

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

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December Music Season needs structural changes

It has been around for 97 years, for the first such season was in 1927. Since then, this annual fixture on Chennai's social and cultural calendar has had its ups and downs, more ups than downs – that is until the COVID pandemic. Since then, technological leaps and drastic changes in the modes of offering entertainment have precipitated a steep decline. The December Music Season that just got over witnessed drastic reduction in concert attendance at all venues and none but the most stellar among performers managed to pull in audiences at their various concerts. If the December Music Season is to survive its first century and confidently step into its second, it has to seriously rethink its model.

It was the COVID pandemic that really changed everything. Audiences began receiving the bulk of their entertainment at their homes. Carnatic music, faced as it has

always been with an ageing audience, was hit far more and for far longer. Much of its fan base thereafter preferred to stay at home and listen to concerts being dished out for free, even after restrictions were lifted and events began for an in-person audience. Artists sensed this change before the sabha-s. Many resorted

● by **Sriram V.**

to YouTube channels and a couple of front-rankers even ran their own sabha-s online. As to how these latter forays fared we do not know, but suffice it to say that the YouTube route has come to stay. That its revenue model is tailored to pay miniscule amounts is something artists seem prepared to live with. They have at least managed a connect with their audiences.

This is exactly what the sabha-s were offering in the good old days. Each had its membership base and when it presented a concert or a series, attendance was assured. Tickets sales too were and this way, most sabha-s flourished, for long. Most in reality managed just about a small surplus, given that the last such organisation to build an auditorium of its own, managed to do so in the 1980s! But as long as audiences were coming and a surplus was made, you could coast along.

The 1990s-2010s were the golden age of the Season and the sabha-s, when they made that surplus. That was when their numbers proliferated and so too that of the audience – fed by NRI-s. And it was a win-win – the sabha concerts became talent-spotting events and musicians who impressed could hope for a concert tour abroad, and many teaching assignments, apart from arangetram invites. The venues



Sketch of Music Academy, by Aafreen Fathima.

were also where CDs of the musicians were sold, as were books and other merchandise. We of the consumer class may have scoffed but it was this economic model that kept the Carnatic music world afloat. We may not realise it, but musicians too need to earn.

Direct to Home offering of Carnatic music via YouTube

and other channels has bypassed the sabha-s altogether. Who needs them when all of the above can be managed through a good presence on social media and streaming of concerts online? That the latter has not been cracked commercially (all musicians are

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The POSH Act – Let down in spirit, Application reforms the need of the hour

The Anna University sexual assault case has demonstrated yet again that our city and State have a long way to go in creating truly safe, inclusive places of work and study.

A brief review of the facts – in December, an Anna University student was sexually assaulted on campus. She had been in the company of a male friend when one Gunasekaran approached the couple, threatening them with blackmail; the friend was subsequently intim-

idated into leaving, following which the student was sexually assaulted. The survivor – along with a professor from the university's POSH (Prevent of Sexual Harassment) cell - filed a police complaint about the incident the same day, and Gunasekaran was apprehended the next day. He has confessed to the crime.

The administration has come under fire for its mismanagement of the case. Initial reports of the crime saw

● by **Varsha V.**

reprehensible victim blaming by dint of the circumstances under which the crime was committed. Further, the First Information Report (FIR) containing the survivor's personal details was leaked to the public. According to a piece in *The News Minute*, the Court directed the administration to provide Rs. 25 lakhs to the sur-

vivor by way of compensation. Pointing out that such leaks create an environment of fear preventing other victims from coming forward, the bench questioned the conduct of law enforcement. The bench also emphasised in its remarks that the survivor cannot be blamed and that it is her private right to choose her companion, adding that the university ought not to resort to moral policing citing this incident.

The leak is thought to

have occurred due to technical glitches arising from the migration of data from IPC (Indian Penal Code) to BNS (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita). However, it is notable that the POSH Act mandates that the confidentiality of the survivor be respected and maintained.

