

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

Vol. XXVII No. 3

May 16-30, 2017

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## The rot in Tamil Nadu real estate

(By The Editor)

The whole business stinks. Real estate in Tamil Nadu is nothing other than a nefarious nexus between builders, officials and politicians. How else can you explain the fact that the last one month has exposed scandal after scandal in this sector, each of which has shown that malpractices continue unabated with everyone cocking a snook at the law?

Let's start with the latest. A building in Vadapalani caught fire owing to a short circuit. Four people died and the casualties could have been much worse were it not for the efficiency with which the fire service responded. The media, of course, made much of the way some residents swung out Tarzan-like or threw their children down to waiting people below. It was what emerged the next day that showed how avoidable the whole tragedy was. The building had been constructed in complete violation of norms. The Corporation had sealed it in consequence. The owner, a political party functionary, cared two hoots for such bars placed in his progress and proceeded to rent out the place.

What is amazing is that tenants, knowing full well that the structure was illegal, rented it. And because the entrance had a Corporation seal, they used a rear stairway for their entry and exit! What is even more surprising is that the Electricity Department provided power connection and meters to this building. And, of course, why the Corporation officials sat quiet after they saw a structure they had sealed being in full occupation is the biggest mystery. Looking back at the whole episode, you realise that there were violations by everyone concerned and such a deadly cocktail had to end in some catastrophe such as what took place. Did those who rent space in this building imagine that disasters happened only to other people? They are as culpable in this crime as the owner and the officials.

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What use such beauty at the Chetput Eco Park (see page 3) when sewage is such a beast in the city?

## Sewage proves beastly in the City

Recent reports of sewage-laden lorries raising a stink and the load being discharged into stormwater channels are disturbing. Sewage is removed and transported because the city's underground sewage network capacity is inadequate to cope with the existing load. The stench of rotting garbage is a sign of a brewing scam in Koyambedu where, it is reported, the contract for daily removal of 200 tons of biowaste has not been honoured while bills are made and payments effected. Which one is easier for the poor citizen to bear – the stench of garbage or the stench of corruption?

Another recent report describes in harrowing detail the sufferings of the residents of a street in Vadapalani where frequent stagnation of sewage blocking the whole street has kept residents indoors, with windows and doors shut to avoid the stench and the breeding mosquitoes. Temporary reliefs from clogged pipelines, without solving the larger problem with a permanent solution, leads us nowhere. Hazardous attempts at clearing the clogged lines are fraught with risk of asphyxiation and loss of life has

been frequently reported. We keep removing the toxic material and dumping it back into waterways and floodwater drains in a vicious cycle. These are signs of a primitive state of our waste water handling system.

Information on plans for the sewage management in the Chennai Metro area, as stated by the Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewage Board (CMWSSB), does not inspire confidence that the government is focused on the magni-

2.5-3% per year, mainly through in-migration. The metro area remaining the same, the increasing density puts an additional the load on the system.

Significantly, the Board does not state the daily rate of waste generation in the metro area to be able to verify if the installed capacity of 486 MLD is sufficient. To arrive at the effective capacity, it is customary and prudent to de-rate the installed capacity by a minimum of 10 per cent for maintenance and

the country. Based on this it would be reasonable to assume the rate of waste generation in Tamil Nadu to be 6,000 MLD. Chennai Metro's population is 11.25 per cent of the State population and as such the share of Chennai Metro could be around 11.25 per cent of 6,000 MLD i.e. 675 MLD against the available effective treatment capacity of 437 MLD. The available capacity does seem far below the waste generated by the City every day, necessitating haphazard dumping of untreated sewage of large volumes.

Upgrading a city's sewage system involves extensive work; apart from a modern sewage facility of sufficient combined capacity to meet the growing needs for the next fifty years or so. Matching capacity of infrastructure is needed to collect wastewater. In European countries, most of the money spent on wastewater treatment is invested in designing and building systems for wastewater collection – which refers to the sewage drainage underground network in our case. Singapore is setting up a deep tunnel

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• by A Special Correspondent

tude of this problem. The 'Master Plan' speaks of improvement to sewage collection and conveyance system (emphasis mine) in the City, which implies that physical collection and conveyance is substituting for the inadequate capacity of the underground pipeline network. This is treatment of the symptom instead of the malaise. The Board also states that the treatment capacity has been raised from 222 million litres per day (MLD) in 1991 to 486 MLD. Urban population has also been growing during this period from

unavoidable breakdowns causing loss of production time. On this basis, the effectively available capacity is only 437 MLD.

In 2015, the estimated sewage generation in the country was 61,754 MLD as against the sewage treatment capacity of 22,963 MLD (according to the International Institute of Health and Hygiene, New Delhi, a Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change body). Tamil Nadu is one of five States that account for approximately 50 per cent of the total sewage generated in

# Desalination – is it the answer?

● Population growth estimates suggest that India will be supporting over 1.5 billion inhabitants by 2050 if the present growth rate of 1.9 per cent a year continues. From 710 billion cubic metres (BCM) in 2010, the demand for water is expected to surge to 1,180 BCM in 2050 as the Planning Commission has predicted a 2.5-time increase in domestic and industrial consumption.

With conventional surface water sources drying up or disappearing over time and borewells getting deeper by the year, sourcing and supplying water have become uphill tasks for corporations and panchayats across urban and rural areas. It is at such a time that seawater desalination is emerging as one of the top alternatives. But the most important question is, is it a viable one?

Desalination technology has grown and matured by leaps and bounds over the years. Seawater Reverse Osmosis (SWRO) technology, developed by American scientists in the 1950s, was a game changer of sorts.

According to the International Desalination Association (IDA), there are around 18,500 desalination plants in 150 countries, benefitting as many as 300 million people. Nearly half of Israel's water is manufactured and many countries, especially in the arid regions of North Africa and West Asia, find desalination a relatively cheaper option compared to other alternatives.

Among the early adopters of this technology, Tamil Nadu currently boasts of two functional desalination plants churning out 200 million litres of water per day (MLD) to quench its capital's thirst. The two 100 MLD plants, one in Minjur and the other in Nemmeli, installed after a government decision in 2003-04, now contribute close to one-third of the city's total water supply.

Sustained governmental support has enabled Tamil Nadu to contribute 24 per cent of the total desalinated water in India, making it the second best in the country after Gujarat.

