

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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# Looking at the old again

(By A Special Correspondent)

## Chennai Heritage

As *Madras Musings* enters its ninth year, we have received some of the best news on heritage since the time three years ago when a dozen corporates banded together to save *Madras Musings* and encourage it in its quest to create public awareness about the City's heritage and its environment. This thrust is now to receive a further push.

At long last, the unstinting support for *Madras Musings* over the last three years has been formalised with an organisation which will not only continue the support for *Madras Musings* but will also take a wider look at how it can help make Chennai more heritage- and environment-conscious and contribute to the conservation of the City's heritage.

The new organisation, which came into existence at the end of March, is to be called 'Chennai Heritage' and will be a Section 25, non-profit private limited company working for charitable and social causes. Its directors will be N Sankar, M V Subbiah, Tara Murali and S Muthiah.

Chennai Heritage, apart from ensuring the continued publication of *Madras Musings*, will, in the initial stages, consider lending assistance to studies of heritage projects, heritage workshops, seminars, talks etc., and heritage exhibitions. If support for Chennai Heritage itself grows, the Company will look at assisting projects themselves or mobilising support for heritage projects.

While Chennai Heritage was being formed, *Madras Musings* had not requested for additional support. Now, with Chennai Heritage in place and knowing the direction it is headed, it certainly welcomes additional support and invites corporates interested in joining its dedicated supporters to write for details to Tara Murali, 260A, TTK Road, Chennai 18.

*Madras Musings* welcomes Chennai Heritage and looks to it making a major contribution towards saving the City's heritage and environment.

— THE EDITOR

When OLD is gold, it is best to leave well enough alone. But that's not the favoured way in Madras that is Chennai. Alter unrecognisably, change totally, erect anew, that's the official philosophy in town. And in keeping with that faith, the 300-year-old and more wooden flagstaff on Fort St. George's main bastion was pulled down for no good reason in 1994 and a new metal one erected in its place. It would now appear that the NEW has not withstood the test of time — just about five years! — and needs replacing.

A decision has been taken on archaeological advice, *Madras Musings* understands, to go back to a wooden flagpole. Fortunately for the PWD and the Archaeological Survey, the OLD, chopped up in six-foot-or-so lengths, is still lying in the Fort. These pieces are to be examined and analysed to see what made it survive so long. Its secrets are expected to help Authority raise a new flagpole sometime this year. A flagstaff that will last!

The Yale flagpole, at 152 ft. said to be the tallest in India, was raised by Governor Elihu Yale in 1687. It is believed to have been made from the masts of the *Loyall Adventure*, an East

Indiaman blown aground in a cyclone earlier that year and wrecked. When the flagmast was raised, hoisted on it for the first time in India was the Cross of St. George, replacing the Company's flag.

The cyclone of 1687 is reported as being one of the worst storms in Madras history. The Yale flagstaff weathered many a similar storm in later years but was pulled down on little more than a whim. It would have been nice if it had been raised elsewhere in the City — or if Yale University had transported it to New Haven and raised it as a memorial to he who had given it its name — but it was chopped up and made unusable. Fortunately it was left lying around and not sold as firewood. That decision leaves it to be of some use again.

TAILPIECE: *Madras Musings* learns that a visitor to the City, seeing the pieces of the old flagstaff lying around the Fort, had written a 'stinker' to Authority for not taking care of the pieces. He even offered financial assistance to have "the pieces kept in good condition". Shortly after that, the pieces were collected and 'stored' near the Fort Museum. To prove of some use again today, it would seem.

## Chennai girl wins all-India poetry prize

K Srilatha, member of the British Council Poetry Circle, Chennai, was adjudged the winner of 1998 All-India Poetry competition conducted by the British Council and the Poetry Society of India. The competition, which attracted over 4000 entries, was judged by an eminent panel of contemporary British and Indian poet.



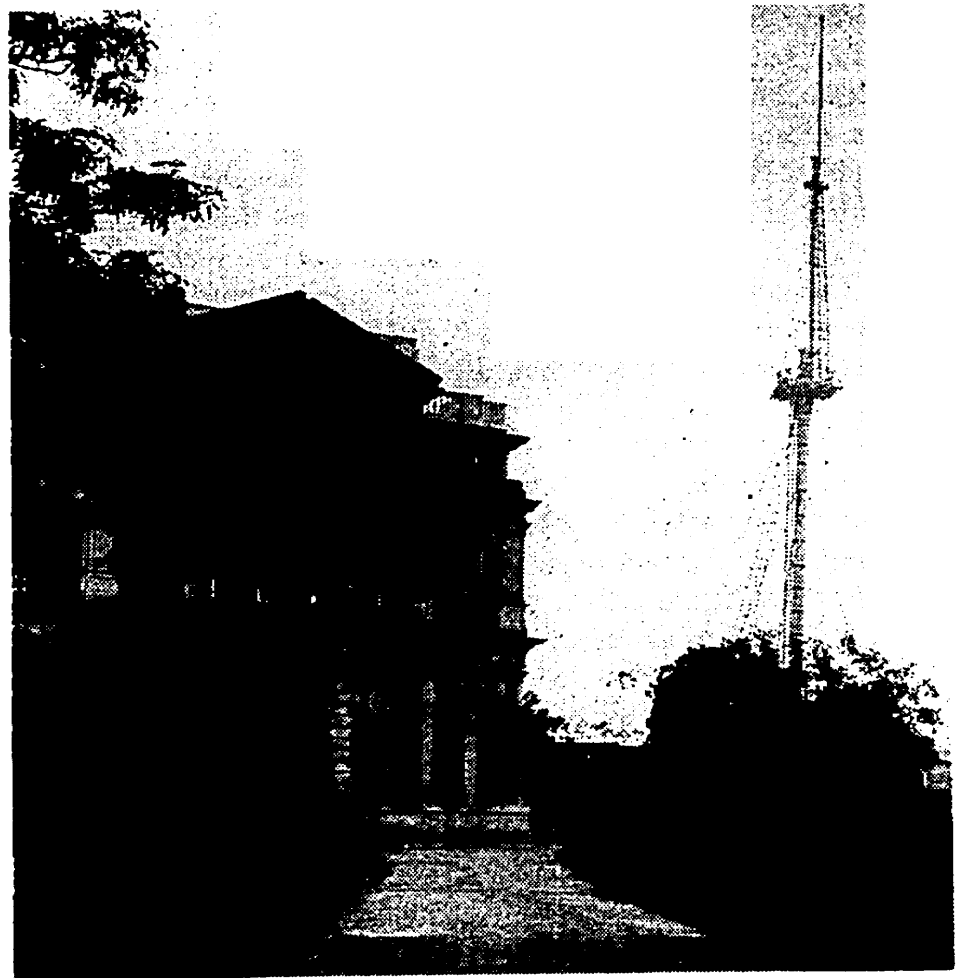
Srilatha's prize-winning

poem was 'In Santa Cruz, Diagnosed Home-Sick' and some of it read:

At the gift shop by the wharf  
I bought an indigo octopus  
all arms....

I, a new comer to this  
out-of-the way white-hippie town  
settle into the sea.

My two-month hostility melts  
even as I see what divides me from  
home  
more clearly than I did from my  
airless plane.

