

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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Pollution is one thing we don't have to worry about in Chennai... It's great that we are above it!

Go ahead – breathe in!

Noise has been defined in many ways – 'commotion', 'disturbance', 'loud talk', 'din', 'uproar', 'pandemonium', 'hullaballoo', 'hubbub', 'clamour', 'babble', 'racket', 'rumpus'...

Yet, even given all this information and choice, you still cannot find the right word to describe the sound made by six million Chennaiites (give or take, not counting visitors and very small people) falling down one morning when greeted by newspaper headlines announcing: "Chennai least polluted city in India"!

Some fell off chairs, upsetting coffee tumblers, drawing the wrath of harassed spouses. Those already on their feet merely toppled over gracefully, while those accustomed to reading morning newspapers in certain imaginatively chosen surroundings fell off accordingly.

The general mood was one of dazed shock. Naturally.

The Chennaiite isn't used to appreciation, being more familiar with taunts about heat, humidity, lack of pubs and other evidence of "things to do". Any attempt to ramble on about the "rich culture" invariably receives, after initial appreciative noises, sniffs and shrugs from certain quarters.

The Chennaiite is now walking around pardonably smug and pleased, while long-suffering two-wheeler users in particular wonder if they, being able to breathe with confidence, can at last be relieved of masks and things, ridding themselves of the distinctly bandit-motif in their appearance.

That funny smell you've been complaining about for the past few months? That's clean air – or rather, cleaner air ... by comparison.

Ranjitha Ashok

... And so vanishes Quibble Island



Schools in need

Have things improved after CAG survey recommendations?

School classrooms, and their primary constituents, such as desks, chairs and blackboards and well-qualified faculty, are vastly different in schools for the rich and those for the poor. Such class differences perpetuated upon children in schools needed close examination and remedial action, and the Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) decided to study the efficiency of the government with respect to civic amenities, such as transport, drainage, garbage clearance and drinking water, in Chennai's schools. Its recommendation did result in some action by the Tamil Nadu Education Department and the Corporation of Chennai. But since many of the issues studied at that time still remain in a greater or lesser degree, *MADRAS Musings* publishes this reminder, a report by SHOBHA IYER, Coordinator-Administration, CAG, on those findings of a few years ago. She writes:

On transport-related issues

- Nearly 85% of the schools

have their students rely on the public transportation system.

- Schools with their own bus or van services catered to only one-fourth of their students.

- 60% of the schools provided space for cycle-rickshaws and auto-rickshaws to wait and pick up the children, permitting entry only at commencing and closing times during the day.

- Though the schools were accessible by public transportation, either the frequency was low or the schedules were not met.

- Students needed to walk 500 metres–2000 metres to the nearest bus-stop, where bus

• And so Quibble Island and many other parts of the Adyar Estuary have begun to vanish under the weight of highrise that's been sprouting here ever since a court decision permitted the first lot of luxury apartment blocks to come up. Now, super-luxury hotels, commercial and residential complexes, kalyana mandapams, office blocks and even the concrete and cement mixers for them have all begun sprouting. Already a heavily used San Thomé High Road has begun to feel the pressure on it; gridlock isn't too far away. And before long, all the arguments used to permit such buildings will be used to justify highrise, as had once been indicated, on the San Thomé Beach and elsewhere along the city's coast. If that ever happens, this will become a city even more unmanageable than it is today.

Our pictures by V. RAJESH show work on the luxury hotel underway not far from the beach that stretches behind MRC Nagar and Chettinad Palace. The striped towers visible in the picture below are mixing units. If only an aerial picture was possible, there'd be seen all the other development rising around this huge construction, spelling the end of what had once been the Forest Department's – and that of many others – dream of having the whole area declared a wildlife sanctuary. What is left of the proposed area was to be developed as an eco-park, it was announced some time ago, but nothing has been heard of that proposal after an out-of-town organisation submitted some rather interesting plans to meet the requirements.



shelters were not in place in most of the cases. Pavement dwellers, vendors, shops, stray animals, human and other excitement, insufficient waiting

space and eve-teasing made it inconvenient for students of nearly 30% of the schools surveyed to walk this distance.

(Continued on Page 5)

The people's right to know

• by ARUNA ROY
Magsaysay Award Winner

The first public hearing the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), Rajasthan, organised in December 1994 estab-

lished the importance of information for the people, and exposed the official opposition to disclosure of records. This flagged off the struggle for the people's Right to Information. From 1995, a 3-year struggle

(Continued on Page 7)

The growing city

Although urbanisation is now a new phenomenon, with the first city, old Ur of the Chaldees, having about 50 centuries of history behind it, it is only during the last 100 years that the stark force of urbanisation is being felt all over the world. In almost all advanced countries, urban dwellers far outnumber the rural inhabitants. Even in the developing countries, the trend is unmistakable. Every year, more and more people take the high road to the cities, significantly in the larger cities.

There are, in the main, three general factors that have contributed to the rapid growth of cities. First, there is the general increase in population. The population the world over is increasing, thanks to longevity of life made possible by modern medicine and the spectacular improvement in standards of living. Second, there is the continuous movement of people off the land into industry and service in the cities. In the advanced countries, improved farming practices and the mechanisation of agriculture have forced farm labour to migrate to urban areas in quest of employment. In the developing countries, too, the shift from the rural areas to the urban is due to the undiversified rural economy and the crumbling of older social institutions like the joint family. These 'push factors' are matched by the 'pull factors' exerted by the cities themselves. Urban areas are the potential centres of prosperity in a nation's economy. Almost all manufacturing industries are located in or near cities. Most of the trade and commerce of a country pass through the cities and this provides a wide range and variety of employment, catering to every idea, interest and inclination. In developing countries, however, people come to the city more in the hope of securing rather than actually landing a job. The cities also provide more interesting and convenient living condi-

tions than the rural areas in the developing countries, as dispersal of amenities of living in rural areas is yet to come about.

The third factor is that a large part of the total urban growth gets concentrated in the larger cities. The relative growth of large cities in relation to a country varies from nation to nation but, in absolute terms, all large cities, particularly metropolitan cities, are growing rapidly. Even in our country, the growth of the metropolitan cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras has been phenomenal.

When cities were smaller in size, comparatively speaking, and the growth rate was low, they had all the time to mould their environment to the slowly changing and increasing needs. Although housing did not measure up to present-day

● **A Madras Day
address by
V. Sundaram, IAS (RTD.)**

standards, it was adequate. Movement was by foot or by animal-drawn carriages and traffic did not pose any serious problem. The various parts of the city were within walking distance of each other. These cities had, of course, peculiar problems of their own, but these were small in scale and capable of easy identification and speedy solution.

All this has changed with the mushrooming population in cities in the last few decades. The extra thousands who arrive each year in the city have to be housed, but the rate of house construction has not been able to keep pace with the demand. This has resulted in the overcrowding of residential areas and the proliferation of slums.