The Minjur Desalination Plant, India's largest, was set up in Kaattupalli, just north of Chennai, in 2010. Ever since, the plant has been supplying 100 MLD water to households in Ennore, Manali, Tiruvotriyur, Tondiarpet and Madhavaram. The second plant came up at Nemmeli, about 35 km south of Chennai on the East Coast Road. Functional since 2013, the plant supplies 100 million litres of drinking water a day mainly to the city's southern suburbs, including Sholinganallur, Neelankarai, Thoraipakkam, Tiruvanmiyur, Velachery, Taramani, Adyar and Besant Nagar.

While the water demand for the Chennai urban agglomeration is projected at 1,560 MLD in 2019, the actual water supply hovers around 840 MLD. To fill this demand gap of 720 MLD, the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) has proposed setting up additional units of 150 MLD and 400 MLD as part of its phased expansion in Nemmeli and will come up in Perur, very close to the existing facility.

A staunch opponent of desalination, especially in "a rain-rich location like Chennai", Professor S. Janakarajan of the Madras Institute of Development Studies terms desalination as an utterly "lazy option". "Seawater desalination was conceived as an option for providing potable water in rain-starved countries, like those in West Asia. Chennai's average annual rainfall is well over 1,200 mm. Where is the need to go in for such an environmentally damaging and costly exercise? It should ideally be the absolute last resort, which, in this case, it is not," he says.

For every 100 MLD of potable water generated by the desalination plant in Minjur, the treatment unit draws in 237 MLD of seawater. Post-treatment, the briny reject is let out into the sea, around 650 m away from the shore. While it is said that a similar reject-discharge arrangement is in place at Nemmeli, reality appears otherwise.

Back in 2013, a fact-finding team looked into allegations of environment and human rights violations arising out of the construction and operation of the Nemmeli plant. The report recorded villagers' accusations of the desalination plant eroding the coastline and endangering their livelihoods in addition to turning the groundwater salty.

From the time the plant commenced operations in 2013, villagers have complained of brine reject from the plant being let out directly onto the beach and not 650 m into the sea as mentioned in the environmental clearance granted by the Ministry of

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## The ways of those in office

Dear DeMo from Delhi (sorry Chief, this fortnight's column begins with the same obeisance as the last but *The Man from Madras Musings* cannot help it) is all for Government offices changing their ways if his speeches are to be believed. MMM who belongs neither to the loony left nor the bovine sorry divine right, takes some and leaves the others but in this matter he is one with DDD, namely that Government offices need to change their ways. And what little experience he has had of them leaves him (MMM and not DDD), with the view that they cannot get any worse.

MMM is not sure about you guys and gals out there but he tries to avoid going to any Government office as far as possible. The seats will always be in short supply as will be drinking water, ventilation and, of course, toilets. And the older MMM gets, the more he finds he needs all of the above, right through the day. And it was therefore with a sinking feeling that MMM heard

possible came via electricity as did air. The number of people waiting to see whoever it was outnumbered the available seats by a ratio of 2:1. The corners were all rendered red by years of betel juice being spat at them. The counters had notices warning visitors to not use cell phones. But either this was a mere formality or every-one other than MMM was illiterate, for the place was abuzz with calls being made and received.

It was 10.00 am and there was no sign of any officer or clerk. Enquiries half an hour later revealed that everyone had gone off to attend a wedding of their colleague and the office would begin functioning at 11. A clock, that was far ahead of everything else, showed the time to be 1.00 pm. MMM reflected that this could be the time of the previous day. The staff trickled in eventually, at around 11.30, all of them looking well fed. Some of the staff had brought their children along. The summer vacations having begun, this was their idea of taking their children out

beacons are still permitted on police vehicles and ambulances. Since our leaders and officials cannot be seen going around in the latter, they have taken resort to the former. By that MMM does not mean our beloved bosses are now going around in police cars. What they have done is to get a posse of these vehicles, all of them with beacons flashing, serve as outriders to their humble beacon-less vehicles. And the effect is pretty much the same. In fact it is even better because what were lone vehicles sporting a red beacon have now become entire convoys with screaming outriders.

The other day MMM was driving along somewhere in the city when his reverie was interrupted by a prolonged hooting of the horn and a series of wails as though an ambulance was trying to forge its way ahead. MMM moved his car to one side only to see a police patrol van charging forward. Several protectors of the public weal were inside and all of them to a man glared at MMM, indicating that he

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

his good lady (also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed) announcing one morning last week that he (MMM not DDD) had to be at the registrar's. There was some property being either bought or sold, MMM forgets which.

It was in vain that MMM suggested that his good lady handle the matter herself. She has, in his view, a way with Government offices that MMM can only marvel at. A tout or two will invariably tackle what are known as pourparlers on her behalf and by the time she arrives, everything will be well handled barring the beating of drums and blowing of trumpets, not to forget the shouting and cheering. MMM on the other hand, on the occasions that he has been on his own to such places, has invariably hung around for hours in numerous queues only to have the officer concerned tell him that he (MMM) had forgotten to bring document number 393 section E which as is well known is mandated in rule 543 (xiii) subsection 67 (amendment F) and without which all Government machinery will grind to a halt. And so can MMM come back again with the document, duly signed by a gazetted officer in triplicate?

The visit this time proved no different. The office was located exactly where any right-thinking architect would have placed the latrines in a public building. The only light

on an excursion. The children duly sat on the chairs meant for their parents and each one began to play with a cell phone, completely ignoring the others in the room. But that did not prevent the lower orders in this office from trying to befriend the children, no doubt with a hope to curry some favour with the parents later. The offspring later moved off to a room that resembled the Black Hole, not that it mattered to them as long as the cell phones received signals. MMM also noticed that the children were seated there in exactly the same order of precedence as their hierarchy and seniority-obsessed parents. Work began by 12.00 noon. MMM finished his business by 1.00 pm. The only improvement he noticed was that thumb impressions were now taken digitally and not with the horrid black ink that like Lady Macbeth's spots could never be wiped off.

ought to have known better than to block their progress. Immediately behind this came one of those large SUVs that have become synonymous with our political class. Crouching inside was a well-known face, which was trying to look unconcerned with all the chaos that it was causing. Behind the SUV came another police vehicle, also flashing its beacon and wailing like a banshee. The trio then proceeded to push cars and pedestrians out of the way, jumped the traffic light ahead where a policeman saluted them for their act, and were lost to sight thereafter.

