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MADRAS

MUSINGS

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That can't be me! What are they trying to do? Put a black dot on my otherwise spotless reputation?

What's your name?

Literary legend has it that Lord Byron woke up one morning and found himself famous. Well, I assume that old George Gordon felt suitably gratified and pleased with himself – always a nice state of mind to be in.

A certain king of names currently sitting on brightly coloured billboards all over town is not having that same effect on its many owners though.

Those who have had possession of this name for many years and therefore can justifiably lay early claim to it are feeling just a bit put upon.

"What is this?" they ask. "You couldn't get anything else? You couldn't make up a name? You had to pick ours, albeit in a slightly disguised form?"

This business of hijacking a name is always a tricky one.

Does one have a copyright over one's name?

And would these same people mind their name being used for, say, an exotic perfume? Or the smash hit movie of the year, maybe?

Rumour has it that a new underground movement is on. "King's Generals", they call themselves, swearing awful oaths under – well, not old oak trees, obviously, but under anything that's a passable imitation – resolved upon revenge.

You steal someone's purse; you may end up with nothing. You help yourself to someone's name, you're in danger of being called a few choice ones yourself.

Ranjitha Ashok

Threats to our coastal habitat

(By R. Sabesh)

India's coastline is nearly 7500 km long. And all along its length the marine and coastal habitats are being subjected to severe environmental stress.

The coastal areas and the seas are treated as a depository of all pollutants from the terrestrial environment. Silt and sediments from uplands, residues of fertilisers and pesticides from farmlands, sewage and industrial effluents are all dumped into this habitat. On the other hand, the 'marine revolution', which has introduced powerful technologies in the fisheries sector, has transformed fish from being a renewable resource into a non-renewable resource. Pollution combined with over-exploitation is threatening marine resources as well as the livelihood of the fishing communities.

Coastal resources are important for people living within 50 km of the coast, not only for their livelihood but also for the economic growth of the country. Despite recognition of the serious problems on the state of the coastal resources, information regarding particular threats and mitigating measures to specific threats is limited. This lack of information provides an obstacle to effective decision-making on coastal resources. Environmental education, mainly on coastal ecology for school students, has to be given priority as part of the restoration of the coastal ecosystem.

The coastal ecosystem of India — much of it threatened — comprises salt marshes, mangroves, estuaries and coral reefs.

They are each examined briefly below.

Mangrove Ecosystem

Mangroves are salt-tolerant vegetation found mainly in the tropical and sub-tropical intertidal regions. They are reservoirs of a large number of plant

and animal species associated together over a long evolutionary time and exhibiting remarkable capacity for salt tolerance. They stabilise the shoreline and act as a bulwark against encroachments by the sea. Mangroves occur all along the Indian coastline in sheltered estuaries, tidal creeks, backwaters, salt marshes and mud flats covering a total area of 6,740 sq. km, which is about seven per cent of the world's total mangrove area.

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Pavement travails

• The drive to create pavements, narrow and narrower, is in full swing in many parts of the city. But how do the aged and the infirm negotiate pavements over a foot high?! Especially at entrances, where they have to step down and then up, sometimes in a distance as short as 3 feet? Photograph by REFLECTIONS.

THE RAJAJI VIEW ON CITY FISHERMEN'S WOES

It is a most reprehensible form of cruelty and social aggression to drive the fishermen families of Madras out of their natural immemorial homes and occupational camps, in order to beautify the city and make room for industrial expansion and the housing of the more fortunate and influential classes.

Madras was and must be treated even now as being basically a group of fishing villages — if human rights are to be respected in modern civilisation.

What right has Government to oust these ancient owners of the seashore, whose occupation depends on proximity to their Mother, viz. the salt water that bathes the coastland and the wealth it bears for them.

The fishermen have no representatives or advocates in the legislature, but it does not follow that anything can be done with them that an official conceives in the direction of beautifying the city for tourists from abroad.

In truth, the tourists would develop increased respect for a government and its army of off-

icials, if they saw efforts made to make the lives of these ancient citizens of Madras more happy and easy. Foreigners would admire us if those who are in possession of authority displayed real concern to help

• In the name of beautifying the Marina and its beach in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu Government has taken several steps that have upset the fisherfolk who have held a number of protest meetings.

Rajaji spoke for the fishermen in these terms a long time ago.

these men who go out on the rough sea with their catamarans and their country boats and nets.

