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No haven for flamingoes

— Or for the inhabitants of 52 villages if Pulicat is made a freshwater reservoir

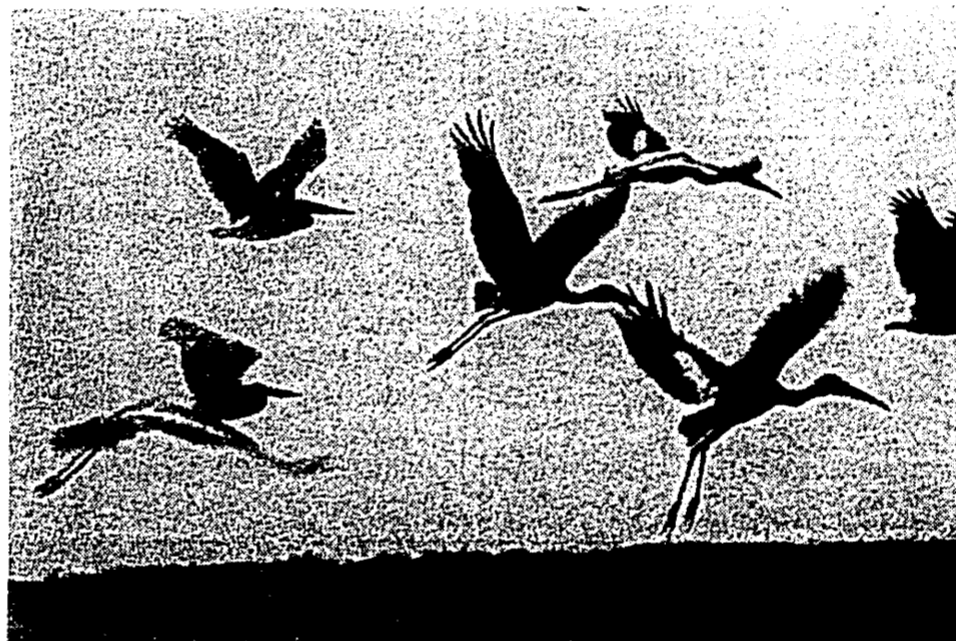
(By A Special Correspondent)

Damned if it is done, and damned if it isn't — that seems to be the story of most of the plans hatched to bring water to parched Madras. The latest, and most controversial, solution to the metropolis' water problem is the

proposed conversion of Pulicat Lake, about 60 km north of Madras, into a freshwater one.

The lake, a shallow brackish lagoon spreading 460 square kilometers parallel to the Bay of Bengal and with a 200 m wide entrance to the Bay, has, so far, been known only as a breeding ground for choice prawns, crabs and oysters and as a resting place for migratory waterbirds, including flamingoes. (In fact, after watching the thousands which arrived this year, bird-watchers have felt that there were distinct hopes of flamingoes breeding at Pulicat, which is declared welland that has to be preserved for migrant waterbirds and which supports two bird sanctuaries, Pulicat and Nelapattu.) The Lake falls partly in Tamil Nadu and partly in Andhra Pradesh and many of the inhabitants of the 52 villages around the lake make their living by fishing in it. In fact, this has become such a competitive activity that there have been recent reports of violence between Tamil Nadu and Andhra fishermen on this account.

The 1992-93 drought sent engineers and planners of the Madras Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board — Metrowater — scurrying wildly to locate alternate sources of water



These photographs were taken by V S RAGHAVAN a little late in the season at Pulicat Lake this year. Nevertheless, the picture on top shows hundreds of flamingoes that had wintered there. At the height of the season this year, there had been thousands. With various schemes being debated to bring Pulicat Lake into the 21st Century, will scenes like these be another thing of the past before long?

turning it into a freshwater one, the biodiversity supported by it at present will vanish forever. P J Sanjeeva Raj, a strong anti-Pulicat scheme campaigner, argues that cutting off the lake from the sea would prevent exchange of water, oxygen, nutrients and plankton. It would also prevent the outward migration of breeding prawns, crabs and fish and the inward migration of their eggs, larvae and juveniles.