So much then for the beacon having taken away with it our VIP culture. Dear DeMo in Delhi and Extremely Precarious Seat closer home may as well screw the damned bulb back on.

### A silent airport

*The Man from Madras Musings* is deeply concerned about the announcement that Chennai's so called international airport will be a silent one from now on. Will that mean the falling tiles from the roof will be rubber lined so that they do not make a noise when they crash on to the floor? How can the passengers be warned of this menace? MMM recommends that the Airports Authority of India dispenses helmets for every-one.

### Post red beacon

For all those who rejoiced at the announcement that the red beacon on Government cars is a thing of the past, *The Man from Madras Musings* brings sad tidings. It was only in the last issue of *Madras Musings* that MMM had speculated on the possibility of Babudom finding some means or the other to perpetuate their importance. And, boy, have they succeeded!

The bureaucrats have gone in for provisions in the fine print, of which as we all know, they are past masters. Red

– MMM

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



**Memories stirred**

Was pleased to read that “Cooum now has a good guide that none of our other rivers have!” (MM, March 16th, 2017).

‘Chitti’ Sundararajan and T. Janakiraman’s *Nadandai Vazhi Kaveri*, a brilliant bit of Tamil non-fiction crossed my mind, and I remembered having feverishly read it as a high-school student in Madras several years ago.

This book excited me by its brilliant notes on the sociocultural aspects of Kaveri and the civilisation(s) it nurtured from Thalai-k-Kaveri to Kaveripoom-pattinam over millennia.

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**IIT green canopy**

I used to cycle on the roads of IIT-M in 1979. I zipped through the winding, curving roads with glee on my Blue BSA-SLR. One day, I came upon a side-path, past Gajendra Circle; and, following an adventurous instinct, came upon an ancient Shiva temple. Therein resided a picturesque character – an intense forceful, lithe man called Ranganathan Yogi. His devil-may-care attitude and trait of speaking his mind attracted me. I began to materially support him – within my limited means.

The Shiva temple had a 3-plus feet tall cylindrical stone *lingam*. Its name, Adipureeshwarar, was on the lintel. There

was a living Vilva tree (*Aegle marmelos*) at the back. Provision for water from a tap was made years later. Adjacent to the main deity was a 5-armed elephant-trunked Pillaiyar. There was an asbestos roof overhead.

Sometimes, when I went early, I saw a plenty of *Avifauna* in this area: Forest Wagtail, Paradise Flycatchers, White-breasted Waterhen, Ruddy Crane, Purple Moorhen and so on. I could also hear the call of a Magpie Robin pair, a Pied Bushchat, and, rarely, a lone Golden Oriole. I once, many years later, saw a large mon-goose on the ground. There used to be an eerie aura of silence and stillness most of the time, in the temple precincts.

I began to regularly visit the IIT campus during the early 1980s – basically for the exercise, but sometimes to see the Yogi and converse.

The priest claimed that the temple to the Mother Goddess Durga Peeli Amman, originated as a spontaneous amorphous stone idol, 500-plus years ago.

The temple has been developed now, with mosaic tiling and priced tickets for each ritual. However, may be due to the passing of time and increasing number of people or the campus, or because I have matured differently, I no longer have the feeling of sanctity when I visit this spot within the IIT campus.

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**CHENNAI NEWSREEL**

**Welcome to a prince of parks, once a frog**

Two words recur during my visits to the Chetput Eco Park, mirage and oasis. Mirage because of my on-and-off disbelief at what I see around me, and that leads me to my second word, a humongous park that’s an oasis amidst urban sprawl. On the eastern side of the park are the buildings of the KMC Hospital. But the distant view of vehicular traffic down the Chetput overbridge on the west romanticises my perspective rather than the usual cursing of it.

Strolling around in the spaciousness of the park, I can clearly see the transformation that has been wrought. Largely disused water bodies – some of them were aquaculture ponds – have become twin lakes neatly embanked on all sides, a green and blue revelation to those who’ve seen the before and after pictures. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation, custodians of the park, took 20 months and spent Rs. 42 crore to turn the proverbial frog into the prince.

Finding my way into the park from the ever-busy Poonamallee High Road on the north, I enter past an art installation of a couple holding aloft what could be a nylon net dripping water. The walls have large aquariums and water fountains. Soon after entering, I see an ‘in my face’ two-storied building. A relief, it’s a parking lot. Never mind that a park in a metro is where we go to connect with nature, breathe in the cleaner air, look heavenward at the skies or simply stand and stare!

The administrative office of the park and the ticket counter, (you pay Rs. 25 towards entry) share the same single-storied building in a green garden space. For the regulars, there are monthly, half-yearly and annual passes at Rs. 200, 500 and 1,000 respectively. There are information boards placed near the counter telling you about the Eagle Ray, Clown Fish, Killer Whales, Coral Reef and Lion Fish among others. Other boards trace the history of the park since the days it was a brick kiln in 1934, when the site was dug up to form a depression for water to fill.

The entrance lobby overlooks the major lake with a knoll in the centre. There’s a deck in the



The entrance to the Park.

lobby which offers a ‘feast for the eye’, the expanse of the lake, supplemented by a freshening breeze. A walking track paved with cement stones runs the distance of 1.5 km round the twin lakes. The path around the embankments is grassy. The land spread of the park is 6.9 acre and water spread, 9.1 acre. A water treatment and recycling plant keeps the rainwater harvested lakes clean.

Newly planted trees and shrubs grow around the park, with open and covered seating in several places. A few of the seats are designed to look like polished stumps of trees.

There are two figure-of-eight-shaped acupressure walkways where people walk bare-foot on pebbles embedded in the ground. After all the appreciation of Nature, the cafeteria alongside a children’s park brings me down to earth.

The smaller of the two lakes is reserved for angling. A short, curved bridge separates the two lakes. A team of ducks glides across the water, changing course together and now and again dipping their necks into the water. Sometimes they waddle on the walking track, going quack-quack.

One of the highlights of the park is the boating on the bigger lake. Life jackets are provided to those going for a round in the pedal boats. The deepest point of the lake is said to be 15-18 feet.

Well-wishers of the park will knit their brows over what the looming summer of 2017 holds for the park and the lakes with their shrinking edges. As for the present, the park which opens at 4.30 am and closes at 8 pm, is the delight of the walkers circumambulating the park, each at his or her own pace.

