



metroPLUS

THE HINDU



Adventure of a lifetime: Chennai senior citizens visit the South and North poles **P3**

INSIDE THE WORLD OF KANTARA **P4**

No more taking naps when you WFH. Now, people are gathering in city cafes for supervised productivity sessions. Swap your boss for an espresso with communal co-working

Cafe clock-in



S Poorvaja
poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in

Finding it tough to focus when you WFH (work from home)? A cafe may be the answer: silence, espresso and someone (other than your boss) to crack the whip.

Tucked away in a corner of Halt, Anna Nagar, a group is hard at work. Laptops are open, notebooks are being scribbled into, and phones are occasionally glanced at. A co-working session by Flow State is in progress, and Lakshaya Priyaa Ravishankaran, a young medical student is in charge. An initiative for communal co-working to beat procrastination, Lakshmi says her vision is to ensure that people have access to a space where they can focus and feel supported, whether they are freelancers, working professionals, or chasing a dream.

Chennai's cafes, and even a restaurant or two, are now places where one can join such communal initiatives to focus and work better. You can also take up monthly subscriptions now, so that you can plough through work emails with a



side of steaming vadas. As remote and hybrid work models continue post the COVID-19 pandemic, people continue to have reasons to want to step out of their home offices. "For quick meetings in particular or easing out over a coffee or a meal, I love stepping out of my office for a change of scene," Suganthshree Sudanthiram, an entrepreneur. An added benefit for people missing their colleagues at work? You can



now make friends at the cafe.

"I had been working on a book for many years and realised I needed people around me to push me forward, and a space close to home where I could actually sit down and work. Flow State was born out of this – and the fact that I could also put my phone down and do the deep work I wanted to. This isn't just about productivity, but also about creating a supportive work environment," Lakshaya says.

Having taken place at cafes like Soroco, Chamiers, and Halt, Flow State's three-hour sessions are scheduled for Saturdays and Sundays, which people can sign up for in advance with a registration fee of ₹600. "We pitch this to cafes and target their slow hours when there's more space available and it's quieter. Students and freelancers seem to appreciate the idea, and say they feel motivated and focussed to get some work done," she adds.

Work pod after lunch

In the three months since they opened, Kalpana Rao, co-founder of Sortd Cafe, says that seeing repeat customers use their space to work gave them the idea to introduce a

subscription model for their work pods and meeting rooms. "We noticed that people were ready to work out of these spaces for up to six hours. People appreciate the semi-private style of working they can get here – where they can plug in and work out of our pods, yet still hear and be aware of the action happening outside," she says.

Their subscription model, called Sandha, enables customers to book a space for 24 hours, which can be used throughout the month. Packages for singular work pods start from ₹4,000 (as a launch offer, pay for 16 hours and get to use the spaces there for 24 hours), and meeting rooms that can seat up to 10 people can be booked for 24 hours for ₹20,000. Apart from these designated workspaces, Kalpana points out that several functional details went into their design, something every cafe could be mindful of – from rounded table edges to ample plug points.

While access to freshly brewed coffee is a plus, the food on offer often takes working customers into account as well.

At Kaylir's newly opened Marathadi, a cosy space to work out of, the menu feels like a comforting

Work from anywhere (Clockwise from far left) A representational image of working out of a cafe; a session by Flow State; at Cafe Ave; working out of Sortd Cafe; food at Beachville. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



extension of what is available at their bustling canteen below. There are ghee podi idlis, pongal, vadas, and poori for breakfast; quick lunch options that include variety rice, with vegetables; evening snacks; as well as all-day bites like pudina cheese sandwiches, paneer bhurji pav, and more. It is all food that can be eaten quickly while working; mess-free and spoon-friendly.

"While this was initially an event space, we thought of how nice it would be for people to sit and do things together. We wanted a simple, well-lit space that wasn't intimidating. I've seen people come in for business meetings, hold script narrations, or even have company offsites here," says Bhargav Ramakrishnan, co-founder, Kaylir. Marathadi has

hourly packages where one can pay ₹320 for the first two hours which includes a complimentary beverage. Every additional hour will be ₹100 or a full day package with a complimentary beverage is priced at ₹720. Bhargav says that they also have weekly packages and monthly packages which people can pay for in advance. An advantage for them, he explains, is the space they have, which includes a breezy terrace to take phone calls while walking, and areas around the restaurant to take a break.

Workshopping culture

A work-from-cafe haunt since it opened, Beachville Coffee Roasters sees people working there throughout the day. "I was inspired by many American cafes where people work out of, and this played a huge part when we designed the space," says Divya Jayashankar, founder. While comfortable seating, Wi-Fi, and coffee, of course, rank high on the workplace essentials list, Divya also says that a cafe culture where people are not asked to leave after a point, as well as the relationships their service staff build with regulars, go a long way. "Ninety-nine percent of our customers are well-mannered and mindful of others in the cafe. For the 1% who take loud Zoom calls or overstay during peak hours, the rapport our staff builds with them helps; so they can have a polite conversation," she adds.

"I expect the vibe to be comfortable and warm, and it helps if the space has adequate plug points and great Wi-Fi," says Prashanth Chander, an entrepreneur who regularly works out of cafes. He speaks to us from Madras Kissaten, a coffee shop on TTK Road.

At the newly opened Cafe Ave in Besant Nagar, owner Nayantara Venkatesh says that despite being a small space, the design was conceived with the intent of catering to both casual meet-ups and remote workers. "We do ask people, if possible, to restrict working out of the cafe on weekends, and they're very understanding," she says. A communal table tucked away in a small room at the cafe sees many visitors, including writers, content creators editing videos, and remote workers going through their daily grind, share the space in silence. "Nine out of 10 times, people are willing to share table space," Nayantara adds.

