Buckingham Canal high and lows

The water in it may be fairly stagnant at least as far as the city is concerned but, when it comes to news about it, the Buckingham Canal is full for highs and lows. Within the last fortnight we have had heartening and disappointing news – there are plans for its revitalisation and, at the same time, an insipid public is doing its best to pollute the few surviving pristine portions of the water body.

Late last December the Central Government announced that it was keen to revamp the Canal, in particular the portion that runs between Chennai and Yanam. This declaration was made on the occasion of the opening of the new regional office of the Department of Inland Waterways, located in Vijayawada. It is learnt that a comprehensive survey of the Canal will have to be undertaken if it is to be made navigable for ferrying passenger and industrial and agricultural produce. At a time when the road network in the country is coming under great strain, the canal can be a viable alternative especially for goods that do not have to be transported very quickly. It is to be noted that the Canal can serve to transport nearly 15 million tonnes of goods along its route. The Centre’s survey will cover the three States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Pondicherry.

Preliminary studies have revealed that encroachments and siltation have narrowed the canal considerably along most of its route. Originally planned to be 32 metres wide, it is at many places less than 6 metres. The depth which was to be maintained at 2.5 metres, is less than a metre now. The locks, which at one time maintained water levels in the canal even during low tides, have mostly disintegrated. In any case these need to be replaced for they were designed for much smaller vessels. But with the Centre pledging Rs. 2000 crore for the revival of inland waterways, all this should not be an issue. What is needed is speedy execution of the whole project. Much will depend on whether the Detailed Project Report is completed as planned by June this year.

And now for the bad news. As is well known, our city has been one of the major contributors to the destruction of this canal. Used as a sewage channel for long, the last nail on its coffin was the construction of the Mass Rapid Transport System on the canal bed. That blocked the waterway for good and destroyed all hopes of its revival. But with the MRTS running only within the old city limits and the canal extending...

(Continued on page 8)

The importance of being smart

It is just a fortnight since we brought you the news that a national magazine survey placed Chennai at the top of the chart on the liveability index. We now have the other side of the tale to tell – when it comes to the digital divide. Chennai ranks very low on Internet connectivity and also facilities that are available online.

This finding has come to light following the expiry of the deadline set by the Centre for the States to nominate their smart cities. A national daily based outside of Chennai has some rather depressing statistics to report – out of 11.64 lakh property owners in the city only 70,500 pay their taxes online, 10 per cent of electricity consumers pay their bills online and out of 37.53 lakh buildings with water connections, just about 60,000 use the online payment facility. The record when it comes to public transport is even worse – out of 3,600 buses plying in Chennai, only 50 have global positioning systems (GPS) installed and out of 1,800 bus stops just a handful have digital signboards that give updated information on bus arrival timings.

Compare this with what is happening in other cities – Bangalore is working overtime to meet its self-imposed deadline of installing GPS in all 6,500 of its buses within this year, Ahmedabad is setting up clusters where free internet connectivity will be available and Delhi police is working wonders on mobile applications for smart phone users – there is an app to report lost property and there is another for...

(Continued on page 8)
Eco-friendly dry toilets

In Madras Musings, February 1, 2005, I wrote, says reader K.V.S. Krishna: “The plantation companies in South India have long been providing latrines for workers according to the Plantation Labour Act.

“For example, dry-pit latrines are provided by the management. A later version has a 1.5’ to 1.75’ bore hole dug manually to a depth of 15’ or 20’. On top of this is mounted a cylindrical concrete monobloc latrine which usually has a 36” internal diameter and is 6’ high, with the top and bottom concrete slabs fused together. The bottom has an opening aligned to the bore.

“These cylindrical mobile toilets can be refilled, after the bottom is filled with sullage, on a new bore within minutes. When the second bore is filled, the first bore can be cleared of night soil (used as manure) and refilled on the same bore hole.

“These cylindrical toilets can be made with just two bags of cement, jute, sand and steel rods for reinforcement. In 1975, they cost Rs. 150. When normal toilets cost Rs. 350-400.