– T.K. Srinivasa Chari

**IS DESALINATION THE ANSWER**

(Continued from page 2)

Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Pipelines carrying the reject water were later buried under the sand but poor maintenance led to clogging, as a result of which pools of brine reject stagnated along the beach stretch. Even as recently as December 2016, the Chennai-based Coastal Resource Centre has documented evidences of hyper-saline reject being dumped right on the beach. The situation has not changed since; concentrated brine reject continues to be let out on the beach till date.

Ecologist Sultan Ismail says that the brine reject has an impact on marine life. He explains, “There are some species of fish which feed, breed and spend the better part of their early life along the coast. If the hypersaline reject is let out close to the coast, the probability of these organisms being affected is high. Fish species,

such as sardines, mackerels and anchovies, feed on planktons along the coast. When the plankton population decreases due to hypersalinity, it affects the health of fish up the food chain which in turn affects fish diversity as well as density.” High-pressure motors used to draw in water also bring in marine life forms of varying sizes despite nets placed to avoid relatively larger organisms. Fish fry and crabs get crushed and killed in the process.

Loss of income and marine resources is alleged by fishermen in and around Nemmeli. Santhosh, a fisherman from Sulerikattu Kuppam, recalls that 6-7 years ago fishing was “lucrative almost throughout the year. Prawns and fish were abundant and we didn’t have to venture very far. But that is not the case today. Near-shore navigation and the use of *periya valai* (shore seines) have become problematic ever since boulders were dumped into the

sea for the laying of the plant’s pipelines.”

The plant has also depleted the area’s freshwater sources. During its construction, groundwater was pumped out continuously to sink deep foundations. This resulted in rapid depletion of the available underground sweet water, which eventually got replaced with intruding salt water from the sea. The area’s drinking water supply has been affected. A fact-finding team has noted that the CMWSSB violated coastal regulation zone notifications of 1991 and 2011 by pumping out fresh water from a CRZ area in addition to irreparably damaging the beach front.

“Our land and livelihoods have been compromised so that people in the city don’t go without water. We don’t get a drop of drinking water from the plant,” complains Santhosh.

The MoEFCC’s Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) which met in January 2017

questioned the need for setting up two additional desalination plants within a distance of 600 metres in addition to bringing up the significant issue of beach erosion which has plagued Nemmeli since the first plant was inaugurated in 2013. The EAC has deferred the project for want of information and has called for fresh studies to understand the impact of shoreline change in the area. It has also sought recommendations of the Tamil Nadu Coastal Zone Management Authority (TNCZMA) in connection with certain relevant provisions of the CRZ notification 2011.

Janakarajan insists that our aim should be to conserve water received during the monsoon months instead of resorting to options like desalination after letting fresh water run wastefully into the sea. “Desalination is extremely unfriendly to the environment, contributes to coastal ecological degradation in addition to being ir-

diculously expensive,” he says.

Brine concentrate and effluent management are huge concerns the world over. Despite advancements made at developing “zero liquid discharge” technologies, where the brine concentrate is converted into solids fit to be disposed at landfills, the costs remain prohibitive.

In spite of their heavy reliance on desalination, countries like Israel have invested heavily in securing their water sources and recycling used water. For example, Israel treats close to 85 per cent of its wastewater which it then uses for irrigation, gardening and industrial purposes. Another crucial element is strengthening water supply infrastructure to prevent losses arising from transit leakages. Even officials at the Israeli Water Authority recognise that efforts at strengthening infrastructure and recycling wastewater should precede desalination.

# LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

## An idyll that has vanished

The founding of Madras that is Chennai may be a matter of debate but not so that of its suburb – Collettpet or Kaladipettai as it is now referred to. Given our tendency to mix facts with fiction, locals aver that the latter name is correct and credit it to the holy feet (*kaal*) of Ramalinga Swami of Vadalur having walked this area. But he was born only in 1823. Moreover, the founding of this village, now a part of Chennai, is well documented. It was in 1717 that Governor Joseph Collet hit upon the idea of settling weavers from far-flung areas into a local colony. The place, just south of Tiruvottriyur, was named Collettpet after him and that in time morphed into Kulatipettah and still later to Kaladipettai. 2017 therefore marks the tercentenary of its founding.



Four-pillared Vahana Mandapam.

The Governor is now forgotten but his right-hand man, Viraraghava, or Virago Brahminy as he is referred to East India Company records, is not. For it was entirely due to his efforts that the village got a temple right in its midst. This is dedicated to Kalyana Varadaraja Perumal, the tutelary deity of Kanchi to whom Viraraghava is said to have been greatly attached. That he was also greatly attached to Podala Lingappa, the Governor of Poonamallee who has a street named after him in Kanchipuram, is less well known.

That proximity landed Viraraghava in trouble and he was dismissed from his position of Agent of the Company at the Golconda Court. But his closeness to Collet helped and when the latter became Governor in 1717, Viraraghava was reinstated as Telugu Writer to the EIC. This is perhaps the reason why a principal thoroughfare in Collettpet is still called Ezhuththukaran Street.

Collet exempted the settlers from quit rent for three years and also conferred some unspecified "minor privileges". In its first year of existence the figures were 104 houses, ten shops, a temple and 489 adult inhabitants. Shortly after the moving, Collettpet, along with neighbouring Tiru-

vottriyur, had to be defended by the EIC from the depredations of Nawab Sadatullah Khan. He was fended off successfully. Collet left India in 1719 and Viraraghava appears to have carried on with expanding the temple, at his personal expense, thereby bringing his family to its knees. We later see his son, Kolacherla Papiiah Brahminy, petitioning the Company for relief. He was given hereditary right to manage the temple.

Chances are that very few in Chennai have been to Collettpet. Most vehicles whizz past on the Tiruvottriyur High Road towards the industrial establishments up north. Wandering around the remarkably ugly locality today, for it is full of the



View of the main shrine at the Kalyana Varadarajaswami Temple, Collettpet.

most terribly constructed wedding halls, tenements, shops and markets, there is very little that you can trace to its origins. But the street names do point to a rich past. Sannadhi Street is in the middle, leading directly to the temple at the western extremis. At its opposite end, now separated from it by bustling Tiruvottriyur High Road is Market Lane, which leads to the sea. Branching off Sannadhi Street are Vanniyar and Chetty Streets (the regulation banning caste names has not yet been imposed on Collettpet and this is perhaps to the good as all the thoroughfares here would then be reduced to nameless streets) thereby indicating the castes that settled here.

