have for winning the election. They are so keen to contribute to the development of the city and convert it into another Shanghai that they would do anything to get into power for it. So what if it involves Shanghaiing a booth or two (or a hundred) and causing injury to a few bystanders (read genuine voters)? It is all a sacrifice worthy of the cause.

ladder left upright on the roof had apparently been the conductor. A concrete water tank was severely damaged. Electronic items were, however, the most affected and it was not only in the building struck by lightning but in all the neighbouring houses, including that of MMM. The TV, the computer, the DVD player and the telephones went on the blink and most had to be thrown away as junk.

MMM was puzzled at this, but was then informed that this is what happens if these gadgets are left plugged in when lightning strikes, even though the switches themselves may be turned off. The surge in electricity apparently does not recognise switches being turned on or off and distributes destruction with a fairly even hand.

A cell phone transmission tower was, however, unaffected despite its height, for it had a lightning arrestor. MMM had once read somewhere that if such a tall structure with lightning arrestor existed in the neighbourhood it offered protection from such strikes for a certain radius in the surrounding area. That, apparently, was not the case here.

The local cable channel service provider was the worst hit, as his entire equipment went on the blink. That was a fate worse than death for the television addicts of the neighbour-

hood and small gardens are being developed in them. Enquiries reveal that the powers-that-be are concerned that these spaces may soon be taken over by vagrants and slum dwellers. What intrigues MMM is that these powers turn a blind eye towards a makeshift eatery that springs up each evening below the Royapettah flyover, not in the space for parking, but in the tunnel through which traffic is expected to move. How then are gardens going to prevent such hijacking of public spaces?

## Platinum Jubilee

It is really the Platinum Jubilee of South Indian cinema and not Tamil cinema alone. For, the first South Indian talking film was released in 1931 on October 31<sup>st</sup> (see pay 5). Curiously, despite being a major film production centre with many film personalities in powerful positions, Chennai chooses not to celebrate such a landmark event. For, apart from a couple of talks by film historians, the event promises to go largely unnoticed. No commemorative stamps, no retrospectives and no recognition of the event either. Perhaps that is in keeping with the view that cinema is really an illusion.

– MMM

OUR  
READERS  
WRITE



### Courting disaster

Among the myriad potential hazards which Madrasians have learnt to live with and ignore, one relatively recent feature which nobody can miss is the TV cables on practically every thoroughfare, festooned between the street-light poles and also draped over trees and buildings and other structures. The ugliness of the already miserable street scene is, naturally, of little concern to anyone, since we are so addicted to the idiot box.

However, what should be a matter of alarm is the dangerous manner in which these cables are strung from the free-standing poles which were never intended to support such loads, especially sideward pulls. I am sure the electricity rules do not permit the use of street lamp-posts for fixing communication cables of any sort, but then who is bothered about rules.

In earlier times, before underground cables were introduced for street lights, the poles used to be more sturdy and were also anchored by guy wires at locations where side loads were unbalanced. Though most of the city now has steel poles, there are still

areas, such as some lanes in Adyar, where the ancient ornamental cast iron bases and poles are still in service. These are particularly vulnerable because cast iron is a brittle material, liable to snap suddenly under a side force or bending load. (I hope readers will excuse the technical jargon.)

Now that we are commencing our Northeast monsoon season, with likely storms or even a cyclone, there is a high possibility of the lamp-posts festooned in such fashion being subjected to tremendous wind forces, not to mention broken tree branches or toppled hoardings. There has been a significant increase in the number of cables over the past year. I noticed during last year's rains that some of the poles which had half toppled were rectified on a war footing. I presume there were powerful commercial influences at work, for whom bad publicity would have been more costly than the effort of getting things fixed fast.

The reason why nothing usually gets done about a problem like this is, no doubt, the same as why a corpse continued to lie 'unnoticed' beside a police station ("...but sir, there is no such complaint on record in the case register..."). Why should anyone go out of his way to complain?

I must admit that the regulation or removal of TV cables will not affect me personally in any way, since I am of the view that a person must be a moron to stomach the endless violence and vulgarity and vacuous blablah by way of news and discussions which dominate the screen. But there are thousands of others who relish this material. Surely they should be concerned about the dangers the cables and the poles pose. But is anything likely to change in Singara Chennai?

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### Value of time

Reading the reminiscences of M.S. Venkataraman, (MM, October 1st), I was reminded of my interaction with the legendary H.C. Buck. We had fixed an appointment with him. Some of us reached the YMCA a little earlier, some a little later. The remarks made by Buck were a lesson for life. "When I say 8, I mean 8, neither 7.59 nor 8.01. If you come at 7.59, it means you don't know the value of your time. If you come at 8.01, it means you don't know the value of my time."

I have followed the second part assiduously, never making others wait for me.

Yet another great promoter of sports forgotten is Grigg, who was the Director of Public Instruction in the last decade of 19th Century. He was lover of sports. He also took keen interest in girls' education. When he left for the UK, his well-wishers created an endowment, the proceeds from which were intended to award gold medals to champions in every district. The meets were also called the Grigg Memorial Sports and the champion known as Grigg Champion. With the government taking over the conduct of District Sports Meets, we do not know what has happened to the endowment. Anyhow, Grigg is worth being remembered for his devotion to the cause of education, especially women's education and sport.

