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MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXV No. 12

October 1-15, 2025

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Move over Madras, Madurantakam is here!

The Tamil Nadu Government, no matter who is in power, is always on a spree of announcing world-class facility developments. They make very interesting reading when announced and then are forgotten. When finally implemented they are a mere shadow of what was promised and take so long that the original plan, its originators (proud fathers?) and timeline are forgotten. The latest is a 2000-acre global city to be developed at Madurantakam. The announcement was made in the State budget, and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation has sought bids for appointing a consultant.

We don't want to sound negative but whoever it is that comes up with these plans will do well to consider that littered all around the city are failed instances of similar global cities, though they may have not been termed as such. Take for example the Maraimalai Nagar development. It was envisaged as a 172-acre satellite town and mooted in the First Master Plan for the city. It is still work-in-progress after so many decades and when you visit it, all you can see are plenty of half-hearted attempts at infrastructure building. Then there was Manali New Town, envisaged in the 1990s. It never took off. And now, as these are times of thinking big, we have a 2000-acre city planned.

The choice of location is outright shortsighted. The inspiration is no doubt the Gurgaon (sorry Gurugram) experience, planned as it was as a satellite to New Delhi. It has no doubt prospered but the cost has been immense. The urban agglomeration has brought with it several issues – built, cultural and natural. If the Madurantakam experiment is to go the same way, what we are likely to see are highways exploding at the seams with vehicular traffic. There will also be huge challenges of water.

● by **Sriram V**

The answer to that, no doubt, will be yet another desalination plant. But what is likely is that the waterbodies of Madurantakam, of which there are plenty, will be the first casualties. It should also be remembered that Vedanthangal, a precious bird sanctuary is right in the heart of this district and the impact of such development on it will be detrimental to say the least. We are not here dwelling on the loss of agricultural land as that is anyway already a lost cause. Much of Chengalpattu is viewed as prime housing but even that urbanization is likely to be slow and measured, unlike a wholesale development of 2,000 acres.

This latest announcement is also to be looked at from an-

other context. The State Government, and its predecessors were no different, always seems to see any development as possible only around Chennai. You need to just see the plans – they are all in Kanchipuram, Tirumazhisai, Minjur, Mamallapuram and Tirvallur. When this KTCC (Kanchi Tiruvallur Chennai Chengalpattu) region is already such an ecological hotspot, why continue to build on or around it? Why not look at developments around Trichy, Madurai or Thoothukudi?

Trichy was once considered a site for a new capital but given up for political reasons, the logic of which belies belief. But maybe it was all to the good as the region is still predominantly agricultural and it would be a pity if all that went under concrete. But there are regions further south, in and around Pudukottai, Madurai and Thoothukudi, where the land is essentially barren. Surely these areas can be developed and that will help in making sure that urbanisation is uniform across the State and not restricted to certain pockets. The present plan for Madurantakam is nothing short of a long-term disaster that will only enrich the real estate lobby in the short term.

HERITAGE WATCH



This innocuous building on Lloyds Road/ Avvai Shanmugam/ VP Raman Salai may well hold within it the seeds of five localities of the city. The Madras Government Servants Housing Co-Operative Bank was once the owner of this structure and it gave birth to Gopalapuram, Lakshmiapuram (Royapettah), Sriram Nagar (off TTK Road), Norton Street (Mandaiveli) and Ganapathypuram (Guindy). We sent photographer Surya Kumar to see if all these areas have anything in common. And sure enough, all of them are leafy neighbourhoods, exemplars of how housing colonies were once planned.

Chennai One – promising seamless connectivity

The Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (CUMTA), an idea that had been spoken about since 2010 got a fresh lease of life a couple of years ago. Given the importance of the subject on hand for an ever-expanding city, the progress (or rather, for almost a good decade, the lack of it) has been keenly followed in these pages over this period. Much traffic, so to speak had passed since the time the idea was envisaged, with the entire public transport scene in the city having undergone a trans-

● by Karthik Bhatt

formation in all aspects. And so, when it was announced in 2023 that it had become a reality, it was warmly welcomed (MM, April 16-30, 2023).

There have been a couple of recent heartwarming developments with respect to the agency's work. The first was the approval by the State Government of a Rs 2.5 lakh-crore Comprehensive Mobility Plan, a 25-year vision to expand and integrate the city's transport network. The second has been the launch of the Chennai One mobility app, a platform, offering seamless connectivity to public transportation networks. Integrating 621 MTC bus routes, three suburban and MRTS lines and two metro corridors in one ticketing platform, it has the distinction of being the first of its kind in the entire country. Operating on a GPS model, tracking users and vehicles in real time, it suggests live routes, displays schedules, and allows commuters to buy tickets through UPI and scan them on boarding.

Going by the initial reports on social media, the app seems to be a hit on all counts. Over 1.3 lakh downloads and 4,300 bookings were reported on just day one of its launch. A particularly heartening feature has been the signing up of more than one lakh auto drivers belonging to the Namma Yatri platform. Autos are the most common service providers providing the last mile connectivity and hence getting them into the fold is a major step in the

right direction. While feedback about the overall experience on the app has been mostly positive, there have been glitches reported in terms of its performance and notably in aspects such as making it more disabled-user friendly. Officials at CUMTA have acknowledged these issues and have announced that the app will continue to be upgraded to provide better convenience and inclusivity for commuters.

While we await further evolution of the Chennai One app, it is an opportune moment to pause and reflect on a few issues with respect to public mobility. The first concerns the basic infrastructure on which the entire system evolves. Take for instance our roads. Ours is a city where some part or the other is dug up through the year on account of various reasons. As the relaying of roads after completion of the work is invariably delayed, many areas resemble bombed-out war zones with trenches in the guise of potholes. Unless there is an overhaul, in the way these road digging and relaying exercises are conducted, to ensure minimum public inconvenience in terms of time involved, no amount of mobility planning will make it effective. Yet another aspect, about which volumes have been spoken and written about is the dire need to upgrade the pedestrian infrastructure. Walking and cycling-only zones in a few areas of the city cannot obliterate the need for uniform safe mobility to pedestrians. An ever-growing vehicle population, particularly of two wheelers and four wheelers, is increasing the pressure on the roads and bringing about associated problems such as haphazard parking.