Another major argument against the conversion of the lake is that, if it happens, fishermen in the area would be suddenly deprived of their means of livelihood. Prawn fishing in the lake

(Continued on P3)

supply for the city. With the Telugu Ganga project far from nearing completion, and not expected to fulfil the entire water needs of the city even when completed, every other option, including reviving the much tainted Veeranam project and the obviously expensive Kilkatalai scheme, has been considered. One of these options is the Pulicat scheme. In fact, this seems to have been viewed as so viable that Metrowater has assigned the feasibility study report to Mott McDonald, a British firm.

The Rs. 20 crore conversion of Pulicat Lake to a reservoir of freshwater requires the erection of two dykes, 300 to 400 metres long at each point that the lake meets the sea, thereby disconnecting the two. Seawater would, thus, be kept out of the lake into which three small rivers, Swamamukhi, Kalangi and Araniyar, empty. Water storage in the lake could be augmented not only by rainwater but also, according to R K Murthy, veteran water resource expert, by Krishna water from a modified Telugu Ganga scheme. Murthy also suggests the ideal water level in the lake should be six to eight feet above mean sea level and nearly 12 feet at the maximum discharge level, through spillway discharge. It is not known, however, if this will prevent the area around the lake from being flooded in the event of torrential inflows into the lake, as happened during the 1984 cyclone. Six or seven new openings to the sea appeared in the lake at that time, and these alone helped drain the excess water and prevent flooding, it was felt. If the mouths are blocked, will the lagoon flood the surrounding land during monsoon floods, is the question being asked.

There seem to be several impediments to the implementation of what Metrowater sees as a viable scheme. As is happening increasingly frequently, this developmental plan too is apparently in conflict with environmental interests. Alarmed Madras environmentalists point out that once the delicate saline ecobalance of the lake is upset, by

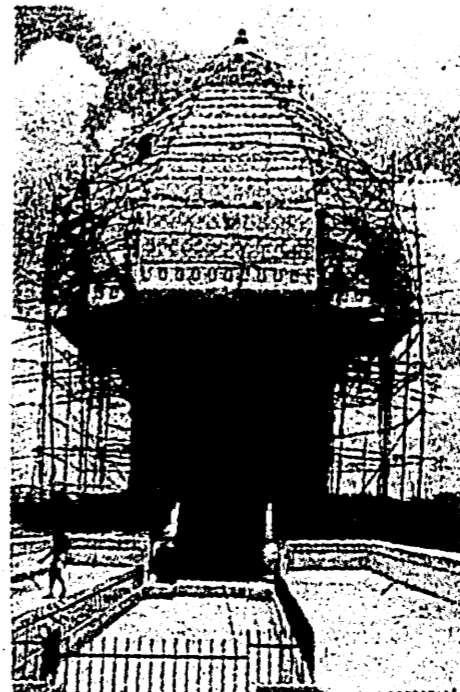


Sheer coincidence?

(By The Editor)

It may have been pure coincidence. Or it might just be that someone out there — or even up there — reads Madras Musings and has decided to care for Madras too. Whatever the case, Madras Musings had drawn attention to the sorry state of Valluvar Kottam in its issue of April 1st and V S RAGHAVAN took these photographs of a facelift underway on April 15th.

With Government House, also a Madras Musings' 'cause', now getting a facelift, would that other conservation suggestions mentioned in these columns received the same attention. For instance, would that someone would say that the Police Headquarters building was being preserved. And would that someone would say that a Heritage Act will soon be enacted. We live in hope.



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Quizzin' with Ramanan

Will there ever be another Norton?

He was the mightiest Roman of them all, a legend in his lifetime, a brilliant lawyer and a rapier-sharp cross-examiner. Many were the sensational cases, both civil and criminal, he featured in, not only in Madras but also Calcutta where he practised for years after leaving Madras.

He was not merely a legendary lawyer. He was a politician and also a journalist. He loved India and Indians and not his own people. The British hated him because of his association with the Indian National Congress in the late 19th Century. For which reason he was never knighted, so was never 'Sir Eardley Norton', as he was described in *Madras Musings* recently!

The Norton family roots went back a long time in Madras. An ancestor, George Norton, was a judge of the Supreme Court of Madras (the predecessor of the High Court). John Bruce Norton, Eardley's father, was a leading Barrister of Madras in his day and was the Advocate-General. He was also the leader of English society in the city. But Eardley Norton outshone them both.

