



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



**Chennai gets a sugar rush:** Dessert spots get creative with inventive flavours **P3**

**WHY RAHUL'S LATEST IS A WARM HUG FOR ALL** **P4**



## An untamed beast

**Director Mari Selvaraj** takes us into the world of *Bison Kaalamaadan*, his latest hit film starring Dhruv Vikram

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A stunning painting of him holding a piglet and embraced by his mother and father welcomes you into ace filmmaker Mari Selvaraj's Chennai office. The shelves gleam with the many awards he has won since his stellar debut, *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018). Two curated installations compel you to pause and wonder – one honouring feature films from across the globe that have had an impact on him, and the other, for writers, all of whom the director says carried him to distant worlds and showed him the transformative power of art.

But nothing prepares you for the centrepiece – a bison's skull, the one that features throughout the filmmaker's latest socio-political sports drama, *Bison Kaalamaadan*, a blockbuster that has propelled Mari to national fame. At the centre

of this hall of fame is Mari, a few days before his visit to *The Hindu's* Chennai office. As with all great artists who understand this game, all this celebration only makes Mari ponder over his next project. "So many people believe in my work and look keenly into its craft and politics; that adds responsibility. When audiences place such trust in films, regardless of who the hero is, we must do them justice," says Mari. *Bison*, starring Dhruv Vikram, is an emotionally rich tale based on the life of Indian kabaddi champion Manathi Ganesan, who shares a close bond with Mari. The kabaddi coach felt overwhelmed with emotion upon seeing how his story had come out, says Mari. "He hugged me, and when I told him what he saw was the rough cut without any orchestration, he was speechless. We celebrated that entire night, talking and talking."

*Bison* is a milestone in Mari's filmography, as both his politics and craft have come together in

near-perfect unison. For a filmmaker who had yearned for his audiences to speak about his filmmaking acumen more than his politics, this is validation. "For instance, Simbu (Silambarasan TR) called me and said, 'After a point, when you keep working, you inadvertently become a person capable of making miracles, and whatever you do turns into a miracle, and I believe that has happened with *Bison*,' and I felt very emotional hearing that." He adds that artistic elements he had blind confidence in getting their due make him even happier.

**Slice of the real**  
What astonishes one about Mari's filmmaking is how close to reality he takes his camera, capturing his artistes as subjects living amongst



***While writing a script, I would write whatever I imagine. But when it takes the form of a film, I need to go to the landscape, see the visuals there, and then decide how I can imbibe all that and add more life to the script***

**MARI SELVARAJ**  
Filmmaker

the real native people of that locale. It is a process that needed everyone in the team – including the actors – to live in Tirunelveli in southern Tamil Nadu for more than a year as Mari acclimatised them to his world and captured them enacting out his scenes. The filmmaker says that he

**Power of art** (Left) Mari Selvaraj; and (inset) Dhruv Vikram in *Bison*. THAMODHARAN S AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

fixated on shooting his films through such a process when he decided on the kind of stories he wished to tell.

Such a process also allows him to capture some of the breath-taking visual metaphors and montages that populate his films. "While writing a script, I would just write whatever I imagine, like a novel. But when it takes the form of a film, I need to go to the landscape, see the visuals there, and then decide how I can imbibe all that and add more life to the script," he informs.

If Mari is the backbone of *Bison*, it is Dhruv Vikram's restrained performance as Kittaan that strongly shoulders the story of a young boy who must face concentric circles of battles to realise his dreams in kabaddi. "All I told him was that Kittaan must control and save every ounce of his energy everywhere else, to unleash it on the kabaddi ground."

Throughout *Bison*, Kittaan runs and runs whenever he is faced with the stark reality of his world. This also becomes a synecdoche for how he wishes to flee the land that keeps erecting fences around people and their dreams. "If I am someone who wants to calm my mind, I would go to a desolate forest or swim in the river. *Bison* is a sports drama where the physicality of the character is at the forefront; Kittaan's war is one in which he uses his physique as a weapon." Hence, when someone humiliates Kittaan's strength, all because he belongs to a certain social identity, he needs to calm his nerves, explains Mari.

One would assume screenwriting to be a meditative process for Mari, given how chaotic – "war-like," as he puts it – such grounded filmmaking of this scale can be. However, you would be surprised. "Writing is the most horrifying process, one that can make me feel isolated or emotional. I will have to take myself out, put myself in a hot seat as a victim, and become a journal to whatever that person has to say." The process, he adds, is meditative to the point that its pleasure would not let him sleep.

Up next, Mari is reuniting with actor Dhanush after *Karnan*. He says he has a huge responsibility in his hands. "Everyone's expecting me to tell them a story rich in character. I am hoping the audience will come out of that film once again with the satisfaction of watching a definitive Mari Selvaraj film."

### STEPOUT



#### Tracing Madras' modernism

The Avtar Foundation for the Arts, in collaboration with Alliance Francaise de Madras, is presenting the fourth lecture in its series Madras' Tryst with Modernity, delivered by Aparajithan Adimoolam. Titled Madras Art Movement: A Culmination of a Hundred Years of Art, Design, and Craft, the talk will examine how the city evolved into a modernist art centre with a strong regional identity. It will also highlight KCS Paniker's pivotal role in shaping a modern Indian aesthetic grounded in indigenous traditions. @Alliance Francaise, Nungambakkam. November 12, 6.30pm. Entry is free, but registration is mandatory. Call 28279803 to register.