**Dr. S.S. Rajagopalan**

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Cynosure of all eyes: The impressive Koondalpanai in Nagapattinam (near the Collectorate on NH 45A) with its crown of eye-catching flowers. (Photograph: R. SREENIVASAN.)

## A majestic crown of flowers

A stone's throw from my house stands a pair of beautiful palmyra. Known as *Koondalpanai* in Tamil, the tree belongs to the palm family. It typically has a single trunk (without undergoing secondary thickening) and 2.5-metre-long palmate leaves. Three months ago, one of them, a 25-metre tree, started flowering countless creamy-white flowers after shedding its leaves. This crown of flowers has been drawing the attention of everyone in the vicinity.

Normally, palm trees – there are about 2,800 species – grow in tropical countries. *Koondalpanai* is indigenous to the Kaveri delta.

My friend, K. Ramachandran, a government servant, who is also a botanist, says that *Koondalpanai* is monocarpic, that is, it bears fruit only once. He adds that the tree emits heat, making it unsafe for people to live near it.

According to oral tradition, the famous *Tirukkural* was originally written on *Koondalpanai* leaves (considering, perhaps, its sturdiness and longevity).

What is special about *Koondalpanai* is that on attaining 60 years, its leaves at the top droop and drop. Then, marvellous flowers of a ivory hue start appearing on the stalks that shoot afresh (see picture). The florescence is, quite simply, magnificent! After three months, the flowers turn green. It is the time when the flowers produce seeds. As months roll by, the seeds morph into a dark brown and as they ripen they get hardened, like arecanuts. They burst with great force and fall to ground more than a kilometre away. These changes that accompany the ageing process take about a year.

Our excitement, however, is short-lived, as we know that flowering of this extraordinary tree heralds its slow demise. After all, all life is transitory and *Koondalpanai* is no exception.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We wonder whether the *Talipot* palm is the same as the famed *Koondalpanai* palm. To judge by the picture, it could well be. The *Talipot* is generally reputed to bloom only once in a lifetime when the tree is around 100 years old.



## CARING FOR TREES

Some months ago, *Madras Musings* featured an article titled 'Space for trees to breathe'. These pictures I took recently show the attention paid to trees – occasionally in Chennai and more frequently in Bangkok.

From top to bottom:

A very old palm tree given a helping hand in the grounds of Ewart School. Talk of taking care of trees... Chennai seems to have some hope!

I took this during my recent trip to Bangkok. Note the props given to the trees to help them grow straight.

A shot of just one of the trees I saw in several public places in Bangkok. Note the way the orchids are being grown.

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# Right and Left Hand castes of Old Madras

According to C.S. Sreenivasachari (*The origin of Right and Left Hand castes division* – Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society, Vol 4, 1929), the Hindu population of Madras had for many centuries been divided into two main factions, the Right and Left Hand castes, “the members of which were as ready to fall out with one another on the smallest provocation as Orangemen and Ribbonmen were in Ireland, or the Montagues and Capulets of Verona”.

He wrote, “The Madras Consultations October 30th for 1707 have an entry regarding a paper in the *Gentue* (Telugu) language signed by President Baker, Agent Greenhill and Mr. Gurney dated in the year 1652, i.e. only twelve years after the foundation of the settlement, for composing differences among the Right and Left Hand castes, which Governor Pitt had from the latter. A translation of this paper is appended to the Consultations and its substance was that there were several disputes and differences between the castes about their respective streets.”

The factions thus appear to be coeval with the foundation of the settlement. But these differences were unknown in the North and confined only to the South, especially the Tamil and Canarese-speaking areas alone.

Numerous castes were stratified horizontally and their importance in society and their traditions were recognised by the way they grouped themselves. At the macro level, this might have been necessitated due to the ambiguous position among the non-Brahmin communities, but the East India

Company recognised this division both as a social necessity and as an important tool to control the trade. The dubashes played an important role and the division to which a particular dubash belonged played a significant part in the transactions.

The divisions distinguished themselves by the ritual honours and temple prayers, insignia, marks of distinction and practices. The conflicts, according to Kanakalatha Mukund, had two dimensions. “First, the

Henry Davison Love says (Vol II page 141), “Notwithstanding the settlement effected by Pitt in 1708, and the heavy penalty prescribed for breach of the agreement then made, a fresh caste dispute broke out in October 1716. The dispute started through the contention of the Chettis belonging to the Left Hand group saying the Right Hand group Komatis had usurped some of their exclusive rights. This was in connection with the performance of certain rites while the religious procession was on. The Council then

– *Community and individuality in South India*, page 84), “The maps show that even in these early times, the local organisations of the town reflect the division of castes into right-hand and left-hand moieties... As we have seen, the left-hand division to which the Beeri Chettis belonged lived predominantly in the eastern section of the Town, to the seaside, while the right-hand castes headed by the Komati Chettis lived in the western section. Today, should a person stroll the streets of the two areas, the division is still apparent in the location of the temples. In the eastern section of the Town, temples are Saivite, because the left-hand castes were predominantly Tamils, the great majority of who are followers of Siva. By contrast, Vaishnavite temples predominate in the Town’s old right-hand section because its residents were Telugu-speakers, a group composed largely of worshippers of Vishnu. But the right-hand/left-hand division was not sectarian-based. There are Telugu-speaking Beeri Chettis who are followers of Vishnu, and while the majority of Telugu-speaking Komatis consider themselves Vaishnavites, nonetheless Komatis claim a Saivite Goddess for their caste deity, Kanyaka Parameswari. Her temple located in Kothawal Chavadi market is the counterpart of the Beeri Chettis’ Kandaswami temple.”

