

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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## Going private? Is it the way?

(By A Special Correspondent)

Privatisation is now an accepted alternative means of delivering municipal services in America's largest cities. "To do more with less" is the objectives. Will Chennai consider this lead?

Of 66 American cities covered by a survey in 1995, only three had not privatised any of the city services, while a large number of large-population cities had not fully adopted the privatisation approach, which features competitive bidding between the private sector and existing city agencies.

The five categories, with 47 services, contracted in the private sector are: Public works/transportation; public safety; health and human services; parks, recreation and culture; and support functions. The number of privatised services in each city, according to the survey, ranged from 0 to 19, with the average about seven. The over-all conclusion is that the privatisation movement has made a significant impact in the largest cities.

Of the 456 services privatised by 66 cities, 106 are in public works/transportation; 98 in public safety; 89 in health and human services; and 57 in parks and recreation. The ten most privatised services in cities these were:

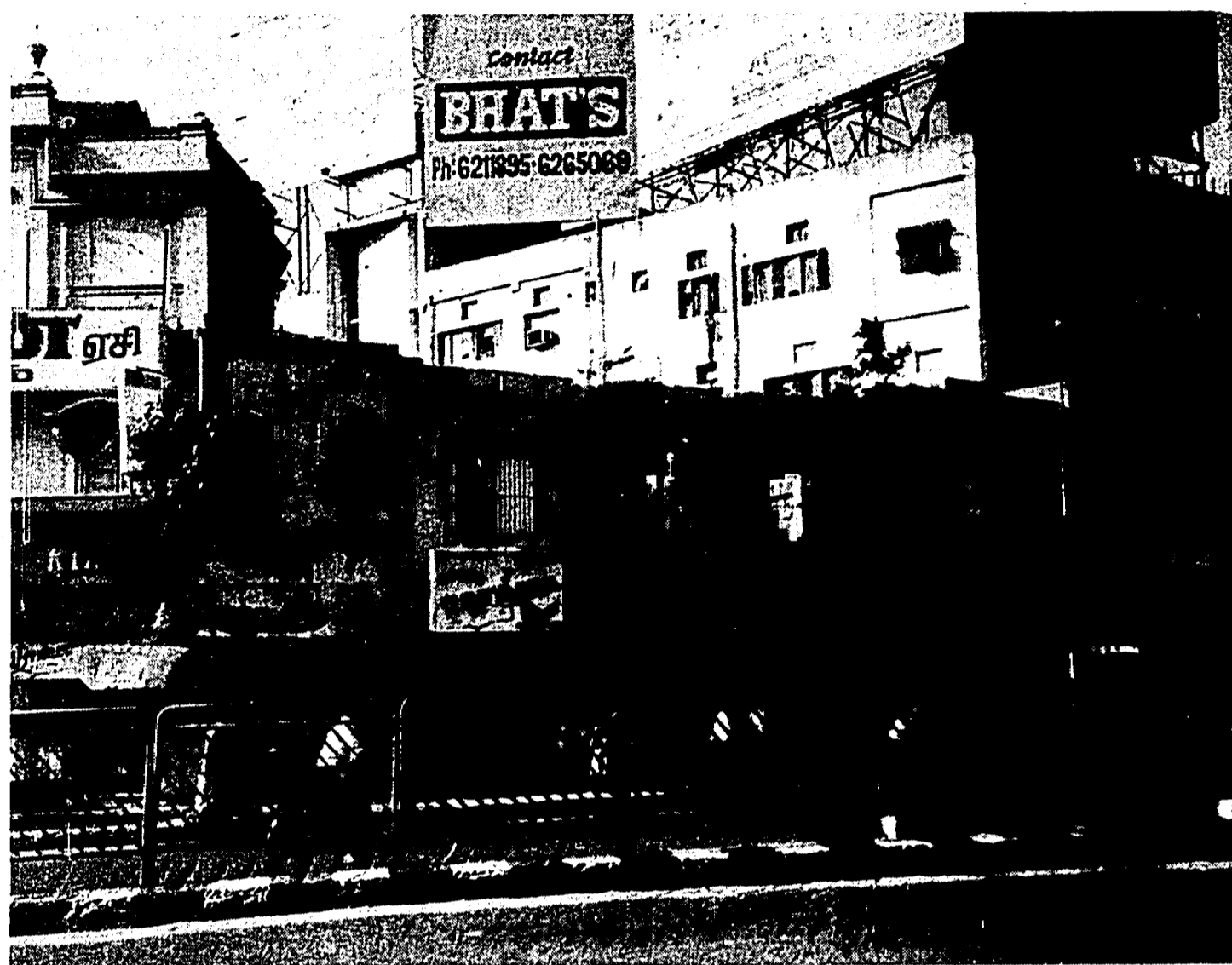
- Vehicle towing - 53-80% of the cities;
- Solid waste collection - 33 to 50%;
- Building security - 32 to 48%;
- Street repairs - 26 to 40%;
- Ambulance services - 24 to 36%;
- Printing services - 23 to 35%;
- Street lighting/signals - 17 to 26%;

- Drug/alcohol treatment centres - 16 to 24%;
- Employment and training - 16 to 24%;
- Legal services - 16 to 24%.

The survey pointed out that satisfaction with the privatised services was expressed in 54 of the 66 cities.

Reduction of cost and improvement of services were the two important factors that weighed with the municipalities in their decision to privatise services. Result: About 40% of city officials reported that more than 20% was saved from previous outlays and another 40% reported that they saved 10 to 19% of the previous outlays. The average estimated cost savings was 20.7% in public works/transportation; 16.3% in public safety; 17.3% in health and human services; 16.6% in parks and recreation; and 16.1% in support functions. Privatisation has improved service delivery in most instances by about 25 per cent.

City officials in these American cities were relatively satisfied with the privatisation experience. According to some opponents of privatisation, however, it may decrease city expenses in the short term, but increase it in the long term. And one city official has cautiously observed, "Privatisation is no panacea. It has tremendous political implications. There are good and bad contractors." Though he added that "overall, the experience has been good." Monitoring of customer complaints was found to be the most effective technique to ensure services.



### ...AND ANOTHER BIT OF HISTORY VANISHES

"Going, going gone".. and by the time you see this issue of Madras Musings, even what is seen in it of the historic Madras Mahajana Sabha Building will not be there at Anna Circle, once known as Round Tana. The Sabha, founded in 1884, two years before Congress, is one of the country's oldest political institutions and was born of the Theosophical convention that year. A vocal voice of public opinion, it functioned for many years in these premises it owned, before renting them out and moving to even older premises behind the LIC tower. After Independence, the Sabha reduced its political links with Congress and became more of a cultural body. (Photography by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

## A nature map for the City?

The wildlife and forest cover in the 1200 sq km Chennai Metropolitan area is slowly vanishing as it increasingly attracts the attention of those intent on exploiting these covers for commerce. The City's natural cover includes the Manali Jheel, Pallikaranai Marsh, Adyar Estuary, Guindy National Park, Simpson Estate, IIT Campus, the city's parks and Chembarambakkam Lake (which can qualify as an international site under the Ramsar Convention) to name the best-known areas.

There are many others places in the city which need documenting, says Dr. V. Shantaram, Honorary Secretary, of

the Madras Naturalists' Society, so that we become aware of what needs to be protected. The Society is therefore drawing up plans to give the city a Nature Map. This map will project the protected areas and the Society hopes this will keep the exploiters from encroaching on such natural cover.

The Project primarily involves surveying the sites of Natural History in and around the city. These sites will be documented on the basis of species of plants, birds, amphibians, fish, butterflies, spiders etc in each area. Physical verification of the sites, with details about area, condition of each

place, the uniqueness of it, ownership, threats, pollution and allied problems will be documented. All these will be graded on a point format to arrive at conclusions.

The Nature Map will be made available to city planners, developers, educational institutions, researchers and to promote ecotourism.

The Madras Naturalists' Society seeks volunteers to work on this project; those interested may contact their office at 8 Janaki Avenue, Abhirampuram, Chennai 18, or call 4997614.

Rajind N Christy

# When do we get our convention centre?

Madras Musings is now nearly seven years old — and *The Man From Madras Musings* has seen it appealing from the FIRST issue onwards for a major convention and exhibition centre to be established in the City. Promises have been made, promises have been broken and promises have been made again — but both Chennai and MMM still await a centre worthy of a metropolis.

The result of Government's game of ducks and drakes with proposals for a convention and exhibition centre has been that when the Confederation of Indian Industries wanted a venue for its high-profile international meet, wooing investment in India, all the Government could offer it as a venue was the Nehru Indoor Stadium. Fortunately for that stadium, many of CII's leadership, and particularly its chairman, N Kumar, are sportsmen and are sports obsessed, consequently taking good care not to affect the stadium's splendid facilities in any way. But can this bit of good fortune be expected all the time, say when the stadium is hired out for an industrial exhibition or a song and dance recital?

MMM is aware that Madison Square Garden in New York or the Boston Gardens or other such stadia in American cities are hired out for conventions, exhibitions, concerts etc. But every American city has alternate facilities if its main facility is not usable, not to mention the fact that every such facility has the funds to carry out any maintenance or repair work if needed. The same can't be said of our lone facility. It is in this context that MMM draws attention once again to, and echoes, *Madras Musings's* view that Chennai needs a major convention and exhibition centre, with hotel facilities nearby, POST HASTE. There is talk of such a centre being developed in the St. Thomas Mount area. Can we get on with it, Mr. Chief Minister?

