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# MADRAS MUSINGS

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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## Water starvation faces us

(By The Editor)

Earlier this year, Cape Town acquired the dubious distinction of becoming the first city in the world to face the prospect of forcibly closing off all taps and get its population to get water from 200 collection points across the city. That catastrophe got pushed back somewhat, but Simla was not so lucky. Last month, piped water was no longer feasible, and people lined up at various places to get their share of this precious commodity. A newspaper report has it that Delhi is not far behind, likely to go dry in 2020. Can Chennai be far behind?

Or has the city already crossed that tipping point? Reports speak of the rich in Cape Town drilling deep bore wells in a panic reaction to the crisis. Have we not been doing this for years? In some areas of the city, the depth of these bore wells has already reached impossible levels. With this, what little subterranean water exists will soon vanish. The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) has been overcoming the problem of reducing water levels by simply identifying wells in the countryside and bringing water from there to the city. The residents there have been protesting but this has been overcome by declaring all these feeder regions as the Chennai Metropolitan Area. When you are part of a city, you cannot deny water to yourself, or at least that appears to be the logic.

In May this year, the Central Government approved a Rs. 3,900 crores desalination plant for the city. To be located at Minjur with a capacity of 400 million litres per day, it has raised the concerns of marine biologists who feels that such a giant facility would wreak havoc on animal and plant life by, and in, the sea. Not that this appears to have worried

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Queuing to supply water to the City. (Photo: R. Raja Pandiyam.)

## Is new MSP good for TN farmers?

Agriculture supports about 40 per cent of the population for livelihood. How it is impacted by the Centre's proposal to introduce a *Margin Guarantee Scheme* to farmers is of importance. The present Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme has been only moderately successful in many states and, so, continuing to call the new proposal by the same name may lead to its uninformed rejection. The new scheme being still in its embryo, there is opportunity for the Tamil Nadu government to interact with the Centre and ensure that the new proposal in its final form becomes a real boon to our farmers.

The present MSP offers protection to farmers against a falling market for produce. While in concept it is good, in practice it has not been as effective as expected, mostly because of implementation deficiencies. The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices (CACP) determines the national level production cost per quintal/tonne of each crop covered by the scheme. It is derived from data of each State which are weighted for the volume of production of that state and averaged for all the States of the country. To determine the cost of production, paid costs are

taken and to these the imputed (although unpaid) cost of family labour on the farm is added. This is referred to as *A2 + FL cost*. Quantum of margin over the cost is arrived at by assessing the effect of the following factors – supply-demand balance, inter-crop price parity, domestic and international prices, terms of trade for agriculture and non-agriculture sectors and effect on cost of living – which sounds daunting.

Expectedly, this version of MSP has not been very successful. Data availability for cost de-

termination has a time lag of a minimum 2 years. From this outdated data, the cost for the year on hand is extrapolated (really, in effect, *guessed!*). Farmers found that their experience of cost was very different from what is assessed by the Commission. The margin calculation factors are too complicated and lofty to be quantified and when some statistical dignity is given to the calculation the resulting margins over costs varied widely for different crops and seemed irrational. Importantly, there was total opacity in the process of formation of the

final MSP and it was not convincing to lay farmers who were faced with real costs. The process, because of its elaborateness, took too long and, consequently, support prices were often announced after sowing was over. It was too late for planting decisions. Immediately after harvest, prices do collapse because of heavy arrivals in the market and farmers, anxious to encash their produce, undersell their produce. The procurement mechanism reacted belatedly to the falling market driving farmers into the waiting

hands of farmers, putting them to financial stress. This made a lower price from the private dealer, on spot payment of cash, appear more attractive.

The proposed new MSP offers a pre-determined 50 per cent margin over production cost for each crop, straightway removing the non-transparent and time-consuming procedure for calculating the margin. The new MSP can be announced much sooner and in time for planting decisions. All that CAPC needs to do now is to calculate the cost and add the prescribed per cent margin. With a standardised formula, the production cost determination could be decentralised to States and these can be consolidated by CAPC further reducing the time needed to announce the MSPs. The vague element of margin under the existing scheme having been done away with, farmers can easily take the previous year's price with a chance of it being higher by, say, 5-8 per cent and proceed. It eliminates room for politicising pricing decisions as the margin added to cost is pre-determined. The mystique

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● by A Special Correspondent\*

arms of exploiting intermediaries – on the whole rendering the MSP numb and ineffective in some States. In Tamil Nadu, where the public procurement mechanism functions relatively more efficiently, the scheme has been functionally more successful. Study reports cite instances of the centre fixing MSPs at variance with the recommendations of the CACP without any visible rationale suggesting the possibility of political considerations in fixing support prices. When produce was bought under the MSP scheme, payments took too long to reach the



## From India's Digital Archives

– Karthik Bhatt

● The Digital Library of India (DLI) project, an initiative of the Central Government, aims at digitising significant artistic, literary and scientific works and making them available over the Internet for education and research. Begun in 2000 by the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India and later taken over by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, it has to date scanned nearly 5.5 lakh books, predominantly in Indian languages.

The archives of the DLI contain a huge collection of books on old Madras and various institutions that were/are part of its landscape. While these include the more famous ones, such as the *Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume*, *Story of Madras* by Glyn Barlow, and *Madras in the Olden Times* by James Tallboys Wheeler, several out-of-print publications too are part of the collection. This column will profile some of them.

## Freemasonry comes to South India

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest social movements, with its origins traced to the times of King Solomon. Modern Freemasonry is, however, dated to 1717, when the United Grand Lodge of England, the body that has overseen much of the progress of Freemasonry across the world, was founded. The first Lodge formed in our country was in Fort William, Calcutta, in 1728. The movement took root in South India in 1752, with the formation of the District Grand Lodge of Madras. The book featured in this edition, *History of Freemasonry on the Coast of Coromandel* (1895), traces the origins and early history of the movement in South India.

