

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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"Take a left into the 'No Entry' street, then make an unauthorised 'U' turn at the traffic signal and there you will see my car parked just next to the 'No Parking' sign!"

We're home!

It starts at the airport.

A whole bunch of people, who have spent the past few days/weeks/months queueing up in a disciplined, decorous manner on foreign shores, rush headlong to the counters, ignoring the passengers before them.

How does this happen?

You've shown that you can follow rules; that you don't need the stern eye of law watching you to ensure your co-operation.

"Do not cross the yellow line," the sign says, and you wait patiently, your toes a perfect half-inch away from the line – and this in a supermarket, hardly a danger-zone.

And yet, when you come home, you cross a far more potentially dangerous yellow line, breaking into the speeding stream of traffic, making an unauthorised U-turn in one of the most congested roads in the city.

Or rush through a brilliantly red stop sign.

You don't drop even a tiniest square of foil on an empty street in a faraway land; but you have no problem dumping the evidence of a day in your life outside your home.

What is it about us, that we treat our own soil this way?

Maybe, the air here needs checking.

There's something in it that turns even the most educated, well-travelled, mall-hopping, Blackberry-using, lap-top-toting among us into a breed of careless 'free' spirits, unquestioning, unconcerned in our rule-breaking, self-absorbed world.

Ranjitha Ashok



The bright lights of Chennai today only light up a slew of flyovers and hoardings, all reflecting why Chennai is becoming a costlier city by the day. (Photograph: S. ANVAR.)

Colourful Chennai

(By A Special Correspondent)

What's the quality of life in Chennai today? Fair to middling by Asian standards, it would seem, but still far from international standards.

In India, Chennai ranks second, coming after Delhi, in terms of quality of living. Within Asia too, Chennai has moved from 31st last year to 26th this year. But all that is not saying much when you look at its international ranking of 159 in terms of overall living conditions.

The ratings were made during the 2007 Worldwide Quality of Living Survey by Mercer Human Resource Consulting, released recently, and it has all Indian cities scoring very poorly. Mercer's study is based on detailed assessments and evaluations of 39 key quality of living determinants, grouped in categories of **Political and social environment** (political stability, crime, law enforcement, etc), **Economic environment** (currency exchange regulations, banking services, etc), **Socio-cultural environment**

not exactly inexpensive

(censorship, limitations on personal freedom, etc), **Health and sanitation** (medical supplies and services, infectious diseases, sewage, waste disposal, air pollution, etc), **Schools and education** (standard and availability of international schools, etc), **Public services and transportation** (electricity, water, public transport, traffic congestion, etc), **Recreation** (restaurants, theatres, cinemas,

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Is it tolling for real estate?

By A Special Correspondent

The order came into effect on June 1, 2007.

With over 40 million sq ft of residential and commercial space likely to be developed in the next 18 months, it is presumably the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, acting on the order of the

T&CP Department, that will collect around Rs.500 crore this year. The additional levy has been given ceiling rates for various types of buildings, such as Commercial and IT (Rs. 500/sq m), multistoreyed (Rs. 1000/sq m), Institutions (Rs. 200/sq m) and Industrial Use (Rs. 300/sq

m). In areas outside Chennai, the Director of Town and Country Planning will fix his charges.

The amount thus collected will go towards the creation of an infrastructure and amenities fund which will be used for development of such requirements as water supply, drainage

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Aesthetics, please, in the temples

The *Man from Madras Musings* has been indulging in a temple going spree and is bewildered by what economic prosperity has done to our shrines. True, the number of devotees has gone up and there is a lot more life in most temples. But more money means more devotees wanting to spend on temple renovation. And this has amounted to doing just about anything. There are white glazed tiles all around the shrine for the Goddess at the Tiruvottriyur Adipuriswarar temple. Many temples have new drinking water tanks made of synthetic material and these have been sited in the most prominent locations. The ancient Valliyur temple in Tirunelveli has had its entire flooring redone in (hold your breath) white marble! MMM, however, has to admit that it was a contrast to the red granite over which our State appears to have a monopoly in consumption. But still, the very idea of using white marble in a South Indian temple is galling. At the Kumbakonam Saranganpani temple and the Srirangam temple, raising the floor level has led to statues and carved friezes sinking below. At not one place has any thought been given to aesthetics.

MMM went about enquiring into the modality of such renovations and additions. Apparently, there are no rules that stipulate that temples need to consult the Archaeological Survey while doing structural changes and repairs. (Or is it yet another instance of there

being a rule but one which everyone has been advised to go soft on?) As soon as a temple receives funds for a particular purpose, the trustees swing into action along with the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments and do pretty much whatever they fancy. Which includes the strategic placements of ugly tubelights, just about any kind of collapsible shutter and grille work, and other such additions. MMM shudders over what must be happening to stone inscriptions in this process.

Hoardings leadership

The *Man from Madras Musings* thought, in his innocence, that there was some kind of ruling about the size of political hoardings and the duration for which they can be placed on the road. But he must be mistaken, considering that hundreds of these hoardings in the city appear to have come to stay. You cannot miss them. All around you there are pictures of leaders smiling, laughing, walking, holding a pen thoughtfully, talking to a minion or two, and doing everything else other than some concrete good work. MMM wonders if our leaders are so wrapped up in themselves that they need to see themselves all the time as they move about the city. A hand mirror may be simpler and far more cost-effective.

All this makes for some great poster art, but MMM cannot but help wishing that

these hoardings are removed and the sidewalks (those that are still in existence) returned to the pedestrian who, always being meek, was originally meant to inherit them. There is, in particular, a circular hoarding made entirely of cloth with a picture of the leader in the middle, which does not allow even the usual mercy of pedestrians ducking below the hoarding and continuing on their way.

These hoardings are all 'temporary' structures, for they are supported by casuarina

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

poles lashed together with ropes. In wet weather, the ropes work loose causing some of these hoardings to come crashing down, putting every passer-by at risk.

The police and other authorities, of course, turn a proverbial blind eye to what is happening, even if the hoardings block traffic signals. Or, perhaps, as can be seen from their movement on roads, the vehicles of these authorities do not need or heed traffic signals.

Welcome weather

The city's weather has been rather unusual in the past two weeks. Just as *The Man from Madras Musings* was bracing himself for another heat wave, along came clouds

and some rain. The temperature has been down and life in the city appears a lot more bearable. But then, you cannot satisfy everyone, can you? Apparently the windmill owners of the State are an unhappy lot. MMM learns from newspaper reports that the TNEB now claims to have a drop in power consumption and has stopped buying power from the windmills leading to a loss of Rs. 1 crore and more.

Road-users are an unhappy lot too. The drizzles of last week were enough to show how inadequately Chennai is equipped to handle a full monsoon. There were potholes galore and plenty of blocked drainage leading to water stagnation. By the time our authorities wake up to these and rectify them, the monsoon will be on us. And then? MMM gets a sinking feeling (pun fully intended).

Migrating varsity?

