

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

Vol. XXXVI No. 8

August 1-15, 2026

INSIDE

- Short N Snappy
- Madras High Court Walk
- Sharan – Towards Mutual Support
- Cricket's Greatest All-rounder – Sir Garfield Sobers

Chennai Heritage-Madras Musings Lecture Series for Madras Week 2026

Sunday Aug 16, 2026

Screening of *Dispatches from the Wall Corner* – a documentary of single screen cinemas by Ninad Kulkarni, followed by interaction with the filmmaker

Refreshments – 5.30 pm
Programme – 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Hanu Reddy Residences, Poes Gardens
Chennai 600086

Monday Aug 17, 2026

Birds of Madras – Talk by KV Sudhakar, President, Madras Naturalists Society
Amethyst, Whites Road, Chennai 600014

Tuesday Aug 18, 2026

Musical Memories of Madras – Sangita Kalanidhi Dr S Sowmya in conversation with Sriram V
Amethyst, Whites Road, Chennai 600014

Wednesday Aug 19, 2026

The Sporting Side – Padma Shri Sharath Kamal in conversation with Srinivasa Ramanujam
Hotel Maris, Cathedral Road, Chennai 600086

Thursday Aug 20, 2026

Waves of Memory – Release of the English translation of the memoirs of Dr TSS Rajan, conversation between translator N Kalyan, writer PA Krishnan and Sriram V on the book.

GRT Hotel, Sir Theyagaroya Road, T Nagar
Chennai 600017

Friday Aug 21, 2026

Sleepless in Chennai – Dr N Ramakrishnan in conversation with Ramya Kannan.
Residency Towers, T Nagar, Chennai 600017

Saturday Aug 22, 2026

A Madras Day Special – *The Future has a Past* – Sriram V in conversation with Tripurasundari Sevel.

Programme in collaboration with Super Chennai Arattai. Entry by registration only. Link for registration: <https://www.superchennai.com/arattai-with-v-sriram/heritage-historian>

Refreshments – 5.30 pm
Programme – 6.00 to 7.00 pm

MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Taramani,
Chennai 600113

Monday Aug 24, 2026

The Madras Players and American Drama over the Years – celebrating 250 years of the birth of the USA. Talk by PC Ramakrishna

Programme in collaboration with the Madras Book Club. Entry by registration at masbkclub@gmail.com

Refreshments – 6.30 pm
Programme – 7.00 to 8.00 pm

CP Arts Convention Centre, Eldams Road, Chennai
600018

Timing for all programmes unless specified otherwise will be refreshments at 5.30 pm followed by event between 6.00 and 7.00 pm

Entry fee and no registration required unless stated otherwise.

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Madras Week events by Kreedha

Playing Through Madras: A Month-long Journey Across the City

August marks not only the city's founding but also the anniversary of Kreedha's own journey to document and revive traditional games. For over two decades, the organisation has explored how games are woven into everyday life, appearing in temples, public spaces, homes, stories and memories.

Each Monday will feature a public conversation bringing together researchers, community historians and subject experts. Alongside presentations on game documentation by Vinita Sidhartha, speakers will explore themes ranging from local heritage and neighbourhood histories to cooking traditions, urban ecology, indigenous plants, cycling culture and other enduring stories.

Rivers have historically shaped settlement patterns, neighbourhood identities, cultural practices and therefore play traditions. So, Kreedha has divided Chennai into four areas, each with a unique exhibit and conversations.

(Continued on page 2)

Dealing with the Underbelly of Flyovers

For long our city's only solution for dealing with traffic congestion has been the construction of grade separators aka flyovers. That they have merely served to move the points of congestion a little further ahead seems to have escaped the attention of all those who are involved in city planning. However, it cannot be denied that they are now an integral part of our cityscape. Not only have they created bylanes out of the arterial roads on which they have been constructed, they have also given rise to

spaces underneath which, being devoid of any maintenance, are sorry spectacles.

Faced with this challenge, the Greater Chennai Corporation has been experimenting

● by Sriram V

with various solutions, most of them with very little success. A few years ago, there was this much touted greening of the pillars under the flyovers by means of saplings in

small plastic receptacles. These were supposed to be watered at specific intervals by automated supply. When the system worked it cannot be denied that the plants presented a very pleasing appearance, the lush greenery serving to mitigate the harsh Chennai heat. *Madras Musings* being rather a cynical newspaper, had predicted all along that the greening was too good to last and sure enough, it's Cassandra-like predictions proved to be true. Scarcely had the commissioner, who had promoted the idea, been

transferred that water supply to the receptacles was turned off, the plants drooped, some receptacles were stolen and finally what was left was all taken away.

Yet another quixotic attempt at improving the appearance of the space under flyovers has come under the head of what could be termed beautification. This involved the installation of public art, benches for people to rest on, fountains and tiled flooring. Who in their right senses would want to sit under a flyover? Naturally, the homeless

and other vagrants. The Corporation has not been able to evict them and it has also failed to maintain the public art. Much of the money therefore has gone to waste.

