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ADVERTISEMENT Future CEOs with a Cause: How Sharanalaya's Young Entrepreneurs Proved That Enterprise meets Empathy

CHENNAI, December 20:

At a time when the world is increasingly debating the role of ethics in business, the students of Sharanalaya School have offered a refreshing and hopeful answer—one that blends entrepreneurship with compassion in a way even seasoned corporate leaders might envy.

Their recently concluded 'Santa Startup Sale', part of the innovative **Kids MBA programme**, was not merely a school event. It became a remarkable demonstration of how children, when empowered with the right learning experiences, can turn enterprise into social impact. In a choice that reflects maturity well beyond their years, the students chose to donate **100% of their profits** to the **PM CARES Fund**, affirming that the spirit of giving can be nurtured as early as the spirit of enterprise.

What began as a classroom project quickly evolved into a live entrepreneurial ecosystem. Students stepped into the shoes of founders—conceptualising products, building teams, forecasting costs, and designing marketing strategies. Their school corridors transformed into vibrant business hubs, buzzing with pitches, prototypes and purpose.



A particularly impressive highlight of the programme was the '**Junior Investor Connect**', a miniature version of real-world funding pitches. Children presented business ideas to teachers and parents acting as "investors," defending their cost structures and projected returns with clarity that would make even boardroom executives nod in approval. The exercise did not just teach them numbers—it taught them confidence, articulation and the courage to own their ideas.

The **Santa Startup Sale** itself was a display of youthful creativity: aromatic homemade snacks, carefully crafted décor pieces, artistic stationery, and festive collectibles—all made by the students. The school community rallied behind the young entrepreneurs, turning the marketplace into a celebration of learning, collaboration, and purpose.

But the true triumph came later, when the students gathered to hand over the proceeds to the **PM CARES Fund**. Along with the donation, they submitted a heartfelt letter expressing their desire to contribute to national welfare initiatives—a gesture that left many parents and teachers visibly moved.

Speaking about the initiative, **Mrs. Manju Venkat, Founder of Sharanalaya School**, said, "Our goal was always to go beyond textbook concepts. Through this initiative, the children learned that profit and purpose can go hand in hand. Their decision to support the PM CARES Fund reflects not just learning, but character. We are deeply proud of their sincerity, teamwork, and vision."

"In an era where education is rapidly evolving, Sharanalaya's approach stands out for a simple reason—it trusts children with real responsibility. And in return, the children have proven that when learning is experiential, meaningful, and values-driver, young minds rise to the occasion with surprising brilliance."

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The Kids MBA initiative has not just produced mini-entrepreneurs—it has shaped socially conscious leaders of tomorrow. Their message is clear: ***The future of business belongs to those who can build with their minds and lead with their hearts.***

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And at Sharanalaya, that future has already begun !!



Stella Maris campus is number 2 on eBird Chennai's checklists for 2025

PRINCE FREDERICK

This is kindergarten stuff to any patch birder. One cannot amass bird species records at will in their chosen patch. Each patch has built-in factors controlling – restricting, if you like – the bird diversity out there. Patches differ by the degrees of restriction thrust on them by factors that are natural as well as anthropogenic. Largely natural.

In the light of this reality, certain patches are meant to be laggards in terms of species counts on platforms such as eBird. But they need not stay invisible. The will of those associated with this patch (its residents and habitues) can overcome this fate in a different way – by diligently generating checklists of birds found in the terrain, every day. If multiple checklists pour in, they can hog a corner of the spotlight.

Through perseverance, and even a form of doughtiness, Stella Maris college has made it to number two on eBird's checklists leaders' roll for Chennai in 2025.

In terms of variety of species, the Stella Maris campus is no patch (pun intended) on Adayaru Estuary. But it is tailgating the leader, which Adayaru Estuary unsurprisingly is.



On December 27, around 2.15 p.m., when this edition was rushing with winged feet to the press, Stella Maris campus stood with

tude of bird species tripping over your doormat, but you can record and report the small number of them that do.

Watching the same set of bird species over and over again is sufficient to understand the essence of all species, even those continents away and never to visit your garden. Kalpana Jayaraman, who

retired in May 2025 as head of the department of zoology at Stella Maris (autonomous), touches upon two reasons for Stella Maris college being where it is on eBird checklists leaders' list.

