

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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"No takers for anything Blue or India, even for free! Can we try changing it to Yellow and...?"

Silent night

Talk about a party fizzling out. On a recent Friday night, an entire nation, or at least a substantial part of it, reached as one for the switch-off button, and, flicking petulant blankets over themselves, turned their backs to their TVs and their faces to the wall, shutting out the world with grim determination.

They had planned to stay up nights, these aficionados, rearranging their travel and work schedules, all the while wishing they possessed an Urmila-like gift to sleep at will, storing up rest for the weeks ahead.

Very sad.

Anxious parents with kids in exam mode can now relax.

No more: "If you fail, will Dhoni give you a job, or take care of you for the rest of your life?" and other such singularly unreasonable questions with no real answers.

Of course, the more optimistic are doing their to-weakest-hope-will-cling act, borrowing quotes from a non-cricket nation, and going: "It ain't over till it's over."

You wish them well.

But that rending sound you hear?

That's the sound of all those with commercial stakes in the game beginning to tear their hair in despair, as fan-interest falters.

All that creative trouble for disillusioned multitudes too disheartened to be enticed.

Closer home, you are now worried about those kilos of coffee powder you bought, anticipating endless cuppas through sleepless nights.

Oh, what a loud thud it is when heroes fall.

Ranjitha Ashok

Threatened beachfront? Or eco-friendly improvements?

(By Sriram V.)

In the past months, Chennai has seen a slew of announcements being made on various projects to "improve", "beautify" and "provide amenities" on the beachfront. These announcements have been made by various agencies. Consider the following:

- Reconstruction of tenements along the Nochi-kuppam-Srinivasapuram stretch of fishing hamlets. AGENCY: Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board.
- Large hotels and highrises coming up along the MRC Nagar stretch. AGENCY: Private operators.
- Beautification of the Marina and Elliot's Beach at a cost of Rs. 25 crore. AGENCY: The Chennai Corporation.
- A separate beautification plan drawn up at least three years ago for the Marina Beach. AGENCY: The Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority.
- Announcement of a new bridge, running parallel to the Tiru Vi Ka Bridge in Adyar to connect Foreshore Estate to the East Coast Road. This was announced

in 2005 and there are indications that work will soon begin. AGENCY: PWD.

- There is talk of a road that will connect Elliot's Beach to the ECR. AGENCY: Probably the Highways Department.
- Ban on construction along the ECR from Tiruvanmiyur to Uthandi lifted. AGENCY: Department of Housing and Urban Development.

It is therefore clear that all of a sudden there is a surge of interest on the beachfront and, taken in conjunction with skyrocketing real estate prices, there appears to be more to all this than meets the eye.

This is not the first time that the Government has viewed the



The fisherfolks' tenements due for replacement.



beachfront as prime real estate. In 2003, the then State Government announced that it was planning a large-scale construction of highrises meant as residential buildings for employees of multinationals all along the stretch being occupied by the fishing hamlets. The hamlets

were themselves to be relocated far from where they needed to be - namely the sea. This would have been in violation of CRZ regulations, which clearly forbade any construction within 500 metres of the high tide line. The tsunami that followed put
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TN Budget promises much for the city, but...

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Tamil Nadu Budget proposals for 2007-08 include a slew of welfare measures for Chennai and some of them are:

- **Hostel facilities for women in the IT/ITES sector:** The Information Technology sector is contributing enormously to the State's economy and women form a large section of the workforce in this industry. The State Government proposes to build a mega hostel with the latest facilities under the Working Women Hostel Scheme of the Government of India.
- **Improvements at Vandalur Zoo:** It has been proposed that a butterfly park, on the lines of the extremely successful ones in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, be set up. A night safari facility is also being planned.
- **Modernising library facili-**

ties: With Rs. 80 crore from the Local Library Authority and Rs. 20 crore from the State Government, a modern State library of international standards is planned to be built. In addition, the Chief Minister's promise of a Book Park in the city, where the annual Book Fair can be held, is also likely to be fulfilled this year.

- **Beautification schemes:** Beautification of the Marina, the Elliot's Beach and the Secretariat seafront has been planned at a cost of Rs. 25 crore. The construction of an aquarium on the beach has also been promised. The Jawaharlal Nehru stadium will see structural improve-

(Continued on page 4)

'Hoarding free' Chennai still only a promise

(By A Staff Reporter)

The Chief Minister may have announced a couple of months ago that Chennai will be made a 'hoarding-free' city and a High Level Monitoring Committee, with the Collector of Madras and Commissioner of Police as members, may have been appointed, but the number of hoardings in the city has only increased many times, not decreased.

Travellers on the roads of Chennai could see new hoardings coming up almost daily, occupying the beleaguered pavement space or on top of and in front of buildings.

After the Chief Minister's announcement, Chennai has, in fact, become a 'free hoarding' city and not a 'hoarding-free' city, some feel.

Can't we just protect nature's bounty?

Why is it that we cannot leave the work of nature all to itself and enjoy the beauty of it? Many years ago, *The Man from Madras Musings* had occasion to visit Assam and near the capital city of Guwahati was a beautiful spot called Vasishta, where a mythical sage is said to have built his hermitage. The river flowed by and there were a few rocks on which a picnic could be held. Then along came a businessman who believed that he was blessed with children thanks to the sage and he had to do something in return. He put up a marble edifice complete with a statue of the sage and also had music blaring around the place all the time. Shops moved in and, pretty soon, animals and birds moved out and that was that.

Pretty much the same is happening to the Marina. We first had a beach, then we had statues and after that came landscaped lawns and lights. Then we had stone birds and animals for no reason whatsoever. Now there is talk of a further Rs. 25 crore to be spent on further beautifying the area. Why can't that money be spent on improving civic amenities in places like Washermanpet?

Senate House blues

The Man from Madras Musings was rudely awoken from his siesta by an irate woman who claimed to have just returned from a visit to *Senate House*. She claimed that despite all the talk about renovation, the building was now poorly maintained and that there were cobwebs and dust all over. She almost gave the impression of being the owner of the place and of MMM its errant caretaker.

While MMM appreciated her passion for the historic building and her sense of commitment, there was very little he could do but tell her to in-

form the University authorities about it. Presumably she did and, hopefully, they heard.

In the meantime, things appear to have come almost to a halt as far as the rest of the restoration is concerned. MMM hears rumours of unpaid bills, the slowing down of work on the remaining two turrets, and the firing by the University of the contract supervising engineer. What happened to the place would be once again opened to the public by April 14th, which is just a couple of weeks away?

Heritage buildings

The Man from Madras Musings has nothing but depressing news to report on this front. *Gandhi Illam* in Government Estate remains half demolished. A huge beam lies at a 45 degree angle across the exposed innards of the first

floor and has remained that way for over three months. All work has come to a halt. It would appear that the principal aim was to ensure that the building should be uninhabitable and then leave it to the elements to do the rest.