#### Musical laurels

The Musical I Can Awards 2025, is an evening dedicated to honouring excellence in music. The event will recognise outstanding singers, musicians, composers, lyricists, and innovators across film, Carnatic, devotional, folk, western, and Indian classical genres. Presented by distinguished guests, the celebration will also feature fusion instrumental performances blending tradition and modernity. @The Museum Theatre, Egmore. November 6, 5.30pm onwards. For passes call 8939570319.

## Stitching up success

Meet Chennai resident Dr Harini Muralidharan, the doctor of the Indian team which won the Women's World Cup recently

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On the night of November 2 when South Africa was 53 anxious runs away from a shot at the Women's World Cup, Nadine de Klerk who was at the crease, tossed a ball that India's Deepti Sharma had bowled. Silence ensued. That was until Harmanpreet Kaur swooped in for a catch, helping her team cement arguably one of cricket's most cinematic moments in Indian sporting history.

Everything changed at that moment. Harini Priyadharshini

Muralidharan, team doctor, and 33-year-old Chennai resident, was witnessing, and eventually partaking in the enormous victory.

"The dugout was tense. Everyone... every single person there was praying. By the ninth wicket, we somewhat knew that we were going to win. It is that kind of excitement where it is too early to jump up and celebrate. But when the moment happened, all we wanted to do was hug and cry, so that is what we did. Then, the running into the field happened,"



**Charting victory**  
Dr Harini Muralidharan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

says Dr Harini.

Although it has only been a year since Dr Harini has been part of the team, she says that she is excited to be on tour, and has felt a camaraderie with the team and the players. This victory signals a reaffirmation of the phrase "right place at the right time," she says.

Back in 2017, Dr Harini, who comes from a long line of doctors, says that she was unsure about her specialisation. That is when her father suggested that she take up Sports Medicine, a career different from the norm. "I reached out to Basu Shanker [an Indian performance coach], who said that in order to enter this field, I needed to have tried my hand at it. Which is why I began interning with him," she says.

After a year with him and recognising that this was her forte, the young professional flew to London to pursue her Master's in Exercise Medicine at Queen Mary University. She returned when COVID's first wave had just begun. "It was chaos,"

she says, adding that the COVID years were quiet, and subsequently filled with applications to several places for jobs. "I must have sent out at least 100 CVs," she says.

Eventually, Basu, who was working with the Royal Challengers, Bengaluru, put her in touch with senior members of the team, who eventually recruited her after interviews and conversations. "It was wild to work with the men's and women's team. The aim however, for anyone in this field, is to eventually work with the national team. When that call came, I didn't even think of saying 'no'," she says.

Over the duration of the World Cup, Dr Harini says that she spends at least four to five hours in the treatment room. "The main focus in sports medicine is injury

**Although it has only been a year since Harini has been part of the team, she says that she is excited to be on tour, and has felt a camaraderie with the team**

management. There are several expert physiotherapists and masseuses who are recruited to the team for this purpose. I come in when one needs to deal with a big injury. Everyone stays in their own lanes. Sometimes at physiotherapy, when a player brushes aside a problem that might be a potential problem later, I ensure I take a look. The team here however, has been working with girls for years now. It is a lot of excellent work that has been put in," she says.

When asked if there are any incidents from the tournament that Dr Harini would like to recount, she says, "I'm sure there's many but most have been eclipsed by the victory," she says. "I do miss my son though," she adds.

The doctor says that people often forget to look at the kind of work that goes behind making a champion. It is not just physical but also mental. "To witness the work put in has honestly been grounding. This [win] has made a noise so loud that I think society is willing to stop and let these girls do what they want to. That is the kind of impact sports has," she concludes.



Life in colour Cinema banners painted by V Jeevananthan; (below) the artist at his studio in Coimbatore. S SIVA SARAVANAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



# The making of Jeeva

Artist **V Jeevananthan**, who recently won the Kalaimamani, looks back on the years that defined his career and style

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A narrow flight of stairs in an old building in Coimbatore's Five Corner neighbourhood leads into a tiny studio stuffed with paints, brushes, bundles of canvases, a wooden easel and finished and unfinished portraits arranged in boxes along the wall. "I don't like cleaning up," mutters artist V Jeevananthan. The splotches of paint on drop sheets on his table look like works of art themselves. If given the chance, the 69-year-old artist, who was recently conferred the Kalaimamani award by the Tamil Nadu Government, would prefer to spend his days cooped up in the room doing abstract art.

But life has other plans for Jeeva. "I hardly

have time to work on paintings that I conceive," he says. "These days, I mostly work on assignments." These are sketches for magazines, newspapers, and book wrappers, and portraits that are commissioned. Jeeva is known for realistic paintings. He started out as a cinema banner artist after his father N Velayutham, who founded Cine Arts in Coimbatore in the early 1950s. "Appa trained at the Chitra Drawing School in Nagercoil, our hometown," he says, adding that the school, that is over 100 years old, continues to train artists even today. Velayutham was offered space inside Coimbatore's Royal Theatre, from



where he painted cinema banners that were as large as 10 x 25 feet. Jeeva, named after the Communist leader, would watch him at work in awe. The way he deftly moved the brush across the banner, bringing alive the faces of popular actors in just minutes as though he knew their features by-rote...Jeeva took it all in.

**Taking charge** When his father passed away, the company naturally fell on Jeeva's shoulders. He had no formal art training – he studied Political Science and trained to be a lawyer. Jeeva simply took his father's brushes and paints and got down to it. Painting came to him naturally, much like walking or riding a bicycle. Soon, Jeeva found himself drawn into his father's world – working on up to 10 large film banners a day with tight deadlines. But he enjoyed it. "It was like a *bodhai*," he says: an addiction.