First, the college got started on campus bird count in 2013. But after two years of forgettable results, the initiative gained momentum – well, the wings of an albatross – in 2015, recalls Kalpana. Salient features of the initiative include training students how to bird, where to bird (around the campus) and where

to post the results of birdings (eBird obviously).

Kalpana notes students are encouraged to prepare multiple checklists, teaming up in groups of three or four. Each group is also asked to eBird in multiple places across the campus, thereby more pairs of eyes are trained on each section, and nothing avian misses the eye. The current head, S.A. Vidhya is "a regular patch birder, birds from campus almost every day, observes Kalpana. So, the baton gets passed, always.

The other reason, according to Kalpana, is the college has been offering a certificate course – Essentials of Birdwatching – for the last five years. It is open to students across departments.

And these factors have obviously made a huge difference.



Snapshots of Campus Bird Count at Stella Maris College in 2021 and 2024; and a screenshot of eBird Chennai checklists leaders' list for 2025.

'Restoration of lakes in Perumbakkam sluggish'

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

More than a year since Chennai Metropolitan Lake Development Authority and Water Resources Department appointed 'lake planners' to rejuvenate Perumbakkam Periya Eri and Sitheri, there seems to be little progress, say residents.

"Not even 30 percent of the restoration work is completed at Perumbakkam Periya Eri and at Sitheri. There is no sign of any restoration work," says N. K. Raja, president of Nesamani Nagar Residents' Welfare Association (NNRWA), Perumbakkam. The development work is being carried out at a cost of ₹19 crores.

NNRWA had sent a petition to the Water Resources Department and Public Works Department to expedite the restoration work in the lakes.

The restoration project includes construction of revetment walls, an illumination facility, walking



tracks, benches, an island and a boat service to the park on the island in Periya Eri, as well as a park along Perumbakkam Periya Eri and Sitheri outside the boundary walls.

At present, in Periya Eri, water hyacinth, trash and 'Seemai Karuvellam' trees. Moreover, the walker's path and the revetment wall along the lake are also overrun with vegetation. Parts of it are bro-



Work to develop a park is under way along Perumbakkam Periya Eri and Sitheri. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ken. "CMDA and WRD officials should visit the lake and expedite the restoration process and throw it open for the public soon," says Raja.



Adyar Estuary clear leader in species count in 2025

Outcomes of certain contests are known even before they are flagged off. The only thing to look for is how decisively the victory is won. Adyar Estuary (as the estuary is spelt on eBird) is a heavily birded patch in Chennai, sometimes verging on the "Overbirded" category.

On December 27, at the time of this article going to press, it had racked up 179 species on eBird for 2025, some of them rarities of the kind that sparked a procession of hopeful birders.

At 150 species, Broken Bridge Road stands second. And Broken Bridge Road is a cousin to Adyar Estuary, being contiguous with it.

At 140, species, Sholinganallur/ Perumbakkam marshlands takes the bronze.

Volunteers spruce up temple



As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sri Krishna Sweets, in coordination with YACD Trust, Gopalapuram, held the 165th 'Paramam Pavithram' (cleaning seva) at Sri Raghavendra Swamy Temple in Triplicane.

More than 70 volunteers, formed into four groups, handled different aspects of the Seva, including cleaning the silver vessels and the temple premises, said a release.



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Spotlight on young alumni

A number of initiatives were launched at the third global meet of RKM Vivekananda College Alumni Association



The third Global Alumni Meet of RKM Vivekananda College Alumni Association, held on December 20, ended on a high note. The meet witnessed the participation of over 600 alumni, including nearly 50 of them aged above 80 years making it to the event. Over 30 alumni from overseas and more than 100 from Chennai and other cities took part in the event.

A number of initiatives were

launched on the occasion. Raksha Green Solutions and RKMVC exchanged a collaborative MoU to promote biotechnology research, with scope for other alumni to participate.

A 'Youth Forum' was launched to actively engage young alumni and prepare them to take leadership roles. A placement corner stall was introduced for the first time at the meet, receiving encouraging responses. A 'Souvenir Shop' was inaugurated, showcas-



From the event held on the college campus. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



vidual donor and an alumnus of the 1974 batch; R. Seshasayee, Chairman, Asian Paints (1966 batch); and R. Varadarajan, former Chairman, BPCL (1976 batch).

The alumni association has taken up a number of initiatives in the last one year including opening an Alumni Office on the college premises and creating a governing board consisting of seven members with the secretary, RKMVC as patron.

