

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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"What! No curd rice...?!"

It's haute cuisine now!

Isn't this something?

Our very own *thair saadham* making it to billboards, finding a slot for itself in the midst of all that fancy global cuisine/food festivals brouhaha.

Who'd have thought...?

Now, if you belong to the generation that grew up on school lunches of *thair-saadham-dotted-with-pickle* in little single-tiered tiffin carriers (those were the dinosaur days before hot packs and cute containers, you see), you cannot but help glowing just a bit.

Imagine, we were so 'in' (Yes, I know, yet another dated word that betrays your time-slot), and didn't know it.

Instead, we used the dish's name when accusing someone of a certain lack of panache or savvy-dom.

Another image with the dish playing centre-stage.

Dinner time. A grandmother (or someone equally venerable) sits, facing a semi-circle of youngsters. Their hands are stretched out, palms upturned. Scooping perfect little mounds of *thair saadham* from a big vessel in front of her, she places them bang in the middle of each palm. And the children eat, mesmerised by her stories into finishing dinner minus any fuss.

The dish has certainly come a long way — fancy packing, advertised by stars, and given a name that's a play on its old one.

But, inside, the same familiar friend.

Not all makeovers change the essential soul.

And thank God for that.

Ranjitha Ashok

Government to the rescue of what's illegal

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Government of Tamil Nadu gave a shot in the arm to all those violating building rules and land use specifications on July 27th. In a sweeping move, it promulgated an Ordinance that allowed the status quo on illegal buildings for a year. The Ordinance sought to maintain the status quo on unauthorised constructions for a year, notwithstanding any judgement, decree or order of any court!

It also said all notices issued by any authority for initiating action against unauthorised development shall be deemed to have been suspended and no punitive action shall be taken for a year.

The reason given was that the Justice Mohan Committee is, anyway, reviewing the Town and Country Planning Act and, in the light of that, several new recommendations will emerge which will need to be implemented. Therefore, all such violations can be taken care of in the light of the Committee's report with retrospective effect.

The Government has cited protection of hawkers' interests as the main reason for the Ordinance. It claims that they would have been the worst affected had the High Court's recent judgements on demolition of illegal structures been put into effect.

The Citizens consumer and civic Action Group (CAG), which had successfully challenged the indiscriminate regularisation of unauthorised constructions earlier, is of the view that the clause about protection of hawkers' interests is a sham, as no court order has ever asked for eviction of hawkers. On the other hand, in terms of court judgements, there is a Committee that is looking into the interests of hawkers.

What in reality the Ordinance has done is to protect the high profile violators of building safety rules and FSI regulations, and in particular the illegal buildings that have come up in T'Nagar's shopping area which were slated for demolition. All legal actions, such as demolition and the imposition of regulatory fines, have now come to a stop.

It is worth reminding readers that the State government is not alone in this. The Delhi Government too has taken shelter behind a similar excuse and the Tamil Nadu Government has obviously taken a leaf from the country's capital.

There is a strong belief among those shocked by this

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To be seen at Nanmangalam

• Among the dominant plant species are Kayampoo (*Memecylon umbellatum*), Virali (*Dodonea viscosa*), Marakalan (*Catunaregam spinosa*), and *Eugenia bracteata*. The Reserve Forest is also a habitat for Jackals, Grey-naped hare, Monitor lizard, Sita's lizard and a variety of bird species. Birds like Little brown dove, Jungle wren-babbler, Small minivet, Indian robin, Stone curlew, White-eyed buzzard, Common Indian nightjar and Indian great horned owl (in the picture above) are noteworthy. During winter, several birds, like the Brahminy starling, Chestnut-tailed starling and Rosy starling, can be sighted in great numbers. The insect life is quite prolific, many unnoticed being nocturnal and/or camouflaged well. Notable among them are eight-inch-long praying mantises resembling grass leaves, and ant-lions, beautifully coloured crickets, jewel beetles, spiders, butterflies and moths. The water in the ravines holds frogs and turtles. (Also see page 7.)

Let's all add to this celebration of Madras

It is now clear that Madras Day has come to stay as an annual event in Chennai's social calendar. It is difficult to believe that it was just three years ago that the Editor of *Madras Musings* and a few other journalists who are heritage and history enthusiasts got together to celebrate the founding of this city by Francis Day, Andrew Cogan, Beri Thimmappa and Nagabathan, none of whom is remembered anywhere in the metropolis.

In 2005, Madras Day was a low key event with a couple of Heritage Walks, a few quiz contests and a couple of talks

centring on the city as its subject. The sudden arrival of Salman Rushdie with Padma Lakshmi in tow for one of these talks created quite a flutter. But that was largely it. It was felt that such an event needed to be

By A Special Correspondent

broadbased with hotels, shops, establishments and organisations getting involved. The city needed to wear a festive look and feel festive for it to be a proper birthday.

Chennai Heritage, publishers of *Madras Musings*,

decided to organise a series of talks in order to commemorate the city's founding and this changed the event from Madras Day to Madras Week. Naturally, this enlarged the scope of the celebrations. The corporate houses of the city came forward to participate. The Taj Group of Hotels was the first to come forward and offered to host a couple of the talks. An exhibition of photographs of Carnatic musicians of the past was held at the Piano Lounge of the hotel. Closely following it came the Park Hotel which hosted the first of the talks. The restaurant-cum-boutique Chamiers chipped in offering its venue for

The Madras Week Programme: Page 5.

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GOKHALE HALL - OUT OF BOUNDS

The Young Men's Indian Association is following the time-tested route for building a case for the demolition of historic *Gokhale Hall* on Armenian Street. *The Man from Madras Musings* learns that eager students of the Music Department, Madras University, on a walking tour of the George Town area, were denied permission to enter the building. The senior office-bearer from whom permission was sought declared over the phone that the building was unsafe for entry and he did not want to be held responsible for any mishap to the students in case the edifice came crashing down on them! The students simply contented themselves with standing outside this "endangered" structure. What impressed them most was the visible solidity of the edifice. No signs of imminent collapse at all! A few locals, on seeing the group, came forward and expressed their distress at the closure of the Hall. Apparently, these people were regulars at the gymnasium run by the YMIA and are lost without it.

To MMM, the strategy of the YMIA is crystal clear. The Association, having made up its mind to demolish the building and finding the Corporation not forthcoming with the necessary permission, has decided on a long-term plan. The building will be locked and made over to the elements. Within a few years, lack of maintenance and, in particular, seepage of rainwater will anyway endanger the structure. It will then be child's play to obtain permission to demolish it. And then, a new modern swanky building will emerge, but with no history to speak of. The YMIA, incidentally, built a modern premises on its Royapettah property which it is finding difficult to get tenants for. This property also has a heritage building in it, though not as that of the *Gokhale Hall*. That building is also badly maintained, but is often used as an inexpensive location for lectures. It is a pity that an organisation with such a hoary past should have such a poor sense of history and heritage.

Musical legacy

The Man from Madras Musings learns that the room in which Tyagaraja, the great composer, stayed in the Bunder Street residence of dubash Kovur Sundaresa Mudaliar, has been pulled down and a new structure has come up in its place. What amazes MMM is that the rest of the building remains the same and the only room which perhaps qualified as being of heritage importance has been demolished and rebuilt. Poor Tyagaraja! His house in Tiruvayyaru was razed to the ground last year and those in charge have decided to build a temple in its place. This was



The state of composer Tiruvottriyur Tyagier's house in George Town.

challenged in Court, but was dismissed on the grounds that the demolition had already happened and so nothing could be done about it. In a State that does not have any heritage laws, this is only to be expected.

On its last legs, MMM told, is the home of yet another composer, Tiruvottriyur Tyagier, which is in Ramaswami Street, George Town. The house is owned by the TUCS which, unlike in the case of its properties in Triplicane and Royapettah, has chosen to neglect what was once its Muthialpet Branch. Though the façade still stands, the interior has completely caved in, as can be seen from the photograph which MMM's legman took when he visited the place.