There is no meaning in asking them to shift to places pointed out by ignorant officials, when their work depends on their location. Their life is hard as it is, but if they are harassed in the way town improvement men are doing, it will be insufferable.

The sea looks fluid and uniform for those who do not live

on it. But to the fisherfolk, it is like land and plotted into fields, definitely demarcated, each with its own harvest and giving it to the particular group of the community to whom it has belonged for ages.

Those who have a bias towards joint operations and socialist employment, can find in the lives and adventures of these fishermen what they so much aspire to. For that reason at least, they should be saved from annoyance and inexcusable aggression.

Things must change with time, but oppression is not justifiable. To interfere in the affairs of a people whose life is very different from the land animals that we are, requires a thorough understanding of their conditions of life and occupation and an attitude of respect for those who are poor, but who work much harder than we do and risk their lives and, above all, are contented with their lot and do not disturb the peace of the land or create problems.

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A *rasika's* view of the Mad, Mad Season

Will this Mad, Mad Madras Season due to start shortly eliminate the shortcomings of previous seasons or will it be a repetition of the same story?

I have been trying to test various hypotheses in this regard, over the past few years, in a search for the so-called ideal concert.

Before the introduction of information technology into the music field, I used to wait eagerly for the supplement to *The Hindu* on December 1st to draw up a chart of concerts to attend during the season. Now we get a booklet containing date-wise, artiste-wise classification of the concerts, details of *sabha-s* — a great achievement indeed!

Initially I tried 'chasing' my favourite artistes in different *sabha-s*, thinking one of the concerts would give me the expected level of satisfaction. I cannot say that I fully succeeded. Thereafter, I tried buying a season ticket in a leading *sabha* and attending all the evening concerts by different artistes. To my dismay, I still did not get the five-star satisfaction I expected. At the most, the level of satisfaction could be rated as three- or four-star. Nowadays, I buy season tickets in two *sabha-s* and attend concerts depending on the performers. These are *sabha-s* which end the day with the 6 pm – 9 pm concerts wherein, I feel, the artistes are relatively more relaxed because there is no concert to follow and hence give of their best.

The off-season concerts also follow more or less the same pattern and you cannot say that the satisfaction level is any higher during the off-season. I am not therefore sure whether spreading the concerts over different months would deliver the goods.

I feel that the present position of a concert is very much like that of a one-day international match in cricket where you often hear comments such as, 'it was not his day' or 'in his day he can thrash the best bowling side in the world'. But the fact remains that such days are very few and far between. Just as a cricket team needs to perform consistently well in order to keep the fans thronging the field, the performers and *sabha-s* need to play their role in a more professional manner. When they do not, the result is a sparse audience, even when the concerts are free. I counted 14 listeners when a leading artiste commenced a morning concert at Narada Gana

Sabha last season. The number swelled to 57 by the time the concert ended! The concert was highly rated in the reviews later on.

Analysing the situation on the basis of my experiences during different seasons, these are my observations.

Audience

I put the blame on the audiences to a large extent for failing to bring out the best from the performers. It will be correct to say that the audience gets the concert it deserves. Its behaviour makes an interesting study in itself. In North India you can see members of the audience en-

• by K. SIVARAMAN

gaged in knitting sweaters for their near and dear ones. In *sabha-s* in the South, the audience behaviour is different. A senior critic, in his article in the supplement to *The Hindu* on December 1, 2002 speaks of two persons getting down from a sleek sedan car at a *sabha* and getting back into the car and driving away when they were told that the entry ticket would cost Rs.20! Some *rasika-s* buy tickets of lower denomination and, when they are denied entry to the front seats, create a ruckus, disturbing the performers and other listeners. Others buy tickets for the front rows, but come in late. Waiting for the concert to commence is beneath their dignity.

There is another category of *rasika-s* who generally occupy the front rows, by virtue of their standing in society and just wait for the artistes on the-dais to recognise them. Once they are recognised, they start getting restless and behave as if they had forgotten that they had invited someone for dinner. They then make a hasty exit, the *sabha* officials following them to the gate. Yet another category of *rasika-s* just waits to know which *raga* the performer is going to elaborate and, once it is known, they leave the hall as though they know all the finer points of the *raga* and it is not worth wasting their time.

