

THE WORD

Volume No 18

Issue No 10

March 29, 2018

LAB JOURNAL OF THE ASIAN COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM



New scheme to fight TB

Page 2



PwD struggle for disability card

Page 3



Chennai theatre in a decline

Page 4

Row over slum housing project

Moolakothalam housing project for Adi Dravidars is to be built over graves

ASHWIN MANIKANDAN

CHENNAI: Vijay Bhaskar, a freelance civil engineer, discovered a couple of months ago that the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) had bulldozed his father's grave at the Moolakothalam Mayanam (crematorium and burial ground) to clear the land for building a housing colony for slum dwellers.

On September 15, 2017, TNSCB identified 11.5 acres of land from the 26 acres originally belonging to the Moolakothalam Mayanam as unused, and a slum-housing project was planned to resettle an Adi-Dravidar (Dalit group) community of 1044 families residing in the adjacent Katpada Slums.

The Corporation soon issued a no-objection circular claiming that the land in concern did not encroach any of the existing graves and proceeded with demarcating it with a steel fence.

"I first visited the site in January and realized that the proposed houses would be built right on top of burial sites including that of my father's," Bhaskar says.

The civil engineer sent out detailed letters about the encroachment to various party representatives of the area after his complaint to



It remains to be seen if these slum dwellers get their new houses ASHWIN MANIKANDAN

TNSCB was left unheeded.

"I wrote to AIADMK, DMK, Congress and others in the hope that someone would stand with my cause. The Moolakothalam Mayanam is the oldest burial ground in Chennai and has a lot of heritage attached to it. I felt that it was only a matter of time before people took notice and stood up for the issue."

"The Moolakothalam Mayanam has tombs of great anti-Hindi martyrs of this land like Natarajan and

Thalamuthu Nadar. MDMK leader Vaiko, when he came to know that the burial site was in danger, went and visited them," says Arunagiri, Vaiko's Secretary.

T Jeevan, District Secretary (North Chennai), MDMK, says "We are not against the development of the poor, but the housing project is just an agenda of the builders to destroy the burial site in collusion with the Corporation to increase the real estate prices."

MDMK Chief Vaiko has been vocal in his protest against the housing project.

"People might come in large numbers and might assault me, but I would not care. Moolakothalam burial ground is connected with the sentiments of the soil of Tamil Nadu and none would be allowed to take away an inch of the land," he had told reporters after a group of Adi Dravidars from Katpada Slum staged a protest outside MDMK party office in Egmore on

Monday.

However, Saiba, a 40 year old Adi Dravidar living in Katpada Slums for the last 20 years, asks "We have been living here for the last 60 years. During monsoons, the slum gets filled with up to three feet of water. Do these political parties standing against the project value the dead more than the living?"

According to the locals here, in compliance with the Slum Clearance Act (1956), the TNSCB had planned to relocate the residents of the slum to a housing facility in Perumbakkam, but after conducting various surveys, the decision to use the burial ground for the housing project was taken.

Nagaraj, a resident of the slum, says "We are not represented by any political party. The makhal of the slum came together and decided to protest against Vaiko. He has his own agenda in denying us an opportunity of having a decent housing facility."

Solomon, an 11th Standard student at the slum says, "Our schools are here, there is a hospital nearby, our playgrounds are here. Our parents and grandparents have been living here for decades now."

"We can't possibly shift to Perumbakkam now which is 50km away."

Where are the missing girls?

HRIDKAMAL ROY

CHENNAI: The sex ratio in the gender biased districts of Tamil Nadu has gone down from 923 to 911 in spite of the Cradle Baby Scheme under which unwanted infants, mostly female, were dropped off in Government-designated centres.

According to activists, there can be two possible reasons for it: One being the growing acceptance of the girl child and the other being increasing female foeticide preceded by illegal sex determination tests.

Till recently this scheme was accepted widely. In 2009 Salem had received 745 infant children of whom 36 were boys. But the number has dropped to an extent where the facility in Cuddalore received only one infant girl last year.

S. Anandhi, a gender expert, said, "As far as the districts of Cuddalore and Ariyalur are concerned the government did help to improve the sex ratio. Strict penalty for female foeticide and infanticide too helped. With the 2011 census The alarming decline of sex ratio in these districts in the 2011 census led to various state actions that did help to curb this trend. If the state wills it can show the way."

"But yes, overall in the last two decades girl children are not seen as burdensome", she added.

Indian Council for Children Welfare (ICCW), Chennai which worked during 1992-2003 on the Cradle Baby Scheme in Usilampatti, Madurai after it was re-initiated in 2001 stated in its report that it was able to bring female infanticide under control in that area.

Vimi Jony, Information Officer of ICCW, Chennai said, "We did witness improvement in Usilampatti. In Cuddalore also we have carried out work on this scheme and we could see improvement there too."

"When I found out about the decline in the sex ratio even I was confused. Maybe the problem has risen up again. There might be several illegal ultrasound clinics for sex determination operating in the interiors. There might even be some in Chennai also."

"We worked very hard in 17 villages of Usilampatti block and brought about a sharp decline in the incidence of female infanticide in 2002-03 compared to 1991-92. Even in places like Salem and Dharmapuri acceptance of the scheme could be seen but somehow the brutal practice might have sprung up again. Nothing can be properly said until some research is done", said Vimi.

Purohit to rethink on district visits

DEBDUTTA MITRA

CHENNAI: DMK president MK Stalin announced that Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit had assured him that he would rethink his plans to visit various parts of the state to review various projects and schemes.

The DMK had raised the issue at the Raj Bhavan here on Tuesday, March 27.

Speaking to the press, Stalin said that the Governor claimed that he wasn't conducting reviews but only visiting parts of the state to check on the development.

"We told him that we won't oppose his visits for reviewing the

parts of the state if he feels that the government is not doing its job," said Stalin adding that it was only after the party raised the issue that the governor agreed to rethink his plans.

Stalin also said that though he was satisfied in meeting the governor, there should be an official statement from the State Government or Purohit himself that the purpose of the visit wasn't for a review.

Purohit had invited him and party secretary Durai Murugan to discuss the appointment of TM Sastry as the Vice-Chancellor of the Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University which was being opposed by the DMK citing that his name had not been recommended by the Vice-Chancellor Search Committee.

"Though the governor accepted the fact that Sastry had faced disciplinary action in the past, he said that a probe by a special committee had given him a clean chit," said the DMK President, M.K. Stalin.

'Budget not used for SC students'

DEBDUTTA MITRA

CHENNAI: Members of the Student's Federation of India (SFI) and Ambedkar Kalvi Centenary Movement (AKAM) were apprehended by the police for protesting without permission against the education budget allocation for SC/ST/OBC college students.

Around 700 students from various colleges of Tamil Nadu protested in Chepauk on March 27 stating that the state government hadn't utilized the fund of Rs. 1546 crore allocated by the Central Government for the Post-Matric Scholarship scheme.

"In the recent state budget, deputy chief minister O Panerselvam claimed that over 8 lakh students have benefited from the scheme which is false," said Mariyappan, State President (SFI) adding that the students had not received application forms for the scheme to be implemented. He also said that after the death of former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, the EPS government had reduced the allocation for the scheme without the approval of the state assembly due to which 1.5 lakh students have been affected.