One of the few instances where the space under the flyover has proved to be a commercial success is Kathipara. An entire food court has come up here and the space being reasonably wide it has been able to handle the footfalls and the demand for parking space

(Continued on page 2)

Madras Week Programmes 2026

(Continued from page 1)

August 3, 2026 – Between the Adyar and the Cooum

Speakers – Vinita Sidhartha of Kreeda, Shreya Krishnan of Pelathope Urban Living Lab and Priya Ramkumar on Meenakshi Ammal and her cooking legacy

On view till August 8, 2026

August 10, 2026 – South of the Adyar River

Speakers – Vinita Sidhartha of Kreeda, Pavithra Sriram, Co-founder, Project Thiruvannamiyur Mada Street, and Dr. Meenakshi Swaminathan an avid birder on birds of Chennai

On view till August 15, 2026

August 17, 2026 – The Westward Push

Speakers – Vinita Sidhartha of Kreeda, Thirupurasundari Sevvell, a heritage architect and a talk on indigenous plants of Chennai

On view till August 22, 2026

August 24, 2026 - Travelling North of the Cooum

Speakers – Vinita Sidhartha of Kreeda, Ramanujar Mounlana of Cycling Yogis and a talk on Madras Checks

On view till August 29, 2026

The series offers a chance to explore the city through play, memory, and the many neighbourhood stories that continue to shape Madras.

Time: 5.00 pm to 7.00 pm; Location: Kreeda Experience Centre. Phone: +91 9841748309

Email: info@kreedagames.com

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Madras Week events by Nizhal

15th Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk in Mayday park. 4.30 to 5.30 pm.

16th Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk Egmore Museum. 7.30-8-30 am.

22nd Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk in the Anna Nagar Tower Park, 7.30-8-30 am.

23rd Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk – Natesan park, 4.30 - 5.30 pm.

29th Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk– Semmozhi poonga, 4.30 - 5.30 pm.

30th Aug. – Nizhal Tree walk in Kotturpuram Urban Forest 7.30-8.30 am.

Please register with 9445028067 for all Nizhal Walks.

Dealing with the Underbelly of Flyovers

(Continued from page 1)

that such a food court requires. What it has not been able to handle is the disposal of food waste which seems to litter the area once the shops close at the end of the day. There is a growing feeling that such commercial activities can be considered under other flyovers too. This, in our view, is not advisable because the space that exists in those roads is very limited unlike at Kathipara. One way of utilizing the spaces would be to let them out as parking bays for which a fee could be charged. This could also bring in some amount of revenue to the corporation. This idea is not new, and it has been in practice under some of

the flyovers. It is not clear as to why it cannot be extended to others and why harebrained beautification schemes must be at all thought of.

Ultimately those in charge of planning the city's infrastructure would do well to keep in mind that such ideas as grade separators have very limited functionality. The best option would be to go in for a long-term solution of rationalizing private vehicle utilization. This will necessitate encouraging people to use public transport, ensuring last mile connectivity and making sure that pathways are pedestrian friendly so that short distances can be covered on foot.

Driven Around the Bend

What is it about our country that makes even the smallest dealings with statutory authorities seem like a major battle and the slightest result being obtained seems like a major achievement like climbing Mount Everest? At least that is how *The Man from Madras Musings* views it. Of course, in MMM's view Madras that is Chennai is nothing compared to Calcutta that is Kolkata in this matter and MMM's terror of dealing with the government probably stems from early trauma in negotiating with the babus in the latter city. After all, when MMM in his present status of the celebrated MMM cannot deal with the government, can you imagine his plight when he was a mere CCC [cherubic child of Calcutta]?

MMM having recently reached a landmark age, required his driving licence to be renewed. He was assured by several others who had gone through the process that it was now, what in local parlance would be termed, a jujube. There was no reason to engage a tout said MMM's advisors and all that MMM had to do was to present himself at the RTO office and do the needful, after applying online. However, being the burnt child that dreads fire, MMM decided to do the needful using one of his office assistants. In matters such as these he is very much like one of those maharajas of yore who on being asked to sign the Treaty of Accession when India became independent did so and then rather than present himself in person chose to send the document through his man.

MMM's assistant applied online and then informed MMM that as far as the personal appearance was concerned nothing could be done other than MMM going to the RTO office in person. The process demands a photograph to be taken at the premises said the assistant and if MMM wanted his image to be on his driving licence then he had better go. To ease the pain MMM's assistant offered to stand in the queue so that MMM could come just when his turn was imminent. This MMM agreed to with gratitude and matters proceeded accordingly. The call soon came through and MMM girded his loins to make his personal appearance at the RTO office.

Considering that an RTO is supposed to deal with driving licences, you would expect such offices to be located on main roads with easy accessibility. MMM is not sure of your experience but as far as he is concerned, he has noticed that all RTO offices are holes in the corner, easily missed, and of a uniform shabbiness that could be easily taken to be standard operating procedure. A rusty set of chairs, dark walls that

have not seen a coat of paint since the day the office was opened, cobwebs, and a plethora of notices pasted all over the premises. MMM, who prefers to have his surroundings of a certain tidiness, looked neither left nor right but proceeded to the cubbyhole where the grand panjandrum who held the high and low over matters of licence sat. He was offered a seat and then asked to look at a camera. He was then informed that he could leave and that the driving licence would arrive by post within a couple of days.

All this while MMM's phone was busily buzzing, and on emerging into daylight he found that he had received a series of messages from the RTO informing him of every stage of the process of his driving licence. Miraculously, he had cleared each one of them. He came home greatly impressed and then waited eagerly for the arrival of the licence. Ten days went by and there was no sign of the promised document. During these days MMM drove around the city in mortal terror of being apprehended by the police for some trifling offence and then being found to be without a licence. After ten

around two weeks MMM did get his. He now wonders as to why the licence itself cannot be made downloadable so that once it has been approved, the applicant can get it online and print it for himself or herself.

The posters are back!