The legal proceedings also included a telling exchange between the Advocate General and the Court – when the for-

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DECEMBER MUSIC SEASON NEEDS STRUCTURAL CHANGES

(Continued from page 1)

offering concerts for free) is a deterrent but time will offer a solution and then what of the sabha-s?

It is very likely that only those that are perceived to add value – by way of listening comfort, curation of content and quality of venue will survive. And that will mean the Season will probably go back to what it was in the 1980s – a handful of organisations conducting it. That may not be such a bad thing after all, quality may triumph over quantity. But even

the survivors will need to sort out many things if they need to survive – the most important being considered by artistes to be venues where it makes sense for them to perform.

Artistes too need to do some soul-searching. For how long will they offer their art for free? How will this encourage youngsters to take to Carnatic music if earning possibilities continue to dwindle? And will AI swallow what little there is? At present there are no answers. But these questions need to be faced squarely.

The POSH Act – Let down in spirit, Application reforms the need of the hour

(Continued from page 1)

mer argued that the State has been denied due credit for apprehending the accused within 24 hours, Justice Subramaniam is reported to have asked, “Constitutionally, the state is supposed to prevent crime. How can you say the state must be appreciated just because one accused was apprehended?”

There lies the rub. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (which also applies to educational institutions) not only lays down the guidelines for an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to address complaints, but also mandates the provision of a safe working environment. In other words, a legitimate application of the Act will not only establish the means of redressal but also actively prevent the occurrence of sexual crimes. However, current application appears to be lax. Case in point – Gunasekaran (who is said to have run a roadside eatery near the campus) was reportedly discovered to have a history of crime including one for sexual assault on the very same campus in 2011. The recent incident simply should not have had the opportunity to arise.

A paper published by CEDA (Centre for Economic Data and Analysis) in May 2024 by Akshi Chawla [A decade of the POSH Act: What the data tells us about how India Inc. has fared] also points out that compliance with the Act is poor. It says that the Supreme Court of India made much the same remark in 2023, ruing that there were “serious

lapses in the enforcement of the Act” even after a decade of the law coming into force. Instead, what typically unfolds when such crimes surface are long debates that pick apart and sensationalise singular instances – a situation that is unfair to survivors as well as the spirit of the Act. Readers may remember that not too long ago, widespread media reports were made of another sexual harassment case at a well-known arts institution in the city; that case too saw a lot of dialogue but clearly no policy reform has come of it to benefit the city and its people. These discussions appear to almost always descend into some form of politicking, post which a slew of myopic measures is hastily rolled out.

Anna University too is said to have kick-started several reforms. The ICC is reported to have initiated an inquiry into the incident while the university's Chancellor – TN Governor R.N. Ravi – is said to have personally reviewed the security measures on the campus. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has reportedly taken suo motu cognizance of the case and has arrived in the city to take their investigation forward.

Much effort seems to be underway to create a safe environment at Anna University. But what, we ask, about the rest? Will there be a comprehensive audit on the implementation of POSH in educational institutions? Will there be efforts to identify and review well-defined actions to create truly safe spaces of work and study? One can only hope.

Red light, green light

The Woman from Madras Musings was on the way to the airport. It was early evening, and the traffic was light; WMM was just beginning to think that she would have time enough to spare for the luggage drop when – to the driver's great indignance – a pair of traffic policemen waved the car to a stop. As one officer peered into the backseat, his colleague explained to S that he had crossed a red light at the signal behind. S would hear none of it. According to him, the signal had been yellow. The exchange attracted more policemen but S stood his ground.

If the officers had asked WMM beforehand, she would have told them about S. She's seldom seen another as fair-minded as him – once, he had a tiff with the attendee

life's too short to bother about the petty things. During his turn, A was pulling his wallet out of his pocket even as he was getting down from the car. A brief reprimand later, he returned and resumed his place at the wheel.

Did WMM hear readers ask whether she's been stopped? She has, on rare occasions and she daresays that not all were in error. But given that her purse is almost always empty and that she hasn't set up a single digital payment app, her experiences are more embarrassing than annoying.

