NEET
A wake-up call for the State
(By The Editor)

The vexed issue of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate medical and dental degree courses just refuses to go away, as we write. At the heart of the issue is the state of Tamil Nadu's unpreparedness to cope with such a blanket examination set for the entire country. The political parties of Tamil Nadu are protesting and the State Government has seen its attempts at approaching the Courts on the matter sternly rebuffed. The Centre, with its present attitude of fishing in the troubled waters of the State, has been playing a double game, now seemingly supporting the State and then backing off when action is needed. In all this chaos, a student's life has been lost. And that was an avoidable tragedy.

The final year of school is a stressful period for most children, what with the pressure to perform being intense. The marks of the public exam are inextricably linked to the student's future in the eyes of society. The Centre, even as it lobby-stresses the need for students to cope with such a blinding pressure, has failed to come up with a policy that would make the experience bearable. The only way out is for the Government to ensure that its Education Department gets cracking on setting up counselling and coaching centres where students can get familiar with the NEET process and its methods of examination. Time and money would be spent usefully if this was done.

It is also high time the State woke up to the reality that its education standards are way below par. We had earlier commented on NEET in our May issue but the issue has not diminished. If this was done.

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Riding a costly Metro
(Continued from page 1)
including intermediate stops. The same journey could take nearly an hour by bus, according to regular bus-users, and that does not include the waiting time. This is an important feature that should make for Metro's eventual future popularity. There was a separate compartment for higher class and one exclusively for ladies. Both were practically empty at about 11.15 a.m. on a week day and quite a few ladies were found travelling in the general compartment. Special compartment for a higher class seems unnecessary as it is running practically empty and the chances of attracting car-using commuters to the Metro does not appear to be high for quite some time.

Chennai's much-delayed project has set its fares much beyond the reach of the segment of commuters who constitute the most potential of Metro users. With a fare of Rs. 30 for 8 km between Alandur and Koyambudu, Chennai Metro Rail is costly. On the other hand, the fare from Chennai Beach to Guindy costs just Rs. 5. On the MRTS, between Velachery and Guindy Beach for 19 km the fare is Rs. 10. Of course, the comfort and speed of the older services are not as good as those of the Metro but the lower income groups having to cope with a tight monthly budget and high rental payments do not care for the frills.

There are, broadly, three types of transport that account for the bulk of the movement of people outside their localities – motor cycle, bus and motor car, without counting suburban trains and autos. Autos cater to movements over short localised distances. Motor cycles constitute the bulk of the transport modes on Chennai roads. The number of vehicles is growing rapidly in Chennai and of this the fastest growing is the two-wheeler segment. It is symptomatic of the motor cycle commuters declaring their independency from inadequate public transport. The focus on the large motor cycle segment as its potential market if any impact is to be made on congestion and pollution levels. If Metro fares, parking charge and last mile connectivity cost, together, are significantly more than the present monthly cost for going to work by motor car, then perhaps this could be turned into a week-end novelty for pleasure rides. A substantial fare reduction seems necessary to reach 60-70% capacity utilisation and its feasibility is an issue for further study. (A cost study will appear next fortnight.)

NEET: a wake-up call

16th issue and expressed our view that the fault for this present impasse lies solely with successive State Governments that have consistently aimed at lowering educational standards. This was not peculiar, for it ensured that most students got extraordinarily high marks. The entrance tests to medical and engineering colleges also being under the control of the State meant the system there was an extension of what was happening at school level. Everyone was happy – the parents, the children, the politicians, the teachers and the bureaucrats. It was one big happy closed world where no external benchmarks existed.

For everyone, fortunately for everyone, Tamil Nadu is part of a larger country. The engineering discipline was impacted first when others declared their independence. Tamil Nadu exists as a part of a larger country. As a result of this, the quality of the engineering education and the output of students, both in terms of the standards and the numerals said that it was his pleasant surprise, and him- self to be, round, beamed at words, the speaker turned soothing monotone that had

Moving statues of Chennai

Chennai that was Madras is a very dynamic city. The local male population (and in this context NEET is a very important issue) Madras Musings does not include him- self) may have a partiality to be supine especially after imbibing the good effects of TASMAC outlet, but the statues are forever on the prowl. Take for instance Cornwallis – what a story his statue could relate if only it could speak. From Fort to First Line Beach to Cauvery Museum Place. From Fort to Fort is quite a journey. Similarly, Lords Willingdon, Ripon and Amphill have all moved, is he not so? It could be a great study in democracy. And moreover, it was a distraction at an important traffic junction. Kudos to whoever re- moved so to speak. The statue was hardly a tribute to the old man. Its gold paint had worn off, but, as for its legend, it is symptom-atic of the motor cycle commuter, bus and motor car, high housing rentals do not care for the frills.