In the mid 19th century, Collettpet became a holiday home for the wealthy Arya Vaisyas of George Town. The Calavala and Chimata families in particular had garden houses here. The former were the owners of King & Co. while the latter ran (and still run) Curzon & Co., their kinsmen doing business under the name of Wenlock & Co. In an account of the place, C. Seshachalam Chetty wrote of how it was full of traditional houses with open courtyards and coconut trees. Under the Arya Vaisyas, the arts flourished in Collettpet. Musicians and dancers performed regularly here. A family in residence was that of the eminent musician 'Tiger' Varadachariar. In a radio talk given in the 1940s, Tiger reminisced about Collettpet as an atelier and as to how it played an important role in him becoming a musician. His elder brother K.V. Srinivasa Iyengar within a very short life managed to compile one of the best collections of Tyagaraja's works and publish them. Tiger's younger brother 'Puliyodharai' Krishnamachariar was trained in music thanks to the munificence of the Chimata family and later became a well-known composer. Many of his songs are dedicated to the Kalyana Varadaraja Temple.

Walking around Collettpet today you can only wonder if all this happened. Seshachalam's idyll has vanished. It is clearly a colony that was once a landmark, now forgotten.

being a local tradition that the deity helps you to pass. A fourth sanctum, at right angles to the other three, is to Lord Rama. There are smaller sub-shrines to Vaishnavite Acharyas and a modern one to the nine planets. The temple has a tank within the premises, but devoid of water. A stone inscription in Telugu within the temple has it that the *vahanamandapam* (store house for processional icons), built by Sri Tava Ramanujam Chetty, the son of Venkataraghavulu Chetty, was completed on March 16, 1924. The deities do not have processions now.

More important is Jandrayar Street, for it tells us something of the weaving past of Collettpet. The Jandras, recognised as a caste now, are traditional weavers from Andhra and as early as the 1680s, Elihu Yale was taking steps to get them to settle in Madras. Collet evidently achieved that. Jandrayar Street would have been its original name and it is now corrupted to Jandrayar Street.

In keeping with its central position in the colony, the Perumal temple has four broad Mada Streets. There are two inner streets that hug the temple walls and these are the North and South Prakaram Streets. The temple faces east and has fronting it a beautiful four-pillared *mandapam* built in true copy of the Vijayanagar style. The small *gopuram* that Viraraghava built was demolished a couple of years ago and work is in slow progress on a larger *rajagopuram*. The temple courtyard has another four-pillared *mandapam* similar in style to the one outside. There are four sanctums, the biggest being for Kalyana Varadaraja. A stone forecourt has a human figurine in a supplicating posture on one of its pillars. Could this be Viraraghava? The Varadaraja sanctum is flanked by those to Perundevi Thayar and Andal. The latter's wall has many exam-roll numbers scribbled on it,

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Quizzin'  
with  
Ram'n'an

(Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's questions are from April 16th to 30th. Questions 11 to 20 relate to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. With what prestigious literary award was eminent Bengali poet and critic Sankha Ghosh honoured by the President on April 27th?
2. Name the spacecraft which recently dived successfully through the space between Saturn and its rings, a region no spacecraft has been before.
3. Which place off Mumbai is to be connected by India's first sea rope-way?
4. According to a Supreme Court ruling, what percentage of the net salary is the maintenance to be paid by a husband to his estranged wife as alimony?
5. The Olympic Council of Asia has decided to have which 'e-sport' as a full medal event at the 2022 Asian Games?
6. Who are the only three categories of people exempted from the ban on using red beacons on vehicles that came into effect on May 1st?
7. Which cricketer is the first to score 10,000 runs in the T20?
8. Apart from PM Modi, which other resident Indian features in *Time* magazine's list of '100 Most Influential People of 2017'?
9. In which Northeastern State was the Sumi Baptist Church, Asia's biggest church with a plinth area of 23,73,476 square feet, inaugurated recently?
10. Name the news website launched by the co-founder of Wikipedia Jimmy Wales in which professional journalists report news stories that are credible and will counter the spread of fake news.

\* \* \*

11. Which is the only place in Tamil Nadu named as a 'Swachh Iconic Place', a National-level initiative to keep it intensely clean and enhance the experience of visitors from India and abroad?
12. Name the P15A Guided Missile Destroyer, the largest ever destroyer built in the country, dedicated by the Indian Navy to the city of Chennai recently.
13. The English translation of Perumal Murugan's novel 'Mathorubhagan' has won the Sahitya Akademi's award for translation in English. What is it titled and who is the translator?
14. Name the other imposing building on the beachfront that J.J. Underwood of the Madras Engineers constructed along with Ice House.
15. What did the initials expand to in the name of U.V. Swaminatha Iyer aka 'Tamil Thatha'?
16. What is the term used for the style in which the *Tolkappiyam* has been written?
17. In which sport has the young S. Shrikrishna brought glory to himself and the State by winning National and World titles?
18. In the days of the Raj, which delicacies were called hoppers and string hoppers?
19. Who is the present vice-chancellor of Madras University?
20. If MGR was 'Puratchi Thalavar' and Vijayakanth 'Puratchi Kalaingar', then which actor is 'Puratchi Tamilan'?

(Answers on page 8)

## 90+ and still going strong

# 'Venkataraman now 93'

## — A railwayman's sign-off

The Tamil word *thuru-thuru*...energy in action and thought... is the word which best describes S. Venkataraman. And this is one 93-year-old whose matchless energy and infectious enthusiasm can floor even a teenager!

'Super busy' in his working life. And he has been working "a lot more vigorously" in the last ten years. Since 2010, he has self-published four well-researched volumes of Indian Railway history and a fifth is to come out soon. In 2010, he published *Indian Railways at a Glance*, in 2014 came his magnum opus, *Indian Railways: The Beginning up to 1900*, then *The Madras Railway from 1849*, followed by the *South Mahratta Railway 1888 to 1908*. He is currently working on the Pondicherry Railway!! Neither advancing years nor his limited personal resources have unsettled him at any point.

Joining the Railways as a materials manager (stores) in Hubli, he retired in 1982 as a stores officer at Diesel Loco Works in Varanasi. He began to write his first book "more than three decades after retiring". From 1982, he has used his spare time to travel, to collect details and take pictures of railway stations and trains throughout India. As one of the oldest members of the Indian Railways Fan Club Association, accessing Indian Railways' archives has meant crisscrossing the country, mostly shuttling between Chennai and Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and Bhubanes-

war, "whenever there is a need to find the material for the books" and "for the sheer joy I get from doing something that is creative and also connected to the Railways".