MMM feels the reasons for refusal to migrate are something else altogether. Life in a company town — or a tea estate, which MMM is a little more familiar with — is a cocooned, protected, safe environment where everyone knows everyone else. A person brought up in this cushioned milieu fears to move out of its perceived safety — and no matter how bad they make life out to be in such 'colonies', few want to voluntarily leave this protected society. As for discrimination such 'protected' persons face outside their accustomed environment, much of it has to do with the strong Unionism — and not caste — prevalent in such environments. Repatriated Indian estate labour from Sri Lanka, for instance, has never been welcomed on Indian tea estates because they are seen to be strongly union-minded and work to the rule-books which means they produce less. That is a situation not very different from what prevails in the Kolar Gold Fields.

## Mining history

The Kolar Gold Fields, *The Man From Madras Musings* knows, are not in Tamil Nadu and should, therefore, not have a place in this column. But they were in the Madras Presidency, they do have a population with a substantial majority that is Tamil, and this Tamil element was what was emphasised in a film, *After the Gold*, that was recently screened at the British Council. And so, MMM has something to say about this state of affairs.

The hour-long documentary made by Janaki Nair of the Madras Institute of Development Studies was made in the context of the concerns of the miners who fear that the now-Government-owned mines may be closed any time. These mines, nearly 120 years old, provided substantial gold and profits to the succession of British commercial institutions that owned them. They were, however, nationalised in the 1960s at a time when

their production was already falling. Today, these mines have become the world's second deepest mines and, at even those dangerous depths, are producing little. It is, however, held that better and more honest management would produce something more than the negligible amount of gold being mined these days. Nevertheless, it seems clear to MMM, that even better management cannot make the venture profitable, though it can prolong life in what is essentially a company town for some years more. It is this company town aspect that is not explored in sufficient depth, particularly in the context of labour's passions, in the film, MMM is inclined to think.

Much of the film was spent on the miners articulating loudly on their heritage, the dangers they face, their wages, how badly the mines are run, and, most important of all, what was to happen to them if the mines closed. Much was also said of the labour movement in the mines and the role Periyar's self-respect movement had played in their settlement town. An articulate woman scholar emphasised the Periyar contribution even more loudly. But not enough was made, MMM feels, especially in the context of the film, about two points.

Mention was made, but not emphasis, of the fact that the population of the Kolar Gold Fields has the largest education facilities in rural Karnataka (presumably, per capita) and it has the best educated Scheduled Caste population in the State. In this context, they could do reasonably well elsewhere — and at least one member of the audience, whose home was once KGF, pointed out that they indeed have done so elsewhere. The film, however, makes out that outside the settlement, those leaving the mining town are discriminated against if they say they are from the KGF... and thus explains the reluctance to migrate.

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The provocation for AIEMA's outburst against the Government is the recent rains and the consequent marooning of 80-100 units inside the estate, resulting in a production loss of Rs. 20 crore apart from damage to the machinery. Flooding of AIE's northern part, MMM is told, is a perennial problem during the rainy season, as the Ambattur lake waters are

diverted by residents living near the lake.

## Pathetic conditions

Life in the settlement if it had been focussed on — instead of a focus only on the grumbles — might have offered a different view of the Kolar Gold Fields. And a better film.

Two of the City's major industrial areas are Ambattur and Avadi. Civic conditions in both are pathetic. Considering that they are the core of Chennai's famed auto ancillary industry, both townships and industrial areas are hardly likely to inspire confidence in foreign investors and those from abroad wishing to do business with factories here, *The Man From Madras Musings* would think. But those located here could also do much to ameliorate the situation. Self-help, however, is not exactly a strongpoint of Indian businessmen, ever ready to benefit from Government's contribution or any made by their fellows. MMM recently met someone who runs a business here and he opened a Pandora's Box for MMM to peer into. This is the scene that MMM caught up with:

Spread over 1,500 acres, the Ambattur Industrial Estate (AIE) is one of Asia's largest.

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Established in 1963, it today has about 2000 units, mostly small and medium-sized ones, and a couple of major ones. Their combined annual turnover is around Rs. 2,000 crore. Apart from providing employment to around 2 lakh persons (of which 30 per cent are women) the units contribute about Rs. 200 crore as sales tax and Rs.300 crore as excise duty to the State coffers.

Despite its contribution, this estate does not have basic infrastructure, like proper roads, sanitary facilities, defined parking areas for heavy vehicles, garbage disposal means and adequate police security.

"Let the government first maintain the existing industrial estates properly and then establish newer ones," fumes N. Jayaraman, President, Ambattur Industrial Estate Manufacturers' Association (AIEMA). Emphasising his Chairman's words, G. Renganathan, Committee member, adds, "the pathetic civic conditions that exist in the estate is spoiling our image abroad".

The provocation for AIEMA's outburst against the Government is the recent rains and the consequent marooning of 80-100 units inside the estate, resulting in a production loss of Rs. 20 crore apart from damage to the machinery. Flooding of AIE's northern part, MMM is told, is a perennial problem during the rainy season, as the Ambattur lake waters are

diverted by residents living near the lake.

In respect of laying new roads and clearing garbage, MMM understands that the Ambattur municipal authorities will not lift a finger as they say the estate comes under the purview of SIDCO. The latter, on the other hand, cries for funds to carry out maintenance. Ironically, the municipality, which shifts the responsibility of garbage clearance to SIDCO, lets out sewage water collected elsewhere in Ambattur into the estate!

## Two views

Jayaraman does not particularly believe in self-help. "Why are we paying property tax and maintenance charges? Are we here to produce or do other's duty at an additional cost?" he asks. But what AIEMA's members pay is paltry — Rs. 20 lakh as maintenance charges to SIDCO and Rs. 1.5 crore as property tax to the municipality — compared to what is needed. It is also a minuscule percentage of their turnover and the value of property owned by the members.

With the unofficial two hours daily power cut resulting in substantial production losses, AIE industrial units have mooted a proposal for a captive power plant. MMM hears that a proposal to set up a 150 MW captive power plant, at an outlay of Rs. 350 crore, is with the Government. As the entire power requirement of the industries located in Ambattur estate is only around 80 MW, the captive power project, when it comes up, will have excess production that could be fed into TNEB's grid.

MMM wonders why when AIEMA members are willing to chip in with their share for the proposed captive power project, they are reluctant to raise funds for upgrading the civic amenities inside the estate.

The AIEMA President wants the State Government to quickly establish the Tamil Nadu Industrial Township Area Development Authority announced by the Chief Minister some time ago in the Assembly so that it will take care of the civic problems of the industrial estates. Civic amenities are something his Association does not want to tackle.

## In brief

★ The 'skyline' of Mount Road is due for another change, *The Man From Madras Musings* hears. With the Amalgamations Group having sorted out the legal tangle over the P Orr buildings — which founder Anantharamakrishnan had once acquired — the way is open for the giant building it has long dreamed of in *The Madras Mail* - P.Orr complex. While welcoming what promises to be a landmark building, MMM hopes for two things. One that it will not be a plateglass and steel building, but will be more environment friendly. And two, even more importantly, the F Orr and Mail buildings fronting Mount Road — both

historic buildings that would figure in any Heritage Building list — are not pulled down but incorporated with the highrise being planned. MMM hopes heritage-conscious Amalgamations will have the will to do this if they decide to go ahead and build new in the large space behind these two buildings.

★ Both the bit of news mentioned above and the Editor's choice for OLD and NEW this fortnight, *The Man From Madras Musings* is pleased to note, have independently found echo in a recent issue in *The Economic Times*. In it, conservation architect Abha Narain Lambah writes:

"Today, concrete and glass boxes with flashy facades can be seen everywhere, from New York to New Delhi.

The climatic responses are no longer the purview of the structure, but the domain of air-conditioning experts.

The glass facades not only create an overheated glasshouse effect within the building, but also contribute in a major way to the ozone layer depletion, thanks to the use of CFC's in air-conditioning systems.

All this is yet again leading us to that cross-road in history where it becomes imperative for us to take stock of our depleting resources.

The only viable answer lies in our roots. In a design methodology that aims at optimising the available resources, this simply translates into sound utilisation of material resources, low energy options, thermally correct orientations and a design that is based on a lot of commonsense and respect for the environment.

Maybe it is time our architects became a little more conscious of the ground realities instead of imagining that we have unlimited resources for any one prepared to pay for them.

★ What has happened to the IGGI motels every 100 km along the national highways of Tamil Nadu, *The Man From Madras Musings* is not aware of; certainly the site earmarked on one stretch of a highway he frequently uses still remains unused. MMM hopes better progress will be made with another set of plans, this one by the State Government and enunciated by the Directorate of Tourism. These plans call for toilet and recreational facilities as well as fast-food service and, possibly, a petrol station every 120 km on national highways. The first three highway service centres are expected to come up on the Chennai-Kanniyakumari highway in the next financial year, erected at a cost of Rs.18 lakh. The toilets, it is planned, will be looked after by Sulabh International or Civic Exnora. MMM hopes that faster progress will be made with these plans than with the IGGI proposals. Travellers on the highways could do with rest stops of a higher standard than Tamil Nadu Tourism motels.

MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



## Analysis appreciated — I

'The Veerappan Paradox' by Rajat Banerji (MM, December 16, 1997) deserves appreciation. While most newspapers and magazines have dealt the issue superficially, MM has analysed the root cause. Corruption becomes rampant wherever there is monopoly of the Government. The result is vested interests, anti-social elements and mafia. And political patrons or godfathers enter the arena, nurturing muscle power and black markets.

India needs honest, bold men of high moral convictions who can lead us into the 21st Century. But that seems a mirage.

J.N. Manokaran

11, Gandhi Nagar  
Kulathoor, Chennai - 600 099

## Analysis appreciated — II

'The Veerappan Paradox' (MM, December 16, 1997) was really superb and the Veerappan cartoon well done. Keep it up.

A.S. Sultan Alaudeen

3/47, Raja Street  
Adiyarkamangalam 611101

## Leave cats alone

We read in the city newspapers complaints about stray dogs, but this is the first time that I have heard of stray cats posing a problem (MM, December 16). Would it not be better if we concentrate on the problems caused by a burgeoning population, slums, garbage etc., instead of focussing on the hapless cat? I do believe that organisations like the Blue Cross have an ABC programme in place (even for stray cats) and the situation is not out of control. Can we therefore hope you will continue your campaign for a beautiful Chennai without disturbing the feline population?

T. Ashok

No.113, A.K. Swamy Nagar,  
9th Street, Kilpauk,  
Chennai 600 010.

## May they increase!

Why didn't you think of it before? To make it a status symbol and a prestige issue to be a sponsor of MM? Then you needn't have gone through the trials and tribulations that you did (pangs of growth?) for a good five years or so. Cynic that this writer is, he cannot help but wonder at the sudden increase in corporate sponsorships. The bottom half of your last page is crowded with company logos. May their tribe increase!

Hopefully MM has not reduced the sponsorship amount per company, commensurate with the increase in their number but is collecting the same amount per company from a larger group. Now the question arises — what to do with the extra money? Simple. Increase the number of pages. (A circulation drive may also be launched to increase the offake of MM.) There should be no problem filling up the extra space. Surely there is no dearth of issues to focus upon that will make for a better city.

A half-page may be allocated as free advertising space that can be used by the sponsors on a rotational

basis. This would be an expression of gratitude (over and above the bottom half of the last page) from not only MM but also its audience of whom this reader would like to be the foremost.

B. Gautham

122 Wallajah Road  
Chennai 600 002.

Editor's Note: One thing we have been able to do is meet the increased demand for *Madras Musings*. When the first 12 sponsors came to MM's rescue, we agreed that the sponsorship amount would make possible a 10,000 circulation. The extra sponsorship has made it possible for our circulation to increase to nearly 12,000 — every copy one that has been requested. Anything left over, will, as announced already, go into the corpus of the Chennai First Trust which is under formation. This Trust will, it is planned, make a start on bringing heritage buildings alive again and in creating a greater awareness about the heritage of the city.

## Mobile patrol

With great fanfare, Madame Jayalalitha introduced the Mobile Patrols of the Chennai Police. This was intended to prevent crime and create a sense of confidence in the general public.

In the USA and Saudi Arabia, the patrol is a highly respected force. I had the good fortune of living there (in both places) for a few years and a patrol policeman in his bike was a deterrent to crime. In Saudi Arabia they are good friends, helping a stranded motorist, keeping a vigil on the highway, and generally instilling a sense of confidence in society. In the USA, the patrol is on the move always, and have helped nab gangsters and prevent crime. It is a nice feeling to see those smartly dressed policemen buzzing past you when you drive.

Our intentions are good when we want to ape the west. But let's understand the spirit behind the actions, before we implement them. We hear of chain-snatchings, petty quarrels, acts of rowdiness, jumping from running buses after snatching bags — and our mobile patrol was nowhere to be seen. Recently when a chain-snatching took place, a mobile patrol was seen in "deep slumber" parked under a big tree nearby.

How about getting them to move?

M Fazal

No.1, Seaview Apartments  
16 Leith Castle Road  
Santhome, Chennai - 600 028

## New consumers

I have read with much interest the correspondence on hoardings in Chennai. It is hopeless to think that the Government will check the proliferation of these monstrosities, for there is no doubt that it is intent on the revenue that it derives from them.

Even as I am sceptical about our Chennai ever becoming *singara*, I am writing this letter to inform you how these hoardings hit the eye of even casual visitors to the city. The October 12th issue of a Tamil magazine carries a cartoon of a Finnish cartoonist Leif P. which speaks volumes for life in Chennai. There is the chaotic scene on the road with a pedestrian amidst the swirling traffic and looming above all on either side not the facade of

magnificent buildings but a continuous array of hoardings of gigantic size!

I wish to add just one point to all the correspondence on hoardings. New, fighting-for-prime-space, advertisers have started piling up hoardings on the same building, each towering above the other. Soon the Gods in heaven will want to BUY THIS AND THAT!

C Kesi

21 Conran Smith Road  
Chennai - 600 0086.

## Untended tanks

I refer to the item 'The price we pay...' (MM, September 1) which deals with the Rs.1200 crore expenditure of the Tamil Nadu Government in providing free electricity to agriculturists in the State. The report rightly points out the two major risks connected with the over-exploitation of groundwater.

I recently conducted a survey of irrigation tanks and other wetlands in the erstwhile Chengalpattu District for the Bombay Natural History Society and had the opportunity to visit over 120 (of the nearly 1000) tanks in the 13 taluks of the district. I was shocked and appalled at the condition of a great majority of these tanks built several hundred years ago. Most of them were neglected and overgrown with weeds and thorny bushes, while others had broken sluice gates or breached bunds. None of these had been desilted in the last few decades and have, as a result, lost considerable water-holding capacity. This results in overflow and wasteful loss of rainwater during the periods of heavy rains and, at times, in floods and considerable loss of crops. In several instances, there were encroachments and cultivation on the tank bed. The channels connecting the various tanks are poorly maintained and, in several cases, they are blocked by ill-planned roads and other structures. The poor maintenance of tanks affects the groundwater recharge on the one hand and the excess drawing of groundwater depletes the resource at a faster rate. How long can this kind of exploitation last?

Despite the poor conditions of the tanks, I could see cultivation going on in most villages even in the month of June. This was possible due to the operation of electric pumps. But not everyone in the village is able to afford a pumpset and these people have to hire the facility paying Rs.10-15 an hour. Obviously then the subsidy is not benefiting the poor and marginal farmers who are the prime targets of such schemes.

As a result of free electricity, there is no interest among those villagers who can afford an electric pumpset to repair and maintain their traditional irrigation systems which need no electricity to operate. Earlier, the maintenance of these tanks were the joint responsibility of the villagers. Now most people consider it the job of the government and elected local bodies to maintain these tanks and blame them for the neglect.

The Tamil Nadu Government could do well to spend the Rs.1200 crore that it now spends on the subsidy in improving and maintaining the irrigation tanks and in the process save precious electricity. In this connection, it was sad to read recently (*The Hindu*, August 24, 1997) that we received Rs.400 crore

## When the cow jumped over the moon...



Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said.

"One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen.

"Why sometimes, I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

-Lewis Carroll  
Through the Looking Glass

Most of the time when we mean something 'can't'

be done, we actually mean 'won't'.

Service never asks what we cannot do but

what we most truly can do.

And because we can, we should.

Thank you for believing in our dreams.

The Banyan Family owes its future to your faith

in the impossible.

Best Wishes for the New Year.

Vandana & Vaishnavi  
For The Banyan Family

Once again, the most imaginative greeting card we received was from The Banyan. Pages 1 and 3 say it all: 'Nothing is impossible'. We must, however, add that several other organisations this year sent out cards with 'messages' ranging from disability to the handicapped, but they were nowhere near as imaginative as this one.

from Japan to desilt and repair some 2500 irrigation tanks in Tamil Nadu (which has nearly 40,000 tanks). While we have the resources in our own hands why should we depend on outsiders? A little bit of thought and action in this direction can take us a long way towards being self-reliant in this Golden Jubilee year of our country's Independence.

V. Santharam

68 I floor, Santhome High Road  
Chennai - 600 028.

## We are told...

A reader who wishes to remain anonymous, telephoned us to point out that in the picture on the Parsi Fire Temple complex in Royapuram (MM, January 1), the 1910 Fire Temple is the building on the left. The building on the right is the Chief Priest's house and was built in 1985 to blend harmoniously with the Fire Temple.

Our caller points out that architects can — and do — occasionally build sympathetically.

— The Editor

(Also see Page 4)

## Vanishing sidewalks

In an MM issue, K.M. Balagopalani highlighted the problems of pedestrians and bus passengers. This is not all. In the name of broadening the road, sidewalks meant for pedestrians are pruned much to the consternation of the pedestrians. For the size of Mount Road (Anna Salai) how much pedestrian traffic will be there! But the pavements are not even two feet wide at some places, forcing them to use the busy road and subjecting them to accidents.

There should also be better regulation of traffic, and slow moving handcarts and cattle should be banned from busy roads like Mount Road.

As regards transport facilities, the less said the better. Even after the assumption of power by the new government, the commuters' lot has not improved even a wee bit, since the same old method of fleecing continues by converting all the regular buses into P/PP/Exp. etc services without augmenting the fleet.

T.M. Sundaraman

19 Nallappan Street,  
Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004.

## Want to muse with MUSINGS?

If you would like to be put on *Madras Musings's* mailing list, just fill in the form below (use block letters/type) and post it to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press Pvt Ltd, 62/63 Greames Road, MADRAS-600 006.