“The dry pit toilets can also be made with Indian-style seats for wet use. The sullage is cleared as in the dry toilet by having two bores, five feet apart, and two drain pipes attached to each of them. However, when contamination of soil is likely, a septic tank can be made with Indian-style seats.

“Some differences of opinion with the whole world is with this idea for deterring the poster nuisance. Firstly, do those who actually paste posters on walls pay any taxes? Highly unlikely is MMM’s view for these are the people who actually contribute to the springs of society. And so how does the Corporation aim to protect public walls from them? Secondly, do those people who commission these posters pay any taxes? That too is highly debatable. Here special media persons are the political variety, and leading the battle against post- ers! MMM is certain that the various big governmental agencies in the city definitely pay their taxes but when it comes to putting up posters their record is not particularly edifying. The latest issues of the vernacular magazines in particular are widely advertised by means of posters, and these are to be found everywhere.

“Lastly, by putting up this sign, MMM feels the Corporation stating that public property alone is to be spared of posters and private walls can be used with impunity. That is a matter to ponder over. But having said these are largely men and women from the lower section who spend money on posters and cutouts featuring their city-based political top bosses. The posters herald on these closely follow these. There, again, taxes are a sensitive subject. Next come the posters featuring club and society. The basis is the same.

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“A new variety of offenders is the Sahba or classical music organisation. MMM is rather unsure of this, the secretary of a Sahba gets by putting up posters of artists which are not frequently four-legged brethren or united upon by the two-legged variety. But this is a recent trend and MMM would not comment on this industry too. It is notorious for low fees.

“On paper by which MMM does not mean poster paper.

What of the media which rightfully speaking ought to be all that, MMM is of the view that the latest posters are very much an improvement on the old ‘Stick No Bills’ or ‘Those Pasting Posters Will Be Prosecuted’. MMM is clearly aware that there are latecomers to this new kind of speed breaker that have come up and wanting the city definitely pay their taxes but when it comes to putting up posters their record is not particularly edifying. The latest issues of the vernacular magazines in particular are widely advertised by means of posters, and these are to be found everywhere.

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Driving up, and down

The Man from Madras Musings has in the past lamented about the state of the speed breakers on our city roads. The lack of standardisation in curve, slope, width and texture has been dealt with in detail. So also has the lack of markings to indicate that a speed breaker is lurking on a particularly dark stretch of road. But before you go on to the next article with a muttered comment about how MMM has lost it and is repeating himself, lend him your eyes a little, for MMM now writes of the new kind of speed breaker that has manifested itself.

MMM is fairly sure that you have come across it. It is broad unlike the earlier ones that were sharply curved. But such is its width that it gives you the feeling that you are climbing up a hill. If you are in a car, even one is thrown back as the vehicle makes the ascent. If you are on a two-wheeler and you hit the up slope with some speed, chances are that you take off like a rocket and land in the next postal district.
A trail of hope

The opening lines in The Chief’s Madras Miscellany column of the Hindu Metropolitan supplement of December 15, 2014 read: ‘When Virginia Jealous speaks to members of the Madras Book Club this evening, it will be as though she were amidst all the tall grass in the unkempt St. Mary’s Cemetery on The Island she found the tombstones of Adele Florence Nicolson, well known as Laurence Hope, and General Malcolm Nicolson.

And, as life and luck would have it, that’s precisely what travel writer, poet and essayist, Virginia Jealous, announced the other day in the Madras Book Club event.

It’s great when Life decides to show off, revealing its ability to evoke that perfect touch of drama that reinforces how that kind’s eternal belief that there are such things as ‘special moments’... unscribed, sudden, miraculous even... or just plain fun.

In the past few weeks, much has been written, both here in Madras Musings and elsewhere, on Virginia Jealous, her father John Jealous, and the latter’s attempts to unearth the story of Rajay-dos poet ‘Laurence Hope’, a pseudonym used by Adele Florence Nicolson – yes, we’re up to speed on all of that.

Now, your own connect with Laurence Hope is almost non-existent. Almost, because, without having a clue about their origin, you have come across a ‘Pale Hands’ I Loved Beside the Shalimar...’, the opening line of her most famous poem, ‘Kashmiri Song’.