He broke his father's traditional, straightforward style incorporating modern colours. "I made Rajini dark like he was in real life, adding blues and browns to his face," he says. He would sign his name below in his trademark style. Soon, people noticed the new artist in town. He grew in popularity with people coming to watch him paint at a workspace in the same neighbourhood.

But one day, everything was gone. "Digital flex boards arrived in 2005 and our lives changed overnight," he recalls. For six months, he waited, finally taking the plunge into digital. For someone who gave up pursuing a stable career for the love of the arts, digital work was like "forcing a sculptor to tap holes into an ammikkal". But he had to do it.

He continued doing portraits and taking up work for books on the side, and even wrote film reviews for magazines such as *Kalki*, and contributes to magazines even today. His book *Thiraiseelai*, a collection of essays on cinema that he wrote for the magazine *Rasanai*, won him the National Award in 2011.

Jeeva considers his 47 years as part of Coimbatore's Chitrakala Academy, that held art exhibitions and free Sunday art classes, a defining part of his life. "We were the first people to hold art exhibitions in the city when such a concept was unheard of," he recalls. "We went on even when we had no visitors." Their Sunday art classes gave rise to a generation of artists who are now doing well in fields such as art direction and design. "The Kalaimamani recognition was probably for my work with the academy," he says.

Minutes before our meeting, he is sitting in front of the computer below his studio, working on a sketch. "Was it a boon or bane to have been pulled into the arts?" he wonders, adding with a laugh, "I don't know." He has fame and success, but wouldn't call himself commercially stable. "Art rarely offers one everything," he says.

Working alone inside a dusty building in a commercial neighbourhood in the city, his heart in the studio upstairs, but his mind on the computer in front of him, Jeeva perfectly fits the 'melancholic, brooding art genius' label. Is he happy? "I'm not," he laughs. "But I'll keep painting."

## Beyond borders

Explore the origins of dahdi, a forgotten game, at Kreedaa's new exhibit



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For Vinita Sidhartha, the game of dahdi which has three nested squares, is something she refers to, almost fondly, as her 'problem child'. "This particular game can be seen on the floors in so many temples in Tamil Nadu which includes at least 10 here in Chennai. I have always been surprised that nobody recognises or remembers this game even though not too far away in the Telugu heartland it is called dahdi," she says.

Her fascination to unearth the history behind this game and its surprising links to Spain has been displayed as Madras to Madrid, an exhibition. Her organisation Kreedaa has been working in researching, developing and reviving traditional games. The dahdi, also known as nine men's morris, is a strategy game which involves two players placing their nine pieces on the board and forming mills or three pieces in a row to outsmart their opponent.

"I found a very interesting style of etching at the Hoysala temples in Karnataka, crawled through shrubs at the JNU campus, Delhi, and found the game etched on stone there, and even at the temple unearthed in Salavankuppam post the tsunami in Tamil Nadu," she said. It was a trip to Madrid,

however, 5,500 miles away that not only gave her insight into an early documentation of the game, but also an interesting geographical link. Many churches in Spain, she points out, also have the game etched on the floors, much like the temples here. "At the Library of the Monastery of El Escorial, near Madrid, I was able to look at the Book of Games commissioned by Alfonso X of Castille in 1283. The book features nine men's morris, as well as interesting stories about games travelling from India," she says. A sample of this book has been recreated and is on display as part of the exhibition.

"Another exciting discovery for me was to see these nested squares carved into stone under the Butterball or the large balancing rock in Mamallapuram. I was barely able to crawl under and take a few pictures of the games etched underneath. Popular legends say that the Butterball has probably been here since the 1100s or 1200s. This gave me some sense of the antiquity of the game in India" she says. This journey to unearth the global spread of traditional games, has been an eye-opening one that has left her with many questions and insights that she has documented.

*The exhibition will be on display at the Kreedaa office till November 30 from 10am to 6pm on weekdays for groups; on weekends by request. Contact 9841748309 or 40091500.*



### Words that win

To mark its 18th year, Union Christian Matriculation Higher Secondary School hosted Oratoria '25, an interschool oratorical and debate competition, on October 31. The event drew over 40 debating teams from schools in Tamil Nadu.

Samritha K from PSBB KK Nagar won the Talk Your Way to Singapore contest, earning a Singapore ticket. Other winners across contests include Dhruva Seshadri Anand, PSBB Siruseri; Kaniska A, Alpha School, Porur; T Mohammed Arshan and B Bertina Gracelin, Union Christian Public School; Sourish Balaji Ramakrishnan and AB Aishwarya. The jury included Sanjay Pinto, Prince Frederick, David Appasamy, Sam Daniel Stalin, Pradeep V Philip, and Ramya Kannan.



Songs of liberation (Left) Karab Surya in 'Kelra'; and (inset) a still from the rap song. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and the dignity associated with it. This is what SlumLore set out to accomplish in helping release Karab's debut track. He makes it a point to question if one's geographical location is an indicator of one's innate talents. "No. Yet, people deny them [Dalit voices] any dignity or recognition. We want to show people that this 'other' that the elite describes when talking about slum-dwellers is just as good as them," he says.

### Taking up space

The obverse is also true. "Many of the people living in these slums did not know that most of the issues they were facing, like caste discrimination, were serious matters that the entire nation was grappling with. On the other hand, urbane metropolitans had no clue that slums existed in their cities," explains Naren. "We wanted to bring them together to eradicate this notion that rap can only be birthed in spaces of affluence. The audio launch of the song was held at Jyothipura. We want everybody to witness art here, because we define the space we perform in. Not the other way around," he adds.

