

weekend VIVA!

metro PLUS THE HINDU

From brunost and manchego to queso oaxaca, the options are aplenty. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Take it cheesy

India's artisanal cheese market is booming as niche producers create classics such as burrata and cheddar, as well as varieties steeped in wine, chilli and spices



TRACKING POACHER

Alia Bhatt and the series' cast on making a gripping topic entertaining. **P6**

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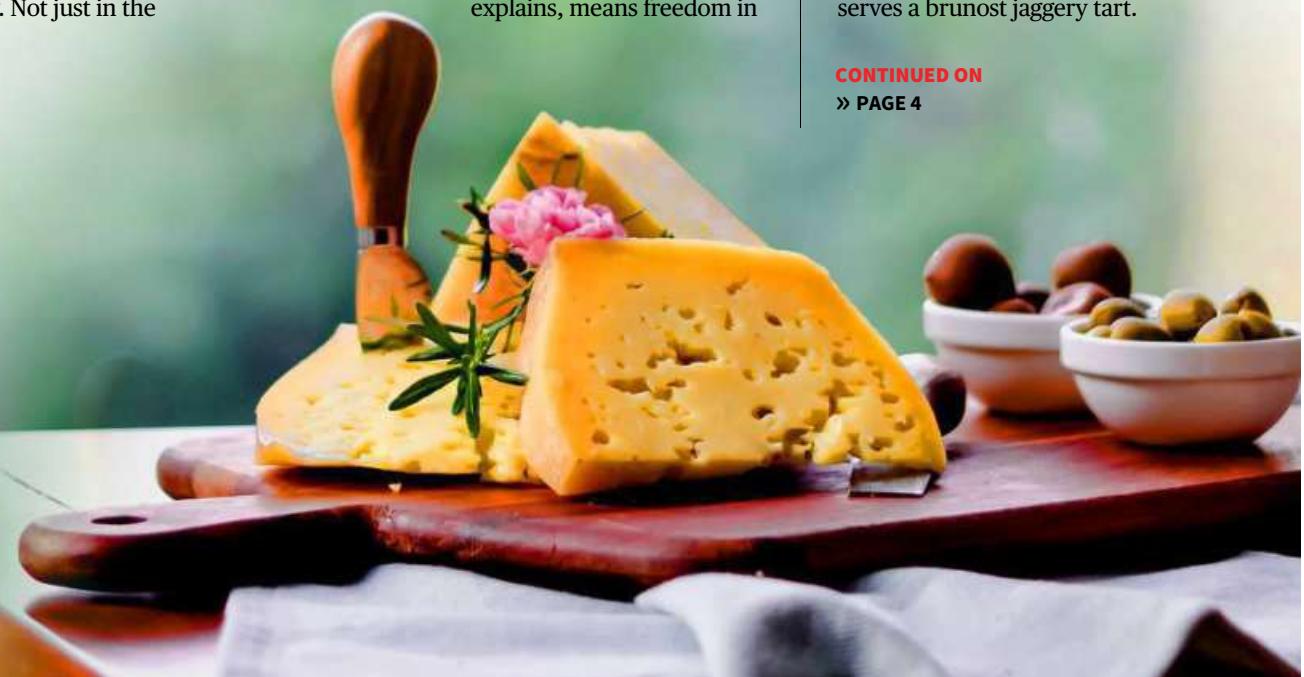
domestic market, brands like Eleftheria cheese have also made a mark at international competitions," says Arvind, whose farm makes eight varieties of cheese and sells around 22 tons a year to all major markets from Chennai to Delhi.

"We are taking away retail shelf space from foreign cheese. There is a gradual transition and Indian cheesemakers are gaining visibility. Not just in the

Greek. For her, starting this creamy meant, freedom from a corporate job, as well as freedom from processed cheese. Obsessed with cheesemaking, by 2016, Mausam was supplying cheese to cafes and restaurants.

While they started with mozzarella and burrata, Eleftheria now makes 15 varieties of cheese. "Brunost was unusual for India before but it has picked up tremendously well. It's one of our best selling cheeses now. It's a whey cheese. Many clients are using it for dessert," she says, adding that at Mumbai's O Pedro, the restaurant serves a brunost jaggery tart.

