

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

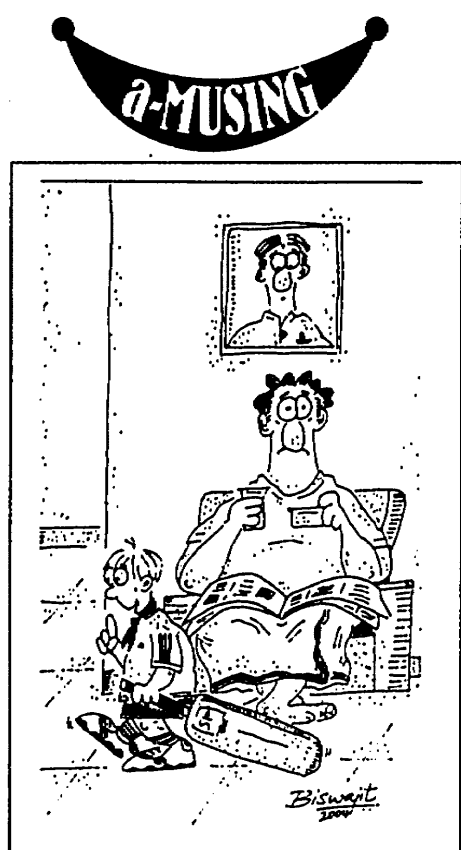
MUSINGS

INSIDE

- Conserving city's rivers
- Chennai's mosquitoes
- The other Subbulakshmi
- Unsafe street food
- Tamil Nadu falters again

Vol. XIV No.1

April 16-30, 2004

Rs. 5 per copy
(Annual Subscription: Rs. 100/-)

Our school won the cricket match, Appa... and it wasn't fixed!

You just can't win!

Two teams, both having given a great deal of thought to matters of grave concern such as selection of individual members and general strategy, confront one another on the battle field of sports.

As usually happens on such occasions, one team wins.

And having done so, they find, much to their consternation, that many who have lost their voices yelling themselves hoarse in support, and perhaps their jobs in some instances on charges of goofing up, are now chewing their lips in doubt and going "Hmmm" in an ominous way.

You can only begin to guess at the emotional state of a winner who shuffles up, laden down with diverse medals and trophies, in happy anticipation of kudos, only to stub his toe on a 'that's-all-very-well-but-did-you-win-fair?' attitude.

And that too from the one source he thought was completely on his side, urging him on with word and gesture.

How strange are the workings of the human mind!

We grasp failure to ourselves with an almost welcoming fervour, wallowing in subsequent martyrdom, with endless hours being devoted to blame-allocation and angry analysis.

But success we view with suspicion; either embarrassed by it, or wondering if the path leading to it was...er...subjected to some amount of 'help'.

You can't help feeling a bit sorry for the heads that wear these uneasy crowns.

Ranjitha Ashok

A priced journal from today

(By The Editor)

Madras Musings becomes a priced publication from today, as we begin our 14th year of publication. It is a step we take reluctantly, because we do have sufficient support at present to continue disseminating information and creating awareness – about the city and State's heritage, their environment, and their achievements and failures – as a free journal. But the law requires a journal to be priced if it is to be recognised as a registered newspaper and be eligible for postal concessions. And without those concessions we have no economical way to distribute *Madras Musings*. We are therefore compelled to price *Madras Musings* at Rs.5 a copy (Annual subscription: Rs.100) from today.

But even as we become a priced journal, we intend to appeal to the postal authorities to review the 1893 law they are citing. Journals like ours that provide information and create awareness on many matters dear to national policy – and there are several others published by NGOs, scientific and cultural organisations etc. – do not have the infrastructure to handle subscriptions and all that follows. And this needs to be appreciated by the authorities.

In the case of *Madras Musings*, it is only the volunteer efforts of a few working in the offices of those connected with Chennai Heritage, the non-profit organisation that publishes *Madras Musings*, that enable us to keep some kind of track of subscriptions, donations, receipting, mailing etc. None of them is really responsible for any of these activities and in case readers telephoning or writing in with complaints do not get a prompt answer or prompt action, they must forgive us, because the volunteers, despite all their dedication, do

attend to *Madras Musings* only as and when they have free time, and cannot keep track of matters pertaining to it on a day-to-day basis. It is because *Madras Musings* cannot afford full-time staff – and it does not have a single full-timer in any capacity – that we decided to take the FREE publication route, enabling a more relaxed administration. Making *Madras Musings* a priced publication entails a greater need for more

(Continued on Page 4)

Please send in your subscriptions

(By The Editor)

As readers are already aware – and hundreds have responded positively – we have no other alternative but to price *Madras Musings*. From this issue (Volume XIV, No.1), *Madras Musings* is being priced at Rs.5 a copy, ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: Rs.100/-. Please make out your cheque only to 'Chennai Heritage' and send it together with the COUPON ON PAGE 7, to Chennai Heritage, 260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018 or C/o Lokavani-Hall Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

As you will notice from the coupon, 'Chennai Heritage' continues to welcome contributions from you for the causes it espouses. So if, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2004-5 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions. We are indeed sorry we can no longer remain a free mailer.

Without people's participation, there'll be no cleaner Chennai

A new conservancy campaign was kicked off in the city in May 2003. Door-to-door conservancy operations were officially introduced in September 2003 in all Zones in Chennai, except VI, VIII and X. Enthusiastic participation by some and apathetic non-cooperation by most of the rest has been the general scene. What have these campaigns really achieved?

Says an enthusiastic M.P. Vijayakumar, Commissioner, Corporation of Chennai, who has been the driving force behind these campaigns, "From 8500 dustbins on the city roads, we have now brought it down to 2500 collection points. The earlier open bins were always overflowing, an eyesore, and also took longer time to clear. In the three Zones already in the process, collection of garbage does not take place beyond 12.30. We plan to distribute a total of 8000 plastic bins in all Zones to help separate biodegradable and nonbiodegradable waste (with four bins per cycle and spare bins, where needed). Our local conservancy staff have been tuned to work with the community organisations."

Joint Commissioner Apoorva adds, "The whole operation is taking place in phases. We started by allotting 200 bins to Zone I, thereafter 400 to Zone II and so on. Already 1600 bins (both red/blue for nonbiodegradable, and green for biodegradable rubbish) have been distributed to local conservancy offices. We are targeting on a time when the conservancy worker does not need to touch the gar-

● by
Shobha Menon

bage at all. The householder hands over the separated garbage, the worker puts it into the respective bins and then dumps it at the collection points, from where the rubbish goes to the landfill sites. Currently the local staff themselves dispose of the plastic recyclables at local stores. With separation at source, two-thirds of the existing volumes can be beneficially composted at selected sites within the respective zone itself."

A Conservancy Inspector describes operations in his Zone thus: "For every 1000 residents, one tricycle has been allotted

(there are four private tricycles already, managed by the local associations, besides the eight Corporation tricycles). In five hours, a ton of garbage accumulates, which is deposited at the specific collection points. By 11.30, door-to-door collection is over. We are authorised to charge a minimum fine for violations. Residents are expected to inform the local division office regarding garden garbage, but if, as usual, they throw it over their respective walls, then they will have to pay a stipulated fine. There is a lot of community participation, as compared to a few months ago. Door-to-door collection has caught on, but segregating garbage has been rather slow among the public. More awareness and education of the public are needed to make this project a success." Definitely so, considering that of the 8,100 families that live in this division, only 210 have started segregating at source, and this too many months into the campaign. Many workers feel that responses are better from lower

(Continued on Page 7)

Have City's rivers been conserved?

A major Government project, with support from the Centre, to conserve Chennai's waterways was begun on January 1, 2001. The Rs. 720 crore project appears to have somewhere along the way lost sight of the Buckingham Canal, for it is now called the 'Chennai City River Conservation Project'. The *Man From Madras Musings* is delighted to find the Government not only interested in CONSERVATION but also announcing that it is likely to successfully complete this project in the next few months.

MMM has indeed seen the water flowing fast in stretches of both the Adyar and the Cocum in recent weeks. And in a parched city like Chennai, that flow, no matter how dirty the water looks, does offer a refreshing sight. But MMM wonders what sustainability measures the project has put in place to ensure that this scenario remains with us for a few more years at least.

From what MMM understands, a considerable amount of the funding has been spent on improving the sewerage facilities and preventing the discharge of sewage into the waterways. If Metrowater, in implementing the project, has ensured that no more sewage will flow into the rivers and that alternative arrangements have been made for sewage discharge, this is certainly a major achievement — if what has been put in place, stays in place and WORKS. But while this is an essential element of restoring the rivers, it is equally necessary that the flow in the waterways and the improvement of their banks should not be lost sight of. And MMM is inclined to feel that not enough attention has been paid to this aspect of the project — despite the pretty sight of flowing water.