"When we were children, we did not know that we could question oppressive systems of authority. It took us a long time to arrive at that stage in our lives. But in providing an opportunity to rappers like Karab, we seek to motivate youngsters to instil a sense of critical questioning through a medium that appeals the most to them: hip-hop and rap," he explains. SlumLore instils a sense of pride in the labour of people who live in slums. "Most city-dwellers do not stop for a moment to think of the people who clear their garbage; the labourers whose efforts are made invisible are the ones who keep the city going. With this project, we want to give them a name and a voice," Naren says.

*'Kelra' is available for streaming on major music streaming platforms.*

# Freeing verse

'Kelra', a single from Bengaluru-based rapper Karab Surya, make us think of subaltern lives through powerful bars

### Judah Jerusalem

Think teenage angst. Think anger commingled with an urge to lash out at caste. Think primal drum beats heralding a lyricist's spit on a dry-boned mic. Seventeen-year-old Karab Surya's Tamil rap track, 'Kelra', meaning both 'listen up' and 'question them', does just that: it questions systems that oppress by beckoning people to listen to what the lyrics are saying.

Karab, the youngest of three born to a Tamil couple living in a slum in Jyothipura, Bengaluru, says that he was not ready for the ice-cold splash of the harsh reality of having to answer a schoolmate who asked him which caste he belonged to.

"He [the other schoolmate] was in the fifth standard. This kid did not want to know my name, nor who I was as a person. I was

shocked by the unassuming crudity and could not offer him a reply, because that's not how our parents raised us," he says. His parents interject in agreement. "Everywhere I looked, I had only questions. The issue that linked them all was caste. My way of fighting against such injustice was to rap. That's how 'Kelra' began," he says.

As a child, he had been influenced by other Tamil rappers in terms of style and content. This pushed him to write his own lyrics. "Not a day goes by without writing bars," he says. His debut, however, takes a sharp turn from the glitz and glamour that most rappers croon about, offering another perspective that gives voice

to the realities that many from his community face.

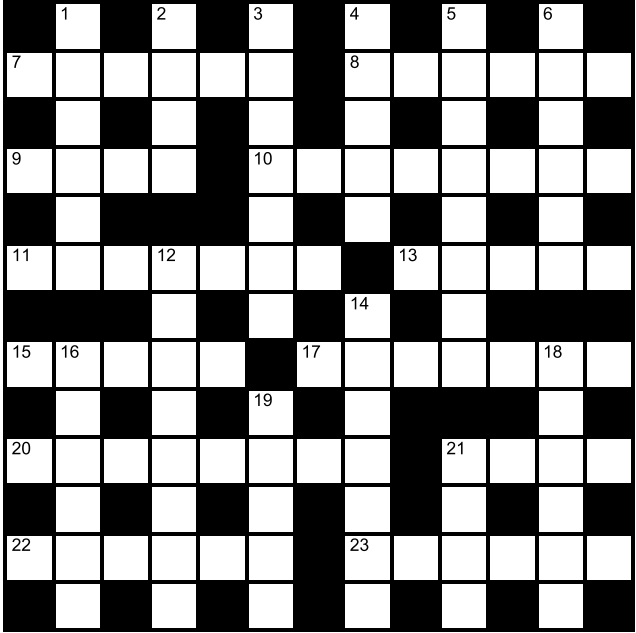
The track is part of a series titled SlumLore by Adavi Arts Collective, a Bengaluru-based troupe that has been breaking barriers. The purpose of the project is to provide a platform for Dalit voices from the slums of Bengaluru. Members from the collective conduct workshops in slums and set up street theatres with the aim of raising social awareness and instilling political consciousness among marginalised communities. Karab Surya is one lyricist whose talent shone when he asked Naren, one of the founders of Adavi Arts Collective, to check his bars out.

Naren is preparing for a Kiran Nadar Museum of Art performance of a rendition of the poet Kotiganahalli Ramaiah's poem *Nannaja* in the form of a play where he ponders over the question of history and memory of a people –



### QUICK CROSSWORD #26

{Set by Doppelganger}



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

#### Across

- 7 Travelling through air (6)
- 8 Unforeseen happening (6)
- 9 8A can be a result of being .... (4)
- 10 A region rich in petroleum deposits (8)
- 11 Draw something in dots (7)
- 13 Greasy (5)
- 15 Fit something out (5)
- 17 Amount of electrical power (7)
- 20 Bitterly hostile (8)
- 21 Come together (4)
- 22 Once in a while (6)
- 23 Mentally perceptive (6)

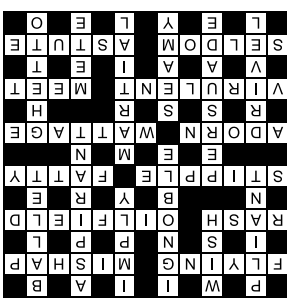
#### Down

- 1 Easily influenced (6)
- 2 Want something (4)
- 3 A person of humble birth (7)
- 4 Hint at (5)
- 5 One trying to achieve a higher

#### position (8)

- 6 Classical dance style (6)
- 12 Prevail upon successfully (8)
- 14 Characteristic of a warrior (7)
- 16 Talk nonsense (6)
- 18 Dharavi, for example (6)
- 19 Showing the least pleasant aspect (5)
- 21 Hand out (4)

#### Solution No. 26







Kueh and Kopi

Mithila Jayaraj says Kueh and Kopi was her mother Nirmala Devi's idea and a space for them to explore their Malaysian roots through food. "Kueh means dessert in Malay and there are several Malaysian desserts on the menu," Mithila says. We bite into ondeh ondeh, small, sweet glutinous rice balls covered with coconut shavings and a hit of pandan flavour and dig into a spongy pandan tres-leches, which comes drenched in coconut milk and topped with bits of pandan jelly.