In all this tale of gloom and doom, said a friend who went on the walk, there was one bright spot. 'Veena' Dhanammal's house on Ramakrishna Chetty Street has not been demolished. The new owner has decided to use it as a godown, though, for reasons best known to him, he has painted the exterior a bright green. But then, this must be a mere temporary reprieve for he can change his mind anytime and pull down the house. All in all, said MMM's friend, it is a gloomy prospect for the city's classical music heritage.

Which class now?

The Madras University, said a wag to *The Man from Madras Musings*, may possess a world class *Senate House*, but when it comes to educational standards it appears to be nowhere among the top few that count. *The Times*, London, has brought out its Higher Education Supplement 2007, an authoritative journal in the world of academia, and it lists the world's top 200 universities. The IITs rank 57th overall, while holding the 3rd place among technology universities, after MIT and the University of California, Berkeley. The IIMs rank 68th overall and the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, ranks 183. The Delhi University holds the 75th position in Humanities and Arts and 86th position for Social Sci-

ences. Now what about the city's own, presently celebrating its 150th year, asked the wag. MMM had no answer.

The warring and wrangling dons should get the message. The University incidentally is no longer 5-star rated. It is now ranked in the 4-star category. Where is it headed?

The CMWSSB way

The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, which administers what was once called Molony's Mixture to all of us, woke up sometime last month to the fact that *The Man from Madras Musings* and his neighbours had been leading a trouble-free existence for some time. In order to make us all believe like Marcus Aurelius that the falling of aught upon us is a good

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

thing, they sent a missive that water supply would be suspended for a period of three days for preventive maintenance and cleaning of the pipes. MMM and his neighbours stockpiled necessary water for the period and patiently waited, certain that they had taken the necessary precautions. There was complete silence from the CMWSSB thereafter. It was hoped that they were seriously doing preventive maintenance and had not been prevented from their work in any way. But when after four days water did not emerge and remained elusive for a good four days more, tempers and tensions ran high in MMM's locality. The local office of the CMWSSB was evasive at best and, soon, pessimists were proclaiming that the days of the water tankers had come about once again.

A body of negotiators was gathering more and more adherents which claimed that only the passing on of "something" would ease the situation. But then all these fears proved unfounded. After a good ten

days, water, though a little murky, no doubt owing to the cleaning, emerged. It was just that the CMWSSB is a 'Chaotic Metro but Wilfully Strong and Silent Body' that moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform, MMM discovered.

In the dark

The Man from Madras Musings is certain that the Editor of this journal (or the Chief as we like to think of him) is not going to like this, as the contributions of Ziegenbalg of Tranquebar and the Jesuit missionaries of Madura in the propagation of Tamil rank high among his favourite subjects. But why is it that when all other statues dotting the Marina are always in a blaze of light, thanks to the new spotlights fitted on their pedestals, that of GU Pope alone is always shrouded in darkness? Is it because the powers-that-be view him to be a rank outsider? But surely they can't, with Beshi and Caldwell on pedestals too?

Another mystery that MMM would like unravelled is the wire netting that has been stretched on the lawn on which the statue stands. It is apparently to protect the lawn from being eaten up by bovines. But then why is the same privilege not extended to the other patches of grass?

On the subject of the Marina, MMM also wonders why the Great Rockery that has sprung up next to the Triumph of Labour statue is not illuminated at night. Regime politics is said to be the reason. Drunks are known to have sworn off their tittle when they come up against this dark mass all of a sudden. In the old days, had this rockery existed, it would definitely have made horses shy and rear. MMM, taking a leaf from Betsy Trotwood in *David Copperfield*, has named this piece of art as "Blunder Stone Rockery".

Pizza boys whizzing by

The Man from Madras Musings has often marvelled at the pizza outlets that commit in true international style that the item ordered would be delivered at home in exactly so many minutes. Some go further and offer a money-back guarantee if the pizza is not delivered within the stipulated time. All this works very well in the Western capitals where traffic is extremely organised and it is possible to estimate travel time from one place to the other.

In our city of Madras that is Chennai, things are different. Just as the pizza delivery boy (PDB) sets out on his journey, what does he find but a car blocking the very exit! Time is spent in getting this removed only to see that the usual route has been dug up by a leisurely set of workers who are even then consecrating a tribal-look-

ing deity made of two rubber tyres, a plastic bucket and the branch of a tree in order to warn motorists that road works are ahead. Once the PDB has crossed this hurdle, he reaches the traffic lights where a bigwig's arrival has ensured that all traffic is thrown out of gear. Then there are political rallies, bus breakdowns, fist-cuffs between two car drivers whose vehicles have collided and who have therefore decided to dispense justice on the spot, vendors, hand-pulled carts and many other hurdles. Which, incidentally, reminds MMM of the difficulties Vikramaditya went through in his prime to fetch the egg in which the demon's source of strength was stored which, if not released, he, the demon, would eat the girl whom Vikramaditya had his eyes on. To marry, of course, not to eat. Anyway, to get back to the PDB, given all these obstacles, it is amazing that he delivers the items on time, anywhere. But, then, the secret to it lies in the fact that in order to achieve the 'deadline', the PDB violates just about every traffic rule on earth including speed limits. The PDB does not stop at traffic signals, careens on the wrong side through one way streets and, like Spiderman, arrives, just in time. It cannot be denied that the PDB is yet another road menace in Chennai. It is perhaps appropriate that the PDB wears red. For he spells danger to everyone in the vicinity.

But, like much else in the city, he too has come to stay.

Elegant Egmore ...

One of the Wodehouse characters, it was Uncle Fred if *The Man from Madras Musings* remembers correctly, waxed eloquent over the quiet dignity of Paddington Station vis-a-vis Waterloo. MMM has often felt the same about Egmore as compared to Central. In Egmore, there is a certain old-worldly, leisurely pace even now, while at the Central it is all hustle and bustle. Recently, MMM had to catch a train from this elegant station and, while waiting for the rake to arrive, had ample time to wander about the platform. The station has seen several changes recently, all in keeping with its overall structure. There is an escalator for those who cannot climb. But what is a real success is the cleaning of the sloping roofs above the platforms and the introduction of skylights in them. As a result of this, the station concourses do not need any artificial illumination during the day. The whole station looks bright and nice. Kudos to the railways for the good work. But not so the passengers behaviour, as MMM had mentioned last fortnight.

- MMM

• The fourth part of a series of articles on the pluses and minuses of the draft Second Master Plan for Chennai.

Searching for 'Green' in the blueprint

A brief analysis of environmental considerations and the draft Second Master Plan.

A lot has been written and debated about the draft Second Master Plan (DSMP) for Chennai, its disappointments and the potential it might hold for a rapidly growing metropolis. Fraught with shortcomings, it will be no surprise for readers of this series to see one more added to a rather long 'wish list' for the DSMP. On reading the proposed plan with an environmental lens, it appears abundantly clear that no ordinary lens would suffice to glean what the Plan holds for the city's environment!

"Sustainable cities are fundamental to social and economic development. As stated in the tenth plan document of the National Planning Commission, sustainability is not an option but imperative. For a better world to live in, we need good air, pure water, nutritious food, healthy environment and greenery around us. Without sustainability, environmental deterioration and economic decline will be feeding on each other, leading to poverty, pollution, poor health, political upheaval and unrest" – to quote the promising opening lines of the environment chapter of the DSMP. But as you progress, or, rather, ramble through the pages, you are left wondering, would a mere nine pages ever do justice to Vision 2026 of mainstreaming environmental sustainability. Perhaps not, given that this section finds a standalone spot at the far end of the DSMP, reflecting, no doubt, the importance that environmental matters get in current developmental approaches!

At the outset, the Plan does not seem to rely on any kind of significant statistical data baselines – a fundamental prerequisite for environmental analyses. Intermittently, as in the section on air pollution, the document draws from an Environment Management Plan for Chennai from 2003, but pays little attention to baselines in the subsequent sections. Having failed on that account, the DSMP could have at least stressed the need for Environmental Impact Assessments

(EIAs) for the city's resource-intensive development proposals, such as IT parks and gated communities, but of course this may not augur well with the booming construction industry!

