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BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

On January 3, 2025, at the Chennai High School in Kamaraj Avenue, Adyar, two batches of students – one from a higher, and the other from a lower grade – had a rather uncustomary learning experience. The lesson does not figure in their programme of study, but is crucial to their development as responsible citizens. They had a front-row view of a bio-gas plant (named 'Vayu'), whose wraps were off just moments ago. They acquired information about its functioning. In the days to come, batches of students from other grades would have the plant's functioning decoded for them as well.

Residents of Kasturbanagar Association (ROKA) has established the bio-gas plant with Environmentalist Foundation of India (EFI) picking up the tab, much of it; and Avris Environment Technologies, the company that installed the biogas unit, meeting a part of the expenditure as its CSR outreach.

Arun Krishnamurthy, founder of EFI, remarks: "Community level conservation through collaboration is what we aim to achieve through this project. Localised action for cleaner, greener tomorrow."

Food circulates around the campus three times every working day: breakfast being brought in for the 200-plus students from a community kitchen and lunch and snacks being made at a kitchen in situ. The food waste collected from the campus would fuel the production of biogas that would in turn "fire" the

Biogas plant at Corporation school in Adyar

The facility was established by ROKA with the support of EFI and Avris



kitchen on the campus.

"The biogas plant can handle 75kg of food waste in a 24-hour time frame of food waste to biogas conversion," says ROKA secretary Janani Venkitesh.

It is a virtuous cycle: food produced in the kitchen going back to

work that same kitchen. For the students, it is a practical demonstration of a sustainable practice – an addition to the other green processes they see being illustrated on the campus.

ROKA's engagement with the school has to be retraced to 2021;

this association has borne a variety of fruits. A kitchen garden established by ROKA at the school that students get to tend to. ROKA also imparts environment education to these students on a voluntary basis, teaching them about plastic waste management and compost-

ing, among other things.

According to information shared by ROKA, "the ideation and permissions started when Sharanya Ari was the DC -Education, Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) and it was decided to have this as a pilot, and implement the same at various other schools and community kitchens run by corporation." The biogas plant was inaugurated by Dr. T.G. Srinivasan, Health Education Officer, GCC and AEO R. Sumathy. The event was represented by officials from Zone 13 of GCC, representatives from UNICEF, UNDP, INDIA NGO & CHEER. Environment enthusiasts from other communities, Urbaser Sumeet officials and Kasturbanagar residents were supportive of this initiative and present during the inauguration, the ROKA communication adds.

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STATUS REPORT



'Dump sites' on Karanai Main Road

PRINCE FREDERICK

The Ottiyambakkam leg of Karanai Main Road is a "store" that latches on to its "stocks", its mind impervious to the notion of year-end clearance. It hoards a random assortment of items – a sofa set sitting pretty among a caboodle of household discards, automobile parts that dropped out of the journey, clothes that have long ceased to trace the contours of a human frame. And then, just tightly tied bundles whose contents are a mystery. This store keeps piling them and sees them go to tatters, shrivel, rot, crumble and sink into the soil.

These products are garbage having been carted past the last window of opportunity – the possibility of re-embodiment and installation in a new life. Organic, a huge part of this garbage could have gone into compost pits. There is an ensemble of recyclables. They invite repurposing and recycling



Garbage found scattered at different spots on Karanai Main Road, on November 22 and December 19, 2024. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

exercises – in a better world, those possibilities would have been realised for these products. But here they are, squatting on the road as an embarrassment to it.

One needs to cool their heels

out there just a wee bit to be able to see a motorcyclist wheel in and wash their hands of things that were once of use to them; or a bundle of waste being rolled in on larger wheels and disgorged. Usually,



The diversity of the discards suggests that this section of the road has caught many pairs of eyes as an easy spot to get rid of offscourings.

dumping of the latter kind happens under cover of darkness.

Prolonged scruffiness encourages further scruffiness. The dumping is no longer restricted to a spot diametrically opposite a gated community. New pockets of dumping have emerged nearby. And the diversity of the discards suggests that this section of the road has caught many pairs of eyes as an ea-

sy spot to get rid of offscourings. One patch "specialises" in coconut-related waste; another deals in textiles.

This section of the road has a sprinkling of gated communities – Cassia Jones and Bolleneni Renatta found in the immediate neighbourhood.

A Thalambur resident, Neela Chandran has been tracking the "growth" of this "dump site". She believes that unless residents of the gated communities nearby make their displeasure known and seek the clearance of this unofficial dump site that sprang up overnight, the patch cannot be made whole again.

