

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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### INSIDE

- Short 'N' Snappy
- Doubting Thomas
- The culture divide
- A cancer patient's search
- Chennai's new hope

# So indifferent to heritage

## Who will save the Madrasa-e-Azam?

(By The Editor)

Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad is a splendidly restored heritage structure. Its most distinctive feature is its stairway – a pair of curving steps in front which, aerially, gave the building the look of a scorpion. Our city too had one and a much older building at that – the building presently known as the Madrasa-e-Azam and once *Umdah Bagh*, a property of the Nawabs of Arcot. If the Government has its way, the building will soon make way for a wedding hall.

Located on Mount Road, this is a historic property. In 1816, Colah Singanna Chetty, a dubash, owned it. The Armenian millionaire Edward Samuel Moorat later bought it. Ghulam Ghouse Khan, the last of the titular nawabs, who died in 1855, subsequently acquired it. From him it passed on to Her Highness Azim Un Nissa Begum, *nikah* wife of the Nawab. Though owned by her, the house was rented by the principal wife of the Nawab, Khair Un Nissa Begum and became the social epicentre of the Muslim aristocracy in Madras. This was where luminaries such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, and His Exalted Highness Mir Mahbub Ali Khan Bahadur, the Nizam of Hyderabad, stayed when they visited Madras. The curving steps of Falaknuma could well have been inspired by *Umdah Bagh*, for the Prime Minister of Hyderabad, Sir Vicar Ul Umrah, who built the palace, was also part of the Nizam's entourage.

In the late 19th Century, the property came to be owned by the Gujarati business family of Lodd Krishnadoss Balamukunddoss. In 1901, the All

India Muslim Educational Conference was held in Madras and a request was made that the Madrasa-e-Azam, founded in 1849 and functioning till then at Chepauk, be given the property. The Government acquired *Umdah Bagh* from the Lodd family, who were kind enough to sell it at less than market rates on coming to know that it was to be used for an educational institution. The Madrasa-e-Azam, then, came to be housed in the original *Umdah Bagh* palace, which is now in a serious state of disrepair. The Diwan Khana of Firuz Hussain Khan Bahadur, principal agent to the Begum, became the residence of the Principal of the school. A mosque was built in the campus in 1909. In the



• The Madrasa-e-Azam today (above) and (below) as it was in the 1980s. (Today's photo: Shantanu Krishnan)

same compound was set up the Government Mohammedan College in 1919, which acquired its handsome set of buildings within the compound in 1934. The institution became the Government Women's College after Independence and, subsequently came to include

(Continued on page 2)



## Social progress in TN needs speed-up

The Institute for Social Competitiveness, India, has published a Social Progress Index for individual States and for the country. Tamil Nadu, with an overall score of 65.34 for Social Progress has done much better than the country score of 54.90. India itself ranks 98 out of 133 listed countries, which is not something to crow about.

Social Progress is divided in the Study into three dimensions. The first dimension is **Basic Human Needs** comprising nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter and personal safety. The second is **Well Being Needs** under which are included basic education, access to information and communication, health and pollution-free environment. The third dimension is **Opportunity** comprising per-

sonal rights, freedom of choice and inclusiveness.

From the scores for 2016, it is seen that, generally, smaller States have done well, recording good scores although their GDP size is smaller. Their scores are as follows – Goa 63.39,

Himachal 65.39, Kerala 68.09, Mizoram 62.89 and Uttarakhand 64.23. Contrast these with traditionally well administered bigger States like Maharashtra at 57.88, Karnataka at 59.72 and Tamil Nadu at 65.34.

Within the country, Tamil Nadu tops the list, not taking smaller States into reckoning. Ranking is misleading in some

ways. You could be a very good performer but low in rank because the class is made up of excellent performers. One being only just above average could shine in a class of mediocrity. Looking at the absolute score of 65.34, it is just above

the "middle" category. So, we cannot rest on the distinction of being near the top in the country.

Deeper analysis of the components of each of the three dimensions of the Index provides insight into what our State needs to work on to improve its social progress record. On **Basic Needs**, we seem to be doing very well with a score of 76.25,

but baffling is the high score of 91.28 on water and sanitation that does not tally with our everyday observation and experience.

On **Well Being**, the State's performance is 58.84, falling into the average category. **Well Being** comprises environmental quality, health issues like life expectancy, prevalence of respiratory infections, unsatisfactory level of enrolment in primary and secondary schools, school drop-out rate and gender parity. Greater attention in terms of investment and raising institutional efficacies at the grassroots is necessary on these fronts.

On **Opportunities**, we just emerge out of the average category at 60.92. The components that offer scope for (Continued on page 2)

• by A Special Correspondent

## SO INDIFFERENT TO HERITAGE

(Continued from page 1)

Quaid-e-Milleth in its name, in honour of Muhammad Ismail Sahib, leader of the Indian Union Muslim League.

Since then, the Madrasa-e-Azam campus has all been steadily downhill. The Government did precious little to preserve the property. The main structure weakened over the years and parts of it began collapsing. Even then nothing was done. Then, a couple of years ago, the main wing came crashing down. Still there was no action. Now, for some reason, the place is all in the news and a

minister has announced that a wedding hall will come up here. The standard operating procedure of the Government has been followed in full – do nothing to preserve a heritage structure, wait for it to weaken/catch fire/collapse, then announce demolition.

There is a small ray of hope. The Nawab of Arcot has appealed to be allowed to run the school and take over the place. This being an institution for minorities, there may be some mulling over the idea on the part of Government. Given the school's heritage, the Nawab deserves a positive response.

## Social progress in TN needs speed-up

(Continued from page 1)

improvement are in respect of child labour, and access to higher education, like technical institutes.

In sum, health and education emerge as critical factors for social progress and this is corroborated by other studies as well. Funds assigned for health and education are good indicators of policy priority and can be ascertained by comparing Budget allocations for the years 2010-11 and 2017-18 as cited in Budget Speeches. Health related issues were earmarked for Rs. 7265 crore in 2010-11 and Rs. 32,231 crore in 2017-18 reflecting a 4.44 times increase and, in terms of share of total expenditure, it grew from approximately 9 per cent to 16 per cent. Even allowing for inflation and corresponding reduction in real value, the increased importance accorded to the health sector is indeed remarkable. On Education, the corresponding numbers are Rs. 11,899 crore and Rs. 30,762 crore, 2.6 times increase and share remaining constant at 15 per cent.

Overall, the readjusted priorities under the new Government cannot be faulted. It is time, therefore, for the Government to focus on improving the project selection process to ensure higher impact and effective implementation. A bot-

toms-up participative approach to project identification would ensure that government schemes address community needs and produce maximum impact. A pre-requisite for good governance is also a mechanism that provides for honest feedback on the effect of governmental policies and actions on outcomes. Feedback published at predictable periodicity also serves the need for transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

Studies such as this one enable governments to look back objectively on the impact they have been able to create in terms of actual experience at the recipients' end. But, specially focused outcome evaluation studies at regular intervals should be commissioned; government should not wait for surveys of external agencies done in a larger context. Quantified findings help to identify areas for increasing public investment and areas where investment has been adequate but not effective, calling for strategy review. Besides being able to prioritise public investments, findings of such studies help sectoral and geographical identification of projects for private sector participation through CSR funding. Companies with CSR funds are on the look out for "good" projects and reliable implementing agencies.