It was just a couple of issues ago that this periodical carried an article about how the new government was seriously cracking down on the poster menace. *The Man from Madras Musings* wondered even then as to whether it was wise to carry the story, for in his view such promises are generally of a very fleeting nature. And sure enough, he was proved to be right. The *Lord of the People* released recently to much excitement and what should the followers of the Lord of the People do but put up posters everywhere lauding the Lord for having acted in the *Lord of the People*? Outside the theatre where the *Lord of the People* premiered, the followers of the Lord put up not just a cut-out of their idol which is what you would have expected under normal circumstances in Tamil cinema, but they chose to create the facade of an entire fort probably to indicate to the meanest intelligence that the Lord of the People was now the Lord of the Fortress. Consequently, what little remained of the sidewalk in front of the theatre was blocked off not just with this facade and the cut-outs, but huge ornamental gateways created out of palm fronds, plantain leaves, and bananas. MMM is not sure as to whether the film justified all the excitement, but he is certain that if the facade is not removed soon, it will cause excitement of other kinds, associated with accidents and ambulances.

The Lord clearly viewed such rules as being applicable to those outside his flock. Or is it that the flock viewed his sage observances to be applicable to only those who are outside his fold? MMM is not certain. But he is quite clear that Father, Son & Co who are in the Opposition will not have much to say on this, for in their time they were as toothless as the Lord when it came to fighting the poster menace.

Tailpiece

It was in Mughal times that they bricked up a dancer alive. The Man from Madras Musings notices that of the three statues of women in dancing poses that were put up under a flyover, one certainly seems very near being bricked up. The tiles are rising as you can see in the pictures alongside.

– MMM

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

days he could bear it no longer and sent his assistant to find out as to what had happened to the licence.

The assistant went grumblingly, stating that there was no purpose in following up on these matters as it was all automated these days. But he did return with news. The licence was ready said the officer, but it had not been dispatched. Why? Because there was no one to take the licences to the post office from where they could be sent to the applicants. This was a weak link in the chain that no amount of online and automating could solve. And therefore, there were around 100 driving licences all kept pending. But be of good cheer said the officer, for that was the day when the postman was coming and the driving licences would be dispatched. And so it came to pass after a delay of



OUR READERS WRITE



Let's Disagree Over Coffee

The best conversations with my son never happen when I plan them.

They arrive unexpectedly – over a plate of hot bajjis, or, on this particular evening, over two tumblers in a coffee shop tucked away in Madambakkam.

Mine held strong filter coffee.

His held hot chocolate.

Outside, the evening crowd moved at its familiar Chennai pace. A flower seller sat cross-legged, threading jasmine into perfect white circles. An auto driver was explaining cricket to a passenger with the authority of a national selector. Somewhere in the distance, the temple bells quietly announced that another day was drawing to a close.

I, meanwhile, was smiling at my phone.

"What are you laughing at, Amma?"

"The comments."

He looked puzzled.

"People actually read the comments?"

"Only when I'm feeling unusually brave."

He laughed.

"What are they arguing about now?"

I handed him my phone.

Someone had posted a simple question about whether mobile phones should be allowed in schools.

Simple question.

Complicated answers.

Within seconds he was reading aloud.

"Anyone who disagrees has no common sense."

"This country is doomed."

He looked up.

"That escalated quickly."

"It usually does."

He scrolled a little more before giving the phone back.

"They all sound so sure."

"They do."

He stirred his hot chocolate for a while before asking,

"Amma... how do they know they're right?"

Children ask the sort of questions adults spend years avoiding.

His question took me back to school.

Our English teacher loved debates.

Or perhaps she loved confusing us.

Just when we thought we had prepared the perfect argument, she would smile and say,

"Now switch sides."

The classroom erupted.

"But Miss... we don't agree with that side!"

"I know," she'd reply.

"Then why should we argue for it?"

"Because before you disagree with someone, you should first understand them."

At twelve, I thought that made no sense.

At forty, I wish more people had teachers like her.

"So you had to defend an idea you didn't even believe?"

"Yes."

"Did you win?"

"Sometimes."

"And sometimes?"

"Sometimes I discovered the other side had better arguments than I expected."

He smiled.

"That must have been annoying."

"It was."

"It was also useful."

Outside, a gentleman at the next table had somehow managed to involve three strangers in a discussion about whether Chennai's traffic had become worse than Bengaluru's.

Within five minutes everyone had an opinion.

Within six minutes someone had statistics.

By the seventh minute they were all laughing.

Nobody stormed off.

Nobody announced the end of civilisation.

They simply disagreed.

Then ordered another round of coffee.

Perhaps that is what I miss most today.

Not agreement.

Conversation.

Somewhere between verandah chats, intervals and coffee-house debates, we seem to have forgotten that listening isn't surrender.

It's curiosity.

"Amma..."

"Hmm?"

"If someone is wrong, shouldn't we tell them?"

"Of course."

"But..."

"You can challenge an idea without attacking the person."

He thought about that.

"That sounds difficult."

"It is."

"It's much easier to type, 'You're an idiot.'"

"Where did you learn that?"

He pointed towards my phone.

"The comments."

Fair enough.

After a comfortable silence, he asked one final question.

"So... what was your teacher trying to teach you?"

I smiled.

"There's actually a name for it."

"What?"

"Playing the devil's advocate."

He frowned.

"That's a strange name."

"It is."

"But the idea isn't strange at all."

"What is the idea?"

"To spend a little time looking through someone else's window before deciding your own view is the only one."

He nodded slowly.

"I like that better."

"So do I."

We finished our drinks and stepped back into the familiar bustle of Madambakkam.

The flower seller was packing up for the evening.

The auto driver had found a new passenger.

Parandhur Airport

In the well-balanced article, *Landing Before Take Off*, on the proposed Parandur Airport, explaining its pros and cons (*Madras Musings*, Vol. XXXVI, July 18, 2026), Karthik Bhatt states that the previous government's vision of achieving a one-trillion-dollar economy has revived the proposal for a greenfield airport.