One of them being Neyveli Lignite Corporation or the PWD sent around. Even old Neil, not the most popular among the locals, went walkabout and finally rested permanently (not including MMM of course), horizontally. There are movements over short localised distances. Motor cycles constitute the bulk of the transport modes on Chennai roads. The number of vehicles is growing rapidly in Chennai and of this the fastest growing is the two-wheeler segment. It is symptomatic of the motor cycle commuters declaring their independency from inadequate public transport. The focus on the large motor cycle segment as its potential market if any impact is to be made on congestion and pollution levels. If Metro fares, parking charge and last mile connectivity cost, together, are significantly more than the present monthly cost for going to work by motor car, then perhaps this could be turned into a week-end novelty for pleasure rides. A substantial fare reduction seems necessary to reach 60-70% capacity utilisation and its feasibility is an issue for further study. (A cost study will appear next fortnight.)

of actors, among others, of the Metro's eventual future popularity. Furthermore, it now threatens by NEET and several have applied for closure. This was the State that once showed a very dynamic city. The members said that it was now threatened by NEET and several have applied for closure. This was the State that once showed

short 'n' snappy

The Man from Madras Musings, rather like the politician or the above, has had a busy August going gither and thither, being the life and soul of countless Madras Week events. He has therefore become weak of Madras. During his well- earned reposes he has taken to reminiscing about some of the events of ye olde month. And one of them brings much mirth each time he goes through it.

This was one of those where the elderly met the very young, the latter thanks, he has never grasped a cricket bat nor ever bowled a ball.

Talipiece

The Man from Madras Musings was quite intrigued to see this signboard with no fire extinguisher in sight. He then came to realise that in the event of a fire, this board was to be used to beat it out.
Cleaning lakes – his passion

E

vironmental conservation has been a much-discussed subject of vast scope and has naturally meant many things to many people. To Arun Krishnamurthy, it is cleaning lakes. He has not only chosen this specific aspect of environmental conservation, but has engaged in direct action on this aspect over the last ten years with dedication and tenacity.

Krishnamurthy, in his early thirties, graduated in microbiology, but had dreamed from his boyhood of saving lakes and ponds in his neighbourhood in the outskirts of Chennai where he was brought up. In his time, boys of his age entertained more exciting aspirations and interests, but Arun was obsessed with the state of unclean lakes and ponds in his neighbourhood. He started – over-ambitiously as it may have seemed then – the Environmentalist Foundation of India (EFI), an NGO, in 2007 to mobilise support for conserving environment.

EFI’s web-site refers to several programmes, each of which is as important as the other. The holistic village development programme which involves large scale sensitisation and environmental volunteering efforts is Green Gramam. Through this project EFI adopts villages and converts them into eco hubs. Green Gramam is executed through volunteers from the village.

Cities generate enormous quantities of waste every day, and with no appropriate waste management system in place, our landfills are mounting in size. Through their waste management programme, EFI aims at sensitising people to segregate their waste. Post-segregation, the waste is recycled and not sent to the landfill.

Waste generated at home is a big challenge. EFI teaches households how to convert this waste into nourishing manure. Herbs and saplings can be treated with the compost nutrition. From as little as kitchen waste to something as big as collection of apartment complex waste, EFI offers help in these tasks.