Name .....

Address .....

Note: Overseas postage extra. Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Gulf: Rs. 375/year. US & Europe: Rs 425/year. Cheques payable to M/s. Lokavani Hall-Mark Press.

# Bitter sweet!

Even as the South Indian Sugar Mills Association (SISMA) urges a freeze on establishing new sugar units because there is already excess capacity, the State Government has announced that it plans to allow eight more plants in Tamil Nadu — two in the cooperative sector and six in the private sector. Letters of intent for the private mills have been issued. If all these new plants come up, we will have 42 units, not 34, and the crushing capacity would increase by another 20,000 tons per day (tpd) from the current level of 90,300 tpd.

A. Rama Babu, President, SISMA points out that, with "the average capacity utilisation of the sugar mills in the

one of the issues exercising the mind of SISMA. At present, no two sugar plants can be located within 25 km of each other and each unit has to source its cane from its cane command areas.

B.H. Kothari, Chairman and Managing Director, Kothari Sugars and Chemicals Ltd, feels demarcation should continue as the sugar mills have invested substantial sums in research and development of sugarcane in their command area and even help the farmers financially. Chemtai is seeing several of these being built, all of them DEMANDING more airconditioning, more lights, more lifts and, consequently, more electricity which we can we can scarce spare. And, of course, when the electricity does not work, they need more generators. All of which cost the country a pretty paisa in financial and natural resources in the name of modernity. Wouldn't variations of the Harrington School building prove wiser construction in power-short cities like ours? (Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



Venkatachari Jagannathan looks at THE INDUSTRIAL SCENE

State being 80 per cent of the 13 lakh ton installed capacity", there will be excess capacity. This would result in competition for cane, the basic raw material of the mills. According to him, this is the case nationally too: about 200 licensed units are under construction pending implementation and will add 100 lakh tons capacity, while the average national capacity utilisation is just 70 per cent.

Sugar production in Tamil Nadu came down to 10.50 lakh tons last sugar season (October '96 to September '97) from 16.1 lakh tons registered during 1995-96. The total cane crushed was 117 lakh tons (193.80 lakh tons). The industry attributes the fall in output to cane diversion to alternate sweetener manufacturers and reduction in cane crop.

Despite the winds of globalisation and liberalisation, sugar remains under government control, whether it is setting up a mill, pricing and sourcing of sugarcane and even in respect of selling sugar and the by-product molasses. The Centre has for the last couple of years been toying with several ideas to liberalise the industry. Not much progress has however, been made because "we are engaged in an industry which is dealing with living entities — the cane and the cane growers," explains Rama Babu.

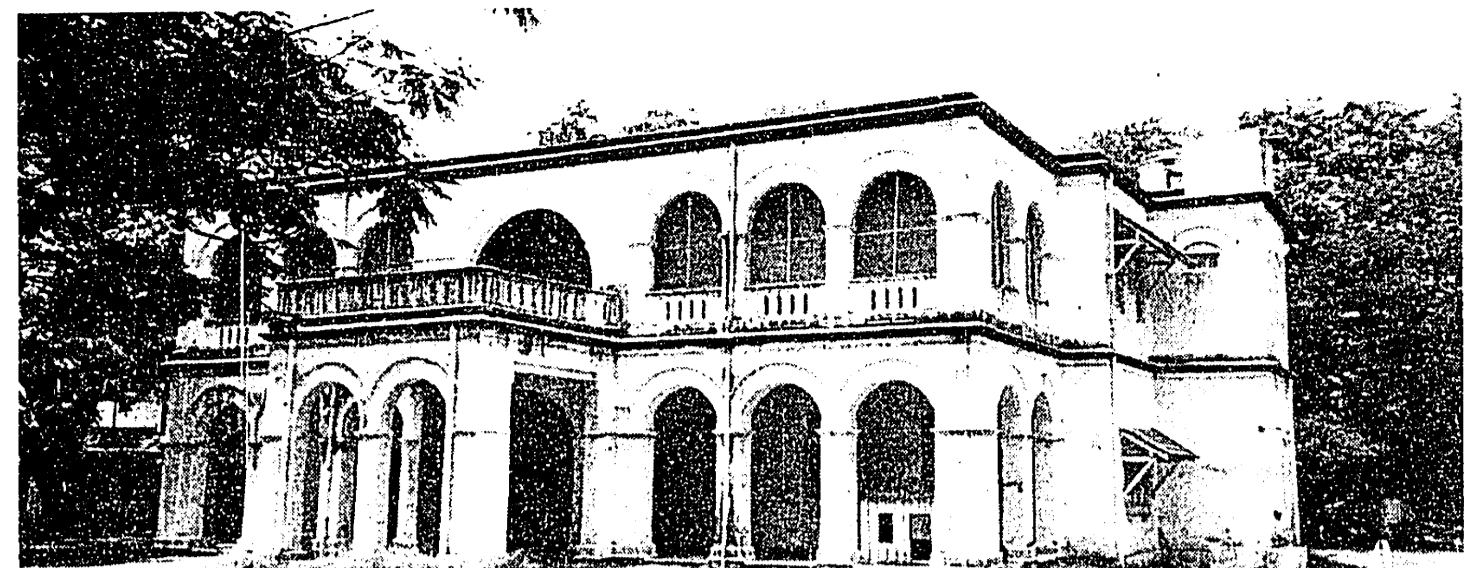
The Centre's recent thinking of reducing the distance between two mills to 15 km, is

mate to their mills." Some sugar units enjoy 400 acres of command area per ton sugar capacity. While co-operative sugar mills generally have ten times higher acreage than their capacity needs and trade their surplus cane for a profit, he points out.

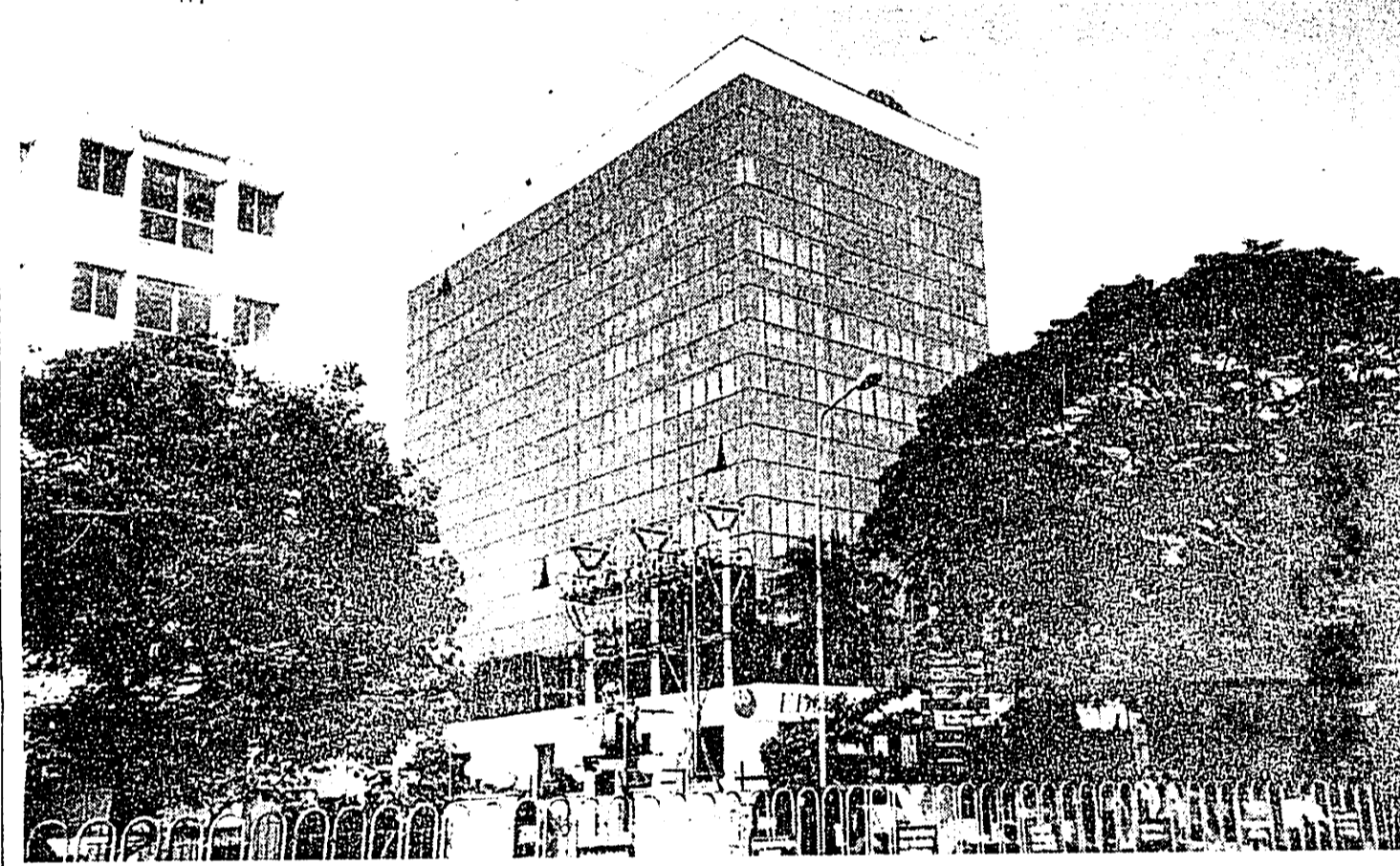
Ram V. Tyagarajan, Chairman and Managing Director, Thiru Arooran Sugars Ltd, says that "de-zoning has to happen as it is irrational and a historical accident". And he adds, "Zoning should be dovetailed with the licensing policy, which is not the case now."

