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PONGAL IN A VERTICAL VILLAGE

Residents of Kottur Villa, a four-block apartment in Kottur Gardens, once again celebrated the harvest festival in a manner that connects with its essential character **P3**



THREE CHEERS TO GCC'S ONLINE SPACE FOR TREE TALK

GCC tightens the 'noose' around those abusing trees in public spaces **P5**

RWAs reroute textile and footwear waste this Pongal

Threads & Treads, an initiative that gets communities in the OMR and Tambaram regions to dispose of their old clothes and shoes responsibly, gets off to a flying start with nearly three tonnes of this waste being stopped from hitting the dumping grounds



HARSHA KODA

In a significant step toward urban sustainability, the inaugural edition of Threads & Treads has successfully diverted almost three tonnes of post-consumer waste from landfills. Initiated by Spreco Recycling, the community-led collection drive saw active participation from 17 residential societies across the Tambaram-OMR belt. The drive was organically linked to the season with the poster crafted in appreciation of the 17 communities' effort, reading: "Members from 17 RWAs got new clothes for Pongal and gave us their old ones!"

The drive specifically targeted overlooked waste streams, collecting 2,100 kg of textiles and 650 kg of footwear. Unlike traditional dis-

posal methods, this initiative ensures a circular lifecycle for every item; all collected materials will be responsibly repaired, refurbished, reused or recycled.

By establishing a transparent, community-level system, Threads & Treads addresses the growing challenge of fabric and shoe waste. The project's success was bolstered by strategic partnerships with Simple, FOMRRA, ReCity, and Biseri's Bottles for Change. This collaboration highlights the power of collective action in building scalable, eco-friendly solutions for a cleaner Chennai.

(Harsha Koda is co-founder of Federation of OMR Residents Associations)

You can be our volunteer-writer



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The unseen lives of Chennai's beach horses

As earnings for beach horse ride operators dwindle, the equines find themselves hobbling unsteadily on the shifting sands of malnutrition and poor health care

RHENIOUS JOHN TYSON A.
HARRY JASON ROY M.

For the people of Chennai, the Marina is not just a beach but a part of their identity. The rhythm of the tides, the cool, refreshing breeze, and the constant buzz of vendors and visitors make this beach what it is. But there is one other presence at the Marina that always manages to pull a beach-goer's attention: the horse.

A horse ride at the beach is cherished by children and adults alike, but one rarely wonders where they go once the crowds thin out. Housed in makeshift shelters un-

der the Chepauk, Lighthouse and Triplicane MRTS stations along the Chennai Beach-Velachery MRTS line, most of these horses have seen better days. Animal rights activists have time and again raised concerns about their upkeep, but their owners say the earnings from the rides are so little that they are unable to sustain themselves and the animals.

According to the owners, the horses used for joy rides are mostly native breeds, mainly sourced from Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka's Mysore and Bijapur regions. Most of them are purchased after they undergo basic training and medications. The owners claim that the daily upkeep

The horses are accommodated in spaces under overhead MRTS tracks.

of a single horse costs about ₹500, with earnings of ₹1,000 on weekdays and around ₹2,000 on weekends.

K. Kumar, 35, who maintains horses under the Triplicane MRTS station, said the income from the horse rides does not amount to much and is not sufficient to feed his family. "These animals feed us, and we feed them. That is how it is," he remarked.

Microchipping beach horses

It is concerning how these animals are maintained, says Shruti Vinod Raj, Member, Tamil Nadu Animal Welfare Board (TNAWB). In 2023, the TNAWB began microchipping beach horses to keep track of their health. As many as 122 horses were microchipped at the Marina, Chepauk, Lighthouse, Ripon Building, and Besant Nagar, in August 2023. At present, however, there are only 51 microchipped horses in the city, as per data from an inspection, Raj

said, expressing apprehension that the remaining may have died or been sold.

"The Board is in the process of implementing a policy on beach horses to address these issues. The policy will outline regulations regarding horse maintenance, operating hours, and penalties for repeat offenders who fail to maintain their horses," Raj said.

She added that horses are very sensitive animals and they should not be taken out between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., as hot sand could damage their hooves and weaken them. While acknowledging that maintaining a horse is expensive, she insisted that owners must take better measures for their upkeep.

