

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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June 1-15, 2008

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"Look at the bright side, the humidity today is only 40%... Isn't that cool!?"

**With warm greetings**

Listen, we realise you're just doing your job, but could you dial it down a little for us?

It's summer for some, you shrug, adding that it's been designed this way, and who's 'us' anyway – specifically?

Oh, we're number three from you. You know... the blue one? And specifically, we're the ones who, right now, are on the spot, your spot, slowly melting into grease.

What's that?

Our kind has been known to extol the glories of those such as you, etc, etc, so what are we complaining about?

Point taken – but you really shouldn't let that kind of stuff go to your incandescent, gorgeous head. You get carried away – we're done for... well-done, at that.

You know what happens to us mere mortals when you Universe types decide to step high and plenty?

Look, news headlines are warm enough – what with all those 'inflation heats up' reports, and even the gentle, ubiquitous idli finding itself in the middle of a price row. The powers-that-be shouldn't give us a sort of package deal of rising prices and temperatures.

Unfair.

That thick, wild, fiery mane, that glowing smile – awesome image... still, can you ease up, old friend?

Just a bit?

That way, we can strive for a place amidst you.

So much nicer than having it thrust upon us.

Ranjitha Ashok



**The Old...**

These statues had once been Vestal Virgin white – though when these pictures (above) were taken sometime ago they had got blotched through sheer neglect. But when their white gleamed, they were as eye-catching as My Lady's Garden was. Today, in Technicolor, they are cinematic embellishments that are an affront to aesthetics – unless you are a Tamil cinema poster collector.

**...& The New**



## An ecosystem under threat

(By A Special Correspondent)

The recent decision of the State Government to sanction the building of a shipyard-cum-port with private participation at a cost of Rs. 3000 crore in the area of Kattupalli, 25 km north of Chennai, has raised questions – and protests – from ecologists.

The latest announcement follows a series of developments that have taken place in the Kattupalli area, each degrading the environment further. The North Chennai Thermal Power Plant, the Ennore Port and

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Chennai goes blindly Technicolor

(By A Special Correspondent)

Who governs public aesthetics in Madras that is Chennai? Is there a body that looks into aspects such as these when the Government announces "beautification" schemes such as those in progress on the Marina and elsewhere? True, there have been concerned citizen forums and local newspapers which have taken some interest, but is there a panel of eminent independent citizens

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Chennai goes blindly Technicolor

(Continued from page 1)

which monitors such grandiose plans and their ultimate fruition? The answer is a resounding NO. If such a monitoring body had existed, we would perhaps have never got those rockeries with stone birds and deer on the beachfront. The same goes for the "Peace Monument" next to the War Memorial which is, at best, a memorial to a super-fatted dove relieving itself on a globe.

Now the city is becoming extremely colourful. And the colours are not the ones any person with a sense of aesthetics would suggest. You need to only look around to see the liberal use of colour. The Dental College on Muthuswami Iyer Road has been painted in blue. Victoria Technical Institute on Mount Road, which was white till recently, first went pink (often referred to as 'mittai' pink in local parlance) and has now gone parrot green – or should we say 'bilious green'? There is also a flourishing trade in fluorescent paints, with many residences in the city now donning yellow, saffron and purple. These colour changes are apparently being recommended to those seeking to appease the Vaastu gods. On a more mundane level, there are tales spun about those left with a large surplus stock of fluorescent paints.

Even statues are not being spared. There was a time when these were put up with their natural bronze or a coat of black paint at the most. But now many of these are painted a bright gold, as the Swami Vivekananda statue on the beach will attest. Even worse has happened to the statue of the Travancore Maharajah Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma. This was for long in the Travancore Maharajah's Park opposite the Annamalai Manram. Then the park became a bus terminal and the statue became a convenient urinal. All this while, however, it retained its bronze finish. But well-wishers of the Maharajah felt that he was better off enshrined in the Ananthapadmanabhaswami Temple in Adyar and shifted the statue there. And, lo! some bright spark thought the ruler was better off painted in multiple colours and he now stands looking like a clay doll in polychrome hues.

Nowhere is this "Benneton"isation of statues more evident than in the My Lady's Garden, which possesses five statues in all, four depicting Venus, Prosperity, A woman writing a letter, Flora, and one commemorating Subbiah Chettiar, Commissioner of the Corporation in the 1930s. All of these were done by students of the College of Arts and Crafts and, being plaster statues, were given a coat of white paint. That is how they remained during the long years when the park was a much sought after haven and then a picture of neglect. But in the late 1990s when the park was restored, someone decided to paint the statues in the best traditions of Tamil cinema. They were all done up in gaudy colours, including that of the late Corporation Commissioner. He, in fact, now looks more like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar than anyone else.

The 'Maadi Poonga' which was a neglected park on Olde Madras's boundary wall in North Chennai was converted overnight into a cinema-set-like structure a few years ago. This despite the fact that this was a protected monument on the ASI list! Temples in the city have not been spared either. Glazed tiles have made their appearance in the sanctum sanctorum and as for the gopurams they are becoming brighter by the year.

All these acts point to a sharp decline in public aesthetics. The tendency to depict everything in the gaudiest possible colours and in cinema-set-like fashion is rampant. Gone is the time when Chennai was known for its white or offwhite homes and classical structures, red police stations and offices of government agencies in red brick, all giving the city an elegant look.

What all this sadly reflects is the absence of an Urban Arts Commission that can intervene and prevent such offences to the eye. Compare this with the case of Delhi where such a body exists since the mid-1970s. It has powers to advise the Government and local bodies on matters of aesthetic quality or urban environmental design. Every local body must seek the Commission's clearance before according approval to any building or engineering operation and developmental proposal in identified areas. Proposals by public or private bodies to develop buildings or construct multi-storied buildings; institutional or public buildings; hospitals; educational buildings; cinemas; large residential; and office complexes or plans of giving a face-lift to buildings and those earmarked for government or administrative functions within the city limits also fall under the Commission's ambit.

At one time it was hoped that a Heritage Committee set up by the Government could go into such matters in Chennai. But with the Committee having long been given a burial, aesthetic revival in public spaces in this city remains a distant dream. Those who are concerned with such matters as a uniform skyline have long given up such ideas. But can we at least hope for some neutral colours which please and not offend the eye?

# Reporters in search of soundbytes

The arrival of a new daily in the city has thrown the newspaper world of this city into turmoil. In fact, the churn began much before the daily made its actual appearance. Several journalists think that *The Man from Madras Musings* has all the answers to queries on Madras and keep calling him. A few weeks ago these calls diminished in number and, instead, he began getting a host of calls from strange and unrecognised telephone numbers. MMM, who has the habit of avoiding calls unless he recognises the numbers, ignores them all. In this respect, MMM differs from his good lady, who answers all calls and manages to strike a conversation with even those who call inadvertently. However, that is neither here nor there.

To get back to the main story, MMM eventually got around to answering the calls only to have the callers rather sheepishly confess that they had made a change and were now in new offices. To MMM, it is all rather like a game of musical chairs, only there seem to be fewer reporters and more jobs available.