The heavy increase in population, coupled with the adhoc locations of industry and business, has put a dire strain on the urban transport system. The

widespread use of automobiles has caused serious congestion on the streets. Deterioration has also set in in water supply, drainage and essential facilities like schools, hospitals and parks. Pollution of air and water has become a serious health hazard. The greatest casualties in the process are human and aesthetic values. The scale and pace of development is now dictated by the automobile and, today, it is the buildings which have become secondary to the highway system. Shady avenues, open spaces and parks, squares and streets have all disappeared and, in their place, have sprung up paved highways, crazy fly-overs, and multi-level interchanges. The selfishness of competing groups and interests, whose acts and demands take little into account the general welfare of the community, have made cities ugly, though efficient, groaning, though growing.

The art of urban designing which permeated the towns and cities of old is no longer to be seen in our present-day cities, so much so that whenever we see a picturesque town we often feel that it is a happy accident. There is distinct evidence to show that our ancestors bestowed careful consideration to the way cities and towns not only functioned, but also looked. The beauty and efficiency of old towns and cities we admire so much were but the product of a general awareness and active concern of, and for, the urban community. Beauty in cities should not be dealt with as a by-product or as an afterthought. It is a necessity and has to be preceded by careful planning. Man cannot live long without beauty; otherwise, he will degenerate into a distorted human being. Today's large cities are a jungle of steel and concrete structures, giant buildings in treeless and tiresome settings, huge bridges, flyovers and subways crisscrossing them in reckless abandon. The damage done by highways to the basic structure of some metropolitan cities has to be seen to be believed. Fortunately, our cities have not, as yet, reached that stage. But the trends are unmistakable. There are no softening touches of nature, no cool cathedrals of greenery left, what with the advent of the automobile. If the present conditions are depressing in themselves, you can well imagine the wild state of affairs in the next 20 years when every city is going to double itself in size and population. This, surely, is a challenge to townplanners, architects and administrators.

A big 'Thank You' to 38 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.9.05 and 15.10.05, 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.

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Man has already lost his sensitivity and aesthetic sense. As Lewis Mumford has said somewhere, "We may not, in course of time, even know what we have lost."

The problem of resuscitating our cities and rebuilding them to reflect the aesthetic aspirations of the citizen has, therefore, been taken up with earnestness and energy all over the world. It may sound a paradox but it is true that the future of healthy and sane living lies in developing more and more city-centres. Most of the ills besetting our large cities are due to the fact that these have become, over the years, lumbering Leviathans. The basic solution for the problem lies in integrating economic and physical planning on a regional basis.

Dispersal of industry and distribution of population over new growth centres, based on regional study and analysis of the needs of the community, should be the first step to save our large cities from the unmitigated forces of migration. A number of potential urban growth-centres should be identified and future urbanisation diverted to these centres on planned lines. Simultaneously, spatial dispersal of activity should be undertaken in the larger cities by the establishment of satellite communities around them. These should be designed not only to attract and absorb the migrants as they move towards the city, but also serve as rehabilitation centres for the spillover population from the crowded areas of the mother city. Only the successful implementation of these policies on a regional basis can yield an effective solution for the basic problems of the urban community.

But care has to be simultaneously taken to ensure that the solution, while making the city convenient and efficient, does not leave it ugly. An environment satisfying the senses as

well as the spirit is essential to make the urban dweller, harassed by the frenzy of city life, what nature intended him to be, a human being first. Conscious effort has to be made in this direction. In whatever we build, be they buildings or bridges, roads or residential neighbourhoods, power plants or packing plants or parking places, it is certainly possible, with a little forethought, not only to make them functional but also make them blend beautifully with the urban landscape. Imaginative exploitation of natural features, innovations of design, a judicious use of colour, effective play of light and shade and a proper use of spaces could all be efficient tools for converting the city from a ruthless reality to a relaxed refuge.

Adhoc solutions for water supply or drainage or playgrounds will not, by themselves, be enough. Only an integrated approach, which has the whole city as the core of planning, can make the city a beacon of both beauty and utility.

As for Madras City, the strategy lies in developing a number of satellite towns in the metropolitan area to check the rate of migration into the city. Each of these well-planned urban modes should be a self-contained community, providing for optimum employment in clean industries, located in well-designed industrial estates, together with housing in well-planned neighbourhoods, each with its own complex, of playgrounds, parks, schools and hospitals. Comprehensive schemes for renewal of the central area and the older residential areas should also be part of the overall strategy. This is, no doubt, a stupendous task but, given the active co-operation and understanding of the urban community, can certainly be surmounted with success. In the final analysis, the city is the people.

OUR ADDRESSES...

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

THE EDITOR



High cost of care

Ranjitha Ashok's article on the present state of affairs of the Caregiving (MM, September 1st) is quite thought-provoking. I remembered the sincere approach the medical profession had in this city till the beginning of the 1960s towards the care and comfort of the sick, irrespective of their financial status.

This writer was born in a now-electrified house in George Town in 1931 under the aseptic care of the then famous obstetrician, Dr. (Major) V. Sivaramakrishnan, LM & S, a World War I veteran. The fee was Rs. 5. He treated his patients without placing a price for his skill and used to sternly turn away malingering women patients unmindful of his loss. He prescribed long walk back home as treatment. The Corporation dispensaries were well equipped and manned. Midwives were sent free to care for the post-natal needs of the poor, in man-pulled rickshaws.

Those practising privately in the city for a small fee handled minor ailments and prevented crowds from thronging bigger hospitals which took care of cases needing detailed investigation and hospitalisation if necessary.

The Government General Hospital and the Women's and the Children's Hospital, Egmore, were superb in giving care. The latter treated even as early as the 1940s women cancer patients needing radiation. The discipline and commitment of the nursing and other support staff were something to be seen to be believed. Of course, the men at the gate at times charged one anna for coffee during non-visiting hours.

I know of many doctors who used to personally admit poor patients in public hospitals and took care of their food and other comforts, spending their own

money. They never showed any commercial inclination in their dealings.

Contrast this with conditions as obtaining now when clinics and nursing homes interact with expensive diagnostic centres, at the expense of the patients. There are, of course, exceptions, but many in the medical profession have developed an appetite for making money or, in the process, Hippocrates has been given an unceremonial burial.

Those dedicated to the profession can slowly regain their lost glory and respect by gradually reorienting the younger generation to the genuine needs of the patients by sternly discouraging wasteful diagnostic procedures and by inculcating in their fresh minds the good old art of physical examination and easy and accurate diagnosis. If approached with total commitment, this may change the present trend of exorbitantly charging patients.

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No feeling for heritage

The lament of V. Sriram over the demolition of the house in which Dhanammal lived (MM, October 1st) is understandable. What I am sorry to note in this instance and in several other instances, like the demolition of Gemini House on Cathedral Road, and of the first aquarium on the Marina (mentioned in *Nature* in those early years), is the utter lack of feeling about the erasure of heritage landmarks. The Government's reluctance to go through with the Heritage Act itself stems from the same lack of feeling, apart from the pressure which the land sharks exert on it. Possibly, once all the heritage landmarks are gone, the Heritage Act will be passed. It will then be a case of locking the stable after the horses have bolted!