Colic, meaning severe abdominal pain, is very common among beach horses, and is caused by a lack of proper food, she said. "Horses should be rolled in the sand to prevent colic. This, however, cannot be done in makeshift shelters, causing many to eventually die," she further said, adding that while some owners take genuine effort to care for their horses, many fail to do so due to financial constraints.

Lack of Shelter

R. Devaraj, a horse owner, claimed that during heavy rains, many like him are unable to shelter the horses, leaving them exposed to the elements. "The TNAWB provides food for the animals during the rainy season. Likewise, building sheds would benefit the animals," he said.

To improve welfare of horses, the TNAWB has come up with a ₹3.5-crore proposal to prevent cruelty, and to help maintain beach horses with all necessary arrangements, including stables, treatment facility, feed and medicines, manpower, and veterinary specialists.



A temporary selfie point



Intricately carved wooden replicas of elephants parked at the Marina ahead of the 2026 Pongal festivities. This display would reportedly continue on the sands of the Marina for a month after these festivities. In a tweet on X, Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary -- Environment, Climate Change and Forests, Government of Tamil Nadu, dwelt on the origins of these "elephants"; that they are made in the mountains of Gudalur by local tribal artisans. The replicas drive the sustainability narrative further -- they are made with lantana "an invasive weed choking our forests", she added. The images were taken on January 12, 2026. PHOTOS: M SRINATH

Pongal in a *vertical* village

Residents of Kottur Villa, a four-block apartment in Kottur Gardens, once again celebrated the harvest festival in a manner that resonates with its essential character



Kottur Villa at Kottur Gardens in Kotturpuram once again kept its date with Pongal in characteristic style.

Pongal celebrations at this 74-unit, four-block apartment – it might go with the nomenclature Kottur Villa but that does not obliterate the reality of it being an apartment-based gated community – come with rural trappings.

The pastoral elements are planned to the last detail.

According to a resident of Kottur Villa, a trader in construction material, largely sand and blue metal (jalli), has a bullock and a cart to go with it. Every Pongal, this “transport” is hired for celebrations of the harvest festival at Kottur Villa. This year was no different. In customary fashion, the children went on bullock cart rides around the gated community, letting out squeals of delight.

In this fast-paced world, neighbours even in an apartment are separated by more than the walls that divide their dwellings. The association at this gated community uses Pongal among other festivities to bring down those “walls” existing in the mind.

The festivities included feed being given to cows. There was a kolam competition.

The icing on the cake was a magic show presented by one of the residents.



Milestone meeting today for **Toastmasters club** in East Coast Road

Toastmasters International @ East Coast (TMI@ East Coast), a community-based Toastmasters club located along the East Coast Road, is having its 160th meeting on January 18 (4.30 p.m. to 6 p.m.) at Vaels International School in Injambakkam.

Club members are treating it as a significant milestone meeting. In a press release, they observe that it reflects the club's consistency, steady growth and continued contribution to community learning. Interested members of the public are welcome to attend the milestone meeting and learn more about the club's activities, the press release says.

TMI@ East Coast brings together students and working professionals from the surrounding areas of ECR and focusses on improving communi-

cation and leadership skills through structured meetings and peer feedback, the release adds.

In an increasingly interconnected and competitive world, effective public speaking and leadership skills have become essential for not just career advancement but also for social engagement and personal growth. The ability to articulate ideas clearly, listen actively, and lead with confidence plays a crucial role in education, professional spaces and community life, the release notes.

Toastmasters International (TI), a global non-profit educational organisation, has long provided a structured platform for individuals to develop these competencies through regular meetings, peer evaluation and experiential learning.

Songs of **Kishore Kumar**

Satrangi's next presentation 'Kishore Da with Rajesh Roshan and Bappi Lahiri' will be held on January 15 from 5:45 p.m. at TEACH Auditorium, Taramani.

This programme will feature memorable songs of Kishore Kumar composed by music directors Rajesh Roshan and Bappi Lahiri from movies such as Julie, Sharabi, Mr. Natwarlal, Yaarana, Namak Halal, Chalte Chalte, Kaamchor, Khatta Meetha, Baaton Baaton Mein and Des Pardes. The programme will be presented by Promod and Ramya on pre recorded tracks. Tickets for this event are priced at ₹500 and ₹300 and will be home-delivered on calling 9884778073.

Madhura Mahotsav at ISKCON

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Akkarai, East Coast Road, is celebrating 'Nama Sankeerthanam' (Madhura Mahotsav) on January 18.