Now, given such a situation, all these young 'uns are under great pressure to rustle up some story or the other and very often they are given about the same time as it takes for a mosquito to breed. Consequently, old fogeys (mental or physical) such as MMM are in demand. While MMM is all eager to help, for he cannot forget that he was in his time helped by seniors in the field, he strongly resents the usage of the word "Uncle" as a standard form of greeting. It destroys MMM's mental image of himself as a young man on the threshold of life.

And that is not all. The caller wants to finish her (and invariably it is a she) part in a trice and so cannot be bothered with details. If MMM tries to give any side story, he is invariably cut short and told to stick to the point at issue. ("Uncle has had it, he rambles!" must be the war cry in journalistic circle.) And when the reporter thinks the story is over, the call is immediately cut, with a terse "Thank you". But the story does not end here. Within ten minutes there will be a fresh call, this time with doubts which would not have arisen had the reporter listened to MMM's story in full. Such calls keep continuing far into the night till the story is eventually put to bed.

MMM is shocked at the ignorance of such reporters on very basic aspects of history and heritage, which a quick read of a book would set them right on. However, this being the electronic age, Gen X is more comfortable getting information with the brevity of an sms and preferably over phone. The correct term apparently is "soundbyte", though it is perhaps more commonly used in the television industry. MMM has now taken to soundly bit-

ing off whoever calls with a terse "No comment."

## Crossed talk

At least one request for a soundbyte deserves recording in the annals of *Madras Musings*.

The reporter called *The Man from Madras Musings* and asked if he has heard of a particular starlet from the Hindi film industry. MMM confirmed that he had. Whereupon he was asked if he knew that she had recently been in the thick of a controversy over a particular sitting posture of hers in a film. MMM had not and all this while MMM's blood pressure, always apt to reach great heights, began its ascent.

The reporter then proceeded to ask MMM if he could tell her what, as per the *shastras*, were the acceptable sitting postures of women! MMM replied that, alas, he knew nothing about our hoary scriptures. There was a click of exasperation at the other end of

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

the wire. "But, Uncle! I thought you were an expert on heritage!"

You could see that MMM had fallen from his pedestal. There was nothing to be done except to hang up on the caller. But, somehow, MMM was not upset over his ignorance. Something tells him he will not be called again. Or, perhaps, he is too sanguine.

## Speed journalism

If there is one positive development with the present rush for journalists in the city, it is that the city itself is receiving a lot more attention than it ever did in the past. All kinds of people are trying to write knowledgeably about Alangatha Pillai, Charles Trevelyan and other such long forgotten characters, all of whom *The Man from Madras Musings* thought lived only in the Chief's mind. The only problem is everyone is writing the same thing with a few reshaped sentences thrown in for good measure. There is really nothing new, except for the errors, one of which gave MMM a hearty laugh. Writing about the Mylapore Tank, a young woman had written that the Portuguese had shifted the temple inland in the SEVENTH Century! Kudos for imagination, thought MMM.

The other point is that not one of these newfound writers is analysing anything critically or doing any research – not even a skimming through of the books on Madras. There is no viewpoint and most are simply descriptions of what they see. There is consequently no depth in their writing. The other day, a young man called MMM and asked for a few sentences on

Saidapet. He also helpfully added that he needed to write 100 words about the area. Realising that a few sentences would amount to just that and would save him the job of researching, MMM suggested that he could read *Madras Rediscovered*.

"But, Sir," came the reply, "It has 500 pages and I have fifteen minutes to write the piece."

"Look up the index," was MMM's sage advice. He's lucky he did not contact the Chief who would have snapped his head off and informed him that after 60 years in journalism he knew all about deadlines.

## Railway billboards

Now that the hoarding industry has gone into a temporary exile, those who need to advertise are desperate for new venues and what better than the sides of railway coaches? Given that our railways are commercialising with a vengeance, it is a win-win situation for one and all. That is, if you do not consider aesthetics and passenger convenience. These two, of course, do not matter in today's world.

To *The Man from Madras Musings*, there is nothing uglier than a railway carriage which is covered from top to bottom on the outside with vinyl sheets or whatever they are, advertising products ranging from cell phones to pressure cookers. Even the window panes are covered, though MMM is assured that this does not block the view from the inside, owing to the special nature of the material used.

The railways in its zeal to make money has forgotten that such blanket advertising hides the seat numbers which are usually painted above the windows. This helps passengers to identify from outside where their berths are, especially in airconditioned coaches, thereby helping them plan which door of the coach they need to get in by.

At present, with the seat numbers obliterated, passengers have no option but to get in and then locate their seats. This results in a lot of needless to and fro movement, complete with bags and cursing porters.

MMM, who was recently part of such a fracas, is still recovering.

## Cooum hazards

Recently, *The Man from Madras Musings* was asked to give a lecture on heritage to schoolchildren. During the presentation, MMM dwelt at length on Pachaiyappa Mudaliar, the man after whom the famed Trust is named. MMM spoke of how Mudaliar lived on the banks of the river Cooum and bathed frequently in it.

"That was why he died young," said a voice from the audience. MMM is still to live that down.

— MMM

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



### Doomed heritage?

It is wonderful that *Madras Musings* feels so strongly about heritage buildings. But, with children dying of hunger and poor folks dying of diseases that could be prevented and amidst all sorts of other terrible things, I feel buildings will have to come and go, and go they will, if not in our generation, surely, in the next.

**V. Ravindran**

5/2, 4th Trust Cross  
Mandaveli, Chennai 600 028

### Callous vandalism

The demolition of *Government House* (MM, May 1st) is callous vandalism.

Although, as you say, the heritage movement in this city lacks steam, what is baffling is why the legal route has not been resorted to at least to stall the demolition. Legal pundits are filing PILs for such lofty matters as the inadequacy of Mallika Sherawat's attire in the presence of many VIPs. A PIL to save *Government House* would have evoked thousands of silent votes of thanks.

Supplanting the *Government House* with a new creation is like pulling down the Thomas Munro statue and erecting in its place a statue of Marilyn Monroe!

**C.G. Prasad**

9 C.S. Mudali Street  
Kondithope, Chennai 600079

### Buildings ahoy!

It is sad and shocking that Government is bringing down another heritage building (MM, May 1st). With *Government House* will also go many old trees. All that *Madras Musings* has been writing about or talking about has only reached deaf ears. Obviously, people at the helm think only in terms of concrete structures and more of them.

Already Chennai has over 24,000 people per square

kilometre. In another 20 years, this will go up to 37,000 people per square kilometre. This means that heritage buildings like what you have illustrated will come down and mini skyscrapers or even 20/30 storey buildings will be the order of the day. This is now a disease affecting not just Chennai but most, if not all, States in India.

By 2010, India would have 1.2 billion people and 20 years thereafter this will be 1.4 billion going on to 1.6 billion. Surely, other heritage buildings, if any left by then, will go under the hammer to make way for concrete jungles.

Heritage buildings will thereafter remain only on paper and in books. Does anyone really care? If so, surely they will plan to move the capital of Tamil Nadu to its heartland.

