

TAMBARAM

Chromepet » Pallavaram » Tambaram West » Rajakilpakkam » Mannivakkam » Guindy » Keelkattalai » Nanganallur » Guduvanchery » Hasthinapuram » Pammal » Tambaram East
Medavakkam » Srinivasa Nagar » Kathipara Junction » Kovilambakkam » Sadasivam Nagar » Potheri » Selaiyur » Sembakkam » St.Thomas Mount » Madipakkam » Urappakkam » Paranur

Three line agencies inspect rainwater vent under Chennai Bypass Road



At a meeting with residents and officials. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

On November 30, a team of officials from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Water Resources Department (WRD) and Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) conducted a joint inspection of a rainwater vent below the Chennai Bypass Road in Thiruneermalai.

This marks the second time NHAI and WRD has carried out an inspection following a request being made by residents. They want NHAI to widen the vent located below the Bypass Road to facilitate rainwater drainage from 'Nattukalvai'. The office bearers of the Federation of Welfare Associations accompanied the officials.

B. Saravanan, a social activist and resident of the area, points out excess rainwater from Pachai Malai flows into Veeraraghavan Eri, Thiruneermalai Periya Eri and finally into 'Nattukalvai'.

"Due to encroachments, floodwaters enter areas near Nattukalvai, causing flooding. A retaining wall and a closed ca-

nal have to be constructed to prevent flooding. During rains, 1,000 to 1,800 cubic feet of water flows through the channel to the Adyar river," says Saravanan.

The WRD officials say they have submitted a representation in this regard, estimated at a cost of ₹ 35 crores, at a camp held by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Office, which is awaiting funding.

CMWSSB officials say that in addition to a Veeranam drinking water pipe going across the canal, five more pipes will be laid.

Officials say the pipes will be laid below the earth along and across the channel and have sought permission from WRD. NHAI is awaiting provision of bed stream level details of Naatkalvai from WRD to analyse and submit a project proposal to the regional head (New Delhi) for permission to provide additional water vents.

"We request that the officials from the three departments work together to expedite the process so that this project can begin before the 2026 State Assembly Election Code of Conduct kicks in," says Saravanan.

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A 'rosy' start to environment activism?

Close on the heels of its first wetland bird count, Birders Tribe, a fledgling group, has scheduled a survey of five lakes across Chennai Metropolitan Area, including Nanmangalam, Chitlapakkam and Vandalur lakes, for the fag end of this month



PRINCE FREDERICK

On the morning of December 7, Birders Tribe (@birdertribe) had not bargained for a psychology lecture. They had traded a Sunday lie-in for a bird count at the Pallikaranai marsh. While their ears were perked up for chirps, they also heard the hoofs of an unexpected visitor. Not this writer, who was expected to show up that morning at the Marsh and meet with the fledgling birders group. The guest who had arrived unbidden was Kurt Lewis. There was an illustration, an unmistakable exposition of approach-avoidance conflict. The man associated with this theory, Kurt Lewis had come back from the dead, dodging the fast-

moving traffic on the Pallavaram-Thoraipakkam 200-feet Radial Road and settled down for a concise lecture about it by the side of the road. Greater Chennai Corporation's massive Perungudi dumping yard reared up on the other side of the road.

The birders were repelled by what had drawn them, approach-avoidance theory kicking in for them. Rosy starlings had gathered in sizeable numbers. There were dozens and dozens of them, perched on a small dead thistle-tree and skipping about in the land right under it. The tree and the land were outside the dumping site. The species and its numbers would look good on the census sheets. It was Birders Tribe's first wetland survey. It was also a great

opportunity for clicks, a binocular and a camera in these times being as inseparable as word pairs.

At the same time, the fact that the piece of earth, essentially the roadside space, was sullied by garbage, bringing the stench of the Perungudi Dump closer to the nostrils, rankled. Mounds of earth are heaped up from deepening and dredging the earthen canal by the side of the road to facilitate free flow of water. Pieces of trash stick to these mounds like confetti to the coiffures of invitees to a birthday party.