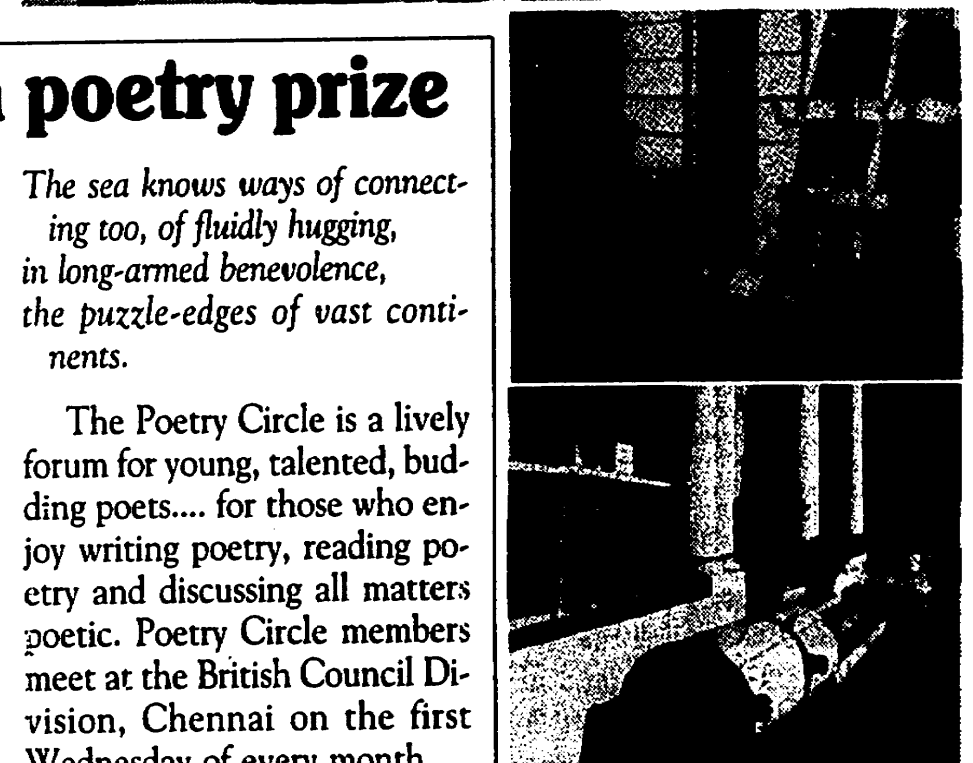
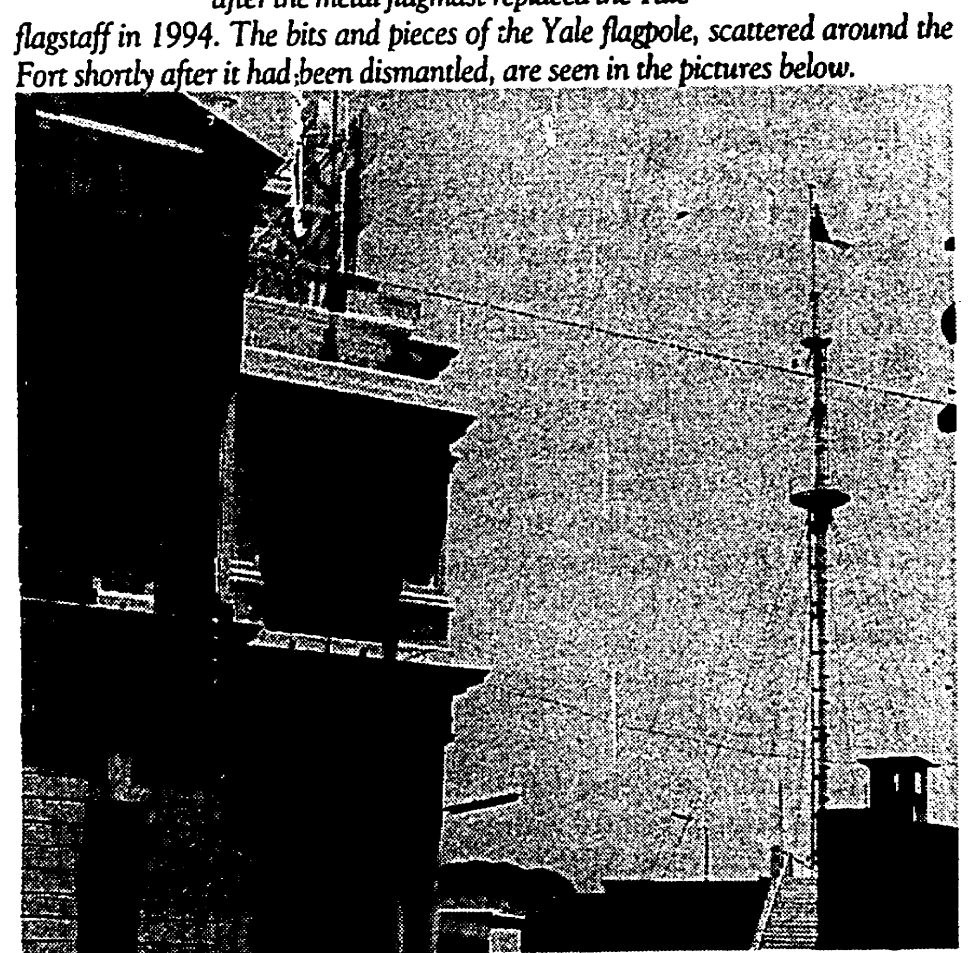


Our OLD, from the VINTAGE VIGNETTES' collection, is of the entrance to the Secretariat with the Yale flagstaff standing tall before it. This is a picture taken around 1910. The scene doesn't look too different in our NEW, but it was taken shortly after the metal flagmast replaced the Yale

THE  
OLD...

flagstaff in 1994. The bits and pieces of the Yale flagpole, scattered around the Fort shortly after it had been dismantled, are seen in the pictures below.

...& THE  
NEW



The sea knows ways of connecting too, of fluidly hugging, in long-armed benevolence, the puzzle-edges of vast continents.

The Poetry Circle is a lively forum for young, talented, budding poets.... for those who enjoy writing poetry, reading poetry and discussing all matters poetic. Poetry Circle members meet at the British Council Division, Chennai on the first Wednesday of every month.



# A role that should be given Gavaskar...

"Why are all you people asking that Sunil Gavaskar be made the President of the Board of Control for Cricket? That's too small a post for him. We in Chennai must have him made the Sports Minister of India."

And responding to that emphatic declaration, Sunil Gavaskar recalled, "The first time I received an honour in Madras, it was in the Seventies and, after presenting me the *Sportstar Award* MAM Ramaswamy said, I should be made captain of India. And when I was, it brought me my share of troubles. Now he's making another suggestion. I should run for cover."

The good-humoured occasion was the second anniversary celebrations of *Straight Bat*, a privately circulated journal whose frequent target appears to be the tamashas of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association. *Straight Bat*, the baby of stormy petrel SR Jagannathan, succeeded in getting Kapil Dev as its first chief guest and has now followed that feat by getting Gavaskar to grace its second celebration. Jagannathan, known for his doggedness, would not surrender the mike till Gavaskar nodded assent to his 'request', "You must help us get Tendulkar for our third celebration". Jagannathan, *The Man From Madras Musings* noted, was so preoccupied with plans for next year that he didn't quite get to riding his hobby-horse: TNCA office-bearers more intent on still higher office than on tackling the cricket problems of Tamil Nadu and its fans.

Jagannathan, however, did not forget to get his priorities right. Ringside seats and first to be addressed were MJ Gopalan, AG Ram Singh and MO Srinivasan. When Gavaskar came down to garland Gopalan, he didn't forget to make a thoughtful feet-touching gesture. He certainly seems to be getting it all right on the road to where MAM feels he should be headed.

## From the dais

Responding to being felicitated and being presented with a silver bat (courtesy MRF) recording his Test centuries, Gavaskar had a word for everyone on the dais. The best story of the evening was when he remembered arriving with team official and father figure Balu Alagunan in New York after a tour of the West Indies. At a loose end that evening, he suggested that they go and see a film. It's a thriller, he persuaded Balu; after all, wasn't its title the name of Woodward and Bernstein's Watergate source? And so they went to see *Deep Throat*! Balu was a good sport, recalled Gavaskar; "he may have squirmed through it, but he sat through it all and neither of us was quite sure at the end of it who was more embarrassed."

He was, however, certainly not embarrassed when someone who had heard about *Straight Bat's* invitation to him had suggested that he should not attend. You're the senior player, yet Kapil was invited to the first function, the troublemaker had pointed out. But what's wrong with that, Gavaskar recalled responding; after all, he had pointed out, till a bowler goes into action, a batsman has no role to play. Kapil, therefore, had to start the proceedings.

And then there was that small dinner at CD Gopinath's house where Gopi's daughter had asked Gavaskar whether he too played cricket and brought the house down. She, he recalled, had the last giggle when his knife and fork, resting on the plate, slid down for the fourth or fifth time with a clatter.

Midst all the good humour MAM Ramaswamy introduced a couple of serious notes. He didn't know anything about match-

fixing, but betting on cricket, especially the one-day game, had superseded by far the betting on racing. Anything from Rs.50 to Rs.100 crore was being bet on a match day with Indian bookies "he knew for a fact", he stated. And this, he added, was affecting racing considerably. The other point that concerned him was Pakistan's attitude to India, particularly in sport. He mentioned this while recalling a winning Indian hockey team having to seek refuge in the dressing room in Lahore. He, as President of the IHF at the time, had witnessed those frightening, unsporting events. India should not play Pakistan in any sport for a long time to come, he felt. And there was one enthusiastic about this view sitting behind *The Man From Madras Musings* and shouting, "Hear that, Ram? Listen to that carefully, Ram?" And 'Peace-in our-time' N Ram, also on the dais, smiled through it all.

## Heritage concern

*The Man From Madras Musings* was delighted to find a new wind sweeping through the corridors of the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority building. Heritage is becoming a matter of concern. Whether that concern will convert into action MMM wouldn't like to predict, but it's nice to find support for heritage activities in the CMDA now.