Ever since the announcement of the proposed Maritime University in Chennai with campuses in Kolkata and Mumbai, *The Man from Madras Musings* has been puzzled over the lack of subsequent action. The Comrades from Kolkata cried blue murder and suggested that their own Maritime Institute could be put to better use as a university. Since then, MMM learns, a 30-member Parliamentary committee has been set up to decide on the location. This means that Chennai celebrated a little too

early. However, the committee, which began doing the rounds of the three cities was not impressed with Mumbai, which is surprising given that city has a very powerful maritime history. MMM wonders how Chennai fared.

Kathipara confusion

The *Man from Madras Musings* has seen newspaper reports that the construction of the flyover at Kathipara Junction is going to take longer than scheduled. While the flyover is an absolute and long-felt necessity and will ease traffic flow in the area when completed, what is surprising is the lack of any signboard allowing people alternative routes to take to avoid congestion and the consequent confusion, even as the construction is in progress.

As vehicles approach the junction, scaffoldings and other construction equipment block the view of the other side. Given the traffic pressure, it is very difficult for vehicles to change lanes and, as a consequence, many of them take the wrong turnings. MMM was in such a situation last week; when returning from the airport, he drove into the exit for Ashok Nagar, though his destination was Guindy. There being no U-turns on the particular stretch, he took quite a while to get back to the right track. Can we expect some help from those concerned?

— MMM

IS IT TOLLING FOR REAL ESTATE?

(Continued from page 1)

and roads in urban areas. The fund will be operated by the Director of Town and Country Planning.

There is, as usual, considerable confusion as to the definition of buildings. What happens if a multistoreyed building houses commercial and residential units, as is often the case in

this city where mixed zoning is allowed? What happens to IT units that are coming up on estates earmarked for industrial use?

The new levy will be in addition to existing levies, such as those of the State Industries Promotion Corporation (Rs. 60/sq m) and the Metrowater. In addition, any development hap-

pening in Industrial Estates, such as Guindy and Ambattur, has the local authority to collect a levy in the name of infrastructure.

Yet another cause of concern is that the charge also attracts service tax, in terms of the Union Budget norms.

All this makes Chennai a high-cost proposition when it

comes to land development. In fact an even higher cost city than it has been recognised internationally (see 'Colourful Chennai not exactly inexpensive').

Just looking around the city may not, however, reflect this picture. There are malls, IT Parks and residential complexes coming up all over. There is

likely to be an addition in IT space alone of 10 million sq ft in the next 12 months. But it also means that builders in Chennai alone will fork out Rs. 200 to Rs.400 crore on this new levy. Obviously, builders who have already finalised long-term leases before construction are now concerned, as the lessees are likely to press for fulfilment in terms of the contract and may not accept any hikes.

The cost of development, which in the past few months has more than doubled in the city, has seen many multinationals complain that business in Chennai is not sustainable. They have also begun putting the brakes on lease rentals, as a result of which rates in the city have begun stagnating. Will the new levy actually begin a pull out? Unlikely, according to builders, but it can happen in future.

Builders are not against the levy. But what they complain about is the lack of transparency in the move and the complete absence of any debate of any sort. But, then, our Governments are not exactly known for such practices, are they?

Not exactly inexpensive

(Continued from page 1)

sports and leisure, etc), **Consumer goods** (availability of food/daily consumption items, cars, etc), **Housing** (housing, household appliances, furniture, maintenance services, etc) and **Natural environment** (climate, record of natural disasters).

The study states that Indian cities score relatively poorly in health and sanitation, with scores ranging from 52.8 for Chennai (position 177) to 38.2 for Mumbai (position 209). Most Indian cities are densely populated with poor waste removal and sewage systems. These issues, combined with increasing air pollution, contribute to their relatively low ratings, according to the study. It highlights the fact that there is a very real risk of transmission of diseases in these cities.

In terms of cost of living the news is not much better. The survey was based on the comparative cost of over 200 items in each location, including housing, transport, food, clothing, household goods and entertainment. With Moscow being the costliest city overall, Chennai's ranking of 133 may not look too worrisome in a study of 143 cities in this category. But it has been moving up

steadily, becoming more costly than Bangalore in the last one year. Of course, it is nowhere near Mumbai which has jumped from 68 to 52. It is believed that rising property prices, with land in some parts of Chennai now being costlier than London, is the main reason for the rising cost of living in the city. It is interesting to note from the survey that some cities in China (India's main rival) are now moving down the cost of living scale, even though they are at present ranked higher than Chennai. With a low inflation rate and stable property prices, it is expected that these cities may become cheaper than Indian cities in the long run.

Asuncion in Paraguay retained its position as the least expensive city for the fifth consecutive year, while Karachi, Quito in Ecuador, Monte Video in Uruguay and Argentina's Buenos Aires were the other least expensive cities.

It must be pointed out here that this survey has been done keeping expatriates in mind and is targeted at multinationals whose executives can be posted to locations all over the world. However, in terms of rankings, it is good to know how our city stands when compared to metros across the world. Obviously, there is much to be done before we can claim to be truly world class.

OUR READERS WRITE



Arbitrary fees

It is tragic to see the plight of poor students driven from pillar to post to find money to pay the fees demanded by Government-aided and Government-owned schools, including Corporation schools.

The fees are fixed by the individual schools in a totally arbitrary manner and there is no uniformity at all. Fees are demanded under several pretexts, such as Parent Teacher Association, Building Fund, School Upgradation Fees, Computer Fees, uniform, notebooks, etc. The amounts demanded under such heads also vary considerably. I wonder whether there are any Government norms at all about collection of fees by these Government-owned and Government-aided schools in Tamil Nadu.

Government-owned schools are fully funded by the Government. Substantial amounts are provided by the Government to the Government-aided schools by way of salaries to the teachers, etc. as per the government pay structures.

When Government provides so much funds to these institutions, it should not allow them to collect fees from the students in an arbitrary manner. The objective of the Government providing huge support to these schools is to offer free or low-cost education to children from the lower income group.

Nandini Voice for the Deprived wrote letters to the Chief Minister and various other authorities in the Tamil Nadu Government, seeking to know

whether it is in order for Government-owned and Government-aided schools to collect fees from students in an arbitrary manner. As there was no acknowledgement or reply, a letter was sent under the Right to Information Act to the Ministry of School Education in Tamil Nadu. After three weeks, a reply was received stating that the letter has been forwarded to another department for necessary action. No reply has been received and no one seems to be clear as to what are the governmental norms and regulations in the matter.

In any case, it is crystal clear that the Tamil Nadu Government does not exercise any visible control over the schools and the school authorities are charging fees according to their whims and fancies. In the process, poor families are put to enormous suffering. They are forced to borrow at heavy interest, as the parents realise that they have to educate their children at any cost.

On the whole, Government's objective of providing free or low-cost school education to poor children has been defeated. The Chief Minister should look into this matter urgently.

N.S. Venkataraman

Trustee

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Butchering trees

Trees are to be planted, nurtured and well maintained. Once, they were also venerated. But nowadays in our country we do exactly the opposite. Avenue trees are cut down indiscriminately – either deliberately, to widen road, or wantonly, to protest against some issue.