Monthly leadership talks highlighting career opportunities across industries and launching a quarterly newsletter for the alumni fraternity made sure old students stayed connected with events in the college. Likewise its LinkedIn page, launched in July 2025, has been growing.

Photo gallery chronicles memorable events

The Golden Jubilee Alumni Meet of P S Senior Secondary School dripped with nostalgia

The golden jubilee alumni meet of P S Senior Secondary School was held on the campus in Mylapore on December 20.

Alumnus Kamakoti Veezhinathan, Director of IIT - Madras, was the chief guest. In his address, he delved into how the school moulded him.

Principal Revathy Parameswaran, in her address, thanked the alumni for contributing towards the scholarship fund. K. Alamelu, a retired principal who was at the helm for 21 years; K. V. S. Gopalakrishnan, president of P S Educational Society, and P. S. Prabhakar, correspondent of the school, presided over the event.



A photo gallery featuring memorable moments of the school spanning its 50 years – starting from its inception in 1976 and its founding fathers, the international Olympiads won by students, the school's four Principals winning the President's "Best Teacher Award", expansion of infrastructure – was a huge hit among the alumni, said a release.

The current students of class 12 gave a video presentation chronicling the school's development since its inception. On the occasion, alumnus R. S. Advaith organised an orchestra.

The reunion witnessed participation of an impressive number of alumni. They visited the classrooms and regaled old memories. The day concluded with a sumptuous dinner hosted by the school.

The alma mater was grandly decorated with flowers and dazzling lights to mark its golden jubilee.

Storytelling event today in Teynampet

Storyteller Pretigaya Haran is organising a storytelling event in which she will share some nostalgic personal tales from her life. It will be held in Teynampet on December 28. Time: From 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

According to a press release, no fee will be charged to take part in the event. The session will be of interest to those 16 years of age and above.

For venue and other details, call 8056051247.



Handcrafted wishes

In a few days, there would be a burst of greetings. They would resonate with different wavelengths of emotion and effort. Simple and insincere. Simple but sincere. Complex yet insincere. Complex and sincere. That last category would encompass physical greeting cards that come at some price to the sender, the cost more hidden than revealed. These are customised and handcrafted cards; if the reader fancies sending them when 2026 dawns, they might want to pick the brains of these two residents of Chennai, one a corporate professional and the other yet to outgrow the school uniform



Jyotsna K and a couple of her works; and (below) Kavya Aravind and a display of some of the greeting cards she crafted. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



days, obviously given her corporate job, with free hours snatched out of those days. But Jyotsna also runs marathons with these greetings. Scrap books with ten to twelve pages take several days, while resin elements require up to six days simply to dry. "Waiting becomes part of the experience," says Jyotsna, a resident of Adyar. "When someone orders a New Year card early, it already shows care."

Personalisation is ever an unpredictable child, there is no telling what new demand it has tucked in its armpit. Some customers arrive with reference reels saved on their phones, but many come with stories instead. "They tell me about their journey, their relationship, their memories," she says. These narratives are translated visually through photographs, handwritten messages, song references, dates and timelines. "It is never just decoration. It is about their story."

Handmade greeting cards start at ₹200, while scrapbooks are priced per page depending on

fort, multiple revisions, and quality material. Only the maker understands the patience involved."

Jyotsna notices that younger customers respond strongly to handmade New Year greetings. "Gen Z values emotional connection," she says. "They want something intentional. Something that feels chosen, not forwarded."

Warmth on paper

At age 11, a child would not be expected to carry projects from craft class at school over to the home, let alone carry the weight of a craft-based brand on their slender shoulders.

Kavya Aravind, 11 years old, carries the latter responsibility without flinching from its rigours. A student of Velachery-based Sunshine Chennai Senior Secondary School, Kavya runs Krafty Kings, quilling greeting cards, patiently coaxing flowers, trees and festive motifs (an immediate example being Christmas trees) out of thin paper strips. Greeting card making fits into the margins of her days shaped around school, homework and weekends – the support she receives from her parents ensures she does the balancing act commendably well.

"I started making greeting cards when I was in third grade," Kavya says. She learnt the art of quilling from a neighbour, beginning with a simple card adorned with quilled flowers. While not placing a cap on creativity, Kavya respects the power of seasonality while crafting greeting cards. For example, Christmas and New Year have their unique idioms, flavours and even tropes. She settles designs into the language of the season without a frown. "My friends asked me to make a Christmas greeting card with a tree," she says, as if such requests were inevitable.