A Metrowater official is reported to have stated that the sandbars across the mouth of the Adyar and the Cocum are a result of the accumulation of sludge over the years consequent to untreated sewage being released in the rivers. This has led to environmental degradation, he is quoted as having said, and the project has been conceived to remedy this problem. If that is indeed the case, MMM regrets the project has been tackled without facing up to the reality of the situation. While the solution to the sewage problem is certainly important and welcome, the waterways will not be in full flow till the sandbar problem is solved. And as MMM understands it, the sandbars are not due entirely to sludge; in fact, they are almost entirely due to the breakwaters of the harbour and the currents which deposit at the rivermouths the sands blocked by the breakwaters. Till this rivermouth problem is solved, the free flow of the rivers will always be affected, no matter what is done about sewage.

Meanwhile, what has happened to making the Buckingham Canal a waterway again? Only lip service has been paid to this aspect of the project; while

the Railways continues to occupy with its Metro whole stretches of the Canal, creating long stretches that are nothing more than swamps and cesspits. To see these stretches instead of water-rich canal — alongside a highway to a 21st Century Chennai that is inviting the world to what is being propagated as wondrous development the city offer investors — and to believe that new investors will turn a blind eye to all that is wrong in the city and will not get a wrong impression of Chennai and its management is to live in a world of make-believe!

Renewing a bridge

For over a decade now there's been a plan that INTACH-Tamil Nadu and the M (now C) MDA have wanted to implement for the 160-year-old Elphinstone Bridge near the Adyar Estuary. The plan, which calls for the hoardings at both ends of the bridge to be removed, for the bridge to be made a green-embellished promenade and sites for birdwatching, was held up and that alternative arrangements have been made for sewage discharge, this is certainly a major achievement — if what has been put in place, stays in place and WORKS. But while this is an essential element of restoring the rivers, it is equally necessary that the flow in the waterways and the improvement of their banks should not be lost sight of. And MMM is inclined to feel that not enough attention has been paid to this aspect of the project — despite the pretty sight of flowing water.

The *Man From Madras Musings* is now shocked to hear that the CMDA appears to have washed its hands off the project, and the Corporation — owners of the old bridge — plan to hand it over to Metrowater, which, for its part, sees use for the bridge totally dif-

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

ferently from what the conservationists and heritage buffs see as its potential. Horror of horrors, Metrowater proposes to lay huge sewer pipes on the bridge and then lay concrete slabs to hide the pipes and create a walkway. While offering walking space, neither sewage pipes nor concrete slabs are likely to do anything to beautify the bridge. Nor are such plans in keeping with how heritage properties should be treated. The CMDA, which has every right to stop such development, particularly if it threatens what might be considered a bit of heritage, appears to have washed its hands off the project. And so will soon vanish another bit of the city's heritage.

Meanwhile, MMM understands that the CMDA has called for the excavation and restoration work in the San Thomé Basilica be stopped. But such orders do not appear to have brought the work to a standstill; instead, it goes on apace, according to conservation norms or not, no one knows, but certainly without any documentation. A parishioner, concerned about what was going on, rang MMM the other day and wondered whether something could be done to stop what was

happening in the Basilica. When MMM expressed his helplessness, and pointed out that in a city without Heritage Regulations and a State without a Heritage Act, there was nothing that could be done, the caller ruefully said, "Then, even the Pope will not be able to stop what's happening to this Church!" All MMM could advise was "One never knows, if that is the court of last resort".

The bare creek

What's left of the Adyar Creek has been denuded of all vegetation and lies bare and parched in the sun. Once it was rich with scrub and trees, birdlife and small fauna, with bits and pieces of backwater visible at the worst of times and water flowing in the best of times. What a sorry site it poses today!

But the sight it presents, *The Man From Madras Musings* understands, is due to a cleaning operation by one of the two official bodies in the city entrusted with caring for it, be their portfolios different and never shall they meet. Obviously something is in the air. But what? Since we never have public hearings on any civic plans in the city, no one will know till work starts on whatever is planned.

The guessing game, however, has it that the authorities intend to develop what's left of the Creek on either side of San Thomé High Road into a park with vegetation only to provide shade and colour. The focus of use, however, it is said, will be avenues of entertainment. There is, however, another set of guessers who say that this may be the intention, but before

long the developers will grab it all for highrises.

Whatever be the case, the whole of the Adyar Estuary area and the backwaters were doomed the moment a highrise was permitted on the banks of the river in an area marked out to be declared a wildlife sanctuary. From then on, it's only been more and more construction on all the landfill that decades ago was used to link the islands of the Estuary. Highrise, huge halls with ancillary facilities, Government installations and office blocks have all risen here. And MMM is sure that it won't be long before what little space there's left in the Creek will be built on. San Thomé High Road will then become one of the most traffic-congested roads in the city. But that's development, MMM is told by many, particularly those who admire what's happened in the West but can't see the difference between the two schools of development.

Uncared for roads

A friend of *The Man From Madras Musings* who was on the road in Tamil Nadu for a ten-day period tells MMM that while the highways are considerably im-

A big 'Thank You' to 74 of you...

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.03.04 and 15.04.04, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, *Madras Musings*, have already received. We thank all of them for their support for the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

— CHENNAI HERITAGE

- Rs.20: Dharmeswaran, N. (Bangalore)
 Rs. 50: Cherian, V.M.; Nandagopal, S.
 Rs.51: Muralidharan, K.
 Rs. 100: Aaron, Manuel; Ameenuddin; Chandrasekar, M.S.; Dharmaraja, A.R.; Doshi, Eira; Gandhiraj, Dr. K.; Gita Gopalakrishnan; Hazari, Lt.Cdr (Retd.) Keshao, G.; Jayakumar, B.; Sridharan, Rear Admiral, K. (Bangalore); Karthik, S.; Karuppaiah, L.; Mahadevan, S.; Mahaveer, M.; Murthy, S.; Nagaraj, V.C.; Nagarajan, S.; Narayanan, K.; Paul, F.V.N.; Pillai, M.R.; Prasad, C.G.; Raghavan, Dr. Sekhar; Raghavan, G.; Ramakrishnan, R.; Ramamurthy, K.M.; Rangarajan, S.; Rao, A.V. Ramana; Sekhar, Seela; Shumugasundaram, R.; Srinivasan, M.R.; Sundaram, Dr.G.; Unnikrishnan, P.; Varghese, Dr. P.G.; Vedanarayana.
 Rs.101: Neelakantan, N.N.; Tagat, R.K.O
 Rs.150: Chellappa, A.C.
 Rs.200: Eapen, K.V. (New Delhi); Padmanabhan, K.S.; Padmanabhan, S.; Subramaniam, S.; Usha Kris.
 Rs.210: Rao, T.Y.C. (Bangalore)
 Rs.300: Nigli, P.; Narayanan, Gomathi A.
 Rs.400: Anthony, Raj; Asokan, K.; Ayer, S. Baskar; Balakrishnan, Dr. D.; Balasubramanian, M.G.; Balasubramanian, R.; Chitra, S.; Ebrahim, Suchi; Mahendran S.; Nandagopal, S.; Radhakrishnan, R.; Radhakrishnan, S.; Raghunathan, T.M.; Ramanathan, K.V.; Rekha Shetty; Simon, Dolly; Srinivas, Dr. Krishnamoorthy; Subramanian, N.; Subramanian, T.S.; Thomas Tharu
 Rs.410: Sreekumar Menon
 Rs.500: Anandakrishnan, Dr.M.; Cochran, D.M. (Secunderabad); Dutt, Dr.V.L.
 Rs.700: Devadoss, Mahema
 Rs.900: Bhasiyam, Ranjini; Swaminathan, Prof. M.S.
 Rs.2400: Venkatraman, Murali

Subscriptions now, but may you continue to help

• A word to all donors. As you would have seen on Page 1 today, *Madras Musings* has become a paid publication. But an ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION of just Rs.100 covers only a part of our costs. Corporate support and YOUR support will continue to be essential for Chennai Heritage and *Madras Musings* to play a greater role in creating awareness about the city, its heritage and its environment. We therefore look forward to you sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

Among the steps your contributions have enabled Chennai Heritage to take, apart from keeping *Madras Musings* afloat, have been — the organising of meetings with corporates, leading professionals and University alumni to create awareness about what is needed for the restoration of *Senate House*, and — the preparation of an awareness-creating film and the screening of it to various groups to generate support for the restoration of the Tiruvanniyur temple tanks.

If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep *Madras Musings* going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS.

The Editor

proved or are being improved, the side roads — and especially the back roads — are in a terrible state of disrepair. Even a stretch of road like the one from Pondicherry to Tindivanam is anything but satisfactory.

Once, Tamil Nadu prided itself on its road network, be it highway or back road. That, says MMM's friend, is no longer the case; Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala have all overtaken Tamil Nadu in improvement and maintenance of less-travelled roads. What, he wonders, has brought about this change, which he finds in the cities of the State too?

MMM has, on the other hand, heard of crores being allocated for road infrastructure in off-the-

beaten-track areas the State plans to open up as new tourist destinations. But while these destinations will get better roads and outdoor lighting, the same attention is not planned for approach roads or other means of access. Worse, MMM does not see any planning being put into facilities to receive visitors and make what's important in these destinations accessible to them. There's been no attempt to even understand the ethos of these destinations. Roads, lighting and a couple of hotels alone, it appears to be felt, will make the tourist happy. No wonder tourism has never taken off in Tamil Nadu.

—MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Bad to worse

When I got back to Chennai recently after a few months abroad, what I was happy about was that the Chennai Corporation has introduced door-to-door collection of garbage and it was whispered that there would be a fine of Rs.1000 levied on anybody who threw garbage on the street.

This has been a short-lived euphoria! The boys with carts were regular, but are now lax, absenting themselves. All bins have been removed. A stormdrain nearby is getting filled with garbage. Some of us have been trying to find out who is the authority to attend to. There are sanitary inspectors in charge, but no way of locating them. Go to zonal office and you return with a promise that they will come and check the next day. That tomorrow never comes!

Boys who collect garbage discard it along the Out Circular Road, creating a necklace of garbage. Even the prestigious Jayalalitha Stadium in the colony has garbage around it. A lorry cruises around once in a way and picks up what it can.

There is no use saying there will be a fine, if no action is taken. We would prefer to have the garbage bins back and the lorry coming on alternate days to collect the garbage, rather than what's happening now.

Anna Varki
 21, Central Street
 Kilpauk Garden Colony
 Chennai 600 010

Colourful signs

Of late I find that various cautionary signboards, like 'No Entry', 'Entry', 'No Free Left Turn', are given a border in different colours, depending on whims of the companies gifting the signs to the Traffic Police.

The boards are welcome but there are certain international colours and conventions that have to be adhered to:

Red — Negative — or No
 Green — Positive — or Yes.

For example, at Madhya Kailash temple, Adyar, the traffic board with the words 'No Free Left Turn' is in BLUE. It should be in RED. If it is a free left turn, it should be in GREEN.

Will the Traffic Police adhere to international conventions?

Bharat Hiteshi
 New No.3/54 Gandhi Nagar
 II Cross Street
 Palavakkam
 Chennai 600 041

Real responsibility

I was amused to read the concluding part of the article, 'Environment, Employee Welfare — Key areas in Corporate Social Responsibility' (MM, March 16th). Sashi Nair has observed, "More than 80 per cent of the respondents felt that protecting the environment and the health and safety of their employees should be the main role of corporates in society. More than 70 per cent of the respondent companies saw themselves as entities that earn profits but through ethical practices complying with regulatory requirements and never participating in corrupt practices." Sashi Nair has ended optimistically, remarking, "Encouraging indeed!"

But the big question is who should monitor the activities of even the 400 companies that responded to the questionnaire and admitted accountability through the answers given.

Most corporate bodies have absolutely no concern for the protection and conservation of ecology. The laws of the land are honoured more in the breach by the corporate sector. To name a few of them, the Factories Act, 1948 (with sub-

FOR THOSE WHO ATTEND MEETINGS

• Lord, grant that this day we come to no decisions,
 Nor run into any kind of responsibility,
 But that all our doings may be ordered to establishing
 New and quite unwarranted departments
 For ever and ever.

(Chorus)
 O Thou who seest all things below,
 Grant that Thy servants may go slow,
 That they may study to comply
 With regulations till they die.

Teach us, Lord to move
 Committees more than commonsense.
 Impress our-minds to make no plan
 But pass the baby when we can.

And when the tempest seems to give
 Us feelings of initiative,
 Or when alone we go too far,
 Chastise us with a circular.

Mid war and tumult, fire and storms,
 Strengthen us, we pray, with forms,
 Thus will Thy servants ever be
 A flock of perfect sheep for Thee.

Mala Goel
 New Delhi

NOSTALGIA

The interview

When I read recently in a newspaper about former Cabinet Secretary T.S.R. Subramanian's book, *Journey through Babudom*, and the interview he faced for the IAS in 1961, I remembered my own interview in 1971 for selection as a Probationary Officer in SBI. Just a few months earlier, I had been interviewed at Fort Glacis (good old RBI, Madras) for the Indian Police Service and the results were awaited. Of the two, the SBI interview was considered a notch higher in class.

One among the SBI interview team was a veritable braintrust called Raman (retired ICS) with a reputation for chewing and spitting out many a candidate. When he asked me to compare the English papers of the IPS with those of the SBI, the interview started on a disastrous note. I hastily blurted that the SBI papers were "far more easier". He pounced on the slip. "More easier? Double comparative. And you are a M.A. in English Literature!" The others grinned. I squirmed.

Another panelist asked me what book (if any) I had been reading and what it was about. I hadn't been reading anything, but quickly, told him the gist of *Crime and Punishment* and he seemed pleased. Next, a self-effacing type (from SBI) asked me the reason why the Indian cricketers then touring England under Wadekar were faring badly in

their county matches. This question had a lot of reverse swing and I sensed a veiled trap. When I replied that English conditions favoured front foot batting whereas most Indian batsmen were backfoot players and so took time to adjust, this was too much for the SBI man and he decided to take a back seat.

Raman then began his Khedda operation to subjugate my elephantine ego. "What do you think of the recent expose in the American press regarding official secrets?" he asked. "Are you referring to the Daniel Ellsberg papers, sir, the leak in the Pentagon?" I asked. "Yes," he snapped. "Really, I don't see what all the fuss is about, sir, now that the event is over," I said. "Over! Don't you know that the papers concern the Vietnam War which is far from over." Mr. Raman pounced back, sure that he had his man. "Sir," I said, "the Ellsberg papers deal with how the decision was taken by the U.S. to enter the war. That event is over." Silence. From a stymied Raman too.

Needless to say I came out with flying colours. However, a few years later I was grounded and the colours faded, but that is another story.

C.G. Prasad
 9, C.S. Mudali Street
 Kondithope, Chennai 600 079

sequent amendments), the Consumer (Protection) Act, 1986, the Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, the Water and Air legislations of 1974 and 1981, respectively, the Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939 — the list is a lengthy one — I do not know whether the survey addressed how corporates were implementing these Acts.

The article also did not say anything about the nature of the industries involved in the survey. The legislations dealing with industries specify 15 factors as highly polluting and causing environmental degradation and, worse, waterborne diseases. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board had, in its survey released in 1999, stated that there were more than 17,000 companies in the Small Scale Industries sector of which 6500 were tanneries and dyeing industries which were responsible for the break-out of skin and respiratory diseases and for major waterborne diseases. Ironically, the policy of the Government is to encourage the SSI sector!

P.S. Subrahmanian
 Muruganadi
 1 (Old No. 47), TNHB
 (Near) Combined Courts Building
 Sathuvachari
 Vellore 632 009

Improving TN Cricket

As it did last year, Tamil Nadu cricket team once again caved in in the final of the Ranji Trophy despite having several senior cricketers. Mumbai played to a plan and achieved the vital first innings lead and won the coveted Trophy for the second time running and for the 36th time in 39 appearances, but we failed in the crunch situation. How do we improve the game in Tamil Nadu?

To improve the standard of the game in the State more and more turf wickets must be laid. The water problem should not come in the

way of preparing lively wickets even for league games. Talented players must be given additional incentives.

The Press must play a key role in giving good coverage to key players. Wicket-keeper Karthik's centuries in the semifinal and final and Badrinath's four centuries in the season, contributing nearly 700 runs, should have received greater attention.

Left hand batsmen and bowlers must be given maximum encouragement. The TNCA must also appoint experienced coaches to train the players.

C. K. Subramanian
 A 101, Dhanashreya
 Plot 28, Sector 17
 Vashi 400 703

Index will help

I totally agree with N. Dharmeswaran (MM, March 1st) that *Madras Musings* is not like other journals that should be cast away when done with. See its motto: "We care for Madras that is Chennai". So, I keep the journal bound volumewise with a select index for future reference.

How I wish *Madras Musings* publishes an index as soon as each volume is over and a new one started, for the benefit of readers like us, who take the articles seriously and preserve the journal carefully.

T.M. Sundararaman
 No.19, Nallappan Street
 Mylapore
 Chennai 600 004

Editor's Note: Thank you for your appreciation and for your suggestion. We certainly would like to develop an index. But *Madras Musings* is a journal without the luxury of a staff. Only volunteers keep it going. Maybe someone will one day volunteer to do an index.

Eye donation fears

Of late, I have often been read in the newspapers about the donation of eyes by the families of the deceased.

I am sure these are done voluntarily and it is only to propagate the idea of eye donation that these advertisements are being released. But what accountability is there that this practice is not converted into a commercial proposition and donated eyes charged for at a premium rate.

Already this is happening in the case of blood donation in leading hospitals, where they charge premium rates for blood irrespective of groups.

The higher medical body of the State Government should look into this and ensure that there is no exploitation in this and that only the needy get the benefit, in deference to the wishes of the deceased.

C.S. Baskar
 17, Ramarao Road
 Mylapore
 Chennai 600 004.

PLEASE NOTE

• All letters for The Editor's attention should be addressed to The Editor, c/o Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

• All business correspondence should be addressed to The Director, Chennai Heritage, 260-A, TTK Road, Chennai 600 018.

• Madras Musings does not accept letters by e-mail.