The book notes that most of the early Lodges were what were known as Travelling Lodges. Owing to the fact that most of the early members of the fraternity were attached to regiments, the Lodges shifted bases with the regiments. The fate of these Lodges depended on the exploits of their members on the battlefields. Thus, the book records several instances of Lodges going out of existence, only to be resurrected by surviving members a few years later at a different place.

The year 1786 marked a watershed moment in the history of the movement in South India. It saw the coming together of the Ancients and the Moderns, the two competing branches of Masonry that owed allegiance to their parent bodies in England. The Grand Union, as it came to be known, was a momentous occasion which put an end to a period of strife and uncertainty surrounding the movement. Marking the Grand Union, a new Lodge, Perfect Unanimity No.1, was formed in 1787. It is the oldest Lodge in continuous existence in Madras. This Lodge was the pivot around which the entire movement revolved in the region. It was at the forefront, along with the Provincial Grand Lodge, in overseeing the development of the movement in all aspects. For instance, it was the leader in the practice of the Masonic virtue of charity, playing an active role in the founding of the Civil Orphans' Asylum and a Charitable Committee for the relief of the poor, which was the origin of the Friend in Need Society. The role of the Lodge in leading the search for a permanent home for the fraternity in Madras, which would culminate in the coming up of the present premises in Egmore in 1925, is another noteworthy contribution.

Over the period of its existence, several prominent personalities, both Indian and European who have contributed to the social, political, commercial and cultural landscape of the region have been members of the movement. Notable names from the latter section include that of Dr. James Anderson, the botanist, F.W. Ellis (the Tamil scholar who propounded the Dravidian proof), R.F. Chisholm, the famous architect and pioneer of the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, and G.B. Bruce, the Father of the Railways in South India. It is also interesting to note that three Governors of Madras, Lord Elphinstone, Lord Connemara and Lord Amphill were at the helm of the fraternity in South India as District Grand Masters during their gubernatorial tenures.

Indian participation in the movement began to increase only in the 1850s, though the first Indian member, Umdat-ul-Umrah, the Nawab of Carnatic, had been initiated in 1775. In 1883, the first Lodge to be exclusively formed by Indians, Lodge Carnatic, came into existence. Over the years, the Lodge has had on its rolls several illustrious personalities such as Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, Sir

## Swacch moves up paper scale

Years ago, *The Man from Madras Musings*, when he was a Cherubic Child of Calcutta, had read a story in the *Arabian Nights* of a man who slept on a palm seed and his body warmth made it germinate. When he awoke, he found he was several feet above the ground. And he decided to stay there, for he was assured of food and drink from the tree. The story was, however, quite silent on what he did for relieving himself. Presumably others had to worry about it. Talk about serendipity.

Chennai that was Madras is now in congratulatory mood in rather similar circumstances. Apparently, the city, which ranked last year 235th on the cleanliness or to give it its official name – Swacchatha – index, has zoomed to 100th position this year. Government babus are congratulating each other. It is party time at *Ripon Building* and the Tweedledum-Tweedledee combine that is in power is claiming all credit for it and attributing it all to the blessings of late lamented mommy dearest. Not so happy is perpetual prince in waiting aka eternally youthful leader who owes allegiance to daddy dearest. But that is understandable.

The public, and that includes MMM, is puzzled as to what has really caused this sudden improvement in ranking. Last year's pathetic marks were on account of "poor performance in waste collection, lack of scientific solid waste processing, delay in construction of toilets and poor communication to bring about behaviour change." In what way has all this changed in the past one year? Have we improved markedly on waste collection, have we evolved a scientific method to process solid waste, have we speeded up construction of toilets or is there a change in the way we are communicating to bring about behaviour change? MMM does not think so. And his views are shared by much of the ever-growing population of the city. All over the place people are wandering about with puzzled looks, wanting to find symptoms of better performance in waste collection and the rest.

Having debated on the matter in his venerable mind, as

the Father of the Nation often said, and what is good for he (Father of Nation) is good for him, MMM, he, MMM has come to some conclusions on how we improved in ranking. The first is of course the simplest – we remained the same while other cities slid rapidly down the scale. Perhaps there was an epidemic of defecation in the open in the rest of the country. That could explain why we suddenly found ourselves 100th. The other reason, which is more plausible, was found by MMM deep within the celebratory bureaucratise on this improvement. Last year, the Babus who sit in judgement over such rankings had cast Chennai down to 235th chiefly because we failed to submit documents on time. This error was rectified this year and the babus were pleased. They gave us high marks and we zoomed ahead. In short, it is all in the paperwork.

### SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Now that is something our bureaucrats are very good at. After all, up north it was always believed that we Tamils are best when it comes to filling forms. And, so, MMM expects our ranking on Swacchatha to only improve. Soon, like Abou Ben Adham, we will awake from a dream of peace to find our name leads all the rest. As to all that ground work on waste collection and the rest, why bother? We can go a long way on paper.

### Why only Opposition?

The woes of eternal youth leader aka prince in perpetual waiting appear to be piling up. Looking at him, *The Man from Madras Musings* was tempted to comment if this, and not Mona Lisa's was the head on which all the sorrows of the world had fallen. Let's face it – you thought the Tweedledum-Tweedledee combo would collapse within weeks and here they are going strong. You thought the river water could be ratcheted up as an issue and all of a sudden Tweedledum claimed victory

though as to what exactly was won is yet to be understood by anyone. Then came the polluting plant in distant pearl city but there too matters just went ahead and all is quiet. Eternal Youth Leader (EYL), at the time of going to Press, was contemplating laying siege to the Governor's residence, than which there can be no bigger non-issue. MMM doubts if anyone would notice. The Governor will be happily ensconced in his beautiful home and the rest of the world will continue to function as usual.

But that is not all. Last fortnight, EYL and his party, the Rising Sun, conducted a political meeting in a locality named after the original founder and elder brother of the party. In the process of this, they followed the usual procedures laid out – drilling holes in pavements, digging up roads, putting up flags and generally making nuisances of themselves. The public, which all along ignored these things (a euphemism for suffering in silence), suddenly decided to protest. Social Media erupted in anger. Tweets and Facebook posts proliferated and EYL had to take notice. It is unlikely that he would have cared if people had protested in person bit something on social media was a different matter altogether. He issued an immediate apology and asked his legions to repair the damage done. This was done after a fashion – concrete was poured into the holes, grit pushed into the pits and the banners vanished. The Social Media protestors went on to protest other things – such as the situation in Outer Mongolia for instance. Attention span is notoriously short on Social Media.