The highest percentage of *rasika-s* perhaps belongs to the class which leaves the hall when the *tani avartanam* starts. I have

heard some of the main artistes requesting the *rasika-s* not to do this but show some respect to the accompanying artistes. Some of them return to the hall after they have disturbed the other *rasika-s* as well as the artists while making their exit. They are probably lured by the 'today's special' prominently displayed by the canteen contractor and do not want to see the board 'sold out'. After they return to the hall, they complain about the falling standards of different items of food served and how their own better halves make them more deliciously! Sometimes I wonder if it is the prowess of the canteen contractor that is more attractive than that of the artiste.

Performers

The artistes too have an important role to play in making a season memorable. The performers who are slated to sing in the main slots and those who are likely to step into the slots of senior artistes in the years to come,

Ushering in the Music Season

have to bear in mind that they should not take the audience for a ride. Perhaps some self-regulation is needed while accepting assignments to sing.

I cite below two experiences I have had.

The first was at the concert of a very senior artiste. The *sabha* officials had doubled the daily ticket rates. I bought the lowest denomination ticket and sat in one of the back rows. There were many *rasika-s* like me, belonging to the middle class, and we were expecting a memorable recital. Some ladies had notebooks to copy down the structure and other finer points of the concert. Perhaps they were music teachers in their respective localities. After the *varnam* was over, there was a feeble applause. Even this was non-existent by the time the third song was over. It was embarrassing. The artiste however had a sense of humour and remarked that if this was the level of applause, it was doubtful whether a concert would be offered the next year! The situation did not improve. After a prolonged agony for the artiste as well as the audience, the main *raga* was taken for elaboration. I could not identify the *raga*. I am not very knowledgeable about technicalities, so I thought the artiste had taken up one of the rare ones to show his *vidwat*. I asked one of the persons who was



Walking out during the 'tani'

noting down the finer points about the earlier songs, but she too expressed her helplessness in the matter. Only when the *kriti* was taken up could my neighbours identify the *raga*. It was a relief to all concerned when the concert ended! I thought the audience deserved a better deal for their money.

The other experience was equally embarrassing. The artiste was a very senior performer, but was struggling unsuccessfully to get into the mood. When different *ghana raga-s* were taken up one after the other, we were

wondering which one would be the main *raga* for the day. Finally, at 8.40 p.m., *Nasikabhooshani* was taken up for an RTP. The hall was near empty by the time the *tanam* was completed hurriedly.

These may be extreme cases, but I could not help feeling that the audience deserved to be treated better. I have no complaints about performers taking up any number of concerts in India or abroad. But they should not take the audience for granted. I once asked a senior artiste about prior formatting of a concert. I was told that they

could judge the mood of the audience and sing accordingly and no formatting was necessary. I do not know if the artiste was just evasive. Once the performer graduates to the main slots he/she should continue to show the same professionalism. When I mentioned my *Nasikabhooshani* experience to a top artiste, a Sangeeta Kalanidhi, the reply was: "One cannot serve *kurma* and vegetable biriyani to a lover of conventional South Indian food. It has to be a South Indian Thaalii!" The point could not have been put more succinctly.

Sabha-s

The *sabha-s* should treat the artistes and the audience well. Very often, once *sabha-s* have established themselves, both the artistes and the audience are forgotten and only the sponsors matter for them.

I witnessed this incident at the Mecca of Music in Chennai last season. A leading artiste from outside the State came out after performing in the 9.30 am to 12.00 noon slot. Many admirers surrounded the artiste to exchange pleasantries. Afterwards, the artiste walked to the gate near the mini hall and got into an autorickshaw and left. Does the responsibility of the officials end with handing over the envelope once the curtain comes down? Can we not think in terms of having a pool of *rasika-s* willing to pick up the artistes and drop them back after the concerts? I think all *sabha-s* should

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To better appreciate Carnatic Music

There is considerable concern about the declining popularity of Carnatic music. The auditoria are rarely full. The problem is how to attract the common man who is a potential *rasika*. It is a vicious circle: He will not go to the concerts until he develops a taste for them which he cannot unless he attends them.

In this connection, a perceptive statement made by a leading musician, Sudha Ragnathan, when interviewed by children on one of the Tamil TV channels, might be noted. She was asked how she felt about singing for TV serials, as she is basically a classical singer. She said that she thought that her popularity through music for TV serials might attract laypersons also to her classical concerts. If even a few film/TV *rasika-s* develop a genuine taste for Carnatic music in this way, a useful purpose would have been served.