Simple greeting cards can be completed in twenty to thirty minutes; the one with intricate designs, close to an hour. The tools are modest. Paper. Quilling strips. Glue. A slender quilling tool. Yet the smallest step often proves the most unforgiving. "The sticking part is the most difficult," Kavya admits. "If we do not put the right amount of glue, it will come off and we have to start again."

Kavya prices her greeting cards at ₹ 200; and canvas wall hangers at ₹ 250. Orders now arrive through WhatsApp groups.



week. It's not always easy to balance both, but doing something I truly love brings immense joy and keeps me going."

Besides making personalised greeting cards for customers, she also teaches how to make them, through workshops. A cache of reels on her Insta page function somewhat like tutorials, dishing out DIY greeting card ideas for special days – Teacher's Day, Father's Day and so on.

Handcrafted cards obviously do

not roll off the assembly line, and they gobble time like a gourmand. On an average, work on a handcrafted card is wrapped up in two

complexity. Pricing often invites questions. "To some people it looks like just paper," she admits. "But behind it is time, creative ef-

Colleges as civil service coaching hubs

An increasing number of colleges in Chennai run study circles on their premises to help students prepare for UPSC and TNPSC exams

LIFFY THOMAS

From January 2026, in Chennai, those aspiring to crack competitive examinations that would open doors to civil services jobs have an added place to visit to sharpen their edge – the IAS study circle established by Annai Veilankanni college at its premises in Saidapet. While offering coaching to its arts and science students at a “subsidised” fee, the college rolls out the red carpet to aspirants in their neighbourhood.

Both arts and science and engineering colleges running their in-house academies/ study circles that serve as a pathway to a career in civil services is not a new trend, just that the number of institutions offering this option has been on the increase over the years.

From government colleges to self-financing institutions, a focused group or centre providing coaching, mock tests, inviting expert speakers and offering personalised guidance for success in examinations conducted by UPSC and TNPSC has become an important talking point.

While a majority of institutions offer these classes at no cost, some levy a nominal fee. Many of them do not promise intensive coaching, just a launch pad. This academic year, A.M. Jain College in Meenambakkam opened two study circles, one for careers in armed forces and the other for UPSC coaching, both offered free of cost.

“In a class of 40 if one cracks the exam then it motivates the others. The preparation for the exam is such that there is greater collaboration among students and there is a plenty of resources available on the campus for students to get much out of it. We only see students gaining by preparing for such examinations,” says M. Raanya, dean, AM Jain College. A faculty related to the subject is asked to handhold the students. “We ensure there is separate remuneration for any value-added course a faculty takes up,” she says.

For those keen on intensive training, A.M. Jain College has a MoU with an external academy that comes to the campus to train students at a cost.

For students focused on cracking the exam, the college grants them on-duty leave to prepare before exams or gives a re-test if they have missed an internal exam, says the Dean of A.M. Jain College.

Colleges opening their doors for external coaching academies and roping in guest speakers means students save on the addi-



Students of A.M. Jain College who aspire to civil services jobs immersed in a discussion. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tional travel they would have to undertake to access these resources.

Last year, Guru Nanak College set up a committee to support students keen on a career in the civil services.

The website of KCG Tech says

its Civil Service Aspiration Club conducts classes every alternate week for two hours, which includes exam preparation and talks from UPSC achievers and high-ranking civil servants. Easwari Engineering College calls its programme Civil Services Training

Programme. CTTE College in Perambur is increasingly focusing on helping its students excel in Group II and IV exams.

Janani G, a Union Public Service Commission aspirant and a tutor at academies, says, “When I graduated from engineering college 12

years ago, we did not have such avenues being opened to us. There may not be many success stories from colleges, but that is fine as long as students are getting exposure even while pursuing under graduation.”

With government funding

Even before Chennai began to witness a craze for civil services, Queen Mary’s College started providing free training since 2001 for

Colleges opening their doors for external coaching academies and roping in guest speakers means students save on the additional travel they would have to undertake to access these resources

women graduates who are selected through an entrance exam and interview. The free coaching centre is funded by the government of Tamil Nadu. But more still needs to be done. Despite having Anna Nagar, which is hailed as a magnet for civil service coaching centres and colleges grooming students to think of a career in UPSC, Chennai is yet to see a string of success stories. Delhi continues to see the highest number of successful UPSC candidates.

