

CHENNAI • Thursday, November 27, 2025

metro PLUS

THE HINDU



UPTO
25% off*
ON DIAMOND &
UNCUT DIAMOND VALUE
(EXCEPT SOLITAIRES)



FLAT
30% off*
PLATINUM JEWELLERY
ON MAKING CHARGES &
ON WASTAGE (VA)

Offers also applicable on Oriana Light Weight Diamond Jewellery

• GRT DIAMOND ASSURANCE •

- 100% BIS Hallmark for Purity
- Certified Quality Diamonds
- Accurate Weight-Based Pricing
- Transparent Pricing
- HUID HUID Mark
- Lifetime Maintenance Assurance
- Carat Assurance in Diamonds
- Ethically Sourced Diamonds
- Guaranteed Buyback

Tamil Nadu | Puducherry | Andhra Pradesh | Telangana | Karnataka || Singapore



Shop online at: grtjewels.com |

LIVE
VIDEO SHOPPING

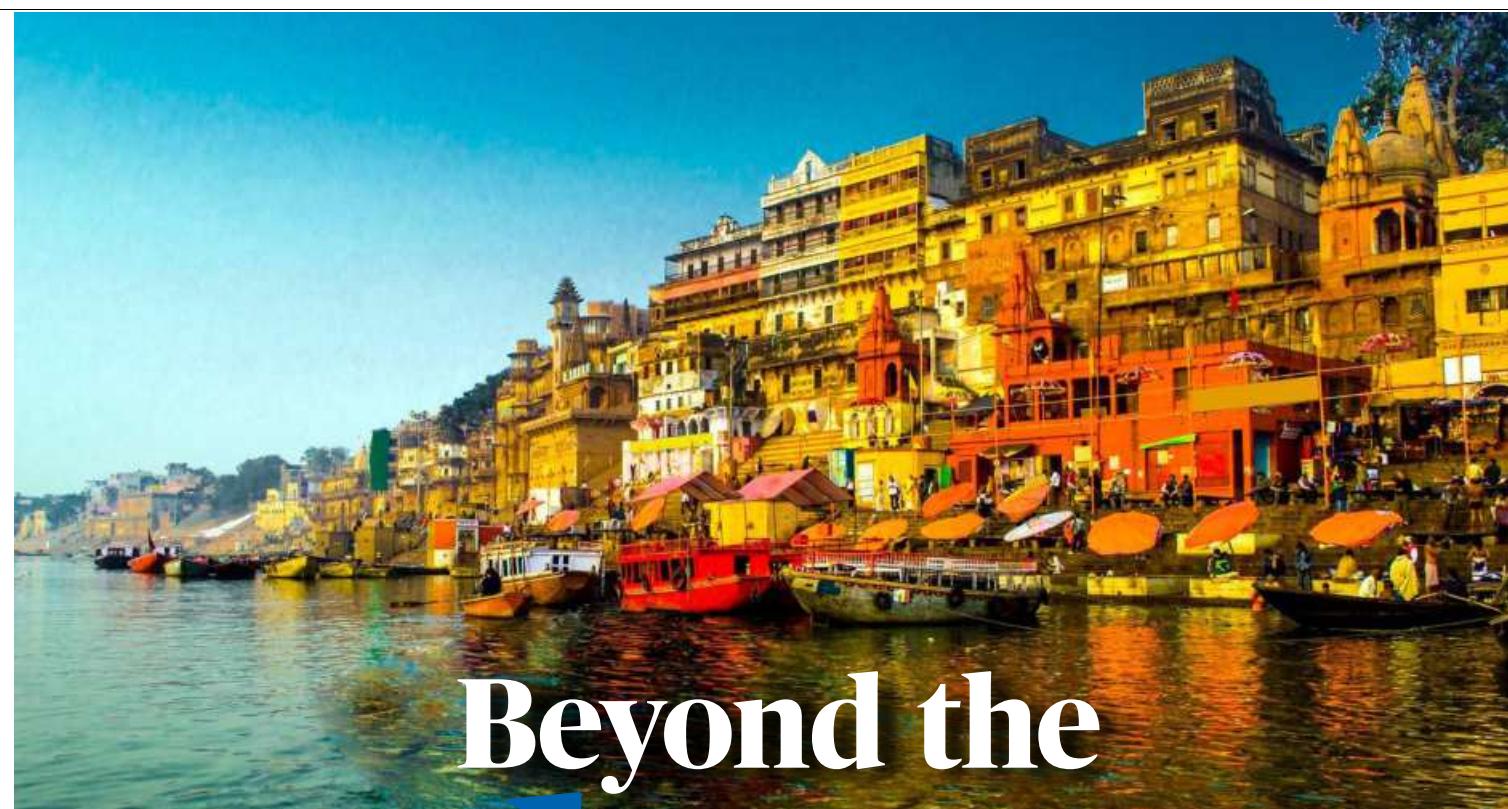
Shop from the comfort of your home |



: 1800 203 1000 / 1800 599 1515 | Follow us:

Store Locator





Beyond the ghats

In Varanasi, mornings unfold

with sacred chants and age-old
wrestling arenas. We explore them with
some spicy chaat and a cup of lassi

Srinivasa Ramanujam

srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Varanasi is awake. Even before the morning sun's rays hit Varanasi's ghats, the Ganga Aarthi begins. Replete with chanting of hymns, this aarthis, an everyday ritual, is an offering to the magnificent river.

On its banks, a rare quiet envelopes Assi Ghat. Someone is chanting 'Om'. A few yards away, someone else is offering a surya namaskar to the rising sun.

These still mornings offer Varanasi's finest moments. "There's a local myth that these neighbourhoods were all part of a big forest, and hence 'van ras' lent its name to the place," says Pukit Gupta, who runs Banaras Lanes, which curates walking tours, "For many, this is the place for spirituality and education."

The narrow gullies here have a thousand stories to tell, each echoing with myth and history. They prompted celebrated writer Mark Twain to describe the town as, "older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

Varanasi - also known as Banaras or Kashi - has 84 ghats right now, with four built in recent times by the government. About 80 were built by different rulers, most from the Maratha empire. Explains Pukit, "They would come here once in every year to perform certain rituals, and when they left, a few people would be left behind as caretakers."

This explains the many festivals that are celebrated throughout the year in Varanasi. As Pukit says, "In the 365 days of a year, there are 366 festivals here."

To get a heady dose of celebration, look no further than the famous Kasi Viswanath, the city's spiritual pulse

that finds a mention in many sacred books. Destroyed and rebuilt over centuries, it remains the place Kasi is most famously associated with.

We visit at around 10.30pm, as the temple gears up for shayan aarthis, an almost-informal good night gesture to the gods. Organised by local residents and not yet on things-to-do-in-Varanasi travel lists, the shayan aarthis is an audio visual experience. Hundreds of devotees chant a set of hymns in unison, almost like a choir. And the most beautiful aspect is none of these hymns are written, according to Abhishek Mishra, a Varanasi-based pandit, "While there are set hymns

rain-washed soil.

"Almost everything you eat here," Dharma tells me, "comes from within a few kilometres. That is our zero-kilometre kitchen."

