

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXIII No. 6

July 1-15, 2023

INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- A Flyover turns Fifty
- Cricket reminiscences
- Gandhi's Madras connection
- It was squash time in Chennai

TN Government seems to wake up to heritage at last

Will private players follow?

Government-owned built heritage in Chennai seems to have never had it so good. All over the city, many Indo-Saracenic structures are getting much needed restoration and if not that, at least a facelift. In the last decade or so, there has certainly been a change in attitude as far as the authorities are concerned over built heritage of the colonial kind. And this is to be welcomed. It is certainly not the happy ending as far as the battle to preserve heritage is concerned but it is undoubtedly progress. The question remains, will this influence private players and more importantly Government undertakings to also preserve the heritage they own? Or can

the Government at least work towards making this happen?

All over the city, heritage structures owned by the State are seeing restoration exercises. Work on Chepauk Palace seems to be nearing completion going by the blood red coat of paint it is now doused with. That

● by The Dy. Editor

will hopefully fade with time to a more acceptable shade but what is important is that conservation seems to have been done on scientific lines. VP Hall is under scaffolding and long-promised restoration is underway. In our last issue we reported on how Rajaji Hall

is to be restored at a cost of Rs 17 crores. The Government has since followed that up with an announcement that it plans to renovate the TANUVAS building in Veperly. Last heard, even the Mint Building was supposed to be restored.

A crucial factor in all these restorations has been the trained team that the Public Works Department has developed inhouse for such projects. There has therefore been heightened sensitivity and while purists may not agree with all that is done in the name of conservation, there is doubtless a sincere effort to see that old structures are preserved.

(Continued on page 2)

Chennai Traffic Police make a U-turn on new speed limits

“I felt rather silly for a second there,” confesses Siddharth, waving towards his expensive new sports car. The bonnet catches the sun rather prettily – sophisticated, shiny and sleek, it can accelerate to high speeds in the blink of an eye. Siddharth was temporarily thrown for a toss earlier in June, when the Greater Chennai Traffic Police (GCTP) announced that city speed limits would be revised to 40kmph in the daytime and 50kmph at night. Newly installed speed radars with ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition)

cameras at key spots such as Anna Arivalayam junction, Dr Gurusamy Bridge, Pulla Avenue, Ration Shop Junction in Maduravoyal, Parry's Corner, Injambakkam, and Spencer Plaza would help identify vio-

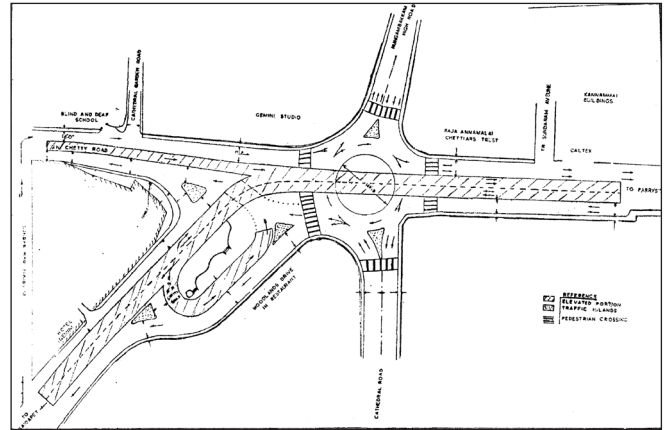
● by A Special Correspondent

lators. In all, the installation is reported to have cost Rs. 54.33 lakhs, but the change was met with great public indignation, leaving vehicle owners an especially disgruntled lot. A mere two days later, another an-

nouncement followed, assuring the public that the new equipment would not enforce the proposed speed limits but only serve to encourage safe driving. The GCTP's official social media handle released the following statement – “Owing to criticism from certain quarters in social media and some confusions alleging that Chennai police have proposed to generate challans for speed violations, it is clarified that police installed six speed display boards wherein the speed of every vehicle crossing that board will be displayed and the

HERITAGE WATCH

A City Icon Turns Fifty



July 1 will mark the completion of fifty years of the iconic Anna (Gemini) Flyover. Built at a time when the number of vehicles crossing that junction was around 9,000 during peak hours, it continues to cater to a load far higher than that. And yet it keeps working, with minimum maintenance. It certainly deserves to be commemorated and celebrated. True, there are today much larger flyovers and grade separators across the country and technology has advanced to an extent when this structure may seem a minor piece of work but in its time it was pathbreaking. And our city planners, in anticipating traffic loads showed remarkable foresight, something that seems lacking today. Certainly, life without the flyover on Anna Salai would be very difficult – the mind boggles at the traffic lock jams that could happen.

Our OLD shows the plan of the flyover, courtesy *The Hindu*. Our NEW is of a part of the structure as it stands at present. Long may it tower over us.

For further details on this icon of the city, please turn to pages 4 and 5.



road user will be able to know if they have crossed the permitted speed limit. These boards are for cautionary purposes and not equipped to generate chal-

lans.” The data captured by the ANPR cameras, it was added, would be used to feed a civic study on permissible speed (Continued on page 2)

TN Government seems to wake up to heritage at last

(Continued from page 1)

All this stands in sharp contrast to what is happening to heritage edifices that belong to Government undertakings and private owners. Take the Bharat Insurance Building for instance. It has remained a roofless shell for over a decade now. The LIC is not willing to take up restoration and is awaiting the eventual collapse of the building. The SBI seems to have abandoned its Rajaji Salai premises after a fire that happened several years ago. This building and its neighbour, the GPO, seem to cry out for attention and stand in sharp contrast to the gleaming Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and the First Line Beach police station. Are the LIC and SBI lacking in funds? Educational institutions fare no better. The Pachayappa's College in Chetpet is in a bad way but even worse is the condition of the old college building on NSC Bose Road.

The record of private players is terrible. Demolition and redevelopment seem to be the

only policies in place. Unlike the Government, which in a way has a duty to maintain the heritage in its possession, private players, unless supremely enlightened, view their buildings as so much real estate. And they cannot be blamed for this either. There are no rewards or recognitions in place for heritage conservation. In such a scenario, why should any structure that occupies valuable land be protected? The Government has long been talking about Transfer of Development Rights for those in possession of heritage buildings. It is high time this is brought into play. It can make an enormous difference in protecting private built heritage. The ensuing demand for conservation will also ensure that artisans and engineering professionals will once again turn their attention to traditional methods of construction. This in turn will mean we don't copy western techniques that are alien to our weather conditions and ventilation requirements. Is the Government willing to take this step?

U-turn on new speed limits

(Continued from page 1)

limits, enabling the city traffic authorities to explore "different speed limits in different roads at different times."

Siddharth is heaving a sigh of relief, but the plain fact remains that reducing speed limits is considered good practice in urban planning by civic experts the world over. For one, it directly reduces the frequency of road accidents and drastically reduces fatalities - an outcome that Chennai should welcome, with its poor track record on road safety. Increased vigilance has already helped bring down the number of deaths from road accidents by 20 per cent compared to 2021. A revision of speed limits is quite in alignment with safety goals. In fact, the World Bank endorses a 30kmph speed limit, as evidenced by this excerpt from a 2021 article published on its blog - "Many cities in Europe are already moving toward slower speeds, with considerable gains in terms of road safety and quality of life. Brussels and Paris have introduced 30km/h limits in order to improve air quality and reduce noise pollution and traffic collisions.