This lack of prioritisation of environmental considerations does raise critical concerns for the natural features of Chennai, such as the coast and its beaches, and the nesting habitats it provides to the endangered Olive Ridleys. Further, in the current plan, the 'tsunami-prone coast' (in the Master Plan's own words) does not seem to benefit from the vulnerability assessment strategies being undertaken by the State. Redundantly, having detailed the background to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 1991 and its provisions,

the Plan would have done well to elaborate strategies in dealing with violations on the coast and in effective future implementation of CRZ regulations, keeping in mind the vulnerabilities arising out of sea-based disasters and global warming concerns. Another missing piece of the jigsaw for Chennai's beaches in the Master Plan is their proposed beautification!

Continuing its disconnected 'intentions', the DSMP tries to tackle air pollution by relying on a 2003 study without attempting to link the traffic and transportation sector, barring a mention on the use of alternative fuels. Ridden with further inadequacies, the sections on waste management fall way short of what might even remotely be called a plan and, thus, significant portions have slipped through – source segregation of solid waste, bio-medical waste generation from private medical practitioners, and hazardous waste situation in Manali industrial estate, to name a few serious misses!

It is no surprise, therefore, that the 'Strategy & Actions' section falls woefully short of anything concrete. The DSMP offers very little as 'strategy' or 'action' for environment protection, insipidly proposing studies which may not stand the scrutiny of environmental

(Continued on page 8)

● by **Rajesh Rangarajan**
Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG)

A racy chronicle of Madrasapattinam

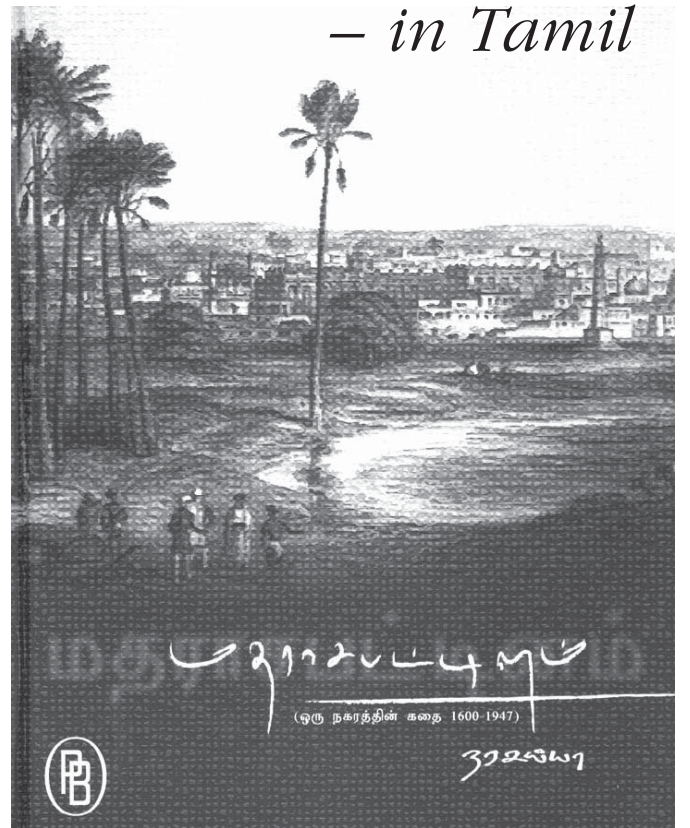
– in Tamil

Madras that is Chennai is singularly unfortunate in that it does not have a heritage act to protect its buildings and environment. But it is lucky in having a dedicated band of heritage enthusiasts and historians which, despite all odds, is determinedly working towards preservation, conservation and, above all, telling the tale to leave behind a written record. K.R.A. Narasiah is one such who, after a busy career in marine engineering is now a devoted researcher on the history of our city. The output of this research is *Madarasapattinam, Oru Nagarattin Kadai 1600-1947*.

If there is anything that is seriously lacking in the documentation that is going on on this city, it is that there are very few works published in Tamil. The needs of those fluent with English have been met by works such as those of J. Talboy Wheeler, Henry Davison Love and, later, C.S. Srinivasa-chariar, and the Madras Tercentenary Volume in 1939. In the recent past, we have had authors such as N.S. Ramaswami and S. Muthiah. But in Tamil we have had hardly any serious works and this book of Narasiah aims to fill that lacuna and does it admirably.

Narasiah has based his work largely on the numerous secondary sources already published on the city and has ensured that all facts he has recorded are substantiated with references, thereby making it easy for those who wish to delve deeper into any of the topics. The book aims to be a holistic work, which prefers to paint a broad canvas covering a range of activities rather than focusing on the political and administrative developments, which alone often unfortunately qualify as historic writing. Thus, while reading the book, it is possible to get a sense of the hustle and bustle of the streets and the markets, as the common people contributed towards the building of great institutions of the country, many of which began in this city.

The story of Madarasapattinam begins in the book with a brief history of the Coromandel Coast prior to the arrival of the Europeans and then the settling of the Portuguese in San Thomé. The story then moves on to the coming of the British and the consequent de-



velopment of Fort St George and the old Black Town. The book next takes a detailed look at the beginnings of trade and commerce (including, yes, the slave trade!), with the role the prominent Dubashes of the city played. With the settling of more and more communities came the religious and caste disputes and the account of the Left Hand and Right Hand Caste riots, in particular, makes for fascinating reading. The development of the city's transport systems (road, rail, air and water) is given in detail and the book also traces the gradual expansion of the city itself. Among the institutions covered are the University, the Corporation, the Archives, the Connemara Library, the Port, the Geological Survey, the Mint and the Museum. Taxation, security, publishing, the growth of entertainment, banking and healthcare are some of the other aspects that are looked into. The section on prominent women of the city and the history of feminism is one of its

most interesting parts. Strangely, one aspect that the book leaves out is the growth of the arts and culture in the city, though it does include accounts on individuals.

One of the heartening features of the book is the balance it strives to strike between the contributions of the British and the Indians towards the growth of the metropolis. Most writers tend to veer towards one end or the other.

The flow of language through the book is very smooth. It makes for a very interesting read and is a valuable addition to books on the city. It is to be hoped that an English version will also come out soon, though, given that Narasiah is the nephew of eminent Tamil writer 'Chitti' Sundararajan, it is clear as to where his preferences are!

The book is published by Palaniappa Brothers, who are to be congratulated for moving away from the beaten track of Tamil publishing.

Sriram V.

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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.

● We regret that we have had to hold over 'Our Readers Write' this fortnight.

– THE EDITOR

THE EDITOR

• Another year whizzes by...
and it's Madras Week again in...

Chennai changed and unchanged

Here we are – one more birthday for the old girl. Madras Day, August 22nd, has come around again. And with it Madras Week.

Then, some are promising to make a Madras Month.

She's got into this habit of partying for a while now.

Chennai Sangamam, locality-based festivals, heritage walks, and all those books, talks and shows based on her culture, history, heritage, music, dance, literature, urban and folk art, the cinema – apart from her signature annual December Season.

Yes, they all represent a rich, and apparently bottomless, trove of treasures...

Yet, somehow, you can't help feeling there are other sides, other layers, to this city's rather unique spirit.

And that's when the images come rushing up.

Like:

• **Chennai's insouciant attitude these days towards what is charmingly called 'home cooking'.**

(Have you ever been asked if you are "cooking yourself"? Ghastly image, but you get what they mean.)

The city has certainly taken drudgery out of the daily meal, if the packed restaurants catering to all wallet and credit card sizes, and long lines of hungry humans waiting for tables, are anything to go by.

The steady spread of global cuisine and its insidious chipping away at generation divides – now that's something worth considering. You know the city has changed when you see someone, whose definition of couture is set on strictly ortho-

dox lines, samples a large portion of calzone with obvious relish, or gulps down the trendiest flavour of coffee...and does **not** announce that he can't see what the big deal is, and that home-brewed filter coffee is much, much better.

A little further, near cycle shops and re-cycling gurus, a little food cart boasts, 'Chinese Food and Fast Foods Available'.

