

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

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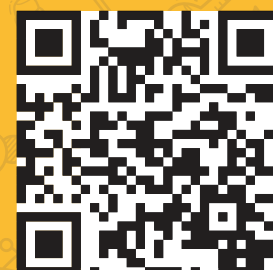
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Waterbody in Pozhichalur comes back to life

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Environmentalist Foundation of India has restored Puthur Thangal, a waterbody in Pozhichalur, straddling three neighbourhoods, Bhavani Nagar, Rajeshwari Nagar and Gnamani Nagar.

EFI founder Arun Krishnamoorthy says: "The seven-acre waterbody, once a pristine source of freshwater, was abused and turned into a cesspool. Residents complained of health issues, floods during monsoons and water shortage

during summer."

Restoring a lost lake in a flood-prone region, located south of the Adyar River, was an arduous task.

The EFI team removed invasive vegetation, garbage, and debris with the help of local residents and through mechanised excavation, desilted the lake, established a new dual embankment, nestling islands, and protective fencing around the lake, says Arun.

Six rectangular recharge pits of 1 to 1.5 m depth were established to enhance the groundwater percolation rate. The recharge pits will also serve as

crucial microhabitats, supporting local flora and fauna during the dry summer months.

"Using the excavated silt, around five nestling islands were established to attract local birds, amphibians and reptiles that depend on the lake for survival and nesting, especially when the water in the lake is at maximum capacity," adds Arun.

A peripheral percolation trench has been designed around the lake to mitigate waterlogging. The protective fencing is intended to prevent garbage dumping and future encroachments.



An opportunity to be a zoo ambassador

School students attending Vandalur Zoo's winter camp will receive this title and also a one-year passport that offers 10 free visits and access to newsletters



Water splashed on an elephant in the Zoo during summer. FILE PHOTO

Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur is hosting a winter camp in three batches for school students.

'Vandalur Zoo's Ambassador Winter Camp - 2025', as it is called, is open for enrolment by students from Standard V and above.

The two-day camp will be held on December 24-25, 26-27, and 28-29. The camp will run from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on each of these days, and the fee is ₹900.

Parents should arrange for their children's transportation from home to the zoo and back home. They should send their children

with a water bottle, snacks and fresh-cut fruits, says a press release.

The participants will receive a course kit that includes a student bag, writing pad, pen, activity sheets and an e-book on 'Animals in Vandalur Zoo'.

The benefits of the camp include being titled 'Zoo Ambassador' with a badge and certificate, a zoo passport with a validity period of one year that entitles them to 10 free visits and access to newsletters.

For details, log in to <https://aazp.in/wintercamp2025/>

A souvenir of initiatives

The book could serve as a guide for others battling civic issues in their neighbourhood

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Chromepet-based citizens group People's Awareness Association recently released a souvenir on the occasion of its founder V. Santhanam's 88th birthday.

Titled '88 Seva Rathna Dr. V. Santhanam - People's Awareness Association Journey (2018-2026)',

The book includes articles by social activists highlighting the association's role in addressing civic and other issues, articles written about Santha-



V. Santhanam

nam and awards given to the founder and members. Issues taken up by the association are a major highlight.

When one goes through the

book, they would find that association members did not restrict themselves to issues in and around Chromepet but have taken up a host of issues

in other areas as well.

This includes pushing authorities to restore Guduvancherry Lake, getting the non-functioning escalators running at Tambaram Sanatorium footbridge, reopening Tambaram (West) subway, and driving home the need for a footbridge in Irumbuliyur.

What sets this association apart is the way its members conduct the protests.

For example, to highlight the stray dog issue, the members barked like dogs at the Chromepet zonal office of the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation. They conducted rituals on the MIT Flyover service lane (indicating it is dead and not mended) for a long time.

In the souvenir, the octogenarian shares highlights of his activism, which started in 1967 over the acquisition of lands in The New Colony, Chromepet, by the then State Government.

Crafts fair in Pallavaram

Bhaskar Raju is holding a home decor and textiles exhibition, 'Kalaa Utsavam', until December 28 in Pallavaram.

