

**WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI**

# MADRAS

## MUSINGS

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## The Never-Ending Saga of TN's Heritage Commission

We were writing on this subject in 1992 and we are still doing it in 2026. The story of Tamil Nadu's Heritage Commission seems never-ending. The Government, which has of late been doing a commendable job when it comes to preserving heritage buildings under its purview, has however not bothered to bring in larger systems and procedures into place. That is the responsibility of a heritage commission and unless that is in place, a heritage act will remain just on paper. Conservation and preservation will remain subject to the whims and fancies of the party in power.

The High Court of Madras on January 29 questioned the Tamil Nadu Government as to why it had not yet constituted a heritage commission that could look into the conservation and

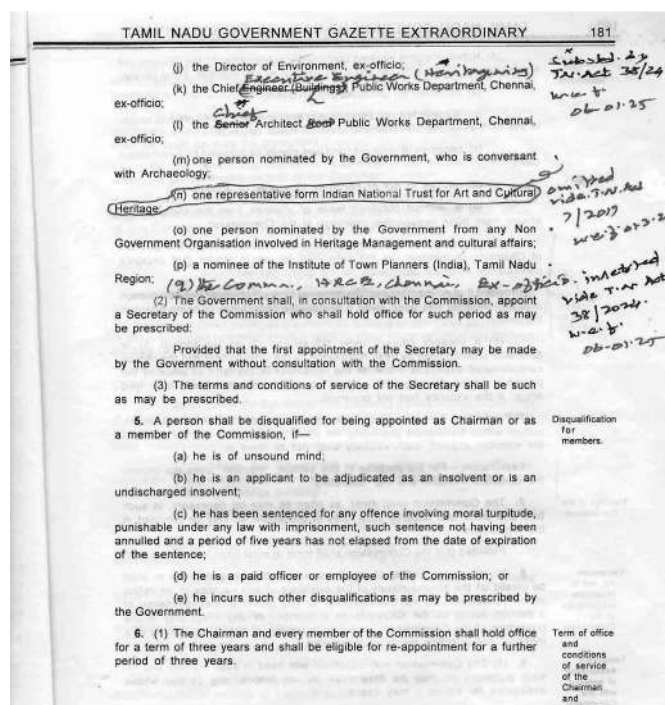
preservation of ancient structures not covered under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958 (GOI) and its State equivalent dating to 1966. This is not the first time that the High Court has questioned the Government over its tardiness

● by **Sriram V.**

in the matter. In February 2024 the High Court was shocked to know such a Commission was not yet constituted. Then in October 2025 it ordered the State Government to constitute such a panel in four weeks flat. Obviously, the State Government follows a calendar that is different from ours. Or as Florence Nightingale famously

observed, "at once in Madras is measured in periods of Indian cosmogony".

The State Government in response offered what can only be described as dilatory tactics. It said it had advertised for applications from eminent persons to fill in the post of Chairman and had thus far not received any suitable responses. When pressed it came to light that the said advertisement was released on the State Archaeology Department's website. The Court had difficulty in accessing the site and then directed the State to release advertisements to the same effect in dailies, which presumably has been done. Incidentally, *Madras Musings* did access the site and found the announcement asking for applications. What was interesting was that the supporting document, which is the gazette



A Screenshot of the State Archaeology Department Website.

(Continued on page 2)

## SOP for public gatherings – A need to follow in full spirit

In a country like ours, where mass gatherings of various kinds are an integral part of life, we keep hearing of stampedes invariably leading to casualties, every now and then. Last year saw two such events which made national headlines and shook the nation, one a sports victory parade gone sour in Bengaluru and the other, a stampede at a political road show in Karur. The year before, our city witnessed huge crowds at an IAF show on the Marina, which led to five deaths and more than hundred hospitalisations due to heat related issues and chaos arising from crowd

management. The aftermath of the incidents brought about with them the inevitable inquests and ongoing probes, also

● by **Karthik Bhatt**

highlighting a sore point, that no lessons seemed to have been learnt from past tragedies.

Following the Karur stampede, the Madras High Court ordered the State Government to come out with a SOP for the regulation and management of public gatherings in Tamil

Nadu. After consultations with various stakeholders, including political parties, these were formulated and issued by the government on Jan 5, 2026. The SOP, which applies to all meetings, road shows, protests and all other forms of public gatherings, where the anticipated number of participants exceeds 5000, seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for planning, regulating, monitoring and conducting public gatherings in the state, with exclusions to religious gatherings organized in places of worship as customary events or where

the venue/route is already fixed by precedents. The applicability shall also be limited during the period the Model Code of Conduct is in force, as the norms/guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India would prevail.

According to the SOP, the primary responsibility for the event related safety and convenience of all the participants attending lies with the organizer. The government's role is to ensure protection to the organisers and aid in smooth conduct of the event, while ensuring that the public is not put to inconvenience, and traffic and

public order are not disturbed in the conduct of the event. Without going into the specifics of the SOP, it must be said that it seems to be a fairly comprehensive one, covering every aspect of a public gathering, right from the permission stage, to facilitating a post-event analysis for continuous improvement in crowd management.