Eardley Norton was born on February 19, 1852, and studied in Brussels, before joining Oxford's famed Merton College. Choosing the family profession, he became a Barrister in 1870 and practised for nine years in the Northern Circuit in England before deciding to return to roots. He landed in Madras in July 1879 and enrolled himself as a lawyer of the Madras High Court. That same month, a poor but brilliant Brahmin, R Satagopachariar, also enrolled. 'Sadagopa', as he called him, became Norton's closest friend in Madras and both appeared together in many sensational cases.

Within a few years, Norton became one of the leaders of the Provincial Bar. As a criminal lawyer he had few equals and appeared in almost every important and sensational trial in Madras and in district towns. Some of the celebrated cases he appeared in included the Coimbatore Photographer Murder Case, the Garston Dacoity Case, the Salem Riots Case, the Kannivadi Zamin Case and many others.

He was a master of human psychology, which he made full use of in his cases. Once, a case came up for hearing before a British judge in Madras notorious for sliding into a comatose state.

condition after a heavy meal. The case involved very heavy stakes and Norton's client's livelihood depended on its successful outcome. To keep the honourable judge awake, Norton hit on a brilliant idea. He requested an invitingly buxom British woman to be present in court and look admiringly at him when he was on his feet, conducting the case. The judge had an eye for female amplitude and was all attention right through the trial! Norton, arrival of the Governor, he wrote, "...a large number are present on the principle that the next best thing to being a rose is to be seen near it. A few wives seize the opportunity of doing their husbands a good turn and airing their latest dress-improvers. The Church is there to gather glory from an earthly King. And when it is all over, everyone comes back to the club and swears the whole thing is a damned nuisance... Amen!" (One wonders what Norton



by Randor Guy

would have written if he were in Tamil Nadu today when sycophancy is virtually a religion!) Norton lived alone in Madras in famed *Dunmore House*. If he was married, no one saw his wife here. In Calcutta, Norton wrote his memoirs as a serial in 'Looker-On'. This magazine has vanished and Norton's narrative is a collector's item. (A Madras-based Barrister has a Xeroxed copy which he refuses even to show this writer!)

Norton was a member of the Madras Corporation, having won his seat from the Triplicane constituency. He was also a member of the Imperial Council in Delhi, and had to resign his seat when a case of defamation was filed against him by Sullivan. The case Sullivan vs. Norton became a *cause célèbre* and has entered the law books of India.

Norton spent his vacations up in Kodaikanal and, at the age of 70, he spent his leisure hours there learning typing! He typed his letters to close friends and one such, addressed to 'Dear Sadagopa', ended with the line, "Your Affect (sic) friend... this is my own typing. So be lenient as I am but a beginner." This letter became famous and found a place in V.C. Gopalratnam's classic book on the history of the Madras High Court, *A Century Completed* (this book, sadly out of print, is another collector's item).

Norton left India in 1926 and, after some years, passed away. His fans had his portrait unveiled in the Madras High Court portrait gallery, where he was the first non-judge to have his portrait hung. A prejudiced Chief Justice shifted the portrait from the gallery to the High Court corridor, an act of sheer British bureaucratic snobbery! Norton was the stuff legends are made of... excellent as ever, won the case. After which the judge sent a note to Norton asking for details about the lady. Norton wrote back on the same note, "Dear judge, I don't think I'll ever meet her again, nor do I think would you!" Norton practised for three decades in Madras with spectacular success but was more or less forced to leave the city. His pro-Indian attitude and anti-British stance made him *persona non grata* with the English community in Madras. But there was another, more telling reason. A somewhat sordid one.

He was cited as co-respondent in a divorce suit filed in the Madras High Court, on the Original Side, Matrimonial Division. The case was filed by a Briton against his wife alleging her "repeated acts of adultery with a local lawyer named Eardley Norton". That was a period of prudery and Madras was a very conservative small town rather than a city. The details of the case, especially the acts of adultery, titillated the locals and many wrote letters to the editor of *The Hindu*. The Editor, a Norton admirer, was so embarrassed by many of them that he put an end to the spate of letters, for and against! In keeping with the practice of the times, only initials of the people concerned were mentioned! (But the original records would have the full salacious details!)

