

Coimbatore

The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis



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From the people of Coimbatore...

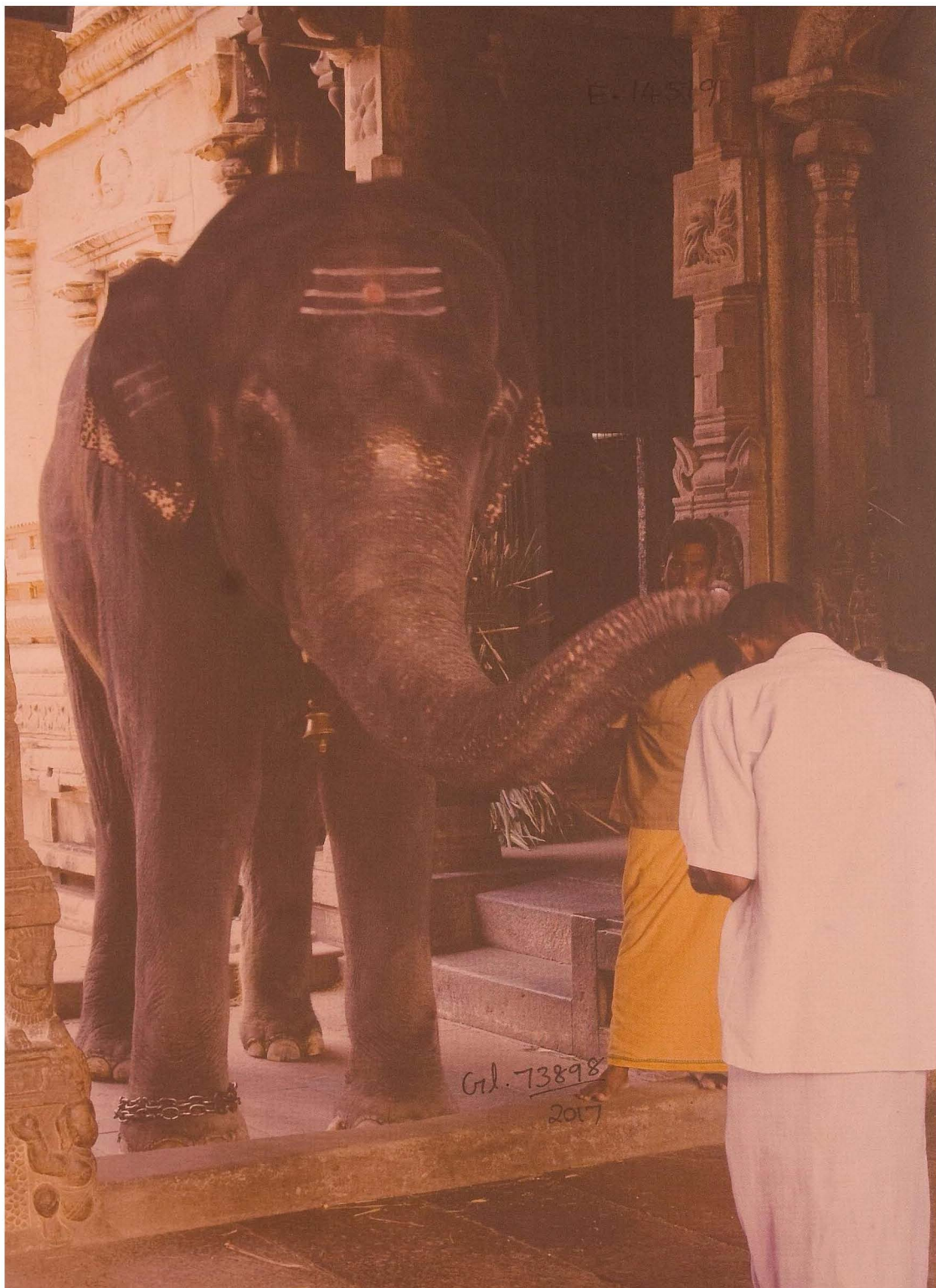
To the delegates and special invitees of the

World Classical Tamil Conference - 2010

"Thank you!"

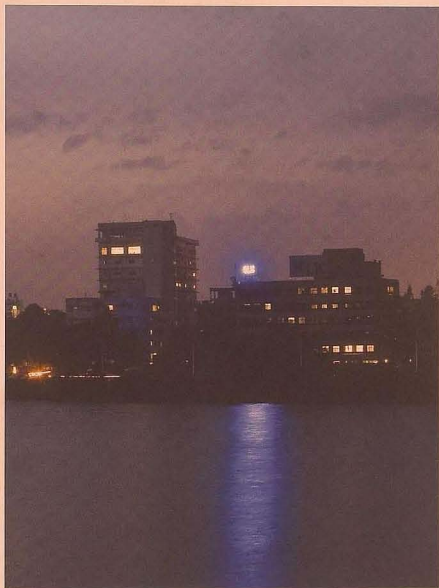
For gracing our city For bringing to life,
the glory of our rich Tamil heritage
For giving us a chance to be a part of
this glorious history in the making..!!"





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2017



Coimbatore

The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis

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COVER PAGE: *A night view of
the city from Avanashi Road,
set against the backdrop of the
beautiful Western Ghats.*

FULL PAGE: *The hues and shades
of the landscape from atop the
Maruthamalai hills.*

HALF TITLE PAGE, LEFT: *An
elephant at the Perur temple
plants a blessing on a devotee
and he bows down to receive it.*

HALF TITLE PAGE, RIGHT: *City
lights reflect in the calm waters
of the Valankulam, a large water
tank.*

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Dr. Nanjappa
Road, one of the city's busiest
streets comes alive in the early
hours of a weekday.*

RIGHT: *School children dressed
in traditional attire dance to the
tune of a popular song.*





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Acknowledgements

Coimbatore, The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis is a compilation that has taken a little over 6 months to evolve; a time frame that has limited the ways in which we would have liked to portray our beloved city. Our work is not in anyway meant for the connoisseur of history; rather it is a life like portrayal of what makes the city tick, captured through its sights, smells, sounds and people.

This book is the first compilation of Coimbatore - so our team had to rely on the expertise and generous contributions of many people but for whom this effort would have remained a dream.

We would like to place on record our sincere appreciation to the board of Esscom for giving us the opportunity and the freedom to work and bring out the various facets of the city.

Our special thanks to Mr. K Marudhachalam who willingly contributed some of his best photographs to the making of the book.

We acknowledge the contributions of all the corporate, social and government organisations for giving us permission to use their photographs.

We express our gratitude to every Coimbatorean who has willingly come forward to be a part of the photo-stories.

PREVIOUS PAGE : Fruits, flowers, and betel leaves arranged on a tray form the 'tamboolam' - the traditional way of welcoming guests to an auspicious occasion.

RIGHT: The façade of one of the oldest educational institutions inception in the city.





Preface

Centuries of toil and enterprise have gone into the making of our land. However, for the people of the world, Coimbatore passes as a small city with an industrial background. As citizens of this beautiful place, we believe that its cultures, people, history, events, industry, rural beauty and its very fabric of life must be unveiled to the world; that Coimbatore's time to take centre stage in our country's future has come, especially now that India's growth is going past the metros.

The partnership between Coimbatore and Stadt Esslingen Am Neckar in Germany provided the opportunity. Esscom, an NGO was founded to bring together the best of both cities.

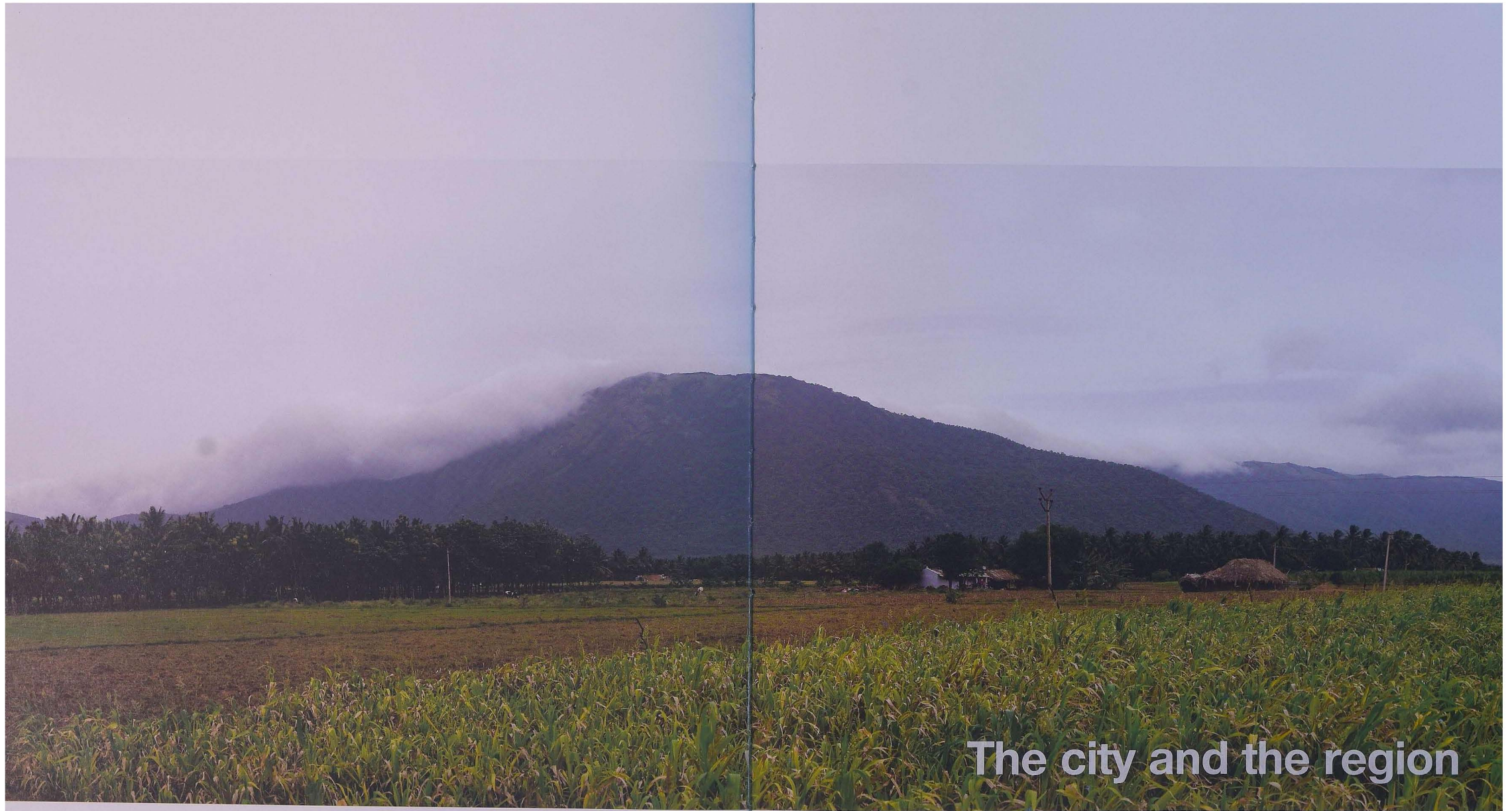
Coimbatore, The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis is a culmination of the efforts of team Esscom.

For well over four months, the artistic eye of our photographer scanned the city and its regions in minute detail. What ensues in the following pages is our effort to capture the pulse of our city and help a traveller connect with its warmth instantly.

Putting together this tapestry of colour, life and words has been a truly enriching experience for us. So much is known; a lot more remains to be written. What we have set out to do is merely a beginning.

LEFT: *Avanashi Road is one of the arterial roads of the city and connects it to the major metros in the country.*

OVERLEAF: *Once past the city, the eye can feast on cloud-kissed hills, freshly ploughed earth and lush green fields.*



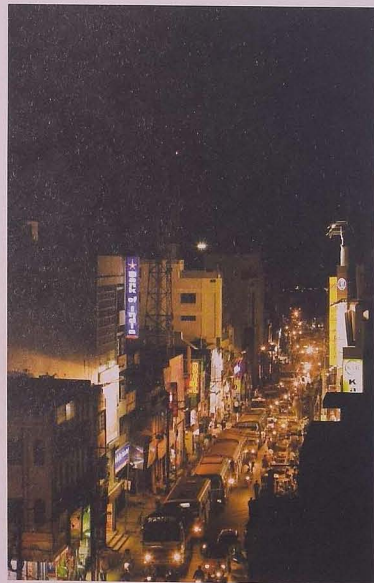
The city and the region

Coimbatore

Some cities are born from the pages of history. They have mythical pasts and become immortal by that mere right. Some are either strategically positioned in a natural zone or reign as chosen capitals of ruling powers. Civilisations thrive on their riverbanks and glories of achievement are etched on their walls.

Some cities have none of these elements; yet they bear witness to numerous tales of unsung heroism. Their position is ideal in every sense; but they seem untouched by political turmoil. Their lands and boundaries bear little relevance in the larger landscape; still their people traverse geographical confines as easily as they welcome new cultures.

Coimbatore is one such city that has grown from a less-seen, less-heard spread of land to an emerging metropolis; a confluence of cultures and people. This is a city not born from the mere glory of its past; rather it is one carved from its eagerness to travel into the future.



LEFT: Oppanakara Street is in the very heart of the city and is a burst of colour and noises.

OPPOSITE: Standing tall amidst a bustling street is the Victoria Town Hall, a landmark that epitomises Coimbatore.



The setting

The Coimbatore district is spread over an area of 7,469 square miles and lies between 10°15' and 11°18' N and 76°39' and 78°14' E. The region is bordered by a series of hills including the famed Blue Mountains (Nilgiris), the Anamalais and a smattering of hillocks of the Eastern Ghats. The Nilgiri Biosphere is one of the world's most enchanting biodiversity hotspots and adds charm to the geographical location of the district. The faint blue hint of the Blue Mountains is visible from virtually every part of the city and dominates the rural landscape.

The region itself is a series of plains, with undulating slopes and is criss-crossed by rivers that hasten to join the Kaveri. The Bhavani, Amaravati, Siruvani, Aliyar and the Noyyal rivers have legendary pasts and have enriched its glory in many ways.

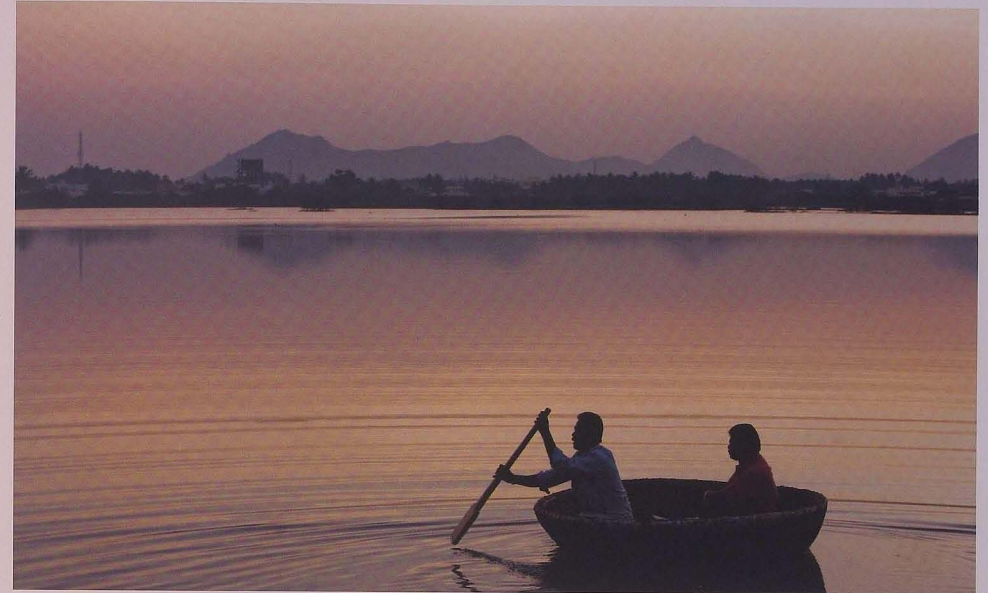
Fresh water has always been a scarce resource in the region and the landlocked boundaries may have dulled the setting, if it were not for the enterprising spirit of the people. Consequently, numerous tank systems to harbour fresh water were constructed around the city and still continue to feed the growing populace.



LEFT: A political map of the city and the region.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: 'Parisal' or coracles are sometimes used to ferry people from one side of a tank to the other and for fishing.

OPPOSITE BELOW: The Nilgiris probably gets its name from the blue tint that envelopes the mountain range.



The land

Coimbatore is perhaps best known for its pleasing climate and the sweet taste of the Siruvani water. The region enjoys pleasant weather for most part of the year. However, as with every tropical place, temperatures soar to a high of 40° C in March, April and May. Humidity levels are not as high as the coasts and therefore leave the land with a dry heat.

By June, the spell of the monsoons cast on Kerala and the Western Ghats rapidly cools the region with occasional bursts of rain and high velocity winds. The region receives rainfall from both the North East and South West monsoons.

The time between November and February is cool and the temperature drops to below 28°C. It is perhaps this healthy setting of the land and its proximity to the famed hill station of Ooty that earned it the popular sobriquet, "Poor man's Ooty." The best time to visit the city is between July and February, when the heat is at a comfortable temperature and travel is easy.

Cotton clothes are ideal throughout the year and are available in stunning shades and weaves.

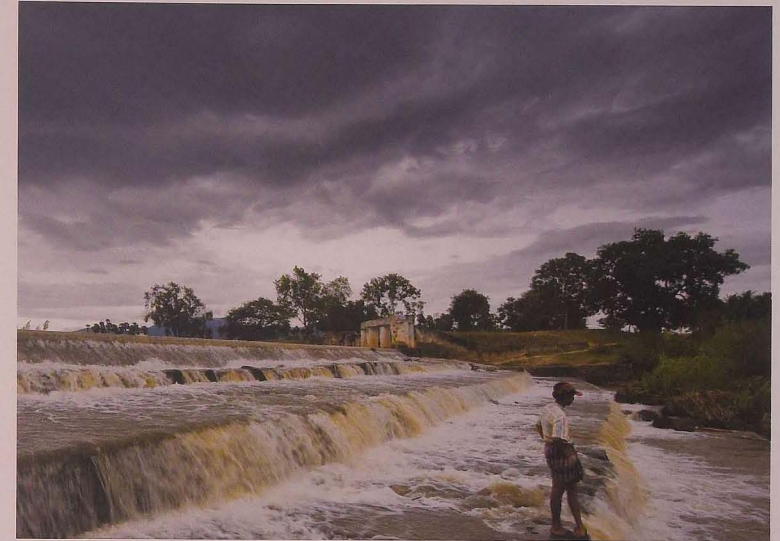
The water from the Siruvani is believed to be among the sweetest in the world. However, with the rapidly escalating population and the geographical expansion of the city, the water has been made accessible only to a few restricted areas.

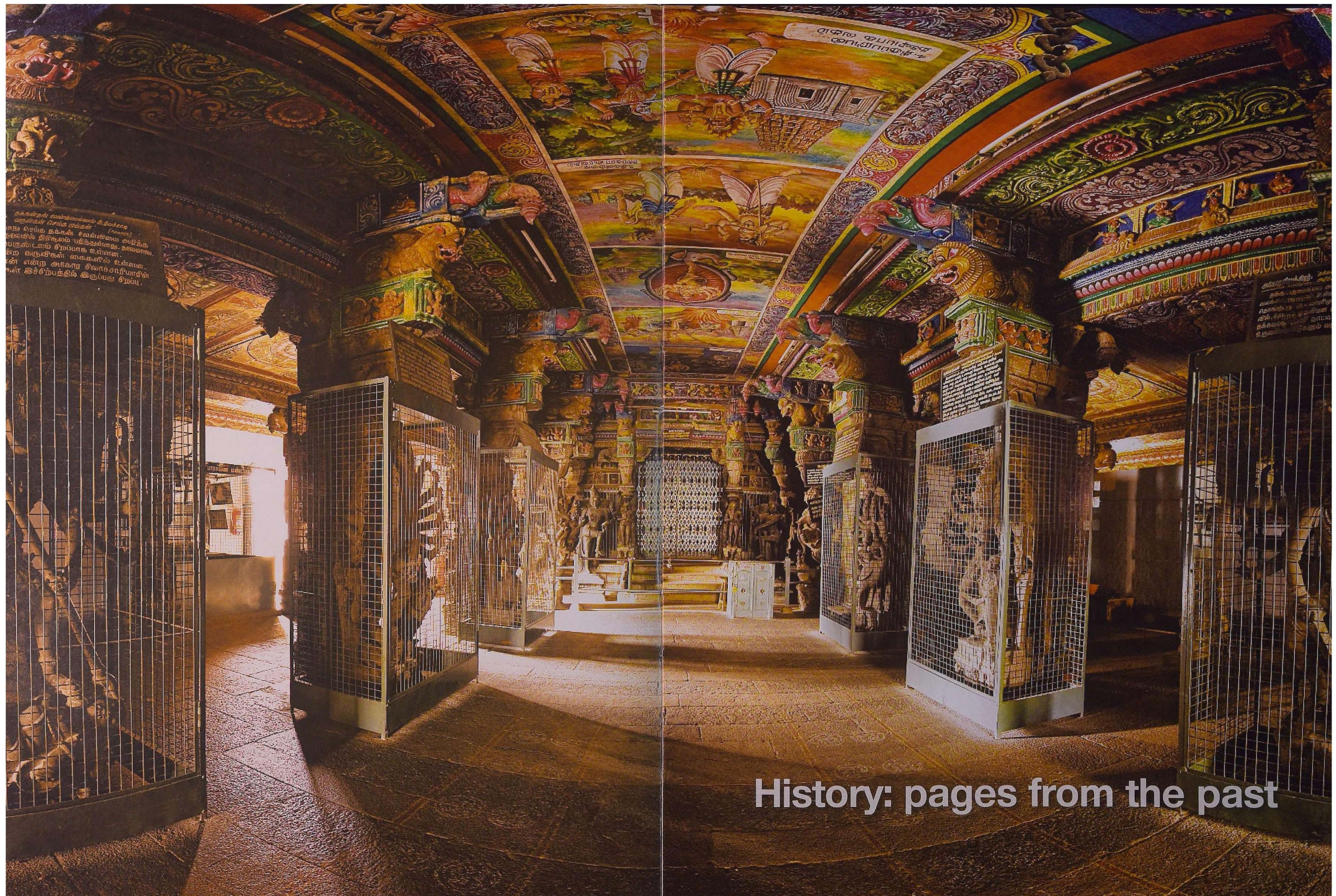
Vast expanses of lush green sprout amidst the grey concrete structures and give the city an alluring charm.

In a lot of ways, Coimbatore still dons the warmth of a small city and it is easy to find oneself completely at home.

RIGHT: *The waters of the Chittiraichavadi dam flow past the city.*

BELOW: *Areca nut palms abound in rural Coimbatore. Set against the blue sky, they form a picturesque backdrop.*





History: pages from the past

Early civilisations

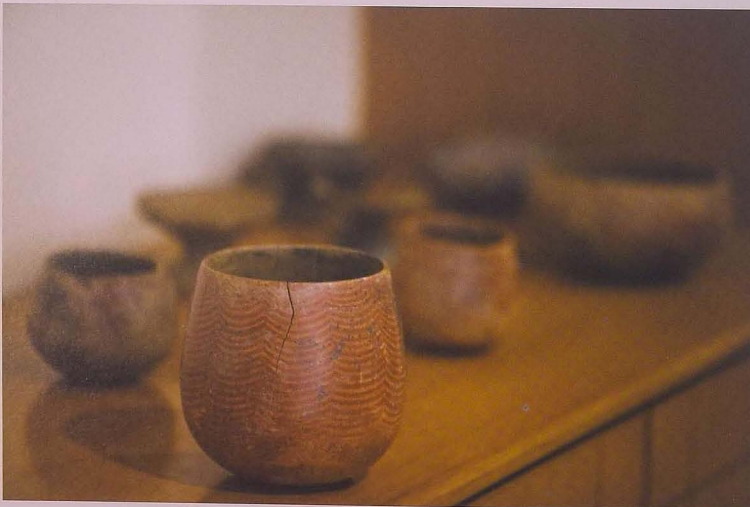
For centuries, Coimbatore remained enveloped by an expanse of forests. The nomadic lifestyles of early humans naturally led to small settlements. From these colonies, emerged an active farming community.