The slow life

The Woman from Madras Musings and the Better Half recently entertained an old friend, one that she had last met about a decade ago. It was only when she spent time

seen. WMM was about to leave for the restaurant when a relieved B.H. shared that he had spotted the fellow. He had been washing his hands when he had seen something interesting elsewhere and wandered off; and then, upon his return, had made a stop to wash his hands once again. He had ended up making friends with the restaurant owner and learned some Tamil phrases in the bargain. Come the day of his departure, WMM was more stressed about him missing the train than he was – he had a presentation to make the very next day, but he was supremely unbothered about the whole thing. It left WMM quite jealous, to be frank.

WMM is considering embracing the slow life this year. It certainly seems more peaceful than her current lot.

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

at the airport exit toll booth because he thought she was deliberately slow in moving the line along; another time, he insisted that the flower seller give WMM an extra rose because he thought the rates were criminally high. So when he was accused of crossing the red light, it was quite natural that he asked for a video or picture from the traffic camera. In reply, one of the officers explained that the traffic challan would be sent later as a message. S said that he'd prefer to wait for it. They asked him if he was sure. He replied that he was, and asked if he could get their leave. The policemen agreed after some internal discussions, and that was that.

S has two brothers who also offer their services as a driver, and WMM has gone through much the same experience with each of them. Interestingly enough, each dealt with the policemen differently. The middle brother H is a soft-spoken gentleman and a diplomat of sorts, slow to anger. At the time, H alighted from the car with a puzzled smile on his face. So mild did he look that the traffic policeman softened immediately; a brief exchange ensued which ended with the latter patting H on the back – he asked him to be more careful in the future before sending him on his way. Contrary to S and H, the youngest brother A is a straightforward chap, drawn to the path of least resistance – he feels that

with him that she realized how much she had changed as a person. He was still the same man she had known, sweet and gentle and unruffled; but WMM appears to have grown more restless and unruly over the years. What struck her was how unhurried he was during his time here. He took his own time to get ready in the mornings – his baths were indulgently long and leisurely; he took the time to really enjoy his first cup of coffee, and accorded much the same reverence to the second, and the third; and when he visited the Government Museum, he spent a solid four and a half hours to look at everything to his heart's content. Each time he left home to explore the city on his own, WMM had to make sure that his backpack had enough water and snacks to see him through the lunch he would invariably miss from lingering at tourist sites. B.H. was well and truly puzzled by his unrushed style. WMM thinks it rather flustered him, for it is so in contrast to his own way of life; B.H. is an impatient sort and tends to take matters into his own hands just to complete things more quickly.

One morning, B.H. took the friend to a favourite lunch spot; WMM couldn't join as she was otherwise held up at work. She had rather forgotten that the pair were eating out together when an alarmed B.H. called WMM – they had finished lunch half an hour back, he said, and now the friend was nowhere to be

Safari spree

The Woman from Madras Musings went on her first safari with the Better Half this year. It was interesting, to be sure – WMM saw spotted deer, langur, elephants, bison, wild boar and more. The monkeys were particularly endearing. One handsome langur caught WMM's eye as he sat on a branch, lost in thought; with one hand cradling his chin, the fellow looked disarmingly human. WMM was rather moved by the sight.

She was in the midst of likening the scene to Rodin's masterpiece when the chap made a sudden, decisive leap to the neighbouring tree to pick an entirely unprovoked fight with an indignant friend.

But the headliner of the safari – the tigers that the forest reserve is famed for – remained elusive. WMM wouldn't have minded it much except that her jeep kept running into other safaris that kept telling them that they missed a tiger sighting by 'mere minutes.' The worst of the lot was one large bus full of obnoxiously jubilant tourists. They triumphantly held out their smartphones at WMM and B.H., cackling as they played videos of a tiger crossing the road. WMM has a deep suspicion that they enjoyed crowing about their experience more than they did the sighting itself.

– WMM

Navigating a maze: Kindergarten admissions in Chennai



As the Margazhi season descends upon Chennai with kolams adorning doorsteps and kutcheris ringing through the air, my mind, instead of revelling in the festive rhythm, is caught in a different raga altogether – the overture to the great Chennai kindergarten admission drama. This isn't your average Carnatic jugalbandi; it's a nerve-wracking juggle of forms, follow-ups, and frantic prayers to every known deity on the gopuram.

