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The poetry of space

Two of Chennai's iconic buildings, the Museum Theatre and the National Art Gallery inside the Government Museum Complex, return to dazzle heritage enthusiasts after a long, multi-crore renovation. We take a look inside



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On a scalding summer day, the pink sandstone cupolas shine brighter. While cruising down the Pantheon flyover, they catch one by surprise begging a second, curious glance. Further down, the structure teases one by revealing its ornate jharokha (stone window) and intricate arches reminiscent of Mughal architecture – a sight surely uncharacteristic of the chaos that is Egmore.

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There is a wonderfully still moment at the beginning of a theatre production when the audience has settled into its seats and is visited by ghosts of plays past. On a muggy weekday morning at the Museum Theatre, Egmore, time, history and the spirits of actors, musicians, dancers and art aficionados hang heavily in the air, like the newly-furbished velvet curtains on stage.

The 1896-built theatre is part of the Government Museum complex founded by Scottish surgeon Edward Balfour, an Orientalist, who also pioneered forest conservation and public health in India. This complex on Pantheon Road houses the red-brick colonnaded museum with its prized Chola bronzes and antiquities from the time of Emperor Augustus when sea-faring Romans first made landfall in the Indian peninsula; the Connemara library whose stunning interiors compete with its vast literary collection; and the recently-renovated National Art Gallery.

The complex was built during the heyday of the British Raj with most of it designed by Henry Irwin – he built the Museum Theatre as a red-brick building in Classical Italianate style. N Sundararajan, Assistant Director-in charge, Technical, Department of Museums, says, “Over time there was seepage from the domed ceiling, leading to mold on the walls. It necessitated renovation which was carried out over three years at a cost of ₹3.4 crores both by the Public Works Department and Jeernodhar Conservators.”

When you cut through a large swathe of time, the one constant that has remained is Museum Theatre as a popular venue for the performing arts. From outside it appears to the viewer in layers, its top crowned with a sash of white paint like a daintily-iced cake. It is also perhaps among the rare few theatres that are surrounded by cannons captured in colonial



conquests from far afield as Burma and Tranquebar – among them Tipu Sultan's tiger-head cannon from the siege of Seringapatam (1799). Up a flight of hewn granite steps is the double-arched, broad colonnaded verandah where the audience gathers in anticipation before walking in through tall teak doors.

A peek inside

The inside resembles an oval Elizabethan theatre where the seating is gallery-style with the side and central aisles leading to the pit separated by ornate grille work. The pit with its rows of seating closest to the stage has the premium seats. When it was first constructed, the chairs were of wood and early theatre-goers brought along a cushion to minimise discomfort. Later, the 550 seats were cushioned. “Now we have reduced the number to 450,” says Sundararajan, speaking of the olive and wine-colour upholstered seats. “The space now allows for push-back chairs.”

Electric lights illumined the theatre only in 1909 and air-conditioning only by the turn of this century. Earlier, ceiling fans and breeze from the open doors ventilated the hall but the noisy road outside took away from the theatre experience. A grand chandelier hangs from the ceiling and subtle lights mounted on the walls showcase floral plaster work in hues of mustard and white. Above the stage is more ornate plaster work, and the midnight-blue and

Yesterday once more The inside and the renovated facade of the Museum Theatre. S SHIVA RAJ

maroon velvet drapes glisten under powerful spotlights.

“The wooden stage has been redone, keeping the trap-door on the floor intact. The lift that was worked manually and acted as a dramatic tool has now been motorised,” says Sundararajan, adding, “The acoustics continue to be superb; a new audio system has been installed. There has never been a need for an amplifier.”

The Museum Theatre's acoustics has always been its crown jewel, a fact vouched for by the city's performing arts community whose darling it has always been. Earlier, even the faintest whisper and sigh on stage could be heard across the theatre, which has seen romance, murder, laughter, and anger unravel over the course of the century.