The protesters demanded that the government order which called for reducing the funds be revoked and the old orders be implemented.

"For the last seven months, we have



Police detained around 400 people

DEBDUTTA MITRA

been trying to convince the ministers to consider our demands to which they said they will look at it but they haven't done anything yet," said Chandramohan, a member of AKAM adding that they also tried writing to the MPs who just gave them fake assurance that they would try convincing the Prime Minister.

"Out of the Rs 4000 crore meant for the education of SC/ST/OBC, the central government cut down Rs. 1000 crore in the recent Union Budget and due to which the fee

increased for the students," added Chandramohan.

However, the protest was broken up by the police who claimed that the protest was being done without government permission.

"Along with protesting without any requisite permission, they were picketing and were planning to lay siege in front of the Secretariat. So, we have detained them until further action," said Praveesh Kumar, DCP (Triplicane District).

Protest against Sterlite plant

DEBOLINA BISWAS

CHENNAI: Vedanta's company, Sterlite Copper, along with the government has misled the Madras High Court by making false representation of its location and obtaining the environmental clearance without public consultation, said representatives of 'People's Movement Against Killer Sterlite' (PMAKS) at the Press Club on Wednesday, March 28.

Following intense protests in Thoothukudi on March 24, Chennai Solidarity Group released a report titled 'Toxic Conspiracy: How Governments are helping Sterlite violate the Law' stating that the company's project site is not within the existing 1038 acre SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu) Industrial Complex. It is contained within a separate 1616-acre of land which is proposed to be developed as a standalone Tuticorin Industrial park (TIP) by SIPCOT, approval for which has not been obtained.

The report called for an immediate halt of illegal construction at the site and prosecution of the officials of Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB), Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF), SIPCOT and Sterlite who are guilty of perjury. It also called on the District Collector to enforce the master plan.

MoEF granted environmental clearance to Sterlite on January, 2009 exempting public consultation. The MoEF argued that the 1200-tonne-per-day copper smelter complex was located within the existing SIPCOT industrial complex. TNPCB followed suit and granted consent in 2016 helping the company commence construction.

A public hearing for the TIP project held in Thoothukudi on January 25, was cancelled due to public opposition. According to the report SIPCOT has, however, concealed the fact that it has already allotted 324-acres to Sterlite within the proposed TIP. The environmental impact assessment for the project does not mention or assess the impacts of Sterlite's copper smelter. Exemption from public consultation under the EIA Notification, 2006, is available only to projects coming up within industrial estates that are approved.

"If Sterlite's proposed copper smelter complex will take total installed capacity of copper production in Thoothukudi to more than 8,00,000-tonnes-per-annum, that would make this the world's largest smelter complex, and the largest to come up within a densely populated urban area. The project site is in close proximity to Kumareddyapuram residential area," said social activist and representative of Chennai Solidarity Group, Nityananda Jayaraman.

Residents of the Thoothukudi town came to the streets on March 24, demanding the closure of Sterlite's copper smelter plant which is allegedly polluting the air and the ground water.

Fatima Babu, representative of PMAKS, said, "Once officials had come to inspect the ground water and we offered them a glass of water from the site of inspection. They did not even touch it."

"The National Environmental Research Institute Engineering (NEERI) reports show that the plant did pollute the environment through emissions," said Jayaraman.

Meanwhile responding in newspaper advertisements Vedanta has denied allegations that the Sterlite plant was causing pollution in the area.



DMK President M.K. Stalin meets Governor Banwarilal Purohit

DEBDUTTA MITRA

Chennai's 91-year-old legacy

GOWRI S.

CHENNAI: On the busy and dusty Triplicane High Road, is a quaint office space which is currently undergoing renovation. Inside sits a calligrapher, carefully writing down the headlines on a small piece of white paper. This will later be copied onto the broadsheets and printed. This is the office of The Musalman, India's only hand-written paper currently in circulation.

The 91-year-old Urdu evening daily which is published from Chennai, has been in circulation throughout the country, since 1927 and costs 75 paise per copy. "The paper was started by my grandfather, Syed Azathulla and after he expired, my father took it up. Now, since 2008, I have been the editor," said Syed Arifulla, the current editor of The Musalman. The first copy of this Urdu daily is handwritten using calligraphy which is then mass produced.

"We have trained calligraphers working for us on a part-time basis. There are three reporters who write the news within the deadline of 1 p.m. From 3 p.m., the writing starts," said Arifulla. The newspaper accepts content from freelancers as well. The arduous task of writing a whole page takes two hours. If mistakes are made, the entire page has to be redone.

Some reporters double up as writers. "I have been working here for 35 years now and have been a resident of Chennai all my life," said Rehman Hussain, the chief reporter of The Musalman who also writes.

National, international and local news along with editorials and advertisements, are covered in the four pages which are stylistically written using calligraphy. While the first page consists of local and national news, the second page covers editorials and international news. The third page has quotes from Quran while the fourth page is a

combination of all of the above. Apart from these, advertisements take up a considerable space.

"There is no voice for the Muslim community in the South. This was the main reason behind my family's decision to operate from Chennai," said Arifulla. The newspaper currently reaches 21,000 people across the country, according to Arifulla.

However, the advent of technology does not scare the team of The Musalman who firmly believe that their paper is here to stay. According to Arifulla, there are a lot of technical difficulties in making a digital version of the newspaper.

"Since we use calligraphy, the digital version will not be able to replace the hand-written version," said Arifulla who claims that they have not lost any readers in the last couple of years. He added that changing the paper into a digital form might affect the business adversely as a large percentage of The Musalman's readers are old people.

"I am just maintaining the hierarchy. From the beginning, calligraphy was used right? So, I don't wish to change that which might actually disappoint our readers. In fact, the calligraphic content is one of the main reasons why readers prefer this paper," continued Arifulla who also said that the newspaper has a strong readership in the northern states as well.

The main source of revenue comes from advertisements. Unless the advertisements demand otherwise, the paper is completely written in Urdu and is printed in black and white.

The 91-year-old legacy of the newspaper is bolstered by the team's devotion to the job. This, according to Arifulla, also serves as the reason behind the existence of the paper despite the intervention of technology.

(Right) An issue of The Musalman GOWRI S.



New scheme to fight TB harder

World Tuberculosis Day: More emphasis on nutrition and better equipment

AYESHA ROY

CHENNAI: This year's scheme announced on World Tuberculosis day (March 24), gave yet another push to the government's TB free Chennai initiative of October 2017. And the 'nutritional assistance' scheme is one of them in association with the NGO Research Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health (REACH) and National Institute for Research in TB.

The new scheme will come into effect from April 1. Money would be directly transferred to the patients' bank account in the hope that they can consume nutritious food. "TB patients are advised to take protein rich diet like pulses, jaggery, dates, egg and milk," said Dr. Lavanya, TB programme officer in Greater Chennai Corporation. "We need to trust patients that they would utilise the money efficiently. This will help them compensate for their wages during days of treatment."