The elements are doing their best at Bharat Insurance Building also which, now roofless and awaiting the decision of the courts, is rapidly going to seed. Unless something quick is done, we may not have a building to protect.

There are strong rumours that the Corporation has given permission for the demolition of Gokhale Hall. If true, then it is yet another nail in the coffin (how apt) of Chennai's heritage.

Chaotic Chromepet

The Man from Madras Musings had occasion to visit Chromepet recently. Access to the area is now a lot easier, thanks to the flyover that has come up, but things are only getting worse at the other end of the bridge. Encroachments have narrowed the width of the road to about twenty feet or so and it is through this road that every vehicle worth its name has to jostle through. There are open drains on both sides, often clogged and with sewage overflowing; cyclists and pedestrians who are often pushed to the very edge have to be careful that they are not pushed into the drains. In many places, the drains are covered with concrete slabs which are in various stages of displacement, adding to the hazards.

The roads and streets have not seen any repair works since

dug just outside his house by one of the many agencies that mismanage our city. This chasm has remained as it is for over many months now. This necessitated MMM's acquaintance to be physically lifted over it in order that he could be put in a vehicle to go to hospital. Each time, it was a traumatic experience for the person and a taxing one for all those helping him. So much for our concern for the travails of the common man.

It has often been said of George Town that the street was the space that was left over after the buildings usurped the rest. That is perhaps acceptable in an area that is old. But what about Chromepet which, though old enough, has really exploded only in the last few years? Could not the authorities have planned things a little better? Do they need to wait for an explosion to happen?

where a part of the road below has been declared no entry (and no exit also), making it a kind of dead end. Why don't we look at underpasses in such heavy density areas rather than having flyovers?

Mobile medians

Surely there must be a better method of dividing two sides of a road than the huge concrete boulders that our beloved Corporation – or is it the Traffic Police? – puts up. *The Man from Madras Musings* has come to the conclusion that these are the greatest hazards awaiting anybody venturing out at night. The authorities place these blocks as dividers and expect them to stay that way. Along come some enterprising cyclists and two-wheeler users who, in their haste to cross over, think nothing of moving a couple of these blocks out of alignment with the rest. Then at night, what with these dividers not having any luminescent paint, it is very difficult to make out a boulder lying more or less in the middle of a road. The damage it can inflict on a vehicle can be enormous. As for the risk it poses to the lives of two-wheeler and autorickshaw users, that's incalculable.

The mindlessness of the authorities when it comes to road dividers defies all description. A few months ago, permanent (not the mobile variety) dividers were put up on Chamier's Road. This brought about a modicum of traffic discipline to the place. Now, suddenly and without any purpose, a large section of the divider has been removed. Rumours have it that pressure has been brought to bear to have it removed by several influential persons living in the area. *The Man from Madras Musings* can only wonder at the financial implications of such chopping and changing.

– MMM

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Flyover work

Road testing for a flyover in the Perambur area put traffic out of gear over there for more than a week. For all that *The Man from Madras Musings* knows, some vehicles may still be hanging out there. The situation in South Chennai, especially in the Chamier's Road area, was marginally better. But MMM wonders what would happen to the road at ground level once the flyover is put up. The width of the road is nothing to write home about and MMM guesses that with the flyover coming up, the rest of the road will become pretty much unusable. This is already the case with the flyover on C.P. Ramaswami Iyer Road,

they were first laid and in many places the bumps and depressions can only qualify as hills and dales. In many of the streets, MMM was intrigued to find poles erected by the Electricity Department right in the middle of the road. Apparently that was the original width of the street and when the street was widened nobody thought of telling the EB and so the poles remain. If there are no EB poles in places, there are plenty of flagstuffs put up by various political parties in the most inconvenient places possible.

The acquaintance of MMM's was essentially wheelchair-bound and needed to go to the hospital fairly frequently during illness. To help matters along, a huge cavern had been

be demanded, no other development scheme has been presented to the public. True, the TNSCB has shown drawings and invited comments from the fisherfolk as far as the reconstruction of the tenements is concerned, but how many of them will visit the TNSCB and give their comments? A public debate has to be initiated with all the people affected by any new plan – and this is not being done. Activists question the basis on which designs for "improvement" of the Elliot's Beach have been taken from one agency and without any qualifications

being specified for the same.

- **Environmental impact.** This aspect has simply not been thought of in any new scheme. The buildings of hotels on the seafront apart, the building of new roads and bridges in this area will also take its toll and it is not clear if any assessment has been done.
- **Exploitation of land.** By laying these lungs open to unwanted "improvements" and by now opening up the ECR for construction, it is clear that it is the land that everyone is after. True, the regulations on ECR now permit only construction of residen-

tial apartments and these also have to be of one or two storeys. But given that there are no zoning laws in our city, it will not take long for some of these residential buildings to become offices and, soon, the area will become just like any other. From there to the permission for building highrises will be but one more step.

All this had its beginnings on the day when environment activists lost their battle to save the Adyar Estuary and Adyar Creek and the builders of highrises on the banks here were given carte blanche.

THREATENED BEACHFRONT?

(Continued from Page 1)

paid to any plans for building homes along the seafront, but the CRZ rule has been continuously violated with impunity.

The recent announcements all indicate that there is going to be an increased load in terms of buildings and traffic along what is perceived to be a fragile ecosystem and, more importantly, a fragile area in terms of stability and one which is subject to frequent flooding during rains and possible recurrence of tsunamis as well.

There are several more issues in these moves that are causes for concern for any interested resident of Chennai.

- **The multiplicity of agencies.** There appears to be no clear cut plan as to what needs to be done. A variety of Government bodies are involved with no umbrella organisation to regulate and also be accountable. Activists see this as a clever strategy to divide and, therefore, phase out the accountability of any one agency.
- **Lack of transparency.** There is an air of secrecy in the manner in which these developments are taking place. Barring the Elliot's Beach beautification project, and in which instance too information and plans had to

OUR
READERS
WRITE



Kraits & superstition

I read with interest Malcolm Murphy's letter (MM, March 16th) on my note on the legend concerning the 'eight steps cobra' (MM, November 1, 2006). He says that I make "no mention of the dreaded *kattuviriyana* or [sic] banded krait". I did mention *kattuviriyana* – by its English and Latin names (Common krait, *Bungarus Caeruleus*).

I made no mention of the banded krait because there is no such belief about it as referred to in my note, namely, that death occurs before the victim walks eight steps.

