

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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"I think I've found the perfect replacement for a petrol engine!"

It seemed a good idea

Enough with ads on those fancy/cute/rugged vehicles. No, this isn't about high prices. Looks like there are even more basic issues, if poor Chennai's "No fuel" panic a while back was anything to go by.

Car manufacturers, who once thought they were on to a good thing, given the country's buy-ability and general attitude towards expenditure today, are chewing their lips, their foreheads more furrowed than an over-active field.

Manufacturer A, deciding to shelve competition briefly, calls on Manufacturer B.

"About these goings-on," he begins, tentatively, "What do you think the outcome will be?"

"I was wondering myself," replies Manufacturer B, grateful for a soul-mate. "Surely, vehicles aren't produced for decorative purposes."

"Of course not. Vehicles were born to run around."

"Or storage space," laughs B.

"Or potholders, and garden bric-a-brac," rasps A, getting a bit carried away.

They shake their heads gloomily.

A then says maybe things will get better.

B sniffs, retorting that this is just the sort of foolish optimism that is the bane of all civilisations.

A bridles angrily, then calls B a few names, all automobile-inspired.

They glare at each other, then trundle off, indicators pointedly indicating opposite directions. Very sad. And yet, as always, someone's smiling.

The guy who's always manufactured cycles.

Ranjitha Ashok

Adyar Creek water gets murkier

With lack of transparency over development plans

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Government has announced that the first phase of the Adyar Poonga restoration will be completed by December 2010. This will comprise 58 of the total 358 acres designated as the Adyar Creek. The work is being carried out by the Pitchandikulam Forest Consultants, Auroville, an organisation involved in eco-restoration projects. The Government has also declared that this will be an "environment education" centre. The planned park has come in for a lot of praise in sections of the media recently, but *Madras Musings* learns that all's not as smooth as it is being made out to be. In fact, there are serious concerns.

The Madras High Court, based on whose decision the Park project was announced, had stipulated the setting up of a Monitoring Committee which included, apart from Government officials, representatives of the Consumer Action Group also, which organisation had first brought to the notice of the Court and the public the continued neglect of the area. The Court had also directed that periodic review meetings of the Committee be held to monitor the progress and quality of the work being carried out in the proposed Park. However, it transpires that the Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial Services Limited (TNUIFSL), which is the nodal agency for the development of the Park, has not called for Monitoring Committee meetings for over six months now. Consequently, non-governmental representatives on the Committee are in the dark over what is happening at the Creek.

The CAG had also asked the TNUIFSL for details of what

kind of flora are being planted in the Park. The selection of proper vegetation is crucial for the survival and regeneration of the wetlands. However, this information has also not been forthcoming. This has naturally made environment activists concerned over what is the work in progress. A casual visit

(Continued on page 7)



Raising of embankment in progress along the Adyar.

TN tops in production - though Chennai-centric

(By A Special Correspondent)

There is good news on the manufacturing front in Tamil Nadu. While the State may not rank on par with Maharashtra or Gujarat in attracting direct investment, it has registered the highest in terms of setting up units in the manufacturing sector. There are 33.39 lakh manufacturing units in the State. In addition, it has also ranked highest in the number of manufacturing jobs added - 5.79 lakh between 1998 and 2005. These figures come from the Fifth Economic Census released by the Government of India last month.

However, what is not being looked at is the concentration of most of the industrial development around Chennai city alone. Just to give one instance, the city alone accounts for 35% of the automotive manufacturing sector units in the country. The city and its environs can expect a total of USD 15-20 bil-

lion in this sector by 2015, says the 11th Five Year Plan. Added to this, we have the IT sector which is growing rapidly and so are other businesses in the city.

The question is: Can the city take in so much of industrialisation in one go? And is it necessary to concentrate all the development in and around the city? The Human Development Index (HDI) for the State has shown glaring disparities. This data, released as part of the 11th Five Year Plan for the State (2007-2012), shows that there has been skewed development in and around. Chennai at the cost of all other districts. Four indicators - life expectancy at birth (LEB), literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio (GER) and the real per capita gross state domestic product (GSDP) at purchase power parity in dollar terms were used to calculate the HDI. A large difference in HDI

separates the first and second districts, with Chennai at 0.842 compared to Tuticorin at 0.791.

In terms of Gender Development Index (GDI) too, Chennai tops the list. GDI is defined as one which adjusts or discounts gender inequality and shows the level of attainment in human development when there is no gender disparity.

While it is a matter of pride that the city has scored on such counts in the State, the Government has in its own document noted that such disparities are a matter of concern. What has not been listed, however, is that the city's infrastructure is also close to breaking down in terms of roads, water supply and other counts. In addition, quality of life has also become from bad to worse. The Mercer study

(Continued on page 7)

An ode to the *dosai* from America

Last year, the humble *dosai* got the nod from the foodies of New York when they voted Thiru Kumar, the 'Dosa Man', the purveyor of the best street food in their city.

I mailed my mother in India telling her of the *dosai*'s showing at the culinary crossroads. She did not seem as elated as I was at the news. She reminded me that I had never been a big fan of the *dosai* when growing up. Her response revealed the quiet angst of a woman who packed under-appreciated lunches for two decades when she could have aspired for greater glory. Immigration rules permitting, she also seemed ready to set up a stand right next to the Dosa Man. After all, none of the items on the vendor's menu posed a real challenge for her.

For most South Indian cooks, I suspect, this is the real sore point – the home-made *dosai* doesn't look or taste the same as the pliable, paper-thin restaurant *dosai*. Even children

Once, making *dosais* used to be physically hard work. Cooks soaked rice and lentil in water for several hours, and ground these ingredients in a stone mortar. In black-and-white Tamil films, Chaplinesque characters – too broke to pay at the restaurant – faced the prospect of being sent to the kitchen to do this job. Fermentation, which gives the *dosai* its slightly-sour taste, is guaranteed in the tropical climate when the batter sits overnight in a covered bowl. But the batter has to be refrigerated at just the right time, or it turns over-sour and completely unfit to be made into *dosais*.

Though groceries now sell readymade batter, *dosai*-making is no piece of cake. Take the *Rava dosai* conjured from cream-of-wheat and rice flour – this involves little preparatory work, but calls for some serious skill. During my student days, I would wait in line for this lace-like food in the mess. This *dosai* simply can't be hurried – every-

● by VIJAYSREE VENKATRAMAN

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who disdain the sturdy everyday *dosai* ask for *Masala Dosai* – the foot-long roll-up version filled with savoury stuffing, when eating out. The delicate-looking *dosai* from the 'hotel' – as South Indian eateries are still known – endures the take-out stress well.

On Sundays when we ordered in, the home-delivered *Masala Dosai* came swathed in a banana leaf further wrapped in newspaper. When it arrived, even the deftest fingers I know – my mother's – seemed too slow for the task of unwinding the twine around these aromatic parcels. The stuffed *dosai*, despite being a complete meal in itself, comes with sachets of condiments which have to be freed from the unyielding clutch of tiny rubber bands.

Not that I am complaining about the time-tested accompaniments, but it was my job to transfer the fragrant *sambar* from the knotted plastic bag into a bowl, and ladle a cupful for everyone at the table. Then, I had to coax chutneys of various colours into containers. Duty done, I could work on my treat, starting from the crusty golden-brown edge. Some others in my family dig right into the *dosa*'s heart, softened by the filling within. There are all kinds of stuffing: *paneer*, *kheema* – mincemeat or even *Chinese!* – grated tofu, but the traditional spicy mashed potato is our favourite.

one understands that. Our strict Organic Chemistry professor, who would not let students enter the classroom past 8.30 a.m., when his lecture was scheduled to start, allowed latecomers in if they mumbled something about the "dosai queue." True, we could have had bread for breakfast and reached on time, but even this disciplinarian did not expect that kind of self-denial from us.