CONTINUED ON
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Centrum



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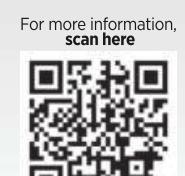
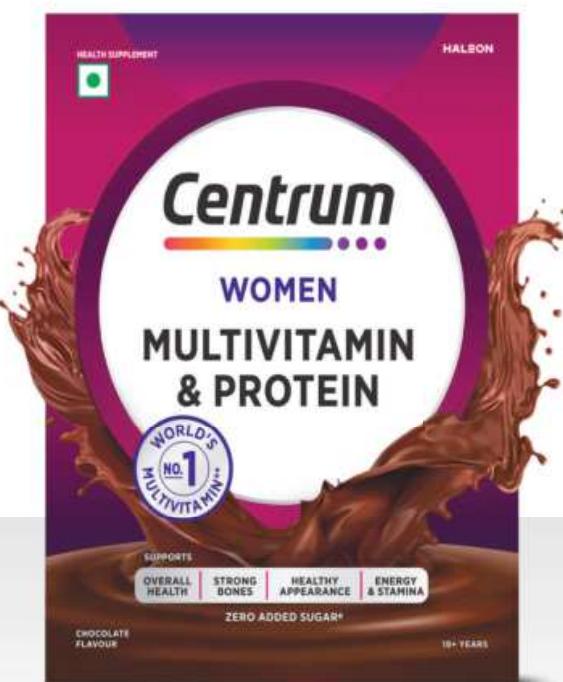
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Zesty olympic marvel: Menton, a French Riviera town, honours the Paris Olympics with sculptures crafted from lemons and oranges at its annual Lemon Festival. Approximately 140 tonnes of citrus fruits were sculpted into floats and historical scenes, expecting 2,00,000 visitors to the two-week carnival-style celebration.



Talkingpoint

Country triumph: Beyoncé breaks records as the first Black woman to top Billboard's country music chart with her single 'Texas Hold 'Em'. Released during the Super Bowl, the track, along with '16 Carriages', debuted on the country airplay chart. Both songs are set to feature on Beyoncé's upcoming country-themed album, *act ii*.

pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours, and everything else you need to plan your social calendar. For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Culinary adventures
Indulge in the **flavours of Karaikudi** at Feathers, A Radha Hotel until February 29 with dishes like saiva meen porichathu, maravalli dhul mass and more, starting ₹2,000. For reservations, call 7823977813. For a celebration of culinary mastery, head to **Culinary Art India** at Pragati Maidan, Delhi, from March 7 to 11. Learn, and network with chefs and industry experts. Entry is open.



Dive into theatre
Experience music, emotions, and reconciliation at **Vanambadi Light Music**, a Tamil play about intense rivalry at the Music Academy tomorrow at 3pm and 5.30pm. Tickets on [in.bookmyshow.com](#) at ₹300. Another play to catch is **Hold the Mushrooms**, an English play about family dynamics. Head to Medai - The Stage on March 1 and 2 at 7pm. Tickets on [in.bookmyshow.com](#) at ₹300.



Hidden gems
Pair your outfits with vintage jewellery from **Aulerth X JJ Valaya**'s new collection, Valaya Perennials. Shop finger rings, earrings, and bracelets in geometric patterns, sleek lines, and defined angles on [aulerth.in](#) starting ₹4,000. Check out the fine jewellery of **Studio Renn**'s collection at Collage, Rutland Gate, until February 29 from 10.30am to 7.30pm. Shop bracelets, rings and more starting ₹2.50 lakh.



Arts and stories
Attend an art auction with a twist this weekend! Bid on artworks from local artists by shouting out your prices at **Backyard, Adyar**, on February 25 from 4pm to 8pm. Tickets on [instamojo.com/backyard](#) at ₹50. Indulge in an evening of storytelling with Janaki Sabesh at Lil Trails, Adyar on February 25 from 11am to 12pm and celebrate **International Mother Language Day**. Tickets on [liltrails.com](#) at ₹400.



Creative weekends
Starting a new hobby? Attend this **acting workshop** for beginners at Idam, Kodambakkam today from 10am. Put your body, voice, and mind to work and book tickets on [in.bookmyshow.com](#) starting ₹4,000. For a laidback start to the weekend with your partner, head to Hibiscus Cafe, Injambakkam, at 11am to learn the art of **caricature sculpting**. Tickets on [townscript.com](#) starting ₹600.



Runway hits
Wear a look straight from the runway! Check out **Falguni Shane Peacock**'s soon to launch Forward Momentum – Chapter 20 collection from the New York Fashion Week. Shop dresses and statement pieces at [falgunishanepeacock.com](#) starting approx. ₹1,25,000. Looking for a summer sale? Head to the Folly, Amethyst to shop from **Tilla and Eka** for kurtas, kaftans, and day dresses starting ₹3,500 today.