As Chennai's cafes continue to reimagine their spaces to support focussed work, the best workspaces might not necessarily be in the confines of your house or a sterile office desk. Productivity is probably best found at a cafe, alongside an impromptu community of coffee-co-workers, fuelled by ghee idlis and strong Wi-Fi.

Priyamedha Dutta
priyamedha.d@thehindu.co.in

Step into Artworld Sarala's Art Centre, and you are greeted with a quiet swirl of colours – lines of varying shapes and sizes that seem to breathe, pause, and shift like memories. Look closer, and you see delicate fish emerge in some, peeking through the abstract forms. The artworks in watercolour and gouache are part of an ongoing exhibition titled Fragments of a Horizon by visual artist Ganesh Haloi – a series that feels like a poetic echo of landscapes.

Haloi was born in Jamalpur, Mymensingh, now in Bangladesh, in 1936. Following the Partition of India, he moved to Calcutta in 1950. Nature is a recurring theme with dots, dashes, and lines that shows trees, water and green fields, perhaps a reminder of a lost homeland.

His early tenure with the Archaeological Survey of India moulded his understanding of history, memory, and multifaceted landscapes, following his studies at the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta.



Poetry in abstraction

In Fragments of a Horizon, Nature is a recurring theme with dots, dashes, and lines that show trees, water and green fields, perhaps a reminder of a lost homeland

Decoding frames Gouache on paper by artist Ganesh Haloi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

In Fragments of a Horizon, Haloi's watercolours manifest as reflections on remembrance, silence, and varying dimensions of human experiences. Landscapes dissolve into fields of colour and rhythm – inviting viewers into a world of abstraction.

"With Haloi, subtlety is everything – his work doesn't shout, it whispers. So the real curation was in the placement, spacing, and rhythm of the exhibition. I focussed on showing the range within these 25 works – different moods, structures, and energies in his abstraction and creating a natural visual flow so the viewer slows down and actually absorbs the works," says Anahita Daruwala Banerjee, curator of the show.

"There wasn't a dramatic story in the selection – but there is a quiet narrative in how the works unfold in the space. That's where the true curation happened. My role as a gallerist is to honour the artist's language and make sure the audience

truly encounters it, not just passes by," she further added.

"Although his work is often perceived as abstract, he does not consider himself an abstract artist. His art is primarily inspired by landscapes, particularly the lush landscapes of Shantiniketan, where he spent significant time," says Sarala Daruwala Banerjee, director.

Haloi's works have been exhibited in major cities across India and internationally – including in New York, London, Hong Kong, and Dhaka – and are housed in eminent public and private collections worldwide. Towards the end of the 1950s, when the Archaeological Survey of India assigned him to recreate the Ajanta frescoes, Haloi was captivated by the splendid Visvantara Jataka murals. The encounter at Ajanta left a deep impression on his works.

Through his watercolours and profound visual philosophy, Haloi continues to shape the discourse of Indian abstraction.

Until October 31, at Artworld Sarala's Art Centre, Cenotaph Road, Teynampet. Entry is free.



Ability and art

V-Excel Educational Trust marks 25 years of service to children with special needs with Tattva 2025, its annual art and photography exhibition featuring 151 special artists from 25 inclusive schools across Tamil Nadu. This year's themes – Pattern Art and Abstract Art for paintings, and Harmony: Humanity and Animal Love for photography – celebrate creativity and compassion. The event will include live art demos, digital printing on merchandise, and an auction benefiting the artists. Visitors can look forward to live art demonstrations by special artists and on-the-spot digital printing of artworks on mugs and bottles, besides the auction.

@The Tamil Nadu Music and Fine Arts University, RA Puram on October 25 and 26 from 10am to 8pm. For details, call 9884048738.

The restaurant industry is booming, but behind the packed dining rooms lies a staffing crisis — from long hours and untimely salaries to poaching. Can training and culture fix this?

Restaurant burnout



Prabalika M Borah
prabalika.m@thehindu.co.in

The biryani lands on your table. You eat it, pay and leave, satisfied with a good meal. Rarely do we pause to think about what it takes to get that plate in front of us — the unseen reality of manpower. Now, imagine this: you own a restaurant. At dawn, your phone buzzes relentlessly. Bleary-eyed, you read the message: The kitchen staff has quit. Within a month of opening Tuya in Jubilee Hills, Chef Suresh DC faced exactly this. His core team of five years, quit overnight without notice. “I had no time to react. I’m a chef, my sous chef was still there, so we began to wash, chop, prep, cook, and serve 45 guests,” he recalls. With a skeletal service staff, they pulled it off.

Suresh’s story is not unusual. Almost every restaurateur in India has lived this nightmare, sometimes scrambling for replacements,



sometimes just surviving for days until they find their feet again. The irony is the industry is booming. According to the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), the country’s food services market is projected to grow at 8.1% — outpacing GDP growth — and touch ₹5,69,487 crore by the end of this year. Yet, the churn of manpower continues to threaten kitchens across the country. Growth and expansion in the restaurant business is not directly proportional to the staff available. Shaaz Mehmood, founder, NRAI and advisory committee (Hyderabad chapter), points out, “Everyone talks about expansion — bigger spaces, elaborate menus, better infrastructure. But rarely about who will actually run the show on the ground. The service staff, the captain and his team, and the kitchen staff — the executive chef and his brigade — are the ones who make everything happen. Hiring is

easy. Retaining is not.” Japtej Ahluwalia, founder, BORN (Beyond Ordinary Restaurants and Nosh) which has Double Roti, Double Dashi, Sortd etc and managing committee member, NRAI, lists the issues that drive attrition: “Untimely payment of salaries tops the list, followed by long working hours. Finally, because restaurants are largely in the unorganised sector, there’s no barrier to entry. Anyone with ₹50 lakhs can start a restaurant without understanding how the industry works. The glamour attracts people, but staff poaching happens with hikes as low as ₹500 or ₹1,000. When attrition issues pile up, staff simply walk out.” Shreya Kapoor, co-founder, Masala Synergy, a restaurant in Delhi, explains why attrition remains a persistent challenge: “Long working hours, limited work-life balance, and the constant physical and mental demands often lead to burnout. With new restaurants and hotels constantly emerging, competition is