Because it is pointless to hanker after the unattainable, I make low-carb Green *Dosais* in my New England home. I tell myself it is healthier. Tanginess is not crucial for this *dosai*'s taste, which is just as well, because, except during summer, the temperature is not high enough to ensure fermentation. The soaked *moong* beans look ready to burst out of their skin when I step into the kitchen to fix brunch. Blending the about-to-sprout beans with ginger takes me all of five minutes. Laddling out a dollop of this pleasant-smelling batter into the centre of the hot skillet, I draw the mix in a slowly-widening circle till I reach the rim of the vessel.

Sometimes, I do succumb to nostalgia and bring back boxes of frozen *Masala Dosai*. Though I am largely content with my culinary lot, I envy the New Yorkers because the Dosa Man hands them the crisp, authentic South Indian original in a platter.

The mad, mad Mambalam maze

Residents of Mambalam may be up in arms on reading this, but *The Man from Madras Musings* is not far off the mark when he describes the area as a place that the city planners took over and then forgot. Over the years it has developed into a perfect picture crafted by complete administrative apathy. And standing as a proud representative of this area is its railway station.

MMM recently went to receive some guests who were getting off the train at Mambalam. It was early morning and MMM was looking forward to driving into Ranganathan Street, parking his car there and waiting for the visitors. MMM can see eyebrows being raised on the point of driving into that shoppers' mecca, but at 5.00 am it is really devoid of people, difficult though it is to imagine such a scenario. Be that as it may, MMM drove up to Panagal Park, with a song on his lips, his hand at the wheel and his foot on the accelerator when having turned left he realised that a huge flyover was where Usman Road once used to be.

True, MMM had read all about the flyover, but it had completely slipped his mind and he realised that there was no way that he could access Ranganathan Street. He was sorely tempted to park under one of the pillars and walk to the station, but one of his guests was elderly and getting that person to walk all the way to the car was impossible. Having searched in vain for some signboard with alternative routes to the station, MMM asked a few auto-rickshaw drivers, who initially having pretended to have heard of Mambalam railway station for the first time in their lives, proceeded to explain that it was not all that simple to access any longer. You go down Doraiswami Bridge, explained one, and then having come out, make a sharp turn to the right or left, duck down a couple of side streets like a fugitive escaping justice and land up near the station.

MMM did so, only instead of turning right (or was it left), he turned left (or the other way round), went down a narrow alley with a whole host of autos coming from the opposite direction and then realised that he was well and truly lost and on the wrong side of a one-way road. This also gave MMM the opportunity of learning of what appeared to be well published news about his own parentage, financial position, looks, and sanity from the auto-rickshaw drivers he nearly collided with. Finally he had to request one of the less menacing auto drivers for directions once again. This involved going up to Doraiswami Bridge once again and turning left (or was it right) and then negotiating a couple of side streets before landing up at a temple. Here, a kindly flower-seller showed MMM the way to the station. "But you cannot

park your car on this side," added the kindly soul. "For that you need to come from the opposite direction." MMM, having drawn a deep breath, then asked as to where the opposite side was and whether it was the Usman Road entrance that she had in mind. No, she did not. She gave a fresh and more roundabout route which MMM managed to successfully negotiate only to find that the entire parking lot had been cordoned off by the Railways who had also put up signboards giving details of the kinds of the punishments they had in their power to dole out if they caught MMM in the act. This had everything short of hell-fire in it. But to MMM, that was nothing compared to going back to Doraiswami Bridge and so he decided to violate the law for once. Surveying his surroundings, he found no reason why the area was not fit for parking. The only reason that MMM could think of was an attempt by the Railways to protect the modesty of those who were using the place for their morning ablutions with complete equanimity.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

The train with MMM's guests was running late and so this story ended on a happy note. But the plight of those who wish to reach Mambalam station in a hurry can only be imagined. Perhaps it is safer to get on and get off at Egmore. Why those in charge of our fates on the roads cannot put up prominent signboards with directions beats MMM.

Welcoming the Chief

The Chief is away, having scooted off for three weeks, a luxury he rarely gives *The Man from Madras Musings*, Ranjitha Ashok and the rest of the chain gang over whom he lords. He has asked MMM to keep an eye on the paper while he is away. He may not have noticed it, but MMM could discern a doubtful shake of the head even as he said it. And since then MMM has not slept a wink, ever worrying about the paper. Has it been put to bed? Has it been printed? What if the postal department does not deliver it to one and all? MMM's favourite nightmare is one where he is seated on a throne and the printer and his staff approach in solemn procession to hand him a copy of the latest issue. And when MMM graciously rises to accept it, he finds that it is a blank sheet with just the masthead printed. MMM wakes up screaming at this point and he wonders how the Chief goes through this kind of thing fortnight after fortnight. The Chief must have been a child of blood and iron and, of course, now he possesses an eye like Mars with

which he threatens and commands and that makes all the difference. Now, MMM being short-sighted cannot boast of such ocular facilities.

Anyway, as the return of the Chief draws nigh, MMM wonders if he ought not to be given the kind of welcome that most leaders receive when they disembark at Chennai airport. Firstly, MMM would like to have posters pasted on the pillars of the flyover under construction near the airport, Kathipara junction and also on all buildings along the way. These will show the Chief in various postures, writing, releasing books, speaking, and generally being the life and soul of heritage. Below these pictures will be slogans that would go like this – "Chennai's Chief returns", "Welcome home, O human face of heritage", "Madras salutes its coming Man", "Saviour of Senate House, we salute thee" etc. Besides these, MMM also plans to have digital signboards (vinyl sheets for the uninitiated) all along the way, carrying similar messages. After all, the police has said such signboards would be permitted for three days before and after any event.

A couple of cut-outs will be placed along the way, preferably blocking a traffic signal or two. On the appointed day, a huge group of supporters, rounded up from *Madras Musings'* mailing list, will throng the airport. The main objective of this group would be to shout slogans, block the carriageway and ensure high levels of nuisance to the other passengers at the airport. And when the Chief clears immigration and steps out, crackers of high decibels will be lit, garlands and shawls will be presented to the Chief and he will wave to his supporters. By then, people around would have automatically realised that the Chief is a powerful personality and will clear the way of all traffic. Many more people will also join the cheerleaders and, presto, we will have more numbers for the heritage movement. From here, fighting an election on the heritage plank is but a step and from there a Heritage Act is a mere bagatelle.

But something tells MMM that the Chief will scotch the whole idea.

Madras Week ahead

It is that time of the year again. A little bird informs *The Man from Madras Musings* that this year's celebration promises to be bigger, better and more event-packed than in the previous years. More and more people are joining the small group of volunteers who began the celebrations a few years ago with nothing beyond enthusiasm and hope. MMM prays for the success of Madras Week, this year, next year and all years to come.

– MMM

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Health hazards

We, the residents of Besant Nagar, have been representing to the Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai Corporation and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board for a long period about the serious health issues faced by residents of Besant Nagar due to pollution caused by the operation of the cremation ground located in the area.

Chennai Corporation converted the manually operated system to a gasifier crematorium but it has not improved the environmental conditions.

The gasifier crematorium is being operated without adhering to the specifications and parameters. The maintenance of the gasifier crematorium is also extremely poor and the unburnt flue gas and dark smoke come not only from the chimney but also from several other sides of the structure.

