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THE HINDU



Bengaluru favourites like thatte idli and akki roti are stars at this new Chennai cafe **P3**

TAMIL CINEMA 2024: AN AVERAGE FIRST HALF **P4**

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At first glance, they appear to be butterfly wings. A closer look from a nearby passenger boat confirms that the 'butterflies' in hues of red and pink are in cahoots with the wind to cross a finish line between an orange buoy and a flagged boat on the choppy waters of the Bay of Bengal. These are sailboards carrying windsurfers; all vying for the top spot at the All India Windsurfing Championships that wrapped up last weekend at the Chennai harbour.

While a half-metre swell in the ocean is enough to throw the distant observers (safe in a boat) off-balance, windsurfers deftly combine the techniques of surfing and sailing to find their sweet spot on the waters; with the wind as their guide. They don't always follow, they fight it too.

The sailboard carries the weight of the windsurfer who uses their body weight to determine the movement and direction.

Windsurfing is slowly but steadily seeing an uptick in interest. "You are looking at more than 20 windsurfing training institutes across the country, so the accessibility has definitely improved," says kite surfer Jehan Driver of Quest Academy in Rameswaram.

While cities like Mumbai and Goa have for long been touted as strongholds, this is the second time Chennai is hosting an all-India competition.

Last year, the event was held between the curvy shoreline of Kovalam beach and the fishing hamlet nearby, with an eager crowd of spectators. This year, windsurfers from 14 states and nine different clubs were in attendance at the Championship organised by the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association, Chennai Sailing Academy and the Indian Coast Guard, of which many young Chennai athletes clinched



silver and gold medals in different race classes, like the Raceboard, Techno-293, RS-X and IQFoil.

The adventure sport is also likely to be a preferred leisure activity along the East coast for the next five months, thanks to ideal wind and water conditions.

"Along the coast, we have a completely open ocean, with no land formations till the Andamans, which means we have steady winds, and good, clean waters. We also have swells ranging from half-metre to three and four-metres, and that's the challenge. I would say this is one of the best conditions for windsurfers and sailors," says Ajit Diaz, founding member of the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association and International Race Official appointed by World Sailing.

Ebb and flow

Arun Vasu, president of the Surfing Federation of India, has been windsurfing along the East coast since 1983. He started when he was all of 13 years. "Back then, apart from a few locals who were already sailing, there were expats who stayed in the city for two to three years, windsurfing," he says. The scene did burgeon for a brief



Wind beneath my wings

We board a yacht at the port, and brave the choppy waters of the Bay of Bengal to watch windsurfers race each other. Learn more about the Olympic sport gaining popularity in Chennai, thanks to our ideal winds and waters



Testing waters (Clockwise from above) Ishwarya Ganesh; windsurfers in the race; Arun Vasu with the sailboard. SHIVA RAJ S, THAMODHARAN B AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

windsurfer to qualify for the Asian Games 2023 started with a sailboat that traversed the waters of Chennai. "I used to sail a Class called Optimist. After I turned 15, I chose windsurfing. Initially, people used to say that I can't make it as a windsurfer in Chennai, but now look at all of us," says Ishwarya who also clinched a gold medal in IQFoil, Womens U-23 category at the recently-concluded All-India Championships.

Sumant Arunachalam, on the other hand, took up windsurfing only a month back. He has already bagged a silver medal at the T-293 class, and is touted to be a noted Chennai name in the years to come.



To watch a related video, scan this QR code



Get comfortably numb

Chennai gears up for a Pink Floyd Tribute Concert by retro-rock band Medium Rare

Reji Varghese

I am at a practice pad in Nungambakkam listening to the retro-rock band Medium Rare rehearse for its upcoming Pink Floyd Tribute concert. Vikram Vivekanand gently strums the guitar, providing a mellow, haunting backdrop as Conrad Simmons steps up to the mike and sings, "The lunatic is on the grass..."

Medium Rare is rehearsing 'Brain Damage' which addresses mental health issues, a recurring motif throughout the album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*. As the song progresses, there is a gradual build-up of sound with Orlando Ambrose, Eugene and Conrad's soaring vocal harmony crescendoes into the iconic line, "I'll see you on the dark side of the moon".