Statements like "it will spoil the voice" are not based on any scientific study, nor are they borne out by any evidence of a musician damaging or losing his or her voice because of singing for movies or TV serials. K.J. Yesudoss has successfully pur-

sued a career both on the concert stage and in movie music. It is just one of the several superstitions afflicting the Carnatic music world. In fact, a playback singer for movies or TV who sings without *sruti* alignment cannot survive there; he/she can, in classical music!

What intrigues me is the fact that, unlike in the case of Carnatic music concerts, there is no problem of getting *rasika-s* for Hindustani concerts, so far as Mumbai is concerned. The National Centre for Performing Arts' (NCPA) large-sized Tata and Bhabha auditoria at Nariman Point, at one end of the island, not convenient to reach for people in the extended suburbs of the city, are packed when leading musicians perform. This is true not only of complimentary programmes but of even the ticketed ones. Tickets are sold out

• by A. SESHAN

within a few hours of the opening of the box office. Why does it not happen in the case of Carnatic music? Of course, the Hindustani musicians who attract large crowds are cult figures. Is it that we do not now have such artistes although in the past we did? Does it mean that the age of the titans is over? We need to ponder.

We are today living in an information age — an age of curiosity to know. Whether they are students or *rasika-s*, their questions need to be answered; only then are they satisfied. They do not like it if any musician tries to keep any aspect of classical music a trade secret. In fact, such secrets can no longer be kept, not since the late Prof. P. Sambamoorthy flooded the market with his introductory books on various aspects of music. If he was not popular with musicians and had to wait for a long time to get the coveted award of Sangeeta Kalanidhi from the Music Academy, Chennai, it was precisely because of this.

For the understanding and appreciation of Western classical music there are a number of books available with accompanying audio materials. There are also books and cassettes, some with both as a set, available in the market that try to teach the

appreciation of Carnatic music. But most of them are very elementary and just skim the surface. For those who have no knowledge of the subject they are not helpful in getting a good understanding. For those who have some knowledge but want to improve it, they are very shallow. One exception which this writer has come across is *Alaap — A Discovery of Indian Classical Music*, prepared by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, and brought out by Times Music. The book is accompanied by 20 CDs costing Rs. 4,900. There is also a less expensive audio cassette version. After a general introduction to Indian classical music, the book deals with the Hindustani and the Carnatic systems.

While the total impression is favourable, there are parts which need improvement. Professional publications should aim at hundred per cent precision and accuracy as they are intended to be reference works like a dictionary. There is no excuse for even a single imperfection or mistake.

Lecture demonstrations are yet another way to promote the appreciation of music. There have been music appreciation slots in both radio and TV. All India Radio's Vividh Bharati, the commercial channel, has a programme called 'Sangeet Sarita' for ten minutes in the morning in which the gist of the *lakshana* of a *raga* is given, supported by recordings from both classical and film music. TV channels also have attempted similar programmes with a longer duration of 30 minutes, interrupted, of course, by commercials. But the difficulty with all these programmes has been the inconvenient timings and the lack of clarity as to the audience addressed. Either they are too brief for the beginner or are too elementary for the knowledgeable.

A number of institutions are doing a good job in the field. SPIC-MACAY and others organise lectures periodically in Chennai, Mumbai and other places. The Sri Shanmukhanda Fine Arts and Sangeetha Sabha, Mumbai, has conducted Carnatic music appreciation classes as early as September 1976.

The most recent Shanmukhanda music appreciation course was successful from the point of view of the participants,

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Severe Awards and Recognition Syndrome (SARS!)

It all started innocently enough. And the virus had been around for so many years, no, centuries, that nobody had ever noticed it. It was like the common cold. It came and went. You had isolated instances of it breaking out, such as the award of a horse for 'Kudirai' Vaidyanatha Iyer, the title of 'Maha' to Vaiyacheri Vaidyanatha Iyer and so on.

Occasionally, you witnessed a full blown infection, as in the case of Bobbili Kesavayya (he had the title 'Bhooloka Chapa Chutti' — he who rolled the earth into a mat) and Kundrakudi Krishna Iyer (he had the title *Murukku Meesai Jigi Bigi Ghana Naya Desya Rettai Pallavi Krishna Iyer*). But it was always contained. The ancients had effective ways of treating it. They believed in *naattu vaidyam* and never went in for allopathic treatment.