What is interesting to note is the emphasis placed on ensuring adequate facilities for people attending the event. It quantifies the provisioning of water and toilet facilities by way

(Continued on page 2)

# The Never-Ending Saga of TN's Heritage Commission

(Continued from page 1)

notification of the Heritage Act and the constitution of the panel, has numerous handwritten corrections on it, which we reproduce alongside. This is hardly the way an advertisement on a Government website ought to be released.

Be that as it may, it is worth noting here that between 1992 and 2010, S Muthiah was more or less a lone voice writing repeatedly about the necessity for passing a Heritage Act and a Heritage Commission to be set up in the State. The first judgement in this matter came in 2010 when Justice Prabha Sridevan recommended the adopting of the Justice Padmanabhan Committee report on heritage buildings. A lame duck commission was constituted and then when it did not cover itself with glory came the Heritage Act of 2012. It put the cart before the horse for the

commission predated the act and so could do nothing. That meant a fresh commission had to be in place which it has taken the State Government all of 13 years to constitute.

Rather miraculously, the fate of public buildings improved dramatically in the interim. These were of course the big and news-worthy ones. Several others, big and small have vanished and as for private buildings, they have all gone – most owners preferred to demolish and sell before a Heritage Commission prevented them from doing so. What was left in a limbo was the repairs and restoration of temples. And that is where the present attention of the Court has come in. It remains to be seen what happens next. The latest advertisement calls for applications before 5.00 pm on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026 and further action will result only after due scrutiny of the applications received.

# SOP for public gatherings – A need to follow in full spirit

(Continued from page 1)

of benchmarks. It also mandates that vulnerable sections such as senior-citizens, pregnant women, children and differently-abled people are safeguarded and that separate enclosures are provided for them. Yet another provision is that audience shall not be made to assemble more than two hours in advance, which is extremely essential given the tendency to “gather crowds” in a display of organizational strength and keep them waiting under intense heat for long hours. Adequate volunteers, properly identified, are to be present to ensure smooth conduct of the gatherings. The draft SOP which had been laid out in November 2025 proposed collection of a refundable security deposit ranging from Rs 1 Lakh to Rs 20 Lakhs from the organisers, which was omitted in the final version issued based on the feedback received from political parties.

The response to the SOP across the political spectrum has expectedly been mixed. Two of its provisions have been challenged on the ground that they are discriminatory in nature and that there is too much of burden placed on the organisers. While the matter lies sub-judice on these grounds, it is imperative to understand that these SOPs have been designed to bring about a sense of standardisation in terms of how public gatherings ought to be managed. While its effectiveness may lie in how truly it is followed in spirit, there can be no denying the fact that this was very much a necessary documentation. There can be no compromise on public safety at any cost, and it is essential that the organizers too understand this and extend their cooperation. We just cannot afford to repeat the “tragedy – umbrage – move on with it till the next one” cycle anymore.

# Mongoose Musings

The mongoose was found sitting petrified in the car park of chez *The Man from Madras Musings*. A car was covering it from closer inspection. Hearing some commotion, MMM decided to come down from the lofty thoughts of MM and focus on the mundane. Many voices offered to help and after sifting through the evidence MMM got to know the following –

The mongoose had been seen going around the garden and even then appeared to be in some pain.

It had crawled under the car and after that had ceased to move though it was alive as could be seen from its frightened eyes.

If a mongoose was wandering around it meant a snake, or snakes, were not far away.

The question was, what was to be done with the mongoose.

There was a growing body of opinion (driver, cook, maid, watchman, neighbour's, drivers, cooks, maids, watchmen, etc.) that the animal ought

one. MMM asked as to how many mongoose bites had the man seen and to this there was sullen silence. He then went on to explain that unlike us humans, mongooses do not recognise compound walls as boundaries and will wander around at will. So we would not be put to any trouble. The driver, whose ambition it has been to cut the sole tree in MMM's garden as birds roost on it and commit nuisance on the car, then piped up. In that case he said, the entire neighbourhood would be at risk. To this MMM countered that that risk could not be more than dangers caused by bad driving.

The mongoose solved all matters anyway by dying the next day despite the best treatment. It had died due to internal causes. And so peace returned though much of the resident population would like to see all the animals exterminated.

MMM wonders as to what would happen if the animals got the same idea. The problem is loss of habitat and a cursed

creative than others. The ones near historic buildings have the facades replicated on them. And so, in terms of creativity, full marks to GCC.

But when it comes to sheer suitability of such things, MMM has colossal doubts. The first of these concerns posters. The shutters have the standard warnings addressed to defacers of the surface but no political party seems to have noticed them and this includes the present dispensation at the State and city level. You would have thought at least they would have desisted from such defacement.