Are push-carts selling health drinks an oxymoron-like image? Or is that being painfully fussy?

• **Chennai's amazing capacity to toss together the new and the always-been with the skill of an experienced chef.**

A Mylapore-Manhattan, Chennai-California, Luz-London (Come up with any combination you like) lifestyle?

Like *yelai-sapaad* for lunch and mojitos in the evening?

Easily done.

Some computers wear vermillion dots. If we must live in an appliance-ridden world, let's make it one of peaceful co-existence.

Aarti-trays in a showroom filled with the latest gizmo-ridden cars. The proud owners drive their new acquisition out ... but not before offering a little thanks-and-please-look-out-for-this-car appeal to the powers-that-be.

Well, a little humility is not a bad thing.

An upwardly-mobile young lady scours the market, choosing the very latest in European

tiling or the purest of marble for her flooring ... but never forgets the little *kolam* on this so-very-'today' base every morning.

• **Chennai's cinema.**

Tomes can be written about 'Kollywood', as some insist on calling it, but cannot really describe fan support and enthusiasm.

If you find yourself stunned, bemused, and covered with confetti, among people busy placing garlands near the silver screen, or performing *aartis* to it, before breaking into a full-throated roar of approval, that startles you into spilling the popcorn, when the hero makes his appearance...chances are

that you are in the midst of the first-day-first-show brigade. The daily-wage worker who flings a few hard-earned coins he really cannot spare at the screen when his idol appears? Now that's generous, unconditional devotion.

• **Chennai's skyline.**

They may be tilting more and more towards highrises; but these glass giants seem to diminish next to the tiny places of worship that you find right outside those fancy gates and driveways, as well as dotted about the city.

• **Saree shops whose displays are so over the top, even the sky seems too small for them.**

Have you seen these? Sylvan gardens created on half a dozen steps, or creations that look like

inefficiency and laxity that has led to almost half of the city's buildings violating town planning legislation, and uses its own inefficiency to legitimise the illegal acts of large builders and developers putting up construction either without or in violation of a sanctioned plan.

The High Court has given the Government four weeks to respond and the next hearing on the matter is posted for September 12th.

dinance is a blow to honest citizens and is a classic instance of the Government bending over backwards to protect the big bucks. It has challenged two specific aspects of the Ordinance in Court, namely the stay on action against illegal structures and also the implication that the Ordinance was above any order of a court of law. The CAG states that, in one stroke, the Ordinance glosses over the administrative and regulatory



gigantic props from old action-films – anything goes as long as you induce people to walk in...and spend.

(They do – and how!)

As for the way the saree keeps re-inventing itself. Apparently some have little pouches for the ubiquitous cell-phone. Now, you've just seen a gentleman on a bullock-cart wielding his cell-phone with the same airy panache of a suave urbanite with his Blackberry, and acknowledge that this is certainly 'The Age of the Cell-phone'. Makes sense to find a place for them, then.

• **The re-defined Chennai look.**

Oh God, where would we be without bonded hair?! And yet, a woman's lithe fingers dart back and forth as she weaves sparkling white jasmine into long, long strands. They still have a place then, even in today's short, strraight hair world.

• **Our much-enduring young ones who get more than a fair share of ever-growing lists of dos and don'ts.**

Yet they never hesitate to turn up in large numbers, or raise their voices, in support or protest, for their city. It is the adults who have memories that seem so easy to wash out or doctor.

"Malls, movies, computer games, and TV have killed communication, and the reading habit," misinformed adults thunder. But you've seen the Sunday family expeditions in bookshops and eateries, and you think that maybe we should have more faith in our young.

You watch as a mother buys the latest Harry Potter book for a child who is so happy, he can't speak. She hands it to him impatiently, saying "*Aachu, oru peria velai*", and then sensing that you are watching, gives you a rueful grin. You smile back in sympathy, imagining the scene at her breakfast table that morning.

• **And of course Madras bashai, so magnanimous in its inclusions of all voices and tongues.**

Where else can you declare: '*Dhool, Naina, super gaana*', and actually be understood?

'Cursing – Madras-style' is a must-have experience. Especially when the stress and strain of crowded roads, or dealing with inadequate water supply, prove a little too much for jagged urban nerves. The loaded words, uttered at full volume, come flowing out in a glittering, unbroken stream. You wonder how anyone can get so angry and still manage to come up with such colourful imagery.

An art-form in itself.

• **Chennai's environs.**

Of course, it's either sweaty and hot, or pouring rain.

But some parts of the city are pretty. All those waterways, and little bridges. True, some do smell like a door in Hell has been carelessly left open.

But – life goes on, and the citizens display a 'take-it-easy-policy'.

Sometimes, driving through a narrow, crowded, dirty, polluted lane, desperately trying to avoid hitting both people and other vehicles, you suddenly see an old, old gem of a house that looks like its children have moved to 'foreign'. It snoozes in the heat, and you hope they'll let it sleep a little longer, before tearing it down.

* * *

Designer-rash may have spread all over the city, claiming to set tone and appearance, but the plastic-basket-covered-with-a-towel still holds its head high.

Name boards display the owner's pronunciation preferences. That's why you have a 'Char-less Stores'?

And – why not?

Little, little things (as we say) about Chennai.

Images.

Changing. Un-changing.

Perhaps this merits a talk or two, or even a celebration...of a different kind?

GOVERNMENT TO THE RESCUE...

(Continued from page 1)

action of government that all such moves are motivated only with one interest in mind, namely protecting the real estate lobby, which, thanks to sky rocketing land prices all over the country, has become immensely powerful and is breaking every rule in the book, unmindful of safety or environmental norms.

The CAG feels that the Or-

An invitation to the good things about the City

Yet another trail that we have put together for the celebration of Madras Day (August 22nd), a day to celebrate the founding of this city, is the Stone Age Madras tour.

Not many of us are aware that the city and the local region were inhabited by Stone Age man some 40,000 years ago.

The first Stone Age artefact discovered in India was in the Pallavaram area in the city's suburbs.

Dr. S. Suresh will speak on the theme at a public lecture on August 18th evening, and on the next morning, a Sunday, will lead all those who wish to be part of the tour to a Stone Age region located

near Poondi, about 80 km from the city. The trail, a rather challenging one (we did a 'reece' recently), will lead you through rocky terrain and scrub forest to a large, natural cavern inhabited by pre-historic man. (Details on this and all other Madras Week events on Madras Day during Madras Week are being posted on the web site – www.themadrasday.in)

But you don't have to look for an adventurous theme to celebrate this city of ours.

If you are a school teacher, you could plan a neighbourhood tour for your students. To help them discover places they haven't seen.

One group has come up with this simple initia-

tive – to draw up a trail that starts at Fort St. George, goes through the University campus, then to Subramania Bharathi Memorial in Triplicane and Vivekananda Museum off the beach road, to Queen Mary's College, along the DGP's office, to All India Radio and the San Thome cathedral and ends with a picnic on the Marina.

Madras Week does not call for wild parties, colourful wristbands and ribbon-cutting events.

It invites you to enjoy the good things about this city.

Vincent D' Souza

Heritage talks

August 18: *Stone Age History of the Madras Region:* Dr. S. Suresh. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, Eldams Road, 6.30 p.m.). The talk is a preview to a tour to the pre-historic museum in Poondi and trek to the Gudiyam cave the following day. To register for tour, call 98410 49155. Fee: Rs. 400.

August 19: *Music in Madras:* Gowri Ramnarayan. (At Taj Coromandel, 6.30 p.m.).

August 19: *Early Imprints of Madras:* G. Sundar. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 20: *Eating out in Madras:* Geetha Doctor. (At Park Sheraton, 6.30 p.m.).

August 20: *Do's and Don'ts of Restoration of Historic Buildings:* K. Kalpana. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 20: *Madras and the Movies:* Randor Guy. (At Hotel Green Park, Vadapalani, 7.00 p.m.).