Chennai's mosquitoes

Their singing never stops

My family lives in what my son calls a 'mosquito resort'. We've tried everything we can to drive the mosquitoes away, with no luck, of course. And long-time residents of our area merely smile stoically and say, 'This too shall pass!' But will it? And then I stumbled onto some alarming facts — that no other city in the whole of S.E. Asia is as malarious as Chennai, and that 70% of malarial incidence in the State is observed in Chennai alone (the rest of Tamil Nadu accounting for a mere 30%). Which led me to check out Chennai's mosquitoes and their malarial propensities.

Available statistics at the Corporation of Chennai's Health Department show that the increase from January 2003 to January 2004 of the total number of 'benign' malaria cases (the *Plasmodium Vivax* kind) has been 15.1%, as compared with the previous year's increase of 3.6%. The increase over the same period of *Pf. malaria* cases (the *Plasmodium Falciparum* type, that can be fatal if not treated on time) has been 11.5%. But a former Corporation Health worker who is now

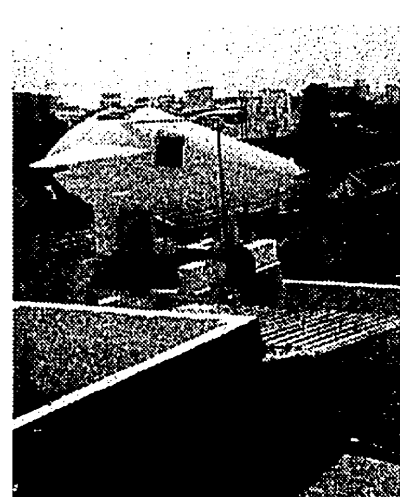
into private practice confides, "Actual statistics will be even more disturbing".

Mosquitoes that cause malaria breed only in stagnant clear water (generally wells or uncovered overhead tanks). They operate only at low density, and the 'No singing, no stinging types' are the ones that spell danger. Others in Chennai are, according to the Health Department, just a major nuisance. But did you know that 100 or more cases can be traced to a single carrier?

Dr. K.C. Reddy, a senior consultant nephrologist, states, "Would you believe it that it was only in 1964 (as a house surgeon at Madras Medical College) that I saw my first case of clinical malaria at the General Hospital (not once in the early 1960s while a medical student). Malarial incidence was so very rare. That was probably because of the then very successful National Malaria Eradication Programme (NMEP) which was in its second phase and which managed to confine the vector to its endemic areas one of which, I remember, was the foothills of the Shevaroyis. But, sadly, the NMEP didn't consolidate on its gains, and the endemic areas expanded nationally". Actually, this national eradication programme is still there, but is reported to have failed in recent years due to non-cooperation by the State Government.

Says Sundaramoorthy, Deputy Commissioner, Health, Corporation of Chennai, "The reason for the inordinate increase in the mosquito population in the city is the 825 km of stormwater drainage canals across the city, 16 different major waterways that crisscross the city, the 120 km of minor waterways that are all open and the 1,22,000 or so open overhead tanks, wells and sumps in the city which are all potential breeding factories. Such a complex issue needs a long-term perspective in planning. At the microlevel, we plan to address the problem initially by inhouse reformation of the Department. We've also purchased around 450 new machines for hand-fogging purposes. At the macro-level, all open tanks need to be sealed. Health Officers have been given targets of sealing at least 10% of open tanks, sumps, wells etc. in their areas in three months. Prosecution will be the last resort".

Says another official, "30%



Water storage tanks, fancy or otherwise...



... and clogged waterways ensure the mosquito menace remains with us.

of the overhead tanks in Chennai are inaccessible and open. Most of the others are open anyway (because people feel that open water is healthier). The Health Department can send people to spray open wells and tanks. But with the seven-day lifecycle of the mosquito, even if it is not done even once out of the 52 times a year (a day every week), the entire effect can be nullified. Or if, out of 100 possible sources, it is

● by
Shobha Menon

not done in one (the source may be inaccessible, the owner might not be in etc) malaria incidence can happen. This is the crux of the issue. Another major problem is the stagnant water in the network of stormwater drains that contain still water because of illegal connections. A metro like Mumbai has malaria under better control because, according to its Public Health Act, a specific design of overhead tank has been brought in across the city. Wells are all closed, all overhead tanks are kept closed. If they are not, their Metrowater Board cuts off the offender's water supply. Excellent coordination between different departments who are all under one umbrella makes it better for all concerned."

An expert feels, "In Chennai, which has rainfall generally for about two weeks, stormwater drains should be dry 350 days of the year. But they are wet, all through the year, because of inefficient and apathetic officials who turn a blind eye to the public who connect their drainage to these drains. To add to the existing woes, Chennai's geography, of plain terrain, has no natural gradient. And so this stagnant water is an

excellent breeding and hiding ground for mosquitoes. These again join the minor canals, then the major canals (all open cesspools at this point) and then through the Adyar and the Cooum into the sea. With the natural sandbars formed in the Bay of Bengal due to tidal wave action preventing natural flushing out, more stagnation results. The result — the entire city is perennially in the throes of the mosquito menace and is the epicentre for malaria."

Meanwhile, a retired Government official points his finger at the Metrowater Department, "The Adyar and the Cooum are natural rivers, whose major polluter is the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB). Pollution is 85% by Metrowater, 15% by others, and 5% by slumdweller. Now, with cleaning the waterways projected as a Rs. 1700-crore project, the situation is even more pathetic. While the cleansing is going on on a massive scale, rectifying what goes into the waterway is still not being considered. The growth of the water hyacinth is abundant due to the pollution by organic matter. Even spraying will not help remove mosquitoes. Why can't a legislation be introduced either at the State level or at the Centre to cut out all potential breeding grounds through man-

datory covering of all open sources of water? How can any cleaning be effective, if the agencies responsible for the pollution are not held accountable?"

And a senior spokesperson of the Chennai Corporation said, "Even clearing these blocked waterways is proving to be difficult, hazardous and very slow. When passers-by can't stand the stench, the workers have to wade through the filth. While the mosquito-generating situation is being created by one Government Department, others have to undo it. In fact, people who allow mosquitoes to breed are actually guilty of a social crime. There is an urgent need for stern policy measures that are everyone's concern, not the Corporation's alone."

But as Dr. Reddy rightly concludes, "The whole issue boils down to a deplorable lack of environmental sanitation. And, of course, the accountability of the various agencies responsible for it. Only if they get their act together — by attacking the vector, removing the possibility of breeding grounds, and through larvicides (both biocontrol and biopesticides) — not only malaria, but a whole set of other diseases can be eradicated. Merely spewing a lot of hot air without getting down to the needed action will just not help."

A PRICED JOURNAL

(Continued from page 1)

responsible administration — but we cannot offer that, as the journal just cannot afford to employ full-time or even part-time staff dedicated to it. It is problems like these that the postal authorities need to understand when they insist on publications being priced to be eligible for postal concessions.

We hope that we will one day be able to make the postal authorities appreciate that *Madras Musings* is every bit a newspaper like the larger and richer ones, despite being run on a shoestring budget and with volunteer support. Publications such as this need understanding and support from the postal authorities, not roadblocks.

Recalling the other Subbulakshmi

All attention was recently focussed on the Subbulakshmi of music who has been the subject of two biographies, but lost in all this fanfare was the relaunch of the biography of another pioneering Subbulakshmi. First published in 1966 by Victor Gollancz Limited, it has now been re-issued by Katha.

The author of the biography, Dr Monica Felton, was well-known in the Madras of the 1960s. After many years of public service in the UK, she moved to Madras in 1956. Here she worked on many books, the best-known of which is *I Meet Rajaji*, a moving biography. Felton passed away in Madras in 1970.

In *Child Widow's Story*, she told the story of Sister R.S. Subbulakshmi, a pioneer in the field of women's emancipation and education. Sister was 76, quite frail, completely deaf and losing her sight when Felton met her for the first time and asked that she be allowed to chronicle her story. Sister, pragmatic as ever, agreed, but not before commenting that Felton would be better off writing on someone more important, while she herself would only fall under the "Useful" and not "Important" category.

Sister was born into a family of broadminded men and orthodox women in 1886. Her family comprised her father, Subramania Iyer, working at the Government Agricultural College, then in Saidapet, her mother, Visalakshi, and a widowed aunt (with shaven head), Valambal or Chitthi. Sister was the eldest among four girls (none of the boys survived), all conceived in the hope that at least one would be a boy. Sister's birth in itself was under pathbreaking circumstances, for it was the first time that a 'European' midwife, who used a pair of forceps to extract the infant, was involved in a delivery in the family.

Subbulakshmi was married at the age of eleven, but lost her husband within a very short while. The marriage had not been consummated. She was thus destined to be a virgin widow. However, her father, aided and abetted by her Chitthi, had other plans than a mere shaving of the head for her. Despite the opposition, he decided to have his daughter educated. Having taught her all he knew by way of English and mathematics, Subramania Iyer decided to enroll her at the Presidency and Secondary Training School (P&T), Egmore. It was decided to hire a *jutka* to take Subbulakshmi and

the daughter of another professor of the Agriculture College to Egmore every day. However, Subbulakshmi's orthodox grandmother would have none of it. But an uncle (referred to as Euclid right through the book) suggested a house be taken in Egmore for Chitthi and young Subbulakshmi and, thus, *Peepul Tree House*, opposite the school, was acquired and became the family residence.