An extended gaze

Members of Birders Tribe revealed they did not stop at looking at birds, but extended the gaze to the state of the habitats that support



Some of the members of Birders Tribe; Rosy starlings by the side of Pallavaram Thoraipakkam 200-feet Radial Road; and the garbage close to the road the group took cognisance of. The images were taken on December 7, 2025. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK

them. They want to function as an advocacy group. There is a series of surveys being lined up.

One of the two founders of Birders Tribe, Vignesh V – the other founder is Rajeev Vishwakarma – elaborates: "A survey of five lakes – Vandalur, Potheri, Nanmangalam, Chitlapakkam and Perumbakkam lakes – is in the offing, having been scheduled for December 27 (nocturnal survey) and December 28 (diurnal morning survey). It is being carried out with the Forest Department's support. Before that, on December 21, an awareness walk is being organised at the Po-rur wetland park for the families of members, with the special focus on educating the children." Additionally, a window has been reserved for the survey of what is called Sho-

linganallur marshland, which essentially is a spit of land organically related to the Pallikarani Marsh. Vignesh notes that this planned survey just hovers over the calendar and is yet to land on a definite date.

Wrapping this up, Birders Tribe is a young group, and in birding terms, just "one winter old", as Vignesh says it will be celebrating its first anniversary in January 2026. It shows promise in terms of citizen science and advocacy, if you factor in the care it takes with its surveys.

It has drawn up a December 7 trip report, a collation of six eBird lists by members. This data collated by two members, K Sujatha and Saptarshi Chatterjee, is up on eBird – <https://ebird.org/trip-report/439989>

STATUS REPORT



Trees felled in Rajakilpakkam to make way for lorries, say residents

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

According to residents of Rajakilpakkam, on December 5, a real estate developer constructing houses at Rajiv Gandhi Nagar Extension in Rajakilpakkam, cut 15 trees to allow lorries transporting construction materials to move without any

hindrance.

When residents questioned the action by the developer, those engaged to cut the trees said they obtained permission from the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation. However, the officials with the Corporation say they are unaware of the entire episode.

Residents have requested

the civic body to file a police complaint in this regard.

Residents note that in the wee hours of December 12, the builder placed seven saplings and tree guards. When contacted, S. Balachander, Commissioner of the Corporation said: "I had given a complaint to the Police to file an FIR against the builder on December 11."



Buses up against a tiresome bottleneck at Airport Metro

Passengers arriving at the NLC India Airport Metro station in Tirusulam can easily access the bus stop located inside the airport premises, but the MTC buses cannot

T. ARVIND

Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) has been operating both mini-bus shuttles and regular services from NLC India Airport Metro station, connecting the airport with Kilambakkam's Kalaignar Centenary Bus Terminus (KCBT), Alkarai on East Coast Road, and neighbourhoods along GST Road. The services, which offer an affordable alternative to cabs and autos, have been steadily gaining patronage from air travellers and local commuters.

Passengers arriving at the NLC India Airport Metro station can easily access the bus stop located just across the short stretch within the airport premises. However, this convenience is undermined by a persistent bottleneck at the station's exit, where buses must make a sharp left turn – effectively a tight reverse U-turn – onto GST Road.

Every evening, this narrow turn becomes severely choked. Even mini-buses struggle to negotiate the bend due to the barricaded lane allotted exclusively for vehicles exiting the Metro station.

The remaining half of the stretch, located below the flyover, is already used by vehicles coming from Pallavaram via the service lane, leaving buses with very little manoeuvring space.



Mini bus S100 that plies between Chennai Airport and Tambaram West. Photo: Velankanni Raj B/The Hindu

Tweak the traffic regulation'

Commuters and crew members point out the issue is not only one of road geometry but also of traffic management. They want CMRL officials to deploy personnel to regulate the movement of buses, cabs and private vehicles at the exit point.