Connundrum platter (Clockwise from far left) At 10 Downing Street, Begumpet; inside Masala Synergy; and service at Ci Gusta in Madhapur, Hyderabad. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

intense, and employees tend to shift frequently for marginally better pay or benefits. The absence of structured training and clear career growth paths only adds to the problem.” According to the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (a trust established by the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry), the restaurant sector is projected to employ 10.3 million people directly by 2028, up from 8.5 million in 2024. This makes it one of the largest employers in India — larger than many other sectors — and the country’s third-biggest industry overall.” As India positions itself to become the world’s third-largest food services market by 2028, overtaking Japan, the NRAI has also stressed the need for supportive policies and structured training to harness this potential.

Currently, the unorganised sector outpaces the organised, but this balance is expected to flip by 2028. “Which makes skill centres a necessity,” adds Shaaz. “We need to move away from the cookie-cutter approach to the food business.” Anthony Lawrence who started with 10 Downing Street is currently the General Manager of the brand’s outlet in Gachibowli. “We were trained to interact, remember regular orders and to build a rapport with our guests at a professional level. All the training about attention to detail of our regulars helped us get better at our work. I never intended to move out because the management treated us with respect and love.” Shreya Kapoor, echoes this. “Fostering an environment of respect, inclusivity, and recognition is key. Offering skill-development programmes, clear career pathways, structured shifts, and fair scheduling ensures staff feel valued both professionally and personally.”

Knowledge voyage

In his latest book Atulya Misra traces the journey of a young man across our country to understand its environmental concerns

Akila Kannadasan
akila.k@thehindu.co.in

It all begins at the fateful forest fire of 2018 on the hills of Kurangani in Tamil Nadu. Atulya Misra, an IAS officer, was appointed by the State Government to probe the incident. He has now written a novel whose protagonist is inspired by the guide who saved the lives of several trekkers. *Testimony By Fire* (published by Rupa) is about a journey this survivor undertakes across the length and breadth of our country. When Misra, an Additional Chief Secretary to Government, Department of Sports & Youth Welfare, set out to write a novel, he wanted his protagonist to travel through India’s “aspirational districts”.

The term, he explains, is used in administrative parlance to describe places that are underdeveloped. “I always thought that as an officer, I should work on these districts; find out what can be done for them,” he says. His protagonist’s journey, hence, is through these “underdeveloped parts of our country,” Misra explains, adding: “He tries to figure out what is going wrong in these

places, but does so without judgments.” Misra took over a year to write the book, balancing a very demanding work schedule. *Testimony By Fire* is his third work of fiction. His previous titles, also by Rupa, include *Oxygen Manifesto* and *Vultures of Paradise*, both of which have, at their core, the environment.

Misra enjoys writing; he finds the process a “stress-buster”. He says, “I am not a regular writer. I’ve just written just three books over a period of 10 years.” He explains that when certain story ideas take root in his mind, he has the urge to put them down in words. “This is how I started writing,” he says.

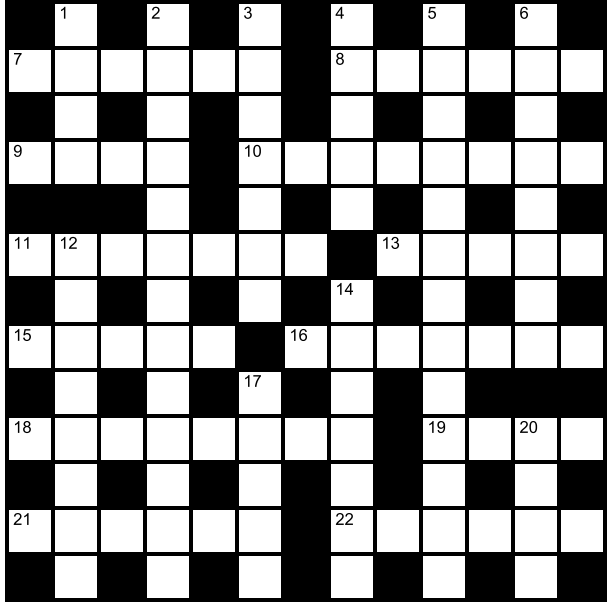
While Misra is constantly on the move on official duty, he is also thinking of story ideas to work on. He hopes to write a book on the Chennai floods next.

Testimony By Fire is available online

A journey to remember
Atulya Misra. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



METROPLUS QUICK CROSSWORD #24
(Set by Doppelganger)



- Across
- 7 Artificial pool (6)
 - 8 One who turns tail (6)
 - 9 Type of voice (4)
 - 10 Has no spouse (8)
 - 11 One who is being educated (7)
 - 13 Lacking respectability in character (5)
 - 15 Terminate a procedure (5)
 - 16 Skilled person (3,4)
 - 18 Naval unit of two or more squadrons (8)
 - 19 In between (4)
 - 21 Walked with long steps (6)
 - 22 A cricket team (6)
- Down
- 1 Spanish sparkling wine (4)
 - 2 Fact to be taken into account (13)
 - 3 Straighten out (7)
 - 4 Eat food greedily (5)
 - 5 Excessive pride of one's

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

achievements (7-6)
6 11A in his/her first year at university (8)
12 Having a flat surface (8)
14 Light sailing vessel (7)
17 Deciduous tree (5)
20 One in a list (4)

Solution No. 24

Dice dance The Moksha Trek game; (below) Falguni Gokhale. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Moksha Trek, a board game reimagines the ancient Snakes and Ladders game into a fun, meaningful experience