Kattuviriyana (a name in Tamil and Malayalam) and banded krait are two different species altogether though of the same genus. The former is the common krait (*Bungarus Caeruleus*), highly venomous, found in most of mainland India. Considering the location cited by him (Perambur, near Chennai), this must have been the villain of the piece. The banded krait (*Bungarus Fasciatus*) is not found in Tamil Nadu. Incidentally, though venomous, its venom is much weaker than that of the common krait and, unlike the common krait, it rarely bites.

I am not aware of any scientific basis for reader Murphy's observations (he seems to affirm them as facts) that the number of hours after the krait's bite when the victim dies corresponds to the number of rings on its body, that its venom becomes more virulent as it grows older, and that, as it ages, it becomes shorter and shorter resulting in the rings becoming fewer and fewer and the death of its victim that much quicker. I had not heard of these even as superstitions but, then, I must confess I am yet to hear a lot about snakes.

B. Vijayaraghavan
Chairman

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Chennai 600 022

Overbridges in Chennai

I am happy that at least one reader (MM, February 16th) has gone through my letter

(MM, December 1st) and examined it critically. He has noted four points which I shall answer one by one.

1. *Sharing of costs.* If once a project has been passed, there can be no quibbling over sharing of costs. The Railway has a well-marked portion as its share – that part which is well within the bounds of Railway land. As there is no other landowner to confront, the Railway finishes its portion first and in many places these usually stand as isolated *mandap* over railtrack until the road department gets untangled from various land-grabbers to build approach roads.

2. *Getting plans sanctioned.* This is no problem, as both ministries are headed by dynamic Tamil Nadu Ministers. Both are go-getters capable of bulldozing away even the stiffest of impediments.

3. *The acquisition of land.* No problem too. We have recently seen that even built-up land belonging to political heavyweights have been acquired for road expansion scheme.

4. *Building contractors.* They know that any shoddy construction or shady transaction will be brought to light, as the opposition parties are always vigilantly waiting to expose the shortcomings of the ruling junta to embarrass it.

I may also say that there is no history of any rail bridge coming down in Chennai due to defective construction.

My letter is about adding another tier to the existing bridge to ease road traffic. It does not present these problems.

The idea of baling out stagnant water is far-fetched. The whole place gets flooded and the water has nowhere to go. There is no point in waiting for months expecting the summer sun to come up and dry out the swamp. It is a seasonal problem, requiring immediate attention. If a demon threatens, as the correspondent states, he should be driven out by hook or crook, instead of allowing oneself to be intimidated by him.

M. Sethuraman

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Legislation needed

This is with reference to 'The Editor's viewpoint: Some

Fight mosquitoes thus...

Water and mosquitoes cause most of the diseases in the world, especially in the tropical countries. Several ways and means are being tried to control the mosquito menace, especially nowadays when Dengue, Chikungunya, Malaria, Elephantiasis and other diseases are taking an increasing toll. Water-borne diseases are likely to increase further during monsoons. Surveys conducted annually reveal that an alarming number of water samples are unfit for drinking, particularly during monsoons.

Introduction of mosquito larvicidal oil, a brainchild of Dhanaraj, Chief Vector Control Officer of the Corporation of Chennai, is in the right direction. But the larvicidal oil is available only in restricted quantity and is costly. Moreover, the method is labour-intensive. And how much oil can be dripped into the flowing water?

The cheapest and the easiest way of keeping mosquitoes away is to burn green or dried leaves that have insecticidal active ingredients, especially to drive away or kill mosquitoes while, at the same time, proving good for human inhalation. The shrubs and leaves are:

Species Name	Tamil Name
1. <i>Adhatoda vasica nees</i>	(<i>Adhatoda</i>)
2. <i>Trigonelle foenum-graelum</i>	(<i>Vendhiam</i>)
3. <i>Aziodivachta Indica adr juss</i>	(<i>Neem, Vepam</i>)
4. <i>Moringa olaifera adans</i>	(<i>Murungai</i>)
5. <i>Ocimum basilum linn</i>	(<i>Tulasi</i>)
6. <i>Carica papaya</i>	(<i>Pappali</i>)

7. <i>Catharanthus roseus</i>	(<i>Nithya Kalyani</i>)
8. <i>Peganum har malall</i>	(<i>Simai yaravandi</i>)
9. <i>Eucalyptus</i>	(<i>Neelagiri thalai</i>)
10. <i>Vitex negundo L</i>	(<i>Vellai noch</i>)
11. <i>Acacia holosericia</i>	(<i>Olosia</i>)
12. <i>Datura</i>	(<i>Voomatham</i>)

A handful of a mixture of at least four of these leaves should be burnt in a tray every night before bedtime in any closed room and, if necessary, once again around midnight.

All, excepting one or two, are shrubs and grow wild and uncared for. If they are planted intensively all along the bunds and banks of inland waterways and open gutters they will prevent mosquitoes multiplying.

Acacia holosericea, which is leguminous and drought-resistant and has a high calorific value, grows in different types of soil and climatic conditions. It is a medium-size tree, ornamental, fast-growing and belongs to Australia. The tree has a natural, self-regenerating property, attracts honey bees by its small yellow flowers and repels mosquitoes. Auroville has thousands of these trees in the township, multiplied by the seeds and saplings brought from Australia. This tree and the neem tree must be planted in rows in the middle of our inland waterways and on either side of their banks and bunds. They can be uprooted easily when not wanted.

Many of the shrubs mentioned have medicinal properties also and some of them are exported from India.

Felix Ryan

plainspeaking' (MM, March 16th).

What was started as a purely local event by *Mylapore Times* has blossomed into a Chennai Sangamam. There are also now the Triplicane Festival, the ECR Festival and the Tiruvanmiyur Festival. It may be noted that except for the ECR Festival, the other places which celebrate the festivals are heritage towns with ancient temples.

Unfortunately, the identity of these places is getting lost because of unplanned construction activities in which several heritage sites are giving way for 'modern' monstrosities spoiling the heritage value of these places. Before it becomes too late, it is better to ensure the oldworld charm is preserved. More than celebrating these annual 'festivals', it should be our endeavour to prevent such unbridled activities by bringing in suitable legislation so that the heritage value of these ancient towns (or rather 'villages') is not totally lost.

* * *

Festival songs

Songs of the crossroads, (MM, February 1st) reminds me of a similar practice in the Southern Districts (especially in Thanjavur) in the 1940s. Gurusamy Doss used to compose lyrics in popular tunes about the day-to-day occurrences of the times, including World War II that was raging

then, and famous murder cases like Lakshmi Kanthan Murder Case.

During festival seasons, he used to climb on a pedestal, with a drum in his hand, and an attendant would hold a petromax light on his head. Doss would sing his songs and sell his works for quarter anna or half anna. They were very well received and were very popular.