Growing older just means he is "more vigilant, stimulated and excited by ideas"! "I started by wanting to unearth something special on Indian Railways, when I found no one had written of its origins. Every little bit of information can be a potential nugget of history. How it began, with how many people, how did it develop,

● by  
Shobha Menon

what details of the broad gauge, metre gauge. So exciting a journey it has been! In each of the 16 railway areas, I have delved deep. Did you know the designations of different wagons can actually tell you of the products they carry... coal, petrol, etc? Even each Coach Number can be deciphered, according to its digits," he says excitedly.

"My vision is to now record in detail how varied foreign forces gained entry through the railways. When I write about the British connections with the railways starting from 1856 in Thane, I want to record how the Portuguese came to Daman and, of course, the Duplex connection with Pondicherry. It's a race against time!"

# Sewage proves beastly

(Continued from page 1)

sewage system that provides for laying two 80 km long, 6.5metre-wide tunnels placed 50 metres below ground level to carry sewage from feeder lines by gravity to the treatment plants. In Israel, about 50 per cent of agricultural water use is provided through reclaimed sewer water. Arab countries with scarce water employ similar treated and recycled usage of waste water and keep their public places adorned with lawns and flower beds, as, for instance, in Abu Dhabi.

Handling wastewater sewage and treating it for final re-use or

disposal in harmless form is a mammoth task and the biggest challenge that cities face everywhere and especially so in developing countries. With a possibility of water becoming a scarce resource, globally, we cannot afford for long to squander away much water to wash our waste and let it become a breeding base for squalor and disease. The Smart City funds provided by the Centre should be utilised for this urgent public health challenge which, by its criticality, can easily win the priority contest. Funds for such projects would also be available from multi-lateral finance institutions provided we put in our share which



Venkataraman at his desk in his library.

His laborious research on this love of his life was inspired by his late wife, Lalitha, who embarked on, and completed, her Ph.D. in her 40s!

Venkataraman used to occasionally contribute articles to the journal *Rail Business*. Somewhere along the line he felt "why not compile this information into books on Railway history?" His rummaging through dusty tomes in search of 'railway vignettes' even led him to IRFCA, the Indian Railways Fans' Club of America.

Hailed as "a rare repository of knowledge of Railway Heritage, a veritable treasure house and a living Wikipedia on the subject," this Railway aficionado's keen eye for detail is constantly evident. 'Guruji' to his innumerable admirers in the railways, his advancing years have not diminished his infectious enthusiasm for the railways. His books "appeal not only to railway fans but also to scholars and historians," remarked former General Manager, Southern Railways, V. Anand.

Venkataraman talks of his usual routine. "Write, Write, Write... with small breaks for light nourishment"! Surrounded by books and railway history material, of all sizes and shapes, he confesses, "Sometimes, I wake up in the middle

of the night to jot down ideas. I handle all the copying and book work, myself, usually during my post-lunch hours, when I try and also pick up some vegetables for my daughter-in-law's kitchen! Once I return, after that brief contact with the community in my area, I'm back to my job of compiling the history of the Indian Railways, and what a magnificent history it has been. My work may be considered challenging by others but I feel great to be able to do such work!"

Keeping fit means to him, "Eat less, drink more fluids." "When you eat more, all the extra stuff will only deposit in various organs within your system and cause you trouble," he smiles mischievously. He then muses, "Why do senior citizens spend most of their time discussing when the next pay commission is, or the interest that has accrued on their bank FDs? They need to realise that for their own sakes, it is important to find a reason to give back to society in some way. And the reasons are many, and all around us. It will give you much to do, and keep you in good mental and physical health!" He then adds, "on Sundays I spend some time in the temple, morning and evening. All other 'work days', are still very busy."

Cricket and music are Venkataraman's other passions! "I used to play lots of cricket in high school and nothing can take me away from the TV during important matches. I'm waiting to watch Dhoni and Kohli in IPL action soon!" his eyes twinkle delightfully. "The music season in Chennai is special too... I love listening to the classics of Chembai Vaidyanatha Bagavathar, Musiri Subramania Iyer or K.B. Sundarambal. And Chittur Subramania Pillai is my all-time favourite!"

Venkataraman, concluding our meeting, says, "The nineties have just made me even more confident and I'm always thinking 'What next?!' And then he says, "Venkataraman now 93"; his signature sign-off in his lightning quick responses to all mails!

can be released by cutting out vote-seeking freebies.

Till a comprehensive sewage management project, using latest technology, that would stand good for several decades is conceived and executed, money and effort spent on river front and beach beautification and similar schemes of cosmetic nature smack of a basic misunderstanding of priorities. Chennai is naturally well-endowed and a beautification scheme can wait for its turn. What citizens want more is a safe and healthy sewage disposal project. Beauty needs to be rescued from the Beast.

# The Portuguese first on the Coromandel

The waters of the Indian Ocean, which facilitated free movement of people, commodities and ideas for long, became the major theatre for confrontations between various commercially motivated European powers from the 16th Century onwards. The Portuguese were the first to claim supremacy over the Indian Ocean.

Afonso de Albuquerque realised that Portuguese interests in India could be well protected only by maintaining a centralised system of control in the Indian Ocean and also by keeping Malacca, Hormuz and the mouth of the Red Sea as part of their power-pillars.

From the second decade of the 16th Century, there evolved bi-partite divisions of the Indian Ocean, which again got modified by the 1550s so as to have a tripartite division. The centralised control of the Portuguese

over the Indian Ocean, which included a tentative power centre in Goa, and supporting bases in Malacca and Hormuz, and a patrolling mechanism at the mouth of the Red Sea, started crumbling immediately after the death of Albuquerque. It happened mainly because of the pressure from the married Portuguese private traders.

During this period, these traders organised themselves as pressure groups, particularly in Cochin, and they wanted less state control in trade and a more liberal atmosphere to expand their commercial activi-

● by  
**Pius Malekandathil**  
Professor, Centre for  
Historic Studies,  
JNU, New Delhi

ties. As they found the State to be a stumbling block for their private commercial activities, they put pressure on the Portuguese authorities to earmark space for them, to conduct private trade. The lobbying group of private traders ultimately got the upper hand with the nomination of Lopo Soares de Albergia as the new Governor in 1515.