Slither, climb and twist

K Jeshi
jeshi.jeshi@thehindu.co.in

Mokshapatam is the original Indian board game from which the world knows Snakes and Ladders” describes Falguni Gokhale, a Pune-based graphic designer and illustrator. Created by 13th Century saint and philosopher Sant Dnyaneshwar, it was not just a pastime, but a map of life. Here, ladders represented virtues while snakes symbolised vices. The goal, however, was to help people reflect on choices and guide them towards building lasting values. “It was a game for everyone, adult and children alike,” she says adding that a few years ago, she was fascinated by it while researching for an art project. This journey led to the creation of Moksha Trek, a

game by the designer incorporating values, quick play, and lessons on consequences. Falguni studied Communication and Graphic Design at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. This is before setting up her design studio, Design Directions in Pune along with her husband, Satish Gokhale. While the spirit of Snakes and Ladders stayed on her mind, she wanted to give it a modern design edge that appealed to today’s families. This is when she found the answer in Moksha Trek. This new board game allows families and friends sit together, laugh, and reflect. “This is a passion project for me. My friends Hemant Karandikar, who brainstormed the right words in Hindi on the board and also wrote their meanings, and Darshana



Bhalgat who helped in conducting playing sessions with people, helped make the game sharper, fun and more relevant.” Beyond the game The game can be played alone, with two players, or in a group. It follows the familiar style of Snakes and Ladders on the board, but Falguni has added another layer through special squares which encourages pause. The aim is to spark conversation about choices, consequences, and values. “Schools can use such games to teach morals and emotional intelligence. Learning through play creates memory; it stays longer because it is felt, not forced. A platform where values are not taught as lessons but discovered through play.” While children can approach it with imagination

by using basic movements of dice across the board, adults can guide them on the consequences of the actions. A QR code on the board leads them to a website where they can explore the meanings of the words that are part of the game. “India has a treasure house of wisdom woven into playful forms. Moksha Trek is my attempt to revive a tiny part of that heritage making it relevant, beautiful, and enjoyable again. It is about reimagining our roots for today’s generation,” she explains. While her design work across varied fields fetched her many awards, the joy of problem solving through thoughtful designs has also led her to write and illustrate children’s books. “I have created a series called Books to Inspire. The book series grew out of curiosity and a desire to create something meaningful. The books and the game are extensions of what I have always loved — using design to inspire reflection, play, and imagination.” Reflecting upon her Moksha Trek journey, Falguni says that opening the box is intended to feel like embarking on a journey. “Old games like Mokshapatam were not passive entertainment. They were designed to make people think and learn from one another. Inherently, they carry the soul of our culture,” she says. She adds, “At a time when we are surrounded by fast, digital distractions, such games slow us down, bring people face-to-face, and reconnect us with timeless wisdom.” To buy the game, email mokshatrek@gmail.com or call 09356838374.



Artistic legacy Currently ongoing at Lalit Kala Akademi, the work of Bengal-born artist Chunilal Dutta Gupta who went on to lead creative teams at J Walter Thompson in Chennai before turning full-time painter. His art themes mainly consist of scenes of rural life, especially of Bengali baul musicians and landscapes. At Lalit Kala Akademi from 11am to 7pm till October 24.

Three senior citizens from Chennai navigate icy waters, polar bears and vegetarian diets to travel from Antarctica to the Arctic

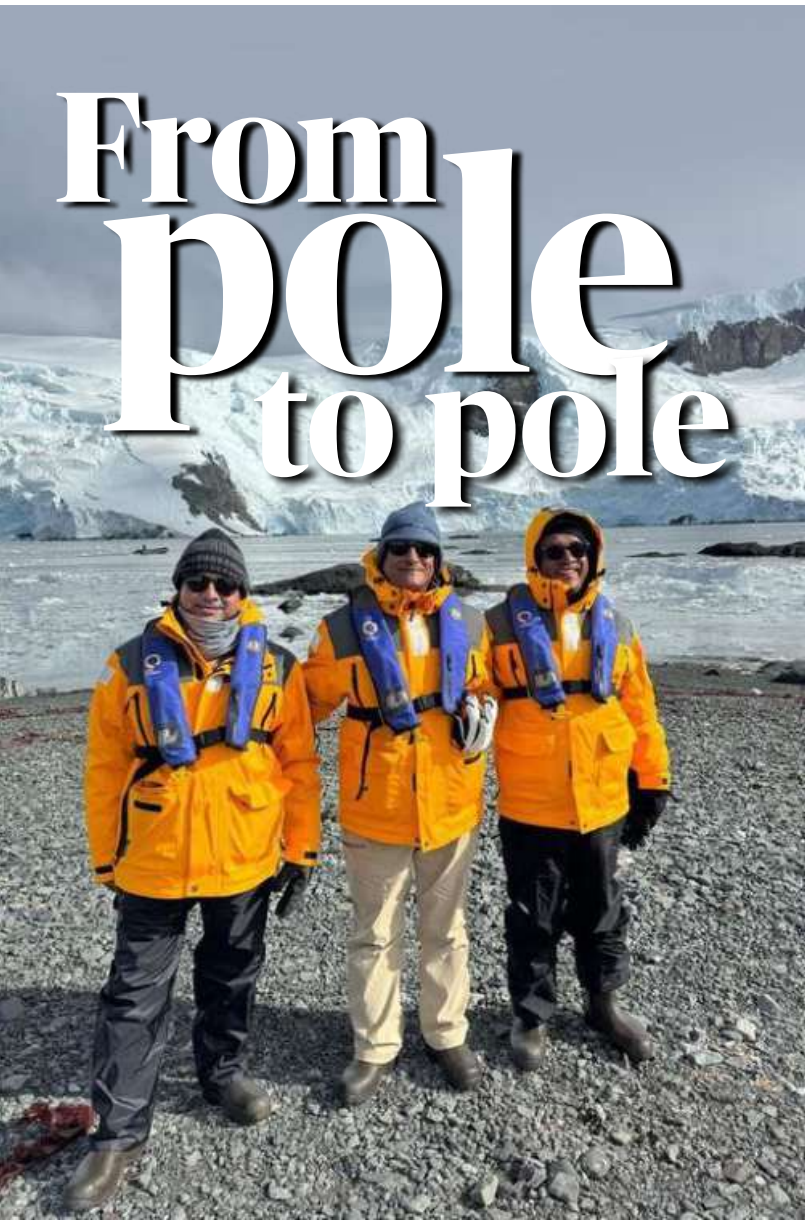
In cold climes
(Clockwise from right) Scenes from the expedition to the South Pole; Venkatesan, Chandrasekaran and Raju at the Arctic Circle; walruses. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Anasuya Menon
anasuya.m@thehindu.co.in