"This scheme will mainly focus on private sector doctors who will be made aware to collect details of bank accounts of the patients and then they can register the case on the Nikshay app. It will bring all the public and private sector patients together on a single platform," added Mrs. Lavanya.

Nikshay app is a web based solution developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) for monitoring TB patients under Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP) effectively.

Tamil Nadu passed a gazette notification making non-reporting of tuberculosis (TB) cases, a punishable offence, with even a jail term. "But this was not given much cognizance," she said.

"The choice is left to the doctors (private sector) whether they want to notify for Public Private Mix (PPM) Coordinator to supervise them. REACH has been given the responsibility to collect information on patients and notify weekly

Facilities under the new Scheme	
Tablets to Senior Treatment Supervisors and TB lab supervisors	Will be used for recording patient data on treatment and medicines
2 medical vans with gene expert machines	Cartridge Based Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (CB-NAAT) machines for faster detection

(since 2015) and set up the Nakhathra Centres. In these centres, the private sector proprietors will lend a room to PPMs to set up a clinic for X-ray and sputum test and record data, counsel them (Counselor here is known as nanban meaning friend), and refer to the required doctors," she said. "Government hospitals and urban primary health centres (104 out of 120) are equipped to diagnose and treat TB," she added. TB patients who are terminally ill

are referred to the Government Hospital of Thoracic Medicine located in Tambaram (TB Sanatorium- State owned since 1928). Dr. Vidya, MD in Chest Medicine at the hospital said, "most of the people from lower economic classes take the course of medicine very lightly and leave in between. This makes them drug resistant and then we have to restart the course." In case of the social stigma that patients face, "it is mostly the upper educated class that feel excluded

upon being diagnosed and not the lower economic classes. They take it as it comes and come here to get treated."

People from other states also come here for treatment for the "facilities are up to the mark and doctors are well trained," said Saifullah, who has come from Andhra Pradesh to get his brother treated.

But "four doctors have visited us in the five days since the admission of my brother as they changed the wards. He has been diagnosed with both HIV and TB. We feel the doctor who attended to us first would know the case better," he said.

"The patients from Tamil Nadu are given free treatment whereas the admission fee for patients from other states is Rs. 1500. Sputum and urine test are free where as a test like X-ray (mandatory test) is charged Rs. 20 from Tamil Nadu patients and Rs. 90 from outside patients," said his uncle, Manimaran, who lives in Vandalur, in Chennai.



Panel on Minorities and human dignity at MIDS EISHA NAIR

Workshop on minority rights

EISHA NAIR

CHENNAI: Frontier Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan's son, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, was once asked whether he was a Pakistani first, or a Muslim, or a Pathan. He responded that he had been a Pakistani for the last 35 years, a Muslim for the last 1800 years and a Pathan for the last 5000 years.

This anecdote was narrated by V Suryanarayan, an expert on South and South-East Asian studies, at a seminar in the Madras Institute of Developmental Studies (MIDS) on Tuesday.

"We have multiple identities which must coexist harmoniously or we face tensions in nation building," said Suryanarayan at the seminar titled 'Minorities and Human Dignity: Contemporary Challenges of Self-Development, Inclusion of the Other, Social Transformations and Planetary Realizations,' covering perspectives from Malaysia, India, Italy, Northern Ireland and Myanmar.

"Post colonial states are all artificial creations. Instead of uniting people speaking the same language, and following the same religion, we have Nagas in India but none in Myanmar, Tamils in India, Tamils in Sri Lanka. And in such States, minorities are vulnerable and persecuted. For example, in Myanmar, a Tamil child joining school, has to take a Burmese name, a Tamil woman with a government job cannot go to work in a sari," said Suryanarayan.

The introductory talk given by the chair, MIDS professor, Dr. Ananta Kumar Giri, posited that identities were like trees - they had roots. "Wherever we are in Tamil Nadu, Westfalia or South Tyrol... we cannot dissociate ourselves from our placement in these locales. All our identities -- minority or majority, emerge with this fundamental earth," he said. Quoting political philosopher

Hanna Arendt, Giri said that all minorities were doomed to failure and insecurity because of the authoritarian nature of State sovereignty. However the solution lay in the inclusion of all identities through self development and responsibility.

"I was doing my fieldwork in Kerala with a Christian organization and I told my colleague that all your employees are Christian. He asked me in turn how many Christians can you find in a Ramakrishna mission institution? It was my suggestion that his institution employ some non-Christians so we could move forward with structural social transformation," said Giri.

However, according to the next speaker, Rüdiger Korff, Professor, Center for South Asian Studies, at University of Passau in Germany, identities are merely constructs.

"Both minorities and majorities are made in a double process. On one hand, there is a process by which the collective somehow creates itself based on imagined similarities. This can be whatever you wish—take for example smokers versus non-smokers. For smokers, smoking is civilized, and the act of non-smoking may have started in fascist Germany. So smoking becomes an anti-fascist act. And what distinguishes humans from animals? — smoking? So if I smoke, I express my level of civilization. At the same time there are imagined differences — where collectives are created from the outside, based on constructed differences," said Korff.

Korff advocated the shift of focus from minorities to majorities and discuss identities in terms of universal human freedoms and rights. "Let us discuss freedom through new forms of economic redistribution, new forms of administration which does not control but facilitates, and new forms of democratization. We don't need to discuss any more culture. We need to discuss more politics and practice," he said.

Burn victims get hotline



The German President's wife Elke Budenbender inaugurates the 24/7 hotline THE HINDU

DEBOLINA BISWAS

CHENNAI: Chennai based organisation, International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC), launched a national support line (044-43111143/ 8001027282) for women burn survivors and domestic violence victims, here on Sunday, March 25.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's wife Elke Budenbender inaugurated the round-the-clock hotline which is to provide counselling, legal awareness and information to victims, their families and care-takers. Callers would be directed to nearby hospital burn wards.

Registered in 2001, PCVC has been co-founded and is managed by Dr. Prasanna Gethu. The organisation has a recovery and healing centre in Anna Nagar and is associated with Chennai's Kilpauk Medical College.

"To prevent infection while being treated at the burn ward in the hospital, we provide disposable sheets. Egg shots, protein-rich supplements and nutritious food is provided to the patients," said Swetha Shankar, psycho-social manager at PCVC.

"We help the burn survivors and domestic violence victims by offering skill-based training and economically empowering them by helping them find jobs," said Swetha.

Survivors have been previously trained in bakery management for six months, in collaboration with Mr. M. Mahadevan of Hot Breads. At the end of the sixth month, 15 were placed in Writer's Cafe and Loyola College's canteen. Two of them are still under training. "Almost 90 per cent of domestic violence cases are reported as accidents and the mortality rate of burn victims is as high as 80 per cent," said Swetha. "Psycho-social and social rehabilitation is the immediate need of these victims," she added.

PCVC receives financial help from individual donors in Chennai. Vidiyal or 'new dawn' is their latest flagship project.

Daily wage film employees bear the brunt of strike

HARIPRASAD RADHAKRISHNAN

CHENNAI: The nearly 23,000-strong workforce dependent on the Kollywood industry is facing a crunch as the strike between the Tamil Film Producers Council (TFPC) and the digital service providers has stretched over two weeks. This adds to the existing woes of the industry which has not been very rewarding for its wage-labourers.