Next, how correct is it for the GCC, which should be championing footpaths, to appropriate large chunks of these and cordon them off? Agreed that the transformers were themselves occupying the same space, but with smaller designs now in vogue these could have been lifted on to platforms thereby allowing free access to the space below. But now, with these shutters in place, those

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

to be done to death, though why, MMM could not fathom. Someone said it would act as a deterrent to other animals. The answering chorus reinforced this, and a broad consensus was reached, unlike in the Houses of Parliament, that this was a locality where there were too many animals anyway – squirrels, parakeets, bats, frogs, toads, cats, dogs, crows, eagles, and now mongoose and possibly snakes. MMM's maid led the chorus stating that living with such animals was an impossibility. Considering that she is a true representative of the cow belt, MMM was reasonably sure that back home her family led a life similar to the late Old MacDonald but here in Madras that is Chennai she had put on airs.

MMM declared that the matter was best handed over to Blue Cross. There was a stunned silence and thereafter some muffled grumbling about misplaced kindness, etc. but MMM had his way. The volunteers of that body arrived and took away the mongoose. They later called to say it seemed to be in some shock but was stable. When it recovered they wanted to know if it could be brought back to chez MMM. To this MMM agreed at once.

When this news broke there were protests galore. Having a mongoose resident in the garden would be a hazard as it could bite people said some-

view that all specimens of animal life other than humans are a nuisance we can do without.

## Electric Art in Chennai

To *The Man from Madras Musings* it will always remain EB though it has changed avatars, always leaving behind colossal losses. It called itself TANGEDCO for a while, no doubt to fool creditors of the EB and then now it has split into two – TNPGL and TNEGCL – whatever they may be. But to MMM they will all be EB only. Anyway, that is not what MMM is writing about this time. His attention has been drawn to the rather handsome set of metal grilles that now enclose the electric transformers at various localities.

MMM was not sure who, TNPGL or TNEGCL, was behind this rather creative idea. He thought it was Mutt (TNPGL) and not Jeff (TNEGCL) for the latter is all about green energy and is scarcely likely to focus on brick-and-mortar stuff. It transpires that it is good old GCC that is responsible for this. No doubt all of this comes under the smart city initiative which is all about optics. Anyway, these shutters have been put up all over the city and enclose transformers. They are in very pleasing pastel colours and have intricate designs cut in them. Some are a shade more

who (or at least attempt to) walk on footpaths (where they exist) have to necessarily get off and jostle with the traffic. MMM has not experienced it but there are many who have complained that the metal sheets have small protrusions that tear clothes or scratch the skin as people walk by.

Lastly, if the Corporation thought it had solved the problem of littering around electrical installations, it is much mistaken. People have taken to placing their garbage all around these. And the spots that are free have become convenient urinals anyway. We the people get the administration we deserve.

## Tailpiece



Moving on to light-hearted matters, *The Man from Madras Musings* is happy to share this photo with you. Dumping garbage in public spaces is dumb anyway.

– MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Apothecaries and Dressers

Your article on the qualification and duties of Apothecaries and Dressers was interesting.

Jean Menezes  
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### Stray dogs and tourism

A business associate of mine from a West European country visited Chennai recently with his wife and two children on a holiday trip. I had the opportunity to explain the various features of Chennai city, particularly highlighting its glorious history. I also handed over to him a few copies of *Madras Musings*, which I preserve, while explaining to him as to how the heritage features of Chennai city are being highlighted by a dedicated journal. Finally, I told him that Elliots beach is the pride of Chennai city.

Then, I took him to Elliots beach and he was highly impressed, particularly by the large beach sand area. He said he has never seen so much of sand area in the various beaches that he has visited around the world.

I also took him along the well designed and executed track specifically built on the beach sand for the benefit of the differently abled persons, who cannot walk on the sand. While walking on this track, he could not see any disabled persons but only normal men and women of different age groups and pointed out this to me. I explained to him that differently-abled persons are only a fraction of the population and nevertheless we care for them by building this special track. So far, so good.

Then we walked on the platform with a smooth bench reasonably well-designed to enable, particularly, the senior citizens to sit and enjoy the sea breeze. As we walked on the platform there were a number of slabs missing or broken and we saw several hawkers partly blocking the platform by exhibiting their assorted items and eatables for sale. He saw them but did not comment.

As we walked along further, we saw a number of dogs, either sitting, sleeping or walking on the platform, very near the persons sitting on the bench. Suddenly, a dog came very near us and the little girl walking with her father (my overseas associate), got frightened and screamed. My friend immediately lifted the child and pacified her.

Then, he started noticing the number of dogs and asked me whether they are pet dogs brought by their owners to enable them to walk freely and enjoy the sea breeze.

I explained to him that these dogs have no owners and they are "independent animals" and are stray dogs. Then, he said that they all seem to be well-fed and wanted to know who cares for them. When I explained to him about the stray dogs and how they are being fed by dog-lovers and that they also survive by eating the thrown away food from the number of eateries on the beach sand, he was surprised. When I told him there have been occasional instances of these dogs biting the passers by, in the city, he was shocked and looked anxiously at his wife and two children, as we were walking with the dogs criss-crossing. His equally alarmed wife observed that the free moving dogs may pose hygiene and public health issues and wondered as to what could be the problem in moving them away from the public places. I remained silent.