But if you thought EYL's troubles ended there, the next day saw people protesting against his party blocking off a central thoroughfare for a political meeting. Protests about this were less vociferous and the meeting went ahead. But it just shows that EYL is going through a tough phase. What puzzles MMM is that nobody protested when Tweedledum and his twin, and their party did just about the same thing – drilling holes, dug pits and put up banners. How is it that Social Media did not protest? The only one who did was old Traffic Ramaswami and he did it the old way – remaining steadfast and moving the Courts to act, not by sitting in a couch and pressing the 'Like' button. It would be good if EYL and the two Tweedles pay attention to the likes of Traffic Ramaswami and not the likes on Social Media.

–MMM

C. Sankaran Nair, C. Rajagopalachari, Lodd Govindoss and T.M.S. Mani, ICS (who developed the Neyveli township).

The book, written by Rev. C.H. Malden, Garrison Chaplain of Fort St. George and published by Addison and Co, Mount Road, is a fascinating account of the early history of the movement. Containing short histories of the old Lodges, the book also has comprehensive appendices which list out the 69 lodges "ever warranted on the Coast of Coromandel" chronologically along with their places of meeting from 1752 to 1895. Malden also authored *A Handbook to St. Marys Church* and two other comprehensive works, *List of Burials at Madras from 1680 to 1746* and *List of Burials at Madras (St. Mary's Cemetery) from 1801 to 1850*.



# Corporate houses and contemporary art

A 20-year old article that's still relevant.

Walking through the Peugeot Talbot factory near Coventry, U.K., recently, what struck me were the posters – pin-ups really – of lavishly endowed women that the assembly line crew had stuck near their work stations. Even in the most technologically perfect environment, where the workers hardly have the time to pause in between their carefully timed activity, people need to keep alive an element of fantasy.

The blonde bombshells are the modern Western equivalent of the brightly coloured calendar images that are to be found in the Indian context, hanging over the entrance of a car mechanic's workshop, in a bank manager's airconditioned room, no less than that in a pawnbroker's shop, or over a modest hotel desk. Formerly, these were of smiling goddesses, no less well endowed, sitting on lotuses, attended by swans; now the nubile nymphs seem more intent on advertising a brand of soap or *agarbathi*. The basic theme in both societies remains the same. The representations are almost always of buxom women, erotically clad, with a "come hither" look, though I presume that goddesses work on a different level...

...In the last ten years, however, there has been a steady growth of goodwill and intelligent interest in the work of South Indian artists. This has been partly due to a more cosmopolitan clientele moving into the South with the growth of a five-star culture and easier

travel, the support of banks and a more professional attitude in the purveying of art with the establishment of art galleries. A.N.Z. Grindlay's Bank started the trend with the commissioning of a large mural by Laxma Goud at their head office, which was chosen in a competition. Since that time, they have also opened a gallery on their premises that is open to all artists.

At about the same time, the two new art galleries – the Gallery, owned by Sharan Appa Rao, and Sakshi, owned by Geetha Mehra – set a new trend. By consistently promoting contemporary art with imaginative invitations, beautifully produced catalogues and interestingly arranged shows using exotic props and thematic content, they managed to attract both buyers and artists. They can well claim to have, at last, brought some degree of art awareness to Madras.

Sakshi Gallery went one step ahead in organising an exhibition entitled 'Corporate Collection' at the Lalit Kala Akademi on Graeme's Road. The exhibition showed a fairly impressive number and range of works owned by different companies.

Again, Grindlay's Bank led the list with works by artists as different as Jatin Das, Laxma Goud, Surya Prakash, Palaniappan and Sunil Das. There were some excellent early works by Vasudev (Ashok Leyland), dramatic slashes of colour from his 'Force' series by Thotaa Tharani (Thiru Arooran Sugars Ltd.), and a series of prints commissioned by Hotel Shrilekha Intercontinental from the artist Vasudha Thozhur.

● by  
Geetha Doctor

Besides this, a major portion of the exhibition consisted of works of art lent by Chemicals and Plastics India Ltd. and its subsidiaries. There were works from the collection of Dura-metallic India Ltd. and a small but interesting range from the collection of Overseas Sanmar Financial Ltd. (henceforth collectively referred to in the article as the Chemplast Collection).

"What's interesting about them," says Geetha Mehra, referring to the Chemplast Collection, "is that once they started buying, they have been

consistently supporting contemporary art." Of the more than thirty works on view, there were around fifteen different artists, ranging from Husain to Vijayavelu, Aziz to Thotaa Tharani, and others like Reddeppa Naidu, D.L.N. Reddy, Dakshinamurthy, Arnawaz, Ram Kumar, Parthaba Sinha, Vinod Kumar, Nagdev, Lahoti, Adimoolam, B. Prabha, Dimpy Krishnan Menon and B. Dasgupta.

These paintings, along with the metal reliefs and sculptural pieces, now occupy pride of places in the different rooms of the senior staff or are distributed at strategic locations either at the main head office or at the offices of the associate companies. On the ground floor of the Chemplast head office there is an Aziz work – one of chestnut horses in rich relief galloping against a brown background. The visitor to the Directors' offices is greeted by a large abstract painting by Ram Kumar in the lobby. In the Vice-Chairman's room itself, pride of place is given to an Aziz abstract, done in his distinctive style. There is a small but exquisite Husain from his

"Tree" series of watercolours, a Badri Narayan and a dream-like landscape of fused colours by Nagdev.