August 21: *The Emden, the bombing of Madras and after:* Dr. Joachim Bautze. (At Max Mueller Bhavan, No.4 (Old No.14), 5th Street, Rutland Gate, Nungambakkam. 6.30 p.m.).

August 21: An evening of readings in Tamil on Chennai that is Madras – essays, stories and poetry (Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 22: *Ramanujan, the mathematician:* K.R.A. Narasiah. (At Chamiers (Anokhee), Chamiers Road, 6.30 p.m.).

August 22: *Glimpses of Madras Heritage – Built, Natural and Cultural:* Prema Kasturi. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 23: *Wiele and Klein, early photographers of Madras:* Dr. Joachim Bautze. (At Max Mueller Bhavan, 6.30 p.m.).

August 23: *Street Cricket in Chennai:* Badri Seshadri. (At Gallery Sri Parvati 6.30 p.m.).

August 24: *Famous murders in Madras:* Randor Guy. (At Taj Coromandel, 6.30 p.m.).

August 24: *Coins of the Madras Presidency:* R. Vaidyanathan. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 25: *The Devadasi of Madras:* Sriram V. (At Chamiers (Anokhee), 6.30 p.m.).

August 25: *Words and Images of Madras that is Chennai:* Shreekumar Varma. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

August 26: *Madras as a backdrop in Tamil films:* Mohan Ram. (At The Park, 6.30 p.m.).

August 26: *Wildlife Heritage of Madras that is Chennai:* Dr. R. Bhanumathi. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 6.30 p.m.).

NOTE: All venues are helping to sponsor these talks by providing space and hospitality.

Heritage talks by invitation

August 19: *Madras – its heritage:* S. Muthiah, under the auspices of Ramu Endowments. (At the Tag Centre, TTK Road, 9.00 a.m.) Entry by invitation only. A few passes available on first come, first served basis; contact chari@tag corporation.net

August 20: *Madras, the American Connection:* S. Muthiah, under the auspices of the Indo-American Association. For members of the Association. Guest fee applicable. (At the Taj Coromandel, 7.00 p.m.).

August 21: A talk on a Madras-related subject under the auspices of the Rotary Club of Madras South and two other Rotary Clubs. For members and their guests only. (At the Saveria.)

August 24: *Early imprints of Madras:* G. Sundar. For Public Relations Society of India Chennai Chapter members and their guests only. (At Accord Metropolitan, 6.30 p.m.).

August 26: *Two books on Madras:* K.R.A. Narasiah and A.R. Venkatachalapathy, under the auspices of the Madras Book Club. Guest fee applicable (At the Taj Connemara, 11.30 a.m.).

Heritage walks

August 19: *A Tree-walk in the Government Museum Grounds,* 7.30-8.30 a.m.

August 19: *The buildings of Poonamallee High Road.* Tour organised by Chennai Heritage from Mayor Ramanathan Stadium, Egmore. 6.30-9.00 a.m.

August 25: *Mylapore Heritage Walk.* Two-hour-long walk winds its way through the heritage landmarks of Mylapore. No prior registration. No fee. Entirely on foot. Starts at Luz Church campus at 7.00 a.m. Conducted by Namma Mylapore.

August 25 & 26: *Heritage walk inside Fort St. George,* organised by Mylapore Times. Open to all. No fee. Assembly at car park opp. Fort St. George at 7 a.m. each day. Interested persons should call 98410 49155 and register.

August 25: *A heritage tour of the city.* Hippocampus, Abhiramapuram, will conduct the tour for

Your dates to keep during Madras Week

children. To register, contact 2466 1544 or 94440 49175.

August 26: *Tracing the Dancing Girls of George Town –* Tour organised by Chennai Heritage from Marina Beach. 6.30 - 9.00 a.m.

August 26: *A Tree-walk in the Guindy National Park.* 7.00 - 8.30 a.m.

NOTE 1: Both Chennai Heritage tours need to be booked in advance. Each participant will receive a small booklet on the places covered. Participation fee is Rs. 300 per person. For further details contact: 98400 24200

NOTE 2: Those interested in the Tree-walks organised by Nizhal should call and register with Divya at 98404 13021 or 2462 0334. Each Walk is open to the first 25 registrants. Contribution of Rs. 25 per head per walk.

Exhibitions

From August 15: An exhibition of early publications, periodicals and magazines of the city. N. Murali, Managing Director, *The Hindu*, and A.R. Venkatachalapathy of MIDS will speak at The Roja Muthiah Library, Taramani, at 4.30 p.m.

August 19: *Exhibition of old and new Madras photographs.* Talk on Madras by Randor Guy. (At Gallery 4, 255, Kilpauk Garden at 5.30 p.m.).

August 19-25: *Exhibition of photos and prints of parts of old Madras.* (At the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation.)

August 19-26: Rod Hudson, a British-born numismatist and still photographer, exhibits his photographs of Madras. Gita, a Chennai painter, will supplement this with her work. (At Gallery Sri Parvati, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.)

August 19-26: The Larsen & Toubro Heritage Museum in Manappakkam will be open to schoolchildren during Madras Week. Contact: 99401 98135.

August 19-September 18: An ex-

hibition showcasing the work of about 45 artists, both emerging and established, four photographers and two cartoonists, all living and practising in Chennai. Also planned are participatory events for children and young adults during this period. (At the Forum Art Gallery, Padmanabha Nagar, Adyar. Inauguration 18th.)

August 21-23: *Exhibition of old Madras photos, rare books and maps of the city.* Organised by D.H. Rao and S.B. Raja Seetharaman. (At Centenary Hall, Govt. Museum, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.)

August 21-28: Exhibition by Tamil Nadu Archives of old records, documents, illustrations pertaining to the British period in Madras. Exhibition by Reserve Bank of India of old currencies, coins, growth of banking etc. And *Madrascaples –* Photographic exhibition by Karthik Venkataraman. Organised by the Association of British Scholars, Chennai Chapter (at Lalith Kala Akademi, Inauguration 6.00 pm on the 21st.)

Other events

August 20-22: An exhibition titled *Madras Remembered.* There will be a power point presentation and a walk down Anderson Road. Exhibition open to schoolchildren from neighbouring schools. Children who wish to register for the walk can call 42043487 or 28275858. (At Asan Memorial S.S. School.)

August 20: An interactive storytelling session for children and adults organised by Spring Into Reading, K.K. Nagar. Storytellers Jeeva Raghunath and Nandini Sridhar will trace the growth of Madras that is Chennai. To register, contact 23716927 or 99404 50495. (At Hotel Green Park, Vadapalani.)

August 20: *Thudumbu attam,* a performance of the folk instrument by Unarvugal Dramatics, followed by stories about Chennai by mime artistes (At Hotel Green Park, 5 p.m.).

August 20: North Madras schoolchildren tour South Madras schools. Students of Kalaimagal Vidyalaya, Royapuram, will present *Villupattu* and a visual display highlighting North Madras landmarks during tour.

August 22: *Release of special Postal Cover* by the Department of Posts, Tamil Nadu Circle, at Head Post Office, Anna Salai.

August 22: *Release of Chennai T-*

Shirt for Madras Day 2007. (At Srinivasa Sastri Hall, Mylapore.)

August 22: Launch of *The History of the Early Madras Region –* reprint of the 1959 book by K.V. Raman, retired Head of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras. (At C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation.)

August 22: *Happy Birthday, Chennai,* featuring a variety of events for children, such as wearing of traditional Madras costumes, makeover and tattoo sessions, pottery painting, treasure hunt, lucky dip, and snapshots before heritage buildings in the City. Children who wish to register can contact 98842 80085 or email alpsacademy@mylapore. (At Alps Academy, Mylapore.)

August 24: Open quiz on Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy organised by Aseema Trust (www.aseema-trust.org). An expert will throw light on different aspects of Dr. Reddy's life. To participate register with V.R. Devika 98400 98495 or Vasantha Parthasarathy 98410 09927, or email to aseema123@yahoo.com. (At Avvai Home, Besant Avenue, 4.00 p.m.).

August 25: *Ladies' morning out at the Saveria:* Chandri Bhat on Madras Cookery, a Madras Quiz, other events and brunch. By invitation only. (11 a.m. at Hotel Saveria.) For details contact Susha 98840 72433.