Accordingly to Y. Subbarayulu, this system existed from the 11th Century, to judge from inscriptions, and denoted two opposing groups. According to him, Burton Stein, synthesising earlier writings, makes a convincing proposition, that the two divisions were not fixed social groupings but potential formations occurring on occasions due to polarisation, depending on the time and place. However, Subbarayulu continues, “Stein inadvertently accepts the generally prevailing notion that while the *valangai* or Right-hand division comprised only those castes or groups relating to land and agriculture, the *idangai* or left-hand division comprised the commercial and artisan groups. This notion, which was somehow made popular by the Colonial (sic) administration and became a

stereotype, is contradictory to the impressive evidence that has been marshalled by Stein himself.”

In Stein’s table in his *Peasant State and Society In Medieval South India*, of 68 castes he has shown only ten of them as Left-hand. Therefore, it is clear that some of the commercial and artisan groups have been included in the Right-hand group.

Subbarayulu argues convincingly that the British notion is not correct as in several Left-hand inscriptions of the 14th and 15th Centuries, the leading role is played by the *palli* or *vanniya* caste, which was never a commercial or artisan caste, “during the thousand years of known history.” According to him, “this caste is first noticed as a martial group in the 11th Century serving in the Chola army, and is found to slowly transform itself into a peasant caste within a couple of centuries and it has retained the same status to the present day.”

He also states that Sri Lankan inscriptions of the 11th -12th Centuries mention *valangai* as the title of some of the merchant groups. Nattam Koilpatti in Madurai District also has similar inscriptions. The *Valangai* title has been found to be attributed to the militia and guardsmen of the garrisoned towns (*eriveerapattinam*). He further states that during the 12-14th Centuries, many warriors became landowners; thus *pallis* became landowners as seen from both Pandya and Chola inscriptions. Similarly *surutimans* were martial people who turned landowners in 11-12th Centuries.

Thus it is clear that the nature of Right and Left-hand classification went through changes over the centuries. In course of time, it became a notation of class in society. However, in the inscriptions of 12th and 13th Centuries, *idangai* has been shown as attributes of certain caste groups. Again quoting Subbarayulu, we find, “The Valikandapuram inscription of 1227 is a sign of solidarity pact of the Left-hand communities which included the communities Brahamana, ariya, nattaman, malaiyaman, andanar, pannattar, vaniyanagar, and kaikkola. It may be observed here that the *nattaman* and *malaiyaman* occupy the top positions next only to the Brahamana caste...”

It is therefore obvious that in the vertical division, changes took place and at the different strata levels at different times.

(To be concluded next fortnight)

● by K.R.A. Narasiah

overt contexts in which the conflicts took place, and second, the underlying motivations and social dynamics which gave rise to the disturbances.” According to Mattison Mines and several others, the conflicts had also the dual purpose of strengthening economic power and the share in the trade with the English. It is obvious that the influential dubashes played important roles. It is also noted that the Governors of different times preferred one group to the other.

ordered each group to select equal number of Brahmins who were considered neutral, to settle by an arbitration. The head of the Komatis did not agree to this and, therefore, had to be confined to the merchant godown. The result was total chaos with armed fighting between groups.”

From this passage it is clear that the trading Chettis were of the Left Hand caste and the Komatis or the artisan group belonged to the Right Hand caste. John Company preferred the trading Chettis as is clear from their dispatch, “The Right Hand castes are forty to one in point of numbers and all sorts of handicraft people but then they are generally poor and lavish, whereas the Left Hand castes are mostly merchants, wealthy and parsimonious and forty times richer” (Love, Vol II page 142).

It reads something like the Pareto principle! Pareto’s 80-20 principle says, while preparing goals and setting up a Time Management Scale, the thing to be remembered is that only 20% of the tasks performed produce 80% of the results. Conversely, 80% of time is spent in achieving only 20% of results! While prioritising goals, therefore, high priority must be given to these 20% main tasks. So the English desired that the useful trading people be favoured, though they were less in number!

Mattison Mines states (*Public Faces and Private Voices*

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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

Two pages to mark a Platinum Jubilee

# The first Tamil talking picture

October 31, 1931 ... seventyfive years ago. Large, enthusiastic crowds had gathered at the Central Station, then the terminus and main station of the Madras and South Mahratta Railway, awaiting the arrival of the Bombay Express. Many joined the crowd without knowing the reason for the mainly male turnout. People spoke in excited whispers, wondering who was arriving...? Mahatma Gandhi? Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru? Who?