Everyone appears to be enamoured of the phrase "one trillion". But at what cost? The proposal conveniently overlooks the fact that it would require the acquisition of thousands of acres of fertile agricultural land, the destruction of hundreds of water bodies, including lakes, ponds and other water sources, the felling of hundreds of fully grown trees, and the resulting ecological devastation. It is frightening even to contemplate the environmental damage.

Tamil Nadu is already facing a shortage of paddy production and has had to procure rice from Andhra Pradesh. Aavin's milk procurement has also declined significantly over the past few years, necessitating the purchase of milk from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh at enormous cost. Ultimately, it is the common man who bears these additional costs. To add insult to injury, we are now contemplating the further reduction of our agricultural

resources. Thousands of acres of farmland and beachside land have already been taken over for the construction of concrete structures.

Whether mankind reaches the Moon, the Sun or the stars, food can only be grown on the earth. In that context, the present government's decision to abandon the project appears both wise and prudent.

The question then is how to meet the growing demand for air travel. The quicker, less expensive and more practical solution – without the inevitable cost overruns and inordinate delays associated with a new airport – is to expand the existing airport towards the west and south. Expansion to the north is constrained by the hills, while the east is bounded by the sea.

There will, of course, be resistance from affected residents. However, if they are offered more than fair compensation, along with suitable alternative sites for relocation, many may be willing to accept. Such an approach would enable the creation of additional airport capacity more quickly and at a substantially lower cost, while also ensuring easier access for travellers.

It is understood that the present Government is actively considering such an approach.

N P Andavan
audcomp@gmail.com

Website Comment

Anusuya Bai: Doyen of Chennai's women sports talents
(Vol. XXXVI No. 7, July 16-31, 2026)

Very Beautiful writeup about Ms. Anusuya Bai.

She is my very close family friend. I am Ranjit Narayanan, a former National 100m athlete, retired from ICF.

Ranjit Narayanan
enranjit100m@hotmail.com

The argument about traffic had somehow turned into a discussion about where to find the city's best pongal.

Nobody had changed the world.

Nobody had won.

Yet everyone had gone home having listened to another point of view.

Perhaps that is enough.

As we crossed the road, my son slipped his hand into mine.

"Amma?"

"Yes?"

"The next time you read the comments..."

"I know."

"Read them."

"And?"

"Just don't forget to read between them too."

For a moment, I wondered whether my old English teacher would have smiled at that.

I think she would have.

– Priyanka Soman

Madras High Court – A Shining Beacon of Heritage



Madras High Court's sprawling building with Manu Needhi Cholan statue, a symbol of justice.



Distinctive arches, pillars, cupolas, jharokhas and red brick exterior.



The grand staircase which wraps the main dome tower.



The piece de resistance of Madras High Court is the main 'lighthouse' dome.



Spectacular stained glass doorways to courtrooms.

I had the singular honour of visiting the exquisitely gorgeous heritage edifice of Madras High Court. It was to attend a heritage walk led by Mr. N.L. Rajah, Senior Advocate of the Madras High Court. Normally laypeople are not allowed inside the heavily secured confines of the court but this was an exception. It was a memorable peek into the hallowed corridors and courtrooms of this marvel of Indo Saracenic architecture.

Let us go back in time and learn about its origin. It was designed by J.W. Brasington and the architects were Henry Irwin and J.H. Stephens. It took the renowned contractor Namburumal Chetty four years to build and it was declared open on July 12, 1892.

With distinctive red brick exterior, massive granite pillars, gorgeous arches, traditional *chajjas* with intricate brackets, stunning stone balconies, magnificent bulbous domes of various sizes, glorious minarets, stained glasses, Athangudi tiles flooring, imposing staircases and multi-coloured plasterwork, the

sprawling buildings of Madras High Court are mesmerising.

The judges of the High Court have been true trailblazers. For the first time in the Madras Presidency, an Indian was appointed judge of the Madras High Court as early as 1877. He was Justice Sir T. Muthusamy Iyer. He then rose to the enviable position of Chief Justice of the Madras High Court in 1893. Who could have thought that a Munsif could climb so high. I kept gaping at his marvellous marble statue which is so lifelike?

During the heritage walk of the High Court, our group came across a defunct lighthouse. This lighthouse called the Doric column (135 feet tall) is made of Charnockite (Pallavaram Gneiss), a locally available stone. Incidentally, it was the second lighthouse in the city's history

and functioned for 50 years from 1844 onwards until the need was felt for a taller option. The first ever lighthouse was in Fort St. George built in 1796. What's most interesting is that in 1894, the third lighthouse came up on the top of the High Court's central dome as it dwarfed the nearby Doric column by 55 feet. So, a 'lantern room', an engineering marvel of the time, with a kerosene lamp was established right on top of Madras High Court's tallest dome.

It functioned as the city's flagship lighthouse until the fourth and the last lighthouse was inaugurated on the Marina in 1977. How interesting that when the High Court was instituted in 1892, nobody had a clue that within two years it would have a lighthouse operational from the top of its highest dome.

● by
Dushyant Singh



Doric column lighthouse (1844-1894).

Significantly, our very own Madras High Court holds the distinction for being the only court in the world to have functioned as a lighthouse as well, from 1894 to 1977. It was decommissioned in 1977 when the Marina lighthouse, which was electrical, was instituted.