The items displayed include oxidized jewelry, handlooms, artistic wall hangings, terracotta dolls, readymade blouses, saris from Kashmir, Kancheepuram and Karaikudi. Do check out the varieties of flowering plants, organic pen kalam-karis, and hand embroidery work by tribal artisans from Sandur in Karnataka and Sittlingi valley in Tamil Nadu.

The expo is at Arul Murugan Towers, 200-Feet Radial Road, Perumal Nagar, Old Pallavaram, from 11 a.m. onwards.

For details, call 95660 55040, 79049 89326.



Residents stage stir seeking link road

T.S. ATUL SWAMINATHAN

Members of the Federation of Civic and Welfare Associations of Zones 2 and 3 (Pammal and Pallavaram) of Tambaram City Municipal Corporation staged a demonstration along Radha Nagar subway on December 7 seeking a link road connecting Radha Nagar Main Road and the footbridge on Station Border Road.

People on Station Road and Station Border Road to go to GST Road and Radha Nagar Main Road, cross, and walk along the tracks. If a link road is created and the openings are closed, pedestrians can walk safely up to LC 27, says A. Jyothi, a pedestrian.

The other option is to walk through Station Road, Bashyam Street and Radha Nagar Main Road.

Southern Railway should construct a tunnel connecting platforms 1 and 2 at Chromepet station, and the walkway at Radha Nagar subway.

If a tunnel is not constructed, commuters will cross the tracks to reach Radha Nagar Main Road, adds Jyothi.

On November 17, the Madras High Court advised the Railway to consider constructing a tunnel.



'Chennai needs trifurcation, not just expansion'

HARSHA KODA

The proposal to expand the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) to 300 wards is a welcome move. For the rapidly expanding suburbs, especially the cosmopolitan IT corridor of OMR, this change is long overdue.

The stagnation under village panchayats has been palpable. Every time residents ask why solid waste management is collapsing, why garbage dumps are choking our lakes, or why unsorted trash "mysteriously" catches fire, we get the same tired excuse: "We are a poor panchayat; we have no funds." Bringing these areas under the Corporation umbrella finally unlocks the budget required to fix these issues.

Yes, property taxes will rise. But most of us are willing to pay that premium if it guarantees paved roads, drainage, and

professional civic amenities.

But let us be realistic. Being part of the GCC is not a silver bullet. Large parts of OMR came under GCC limits 15 years ago, yet many of us are still waiting for piped water and underground sewage. Expansion is a step forward, but it does not guarantee efficiency.

The problem with size: large bodies bring large problems.

A single corporation managing 300 wards risks becoming a bureaucratic behemoth. Instead of creating one giant entity, we should look at Trifurcation.

The precedent: the Chennai Police successfully bifurcated into Chennai and Tambaram Commissionerates to improve law and order. The solution, we believe is to split the civic body into North, Central, and South Chennai Corporations. This makes the city manageable and the administration accountable.

The fog effect



Heavy fog enveloped Chennai, reducing visibility and causing delay and cancellation in flights. This image was taken on December 19 past 11 a.m. from the Saint Thomas Mount Hill. PHOTO: VELANKANNI RAJ B

Hyperlocal History, as written by residents



Three years shy of three decades: that is a long time. Over this period, *The Hindu Downtown* has been at its post, relaying residents' civic concerns to the powers that can address them. On this anniversary, besides renewing this commitment, the supplement refreshes the various initiatives it has launched. One of them is to spotlight climate change in a manner that is accessible to residents: what they can do in their corner of their world to combat it.

Besides, in the new year, *The Hindu Downtown* will be rolling out what it calls "Hyperlocal History". It is history as written by residents, not just residents of neighbourhoods with known heritage value, but also obscure ones whose stories are waiting to be told. In the first edition of 2026, the focus of this project, and how residents can contribute to it will be made known. So, be tuned in.

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Garbage dumping turns Gandhi Nagar Extension into a health hazard

Despite outsourcing of waste collection, open dumping persists in Chromepet

T. ARVIND

Residents of Gandhi Nagar 2nd Extension in Chromepet, under Tambaram Corporation limits say their neighbourhood has effectively turned into an open dump, with repeated accumulation of garbage, dead rodents and waste material along the main road posing serious public health risks. The situation, they argue, points to a systemic failure in monitoring and enforcement, despite official claims of improved solid waste management under the Swachh Bharat mission.