Subbulakshmi sat for the matriculation exam in 1905. She was one among two girls and eleven boys. When the results were announced, she had secured honours in every subject, something none of the boys had managed. The Madras Presidency was stunned, nobody wanting to accept the fact that a girl had scored over boys.

The question now was what about higher education for Subbulakshmi. While many in the family wanted her to stay at home, Subramania Iyer, Chitthi and Subbulakshmi's mother (who had become a convert to the concept of women's education) decided to enroll her for a University degree. At the time, the only college in Madras that admitted women was Presidency College. But Subbulakshmi could not bring herself to study with so many men, so she sought admission at Presentation Convent, George Town, to study for the FA exam. The daily journey to the Convent was by *jutka*. Describing the journey, Felton wrote:

"Subbulakshmi, sitting so far back in the shadows of the arched roof that passersby hardly noticed that she was there, would... have a good look at the shops in China Bazaar, the busiest shopping district of the city. When the shutters were taken down in the morning the goods would be piled up outside so that it was impossible to be sure where the pavement ended and the shops began. There were rugs and carpets from Kashmir and Kidderminster, and exquisitely thin straw mats from Muslim villages in the far south, all spread out for customers to look at. In front of the hardware shops were pagoda-like towers made by brass and copper vessels piled accurately on top of each other. The cloth shops were festooned with Manchester cottons and Japanese cottons... it was possible to peep inside at the shelves stacked with saris from Conjevaram and Benares and Lucknow and Kollegal and Bangalore..."

Amidst all this, it was the plight of the Brahmin widows

that caught Subbulakshmi's attention. She would see the numerous shaven-headed women walking around, completely emaciated, with a dirty white saree barely covering their torsos. Most worked as unpaid cooks or servants in the homes of relatives, where they were given some food and certainly no healthcare or love. A visit to Benares further exposed Subbulakshmi to the fate that befell widows and, painfully aware of her own good fortune in having enlightened parents, she made up her mind that widow emancipation would be her life's goal once she had graduated.

In 1907, Subbulakshmi cleared her FA, winning two gold medals to boot. She then overcame her earlier hesitations and joined Presidency College. But this was to be traumatic. While travelling by rickshaw from Egmore to the College — and this was almost the first time any woman in Madras had travelled alone in such transport — she would shield her face completely with a black umbrella, till she could hardly breathe, but this did not prevent the orthodox elements lin-

● by
V. Sriram

ing the streets and making rude remarks about the 'pushy' widow. The male students in her class also made fun of her, all of which resulted in her failing in her favourite mathematics in the first year at college. She shifted to Botany and continued with her studies.

The Agricultural College having shifted to Coimbatore by 1909, her parents had moved with it. There, they played host to a group of women teachers from Madras. The leader of the group was Miss Christina Lynch, an ardent English feminist. Miss Lynch felt that the education of Indian women lay in the hands of women alone and the more the women teachers the better it would be. She targeted the Brahmin community, amongst whom she estimated there were over 22,000 widows between the ages of five and fifteen, all waiting to be educated and trained as teachers. Subramania Iyer immediately offered his daughter Subbulakshmi as the first pupil.

When Miss Lynch met Subbulakshmi in Madras, there was born the Widows' Home, with *Peepul Tree House* as its headquarters. Subbulakshmi styled herself Sister Subbulakshmi, claiming that she was

sororally attached towards widows and would like to help them. To begin with, three young widows joined the Home and came under the care of the redoubtable Chitthi. All of them enrolled at the P&T just opposite and began their studies in right earnest.

Subbulakshmi, meanwhile, cleared her B.A. in 1911 with Honours and the highest marks in the Presidency. She was offered several lucrative jobs, in the neighboring provinces but preferred to join the P&T as a teacher on Rs. 50 a month. In her spare time, she prepared for her Licentiate of Teaching exam, which she cleared in 1912. The number of students in the P&T, meanwhile, kept increasing and a second school for girls, to which the Tamil section could be attached, was opened.

The number of widows at the Home too kept increasing. Sister managed to save around Rs. 2000 for a new building for the girls. Chitthi had by now begun holding lectures on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* at the Home for the women of the neighbourhood, who formed the Sarada Ladies' Union. These women contributed cash and soon nearby *Adi Cottage* was acquired for the Home.

The search, however, was for an existing school to be taken over. Negotiations with a school in Mylapore failed when its promoters insisted that the various castes be segregated. Around this time, there were feelers from a school for girls in Triplicane founded by the Maharajah of Vizianagaram. The only condition the founder made was that the school's status be raised to that of a high school. Miss Lynch saw to this and the school was taken over, with another ardent champion of women's rights, Miss Mildred Prager, as superintendent and Sister Subbulakshmi as the superintendent of the Widows' Home. The Home was shifted to Tulasina Perumal Koil Street, Triplicane, much to the disgust of the local residents. They would shout abuse at the girls as they set forth each morning to the school. Over time, this diminished. But the landlord of the building ordered the hostel be vacated claiming he needed the property himself.

Miss Prager and Sister set out on house-hunting, but with no success. Till one day, someone suggested that *Ice House* might be suitable. Its owner, a Zamindar, agreed to rent at Rs. 160 a month till the actual purchase was completed. But orthodox Triplicane was not amused. Several predicted that the ghost that was said to haunt the building would soon take care of things. It didn't — and by late 1914 and early 1915, the girls moved in. The shift was not without its shocks, for two girls went missing and were finally



Sister Subbulakshmi

discovered in the cavernous cellars of *Ice House* — searching for ice!

By 1918, Miss Lynch, who was now Mrs. Drysdale, was made Director in charge of girls' education in the Presidency. When she returned in 1922 to England, she was confident that several of the girls in the Widows' Home and the schools were on their way to becoming doctors, teachers and educated housewives. Sister herself was awarded the Kaiser-I-Hind medal in 1920. Successive First Ladies of the Presidency, such as Lady Pentland and Lady Willingdon, also began taking an active interest in Sister's activities.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Sister, the Lady Willingdon School for Girls came up in Triplicane in 1922. In 1927, Sarada Vidyalaya, sponsored by the Sarada Ladies' Union, was established. The school moved from Triplicane to Mylapore and, finally, to Mambalam. In 1932, Sister became superintendent of the Government Hobart School on White's Road for a short while. Later, she moved to the Government Secondary and Training School, in Cuddalore. In 1936, she returned to Madras and, in 1938, the Ramakrishna Mission offered to take over Sarada Vidyalaya which Sister then handed over on behalf of the Sarada Ladies' Union. The only condition she laid was that the name should not be changed. The Mission had no problem with that, for Sarada Devi was the wife of their patron-saint, Swami Ramakrishna Pramahansa.

The book on Sister's life ends with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Sarada Ladies' Union which was held on January 21, 1962, during which Sister was feted and honoured. She had by then been a member of the Madras Legislative Council as well. She had also been co-founder of the Vidya Mandir School, which today is a landmark institution in the city.

The book does not mention Sister's date of passing away. But that does not matter. For, a person like Sister never really passes away. By dint of her efforts, she lives on in every girl child that is educated.

More deer and blackbuck

The Madras Naturalists' Society members, along with WWF, local schools and colleges, participated in the annual wildlife census at Guindy National Park and the adjoining areas, namely IIT and the Raj Bhavan campuses.

The census was done by transect method and was completed in 3 hours. The park appeared dry and all the natural waterbodies were empty. The Forest Department has been doing yeoman service in supporting the wildlife of the park by supplementing water and fodder.

According to the final tally of the census released by the Forest Department, the population of Spotted Deer and Blackbuck is up by one per cent. During the exercise, the team found 1,743 female spotted deer and 336 fawns, while among the blackbucks, they counted 190 females and 60 young ones. The park ranger explained that these numbers might indicate that the deer population had reached its capacity. — (Courtesy: *Madras Naturalists' Society Bulletin*.)

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Tamil Nadu and Chennai.)

- Name the new planetoid discovered by NASA researchers in our solar system recently.
- If it was Hashan Tillekeratne for Shane Warne, who was it for Muttiah Muralitharan?
- Which SAARC country did the U.S. recently name as a 'major non-NATO ally'?
- What distinction does the voting station Chako 6 I.B. in Arunachal Pradesh have?
- Name the top spiritual leader of Hamas who was assassinated by Israel on March 22nd, sending shockwaves throughout West Asia.
- Abdullah Ahmed Badawi is the new Prime Minister of which Southeast Asian country?
- Name the Oscar award winning British actor and writer who passed away on March 28th.
- What Indian Test cricketer feat was achieved on March 29th at Multan?
- NASA's X-43A recently set a new world speed record by flying at how many times the speed of sound?
- Why was a building named Bichitra in West Bengal in news on March 25th?
- Out of which district was Tuticorin District carved in 1986?
- Which popular bank, registered in Kumbakonam, is celebrating '100 years of trust and tradition' in 2004?
- What important academic post does S.P. Thyagarajan hold in the city?
- From where did the MDMK General Secretary Vaiko win the Lok Sabha seat in the last elections?
- Which district in Tamil Nadu is called the 'land of tanks'?
- The Archaeological Survey of India office in Chennai functions appropriately from a 300-year old building in Fort St. George. Its name?
- Who won the Ranji Trophy final held in Chennai from March 26th?
- On the above theme, who were the only two Ranji Trophy-winning captains from the State?
- What facility beneficial for telephone subscribers was introduced in 39 Post Offices in the State on March 26th?
- T.J.S. George and Lakshmi Viswanathan have in the recent past written biographies of a living legend of Chennai, nay, India. Name the legend.