PC Ramakrishna, thespian and past president of The Madras Players says, “Museum Theatre is home. We've performed here for close to 50 years and there are very few places in India that offer such a rich theatrical experience. I first went on stage here in 1969 for Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, in which actor-writer Girish Karnad too featured. The stage has an apron that allows for the actor to commune with the audience personally. Museum Theatre has ample parking, the rates are reasonable, and of course there is the incredible acoustics. We didn't use mics upto the 1990s and we somehow got heard. It's a great place for chamber music too and should be used more for the performing arts. But the changes have to be more than just cosmetic and more cast and crew friendly.” The stage flanked by a generously large green-room has hosted school annual days, Christmas musicals, jazz and opera concerts and that gold standard it is home to – a stage play. With its return as a performance space, the Museum Theatre continues to remain a solid, touchable survival from the best years of our lives.



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The National Art Gallery, an architectural marvel that Chennai should be proud of, despite being 115 years old, remains a mystery. Nestled inside the Government Museum campus, the Gallery is now open to the public after being shut for a renovation project that spanned more than a decade, as per official records. The long-drawn out renovation is perhaps the reason why the historical building is alien to young public memory.

An ode to Akbar's dream doorway, the Bulund Darwaza in Fatehpur Sikri, the structure built in the Jaipuri-Mughal style by Namberumal Chetty in 1909 was designed by Henry Irwin, a regular contributor to the British-era Madras skyline. It was earlier called the Victoria Memorial Hall, and was one of two buildings meant to honour Queen Victoria. It hosted the Victoria Technical Institute until 1951, when it was christened one of India's National Art galleries. Most paintings that belonged to the archival section of the museum then were relocated. "It is Chennai's only Indo-Saracenic structure inspired by Mughal architecture," says N Sundararajan, Assistant Director-in charge, Technical, Department of Museums.

Today, busloads of (mostly) Architecture students, and a steady stream of visitors and tourists through the day, is a happy sight. There has been an increase of 200 to 300 in footfall per day since the reopening. Past the mammoth facade, unique for its pale pink palette, and replete with bulbous

The poetry of space

domes, pointed arches, *jaali* work, minarets, and stained glass, an amalgamation of Mughal, Persian and Hindu elements that came to prominence in the 19th Century, is a deep hallway, sans pillars. Housed here are over 120 works of art moved from the adjacent Contemporary Art Gallery.

"When cracks were identified

on the roof, the building was no longer in a condition to house the paintings. The cement layering was disintegrating," says J Kalathy, Curator, National Art Gallery.

After years of back and forth, the renovations were sanctioned for ₹12 crores. "Most of the paintings were cleaned by chemical conservation before displaying them again. The broken frames have also been repaired. Apart from that, we have erected panels for the 12 British portraits that were not in a good condition, now saved through chemical conservation." The upkeep of the facade is hinged on sourcing pink sandstone from Andhra

Pradesh, adds Sundararajan.

The newly plastered walls of the white hallway broadly categorise the art, some of which are undated, into the schools of Tanjore, Mysore, and Rajput paintings. While some are recreations, specific canvases like that of the portrait of Rani Durgawati, or Jehangir atop an elephant are priceless originals.

While the display lacks a narrative, and is sometimes ambiguous in its descriptors and attributions, this cross-section speaks volumes of the museum's vast collection. It is important to also note that a more sensible lighting design and the use of non-reflective glass in vitrines, would have helped the viewing experience a great deal more.

The entry into the hallway is flanked by smaller rooms that host abstract canvases apart from bronze and wooden sculptures by the veterans of the Madras Art Movement. The idea was to bring South Indian works of art into focus, adds Kalathy. Some of DP Roy Chowdhury's rare, poignant works in bronze, and Redappa Naidu's distinctive strokes that are hard to come by, make for great viewing.

However, the gallery's small yet brilliant collection of the original works by Raja Ravi Varma (which were conserved in 2020) are an easy crowd puller. Here, one can see the nuances that make a typical Ravi Varma canvas, up close, through The Miser, Yashoda and Krishna, Old Peon Taking a Nap and Mother Preparing Vegetables. The beauty in each of these oils on canvas cannot be contested. "But the most popular work that people specifically come for is Shakuntala. It is a treasure for India," says Kalathy.