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Inspirational teachers

Reader M. Sethuraman's Recollections on Teachers' Day (MM, September 16th) make me recall those selfless, devoted teachers who were an inspiration to students like me decades ago. There was Krishnaswamy Iyengar, the Maths teacher in the Board High School, Krishnagiri (then Salem District). I had to walk 5-6 kilometres from my house in Oldpet to school four times daily for the morning and afternoon sessions. He used to advise us not to merely glance at a tree whenever we passed one but to study it, count its branches and sub-branches and calculate the total number, etc. That was a very practical



Singing for Dhanammal

To V. Sriram's two articles on Veena Dhanammal (MM, September 16th and October 1st), I'd like to add these reminiscences.

My father, T.V. Subramania Iyer, himself a musician and drama artiste (Sanskrit stage), lived in his younger days on the street next to Dhanammal's in George Town. He was an ardent admirer and devotee of the 'Dhanammal Bani' (style of music). He, therefore, wanted his two daughters, my sister Sarojini and I, to learn the style. In 1935, Jayammal, the third daughter of Veena Dhanammal, lived with her family at Aravamudam Garden Street, Egmore. Father who was then living on Poonamallee High Road approached Jayammal and requested her to teach both of us. She flatly refused, saying that her style of music was very difficult to learn. But my father persisted, and after six months, she agreed, but on these conditions:

— He should not interfere with her method of teaching.

— She would quit if she did not find her pupils talented enough.

— A sum of Rs.100 a month as remuneration (a princely figure as, in those days, the 1920s and 1930s, the usual fee was only Rs. 10-15 a month).

My father agreed and so we began our lessons in 1935. I was 13, and my sister 11.

Jayammal started with *Meru Samana* (just like her mother Dhanammal) in *Mayamalavagowlam* and taught us the *pallavi* (first line only) for full six months without proceeding further. This she did to test my father's patience and his true passion for that style of music. Once she realised my father's true passion, she took us both as her own children and taught us *varnams*, *kritis*, *padams*, etc. with great affection.

Every Navartri, she used to take us to visit Dhanammal to pay her and our homage to her. Dhanammal used to call us *Brahmana kuttigal* and make us sing for her, at the end of which she would teach us a new *Kirtanai*. On one such occasion, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Musiri Subramania Iyer and another famous musician

(whose name I can't remember) were there, sitting and chatting with Dhanammal, waiting to learn a new *kriti* from her.

When we went there with Jayammal, she told the musicians, "Today you are going to hear my *Brahmana kuttigal* sing," and asked us to do so, which we did, even though we were diffident to sing before such stalwarts in music. After we finished, Dhanammal heartily laughed with her mouth full of *paan* and told them, "Can you produce this kind of music, which my daughter Jayamma has taught them? Look at the *gamakkam* and *shruthi suddham*."

Then, as was her usual practice, she taught us and the *vidwans*, together, the song *Veena Pusthaka Dhaarini* in the raga *Vegavaahini*. A most unforgettable moment in my sister's and my life.

The second such moment came when Veena Dhanammal was on her deathbed in Jayammal's house in Egmore. One evening, when my sister and I were returning from school (Presidency Training School, Egmore), we were told Dhanammal was dying and we rushed to Jayammal's house to sing for her before she breathed her last. The family members, Jayammal and Bala and brothers, were too upset to do so and, therefore, wanted us to sing instead. We both sang the *Saveri Kriti Amba Durusuga*, a favourite of Dhanammal's. When we reached the *Chittaswaram* portion, we heard some rumbling sounds from the bed. Everyone rushed to her and one of them put a ear to Dhanammal's mouth. She who had lain like a corpse till then, was trying to say something. Jayammal heard her mutter, "What have you done? You have taught the *chittaswaram* wrong". Immediately, Jayammal realised her mistake and corrected us and we sang back the corrected version. As soon as we finished, the great Dhanammal breathed her last.

A truly fantastic and moving experience for my sister and me that we were blessed to sing for such a great musician just before she breathed her last.

Leela Sekhar
Chennai 600 018

method of learning multiples in mathematics.

He did not have children but he used to help several poor boys by paying their school fees. He looked after the educational need of the son of a peon of the school who later distinguished himself by becoming the Dean of the Madras Veterinary College.

Another teacher I recollect was Thothadri Iyengar, Maths Professor, St. Joseph's College, Trichy, in the late 1940s. He always wore a bright *naamam* and a white turban. While several teachers got converted from Hinduism to Christianity and worked as faculty in the college, Thothadri Iyengar stuck to his principles and attracted a lot of respect from students.

The teachers of those days were not commercial in any way and richly deserved the worship of students as Acharya Devo Bava.

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Decent haste?

Hamlet felt that his mother married in 'indecent haste' after her husband's

death. The Chennai COP's diktat to star hotels and bars to drive out customers at the stroke of 11 p.m., when the party is just starting, also appears to be in similar haste. Even Cinderella was given time upto midnight by the Fairy Godmother. At least on Saturday nights, time should be given to nurse a drink or two, shake a leg or any other part of the anatomy, have one for the road and return relaxed in the wee hours of Sunday. Chennai is hardly a Sodom or a Gomorrah requiring such an overdose of moral policing

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Station by the beach

I am glad to note Royapuram Railway Station has been restored. I was living in 1947-1948 in Perambur and was working in the Postal Audit Office in Egmore. I had a Railway Pass to travel from Perambur to Madras Central or Royapuram R.S. daily. During weekdays, I would go to Central and attend office. On Sundays and holidays, I would catch the Avad-Royapuram passenger train in the evenings, and go to Royapuram R.S. where I would

sit for a few hours at the Station, near the beach (seashore). I used to enjoy those weekend hours at Royapuram R.S.O.

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Friendly attitudes

Quite recently, my wife and I visited the United States and Canada. The Americans and Canadians demonstrated a very friendly attitude towards visitors, greeting them with a "Hello, how are you" and a smile, no matter whether the visitors were known to them or not.

They did not hesitate to offer help if needed by visitors, guiding them to the places where they wanted to go.

They strictly adhere to traffic rules to avoid accidents. Where they have to, they 'Q', without pushing others, and exhibit patience. The shopkeepers are courteous and when transactions are over they remember to smile at you and say, "Have a nice day!"

It's rather different here!

P.A.Ranganathan
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READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **handwritten** 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 post-card space, making reading or editing impossible.

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

THE EDITOR

CAG 1985-2005 and here on – some thoughts

20 years is a good time for me to reflect on CAG. I ceased to be a Trustee of the Group in October 1997 and was invited to advise the Board of Trustees subsequently. When we started CAG in 1985, we put in a clause in the Trust Deed that limits trusteeship to 12 years running. We felt that it was not desirable to have people holding office for too long; that organisations need fresh blood and spirit if they are to be alive and kicking (self and others). So I can step back a bit and try and see CAG from this point of vantage.