(Answers on page 8)

Is street food safe?

There was a 'time' when everything around was filled with life, beauty, greenery, health, vibrancy and what not! Everything flourished without pollution. People led healthy lives. Today, when a person looks around, he finds pollution, dirt, smoke, dust, fumes from automobiles and nine persons out of ten are suffering from some sort of illness or the other.

Two or three generations back, home cooked meals, prepared with love, care and concern by the mother were nutritious and always safe and hygienic to consume. Today, as we all see, it is not so. Most mothers and wives today are too busy to cook tasty and good meals and so family members resort to the consumption of 'street food', as we call it.

The term 'street food' refers to a wide variety of ready-to-eat foods and beverages sold, and sometimes prepared, in public places. It is readily available, cheap and tasty. But is it safe? No sane person would say that it is entirely safe!

Street food is consumed where it is purchased or can be taken away and eaten elsewhere. The washing of cooks' and servers' hands, and utensils and dishes is often done in stored water. Disinfection is usually not carried out, and insects and rodents may be attracted to sites where there is no organised sewage disposal. Finally, the food is not adequately protected from flies and refrigeration is usually not available.

The consumption of street food is common in many countries where unemployment is high, salaries are low, work opportunities and social programmes are limited, and where urbanisation is taking place. Street food vendors benefit

from a positive cash flow, often evade taxation, and can determine their own working hours. In selling snacks, complete meals, and refreshments at relatively low prices, they provide an essential service to workers, shoppers, travellers, and people with low incomes. People who depend on such food are more often interested in its convenience than in questions of its safety, quality and hygiene. Schoolchildren are frequent customers of street food vendors.

Food is considered 'safe' when it is free from biological, chemical or physical contaminants in amounts or levels that may represent a hazard to health. A hazard means the potential to cause an adverse or injurious effect when present beyond acceptable or tolerable levels. Yet food should be kept clean at all stage, from preparation to consumption.

Food can be contaminated biologically, chemically and physically through improper preparation, storage, handling and servicing. Harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi (molds) cause biological or microbial contamination. These pathogenic organisms may cause infection or intoxication.

Chemical contamination occurs when substances such as cleaning compounds, additives or pesticides get into food. Physical contamination occurs when hair, broken objects, metal shaving, dirt, etc. get into the food.

Of the three contaminants, micro-organisms are the most dangerous from the point of view of spoilage (which may cause food poisoning) and public health.

The greater the numbers of

bacteria present in food, the faster the rate of spoilage and the greater the hazards to health. The most common diseases that may be transmitted through microbiologically contaminated food are:

- Acute diarrhoea caused by viruses or bacteria;
- Bacillary dysentery, typhoid fever and food poisoning caused by bacteria;
- Amoebic dysentery caused by a parasite;
- Hepatitis caused by a virus;
- Red tide poisoning caused by flagellates; and
- Gastroenteritis caused by E.coli and Salmonella.

• by T.S. Priya

Diseases that occur through accumulated consumption of chemical contaminants are:

- Cancer caused by potentially toxic-metals, like mercury and lead, mycotoxins (such as aflatoxin) and pesticides, as well as additives, e.g. nitrites and certain food colours; and
- Illnesses of the nervous system caused by mercury poisoning found in fish and shellfish taken from contaminated water, and from bread prepared from pesticide-contaminated wheat.

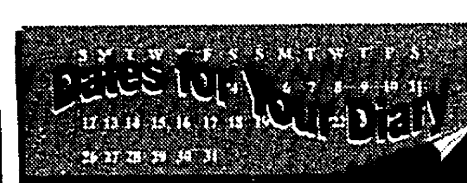
A person may not actually experience the after-effects of street food immediately after consumption. People who are quite resistant and have good immunity can survive the after-effects for quite some time, but for others it is vice versa. They may immediately show signs of sickness, the symptoms being nausea, vomiting, headache etc. Most often school-children who consume street food suffer from such serious illnesses as typhoid, cholera, jaundice, diarrhoea, sometimes leading to death.

When we find nothing but pollution around us, then how can we expect street food to be safe and uncontaminated? Today when we have a water scarcity, we cannot be sure of the quality of water vendors use to cook the food and to wash the plates and utensils, nor can we be sure of the drinking water given to us by them. At home, we boil the water to drink, cook the food long enough to get rid of micro-organisms in them. We heat every meal cooked earlier before consuming it in order to be sure of its sterility. Missing this practice even once can be dangerous. Then how can one be sure of the safety of street food?

April 23: Special architecture workshop on conservation techniques. Experienced architects will conduct these hands-on workshops. (At DakshinaChitra, call 2249 1744.)

April 24: Residential summer camp for children with sessions in mask-making, simple crafts, stargazing, traditional games, village expedition etc. (at DakshinaChitra, call 98414-23149.)

April 26: Kaveri's Studio: Workshop for adults and children over 12 years that introduces every aspect of pottery. The two-week workshop includes preparing the clay, wheelwork, smoke firing the pieces and making tiles, pots, masks and jewellery. For registration, call 98841 44693 or 5207 4858. Time: 10 to 1 p.m.



April 20: Madras Photography Association and Jayagopal Garodia School present an amateur photography exhibition. (At Lalit Kala Akademi.)

April 21: Paintings by K.G. Narendra Babu, K. Balasubramanian and N. Srinivasan (At Vinyasa.)

April 22: Anand Patwardhan, a distinguished documentary filmmaker, screens *Ram ke naam* ('In the Name of God') and *We are not your Monkeys*; on the 23rd *Father, Son and Holy War* and on 24th *War and Peace*. (At Max Mueller Bhavan, 6.30 p.m. each day.)

• CAG and the Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) recently conducted painting, collage and essay writing competitions for school and college students in Chennai as part of a campaign on "Involvement of college youth and school students in the National Campaign on Food Quality and Literacy and Awareness amongst Consumers". The campaign's objective was to create awareness among the youth on food safety issues. Published here are excerpts from the prize-winning essay on the topic 'Is Street Food Safe?'

Can street food be safe?

Yes, provided food handlers have the right information and training on:

- Food handling and services
- Food preparation
- Hygiene (personal hygiene and wholesome environment).

According to some physicians and researchers, usage of the same oil again and again can lead to cancer, as the oil becomes carcinogenic.

The use of a spoon or ladle to serve food reduces the level of contamination, while the use of bare hands results in its increase. Several vendors serve food with their bare hands. Vendors are potential carriers of a variety of bacteria. Defective personal hygiene can facilitate the transmission of these pathogens via food to humans. The serving stage is, thus, a critical point in the street food industry.

A healthy attitude towards cleanliness and sanitation will prepare every individual to practise food safety. Adequate education, followed by responsive action, is most important in preventing any illness from unclean and contaminated food.

Can street food provide nutritious meals and snacks?

Yes, if street food is chosen and prepared properly. Studies indicate that street food could provide nutritionally adequate meals if nutritious meals and snacks are offered and if customers exercise proper food selection. The importance of good food handling practices, proper meal planning and food preparation, needs to be emphasised to both vendors and consumers.

Children should be taught about the possible harmful effects of contaminated food. Street vendors should be informed about the possible health effects that their food could cause to people — (Courtesy: CAG Reports).

A promise overshadowed by cinematic extravagance

"A friend's invitation meant that we had to attend 'the world premiere of The Living Tree, a dance-drama production of the Cleveland Cultural Alliance at the Music Academy, Chennai...' Wary of so-called innovations in Bharata Natyam — for that is what I assumed the programme to be — I expected to be bored to death.