The office of the former Chairman, K.S. Narayanan, has one of the earliest pieces bought by daughter-in-law, Chandra Sankar, an austere beautiful Reddeppa Naidu, depicting a temple on a hill. There is a large metal relief by Vijayavelu, and a charming early piece by Thotaa Tharani showing a glass chimney lamp and a brass pot in a formal arrangement. Tharani has also executed an exuberant mural in ceramic chips in the terrace garden at the very top of the building, complementing the magnificent view of the city.

"I never force anyone to display a painting or work of art that they might not like," says Chandra Sankar, the main force behind the drive for putting art into office rooms. The choice is, therefore, eclectic rather than heavyweight, personal rather than pretentious, meant for the present rather than for posterity. In some ways, this is admirable, as it reinforces the idea that art, whether modern or otherwise, must be enjoyed. People must want to live with a work of art and derive some measure of aesthetic enjoyment out of it.

The extraordinary thing is that most people have responded with tremendous pride and interest and are eager to flaunt their corporate

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## NEW MSP AND TAMIL NADU FARMERS

(Continued from page 1)

surrounding the determination of the margin is done away with. For procured produce, payments can be made through the Direct Benefit Transfer system free of corruption. Thus, transparency and speed would make the new MSP a big improvement over the old one.

MSP is a better way of supporting farmers than deficiency payments. Under Madhya Pradesh's *Bhaavantar Bhugtaan Yojana* (BBY), market arrivals of crops are rising to avail of the scheme. They have shot up by four times in the case of *urad* as compared to the previous year, when there was no such scheme, and 50 per cent in the case of maize and soybean. Market prices are manipulated through false billing to show lower prices to be able to claim the deficiency payment.

While the new proposal is a substantial improvement, there are a few asymmetries in the system, as it is today, that should be weeded out in the new proposal. Tamil Nadu Government must take these up in good time with the Centre to ensure that our farmers' interests do not suffer.

Firstly, as paddy accounts for a third of land use and is a major

part of production in Tamil Nadu, paddy farmers must be assured of the full or near-full benefits of the new MSP. A national average of production cost, although weighted for production volume, still works against the interests of our State. The national average gets reduced because a few States having the advantage of favourable irrigation conditions produce enough quantities to pull down the average. Tamil Nadu cost for paddy consequently appears high compared to the national average. This applies to the four southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu which together account for over 20 per cent of national production. Any weakening of the price assurance effect for these States would have a demotivating effect. In the new MSP, the datum line of production cost should be the weighted average of the cost in the four southern states. The existing disadvantage can be illustrated. For 2014-15, for example, according to CAPC, the All India production cost of paddy was Rs. 979/q. and for Tamil Nadu it was Rs.1266. Tamil Nadu's MSP would only be based on 979 and would be

979 x 50 per cent = Rs. 1469 against its production cost of Rs. 1266 getting, in effect, only 16 per cent over cost instead of 50 per cent.

Secondly, in the case of pulses and minor millets, there is only one crop in a year and the production cost in rupees is relatively lower earning a correspondingly lower margin in value at the uniform 50 per cent margin over cost. This is inadequate to sustain them raising crops against odds. The mark-up margin should be higher at 75 per cent or more over production cost as this is the segment that is disadvantaged. These are all identifiable segments and, as such, there is no risk of the differential margin being abused. On the other hand, it is the offer of higher margin based on geographical or climatic distinctions that is open to abuse as neighbouring markets could send material to the specially treated segment to take illegal advantage of the higher margin. The Centre can be persuaded not to decree indiscriminately the same profit margin for all crops. The Finance Minister's outline of the new MSP scheme does refer to a margin of return over production cost as at least 50 per cent.

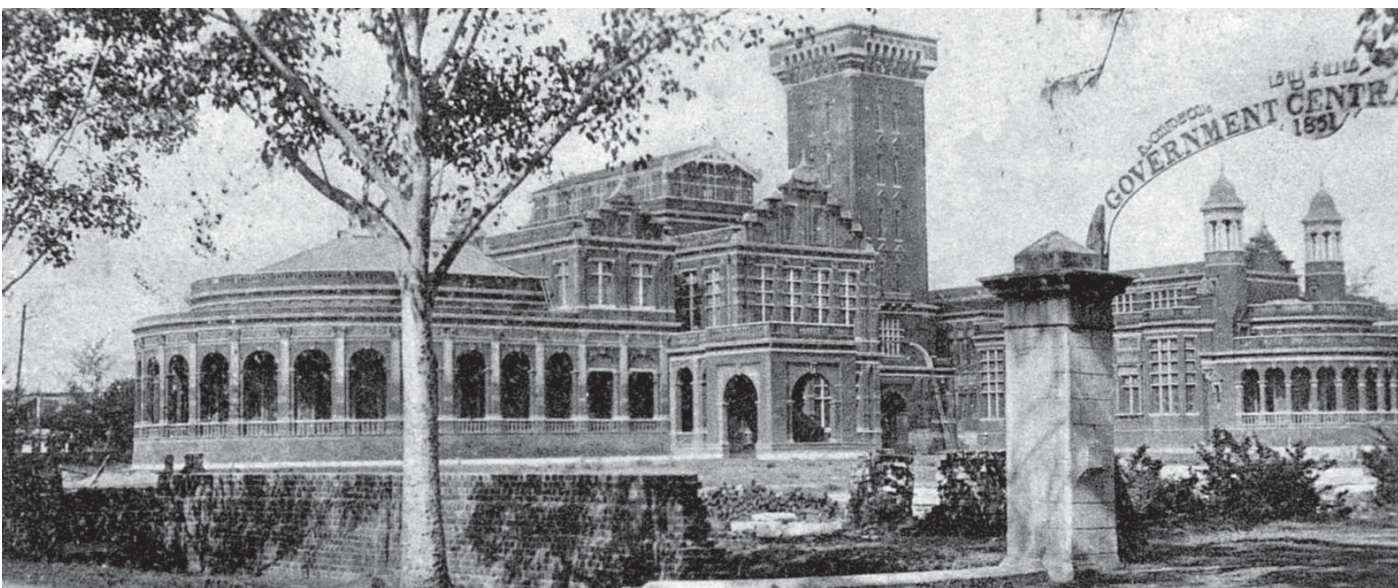
A universal norm could drive out segments where production costs are higher because of natural handicaps like lack of irrigation, poor soils and uncertain rainfall. Not only do farmers in these areas produce and contribute to the total supply, which is still needed, but there is also a sociological justification for them to be encouraged to be part of the economic mainstream.