**K.V.S. Krishna**

24, Parkland Apartments  
Kamala Bai Street,  
T. Nagar  
Chennai 600 017

### Long-term view

In such an important project as building a new Assembly and Secretariat complex (MM, May 1st), Government should have initiated a public debate regarding the choice of site for the new project.

Government could have at least chosen another place, like the sprawling Guindy race-course maidan, and allotted the Racecourse Club enough land on the periphery of the city for racing.

But even that would have been no real answer to the problem. If not now, after some decades both the capital of Tamil Nadu and the Assembly and Secretariat may have to be shifted to a centrally placed region. A long-term view should have been taken in the matter.

**M.R. Pillai**

110, Rupa Nagar  
Coimbatore 641 045

### Vanishing heritage

After reading the contents of the letter from the Secretary and your reply, which has not drawn a response from the Government (not surprisingly), it is only MMM's (May 1st) last line that comes to mind: "Chennai has never been known for public spiritedness, has it?"

Love or commitment towards heritage structures has never been our strong point or culture. So, many ancient temples and houses have been left to rot and become ruins in rural India by the highly religious people of our country. They build and consecrate new temples in their present place (of new residence) for their convenience, but they don't want to spend the same amount on renovating ancient architecture! Perhaps, because permission for renovating does not come as easily as it does for building new ones with "modern" technology!

I earnestly appeal to you to organise tours of the remaining heritage structures in Chennai, at least for the benefit of heritage lovers, so that they can still hope to get to see and admire them before they turn to dust.

**Kanchana Ravi**

237, Natesan Nagar  
1st Cross Street  
Virugambakkam  
Chennai 600 092

### Back to sender

This refers to *A delivery problem* in the Short 'N' Snappy (MM, May 16th).

On May 4th, I posted a letter at the T. Nagar Head Post Office to Hyderabad, clearly indicating on one side of the cover the sender's address and, on the other side, the addressee's. In two days, I was surprised to receive the cover back, intact, but with postal cancellations of T. Nagar Head Post Office on both sides of the cover. I took up the matter with the Senior Superintendent of Post Offices at T. Nagar. I received a reply dated May 15th, informing me that an enquiry has been instituted to find out the reason. Even when we opt to use postal services we are not always happy with them.

**V. S. Jayaraman**

31, Motilal Street  
Chennai 600 017

### Our public transport

I think the public transport system in Chennai, particularly for those belonging to the lower and middle income groups, has virtually collapsed.

In recent times, the Government of Tamil Nadu has coined several appealing names, such as 'Deluxe', 'Express', 'Point to Point', and 'AC buses'. A frequent traveller, however, knows that there is practically no difference between these buses of

## It's pathetic!

What's all this Retired Army General Ration Card rigmarole!

In a country where, in a sense, corruption is not news and, in another, it is the daily news, the real issues are:

Why does a Retired General have to put himself out to get a ration card?

Why, with his rank, stature and demeanour is he unable to impress civilian staff to just issue him a card?

Why, even after an year and more long ordeal, has his contact with the topmost civilian of the State not borne fruit?

Why cannot the Chief Secretary just press the buzzer/ring the phone and see that the card is delivered at his desk in a jiffy to enable the General to collect it and walk off?

**N. Dharmeshwaran**

11/5, First Cross, Bharath Nagar  
Madipakkam, Chennai 600 091

various nomenclatures and the travel time is almost the same between destinations. A few categories of buses stop only at a few specific locations, which is not improvement of service but only denial of service. Even if the bus makes only a few stops, the travel time is almost the same for various categories of buses in view of the traffic congestion and road conditions.

The only visible result of such categorisation of buses is that the poor, who cannot afford to pay high fares, have been driven to despair. Government has failed to realise that the public transport system is most essential mainly for the poor, who cannot afford any other form of transport, such as two-wheelers or autorickshaws.

By categorising the buses, the number of ordinary buses has been reduced for all practical purposes, making people wait for long at bus stops and travel in extreme discomfort in the fewer but more crowded buses.

Ministers and senior IAS officers responsible for this state of affairs should travel in the ordinary city buses and feel the intensity of the problem for themselves.

If they already know the problems but have nevertheless introduced such measures, it only amounts to an indifferent attitude to the problems of the poor in the city.

Government could have marginally raised the fare and kept only the ordinary buses in the city, instead of reducing the number of buses and promoting class-consciousness by such categorisation. The sight of AC buses plying largely empty will certainly create a feeling of neglect and frustration amongst the poor waiting long for the ordinary buses at bus stops.

**N.S. Venkataraman**

M 60/1, 4th Cross Street  
Besant Nagar  
Chennai 600 090

### No prostration

Ranjitha Ashok has clearly recounted the state of affairs in matrimonial discussions (MM, April 16th). But one thing has changed (and perhaps

Ranjitha is aware of it) and that is, gone are the days when girls being looked at were humiliated by having to repeatedly prostrate themselves before the would-be bridegrooms and their family members, not to speak of the avaricious demands in the name of dowry.

**P.A. Ranganatha**

10/24, Vedachala Garden  
Mandaveli Street  
Chennai 600 028

### Pocket radios?

I read reader Ganapathy's article on Chepauk and enjoyed it. It brought back nostalgic memories (I am 77 years young). But I think there was a mistake in his recollection. He says that they went for the match with score-sheets, binoculars...pocket radio, etc.

To my knowledge there were no pocket radio sets in 1945. Notwithstanding this, I thank him for so vividly bringing back to mind the 1945 match, especially Russi Modi's 205, for which he appeared on the front page of *Kalki*.

**Dwarakanathan**

112, Habibullah road  
T.Nagar, Chennai 600 017

### 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**

### OUR ADDRESSES

For matters regarding subscriptions, donations, non-receipt of receipts etc.: Chennai Heritage, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, Westcott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014.

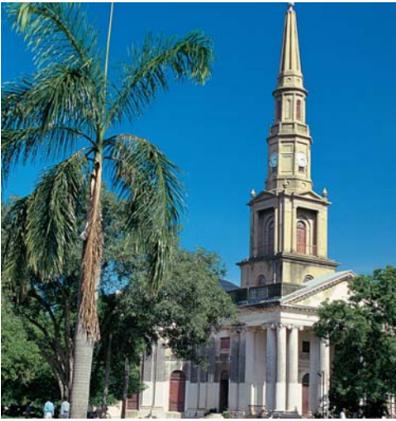
Madras Musings now has its own email ID. Letters to the editor can be sent via email to editor@madrasmusings.com. Those who wish to intimate change of address can also do so provided the subscription number is quoted.