Gradually, civilisations blossomed on its river banks. The Noyyal, a small river is believed to have nurtured a civilisation on its banks between 3 BC and 3 AD. Legend has it that the Noyyal even absolved the sins of the great Karikala Cholan when he killed a human being in the form of a boar. The king later went on to build many temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, on the banks of the river.

Another myth believes that this famed river was formed by the River Ganga herself, at a time when Lord Shiva's serpent coughed up enormous amounts of poison, unable to bear the ferocity of his master's *Thandava*.

In this span of 600 years (between 3BC and 3 AD) or so, trade flourished on its banks. Coins, implements and ornaments unearthed here reveal active trade routes between Rome and the region. Archaeological excavations continue to unearth its rich past even today.

Coimbatore has always been at the crossroads of cultural influences and with time, these different threads have woven themselves into a rich tapestry of experiences.



PREVIOUS PAGE: The 'mandapam' at the Perur temple was built around the 17th century, AD.

LEFT: A terracotta bowl, unearthed in the city dates back to over 1000 years.

RIGHT: A majestically carved sculpture of a ruler of the region is erected just outside a temple.

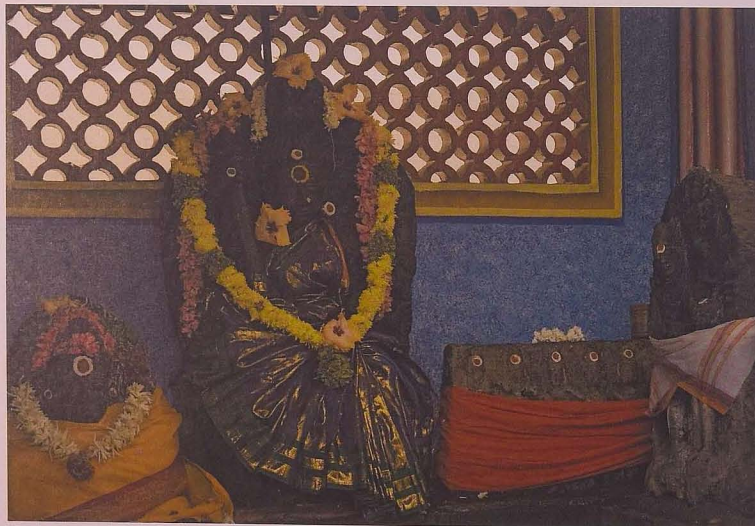


Kovan, the king and the ruling deity

There are interesting versions as to how modern Coimbatore got its name. Historical evidences from the 8th century AD point to a particular tribal community called the *Irulas* who lived in the jungles and led a life in harmony with Nature. As their population grew, little hamlets and villages sprouted alongside the jungles and rivers.

Legend has it that people chose *Kovan* as their king. Down the ages, *Puthur*, the area that became Kovan's capital was called *Kovan Pudur* (literally, the place of *Kovan*). Over time, it came to be known as Coimbatore.

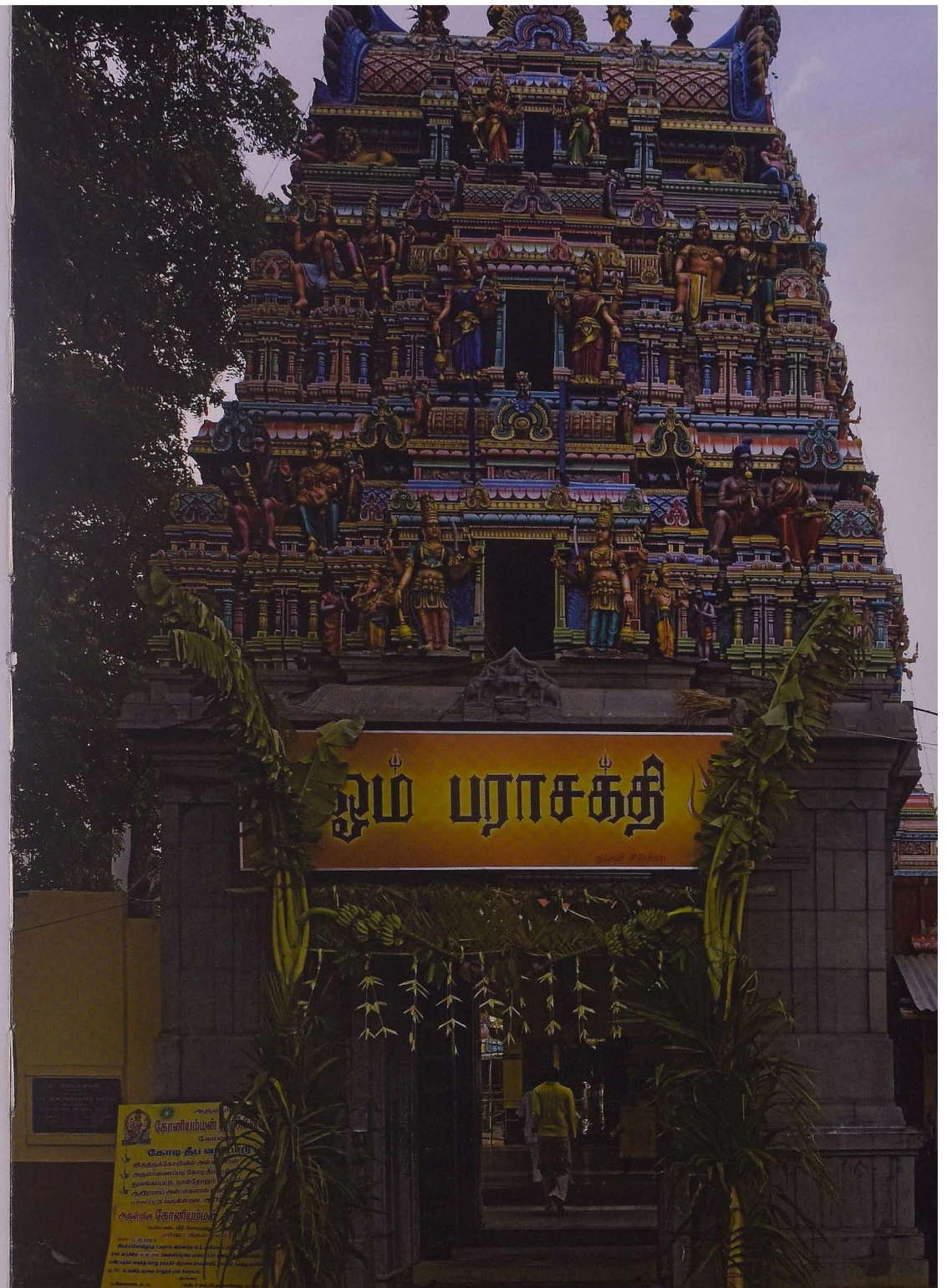
Another version of the name draws its story from the tale of Koniamman, the ruling deity of Coimbatore. It is believed that Koniammanpudur has today become the city it is. Every year, in the first week of March, devotees take the Goddess on a temple car procession throughout the city. On this day all traffic comes to a standstill.



LEFT: An idol of Goddess Koniamman.

RIGHT: A view of the 'gopuram' of The Koniamman Temple.

OVERLEAF: Inscriptions are etched in stone and found on temple walls. They are veritable treasure troves of history.



The dynasties

The word *Kongu* traces its origins to ancient Tamil and means honey. The nectar laden forests probably lent their name to this region. With time, Coimbatore and its surrounding areas came to be known as the *Kongu* country or Kongunaadu. Although the region was never the capital of the ruling dynasties of the South, it became a vital trade route and came under the dominion of many powerful dynasties, including the Cheras and Cholas at various points of time.

In the early 9th century, the region came under the rule of the Kongu Chola kings, a sub sect of the powerful Cholas. They had a significant influence on Kongunaadu and held it for close to 200 years. Records reveal that the Kongu Cholas also contributed a lot to the development of the region.

In the 11th century, the Hoysala Ballala Kings of neighbouring Mysore usurped the region. War broke out again by the end of the 14th century. The land then became part of the kingdom of Vijayanagara. By 1575 the famed Vijayanagara Empire became a thing of the past, thanks to the relentless wars and conflicts between neighbouring kingdoms.

However, the Vijayanagara kingdom continued to extend its powers to the *Kongu* country till about the early 17th century. The land then passed hands from the powers of Mysore and was ruled by poligars (who later came to be known as zamindars during the British Raj) who had autonomous control over their provinces.

Not surprisingly, Kongunaadu was also briefly under the rule of Hyder Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan between the 16th and 17th centuries. The fact is endorsed by temple inscriptions dating back to this time.

The numerous influences that Kongunaadu came under reveal the strategic importance of the region. This is also perhaps what led to the confluence of diverse cultures.



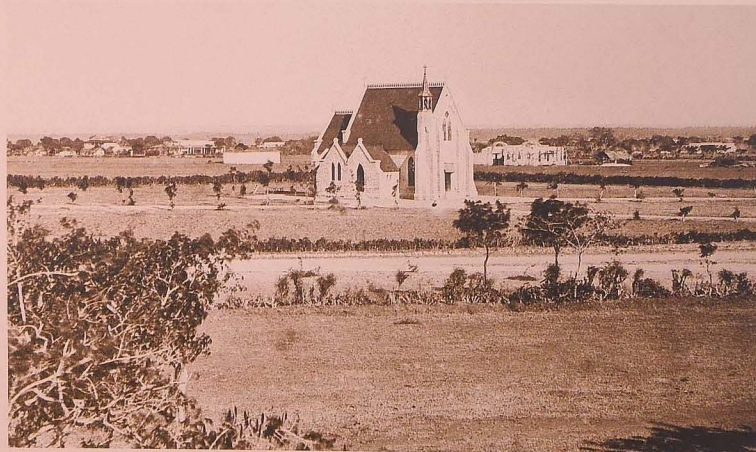
The evolution of Coimbatore

After a troubled period of petty conflicts and the Polygar wars, the region passed under British rule, or The Raj as it has come to be known. The year was 1799. Under the stewardship of Lord Wellesley, pacts were made with the ruling landlords and political stability was restored.

In the early 1800s, Coimbatore was made district headquarters and was divided into 10 taluks for easy governance. The British brought in land reforms, imposed new laws and meticulously documented details of the land – from the landscape to flora and fauna to the people and culture.

With time, as with the other parts of the country, the thirst for India's freedom permeated to the *Kongu* region. Documented evidence reveals that Mahatma Gandhi visited Coimbatore thrice between 1929 and 1934. His visits stirred the patriotic fervour amongst the citizens and large groups of people joined forces to regain independence of the country. The city still preserves those memories through a collection of souvenirs and books at the Gandhi Museum.

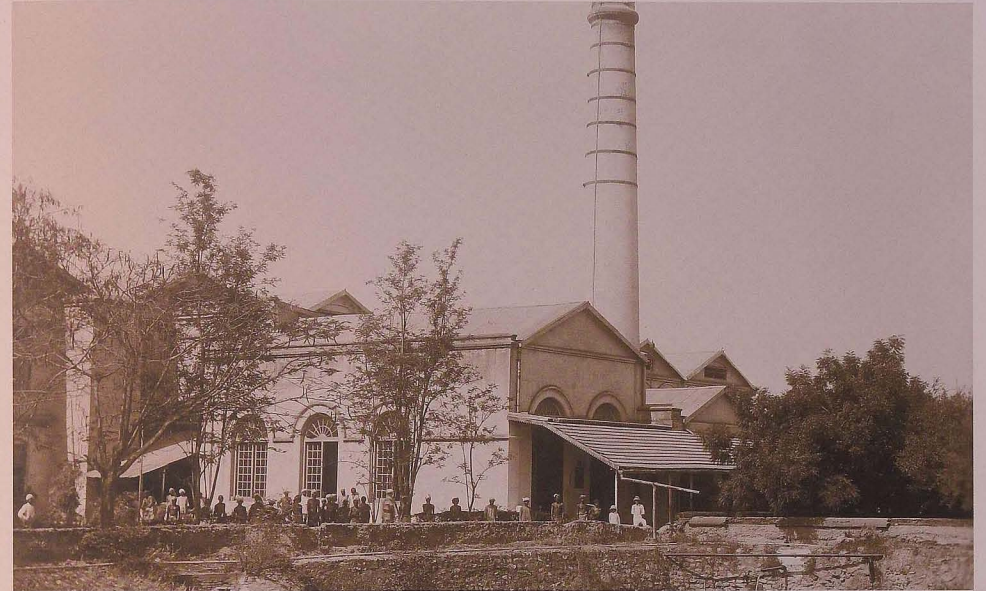
Coimbatore and its neighbouring areas were undoubtedly influenced by numerous cultures and people. However, it was the paucity of water that triggered the spirit of enterprise. With inadequate water, people were naturally compelled to find new ways to sustain themselves. This led to the establishment of small industries and eventually created a vibrant economy.



LEFT: A picture of the Race Course, long before it became the premium residential hub of the city. Captured here is the expanse and the All Souls Church.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Sir Robert Stanes is credited with the opening of the C S & W Mills, the first textile mill in the city.

OPPOSITE BELOW: The old court complex was a very significant landmark during the British Raj.





The emerging cosmopolis

Coimbatore today

The city has enjoyed the pleasures of a leisurely growth. Its transition from a traditional cotton farming land to a bustling city with an increasingly cosmopolitan flavour has been gradual, allowing its people to savour every stage of its development.

In many ways, the 1970s was the high point of growth for the city and its people. The rich black cotton soil led to a flourishing cotton trade. Trade in turn inspired the growth of the textile industry and Coimbatore came to be known as the Manchester of the South, earning it a firm place in the world's textile history.

With time, the entrepreneur friendly environment resulted in the growth of different industries. Today, Coimbatore and its adjoining areas are at the brink of change. Its infrastructure is gearing to meet an avalanche of technology led growth.

The city's industrial community has contributed immensely to the fields of education and health care. It is perhaps this harmony of industrial, economic and social growth that has helped carve a unique identity.

The urban setting is well segmented and has ample lung space within the structural framework. Whilst street life is a heady concoction of smells, noises, people and sights, the suburbs reflect solitude.

A large part of the city has sprawling homes, educational institutions and heritage buildings. However, the landscape is witnessing the rapid growth of towering apartments, gated communities, malls, multiplexes and specially created economic zones.

The past has left indelible impressions on the land and in many ways has moulded its individuality.

Coimbatore, the leading light of Kongunaadu continues to radiate a charm that draws a multitude of people to its welcoming soil.



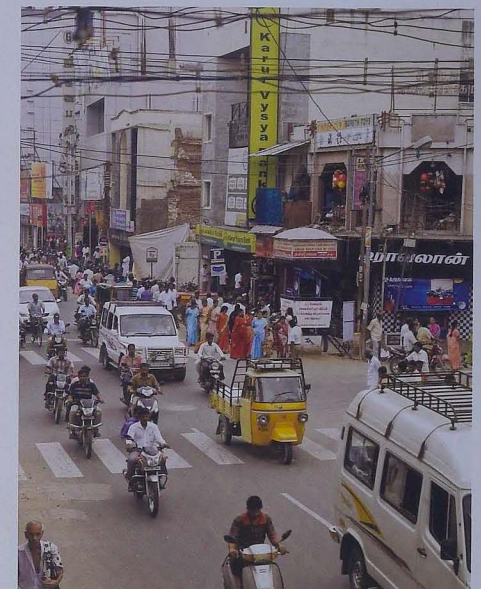
PREVIOUS PAGE: *The Mettupalayam Road is constantly abuzz with traffic and people throughout the day and well into the night.*

LEFT: *Most roads in the city are shielded on either side by tall, towering green.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: *A sleek glass and steel façade on the Avanashi Road dwarfs everything around it.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: *Street life in all its organised chaos.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *A view of the neatly aligned rows of houses within a contemporary gated community.*



People

Inventors, farmers, scientists, street hawkers, academicians, skilled labourers, entrepreneurs, construction workers, technocrats, small business owners, professionals, students... more than 4 million people work, live and enjoy the fruits of the district in various ways.

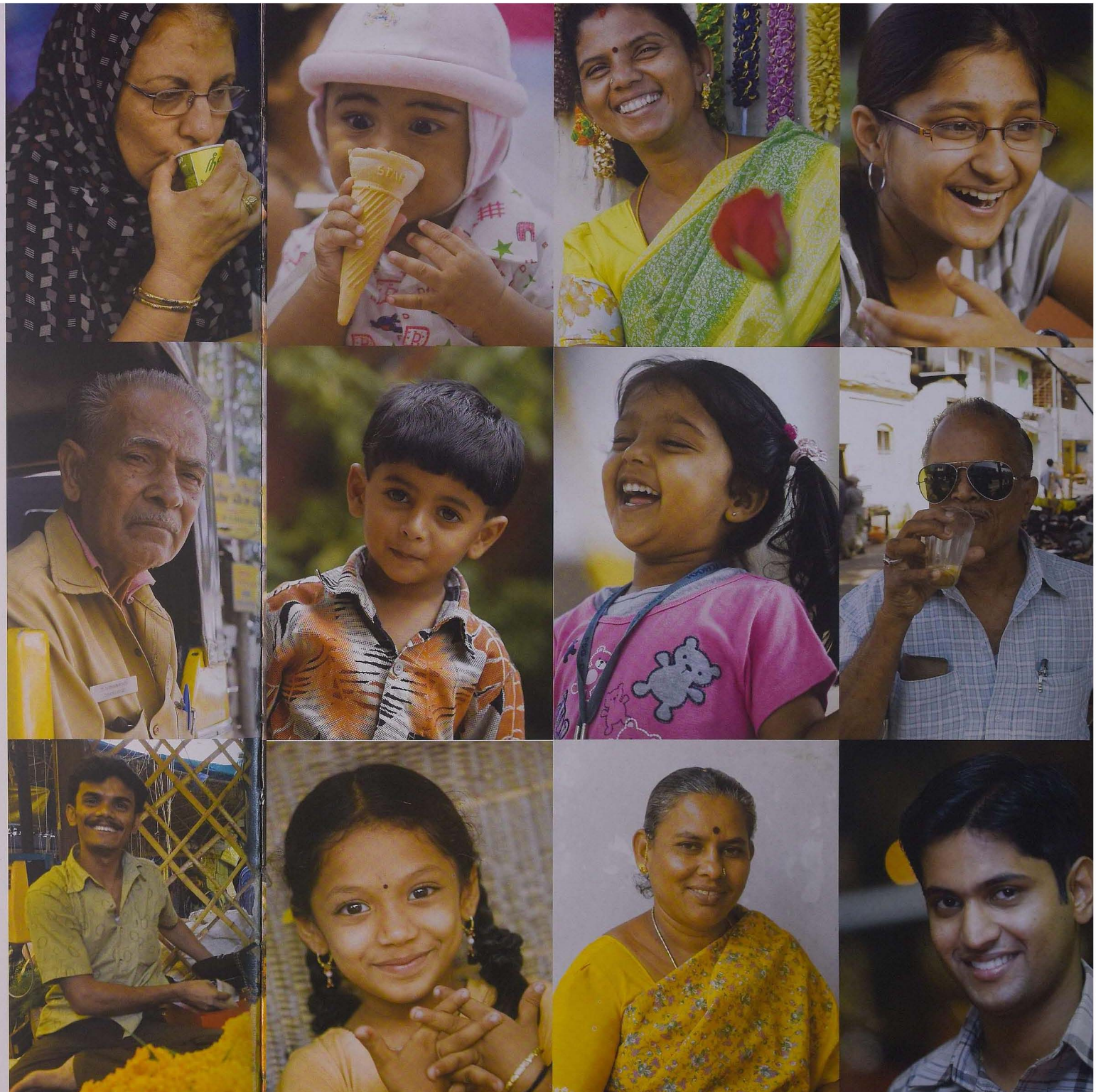
Every community that has made Coimbatore its home has contributed to the prosperity of the land. The presence of large industrial houses draws expatriates from around the world and there is a steady migration of skilled labour from different parts of India.

The constant interaction amongst various cultures has created a friendly air around the city. People are eager to help, celebrate together and lend their name to social causes with equal devotion.

The people are passionate about giving back to society and have helped Coimbatore create a wealth of resources.

Education is given high priority and the region has always held a higher literacy rate than other parts of the state. The city's women are educated, empowered and actively involved in the day to day activities.

RIGHT: The different emotions of people portray the moods of the city.





A potpourri of experiences

Culture

Although the intellectual evolution of Coimbatore rivals any other megapolis, the heart of its culture is still rooted in tradition.

With every passing century, more and more immigrants made Kongunaadu their home. Today, the city's natives speak a multitude of languages— Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujarati, Sindhi, Rajasthani, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali among others. However, Tamil and English are the commonly spoken languages. The communities are represented by independent cultural organisations and festivities are a potpourri of fun, food and frolic.

In Coimbatore, different communities thrive within the framework of their own culture and still mingle with the local flavour. This trait makes the city open to the steady exodus of people from all walks of life and from every place on earth.

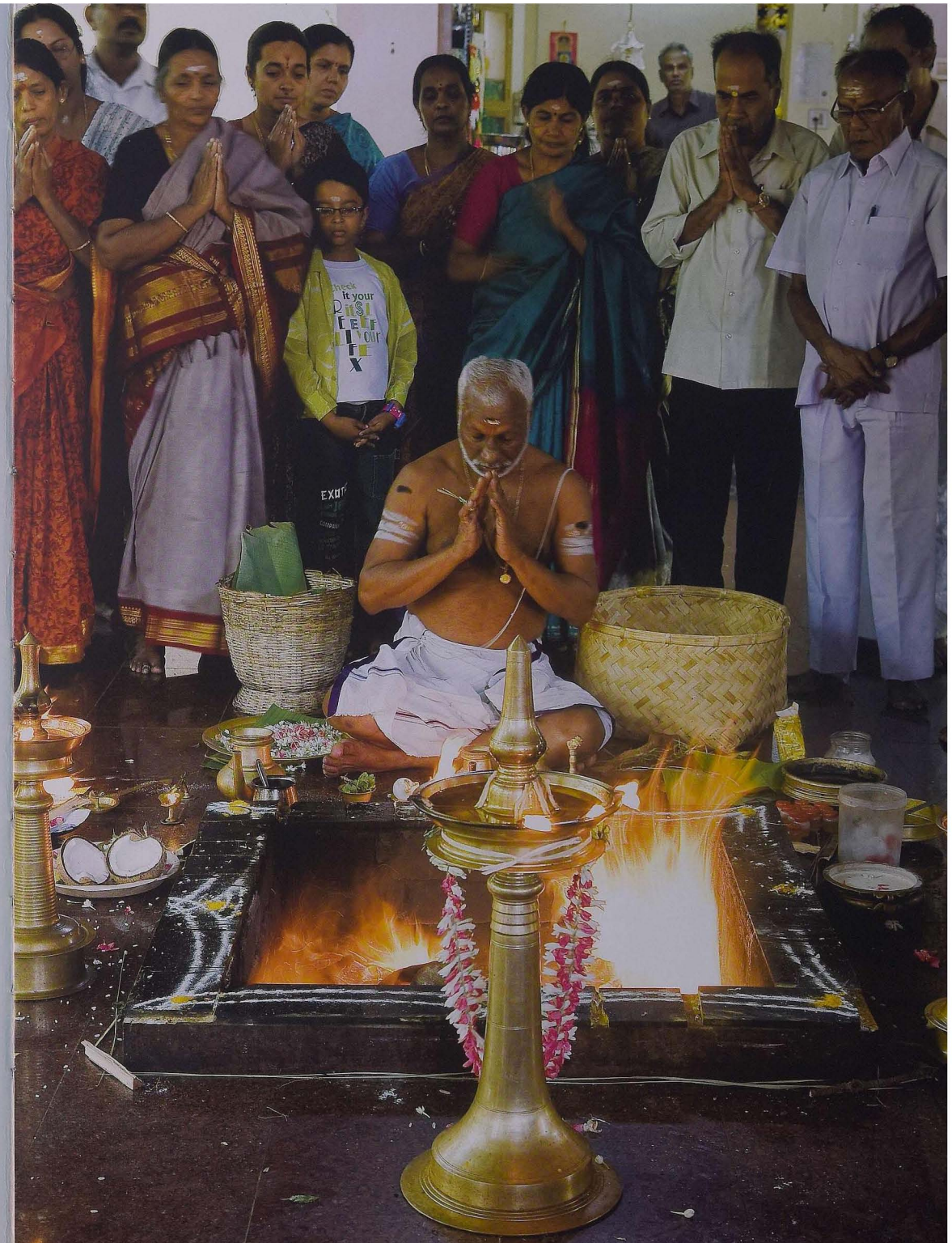
Simplicity, honesty and integrity are attributes instantly associated with the region. The 'simple living, high thinking' philosophy is woven into the fabric of life.