Step out onto any Chennai street this time of year, and you'll find an unusual sight: parents pacing like tense performers before a Sabha committee, clutching admission forms as if they were divine prasadam. In auto stands and tea shops, hushed whispers of school names replace the usual IPL banter. "Chettinad Vidyashram polaam... illa Vidya Mandir?" "But Anna, did you try that CBSE school near Anna Nagar? Approm, recommendations mudiyuma?" It's the city's most competitive season, second only to the December music festival. The connections game is where the real drama unfolds. Every forgotten cousin suddenly resurfaces like a long-lost relative in a Tamil movie climax. That maama who once stood behind the principal in a wedding group photo? Call him. That akka whose athai's daughter is married to a PTA president's son? She's your ticket to salvation.

The odds? Terrifying. With some schools reporting waitlists that rival MTC bus queues during peak hour, it feels like an epic thiruvizha. Yet, amidst all this chaos, there's my four-year-old Meenakshi, blissfully unfazed. For her, these "interviews" are just new playgrounds to explore. She marches inside, crayons in hand, and nonchalantly narrates stories about her imaginary elephant friend. Meanwhile, I'm outside, mentally reciting every parenting book ever written, from Dr. Spock to Values in Modern Education.

Then comes the big day. As the early morning Chennai sun bakes the roads outside, I iron a dress that seems respectable yet relatable. Meenakshi skips along, carefree, while I clutch a file stuffed with birth certificates, ID proofs, and enough Xerox copies to make a Mount Road photocopy shop jealous. At the school, the waiting area is a blend of Chennai's finest diversity – parents decked out in everything from pattu sarees to corporate blazers, united by their collective anxiety. One dad whispers strategies like a T20 game plan: "They like kids who can sing. Did you teach her 'Twinkle Twinkle'?" Another mom confidently advises, "Always talk about holistic learning. That's the keyword!"

Finally, it's our turn. Meenakshi walks in like a pro, her ponytail swinging as she declares to the interviewer, "I like blue. And dosa." She proceeds to draw something that she insists is a "temple elephant," though it looks suspiciously like a squashed idli. The interviewers laugh, charmed. Meanwhile, I field questions about "parental involvement in the child's growth" with the seriousness of someone presenting a project at a Chennai corporate meeting.

As we leave, I can't help but smile. Sure, it's exhausting, absurd, and feels like a movie plot. But it's also uniquely Chennai, this blend of chaos, community, and a dash of humour. For now, I'll keep the phone charged, awaiting that magical admission call. And when it comes, maybe I'll finally relax enough to hum a Margazhi tune – accompanied, of course, by Meenakshi's giggles and her endless stories of temple elephants and blue dosa.

– Priyanka Soman

Treasure Trove of Postcards on Madras

As the city gears up for the TANAPEX 2025 philatelic exhibition, the Philatelic Bureau on Anna Salai showcased a unique collection of postcards that celebrates different facets of Chennai through art, literature, movies, books, and more. Located opposite the iconic Devi Theatre, the Philatelic Bureau is a hub for stamp collectors and history enthusiasts. The recent exhibition was a special one; it ran for five days and was a rare opportunity for visitors to explore the city's historical and cultural heritage through the lens of postcards.

Curated by renowned philatelist Jaisakthivel, the exhibit featured over 180 postcards and presented a fascinating glimpse into the city's past and present. From vintage depictions of iconic landmarks to modern illustrations of the city's vibrant culture, each postcard told the story of Chennai's transformation over the years. The collection, which focused on postcards from 2010 onwards, served as a testament to the city's evolution into the thriving metropolis it is today. "This exhibition is a labour of love that celebrates Chennai's unique spirit," said Jaisakthivel, when I spoke to him

during the event. "We invite everyone to come and experience the city's fascinating history and culture through these remarkable postcards."

