

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

INSIDE

- Ford puts down roots
- Opening up insurance
- Threatened parks
- Two pages from the past
- From ball to tee

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FREE ISSUE

April 1-15, 1999

# A threat to four parks

Four major parks in Chennai are under threat of denotification and subsequent development by private developers. *Madras Musings* learns that:

- My Ladye's Garden, once the pride of People's Park and a heritage area if ever there is one, is to be given over to private enterprise to develop as an amusement park.
- An open space that is a part of 30-year-old Visveswaraya Park in Anna

zens of a city need are open spaces, lungs and green areas, NOT amusement parks or shopping bazaars.

Amusement parks and bazaars may bring the Corporation much-needed revenue. They will, however, not only deprive the city of vital open, green space but will also increase the congestion in all the areas they come up in and, as a result, add to the pollution. Highrise parking lots might provide parking space and rev-

### ● by The Editor

Nagar is threatened with the same fate.

- Sixty-year-old Panagal Park, bearing the name of one of the illustrious founders of the Justice Party, is to be made into a kind of underground shopping bazaar (*a la* Delhi's Palika Bazaar) with parking space for the vehicles expected to visit it possibly being provided in a towering parking lot to be built over it.
- And of course, there's Loane Square in George Town, which is already an illegal parking lot and public latrine.

That *Madras Musings* is shocked by these plans is to put it mildly. A Municipal Corporation's duty is to provide lungs and green areas for the citizens of the City it tends. To throw up its hands in helplessness because it cannot manage such open spaces effectively and, as a consequence, hand them over to private promoters are not its mandate. What the citi-

zens of a city need are open spaces, lungs and green areas, NOT amusement parks or shopping bazaars. Amusement parks and bazaars may bring the Corporation much-needed revenue. They will, however, not only deprive the city of vital open, green space but will also increase the congestion in all the areas they come up in and, as a result, add to the pollution. Highrise parking lots might provide parking space and rev-

enue, but how do you get to them if you have created congested roads leading to areas that the Corporation hopes will prove major attractions in the City? Apart from being shocked by the Corporation's plans to reduce green areas and develop built-up areas in the space, *Madras Musings* also wonders why and how policy-makers continue to go ahead with such plans without once consulting the people most concerned. Don't the citizens of the city have a voice in major changes in the city once they have elected their representatives? Don't those elected feel it is their duty to consult with their constituents when they dream up such cataclysmic changes that affect life in the City?

We hope that even at this late date, when there is still time to halt the denotification notices, the Corporation will hold public hearings on all four parks, seeking the views of environmentalists, conservation-



When the pavements of the City virtually vanish, tragedies like these are bound to occur. How this pony that is hired out for rides on the Marina's sands got into this predicament no one seemed to know... but help was a long time in coming. (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

## Students find a model multiple ecosystem

Ornamental fish, fireflies, a jackal's trick to capture its prey, local methods to trap the monitor lizard, nocturnal visitors like the snakes and scorpions, all recently gave a new perspective of a multiple ecosystem to the postgraduate research students of the Botany and Zoology Departments of Madras Christian College. They were on an environmental survey of Kattupalli village on the Ennore island now threatened by a petroproduct park.

Speaking to *Madras Musings* on their findings on the island, both professors and students pointed out that the multiple ecosystem with an original tropical evergreen forest sandwiched between the sand dunes on the east and the mangroves on the west, was an excellent model for students of Ecology and Environment to study.

The 22 students and their professors divided themselves into groups to explore the is-

land. Dr. Samuel Sukumar said that within a short period they were able to record 152 species of insect fauna, including the wingless *Lepisma*. Dr. David Livingstone, Entomologist, said there was a large presence of the pentamoid bug in the ever-

### ● by Rajind N Christy

green forest, a species more usually found in the Sikkim and Himalayan regions. The large congregation of chrysomelid beetles on leguminous plants was another feature.

Winston Henry, the ornithologist of the team, was able to spot 50-60 species of birds including the paradise flycatcher, pelicans, egrets and moor hen. The presence of green frogs, wild boar, jackals, monitor lizards and snakes like the krait and Russell's viper were also noted.

The biodiversity rich island is also a source of medicinal

plants, says Dr. C. Livingstone. The botany group recorded about 290 species of flowering plants and 10 species of Algae. Korai grass usually found on the west coast, was surprisingly noticed. Terrestrial orchids, an insectivorous plant and the smallest flowering plant, wolfia, were found.

A team led by Deepti Sukumar looked into the sociological aspects of life in the fishing village.

The survey report would be presented to the appropriate government authorities in a bid to save the island, says Dr. Sanjeeva Raj, Centre for Research on New International Economic Order. This report, he pointed out, would only help in conducting the Environmental Impact Assessment here. The students' enthusiasm has led to the college planning to set up a permanent laboratory on the island to extend research activities all round the year.

ists, the major NGOs, the City's major trade bodies and the public in the areas.

(Also see Page 5)

### Madras

### MUSINGS

wishes all its readers a  
Happy Tamil New Year's Day

# And so Ford puts down roots...

It wasn't the best of shows, nor was it the worst of shows. It's because *The Man From Madras Musings* had expected so much when Ford inaugurates a new plant that he was disappointed by the latest Ford show. Perhaps Ford has inaugurated so many plants around the world, it's become blasé about it all; but it can't expect the same attitude from its invitees, who've come only for a show, NOT to shower blessings on the Company.

Ford had its giant, Rs.1700 crore Chennai plant inaugurated by the Chief Minister in a huge, jungle-green tentcloth hangar erected in an open space not far from its gleaming corporate office block on the 250-acre Maraimalainagar campus with all inauspicious times avoided. A spectacular event promised by an enthusiastic but far from professional compere turned out to be yet another Ford film — a couple of more of which were screened during waiting periods — with a high soprano belting out the audio background, followed by a brief bit of computer wizardry that had light patterns flashing on the backdrop before the ever-so-familiar Ford symbol was re-created on it. Thereafter, all the right things were said — including a commitment being made that 'Ford is here to stay' — though Ford India's new Managing Director, Philip Spender, had not done as much homework on the pronunciation of Kalaingar Karunanidhi's name as the rest of the Ford team had.

It was here and during the visit to the plant that *MMM* — and most others — felt the need for greater activity by Ford's shepherds and shepherdesses. The new British Deputy High Commissioner looked rather lost in the dining hall, wondering which long queue to join, when *MMM* bumped into him. He had come to the function specially because Ford's famed Dagenham facility in England had contributed much to Maraimalainagar, as had other British manufacturers; even the buildings on site had much British inputs in them, he told *MMM*. When we parted company, he was still wondering which serpentine queue to join.

There obviously were no shepherds to take care of such VIPs; not even the Press had a caretaker. Perhaps this was a demonstration of Ford's equal opportunity policy, perhaps it was a reflection of the American belief that all are born equal (though *MMM* spotted one or two who appeared to be more equal than others). Further demonstrations of this was the 'Hey, guys' approach of the Caucasian supervisors in the factory as they tried to herd groups together to listen to spiels on what each station/sector was doing. Did it occur to them that many of the 'guys' were fairly senior people in a hurry to get back to work and wanted the quickest possible walk through the factory, with an opportunity to

exit whenever they felt like it? Many were senior engineers who would have been perfectly capable of strolling through the factory on their own and understanding what it was all about. And there were also so many who just wanted to say I saw it and, so, only wanted a stroll through without lecture halts. As for the 'Hey, guys' approach, it became a loud "Hey there you" when one Caucasian supervisor found a couple of soft drinks bottles on a side and wanted the service boy to clear them on the double. It was a tone of voice the boy responded to with rather more speed than was warranted. But maybe that's how Ford will get things done in Maraimalainagar, perhaps demonstrating why India can't achieve Ford's records.

## Guys and gals

To get things done, done at Maraimalainagar, Ford has about 600 local personnel, a little more than half in the factory. Talk around the facility is that a three-shift operation could produce 75,000 vehicles a year with provision for expansion for another 25,000 vehicles a year. But when code-named C-195 — "smaller than the Escort on the outside and bigger on the inside" — rolls out around October, the target, as of

go all the way? Perhaps not pushing for that additional investment in engines and transmission systems is the pragmatic way to go.

Ford has demonstrated pragmatism in other ways too. The assembly line is not fully automatic; it has several manual areas, decisions on manual or automatic being taken on the basis of cost-effectiveness in a manpower-rich situation. There have also been several investments in goodwill — Chairs at IITs in Chennai and Delhi, assistance for healthcare in Maraimalainagar, training programmes and workshops for students etc. Ford certainly seems to be sinking its roots deep in Tamil Nadu. Welcome, Ford... but less of the 'Hey, guys' approach might win Ford more friends here and greater acceptance as an integral part of the local scene and not as a carpetbagger.

## Changing heritage

It happened very quietly, certainly very few knew about it when a part of Madras that is Chennai's heritage passed into oblivion. The Connemara — not even Connemara Hotel ever — has been an integral part of Madras/Chennai heritage for a

persisted with "Can't, Won't or Haven't?", he was told, after a staring match, "Haven't". If one of the leading hotels in India is unable to provide change on request to its clients, then it must begin rethinking its status. Certainly that incident would not have occurred in The Connemara.

## Nye — and the Raj

A BBC programme about the Raj which has caused much discussion turned up with a Madras angle not so long ago. Reviewing it for *The Spectator* magazine was Edward Heathcoat Amory, grandson of Archibald Nye, last British Governor of Madras. Amory's piece had an item or two not without Madras inter-est. He said:

"When my grandfather, General Sir Archie Nye, was appointed governor of Madras after the war, he left a grey and austere post-war Britain, which had just elected a labour government, for a world of polo, palaces and power. He knew that his role was to help organise an orderly transition to independence, but in the meantime this austere soldier, whose career had begun in the ranks, lived like a prince. Neither

was a supercilious Indian academic Mani Shankar Aiyar, who remarked that 'since Roberts was at Caius, I'm glad I went to Trinity Hall'. Having, like so many Indians before him, received the benefit of an excellent British education, he was now indulging in the easy option of sneering at 'the Brits' and all their works on the sub-continent. The presence of this man as a representative of the British liberal establishment demonstrated not only our extraordinary national capacity for self-denigration, but also the importance of allowing revisionists like Roberts to say their pieces..."

*The Man from Madras Musings* wonders when both sides are going to let the Raj rest in peace and get on with the difficult business of getting on today.

## In brief

★ When a sweet young thing spotted *The Man From Madras Musings* coming out of an International Standards Organisation press briefing on ISO standards for "mechanical contraceptives", she wanted to know "what's them?" And was most intrigued to find out what kinds of standards were being set for items like condoms, diaphragms and intra-uterine devices. To find out for himself, *MMM* popped into the sessions from time to time and found the technicalities rather overpowering. But one thing *MMM* found intriguing was the attempt to find a burst strength formula when condom lengths and widths varied so much. Apparently many African countries looked at 180 mm long condoms while a learned person from Korea spoke of the 140 mm long condoms the Koreans used — and both delegates had mentioned these lengths being offered on a variety of widths. Finding a formula for burst strengths in these circumstances, called for a Solomon, not benign Chairman Bengt Gustafsson, who heads the ISO Technical Committee on this subject.

he, nor my grandmother, touched

cash at any point during their week, except on Sunday, when the white-gloved butler would be waiting at the door with their contribution to the church collection ready on a silver salver.