Also on their menu are cendol (a chilled coconut milk beverage with pandan and rose jelly, crushed ice and a palm sugar syrup from Malaysia), mango cheesecake shaped like a cheese block from the Tom and Jerry cartoons, and crisp buttery toast topped with a generous dollop of purple yam or ube flavoured coconut jam. "The Kopi here is the Malaysian white coffee, which has a unique aroma and taste to it. Our customers love the iced Kopi, which goes great with desserts," says Prabhu Mejel, co-founder.

Kueh and Kopi is at 2, Co-Operative Colony Road, Austin Nagar, Alwarpet.

Treat yourself

From Malaysia's ondeh ondeh, to ice cream flavours like garlic, and green chilli, here are four unique dessert spots in Chennai

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Amour Ice Cream

Would you eat garlic ice cream? Or even a cold scoop with a subtle green chilli flavour? Amour, an ice cream brand from the popular biryani chain Dindigul Ponram aims to introduce diners to ice creams in native flavours.

"From gulkhand made of roses from Nilakottai to bananas from Sirumalai, we have several native ingredients that we wished to showcase through our ice creams. This has always been highlighted in our food as well, and it was only natural that we wanted to replicate the same in our ice creams," says S Mani Ram, from the Ponram family, stating that his uncle started the ice cream brand in 2014 back in Dindigul. "Our flavours include karupatti, gulkhand, fig and honey, jackfruit, banana, as well as unique flavours such as garlic, green chilli and ginger," he says.

Made of garlic from Poombarai, and green chillies from Virakkal, Amour's savoury flavours prove to be a great pick. The sharp, spicy hit of the green chilli ice cream in particular makes for a unique tasting experience. "For diners at the restaurant, we are happy to provide samplers and some families are even enthusiastic to guess what flavours they are trying," Mani Ram adds.

Amour is at Dindigul Ponram, 90/35, 1st Street, Ashok Nagar, and is open from 11am to 11pm.

Moutan by Taiwan Maami

In May 2024, Theresa Hu and her husband Kannan Swamy introduced the city to authentic bubble tea through Taiwan Maami, a bubble tea cafe in Palladium mall, Velachery. Now in T Nagar, their new restaurant Moutan has bubble teas alongside pillow brioche with a dulce de leche crust, shaved snow with crème caramel, and a savoury menu as well. "We were keen to offer the same quality as Taiwan Maami, but at Moutan prices," says Kannan, of their new venture.

The pillowy-soft brioche comes with a dusting of matcha powder and blueberry compote heaped on top and is just the perfect amount of sweet. From their boba menu, we

sample their newest addition, the popping boba which can be added to slush pops of different flavours. Their milk teas include saffron, cinnamon, matcha and the Hong Kong style yuen-yueng milk tea variants and can be ordered with or without their boba.

"Our savoury menu includes simple, street-style Asian foods and to keep the flavours authentic, we make everything from the chilli oil to the 13-spice mixture in-house," Theresa says. Their hand-pulled biang biang noodles and the yaki onigiri or crisp Japanese rice balls make for a flavourful savoury relief from sampling their desserts and teas.

Moutan is at 29, Burkit Road, CIT Nagar East, T Nagar and is open from 12pm to 12am.

Scoop Dawg

Chef Shriram Rajendran calls Scoop Dawg, his ice cream brand with the chuckle-worthy name, a 'frozen-forward' brand. "We have protein ice creams, yoghurts, popsicles, gelatos, and everything else that you can think of that is frozen," he says. On one side of Double Roti in Teynampet, Scoop Dawg's tubs of ice creams are under bright lights. "With Scoop Dawg, we were keen to have a brand catered to Gen Z," he says.

Their bold line-up of flavours includes a pani puri sorbet, zero abv gin and tonic, and Negroni sorbets, and ice cream scoops in flavours ranging from burrata to black sesame. "We try to be as different as possible with our flavours; even the vanilla is Pollachi vanilla bean, burnt butter and honey," Shriram says. Their popular Taró bubble tea flavour, a light purple coloured, creamy scoop, allows the flavours of its sweet, starchy main ingredient to shine.

Scoop Dawg is at First Street, 4/27, Cenotaph Road, Sri Ram Nagar, Alwarpet, and is open from 11am to 11 pm.



From the streets of Paris

Paris Qui Dort, the cine-concert, will transport its audience to a realm where music and motion picture intertwine

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What happens when a century-old French silent film meets a futuristic soundtrack? The Édouard Michelin Auditorium at Alliance Française de Madras will transform into a space where cinema and sound collide this weekend. French percussionist and composer Stéphane Scharlé brings *Paris Qui Dort (The Crazy Ray)*, René Clair's 1924 silent sci-fi classic, to life through a live soundtrack performed entirely on his self-created augmented drums.

Set in Paris, the film follows Albert, a night watchman who wakes atop the Eiffel Tower to find the city mysteriously immobilised by a mad scientist's ray. What unfolds is a city without motion, time or consequence, explored through images from the Eiffel Tower and the Champs-Élysées to Place de la Concorde and the Opéra Garnier. Restored in 4K by the Jérôme Seydoux-Pathé Foundation, this early work of science fiction in French cinema still retains its beauty and social satire – a reflection on freedom, power and human conscience in times of conflict.