The grand balustrades and vintage hanging lights are now a portal to the past, putting the curious minds of 20-somethings to rest as they enthusiastically pose for the camera in front of the facade. A quick selfie with the bronze Nataraja sculpture inside, is next on the agenda.

There is no one way to appreciate history.



Hymn for the arts
(Top) National Art Gallery after renovation; (above) a painting from the Tanjore school on display; (right) DP Roy Chowdhury's Victims of Hunger. S SHIVA RAJ



To watch a related video, scan the QR code

Cheesemongers unite

The Desi Dairy dialogue, held recently at The Farm in Chennai, brought together cheese makers, pastoral dairies and fermentation specialists. Meet the cheesemakers who use traditional knowledge to craft contemporary cheese

Anisha Menezes

The Farm



Arul Futnani, at The Farm, Semmencheri, says making cheese just a 100 metres from where the buffaloes are milked, is a privilege. "That yields better quality milk," he says. Starting in 2014, with buffalo milk mozzarella to top their wood fired pizzas, they used the leftover whey for ricotta. "Then we started making tomme, which is a stronger cheese, and for those who need something in between, we created the jack variety of cheese," says Arun. Their cheese platter is now a happy blend of 17 cheese varieties including soft cheese like the double cream Bloomy Rind 1/277, Piccolo and aged cheeses like the Tomme de Semmencheri and Queso Coromandel.

The Farm is at 1-277, Old Mahabalipuram Road, Semmancheri, Chennai. Call 9176050562 for reservations.

Ladakh Cheese Shop

For casei culture in the unforgetting cold in Leh, using a raw milk culture, clabber (produced by allowing unpasteurised milk to turn sour at a specific temperature, with a yoghurt-like consistency) works better, creating cheese that tastes of its terroir. Sunil Meka, founder of Ladakh Cheese Farm, (currently on a six-month hiatus), makes over a hundred batches of cheese for six months in the year, each with a batch weight of around four kilograms. It is then aged, near the Stakna monastery, 25 kilometres from Leh. From parmesan, cheddar, gruyère, tomme, gouda to mozzarella, burrata, stracciatella, ricotta, halloumi and cream cheese, Sunil says he wants to encourage pastoralists to, "continue their herding and nomadic traditions, even in very trying times."

For details follow @ladakhcheesefarm on Instagram.



Bombay Fromagerie

Asma Sayed, a cheesemonger, and co-founder of Bombay Fromagerie, believes that working with pastoral communities to make artisanal cheese is the best way to add value to the rich, nutrient dense milk of local herds. She has worked extensively with pastoral communities in Gujarat and along with her co-founder Ayesha Sayed, is on a mission to bring pastoral cheese to the Indian market. Bombay Fromagerie stocks kalari from Jammu, camel milk cheshire from Rajasthan and a variety of other hard and soft cheese from across the country. "Preserving pastoralism is important, as the culture is slowly dwindling," says Asma.

For details follow @bombayfromagerie on Instagram.



Panchal Dairy

Panchal Dairy in Gujarat, follows pastoral cheese making, using goat and sheep milk, available in plenty from local herding communities. Started in 2022 by two Maldhari pastoralists, Arpan Kalotra and Bhimsinhbhai Ghanghal, the venture translates their rich dairy culture into value added products. Terroir driven flavours of goat milk are transformed into chevre, feta, halloumi, tomme de Sayla (semi hard cheese with notes of butterscotch), tynsboro (French style lactic cheese coated) and St. Marcellin (goat milk cheese). Sheep milk is turned into ricotta, pecorino fresco, roquefort and macheo. The founders trained with Namrata Sundaresan of Käse Cheese, Chennai.

For details check panchaldairy.com and www.kasecheese.com.