This "zero-kilometre philosophy" lies at the core of Brij Sone Bagh's ethos. Vegetables come from neighbouring farms, milk from local dairy farmers and grains such as kodo millets and lentils from nearby villages. Even the spices and mahua-based recipes have been sourced through local women's cooperatives.

This approach cuts down food miles, sustains rural livelihoods and gives guests a taste of regional cuisine.

Jungle safari

Back to the safari, we pause for breakfast at a designated forest clearing, where chef Dharma and the nature guides lay out warm parathas, fresh fruit and chilled watermelon juice on the hood of our jeep.

Before leaving the Tala zone, we make a brief stop at Sheshshaiya, one of Bandhavgarh's most remarkable archaeological sites. Located deep within the forest at the base of a moss-covered hill, this ancient sandstone statue of Lord Vishnu reclining on the seven-hooded serpent, Sheshnag, is believed to date back to the 10th Century AD. The sculpture is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India and remains a symbol of the region's layered history.

That evening, I walk to a nearby village where only three families continue the local craft of bamboo weaving.

"There used to be more of us," says Karishma Basoi, deftly splitting a bamboo strip. "Now, only a few make tourist crafts."

Her fingers move with a memory that predates the resort, the tiger reserve, even tourism itself.



Rooted in the wild

In Bandhavgarh, we set out on a safari, amid vultures and deer. Will we spot a tiger?

Nivedita Ganguly

nivedita.ganguly@thehindu.co.in

The sounds of the forest deepen; the rustle of bamboo, the rhythmic call of drongos and somewhere ahead, the faint alarm of a spotted deer. A few turns later, as we round a bend, a tiger appears, reclining beneath a sal tree, its striped flank rising and falling in slow rhythm. For a moment, all sound stills. The forest holds its breath.

I am on a safari at Bandhavgarh, with Guljar Singh, who has been exploring these forests for years. "The forest changes with every rain," he says as we drive past patches of grassland and sal thickets. Bandhavgarh's core area spans 720 square kilometres, with an additional 816 in the buffer.

We spot the Indian pitta, resplendent in turquoise and orange, hopping across a fallen branch. Jungle owlets blink from their perch and a giant wood spider hangs between two trees, its web glinting like glass. Overhead, a small group of vultures circle lazily in widening spirals. The Tala zone, guide Guljar Singh explains, has become one of

Bandhavgarh's few remaining strongholds for these endangered birds.

The tiger may be the highlight of the trip, but there is plenty to keep me engaged for the rest of my stay at Brij Sone Bagh, the newest retreat by Brij Hotels. Chiefly, the peace. The first thing I notice when I arrive, after driving four hours from Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur airport, is the layered sounds of the forest. Cicadas, a distant call of an owl and the rustle of leaves.

"This retreat sits within a natural forest of 32 acres," says Arvind Bhende, regional development head of Brij Hotels, over glasses of cold, spiced buttermilk. Pathways curve naturally around the terrain, and gardens merge seamlessly with the forest.

Farm to kadhai I dine beneath an old jamun tree. The cool air carries the scent of damp soil. A local, dressed in traditional attire to honour the serpent god, plays the flute as chef Dharmender Kumar - or Dharma as he is fondly called - tends to an open barbecue nearby. He slowly turns the chicken marinated earlier in the day with turmeric, ginger, garlic and a blend of foraged forest

herbs. The aroma of smoke, spice and mahua blooms mingles with the night air. Dharma invites me into his kitchen for what he calls a "farm to kadhai" session the next day. He has brought produce from the market - amla, bunches of coriander and green chillies. With measured ease, he shows me how to prepare amla pickle and a sharp, green chutney, adjusting the flavours by instinct rather than recipe. The chicken we marinade together - wrapped in banana leaves and slow-cooked in bamboo - appears later that evening for dinner, tender and fragrant, tasting of smoke, herbs and



Forest haven A tiger spotting; and inside the resort. Getty IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Spiritual awakening
Snapshots from Varanasi; (above) a training session at the Tulsi Ghat Akhada.
SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM/I STOCKPHOTO

for other pujas in the temple, the recitation during the shayan aarthis has been composed and devised by the local residents."

Fight club

At the Tulsi Ghat Akhada, a traditional Indian-style gym established in the 16th Century and one of the oldest functioning akhadas, young men train under experienced fighters learning martial arts and mud wrestling.

When we visit, we watch a young student place a mudgar - or the wooden club, usually used to build strength and endurance - on G Sharma's shoulders. "Traditionally, this akhada used to train warriors and prepare young men for protection of pilgrimage routes," he reveals, after lifting the 25-kg mudgar more than 25 times, an act that draws awe and praise among his fellow trainers.

Today, many young boys and girls come here to strength train and learn gusthi for local tournaments. A custodian of traditional indigenous forms of physical training, the Tulsi Ghat Akhada is a reminder of Varanasi's physical culture, which held as much value as its spirituality.

Food for thought

The Varanasi of today also offers rich heritage experiences to travellers. Many properties have sprung up near the ghats, like the recently-opened juSTa Luxe - Kashi Parampara, a 80-year-old ancestral home, which offers experiences such as a traditional aarthis welcome, daily live musical performances and boat rides in the Ganges.

For breakfast, we head to the Chachi Ki Dukhaan, a street-style eatery established in 1915. Sitting on oil tins that double up as seats, we sample the classic Banarsi breakfast trinity: kachoris, sabzi and jalebi. Glasses of fresh lassi from the hallowed Pehalwan Lassi, long favoured by local wrestlers for nourishment after hours of intense training, follow.

Lassi and kachoris done, we head out to explore the busy streets, replete with constant honking and activity. For, Varanasi is awake.

The writer was in Banaras at the invitation of juSTa Kashi Parampara

Tasting modern Jaipur

From butter chicken vada pav to khoba quesadillas – Jaipur's culinary story gets a new chapter at Mirove Artisanal Kitchen

Priyamedha Dutta

priyamedha.dutta@thehindu.co.in

In Rajasthan, where dal bat churma and lal maas take centre stage, a quiet revolution is unfolding. Across Jaipur, chefs and restaurateurs are reimagining the familiar, creating a foodscape that is rooted in tradition and yet refreshingly experimental.

Tucked away in the C-Scheme neighbourhood, just minutes away from Central Park, Mirove Artisanal Kitchen, feels both, familiar and surprising: a modern take on the Pink City's soul in muted rouge. "We wanted the menu to be simple yet appealing," says Sonali Sharma, the founder.

Conceptualised by Pantone Collective, New Delhi, and led by principal architect Tanya Chutan, the 8,000-square-foot space draws from Jaipur's heritage architecture – the geometries of Jantar Mantar with the repetition of traditional arches.

For Sonali, Mirove was not a pre-mediated career move.

That dream took shape when she met Jay Surolia. "He lived by the motto of entertaining people, making them laugh," says Sonali. "Jay, in fact, was part of the restaurant's ideation from the very beginning – he found the space, and was involved in everything from shaping the vision to selecting kitchen consultants."

Tragically, Jay passed away before the dream materialised. The restaurant, aptly named Jay's Mirove, now stands as an ode to his spirit.