After independence, he stayed on as high commissioner in Delhi, and became friends with Nehru and the other Indian leaders. Sir Archie died the day after my christening, and so I never knew him, but on his behalf I feel a personal investment in the history of the British in India.

Least pleasant of the three

★ It may not strictly be a part of Madras that is Chennai's heritage, but a thirty year and more link with the City was recently broken when the Ponds advertising account moved from Hindustan Thompson Associates Chennai to HTA Mumbai. It is not merely the Rs.65 crore value of the account the City is losing; it's losing its close link with a product it manufactures and which has soared to great heights thanks to the inputs of HTA Madras/Chennai and all in the City — including *The Man From Madras Musings* — who had worked with the account in one manner or another over the years. Parting may be sweet sorrow, but *MMM* is inclined to think that often the sorrow of parting is unnecessarily brought about.

K. Raghunathan  
Secretary to Chairman  
& Mg. Director  
Sundram Fasteners Ltd.  
Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai,  
Chennai 600 004.

— MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Repairs or restoration?

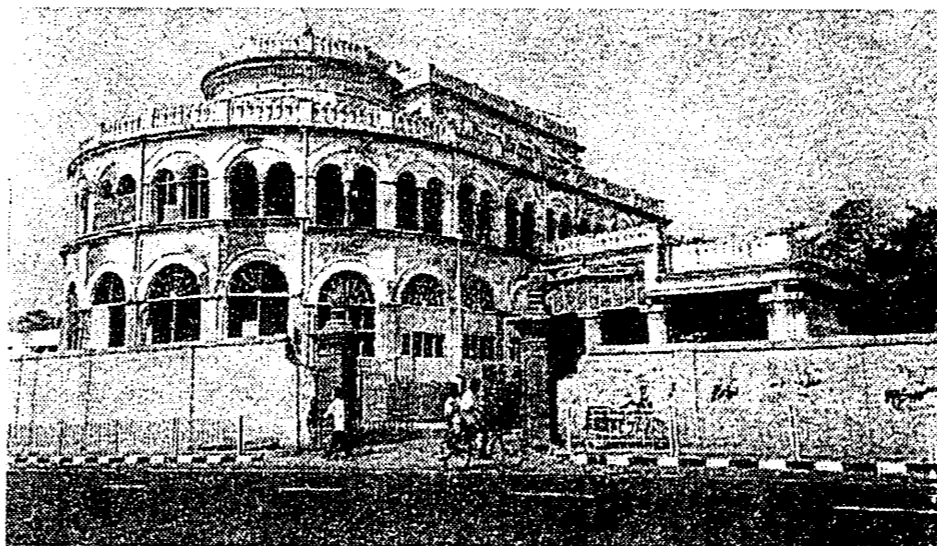
We have commenced repair-work at the *Vivekanandar Illam* recently (*MM*, March 1st). We could not commence the work earlier as there was no direct access to the building and the entry was through the entry gate of Lady Willingdon College. A new gate has been put now adjacent to the *Vivekanandar Illam*, which gives us direct access to the building. Repair work inside the building with the guidance of eminent architects has also commenced.

Swami Gautamananda  
Sri Ramakrishna Math  
P.B. No. 635  
16, Ramakrishna Math Road  
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

### History repeats

The item 'TN Cricket Personality heads CBI' (*MM*, February 16th) reminds me of F.V. Arul from our State who headed CBI in the 70s. He was a prominent hockey player, who had the rare distinction of leading the Madras State Team to victory over the Melbourne-bound Indian Olympic Team. The latter, later won the Gold Medal at Melbourne, humbling the U.S., en route, by as many as two dozen goals!

M.Ratna Prabhu  
B-11, Sterling Apts-I  
Behind City Club  
Near Taleem Foundation  
Bhopal  
Ahmadabad 380 058.



The new gate of Vivekananda Illam nee Ice House. That gate has enabled restoration work of a sort to begin. (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Editor's Note: We, and other conservationists, are rather concerned that, as in the case of the DGP building, cement is being used in the restoration of the building, not the original traditional lime and mortar. Recently, when an Australian team of conservationists visited the building, they too expressed concern that the traditional method was not being used — thereby shortening the life of the building. The *math* should note that all architects and civil engineers are not specialists in conservation and restoration technology.

### Spelling explained

Reader B. Gautham's interesting question (*MM*, March 16th) about the different spellings of "Sundram" adopted by the TVS group companies:

T.V. Sundram Iyengar, the founder of TVS, spelt his name as 'Sundram'. The parent company, which bears his name, viz. T.V. Sundram Iyengar & Sons Ltd., also has the same spelling. Hence, Sundram Fasteners has felt that it is only appropriate that the name should be spelt the same way.

However, there are companies in the TVS group which have opted for the more common spelling 'Sundaram', probably based on numerology.

We would like to reiterate that our company's name bears the same spelling as that of the founder's name.

### The name remained

I am not sure whether T.M. Sundararaman (*MM*, March 1st) has got it exactly right, for though the name *Round Tana* may have

### The spread of roots

With reference to the letter on cutting trees (*MM*, March 21st), it should be stated that the effect of vegetation on buildings had been studied in the U.K. extensively and it was found from this study that the tree roots can extract large quantities of water from soil; a full grown 'Poplar' consumes over 50,000 litres in a year. The roots take up moisture from under, or near the foundation, which will cause settlement of the foundation and lead to cracks in the walls. The distance to which the roots of the tree spread depends largely upon the type of tree and its height (see table). The roots of many common trees extend to a distance at least equal to their height. The roots of a willow, elm or poplar can extend to twice the height.

It is also important to note that if a tree is felled, clay soil will gradually swell as water returns to the ground. The clay site needs to be allowed to recover before building activity begins or the foundation needs to be specially designed to prevent damage caused by this swelling. When trees are cut down, long-term swelling of clay soils can be substantial and take place over several years.

N. Subramanian  
191, North Usman Road  
Chennai 600 017.

existed even in the 1960s, the brown howday-like (or can it be compared to a cupola) structure which I remember in the 30s was no longer there. Indeed, there were toilets constructed by the Municipal Commissioner I.P.L. Shenoy, which undergrads of those days laughed at and derisively called Shenoy Nagar.

Long after a structure has been demolished by the vandals in our corporate bodies, the names still exist — as in Mumbai, where *Kala Goda* is still *Kala Goda*, though the statue has been removed, and Fountain is still known as Fountain and not Hutatma Chowk.

The original Round Tana may be seen in Mr. Muthiah's classic book, *Madras — its Past and its Present*. It was nowhere on the scene even in the 40s.

K.N. Prabhu

63, Ocean View, Dumayne Road  
Colaba, Mumbai 400 005.

### Not respected

In *MM*, March 1st, the DC Traffic is quoted as saying that tougher traffic laws are needed. But the state of traffic in Chennai has much to do with the public not having any respect for the police. Go to any other city and the traffic obeys the police presence and respects it. Not here.

Traffic signals do not function properly. From green, it becomes red suddenly, with amber not even seen for a few seconds. Many junctions have policemen who just watch the traffic find its level as and how it wants.

Anuradha Prasad  
Saikrupa B-2  
O.P. Road, Chennai 600 026.

### No change at all

I opted for a transfer to Madras from Delhi with high hopes in 1974. Since my workspot is at Meenambakkam Airport, I chose to

### Heights of some common European trees

Com. Name	Approx. mature height (m)	Approx. height after 15 years (m)
Douglas Fir	40	12
European Larch	40	9
English Elm	40	7
Lombardy Poplar	30	9
European Ash	30	7
London Plane	30	5
White Willow	25	15
Scots Pine	25	10
Silver Birch	25	9
European Horse Chestnut	25	9
Oak	25	8
Beech	25	7
Lime	25	7
Cedar	25	6
Weeping Willow	20	9
English Holly	15	4
Yew	10	5
Juniper	5	3

Editor's Note: Does any reader have any similar information on trees in Chennai/Tamil Nadu?



### Hiding heritage

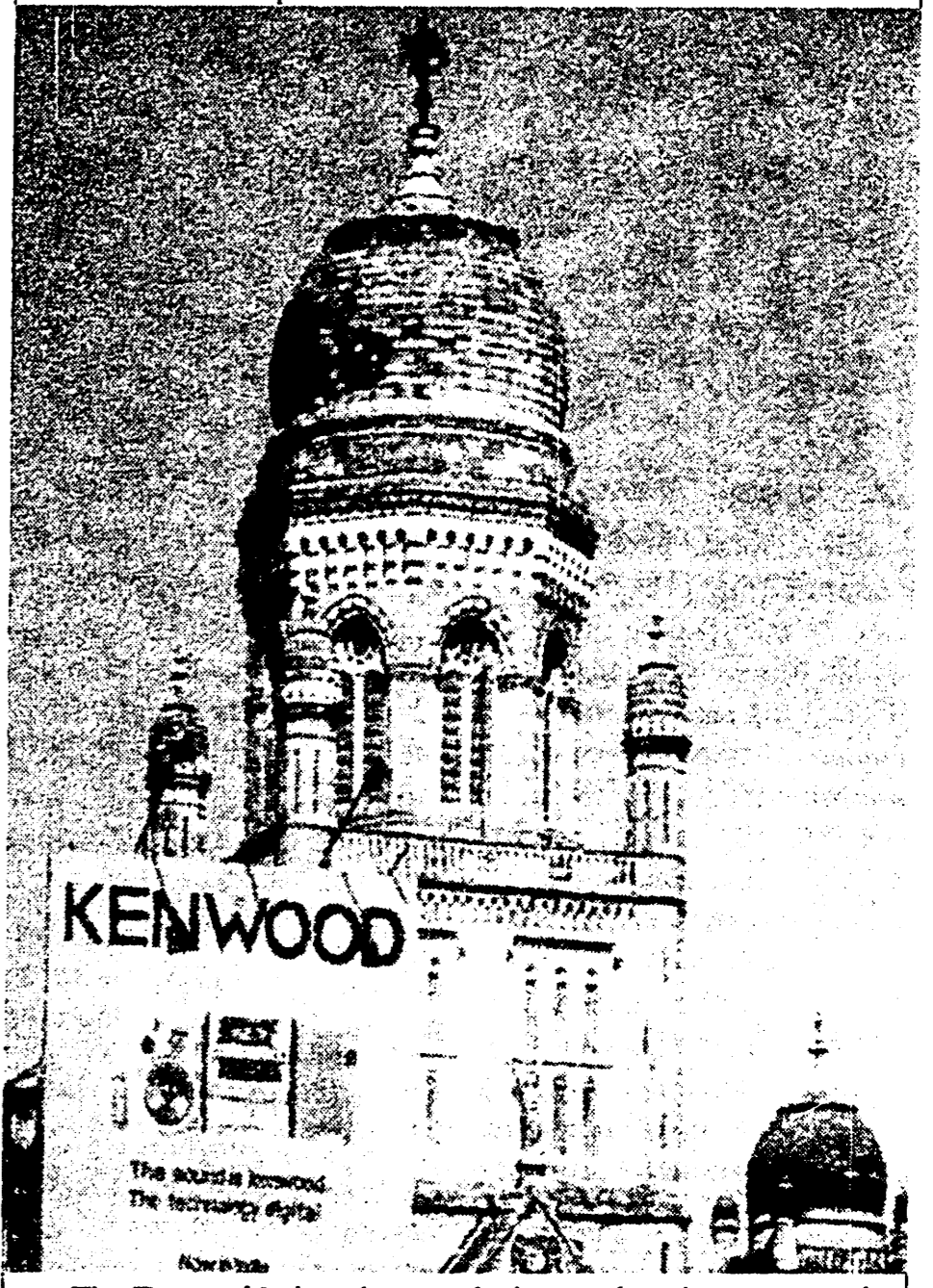
Last fortnight's pictures of the Corporation removing hoardings on a citizen's request, because they hid public buildings, makes me wonder whether it will do so wherever else they hide heritage buildings, important public buildings and architecturally noteworthy buildings.