August 25: *The Madras Quiz* (in Tamil). Only for students studying in Tamil medium. Each school can send up to a maximum of four teams of two students each (At P. S. Higher Secondary School, R.K. Mutt Road, Mylapore, at 1.30 p.m.).

August 26: *The Madras Quiz* (in English). Open to all. Teams of two can participate. No fee. No registration. Just land up for the written prelims (at P. S. Higher Secondary School, R.K. Mutt Road, Mylapore. 2.00 p.m.).

August-September: The Rotary Club of Madras South's three Rotaract Clubs and four Interact Clubs will organise painting, elocution, and quiz contests, and exhibitions on Madras. The Club states it is celebrating Madras Month rather than Madras Week. For further details contact S.R. Madhu at 2446 8594, 4238 4229.

September 1: Inter Collegiate Madras-focussed Quiz, organised by ABS – Chennai Chapter. (From 9.00 a.m. at Bertram Hall, Loyola College.)

NOTE: Many more events are planned. Watch the Press and website www.themadrasday.in.

CONTESTS: Four contests are being conducted by *The Mylapore* and *Adyar Times* in connection with Madras Week. Closing dates for these are between August 18th and August 22nd. In case you miss the closing date and still want to enter a contest, contact Vincent D' Souza at 98410 49155 and find out whether late entries are being accepted.



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

1. Which book released on July 21st has become the fastest selling book in history?
 2. Which building now has the tag of being the tallest building in the world?
 3. Name the famous media tycoon who has bought the venerable *Wall Street Journal* for \$5 billion.
 4. Which West Indian cricketer legend joined the Indian Cricket League on July 23rd?
 5. In the context of the Services, why is Lt. Gen. Deepak Kapoor in the news?
 6. At which prestigious athletics meet did India win five gold, five silver and five bronze medals to finish in second place behind China?
 7. Name the last King of Afghanistan, who reigned between 1933 and 1973 and who passed away recently.
 8. Which famous movement, which had its origins in Brownsea Island, celebrated its 100 years recently?
 9. In which South American country did a disastrous air crash leave 189 people dead?
 10. For how many years has Sanjay Dutt been sentenced to RI for his involvement in the 1993 Bombay blasts?
- * * *
11. In which country has TVS Motor Company's first overseas plant commenced production recently?
 12. Where in Chennai's suburbs is the country's second largest water treatment plant?
 13. What sort of shops is the South Cooum River Road in Chennai known for?
 14. Which is the oldest building in the Government Estate in Chennai?
 15. Which building was meant to be the official residence of the Chief Ministers of the State after Independence?
 16. Which famous director's son is making his debut as hero in the film *Thottal Poo Malarum*?
 17. How is Thiruthuraiipoondi Subramania Srinivasan better known?
 18. Which notable incident from the *Mahabharat* is associated with Keeranur?
 19. With which film pioneer would you associate the Crown, the Globe and the Gaiety in Chennai?
 20. What is housed in the place once known as *Moubray's Cupola*?

(Answers on page 8)

• As Madras that is Chennai prepares to celebrate Madras Day – August 22nd – and Madras Week – August 19th-26th – *Madras Musings* looks back on this page at some of the things that were said about the city during last year's celebrations.

The success of Chennai Cinema

(Continued from last fortnight)

K. Hariharan, a graduate in Film Direction from the FTII (1946), by the time he spoke last year had made five feature films, three children's films and over two hundred documentaries on a variety of subjects. One of them, titled *Ezhavathu Manithan*, won the National award and the Moscow Festival award. He has been teaching at the University of Pennsylvania for over 7 years. A Director of the LV Prasad Film & TV Academy, he has been training students in the field of Cinematography, Direction, Editing and Sound Design.

Hariharan, who spoke at one of the Chennai Heritage lectures last year, passionately feels that Chennai is actually the capital of cinema, but admits that Mumbai has usurped the credit.

"In Chennai there is national cinema. No other city encourages cinema in a variety of genres and in all the Southern languages. It gave films a new syntax. The grammar developed by default. During pre-independence, there was a strong nationalist agenda. Cinema had a free mobility and silent cinema had sub-titles. There was more reading material than sounds. We are a talkative nation and were quick to take to the 'talkies'," he said.

Hariharan linked the emergence of a new pan-Indian audience and the establishment of metro cities to the development of cinema. "Tamil Nadu has many cities. Many people were sharing and seeing movies and were linked by a common myth – whether it was Pune, Calcutta, Mumbai or Chennai. It was the birth of the single identity of India. India is a cinematic nation that has been culturally bonded. Cinema also developed the secessionist element and created the Tamil identity. The other three languages, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, came to Chennai to make movies and joined hands to attack Hindi cinema."

Hindi cinema, according to Hariharan, was constructed to compete with Hollywood. Tamil cinema had a dual competition – Hollywood and Bollywood. The melodramatic style

of cinema managed to combine nationalist ideas, love of icons, myths and consumerism. Songs, dance and music formed a core for regular cinema to rally around.

Chennai became by default the most prolific centre in the world, with 800 feature films being shot at a fraction of the Hollywood budget. Hariharan quoted facts and statistics: the total turnover was \$1.6 billion or Rs.6500 crore. An average Hollywood production costs \$125 million, i.e. the money spent on 14 Hollywood movies was used to produce 800 movies here. But it is not a cottage industry, for we have the best state-of-the-art equipment, on par with any other country producing films.

The miracle is that with such a disorganised industry, so

dual roles with heavy make-up, and alcohol, an important factor. The remakes of Tamil to Hindi were big money spinners. Many heroines from Chennai moved to Mumbai. The Malayalam and Kannada heroines wanted to come to Chennai. Yet when the men tried to move to Mumbai, like Kamal Hasan, feudal politics did not allow them to be a success," he continued.

Hariharan categorically stated, "Tamil cinema never cared for national awards or international film festivals. The comfort level in showing the movie locally was incredible. At the same time, they have been ready to adopt and adapt to new technology and new equipment. People do not blink an eye to invest in a camera worth Rs.2-3 crore. The true test of German

• by
PADMINI NATARAJAN

much is done. "It is so productive, with 65% of Indian cinema being produced here in Chennai. Why did we have all great stars of the 1960s and 1970s sitting here, like N.T. Rama Rao, Prem Nazir, and many others, and all the greatest musicians? Why is it so comfortable here? Why did I decide that Chennai was the right place to be in?" These were questions he posed and then provided convincing answers.

"It is the atmosphere, the kind of warmth and respect. People like you, even when you have only a slight knowledge about movies. Just knowing that a raga is called *Hamsadwani* is enough for you to be welcomed. There is genuine camaraderie. The industry is well organised and disciplined and people come to work on time. Why do people in Chennai come on time for a shooting schedule? Let me tell you a secret. People from Bombay never caught on to the fact that it is the hot and tasty breakfast that is served to every person on a shooting schedule. It is the hot *idlis* and *uppuma* that make the cast and crew so punctual," he quipped.

"Most South Indian films have the same stories with strong heroes in moustache or

or US equipment is done here. All equipment run for 24 hours and the cost factors are simply not valid. Profits are ploughed back into the industry. Look at Prasad, Nagi Reddy or AVM – the profits from a film called *Bhabhi* were ploughed back into Prasad Labs; the income from *Ek Dujhe Ke Liye* was invested into 70 mm recording studio that may be the only one in the world today." Hariharan commended the sheer simplicity of the lifestyle. "Their attitude is to make more cinema, not to make money."

Considering another aspect of Tamil films, he said, Tamil cinema is inextricably linked to Tamil chauvinism. Cinema was cleverly used as a counterpoint to politics.