These three friends saved their biggest adventure for their sixties. CS Chandrasekaran (67), Venkata Subra Maniam Raju (65), and Krishnan Venkatesan (65) are back from the Arctic. Earlier this year, they embarked on a luxury cruise (Swan Hellenic), sailing through the remote Svalbard archipelago, North of mainland Norway to the breathtaking vistas of the Arctic region. Swaddled in layers of warm clothing and gliding through icy fjords, taking in jaw-dropping views of snow-dusted peaks, it was a journey that inspired awe. “The

beauty and the silence were sublime – a reminder of how small we are in Nature’s grand design,” says Venkatesan. This was not their first polar expedition. In January 2024, they travelled to the Antarctic Peninsula. The senior citizens, who retired as senior executives from companies in West Asia, have been long-time friends, who shared a passion for travel and adventure. Currently settled in Chennai, the globe-trotting trio, who have each travelled to over 40 countries, decided to chase a cherished dream – to journey to the poles. In 2023, they put their heads together and started planning a trip to Antarctica. Things fell in place and by January 2024, they were set for the journey.



They did their research and prepared well, went to the gym for fitness. “We knew the journey would be intensive, given the weather conditions. But our families were very supportive and we felt we had nothing to lose. We could afford to take some risks,” says Chandrasekaran, who even did a polar plunge, along with Raju. “We had to dive into icy waters from the ship. It was an inexplicable experience. All I can say is, the heart stops beating for a few seconds and then you come back alive,” he adds. Polar expeditions are about raw adventure and a complete disconnection from the modern world and its chaos, say the friends.



“An expedition cruise in Antarctica means kayaking among icebergs, hiking through untouched snowfields, and being surrounded by wildlife. We saw herds of seals and rookeries of penguins. We even caught sight of the elusive emperor penguin and were lucky to see a humpback whale breaching near our Zodiacs (rugged inflatable boats that ferry people from the ship to the shore). Watching the animals in such huge numbers in their natural habitat was an experience that will stay with us forever,” says Venkatesan. They flew across the Drake Passage from Punta Arenas, Chile, to King George Island in Antarctica and set sail on the Ocean Adventurer (of Quark Expeditions). With temperatures around -5°C, every day (they were in Antarctica for eight days and seven nights) was filled with excursions on Zodiacs. Their journey concluded with a detour to Patagonia’s Torres del Paine, offering a final contrast of rugged mountains and windswept plains.

Climate change challenges But the experience was not without reflection, say the friends. They witnessed firsthand the effects of climate change – melting glaciers and shifting ice patterns – a reminder of the planet’s fragility. “In our team were researchers, who explained to us how rapidly the region is changing,” says Venkatesan. Back in Chennai and energised by their Antarctic success, the friends were set on completing their polar quest. In July 2025, they took a

We had to dive into icy waters from the ship. It was an inexplicable experience. All I can say is, the heart stops beating for a few seconds and then you come back alive

CS CHANDRASEKARAN

chartered flight from Copenhagen to Longyearbyen in Norway – the world’s northernmost town – to mark the beginning of their Arctic expedition. The wealth of wildlife was the first striking thing about the Arctic. “They seemed to appear in a dramatic fashion. One morning, we watched in silence as a polar bear ambled along an ice floe – majestic, powerful, and humbling. On another day, we floated past walruses lounging like grumpy giants on the shore. We saw a number of reindeer and snow foxes. Puffins, guillemots, and Arctic terns filled the skies, while belugas and seals danced in the icy waters,” says Raju. It was summer and one of their lasting memories from the trip is standing on the ship’s deck at 2am, sipping hot chocolate under the midnight sun. A visit to the famed Global Seed Vault (at the remote Arctic Svalbard Archipelago) was special. “A storage facility for seeds from around the world, it is humanity’s insurance policy for crop biodiversity,” Venkatesan adds. Chandrasekaran and Raju dove once more into polar waters in the Arctic Circle. As they departed Longyearbyen, they carried more than souvenirs and snapshots, taking with them memories etched in ice and sky. The trio, considers it a feat to have completed both polar expeditions within 18 months. “From adapting to sub-zero temperatures (a far cry from our warm Chennai) to managing vegetarian diets, the journey tested our endurance, planning, and spirit. But every challenge was met with resilience, camaraderie, and unyielding curiosity,” says Chandrasekaran. And, yes, they had an Indian chef, who rustled up some vegetarian dishes for them. Until they plan their next adventure, the friends will talk about their journey to the poles – the silence, the purity, and the enormity of the experience that left them deeply moved.



Colour and form Neelam Cultural Centre presents, Becoming – Weaving the Commons, an art exhibition featuring the works of S Venkatesan and K Natarajan. Curated by Prema Revathi, the exhibition brings together two Dalit artists whose practices embody reclamation, fraternity, and a shared commitment to community. The exhibit foregrounds art as both a personal and collective act. At Lalit Kala Akademi, Greams Road, October 26 to November 1, 10.30am to 7pm. For more details, call 9442549411.