He also used to sell toothpowder, claiming that he prepared it with the formula of Theraiyar (a famous physician of yore) as found in the palm leaves kept in the Saraswathi Mahal library of King Serfoji!

T.M. Sundararaman

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Strange 'misnomers'

Two very strange 'misnomers' still prevail amongst us even in the 21st Century.

Firstly, in Railway parlance, a train which stops at all stations from starting point to destination is called a 'Passenger train', whereas a train which briefly stops at some important stations only, for the sake of speed, is called 'Express train'.

To denote a train which stops at all stations alone as passenger train is technically wrong, because an express train as stated is also a train carrying passengers. Hence, the definition should be 'ordinary (or slow) Passenger Train' and the

other 'Express Passenger Train'!

Secondly, only anything that is part of ten is denoted decimally, whereas in the case of cricket, the quantum of overs is denoted in decimals as 25.4 overs or 25.3 overs. Yet a bowling over is of 6 balls only and not of 10 balls.

Will any reader offer his comments?

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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, 260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018.

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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.

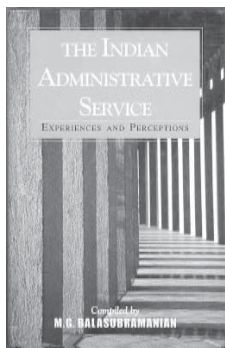
THE EDITOR

Looking back on their IAS days

But for Sardar Patel, to whom we owe much, there would have been no Indian Administrative Service. Prior to Indian independence, it was the Indian Civil Service (ICS) that was the steel frame that held the Raj together. Recruitment to that service was stopped owing to War pressures and the last examination was held in January 1943. However, what with the War going on and also due to natural circumstances such as retirements and deaths, the numbers in the service had to be increased and, in 1944, the Government made an announcement that members of the armed forces who were otherwise eligible to join the ICS but could not do so owing to the stopping of the examinations would be given one more opportunity at the conclusion of the War to fill the "War Reserve Vacancies".

The Federal Public Service Commission invited applications for recruitment in early 1945 and in November that year recommended 163 names for appointment to the ICS. However, in February 1946, with the formation of the Interim Government and Independence being in sight it was decided in England that the ICS would be wound up when India become free. Recruitments were therefore put on hold. Sardar Patel, then the Home Member of the Interim Government, foresaw the chaos that would happen with the winding down of the bureaucracy and called for a conference of Provincial Premiers in October 1946 to assess the requirements and to plan two All-India Services, namely the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS). With the offer of appointment to the selected candidates of the War Reserve Vacancies in February 1947, the IAS came into existence. Women entered the service fairly early with the first successful candidate being Anna George in 1951. Gradually, their numbers increased and now they comprise over 20% of the total candidates recruited.

Today, the IAS and other Public Service Commission recruits are trained at the National Administrative Academy in Mussoorie. But the first batches had their training in Delhi in wartime hutments at what was called the IAS Training School. The only classroom had huge pillars, low sofas and the Mess provided oily lunches, all of which did not prove very conducive for training. Horse riding lessons were compulsory, but some of the early batches



missed even this, what with the Delhi Police, no doubt owing to some bureaucratic process (how apt!), refusing to loan horses. The training in the main in those days was in law and the Indian Constitution. The real on-hands training began with the recruits being appointed to various districts and there they were guided by their respective superiors, most often the Collector. The Services were still in the formative years and many of the training procedures crystallised only with the recruits themselves contributing to the process.

With English being adopted as the common language for administration, the Services provided opportunities for candidates from non-Hindi speaking states to qualify. This gave the Service a truly all-India stature, though the attempts at speaking Hindi by those from the South did give rise to amusing moments such as when an officer asked for "chaar ladki" (four women) instead of "chaar lakdi" (four sticks) to tie his mosquito net. In the first years, the number of successful candidates from the South was high and over the years, with the examination now being held in Hindi as well, the domination of the South has declined.

What made people join the IAS? In the early years, it was the power and prestige that went with the Service as also the social recognition it had. The nation was still young and idealistic and there was, therefore, the attraction of doing real service. However, by the 1960s, the lustre had begun to dim, what with increasing political interference. This went from bad to worse in the 1970s, when the (continuing) trend of frequent shuffles and transfers in the bureaucracy to suit political ends began. The Services are today viewed as partners with the politicians in manipulating all that goes on in the country in the name of governance. There are, however, still very many good administrators, but caught up as they are in the quagmire of red tapism, real merit rarely stands out.

Has the time come for a

relook at the way the IAS is structured? Has it become toothless? Do the bureaucrats need stints in industry for them to appreciate how exactly a well-administered corporation works? Is it not necessary when some Chief Ministers declare themselves to be CEOs of States? Will the IAS officer ever stop pushing files and look at ground realities?

These are some of the many questions that have been raised by a few retired officers of the Indian Administrative Service who have, since their superannuation, settled in Chennai. Banding together under the name of the Tamil Nadu Retired IAS Officers' Association, they have put together their views on the Services and have also penned their reminiscences of their years in power. There are many hallowed names from the Tamil Nadu cadre such as P. Sabanayagam, K.V. Ramanathan and S.P. Ambrose besides officers from other State cadres who have since settled in Chennai, like Dr. G. Sundaram.

The first part of their book is fairly dry and analytical, with each officer giving his views on what is wrong with the Services and how it can be rectified, something that all retired bureaucrats appear to be experts in and something that they manage to express only after they leave the Services. It is in the second half of the book that each man comes into his own with anecdotes of his time in the Service. There are tales of human interest, such as a superior in the Service taking a fatherly interest in the development of his junior. There are tales of political interference and harassment and a very touching account by R. Kunchitapadam in particular of political machinations leading to great trouble around the time of his retirement which led to his suspension a few days before retirement at the end of 31 years of service. It took more than three years for the case to come up for hearing and, finally, he was given all his dues. A classic case of delayed justice so common today. There are, interestingly, stories of ministers who were worthy of admiration and who worked with a high degree of ethics as well. Clearly, as in every aspect of life, the Government and the Services have all kinds of people and, therefore, various interesting aspects.

Sriram V.

• The *Indian Administrative Service – Experience and Perception*, compiled by M.G. Balasubramanian, IAS (RETD.) is published by East West Books (Madras) Pvt. Ltd.



Though the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has initiated steps to save the world heritage Shore Temple from sea threat, many of its measures have failed due to inappropriate methodology adopted in the execution, it is reported. A few decades ago huge stones were dumped on the north and east sides of the Temple to save it from sea erosion, leaving the south side free and open. Seawater entered the temple premises at the time of tsunami from the south. During high tide times, water comes closer to the Temple. Since such reoccurrences may result in defacing the structure, the ASI decided to extend the temple area and also to construct a barrier wall around it.