Look at the picture (above) that accompanies my letter. *Ice House*, or *Vivekananda Illam*, is totally hidden from public view on one side by these hoardings. What is the use of restoring such historic buildings if they are to be so hidden? Either the Corporation must

stop licensing sites for hoardings around heritage buildings — and I hope the Heritage Act will take care of that when it comes — or advertisers must voluntarily stop advertising on such insensitively located hoardings.

Another picture I send with this letter is from *The Times of India* and shows that Mumbai — with heritage rules in place — is nevertheless not immune to such a hoarding menace. When are we going to be proud of our buildings and our heritage and not of our crass commercialism?

Rajind N Christy  
Chennai 600 040.



This Times of India photograph shows a hoarding marring the beauty of even the hoarding licensing authority, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation. The article that accompanied this telling photograph stated that New Delhi does not suffer from this problem because the Delhi Urban Arts Commission has been "entrusted with street furniture and signage".

live in Nanganallur which is just 2 km from my office. During these 25 years I have always walked to work. It has been said that Indian roads were formed by buffaloes and cows. After 25 years of walking the same road I am convinced of the truth of this legend. The road I have walked has not been improved once!

P.S. Parameswaran  
C-70, Hindu Colony  
Nanganallur, Chennai 600 061

### Stop name-changing

It is unfortunate that instead of addressing themselves to improving the living conditions in the city and making it truly a 'Singara Chennai', the Councillors fritter away their valuable time in changing the names of the roads and

streets in the City as if it is the crying need of the hour.

The renaming of streets will tamper with the history of the City, as these roads and streets are named after dignitaries of yesteryear, besides inconveniencing the Postal Department and creating confusion in the minds of the citizens who are used to the old names.

If the memories of these leaders are to be perpetuated, why not name the various Corporation and Government Schools after them. Those who are interested in such schemes can help those schools by providing them with well-equipped laboratories, libraries, blackboards and other essential amenities.

T.M. Sundararaman  
No.19, Nallappan Street  
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.

# Present stability and future competition

## Concerns of opening up the Insurance Sector

When 'The opening up of the Insurance Sector' was the subject of a panel discussion organised by The Citizens Consumer and Civic Action (CAG) group recently, N.M. Sundaram, General Secretary, All India Insurance Employees' Association, was more than passionate in going to great lengths to show LIC as a caring organisation, that was at all times engaged in 'protecting' the interests of the customer. However, he went overboard raising the bogey of 'foreign companies being driven by one motive only — that of profit'. It was also surprising

and, hence, result in an oligopolistic situation. He stressed that the Bill should go all the way in opening the door to competition and not result in half measures.

The government's viewpoint was presented by N Rangachary, Chairman, Insurance Regulatory Authority, who also pointed out to Sundaram that the government's intervention in the insurance sector in Japan has been made only with the intention of protecting the consumer, and not the shareholder.

During the floor discus-

sions, the question of the evening was raised: Will private entrants target merely rural customers, or will those in rural areas too be served? Rangachary, in replying to the question highlighted the regulatory role that will be played by the IRA at every stage. "It will be a level playing field," he assured.

Rangachary also stressed the fact that the regulatory body would monitor both underpricing and overpricing in order to provide safety and cost-efficient products to the public. He also defended the minimum capital requirement on the grounds that the need was for large players and not for small operators.

The fact of the matter is, Indian consumers are coming of age, regardless of whether they are in the metros or in mofussil areas. The day belongs to those who go beyond a copywriter's slogan of "the customer is king" and truly deliver not merely the product but the attendant services.

Speakers from the full house who were in favour of liberalisation cited the inefficiencies of the current system and the lack of responsiveness to the consumer as the main reasons why change was required. They quoted statistics on the number of products which are available to the consumer in liberalised countries and the cost-effective service. Many of the examples and instances cited induced a few hearty laughs from the house.

A fitting reply to Sundaram was given by G.K. Raman, Managing Director, Sundaram Finance. Rebutting the official stand that liberalising is not about competition, but about profits, Raman pointed out the merits that customers have derived because of the level of competition in, for instance, the automobile industry.

Raman was also critical of the proposed minimum capital requirement, stating that such a move would not create a truly competitive situation in the sector but would limit competi-

• by Bhama Devi



## OUR OLD... &...THE NEW

Our OLD (top) shows the Chennai Municipal Corporation's Ripon Buildings in pristine splendour, its beauty not marred by even the occasional statue. But now there's arisen a large and rather elaborate memorial in the gardens which, from certain angles, totally deprives the viewer of the unbroken line of Ripon Building's handsomeness.

Our NEW (above) shows the line broken by a mausoleum-like memorial (close-up on left). This memorial has been erected, it is reported, to mark the Golden Jubilee of Indian Independence. Was it really necessary? Are we opening the floodgates to a whole lot of new memorials and statues, ruining Ripon Buildings' striking appearance.

## Want to muse with MUSINGS?

If you would like to be put on Madras Musings' mailing list, just fill in the form below (use block letters/type) and post it to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt Ltd, 62/63 Greames Road, MADRAS-600 006.

Name .....

Address .....

Note: Overseas postage extra. Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Gulf: Rs. 375/year. US & Europe: Rs 425/year. Cheques payable to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press.

MADRAS MUSINGS is now also on the web at [www.lokavani-hallmark.com](http://www.lokavani-hallmark.com)

# Consult the citizens

— urges former IAS officer, referring to plans for two major parks

L. Menezes  
Director  
Centre for Urban Poverty Alleviation,  
Chindadripet,  
Chennai - 600 002.  
February 1, 1999.

To  
The Secy to Govt,  
Municipal Admn. and  
Water Supply Department.

Sub: Information requested  
under Tamil Nadu Right to  
Information Act

Madam,

I enclose copies of letters written to the Commissioner, Chennai Municipal Corporation, dated 22/10/98 and 15/12/98, regarding proposals announced for the development of My Lady's Garden and Anna Nagar Tower Park. There have been several official announcements for developing these parks as Theme Parks with the implication that they will be leased out to commercial interests. I have pointed out that these are notified public parks and requested full information on these proposals as a matter of public interest. I have received no reply from the Commissioner to my two letters.

Yours sincerely  
L.M. Menezes

\* \* \*

Centre for Urban Poverty Alleviation,  
Chindadripet,  
Chennai - 600 002.  
February 9, 1999.

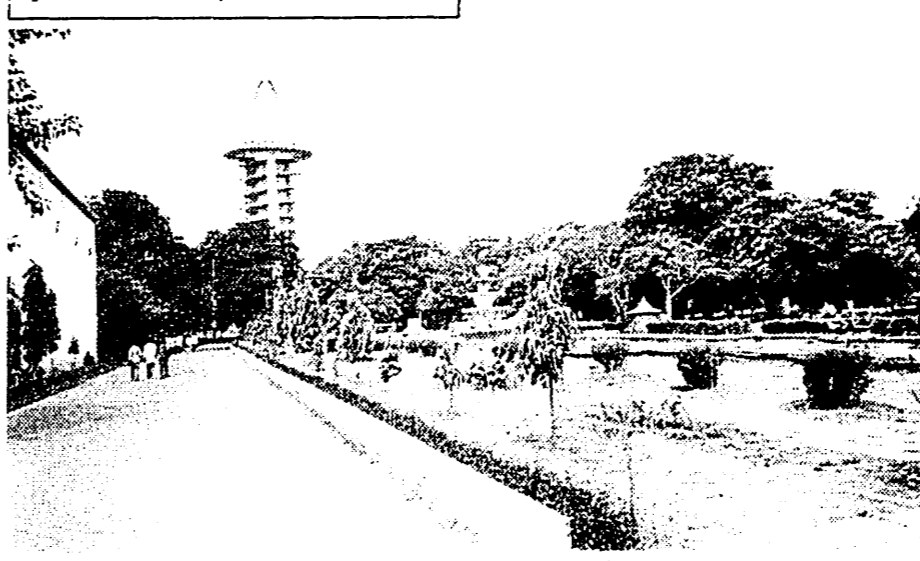
To  
Mrs. S. Malathi  
Secretary,  
Municipal Admn.  
& Water Supply Dept.,  
Chennai.

My dear Malathi,

I wrote two letters to the Commissioner, Chennai Municipal Corporation, asking for information on the proposals of the Corporation announced in the newspapers, to develop the My Lady's Garden, Anna Nagar Tower Park and other Parks as "Theme Parks". I got no reply. I then wrote to you, under the Right to Information Act, to direct the commissioner to give me the information.

Meanwhile, I sent someone to ask the Superintendent of Parks and Playgrounds for information on these proposals and he was told the information is "confidential" and cannot be given to anyone. Today

Madras Musings on February 16th published a major story on 'When the public were heeded... and a railway along the Marina was rejected'. That was 100 years ago. More recently, that ancient correspondence Madras Musings published was dug out and discussed, leading to the Metro abandoning a route the public had spurned a century earlier. We today publish come current correspondence in the hope that the public will be heeded again and the threat to some parks in the city are withdrawn.



The better-kept part of Visveswaraya Park.

I telephoned the Secretary to the Council in the Chennai Municipal Corporation asking where I can get copies of the Council resolutions on the subject of the proposals for these parks. I was quite astounded to be told that resolutions of Council are sent on to the concerned departments and no copies are given to members of the public because the fee has not yet been fixed by the council.

I am writing to you specially in the context of the various claims made by the Government of Tamil Nadu regarding recent municipal reform and the full page advertisements of the Chennai Corporation so-called achievements of the local body. Am I to understand that no member of the public can have access to resolutions of the Chennai Corporation Council, not even in development matters involving public expenditure on Parks and Playgrounds?