Our city is in the throes of a breakthrough in terms of connectivity, with the work on Phase II of the Metro Rail gaining speed. The development of the Chennai One App and the announcement of the Comprehensive Mobility Plan have hence come about at the right time after making all the right noises. It is for the authorities to take steps to recognize and take corrective action for existing challenges, which will truly ensure that commuting becomes a pleasurable experience.

Bedside Manners

In the view of *The Man from Madras Musings*, it was touch and go. But here he differed sharply from his good lady, also known as She Who Must Be Obeyed. He felt it was serious, probably plague or at least tuberculosis, but she felt it was nothing but a sharp attack of hypochondria. And for once, MMM was proved right in the sense he was ill, but not to the extent that he imagined. It began with a cough, and then lack of appetite and finally fever. And it ended in the reverse order in the sense that the cough is still around. In a way, MMM's good lady was right too – MMM did not waste away but recovered after three days of rest. And so he has lived to tell the tale.

This tale, by the way, is not of his illness but of the way people behave in our city when they call and get to know you are ill. There are a few decent people who will wish you a speedy recovery and ring off but these are now a minority, probably requiring protected status. The rest sadly are of what can be termed as varying degrees of insensitivity. The first is of the kind that wants to know a blow by blow account of how the fever developed and at each stage interrupting to tell you how they too had it but in a far more serious manner than yours. Theirs was pneumonia while yours is the common cold and nothing more! It shattered MMM's ego quite a bit for he had visions of baffling doctors and getting written up about in medical journals.

The second variety, more sympathetic no doubt, is prone to dire predictions. They always have an uncle, or aunt, for let us face it these are times of gender parity, who too had the same symptoms and before you knew it were being measured for bier/coffin. A variant of this kind is the type that tries to diagnose what could be the true ailment – COVID they say and when you inform them that the tests were negative, go on to speculate about brain-eating amoeba, swine flu and sleeping sickness. They then proceeded to warn MMM on what to watch out for and suggested in an undertone that he had better write a will as well. There is a subject here – the kind that imagines it is a doctor and freely dispenses verbal remedies, quoting pills and potions, with a fluency that can only be wondered at.

The third variety is of the kind that assumed that MMM was not really ill but merely

making it an excuse to take time off. Which in their view, meant he had all the time in the world to do something for them. MMM began receiving requests that began as follows – Really sorry that you are not well but while you are at home can you please look up this reference for me? MMM chose not to respond but when pressed repeatedly politely told the person(s) to take their custom elsewhere.

Taken overall, in MMM's view, there ought to be some etiquette lessons for people in our city on how to respond when someone is unwell. Extreme curiosity about other people's illnesses is as much unwarranted as is the desire to offer unsolicited advice. It is an art to be concerned and yet not be intrusive and MMM hopes that more people will master it.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Now One Way, Now Two

The Man from Madras Musings has come to the conclusion that our city's police are nothing short of wizards. They have managed to convert the narrowest of lanes into two-way roads and what is more, convinced people that they can drive through them at ease. How else can you explain the fact that traffic moves through all kinds of stretches – alleys in which, in other circumstances, no self-respecting car or bus or truck or even two-wheeler would want to be found?

But that is not the burden of the present account. What is of even greater interest is the manner in which the police switch between one-way and two-way traffic, especially on flyovers. Of course, as some have cynically observed, there is no such thing as a one way in Chennai. Traffic generally flows in all directions, rather in the manner of pieces on a chess board, only that in the game each piece has rigid rules on how it can move while in our beloved city roads anyone can move in any direction. And that includes the two and four-legged, and the two, three, four and many-wheeled as well.

But there has been one place where rules have been followed – namely on flyovers. Possibly owing to the fear of heights and the threat of being pushed over, nobody has thus far tried to go up the wrong

side of flyovers. But our police, no doubt tiring of such orderliness, have decided to spice matters up. There is this flyover near where the Governor lives, where at a specific time each morning and evening, a barricade is pushed out or in, and the grade separator (that being the official name of these urban horrors we refer to as flyovers) changes from one to two-way or the other way round.

But all of this pales into insignificance when you hear about another flyover, also in the southern part of the city. This is designed with a sharp curve halfway up, then a flat and finally a ramp going down. The flat makes this flyover a record holder of sorts – it is the only elevated road in the city that waterlogs and douses those going down below. But that is nothing when compared to what has happened to the flyover in more recent times.

This was all along a one-way flyover and in fact motorists on the way up had a tendency to zoom, imagining no doubt that they were pilots taking off. That was until they were brought to a crawl by the sharp bend. Then there came a day when MMM noticed a series of small plastic rods being erected in the median of the flyover. That was the first indication that this was soon to become two-way. That of course did not prevent two-wheelers from zig-zagging through the gaps and sometimes hitting the dividers, which being of plastic were soon flattened and lying prone on the road. And there came a day when the flyover truly became two-way.

As a consequence, traffic has slowed to a crawl. But that is not the end of the story. The police keep switching between one and two-way at a whim and it is anybody's guess as to when this flyover is in one state or the other. MMM has taken to avoiding this flyover. His pet fear is that he will be driving happily on it, only to find traffic thundering down in the opposite direction. But MMM's fears are evidently not shared by others for the congestion on the flyover seems only to increase.

It is MMM's view that someone senior in the police watches these switches via camera and has a hearty laugh at the chaos caused. There can be no other logic for these switches. Well, at least someone is happy!

– MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



Old symbols in the metropolis

It's around 10 in the morning, rush hour on a weekday in this 21st century digital era. The metropolis is wide awake, people are taking their fast cars, bikes or trains or packed buses to give the last day of the week their best shot. Suddenly live notes of the nagaswaram reach my ears from the road two storeys below. I shout to the apartment's watchman to call the keeper of the 'boom-boom' maadu (bull) as I scramble around for some money. Marimuthu is waiting at the gate holding a nagaswaram and a rope at the other end of which is the bull or 'Nandi' -- the vehicle of Shiva! Conversing with him, I learned that the bull is believed to efface the malefic influence of planets on dwellings and their denizens. Marimuthu, who as a devotee of Vishnu sports a white and red namam on his forehead, is a harbinger of hope. When Marimuthu speaks to his bull, which has a prominent hump, it shakes its head this way and that making the bells it is decked with jingle. Its called boom-boom maadu because the bull understands and shakes its head when spoken to. In Telugu-accented Tamil, Mari-



muthu tells me he is from Tirunirai (near Minjur) which it seems is generic for a sacred town. While in my part of the city, he camps at Gangai-amman temple in Aynavaram. He took up this way of life even as a boy following the example of his grandfather and father. His son is however getting a formal education. Marimuthu and Perumal are at once an anachronism and an enduring cultural symbol. I cannot imagine what it would be like to be in his place carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. 'How long will the two hold up against faceless modernisation is the question?'