No sustained monitoring

Tambaram Corporation outsourced door-to-door garbage collection across its five zones in 2023, in line with the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, which mandate daily collection, segregation at source and prevention of open

dumping. However, residents say the ground reality in Gandhi Nagar Extension tells a different story.

Although conservancy staff clear the garbage periodically, waste reappears within hours, spilling onto the road and obstructing access. The lack of sustained monitoring, residents allege, allows the same spot to be repeatedly used as a dumping ground.

Hard-hit area

Located on the western side of GST Road, Gandhi Nagar Extension connects Nagalkeni and Pammal and lies close to Thiruneermalai, a major religious destination. Despite being a prime residential locality, civic neglect has persisted for years, residents say.

"People from nearby localities come and dump garbage here because they know there is no surveillance," says Sivakumar, a resident. "Repeated complaints to stop this have yielded no results."

Dual role

Kanakaraj, another resident, points out that the garbage heap forms at the entrance to a playground used by children from economically weaker sections. "During the day, children still come here to play. At night, the area becomes unsafe, with tipplers occupying the space. It turns into an unofficial bar after dark," he says.

Residents say several people in the area have fallen ill recently, attributing it to unhygienic surroundings. The dumping of dead rats and rodents overnight has worsened the situation, with residents complaining of a persistent stench that causes nausea and loss of appetite.

Violation of norms

Under the Solid Waste Management Rules, local bodies are required to prevent open dumping, ensure scientific disposal of animal waste and maintain sanitation in public spaces. Residents argue that



Garbage dumped along the main road in Gandhi Nagar 2nd Extension in Chromepet. PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the continued presence of dead rodents on the road is a clear violation of these norms and exposes gaps in enforcement.

With no active residents' welfare association in the area, locals say they are forced to rely solely on civic officials and elected representatives to intervene.

'Long-term solution'

When contacted, V. Karunanidhi, councillor of Ward 16 under Tambaram Corporation, said a permanent solution was being explored. "We will examine the feasibility of setting up a green recomposite yard if the street width permits," he said.

Surveillance sought

Residents have suggested installing

covered, modern dustbins at strategic points as an interim measure, citing erratic collection timings that are often announced only by a whistle from conservancy staff. However, many fear that without strict oversight, bins could overflow and worsen the problem.

They say installing CCTV cameras at vulnerable points, clearly marking no-dumping zones, and imposing fines—as permitted under civic bylaws—are essential to deter offenders. "Unless open dumping is penalised and monitored, the problem will continue," residents say.

Calling for a clear, time-bound waste management plan, residents say restoring basic hygiene in the locality should be a priority, not an afterthought.

READERS WRITE

'Maintain the vertical garden on the flyover'

K. SWAMINATHAN

On the pillars of the Madras Institute of Technology flyover-grade separator on GST Road in the Chromepet region, the State Highways Department has installed plastic boxes to nurture green shoots. However, over time, these were not adequately maintained.

Now, the creepers have grown and its roots will weaken the pillars over a period of time. The authorities concerned in the Department should take timely action to prevent any damage to the structure and properly maintain the green shoot boxes.

K. Swaminathan is a resident of Chromepet



'Road work causes more damage to carriageway'

S. ABOORVA

More than two weeks ago, on Suriyan Street in Kamatchi Nagar Extension, New Perungalathur, the Tambaram City Municipal Corporation initiated road-scraping work as part of an exercise to lay a new carriageway.

During the process, the vehicular ramp connecting an apartment premises and the road was damaged. The workers informed us that the new road would be laid that night, but no further work has been done since then.

Deep hollows and uneven surfaces now surround our apartment's entrance, causing significant inconvenience to residents. We cannot take our vehicles out safely because of the broken slope, and two car tyres have already been punctured.

The rains caused waterlogging as the scraped and damaged road surface restricted proper runoff.

Despite repeated follow-ups, the Corporation has not responded for days.

S. Aboorva is a resident of New Perungalathur



Slippery path at Tambaram Sanatorium subway

P. VISWANATHAN

B. SARAVANAN

It is the same story at Tambaram Sanatorium subway after the recent rains. The staircases and walkway were flooded, affecting movement of commuters.