It was very different 20 years ago, for a group that set out to take up public interest issues, especially such contentious ones as consumer and environment protection, health and safety. The field was new, with just a couple of earlier entrants. Consumer and environment rights were not recognised as full-fledged human rights. It is very different now. The social map is dotted with consumer groups; indeed, there has been an exponential increase. People at large are now aware that they can approach these groups for redress; a stock phrase now in confrontation with traders, manufacturers and government officials is "I'll complain to a consumer group" or "I'll take you to the Consumer Court". Consumers too are aware of their increased clout, resulting from the representative capacity accorded to them by the Consumer Protection Act and by the Courts in general, which have treated them as bona fide litigants representing public interest and voicing public grievances.

When we brought CAG into being we had a few key concepts:

- to see the macro picture;

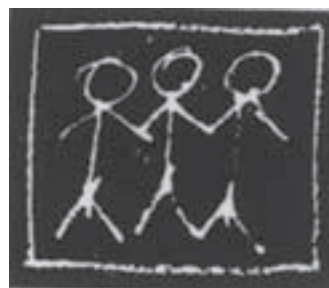
- to identify the factors causing damage or preventing protection;
- to hone in on the jugular, the point of critical intervention;
- seizing the opportunity;
- seeing it through;
- not worrying about who we took on, and about speaking out clearly and strongly; and
- being aware of our strengths – resources of people with expertise, legal energy, study and research – and mindful (though not too much) of our limitations: not mass-based; limited finances; and no official support or patronage (which can sometimes be a strength).

And I think it is these same concepts, which should guide CAG in the next decade. With one additional concept – with so many groups being around – CAG should not just try to do better than many others are doing, but should identify new areas and activities and ways of conducting the activity of public interest protection. Some ideas:

- how can the tools of the information age be applied to our causes;
- critique legislation and write better ones;
- evaluate judicial activism and see whether it has made a difference to ground realities (could it work better?); and
- keep hammering away at corruption and examine why the systems to curb it don't work, and how they could, without much ado.

Being different is perhaps a good way of being alive and being relevant. — (Courtesy: CAG Souvenir 2005).

• by **SRIRAM PANCHU,**
ADVISOR, CAG



Twenty years ago, on October 7, 1985, the Citizen Action Group (CAG), now the Citizen consumer and civic Action Group, came into being as a non-profit, non-political, voluntary and professional citizens' group in the then Madras, at a time of urgent need to address issues of consumer protection. Its objectives were to provide a platform for the citizens to represent consumer problems and monitor the performance of public utilities and to take up issues like public health, public safety, public administration and the environment protection.

Its founders, S. Govind Swaminathan, that eminent lawyer, S. Guhan, a former Government of Tamil Nadu administrator, S.L. Rao, currently with the Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, Shyamala Nataraj, currently with the South India AIDS Action Programme, Chennai, and Sriram Panchu, another advocate, had envisioned a body that would systematically process complaints, research legal and technical aspects of issues, identify larger policy issues and devise advocacy strategies to bring about changes in the interest of the public; these included issues related to products and services, civic amenities, healthcare, housing, etc. Most important of all, CAG was prepared to fight for what it believed it was willing to have recourse to the Law. Sriram Panchu, one of CAG's founder-Trustees recalls: "We were not going to sit around complaining, here was a group that was finally doing something about all of this". CAG started quietly in July 1986 an exhibition which focussed attention on the civic problems in Madras. It carried out to be a groundbreaking effort in identifying the many different issues at the centre of the people's concern.

CAG's approach in the early years was mainly re-active. Whenever a new public issue came up, CAG simply acted upon it by conducting studies, researching law, advocating policy, promoting awareness, reaching out to the public and launching public interest litigation (PIL). Starting with going to court to prevent the former zoo area in People's Park being sold to a hotel, it went on to investigate blood banks in government and private clinics. This public helath report published in 1992 resulted in Government taking

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20 years in the service of the citizen

several remedial measures. CAG campaigned in 1993 amongst the public against the hazards of noise pollution caused by loudspeakers and air horns. In recognition of its work, CAG was awarded the National Award for Consumer Protection by the Government of India for 1989 (II place) and 1992 (I place).

In its role as a capacity building organisation, CAG conducted in the early 1990s workshops and socio-cultural studies to educate other local consumer groups on issues connected with safe drinking water. Extending its role to outreach as well in the area of medical care, it organised in 1994 a workshop on 'Doctors, Patients and the Law' to highlight the need for self-regulation and accountability in the medical profession. This resulted in the formation of small working groups comprising consumers and medical professionals, with

a role in preventing the demolition of the DGP building and Queen Mary's College, two of the city's heritage buildings on the Marina. CAG's working has been 'in sync' with the continually changing needs of the times. With the focus now on a more complete look at any issue in all its aspects – of consumer protection, governance, or the environment – CAG today has had to quickly upgrade its capacity to understand new sectors. It has now set service delivery standards in the cable television, telecommunication and electricity sectors, while benchmarking good practice and working along with Regulators. "This has required changes in our outreach strategies, since our legitimacy comes from keeping in touch with citizens and providing them information that is relevant and reader-friendly," informs a CAG spokesperson.

• **SHOBHA MENON** recalls the contribution made by the Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) and looks at where it is headed.

the goal of drafting a self-regulation code.

To highlight public complaints and seek action, CAG has not shied away from taking the 'PIL route'. Some critical PILs filed by CAG include:

- Challenging the State Government's sale of the old zoo site to an individual for a hotel. The High Court granted a stay against the construction and the transaction was subsequently annulled.
- Protesting against the indiscriminate and arbitrary grant of exemptions from building laws to 72 select buildings to Chennai. The Supreme Court struck down these exemptions in a landmark judgement.
- Challenging the destruction of a wetland area in south Chennai, on the ground that it would damage the surrounding environment and groundwater sources. The High Court stopped the proposed construction and sought the restoration of the area.
- Challenging the State Government's attempt to increase electricity tariff by circumventing the Electricity Regulatory Commission. The High Court, while allowing the tariff hike as a one-time measure, clearly ruled that such future tariff revisions be placed before the Regulatory Commission.

CAG also successfully played

in schools. CAG's study on the nutritive value and effectiveness of school feeding programmes, such as the Noon Meal Programme, and on the influence the food corporates have in school canteens serving junk food, came up with a well-defined set of recommendations.

Since 1999, CAG has also been working on Bio-medical Waste Management practices by Chennai-based healthcare institutions. Besides advising the State government on medical waste management, it has brought out training material on best practices.

CAG offers a free 'Legal & Consumer Advice Clinic' to assist citizens in finding answers to queries or complaints they may have, besides an advanced research library on good governance principles, consumer rights and awareness, environmental protection, public health and safety, international trade issues and law.