What I absolutely loved about this unique and rare heritage tour was the climb to the top of the main dome. The first stage was a winding stairwell which was rather narrow and had steep stairs so that when I reached the next storey I was panting for breath. The next level was a huge octagon. The view from here of the Bay of Bengal, the Chennai harbour and the rest of the city's landmarks was spectacular. It also serves as a vantage point to look down at the other domes and numerous minarets of the entire High Court building which has a crucifix plan. Finally, right at the centre is a spiral staircase which takes you to the very top of the main dome where the 'lantern room' of the now defunct lighthouse is. Although many of us wanted to go up the spiral stairs, Mr. N.L. Rajah told us that nobody is allowed to go

(Continued on page 7)



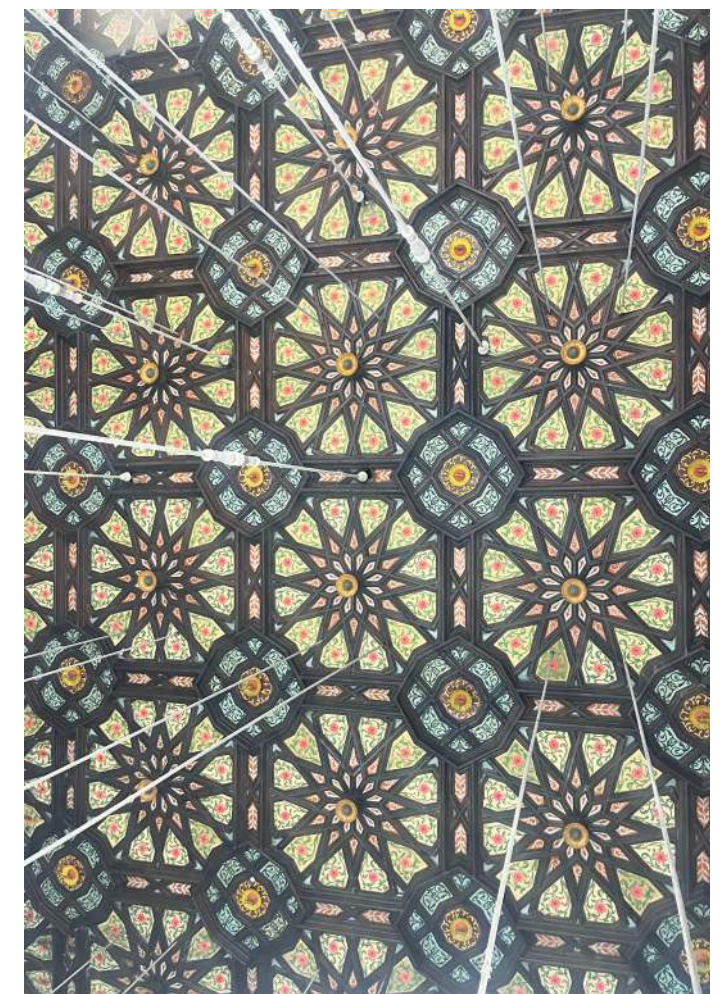
The fine plasterwork of the West Block dome.



Beautifully framed West Block dome with a uniquely shaped finial.



The spiral staircase leading to the lighthouse of Madras High Court.



The minute details of geometric woodwork of the roof in courtrooms.

Sharan – Towards Mutual Support

The number of senior citizens with children settled abroad and those living alone because of the breakdown of the joint family system has multiplied manifold. Correspondingly, the number of Senior Citizen Homes (SCHs) with excellent infrastructure and services for senior citizens has also grown. But what about those who cannot afford such expensive SCHs or those not in a position to move to an SCH for several reasons? Many of them lead an insecure and lonely life. What kind of support system do they have?

This is where informal groups of friends come together in many cities to provide help and support in times of need to such people. This story is about “Sharan”, started by a few friends in the Adyar neighbourhood in South Madras in 2008. Reflecting on its origin R. Shanker, one of the two founders with children living abroad, has this to say:

“During my walk in Indira Nagar, Adyar, one day, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was my friend T.S. Venkataraman, whose children also live abroad. He talked about the need for a few friends living alone in the neighbourhood to come together to form an informal support system – to support the elders in their own homes, particularly during health emergencies, apart from offering any other help they need.”

Both friends decided to act on the idea with a few more friends. The result was the birth of Sharan, an association of senior citizens, which was registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Act in 2010 with the primary objective of providing ‘Mutual Support’ to its members.

T.S. Venkataraman adds, “We initially faced difficulties in enrolling members, as many were sceptical about the need for one more association. Two

well-written articles about Sharan in *The Hindu* supplement “Downtown” and a report in *Adyar Times* catalyzed to create more awareness about Sharan among residents of Adyar and adjoining areas. What differentiates Sharan from the other associations is its aim to promote among its members the spirit of mutual support; a desire and mindset in every member to help others in the group in times of need to the extent possible.

An ex-Sharanite, Hariharan, with help from his designer son, helped design the Sharan logo. The visual of multiple stretched hands represents the motto of Sharan: “Towards Mutual Support”. Another Sharanite,



Dakshinamurthy @ Kavignar Thenmugan, wrote the lyrics for a special Sharan Anthem, which was set to music by the Sharanites, Radha Shanker and Usha Sethuraman.

Every meeting of Sharan starts with this anthem sung by a couple of Sharanites. Sharan is managed by a committee consisting of the President, Secretary, Treasurer and six members who are elected by the members and hold office for a period of two years. The first President of Sharan was Prof V. Narasimhan. He was followed by T.R. Gopalan, R.S. Bakshi, and Dr. H. Raman. Since the

beginning, Sharan has seen the Presidents and their Secretaries, with the active support of the Management Committee members, doing a commendable job.