The festival, centred on the practice of bhakti yoga and the

chanting of the names of Bhagwan Krishna, will run from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Apart from the festival, there will be devotional songs sung on the life of Krishna.

For details, visit <https://madhuramahotsav.com/>.

As evening walkers gather by Chitlapakkam Lake, a small music ensemble led by a retired insurance officer presents a performance to raise funds for visually challenged artistes and underprivileged families

Lakeside music serves the downtrodden



T. ARVIND

When the Chitlapakkam lake shimmers in the gloaming, music floats across the promenade, disrupting walkers' routine, turning them into eager rasikas. The "disrupter-in-chief" is V.S. Anantharaman, a retired Development Officer, United India Insurance Company, who wades in with a modest set of instruments, a microphone and a donation box. A donation box indeed! A small ensemble of visually challenged musicians assist Anantharaman in these daily music performances and are in turn benefit-

ted by the generosity of the listeners. The objective of these daily music performances travels on a dual-track: one, supporting those visually challenged musicians as well as underprivileged families; and the other obvious one has to do with keeping lake visitors entertained.

The concert begins at 5.30 p.m. first running through a set of Hindu, Christian and Muslim devotional songs, striking the chord of unity in a resounding manner. Following this, as the shadows deepen, the lake is doused in sounds of popular film songs.

Anantharaman founded this karaoke orchestra, "Ananda Raagh-

am Innisai Kuzhu", following his retirement from UIIC, Tambaram, letting his passion for music drive a social service. Among the regular performers are Syed, known for his effortless renditions of T.M. Soundararajan's songs, and James, whose repertoire of Hindi songs includes classics by Kishore Kumar and Mohammed Rafi. Their music, lake regulars say, adds warmth to the renovated public space.

"With the lake now a hub for walkers and nature lovers, the music enhances our daily routine," says Charles, an IT professional and regular visitor.

An active singer himself, Anantharaman had earlier been part of

Ayyappa troupes performing devotional songs in praise of Lord Ayyappa, besides amateur music orchestras. "Meeting Prabhakar, a talented but physically challenged singer at the mobile orchestra in Tambaram, moved me deeply. I felt this should become a public cause," he recalls.

After Prabhakar's passing, the group continued its support for Syed and James, who have since become familiar voices along the lake. Several walkers, including

Amritaraj and Ramaswamy, have also joined the effort as volunteer singers.

An extended mission

Beyond supporting the two artistes and their families, the group funds the education of six children from economically weaker sections and provides essential provisions to an equal number of underprivileged families. The annual expenditure, Anantharaman says, is around ₹3 lakh. Anantharaman can be contacted at 9444269926.



Visually challenged singers Syed and James are beneficiaries of this exercise. V.S. Anantharaman (in a winter jacket) is the founder of Ananda Raagham Innisai Kuzhu. PHOTOS: T. ARVIND

A time for gratitude



The Tamil Nadu State Commission for SC&ST celebrated Pongal with a special function held at its office premises. The event was marked by a special Pongal offering, symbolising gratitude for the bountiful harvest, says a press release. K.S Kandaswamy, member secretary; author Imaiyan, vice chairperson; and members and employees participated enthusiastically. The celebration fostered a sense of unity and festivity.

Revision in schedule of air-conditioned trains

The Chennai Division of the Southern Railway has revised the schedule and timings of following air-conditioned electric trains in the Chennai Beach - Tambaram section. The revised schedule will come into effect today and apply only on Sundays.

Train Number: 49004 will depart Tambaram at 14.25 hrs and arrive at Chennai Beach at 15.20 hrs.

Train Number: 49005 will depart from Chennai Beach at 15.52 hrs and arrive at Tambaram at 16.47 hrs.

Three-day workshop on GST e-way billing

Entrepreneurship Development and Innovation Institute, a Department of MSME, is conducting a workshop on GST e-way billing and income tax returns submission from January 28 to 30 at its premises at EDII Office Road, SIDCO Industrial Estate in Ekattuthangal. Time: From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to a press release, the following concepts will be covered in the programme: introduction to GST, GST structure and components, GST registration process, GST invoicing and billing, input tax credit GST audits and assessments, GST compliance and penalties.

The session will also focus on income tax its structure, types and slabs, introduction to ITR forms, deductions and exemptions, TDS (tax deducted at source), process for filing income tax returns, advance tax and self assessment tax, income tax notices and scrutiny, income tax refund process and tax planning strategies.