The augmented drums blend acoustic drumming with loops, electronic textures, and improvisation, turning the century-old film into a sensory experience. The screening of

*Paris Qui Dort*, a surreal black-and-white masterpiece, is often hailed as the first French science fiction film. "When the film was first shown a hundred years ago, in 1925, there was no sound – the technology simply didn't exist yet. Back then, musicians often performed live alongside the screen, and sometimes even narrators would explain what was happening on screen," says Stéphane.

"The augmented drum is an instrument that I created a few years ago – it lets me play regular drums, but also launch many electronic sounds, loops, and effects at the same time. So I can basically create a whole orchestral soundtrack during the film. Every time I compose the soundtrack, I do it differently because I like to improvise," he adds.

A founding member of jazz collective OZMA, Stéphane has performed over 600 concerts in over 45 countries. His foray into solo performance marks a new chapter. "In France, cine-concerts are quite common. I am happy to bring this to the Indian audience, which is different from my usual jazz quintet," he says.

The evening is presented by the French Institute in India and the Alliance Française network.

On November 7, from 7.30pm onwards at Édouard Michelin Auditorium, Alliance Française de Madras, Nungambakkam. Entry free.



Framed  
Stéphane Scharlé  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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On a rainy Tuesday night, I surprisingly find myself in queue, waiting to be seated. We are at the new improved Madras Pavilion at ITC Grand Chola. When this mammoth hotel opened its doors to the city in 2012, Madras Pavilion was the first restaurant that started receiving guests. According to the hotel's research, nearly nine million diners have dined here since. "Everyday we see at least 13 occasions being celebrated here: birthdays, graduations, proposals, anniversaries..." says Shaariq Akhtar, general manager, ITC Grand Chola.

After 13 years, it was time for a little shake up. The renovation took four and a half months. "The seating capacity has increased to 190. The live kitchen counters are bigger, allowing scope for more dishes. Initially, the

If it's Tuesday, it must be biryani

Madras Pavilion at ITC Grand Chola now features new flavours and greater variety

restaurant had four small hubs where food was made. Guests often wouldn't get to see the entire buffet spread," says Shaariq. Now, the bustling live kitchen is at the centre; much like a superstar being watched by their fans. There are 300-plus dishes for lunch and dinner. Diners mill about deciding what to eat – this, that, a bit of everything, perhaps?

"The menu has changed too. We've introduced modern Asian food. There are different types of

Makeover magic (Clockwise from left) The revamped interiors; Teq no-guava; and a dish on the menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



dumplings, rice cakes... Since it's called Madras Pavilion, we continue to highlight food from this region, like *thattu* idli with prawn on top," he says. There is also what they like to call fusion burgers. Picture this: crisp *vazhapoo* cutlet sandwiched between soft curry leaf buns, there is even chicken *chukka* masquerading as a patty but packed with far more robust flavours, and sannas burger.

Despite the vast choices, Indian food still continues to be the most popular. Try the saffron-rich, rose water-infused gosht biryani, the butter chicken with Malabar parotta, or the vermilion red chicken ghee roast that is tangy, spicy and can jolt you out of that mid-day slump. Here, there is a theme everyday. Mondays are for tandoori, Tuesdays for biryani...

Among the new introductions is *elai saapad*, something the team at the restaurant is quite kicked about. The meal is laid out on a banana leaf and includes 20 dishes, with three menus to choose from: vegetarian (₹3,000 plus taxes), non vegetarian (₹4,000 plus taxes), and seafood (₹5,000 plus taxes).

To take things up a notch, the restaurant has introduced a new beverage menu called Vera Level Unlocked. Each cocktail/mocktail – served in bottles – features local ingredients which is the star of the drink. There is Jamun Soda, Inji Kaapi, Cheeky Chikoo, and the team's favourite and now ours: The Jasmine. It tastes like summer in a glass and is refreshing with coconut milk, coconut water, and jasmine cordial made in-house.

The buffet is priced at ₹1,999 plus taxes. For details, call 22200000.

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Kabaddi coach and Arjuna awardee ‘Manathi’ P Ganesan, who inspired Mari Selvaraj’s latest film, on the sport and struggles that define him

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They called him the Bullock. When he walked into the court, his fans would scream his name. At one such match in the village of Puliyangudi near Tirunelveli, Mari Selvaraj was in the audience. The Tamil film director was probably nine or 10 years old then. He looked at star kabaddi player ‘Manathi’ P Ganesan in awe. Years later, he went on to make a film inspired by his life. Mari’s *Bison Kaalamaadan* with Dhruv Vikram reprising the lead, is winning accolades.

At the centre of it is 55-year-old Ganesan, who played for Tamil Nadu for 10 years, India for four years, winning the Arjuna award in 1995, the second sportsman from Tamil Nadu to be given the recognition for kabaddi. The current coach of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board kabaddi team, he is posted as Senior Sports Officer with the TNEB.

*Bison* is a fictionalised account of Ganesan’s life. At its core is his struggle to succeed against the odds. Ganesan and Mari are relatives. “Thambi spoke to me after completing the shoot for *Karnan*, saying that he wanted to make a film based on my life,” he recalls. Mari and his assistants held several interviews with Ganesan, during which he opened up about his life and the sport that defines it. Once the story was ready, Mari got Ganesan on board to train Dhruv. Ganesan worked with the actor for



Meet the real Bison

over a year, at the end of which, Dhruv turned into a well-rounded kabaddi player himself.