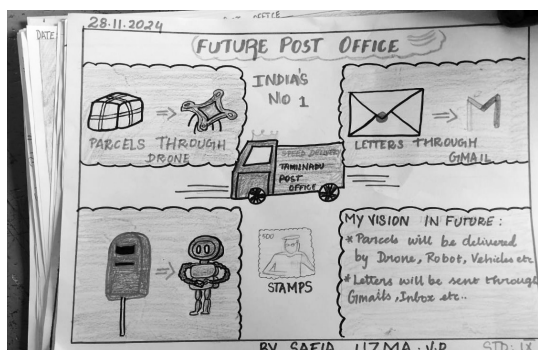
One such captivating collection was the University of Madras series. It was also interesting to see how black and white postcards from *The Hindu* have evolved – two exhibits were presented from their archives, the 2023 Oor, Ula and Ulam and the 2024 Nagarum Nam Nagaram; both these were put together expertly by historian Thirupurasundari Sevvil. The postcards on display emerged as a unique visual record of the city's architectural landmarks, street scenes and daily life; each was a historical artefact as well as a beautiful work of art that evoked nostalgia and curiosity.

I for one was moved by the way the exhibit reflected the changing times. From the colonial era to the post-independence period, the display showcased the city's metamorphosis from Madras into the Chennai we know and love today. The exhibition was a testament to the power of photography to preserve history and inspire future generations.

– by Prasanna S



As part of the promotional activities for TANAPEX 2025, the upcoming Philatelic Exhibition in Chennai, an exciting series of games and activities were organized at Baynes Baptist School. Prizes were distributed to the winners, encouraging their interest in the fascinating world of stamps. (All pictures have been sourced from Facebook.)



Students of Baba Matriculation School, Kodambakkam, created beautiful drawings of futuristic post offices at an event organized to promote the State Level Philately Exhibition – TANAPEX 2025.



Post office customers at Thuckalay and Nagercoil, had a meet with cute Muthu, the mascot of TANAPEX 2025, the Circle-Level Philatelic Exhibition.



TANAPEX 2025 the Circle level Philatelic exhibition awareness program conducted at The Hindu Senior Secondary School, Adyar.

Another phase of a new modern market

– Pictures by Thamayandhi R.



Loop Road has been witness to innumerable stories. A new chapter has dawned with the modern fish market newly established by the Greater Chennai Corporation at Nochikuppam. The facility costing Rs. 9.97 crores was inaugurated by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in August 2024 and hopes to change the face of the fishing business in the city. It has 366 stalls of which 332 have been allotted to the fish vendors who were plying their trade on Loop Road. It has a plethora of amenities to facilitate trade, from the provision of fresh water and storage facilities to the waste management processes implemented.

Madras Musings visited the new market and met the vendors. We discovered that the ground reality is not quite in line with expectations. Most vendors complain that they are uncomfortable with the market's circular design and the allotment of shops – customers rarely reach the rear end of the market, so many sellers are struggling with low footfalls. The facility's layout and flow have thus been a bit of a disappointment and concerns have been raised about its effectiveness for both vendors and customers alike. Many sellers have chosen to locate themselves in the market's parking lot, instead.



Memories from Covid Years

– Part I

Thirupurasundari Sevvai directed our attention to two pieces written by Karthik Nagappan during the COVID lockdown. The period evoked in the author fond memories of Chennai's suburban trains and the vegetable market at T Nagar. Though COVID has now been relegated to the past, we thought readers would enjoy the affection that shines through Karthik's writing. We present the first of the pieces below, a love letter to the city's suburban trains.

– Associate Editor

Chennai's Suburban Trains

Trains are more just than a medium of commute. For many, they're an emotion, a memory capsule on wheels; after all, they've carried millions to their destinations with punctual regularity, save a day or two for maintenance. Why, even the 2015 floods or the 2016 cyclone put them out of service for only a week or so – the tracks were inspected at the earliest opportunity, and the trains were soon running trips between Chengalpattu and the Beach! Today, however, we enter month six of the lockdown and these giants yet stand still on the tracks they've run marathons on for centuries. I miss Chennai's suburban trains very much indeed and write this small piece as a beneficiary and ardent fan.