Yours sincerely  
L.M. Menezes

\* \* \*

S. Malathi, I.A.S.,  
Secretary to Government

Municipal Admn.  
& Water Supply Dept.,  
Secretariat, Chennai - 9.  
February 11, 1999

Dear Thiru Menezes,  
Please refer to your letter(s) dated 1.2.99 and 9.2.99 where-

in you have solicited information on the proposals of the Corporation of Chennai, for the development of My Lady's Garden, Anna Nagar Tower Park and other Parks as "Theme Parks", I am to inform you, that the Commissioner, Corporation of Chennai, has been instructed to furnish the necessary information to you, direct in this regard.

Yours sincerely  
S. Malathi

\* \* \*



My Lady's Garden, where even the Asoka Pillar is ill-kept.



Panagal Park...where there's still shade for statues and catnappers.



One end of Visveswaraya Park, with a bone-dry ornamental pond. (All photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

The above projects have been taken up with the help of Tamil Nadu Urban Development Fund as per the World Bank norms and TAFSIL, New Delhi have been selected as consultant for the projects.

The B.O.T. operators have been invited.... to run the amusement parks.... for the period of 20 years and the lease amount will be paid by the operator to the Corporation. As far as the Tower Park, Anna Nagar is concerned, 50% of the park area which is not in use at present will be converted as amusement park and balance will be maintained by the operator for the public use without any entry fee. The above mentioned two parks will only be used for the recreational purpose as per the norms.

With kind regards,  
Yours sincerely  
P. Kolappan  
Centre for Urban Poverty Alleviation,  
Chindadripet,  
Chennai - 600 002.  
March 17, 1999.

To  
Mr. P.Kolappan, I.A.S.,  
Commissioner  
Chennai Municipal Corporation.  
My dear Kolappan,  
I am in receipt of your letter P.D.C.No.P2/2120/98 dtd. 17.2.99....

To begin with I must point out that I had sought this information from you as long back as October '98... (a reiteration of the history of the correspondence)... I am mentioning all this because if a retired I.A.S. Officer and former Special Officer of the Madras Corporation cannot get information on public projects of the Corporation, I can well imagine the fate of ordinary citizens. But more important, this does not inspire any confidence in me regarding the bonafides of these proposals since there seems to be a veil of secrecy and reluctance to give any information to the public.

It has come as a shock to the residents of Annanagar that the only major park which we have is to be bifurcated and a portion is to be given to a private developer for some commercial project. In your letter you have said that the proposal is to provide recreational facilities to the citizens of Chennai which is "obligatory to the Local Self Government". This is a novel interpretation of the Municipal body's obligatory function. It is indeed the duty of the urban local body to provide parks and playgrounds to the citizens and to maintain these facilities for the use of all citi-

(Continued on Page 9)

Two pages from the past

## 85 years later, is she remembered?

As you cross the Cooum bridge from College Road and enter Pantheon Road, there on your left is the Co-optex complex, whose facade bears in large type the name, THILLAIYADI VALLIAMMAI MAALIGAI. It is a safe bet of ten to one that not one in ten who sees the name recognises the person behind it. Pressed, you would get responses like, "maybe a well-known weaver member of Cooptex", "possibly, a pioneer weaver from Kanchipuram" and so on. Few residents of Madras know that Thillaiyadi Valliammai is the name of one of Gandhi's many Tamil followers in the Satyagraha campaigns in South Africa.

Indeed, Valliammai was among the three Tamil martyrs so vividly and fondly remembered by Gandhi in his writings about the Satyagraha in South Africa. The other two were Nagappan and Narayanaswamy. All three were teenagers born in South Africa.

Valliammai was the eldest child of R. Moonsamy Moodliar and Mangalam, pioneer settlers in the Transvaal, who owned a fruit and vegetable stall at Doofontein, Johannesburg. She was still in middle school, when her father took part in the first phase of



Thillaiyadi Valliammai is remembered in Chennai — at Co-optex's main showroom on Pantheon Road, but no one really remembers why. The article that accompanies RAJIND N CHRISTY's photograph sheds light on the name and why it was remembered here.

the Satyagraha, launched in 1907 to protest against finger printing of Indian residents in the Transvaal. Moonsamy was too sick to take part in the second phase of Satyagraha, launched in 1913, but Valliammai and her mother filled his place. Appropriately, too. For, this second phase had as its main plank, the legality of non-Christian marriages, as such marriages had been decreed illegal by the Cape Town Supreme Court. All Indian women, who could by the rul-

ing, no longer claim to be wives of their solemnly wed husbands, rose up in arms, led by Kasturba Gandhi herself.

Valliammai was hardly 15 when she joined the Satyagraha. The task assigned to her was to motivate the indentured and other Indian workers in the railways, sugar plantations and coal mines to strike work and offer to go to jail, if need Valliammai travelled all over the coastal Natal, in the

(Continued on Page 8)

## When Irish fought Irish on the Coromandel

Here I am, sitting in the beautiful garden of a private house in Pondicherry, waiting for the Northern Irish flute-player, Brian Finnegan, to return from a visit to Auroville, and passing the time reading a biography of the British soldier, Eyre Coote, and all of a sudden instances of the Irish presence in India leap out of the page one after the other.

I already knew that the French general during the Third Anglo-French war of the Carnatic, Lally, was of Irish Catholic stock. His full name was Thomas Arthur, Count de Lally and Baron de Tollendal, and he came from the O'Mallalys of Tullendaly. His father, Sir Gerald, had gone over to France in 1691 after the capture of Limerick by the English forces.

And I was now reading that Eyre Coote was also from Ireland, being of Anglo-Irish stock

and descended from English settlers of the time of the first Queen Elizabeth. So here we have the British and French armies of South India at war with each other in the 1760's and both led by Irishmen!

At that point, Brian Finnegan came in and I told him the strange tale.

"Irish fighting Irish?" he said. "Sounds familiar".

"There's more," I said, "There was a regiment in the army of the East India Company called the Madras European Regiment and according to this book, they later were renamed as the Royal Dublin Fusiliers."

"Get away!" After that, we talked about the greatest Irish-born soldier of them all, Arthur Wellesley, the Iron Duke himself, who had bloodied himself in India against Tipu Sultan and after whom the location of the mili-

tary academy in South India is named.

Then we fell silent for a moment, wondering about the vagaries and ironies of history, before we realised that after all it was not so strange that Ireland should be in our thoughts for March 17th, St Patrick's Day, was almost upon us. And that evening, old battles and old enmities were forgotten as India, Ireland, Britain and France came together and the lyrical notes of Brian's flute wafted out of Pondicherry, over ancient battlefields and across the Coromandel shore.

Later that night, the discussion about Wellington made me think of Napoleon and of how an amateur Scottish genealogist had recently completed research suggesting that Boney had a Scottish father; but that's another story....

Jaspar Utley

## Respect for the Law...

THEN: The Cop's Cap

In the early Forties, the uninhabited Tank Bund Road opposite Loyola College was a deserted stretch with only shrubbery on either side. It provided ample cover for those who had to answer their calls of nature.

On a morning jog along that road I saw a man with the proverbial *chembu* seek out a hidden place and squat. He suddenly got up as quickly as he had squatted, took to his heels and disappeared. Musing on whether there was a snake in the bush, I continued my jogging. That was when I noticed a red head-dress in the distance and presumed it was a police constable on his routine morning "nuisance patrols" to prevent the misuse of pavements and carriageways. Imagine my amusement and surprise when I approached nearer and saw a pair of milch buffaloes followed by their owner — a burly milkman — who had put his red shawl to good use to protect his head from the morning dew.

The man in the bush, like me, had mistaken him for a cop. The red shawl had done the trick.

Such was the respect for the law-keeping cop and his cap, THEN.

THEN: The Cop's View

In the early forties again, I had to accompany a very senior officer in the then Madras Presidency (a relation) who had been summoned by the Chief Minister to his Cooum House residence.

As I waited, in the car for the officer's return, a taxi cab pulled up into the Cooum House porch and a woman and several children alighted and taking their luggage went into the house. Out of curiosity, I asked the uniformed police constable on duty who these people were and was told they were the family of the Chief Minister and, having arrived by train, had taken a taxi home. I then asked why the Chief Minister's car, which was standing by with its driver, was not sent to the railway station to bring them.

The policeman's eyes widened in wonder — apparently at my ignorance — as he replied in all earnestness, "Sir, Government vehicles cannot be used for private purposes". I was not a policeman then.

## ...and (dis)respect

NOW: For the Gods and the Law

If there's one place on Hall's Road (Kilpauk) that is (in)famous, it is that stretch joining the New Avadi Road and Kilpauk Garden Road. The particular stretch is the pedestrian footpath hardly 4 feet wide, it is between a chapel and a temple and a public convenience nearby. No pedestrian can ever use this stretch of pavement as it is used as a toilet by the local children. Life is different for pedestrians as the narrow carriageway on this one way stretch is unable to cope with the ever-increasing traffic.

Parents must be held responsible for such acts of their wards. If persistent persuasion fails, the only remedy seems to be to do as a former D.G.P. of Tamil Nadu, Mr. Stracey, did in front of the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore. After three days of warning proved futile, he had the Police swoop down on the young offenders and pack them off to the police station where they were let off only after the lethargic parents came and promised that such violations would not be repeated.

NOW: For the Dead and the Law

While dirtying pedestrian footpaths and the carriageways is highly reprehensible, what can we say of someone who desecrates the solemn resting place of the dead?

This is what happened a couple of years ago when I was attending a funeral in a city burial ground along with a former Minister of Tamil Nadu. *Mantras* were being chanted loudly and the flames leaping high when I noticed an individual hardly forty feet away mount a tombstone, squat and ease himself. I was shocked beyond words and shamefully pointed this out to the Minister who was speechless.

Looking at and sympathising with each other we hung our heads in shame, bemoaning the fate of our country whose citizens seem to be losing their sense of values.

K. Sreekumara Menon

# Kilpauk and the movies

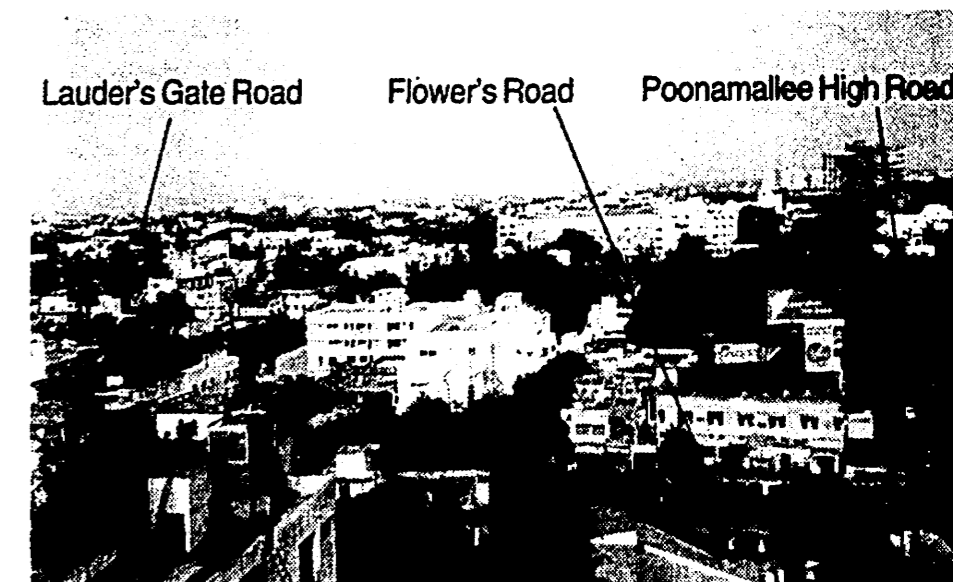
Kilpauk has evoked nostalgia in the memory of several contributors to *Madras Musings* in recent weeks. My own memories are of the hectic filmmaking activity there from the 1930s. As many as five studios existed in Kilpauk from 1934 and the busiest of them all was Newtowne Studio which was active until 1970's under different names and managements.