### MADRAS MUSINGS ON THE WEB

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

## An evening at Museum Theatre

Now, Chief, *The Man from Madras Musings* knows how touchy you are on matters concerning heritage and, so, let MMM inform you upfront that he has nothing against the Museum Theatre per se. It is an excellent piece of architecture and its round form makes it stand out. And it is one of the few heritage buildings in our city that has been preserved rather well. But what of the amenities, Chief? Don't you think these could do with some improvement?

It was just the other day that MMM went to attend a play at the place. Having driven up to the gate he was informed by a watchman that he ought to proceed to the right and park. When asked if there was a specific place to park in, the man simply waved in a wide sweeping manner, thereby indicating that MMM

specialist in case you did not watch out which you Chief, had not, and twisted ankle after taking a tumble.

MMM had barely seated himself when he realised that in all the struggle to get in and find his seat he had not bothered to use the toilet. There being a few minutes before the curtain rose, MMM decided to go and relieve himself. He made his way to the door and wandered around the curved corridor looking for signs that could direct him to the toilets. Having found none, MMM asked a man who was clearly on the Museum payroll and looked as though he had been around since its inauguration. He looked surprised that someone was actually asking for a

you at odd spots. And when you get up to leave, they snap back like an irate University don asked a particularly silly question by a student. In case you don't move away in time, a part of your rear can actually be retained by the seat and later no doubt used for building the 'Varsity's DNA bank.

The air-conditioning system here too is of a time period when cooling meant lots of attendants with handheld fans. Apparently, or so MMM understands, the original system designed for the hall no longer works and so they have several banks of airconditioners that are stationed at the rear of the halls. Those who are unfortunate to sit near these are bound to be frozen to death, also, given the noise these machines make can hardly hear any of the speeches that are delivered

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

could park anywhere in the vast and, may MMM add, rather ill-kept compound. MMM duly drove right and found that there was really no earmarked parking space and he could do so anywhere. He selected a suitable spot located between two trees and, more importantly, rather close to the gates. This was in case the play was a complete frost and MMM had to make a quick getaway. Too often in places like this where parking spaces are not demarcated clearly, you cannot leave until the end of the programme. Cars are bound to block your way.

There was no fear of this here for the driveway was just a few inches from MMM's car and so nobody could really block MMM in case he decided to do a bolt. It was only after MMM had switched off the headlights that he realised that there were no lampposts to guide MMM from car to theatre. Or, to be precise, no working lamppost. MMM had to get down and literally grope his way to the theatre. True, the lights from the building did guide MMM, but they did not allow him to detect soft soil at various spots in the garden. In some places, the mud, together with fallen leaves, had formed a rather rich oatmeal like substance and that clung to MMM's shoes like glue. It was thus that MMM staggered on and reached the theatre proper.

He was ushered in and only then did it strike him that the steps here are rather steep. And, so, MMM was doubly careful. As he walked towards his seat he did notice that in some places there was a sharp drop of at least six inches between the chairs and the aisle. A wrongly placed foot could turn you into a somersault

toilet and then deigned to direct MMM. You had to go down the steps, take a right, cross the portico and then plunge into what looked like a place of eternal night and somewhere out there was a toilet. MMM wondered if it was really worth all the trouble. What if he slipped on some of the oatmeal and hurt himself? Nobody would notice till the morning and then it may be too late. MMM slunk back into the theatre.

### At the University

*The Man from Madras Musings* happened to relate this experience to a friend who immediately replied that this was nothing compared to the travails people experience at the University Centenary Auditorium. MMM reflected on this and had to agree with his friend. The Museum Theatre at least has ample parking space. That is not something that the University campus can boast of.

And as for the auditorium, the less said the better. MMM is not sure if you have ever been there, but in case you have, you are sure to agree with him. There is, firstly, the seating, which is most peculiar – rows in three different axes with a distant stage. The arrangement makes sure you have a better view of what is happening in rows opposite you than of the stage itself. Then you have the seats which were clearly made for a different era. They have no idea about the requirement of modern posteriors and, rather like academics who are these days accused of inappropriate behaviour, rather prone to pinch

here. Of course, on the three occasions that MMM did attend an event at this auditorium, the speeches were so bad that he did consider the noisy ACs to be something of a blessing.

As for the toilets here, these too are of a sound vintage. But hardly anyone uses them. This is more because the Uni's auditorium is invariably used only when some top-ranking VIP chooses to address lesser mortals. That means security and that in turn means the unfortunate audience has to be in place at least a few hours before the actual event. And once seated, nobody is allowed to get up until the VIP comes, speaks and leaves. Consequently, people are afraid of even getting up to answer calls of nature. This, of course, is sometimes a blessing for given the condition of the loos here, you may be better off not using them, or even getting to know them.

### Tailpiece

*The Man from Madras Musings* is aware that medicine is a science and, as is well known, Alfred Nobel thought so too. So too did this pharmacy evidently, as can be seen from the picture below.



–MMM

## ● Putting Chennai at risk

# Shrinking wetlands, felling trees

It is the network of blue and green that provides climate resilience to Chennai city – blue of its wetlands and green of its patches of vegetation. However, this combination that had been protecting the city in the past is today under stress. The shrinking of blue and green has drastically reduced Chennai's ability to deal with extreme weather events.

Just 15 months after a massive flood in November-December 2015 battered the city, the residents suffered a serious drought during the summer of 2017. Even while sporadic rains over the city since the onset of the Southwest Monsoon in June 2017 have given respite from the drought, residents fear that there could be flooding with the Northeast Monsoon.

Chennai, which receives up to 60 per cent of its annual rainfall from the Northeast

● **Chennai has lost much of its climate resilience due to the shrinking of its wetlands and forest patches, which has drastically reduced the city's ability to soak up excess rainwater, writes S. Gopikrishna Warriar.**

the green cover within the city. As the blue (of the wetlands and water bodies) and green (vegetation cover) decreased in the past three decades over the Chennai metropolitan area, the red of built up area increased.

"Under the resilience framework, megacities are characterised as uncertain environments," says Vencatesan. "We do not know whether climate change is causing the uncer-

tal Panel on Climate Change (IPCC-SREX) stated this for the first time to policymakers.

Since there are indications of an increasing trend in EREs over Chennai, the network of wetlands and forests is important to provide resilience against such extreme weather events. These have been part of the natural landscape over which the city was built with rapid speed in recent decades.

For a coastal city with an almost level gradient, wetlands and forests serve as the points from which water recharges into the aquifer. They act like sponges on the city floor. The four rivers that run from west to east across the city – Araniyar, Kosasthalaiyar, Cooum and Adyar – serve as the drainage channels for excess stormwater to flow into the sea. This network is complemented by the Buckingham Canal, which runs north to south across the city, and other smaller canals.