Listening to the band rehearse I am transported to the 1980s, to smoke-filled college hostel rooms, with scruffy young teens with long hair listening to Pink Floyd. The



album *The Dark Side of the Moon* was released in 1973, and has sold over 45 million copies since; it has also been listed in the Guinness World Records for being on the charts longer than any other album in history.

Medium Rare was founded by



A fitting tribute The band will perform Pink Floyd classics like 'Comfortably Numb' and 'Coming Back to Life'. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Orlando Ambrose in 2005, and over the last 19 years, has performed over 350 gigs across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The band has an experienced line-up of musicians with Orlando on lead vocals and Conrad on bass and

vocals. Dave Gilmour's scorching guitar solos will now be shared by Vikram and Darren Hickman. The versatile Eugene Guest who also plays bass, guitars and keyboards, is on the drums and the talented Anthony Karuna, on keyboards.

The band's original composition 'Mad about you', a rock ballad, was chosen by AR Rahman and Nexa Music as one of the top 24 original English songs in India in 2020.

At the tribute concert, they will be performing Pink Floyd classics like 'Comfortably Numb', 'Coming back to life', 'Another brick in the wall', 'Wish you were here', 'Brain damage', 'Money, Time', and 'Shine on you crazy diamond', amongst other songs.

"The music has an enduring quality that continues to attract new fans across generations," says Orlando, adding, "This tribute concert offers longtime fans and new audiences in Chennai an opportunity to experience the magic of Pink Floyd's music in a live concert setting."

At Bay 146, Savera Hotel on Friday, June 14 at 8.30pm. Tickets from ₹250 onwards are available at Insider.in. Call 9710976876 for details



Carnatic with a twist

The present meets the past with Carnatic 2.0, a band that seeks to bring together Indian classical music and modern electronic sounds. Led by Mahesh Raghvan, known for his work as a music producer and iPad performer, the band also features Sharanya Srinivas, Shravan Sridhar and Akshay Anantapadmanabhan, along with Mylai Karthikeyan and Sunil Kumar.

@Egmore Museum Theatre, June 14, 7.30pm. Tickets on insider.in

The pristine shore

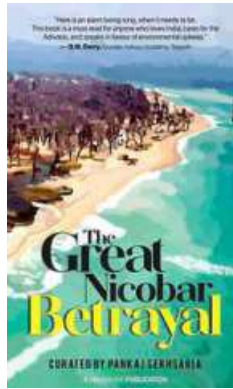
Pankaj Sekhsaria, well-known chronicler of contemporary issues in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, has compiled a set of articles written by various experts across publications that examines the proposed project from every angle — environmental, geological, impact on local communities, law, due process, and ecology. Published by Frontline, the book, titled, *The Great Nicobar Betrayal*, is to be launched by N Ram, Director, The Hindu Group. Following the launch there will be a discussion between author Pankaj, an academic and member of the Kalpavriksh environment Action Group, and Yuwan Aves, naturalist, writer, educator and environment defender.

@Adeshiah Auditorium, Madras Institute of Developmental Studies, Adyar. June 14, 3.30pm. Call 24412295



World of creativity

The fifth edition of Maisha Studio's annual student art and design exhibition, Local, is curated by Aishwarya Manivannan. With over 100 artworks by 16 talented artists from Chennai aged 16 to 23, Local presents an array of artistic expressions from fine art, painting, installations, sculptures, film, photography, fashion, and more. @Lalit Kala Akademi, Greaves Road, June 15 to 20, 11am to 7pm. Entry is free.



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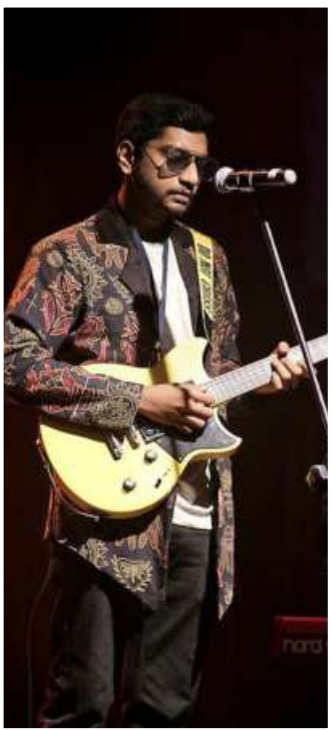
Folk, blues and pop

What has kept musician Siennor away from actively performing on stage for one and a half years?