Those above 18 years of age with a minimum educational qualification of class 10 may apply. Hostel facility is available on first come, first serve basis.

Prior registration is mandatory.

To register visit www.editn.in

For details, call 8668102600

Greater Chennai Corporation tightens the 'noose' around those abusing trees in public spaces

LIFFY THOMAS

Less than a week since Greater Chennai Corporation opened an online mechanism for the public to seek permission for cutting and pruning of trees at public places, the platform has received a huge response. As on January 13, 2026, GCC's website and Namma Chennai mobile app had received close to 27 applications.

Both public and private institutions and residents can submit a request with valid documents such as picture of a branch that needs to be cut or damage caused (or likely to be caused) by a tree, clearly stating the reason why it is a hindrance.

In the earlier system, applications were submitted through the Forest department and then forwarded to GCC. The new system promises to reduce time, bring in greater transparency and would serve useful for documentation.

"In the earlier process, many applied to the Forest Department, some to the Collector and even to the Police Department. Now, all applications would land at one platform for the Green Committee to start scrutinising. Once we get a request, inspection would be taken up and a report submitted for the committee to take a final call on it," says S. Nireshkumar, superintendent of Parks, GCC, adding that the Green Committee comprises offi-



A tree that had fallen during cyclone Vardah in Besant Nagar.
FILE PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Three cheers to GCC's online space for tree talk

How to register complaints about tree abuse

- Download the Namma Chennai App/ Go to Grievance/ Register the complaint with a photo. Make sure the correct location is given
- Call 1913 and register a complaint when you see a tree being abused

cials from GCC, Forest Department and representatives from two NGOs. The opinion of every mem-

ber in the committee has to be taken into consideration before permission is granted to remove a tree in a manner that is scientific.

The team assesses certain aspects of the tree before taking a decision on the request. GCC has reiterated that anything that hampers growth of trees would invite a fine as it comes under tree abuse, which includes concrete chocking tree, nailing of trees and placing decorative lights.

"Cement blocking trees harms it

by cutting off water, oxygen and nutrients ultimately weakening the roots. Likewise, hanging electric lights affect the photosynthesis process that plants need for its food," says Nireshkumar. Citizen groups have welcomed this step by GCC and also want the civic body to periodically give an update on the number of permissions given and the reasons for granting them. They also want this initiative to be promoted on social media.

How to apply

- Go to <https://gccservices.in/greencommittee> or download the Namma Chennai App and share details of the tree or branch that is in question
- **Penalty:** Unauthorised cutting of branches, fixing advertisement boards by driving nails into trees, installing decorative lighting around trees - ₹ 15,000
- Illegal cutting of trees - ₹1 lakh

Zone X tops requests for doorstep collection of waste

GCC's Saturday drive for collecting old sofas, clothes and other unwanted items is 14 editions old and still going strong

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Greater Chennai Corporation's Saturday drive of collecting old sofas, clothes, beds and furniture is 14 editions old, as on January 10, 2026. The collections are carried out on the basis of requests made by the public on the helpline

number 1913.

According to an official from the Solid Waste Department of GCC, they have received 1,078 requests from the public since the drive was launched on October 11, with maximum requests for doorstep pickup of waste coming from Zone X (236).

"Close to 665 metric tonnes of the afore-mentioned waste was processed by the incinerator in Kodungaiyur," says the official.

The public can make a request through the GCC helpline number, through the Namma Chennai app or through WhatsApp number 9445061913, mentioning details of the items they have kept ready for disposal.

The request is passed on to the respective conservancy inspector

of the zone who coordinates on the time for the doorstep pick-up. Once collected, the items will be taken to GCC's incinerator in Kodungaiyur.

Allotting a fixed day of the week for the drive helped impart good recall value to it; in other words, it was difficult for residents to forget and ignore it. Regular updates on GCC's social media pages helped spread the word about the drive.

The drive will continue. Officials however want to dispel one misconception: that doorstep does not mean entering one's home to collect the items. The official explains: "The things to be collected must be kept outside the door just before the team is expected to come."