I live in Vandalur, a silent suburb about thirty kilometres from the city. Life is beautiful here – we wake up to amazing mountains, the forest range, lakes, farms, and of course, the zoo. We're mere minutes away from the railway station, which has been our lifeline for as long as I remember. There have been days where I've found myself at the office past 11 pm; even though I've been offered a cab, I always requested to be dropped off at the nearest railway station to catch the last Chengalpattu train – I know I'm heading home when I board the rail from any station between the Beach and Tambaram!

I've always been happy when riding trains and enjoy the trips down to the last detail. Relatives who come to stay with us once a year or so wake up to the train passing by, and call it

a disturbance; but for me, the familiar sound is a lullaby that rocks me to sleep. That the corona virus has silenced it is another reason for me to hate the pandemic.

The trains too have known me all my life. As a kindergartener, I travelled to school by train holding my sister's hand; I continued to use them later when I had to commute to the Tambaram sanatorium for my secondary and higher secondary schooling. There was a brief period during my college years when I did not travel by train; I missed them so much during this time! I went back to commuting by train in 2007 when I began to work. My last trip to the office and back was on March 13, 2020.

When people ask where I come from, they tend to stare. But trains made life so easy! The locals were lightning-fast and took just 25 minutes to make the trip from Vandalur to Mambalam, and one didn't have to contend with traffic or pollution, either. When office discussions turn to the subject of parking spaces for cars, I love saying my piece when it's my turn – every time I am asked about my vehicle, I enjoy replying that it is a twelve-car behemoth driven by a government-allotted driver and with designated parking to boot! Above all, friends made on trains are a special lot; it is a camaraderie that will never fade. At one point, I was part of an informal group that took the morning local. We created What's App groups named Last Fast and Train Friends. We had great fun in the mornings, chatting with each other – the group had people hailing from different locations and they worked in diverse industries, so each had refreshing perspectives on many topics. Those forty minutes were a wonderful start to the day. One also encountered so many different people – a man in his sixties, completely engrossed in his newspaper; a young fellow absorbed in watching a series on Netflix; a familiar couple who had managed to find a regular spot on a busy train to flirt with each other; that one group that never fails to be noisy; the woman who plaits her hair and has her breakfast; the school children discussing homework; the ones who go to



Suburban trains. Picture courtesy: The Hindu.

sleep on the window railings; the group of middle-aged men who constantly discuss politics and claim the media is biased; and the bunch who resolutely refuse to sit even when the train is empty!

For a marketer, the train is a fantastic place to observe consumer behaviour. Each day, I count the number of people reading the *Times of India* and engage them in conversation to gauge their perception of the paper. I miss this today! Most of the puns and memes I post on social media owe their origin to my train journeys. I also read newspapers and books during this exciting one-and-a-half-

saw the flights, and little me dreamed of travelling in one someday. It was an especially lucky day if a flight was taking off or landing as we passed by – the sound of the plane piercing through the air was thrilling indeed. The homes and buildings in and around the hills of St Thomas Mount and Tirisulam made for a pretty sight too, especially when their lights winked on past sunset. Today, the flyover parallel to the airport on GST Road, the ongoing Metro construction and other airport developments have made this joy impossible.

Then there's the unofficial race that we all become a part

to their destinations – while common now, perhaps one may not see such things even ten years down the line. One sees the Sanatorium Church and National School; and when the train goes past Saidapet, one sees people praying towards the Karaniswarar Temple; and on rare Friday afternoons, a few doing Namaz facing the mosque at the end of the Guindy station towards the Tambaram side. They make for such a lovely sight of unity.

Every day was a new day when I took the train from Vandalur. I looked out carefully for memories that transported me to my childhood days – back then, I travelled the route in metre gauge trains with nary a care, unlike today when thoughts of meetings and presentations stop me from enjoying the view outside.