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The strum and squeak of Siennor’s guitar often lend itself to deliberation. The Tamil indie musician who writes on familiar themes – of love and a mind lost in thought – is back on stage after taking a one-and-a-half year break. He will be performing a set with crowd favourites like ‘Innum Enna’ and ‘Ponnira Maalai’ at Barracuda Brew on June 14 with two other veteran musicians and friends – Vinay R (drums) and Aravind Murali (bass). New material is a given too, considering the break. While most listeners tune into Siennor to hear gentle music with lyrics that urge one to engage with thoughts, all consequences of today’s times, the artiste says that he has also

received adulation from listeners from North India who do not speak a word of Tamil. “I mostly do not know how to react,” he says. Siennor has only rarely sung in front of an audience since the beginning of 2023. A magical experience last year involved singing under the stars during the Perseid meteor shower, but that was a one-off. Through this phase, he has received several messages and requests from fans demanding an explanation for his absence. A live performance is where he most comes alive. What has kept him busy? Besides actively working on new music, Siennor has been creating a witches brew of funky sounds through his new app, Metropolitan Koothaadi. “I have been working on an electronic project – an app where new sounds can be sampled with electronic sounds,”



I have been working on an electronic project – an app where new sounds can be sampled with electronic sounds

he says. This application plays around with electronic music, a bit of neo folk and psychedelia. The idea behind it is to have fun while creating engaging music. The app will play a significant role during the concert. He adds that a reunion of the trio that is going to be performing on stage, will be an asset as the musicians are familiar and have known

each other a while. They have been rehearsing to ensure that all the new material creates a rhythm that promotes nods and grooves. This Chennai-based musician who first played the keyboard at seven and then picked up the guitar, has been writing songs since 2009. “What first began as lyrics in English quickly became Tamil as I was more comfortable there. I try to keep the lyrics simple. The songs go through several drafts until I land on what I like,” Siennor says. While some songs are inspired by incidents, others are moulded by prompts. ‘Muyal Thottam’ for instance, came into being because the musician read a line by philosopher J Krishnamurti. “It urged the reader to observe one’s thoughts as one would watch rabbits play,” he says. Siennor says that talks are on for a tour in the future as he has listeners in cities with Tamil diaspora across the world including Canada, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. For now though, the audience in Chennai will see more of him on stage. @Barracuda Brew, Nungambakkam on June 14, 7pm. Curated by Quiriosity. Tickets starting from ₹699 on insider.in.

The Karnataka darshini steps up

Crave benne dosas or Mangalore buns? At Sashwatha Cafe, Chennai goes the Bengaluru way

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Do you like Tamil Nadu’s spicy sambar or prefer its sweeter cousin from Karnataka? Sashwatha Cafe (the word means eternal in Sanskrit), the new addition to the bustling streets of Nandanam, is trying its hand at finding a balance. At this luxe new restaurant where one washes their hands in *urulis* amidst swanky interiors, one can find akki rotis, Mangalore buns and the crowd favourite, masala dosa, for all those craving a taste of darshinis (small self-service cafes) from the land of sandalwood. Anitha Sivakumar, the founder of this establishment and her daughter Shivani who heads this operation, seem to have had quite the adventure during their trials. “My head chef is from Karnataka so we went through several iterations of the food to ensure that ghee and butter, a central part of the Karnataka tiffin cuisine, are not overwhelming,” she says. Among the most staple of food items in Tamil households, is the idli. Here, its iterations – thatte idli, podi idli and rava idli – are soft like sponge, waiting to be soaked in the three accompanying chutneys: coconut, mint and tomato. The podi, with a generous heaping of ghee crowning the hot thatte idli, is homemade, says Anitha. “We will have to scale up the batches,” she says, laughing. The dosas, made fresh from their open-kitchen across the tables, arrive before one can