T.K. Srinivas Chari
srinivaschari@gmail.com

Refreshing timelessness

Madras Musings (June 16-30, 2025) made for delightful reading, even for a new and semi-senile subscriber in a rival city who may not identify with some of the Chennai-specific civic problems afflicting the inhabitants of the metropolis he left in the 1960s.

The most refreshing thing about *Madras Musings*, apart from its humorous way of looking at things, is its timelessness. I read the latest issue at my leisure a week later and the articles you carried were still relevant, like the one by Varsha V on rising rental prices posing a challenge to affordable housing -- bang goes the middle-class dream of saving enough to buy a house to live in post-retirement, I told myself.

What took my mind off the economic aches and pains of life in 2025 was your centrespread *Tales from Tiruvottriyur (TVT)*, excerpted from "In Good Company -- Tales from ITC Junction". It was fascinating to read K Vaidyanath's anecdotal snippet that when television arrived in Madras towards the end of 1976, the Assistant Financial Controller and the ex-officio Treasurer of the ITC Club in TVT was designated as the 'TV in-charge' just to ensure that the staff and their children did not encroach on the members' viewing pleasure. But, then, boxwallah companies like ITC not only had/have separate office-toilets for executives and for staff but even dedicated towels on hooks for each officer. However, within less than a decade of the advent of television in Chennai, retired railway employees like my late father had invested in a black and white TV set, on top of which they stuck the KBK graphic from Indian Express giving the dates and venues of Test matches so that they would not forget to watch the live telecasts of five-day international matches between India and the visiting team.

A late uncle would synchronise his daily retired life with that of the performers of telecast Test matches to such an extent that he would not only have drinks,

Is redevelopment the only solution?

The recently introduced TN Apartment Act, and the rules thereon by the Tamil Nadu Government, heavily encourages redevelopment of old apartments. As a result, the Act is being seen as a bane by those owners who feel that even the apartments which can still withstand, are forced to toe the line of redevelopment.

I reside in a residential complex comprising many flats. The complex was built by a reputed builder about 30 years ago. Recently, a group of residents, in a bid to feel the pulse of the others, mooted the idea of going in for redevelopment. The group held a meeting and told the gathering that the complex can go in for a joint venture in view of the vast area on which it was built, and as a direct consequence thereof, the residents can get new flats, at no extra cost, as the builder will profit from adding a few more flats. Encouraged by the idea, the group held a poll where many residents recorded their 'nod' for the redevelopment, least realising that the complex is sturdy and can still withstand many storms.

Interestingly, it was revealed that following the request of an owner, a structural engineer was called to inspect the structure. He was of the opinion that if the building is maintained, it will survive for a minimum of 15 years!

To gain support from the owners for redevelopment, one of them sent out a message stating that if the complex is redeveloped, there will be no cause for worry for the next 35 years! The said owner does not seem to know that a complex cannot itself sustain without regular upkeep and maintenance.

The Act states that if the structure is in a dilapidated or ruinous condition or poses danger to the inhabitants, it can be demolished, paving the way for redevelopment. Quoting this, I sent a note to the group and sought to know its justification for the redevelopment. The move was immediately abandoned. I was told by one of the owners that many do not contribute towards repairs with the result that certain pending works remain unattended. It was because of this reason that the group was trying to go in for redevelopment. True, owing to wear and tear the building may have developed some problems and the inability of the residents to attend to the same as and when they surfaced, could have led them to spend more.

I do not understand the justification. Does it not amount to our allowing the building to decay itself by not undertaking even the bare minimum repairs? This is ridiculous to say the least. But this cannot be a ruse to demolish the building. Even if a building is pretty old, it does not mean that it is fit to face the axe. Olden day constructions are very different from the present ones. Stories of even new buildings falling apart due to various factors are in the news.

Though there is nothing wrong in going for redevelopment if the building is really weak and poses dangers, it cannot be said so in the case of many buildings which by age may be older, but can still serve. Irrespective of the age of the buildings, unless they are nurtured regularly, they become a liability, and, for this collective failure, the solution is not redevelopment. If a joint venture is not possible and the builder is engaged to only construct a new structure, where each owner has to pay money according to the present day rates, will they still consider redevelopment? Furthermore, just because of the paucity of parking space or any other issues, redevelopment is not the solution. When the cure becomes worse than the disease will the residents apportion the blame for the foolhardy decision of going in for redevelopment?

VS Jayaraman
ramvsj@gmail.com

Stray dogs verdict, now a national debate

There are reported to be more than 1.5 lakh stray dogs in Chennai city (dogs without owners) and well over one million stray dogs loitering on the streets in villages, towns and cities in India. As the dogs give birth to four to five pups at a time, the population of stray dogs is increasing at an alarming rate. Several cases of children and passersby being bitten by stray dogs, which sometimes become fatal, have been reported. In such circumstances, concern has been expressed by people all over India, demanding that this problem should be solved once for all.

These stray dogs are not starving as they are being fed by genuine animal lovers or by those who expect to be blessed for this "charitable" act. The ground reality is that the stray dogs population has now become a national issue. I wonder whether stray dogs are allowed to roam freely on the streets and platforms in any other country or to such an extent as is happening in India.

The Supreme Court of India has taken up the issue and has given a verdict that stray dogs should be caught and housed in shelters and taken care of there by civic bodies. Animal lovers have opposed this verdict and staged a protest march and have appealed to the Supreme Court to reconsider this verdict. The court has agreed to review the decision and the last word is yet to be said on the matter.

Animal lovers seem to be of the view that housing dogs in shelters would amount to curbing their free movement and curtailing their liberty to live in the way they want. They argue that stray dogs are as much children of God as the humans are and humans have no particular right over the stray dogs. These are some of the academic views and the issue is now a subject of feverish discussion in India.

The ground reality is that the local administration all over the country has ignored this problem so far and has failed in its responsibility to protect the safety of citizens, who are sometimes wounded by the stray dogs. There are also traffic hazards with stray dogs criss-crossing on the roads and affecting public hygiene. The local administration in villages, towns and cities has allowed this problem to become an issue of monstrous proportions.