These days, I simply sit in the silent Vandalur railway station for some time, looking at the trains parked in the station. It's been months now. I peer to see if one comes chugging along the tracks that wind into the distance; the realization that none will come any time soon brings a tear to my eye. But come they will for sure, roaring on these tracks as they always do, carrying not just passengers but all their hopes, too. That day will certainly be one for celebration.

Dear Southern Railway, please take care of the trains – they are precious to the middle class in this country!

This article was written during the COVID lockdown. Karthik has resumed his train rides to work since then.

● by Karthik Nagappan

hour ride. There were days, too, when the cool iron bar in the train helped keep my migraines under check; and some when I've simply plopped down in the backseat, exhausted!

More often, though, the child in me is always awake when on a train, enraptured by the scenery passing by and the lovely turns taken by this magnificent beast. In the '90s, when we were small, my brother and I used to fight for the window seat on the left side of the train when travelling towards the city from Vandalur – the seat afforded the best view of the parked white-and-red Air India flights as the train chugged past Tirisulam station. It was a small happiness that a middle-class child like me cherished – there was a sense of awe when one

of when a Fast Local runs parallel to a Local; the trains run a right race as they zip past each other, and the adrenaline rush that cheers for one's own train to win is amazing. Who doesn't like to see their favourite win, after all? Ask a Nadal fan and a Federer fan, and you'll know!

One also enjoys amazing vistas of flyovers during train rides. Worthy of special mention is the view of the Adyar River between Guindy and Saidapet during the rainy season; then there are also the lakes, mountains and lush greenery that one sees when travelling between Tambaram and Chengalpattu. The sights flaunt all the beauty that Madras has to offer. Then, there are the wall-painted advertisements and the sights of people walking on the train

Reviving Anakaputhur's Weaving Legacy: A Journey Towards Sustainability

Anakaputhur is a suburb of Chennai that is home to a community of handloom weavers. It is especially well-known as the source of the famous Madras handkerchief, a nine-yard piece of colourful plaid cotton. For centuries, the fabric – now known the world over as Madras checks – was widely used by the populace in and around Madras. It was introduced to the world by Portuguese merchants in the sixteenth century and quickly became a popular item of trade in colonial-era European and African markets. The Kalabari people of Africa gave the textile the name injiri – meaning 'real India' – and adopted it as a sacred fabric in their religious and cultural rituals, thus forging

a cultural link between African and Indian textile heritage; and the Madras handkerchief found its way to the Americas and the Caribbean, where it soon gained favour. Madras checks itself retained its popularity until as recently as the twentieth century when it was seen as something of a fashion statement – the fabric was widely used to make stylish garments for both men and women, appearing in brands like Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Brooks Brothers. However, its star began to wane with changing trends and technological changes in the textile industry.

As for Anakaputhur, the weavers were able to sustain a global market for the Madras handkerchief until the

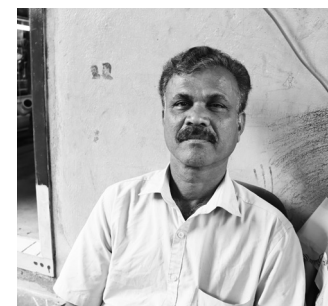


Crafting Dreams: Artisans at Anakaputhur Jute Weavers Association turning natural fibres into sustainable fashion.

seventies, with Africa making up the bulk of its exports. But a change in the region's political dynamics brought about a ban on imports, crushing what little demand was left for the product. The Telugu-speaking weavers of Anakaputhur sus-

tained significant losses. They pivoted to produce Madras checks fabric instead and also branched out into weaving silk and cotton saris.

Today, things are not quite as they once were – there are only around fifty handloom



C. Sekar, president of Anakaputhur Jute Weavers Association.

weavers left in Anakaputhur. One of them is C. Sekar, a third-generation weaver who runs the Anakaputhur Jute Weavers Association. They still use traditional handloom techniques to make their wares, though their new focus is the production of clothing made from natural fibres like banana, aloe vera, pineapple and lotus. The dyes used to give colour to the fabrics are also natural and made from fruits and vegetables. By ensuring that its products are biodegradable and safe for the environment, the Association has positioned itself as a player in the sustainable fashion movement.

