

# Anna flyover, half-a-century old and yet still young



**-S.Arun Prasath. For contact:  
arunprasath.s@hindutamil.co.in**

Tamil iconic writer Pudumaipithan was one of scores of people who felt stressed out by the burgeoning road traffic teeming with jams and snarls in the middle of the 20th century. Deploring the gruelling road traffic congestion caused by trams travelling with the people jostling and squeezing together, he found his frustration touching a new high in his short story 'Mahamasanam' (1941). He writes as follows: "When it is evening, the city changes so as to demonstrate that road is the place where civilization means jostling and jolting. That too, at the junction where the tram roads and four big roads converge like the knotty veins of body, the trouble is all the more unbearable."

**Population and road traffic**

Chennai's population, which was 7.77 lakh back in 1941, almost doubled to about 14 lakh in a decade, that is, in 1951. The population growth rubbed off on the population of motor vehicles.

Writer Ashokamithran said on a note of wonderment, "So many people and so many vehicles; where are they actually going? What are they upto? They probably do a lot. The equilibrium and progress of today's life in the country are entwined with the way the transport and traffic happen."

Back in 1949 the Chennai Corporation proposed to construct flyovers on Mount Road and on the Poonamalee High Road in order to ease road traffic congestion in Chennai. But the proposal did not take off then. Later, in 1965 it was again proposed to construct a flyover at the Gemini Circle where the Nungambakkam High Road and the Cathedral Road converge.

### **Need for flyover**

Chennai's population crossed 24 lakhs in 1971. In a spin-off, the vehicle population registered a massive increase, triggering more acute traffic congestion on the roads. Mount Road named after Anna, which is the primary landmark of Chennai, was teeming with vehicle after vehicle.

In Nungambakkam, heart of the city, the Gemini Circle, the junction where Anna Salai, Nungambakkam Road (Uthamar Gandhi Road), Radhakrishnan Road (Cathedral Road) and G. N.Chetty Road converge, witnessed 12,000 vehicles passing over every day in 1970, according to some data. More agonizing and challenging was the exercise of controlling the rush hour traffic.

It was against this background that the Tamil Nadu government in 1969 announced that a flyover would be constructed by the state Highways Department at the Gemini junction at the cost of Rs. 66 lakhs.

## **First flyover**

After the demise of former Chief Minister C. N. Annadurai, the government helmed by M. Karunanidhi laid the foundation stone for the flyover and the construction work started on September 1, 1971. Constructed with 1,500 tons of steel and 3,500 tons of cement through the grade separator method, this flyover is the first of its kind in Southeast Asia. The Chennai flyover was the third in the country, preceded by the flyovers constructed at Kemps Corner and Marine Drive-in in Mumbai, and was the largest at that time. This was the first flyover that had used the insulation mastic technology in order to avert the danger of vehicles skidding or sliding. Through the cloverleaf interchange, this flyover facilitates a free and uninterrupted flow of vehicles coming in from all directions.

Ashokamithran has, in his novel 'Aagaaya Thamarai', delineated the start and end of the construction of the Anna flyover, infusing the description with the spirit of characterization.

His pen portrait dwells at length on the way the flyover was coming up thus: "The construction of the Gemini flyover was on in full swing. So, the road was blocked by pits and concrete pillars along with workers in hundreds. The space left was blocked by policemen. The drivers of cars, buses and cycles and pedestrians hogged the policemen's attention in equal measure. After traversing the one-furlong distance they heaved a sigh of relief."

This flyover was constructed in 21 months.

## **Anna flyover**

The flyover formed so as to lend charm to Chennai city and to facilitate hassle-free traffic was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi on July 1, 1973 and named as Anna flyover. Speaking at the function, he said, "After Anna's name was given (to the flyover), I don't know if there's anyone in Tamil Nadu who questions the naming of the flyover after Anna."

A statue of Anna sitting and reading a book along with the inaugural foundation stone was installed at one of the pillars of the flyover. After the demise of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy, the AIADMK led by M.G.Ramachandran wanted to install Periyar's statue on the flyover in 1974. The Chief Minister Karunanidhi granted the wish and MGR on behalf of his party thanked Karunanidhi in this regard.

By way of commemorating the abolition of horse racing in Chennai, an equestrian horse statue was installed on both sides below the flyover in 1974.

The junction was called Gemini Circle in the name of the once famous Gemini Studio (closed in 1976). The flyover that came up at the spot has also been called Gemini Bridge right from the days of its construction to this day.

Fifty years

Chennai is called a city of flyovers. The seed for the moniker was sown by the Anna flyover. According to the data available now, over three lakh vehicles cross over the flyover standing erect and solid even now. In commemoration of its 50 years, renovation of the flyover is apace at the estimated cost of Rs.8.85 crore. Soon this facility is set to wear a new glossy look.

“... The Gemini flyover construction is over. You must visit Chennai once and tour around the city,” says Ashokamithran calling on readers at the end of his book ‘Aagaaya Thamarai.’

Similarly, I extend an invite: “You must come and see the new-look Anna flyover.”

*July 1 marks completion of 50 years of inauguration of Anna flyover.*

**Translated by V. Mariappan**