For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: MADRAS MUSINGS, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

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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**



St. Andrew's Church

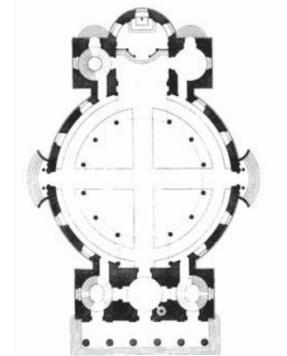


Pachaiyappa School

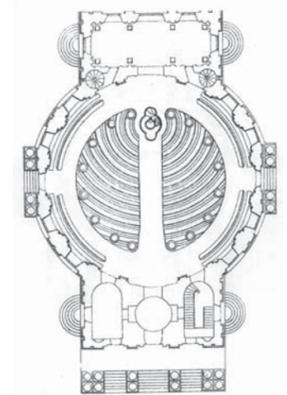
Whenever a heritage structure of Madras city bites the dust, those who lament its passage are branded as apologists for the British Raj and all that it stood for. Part of the reason why the city's built heritage of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries remains unprotected is that there is a very common notion among the powers that be that these are buildings built by the British and so Indians have no necessity to protect or restore them. But were these purely British? Was there no Indian participation at all?

The recent restoration efforts at *Senate House* have revealed an altogether different angle which may require those who brand such buildings as alien to do some serious rethinking. For, while the design of the building may have been R.F. Chisholm's and, therefore, can be branded as English, though here again it is in reality an amalgam of Indian, Byzantine and Saracenic styles, it is clear that the execution of that design was very much Indian or, more specifically, that of Madras. The details are too numerous to go into, but just one example would suffice, namely that of "Madras Plaster". This lost technique, entirely unique to this part of the world and completely unknown outside, was used extensively in *Senate House*. To quote from the book *A Genius at Work, The Senate House of the University of Madras*, this "kind of plaster involved the application of ground lime mortar in many layers over several days, the final layers of which contained egg-white and quartz sand... (The) preparation of lime mortar required slaking and grinding at the site along with organic additives such as gallnut (*kadukkai*) and a brown sugar (*jaggery*) solution. After several days of preparation, the plaster was applied on the walls in coats. Starting with large-sized to very fine-sized sand, the number of layers varied from 2 to 4 depending on the location. The 'base' coats were cured for at least ten days before the final finish was applied." This is just one of several indigenous methods used on this one building.

So, were buildings such as *Senate House* purely British? No, argues Shanti Jayawardene Pillai in her book *Imperial Conversations, Indo-Britons and the Architecture of South India*. Basing her work on the construction and subsequent history of four buildings of Madras city, the Chepauk Palace (and the Revenue Board Building), St Andrew's Kirk, Pachaiyappas College Building (NSC Bose Road), and the *Senate House*, she states that all such work was purely collaborative and involved British design interacting with a robust and thriving native engineering. Such collaborations have been termed



St. Martin-in-the-Fields plan (above) that influenced St. Andrew's plan (below)



*Imperial Conversations - Indo-Britons and the Architecture of South India*, by Shanti Jayawardene Pillai (Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2007.) Price: Rs. 895. pp. 326.

"Imperial Conversations" by the author and she cites several examples in her book to support her claim. These vary from the most commonplace, such as the making of bricks, to the building of the great edifices of the Raj.

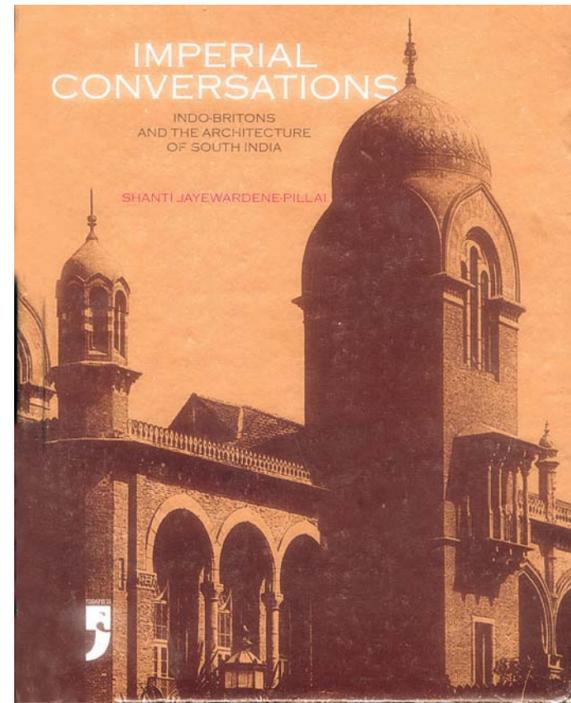
Prior to the coming of the British military engineers, states the author, native architecture flourished under the rich patrons and was designed and executed by native *stapathis*. However, the absence of pre-Raj palatial mansions and public edifices, leaving aside those used by royalty, points more to the ascetic nature of the South Indian population which believed in building residences that looked inward onto a courtyard rather than putting up a massive display to the outside world. The Indian brick too prevented the building of tall structures, as it could bear only about 350 lbs/sq.inch. This was changed with the arrival of Thomas Fiot de Havilland in Madras as a surveyor and architect in the employ of the army. de Havilland had in 1807 built the Banqueting Hall in Mysore and this was in its time considered a wonder, for the roof was unsupported by columns. For this de Havilland had built a prototype arch in his garden with native help, to establish that such a feat was possible. He also studied the barrel-vaulting and wagon-vaulting techniques of roofs as followed by native masons and as evident in the palaces of Tanjore and Mysore. It must be remembered here that such techniques had been in vogue for centuries in India.

In 1816, the elders of the Presbyterian Church of Madras decided on a circular plan for their own Kirk in Madras and were keen to begin work. The design for this was provided by the Presidency Superintending Engineer, Lieutenant Grant, who modelled it on an earlier unused design for London's St Martin-in-the-Field Church. The technology of putting up a dome, even one as shallow as the one in the Kirk, was fairly alien to those in charge and both Grant and Col. Caldwell, the Chief Engineer, recommended a wooden structure with a metal covering.

In 1818, de Havilland, fresh from the success of building St George's Cathedral (Cathedral Road) and by then Superintending Engineer, took over the task. He persuaded the authorities to go in for a brick dome, confident of the abilities of the native masons to produce one. He argued that a timber structure was subject to the depredations of white ants and would wear out soon in the harsh climate of Madras.

To convince the patrons, de Havilland had a test dome built in his garden on Mount Road. From the absence of any drawings it has been assumed by the author that de Havilland relied on local talent to complete it. To ensure its success, he modified the dimensions of the dome from the original Gibbs design and made it shallower and smaller in circumference. He also increased the number of columns to support it. This was later copied in full when the Church was finally built. Indians did not document their skills, but the building of the prototype helped de Havilland to note their methods, document them and have hands-on contact with the material where required.

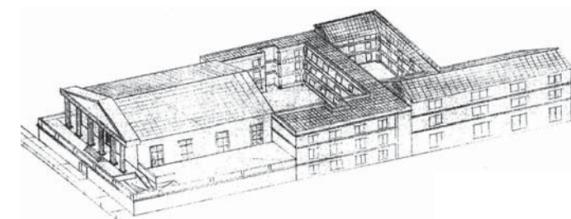
de Havilland was of the view that Indian bricks were of poor quality and this is why they were inferior in load bearing capability when compared to British bricks that could withstand 1000 lbs/sq.inch. He regulated the manufacture of bricks in Madras by stipulating that soil for brickmaking must be dug before the monsoon. A dimension was fixed for the standard brick and a mould made by the police was given out for this. The 1804 "Regulations for Controlling the Manufacture of Bricks, Tiles and Pots and the Burners of Chunanam" were modified and a licence fee, Rs. 4 for brick and *chunanam*, and Rs. 2 for tiles and pots, was announced. Applications for licences were considered after the Superintending Engineer had inspected the soil on the spot. A Committee of Police would measure the produce and also fix market rates for it. With these improvements in brick quality, the construction of the St. Andrew's Kirk and later buildings in Madras became possible.