"They should ensure that vehicles line up to the extreme right before turning left. This will make the turn easier for buses," a crew member says.

With multiple junctions and signals immediately after merging into GST Road, passengers say the added difficulty at the exit unnecessarily lengthens travel time on what is otherwise a short, five-kilometre stretch.

Many hope that Metro Rail and transport authorities will coordinate to ease the turning space and streamline vehicle flow, and ultimately address this problem.

Plea to remove structure on SWD network in Pammal



Residents of Gokulam Colony in Pammal have requested the Pammal Zone of the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation to remove an encroachment on the stormwater drain network on Anna Salai and in a section of Second Street.

M. Sreekumar, a resident, says, "A year ago, after we raised the issue with the Pammal Zone, steps were taken to remove the structure, but it has come up again."

During rains, water in the stormwater drain network on Anna Salai (along a hospital) is unable to flow into the drain network in Gokulam Colony, Second Street, flooding Anna Salai.

Residents say the stormwater drain network on First and Second Street was not properly de-silted, leading to flooding. The network is stagnant with sewage and trash is being dumped. In addition, in the Colony, along Teacher Samuel Street, the networks on Anna Salai and the street intersect with the network on First Street via a culvert. The network on First Street intersects with the network on Pammal Main Road, Pammal, (through a culvert) which connects to the Adyar River.

Text by T.S. Atul Swaminathan



The stormwater drain network on Gokulam Colony Second Street in Pammal.

NGO in Pammal distributes clothes

Members of Manasathottu, a non governmental organisation in Pammal, led by its founder M. Paneerselvam, recently paid a visit to Saint Joseph's Hospices for Dying Destitute, Palaywaram, Kancheepuram and Child Haven International School in Kaliyampondi, near Uthiramerur.

At the Joseph's Hospices, the mem-

bers distributed more than 200 nighties, 100 neck vests and bermudas. For more than 200 children, the members distributed notebooks, pencils, pens, whitepaper, and groundnut candies.

Rev. Fr. R. V. Thomas, founder of Saint Joseph's Hospices for Dying Destitute, was present during the visit.

Here is another example of how private entities ignore the process of approval from the district green committee that is needed for removing a tree

Two trees felled; violators fined



PRINCE FREDERICK

A good number of us dream to live as long as Methuselah did. Trees live that dream, some even outliving that poster boy for longevity, if they are allowed to. Last week, two trees on PV Cherian Crescent Road in Egmore was denied that "permission". Count it among existential oddities that trees have to be permitted by an artificial human-made world to realise the potential for longevity received unconditionally from Nature.

At PV Cherian Crescent Road, which derives its quietude in no small measure from the trees lining it, the axe struck twice last week, the first time on December 7, reducing one massive tree to a stump. According to a resident who wants to stay anonymous, when the workers were questioned about it, pat came the reply that

the Corporation had ordered the hand that wielded the axe. With that explanation, residents who were disturbed by the cutting of the tree assumed there should be a justification for the act and let the matter rest. On December 12, the axe struck again, the Avenue's arboreal wealth down by one more tree.

"Two beautiful big trees with their canopy spreading from one side of the road to the other, were mercilessly felled. We now fear the other trees around here for years providing shade, will be soon gone too," says M. Deepika, a resident of PV Cherian Crescent Road.

The matter was now breathed to tree conservation NGO Nizhal and the Chennai District Green Committee. As it turned out, the cutting of the two trees had not been authorised by Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC).

At the time of this article going to press, a GCC official familiar with the developments said Corporation



staff from the GCC's parks department had gone to the site to collect the fine from the private entity who had had the trees cut.

T.D. Babu, a member of Chennai District Green Committee who is also associated with Nizhal, said the cutting of these two trees was news to the green committee.

"GCC had not given permission for the trees to be cut. GCC or any other local civic body or government agency managing a road (example: highways) cannot order the felling of a tree in its roads, no matter how justified the move might be, without first presenting the case to the district green committee and seeking its approval," explains Babu.