The wastewater flows through two holes (on the tiles), creating a foul stench and resulting in the formation of silt.

For days, the water has been overflowing.

Pedestrians can use the lifts at the bridge, but to reach platforms 1 and

2 at the station, commuters have to climb the stairs. It would be helpful if escalators were provided connecting the platforms so commuters can use the bridge when the subway is flooded. The subway roof is peeling off and has developed cracks. The underpass connects Tambaram Sanatorium (East and West) and is used by a large number of people to reach East Tambaram and Chitlapakkam.



(Clockwise from top left) Garbage bin at First Main Road in Vimala Nagar on December 9; garbage dumping spots at Neela Nagar Extension Third Street, Vimala Nagar Third Cross Street and Babu Nagar Third Main Road on December 20. PHOTOS: PRINCE FREDERICK



A tour of *mini garbage dumps* in Medavakkam

PRINCE FREDERICK

A garbage bin stationed at First Main Road in Vimala Nagar has the unmistakable attraction of a celluloid superstar's vanity van. Those hopefully milling around the van would obviously outnumber those authorised and allowed to step inside. Garbage accumulates thick and fast around this bin. An unrelenting procession of people fling their garbage in the precincts around it, having been denied space in the bin – just how much can one lone bin take.

There are “heraldic displays” on the bin – the name of the locality (Vimala Nagar) and the local civic body (Medavakkam panchayat).

The bin looks intact, but is likely to get worn to the fingertips if no efforts are taken to reduce its current

workload. Vimala Nagar Third Cross Street has a garbage bin gnawed down to the bones, left with a gaping hole it cannot hide any more. The stench of decaying waste, dumped around it and beyond, day after day, hangs heavy in the air. In a vacant plot in neighbouring Neela Nagar Extension Third Street, a similarly weathered, broken bin lies toppled over. Put out to grass, it witnesses huge amounts of garbage being dumped around it.

There are any number of examples to describe how garbage is not allowed to depart gracefully from the streets of Vimala Nagar, Babu Nagar and Neela Nagar in Medavakkam. Instead of lining up example after example, it would be judicious to zoom out and take in the whole picture.

According to residents, bins

have either been removed or unusable. Conservancy workers from the Panchayat do knock on the door to collect garbage. But simultaneously, garbage makes it to the street, residents dumping in patches where bins once stood. In Babu Nagar, a bin on First Main Road is gone, but the dumping has not. Babu Nagar Third Main Road has its own “dedicated” inglorious dumping spot. Dumping is rampant along one side of Babu Nagar First Cross Street; even after conservancy workers from the panchayat clear the waste, foul-smelling leachate hangs around.

Efforts to go bin-less mark the right course, but not until other cylinders in the system are firing right. Resources at hand to carry out door-to-door collection need to be counted; residents have to be educated about composting, and

what to do with recyclables and so on. Without these factors, garbage will end up on the streets, bins or no bins. The garbage bin on Vimala Nagar First Main Road is a rarity, surprisingly presentable, probably because it has not seen many winters. It has stepped into the breach left by an old, battered bin. The bin's wholesomeness seems to, ironically, add to the problem. Residents with qualms about dumping garbage on the streets, head to this patch to offload the waste in this bin. It seems to be force-fed garbage from neighbouring streets. This road connects to Velachery Main Road and witnesses an unending parade of “wayfarers”, people

who are not domiciled in Vimala Nagar. For their part, they bring “gifts” for this bin. Seeing it filled to the brim, they end up discarding their garbage around it, creating another mini dumping ground.

The administrative future of Medavakkam is still in the air, at first the panchayat was expected to be merged with Tambaram City Municipal Corporation and now, Greater Chennai Corporation is in the picture. Until the time Medavakkam gets the tight embrace of a Corporation and is swept into its fold, existing waste management systems have to be tweaked, and attention paid to how garbage leaves its streets.



Chennai-based non-profit Road Guru Trust is close to completing the distribution of 15,000 helmets provided by an insurance company to students and their parents in the city

LIFFY THOMAS

Recently, 48 students of Kesari Higher Secondary School in T. Nagar and their parents received free helmets. When this initiative kickstarted at the beginning of the academic year, 15,000 helmets had to be given away. The stock has dwindled hugely, which is commendable; every helmet cleared off the shelf is a safety measure in place for an individual.

