

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

Vol. XVII No. 14

November 1-15, 2007

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You can click only if you report that we are wearing very expensive and the latest designer outfits and jewellery...!

Lens attack

Someone is taking the phrase '15 seconds of fame' a bit too seriously, and Chennai has become dangerous as a result.

Random cameras are afloat, stalking you everywhere.

Everyone's fair game... even the non-celebrity, non-Chief-Guest, non-I-love-to-see-myself-in-print-or-TV types.

You may be out on innocuous, routine errands; or merely honouring an invitation to an event, or even at what you assumed was a private social gathering.

Within 24 hours, there is a good chance you'll find yourself in a newspaper (where apparently certain page numbers are of far greater significance than others) or magazine or TV channel – sometimes accompanied by captions being funny at your innocent expense.

Citizens are becoming furtive, glancing this way and that, trying to ensure the deadly camera is nowhere around – to capture the unguarded over-wide yawn or grin, the poor posture, the bored look, or that truly dreadful moment when you are trying to negotiate a large, or slippery, item of food into your mouth.

Some people now dress for vegetable shopping.

Can you blame them? This could be the day they do a story on cabbages... and you'd better not be wearing what you wore last week.

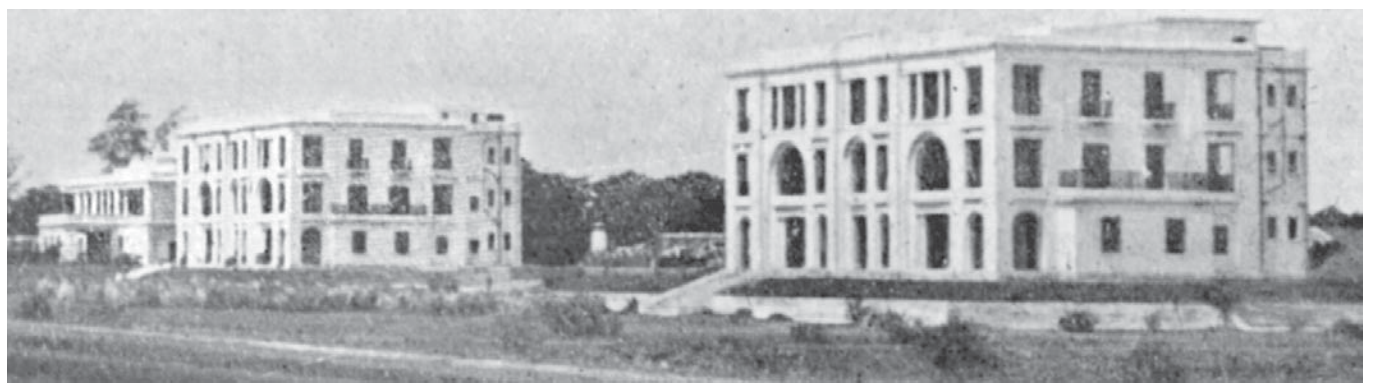
Big Brothers are all over... and they're watching.

But the leave-me-alone types have their rights too, to be...er...left alone.

Not everyone is into fame. (Or notoriety?)

Especially of the unsought kind.

Ranjitha Ashok



From left to right: Capper House, Pentland House (1915), and Stone House (1918) reveal the clean lines of Classical architecture on South Beach Road in 1919/20.

Classical no more at QMC?

(By A Staff Reporter)



In picture on left, Capper House as it was in 1919/20. On right, Capper House with all its additions before it was pulled down c. 2002. Below, the Kalaingar Block that has been planned to replace Capper House and which is promised to be "in keeping with the architecture" in the campus.



There was much excitement at Queen Mary's College (QMC) last month when the Minister for Local Administration, M.K. Stalin, laid the foundation stone for the Kalaingar Block, which will be the College's new main building. The new facility, comprising ground plus two floors, will come up on the site where once stood Capper House, which had been the main building for over 85 years.

Capper was a soldier and geographer in the 1800s. His house, the first on the beachfront, was later converted

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Ben's Gardens: Awaiting development?

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Ben's Gardens property, standing at the intersection of Boat Club and Chamier's Roads, is once again in the news. As is well known, the property was a part of what John de Monte, the wealthy Portuguese business magnate of the 19th Century, left to the Church. This huge legacy was to be managed by the Bishop, or Vicar General, of St. Thomé and his successors. The successor, with the changing shape of dioceses, has become the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore.

The original extent of the

property was 105 acre and was left with specific instructions that none of it ought to be sold and the income from it was to be used for the benefit of "Orphans, Widows and distressed Families...and also Charity Schools."

Subsequently, as and when the need arose, the Church did dispose of parts of the property, always after obtaining the permission of the High Court. Finally, what was left included nine acres called Ben's Gardens

which was leased to Parry and Co. till 1996. Originally having only one big bungalow, which could well have been the garden house of the property, it later hosted three bungalows built for the executives of Parry and Co. (now EID Parry).

It was decided by the Church to hand over the property on long lease in 2001 to two influential businessmen belonging to the Roman Catholic community. As the businessmen moved into the property, it was

whispered that the deal was not in keeping with the spirit of de Monte's will and some members of the community, led by M.G. Devasahayam, retired IAS officer, formed the Forum of Catholic Unity to protest. L.M. Menezes, a former IAS officer, who retired as Secretary to the Government of India, Joseph C. Kuriacose, a retired IIT professor holding a Doctor of Science degree from Louvain, Belgium, and Harold D'Silva, a retired senior executive of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd.,

(Continued on page 2)

Synes of Our Rodes

The *Man from Madras Musings* can never tire of this subject and, thanks to those who put up road signs and street names, there's no end to the subject. With the growing tendency among shops and establishments to sponsor boards bearing road and street names, the mutilation of names keeps increasing. MMM thought Pycroft's Garden Road and Jilvan Lodge Colony took the cake. But then he had not seen all. The latest is to do with Lazarus Church Road in the Foreshore Estate area. This is a fairly old street and the name is well-known. But a well-known boutique in the area has put up a board which proudly proclaims that it is "Loser's Church Road". Wonder what Lazarus would have thought of it? As for the residents, some of them are up in arms. A couple of lawyers who practise in the vicinity have informed the boutique to correct the name but to no avail. Perhaps it is not enough for lawyers to bring it to the boutique's notice. A lawyer's notice may be more effective!

And then what do you have to say about East Coach Road? A signal at Brodie's Castle junction declares that by turning to the right you can enter that thoroughfare. And so it goes on. Watch this space for more.

Puzzled in Padi

That was how *The Man from Madras Musings* felt when he, having stopped his car at the Padi Junction, wondered as to which way to turn. MMM was visiting the area after more than a year and on approaching the junction where the TVS group companies have their plants, he was surprised to find that the topography of the place had changed completely. There was nary a signboard in sight explaining directions. MMM recalled rather wistfully an old one that stood at that junction in days past and showed the way to Villivakkam, Ambattur and other places. Wondering where it has gone, MMM would have gone on standing there indefinitely had a bus driver not indicated to him

with word and gesture that he better move on or else. MMM did and promptly got lost. *The Man from Madras Musings'* Lady has often remarked that if MMM has a weakness (and she can list quite a few), it is inability to ask anyone for directions. But a passing cyclist noticed MMM's predicament and came forward to help and so if you are reading this column you have only the cyclist to thank (or blame).