Shalini Madhu, a consumer who'd approached CAG a year ago for help in redressal of her grievance against a leading builder, speaks warmly of "the professional, organised and caring approach" she met with that helped towards a quick settlement of the issue. And Syed Husain, a 54-year-old consumer, whose problems with the non-applicable insurance contract that came with his loan for an air conditioner, were resolved

CAG is represented on the following institutions:

- Working Group on Amendments to the Consumer Protection Act, Government of India
- Tamil Nadu State Consumer Protection Council, Government of Tamil Nadu
- Core Group on Consumer Advocacy, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)
- State Advisory Committee, Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC)
- State Advisory Committee on Medical Waste, Government of Tamil Nadu
- Steering Committee on ECO Mark, Government of India

with CAG's guidance, says, "Now I go around recommending the CAG to every friend who needs help in a similar dilemma."

On the aspect of CAG's hurdles, advocate and current Trustee N.L. Rajah, says, "At present, there is no separate ministry for Consumer Protection. Clubbed with the Food and Civil Supplies Departments, that are already mammoth ones, it does not get the focus it deserves. Insufficient funding from Government and tardy implementation of the Consumer Protection Act mean that most trade associations are forced to accept unfair practices because the others 'are not regulated properly anyway'. Also, the whole process of redressal of grievances itself is so very tiring that consumer indifference is generally at an all-time high."

However, Tara Murali, architect, conservationist and another Trustee, talks hopefully of the

future, "Very soon, I see the need for CAG to represent the voice of the people at international fora – and work with institutions like GATT, WTO and UN agencies on environment – when governments themselves may not be able to take decisions on behalf of their people. It will continue to play both a proactive and reactive role, as it has always been doing, in a larger forum. And we're already equipping ourselves for these even bigger challenges."

Ultimately, the strength of CAG's activities is the belief "in the strength of the collective voice, in the power of citizens to force governments, sellers and service providers to take action by being informed, asking questions and seeking answers, and that every citizen has a right to a healthy, informed and equitable way of life. And that each individual can make a difference for the collective".

given to buses plying school routes to avoid skipping bus stops and to allow ample time for students to board and alight.

• Corporation officials should periodically inspect bus routes to ensure that the stops are safe and clean.

• Policemen should be present near school approaches to enable safe passage for students.

On water-related issues

• Clean disinfected Corporation water should be supplied in sufficient quality.

• When there are shortages, student requirements should be met through water tankers supplied by the Government.

On garbage-related issues

• The Corporation should clear garbage frequently to ensure that students are not infected due to contamination from exposed waste.

• Prior to the monsoon, rainwater harvesting structures must be in place and, if necessary, all stormwater drains should be cleaned. Adequate drainage should be provided in low-lying areas.

On other general issues

• Students should be encouraged to plant trees as a co-curricular activity to minimise the ill-effects of pollution — (Courtesy: CAG Souvenir 2005).

An essential manual for savvy customers

Clothing; Transport; and Water and Sewage.

It also looks at such emerging consumer issues for which there are no legal remedies as yet, namely Telemarketing and Spam.

The booklet further advises on how you can be a savvy consumer, discussing the development of such consumers under the following heads:

Consumer Tips, Consumers' Rights; Consumers And Their Right Choice; Right To Information; and General Buying Tips.

And it concludes with "how consumers should go about filing complaints".

In its introduction to the book, CAG states:

"Consumers make innumerable choices everyday encompassing a wide variety of products and services. And consciously or not, these choices affect the quality and calibre of their lives. This places a huge burden on the consumer to make the right choices with very limited knowledge or information.

Today India has a large buyers' market and consumers have the liberty of an enormous variety of choices with regard to the products or services they want. But along with this freedom of choice comes the caveat of an

equal number of ways to be cheated. Informed choices by consumers are entirely dependent on the level of consumer awareness.

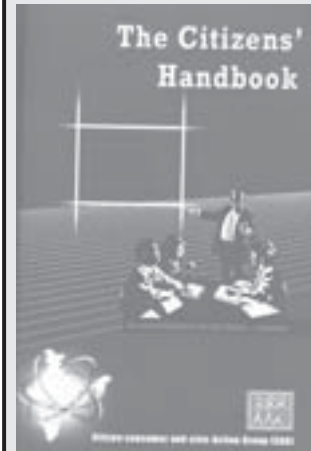
'Consumerism' today can be understood in many ways – both positive and negative. While several inroads have been made regarding the comprehension of consumer rights, the negative aspects of today's consumerism are primarily the promotion of unsustainable consumption patterns and the complete faith that is reposed by consumers in the ability of market forces to protect them.

As the concept of consumer protection and consumer rights progresses, we are making the move from being a sellers' market to a buyers' market. The Consumer Protection Act 1986 is consequently a landmark legislation. This legislation was brought about to provide speedy and relatively inexpensive justice and to ensure that the fundamental consumer rights of safety, information, choice, redressal and consumer education are carried out.

However, despite the existence of consumer rights, consumer courts and grievance redressal mechanisms, a majority of the consumers today are ignorant and unaware of how to deal

with their problems. The complexity is due to the large number of government owned utilities such as health services, transport, banking transactions, electricity, cooking gas, essential food commodities, water and telephones that consumers interact with almost on a daily basis. Apart from this, the constant sales pressure from manufacturers and service providers, through innovative means, lures consumers into buying products and services without accurate information. Another major drawback lies in the consumers' haste in buying products and services without ascertaining facts. A more recent cause is the proliferation of outsourced customer complaint centres that remove the consumer so far from the root of the problem that direct resolution of any problem is almost impossible.

Rapid changes in the market forces have increased the intricacy and obscurity of specific services, often outpacing legislation much to the disadvantage of consumers. In such circumstances it is essential for consumers to develop the necessary skills to make informed choices.▶



The Citizen consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) celebrated its 20th anniversary by releasing what it calls "an essential manual for the 'citizen-consumer'." The handy booklet, titled *The Citizens' Handbook* and priced at Rs.125/- contains a wealth of information, including what consumers need to know in order to seek redressal in the following cases:

Issues

Accidents; Advertising; Airlines; Animal Cruelty; Banking; Cable Television; Consumer Goods; Cooking Gas; Couriers; Drugs And Pharmaceuticals; Education; Electricity; Environment; F.I.R. (First Information Report); Food; Healthcare Services; Housing And Construction; Insurance; Municipal Services; NBFCs; Provident Fund; Pollution; Postal Service; Public Distribution System; Railways; Rainwater Harvesting; Telephone Services; Textiles And

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Current affairs questions are from the period September 16th to 30th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Tamil Nadu and Chennai.)