Fashioning civil servants for 25 years

For the last 25 years, Directorate of Employment and Training has been running ‘Study Circles’ that function at all the district employment and career guidance centres in the State. These centres assist aspirants in various competitive examinations including UPSC, TNPSC and RRB by conducting mock tests and inviting experts to conduct sessions. According to www.tnvelaiavaippu.gov.in, free coaching is offered to the differently-abled aspirants by engaging sign language interpreters and Braille assistance is given to the visually challenged.

Coaching classes are also conducted at various universities and affiliated arts and science colleges to help economically weak students studying in the final year. In 2024 and 2025, at least 10 students who attended classes at the



Candidates take a mock test at the Study Circle.

Study Circle have cleared TNPSC examinations. One can avail these classes on all weekdays (between

10 a.m. and 1 p.m.). They also have a library with a good collection of books. The Study Circle is

located at Alandur Road, Thiruvikka Industrial Estate, Guindy. For details, call 94999 66026.

STATUS REPORT

'Kolapakkam junction operates without rules'

Commuters and activists demand signals, speed breakers and other safety measures at Kolapakkam junction on Vandalur-Kelambakkam Road. During peak hour, this intersection becomes a major traffic bottleneck and cannot do without police presence



T. ARVIND

The traffic passing through Vandalur-Kelambakkam Road every day is voluminous, placing this arterial stretch among the busiest on the city's southern fringe. The road, which rolls past several engineering and medical colleges, schools, a police academy and forest department establishments, connects Vandalur Zoo with Kelambakkam on Old Mahabalipuram Road (officially called Rajiv Gandhi Salai).

While traffic flow at several intersections along the corridor has improved with the installation of speed breakers and introduction of basic traffic management measures, commuters say the Kolap-

kam junction continues to remain a major bottleneck.

Unregulated intersection

At Kolapakkam, the absence of traffic signals and consistent police presence results in frequent congestion, especially during morning and evening peak hours. Motorists criss-cross the junction with little discipline, pedestrians jaywalk unchecked, and school vans are often seen overtaking MTC buses and heavy vehicles, commuters allege.

The situation worsens as motorists from Perungaluthur use Gandhi Road to join the Vandalur-Kelambakkam High Road, while



At the Kolapakkam junction on Vandalur-Kelambakkam Road.

PHOTOS: T. ARVIND

Headmaster of government school honoured at convocation



More than 1,200 students (undergraduate and post-graduate courses) and Ph.D. scholars were awarded degrees and doctorates at the two-day 19th annual convocation of Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research (MAHER).
Mas, head of the Centre for Stem Cell Research, Christian Medical College, Vellore, was conferred the 'Degree of Doctor of Science' in recognition of his contribution to the field of diabetology.

S. Ayyappan, Headmaster of the Government Tribal Residential School, Udumalpet, Tiruppur district, was honoured with the 'Jayanthi Radhakrishnan Award' for educating tribal students.

Additionally, 103 meritorious students received medals and certificates in recognition of their outstanding academic performance, said a press release.

Renowned ophthalmologist Dr. Amar Agarwal, chairman of Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital, was the chief guest.

During the two-day ceremony, Professor Nihal Tho-

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heavy vehicles moving between Vandalur and Kelambakkam also enter the same junction from the opposite direction. "In the absence of regulation, everyone tries to push through and the junction descends into chaos," a regular commuter observes.

'Accident-prone stretch'

Regular users of the road have flagged the junction as accident-prone. "There have been several accidents at this spot, though thankfully none has been fatal so far," says Seshadri, who commutes daily through Kolapakkam. He adds that a speed breaker is also needed to rein in speeding vehicles.

Call for signals

Residents and road safety activists have urged the traffic police and highways authorities to install a traffic signal at the junction to streamline vehicle movement. They have also called for speed breakers fitted with reflectors, proper lane markings and clear signage to alert motorists approaching the intersection.

In addition, activists have demanded brighter streetlights along the stretch, citing poor visibility at night as another factor contributing to unsafe conditions.

Commuters say timely intervention at Kolapakkam junction would not only reduce congestion but also prevent accidents on a road that continues to witness rising traffic volumes.

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Venue: Muthamizh Peravai, T.N Rajarathinam Kalai Arangam



**SARGAM
CHOIR**
6 PM - 7 PM



SPOORTHI RAO
7.30 PM - 8.30 PM

30th Dec 2025

Venue: Muthamizh Peravai, T. N. Rajarathinam Kalai Arangam



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