Shunned by the local British, Norton took off for Calcutta. Here he conducted many famed trials, like the Manikattala Bomb Case in which Aurobindo Ghosh was one of the accused. Norton was the prosecutor. During his Calcutta innings, his friend Sadagopa asked him to come to Madras to argue the famous appeal in the Coimbatore Photographer Murder Case. The accused, a playboy zamindar of Coimbatore, was sentenced to death, and Norton's brilliant arguments earned acquittal for the accused. An enquiry was made into the conduct of a police officer in the case, and the IG of Madras, on enquiry, found nothing against the officer. In his confidential report, the IG commented that the police lost the case because of the bad handling of it by the Crown, "Eardley Norton proving too much not only for the lawyer but also for the British judges!" Norton wrote a regular column for *The Hindu*, titled 'Olla Podrida', under the pen-name 'Sentinel'. The pseudonym was a well-kept secret and revealed only when he stopped writing. Norton criticised the ruling class with a heavy sarcastic pen without fear or favour. For example, writing about a scene at Madras Central station on the

would have written if he were in Tamil Nadu today when sycophancy is virtually a religion!)

Norton lived alone in Madras in famed *Dunmore House*. If he was married, no one saw his wife here. In Calcutta, Norton wrote his memoirs as a serial in 'Looker-On'. This magazine has vanished and Norton's narrative is a collector's item. (A Madras-based Barrister has a Xeroxed copy which he refuses even to show this writer!)

Norton was a member of the Madras Corporation, having won his

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A family evening of rare brilliance

The Family Show' promised a colourful evening. It was a show put together by members of the family of the pioneer film director K. Subramaniam and his brother K. Viswanathan to commemorate the 90th birth anniversary of K. Subramaniam.

The members of the family are all well-known in the worlds of film-making, dance and music. The grandchildren, each well-groomed in music and dance, proved to be excellent organizers as well as hosts. Not a note of discord was seen in a show in which there was a blend of such different media as video, pop music, classical Carnatic and Hindustani music and Bharatha Natyam presentations.

Among the grandchildren, it is perhaps Kannan who stands out as the most brilliant, with his mastery over the veena. Lata and Gita, Krishnaswamy's daughters, and Lakshmi and Saraswati, Ramanan's daughters, are dancers with very different approaches to their dancing. While the Krishnaswamy sisters presented their own choreography in Aurobindo's 'Savithri',

the Ramanan sisters presented extracts from 'Krishna Tulabharam' choreographed by their aunt Padma and composed by their grandmother Meenakshi Subramaniam. S.V. Ramanan, in his inimitable style, presented a tableau, 'Ulagam Namade', with the whole family participating.