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SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Sustainability exercises can scream their heads off. A typical case: massive biomining machinery massed up at a landfill to segregate and process legacy waste. You can tell what is going on from a mile away.

Sustainability exercises can also speak in soft tones, the message gently dropped into an ear here and another there. A typical case: a guild of volunteers sharing a club affiliation squirreling away pre-loved items (that have turned white elephants to their owners) and, finally, quietly placing them in fresh pairs of hands. In rare instances, the whispered syllables of this unobtrusive initiative would multiply and assume the intensity of a scream.

Hold that idea in the crook of your palm and flesh it out with a name, an address, a date, people on both sides of the poverty line, wants and needs, and add a snippet of a back story to it, and the picture is inviting. On January 5, Thillayadi Valliammai Madhar Sangam would have dusted off a vast collection of items, painfully accumulated over months knocking on many doors, and line them up for a sale, a Jumble Sale. In a zeitgeisty twist to the Robinhood legend, this sale would declutter the lives of the haves and fill those of the have-nots with essential items, creating a win-win situation. These volunteers are ruling out the alternative for these pre-owned items: slipping into the maw of a landfill. Initiatives of this kind might be moving inchmeal, their results hard to see, let alone quantify, but their significance cannot be pooh-poohed: they reduce landfills even before they are formed.

It is the third edition of the Jumble Sale by Thillayadi Valliammai Madhar Sangam, a ladies club with coordinates in Valmiki Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur.

Jayanthi Premchander, a member of this ladies club and one of the masterminds behind the Jumble Sale, explains how, between the first and the third edition, the initiative has grown in stature and reach and acquired something approaching a scream.

In its second edition, when the sale was scheduled to start at 2 p.m., the crowd had already begun to form by 1:30 p.m., eagerly standing outside like a tide waiting to crest.

"We were all a bit anxious," Jayanthi recalls with a chuckle. "We had no idea that so many people would show up. It was like a floodgate opening!"

That crowd signalled the transformation of what began as a modest attempt to declutter a few homes into a full-fledged community tradition, one that attracts families from near and far.

What to expect from the Jumble Sale?



A sale with a social focus

Today, a Jumble Sale at Valmiki Nagar in Thiruvanmiyur would give a modern twist to the Robinhood legend by decluttering the lives of the haves to fill those of the have-nots with essential items, creating a win-win situation

It is the kind of event where pre-loved clothes, well-worn toys, and gently used household goods, including furniture, find a new home. It plants on the faces of donors the warm glow of knowing their discarded treasures will be cherished once more, and places within easy reach of the underprivileged, items they would think multiple times before buying spanking new off the shelves of a showroom.

The cost factor

It is close to free, not entirely free – a sale presupposes transfer of currency, but the figures are on the lower side.

The pricing is as accessible as it gets: 20, 50, and 100 rupees. And, of course, there are those irresistible

ble 10 rupee items – things that may not have much value in the commercial market but are worth their weight in gold for the right person.

"We keep it simple," says Jayanthi, "100 for the really great items, and then we have categories for 50, 20, and even 10 rupees." All the three editions of the Jumble Sale put together, the maximum price for an item stays pegged at ₹500. A mini fridge went for that price in the second edition.

Each item is meticulously categorised and sorted into boxes. As these items are received from donor hands, there is no telling what would make it to the "marketplace" until they do. Some items

would not "fit" into those boxes.

If a high-ticket item, something based on electronics and of intricate workmanship comes through, the price may be adjusted, but the philosophy remains: keep it affordable, keep it real. Well-maintained furniture can also fall outside the boxes.

"The pricing is part of the charm," Jayanthi says. "No one leaves empty-handed. It is about making sure everyone can find something that fits both their budget and their heart."

The Jumble Sale is a day's affair, spanning just hours – but considerable forethought goes into how those hours are orchestrated, the preparation beginning months before the event. Since its second edition, the Jumble Sale has a time table set in stone.

Planning for this Jumble Sale kicks off as early as September. By October, the collection of items starts in earnest. "We begin gathering things from all around – neighbours, friends, and even acquain-

which includes the president (Rama), secretary (Lalitha) and treasurer (Vaidehi).

Even unsold items end up finding their unique purposes. They are donated to local charities, ensuring that nothing goes to waste and everything finds its place, a place of utility. The funds raised from the sale are channelled into environmental and community projects, creating a positive ripple effect that stretches far beyond the day of the sale. "In that sense, the sale keeps giving, even after it is over," remarks Jayanthi.

