

about visual aspects of theatre, and the supper is magnificent. We are nearly all Indians, but I feel strong resonances of the Raj. There will forever be something of an Anglo-India.

LIGHT PATRIOTISM

The heat and humidity of Madras hits like a steamy blanket as soon as the plane door opens. This is sea level and, beyond the air conditioned cocoons of the Connemara Hotel and the British Council car, comfort depends on sea breezes. Where the wind does not blow, the air must be encouraged to flow and ceilings are dedicated to forests of fans with blades like aircraft propellers. A short walk along the main street reveals the meeting of the old and new worlds. Trucks negotiate bullock carts while cars hoot at tricycle rickshaws. Sand emerges through fragmented pavements on which tradesmen ply their crafts of make and mend. Much read paperbacks are everywhere laid out for resale. The old has a thirst for knowledge about the new.

In the courtyard of the British Council HQ. I am billed to talk about the new in theatre lighting. The moon is at the wrong angle so I am lit by a pattern 60 flood which is rather too vertical for my eyes and teeth. However it does make a point, even if I have to spend the evening with my chin up. Grow quite passionate about the potential of the new technologies when used properly, and even patriotic about Britain's role in the development of the latest theatre design and technology. Good questions afterwards.

INDIA OF CLIVE

St Mary's, the earliest protestant church east of Suez, was consecrated in 1680 and its memorial tablets encompass the British influence from the beginnings of the East India Company to the end of the Raj. How many minds, enduring endless sermons in stiff starched collars on these wicker pews, must have wandered towards these tributes to lives shortened by cholera. St Mary's is situated within the Fort St George compound where every stone breathes the spirit of Clive and in the Sunday afternoon heat the empty square seems alive with the ghostly drill of the military boot — especially after emerging from the museum that records over two centuries of anglo governance of Madras.

AN ART SCHOOL . . .

The **College of Arts and Crafts** of 1865 was the first art school in India. Principal Munuswamy takes me on a tour of the high airy studios set in a lovely garden where the trees provide a gentle shade for the sculptors and the life drawing classes. Everywhere students working in paint, ceramics, textiles, wood and metal are producing work of the highest quality in both its design and craftsmanship. The atmosphere is one of peaceful purposeful dedication.

. . . AND AN ARTS CENTRE

Professional artists receive three-way support from the **Lalit Kala Akademi**. Studio facilities, particularly for ceramics

and print making, are made available for concentrated periods of work. Illustrated monographs are published on the work of contemporary Indian artists. And there are exhibition spaces.

IN SEARCH OF THE DARK GOD

A morning at the Madras Museum enjoying the bronzes and (see last Cue) the Museum Theatre. In the garden, preparations are underway for an evening performance by CULT (Calicut University Little Theatre). The spreading horizontal branch of a tree makes a convenient spot bar to which spotlights can be lashed. Variac dimmers are laid out on tables concealed behind a hedge. Return at dusk for Sankara Pillai's 'Karutha Daivathe Thedi' (In Search of the Dark God). This is total theatre: the movement, the music, the lighting are all so integrated with the acting that I forget that I have absolutely no understanding of the Malayalam language. A couple of simple ramps are set within the clearing in the trees: the actors feed our imagination with bamboo sticks which become vertical forests or horizontal undulating water.

THE ROAD TO MAHABALIPURAM

Along the coastal road the villagers are drying their hay on the road surface and bashing it patiently in bundles to extract the seed. Every few miles there are roadside shelters 'for natural disasters'. Although the sun is high, it is not difficult to imagine storm, tempest and flood. Refreshment against the humid heat is provided by the roadside piles of young coconuts whose sellers, with a deftly handled knife chop off just enough to insert a straw. When the milk has been drained, you return your nut for opening with a second chop: for the lucky there is a nibble of freshly deposited coconut.

At **Cholamandal Artists Village** thirty painters and sculptors have bought land to build studio houses to live and work. There is creative calm. Their theatre is an exquisitely simple circle under the trees. At Mahabalipuram, the temple sculptures were cut from solid rock in 5AD. They are not to be described in words: one can only stand in awe. The traditions are carried on, formally at the **School of Sculpture** and informally by the many roadside sculptors working the local bluestone to sell to visitors like me. Three miles north, by a lonely shore, is the **Tiger Cave**, a carved rock backing what appears to be an amphitheatre and now occasionally used for festivals. What performances took place here in 5AD?!

GODOT IN MALAYALAM

Calicut University Little Theatre play 'Waiting for Godot' in a small hall at the Alliance Francaise. Despite not understanding the dialogue in Malayalam, I feel I have moved closer to this play tonight.

STAGES OF MADRAS

The **Music Academy** has a good big stage with a width which allows most of the 1600 seats to be reasonably near to the stage. On the other hand, the **Rani Seethai Hall** has a

long tunnel auditorium which makes this theatre seem much less intimate than its 642 seating would suggest. These are conventional westward looking theatres. I get much more excited by the **Kalakshetra**, a rather lovely piece of Kerala style architecture. This is a dance theatre with an extensive forestage backed by a proscenium with full flying. And I fell in love with the **Mandela Theatre** set in a dancer's garden which includes several performance spaces including a simply roofed proscenium stage house facing an open walled courtyard with an optional central acting area.

A NIGHT ON THE COCHIN EXPRESS

Wake up without my voice. The pharmacist in Spencers — a department store in a building inspired by memories of St Pancras Station on a scale of about 1:5 — recommends herbal lozenges from a sweetie jar. I don't know what's in them but never was a cure so instant. Wish I had bought up the entire stock! At dusk Suresh Jayavant from the British Council escorts me to the railway station for the Madras-Cochin Express. It seems that half the city is going on tonight's trains and the other half has come to see them off. The general spirit of chaos is not helped by an intermittent electricity supply which plunges everything into a series of short blackouts. Armed with an official letter, Suresh goes off to organise my bedding roll. Returns in some anguish to report that no bedrolls available on trains as humble as mine. I am assuring him that 22741945 Corporal Reid F. Royal Signals (retired) is well capable of sleeping with his head on his knapsack when a little procession appears on the platform. Upward referral of the letter has reached a level where authority can be given for an official in brass buttons and paperwork to precede a bearer carrying a bedroll on his head to be signed for by Professor Reid of the British High Commission. This assures that I become a person of no small importance in the eyes of the staff of the Southern Railway in whose sleeping car I doze between crisp sheets under not one but four sweeping fans as we saunter between moonlit paddy fields. In the couple of hours after dawn I have, through the bars of the open



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