Building a flyover is all very well, but does it have to involve removing every road sign in the vicinity so that people are thoroughly confused, thereby adding to the chaos caused by the construction? Also, MMM would like to know what exactly is the status of the project. He recalls a presentation made by the then chief of the Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation a couple of years ago, wherein a rather optimistic power point presentation showed a beautiful clover leaf-shaped flyover with verdant greenery, angelic road users, orderly traffic, pedestrian pathways (oh, can you believe that), kiosks and such things predicted for Padi. It only needed a couple of waterfalls, a few cherubs and seraphs and a couple sporting under a fruit tree to indicate that it was Eden. The TNRDC chief had confidently asserted that the flyover would be completed in a few months, the exact figure of which escapes MMM's mind. But that deadline is obviously long gone.

At present the structure resembles a rather badly resurrected dinosaur's skeleton with a few key bones missing. MMM looks forward to the day when it will be all over and done with.

Ambattur horrors

The Man from Madras Musings has often written about the pathetic condition of roads in the city's industrial estates. The excuse often given for their condition by the powers-that-be is that these roads take a beating thanks to the heavy vehicles that ply on them. Now what other kind of vehicle is expected to use a

road in an industrial estate is not clear to MMM.

Heritage lovers of Madras that is Chennai, however, will be glad to note that if one place is unchanging it is Ambattur Industrial Estate. The roads are as battered as ever and the strips of land beyond the road, meant for sidewalks at one time, are as full of refuse as ever. It appears that every organisation in the estate uses these spaces to dump its filth and this includes the IT companies that are rapidly filling up the estate, thereby causing land prices to skyrocket. Come the rains and the roads can only get worse.

And this is meant to be a pioneering estate in our city!

T' Nagar one-ways

The Man from Madras Musings has not yet found time to visit the place, what with his having just returned from Padi and Ambattur, but he hears nothing but praise for



the present traffic arrangements from those who use the Panagal Park/Usman Road area. To MMM, never at its best when it comes to understanding directions, it all appeared as confusing as ever. But those in the know claim that the changes have brought down the chaos considerably. Large areas have become more or less exclusive to pedestrians and many roads are one-way, with specific spaces earmarked for parking vehicles. The autorickshaws, always a menace on the roads, have been prohibited from using certain stretches. And, what's more, these restrictions are being strictly enforced by a posse of policemen and several private security personnel.

While MMM has taken his informants' views as correct — though readers of *Madras Musings* may have other views — it only buttresses MMM's long-standing demand for de-



One of the city's rode synes.

claring the four Mada Streets around Mylapore temple a pedestrian area. If it can be done in T' Nagar, why not in Mylapore also? The area is simply crying out for such a restriction and during the recent Navaratri festivities the chaos there had to be seen to be believed. Shops there cannot claim any loss of sale because of such restrictions for the shops in T' Nagar have not seen any reduction in business owing to the new traffic regulations there. MMM lives in hope.

Dredging drains

The road where *The Man from Madras Musings* lives is at a fork, one prong of which is a vital artery leading to Adyar. Traffic rumbles along on it day in and day out. Came a day when the laying of drains, which is now proceeding apace in the city and like all digs appears to be just one step ahead of the monsoons, reached this particular stretch.

The *modus operandi* for the work to begin was quite simple. 9.00 am, which as everyone, except the police and the PWD, appears to recognise as peak traffic time, was selected as the auspicious hour. At the appointed time, two burly law enforcers came along and, by the simple act of moving two metal barricades across the road, declared it out of bounds. Traffic on both sides came to a halt. As usual there had been no prior announcements either in the local tabloids, or in the form of roadside signboards and it was an on-the-spot shock for most of those driving along, generating no emotion other than pure road rage in their hearts and minds. The ensuing gridlock lasted a few hours during which the road diggers dug, car and bus drivers honked, argued and abused, and the

police stood by unconcerned. After all, this world is but an illusion, as the good book says, and it is best to take such matters in our stride.

Planning ahead

The city, as *The Man from Madras Musings* could see on a recent journey, is rapidly growing along the road to Chengalpattu. And yet, while the four-lane road there is excellent, we appear to be repeating the same mistakes that we have committed earlier in the city.

The land earmarked for future expansion on either side is occupied by illegal shops, tenements and flag-posts bearing political party insignia and it will be only a short while before these spill on to the road and choke it. As it is, most junctions which just a few years ago used to be easy to drive past have become busy traffic intersections. Can steps not be taken to ensure that the roadsides are kept clear of encroachments so that any expansion in future need not be delayed due to court cases, high profile demolitions and road rOKOS in protest?

The road runs parallel to the railway track on one side and the city is developing on the other side. Most rail users today simply cut across the road endangering their own lives owing to high medians and also the high speed traffic. Perhaps it is time for the government to begin working on subways from stations to the other side of the road to ensure road safety. It is easier to get this work done now when the traffic is still manageable. But then such planned activity does not bring in votes. Unless some heat and dust and much noise are generated, how does it benefit those in power?

— MMM

Ben's Gardens: Awaiting development?

(Continued from page 1)

filed a suit in the High Court in February 2002 to set right "the mismanagement" of the Trust properties. The convener, Devasahayam, also impleaded himself.

In the meanwhile, a kinsman of de Monte, Ian McDonald Fennhahn Cain, resident of Houston, USA, filed a third party suit praying for the reconstitution of the de Monte Trust

and also identifying the lost properties and restoring them to the original purposes for which they were meant. The Archdiocese tried defending its deal of Rs. 75 crore for leasing out 150 grounds of Ben's Gardens to the Sathyabhama University. The Court in its judgement of 2006 struck down the deal. However, it is evident the University is yet to vacate the premises, as the University's vehicles are still found parked in the property.

The second deal involving 50 grounds was with the MGM Diamond Beach Resort and was for 50 years at a cost of Rs. 12.5 crore. The Forum of Catholic Unity is still fighting this.

In the meanwhile, the Archdiocese called for sealed bids on the property that was originally to be leased out to Sathyabhama University. This bid was for a lease for 66 years and was awarded to Nitesh Estates for a value of Rs 642 crore. The

bidder has plans for putting up a five star hotel, a mall and an office complex on the property. However, the Church is yet to seek the permission of the Court to proceed with the matter. With the University not having vacated the premises, it is anybody's guess as to what will happen to the place now.

However, what is surprising is the assumption of the developer that permission will be given for commercially de-

veloping the place on such an ambitious scale. It should be pointed out that the University had plans for putting up a hospital on the site and that this was struck down. In what way will the proposed development be any different, considering the narrow roads there that are already under severe pressure? But such considerations cannot amount to much when the real estate is so valuable in the city!



Ignoring the past

Chennai Heritage needs to be commended for initiating 'catalytic efforts' to clean up the polluted waterways of Chennai. But this can never happen if Chennai Heritage and 'Chennai's opinion makers' decide to succumb to sudden amnesia on the history of past efforts.