Then, he made a sharp remark that such a beautiful beach is spoiled by the roaming stray dogs and this could be a deterrent to tourists from abroad who are not used to such a number of stray dogs on the streets anywhere in the world.

His observation made me think that while the Supreme Court, which is concerned about the stray dogs menace and has said so much about the various problems caused by the stray dogs, does not seem to have pointed out the adverse impact on the tourism industry due to the stray dogs, which are now seen in lakhs and spread all over the country including in the tourist spots.

# Chennai, the city that Kamala Loved

It was Bharatanatyam's good fortune that Baby Kamala and her family had to move from Mumbai to Mayavaram (present day Mayiladuturai) because of World War II. That was a time when almost all south Indians moved out from that city. She was initiated into the ancient art form by Guru Kattumannarkoil Muthukumarasamy Pillai and then continued

and A.V. Meiyappa Chettiar chose to mesmerise Tamil audiences with her graceful moves and expressive face. She acted in around 100 films in Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Kannada. Her roles in films like *Konjum Salangai* and *Naam Iruvar* are still remembered by audiences.

Entering the film world gave her joy, "It is because of my fame in cinema that

● by  
H. Ramakrishnan

learning under Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai.

Her mother loved dance and so little Kamala was taught Kathak and Bharatanatyam. She also learnt Hindustani and Carnatic music. Baby Kamala and then 'Kumari' Kamala, who passed away recently at the age of 91 in California, was a child prodigy of the 1940s, who reigned supreme for over three decades in the dance world, making a mark in cinema as well. She was just seven when her bharatanatyam arangetram was held at Mayavaram.

Ranjith Movie Tone's Chandulal Sharma introduced her to Hindi cinema

I got more opportunities to perform. Dance was everything to me. When I was not dancing, I would be at shootings or watch films. My evenings were however spent at the beach, relaxing after a hectic schedule," she told this author in an interview in 1998.

Kamala Laxman and then Kamala Lakshminarayana, as she was known later in life, loved to watch other dancers perform. She used to say she would pick the good aspects from the performances.

Once in 2004, at a concert by vocalist Nithyasree Mahadevan at Sri Bhairavi Gana Sabha, Kamala arrived and enjoyed the



Kumari' Kamala. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

performance. She said she wanted to listen to Nithyasree's kutcheri for some time as the songs of her grandmother D.K. Pattammal had provided an outlet for her in films.

Kamala left India for the USA in 1980 where she started a dance school named Sri Bharatha Kamalalaya in Long Island, New York where she trained students in the Vazhuvoor style of dance. A recipient of the Kalaimamani award from the government of Tamil Nadu,

she was also presented with the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the Padma Bhushan for her contribution to the arts. The first E. Krishna Iyer Medal was presented to Kamala by the Sruti Foundation in 1989 in Chennai. It was a memorable occasion for her to receive the award and perform in the presence of her veteran guru, Ramaiah Pillai on the occasion, as she recalled later. Her death leaves a void in the world of classical dance.

## Website Comments

### MB Srinivasan – A Centenary Tribute

(Vol. XXXV No. 13, October 16-31, 2025)

It is heartening to read the heroic life history of the Father of Indian Choir music, the late MBS. This article pays a fitting tribute to the selfless musician. His life was of a two dimensional one, the first being a musician and the other – a well-principled trade unionist. He never compromised on his well-set principles throughout his

The Government of India and state governments consider tourism as priority area for focus, and special measures have been taken to boost tourism, particularly from abroad. I am afraid that all the good work done to promote tourism could be wiped out in one stroke by the lakhs of stray dogs loitering around in public places all over India.

N.S.Venkataraman  
Trustee

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life. It is not a simple thing that thousands of families of cinema workers in South India as well as across the country are leading a decent life with guaranteed financial support which would otherwise not have been possible without MBS. He was strong enough to declare that he would manage his private life with the meagre income that he may earn from jingles.

My heartiest congratulations for bringing out this article. My humble thanks for mentioning the book written by me.

Iqbal Ahamed  
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### Higginbothams of Madras Central

(Vol. XXXV No. 20, February 1-15, 2026)

Wow, Mr. Jeganathan — you've beautifully brought back memories of those good old bookstore days while highlighting the decline in reading habits. We're all running fast because the world around us is running too, but sadly, without much direction. A truly thoughtful article!

Ravishankar R  
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# Madras Dyslexic Association

## *A journey to empower dyslexics to go from “can I?” to “I can!”*

Madras Dyslexia Association is a not-for-profit organisation which has been empowering children with specific learning disabilities since 1991. Founded by D. Chandrasekhar, along with specialists and a group of parents of children with dyslexia, MDA has transformed the lives of thousands of children with this condition.