Highlights from Mahindra Percussion Festival 2024 Bengaluru: Taufiq Qureshi's genius, Swarathma goes wild, and more



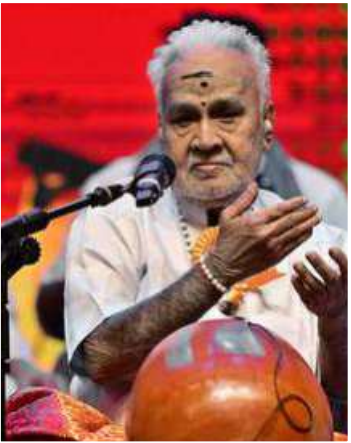
Praveen Sudevan
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For two days (March 23 and 24), the Prestige Srihari Khoday Center for Performing Arts in Bengaluru thrummed with the energy of the Mahindra Percussion Festival. The event showcased a dazzling array of percussive styles, drawing on traditions from across India and the world.

Highlights included the Charu Hariharan Quartet's opening blend of classical Indian percussion and contemporary influences, and Two Summ's exploration of the digital-analog MIDI mridangam. Swarathma, featuring "Thavil" Raja and the Beat Gurus, thrilled the audiences with a fusion of African rhythms, Indian percussion, and soaring violin melodies.

Day two continued the rhythmic exploration with Rhythms of India, highlighting the country's rich musical heritage with a rousing performance led by BC Manjunath, Darshan Doshi, Varijashree Venugopal, and Praveen Rao. Ashtanayika - Kal Aur Aaj presented a compelling fusion of ancient poetry, Kuchipudi dance, rap, and contemporary music. The festival concluded with a dazzling show by Taufiq Qureshi's Surya, where traditional Indian melodies intertwined with jazz, folk, Afro, Latin, and contemporary sounds.

The Mahindra Percussion Festival, in association with The Hindu, was co-sponsored by Mahindra Finance, Paul John Visitor Centre, and Carlsberg Smooth Soda and promoted and produced by Hyperlink Brand Solutions.



(Clockwise from top left) Two Summ; The Hindu's #FeelYourBeatZone; Swarathma Percussive Experience ft. Thavil Raja and Beat Gurus; Ashtanayika Kal Aur Aaj; Charu Hariharan Quartet; Rhythms of India; Taufiq Qureshi's Surya; and Vikku Vinayakram's Ghatam Symphony. K MURALI KUMAR AND SUDHAKARA JAIN

Home chefs share their own takes on *nonbu kanji*, the gruel that is eaten when breaking fast during the holy month in South India

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The delicious dishes prepared for evening iftar and pre-dawn suhour meals during the Islamic month of Ramzan have become a subject of food tourism, especially on social media, where kebabs, samosas, rolls and a myriad other fried snacks rule the roost, alongside sugary milkshakes and juices.



A cup of *kanji* for Ramzan

But crowning it all, quietly, is the *nonbu kanji*, a mushy porridge that is prepared fresh every day in Muslim households and mosques across southern India.

Consumed only during iftar, when the day's fast comes to an end, *nonbu kanji* is comfort food for the abstaining soul, aromatic like biryani, but without the grease and curried

aesthetics of the rice dish. It is considered to be easier to digest after long hours of abstinence from food and water.

The *kanji*'s variants include the Arab gruel 'harees', and, closer home, the Hyderabad 'haleem'. All these recipes involve slow cooking wheat and lentils with butter and seasoned mutton, beef or poultry to a mash. The *nonbu kanji*'s warm presence on the iftar table makes it the perfect foil for accompaniments like samosas, pakodas, mint chutney, or pickles.

Meals to share (Left) Nombu Kanji served at the mosque on Chennai's Ellis Road; (below) Zulfia Syed. R RAGU AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"In South India, where it is regularly prepared in neighbourhood mosques as well as homes during Ramzan, each street can have its own distinctive style and flavour," says Hazena Sayed, a food blogger from Tirunelveli who has documented 300 traditional recipes of the Ravuther Muslim community, and runs the sautefrynake.com website.

A staple Her fondest memory is of *jeeraga kanji*, made by her grandmother, with the porridge of samba rice and moong dal thickened using ground coconut paste towards the end. With the delicate seasoning of *jeeragam* (cumin), the *kanji* would once make for a sumptuous start to iftar, she recalls.