Emperor Ashoka would turn in his grave (was he interred?) at this butchering and would take up arms (which he laid down after the Kalinga war) against all agencies responsible for this crime. Among all the good things enunciated by him, growing trees on the roadsides was lauded the most. In a hot country like ours (especially states like Bihar), he knew what was the most important succour needed by his subjects who mainly travelled on foot. Now, entire Anna Salai is bereft of any shady trees worth the name and in the four-laning process of national highways we have only barren metalled roads with no vegetation. It is forgotten that not all of us travel by A/C car in this country.

The general modus operandi

An Algerian connection?

The article 'Romans in South India' and the letter 'The Australian-South Indian connection' (MM, May 16th) reminded me of Indian (Dravidian or Tamil) connections in Mediterranean Europe and North Africa.

There is a city by name Warkala, the name of a town in Kerala, in the heart of the Algerian Sahara. A small town by name Methili, perhaps a corrupted form of Mithila of the *Ramayana*, exists in the State of Laghouat, Algeria. In the same State, there is an Arab family with the family name of Benagal (A). Note the family name of Shyam Benegal and illustrious ICS officers B.N. Rau and B.R. Rau.

A tribe in Algeria is called the Kabil and the language they speak is Kabili. (Note the name of sage Kabilar.) One of the ministers of Algeria who visited a tribal village in North India stated that the villagers spoke a language resembling the language Kabili. One of the family names of the Kabil tribe is 'Kadi', a family name in the Telugu speaking Devangar community in Salem. An internet search revealed hundreds of sites involving the name Kadi.

The Telugu Devangar community is found dispersed throughout the Southern States. But most of their family names do not match towns and villages in the Southern States. By chance I found the existence of a village called Santhri in Haryana. This is one of the family names of the Telugu Devangar caste. On further search,

two more family names were identified with the names of towns in the north.

Family name	Identified village
Santhri	Santhri in Haryana
Karna	Karna(I) in Haryana
Arappa	(H)Arappa – Indus Valley Civilisation

This could indicate that the ancestors of the Telugu Devangar community might have been one of the linguistic groups of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

There are more than one hundred Telugu speaking castes living in Tamil Nadu. They also might have had their origin in the north and migrated to the south around 1000 BCE, when the people fled the Indus Valley. According to historians, "The Brahmi speech in Baluchistan is the only Dravidian dialect in the North and may be regarded as the sole surviving fragment."

A similar study of family names of Saurashtra community, Nattukkottai Chettiar community and other communities may throw more light on the history of India.

I have presented fragmentary facts for a deeper probe by specialists.

S.N. Mahalingam

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of felling roadside trees is to first widen the road leaving the tree standing. After some time, they state that it is blocking the way and bring it down. I kept wondering when the axe will fall on the trees near *Raj Bhavan* and in Kotturpuram.

They are talking of relocating trees. How many trees can be relocated? It is all eyewash.

Even trees that exist are throttled and choked by black topping or cement slabs, leaving very little space for water to percolate.

There is a street in Germany called *Unter den Linden* (under the linden trees). In France we have boulevards. In the U.S., whether it is New Jersey, Chicago, Houston, San Diego, Seattle, Savannah or New York, trees line the roads and are well-maintained. Dr. K.M. Munshi started *Vana Mahotsava* in the 1950s and if he had adhered to his principles, India would abound in forests now. But, alas! we plant saplings by the thousands for birthdays or other celebrations of political leaders and forget about them the next morning. Will we ever correct ourselves?

Dr. R.K. Natarajan

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Not in the North

MMM had written about fancy new residential complexes springing up in staid Chennai, promising all the pleasures of, well, may not be the Arabian Nights, but Western excellence, at least. He also noted the tendency of swimming pools turning into new ponds and exercise gyms into lumber rooms. Very true. Buyer beware.

Indeed, in Western Chennai a clutch of apartments is com-

ing up with exotic French names. It only needs a guillotine to complete the Parisian effect.

Like the ad says, Life's good. But certainly not in North Chennai which is festering like a wound treated by a quack.

C. G. Prasad

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Editor's Note: See Page 4.

Veeranam & other lakes

Reader T.M. Sundararaman (MM, June 1st) need not feel apologetic, because I have read in some authentic sources that the Lake Veeranam was known as "Cholagangai" and was founded by Emperor Rajendra Chola, son of Raja Raja Chola, after his successful Ganges campaign.

It was the normal practice for kings to erect 'victory sthambas' after successful campaigns. Rajendra, instead, wanted a 'water-sthamba' for the benefit of the public.

The then kings, right from the Pallavas and including the

Imperial Cholas and Vijayanagar, had kept the Department of Irrigation under the control of the Central government, leaving only maintenance of lakes to 'village democracies' like that of Uthiramerur. Tampering with waterways and lakes attracted severe punishment. We, on the other hand, have left the lakes and tanks to village panchayats and, as a result, they have disappeared! Besides, is there any punishment at all for anything?

Dr. G. Sundaram, IAS (RTD.)

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Randor Guy...

... it was he who wrote the article 'The Ceylonese charmer of Madras Cinema' in *Madras Musings* on June 16th. We regret inadvertently omitting his name as the author of the article.

–The Editor

READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

– THE EDITOR

Our Addresses

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

THE EDITOR

South Chennai is the favoured Cinderella and the preferred destination of development, while north Chennai is like the ugly sister, forgotten and overlooked. Properties and rentals in north Chennai have not grown as much as the south. If the lack of development and attention continues, north Chennai would slide even further. Many understand that the real estate market prefers only high profit-yielding locations and overlooks north Chennai. But what disappoints and angers the residents is that the draft second master plan for Chennai too has nothing much to offer.

The land price at Royapuram is Rs.25 lakh per ground, at Kaladipet and Tiruvottriyur it is Rs.20 lakh per ground (2400 sq.ft). The rent for even the most sophisticated apartment or house of 1000 sq.ft is only Rs.3,500. In places like V.O.C. Nagar in Tondiarpet, there are many houses having just one room and kitchen, something no longer built in South Chennai. There are many tenements as small as 400 sq.ft., rented for Rs.500 to Rs.600 a month. In contrast, the property values in Adyar, Thiruvanniyur, Besant Nagar and along the ECR and OMR have hit the rooftop.

The land in these areas is priced between Rs.80 lakh and one crore a ground. An apartment of about 1000 sq.ft fetches rent nothing less than Rs.10,000 a month.

In the imagination of the planners and authorities, North Chennai is an industrial and commercial hub. But it is seldom realised that it is a thickly populated area. In places like Tondiarpet and Basin Bridge there are about 7.8 lakh people living under a high density of about 280 persons per hectare. The majority who live in North Chennai belong to the middle and lower middle classes. They live in areas that are annually growing at a low rate of about 1.5 per cent, while South Chennai is growing at an average rate of 3 to 5 per cent. The land value and rentals are lower in North Chennai, because of problems of pollution – automobile and industrial, iron ore and coal dust from the harbour, and garbage.

There are doctors and directors of big companies who live in North Chennai. The reason is they are closer to their industries or hospitals and not because they wish to stay there. However, they send their children to the more fashionable schools in

•Of Cinderellas and ugly sisters

A searching look at Chennai's North-South divide

San Thome, MRC Nagar and Egmore. There is a complaint from residents that there are no proper hotels, no premier shopping complexes, or marriage halls with car park facilities. Besides the Sir Theagaraya College and Bharathi Women's College, there are no other colleges of arts and science and engineering for the residents of North Chennai.