Road Guru Trust, a non-profit committed to improving road safety in Chennai is distributing these helmets provided by ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company as part of its corporate social responsibility.

K.P. Sendil Kumar, who runs Road Guru Trust, explains: "In June, I attended this national summit 'Dialogue to Action: VRU's and Road Safety' organised by NGO TRAX S. Society and Central Road Research Institute in New Delhi. Under the CSR programme 'Ride to Safety', the company has been giving away helmets for the last seven years, focusing on one metropolitan city every year. Chennai was their focus for 2025 and I happened to be the only person from the state at the summit, so I volunteered to drive the distribution." Sendil, 58 years old IT professional who retired from a multinational company.

The campaign resonated with Sendil for many reasons including the fact that his Trust promoted road safety through education and awareness programmes.

The highlight of this initiative is the equal focus on distributing junior helmets. It therefore serves as a silent but effective advocacy for children's helmets, largely ignored because many parents are unaware of their availability.

"Most children dropped at schools by their parents in a two-wheeler do not wear a helmet. In fact, many do not buy one for their children. So this campaign was unique as it targeted both parents and children, each nudging the other to wear an ISI helmet while driving," says Sendil.

The Trust received close to 15,000 helmets for distribution. Since June, Sendil has been reaching out to government and less-privileged institutions asking school heads to identify students who would need them the most.

This turned out to be the most challenging task for the Trust. "We reached out to 170 schools in Chen-



A head start in road safety



Volunteer for road safety

K.P. Sendil Kumar's longstanding desire was to wear the police uniform and he fulfilled that by becoming a member of Tamil Nadu Police Traffic Warden Organisation in 2011. "Various statistics on road accidents was the trigger for me to do something more on road safety," says Sendil Kumar.

In 2015, Road Guru Trust was registered and works on a lean team mainly volunteers from Rotaract clubs. "We conduct awareness campaigns at schools, colleges and apartment complexes," says Sendil, adding that they invite volunteers to join them in efforts to make city roads safe.



nai and only 65 got back to us with a list of names," says Sendil.

The next task for the Trust was conducting a session at the schools for students and parents about road safety and the importance of wearing a proper headgear, before giving them a helmet.

"My sessions are made interactive and engaging with stories and live examples," he says.

The Trust has 15 more schools to cover. The number of helmets distributed in a school ranges between 48 and 540, and they are only given to students from classes IV to VIII, given the size of the junior helmets.

Sendil is grateful to a few school heads who helped spread the word. The headmaster of Chennai Public School in Thiru-Vi-Ka Nagar contacted other GCC schools. Likewise, Natanasabapathy, principal of Anjugam Higher Secondary School in West Mambalam collected details of 15 educational institutions and got a list ready. T. Nagar traffic SI Manjunath and traffic warden Mala have also been great support.

K.P. Sendil Kumar during a distribution drive at a school.
PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

MTC to issue tokens from December 21

Metropolitan Transport Corporation - Chennai will start issuing tokens from December 21 for senior citizens for travel on its fleet of buses. The half-yearly tokens will be valid for the January-June period (till June 30).

Elderly citizens can travel on the bus 10 times a month and they receive around 60 tokens for the period.

The tokens will be issued from 8 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. until January 31 at more than 40 bus depots, halting points and terminuses across the city.

In addition to renewing (obtaining new tokens), beneficiaries can also apply for new identity cards and first-time applicants can get to-

kens, said a release from the MTC.

Address proof

Those who want to apply for tokens and beneficiaries renewing their identity cards should submit photocopies of their ration card (address proof), Aadhaar card, driving license, educational certificates, and electoral identity card (age proof) and two-colour passport-size photographs.

Beneficiaries who want to renew the tokens should bring their identity cards and a recent passport-size photo.