"The use of ingredients depends on the region. *Kanji* is made with coconut milk extract rather than paste in the coastal town of Kayalpattinam,

which we have picked up in Tirunelveli too, whereas in some of the interior towns, *kanji* is tempered with mint leaves flash-fried in hot ghee. Coconut and fresh mint are essential to the flavour profile," she says.

Chutneys are a must. "Brinjal is boiled or char-grilled, and then mashed with spices into a paste. We also use boiled yam and colocasia, or shallots and dried red chillies to make chutneys," says Hazena.

Among her own spins to the *kanji*, are a version that uses oats and cabbage instead of rice, and the *kaima urundai kanji* where mincemeat balls are cooked in coconut milk before they are added to the basmati rice gruel. "Ramzan is not just about feasting. It is more about sharing our food with the less privileged, and a dish like *nonbu kanji* is the ideal example of this," says Zulfia Syed, a YouTuber who creates culinary content from Tirunelveli and

the United Arab Emirates through her channel Zulfia's Recipes.

"Since its quantity can be scaled up, *nonbu kanji* is best for mass catering during Ramzan, especially in mosques. Caterers usually prepare the gruel over firewood stoves and leave it on 'dum' (heat compress) for a few hours before serving it," she says.

Kanji can be a meal in itself, which is why Zulfia advises home cooks to be sparing with the measurements when making it at home. "The fragrance of *nonbu kanji* announces to the world that something special is being cooked. The biryani-like aroma

tantalises people living next door, even though it is just a simple gruel that is being prepared. We add carrots and beans to the mixture, to make it more nutritious and suitable for our vegetarian friends," says Ayesha Begum, a Tiruchi-based homemaker.



Breads and brews from Tuscany

You may have seen the grey walls and haunted house facade of the Tuscan Table in RA Puram on Instagram reels. On our first visit months ago, there was little to write about. The restaurant was awaiting a chef from France to train the staff, as we navigated through excessively buttered croissant sandwiches and abrasive open toasts.

Responding to customer feedback, the team has now crafted a breakfast menu featuring buttery croissants, eggs, breads, beans and brews. The not so 'gentle plate', a build-your-bite breakfast platter, offers a delightful array of flavours with slices of mandarin orange, silky brown butter sautéed mushrooms, eggs, emmental cheese, tangy baked beans, tart homemade strawberry compote, and butter, served with toasted rye and sourdough bread slices. Despite the scorching weather, the hot lavender latte we try is a floral delight. The restaurant has certainly put their oven to full use as there is an array of croissants, puff pastries, breads, pithviers, cookies and more also available to indulge in. Smoothie bowls and granola bowls are also available, alongside artisanal tea options.

A meal for two at the Tuscan Table costs ₹1,500. It is located at Old 27A, New 60, 4th Main Road, RA Puram.

-Ananyaa Desikan

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When we raise our glasses to Pandan Club's first cocktail menu, the bartenders laugh. "Finally! This is the first time someone has said cheers at this bar," one of them chuckles. It has been a long wait.

Pandan Club, a Peranakan restaurant helmed by Chef Sashi Chelliah of *MasterChef Australia* fame, launched in Chennai in December 2022. Over the last year, co-founder Manoj Padmanabhan worked on their non-alcoholic menu, creating a line of craft drinks as they waited for their alcohol license to come through.

This week, they announced the launch of their fully stocked bar (operating under Chennai Best Recreation Club) with a new cocktail menu. Named The Shortest Route, it is a cheerful, flavour-packed journey between India and Singapore.

Discussing how Pandan Club's non-alcoholic craft drinks came together, Manoj says he decided to move away from soft drinks and sugary mocktails and instead build drinks from scratch using fresh, vibrant ingredients, then adding an Asian twist. "For example, we make sugarcane juice with galangal and yuzu instead of ginger and lemon," he says. The same philosophy has been carried into the cocktail menu, which features six specially crafted drinks, in addition to the classics.