Recently, the CMDA convened a round-table chat to discuss what lay in store for the Bharat Insurance Building. And while LIC's concern for getting equitable return on property was well taken, it was suggested to the local LIC officials that they should inform their headquarters of the concern of many Chennai citizens over the future of the aesthetically striking building and

that these groups felt that an affluent organisation like LIC could afford to set a splendid example for other owners of heritage properties without losing.

Looking at the heritage issue even more widely, the CMDA plans to invite all those concerned to discuss what steps could be taken to conserve and restore at least the major heritage buildings in the City. While new Development Control Rules and a Heritage Act are likely to take time to be introduced and implemented, it was felt that some kind of positive heritage activity could get underway informally. And the CMDA now appears to be quite responsive to acting as a catalyst to this end.

May these winds blow long and strong.

## Clearing the air

Work is likely to start immediately on restoring the University of Madras's *Senate House*, *The Man From Madras Musings*

and negotiate the special rates necessary for the civil work aspects of archaeological restoration.

With about Rs.1 crore already collected for the restoration, the first funds to restorers are likely to be released shortly so that the work can begin. The Committee, the University and all those looking forward to the restoration of *Senate House* are hoping the trickle of donations will substantially grow once work starts to reach the Rs.4 crore target before the end of the year. If that is reached, we should be able to see a model of restoration some time in the Millennium.

## Aussie help

Yet another look at Chennai heritage recently came when a group of conservationists from South Australia, the *Sacon Heritage Unit*, visited Chennai and looked at several heritage


buildings in the City. They also gave a talk at the School of Architecture and Planning on the work they've been doing in South Australia and Southeast Asia. *The Man From Madras Musings* could not, unfortunately, catch up with their talk but architects, students and conservationists who were there appear to be unanimous that this team had much to offer Chennai conservationists and restorers.

Citing the Venice Charter on Monuments, they stressed that conservation meant protection, preservation, repair, resto-

understands. This follows a meeting of the Technical Committee for the Conservation and Renovation of *Senate House* where the Committee endorsed the view recorded by the former Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. PT Manoharan, that all contributions towards *Senate House* restoration would go into a SEPARATE FUND and would not be mixed with the General Funds of the University.

It was also agreed, MMM understands, that a Special Committee of the Technical Committee would supervise all the work

— MMM



**MCCI**  
The Madras Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
Established in 1836  
Karumuttu Centre 1 Floor  
498 Anna Salai  
Chennai - 600 009

In my capacity as the Chairman of The Madras Chamber of Commerce & Industry may I suggest for Mahindra & Mahindra's serious consideration Tamil Nadu as a location for your proposed venture. If there are things we can do to be of any assistance to Mahindra & Mahindra, please do let us know.

Yours sincerely,  
L Lakshman

With best regards,  
Mr R K Pitamber  
Managing Director  
Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.  
Bombay 400 038.

cc Mr C Ramachandran, IAS  
Principal Secretary to Government  
Tamil Nadu  
Chennai

Dear Mr. Pitamber,

I refer to our telephone conversation.

We are delighted to learn of the proposal for building passenger car in India. Please let us know the details.

As you are aware the State of Tamil Nadu has a large number of skilled labour and also offers the advantage of a natural port.

Apropos, *The Man From Madras Musings* reference to the inauguration of the Ford factory (MM, April 1st), MMM was recently reminded of the fact that the Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry was, possibly, the first to invite what was then Mahindra-Ford to consider Tamil Nadu as a potential home. L Lakshman, then Chairman of the Chamber, wrote the letter featured above to RK Pitamber, Managing Director, Mahindra & Mahindra. Follow-ups on the invitation helped bring Ford to Chennai. MMM looks forward to all the Chambers playing a greater role in the City — not only in Commerce and Industry but in the City's infrastructure, life, and heritage as well.

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Temple tanks

T.M. Sundaraman has suggested (MM, December 1st, 1998) the following means for saving the temple tanks in the city: (i) restore the rainwater inlets to the tanks; (ii) interconnect all the temple tanks in the city with the stormwater drains; and (iii) divert excess rainwater going waste from the Adyar river to these tanks. I agree with him that this is possible, economical and has multiple advantages.

As far as the two tanks of Mylapore are concerned (Sri Kapaleeswarar temple tank and the Chitrakulam), suggestions (ii) and (iii) were in vogue from the British period till about 1955. The entire rainwater collected in the P.S. High School grounds flowed into the Kapaleeswarar temple tank via stormwater drains. Similarly, rainwater in and around Mandaveli bus terminus used to flow into this tank through the same channel. In those days, no waterlogging was there, due to these excellent arrangements. By suitably repairing these old stormwater drains, the supply to this tank can be easily restored with advantage to all.

Water from the Adyar river used to be transferred from near the Andhra Mahila Sabha Hospital to this tank via the stormwater drain in January, or whenever the water level in the tank was depleted, hindering the conduct of the Float Festival. After reaching the optimum level, the excess water used to be diverted to the Chitrakulam through a special drain channel, which is also now damaged and blocked. In my school days and up to 1955, we used to witness the water flowing into the Chitrakulam, carrying a lot of fish from the Adyar river, even though there were no rains during January.

In those days, these two tanks were interconnected because, while Chitrakulam had direct access to the underground waterbed, the Sri Kapaleeswarar temple tank lacked this due to the clayey soil underneath. We cannot but admire the forethought and vision of the citizens of yesteryears. These temple tanks helped recharge groundwater, evidence of which was the copious water in the wells in the neighbourhood.

Mylapore, which had excellent groundwater, started facing acute water shortage only after these arrangements were disrupted. Now the groundwater table has also gone down considerably.

If only all the rainwater that is drained from the Adyar during each monsoon could be usefully diverted to both tanks at Mylapore, Mylapore will not face any water problem in spite of its many highrise buildings today. Chitrakulam should be renovated while it is more or less dry; and the suggestions given above should be seriously pursued and implemented so that the temple rituals and festivals could once again be held with the traditional fervour and gaiety.

K. Sampath  
Karthik Flats  
13/3, Nallappan Street  
Mylapore  
Chennai 600 004.

### Heritage of Chennai

Your coverage of the 'Heritage of Chennai' Exhibition and the play put up by schoolchildren on the founders of this gracious city (MM, March 1st) is excellent. In this connection, I would like to share with readers the thrill I experienced during a recent visit to Singapore where I admired a historical museum featuring the history under the title 'Images of Singapore'. Why cannot we in Chennai establish such a Museum? Is this neglect due to our reservation in acknowledging the significant contribution of the British in building this city? Let us depict all images of Chennai objectively, including the contributions of the Dravidian parties which have been holding sway at Fort. St. George since 1967.

Fortunately we have a Chief Minister with a sense of history. Would he ensure that at 'Images of Chennai' exhibition is permanently located in *Senate House* — a building which is itself a historical marvel?

# The magic of moringa

Obtaining clear water is one of the major problems facing the poor in developing countries like India. Scientists report that some 1.3 billion people in the developing world still lack safe drinking water and millions of children die every year from drinking contaminated water.

Researchers at the Environmental Engineering Division of Leicester University in England have discovered that the moringa tree can provide an effective means of clarifying water. The moringa — also known as the drumstick tree, Benoi tree and horseradish tree — also offers a wealth of other benefits.

Native to India, the multipurpose, perennial tree is easy to cultivate. Its properties are numerous. When crushed in a press, the seeds produce a valuable, clear and odourless vegetable oil for cooking, non-coagulating lubrication, soap-making, and a fuel oil for lamps.

The tree is grown for hedging purposes and the trunks are used as fence posts. The thickened root can be used as a substitute for horseradish. The moringa's timber is used as fuel, its pulp for paper making, and its bark for leaves, flowers and roasted seeds are highly nutritious, containing large amounts of vitamins A, B and C as well as protein, calcium and iron.

Parts of the tree are used in folk remedies for the treatment

of ear, eye and bronchial complaints, for fever, stomach ulcers, diarrhoea, syphilis and nervous disorders.

Though some of these properties have been developed commercially, little has been done to exploit the water treatment potential of the seeds. During the last few years, however, the Environmental Engineering Division of Leicester University has researched this aspect of the *Moringa oleifera* with very encouraging results.

This variety is fast growing and attains a height of five metres within one year. It is hardy, drought-resistant and can grow in poor soils. It is also able to flower and produce fruit twice a year. Its seed is contained in long pods hanging from its branches.

When harvested and extracted from the pods, the seed, pounded to a powder and stirred into water, becomes a very effective water coagulant capable of removing up to 98% of suspended solids. Any remaining impurities can be rendered harmless by chlorination.