The nauseating smell is causing serious discomfort to the residents nearby.

We earnestly request Tamil Nadu Government and Chennai Corporation through your columns to look into the matter with the urgency that it deserves, in the interest of public health, healthy living conditions and reputation of Chennai city.

N.S. Venkataraman
M 60/1, 4th Cross Street
Besant Nagar, Chennai 600 090

We need more!

This is with reference to the excerpt "The Buchanan-Stanley Wedding in Madras", (MM, May 16th) and the subsequent letter by reader T.M. Sundararaman questioning the relevance of publishing it now.

Your article (both the excerpt from *The Madras Mail* and your accompanying note) took us back in time almost with cinematic perfection, and gave us an insight into life during those times in Madras. It was truly a page out of history and we enjoyed reading it. In fact, it is a slice of Madras that has been

long forgotten, and one that can never be imagined by us today – but for accounts like these. As members of the Anglican Christian community, my family really enjoyed reading about the wedding service, the hymns and musical pieces that were part of the event, at the majestic St. Georges Cathedral, now the Episcopal Seat of our Diocese.

The article itself was an unique piece of journalism as it was practised in those days. One can understand that in the absence of live television or radio, people relied on the vivid description in newspapers with all those apparently superfluous details about the colour of the dresses, the flowers and the event itself. And nevertheless, the article was a delight to read, and I wish *Madras Musings* would publish many more like this.

My parents and grandparents were regular readers of *The Mail* during the 1950s and 60s and they often reminisce about how they used to wait eagerly for their copy, especially during the Royal Weddings to see the pictures of the royal couple. The Curly Wee cartoons were also a major attraction and they are extinct now. As I'm not able to find these anywhere for my 9-year-old daughter, could you please publish these cartoons if you have them?

Fabiola
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Postal woes

Reappearing in these columns about postal services, I am only sorry that the efficiency of the Postal Dept. has come down in recent times. It was Rafi Ahmed Kidwai who, as the Minister for Communications, introduced the 'all up' scheme, viz. airlift of all 'first class' mails, i.e. letters, registered letters etc. Book post, etc. are treated as second class mails and are not given preference over the first class mails.

The motto of the Dept. then was that the local letters posted in the morning hours should be delivered the same evening and the mails to metros connected by air should be delivered the next day. But then the mail traffic was very huge as

Egmore centenary celebrations

Egmore Railway Station celebrating its centenary brings back fond memories of life in Chennai in the 1930s and 40s when Madras had its old world charm.

Apart from the Marina Beach and good old Moore Market, our one and only mall where you could get everything you wanted was the Egmore railway refreshment room. It was a place I have vivid memories of where we could have a treat.

It used to be a favourite haunt of my father and journalist buddies who enjoyed their anecdotes and we could hear their raucous laughter. Those days the majority who spent time in Railway refreshment rooms were not travellers but just those who wanted a place to eat and get together in small groups.

Chennai those days was very laid out and eating out was not encouraged and in fact not allowed, but my dad used to take us for a treat to Egmore Refreshment Room. We looked forward to enjoying sponge cake and lemonade fare and spent time moving around or watched the trains coming to the platform, the guard blowing a whistle and waving a green flag, and the train steaming out.

No *idli, dosai*. English breakfast consisted of two fried eggs, bacon and coffee. You could have a four course English lunch – soup, a fish dish, meat dish and a dessert. A great favourite which now may be termed Anglo-Indian was rice and curry and the famous Mullagutawny soup which is really a kind of pepper *rasam* with some other ingredients. Even some chicken pieces were included making it Chicken Mullagutawny soup.

Train travel those days had four classes. First class by which only the rich and the British travelled. This was a four berth compartment and had an attached bathroom. Then the second class and interclass depending on the degree of thickness of the cushions. In interclass the cushions were very thin. Then the third class with wooden seats which could hold at least 40 passengers. Majority of people travelled by third class as it was the cheapest. Any travel meant a holdall, suitcase and a trunk. Travel light was years away. Not far from Egmore station was the Egmore Ice Factory which had a history of its own.

Anna Varki
18, Harrington Road, Chennai 600 031

that was the only mode of communication barring telegrams.

Due to the advent of modern communication facilities like STD/ISD/Internet/Fax etc. the mail traffic has considerably reduced; but still the old efficiency is not visible mainly due to shortage of staff. There has been no recruitment for the past many years and naturally the performance of the Dept. suffers. Even to handle the reduced volume, sufficient staff is essential. Besides, the Post Office is diversifying into many activities like selling air tickets, passport forms etc. But these are all at the cost of its main business, i.e. collection and delivery of letters.

A reader has mentioned about Mobile PO, Express Delivery, etc. These facilities had been withdrawn long ago. There is no R.M.S. Sorting Section and naturally the letters take their own time in reaching the addressee.

T.M. Sundararaman
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Mylapore, Chennai 600 004

The Adyar broth

Referring to the article "Are too many cooks spoiling Adyar broth?" (MM, June 16th), pray let us know where is the doubt on this point? When so many government agencies vie with one another "to help the man on the street by providing him a comfortable living, with less hassles in crossing the road and with more greenery to please his eyes", naturally there will be clash of ideas especially when huge amounts are involved. The poor CAG at the other end, generally entrusted with post-audit, can only copiously comment on the quantum of 'infructuous expenditure' (taking care, of course, to word the protest in a way not to

wound the sentiments of the powers that be). MM and the like-minded may go on crying hoarse to help retain heritage, but the bland reply from the bureaucracy will only be "What heritage?"

S.N. Dikshit
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Srikamakoti Archasarya Colony
Chennai 600 060

Natural beauty

The Adyar Estuary was one of the havens for bird watchers and others who love nature. Some Mylaporeans used to go there gazing at the beauty that was there. It is rather unfortunate to see some who want to beautify that place at the cost of its natural beauty.

P.A. Ranganathan
16/24, Vedachala Garden
Mandaveli Street
Chennai 28

Prevent their falling

Trees (mostly Gulmohar and Neem) planted two decades ago by the Corporation and the Lions Club on the pavements in R.A. Puram and Mylapore have become huge and are leaning heavily. Trees in Krishnapuri, Bishop Gardens, have shallow roots and will fall anytime there are strong winds and rains. These trees will be hazardous and could prove fatal to pavement users or dangerous to vehicles parked under them.

Urgent action is required to provide support to these huge trees by using steel wires.

H.K. Lakshman Rao
33, Krishnapuri
R.A. Puram
Chennai 600028

Inspiring

The letter of West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi 'Trying to sell India to Satyamurti?' (MM, June 16th)

was nostalgic, historic and inspiring. It is indeed true that India's one and only Indian Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari had a way with metaphors. In the early 1960s CR visited the United States and had talks with President John F. Kennedy in the White House regarding nuclear disarmament. After the talks the Press reporters asked CR whether the talks were "fruitful". For that CR in his own inimitable style replied that talks were only "flowerful" and may take time to bear fruit. I wish the younger generation reads this letter of Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi reproduced by you in instalments.

Dr. R. Daniel Jayakumar
30, Pappamal Nagar
Kondur, Cuddalore 607 002

READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

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

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

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

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

THE EDITOR

OUR ADDRESSES

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

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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

To Satyamurti, with love

(Continued from last fortnight)

Tell me, Sir, when, in 1934, you were declared elected over the distinguished Ramaswami Mudaliar, did you exult? You said that it was not your opponent who had lost, only his political platform. You could agree with your leaders and colleagues Sir; you could, equally, disagree with them. The leadership of the Congress Legislature Party was regarded as rightfully yours. But when you saw that the Congress Working Committee had another plan, you stepped aside. Resentment must have risen in your heart; you were human. Yet you sublimated it; you sublimated it. CR's Premiership of the Madras Presidency has been rightly hailed as an enlightened one, a pioneering one, a role-model. But let us acknowledge that if the lamp that CR lit glowed strong, it was for two reasons: One, it had the luminosity of CR's greatness. Two, it glowed on the burning wick of Satyamurti's sacrifice.