The most impactful of all programmes seems to be EFI’s water-body clean-up campaign. Under this programme the organisation adopts a beach, lake or any water body on a voluntary basis. The water body or beach with its periphery are cleaned, strengthened and restored to its original capacity and beauty. The cleaning process involves massive removal of physical garbage followed by scientific lab testing of the water samples repeatedly to check contaminant and pollutant levels being cleaned up and renewed by about 70,000 volunteers. Cleaning cannot go on endlessly, the objective is to make cleaning unnecessary. Considering that it is a difficult, long process needing persistent effort, it takes about ten years to restore the water body and make it sustain itself with minimal maintenance and cleaning. Such a self-sustaining state is the aim and that mark has been attained in 26 out of the 83 sites in the country over the last ten years, says Arun. In these sites organisation has adopted, the lake, or any water body on a voluntary basis. The water body or beach with its periphery are cleaned, strengthened and restored to its original capacity and beauty. The cleaning process involves massive removal of physical garbage followed by scientific lab testing of the water samples repeatedly to check contaminant and pollutant levels being cleaned up and renewed by about 70,000 volunteers. Cleaning cannot go on endlessly, the objective is to make cleaning unnecessary. Considering that it is a difficult, long process needing persistent effort, it takes about ten years to restore the water body and make it sustain itself with minimal maintenance and cleaning. Such a self-sustaining state is the aim and that mark has been attained in 26 out of the 83 sites in the country over the last ten years, says Arun. In these sites

Bharat Matha in Kapali Temple

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ave you taken a close look at some of the sculptures at the Kapali Temple? Here is one that may surprise you, a beautiful sculpture of Bharat Matha. It is seen in the dhuajarohana mandapam of this temple. On a Mylapore temple walk with Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, we came across this wonderful sculpture. It is an exact replica of a wall poster printed by Nagpur City Press – the Bharat Matha with a crown on her flowing hair, clad in a saree, resting her left hand on a seated, decorated elephant, her right hand holding a trident, tied to which is the tricolour flag.

The mandapam was a later addition to the temple, built in 1939, by Kaatupalli Patyur K.N. Shanmugu Mudalair.

That was when India’s freedom struggle was at its peak and the world was at the threshold or probably had entered World War II. The sculptor who did the work proved his love for the motherland, undetected under the watchful eyes of the British, with this sculpture. (Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

Volunteers at work with Arun.

The sculpture of Bharat Matha in the Kapali Temple.
From India’s Digital Archives – 3 – Karthik Bhatt

Thomas Parry, Free Merchant

Thomas Parry was one of the most prominent merchants in the annals of the business history of the Madras Presidency. Arriving in Madras in 1788, he made the city and, by extension, the Presidency his home for the next three decades. He played a vital role in the expansion and agency business, ranking among the most prominent merchants of the city. His private ventures, however, were short-lived, as he entered into several partnerships. His relationship with the East India Company was one that blew hot and cold, and he found himself perilously close to being deported to England in 1800.

Born in 1768 in Leighton Hall, Wrexham, Thomas Parry arrived in Madras aged twenty and registered himself as a Free Merchant. His first business enterprise was in 1789, in partnership with Thomas Chase, a civil servant, who, besides his official duties, carried on a general banking and agency business. The partnership lasted for three years, before Parry quit in 1792 to strike out on his own. By 1795, he had become a known name in commercial circles, thanks to the success of his shipping business that he had begun in a small way during his partnership with Chase. His reputation led him to being appointed the Secretary of the Carnatic Insurance Co. and Examiner to the Mayor’s Court, positions that he described as “situations of respectability and emolument”. These, however, were short-lived ventures, as he entered into partnerships with several others. His relationship with the East India Company was one that blew hot and cold, and he found himself perilously close to being deported to England in 1800.

Over the course of the next two decades, Parry’s businesses spread across South India. In 1805, he founded the first tannery in Madras, in San Thomé and, four years later, took over sugar and indigo manufacturing units in Porto-Novos. In 1824, Parry arrived in Madras, where he had become a known name in commercial circles, thanks to the success of his shipping business that he had begun in a small way during his partnership with Chase. His reputation led him to being appointed the Secretary of the Carnatic Insurance Co. and Examiner to the Mayor’s Court, positions that he described as “situations of respectability and emolument”. These, however, were short-lived ventures, as he entered into partnerships with several others. His relationship with the East India Company was one that blew hot and cold, and he found himself perilously close to being deported to England in 1800.

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In chapter 2, verse 47, the Bhagavad Gita says, Do your duty without expecting anything in return. Results will follow automatically.