"I don't like to 'cut copy paste' ideas, so I spent months building each of these cocktails, making



Sipping on Singapore

Inspired by Chennai and Singapore, these cocktails use modern mixology techniques and a splash of sea water

sure each is unique," he says, ordering a Serangoon Smith. A tribute to the many Indian goldsmiths on Singapore's Serangoon Street, the golden cocktail, served in a long stemmed



If you want to make an impact, you have to have the courage to be different

MANOJ PADMANABHAN
Co-founder, Pandan Club

glass, is a refreshing and potent blend of lemongrass gin, young coconut and gula melaka, a type of palm sugar. It comes with a sugar-spun Singaporean stamp, pressed on a flat square of kamarkattu.

Fun Chennai elements abound, as Manoj has focussed on story telling with this menu. His most quirky move is incorporating sea water in a steamy cocktail called Affair. "How hard is it to get a bucket of it from Marina beach?" he chuckles, adding that the water is distilled and then added to pandan scotch and palm jaggery. "It gives an elevated taste, instead of just adding salt," he says.

The cocktails use a slew of modern mixology

Popcorn in my rum A drink called Movie Night, part of Pandan Club's new cocktail menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

techniques like sous vide, fat washing and infusion. Cocktails are clean and spirit forward. But what makes them really stand out is their sense of humour.

The savoury Instant Noodles cocktail, admittedly an acquired taste, is a good example. Gin is steeped overnight with a pack of noodles and nori, then distilled. It is served cold, with a umami-rich noodle broth, along with addictively salty crackers. "Maybe not everyone will like it," says Manoj, "But if you want to make an impact, you have to have the courage to be different."

Pandan Club is at 39, Bazullah Road, Parthasarathi Puram, T Nagar, Chennai. Cocktails start at ₹575 plus tax.

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Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated April 4, 2024

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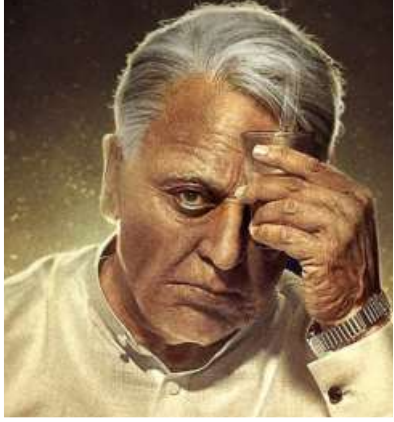
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Kamal Haasan is currently in a mental zone filled with political and campaign ideas. His focus is on the general elections that will take place in Tamil Nadu on April 19. With his political avatar hogging the limelight, the cinema personality Kamal Haasan has currently taken a backseat. But just for the next month or so. Because, after that, Kamal will start shooting for Mani Ratnam's *Thug Life*, a much-awaited collaboration for Tamil cinema fans. There's more in store, as Kamal tells us in a candid chat at *The Hindu* office in Chennai during a recent visit.