The laying of well foundations for St Andrew's Kirk is an oft quoted story. de Havilland opined that "the time immemorial Madras method of well sinking" be used for overcoming the problem of soft soil on the site. Well sinkers were very much in

● by  
**SRIRAM V**

demand at the time and de Havilland observed that they were a very useful set of people and left behind his opinions of their community. "They are a very hard working people but not provident though well paid while employed. They are given to drinking, perhaps more than



An aerial view of Pachaiyappa School

# A great collaboration, British and Indian

*The result, the colonial architecture of Madras, an 'imperial conversation'*

Kirk was built, Robert Fellowes Chisholm said that "if a dome was turned on true Hindoo principles without a centre, the cost of doming was very little more than the cost of walling."

An inherent trust on the native method of building the dome, however, meant that acoustics had to be given the go by, resulting in a dismal echo in the Kirk. The service could scarcely be heard but de Havilland conveniently blamed it on the "age of the reverend!" During this time, he also experimented with and studied the benefits of mixing jaggery with mortar as the Indians did. He came to the conclusion that this made the mortar more plastic and therefore easier to work with.

If the Kirk depended heavily on Indian methods, the next grand building, the Pachaiyappa School, was a mix of European design, Indian construction and meant for mixed usage. The old school building on the Esplanade, close to Bunder Street, was demolished in 1844 and Captain Ludlow, an officer of the Madras Engineers, came up with the new design. The brief was to build a school and a hall. The hall, which still dominates the structure, was in the severely classical style, said to be based on the Temple for Theseus in Greece. This section had 15 classrooms as well, all fronted by a verandah. To the rear of this hall came the school proper and this is a tiled roof structure, completely Indian in its design. What better example of an Indo-British conversation, commemorated in stone, *chunanam* and tile?

In keeping with the nature of the structure, the laying of the foundation on October 2, 1846 was a multi-cultural event, with people (Indians and English) assembling at *Kovur House* in nearby Bunder Street and being led in procession by Kovur Ekambara Mudaliar and George Norton to the venue. Here Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit poems were sung in praise of Queen Victoria, Lord Hardinge (the Governor General) and Lord Elphinstone (the Governor). The Governor's Band played airs such as *British Grenadiers* and



Chepauk Palace



Senate House

*Roly O More* and while speeches in English were being made, Brahmins were given gifts of money! In direct contrast, the inauguration of the building, on March 20, 1850 was completely European in character with only a sprinkling of Indians present. The Governor, Sir Henry Pottinger presided and a choir sang the British Anthem. This was perhaps indicative of the growing divide between the masters and their subjects which resulted in the revolt of 1857 which, however, barely touched Madras.

Those who attended the opening would not have failed to notice the unique roof which was truss supported and had three coverings of zinc, felt and slate. The zinc was imported from England, but wrought-iron rafters, beams, king and queen bars, struts, bolts and nuts were per made for mixed usage. The old school building on the Esplanade, close to Bunder Street, was demolished in 1844 and Captain Ludlow, an officer of the Madras Engineers, came up with the new design. The brief was to build a school and a hall. The hall, which still dominates the structure, was in the severely classical style, said to be based on the Temple for Theseus in Greece. This section had 15 classrooms as well, all fronted by a verandah. To the rear of this hall came the school proper and this is a tiled roof structure, completely Indian in its design. What better example of an Indo-British conversation, commemorated in stone, *chunanam* and tile?

By the time the Pachaiyappa School building was completed, the Public Works Department had begun to grow in stature. In 1851, it was called the *Marumut* Maintenance Department and was chiefly involved with building and the care of canals, roads and irrigation. The *Grand Anicut* of Tanjore had been made over to the British in 1801 in full working condition and many Civil and Military Engineers learnt their early lessons in hydraulics from it. Tank supervision committees were the norm even prior to this and there is no doubt that men on such bodies gave freely of their knowledge to the English.

In the 1830s, Major (later Sir) Arthur Cotton began work on the renovation of the *Grand Anicut*. He supervised the building of dams over the rivers Godavari and Krishna in the 1840s. In 1859, he acknowledged his debt to sub-engineer T. Veeranna and petitioned the Government to grant the latter a

piece of land in free hold. The early records carry names such as Polony Vellur Moodelliar and Vencataramiah who were praised for their expertise in building bridges. The coming of the PWD in 1858, however, saw to it that such native experts were hidden behind the mask of officialdom. Thus, as the author notes, while Cotton got a knighthood and was promoted, Veeranna remained a sub-engineer all his life! By then, however, the construction industry had moved to other areas such as the building of colleges, Government offices and, most importantly, the *Senate House*.

Surprisingly, the author has not dwelt much on Chepauk Palace, the first among the buildings to follow the Indo-Saracenic style. She has cited lack of information about the original plan of the building as the reason. She also cites the lack of any authoritative source to back the claim that the Records Tower, built in 1870 to link the two wings of the palace, is a Chisholm construction. The role of the tower as a repository of records is also doubted, as the interior is largely a cone around which the stairs wind, leaving no space for storage. However, Pillai has painstakingly documented the changes that were made to the palace by Lord Napier, the Governor, during the 1860s, once he had decided to convert the building into office space.

From drawings dating to 1858



Senate House section

Pillai concludes that the *Diwan Khana*, once a Palladian pavilion, had been modified into a two-storeyed Revenue Board building. This was, according to the drawing, already clad in the classical style and was transformed into an Indo-Saracenic façade by Chisholm in 1868, to match the frontage of the *Khalsa Mahal*. This is backed by a minute recorded by Napier where he proposes a "whole new façade" for the Revenue Board buildings that "might be harmonised with the fantastic but agreeable style of the old Native Palace." But where did the inspiration for the old palace come from? Here the author suggests the Chow Mahalla palace of the Nizams in Hyderabad which was built in the 1750s. The Nizams were the titular overlords of the Nawabs of Arcot and this may be a plausible explanation. But, with no records extant of the residences of the Nawabs in Arcot town itself, this can at best be an assumption.

By the late 1860s, architecture in Madras was largely defined by the work of Chisholm. He moved to the city from Calcutta when his designs for the Presidency College were approved in 1865. By 1866 he was so indispensable to the Madras Government that, at the instance of Lord Napier, he was appointed Consulting Architect to the Government of Madras.

