



Ninety percent pourakarmikas need medical attention
Pg 3



Service Apartments in demand in Bangalore
Pg 3



Gary Kirsten Exclusive
Pg 4

A journey from a school to a tavern ...



The Government Primary School at Kengeri established in 1886. In the right corner the headmaster shows one of the built-in blackboards. *TWO Photo*

Nimish Pratap Singh

Stop singing the age-old song about the poor, crumbling infrastructure of primary schools in India. Have you ever thought that they might be turned into historical monuments? That they might have been the alma maters of legends like Kengal Hanumanthaiah's and Sir M. Vishveshwaraiyah.

The Government Primary School in Kengeri is about one and a half centuries old, one of the oldest surviving school buildings built by the British in India. Older than the prestigious Wynberg-Allen in Musoori (1888) and Amitabh Bachchan's alma mater Sherwood Academy in Nainital (1867), this 3,000 square-foot, five-classrooms building was built in 1863.

K.R. Ramachandran, who was a student of this school till 1956, said that, "K. Hanumanthaiah's, former Chief Minister, and also a former union railway minister, was a student of this school. S. Mahadevan, another alumni of the school, who runs a medical shop near the school, said that, "I am still wondering why this man [K. Hanumanthaiah's], who planned and constructed the imposing structure of Vidhana Soudha, one of the largest secretariats of India, was never able to do something for his alma mater."

The British introduced primary education in India after

1854 on the recommendations of Sir Charles Wood, then President of Board of Control for India. The 'Wood's Dispatch', called as the 'Magna Carta of education in modern India', laid down the pattern for future government-aided expansion of elementary and secondary schools, and affiliating universities (founded in 1857 at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay).

"Though the new building is clean and strong, it lacks the charm of the old structure next to it"

Shivalingappa, the current head master of the school believes that the building might be the remnants of a jail of those days, but he couldn't explain why the walls of the rooms have built-in black boards. He said that the defunct building is crumbling and the tiles of the roof keep falling continually. He said that he continuously keeps reminding the children to not to go near the building.

Mr. Kallappa, the deputy director (planning) of south Bangalore district's primary education department, was

surprised when he was told by this reporter that the school building was deserving of a heritage status. He said that he would moot the idea in the education department to develop it into a library. Mr. Kempiah, the public information officer of the department of public instruction, hinted that a similar old primary school building in Muddenahalli village in Kolar district should also be preserved because it is the alma mater of Sir M. Vishveshwaraiyah, the legendary dewan of Mysore and the architect of magnificent projects like Krishnaraja Sagar dam.

Mr. Ramachandran said that classes were held in the building till about five years ago. Now the school is housed in a new building in the same yard. "Though the new building is clean and strong, it lacks the charm of the old structure next to it," he said. Mr. Mahadevan mourned, "But the beauty of the old building is being molested every night by gamblers and drunkards." Shops have cropped up, on the school land and the school's playground is used for hosting various events, many times during school timings.

Ms. V.S. Kamlabai, the Assistant Director of State Archeology department said that they are helpless when it comes to protecting the building, since it is with the education department. "We can do any thing only after the department gives us the possession of the building." Mr. Kempiah said that only after a forthcoming meeting, they would be able to comment on the fate of the building.