The tokens will be issued at Adyar, Besant Nagar, Thiruvanniyur, Foreshore Estate, T. Nagar, Saidapet, Saidapet railway Station, Central bus depot (Pallavan Salai),

Central Railway Station, Broadway, Chromepet 1, Pallavaram, Alandur, Guindy Estate, Iyyappathangal, Vadapalani, K. K. Nagar, Adambakkam, Velachery, Anna Nagar, Koyambedu, Ambattur Industrial Estate, Ambattur Old Terminus, Avadi, Ayanavaram, Integral Coach Factory, Tondiarpet -1, Toll Gate, Ennore, Vyasarpadi, MKB Nagar, Madhavaram, Padiyanallur, Red Hills, Tambaram Sanatorium Madras Export Processing Zone bus terminus, Poonamallee, Perambur railway station, Vallalar Nagar, Semmancherry, Thiruvottiyur, Kilambakkam, and Kundrathur bus terminuses.

After January 31, tokens will be issued at the terminuses during working hours.

Entrepreneurs honoured at Learnersfy Excellence Awards ceremony

Tamil Language and Culture was a treasure trove of knowledge and everyone should work towards conserving and fostering it, said professor. G. Gnanasambandan speaking at Learnersfy's Annual Excellence Awards ceremony held on December 7.

He said while rapid advancements in technology had made access to learning, including languages, easier, at the same time people tend to rely too much on IT tools, while forgetting the beauty and uniqueness of the ancient language of Tamil.

As far back as Sangam Era, Tamil literature had documented various aspects of life, including the various stages of development of a child - from birth till teenage. Prof. Gnanasambandan also said that many people were reluctant to travel outside Tamil Nadu or outside the country, as not knowing other languages was a barrier. It could be easily solved by adopting IT tools for real time translation of Tamil to all languages, Prof. Gnanasambandan, said, while also ap-

pealing to people to involve themselves completely in whatever they do.

At the event, prof. Gnanasambandan, handed over Excellence Awards to T. Mayilvaganan, managing director, Kanchi Housing; Raja, founder of Inspire Exports and Imports; and K. Karunakaran, Rotary Club Governor for his contribution to the society. The ceremony was marked to celebrate the achievements and success of people trained by Learnersfy.

Aravindraj, chief trainer, Learnersfy, interacted with the audience. Shanmugham, chief executive, Learnersfy, said the organisation was led by a vibrant team of young people and highly skilled mentors, including Aravindraj, had brought a tremendous change in the lives of several women and men across region and age groups. He said he was glad that Learnersfy, among Tamil Nadu's leading online educational platforms, was also able to bring out a transformation in the lives of people.

Hospital celebrates founder's day with blood donation drive

As part of the founders' day celebration, Be Well Hospitals organised a series of events to support those in need. Dr. C.J. Vetriavel is the founder of the hospital.

The hospitals organised a blood donation camp with Chennai Blood Centre, where the public and hospital employees donated blood.

This was followed by free lunch for the residents of Charu Old Age Home and distribution of household essentials, including dhotis to underprivileged families in T. Nagar, said a release issued by the hospitals.



Session on baking

Entrepreneurship Development & Innovation Institute, a Department of MSME -Tamil Nadu, is conducting a workshop on baking from December 29 to 31 at its premises at SIDCO Industrial Estate, Guindy. Time: From: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to a press release, the workshop will focus on preparation of bakery products such as cookies, biscuits, and cakes made from millets and wheat. Participants will also learn about government subsidies and loans.

Registration fee is ₹5500. For details, call 8668102600 / 9943685468.

Pothys opens new showroom



Pothys and Pothys Swarna Mahal opened an 'integrated' showroom on December 14 in Padi. Spread across 5,00,000 square feet, the showroom is designed as a one-stop destination offering textiles, jewellery, home essentials, lifestyle products and groceries.

The seven-floor showroom has dedicated each floor to a category such as ground floor for jewellery and sixth floor for groceries, vegetables and fruits.

As part of the opening offer, a 10 percent discount is given on textile products till December 21.

At the Swarna Mahal, ₹2,000 discount can be availed per sovereign on gold jewellery and a ₹10,000 per carat discount on diamond jewellery till December 31, said a release.

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The Ball is back

On December 25, the famous Anglo Indian Christmas Ball will get rolling once again, at Faiz Mahal in Egmore

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Over the decades, the Anglo-Indian Christmas Ball in Chennai has stepped into many venues, from Railway enclaves to private halls. It has left an indelible mark on some of these venues, Faiz Mahal and Shiraz Hall, both in Egmore, counted among them. On December 25, Faiz Mahal is going to play host to yet another Christmas Ball, organised by Anglo-Indians but by no means restricted to them.