"The rivers and canals of Chennai have a clear role as flood control channels," says Paul Appasamy, former Director of the Madras School of Economics. "The natural hydrology of the city was forgotten and haphazard construction and development was done on the banks of the waterways obstructing their flow. This amplified the flooding of end-2015."

There is an added obstruction to the flow of floodwater into the sea. Both the Cooum and Adyar have sand banks at their mouths. Construction of the sea wall for the Chennai Port in the northern part of the city has resulted in coastal erosion north of the structure and accretion south of it. Thus, over recent decades, while the sea has eroded in north Chennai, swallowing fishing hamlets and old temples, the Marina Beach has been growing in width. The very same process has been building sand banks, obstructing the flow of the Cooum and Adyar into the sea.

It was the loss of the wetlands and forest patches that drastically reduced the city's ability to soak excess rainwater and use it during the lean months. Since the opening of TIDEL Park in 2000, the city has radiated out through a southern axis almost all the way to Mamallapuram. This has been at the expense of a network of wetlands that ultimately drained into the Pallikaranai marsh.



The Pallikaranai marsh in the southern part of the city with streams draining into it. (Photo by S. Gopikrishna Warriar.)

Monsoon expects this year's rains to be at least average or better than that. With the city's ability to deal with intense rains decreasing, there are chances of waterlogging and floods. Even by its very nature, the Northeast Monsoon that brings rains to Chennai is different to the Southwest Monsoon. The Northeast Monsoon is mostly a string of depressions or cyclones, which bring heavy rain over a few days. The destruction caused by the 130 km per hour winds and rains of Cyclone Vardah in December 2016 only adds to the fear of citizens.

"Unless the city's landscape is resilient, the people cannot be resilient," says Jayshree Vencatesan, managing trustee of Care Earth Trust. "We are only coping because there is no other choice. Each extreme weather event hits us hard."

Using historical geo-spatial data, Care Earth Trust has developed maps that show the relationship of water bodies to built-up area in the city and

tainty or whether our messing up of the city's environment is causing it."

The development of the maps is part of a process to understand Chennai's landscape and environment, according to her. There is inadequate data and insufficient understanding of the land use changes in the city and where population density is increasing. As a result, there is lack of clarity on the consequences of that change, especially with the ability to deal with extreme weather events. "We don't have the detailed nuts and bolts understanding, and unless we have the data, our ability to deal with the situation is also not there," Vencatesan adds.

There is evidence of increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events (EREs) not just in Chennai but also across India, even though their direct link with climate change is still considered tenuous. The 2012 special report on extreme events by the Intergovernmen-

## ● A READER WRITES

# Really deserving of gratitude

We Indians are generally a whining, cribbing, complaining lot. We complain about power cuts, bad roads, stagnant water, dengue, traffic snarls, corruption. Well, the list is endless.

But we fail to see how the Government has taken care of our mental health and well-being, especially those of senior citizens. Medical journals say the brain cells do not degenerate if kept active, so your chance of getting senile dementia is much less. Now let me justify my heading.

As a senior citizen I have to prove to the Government the following – that I am not a cheat trying to evade tax, I have not borrowed heavily from banks and am not trying to flee the country, I have not accumulated black money, I am paying my GST dues regularly, and so on. Now all this keeps my brain active and agile.

Just as I was feeling complacent about my cerebral powers, something happened that shook me out of my comfort zone. My income from rents, interest from deposits, all electronically transferred, stopped altogether. Did I miss any new rule announced by our Prime Minister on the eve of his departure to China? All important announcements are made on the eve of his going abroad. Did he say that unless and until I proved the house was built with clean money the tenant need not pay rent? Things took a turn for the worse next week. My son's salary was not credited too.

It was left to a septuagenarian tenant of mine to solve the mystery. He pointed out that the IFSC code of the Bank Branch had been changed following the merger of the bank with SBI. Neither the smaller bank nor SBI had informed the clients of this fact. Well, to cut a long story short, we had to inform our contacts of the new code. Some MNCs insisted on a new cheque book to prove our bonafides. All this took a lot of time, effort and energy.

On a more serious note, the Government is contemplating merger of more banks for reasons best known to them. With the brute majority it enjoys, it can put it through. If and when it happens, we senior citizens dependent on pensions and interest from deposits should not be caught unawares. You should be alert enough to inform the sources of your income about the change in the bank codes.

By force of habit I am attaching my Aadhar, Pan Card, KYC documents in triplicate, my driving license, my GST number all duly attested. If, in case, you want to see the original, no problem I shall bring it to your office whenever you want. If you are on leave when I come or have gone out for lunch and may not come for the day again, no problem I shall come again the next day.

After all, the walk and climbing stairs would take care of my physical well-being as well. With both my mental and physical well-being taken care of, what more could I want.

Prema Raman  
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According to Vencatesan, there were almost 50 water bodies that were linked to the Pallikaranai marsh through a network of cascading channels. Many of them have been built over. The natural forests along their banks have also been removed. Radial roads that connect the Old Mahabalipuram Road with the Chennai-Trichy highway have bisected the Pallikaranai marsh along multiple axes. Embankments were created across the marsh to build these roads, thereby disturbing the natural flow dynamics in the marsh.

"The wetlands in Chennai are like the arteries and veins of the city," observes Ritesh Kumar, conservation programme manager, Wetlands International South Asia. "These have been under tremendous stress from development pressures in the past

two decades and have been losing their ability to hold water when needed and control floods during heavy rains."

He feels that the Wetland Conservation and Management Rules (2017), notified by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on September 26, 2017, can help conserve the remaining wetlands. "There are two points of strength for the new rules. First, it gives powers to State governments to identify wetlands (which are not protected areas already) and develop conservation and management plans and implement them. Two, it stresses the principle of wise use for these wetlands. Most of the wetlands are not 'no go' areas, and they can be conserved and managed in a sustainable manner through wise use."

(Continued on page 6)

CHARIVARI – 8

The Ellis Florence Nightingale influenced



R.S. Ellis, M.C.S.

Who is Ellis Road off Mount Road named after? The competition is between two individuals – Francis Whyte Ellis of the Madras School of Orientalism fame and Robert Staunton Ellis who had a long and distinguished career in the Madras Civil Services. Given his love for Tamil, I sincerely hope it is the former, but then R.S. Ellis could well be the man.

The last entry in the Indian Charivari concerning someone from Madras is on R.S. Ellis. His father, Sir Henry Ellis, was an illegitimate son of the fourth Earl of Buckinghamshire and rose to become a diplomat, serving in Persia, China, Brazil, Africa and Brussels. His career, however, began with the East India Company (EIC) where he served in Bengal as the Private Secretary to the President of the Board of Control. Perhaps following in his father's footsteps, Robert Ellis too joined the EIC, becoming a part of the Madras Civil Services in 1844. He worked initially in Coimbatore and Tanjore and then went on home leave in 1848, much to the distress of the Madras Literary Society (MLS) from which he had borrowed a couple of books and forgotten to return them. The money was duly extracted from him when he returned and took charge as Assistant Collector of Customs, Madras.