Next the question naturally arises as to whether the animal lovers who fight for the cause of stray dogs are really 100 per cent animal lovers! The fact is that several of these animal lovers are non-vegetarians who don't mind the killing of goats, chicken, fish, cows, pig, deer, etc., and relish eating some of them. Their love for stray dogs seems very selective, and at best, they can be called as stray dog lovers!

In any case, the consensus view in the country appears to be that the stray dogs should not be harmed or killed but must be protected in a way that they would not become a public nuisance, as it is now.

While a large number of people want stray dogs to be removed from the streets, a suggestion doing the rounds is that why not animal lovers take the responsibility to take care of the stray dogs by adopting them as pet animals and keep them in their custody, thus removing their status as stray dogs! Interestingly, stray dog lovers do not seem to have reacted to this suggestion so far.

NS Venkataraman
Trustee, Nandini Voice For The Deprived
M 60/1, 4th Cross Street
Besant Nagar, Chennai 600 090

lunch and tea with the cricketers but even perch a cap on his head during the afternoon session when the sun shone directly on the head of the players. By the way, whatever happened to the TV brands of the 1980s like *Solidaire*? Thanks, *Madras Musings*, for reactivating all those memories.

Raghu Krishnan
krishraghu@gmail.com

A.S. Diwakar – A Man for All Seasons, From Table Tennis to Digital Printing

It was my first publisher, Srinivasamurthy of Productivity and Quality Publishing Pvt. Ltd., who referred me to Diwakar 12 years ago. I remember visiting his office behind the late Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi's home in Gopalapuram. It was on the ground floor of a stand alone apartment complex. The receptionist, who was surrounded by boxes of books and other materials, indicated the room where I could meet Diwakar. When I entered the room, I was pleasantly surprised to see a young, handsome couple welcoming me to their office. I felt instantly connected with the ever-smiling couple – cool, humble, friendly, helpful, with a positive attitude. No wonder, Diwakar was to play a major role in publishing a dozen of my books and also helped many of my friends realise their dreams of seeing their Memoirs in Print.

This is the story of a sportsman turned entrepreneur, who was the first to introduce Digital Printing with a 'Print on Demand' facility in Chennai.

Diwakar is the youngest of three sons of Sri Ramanujam, who was the Set Master in Gemini Studios. When he was in his 10th class, his father passed away, leaving the responsibility of bringing him up to his mother and the two brothers. His mother was interested in cookery, handicrafts, and writing, in addition to being actively involved in social service through the Saidapet Ladies Club, which she founded in 1973.

Diwakar says, "My mother inculcated in me the spirit of service to society. Thanks to her motivation, I have so far donated blood 77 times. All members of my family have also pledged to donate their eyes."

Diwakar did his schooling in Sankara Bala Vidyalaya and Shrine Vailankanni Senior Secondary School, T. Nagar. While in Vailankanni, he became the unofficial photographer for the school events simply because he had access to his brother's professional photography equipment.

Diwakar's brother, AV Bhasakar, was a professional photographer and was quite famous for photographing film stars and producing magazine cover photos for many popular maga-

zines. Diwakar used to assist his brother in the shoots and learnt the art of photography from him.

"After an unsuccessful attempt to get a medical seat, I settled to do my B.Sc. Zoology from Vivekananda College, Mylapore. My heart was not in that course. So, I continued my photography and discovered that I could also write in Tamil! I got the opportunity to take photos and write articles for *Kalki*, *Amudasurabi*, *Subhamangala*, *Dinamalar* and *Mangaiyar Malar*. The association with magazines and newspapers introduced me to the nascent development of Photo Typesetting and later the emerging technology of Desktop Publishing".

Before he discovered his interest in printing, Diwakar was to make his mark as a Table Tennis player.

"I started playing Table Tennis only during my school final years. In Vivekananda I represented my college together with S Raman, who later went on to become National Champion multiple times. While participating in the tournaments organised by the Tamil Nadu Table Tennis Players Welfare Association, I was encouraged to umpire the matches by the then President of the Association, Smt Tara Murali. She motivated me to qualify myself as an umpire, and very soon, I was umpiring in the State Ranking Tournaments. I then rose to the level of conducting classes and

examinations to select Umpires for the State. I was the Chief Referee for several State Ranking tournaments—all these, while I was still in college.

I had the opportunity to be a referee in the World Table Tennis Championship in New Delhi, 1987 and also in the Asian Junior TT Championship, New Delhi, 1989. By then, I had already started my company Compuprint and spending time away for extended periods was proving to be difficult. So my umpiring had to be curtailed."

Diwakar met his future life-partner Deepa in the Table Tennis tournaments. Apart from being a State-Champion, she also represented India as a Junior, in competitions in Japan, Egypt and Indonesia and won medals. He covered her TT achievements in many Tamil magazines, including cover stories in *Kumudam*, *Mangaiyar Malar* and *Saavi*. Cupid entered their lives, and love blossomed between this made-for-each-other couple.

Deepa's father, Sri TN Lakshmanan, was the Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Table Tennis Association and took a liking to Diwakar and encouraged him to be a part of the Association's activities. No one in the TT fraternity was therefore surprised when the two families joined to get the couple married in 1992. Diwakar was then 26 and Deepa 21.



A special wood cut portrait of Diwakar and Deepa commissioned from Mysore by RT Chari.

After completing his UG in 1986, his brother Jayaprakash and he toyed with several ideas of entrepreneurship, including Desktop Publishing. It was R Krishnamoorthy, then editor of *Dinamalar*, who gave the brothers a set of brochures of Apple Mac-based DTP systems and suggested they explore this option. Soon, a supplier of Apple Mac-based systems in Delhi was identified. After going through several ups and downs, three Apple Macs and a Laser Printer were imported, and Compuprint started operations in January 1988.

"On the first day of official business, one of our printer friends walked in with the first order to design the souvenir of the London Murugan Temple. Talk about auspicious beginnings," said Diwakar.

There were no trained operators at that time. So he recruited youngsters with fast typing skills in English and Tamil and taught

them the essentials of layout and designing. Soon, he had enough business to add two more Macs.

"We were doing a lot of company newsletters and annual reports. The companies did not want to deal with multiple vendors and, encouraged by the quality of my typesetting work, wanted me to undertake printing works also. So I tied up with good-quality offset printers and delivered the finished products to the customers.