A fabric of fantasy Step into a world where compassion threads through music, movement, and storytelling. The Magic Handloom, presented by The Schram Foundation, is a musical theatre production that celebrates empathy and imagination. It is conceptualised by Harry MacLure and directed by Judith Sugirtha, and choreographed by Abdul Azeez of Instinct Dance Co. Music by Eugene Guest. Presented in aid of the Student Theatre Club, the show runs at Museum Theatre, Egmore, October 24 (10am and 6.30pm), October 25 (2pm and 6.30pm). Tickets on townsript.com.



Nidhi Adlakha
nidhi.adlakha@thehindu.co.in

Every day, Chennai sends about 5,500 tonnes of garbage to two dumpsites – Perungudi and Kodungaiyur. For decades, they have loomed over the city like mountains. Now, one of them is finally slowly vanishing. Dumpsite mining, a method of reclaiming and restoring the land locked in landfills, offers hope for neighbourhoods battling growing piles of trash. Chennai-based integrated sustainability platform Blue Planet’s Zigma Environmental Solutions has cleared close to 95 acres of the nearly 200-acre Perungudi dumpyard. The waste is being used to craft everything from furniture to steel pallets at their facility in Coimbatore. Prashant Singh, co-founder and CEO, Blue Planet, explains how the Perungudi dumpyard has been a growing concern for decades, especially since it sits close to Pallikaranai marsh. One of the largest natural marshlands in the world, the latter is an internationally recognised wetland as well as it is Chennai’s natural rainwater harvesting system, helping prevent floods, recharge groundwater, and support incredible biodiversity. The marshland is home to an astonishing variety of life: 115 bird species, 46 fish species, 21 reptile species, and over 100 plant varieties. “This massive waste

Now, sit on garbage

Chennai-based Blue Planet is recycling the city’s decades-old waste as building material, tables and chairs



Trash talk (Anti-clockwise from above) The production facility at Coimbatore; the Perungudi dumpsite; tables and chairs made from waste. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mountain contained over 30 lakh cubic metres of garbage. Imagine a pile so large it could fill hundreds of Olympic swimming pools,” he says, adding that since 2004, air quality tests have revealed the presence of 27 toxic chemicals around the dumpyard, including three known cancer-causing substances. In November 2020, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) launched an ambitious project to mine the entire Perungudi dumpyard, dividing it into six packages. “By February 2021, contracts were awarded with a 40-month timeline. Three of the six packages – covering over 16 lakh tonnes of waste and 93 acres – went to us,”

windrows and cones in a phased manner, “frequently raked and sprayed with bio culture to reduce the stench, flies, and moisture”. Then, processing systems help segregate the material based on size and density to ensure they can be responsibly recycled, re-used and re-purposed. Coarse soil recovered from the dumpyard was washed, cleaned, and processed to match construction-grade standards. “It’s now being supplied to leading Chennai companies as an alternative to river sand, saving our rivers from destructive sand mining,” he says. A part of the plastics, namely the non-recyclable HDPE, LDPE, and LLDPE variants, were transformed into furniture such as benches, chairs, and tables. “Using an extrusion process, these plastics were converted into lumber to become sturdy outdoor furniture, and to be used in decking and wall cladding for interiors and construction applications.”

Not only are these products made of non-recyclable plastics, but can be indigenously recycled again if damaged making it a classic case for environmental circularity, says Prashant. He adds that while they do not sell online, they are sold through existing partnerships that are slowly being ramped up.

Cladding and decking units are priced between ₹280 and ₹300 a square foot. Details on blueplanet.asia

Sundae passport club

From black sesame to filter coffee, Ciclo Café’s new ice creams are globe-trotting adventures

Sangita Rajan
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

Chennai has three seasons: summer, summer with rain, and less summer. Which makes ice cream less of a craving and more of a civic necessity. But lately, it is not just the weather dictating what is in the bowl, but curiosity. Somewhere in the city, the scoop has become a vehicle for travel and crossing borders.

At Ciclo Café, that idea has taken shape as Scoops Around the World, a five-flavour experiment that treats ice cream like a storyteller. “We wanted people to step out of their comfort zones,” says Sanjana Ramesh, head, Recipe Innovation, Ciclo Café, who designed the flavour pairings. “Ice cream is already one of our strongest offerings, but this felt like a chance to show what it could really do.” The five sundaes take their cues from different parts of the world. The Great British Banoff brings together banana ice cream, biscuit crumbs and dulce de leche, served with fresh banana slices and shaved chocolate. Orange is the New Black pairs toasted black sesame ice cream with bright orange marmalade, black sesame soil, dehydrated orange and a sesame brittle. Matcha Mia combines a mascarpone tiramisu ice cream base with matcha-soaked sponge fingers and strawberry coulis. Arabian Treasure draws from



Scoop it up Orange is the New Black ice cream. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

West Asia with toasted ghee and pistachio ice cream, rose water and a topping of mahalabia cream and a kunafa nest. The lineup ends with Chennai Express, a Madras filter coffee ice cream served with extra decoction, sponge, buttery toffee and toasted hazelnuts. “At Ciclo we do a few special menus throughout the year whenever there is a gap to keep things a little bit interesting,” says Sanjana. The festival, she explains, was also a way to introduce playful flavour experiments. “It’s not just about trying new combinations,” she adds, “we can also customise any flavour someone wants, even for a private party.”

For the city’s heat and humidity, these sundaes do more than cool. They offer a brief, delicious detour.

The Scoops Around the World menu is available at Ciclo Café’s Kotturpuram until October 31.

SIR MUTHA CONCERT HALL PRESENTS

THE OCTOBER THEATRE FEST

3 PLAYS 3 DAYS

Theatre Performances | Stalls | Live music & dance | Workshops | Art Exhibition

ALL IN ONE PLACE

A PLAY IN ENGLISH

AN AKVARIOUS PRODUCTION

SERVING YOU A PORTION OF DYSFUNCTION

24TH OCTOBER @ 7:30 PM (DOORS @ 7:00 PM)

FREE!