It is one thing to generally bemoan the past failures of political and bureaucratic will and quite another to suppress the scandalous failure of the Rs.1000 crore Chennai Waterways Project funded by the Central Government under the National Rivers Conservation Project, which has been under implementation for almost a decade, right under our noses.

This is what the Comptroller and Auditor General of India has to say in his report for the year ending March 31, 2007:

"The Project aimed at alleviation of floods and abatement of water pollution in Chennai city by increasing the carrying capacity, resettling the families living on the banks, and prevention of pollution of the waterways. Many works essential to the achievement of the twin objectives were not included in the Project and all flood relief works included in the Project were not sanctioned for execution. Poor coordination between various implementation agencies delayed the execution of flood defence works and sewage continues to pollute the waterways even after completion of the sewerage components contemplated in the Project. Consequently, the Project was a failure even after execution for seven years and an expenditure of Rs. 621 crore.

"The Project components were executed by the PWD, the Chennai Corporation, the TNSCB, the CMWSSB and the CMDA.

"The Project as a whole was monitored by the CMDA. The High Level Committee, headed by the Chief Secretary of the State, was constituted in 2001."

Apart from shoddy project planning and implementation and project mismanagement, the CAG of India has also brought to notice financial irregularities.

None of this appears to have been seriously discussed or noted in the two meetings organised by the Chennai Heritage with Dr. Bimal Patel of the Sabarmati Water Front Development Project, Ahmadabad.

However well-meaning the intentions of Chennai Heritage, what we first need is a thorough enquiry into the Chennai Waterways Project by an independent body, which should include outside experts and civil society representatives, to fix responsibility for the multiple failures in the Project, the enormous wastage of public funds and the financial irregularities, and recommend steps to hold all the officials involved accountable.

If we do not demand this, we would be guilty of sweeping ten years and Rs.1000 crore under the carpet, pretending that we are starting on a clean slate, and be living in a fool's paradise if we think that the next project will not meet the same fate.

L.M. Menezes

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The issues mentioned by Reader Menezes were mentioned at both meetings, even if in not as detailed a fashion as stated above. But Reader Menezes must also keep in mind that Chennai Heritage is not a watchdog organisation. We wonder whether Transparency India is. If it is, then it would be up to it to take up the matter. As for CAG reports, who is meant to act on them? Governments or the citizenry?

The Texan way

During my recent visit to Texas, I had the good fortune to visit the tourist paradise of San Antonio. The famous River Walk (Paseo del Rio) is a wonderful attraction for tourists — yet the river is not even as wide as our Buckingham Canal (for details visit www.thesanantonioriverwalk.com).

While enjoying the world-famous River Walk (below street

Enforcement is what's needed

It is unfortunate that the Chennai Corporation is proceeding with the beautification project of Elliot's Beach unmindful of the various criticisms levelled against the project by citizens of Chennai and particularly the residents of Besant Nagar.

There is a widespread feeling that the Chennai Corporation will be wasting several lakhs of rupees in this so-called beautification project. The immediate question that comes to mind is how can anyone beautify nature at all.

Elliot's Beach is an awful sight at present due to very poor maintenance and lack of cleanliness. I have seen people even urinating on the beach, particularly during the Velankanni festival. Spitting on the beach is commonplace. The hawkers are there everywhere, selling all sorts of products, including food that is either packed or unpacked and not certified. Spending tens of lakhs of rupees is not required to solve these problems.

The Corporation is not in a position to evict the hawkers whose number is increasing every day and is said to be negotiating with them "to buy peace", while relocating them on the Beach sand itself.

The Corporation is not even able to maintain the avenue trees on the Beach Road. Every

year, during the pre-monsoon period, it plants saplings which wither away after a few weeks due to lack of any attention. Even the existing street lights are not being maintained properly and in several places the area is often dark.

The Corporation and the Police frequently allow cinema shootings to take place, with considerable noise and other associated problems. This makes one wonder as to whether the authorities have any desire to maintain a beautiful beach at all.

One easy method to make the beach more environmental-friendly is to ban the plying of two-wheelers, three-wheelers and four-wheelers on the beach, insisting that the visitors should only walk to the beach from a distance of one kilometre. I doubt whether the Chennai Corporation can enforce even this simple measure.

If the Corporation proceeds with its so-called beautification project, we will see in the next few years an Elliot's Beach full of commercial activities and artificial structures, marring the natural beauty and wiping out the image of Elliot's Beach as a beautiful beach, for all time.

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Issues not addressed

The Corporation seems to have adopted an architect's plan and a version of it is put up at the gym on the beach. However, no details have been made public. A company bidding for the project is to be chosen to implement it — and that is expected to happen soon.

A few issues are unclear/not addressed.

1. Little is said about addressing the current issues of the beach.

Hawkers' management and sales, garbage clearance, urination, sewage provisions, pollution from the *kuppam* areas and from the beach road region (where rainwater runs off into the sands), cleaning the dirty shore side. How does the civic body plan to address these issues?

2. It is not clear, many people say, why a natural beach needs beautification. Should the Corporation's monies be set aside for beach cleanliness, provision of toilets, drinking water

and day-to-day management, or merely spent on lawns, pergolas and seats?

3. Existing issues on the beach have not been addressed: the Schmidt Memorial will crash any day, hawkers have doubled and the *kuppams* do not have any sewage management system, so sewage is let into the beach. Shouldn't the Corporation address these too? When and how?

4. We sense that the Corporation wants to get on with the work come what may. Is there still a need for a final debate/discussion or is public money to be spent the way officials think it should? Does a protest campaign have a role to play in such issues? Or is there need for something else?

Vincent D' Souza

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level and bordered by lush gardens and trees), the San Antonio river which winds through downtown is home to many attractions, points of interest, shops and restaurants. I could not but recall the condition of waterways in Chennai and long for our city administrators to emulate and develop the opportunities in Chennai.

Returning to Chennai, I was happy to read about Chennai Heritage presenting the Ahmadabad way as a possible pointer to showcasing our waterways. I had the good fortune to visit Ahmadabad in December 2006 (my earlier visit was in 1958) and I could see for myself the magnificent changes brought about by the Narmada Project. We should take a cue from it to create a Singara Chennai.

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The 'X' factor

Reader M.K. Chubby Raj has mentioned (MM, October 16th) the 'X' factor in Sri Thyagaraja's *Keerthanas*. This 'X' factor is nothing but pure devotion and spontaneous out-

pouring of the soul. His *kritis* reflect the mood of the saint and the *ragas* are also indicative of his feelings and moods. That is why they stand the test of time and enthral the listeners, if sung soulfully like M.S. did.

T.M. Sundararaman

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Change bus policy

It is a known fact that private companies run buses to various places in Tamil Nadu under the guise of what is popularly called 'omnibuses'. The buses are modern, clean and well maintained. The charges are also higher. Most of these buses operate only at night and cater to thousands of the travelling public all over Tamil Nadu.