1. Which country retained the Federation Cup, the symbol of supremacy in women's team tennis?
2. Which jet aircraft has been inducted into the IAF for VVIP use?
3. Name the legendary Nazi hunter and Holocaust victim who passed away recently.
4. Which historic English newspaper from North India celebrated its 125th anniversary recently?
5. Name the hurricane that slammed into Texas on September 24th creating considerable damage.
6. Who became the youngest F1 champion after finishing third in the Brazilian GP?
7. One more on sports. Who won a grand double at the Sunfeast Open held in Kolkata recently?
8. Which big animal was photographed live for the first time ever by Japanese scientists near Bonin Islands?
9. Which troubled global sportstar is now back on centrestage with a TV programme called 'La Noche del 10'?
10. Who has been short-listed to play M.F. Husain in a bio-pic of the famous nonagenarian painter?

* * *

11. Water trivia. How much water is the city receiving daily through the New Veeranam Scheme: 470, 550 or 620 million litres?
12. Where in Chennai has a new skating rink been inaugurated?
13. Which veteran parliamentarian, a founder-member of the DMK, has been chosen for the Thanthai Periyar Social Award for Social Justice?
14. Where have the remains of an ancient temple, considered to be the oldest in the State, been unearthed recently?
15. What clarion call was made by Mahatma Gandhi from Chennai on March 18, 1919?
16. *Look At Me* by Amanda Tetrault is about which social organisation in Chennai?
17. Which popular actress was forced to apologise after her comments on pre-marital sex were made an issue by certain organisations?
18. Ann Mary Fernandez has achieved a first for a woman in the 150-year history of the University of Madras. What?
19. Which Australian State is to be Tamil Nadu's 'Sister State'?
20. Simple one to end with. What was the size of land granted to John Company in 1639 from which grew our historic city, Madras?

(Answers on page 8)

Grey-headed lapwings in a marsh worth Rs. 90 crore

At our last Madras Naturalists' Society meeting, I told my fellow members that the Pallikaranai marsh at our doorstep is at least a stopover point during its migration for a large species of lapwing called the Grey-headed lapwing. On December 19, 2004, we counted as many as eighty birds, very likely a record for southern India, as the bird has been regularly sighted only in Northeast India and near the Chilka Lake. You can easily distinguish the bird in flight, since the black at the distal ends of the wings and tail contrast very strongly with the white proximal regions on the sides. At rest, the grey head and a dark breast band easily

● by A. RAJARAM

point out its identity. MNS members have made sporadic sightings of the birds in Pallikaranai, Adyar Estuary and Chembarambakkam over the last two decades, but never in such numbers as at Pallikaranai last year.

It was suggested that as birdwatchers we should support the effort of other organisations to preserve the wetland and its birds. At this juncture, someone mentioned that if we put forth the idea that the wetland should be preserved for birds, the authorities (whoever they are) would only ridicule us, since human interests in polluting it by dumping all sorts of gar-

bage are more important than a few grey-headed lapwings. This common misconception should be set right and it is essential that everyone is educated on this aspect. In the past (MM, October 16, 2000), I had written about the service rendered by the marshland. Below are a few facts that can be verified by the readers from the Internet – by searching for the keyword 'reedbed technology' in a search engine like Google.

Research has been done in laboratories since the 1960s on how reedbeds like the kind seen in Pallikaranai purify sewage water. This purification is brought about by micro-organisms present at the roots of plants, like the Typha grass seen in abundance there. The plants usually have a hollow shoot system of diameter upto 2.5 cm and length about a metre or more (as in the Typha reed). Bacteria are present in the roots which are both aerobic (needing oxygen brought in by the hollow stem) and anaerobic (not needing oxygen). It is these microbes that treat the dirty water contaminated by sewage, salt (upto 10 gram per litre), organic solvents, metals in microgram quantities and others. Laboratory studies showed that such wetland plants of many species can be successfully grown as desired and the effluent from different industries within certain limits can

(Continued on Page 7)



Grey-headed lapwings – illustrated by R. VAGEESWAR

Traditional medicines gain acceptance

Folk medicine is a significant source of Ayurvedic, Unani, Siddha and Tibetan medicine. It incorporates raw medicinal herbs, decoctions and syrups. Some folk preparations are of surprisingly high curative value. A large proportion of the population in a number of developing countries still depends on traditional practitioners, including traditional birth attendants, herbalists and bonesetters as well as on local medicinal plants for their primary healthcare needs – for instance, *Vincristine* and *Vinblastine*, derived from the plant, *Vinca rosea* (rosy-periwinkle), are potent anti-cancer drugs traditionally used for the treatment of diabetes mellitus. Today, herbal medicine is making a dramatic comeback and scientists are focussing towards natural products for curing ailments like cancer, AIDS, hepatitis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Alternative systems of medicine have become more popular in recent times. They include a number of systems like homeopathy, acupuncture, traditional remedies and herbal medicine. Herbal medicines are assuming greater importance in the primary healthcare of individuals and communities in many developing countries.

Plants are the oldest known healthcare products. Their importance is growing, although it varies depending on the ethnological, medical and historical background of each country. Medicinal plants are also important for pharmacological research and drug development. During the last decade, there has been a growing interest in traditional and alternative systems of medicine in many developed countries. A genuine interest is being shown towards various traditional practitioners by practitioners of modern medicine. Practitioners of traditional, indigenous or alternative systems too are beginning to accept some of modern technology. This will help adopt teamwork among all forms of health workers within the framework of primary healthcare. There has, consequently, been an increase in international trade in herbal medicines.

The history of the relationship between products from living plants and healing medications goes back to the earliest times. Evidence from one of the earliest sources, the *Atharvaveda*, (about 1200 BC), shows that early medicine was based on plants and minerals. Folk healers, however, are traditionally known to retain informa-

tion within the close circuit of their family. Therefore the art of healing is learnt only by observing the family members. But they are not licensed to practise.

Herbal medicines were connected with magical practices. But many of the herbs used by the American Indians – such as datura, cocoa, cinchona – are now used as drugs in modern scientific medicine.

Among the Indian medical systems, Ayurveda has listed the medicinal values of plants. Almost 2500 years ago India recognised the medicinal properties of the *Rauwolfia serpentina* (*sarpagandha*) root, used by folk healers to calm violently disturbed patients. Indian scientists during the 1940s isolated the active substances from *rauwolfia* and discovered their added benefit as a remedy for high blood pressure.

The Madagascar periwinkle with its pink/white flowers grows in the wild and in graveyards. Huge amounts of crushed periwinkle leaves and roots are now exported to the U.S. and to Germany to be ground and processed into anti-cancer drugs. Traditionally, folk healers used this drug for treating diabetes mellitus.

Folk medicine describes a drug, *Ati-bala* (*Sida rhombodi-*

folia) to be the most powerful immuno-modulator. The drug acts as an anticomplementary agent, an immune stimulant and a hypoglycemic agent. According to the latest developments, the drug has been found to be effective in enhancing immunity in AIDS patients.

Bacopa monniera is a medicinal herb used in Ayurveda. Recent clinical research has highlighted the role of the herb as a 'brain tonic'. *Bacopa monniera* is mentioned in old texts as *Medhyarasayana* (in allusion to brain tonic). The drug is widely prescribed by folk healers to cure loss of memory. Saponins, known as bacosides, is the active component of the herb.