All is well with the demarcation concept as long as the farmer gets paid on time. The problem crops up when a mill fails to meet its obligations to the farmer, who then starts to look out for another mill or diverts his produce to gur and khandasari sugar manufacturers. Compared to the sugar mills which pay Rs. 660 a tonne of cane, the jaggery manufacturers pay more than Rs. 1000 a tonne, which is too sweet for the farmers to forego.

In this situation, the Sugar Growers Association had demanded that the State fix the cane price at Rs. 1000 a tonne for the sugar season 1997-98. Dr. M.R. Sivasamy, President, Tamilaga Vivasayigal Sangam, says that while sugar is sold at Rs. 1700 a quintal and jaggery at Rs. 2,000, their demand is justifiable. The Centre has fixed the Statutory Minimum Price (SMP) for the 1997-98



Our OLD is of the Harrington School off Nungambakkam High Road (U.G. Road). The school, founded in 1962 on the initiative of the British Women's Association of Madras, is run by the Harrington House School Society. Once a home of various Directors of Parry's, this garden house is typical of the late 19th Century-early 20th Century bungalows which, by the very nature of their construction, did not need airconditioning even when it became available. High ceilings, wide verandahs, and tall doors opening out on them ensured that. But what we build today is quite different. Our NEW is of the DBS Westminster Towers on Radhakrishnan Salai, one of those plate glass and steel cubes, the darker the glass the more stylish the building. Chennai is seeing several of these being built, all of them DEMANDING more airconditioning, more lights, more lifts and, consequently, more electricity which we can we can scarce spare. And, of course, when the electricity does not work, they need more generators. All of which cost the country a pretty paisa in financial and natural resources in the name of modernity. Wouldn't variations of the Harrington School building prove wiser construction in power-short cities like ours? (Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



season at Rs. 484.50 per tonne linked to 8.5% recovery. Generally, the State Governments, in order to appease the farmers, fix the price at which mills should procure the cane higher than the SMP. There is a Court ruling that State governments have no 'locus standi' in fixing cane prices. SISMA, which favours a realistic SMP, does not favour court action. "We don't want the agitating farmers in front of our mill gates with attendant risks of damage to the plant and human lives. On paper the Allahabad ruling is good, but it is not implementable," says Kothari.

The State Government has recently announced the SAP for the current season as Rs.660 a tonne, linked to a recovery rate of 8.5%. This is Rs.185.50 higher than the SMP and Rs.61 above the last year's SAP. Further, the Government, accepting the plea of SISMA, has decided to follow the pattern of Gujarat and Haryana and levy a purchase tax at a flat rate of Rs.60 per tonne of cane, replacing the 8-10.5% ad valorem which worked out to Rs.65 per tonne. SISMA also demands a reduction in excise levy on sugar and molasses from the current rates of Rs.85 per quintal of free sale

sugar and Rs. 500 per tonne respectively. As a viable alternative for the farmers to get attractive prices, SISMA recommends introduction of forward trading in sugar as in the case of other commodities like cotton, oilseed, pepper, gur, etc.

With the nation's sugar production declining to 129 lakh tonnes from 164 lakh tonnes last season and production during season 1997-98 likely to touch 115 lakh tonnes, the initial enthusiasm of the industry for higher prices and profits has been dampened due to the threat of imports. The commodity is under OGL and is free of duty. Tamil Nadu being a coastal State, import consignments would land at Chennai and Tuticorin ports driving sugar prices down. Further, as supply exceeds demand, Tamil Nadu mills will necessarily have to look at the saturated markets of the neighbouring States to sell the commodity. On the other hand the lucrative eastern region market is out of their reach owing to high freight rates.

SISMA also wants the Centre to impose an import/auxiliary duty of 40 per cent on import consignments, in order to provide a level playing field for the domestic manufacturers.

Supporting industry's demand, Ram V Tyagarajan says that no other country allows sugar imports free of duties, even neighbouring Pakistan levies 26 per cent duty on sugar imports.

Pioneers in co-generation of power from bagasse, the sugar mills in Tamil Nadu have an installed capacity of 60MW, while an additional potential of 145MW is projected. In order to achieve that and to develop the sugar mills as rural power houses, SISMA seeks reasonable tariff from the TNEB. While the TNEB has refused the industry's demand to permit sale of power to third parties, it has recently allowed wheeling of power to sister concerns located beyond 25 km.

Regardless of its woes, which are cyclic, corporates still flock to the sugar industry. For instance, India Cements is putting up a sugar plant in Karnataka and Thiru Arooran Sugars, according to Ram V Tyagarajan, will be putting up two more integrated plants with 2500 tonne crushing per day (tpd) in the Thanjavur District. In addition, companies like KCP Ltd, Chennai, and Rajshree Sugars, Coimbatore, have gone global by putting up sugar plants in Viet Nam.

# New front in 100-year war

It has been a hundred-year war. It may rage on for another hundred years. A century after Ronald Ross established that malaria is caused by a parasite, scientists are still struggling with research and implementation of malaria control. The disease is prevalent in 102 countries and poses a risk to some 2,700 million people across the world. But as new frontiers are opening up, scientists are hopeful.

There can, however, be no single 'wonder vaccine' to curb the disease. Of this the scientists seemed convinced at the Second Global Meet on Parasitology, with a focus on malaria, held in Secunderabad recently. An intersectoral approach, greater awareness of malaria among the people, their involvement in curbing the disease and, of course, finances to make malaria control programmes across the world effective and sustainable would be the actual magic bullets that halt the spread of the disease.

Poor public health infrastructure was responsible for the transmission of the malarial parasite in the early years of this century. Its comeback in the late 1960s and early 1970s was because of the development of resistance by the vector and the parasite to drugs and insecticides. Its resurgence in the 1990s is due to industrial and agricultural projects which have caused ecological changes, favouring the transmission of the disease.

The search for alternatives to fight malaria have followed three distinct lines.

The first relied on conventional methods, such as the development of new or alternative (herb-derived) drugs, and the use of insecticides other than DDT and BHC (benzene hexachloride) in aerosols and mosquito repellents.

The second approach involved innovative developments such as the use of insecticide-treated bednets and DNA vaccines

The third explored alternative methods, such as genetic engineering, to make the *Anopheles* less fertile or resistant to *Plasmodium*.

Given the wide variation in local conditions in which malaria exists, no one approach is likely to succeed in all places. Also required is a better knowledge of the mechanism of transmission of the disease in high intensity, medium intensity and low intensity areas.

But knowledge about disease transmission depends on how much is known about various species of the vector and the parasite, an area yet to be fully explored. One approach, to seek vector species which do not get infected and to investigate their resistance to the parasite, is being followed in India by the Malaria Research Centre (MRC) of the Indian Council of Medical Research

(ICMR) and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai. Institutions in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (USA) also follow this approach.

Research in the second approach, which investigates natural immunity to malaria among humans, is in its infancy.

While most conventional drugs have failed to check *Plasmodium falciparum*, the malaria parasite which causes the disease, ethnic medicines have come to the rescue in the fight against malaria. Of the various herbal drugs identified, the

drug artemisinin, extracted from the Chinese plant *Artemisia annua*, has proved invaluable in reducing deaths due to cerebral malaria.

Another approach which appears promising for the development of a new anti-malarial drug is being tried out by some researchers like Philip J Rosenthal and others of the Department of Medicine, University of California, USA. The

## • by Sagar Singh

malarial parasite derives its nourishment from red blood corpuscles (RBCs) of the host by degrading haemoglobin (the protein which enables transport of oxygen) and uses the products (amino acids) to synthesise its own proteins. Rosenthal has found that certain chemicals (phenothiazines) inhibit the enzyme that the parasite uses to break haemoglobin in RBCs and can be used to arrest the development of the parasite.

Perhaps the most effective but controversial solutions lie in genetic engineering and molecular biology. Genetic engineering has been used to pro-

## In search of planners, not sprayers

The Directorate of the National Malaria Eradication Programme recently launched the Rs.715-crore Enhanced Malaria Control Project. The project is to receive assistance from the World Bank (WB). Prabhat Jha, task manager, WB says:

The Enhanced Malaria Control Project is unique due to two reasons — decentralised planning and the adoption of a variety of strategies. Decentralised planning has changed the role of the National Malaria Eradication Programme (NMEP) to that of facilitator, financier and evaluator. Actual implementation is done by the districts. Therefore, it is no longer Delhi-based. Malaria eradication began as a military programme in India. The influence had spilt over and made the NMEP rather hierarchical in operation.

Secondly, the project relies on a variety of interventions and not solely on the spraying of DDT (dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane), that has adversely affected the environment. Spraying will be reduced and even that which is done will be focussed. Insecticides

that are environmentally less harmful will be used. Such an approach will improve the chances of successfully controlling malaria. Evidence from other countries suggests that a single strategy like spraying or just giving out chloroquine does not work. A combination of approaches reduces the risk of the failure of any one.

The government has conducted several state and district-level workshops. The aim

## • As told to Priti Kumar

is to present the contents of the programme, circulate questionnaires to elicit local responses and improve on the quality. The first round of implementation has already been carried out. To be fair, implementation has been terrible in some places and good in others, but the idea is to move everyone up by training.