Our nation is going through a phase of liberalisation where the Government, both at the Centre and State, is throwing open various sectors for participation by the private sector. If that be the case, why not open up the transport sector for private participation? It is a known fact that Government, in spite of augmenting its bus services, is unable to cater to present passenger traffic even during nor-

mal days. In the case of the omnibus operators they are paying all types of road taxes depending on the passenger-carrying capacity of the buses. But then why should these operators run buses only at night?

The important aspect of the whole problem is that there is no transparent Transport Policy.

Considering the future, it is time the Government came out with a clear-cut Road Transport Policy allowing healthy participations of private companies in both long and short distance travels throughout the State. I hope the outcome of this policy will be a just fare structure as well as well marked parking facilities for private vehicles in existing bus stands. It would also create well recognised cafeteria and multi-various facilities for passengers along various routes all over Tamil Nadu. In the long run, thousands of travelling public will be benefited by such foresighted and policy. Will the Government urgently act?

S. Shanker Dev

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READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more hand written letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

— THE EDITOR

Feminism in the 20th Century

Madras was perhaps the first city in India to launch movements for the betterment of women. It also started much early in Madras compared to other urban cities. The movement was started by some enthusiastic males, in an attempt to raise women's literacy, which would help prevent child marriage and give young widows the opportunity to earn a livelihood. In 1854, one Gopala Krishna Pillai approached the Government for financial assistance to help run the girls' school that he started two years earlier.

Upper caste men wanted their spouses to be educated more as a symbol of social status rather than to really uplift or empower women. But a side effect was the growth of a class of thinking women.

In addition, there were in the early 20th Century revolutionary writers and poets who sang the praise of women and sought their uplift, like Subramania Bharati. In the last decades of 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, there were over forty journals in Madras alone publishing articles written on and by women. A journal started in 1899 that ran for 18 years was *Mathar Manjari - Andappurathu Tamizh Itazh*, dedicated to women readers; it seems to have had even the support of the Government. One C.S. Ramaswami edited the magazine. *Andhappuram* is a place reserved for women in large houses and bungalows and, therefore, the magazine must have been intended for the well-to-do women of society. However, the magazine focussed on education, marriage reforms, equal rights, and awareness among women through education.

It was about this time that the Tamil novel became an influential medium to convey the ideas. Respected male writers also used their pen to inculcate the idea of necessity of women education. The shining example is the treatise by Vedanayakam Pillai, titled

Pen Kalvi which is in the form of an address to his daughters. Even in his famous novel *Pratapa Mudaliar Charithram*, he made the heroine, who had an independent mind, more learned than the hero. Similarly, A. Madhaviah, another pioneer novelist of Tamil, in his novel *Padmavati Charitram*, criticised and condemned the neglect of girls' education, the tonsure of widows, and pre-puberty marriages. Thus was born an era of awakening for women's uplift, though in a very small measure and restricted to urban area. When Vai. Mu. Kodainayaki Ammal, who never had a formal education, wanted to write, she bought in 1925 a magazine, *Jaganmohini*, a Tamil monthly, to express herself.

When the Congress met in Madras in 1908, the women's meeting was organised separately, presided over by Maharani Gayatri Devi of Vizianagaram. The formation of Hindu Ladies' Association was praised at this session. However, in the beginning, it was only the well-to-do women who benefited by all this. The advent of service to the less fortunate women and children was by the likes of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and that was what brought about real uplift.

Annie Besant's Women's Indian Association (WIA) which was founded on May 8, 1917, became the torchbearer of the women's movement. The service-oriented Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Mangalamma Sadasivier, Herabai Tata, Sarojini Naidu and others guided the movement.

From time to time in the fortnights that follow, some of the leaders in the women's movement will be focussed on. I start with Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy this fortnight.

K.R.A.N.

who delivered the boy after a great deal of difficulty as the child was in a difficult position. Muthulakshmi later said that when the child was still to be delivered, Mudaliar strived to listen to its heartbeat using a wooden stethoscope.

It was when she went to feed the poor in Dr. Vardappa Naidu's Home for Destitute Children, on her child's *Vidhyabyasam Day*, that her life took a new turn. The plight of the poor children made her to feel she had to do something about them.

When her youngest sister developed some problems, later diagnosed as cancer, and passed away at a very young age in 1923, Muthulakshmi was determined to do something to tackle the scourge of cancer.

When she got a chance to study abroad, she had to forego a handsome income by way of practice, and yet she undertook the trip with her husband and children, Rammohan and Krishnamurthy. She wanted to study cancer and how to deal with it. Her younger sister, Nallamuthu, was already in London on a scholarship at the London School of Economics. When she was in England, her only brother, Ramaiah, who she left to look after her house in India, suddenly died in 1925.

In June 1926, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy attended the International Congress of Women in Paris as a delegate from India. Shortly afterwards, she returned to India and was chosen by the Women's Indian Association for a seat in the Legislative Council of Madras. When elected unanimously, she was the first woman legislator in the world! The Council was the first to pass a resolution giving the right of franchise for women. She was also the first Alderwoman and remained so from 1937 to 1939.

While practising in Madras, she became a visiting doctor to a home run by Sister Subbulakshmi and began taking active interest in the welfare of destitute women and children. She was instrumental in bringing about the legislation for prevention of child marriage. In fact, Haribilas Sarda, who was the first one to suggest such an act (and in whose name the act was passed) wrote to her, congratulating her and asking for details of her speech which could be used in the Assembly when it came up for debate.

The next problem she tackled was that of the *devadasis*. The bill for abolition of Devadasi system was passed after much debate in February 1929. The law regarding Inam lands to be given to the *devadasis* without further service was held up till 1947, though she moved it as early as 1937. Dr. Muthulakshmi

(Continued on page 8)

The first woman M.B. & Ch.M., she freed the *devadasis*

When Narayanaswami Iyer married Chandramma, of the *devadasi* community, it created a sensation in the princely State of Pudukkottai. To them was born Muthulakshmi, when Chandramma was just 16 years old. Of the eight children she bore, four died as infants. Her only surviving son Ramaiah became an advocate. Another daughter, Nallamuthu, learned English, went on to study in the UK, became a professor in Queen Mary's College and, later, its first Indian Principal. The other daughter, Sundarambal, became proficient in Tamil and took to music.

Differently destined Muthulakshmi started her education in the pial school of Pudukkottai. After 13th year of her age, she could not go to school and, therefore, studied at home tutored by good teachers, and was allowed by Principal (famous mathematician Radhakrishna Iyer) to attend laboratory classes in the college, though not a student. In 1902 Muthulakshmi passed matriculation.

When she happened to see the photographs of two girls in Graduate gowns from Madras (Kamala and Krishnamma, both Telugu Brahmins converted to Christianity), she started dreaming about graduation! But her father with his meagre pension could not send

her out of Pudukkottai, and the men's college originally refused permission. Learning about this from her father, the Maharaja passed an order exempting her case and she was admitted - the first girl student for higher studies and she would be one of the class-mates of the great Satyamuurthi who later was to argue against her motion in the Assembly (her father Narayanaswami was the granduncle of thespian Gemini Ganesh)!

Against her mother's wishes, Muthulakshmi refused to get married and wanted to continue her studies. At a nearby



Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy.

reached Madras than she heard that her cousin, who had been delivered of a baby girl, had passed away. This gave her further impetus to study medicine.