Scientific research in herbal medicine has made it clear that medicinal herbs have a potential in today's synthetic era, as a number of synthetic medicines are finding diseases becoming resistant to them. According to recent research, only 20% of plant flora have been studied, yet 60% of synthetic medicines owe their origin to plants. Ancient knowledge, coupled with scientific principles, can provide us with powerful remedies to eradicate dreadful diseases — (Courtesy: CPREEC Eco News.)

P. Sudhakar

The people's right to know

(Continued from Page 1)

was waged to secure relevant amendments in the Panchayati Raj Act, and enact a comprehensive legal entitlement for the People's Right to Information. In July 1997, the Government of Rajasthan amended the Panchayati Raj Rules. The Rajasthan State Right to Information Act was finally enacted in May 2000.

However, the Rajasthan Act suffers from many lacunae and the Right to Information Campaign continues to highlight these shortcomings through its use of the Act.

In a democracy, without the right to know there can be no real right to exercise power and make the Government and the State accountable to its people. The Constitution of India acknowledges that the people are the sovereign power. To exercise their sovereignty in a responsible, ethical and effective manner, the people must have the right to know.

The elected government and the bureaucracy exercise power arbitrarily. They are both riddled with corruption, without any real accountability to the people. Corruption impacts the poor and their survival. In a democratic framework, it makes a mockery of the people's right to decision-making by undermining even the formulation and implementation of law and policy.

Right to Information is an effective tool to control the arbitrary exercise of power and corruption, and to secure Government's accountability to the people. Exercising the Right to Information can transform

the relationship between people and their Government by empowering people to exercise control over governance. It is of utmost importance in preventing anti-people policies and is a crucial part of the larger movement to deepen democracy and ensure democratic rights, development rights and human rights.

It is now recognised that Right to Information legislation is necessary to enable enforcement of the citizens' fundamental rights under both the Freedom of Expression under Article 19(1)A and the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

Since 1996, Right to Information laws have been enacted in Tamil Nadu (1996), Goa (1997), Madhya Pradesh (1998), Rajasthan (2000), Maharashtra (2000) Karnataka (2000), Delhi (2001), Assam (2002), and Jammu and Kashmir (2003). A national Bill was placed in Parliament in June 2000, passed as the Freedom of Information Act in 2002 but not notified. On protest that the national law was weak and ineffective, the UPA government promised a better law under its Common Minimum Programme. But the 'Right to Information Bill' tabled in Parliament on December 23, 2004, seeking to replace the old one, itself has serious lacunae. The non-transparent and damaging manner in which the bureaucracy introduced last-minute changes in the Bill, demonstrates the critical need for an open and participatory process of drafting legislation - especially a Right to Information Law.

Most of the State Acts are

also far from satisfactory. They only pay lip service to the notion of the right to know. This constant denial of access to information only proves that information is power, and those who have it do not want to share it. But it shows too that the Government cannot overtly deny the people's right to know, and that we need to continue the enactment and implementation of better laws. The best State law is that of Maharashtra which replaced a very weak law with a better law after a sustained people's campaign.

While people seek to mould a more meaningful and accountable democratic framework for themselves, vital decisions concerning people's lives and livelihoods are being usurped by distant supranational bodies like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, whose jurisdiction lies beyond the scope of national governments. The challenge before all movements for democratic rights will be to find ways to dismantle this new, more distant, yet more powerful form of control. This process will also have to begin with simple and straightforward questions which unmask the web of exploitative relationships. With increasing concentration of economic and political power, information in the hands of ordinary people is an important tool that can help break these unmandated centres of power.

National Governments must be forced to work with the people's mandate. Links with the world outside simply cannot derail the people's right to live, to know and decide on matters that affect their lives.

GREY-HEADED LAPWINGS

(Continued from Page 6)

get purified if there is gradual inlet, flow and exit out of the reedbed. This has spurred the growth of many companies specialising in marketing 'reedbed technology', as it is called.

I looked up to one of these companies and it mentions the following facts. A typical municipal sewage plant discharges 7000 tons of sludge with 7% solids annually, for cleaning which 7 hectare of reedbeds are required. The cost of equipment and installation is \$280,000, with cost of operation \$30 per ton (all done for us free by the marsh). The system is said to be 30% cheaper than conventional sewage treatment systems, provided land is available. Since labour is easily had in India, maybe the cost of installation and maintenance of a reedbed would be cheaper - so if we take just half the costs

mentioned above, we have the cost of a reedbed of 7 hectare treating normal municipal sewage as \$250,000 (including operational costs). According to an article published in MM, July 1, 2005, the remaining area in Pallikarani after the destruction of 90% or more of the marsh, is 5.5 sq. km or 550 hectare. These 550 hectares are worth more than 78 times the cost of the 7 hectare, i.e. around \$19.5 million or just under Rs.90 crore. If we destroy this remaining wetland, this is the kind of money we lose, apart from the Rs.810 crore already lost. We also lose a natural reedbed system that can sustainably be used for water purification. And we will not have the birds that come here throughout the year.

To be able to see ten species of birds in a period of two hours, the charge in Europe in a bird sanctuary is Rs.200 per head - and there you can see the birds

only in summer. Pallikarani has over 120 species, both native birds (seen all round the year) as well as winter migrants. Should we lose this heritage when the landfill is complete?

We have noticed that during the off-breeding season of Vedanthangal, many species of birds, like the glossy ibis, grey heron, openbill stork, all species of egrets and painted stork, seek Pallikarani as a resting and feeding place. If the birds like the greyheaded lapwing are seen in the marsh, it means that the natural reedbed is doing its job of cleaning the polluted water. They are indicators of the health of the swamp. The surrounding areas will have clean groundwater too. These are priceless. A halt to the dumping at Pallikarani is the sane thing to do and money should be spent to segregate the garbage and utilise it rather than dump it there.

Subscriptions and contributions

● As readers are already aware - and hundreds have responded positively - we have no other alternative but to price *Madras Musings*. From April 16th (Volume XIV, No.1), *Madras Musings* has been 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 BELOW, to CHENNAI HERITAGE, 260-A, TTK ROAD, CHENNAI 600 018 or C/O LOKAVANI-HALL MARK PRESS PVT. LTD., 122, GREAMES ROAD, CHENNAI 600 006.

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 your sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

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. 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.

— The Editor

CHENNAI HERITAGE

260-A T.T.K. ROAD, ALWARPET, CHENNAI 600 018.

I am already on your mailing list (Mailing List No.....) / I have just seen *Madras Musings* and would like to receive it hereafter.

● I/We enclose cheque/demand draft/money order for Rs. 100 (Rupees One hundred) payable to CHENNAI HERITAGE, MADRAS, as *subscription* to *Madras Musings* for the year 2004-05.

● As token of my support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, I send Chennai Heritage an additional Rs (Rupees)

Please keep/put me on your mailing list.