The organisation was set up at a time when there was no awareness about this condition, no empathy for individuals afflicted with it, and no remedial support to help them cope with these difficulties. Tireless and proactive efforts across the past 34 years have enabled a structured dyslexia-sensitive learning-environment empowering children with dyslexia.

### Understanding specific learning disability

Specific learning disability (SLD) includes a number of learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia. It is a neurological condition that affects one or more processes related to learning, impacting basic learning skills i.e. reading, spelling, writing and/or maths. These difficulties could impact the individual's emotional wellness. SLD can also interfere with higher level skills such as organisation, time planning, abstract reasoning, long term memory, active working memory, short-term memory and attention.

Generally speaking, people with specific learning disabilities are of average or above average intelligence. There often appears to be a gap between the individual's potential and actual achievement. This is why specific learning disabilities are referred to as “hidden disabilities”: there are no physical manifestations, and the individual may be unable to demonstrate the skill level expected from someone of a similar age. Hence, children (nearly 10-15 per cent of school-going children) with SLD are often misunderstood and accused of not listening, being lazy or clumsy, resulting in low self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

Since difficulties with reading, writing and/or maths are recognizable problems during the school years, the signs and symp-

toms of learning disabilities are most often diagnosed during that time. However, some individuals do not receive an evaluation until they are in post-secondary education or when adults in the workforce. Other individuals with specific learning disabilities may never receive an evaluation and go through life, never knowing why they had difficulties with academics and why they may be having problems in their jobs or in relationships with family and friends.

SLD cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong challenge. However, with appropriate support and intervention, people with SLD can achieve success in school, at work, in relationships, and in the community.

### The MDA's mission is to

- Identify and support children with dyslexia through assessment and remediation.
- Empower teachers and parents through training.
- Create awareness across schools and communities.

● by Mala Raju

MDA is equipped to handhold an individual with dyslexia through different stages of life – from pre-primary to adulthood. It provides a gamut of services from spreading awareness to assessment to remedial support to enabling teaching fraternity through training and development of teaching aids.

MDA identifies at-risk children, builds up skills and empowers them with coping strategies, through their educational phase. In addition to these full-time and after-school remedial centres, it works closely with the schools to sensitize and train the teachers, and set up and help run resource rooms within the school in order to provide support at the front end within the school environment. Special educators in resource rooms, are developed through MDA's flagship “Intensive Teacher Training programme”. All the training programmes are based on MDA's

deep understanding stemming from the practical experience of remediating children in its full-time Ananya Learning and Research Centre and after-school remedial centres.

Bangalore, Bhuvaneshwar and in Raipur. The next one is coming up at Gangtok.

MDA has also collaborated with the Government of Tamil Nadu to sensitize and train teachers in all the districts of the state to equip them to identify and help children with dyslexia. It has supplied remedial kits to enable these teachers to provide the support.

The services offered by Madras Dyslexia Association are:

- Creating awareness on dyslexia in schools, corporates, parents.
- Conducting training programs for mainstream school teachers. This includes teachers from pre-primary, primary and middle school.
- Intensive Teacher Training programme that trains an individual to become a special educator for children with dyslexia.
- Setting up and monitoring Resource Rooms in mainstream schools.
- Assessing school children for dyslexia.
- Providing full-time and part-time remediation for school children with dyslexia.
- Providing Remedial kits in English and Tamil and workbooks developed by MDA for teaching children with dyslexia.
- Providing math kits and

workbooks developed by MDA for teaching children struggling to learn math.

- Providing MDA Avaz Reader app to help children with dyslexia.
- Publishing newsletters to disseminate information on dyslexia.

These initiatives have enabled MDA to reach out to as many children as possible notwithstanding the physical barriers of classroom size and distances.

While some of these activities are paid for by the recipients, a large proportion of them are supported by CSR initiatives of corporates, and by donations from individuals.

### Next steps

Leveraging the deep penetration of internet and device accessibility, MDA is closely working with IIT Madras on the development of an app powered by AI to screen children for dyslexia, empower their caregivers to initiate training to them on use of coping strategies and reinforce the learning with activities and games. This project is supported by Cap Gemini. This is the next step to reach out to children who are unable to access the facilities of a resource room, learning center or a special educator; not limited by constraints of distance and time.



A picture of the recently developed maths kit called Count on Me.

# An abode in nature's lap at Perumbakkam

We as a family relocated to Madras that is now Chennai in May 2025 from Delhi NCR, driven by a desire to explore an entirely new culture and to breathe cleaner air. Since I love nature and peaceful surroundings, we decided to stay away from the congested core of the city. We found just the right place on the banks of the Perumbakkam lake, a home in a leafy locality, directly overlooking the giant water body.

The Perumbakkam lake is spread over about 200 acres and is a vital source of water to residents and farmers nearby. However, rapid and unchecked urbanisation is encroaching

upon the lake and there is also proliferation of water hyacinth threatening it.