These lines perfectly describe what insects (Poochi, in Tamil) are doing all the time. Insects are not for the faint-of-heart! Their strange shapes and buzzing and colouring and stinging and creeping can make you a phobic...or a lover...of these beautiful creatures that have been around from millions of years before us and will live long after all of us have disappeared.

Being in the tropics, our country has an immense variety of insects. New species are being discovered almost every day. The very fact we are alive on this planet is because of all of these creepy-crawlies. From pollinating flowers to decomposing carrion, they are absolutely essential to life cycles and processes on Earth.

Humans regard insects as pests. From using pesticides to destroying habitats to outright elimination, they’re continuously inventing ways to exterminate them! Our actions on this planet are causing a worrisome climate change which is seriously affecting pollinator insects.

Many insects like silk-worms and bees are economically beneficial to us as they are used extensively for producing silk and honey. It is vital for us to take a multi-pronged approach in our conservation effort by increasing insect populations and raising native plants primarily for pollination.

Insects are always hovering around me, and the occasional mosquito or cockroach is my favorite target to wipe out! But the insane interest in these creepy-crawlies began with a delicious mix of photography and curiosity, which led to a word filled with amazement and wonder. My aim was to capture the infinite forms and colours of these innocuous creatures and maybe later – maybe never – understand their complex names and biology.

This endeavour started 25 years ago in the analogue age, where we had only films and only 36 frames in each roll and no way to ‘preview’ any shot and absolutely no internet! This combination made each click priceless and each breath held, a lifetime of stillness. This also made me study the behaviour of insects, their movements, their habitats, their likes and their dislikes.

One thing became clear: to get that elusive valuable shot, I had to become an insect myself – creeping on the ground, approaching stealthily from behind, distracting by waving from one angle while “attacking” from another angle – The ‘attack’ here refers to the clicking of the shutter! In my relationship with these creatures, I’ve been bitten, stung, and infected, and I’m happy and content to follow their philosophy of duty!

I included arachnids in my book for several reasons. In Tamil, they’re also called “poochi”, they play a very important role in the life of insects, and I’ve done specific research on spiders.

Though Darwin and Linnaeus divided and classified all living organisms on Earth, modern digital technology and genome-level research is changing everything. All divisions are being re-divided and all names are being renamed. Quite soon we may have to identify humans by some other name! I therefore kept scientific jargon and information to a minimum and, in most places, given a transliteration of names and terms.

The pictures in my book are from early negatives (and slides) as well as from modern digital images. Digital image processing has helped me render colours accurately. I started off with a Pentax film SLR camera and worked my way through Nikon and Canon. Today, even compact cameras produce professional-quality macro photographs. At present, I use DSLR cameras from Nikon and Canon, specialised macro lenses from Tamron and Zeiss, dedicated flash units from Nissin, and macro accessories from Kenko. I occasionally take along my compact camera (Lumix LX5) with Leica optics and some of the pictures in this book are from that small unit!

The purpose of the book is to start you, the unsuspecting reader, on a curious interesting journey into the amazing world of insects just by appreciating the beauty of their shape and colour. I want you to marvel at the variety these creatures display and the fact that all these pictures are from India.

If we go beyond the creepy- ness, the aversion and all those scary insect movies, to conserve and support insects, then we can live safe, secure and healthy.

If, after reading everything, you want to go further in entomology, research, conservation or photography, I would be proud and happy that this book has done its work.

I apply John Keats’s lines here: A thing of beauty is a joy forever! (Published by Kalam-kriya of the Sanmar Group.)
Kripal, Venkat, Ashwin and others

Tamil Nadu has perhaps contributed the number of off-spinners to Indian teams in the past five decades – A.G. Kripal Singh, S. Venkatraghavan, M. Venkata ramana, Ashish Kapoor and Ravichandran Ashwin. Of course, there were splendid spinners around the world, but steady trade from outside the State, like Jasu Patel, V.M. Mudhiah, Erappali Prassana, Shivlal Yadav, Rajesh Chauhan and the inimitable Harbhajan Singh. Not to forget the giant of Indian cricket, the great Polly Umrigar who served the country most nobly when captains threw the ball to him.