In 1854, Ellis was posted to the Central Provinces and, while there, played an important role in keeping the area free of any trouble during the great Revolt. Much of this was due to the excellent relations that Ellis had developed with the widowed Ranis of Nagpur. These women had every right to resent the British, mainly on account of Dalhousie's doctrine of lapse, which had prevented them from adopting an heir to the throne following the death of the last ruler, Raghuji Bhonsle. But Ellis ensured that there was no trouble and was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB).

Ellis was of a delicate constitution and we see his career punctuated by several bouts of home leave. In 1858 he sailed for England and when he returned to Madras in 1860 he was made Special Income Tax Commissioner, a hugely unpopular post. He had to face protests from everyone from the Madras Chamber of Commerce downward. But the tax was implemented. A year later he became Deputy Secretary and was appointed Special Sanitary Commissioner, a post he held till 1862 when he became the Madras Member on the Viceroy's Executive Council.

In 1865, he again went on home leave. This is when Florence Nightingale got to know of him. That redoubtable lady had by then put together the Indian Sanitary Report and among its chief findings was that Madras was particularly susceptible to cholera chiefly because it lacked proper drains. She summoned Ellis to her home and then being charmed by his manners invited him to stay as a houseguest. He was sent to barracks, hospitals and other institutions in London to see how drains were laid in that city. Guided by Miss Nightingale, Ellis drafted several proposals on sanitary arrangements and other improvements for Madras. The

Home Government too was lobbied with for release of funds. But matters moved slowly ("At present the progress of sanitary works in Madras is nil," noted Miss Nightingale, which statement could well be emblazoned in every Corporation office even now) and it was not until the 1870s when cholera swallowed the then Governor Lord Hobart that drains finally came to Madras. Miss Nightingale lived to rejoice at the commencement of the work but not so Ellis, who passed away in 1877. In any case, his was unlike hers, a very mild personality and he was more used to getting his way through diplomacy and not by aggression. Sanitation however remained Ellis' passion and he filed many reports on the situation in Madras, several of which still survive in the Corporation archives.

The years left to him saw him rise to the top. On his return from home leave in 1867, he was made Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras. The Governor, Lord Napier and he formed a tight team, pushing many reforms and ambitious building projects. He became a short-term member of the Governor's Executive Council in 1870 and was made a permanent one in 1872. While there he came into conflict with the dynamic Sir William Rose Robinson, profiled earlier in this Charivari series. He was back in England in 1873 owing to ill-health and was persuaded to return to Madras in 1875. In 1877, he was made a member of the Indian Council in England and so went back, only to die a year later. He was just fifty-two.

While in Madras, Ellis took an abiding interest in the Madras Literary Society, whose books he had once forgotten to return. He was a member of the editorial committee of the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science* that the MLS brought out. The poor in the city also knew of his charitable disposition and it was said of him that he enjoyed nothing more than the spending of his money on those in need.

AFTERWORD: When I began this series I had written that the Indian Charivari was brought from D'Acres Lane, Calcutta and wondered as to where that was. I had an email from S. Ganesh that it was a dead end off Waterloo Street in that city. In September this year, I had the opportunity to do a heritage tour of Kolkata in which Ganesh too participated, and I did get to see the street. It is just opposite the Great Eastern Hotel's main entrance. Waterloo Street is now Nawab Siraj ud Dowlah Sarani. And guess what D'Acres Lane is? It is James Hickey Sarani! Yes, the same Hickey who brought out the *Bengal Gazette*, India's first printed newspaper. Clearly someone in Kolkata has a sense of history.

– Sriram V.

(Series concluded)

Doubting Thomas

In December 163 CE, a Christian merchant from Edessa in Upper Mesopotamia (Iraq today) arrived in the port of Supattinam (possibly Sadras). Hearing that the martyrdom of Thomas was to be commemorated on December 21st, the traditional date of Thomas's martyrdom, the merchant went to partake in the celebration of the Eucharist at the saint's grave in Mylapore. São Tomé, or San Thomé, would not be founded until the early 16th Century. On his return to Edessa by an overland route, his account of this experience stirred laity and clergy alike.

Although the oral tradition concerning Thomas's Indian venture is strong, there is not a single written account in India. However, it is not wise to dismiss the oral traditions of the East as having no historical value. All the Syriac sources relating to the

On his return voyage from China, Marco Polo visited Mylapore in 1293 and stated confidently that "the Body of Messer St. Thomas, the Apostle lies in the province of Maabaar at a certain little town having no great population. Both Chris-

• December 21st is the traditional date of Thomas's martyrdom. SIMEON MASCARENHAS, who has spent time in the Portuguese Archives, reviews the story of the Thomas who became the Apostle of India.

Two years later the same merchant set out for South India with a bold plan. He sailed to Mylapore where, in the dead of night, he removed the relics and conveyed them back to Edessa, arriving on July 3, 165 or 166 CE. In 1258, some of the relics were sent to the church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Abruzzo, Ortona, Italy.

So goes one of the legends of Thomas.

Nobody really knows whose relics lie beneath the São Tomé basilica, or even if any relics do. Faith and tradition are one thing, hard historical evidence quite another.

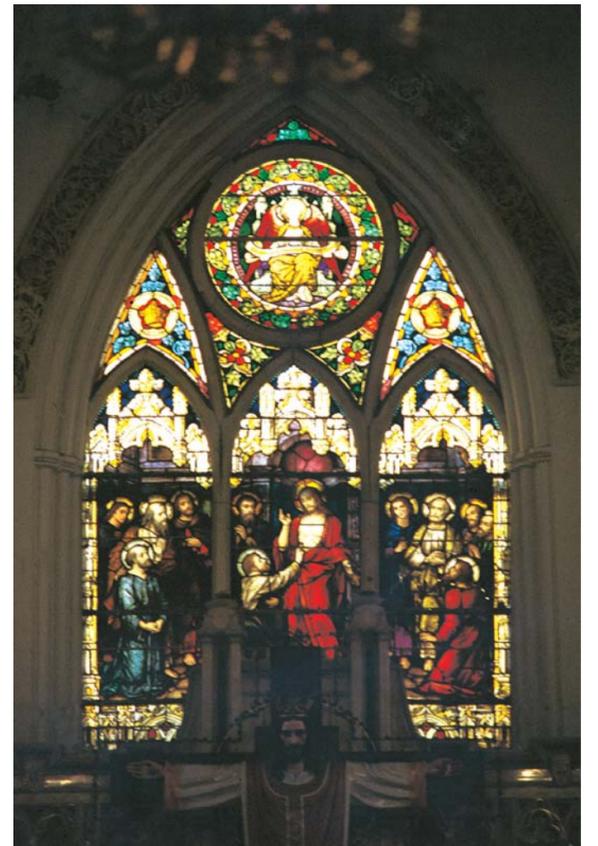
early Christians in India and the arrival of Thomas contain certain points that emerge as a common pattern: from the Chera country he moved to the Pandya realm, where he continued to preach the Gospel. He was killed by a dart shot by an Embran, or Brahman, or accidentally by a Govi who was out hunting. He was buried in the 'Little Mount of Mylapore'. From there angels carried him to Uraha (Edessa).