When the train steamed to a stop, those who were in the know checked, to the surprise of others, the boxes that were being unloaded from it. The boxes contained the print of the first Tamil talkie *Kalidas*, produced by Ardeshir Irani and directed by H.M. Reddi from the South Indian silent film world, for Imperial Films, Bombay! With them arrived the awesome, new-fangled equipment like 'sound' projector, amplifier, loudspeakers, yards of wires and spares. The technicians, spe-

cially trained in sound, were treated like some kind of supermen and received with cheers. Shouts of joy in Tamil, "*Talkie Vandhaacchu...!*" (Talkies have come) rent the air! The 'magic boxes' with the film cans, the equipment, and the accompanying crew were all garlanded. Coconuts were broken and camphor burnt as though to the Gods. Then, all were taken in a grand procession from the station to the Kinema Central some miles away. Jubilant crowds gathered on both sides of the road and cheered them,

a prestige-plus cinema. Earlier it had also served as a 'drama house' where the likes of TKS Brothers staged plays in their early years. Sadly, this cinema house, re-named 'Murugan,' is today neglected and almost forgotten. Today, you have to virtually search for it, to locate this once-popular A-class theatre so full of film history!

Having made a success with the first Hindi talking film *Alam Ara* released earlier the same year, Irani wished to make a film in Tamil. But he had some

**RANDOR GUY remembers...  
on the occasion of the  
75th Anniversary of the Tamil talkie**

heralding the dawn of a new age in cinema.

The staff and manager of the cinema – and milling crowds – received them in style at St. Xavier's Street where the cinema was situated. Kinema Central, off Broadway, was then

doubts. He was not sure whether his German-made sound recording equipment would record the Tamil language! Even the men around him had similar doubts. To clear his doubts and spread his risks he had some characters in *Kalidas* speak and sing in Tamil and the hero in Telugu and, by way of abundant caution, as the system had already recorded Hindi successfully, he had other actors speak in Hindi! Well, the equipment had no linguistic prejudices and it recorded clearly all the three languages without discrimination. Thus *Kalidas* was the first Indian multi-lingual movie! Indeed it was advertised in Madras-based newspapers like the *Swadesamitran* (the leading Tamil daily of the day) as a "Tamil-Telugu film".

Technically, *Kalidas* was far from perfect. Sound synchronisation was poor. When sound was heard from the screen, the actors often had their mouths tightly shut! When they moved their lips, no sound was heard. But nobody cared and *Kalidas* proved to be a box-office hit. The mere novelty of the screen exploding into sounds, song and dialogue – in Tamil and that – thrilled people.

Before the screening of *Kalidas*, a few gypsy dances rendered by T.P. Rajalakshmi, accompanied by appropriate music, were screened as curtain-raiser. These dances had absolutely no connection with the story or the main film. In the early days of sound films in India, such scenes, colloquially known as 'items', were

## SONG & STORY BOOK OF KALIDAS

FIRST TAMIL & TELUGU TALKIE

PRODUCED BY  
IMPERIAL MOVI-TONE



AT KINEMA CENTRAL  
FROM SATURDAY 31st OCT. 1931.

screened. This was the impact of that American art form, vaudeville. Ardeshir Irani had shot these dance sequences more as an experiment in sound recording. K. Subramaniam recommended the stage and silent film star T. P. Rajalakshmi for the dances and also to play the title role in the historic movie. That was how she made her debut in talking pictures.

In passing, it should be mentioned that the word 'talkies' was used as a suffix to the names of several cinema theatres. For example, 'Select Talkies', 'Crown Talkies', etc. The word was used by theatre owners to make it clear that the theatre was wired and equipped for sound and screened talking and not silent films. In India, even after movies began to talk in 1931, silent films continued to be made and screened for some years. So, at a given point of time in a town, both silent and talking pictures were often screened! The word 'talkies' is used in the names of some cin-

ema halls even today in many parts of India, especially in small towns and rural areas.

*Kalidas* was a folk tale based on the life of the legendary Sanskrit poet Kalidas, the creator of many classics like *Abhignana Shakunthalam*.

Two songs by Rajalakshmi became immensely popular. One was the emotional outburst of love by the heroine. She sang, *Manmadha Bhaanamadaa... Maarinil Paayuthadaa...!* The other highlighted the Indian Freedom Movement, Mahatma Gandhi and his icon the *charka*.

The first line of song was *Raattinamam... Gandhi Kai Bhanamaam... Cinema in those early days threw in everything it could think of to make it mass entertainment.*

Unfortunately there are no gramophone records of *Kalidas* songs and no print of the film has survived. Even the songbook is not easily traceable.

*Kalidas* was the only film to be produced in Tamil in 1931 and it created history.

## Our 'eight steps', their 'seven steps'

There is a belief in parts of South India and in Sri Lanka about the existence of a highly venomous snake whose bite will kill the victim by the time he moves eight steps ahead. In Kerala, it is called *ettati moorkhan*, the 'eight-steps cobra'.

K.G. Adiyodi in his 1965 book in Malayalam on the venomous snakes of Kerala identifies *ettati moorkhan* as *Calliophis nigrescens* – the striped coral snake which is a rare, 4 feet long venomous snake of the Western Ghats. He also says that the snake known as *ettati veeran* is different – it is the common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*).