Except that it was through a chance conversation with G. V. Shantam, as he ‘...sat in the bath tub soaking a meditative foot, and singing, if I remember it correctly, ‘Pale Hands I loved beside the Shalimar...’ that I came to know about Pale Hands and also a deep revealing introduction.

That evening, the Book Club met was about Virginia’s journey, a daughter’s tribute to her father’s magnificent obsession, following his trail, tracing the life of Adele Florence Nicolson, aka Laurence Hope.

John Jealous first came to Madras in 1989 on the trail of Laurence Hope, a pseudonym used by Adele Florence Nicolson. By coincidence, fact, found her grave, alongside her husband’s, during that visit.

Looking back, how did this particular obsession ever begin?

John started his research in ‘83, and my father wasn’t really interested in Laurence Hope back then,” Virginia Jealous, in a pretty floral kurta, is relating the story, while comfortably addressing the Madras Book Club. A friend remarks that Virginia reminds her a bit of Meryl Streep. "But, by about the late 80s, he was obsessed with the thought of finding out more about Laurence Hope. He travelled in the Middle East, India and Britain to meet his heroine’s friends with an Indian gentleman, Partha, a friendship that lasted for more than 25 years. I think it was Partha who introduced me to the works of writers from India.”

Virginia, who is described as someone who ‘lives out of a suitcase’, has travelled extensively, written guide books for Lonely Planet, and published essays and collected poems of her poems which grew out of a three-month Asian writing residency in India in 2012, was published by Hallowell Press in 2013.

Virginia has presented talks and given readings in writers’ festivals in India, Singapore and Australia.

Laurence Hope was the 'second love' of her father’s life, says Virginia.

Hope’s last collection of poems, published by Heinemann, was put together in 1904 in Madras.

She worked with passion, sex, loss, longings, and longing

worldliness about her; yet her direct, searing gaze must have chilled the men around her, used to perhaps very different treatment. Her nickname was ‘Violet’, thanks to her violet eyes. She wore her hair in fringes, and wore bangles, sarees, and was mostly comfortable reclining, barefoot, on a sofa, while smoking.

She also liked dressing up like a Persian Boy.

No one knows why she chose this particular pseudonym. But choose she had to, given that it just wasn’t okay back then for a woman to write the way she wrote.

Laurence Hope, says Virginia, was “extraordinarily famous” by 1901.

By 1904, she was dead.

The couple, having realised that they were most at home in India, left their only son in England and from then on till 1945, the world of Laurence Hope was written in the blood of her father’s life, says Virginia.

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b·ranjitha Ashok

The name Jealous

Virginia smiles in perfect understanding when you, like a million lion before you probably, ask about her extremely unusual surname.

“My father spent some time tracing family history and compiling the family tree,” she replies. “He had a tailor in Mehboob Nagar, we came by this name, and believed it may have come to England in the 17th century with the Huguenots, who were craftsmen in wool, well known as lattic makers in particular. ‘Lattice’ in French is ‘jaaliouse’, so perhaps the name grew out of a profession, in which I may have morphed into ‘Jealous’. It is a good story, isn’t it? Better than being given this name because you are a jealous person!” she laughs.

A search through Wikipedia reveals that slats, or louvers, in windows, called ‘Jalousie’ in France, not only kept out harsh sunlight, but also the gaze of jealous, prying eyes – ‘la jalouse’, probably so named as they permitted one to see without being seen.

The Chief, overhearing this conversation, points out that we use the word ‘jadai’ here.

The Laurence Hope effect – everything connected with her seems to lead to further information-seeking quests.

- RA

Recalling certain lines in Laurence Hope’s poems, which speak of a lonely place with sun-shine and the sea, Virginia says it is no wonder he had back tears while walking around the property, gazing at tiles dating back to more than a century, imagining Laurence Hope walking on them. Today, she was not just in the property, but also in the grave of Laurence Hope, given her theories and rumours abound. Of affairs. Of possible lesbian relationships. Her best known poem had people speculate if she was a Muslim, a Christian, or a Muslim’s wife. She was a jealous person!!