From the land of sandalwood (Above) The interiors of Sashwatha cafe; (inset) a plate of rava idli. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

finish this first course, urging the table to quicken its pace. While the rava dosa is forgettable, the one that elicits most ‘ooo’s and ‘aah’s is the masala dosa. Though this dosa is not laden with the quintessential red paste made of soaked Byadagi chilli and

garlic, the podi and a heaping of the tempered potato mash, calls for another plate. The restaurant also has other popular darshini staples like akki roti, ragi roti, karabath, chow chow bath, bissibele bath and Mangalore buns – all making for interesting meals to

try post work or workout. Bengaluru-style food is not unfamiliar to Chennai. Other restaurants like Eating Circles in Alwarpet and Bengaluru Tiffin House in Kilpauk, have a steady following in their neighborhoods. Anitha says that she would like for Sashwatha Cafe to be the dine and dash of Nandanam, where one can be assured of a quick and hot meal from as early as 6am till 2am, when one gets the munchies. This probably explains why there are only a handful of chairs (can seat 10 but accommodate 50 others on serving tables). The meal ends with a coffee procured from Anitha’s own estate in Yercaud. This strong concoction made with milk that has been boiling for a while, lends a rich, caffeinated sweetness to the meal. Anitha says that their menu also has desserts including badam halwa and gulab jamuns for those who would like to finish with something sweet. Anitha’s other ventures, Parambriyam and Sundays in Anna Nagar, have passed the test of longevity and she is happy to tread new ground. While Sashwatha’s everlasting legacy remains to be seen, one thing remains clear. One can go back for that cup of filter coffee. Sashwatha Cafe is on 36, Chamiers Road, Nandanam Extension, and is open between 6am and 2am. A meal for two costs ₹300.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13589

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Across

- 1 Thought out strategy (4,4)
5 Member of a people of eastern Europe and Asian Russia (4)
9 Garfunkel’s partner (5)
10 Settle a score (3,4)
11 Eventually (2,3,4,3)
13 Old English coins worth five shillings (6)
14 Material for starting a fire (6)

- 17 The Nine Days’ Queen England in July 1553 (4,4,4)
20 Nonsense (7)
21 World’s second most populous country (5)
22 Vocal composition (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated June 20, 2024.

Solution No. 13588



To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

- 23 Pink wading bird (8)
Down
1 Deep open cut (4)
2 Keepsake (7)
3 Traditional puppet show (5,3,4)
4 Cherubim, seraphim etc (6)
6 Bile-secreting organ (5)
7 Wine merchants (8)
8 Holding one’s ground (8,4)
12 Cosy tale (anag) – followers (8)
15 Fine German porcelain (7)
16 Out of sorts (6)
18 Attracted (to) (5)
19 A sign of saintliness? (4)

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An eye for colour

Art Kin Centre is back with its third edition of AKC’s Art Market, a platform for artists, artisans, crafters, bakers, homegrown brands and more, to showcase their new, experimental works and products. One can find detailed paintings, evocative original landscapes, abstract paintings in the contemporary style as well as resin art work and jewellery. While taking a look at the art, one can also choose to indulge in sweet treats and bakes. @Art Kin Centre, Alwarpet. On June 14 (2pm to 9pm) and June 15 and 16 (11am to 9pm). Entry is free.



Verandah, Kanika Vriksh, ASHRAFI and Nizam-e-Gul, set in subtle pastel tones and featuring exquisite chintz artworks. Their collections include dining, stationery, and gifting. @The Folly, Amethyst, Royapettah. June 14 to 16, 10.30am to 7.30pm. For details, call 9884910721.

Art and design

Aura Design will showcase its latest tableware and table linen collections, all inspired by the diverse regions of India. The launch features four new collections, that seamlessly blend tradition with contemporary aesthetics. The four collections are, Verandah, Kanika Vriksh, ASHRAFI and Nizam-e-Gul, set in subtle pastel tones and featuring exquisite chintz artworks. Their collections include dining, stationery, and gifting. @The Folly, Amethyst, Royapettah. June 14 to 16, 10.30am to 7.30pm. For details, call 9884910721.

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Tamil cinema has experienced a lull in 2024 till now. Will the rest of the year see a star-studded resurgence?

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The boom of Tamil-language entertainment content and the constant chatter about Kollywood on social media might deceive you, but it is no longer easy to pick a new film to watch. Tamil cinema has just gotten through a jittery five months in 2024, with only a handful of titles tasting varying degrees of success at the box-office.

The big star vehicles that were released for Pongal – Dhanush’s *Captain Miller* and Sivakarthikeyan’s *Ayalaan* – failed to do well, and the same goes for *Lal*

Salaam, which had Rajinikanth in an extended cameo. However, as of May, these three titles remain the highest-grossing films of the year. There have been some winners like *Lover*, *Aranmanai 4* and *Garudan*, but they remain exceptions in an industry that produces hundreds of films every calendar year.