By the end of 2021, the Dublin City Council's Transportation Department intends to do the same. The Spanish government is also introduc-

ing new traffic regulations, lowering speed limits, and increasing fines. Luxembourg has extended its 30km/h zones to all built-up areas, as have Oslo and Helsinki, where not a single pedestrian or cyclist was killed in a road crash last year."

Secondly, reduced speed limits also help cut down on pollution and fuel consumption - it is a matter of general acceptance that higher speeds burn more fuel while lower speeds economize. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, lower speeds make roads accessible and safe for all citizens, not just privileged owners of automobiles. It is unlikely that the proposed revisions faced criticism from those who regularly walk on the roads or cross busy junctions - the city's pedestrians, mass commuters and cyclists have arguably been pushed out of the roads by motorized vehicles. Reduced speed limits will almost certainly make commutes longer and put additional pressure on congestion at peak hours, making it a little more inconvenient to own and ply private vehicles - but that's not necessarily a bad thing. In the long run, it will help build equitable, accessible public paths.

It is arguable though that the change was introduced without much thought to the transition involved. There is ample scope to mould commuting

The Madras brand of affection

The *Woman from Madras Musings* was marching to her position on the tennis court when her doubles partner suddenly stopped and gazed at her, his forehead crunched. "Where's your pottu?" he asked after a while. When (Wo)MMM replied that she has never worn one to tennis, his frown deepened. "Perhaps you should. Your forehead looks... empty." (Wo)MMM found this to be a rather strange exchange, and it was only after much thought that a theory presented itself to her - perhaps he had grown fond enough of her to take an active interest in the welfare of her forehead. She told the Better Half, who rather concurred. "You should have asked him in return why he wasn't wearing any vibhuti," he said. "That would have thrilled him to bits."

(Wo)MMM has always felt that it is at once a privilege and a sort of sweet suffering to win the fondness of a Chennaiite. As far as Madras is concerned, love is obliged to break down social fences that guard against inhibition and candour. Our favour and affection are wild things - freely given whether the recipient wants them or not, transforming personal boundaries into entirely porous lines. Advice is dispensed freely, as are disapproval and disappointment; and affection is largely communicated through a brand of mockery endemic to our city. The other day, Victory Mother - an itinerant vegetable seller and longtime friend - sprang to (Wo)MMM's support as Ma-

behaviour to the common good, but that necessitates the provision of a dependable solution - well-connected, safe, and timely mass transport systems. With city roads in their current state of disrepair from civic works and the rains, it should have been anticipated that the public would not react kindly to a further burden of increased congestion and travel time. It would have been prudent to establish the alternative before pushing for greater restrictions. As it is, the touted plan of establishing variable speed limits in different parts of the city is a good start, and one hopes the new speed radars would be useful in swiftly enforcing such plans. Siddharth and his ilk may grumble anew, but it is hard to muster sympathy for them. They're welcome to use the roads responsibly right alongside the rest of us.

ter Eternal admonished her for constantly loafing around in shorts. "She doesn't look hideous!" interjected VM with a grin that ought to have braced (Wo)MMM for the punchline. "She looks absolutely lovely, just as she is - why, she almost looks like a boy!" VM went off chortling as (Wo)MMM wilted under the Mater's glare; she surfaced shortly after, offering a couple of cucumbers in a bid for peace.

Then again, (Wo)MMM has never quite experienced a kindness so unstinting and forthcoming as Chennai is capable of. Memories of the floods carry the faintest hint of sweetness for this reason; (Wo)MMM recalls a great number of people popping up at home in those days, bringing what they knew to be treasures - a couple of pieces of brinjal or bottle gourd, a packet of milk or a few candles. Why, (Wo)MMM is currently in the process of shifting houses and it is inexplicably the driver anna who

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

is running the whole complex operation. Responsibilities are cheerfully assumed and carried out without a hint of complaint or expectation; the liberties of affection go both ways.

There's nothing quite like being loved by a Chennaiite, isn't there?

Elevator Shenanigans

The *Woman from Madras Musings* was lounging about on the sofa when Pater Eternal entered, sporting a decidedly sheepish look on his face. Mater Eternal, hawk-eyed and sharp as she is, pounced on him at once demanding to know what he had done. It transpired that he had had a small adventure of sorts in the apartment elevator. PE had sought to go to the ground floor for a short walk around the premises. Due to an inexplicable series of miscalculations, he had found himself alighting on the first floor repeatedly - four times in a row, to be precise. The explanation for how this occurred is rather confusing, but it consists of (a) PE pushing the wrong button; (b) co-passengers pushing the right button and (c) a self-aware elevator focusing all its energies upon subjecting PE to great vexation. (Wo)MMM advises

our readers to take that last claim with a generous cupful of salt.

PE's shenanigans would have gone entirely unnoticed but for a young lady sitting in the doorway of her first-floor house. She, having seen PE hop in and out of the elevator all day, understandably assumed that he was enjoying a wild joyride in the wee hours of the morning. PE reports that he was deeply abashed when she went on to assure him that she too liked to ride in the elevator, conspiratorially adding that discretion would be wise given that the association heavyweights took a rather dim view of the game. "I think we've become friends though," finished PE. Going by the look on Mater Eternal's face, (Wo)MMM rather doubts that PE will be allowed to travel in elevators unsupervised for some time.

Of searing heat and inconvenient rains

The *Woman from Madras Musings* had a particularly rough go of the summer. She spent most of her time hibernating indoors, for the very thought of stepping out in the sun brought on intolerable exhaustion. And so, when she was invited to attend a family function in Kanchipuram during the peak of the season, she confesses that she was rather relieved that work obligations prevented her from going. The Betternals went and returned with an armful of stories. Most of it was about the searing heat. The mandapam was not air conditioned; the timings were not helpful either, for the event was scheduled close to noon. The guests were apparently constantly sweating rivulets, all the while convincing one another in some sort of mind-over-matter stratagem that the heat was not as bad as they feared it would be. 'I think they willed themselves into believing their own words,' said one Betternal in admiration.

Now that we've enjoyed a couple of thunderstorms, the vehemence of summer feels rather like a dream. Its torture seems to be largely forgotten and the general gripe has turned towards the state of the roads under the lashing of the rains and the never-ending civic work on the city's stormwater drains. What short memories we mortals have!

- (Wo)MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



The Randor I knew

I wanted to write about dear Randor, whom I had known fairly well.

A long time ago, I was attending a dinner in Delhi hosted by my colleague Muthuswamy Varadharajan, accompanied by my wife. Alarmel Valli and her mother were there, too. There was some talk about the writers at *The Hindu* and we were wondering about this chap Randor Guy. Was he a foreigner like Ellis Dungan, or an Anglo-Indian, perhaps? It was Alarmel Valli who enlightened us – his name was, in fact, Rangadorai.