WORKSHOPS

- Tuning Into Your Sound
- Theatre Games

DANCE PERFORMANCE

- Ensemble by Academy of Modern Danse

GET TICKETS ON

district BY ZOMATO

An epic world

Cinematographer Arvind Kashyap opens up on the various challenges involved in shooting Rishab Shetty's *Kantara: Chapter 1*

Vivek MV
vivek.mv@thehindu.co.in

Arvind Kashyap was “excited yet scared” when the idea of a prequel to *Kantara* was pitched to him in 2022. “To achieve a film on that scale felt impossible back then,” he says. Three years later, the cinematographer is basking in the success of *Kantara: Chapter 1*, actor-director Rishab Shetty’s magnum opus. Arvind approached the biggest project of his career with support from producer Vijay Kiragandur from Hombale Films and Rishab. “Vijay *anna* told me that ‘even if the project feels big in size, don’t forget that people loved your frames of *Kantara*. So, retain the essence of the original.’ Rishab wanted me to forget the widespread attention we received for *Kantara* and start afresh.”



Think big
Stills from *Kantara: Chapter 1*.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Rishab wanted me to forget the widespread attention we received for the first installment of *Kantara* and start afresh for this project

ARVIND KASHYAP
Cinematographer

Cinematography and Nature

The ‘Brahmakalasha’ song (Ajaneesh Loknath) has an aesthetic appeal thanks to Arvind’s cinematography, which captures a dance duet involving actors Rukmini Vasanth and Rishab. “The single shot required extensive rehearsal. Moreover, it had to be shot during the golden hours, just after sunset or moments before. So, thousands of dancers had to wait for hours together just for the 10-minute sequence. I could feel the tension on the sets. To ensure thousands of people take the right steps in a 15-20 minute span was a challenge.”

Filming ‘daiva’ scenes

Rishab’s portrayal of divine possession in the first part earned him acclaim, including a National Award. The prequel, too, has the *daiva* portions, which have now become the hallmark of the franchise. “During these portions, you can feel the positive vibes on the sets. For Rishab, it’s challenging to be in that zone for long hours. So, we go for as few takes as possible. For a cinematographer, it’s very easy to get overwhelmed by those scenes, but it was important for me not to get carried away,” he explains.

VFX work

The fine fusion of VFX and cinematography is another plus in *Kantara: Chapter 1*. The tiger, which has an integral role in the plot, was created with great planning, says Arvind. “We would give daily feedback to our VFX supervisor, Sanjit and spend an hour every day checking the VFX work. The tiger you see in the movie is perhaps the 15th or the 20th version.”

Rishab’s energy

Arvind is a regular collaborator with Rishab. “Right from his debut directorial, *Ricky* (2016), to *Kantara: Chapter 1*, his energy has remained constant. Rishab is one of the few who can get thousands of people on their feet and get them to give their best.”

Technology-enhancing drama

Arvind credits the smart usage of technology for the positive output of the action sequences. He picks the first fight scene – which introduces Rishab Shetty’s character – as an example to reiterate his point. “That’s the only sequence where we used a global shutter camera. With that camera, even if you move or shake it extensively, the image will still be clear. The entire fight is a single shot executed with hand-held cinematography.” Arvind also opens up on the scene inside the forest, where the antagonist Kulashekhara (essayed by Gulshan Devaiah) orders the mass killing of the tribal community. The highlight of the long scene is the breathtaking drone shot. “That’s an FPV drone that is used a lot in movies, especially by fight masters to achieve dynamic shots.”

The indie path

Known for her playback hits, singer Shweta Mohan on finding her voice beyond film music

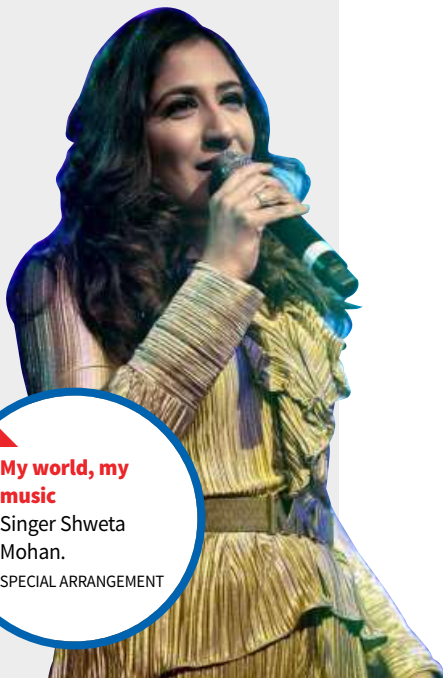
Nidhi Adlakha
nidhi.adlaka@thehindu.co.in

“All these years, I have been singing for someone else’s music, and that is my forte,” says Shweta Mohan, adding, “But when I listen to a favourite singer, Arijit Singh, for example, as a fan I want to listen to his original music.” The singer says she has been working on her own independent tracks. “One is almost complete; it is a pop song in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi. Next is a love track, and I have more in the pipeline. The idea is to keep giving out more of my music.”

Known for Tamil hits like ‘Hey Minnale’ (*Amaran*), ‘Vaa Vaathi’ (*Vaathi*), ‘Maya Nadhi’ (*Kabali*), ‘Enna Solla’ (*Thangamagan*), among several others, Shweta draws inspiration for her original music from the world around her. “While my first single titled ‘Yaavum Enadhe’ (Tamil) / ‘Sab Mera Hai’ (Hindi) spoke about how it’s good to be selfish for yourself and your world, my second single, ‘Amma’, was a tribute to my mother, Sujatha Mohan,” she says, adding that she is currently creating romantic tracks. “These are tunes that came to me while I was travelling or on a shoot.”