Having tried to balance the book, let me now, in good old accounting style, draw up the last page in bold differentiated ink. Sir, a salute emerges on that final page: a salute not to one institution, to one achievement or to one tradition. Sir, it rises to the greatest player, to the greatest survivor, to the greatest achiever – to that extraordinary phenomenon – yes, Sir, you guessed it: to that extraordinary being, the 'ordinary' Indian.

Unfazed by the cost of living, rapacious traffic, intolerable levels of suspended particulate matter in the air, adulterated rations, contaminated water, spurious medicines, voltage fluctuations, bureaucratic arrogance, customer-trampling, card-sharpening, short-changing and, yes, under-aided by the grotesque terrorist violence in market squares and public spaces, that 'ordinary' Indian, who faces all these, is the clear and great winner. He or she appears in the shape of an honest officer rebuffing a bribe, or a threat, the three-wheeler driver who returns a valuable 'left behind', the chemist who checks a medicine's expiry date before selling it, the flower-string seller who gives an extra *muzham* free to a child buyer, the *vidwan* who wants the mike adjusted to the accompanist's advantage, the rail passenger who helps the porter heave his heavy luggage on to his head, the champion carrom-player who refuses to sell her first striker to a curio-collector, the doctor who cuts family-time to attend to a patient after 'time-up', the neighbourhood activist who organises garbage collection rather than blame the times, the passer-by who swings into action on a terror-device going off, *that* is the extraordinary 'ordinary' Indian. And, Sir, we have countless numbers of them.



The final instalment of the letter to Satyamurti written by Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal and grandson of Gandhiji and Rajagopalachari.

There are statues raised after wars to the Unknown Soldier. Let us salute the imaginary statue of that brave warrior in the battlefield of plain goodness, the statue of the Unknown Citizen. The 'ordinariness' of that Unknown Citizen is, to my mind,

the most extraordinary accomplishment of India.

He and she may not be ranked among the 'great', but they are precisely that.

It is good to be great; it is greater to be good. And, let me say, vastly more difficult.

These people are, besides, what may be called eminently 'regular' people.

You were, as I said, your own person. You never pretended to be one thing when you were an-

A big 'Thank You' to 39 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 16.6.08 and 15.07.08, 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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Rs. 100: Sankarasubbaiyan, V.; Pattabiraman, K.V.; Rajagopalan, N.; Natarajan, R.K.; Chandrasekaran, R.; Mathew Jacob; Balakrishnan, M.; Micher D.S. Dowie; Padmanabha, P.; Malireddy Ramagopal Reddy; Radhakrishnan, D.; Uthandaraman, A.; Meenakshi, S.; Saroj A Menon; Sukumar, S.; Ramachandran, K.S.; Viswanathan, S.; Sankaraiyah, K.; Ramakrishnan, A.S.
Rs. 50: Santha Kumar, B.; Srinivasan, V.

other. You could laugh with the naughty, be silent with the sagacious, weep with the hurt. You made no secret of your fondness for the *navarasas*, for the arts, for classical dance and music. Your tongue acknowledged the tastes it relished. Perhaps if you had been and been seen to have been a self-denying ascetic, you might have been in the inner and higher circles of the Congress. But, thank God, you were what you were.

Today, you will be glad to see hypocrisy is hated, especially by the young. And yet, it manages to thrive as something of a fine art.

We have refined other traits as well.

You could praise, but did you flatter? No, Sir. We have raised that talent to a plastic art.

You could criticise, but did you humiliate? No, Sir. We have promoted that practice to a performing art.

You aspired, but did you covet? No, Sir. We have lifted coveting to the level of a new art form, Sir, which was not known in your time: Installation Art.

We grieve at your missing the triumphant finale of the great battle of which you were a gen-

eral. Sir, in 1947, you would have been but sixty – younger than most people in this hall, younger than everyone on the stage. If in 1962 you had been with us and, at the urging of the incomparable Kamaraj, had been returned to the Lok Sabha, what a treat for Parliament that would have been! Nehru, at 73, Prime Minister and Leader of the House, S. Satyamurti, at 75, mesmerising the Lok Sabha, and the charismatic and brilliant C. N. Annadurai at 53 doing the same in the Rajya Sabha. Alas.

But you will say you have no regrets.

No regrets... look at the irony of it! If anyone was entitled to rise above regrets and say 'No regrets have I', it was you. Yet, that expression which, by the rule of ownership, should be yours belongs by the rule of patents not to you but, again, immortalised by MS's rendering of *Kurai Onnum Illai* to the noble CR.

When I hear that ineffably moving song, *Kurai Onnum Illai*, I thank CR and I think of Satyamurti: There, on the Seven Hills, I see both of you worshipping together. And I hear M. D.

The Maami-ian way

Is that a tattoo on that young spaghetti-strap-clad shoulder? Yes it is, sassy, cute – in Tamil. How cool is that!

Could that be a Maami youngling?

As she walks briskly down the street, you notice the attitude-riddled pace slackening slightly just as she crosses the little temple. She glances in, does a quick tap-tap on her cheeks, acknowledging the presence of a higher power, before picking up speed again.

Yep – that's a Maami-ian in the making all right. And only a true Maami-ian can combine countless streams of thought, attitude, and belief systems into a harmonious whole, and still have room for more.

Chennai has always had its 'Maamis'. If you are of female persuasion and say you live in Chennai (or did in Madras), chances are someone out there

Ramanathan sing *Hariyum Haranum onre enru ariyaadar ularo*.

When you died, CR spoke of your "red-hot will to live". What does that teach us, Sir? I think it teaches us that we must never give in to cynicism. We have become far too cynical as a people. There is an all-pervasive emptiness within most of us. Even those who are doing well, making wealth or making waves, at the end of the day, do not know what they are living for. Your daughter Lakshmi is an exception, of course!

India waits for a redemption from a cynical acceptance of wrong-doing and, equally, from a cynical suspicion of the good that is being done all the time.

India waits for its truer and more abiding *Swaraj*. Not from any foreign power, but from its own pettinesses and meannesses. It waits for the freedom that will enhance and fulfil the freedom that was won in 1947. It waits for the freedom that will see safe water, clean air and good governance. It waits for the freedom that will see justice and fair-play. The freedom that will see an end to terrorism. And it waits for a freedom from the traps that global warming is laying for us. When that freedom is being wrought, you and those martyrs who were recalled before their time, before the last victory, will, I would like to believe, be sent again by Destiny to bring the torch home.

Your father, adjusting his spectacles on the bridge of his nose, will then tell your mother in a celestial Tirumayam, *Yellaam ahiruthu-mma, kaalakramattile. Yellaam kaala-kramattile...*

(Concluded)



"Do you remember our boring 'traditional maami' days?"

is going to type-cast you a 'Maami'.

A lot has been said about the changing face of Chennai-that-was-Madras.

But the city's maamis, and the younger maamis-in-the-making, have their own special brand of interpreting, and incorporating, changes. A process much more than a simple wardrobe shift like exchanging the *patu* saree for power-dressing, or going global in kitchens.