(Continued on page 8)

Quizzin'  
with  
Ram'nau

(Current Affairs questions are from the period May 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

- Which country celebrated the diamond jubilee of its independence from the British Mandate of Palestine on May 14th?
- Name the cyclone that devastated parts of Myanmar after causing landfall on May 2nd.
- Who assumed the role of the President of Russia on May 7th?
- Name the egg-laying mammal for which scientists have deciphered the genetic blueprint recently.
- What historic 'high' and 'first' did the Olympic torch achieve on May 8th?
- Which cyber major has agreed to buy Electronic Data Systems Corporation for \$13.2 billion?
- Name the three Indians who made it to *Time* magazine's 2008 list of the world's 100 most influential people?
- According to a recent, startling study, which birds in the wild could be extinct within a decade in the absence of measures to check the retail sale of diclofenac, a livestock drug?
- Name the 'missing' fourth element of electrical circuitry whose discovery was announced recently.
- Where did India's Narain Karthikeyan seal off AIGP's season finale with a commanding victory?
- Why were Sembiyankandiyur and Melaperumpallam villages in Nagapattinam District in the news recently?
- Which temple town, on the Tiruchi-Madurai National Highway and closely associated with the life of saint-poet Sri Arunagirinathar, is to be declared a heritage town?
- What is the old name of the ever-busy Adithnar Salai in Pudupet, Chennai?
- Which eminent Indian business house has announced an agreement with TIDCO to jointly develop an IT SEZ at a cost of nearly \$750 million in Taramani?
- Which institution that opened in Chennai in 1851 is housed in the Pantheon Complex?
- Which among the five cosmic dance halls of Shiva is located at Tiruvalankadu?
- Which first-of-its-kind National Institute, costing \$125.2 million, is to be set up in Chennai?
- How many 'seers' are there in each Tirukkural couplet?
- Which attraction in Ooty came up in 1848 thanks to the efforts of the Marquis of Tweeddale?
- Siruththondar Nayanmar is referred to by what name in Kalki's *Sivagaminiyin sabatham*?

(Answers on page 7)

# What is the funda?

The sylvan campus of the Indian Institute of Technology is a good degree or two cooler than the rest of Madras. Here, blackbuck prance alongside runners on the tracks, rhesus monkeys hang around the residential hostels, and at dusk, twittering red-beaked parrots soar over tree-canopies in flocks. And the humans – particularly the undergraduates who pass a gruelling exam to enter this premier institute – speak to each other in a trademark tongue.

Campus slang is never immediately intelligible to outsiders. But budding engineers in this residential campus spout something that sounds like arcane gibberish to most. It can confound polyglots, including the city's English-educated Tamilians, who have more than a smattering of other Indian languages. So what is the *funda*, as they ask around here? Not so long ago, a young linguist from Germany decided to get to the bottom of this mysterious in-language.

In 2005, the research scholar Evelyn Richter arrived on campus where she taught German, a Humanities requirement. An old article in the student magazine, *The Fourth Estate*, confirmed her suspicions – students spoke to instructors in neutral English, but among themselves they used expressions that took systematic deciphering. The linguist designed a detailed questionnaire to learn the slang – the how, why and when of it – from the students themselves. The answers provided her plenty of material for serious etymological analysis.

In her M.A. thesis published a year later, Richter wrote that the IIT-Madras campus language borrowed from Indian languages as well as American and British slang. Considering the fact that students came from almost every state in the country, there is a variety of vernaculars to choose from. Grammatical peculiarities mark this cosmopolitan in-language as do shortenings and semantic changes of English words.

Arjun Chennu, whose article first alerted Richter to the slang, had written an essay about the difficulties of new students in this residential campus. Not only do *freshies* have to get accustomed to the spartan hostel life and a rigorous academic schedule, they also have to learn a brand-new vocabulary

that describes this lifestyle. Even seniors who try to help by putting *fundae* don't make sense initially, says Chennu. But within one semester, the undergraduates become fluent in the *insti* tongue.

The slang has travelled to other educational institutions in the city. In truth, certain expressions, which are part of the *lingo*, did originate outside the engineering campus. Still, these terms gained currency with the hip crowd only after they became part of IIT parlance, a fact some find *hajjar* irksome. True, other campuses develop their own slang, but the sheer range and the number of expressions at IIT are noteworthy, says Richter.

Some outside *junta* do appreciate the rich slang, and put in efforts to perfect their IITese, as they call them. One such unabashed aficionado from a local engineering college, G. Vinod, had created a lexicon of the "God-level" *lingo* on his blog.

The online compilation from his student days was an attempt to take the guesswork out of the usage for other devotees. For insiders, too, it can be hard to keep up with the evolving slang.

Every generation of students adds phrases to the existing dictionary; the slang grows organically. Each of the thirteen hostels on the campus coins phrases that don't always propagate *insti*-wide. A 1990s alumnus could *bulb* over current words. Terms go extinct. Like *vanloon* – a word for a post-graduate geek who shies from BTEch types – has not been used since the 1980s. "We used to go *vanloon*-hunting," recalls Prof. Ram M. Narayan, a 1976 *pass-out* who teaches at Pennsylvania State University.

Alumni from this 50-year-old Institute have gone places, and they have carried their hometown slang with them. You can hear snatches of this earthy, eclectic tongue in the business lounge at Frankfurt airport, or down the Infinite Corridor at MIT. For the engineers, the slang is a veritable Esperanto. "It lurks beneath the surface and erupts as soon as I start talking to *insti* friends," says Chennu, who is currently in Europe, doing a Master's degree in Photonics.

Certainly, the use of this slang seems to be an extremely vital part of the student identity. "After publishing my thesis, I received e-mails from

## An IIT Glossary

<b>Arbit</b>	– Something which is not understandable, comes from 'arbitrary'.
<b>Ax</b>	– A common suffix.
<b>Bulb</b>	– Confused, not knowing what's going on.
<b>Cash</b>	– To do well.
<b>Cat</b>	– A very smart chap.
<b>Chumma</b>	– Something said or done not seriously.
<b>Crack</b>	– To solve a problem or to do well.
<b>Crash</b>	– To go to sleep.
<b>Cup</b>	– To fail. Comes from the "U" grade which is the fail grade at IIT-M. The "U" probably looks like a cup, hence the derivation!
<b>Deesh</b>	– Get lost.
<b>Despo</b>	– Noun: Someone who studies very hard. Verb: To study very hard.
<b>Enthu</b>	– Having lots of enthusiasm.
<b>Funda-s</b>	– (also spelt as <i>Fundae</i> ) comes from "fundamentals".
<b>Hi-funda</b>	– Someone who is very smart or something which is very good.
<b>Low funda</b>	– Is exactly the opposite.
<b>Goodals</b>	– To cheat, cheating; e.g. Hostel X did <i>goodals</i> and won the match!
<b>Grub</b>	– Food.
<b>Hajjar</b>	– Many, actually anything more than two (synonyms are "n", <i>infinite</i> ).
<b>insti</b>	– Institute, IIT-M itself.
<b>Jobless</b>	– Synonymous with <b>Chumma</b> , having nothing to do
<b>Junta</b>	– <b>Hajjar</b> people, everyone.
<b>Kill</b>	– To do very well.
<b>OT</b>	– Short for "Own Trip". Someone who's not very serious about acads, life, etc is called an <b>OT</b> fellow.
<b>Put</b>	– Do, give. Sometimes this word serves no real purpose at all.
<b>Pack</b>	– To respond negatively, to say "no".
<b>Peace</b>	– A positive acknowledgement, or something which is very simple to do.
<b>Localite</b>	– Student from Chennai.
<b>Muggu</b>	– Too studious.
<b>Nice try</b>	– Ironic comment on a suggestion that is impossible or ridiculous.
<b>Put</b>	– Put forth.
<b>RG</b>	– Get ahead of someone in a mean way, short for relative grading.
<b>Stud</b>	– A very intelligent or well-informed person.
<b>Thulp</b>	– To eat a lot, do well in a test.
<b>Vandi</b>	– Vehicle, usually a scooter, moped or motorbike.