PREVIOUS PAGE: 'Kolam' is the art of drawing intricate patterns with rice flour and is drawn outside every home in the morning.

LEFT: A man receives an elder's blessings before setting off to the temple.

RIGHT: A 'homam', or a ritual of hymns and offerings and brings together many people of a community.



Community

Although nuclear families are fast becoming the norm, Coimbatoreans are keen on maintaining close ties with their extended family. Festivities are not the only reason that families come together; any little celebration is. This has given rise to a well-knit society where elders play a prominent role in both family and community activities.

It is the pioneering effort of several octogenarians that has resulted in creating a robust growth in light engineering and manufacturing in the city. Most senior citizens are still actively involved in the management of these organisations and their contributions have helped companies strike a balance between the old and new schools of thought.

The deep sense of belonging is evident even at the workplace. Several corporate organisations have generations from the same family work for them. It is not uncommon to see people help the members of their community on the road to economic independence.

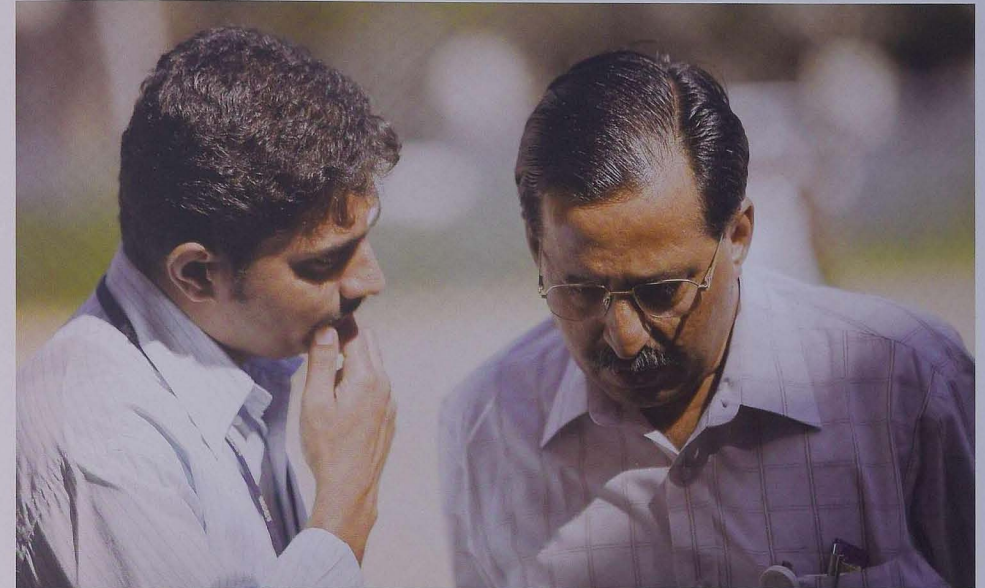
Community bonding in Coimbatore is strong and has made way for ample interaction on a variety of issues: from social awareness to eco protection.



LEFT: A group of ladies revel in their day out with their extended family.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Senior colleagues often act as mentors at the workplace and beyond it.

OPPOSITE BELOW: The fun of belonging comes alive at a traditional wedding.



Typical Kongunaadu

Over the years, the essence of Kongunaadu culture has quietly permeated different walks of life in South India. Kongunaadu homes are immaculately maintained and the region is renowned for its hospitality. Guests are regarded akin to the Gods and one will be surprised at the thoughtful gestures of the host to ensure that tastes and preferences are always attended to.

The people are friendly and often go out of their way to help a lost passerby or tourist. Their gentle manner and soft spoken ways make visitors feel instantly comfortable.

The people of the land show a lot of respect for human dignity and values. Even small children are addressed in the plural and the little ones naturally grow up to emulate the ways of their elders.

The native language is Tamil and the people of Coimbatore and its surrounding regions are well known for the *Kongu* slang. A lilt in its manner gives it an alluring charm and has made it immensely popular in the state.



LEFT: Prayers and pujas are an integral part of everyday life in most families. Seen here are the younger members receiving blessings from the head of the family.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Most people still live in joint families. Seen here are a group of young and old women chatting before they resume chores.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Traditional feasts are normally served on banana leaves and consist of sweetmeats, curries, rice, lentils and pulses.

OVERLEAF: Works of art showcased at the Kasturi Srinivasan Art Gallery are a treat to the eye.





Celebrating art

Art and craft

There is no singular art form that is instantly associated with Coimbatore. However, native communities have managed to preserve age old traditions. Most rural craft forms still rely on the skill of the hand rather than technology.

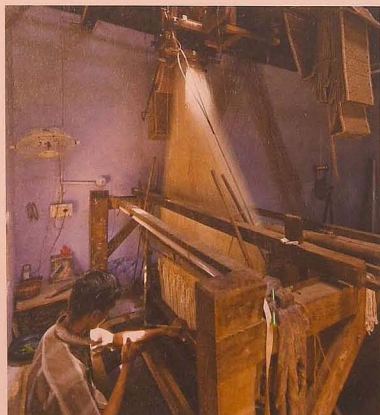
Holding pride of place in the art and craft of the land is textile craftsmanship. Coimbatore cottons are world famous for their soft texture and stunning weaves. The rural landscape abounds with handloom weavers and the secret of craftsmanship has been handed down through generations.

Stone carving is another significant art form. There are carvers of every kind: from those in quarries who craft grinding stones and other utilities to the highly evolved sculptors of idols. It is said that some sculptors are often driven by a divine power to craft the images of the Gods.

Art lovers abound in Coimbatore and thanks to the initiatives of a passionate group of entrepreneurs, the Kasturi Srinivasan Art Gallery was opened exclusively to promote art and upcoming artists.

Like minded people come together to host exhibitions of every kind, from hand-embroidered linen to candles, from designer clothes to modern art. The city has several community halls where these exhibitions are held and are a must-see for visitors.

Coimbatore's art of garland making and its garland makers hold a special place in South India. The art has grown to such prominence that it has fuelled a dedicated flower market. The fragrances of lilies, jasmines, roses, lotuses and native flowers like *Shenbagam* are a treat to the olfactory nerves. One can spend hours watching the nimble movement of the flower artists as they thread wreaths, hair adornments and garlands.



LEFT: *A typical handloom still in use.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Garlands of every colour and size are ready for sale at the flower market.*

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: *A stone carver is intently focused on chiselling the contours of a sculpture as his friend looks on.*

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: *Many women take up painting as a hobby. Portrayed here is an aspiring artist learning the art of glass painting.*

Music

South India is the birth place of Carnatic Music, a classical form that emphasises technical prowess. This form holds a special place in the world of classical music. After Chennai, it is perhaps Coimbatore that has helped nurture the interest in classical arts and has given rise to a loyal following of music lovers, teachers and students.

Music is often a part of the co-curricular activities of a student's life and training is rigorous. Although the popular genus remains Carnatic music, other forms like Hindustani and Western Classical Music have also carved their own niche. Different genres of instrumental music coexist and have dedicated followers.

A number of fine art trusts and organisations have been incepted to nurture the traditional music forms. These organisations invite renowned artistes and conduct music festivals all the year round.

Thanks to the flood of radio channels, film music has become an integral part of the street life at Coimbatore. Ipods, cellphones and radio players churn out peppy tunes all hours of the day.



LEFT: A veena artiste prepares for a concert.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Students of instrumental music play in unison.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Children begin their training in Carnatic Music very early.

Dance, theatre and literature

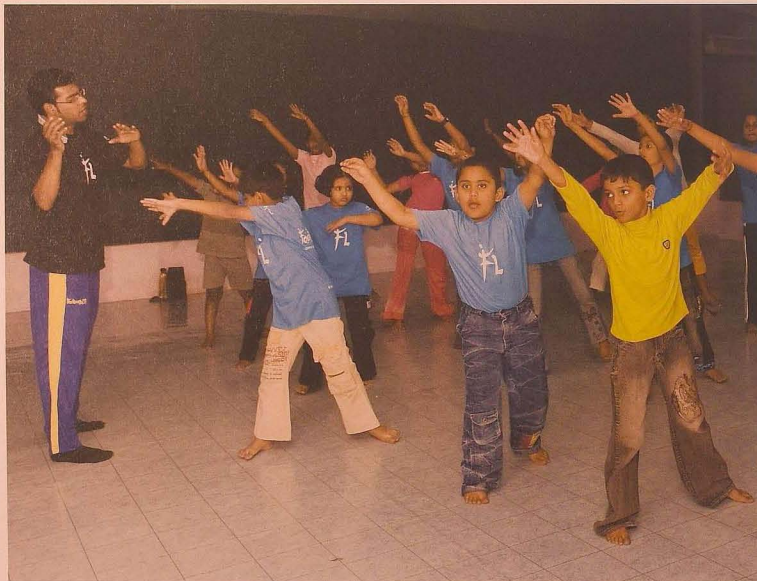
Like traditional music, classical dance finds wide acceptance in the textile city. Different schools of Bharatanatyam flourish and a large number of people pursue it with passion.

Several dance festivals are held round the year. An annual tribute to Lord Nataraja is conducted at Perur temple and dancers, both eminent and upcoming are invited to perform before the deity.

Coimbatore's urban population loves to sway to the tunes of contemporary dance as well. Salsa, Hip hop and other western forms of dance are gaining popularity amongst youngsters and adults alike.

Folk dance in the region involves the women of the community dancing the *kummi* and *kolattam*. *Karagattam*, a dance form that involves balancing several pots on the head and dancing to devotional tunes, is also popular in rural Kongunaadu.

The city has just seen the emergence of theatre artistes and the art form. Performances are often organised and hosted by independent organisations and are a rare treat for lovers of dramatics.



LEFT: Hip hop is the way to dance for this group of youngsters.

FAR RIGHT: The music comes alive with the facial expressions on the classical dancer's face.

RIGHT: Village women join in the kummi dance just before the Pongal festivities begin.

Street plays are a very important part of the culture. They are often used to educate and inform the rural and semi urban populations about social causes.

Coimbatore was home to some of the state's first film studios. The Central and Pakshiraja studios created several celluloid impressions long before Chennai became the Hollywood of South India.

Several books recounting the history of the region have been written in Tamil. Many writers and poets from Coimbatore have made a mark in the literary map of the country. The city's love for the written word has also led to the founding of several book clubs.



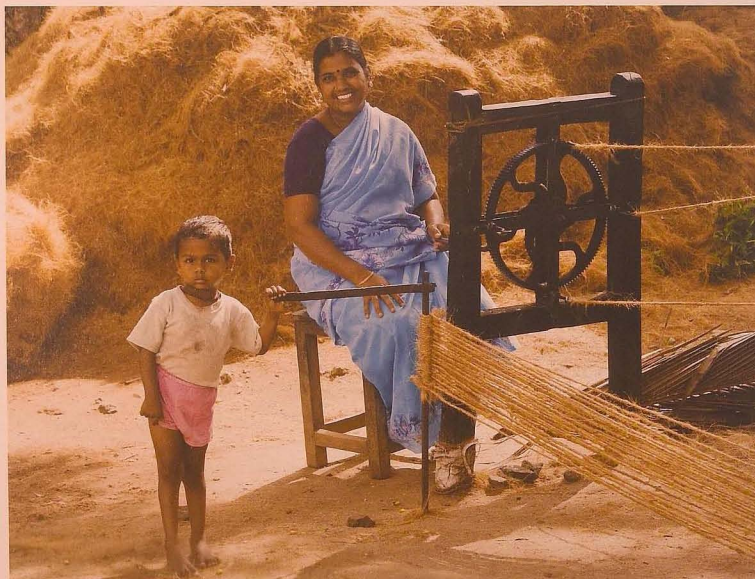
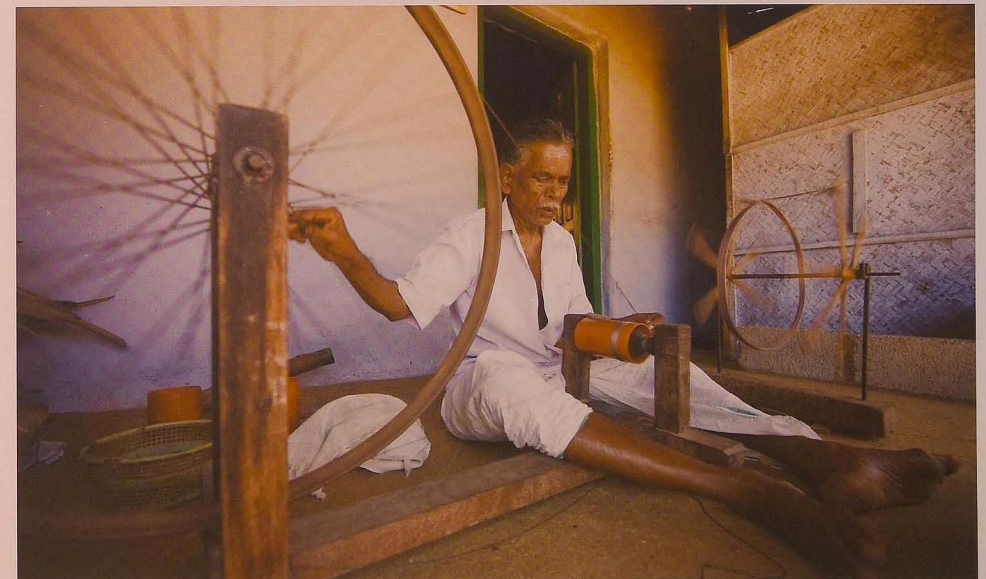
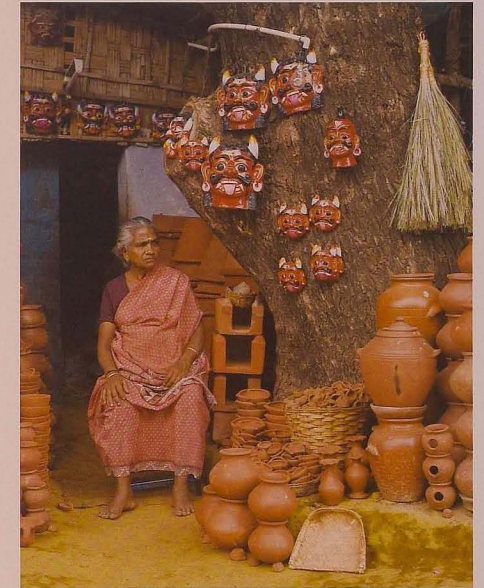
Rural art

The best of India's crafts still lie in the villages and Coimbatore's neighbouring hamlets are a treasure trove of skill and talent. Most rural art forms are passed down from one generation to another and a cluster of families are usually involved in one particular activity.

Basket weaving is one of the favourite craft forms of rural folk. Hewn from the dried barks of palm trees and woven using acquired skill, the baskets take on different shapes and accommodate anything - from fruits to flowers.

Villagers are also actively involved in coir rope making. It is worthwhile to watch the intricate twisting and turning of coir winding its way to become a sturdy reign. Although the process is still largely a handicraft, modern contraptions resembling a giant wheel are often used to pile the coil of ropes.

There are pottery shops all along the roads in the city and those leading to villages. Water pots, mud stoves, flower pots and the likes are stacked and gleam a deep red in the hot sun. Drinking cool water from an earthen pot is a truly refreshing experience, and is worth a try in the summer heat.



LEFT: Coir from coconut fibre is used in a variety of products, from mattresses to ropes. Seen here is a little boy who urges his mother to strike a pose before she resumes making ropes.

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: A basket weaver fashions a basket from the criss-cross sections of bamboo.

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: Wayside pottery shop sells pots of every kind.

OPPOSITE BELOW: An old man clings on to the old art of making Kadar yarn from the spinning wheel.



Worship

Religion

Temple bells chime in rhythmic fashion. The prayer call from a neighbouring mosque hastens the pace of followers. A quiet congregation assembles at a church. All this on one stretch of road; that is the magical charm of Coimbatore. The places of worship do not end there. Coimbatore has a Gurudwara and a Jain temple as well.

It has always been a place where religions thrive in harmony and its people celebrate Christmas with as much fervour as they do *Deepavali*.

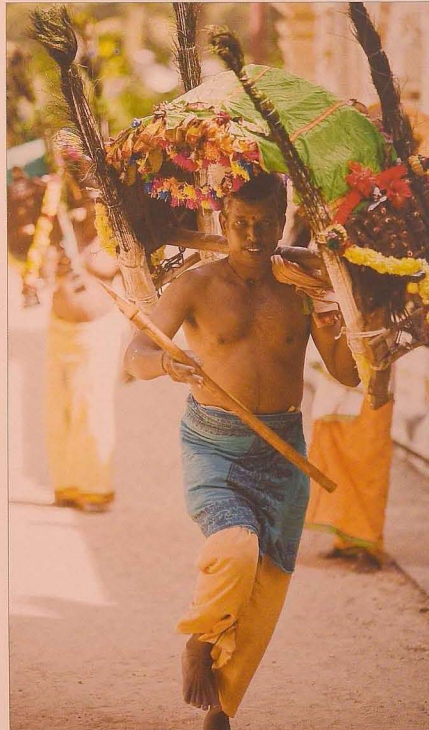
Down the ages, like most of India, Coimbatore and its surrounding regions bore witness to many religious influences. Jainism is believed to have been very active during the 8th and 9th centuries. It is said that the Kalabhras, the Jains from Karnataka became a strong power in the region.

Over time, many more religions came into prominence and some beautiful structures were built in the process.

Different religions have also contributed to the economic, intellectual and spiritual growth of the region in many ways. The Muslim settlers contributed to trading and still play a prominent role. Christian missionaries set up several educational institutions and destitute care homes.

It is perhaps the proximity of the land to the sylvan forests of the Western Ghats that prompted many spiritual masters to preach their path to nirvana. Different schools of yogic thought and Vedanta originated here and have in turn set up ashrams, educational institutions and retreats.

The Tirumoorthy Hills, Vellingiri hills and Kurundhamalai house many temples that beckon thousands of people all the year round.

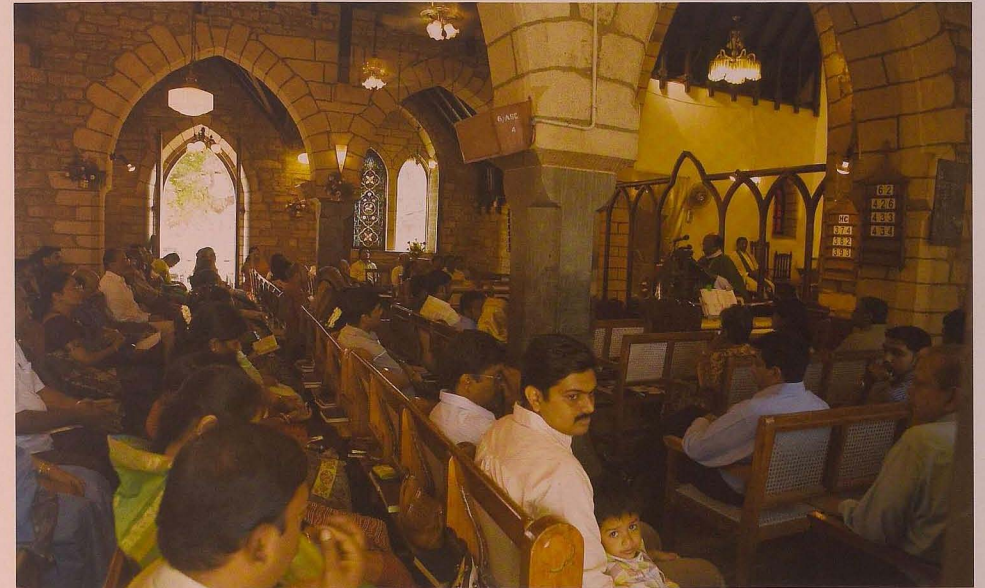


PREVIOUS PAGE: Several temples were erected during the reign of the Cholas. Portrayed here is a 700 year old temple.

LEFT: Kavadi is a form of paying tribute to Lord Muruga and involves dancing one's way to the temple.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Worshippers gather before the weekly mass at a church.

OPPOSITE BELOW: A man waits to buy a talisman outside a mosque. The red and black strings are tied on the wrist to ward off evil.



Places of worship

Temples

Perur is of great historical relevance in the region and dates back to more than 800 years. The temple holds deep significance in the Shivite tradition and is dedicated to Lord Shiva, the Destroyer of Evil. Perur was eulogised by one of the famed 63 Shivite saints. Ancient records preserve the memories of travelling monks who visited the temple through the ages.

The carved stonework around the periphery of the temple is carefully chiselled and a host of celestial beings are brought to life in the artiste's hands.

The world's oldest dated bronze statuette of *Ulagalandha Perumal* or Lord Vishnu is housed in the Singanallur temple in the city. It is an honour that elevates Coimbatore's position to among the heritage cities. Although the temple is a modern erection, the bronze statue dates back to the early 8th century.

Most temples dedicated to Lord Muruga are situated atop a hill. Maruthamalai is the famed hillock that houses the deity of Lord Muruga in the *Kongu* region. Devotees throng the temple all times of the year. *Thai Poosam* is an auspicious day in late January and brings thousands of people to the temple.

Coimbatore has an abundance of other temples devoted to all the Gods and Goddesses of Hindu mythology. The city also abounds with temples erected by different communities and organisations.

RIGHT: The Perur temple is situated on the outskirts of the city and is visited by hundreds of devotees everyday.