For many years, North Chennai, with George Town as its centre, was a thriving residential and trading place. During the 1960s and 1970s, most of the industrial projects were located there and the place continued to serve as the economic hub of the city. The Harbour, Central Station and the road connection with the Northern and Western

• by
**SWAHILYA and
A. SRIVATSAN**

States made it a favourable location. This was reflected in the land prices, and even as recently as in 1980s land prices were fairly high and almost even with South Chennai. Since the beginning of the 1990s the importance of North Chennai has declined. In the new scheme of things South Chennai is the icon of the global city, while North Chennai is considered an industrial backyard.

As a part of the First Master plan for Chennai, proposals were made to decongest George Town by shifting the vegetable and fruit wholesale market to Koyambedu and the iron and steel market to Sathangadu. A truck terminal was constructed at Madhavaram to relieve the roads from heavy lorry and bus traffic.

The markets have been shifted, but the area has not been significantly improved. For instance, the demand of parking spaces is 1.5 to 2 times the supply. In place of

markets, port activities have increased. About Rs.55,000 crore worth of trade is done through the port (2003-2004 figures).

The Chennai Port Trust has proposed to invest about Rs.418 crore over a period of 5 years (2004-09). In addition, Ennore port is to be expanded and Rs.1026 crore is to be invested there. As a result, new tank terminals, LPG terminals and metallurgical coke and power plants will soon be built in and around Ennore.

Unlike the investments in South Chennai, the proposed developments do not push the property prices. This is because the investments are made only on industries that have high impact on the environment. The infrastructure is developed primarily to support the industrial activity. There are hardly any proposals to improve the housing conditions and supply. The proposed economic activities will employ more blue collar workers and the private market is not interested in providing housing for them.

The Second Master Plan draft too is silent on housing and leaves the responsibility to the TN Housing Board. The draft is also silent on how it envisages reducing the population density of North Chennai.

It appears that the city benefits from the polluting industries of North Chennai, but in return is not preferred to offer much to it.

In a recently held public discussion on Master Plan, a North Chennai resident wanted to know why IT corridors are not planned in North Chennai. The authorities replied that North Chennai lacked infrastructure and human resources.

That exactly is the complaint of the residents. What they seek is a comprehensive development proposal that would improve the quality of life. (Courtesy – *The Hindu Property Plus*)

•A two-page look at the City – past & present

• The second part of a series of articles on the pluses and minuses of the draft Second Master Plan for Chennai.

Not looking at reality

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.

— ANATOLE FRANCE, *Nobel Laureate*.

In the last issue of *Madras Musings*, several of the positive aspects and features of the draft Second Master Plan (SMP) for Chennai, developed by the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), were discussed. However, the draft SMP also suffers from several shortcomings and infirmities.

The first set of shortcomings in the draft SMP are the inadequate efforts by the authors in putting together a document that is accurate, current and user-friendly. The draft SMP states that it is a re-hashed version of the ill-conceived 1995 draft SMP. Despite being given four years (2001 to 2004) to "take into account the urban developments, amendments to DCR, future needs of CMA etc.", the CMDA has chosen to retain substantial portions of the 1995 document. The primary defect with this approach is that much of the data and reports referred to in the draft SMP are archaic, out-dated and, often, irrelevant. Consider the following: a 1985 study that discusses what materials and goods need transportation facilities in the city, a 1989 study on the number of pavement dwellers, a 1995 study on the quality of water and sewage in Chennai's waterways, and so on. While there can be no debate on the need to update the data, the very objective of developing 'strategies' based on this out-dated information needs to be questioned. For instance, why refer to recommendations of a 1996 ERM study on municipal solid waste (MSW), when the entire MSW management system changed in 2001, with the introduction of the MSW law? Similarly, why discuss the Environment Improvement Scheme of the Slum Clearance Board when the scheme was discontinued in 1978? Why discuss the "recent identification" of a site to treat and dispose off medical waste, when not only have other sites been identified, but two facilities have been constructed and have been treating and disposing medical waste in Chennai from 2002?

Similarly, there are pages of information that are irrelevant to the draft SMP. For instance, in its sub-chapter on noise pollution, the draft SMP makes only two statements – one that vehicular noise pollution is increasing and, second, that noise levels in the city during festivals, particularly around the Deepavali season, are high! Is this the only information about noise pollution in the city? In the section relating to disaster management, needless reference is made to "landslide-prone areas" in Chennai (of which there are NO areas in Chennai)! Still worse, what is the CMDA doing when they recommend that areas in Chennai that were hit or flooded by the tsunami be zoned as "tsunami-prone areas"? What is the logic for this recommendation? Are these areas tsunami prone by any stretch of imagination?

However, there is no debating the fact that the draft SMP provides a wealth of information, dated or otherwise – for public consumption. However, why has this information not been put to use? For instance, the draft SMP recognises the problems faced by pedestrians, who make up 30% of road-users, due to the absence of pavements on many roads. It also recognises that where there are pavements, they are often poorly maintained or encroached on by commercial activities or public utilities. Yet, the 'proposals and interventions' make no mention of pedestrian needs. Similarly, the recommendation that lakes and water bodies must be handed over to the PWD focusses on the removal of encroachments, and not the need to protect the water bodies, which would logically require development of buffer zones around them. In many sections, causes for the problems have not been identified. And, as mentioned above, solutions are selectively provided for some of the problems identified, ignoring the remaining.

In a draft SMP, solutions must eventually be reflected in the land use plan with provision of resources (land) for the implementation of the solution. This too has been selectively done. Further, given that the agency responsible for implementation is often not the CMDA, the agency concerned should have been identified in the draft SMP. In most sections of the draft SMP, this has not been done. For instance, there is an elaborate discussion on how public streets are choked with private cars and the lack of sufficient parking. The link to environment pollution is also made, as is a broad recommendation that people should switch to public transport and non-motorised vehicles. But the draft SMP stops here. Who is the agency that should act on this advice? How should it be done? What time frame? And

who will monitor the change and results? None of this is addressed.

The chapters are almost independent of each other, making it very confusing for the citizen to knit them together. For instance, the sections relating to water supply talk about dark times ahead with increased need to draw water from far-away rivers and river basins to the city. Yet the section on Land Use and Planning Strategy recommends development in the existing Aquifer Recharge Area of Chennai to "meet the demand for housing, particularly for the IT sector". Another section talks about meeting additional demands for water for the IT Corridor by constructing a dedicated desalination plant. It is evident that, despite the presence of volumes of information, it has not been presented to the citizen as a set of connected issues for which solutions are provided.