The word 'maami' describes a certain section of the female half of Chennai/Madras's population, and can define a relation by blood or marriage, show respect for age and, sometimes, nastiness, as in: "God, she's such a Maami".

A while ago, the word brought with it a strong whiff of traditional cooking, the oily-plait-topped-by-loads-of-jasmine image, a slight penchant for plastic-basket-weaving classes, and a certain mind-set.

This mind-set has, at times, driven family circles around the bend, with words like "stubborn" and "typical" being banded about, to which the Sisterhood of Maamis has always pointed out that one person's pigheadedness is another's strength of conviction.

Did a new 'maami' emerge when Madras became Chennai? Depends on your definitions.

If the Maami-ian way basically calls for a capacity to walk new paths without forgetting your mental-map of the ways in being able to combine seemingly irreconcilable contrasts into a working system with minimum fuss – then, 'change' is only superficial, the soul has stayed.

Today, grey-haired ladies, ubiquitous jasmine strands in place, drive through teeming traffic, finish their *bhajan* and Tai Chi classes, then head for the latest literary club. You spot a younger, jean-clad version, dropping her kid off for karate or yoga lessons, picking veggies on route, tying up office loose-ends over the cell-phone, and everything else.

The Maami dances to Bollywood today with the same élan as a classical rendering, or the *kummi*.

A young Maami-ian, speeding down the road – on her motor-bike, no less – heads for a huge glass and concrete office, as though to her own place.

She exudes the same personality as the older version who has the final word on a particular family extravaganza.

Sore throat? Even the youngest Maami-aspirant will offer at least three remedies in a second.

It's in the blood.

Today, waves of Maamis find themselves on far-flung shores, thanks to their work, or their children's choices. Many travel briskly – complete with gym shoes and sarees, armed with spices to tame foreign kitchens.

But the migratory Maami, leading to some colourful family characters like 'Matunga Maratham', 'Chandigarh Choodamani', and 'Tatanagar Tara', has been around for a while.

Years ago, you could tell the Maami who had got away. Was it the pink lipstick; the "cut-choli", or her disconcerting habit of breaking into Hindi exclamations when least expected? She went around saying things like 'paranthas', and 'amle ka murabba', while Grand-Aunt La Formidable sniffed and mumbled about new-fangled names for old, routine stuff.

And, for some strange reason, being considered sophisticated and urbane by this hybrid creature would become a shame-faced, unacknowledged need within the home-bound circle – who would rather be boiled in oil used for *bhaktanamams* than admit it, of course.

If she was bold and outspoken, the rest of the family put it down to her "having been in the North"...go figure, because there were an equal number of high-spirited ladies right here, who stayed within city limits.... tying up office loose-ends over the cell-phone, and everything else.

The body language over the

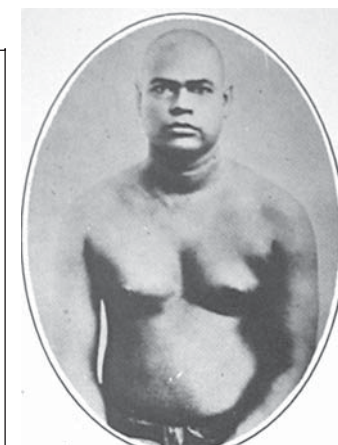
The Ramakrishna Mission Students Home, Mylapore

(By Karthik Bhatt)

One day in 1905, C. Ramaswami Iyengar, a clerk in the Public Works and Labour Secretariat, Madras, was walking on Brodie's Road when he saw a group of four boys sitting under a tree beside the tank looking miserable and forlorn. When asked what ailed them, they replied that they were from Andhra and had come to Madras on hearing that a renowned charity was helping poor students pursue their studies by providing free boarding. However, they were disappointed to learn that no help was on hand. They had not eaten and had no money to go back. Moved by their plight, Ramu (as Ramaswami Iyengar



Ramu (Ramaswami Iyengar)



Sashi Maharaj

was known) arranged for their meal at a friend's place and promised to do something more.

That evening, he went and met Swami Ramakrishnananda (Sashi Maharaj), a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission who was living in *Ice House*, looking after the small shrine of Sri Ramakrishna there. The Swamiji had been sent by Swami Vivekananda to Madras to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, after appeals by devotees at Madras, to start the work of the Mission here.

Ramu asked Swamiji whether they could start a free boarding house to help such boys. So were sown the seeds for the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission Students Home, now better known as The Home.

Ramu set about mobilising the support of friends. One of them was Dr. M.C. Nanjunda Rao, the famous doctor-philanthropist and a devotee of Swami Vivekananda. He agreed to give his house on Keshavaperumal Koil South Mada Street for a year, initially rent-free and then at a rent of Rs. 3 per month, if possible. But he later announced it would be rent-free.

Ramu next looked for a cook. A poor Brahmin approached him and agreed to cook for the boys if

More power to the Chennai 'Maami', then.

A man of many parts

C. Ramanujachariar, or Ramanuju as he was called, was well versed in music and theatre. He was instrumental in the formation of the Madras Secretariat Party whose membership was a mix of his colleagues from the Secretariat, students of The Home, and other friends. The Party raised funds for The Home through various stage performances of mythological plays. The Party had several illustrious persons of yesteryears as members. Amongst them were Parur Anantharaman, leading violinist, M. Subbaraya Iyer, leading income tax lawyer (a non-acting member), Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar, noted Harikatha exponent, and Dewan Bahadur L. Venkatakrishna Iyer, ISE, Chief Engineer of Madras and Kerala Governments. The success of the party can be gauged from the fact that it raised nearly Rs. 5,50,000 by way of collections. This was later made into an endowment fund. Later, Ramanuju formed a stage troupe

called 'Ramakrishna Kripa Amateurs' which raised about Rs. 3,50,000 by staging dramas. In 1954, this troupe was adjudged the best drama troupe by the Government of India and was called upon to stage a drama in Delhi.

In the Ramakrishna Kripa Amateurs' troupe, Ramanuju himself was the producer, director, music director and principal actor.

He was a great lover of music and also appreciated the meanings behind the songs. He translated the songs of Saint Thyagaraja and got them printed in the Devanagiri script with his own translations in English so that they could be better appreciated. The book was released in 1958, a year or so after his death, and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who wrote the foreword for the book described it as a "Bhagavatha in every sense of the term." It was called the *Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja*.

KB

his two sons were taken as inmates. He was appointed at a salary of Rs. 3 per month. Ramu searched for vessels for the Home. His mother donated a brass cooking vessel. A few other women in the neighbourhood gave vessels. A petty provision merchant provided provisions on credit initially. Appeals for monetary help were made and P.S. Sivaswami Iyer contributed Rs. 15. All the preliminary work was completed within a week and on February 17, 1905, Sashi Maharaj formally inaugurated the home. Its first wards were the four boys from Andhra, the two sons of the cook and a boy whom Sashi Maharaj was already supporting. Initially, The Home went through a difficult phase and collected just over Rs. 430 in its first year. Sankranti Day, 1906, however, saw a generous contribution of Rs. 100 from V. Krishnaswami Iyer who had originally been skeptical about the idea and had not supported it. He was to continue his support in the years that followed, as did many other eminent Brahmins in Madras. Annie Besant too was a regular contributor.

Meanwhile, the Ramakrishna Math had moved to Brodie's Road in 1907 and the boys of the Home were taken every Wednesday to meet Sashi Maharaj who had moved there. He spoke to them on diverse matters emphasising, among other things, the importance of dignity of labour. Even today, the inmates of the Home are entrusted with its daily upkeep.