Veena Dhanammal was an expert at this. When Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar went to her and said he had been given the title of 'Sangeeta Ratnakara', all she said was, "Oh! Since when have they begun giving book titles to human beings?", for it was also the title of an ancient treatise on music. Ariyakudi was immediately deflated and cured.

It was around 1942 that the infection became important enough for the music-loving population to sit up and take notice. Till that year, the Music Academy was content with just hosting a conference, a few concerts and having a president, who was selected from the honour rolls of musicians. It was, thus, a mild enough infection. In 1942, however, things began to get out of control.

K.V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, who was the president of the Music Academy, a passive carrier of the awards virus, suddenly transmitted it to that august *sabha*. He declared that the musician selected for the annual honour would be given the title of 'Sangeeta Kalanidhi'. Not content with passing on the virus to Mazhavaranendal Subbarama Bhagavata, that year's awardee, he also insisted on all the previous presidents being presented with the same. Three of them, namely Mangudi

Chidambara Bhagavata, Kallidaikurichi Vedanta Bhagavata and Pazhamaneri Swaminatha Iyer, had passed away by then.

For a few years, it looked as though the infection was confined to one *sabha* and if it had been allowed to remain so confined, it would not have multiplied. But soon, other strains of the same 'virus', with similar symptoms, began to be noticed. The second sensational spread happened at Stringer Street, George Town, where the Indian Fine Arts Society proved to be a fresh breeding ground by the mid-1940s. It declared that it would give the award 'Sangeeta Kalasikhamani'.

While all this was going on, a third strain was noticed at the Tamil Isai Sangam, where the award of 'Isai Peraringnar' was soon announced (1957), with M.M. Dandapani Desigar being the first victim. (oops!) awardee.

• by V. SRIRAM

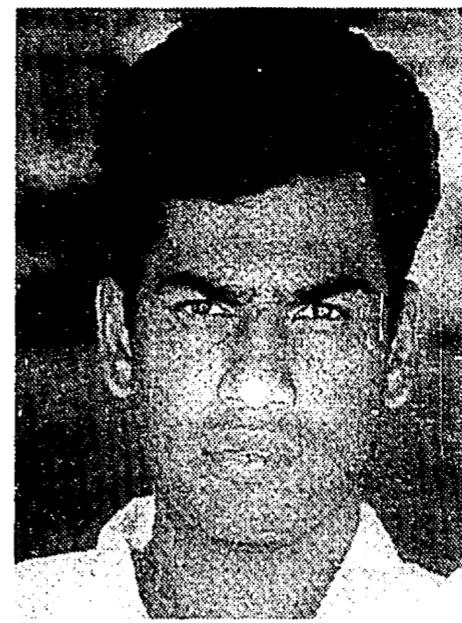
There was a brief ray of hope when it was detected that because of differences between the Academy and the Isai Sangam those detected positive with the Kalanidhi would not get the Peraringnar. But, alas, that was not to be. In the same year (1957), Kumbakonam Rajamanickam Pillai tested positive for Peraringnar. He had been infected with the Kalanidhi in 1948. Within a few years, multiple strains of the same virus made themselves manifest across the length and breadth of Madras and other music centres in India. By the mid 1980s, it was generally agreed that the situation was hopeless. Artistes were expected to battle against many a virus — the Nadhabrahmam, the Sangeeta Kala Nipuna, the Sangeeta Choodamani, the Isai Vendhar, the Isai Peroli, the Sangeeta Kala Siromani and so on.

Tamil Nadu's highest run-getter

In all the noise generated by the recently concluded TVS tri-series and the Abhijit Kale episode, a significant milestone achieved by a Tamil Nadu batsman has almost gone unnoticed. At Bangalore, on November 8th, during a match against Karnataka, the State's senior-most batsman, left-handed Sridharan Sharath, went past V. Sivaramakrishnan's career aggregate of 5,042 runs to become Tamil Nadu's highest run-getter in the national championship. Like the man whose run tally he surpassed, Sharath too, has been the sheet anchor of the Tamil Nadu team for over a decade, without ever being selected to play for India.