As several industry

The big short



Man and machine

Documentary filmmaker Ramesh Yanthra’s debut feature, *Tractor*, talks about how the arrival of the machine sends a farmer’s life on a downward spiral



A special ride A still from *Tractor*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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A Facebook video of a farmer in Thanjavur refusing to let debt collectors seize his trusty tractor, sowed the seed for Ramesh Yanthra’s feature film *Tractor*. The film, which will hit screens in August, marks the 53-year-old documentary filmmaker’s foray into feature films. “It talks about how a farmer’s innocent ways are spoiled by corporate development,” says Ramesh, about the film that was shot in Veppampooni village in Salem.

Tractor is Ramesh’s way of

offering gratitude to our county’s farmers. “The film starts and ends with *maatu* Pongal celebrations,” he says, adding that towards the end, instead of the actual bull, what is left is a replica of the same on the bonnet of the farmer’s tractor. Bull replicas, says Ramesh, are found on many tractors across Tamil Nadu. “Although tractors have replaced bulls in agriculture, farmers never forget to thank them,” he adds.

Ramesh has documented *maatu* Pongal celebrations to the minutest detail. “I wanted to record this for the coming generations to appreciate such rituals,” he says. Most of his actors are from Veppampooni village, where Ramesh is from. “The male lead is

played by Prabhakaran J, who gave up his IT career in the US to do organic farming in his hometown,” he explains. The female lead is Sweetha Prathap, who is also an IT professional.

The film revolves around a farmer, his five-acre farm, wife, mother, and son. Ramesh says that he was keen on retaining the local dialect, which is why he roped in the headmaster of a school in the village to write the dialogues. “I moved to Chennai for work many years ago, and my Tamil has long lost the touch of the dialect of my hometown,” laughs Ramesh, adding that it helped that most of his actors were from Salem themselves.

Tractor is devoid of a background score. “As this is a story about our land, I wanted it to be realistic; I did not want to enhance scenes or tone them down with music. What you hear and feel is the rawness of the landscape,” he says, adding that the story unfolds to the sound of the wind, cows mooing, and hens clucking.

The film features sync sound, and Ramesh says that despite budget constraints, they brought in equipment from Mumbai to record live sound. The film does have a song; it is rendered by actor ‘Kovilpatti’ Jeyalakshmi, popular for her compositions of folk songs, particularly *oppari*.

Tractor is produced by Jayanth V, with cinematography by Gautham Muthusamy. It is currently doing the rounds in the festival circuit.



The real deal

These days, actor Ram Nishanth often gets called ‘Naan Komali’ Ram Nishanth. That’s because of his roles in the latest season of the webseries *Naan Komali*, currently streaming on Blacksheep OTT. Directed by Visakan Jayakathir, *Naan Komali* features characters from more than 30 professions, with its latest season including a cab driver, traffic policeman, meme creator, movie producer and bus conductor, among others. All these characters have been portrayed by Ram Nishanth, who underwent several make-up and look tests to suit the needs of the roles. Nishanth, who has also done films like *Baba Black Sheep* and *Nenjamundu Nermaiyyundu Odu Raja* and webseries like *Kadhala Kottai*, says in a press statement, “*Naan Komali* was very challenging because it involved a lot of research and speaking with people, whom I was going to portray. I wanted to stay true to all characters and bring out their emotions as real as possible.”



Reel tales Stills from *Ayalaan*, *Star*, *Aranmanai 4*, *Lover* and *Captain Miller*; (above) *Manjummel Boys*; (below) *Ghilli*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the negotiations for satellite and streaming rights. “There are only a handful of players and in such an oligopoly – in which only a few set the price – the parties might struggle to find a middle ground,” he says.

Small wonders

Good Night actor Manikandan, whose *Lover* was one of the critically-acclaimed Tamil film of 2024, says that getting theatres, amidst a line-up of star films, has always been a constant battle for producers of smaller films. “Releasing a film in theatres takes enormous effort. And even if they do find a release window, many factors determine if the audiences would choose to watch it in theatres,” he says, adding that he is at least glad now that there has been a shift in how people look at non-star films. “There is belief now that such films with good content could also work in the theatres.”