Though the periphery wall was constructed and repeated three times, it has been washed away by sea erosion every time. The ASI has not yet learnt a lesson from the experience, particularly on the behaviour and impact of the sea.

As executed on the other sides of the Temple a few decades ago, the ASI should have simply adopted the same method. "Before constructing the compound wall, huge stones should have first been dumped and filled with sand to save compound wall as well as the extended area," locals said while commenting on the ASI actions.

It is evident that measures taken by the ASI have failed due to inappropriate methodology to save the historically and architecturally important structure from the sea. — (TAL News Bureau.)

BIGGER CHENNAI

The fourth largest metro in the country might grow further, according to the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), which has urged Government to extend the Metropolitan area to Thiruporur. The need for expansion was felt to regulate the rapid developments taking place in that sector due to IT companies.

TN budget promises much for the city, but...

(Continued from Page 1)

ments. (Ed: The merits of the beach plans are debatable.)

- **The Adyar Estuary Eco Park:** A Rs. 100 crore allocation has been proposed for this park. It has been announced that special attention will be given to take care of the flora and fauna of the area. (Ed: It is worthwhile noting here that nothing beyond the construction of a compound wall has happened in the area for over two years now. With real estate prices shooting up, it is anybody's guess as to what will happen if the place remains neglected.)

- **Infrastructure:** The Government has decided to implement the Metro rail project at a cost of Rs. 9000 crore within five years. The project will have two rail corridors with a total length of 49 kms. The airport expansion scheme, however, is in limbo, what with even the political allies of the Government opposing it. A State level traffic and transportation advisory committee has been proposed with sub-

committees in Coimbatore, Madurai and Chennai. This will suggest plans for easing congestion and pollution in the cities. (Ed: What, however, is most disappointing is that proposals for satellite townships have all been given the go-by, no doubt due to political pressure. These would have been the only way in which congestion in the city could be eased and if there is no thinking in that direction, all other schemes are unlikely to have much of an effect.)

- **Mahabalipuram:** It has been proposed that a Sculpture Park be put up in Mahabalipuram which will showcase the talents of Tamil Nadu in stonework. In addition, a Centre for Tamil Culture and Folk Arts has been proposed which will promote local arts during Pongal-time year after year. (Ed: This is believed to be a direct fallout of the success of the recently held Sangamam.)

Overall, while the budget promises much for the city, it remains to be seen how much of it translates into reality.

A yearful of projects in Tamil Nadu

The INTACH's Tamil Nadu (Madras) Chapter last year (2005-2006) successfully restored the Marundeeswarar Temple, rainwater harvesting was done with the help of community effort and Government agencies, and a fencing-cum-seating made around the tank, along with a pathway for walkers.

The Chapter continued the restoration work at the *Senate House*, participated in the Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple area improvement meetings, prepared a preliminary conservation report on the Governor's Bungalow in

Tranquebar, prepared a conservation study on the Madras Bank headquarters building in Chennai that is now a State Bank of India property, undertook the research project, 'Envisioning the city and politics of development', by IDPAD, an Indo-Dutch programme, prepared a film project on Chennai, titled, 'Re-imaging Chennai', participated in the 'Chennai City Heritage' projects contest for city schools on the occasion of Madras Day, undertook documentation of Maritime Heritage along the Tamil Nadu coast (a preliminary report on the structure of

the listing is already complete), made an appeal to the Life Insurance Corporation against the demolition of Bharat Insurance building, and conducted a workshop on children's radio programmes on heritage.

The Coimbatore Chapter spearheaded the restoration drive of the Victoria Town Hall. It also prepared the blueprints and drew up plans for creating a museum tracing the history of Coimbatore and the efforts of eminent citizens. It also continued to urge the reuse of the Old Labour Court building as a Law Museum.

The Nagercoil Chapter organised a seminar on *Tsunami and its Impact* and worked towards getting the newly discovered wayside inn, sunk in the earth, declared a protected monument by the Archaeological Department. The Chapter undertook the listing of around 50 heritage buildings and certain artefacts as well. With the Chapter's intervention, the Marthandeswarar and Vadi-veeswaram Temple tanks were renovated by the local administration, and the stone *madam* of Chungankadai was converted into a library. The Chapter organised an exhibition of rare and ancient coins and established INTACH Heritage Clubs in some schools.

The Nilgiris Chapter's biggest achievement was lobbying to get the Nilgiri Mountain Railway declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

The Thanjavur Chapter was instrumental in restoring the 18th-19th Century mural paintings in the Ellaiamman Temple in the Thanjavur Palace Devasthan. The Chapter conducted the *bhoomi puja* for the renovation of the Royal Maratha Memorials, deepened and renovated the historic pond, and made a power-point presentation of the Braha-deeswarar Temple.

INTACH plans for heritage tourism

With Heritage Tourism becoming the mainstay of Indian tourism, it will gain strength in the future. The Heritage Tourism Division of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) was set up in January 2006 and extended the INTACH mandate beyond conservation. The Division planned to evolve a cogent system of sustenance of conserved sites which would allow visitors to have access to heritage sites, enabling them to understand such historic sites and their architecture in detail.

The Division has drawn up a range of activities, including the following:

1.1 Developing tourism management concepts for the following heritage sites:

a. Heritage sites recognised as the World Heritage Sites, of which India currently has 26;

b. Other Heritage sites/circuits which have the potential of becoming WHS (14 on the current list of ASI and growing substantially);

c. Reuse of heritage property for training purposes;

d. Heritage cities and archaeological sites; and

e. Examining existing tourist facilities at the World Heritage Sites and other heritage sites of national importance, identifying the facilities required, and preparing a plan for implementation consistent with the ethics of the area and the INTACH guidelines on the subject.

1.2 Conducting workshops for various stakeholders involved at identified heritage sites to create awareness and garner support.

1.3 Facilitate marketing and promotion of the heritage destinations identified by INTACH.

1.4 Identifying unexplored heritage sites for conservation and then making them part of the tourism circuits.

2. Conceptualisation and development of heritage interpretation centres complete with signage.

3. Detailing heritage tours and walks at identified places using the listing documented by INTACH and promoting them through the INTACH chapters.

4. Developing training modules for identified heritage monuments for tourist guides.

5. Providing consultancy on policy issues connected with Heritage properties and hotels through a process of recommendations to the Central or State Government.

6. Conducting tourism impact assessment studies to access the impact of tourism on Heritage sites, covering different factors like socioeconomic, political, and economic, complete with tourist surveys.

7. Under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, taking up the issues related to Heritage planning in identified cities, which may include open spaces, water bodies and Heritage precincts or zones.

8. Determining if there is anything wanting for the up-market tourist through tour agents and operators and providing the same through Government intervention. Thus, conceptualising customised heritage tour packages for specifically identified groups of tourists visiting particular destinations.