Summer wardrobe
Welcome summer in style! Shop luxury leather goods from **Tod's** Spring Summer 2024 collection of bags and shoes in a monochrome of natural colours on [luxe.ajio.com](#) starting ₹38,000. To go the playful and vibrant route, check out **Kate Spade's** Spring collection of bags, shoes, and accessories. Shop for the colourful yet elegant looks on [luxe.ajio.com](#), starting at approx. ₹30,000.

Clothes and accessories from the collection; Shubhika Sharma (in white). SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Feline stylish

The Garfield X Papa Don't Preach line celebrates the iconic cartoon's 45th anniversary with a fun, limited-edition collection

Shubhika Sharma has five cats – two in her office and three at home. And they served as inspiration for her just-launched collaboration with Garfield. To commemorate the iconic, lazy, orange cat's 45th anniversary, Viacom 18 Consumer Products tied up with Shubhika's brand Papa Don't Preach for a limited-edition collection.

"Just observing my cats' personalities – sassy, loving, huggable – gave me clear direction as to what attitude this collection should have. I wrapped it up in a

month," says Shubhika who grew up reading the Garfield comic strip in newspapers and only later discovered that the tabby cat is orange in colour.

Jim Davis, the creator of Garfield, was clear that the brand had to operate according to guidelines laid down by him. "Garfield can never step out of his world, so Papa Don't

Preach had to enter his world. I really enjoyed the challenge of elevating Garfield to a luxury collection and incorporating Indian elements like paisleys and miniature art techniques in prints. As a brand we are future facing. We don't use nostalgia as a tool. But this time, I allowed myself to dip into nostalgia," adds Shubhika.

Shubhika was certain she did not want the collection to look

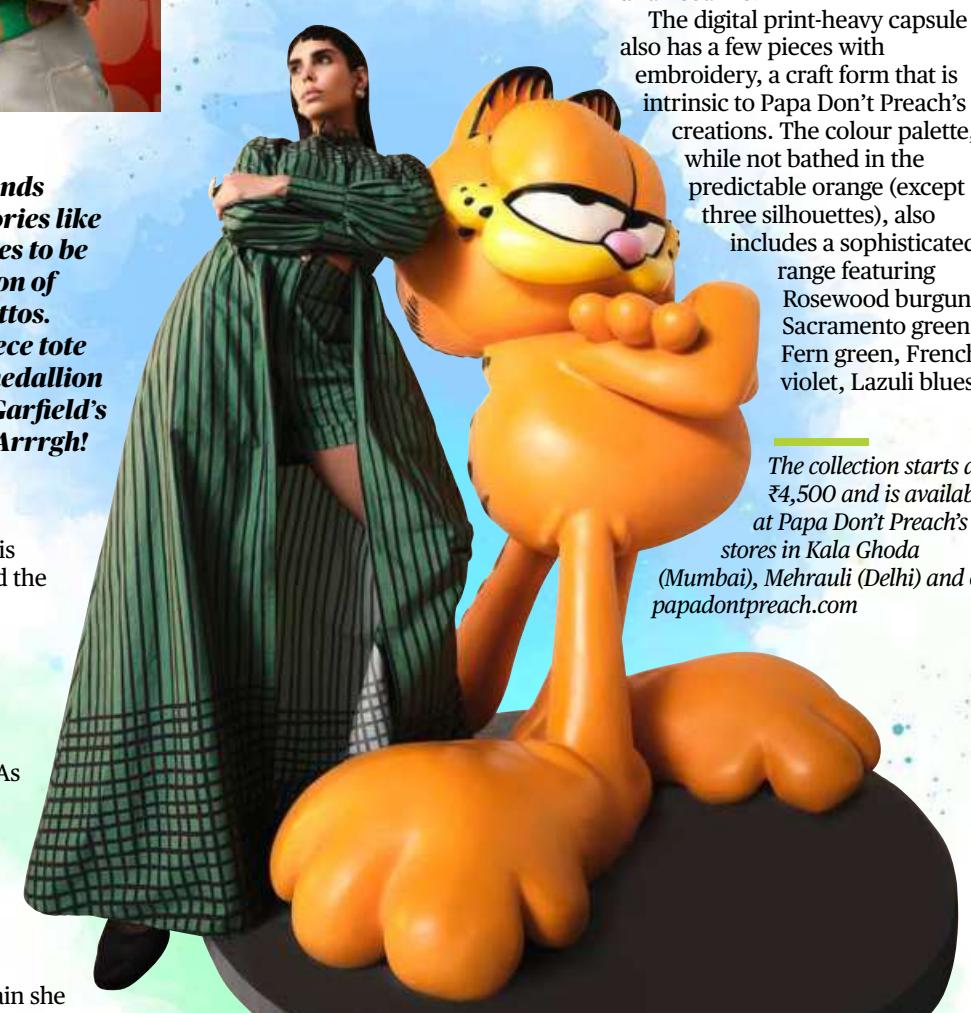
very cartoon merchandise-esque. She also did not want T-shirts and outfits with quotes. So, now you find Garfield within paisley prints and polka dots. "We've woven him into small places because cats like getting themselves into small cosy spaces," says the 36-year-old designer, whose Kala Ghoda store has mannequins in the shape of animals; they even sport eyelashes, eye shadow and look fashionable in Papa Don't Preach's outfits. "When people from Viacom 18 visited the store, they identified a synergy between the