PHOTO: RAGU R

Pongal restored to 'factory settings'

In urbania, Pongal is often a mere holiday providing respite from the everyday grind. At some corporate houses, usually one day in advance, the marbled aisle between banks of cubicles would sport the boiling rice pot and host traditional games that go link-armed with the harvest festival. For the 9to5ers, this is an act of symbolism, one designed to strengthen their bonds with teammates. Here are two corporate professionals from Chennai who decided to go in for the real McCoy — having all of these festivities in its original settings, on the earthen path with stubbles of grass separating paddy fields. For them, this is an act of gratitude, one that renews their bond with the land where they grow their own food. Treading separate paths, these two represent a growing tribe among the urbane that seeks greater purpose by pausing the bustle, if not muting it entirely



At Chennai-based tech consultant Kiruba Shankar's Vaksana Farms in Rettanai village, Tindivanam.

SHARON JESSICA MICHAEL

Only a toehold in Chennai

Parameswaran Natarajan has exchanged the fast lane for a pace of living best described as a leisurely lumber. There is a literality to what was just said. From being an auto journalist with reputed publications who test-drove cars that pretend to possess the speed of light, almost convincingly, he settled on a form of existence where pauses for 'just being' are as pronounced as bursts of activity.

Welcome to Lazy Grasshopper Farm set in a parcel of land (a two-hour drive from Chennai, at Ozhavetti village near Madurantakam) that he and his wife Ayesha Chandy purchased a few years ago. Residents of Pudupakkam, where the bustle from the nearby IT Corridor (aka Old Mahabalpuram Road) is only barely muted, the two have created the option of cutting out the noise entirely when they choose to.

The farm is a demanding entity with fields of paddy seeking care, cows bellowing for their share of attention and farmhands needing supervision.

Parameswaran and Ayesha,

who is a chartered accountant, grow organic paddy on a limited scale, primarily for friends and family and then for the larger world (check out thelazygrasshopperfarm.com). Guests are accommodated at the farm. Growing their own rice has altered Parameswaran's understanding of the harvest festival. "You are not just boiling over some Pongal at home. Out here, you are part of the land. You are part of what the celebration is." Parameswaran's switch to a lower gear was expected, having been marinated in J Krishnamurthy's philosophy organically through education in a KFI school in Chennai. Seeking the same educational anchor for their son keeps Parameswaran and Ayesha still tethered to Chennai, Ayesha more so than Parameswaran. Parameswaran comes into Chennai only when he absolutely has to. "Very occasionally," is how he would like to put it. The primary reason for having a toehold in Chennai is his son Armaan's education. The boy is in Class XI at a KFI school in Thazhambur. For now, Parameswaran lives mostly on the farm, while his wife spends most of her time in the city. When his presence is required Chennai, the arrangement is reversed; Ayesha holds the fort at Ozhavetti.



The tech consultant is also the farmer

When Virugambakkam-based tech entrepreneur Kiruba Shankar is at his 13-acre organic permaculture farm (vaksanafarms.in) in Rettanai, a village in Tindivanam that is a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Chennai, he is not seeking an escape from urban life, not entirely.

This is how Kiruba, who runs a digital consulting firm in Virugambakkam, views farming:

"I consider this my second profession."

He alternates between Virugambakkam and Rettanai, one week here and the next there.

There is therefore an earthiness to how Pongal is observed in Kiruba's household; an expansiveness to the festive spread.

At 2.30 a.m., the household is already awake with Kiruba's wife, mother, daughters, and Kiruba himself preparing a feast that is both abundant and grounded. Sixteen vegetable dishes are cooked, using produce grown on the farm or sourced from neighbouring fields.

The land itself shapes the celebration. The farm grows rice, pulses, greens, coconuts, and over a dozen varieties of vegetables. Its orchards hold nine varieties of mango, multiple varieties of guavas and bananas, not to mention citrus fruits such as lime and sweet lime.

For Pongal, the farmstay run by his parents is booked months in advance. Guests are mostly urban professionals who grew up in villages or watched their parents and grandparents celebrate Pongal close to the soil. They do not come to observe, but to participate. They wake early, dress in veshti and saris, cut vegetables, stir pots, and stand close by when the Pongal boils over. As evening settles, the celebration moves beyond the farm. Guests travel by tractor trailer and bullock carts to the centre of Rettanai, where the village gathers. Dressed in saris, and veshti, villagers welcome city visitors even foreign guests without ceremony. They join the games, the conversations, and the shared pulse of a village neck deep in festivities.

Farming has profoundly changed Kiruba's relationship with food. Growing rice takes nearly 95 days from seed to plate, involving backbreaking labour, uncertainty and persistence. "When you know that journey," he says, "you develop deep respect for food."