After the indefinite strike was called, the production of more than 35 movies, both big-ticket and low-key, came to a grinding halt. The employees in the allied businesses, especially the daily-wage workers -- such as junior artists, lightmen, cameramen, drivers and a host of other tradesmen -- have been left scrambling.

The Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI) which represents a total of 23 unions has stood in unison with the producers in the issue of the virtual print fee (VPF), when the production and post-production activities were halted on March 16. While there are two types of employee engagements in the pro-

duction -- contractual or package deal and daily-wage, the latter has been the worst hit.

"It is becoming increasingly difficult for the people dependent on the cinema to survive. We earn somewhere between Rs. 850-950 a day. The employment is also erratic. Add to that, there are strikes. Come April 1, we'll have to pay the bills. I think taking loans is the only option," said Maries, who works on daily wages as crane operator and lightman.

The lightmen also flag other problems with their payment. "Big production houses, especially

after demonetization, defer the payment till up to 20-30 days. This is creating a big crunch. When small budget films can settle their payments immediately, why don't the big houses do the same?" said Senthilkumar, president of the Cine & TV Outdoor Lightmen Union, which has over 1500 members.

Many of the employees feel a sense of inertia after having worked in the field for several years. A. Vikkinraj, 62, a member of the Cine & TV Lightmen Union, said: "Some work as security guards or as domestic help. But at this age, it is not possible for us to get into other professions." The makeup artists and the cos-

tume designers' businesses have also been hurt by the strike. "Although I work on a package-basis for movies, I have 10 assistants working with me on daily wages. They are suffering a lot because of the strike," said D. Venkatesh, a costume designer. The designers also do not take retail orders and work almost exclusively in the film industry.

To bring something of an equitable setup of employment, employees take turns on assignments, especially among production assistants. "If someone gets to go on an assignment this week, someone else is given the opportunity next time," said S.R. Chandran, president of the South India Cine & T.V. Production Assistants Union. On the flip side, under the arrangement, some people may have to wait longer for assignments.

However, Mr. Chandran, who was present at the meetings between the producers council and the digital service providers, sees light at the end of the tunnel. "The strike may be called off by April 1 or 2," he said.



Nearly 23000 daily-wage film employees have been affected by the strike MOVIES.SULEKHA.COM

Grey Water: A viable solution to save water

AYESHA ROY

CHENNAI: Chennai is not meant to face water scarcity with five lakes, three rivers and several reservoirs. But no one seems interested in tackling the problem in easy and cost-effective ways.

One of the many ways in which Chennaites can save water is to recycle grey water (water from bathrooms and kitchen).

"The water is sterile, has just soluble salts of soaps," said Indukanth S Ragade, a pioneer and expert in grey water recycling here.

After his success in Sri Nagar Colony, in Saidapet, 16 years ago, he approached architects, architects, Chennai Metropol-

itan Development Authority (CMDA) and students and conducted workshops to encourage people to take up a cost-effective way of saving potable water by this method.

"People do not realize the value of reusing grey water and it is more fashionable for them to buy water from tankers and in bottles," said Indukanth.

"Instead of sending the water from bathrooms, washing machines and kitchen (constitutes 60 percent of city sewage water) to the Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), which are a costly affair for the State, residents can themselves build shallow dug wells or sumps to store this water and redirect it to the toilets for flushing or gardening," he added.

Prasuna, a resident of Sri Nagar Colony said "all you need is a little bit of maintenance to keep the system running."

"We tried the same on the left side of the compound but trees from adjacent compounds hinder sunlight and hence the plants are not growing. So we are using the water currently for flushing only," she added.

"As the population increases, the capacity needs to be upgraded and the cost keeps increasing in treating water," added Indukanth.

Chennai Corporation has no such agenda of building such sumps or wells said Priya, Assistant Senior Manager in the Urban Works Department. "Instead RO plants have been set up to supply potable

water to the poor areas." In rest of the areas, people need to buy water once the summers start to peak and water tables go down in reservoirs.

Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewage Board (CMWSSB) has five treatment plants with the capacity to treat 486 million litres per day (MLD).

Having authored the book, Self-reliance in Water, Indukanth added that Chennaites who took up recycling, sent the left out water through lorries in night and dump it in water bodies.

These projects are so easy that "one just needs a plumber, a storage tank and some pipes and the recycled water can be used for the garden. This can be done by even 10-15 year old children," said another

water expert, Thillaiampalam Sivaramalingam.

He started a project of planting 300 trees in the coastal area of Besant Nagar back in 2002.

The city needs 830 MLD of water each day out of which 200 MLD comes from desalination plants in Nemmeli and Minjur and efforts are currently under way to set up a third plant which will provide 150 MLD of water. "If the whole city needs water only businesses can supply it overnight," said Sivaramalingam.

"Grey water is the biggest asset if recycled. Trees can be easily grown and watered instead of pouring it into the sea and rivers," he said, adding that it c be a worthy fight against global warming

IIT researcher raises educational awareness through posters

AVANISH C

CHENNAI: As a young student at Tirupati, Bhanu Chander faced difficulties in completing his education. Not having studied in elite schools, he was unaware of the entrance exams he could write and the scholarships he could apply for. Lack of money forced him to drop the idea of appearing for the IIT-JEE exams. These difficulties motivated him to help underprivileged students, who were unaware of their prospects and were strapped for funds.

"My parents are neither rich nor educated. But they were determined to send me and my siblings to school, even if it meant taking loans. The education I received be-

nefitted me greatly," said Chander adding, "If it can change my life, it can improve the lives of other students too and contribute greatly to our nation's economy."

Chander completed his under-graduation in engineering at Tirupati, and started working with Larsen & Toubro Constructions. He soon resigned, as he wanted to study further.

He found that coaching centers were charging exorbitant prices for study material for the IIT-GATE exams and the Common Entrance Examination for Design (CEED).

"I decided to help the people by starting a blog called Stuff You Look. I started sharing free materials and solved thousands of design aspirants' queries. Soon,

people writing other exams approached me and so as of now I'm handling material for more than six exams," he said.

Chander is now a researcher in Robotics at IIT-Madras. He got together with a group of like-minded students, with whom he participated in social service activities.

As a result, he eventually developed contacts with NGO's and social activists in the field of education.

He soon developed the idea of spreading awareness about educational facilities in India in an economic fashion.

"I started collecting resources and details about the exams as well as scholarships. After compiling the course list, I got the idea of ma-

king a single poster so that I can send that through social media," said Chander.

"I made one by myself and started sharing. I soon started making YouTube videos in lesser known languages for those who couldn't understand English."

Chander soon graduated to making physical posters for students who couldn't afford an internet connection.

"The government has many educational initiatives and scholarship programs. The only problem is reachability and awareness amongst students," he said.

Chander then launched Project Vidhya Spurthi. "Under Vidhya Spurthi, I started sending posts to government schools. Being a resi-

dent of Tirupati, I started spreading awareness around Tirupati. As of today, I have reached out to more

than 100 schools," Chander said. Chander did an internet search and found contacts of NGOs and



Banu Chander at a social service drive C AVANISH

many individual social workers. He sent them copies of his posters and got a good response.