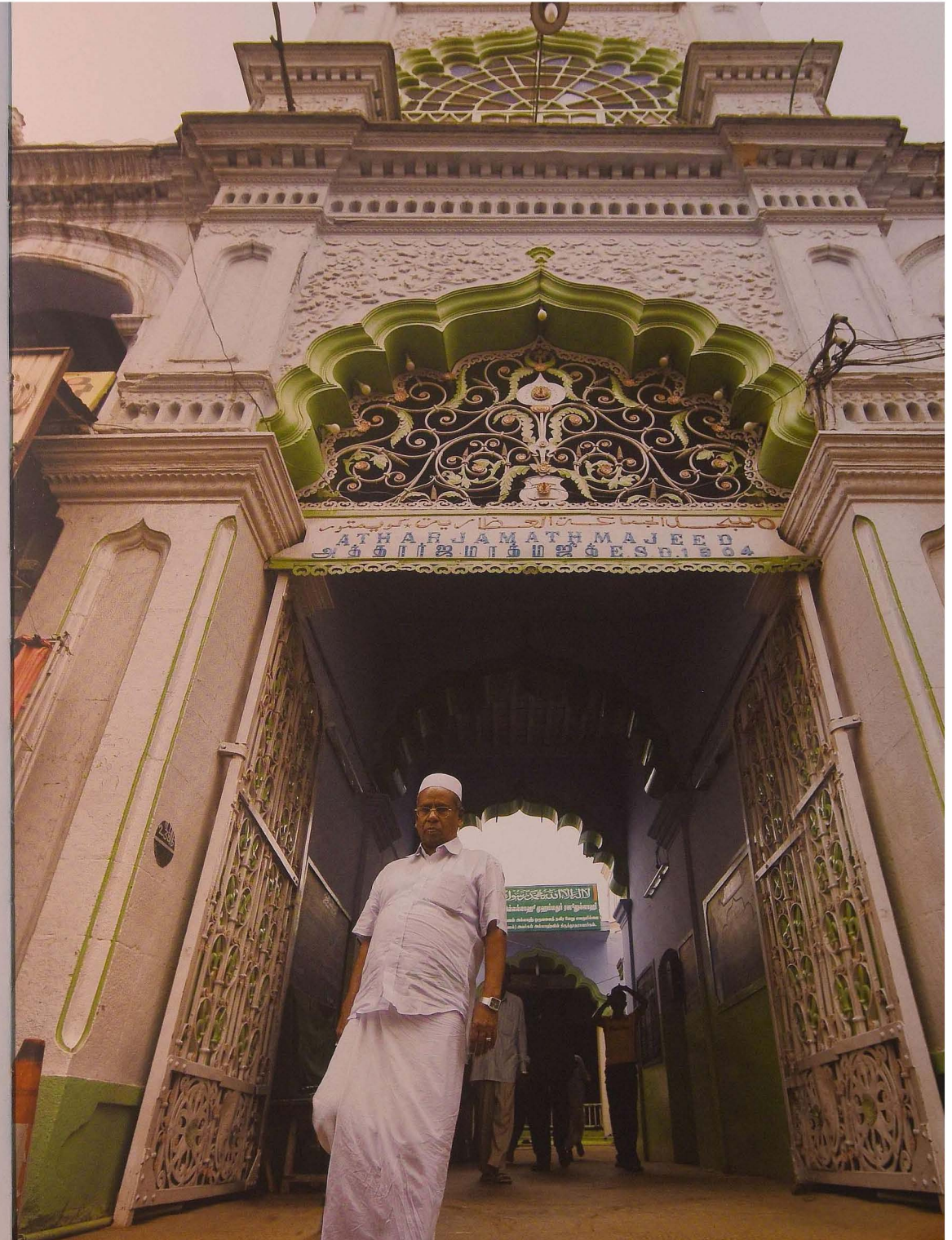




ABOVE: The temple at Marudbamalai is dedicated to Lord Muruga.

LEFT: The deity at the Ulagaṇḍha Perumal temple at Singanailur.

RIGHT: The Akhtar Jamath Masjid stands tall on the bustling Oppanakara Street. Seen here are followers coming out after the Namaz.



Mosques

The Athar Jamath Masjid stands proud amidst the mayhem of the commercial hub of the city. Its green walls quietly dominate the crowded street-scape. The masjid was built by a group of Athar traders and is over 100 years old.

Dargas, or tombs of Islamic saints and other mosques abound in the city. Dargas are open to all religious communities and on Fridays, one can see a queue of people waiting to receive the blessings of the saints.

Churches

The All Souls Church is one of the oldest in the city. Its Belgian glass windows are carved with pictorial representations of the Bible's teachings and the church looks picture perfect; its walls set off the green backdrop of trees.

St. Antony's Church in Puliakulam is flocked with followers. A number of Christian sects have emerged in the recent past and several modern churches have been erected to bring congregations of people together.

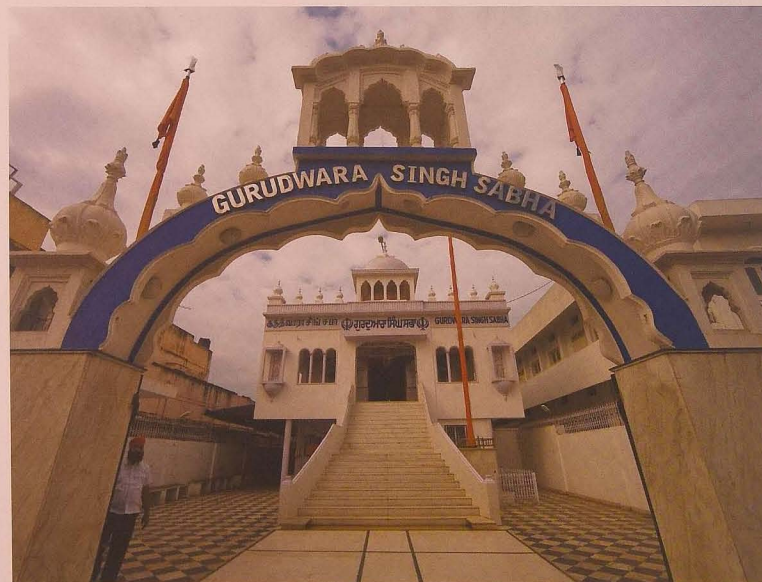
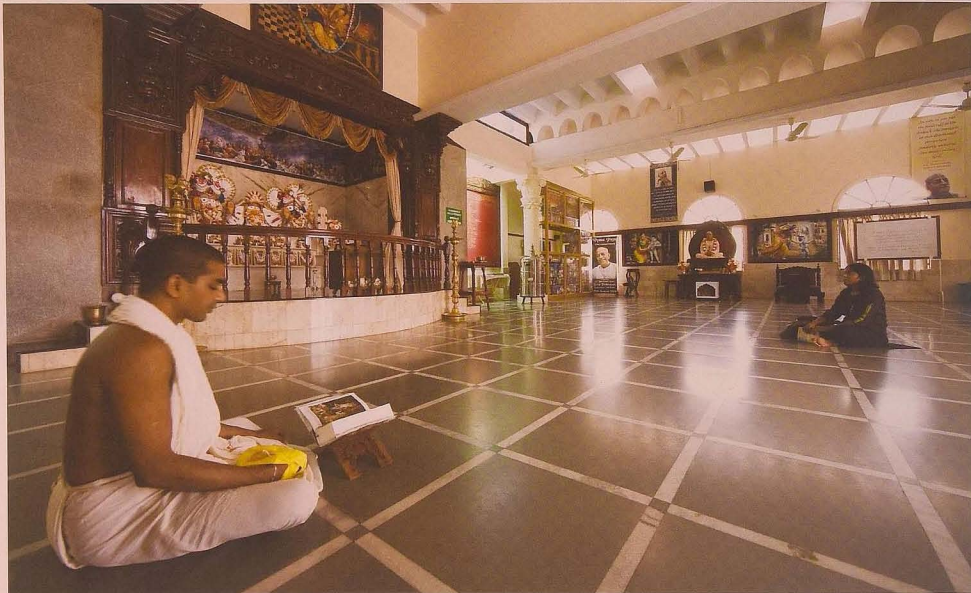
Other religious places

The Jain Temple at RS Puram is a contemporary erection and has been meticulously carved using marble and other raw materials. Devotees throng the temple on all holy occasions.

The Gurudwara reflects the serene ambiance so typical of the Sikh places of worship.

OPPOSITE: *The Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church is tucked away from the urban eye and its towering columns compete with giant trees adjoining it.*





ABOVE: A monk recites passages from a holy scripture as a worshipper offers silent prayers to Lord Jagannath at the Iskon temple.

LEFT: The Sikh community congregates at the Gurudwara on all religious occasions.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: The stunning façade of the Jain temple.

OPPOSITE BELOW: A universal shrine of peace, true to the cosmopolitan culture of the city.



Festivities

India's festivals are a celebration of good food, music, dance and God. Festivals are the time when people come together with song, dance and family reunions. Visits to the places of worship form part of the festive ritual.

Hindus are a majority in the region and the most important festivals are *Pongal* and *Deepavali*. Pongal is the time when the locals bow down to the Sun God and seek his blessings for prosperity. Although urbanites celebrate it with great pomp, the festival's grandeur is evident only in the villages. It is also the time to thank the toil of cattle; cows and bulls get to don freshly painted horns and enjoy being the centre of attention for a whole day.

June heralds the festive season in the region. *Aadi Perukku* signals the onset of monsoon and the rise of tide in the seasonal rivers. The festival is also a time when people pay homage to departed souls. Rituals are conducted in their honour and the day culminates with a picnic of assorted rice eaten on the river banks.

Navaratri, the period of 9 days in tribute to the ruling goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon is a joyful burst of celebration. People from all parts of the country make elaborate preparations to welcome the Gods. The North Indian community dons brightly coloured ghagras and engages the town in 9 long days and nights of dancing the *Garbha* and *Dandia*.

Deepavali is spent in a haze of fireworks, new clothes, gifts and feasting. It is perhaps the most eagerly awaited event for children.

Ramzan and Christmas are celebrated with equal fervour and in December, one can see the Guiding Star put up in a lot of homes.

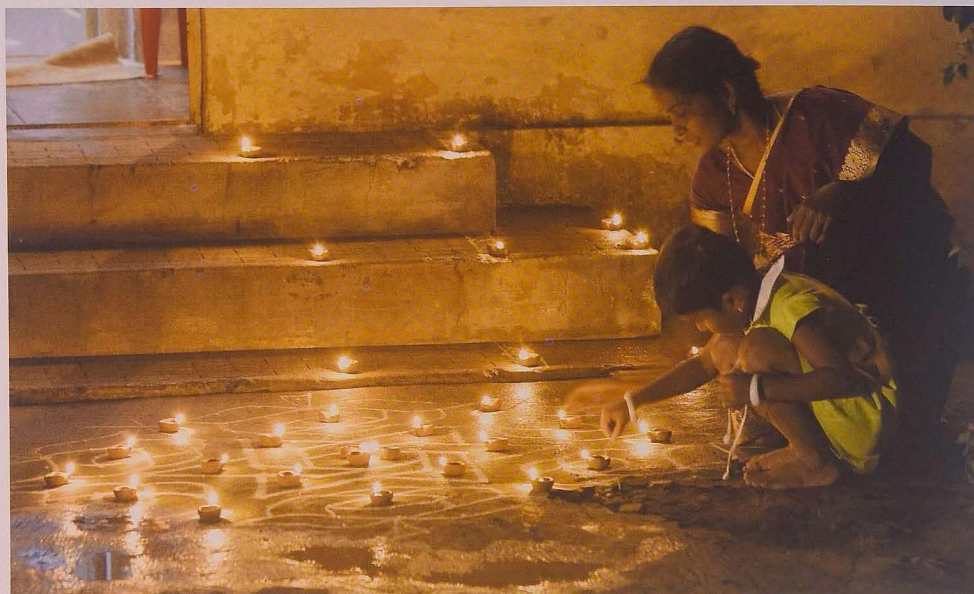
A lot of the shopping bonanzas are tailored around the festivals and stores create special promotional packages to attract the celebrating crowds.



LEFT: People offer their prayers to departed souls during 'Aadi Perukku'.

RIGHT: The charm of Pongal, the harvest festival is vividly portrayed in this rural home.





RIGHT: Devout Muslims offer prayers at the mosque during the fasting period of Ramzan.

BELOW: For children, Deepavali is synonymous with fun, crackers and new clothes.

OVERLEAF: The façade of the Tamilnadu Agricultural University is one of the most beautiful symbols of Indo-Saracenic architecture.



ABOVE: Lamps are lit in the front yard of every home on the occasion of Karthikai.

LEFT: Santa decides to visit the city on Xmas.



Architecture

Until a few decades ago, Coimbatore was a quiet city that carried reminders of the Raj in its landscape and way of life. Today, all that has changed and the city is raring to join the ranks of the Indian metros.

The British Raj was a period when the region saw the erection of several institutions, homes and buildings. The strong influences of Colonial architecture, a combination of European, Islamic, North Indian and Dravidian styles are reflected in some beautiful buildings.

The clock tower in the town area has become one of the architectural symbols of the city. The Victoria Town Hall, a beautiful white building of European architecture lends its name to the suburb in which it is located. It stands gracefully amidst the chaos of the millennium.

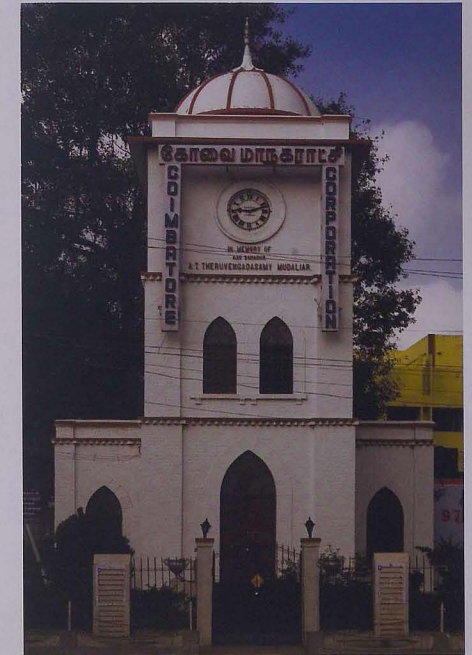
One of the finest examples of the Indo-Saracenic architectural styles is the century old Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Monolithic granite pillars and local brickwork reflect a combination of European, Hindu and Islamic designs.

The urban heart of the region is a curious mix of contrasts. There is a sudden burst of



intricate carving and stonework on a temple façade in the middle of a street that houses modern residential complexes. It is not uncommon to see a century old home, covered by the shade of green standing amidst its ostentatious, modern counterparts.

Architecture in Coimbatore today has influences from many parts of the world.



OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT:
The Coimbatore Club acts as both 'intellectual and social stimulus for its members.

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT:
The Gass Forest Museum and College is another example of architectural confluence.

ABOVE: *The clock tower in the town area is a quiet reminder of time passing by.*

RIGHT: *A sprawling old bungalow evokes grand memories of the past.*



A trip to the quieter locales will take one to art deco homes that regularly feature in design magazines. In the same breath, the city will also reveal hastily erected apartment blocks. That's Coimbatore – the old blends with the new; heritage stands proud in some places and has given way to urbanisation in others.

Rural Coimbatore takes one back to a time before brick and mortar; the beauty of the Western Ghats, endless stretches of coconut palms and homes built with natural resources; potter tiles for the roofs, lime for the floors and rose wood carvings for the doors. Several hamlets and suburban areas have managed to retain the charm of their heritage buildings and should one have the luxury of time, it may be well worthwhile to visit to some of them.

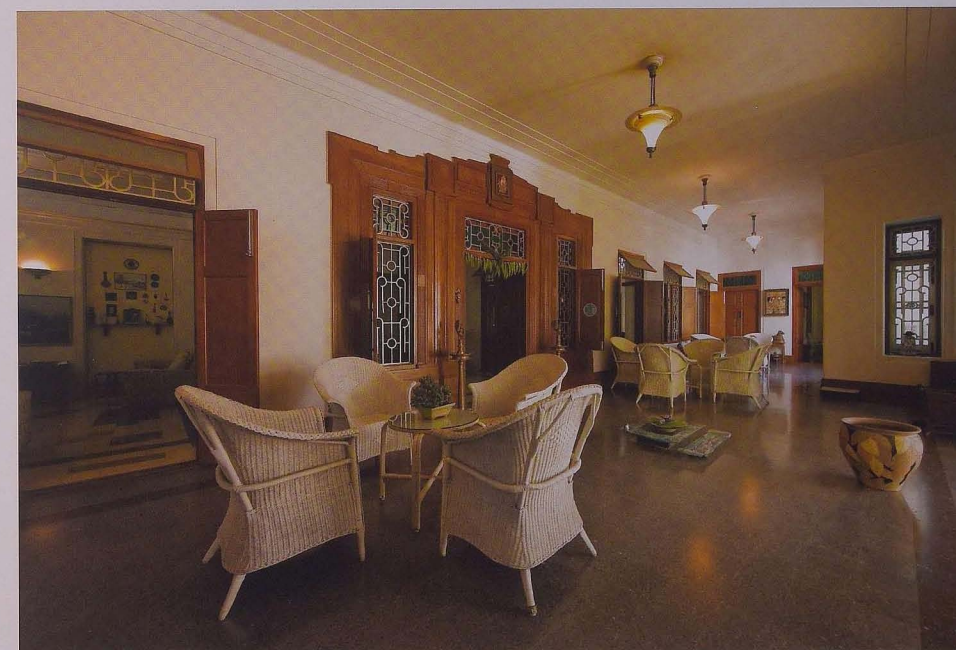
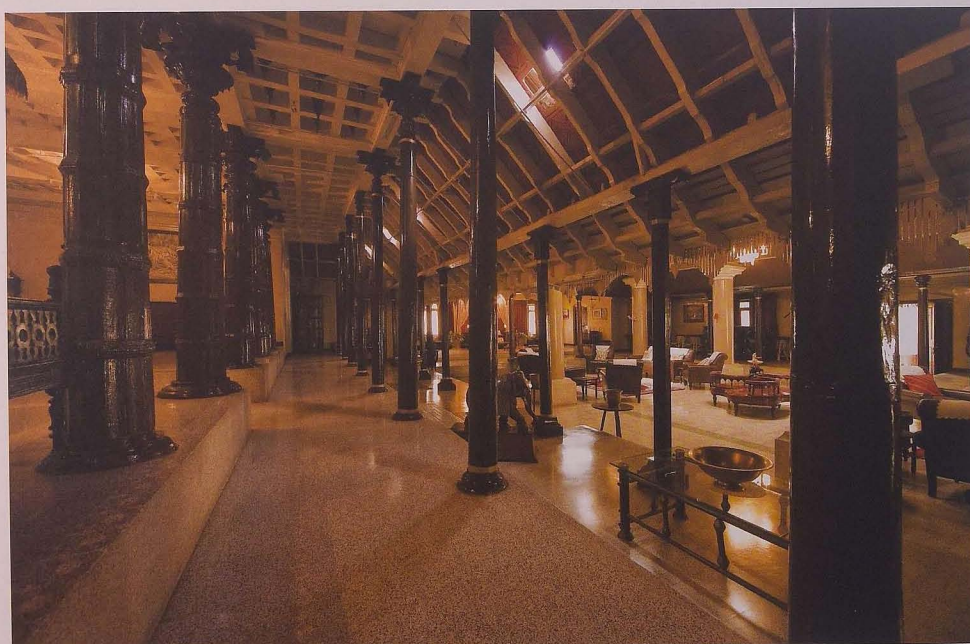
The neighbouring areas of Coimbatore were ruled by Polygars (who later came to be known as Zamindars during the Raj) for several centuries; Samathur, Puravipalayam and Uthukuli are about an hour's drive from the city and house ancient palaces. The palaces are a curious mix of Kerala, local and European architecture. Many in the region are over 300 years old and have been preserved by the heirs to the legacies.

BELOW: The play of light makes the teak pillars gleam in the Palace 'darbar', the ceremonial reception chamber at Samathur.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Palaces of the Polygars reflect different styles of architecture.

OPPOSITE BELOW: The understated elegance of an art deco home.

OVERLEAF: A fair comes to town and people flock to see the giant rides and products it has on offer.





Entertainment

If one is looking for an active night life, party zones and endless entertainment choices, Coimbatore is not the first place the mind will conjure up. This is for the quiet spirited, and if one has just a little patience to savour it, there is a lot to see.

Entertainment in the city is largely restricted to good food and the cinemas. Several cinema halls are on the brink of a makeover to give residents the multiplex experience. Coimbatore is an ideal base if one has a couple of days to spend at leisure.

The more affluent families in the city enjoy an active social life and often get together with like minded people to contribute to social causes. The famed English Club, now called the Coimbatore Club was inceptioned over a hundred years ago to create space for leisure for the English speaking community. The quiet resort-like ambience speaks of ancient charm and it still abides by the rules laid down in the yesteryears.

The Cosmopolitan Club was inceptioned in the early 1880s by the founding fathers of the city. The cream of the business community continues to meet here for its daily dose of intellectual stimulus. The city has several other clubs that engage in both sport and leisure activities. Entry into these premier houses is often restricted only to members.

Coimbatoreans simply love fairs and exhibitions. The city has become a favourite destination amongst event managers and large throngs of families regularly visit these shows to get an update on what's on offer in the consumer market. Sundays are often spent in visiting a fair or two and wound down with dinner at a restaurant.

Circuses, magic shows and live film music performances are regularly conducted in the city and are eagerly awaited by children and adults alike.



LEFT: Crowds gather outside a recently spruced-up cinema theatre to catch the first show of a Tamil film release.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Coimbatore has several parks with trees, slides and swings for children and Sunday evenings are normally spent at one of them.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Restocafés are the new rage in leisure; they are the perfect place to catch up with a friend over a cup of coffee.



Cuisine

Research into Kongunaadu cuisine reveals a varied spread of both vegetarian and meat delicacies. Everyday food is a staple diet of rice, vegetables and curries. Chicken is an all time favourite. Food is moderately spiced, well balanced and healthy.

The traditional foods of the region that have become universal favourites include the *kuzhi paniyaram* (shallow fried, spiced rice and lentil dumplings), *kambu saadam* (millet rice) and *ennai kathirikkai* (deep fried brinjals). The humble wheat *uppuma* is a favourite and is served in most homes as part of the breakfast menu. Steamed horse gram is eaten with rice only in this region.

Coimbatore gets a fresh supply of vegetables and fruit from the neighbouring hill stations of Ooty and Kodaikanal. Local produce is sourced from neighbouring villages and farmlands and is brought fresh to the market everyday.

Thanks to the growing cosmopolitan flavour of the city, numerous multi-cuisine and speciality restaurants offer delectable choices. There's authentic North Indian fare, served on a traditional thali; an eatery that specialises in Italian cuisine, resto cafes that serve titbits from Mexico and star restaurants that offer a wide range of continental food. Pizzas, wraps and rolls are very popular as well.

A number of bakeries serve up hot brews of tea and fresh-from-the-oven puffs and have loyal customers who always turn up for their daily dose of caffeine.

A visit to Coimbatore is incomplete without savouring the crisp, brown *dosas* and piping hot *sambar*, served at many restaurants.

Apart from a string of home-grown ice cream brands and Chettinaad restaurants, one will also find a number of small 'mess' homes, wayside eateries usually run by families. Typically, a mess offers people home cooked food and a staple menu that runs through the week.

Jostling for space amidst the finer eateries is the pushcart vendor, offering home made gruels and iced sugar cane juice for the tired passerby.



LEFT: Huge chilies fried in a thick batter of Bengal gram flour are hugely popular at exhibitions and fairs.

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: This gentleman decides to stop by for a quick snack before he heads off to work again.

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: A family decides to treat itself to a 4 1/2 feet family dosa.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Star restaurants serve a variety of cuisine: from the traditional South Indian thali to global flavours.



Hospitality and leisure

Leisure for a traveller probably means one voyage after another, seeking treasure troves in faraway places and gaining new experiences all the time. For the overworked urbanite, it simply means a time to put one's feet up. Coimbatore offers plenty for both. Although the city is yet to receive its share of five and seven star hotels, there are luxury hotels that offer an alluring service basket.

A day in the city can take one to heritage sites, the Gandhi Museum, the GD Naidu Museum, the Kasturi Srinivasan Art Gallery and end with a sumptuous buffet spread at a restaurant.

If rejuvenation is on one's mind, one must try the relaxing therapies at the beauty parlours in the city. Or better still, there is always a great Ayurveda massage at one of the authorised treatment centres. Coimbatore also has a growing share of spas and resorts that bundle in attractive dine and stay packages.