9. Documenting intangible Heritage as part of the INTACH documentation programme.

INTACH creates awareness, does NOT fund work

From time to time, we, at *Madras Musings*, have received inquiries about the aims of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). The main aims and objectives of INTACH, as laid down in its Memorandum of Association, are:

- To create and stimulate an awareness among the public on the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of India.
- To undertake measures for the preservation and conservation of natural resources and cultural properties.
- To undertake measures for the preservation of not only historic buildings but also historic quarters and towns, and domestic architecture displaying artistic and skilled craftsmanship.
- To undertake the documentation of cultural and natural heritage.
- To undertake pilot conservation projects.
- To promote the preservation of traditional arts and crafts.
- To create a suitable forum for the exchange of ideas and techniques and to facilitate study courses, workshops, conferences, etc.
- To undertake the publications of journals, books, newsletters, posters, etc. in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.
- To set up and maintain libraries and information centres to facilitate the study of cultural and natural heritage.
- To constitute chapters/centres in India or elsewhere to promote the objectives of the Trust.

NOTE: INTACH helps with advice and documentation, it does NOT fund restoration projects, as many seem to think it does or expect it to do.

There are several Chapters in Tamil Nadu, the first one being the Madras/Chennai Chapter which was convened as the Tamil Nadu Chapter.

Heritage on the air - by schoolchildren

The Tamil Nadu Chapter of INTACH completed basic groundwork on a schools' radio programme in the latter half of 2005 before the Heritage Education and Communication Service (HECS) mentors arrived. HECS, on arrival, made a brief presentation on the pilot project in Delhi and gave suggestions for improvement. The group listened to recorded snippets of the Delhi radio broadcasts and topics and were to discuss these with AIR at a later date. They viewed the Radio Fest Film to gauge the response of children and teachers.

The Chapter decided to work with Gyan Vani, an independent educational radio station in Chennai, to ensure maximum outreach and ben-

efits from the programme. Gyan Vani conducted two workshops with the participating schools in December 2005 on Script-writing and Voice Modulation. The themes were decided by a very active team of INTACH members in Chennai and research was completed within a few months.

The Chapter recorded a pilot programme in Tamil on the Adyar Creek, with children from Olcott Memorial School and Gyan Vani featuring together on it. It was used as a demonstration tape at a workshop held on January 27, 2006 for teachers and students from other schools who would work on the forthcoming programmes. Several programmes have since been produced.

Heritage regulations for cantonment towns

(By A Special Correspondent)

There are 62 Cantonment towns covered by the Cantonments Act 1924, in addition to which there are 650 military stations (for which there are proposals to convert them into Cantonment Towns).

The Cantonment Act was revised and the Cantonments Bill, 2003 was introduced in Parliament. Along with the Bombay Environmental Action Group, personal and written representa-

tions were made by INTACH to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence. Several amendments had been suggested to the Cantonments Bill, 2003, including specific provisions for protection of Heritage. The Parliamentary Committee recommended that Heritage conservation be provided for.

The dialogue with the authorities in this regard continued. This achieved fruition in

August 2006, when the revised Cantonments Bill, 2006 was enacted with specific provisions empowering the Cantonment Boards to enact Heritage Regulations.

We wonder what has happened at St. Thomas' Mount and the military areas in Fort St. George as a consequence. — (All features on this page are courtesy of INTACH's 2005-6 annual report.)

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

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

1. Into which country did the 'traditionally neutral' Swiss army stage an 'unplanned invasion' after a troops movement blunder on March 1st?
2. What global-level \$1.5 billion research environmental programme, the fourth of its kind, was launched in Paris on March 1st?
3. Name the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MP from Jamshedpur who was brutally killed on March 2nd.
4. Where exactly did the ninth cricket World Cup open on March 11th?
5. With whom did Japan sign a security pact recently, the first with a nation other than the U.S. since the end of World War II?
6. In which Asian islands have a new species of a big cat been discovered according to the WWF?
7. Which EPL side played a match against Europe XI to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome as the foundation of the European Union?
8. Who are the new Chief Ministers of Punjab and Manipur?
9. Which two banks are to join HSBC to float an insurance company in the country?
10. The concept car unveiled by Tatas at the Geneva Auto Show is called....

* * *

11. Who is Tamil Nadu's Transport Minister?
12. According to the Delimitation Commission's new draft Lok Sabha constituency list for Tamil Nadu, how many of the 39 constituencies are to be removed and replaced?
13. Which former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras has the honour of having a new species of thripidae named after him?
14. Who on March 12th became the first woman to present the Chennai Corporation's budget at the Ripon Building?
15. In which Chennai city temple precincts every year are Muslims allowed to dip their *panjas* (the sacred symbol of the hand) in the waters of the temple tank on the 10th day of Mohurram?
16. What is the rank of the Prince of Arcot in the Warrant of Precedence, the courtesy ranks accorded to officials and non-officials, in the State?
17. Which famous road in Chennai is named after the eighth Nawab of the Carnatic?
18. Which famous edifice in Chennai was once known as *Kals Mahal*?
19. Who was India's opponent in the first-ever Test played on the ground now called the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium?
20. Which former Supreme Court judge's book of poems called *Singing Sparrow* was released by the Chief Minister recently?

(Answers on page 8)

• ARTLESS INNOCENTS AND IVORY-TOWER SOPHISTICATES – The third article in a five-part series*.

The Weil influence

– and Vijayaraghavan's contribution

“Hardy spoilt many Indian mathematicians; but of course Ramanujan was much too great to be spoilt!” That brings me to the man who made that statement – Andre Weil, one of the greatest mathematicians of the 20th Century.

He was a colourful personality with a powerful sense of humour and was not averse to using it to cause discomfiture. He spent two years, 1930-32, in India as a Professor of Mathematics at Aligarh Muslim University.

The contrast between the supreme confidence of the Normalien (as students of the Ecole Normale Superieure are known) and the diffidence of the clerk from the Port Trust is striking, but it would hardly surprise the sociologist. Weil promptly sacked one of his three colleagues, removed another temporarily and let the third continue, only to regret that decision soon. In Aligarh, he made many friends, not all of whom were academics. He was pleasantly surprised to come across some talented young people of promise. He recruited one of them, T. Vijayaraghavan, a student of Hardy, to the vacant post in the department; this, despite the fact that Vijayaraghavan lacked formal qualifications. The two struck up a lasting friendship. Apart from their common interest in mathematics, Vijayaraghavan with his scholarship in Tamil and Sanskrit, could cater to Weil's interest in Indian culture...