The first studio in the area was Srinivasa Cinetone also known as 'Sound City'. Because it was the first studio with sound recording facilities in Madras, it was called 'Sound City', a name inspired by 'Universal City' in Hollywood. The founder, a sadly forgotten Indian film pioneer, A Narayanan, visited Hollywood in the 1930s and was the guest of legends of cinema like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, John Barrymore, Louis B. Mayer, Carl Laemmle (founder of

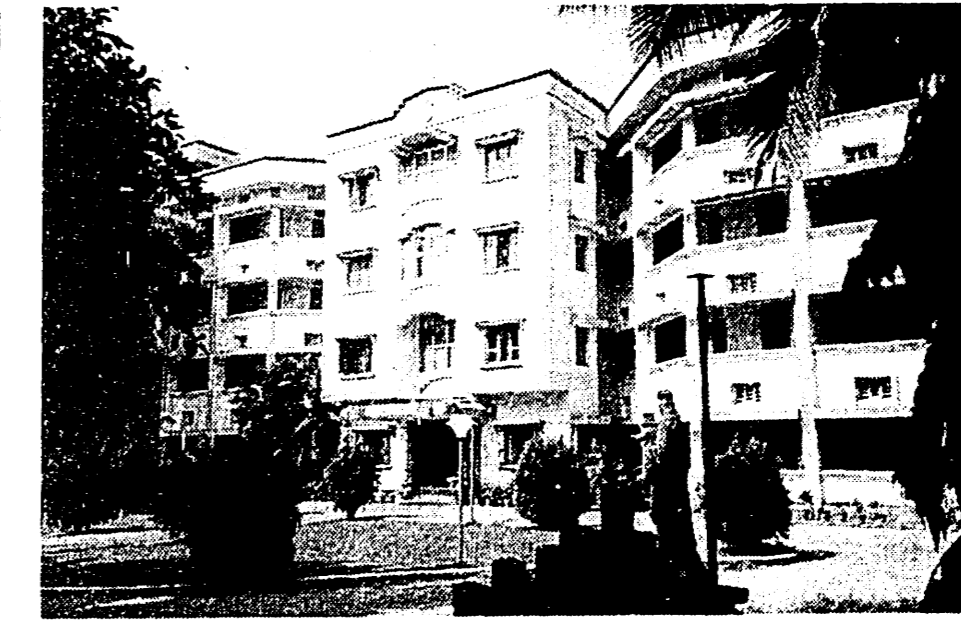
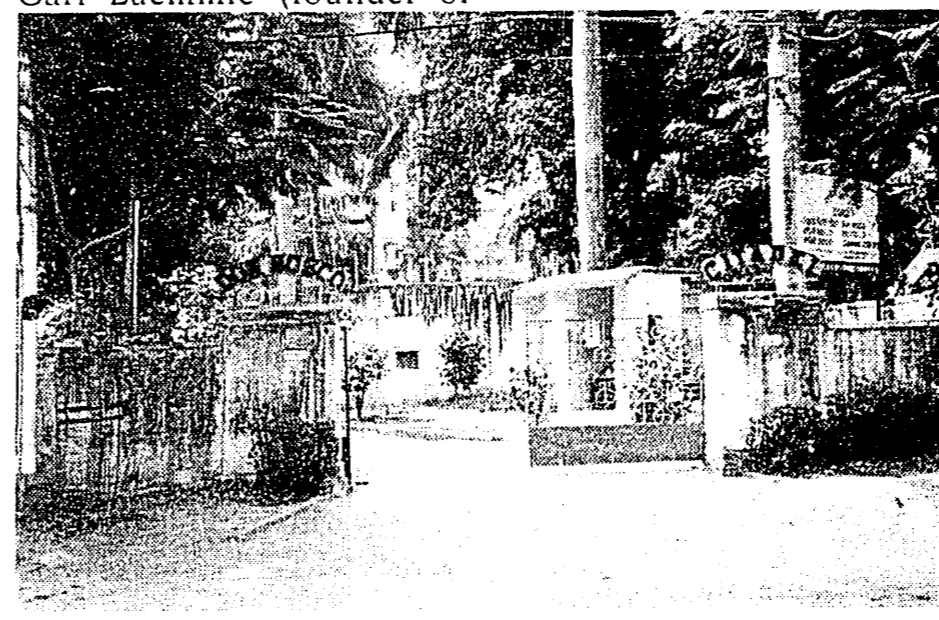
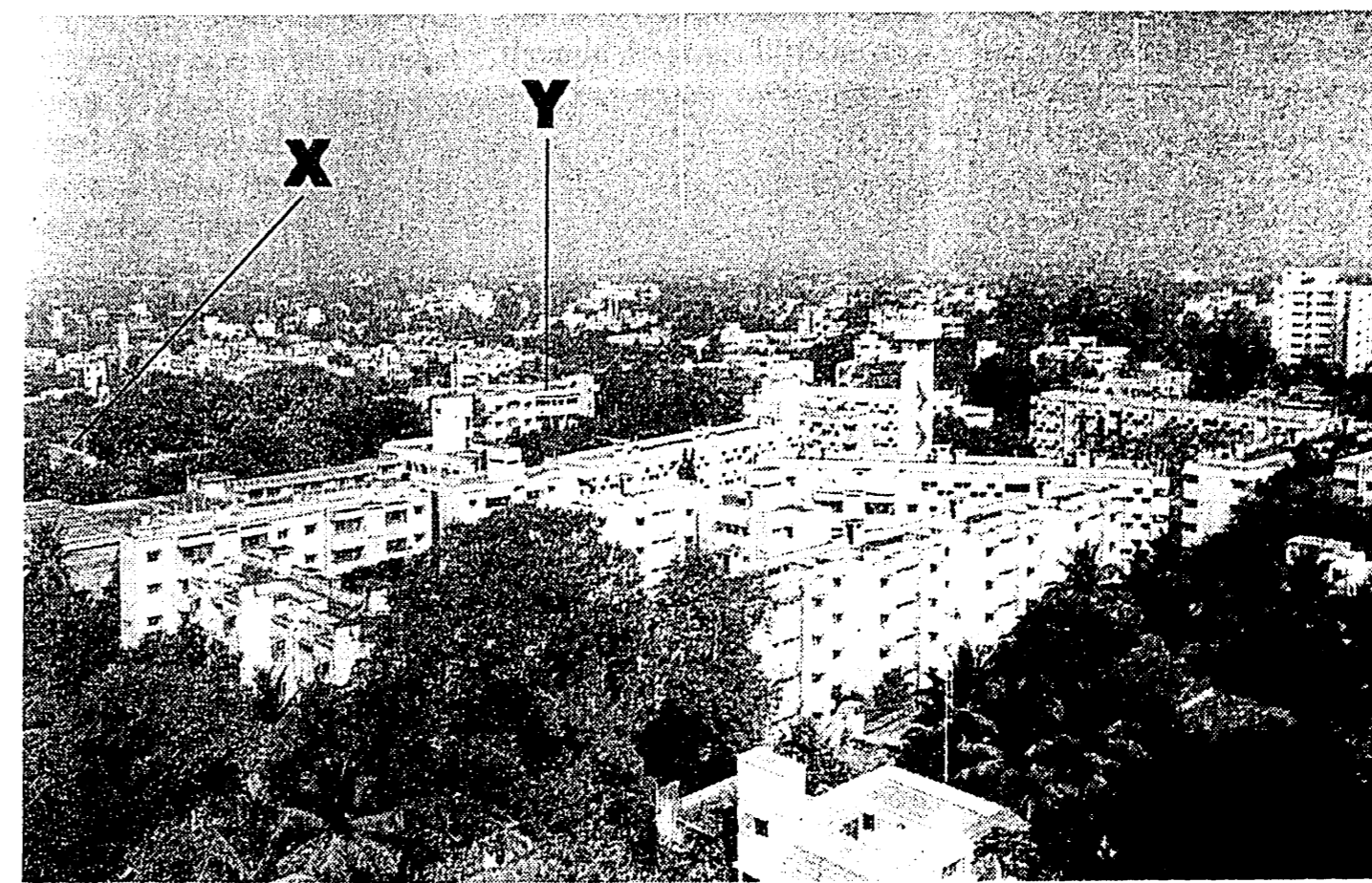
Flower's Road. A vast area indeed! Narayanan died young, when he was only 39. His wife, Meenakshi Narayanan, was the sound recordist of the studio, the first woman in India, and perhaps the world, to hold that

the studio was wound up and the land sold.

At the western end of the same road was another studio which had a better innings, Citadel Studios. A vast stretch of land was acquired by a group



That's Poonamallee High Road on the right, Flower's Road in south and somewhere on the extreme left in the picture is Lauder's Gate Road. All the buildings seen within those bounds came up on Srinivasa Cinetone's 'Sound City' grounds.

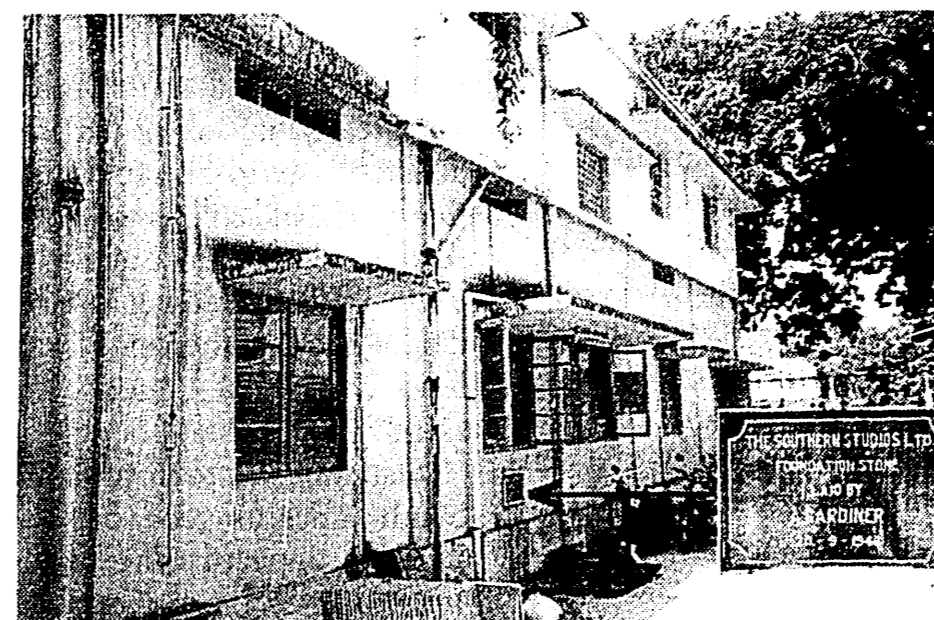


Further west in Kilpauk are the Don Bosco Salesian Institute's campus and the Reserve Bank quarters, all once part of Citadel Studios, a successor to Southern Studios. Citadel still lives on in the Don Bosco gate and the main buildings of the graphic studies institute, while its sister institution SIGA, where printing is taught, still carries the Southern Studios' foundation stone. On the campus is the swimming pool Southern Studios used to boast; today, it is unused. And both SIGA (X) and Citadel (Y) are seen to the left of the sprawling RBI quarters that came up in Citadel's gardens. (All photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Universal Studios) and others. In his studio he made the first talking picture to be produced in Madras. *Srinivasa Kalyanam* (1934), a mythological featuring P.S. Srinivasa Rao and R.B. Lakshmi Devi.