As technology evolved, we updated ourselves with the state-of-the-art software and computer systems. I invested in a Colour Digital Printer and converted most of the offset jobs into digital. I also decided to use a Monochrome Production Printer, which gave a fillip to our operations. With designing, printing and binding operations all under the same roof, we were

● by R.V. Rajan
rvrajan42@gmail.com

successful in providing good quality books at attractive prices and in a short turnaround time."

Reliability and integrity were major factors for the publishers, since they were giving away the print file of their books. He had already established himself as a reliable and quality-conscious printer, and once he set up the print-on-demand vertical and convinced the hesitating publishers of the economics of short runs, there was no looking back.

The first book publishing client was Mr. Srinivasamurthy and his Productivity and Quality Publishing. Soon, many prestigious publishers followed. In addition to book printing, commercial printing for many five-star hotel chains and commercial organisations kept the colour production facility busy. Among the many other clients, Music Academy has Compuprint as its main printer for all its designing and printing requirements.

Diwakar says, "There have been several challenging and fulfilling productions during these years. The 12" x 12" coffee table book, *Pigeons to Post* by Steve Borgia, which presented the development of Post in India, was highly acclaimed in India

and abroad. *Discovery of Japan*, a full-colour coffee table book written by Ichiro Hoshino and published by the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, is another prestigious project which demanded uncompromising quality.

The five-volume *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini*, brought out for The Music Academy, Madras, was an extremely complex job in terms of the content. With complex music notations, this tested our competence to the hilt. We have now done several complicated music books, including for the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society. The publications on Sri-rangam, Ramanujacharya, Kanchipuram, Maestros of Carnatic Music and more for RT Chari have been fulfilling assignments. I owe a lot to Mr Chari for his unstinting encouragement."

Diwakar's was among the first set of print houses venturing into Digital Printing. Now,

the latest computers and design software, four-colour and monochrome digital production printers, finishing equipment including Perfect Binders, Programmed cutting machines, Laminating, Creasing, Sticker Cutting machines in-house, it is able to offer high-quality, timely service to its clients.

Diwakar received the Hall of Fame recognition from Konica Minolta for being one of their top users who brings out the best in their machines.

Growing Up in *Tamilmanam* and Rediscovering a Legacy

Growing up in *Tamilmanam* meant an upbringing steeped in memory. Everywhere around me were letters addressed to my great-grandfather: people requesting his *Tamil Thirumanam* book or *En Varalaru*. These weren't just letters, but the lives touched by his work. My curiosity, stirred by these appeals, led me to my grandfather's diary – a hidden trove of recollections, dates, book titles, correspondences.

This year, on what would have been his 125th birth anniversary, I find that the journey of rediscovery still continues. Even as these words are written, a new mail arrives requesting his book to help with a Tamil wedding; a wedding invitation and another book addressed to him rest quietly beside me. His work is living, breathing in people's lives, ceremonies, in the very fabric of community.

The Life and Contributions of K. Ramalinganar

K. Ramalinganar was born in 1899 in Keelacheri. His education led him to Zion School (Chindadripet), Wesley College, and later Pachaiyappa's College, where he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree. During his formative years, he came under the influence of notable Tamil scholars and thinkers, which shaped his sense of language, culture, and public duty.

"In addition, for almost all the new book launches, I have been invited to the stage and honoured. That, I consider as being the best award I could get," says Diwakar.

His wife Deepa, a Post Graduate in Commerce and a B.Ed degree in Teaching, quit the teaching profession and now takes care of the back office operations and accounts of the company. Diwakar considers her a pillar of support to him in all his activities. His eldest son, Sai Darshan, is a Chemical Engineer

from BITS and a PhD in Chemical Engineering from Cambridge University, UK. He works in Siemens Digital Industries in London. His younger son, Sai Prapanch, is a Game Designer and works in the USA.

Diwakar is a man of many parts – a writer, photographer, printer, publisher, social worker. He also has an active presence on Instagram, where he shares his photography, including images of cityscape, nature, and cultural events. Above all he is a wonderful human being who is willing to

accept any challenge posed by his clients with confidence and delivers on his promises, every time. The number of friends whom I referred to him for their book jobs will vouch for this. A man for all seasons, indeed!

I am happy that Diwakar has been given 'Man for all seasons Award' by the TAG group and Ramu Endowments at a function held recently at the Tag Centre, presided over by Mr N Murali, President of The Music Academy. A well deserved honour. Let us wish Diwakar many more!

His Books and Writings

From what is known, K. Ramalinganar wrote around 17 books across many decades. Some of the titles and their themes include:

Isai Chakravarthi Naina Pillai Varalaaru — a biography of a music maestro

Nagaraatchi Murai — guidance for how municipal administration can use Tamil

Thiruvembavai — a devotional commentary

Tamil Aatchi Solgal — Tamil administrative terminology

Aatchiththurai Tamil — a compendium or resource of administrative terms in Tamil

Aatchi Sol Akarathi — a dictionary/glossary of terms for official use

Tozhilalar Savath Thoguppu — translation of the Labour Code into Tamil

Tamil Thirumanam — a guide explaining Tamil marriage customs and procedures

En Varalaru

These works reflect both the functional and cultural side of his mission: to equip people with knowledge in Tamil (law, customs, governance) and to root identity in language

Reflections on 125 Years and Personal Connection

This 125th birth anniversary is more than a date – it's



a reminder of how work done decades ago still resonates. The books he wrote are still requested; cultural rituals still refer to *Tamil Thirumanam*, people still ask for *En Varalaru*. The invitations, the letters – in essence, the legacy – is alive. It's strengthened for me not just by reading his public works, but by entering the private archive: my grandfather's diary, the letters written to him. I was asked last week in a family event, was that your thatha who coined the words, Bus — perundhu Car — maghizundhu Conductor — nadathunar Governor — alunar And many more

And I said yes, it is and then I was back thinking about what made him choose that path, amidst lots of responsibilities and difficulties.



Diwakar (2nd from left) receives the Man for All Seasons award from N Murali. Others on stage are RV Rajan, RT Chari, Sriram V and SR Madhu.

Seeking timely professional help promotes good mental health

● Published to coincide with World Mental Health Day, October 10.