If this process is not followed, a line, a clearly etched green line, is crossed.

Babu continues: "The green committee had decided to penalise such violators with a fine of ₹ one lakh per tree. The way builders and other commercial establishments are violating the rule by bypassing the approval process and getting away with a penalty, I feel ₹ one lakh is too small. They, especially builders and commercial establishments, need temporary suspension of the building project and suspension of commercial license beside heavy penalty respectively. This will bring them in line. Similarly, private tree cutters need to be brought within a ring of accountability. Every district should identify tree cutters and have them registered and given licenses. Only these people can cut the tree upon approval. This will help in traceability, which is lacking."

Back to PV Cherian Crescent Road, from whatever was left of one of the trees that was captured on camera, Babu identified it as a rain tree, probably 70 years old with considerably more years un-lived, never to be lived. In the arboreal world, its epitaph would read "struck down in its prime."

The stumps of the two trees that were cut on PV Cherian Crescent Road in Egmore; and the logs being carted away. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

An unsafe stretch, particularly at night



Mambakkam Medavakkam Main Road is an arterial stretch serving as a major link between two busy corridors – Tambaram Velachery Main Road (at Medavakkam) and Vandalur Kelambakkam High Road (at Mambakkam). A section of this key road has taken on the character of a mud road, thanks to it being opened up for civic infrastructure project and not being relaid after completion of the work. This section where a part of the carriageway is filled with earth falls in Veerabandra Nagar in Vengaivasal (landmark: Sairam Leo Muthu Public School) and is around a kilometre long. The images were taken on December 11, 2025. PHOTOS: R. RAVINDRAN

Young gated community bags composting project

Clover By The River in Kotturpuram was adjudged the winner; SIMPLE from Thalambur and RK Nagarra from Mandaveli made it to the finals

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Sometimes, work is rewarded with more work. Clover By The River (CBTR), a gated community in Kotturpuram, is the recipient of such a reward. It considers itself to be in an enviable situation, because 12 other communities were seeking that increase in their daily workload.

The seeds of this competition, certainly not a no-holds-barred one, but one involving like-minded green souls and therefore one assumes it to have been more of “coopetition” (competition ruled by a spirit of cooperation), was scattered when the brains behind “We Segregate Stewardship Program” wanted to take it beyond Kasturba Nagar. In Kasturba Nagar, the visible sign of the initiative is three lane composters, and bagfuls of compost every three months.

The idea behind the contest was to have lane composters parked in at least one more community in Chennai.

(We Segregate project is funded by the Urban Ocean program and nurtured by Okapi Research & Advisory, ROKA and Chennai Resilience Centre with the support of on-ground partners which include



Snapshots of the process that was followed as part of the competition.



Greater Chennai Corporation and Urbaser Sumeet).

The exercise to find a new com-

munity that could be “saddled” with the responsibility of lane-composting in its environs, had 13 con-

testants. Research and Advisory, ROKA, Chennai Resilience Center and Urban Ocean teams.”

Clover By The River will find two lane composters parked in its neck of the woods in January 2026, after Pongal, says Ayesha.

Here is a glimpse of the SWM ethos at this gated community in Kotturpuram through the eyes of inside volunteer. This is based on a document a resident-volunteer of the Green Team in the community shared with *The Hindu Downtown*.

“We are a young, three year old, 300 apartment, gated community in Kotturpuram. Once residents started moving in during 2022, we realised that we had a group of like-minded residents interested in activities relating to sustainable living. The Green Team was formed when barely 30 residents had moved in. Being a 300 apartment community we were categorised as bulk waste generators by the Greater Corporation of Chennai. We also understood that proper waste segregation was not just important for the community and the environment but also mandated by the GCC. After much discussion, observation, monitoring, testing and consulting subject matter experts we realised that the in-house composter we were using, produced output that was potentially harmful to the soil and plants in the long run. With the support of our Association we were able to come up with an alternative method of green waste handling that was also acceptable to the GCC. We now have a GCC empanelled vendor who picks up our green waste and reject waste. Our recyclable plastics are collected by Bisleri as part of their CSR initiative.”