Thirdly, discretion should be allowed to state governments to operate the designated mark-up percentage on a sliding basis. If 50 per cent over cost is available immediately in the wake of harvest, the entire production or most of it, is likely to be dumped on the public procurement system as no private dealer would like to match that price when so much is overflowing everywhere. He would be happy to see the government saddled with carrying costs of warehousing, transport, handling and wastage, for 4-5 months and buy the same material later at low prices from the government storage points. The MSP margin should be scaled according to the season – 30 per cent margin for one month or six weeks after harvest, 5per cent increase every month thereafter and 50

per cent continuing till close to the next harvest. MSP is not a one-shot match with market price, but a seasonally lasting game and, therefore, it has to be made dynamic.

Farmers in India need protection from two debilitating vulnerabilities. One is against the vagaries of the monsoons and the other is against the precipitous fall of produce prices immediately upon harvest. Nowhere are these as dramatically demonstrated as in raising sugarcane and in sugar production. Alternating shortages and zooming prices and surfeits with fall in prices and mounting cane dues are well known. Farmers' weak financial holding capacity is fully exploited by intermediary agencies to derive unduly large benefits at the farmers' cost. It is this vulnerability that a scheme like the MSP has the potential to address. The 50 per cent mark should not be read into too much as it is amenable to adjustments to make the MSP's beneficial impact adequate and equitable. Properly implemented, the scheme holds the potential to spur the Indian farmer to raise paddy productivity from the present 5 t/ha to China's 6.66 t/ha and Vietnam's 5.55 t/ha.





## The tower that vanished

Today there is no sign of a tower at the Government Museum, Egmore. Yet, in its time the absence of such a structure would have been completely out of character for the architects who designed the public buildings of Madras. Chisholm, Irwin, Pogson, Brassington – almost all of them believed in their structures being surmounted by a tower. The Museum too was no exception. It is just that the tower does not exist any more. Its disappearance had as much to do with professional rivalry as it had to do with structural problems.

The Madras Museum, as is well known, emerged from an informal collection of artefacts that people kept adding to at the Madras Literary Society. The latter, founded in 1818, was an adjunct to the College of Fort St. George and lived much of the first century of its existence at old *College House*, now part of the Directorate of Public Instruction campus, College Road, Egmore. The collection kept growing and was soon allotted the first floor of *College House*. By the 1850s, Dr. Edward Green Balfour, who was then Superintendent of the Museum, began asking for a suitable premises for the collection. This was granted, with *The Pantheon*, formerly the principal entertainment space for the British in Madras, being

made over to him. The move was completed in 1854.

Thereafter, the Museum grew, with structures such as the Reading Room being added to it by Robert Fellowes Chisholm. But it was in the late 1890s that major expansions took place, with the addition of what were called the Front Buildings, the Theatre and the Public Library being sanctioned. These were all designed by Henry Irwin, then the Consulting Architect to the Government of Madras. Topping the Museum in his design was a tower, 200 ft high and, when completed, the highest in the city.

Its construction was not without drama, apparently, for Edgar Thurston, who was then the Superintendent of the Museum, noted in his *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India* that the labourers involved believed that evil spirits had to be propitiated. A goat was sacrificed before the growing and was soon allotted the first floor of *College House*. By the 1850s, Dr. Edward Green Balfour, who was then Superintendent of the Museum, began asking for a suitable premises for the collection. This was granted, with *The Pantheon*, formerly the principal entertainment space for the British in Madras, being

Considering that the tower barely stood for a year after inauguration it is quite amazing that there is a written record of how it looked. In his *The Tourist's India*, (published by Swann Sonnenschein, 1907), Eustace Alfred Reynolds Ball wrote that Irwin had been inspired by the tower at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence in his design. Several decades later, Jan Morris was not so impressed when she reviewed the design. The tower was undoubtedly phallic, she declared. But by then the structure was long gone.

Let us now see what led to its untimely demise. Henry Irwin who was the designer had come

St. Andrew's Kirk in Egmore would come crashing down on the faithful. In 1881, Major Charles Mant went insane and committed suicide over fears that the tower he was building as part of the Laxmi Vilas Palace in Baroda would collapse. This pessimistic view was not shared by R.F. Chisholm, his successor at the task, and he went on to complete it. It is still standing tall. But then not everyone had Chisholm's breezy confidence.

Thus when Harris began spreading his stories that the Museum Tower was structurally unsound and could collapse any moment, he found ready listeners. There were opponents, of course, in particular the Calcutta-based publication, *Indian Engineering*, edited by Patrick Doyle. Closer home, J.H. Stephen did his best to defend the tower. But it was a lost cause in the face of consistent propaganda by Harris who also managed to convince Sir Arthur Havelock that the Museum was probably better off without a tower. That swung matters in his favour.

Without losing any further time, Harris gave instructions for the soil around the tower to be opened. That straightaway weakened it. Some of the granite blocks went out of plumb and from then on it was but a matter of time before an army of workers, probably the same team that had built the tower, descended on the spot to demolish it. The Museum was closed for a few weeks, beginning in March 1897, to facilitate the removal. *The Indian Engineering* lamented that it had been the leading feature of the structure, without which "a magnificent pile of building had been defaced and deformed." In the event, this appears to have been an isolated cry. The tower is completely forgotten, and indeed, few would even believe that such a structure once existed.

### LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

— SRIRAM V

to Madras in 1888, to succeed Chisholm. He arrived in a blaze of glory, having virtually transformed Simla into an Imperial summer capital, complete with a *Viceroyal Lodge*. In Madras his most magnificent creation was the High Court, designed largely by him and executed mainly by J.H. Stephen, Chief Engineer, PWD, Madras. The same was the case with the Connemara Library and the rest of the Museum. In fact, Irwin had retired in 1896 to Mount Abu, leaving Stephen to see the Museum project through to completion. By the time the new buildings were complete, a new Consulting Architect had arrived in Madras. This was G.S.T. Harris. And he was not so well disposed towards Irwin. His views were also perhaps coloured by the fact that Irwin's *Town Hall* in Simla was proving to be a structural nightmare (it would be dismantled 20 years later).

Such fears were not entirely unknown in colonial India. Years earlier, Thomas Fiott de Havilland had to fight the widespread opinion that the dome of

# Rethinking Indo-Saracenic architecture

• A look at the Indo-Gothic style of architecture which drew elements from native Indian styles and the Gothic revival style.

Colonial architecture is an important chapter in the modernisation of India. British architecture started with governmental and public buildings in the European classical styles in India. Three remarkable styles adopted in the British era were:

- Gothic
- Palladian
- Victorian Gothic

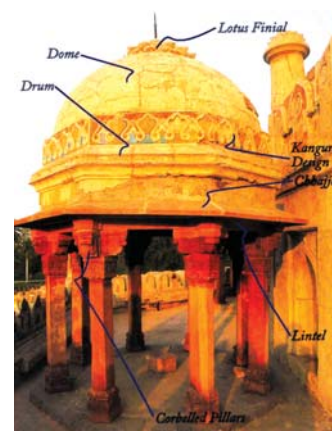
Firstly, with the influence of the Mughal tradition, Gothic revival was introduced to the colonial constructions, giving birth to the Indo-British style. The new Palace of Kolhapur (1881) and Muir College (1886) in Allahabad are exquisite examples of Indo British Architecture featuring pinnacles and domes.

Secondly, elements of the Palladian style had an ornamental focus – central and side sections with semicircular arches supported by pillars. Certain buildings in Lucknow follow the purely Palladian style.

Thirdly Madras, Bombay and Bengal were dominated by the Victorian Gothic Style. However, in later years, the buildings and monuments saw a mix of the Indian (Mughal), Victorian, Gothic, Palladian, Baroque and other styles. Indians preferred oriental substances and elements in the buildings, which gave rise to Indo-Gothic or Indo-Saracenic revival. The Indo-Islamic architecture combined with Gothic revival and neoclassical styles created remarkable monuments, which are significant in the history of Indian architecture. The Victoria Memorial Hall of Kolkata, for instance, inculcates numerous Mughal elements and presents a true example of the Indo-Saracenic style.

The Indo-Saracenic style, also recognised as Indo-Gothic, was a style of architecture used by the British architects in the late 19th Century in India. It drew elements from native Indian architecture, and combined it with the Gothic revival style. In India, it was followed by a combination of different styles specific to the regions – Edwardian Baroque with Indo-Saracenic and a fusion with European architecture.

In Edwardian Baroque with Indo-Saracenic style, the building designs were adopted from the Mughal and Rajputana styles of architecture. Key features of



The Indo-Saracenic style.

this category were use of *Jalis* – decorated stone screens – *Chajjas*, domes, and so on. This era also marked the accomplishment of two contrasting cultures, Indo-Saracenic Art or Indian Islamic Art.

The architecture of Syria and Egypt acquired a fundamental character of its own distinguished by standardised forms and concepts. The other side of Indo-Saracenic dealt with fusion with European Architecture.

Many European architects who arrived in India took the elements of the Indo-Saracenic architecture and applied the same to the Gothic and Victorian architecture popular at that time and also to many buildings built during the 19th Century. The Palace in Mysore is a fine example of this style. Indo-Saracenic architecture in India came into prominence during the latter part of the 19th Century. With the coming of the pattern, a majority of the patrons felt that they needed to be part of a particular style, which at times led to a highly inventive blend of Western and Oriental design.

Characteristics of Indo Saracenic, which were considered for a majority of buildings of this style were onion (bulbous) domes, overhanging eaves, pointed arches, vaulted roofs, domed kiosks, pinnacles, towers or minarets, harem windows, open pavilions and pierced open arching. The chief historians of this style of architecture were Robert Fellowes Chisholm, Charles Mant, Henry Irwin, William Emerson, George Wittet and Frederick Stevens. Architecture of this era gave rise to grand public buildings, such as clock towers, courthouses, civic and municipal establishments, government colleges, town halls, railway stations, museums, and art galleries. Blend of Muslim designs and Indian materials developed by British architects in India during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries were perfect

reflections of Indo-Saracenic architecture. Diverse Hindu and Mughal architectural elements were combined with Gothic cusped arches, domes, spires, tracery, minarets and stained glass, in a wonderful, almost playful manner in this epoch.

\* \* \*

Indo-Saracenic architecture found its way into public buildings of all sorts, such as railway stations, banks and insurance buildings, educational institutions, clubs and museums. *Chepaik Palace* in Chennai designed by Paul Benfield is said to be the first Indo-Saracenic building in India, which incorporated elements and motifs of Hindu and Islamic precedents. Other outstanding examples are spread across the country – the Muir College at Allahabad, Napier Museum at Thiruvananthapuram, the Post Office, Prince of Wales Museum, University Hall and Library, and Gateway of India in Mumbai, M.S. University, Lakshmi Vilas Palace at Baroda, the Central Railway station, Law courts, Victoria Public Hall, Museum and University Senate House in Chennai, and the Palaces at Mysore and Bangalore.

**Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus:** Its majestic appearance best



Sainik School.

represents the architecture of colonial India. The combination of brick and stone along with various oriental elements enhances the appearance of CST. The domed roof is highlighted with designed ornamentation. CST is a blend of Victorian, Hindu and Islamic styles emphasising on butresses, domes, turrets, spires and stained-glass windows. The Central Dome has eight decorated ribs highlighting Victorian elements. Adding to the station's beauty are stained glass windows, colourful tiles and decorative iron grilles. Beneath the dome are

brilliantly coloured stained glass windows, decorated with foliage.