As there was no hostel for

to the Congress. Along with Sarojini Naidu she attended one of Annie Besant's speeches under the Banyan tree in Adyar and became greatly drawn to the Home Rule movement.

In college, she was brilliant, stood first in the university examination and got the M.B. & Ch.M. degree. When she was doing her house surgeonship in Government Hospital for Women and Children in Egmore, the British nurses did not like the idea of working under an Indian! She managed to get them to like her.

In February 1913, Dr. T. Sundara Reddy, the first Indian F.R.C.S. and a well-known surgeon serving in the King George Hospital in Vizagapatam, hearing about the first Hindu woman doctor, wrote to her father for her hand.

Worried about her age (she was already 26 years old), her mother did not want to miss this chance. But Muthulakshmi would have none of it; she wanted to serve as a doctor and did not want to be drawn into the responsibilities of married life. However, after having spoken to Reddy, she changed her mind and they were married in April 1914 under the Brahmo Samaj Act of 1872. He joined the Pudukkottai Hospital.

Muthulakshmi was delivered of her first child on December 23, 1914. It was the famous Dr. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar

• The early feminists of Madras by K.R.A. NARASIAH

An occasional series

Ganapathi shrine she would daily pray for this, as she was an ardent devotee of Lord Ganapathi. An old student of her father, Srinivasa Rao, a student of Madras Medical College, suggested she could study medicine. When she saw her mother's suffering, she felt she should study medicine, especially after seeing an American Doctor Van-Allen who called on their family.

In spite of opposition from her mother, Muthulakshmi's father brought her to Madras in 1907 for admission into Medical College. No sooner she

women, P.S. Krishnaswamy Iyer helped them to get a house next to his (he was the father of Prof. Swaminathan and Dr. Sanjeevi) and he and his wife took care of young Muthulakshmi till her family shifted to Madras.

When she went to Dr. Nanjunda Rao's palatial house, she was surprised to find a handloom using which Rao's wife and daughters would weave! She was impressed by their simplicity in spite of their being rich, and began to look to Dr. Nanjunda Rao for advice. It was in his house that she met Sarojini Naidu and was drawn

Nature Study

Vanishing sparrows and changing environment

The house sparrow is one of the most common song birds in the world. It finds mention in most of our mythologies and folklore, along with such birds as the common crows and eagles.

In South India, it is considered a good omen if the house sparrow builds a nest inside the house. House sparrows faithfully followed man wherever he went.

The house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) belongs to the family Passeridae. The length of the bird is 14 to 16 cm, it weighs about 26 to 32 gram and the wing span is 19 to 25 cm. Grey and black are the dominant body colours of the bird. It is gregarious in nature, irrespective of seasons.

The house sparrow is an omnivorous bird and its primary

food includes seeds and insects. In urban areas, it eats insects, spiders, berries, seeds, flower buds and scraps of food and other waste left by humans.

It is a monogamous bird and breeds mainly in cavities such as tree holes and nest box. The nests of these birds have been found in protected locations such as beams, gutters, roofs, ledges, roof space and top storeys of the buildings. Nests are often found at heights of 8 to 30 feet off the ground, which may offer additional predator protection. Both sexes help in the nest-building activities.

● by Dr. T. Sundaramoorthy

House sparrows lay 3 to 6 eggs, with an incubation period of 10-12 days, the shortest incubation period of all birds. A pair of house sparrows raises 2 or 3 broods each year.

Until recent times, people did not use chemical insecti-

cides in their gardens. The lawns in big compounds were of the native variety of grass, which grew fast and needed constant mowing. This kind of grass was sturdy and needed no pampering, except for a good spray of water. These lawns also harboured many insects. The sparrows foraged for insect larvae in these lawns to feed their young.

Today, in urban areas all gardens are liberally sprayed with

insecticides and fungicides and the native lawn grass has been replaced by the shorter Mexican grass. This grass needs the support of fertilisers and plant protection sprays and does not harbour any insects.

Apart from this contributing to the decline of sparrows in urban areas, there could be other reasons like high automobile pollution which has a residual effect on the eggs of sparrows. It has also been observed in other countries that eggs have become thin-shelled. Higher noise pollution might have also affected them.

In the last three decades, the house sparrow has increasingly become rarer in many places in the world — especially in the urban areas. Since the population of this species has declined in the UK, the government declared this species as 'Birds of Conservation Concern'. A recent study conducted by the

British Trust of Ornithology reveals a 50% decline in the population of house sparrows in farmlands. In London, there is a 60% decline in the population of house sparrows.

Apart from pesticides, increasing pollution levels, both in the urban and suburban areas, other factors for the decrease in population are:

- Loss of nesting sites
- Reduction in the availability of food and nesting sites
- Change in building designs.

Only a few studies are available in India, but their results indicate considerable reduction in the urban population of house sparrows. This decline may be due to changes in our architecture (not using roof tiles) and in the cropping patterns (less grain, more insecticide usage, and less caterpillars). The effects of pollution and pesticide contamination are yet to be studied in detail.

This decrease of the most common bird species in the world, indicative of the impact of environmental change, is cause for real concern. (Courtesy: *Eco News*, the journal of the CPR Environmental Education Centre.)

Can snakes predict earthquakes?

Reports have appeared in the press occasionally of the queer behaviour of different species of mammals and birds ahead of earthquakes, even as humans had no idea of the impending doom. Similar reports had also come after the tsunami of December 2004. The earliest such account seems to be of earthquake in 373 BC which wrecked the Roman port city of Helice. According to the Roman scholar, Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), one of the signs of a coming earthquake is "the excitation and terror of animals with no apparent reason."

There are accounts of such phenomena down to the present times. Most of the observations, understandably, relate to cats and dogs, farm animals and commonly seen birds. The historian Diodorus Siculus records animals leaving the city of Helice in droves days ahead of the earthquake of 373 BC much to the puzzlement of the human inhabitants. And, in this exodus, he includes snakes also. On February 4, 1975, there was a major earthquake in the Liaoning province of China causing widespread damage and loss of lives. This had been preceded for some two months by unusual behaviour of many species of animals and birds. It had been reported in this context that "snakes came out of hibernation, crawled from their burrows and froze to death on the snow-covered surface."

Various theories have been advanced to explain this phenomenon but none that will stand scrutiny. There has been no detailed or consistent research on this, except some attempts by the Chinese State Seismological Bureau from the 1970s and some studies by Rupert Sheldrake and Daniel Jay Brown in California from the 1980s which have not led to any significant findings so far.*

This note has been occasioned by a report from Reuters that appeared in *The Hindu Business Line* of December 29, 2006 on the observations made by the earthquake bureau in Nanning,

capital of the Guangxi autonomous region in Southern China, about the curious behaviour of snakes before an earthquake. "Of all the creatures on earth, snakes are perhaps the most sensitive to earthquake," bureau director Jiang Weisong was quoted as saying. Jiang said snakes could sense an earthquake 120 km away, three to five days before it happens. Their erratic behaviour would be an indication of the quake to come. A report in *The Hindu* of January 12, 2007, based on the same source, further quotes Jiang as follows: "When an earthquake is about to occur, snakes will move out of their 'nests' even in the cold of winter. If this earthquake is a big one, the snakes will even smash into walls while trying to escape. By installing cameras over the 'snake nests', we have improved our ability to forecast earthquakes."