Early detection and prompt treatment, which are key elements of the project, call for heavy reliance on an improved surveillance system. There are three needs in this crucial area. The officer ought to be a planner and think like an epidemiologist, not a sprayer. There is

the need for a modest, paper-based system, whose functioning can be evaluated before computerisation is introduced. A third prerequisite is a Geographical Information System (GIS). The idea is to simply feed-in the information and have tools to analyse the geographical distribution of area under the influence of malaria.

The free public distribution of medicated mosquito bednets, a feature of the programme would be a big mistake at an early stage of the programme. Once the bednets are distributed free of cost, you will never be able to charge people for something that benefits them directly.

There are many factors that will determine how the programme is working over the next five years. The indicators are the number of malaria cases reported. We anticipate a five per cent increase in the 2.85 million per year currently detected, in three years time, due to better detection. But five years from now, there would be a 10 per cent fall in the number of cases (in relation to figures

codenamed MRC-367. Larvae die within hours of ingesting the spores of the fungus and it could help fight malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases.

On the flip side, the production costs of biocides are sometimes higher than for conventional insecticides. Secondly, in spite of the proved safety of these formulations, environmentalists and people are sceptical about introducing them in clean water sources where *Anopheles* breeds. Thirdly, their application is not easy, since the mosquito breeds extensively in small water bodies like rainwater puddles which dry up soon.

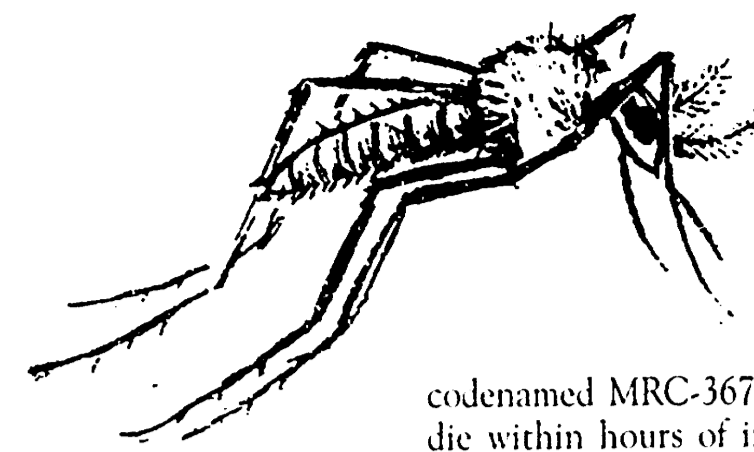
With so many options now available and with many more in the pipeline, malaria control does not look so daunting. But unless these interventions are supported by a global cooperation, strategy, research and funding might have little meaning as past experience has shown. Brian Greenwood, a delegate at the Secunderabad conference, got to the crux of the matter when he commented, "malaria needs to be tackled with several hammers, not one".

— (CSE/Down To Earth Features)

obtained during the third year of the project). Another criterion of success is the percentage of staff who acquire management skills. Also, the average gap between the time and collection of blood sample and the recording of the diagnosis should be reduced from the current period of over two weeks to less than a week.

The Government of India will be able to sustain this programme in the long run. It will be able to finance the project independently. The large amount being spent on insecticides currently, can be used for other things that are more cost-effective, like the environmental management of vectors. So, less money would be needed to sustain the programme. Managerial strengths would have been developed. A competent district malaria officer can go a long way in controlling malaria. Someone who is well-trained, has all the resources and works intersectorally, can do a lot. And, thirdly, a number of interventions have been chosen, so we will be able to judge what works and what does not early on in the programme.

— (CSE/DEF)



# The lure of the loathsome

What I can't understand," HRH the Duke of Edinburgh once said to me, "is why people find snakes so fascinating." With the Duke as President of the World Wildlife Fund, I thought it a good question. Why indeed? Everyone familiar with zoological collections knows that the Reptile House is next in popularity only after the Primates — the monkeys and apes. Yet the usual human attitude to snakes is one of dread and loathing.

• by  
Harry Miller

One female friend of mine can be depended upon to scream and fling away from her even an ordinary black and white photograph of a snake, if she happens upon one while looking through a pile of my prints. And God Himself, of course, at the very beginning of all things, laid a divine curse upon those reptiles who so efficiently and magically move with such speed without the benefit of limbs of any kind — "upon thy belly shalt thou walk and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life". Even the eminent and enlightened Linnaeus himself found reptiles "foul, loathsome beings".

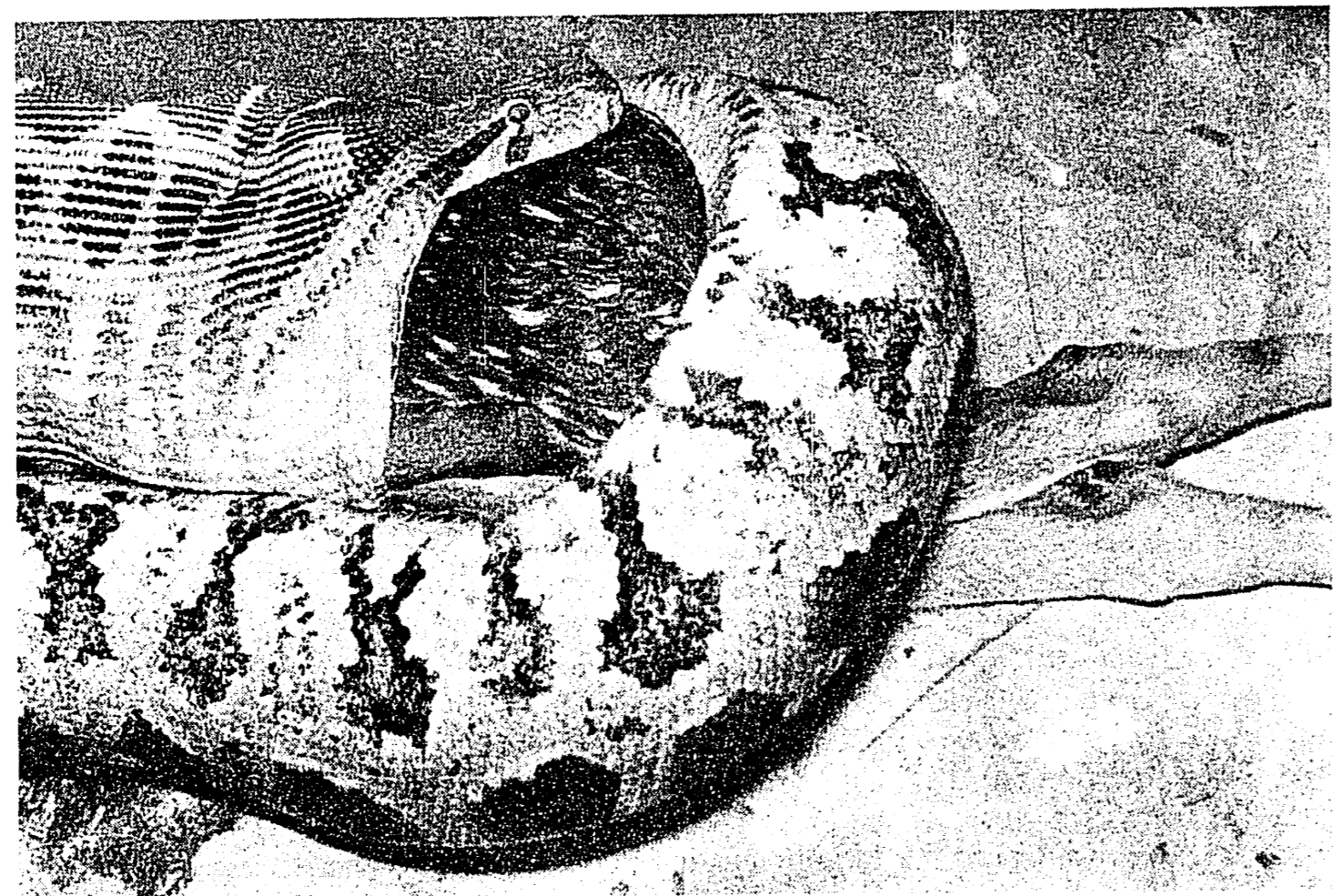
Poor friendless serpent! Snakes have had a bad press from the beginning of time. What with God and the Duke of Edinburgh, one wonders indeed why it is that collections of reptiles fascinate people so keenly, let alone why anyone should spend forty-five dollars on a coffee-table-style book of information and photographs of this unique form of life.

The very common Indian rat-snake, or *dhama* (*Coluber mucosus*), is a large, heavy snake that is non-venomous but when cornered and molested can deliver a nasty bite. This is one of several snakes, including the venomous cobra and krait, that live commensal with people in the south of Madras city where I live, and are often active in the daytime. One of these was seen and attacked in the garden of a house just a few doors down from mine a few days before I began

\*Snakes: The Evolution of Mystery in Nature by Harry W. Greene. Photographs by Michael & Patricia Fogden. (University of California Press, 1997.)

writing this review. The snake could find no handy refuge and so climbed a young pipul tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and lodged itself in a fork about thirty feet above the ground. A young employee of mine went up hand over hand with the agility of a chimpanzee to catch it, but before he reached the snake it decided to make a dash for it and came down the tree head-first, flashed across my feet, crossed the road outside and vanished into some ornamental shrubbery opposite, where it presumably knew of a secure hole, for it could not afterwards be found. One can easily understand how a snake, using its backward-facing scales and taking advantage of every irregularity of the tree's surface, can climb it, but how could a heavy, six-foot snake come down the tree without falling off? It is demonstrations of snakes' astonishing powers of survival like this, as well as so much else that seems downright magical, that ensure their fascination.