In order to provide opportunities for members to bond, Sharan regularly organises cultural and social activities. Within ten years since Sharan started scores of activities covering lectures, visits to old age homes, outstation trips both within the country and abroad, Temple visits, celebration of all important festivals, musical evenings, workshops on health-related subjects and many other activities which would help members bond, were held regularly. On the personal level, any appeal or help sought by members through telephone calls or messages in the Sharan



The founders of Sharan – T.S. Venkataraman (L) and R. Shanker (R).

● by R.V. Rajan

rvrajan42@gmail.com

WhatsApp group was promptly addressed by members living close to the affected person.

Like all other associations, Covid Pandemic made Sharan go online. It was in July 2021, when the pandemic was at its peak, that K. Vishwakumar took over as the fifth President of Sharan with Raji Venkatesh as his secretary for a second term.

Raji says, “We conducted virtual meetings with Sharan members month after month during the first seven months from Aug 2021 to Feb 2022. In May 2021, the chanting of the Dhanvantri Mantra by a group of dedicated Sharanites was started for the good health of all members. I am glad to say that this online chanting is continuing even now every day without a break.”

It is interesting to note that a big Dhanvantri homam was

performed on December 12, 2025 at Viswakumar's residence for the well-being and prosperity of all members and mankind.

When the physical meetings started again, Vishwakumar offered the air-conditioned meeting hall on the second floor of Kokiladvani in Valmiki Nagar, which he owns, for free to Sharan to conduct all its meetings. He has also provided a basic sound system and a screen for use in meetings.

This hall can comfortably accommodate about sixty people. Since then, Sharan has had all meetings at this Hall. Only for special meetings like the AGM or the Founders Day celebrations, where the attendance is bigger, outside venues are considered. Expenses related to some of these meetings are sponsored by some members. This has helped Sharan save a considerable amount used for hiring a hall and paying for refreshments.

It was during Vishwakumar's tenure as the President that Sharan brought out a book commemorating the Pearl Anniversary (12th Anniversary) of Sharan. The book gives not only the history of Sharan but also a brief bio of its members. Though Smt Janaki Venkataraman and R.

Parameshwaran have succeeded him as President, Vishwakumar, supported by his wife Geetha, continues to be a live wire Past President, extending every possible help to the new teams in their efforts.

Some of the new ideas introduced during the last three years include revival of Sharan E magazine (a quarterly online magazine edited by Parameshwaran), formation of three distinct WhatsApp groups covering Sharan News, Sharan Greetings and Sharan entertainment to ensure that important information is not lost in the deluge of responses and forwards by members and the formation of special interest groups like cards, music, share market, chit chat, potluck, etc. Besides programmes like *Chai Pe Charcha* and breakfast meetings in members' homes, the President and Secretary also visit the homes of the new members and others who are having mobility problems, creating better bonding.

Sharan started with just 10 members. As of June 2026, it has 130 members. Interestingly, except for a few singles, most of the members are couples. Ladies take a more active part than men in all the activities. From an informal association of a few friends, Sharan has evolved into a very vibrant group which is run on professional lines while retaining the core principle of friendship & mutual support. It is a fact that in today's digital world, it is friends, more than the family, who help in fighting loneliness among elders.

I would like to conclude this article with a quote from a member, Mrs Malthy Sinha, “Good friends are like stars; you don't always see them, but you know they are always there for you.”



The members of Sharan.

Cricket's Greatest All-rounder – Sir Garfield Sobers

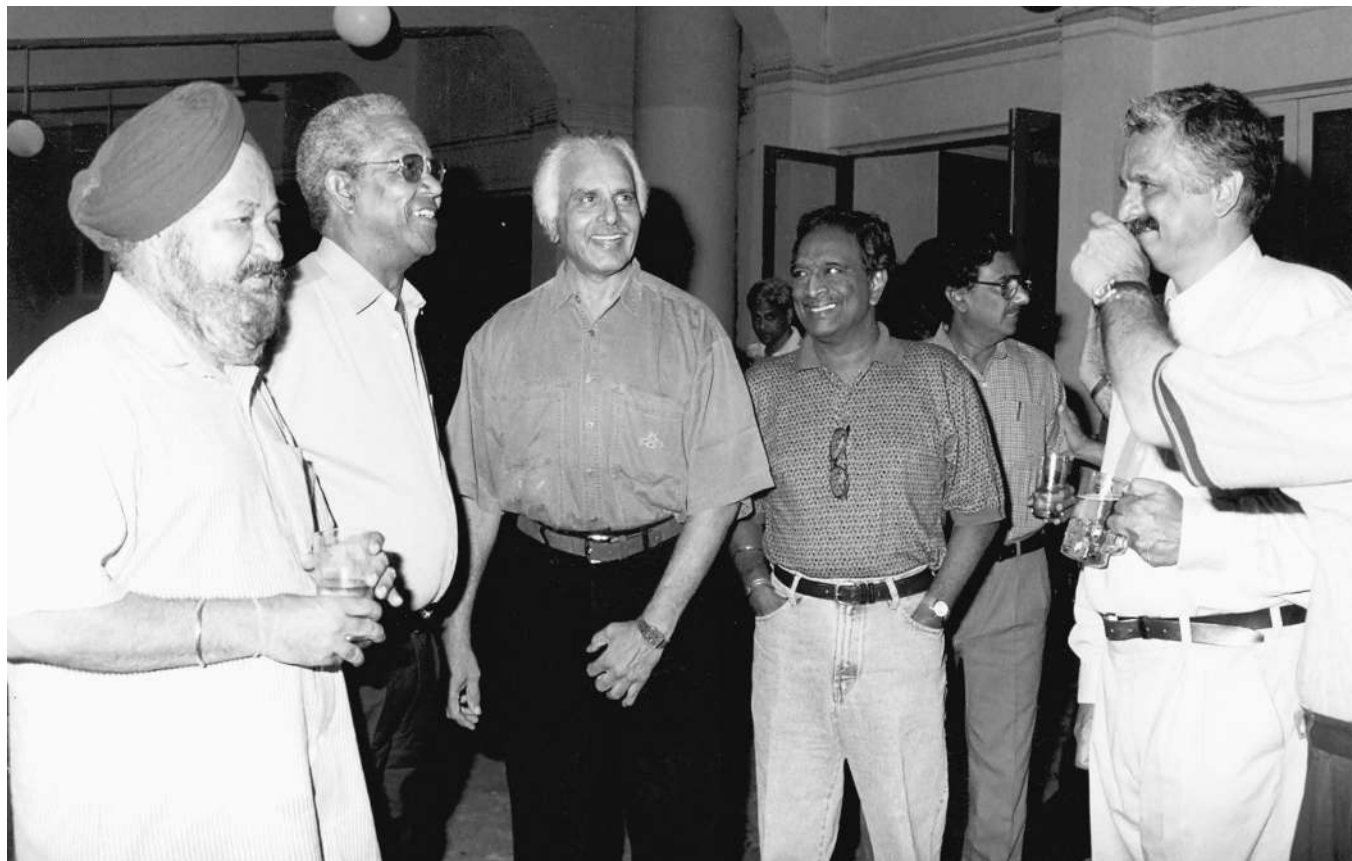
“Seymour Nurse, he don’t read Chaandrasaykaar, Baasil Butcher has no clue to his bowling. About the others, the less said the better. What makes you think you can master Chaandrasaykaar in ten minutes of coaching, Wesley, old man?”