Engineering, Agriculture and Commerce are represented by the gables crowned by sculptures. The Neo-Gothic vaulted roof with wooden ribs over the hall provides an impression of Victorian Gothic elements. Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus is the best example of Victorian Gothic architecture in India.

**Sainik School:** The much renowned Sainik School, formerly known as Jagatjit Palace, is housed in what was formerly the palace of the erstwhile Maharajah of Kapurthala State, Maharajah Jagatjit Singh. The palace building has a spectacular architecture based on the Palace of Versailles and Fontainebleau spread over a total area of 200 acres. A French architect, M. Marcel, designed it. The elements include pillars, piers, columns and pilasters, arches and vaults, roofs, domes and shikharas, verandahs and porticos, platforms and plinths, and so on. The major feature of the Jagatjit Palace was the presence of pillars and pilasters. In most palaces, the bases of pillars were built on square platforms that rose from a few inches to about two feet high. Simple moldings were provided for the designs



under the shafts that were plain. The capitals were built with the inverted bases. Usually, it is a weight-carrying member.

Its magnificent Durbar Hall is one of the finest in India and the plaster of Paris figures and painted ceilings represent the finest features of French art and architecture. Its architecture represents the Indo-Saracenic style. Beautiful galleries have been created on both sides of the upper deck. It unfolds stylised domes, canopies, and superb lattice work executed in stone.

Comparison of Elements:



Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus.

CST and Sainik School have combined distinctive features of Indo-Saracenic Architecture, picking up elements that are altogether different. When looking at CST's pointed arches, which are the most notable character in the Gothic style, they are not so sharply pointed here, with most of them almost semicircular. That renders warmth to the station building, softening the acute components of the Gothic style. Rich extravagant domes, spires and arches are the notable features of CST.

On the other hand, in Sainik School the major feature of the building is the presence of pillars and pilasters. A pillar is a free-standing upright member, which need not be cylindrical or plain rectangular or square. These were used, both decoratively as well as structurally, to support the galleries, arches, rafters or roofs. No doubt the building followed the Indo-Saracenic

is the issue of following different styles and implementing their elements in the new style form. It never had its own authenticity. If anything, one is closely premised in the other. One of the problems revolves around the central act of turning back to the original state. It concerns the various ways in which the past gets interloped, acted upon, and reinvented.

In confronting these questions, I obtained leads and directions provided by Indo-Saracenic architecture – influence of different styles and elements. I also became familiar with the vocabulary used in Indo-Saracenic architecture. One defined the subject for me within the kind of historical framework, the other served as my point of access to quite a different conception of Indo-Saracenic. An architecture of colonialism, the Indo-Saracenic style was also a modern, or even a Victorian style of architecture that incorporated its design much of the taste of the time. Elsewhere, however, as a new era of imperialism flourished, Indian conquerors sought to control their subjects more fully, setting out to assert their own legitimacy by proclaiming themselves an Indian empire. This intention was made visible for all to see by the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture. (Courtesy: *Architecture – Time Space & People.*)

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(All photographs: courtesy the author.)

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

1. Where did the much-hyped meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un take place in early June?
2. The world's most powerful and smartest scientific supercomputer, with a peak performance of 200 petaflops, was unveiled recently. Name this IBM computer.
3. Who is the only Indian to appear in Forbes' annual list of the world's 100 highest-paid athletes?
4. Who recently became the first Indian cricketer to score 2000 runs in Twenty20 Internationals?
5. Name India's first indigenous, long-range artillery gun that recently cleared its final test and is to be inducted into the army soon.
6. On June 8th, which world leader was presented with the first Friendship Medal, considered the highest state honour of China?
7. A team of researchers from the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmadabad, recently discovered a planet six times bigger than Earth revolving around a Sun-like star about 600 light years away. What name has been given to both the planet and star?
8. Where is India's first ever National Police Museum to come up?
9. Two species of which animal, which have been named *Kalinga* and *Krishnan*, were discovered in the Eastern Ghats and Western Ghats recently?
10. The 125th commemoration of which historic incident in Mahatma Gandhi's life was observed on June 7, 2018?  
\* \* \*
11. Which famous film mogul began his career selling magazines at the Tiruchi railway station?
12. Name the HR firm started by Minister and MLA K. Pandiarajan?
13. Which famous lyricist made his debut with the song *Kalangathiru Maname*?
14. Which educational institution was founded by Chinna-swamy Rajam?
15. Name the Chennai-born, Harvard graduate named the new CFO of General Motors.
16. In which Chennai educational institution's campus is *Dare Bunglow*?
17. Name the hospital started by Dr. Ida Scudder at Vellore in 1902.
18. Who, apart from Kasturiranga Iyengar, bought *The Hindu* from M. Veeraraghavachariar (one of the founders), for Rs. 75000 in 1905?
19. Which Thoothukudi-born composer, whose centenary was celebrated recently, was instrumental in writing and augmenting the Western musical notes for the National Anthem?
20. The K. Balachander flick *Oru Veedu Iru Vasal* starred which musical siblings?

(Answers on page 8)

# Twelve women's groups, one dream, total sanitation

In May 2016, the Gandhigram Trust, a resource agency with the Government's Department of Rural Development, set up an online platform to position Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in digital space. This is one among a range of capacity-building efforts, the Trust has introduced to attain the targets set under the sanitation campaign. The virtual platform has been instituted with an idea to facilitate the implementation of the scheme and to build a system of receiving regular updates to monitor its progress. Of course, central to its execution and success are feisty village women, who have been trained to become proactive agents of change for their communities.

The Trust had started working on the sanitation project in Athoor, Nilakkottai, Bathlakundu, Reddiarchatram and Vadamadurai Blocks in 2014 with the objective of creating model villages that focus on the establishment of competent waste management systems with strong community participation. Specifically, the idea was to get built 12,000 individual household latrines, or IHHLs, in the region. To get the ambitious operation off the ground, 12 all-women clusters were created and then trained to talk to families about the benefits of building toilets and keeping their surroundings clean.