Visitors to zoos

In the preface to his book *Life at the Zoo* (2004), Phillip T. Robinson says: "...more Americans are reported to visit zoos and aquariums annually than attend all major professional sporting events combined, with present numbers approaching 140 million. Worldwide attendance at zoos and aquariums (in a year) is estimated at 600 million people."

It will be interesting to know the corresponding figures for India.

The simian context

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the philosopher, was one of the earliest proponents of evolutionary theories, even preceding Charles Darwin in some respects, and is credited with coining the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. Col. R. Meinertzhagan (*Diary of a Black Sheep*, 1964) has this story to tell about Spencer who was a frequent visitor to his mother's house: "On one occasion I asked Spencer if he believed that we were descended from monkeys. His reply was, "About 99 per cent of humanity have Descended from monkeys and one per cent have Ascended." — (Courtesy: *Cobra*, the journal of the Snake Park Trust.)

B. Vijayaraghavan

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For matters regarding subscriptions, donations, non-receipt of receipts etc.: Chennai Heritage, 5, Bhattad Tower, 30, West Cott Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014.

For non-receipt of copies, change of address, and all other circulation matters: MADRAS MUSINGS, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

On editorial matters: The Editor, MADRAS MUSINGS, C/o Lokavani Southern Printers Pvt. Ltd., 62/63, Greames Road, Chennai 600 006.

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— THE EDITOR

* *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home and Other Unexplained Powers of Animals* by Rupert Sheldrake (Hutchinson, London, 1999), particularly the chapter captioned 'Forebodings of earthquakes and other disasters'.

Some improvements in Adyar Poonga plans, but...

One recent Sunday morning, seated under a mighty banyan, with parakeets screeching merrily above, members of the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) listened to Chennai Corporation's consultant from Auroville, Joss Brooks, share his thoughts on what he plans for the Adyar Poonga. He spoke of 60% wetlands incorporated into the plans, of restoration of ecology that cannot happen without people's support, and on how environmental education initiatives have brought 7000 children to visit the Adyar Poonga area in the last few months! Preliminary interaction over, members were escorted and guided on an over two-hour tour of the Poonga area.

The proposed Education Centre will "play a supportive role in restoration work". They will also use a Sustainable Schools Programme, Continuing Education Programmes, Art Classes for Nature Studies and a Bird Watchers' Study Group. The conversion of the Poonga space into an ecologically significant and sustainable one involves "phased eradication of *Proscopis juliflora*, implementation of a water management plan, the deepening of existing water-logged areas to create a stormwater reservoir, and the introduction of appropriate floral biodiversity."

The Adyar Poonga project, however, has been going through protracted wrangling over environmental issues between various ecogroups and the Government representatives. I record below a few opinions of some MNS members who have been witness to the happenings in the area, pre- and post-project proposal period.

K. V. Sudhakar, Secretary, MNS, says, "The recent cleaning and protection has encouraged the regeneration of indigenous species and has seen the area to the west of the Poonga begin to support birds like cormorants and night herons. Spotbill ducks and Water hens too! This is a definite improvement over what it was a couple of years ago. But by just fencing the area off and hoping

the estuary returns to the natural state it was decades ago, is there not a chance that we might lose it altogether, especially in a land-starved city like Chennai where real estate prices for prime land are zooming upward? For any project like this to succeed, it must have public support. Walkways are necessary for public movement to ensure that the area does not regress. And a few compromises may be necessary for a good cause – sensitising thousands of people to the environment.

"But safeguards need to be built into the whole plan, including the active participation of a Working Citizens' Committee that is involved at every step of the plan. Absolute transparency is necessary."

The apprehension is that the eco-park will be a park like any other place for recreation, with manicured gardens, plenty of concrete structures, including walkways, not to mention electrical lighting – all of which will make it as unnatural as it can possibly be. A senior member says, "The projected plans are good, but interventions need to be minimal, with a focus on protecting the bird and wildlife. Also careful thought is needed about the estuarine ecosystem that has already been modified over the years. What is going to be done should not drive out the smaller micro-organisms that are food for the birds. Walkways need to be very care-

fully planned, so as not to scare away the birds. It is important to have no artificial lighting that will disorient and frighten them away. Winding down all activities by sundown, like in the Guindy National Park, is necessary. Also important is the aspect of maintenance when the project is completed. If sensitivity to environmental issues and maintenance is lacking, the whole exercise and the funds that go into it will be pointless."

Says veteran naturalist Jagannatha Rao, "Definitely a positive beginning, looked at it in the context of the generation. In these last 35 years, for

● by
SHOBHA MENON

the first time, I see hope of educating politicians on the usefulness of such a project. Enough funds have been allocated, and they are ready to listen to the ecologists. This project could be the start of helping people get back to feeling for the environment and see it happen. Initiating interest in the environment is important, coupled with practical experience. But such large projects must be taken for what they are, with 'a pinch of salt'. To help the thoughts of youngsters get going must be the main focus."

Many naturalists agree on the choice of development and

feel "better an eco-park than any of the other horrifying possibilities". And the project planners having a reliable reputation under their belt, in the form of eco-restoration in the Pondicherry area that makes them more credible, they feel. "The question is what kind of a park we are willing to settle for. Since the government seems bent on 'developing' that area, instead of having some ghastly theme parks/waterparks or having some multi-storied monstrosity there, we have what seems a sensitively planned ecopark that includes the people in the planning," feels Chithra Viswanathan.

Dr. T. Murugavel, reviewing what's been happening, says, "Restoring the creek to its pristine condition is impossible. However, it is good to note that an attempt has been made to re-establish some faunal and floral characteristics of this ecosystem. I am aware that the plan has undergone a lot of changes based on scientific and public opinions. The earlier plan had 60% of land and 40% water. But now it is 60% of water and 40% of land, which is a welcome change. An inspection of the creek area will indicate that though it is more of an estuarine ecosystem, it also has two natural freshwater ponds. The planners need to give serious thoughts to these aspects too. Also there is a need to create a sand bar to prevent the high

tides entering and, at the same time, allowing only the spring tide – which again is a natural phenomenon. As regard the flora, I understand the planners are planning to have pertinent coastal species – mostly mangroves and its associates only. If all these are planned and executed scientifically the Poonga is a good idea. The Poonga area may be divided into a buffer zone and a core area to restrict human interference. The public should be restricted only to certain areas where there is minimal contact with the birds that might breed here (even now we have night herons, little egrets and cormorants breeding). Only serious bird watchers or researchers approved by some Society or educational institution should be allowed into the core area. Maintenance and management will also be areas of concern in future. The government should not view or maintain the Poonga like the Corporation parks and it also should not indulge in activities like constructing roads on the coastal zones, that might have an impact on the fragile estuary and creek ecosystem."

One final suggestion on the Eco Park (by a member) is the "the need for a multi-institutional citizens' monitoring committee that should not just be for this project but for the overall environmental health and sustainability of Chennai and its immediate surroundings..."