The experiments conducted at Leicester, found that the moringa seed treatment was as effective as, and in some respects superior to, that of aluminium sulphate which can be dangerous if overused.

During the initial research, some of the seed powder tended to float in the tank. This was corrected by processing the seeds to extract their natural oil and then grinding the seed cake to a powder for re-introduction to the co-

agulation process. This refinement revealed that the seed yielded a high-quality oil, yet the residual seed cake, when powdered, had lost none of its coagulating properties.

This research indicates a number of positive implications for rural communities:

● The way is now clear for this technology to be employed in many developing countries such as India where an improvement in water quality is desirable.

● Water treatment in those countries need not depend on the availability of proprietary chemicals such as aluminium sulphate and ferric salts.

● The moringa seed treatment does not require expensive, imported chemicals.

● Water treatment does not rely on the availability and employment of skilled operators; it can be performed by local semi-skilled labour and at less cost.

● By-products from the tree can offset at least some of the costs of treatment.

● Water treatment for drinking purposes can be introduced inexpensively at the household level by using traditional water vessels adapted for this purpose.

● Moringa plantations are not only desirable environmentally, but they can also stimulate the rural economy by the creation of a cash crop for farmers.

Dr. N. Subramanian  
191, North Usman Road  
T Nagar  
Chennai 600 017.

House. My letter was acknowledged by the V.C. on February 5th and the cheque by the Registrar on February 10th. However, the formal receipt with the IT Exemption Certificate is yet to come (I write on March 23rd). If I do not receive it by March 31, I wonder whether I can claim IT exemption at all for the year 1998-99.

The article by your Special Correspondent echoes misgivings by the very few sincere, loyal, one-time students of Madras University who did not hesitate to respond to such a moving appeal to bring back the hallowed *Senate House* to its pristine glory.

Will the University disclose how many ex-students and others have responded and the total amount of donations received since the publication of the appeal two months ago? It will be a great pity if the donations (received or promised) do not work out to even one per cent of the total outlay and ultimately wisdom prevails to scrap the project and allow the *Senate House* (which I entered only twice, to attend my convocation and to listen to Mariam Anderson) to crumble brick by brick.

I hope *Madras Musings* succeeds in saving this piece of our Heritage.

K. Ramakrishnan  
96/A2, 3rd Cross Street  
Gill Nagar, Chennai 600 094.

### Style to follow

The review of the Chennai Test by V. Ramnarayan (MM, February 16th) was splendid, recapturing in short space all the salient features of that exciting match. I would commend his style and comments to all young aspiring cricket writers.

The other superb article was on the battle of Wandiwash. The very name Wandiwash makes me wonder if it was a staging port — where 'wandis' (carts) were washed and refitted. Or is this just a flight of my imagination?

### Back again

Re the item I wrote about Rhoardings (MM, March 16th),

KN Prabhu  
53, Ocean View  
Dumayne Road  
Colaba, Mumbai 400 035.

### Saving a tree

Reading Gautam's letter 'A Tree Problem' in MM, March 1st, brought to mind a similar problem faced by the citizens of Bombay thirty years ago.

On the occasion, the Bombay Corporation decided that a majestic baobab tree in the heart of the city should be cut down. This raised many protests. Homi Bhabha, M.G.K. Menon and S.D. Vaidya of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, all tree-lovers, thereupon took on themselves the responsibility of saving the tree by uprooting, transporting and transplanting it in the T.I.F.R. Now, after over thirty years, it is in perfect health, giving pleasure to all visitors. This act of kindness to a dumb and helpless tree aroused my poetic instincts, resulting in the 'sonnet' (right). I hope it inspires others to emulate the TIFR whenever an opportunity arises.

K. Sreedhara Menon  
2, 2nd Street, Ormes Road  
Chennai 600 010.

## The lucky baobab

*The City Fathers said the tree must go,  
Tree lovers rose as one and said "Oh, no,  
First cut our throats," they said, "before you cut the tree.  
Till then to cut the tree you'll not be free."*

*Some said "We'll take it and won't let it die",  
"O.K." the City Fathers said, "That you may try".  
The lovers of the tree then dug a largish pit,  
So big the tree with earth and roots would fit,*

*And dug all round the tree freeing roots and earth,  
And with a crane lifted it like a container load  
And carried it in trucks to its new abode,  
Where after thirty summers warm and winters cold,*

*It stands majestic as in the days of old.  
Such lovers of trees are worth their weight in gold.*



## New in Chennai

## A lifestyle landmark shortly

Chennai-based Lifestyle International Private Ltd. plans to open its first and the city's largest retail store shortly. Spread over 30,000 sq.ft — 10,000 sq.ft. more than Tata's Westside at Spencer Plaza — the Rs.25 crore store, is fast coming up at Alwarpet junction.

Lifestyle International is a 100% subsidiary of Lifestyle International, Mauritius, which, in turn, belongs to the Dubai-headquartered Landmark group. The group, promoted by Mukesh Jagtiani, better known

in India by the year end and 11 by 2001 AD", discloses P. Krishna Murthy, Finance Manager. According to him, the company has already invested in retail space in Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai and negotiations are underway for property purchases in other places. Construction work has already commenced in Bangalore, where the company is building a 42,000 sq.ft store to be inaugurated by year end.

Compared to the group's stores abroad — Dubai 3.2 lakh

sales of Rs.18 crore during the first year. "Though it would take us about two years to break even, in the long run, retailing is a lucrative business," Krishna Murthy stated.

Abroad, the Landmark group has different outlets to sell different products — 'The Baby Shop' (for children's clothing, shoes, toys etc.), 'Shoemark' (said to be the Gulf's largest footwear outlet), 'Splash' (branded fashion clothing), 'Home Centre' (houseware, gifts, furniture etc.), 'Lifestyle' (cosmetics, toiletries, perfumes, gifts etc.), and 'Uno' and 'Juniors', two other variants of footwear and babyware retail stores designed for shopping malls. However, all these products would be sold under one roof in India. Imports, such as perfumes and toys will be around 12.5% of total stocks, it is learnt.

'Lifestyle' will retail both outside as well as its own brands. The centrally air-conditioned store will have an escalator to carry shoppers to the first floor. "We will have a coffee shop and a children's play area with an attendant at all our shops," says Krishna Murthy.

"Our target segment includes the middle class", says Krishna Murthy, assuring competitive pricing.

as Micky, an NRI, commenced operations about 25 years ago with one retail outlet in Dubai. Today, the Landmark group owns more than 100 retail stores in Bahrain, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Cyprus. For Micky, opening a shop here is a sort of homecoming after a quarter of a century.

He however does not plan to restrict himself to one store in the country. The group has plans to open retail outlets in Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Pune. "We plan to have at least five shops

sq.ft., Jeddah 1.75 lakh sq.ft., Kuwait 1.2 lakh sq.ft., Muscat 1.2 lakh sq.ft., Al Khobar 1.3 lakh sq.ft., Doha 77,000 sq.ft. — the Indian stores are small in size. In Chennai, Lifestyle International, apart from owing the store premises, has rented 8,000 sq.ft. warehouse.

Speaking about the company's Indian operations, Krishna Murthy said that out of Rs. 100 crore approved by Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), the Company has brought in about Rs.13 crore. "We will bring in the balance in a phased manner, based on need," he said. He projected

cences and *Ramanujan: an Inspiration* in the late 60's to mark the 75th birthday of Ramanujan. Subsequently, the great efforts of Mr. P.K. Srinivasan and Mr. A.T.B. Bose, Secretary

brought out a facsimile edition of these notebooks. Between 1947 and 1997, Dr. Bruce C. Berndt of the University of Illinois, studied each and every one of these entries and gave

proofs to the theorems when required. At the end of his 22 years of undivided attention to the works of Ramanujan in the notebooks, Prof. Berndt could only admire the 'natural' genius of Ramanujan; he could get no clue as to how Ramanujan ever arrived at so many originally new mathematical results."

"Ramanujan has been called a 'natural' genius," Dr. Rao added. I have always been at a loss to define the calibre of



## You won't be lost in Chennai

That's the promise made by *Naviga for Chennai*. And by and large that's a promise that a user is likely to be able to depend on. As one cartographer to another, I must congratulate *Naviga* for beating all the big boys to it and coming out with a reasonably good 'A to Z' of Chennai.

What *Naviga* has done is to divide the City, from Tondiarpet to Velachery, from Alwarthirunagar to the coast, into 62 sections and map each section in four or five full-page maps, giving all the roads to be found in each subsection of each zone. There are in all 329 maps and that covers the city pretty well. This coverage not only comes down to the lane and cross street levels but also gives some indication of the numbering on each stretch of street as well as important landmarks in many areas (which may just be a local store in the outskirts).