"In the late 1970s, new wave Tamil cinema, led by Tamilians, spoke of liberation and breaking all the rules. The 1970s saw a complete political turnaround. *Raja Raja Chozhan* with Sivaji and *Ulagam Sutrum Valiban* with MGR slipped at the box office and Emergency was declared. In the post 1980s, there was again a change in the genre. Tamil cinema attacked the hegemony of previous cinema. Kamal Hasan's songs were in the rural idiom. 'I could not un-

derstand the Tamil spoken by earlier generations in cinema, as it was written Tamil,' said Bhagyaraj. He introduced colloquial Tamil. The strange thing was that in this rebirth/renaissance, other languages moved out of Chennai. Other states at that time began to offer subsidies to set up studios and labs."

In 1985, people like Bharathiraja and Mani Ratnam ushered in new cinema. Hariharan is convinced that T. Rajender is a phenomenon. "He defied every code that had been established by the cinema of MGR. A gorilla-like protagonist replaced the white, fair hero; the flowery language gave way to mindless alliteration. Of course, his picture *En Thangai Kalyani* disappeared after six shows. The counter-culture that was born became Tamil cinema. Mani Ratnam created a strong Tamil hero in *Roja* who goes to the north and offers them a challenge. Today, there is reverse integration. Heroines from Bombay, like Aishwarya Rai, Tabu and Rima Sen, are all entering the Tamil market."

In the past five or six years, documentary and short films are being shot with handcams. "Anybody can make a movie. The democratisation of cinema has become very rapid and there is more of a national idiom."

On another tack, he pointed out that, out of 800 movies, 70 were dubbed. But now Hollywood movies are attracting the southern audience; in fact, Schwarznegger sounded better in Tamil than in the original. The film *Mummy* was a phenomenal success, he said.

Hariharan was critical about melodrama. "It is not about reproducing reality. If you see a Tamil film and fall in love, afterwards you are in deep trouble. Many of our films are love stories but very few people have love marriages. Look at the matrimonial columns," he joked.

Pointing out a worrying factor, Hariharan said, "There are no safety standards in our studios. Three wires are stuck into electrical outlets. No hats or helmets are worn and workmen dangle dangerously from catwalks high up in the studios. Even the cameras that are hired change from day to day. There is a desperate need for standardisations. Audiences in Chennai are very conscious of technology. They appreciate unusual shots and clap for them. They even clap for titles. For example, when they see the name of P.C. Ram, they clap in respect for the technician. Today, Tamil cinema plays in theatres all over the South; but it is not the other way." But there is a globalisation of Tamil films beginning. Are we going to land up with a hodgepodge genre or can we maintain our cultural identity? Only time will tell.

(Concluded)

● *A trek through the Nanmangalam Reserve Forest, only to find...*

‘Extension’ could be a threat too

Early one Sunday morning, I drove through the smoking garbage at Pallikaranai, through the confusion that is Medavakkam township, and progressed into peace and serenity. Actually, into one of the last scrub forest strongholds of the once richly biodiverse Coromandel Coast (which now has only an estimated 1% of its original scrub jungle) – the Nanmangalam Reserve Forest near Tambaram. Its wide variety of indigenous, medicinal flora and native fauna has been the focus of many scientific papers, but this fragile ecosystem is just where more ‘development’ is slated to happen, and soon!

An Extension Centre is proposed by the Forest Department in the Reserve Forest area on 100 ha, “to educate farmers on raising economically viable timber species,” according to P. Subramanian, Chief Conservator of Forests (Extension). Indigenous tree species “in five to 10-acre model plots on the site” would be raised and the “agro-forestry models of economically viable species” could help farmers earn higher incomes.

Nanmangalam lies adjacent to the road to Tambaram from Velachery junction (at a distance of about 7 km). The main path to the north leads to several rocky quarries – previously used for granite quarrying – and ravine-like areas with water present throughout the year. The steep face of the ravines with water below is the home of many species of birds which roost and/or breed in cavities



Red-whiskered bulbul.

here. Naturalists seek out Nanmangalam as the haven closest to Chennai for the elusive Indian great horned or Indian eagle owl (*Bubo bubo bengalensis*). Conservative estimates of the breeding population of this bird in India are less than 2,000 pairs.

We made our way through the unyielding stiff branches of the cactus-like *Euphorbias* and the exhilarating scented wild jasmine. In flower from December to February, they are visited by hordes of flies, bluebottles and bees, and, slowly, the birds too, says a naturalist. “A common nesting bird is the Little brown dove, the most common groundbird, the Grey partridge, and the most colourful seen here, the Small minivet,” says

K.R.K. Thirunaranan of The Nature Trust.

Members of the Madras Naturalists’ Society confirm, “We have noticed nests of Indian robin, the Pied kingfisher, the Small blue kingfisher, the White breasted kingfisher and the Hoopoe. The Whitebrowed bulbul is also common. Rosy pastors have been seen in winter. The common raptor seen is the Shikra. The waterbodies attract birds like the Common sandpiper and the Little cormorant. The fig tree near the ravine, the only one in the area, when in fruit, attracts Mynahs, Coppersmiths, Drongoes, Sparrows (Yellowthroated and House), Red vented and Red whiskered bulbuls. White throated munias have been seen feeding on grass seeds. The Common Indian nightjars are, however, seasonal. Both the Purple sunbird and the Purple-rumped sunbird are resident.”

Meanwhile, the Indian great horned clings to a precarious existence, as human pressure drives it out of its preferred habitat with land development activities treating ravines and gullies as sewage dumps, and rock faces being intensely mined for pebbles and bluemetal chips. Add to this local mythical beliefs (which consider owls as creatures of ill-omen and harbingers of death) and the general apathy towards the plight of wildlife, and their future looks rather bleak.

The presence of year-round water in the quarries attracts locals who utilise the water for washing and bathing (of course,



Wild jasmine.

adding to the plastic and garbage for good measure). Lorries are also driven into the water sources for cleaning purposes. Just one forest guard and one watcher having to patrol an area of 560 ha certainly cannot control the trespassers who enter the Reserve Forest!

On the viability of the recent ‘developmental projections’ on this fragile ecosystem, and the extension centre planned, Dr. T. Murugavel, Project Coordinator, Environment Monitoring and Action Initiating (EMAI), who has been monitoring this

habitat would cause great loss to the resident fauna.”

But another expert feels, “We cannot say a definite ‘No’ to the projected activity, as long as ‘extension’ activity is only in the peripheral area of the Reserve, and does not in any way affect the core area.” Concerned naturalists, however, feel apprehensive that any form of active development in this area will only bode ill for the flora and fauna of this fragile habitat.

However, at a recent meeting with concerned environmental groups, the Forest Department has assured environmentalists that a) though they have been allotted 100 hectare, they are not going to bring whole area under plantation; b) only old Eucalyptus trees will be uprooted and the natural growth will be allowed to grow; c) if the natural vegetation does not grow, native trees will be planted; d) there will be no disturbance to the scrub vegetation; and e) the water source for the saplings raised there would be borewells.

The sun is by now really hot. One last look at the beauty and grandeur of the overhanging cliffs of an old quarry surrounded by Ficus trees, midst the cicadas and the heady scent of wild jasmine, and I have to return through the ‘butterfly paths’. And I wonder, should havens of local wildlife and protected scrub jungles undergo threat in the name of ‘forest extension’ too?

● by **SHOBHA MENON**

area for more than two decades, says, “The Forest Department’s plan to use 100 hectare of this reserve forest area for a research station and to plant saplings would definitely have a great negative impact. The Department has already put up a building and planted tree species (close to the Quaid-e-Milleth College) and fenced the area; it has also cleared scrub vegetation (approximately 2m width) all along the fencing. The Department should confine use only to the area where the eucalyptus trees are seen. Care should be taken to leave all scrub vegetation untouched, along with traditional watershed management practices. Vehicular movement of any kind or for any purpose should be avoided. Any change in

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— Chennai Heritage

Rs. 30: Srinivasan, V.

Rs. 50: Gowreesan, V.S.; Amith Nag, V.A.; Kamalakannan, A.; Ballal, C.B.L.; Ganesan, N.

Rs.100: Muthu Damodaran, G.; Pillai, M.R.; Ram Ganeshan, R.; Shantha Krishnan; Suresh; Ponnusamy, M.P.; Nina Gopalakrishnan; Prema, S.; Mahadevan, M.; Raman, K.V.