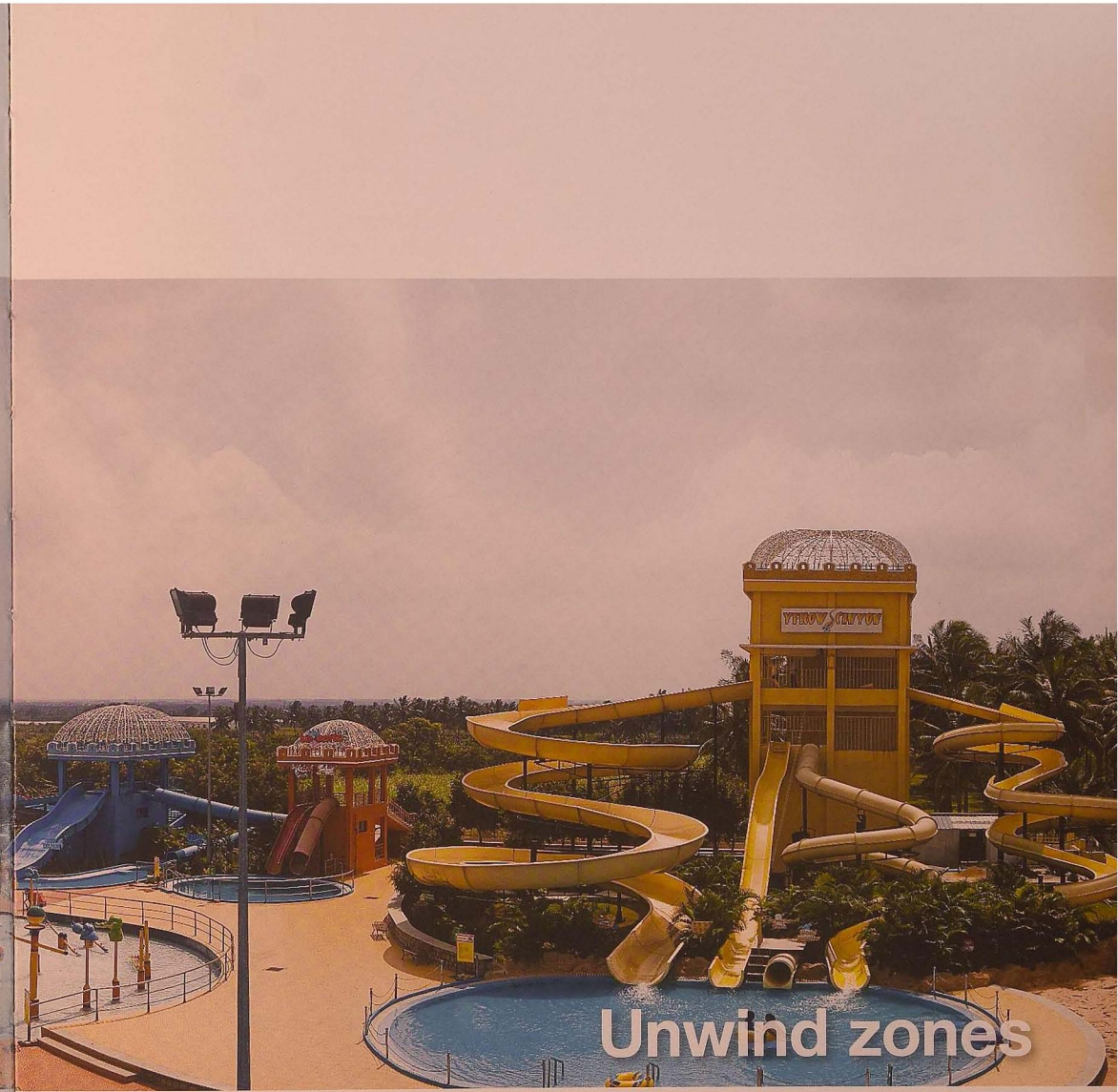
One can take a leisurely browse at the book stores or simply settle in the comfort of the room to a movie and some good food. Book lovers can find plenty to pick at the old book market- from an old edition of a much loved classic to popular fiction.

BELOW: Leisure cafes are where the young urbanites head to after college or work.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: One of Coimbatore's many fine dine restaurants.

OPPOSITE BELOW: The lobby of a star hotel in all its grandeur.





Unwind zones

Holiday destinations

From jungle trails, to cultural tourism, resort getaways, natural hotspots, wildlife sanctuaries, the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) and the Botanical gardens, there is plenty to see close to the city.

Coimbatore is just about an hour's drive from the neighbouring Kerala, one of the 50 must see destinations of the world. A 4-hour journey takes the traveller to the quaint charm of Mysore city in Karnataka. Andhra Pradesh, the other Southern state of India is a night's travel away. Its central location appeases the nature loving, spiritual and urban tourist with equal charm.

Ooty

The charm of the Western Ghats comes alive in a hint of blue and it is easy to instantly fall in love with the beauty of these mountains. These are one of the oldest mountain ranges of the world and the region is a biodiversity hotspot.

At the heart of the Blue Mountains is Ooty, originally known as Udhagamandalam. Coimbatore led the British to Ooty, a much loved retreat that they lavished their attention on.



John Sullivan is the founder of this beautiful Queen of Hill Stations. Ooty was initially used as a summer resort and sanatorium before it became the seat of governance.

Ooty is about 3 hours away from Coimbatore. It is an uphill drive with each hairpin bend going a little higher up the mountains. The fragrance of Cyprus, Eucalyptus and Shola trees is a festive treat to the city eye and sometimes, the fresh mountain air catches one's breath.

A wonderful way to experience the charm of the Western Ghats is through a ride up the heritage train. A century old steam engine puffs its way through meandering tunnels, allowing one to savour the breathtaking view all along.

The first hydroelectric project at Pykara, Doddabetta, the highest peak in the Nilgiris, the boathouse and the botanical gardens are just some of the must see places in Ooty.



PREVIOUS PAGE: A theme park is where families go to spend a holiday.

OPPOSITE BELOW: An old Toda man buggles besides a rock outside his hand crafted home.

LEFT: The Nilgiri Mountain Railway has gained world heritage status and offers a thoroughly enjoyable ride up the mountains.

Kodaikanal and Palani

The pristine charm of the Western Ghats has created another picture perfect town: Kodaikanal. A 5 hour drive will take one to this paradise and the magic of Nature is overpowering.

The Bear Shola falls, the Kodai Lake, Coaker's walk, the Kukkai caves and the Orchidarium are some of the must see places in town. The Kurinji flower blooms on the hills only once every 12 years and draws large crowds of tourists.

The temple town of Palani, the abode of Lord Muruga is en route to Kodaikanal and is a revered pilgrim centre. Palani holds a very special place in Hindu mythology and Tamil literature abounds with stories of the Lord's tryst with the temple town. *Thai Poosam*, in the month of January sees millions of devotees walk miles to see the Lord. A rope car is available for those who prefer to travel in a little more comfort.



LEFT: A lone bridge connects one hill to another at the Silent Valley.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: The famed Palani temple is the abode of Lord Muruga and is a revered pilgrim centre.

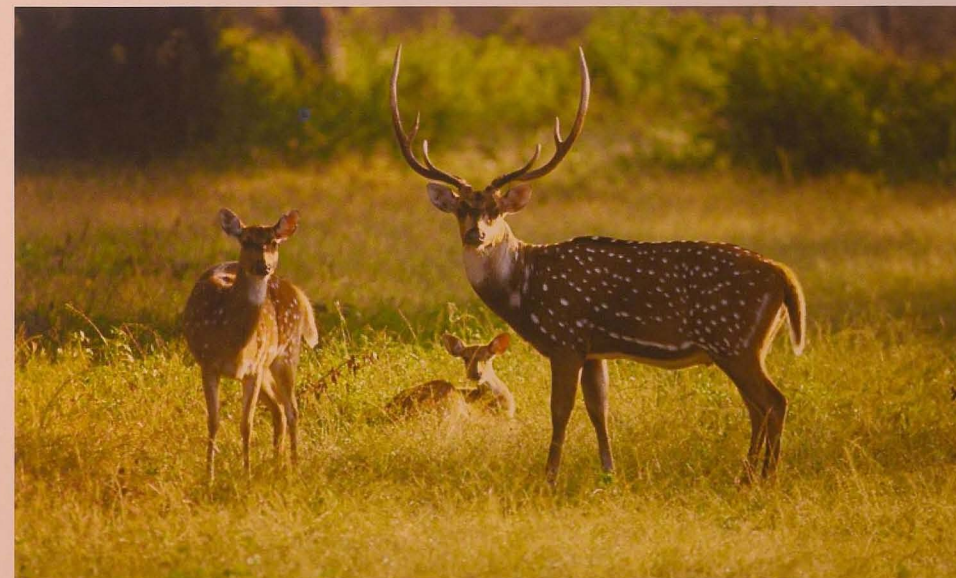
OPPOSITE BELOW: This spotted deer stops grazing for a moment and strikes a pose for the camera.

Valparai

Tea, tea and more tea; that's what awaits a visitor at Valparai. Waterfalls, streams and dams meander through the tea gardens, creating a stunning canvas in green, white and blue. Valparai has still managed to retain its pristine charm and one can get to stay at some of the sprawling bungalows that were constructed during the Raj.

Top Slip

A large expanse of jungles and wildlife await the nature lover. It takes an hour to reach Top Slip and one can experience the wilderness at Tree top guest houses or bungalows nestled in the forests. Top Slip adjoins the Parambikulam reserve forest.



One day getaways

There is a lot to see within the city. The Gass Forest Museum, built in 1902, is the first of its kind in India. Other places of interest include the century old Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. The zoo at the VOC Park has a curious mix of wild cats, birds of prey and reptiles.

A number of theme parks have emerged on the outskirts of the city and a child's holidays invariably begin with a fun trip to one of them.

Kovai Kuttralam is a picturesque waterfall, about an hour's drive from the city. Tall teak trees surround the area and it is a beautiful sight to watch the water gush down the mountain precipices. One can pack a picnic lunch and head out to the Siruvani river, known as one of the sweetest tasting waters of the world.

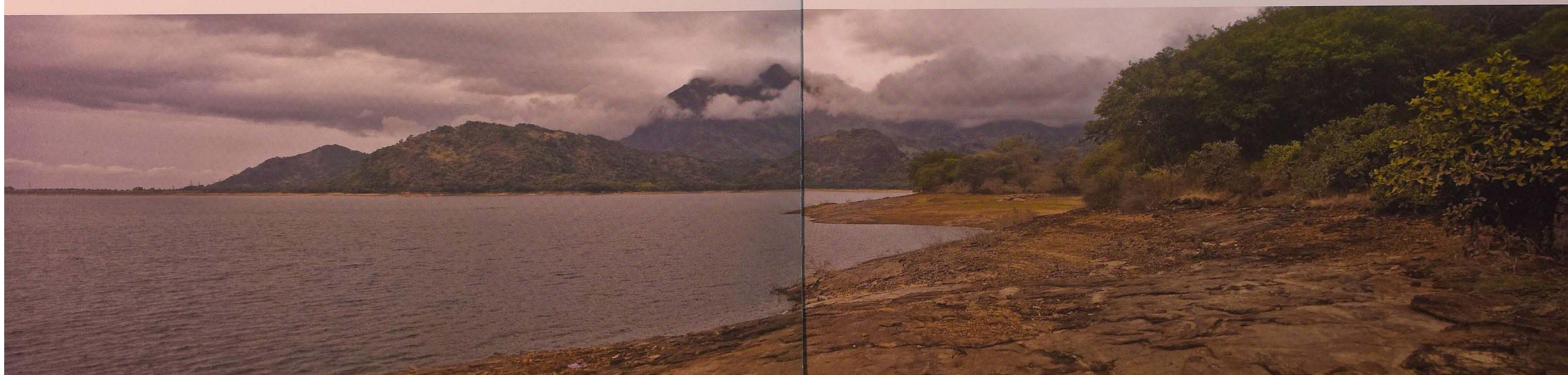
Other spots to visit include the Aliyar dam, a series of dams constructed over tunnels and canals. The Parambikulam–Aliyar multipurpose project is a major source of power generation and supplies water to the agricultural belts around the region. Other noteworthy places include the Vaidehi falls, the Tirumoorthy Hills and the Nirar dams; a welcome relief from the grey of concrete. The Vellingiri Hills is a quiet, picturesque retreat where one can surrender to the power of Nature.

For a city that is much quieter than its metro counterparts, Coimbatore has a unique blend of opportunities for the tourist to savour and surrender to. They can be hurried through in a day or relished at leisure, over time.



LEFT: Kovai Kuttralam, a picturesque waterfall fills up every monsoon and a splash in the cool waters is very inviting.

BELOW: The water rises in the Aliyar dam even as dark clouds gather for the next downpour of rain.





The wild side of life

Wildlife

The charm and majesty of the Western Ghats envelops the region and creates an exotic setting. The play of Nature is everywhere, from the exotic flora to certain species of fauna that are found only in this eco system. Although several species of the wild have dwindled in size, there is active support from the local governments to preserve natural habitats.

The Anamalai Wildlife Sanctuary is home to exotic species of fauna including the tiger, panther, sloth bear, pangolin, civet and the Malabar Flying Squirrel. The Amaravati Reservoir houses a crocodile park and also has a beautiful dam.

An overnight stay at the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary can end in a thoroughly enjoyable safari and if lucky, one might even be able to spot the tiger.

The Silent Valley National Park is the very heart of the Nilgiri Biosphere. It is perhaps one of the last undisturbed montane rain forests and tropical moist evergreen forests in India. The Silent Valley is located in Palakkad district and is a much loved trekking trail.

SACON, located at Anaikatti, on the outskirts of Coimbatore is a well-established ornithological research centre. Interactions with ornithologists at the institution is an invaluable learning experience.

The tanks in and around the city welcome migratory birds from as far as Russia. In short, the region around Coimbatore is a veritable treasure house of the wild and for a nature lover, the trails are unending.

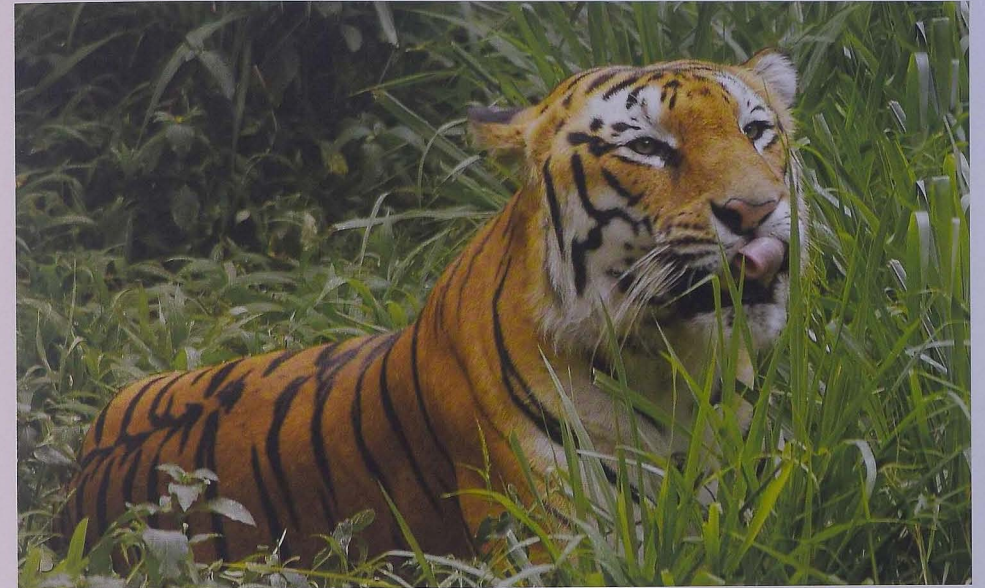


PREVIOUS PAGE: Remnants of a past wilderness seen at the Gass Forest Museum.

LEFT: The Velvet Fronted Nuthatch is a rare find in the grasslands of Valparai.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: The flame orange and black stripes of the tiger stuns the onlooker even in a photograph.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Steep cliffs and rocky terrain are where one finds the Nilgiri Tahr.



The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve has its own share of the exotic wild: the Lion Tailed Macaque, tigers, elephants, bisons and the Nilgiri Tahr.

The Nilgiri Tahr, a rare species of the mountain goat finds its habitat here. The Tahr has an uncanny ability to climb precipices and can traverse difficult mountain terrain with the finesse of an acrobat.

Completely hidden from the view of human habitat, roams the tiger. With its territory rapidly dwindling, it creates a mystical aura leading people to wonder if the title, 'king of the jungle' is more befitting of this beautiful animal.

Elephants. Almost everywhere there is jungle, there is the pachyderm. Down the centuries, several elephant corridors have paved way for human habitation, limiting their presence to reserve zones and specially created reserve forests. The elephant camp at Top Slip is a treat to the eye; for it brings together large herds of the gentle giant into a collective whole.

The Lion Tailed Macaque is another rare species found in the region. As opposed to its raucous Rhesus counterpart, the Macaque leads an intensely private life, rarely coming into human view.



LEFT: This mother elephant leads her herd from one grassland to another.

OPPOSITE: The Lion Tailed Macaque is listed among the endangered species and is found exclusively in the Western Ghats.





Trailblazers

Sports

Coimbatore has always enjoyed a special relationship with the world of sport. It has been the epicentre of Indian Motor Sports for long and has relentlessly pushed its talent to make a mark in the international arena.

Racing is perhaps closest to the city's heart. Coimbatore earned the distinction of being one of the first cities in India to have a Formula 3 category circuit. The Kari Motor Speedway has earned a legendary status in the nation's go-kart circuits. Coimbatore is an important stage in the National Rallying Circuit and its champions have brought home many laurels. Professionals from the city have represented India in Formula 1 racing and international rallies. Its avid sports engineers have made significant contributions to the technical development of racing and rallying cars.

Golf has caught on as a popular game and a beautiful course outside the city offers exclusive memberships for avid golfers.

A fully equipped stadium for football and athletics is an ideal training ground for budding athletes. The city also has professional clubs to train people in tennis, chess, badminton and other games.



PREVIOUS PAGE: Bikers rev up with a dose of adrenaline and kick start the race.

LEFT: Go-kart championships bring enthusiasts from as far as Chennai and Bangalore every year.

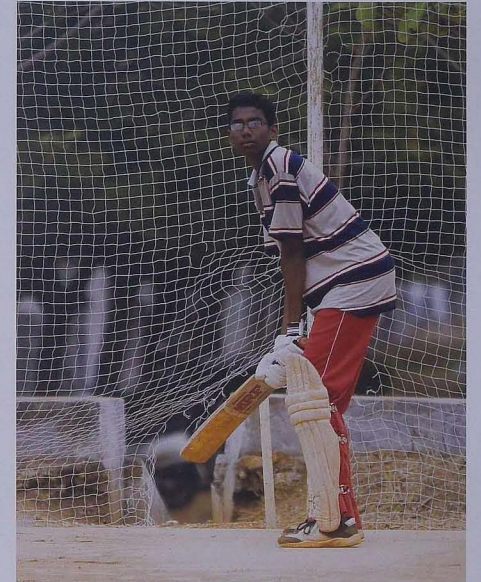
OPPOSITE ABOVE: What is sports in India without cricket!

OPPOSITE BELOW: A rally car manoeuvres a curve and leaves behind a trail of dust.

Cricket, the sport that India is fanatic about, is very popular in the city. One can find youngsters facing the ball at both professional levels and around street corners, with equal fervour.

Large groups of fitness enthusiasts indulge in an exercise activity of some kind. Games and sports are a part of life in the residential communities as well. With the emergence of gated complexes, people find more time to indulge in a variety of sport within the comforts of their homes. Sports are also part of the co-curricular activities in most schools.

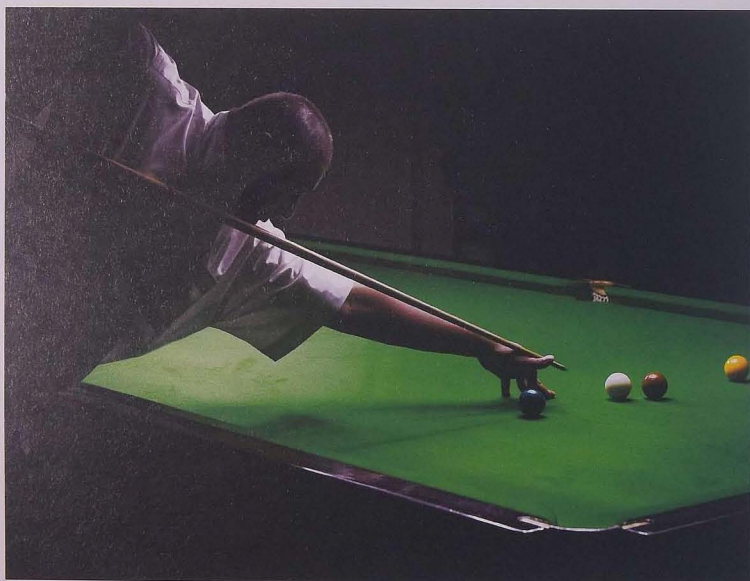
Coimbatore has its share of sports celebrities, both players and coaches.





ABOVE: Avid golfers often spend weekends at the course.

LEFT: Billiards is part of many indoor recreation facilities in the city.



ABOVE LEFT: A skater skims past the waiting crowd and seems to be in complete control.

ABOVE RIGHT: This high jumper is training to raise the bar.



LEFT: The swimmer stays intently focused on finishing her lap on time.



A shopper's haven

Shopping

What would a tourist destination or city be without its shopping hubs? Coimbatore offers an array of products for anyone with an aesthetic eye. Of course, it is the woven cottons and fabric that rule.

One of the most regular events in the city is the handicraft exhibitions from different states of the country. These fairs bring with them skilled craftsmen, a variety of hand crafted bric-a-brac and give avid shoppers plenty of excuses to lighten their wallets.

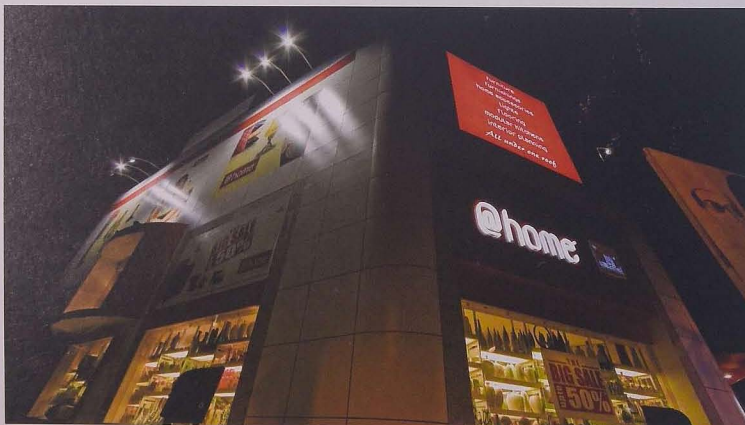
Shopping is relatively hassle-free if one already knows what to buy, for there are specific streets that cater to specific demands. The city is demarcated into 3 distinct commercial hubs and each is a beehive of activity: the Oppanakara Street, which offers everything from groceries to clothes; the Cross Cut Road, a criss-cross road of commercial complexes and megastores and RS Puram, the place that houses hip brands with as much ease as locally fashioned accessories.

A wholesale market for groceries, pulses, rice, wheat and cosmetics is located in the commercial market in the town hall area. Vegetables and fruits have a central market as well and they are later sold in bulk to the numerous retail stores in the city.

The Tamil month of *Aadi* falls between mid July and mid August and is the shopping season of the year. Virtually every store has a sale and offers attractive discounts. *Deepavali*, the festival of fireworks is another time when the shopping season is at its zenith.

Bargains are not normally encouraged, especially in the large retail establishments. However, one can often see people haggling over the price of vegetables or other ware with roadside vendors.