When I was researching about this area's history, I came across a lesser-known piece of information. The Great Trigonometrical Survey (GTS) of India was started by Lt Col William Lambton, an English surveyor and geographer, on 10 April 1802 with the measurement of a baseline near Madras. Lambton selected the flat plains between St Thomas Mount at the north end and Perumbakkam Hill (next to the lake) at the southern end. This survey was conducted to create scientifically precise maps of the Indian subcontinent and

establish accurate geographical coordinates.

Our Chennai home is an ideal choice as we enjoy the lake caressed by gusts of wind all day long. It is framed nicely by swaying palm trees along its bank. What is interesting and magical is that the lake changes hues depending on the time of the day. The most gorgeous time is the sunset. The setting sun reflects in the placid waters with a shimmering golden touch as if a divine painter is going about his job. It is so lovely to see the colours of the sky turn into molten gold, pinkish blue, orange with a dash of grey and then progressively everything turning dark. My little daughter and I watch this bewitching sight together as

we marvel at it endlessly from our home's ample terrace.

It is evening time when we thoroughly enjoy looking at birds gliding over us while returning to their nests. As soon as it is about six in the evening, we see a flock of Ibises forming a V and effortlessly gliding overhead back to their homes. I just love their distinctive curved bills. Often, we catch a bunch of Common Swifts with their unique bow like wings, frolicking and darting about with quick changes in direction. Since we have trees all around our home there are enough Bee-Eater birds which perch themselves at a high vantage point and then swoop down quickly to catch an unsuspecting dragon fly or any of the myriad variety of insects that are available on a buffet here. It is amazing to see how

it is over in a blink of an eye. We have also seen white-throated Kingfishers many a time with fish in the beak and Cormorants drying their feathers in the sun with both wings spread out in Shah Rukh Khan's signature pose! In Delhi we never saw such a wide variety of avians.

● by  
Dushyant Singh

After moving to Chennai, I met Poochi Venkat (S Venkataaaman), renowned naturalist and insect photographer, at some event. I found his work intriguing and thereafter for some reason I suddenly became more conscious about noticing insects around my home and locality. So, whenever I am cycling, walking or running inside my colony, I notice these gorgeous creatures. I stop and patiently wait for the right moment to click their photos on my i-phone. I often ask him about their names and other related queries. He told me that due to the presence of the lake nearby, the ecosystem of this area is conducive for the insect population.



Some of the insects found at Perumbakkam.

MDA hopes to inspire many more individuals to understand this condition and join hands with it. Let's together Embrace, Empower and Elevate individuals with dyslexia!

Please contact Kalyani Balakrishnan, 98410 47550 for more details on MDA. Email id: ananyamdachennai@gmail.com



A view of the lake.

# Chennai Loses a Multifaceted Writer

It is very difficult to accept that Geeta Doctor is no more. I can say without hesitation that she was one of the best writers from Chennai, may be the country, who could write on any subject effortlessly. She was one of the icons of the city.

I met her first as a young friend of my father's when I moved back to Chennai from Mumbai. I was then working for *Business India* magazine, the country's first and the leading business fortnightly. Having started my career in Mumbai, publicity-shy Chennai was daunting to put it mildly.

Fortunately for me, Geeta was then associated with the *Inside Outside* magazine which was part of the *Business India* group. She helped me connect with people and gave a lot of ideas on how to deal with them. She truly encouraged me.

She focused on design and architecture. When we used to have *Inside Outside* design exhibitions in Chennai, people were clamouring to be featured,

and Geeta played a major role in choosing the right people. I know very few people who can write as well as Geeta on these subjects. She was also a great art critic as she really understood art and artists. It must have been very difficult for her to move from vibrant and lively Mumbai to what was then seen as conservative Chennai.

She was not a people pleaser. I know some artists who stopped talking to her after some of her reviews. She never compromised.

Fortunately, the Cholamandal Artists Village was coming up then and artists were beginning to move in there. Geeta was closely associated with most of them such as S G Vasudev and his wife Arnawaz and played a major role in promoting Cholamandal.

by Sushila Ravindranath

Geeta was a much admired and feared critic. She was multi-faceted. She reviewed fiction, art and also food. She used to let me tag along to some of the restaurants she went to. They were not casual outings. She used to have detailed discussion with the chefs. I listened, riveted.

She was a writer who didn't mince words and said it as it was. It took Chennai some time to get used to her elegant and blunt writing style which was not accepted by everybody. People used to call up the editors and crib. She always said what she had to say and did not compromise.

Geeta never missed a deadline. She was truly professional. She is going to be greatly missed.



Geeta at the Woodlands Drive-In restaurant on Poonamallee High Road.

## The Emotional Geography of a School Change

Chennai has always been a city that lives comfortably with change.

We've watched our coastline redraw itself during every cyclone.

We've seen new flyovers rise where we once waited at level crossings.

We've seen old bookshops move, theatres reinvent themselves, and heritage buildings get new lives.

We adapt.

Sometimes reluctantly, sometimes gracefully — but always eventually.

Yet nothing prepared me for the very delicate, very emotional transition called: "Shifting My Child to Another School."