The maps are not to scale; maps meant to join a particular area in the north, south, east or west are likely to be of totally different scales. There are bound to be errors here and there. Not enough care has been taken on spelling. The size is unwieldy. And the paper is flimsy, so the longevity of the book is not likely to be high, but all this makes no difference to its one major plus quality.

And that is that it provides so much information that so

many have been asking for. At a very affordable price too, Rs.120. It's the best buy in town — and every house in town should have one. I only wish the marketing were a bit better and exposure greater at outlets. But if you get a copy, don't lock too closely at the cartography or errors. Just take in the wealth of information.

The information reflects the three years it took to collect. But in print, it seems almost up-to-date; Domino's, for instance, is marked on Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai. But locations such as these are not the prime value of *Naviga*; its wealth is all those alleys and byways of Chennai that lead off the major and even minor roads. They ensure an entry list of a few thousand streets — and THAT is INFORMATION.

Two points the publishers might like to keep in mind next time around. One, there MUST be an alphabetical index of ALL roads included. The present alphabetical road index is by area, and though there is a map showing area, the user has to first locate the area and then look for the street. A purely street index, with area names in brackets by the street name, where necessary, would make life so much easier. The second point is the size. The present 9" x 7" size may be in order for motor cars and home use, but for most other users a 7" x 4 1/2" size will be much handier, even if it makes the book bulkier. But even that bulk can be compressed with better designing; remember the original A to Z is many pages fewer for a much bigger city, London. It is truly handy, and that is what *Naviga* should strive for.

Congratulations on an excellent effort, *Naviga*. And on leaving the big boys at the post by discovering how to make best use of a computer.

TAILPIECE: Just a few days after I received *Naviga*, I spotted a booklet titled *The Chennai Street Pages* in the bookshops. Priced at Rs.70 this does in 120 pages, in 8"x5.5" size, what *Naviga* does, but legibility is nowhere near as good. It does, however, have the advantage of the street index I have suggested above. Listed appear to be about 7,000 streets.

S. Muthiah

## A labour of love

● Your book is a very personal account. Rather than ask you why you wrote it, I would like to ask for whom you wrote it?

Just before Kumar died he dictated an article describing some of the pain of being terminally ill and the difficulties it involved. It was to be given to his doctor. His doctor shared the article with other patients of his who faced similar situations. I was told that it brought peace and comfort to several people who were dying and to those who waited beside them. Though I was reluctant to write the book at first, I did see the enormous comfort and strength it could bring to others, and I realised that the most personal is also the most universal. Being a journalist, I have the habit of writing down everything that happens in my life and of those close to me. I



Dr. Kumar and Usha Jesudason

● You have written biographies before. Is this a biography of your husband?

No it isn't. This is just the story of one part of his life. The last part. To make it authentic and interesting I have also woven into it incidents from other times of his life, his early career, our marriage and some elements of his work, so that the reader can know what kind of a person he was.

self after his wife died, and said grief is very much like fear. Do you agree?

Yes, I do. Grief has the same gripping elements that fear does. Butterflies in the stomach, a dry feeling in one's throat, palms that sweat for no reason, a blankness of mind, a feeling which says, 'If I don't think about it maybe it will go away.' But of course it doesn't. Unlike fear, grief is very hard work, it is exhausting. Loss and grief are two very different feelings. Loss is the feeling of emptiness, of loneliness, a void that may never be filled again, and that is frightening. Grief, on the other hand, is intense sadness. Sadness, as just for a moment in your mind, you can feel the touch of his hand, or the caress of a kiss, or the warmth of a hug, and slowly that moment disappears. Grief does lessen with time, but loss re-

## EXCERPTS

The final test came when a previous Director, who had caused him a lot of grief at one point, visited. For many years, there had been bitter and angry feelings between them. Now hearing about Kumar's illness, he had come to see him, and was shocked at the change in Kumar. Gone was the strong, challenging, arrogant personality. To his sadness, he found a frail, gentle Kumar, still challenging, but in a different way. He brought his good wishes and blessings for Kumar. Kumar held his hands and gracefully accepted them,

wrote down our conversations, our feelings, what other people said to us — not with the idea of writing a book, but as a habit, and this made writing the book easier.

● Was writing it a painful experience?

Writing it was a very painful experience. To go back to my diaries (four during those three months) was simply heartbreaking. Especially as I read the bits when I was impatient with him, or uncaring of his feelings or angry with him for silly reasons. But then I realised that if I was to tell this story, I had to tell it the way it really happened, with all the pain, the frustrations, the anger and the sadness between us....

James and John, the boys also shared their memories of this time, and told me things that Kumar had said to them separately. All of us cried a lot while I was writing it. It certainly did not help in the grieving process. If anything it just made it worse, as I was constantly reliving the whole thing word for word, feeling by feeling, I felt like a worn-out, much wrung-out rag!

● C.S. Lewis wrote about how he struggled within him-

and in his inimitable way broke the tension between them with one of his jokes. In that moment, all the old animosity vanished with the laughter. There was peace between them as the two men chatted like old friends. They parted finally with the firm knowledge that the years of mistrust and misunderstandings were over, and that both of them had forgiven each other. Thus was peace restored between them.

The family was stunned at this turn of events. So was the community watching us. 'How

could you sit there and hold his hands as if nothing happened?' many people asked Kumar.

In reply Kumar explained, 'All that grieves and hurts, all the fights, the manipulations, the desire to have things one's own way, the need to be right, are all only for a moment. So too is all that pleases us and makes us happy. In the final tally, the only things that really matter are the things which will last till eternity. We cause so much grief to each other in petty ways because of ambition, pride and greed. We want the applause, the credits,

mains. Grief and loss are the most frightening things I have ever experienced, and somehow I think they will always be with me.

● The depth of your faith seems to be very great. Did the experience of being so close to death shake your faith?

It wasn't being close to death that shook my faith, it was all the pain and uncertainty we had to go through. There was one point when I thought Kumar was dying and it all seemed so chaotic and undignified and pointless. There was so much physical pain, nothing made sense. At the point I did lose my faith not only in a caring God, but in God Himself. It was the love of those around me that restored my faith.

● Your husband Kumar was a medical doctor. Didn't he feel frustrated and angry at medicine because he couldn't be cured?

Strangely enough, no! Frustrated and angry with fate, with God, with me, with himself, but never with medicine itself.



The cover of Usha Jesudason's poignant book.

● I will lie down in peace is one of the most poignant books to appear on the Indian literary scene in many a year. It is the story of a young doctor who had

● Did your family members (not only the children) help you with the book?

I think it was too painful a topic for any of my close family, to even talk about for a long while. My mother read the manuscript just before it was actually printed. My father read

the awards for ourselves. There comes a time, like this time for me, when I realize that all that matters is not power or fame, but the love one has given and received. That is all I want to remember now, nothing else matters. And I am grateful that there has been so much love in my life.' — An excerpt from *I will lie down in peace* by Usha Jesudason (EastWest Books, Price: Rs.150/-). The proceeds from the sale of this book will go towards the work Dr. Kumar Jesudason dedicated his life to: the care of those suffering from leprosy.)

the book after it was released. The boys read almost every line as it was being written, and gave me their suggestions and insights. Both of them would sit close to me and put their arms around me while I wrote certain very sad passages. Mallika was just a year and a half and she would play quietly beside me and dry my tears, and say, 'Don't cry, amma, I'm here.'

● You have designated all proceeds from sales of the book for leprosy research. Why not liver research, or to Hepatitis B eradication, since that was the cause of your husband's illness?

Donating the proceeds from

devoted his life to serving leprosy patients till he was struck by terminal illness and told that he had about five years to live. He was only forty when this diagnosis threatened to crush everything he held so dear — his dreams, his faith and even his own uniquely optimistic and joyous nature.

I will lie down in peace is a touching account of how Dr. Kumar Jesudason and his family coped with the confusion, bitterness, pain and loneliness of terminal illness. The manner in which Kumar converted his painful confrontation with death into a positive and healing experience is narrated in this warm and moving book by his wife Usha.

In an interview with ANNE DAYANANDAN, Usha Jesudason shares the experiences that motivated her to write this book.

sales of the book to the care of those suffering from leprosy was the publisher's idea, one that I am extremely touched by. Why leprosy? Because that was what made Kumar's life tick. He was happiest when he was with his patients — he loved them, he treated them, they were his family. Today I see so many of Kumar's old patients, some of them in their eighties, deformed, but cured. Yet they still have ulcers and other problems, but no one is prepared to treat them because they are 'cured' and as such are not welcome in hospitals or leprosy centres. Such people will always need our help, and I am so thankful to EastWest for making it possible for such people to be helped.