I happened to meet him when we came to Chennai in 1999, post retirement. A most friendly person, he visited our house on one occasion and showed a lot of interest in my wife's writings. He always enquired about her whenever I spoke to him over the phone. It was he who took me to R.T. Chari and his TAG lectures. I attended almost all his talks, which were scintillating. At times, I supplemented what he forgot!

I visited his house in Ayanavaram once and met his wife, too. His friend Sridharan took me on another occasion. Sridharan told me later that they had moved to a hospice and that Randor might not be able to talk to me or recognize me. He rightly advised me to remain with the pleasant old memories.

I do not know whether he wrote a book on the Alavandar murder case. But he told me that he wanted to write about the Lakshmikanthan murder case, but could not get authentic information. One of the accused – Aarya Veera Seenan, as I recall – had advised him not to pursue the matter! According to Randor, there was a mystery in the Boat Mail murder case too.

At times, I used to wonder about the claims he made but found him to be accurate in all details. I cross-checked one or two matters. He was related to some Iyengar trustees of the Varadaraja temple in Kanchi, whose two boys were known to me in Vellore. Randor gave information about them. He was screening *Krishna Bhakti*. I enquired from Randor as to who acted as Vasudeva carrying Krishna. He rightly told

me that it was one Rajagopalan who also used to come often to see his law senior – V.C. Gopalaratnam. I told Randor that this supporting actor – we used to call him Rajagopala Aiyer with a tuft – was actually my own Mami's father. He acted as a Judge in Pakshiraja's *Eazhai Padum Padu* (an adaptation of *Les Miserables*). So Randor was accurate and humorous.

My wife and I feel that it was nice knowing him.

Dr. G.Sundaram, IAS (R)

A 601, Dugar Apartments
Keshav Perumal Puram
Greenways Road
Chennai 600 028

Boating in Buckingham Canal

Thanappan K. has highlighted the condition of the Buckingham Canal in the city (MM, June 1st) while pointing out that the Canal traverses a long distance. The stretch south of Thiruvanniyur is quite clean. Why not introduce boating in this stretch?

B. Gautham

137 Wallajah Road
Chennai 600 002

The new MA Chidambaram Stadium

As I read this article, I recalled a couple of test matches that I saw from the E Stands of this Stadium.

At the end of the piece, there is a mention that there are plans to introduce a tour of the historic MAC stadium. I welcome this idea, as a similar practice is followed at MCG, Melbourne, Australia. When there are no matches, the public is allowed to book a tour online by pre-selecting the date and time slot. Visitors are grouped in tens and led on a walk around the stadium by an expert guide. Some groups start clockwise and some anticlockwise, so that the route does not get crowded at any point. The museum has a special entry with a sports shop inside - another way of pulling in revenue. The administration has to only ensure that the stadium precincts are well-maintained, regardless of whether there is a match or a tour.

Arumugam PK

A101, Cedar Block
Prince Greenwoods Apartments
Vanagaram Road, Athipet
Ambathur
Chennai 600058

Anna Nagar west – a place for peace and harmony

Today, Anna Nagar is a prestigious locality to live in. However, the event which brought Anna Nagar into focus and existence is sadly forgotten. Madras, with a century-long history of fairs, saw its first industry-oriented event in The Indian International Trade and Industries Fair of 1968. Organised by the All India Manufacturers organisation to showcase Indian industrial development post-Independence, it was planned to be the largest international trade fair in Asia.

The location identified was the Naduvankarai village on the north bank of the Cooum. The fair was scheduled to open in 1967 but that being a watershed year in Madras politics, the fair was postponed by a year until the new government found its bearings. Now, we have a Metro station at Thirumangalam as well as the Anna Nagar Station for the locals and the area is well connected on all sides. In the beginning, the Anna Nagar arch was the entry point from one side and later on other entry points cropped up from Koyambedu, Mogappair, Padi and Villivakkam. The Industrial area of Padi gave a big boost as the TI group and TVS had their units in here, providing employment for people. Having lived in this area since 1983, I have really enjoyed the true value of life in such surroundings.

The Anna Nagar area near the Exhibition spot attracted many Malayalis and the Telugu speaking people to form their base there. Anna Nagar West has become a highly cosmopolitan area. The Ayyapan Temple is a landmark and devotees throng the shrine during the festival days of Vishu and Onam. Later on, we saw a church come up too, accompanied by a Saravana Bhavan branch. The Thirumani Amman Temple is another divine centre for the 13th Main Road residents. At that time, the consumerist trend assumed greater importance for household purchases and this area was surrounded by shopping amenities. The Anna Adarsh Educational Centre brought many families to the Shanthi Colony area, and it is now a prime locality. The road leads you to Hot Chips. Senthil Nursing Home meets the medical needs of the people. And then there is Adyar Ananda Bhavan, which provides



Anna Nagar Tower. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

delicious sweets like Krishna Sweets.

A new flyover now connects Anna Nagar to the Airport and the Mogappair belt that has many medical facilities and is a major residential complex. The locality hosted the world expo and the venue was later converted into a residential layout by the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB) in the 1970s. The iconic Tower Park that was constructed during the expo remains the area's landmark. It was built in 1968 by B.S. Abdur Rahman and was inaugurated by the then Vice-President V.V. Giri on January 21 in the presence of the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu C.N. Annadurai. The iconic 12-story tower with a spiraling ramp overlooks a surrounding park, fountain and sport courts. The park has restrooms, a play area, skate and a dance area. There is also an elevator. Named after M. Visweswarayya, it somehow got renamed as the Anna Nagar Clock Tower but as such there is no clock to prove that point.

Access to the top of the tower will soon become a reality when the Greater Chennai Corporation opens it to the public after a 12-year hiatus, once the ongoing renovation works are complete.

At a cost of Rs. 62 million, the park underwent renovations and reopened in 2010. Entry to the tower has been prohibited since 2011 due to

incidents of suicides and scribblers, making the city lose a valuable tourist destination. To quickly reopen it to the public, the authorities began a Rs. 3 million renovation project in 2018. The civic body began repair work last year to install grills to cover open balconies on each of the 12 levels of the building, making it safe for use by the public and ensuring visitor safety. The tower, which was originally supposed to be opened to the public last month, was delayed due to the artwork undertaken in and around the locality. While the tower has been closed to the public, the park continues to be in use.

As an old timer from Thirumangalam, I enjoyed the tower surroundings and my children liked strolling in the area as the place was a landmark. Those days, the crowd was less, but now, the number has increased since there are lots of other attractions. A functional toy train going round the tower area can give value added attraction. Charges must be collected for entry as maintenance must be upgraded to provide the best ambience. The people should realise and keep the place neat and clean following Swachh Bharat Abhiyan guidelines strictly. After all, cleanliness is next to Godliness.