The eastern space of the Indian Ocean was then earmarked as an exclusive space for the private trade of the married Portuguese traders, known as casado traders, while the western space of the Indian Ocean was earmarked as the space for Crown commerce. The Crown instituted mechanisms of power like establishing *cartaz* (fortress) and a patrolling armada in the western Indian Ocean to protect their monopoly trade, while the Portuguese private traders, who were married to Muslim women, began to move more and more towards the Coromandel and other places in the eastern Indian Ocean – in the company of their Muslim relatives. By the 1520s, their number rose to 300 and they had established a long chain of Portuguese enclaves from Punnaikayal and Vedalai on the Pearl Fishery coast to Nagapattinam at the mouth of Kaveri, Devanampattinam near Pondicherry, Mylapore near Madras and Pulicat. The expansion of the Portuguese in the western Indian Ocean was a crown-sponsored project,

while the Portuguese expansion in the eastern was a result of mercantile expansion of the Portuguese private traders. In order to keep the eastern Indian Ocean as a commercial space, the Portuguese Crown slowly withdrew from the monopoly trade in spices in Southeast Asia (from Malacca in 1533, and Moluccas in 1537), and refrained from the use of control devices like fortresses and patrolling fleets on the Coromandel coast.

Eventually some of these Portuguese private traders, joining hands with the Muslim traders, even began to attack the vessels of the Portuguese Crown, as happened in 1537, when they found the Portuguese State to be their common enemy and the Portuguese vessels to be their common target of attacks. The Portuguese *casados* built ships for the Muslim corsairs and helped them to enlarge their fleet.

In 1537, Diogo Fenandes wrote to King John III that the Portuguese, who were married to native Muslim women, were giving protection and support to the Muslim corsairs. Seeing the eastern Portuguese settlements as a threat to the Crown's projects, Portuguese officialdom twice ordered – in 1547 and 1568 – military preparations to destroy these private settlements on the east coast of India and to bring the Portuguese settlers in these places to the official Portuguese enclaves on the west coast of India.

Eventually, after the 1540s, the Portuguese identified certain regions as fringe areas in the Indian Ocean where the Portuguese power centre had no control. Portuguese private traders, adventurers and renegades began to move in considerable numbers, to such peripheral areas like Bengal, Pegu, Tenasserim, Moluccas, Timor, and, later, Japan, in order to escape from the rigorous control of the power centre at Goa. Though these peripheral areas remained outside the zones of direct control of the Portuguese authorities of Goa, attempts were often made by the Lusitanians to tame them and integrate them with the power centre at Goa, with the help of multiple sets of missionaries who made frequent visits. (Courtesy: *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*.)

## WORKSHOP DATES

For adults

May 19-21: Rajasthani Miniature painting on canvas supervised by Madan Lal (At Dakshina-Chitra).

May 20: Workshop on Terracotta jewellery making. Earthen clay will be moulded into different shapes, either rough or glazed

finish, embossed with patterns, fired and made into wearable jewellery (DakshinaChitra).

For children

May 21: Miniature animal/birds figures made using clay, then fired and painted. Inhouse Ceramist Potrarasan will supervise (At DakshinaChitra).

# Discovering a neighbourhood

A small shrine dedicated to Lord Vinayaka on the landing step of a small block of apartments, fronting a busy road. On the opposite side, a shrine for Mother Mary embedded into the boundary wall of Dhyana Ashram.

The former, a more recent structure, the latter a few centuries old. Two sides of a city neighbourhood sandwiched between San Thomé and Mandavelipakkam which goes back in time, to many centuries.

Recently, on a Sunday, I was with a group of heritage enthusiasts who are attempting to create a cultural map of the Adyar river. From its source to its drop into the sea.

The Sunday tour was to be a *rece* of sorts.

The idea was to take a close look at places on the banks of the river that have a history of their own. We were restricting ourselves to the northern zone of the Adyar Creek.

A Christian quarter dominates one end of this neighbourhood. And I am familiar with it, having had long sittings with a few residents whose grandparents came to settle here. In this once sandy expanse of groves, settled the early Christian converts. And in this space arose houses and churches which these people made their own.

These people carried their culture and traditions to their new home and place of worship and this intense loyalty left sharp imprints in this part of our city.

Life revolved around the church. And the people had a say in everything. Even in the manner in which festivals of patron saints were celebrated, rights of elders and the place of the religious.

There is evidence of the history of this neighbourhood in the church and on and off the streets of this area.

The tiled street houses have made way for huge blocks of apartments. And yet, the practice of planting a framed picture of the family's patron saint on the door or doorframe continues.

The celebrations of the feast of Saint Lazarus are now shorter in duration and less grand but the practice of the cars (*ther*) carrying the images of the saints stopping at the houses of the elders of the once-dominant community is followed. That Sunday as we walked through the inner streets of this area – Lazarus Church Road, Malayappan Street and Madha Church Road, the thin layers of the past showed themselves up.

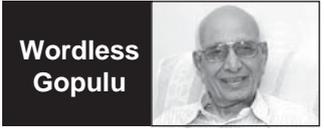
And then, we were in a new zone – Mandavelipakkam.

Once dominated by a palace, a hotel and a film studio, then by the sprawling bungalows of the wealthy and then, developed by the City Improvement Trust as part of this city's planned housing projects for the middle-class.

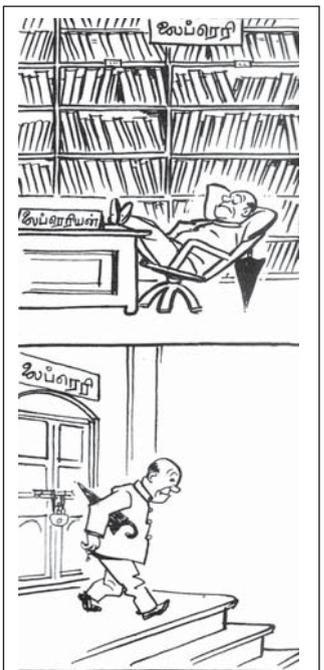
Today, the area still offers large plots for development as apartments.

Fascinating are the histories of our neighbourhoods. – (Courtesy: *Mylapore Times*.)