In view of the extraordinary success of Ashwin in recent series, I was tempted to have a look at the prominent off-spinners that I had faced during my playing days. Undoubtedly, Ashwin is an extra ordinary spinner that he has become the second bowler after the eminent Australian offie Clarrie Grimmett to complete 200 wickets in international cricket in the shortest time – 37 tests. Of course, Test matches were far apart in those days, and players did not play continuously as Ashwin does these days. For instance, Venkatraghavan and Prassana, despite being in the team squad played few Tests together.

Kripal had started off prima as a batsman when he made his First Class debut in the 1950-51 season. There was no zonal system in that season and he got to play just one match against Hyderabad. However, he had a splendid all-round career becoming the batting lynchpin of the Madras Ranji team and an off-spinner. He gave splendid all-round performances in the game against Holkar, who Madras defeated to win its maiden Ranji Trophy in the 1954-55 season.

His splendid displays in the Ranji Trophy earned him an India cap in 1955 against New Zealand and he excelled at it with a 100. He hardly got a couple of overs to bowl in the Tests that he played in. However, he earned more recognition in the Test time often when he was selected to play in the First Test at the Brabourne Stadium in Bombay during the series against the Ted Dexter led England side in 1961-62. That was largely due to his role as a match-winner for the then Madras and South Zone teams, runner-up in the inaugural Duleep Trophy tournament. It’s still vivid in my mind how he teased and tormented batsmen of the calibre of Bill Lawry and Norman O’Neill. He hardly experimented and with a lovely action changed the line now and then and bamboozled the batsman. The best part was that he was not overlooked by either left-arm bowler, Basu Nadkarni or Salim Durrani.

Kripal was also a very shrewd leader and made both Madras and South Zone forces to take note and in the tournament they played.

Coming to Prassana the bowler with an artistic, stylish action, he had excellent control over spin and flight and never worried about bowling with easing flight to any cricketer in the world. I recollect his brilliant bowling against Bill Lawry’s Australian in the final Test at Chepauk when he bowled them to 57 for 7 and pushed them into a corner. If wicket-keeper Farokh Eng another had not missed a stumping, I would have bowled him for 57 for 8.

Venky was very much in the Anil Kumble mould, bowling quicker, but was not a leggie like the latter. He had shot into prominence when he played for Madras University in the Rohinton Baria Trophy and earned a place in the Madras Ranji team when he was around 18. In another year, he was play-turns they’ve got 1,000 wickets each! Venkut would get deeply involved in the match was a terrific close-in fielder and a great leader. He was great sportsman as well.

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A traditional way of learning maths

A strategy game and geometry. Cowrie shells and Probability. Tamarind seeds and mathematical concepts. So many varied thoughts, yet they all came together in a high energy workshop conducted by Kreeda and the Ramanujan Museum and Math Education Centre at the Museum premises in Royapuram as part of the Madras Week celebrations.

Aimed at primary and secondary math teachers from schools around Chennai, the in-a-row game – Kattam Vilayattu, the pallanguzhi, and the challenging puzzle game – Nakshatra Vilayattu, among others.

Each game was played and then presented through varied mathematical concepts that are required for primary and middle school students. Participants were also introduced to various traditional elements of play, such as long dice, cowrie shells and the math lessons they can teach.

Studying a transit corridor...

M adras Week events organised by Xavier Benedict of (AARDE) included an exhibition organised by MIDAS Architecture College and a whole day event in Pulicat.

The MIDAS Urban Initiative (MUI) featured exhibitions organised in two locations where Urban Design Studio sheets by the final year B.Arch students of the College were displayed. The sheets were based on the students’ study of Grand South Trunk (GST) Road transit corridor from Pallavaram to Tambaram done in July-August/2017. The study on which 110 students worked, was based on various parameters – socioeconomic, history, built-form, transportation, physical-study, vegetation, urban-elements, etc. The study was analysed and few proposals were made by the students.

The whole-day exhibitions were organised at the Pallavaram Santhai one day and at the Tambaram Railway Station on the next. The public was asked to review the study and proposals. The students plan to submit the final outcome of the studio-work to the Corporation of Chennai in October.