Hope’s most famous poem: Kashmiri Song was set to music around 1902 by Amy Woodforde-Finden, a composer well-known for her ability to link diverse cultures through music, and from then on till 1945, the song was heard in tea houses and parlours, becoming a drawn-out sorrow to the Chief, in his welcome address, recalls hearing the song in London.

Rudolph Valentino has sung it. And now Finden’s granddaughter sings a modern version.

The years haven’t reduced the poignancy of the words. The longing remains, sighing that while love never goes, it can, and does, go horribly wrong.

And Laurence Hope prefers Death to Farewell.

Pale hands, I loved beside the Shalimar...

Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?

Whom do you lead on Rapture’s way to far

Before you agonise them in farewell?

I would have rather felt you round my throat,

Crushing a life, than weeping me to fate

The poem first appeared in Hope’s first collection of poems, The Garden of Kama (1901), also known as India’s Love Lyrics. The illustrations that accompanied her work were done by people with little or no experience of India, and so were full of stereotypes of what the stay-at-home British imagined India to be like.

Laurence Hope was the highest selling poet in the early part of 20th century, in both UK and in USA, the music adding a lease of life to her poetry. Then, in 1945, she disappeared from the scene. The world moved on, and she was out of fashion.

Perhaps what keeps the interest going is the fact that so very little is known about her. Her best known poem, Kashmiri Song, given her theories and rumours abound. Of affairs. Of possible lesbian relationships. Her best known poem had people speculate if she was a Muslim, a Christian, or a Muslim’s wife. She was a jealous person!!

The name Jealous

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Why can’t Tamil Nadu villages aim to be like these?

India, having an agro-based economy, depends the most on its villages for growth. The geon always has a distinct nostalgic charm. But as India becomes urbanised, the villages are, unfortunately, deteriorating. Poverty, lack of education, lack of sanitation, etc. are what we now associate with villages. Tamil Nadu, despite its rating as one of the best States in the country, is no exception to this.

There are, however, increasing examples of villages that are different. These ten villages featured here could even make metros blush. Can’t Tamil Nadu villages emulate these, setting examples of rural progress?

-- THE EDITOR

(B. Y. Ramalinga Sarma sent us this feature which he states was sourced from BABA-MAIL)

Shani Shingnapur – A village so safe that people don’t need doors

Shani Shingnapur, in Maharashtra, is a village that defies every newspaper report you have ever read. Touted as the safest village in India, the place is known for its lack of doors to houses. Not just the houses, but even the streets are unsafe too. The villagers treat their winged compatriots as family and have even created an area for wounded birds to rest and heal. (Source: Flickr).

Mawlynnong – Asia’s cleanest village

Mawlynnong, a small village in Meghalaya, was awarded the prestigious tag of ‘Cleanest Village in Asia’ in 2003 by Discover India magazine. Located at about 90 km from Shillong, the village offers a haven for you to take in the beauty or to explore it. According to stokers, you cannot find a single cigarette butt/plastic bag lying around anywhere. (Source: Flickr).

Hiware Bazar – The village of 60 millionaires

Hiware Bazar, in the Almora district of Uttar Pradesh, has transformed from being a place fought with issues to being possibly the richest village in India. The sole reason for this forty-fold change is one man called Pavansh Pandey. He banned allгадие transfers to minimum wages and encour-aged the villagers to invest in rainwater harvesting, cattle, etc. There are a record 60 millionaires in the village and hardly any poor. From 148 below Poverty Line families in 1995, Hiware Bazar now has just nine. The villagers continue to strive to see a day when not one person is poor. (Source: Hiware Bazar).

Ballia – the village that beat arsenic poisoning with indigenous method

Ballia village of Uttar Pradesh had an tricky problem to deal with. The soil that the villagers were drinking contained arsenic, which caused serious skin problems and even physical deformities. What is ironic, was not. ‘Akmoil’ exists in the soil, but when combined with water or sugar, it turns toxic. Initially, the villagers faced the problem after the government introduced many hand-pumps in the area for easy water access. The level at which the hand-pumps were dug led to an increase in arsenic levels in the soil and water. When the villagers realized what had happened, instead of waiting for the government to act on it, they (physically) flushed their old wells and went back to an older, safer time. (Source: The Better India).