Under such circumstances, what has kept the theatrical business going is the avalanche of blockbusters from the neighbouring industry. 2024 has been the year of Malayalam cinema throughout India, chiefly thanks to titles such as *Bramayugam*, *Premalu*, *Aavesham*, *Aadujeevitham*, and *Manjummel Boys*, all of which enjoyed a great run in Tamil Nadu.

However, to state that these Malayalam films affected the run of Tamil films might be a stretch, say producers. Both Thanu and Thenappan feel that the quality of Tamil films is to be blamed. “If a Tamil film has good content, audiences will watch the Tamil as well as the Malayalam one,” says Thanu, something which Thenappan too resonates with when he states how the run of films like *Premam* (2015), *Baahubali* (2015 and 2017) or *KGF* (2018 and 2022) did not stop good Tamil films from tasting success.

Another fascinating phenomenon that gripped Tamil Nadu this year is the nostalgia-driven trend of re-releasing older blockbusters. The trend reached its peak popularity when Vijay’s *Ghilli* became the biggest opener at the box-office of 2024, 20 years since its original release. Ruban Mathivannan of GK Cinemas says, “Yes, these re-releases might have helped a bit, but it’s more like a ‘something is better than nothing’ situation. These few successful re-releases or a handful of Malayalam films aren’t enough to survive. We need at least one good Tamil film every month to meet our recurring expenses and fill the occupancy.”

Like many Tamil cinema fans, Ruban too is also looking forward to the rest of the year. Kamal Haasan’s *Indian 2*, Suriya’s *Kanguva*, Vikram’s *Thangalaan*, Vijay’s *Greatest of All Time*, Rajinikanth’s *Vettaian*, Ajith Kumar’s *Vidaa Muiyarchi*, Vijay Sethupathi’s *Maharaja* and Sivakarthikeyan’s *Amaran* are just a handful of films slated to release later this year. Will 2024 turn out to be like one of those films with a poor first half and an adrenaline-pumping second half? We’ll find out soon enough.

Where is my pongal?

MasterChef Tamil winner Akash Muralidharan on his tryst with food



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The Tamil edition of *MasterChef* has drawn to an end, crowning Akash Muralidharan from Chennai as the winner.

Akash’s journey through the culinary world is rooted in nostalgia. “I learnt a lot of cooking from my grandmother and mother. As a boy, I remember helping my grandmother in the kitchen to make Mysore pak. It has only three ingredients so the recipe was easy to remember,” he says.

He believes that his grandmother’s influence was not limited to cooking, but also in helping him develop a better relationship with produce. Throughout the competition, he was lauded

Akash’s prize-winning dishes included deconstructed versions of pongal and sakkarai pongal

for the use of oft forgotten vegetables in his cooking. “When my grandmother got married, she got the cook book *Samaithu Paar* by S Meenakshi Ammal. It is a goldmine of recipes, many of which use vegetables that I haven’t heard of. There was a mention of thumatikai which is generally very bitter, but can be brined, dried and used like a vathal. Inspired by this, in the



What’s cooking? Akash Muralidharan and his prize-winning dish. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

competition I made a chow-chow noodle soup which tastes great,” he shares.

Although Akash loves to cook and eat, he did not think of pursuing it professionally at first. “I started my journey as an architect, and then moved on to study Food Design in Milan. But on the show, it is the design thinking I learnt as an architect that helped me,” says Akash.

For his final cook, Akash made sweet and savoury dishes quirkily named ‘where is my pongal’, and ‘where is my sakkarai pongal’, deconstructed versions of the popular Tamil dishes. “When I made a deconstructed kesari earlier, I didn’t get the deconstruction part right. So I wanted to give these simple dishes, the right makeover.”

He goes on to add that his mother’s recipes, are at the heart of these dishes. “Her kesari is very good! In fact, she came along with me to Mumbai after the audition, and we kept discussing recipes.”

Akash’s other area of focus is sustainability. “There are two approaches here – zero-waste cooking, and buying local, both of which I have tried to do through the competition. I am very passionate about amplifying this. Even a simple, everyday-dish like sambar has 15 to 16 ingredients, including the spices in the sambar powder. We should know about where each of those spices come from,” he says.

With this win, Akash has mapped out his next step, that may not necessarily have him in front of a stove or an oven. “I have always been passionate about teaching. I have had the opportunity to be a student all these years, learning from my teachers and judges on the show. I want to be able to pass on all this knowledge to aspiring chefs,” he adds.