Despite his being one of the most prolific scorers in domestic cricket, the national selectors have never really considered Sharath seriously for a place in the Indian team over the years, though his name did come up for discussion a few times. The sometime Tamil

modest showing against Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy last season, following his splendid run of good scores in the previous rounds. In 1999-2000 too, he had failed in the semifinal against the same opponent at the end of a magnificent season in which he scored 863 runs, in-



Sridharan Sharath

besides turning out for India B in the Challengers Cup tournament. That year he made 86 and 94 against Goa, 151 against Kerala, and 131 in the Bengal match.

A motorcycle accident at a crucial stage in his career slowed it down considerably, as it caused a serious leg injury. Sharath's cricket at that time was on the verge of a major breakthrough. He fought back with great courage and determination, but he probably never recovered his earlier speed and mobility in the field. I, like many followers of Tamil Nadu cricket, am convinced that Sharath would have certainly made it to the Indian team but for the accident.

plenty of nuisance value to the opposition. He is a most obdurate customer with a tendency to make big scores as his three first class double hundreds and 21 hundreds signify.

Sharath arrived in Ranji Trophy cricket in the early 1990s, after very consistent performances at the junior level. He was the mainstay of Tamil Nadu's age group teams, making an impact at every stage. For three consecutive seasons, he was named the schoolboy or college cricketer of the year. He was also nominated State cricketer of the year in 1995-1996. That was the season when he played for India A against South Africa and took part in the SAARC tournament in Dhaka,

With stiff competition for batting places in the Tamil Nadu squad, Sharath's achievements and longevity acquire greater significance. Most batsmen in his place would by now have hung up their boots. It is to Sharath's great credit that he has held his place by dint of consistent performance. No youngster has yet been able to replace him in the side, because the selectors know that whenever the team needs a fighting contribution with the bat, Sharath will deliver.

• by V. RAMNARAYAN

Nadu captain should consider himself unfortunate in this regard, though his detractors will accuse him of failing in vital, so-called selection matches. The most recent example was his

cluding a double century, at an average of 66.38. In 2000-2001, he capped another good season with a double century against Delhi in the Ranji Trophy knockout.

Of Sharath's temperament, there has rarely been any doubt expressed, despite this perceived tendency to choke in crucial matches, but it is a good performance in one of these important games that convinces selectors that he could be their man for the big occasion. He was not able to take advantage of the opportunities he was given to prove his mettle, playing for India A against South Africa, India Under-19, Rest of India in the Irani Cup, and the BCCI XI versus South Africa and Sri Lanka.

Though not known for scintillating strokeplay, Sharath can bat aggressively whenever the situation demands. As in the case of Abdul Jabbar of an earlier era, Sharath's arrival at the crease is invariably confidence-inspiring to the batting side and

RAJAJI'S VIEW

(Continued from Page 1)

Madras belongs to the fishermen families and not to the trespassers which we all are in the city. By all means beautify the city. You can beautify even the fishermen's *kuppams*, but do not destroy them, do not put others where these poor folk have lived for ages, do not expect them to occupy apartments and pay the rents which you fix, do not ask them to live impossibly away from their places of livelihood. They have to watch the sun and the tide to make their sea mother give what they want; they cannot change their timetable and come from a dis-

tance to their place of toil to suit your tastes.

One word more at the end. Let it not be imagined that I am writing this to fish in troubled waters. Let the Government and its quasi public organisations for city improvement stop interfering and begin helping the Madras fishermen families in an understanding way at once.

I shall be very happy if all the credit is taken by the Tamil Nadu Government provided the welfare of these fisherfolk is properly looked after. — (Courtesy: *Nandini Voice for the Deprived.*)

Answers to Quiz

1. Dempo SC, Goa; 2. Panama; 3. ACC's Under-19 cricket championships; 4. Bobby Jindal; 5. The 2010 Commonwealth Games; 6. Piyush Pandey of O & M; 7. A world ODI record bowling figure, at all levels, of 9 for 16; 8. *Matrix Revolutions*; 9. 'The dabbawallahs'; 10. Sushil Kumar.

* * *

11. M. J. Gopalan; 12. C.V.

Narasimhan; 13. Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, Chromepet; 14. Alagiya Narasingaperumal temple in Ennayiram village near Villupuram; 15. S. Selvam, editor of *Murasoli*; 16. TVS Motor Company; 17. Ram Kumar; 18. Sir Ramaswami and Sir Lakshmanaswami Mudaliars; 19. St. George's Cathedral near Gemini Flyover; 20. 'Rejuvenation' camp for domestic elephants.

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