C.K. Subramaniam
cksumpire@gmail.com

A Flyover Turns Fifty

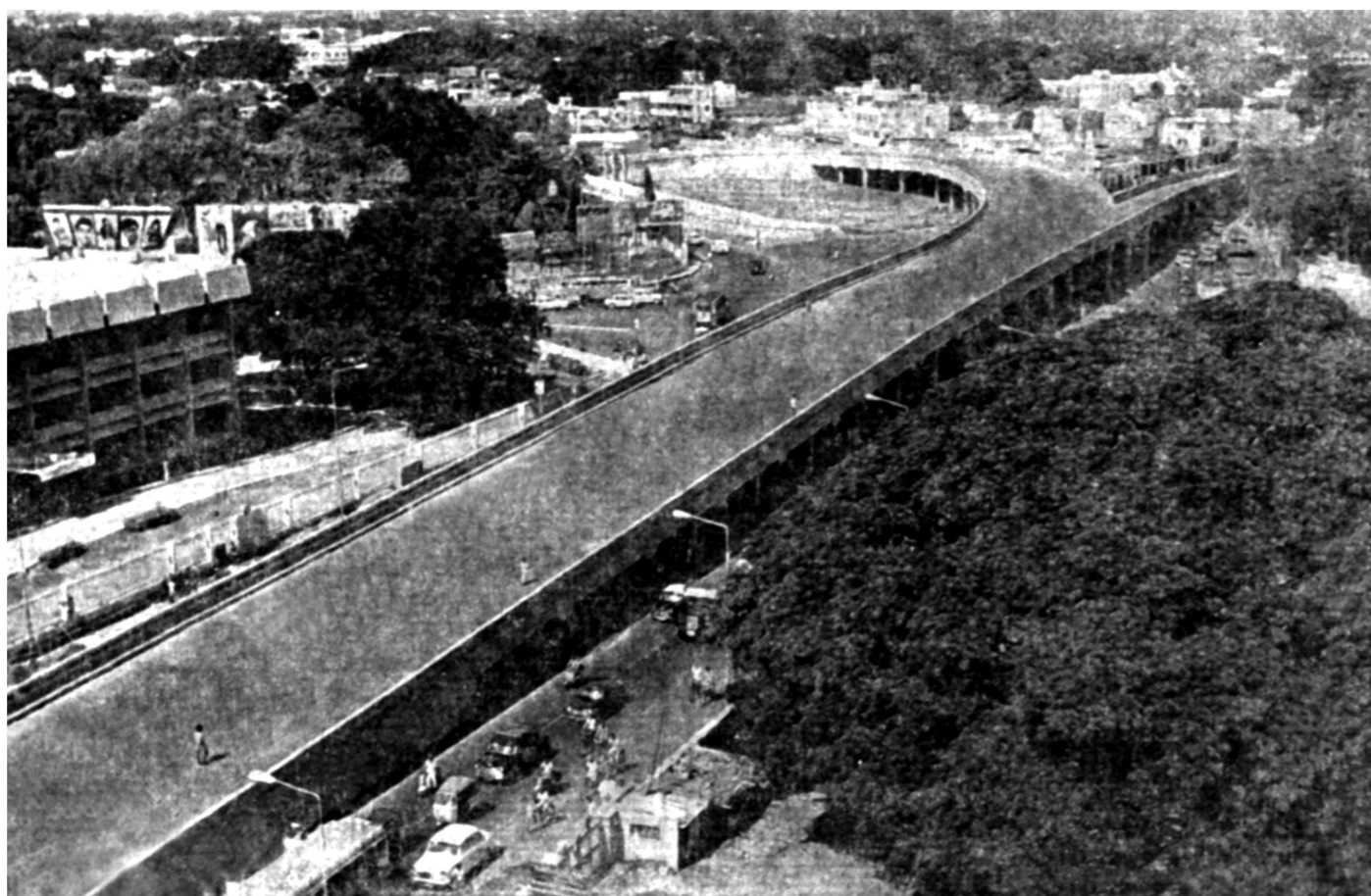
July 1, 2023 marks fifty years of the inauguration of one of the city's most identifiable landmarks, the Gemini Flyover. It was the first flyover to come up in the city (and the 3rd in the country) and was touted to be the largest of them all at the time of its construction. The English and Tamil versions of the July 1973 editions of the *Tamilarasu* magazine, the official organ of the Government brought out by the Department of Information and Public Relations carry interesting information about the project.

The need for measures to ease the traffic congestion in one of the busiest parts of the city was felt even in the early 1960s. In 1962, the *Journal of the Indian Roads Congress* carried recommendations made by the body, which included provision of traffic signals, improvement of roundabout islands and providing a traffic rotary and a flyover at the Gemini intersection. Writing in the *Civic Affairs* magazine on 'Traffic Safety in Madras City' in 1965, M. Singaravelu, the Commissioner of Police stated that the installation of automatic signals was not adequate and recommended the construction of a flyover at the intersection.

A study in the late 1960s revealed that around 9,000 vehicles passed through the intersection during peak hours. The signal system that had been put up helped in regulation of traffic to a certain extent, but at the cost of considerable holdup. It became imperative to devise means to provide for continuous

flow of traffic and hence, after a long thought-out study of several plans, the Government of Tamil Nadu approved the flyover project in 1969-70. The *Civic Affairs* magazine reported that the project was estimated to cost around Rs 75 Lakhs and that it was included in the Fourth Plan of the government. M/s East Coast Construction and Industries, of the Buhari Group were awarded the contract for the planning, design and execution of the project.

The main wing of the flyover, which ran from north to south comprised four lanes, 48 feet wide and 1,599 feet in length. An access ramp 24 feet in width was provided on GN Chetty Road. It is interesting to note that the clover leaf shaped elliptical path (this would be a forerunner of sorts to the design of the Kathi-para flyover in the 2000s) was adopted to provide passage for vehicles coming from Mount Road to GN Chetty road. Service roads were laid on the four corners of the junction to cater to the needs of these vehicles. In addition, a central rotor of a diameter of 150' was put up at the junction, providing a two-lane roadway around in order to accommodate the straight traffic on both sides of the Nungambakkam High Road and Cathedral Road. The adoption of a hollow beam perforated deck for a road-bridge was the first of its kind in India. The flyover was intended solely for fast moving vehicles, with all other vehicles to use only the ground level roads.



Picture of the Flyover from The Hindu dated July 1, 1973.

by Karthik A Bhatt

The work was programmed to be carried out in three stages viz., the western half of the main flyover and access ramp on GN Chetty Road, the portion south of the junction in the eastern half and the clover-leaf and the

balance of the eastern half of the main flyover. The design and planning of the entire scheme were done to facilitate the construction and the phasing of the work in such a way so as to help the movement of traffic without

any undue and long diversion from the junction. This resulted in savings of around Rs 4 to 5 Lakhs, which would have otherwise been spent on the improvement and maintenance of long diversion routes.