For a brief period, The Home opened its doors for children of affluent people who wanted their children to imbibe the values The Home taught. This payment system was, however, soon discontinued as the children under this scheme could not easily cope with the rigours of the style of living the indigent inmates of the home were undergoing.

In 1915, The Home received its first endowment. It was by Mathosri Komalathammal, wife of R. Chakravarthi Iyengar, Ramu's professor at Presidency College. It was for Rs. 1000 and was for maintaining one boy. The second endowment was from Port Blair and was called the 'Port Blair Temple Club Gokhale Fund'. But what The Home needed was a home of its own.

The Home shifted residence quite a few times in its early years. At the end of 1905, it moved to a house on Keshavaperumal Sannidhi Street on a rent of Rs. 7 per month. A year later, it shifted to another spa-

(To be concluded)



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

1. In which famous and most destructive maritime disaster case did the US Supreme Court rule that the damages awarded were excessive and reduced them from \$2.7 billion to \$507 million?
2. Who scored the only goal in the UEFA Euro 2008 final won by Spain on June 29th?
3. Which team won its first NBA title in 22 years at the expense of the LA Lakers?
4. According to recent data from UNHCR, from which two Asian countries do more than half of the world's 11.4 million refugees come?
5. Which community has got an assurance from the Rajasthan Government on reservation after a period of violence?
6. Which African President was stripped of his knighthood because of internal turmoil?
7. ICANN, the regulator of domain names, has recently voted on what big system change as regards TLDs?
8. The Vatican has slapped a ban on the filming of which Dan Brown work in any of its churches in Rome, calling the work "an offence against God"?
9. Name the scientist who helped pioneer the field of molecular biology and was one of the first to confirm the structure of DNA, who died recently.
10. Name the Indian shooter who won the double trap gold in the shotgun World Cup in Belgrade by equalling two World records.

* * *

11. With which party did the DMK snap ties on June 17th?
12. On what date and in which year was the Conditional Access System (CAS) for cable TV rolled out in Chennai?
13. As per the State Government's recent decision, how much monthly assistance would Tamil scholars and enthusiasts, who rendered service to preserve and develop Tamil language and culture, be given?
14. Who ceded Thanjavur district to the British East India Company in absolute sovereignty in October 1799?
15. What is the actual name of the famous basilica in Velankanni?
16. Name the birth place of the Carnatic Music Trinity of Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri.
17. Name the spherical edifice of spiritual significance situated at the centre of Auroville.
18. Expand the initials V.O. in the name of the famous freedom fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai.
19. What is the common name for the cookie made of cashew, egg and yeast for which Tuticorin is very famous?
20. In the K.B. Sundarambal film *Nandanar*, three tunes were lifted from which Hindi film, as an early example of inspired music?

(Answers on page 7)

The Captain of Cathedral Road

(By P.C. Ramakrishna)

Dewan Bahadur Captain (Dr.) Pennathur Krishnaswami (1888-1962), my grandfather, was from the rather sleepy village of Pennathur – now more ambitiously termed a 'Town Panchayat' – in North Arcot District, about eight miles from Tiruvannamalai. Pennathur, of course, would have continued to remain one of the unsung little hamlets of rural Tamil Nadu, had it not been for a paternal first cousin of Dr. Krishnaswami, Pennathur Subramania Iyer (1860-1901), leaving a will stipulating the founding of an institution in Madras, the Pennathur Subramania Iyer High School (better known as the P.S. High School) in Mylapore in 1905. Subramania Iyer's early death led to Pennathur Krishnaswami becoming patriarch of the Pennathur clan.

After obtaining his medical degree from Madras Medical College, Dr. P. Krishnaswami enrolled for service in the Great War (1914-18). He served for four years in Mesopotamia and Europe in the rank of Captain. The British Government later awarded him the Dewan Bahadur title for his services to the State. However, the title 'Captain' was what he seemed to prefer and was known to family and friends as 'Captain Mama', except to his own children and grandchildren who, curiously, referred to him as 'Naayana', after the fashion of the Andhras (not to be confused with the rather flamboyant usage in Madras Thamizh!). It is still unclear why this was so. I suspect, however, that many of those from North Arcot either studied or spent much of their impressionable working life in Andhra (Dr. Krishnaswami

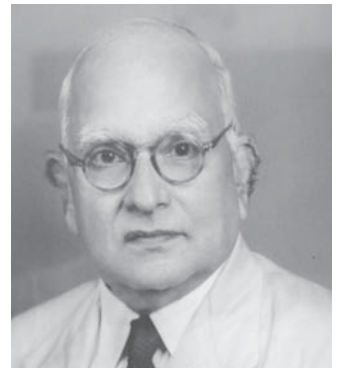
himself did significant medical duty in Nellore and Visakhapatnam in his early years in the profession) and quite a few of them spoke Telugu more fluently than Tamil. I know my father did. His Tamil was generously embellished with Telugu words. In fact, it could be said that he spoke Telugu, if not better, certainly with greater relish. My grandmother Kanthammal could only read Telugu, and discovered Shakespeare in her later years through Telugu translations of Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*.

Captain Krishnaswami went to the UK after the Great War and spent four years there during which he completed his MRCP. Returning to India, he was posted to the Heart Clinic of the Madras General Hospital. It was at that time the Electrocardiogram machine first arrived in Madras, and as he was at the time the only doctor familiar with the mysteries of its working – owing to his stint in the UK – he was much in demand. He went on to become one of the first cardiologists in the Madras General Hospital.

After transfers to Nellore and Visakhapatnam, he returned to Madras as Dean of Stanley Medical College, from where he retired in 1942. After retirement, Captain Krishnaswami did not opt for extensive private practice; he was not the sort of man fuelled by some burning desire to heal the world. Instead, he chose to minister to a select clientele of patients, who swore by him, and was known to be adept at what a worthy cousin of mine referred to as "stethoscope and knuckle down diagnosis", without the need for complex laboratory procedures.

In the 1940s, Captain Krishnaswami bought the house on Cathedral Road (No.15) with about 40 grounds from U. Ananda Rau. Because of its proximity to the Agri-Horticultural Society gardens, it was named *Garden View*. Approached from Gemini Circle, it was the first residential building on the right, at the corner just before which the wall of the present Stella Maris compound begins. The area on either side of *Garden View* was dense vegetation and paddy fields. The tree cover was so thick that you could not see *Garden View* from Cathedral Road, even though it was right on it. To the east were paddy fields that belonged to Kasturi and Sons (owners of *The Hindu*); hence these areas still bear the names Kasturi Estate and Kasturi Ranga Road. Binny and Company owned two buildings in the middle of the paddy fields. These were later sold to builders, which is why the road branching off from Cathedral Road into Poes Garden is called Binny Road even today.

I remember, as late as the 1950s, most of the stretch from Gemini Circle to the Marina Beach was heavily wooded. There was, of course, St. George's Cathedral, then Captain Krishnaswami's *Garden View*, T.T. Krishnamachari's house (*Shanti*) where the TTK Group office stands today, S.S. Vasan's *Gemini House* at the mouth of what is now Radhakrishnan Salai, the bungalow and sprawling grounds (*Sudharma*) of S. Anantharamakrishnan of Simpsons immediately thereafter, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's house (*Girija*), the noted ophthalmic surgeon Dr. E.V. Srinivasan's house, the



Captain (Dr.) Pennathur Krishnaswami.

E.V. Kalyani Nursing Home, and the house of the famous Travancore Sisters, Lalita, Padmini and Ragini. The rest of Cathedral Road was forest – no Drive-in-Woodlands, no Stella Maris, no Music Academy and other landmarks so familiar today. You could drive from Gemini to the Marina within a couple of minutes!