Lakshmi Devi was from a wealthy snuff-maker's family of Tondiarpet and she created history in many ways in Madras. She was the first woman in Madras society to drive a car, wear trousers in public, smoke and be seen at the Guindy Races! An attractive, buxom, sophisticated woman of much charm, she played lead roles in many films. Happily she is still around and still keen on doing roles even now!

Srinivasa Cinetone was situated on Poonamallee High Road, opposite Nehru Park. It had one entrance on Lauder's Gate Road and another an



portfolio. Narayanan named his studio after his son, Srinivas, who now lives in Madras with his sister, a noted doctor.

A studio in Kilpauk few remember is Kubera. Promoted by a group of rich Reddis of Nellore, this studio was at the eastern end of Landon's Road. Here, a film or two, like *Bhakta Markandeya* (Telugu), were produced and soon afterwards

of film persons who promoted a company called Southern Studios Limited, with another forgotten pioneer filmmaker, C.V. Raman (A Narayanan's brother) as the Managing Director. A lawyer-turned-filmmaker, Raman promoted many studios in Madras (including Satya Studios in Adyar) but bad luck haunted him through life. He made many films but real success sadly eluded him.

A South Indian film pioneer and successful multi-lingual producer, S. Soundararajan of Tamil Nadu Talkies, took over the management of Southern Studios. But busy with his own career, he too could not make much progress with the studio and sold it to an aggressive aspirant from Trivandrum, the son of a High Court judge, Joseph Thaliath Jr. He was Soundararajan's assistant and

was learning the the ropes of film-making. He now floated Citadel Studios, guided and helped by the noted art director and film-maker, F Nagoor.

Why Citadel? Thaliath's favorite novel was AJ Cronin's best selling work, *The Citadel*, which he was eager to make as his maiden effort. But Nagoor advised him that the English novel could be too highbrow to the local audiences of the 1940s. Both dropped the idea and made a popular Christian folklore tale, *Gnanasoundari* (1948). It was a big hit and established Thaliath and his studio. At Citadel he directed and produced many box-office hits like *Travam Pagalum* (which introduced the top star, Jai Shankar to cinema), and *Vijayapuri Veeran* (A rehash of *The Three Musketeers*). This film introduced many new faces, some of whom became stars. Its screenwriter was A.C. Thirulokachandar, an educated young man of the famed Arcot Mudaliar clan who emerged later as a leading multi-lingual filmmaker of South India.

Thaliath sold a vast area on the western side to the Reserve Bank of India, which built its staff quarters here. After some

years making films at Citadel, he faced diminishing success and sold the studio to the Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts, where SIGA now teaches printing in the rebuilt studio. Only the name *Citadel* remains in the entrance on Landon's Road.

(To be continued next fortnight)

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Quizmaster V.V.RAMANAN'S questions are from the fortnight March 1 to 15. Questions 16 to 20 pertain to Chennai.)

1. What superb 'dubious' record did New Zealand tail-ender Geoff Allott set in a Test match against South Africa recently?
2. Free India's first media organisation — and still one of the country's foremost — celebrated its Golden Jubilee recently. Name the organisation.
3. Name the popular cartoonist of *Outlook* magazine who was found murdered recently near Delhi.
4. Which Indian golfer won the Blue Riband of the Indian golfing calendar, the Indian Open, in Calcutta recently?
5. Name the East European nations that officially joined NATO on March 13th.
6. The Centre has decided to observe 1999-2000 as the Year of which language?
7. Which legendary West Indian spinner admitted to cheating, while bowling, during his playing days?
8. Name the violin virtuoso and one of the greatest icons of the 20th Century who passed away on March 12th.
9. Name the newest (and the second after Kaziranga) National Park in Assam.
10. Name the Indian Davis Cupper and Asian Games gold medalist who called it a day on March 10th.
11. Which Indian has been awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best First Book in the Eurasia region?
12. Name the director of such cult films as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange* who passed away recently.
13. Name the CPI(M)'s new publishing house, set up to offer a non-doctrinaire Left perspective on contemporary issues.
14. The millennium celebrations of which famous temple complex was inaugurated by the President on March 6th?
15. Name the author, also the biographer of Princess Diana, of the best-selling book on Monica Lewinsky entitled *Monica's Story*.
16. A pavilion dedicated to which genius was recently opened at the Periyar Science and Technology Centre in the city?
17. Name the auditor who claimed he was assaulted by former Chief Minister Jayalalitha and her associates recently.
18. Who is the recipient of the Woman of the Year 1998-99 award given by the International Women's Association?
19. Which Chennai-based vocalist was honoured with the prestigious Kalidas Samman of the M.P. Government recently?
20. Name the judge of the Madras HC who was asked to step down in controversial circumstances as the date of his superannuation was in dispute.

(Answers on Page 9)

# A friendly gaze

By Chennai's expats

Ulrike Bendl from Austria is on a 'har-trick', or should I say on a "roll", as she has for two years running bagged the first prize in Global Adjustments' photo exhibition 'Beautiful India'. This exhibition is organised by the Chennai relocation service to give the expat community in the city an opportunity to show viewers their views of India.

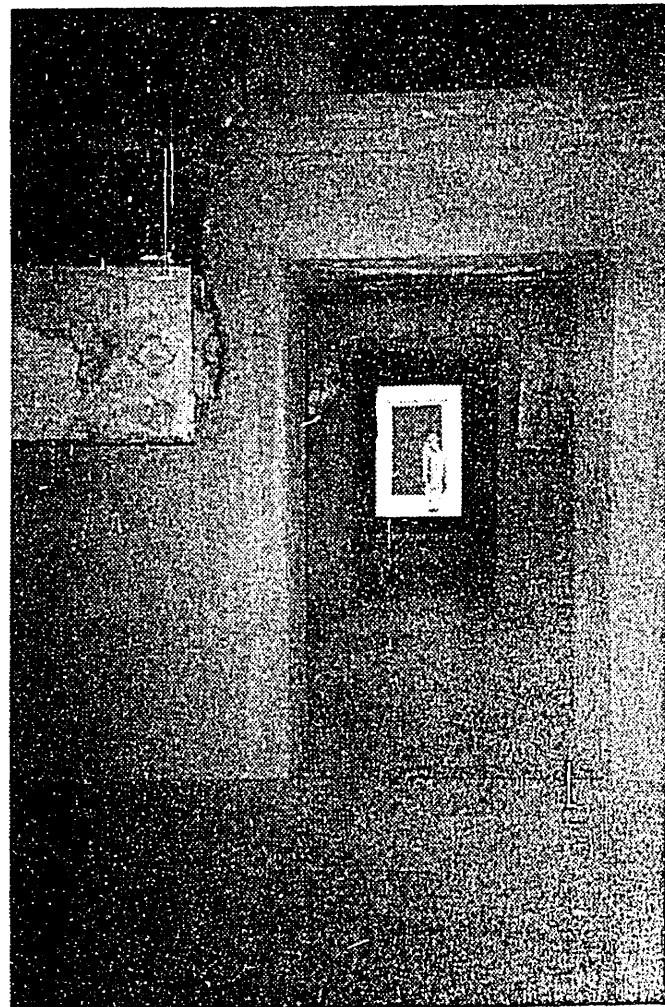
With an unerring eye, Ulrike tries to capture any aspect of Indian life while she is out and about. Her winding picture 'David and Goliath' brings out the gigantesque proportions of the Mahavira at Sravanabelagola by focussing on a pint-sized replica at his feet. The striking feature of the statue's size conveyed through the perspective of contrast is implicit in her caption which won first place too. Ulrike loves week-end trips and "will snatch them at the slightest opportunity", looking out for subjects representative of the milieu, though she treads cautiously when it comes to shooting faces for fear of being considered intrusive.

On the other hand, the Harrisons — William and Laura — harbour no such qualms as they find their subjects warm and endearing, always ready to flash their "beautiful smiles". They are constantly on the look out for the off-beat in India, where the harmonious co-existence of the old and the new fascinates them. This is evident in William's photograph 'Framed by the light' (second prize), which would have been my choice for top spot.

The opportunity presented itself at the Agra Fort with the chance appearance of a woman in an open courtyard, when she realised she was to be photographed. She stood still in anticipation of the click. Separated by two doorways from the subject, the depth provides for a play of light and shade and the resulting view, absolutely uncontrived, is of the woman framed as though in a portrait by the four sides of the doorway. The stone walls reminded me of Siegfried Sassoon's words in *The Heart's Journey*, *The stones remain: their stillness can outlast The skies of history hurrying overhead.*

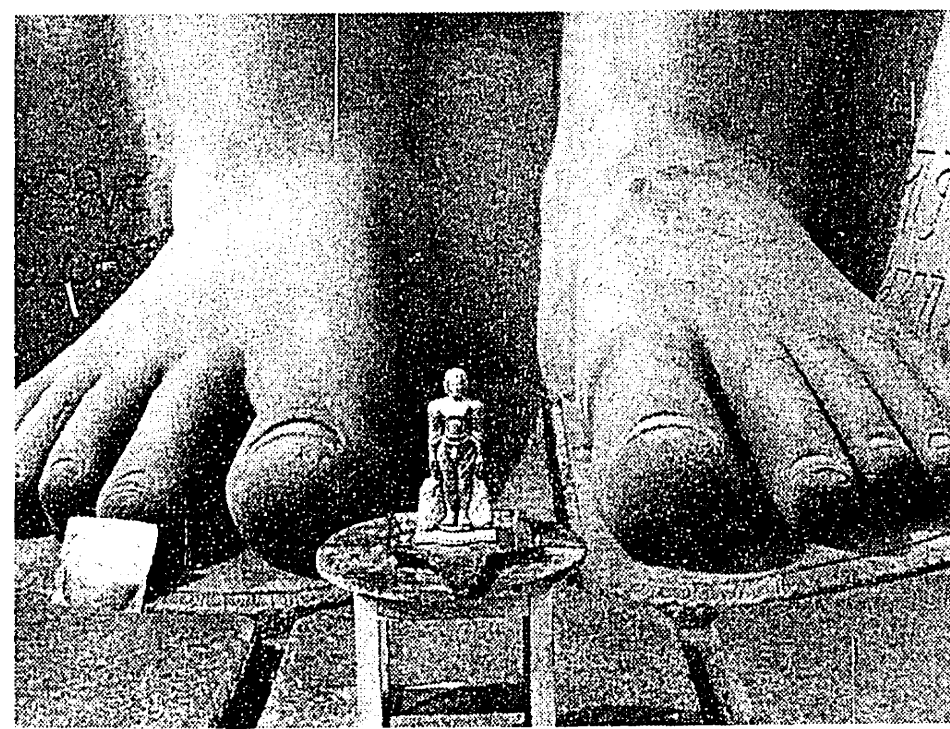
Ulrike Bendl from Austria is on a 'har-trick', or should I say on a "roll", as she has for two years running bagged the first prize in Global Adjustments' photo exhibition 'Beautiful India'. This exhibition is organised by the Chennai relocation service to give the expat community in the city an opportunity to show viewers their views of India.