CLASSICAL NO MORE AT QMC?

(Continued from page 1)

into Capper House Hotel, the first beachfront hotel. In 1915, the Government rented and later acquired what had by then become a run-down property for the Madras College for Women founded in 1914. This was the second women's college in South India and Madras's first. It was re-named Queen Mary's College in 1917.

For long, *Capper House* survived, with classes and offices cheek-by-jowl in it. Additional buildings came up, thanks to the vigorous campaign of Miss de la Hey, the first Principal, with Governor Lord Pentland. *Pentland House* in 1915, *Stone House* in 1918 and *Jeypore House* in 1921, all in the Classical style and harmonising with *Capper House*, thus came up. Neighbouring *Beach House*, the

residence of Sir S. Subramania Aiyar, was acquired in 1920, together with another house on the Marina.

The oldest of these buildings, *Capper House*, definitely merited heritage status, but, as is common with such buildings in the city, it was neglected till a part of it collapsed in the rains in 2000. And then, with not a word to anyone and no hue and cry, it was pulled down in 2002/3.

In 2003, the State Government's, hasty and ill-conceived decision to move the State Secretariat out of Fort St. George into the QMC campus was met with a spirited protest by the students, ensuring that the move to take over the College premises was abandoned. The next Government promised reconstruction of *Capper House* and the recent founda-

tion stone ceremony is the result.

During the recent event it was announced that QMC would be elevated to the status of an University and Rs 2.5 crore would be spent in building the new block which would house 87 classrooms, a library and other facilities. In addition, Rs. 50 lakh was sanctioned for renovating the other buildings in the campus.

While it was publicly promised that the new block would be in keeping with the architecture in the campus, any hope of seeing a building sympathetic in design to the other buildings in the campus – and *Capper House* itself – which is what conservationists would have hoped for, is now dead. A sketch of the proposed building has a dome and much of the mish-mash which today passes for the colo-

rial style in Chennai. What is even more ironic is that those involved in the project claim that the renovation will be in the Indo-Saracenic style, forgetting that *Capper House* itself did not belong to that style of architecture, nor does the proposed building.

The College authorities are undoubtedly delighted that new facilities are coming up. But in the manner in which the original building was done away with was nothing short of vandalism, the proposed building is in no way harmonious with the existing structures in the place – as was promised. *Capper House*, in short, joins the long list of Chennai's heritage buildings which were demolished along with the assurance that the new structures would be in harmony with what originally stood in their place.

**Our Quizmaster
V.V. RAMANAN is on
vacation. His column
will resume after
his return.**

Kartik made the ball talk

There is a saying in the game that cricketers do not retire; they go to the commentary box. Murali Kartik is one of those who has undertaken the journey in the reverse direction. Having been out of international cricket for a couple of years, he has travelled from the commentary box to the playing field and with great success at that.

When the Australians were here for a Test series to cross what they called the Indian frontier, Kartik had bowled them out on a helpful Mumbai pitch, albeit after the trophy had been won and lost. Maybe, it was a case of *deja vu* as Kartik did much the same to the Aussies in a dead rubber game in what must rate now as his favourite hunting ground – Wankhede Stadium.

The game abounds with comeback tales and of players being drafted from extraordinary places to make the playing XI. Kartik's return to big time international cricket must be considered remarkable even among a plethora of comeback stories. The Aussies had hit him all over the park in the finals of the tri-series when India toured down under, from when on Team India had to select specific roles for Kartik as a defen-



Murali Kartik

sive left arm spinner bowling the restrictive line from over the wicket.

Having graduated from the Bishen Bedi school of flighted spin, the orthodox spinner may have come to believe that the only way to bowl is to give the ball air and challenge the batsmen. Such methods met with limited success, particularly against the world champions who back themselves to be aggressive in any kind of game situation.

After a couple of seasons with Middlesex at Lord's, where he was more welcome than in Team India which merely paid him a retainer to keep him on the books, Kartik returned to

top flight action at the behest of new skipper M.S. Dhoni who saw merit in his style of bowling that has dwindled in international cricket, mostly because of lack of quality among practitioners of the art.

Kartik had apparently picked up not only a clipped accent for the microphone from the English county cricket circuit, but had also matured as a spinner who could now appreciate the value of sticking to the basics of line and length and leaving out the more grandiose forms of exaggerated flight out of the bowling equation. On a surface on which the ball was already gripping, the Delhi-based Tamil Nadu bowler who switched from pace to spin early in his career used the arm ball to keep the batsmen guessing. This delivery may not have the pace, sting and pronounced swerve of his teacher Bedi's deadly arm ball. But, on a turner, it gave him the edge to create the ultimate tale of success in a player going on from being a mere 'gob on a stick,' which is how producers term the commentators, to a purveyor of the ball that virtually talked. – (Courtesy: *Straight Bat.*)

R. Mohan

A match not treated seriously

(By A Special Correspondent)

In September 2007, without much fanfare, a rather weak Tamil Nadu team was sent to Colombo to play in the revived Gopalan Trophy game. It was unfortunate that seasoned players like the still-fit and in-form players, such as M.R. Srinivas, Vidyut Sivaramakrishnan and a few others, were ignored by the selectors. And, Dinesh Karthick, S. Badrinath, S. Anirudha and Vijay Yo Mahesh were on national duty. Also many a Tamil Nadu player had deserted the home association to join the 'rebel' Indian Cricket League. All this was rather unfortunate, as this was not to be an "exhibition match" but a serious one.

The selectors, in this context, would have had a tough time picking players for a top-level game. The inexperienced young players were unable to stand up to the pace of promising Sri Lankan pacemen U.W.M.B.C.A. Welegedara and Dammika Prasad. And the visitors' bowling attack was scattered by opener Tharanga Paranavitana's brilliant 166, Michael van Dort (32), skipper Bandula Warnapura (31) and Prasad (57).

Batting first, Tamil Nadu was skittled out for a mere 74 with just three players reaching double figures. Walegedara claimed 5 for 34 and Prasad 3 for 18. The hosts surged ahead on the first day to 202 for two wickets. They eventually declared at 372 for nine wickets. Skipper R. Ashwin captured three wickets for 100 runs and paceman C. Ganapathy bowled with zip to take 2 for 84, while R. Naresh bagged 2 for 74.

Tamil Nadu put up a semblance of a fight in the second innings, scoring 202. Upcoming youngsters Abhinav Mukund (20), R. Srinivasan (73), S.S. Kumar (41) and Ganapathy (23) fought a losing battle and Colombo won by an innings and 96 runs. Welegedera bagged 5 wickets conceding 61 runs. The redeeming feature was that some of the debutants, like Srinivasan and Kumar, put up a valiant fight.

It will be a good move if Tamil Nadu always fields a strong eleven and organises one-day practice matches against the senior Sri Lankan team which seeks to play practice matches while touring India. It's pity that a team from the Island played a third rate Mumbai team early this year before the ODI series against India; TNCA lost a great chance then. Such opportunities should not be lost in the future. (Courtesy: *Straight Bat*)

EDITOR'S NOTE: That the M.J. Gopalan Trophy contest, a long rivalry which once did much for Madras and Ceylon Cricket, was revived again after a lapse of six years was welcome – but it was sad that little attention was paid to it. Certainly I had not seen any report of it till this one; perhaps it was felt that such a historic match deserved only a paragraph that anyone could miss.