Garden View itself was huge and was built around a large *mitham*, or central courtyard, as old houses tended to be in those days. It involved some physical exercise walking from the reception hall to the kitchen at the rear, which was probably why my grandmother retained her spare physique till her end, having had to cover 2 or 3 kilometres up and down the house on an average working day! This also explained in some measure why, as a family, we have ultra-loud voices. We had, you see, to be consistently heard upto the kitchen! And if you were the sole occupant of one of the upstairs bedrooms (an euphemism, because they were as large as basketball courts!) – as I often was, during vacation visits – the wind howling through the trees at night wasn't exactly the ideal soporific!

Captain Krishnaswami himself was as gentle as a lamb, even-tempered and, largely, a gentleman of leisure after retirement. His wife, Kanthammal, ran the house with iron control,

(Continued on page 8)

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— The Editor

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Micro-organism for industrial waste disposal

Most industries traditionally treat their polluting effluents by chemical methods which are not only expensive but create toxic solid wastes that are difficult to dispose. One industry near Chennai, the SNAP Natural and Alginate Products Ltd, Ranipet, has used the magic of the micro-organism, in partnership with the team of algal technologists from the Vivekananda College, Mylapore, to prove the success of a first of its kind initiative in the world!

At SNAP, Ranipet, a company that manufactures alginates (derived from seaweed and used for pharmaceutical and food applications), the use of micro-organisms has completely cut off toxic sludge development and helped to remedy harmful acidic effluent that could contaminate solid and water. Responsible for this is the pioneering effort of the Vivekananda Institute of Algal Technology (VIAT), a research unit of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapeeth, Mylapore.

Using living organisms to clean up contaminated soil or water is known as 'Bioremediation'. The VIAT's method, which employs algae, used to treat industrial effluents and waste water, is safe, eco-friendly and highly economical and is useful in removal of toxic waste including heavy metals.

"Earlier, chemical treatment of 30,000 litres of effluent per day at SNAP meant that caustic soda to the tune of about Rs.50 lakh had to be used each year. And the sludge generated was even more harmful to solid

and water. No longer, thanks to the algae!" says Dr. Sivasubramanian, Director, VIAT. "Bioremediation happens around us in the environment, all the time. By just increasing the concentration of the right kind of organisms at source, we can help clean faster, inexpensively, and with no technical expertise needed to implement. Three years ago we decided to reach out to the industries and discovered many issues that research can handle in a major way." The successful SNAP experience has enthused more industries (including the TWAD Board, Madurai, Agsar Paints, and Coca Cola). MOUs have been signed with Ultramarine and Pigments Ltd, Ranipet (produc-

● by
SHOBHA MENON

ing detergents and pigments), dyeing industries of Tirupur and also with Stahl India Chemicals, one of the world's leading suppliers of leather processing products. Also, a similar MOU has been signed with the Chennai-based Indo-Japan joint venture company, M/s Nichi-In Biosciences (P) Ltd., for a multifaceted research project to develop technology for environment-friendly plastic materials.

With industries, as part of ISRO certification, being required to eliminate waste streams, either through process redesign, or through conversion of waste streams into useful products, bioremediation could just be the answer. An excellent example of this is the composting of sludge from Effluent

Treatment Plants (ETPs) and Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) that turn the sludge into a value added product for use as horticultural amendments and as a potential revenue stream. Another veteran in this field, Dr. Sultan Ismail, says, "Waste streams of the STPs are mainly organic matter and can be composted with bulk material like wood chips and plant waste, like at the Sundaram Clayton, Padi, and the Futura Polyesters in Chennai. Even tannery effluent can be composted, provided Reverse Osmosis process is ensured before sludge production. At the Lactochem factory, the compost generated as a byproduct from the waste stream has got many takers because of its specific gypsum and organic matter content."

Significantly, M.A. Gaffar, an M.Sc. Biotechnology student of New College, has isolated a few species of micro-organisms from areas around petrol pumps that can degrade hydro carbon pollutants, but lack of funding makes student research an uphill task. "Talented youngsters should be encouraged with suitable funds for environmentally relevant projects," feels Dr. Ismail.

Says Dr. Dawood Sharief, Department of Zoology, New College, however, "Way back in 1998, we devised an inexpensive treatment for sugar mill effluent. Unfortunately, there have been no takers!" In their lab, industrial effluents like sago, sugar mill, dairy, tannery and petrochemical effluents have been degraded using microbes.

Another expert feels, "The Pollution Control Board refuses, in spite of mounting evidence, to believe that organisms can be effective in handling technology. So polluting industries continue to be stuck in time, and desist from adopting newer environmentally friendly technologies. Government grants from the Ministry are mainly for projects that are far removed from grassroots level."

At a one-day symposium on 'Biological Methods of Waste Treatment and Management in South India' held at the New College last year, where over 30 research, development and implementation papers covering diverse biological technologies for waste treatment – from

ADYAR CREEK WATER GETS MURKIER

(Continued from page 1)

to the site at this point of time merely reveals a lot of composting work going on.

There are other concerns as well. The fate of the remaining 300 acres of the Creek is still a question mark. The Government had put out for tender the task of developing a master plan for this area and the contract has been awarded to IL&FS Eco Smart, an organisation which, according to its website, focusses on environment management solutions. The site does not mention any of the projects the company has worked on.

Environmentalists have always expressed concern over the divided development of the 58 acres and the remaining 300 acres as they have felt that sustainability of the Park will depend on access to the waters of the Creek. Much will therefore hinge on how the second phase of the development, namely that of the 300 acres, takes place. At present there is no information on this. What is the mandate given to this organisation? What kind of de-

velopment is planned in this area? There is no information on this.

Another area of concern is the multiplicity of agencies that claim to be working on Adyar Creek and its environs. The proposed Creek restoration may be affected by the plans for the Circular Corridor which, if reports are anything to go by, will impinge directly on both banks of the river. There is also talk of a riverside park coming up by the side of the river. Work on building up the embankment towards this end was begun, then given up suddenly, and restarted again. The studied silence of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority over the multiple plans is most puzzling.

What emerges from all this is that the Adyar Creek Project, like many such plans, is being conducted in a hush-hush fashion with no scope for a public debate on what exactly is planned for the area. It is high time the Government made its plans public and lets everyone know where the Creek and its environs are headed.

STATE TOPS IN MANUFACTURING...

(Continued from page 1)

on Worldwide Quality of Living has given Chennai a very low score, though it has fared marginally better than Mumbai and Delhi.

What does all this mean for Chennai and those in charge of its fate? It is high time industrial development is looked at in districts that are further south, most of which have qualified poorly on the HDI and GDI. In addition, it will also be good if the State looks and aims at

dismantling some of its administrative institutions in the city and moving them to other towns in the State. In this connection, the setting up of a separate administrative capital for the State has long been suggested by *Madras Musings* and many other well-meaning people. This should be looked into again in all its seriousness as such a move will help towards substantial decongestion of the city and decentralising development to areas that need them.

What Bioremediation means...

In a non-polluted environment, bacteria, fungi, and other micro-organisms are constantly at work breaking down organic matter. If an organic pollutant such as oil contaminated this environment, some of the micro-organisms would die, while others capable of eating the organic pollution would survive. Bioremediation works by providing these pollution-eating organisms with fertiliser, oxygen, and other conditions that encourage their rapid growth. These organisms would then be able to break down the organic pollutant at a correspondingly faster rate.