Korkrebellur – A village that really loves its birds

Korkrebellur, a small village in Karnataka, believes in the conservation of nature. While most other villages consider birds a nuisance because they harm crops, Korkrebellur boasts of rare species of birds that fly around freely. Korkrebellur honors the State with the least girls ratio (at abnormally 877), every newborn in this village, regardless of its sex, is welcomed into the world with sweets and festivities. (Source: Youth Connect Mag).

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Punsari – the village with WiFi, CCTVs, AC classrooms and more

Punsari, in Gujarat, just won metros to shame. Funded by the Indian Government and the village’s own funding model, Punsari is no NRI-blessed zone. The village also boasts of a mini-bus commute system and various other facilities. (Source: Daniel Bhaskar).

Dharna – First fully solar-powered village

Dharna, a village in Bihar, that 30 years as darkness by developing its own solar-powered system for electricity. With the aid of Greenpeace, Dharna declared itself an energy-independent village last July. Students no longer need to bring their studies to do their homework. Now the children who are 17,563 residents living in the village and all of them are considered literate! (Source: The Better India).

Chappar – a village that distributes sweets when a girl is born

Chappar village in Jharsuguda has a woman Sarpanch, Neelam Dornadula. She has made it her life’s mission to change the attitude of the villagers towards women, and she has succeeded. Not only do the women of the village not wear the choodi at any time, but despite Haryana being the State with the lowest girls ratio (at 877), every newborn in this village, regardless of its sex, is welcomed into the world with sweets and festivities. (Source: Youth Connect Mag).

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How the Buckingham Canal was born

In 1800, the Government (the Board of Revenue) was anxious to build a navigable canal from Ennore to Madras by connecting many large and small water bodies, utilising the seasonal river Elambo. Certain people who had a monopoly in the salt trade showed interest, but the Governor was not in favour. However, the project was advertised in the Gazette of December 1801.

A person called Heefke responded to the advertisement and its conditions, which allowed him to collect a reasonable toll for 45 years, apart from enjoying some other privileges from the Government. The inception of the Canal was thus due to a private enterprise. In 1801, Heefke, with one Basil Cochrane as security, obtained a concession from the Government. He commenced the excavation of a canal, for small craft, from the northwest Blacktown wall through strips of land and shallow backwaters from Madras to Ennore, a distance of 11 miles.

The work was finished in 1806 by Cochrane who, in 1802, had obtained the entire control of the Canal. This portion was named Cochrane's Canal. This canal was soon afterwards extended by him to Pulicat Lake, 25 miles north of Ennore.

The canal remained the property of Cochrane till 1837, when he left India, leaving its management to Arbuthnot & Co. It was then taken over by the Government, who paid Cochrane Rs. 14,061 a year till 1847, the date of expiry of his lease. Government then paid him compensation and took over the canal. In 1852, extensive improvements to the existing line of canal and further northward extension were undertaken. In 1853, the first lock was built at Sadayankuppam. By 1857, the canal had been extended to Durgarapatnam, 96 miles north of Madras. It was then called the East Coast Canal.

At the same time, a new canal was excavated from the Adyar River southwards for a distance of 35 miles from Madras by joining the backwaters along the coast. By 1876, the North Canal had been excavated from Adyar to Krishnapatnam, 92 miles from Madras. The next year, a fresh impetus was given to extending the canal as a measure of famine relief to the people, and the canal was extended up to the Pennar River, 114 miles north of Madras. About the same time, the Junction Canal was excavated, within Madras city, to connect the Cooum and Adyar Rivers, the starting points of the North and South Canals respectively. The extension of the canal to the northern limit at Peddaganjam was completed in 1878, and its extension to the southern limit at Marakkannam was completed in 1882. The canal was then renamed the Buckingham Canal.