... & exploring Pazhaverkadu

T race Origin of Madras @ Pulicat was an all-day event in Pazhaverkadu organised by the AARDE Foundation. 39 participants from Chennai spent the whole day in Pulicat. The tour started with a one-hour presentation by Xavier Benedict on the Natural-Built-Cultural Heritage of Pulicat which was followed by a walk around Pulicat visiting the Dutch Cemetery, a church, the Adinarayana Perumal Temple, a Mosque, the Lighthouse (which they climbed for a 360° view of the lagoon and the sea), the 25th Canal milestone, and Dutch Street. The participants further learnt about Pulicat history from the exhibits displayed at the Pulicat Interpretation Centre (AARDE Pulicat Museum). A demonstration of palm-leaf craft was what attracted the participants most.

The workshop had a record attendance of 56 teachers and the hall was literally bursting at the seams. Surprising that the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers and the sheer joy of playing traditional games from Chennai did not explode those seams!

Conducted by Vinitha Sidhartha of Kreeda and Meena Suresh of the Ramanujan Math Centre, the aim of the workshop was to explore how traditional games can be used to teach mathematical concepts and the critical thinking that the games develop in students.

The workshop explored games played with tamarind seeds, the traditional Indian Snakes and Ladders – Parama Padam, the popular local three-

...
Following the clues to ‘find’ Triplicane

‘N’am Veedu, Nam Oor, Nam Kadhai’ organised an expedition of Triplicane, getting participants to follow clues. Drizzles of the previous night did not hinder the spirit of participants or the volunteers. The task was to decipher the clues given to team with the help of local people, reach the spot and get the next clue from volunteers there. Each team of three consisted of at least one child who was differently abled. The event was a collaborative effort with Akramaa foundation and ‘Explore Differently’.

The trio had gone to the bustling market at 7 a.m. and stayed for a few hours to capture life at that early hour. They learnt the team’s research on the markets of Saidapet.

The celebration is not creating enthusiasm amongst vast section of Chennaiites, since there is nothing to celebrate as far as the present Chennai is concerned. As you walk on the road, you cannot but see overflowing sewage, people urinating on the road and half naked drunks lying on the road. Are we to celebrate this?

Should we confine ourselves just to be proud of the past? Does such celebration of the past glory have any significance for the present and the future?

It has been lamented that the Government of Tamil Nadu is not supporting the Madras Week celebrations. Obviously, recognition is sought for the celebration from the Government in principle and some fund support too. The Government does not have the face to celebrate the happenings in present Chennai and, therefore, it is reluctant to play its role in celebrating the past, which would reveal the difference between the past and the present in glaring manner. Would any government of the day subject itself to such humiliation?

It is high time that we not confine ourselves to celebrating the glory of the past Madras for a week and then wait for the next twelve months. I am very much against the approach of college students and 200 parents and teachers there. Each team of three volunteers there. Each team of three

Winning at the Murugappa’s quizzes

The Madras (Open) Quiz 2017 was organised by the Murugappa Group jointly with AMM Matriculation Higher Secondary School. Dr Sumanth C. Raman was the quiz master. Around 250 people of all ages participated. A significant proportion of students were from the younger age groups. Rama-samy and Sylvan Patrick were the winners for the 2nd consecutive year. Sankhya and Jayakanthan were first runners-up and were followed by Vidya Swaminathan and Aravind Subramanian.

Murugappa Madras Quotient Quiz 2017, which was held at St. Bele’s Auditorium, San Thome, with Quizmaster Dr. Navin Jayakumar, had a record turnout of 355 teams from over 100 schools in Chennai! 1200 students and 200 parents and teachers were part of the event. The winners were the team from PSBB Senior Secondary School, Nungambakkam (Sudharshan M., Akshaya Mohan and Akash Kishore) and they were followed by P.S. Senior Secondary School, Mylapore (Gihan, K.P.S. Abhishek and N. Dhanush) and PSBB Senior Secondary School, KK Nagar (Nithin Karthic, R. Visveswaran and Sashree Kiran Raman). The Padma Sheshadri teams appear to have taken to quizzing in a big way.

Are we celebrating Madras Week in a vacuum?

I appreciate Madrasis (Chennaites?) who celebrate the Madras Week with enthusiasm. I have been following the celebration for the last few years. I have felt that it is being done in vacuum. I got the same feeling this year too.

Obviously, we are celebrating past Madras and its heritage and tradition and not present Chennai or possible future Chennai.

One thing that is very clear is that Madras Week is celebrated by a selected few who belong to upper and middle income group. Those who celebrate are not representative of the present day Chennaiites, whom we call the ‘Common Man’.