Another significant drawback in the draft SMP is the failure to address the poor enforcement track record of the CMDA and the City Corporation. In 1998, the CMDA brought out the first of its infamous Regularisation Schemes, pleading with citizens to pay a penalty for violating the building regulations. At that time, the CMDA's official statement was that 50% of the city was in violation of the law. Subsequent years saw more such schemes, all of which were eventually struck down by the Madras High Court in a landmark decision in August 2006. However, there is still no mention on how the city's enforcement and monitoring systems will be enhanced, since the option for "pay and violate" has been shut by the judiciary. Instead, the draft SMP continues to search for the easy way out. For instance, it recommends that large chunks of the city currently zoned as "primary residential" be reclassified as "mixed residential" – so that assembly halls, *kalyana mandapams*, multiplexes and 'green' industries can come up in these areas. This approach suggests that instead of toning up the enforcement and monitoring, the draft SMP would rather allow "all activities in all areas", so that there will be nothing left to enforce or monitor! There is an urgent need for strengthening current enforcement and monitoring systems and for devising methods of involving citizens and citizen groups in this effort. The draft SMP's complete silence on this huge black hole in the current administration and the suggestion that it will be 'business-as-usual' on enforcement is unfortunate.

However, arguably the most significant shortcoming in the draft SMP is the inadequate attention paid to issues of the urban poor of Chennai. The rather cursory approach to issues of slums, in general, and the housing, transportation, water supply, sewerage and other basic needs of the urban poor, in particular, is unfortunate. The draft SMP quotes the Census data to show that over 70% of Chennai's population lives in structures of two rooms or less, and yet offers no real solution to the challenge of slums. The mantra of Chennai being "slum-free" by 2021 is repeated, but looking at the various episodes of eviction of slum populations and their relocation to the far corners of Metropolitan Chennai, it looks like Chennai is hoping to become "slum-free" by throwing the slums out! The challenge of slums is indeed enormous. The 2003 UN Global Report on Human Settlements rightly observes: "Many past responses to the problem of urban slums have been based on the erroneous belief that provision of improved housing and related services (through slum upgrading) and physical eradication of slums will, on their own, solve the slum problem. Solutions based on this premise have failed to address the main underlying causes of slums, of which poverty is the most significant." The Report argues that what is needed today is for "policies to support the livelihoods of the urban poor by enabling urban informal-sector activities to flourish and develop, by linking low-income housing development to income generation, and by ensuring easy geographical access to jobs through pro-poor transport and more appropriate location of low income settlements." The Report highlights "the great potential for improving the effectiveness of slum policies by fully involving the urban poor," and the increasing emphasis "on security of tenure and on housing and property rights for the urban poor, especially their protection from unlawful eviction." However, very few of these issues have found mention in the draft SMP and even there, the approach is rather perfunctory.

A few months ago, residents in Bangalore complained that their city master plan that was drawn up by a French consultant firm did not provide an accurate picture of ground realities of Bangalore city.

(Continued on page 8)

•Nothing changes in Madras

In 1939 too we were talking about making getting about easier

In all big towns and cities, every great difficulty is experienced by strangers to find out their destination, or places, and persons they want to visit. It is not practicable to procure paid guides, and it should be the duty of every civic body to facilitate their search. This responsibility is twofold: (1) of the Police and (2) of the Corporation or Municipality.

(1) Police: The British Police are known to be the most efficient, courteous, and the best guides to travellers. Anyone who has visited England would tell you of the courtesy shown to travellers by the Police, their help to find out everything that the travellers want, and the utmost ease with which they give the fullest information, and guide the travellers to their destination. They procure for them taxis or point out the omnibuses which would take them to the place they want to visit.

On the other hand, you just ask a policeman, who is on traffic point duty in Madras city, he either says he does not know, gives the shabbiest description of the most important places of public resort, or gives but the vaguest description to reach them. Most of them do not happen to know the small roads or streets in their own beats. One has to find out an obliging pedestrian, who is willing to help them. A rickshaw-puller often knows localities, buildings and the residence of important personages better than the traffic policeman. Even if you step into a police station, you find yourself not much the wiser.

To expect an Indian policeman to grow to be as urbane and courteous as his brother in England, would take a long time. It is a matter of education and the social position of the average enlisted police constable. We can only hope that the Congress government – who are loudest in their talk of public officers being the servants of the people – would do something to improve matters.

To educate police constables in the geography of the

town or city is not so difficult. As it is the duty of the traffic constable to guide and direct a public conveyance, it is equally his duty to guide people to their destination. This responsibility should be dubbed into their heads, and they must be made to understand that it is one of their most important duties. Every traffic constable should be given an extra course of a month or two – over and above the training he receives in a central recruits school to learn drill, law and procedure – to give him a practical training in the geography of the town or city in which he has to work. A map of the town or city – with all roads and important buildings marked

• by A RAMBLER

in it – should be supplied to each police station. In a city like Madras – a city of distances – it would be useful to subdivide the city into two, four, or more divisions and to have a separate map for each division. Constables should be taken round and given practical training before they are posted for duty, and catechised each week by a special Sub-Inspector. In fact, just as we have a class in education in each station in the mofussil once a week, these traffic men should be made to answer questions about the geography of the locality every week. Anyone not found upon the mark should be transferred out of the traffic line to other outdoor work. If finance permits, a small extra allowance may be sanctioned to traffic constables, who have onerous duties to perform in the burning heat of the sun and inclement weather, and who regulate the safety of the lives of countless men who travel in all sorts of public conveyances. Enlistments to the traffic department should be made from among the best educated of the applicants.

(2) Duties of the Civic Body: It should be the duty of the Municipality or the Corporation to supply an up-to-date map referred to above to each police station, and to each traffic party, and possibly to buses

and tram cars to be exhibited in them. It should also be its duty to exhibit at prominent turnings of roads the name of each street. No doubt we have in Madras city such name boards for most roads; but there is no regular system followed in exhibiting such boards. Some boards are faded and indistinct, some are exhibited far away from the ends of roads, some have boards only at one end of the street, and some long roads like the Mint Street, Thambu Chetty or Lingi Chetty Street – which have a number of smaller roads leading up to them – have no boards to such turnings. Men who come up to such turnings to these main roads have to walk long distances either way to find out the name of the street. There are also some streets, without such boards. They must have been supplied at one time and apparently have fallen off, and no one has taken the trouble to supply such omissions. It should be the duty of the Corporation to have such boards, not only at one end but at both ends of each road, and when a branch road meets a main road, there should be an additional board at such turnings. No doubt, this would mean money, but it is money well spent.

There should also be a system in hanging these boards. At present, some are located on walls, some on posts, and some on bridges. It would be very useful if all these boards are attached to small posts at the exact turnings, so that the traveller will know where exactly he has to find the name of the street, rather than go hunting after them. In Mysore Province, it is very refreshing to see the name of each village placarded on the road leading to it. A similar system in a city like Madras will be very useful to travellers to find out which is Mambalam, Egmore, Mylapore, Royapettah, Royapuram, etc. There are some boards at present but not at all places.

At cross roads, we have always an electric lamp post. If to such posts wooden handles with names of the part of the city be attached, it would catch the eye of the traveller quickly, e.g. at the Cathedral turning in Royapettah, you have five roads leading to the Beach, Egmore, Nungambakkam, Mambalam, Teynampet; to the central electric stand, if these sign posts are fixed low enough to be seen by men sitting inside buses, *jutkas* or cars, it would be very useful and would give a decidedly nice appearance. What is said of Madras, applies equally to other Municipalities in the Presidency. (From *The Municipal Gazette*, March 1939.)