Based on the study, three made it to the shortlist – RK Nagarra from Mandaveli, SIMPLE from Thalambur and Clover By The River from Kotturpuram.

All the three were strong contestants, each of them having an unique and inspiring SWM track record,” says Ayesha. “The winner was collectively chosen by Okapi



Learning how to multitask

This law student from SRM School of Law in Kattankulathur has left the stadium with crucial skills, those involving analysis and critical thinking, and they are going to help her in the classroom.

"In law, you learn to deploy various things and manage them with ease. Such were the practical lessons I learnt in the field working with various teams including media and technical for close to 10 days," says Bhagavathi Priyadarshini R, a third year student.

A volleyball player at school, Bhagavathi signed up as a volunteer for the love of hockey and the new skills she wanted to develop. For some days she juggled exams and matches, being in the field in the afternoon.

"Every day, we are either placed with a new team or given a new task. A conclave organised at Kalaivanar Arangam with top 20 hockey coaches as speakers threw up inspiring talks," she says.

The quarter-finals clash between India and Belgium was one of the best matches she has watched. She says, "The stadium was packed; the nail-biting finish made the match memorable. The best part of the whole event was watching the matches up close."



The recently concluded FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup 2025 held at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Egmore had dozens of students volunteering for it. *The Hindu Downtown* spoke to some of them on the unique opportunities for learning that this event threw up for them

LIFFY THOMAS

Spotlight on hockey

In sports, seeing is learning

R. Mumanja waited a full year to get selected into SDAT to pursue hockey. Currently pursuing second year Sociology at MOP Vaishnav College and staying at the SDAT hostel, Mumanja knows the importance of not missing any opportunity in the sport. Her fascination for the 'stick game' began after she accompanied her brother who used to be part of every match played in her hometown Kovilpatti.

Mumanja was among the volunteers during the flag-bearing ceremony all the days of the tournament. Her role would end after the nation-

Tips and tricks for all seasons

V. Aravind is returning to his hometown with a wealth of tips, all jotted down in his pocket diary over the 10 days. "Journaling in my diary at the end of the day about the important hockey lessons I learnt is a practice I follow since enrolling with Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu. So when this opportunity to volunteer for FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup came up, I made sure I carried a small book in my pocket to take down important lessons learnt on the field which I discuss/ clarify with my coach," says Aravind.

The 23-year-old is a promising hockey player and was part of the core team in the Junior India team in 2022. He had seven of his friends playing for India this time and is hoping to get a chance next time. A native of Kovilpatti in Thoothukudi district which is a major hub for hockey in Tamil Nadu, Aravind got inspired to take up the sport seeing his uncle play for the state.

"If we had come as an audience, we would only watch the match and leave. As a volunteer, there are invaluable lessons we could pick up," he says, adding that 21 from SDAT - Kovilpatti were selected to volunteer for the World Cup in Chennai and 10 in Madurai.

The kind of warm-up international players go through before a match, planning and strategy and

the body language are some important lessons Aravind is taking back with him.

His fan moment arrived when he got to see Spain's coach Maximiliano Jorge Caldas. "I had goosebumps seeing him up close; he has been an inspiration for many hockey players because of the way he has groomed the team," says a thrilled Aravind.

Another key lesson for Aravind is the importance of speaking English. He elaborates: "Our coach N. Muthu Kumar would always ask us to pick up English skills but I did not take the advice seriously. Now I really understand why he would say that, because when you have international players and coaches coming to your country you have some deep questions on the sport to ask them; and language can be a stumbling block."