The concrete used for the entire construction was of special grade, with the cement (Arasu brand) being supplied by M/s TANCEM (Tamil Nadu Cements Corporation Limited). Work on the flyover began on September 1, 1971 and proceeded at feverish pace. The *Civic*

Affairs magazine quoting a report from *The Hindu* in October 1972 stated that the concrete structure was to be completed before the end of that year, barely 15 months since work started. The project was finally complete by mid-1973. In all, 901 metric tonnes of steel and 3765 metric tonnes of cement went into the making of the flyover. The entire project was finished at a cost of Rs 66 Lakhs and in a span of 21 months, which was three months quicker than the estimated deadline.

Stirring a Hornet's Nest

The public function to inaugurate the flyover seems to have stirred a hornet's nest regarding a few issues, going by a report in the July 15, 1973 issue of the *Kalki* magazine. Na. Parthasarathy (writing under the pen name Theeran) in his column 'Tamizh Naatile...' noted that there were murmurs of the Mayor of Chennai not being accorded respect due to him. The announcement made by the Chief Minister regarding the renaming of six bridges in the city viz., Marmalong, Adyar, Willingdon, Hamilton, Wallajah and Munro also came in for criticism as being inappropriate on the grounds that proper procedure in the form of obtaining the consent of the Corporation was not followed. Perhaps the most important of the writer's observations concerned the renaming process itself. He states that the history attached to names of the important roads and bridges couldn't be wished away, irrespective of whether or not they had pleasant or unpleasant memories associated with them, and that changing them on the grounds of either lack of awareness or the fact that the history behind them was not to one's liking was not acceptable.

Anna Flyover, some facets

The idea of a flyover over Mount Road was first mooted in, believe it or not, 1948! And it was much bigger than what we have now – for the plan was to construct it from Gemini Circle all the way to Island Grounds. When we speak of lost opportunities this would certainly be one. The Corporation of Madras was the sponsor of the scheme and it simultaneously mooted yet another flyover – from where the Police Commissioner's Office now stands in Vepery, to the Fort Station. This in effect was more or less the elevated road along Poonamallee High Road that is still being talked about. We must be thankful that the Gemini flyover was constructed in 1973 at least.

The man who proposed those flyovers in 1948 was Meeran Sahib, then Corporation Engineer. Writing about this in 1973, he lamented that the idea was approved by the then Government and it was "a pity that due to other circumstances the projects

Over-cum-inter-change at the Gemini Circle has to be different from the ordinary conventional post-lighting as the lighting is required not only for the ground level roads but also for the Fly-Over and ramps. Hence it has been decided to adopt the latest concept of lighting known as "High-mast lighting system" A scheme has been formulated for this, at a cost of Rs. 11.5 lakhs." Clearly, this was when high mast lamp posts first made their appearance in Madras city. They were designed and located in such a fashion that there was uniform lighting on the flyover and also the road below. Pending execution of this scheme temporary flood lights were fixed to existing poles at a greater height, around the Gemini corner to light the flyover and the surroundings.

The police, especially K.R. Shenai, then Commissioner for the city of Madras, came in for a lot of praise for the way the traffic had been handled during

by Sriram V

could not be implemented then." Twenty five years later, and by then a Haji, Meeran Sahib was the Technical Director of East Coast Constructions & Industries (ECCI), the company that bagged the contract to execute the flyover.

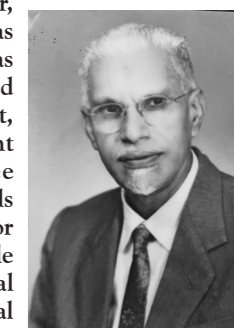
Meeran Sahib was clearly an engineer par excellence, for the design of the flyover both in terms of layout and also structure was his. The usage of "multiple hollow box slabs" for the main deck and an ingenious intertwining arrangement of stirrups" from the precast elements were all part of a design that he patented. The Gemini flyover is thus standing testimony to this man's design skills that after so many decades, it still functions, with minimal requirements for breakdown maintenance.

The PWD Secretary of the time, M.M. Rajendran, IAS recalls that the construction of the flyover itself was a fairly smooth experience but the lighting for the elevated portion was a challenge. The special supplement released by *The Hindu* on July 1, 1973 echoes this. "The lighting system to be provided for the Fly-

the four years the flyover was under construction. A news item in *The Hindu* dated November 11, 1971 notes that traffic snarls were a part of the work, though in the light of present day congestion all of that would seem a mere bagatelle. But there certainly were traffic diversions in place as can be seen from an announcement – "The police have notified the following revised traffic regulations at the work-spot: (i) cyclists motor-cyclists and scooter riders coming along Nungambakkam High Road and turning left towards Mount Road, should take the lane adjacent to the compound wall with the advertisement hoardings on it; (ii) traffic coming along Kodambakkam High Road and wanting to turn right into Nungambakkam High Road to reach Mount Road, would first have to turn left and go up to the Petrol pump and then take a 'U' turn; (iii) repairs to Graemes Road were now being expedited and after one or two days cars coming along Nungambakkam High Road and wanting to go to Mount Road towards Spencers would do well to take Khader

He Designed Lasting Structures

The man behind the Anna Flyover was undoubtedly Haji Meeran Sahib, the Corporation Engineer who in 1948 first mooted such a structure, evolved a design with minimal use of cement and steel and then 25 years later, was responsible for its construction as part of the private company that was awarded the tender. He not only saved the Government Rs 9 lakhs in the cost, which was a remarkable achievement but also finished the project three months ahead of schedule. The details of his design are hard to comprehend for a layman but to quote from an article he wrote for *The Hindu*, "the special feature of the design is in the conceptual development of the structural form of the bridge decking. The bridge deck is a multiple hollow-box slab, made up of precast elements. An ingenious intertwining arrangement of stirrups from the precast elements with the main reinforcement and anchored into the in-situ concrete ensures complete monolithic action of the precast elements for the full deck and thus resulting in a high degree of lateral distribution of live load. The adoption of a hollow section for the bridge deck and the high lateral distribution due to the special detailing has resulted in enormous saving in steel and concrete. Incidentally, this method of construction is the first of its kind in our country and it is the writer's own patented system."



A graduate in Civil Engineering from the College of Engineering, Guindy (1931 batch), he joined the Madras Corporation in 1933 and rose to become its Chief Engineer in 1948. He was a Fellow of the Institution of Structural Engineers, London and a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers India. As Corporation Engineer he designed the present arched spans of the Napier Bridge, the first public tennis courts in the city (now located within the Hockey Stadium premises) at Egmore, and the layout of Shenoy Nagar. Post retirement (1961), and heading the team at East Coast Construction and Industries, he worked on the Tower Park at Anna Nagar, the architect being Yahya C. Merchant and the engineer S.L.N. Moorthy. All these structures still stand, and together with the Gemini Flyover, are testimony to his structural design skills.

— Sriram V, with inputs from Badrunnissa Mahadevan, granddaughter of Meeran Sahib.

Nawaz. Khan Road, Shaffee Mohammed Road and Graemes Road so as to ease the pressure at Gemini Circle." It all reads just like the present diversions in place to accommodate Metrorail work.