GANGA SRIDHAR

On January 11, Mandaveli Raja Street exploded into heartwarming puffs of extravagant colours, defined by tradition and redefined by modern sensibilities. Its Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) once again honoured its promise, conducting the much awaited annual theme-based kolam competition alongside the Pongal festival. What made this edition riveting was the greater challenge tossed to participants in form of a rather unusual theme – "Media World". The neighbourhood transformed into a vibrant hub of art and culture, with residents and guests joining hands to celebrate unity and creativity.

The best for saved for the last: the Kolam competition ushered in the vesper shadows. Participants were challenged to depict the influence of media on society through intricate rangolis. The competition was divided into three categories: Category A for Raja Street residents, Category B for guest teams from across Chennai, and Category C for children. A total of 20 teams participated, including eight guest teams from Avadi, Madhavaram, K.K. Nagar, Ramapuram, Mylapore and Mandaveli. Six enthusiastic children's teams also joined, with one participant from nearby R.K. Nagar, proving that the younger generation was equally eager to stamp social messaging with eye-catching art.

Intermittent rains added a twist to the proceedings, but the organisers swiftly shifted the venue to the Dwaraka Apartments' parking lot, which soon resembled a colourful art gallery. Some participants braved the drizzle and continued on the street, adding charm and resilience to the festival atmosphere. A distinguished panel of judges – Kala Raghu, Dr. Lavanya, and Aparna Ganesh, all experts in kolam and art – evaluated the entries.

In Category A, Team Akai led by Radhika Santhosh secured first place, followed by Team Kavitha led by Sharmila and Team Thrishul led by Shameem. In Category B, guest teams shone brightly, with



Pongal pot boils over with creativity

Mandaveli Raja Street Residents Welfare Association delivers on its promise yet again by conducting its annual Kolam contest, one that drew teams from near and far

Team Kola Chitram led by Revathy from K.K. Nagar winning first place, Team Spark Squad led by Indra Baskaran from Madhavaram taking second, and Team Malar led by Parameshwari from Ramapuram finishing third. Cash prizes were awarded to winners in Categories A and B, while all the 21 children were declared winners and received gifts, ensuring that every young participant went home with joy.

The festival drew visitors from neighbouring RWAs and areas such as R.A. Puram, Mylapore, Greenways Road, MRC Nagar, and Mandaveli. The event was made possible by generous support from Kauvery Hospital, Aapti Gardens, NAC and the large-hearted residents of Raja Street. Kauvery Hospital set up a health stall offering



Snapshots of the event. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

free blood pressure and sugar checks, with an emergency vehicle on standby, blending health awareness with celebration.

Adding to the festive flavour, an

ethnic Paati Kadai at Kanthi Illam served traditional delicacies such as kozhakattai, thena maanga patani sundal, sakkara velli kazhangunnai podi idly, panagam, thena vel-

lam pori and sukku kaapi.

A sugarcane juice machine delighted visitors, while pongal and paanagam were distributed in eco-friendly dhonnais and cups, reinforcing sustainability.

The cultural segment was equally captivating. The chief guest, Dr. Vasudha Rajasekhar, inaugurated the performances. Highlights included a lively Kummidi Dance by women, a spirited Silambam display by 10-year-old Akhil Aaryav of Raja Street and a nostalgic Tholpavai Puppet Show by artist Muthuchandran from Kanyakumari, which transported audiences to the charm of village theatres.

Post prize distribution, residents joined in traditional games such as Tug of War and the thrilling Uri Adi, where surprise gifts hidden in pots added to the excitement. Winners walked away with sugarcane, cash prizes and even coupons for Orange Mithai from Paati Kadai. As the evening drew to a close, the street echoed with heartfelt wishes of "Happy Pongal." The event beautifully blended art, tradition, health and community bonding, leaving residents with cherished memories and reaffirming the spirit of unity that defines Raja Street.

(Ganga Sridhar is a long-time resident of Mandaveli Raja Street and is associated with a sustainability initiative called EcoConnectors)



The EV double-decker; and the buses that were on the roads of Madras in 1997 and 1970.

PHOTOS: R. RAGU AND THE HINDU ARCHIVES

A view from the *upper deck* once again

The newly introduced double-decker bus service in Chennai does not trace a commuting route, but packs enough nostalgia to conjure up those that did

LIFFY THOMAS

A double-decker electric bus that was recently introduced on Chennai's roads ahead of Pongal is likely to evoke nostalgia among long-time residents of the city. First seen on the roads of Madras in the early 1970s, these iconic two-storeyed buses were gradually withdrawn only to be reintroduced in January 1997, 28 years ago during Pongal time. After another run lasting around a decade, they would be taken off the roads again. They have made a comeback yet again,

but on a "different track".