Name :

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Note: Overseas postage Rs. 550/year extra. Cheques for overseas postage alone payable to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt. Ltd.. All other cheques to 'Chennai Heritage'.

Senate House Conservation Fund

● The Senate House Restoration and Management Trust appeals to all alumni of the University of Madras and heritage lovers everywhere to contribute to the Senate House Conservation Fund which the Trust is managing for the purpose of restoring *Senate House* to its old glory by December 2005 and maintaining it thereafter in the same condition. Cheques should be made out to the Senate House Conservation Account and sent to the Registrar, University of Madras, Chennai 600 005. Contributions are eligible for benefits under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act.

Dear Registrar,

I am pleased to enclose a cheque for Rs. as my contribution to the restoration and maintenance of *Senate House*. Kindly acknowledge receipt.

Name:

Address:

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.....

.....

I am an alumnus/alumna/heritage lover and wish the project all success. My college was

Date: Signature:

When Chikka was a joy for all

He's known as Chikka and if you have watched the TV episode called the *Fourth Umpire* (following some recent test matches) you'll know who I am referring to. He is none other than Krishnamachari Srikanth and it is a reflection on his popularity that Chikka is what everyone knows him better by.

I did my best to find out how he got this name, but even the Editor of *Straight Bat*, S.R. Jagannathan, was at a loss. He even asked Srikanth about it, but only got the usual answer, "It was given to me when I was a boy and it just stuck." Chikka suits him admirably for he has been like a boy, in both his approach to batting as well as his commentary. Who will ever forget his debut; it was in Test match against England at the Wankhede Stadium in Bombay and he finished with a 'pair of spectacles'.

In the early 1980s, the Indian selectors were looking for an opening batsman to partner Gavaskar. And since Gavaskar depended on a methodical approach, they were looking for someone who would give an impetus to batting. Srikanth was tipped as a dashing youngster in the Mushtaq Ali mould.

Dashing but just too venturesome you may say, for after making a zero in the first innings you look forward to some runs in the second. But Srikanth had other ideas. He was all set to get a run when he could, but he just couldn't make it. He played a stroke, a 'loose shot', as though in morti-

fication of having played it, and he went for, what the Australians call 'walk-about' and was run-out by an alert close-in fielder.

Indeed, in that series, whenever Srikanth came in to bat, there was always a man placed close-in, to get him while he wandered about. I must admit I was not one of Srikanth's admirers, for I believed in a methodical approach to an innings. But I must admit also that when he got going he took my breath away. And I must further admit I did change my opinion when I saw him open against the West Indies in the World Cup final of 1983.

● by K.N. Prabhu

I recall the stroke he played when one of the West Indies fast bowlers, I think it was Croft, operating from the pavilion end, bowled one well outside the off-stump and Srikanth went for it, as only he could with his bat brandished like a scimitar. He got a four for that stroke, which ended up near the ropes just before the stand which carries Old Father Time. It was a stroke which gave us hope that India would put up a big score, but it failed to do. It proved, however, that India would make a fight of it, which it did.

Making a fight of it and playing cricket for the joy of the game was always Srikanth's way of doing things. And it carried Srikanth to the forefront of Indian cricket. He made his reputation in the Champion's

Trophy against Australia under an appreciative captain, Gavaskar, who has long acknowledged the success in that tournament of Srikanth's approach to the game.

And perhaps it was this that won him a chance to lead India against Pakistan. Srikanth did it with his usual flair, including the eye-ball approach to a wild and fanatic supporter in the Karachi stand, whom he disarmed with his calm and cool attitude. Though he failed as a batsman, he carried the team through a testing series, in which it did well as a new-formed team against a strong side of stalwarts. It must be said that this approach steered the younger members of the side, like Sanjay Manjrekar and Sachin Tendulkar, to stand up to the rampant Pakistanis.

It also gave Srikanth the encouragement to play cricket the way he wanted to, even when it came to backing the team in its efforts to gain a greater share of what was due to it from the tour profits of the Board. For this show of conviction, Srikanth lost the backing of the very officials who had chosen him captain and when he returned he was appalled to find himself left out of the team to New Zealand and his place taken by a newcomer, Azharuddin.

But Srikanth went on playing cricket, as he always did, for Madras and India, doing it the way he liked for the pleasure and fun of it which he shared with all those who saw him. (Courtesy: *Straight Bat*).



October 19: Buzz @ the Courtyard.

Buzz kicks off with Nick Luscombe, a DJ who is guaranteed to rock you off your feet. A dedicated DJ and music-maker since his early teens, Luscombe has gone on to become one of the UK's most influential DJs with his long running weekly *Flo-Motion* show on XFM. Since 2000, he has pioneered a compelling blend of 'deep club' music incorporating elements of broken-beat, jazz, techno and soul, and journeying into the more experimental side of electronic dance music. Nick also presents radio for BBC 6 Music and the BBC World Service.

First Nick and then something special, every other Wednesday, from this month until March 2006 with UK and Indian DJs, bands, spoken word artists, films – and you, coffee in hand, on the dance floor, glued to your seat or sharing the moment with friends – you pick your style and play it your way. (at the British Council).

Till October 20: An exhibition of water colours by Olaf Van Cleef (at Artworld).

October 21: Culture Cafe Poetry Circle presents *My Truth: In Fragments* – a reading of A.K. Ramanujam's poems by Sashi Kumar (at the British Council, 7 p.m.).

October 22: A concert by Kaali, an experimental group that absorbs musical traditions from all over the world. (Alliance Francaise, 7.00 p.m.)

From October 18-25: *Art for Investment*: Ashvita Art Gallery celebrates its third anniversary with this exhibition featuring works of the country's famous artists (at Ashvita).

From October 21-30: *Neo Realism*: A three-man show of paintings – Sivakumar, Elanchezhian, S.E. Raja (at Apparao Galleries).

From October 21: Exhibition of paintings by art director Jaya Kumar (at Vinyasa Art Gallery).

October 22-29: Release of *Meiporull*, Tamil art magazine, and a group show by final year art students curated by N. Srinivasan (at Lakshana Art Gallery).



Art by Olaf Van Cleef

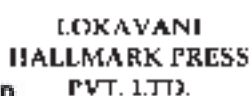
Answers to Quiz

1. Russia; 2. Embraer Jets from Brazil; 3. Simon Wiesenthal; 4. *The Tribune*; 5. Hurricane Rita; 6. Fernando Alonso; 7. The former French Open champion, Anastasia Myskina; 8. Giant Squid; 9. Diego Maradona; 10. Shreyas Talpade of Iqbal fame.

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11. 620; 12. On the Marina Beach; 13. Era Sezhiyan; 14. At Sauvankuppam near Mahabalipuram; 15. To observe April 6th (1919) as 'Protest Day', which led to the Satyagraha movement; 16. The Banyan; 17. Khushboo; 18. She is the first woman registrar of the institution; 19. South Australia; 20. 3 square miles.

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