The construction of the flyover evidently created quite a buzz for among the various tableaux in place for the Republic Day Parade of 1970 in Madras, one had the plan and layout of the entire structure!

If the then Government had had its way, the Gemini flyover may have been the city's first toll road. With work in full swing by 1971, and there being enormous pressure on funds, M. Karunanidhi, then CM, announced on December 8 that his Government was contemplating a levy on motorists so that a part of the expense could be defrayed by them. The idea seems to have

been abandoned later, probably fearing an electoral backlash.

By April 1972, traffic was permitted under the span from Cathedral Road to Nungambakkam High Road. Till then, it was a squeeze via one of the side lanes. The western half of the flyover, namely the portion that connects Mount Road to G.N. Chetty Road was the first to be completed and in April 1972, it was thrown open to traffic. As a matter of abundant precaution, a one-way system was followed for a month – north to south in the morning and in the opposite direction in the evening. By May, traffic was in full flow in both directions. The eastern half, which was the more difficult to build, was completed only by 1973.

(Continued on page 7)



A tableau depicting the proposed flyover at Gemini, in the Republic Day Pageant of 1971.

Boyhood reminiscences of Madras Cricket

I've been bitten by nostalgia for Cricket. The triggers were many – the latest articles carried in *Madras Musings* courtesy a good friend, a recent write-up in *The Hindu* on the exploits of the Holkars in Madras, and so on.

I was ensnared by the sport sometime in the early 1950s. My age was a single digit and our family had moved to a new area. The house was a bungalow with an unbuilt space in the shape of a large L-shaped compound, with our rented house at one end of it. Three of our neighbours had boys of my age group. The stage was set for gully cricket and the L-shaped compound lent itself to experiments in emulating Denis Compton's iconic legside sweeps.

Noting my new found interest in cricket, my father recounted stories of the Holkars Cricket team, whose matches he had seen in action. It was the 1920s and he had then been studying at the Presidency College. A hostel was right behind the institution, and he had stayed there during his college years. On weekends, students would walk across the road to the Cricket Ground. My father always grew particularly

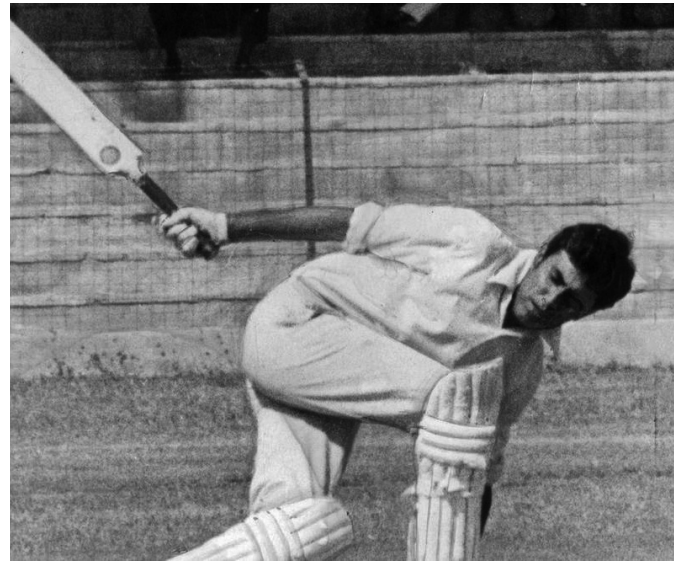
animated when he spoke of C.K. Nayudu, the Holkar's star player – a soldierly-straight six footer, he reportedly hit the ball tremendously hard. Whenever the tempo slackened, some spectator would yell, "Nayudu, sixer!" and the great man would oblige – a few deliveries later, the ball would sail over the boundary line in the direction of the shout!

My father's enthusiasm extended to buying me a subscription to the *Sports & Pastime* magazine as well as a low cost cricket bat. I assiduously oiled the bat (with linseed oil, I think) and furthered its seasoning by using it against an old ball wrapped inside a pair of socks and hung from a tree branch, rafter or door frame. It might have also improved my forward-defensive stroke, but nothing more by way of batting prowess.

I devoured all the articles in the magazine. The despatches of the Australian Jack Fingleton introduced me to a new world. My prized possession was a series of Ray Lindwall's photos in various stages of run-up and delivery. Pinned together and flipped continuously, it produced a moving picture, rather like a Walt Disney Animated

film. A son of one of my neighbours told me rather recently that I had presented him my entire collection of the back issues of S&P magazines including the Lindwall photos, when they had moved out of the neighbourhood. The gesture had won me a friend for life.

Seeing my interest, the cricketer son of our house-owner benevolently invited me to practice with their B-Division League team's weekend net practice sessions. I aspired to be a spinner like him, but gauging my limited potential, he advised me that a spinner required long hours of practice to achieve the requisite accuracy. I would be better off, he advised, bowling slow medium on the stumps and letting the ball do the rest on the matting wicket. My disappointment was soon forgotten when he began to give



Salim Durani. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

Mankad to the sight screen were followed by an apparently similar delivery, only subtly wider and faster which Harvey

ed to walk to the top, shouts would go up from the G-Stand – Jolly Stand urging the gatekeeper to open the Stadium gates for Meckiff's run up!

My benefactor's moving away from Madras on transfer as well as my own to a hostel to pursue engineering studies broke cricket's spell on me. But the charm endured.

The 5-day Test matches clearly tested a cricketer's endurance, resolve and grit and had all the elements of drama and were the stuff of legends and ballads. Little wonder it inspired biographies, autobiographies and writers like Cardus. Unsurprising too that it has caused veterans of the game to be slow to warm towards the shortened versions.

No nostalgia of Madras Cricket of the previous century can be complete without remembering the recently deceased swashbuckling cricketer who had turned out for Jolly Rovers in the Madras League for a couple of seasons. League matches being of shorter duration (besides being unticketed) suited the knowledgeable lovers of the game who could not spare several days for the Test and First Class Matches and were attended by large numbers.

He carried on the C.K. Nayudu tradition of drawing in and delighting crowds and also hitting sixers at will and on request.

As remarked by a player of Club Cricket in the Bombay League of the time, "... he was a Cricketing Genius who could do anything with a Bat or Ball that he decided to set his mind to. A real game changer who could alter the course of a match in a trice." RIP Salim Durani.

● by Vivek G Row

me Members Stand passes for Test matches. He was apparently the Secretary or Treasurer of the Club and knew when some Members would be out of town on Office duty during test matches.

That's how I got to see my heroes in action! The sight of the gigantic West Indian Wes Hall, in particular, was awesome. To a young school boy, many tall men appeared to be giants, but Hall was particularly huge and powerfully built, a veritable Titan. However, the crowd's hero was Gulabrai Ramchand. Those were the days of minimal protective gear. One one occasion, he had been forced to retreat to the Pavilion, having been hit on the head by a rising delivery. It didn't keep him away for long, though – he came back to bat shortly after, with a bandaged head. His return was greeted by a roar of approval from the stands. Gulabrai refused to flinch and retreat from the leg stump towards square leg but stood his ground even to the pacers. He made his point when he hit Hall for a flat six over long-on. It was heady stuff, indeed, pun intended.