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

1. In which famous forest was an entirely new tribe, now christened 'Metyktire', discovered?

2. Which African nation was in the news for suing pharmaceutical giant Pfizer for \$6.95 billion in damages?

3. Name the retired pathologist dubbed "Dr. Death" released from prison after serving 8 years for abetting terminally ill patients with suicide.

4. Who was the last player to win three French Open men's singles title in a row, a feat achieved by Rafael Nadal on June 10th?

5. The latest winner of the Man Booker International Prize is...?

6. Which Nobel Laureate is the new President-elect of Israel?

7. Which famous Briton has been awarded the Order of Merit, restricted to only 24 living members at a time?

8. Why was the old Duchy of Mecklenburg in the Northern German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in the news in early June?

9. In which European country was the world's longest rail tunnel on land, the 34-kilometre Loetschberg tunnel, opened on June 15th?

10. What has the UN declared Mahatma Gandhi's birthday on October 2nd as?

* * *

11. Which superfast train between Chennai and Madurai made its inaugural run on August 15, 1977?

12. In which place in Tiruvannamalai District is the famous Poori Panduranga-Ragumayi Temple?

13. Which Tamil movie, released on June 15th, is the first Indian movie to be fully scanned and post-produced in 4K resolution?

14. Which Tamil film legend made his debut in the film *Thamaraiikulam*?

15. Between whom was the Battle of Chengam fought in 1767?

16. The new IT park 'Acropolis' on Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai in Chennai is built on the place which once housed the residence of which famous film-maker?

17. Viveka Fine Arts Club is synonymous with which lawyer-journalist-actor and once MP?

18. Which thinker and leader from our State passed away on December 24, 1973?

19. Which famous Tamil literary work translates to 'ancient literature'?

20. Which famous Nayanar was born as Nambi Aroorar to Sadaianar and Isaigani?

(Answers on page 8)

NOSTALGIA

Classy symbol of (G)old Madras

Recently, I chanced to meet G.K. Vale's grandson, V. Kumar, and after exchanging plesantries I enquired about the family's prestigious photo studio. I even commented on the sharpness and clarity of their pictures (perhaps as sharp as the Vel's edge meaning to say the trident's point!) and stated aloud – "Is that the reason you gave the studio the name Vale or Vel?" I recollected fondly too how much of a prestigious, status symbol it was deemed in good old Madras if you had a Vale's picture adorning your walls.

The senior founder was my surgeon-father's patient. I can remember how the former was not spared at every turn and point by my perfectionist father till he finally produced a perfect picture of my late mother who had been snatched away from our midst by an untimely death. I used to escort my father everytime on his "snapping" trip (referring to the snapshots, of course!) and had even commented in an aside that it appeared as if until and unless my very mother decided to descend from the heavens and fill in the picture frame, my father would not be satisfied. But to G.K. Vale, the customer was king and all his efforts did not fail when, finally, he succeeded in meeting all my father's specifications, including the part Mona Lisa smile, the sleepily reflective, docile mood, and the acute angle the hair-do presented with the nape of the neck.

That little chat with Kumar sparked off this article – the status symbols of the upper class of

old Madras State. It was a nostalgic mental drive down memory lane indeed! That every man of standing had to literally stand on Bata footwear was common knowledge. But I do not know for sure if everyone around knows that the class had to have their garments laundered at Pioneer Laundry on Mount Road. It was run by a Telugu-speaking sister and brother duo who maintained perfect and cordial public relations. Every VIP was 'hanged'

● by
THARA MOHAN RAO

there by his suit. Every crease ironed out, every stain caused to vanish and all specks of dirt banished – and still they would never fail to deliver on time. You could witness the suits of top executives laundered, brushed and pressed, collected by their liveried chauffeurs and suspended on the sun-shade in the front of the Benz – shall I say a "driving" symbol of the elite? If I ever met the "pioneers" in the field now I would have loved to ask of them if their expertise could remove creases on visages too? (to combat ageing).

While on the topic of suits, I must mention those Madras who decided that the suits suited them right only if tailored at Syed Bawker's on Mount Road. The coat here was not cut according to the cloth but according to the instructions, dos and don'ts and nods of Syed Bawker himself. At every wedding, if the bridegroom was groomed properly, he had to be

clad in Syed Bawker's handiwork! Every status wedding had to be celebrated only in Abbotsbury, Teynampet. The ladies would be rustling around in Nalli's silks and India Silk House's wear. The brides had to be (if of class origin) Stella Maris graduates and the groomed guys alumni of Don Bosco, Egmore, and Loyola College. The topping music concert for the toppest class was by none other than the topmost singer of all times – M.S. Subbulakshmi herself.

My father (believing fully in its excellence) used to get us to listen to music emanating only from the Philips sets, drink cold water from the G.E.C. refrigerators, and cool off with the breeze of the Voltas airconditioners. But quality confectioneries to all meant shopping at Spencer's.

The well-lit showroom or hall would have impeccable English-speaking fair-skinned, smartly dressed (green half-skirts, white tops and green ties) sales girls who trotted about on their high heels without losing balance. Anything picked at Spencer's had to be nothing but excellent. The epitome of hygiene was attained when hands were not used but the shiniest of stainless steel scoops, reflecting even your very image on it, to lift the sweets and almond toffees from within the glass containers.

Stationery was always picked at Perumal Chetty's, housed in the LIC building, while all other reading material was from Higginbotham's. Ice-creams were lapped up at Jaffar's and the most coloured, softest, tasti-

est marzipans were at M.S. Stores on where else but the main artery of the road system – Mount Road, of course.

The day had to begin for people at home with the "authentic" *The Hindu* (note the stress would be on the definite article 'the') and the evening would never make way for the night until and unless *The Mail* was collected. The latter was of the greatest interest to children like me and sparked off fights as to who would lay his hands on *The Mail* first. This was because it carried a lovely strip on the world's most loved pig – none other than Curly Wee, of course.

Christmas and New Year mornings were very special to even non-Christians because it meant special morning cartoon shows at New Globe and Odeon Theatres. The children had to be present there with widowed uncles and spinster aunts as escorts and I for one would be too busy dividing time between the silver screen stars and the movie stars seated amongst the audience. They always graced these shows and it thrilled me beyond measure.

If you dared to fall sick, the rich admitted themselves for deliveries at St. Isabel's and for other ailments at Willingdon Hospital. Sahib Singh's drug bills showing from your handbags showed up your class too. Your junk material (even if very usable at times) had to find its way to Murray's auction. Therefore, as long as you lived, you lived up to the Joneses and when you died you came down to Vincent Parker's coffins.

Well, these are just a few of the favourite classy symbols of Old Madras, to quote Elisa Doolittle's haunting refrain. But mind you, it really did not matter whether the elite patronised these names or not, because all of them offered the stamp of excellence and their quality put them a class apart for any customer.

A home – once upon a time

We are living in an Age of Flats. Ancestral houses are demolished to give way to new constructions. In a conscious attempt to keep burglars away, we unconsciously keep light and air too away from our flats. Flats do not help us in any way to keep the physician away. Yet we prefer the physician's knife to the burglar's.

While many of our villages are fast turning into cities, there are a few yet to be corrupted by the hands of Mr. Fashion and Ms. Civilisation. If you ever happen to come across an unpolluted and uncorrupted village, do not hesitate to stop before any house and take permission to take a look inside.