None of the traditions report Thomas as having been martyred in Kerala. They all agree that this happened in the Pandyan country, the name of Mylapore occurring without exception.

tians and Saracens also do hold the Saint in great reverence." Franciscan priests ministered to a small Christian community in what became Luz. Later, Paulinus do San Bartolomeo (John Philip Wesdin) wrote that "All Christians of the East, Catholics and heretics like the Nestorians, Jacobites, Armenians, the Catholics of Bengal, Pegu, Siam, Ceylon, Malabar and Hindustan, come to make their devotions, and this alone is sufficient to confirm the ancient and universal tradition that St. Thomas died at Mylapore." Paulinus was an Austrian Carmelite monk who worked as

a missionary in South India between 1774 and 1789. Among his many publications is the first European grammar in Sanskrit (*Sidharubam seu Grammatica Samscrdamica*), published in Rome in 1790.

In the church of Nossa Senhora da Luz can be seen the Franciscan emblem: crossed arms over a crucifix. Over the lintel of the front door is the date 1516, suggesting that this is the year Roman (Western) Christianity came to the Coromandel Coast. In fact this is the year that the building we see was erected, a development over an earlier place of worship that was ministered by Franciscan priests. In 1291, the Franciscan John of Montecorvino entered India and remained at "the church of St Thomas", where he baptised about 100 people into the Roman rite. Until this time, the Christians of Coromandel had followed the Eastern rite. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that there was a small but significant community of Eastern Rite Christians in the area, with trading links to Persia and the Levant. The situation of a Christian village on the outskirts of the ancient town of Mylapore is consistent with such a conclusion. Hence the local name for Nossa Senhora da Luz: Kaatu Kovil, or 'Church in the forest'. These Eastern Rite Christians later subscribed to the Ro-



The beautiful stained glass backdrop to the altar in San Thomé Basilica tells the story of the Apostle of India, the Thomas who had doubted and found belief.

man Rite under the influence of the Franciscan missionaries.

For six hundred years before the coming of the Portuguese to Malabar, there was a "perfect blank in the history of Christianity in Malabar," according to K.C. Zachariah. On arrival in India, the Portuguese found the Thomas tradition commonly accepted everywhere in the South. A report dating from 1517 says that they were shown "a half-ruined church at Mailapur" and told that the apostle had been buried in a grave on the Gospel side of the altar: the right hand side as viewed by the congregation. On the opposite side, it was claimed, was the grave of a Christian 'king' named Thomas Mudaliar.

In 1523, the Portuguese, ever fanatical about correct documentation, ordered an investigation into the claim that the grave was that of the apostle Thomas. Excavations were carried out on a weekend in July. After digging through three spans (about nine inches or 229 mm per span) of loose earth, four walls of a white-washed brick grave were encountered. The bricks were about 15 1/2 inches long, 8 inches wide and 5 inches thick. These measures correspond to those of bricks found at the first century Yavana (Greek or 'foreigner') site at Arikamedu near Pondicherry from the first century CE. Removal of these bricks walls revealed a layer of bricks and mortar two spans thick, then a fur-

ther layer of loose earth, followed by a second layer of bricks that appeared to be the bottom of the grave. Breaking through the brick covering the excavators found three spans of earth, and under that a layer of extremely hard cement two spans thick. Beneath the cement they found two stone slabs bound together but with no inscription.

The following day work was resumed. The excavators reached the bottom of the brick lining. Three or four more spans of loose earth were removed. They were now at a depth of about 15 or 16 spans – roughly 12 feet or 3.6 metres. Here they found a bed of sand, and of lime which had crumbled into dust. Finally they came upon what might support the local claims: a skull, some ribs, then other bones, but far too few in number to make up a whole skeleton.

There was also an earthenware jar with a capacity of an 'almude' – an obsolete Portuguese unit of measurement of about 16.54 litres in the Lisbon standard – filled with red earth, at the foot of the grave. From it stuck out a thigh bone, and inside was the blade of a 'Malabaric' lance or spear in the shape of an olive leaf. This lance tip was perfectly preserved and had in the shaft a piece of wood.

\* Based on the report of Diogo Fernandes in 1523.

(Continued on page 6)

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI – SRIRAM V

A house called Chintamani

The late Raghu Tagat, in a wonderful series that he wrote for *Madras Musings* on the history of Edward Elliot's Road (Radhakrishnan Salai), remarked how most houses on the thoroughfare had Sanskrit or Tamil names – *Manonidhi*, *Girija*, *Kamalalayam*, *Sudarshan*, *Sudharma*, *Nandana*, *Mandara*, *Sadhana*, *Kaustubha*, *Srivatsa*, *Venkatam* and *Vinnagar*. All of these and more once graced this road. Now there are hardly any left barring perhaps *Girija*, the residence of the late Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Another, that partially survives is *Chintamani*. There is very little of the house, but what there is, is impressive. It is an octagonal tower that probably encloses the stairway, topped by a dome. The rest of the house has given way to a modern two-storied building that is now rented by a bank.

*Chintamani* was once home to a hallowed family of Madras Presidency. The progenitor, Thiruvalangadu Appayya Dikshitar, was the official Sanskrit pundit at the Tiruvavaduturai Mutt. His son, Thiruvalangadu Tyagaraja Sastri, born in 1821, attained great proficiency in Sanskrit by the age of 18. His talents came to the notice of Bhaskararajapuram Venkoba Sastri, who was then a pundit in the service of the Sudder Courts. The latter got his daughter married to Tyagaraja Sastri and also made him an apprentice. In that capacity he mastered all the languages necessary for the proceedings of the Sudder Court – Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Kannada and Hindustani and, by the age of 25, emerged as a worthy successor to his father-in-law. But service in Court was not

meant for him. Taking up a post in Rajahmundry, he fell in love with the *vena* and began training on it. He became a professional artiste and travelled all over South India giving concerts.

Sastri's talents came to the notice of His Highness Brihadamba Dasa Ramachandra Tondaiman of Pudukottah State and, more importantly, the powerful Dewan, Sir A. Seshiah Sastry. The ruler became a disciple of Tyagaraja Sastri for the *vena* and also appointed him Chief Vakil, Pudukottah, entrusting him with legal reforms in the kingdom. Sastri served Pudukottai well and when the time came for his retirement, the ruler was pleased to appoint the Sastri's second son, Gangadhara Sastri, to the post. Tyagaraja Sastri passed away in 1892. Gangadhara Sastri continued the legal and musical traditions. Like

his father, he too became a *vena* exponent and also composed songs. He also taught numerous disciples.

Gangadhara Sastri's son Ganapathy Sastri (GG Sastri) succeeded his father in turn. Born in 1876, he inherited the family's talents in law and music. Having studied at Maharaja's College, Pudukottah, he later graduated from St. Joseph's College, Trichy, and got his BL from Law College, Madras. Enrolled in the Pudukottah Bar in 1900, he became, successively, State Vakil and Public Prosecutor, Puisne Judge, and finally Chief Judge in Pudukottah. He was made Dewan of the State in 1929 and retired from service in 1931. The British Government conferred the title of Rao Saheb on him in 1929. GG Sastri built *Chintamani* on Edward Elliot's Road. After retirement from the post of Dewan he settled in that house and served on the Senate of the University of Madras thereafter.