Harry W. Greene has done



This picture is "unique", believes HARRY MILLER, who took it. "There have been many pictures of large constrictors with huge bulges in their middles with captions stating that when the snakes were killed and cut open, they revealed a whole pig or deer inside. But this is the only one I have ever seen of a constrictor in the act of swallowing an animal, in this case a young deer!"

us a service by producing this magnificent book\* about one of the least understood and most misunderstood of all the creatures we live with, and are mighty successful at doing so, in spite of the worst we can do to them. And in the case of snakes the worst is bad indeed, for in so much of the world, as in India, most people (including, sad to say, many doctors), believe all snakes are venomous. In the case of the Indian cobra, however, the situation is ambiguous, to say the least, since while it is dreaded it is also worshipped, and its phallic significance is obvious. In the

Tamil language the cobra is called the Good Snake (*nalla pampu*) though in North Indian languages it is simply 'nag', which may mean any snake. Why the Tamils have singled out the cobra for so benign a title is not clear; it is certainly good for the farmers in keeping down the rodents that would otherwise devastate their paddy, but they don't seem to be aware of that, and if the epithet concerns its religious significance, why only Tamil, very much a minority Indian language? ...

The photography is superb throughout, though much of it

could not have been done without the very sophisticated and advanced lenses and photographic technology, such as the use of infra-red triggers, available today. An outstanding example of this is the photograph of the Eyelash Viper (*Bothriechis schlegelii*) striking at but just missing a Rufus tailed humming bird (*Amazilia tzacatl*). I however, wish there was in the book a simplified diagram of a snake's head and jaws, simplified because in fact it is far more complex than our own, but essential in order to understand just how snakes

(Continued on Page 7)

## COOKING with Chandra

A *rava* feast. All the recipes make excellent tea-time snacks. And they're very easy to prepare too.

### RAVA BONDIA

1 cup fine semolina (*rava*)  
1/4 cup sour curd  
3 or 4 green chillies, chopped fine  
1/2 tsp asafoetida powder  
1" piece ginger, peeled and grated  
2 tsp cashewnuts, broken into small pieces  
A small bunch coriander leaves, chopped fine  
Salt to taste  
Oil for deep frying

#### Method

Combine all the ingredients together. Add sufficient water, little by little, till you get a stiff batter.

Shape the batter with your hand, into small balls, each about the size of a small lemon. Heat oil in a deep frying pan over medium heat. When hot, put about 6-8 *bondias* into the oil. Keep turning frequently till golden brown and crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain excess oil.

Serve hot with a coconut chutney.

### RAVA DOSAI

1-1/2 cups rice flour  
1 cup refined flour (*maida*)  
1/2 cup semolina (*rava*)  
1/2 cup sour curd  
2 onions, chopped fine  
1" piece ginger, peeled and grated (optional)  
3 or 4 green chillies, chopped fine  
A small bunch coriander leaves, chopped fine  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
1 tsp peppercorns (optional)  
Salt to taste

#### Method

Combine all three flours. Add salt, sour curd and sufficient water to form a thick batter. Set aside for two hours.

Add more water to form a thin batter of pouring consistency.

Add the chopped onions, grated ginger, chopped green chillies, coriander leaves, cumin seeds and peppercorns. Mix well.

Heat a *tawa* and fry thin lace-like *dosais*.

Serve hot with a coconut chutney.

### RAVA PONGAL

1/2 cup greengram dhal  
5-1/2 cups water  
1 cup fine semolina (*rava*)  
1/2 cup ghee  
1/2 tsp turmeric powder  
1 piece ginger, peeled and grated  
1 tsp peppercorns, powdered coarsely  
A few curry leaves

2 tsp ghee  
2 tsp halved cashewnuts for garnishing  
Salt to taste

#### Method

Place a heavy-bottomed frying pan on medium heat and roast the greengram dhal for 3-4 minutes. Transfer to another dish, add 1-1/2 cups of water and pressure cook. Set aside.

Meanwhile, heat 1/4 cup ghee and fry the semolina till golden. Set aside.

Heat two tablespoons ghee and fry the cashewnuts till golden.

In the same pan, bring to a boil the remaining four cups of water, adding salt and grated ginger.

Reduce the heat and add the fried semolina gradually, about two tablespoons at a time to prevent lumps. It is important to keep stirring till the water is absorbed and the semolina is cooked. This takes about 8 to 10 minutes.

Fold in the cooked greengram dhal. Add the curry leaves, turmeric powder, remaining ghee, cumin seeds and pepper powder. Mix well. Remove from heat, garnish with fried cashewnuts.

Serve hot with a coconut chutney or *kathrika gojju*.

### INSTANT ADAI

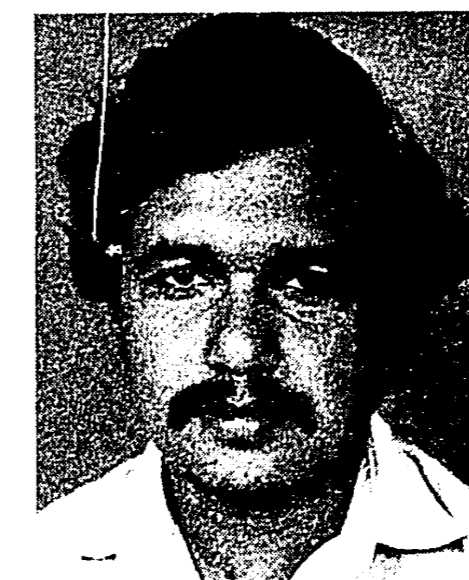
2 cups fine semolina (*rava*)  
1 cup Bengal gram dhal flour (*besan*)



The *Margazhi* (December) cultural season seems to have lost its flavour of yesteryears. Of course, the top performers drew good audiences. And so did the Krishna Gana Sabha's Natyakala Conference in the mornings. But the same kind of crowd was not there for the evening performances there or elsewhere except in a few instances.

This year's Nriyachoodamani awardee, Leela Samson, gave a very neat lecture demonstration at the Natyakala Conference. Her theme 'Bharata Natyam, then and now', was based on the conversation people generally have about the glorious past when music was sung only for devotion, dance was devoid of any commercialisation, there was no avarice and only pure, good intentions. This is an oft-quoted and used idea. But what happened to human beings then? When did we begin to sing for commerce and dance for personal propaganda? Or are we the same Indians who think every dead Indian is a good Indian and hence, the

# Performers past and present



Mohan Das Badagara and two of his splendid 'candid' portraits of musicians

increasing by the day, with no sign of monetary rewards for the dancer in the *Sabha* scene, group presentations, where the dancers share the costs of presentation, seem a sensible solution.

Dancers like Chandralekha made pure dance and group choreography *sans abhinaya* a fashion of the day, but dancers like Kalanidhi Narayanan are bringing in introverted *abhinaya* and making that a fashion too in the art world. It is interesting how the opposite ends of the spectrum are gaining in



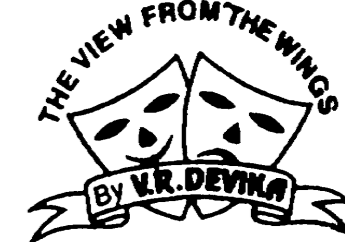
popularity among dancers. Kalanidhi Narayanan was invited to the Music Academy after 57 years. She presented some rare *padams*. The *padams* spoke of the basic instincts and the puritans in the audience may have had singed ears! One *padam* spoke of a young girl who is afraid to go back to her man on the second night, confessing she was quite disgusted with his behaviour and the things that had happened. But she realises that she just has to go back. Another *padam* described how lovelinking after a tiff is so much nicer and eventful and how she was angry that the chain he wore round his neck kept coming between them! These *padams* minced no 'words'. Only 70-year-old Kalanidhi, known for her chaste living, can say all this, say it as it is and get away with it! She even advocated that young girls offer more and more such *padams*!

### Why songs of love?

Then there was young Vidyabhavani Suresh who advocated that it was high time

that we gave up this eternal love song in dance, where the woman is constantly waiting and wailing for the man's attention. She said we have brave and strong women who have achieved so much. Should we still be singing and dancing these songs of love? Well, Vidyabhavani Suresh is still young. She will learn that the bravest and the strongest women also go through pangs of separation, love, anger, jealousy and all the rest. I kept thinking about Princess Diana while Vidya was speaking.

Vidyabhavani Suresh, is a Padma Subramaniam in the



making. She is doing research projects and revealing them in her dance. But she seems to be a girl in a hurry. She should polish her dancing, which is now full of wonder but with little technique.

Young girls like Vidyabhavani, however, are the future. For people who wonder what next, here they come, a whole horde of them!

# THE LURE OF THE LOATHSOME

(Continued from Page 6) manage to eat without benefit of limbs and can, as shown in my own picture accompanying this review, engulf prey of far greater diameter than their own heads and mouths.