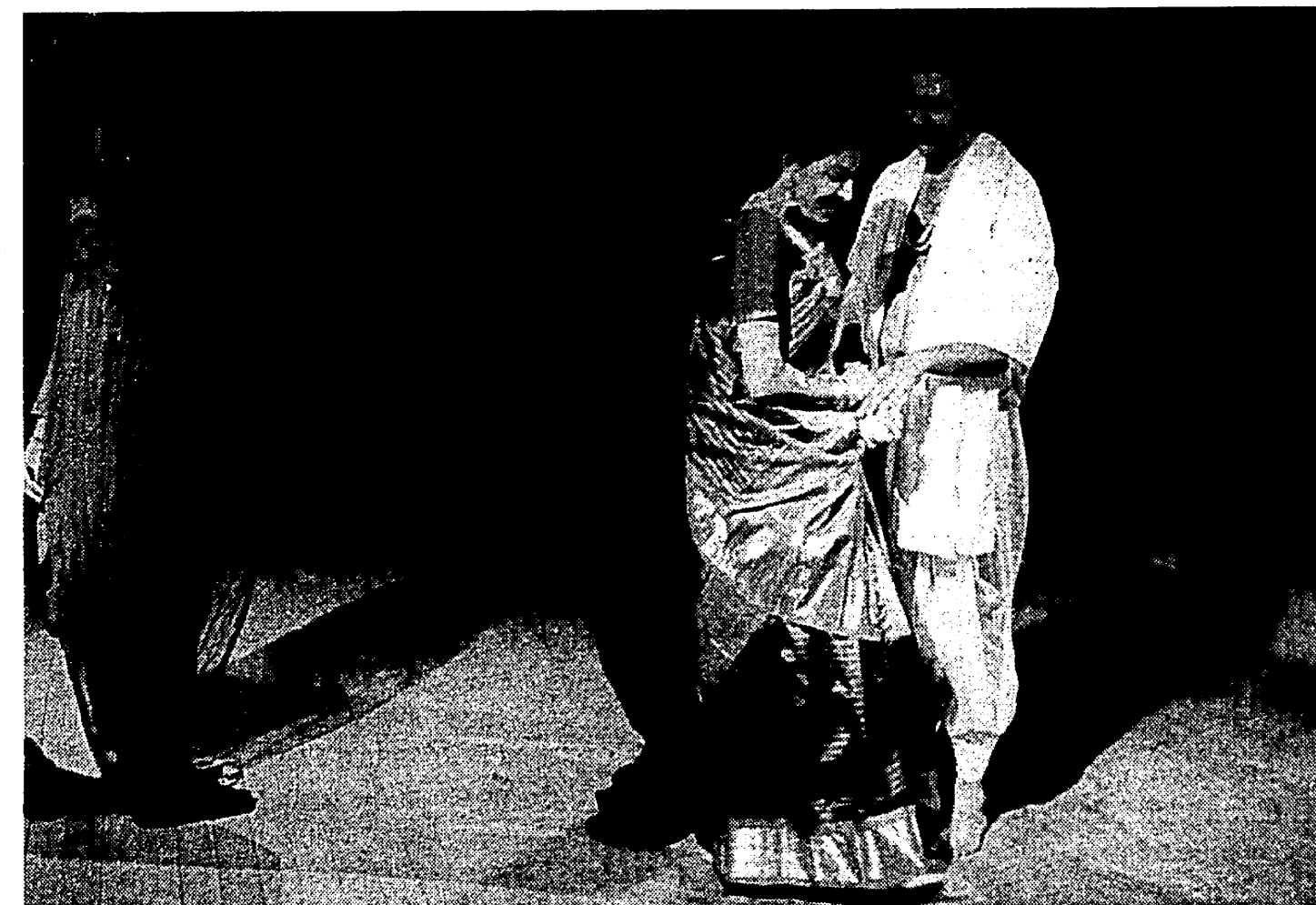
"How wrong I was! In a riveting performance, Kalakshetra alumnus G. Narendra and his troupe of young dancers gave a flawless display of dance and acting that variously moved us and amused us for nearly two-and-a-half hours. Telling a simple tale stressing on the oneness of all beings argued in the Upanishads through the story of a girl and her love and the nurturing of a mango tree, the young dancers, male and female, showed great footwork, expression and teamwork to keep the audience spellbound."

I wrote those lines in May 2001. When on April 4th this year, the same team came together with a few more established and emerging talents, in Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, Bombay Jayashree, A.V. Ilango, Lakshmi Srinath, Ranjitha Ashok and Deppika Nagaraj, to perform *Silappadhikaaram* — *Women of Substance*, my expectations were high, as I made my way to the same venue. And once again, the event sprang a few surprises, but this time around the overall sensation it produced was one of disappointment. The brilliant early scenes with their exquisite lighting and understated stage decor promised a glimpse into the epic grandeur of Ilango Adigal's tale of the anklet — a consummation only partially realised in what followed.

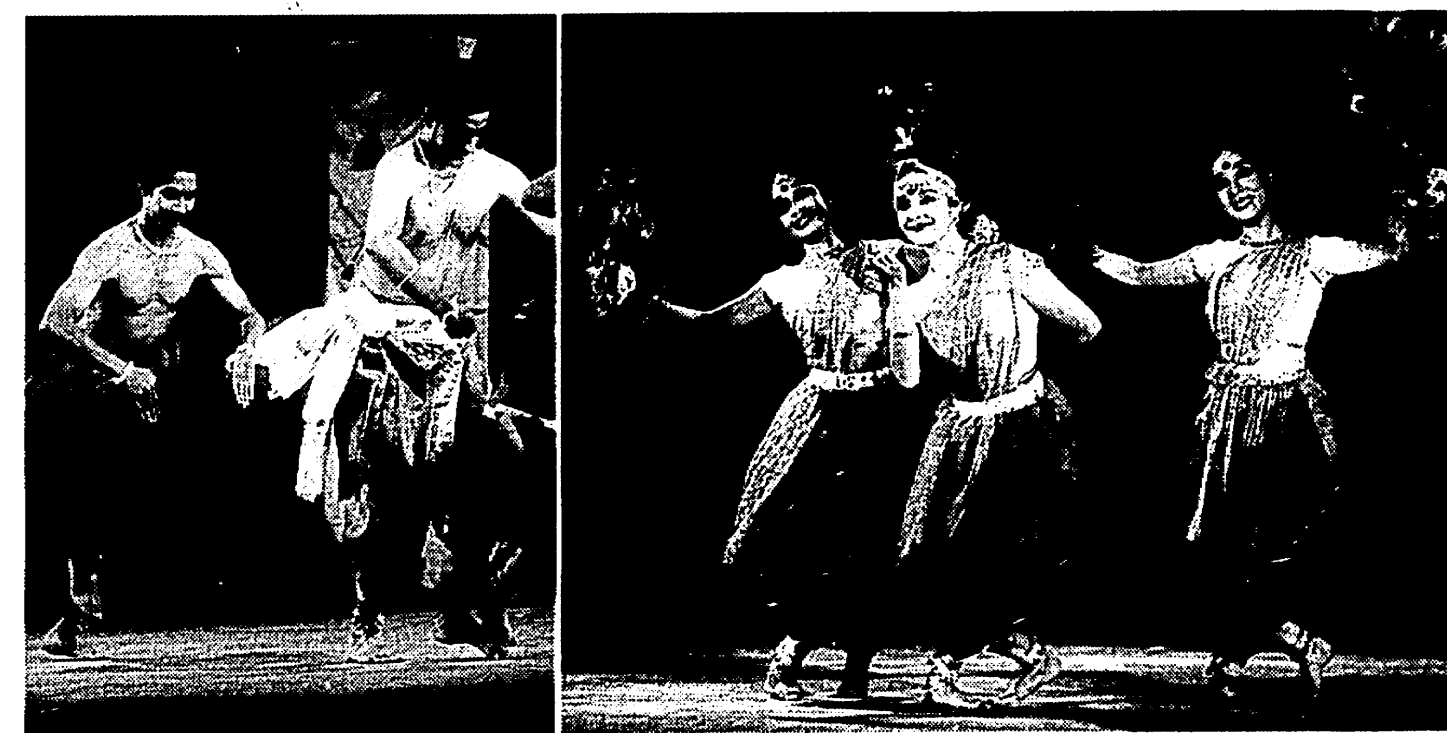
For the uninitiated, it was a revelation that male dancing could be so powerful and virile, that stark props and thrilling athleticism demonstrated in leaps, twirls, pirouettes and somersaults could combine to produce magic on stage, that emotion can be expressed as well with body language and footwork as by facial expression, and that a story can be told so fluently through the dance-drama mode. The seasoned aficionado would, on the other hand, have noted the absence of the gradual establishment of characterisation and the subtle nuances of internal conflicts so integral to the depiction of an epic.

The perfect teamwork of the husband and wife duo of Narendra and Mahalakshmi leading an obviously well-rehearsed Avigna Dance Ensemble was hardly surprising it is something audiences associate with the group. What surprised, however, were the concessions made to popular taste, if such a conclusion may be drawn from the resemblance to Tamil cinema in more than one aspect of the production. The months of hard work that impresario Uma Ganesan spoke about in her eloquent introductory remarks were evident in the dancing, the choreography and the music, but the end product, exciting as it was, fell well short of the profound, thanks to a certain lightness of treatment.

(Continued on Page 8)



Our OLD is from Mrinalini V. Sarabhai of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Ahmadabad, who writes, "Silappadhikaaram (MM, March 16th) was introduced to North Indian audiences by Darpana — in Bombay in the 1940s, in Ahmadabad in the 1980s when ... & THE NEW Mallika, my daughter, did her aranghetram as Madhavi, and later, in Hindi, when Mallika did both Madhavi's and Kannagi's roles. The great Tamil epics were greatly appreciated by the North Indian audiences." The picture (above) is from one of these productions. Our NEW is from the latest production of Silappadhikaaram, by Uma Ganesan's Cleveland Cultural Alliance which plans to take the performance recently premiered in Madras to the U.S. later this year.



Need for people's participation

(Continued from page 1)

and middle-income groups than the 'upper class' homes. Sadly, blaming the Corporation conservancy workers rather than cooperating and participating in making their own environment cleaner seems to be the order of the day.