● Do you plan to continue writing? You've written mostly non-fiction; are you willing to try your hand at fiction?

Yes, I do plan to continue writing. That is how I earn my living after all! I've written a series of value education books published by Macmillan. Promoting these books has taken me to all parts of the country where I have held value workshops; At these workshops I get people to think about their values, of what's really important to them and the lessons they have learnt from life. Each workshop is a very emotional experience. And yes, I do write fiction.... only it has not been published so far! — (Excerpts from an interview that appeared in *EastWest Book News*)

## Ramanujan Gallery at Science Centre

A Ramanujan Gallery has been opened at the Tamil Nadu Science and Technology Centre, Adyar. It is a fusion of two exhibitions. One of the exhibitions is called the Pi Pavilion and the other is a replica of the Ramanujan Museum at the Avvai Academy in Royapuram. The Gallery was inaugurated with little fanfare on February 28th, the day the mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1918.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. K. Srinivasa Rao, Senior Professor, Institute of Mathematical Science, recalled the contributions towards of a "devoted mathematics teacher", P.K. Srinivasan, who brought out two volumes entitled *Ramanujan: Letters and Reminis-*

cences and *Ramanujan: an Inspiration* in the late 60's to mark the 75th birthday of Ramanujan. Subsequently, the great efforts of Mr. P.K. Srinivasan and Mr. A.T.B. Bose, Secretary

brought out a facsimile edition of these notebooks. Between 1947 and 1997, Dr. Bruce C. Berndt of the University of Illinois, studied each and every one of these entries and gave

proofs to the theorems when required. At the end of his 22 years of undivided attention to the works of Ramanujan in the notebooks, Prof. Berndt could only admire the 'natural' genius of Ramanujan; he could get no clue as to how Ramanujan ever arrived at so many originally new mathematical results."

"Ramanujan has been called a 'natural' genius," Dr. Rao added. I have always been at a loss to define the calibre of

● by A Special Correspondent

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## Quizzin' with Ram'n'an

(Quizmaster V.V.RAMANAN'S questions are from the fortnight March 16 to 31. Questions 16 to 20 pertain to Chennai.)

- Who are the recipients of the Best Picture, Actor, Actress and Director Oscars?
- Name the first woman elected to head the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, the 'mini' parliament of the Sikhs.
- Name the two Sri Lankan cricketers finding mention in *Wisden's* Five Cricketers of the year.
- After whom has the international airport in Mumbai been named?
- Name the virus that attacked global computers on March 26th leading to a crisis.
- Where was the epicentre of the major earthquake that shook North India recently?
- Name the state-of-the-art, radar-evading bomber which was brought down by Serbian forces in the ongoing conflict in Kosovo.
- Corporation Bank and Societe Generale of France recently unveiled a commemorative gold medallion featuring which living Indian?
- Name the noted choreographer and son of the famous Uday Shankar who passed away recently.
- Which important ally of the ruling BJP coalition was derecognised by the Election Commission as a national party?
- What is the claim to fame of Maurice Ashley in the world of chess?
- What new vehicle, the first of its kind, rolled out of the Integral Coach Factory on March 22nd?
- Who recently became the first to circumnavigate the world in a hot air balloon?
- Who is the new National Football League champion?
- What food scheme, announced by the Finance Minister in this year's budget, was launched by the P.M. at Sikheda Village in U.P. on March 19th?
- Which popular cricket club, the home to such stars as Srikanth and W.V. Raman, celebrate its Golden Jubilee recently?
- Which city reservoir suffered a major breach on March 31st?
- Where in the city was the State's first private sector power project commissioned by the C.M. on March 28th?
- Who was awarded the Chennai-based Indo-Australian Association's Award for Meritorious Service recently?
- Where in the outskirts of the city has Tata Consultancy Services set up a massive modern software development centre?

(Answers on Page 7)

## Kilpauk and the Movies — II

# National, a busy hive

(Continued from last fortnight)

Another studio of Kilpauk which enjoyed much success during the 1930s and early 1940s was National Movietone. It was located in a palatial mansion with vast open grounds around, *Kushaldoss Gardens* owned by a wealthy Saurashtra family in Madras. A rich Nagarathar from Chettinad, L.Ct. Pl. Chidambaram Chettiar took over this mansion on long lease and established National Movietone Studio here. He engaged talented professionals to run the studio efficiently. His key men were F. Nagoor, Dinshaw K. Tehrani, and Jiten Bannerjee.

Nagoor, who was from Nagercoil, was a good painter and designer. He had moved to Karaikudi where he made a living doing oil paintings and designing jewellery for rich Chettiar families and busy goldsmiths. Drawn to the cinema, he moved to Madras and joined L.Ct. Pl.'s studio as 'Setting Master' (one who designed sets and set props for a movie in a studio).

Dinshaw K. Tehrani, an immigrant from Iran, entered movies as a teenager and worked as a projectionist's assistant in such cinema houses as, Roxy and Wellington. He learnt sound recording and joined National Movietone as Chief Sound Recordist. Soon, he built up a fine reputation for

high technical expertise and finesse. During his day, his name was synonymous with audio-graphy in South India.

Jiten Bannerjee came to Madras in the late 1920s, in the silent film period, and worked as camera assistant under the great but forgotten pioneers, R. Prakash, and his famed father, Raghupathy Venkaiah who brought cinema to Madras during the 1910s. Prakash was generous with talent and under his tutelage, Bannerjee learnt fast and became known as a master of lens-focussing, a difficult task in the era of primitive camera systems. Many cameras had no lens-turrets and the assistant had to change lenses while the camera rolled with minimum loss of frames of the shot! A tough task but Bannerjee became an expert at it!

Many films by different producers were made at National Movietone and for some years the studio was a busy hive. But around 1936, differences between L.Ct. Pl. and the technical trio led to Nagoor, Dinshaw and Bannerjee walking out of the studio. Chidambaram Chettiar leased

his studio to a group of friends, who included cameraman and later successful producer and director, R.M. Krishnaswamy, film lab-man, still photographer and film director, Zhaveri, and Chandubhai, the local boss of a European company manufacturing cinematographic film. Chandubhai met S.S. Vasan who was then a film financier and distributor and looking for a studio to get into production. Vasan agreed to join the group and financially help develop the studio in a big way. But much to the shock of Krishnaswamy and friends, Vasan came up with impossible terms of partnership and for some unexplained reason he showed remarkable reluctance even to come to the negotiating table!

This writer worked with R.M. Krishnaswamy (maker of *Thookkai Thookki*, *Rajambal* and other hits) as a scriptwriter during the early 1970s. RMK told him that Chandubhai did not return Vasan's greetings at a Guindy race meet. The latter day movie mogul felt so hurt he withdrew from the deal in a clever manner. RMK often wondered if Gemini Studio would have

Today *Kushaldoss Gardens* is let out for film shoots and rich North Indian weddings.

(To be concluded next fortnight)



Kushaldoss Gardens today, often a film set still.

## The training of the devadasi

(Continued from last fortnight)

Amrit Srinivasan

The acolyte *devadasi* was sent, usually when she was still a child of six or seven, to a *nattuvanar* for her training in dance; usually the *nattuvanar* belonged to another family. The relationship between the guru and the disciple was very complex.

The dancer had a lifelong association with her master in the institution of gurukulam. For the dancer, the skills of the *nattuvanar* could affect her market value. The expectation of the *nattuvanar* was that his

## Preparation of a devadasi

Given the fact of the devadasi's obligatory celibacy, the ritual dynamics of her marriage to the deity were used to initiate, adopt and retain (her) and her talents for the community.

The devadasi's ceremonial preparation for temple service, the dance and sexual relations were closely associated (with each other).

'Potukattu', signalling the marriage of the girl to the deity of the temple, was performed before puberty, usually between the ages of five and seven. 'Sadangu', the next rite of transition in the 'life' stream, marked the onset of

puberty, a watershed in the devadasi's public life. The final ceremony was 'prayojanam' (equivalent to *santi kalyanam*), leading to consummation with a sexual partner (patron). In the parallel art stream, the rites were the 'sadhaka pooja', marking the ritual initiation into dance, followed by 'gajja pooja', which took place some years after the start of dance training but generally before the girl attained puberty and in which the girl wore new garments and the gajja (ankle bells), and prostrating before the guru began to dance; with full musical accompani-

ment; 'arangetram', or the formal debut in which the girl, now dressed in dance costume and wearing the auspicious marks of a married woman, entered the hall and performed the ritual dance, and 'kutcheri' or a secular dance recital, which signified that the devadasi had attained maturity as a woman and wife, and was now publicly recognised to be under the protection of a local notable, and was free to perform in people's homes.