His son G. Tyagaraja Sastri graduated in law and practised for a while before joining All India Radio where he rose to become its Director General.



The building that's replaced Chintamani.

F.G. Natesa Iyer, who served the South Indian Railway with distinction but made a bigger mark for himself in the field of theatre, was a brother of GG Sastri. He is credited with bringing K.B. Sundarambal to the notice of theatre-loving audiences and encouraging several talents in classical music such as M.S. Subbulakshmi and Palghat Mani Iyer. The 'F' in his name is believed to have been a Christian name. He was a practising Christian for long and, many years

later 'reconverted' to Hinduism at the instance of the Paramacharya of Kanchi! Tongues have since wagged about the initial conversion to Christianity and many theories abound.

Today, *Chintamani* is hardly noticed by passers by. But the tower, earlier a light cream and now a bright ochre, is plainly visible from the road. It serves as a reminder of the glorious lineage that once called *Chintamani* its home.



(Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's questions are from November 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 relate to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. On November 15th, Google honoured Cornelia Sorabji with a doodle on her 151st birth anniversary. What is her claim to fame?
2. Name the Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) launched by the Union Government that comprises 22 stocks, including those of central public sector enterprises, public sector banks and its holdings under the Specified Undertaking of Unit Trust of India (SUUTI)?
3. In which Asian country did the Prime Minister inaugurate the Narendra Modi Resilient Rice Field Laboratory on November 13th?
4. Who are the new national singles badminton champions?
5. What is *Tyrannomyrmex alii* (or *T. alii*), discovered in the Periyar Tiger reserve and named after eminent myrmecologist Musthak Ali, a new species of?
6. How did Umlingla Top in Ladakh make news recently?
7. Which place of worship in Tamil Nadu recently became the first to win the coveted UNESCO Asia-Pacific award for its cultural heritage conservation programme in the Awards of Merit category?
8. The Union Ministry of Communications has launched the Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana, a pan-India scholarship programme for schoolchildren to increase the reach of which hobby and what does SPARSH stand for?
9. Which Tamil Nadu art form was recently accorded a GI Tag?
10. On November 15th, this Leonardo Da Vinci work became the most expensive painting sold at an auction, going for a whopping price of \$450.3 million. Name it.  
\* \* \*
11. Which popular cinema theatre in the city was inaugurated on May 23, 1970 with a screening of Shirley McLean's *Sweet Charity*?
12. For what contribution were fellow Asian cities Almaty and Daegu in the news along with Chennai recently?
13. Actor Karthi's latest action flick *Theeran Adhigaaram Ondru* will depict which meticulously-planned operation of the Tamil Nadu police in the recent past?
14. Which 200-year old centre of education located at the junction of Mount Road and Binny Road is to be brought down and replaced with a modern building?
15. The new Chandra Metromall at *Engineer Thottam*, between Valasaravakkam and Virugambakkam, has come up on the location of which theatre?
16. In 1933, P. Chokkalinga Mudhaliar built ten shops in a now chaotic locality and named the 'market' after his native place. Where was he from?
17. In 1852, Rev. Robert Carver established two schools called the Mount Road Male and Female Schools. What is present name for the institution now?
18. All know that R. Natarajan made the pioneering flick *Keechaka Vadham*. Who wrote the Tamil intertitles and the Hindi intertitles?
19. Name the architect responsible for the *Ice House* and the DGP HQ, both on the beach road.
20. What would you find where once *Serle's Garden* stood?

(Answers on page 8)

# The culture divide

Nowadays, it would seem if you are not outspokenly "for" something, you are taken to be "against" it. The middle path is pitfalls for the unwary. Express admiration for English, protagonists of Hindi exchange dark and meaningful looks. Criticise Indian films, and promptly someone within hearing dares you to declare that you are in favour of "Hollywood vulgarity". And so it goes. Sitting on a wall (if only because you happen to like the view on both sides) is a precarious occupation, and there is always someone around hoping to pick up the pieces when you fall.

This instinctive desire to define your loyalties and stick at any cost to your own side of the fence is, I think, unfortunately becoming more and more evident in cultural field. It is no exaggeration (however much you wish it were) that except for a few uncommitted ones – and, of course those who get free passes – the audience at a Bharata Natyam is quite different from the one you might encounter at a Kathakali performance. The two are, by and large, mutually exclusive, if not antagonistic. And the division is still wider when it is a question of, say, a Tamil drama, on the one hand, and a local production of an English play, on the other. Even when there exists no problem of language, a self-imposed barrier seems to cut off any mutual interest or exchange of ideas.

From the point of view of attendance, the English play suffers most – and this is sometimes a pity. *The Night of the Iguana*, staged recently by the Madras Players, definitely deserved a larger, if not a more responsive audience. In appeal, it was admittedly not in the same class as *Server Sundaram*, but, all the same, you noted with regret that, from the demure (and, alas, so persuasive) programme-sellers, to the company executive disporting himself in the front row in a disarmingly informal bush-shirt, local patronage for the play came almost exclusively from what one might call the "smart set". No doubt their loyalties are also fixed. Quite uncharitably, you felt that a good number of them came there to like – but only to like – what they saw. The comments you overheard during the interval were "frank", and occasionally the present show was compared to the "one I saw in New York last time I was abroad." Not being in a position to verify this assessment (but otherwise only too conscious of the drawbacks a producer here has necessarily to face) you turned away, a little sad that local initiative and talent had been found wanting.

But in actual fact, local talent did acquit itself rather well on that occasion – and that is why, I think, the production would have proved of interest to a larger and more varied au-

K.P. Balaji (1926-76) died in an air crash in Bombay. From Kathakali in Kerala, he moved to *Marg*, that cultural journal in Bombay. Joining *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, he was with it from 1954 to 1961. He then got into advertising with S.H. Benson's and rose to be one of its Directors. His son, K.P. Karunakaran, settled in Australia, put together a collection of his writings and published them as a commemoration of his father's 40th death anniversary. Over the next few issues, we publish a few of Balaji's Madras-focused articles that appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly* in 1964-65.



TODAY'S ARTICLE IS ON  
THEATRE IN MADRAS.

dience. In choosing a Tennessee Williams play, particularly soon after the film had been exhibited in Madras, the producer perhaps revealed a rare measure of courage. It is certainly to his credit that, after the show, you came away with your respect for that courage still intact. Competent (if not brilliant) acting, imaginative use of stage props and lighting, and deft direction set *Iguana* free from the limitations you normally associate with "amateur" productions in this country. Top acting honours go to Snehalata Reddy, whose sensitive rendering of the role of Hannah won enthusiastic praise from critic and layman alike.