Divided into local and global cuisine, the menu brings together the flavours of home and the aspirations of the new, well-travelled



Plated A spread at Mirove Artisanal Kitchen. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

generation. "We have tried to curate a menu that caters to our local audience as well as the people who have studied or lived in bigger cities, who now want those global flavours back home," says Sonali.

Its zero-proof menu also hums with energy. We try the rose and saffron-infused hibiscus tea, reminiscent of Indian mithai, and Midnight Fizz, which captures the nostalgia of sipping on kala khattaa after school. If you are in the mood for something edgier, order the northern lights, made with star anise-infused Sober Gin.

The standout is the Macha Chai, while I personally still have not fallen for this trend, the hot matcha with spiced honey was convincing enough for multiple sips.

The meal concludes with kesari tres leches, soaked in saffron and milk – warm, comforting and quietly addictive.

For Jay, Mirove was about people coming together. As I watch friends and families gather over a steaming bowl of laal maas, I realise he's achieved just that. It is a powerful legacy.

Mirove Artisanal Kitchen is in Malviya Marg, C Scheme, Ashok Nagar, Jaipur, Rajasthan 302001. Cost for two is ₹2000.

The writer was in Jaipur at the invitation of Mirove Artisanal Kitchen



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Understanding harmony and respite, at the South Asian Symphony Orchestra **P2**

A LOOK AT DHANUSH'S TERE ISHQ MEIN **P4**



Spawn point South
(Clockwise from right) A gamer playing Street Fighter 6; player playing mobile game PUBG; and the Chief Minister's Trophy Games in Chennai. AFP, AP, AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Loading level two

Tamil Nadu becomes the first State to treat esports like a real medal sport at the Chief Minister's Trophy Games in 2025, and players say the shift has reshaped the scene from the ground up

Sangita Rajan
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

In 2008, 18-year-old Mumbai-based gamer Reuben Pereira made a sizeable dent in the history of esports in India by winning a silver medal at the World Cyber Games for soccer video game franchise FIFA, in Germany.

Seventeen years later, in August 2025, 25-year-old Street Fighter 6 player Dharun S won the gold medal at the Chief Minister's Trophy Games in Chennai, bringing attention to not just the future of esports, but also the momentum building up in Tamil Nadu's gaming circles.

What is striking today, Reuben says, is not just the structure but the sheer volume of players entering the arena. Where once Chennai's competitive scene could fit inside a single gaming cafe, qualifiers today fill entire halls. The shift is the result of accessible games, affordable devices, and tournaments that make competitors feel like they belong.

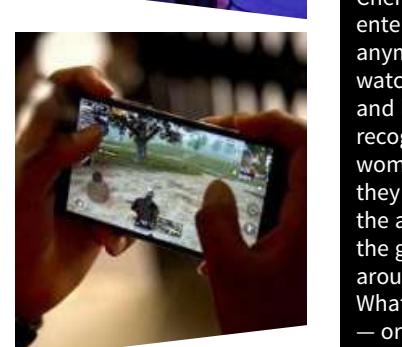
"Tamil Nadu players have become serious now. People are grinding, learning matchups, and asking for sparring partners. The scene has changed. Earlier, it felt like only a handful of us cared. Now, the competition is tougher," says Dharun, who has been playing in



tournaments for the last couple of years.

The Chief Minister's Trophy Games, organised by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu (SDAT), was Dharun's big break. This statewide multi-sport event brings together athletes from different backgrounds. In 2025, the Trophy Games made history by officially including esports as a medal event, making Tamil Nadu the first Indian State to do so. The competition spanned six gaming titles, including Street Fighter 6, EA FC, Valorant, BGMI, Pokémon Unite, and e-Chess, with a ₹1 lakh prize for individual gold medal winners.

Praveen Rathinam, president, Tamil Nadu Esports Association (TESA), says the CM's Trophy has done something few Government-backed events manage – it signalled legitimacy. "When the State puts its weight behind an event, parents start paying attention," he says. "We suddenly have teenagers telling their families they're 'training' for something real."



But legitimacy is only step one. Praveen explains that Tamil Nadu's esports structure, though young, is finally starting to take shape, from clearer tournament standards and player verification to slowly growing community networks. The challenge, he adds, is consistency. "If we are talking medals and global rankings, then we need sustained support. More tournaments, regulated formats, and a pipeline that starts at the school level," he says. "The talent is here; it just needs a proper ecosystem."

For Dharun, that ecosystem Praveen talks about is not abstract. It began with a Discord

Mind the gap

Across Street Fighter, EA FC, Valorant and BGMI, women players remain a minority. "I walk in expecting to be the only woman in the room, and most of the time, I'm right," says Phebe Hepzibah, a 25-year-old casual gamer from Chennai. She does not enter tournaments anymore, but she has watched enough streams and local events to recognise the pattern: women are not absent, they are edged out by the atmosphere. "It's not the games, it's the space around them," she says. What she wants is simple – organisers who enforce behaviour, communities that do not tolerate casual misogyny, and a scene where women do not need a separate qualifier to feel welcome.

server. "I didn't even know Chennai had a Street Fighter server. Once I joined, everything changed. Suddenly, there were people to spar with, people sharing tech, actual competition," he said. That virtual room became his training ground.

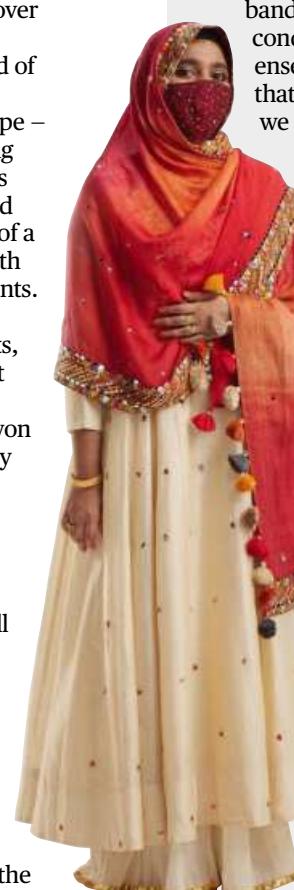
The long game
This shift on the ground is something veteran gamer Reuben Pereira has been waiting nearly two decades

to witness. Back in 2008, when he won silver at the World Cyber Games, esports in India was little more than a scattered network of private tournaments. "There was no structure, no system, nothing official. You just showed up wherever there was a cafe hosting something," he says. Watching Tamil Nadu now formally recognise esports feels like a full-circle moment. "If something like this existed in my time, I would've travelled all over India for it. This is the ecosystem we dreamed of but didn't have."

This boom is not hype – it is talent finally getting visibility. EA FC players have gone from isolated grinders to being part of a recognisable circuit with club-backed tournaments. "When EISL came in, things shifted – formats, analysts, prize pools. It felt professional," says Navin Haridoss, who won gold at the CM's Trophy Games for EA FC.

What has changed most, he points out, is confidence. "You have school kids, college kids, working guys... all playing in the same room. That never happened before." A decade ago, local tournaments felt casual – players arrived to hang out first and compete second. Now, he says, the room feels charged. "People come in with a plan. They've studied matchups, they've done their drills," he says. He has watched teenagers track frame data, organise district-level scrims (practice matches), and build small coaching circles – behaviours that used to belong only to international players. The irony, he points out, is that player skill is accelerating faster than the support structures around them.