The Tamil name is spelt as both *ettati viriyan* and *ettati veeran*. *Viriyan* means viper; *veeran* means 'powerful' or 'brave', but the name is, more probably, a corruption of *viriyan*. In F. Wall's *Snakes of Ceylon* (1921), *yettati viriyan* is given as the Tamil name for the common krait. Gharpurey (*The Snakes of India and Paki-*

*stan*, 1954) says that the common krait is called *yettati viriyan* "in Madras". The *Tamil Lexicon* (University of Madras, 1982) describes *ettati virian* as a viper.

So, is it a cobra or a krait or a viper or a coral snake? Whatever its identity, the belief about its lethal power is the same: it is 'finis' just eight steps away. This is, of course, no more than old wives' tale, even though all these species are venomous.

There is a curiously similar tale from Africa. Mark O'Shea says (*Venomous Snakes of the World*, 2005) that, in Somalia, the African burrowing asp (*Atract-aspis microlepidota*) is called 'seven steps', the belief being that the victim of its bite will be dead by the time he moves seven steps ahead. The venom of the snake can kill, but not that fast. (Courtesy: *Cobra*, the journal of the Chennai Snake Park.)

— B. Vijayaraghavan

### READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more hand written 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 unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

THE EDITOR

# An encyclopaedic effort

— Recording Tamil film history

‘Film News’ Anandan is a well known personality in the field of Tamil cinema. For the past 50 years and more he has been the repository of photographs of film personalities and events associated with the film industry. Beginning with the publication *Film News* which was set up by a close friend, with whom he worked as a photographer, he began collecting information on Tamil films and the Chennai-based film industry. Later he began releasing, annually, a booklet of statistics relating to the industry.

Anandan himself is a diminutive personality, whose frail form hides the monumental and often thankless task he has carried on over the years. But film research scholars from all over the world have knocked on the doors of his modest Peter’s Road residence for information. Anandan maintained a very organised personal archive there from which any photograph or news clipping relating to a film or a film personality could be pulled out and copies handed over within a day. The only problem was contacting Anandan himself for he was and continues to remain an extremely busy person, eternally involved in collecting information and taking photographs.

As in all such private collections, the question of the fate of Anandan’s trove after his time always loomed large. Happily for him, the previous State administration evinced interest in it, acquired it and funded the release of an encyclopaedia with much of the material. It is, however, my earnest hope that the



‘Film News’ Anandan.

collection is also made accessible to the public, which it is not at present, and does not gather dust before eventually disintegrating in some government godown.

The encyclopaedia, in Tamil, titled *Sadhanaigal Padaitha Thamizhthirai Pada Varalaru* is a tome of 738 pages and is priced at Rs 500. Rather characteristically for Anandan, the book talks very little about him. It is divided into 37 sections. Perhaps the most valuable section is Number 28 which gives the list of all films made in Tamil from 1931 till 2004 and spans 450 pages in the book. This is not a mere listing. What makes it interesting is the wealth of detail that is given on each film wherever available, such as the length of the film, its place of production, its producers, date of release, principal star cast, names of the director, music director and lyricist.

In a few instances, Anandan has also recorded certain other trivia which too make very interesting reading. For instance,

while the first Tamil talkie was *Kalidas* (1931), it actually had actors from various linguistic backgrounds and each spoke in his or her own language. The novelty of a talkie ensured that audiences overlooked the multiplicity of languages. Therefore the first full-length Tamil talkie was actually *Galava*, made in 1932.

Wherever available, visuals from the films have also been included. The formatting of this section could have been better, you feel, when you compared it with similar works, such as *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* by Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen (OUP, 2002). There are also some errors and omissions which, hopefully, will get corrected in future editions. But these are few and do not in any way lessen the merit of the work.

The rest of the book is given over to interesting trivia and pieces of information on the film industry. There is a section titled “Gnapakam varude” where the author has reminisced about the film industry and certain key incidents in its history which makes good reading. However, some effort at proof checking and also the correctness of the written text would have improved this section considerably.

The book suffers from lack of proper codification, formatting and indexing – as in most Government publications. A major casualty is the section on film personalities. A footnote explaining why personalities such as Lata Mangeshkar, Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Nargis are included in an encyclo-



The cover of ‘Film News’ Anandan’s encyclopaedic book.

paedia on Tamil films would have been appropriate. The reader has to search to find out that these and a few others have been involved in at least one Tamil film in their lifetime and have, hence, been included.

There is a section which lists out film personalities in whose honour postage stamps have been released. The inclusion of Satyajit Ray, Uday Shankar and Charlie Chaplin is a major surprise as these personalities are in no way connected with Tamil films. A bigger surprise is that this section goes on to list Bharati, Kamban, Tyagaraja, Muttuswami Dikshitar, Syama Sastry Arunagirinathar and Tansen as “Tirai Kalaignargal” (film personalities), sub section “Isai Vidwangaal” (music composers). The details beneath each name then explain why. Anandan has included those whose songs have been used in films or those who have been the subject of films. But here again an explanatory note

would have been appropriate. Similarly, the inclusion of the great dramatist and poet Kalidasa under the category of novelists is not correct. *Shakuntalai* was not the name of a novelist; it was a creation of Kalidasa’s. Therefore including *Shakuntalai* as a novelist on whom a postage stamp has been released is erroneous. Similarly it is not clear as to what role Rukmini Devi Arundale had in the film *Raja Desingu* (1936), for she is also included under the heading of film personalities honouring whom stamps were released and why this film is referred to against her name.