Says another Conservancy Inspector, "Public response to door-to-door conservancy is good. But even after repeated requests to segregate at source, not much happens even in VIP areas. Though we've been given red and green bins for degradable and biodegradable waste, failure to segregate at source means they serve no purpose and add more work for us. Naturally, in areas of lower income levels, we've still not made much headway. We need a massive concerted effort at education through TV, radio and all other media that can reach the public. Also, maybe stricter enforcement measures. Practical problems include day-to-day maintenance of the tricycles and interference from certain political quarters when we attempt to extract maximum work from workers."

Saramma, a middle-class housewife in one of the trial zones, says, "In the beginning, many of us resented the new idea that involved more work. A couple of months into the programme, we were given a cane basket per family to put our plastic waste in. Soon, it became a habit for each family to put all plastic rubbish in this, and all other wet waste into another tub." She smiles proudly, "Our street used to be a mess earlier. Look at it now!"

But S. Vadivelu, a retired Corporation official in Thiruvalluvar Nagar, laments, "Even well meaning effort of the Corporation becomes meaningless when people don't cooperate. Despite repeated entreaties by the local association and Corporation officials to the public not to throw rubbish on the road, many continue to do so merrily. Could some sort of negative reinforcement be a viable method of imposing discipline among offenders?"

Commissioner M.P. Vijayakumar is, however, optimistic, "There have been many interactions with citizens' associations, and we are putting a lot of pressure on our conservancy

officials to make this programme a success, because basically it has to happen at the contingency levels. Already source collection is 70-80% complete. Once successful, nearly two-thirds of the current garbage volumes will come down. We've planned a pilot in each Zone, in a street in each division. However, source segregation as a concept has not succeeded as quickly. It is a process that needs more time; we definitely cannot effect change magically. But the staff at the contingency level are happy with the results. Welfare associations can play a big role in this education process. I'm positive that source segregation (good for a cleaner city and a cleaner environment) will be the norm in every household by the end of 2004."

In the end, it all boils down to people participation — from each Chennaiite, to be precise (especially those householders who pretend they're not responsible for what the domestic help does). How soon can we get our act together, and be accountable for the waste we individually generate? The least we can do is learn to dispose it responsibly.

Collective amnesia, with batsmen literally sleep-walking through the first day of the Ranji Trophy final at Chepauk, meant another instance of so near yet so far for the home team. The most charitable interpretation of Tamil Nadu's failure when it mattered most was that of one bad day at the office, albeit on the all-important day. Of the frontline batsmen, only S. Sriram showed the application and focus needed to put runs on the board, and he too perished when well set, to a ridiculous reverse sweep. The others were dismissed by no more than accurate bowling, with Nilesh Kulkarni's left arm spin assuming menacing proportions and resulting in amazing figures. This was certainly not due to any vicious turn. Before Sriram, skipper S. Suresh had looked good, but he essayed a drive head in air, to exit, as he so often did in the season, when on the verge of a big score. Indeed, as in the semifinal, the batting once again failed to live up to expectations.

The pocket dynamo Dinesh Karthik was a revelation. He showed great nerve when, coming in after four Tamil Nadu wickets had gone cheaply, he batted with cool aplomb, defending securely and hitting out boldly at anything hittable. For the second consecutive match, he scored a brilliant hundred when the team was in trouble. Here is a rare find with a bright future, a Test prospect in the foreseeable future, if he could only polish his wicketkeeping.

Hemang Badani, who has such an outstanding record against Mumbai, failed this time, and so did the consistent Badrinath — though both made amends in the second innings, helped by an assured Vidyut Sivaramakrishnan, earning Tamil Nadu an honourable

Tamil Nadu miss the bus again

draw, when an outright defeat had seemed a distinct possibility. Senior pro Sharath promised much in a brief innings but he too was out to a soft dismissal like most of the Tamil Nadu batsmen.

If the batting collapsed on the first day and Tamil Nadu practically lost the match, the bowling simply failed to measure up. Never had the absence of their match winner, Balaji, away in Pakistan, been more keenly felt. Coming back from a long lay-off, M.R. Shrinivas rarely achieved any decent rhythm, while the other paceman Ganapathi bowled well in patches on a wicket that offered precious little to the quick men. The season's lead-

Mane providing the perfect launching pad for Amol Muzumdar, Vinod Kambli and skipper Sairaj Bahutule to pile up a huge total. With the exception of Kambli and, to some extent, Mane, no Mumbai batsman attempted anything flamboyant. It was good old commonsense batting all the way.

It is easy to be critical of the home team for yet another disappointing display by them in a Ranji final, easier still to dismiss them as lacking the steel to take on a professional outfit like Mumbai. I still believe that Tamil Nadu's batsmen had one off day, that there are enough tough nuts in the team capable of taking on the best in the land. What unfortunately happened

he was used less in the semifinal and final matches. Tamil Kumaran, who impressed with his pace and persistence, had to miss the final after sustaining a fracture. Young left hand batsman Sunil Viswanathan played a few crucial innings that helped Tamil Nadu reach the last four, but the selectors discarded him in the later rounds.

Murmurs were heard against the continued reign of Suresh as captain despite his lack of big scores. A talented batsman and an effective medium pacer, Suresh played some useful innings and picked up valuable wickets with his medium pace, but did not convert these into big scores or a bag full of victims. Perhaps the resultant pressure affected his captaincy.

Missing experience in the bowling department, Tamil Nadu were caught unawares in conditions good for batting. Injuries to key players and the loss of their lead players to national duty did not help. The better prepared team won.

● by V. RAMNARAYAN

ing spinner Ramkumar bowled steadily at best, and not so steadily at times. The other left arm spinner, Vidyut, was wayward to start with, but bowled a little better as the match progressed. Lacking a specialist off-spinner, Tamil Nadu turned to the occasional off-spin of Badrinath, who at one stage looked the most dangerous Tamil Nadu bowler. Captain Suresh looked a bewildered man on the field after his team's poor batting display, and seemed to be short of ideas with which to overcome the limitations of his bowling resources.

The Mumbai batsmen, on the other hand, gave a professional display, with the openers Wasim Jaffer and Vinayak

in the final was that they did not focus hard enough, did not show the *khadoos* attitude of the typical Mumbaikar.

Tamil Nadu were perhaps less than adequately prepared for the final, despite possessing superb support staff in coach B. Arun, physio Hansraj, trainer Basu, and other occasional guest resource persons as yoga, tai chi and aerobics coaches. In my opinion, there were too many changes in the playing eleven through the season. Off spinner Ganesh Kumar was in and out of the team and Vidyut, after missing the first two games, was rarely given a spell thereafter until the semifinal. Ramkumar, the leading spinner, was sometimes overbowed, yet

A promise overshadowed

(Continued from page 7)

Given the unimpeachable credentials of the personnel responsible for the various elements of the production, it was difficult to refrain from speculating about pressure exerted on them to dilute the ingredients of the heady brew on offer. Jayashree, an exciting talent approaching the peak of her career, sang as only she can, in vibrant voice charged with emotion. There was also at least one male voice that stood up to scrutiny, but the rest was lost in the predominance of tunes more in the cinema mould than in Carnatic classical or ancient pann music. Likewise, the compulsions to reach out to Tamil ears unschooled in the classical language of the past must have robbed Kanimozhi's lyrics of the kind of poetry that has brought her attention.

Hopefully, before the show travels to the US, its producers will subject it to intense reappraisal and give it an overhaul to help satisfy discerning audiences without losing out on popular appeal.

V. Ramnarayan

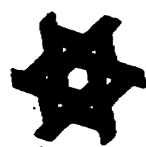
Answers to Quiz

1. Sedna; 2. Michael Kasprovicz. They were the 500th Test victims of the respective bowlers; 3. Pakistan; 4. It's the smallest polling station in the country; it had three voters in 1999 Lok Sabha elections and none now!; 5. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin; 6. Malaysia; 7. Sir Peter Ustinov; 8. Virender Sehwag became the first Indian batsman to score a triple-hundred in an innings; 9. Seven times (about 8000 km/h); 10. It housed the Tagore memorabilia which were stolen, leading to a global outcry.

* * *

11. Tirunelveli; 12. City Union Bank Limited; 13. He is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras; 14. Sivakasi; 15. Sivaganga; 16. *Clive House*; 17. Mumbai beat Tamil Nadu; 18. Balu Alaganan and S. Vasudevan; 19. e-Bill post service; 20. M.S. Subbulakshmi.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations:



Amalgamations Group



Ashok Leyland



Brakes India Limited



Go Placidly

KASTURI &
SONS
LTD.



CONSTRUCTION DIVISION
LARSEN & TOUBRO LIMITED

LOKAVANI
HALLMARK PRESS
PVT. LTD.



MURUGAPPA
GROUP

NNIPO
BATTERIES TORCHES



Rane Group

SAINT-GOBAIN
The future of glass. Since 1665.



Sundaram Finance
Limited



Sundram Fasteners
Limited



TATA
TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES



TVS MOTOR COMPANY



UCAL AUTO PRIVATE
LIMITED

Since 1856,
patently leaders
— A WELLWISHER