"Many of them took photo copies and spread the word to the schools surrounding them. I will try my best to cover all government schools and colleges in India," he said.

"My elder brother Somasundar has been taking care of all the funding," he said, adding that he also spent his own money.

Sasi Kumar, the head of an NGO benefiting from Chander's efforts is all praise for him.

"He does not want others to experience the dilemma he experienced as a student. What he has been doing greatly improved the lives of other students," he said

PwDs struggle to get disability identity cards

GARIMA BORA

CHENNAI: It has been more than a year since the Centre launched the Unique Disability Identity card; but obtaining the card and getting it accepted has not been easy in Tamil Nadu.

R Radhakrishnan, Managing Trustee of Karunai Trust, runs the Anna Special School for mentally challenged and works along with Tamil Nadu Association for the Rights of All Types of Differently Abled and Caregivers (TARATDAC). He says that the doctors don't know how to categorise the differently abled based on the criteria. No proper procedure is followed even though the disability criteria run to about 56 pages.

Radhakrishnan cites the example of a man with one arm amputated, who was given a 35 per cent disability with an additional note of 'temporary disability'.

Another instance was when a man using calipers to walk was denied a disability certificate.

"It is so cumbersome to obtain a simple certificate of disability" he says.

Earlier, the identity cards given would work only in particular districts. Different disability cards were required for different purposes, such as education, railways, and Income Tax returns. The education card will not be acceptable at the



People from TARATDAC protesting at Perambur station

[THE HINDU]

railway counters or vice versa. For each card, the differently abled person has to go to the doctor, get the certificate and then go the District Disability Rehabilitation Centres to register for the particular card.

Radhakrishnan says a lot of times the doctors are not available and the applicants are then told to go see another doctor. All this is done knowing the fact that these are disabled people.

At times, if the doctor is not present, a medical student will stand in as a substitute. Other times camps are held to give the certificate. One of the camps was held in his school in which only one doctor came to

certify 150 differently abled.

This is when the Unique Disability Identity card (UDID) also called Svalambam card came into focus. A universal card was brought in to ensure that the differently abled do not need separate identity cards for various government departments, schemes and concessions and was meant to work all across India.

In Tamil Nadu, as per the 2011 census there are nearly 11.8 lakh People with Disabilities (PwD), only 12791 cards have been issued.

However, Radhakrishnan says the guidelines to obtain the UDID are ambiguous and still not accepted at many places.

"It gets harder to make the differently abled understand about the card"

In October last year, the National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled wrote to the Minister of Railways asking for these cards to be used for identity purposes instead of having persons with disabilities seek another card specifically for railway concession.

Mr. Nambu Rajan, General Secretary of TARATDAC says that though some people have applied and got the universal disability ID card, the scheme has still not been implemented and so cannot be used yet in Tamil Nadu.

An Act to Act Upon

The RPWD Act stands insufficient

BHAGYASRI CHAUDHURY

CHENNAI: Six years of lobbying that led to the passing of the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, has fallen short of expectations in the field of education and maintenance for those who undergo abuse or exploitation, said V. Arun Roy, state commissioner for the differently abled.

A meeting among jurists, disability rights activists, and senior bureaucrats from the state government had taken place earlier this week to discuss the new Act.

The RPWD Act promises free and compulsory education for all differently abled children up to the age of 18 in a neighbourhood school, or a school of their choice.

While the Right to Education Act, 2009, that dealt with children within the 6-14 years age bracket, clearly says that the government should reimburse fees of students enrolled in private schools, the RPWD Act remains silent on

reimbursing fees of children with disabilities who enroll themselves in secondary and high school courses in private institutions, Roy said.

"There are no clear provisions in the RPWD Act explaining who will be liable to pay the maintenance in case of persons undergoing abuse or exploitation," he added.

The Act leaves several rules to be managed by the Central and State governments, but the rules have not been promulgated in Tamil Nadu yet

as well as assistive and rehabilitation devices for the differently abled. New rules on the use of medical devices have been promulgated, and there are laws now on the use of disabled persons in such trials."

The Act leaves several rules to be managed by the central and state governments, but the rules have not been promulgated in Tamil Nadu yet, she said.

"The rules are political and non-implementable," she said, "I don't think the rules are good enough. For example, employers who employ more than five per cent of their workers as those with disabilities will get an incentive from the state. But how much is this incentive? What is this incentivising going to do? It is unclear."

Disability, like many other sectors, require scientific and medical research and input.

The rules that are there in the new act are devoid of numbers and statistics.

"It is incomplete, insufficient and is completely ambiguous," she added.

Swapna Sundar, lawyer, and CEO of IP Dome said, "Recently, there has been a lot of focus on the disability sector. There has been research on the means of preventing disabilities

March for Secularism gets the final nod

DEBANGANA GHOSH

CHENNAI: After facing delays in starting the 'March for Secularism,' the People's Platform Against Fascism (PPAF) finally got the nod from the Madras High Court on March 28, but with a fresh set of directions which will simultaneously ensure some control by the State Police over the march.

"The vicious saffronised Edappadi government, cited traffic, law and order issues as reasons to deny us permission for the march."
- Sathish Kumar, Leader, CPIML

Justice M.S. Ramesh granted liberty to the petitioners (PPAF) to approach the Director General of Police (DGP) for protection during the march. But they need to provide the route of the march which will happen across Tamil Nadu, specifying the places of meeting and the dates. A decision would be taken after obtaining reports from the concerned districts.

The police, however, can impose reasonable restrictions after receiving the representation to maintain peace and order.

Sathish Kumar, Leader, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leni-

nist) (CPIML) said, "The vicious saffronised Edappadi government, cited traffic, law and order issues as reasons to deny us permission for the march. We won the legal battle at the Madras High Court."

The march is expected to begin on April 1 from Chennai and end in Kanyakumari ten days later covering 2300 km across 49 cities and 21 districts. Around 40 to 50 members including personalities from art and cinema industry, activists, educationists, students, politicians, fisher men, tribals and members from different disciplines will be joining the march.

The main attraction of the march will be a customized caravan, designed to "invoke secular anti-caste, resistive and rationalist traditions of the modern Tamil era and of earlier literary and archaeological sources," said a post uploaded on the PPAF's official Facebook page.



Chepauk protest against motor vehicles act

[HRIDKAMAL ROY]

Profit for the company, taxi drivers face loss

HRIDKAMAL ROY

CHENNAI: Taxi drivers working for taxi aggregators like Ola and Uber are planning on going on a strike from next month seeking better wages and service conditions.

This follows a united protest by the LDF (Labour Development Foundation), CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) and TTSF (Tamil Nadu Transport Staff Foundation) at Chepauk on March 13.

Uber driver Tamizhmaran said, "Drivers don't earn much from driving cabs and now the money most of the times goes directly to

the company through online payment from which the driver's cut is very less."

"If I have to earn some more out of this I will have to over work each day. We are planning on going on a strike and demand that the cut of the driver be increased," he added.

LDF secretary Shammugham said that the amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act permitted the commercial taxi services like Ola and Uber to work autonomously. This created problems for the drivers.