It was heartening to see that in the entire collection — rather smaller than last year — none of the photographs sought to make a comment. All the subjects, be it faces or situations, were seen with compassion and many were tinged with a wonderful sense of humour



Second prize-winning 'Framed by the light' by William Harrison.

such as the one with three auto rickshaws in a row, one behind the other by a temple tank, getting a cold shower, a 'Spring Clean' on a hot, humid Chennai day. Yet another picture on such lines was of a woman photographed outside her reliable Ambassador on a



First prize-winning 'David and Goliath' by Ulrike Bendl.

dusty road extolling "A car built for the Indian roads".

"Inspired spontaneity" has always left a lasting impression on me and hence my fondness for subjects caught off-guard. I was moved by the shy smiles of tribal faces caught amidst their chores on a coffee plantation and a single subject, the sole black and white, with a fixed viewpoint, of a hardy worker whose face has a stoic impassivity about it. Also bringing to life the colour and vibrancy of India were spontaneous

pictures of the two Muslim men immersed in 'bazaar chatter', roadside markets and the fascination with 'Dhobi ghats (there were two on this subject)!).

Nature photography had some familiar images of the aqua-marine waters of the Coromandel Coast and the sun 'n' sand experts adore. My

favourite was the close up of a pepper plant captioned 'Cool Green but Red Hot' in a luxurious, verdant setting, the filtering rays of the sun and the photographer's skill providing a rich texture through varied shades of green.

The stereotypical pictures of the mendicant, the snake charmer, the elephant and the *gopuram* of the Kapaleeswara Temple were there too, but for first time visitors these are the first peeks into an 'exotic', bewildering canvas, subjects that understandably merit their gaze.

At another level, an exhibition such as this is not all about photos. It is instead, I am quite sure, a thank you to India from many of them, for the splendid memories they go back with.

Meanwhile, the Harrisons are left with a memory that will one day undoubtedly be a delightful story to tell. William's prize is a trip to Trivandrum and wife Laura's (a third prize winner) to Cochin (or vice versa?). Maybe, just maybe, they will meet each other along the way with fresh sightings for next year! I'm looking forward to them.

Priya Krishnan

## IS SHE REMEMBERED?

(Continued from Page 6)

minefields and plantations, in Newcastle, Charlestown, Dundee, Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg and Durban, on this mission before recrossing into the Transvaal. She was arrested at the Transvaal border on charges of vagrancy and sentenced to three months' hard labour. She was already sick at the time of arrest and was offered conditional discharge, which she refused. She entered the prison on December 22, 1913. She was among those released on February 11, 1914, following a provisional agreement between Gandhi and Smuts. But the prison hardships had taken their toll and she succumbed to her illness on February 22, 1914.

Gandhi visited her on her sick bed and was horrified to see the emaciated body of the

rather tallish child of 16. But he was greatly moved by her indomitable spirit. She told him that she would still go to jail, if required, and was not afraid of death. "Who would not love to die for one's motherland?", was her rhetorical query to Gandhi.

Gandhi was soon to leave South Africa for good, but before his departure he made time to attend a memorial in honour of Valliammai (and the other martyr, Nagappen) at the Broomfontein cemetery in Johannesburg. In his speech, he recalled the third martyr, Narayanaswamy, whose mortal remains were buried in Lourenco Marques, in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). Gandhi declared:

*They are not dead. They will live and live for ever in the memory of every Indian, it is a matter of rejoicing that we*

*have had amongst us such noble souls, Narayanaswamy, Nagappen and Valliammai, who had usefully lived out their lives for the sake of truth.*

When Gandhiji started his civil disobedience campaigns in India, he often held up these three martyrs as examples to follow. As Gandhiji observed, they had no idea of the country for which they were prepared to die, "their patriotism being based only on faith". They were, indeed, the first Freedom Fighters of India and the first martyrs for freedom, too. That was how, when the Tamil Nadu Government decided to name buildings and streets after freedom fighters, Thillaiyadi Valliammai's name was chosen for the Cooptex complex in 1982.

T.G. Ramamurthi

# The devadasi and her role

(Continued from last fortnight)

N. Srinivasan

Historically, various other names were used to identify the girls dedicated to the service of a temple. The term *devadasi*, of pan-Indian usage, entered the Tamil vocabulary only later. Properly speaking, *devadasi* is a term that refers only to a girl dedicated to a temple; other girls of the community not so dedicated were merely *dasis*, though the dancers attached to courts came to be known as *rajadasis*.

Amrit Srinivasan

The transition of a girl from a *dasi* family into a *devadasi* was a step-by-step process in two streams, one concerned with life and the other with art. A set of three rites, performed at different times (when the girl was a minor, then pubertal and finally an adult), marked the transition of the girl from a virgin to a 'wedded' person to an 'auspicious' person in terms of social status; while another set of rites, similarly performed at different times, marked her transition from a neophyte *dasi* to *devadasi* to *nityasumangali*; in terms of sectarian status.

A *devadasi* was married to god; therefore she was not allowed to marry a man. This was the cornerstone of the concept

and the rules and regulations that governed her life.

She was not to lead a monastic life. Accordingly, she was allowed to take on a patron. Her family would select the patron as it would a bridegroom in an arranged marriage, making careful prior inquiries, etc., but often the temple itself would mediate the arrangement. Its mediation served simultaneously to institutionalise and de-personalise these dynamic, erotic relationships.

The *devadasi* was not to lead the life of a *grihasti*. She was not allowed to marry her patron nor was she to cook. She was expected to dedicate herself to temple service, which included the performance of dance as part of temple rituals or as part of the temple's other activities; and to dance as an art-form.

The *devadasi* took a patron to help her in fulfilling her role as a servant of god and as a dancer. The *devadasi* was never a slave to him, nor did she live with him in his home.

The *devadasi's* patron had to be a married man and able to afford to maintain her and her progeny. He entered into the liaison often as a matter of prestige, for intimacy with a *devadasi* demonstrated public success, which visibly marked

the man apart from his peers.

It was important for the *devadasi* to have a girl child, so that the links with the temple could be maintained.

Very rarely did a *devadasi* have more patrons than one. If the patron died, some *devadasis* even considered themselves 'widowed' (even though they remained *nityasumangalis* as far as the temple was concerned).

The wife of the patron very often accepted the *devadasi*.

That a girl wedded to God could have progeny seemed to have shocked the Christian sensibilities of some Western visitors to India and led to the conclusion that the *devadasi* were 'prostitutes'.

N. Pattabhi Raman

The *devadasi* system has been described as one in which the *devadasi* was exploited, in particular, sexually. But the arrangement under which she took a patron could not be described as exploitation; nor is there any evidence to suggest that temple priests exploited them, for the priests, who were also temple employees, did not have the power to withhold any of the rights and privileges of the *devadasi*.

The main thing in matters such as this is not to apply the

(Continued on Page 10)

## CONSULT THE CITIZENS

(Continued from Page 5)

zons. This obligation can by no stretch of imagination be extended to the use of a public park for private profit on the score that amusement would be provided to a few citizens.

I urge you to have a good look at all the parks and playgrounds in the city to see the state of affairs and the urgent need to improve them and to maintain them in proper condition. All this can be done with very modest resources. This is the major obligation of the municipal body and I assure you that there is a lot of work to do which has been neglected so far.

In your letter you have mentioned the privatization policy of the Government and the use of modern technology. It is well

known that there are a number of services and other development projects for the improvement of the city which can be either privatized or taken up through joint ventures with business houses. It is rather far-fetched to interpret Government's privatization policy as handing over notified public parks to the private sector for setting up commercially oriented amusement parks.

You also mention that you are taking the help of the Tamil Nadu Urban Development Fund as per World Bank norms. I am sure that the World Bank would be quite surprised to know that the public parks in Chennai are to be sacrificed for setting up commercial amusement parks by private developers "as per their

norms". I may add that the Corporation does not seem to have taken into account the major impact such a project will have on a residential area in terms of water supply, sanitation, traffic, pollution, public health and security.

Coming to the Annanagar Tower Park, I am afraid that the continued neglect of the northern portion of this park by the Chennai Corporation, which many would consider wilful, is now being made an excuse for describing it as unused and therefore available for some other purpose. This is the only major recreational area we have for a population which is getting close to 500,000 people. The park is regularly used by a large number of people of all walks of life and income strata. The park is badly neglected and needs to be fully developed, utilizing all the available space with provision of modern facilities. The sop you are providing to the residents of Annanagar is that the operator of the amusement park will maintain the balance of the park area for the public.

### ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Longest zero in Test cricket;
2. Press Trust of India;
3. Irfan Hussain;
4. Arjun Atwal;
5. Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary;
6. Year of Sanskrit;
7. Sonny Ramadhin;
8. Lord Yehudi Menuhin;
9. Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary;
10. Gaurav Natekar;
11. Manju Kapur for *Difficult Daugh-*
12. Stanley Kubrick;
13. *Left World*;
14. Khajuraho;
15. Andrew Morton.
16. Srinivasa Ramanujam;
17. R. Rajasekaran;
18. Kiran Majumdar Shaw;
19. D.K. Pattammal;
20. Justice C. Shivappa.

## 'Trad' forms, 'mod' theatre!

When Ponnaiyan Selvan is staged to mark Kalki's centenary

A serialisation that continues to enthrall successive generations of readers, *Ponnaiyan Selvan* is now to be staged for the first time to mark Kalki's centenary. Kalki's *magnum opus* will be staged, in *avant garde* style, on Tamil New Year's Day, in Thanjavur.

Can one reconcile oneself to watching, say, the endearing Alwarkadiyan, not as the dapper, tufted character that Kalki and his devout artist brought forth before the eyes, as it were, of readers, but as a modern version? Are the audiences of Tamil Nadu ready to give a go-by to traditional historical theatre as presented by the versatile Manohar, whose *Indrajit* and *Sukrachariar* held the theatre-goers so spellbound with their admirable mix of historicity, stage props, scintillating dialogue and fabulous costume that you felt as if you were in a time machine?