Under the section on women costume designers, the name of Oscar-winning Bhanu Athaiya is absent. Yet, Attenborough’s *Gandhi* is included in the listing of personalities on whom films were made. On *Gandhi*, AK Chettiar’s film is not mentioned, perhaps because it was more of a documentary. Under dance choreographers, the name of the late Ragini, for her contribution to the Indo-Soviet film *Pardesi*, ought to have been included. Under the section on films without dialogue, Kamal Hassan’s *Pushpak* is also absent.

A wholly avoidable section is the one on film personalities who received doctorates, for the value of most of these honours is debatable.

All that said, the book is a valuable treatise on the Tamil Film Industry about which there has really been no comprehensive written work so far. This book is a must for all serious students of Tamil cinema. It is hoped that an English version will also be released soon. It is also to be hoped that a panel of film historians is brought in to weed out the errors and omissions and that a corrected version will emerge.

## Not a dull page in the book

He has had star performers falling at his feet. An aggrieved senior musician tore his shirt in fury. He has been accused of favouritism towards a few select artistes. A *prima donna* reportedly made a bid to buy his favour and was spurned by him. Private and public organisations have vied with one another to heep honours on him. Lawsuits have dogged him again and again.

What more could a biographer ask for! Lada Guruden Singh, chosen by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, to write *Beyond*

*Destiny*, on the life and times of Subbudu the Critic, is well aware of the daunting task before him as the “city still burns” with the fallout of the searing pen of his protagonist. Singh, awestruck by the multifaceted personality of Subbudu, is bewildered as to whom he should place before the readers – “the sensitive maverick, *karma yogi*, naive egoist, or the ageing lion.”

Compounding his problems is the fact that Singh has to enter unfamiliar territory. He is a stranger to the art scene in Chennai, which is Subbudu’s

chief domain of activity. And he does not appear to know either Carnatic music or the Tamil language, respectively the content and the medium of a major portion of Subbudu’s writings.

Singh has chosen, therefore, to play the role of a faithful scribe to one who is renowned as raconteur par excellence. The outcome is a book of memoirs rather than a biography.

The life and times of Subbudu, told in his own words, packs the same punch as all his writings. There is not a dull page in the volume.



The opening chapters deal with Subbudu’s early years in Rangoon and his trek back to India during World War II. The account of his musical training is sketchy; all that can be gathered is that he was mostly a self-taught genius, who would learn by observing other people being taught. His forays into vocal Carnatic music, playing the harmonium and the *mridangam* and participations in *bajan-s*, mark his initiation as a performer. Playing errand boy for the artistes who were invited by the Sabha run by his father, gave him the opportunity to observe the stars at close quarters and get a taste of off-stage goings on. A punster, prankster and a naturally endowed actor who could unlock his jaw at will

(Continued on page 8)

Sriram V.

# Chennai to become a big 'hotspot'

After becoming the preferred investment destination for global telecom hardware companies, Chennai will soon become favoured for a different reason.

If Dishnet Wireless Limited's plans fructify, the city will soon become a big internet hotspot, an area where you can access the web with a laptop.

The company has announced its plans to set up worldwide interoperability for microwave access – popularly known WiMix – infrastructure all over the city, enabling its subscribers to access the net even from the roads.

Says senior vice president Ram Shinde, "We have sought permission from the Municipal

Corporation and others to set up the required equipment atop Corporation lamp posts, buildings and other places for this purpose."

Launchign the WiMax services in the city, Dishnet Wireless intends to invest \$100 million in expanding the service to 44 Indian cities in three phases. During the first phase the company would focus on ten cities, both metros and tier II cities. In the second phase, 24 more cities will be added and in the final phase WiMax will be offered in 10 other cities.

Once a part of the C. Sivasankaran-promoted Sterling Group, Dishnet Wireless is now part of a Maxis, Singapore, and Apollo Hospitals joint ven-

ture. The duo bought the company along with Aircel—two mobile phone service providing companies – for nearly \$1 billion from the Sterling Group. Under the new ownership, Dishnet Wireless will shortly be renamed.

The commercial launch of WiMax has come nearly a year behind schedule. Last year, when Dishnet Wireless launched its wireless internet fidelity (WiFi) services (a wireless net access technology), it said WiMax services would be shortly introduced.

"We have been testing the services for the past one year. We have around 100 clients now," Shinde remarks.

On the other hand, the company slowed down its WiFi expansion phase. "The existing WiFi hotspots were in low PC penetration areas and didn't get us revenues," he explains. Now, with WiMax technology capable of powering the WiFi hotspots as well, Shinde says a subscriber can access the net while indoors or outdoors.

While WiMax and WiFi may seem similar in terms of wireless net access, actually they are not. The WiFi spectrum is unlicensed, whereas WiMax requires a licence. In the case of WiMax, the reliability is higher and the quality of service is expected to be better than WiFi.