A twirl from the past



The green artificial turf of the hockey ground at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium; and during the men's hockey final against Pakistan in the SAF Games on December 26, 1995. PHOTOS: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

A series of events in Chennai would bring various stakeholders working in the waste management sector to invest in revenue-generating projects where underprivileged women could be upskilled and made part of the circular economy

Recycling solutions for waste we ignore



BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The next time a plastic food container needs to be disposed of, make sure it is rinsed a sufficient number of times before being "offloaded" responsibly. Recycling items with food residue poses a challenge, they often end up in a dumping ground.

Two Chennai-based women entrepreneurs Desika Prabakar and Obulaxmi S., who run the non-profit DPurpose Foundation, have started conducting a series of events focussed on waste that nobody cares about.

Titled 'Waste2Purpose', the first in this 10-part series delved into the subject of non-recyclable plastic waste. Some of the other non-recyclable wastes include thermoset plastics used in packaging crockery, doors and floorings; multi-layered plastics; sanitary plastics, foam plastics and composite plastics

"Waste2Purpose aims to convert some of the most challenging waste streams into scalable, revenue-generating waste-to-value projects, with a strong focus on upskilling women and involving them in the circular economy," says Desika Prabakar, founder and director, DPurpose Foundation.

Designed as a closed round table, the event has conservancy workers as chief guests along with Government, industry leaders, corporate CSR and investors com-

ing together to analyse and establish projects that can resolve issues such as non-recyclable plastic waste with advanced technologies, says a release.

"We need advanced technology to recycle such hard plastics but there are not many who are willing to invest, so our event was aimed at bringing all stakeholders to one table and finding solutions including bringing investors," says Desika that Krystal Venture Studios supported them as investor partner.

One of the first events was held at Startup TN Headquarters at Nandanam. Rajeshwari, a conservancy worker with Urbaser Sumeet, spoke about the realities of handling non-recyclable plastics, especially talking about the challenges faced by ground-level women waste workers every day.

Desika says there are gaps not only in technology but also in implementation. "Several such project machines get installed and due to lack of technical teams and consistent investments the machines gather dust. So the primary goal in this whole initiative is to employ women and upskill them in the whole value chain," she says.

Technology solutions such as advanced pyrolysis, multi-layer plastic recycling, chemical recycling and refuse-derived fuel were presented before expert teams for end-to-end execution. The top two short-

listed finalists are now in stages for further funding. The best startup pitch was recognised as Thaal Innovations for its breakthrough solution converting PU foam waste into polyol through chemical recycling, enabling direct reintegration into the manufacturing supply chain, says the note.

"These two projects will now move into structured implementation under the Waste2Purpose framework. Next in line in the 10-part series is solutions for textile waste followed by hazardous, construction, mining, foundry, effluent, agri, paper and organic wastes," says Desika.

Rajeshwari, a battery-fitted vehicle operator from Urbaser Sumeet, speaks at the round table. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Workshop on entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship Development & Innovation Institute is conducting a programme on entrepreneurship development from December 15 to 19 at its premises at EDII Institute Road, SIDCO Industrial Estate in Guindy. Time: From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to a press release, the following subjects will be covered during the session: basics of entrepreneurship, business ethics, marketing and branding, digital marketing, market survey, project

report preparation, financial management, basis of accounts book-keeping using Tally, laws relating to small-scale business, GST, understanding State industrial policy, and MSME registration.

Those 18 years of age and above and with a minimum educational qualification of class 10 can take part, adds the release. Hostel facility is available on first come, first serve basis. Prior registration is required.

For details, call 8668102600.

Christmas celebrations begin at Phoenix

Phoenix Marketcity in Velachery ushered in the festive season by setting up a Christmas tree.

Actress Sreeleela lit the Christmas tree. Cine buffs got a chance to meet the actress during a 'Meet and Greet' event.

This was followed by disc jockey Suketu's signature chart-topping remixes, which sent the visitors into a frenzy and had them shaking their legs, said a release.