"The grind is there," says Navin. "The hunger is there. What's missing is a calendar that keeps them battle-ready all year, not just for one Government event."



The Garden of Echoes is held together by its collaborators. The concert features The Sunshine Orchestra's String Quartet, a brass trio, the Indian Choral Ensemble directed by singer Kalyani Nair and co-directed by Karthik Manickavasakam, and Khatija's full band. With over two decades in the industry, Kalyani's sensibilities lend the performance its signature

Mic drop Khatija
Rahman. SPECIAL
ARRANGEMENT

warmth and depth. "Her arrangements are so soulful. It captures the sound I have always dreamt of."

The set list spans Khatija's musical journey which includes playback hits, reimagined versions of her compositions, and select covers rearranged in ways she has never attempted before. "The idea is to connect with people."

For Khatija, a little chant is what she describes as her pre-performance ritual. "I ask God to help me connect with the audience, because I still struggle with a fear of the stage, and I'm slowly working my way through it."

Behind the scenes, she is also building her own creative ecosystem. Rather than leaning on the legacy of her father, A R Rahman, she is forging her own path. "My father has helped me so much; he has always been there, but now it's my time to learn, unlearn, fail, and try everything on my own terms."

Khatija's band features a dynamic mix of musicians: guitarist Chris Jason, keyboardist Bhuvanesh Narayanan, bassist Laxman Arvind, drummer Guberan, and flautist Nikhil Ram. They are joined by the voices of The Indian Choral Ensemble's choristers – Aparna Harikumar, Sushmita Narasimhan, Nayantee Sharma, Ananya Bhat, Shridhar Ramesh, Manikandan Chembai, Neeraj MSG and Cyril Simon. The Sunshine Orchestra String Quartet features Vignesh U, Nandini Anbazhagan, Ebinezer Gnanraj and Deepa S, along with a brass trio comprising Pavithra E, Mohammed Naveeth and Nandhakumar, headed by Lisa Sarasini.

Khatija may seem quiet to the audience but she has a different roar on stage. For that, a viewing of her performance is essential.

Catch The Garden of Echoes on December 5 at the Museum Theatre, Egmore, 7pm onwards. Ticket on bookmyshow.com

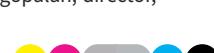


Drishti dialogues

The formidable, colourful symbols of *drishti* that find a place of prominence on many walls in Tamil Nadu will be in the spotlight at *The Hindu's Lit for Life Unplugged* in Chennai on November 28. Madco, a speakeasy on Cathedral road will host a conversation between Ashvin E Rajagopalan, director,

Ashvita's and Piramal Foundation, and Amar Ramesh, photographer and author of *Kolli Kannu: Drishti Paintings of Tamil Nadu*.

In the run up to The Hindu's Lit for Life festival on January 17 and 18 2026, partake in some pre-festival excitement with Lit for Life Unplugged. Follow @thehindulitforlife for more updates.





After the music

Nirupama Rao

I am 74 now, and I say the number quietly, letting it rest in my mouth like a stone softened by years of water. There was a time when I imagined age would arrive like a clearing, a soft field, a place of rest. Instead it has come like a long corridor lined with doors, some open, many closed, a few still trembling on their hinges.

When I was young, I believed in rooms: summit rooms, negotiation rooms, rooms where the future was discussed in careful, calculated tones. We thought we were shaping history. Perhaps we were only borrowing it for an hour. I have since learned that history is not a table at which we sit. It is a tide that moves around us, regardless of our gestures.

I have sat across men who spoke of war as if it were weather. Predictable. Inevitable. I have watched, from behind glass too thick to open, the slow collapse of promises. There are days when it feels as though I have escorted more silences than solutions. And yet, I am still listening.

What astonishes me is not the noise of the world. That has always existed. What astonishes me is how easily we forgot the art of hearing.

Diplomacy was never about eloquence. It was about breath, the space between injury and response. We called it restraint. We should have called it wisdom.

And then there was music. Never as ornament, but as refuge. Music was the language I trusted when words began to rot. A symphony orchestra, to me, has never been a luxury of civilisation. It has been its last defence. The violins leaning into uncertainty. The oboe holding a thin, trembling line of truth. The timpani speaking only when it absolutely must. Each musician alone is vulnerable. Together they become architecture.

I think often of Beethoven now. A

man sealed into silence by his own body, and yet he wrote joy. Not as denial, but as defiance. When he allowed the human voice to break into the symphony, he was not decorating sound. He was confessing it. We suffer. We endure. We belong. And that dangerous line still unsettles the world: Alle Menschen werden Brüder. All men become brothers. Not a suggestion, but a demand. I think, too, of Gandhi, especially in quieter hours. He understood counterpoint before I ever knew the word. Strength that did not shout. Silence that was not weakness. They called him frail. They were frightened by him.

The young are angry now. They have every right to be. Sometimes they look at people like me as if we have failed them. On some nights, I agree.

But there are still small acts of resistance left to us. Musicians from lands that do not speak to each other in daylight sit side by side. They tune. They carry each other through difficult passages. There are no flags. Just breath. That may be the most honest diplomacy.

I have no illusions. I know treaties can break. I know institutions decay. I know words lose their shine. But music still knows how to build a world inside silence.

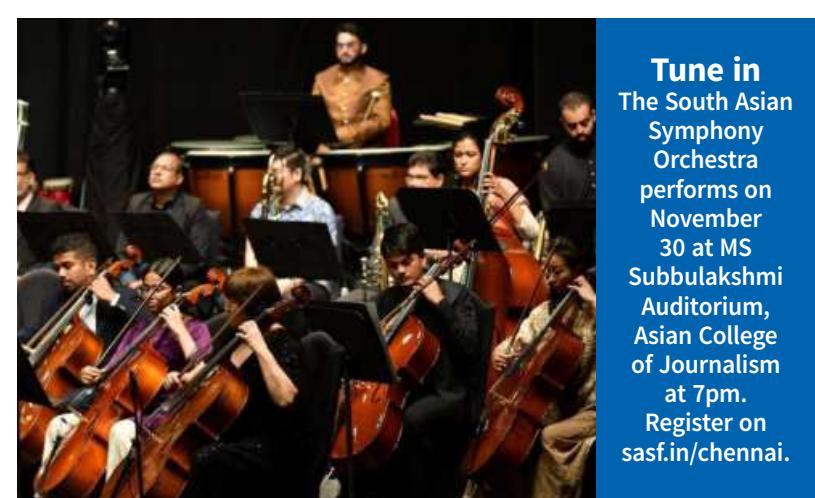
I move more slowly now. I forget names. I remember feelings. And I know this much with certainty: civilisations do not die from noise. They die when they stop listening.

If I have any work left, it is not to impress. It is simply to keep a small space open, however fragile, where another voice may enter without fear. Where harmony is not an accident, but a choice.

That is the last diplomacy I believe in. And perhaps, in the end, that is enough.

Tune in
The South Asian Symphony Orchestra performs on November 30 at MS Subbulakshmi Auditorium, Asian College of Journalism at 7pm. Register on sasf.in/chennai.

The writer is the former Indian Foreign Secretary and the founder of the South Asian Symphony Foundation (SASF). She is based out of Bengaluru.