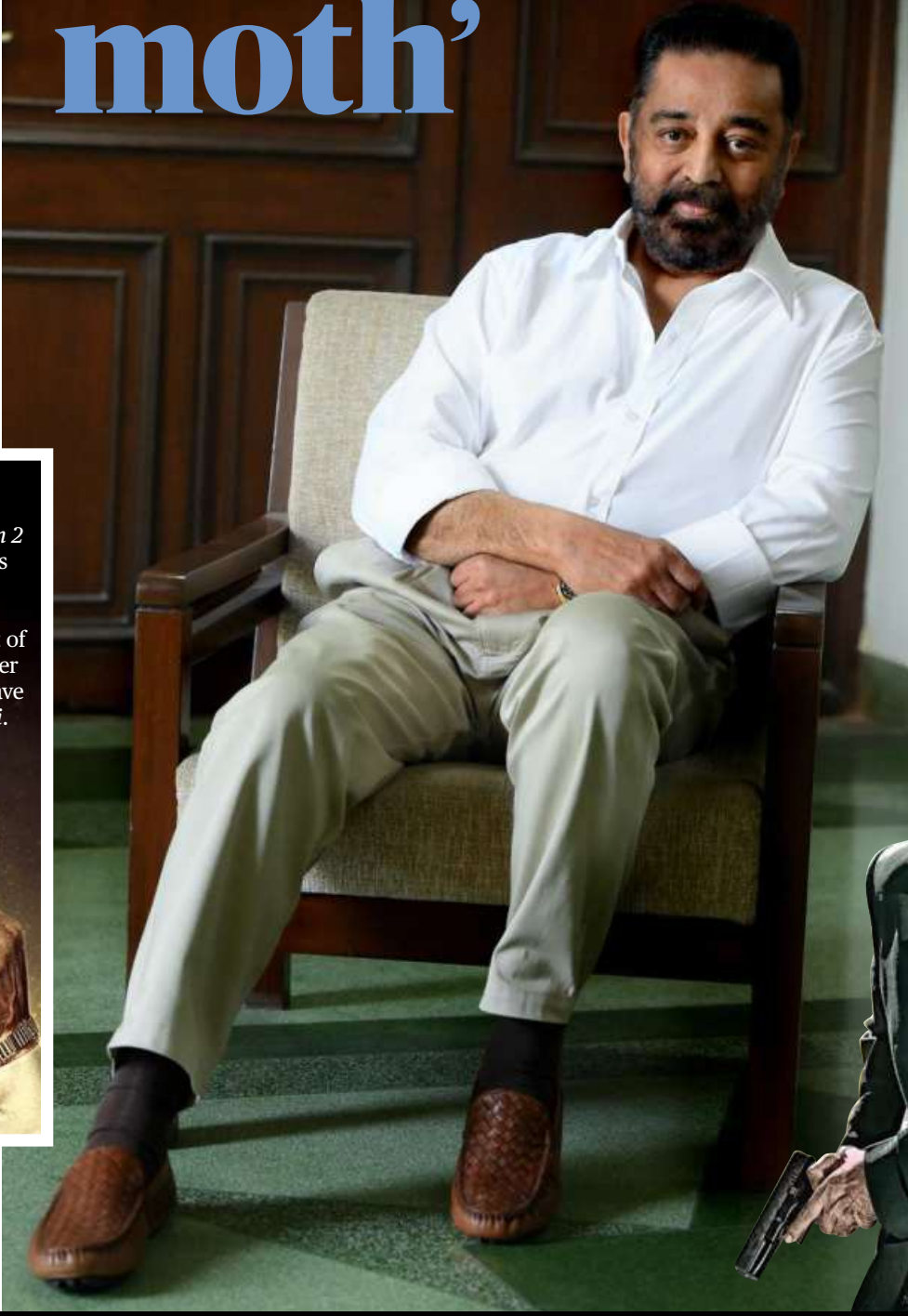
Upcoming projects

We have completed both *Indian 2* and *Indian 3*. Post-production is happening on the former now, and the post-production on the next part will follow. The shoot of *Thug Life* will kickstart soon after my election campaign. I also have a guest role in a film titled *Kalki*.



The reel deal Kamal Haasan at *The Hindu* office in Chennai.
JOHAN SATHYADAS

'I'm a limelight moth'



Manjummel Boys, a 'hat tip'

I'm a limelight moth. I'm grateful for the hat tip from the *Manjummel Boys* team, and it's an encomium to me, Ilaiyaraaja and the location.



Of Vishwaroopam and AI

When satellite TV came, my own mentor was on the opposition bench. I always thought of it as an allied industry and it soon became another branch of the film industry, revenue wise.

Years later, I anticipated the arrival of OTT players and wanted to be the first person doing it by releasing *Vishwaroopam* directly to home, because, for me, it is all about constantly expanding my audience demography... if there is a screen on a wristwatch, I would like to appear on it. But, some people demanded for a ban on it because they were invested heavily in theatres and they thought that this was competition. They tried to buy the film, but we disagreed on the mode of payment. I kept away because the whole industry was involved in such transactions, and I'd be blowing

the whistle for no reason except for personal benefit. This is the real reason behind the ban on *Vishwaroopam*. It was not because it was anti-Muslim; anyone who has watched the film will know that's not the case.