Yes, says Praveen, who, along with Kaushik and Kumaravel, started the Magic Lantern theatre group in 1993, "in order to give something back to traditional performing arts". The group has already successfully staged the ever-endearing Pinocchio and other fables in schools. "Our aim is to revive the traditional form of storytelling, where the audience comes to watch with nothing more than a willing suspension of disbelief", explains Kaushik. Magic Lantern is also driven by a commitment to social consciousness. For instance, *Pinocchio* highlighted the travails of child labour. *Ponnaiyan Selvan* too will echo a burning contemporary problem — *samaya chandai*.

The troupe is remaining faithful to the basic plot; going so far as to retain some of the original dialogue as scripted by Kalki. However, instead of the vast battle scenes, there will be individual fights, while a couple of new characters, Nallan and Sathan, will take on the role of the *kattikaran* — passive onlookers, as it were, who not only take the audience through the action, the plot and the denouement, but also reflect contemporary concerns. There will be no roll down curtains — action will shift from one square to another, with the thread of continuity constantly provided by the *kattikaran*.

"We are trying to give epic quality — there will be enormous sets, replete with special effects," promises Praveen, who has undergone professional training at the Strasbourg School of Theatre in France.

In this the centenary year of Kalki, isn't it rather adventurous of the troupe to embark on such an ambitious venture? "We are confident; we are also prepared for criticism — valid ones that is," says Praveen. Preparations are in full swing, as the artists go through the gruelling paces of individual combat, as laid down in traditional martial arts such as *silambu*, *kuthu varisai*, and *thanda*, to name a few. Bodies fall, groans erupt as they punish their physique to go that extra mile — the jump, the twist, the turn... everything has to be perfect for a synchronised whole.

Their enthusiasm has taken them thus far. Whether Magic Lantern will continue to burn will be known on April 14th, at the Serfoji Palace grounds in Thanjavur. Magic Lantern plans to stage three shows in each of five other towns. Chennai will be the seventh venue.

— Bhamu Devi

I am sorry that I have to describe this as nothing but trying to take the citizens of Chennai down the garden path. You must be fully aware that small and large parks in Hyderabad, Pune, Bombay, Ahmedabad and other cities are being maintained extremely well, free of cost to the Municipal body, by business houses in exchange for some advertising rights. Even in Madras there a few examples. In Ahmedabad a plan for the beautification and proper development of a whole commercial street was prepared by architects and approved by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and the entire development was entrusted to a business house in exchange for advertising rights for a few years. It has become a major attraction to Ahmedabad. There are proven mechanisms and arrangements through which local bodies can enter into partnerships with business houses in a transparent manner for the public good.

With regard to My Ladies' Garden, as you know this a historical heritage park. Time and again, over the past hundred years, the Madras flower show was held in this park, inaugurated by the Governor of Tamil Nadu in the august presence of the Mayor and other dignitaries. Here again, the total neglect of the Corporation is now being made a pretext for handing over this park to private developers.

The manner in which the projects are being processed is questionable. I am afraid that the fair name of the Council and the Worshipful Mayor are at risk. If in spite of all this, you are proceeding with these proposals, it is incumbent on you, since these are notified public parks, to institute the widest consultative process among the citizens through notifications in the newspapers and holding of public hearings before you proceed.

Yours sincerely  
L.M. Menezes

# A long way from a ball to the tee

(Continued from last fortnight)

The original idea was to limit the membership of the Addicts Golfing Society of Southern India to about one hundred, so that at least a quarter of them could, hopefully, still meet in the U.K. for golf and an annual get-together, similar to the Madras Tea Party, held there in June every year. You get the impression that the Addicts Society was formed to keep up the Madras/South Indian associations between those Englishmen who were shortly to retire from India.

It is difficult to imagine that the Founders had hopes of the Society's continuance in India with very little domestic (Indian) following for Golf at the time. It is, therefore, all the more surprising that not only has the Society continued here, but that it has flourished to achieve its present popularity and size.

From its early days, the Society was keen to promote the game of Golf, once it had estab-

lished itself in the social and sporting calendar of South India. Such promotion commenced with sponsoring Caddies to various open Golf Championships in the North, then moved on to coaching camps for youngsters and helping local Golf Clubs with donations towards course maintenance.

It may also be said that through the Fifties to the Seventies, the game of golf in South India could well have suffered for want of support had the Addicts not helped in some measure to keep up interest in the game by its meetings at various South Indian clubs. However, the objective of the Society was basically to gather in the name of Golf and have fun. The conviviality of the 19th hole takes precedence over the capacities exhibited by the swinging of the arm over the preceding eighteen. In other words, more power to the elbow!

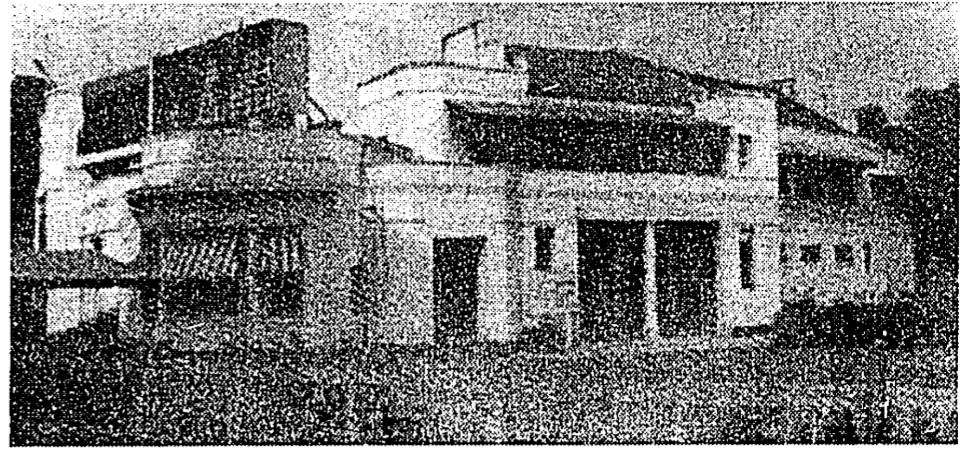
Any reasonable person,

whether familiar or not with the Royal and Ancient Game must admit that it must have taken a great deal of optimism, organisation and good fortune to found, nurture, and support an Addicts Society in a game such as golf, played by a minority, then comprising retreating expatriates in a relatively conservative city like Madras, shortly after Independence. There was no such Society to the best of our knowledge and belief anywhere in the golfing world at the time, and certainly none in India, till the Addicts Society of Western India came in about the late Eighties (originally sponsored by this Society).

\* \* \*

The present Council has recognised the service rendered by many senior Addicts by designating them Patrons, so that later generations may know of their contributions. K.S. Vaidyanathan, A.K. Sivaramakrishnan, S. Venkataraman, George Zachariah, all happily still with us, expended enormous efforts to keep the Society going at a time of change, and when the game of golf did not have the great following it now has. Special mention should be made of the contributions of time and spirit that George Zachariah, made over these many years to the Society at a time of transition to 'indigenous' rule. He was the Keeper of the Traditions, and constantly realigned the Council in its deliberations to be mindful of those traditions.

The original (and official) meetings of the Society were restricted to Bangalore and Madras. Wellington came in



The Madras Gymkhana Club Golf Annexe — where it all began.

next — all the rest, Kodai, Cochin, Mysore were much later additions — first as Unofficial Meets which were later regularised. Coimbatore and Hyderabad were the last to join, in the last decade.

Added to the list of original official meetings were the U.K. gatherings at various English golf courses. The U.K. meetings seem to have dropped off in the 1980's. The Founder passed away in 1985 and with him, it would seem, died the enthusiasm for organising an U.K. Addicts Meet of ageing 'Madrasis' living there.

The Society has no Club House of its own, and the Madras Gymkhana Club happens to be its nominated headquarters for purposes of determining the venue of the Society's Annual Meeting in January, to coincide with the Pongal Holidays, as nearly as possible.

Rumour has it that the founding members wrote up the Bye-laws while sitting with thirst-quenching libations in the Guindy Golf annexe of the Madras Gymkhana Club and they tried to keep these Rules as simple as they could.

\* \* \*

Toasts were drunk originally in Madeira wine (till about 1964) substituted by a local brew thereafter. Toasts to the President of the Indian Republic and H.M. the Queen, and to the Society, were proposed.

The Toasts represent a tradition and a reminder of the Society's Indo-British origins, and do not reflect any divided loyalties.

The Toasts are normally

given after each course is served at the Dinner. The Addicts song is sung after the Toast to the Society, in an indeterminate tune depending upon the intake of the participants.

The Captain of the Society traditionally takes up office on the Sunday at the Pongal meeting at Madras/Chennai, and launches his captaincy by striking a golf ball perched on an up ended match-box across the Adyar River. This used to be done from the Madras Club lawns in days gone by, but now-a-days the missile is struck from the Cosmopolitan Golf Club banks of the same river. Amazingly, to date, an air shot by any Captain has not been witnessed.

\* \* \*

What started off as a Society with about 100 members, fifty years ago, of whom 95% were expatriates on the verge of departure from India to the U.K. now has just under 700 members, (the present ceiling) of whom 95% are Indians.

As the Golden Jubilee is celebrated, a dress code has been circulated and made applicable to all Addicts meets — we might say that the Society has come a long way from the days when Golfers were known to come direct to the tee on Sunday morning from the Saturday night dance with just enough time to change from a dress shirt to a tee shirt.

— K.R.N. Menon  
(Concluded)

(Excerpts courtesy: The Addicts' Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1999.)

## THE DEVADASI AND HER ROLE

(Continued from Page 9)

morality and values of one age to another, or the behavioural paradigm of one culture or community to another, or a universal principle to specific situations, for such an approach handicaps understanding. In this case, the perception of the *devadasi* as a common prostitute — of all *devadasis* as prostitutes — almost led to the extinction of a great art.

















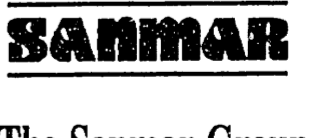






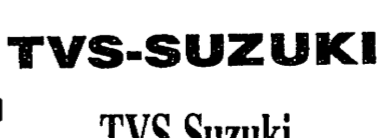


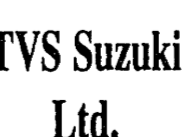
There were *devadasis* who had liaisons with priests or others outside the pale of the patronage, but apparently such liaisons were the exceptions.

There were *dasis* who, because of need or greed, took to prostitution. But even members of the Isai Velala community generally looked down on their sisters who had taken to prostitution as a profession.

E. Krishna Iyer was initially reluctant to be a protagonist of the *devadasi* dance and later was ambivalent in his attitude towards the *devadasi* system. That he worked closely with the Isai Velalar to rescue the dance from oblivion shows that he placed art above personal reservations.

(to be continued next fortnight)

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