Soon after the completion of the excavation of the entire canal, it was found that it was fit only for navigation at high tide by small craft. This state of affairs necessitated an entire reconsideration of the design. Between 1883 and 1891, flood gates and diversion canals in some places were added. By the end of 1897, locks had been constructed along the whole length of the Canal, with provision for passing upland drainages across the Canal, so as to retain a constructed along the whole length of the Canal, with provision for passing upland drainages across the Canal, so as to retain a

A chronology

North Canal

1800-02 Preparations for a navigable canal by Government

1802 Heefke given the work to 'cut' a canal from Ennore to Madras. Work starts from northwest bastion of Black Town wall towards Ennore River.

1806 Reaches Ennore Lake and then Pulicat Lake, 40 km.

1837 Cochrane leaves India, but continues to get lease amount through his agents, Arbuthnot & Co.

1847 Government takes over Canal.

South Canal

1854 First lock at Sadayankuppam (near Ennore)

1857 Reaches Durgarapatnam (Armagacon), 112 km.

1867 Reaches Krishnapatnam, 147 km.

1877 Reaches Pennar River (famine period), 182 km.

1878 Reaches Peddaganjam – connecting Krishna-Godavari Canal, 297 km

1882 Construction of flood gates and diversion canals.

1897 Locks construction.

1900 The whole canal (420 km) becomes navigable. Total length 257 km in Andhra Pradesh and 163 km in Tamil Nadu.

1877 Link canal from Cooum River to Adyar River. Famine period. 8 km.

South Canal

1857 A new canal excavated from Adyar River towards Papanchavadi and further south, joining large water bodies, 50 km.

1878 Papanchavadi to Palar River (Sadras) completed.

1882 Reaches Marakkannam lake, 123 km.

1882 Named Buckingham Canal.

1883 Construction of flood gates and diversion canals.

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Buckingham Canal Locks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of lock/ Distance from Madras</th>
<th>Name of lock/ Distance from Madras</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Savadanykuppam (near Ennore)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1854 (abandoned in 1895)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennore lake (south)</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennore lake (north)</td>
<td>11-3</td>
<td>1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chintamani</td>
<td>19-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulicat (south)</td>
<td>27-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulicat (north)</td>
<td>46-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambli</td>
<td>65-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swarnamukhi (south)</td>
<td>75-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swarnamukhi (north)</td>
<td>75-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandaleru (south)</td>
<td>90-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandaleru (north)</td>
<td>92-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodur (south)</td>
<td>101-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodur (north)</td>
<td>101-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennar (south)</td>
<td>114-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennar (north)</td>
<td>114-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pydaru (south)</td>
<td>123-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pydaru (north)</td>
<td>123-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iskapalli (south)</td>
<td>125-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iskapalli (north)</td>
<td>126-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipaluru (south)</td>
<td>132-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipaluru (north)</td>
<td>132-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkeru (south)</td>
<td>150-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkeru (north)</td>
<td>151-0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannuru (south)</td>
<td>158-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannuru (north)</td>
<td>164-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paluru</td>
<td>168-0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Musi</td>
<td>169-7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudigondi</td>
<td>183-2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gundlakamma</td>
<td>187-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romperu</td>
<td>1947-7 (31 locks)</td>
<td></td>
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Link Canal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of lock/ Distance from Madras</th>
<th>Name of lock/ Distance from Madras</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooum River – Adyar River</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adyar River – Greenways</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTRE Station (north)</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Canal</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adyar river (south) (Sadras lock)</td>
<td>5-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lattice Bridge</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A trail of hope

(Continued from page 3)

Virginia hopes to complete the task, bringing closure for John Jealous, says Virginia, is both 'beautiful and terrible'.

The poet also liked to paint, and her hands appear strong, yet sensitive...artistic, creative hands.

John Jealous, says Virginia, was equally fixated on India, and admits she carries a certain 'colonial baggage'. India, for her, is both 'beautiful and terrible'.

"You have so much history and at the same time, you are barrelling into the future... visitors have to absorb all of it in one day."