An edit of fine craft

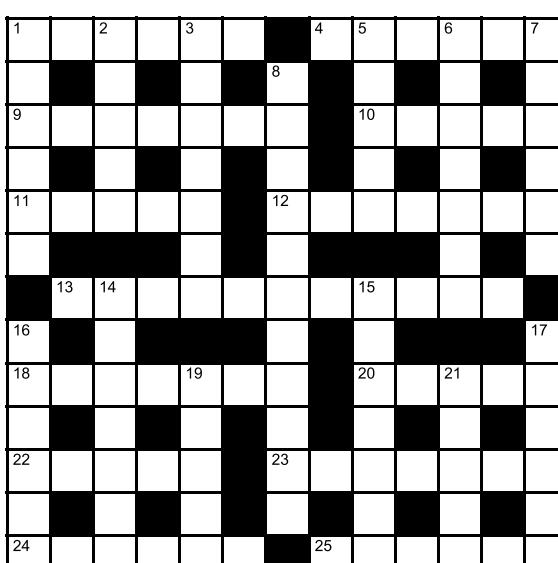
Diamond Continuum— The Chennai Chapter, will showcase Valanda by Chitra Pathi, a jewellery brand of precious gold and diamond jewellery specialising in design, revival and manufacture. All her pieces are crafted in 18kt and 14kt gold.

@Tulsi Madras, TTK Road. November 28 and 29, 11am to 7pm. For more details, call 80150 62905



QUICK CROSSWORD #29

Set by Doppelganger

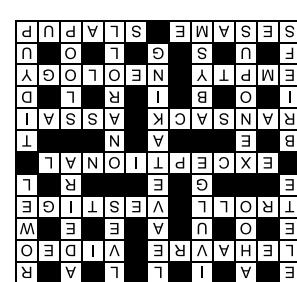


Across

- 1 Woodland nymphs (6)
- 4 A recluse (6)
- 9 French Port (2,5)
- 10 Visual element of TV (5)
- 11 Fish by trailing bait (5)
- 12 A hint (7)
- 13 Outstanding (11)
- 18 Rifle (7)
- 20 Very in music (5)
- 22 Not inhabited (5)
- 23 New usage (7)
- 24 Open _____ (6)
- 25 Lavish meal (4-2)
- 26 Strike out (6)
- 27 A boor (5)
- 28 Proclaim publicly (7)
- 29 Mischievous children (5)
- 30 Wine from this island (7)
- 31 Mason's tool (6)

- 8 Saying goodbye (5-6)
- 14 Aquatic tongueless clawed frogs (7)
- 15 Experiencing a successful period (2,1,4)
- 16 Underwear (6)
- 17 Straighten out (4,2)
- 19 Extremely bad colloquially (5)
- 21 Sailing boat (5)

Solution No. 29



Where the hills come alive

The Nilgiris Earth Festival 2025 returns this December with four days of curated experiences. Expect chef-led tables with Sienna Calcutta, heritage walks, shola-grassland tours, and a vibrant Habba celebrating 15 local communities

KJeshi

jeshi.jeshi@thehindu.co.in

When you sit with an organic farmer in the Nilgiris, understand the labour behind each ingredient, and then taste a dish created by a celebrated chef from the country, something shifts internally," says Ramya Reddy, founding donor and festival director of The Nilgiris Earth Festival (TNEF) 2025.

The TNEF returns for its fourth edition from December 18 to 21 in the heart of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve with over a dozen experiences rooted in food, culture, and ecology.

The Chef's Table, Bengal to Nilgiris, will partner with Sienna Calcutta, one of India's most celebrated restaurants, whose team, led by chef Avinandan Kundu, will craft a meal that

brings Bengal's culinary artistry into dialogue with the Nilgiris produce. Each course draws on produce from local farmers and cooperatives, including TOHFA(The Nilgiris Organic Horticulture Farmers' Association), a weekly market for organic produce of small farmers in the Nilgiris, and Aadhimai, a collective of local indigenous producers.

Since 2022, the festival has brought together thought leaders, farmers, ecologists, indigenous communities and travellers to talk about shared stewardship.

Writer and educator Afshan Mariam from Sky Islands will lead Edible Memories, a sensory workshop on food as a living archive of migration and belonging. Archaeologist Suresh Sethuraman, in collaboration with Vanavarayar Foundation, will present Stories in Stone, a guided walk tracing Udhagamandalam's layered

Rooted in Nature The festival is a conduit to experience the place deeply; (below) Chef Avinandan Kundu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



heritage.

Ecologist Vasanth Bosco opens his nursery garden for guided tours where visitors will step into a sanctuary of more than 150 native shola-grassland species of the Nilgiri Plateau. "Our ecology walks are immersive. When you walk into a native grass nursery and hear directly from an ecologist, the connection becomes real," explains Ramya adding that all the events are intentionally small-format with gentle footprints, many can't even hold 15 people. "It's a sensitive region, so we keep experiences intimate and meaningful. We also want to raise awareness about conscious travel, another reason everything is small and controlled."

The Heritage Table, Food

Butter meets bay

Chef Mathias Vila blends French technique with local ingredients in Puducherry this weekend. Try the ghee-poached sea bass

Sangita Rajan
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

"I'm French, but my cooking changes wherever I go," says Mathias Vila, the Bordeaux-based chef who has spent over two decades in Michelin-starred kitchens across Europe, from Munich to the Côte d'Azur. Now in India for the first time, he is preparing a pop-up in Puducherry that brings his classical training into conversation with local flavours he has been exploring since he arrived.



two choices: Provençal vegetable tian or truffle-scented celery risotto on one side, and beef Wellington, ghee-poached sea bass or slow-cooked chicken with morels on the other. Dessert stays firmly in French territory, closing with either a spiced tarte Tatin or a mille-feuille, and finally, coffee with a small entremet.

In the days leading up to the pop-up, Vila has been working inside The Promenade's kitchen, fine-tuning technique and aligning the menu with the standards he follows in Bordeaux. The tweaks are small, but they make a noticeable difference to the final plate. "I'm only adding little things, like more butter in the pastry or a different way of balancing flavour, so the dishes reflect the way I cook in France," he says.

A Taste of France will be hosted at The Promenade Hotel, Puducherry from November 27 to 29. The meal is priced at ₹2,999. For reservations, call 8189800045.



and Fun Fete co-created by Inside43, will bring together settler cuisines, storytelling, and local music.

Listening to the Forest (curated especially for donors and friends of TNEF) is a guided immersion by Rohan Mathias, associate producer of *Nilgiris: A Shared Wilderness*, which combines nature walks, a film conversation, night listening in the jungle, and a morning birding session, all of which are crucial reflections on eco-conscious travel.

This year, the ecology segment and The Habba 2025 at the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri, a full, vibrant day of indigenous food, music, and conversation have grown bigger.

Another highlight is the screening of *Wild Tamil Nadu*, directed by Kalyan Varma, followed by a conversation with Supriya Sahu IAS, Guest of Honour, Principal Secretary (Environment, Climate Change and Forests), and Kalyan Varma.

At the Habba, over 15 communities from across the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve will share their foods and crafts, with a free indigenous lunch open to all.