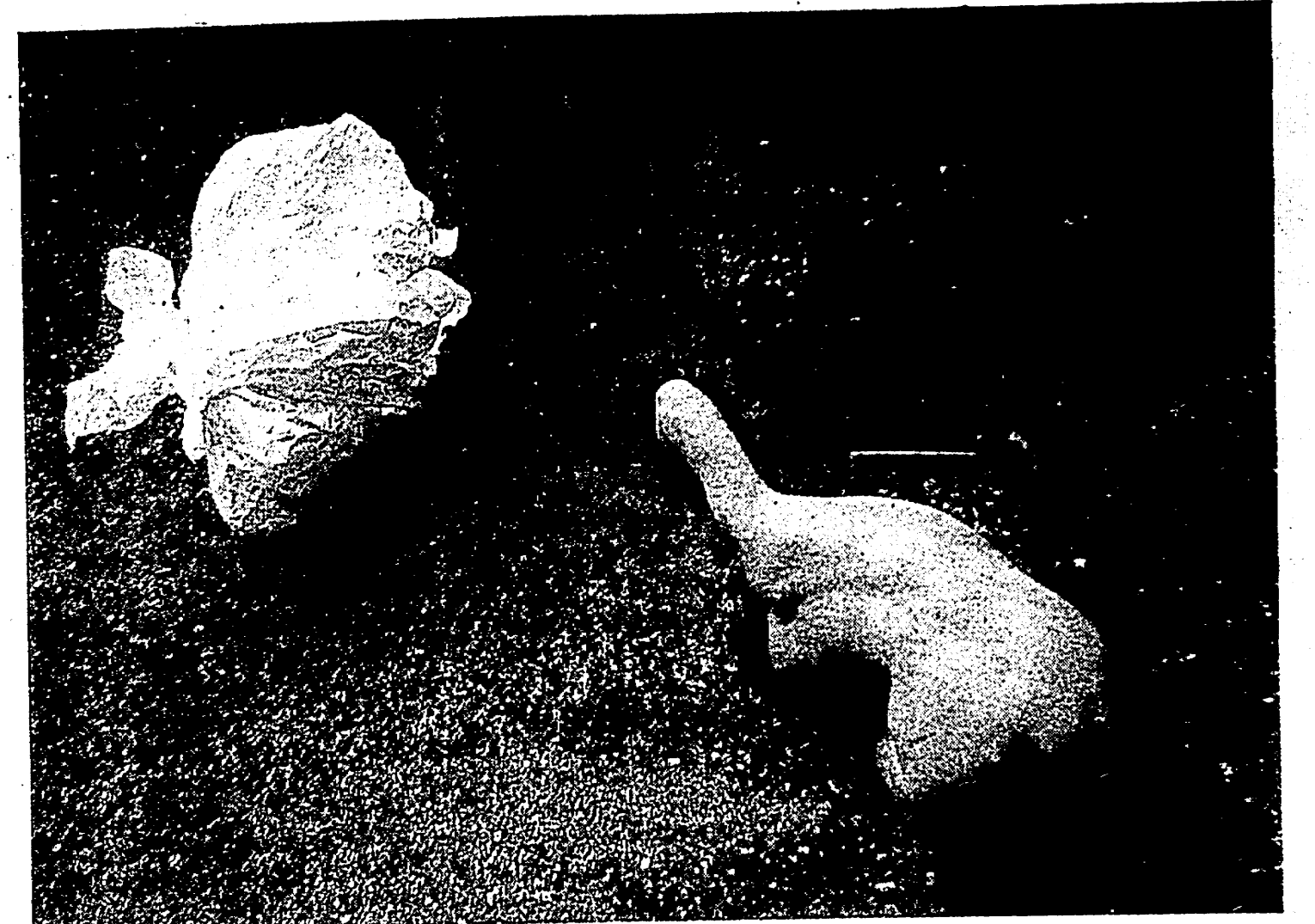
Obviously well-rehearsed, the show was presented against a simple but aesthetic stage decor.

The show was not without its mirth-filled moments, especially when Ramji's Abaswaram made its musical contribution and Padma Subramaniam danced 'Theerada vilayattu pillai' with her little grand-niece, Vaishnavi Ravichandran. Padma danced in a bright orange, sequined *lehanga* with a brocade silk, pale green half-saree.

The evening was delightfully entertaining, starting with a short video film on Director K. Subramaniam and K. Viswanathan made by son S. Krishnaswamy. It featured several interesting stills and film clips, including the famous court scene where the heroine refuses to rejoin a truant husband and offers to pay him alimony. The video also showed a clip from an earlier commemoration, when MGR had made a moving speech about how Subramaniam had been a father-figure to him.

R. Venkataraman, the former President of India, had been a close friend and associate of Director Subramaniam and he paid glowing tributes to him, comparing the patriotic fervour of poet Subramania Bharathi and K. Subramaniam. R. Venkataraman went on to say that he could not think of any family in India, or anywhere else in the world, that had so much talent, with so many members rising to such heights in different artistic fields.

In the classical dance field, Padma Subramaniam, who had been the apple of her father's eye, had made bold strides. She has brought to life her theoretical study of the *Karanas*, carrying on regardless of critics who have called her style 'Padma Natyam' and those who have questioned her sense of aesthetics in costume and presentation. She has been the best-known member of the family, though her brothers Krishnaswamy and S.V. Ramanan have made great successes



A Boyd Webb exhibit at the Lalit Kala Akademi.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Till May 6: Boyd Webb, the official British participant in the Eighth Indian Triennale, who exhibited a series of 12 large, colourful Cibachromes (see photograph) on themes of reproduction

and reprocessing, is a sculptor who uses photography to record the images he constructs. His works shown at the Triennale are on display at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Madras. (British Council in collaboration with LKA).