According to Shinde, the total internet subscribers in India are around seven million and around three million have an 'always on' broadband connection. "The Indian internet access market is around \$360 million. The share of corporates / small and medium enterprises (SME) is around \$255 million. The balance is the broadband connection."

But the growth over the previous year is just 2 per cent. "The company that owns the last mile/access to customers' premises is at an advantage." With WiMax, Dishnet Wireless hopes to overcome that disadvantage. Shinde is banking on WiMax increasing internet penetration fast.

As to the company's business plan, Dishnet Wireless will initially target the small and medium enterprises (SME) and the big corporates. The home segment is out of the company's radar as the hardware cost is around Rs. 4 lakh. If taken on rent, the annual rental is Rs. 30,000, with a minimum subscription of Rs. 5 lakh a year.

Venkatachari Jagannathan

## MADRAS BEING MALLED

(Continued from page 1)

Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) to house a hypermarket, anchor store, four-screen multiplex, food court and retail stores. (Completion: March 2008.)

**Forum Vijaya Mall** (Bangalore's Prestige Group and G.H. Reddy of the Green Park Hotel group): 700,000 sq. ft. at Vadapalani on the site of the Vijaya Sesh Mahal Kalyana Mandapam, to house a mall-cum-multiplex, 400,000 sq. ft. of offices and parking for 1,500 cars. A second Forum Mall will come up on Mount Road with a total built-up area of 1,275,000 sq. ft. including 750,000 sq. ft. of offices and parking facilities for 1,700 cars. (Completion: November 2008.)

**Gateway** (Shriram Properties & Infrastructure Limited and Sun Apollo): Four million sq. ft. of IT park, a 250-room five-star hotel, an 800,000 sq. ft. mall and 300 service apartments.

**Riverside Mall** (Marg Constructions, Karapakkam): 725,000 sq. ft. of building space on the OMR with a multiplex, food court, retail shops and movie theatre by Fame Cinemas.

**Town Centre** (Kshitij with Kishore Biyani): Two million square feet on Velachery High Road.

The following malls are being planned:

**Arenes Gold Souk Mall:** GST Road near Vandalur.

**Business Centre:** At Pallikarainai.

**DLF:** Development of the 5.5 acre MICO property on Ethiraj Salai.

**ECCI Mall:** at Semmanchery.

**Express Estates,** off Anna Salai: 800,000 sq. ft. mall-cum-multiplex, along with commercial space and a five star hotel.

**Gee Gee Kushaldas:** 180,000 sq. ft. mall on Poonamallee High Road, Kilpauk (on the site of Kushaldas Gardens).

**Kalpathi Mall:** At Perambur.

**Mahindra Mall:** At Maraimalai Nagar.

**Orchid Mall:** Near Padi.

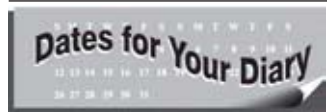
**Ozone Mall:** At Anna Nagar.

**PS Group:** At Velachery.

**Real Value Promoters:** At Perungudi.

**Shriram Mall:** At Perungulathur.

**Unitech Mall:** In the erstwhile Gordon Woodroffe premises in Pallavaram.



**November 11:** The Magic of Mozart by the Signum Quartett (Kerstin Dill – Violin, Valentin Eichler, Viola, Annette Walther – Violin, Thomas Schmitz - Cello)

The Signum Quartett, shortly after its founding, was awarded the First Prize in

Germany's 1994 youth competition *Jugend musiziert*.

The Chennai concert is part of *The Hindu* November Fest and honours the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (at The Music Academy, 7.00 p.m. Entry by tickets only).



## Subscriptions and contributions

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An ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION of just Rs.100 covers only a part of our costs. Corporate support and YOUR support will continue to be essential for Chennai Heritage and *Madras Musings* to play a greater role in creating awareness about the city, its heritage and its environment. We therefore look forward to your sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

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

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2005-06 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

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

— The Editor

## CHENNAI HERITAGE

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## Senate House Conservation Fund

• The Senate House Restoration and Management Trust appeals to all alumni of the University of Madras and heritage lovers everywhere to contribute to the Senate House Conservation Fund which the Trust is managing for the purpose of restoring *Senate House* to its old glory and maintaining it thereafter in the same condition. Cheques should be made out to the Senate House Conservation Account and sent to the Registrar, University of Madras, Chennai 600 005. Contributions are eligible for benefits under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act.

Dear Registrar,

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

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

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

Date: ..... Signature: .....

# Alandur shows the way

(Continued from page 1)

edented fund mobilisation, especially with a multiparty municipal council in place!

A separate bank account in the name of Alandur Municipality Underground Sewerage Scheme (UGS) was opened by the municipality in the Punjab National Bank, and a special committee comprising the Chairman and Commissioner of the municipality and three representatives from registered local residents' welfare associations monitored the operations of the UGS account. "All funds were audited by two representatives from the civic associations. Monthly updates on the project progress were given to the community. However, only 70% of the area has been covered, since everyone hasn't taken a connection yet", says Bharathi.

An independent project management consultant appointed by the municipal administration monitored the project right through "to ensure

exclusive focus on the project and accountability".