scores of current IIT-Madras students as well as alumni," says Richter. The thesis was downloaded 22,156 times as of early May this year, the linguist adds. For an academic study, this is

amazingly popular. Perhaps the alumni look up the document, in great numbers, wistfully, with nostalgia. Or *joblessly*, as they would tell themselves with pretended scorn.

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# An ecosystem under threat

(Continued from page 1)

the planned Petro-Products Park have all done their bit towards converting the area into a wasteland. Illegal quarrying of fine sand has been yet another threat to this place. With the latest announcement, environmentalists fear that all is over for the three villages of Kalanji, Kattupalli and Vayalur Kupam. The continued industrialisation of an area which is so close to a declared bird sanctuary, Pulicat, and an internationally known biosphere has cast doubts on whether the Government pays only lip-service to protection of natural habitats. Further evidence of this is that most of such activity is in violation of the rules governing Coastal Regulation Zones which forbid any industrial activity within 500 m of the High Tide Mark.

The Government on the other hand has, predictably, seen this as a revenue generating exercise. It has claimed that the shipyard, which will come into operation by 2010, will have the capacity to employ 10,000 people. To be built over 1500 acres, for which land acquisition has begun with the help of TIDCO, the shipyard will have the capability to build cargo ships, warships and offshore oil rigs. As a sop to environmentalists, the Government has claimed that it is carrying out an Environment Impact Assessment for the project. How sanctions to plans can be given even while such an assessment is on, is open to question.

It is worth recalling here that when it came to sanctioning the Ennore Port, similar tactics were adopted. Despite it being a Rs. 100 crore project, the port was classified as a minor port and it was announced that it would handle only clean cargo, namely foodgrains and "non-

polluting" goods such as automobile parts. But the scale of activity actually in progress shows that it is anything but minor.

The Ennore Pulicat Environment Protection Forum has been pleading for many years that the Government take steps to protect the area but all this has fallen on deaf years. With the latest announcement, it appears that Pulicat itself is under threat, the area surrounding Kattupalli being a major feeder system that is vital to the ecosystem of Pulicat. But with the powers that be largely being insensitive to environmental concerns, can we expect any better?

Kattupalli island, till recently untouched by urbanisation, is spread across 18 sq km. This island has 12 hamlets, ringed by the Bay of Bengal on the east, Ennore Creek on the south, Pulicat Lake and the Buckingham Canal on the north-west. Fishing and agriculture are the main source of livelihood for the majority of the population. The main features of Kattupalli island are its natural sand dunes, availability of freshwater and its rich greenery. Cashew, coconut and paddy are the main agricultural produces. The protected Olive Ridley sea-turtles breed on the Kattupalli beach. According to a scientific study in 2006, this fragile ecosystem with its low human population density may well hold the key to the survival of Chennai. It is said to be the largest carbon dioxide sink in this region, absorbing all the emissions of its neighbouring metropolis. The water table here is said to be so high that water literally gushes out of the ground even in summer. The whole area is a unique biosphere, found nowhere else in South India. Is this to be sacrificed for a shipyard and a port that could be built almost anywhere else on the State's long coastline?

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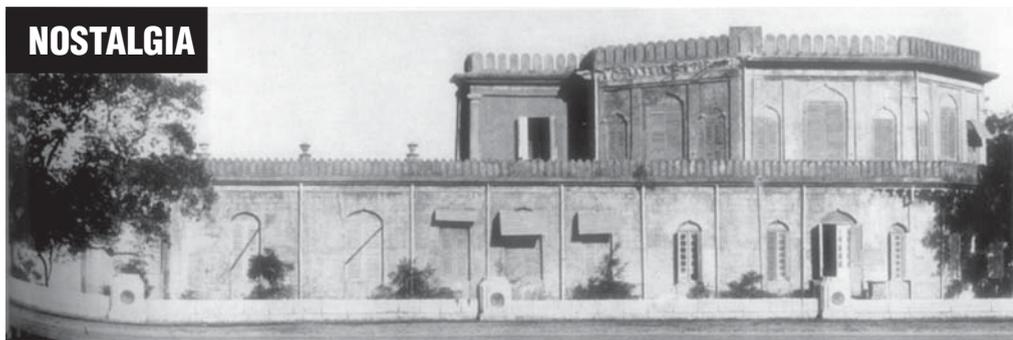
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We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions.

— The Editor

## NOSTALGIA



Marine Villa on the banks of the Cooum where Ramunni Menon started the Zoology Laboratory of the University of Madras.

# Speaking plainly on Gandhiji

(Continued from last fortnight)

Grandmother never went anywhere, but when Valiamma came, we were allowed to accompany her to a few places approved by Grandfather – some visits, or to witness Navarathri Kolu at a neighbour's. On such occasions, as the car waited for us, Grandfather would come down to see us off. He would sit in his easy chair, while my sister and I, faces scrubbed and shiny and hair oiled and plaited, stood against the wall waiting for his signal to leave. If a cloud drifted across the horizon, Grandfather would screw up his eyes and remark, "I say, does it look like rain? In that case, isn't it better you don't go? There might be trouble with the car, you know." Getting no reply from Grandmother, he would turn his attention to us and, catching the look of disappointment on my face, would lash out, "Just look at her expression – one would think she was being taken to the gallows."

One of the celebrated marriages of that era was that of Seethamma to the Raja of Parlikamedi who lived in a sprawling mansion with extensive lawns. We were told M.S. would give the concert. At this bonus, I crossed my fingers hoping Grandfather would let us go. So, when Grandmother went up to give the news to Grandfather, I followed her and stood behind her whispering, till he was forced to ask, "What is Nalini saying?" "She wants to go to the wedding," said Grandmother. "Go to a wedding?" asked Grandfather, absolutely scandalised. "You are getting too fanciful, my dear. Weddings are not meant for schoolgirls. They will only distract you and you will lose your first rank," he said. So that was that.

It was in mid-1942 that I first felt the rumblings of a storm. We heard a strike was on in the University. "It is all that old man's doing – influencing young minds the wrong way and

disrupting their studies," said my Grandaunt, referring to Gandhiji. Though politics was never discussed in the family, we knew Grandfather belonged to the Justice Party which felt that we were still not in a fit state to govern ourselves.