(— from Amrit Srinivasan's doctoral thesis)

dancer-disciple would yield him steady financial dividends over the years. The relationship promised mutual benefit.

The guru would teach several girls at a time, without charging any fee. In return, apart from hoping to reap a

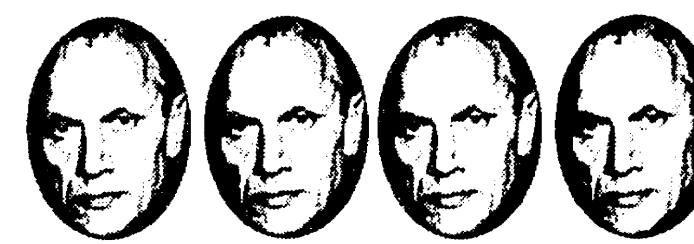
golden harvest in the future, he would expect earnest application and strict conformance with rules of discipline.

The access of the women of the dasi community to closely related gurus particularly

knowledgeable in the solo, presentational and graceful or erotic female classical dance made the Sadir tradition aesthetically perfect.

(To be continued next fortnight)

## With Vaasanthi Sankaranarayanan at the theatre



## Berkoff, back off!

Chennaiites who had forgotten about who Shakespeare was, were recently reminded about "Shakespeare's villains", Shakespearean acting, the Elizabethan era ambience, the celebrated iambic pentameter and the method of reciting it by Steven Berkoff, who was sponsored by British Council. He also strove to show us how contemporary Shakespeare, his verses and his characters are. The Chennai audience lapped it all up with great enthusiasm. I just wondered whether the tribute of the intelligent and aware Chennai crowd was for the memory of the immortal bard or for one of his innumerable perpetrators, Steven Berkoff.

Certainly, we all laughed at his jokes, and even his embarrassingly bawdy enactments. But afterwards, we thought of illustrious British and Scottish professors at Women's Christian College and Madras Christian College, such as Ms. Moore, Dr. Macphail and Dr. Boyd, and Ms. G. Parthasarathy of Ethiraj College who had systematically introduced us to the literary and theatrical aspects of Shakespeare's plays. And in private conversations what really we thought of Berkoff's presentation.

Needless to say, we all agreed that Berkoff is a magnificent actor and performer who had virtual mastery of Shakespeare's verses. We unanimously felt that he tried his best to bring Shakespeare closer to the common man.

## ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. *Shakespeare in Love*, Roberto Benigni, Gwyneth Paltrow and Steven Spielberg; 2. Bibi Jagir Kaur Begowal; 3. Arjuna Ranatunga and Muttiah Muralitharan; 4. Chhatrapathi Shivaji; 5. Melissa; 6. Chamoli; 7. The F-117A Night-hawk; 8. Sachin Tendulkar; 9. Ananda Shankar; 10. Samata Party; 11. First black to become a Grand Master; 12. A self-propelled accident relief medical van for emergency needs; 13. Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones; 14. Salgaocar; 15. The Annapurna Scheme (10 kgs free rice or wheat) to indigent senior citizens.
16. Alwarpet CC; 17. Red Hills; 18. Basin Bridge; 19. Gladys Staines, the widow of murdered Australian missionary Graham Staines; 20. Sholinganallur.

This is not said with any superciliousness, but with clear objectivity (which everyone seems to prefer to "subjective", "emotional" analysis). The programme was highly entertaining, not only to the hoi polloi, but to all of us who have intellectual pretensions. But where we have doubts about this presentation is in his own "interpretations" of Shakespearean characters and the seemingly "casual", but really "racist", comments that were interspersed in the social commentary that he introduced by way of linking Shakespeare to the contemporary world. I am referring to his comments on "Saddam Hussein", "video parlours of Chennai" and the "dirt of Calcutta". He is free to refer to all these in the way he did, but then, by the same yardstick, I am free to take umbrage at those comments too. The fact that he is a well-known and well-respected actor in the western world doesn't prevent me, an ordinary citizen of Chennai (or India), being critical about the stances he took.

Leave aside all these general remarks; I had problems with his basic interpretation of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, as I understand him, did not make a die-hard, binary dichotomy of "good" and "evil" or "hero" and "villain". In fact, the immortality of his plays owes to the fact that he recognised that every human being is a mixture of good and evil. So he did not have any heroes or villains; even if you call some of them heroes in the dramatic sense, they were also human and had undesirable traits in them.

Take Prospero for example. Was he such a hero, he who kept Caliban, a native of the island, in bondage? Or, Othello, who was so malleable in the hands of Iago, ending up murdering Desdemona? Or reversing the argument, wasn't Hamlet or Macbeth, a great hero capable of love, courage and loyalty? So when Berkoff remarks "Shakespeare's villains are in-

## The language of Dattani

When Mahesh Dattani, well-known to Chennai through his plays, was awarded the 1998 *Sahitya Akademi Award* (English language) for his play *Final Solutions*, the British Council, Chennai, decided to felicitate him and the Madras Players, under the direction of Mithran Devanesen, presented selected readings from the award-winning play.

The readings were significant in revealing Dattani as a serious playwright. The theme, based on the communal disharmony which is spreading all through India, is indeed relevant; but, more than that Dattani's treatment of the subject made it noteworthy. Without taking sides, he managed to present in an intensely dramatic style, the dilemma of people caught unwittingly in the webs of fundamentalism and the resultant mob violence. My only criticism of the presentation is that since the play itself is so dramatic, the style of presentation could have been less dramatic and realistic and more abstract and stylistic.

Later, I had a chance to discuss with Dattani, a charming, unpretentious and open person, his plays and the manner in which they are presented on stage. On reading his plays, I had found that the language he uses in his dialogues is almost



Mahesh Dattani

always ironical and resonant with hidden meanings not obvious to a casual reader. His humour, while appearing to be easily understood, is full of irony. While reflecting contemporary reality in seemingly simple terms, he takes unseen twists and turns revealed only to a discerning reader.

Such plays, when they are presented in an obviously dramatic way, take an altogether different texture. The humour seems facile; the sequences too realistic and therefore devoid of reflective qualities. I told Dattani that till I read the plays carefully, I did not realise their real dramatic potential. Dattani agreed with the observation and added, "My plays are usually done in amateur theatre, where the actors are not well trained or disciplined. Moreover, many a time, the directors choose to adopt a direct interpretation to the plays, giving more weightage to the humour and the contemporariness of the themes, thereby failing to explore the

When there are regional language resonances in English plays in India, many in the audience who believe in 'Proper British' accents and pronunciation criticise the play and find it wanting. The regional language theatre, which has its own rich traditions and styles, is also contemptuous of English language theatre. Caught between the two, plays such as Dattani's, are not taken seriously. Again, unlike Girish Karnad, whose plays have historical, folk or mythical resonances which find ready acceptance with the Indian audience, Dattani, who deals with the middle class urban reality has to struggle hard to gain acceptance. He is aware of the fact that his plays appeal to only a select audience of English theatre. I feel that if he himself directs his plays or holds sessions on methods of direction or styles of acting, there might be a better and wider acceptance of his plays.

Chennai, which is famous for its love for Shakespeare in original and translations, cannot appreciate Berkoff without an element of criticism. And there is no point waxing eloquent on his technical capabilities. Remember, this is the land of the great art of *Therukoothu* and the popular actor, Sivaji Ganesan, who was presented the title Chevalier by the French. Were I a young student rebel, I would say, in the Pink Floyd style, Berkoff, back off, leave us alone, don't treat us as nitwits unfamiliar with the incisive wisdom of the great

subtle nuances of the language or the inner meanings of the plot."

Another aspect of the language Dattani uses in his plays is that his dialogue is not literary, but dramatic, underscoring the fact, that while being a part of the discipline of literature, it has a more important function, that of being suited to enactment on stage. It is not the literary merit of the play which is of primary importance, but its dramatic (suitability to perform) quality. Dattani, being in the singularly lucky position of combining all the aspects of theatre in himself, writing, acting and directing, ensures this aspect. Apart from having his own theatre group, who perform regularly, he conducts workshops for students of drama and aspirants to acting.

In discussing the resonance of the regional Indian language (in his case, Gujarati) in his dialogues, he said, "Indian audiences of English Theatre in India have to get used to this aspect of the usage of language. Their preference for British English is quite out of place in the modern Indian context." Dattani is aware of the problem it creates. At dramatic moments, when the dialogue takes on the inflexions of the regional language, the audience titters; it is used to making fun of *desi* language resonances. But, he feels, when it dawns on them that the regional language usages are done deliberately, they will be able to concentrate more on the sequence and not the peculiarity of the language.