Adding grandeur to the celebrations were the snowfall, festive décor reveals, captivating holiday installations, and photo-worthy setups.



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Decking the halls without wrecking the planet

School student Anu Elizabeth Alexander makes origami-based Yuletide decorative items with a process shaped by sustainable practices. And Infanta Leon began to crochet safe Christmas theme-based toys for children, initially for her own; and the pursuit has now evolved into Christmas ornaments



SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

A student at Shishya in Adyar who lives in Besant Nagar, Anu Elizabeth Alexander fashions paper and jute into ornaments and this artistry is manifested in decorative products she sells through her brand, Folded Flourish.

"I first got interested in origami when I was maybe seven or eight," she recalls. "I found a book and I started trying out different designs. I really liked it." Her fascination matured into a deliberate practice: selecting designs she loved and imagining how they could adorn Christmas trees. "I thought they would look great on a tree," she says.

Her speciality is modular origami, a technique where multiple folded units coalesce into a single, intricate form. Her festive repertoire includes eight-pointed stars that gleam under tree lights, paper

wreaths, modular diamonds and Kusudama, a spherical, multi-petaled centrepiece that commands attention. "My favourite part of the process arrives while making more complex folds and adding details," she says. "I like to make it look a little more complex than it already is."

Depending on the design, creation can take 15 minutes to an hour. "The sheets of paper I use are rarely the same size," she admits. "The biggest challenge is making the units stick together perfectly." For this Christmas, Anu offers both single ornaments priced at ₹150, and sets of four stars, four diamonds, or four wreaths, each set priced at ₹500.

Sustainability is not an add-on, but stamped firmly into the process: every piece is biodegradable, waste-free and unembellished, free from glitter or beads. "Products should be sustainable and biodegradable so that our planet is not harmed," she emphasises.

At a recent exhibition, the stars she made sold the fastest, followed by the small diamonds. "I would like people to know about the process, how it is created, and that it is sustainable," she says.

Crocheting for the Tree

Infanta Leon from Kotturpuram developed an interest in crochet as a teenager. It was a hobbyhorse that evolved into a steed that would help her embark on a journey of identity-shaping creative engagement. She started making Christmas-themed decor two years ago, spurred by a desire to craft safe, eco-friendly toys for children. "With a toddler at home, and my elder child sensitive to synthetic materials, I wanted to create items that were gentle, durable and tactile," she explains. Her earliest creations were small amigurumi toys which gradually evolved into ornaments.



Infanta Leon and Anu Elizabeth Alexander at work; and glimpses of their creative expression.

ments that could adorn Christmas trees with warmth and charm.

Today, Infanta's repertoire is a festive menagerie: Santa Clauses, snowmen, miniature candies, mushrooms, bunny characters, Santa hats and bespoke nativity sets. Each piece is meticulously crafted from cotton-rich yarns sourced from trusted suppliers in Mumbai and Chennai, supplemented with some filling and safe embellishments obtained online. Sustainability and safety remain at the heart of her practice, ensuring every ornament is child-friendly yet enduring.

Creating a single piece is a labour of love, often taking three to four hours. Infanta visualises the design, selects harmonious colour palettes, calculates proportions, and imbues each character with personality. "The most challenging part is bringing out emotions in the face of a character," she says. "Even a slight tilt or curve can convey so much." This meticulous attention is particularly evident in complex nativity sets or unconventional pieces like the Grinch, which she recently introduced as a playful twist on traditional decor. Infanta begins accepting orders around mid-November, carefully balancing each request to ensure all pieces are completed and delivered by December 15, leaving homes adorned and ready for the holidays.

Orders are largely word-of-mouth, drawn from friends, neighbours, and local enthusiasts who value the authenticity of handcrafted work. Prices range from ₹100 to ₹500.

Yet for Infanta, the joy lies in creation rather than commerce. "I did not start this as a business," she reflects. "It was about making something meaningful. Seeing these ornaments bring a smile during the holidays – that is the greatest reward."