Till November 10: *All-Women-Show.* An exhibition of paintings and sculptures by women artists from all over India. (At Vinyasa Art Gallery.)

Till November 17: An exhibition of Monsoon photographs. (At DakshinaChitra.)

November 6: Concert featuring Lychee Lassi. Live Illectronic Jamband? That's just one way in which people have tried to describe Lychee Lassi, which has gained respect for its freaky live shows. (At the Museum Theatre, 7 p.m.)

November 19-25: To commemorate the World Heritage Week a photography exhibition of rare heritage photographs of Chennai-Madras will be displayed, together with maps and photographs of the World Heritage Sites of South India. A heritage walk in the city led by Dr. S. Suresh will also be conducted for young friends as part of the celebration. (At DakshinaChitra.)

December 2-16: Painting exhibition by Madhumathi (at DakshinaChitra).

WORKSHOPS AT DAKSHINACHITRA

FOR CHILDREN

November 3: Cartooning workshop. Resource person: Antony Raj (MFA).

December 22: Gift box making & wrapping workshop. Resource person: Manohar.

December 29: Heritage Walk (Chennai). Resource person: Dr. S. Suresh.

FOR ADULTS

November 17: Handmade Paper Products. Resource person: Malarvizhi.

November 24: Silk Thread Jewellery Making. Resource person: Karpagam.

December 1 & 2: Glass Jewellery Making. Resource person: Srinivasa Ragavan.

(To register, please call 24462435/24918943.)

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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.

— The Editor

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Anand triggers Chess explosion in T.N.



Vishwanathan Anand

- Consider the following facts:
- In the Indian team that won the Youth Chess Olympiad at Singapore, four of the five players were from Tamil Nadu.
 - In the 10th National Cities Team Chess championships, Chennai 'A' won the championship, with another team Chennai 'B' winning the third position and Chennai 'E', the sixth position. Two other teams from Tamil Nadu finished within the top 12.
 - Almost 25% of rated players in Indian Chess today are from Tamil Nadu.

These and more such facts merely emphasise the fact that Chess has grown exponentially in this State during the last decade. While the sport is being

played in this part of the country for a long time and chess organisations are well established in Tamil Nadu, it cannot be denied that this growth has been fuelled by Vishwanathan Anand, now the World champion for the second time. In a

● by
N. RAJARAM

felicitation function to Anand, cricketer Rahul Dravid called this the 'Anand effect'. "Just like the effect of Bjorn Borg on Swedish tennis, Anand's triumphs in various world level championships have boosted the image of the game and helped many youngsters take to the sport," added Dravid.

Not taking any of the credit from Anand for a moment, many functionaries of chess associations feel that the strong organisational structure of the Tamil Nadu State Chess Association (TNSCA), with the active participation of all the district associations, the benign presence of many regular sponsors, and the conduct of many age group tournaments, has helped to strengthen the chess base in the State. "The TNSCA has been functioning actively for the last 60 years and has been vigorously promoting the game," points out Manuel Aaron, Secretary, TNSCA. Thanks to it, Tamil Nadu today boasts 6 Grandmasters, including Women GMs, 15 International Masters, not to mention the numerous FIDE rated play-

ers. "No other state has such a huge number," boasts Aaron. Indeed, Tamil Nadu is producing one GM and at least two IMs on an average every year. In 2007, Deepan Chakkaravarthy, from Madurai, became a GM and S.P. Sethuraman from Chennai became an IM. "In fact, Sethuraman is India's youngest International Master," says Aaron.

However, the Vice-President of TNSCA and India's first International Arbiter, Kameshwaran, agrees that the chess scenario in Tamil Nadu can be divided into 'Before Anand' and 'After Anand.' "The spurt and popularity in the game has many interconnections with Anand's victories. When the interest level in many children grew thereafter, the TNSCA

and its affiliated district units started organising more tournaments. Slowly, the game became mass-based. Once it happened, more sponsors came in," Kameshwaran explains.

In Chennai alone, there are more than a dozen neighbourhood chess clubs, apart from the district association. "Thanks to them, we are able to conduct State level championships in the age groups of 7 to 19," he adds. "During the 'Before Anand' period, we had only Manuel Aaron, who didn't get enough opportunities to participate in tournaments abroad. Now, even children below ten participate in many international tournaments," points out Kameshwaran. "And thanks to such a huge following, non- and less active players have started to become trainers," he says and cites his own son's example. K. Visweswaran, in spite of an Engineering degree, is now a full time chess trainer. "As a trainer, you can earn from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 30,000 a month," says Kameshwaran.

The doctor who freed the devadasis

(Continued from page 4)

Reddy says in her autobiography that though Gandhiji asked Rajaji to help pass the bill, Prime Minister Rajaji delayed and "thus, Shri C. Rajagopalachari proved to be an opponent of social reforms in our society."

Avvai Home, a place for destitute children, was started by her in 1930, and was located in Mylapore where her sister Nallamuthu looked after it. Later, when the home was shifted to Adyar, Dr. Sundar Reddy looked after it till his death in 1943. It was called Avvai Ashram. For the funds

necessary for its basic facilities she sold her jewellery!

When Gandhiji was arrested in 1929-30, she resigned from the Council. She was then editing a journal *Stri Dharma* through which she was propagating the national movement. She went as a delegate to London to depose before Lothian Committee on Franchise. From there she was invited to attend the International Congress of Women in Chicago.

Back in India, she was disappointed with the Congress leaders, especially C. Rajagopalachari, as they were not keeping their promises. On Rajaji she

harshly wrote, "Though Rajaji is a great politician, and sacrificed much for the country's freedom, in my opinion he is a reactionary, in regard to social reforms, particularly for the emancipation of women."

Later, in 1952, when Rajaji became the Chief Minister, he asked her to join the Legislative Council, but she declined as she was already 67.

Almost forty years before, when she saw her sister dying of cancer, she decided to do something about it. During the centenary of the Madras Medical College in 1935, she moved a resolution for a separate

specialised hospital for cancer. However it was only in October 1952 that she could realise her dream when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation for the first block.

The Government of India gave Rs. 1,00,000 and the Ministry of Health Rs. 2,00,000. It started with a 12-bed hospital. It has grown immensely since then; today it stands as a testimony to her determined efforts and commitment.

She was awarded the Padma Bhushan for her service to women, children and the sick. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy passed away in 1968.

Though enrolled as students, youngsters like Deepan Chakkaravarthy and Srinath Narayan are criss-crossing the world to participate in various international tournaments. "Thanks to active help from All India Chess Federation, more and more youngsters are able to reach far corners of the world to play tournaments," says Chakkaravarthy, who is currently participating in the 2nd Asian Indoor Games at Macau. At his felicitation function, Anand thanked everybody in a customary speech. Looking at Tamil Nadu's progress in Chess, it should have been the other way round.

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