An incident which stands out in my memory is of the time Gandhiji went on a fast. Grandfather had gone to Delhi for his Council of States' meeting where he made a speech criticising all those who were getting worried about Gandhiji's fast, adding that if Gandhiji chose to starve it was his own lookout. There was general consternation at home on reading this in the newspaper, but Grandmother went about unperturbed. She had immense faith

taunted, "Wasn't it your uncle who made this uncalled-for statement?"

\* \* \*

Holdalls of various sizes and bedding rolls meant for railway travel were kept in a closet downstairs. Among them stood a nice shiny brown bag with LADY MENON written in bold black letters across it. This was Grandmother's official name. When Achachan was knighted, Grandmother came to be known as "Lady Menon". Uncle Appu told us that there was great excitement when *The Madras Mail* announced in large bold letters: "Madras University's popular Vice-Chancellor knighted". But though the title "Sir K. Ramunni Menon" seemed to suit Achachan, "Lady Menon" seemed a bit incongruous to me since, in my mind, the prefix was usually associated with Englishwomen belonging to high society. However, I felt happy for Grandmother's sake, for I knew she valued the title highly, knowing full well that while Achachan rightly deserved the honour, the role she had played in helping him to acquire it had in no way been small.

(Concluded)

## Answers to Quiz

1. Israel; 2. Nargis; 3. Dmitry Medvedev; 4. Platypus; 5. Reached the summit of Mt. Everest; 6. Hewlett-Packard; 7. Sonia Gandhi, Ratan Tata and Indra Nooyi; 8. Indian vultures; 9. Memristor; 10. Brands Hatch circuit in Great Britain.

\* \* \*

11. Megalithic pottery with graffiti symbols having a strong resemblance to a sign in the Indus script has been found there; 12. Viralimalai; 13. Harris Road; 14. The Tatas through Tata Realty and Infrastructure Ltd; 15. The Government Museum; 16. Ratnasabha; 17. National Institute for Cancer; 18. Seven; 19. Botanical Gardens; 20. Paranjothi.

The High Level Group constituted by the Planning Commission on Services Sector to examine and suggest means for development and maintenance of monuments and archaeological sites has made several recommendations. One recommendation that the powers that should be paid heed to reads as follows.

#### Maintenance of Heritage Sites

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has the responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of all monuments and archaeological sites notified by the Government of India as a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. Some of the States have also enacted similar legislation and notified monuments and archaeological sites under the Acts.

The allocation of funds made available to the ASI is

# Another suggestion to save our heritage

grossly inadequate for the maintenance and restoration of the monuments and the environs of these monuments. The difference that adequate funds can make to a monument has been well illustrated by the case of Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi, which has been transformed with the help of donations from the Agha Khan Foundation. Paucity of funds is also a contributory factor for the present state of neglect in which the Delhi Red Fort finds itself. The position is not very different in the case of monuments protected by the State Governments. In a large number of monuments not even minimum facilities such as pro-

vision of drinking water and toilets have been provided.

The Group believes that in order to conserve the monuments and maintain their environs in top condition and undertake restoration work from time to time, the annual allocations from the budget need to be increased very substantially by the Centre and the States. If this is unfeasible the Group would suggest that the ASI and the counterpart State bodies should retain the exclusive right to maintain only the World Heritage Sites and other important monuments and sites for which the funds made available annually are adequate. For the conser-

vation of the remaining monuments and archaeological sites and development and maintenance of their environs, an appropriate partnership arrangement should be considered with the private sector.

A classic PPP would be to hand over to selected private sector enterprises the environs surrounding the monument (outside the immediate perimeter of the monument) for their development and maintenance in lieu of permission for some commercial development so that the enterprise gets a stream of revenue which is enough to provide a return on initial investment as well as for the maintenance of the fa-

cilities. The private sector partner should not be allowed to handle conservation work of the monument itself, but should be asked to contribute for its conservation and restoration where necessary, which should be undertaken only by expert bodies such as INTACH or under their supervision.

Other alternatives could also be considered, such as tripartite agreements involving apex chambers of trade and industry (ASSOCHAM, CIL, FICCI and PHD chamber) along with selected private sector enterprises and the ASI. It is imperative to redeem the lesser known protected monuments, many of which are lying in a derelict state at present all over the country.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** All this would be fine if each State puts in place a Heritage Act and lists in it all heritage sites that need to be protected. As of now not one State has a Heritage Act.

(Continued from page 5)

Presidency College is largely Italianate in style and seems to suggest that Chisholm was yet to imbibe the local styles. But in 1872 Chisholm was sent by Napier to Travancore to design a museum for the Maharajah. Here he had the opportunity to closely study the Padmanabhapuram Palace and its style exerted a strange fascination on him. He made detailed drawings of it and, while designing the museum, did so in what he called "a very beautiful form of domestic art." Later, his design for the Madras GPO was to be based on this.

At the same time, Chisholm was also asked to study the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai and, under the instructions of Napier, he carried out restorations and renovations to

## An imperial conversation

the main Durbar Hall. It was here that he indulged in full his taste for intricate plaster sculptures, ornamental decoration and artwork. Returning to Madras, he studied the famed method of Madras plasterwork or *bulpum* and marvelled at it. Having thus equipped himself, he was ready for his masterpiece, "that work of genius", the *Senate House*. All this indicates that Chisholm must have interacted heavily with local artisans, but in his writings he mentions none save a Mr. Lewis, who was probably a member of the Anglo Indian community and who was Chisholm's draughtsman.

*Senate House* was begun in May 1869, when Chisholm sub-

mitted a detailed estimate for its construction. The idea for a Byzantine look probably came from Napier who was fascinated with Istanbul and Constantinople. But, within that framework, Chisholm managed to incorporate all the features of Indian architecture that he admired. The work reflected the influence of many schools. Thus, the domes were certainly borrowed from the Deccani tombs and the windows from the Mihtar Mahal of Bijapur. The central structure was inspired by the Tirumalai Nayak Palace whose facade Chisholm described as a "Saracenic arcade with a Hindoo cornice." He could have been describing *Senate House*! The Government

Art School (of which Chisholm would later become Principal) was converted into a workshop for glazed tiles, painted glass and terracotta, most of which were used for *Senate House*. The domes, of which there were plenty, followed the "Hindoo method" and the stone friezes that adorned the exterior were clearly inspired by the sculptures at Mahabalipuram.

Ironically, when it was completed in 1873, *Senate House* was declared an important effort in the revival of Indian art, as though it had died previously. Indian art had flourished all along and it was by depending heavily on its practitioners that designers and architects such as Chisholm, Ludlow and de

Havilland could fulfil their dreams and aspirations. So, was Indian art really dead? The author does not make a comment on this, but the death of native methods and artisanship was to come much later, almost a hundred years later, when a generation of new architects began slavishly copying Western ideas, most of them unsuited to Indian conditions, and buildings based on such designs began coming up.

Though dry in parts and suffering from excessive information, *Imperial Conversations* plays an important role in bridging a gap in the mindset of present-day Government functionaries and a largely indifferent public which views the heritage buildings of Chennai as alien. It is a pity that such a detailed work will not be read by many.

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