On December 31 last year I asked MM's editor if I could write about 'my' mental illness. Not waiting for a reply, I wrote to him again saying I would totally understand if the answer was a 'no'. On January 2 he replied: 'Why, of course you should, provided you also...' What he meant was don't make it just about yourself. So the point is well taken!

Mental health and illness are personal and equally societal. American writer John Updike puts it well: "We take our bearings, daily, from others. To be sane is, to a great extent, to be sociable." While I had hoped to write about my mental travails and, in the bargain, gain some clarity myself, try as I might, I couldn't string out sentences on what to say, how and how much to say, or whether to say it at all! To be sure I jotted down ideas and discovered that there was a reason for my unease. Anosognosia, not simply denial or a lack of willingness to accept a mental illness; it is a deficit in the brain's ability to recognize and process information about one's own condition. And yet, let us not forget that Madras or Chennai is a pioneer in mental health, with the Institute of Mental Health having been around for over two centuries. Boom!

Then I put down some queries and met Dr S. Swathik at his clinic in Kilpauk. I also corresponded and discussed with others. There are three brief life stories including mine and insights from a recovered schizophrenic.

Dr Swathik had felt a connection with psychiatry even as an intern in Madurai Medical College. Matters of the mind challenged him like a puzzle he was being pushed to solve. Life sometimes puts us in a state of instability vis-a-vis our distinct thoughts, emotions and behaviours. But when for some the instability becomes prolonged, intense, or frequent — whether individually or together — it signals illness. Instability that leads to harmful behaviour toward others or oneself requires urgent treatment. Generally, when it is a question of mental illness, people tend to trivialise it saying, 'it's all in the mind' thereby suggesting that it is imaginary and not serious.

On his thoughts on the *Bhavavad Gita* verse: "For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but

for one who has failed to do so, his very mind will be the greatest enemy," Dr Swathik would rather use the word 'regulate' instead of 'conquer' because the latter sounds overambitious and controlling. We are better off facilitating a free flowing traffic of thoughts. Religion and spirituality should enhance our wellbeing and we should do the right thing for its own sake not out of fear of sinning and punishment.

There are conditions not tackled merely by talking with a trained professional. They need treatment with medicine to correct imbalances in brain neurotransmitters. Both disturbing and disturbed sleep patterns can lead to exhaustion and aggravate certain mental disorders.

The doctor's advice to prospective students of psychiatry: Anyone who is curious to study the mind, is up for challenges, and is patient and empathetic, is welcome here. As for the mental pressure of practice, they are trained to handle it and need have no fears. A cardiologist is not any more susceptible to heart failure than a psychiatrist is to losing his mind.

Dr Swathik's parting advice: I may be learned, intelligent but if something happens to my mind, I do not know everything about it just because it is 'mine'. Taking help is not a sign of weakness. Though the mind is a part of me, it doesn't define me, its failings don't make me a failure.

Dr Lakshmi Vijayakumar, who founded the Chennai-based Sneha in 1986, writes extreme selflessness can lead to burnout, loss of identity, or even resentment; excessive selfishness can result in isolation, strained relationships, and reduced social support. Balance is achieved when a person is able to care for his/her own physical, emotional, and psychological needs without neglecting his/her responsibility and compassion towards others. She says that belief in religion and spirituality has a positive influence on mental health.

Sneha offers unconditional and confidential support to anyone feeling distressed, depressed or suicidal. Its volunteers are available on all days on the helpline 044-24640050/60 between 10 am and 10 pm.

You can visit their centre in RA Puram any day between 10 am and 6 pm if you feel like sharing in person. The address is on www.snehaindia.org. You can also chat with Sneha through their website on any day between 7 pm and 1 am or

email (help@snehaindia.org). All their services are free.

Dr. Shreevidya, a practising physician for 22 years in Chennai and now the Medical Director of Preventive Health Care at Apollo Hospitals says "Mental and physical health are closely linked. Medical screening in asymptomatic people revealed more than 50 per cent have underlying mental health problems. In women, hormonal issues can be a pointer. Maintaining work-life balance and seeking professional help promotes good mental health."

Girija* (50) of Nungambakam is an artist and art educator. Vivacious, she is married to a loving man and they have two daughters. She grew up in Kolathur with a father who was treated for schizophrenia. His delusions and the 'voices' he heard affected his social inter-

● by
Krishna Prasad

actions. Girija remembers him as an avid reader with a curiosity to know people but because of his illness, had to absent himself from his government job for long periods and finally take early retirement. While he was treated by government doctors, the family had to seek help from private doctors too, paying fees that were high for their means. Her mother bravely faced the challenges of parenting. Two aunts, a teacher, some friends and her all-consuming-interest in art saw Girija through difficult times. Later, five of Girija's marriage alliances fell through because of her father's illness. He went missing on the day before her wedding but returned on the wedding night. All the stress told on Girija's mother's mental health too. Today, Girija observes that parents expect immediate results from their children and are sometimes ignorant of their learning disabilities.

Dr TR Gopalan, surgeon and former Dean, Sri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Thirupurur, says mental illness is entirely treatable like diabetes and blood pressure. Treatment should be tailor-made to each person, as each responds to stress differently. Having medicines on time and visiting the psychiatrist regularly is a must. Caregivers should listen to patients. Being secretive does not help. Patients may have low self-esteem and labelling traumatises them.

Abdul*, a welding shop owner in Amaindakarai took to the bottle, grieved that his daughter on whom he had showered all his affection, wanted to marry out of their religion. But he won over his distress quickly when his family counselled him and he turned his mind to prayer. Work, worship and the desire for the wellbeing of his family keeps him going despite two major setbacks to his health.

The Schizophrenia Research Foundation (scarfindia.org) was founded in Madras in 1984 by Dr M Sarada Menon, Dr R Tara and their associates. According to R Mangala, its joint director, early symptoms of schizophrenia can be sleep disturbances, decline in academics/work performance, irritability, crying spells and neglecting self-care. Later, delusions and hallucinations can appear with significant deterioration in functioning and interpersonal relationships.

While overcrowding and pollution make people in cities vulnerable to mental illness, access to mental health services, better awareness and opportunities to explore new activities, hobbies and socialising keep them sane. SCARF has an outpatient department, a 40-bed hospital, a daycare and rehab centre in Anna Nagar. There is a 40-bed residential facility for men in Mahabalipuram and a 20-bed acute care facility for dementia in Tambaram.