Says Ramya, "The festival is more than a gathering, a bridge that connects the Nilgiris with the sensitive projects under the Nilgiris Forever movement, with donors and supporters who care deeply about this landscape."

From December 18 to 21 at locations across Udhagamandalam, Coonoor, and Kotagiri. To register, visit tnefthenilgirisfoundation.org/



Akila Kannadasan
akila.k@thehindu.co.in

When Paramanathan Ravichandran first arrived in Chennai 15 years ago, he had no idea what he would do for survival.

He was among the thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the civil war, hoping to restart life in a new country. "I walked aimlessly about the streets of Koyambedu for three days," he says. He noticed many tea stalls dotted the neighbourhood. This is when an idea struck him.

Such establishments back home did brisk business with rolls – deep-fried golden-brown parcels of dough stuffed with chicken, eggs, and potatoes. To experiment, he decided to make a small batch of 30 rolls at his rented house in Porur with the help of his aunt Ragini and wife Dharuga. He began distributing them to shops in the neighbourhood, asking if they would be interested in selling this warm snack. "Some owners were kind and open to the new item," recalls the 51-year-old, speaking of how he walked the length of the tea shop line for his business.

Gradually, the orders came piling in for all the varieties – chicken, egg, fish, and vegetable. Today, seated by the front steps of his venture KP Ravi Bakery tucked in a small lane at Alapakkam near Porur, he recalls the sweat and tears that went into setting up his business. This small unit with an oven only has space for two people to stand. It is Ravi's identity in a new land; one that is not too far away. One that he has carved out with difficulty.

Adding up
Ravi came to India with nothing but two sets of clothes. He is from the village of Thennamaravadi that is about 65 kilometres North of Trincomalee.

Back home, he was a Maths teacher. "My father K Paramanathan, the village head, was a Maths teacher too," he recalls. Ravi, known as 'Ravi sir' among school students, was always good with numbers. After completing his Bachelor's in Mathematics, he started his own tuition centre in Vavuniya and Mullaitivu, and was especially skilled at handling class XII.

Life at Thennamaravadi, Ravi recalls, was peaceful. "In my boyhood, I would catch prawns and crabs in the backwaters that my mother would cook fresh," he says. "My family had over 150 cows that would graze freely; we grew groundnuts, onions, and paddy." But once the war broke out, the village was wiped out, and along with it, Ravi's family home, agricultural land, and a stable career in teaching.

In Chennai, he knew it was not



Baking bread, building a home

Paramanathan Ravichandran, who migrated to India from Sri Lanka, makes rolls and flatbread inspired by flavours back home at his bakery in Chennai

going to be easy to start from scratch. Yet, his rolls did the talking. "I graduated to delivering orders on a cycle, and later bought a scooter," he says.

At one point, he was making 2,000 rolls a day with a team of 14, supplying to IT companies, schools, and colleges in Navalur, Ambattur, and Kelambakkam, apart from tea shops in Parry's, T Nagar, Mount Road, and Madipakkam. This is apart from the railway canteens.



Full of warmth Paramanathan Ravichandran with the circular paan; kombu bun; (below) egg rolls. VELANKANNI RAJ B



Learning to swim again

The floods of 2015 however, shook things up and Ravi incurred heavy losses. Despite the stumbling blocks, he kept at it, managing to survive through the pandemic, even adding paan, the famous Sri Lankan flatbread to the menu.

Today, it is among his best-sellers and Ravi says Sri Lankan Tamils from near and far reach out to him to buy the bread. He delivers paan at places as far as Kundrathur on his scooter, apart from Anna Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur, and Medavakkam in the evenings.

Paan, priced at ₹55 a piece, is a soft and flaky savoury bread and is available in two variations: roast and acchu. "We usually pair this with fish, mutton, chicken curry, or even dal," he says. Ravi also makes the addictive kombu bun, a long, soft bread with a sprinkling of sugar on top. He is now experimenting with circular paan.

As tea time approaches, customers start trickling in and by 6.30pm, a small crowd has gathered at his shop. Ravi's phone keeps ringing with orders and he briskly packs rolls and paan.

Ravi's wife and 14-year-old son Kishan are now back home in Thennamaravadi. He too hopes to return. "I want to ensure my business can run on its own before I do," he says. "This will take around three years or so." He does not know what he will do once he is back in Sri Lanka. "Perhaps I can take up teaching again," he says. "But before I leave, I want to buy a house in Chennai."

KP Ravi Bakery is located at MG Chakrapani Nagar, 14th Street, Alapakkam. To place orders, call 8148931500.



Madras and art, a love story

Madras Art Weekend, the annual celebration of contemporary art in Chennai, returns and brings together galleries, artists and designers for conversations on the evolving art ecosystem. This edition's theme is Madras Reimagined and the event is at Taj Coromandel. On December 4, catch a panel titled Curatorial Cartography – Mapping Artist and Gallery Relationship, moderated by Pallavi Khandelwal at 11.30am. The discussion will feature Tarana Khubchandani and Satish Gupta of Art & Soul; Srila Chatterjee of Baro Art; Saurabh Singhvi and Vrindavan Solanki of Art Magnum; and Uday Jain and Ashok Bhowmick from Dhoomimal Gallery. Later that day is Design Through Our Lens, moderated by Samir Wadekar at 4.30pm. On 5 December, Pradeep Chakravarthy will speak with award-winning architect Abha Narain Lambah in a session on the Art of Restoration at 11am. The programme concludes on December 6 with a full-day gallery walk-through for educational institutions, running from 11am to 7pm. Registration is mandatory for all events. Call 8667086322 or email info@madrasartweekend.com.



Songs for the season

Madras Guild of Performing Arts returns with a performance by Tara and Trisha with an ensemble featuring Jaideep Vivekanand on lead guitar, Gerard Joseph on bass, Anish Chacko on keyboards and Ethan Ezekiel on drums. Hosting the programme is the adult choir and the lively Children's Choir, the Shortz. The performance is conducted by Atul Jacob Isaac. @The Government Museum, Egmore. On December 6, 7pm onwards. Tickets priced at ₹500 at mdnd.in.

GUDUVANCHERY

Sri Krishna Sweets

GRAND Opening
NEW OUTLET
Today 27|11|25, 9.00 AM



GUDUVANCHERY
Sri Krishna Sweets
(Opposite to GRT Jewellery)
Gandhi Complex
GST Road, Guduvanchery
Chengalpattu.

INAUGURAL DAY OFFER

Buy 1kg
Sweets
get

1kg

**Mysurpa
as a gift***

Offer Valid only at our new
branches on 27th November
2025 only
Maximum quantity
available per person 1kg

* Conditions Apply

Sri Krishna Sweets 51/1, Bazullah Road, T. Nagar, Chennai.
Toll Free : 1800 102 2343 E-mail : customercare@srikrishnasweets.com.
www.srikrishnasweets.com. Mob : 9345928049, 9345928025,
9677082809, 9345928027, 9345928028 & 9345928029.



K.K.NAGAR

Sri Krishna Sweets

GRAND Opening
NEW OUTLET
Today 27|11|25, 9.00 AM



K.K.NAGAR
Sri Krishna Sweets
(Opposite to Kasi Theater)
Anjugam Nagar
2nd Street, Jafferkhanpet
Chennai.