The Central Government was trying to initiate western laws in India without even analysing if they

could be enforced here.

Taxi drivers who own their vehicles are planning to start their own service.

Ola driver Gunalan said, "We have planned to install a software application for privately owned taxis. What happens now is that the applications in the customer's phone and the driver's phone are different and both are controlled by the company. But under the new system, the application in the privately owned taxis will be handled by the driver himself. He will be able to decide the fare and earn a decent amount of money out of one trip."

ASHWIN MANIKANDAN

CHENNAI: With just more than a week left for the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2018 to get underway, fans of Chennai Super Kings (CSK) can't seem to conceal their excitement to see their team in action after a two year absence from the action.

"When the news of CSK's suspension came in 2015, we were disheartened beyond words. I remember completely boycotting the 2016 edition," says Raghuraman, a 28-year-old IT professional. "Can't wait to see my team in action again!"

On 15th July 2015, IPL franchisees Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals were suspended for up to five years (later reduced to two years) by Justice RM Lodha Committee after finding guilty for betting. The fans are hoping that the team will make amends by bringing the IPL trophy back to Chennai.

"We've been the most successful team in IPL history. I'm sure the team's response will be positive making the comeback," says P Navaneeth, a member of Whistle Podu Army, the official Fan Club of CSK.

However, the fans are aware of improved competition in this year's edition. "I think Hyderabad has the strongest team, but David Warner's

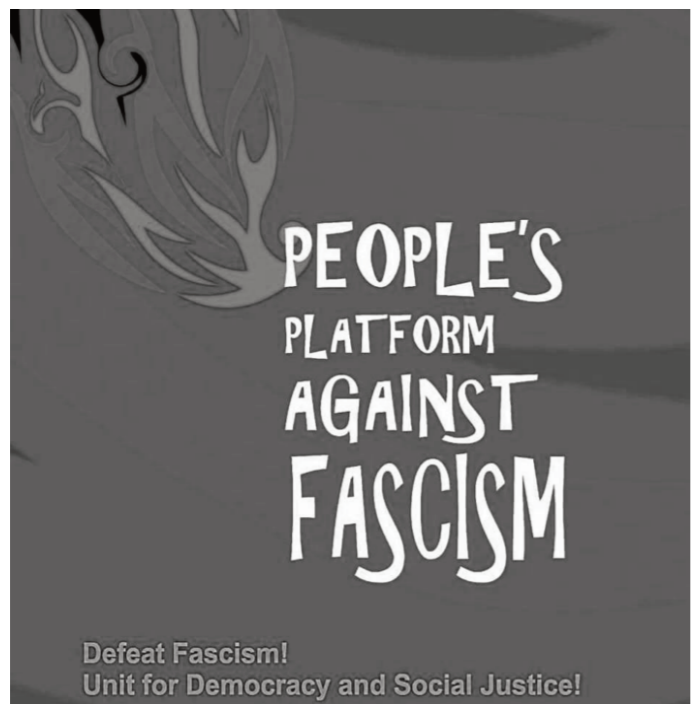


absence (due to recent ball-tampering controversy) would cost them a lot I feel. Other than that Punjab and Kolkata also have strong teams. But we have the best Captain of all, M S Dhoni. He'll be our talisman," Navaneeth added.

Not all is rosy however among the CSK fans. Some fans are miffed with high pricing of the tickets this time. The tickets range from Rs. 6500 for the Pavilion Terrace to Rs. 1500 for the Lower Tier; almost a 200% hike from the IPL 2015 edition.

"We have perhaps the most diverse and loyal fan base. To keep even the lowest ticket prices at Rs. 1300 makes no sense to me. As a student, I'm not sure if I can afford to watch the games at Chepauk," says Vimal John, a first year B.Tech student.

CSK start their campaign against Mumbai Indians at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on 7th April.



Poster for the People's Platform Against Fascism

FACEBOOK IMAGE

'There's no liberation without protests'

HARIPRASAD RADHAKRISHNAN

CHENNAI: "Art is for whom?" questioned retired Madras High court judge K. Chandru. He cited the example of the Brihadeshwara temple in Thanjavur and said, "Thousands of labourers had to bring [granite] stones from very far away to construct that temple as they were not available in Thanjavur. Do we talk about the toils of those labourers today?"

Now, the people who speak of ancient laurels of Tamils, he said, point at the structure and heap praises.

"What did the labourers get in return is a question we seldom ask," he pointed out.

Mr. Chandru was speaking at the week-long 'Archiving Labour' exhibition in which the works of

students from the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai and Kumbakonam are put on display at Spaces in Besant Nagar.

Speaking on the fourth day of the event, he said that the relationship between a labourer and his work is often tenuous.

"The labourers are alienated from their work once it is finished, and usually don't get credit for it," he said.

In today's world, Mr. Chandru pointed at a different kind of exploitation.

"Many MNCs in India have different rules across different countries. In the Western countries they have a strict 8-hour work schedule, but in countries like India they ask them to work for 13-14 hours, and that too for low wages. This is a form of perpetuation of colonialism."

He also stressed the importance of protests to protect labour rights. "Not everybody would be able to go to the courts, as it is a tedious process," he said. "So, there's no liberation without protests."

Speaking of the judicial system, he said that judges are of two kinds: "forward-looking and looking forward."

He said that progressive judges fall under the former category, while the latter comprises judges who look for return of favours through revolving doors.

He also lashed out at the state of contractual labour today. "This is a decadent form of capitalism," he said.

It is very important for the labourers to fight for their rights today, so they can manage a minimum subsistence at least and live to fight another day."



Thanjavur temple... a testimony to the toils of the labourer?

Thespians of Tamil theatre talk of decline

AVANISH C.

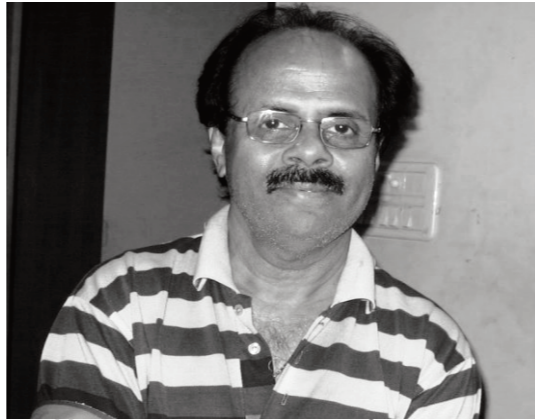
Chennai: Tamil theatre is almost non-existent these days with very few groups staging plays and possibly fewer organizations sponsoring these actors.

In its prime, the Tamil theatre boasted of stalwarts like Cho Ramaswamy and Sivaji Ganesan. Then there was R S Manohar, an on screen villain, who staged historical plays such as Chankaya Sabadham (Chanakya's Vow), Malikafur and Lankeswaran (about Ravana). Manohar's National Theatres produced 29 plays that were performed 8000 times. Stage plays such as Server Sundaram and Major Chandrakanth formed the basis for major motion pictures. Now, many thespians feel that the film industry has taken the place of theatre. Na. Muthuswamy formed the Koothu-P-Pattarai theatre group in the 1970s. His main objective was to bring the Therukoothu form of traditional Tamil theatre to the masses. He recalled the culture that used to prevail in the early years.