Macbeth simply as power-crazy is again an act of injustice to the great poet. What a difference was the late Akira Kurosawa's interpretation of Macbeth, in *The Throne of Blood*, revealing as it did the complexities of Macbeth's character! The only piece of acting in Berkoff's repertoire which I really liked was that of Coriolanus; the magnificence of Coriolanus' stance even when he faced exile was brought out by well Berkoff.

Chennai, which is famous for its love for Shakespeare in original and translations, cannot appreciate Berkoff without an element of criticism. And there is no point waxing eloquent on his technical capabilities. Remember, this is the land of the great art of *Therukoothu* and the popular actor, Sivaji Ganesan, who was presented the title Chevalier by the French. Were I a young student rebel, I would say, in the Pink Floyd style, Berkoff, back off, leave us alone, don't treat us as nitwits unfamiliar with the incisive wisdom of the great

bard. But I just say, Berkoff, even though we are not from the land of Shakespeare, we do have our own way of looking at Shakespeare, born out of years of love and dedication to his plays.



# The Khalsa spirit

● At long last, the TNCA, after several reminders, has inaugurated the Ram Singh gates at the MAC Stadium, Chepauk. On this occasion, the doyen of Indian cricket writers, KN Prabhu, recalls that great Madras cricketer of yesteryear.

Neville Cardus has drawn a vivid picture of the London clubs emptying when news got around that W.G. Grace was batting at Lord's. I am inclined to believe that something of this kind used to happen in Madras in the 30s and 40s when it was known that Minerva would be playing against Triplicane and enthusiasts would get the chance to see a battle between those two giants of Madras cricket, Ram Singh and M.J. Gopalan.

I met Ram Singh, the lion-hearted champion of yester-

year, in Chennai recently. Frail and grey-bearded at the age of 84 he may be, but the eyes beneath the light purple turban and the 'grey cells' above it were as sharp as ever.

Ram Singh recalled the first-ever Ranji Trophy match played in the land on November 4, 1934. The first over was bowled by M.J. Gopalan and the second by him. And what followed was too good for the Mysore batsmen. On a rain-affected pitch, Ram Singh ran through the Mysore side, with six for 19 from 13.2 overs, followed by 5 for 16 in 14.3 overs. It was all over in a day, for against the Madras total of 130, Mysore crumbled for 48 and 59. Such a thing has never been repeated in our cricket.

The magic name of Ram Singh, with equally fascinating figures, was to appear in every Madras scorecard till he retired in 1948. He was not a dasher as a batsman but an innings builder. It is as a bowler that he

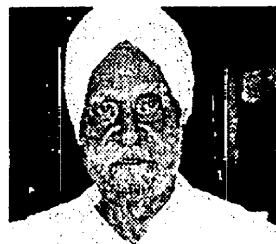
pulled his weight in the side, sharing the new ball with Gopalan and then

A.G. Ram Singh coming on in his light blue turban to flight the ball, each one of his deliveries exploring a different dimension in space, but landing invariably on or just outside the offstump.

"You're like Wilfred Rhodes," said Dennis Compton to him and his parting words were "Get your passport ready, Ram. See you in England". This was after the duel between the two when Holkar met Madras in the Ranji semi-final of 1945. The memory of that match lights up my evenings even these days as I see images of my favourite Chepauk and battles fought long ago. Images of Ram Singh gliding up to bowl, the sturdy fore arms and supple fingers imparting sharp leg spin, daring Compton to respond to the challenge.

It was Ram Singh who had earlier paved the way for the historic encounter with Holkar, dislodging Hyderabad's tail-enders to win the match in the nick of time. I could go on and on, produce figures to prove that Ram Singh was as good an allrounder as Vinoo Mankad. Those of us who saw them in action together at Chepauk felt that Ram Singh was the better bowler. Ram proved his ability in the selection trials at Bombay with a century and his customary haul of wickets. But a stomach cramp was 'diagnosed' by his critics as a heart ailment and he was not considered for the 1946 tour of England.

Ram Singh had no regrets. He was ever ready to do battle for Madras, even when once, with his kit gone astray while returning from Ceylon, he borrowed giant Hyder Ali's boots to take 5 for 10 in one spell.



A.G. Ram Singh

## Ramesh, please note

● Veevi Rajan, who retired from the Indian Defence Services and is a keen cricket enthusiast, offers these suggestions to Sadagopan Ramesh in an open letter. The suggestions are as much a tribute to SR Jagannathan, whose journal *Straight Bat* recently celebrated its second anniversary.

Dear Ramesh,

Tamil Nadu is proud of your achievement and the fine batting displayed in the recent Test matches against Pakistan. But, a word of advice and caution.

In more than one innings you gave the impression of losing your wicket, when you were well set and playing fluently, because of a tendency to play almost every ball outside the off stump (you were seen to curb it in your later innings, perhaps under advice). To avoid this, an assiduous application of your mind to this aspect is called for. If there is insufficient width or height, just remind yourself that there is always the next ball and this one should be left alone. A batsman gets only one chance in an innings (unlike a bowler). Video clips would show your flaws. You could take the advice of senior cricketers like Gavaskar, the maestro, or Geoff Boycott who would surely help you gauge the exact position of your off stump by sheer instinct and let go the ball which would not disturb it.

There is a player from Tamil Nadu who was a past master in 'not playing the ball'. I refer to a cricketer who was a familiar sight in City League matches in the 40s and early 50s who frustrated the cream of Tamil Nadu bowling talent with his stubborn capacity to keep the ball away from his stumps and avoid playing it if his stumps were not in danger. Whoever the bowler, or whatever his reputation, got the same treatment. He is none other than S.R. Jagannathan (Jaggu to the cricketing fraternity) whose judgement in leaving the ball was grudgingly appreciated by all top class players in the city. He is still making noises of varied types in city cricket and would surely give you appropriate advice which you should seek. He is a nice guy beneath a rough exterior.

In making this suggestion I would like to tell you that Jaggu tweaked his nose at the best that our State had at the time and challenged anyone to take his wicket. He did not have many strokes. Statistics will show that he made few runs, but his infinite patience and capacity to keep the ball away from his stumps was a byword. There were many matches which had unexpected results because of him and he thwarted even the League champions of the time. While he was leading Egmore Excelsiors, he was a leg spinner, primarily. Those were the days when Tamil Nadu had bowlers like M.J. Gopalan, A.G. Ram Singh, G. Parthasarathi, C.R. Rangachari, P.S. Ramachandran, N.J. Venkatesan, K.S. Kannan, Parankusam, Kannayiram, B.C. Alva, P.V. Varadan and T.S. Narasimhan. They were all past masters in the art of bowling. Jaggu indeed bowled in good company.

Ram Singh had bowled to the very best in the game, and remembered them: Lala Amarnath, whom he rated above Vijay Merchant, Denis Compton, whose stroke play was audacious, and Lindsay Hassett, who displayed just three strokes in scoring a century in the Madras Test, a hook, a pull, and a square cut. It was Hassett who complimented Ram by wishing he had a bowler like him in his team. He also believed no Indian

team would be complete without Ram Singh.

Ram Singh had come a long way from Jallianwallabagh, to find his place in the sun in the South. Players like him are a rare breed; his is a gentle nature, but the Khalsa spirit would surface when the chips were down. He may have been denied his chance in Test cricket, but cricketers like him are the very salt of the earth.

— (Courtesy: *Straight Bat*)

— K.N. Prabhu

## The model cricket writer

The author of the accompanying article, K.N. Prabhu was recently presented the C.K. Nayudu Award of Rs.2 lakh for his meritorious service to sport as a journalist. Mushtaq Ali, V.S. Hazare and Lala Amarnath were the previous winners of the Prize. Prabhu is the first cricket writer to be honoured in this manner. He is a frequent contributor to *Madras Musings* ever since he discovered the journal a couple of years ago.

Rajan Bala, writing in *Straight Bat*, pays his tribute to Prabhu:

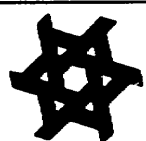
Niran, as he has permitted me to call him, did his first Test in the 1952-53 season, when Pakistan came over under Abdul Hafeez Kardar. He saw Vinoo Mankad take eight for 52 as India won the match. Thereafter,

he became a household name because of his amazing ability to write elegantly and eloquently as also to spot talent.

It was in the late 60s that I came to know Niran. I was immediately impressed because he epitomised everything a cricket writer should be. In addition, he had the responsibility of being the sports editor of *The Times of India*.

A delightful companion in the press box, on aeroplanes and trains, Niran can be a raconteur when the mood seizes him. But his humour is only for friends.

It would be fitting if the Mumbai Cricket Association would name the press box at the Wankhede Stadium after him.



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