The celebration is not creating enthusiasm amongst vast section of Chennaiites, since there is nothing to celebrate as far as the present Chennai is concerned. As you walk on the road, you cannot but see overflowing sewage, people urinating on the road and half naked drunks lying on the road. Are we to celebrate this?

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It is high time that we not confine ourselves to celebrating the glory of the past Madras for a week and then wait for the next twelve months for the next year’s Madras Week celebration. The enthusiasts should fix targets to improve conditions to the level of their ability for the next twelve months, before celebrating the next Madras Week, so that they can celebrate the past and also the present to some extent next year.

Have we planned any purposive programmes for the next twelve months, particularly involving the youth and poor and deprived section of society, who are as much residents of Chennai as those presently celebrating Madras Week?

N.S.Venkataraman
Nandini Voice For The Deprived
nandinivoice.com

EDITOR’S NOTE: Mr. Venkataraman obviously does not follow the variety of programmes being offered during Madras Week celebrations. They include both the past and the present (this year much more of the latter). These programmes range from looking at Madras’s problems by think-tanks to programmes in schools of all levels all around the city, certainly in no vacuum.

Madras Day/Week/Month has from the first never sought government support nor any kind of funds from anyone. It has only called for VOLUNTEER activity and perhaps Mr. Venkataraman should next year initiate some such activities of his own with discussions on the problems he lists and have the voices of the ‘common man’ he wants to be heard, heard. As for Government participation, it has never been sought by any of the participants, but that is no reason why any celebrations organised by it should not be welcomed.

As for the problems Mr. Venkataraman mentions, every city in India has them; doesn’t Mr. Venkataraman seem to say that any city, any city? Does he only see the deprived? Don’t they see this city as their home, a place of opportunity, a place they migrated to in search of a better life?

Discovering the City’s markets

City Markets. This was the theme for this year’s edition of the annual Heritage of Chennai power-point project contest for city schools, organised by Mylapore Times.

Twelve schools came up with fascinating stories. And the winner, AMM School of Kotturpuram, bagged the rolling trophy for city schools, organised by Akrama foundation and ‘Explore Differently’.

The enthusiasts should fix targets to improve

The Government does not have the face to celebrate this?

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Bharati’s treasury of poetry

The renaissance in Tamil letters came to full bloom with Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). Though his father desired that Bharati should pursue ‘English education’, the boy’s heart was with Tamil. It was while working as a Tamil pundit in Madurai in the Settpati High School that he met G. Subramanya Iyer, the legendary editor of Vasadasamitan. He was appointed a sub-editor, which meant translating the speeches of great leaders like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Simplified by his genius, Tamil prose glowed with a new strength. At the same time, the patriot poet was also born. It was the time of the Bande Mataram Movement and Bharati’s fiery political articles roused the Tamil Nation with immediate effect. In fact, later, he became the full-fledged editor of the nationalist paper, India. Without the help of friends, he floated other papers. Swami Vivekananda’s Prabuddha Bharata inspired him to start the magazine, Bala Bharata in 1907, as a mouthpiece of the Nationalist idealists in South India.

The influence of Swami Vivekananda is very clear in what Bharati wrote in the pages of this magazine:

“Let us dream of a service so pure, so vast, so daring that in all our life, from the first moment to the last, there shall not be found a single thread of selfishness.

“In every question that comes before you, make it your rule to assume that India has the essential. She has only to learn how to use it.

“She has unity: must organise and direct it. Has passionate love of country – must avail herself of it. Has abundance of democratic sense and method, must discover how to make use of it.”

– (Bala Bharata, November 1907)

When Bharati went to the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1906, he made it a point to meet Swami Vivekananda’s disciple, Sister Nivedita. As soon as he met her, he realised that this was certainly an emanation of Mother Shakti. In the course of their conversation, the Sister impressed upon him the need to overcome caste and creedal prejudices and the imperative work an educated Indian had to take upon himself, women’s emancipation. He promised to do so and was as good as his word. Considering her as his guru, he dedicated the first two volumes of his patriotic poems, Swadesamitran, to Sister Nivedita: “I place this slim volume at the Teacher’s Feet who showed me the vision of Mother Bharat and instilled in me patriotism, even as Krishna revealed to Arjuna His Viswarupa and taught him the true nature of the Self.”