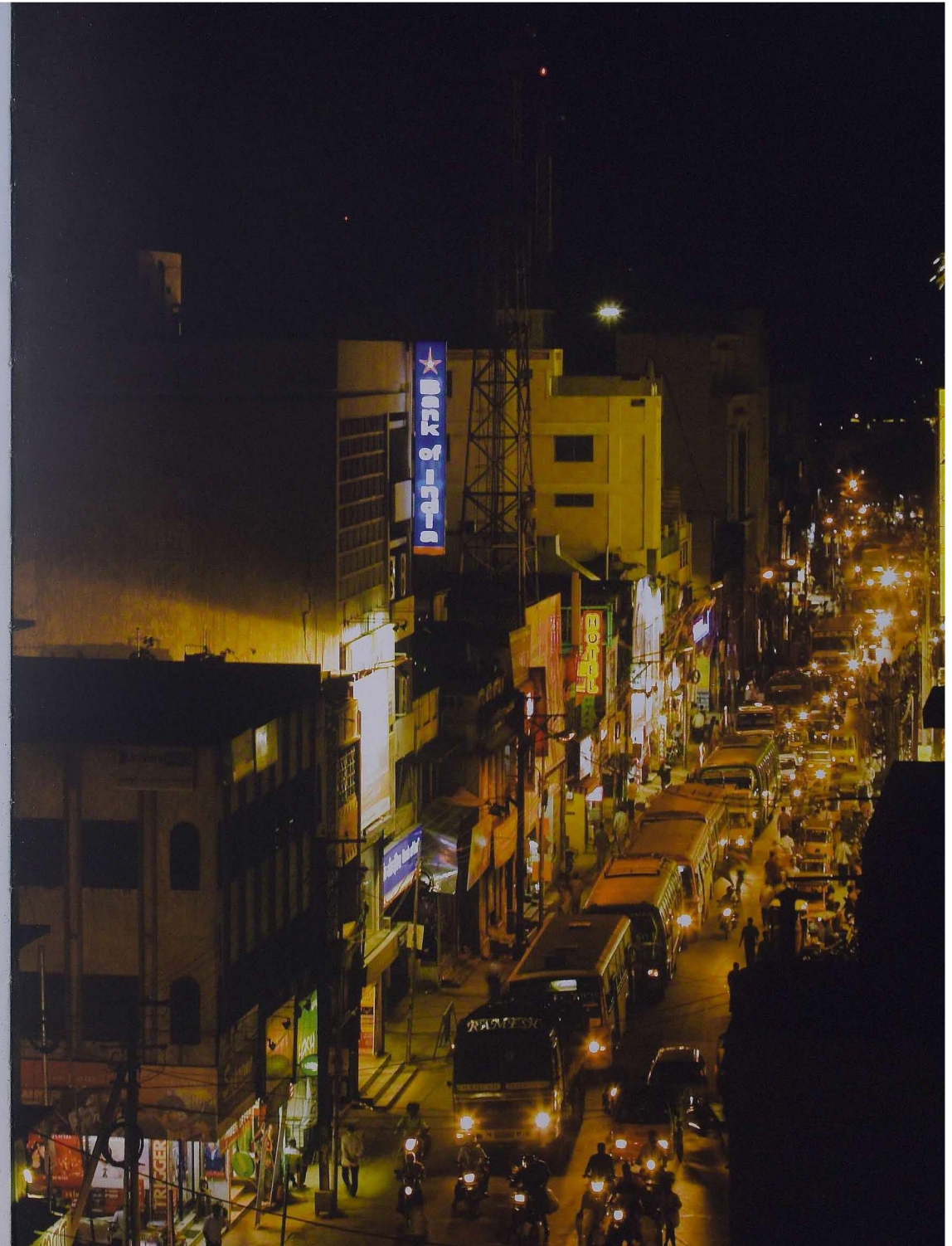
Large department stores stock varieties of fresh vegetables, groceries, cosmetics and imported foods. With malls and multiplexes coming up within the city and outside it, there is a lot an avid shopper can look forward to in the coming years.



PREVIOUS PAGE: *The city gets shoppers from neighbouring towns and states especially during the festive season.*

LEFT: *Huge retail stores offer the avid shopper everything, from home furnishings to artefacts.*

RIGHT: *The Oppanakara Street is a beehive of activity all the year round.*



Cottons, silks and more

Cotton fabric and textiles are the first things that comes to mind when one wants to shop in Coimbatore. Cotton fabric trading from the region dates back to the Roman Empire and continues to enjoy a special place in the hearts of cotton lovers.

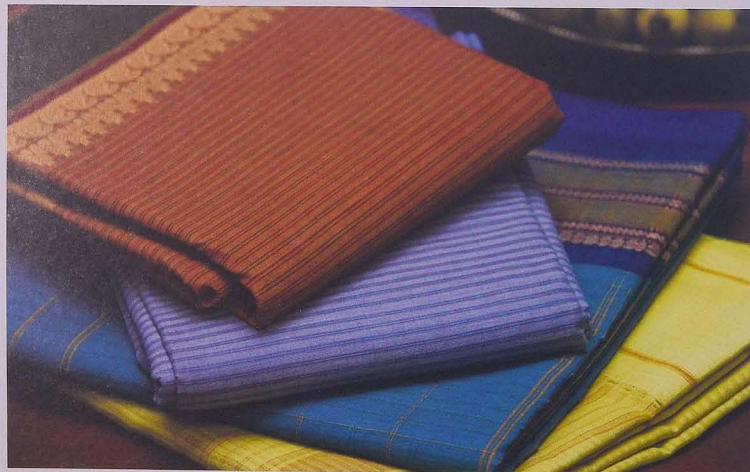
There is plenty to choose from: bale after bale of cotton fabric in stunning shades beckon. The handloom industry is still vibrant in the region and has a loyal following. Most handloom owners employ skilled weavers and infuse a liberal dose of rural art forms into the weaves.

The charm of silk is enough to make even the most prudent shoppers yield to temptation. Although the heavier silk fabric called the *Kanjeevaram* is still a favourite, most stores have a wide variety of stock for the emerging cosmopolitan culture.

Therefore, one will find the zari laden *Benaras* sarees, *Patolas*, *Pochampallis*, traditional *Assamese* silk, *Tussars* and raw silks, *Bandhunis*, work inlaid chiffons, georgettes and an endless range of cottons and synthetic garments.

The city has large retail stores that stock multiple brands and home grown choices of fabric. For the haute, there are a string of boutique and accessory stores.

The emerging prominence of Coimbatore and its neighbouring towns and villages has fuelled the growth of the home furnishing sector. The colours of India come alive in everything from coordinated dining linen to colourful floor cushions and premium bedroom furnishings.



LEFT: Cotton sarees for the connoisseur.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Tees, shirts and branded apparel offer the tourist plenty to choose from.

OPPOSITE BELOW: An eager father relates the different hues of silks to his daughter over the phone before settling for one.

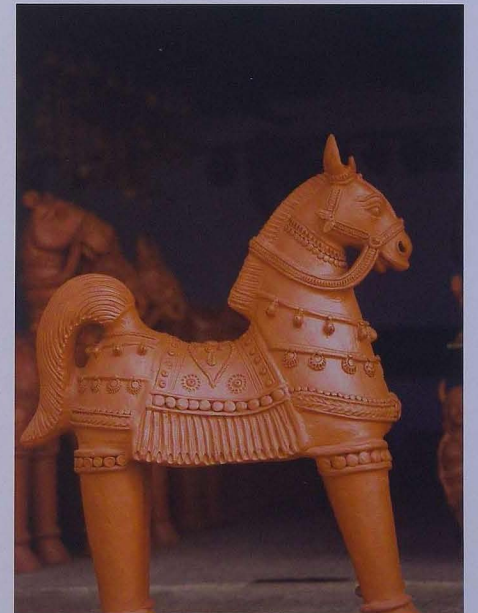
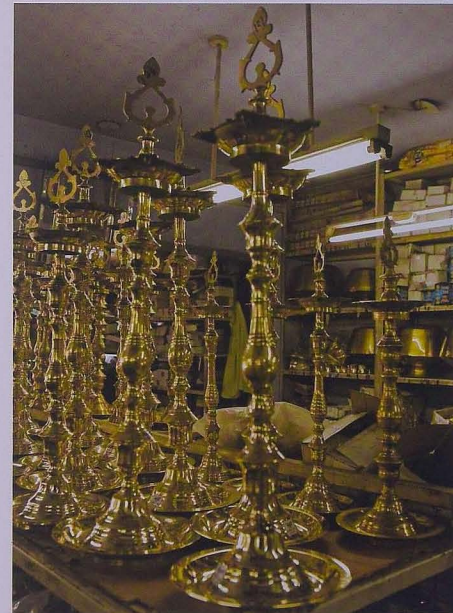


Metal and terracotta

Intricately carved brass trinkets and statuettes, an array of stainless steel and copper cooking utensils, the more urban anodised and Teflon coated cookware, brass utensils; the shine of golden and silver metal lures busy shoppers into multi-storeyed vessel and artefact stores.

Huddled in the shade of giant trees lining the highways, are the terracotta artistes. They are usually immigrants, having fled their homes far away for reasons unknown. Lumps of clay come alive in their hands and are painted in a riot of colours. Brightly painted jugs, flower vases, intricately carved horses and elephants, giant chimes, bell shaped lamp shades painted copper; the wayside seller has it all.

Several stores in the city sell exclusive painted pottery pieces from Jaipur, Rajasthan. The stores also have ethnic dinner sets in stunning colours, assortments of mugs, jugs and flower vases among others.



LEFT: *A lady picks up stainless steel containers for the pantry of her home and is guided by a helpful shop assistant.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Wet grinders are a part of most homes and used to make breakfast batters.*

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: *Neatly shone brass lamps or 'kuthuvilakku' await the time when they will adorn the puja room of buyers.*

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: *Terracotta horses in intricate patterns can be the perfect ethnic addition to a home.*

Jewellery

Coimbatore has a vibrant jewellery industry: a diamond jewellery manufacturing unit and gold jewellery making centres. Whilst a few of the renowned brands have their own manufacturing facilities, there are numerous small scale units that are engaged in the making of gold and diamond jewellery for the retail and wholesale markets.

The jewellery hub of the city lies in Raja Street, a part of the city's commercial zone. This is where the larger stores are located.

There are also a number of small shops that cater to the tastes and needs of small time buyers. Most often, these shops also serve as pawn broking houses and in the lower income groups, pledging gold for a little money is often the means of putting food on the table for the family.

Coimbatore has always been a premium destination for diamonds and gold. Diamonds have moved over from heirloom treasures and taken on contemporary expressions. The designs are global, in vogue and match well with ethnic and western wear.

A number of stores specialise in handcrafted gold jewellery. Artisans are sourced from all over the country and bring with them different skill sets: intricate filigree work from Kolkatta, the heavier, ornate kundan art from the North and intensely crafted work from the South.

Rubies, emeralds, sapphires, uncut diamonds and semi-precious stones like corals and pearls patterned on gold find wide acceptance among the connoisseurs. Antique jewellery has a loyal following and stores offer both original pieces and recreated relics.

The latest street fashion is available at the numerous fancy stores that dot the city. One can get to buy coloured glass bangles, coated metal bracelets, ear rings and accessories without feeling light in the wallet.

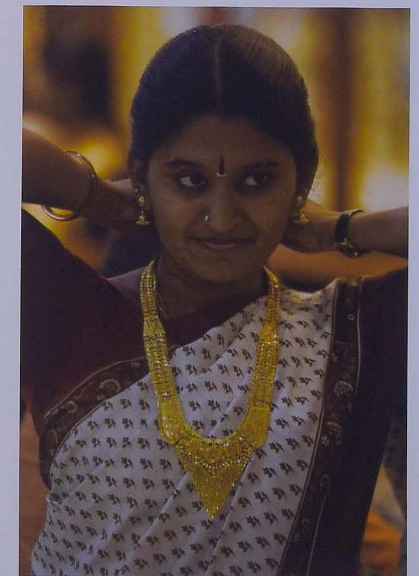
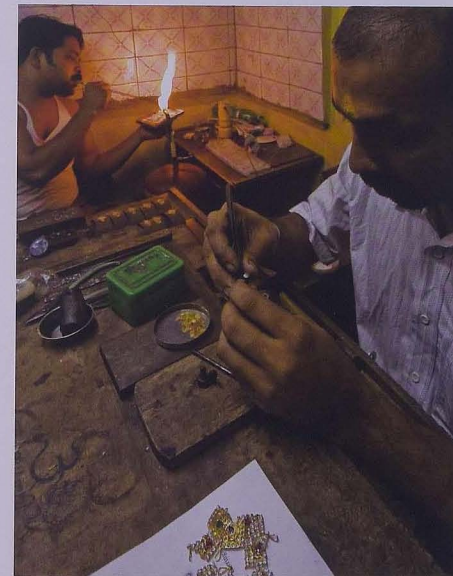
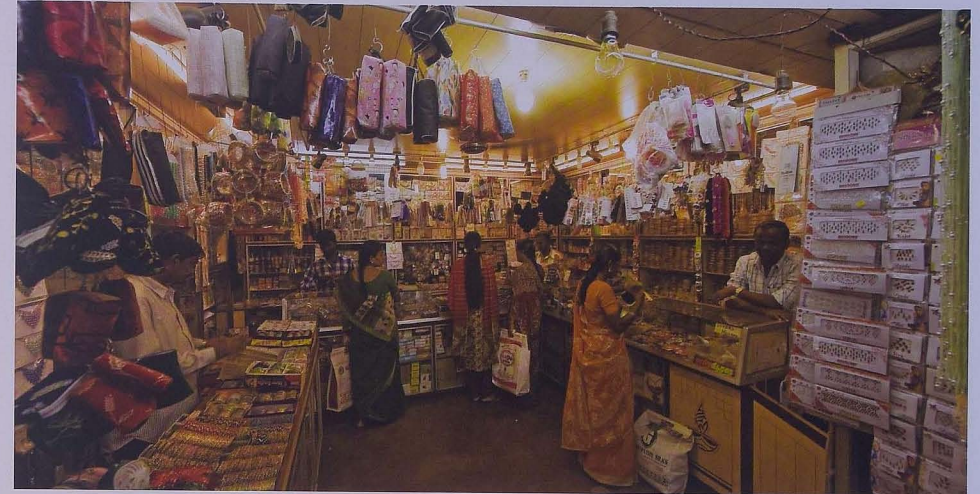


LEFT: This piece of antique jewellery is inspired from the ancient design of gold coins and will probably be handed down generations.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *One of the numerous fancy stores that can be found almost on every street.*

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: *A jewellery craftsman carefully fixes precious stones onto a gold ensemble.*

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: *A lady tries on a gold neck piece before deciding whether she will buy it.*



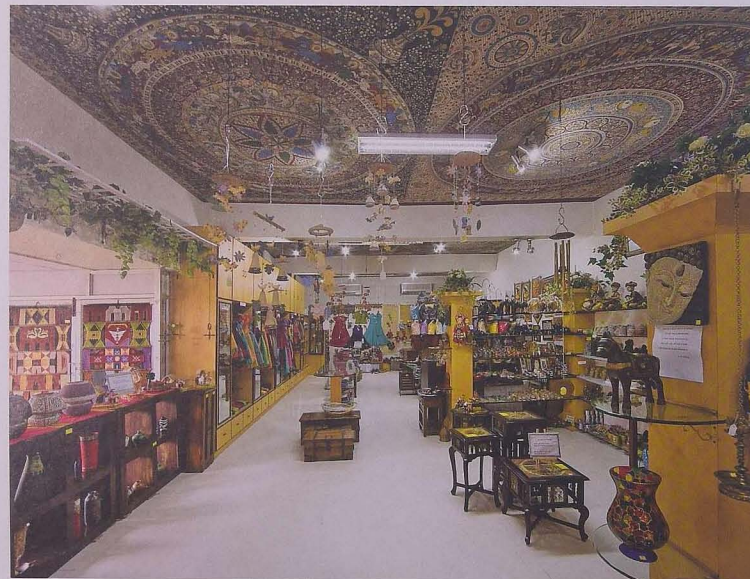
Furniture and bric-a-brac

Furniture shopping in the city can take one from boutiques with global designs to antique pieces and mass produced ensembles.

Antique lovers will find a treasure trove of options: from heirloom artefacts to carved and polished furniture.

The city has exclusive stores that fulfil the creative spaces of the global denizen. Blown glass artefacts, Buddha statuettes, avant-garde steel crockery, handcrafted bags in jute and assorted fabric, crystals, lampshades crafted from silk and paper; if one is looking for bric-a-brac, there is plenty.

A number of women self-help groups create artistically woven jute bags and embroidered fabric. The products are available at regular stores and at the group centres. Jute has entered the world of the haute and the city has plenty of jute handicrafts on offer. From jute bags to jute sarees, there is a lot to choose from.



LEFT: Handicrafts from all over the country find place in this souvenir store.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Carpets, vases, mirror frames and more at this creative boutique.

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: The 'thalaiyattu bommai' is a traditional doll made from clay and has flexible neck and torso pieces that make it dance.

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: More bric-a-brac.



Connections

Transport

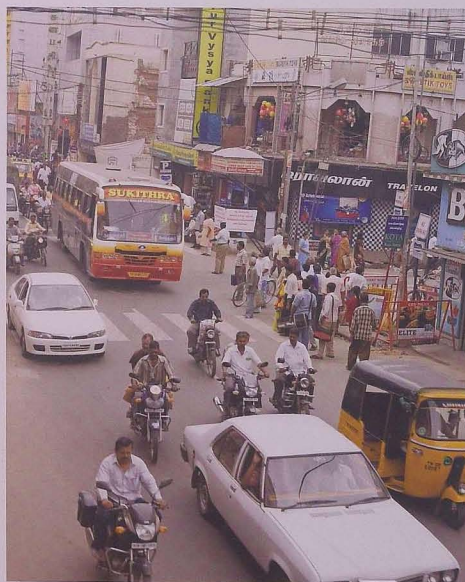
Coimbatore has always been well connected to other parts of the country. Its strategic location naturally led to a thriving transport industry even as early as the 1800s.

Today, Coimbatore remains well connected to major metros through road, rail and air. The city also has direct flights to several destinations on the global aviation map.

Trains and buses ply to neighbouring cities and states with regular frequency. Some long distance buses offer the luxury of semi sleeper comfort. The local network of places is connected by a very efficient public transport system. Buses are the easiest and most affordable way to cover the city at an unhurried pace. The peak hours in the morning and evening are packed and getting a place to sit is a rarity.

The city has a number of private vehicle options. Auto rickshaws are stationed in strategic locations and although their charges can be expensive, it is worthwhile to make a good bargain before setting off. Call taxis are private cab operators who can be called to the location through a phone call. The charges are fixed and metered for the distance travelled.

Taxi operators ply between the city and neighbouring tourist spots. The charges are normally fixed on a day or hourly basis, depending on the length of the journey. The taxis are ideal for one day getaways and weekend trips as they minimise commuting time.

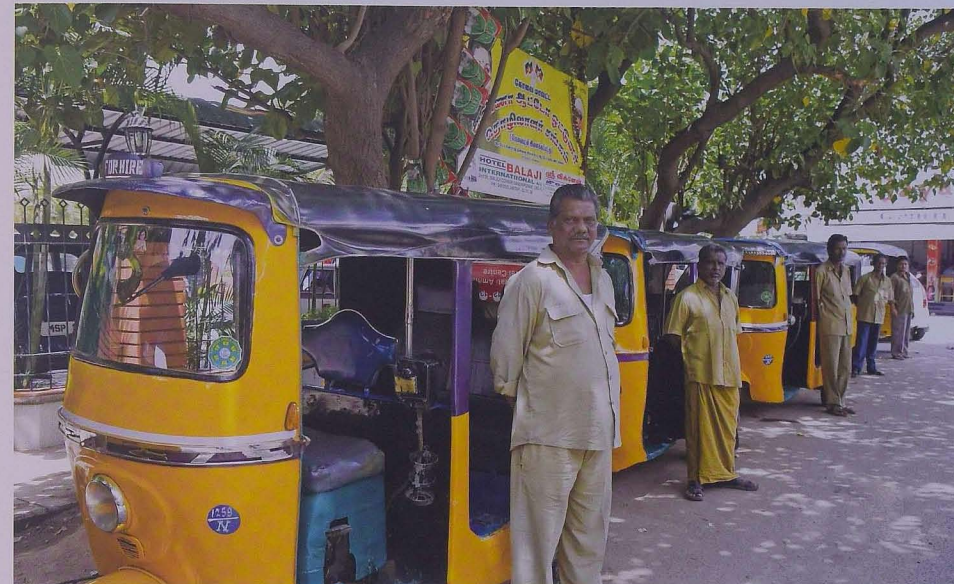


PREVIOUS PAGE: *An aircraft takes off while another offloads travellers to the city of enterprise.*

LEFT: *Motorists of every kind create a constant buzz on the streets.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Autos are a popular mode of private transport and the drivers are friendly and eager to help.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *Coimbatore is an important junction on the South Indian railway map and has trains connecting the country's most important destinations.*





The rustic pulse

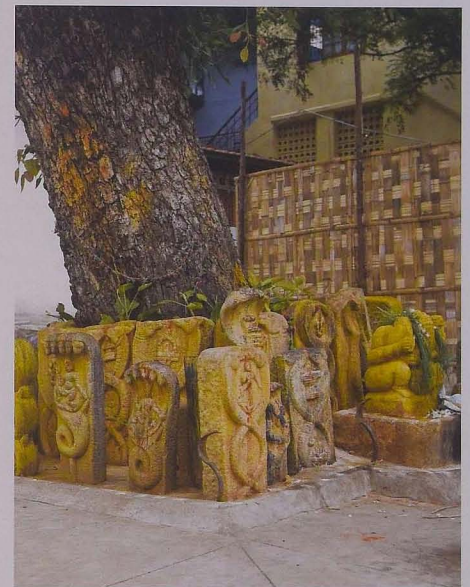
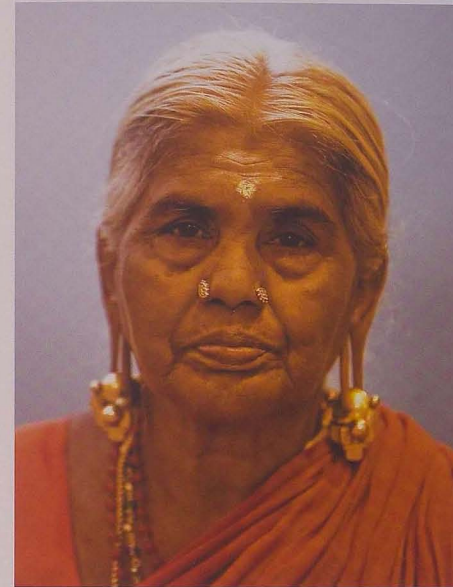
Rural life and farming

In many ways, Coimbatore is a large cluster of villages that have grown and integrated into a harmonious whole. In many ways, contrasts still exist. On one hand is this emerging cosmopolis. On the other, is the appeal of a simple life that continues to hold the sons of the soil to the villages. They live through uncomplicated schedules, take from Nature what she has to give them and in turn, gift her a life of hard work and eternal reverence.

With the city's expansion, several villages and hamlets have paved way for the real estate boom. Consequently, there has been a steady exodus of rural poor to the city, seeking better employment, in the hope of a better lifestyle.

Like Gandhiji once said, India's life lies in her villages, so does the textile city's. An hour's drive takes one to the heart of these village settlements; those that are still unaffected by the onslaught of urbanisation.

Maize and millets were the traditional crops grown around here. With time, farmers turned their lands to coconut plantations and other produce that met evolving market demands. Most stretches of road are lined by coconut and palms. Bananas and sugar canes are grown in abundance as well.



PREVIOUS PAGE: *A farmer makes his way through the lush green fields, picking fodder for his cattle.*

LEFT: *Many rural women take up employment in cottage industries. Featured here are a group of women in a match manufacturing company.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: *Solid chunks of gold hang from this old lady's extended ear lobes.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: *One of the many ways in which Nature is worshipped.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *A pair of oxen help this farmer till his land.*



Community and lifestyle

Rural life is rich with folklore and myths. Every village has a presiding deity, most of which are forms of Goddess *Kali* or *Mariamman*. Festivities and first harvests are all dedicated to the local God and are the biggest events in a village calendar.