The decision had been building quietly — like the slow restoration of a heritage structure — practical reasons, logical reasons, long-term reasons... all neatly arranged in my adult mind. Adults love order. We treat life like a well-labelled archive.

But children?

Children live differently.

For them, school is not an

institution—it is an experience.

It is:

- the familiar walkway they've run down a hundred times,
- the teacher who knows their strengths better than they do,
- the friend who has sat with them since LKG,
- the tree under which they had their favourite chat,
- the rituals, routines, and small comforts that make their day predictable

As a teacher, I've watched children deal with transitions in the classroom.

Some embrace newness boldly.

Some move cautiously.

Some revisit their memories again and again, like re-reading a favourite *Amar Chitra Katha*.

Some simply need time — unhurried, patient time.

But when it came to my own son, all my professional insights quietly vanished.

I approached the conversation with the misplaced confidence of a tour guide.

"Krishna... the new school has a huge playground da. The library is wonderful. You'll enjoy it!"

He listened politely — the dignified, diplomatic patience children show when they know you're overselling something.

• by  
Priyanka Soman

Then he asked the one question that stripped away every prepared line:

"But Amma... why are we changing?"

That was it.

The turning point.

I explained — not perfectly, but honestly. Life was changing. We needed something steadier. The move was necessary, though not easy.

My husband, ever the optimist, insisted:

"He'll adjust pa... children are adaptable."

True.

But they also feel deeply.

They carry emotional maps we adults often forget to acknowledge.

Over the next few days, our conversations unfolded everywhere — during walks, while arranging schoolbooks, in the quiet before bedtime, when children become unexpectedly philosophical.

Somewhere during these small moments, a truth became crystal clear:

Shifting schools isn't about transferring admission forms.

It's about shifting a child's emotional geography.

A new classroom can be shown on day one.

But a sense of belonging?

That takes time.

Interestingly, I realised something else — I had become loyal to his current school in ways I hadn't noticed. Teachers in Chennai form strong bonds with educational spaces. Schools here often carry decades of culture, values, stories,

and legacies. Letting go feels like stepping out of a familiar heritage lane into a new and uncertain one.

But I'm learning that transitions don't need drama.

They need truth.

They need preparation.

And they need the same patient calm we practice during every power cut — trusting that eventually, the lights will come back on.

Krishna will settle in.

Slowly, gently, in his own rhythm.

And so will I.

Because parenting in Chennai teaches us resilience in subtle, everyday ways—through monsoon unpredictability, through city restructuring, through the quiet evolution of our neighbourhoods.

And if this journey taught me one thing, it is this:

"Changing a school is easy.

Changing a child's world?

That is the real lesson plan."

# Chennai, the Sinking City

Two new business ventures have been launched recently in the city of Chennai and are expected to flourish by leaps and bounds in the near future.

One provides the engineering feat of raising existing buildings by 3 to 5 feet from their foundations.

The other builds temporary gates to prevent the rain floods from entering houses, buildings and compounds.

The main cause for the rise of such novel ventures is the alarming trend in raising the road levels by the Corporation of Chennai. Since the year 2000, road levels have been raised from 2 to 3 feet in all the areas. Now the roads have been raised like high bunds and all the rain falling on them runs immediately into the buildings and compounds on either side, which have been sunk below road levels.

Prior to the year 2000, road laying was labour intensive and time consuming for even

a stretch of 100 ft length and 20 feet width. Jelly or crushed granite of 40 mm had to be manually spread and tar poured over it. And the road was levelled by a road roller run slowly back and forth over the surface. Once the road laying machines were introduced, a single machine mixed tar with jelly the size of sweetcorn, spread it, levelled and compacted the surface within a matter of a few hours overnight. Corporation was thrilled with this instant road laying and went on a spree. Every time the level was raised by six inches and before the public realised what was happening, the rains brought the floods right into their homes. Seethamma Colony and Venus Colony in Alwarpet had to empty out and the people had to seek shelter in hotels and houses of friends and relative.

Wells and rainwater harvesting are grossly inadequate to handle the volume of rain that can cause floods in a couple of hours.

A weak and pointless excuse is given by the Corporation that cold milling is mandated to be done before laying the roads. By this instruction the road surface is merely scratched for less than one inch and a six inches thick road material is slapped on it.

While the road laying activity is a very lucrative one with a heavy outlay of funds, there was more bonanza to follow. This was the construction of Storm Water Drains. The Cor-

poration imagined that all the rainwater can be whisked away through storm water drains. No storm water drain can be large enough to carry all the rain that falls on the roads. To understand the volume, it is to be remembered that Chennai with hardly any soil space around buildings has become one vast concrete block, where all the rain ultimately needs to flow on the roads.

residential areas with twists and turns, flooding all the areas to reach the Buckingham Canal near Mandaveli. That it could take the straight and royal path through Cathedral Road and RK Salai to the same canal near Hamilton alias Barbers alias Dr. Ambedkar Bridge, does not cut ice with the officials concerned.