Bioremediation can be used in treating:

Effluents in industries like mining and energy, tanneries, sugar mills, pharmaceuticals, dairies, etc;

Oil and gas industry waste water created by spills and underground leaks, and to clean up waste products from oil production;

Contaminated sediment from sewage, pulp and paper mills, and steel/petroleum industries.

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industry, municipalities, agricultural residues and domestic streams – were presented, its organiser, Dr. John Tharakan, had felt that "grassroot initiatives involving bioremediation need to involve government and community and bring stakeholders together to solve the currently overwhelming social problem of waste disposal." How much longer will this take is the question that remains to be answered.

Bioremediation techniques might well bring about a healing that our beleaguered city's environs sorely need. And now that that world-class expertise is available closer home, it just requires environmentally sensitive politicians and bureaucrats to put a system in place.

Answers to Quiz

1. Exxon Valdez case; 2. Fernando Torres; 3. Boston Celtics; 4. Iraq and Afghanistan; 5. Gujjars; 6. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; 7. Companies or groups can apply to have any string of letters established as a domain name; 8. *Angels and Demons*; 9. Gunther Stent; 10. Ronjan Sodhi.

* * *

11. PMK; 12. September 1, 2003; 13. Rs.3,000 plus medical allowance of Rs.15; 14. Raja Serfoji II; 15. Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health; 16. Tiruvarur; 17. Matrimandir; 18. Vulaganathan Othapidaram; 19. Maroon; 20. *Chandidas*.

Train that bridged time

Father was a keen votary of Indian Culture and the Theosophical movement, while also being passionate about the struggle for Independence, and felt that the Besant School would provide his children with ample scope and opportunities to be exposed to this culture and ambience, to their eternal benefit. Moreover, the school had hostel facilities. Since he was employed in Ceylon, he first admitted 8-year-old Ram, my brother, as a hosteller.

Soon after, the school faced a crisis. Felix Layton, the Headmaster, with great presence of mind, without waiting for a driver, took the school bus and drove it himself from Adyar to Government General Hospital (GH), Madras, to take the patient Ram, who was suffering with acute pain, suspected to be appendicitis. The school bus was the best in town and Felix Layton broke all traffic rules to reach in time for the doctors to perform an appendicitis operation, which was a big operation in those days.

A week after the operation, my parents came from Ceylon. They took the train from Colombo, crossing the Talaimannar/Dhanushkodi strait by the ferry, then took the Boat Mail to reach Madras. Seeing the luxury of raspberry jelly being served to my brother and also the electric train which Vajra (son of N. Sri Ram, later President of the Theosophical Society) played with, my brother and I were captivated. I willingly agreed to join the school as a hosteller, even though I was below the age of

six. Vajra, three years older than me, was my first school friend.

Now, 66 years after this incident, which has always been in my mind, I had to establish contact with S. Vasant Nilakanta, Vajra's elder brother. (Vajra is no more.) The object was to request him to write an article for a compilation titled *South of the Adyar River – Theosophy-in-*

● by
K. V. S. KRISHNA

spired Educational Initiatives – Memories and Tributes from Alumni. I did not know how to request Vasant to contribute an article. He did not know me and would not remember me, leave alone contribute an article on a stranger's request. It took me several days, nay months, to pen a request. It took courage to address the letter to "My dear Vasant" and remind him that Vajra, his brother, used to entertain my brother with his electric train and that his father, N. Sri Ram, and mother, Bhagirathi Ammal, used to visit him in hospital. I also wrote to him that the raspberry jelly they served in the GH made me decide to join the school, and all such stuff by way of introduction.

Then, to my pleasant surprise, after 12 days, I received one of the best letters of my life: a letter dated March 17, 2006 from S.V. Nilakanta explaining about the electric toy train. It reads, "My dear Krishna, your letter of the 4th came very late. I could have answered earlier –

but have become very lazy, the excuse being old age (84 years).

"I have a vague memory of your brother, Ram. He was two beds away from me when I was laid up in Madras General Hospital with a severe condition.

"My parents and my brother (Vajra) visited me almost every day and incidentally cheered up your brother.

"They used to serve transparent, raspberry-flavoured, iced jelly at the hospital. Your brother was very much tempted to eat it, but ultimately refused it as it was an animal extract. Poor boy!

"The electric train set was mine. I allowed Vajra to run his clockwork engine on the same rails. I used to enter competitions through *Meccano Magazine*. On winning prizes, I was offered Hornby and Meccano products. That is how I painstakingly built up an elaborate train set."

Now the ownership of the train has been set right. The train ran 66 years in my mind. I never knew it also ran in Vasant's mind. If I could, as Ravi (K.R.N. Menon) says, remember 90% of my early days, surely Vasant remembers 99%.

I forgot to ask Vasant – is the train still kept for posterity? Eventually Vasant became a Bachelor of Engineering and was in the British Indian Army, which he left as a major to join Scindia Workshops, the ship-repair part of the famous Scindia Shipping Corporation, and then Dynacraft, which specialised in materials handling machinery.

Note by Lt. Col. Nandan Nilakanta:

K.V.S. Krishna and Ravi Menon presented to some of us members of the Madras Gymkhana Club (we invited Krishna, Ravi is a member) their book, *South of the Adyar River*. This was a very interest-

THE CAPTAIN OF CATHEDRAL ROAD

(Continued from page 6)

and he was quite happy to leave it all to her. Many in the family believed that he was so dominated that he was never heard to call her by name! However, he played *in loco parentis* to several youngsters within our extended family, shepherding them through their studies, and helping them get jobs. Many actually stayed with him in *Garden View* over periods of time. V.R. Kalyanaraman, his nephew, who stayed in *Garden View* through five years of his medical education, recalls how during dinner time every day Captain Krishnaswami would quiz him on his day's learning at College.

Strangely, for a doctor with the title Captain, his own attitude to physical fitness was more than somewhat cavalier. He was quite rotund, and his only exercise consisted of waddling up to his favourite armchair in the living room and sinking into it with audible sighs of satisfaction. Of course, a visit to the beach in his Graham car, driven by a chauffeur with the rather improbable name of Tulukkaanam at 5 p.m., was a

daily routine, to take in what he fondly called the 'Ozone'.

Both his daughters – Saraswathi, the eldest of the children and Kamakshi the youngest – were given in marriage to Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar's sons, C.R. Pattabhiraman and C.R. Sundaram, respectively. His son, my father, P. Chandrasekhar, retired as CMD of United India Insurance Company Ltd., and was the Founder-Correspondent of P.S. Senior Secondary School in Myslapore.

There was a time when families belonging to North Arcot District would seek marital alliances only from the same district. Thus it came about that four major families of North Arcot became linked – Pennathur, Chetpat, Calamur and Thandalam. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar was from Chetpat and his sons married into Pennathur. Captain Krishnaswami's wife was from Calamur as was Lady Seethammal Ramaswami Aiyar. My mother is from Thandalam. It is only in recent years that people from North Arcot have sought marital connections outside the district.

ing afternoon. My father, S Vasant Nilakanta, about whom Krishna has written, had asked him to get in touch with me and we have been in e-mail communication, so it was exhilarating for both of us to meet for the very first time at tea before the presentation.

During the presentation, Krishna told us the unpublished story of how he joined the Besant Theosophical School and narrated his memory of the train set, saying it was only after

so many decades that he learnt the train set was actually my father's and had wondered what happened to it. I told him that it had been passed down to me.

When very young, I was only allowed the clockwork engine. Later, my father's sister, Mrs. Radha Burnier, brought a beautiful electric engine from Switzerland with the accompanying transformer. It looked very svelte, with pantographs and lights that worked and was absolutely accurate to scale.

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