Meticulous planning has gone into the layouts of the streets. The homes are neatly whitewashed and lie huddled to each other. The doorways are intentionally kept small and each home shares a wall with the next. The bigger homes have a small patch of dry land in the front and it is mostly used to keep cattle.

Modern luxuries and consumer goods have permeated into the lives of the rural people in different ways; television sets blare out popular film songs and mixer grinders create a buzz in the kitchens. Despite all this, the village folk lead simple lives.

The men are often dressed in sparkling white dhotis and shirts, although the youngsters prefer to don the latest trends in the market. Women wear colourful cottons and voiles and the salwar kameez has become favourite among the younger lasses.

Rural life is also rigid in the way it interacts with the community. Most members of a community stick together and share the highs and lows of their lives within the framework. However, a celebration in one home draws the entire community together, as does a bereavement.

Whilst the festive charm of the cities revolves around feasting, gifts and parties, rural festivities are more about tradition and colour. Most festivals revolve around the seasons and each is an invocation to the Gods. The celebrations culminate in a community meal and dance and song come spontaneously to the jubilant crowds.

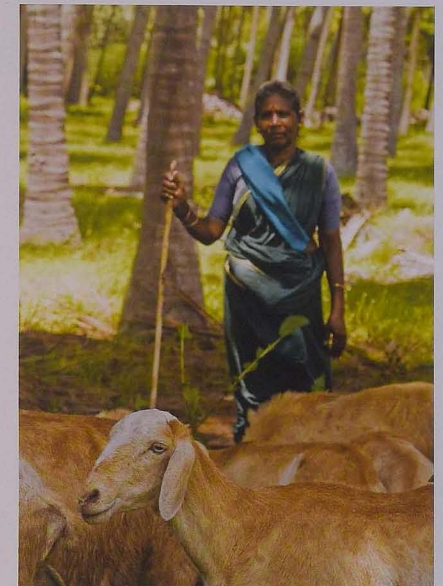


LEFT: *This vegetable stall owner places his daily order over his cell phone as he readies the space for business.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: *Three old friends walk down to their favourite spot at the village for their daily dose of gossip.*

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: *The goatberd pauses to smile before she walks the goats home.*

OPPOSITE BELOW: *Coconut farms are everywhere and sometimes can stretch as far as the eye can see.*





Beyond Coimbatore

Neighbouring lands

The textile influence of the city travels beyond its geographical limits. Tirupur was among the first towns to catch the spirit of enterprise. What was a quiet hamlet until two decades ago is today the knitwear capital of India.

The landscape of Tirupur is dotted with textile manufacturing facilities of every kind. From cotton yarn to apparel, processed fabric and accessories like buttons and labels, the town is the hub for end-to-end knitwear solutions. Most products find acceptance in the global markets and several export houses supply apparel to international brands.

The meteoric growth of the city has triggered large scale migration from different parts of the country. The town has a unique solution to meet the accommodation needs for these communities; many production houses have in-house facilities that cater to their food and boarding.

The spirit of enterprise weaves its way into every lane and corner of the city and everywhere, an entrepreneur waits for the right time to begin his journey to fame.



PREVIOUS PAGE: The sun sets behind the mountains and the city lights come on, one by one.

LEFT: Bed linen and home furnishings are a major source of exports from the neighbouring regions.

RIGHT: An exclusive store that sells T-shirts and branded apparel, manufactured in the region.

Lying scattered all over the *Kongu* region are unknown hamlets, little known villages and large towns. The landscape alternates between vast expanses of arid land and stretches of green. These areas have become active wind energy generating sectors and a major portion of the energy requirements are met by renewable resources.

It is easy to see that the spirit of the land has caught on in the neighbouring towns. Karur and Erode are prosperous weaving belts and offer a wide range of products for the global home furnishing market. Erode has a strong agricultural base and a large part of its inhabitants still hold on to agrarian interests.

The borders of Coimbatore easily permeate into the neighbouring state of Kerala. The sudden burst of green paddy is evident the moment one steps into "God's own country" a sobriquet that the state is popularly known by. Palakkad is the nearest town and the villages surrounding the town house ancient temples.

On the North Western frontiers lies the state of Karnataka. The road to this state passes through dense thickets of forests and is a picturesque ride. Part of the Nilgiri Biosphere extends into the borders of Karnataka and Kerala and the expanse of green stretches mile after mile beyond the borders.



The spirit of the city



Enterprise

Enterprise is perhaps the first word that comes to mind when one thinks of Coimbatore. It is not clearly known why or when the first seeds of entrepreneurship were sown here; what is known is that it triggered an unusual path to growth.

The progression of Coimbatore to an entrepreneurial destination was first fuelled by the lack of natural resources in the region. However, people from different parts of India continued to make Kongunaadu their home. Gradually, this confluence of cultures led people to create a city that would depend on the enterprise of its people, rather than only the natural setting.

Today, Coimbatore is not only a textile hub but has grown into a major destination for light engineering products and automotive components. Most corporate houses founded here started out as family owned enterprises and are today world renowned brands.

The construction industry is vibrant in this emerging cosmopolis and leading real estate brands have a strong presence here.

The growth of industries naturally led to the need to set up an effective supply chain. Thus began the inception of several hundred captive units. The participatory work culture in the city and the large population of immigrant labour has enabled it to sustain growth.

What continues to draw the industrial world to the city is its transparency and strong work ethics. Coimbatoreans are trusted for their commitment to work, their passion for excellence and the faith they invest in working relationships.

Major industrial and trade associations have been incepted and play a proactive role in the development of different sectors. The Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), COINDIA and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) represent common interests. The organisations bring together members of industry and trade, protect trade interests and contribute to the development of infrastructure in the city.

The Coimbatore District Small Industries Association (CODISSIA) was formed to cater to the needs of SMEs and addresses different issues of the community. The organisation constructed the CODISSIA trade fair complex, a large trade fair ground with state-of-the-art infrastructure to host exhibitions and international seminars.

Every industry sector has a common body that looks into the common interests and contributes to the growth.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The CODISSIA Trade Fair Complex plays host to several industrial and consumer fairs all the year round.

RIGHT: The facade of a manufacturing plant stands out in the landscape.



Textiles

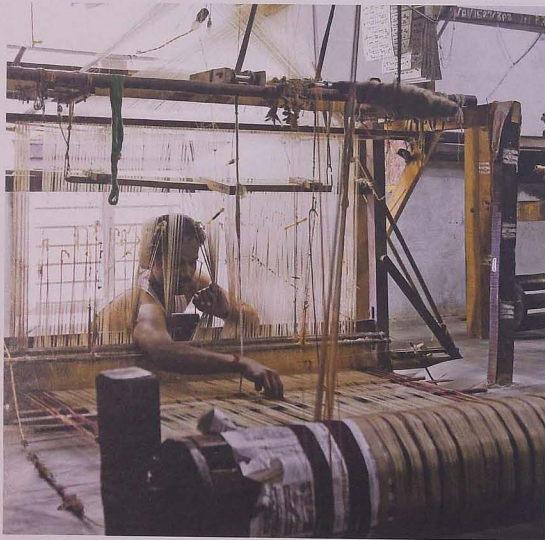
The *Kongu* region is famed for the quality of its cotton and dyed fabric. Documented records reveal that the traditional weavers perfected the art of quality dyeing and that woven fabric from here was known for its colour fastness and vivid patterning.

Even in the late 1800s, Coimbatore district had cotton cleaning and pressing factories and was exported to Mumbai (then Bombay) and England. A spinning mill was established around this time and even back then, the textile industry employed over 300 people.

Today, Coimbatore is hailed as the region with the highest concentration of textile activity in the world. It has numerous centres that specialise in spinning, weaving, powerlooms and knitwear. A large produce of the manufacture is exported to different countries. Exports include knitwear, woven apparel and home furnishings.

The growth of textiles naturally led to the inception of textile machinery manufacturing. Today, some of the best known global brands in textile machinery and component manufacturing are home-grown enterprises.

The South Indian Mills Association (SIMA) was established in 1933, is very active in the Coimbatore region and governs most of the textile industry in South India. SIMA has a membership spread across the southern states and protects the interests of the textile mills and its workers.



LEFT: A handloom weaver arranges the warps before he resumes weaving.

RIGHT: Most textile plants are fully automated and have the latest line of equipment.



Foundry and fabrication

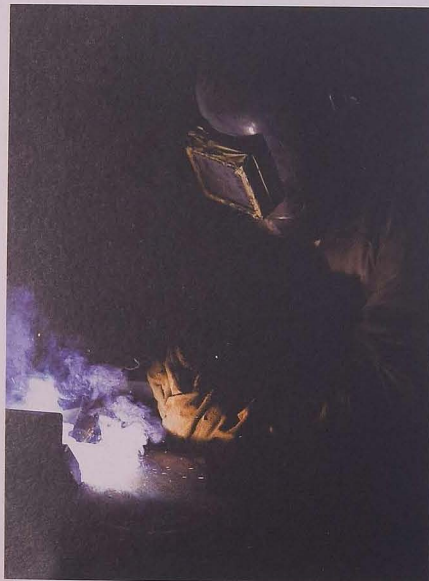
Coimbatore was one of the first Indian cities to enter the manufacturing of cast components. Units that specialise in Non-Ferrous and Ferrous castings abound in the region and service a wide spectrum of industrial requirements.

A majority of the cast components manufactured in the city go into the domestic market. They include Grey Iron, SG Iron, Shell-moulded Aluminium and Investment castings. Special units also cater to a thriving bronze casting industry. Most foundry units have upgraded from traditional casting methods and currently employ state-of-the-art technology.

Foundry talent requires special skill sets and over the years, the city has accrued a large talent pool of highly trained and qualified professionals. Consequently, several international companies have set up their foundry divisions in the city to meet the requirement for specialised castings.

The foundry industry continues to be one of the top revenue earners for the region in both the domestic and export markets.

Coimbatore has a host of fabrication companies that specialise in sheet metal craft. These companies are an integral part of the supply chain to major components.



LEFT: A welder at work.

RIGHT: The casting and forging industry brings together state-of-the-art equipment and technology.



Pumps and motors

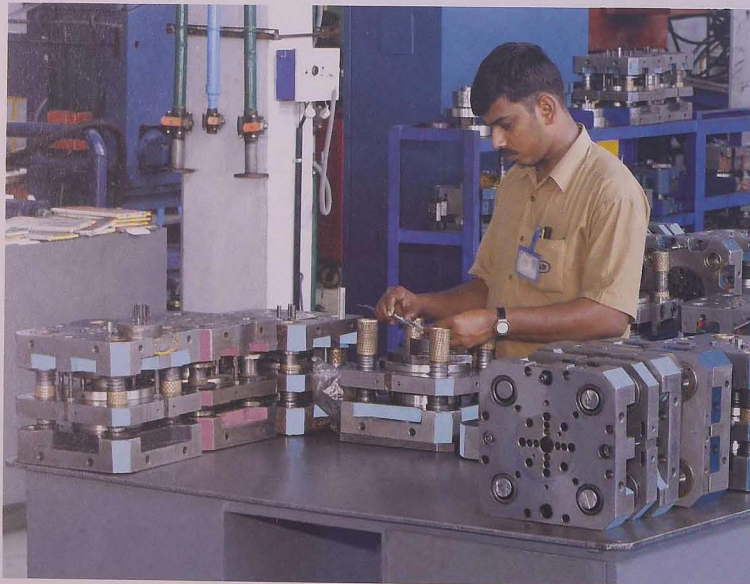
The first motor to be manufactured in India came from a small engineering shop in Coimbatore. Today, the pump and motor manufacturing sector is among the largest engineering activities in the city.

The pump manufacturing industry in Coimbatore holds a major portion of the total Indian market share. Over the years, the city has become as well known for its pumps as it has for its textiles.

Many brands in the international market are Coimbatore based companies and the quality and technical superiority of the products has helped the sector cater to both domestic and global demands.

Apart from a leading presence in the water pump market, the city's manufacturing houses also specialise in the manufacture of industrial pumps.

The steady growth of the pump and motor industry has given rise to an active accessory and spares market.



LEFT: A quality assurance personnel carries out tests to ensure precision in a pump's performance parameters.

RIGHT: A line of pumps wait for the final quality check before being despatched.

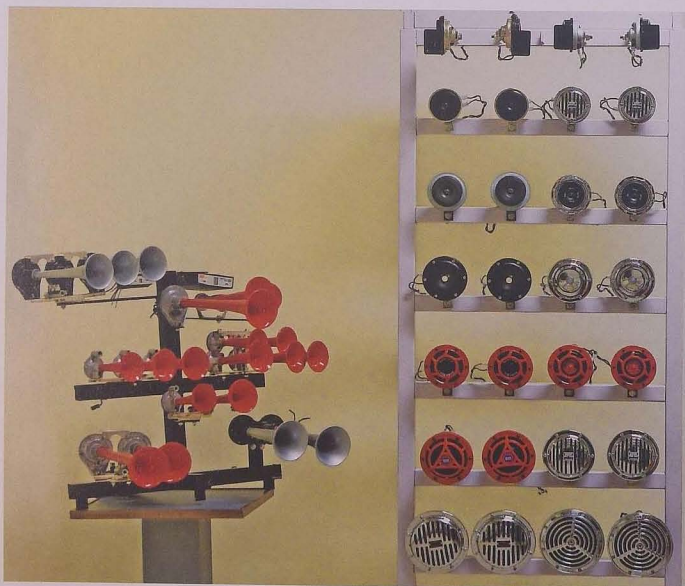


Auto components

Coimbatore has emerged as one of the most trusted outsourcing destinations for the auto component industry. Several factors have contributed to this growth, including ready availability of resources and skilled technical talent.

Several international automotive manufacturers source components ranging from exhaust systems to braking systems, seating, electronic and electrical components, mechanical engine parts, body components and suspensions and radiators among others. Many auto component manufacturing companies are OE partners to multinational brands.

Technical partnerships and strategic alliances with global manufacturers have given the Coimbatore auto component industry more mileage in the international market. Today, auto majors with a growing presence in India source both major components and sub assemblies from the city.



LEFT: An array of automotive horns from the city.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Seen here are samples of the latest digital instrumentation panels.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Technicians keenly pore over auto components and test them for performance.



Engineering

More than 50,000 engineering units function in and around Coimbatore city. What began as a focused centre for the manufacture of textile motors in the early 1900s has today become a multi-disciplinary entity that is capable of catering to voluminous demands in the international market.

Tooling divisions were incepted primarily as captive units for manufacturing houses and have become a major engineering activity in the region today. With time, many tooling divisions became profit centres of their own, owing to the consistent investment in technology. Today several corporate houses offer precision tooling services to global industries.

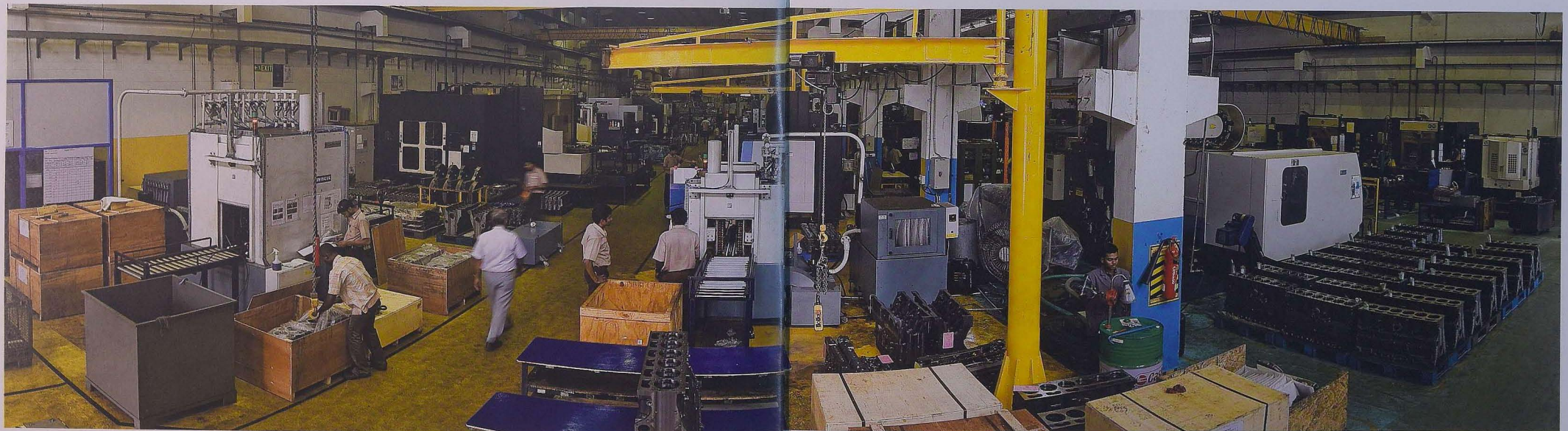
The light engineering industry in the Coimbatore region also specialises in offering customised engineering solutions for diverse requirements.

Common interests of the industry are represented by common forums like the South India Engineering Manufacturing Association (SIEMA) and CODISSIA.



LEFT: Engineering industries invest in state-of-the-art equipment.

BELOW: An integrated manufacturing facility in the city.



Information Technology

The abundant resources in Coimbatore, the ready availability of skilled engineering talent and a city with rapidly expanding infrastructure has stemmed the steady growth of the IT and ITES industry.

The city is an outsourcing destination for several MNCs and is gradually witnessing the exodus of IT companies from other locations in the country.

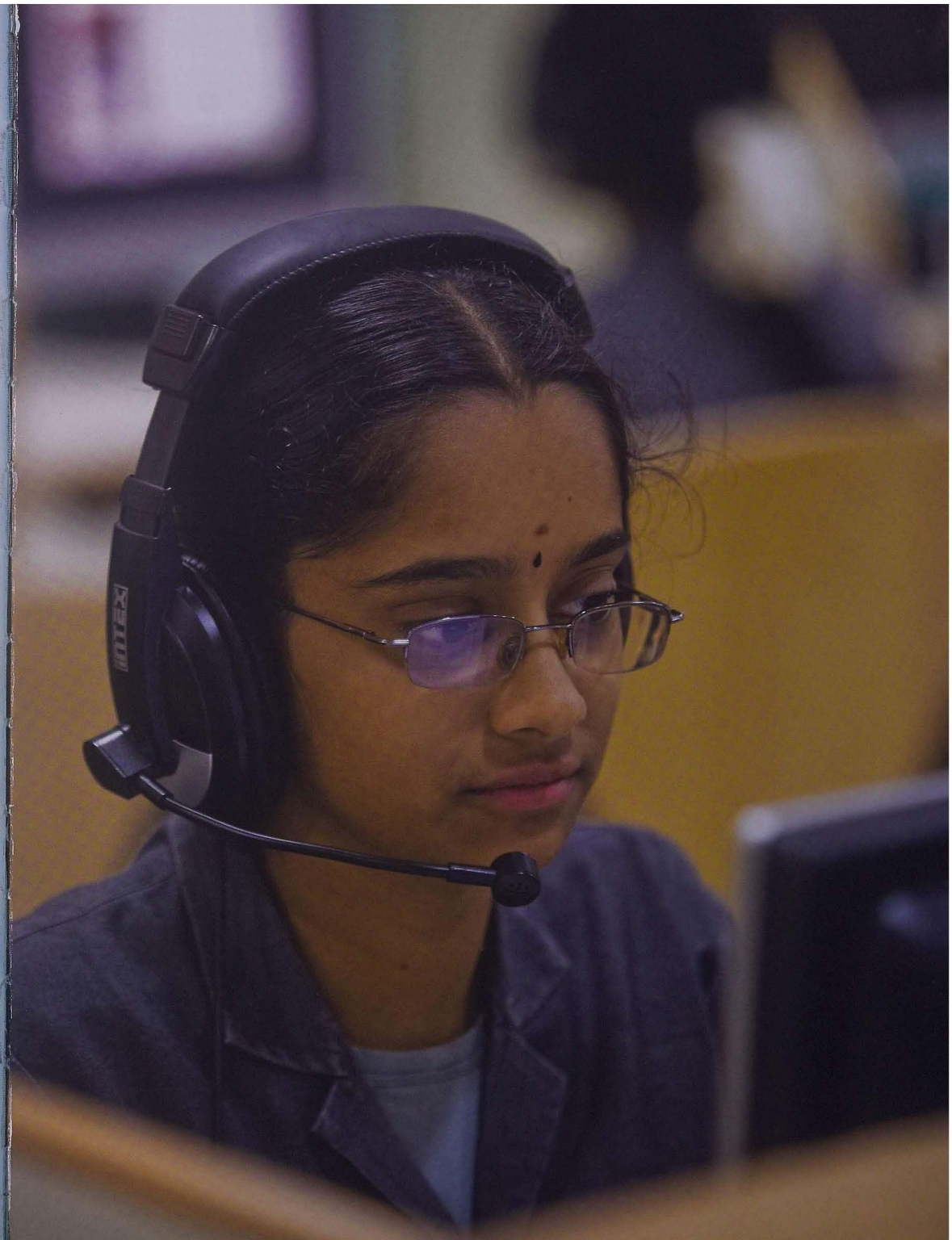
Medical, legal and educational Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) centres are plenty and employ a considerable number of software talent. A number of start up companies specialising in software products and services have also been founded in Coimbatore, keeping in true tradition with the spirit of the city.

The IT revolution has heralded the setting up of specific economic zones. These zones comprise IT parks, residential complexes, entertainment and education centres within a single campus.



LEFT: Computer engineering and allied programmes are among the most sought after at the under graduate level.

RIGHT: Coimbatore is emerging as the next major IT hub. Seen here is an IT professional talking to a customer.

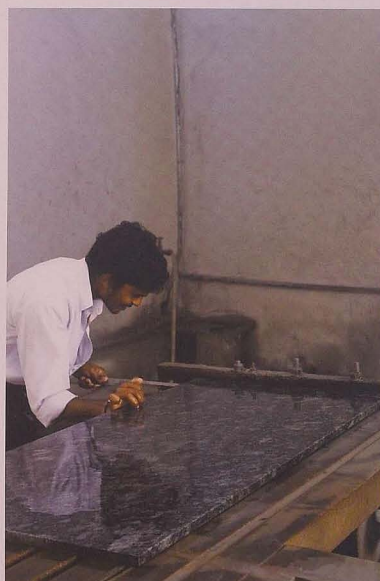
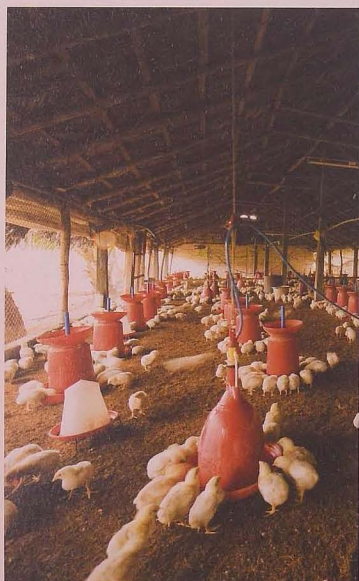


Emerging industries

The surrounding landscapes of Coimbatore are rich in granite. The quality of natural granite found here compares to the best in the world and has necessitated a matching finishing process. Cut, polished and finished granites from Coimbatore find wide acceptance in the global and domestic markets.

Poultry farming is one of the biggest revenue earning industries in the region. The abundance of farming land led the poultry companies to evolve a unique supply chain of contract farmers. This has led to a significant growth in the rural economy and has also triggered the poultry feed industry.