Talking about the reasons for choosing women to lead the initiative, K. Shivakumar, secretary, Gandhigram Trust, says, "The Trust formed these clusters because women know the ins and outs of their panchayats, the community's needs, and where the gaps in service delivery lie. Each group is responsible for four or five Gram Panchayats. They enjoy a good rapport with Government officials which allows them to speed up the process of toilet construction and resolve any related issues on the ground. At the same time, they keep in constant touch with the villagers and are ready to clarify all their doubts on scheme-related matters on real-time basis."

Before the clusters were formally formed, the Trust had held a series of discussions with the Panchayat as well as Block level officials. Acknowledging the pivotal role the Panchayats play in taking the project forward, Shivakumar says, "The village councils have been the key activators. They work together with the women to identify beneficiaries, disburse funds and spread awareness on toilet construction."

Indeed, it's only when there is availability of adequate, proper infrastructure along with sufficient understanding among the people that total sanitation can become a lived reality. Whereas the first can be at-

tained with some concerted efforts and funding, often it's the widely-held regressive attitudes that end up playing spoilsport. Observes Ushree Mukhopadhyay, an independent researcher who studies the interplay of socio-psychology and development, "Most times, people don't know how to use a toilet. It's all very well to suggest that we must use toilets and, therefore, establish them, but in several parts of rural India, communities have been defecating in the open for years together. This has made it difficult for them to understand the confines of a toilet and what they have to use

and we also make it a point to commemorate occasions like the World Toilet Day to spread a positive message on sanitation. The online app for data collection has been developed for efficient monitoring," elaborates Shivakumar.

The Gandhigram Trust has been able to initiate such activities with financial and technical support from the Bengaluru-based foundation, Arghyam, which, besides offering revolving funds and interest-free loans for the construction of IHHLs, has developed the software for the special monitoring app. The software is equipped to collect

checking the progress at each stage. So far, three blocks and a total of 60 Panchayats have been covered."

When the smart phones were distributed, two software experts interacted with the cluster women to take them through the basic operation and its applications. Arghyam's technical team also taught them how to collect and enter the relevant data, and how to upload and update it on line. The collected, the data is transmitted via internet to a central server. "When collected over a period of time and from various Gram (village) Panchayats, this kind of information gives a clear picture of the bottlenecks in the system, backed by hard numbers. The centralised server even has an in-built tool to produce charts, graphs and other pertinent visualisations," adds Shivakumar.

Thus far, this app has proved to be very useful; it's been able to chart the progression of sanitation work taking place at the grass roots. Over the past year, the trust has reached out to households in 881 villages and lent financial and technical assistance for the construction of 3176 latrines, even as 2576 more are being built.

Clearly, the plan of roping in women and technology to achieve 100 per cent toilet coverage is working well. "Looking at the wonderful way in which the sanitation intervention has rolled out, Panchayats that don't come under the project have approached us for help in improving conditions in their respective areas. For us, that's a heartening development and we are gearing up to take things forward," signs off Shivakumar. – (Courtesy: Vidura and Women's Feature Service.)

Ever since the **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** (Clean India Mission) was launched in India, there have been many innovative ways in which communities have taken ownership of Mission Sanitation that aims to eradicate open defecation by 2019. In select blocks of Tamil Nadu's Dindigul District, village councils, local women and technology have come together seamlessly to not only ensure that every home has a toilet, but that families are indeed making use of them. KIRTHI JAYAKUMAR tells this story.

it for. It is vital, therefore, to educate them."

All the aspects have been covered under the Trust's project, which effectively combines infrastructure development, awareness generation and monitoring. "In order to improve the sanitation conditions in their Panchayats, the women's groups are going all out to raise awareness on the various Government entitlements, the Trust's revolving fund assistance, setting up school health committees, and so on. Regular meetings ease the process of purchasing materials for construction as well as the actual building. For those who are not in the know, we have published a handbook on *Construction of low cost IHHL*,

data with fields such as the name of the Panchayat, name of the beneficiary, survey numbers, date of application received, type of construction, the source of construction, loan details such as the total amount and dates of disbursement, the date of completion of construction, photographs taken after completion, total cost of the unit, date of repayment and the date on which the subsidy was received.

Shivakumar explains, "We have given each of the 12 clusters mobile phones pre-loaded with the app. Members have been instructed to fill in three forms – the first one before construction, the second during construction and the third on completion. We have been

## CORPORATES AND ART

(Continued from page 3)

collections. For instance, the person who sat in front of a superb piece by P.V. Janakiram of Lord Vishnu in His Varaha (boar) *avatar*, flanked by a more subtle metal relief by Arnawaz, was most reluctant to part with his Janakiram for the few days of the exhibition. A piece of art allows some measure of pride and self-expression to its owner that challenges the idea of an otherwise monotonous or impersonal work-space.

At the Durametall factory, there are two excellent pieces of metal sculpture by Dimpy Krishnan Menon that reflect the lush beauty of the outside lawns and gardens. There is also a superb canvas by Adimoolam, which catches the serene com-

mand he has over both colour and space.

It was interesting to discover that the artist who found much favour was none other than Aziz, famous for his horses, done in a thick impasto technique with, in most cases, heavy strokes of the palette knife. It is worthwhile recalling that even the prodigious Husain first arrived on the artistic scene on the strength of his horses. One cannot help but draw a parallel. In the old days, kings who wanted to prove their superiority organised a ritual known as Aswamedha Yaga. The first part of the ritual consisted of letting loose a perfectly bred horse to roam free for a year through all the frontiers of the kingdom. If the horse returned

unchallenged, the king could be certain of his supremacy.

Does the image of a horse in a corporate setting still convey a subtle message of strength and power? It is an interesting thought, which might account for the number of Aziz-bred horses galloping through the canvases of the Chemplast Collection. In the best sense of the word, the lessons of art are mooted in our past and form part of our subconscious dreams and desires as they branch out into the unknown. They are small lamps of brightness that float through the stream of eternity – nor vital perhaps in a technological age, and yet important in an intangible way to remind us of our humanity (Courtesy: Matrix, July 1990).