The Jumble Sale is made known largely by word of mouth. "We make a poster, and then every member of the ladies' club is on a mission," says Jayanthi. "We tell everyone – our housekeepers, the drivers, security, the local vendors. The message just keeps spreading."

In the digital age, word-of-mouth communication has an extended meaning. It is about loosely framed information getting circulated in social media. By the time the Sale starts, the digital poster is a "tattered sheet" having gone through a wringer of forwarding on social media. Sustainability circles present on social media serve as repeater stations amplifying the message to those near and far.

This approach ensures that the sale's reach extends far beyond the immediate neighbourhood, drawing people from various corners of the metro. Some even make it a point to tell their friends and family to participate in the sale as a donor or a buyer, even if they are themselves miles away.

A forward button on the poster shared in social media does the trick. It is as though the Jumble Sale has become a whispered secret passed along from one person to the next. Jayanthi says the buyers largely come from the fishermen hamlets nearby – lining the Kottivakkam, Pallavakkam and Neelangarai coast. The donors come from everywhere, even from neighbourhoods as distant as Egmore, Nungambakkam and Anna Nagar.

The origins of the Jumble Sale

In 2022, the committee at the helm of affairs at Thillayadi Valliammai Madhar Sangam were brainstorming over organising a sale (possibly, a garage sale) that would help residents of Valmiki Nagar find a fair price for their used goods. They backtracked on the idea when it became clear that such an initiative would cannibalise on an existing one, something that was running like a well-oiled machine. It was "Marketplace", established under the Sangam's entrepreneurship wing, which allowed members to sell even items as expensive as smartphones, preowned. They decided a sale with a social focus would be a better idea, and thus was born the Jumble Sale on 2 April, 2023, with the now well-entrenched philosophy of decluttering the homes of the haves and filling those of the have-nots with essential items.

The second edition of the Sale took place on 7 January, 2024.



Snapshots of the Jumble Sale from its previous editions. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tances and rank strangers who just want to declutter before the New Year," says Jayanthi.

By January, everything is carefully sorted and ready to go, thanks to the dedication of the volunteers who meticulously prepare the sale. It is no small feat, but the team's commitment is evident in every detail. The Sangam has 43 members and it would be all hands on deck when the Sale is in the works. The efforts are steered by a core group

HARSHA KODA

First up, a laconic history note for the larger world.

Around a decade ago, Federation of OMR Resident Associations (FOMRRA) was formed to represent the interests of gated communities on Old Mahabalipuram Road. Since 2015, the membership of this entirely voluntary organisation has swelled from 10 gated communities to over 200. The Federation fosters a climate of learning from each other's experiences and building a collective knowledge base to tackle shared challenges.

We believe in focussing on proactive advocacy and meaningful activism, steering clear of token protests like hunger strikes or dharnas, as our experience has shown that clearly articulating our concerns and using logical reasoning yields better results.

This year, as in the past, FOMRRA organised an interactive session with candidates from all major parties ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. This forum provided valuable insights into their visions, enabling OMR voters to make informed decisions.

Voter ID correction camps

However, making an informed decision is only part of the equation. What if your name is not even on the voter list or your voter ID contains errors? To address this, FOMRRA, in collaboration with Karmayogam, has initiated Voter ID correction camps. These camps will continue for the next year, aiming to boost voter registration ahead of the upcoming state and local elections. FOMRRA successfully advocated for the closure of toll gates on OMR through a signature cam-

Polevaulting into the future

In 2024, FOMRRA established a wide range of platforms serving a variety of purposes. Far-sighted, these initiatives would continue to serve gated communities on OMR in the years to come, writes FOMRRA's coordinator

paign, backed by the support of our elected leaders. But activism alone is not enough; we also recognise the importance of taking action ourselves.

Action and answers

In line with our commitment to rainwater harvesting, FOMRRA associations now collect over 3.6 million litres of water for every hour of rainfall. This initiative significantly reduces costs for resident welfare associations, as every drop of water in OMR is sourced from tanker lorries.

After years of waiting, parts of OMR, particularly in Sholinganallur, finally received piped water and sewage connections in May 2024. We are actively working to extend this network to multi-story apartment complexes. While there are some "last mile" challenges, we are confident that we will overcome them in due course.

Our Swachh Bharat group organised multiple e-waste collection camps throughout 2024, ensuring safe disposal and recycling in collaboration with the Waste-

Winn Foundation. Additionally, gently used

clothes and toys were donated to Aid India to support residents of tribal villages around Chennai.