"My wife used to work in the office by the day, and was part of a sabha (theatre group) by the evenings. As a result, she always used to get two tickets for every



Na. Muthuswamy founded the Koothu-P-Pattarai in 1970 (L); Crazy Mohan feels that humour plays a vital role in attracting audiences in plays



major play that was on in the city," said the 81-year-old Padma Shri awardee.

Muthuswamy is largely pessimistic about a revival of the theatre culture in Chennai. "Theatre was a phenomenon some 30-40 years ago, when people like Cho were staging plays. Nearly 400-500 people used to pack the halls during a performance," he said. "Now television has taken over and people are provided dramas in the comfort of their homes through serials. Theatre is used as a stepping stone these days,

to get into films."

Muthuswamy developed his love for the theatre as a school student and participated in theatre productions on a regular basis. "These days, I don't hear a single school or college hosting a grand production. The culture has entirely vanished," he said. "If schools inculcate theatrical talent within children from a young age, then there is hope. They need to take the initiative." Crazy Mohan, who formed Crazy Creations with his brother Madhu Balaji in 1979, believes in the importance of

JAVANISH CHANDRASHEKARAN

humour in plays to attract audiences. "Massaging the mind with good humour is the greatest message you can give your audience," said the comedian, who is also known for his screenwriting collaborations with actor Kamal Haasan.

Mohan's play, "Chocolate Krishna", recently completed 1000 performances. "Humour is a visiting commodity. If you keep the comedy good and fresh, people will always come," he said. However, he fears the day when comedy will not be in vogue. "It is a vicious

cycle. New trends emerge every now and then. If the trend changes, me and my plays will have to change with it," he said.

Rejin Rose, who formed the theatre group "Medai" in 2015, got his start with Koothu-p-pattarai. He now takes classes in dramatic acting, alongside appearing in films like "Raanjhanaa" starring Dhanush. Unlike his mentor Muthuswamy, Rose is hopeful that the tide will turn for the better. "The theatre culture started vanishing during the 1980's. But passionate students are now turning up in bigger numbers more than ever," he said. "It is a slow process, but the attendance is rising in both acting schools and theatres."

Rose feels that the government investment in theatre needs to improve. "Other states are actively investing in developing the performing arts. Only Tamil Nadu is lagging behind," he said. He also believes that theatre workshops and festivals need to be organized on a regular basis. "If workshops and festivals are organized in schools and colleges, it provides opportunities for new talents to display their skills. It can possibly give rise to a new culture in the state's theatre scene," Rose said.



An old advertisement of Remy Talcum powder | GARIMA BORA

AVERAGE GROWTH HAUNTS ENGLISH THEATRE COMEDIES AND STAND-UPS ARE THE CROWD-PULLER AT THE URBAN THEATRES

DEBANGANA GHOSH

Chennai: The growth of English theatre in the city has remained stagnant and has not been promoted in any way. Word of mouth and social media are the only resort for them to attempt to get audience into the theatres, according to the English theatre artists.

The crowd pullers are restricted to comedies and stand-ups. Other genres rarely find audience unless it's from renowned playwrights and theatre companies.

"I have done theatre in Chennai for the past 15 years but the audience strength is still the same. This is not a good thing. Apart from our regular theatre going circle, only college students take interest in watching a play," said Sunil Vishnu K, Founder, Evam Entertainment Private Limited.

"Theatre groups have dumbed down the audience. They have

made them think theatre is for entertainment and not for aesthetic interests," said Krishna Kumar, Founder, Masquerade theatre group.

Kumar added, "Unlike Kolkata and Mumbai, newspapers here have stopped covering and reviewing theatre plays here. Even if something about a play comes, it will mostly be an advertisement. The Hindu had stopped reviewing plays six to seven years ago."

With dwindling number of viewers and less to no profit financially, these groups survive solely on their passion for the art. Other metropolitan cities get State government based subsidies to promote theatre, which is not an option here.

"Although most of our prominent political leaders are actors, there is no consideration for the theatre people. But it is not a problem for us as we are a part of the sabha



Krishna Kumar founded 'Masquerade', a theatre group, 25 years ago | DEBANGANA GHOSH

culture. However, there is otherwise no monetary profit from it," said R. Giridharan, Founder, Dummies Drama which does contemporary Tamil plays of sci-fi and fantasy genre.

The sabbas has a big support for the Tamil theatre which being the local language readily gets more

audience as compared to the English theatre. A sabha is a "subscription model" for staging plays where a group of people sponsor a theatre company and in return they have to perform a decided number of plays on a monthly basis. At present, Chennai has between 20 and 30 sabbas, said

Sunil.

This is not the case for English theatres where the revenue model solely depends on ticket sales, sponsors and patrons. Most of them heavily rely on marketing strategies and advertising on social media to get sponsors as well as viewers.

Theatres groups like Evam over the years, have moved on to corporate training and stand up comedies from hardcore plays to make their venture financially viable. Some of their recent initiatives include Happy Cows, a theatre training programme for kids and Training Sideways, a corporate training theatre.

A major difference in terms of content between Tamil and English theatre is that the latter uses a lot of western literature for their scripts as compared to Tamil theatre where they mostly produce original scripts which are more relatable to the city based audience.

A place for old pages in Madras

GARIMA BORA

Chennai: As Govinda Raju opens his garage the smell of old books wafts through the air. The garage is actually a book store called Rare Books.

"There are over 2000 rare books and 5000 clippings of magazine advertisements in this room," said the 82-year-old man as he settles down in his wheel chair. Born and brought up in Chennai, he used to be a human resource development manager and also worked as a consultant in industrial law.

Raju calls himself book collector and not a bookseller. The first book he collected was Penguin Ariel, the first book to be launched by the publishing house. He started collecting books from 1960s after his graduation. Raju wants to have the biggest second hand book store in South India.

He got the idea from Foyles also known as W & G Foyle Ltd., a bookstore with a chain of seven stores

in England, which was once listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest bookshop.

The books Raju has now are part of his second collection. He sold around 13 tonnes of material to a fellow collector to be more conservative about his book hoarding. What started out as books slowly moved to magazines. In 1997 magazines started to gain his interest. He would collect clippings of interesting stories, advertisements, pictures and whatever attracted him. He has more than 5000 clippings of magazines in his store currently, including old advertisements of Lux and Cinthol soaps, cycles, cars, medicines and other products.

Most of his collection is in English and Tamil. He has preserved some 1000 copies of the Statesman dating back to the Sixties. He also bought a collection of Harper magazine from the year 1859. His favourite writers include H.G Wells, Bernard Shaw, Eleanor Wolf, and M. K. Gandhi.

'Made in Hut' Handicrafts

BHAGYASRI C.

Chennai: The out-of-place exterior of a 'world handicrafts' store on the ECR catches one's curiosity but venturing inside opens up another world altogether.

D'Hut, opened by Neethirajan and Reshuma, is a temple of wonder with its first-floor storage space hold masks and figures from Kenya, Rwanda, Turkey, Vietnam, Egypt, Togo, Benin, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and Thailand among many more. They have now started procuring Indian craft forms as well, with their fledgling collection comprising mostly traditional puppets.