Thinnai, nadai, thazhvaram, sami arai, padukkai arai, adupankarai and *thottam* form the seven sections of the house.

As a boy, I had the opportunity of living with my parents in such a house built by my grandfather. Let me try to recapture in words some of these sections.

Thottam is the backyard of the house. A well with a pulley is a common sight here. The pulley helps baling out with ease buckets and buckets of water from the deep well – the perennial supplier of Adam's ale. Jasmine creepers and *kana-kambaram* plants invariably find their respective places near the well. Strung together, these

flowers find their pride of place in the braids of the women of the house. A couple of coconut trees, a few fruit-bearing trees like guava, lemon, banana, custard apple, are only a few yards away from the well. Edible greens like *araikeerai*, *mulaikeerai* and *ponnangannikeerai*

● by
P. RAJA

grow on their own in the *thottam*. Raindrops know where the seeds of these greens are and they pull them back to life. A couple of milch cows, goats, a cock with his harem of hens, and hens with their brood of

chickens invariably find their shelter in a thatched cowshed here.

Goat milk for coffee, cow milk for curd, butter and ghee, eggs for a side dish – huh! What food is more nutritious than these? In short, the *thottam* is the supplier for the kitchen, called *aduppankarai* in Tamil. No *thottam* is complete without a drumstick tree. It is said that a drumstick tree and a milch cow are enough to drive hunger away from any home. Not only the leaves and the drumsticks are good but so are the flowers of the tree and that is the open secret behind the virility of the villagers.

(Continued on page 7)

What are the basic rights of a consumer?

• **Right to satisfaction of basic needs**

To have access to basic essential goods and services, including adequate food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education and sanitation

• **Right to safety**

To be protected against products, processes and services that are hazardous to health or life

• **Right to information**

To be given the facts needed to make an informed choice and to be protected against misleading advertisements and labelling

• **Right to choice**

To be able to select from a range of products and services offered at competitive prices with an assurance of quality

• **Right to representation**

To have consumer interests represented in the development of products and services and in the making and execution of government policy

• **Right to redressal**

To receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for substandard goods or unsatisfactory services

• **Right to a healthy environment**

To live in an environment which is safe to the well-being of the present and future generations

• **Right to consumer education**

To acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices about goods and services while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities

• **What is the right choice?**

The marketplace offers a bewildering variety of choices and there is no single right answer.

However, a right choice should be:

- Informed
- Economical
- Serve your needs
- Safe for you and the environment

It is important to realise that any choice you make will be predetermined to a certain extent by the following factors:

- Peer pressure
- Advertisements and media
- Loan availability and pressure from finance companies offering credit for certain products

However, if you are aware of this, then you will be able to concentrate on more positive factors when making a choice.

How to make the right choice?

Ask yourself these questions before buying a product or hiring a service.

- Is this product or service absolutely necessary for me?
- Am I getting a good market price for this product/service?
- Should I consider alternative products/services?
- Is this product/service safe to use/eat/wear?
- Is this product/service covered by warranties or guarantees?
- Is this product serviceable in case of breakdown, i.e. are spare parts, after-sale service centres and annual maintenance contracts available?
- Does this product/service conform to safety and quality standards laid down by law?

As well as considering your own individual needs, as an aware consumer you should also consider whether the product/service is environmentally and socially friendly. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the packaging of this product biodegradable?
- Where was this product manufactured? Are there any local substitutes available?
- Does this product/service deplete precious natural resources?
- Does this product/service emit harmful chemicals into the atmosphere?
- Is this product/service controlled by manufacturers/dealers/retailers who adopt fair business practices?

Was this product/service created without exploiting anyone in the vulnerable sections of the population?

Although this process may seem time-consuming, try it a few times and see the difference for yourself.

General buying tips

When you go shopping, it is helpful to recognise that the retailer has a headstart on you. He/she knows how much the item costs from the supplier, how much profit is included in the asking price, and the minimum price that they are willing to sell the product for. You walk into the shop and all you know is the asking price. You are definitely at a disadvantage!

Before you buy:

- Decide in advance exactly what you want and what you can afford.
- Don't buy on impulse or under pressure. This includes donating to charity. Do your research.
- Analyse what you need and what product or service features are important to you.
- Review product test results and other information from consumer experts.
- Get advice and price quotes from several sellers. Compare stores. If you are planning a significant purchase, it is worth visiting several stores to compare prices. This way you can get a feel of the market and calmly decide how much you want to pay.

Two important consumer tips

A savvy consumer is always on the alert for con artists and other shady efforts to separate you from your money. To protect your money and avoid being a victim of fraud, keep these things in mind:

1. A deal that sounds too good to be true usually is! Offers that often fall into this category are promises to fix your credit problems, business/job opportunities, risk-free investments, and free travel.

2. Think twice before sharing personal information. Protect your privacy and avoid unauthorised use of your personal information.

- Check for any extra charges, such as delivery fees, installation and service costs.
- Make sure that the seller has all appropriate licences.
- Read and understand any contract or legal document you are asked to sign. Make sure there are no blank spaces. Insist that any extras you are promised orally be put in writing.
- Ask the sales persons to explain the store's return or exchange policy.
- Don't assume an item is a bargain just because it is advertised as one.
- Resist sales pressure. If you have done your research properly, you will be less influenced by a sales pitch.
- Take your time when shopping. You can always go home and think about it first before making a major purchase.

After you buy

What you do after you buy can be as important as what you do before you buy. These steps will help you avoid, as well as deal with, any problems that might crop up.

- Save all papers that you get with your purchase. Keep all contracts, sales receipts, manuals and warranty documents. Ensure that the warranty card is stamped with the seal of the service provider, date of purchase, and term of warranty period. Any card without these details renders the warranty null and void.
- Read and follow product and service instructions. The way you use or take care of a product might affect your warranty rights.

(Courtesy: CAG Souvenir 2005)

A home – once upon a time

(Continued from page 6)

The raised platform around the well is used for bathing, washing clothes and cleaning the kitchen utensils. It is also the place where the women of the house gather to share their joys and grievances. That is the place where words are exchanged in whispers. They see to it that their muffled giggles and laughs are drowned in the beating they give to their dirty linen and in the vigorous cleaning of the utensils. Clothes and vessels really suffer in their hands whenever they talk of their bossy mother-in-law.

Padukkai arai is the bedroom. It should be mentioned in passing that very rarely do people sleep there unless they are sick or feel the need for privacy. Such a room serves as guardian for bags and bags of

grains and valuables locked in cupboards.

Pooja room is another name for *sami arai*. Since we Indians are millionaires in our variety of gods, this room is walled with pictures of gods framed in glass. This is the room where the inhabitants of the house spend a major chunk of an hour pleading to the painted gods to sanction their wishes. Bells ring at odd hours too to awaken the lords from their deep slumber and force them to listen to, and redress, grievances. It is a special room in every house where people feel quite comfortable with the gods.