Community management

Community management has always posed challenges for the leaders of any community. To address this, FOMRRA has collaborated with OMR based CodeDTX to develop Homefy, a completely free (forever) community management app designed with insights from real-world experiences.

Despite being free, Homefy places a strong emphasis on data security, featuring end-to-end encryption and a round-the-clock support team, including a dedicated assistant for each community.

Impacting lives

For years, we have come together during times of crisis, sharing re-

FOMRRA, in collaboration with Karmayogam, has initiated Voter ID correction camps

sources and information while advocating for government action. Our IMPACT initiative – Integrated Monitoring, Preparedness, & Action Coordination Team – is now actively monitoring and communicating specific issues that require immediate attention to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), Panchayats, media, and other government officials. During the recent monsoon season, we successfully highlighted and addressed flooding, power outages, and other incidents before they escalated. Join our efforts by registering at <http://impact.fomrra.org>.

Celebration time

While activism, advocacy and proactive action would resonate with the office bearers of a society, what would truly matter to the everyday resident of OMR? After all, we all chose to make our homes here to enjoy life, not just to engage in activism. Recognising this, FOMRRA set out to create activities that would engage every resident of OMR.

OMR360 was the platform we created last year to "celebrate" our community spirit through healthy "competition".

This five-month series of events, supported by Dr. Kamakshi Memorial Hospital, De-cathlon, *The Hindu*, Big FM, and KYN, engaged over 5,000 participants in 63 events spanning sports, literature and filmmaking. Each sports event was designed to encourage healthy competition, with unique variations that made them even more challenging and exciting.

In addition to sports, OMR hosted its own Litfest and an environmental weekend during this period. Two books by OMR auth-

ors were launched, a thousand books were swapped, and environmental champions from our community were recognised.

Not to be overlooked, students from OMR schools contributed their innovative ideas to solve everyday problems in the "SOLVE-IT – Simplifying Our Lives Via Effective Innovative Techniques" competition.

Special thanks to FOMRRA volunteer Jayesh Panikar for his tremendous work in organising these events on-site.

This initiative marks one of the largest set of events ever organised by a not-for-profit advocacy organisation. We hope this effort is recognised as a "record" and inspires others to connect, compete, and celebrate, just as the 50,000 homes in OMR have done.

The camaraderie fostered by OMR360 unearthed talents within our community. The musical talents of OMR came together to form the Mini Tiffin Band, which performed at the Babaji Vidyashram grounds, attracting over a thousand attendees. Additionally, the comedy play "Dr. Shukhi Mareez Dukkhi", presented by Sushmaa Roshan at the K.C. High School auditorium, was a massive hit with the Hindi-speaking audience.

In a perfect conclusion to the events of 2024, FOMRRA collaborated with Lasya The Culture Hub to bring Mylapore's Margazhi experience to OMR with 30 well-curated classical music, dance, and drama events at the Janaki Ammal Auditorium in Thoraipakkam.

We invite every resident of OMR to join us in continuing to connect, engage and celebrate our community.

Do not miss the opportunity to be part of this incredible journey. Register today at <https://join.fomrra.org> and let's celebrate life in OMR together.

Harsha Koda is coordinator of FOMRRA





AGUA Gifting Smiles spreads joy and hope to thousands of children

This year, Gifting Smiles, an annual flagship initiative of AGUA Women Foundation, witnessed over 800 volunteers working tirelessly to bring smiles to thousands of children aged 1 to 12. The journey began in October – hours spent collecting funds, choosing toys with care and wrapping them with love. By December, these gifts of joy made their way to the hands of children who could

not believe the treasures they were receiving, says a press release.

This year, Gifting Smiles crossed borders: after covering Tamil Nadu, it crossed borders, state and international.

Volunteers in Bangalore and Mumbai reached children in tribal communities such as Adivasipada, Bhattipada, Ambivili, and Titwala. The initiative crossed over to the United States, with Rohit Bharad-

waj, AGUA's youngest volunteer, spearheading the effort in New Jersey. In Chennai, the team brought smiles to children in fishing communities across Panaiyur, Nainar-kuppam, Kanathur, Karikattukuppam, Kovalam, Semmancheri, Nemmeli, Sulur and Pattipulam. They also visited neighborhoods such as Besant Nagar and Vanagaram, with support from Hope Foundation.