Virginia tells the Madras Book Club: "I was so happy to find someone to write today. It was as if she wanted to be found," and adds that while the work of this truly unusual woman was naturally of her time, in her poems East and West did mingle... the twain did meet.
The birth of Matscience

(Continued from last fortnight)

Almost from the start of his tenure at the University of Madras, Prof. Alladi Ramakrishnan actively participated in several conferences throughout India. At one of the meetings of the Indian Academy of Sciences he presented a talk on his new work on Inverse Probability, Sir C.V. Raman, founder of the Academy, was impressed by the presentation, and so, in 1954, had him proposed for election as Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences. Within a few weeks Father received a letter from Sir Raman informing him of his election as Fellow.

To inspire his students, and to strengthen his own research programme, Ramakrishnan was keen to get eminent physicists from overseas to visit the University.

In 1954-55, three world famous physicists who were visiting India came to Madras for lectures and spent time at his family home for leisurely and prolonged discussions on modern physics. They were Nobel Laureates P. A. M. Dirac and C. F. Powell, and Sir Mark Oliphant.

In December 1954, Professor Dirac, one of the greatest physicists of the 20th Century, gave a lecture at Senate House of the University of Madras. The Senate House overflowed and many listeners heard the lecture on loudspeakers while in their cars on the parking lot! Dirac, the first world renowned physicist to visit our family home.

A natural consequence of Father’s visit to Australia was Sir Mark Oliphant’s acceptance to deliver the Rutherford Memorial Lecture at the University of Madras in early 1955. Professor Oliphant stayed at Ekamra Nivas and, being a vegetarian himself, enjoyed the fare offered at our home. Then in December 1955, Nobel Laureate C. F. Powell visited and lectured at the University of Madras.

The visits of Dirac, Oliphant and Powell were the informal beginning of the Theoretical Physics Seminar, although the seminar formally began only in 1959.

In 1956 Father went on what was to be the first of many academic trips around the world and it was to prove the most significant and influential trip in his career. The trip began in February 1956 with a six-week stay at the famous Yukawa Hall in Kyoto, which was the Institute headed by Nobel Laureate Hideki Yukawa. The atmosphere of Yukawa Hall with its steady stream of eminent visiting scientists, and the inspiration they provided to the many young Japanese scientists, greatly influenced Prof. Ramakrishnan. During the speech, I was only a novice in relativistic quantum mechanics. I wanted to learn from the high powered seminars (at Princeton) rather than go through the grinding mill of graduate courses. My ambition was to be realised a year later when I received from him a gracious invitation.

From Rochester Father went to Boston and then to Chicago to meet the great astrophysicist Chandrasekhar. Although Father had corresponded with Chandrasekhar and had published papers in the Astrophysics Journal, it was his first meeting with Chandrasekhar. There, at the University, he heard Chandrasekhar’s lecture on radiation theory and was struck by his thoroughness in preparing even regular seminar lectures. Chandrasekar, as he was popularly known, took Father to Yerkes Observatory where he worked with a team of observational astronomers to confirm his scientific theories.

This academic tour had a profound effect on Father’s career and research, as well as on his PhD students.

In February 1957, Prof. Ramakrishnan received a letter from Robert Oppenheimer, inviting him to visit the Institute for Advanced Study for the academic year 1957-58. He applied to the Asia Foundation for the travel grant to go to Princeton, and a grant-in-aid to defray his living expenses for the year.

The academic year 1957-58 that Ramakrishnan spent at Princeton was a turning point in his career. He heard over one hundred lectures at seminars at the Institute by the leaders of modern physics on the latest and most important developments. T.D. Lee and C.N. Yang were in residence at the Institute and everyone was excited about their recent sensational discovery of non-conservation of parity and wondered whether they would win the Nobel Prize, which they did that year.

Einstein, the most celebrated of the members of the Institute, had died in 1955, and so Father did not get an opportunity to meet him. Instead he got to meet Robert Oppenheimer whose presence dominated most of the seminars. In his Diary, Ramakrishnan describes his contact with Oppenheimer at the Institute: “My meeting with Oppenheimer fulfilled my expectations about this legendary figure who dominated not only American science, but influenced the destiny of the world as the architect of the atom bomb. Lean and of medium height, he had an oval head, prominent cheek bones and piercing eyes. He could pick his men while lighting his pipe, each for the appointed task according to his talent and inclination, from a Nobel prizeman to a truck driver. He was magnanimous in providing opportunities for young scientists, and enjoyed discussions at every seminar where his very presence invited impartial criticism.”