Till May 10: The Sakshi Gallery Collections. Drawings, etchings, lithographs, water colours, oils and sculpture by various artists. Sakshi Gallery, 11 Khadar Nawaz Khan Road. Open between 11 am and 6 pm, Mondays to Saturdays.

The family show was the kind of show only such a family could have presented. They've been born to show biz!

'Screwed', not 'crude'

In my review last fortnight of a lecture demonstration of Hindustani Music by Chandralekha Bannerjee at I.I.T., I had mentioned my being disturbed over Dhruvad music being described as "crude". The word was "screwed", I was told later. The sentence was "The poetic content of the composition is screwed to a rigid framework of the Tala. There is no scope for emotional embellishment." When it was read out, I think there was a pause after the word 'screwed' and the word 'to' had escaped our ears. I heard it as 'crude' and discussed this immediately with my neighbour and, later, with others who had all heard it the same way. My apologies to Chandralekha Bannerjee, but I was as disturbed when I heard it as she was when she read about it.

V.R. Devika



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Chess prize money lags popularity



Viswanathan Anand captured in a happy mood by V S RAGHAVAN. Could the smile be for the chess boom he has been responsible for in Tamil Nadu?

From India's first International Master, Manuel Aaron, to the country's first and lone Grandmaster, Viswanathan Anand, Madras has produced more national and international stars in chess than in any other sporting discipline, indoor or outdoor. While Aaron, unfortunately, did not live up to the promise he showed as a teenager and had to be content with the distinction of being the first Indian to gain

Including Neyveli Lignite Corporation, Indian Bank, Bharat Petroleum, Life Insurance Corporation, Reserve Bank of India, Indian Airlines, Indian Railways and Major Ports, there were as many as 20 teams in all for the seven-round championship held at the Income Tax Club's indoor auditorium in Nungambakkam. So talented were the majority of the players that, to the fans and the solitary chess-playing mediaperson who had turned up to watch such stars as Lanka Ravi, K V Saravanan and others battle it out, the auditorium provided a sight to tingle the blood. There had never before been a tournament in the City where so many boards were engaged simultaneously. Yet, it had a smooth and efficient passage, for which the organising committee deserve a pat on its back.

The tournament was no doubt lucky to have had the benefit of the advice of not only veteran Aaron, still going strong as a member of the Indian Bank team, and of a knowledgeable arbiter in M Subramaniam but also of the ever-active veteran organiser, K Kameswaran, who, apart from this overall supervision, played the rôle of P R O. But the well-organised tournament had one snag! The total purse of Rs. 40,000, with a beggarly Rs. 3,000/- to the top board player (Lanka Ravi), was disappointing. Chess in India, it would appear, has miles to go to earn, ironically enough, in the country where it was born, the patronage such games like cricket and tennis have obtained.

by

AJAX

international recognition, the youthful Anand has scaled the heights as no other Indian sportsperson and has emerged a top contender for the world crown.

Whatever is in store for Anand, his achievements to date have boosted the popularity of chess in Tamil Nadu as never before. The ever-growing number of tournaments, including those for under-13 boys and girls, speaks volumes for the new look the game has gained. Pride of place among the organisers must go to the Central Revenue Sports Board of Madras, which recently conducted the biggest-ever tournament in the city, the annual National Institutional team championship.

MRF cap it all!

The Cricket Club of India's recent Diamond Jubilee tournament in Bombay was the latest feather in MRF's cap. The tyre-manufacturing company's seven-run win over star-studded Sun-grace-Mafatlat in the final, earning it a winner's purse of Rs. 100,000, enhanced its already high status as India's most sport-minded industrial establishment.

Apart from the fabulous investment in their Pace Foundation in Madras, stated to run into several lakhs a year, MRF have established themselves as a force to reckon with in football and motor racing competitions. But their Bombay cricket triumph is more significant than their soccer and motor-racing achievements for it is in tune with MRF's commendable policy to help promising young pace bowlers develop their talent and also provide employment to those who have proved their worth on the cricket field.