INAUGURAL DAY OFFER

Buy 1kg
Sweets
get

1kg

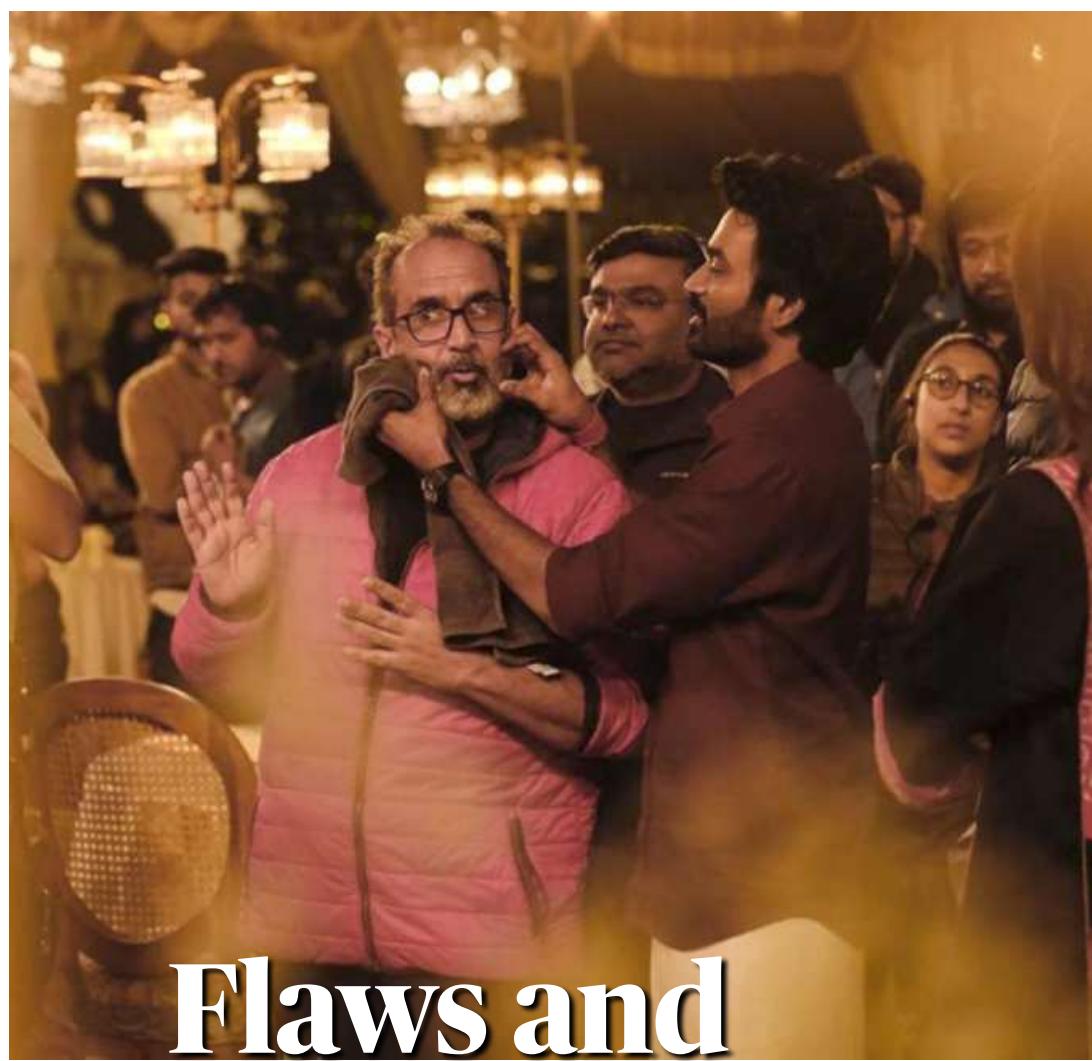
**Mysurpa
as a gift***

Offer Valid only at our new
branches on 27th November
2025 only
Maximum quantity
available per person 1kg

* Conditions Apply

Sri Krishna Sweets 51/1, Bazullah Road, T. Nagar, Chennai.
Toll Free : 1800 102 2343 E-mail : customercare@srikrishnasweets.com.
www.srikrishnasweets.com. Mob : 9345928049, 9345928025,
9677082809, 9345928027, 9345928028 & 9345928029.





Flaws and FIRE

All about director Aanand L Rai's latest flick *Tere Ishk Mein*, starring Dhanush and Kriti Sanon

Shreyas Pande
shreyas.pande@thehindu.co.in

Filmmaker Aanand L Rai has been working around the clock as his film, *Tere Ishk Mein*, releases this week. There is excitement in his voice when he tells us how he loves promoting his movies. "Usually, I can't keep myself awake after 10pm. But these days, I am like a young boy, running around from one VFX studio to another sound studio," says Aanand.

There are glimpses of a stormy, obsessive romance in

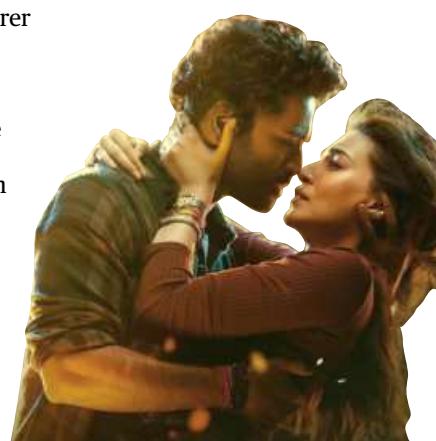
Tere Ishk Mein. Operating in a world similar to that of *Raanjhanaa* (2013), the Dhanush and Kriti Sanon-starrer tells an intense love story between the protagonists, Shankar and Mukti. Aanand says he wanted to explore the maturity of love through the film. "There is so much action happening around, so I just felt that it is time to go for a deep, mature love story," he says, adding that his perspective on love has taken a shift in the last ten years.

"All of us evolve with time through our experiences. Sometimes, you get more

practical, sometimes you are emotional and vulnerable. All of that adds to our understanding of the feeling. So, as a filmmaker, I can put that on celluloid and see how others feel about it."

Tere Ishk Mein is also the third collaboration between Rai and Dhanush, after *Raanjhanaa* and *Astrangi Re* (2021). The director feels their relationship has grown over the years.

"When I first met him, he was just an actor. Now, he is like a son to me," says the director, adding, "We are selfish people who are together for some

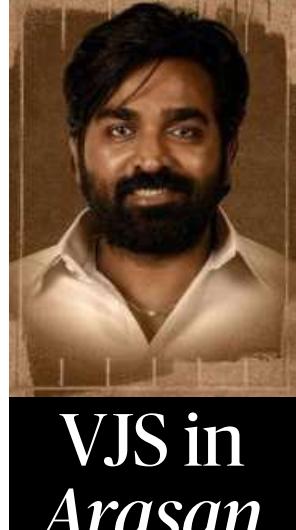


Aanand maintains that they just wanted to tell a story of two different kinds of people who fall in love with each other. "A story is never conceived thinking of your character as an alpha. For me, the character is emotional and sensitive and nothing that he does is wrong."

The romantic drama is also being compared to Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Animal* (2023) and *Kabir Singh* (2019). Aanand feels that his film is different. "There are similarities in how the characters have aggression and rage. But those are just the ingredients and not the story," he says.