Bharati’s fiery and caustic editorials, poems and speeches soon drew the wrathful attention of the British Government. The paper India which he edited was an eyesore for the authorities and an opportunity was an eyesore for the authorities and an opportunity was

The translations from Subramania Bharati quoted in the article are by Prema Nandakumar.
RR Sabha opens its new hall

On July 16th morning, to the strains of the nagasvaram, the chant of religious texts and to the sounds of classical music, the 89-year-old Rasiaka Ranjani Sabha, a Mylapore icon, opened its doors to guests and rasikas. It now offers a well-equipped performing arts complex located on Sundareswarar Street, off East Mada Street, Mylapore. Senior Mylaporean guests will not be able to finger at that iconic statue of Lord Krishna that greeted you in the past, behind the box-office counters. The subha team says a new marble statute will be installed in that spot.

There are three auditoriums here – the main one is a 700-seater and spread across two levels. There is a mechanical lift for seniors in wheel-chairs. There are two smaller auditoriums on the second floor; a 270-seater for concerts, talks and discourses and an 80-seater which is best suited for social functions and informal events. All of them are fitted with smart-designed stages, comfortable seating and state-of-the-art audio equipment which promise the best acoustics. Says R. Nagarajan, senior chartered accountant and subha secretary, “If we hold mike-less concerts in any of our halls they will sound great and can be heard by anybody sitting anywhere in the hall.”

The subha hired an Australian expert to fit the halls here. Soon, the R.R. Sabha complex will also have a music listening room where you can put on the ear phones and listen to the music of the masters, which has been digitally restored from spool and tapes.

There is also a small cafeteria counter for now; a bigger one will be in place in the year ahead.

The re-constructed R.R. Sabha is a Rs. 16 crore project, with Rs. 2 crore given by donors and Rs. 11 crore borrowed from a private bank. To raise revenues, the subha is planning to skip being part of the famed December Season and instead curate theme festivals round the year. Says Nagarajan, “Our focus is on young talent. And we will have unique, themed music and dance fests.”

Work is still going on at this campus where, some eight years ago, the JCBs brought down that iconic auditorium where famed actors, musicians and dancers had performed to packed houses.

Stray dogs dogged the subha when new plans were drawn. We are told that the idea of a Trust was dropped and there is only one subha team now that will manage the affairs and that there are no legal cases to address any more. (Courtesy: Mylapore Times)

Cleaning lakes – his passion

(Continued from page 3)

locations without difficulty and loss of effectiveness. It still seems debatable whether a large spread is overly compatible and completeness area by area, but Arun and his colleagues are shrewd enough to be aware of the probability and need for such a strategic course correction in the future.

EFI’s programmes are so wide and comprehensive that you wonder if meaningful and sustained attention is feasible on so wide a range of objectives. Their conservation efforts include the following lake conservation, herb restoration/native species plantation, creating urban eco-responsibility, composting, setting up bio-diversity parks in schools, animal care, sparrow reintroduction, youth camps and mass awareness through media. Would EFI be better off devoting its energies and resources on selecting critical programmes instead of trying to do too many things all at once?

Even with a fine working model backed by sound organisation it takes many years to restore a waterbody to its natural state of life-giving cleanliness when it does not need any more massive cleansing attention. And there are thousands of such water bodies in every State. As such, cleaning as a post-event correction would be endless, with no closure in sight. While cleaning as a corrective measure is necessary, simultaneous massive efforts to educate people to generate less waste and to dispose of them in a responsible manner would, ideally, reduce the need for cleansing itself, making it eventually even unnecessary.

EFI’s campaign should shift gradually to utilise its model and expertise to bring about a behavioural transformation among waste generators. Arun’s present effort is, no doubt, having the incidental effect of sensitising a vast army of volunteers in the country to the need for protecting natural resources and to more responsible habits in generating and disposing waste. Their example would have a contagious influence on their fellow citizens.

Philanthropic institutions are looking for good causes and committed implementation. And EFI under Arun Krishnamurthy has a worthy cause, a working model that lends itself to easy replication, low delivery costs and a team of young men and women charged with missionary zeal. That should make for a synergistic partnership.

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