– Vincent D'Souza



**Wordless Gopulu**  
● The late Gopulu during his *Ananda Vikatan* days had a series of wordless jokes that brought about loud laughter. These were brought out as a book, in 2005, and a copy was recently sent to me by Charukesi. We are pleased to publish these cartoons for a new generation of Madrasis.  
– THE EDITOR



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To reach out to as many readers as possible who share our keen interest in Madras that is Chennai, and in response to requests from many well-wishers – especially from outside Chennai and abroad who receive their postal copies very late – for an online edition. *Madras Musings* is now on the web at [www.madrasmusings.com](http://www.madrasmusings.com)  
– THE EDITOR

# Two champions from the city

Like the Krishnans, father and son, and the Amritraj brothers who through their deeds boosted the image of Indian tennis and generated a special interest in the sport in the city and Tamil Nadu, two young women players from the State, Joshna Chinappa and Dipika Pallikal Karthik, have taken squash to a new level in the country.

Of immediate note is the historical happening recently at the Express Avenue Mall, when Joshna became the first Indian to win the Asian Championship. Her friend, rival and an equally talented competitor Dipika was the runner-up. For 21 years, India's best in this event had been a runner-up spot, which the former national champion Misha Grewal had earned in the 1996 edition. Ever since, even though Joshna herself and Dipika too had made it to the semi-finals,

Grewal's best had remained India's best.

All that changed that Sunday evening at the most unlikely venue for a sporting event, a shopping mall. If the portable court was unique, then the happenings for Indian squash were the rarest of the rare. Not just Joshna and Dipika, but also Saurav Ghosal (who incidentally now is Dipika's brother-in-law, having married her sister) in the men's section combined to place Indian squash right there at the top.

It has been a great journey for both Joshna and Dipika. Four years separate the two in age, with Joshna the senior, but the two grew up virtually together from school days on the squash scene at the Madras Cricket Club until the Indian Squash Academy took stock of their talent and moulded them. The vision of N. Rama-

chandran, an ardent squash lover, ensured the establishment of the Indian Squash Academy which has virtually shaped the lives of several young talents. It was during his tenure as the Secretary General of the Squash Rackets Federation of India that the ISA became a reality at the turn of

● by  
**S.R. Suryanarayan**

the Millennium, with both the State and Centre backing the facility. Today it is an institution that has already helped script several wonderful moments for Indian squash.

Unlike many juniors of their time, both Joshna and Dipika decided that nothing else would drive them more than excelling in squash. So, step by step, they rose, winning national champi-

onships. Soon they fortified their reputations with international triumphs. The key moments were the British Junior Open titles, considered akin to winning the Wimbledon Juniors in tennis. Joshna won the U-19 and U-17 titles while Dipika bagged an U-17 title. This was followed by admirable performances in the Asian and World junior championships. Both have won Asian U-19 titles, while Joshna has also finished runner-up in the World Juniors. Aside from their individual performances, both were key to India's good showing in team events, be it in the SAF Games, Asian Games or Asian Championships. The culmination of this remarkable run was the first ever doubles gold medal win in the Commonwealth Games in 2014.

Despite taking part in several tournaments, including the professional PSA events (both have been top 10 players at one time in the PSA circuit), the two very rarely met face-to-face on the court. Not unexpectedly when the two met, sparks flew. It happened in the national



Dipika Pallikal (left) and Joshna Chinappa.

championship where Dipika took the upper hand and then again in the Incheon Asian Games in 2014 where Joshna had to accept the next best finish. The Asian Championship in Chennai changed the scenario in a pulsating final. In keeping with their ratings, the edge-of-the-seat contest gave little away to suggest who would emerge the winner until the final points of the deciding fifth game! By then there was enough drama, even a precarious slip and fall that Dipika suffered – though, thankfully, not serious. Joshna ultimately won and that was history, and affirmation of India's rise as a force in Asian squash led by Joshna and Dipika.

## A TREAT TO THE SENSES

(Continued from page 5)

Building 4 is a present-day structure housing the children's gallery. The museum for children in the complex houses several static exhibits such as galleries of dolls adorned with costumes of various nations and civilisations and also exhibits relating to science and technology. Of particular interest here is the electronic animated model of the atomic power plant at Kalpakkam.

The National Art Gallery, the iconic heritage building, is

under restoration and its exhibits have been shifted to the Contemporary Arts building. The National Art Gallery items include traditional paintings, Indian miniature artworks, paintings of Thanjavur and other antique and traditional paintings. Contemporary art includes portraits of British Governors and Ravi Varma's paintings.

Particularly satisfying was the walk-through sculpture garden (with Thirthankara, Gan-  
esha and Maha Vishnu sculp-

tures). The open-air display of ancient stone sculptures surrounded by a garden could well have been the high water mark of the entire museum complex but for the fact that the surroundings were so poorly maintained, with un-cleared rubbish and plastic strewn all over.

Four of the buildings are air-conditioned either fully or partially. In the main building, windows are open, though with netting. The surrounding trees thankfully provide some protection against dust and noise.

Many trees were lost in the last cyclone a couple of months ago reducing the dust protection. Rs. 10 crore has been sanctioned for a major restoration programme to be completed by the end of 2018. Horticulture, restoration of the heritage structures, adding an extra 4,000 sq. ft. to rearrange displays, modernising the 17 of the 54 galleries that need improvement are all part of the renovation plan. After the proposed restoration, the Egmore Museum could well stake its claim to be among the best in the East. We seem to be sitting on a gold mine, unaware of it.

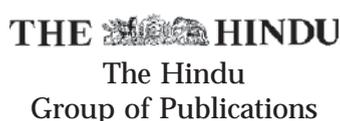
## Answers to Quiz

1. Jnanpith Award, 2. Cassini, 3. Elephanta Island, 4. 25 per cent 5. Video Gaming, 6. President, Vice-President and Chief Justice of India, 7. Chris Gayle, 8. Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma, 9. Nagaland, 10. Wikitribune.

\* \* \*

11. Madurai Meenakshi Temple, 12. INS Chennai, 13. One Part Woman and Aniruddhan Vasudevan, 14. The Masonic Temple of the Lodge of Perfect Unanimity (now the DGP HQ), 15. Utthamadhanapuram Venkatasubramanian, 16. Noorpa, or short formulaic compositions, 17. Cue sports (billiards and snooker), 18. Aapam and Idiaapam, 19. No one! It is vacant and the office is managed by a Syndicate committee, 20. Sathyaraj.

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