I do not mean to imply that *Iguana* was the most significant cultural event of the season. Its failings (apart from your own reservations regarding indigenous talent) were obvious. To begin with, you felt that the choice of an open-air theatre (situated almost on the seashore) was not a particularly happy one in this case. It somehow put you "out of touch" with Williams, let you escape that sense of being trapped in a situ-

ation. Whatever advantage the production gained from a setting remarkably close to the one visualised by the author, a great deal of the impact was destroyed by, of all things, a strong, cross-wind from the sea, which distracted the audience and worse still, snatched away the words almost before the actors had a chance to utter them. Even when the script did not warrant it, the people on the stage seemed to be shouting at one another.

And while the curtains flapped convincingly in the wind and the lights flashed ominously to simulate the storm outside, too often had you to strain to catch the rumblings of the "inner storm" which gives point and purpose to the Williams play.

*Iguana*, according to some, is one of the less successful plays staged so far by the Madras Players. If that is indeed the case, the contention that this gifted and enterprising group deserves greater attention gains weight. The Madras Players present an aspect of the theatre, however limited or "alien", which promises good entertainment for the discerning, and worthwhile lessons for many producers of Indian plays I can think of.

## DOUBTING THOMAS

(Continued from page 5)

The orientation of the remains were north-south, an Islamic tradition. Christians were traditionally buried in an east-west position. Islam did not reach the Coromandel Coast until at least the 7th Century CE.

All the fragments of much-decayed bone were gathered into a chest, and, with a few other fragments that were unearthed during the excavation, placed in a Chinese chest with two silver locks.

It was common knowledge in the area that the site was attended by a Moor (Muslim), and that pilgrims of all faiths came from 'all over India' to pray at the site. The eminent Portuguese historian Joao de Barros (1496-1570) places the town of St. Thomas at 13° 32' north of the equator, which would make the site correspond

very closely with present-day Pulicat, not Mylapore.

Nevertheless, at the end of the lengthy inquiry that followed the excavation, it was concluded, on the basis of strong local tradition and the age of the bones, that the grave was indeed that of Thomas the Apostle. However, the burial could just as easily be that of an ancient Dravidian person of some note.

Although the ancient church of the Thomas Christians is of immense significance to Indians, the paucity of historical and archaeological evidence cannot offer certainty. Much of what is believed remains conjectural. However, history can offer probability in varying degrees. There is no clear written evidence that Thomas, the Apostle, preached in South India, the India of his era encompassing a vast geographical area. All scholars

agree that Christianity existed in India from between the third and sixth centuries CE, the language of worship then being Syriac. It is entirely possible that the apostle Thomas came to India in the first century CE; there is as yet no evidence against this possibility.

As with most matters of faith and even history, due to a lack of convincing historical evidence, the question remains: who or what lies under sanctuary of the São Tomé basilica? Were the contents of that grave the remains of one of the many Levantine traders who settled along the Coromandel Coast 2000 years ago? Or a local megalithic burial? Is there nothing beneath the altar of the Santhome Basilica? We are unlikely to ever know. Faith and tradition have blended to the extent that nobody really cares to know the historical truth.

## Shrinking wetlands, felling trees

(Continued from page 3)

The flood of end-2015, followed by Cyclone Vardah and the drought this summer, has given Chennai residents a sense of what it would be like to live through a string of extreme weather events. In some locations there has been civil society action, supported by organisations and governmental institutions, to conserve and rejuvenate water bodies. Perhaps these could be the initial steps in the process to strengthen Chennai's climate resilience where the network of blue and green holds the key.

● **A JOURNALIST WITH CANCER EMBARKS ON ...**

# An exploration of India

When Tiziano Terzani, acclaimed Italian journalist and writer, known for his extensive coverage of Asia for the European press, is diagnosed with cancer, he stops to consider his past life and how he should spend his future, if he has one.

"I felt as if my whole life had been on a merry-go-round and

and radiation at the Memorial Sloan Kettering in New York, Terzani gets a reprieve. His cancer is in remission and the doctors tell him that he needs to see them only after a while. Terzani packs his bags and leaves for an unlikely location for a man recovering from cancer – India. "Those who love India will

not just a cure for his cancer but the answers to his larger questions about his condition. Terzani travels from Reiki practitioners in Delhi to an ayurvedic doctor in Kakinada, to the hiving streets of Varanasi and the tranquillity of Bodh Gaya, and the serenity of Dharmashala. Then Terzani returns to America for a check-up and, later, on a visit to San Francisco, meets Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, who was then in the U.S. Deeply inspired by the Swami's dissertations on the Vedas and Yoga, Terzani sets out for the Swami's ashram in the Anaikatti Hills near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

"The location was beautiful, around twenty miles from Coimbatore... On the way to the ashram... I saw a man squatting (on the pavement) in front of two bamboo cages which contained sparrows. He was waiting for someone to buy them and set them free so as to earn good karma. I bought all the birds he had and released them, delighting in their chirruping and basking in the approving comments of those around me..." "The outline of the Anaikatti Hills could be seen in the distance – clear, blue and majestic. There was a time when the whole area had been covered with dense forest and even to this day in the little

right from the start I had ridden the white horse. I had gone up and down and round and round to my heart's content, without anyone to ask if I had a ticket. And, in fact, I hadn't. All my life I had hummed a ride! Well, now the ticket collector was coming through and I'd have to pay my dues. But with a bit of luck I might just get...one more ride on the merry-go-round."

After being initially treated with chemotherapy, surgery

know, they don't know exactly why they love it. It's dirty, poor, infected, sometimes thieving and lying, frequently malodorous," admits Terzani who had a home in Delhi. "Yet once you have met it, you can't live without it... In India I had no need of any remedy to get back my equilibrium... The remedy was all around me, in every detail of my surroundings."

There follows Terzani's long exploration of India in search of

woodland that remained, the taxi driver informed there are a primitive people who dress only in leaves and have a king as their leader..."



*Tiziano Terzani receives the blessings of a temple elephant.*

## EXCERPT

The Swami would come in through the northern entrance, accompanied by a young brahmachari who would walk alongside him, shielding him from the sun with an open umbrella. The Swami would take off his sandals, mount the wooden platform, climb the three steps up to his podium, wrap the edge of his orange tunic over his head and sit down cross-legged behind a low table covered by a coloured throw. From under that tablecloth, in the course of a lesson, the Swami would produce all kinds of good things with which to illustrate the points he would make in his teaching, as all gurus have done for centuries in their teaching of the Vedanta. He would take a clay dish and explain how its existence depended on the existence of the clay. Without clay the dish would not exist, just as creation would not exist without consciousness. He took out a crystal ball and a rose to illustrate the illusory nature of the rose's colour when seen through the ball; it is the same confusion created by the self, when it attempts to distinguish between itself and what it perceives. He produced a rope with which to make the classic Vedantic comparison between the rope and a snake: to mistake a rope for a snake is exactly the same as to mistake the world of the senses for the real world. It is confusion of our own making: could the rope be mistaken for a snake if the snake did not exist?

## EXCERPT

India may be a poor country, but it is also a country in which the people have fewer needs, fewer desires; this is why down, it is also a happier country than many others. But not for long: globalization is bringing the rest of the world's desires to India too, and eroding its contentment and its peace in the process.