The Australians provided variety. Neil Harvey was classy and elegant, whether batting or fielding at cover. However, his penchant for stepping out to spinners was exploited by the wily Vinoo Mankad. Two juicy deliveries to which Harvey promptly stepped out as if on cue, and lifted them over

just missed, only to be stumped. I also got to see Ray Lindwall live, with his following, rhythmic game, runup, delivery and all. With conditions not favouring swing or pace, his accuracy at sustained speed fetched him 7 wickets in an innings! My hero Keith Miller was indisposed and did not play. I could catch a glimpse of him from afar, sitting forlornly in the Pavilion. When the West Indians came again, we saw the great Gary Sobers – lithe, with a spring in his step. Sadly he did not set the Stadium on fire that day.

Being an average fielder, I have always admired outstanding fielders. Rohan Kanhai's fielding at fine leg and his accurate throwing at the stumps was electric. For someone like me, who had never managed to throw a cricket ball to any decent distance at school, Collie Smith's throw from the sight screen into the keeper's gloves at the other end of the pitch was mind-boggling. The swift swoop from cover and the accurate throw-in were exemplified by Harvey with his economy and compactness of movement. More flamboyant but also impressive was the fielding of the much-touted Norman O'Neil who had the features of a movie star.

There were moments of amusement too, such as when the ball was given to the gangling Australian fast bowler Ian Meckiff. He had an unusually long run up and when he start-



C.K. Nayudu. Picture courtesy: Wikipedia.

Gandhi's Madras connection continues

The Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Foundation recently organized the GMK (Gandhi Mandela King) 2023 International Conference, an event that sought to establish peace and justice for all, through the mobilization of non-violent change. It was attended by world-renowned academics, intellectuals, activists, and critical scholars. The Presidents of the Conference were Dr. Ela Gandhi of the Gandhi Development Trust (also the granddaughter of the Mahatma himself); Prof. Clayborne Carson of the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University and Ms. Razia Saleh, Director (Archive & Research) of the Mandela Foundation. David Gengan, President of the Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Foundation, was the Secretary and Programme Director of the Conference.

The conference was organized on June 7 to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Gandhi's eviction from the first-class coach of a train travelling from Durban to Natal. When the train reached the capital of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, at

around 9 p.m., a white passenger entered the compartment and looked Gandhi up and down, clearly disturbed by the presence of a coloured man travelling in first class. The man left and returned with two railway officials. One of them told Gandhi to get down and accompany him to the van compartment. Gandhi refused, saying that he had a first-class ticket from Durban. The official said that did not matter and insisted he move to the van. Gandhi remained obstinate, saying that he had been allowed to travel in the compartment in Durban and had no intention of getting down. The official brought a policeman who grabbed Gandhi and pushed him out.

Today, the plaque at the same station reads "In the vicinity of this plaque, M.K. Gandhi was evicted from a first-class compartment on the night of 7th June 1893. This incident changed the course of his life. He took up the fight against racial oppression. His active non-violence started from that day." Indeed, this was a turning point in Gandhi's life, one that sparked his path to developing

the ideals of Satyagraha and leading the struggle against oppression and discrimination in both South Africa and India.

The day was also the 120th anniversary of *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper established by Gandhi in 1903 in South Africa. The Chairperson of the

Prakash handed over a large collection of books to be added to the 100 volumes of Gandhi's writings that are already in a Gandhi Corner in the Pietermaritzburg municipal library. Sri Puneet Kundal noted that this year is significant for another reason – it marks the 30th

Gandhi Museum, Madurai, and four from the Gandhi Study Centre located in Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya campus at T. Nagar in Chennai. A. Annamalai presented two papers at the Conference – one detailing how Gandhi used the media for Satyagraha and the second on Gandhi, The Lawyer. Sri. K. Mohan, Chairman of the Gandhi Study Centre, Dr M. Prema, Research Coordinator, Prof. Vijaya Ramalingam and Smt. Vallabhi Chellam participated in the event as delegates from the Gandhi Study Centre.

It may be recalled that it was Mahatma Gandhi who laid the foundation stone for the Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya on Feb 1, 1946. Gandhi's Chennai connection lives on.

● by K.R.A. Narasiah

foundation David Gengan explained the significance of this year's conference with reference to the three iconic leaders of the last century, Gandhi, Mandela and King Jr.

The National Gandhi Museum also organised an exhibition on Gandhi: The Lawyer at the conference venue. The book *Gandhi: The Lawyer*, written by A. Annamalai (Director of the National Gandhi Museum at Delhi), was released by Mr. Puneet Kundal, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. A copy was received by Dr. Ela Gandhi. The keynote speaker was Clayborne Carson, professor of history at Stanford University and director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. The Deputy High Commissioner for South Africa, Smt. Banu

anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations between India and South Africa after a break of almost four decades because of apartheid.

Among the 26 Indian delegates, two were from the



You can contribute to CHENNAI HERITAGE

As a token of your support for the causes of heritage, environment and a better city that *Madras Musings* espouses, you can subscribe to *Madras Musings* – the annual subscription is Rs 100 and we welcome additional donations too to keep us going. You can make your payments to our bank account as below:

Chennai Heritage
Indian Bank, Alwarpet Branch
CA No. 413158606 IFSC : IDIB000A013

Please make sure you send an email to Chennaiheritage2017@gmail.com with transfer details so that we can acknowledge receipt.

If you are a new subscriber, you need to send us details of your name and address as well. If you are renewing your subscription make sure you quote your subscription number as reference. This is the number that is on the wrapper of your copy of *Madras Musings*.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Readers,

Please email all your letters, comments, additional remarks, brickbats and bouquets to editor@madrasmusings.com

– THE EDITOR

ANNA FLYOVER, SOME FACETS

(Continued from page 5)

The inauguration took place on July 1, 1973 in the evening, within the small patch of greenery that is formed by the curving arm of the flyover. By around 9 pm, after the speeches were all over, traffic was permitted, with heavy police presence to guide motorists. The entire flyover was illuminated. The speeches show that flyovers and subways have been a part of DMK agenda forever. A slew of new projects was announced – an overbridge at Central (covering the Stanley Viaduct), another at Royapuram, connecting it to Rajaji Salai, another at Guindy, and yet another at Manali. All of them came into existence over the years, a sign of the slow manner in which Government progresses. As many as six subways were also announced along Mount Road, and these too became reality over time.

The question of statues along the flyover came up a

few months after inauguration. M.G. Ramachandran had broken away by October and by early 1974, his outfit, the ADMK was demanding the green patch in the clover be made over to house a statue of Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker. What is most interesting is that Karunanidhi publicly rejected the proposal. In July 1974, he said that the Gemini flyover was not a suitable place for erecting the statue of any leader and that his Government had already decided on another space for the Periyar statue. He also said that Periyar Thidal, the place where the leader was interred, was the best spot for honouring him. His Government he said, was contemplating erecting statues of horses along the flyover. By then, his ban on horse racing had come into effect and these statues were meant to commemorate it. They were duly erected only for horse racing to make a come-

back within a short while. In recent years a new piece of fiction has emerged and is clamouring to be accepted as a fact – that the man reining in the horse is a depiction of Vanthiyathevan, a princeling under the Cholas and hero of the fictional work *Ponniyin Selvan*.