Building of SWDs is another lucrative activity and the media is perennially full of stories of the irregularities. The prefab

rain that pour in buckets will cause immeasurable and totally avoidable damage to life and property in the next few years unless the Corporation realises the impending man-made disaster and acts on a war footing to undo its blunders.

Undoing the blunder would mean lowering of road levels by one to two feet in most areas. It would mean enormous cost and effort and the work must start right away to be completed before the rains. If such work is classified as repairs no corporator or contractor would be interested in it. Unless there is a budget drawn and funds allocated, nobody would come forth to do it. Instead, they would all discourage such a move by drawing up a list of reasons against such work.

Let there be incentives to take up the work and to complete it in a short time. Nobody would grudge the money or expense if floods could be prevented. Let there be an emergency plan to remove layers of the roads and create a land reclamation from sea erosion with the debris. Let the roads be lowered below the levels of the buildings on either side. It would mean a big budget. So be it. Let it be an incentive to save the city from sinking and flooding.

● by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan

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– THE EDITOR

poration imagined that all the rainwater can be whisked away through storm water drains. No storm water drain can be large enough to carry all the rain that falls on the roads. To understand the volume, it is to be remembered that Chennai with hardly any soil space around buildings has become one vast concrete block, where all the rain ultimately needs to flow on the roads.

Prior to the year 2000 the roads were low and most of the water flowed on them toward the nearest canal by gravity. Residual water flowed through the SWDrains, which were unplanned, unconnected in several places and were already full of sewage flowing all through the year. That of course is another murky story that needs a chapter all by itself.

Storm water drains are built in an unplanned ad hoc manner. For instance, the waters around Stella Maris college area which should be channelled to the Mambalam canal just across the road, are taken on a wild detour through several

Storm Water Drains laid as an emergency measure, have an astronomical cost factor. A hydrologist has submitted a report in Karnataka court that the cost of laying such SWDs for a kilometre is a thumping 18 crores. Before the Pandora's box of Storm Water Drains is opened, the lowering of roads needs to be dealt with.

Chennai is like Anarkali with the walls being raised all around to choke the life out of the city. The rain floods mixed with equal or more volume of sewage enters every house and building after a heavy shower of two hours. Cyclones and heavy



Picture courtesy: The Hindu.



# TN's new Badminton Boy

For a sport which has a great tradition and following since it first started in the then Madras, neither Chennai city, (this sport's headquarters) nor the rest of the state, for that matter, have exactly been on the national map. It's immediate neighbour Kerala produced at least one national (singles) champion in Vimal Kumar – now a national level coach. Another neighbour, Karnataka produced the yesteryear international talent Prakash Padukone – a former All England champion, who since his retirement embarked on the task of producing new talents in the sport at his Academy, until he outsourced it recently. And, from another neighbouring state, united Andhra Pradesh, there emerged another All England champion Gopi Chand, now a major coach and talent spotter for India, and his daughter a Doubles champion at the international level. Somehow, Tamil Nadu, arguably, failed to produce at least one star at the national level.

Since badminton made its entry into the city via the Madras Club in 1876, after the British introduced it in India in the 1860s, and then the Madras Cricket Club (MCC) introduced it in 1906, there emerged a few talented shuttlers in Edwin Srinivasan,

Sheopuri, Barsi, K K Nair, Usha Balan and Asha Rao in singles. Sugunraj and V S Selvaraj made a mark in Doubles. But, perhaps going by the circumstances in the development of the sport here, they could not raise themselves to the next level.

However, the very first week of 2026 January saw the emergence, for the very first time, of Tamil Nadu's national champion in a Chennai lad – Rithwick Sanjeevi.

This promising new talent, in the Indian badminton firmament spoke to *Madras Musings* on the occasion:

"My family background is very normal, but I have very supportive (Tamil) parents who always decide what's best for me", he says.

Talking about his beginnings in badminton he says, "I started playing badminton at the age of seven, and I started training professionally in the sport at the age of 10 or 11".

Although a Chennaiite, Rithwick trains at Hatsun badminton centre which is located in Sivakasi. "My coaches at Hatsun always planned an individual training programme for me so that I could focus more on developing my skills." The chairman of HATSUN has been sponsoring Rithwick for

● by  
**V. Venkataramana**

all the tournaments in which he competes.

About how he happened to take to sports at all before settling down to badminton, he says, "My father used to do some athletics back in his school days and my great grandfather was a professional football player. My elder sister was the first person to take to badminton in the family".

"Badminton was the first sport that I ever tried. I loved it so much that I decided to take it up as my passion," he points out.

Rithwick is confident about his future journey in the sport: "I can see that I have a lot of potential in me, and I can achieve more. I just have to keep working harder," he avers.

Asked about sharpening his own skills to rise higher in the sport in the wake of his current achievement, Rithwick says, "I will be focusing on playing longer rallies without making any errors".

Rithwick has not put a stop to his focus on academics following his success in Badminton. He is currently pursuing a Masters Degree at SRM University in Chennai.



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