The artiste is also working on singer S Janaki’s compositions. “She has composed and written four new beautiful tunes and asked me to make them into full-fledged songs. She has written them in Hindi, and we are also making the Tamil versions with Gangai

Amaran sir penning the lyrics.” Given Shweta’s vast repertoire, is there a song she believes was written just for her? ‘Hey Minnale’ comes to her mind first. “The song begins with *chakkare* (a term of endearment in Tamil and Malayalam), and when I heard it, I had an instant connection. I call the people I love *chakkare* too.” An artiste’s evolution is inevitable. “As you evolve as a person, your music will also change,” says Shweta, referring to how her music has changed after her daughter Sreshtha was born eight years ago. “Singing is all about the mind and the heart. You don’t perform the same way twice. Motherhood has grounded me, and I have grown as a person with her,” says Shweta, adding that she now plays the piano occasionally. “I try and dust off the cobwebs,” Shweta laughs, “When I sit at the piano, I get transported to my old self. It is my happy place.”



My world, my music
Singer Shweta Mohan.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Setting the scene

Meet the team behind Eunoians Studio, which worked on the animation for recent hit film *Lokah*

Shilpa Nair Anand
shilpa.nair@thehindu.co.in

The *Lokah - Chapter 2* announcement is quite the teaser, adding to the drama is the animation which has a distinct, graphic novel-like quality. It is dramatic and has generated a buzz of anticipation for the next chapter. For the team of a Kochi-based animation studio, Eunoians Studio, tucked away

in a bylane in Edappally, it is a source of pride and joy. They are the team behind the animation in *Lokah - Chapter 1* *Chandra* and the *Chapter 2* announcement. This is a big moment for Eunoians, founded in 2014 by classmates at C-DiT (Centre for Development of Imaging Technology), Thiruvananthapuram. While *Lokah* has catapulted them into the big league, gaining them massive exposure and praise globally, they

Drawn to life (Seated from left) Azeem Kattali, Imodraj Mohanamani, Seerow Unni, and Jeroy Joseph; (below) a still from *Lokah - Chapter 2*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

also recently won the Grand Prix in Animation at the MADDY’s (Madras Advertising Club Awards) for their work in *Bramayugam* (2024). The founders – Azeem Kattali, Seerow Unni, Imodraj Mohanamani, Rajesh Velachery, Mithun Krishna, and Jeroy Joseph – are, understandably, on cloud nine. “We are overwhelmed by the response. We see it as a reward for our struggles in the past decade.” All except Jeroy were classmates at C-DiT where they met when they came together to study Animation after graduation. Explaining what Eunoians means, he says, “It means beautiful thinkers and we like word play. It is one word in English which has all the vowels!” *Lokah*, which recently crossed the ₹300 crore-mark in global box office collections, is still being analysed and one of the hotly-discussed aspects are

the Easter eggs buried in the title cards. The 26 frames created by Eunoians are loaded with hints, clues and suggestions, with references being cleverly embedded. Animation in the film complements the action, organically taking the story forward. “*Lokah* was the entire package. Usually, we come into the picture, literally, in the pre-production phase. But for this film, we came in the post-production phase. The Easter eggs have come up for much discussion, which means people watched the film carefully.”

The entire team, Azeem says, was able to contribute more than a regular animation studio because “we are not just animators, they are artists, motion graphics artists and other aspects of what goes into this work”. Thanks to the title animation, *Lokah* starts with a certain grandeur and depth which communicates the vastness of the universe it inhabits. Although sometimes it gives off anime-like vibes, Balam J, an Eunoian, who was the creative director of the *Lokah* animation, says, “For the title animation and flashback sequences, we were given, as references, works such as Rembrandt’s paintings. We were to give them a feel of grandeur, an epic-like look.”

The team has a couple of films on hand – Rahul Sadasivan’s Pranav Mohanlal-starrer *Dies Irae* and the Arjun Ashokan-starrer *Chatha Pacha*, directed by Advait Nayar – but they don’t want to position themselves as a cinema-only company. “We have a mixed portfolio, working with Government projects, corporate clients and the entertainment business.” We will do any kind of work related to our field. It is only that cinema has made us famous,” says Azeem.



Celebrating King Khan

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan is set to be honoured by PVR Inox with the Birthday Film Festival, which will re-release his biggest blockbusters.

According to a press release, the special film festival will start on October 31, ahead of the actor’s 60th birthday on November 2. This will be a two-week-long film festival that will run across 30-plus cities and 75-plus cinemas. In a statement, Shah Rukh Khan said, “Cinema has always been my home, and seeing these films find their way back to the big screen feels like a beautiful reunion. These movies are not just my stories; they belong to the audience that have lovingly embraced them over the last 33 years.” The lineup includes *Chennai Express*, *Devdas*, *Dil Se*, *Main Hoon Na* and *Jawan*. Shah Rukh will next feature in *King*. Helmed by Siddharth Anand, who has previously worked with the actor in *Pathaan*, *King* also stars Suhana Khan, Deepika Padukone and Abhishek Bachchan in pivotal roles.



Superstar dreams

The makers of Malayalam star Dulquer Salmaan’s upcoming film *Kaantha* have announced that the film will release in theatres on November 14. The upcoming film is directed by Selvamani Selvaraj, known for directing *Nila* (2016) and the acclaimed Netflix documentary series *The Hunt for Veerappan*. The makers had earlier released the film’s teaser, which shows Dulquer as a superstar who has been trained all his life by his father (Samuthirakani) to be in films. However, as time passes, Dulquer and Samuthirakani seem to develop an unexplained animosity towards each other. In the teaser, Samuthirakani is seen throwing chairs at Dulquer. Starring Bhagyashree Borse as the female lead, *Kaantha* has music scored by Jhanu Chanthar. Dani Sanchez Lopez has served as the cinematographer, while Llewellyn Anthony Gonsalves is the editor. Dulquer was last seen in the film *Lucky Bhaskar*, which performed well at the box office in 2024. He also appeared in a cameo in *Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra*.