Vijayaraghavan was four years Weil's senior in age. He did well enough in school, but at college his performance was not very good by the usual criteria. This was because, like Ramanujan, he had become interested in serious mathematics and found the curricular material unexciting. Luckily for him, a real mathematician – Ananda Rau – who could recognise talent that the examination system was incapable of detecting, was at the helm of affairs and he could secure admission to the B.A. (Honours) course in University. The parallel with Ramanujan continued: he sent Hardy his researches and eventually in 1925 went to Oxford

*Excerpts from a public lecture delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences, held at Chandigarh in 2002.



Andre Weil.



T. Vijayaraghavan.

(Hardy had moved there) to work with him. It is not surprising that many in Madras looked upon him as a spiritual successor to Ramanujan. All through, Ananda Rau had been a great help and Vijayaraghavan would apparently recall with great pleasure his meetings with his teacher. Vijayaraghavan's was a fine mind and he was soon publishing excellent papers in Analysis and related areas.

Vijayaraghavan was a keen problem-solver and had no great fascination for building theories or acquisition of extensive scholarship. He was always

Aligarh library). He returned to find himself summarily dismissed. His friend Vijayaraghavan had quit and moved to Dacca in protest when Masood, in Weil's absence, offered him the professorship from which he planned to oust Weil. Weil returned to Paris after a brief stay with Vijayaraghavan in Dacca. During that stay, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the then Vice-Chancellor, invited him to take up a position in Andhra University. Weil was attracted by the offer but eventually declined when Radhakrishnan was unable to meet his

• by M.S. RAGHUNATHAN

on the lookout for interesting problems and was quite happy to get to know them from the knowledgeable. Weil, on the other hand, developed theories and for him problem-solving, while important, was secondary: with the right theory the solutions to problems will assuredly fall out.

Physically, too, the two were a study in contrast. Weil was slim and fit. He enjoyed walking a great deal and used to call it (in the Macarthy days) his 'un-American' activity. Vijayaraghavan's was a portly frame which reflected correctly his sedentary lifestyle.

Weil's initial cordial relationship with Syed Ross Masood did not survive for long. His independent spirit came into conflict with the system in which the Vice-Chancellor was a demi-god; and Masood's perception of the University as a family legacy did not help. Towards the end of his second year in Aligarh, Weil went on a short vacation to Europe (where in fact he exerted himself to acquire books for the

demand for a free hand to run the department.

Vijayaraghavan later moved to Madras to head the then newly formed Ramanujan Institute. He died in 1955 at the relatively young age of 53. Chandrasekharan has this to say of Vijayaraghavan: "No one who knew him intimately – as a working mathematician, as a genial host or as an affectionate father – could fail to say here was an intellectual of whom his country could be proud.

"Vijayaraghavan loved lecturing, and was a lucid, effective and sometimes brilliant lecturer, especially on mathematical topics which were of immediate interest to him.

"It was a pet saying of his that one could not claim that one knew a theorem, unless one could give not less than three different proofs of it, of which at least one proof was one's own."

It is hardly surprising that he was on occasions hoist with his own petard!

Weil's influence on Indian mathematics during the Aligarh

sojourn cannot be considered as greatly significant, although some individuals like Vijayaraghavan would have benefited from his presence. It is some thirty years later that his mathematics had a big impact in this country: after all, Aligarh happened at the very beginning of Weil's career as a mathematician, and the researches that were to wield influence came later...

Indian thought certainly had great influence on Weil. In his autobiography, he says that the only religious ideas that appealed to him were those to be found in Hindu philosophical thought. During the Second World War, Weil refused to do military service and ironically he cited the *Bhagavad Gita* (whose ostensible aim was to get Arjuna to fight) to justify his stand: his true *dharma* was the pursuit of mathematics and that was what he should be doing, not assisting in the war effort, however just the cause!

For all his fascination for India, Weil never came back to India till 1968. That year, he was in India to lecture at an international conference hosted by TIFR. In Bombay, TIFR put him up at the Taj Hotel, but as we discovered later, our hospitality simply could not match what was offered to him elsewhere in the country. In Delhi, he stayed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a guest of the then President Zakir Husain, a friend from the Aligarh days! And it was the Raj Bhavan in Kolkata again – Weil had known the Governor Dharam Vira as a civil servant in Aligarh! In Chennai, he met Rajaji who cut him short when he was trying to remind him about their previous meeting in 1931 with, 'Oh, yes, I remember you very well. You are the French professor who was in Aligarh and I find that your English is as bad as ever!' Weil had an excellent command of English, but spoke the language – inevitably – with a French accent. The ivory-tower was no doubt Weil's natural habitat, but it would appear that he could, if he wanted to, come out and give a lesson or two to Dale Carnegie! (Courtesy: The author who is with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and *Current Science*, 2003.)

(To be continued)

Reviving the Armenian connection

(By A Staff Reporter)

The head of the Armenian Orthodoxy worldwide, Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, came calling recently to Chennai. The visit was a private one, though, later, he called on the President of India. The Catholicos had expressed great interest in visiting Chennai and preparations began almost two months earlier with a team of Armenians coming in from Calcutta to interact with INTACH-Tamil Nadu and ensure a few quick repairs and restoration at the historic Armenian Church. Some repair work was done and a fresh coat of lime was applied, but it was agreed that post the visit of His Holiness, a complete and detailed restoration effort would be taken up.

The Armenian Church on the eponymous street in George Town has seen no service for



The Armenian Church.

quite some years now, what with just a member or two of the community left in the city. However, its courtyard has always been open for anyone wanting to take a look at the historic building and the bell tower. In the midst of noisy George Town, it is a haven of peace.

On March 2nd, however, all was hustle and bustle inside the church as it prepared itself for the visit of the Catholicos. It is always amazing to see how a simple lime wash can brighten up a heritage building and the church was no exception. Inside, the altar rails gleamed. The tomb of Shimovinian who in Madras began *Azdarar*, the first Armenian publication worldwide, had been cleaned and a bouquet of flowers placed on it. The only element missing was



Catholicos Karekin II at the courtyard of the Armenian Church.

the peal of bells, for these have been silent for some years now and the tower itself needs attending to.

This being a private visit of His Holiness, it was minus the usual official trappings, so mem-

bers of INTACH and others could interact freely with him. The Catholicos paid a tribute to the once powerful Armenian community of Madras which, according to him, had contributed so generously to the



The altar and the nave.

church in Armenia that it was impossible for any Armenian not to be aware of the city of Madras that is Chennai. He appreciated the quick repair work that had been done and agreed that a detailed restoration on the lines of what had been done in Calcutta was needed. It has also been decided that services will be resumed by the end of the year at the Armenian

Church. As there are no Armenians left, these services will be open to anyone who wishes to join in.