The director also disagrees with the criticism that

Raanjhanaa received for normalising stalking. "I never found Dhanush's character in *Raanjhanaa* to be a stalker. It is just my perspective of a boy from Benaras, and that is his expression. Characters are bound to have flaws. I am just telling a human story of people with flaws."



VJS in Arasan

Tamil star Vijay Sethupathi has joined the cast of the highly-anticipated *Vada Chennai* film *Arasan*, directed by Vetri Maaran and starring Silambarasan TR. This marks Vijay's second collaboration with Simbu after *Chekka Chivathanam* and consecutive collaboration with Vetri Maaran after their *Viduthalai* films.

The news was announced by Kalaippuli S Thanu of V Creations.

The update comes weeks after the release of the title promo of *Arasan*, which is a film set in the same cinematic universe as *Vada Chennai*, Vetri's 2018 gangster epic starring Dhanush. The promo immersed audiences once again into North Chennai's underbelly, further adding to the hype surrounding the project. Unlike Vetri Maaran's previous films, *Arasan* features music by Anirudh Ravichander, marking their first collaboration.

Spotlight on the Kumbh

Musician Siddhant Bhatia's latest album takes Mahakumbh 2025 to the Grammys

Srinivasa Ramanujam
srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Earlier this year, all roads led to Prayagraj, which hosted the Mahakumbh 2025. An event that happens once in 144 years, Mahakumbh 2025 put the spotlight on spiritual enlightenment, attracting visitors from across the globe seeking to take a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam.

Classical singer-composer Siddhant Bhatia was there for a few days, but on a project commissioned by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. On the banks of the Ganga, Siddhant recorded live field recordings, which would then go for post-processing and sound mixing.

Within 45 days, Siddhant and team crafted 12 songs and 12 music videos, featuring more than 50 artists from across India and around the world. The result was 'Sounds of Kumbha', which has recently secured a nomination at the 68th Grammy Awards in the Best Global Music Album category. "It is a significant moment in my life," he says, referring to not just the nomination but the album itself: "That I was entrusted to pull off such a beautiful musical experience is a huge blessing. I see this as a big step in globally promoting Indian culture."

He is referring to the entire album that seeks to capture



Traditional blend
Siddhant Bhatia.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the living energy of one of the world's largest gathering.

While the 'Colours of Kumbha' track was designed as an anthem that "hits the people and brings them together", 'Inniverse' was inspired by silences and 'Maya' was inspired by the large flow of people.

With established artists like V Selvaganesh and Rajakumari, along with musicians like Kanika Kapoor, Kala Ramnath and Bhanumathi Narasimhan, among others, 'Sounds of Kumbha' blends traditional sounds and mantras with contemporary music production. "The biggest highlight is the 'Ram Ram'

track that features Gurudev Sri Sri Ravishankar."

'Sounds of Kumbha', which also brings together distinguished producers such as Jim 'Kimo' West, Raghav Mehta, Madi Das, Ron Korb, Charu Suri, and Devraj Sanyal, hopes to give a sense of the Mahakumbh within the comforts of your homes, adds Siddhant. "I'm humbled that this project, which seemed like an almost impossible task initially, is now regarded as a proud product of India," says Siddhant, who has also been nominated in the upcoming Grammys for another album, *Shayan*, by Indo-American pianist Charu Suri.



Crime matters
Pavithra Janani in *Regai*; (below)
Rajesh Kumar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

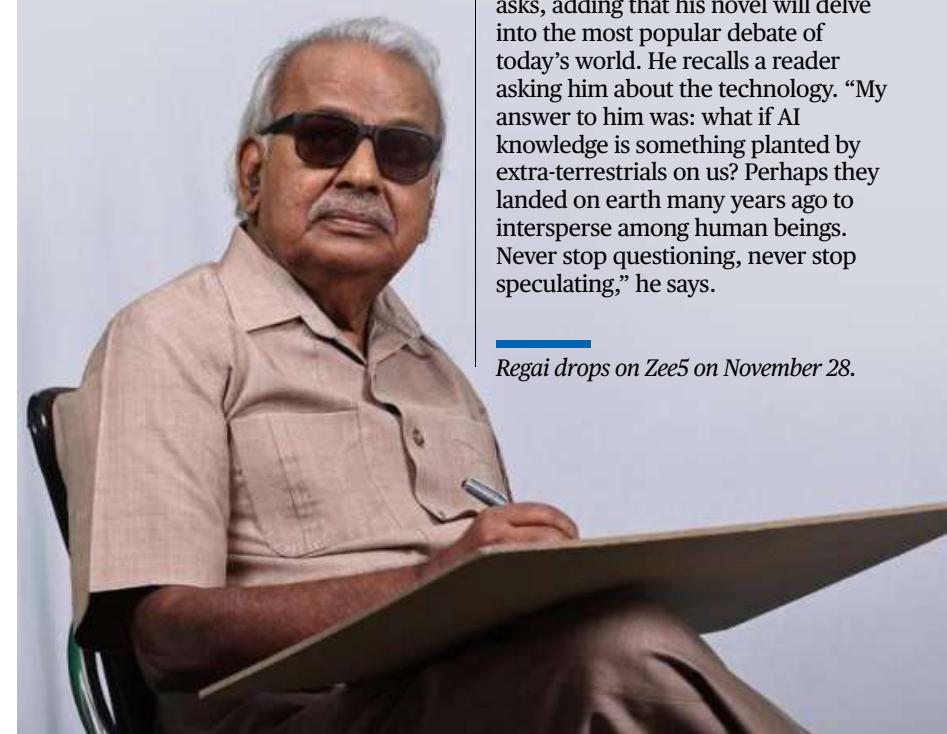
Akila Kannadasan

akila.k@thehindu.co.in

It is past 9pm when I dial crime writer Rajesh Kumar's number. The 77-year-old's baritone sounds just the same from when we spoke six years ago. "I go to bed only at 12," he says, adding that he writes till 11pm. Rajesh Kumar is the talk of the town in the Tamil entertainment world with web-series *Regai*, set to premiere this week on OTT platform Zee5. It is based on his novel *Ulagai Vilakal* from the 1990s, which writer-director M Dhinakaran has further developed.

Regai forms the author's first OTT collaboration and he is excited about it. "I have achieved proper recognition for my work only now," feels Rajesh Kumar. "It is a medical thriller, one that features an invisible crime." His quaint Coimbatore home that has played host to him churning crime novel after novel for decades is now hosting video calls, Zoom meetings and visits from the movie people over story ideas.

He sections time for his various affairs, writing with discipline every day from 9.30am. It is this discipline that saw him through the over 1,500 crime novels and his recent creative collaboration with Zee5. Tamil film directors have long been reaching out



Regai drops on Zee5 on November 28.

Grand Opening !!
on 27-11-2025



Dot.. 커피
COFFEE HOUSE



K coffee
Korean

7.00 am onwards

No.8,
Vasu Street,
Kilpauk,
Chennai-600010.

No.34 B,
Barnabey Road,
Kilpauk,
Chennai-600010.

Not just coffee, it's a Korean experience

Korean brews Chennai vibes

KOREAN
coffee house