The second phase was officially completed in March 2005. The project, serving both current as well as the estimated population in 2027 (of 3,00,000), assures 12 million litres per day of sewage to the STP which will revert to the municipality in 14 years' time.

The Tamil Nadu Urban Development Fund's (TNUDF) role started from project development, implementation, funding and monitoring of the project. R. Gayathri, Assistant Vice President, TNUDF, says, "The Build Operate Transfer (BOT) concept came into existence during implementation since the Urban Local Body (ULB) was short on finances. Our discussions with Government officials and the ULB, for giving the STP, costing around Rs. 8 crore on BOT basis, reduced the project cost from Rs. 34 crore to 27 crore. The original means of finance was a

Rs. 3 crore grant and a loan for the balance. Being the first underground project in a municipality, the World Bank also insisted on public participation. TNUDF explained to the ULB the concept and the necessity to involve the public in creating a huge infrastructure asset. The participation included equity participation (with the public requested to contribute Rs. 5000 as one-time deposit) and participation during construction (a team was formed to review the construction process, in which residents' associations also participated)."

A comprehensive contract document for the BOT ensured that payments were linked to progress of work and resulted in an unprecedented timely completion of the project. Rs. 3 crore from the TNUDF project was given for the implementation of work. Tariffs originally fixed at Rs. 150 p.m. per household were replaced by a revised and graded tariff system based

on the area of house connected to the system.

The fact that in the last 20 years no sewer project begun had been completed on time as per the implementation schedule in the State might have made this project even more daunting. But here, as Gayathri says, "The reasons for success were: clear, transparent processes; involvement of the beneficiaries at all stages; effective contract management; and timely completion."

Says K. Rajivan, CEO of TNUDF during project implementation, "Financial mobilisation of funds from the public was the main challenge. If anyone told me then that such large numbers of the public would pay upfront, I'd have thought they were joking! And the credit, 100%, goes to the municipality and its Chairman. The success of this PPP was due to the demand for the service, a leadership that addressed this demand, and credible financ-

ing. But in spite of such a potent combination, rough weather was encountered when goondas tried to rough up the Chairman, foisted false cases etc. to delay the project. Environmentally-related projects that are for the common good must be beyond such political battles."

Says L. Ravikumar, Senior Vice President, TNUDF, during the project period, calls the ASP "a masterpiece for the entire world" and says it continues to be cited in many world fora, with queries coming from the ADB, WB, European countries, South Africa etc. "The ASP has also changed radically the face of the municipality itself, and the way people look at similar PPP projects! In what is called the Demonstration Effect, seven other towns in the State have now designed projects on similar lines under the National River Conservation Project with public fund mobilisation." Others have begun mobilising public support.

An important lesson learnt has been the need for good contract management practices to ensure that political discontinuity does not affect the confidence of private operators. Whereas the bureaucracy is willing to work for the public good and take a stand against the political set-up, there have been instances of harassment by the Vigilance Department. In many instances, local politicians, in the name of contractors, harassed local citizens who had to connect their sewage to the mains. An expert feels, "It would be a tragedy for Tamil Nadu if private operators refuse to take up such Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects because of anticipating similar issues."

## NOT A DULL PAGE IN THE BOOK

(Continued from page 6)

to play Hanuman on stage, the child Subbudu is most certainly the father of the man.

According to Singh, Subbudu wanted "his biography (to) mainly concern his critical intervention only in the realm of Bharata Natyam and Carnatic music. As for Bharata Natyam, Subbudu admits that he "learnt the ropes of dance criticism by accompanying artistes on the harmonium and *mridangam*." It was 'Kalki' who was his inspiration to take to art criticism. At the very outset 'Kalki' gave him his Gospel: "You must write in such a manner that, after the performance,

people forget about the artiste and start talking about you." The reminiscences show step by step how artistes and the media served as props to elevate the master critic to the dizzying heights he scaled.

He became a bilingual critic, writing in English for the *Statesman* in Delhi and in both English and Tamil for the newspapers and magazines in Chennai. "He ravaged through the streets of the Indian performing arts, beating his chest and roaring stridently till artistes followed his path or were hunted down. His attacks, personal and offensive, were never limited to the talent a person possessed but

sought to prick the skin that adorns the talent," sums up Singh in his prologue.

Correcting an M.S. Subbulakshmi here, ticking off a Semmangudi there, getting even with a Yamini Krishnamurthi in a lawsuit and calling the shots in the competition among the magazines and newspapers, Subbudu rides the crest. It is apparent that he is a rare phenomenon, a unique combination of knowledge, experience, wit, courage and, above all, a highly expressive style bordering on the poetic. Any attempt to follow him would be hara-kiri, for he trod the dangerous line between the

sensational and the scurrilous with the dare-devilry of an adventurer.

He is as much a critic of himself as he is of others and is candid enough to admit, "Even I need some flattery in this old age," when questioned about his lavishing praises on underserving artistes.

To offset the formidable image, there are cameos of Subbudu as a family man with deep, emotional attachments, as a loving albeit absent-minded father, a caring husband and an affectionate brother. — (Courtesy: *Snuthi*.)

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

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