Workshop on mushroom cultivation

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Information & Training Centre is organising a workshop on mushroom cultivation on January 9. Also, a culinary workshop on making brownies will be held on January 10. According to a press release, various flavours of brownies such as walnut, butterscotch, peanut butter, mint, coconut, salted caramel, raspberry, and a few more. The session will focus on both egg and egg-less brownies. For details, call 044 - 29530048.

Gandhi Nagar resident comes up with a collection of poems

Joie De Vivre, the English poetry collection by author Hema Ravi, a resident of Gandhi Nagar, featuring 108 poems was recently self published.

Hema is a freelance trainer for IELTS and Communicative English. She is a poet, author, reviewer, editor and independent researcher. Her poems, short stories, travelogues and articles have been featured in reputed international online and print journals, said a release.

For copies of "Joie De Vivre" contact the poet at 9841003201 or mail her at hemaravi24@gmail.com

Life coach launches book

The Corporate Goddess, the fifth book by author Pushpamma Chandy was released on December 29. The book, originally written in Malayalam and now translated into English by Chandrakala Bhaskar, explores the challenges and triumphs of women navigating life.

The author shared her journey of translating The Corporate Goddess and her hope that the book would inspire women striving to achieve balance and success in life. Pushpamma Chandy is a sought after life coach and psychologist, said a release. She is also an active patron of Aksharasthree - The Literary Woman.

Civic forum seeks better care for KAJ Schmidt Memorial

On December 30, members of Spark, a city-based civic forum, along with the public, lighted candles and placed a wreath on the edifice of KAJ Schmidt at Elliot's Beach in Besant Nagar.

The structure commemorates the valour of a Danish shipping executive who drowned on the beach on this day in 1929 while trying to save the lives of others. The structure was inaugurated on December 30, 1930.

The structure recently got a fresh coat of paint. Spark members T. D. Babu, S. Kamakshi Subramanian and C. Ramakrishnan wanted steps to be taken to

maintain the structure and the space around it.

The rusted gate railings need some maintenance and the area around the monument is littered with trash.

Greater Chennai Corporation is supposed to employ security for three shifts to protect the memorial.

"We see only one person who runs an eatery on the beach being asked to monitor. Many a time, he is not found near the memorial. I hope GCC engages a professional security from an approved agency," said T. D. Babu.

Text: T.S. Atul Swaminathan



During the memorial service held on December 30

Humour club to meet today

Besant Nagar Humour Club is organising its meet on January 5 at Seaview Apartments' Owners' Welfare Association Hall, First Seaward Road, Thiruvanmaimur. Time: At 5 p.m. For details, call 9444755430.



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Two-day programme opens avenues in fashion for tribal welfare students

Close to 150 tribal welfare students from Tamil Nadu got an exposure to careers in fashion and design at National Institute of Fashion Technology - Chennai recently. A two-day residential fashion awareness programme was initiated for them by the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Principles of design, hands-on workshop on drawing skills, colour theory, personality development, storytelling exercises and problem solving activities were some of the programmes that were covered during the two days.

Class XI and XII students who had an inclination towards a career in design and fashion were picked by the Department for this programme which is in its second year. Last year, 100 students were part of this residential programme.

"We are planning to handhold at least 10 students as we see huge potential in them provided the Tribal Welfare Department initiates it

for us," says Sridhar Amanchy, associate professor, Department of Knitwear Design, NIFT.

After last year's awareness programme, 20 students secured admission at various campuses of NIFT with two currently pursuing a course in Chennai, he says.

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Accessibility for elders enhanced at Triplicane temple

Athulya Senior Care, which provides holistic living solutions for seniors, has launched a pilot project – under its #CaringForASenior campaign – at the Arulmigu Sri Parthasarathy Swamy Temple in Triplicane, seeking to address mobility and comfort challenges faced by elderly devotees.

In an event, it introduced wheelchairs for seamless mobility within the temple premises and chairs strategically placed as resting spots for elderly visitors. These thoughtful additions aim to improve the comfort and accessibility of the sacred space for senior citi-



zens. To further enrich the experience, Athulya deployed trained caretakers who volunteered to guide and assist the elders, ensuring their safety and active engagement in temple activities, says a press release.

The #CaringForASenior campaign is

Athulya's promise to enrich the lives of senior citizens by taking a comprehensive approach to their well-being, the release adds.

The project's success can be attributed to the strong collaboration between Athulya, the temple administration, and local senior citizen groups, says the release. This partnership ensured effective outreach and smooth execution, maximising the initiative's impact. Through this model, Athulya envisions creating a replicable framework that can inspire similar accessibility projects at other temples and community spaces, the release adds.

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