"There's still suspicion and stigma about schizophrenia and mental illness in general," says Ganesh N Rajan. "Most employers and the public lack awareness. I could not 'come out' in Chennai and declare I was afflicted, despite being in remission, until after retirement. Mental illness has nothing to do with mental ability. Every act of self-control builds self-confidence. So pause when you sense negativity, inside and out. To care-givers, I say, 'Take care of yourself first. Draw boundaries. Take some time on your own every day and insist that this is a non-negotiable with the person with mental illness'." To the community, he says "Look at the ripples of awareness you can cause in whatever capacity, you never know how it may help someone somewhere."

Dr Bhargav Srivelu, consultant psychiatrist at Veera's Hospital, Mandaveli, and Apollo Greaves Road, says, "City folk are more vulnerable to mental illness. Stigma towards mental illness is more among the educated, especially when it comes to accepting diagnosis

and medication." Young people who come to him with psychological issues are at first told by parents to 'sort it out' by will power, spiritual activities or listening to motivational talks. The way forward is to be open about mental illness.

Sheela* of Anna Nagar has been married for 35 years. She said yes to marriage with Prasad*, impressed that he was open about his mental struggles. Sheela imagined that a bit of TLC would make him better. But Prasad's mood swings and rages — triggered by his anxious mother — were making him miserable. He was unable to stick to a job — there were many — after the first flush of interest.

Sheela tried to balance the constraints with her own earnings. All this stressed out the family. The upbringing of their only daughter too became a huge challenge to Prasad. After 19 years of erratic psychiatric treatment, he was diagnosed as bipolar. With regular medication and therapy Prasad's condition improved as did the family's quality of life. Sheela now realises that she mistook Prasad's sadness, happiness and other such emotions — even when they were out of range — as normal while actually there were underlying issues.

For more than 30 years, S Vidyakar (myhelpinghands.org) and Vandana and Vaishnavi (thebanyan.org) have been serving the cause of abandoned mentally ill persons in the city, and their work must be acknowledged here.

Swapna Nair, a former teacher in DAV, Gopalapuram, and a counsellor for 15 years, says, "I believe that feeling heard can shift a person from hopelessness to possibility. I have seen how stress is not merely an external force, but a deeply personal response. And Chennai being Chennai, the pressures can easily feel magnified. Mindful breathing, exercise, and creative hobbies can regulate our emotional responses. Therapy isn't about weakness, it is insight and giving yourself the right support at the right time. To my fellow teachers, I say focus on knowing your student rather than merely imparting knowledge."

And so, just as the tide returns each day to Chennai's shores, resilience can return to every life — when we learn not to fight the waves, but to ride them with purpose and grace.

* Names changed.

TN's Esports Revolution: How ESAT is Shaping the Future of Competitive Gaming

There has been a spectacular evolution of 'Esports' in Tamil Nadu with the state speedily becoming one of the competitive gaming centres. The Electronic Sports Association of Tamil Nadu (ESAT), the apex body for Esports in the state, is at the forefront of this movement, committed as it is to the legitimization and promotion of Esports in the region. Under the guidance of its President, Sirish Singaram, ESAT has been able to create in-school curricular space for games, organise better tournaments, and forward demands for state recognition of Esports. With the vision of making Tamil Nadu the "Esports capital of India", ESAT is trying hard to pave the way by providing budding gamers with good infrastructure, training, and opportunities.

In this exclusive interview, Sirish Singaram traces the growth of Esports in Tamil Nadu, the challenges faced, and how it can become a leader in Esports in the future.

What is the primary mission and vision of ESAT?

ESAT was formed in 2023 to legitimise Esports in Tamil Nadu and help establish it as a leader. The main mission of ESAT is to develop and promote Esports in the region and eventually make Tamil Nadu the 'Esports capital of India'. To achieve this, a combination of training, curriculum integration of Esports in schools, organising regular tournaments, and the general development of infrastructural support systems for the whole esports industry is being undertaken.

How has the Esports scene in Tamil Nadu evolved in recent years?

Esports has emerged as one of the fastest growing sports in the state with greater accessibility and larger awareness. With its official recognition as a sport, its inclusion in the Asian Games, and the coming Esports Olympics this year, the Esports scene in Tamil Nadu has never been more alive. With the support of SDAT and the Tamil

Nadu Government, it is bound to develop further and its future is assured.

What are the popular Esports titles played in Tamil Nadu?

The Esports are BGMI, EA FC 25, Pokemon Unite, Valorant, and Free Fire.

● by **Geethanjali Rajakkannu**

What are the biggest challenges faced by Esports players in Tamil Nadu?

The major challenges are the lack of infrastructure and mass acceptance of Esports as a legitimate sport. Many still confuse real-money gaming in cyberspace with Esports which is skill-based competitive sports and not gambling. With Esports still in the evolving stage in India, grassroots-level athletes hardly get any support from corporates for sponsorships, scholarships, or funding. Apart from this lack of funding, another

major issue is the non-availability of proper training and lack of Esports academies, which further inhibits skill development. Most of the players and their families do not know about Esports career opportunities such as professional gaming, coaching, content creation, and game development.

How is the association working towards overcoming these challenges?

ESAT is working to mitigate the obstacles through grassroots programmes, enhancing Esports awareness, and campaigning for other recognitions of the sport. It conducts tournaments regularly, trains competitive players, and is working towards establishing an Esports academy for their support. Besides that, we are trying our best to put in



Sirish Singaram, President, E-Sports Association of Tamil Nadu.

place a competent regulatory framework and policies that would protect players while

(Continued on page 8)

Detention in the Living Room: Growing Up as a Teacher's Child in Chennai

● **Priyanka sent us this article for publishing in time for Teacher's Day (Sep 5) but we were as usual full up with other material. But this article is timely at any time! – The Editor.**

"Of course she got good marks — her mum's a teacher!"

"Careful, don't fight with her — she'll complain to her mother."

"She must have it so easy!"

I grew up hearing these lines in Chennai classrooms, whispered with the same seriousness as cricket score updates. People

seemed convinced that being a teacher's child was like getting a lifetime pass to Marina Beach — unlimited access, no questions asked. Honestly? If that's true, then my pass must have expired before I was born.

Two Roles, One Amma

At home in our Anna Nagar flat, she was Amma. At school, she was "Miss". And heaven forbid if I got confused about which role she was playing. I still remember one afternoon

when I ran home, flung my bag onto the sofa, and yelled, "Teacher! Teacher!" Amma froze, gave me The Look, and for a moment I thought she would make me write 'I will not forget this is home' fifty times before dinner.