Today, we have artificial intelligence (AI). It is a new technology and we have to embrace it. But, we have to take care of the artists' livelihood, especially in a field like cinema, where there is nothing such as VRS or pension.



To watch the video interview, scan the QR code

Film city in Poonamallee

It should be an international hub of learning, because we are the largest filmmaking nation in the world. I want an institution that improves the quality of films. The reason why Malayalam cinema is edging ahead of us is because they are aware of international cinema. I want the faculty to be international, like how we did it in the IT industry, and once we study under the masters, we can take off.



Batting for Marudhanayagam

Marudhanayagam was an attempt in that direction [making an international project]. It was a trilingual – in Tamil, French and English. Even then, there was political interference; they thought it promoted a Muslim forefather for the struggle for independence, rather than Mangal Pandey. But, *Marudhanayagam* qualifies for more; the first Sepoy Mutiny happened hundred years before as is shown now. It happened in 1757 in Madurai, and the head of that mutiny was Marudhanayagam alias Mohammad Yusuf Khan.

The missing clue

Inspector Rishi creator Nandhini JS and cast members chat about making an investigative horror story for a new-gen audience

Bhuvanesh Chandar
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The long-format police procedural is one sub-genre that has certainly benefited from the OTT boom, especially in the Tamil streaming space. Prime Video has been putting its best foot forward with titles like *Suzhal: The Vortex* and *Vadhandhi: The Fable of Velonie*. But the upcoming 10-episode series, *Inspector Rishi*, is no ordinary cop story; in fact, the series takes on one of the least explored hybrid genres to tell its tale: investigative horror.

Inspector Rishi tells the story of a group of policemen investigating murders that are said to be the work of a *vanaratchi* (a forest spirit). If that is the case, why is the series titled after the cop leading the investigation and not something like...*Vanaratchi*? "When I started writing the story in 2010, Rishi's character is what popped up first. Naturally, he became the centre-point of the story," says series creator Nandhini JS.

Naveen Chandra
Actor Naveen Chandra describes his character, Rishi, as a calm and composed officer. "Rishi is

someone who doesn't believe in ghosts. Rishi is focussed on his job and until he cracks the case will not compromise on anything. He's so calm that even when he's facing a tense situation, he wouldn't show that so expressively," says Naveen.

It does seem from the success of cop titles on streaming platforms that the long format is helping creators dig deeper and explore characters further. On the short format, it surely seems like the mass masala cop has taken a back seat, with audiences liking better the off-beat cops like the ones Naveen played in *Ammu* or *Jigarthanda Double X*. Naveen credits the directors for writing such characters that are close to reality. "All these characters wear khaki, but each character has its own unique good and bad traits. For *Ammu*, somewhere it became like a reference from real life because I have seen people do that. *Jigarthanda* was complete

madness. *Inspector Rishi* is a very layered, intellectual character and I feel so proud to have gotten the opportunity to play this character," says Naveen.

Sunaina
In *Inspector Rishi*, Sunaina plays a forest guard named Kathy. "Playing a forest guard was quite a new experience because I didn't know what that job entails," she says. Having observed the Tamil industry for over 15 years as an actor, and having ventured into OTT even before the pandemic-induced boom (in Nandhini's *Nila Nila Odi Vaa* in 2018), Sunaina has seen how the writing of female characters has evolved over the years on the big and small screen. "A change is certainly happening, and I am also seeing more audiences demanding such a change. The audiences are telling the writers and directors that such and such actors deserve better-written characters."

She adds that though change is happening in films to some degree, OTTs have always been a good place for good character writing. "Credit goes to creators like Nandhini who started writing and making series. They knew that one can't live life without the women around them."

Kanna Ravi
Kanna Ravi plays a pious sub-inspector named Ayyanar Moorthy, whose journey, he says, is traced through how he helps Rishi crack the case. Choosing such roles is a conscious decision to avoid typecasting, says Kanna. "I like acting because it breaks the monotony. I want to see myself in different roles with different looks."

Inspector Ravi will stream on Prime Video from March 29



Changing times
Naveen Chandra and Sunaina in stills from *Inspector Rishi*.
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