But by August 1974, Karunanidhi had to give in. He permitted the erection of Periyar's statue, and MGR thanked him for it – perhaps the last instance of bonhomie in public between the two leaders. In 1981, MGR, then in power, hosted a World Tamil Conference in Madurai and contemplated moving the two horses to the race course in that city, which was the venue for the meet. However nothing came of it and the two remain where they are, as KRA Narasiah writes, standing as "marvellously irrelevant pieces of art".

It was squash time in Chennai

Big time squash is nothing new to Chennai. Ever since the establishment of the Indian Squash Academy (now Indian Squash and Triathlon Academy), a brainchild of Mr. N. Ramachandran, prominent industrialist and a former President of the World Squash Federation, squash in India has been having a new lease of life. Mr. Ramachandran was the Secretary General of the Squash Rackets Federation of India when he made his dream of a squash academy a reality. The turn of the new millennium saw the world class facility open the door to exciting hopes for the talents in India. In many ways, squash which used to be by and large a club preserve, rose to become a medal-winning sport for India in major international Games. The most recent success was in the Asian team championship less than a year ago in South

Korea where Indian men won a gold for the first time. Three members of that team: Saurav Ghosal, Abhay Singh and Vellavan Senthilkumar had their upbringing at the ISA.

Chennai thus had become a hub for squash in India and over the years a venue also for events like the world men's championship, world doubles championship, Asian individual and team championship for senior and juniors. The latest event which just concluded in the city on June 17, the SDAT WSF-World Cup was the second time it had come to Chennai, the earlier being in 2011, which incidentally was also the previous edition. The present event after a long gap effectively was thus the fourth edition and basically a revival of the series which the WSF had in India and hence Chennai was a willing host.

True a few top players were

missed from some teams but not the quality of the contests nor the drama of the close fights with a huge gathering there at the Express Mall, a feature on all the five days of the championship. To add spice to the event, the WSF tweaked the rules a bit. For instance each tie was decided over four matches (two men's and two women's singles) representing a gender parity never seen

deciding the final result in the event of the two competing teams splitting the four singles. All these changes brought a fresh variety to the contests apart from lending a touch of swiftness and excitement to the action on the court. As the WSF President, Zena Woolridge put it aptly, the quality of contests resembled a T20 cricket match!

Perhaps all this had its effect

● by S.R. Suryanarayan

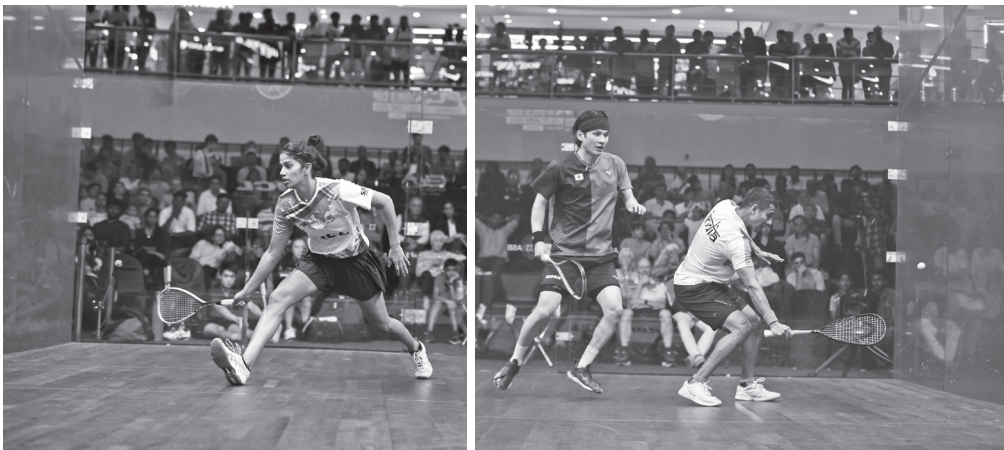
before. Also, each game was played over 7 points and not the conventional 11 and every match was decided over five games. Additionally, the winner of the top ranked player in the tie was awarded two points where the rest three get one point each. This also helped in

from the size of the gathering at the busy Mall and the only touch of disappointment, if one can say so, was the failure of India to reach the final let alone win glory. True, Egypt was always considered the powerhouse; such has been the country's tradition in this sport and expectedly it was the fancied side which went on to win at the expense of Malaysia and yes in effect retained the title. In 2011, Egypt had won the Cup. India which was seeded second and was billed to challenge Egypt in the title-round, failed against Malaysia in the semi-final; a loss that was unexpected but happened. Be it Abhay Singh or Joshna Chinappa or Saurav Ghosal (Tanvi Khanna, was the fourth member of the team) none could emerge a winner and the Mall witnessed jubilant scenes from the Malaysian sup-

porters who were more than a handful on that sad Friday for India! On the final standings India was placed third.

In all eight countries had taken part – host India, Egypt, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong-China, Colombia and South Africa – bringing to Chennai, a kind of variety that was well received by the squash lovers. Mention has to be made of the wisdom in using a Mall for the conduct for it fitted in well with the theme of taking squash to the masses. The growing numbers of the enthusiasts provided an inkling about the rising popularity of squash, something WSF officials watched with a sense of satisfaction as they aspire to take this sport to the Olympics before long.

A great event needed public support and the Chennai enthusiasts did not disappoint there. Equally heartwarming was the support of the Tamil Nadu Government. The Rs two crore that the State government extended (Udhayanidhi Stalin, Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development presented a cheque to that effect) to the organisers underlined the importance that the Government gave for the development of sports in the state. On the final day the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin himself was there to give away the Cup and prizes at a well organised function at a five-star hotel.



Joshna Chinappa (left) and Saurav Ghosal on right.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations


Amalgamations Group

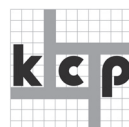
 **ASHOK LEYLAND**
Aapki Jeet. Hamari Jeet.


Brakes India Private Limited


CHATNATH TRUST

 **IIFL**
SECURITIES

THE HINDU
The Hindu
Group of Publications


kcp


LOKAVANI

 **MRF** murugappa



NIPPO


Rane Group


RAYALA GROUP


SAINT-GOBAIN


SANMAR


sify


SUNDARAM FINANCE
Enduring values. New age thinking.


SUPER AUTO FORGE
Forging Ahead Into Future


Sundram Fasteners
Limited


Taj
Hotels Resorts
and Palaces


TAKE®
Enabling Business Efficiencies


TCS
TATA CONSULTANCY
SERVICES


TVS
TVS MOTOR COMPANY


WILD GARDEN
Cafe at Amethyst

Since 1856,
patently leaders
— A WELLWISHER