Rs.150: Pitchai, R.; Vijayaraghavan, CK; Sharma, KSV

Rs. 200: Balakrishna Bhatt, M.; Menon, K.R.N.; Prasad, C.G.; Venkatraman; Arasa Rathnam, CR.; Jayaraj, R.; Mrinalini Sarabhai

Rs.400: Swaminathan, M.S.; Mohanakrishnan, A.; Leila Diraviam; Money, K.S.; Anantha Narayanan, K.V.; Sumangali Chettiar; Anantha Narayanan, T.; Thomas Tharu; Sankar, T.

Rs. 700: Sangameshwar

Rs. 900: Gomathi Narayanan

Rs. 1000: Prakash, NSP.; Kasinathan, S.T.; Capan Ravi Mahajan

Madras Week

(Continued from page 1)

two talks. The Public Relations Society of India decided to have the installation of its new team for the year 2006/2007 as a celebration of Madras Day with a talk on the restoration of *Senate House*. Several Rotary Clubs came forward to observe the week by inviting speakers to give lectures on subjects connected with the city. Schools that had heritage clubs in them had presentations of their work and there was a city-based quiz in PS High School open to students. And a few heritage walks.

This year things have got bigger and better. Taj Coromandel, in addition to hosting a couple of talks, will have a food festival at Southern Spice which will have as its theme the celebrated *Cook and See*, the recipe book of Meenakshi Ammal, the Maami who in the early 20th Century pioneered the concept of a cookbook for young brides. While the Park Hotel will also be hosting one talk, this year sees the entry of Welcomgroup Park Sheraton Towers into the celebrations. Similarly, Green Park Hotel will have an evening of Chennai on the 20th with folk performances and film shows.

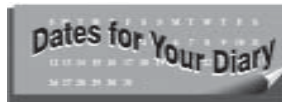
This year there are two sets of talks happening simultaneously with yet another series happening each day at the Sri Parvati Gallery on Eldam's Road. The Department of Posts and Telegraphs signifies the Government taking note of the celebrations as well, with a special cancellation planned for the 22nd of August. The Gallery will also host an exhibition of coins and paintings at the same time. There is, in addition, the exhibition of old Madras publications at the Roja Muthiah Library.

Is Madras Day only for adults? No way! The Asan Memorial School will have a three-day exhibition on the city, and children will celebrate the birthday of the city at the Alps Academy in Mylapore on the 22nd.

In addition, there are at least half a dozen heritage walks to choose from on each of the two Sundays that flank Madras Week. There is, in addition, at least one tour exclusively for kids.

We, a part of the Madras Week team, are not satisfied with all this. For one thing, we would like the festival to spread to the north of the city, with that neglected part of the metropolis joining the bash. What about the IT folks who now comprise the Gen Next in this city? Can we expect their participation? What about the shopping complexes and malls? Will it be too much to hope for special discounts and the beginnings of a shopping festival on the lines of the Dubai Festival? We hope for the best and are confident it will happen. After all, the city's music season began with only one Sabha in 1927 and look where it has gone today! In the meanwhile, it is celebration time folks! See you at the entertaining dos.

Organising this year's programmes, or offering venue, hospitality, presentation or prize support to them, are Chennai Heritage – the publishers of *Madras Musings* – *Mylapore Times*, *Adyar Times*, *Arcot Road Times*, Forum Art Gallery, Goethe Institut, Alps Academy, Aseema Trust, P.S.H.S. School, Gallery, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar Foundation, Sri Parvati Gallery 4, Rotary Club of Madras South and other clubs it has involved, the Public Relations Society of India Chennai Chapter, the Associa-



Till August 31: Exhibition of paintings by S. Jayaraj (at Lakshana Museum of Aarts).

Till August 31: *Power*, an exhibition of paintings (at Artworld).

August 31: *Trinetra*, featuring George Kurien performing movement on stage along with Madhav Chari performing solo piano. (At Alliance Francaise, 7.00 p.m.)

August 19-25: *Faith Onwards*, a collection of digital paintings on canvas by Preeta Gopalswami. She has exhibited her work in online galleries such as indiaart.com and yessey.com

August 21-30: An exhibition of

paintings by K. Bala Subramaniam, G. Raman, N. Manohar, P. Augustine and Nelson Kennedy. (At Vinnyasa.)

From August 22: *Thoughts*, an exhibition of the works of senior artists. (At Artworld.)

Till August 25: *Green Healers* – an exhibition on medicinal plants with panels on the importance of medicinal plants and their uses in curing several ailments. There will also be a display of live plants and raw drugs. (At C.P. Art Centre Main Gallery.)

August 25: *Dasaru Kanda Krishna* dance by Kalakshetra. A fundraising concert for Concern India Foundation. (At Theatre-Kalakshetra.)

August 27-31: An exhibition of

aerial photography using the technique of kite photography (taking aerial pictures by using a kite to lift the camera) by Nicholas Chorier. Spectacular views of the wonders of India. (At Alliance Francaise.)

August 27: *The Roots of Dialogue across Religions in India* by Prof. Mushirul Hasan, Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi. Organised by Association of British Scholars, Chennai Chapter. (At University Centenary Building, at 5.30 p.m.)

August 31: *Haunted by Compassion: Vedanta Desika's 'Daya Sataka'* by Dr. David Shulman, Professor, Indian Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. (At Museum Theatre, 7.00 p.m.)

THE SEARCH FOR GREEN...

(Continued from page 3)

experts, leading to doubt whether these studies would, in fact, assist the enhancement of the city's environment.

Let us not feel ecstatic about establishing increased green cover through advanced satellite imagery and kid ourselves in having improved the environment! It is time that our planners put their energies back in prioritising Chennai's environmental assets and start earmarking them for protection – the last of the actions mentioned in the chapter!

It should, however, be noted here that information about many of these facets does already exist and reinventing the

tion of British Scholars Chennai Chapter, The Indo-American Association, The Roja Muthiah Library, Ramu Endowments, Nizhal, Hippocampus, Asan Memorial School, INTACH-Tamil Nadu Chapter, Larsen & Toubro, The Taj Coromandel, Park Sheraton, The Park, Hotel Green Park, Hotel Savera, The Taj Connemara, Chamiers (Anokhee) and Lalit Kala Akademi.

wheel is not necessary. The actions can begin. Be it the rivers, and their creeks, the Pallikarandai marsh, the beaches or the myriad other natural features, political will, backed by concerted efforts through participatory approaches, can reasonably salvage what is left of an environmental crises-ridden Chennai.

With reference to participatory development, a good place to start would be Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority's (CMDA) own Community Based Environmental Development Programme (CBEDP) (a follow-up to the Sustainable Chennai project) that aims to bring a 'bottom-up' approach to city planning and environment protection. Developing strategies and evolving suitable projects to meet the objectives laid down by the CBEDP, coupled with funding through suitable forms of revenue generation (perhaps impact fees on environment-unfriendly construction, etc.), would be the first significant steps to tackle the current crisis the city is facing.

In all, the DSMP 2026 does

present a window of opportunity to learn and change course to ensure that the environment gets its due. For a plan that determines the city's road map for the next 20 years, city planners must relentlessly work towards mainstreaming environmental sustainability in the Master Plan. It would be an opportunity gone abegging if the DSMP 2026 tries to develop the city without protecting the environment and ensuring social equity.

Answers to Quiz

1. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*; 2. Burj Dubai; 3. Rupert Murdoch; 4. Brian Lara; 5. He is to be the next Chief of Army Staff; 6. Asian Athletics Championships; 7. Mohammed Zahir Shah; 8. Scouting; 9. Brazil; 10. Six years.

* * *

11. Indonesia; 12. Chembarambakkam; 13. Shops which dismantle automobiles; 14. *Government House*, often erroneously called *Admiralty House*; 15. *Coom House*; 16. Sakthi, son of P. Vasu; 17. S.S. Vasan; 18. It is considered the place where Bhima killed Keechaka; 19. Raghupathy Venkiah; 20. Madras Club.

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