The victorious line-up speaks for itself. If a discreet veil is put over the presence of Mohammed Azharuddin, who has signed up

to be a guest player for MRF whenever required, it is an all-Madras squad, headed by former Indian opener W V Raman, which would ever feel grateful to its employer. The MRF team indeed owes a great deal to the drive and enthusiasm of Vinoo Mammen.

TAILPIECE: With former Australian Test Fast bowler Dennis Lillee as its visiting Principal and former Indian Test medium-pacer T A Sekhar as its resident Principal, the MRF Pace Foundation has turned out several State and India stars, like Vivek Razdan, Subroto Banerjee, Venkatesh Prasad and Javagal Srinath, all of whom have earned India caps. And thanks to Vinoo Mammen, the Foundation lads have also had the benefit of advice from former Australian Test stars like John Inverarity, the Chappel brothers, Ian and Greg, and Graham McKenzie, all, of course, roped in by compatriot Lillee. His latest catch is the one and only Jeff Thompson, expected at the Foundation in the first fortnight of June.

JAICI

Bitten by the vintage car bug

Rabi Rajaratnam's unique collection of 700-odd scale-model vintage cars does prove a point: 'A thing of beauty does keep one a boy forever!'

To this industrialist, who confesses to having retired from a busy nine to five schedule, "the automobile has always been an object of affection and a great source of excitement". Remembering his childhood, Rabi Rajaratnam recalls, "My father had three cars in those days. As a boy, I had a wonderful collection of toy cars. I even had a few scale-model cars in my toy garage, which I kept in one corner of the verandah in my parent's home".

Growing up in Salem, he had also seen a variety of rare models owned by the estate owners and managers in Yercaud. "Sometime I used to sneak out of church during service to touch 'n' feel the cars parked outside," remembers this car buff.

Having learnt to drive when he was seven, Rajaratnam had high hopes of doing a lot of rallying and club racing, but, finding no sponsors, he had to forget his dreams. This may be called the turning point in his life: he turned to car collection to keep alive his interest in cars forever.

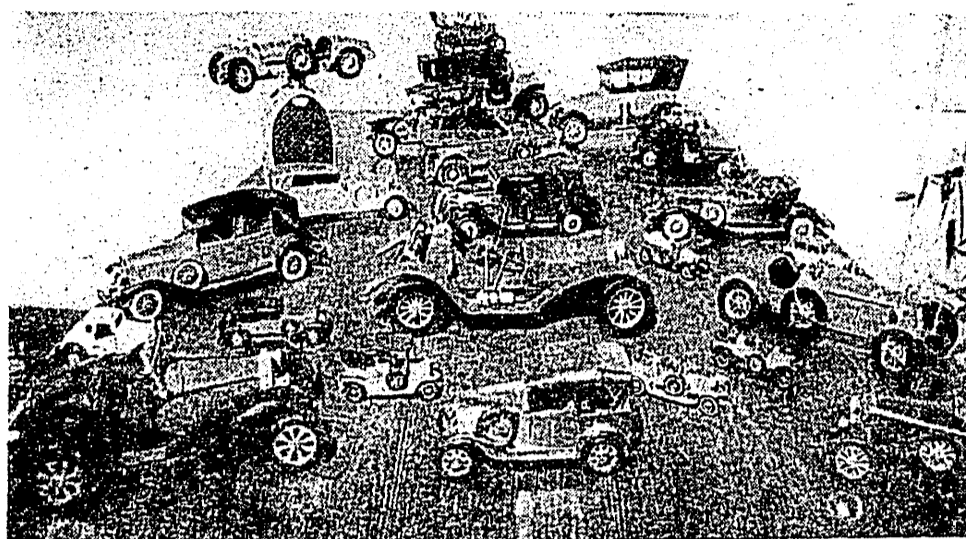
There are plenty of vintage model car collectors abroad, especially in countries like Italy and Germany, but Rajaratnam's fabulous collection, from the first Benz model of 1885 to a steam car of 1900 to a Lincoln of 1939, is one of the few in India.