The body is also actively engaged in training local artisans in the craft of weaving natural fibres, particularly women and unemployed youths, empowering them to earn a livelihood. Women are employed at various stages of production, from fibre extraction and dyeing to weaving and finishing. In 2011, the group created a catalogue of sarees with 25 natural fibres, a feat which made it to the *Limca Book of Records*. Today, the garments they produce are exported to the US, Singapore and Malaysia.

Though Anakaputhur is scripting a new chapter in its history, challenges remain. Handloom weaving is a time-consuming craft, and the workers have limited access to tools that can help with processing natural fibres. The market is increasingly dominated by cheaper synthetic alternatives that are getting harder to compete with. Consumer awareness is not quite widespread about the benefits of natural fibres. The group also lacks financial support, which restricts plans for large-scale production. Sekar believes that government support in terms of infrastructure development, and establishing marketing avenues can provide a large boost to the initiative and help revive the glory days of Anakaputhur.



Empowering Women: Women artisans at Anakaputhur Jute Weavers Association contribute to sustainable textile production.

● by Geethanjali Rajakkannu



Threads of Change: The Anakaputhur Jute Weavers Association pioneers' eco-friendly fabric production.



The Hands Behind the Craft: Anakaputhur artisans breathe life into natural fibres, reviving a fading legacy.

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– THE EDITOR

Meet the Carrom world champion from Chennai: Khazima M. Basha

It would not be amiss to declare that 2024 has been a creditable year indeed for Tamil Nadu as far as sports is concerned. Even as the 18-year-old Grandmaster Dommaraju Gukesh cemented the city's enviable status in Chess, a young Carrom player from Chennai brought international honour to the country last November. Khazima M Basha beat world champion Rashmi Kumari from Bihar to bag the Women's Singles title in the sixth Carrom World Cup tournament held in San Francisco, USA. The seventeen-year-old who studies at Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed College swept the competition, clinching Gold medals in all three categories – Singles, Doubles and Team.

Khazima says that she was drawn to Carrom at the age of six when she saw her brother making good progress as a player. "When my elder brother became the Junior National Champion, my father encouraged me to play and excel at the sport, too," she revealed, adding that she has been training for twelve years. Khazima's flair for Carrom saw her emerging as the Runner-up in the National Championships in 2013; she then went on to win the championship titles in the same tournament in 2017 and 2018. Twice, she won

the Singles title in competitions conducted by the School Games Federation of India. In the Junior National Carrom championships, she has won the title once; attained the runner-up status once; and has led the Tamil Nadu team to victory twice.

Her performance bagged her a place on the state's Senior team, which she led to title wins in the Senior Nationals not once, but twice. Khazima herself has clinched the Singles title once in the Senior Nationals. "I've won the Federation Cup championship title; in another stint in the same competition, I placed third," said Khazima.

The star points out that a budding player becomes a 'really big player' only with sincere and regular practice. Khazima says that the competitions conducted by the School Games Federation of India were instrumental in fostering young Carrom talent and helped them gain the necessary exposure and confidence to excel in National competitions.

Khazima met Sports Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on her return from the US. "He commended my performance and informed me that I would be awarded a big cash prize," she said. The State Government presented her with Rs.

1 crore in recognition of her achievement in Carrom. Her teammates from Tamil Nadu who represented India at the tournament – Mithra (17) and Nagajothi (26) – were felicitated with Rs. 50 lakhs each. "This is the highest cash prize won by any Carrom player in the country," beamed Khazima.

Though a popular sport in the city, Carrom has been starved of development in the past decade due to a lack of support by way of sponsorship. The city has only a few training centres that are run by those who love the game. It was at one of these that Khazima

• by
V. Venkataramana

herself trained. According to her, the sport is in dire need of a financial boost. In fact, she made such an appeal to the Sports Minister during her meeting and requested that her Carrom training centre at Tondiarpet be elevated to a full-fledged academy. Khazima feels that with financial assistance, infrastructure and moral support, Chennai is sure to produce many more world champions. "This holds good for all States where Carrom is a tradition," she pointed out.



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