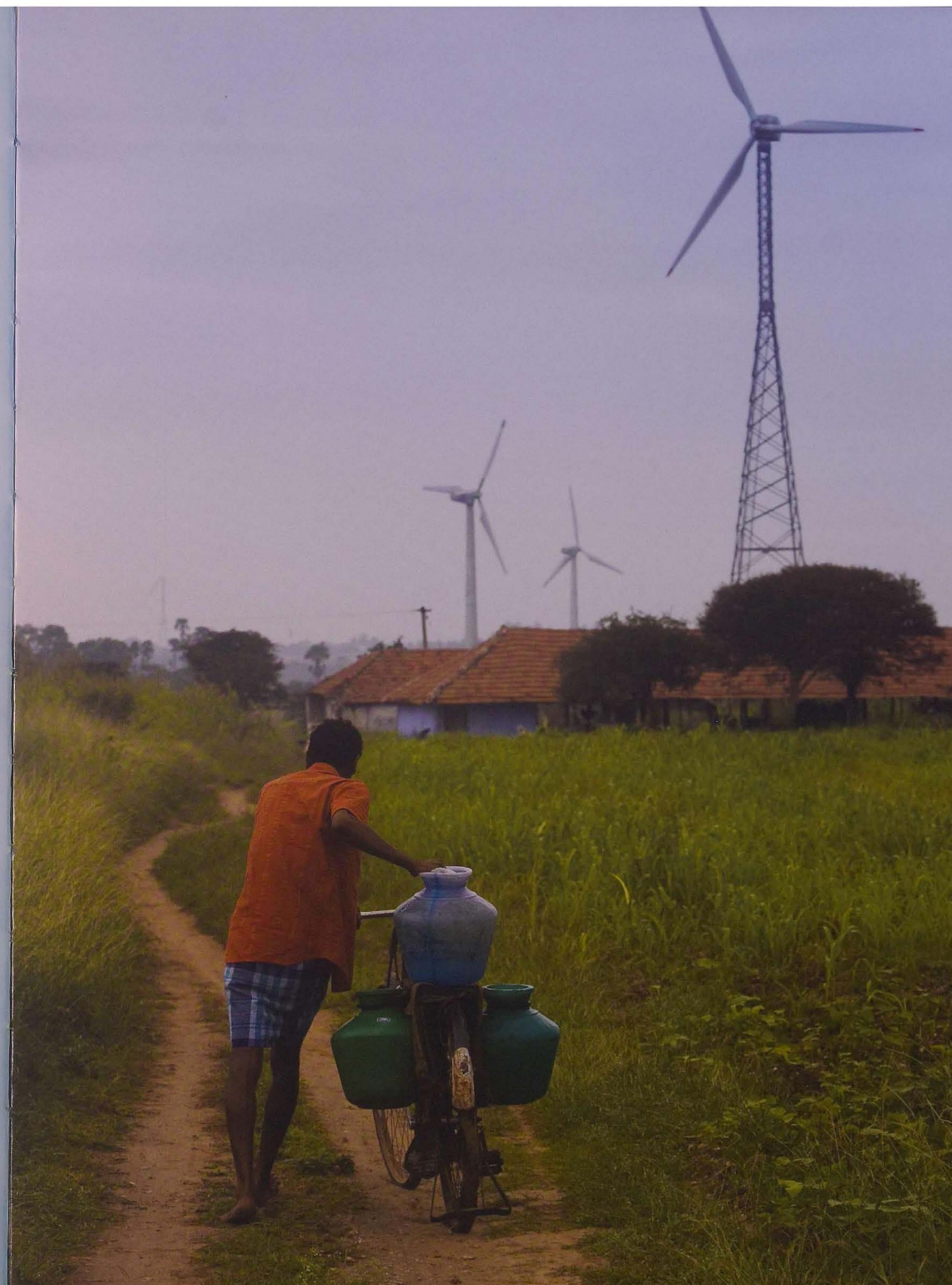
Whilst the growth of this economy has been steady, the organisations have been keen to embrace environment friendly technologies. Power generation using renewable wind energy is a booming market and several companies generate at least a portion of their energy requirements using wind turbines. Naturally, the presence of windmills has given rise to a wind turbine component manufacturing and maintenance industry as well.



FAR LEFT: It is feeding time for the chicks in this poultry farm.

LEFT: Granite cutting and polishing is one of the emerging industries in the city.

RIGHT: A large part of the rural landscape has become a source of renewable energy.





Simple living. High thinking.

Innovation

No one clearly knows why or how innovation became synonymous with the city. But it is easy to see that the ability to look at things differently has played an important role in the making of this cosmopolis.

The inventors who belong to this town have won worldwide recognition for their contribution to their fields of work. Despite global fame, they have remained humble, simple leaders whose values continue to guide today's technocrats.

Coimbatore's first generation entrepreneurs had already started plying private transport services in the early 1900s. The city was also among the earliest in India to own and operate a private airline (and that was over 50 years ago). India's first motor, the first home grown textile machinery manufacturing house; all have their genesis in this city.

Today, brands from Coimbatore represent industries as diverse as textile machinery, auto components, pumps and motors, camphor manufacturing and even food like *dosas* and *Mysorepadas*.

The success of these brands is not born from keen marketing insights from the best B schools. Some were born out of circumstance, some from a creative eye and still others were progressions from farming.

The spirit of innovation lies not only in the city's thirst to create new products but also in its ability to improvise existing ones. And that spirit is everywhere; from bringing a functional dimension to an engineering product, to finding creative ways of presenting food.

PREVIOUS PAGE: *The traditional spinning wheel is a simple contraption that stirred India's freedom revolution. This simple tool perhaps best symbolises the spirit of the city: simple living, high thinking.*

RIGHT: *The GD Museum houses many evolutions of mechanical and electrical devices.*





Health care

Health care and medical tourism

Coimbatore has emerged as one of the most trusted medical care destinations in the country. From comprehensive health care hospitals to speciality centres, the city provides people with the benefits of latest technology and competent professional care.

Most hospitals in the city are professionally run and governed by corporate houses. One of the reasons why the health care industry in the city is so well established is because of the active participation of and funding by the industrial houses. Naturally, this has also brought in the best of talent in various specialities. Paramedical assistance and emergency procedures are streamlined in all major health care establishments, making them easily accessible for all people.

Coimbatore has a large number of hospitals devoted to providing free medical aid. The Government run hospitals and Primary Health Centres offer free medical and surgical aid to the poor. Social organisations often partner with the government run hospitals to bring in latest technology and equipment in order to provide quality care.

Many eye care centres regularly conduct rural camps across India. The city is also home to a world renowned reconstruction surgery hospital and gastroenterological centre. Dental facilities in Coimbatore compare to international standards and many speciality clinics offer comprehensive oral care.

Standing proud amidst the growing health care revolution in the country is the century old speciality centre of Ayurveda healing. The centre runs a full fledged Ayurveda hospital and a manufacturing facility on the outskirts of the city. The holistic medical care provided here brings in a large number of people from all over the world.

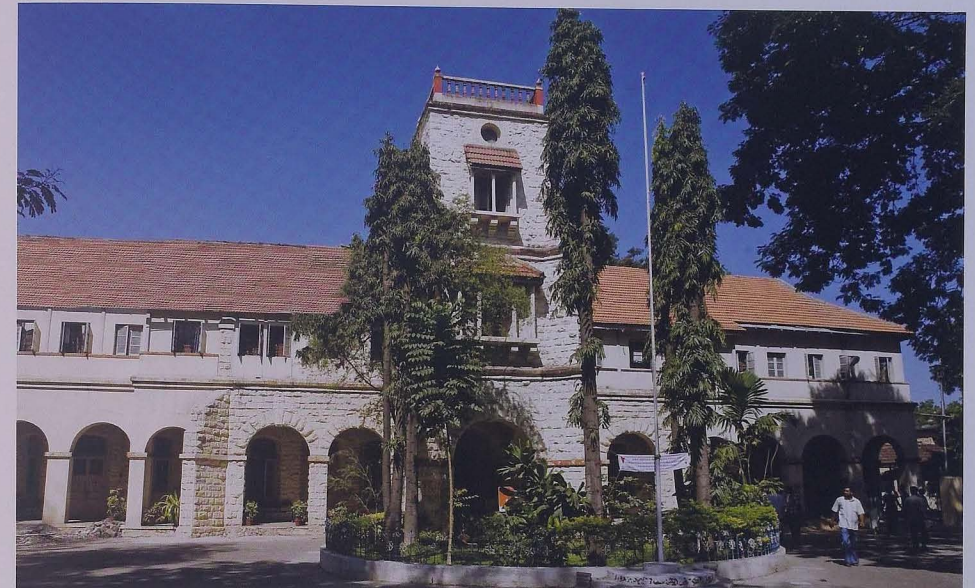


LEFT: Many people from neighbouring towns and states travel to Coimbatore for treatment, not only for the facilities, but also for the personal attention.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Health care for the poor and needy is offered at the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital.

OPPOSITE BELOW LEFT: A doctor lends her reassuring touch to a new born baby and mother.

OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT: A visitor decides to surrender to the soothing effect of an Ayurveda massage at a spa.



Centres of learning



Education

The prominence of technology and industry in the region naturally led to the inception of technical institutions in the city. Many of these technical institutions are today recognised the world over.

By the turn of the 20th century, several land owned families began founding schools to impart education to the children of their employees. The inception of colleges and industrial training institutions was a natural progression.

Today, Coimbatore has one of the highest number of educational institutions and draws a large number of expatriates, foreigners and students from other states to its institutions of learning.

With the arrival of the IT industry, several MNCs have chosen Coimbatore to become their internal learning centres as it offers the institutions a ready repository of talent.

Primary education

Most families ensure that their children have access to quality primary education. Although primary education centres are part of the schools, the city has several play schools for toddlers.

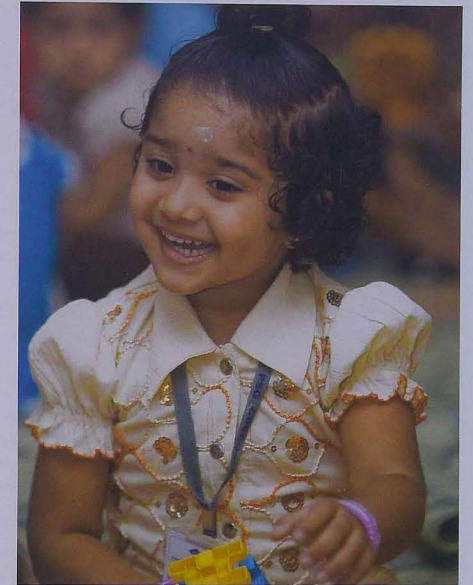
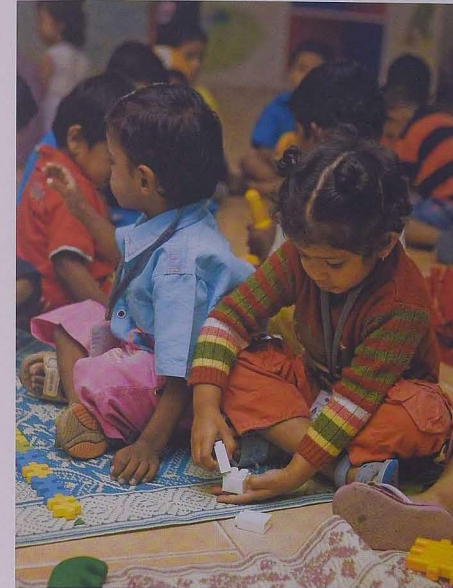
The kindergarten and play schools usually focus on fun activities and are a riot of colours. Many primary schools follow conventional syllabi of learning and there are a growing number of schools that impart Montessori and play-way methods.

Primary education in the rural areas is usually run by the government. Baalwadi and Aanganwadi day care centres and provide a full mid-day meal for the children.

Several religious, missionary, social organisations and corporate houses have adopted rural primary centres and generously contribute to the running of the schools.

Coimbatore has more than 25 matriculation schools and over 150 higher secondary schools, both co-educational and single gender. A flurry of blues, greys, whites, khakis and checked school uniforms are seen on the streets of the city all the year round.

The academic year begins in June every year and ends in March with a two month break from learning. Academics play a very important role in the school curriculum and extra curricular activities are encouraged in most.



PREVIOUS PAGE: The Stanes school is over a century old and was founded by Sir Robert Stanes.

OPPOSITE ABOVE LEFT: Play school is a time when motor skills and co-ordination are given importance.

OPPOSITE ABOVE RIGHT: This little one is delighted after she has put together a jigsaw at school.

BELOW: Children in kindergarten, eager to strike a pose.



Higher education

Coimbatore has perhaps the highest concentration of colleges in the country. From those specialising in Arts and Sciences, to engineering and business administration, the choice of learning avenues for a student is plenty. Several colleges and business administration institutions have entered into strategic partnerships with universities from around the world and offer exchange study programmes. One of the reasons that several IT companies are looking at setting up shop in the city is because of the large talent pool that emerges from the colleges.

The industrial strength of the city has also given rise to the emergence of many polytechnic colleges. These institutions serve as a ready resource to meet the growing need for technical talent.

The city is home to 3 state owned universities: The TNAU, the Bharatiyar Univesity and the Anna Univeristy and 4 private deemed universities. Coimbatore has 2 medical colleges, more than 30 engineering colleges and a host of institutions that offer comprehensive paramedical learning programmes. Leading hospitals in the city run government certified nursing courses and the talent that graduates from these centres finds employment in premier health care centres around the world.

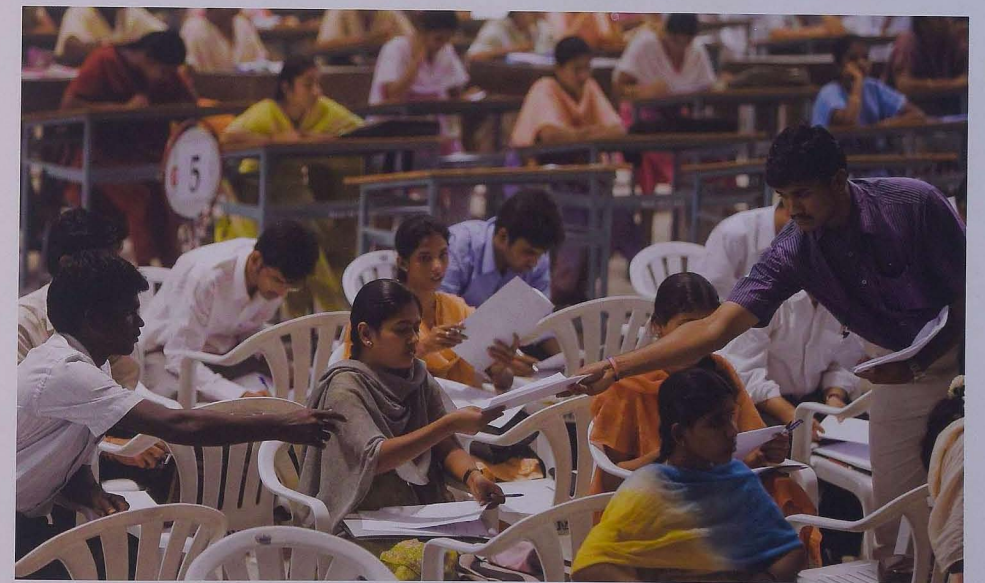
The TNAU is located at Coimbatore and is a premier learning institution in India. The university has a large research centre and over 400 acres of farmland to help it innovate agricultural practices.

The Coimbatore Forest College stands like a green belt amidst the growing heights of concrete within the city. The inception of the college here was a strategic move by the British during their reign and still serves as an ideal learning destination for forest officials.

The steady exodus of graduates from all walks of life to foreign destinations has triggered the inception of soft skill training schools.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Centres of higher education offer an insight into practical learning at various laboratories.

OPPOSITE BELOW: College students are periodically assessed on a variety of subjects.



Research

One of the hallmarks of the city is its passion for innovation and that begins on the research tables of institutions.

The TNAU has its own research and development institute and has been able to consistently come up with breakthroughs in farming practices. The Sugarcane Research Institute was specially formulated to fuel the progressive growth of the industry.

SITRA, The South India Textile Research Association is one among the chain of laboratories established under the aegis of the Ministry of Textiles. SITRA functions as an extended R&D arm of the industry and has eminent scientists and industry professionals as part of its steering team.

SiTarc, or the Small Industries Testing and Research Centre lends metrological and research support to small scale industries and manufacturing companies.

Apart from research programmes offered by colleges and universities, all major industrial houses have development cells to strengthen in-house processes.

The passion for research in Coimbatore has resulted in a constant outpour of product improvisations. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the brands of Coimbatore have been able to sustain amidst growing global competition.



LEFT: SITRA is a renowned centre for research and learning.



ABOVE: A technician is engrossed in testing chemical impacts at a research laboratory.



LEFT: A research assistant sets the testing system in place before he embarks on his work.



Social consciousness

Pioneers

Whilst natural resources may have triggered the need to look for alternative sources of growth, it is the pioneering effort of many individuals that has moulded the city. Today, Coimbatore continues to emulate the initiatives of those who took the first steps to create a harmonious society.

Community sharing is strong and philanthropy is a priority for every corporate organisation.

Entrepreneurial families continue to contribute to a major portion of the economic growth of the city. From governing schools in rural areas to founding hospitals and destitute homes, the passion for the upliftment of society has resulted in creating a vibrant economy and prosperous people.

PREVIOUS PAGE: The citizens of Coimbatore get together for many social causes. Featured here are avid runners getting ready for a marathon run.

RIGHT: A statue of Sir Robert Stanes who set an example of being an agent of change.



Social enterprises

The people of the city take active part in community related causes. Numerous organisations like the Rotary, Round Table and Lions have active chapters in the city. Apart from functioning as a forum for social get-togethers, these organisations act as a common platform for individuals to contribute to the community. Their international standing also allows these groups to partner with similar organisations abroad and contribute on a larger scale.

Thanks to the sudden spurt of growth within the city, the citizens have come together in different ways to form proactive councils to aid holistic development.

Siruthuli is an initiative that addresses water and waste management issues of the city through a common forum. Siruthuli organises several large scale initiatives to raise awareness on pressing issues like water harvesting and waste management.

RAAC, the Residents Awareness Association of Coimbatore is another novel initiative of the people whose spectrum of activities includes creating a cleaner environment and aiding planned development.

Ladies clubs of different kinds, social organisations with special focus on AIDS, cancer care and mental and physical disabilities are also very active in the city.

The people of Coimbatore have embarked on several cultural initiatives like ESSCOM.

RIGHT: Organisations like Siruthuli have their own nursery and saplings are regularly transported to different areas.



The road ahead

Coimbatore has always been a city that has welcomed change. Evolution has been an integral part of its growth but it has been gentle, allowing the city to absorb the past into its present.

From time immemorial, the region has had cultural interests with nations as far as those in Europe and has always held a strategically important position in trade.

Esscom is the first-of-its-kind social enterprise that strives to create a cultural mélange of the city with another. This confluence of the twin cities, Esslingen and Coimbatore will bring together the best of both places by showcasing their music, dance, industry, education and people.

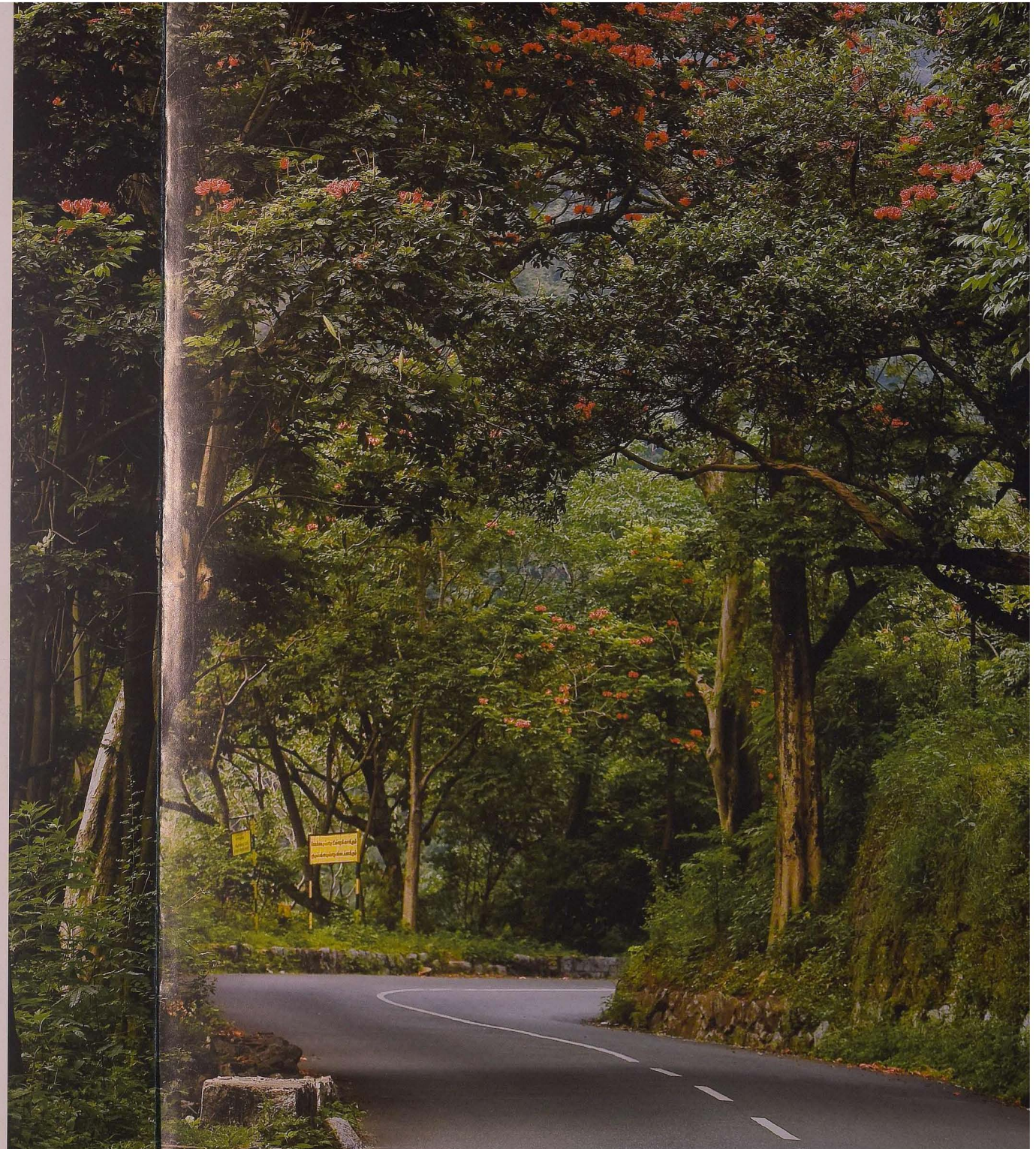
Capturing the essence of Coimbatore through its people, sights and colours is Esscom's tribute to not only the city, but also every Coimbatorean. The story that has unfolded in these pages is a vivid portrayal of all she was, is and is raring to become.

The road ahead for Coimbatore leads her to the future, where she will take her rightful place among the vibrant cosmopolises of the world.

RIGHT: *The road ahead for Coimbatore stretches beyond...*

FULL PAGE: *The ceilings at the Perur temple capture different pages of Hindu mythology in vivid colour.*

BACK COVER: *Snippets of everything that makes the city: its expressions.*



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Photo credits

Mr. K. Marudhachalam: Pages 89, 96, 128, 135, 137, 138, 139, 140, 152-153, 154, 155 (below)

Holidays and festivals

Pongal	: Mid January
Republic Day	: 26th January
Thai Poosam	: January – February
Koniamman Temple	
Car Festival	: February – March
Tamil New Year	: Mid April
Aadi Perukku	: July – August
Independence Day	: August 15th
Navaratri	: September – October
Gandhi Jayanthi	: October 2nd
Deepavali	: October – November

Ramzan, Id, Moharram, Easter and Christmas –
As celebrated across the world.

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Coimbatore

The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis



Coimbatore, The Emerging Indian Cosmopolis is a vivid portrayal of a city, a society and a way of life. This journey takes the reader from a glimpse into its past, through its present to the emergence of the next world city. Its enterprise, multi-cultural existence, rural and urban spirit unfold into a unique experience for one who seeks to savour it.