**Looking back** “Kabaddi is my life,” Ganesan adds. The sport came naturally to him, and he played barefoot in the mud ground of his village of Manathi in Thoothukudi district when he was just eight. “I started playing seriously from the time I was 12,” he says.

Kabaddi is the lifeline for young

men in Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli. “My father played it, so did my grandfather,” says Ganesan. “Each of the 50 to 60 villages and hamlets surrounding Manathi have their own teams formed by a few friends.” There is Jolly Friends, Lion’s Club (the team from Manathi), Young Prince, Morning Star, among others, all of which prefix their village’s name to theirs.

“Back then, we didn’t have open playgrounds and kabaddi was something that did not require much

space.” For young men like him, who mostly worked in the paddy and banana fields that surrounded their villages, kabaddi was an outlet for the immense energy and brute strength that ran in their veins.

Once work in the fields was over, they would gather to practise, even travelling to nearby villages to play multiple teams. It is during such tournaments that heroes are made. Ganesan grew up admiring kabaddi players such as Raja, Panneerselvam and Suyambu Lingam, taking in their techniques and unique characteristics. “They played for Thoothukudi club teams,” he recalls.

It was when Ganesan did his higher secondary at Pope Memorial Higher Secondary School in Sawyerpuram, that his game won recognition from his Physical Education teacher Thangarasu, who assembled a team for the school. “I played for the school team and went on to represent Manathi and the district teams,” he says. Ganesan

**A tale that inspires** (Clockwise from left) From the film; Mari Selvaraj and Dhruv Vikram during the shoot; and Manathi Ganesan. S SIVA SARAVANAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



was then invited to play for the VP Brothers team and the Sun Paper Mill’s team, earning entry into the TNEB, State, and Indian teams. He played centre, a position taken by the key raider.

The journey was far from easy. But Ganesan was fortunate to have players such as Raja, Panneerselvam and Suyambu who

fought for his name to be in the selection lists. His team won India a gold in the 12th Asian Games at Hiroshima in 1994, also winning gold in the Nationals in 1993, coming third in the Federation Cup tournament in 1995.

Ganesan says that it was only after joining the TNEB team could he afford to spend on a special diet. “Till then, I mostly ate pazhaya soru with dry fish and a chunk of karupatti on the side, and large ellu urundais my mother would make at home with jaggery,” he recalls. For strength and endurance training, he filled sand in sacks to sling them across his shoulder, drag heavy wooden ploughs across the field, and ran for hours together on beach sand and pond rims. He would practise head-butting – that earned him the monicker Bullock – on a coconut tree. “The tree eventually cracked and fell,” he laughs.

Ganesan is now organising yearly kabaddi camps for boys and girls from across Tamil Nadu with the Jesus Redeems club at Nalumavadi in Thoothukudi, and wants to identify more talent. Did his rural upbringing contribute to his game? “Maybe. But that doesn’t mean someone from the city cannot achieve the same glory. Look at Kannagi Nagar’s Karthika whose team clinched gold at the U-18 Asian Youth Games recently. Anything is possible for someone who is willing to work hard.”



Conjuring fear

Rahul Sadasivan, who has scored a hat-trick of hits with the Malayalam film *Diés Iraé*, on his love for the horror genre

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When the Malayalam film *Diés Iraé* finally hit theatres on Halloween, the wait turned out to be worth it, making it a hat-trick of horror-movie hits for director Rahul Sadasivan, after *Bhoothakalam* (2022) and *Bramayugam* (2024). The film is about an uber-rich young architect, played by Pranav Mohanlal, whose life turns upside down after his friend from college dies by suicide. The title, *Diés Iraé*, a Latin phrase meaning ‘the day of wrath’, is a hymn about the Last Judgement, often sung at the mass for the dead. “While searching for a title after finishing the story I came across this phrase and felt that it would perfectly fit one of the characters in the film,” says Rahul.

Rahul had written the story much before *Bramayugam*, with Pranav in mind. “He has the swag and style to become Rohan and he pulled it off beautifully with his mannerisms and body language. His agility came in handy, so too did his background as a musician.”

Rahul says horror is a genre that always enthused him. “I find it exciting to tap into fear, an emotion that is subjective. In my design of

**With Bhoothakalam (2022), Bramayugam (2024), and now, Diés Iraé, Rahul Sadasivan has scored a hat-trick of horror film hits at the box office**