Easy Marks? You Must Be Joking

People assumed my report card was hand-written in Amma's neat cursive, with glowing comments like "Excellent child". The truth was more

the other teachers were. In our school corridors, it felt like I was carrying an invisible CCTV camera on my forehead. Once, when I giggled at a silly doodle my friend made of a donkey wearing a veshti, a teacher swooped down and scolded me: "How can you behave like this, when your mother is here?" Seriously? In Chennai, even the auto drivers at the stand near school had more freedom of expression than I did!

Friendships and the Ceilings of Anna Nagar

The real challenge was in school break-time conversations. Chennai students are experts at rating teachers — like IPL players: "That Maths Sir is like Dhoni, strict but cool. But that Chemistry Miss — ayyo, don't even ask." When such conversations started, I would suddenly find the school ceiling tiles deeply fascinating. Join in the gossip, and I risked being branded a traitor. Stay silent, and I became "boring"! Either way, I was stuck, like trying to choose between hot idli and soggy pongal at 7 am.

Parent-Teacher Meeting? Daily Episode

Other students dreaded Parent-Teacher Meetings. Me?

I had them every day. Over breakfast: "Why didn't you submit homework?" At lunch: "Why were you talking in class?" Even during a power cut in the Chennai summer, with the whole family fanning themselves in the hall, she would find a way to say, "And tomorrow, keep your shoes polished." No escape. My life was essentially a live serial — Big Boss: Teacher's Child Edition — but without Kamal Haasan to rescue me.

Looking Back with Laughter

Chennai traffic has taught us patience, and being a teacher's child taught me discipline — with double servings. It wasn't easy, but it gave me resilience, the ability to laugh at myself, and a sharp sense of irony.

So, do teachers' children have it easy? No chance. We don't get away with anything. We study hard, follow every rule, and do all this while everyone else assumes we are secretly sipping filter coffee during exams.

And yes, sometimes even now, I slip and call her "Teacher" instead of "Amma". She laughs these days. But somewhere in the corner of my mind, I still wonder if she's going to write a remark in red ink.

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— THE EDITOR

● by **Priyanka Soman**

like: "Careless mistakes. Needs to focus." Amma was so determined not to favour me that she became stricter with me than anyone else. My friends, who saw her scolding me in class, would whisper, "Machan, poor thing, da. Your life must be tough." Their sympathy was so genuine, I sometimes expected them to sneak me a samosa from the school canteen.

The Extra Pair of Spectacles

If Amma wasn't watching,

How ESAT is Shaping the Future of Competitive Gaming

(Continued from page 7)

ensuring professional pathways and simultaneously attract investments into Tamil Nadu so that it becomes the Esports hub in India.

How does ESAT support aspiring athletes?

One of the major initiatives of ESAT is taking Esports to the grassroots and school settings. We work intensively in rural schools to educate and empower children about Esports. ESAT has successfully incorporated Esports into rural schools as an after-school programme, and we are continuously working on its expansion to include more schools. This initiative not only lends

credibility to Esports but allows parents to learn about its benefits. The youth are made aware of career options within the Esports industry, other than playing. The training includes teaching fundamental Esports skills. The students have really taken to the programme, and many have already participated in the tournaments that we host.

Are there any plans to build an official Esports arena and training centres in Tamil Nadu?

Yes, we would like to establish Dedicated Esports High-Performance Centres (ESPCs equipped with high-end gaming PCs, consoles, and peripherals) across the state providing access to high-



School Esports Outreach program: Students from Kanadukathan Muthiah Subbiah Chettiar Girls School (KMSC).

quality gaming equipment and top-tier trainers. These Performance Centres will act as centres of excellence for Esports training and help nurture local talent.

What are the major Esports tournaments organised by ESAT?

The Chief Minister's Trophy 2024, the official state games of Tamil Nadu, was organized by ESAT in collaboration with the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT). Off-line events are held at least once every month, where games of various categories – wrestling, fighting, and FPS – come into the spotlight. Besides, monthly online BGMI Showdowns have become a staple for the gaming communities, and, together with local developers, we showcase the games they have made. This project nurtures the growth of home-grown games, developed in India, for a global audience.

What are ESAT's future plans for the growth of Esports in Tamil Nadu?

ESAT is geared towards creating an Esports infrastructure through the state with comprehensive training centres, gaming hubs, and Esports arenas to train aspiring players. We want Esports to be a part of the school-curriculum allowing

students to learn and participate right from the beginning. We intend to use schools and colleges as an awareness-raising and participation-increasing medium for Esports. In addition, large-scale tournaments will continue to be held, both online and offline, for local players to get the much-needed exposure and experience. Partnership building with global Esports bodies for national and international contests in Tamil Nadu remains our main focus to get this state on the map in the Esports ecosystem.

In the next five years, I see Tamil Nadu emerging as the leader of Esports in India. I envisage our players participating in major tournaments worldwide, representing our state and our country with pride, with the help of the State government.

What is your advice to young aspiring gamers wanting to enter the competitive Esports industry?

Commitment, discipline,

and lifelong learning are the key ingredients for young aspiring gamers. They must approach it with dedication, concentrate on continuous practice, and improve their skills. Networking is very important to get involved in local tournaments, to connect with other gamers, and to join Esports communities. Don't focus only on gameplay; try to learn about its related facets too like game strategy, content creation, streaming, and even coaching. There are many career paths in Esports. Stay positive, stay disciplined, and above all, keep moving, even if obstacles come in your way! ESAT will help you grow in Esports and in your journey on board.

Our aim is to build a stronger ecosystem for the game. Initiatives focusing on strategy, grassroots programmes, and infrastructure are all in place for the next generation of Esports players. Supported by the state government and other stakeholders, Tamil Nadu is well on its way to becoming a national and global leader in Esports. With plenty of support and opportunities, players from Tamil Nadu may rewrite the rules of the game on the global stage, showing that professional gaming is not a simple pastime but a lucrative and promising career option.

Sources involved:

Interview with Sirish Singaram, the President of the Electronic Sports Association of Tamil Nadu.



Pictures from the CM Trophy 2024, Event by: Sport Development Authority of Tamil Nadu. All images sourced from: E-Sports Association of Tamil Nadu.

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