Let us not, even for a moment, make the mistake of confusing these miniature marvels with toy cars. As Rajaratnam is not satisfied with look-alikes, he insists on authenticity. The scale-models in his collection are true duplicates of the original cars, the miniatures built from metal or plastic kits. A large number of them have been moulded from die casts, conforming to scales ranging from 1:12 to 1:48. Such exotic names as Duesenberg, Hispano Suiza, Marmon, Delahaye, Alvis, Hotchkiss, Graham Paige, Lancia, Delage, Isotta Fraschini and the like, all of which still have a rare whiff of magic about them, are found in this dedicated hobbyist's collection.

If you are a Hollywood fan, you will be pleasantly surprised to find prototypes of cars custom-made for such all-time greats as Clarke Gable, Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, Tyrone Power and Greta Garbo. You will also see the model of the car used by the immortal Rudolph Valentino.

Talk of World History, and there before you stand the scale-models of some legendary cars, like the Austro-Daimler which was being used by the Archduke Ferdinand when he was assassinated, the red Lancia owned by Mussolini, and a Mercedes 36 Model called Grosser Mercedes, the model used by Hitler when he reviewed his stormtroopers. The cars used by the Mafia dons of the American Twenties are also represented in this collection.

For the sports fan interested in folk heroes and their machines, there are scale-models of the cars used by Jack Dempsey, the great heavyweight champion, besides models of some of the greatest sports cars of all times: the Bentleys, the SSKL Mercedes, the Invicta and a few replicas of the magnificent Bugattis.



Just a few of the hundreds of scale-model vintage cars that Rabi Rajaratnam has in his magnificent collection. (Photograph: V S RAGHAVAN)

No narration about Rabi Rajaratnam's all-absorbing hobby would be complete if mention is not made of his Model T Ford, proudly displayed in the centre of his living room. This marvel, one of his larger models, stands almost three feet high and was made from rosewood by a master woodcarver from Vellore under the connoisseur's supervision. Rajaratnam's story of his search for this wood carver is a feature by itself, but more importantly demonstrates his dedication and perseverance.

But what about the real thing? I asked. Rajaratnam showed me his gleaming Austin '39 parked in the front

also has a large collection of books on vintage and veteran cars. One of the walls is adorned with the hubcaps of famous cars like the Packard, Alvis, Jaguar, Sunbeam, Lancia, Auburn and others. Then there are the ash trays, cuff links, stamps, beer mugs, peg tables, bath towels and oil paintings featuring vintage four-wheelers. Among the more exotic items are a cigarette lighter and a room deodorant, each shaped like a car. He also has an old gramophone record that gives a running commentary on a mock Grand Prix car race, complete with revs of engines at different speeds. It also carries some interviews with drivers like Ascari, Fangio and others.

Rajaratnam does miss one thing and that is having no other vintage car collector to talk to. But his interest in cars is shared by his family members in varying degrees.

Publicity shy and extremely careful about his "priceless gems", as he calls them, Rabi Rajaratnam is definitely not interested in making his deeply absorbing hobby an object of public curiosity. But he muses, "How I wish there was a doctorate offered in this subject. I would certainly have had a try." As an alternative, he has settled for collecting at least another 150-200 cars, so as to complete a certain period. And as I get ready to drag myself away, he waxes poetic: "I call my hobby an art. If there is one thing that this car bug has taught me, it is dedication. I now fully appreciate the meaning of Keats' lines, 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever, its loveliness increases, it will never pass into nothingness.'"

ANSWERS IN QUIZ

1. Marrakesh in Africa; 2. Swallowing flies with optimum results; 3. Tondiarpet; 4. Power Macintosh; 5. Bharatidasan University, Tiruchi; 6. He became the youngest swimmer to cross the Palk Strait; 7. Taiwan; 8. K.K. Katyal, Dy. Editor of *The Hindu*; 9. Rusi Modi, S. Venkataraghavan and Mohammed Azharuddin; 10. IndusInd Bank Ltd; 11. He is winner of the prestigious Augusta Masters Golf Tournament; 12. Madhavaram and Nalambur; 13. Anil Kumble; 14. Rwanda and Burundi respectively; 15. As toilet paper!!!; 16. Laurie Baker; 17. V. Ganapathi Sthapathi, at Minor Rock, Kanniyakumari; 18. J.D. Johnson, principal of the SBOA High School and Junior College, Anna Nagar; 19. Jisha Menon and Michael Muthu; 20. Of course, 'Madras Nalla Madras'.