These words spoken in his Barbadian sing song by the greatest cricket all rounder of all time — to fast bowler Wesley Hall — had his awestruck audience of about ten former cricketers accorded the privilege of dinner with Sir Garfield Sobers one evening at the Madras Cricket Club some 15 years ago by the club’s president then, the late S.P. Sathappan.

Sobers went on to regale us with this story of his alleged conversation with Hall during a Test match on the 1966-67 West Indies tour of India. According to him, the West Indies innings was in a bad way with wrist spinner B.S. Chandrasekhar posing a few problems to the touring batsmen, and Hall had approached him with the following offer of help:

“Captain, please tell me how I can tell when Chaandra is bowling a leg break and when a googly. I really want to help you to take us to a good total.”

Hall wouldn’t take no for an answer despite Sobers’s discouraging words. Finally, yielding to Hall’s stubbornness, Sobers told him he would help with hand signals from the non-striker’s end whenever the batsman was facing Chandrasekhar. He would stand a step behind the crease, watch Chandra’s fingers



Left to right. A.G. Milkha Singh, Gary Sobers, C. Lakshman Swarup, K. Rajendran, V.V. Kumar and V. Ramnarayan.

and put his right hand out if it was a googly, and keep it straight otherwise.

The ploy proved successful enough for Hall not only to support Sobers in the recovery but to actually remain unbeaten on 30 or so runs at teatime.

Hall could not contain himself during the teabreak when Nurse expressed his surprise and delight at Hall’s masterly

display with the bat. “Wes, how do you play Chaandra so well when I can’t handle him at all?” the star batsman asked him.

Hall’s response was classic. Simpering modestly, he said,

who fired in a googly, and the skipper’s right hand remained firmly lodged by his thigh. Unsurprisingly, Hall’s middle stump went flying.

we spent with the legend was something to cherish forever.

No batsman entered a cricket ground with greater nonchalance or elegance. If Vivian Richards of the swaggering, gum-chewing arrogance overawed rivals, inducing visions of the imminent decimation of their attacks, I imagined even as a young spectator that Garfield St Aubrun Sobers had a slightly different kind of impact on his opponents – more like inducing a sense of resignation, even reluctant admiration, for so often did he walk into a

(Continued on page 8)

● by
V. Ramnarayan

“You know I read him from the hand unlike our captain who plays him off the pitch.”

Unfortunately, Sobers had overheard Hall’s boastful narration. Came Hall’s first post-tea encounter against Chandra

The stories Sobers spun that evening were mostly wild tales as this one was, with my research afterwards showing no proof of Hall scoring 30 in any Test in India. None of us minded, because every moment

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– THE EDITOR

Madras High Court

(Continued from page 5)

beyond where we had already reached.

It was an unbelievable experience to walk into hallowed courtrooms with antique ornate wooden chairs for judges. They had elaborately carved teakwood artwork along with stained glasses on the entire back wall behind the Chief Justice’s chair. The ceiling of

the court room had highly ornamental woodwork with mind boggling geometric patterns. We were told that everything is as it was in 1892 when the High Court was established. Well preserved heritage indeed.

The incredible heritage tour came to an end under the ceiling of the West Block dome is a sight to behold. It has a silver coloured intricate plasterwork and soars high above

an octagonal junction of four long corridors. The Athangudi tile patterns right under this dome are absolutely marvelous. After bidding goodbye to the esteemed lawyer, Mr. Rajah, I made an exit with all the information and thrill buzzing in my mind. It took me a long while to have all this grandeur and history sink in. It was indeed an experience that will forever be etched in my mind!

Cricket's Greatest All-rounder

(Continued from page 7)

challenging situation and turn the game on its head almost effortlessly.