For a good part of the twentieth century, the epicentre of Anglo-Indian social life was the Railway Institutes, and in Chennai, it was the one in Perambur.

"Earlier, the majority of Anglo-Indians worked in the Indian Railways," says Harry MacLure, publisher and editor of *Anglos in the Wind*. "So all our balls and dances naturally happened there."

These institutes were cultural commons. Christmas dances, Easter balls, May Queen celebrations and Valentine's Day Balls would unfold there year after year. Entry was not restricted to railway employees. "Anglo-Indians from outside the railways were always welcome," Harry recalls. "That camaraderie was a defining feature."

The dances themselves were formal, unhurried affairs. Live bands played through the night. Waltzes, foxtrots and jives held the



floor. Even those who did not dance stayed on, content to listen. Christmas balls often began at nine at night and ended at five in the morning – a full night given over to music, movement and social ritual.

By the 1970s and 80s, Anglo-Indians were beginning to look for fortunes beyond the Indian railways, migrating abroad or entering new professions. "We lost our hold over the Railway Institutes," Harry says. "Once that happened, we had to look for other venues."

That search led to a succession of spaces across Chennai – Binny's among them – before settling, over the last two decades, on private halls. In Egmore, Shiraz Hall and Faiz Mahal emerged as consistent hosts of what is now known as the Grand Christmas Ball. "Shiraz has been happening for at least 20 years," Harry notes.

"There has always been a strong relationship between the Anglo-Indian community and the Muslim families who own these halls." Even as costs rose, negotiation rarely entered the picture. Christmas, after all, is not the season for bargaining.

Not just the economics of celebration, its composition has also

changed. Live bands, once essential, now share space with DJs and singers performing with backing tracks. "Earlier, if you said there would only be a DJ, the show would flop," Harry recalls. "People would not come."

For many, these halls are not interchangeable spaces but repositories of personal history. Treasure Jacob, a member of the Forum of Anglo-Indian Women (FAIW), remembers her first dance clearly and not because of the venue. "I did not meet my husband at the dance," she says. "He was already my boyfriend. But the first time we went together, he taught me how to dance. It was 1988. 'I did not know how to dance at all,' she recalls. "He told me, 'Do not worry, I will teach you.'" Songs such as Save the Last Dance, Mari Mari and Could I Have This Dance still return her to that floor.

Getting there, however, required negotiation. "As children, we went with our parents," Treasure says. "But once we grew up, getting permission was a struggle." Dances ran through the night, and parents enforced strict curfews. "My dad would come at four in the morning, show his watch and say,

▼
An Anglo Indian ball at a star hotel in the city; and (below) an Anglo Indian family in Royapuram in the 70s. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"Time is up.' We would beg for one last dance."

The protocol was firm. Tickets were checked. Dress codes enforced. Suits and gowns were mandatory. Fathers sometimes waited outside, unable to enter without formal wear, standing guard until it was time to go home. Fashion, like everything else, has evolved from low-waist dresses and leg-of-mutton sleeves to long gowns and contemporary silhouettes but the sense of occasion remains intact.

Even the food tells a story. Earlier menus featured pork fry, meat roast, cutlets, chapathis, sandwiches, tongue and oxtail. Chicken was rare. Today's spreads include everything from pasta and noodles to Manchurian – a buffet shaped by migration and return.

That return remains a powerful pull. Many Anglo-Indians travel back from Australia, particularly Perth every Christmas. Others

come once every two years. "We all want to come back," Harry admits. "Even if we can't resettle, the connection never goes away."

So does the venue matter? "Each place has its own mood," Harry says. "But the identity comes from the people."

While the grand Christmas balls now gravitate towards Shiraz Hall and Faiz Mahal in Egmore, the season is not confined to these marquee addresses. Smaller associations continue to hold dances in neighbourhood halls across Pallavaram, Tambaram and St Thomas Mount – areas that once had a striking Anglo-Indian presence. These gatherings are more compact, often organised by local clubs or family networks, but they carry the same codes of dress, music and memory. For many older residents, these halls are closer to home and closer to heart.

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