A major section of the *thazhvaram* (hall), a device invented by the builders of yore to be one with Nature, is open to the sky. Its noble purpose is to provide enough light and air

into the house. Clouds elbowing their way to destinations unknown, stars like beaded bubbles winking at the brim, travelling stars, falling stars are some of the characters in action shown on the biggest of screens. A bamboo coir cot under the sky with an affectionate lap to rest one's head on, all watched by Queen Moon on her parade, O, that's paradise! This also serves as a reading place for children with perfect eyesight.

Mothers make use of this place to feed their babes sitting snugly on their hips, telling stories of birds and beasts, and showing them the old lady on the moon deep-frying *vadai*. No baby munching cooked rice mixed with dhal and ghee ever asks 'Who are the takers?' and no mother ever likes to learn the answer from her elders.

A learning centre in the home, the *thazhvaram* also serves as the family's playground. Man's first and best teacher, Mother, spreads sand to form a smooth surface and directs the child's pointing finger along the curves of the letters of the alphabet she had already drawn with her finger. The next step is to place pebbles on the letters with an instruction to take note of the curves. Basic mathematics with single and double digits is also taught here before the children move on to the use of slates and *balapa kucchi* (crayons).

To get away from the drudgery of daily chores, the women of the house use this place to play games of chance. They throw a pair of dice on the big sheet of *paramapatha sopana patam* (an old version of

'Snakes and Ladders') or play *aadu puli attam* (the modern game of Ludo) and sometimes play *pallankuzhi* with tamarind seeds or cowrie shells or pebbles.

At times, the head of the family too displays his skill by spinning tops or by shooting at marbles with a marble, all the time going down memory lane and telling his children what an adept he was in "those days".

Such a home lives only in my memory. I am sure that the readers of my age group or my seniors will be pulling out chapters from their great book of memory on reading this. It is a pity that under the pretext of safe living we have denied our children the pleasure of living in such houses. — (Courtesy: Sri Aurobindo's Action, Pondichery.)

TN's unique world record

A record is a record, whether it is meritorious or hollow. This unique record is the record that stands in the names of two Tamil Nadu batsmen, each scoring triple hundreds in the same innings. W.V. Raman and Arjan Kripal Singh were the batsmen involved.

It should normally be a matter of great rejoicing that two Tamil Nadu batsmen are part of a unique feat. Unfortunately, the manner in which the record was created was not in keeping with the true spirit of the game and that is why even diehard cricket followers on the State, while happy at the fact that two batsmen from Tamil Nadu are part of an unequalled feat, do not care to remember it with any particular affection.

It all happened at Panjim in January 1989. Tamil Nadu were playing Goa in the last South Zone league fixture with the visitors and Hyderabad already

assured of a place in the knock-out stage. L. Sivaramakrishnan, leading Tamil Nadu in place of regular captain K. Srikanth, who was unavailable, won the toss, but on a good batting track four wickets had gone before lunch with only 95 runs on the board. From then on, Goa had to endure only frustration as one Tamil Nadu player after another piled on the agony. Raman who had come in at 12 for two and Robin Singh added 165 runs for the fifth wicket before the latter was run out for 69. Arjan Kripal Singh, in his maiden season in first class cricket, joined Raman and the two boosted the total by another 110 runs and before close Tamil Nadu were 370 for five, with Raman unbeaten on 182.

It was on the following day that the records really went overboard. Raman and Arjan were concerned in a sixth wicket partnership of 356 runs

— only 15 runs short of the national record of 371 runs for the sixth wicket put on by Vijay Merchant and Rusi Modi for Bombay against Maharashtra in 1943-44. The previous Tamil Nadu record stood in the names of C.D. Gopinath and M. Balakrishnan who added 217 runs against Mysore in 1956-57. In the meantime, Raman had put into the shade the 234 scored by Gopinath against Mysore in 1958-59 — the highest score by a Tamil Nadu batsman. The tall left-hander then surged to his triple hundred and was ultimately out for 313 — the seventh highest score in the history of the 55-year-old national competition.

By the time Raman was out, Tamil Nadu were 616 for six, but for some inexplicable reason Siva opted to continue batting. In fact, it was the skipper who replaced Raman at the crease and he and Arjan, who had in the meantime reached his maiden century in the Ranji Trophy, simply toyed with the bowling. At stumps, the right hander Arjan was on 237 and



On extreme left: W.V. Raman and on left: Arjan Kripal Singh.

Tamil Nadu were 747 for six. It was their highest total in the Ranji Trophy, surpassing the 709 they had compiled against Railways in the final of the previous year's competition.

It was a three-day match and when Siva continued the innings on the final day morning, the already frustrated Goa players lost all interest in the proceedings. They barely made any attempt to field and walked slowly towards the ball to pick it up when it was hit to them. Skipper Kangralkar gave everyone a bowl and even wicketkeeper Bangera sent down two overs. The whole thing was becoming quite farcical, but Siva, who had resumed on 54, kept the innings going till lunch by which time he reached his century.

By the time Arjan had completed his triple hundred and when Siva finally declared at lunch, the total was 860 for six. But with 52 penalty runs added to the total due to Goa's tardy over rate (partly deliberately) the total inflated to 912 for six, equalling the highest total in the tournament — 912 for eight

by Holkar against Mysore in 1945-46. The 244-run unbroken partnership between Siva and Arjan was the third highest for the seventh wicket in the competition and equalled the Tamil Nadu record standing in the name of Abdul Jabbar and Siva himself against Karnataka five years before.

On the face of it, such scores being piled up and all the record going overboard, would make for remarkable reading, but under the circumstances the whole thing was a pointless exercise. One team batting for 2½ days in a three-day match made a mockery of the spirit in which cricket is played. In the remaining four hours, Goa made 230 for six and the farcial match mercifully concluded.

Tamil Nadu, garnering eight points, topped the table and emerged South Zone champions, but they did not win many friends along the way. Still, as I said in the beginning, a record is a record, whether it is meritorious or hollow. Two triple hundreds in the same innings in a first class match still stands as a unique feat and perhaps we should leave it at that. — (Courtesy: *Straight Bat.*)

— Partab Ramchand

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Not looking at reality

(Continued from page 6)

Chennai residents do not have any such excuse since the draft SMP for Chennai is prepared by our very own home-grown CMDA. It is unfortunate that despite this advantage, and despite having been provided over 30 years to prepare a Second Master Plan, the CMDA

has failed to put together a visionary draft SMP that is based on sustainability and equity. The onus is now on citizens to urge the CMDA to make corrections to this document before taking the next steps with this document.

(To be continued next fortnight)

Answers to Quiz

1. Amazon rainforest; 2. Nigeria; 3. Dr. Jack Kervokian; 4. The great Bjorn Borg; 5. Chihuahua Achebe; 6. Shimon Peres; 7. Sir Tim Berners-Lee; 8. It hosted the 33rd G8 and G8 + 5 Summit; 9. Switzerland; 10. International Day of Non-Violence.

* * *

11. Vaigai Express; 12. Thennangur; 13. *Sivaji, the boss*; 14. Nagesh; 15. The British and Hyder Ali after the latter attacked Madras; 16. S.S. Vasani; 17. Cho S. Ramaswamy; 18. Periyar EVR; 19. *Tolkappiyam* (from Tonmai and Kappiyam), Tonmai means ancient and Kappiyam means literature; 20. Sundaramurti Nayanar.

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