

Soumini wins ti- tle



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SPONDENT



CHAMPION: Soumini Srinivas beat Neena Praveen in the final.

CHENNAI: Soumini Srinivas of Madras Gymkhana Club defeated Neena Praveen of TNBSA 3-0 in the senior women's billiards final in the Indian Oil-TNBSA Tamil Nadu State-ranking tournament held here on Thursday.

Soumini's other passion is gardening ... A passion she developed from her college days at Stella Maris, where she spent a lot of time working in the gardens.

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Multifaceted contemporary gardener

By V. Vaishnavi

Soumini Srinivas is a senior citizen who fills a multitude of roles. She is an educationalist who ran a play school for 24 years, an able billiards player who competes at the state level, Director at Integrated Solutions Europe Ltd, a software and BPO company and a dotting grandmother of 4 grandchildren.

However, she identifies herself as an ardent gardener. This interest in gardening came from her father who organised the gardens and lawn of Kalpakkam Central Government quarters, and from her college days at Stella Maris, where she spent a lot of time working in the gardens.

Her terrace garden won the 2nd place in the vegetable garden category at the recent Organic Garden Festival organized by the VGP group. It is a world of its own with bonsai plants like the tiny pomegranate tree with miniature fruit and mature woodapple tree, tray gardens with a complex storyline, fully grown fruit trees like guava and lemon, and rows of vegetables from brinjals and ladies' finger to ridge gourds and flat beans.

"I became interested in bonsai when 'Sunny Brook', my play school did not leave me with enough space for a full fledged garden. I cannot imagine a living space without one, so I started bonsai gardening. Later when we redeveloped this place, I planned a terrace garden and made sure that all the spaces like the sun shades and porticoes could be used for housing plants without causing structural problems. I want to call myself a conservationalist," she says, "not a bonsai gardener, a terrace gardener, or an organic farmer. The most important thing is conserving, the soil, the trees and the resources that we are throwing away. I don't like to throw away anything, because, when used correctly, nothing is a waste. All our biodegradable waste, from flowers to sour buttermilk and paper tissues, goes



for composting. I have a solar plant which cools our terrace even as it generates power and my biogas plant makes enough gas for the watchman to cook his food."

Her garden reflected her interest in conservation and recycling. There is an automobile spare part used now to house a jade plant, a plant trough made of upcycled PVC pipe and broken terracotta pots forming the centerpiece of well-designed tray gardens.

"My garden and the greenery around this beautiful area are food for my soul. If we keep prioritizing vehicles and roads over greenery, the city will become unbearable to live in. Gardens are not made by singing 'Oh, how beautiful,' and sitting in the shade, they require work and love. Similarly our city will not get better by criticizing the current situation and not doing anything to solve the problem. Each person has to work towards turning their locality into a green space so that living here becomes a pleasure."

Soumini has a facebook page with a large number of photos documenting her adventures in gardening, recycling and composting. She can be contacted at ssoumini@gmail.com.

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