A marine engineer in the Merchant Navy, Neethirajan soon realised his thirst for handmade craft was far more than what a house could hold. His house would not suffice for the numbers he wanted to bring back to India from his many voyages.

"It was then that the dream of 'D'Hut' began," he quipped. "My wife was the one to suggest the idea, considering there were more handicrafts than space for people in the house! She was the one to help me, and our passion was soon transformed into a successful business."

Pronounced 'The Hut', the store is filled with curious handmade figures, masks, boxes, trinkets, fertility dolls, bone sculptures, and charms to bring good luck, or ward off

evil spirits, to name a few.

"Anywhere in the world, a person making handicrafts is most likely to be chipping away in some corner with a thatched roof above his head. Since our products were born in huts, we prefer to sell them from a hut as well," said Neethirajan.

According to the couple, African and Indonesian are the most vibrant cultures in their shop. "Simply because their style is undiluted," he says.

Though mesmerised by African masks Neethirajan has had to invest in smiling faces from South Asia because customers demanded for happier looking masks. The couple does not consider anyone as competition, simply because they believe that no one else operates in their space. Neethirajan explains, "Most people selling handicrafts soon diversify into furniture soon. We just want to stick to natural interior décor products." The market in general has been very encouraging and promising to them. They respect their clientele immensely for teaching them the tricks of the trade. Having been in business for ten years, their client is anyone who appreciates art. So which pieces of craft reflect their personalities? Reshuma is quick to answer on Neethirajan's behalf. "Oh. He is most definitely an African mask!

Mexican films with a French connection

GOWRIS

Chennai: Monthly International Film Festivals organised by the Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation (ICAF) fail to attract students who are the target audience, according to Emanadar Thangaraj, General Secretary of ICAF.

The Mexican Film Festival organised by the Embassy of Mexico in India, Honorary Consulate of Mexico in Chennai and the ICAF, will be held till March 28 at the Alliance Francaise of Madras. This edition spanning over three days starting from March 26 will screen five critically acclaimed non-commercial Mexican films.

However, according to the organisers, the reach of such film festivals is limited.

"We acquire these packages of International films from the respective embassies and screen them here in an attempt to present them to students who need to know about non-commercial films and their technical details. But nobody comes," said Thangaraj. "These films are not meant for entertainment at all. They are educative," continued Thangaraj.

These monthly screenings see an audience which mostly constitute of elderly people and retired professionals. "Despite the publicity given through the media, there has been no active response from the

student community," said Thangaraj, adding, "We have around 450 members who all religiously come for the screenings. A small percentage of film makers and others who are involved with the art, also show interest"

The ICAF screens films from different parts of the world on a monthly basis in addition to organising the Europe Union Film Festival, where in films from 25 countries are screened with the support of the State Government every year.

According to Thangaraj, the response has been better in Pondicherry and Coimbatore in comparison to Chennai.

"Chennai has always had a thirst for

foreign films, right from the '70s. I've read how stalwarts like Kamal Haasan and K Balachander used to visit the British Council and U.S. Consulate to watch foreign films," said Mrinalini D S, a film maker and editor currently based in Denver, Colorado.

According to Mrinalini, older audience members are the only ones who prefer watching films in live spaces. She said, "Our generation is more into 'Netflix and chill', which could be one of the reasons for this limited viewership," continued Mrinalini.

John C, a theatre professional based in Pondicherry said, "I try to make it every

month. I find it very interesting to know about different cultures and lifestyles through cinema." An ardent follower for the past five years, he also expressed his disappointment regarding the absence of a younger audience. "I think this is the only outlet through which the older audience can watch these films. They might not be very tech-savvy unlike the youngsters who have varied outlets available," said John. ICAF has scheduled film festivals till August. According to ICAF members, Korean and Chinese films have been acquired for the next month's line-up with a plan to conduct an exclusive screening of films by women directors in May.

MU to accept Kalakshetra diploma for PG courses

EISHA NAIR

Chennai: The four-year diploma course in Bharatnatyam, Carnatic music and Visual Arts from Kalakshetra Foundation will soon be recognized as eligible qualification for a master's degree in the University of Madras.

According to a report in The Times of India, at a meeting ten days ago, the university accepted a recommendation made by a panel from Kalakshetra that the diploma met the eligibility criteria for post graduate programs. However, it still needs to be ratified by the university's academic council and senate. Even though the Foundation is recognized as an autonomous body by the Ministry of Culture, the diploma is not affiliated to Madras University, and hence not recognized.

"Since we only give a diploma, the students pursue a degree course through distance education mode from Madras University (MU). The only rule is that the exam dates should not clash. If it does Kalakshetra exams should be given preference," says S. Ragnunath, administrative consultant at Kalakshetra

Foundation. A Post-Diploma (PD) student at Kalakshetra Foundation, pursuing MA in Carnatic music from Madras University, Mithun Madhusoodanan says, "When looking for a job, diplomas don't have much weight...we have just been carrying on because of the name 'Kalakshetra'."

"In the Madras University course we give exams once a year. Since I'm doing a calendar-year course (January to December) and not an academic year (June to March) course, my exam dates do not clash. Madras University keeps contact classes for 20 days. It's up to you to attend," says Madhusoodanan.

According to Madhusoodanan, the MA course is more theoretical and Tamil-focused. "You have to do six ragam-thalam-pallavis there and only two in Kalakshetra. The University teaches a lot of Tamil traditional songs — Thevaram and Thirupugazh and rare compositions — Kritis like the Pancharatnams of Gopalkrishna Bharati, that aren't so popular these days and that nobody sings in concerts. In Kalakshetra they teach Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit songs. It's a more updated syllabus, and



Students of Kalakshetra Foundation take a break after the examinations

EISHA NAIR

they teach you what you need as a performer," he says.

"While I found it manageable, I think students should have a choice if they want to do both courses together," says Madhusoodanan. "Madras University doesn't have a BA in Dance. So the Kalakshetra students have to pursue something completely unrelated to their

disciplines like literature, or history," he adds.

K. Impana, a student of Dance says, "The diploma course itself is pretty intensive...we train physically daily...we get tired, and then in the evening we go home and study again." Another music student, S. Priyanka, who is also doing a BA in English, says, "Kalakshetra gives

me that flexibility to move from music to dance. I want to pursue both after this, but not English. I'm just doing it as a formality."

Dance student, Karthika Narayan who finished graduation from Kerala Kalamandalam and joined the Kalakshetra diploma course says, "After Plus Two students come here, do a four-year graduation and then a three-year graduation and then an MA...that deters a lot of people."

"Kalakshetra Foundation selects only six or seven students from 25 diploma students per batch for its PD course. We can't apply, they shortlist people. So diploma students who don't get in, and haven't got graduation certificates find it tough. I want to do an M.Phil if I don't get into PD here. But for that also you need a master's degree, says Karthika.

Diploma in Dance student Avantika Viswa says, "I'm worried about the repercussions this move can have. Kalakshetra follows a semester format, but the exam questions aren't level specific. Nobody comes here for a certificate; it has always been for the sake of knowledge."