“His intellectual interests ranged from theoretical physics to Hindu philosophy, and in Rabi’s estimate he understood the whole structure of physics with absolute clarity...It was said that he had two passions – physics and the desert! He found the one in the other when at the age of forty he was called upon to undertake at Los Alamos a task unprecedented in its objective, undefined in its scope, unpredictable in its consequences – the creation of the atom bomb. It was a leap into the unchartered future of mankind and he achieved it with the pragmatism of an American and the vision of a universalist. Tormented by moral ambiguities, he found his haven at the Institute for Advanced Study, the environment to which he belonged...”

The one year in Princeton exposed Ramakrishnan to the revolutionary developments in elementary particle physics, and the opportunity to hear about these developments in seminars delivered by the makers of modern physics. In addition, he had also the opportunity to visit other centres of learning and make further new contacts that helped his own research programme and the career of his students.

In April 1958 after having been infected with the seminar spirit at the Institute for Advanced Study, Father returned to India full of visions to create in Madras a centre for advanced learning that would have the spirit of Princeton. This dream that began in Fall 1958 and became a reality four years later through the Theoretical Physics Seminar that he conducted at Ekamra Nivas.

(Krishnaswami Alladi describes the story of the birth of MatsuCience, the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, the efforts of his father, Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan, and the role of his Theoretical Physics Seminar in the creation of this Institute in Madras on January 3, 1962.)

Author with Professor Niels Bohr.

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The importance of being smart

(Continued from page 1)

users to alert the nearest police station when in danger. Hyderabadi, which is in many ways the pioneer among smart cities in India, has expanded its e-sewa portal which it launched way back in 2006, to encompass all transactions with the public on civic amenities and services.

Internationally, it is accepted that for a city to be defined as smart, it needs to use information and communication technology to:

- make physical infrastructure more efficient thereby making the socio-cultural environment much stronger;
- let them adapt and innovate and therefore respond much faster to changing circumstances;
- engage effectively with local people in local governance and decision by use of open processes and e-processes;
- make use of creative industries, community and social networks to achieve these aims.

Does Chennai fit into any of these? Sadly, the answer has to be no. There is no consistent policy for such a development to happen. Take, for instance, the project of fitting GPS on city buses. This was launched with much fanfare and funding from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission a few years ago. A change of government was enough to ensure that the entire project was moribund. Such shortsighted thinking is making sure that our city lags behind when all others are marching ahead.

At a time when it is considered ‘unsmart’ to be queuing up at counters to do tasks that can be accomplished at the click of a button, it is time for Chennai to wake up. It is certainly a waste of human resources to have people go from government department to department to get their work done. What is needed is a policy statement to make Chennai smart and then having a Chief Technology Officer for the entire city whose task it will be to get it moving quickly on the digital highway.

Most American cities have one or does London, Singapore too has created this post. What is the point in claiming to be working on becoming world class when the building blocks for such a status are yet to be in place?

Buckingham Canal Hopes

(Continued from page 1)

far beyond that, it was always felt that the rest of it stood a fair chance for rejuvenation. But with the city now growing rapidly, it is seen that the same malpractices are in full swing in the new parts also.

Large apartment complexes and commercial establishments have begun doing what they were always good at – discharging untreated effluent and sewage into the canal. The waterway is shrinking rapidly and is quite likely to end up the way it has in the rest of the city. From there to building on it is but the next step. This is also being aided by the dumping of garbage along its banks. Rather ironically, this narrowing of the canal has come about after the State Government has spent a considerable amount of money in widening it to 100 metres along a distance of almost 13 km.

To what purpose will the Central Government efforts to give the canal a new life be if the local populace works consistently against it? Is it not in our nature to be socially conscious? It is high time residents of Chennai woke up to their responsibilities.