The suspension system of the car - another old Hindustan Motors' Ambassador - was on its last legs, and every now again it bounced over the holes in the road and threw me around in the most terrible fashion. If I had had an attack of some kind or my hernia had erupted, I imagined the young taxi driver dropping me off at one of the many hospitals or rest homes I saw along the roadside. None of them inspired a great deal of confidence: even the letters in their names, such as 'Shakti Nursing Home' or 'Lord Krishna Hospital' were falling off. And the treatments they were mostly for haemorrhoids and fistulas!

In the end nothing major happened to me, and I was spared the experience of being a genuine Anam, a Mr Nobody, in the middle of nowhere without the protection of my former identity. We arrived safe and sound in Kottakkal. The Arya Vaidya Sala was well known and everyone knew how to get there; it was the only hospital with an elephant parked in the courtyard.

In the ashram in Anaikatti, for the first time in his life, Terzani deliberately loses his

edged, but even so his mind was not convinced by all his teachings. There was still the hunger to seek and find. "At the end of the three months, I felt like a spy who had infiltrated the ranks of the enemy in order to try and learn its secrets..." Terzani muses. Nevertheless there is a hint of affection as he recalls, "Someone asked the Swami for a last piece of advice. He didn't disappoint them. 'Live a life in which you can recognise yourselves!'"

Later, Terzani travelled to Kerala and other places where ayurvedic cures were offered. Some years later, when his cancer resurfaced and was found to be incurable, he retired to a retreat in the Himalayas above Almora, where much of this book was written and where, Terzani died.

This is a book\* written by a dying man, whose sensitivity, humour and sheer courage, have much to teach the living.

● by Janaki Venkataraman

## EXCERPT

I too, in coming to the ashram, had ended up in a different kind of India. It was not the India tourists come to take photos of, nor the one usually described by journalists. It was the seekers' India, the India of the great myths which gave mankind the idea of God and that of zero, as well as everything that lies in between. I had lived in Delhi for years, but I had always moved in political or cultural circles, and always felt I was missing out on something. This was doubtless because I had never taken any serious notice of what is really Indian: the spiritual dimension. It was like be-

ing a Martian who landed in Florence in the time of Dante and expected to understand it just by visiting the odd church without studying the Bible. Now I felt I was coming closer to the real heart of India in the most typically Indian manner: by going to live with a guru.

Guru is a beautiful word, which unfortunately has lost a lot of its meaning these days through the way we have abused it in the West, where we speak of fashion, health and even sex gurus. *Gu* in Sanskrit means 'shadows' and *ru* means 'to put to flight, dispel'. In other words, a 'guru' is one who dispels the shadows, who

brings light into the darkness of ignorance. His orange clothing recalls the colour of the flame which burns in the darkness, the force of fire which consumes matter.

This was the real India. My guru was called Dayananda Saraswati, and I was a member of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, literally the 'family of the guru of true knowledge', the knowledge which comes from the rishis or the seers. The location was beautiful, around twenty miles from Coimbatore, the capital city of the textile industry in the state of Tamil Nadu.

sense of what he had been all his life and willingly accepts anonymity and silence as a way of life. Calling himself Anam (the nameless), he falls into the soothing rhythm of life in the ashram for the next three months – yoga practice, lectures on Vedanta by Swami Dayananda, meditation and viewing the simple worship of the idol of Dakshinamurthy (who, for some reason, Terzani calls a goddess!). "In the ashram... there was time to live life paying attention to every moment. We practised acting as opposed to reacting, keeping our minds alert and aware of each movement." (This included deciding whether or not to kill a mosquito buzzing around his ear, instead of swatting it by reflex!)

Swami Dayananda was, perhaps, the closest entity to a Guru that Terzani acknowl-

\**One More Ride on the Merry-Go-Round* by Tiziano Terzani, Harper Element.

# The new hope from Chennai

Ramkumar Ramanathan has a huge tradition to follow and it must be said that he has maintained it. The leading Indian player has generally emerged from Tamil Nadu, as history has proved time and again, and the 23-year-old Chennai-born lad, despite the pressures of being in such a situation, is the latest flag-bearer of tennis excellence from the State. Ramkumar is clearly the brightest prospect in the country and in September this year he reached a career-high singles rank of 150 which he improved to 146 at the start of November. The manner in which he is shaping, a place in the top 100 during 2018 is well on the cards.

Ramkumar is a tall and remarkably fit right-hander and his game is power-packed. He has a brilliant serve and volley game and his smooth ground

strokes are a blend of control and accuracy. Taking to the game at the early age of five, Ramkumar's natural talent combined with hard work saw him make rapid progress and he first attracted considerable attention when as a 15-year-old he won the national junior (under-18) title in Chennai in 2009. He then made further headlines when he won the national title at Kolkata in early 2013. It was a year later that he really caused a sensation. First, he qualified for the main draw of the Chennai Open and, then, beat the leading player in the country, Somdev Devvarman, in the first round.

It was clear by now that a special talent had arrived on the tennis horizon and over the next couple of years Ramkumar made steady progress around the international circuit, play-

ing Futures and Challengers. In 2014 he won the Cambodian \$10,000 ITF Futures title in Phnom Penh. Later that year he won back-to-back Futures titles in Turkey. A month later, he underlined his ascendancy by knocking out Yuki Bhambri in the ATP Indore Open. In November the same year, he celebrated his 20th birthday by defeating Saketh Myneni in the final of the Gondwana Cup \$10,000 ITF Futures tournament at Raipur. Early in 2015 he repeated his victory over

● by  
**Partab Ramchand**

Somdev Devvarman achieved at the Chennai Open by defeating India's highest ranked singles player again, this time in the first round of the \$50,000 ATP Challenger Kolkata Open. In 2016 he reached the quarterfinal of the Chennai Open. It was the first time that he reached the quarterfinals of an ATP tour event. In October the same year he partnered Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and the pair reached the finals of the Vietnam Open.

Ramkumar, who honed his skills at the Sanchez Casal Academy in Barcelona for three years, made it clear very early in his career that he wanted to represent India in the Davis Cup, the Olympics and the Asian Games. He has already performed admirably in the Davis Cup. His other goal at the time was to be a top 100 ranked player by the end of 2017. And internationally Ramkumar's



Ramkumar Ramanathan.

career really took off this year. In April he reached his first singles final at the Challengers in Tallahassee (USA). In July he reached his second Challengers final at the Nielsen Pro championship at Winnetka (USA).

But it was in between these two events that he enjoyed his biggest moment on the pro circuit so far. In the Antalya Open in Turkey, Ramkumar produced a major upset by defeating world No 8 and top seed Dominic Thiem in the second round. This was his first match against a top ten player. Ranked world no 222, Ramkumar won

in straight sets 6-3, 6-2. He then progressed to the quarterfinals where he lost to the much higher ranked Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus in a third set tie break. In August, Ramkumar qualified for the first time for the main draw of a Masters 1000 tournament in the Cincinnati Masters. He won his first round match but lost in the second round. It was this result that propelled him to a then career high rank of 150.

The upward graph is likely to continue in 2018, given his growing confidence level, his sublime playing skills and ideal big match temperament.

## CHENNAI HERITAGE

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