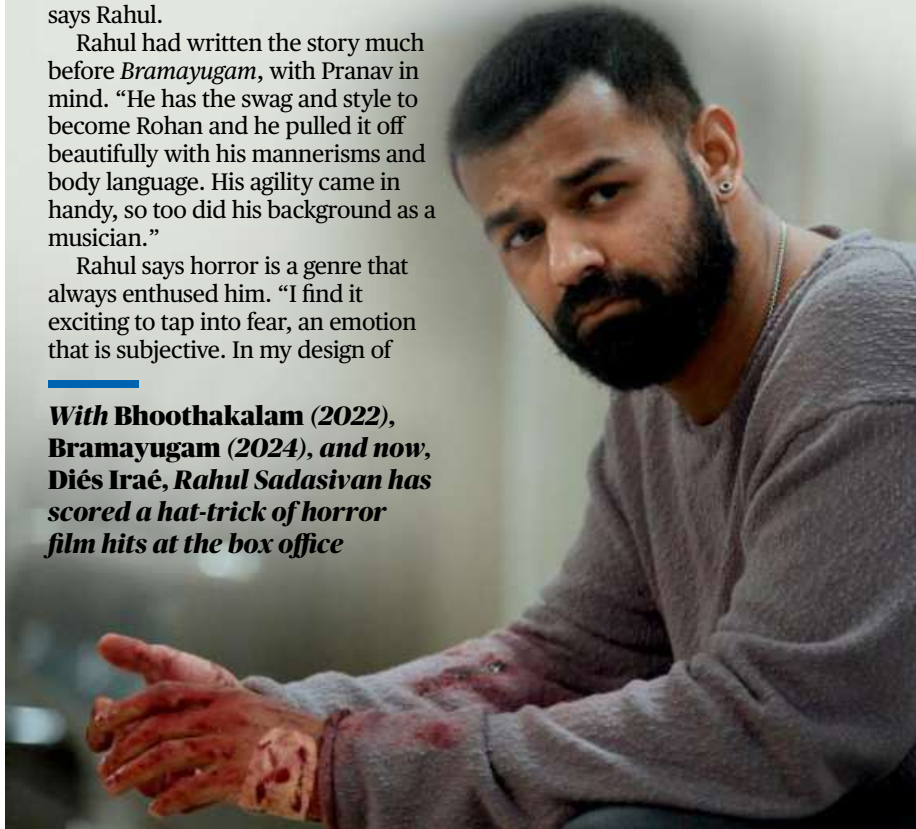
things, I keep the characters rooted and bring depth to them so that when something unforeseen or unpredictable happens, their vulnerability comes across. I plan the whole thing in such a way that the audience are on the edge of the seat.”

He is grateful that he had an illustrious team that stood by him. “It is easy to work with people who understand my vision and the world I create. It is a collective effort.”

Has he ever thought of trying any other genre? “I want to explore the horror genre further. I like this world-building exercise, where I place the characters and experiment.”

The intense climax, Rahul adds, was the exciting part of the shoot. “On the whole, the movie turned out to be exactly how I wanted it to be.”

**Trick or treat** Pranav Mohanlal in *Diés Iraé*; (inset) Rahul Sadasivan SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Blue valentine** Rashmika Mandanna and Rahul Ravindran on the sets of *The Girlfriend*; (inset) Deekshith Shetty and Rashmika in a still from the film . SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

filming for about nine months,” Rahul recalls. “And I felt the story we had then no longer felt relevant. Producer Dheeraj mentioned to Rashmika another idea I’d spoken to him about earlier. She asked for the script, said she’d read it over the next few days – but called me the very next day and said, ‘This is a story that needs to be told.’ We began filming in just over two months.”

Reflecting on his writing process, Rahul says the story first takes shape in fragments in his mind. Once the structure is clear, he begins writing. The screenplay for *The Girlfriend* was completed in just 12 days. “After writing the first 10 pages, I shared them with a friend to see if he could predict where the story was headed,” he says. “His feedback sparked a new line of thought. This is the first time a story evolved while I was writing it. It wasn’t difficult – I’d start around 11am and go on till 6 or 7 in the evening. The eagerness to see where it was going made the process enjoyable.”

For a relationship drama to resonate, performances are key. Rahul credits Rashmika and Deekshith Shetty for bringing emotional depth to the story. “Rashmika is intuitive. I’d talk to her in detail about the character, situation, and dialogues, and she’d absorb everything. Her first three takes are usually magical, so I’d ask my cinematographer, Krishnan Vasant, to make sure we captured every moment,” he says. “Deekshith, on the other hand, rehearses meticulously and fine-tunes every detail before facing the camera. He can deliver 50 takes with the same intensity. As a director, it was a joy adapting to each actor’s process.”

There is already buzz that the censor board was impressed with *The Girlfriend*, suggesting it has the potential to win a National Award. Rahul, however, does not dwell on that: “I’m just waiting to see how the audience responds.”

A warm hug

Rahul Ravindran on his Telugu film *The Girlfriend*, starring Rashmika Mandanna and Deekshith Shetty, and how he reimagines the modern relationship story

“I don’t mean to sound cryptic, but I’d rather not give too much away and spoil the fun,” says actor-writer-director Rahul Ravindran about his Telugu film *The Girlfriend*, starring Rashmika Mandanna and releasing on November 7.

The film is inspired by an incident Rahul heard of in college that stayed with him for years. In the early 2010s, a popular song sparked a trend in South Indian cinema. “That song – which I’ll keep unnamed for now – became part of a movement. I told myself that one day I’d make a film that shifts the gaze,” he says. “*The Girlfriend* isn’t a response to it, but it did trigger a thought. The story, characters and emotions evolved from there. The male protagonist came first, though the perspective through which I tell the story is different.”

The promos of *The Girlfriend* have already sparked curiosity. Rahul says the trailer reveals only a fraction of the story. “When I conceived this a decade ago, we weren’t using words like ‘toxic’ to describe relationships,” he says.

“Many think it’s a story about toxicity, but I see it as one about incompatibility. Rashmika tells me this film will feel like a warm hug for girls stuck in uncomfortable relationships. I’d say it’s also for the boys who lack clarity or emotional maturity. At 21 or 23, a guy might believe he’s being the perfect boyfriend without realising why a girl pulls away. Sometimes, they just need another perspective. I hope this film makes even 5% of them think.”

Incidentally, *The Girlfriend* was not the first film Rahul and Rashmika had planned under Geetha Arts. In 2021, they were set to collaborate on a different story. But the disruptions caused by the second and third waves of COVID-19 forced Rashmika to reshuffle dates for her existing commitments. “We weren’t



**Rashmika called me and said that this is a story that needed to be told. We began filming in just over two months.**

RAHUL RAVINDRAN  
Writer-director