An Armenian festival in India has been planned for November and Chennai will also be a location. On display will be Armenian food, music and dance. What a lovely location the churchyard will be for at least the art display! It is to be hoped that the restoration work will begin immediately, so that the place will be ready by November. Structurally, the church appears very stable and so very little may need to be done on restoration, though it will need going into thoroughly before anyone can be sure. There is also the problem of a part of the church's frontage having been usurped by an eatery whose exhaust fans blow into the churchyard and the Catholicos has said that this will have to be removed.

Let us hope that all this augurs well for the Armenian Church, an important heritage structure in the city. And perhaps when the Catholicos returns on an official visit, the bells will peal again.

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

— The Editor

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Senate House Conservation Fund

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

Dear Registrar,

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

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

.....

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

Date: Signature:

Nostalgia

Remembering traditional South Indian weddings

Unlike its namesake in the African grassland, this Impala crawled. A slow trip in this top-down, convertible Chevrolet is a standout childhood memory. The occasion was my uncle's wedding. Being from the 'boy's side', my cousins and I were privileged to travel with the bridegroom for the short distance from the temple to the wedding-hall. Petromax lamp-bearers led the way; a retinue of relatives and well-wishers followed the whale-like car. Like some minor but triumphant head of state, I waved to complete strangers on the roadside – all from the sheer joyousness of being part of this procession.

At the hall, my cousins and I spun around like dervishes dressed in zari-bordered finery. Gathering enough wind, we quickly sat down on our heels –

our silk skirts billowing out in flurries of jewel colours, like the costumes of Manipuri dancers. When the bride and bridegroom discarded a set of garlands we sneaked them out to stage mock-weddings in a less-busy corner. When you are eight or so, you are oblivious to the fact of holding up street traffic or getting in the way of servers carrying trays of beverages. As children, we just played our small part in the overall din.

Mira Nair's hit movie *Monsoon Wedding* brought back some of these memories. Compared to the on-screen revelry, weddings of my childhood were

my imagination or are there some delicious food items which are to be seen only in a wedding menu? Even if they are regular items, they taste extra-special at weddings.

After one such sumptuous meal, I savoured my first *paan*, that perfect finale to a feast. Sitting in a circle of wooden folding chairs – under a canvas of geometric designs – the elders were busy catching up with their extended family. Chewing betel leaves contentedly, they were too preoccupied to notice what we children were up to; I saw my chance and took it. Hastily folding the leaf into an

aunt threw some coloured rice balls over the couple's heads to ward the evil eye from the newly-weds. Being a great cricket fan, my mother spin-bowled all the wickedness right out of the hall, as part of the ritual.

Much has been said about concerts at the reception – the audience does not really pay attention, they are too busy socialising, etc. Despite all this, well-known musicians perform at such functions. Perhaps, passionate performers and true aficionados can successfully block out the party chatter, who knows? As a child, I used to avoid running anywhere near the stage. When an elder in the family, who never got a chance to perform, finally got his ten minutes with the microphone, I was right there, ready with the applause.

Many of the newer 'functions' within a traditional wedding will probably baffle me. A roadside *mehendiwallah* in an upscale Delhi shopping centre boasted about being in demand for bridal showers down South and asked, "Which part of Ma-

dras are you from?" In the past, there was a boring unisex 'decoration' of hands and palms with henna paste ground from backyard plants. Outside expertise has definitely to be brought in if herbal tattooing is to be part of our weddings. Another brand-new cultural import – inspired by Bollywood – is dancing. It is hard for me to imagine letting my hair down and shaking a leg before elders who grace the event.

Despite all the enjoyable possibilities of this joyous social occasion, one thing is wrong with this picture and – North or South – this practice has remained unchanged over the years. Ever since I was this teenager, who asked herself the tacit question, "Who pays for these weddings?", my enjoyment of these celebrations has diminished somewhat. Recently, the unspoken answer came in the form of a brilliant vignette, titled *Expense*, by Ammani, of the blogosphere, a miniaturist from Myslapore who lives in London.

A quick tale 21: 'No holidays. Rarely new clothes. New shoes can wait, old shoes restricted. Why bother going to movies when there's TV? Dinner always at home. Nothing wasted, everything saved. Squirreled. So that it may all be spent in one afternoon. The day the daughter gets married.'

• by VIJAYSREE VENKATRAMAN

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such sedate affairs. Madras only gets the monsoon on the rebound. The rain god did not generally put in an appearance at these gatherings, but I am told it drizzled at my parents' reception. Despite the lack of any evident commonality, the film was certainly evocative. Besides, it has been a while since I have attended any *desi* wedding.

Now, I enjoy traditional South Indian weddings vicariously, through long-distance calls and flipping through fat albums, post-event. Of course, I completely miss out on the highlights. The banana leaf feast, which has been immortalised in celluloid by the famous song in *Maya Bazaar*, used to bring out the ravenous Ghatotkacha in me too. Is it just

inelegant wrap, the forbidden betel nuts within, I withdrew from the scene. That afternoon, I stuck my tongue out – in front of the mirror too – to check if it had turned orange from the lime I had flecked on the inside of the sushi-sized *paan*.

The musicians, who played the drums and pipes for the religious part of the ceremony, were taking a similar break on the sidelines. You might not find it in the dictionary, but *dum-dum-dum* is a perfectly acceptable synonym for a Tamil wedding. While the music formed the background score, talented women in the family broke into song when the couple sat down on a swing decked with flowers, younger singers forming the giggly chorus. As part of this ritual, each



April 9-21: 1000 Bhopal, a photo exhibition primarily focussing on chemical pollution and its impact on human and environmental health. Though the exhibit displays images of Endosulphan poisoning in Kasargode, Kerala, and chemical pollution from the Golden Corridor in Gujarat, the main focus is on Tamil Nadu where places like Cuddalore, Mettur, Manali and Chengalpattu are severely impacted by industrial pollution (at Alliance Francaise).

Till April 12: An exhibition of paintings by Apu Dasgupta (at Artworld).

Answers to Quiz

1. Liechtenstein; 2. International Polar Year; 3. Sunil Kumar Mahato; 4. Trelawny Stadium, Montego Bay, Jamaica; 5. Australia; 6. Borneo and Sumatra. The cat has been christened Bornean Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis diardi*); 7. Manchester United; 8. Parkash Singh Badal and O. Ibobi Singh; 9. Canara Bank and Oriental Bank of Commerce; 10. Elegante.

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11. K.N. Nehru; 12. Nine; 13. S. Ignacimuthu. The species is called *Jakthrips ignacimuthui*; 14. Radha Sambandam; 15. Kapaleswarar temple; 16. On par with the Cabinet ministers of the State; 17. Wallajah Road, after Muhammad Ali Wallajah; 18. *Chepauk Palace*; 19. England led by Douglas Jardine; 20. Justice S. Mohan.

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