Not only did his batting leave fielders gasping for breath in admiration, it sometimes elicited spontaneous applause even from the bowler whose deliveries he dismissed from his presence. And he was himself the first to applaud a worthy opponent.

Sobers made a quiet debut on March 30, 1954 in the six-day fifth Test at Sabina Park, Kingston, Jamaica, against the touring MCC, when he made 14 not out and 26 batting at No. 9, and took 4 for 75 in the first innings of a match England won by nine wickets.

Omitted for the first Test versus the touring Australians in the next season, he did nothing dramatic in the next four Tests, until the final Test, in which he scored an unbeaten 35 not out and 64 as a middle-order batsman. His 43-run cameo as stand-in opening batsman in the fourth Test, in his home country, Barbados, had convinced at least two Australian allrounders of his enormous potential – one of them Keith Miller, whom Sobers hit for three boundaries in his first over. Richie Benaud, who like many of his contemporaries, considered Sobers the greatest allrounder in cricket, waxed lyrical about the innings. He swore that the

18-year-old left-hander's fierce square cuts and slashes outside the off stump off Ray Lindwall and Miller had him scurrying to the pavilion to fetch the cricketer's "receptacle for cuff links" – a rare instance of a fielder in the slips needing abdominal protection.

The first time I saw Sobers in action, in the fourth Test of the 1958-59 season at the Nehru Stadium, Madras, a huge reputation preceded him, after his world-record 365 not out (followed by a century in each innings in the very next Test) against Pakistan the preceding season, and tons of runs (25 & 142 not out, 4 and 198, and 106 not out) in the first three Tests of the India-West Indies series.

I had already devoured every word written about him and followed his versatile exploits as a batsman who played at almost every position from 1 to 9, medium-fast to fast bowler, orthodox left-arm spinner, chinaman specialist, and brilliant fielder and catcher. Sobers disappointed an eager Madras crowd with the bat, after promising much with his confident entry, shirt-collar up, after the openers Conrad Hunte and Holt were dismissed and he joined Rohan Kanhai with the scoreboard reading 152 for 2.

Sobers was deceived when on 29 by Vinoo Mankad, last-minute appointee to the captaincy and crafty veteran left-arm spinner, who was playing in his last Test as it turned

out. Sobers failed again in the second innings, this time falling to legspinner Chandu Borde after making a mere 9. As a consolation, he gave us glimpses of his spin bowling talent with 4 for 26 and 2 for 39; West Indies coasted to a massive victory. His slip catching too was spectacular. What I vividly remember from that game was that despite the lack of runs, the Sobers persona wove a magnetic spell over me (and my friends) nonetheless. (Who doesn't know that Sobers could bowl fast with the new ball, and orthodox left-arm spin as well as wrist spin of the chinaman variety)?

On his next visit to Madras, when Test cricket returned to Chepauk, Sobers, this time captain of West Indies, more than whetted his fans' appetite, with two outstanding innings of 95 and 74 not out. As he had done after misreading a googly from Benaud in the famous tied Test in Brisbane in December 1960, he changed his shot at the last nano second to a similar delivery from BS Chandrasekhar to straight-drive him for six. On the earlier occasion, the ball had sped to the boundary for four, almost decapitating the bowler in its path. Sobers' second innings defiance – in the company of Wes Hall and Charlie Griffith – of India's brand-new spin trio of Bedi-Prasanna-Chandrasekhar to draw the Test is now part of the lore surrounding him.

Australian great Sir Donald

Bradman was a huge admirer of Sobers. He called his 254 for Rest of the World versus Australia in Melbourne in 1971 the best innings ever seen in Australia. Bradman said, "With his long grip of the bat, his high backlift and free swing, Gary Sobers consistently hits the ball harder than anyone I can remember. This helps to make him such an exciting player to watch because the emphasis is on power and aggression rather than technique – the latter being the servant, not the master."

Talking to us, Sobers graciously played down his achievements including his Chepauk exploits. Yet for all his modesty, Sobers confessed he never feared a bowler in his entire career, not even Chandrasekhar, disappointing the Chandra fans in his audience.

That memorable dinner was made more memorable by a hilarious incident towards the tailend of the long evening, when a somewhat inebriated fan among us fell at Sobers's feet gripping them firmly to his utter shock. And this friend rang me up a couple of days later after reading my account of the dinner in a local daily and angrily complained that I had failed to mention his sashtanga namaskaram of Sobers. A teetotaler now, I wonder what he will have to say today should he read this piece.

Captaincy was the one aspect of Sobers' cricket that came in for adverse comment,

because he tended to go for broke even at the risk of losing matches. To me, it was all part of the brand of cricket he played and believed in. He was an adventurous and positive captain who believed in declarations that gave his side – and therefore the opponents as well – a sporting chance to win. When one such declaration led to a famous England victory in Port of Spain in 1967-68, Colin Cowdrey and his men making 215 in 165 minutes, the critics trounced Sobers for his captaincy. Characteristically, he has never expressed regret for his decision.

E.W. Swanton once said of Neville Cardus that the great man was talking through his eminent hat when he claimed Wilfred Rhodes was a greater all-rounder than Garfield Sobers. My response to similar comparisons between Sobers and the likes of Jacques Kallis, Kapil Dev or Imran Khan will be identical, with no disrespect intended to those other great all-rounders.

To end on a sombre note, I remember once choking with overwhelming sorrow while doing a semi-public reading from Sir Garfield's autobiography. In it he says he batted for two people every time he played—for himself and for his prodigious all-rounder mate Collie Smith who died in a car accident with Sobers at the wheel.

Sobers was more than a great cricketer. He was a wonderful human being.

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