Inspired by Bombay's BEST, these two-level buses caught the fancy of commuters in Madras when they first hit city roads for the sheer number of people they could accommodate, the comfort they offered and of course, for the view from the upper deck.

Prior to their run in the city, these double-decker buses were operating on the Madras-Tiruchy and Madras-Madurai routes only to be taken off the roads by the Tamil Nadu State Transport Department within two years as commuters found them uncomfortable for

long-distance travel.

The ones that made trips within the city received good patronage.

Increased capacity

As the double-decker buses covered more ground, the technology that drove their manufacture did too.

According to *The Hindu Archives*, double-decker buses began to accommodate more passengers when Ashok Leyland's 'Comet' tractor with a Mahindra Owen trailer chassis and body built by Bombay-based Jayanand Khira went into their making. The capacity of this double-decker bus was 100 seats as against 80 in a conventional double-decker.

The larger capacity was possible because the total load was distributed on three axles instead of two. The makers had accounted for any breakdown on the road by having a "spare tractor" to

haul the passenger saloon (the trailer).

Until the mid-1970s, these tall wonders had a good run so much so that Pallavan Transport Corporation (PTC) operated new double-decker buses in the city on route 11-A in February 1976.

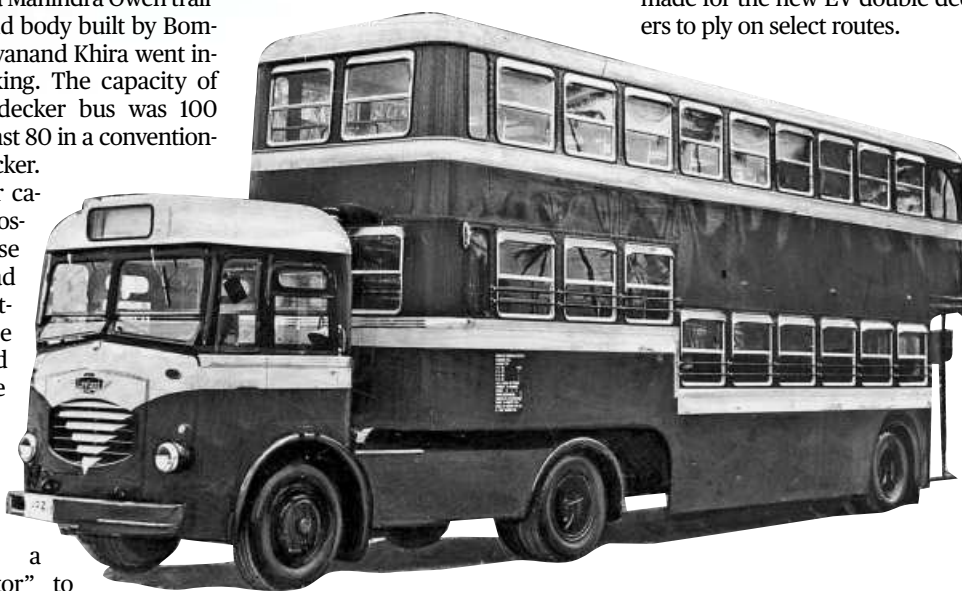
However, these services were withdrawn gradually citing 'operational difficulties'. A report in September 2008 says double-decker buses plying on the A18 route were

taken off the roads as they had "grown very old" and "were difficult for drivers to manoeuvre through heavy traffic".

But they did make a comeback in 1997. During the Assembly session then Transport Minister. K. Ponmudi announced that double-decker services would be reintroduced to 'avoid overcrowding' of regular buses operated by PTC and DATC.

PTC placed orders for 20 double-decker bus chassis with Ashok Leyland, and were keen that the makers of the buses hand over at least one service to coincide with PTC's silver jubilee. It was finally launched on Bhogi day in January 1997.




To facilitate the movement of double-deckers, trees were felled and overhead wires of trams had to be removed. One cannot but wonder what modifications have been made for the new EV double-deckers to ply on select routes.



Stop littering my space!




This piece of sand art at Besant Nagar beach gets the image of a turtle to highlight the devastating impact of plastic pollution on marine life. PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM






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