Those who dredge this sort of book for records will no doubt be interested to learn that possibly the world's most venomous snake is the Australian Inland Taipan (*Oxyuranus microlepidotus*), a bite from which is calculated sufficient to kill no less than two hundred thousand mice, though the author correctly remarks that men and mice may differ radically in their responses to venoms. My own experiences lead me to believe that sea-snakes venom is probably the most dangerous to people, and I am fond of saying that the only cure for sea-snake envenomation is reincarnation. Yet it is important to remember, as we are reminded here, that vast numbers of fishermen around the coasts and islands of the Indo-Pacific region are unlikely to report bites and deaths from sea-snake or other venomous animals. After all, among such

societies, who is there to report to, and why should such simple people invite the interest of authorities who might become unjustly suspicious and troublesome? Moreover, as most of us who have taken an interest in such problems believe, venomous snake-bite is a common cover-up for murders or embarrassing suicides in such societies, and who is there to concern themselves among people who believe that all snakes are venomous, that death from snake-bite is instantaneous, where there are no coroners or autopsies, where bodies are cremated within hours of death and where no one would dream of informing the police?

Setting aside such concerns, we have here a particularly appealing book, with pictures that cannot fail to arouse very human if misapplied emotions. What can one feel but a surge of profound pity, for example, on turning the page to encounter a picture of a hapless lizard or a broad-bellied frog just sitting there helplessly, eyes wide open, while being swallowed alive. What degree of consciousness exists in the brains

of such unfortunate animals, whose hind parts are already being digested while they sit there and suffer the indignity, if not the pain, of being swallowed while fully conscious? All victims of constrictors are dead before being swallowed, as in the case of the deer in my picture. It is not true that the big constrictors can crush or in any way reduce their prey before engulfing it. The prey dies by asphyxiation as the constrictor prevents breathing, and the predator appears to wait long enough to ensure the cessation of the heart-beat and blood circulation before beginning the lengthy and amazing process of engulfing it. They then pull themselves over their prey rather as you or I would pull on a glove or a stocking. Nor are all constrictors large snakes, like boas, pythons and the legendary anacondas. Many smaller snakes, such as the Trinket Snake (*Elaphe helena*), which makes a delightful per especially for children, kill by constriction with exactly the same technique as their larger and more spectacular cousins.

Rudyard Kipling's Jungle

### Pictures of artists

In the middle of the season, photographer Mohan Das exhibited his pictures of the contemporary greats of Music and Dance in the Spirit of Freedom Hall of the Music Academy. Mohan Das V. Badagara is a familiar sight in the Madras art circles. He is always around with his camera, but has not been taken seriously all these days. It is time we did. He has worked with no capital, no sponsors and no care for the kind of investment he has put into his art. He just clicks for the pleasure of it and loses money in the bargain. He says he is happy that the Music Academy has given him the gallery free of charge for the exhibition.

Mohan Das came to Madras from Kerala. He was interested in mastering an art form, tried painting, but that did not work. He worked for a while as a sign-board painter, while in the consulate circuit, and was also the honorary secretary for the art circle of the Soviet Cultural Centre. He then worked on the

(Continued on Page 8)

# The Madras player



Vasanth Saravanan

## — In India's youth team

The Indian Youth team for the under-19 Youth World Cup tournament now underway (till February 1) in South Africa includes one player from Madras, S Vasanth. He is a middle order batsman, normally batting Number Four, and is also a medium pacer and a sharp fielder.

A consistent high scorer in junior grade cricket, he made a memorable first class debut for Tamil Nadu in the Subbiah Pillai one-day match against Karnataka played in Bangalore. He went in when his side required three runs to win in three balls, with two wickets in hand. He had his captain Robin Singh at the non-striker's end and was facing Anil Kumble. The first ball he received in first class cricket was square cut for a boundary, enabling Tamil Nadu to a two wicket win.

Born in a family with no cricketing background, Vasanth, who is just within the tournament age limit, became interested in cricket as a boy in Salem. His father says, "Having spotted his talent in cricket early in life, I decided to encourage him in his cricket. Studies is not the only thing in life." And so Vasanth moved to Madras in 1987 and joined SBOA MHSS, where he received cricket coaching for the first time. He played his first major tournament in 1991-2 for the Chengalpattu District under-13 team and helped it to win the TVS-Sri Chakra Trophy. In the same season, he represented the State u-13 in the inter-State BSA-SLR Trophy. Before long he was a permanent member of the Dis-

tricts u-13, u-16, u-19, u-22 and senior sides as well as the State Junior teams in turn.

He represented the State u-16 in 1993-4 and in 1994-5, was its vice-captain. He played for South Zone in the all-India inter-zone Vijay Merchant Trophy in 1993-4 at Patiala and the next year represented the State u-19 team in the Ghulam Ahmed Trophy. He

1993-4 and 'The Best School Cricketer of the Year, 1995-6'.

A BA (Economics) II Year student in Guru Nanak College, Vasanth has helped his college to title victories in the annual "The Sportstar"-IIT inter-collegiate tournaments in 1996 and 1997. He has also represented Madras University in the inter-university tournament at Dharwad in 1996-7.

● by G. Krishnan

captained the side which won the title this season. His contributions included a quick-fire century against Karnataka u-19 in the league match at Belgaum. He led the state u-19 in the all-India Cooch Behar Trophy but the team lost to eventual winners, Bengal. He led South Zone u-19 in the Col. C.K. Nayudu Trophy but met with little success.

He began playing in the TNCA league in 1992-3 with a Fourth Division team. He graduated to the First Division by 1995-6 and at present plays for SPIC. His big scores with the bat this season include 100 not out against Kohinoor XI and a 93 against MRF-sponsored Globe Trotters. He also plays in the Chengalpattu-Anna District Cricket Association first division.

Vasanth has attended several coaching camps. He was the lone player from Tamil Nadu to be selected for the National camp conducted by the BCCI in Bombay in May 1995. Various awards have come his way and these include the 'Most Promising Cricketer in TN Schools' in 1991-2 and

This tour to South Africa is not Vasanth's first abroad. He visited the Maldives twice with the Ashok Nagar Cricket Club, in 1993 and 1994, and was the leading scorer for his side. Facing an international attack is also not new to him. He played for the TNCA XI against the visiting Australian Cricket Academy last September and scored 84. He has represented the Combined Districts in the all-India Buchi Babu tournament and made some useful scores against some of the best bowling attacks in the country.

Former State selector V.

Sivaramakrishnan says, "We have a list of u-19 players who are talented enough to play for the State. Vasanth is one of them". Chairman of the State Selection Committee V V Kumar endorses his former colleague's views and recalls, "I was introduced to Vasanth 3-4 years ago by his coach in Bangalore and was very impressed by his talent. If only he curbs his hook shots, which mostly land in fielders' hands, he should emerge a very good batsman and a good prospect for India." K. Srikanth, Manager of the Youth team, feels, "Vasanth is the forerunner of boys from the districts with the talent to represent the country." Vasanth's team-mate S. Sharath, who is himself knocking at the doors of international cricket, says, "Vasanth is a very good all-rounder and if he overcomes his negative problems quickly and scores runs, who knows, he should be a possibility for the Indian senior team in the near future". The South African tour will reveal how good that talent really is in international competition.

## PERFORMERS PAST AND PRESENT

(Continued from Page 7)

Viswakarma project with Dasarath Patel. He also worked on film art direction with art director P. Krishnamurthy. "I enjoyed that very much", says Mohan Das. "We worked on two films of G.V. Iyer". But then, wanting to be independent, he embarked on a career as a serious photographer. "I clicked like crazy. Went to all shows and made pictures and lost a lot of money in the pro-

cess. I am bad at commerce," smiles Mohan Das.

At the Spirit of Freedom Gallery, there are more than one picture of an artist. "One picture does not reveal the complete picture of the atmosphere. So I decided to club a few pictures together," he says. He wants to produce a small book with these pictures after the exhibition. I wonder if the artists, at least, will buy copies of the pictures and the book.



January: Regular monthly Pottery and Kalamkari workshops are offered on the first and second Saturday of the month at Rs.225/- including lunch. Phone Ms. Vishalam (4918943) for more information on these activities at Dakshinachitra.

Special workshops planned include Copper Tooling, Enamel Jewellery, and Ari Embroidery. Story telling sessions being organised two Saturdays a month from 11.00 a.m. to 12.00 a.m. by Sheela Gandhi.

Till January 25: Festival featuring plays by the Koothu-p-Pattarai, an exhibition by Natesh and a performance by Anita Ratnam. (At the Alliance Francaise.)

January 28: Professor Osmund Bopéarachchi, researcher at the C.N.R.S., speaks of his excavations in the ancient town of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka. (At the Alliance Francaise, with the Indian Institute of Architects.)

January 29: Dance recital by Nrithyalaya Aesthetic Society, Singapore. Brought by Arangham Trust to the Music Academy.

January 30: Flower arrangements by Malathi Pandurangam (At Lalit Kala Akademi)

February: One of the most outstanding contemporary French thinkers, Michel Serres, member of the Académie Francaise, Professor at the Sorbonne and at Stanford, speaks on the link between the human and natural sciences. (At the Alliance Francaise.)

February 5: Annette Leday and her group from Kerala will present *Cendrillon ailleurs* (Cinderella elsewhere) which they will then take to France for a summer tour. (At the Alliance Francaise.)

February 6: A Jazz concert by the Trio — Ozay Fecht, Jazz vocalist; Gunther Klatt, Tenor and Soprano; Tizian Jost, Piano and Melodica. (At Open Air Theatre, IIT, 7.00 pm.) Entry passes from Jan 23 at MMB.

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