brands and reached out to us last year."

The Garfield X Papa Don't Preach collection pieces are summer-friendly and easy to wear. It comprises a 60s mod dress, 70s style flared jumpsuit, easy flowing skirts, A-line dresses, rich cottons, vibrant prints. The cat also finds himself on accessories like footwear, sneakers and stilettos. There are faux fleece tote bags with a gold medallion in the centre and Garfield's most used words: Arrrgh! and Feed Me.

The digital print-heavy capsule also has a few pieces with embroidery, a craft form that is intrinsic to Papa Don't Preach's creations. The colour palette, while not bathed in the predictable orange (except three silhouettes), also includes a sophisticated range featuring Rosewood burgundy, Sacramento green, Fern green, French violet, Lazuli blues...

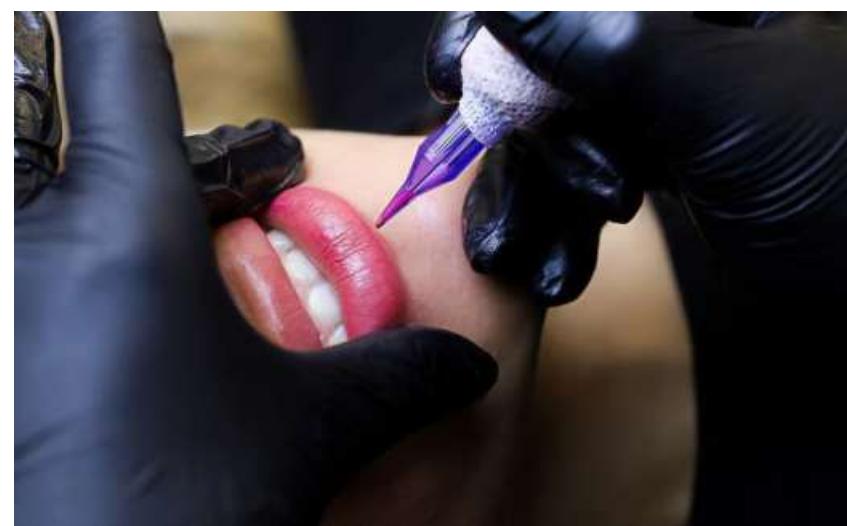
The collection starts at ₹4,500 and is available at Papa Don't Preach's stores in Kala Ghoda (Mumbai), Mehrauli (Delhi) and on [papadontpreach.com](#)



A number of social media users, sans the makeup, are taking on the seemingly perfect faces enhanced by filters and fillers



Bottomless scrolling on Instagram or TikTok for perfection also perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards, wreaking havoc on one's self-esteem, mental health, and collective perception of beauty. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



when I started sharing it on social media made me realise it wasn't just my narrative. All plus-sized people are not necessarily 'lazy'. It is okay to be in a particular body shape and wear whatever you want. Always make the negativity around you motivate you, not make you feel small."

With a strong Instagram family of 52.4K followers, Aishwarya Kandpal is a multi-talented digital content creator who wears many hats: videographer, director, and unfiltered skin and hair care content creator. "We have a lot more to do in life other than just look a certain way. All of us are talented in some way or another; having a loud voice of our own and our appearance shouldn't stop us from doing everything we like and living life to the fullest," she says.

Aishwarya talks about how she started her skincare journey by documenting her story of severe acne and the experiments that people should not do. She adds that something like this needed a louder voice, so she decided to stick to her no-filter projects strongly. "There have been times when people have commented saying, 'What's the point of your skincare if you still have acne.' After my acne got better, people started picking on my moles, which are genetic. With the beauty industry getting more competitive, these things are inevitable. We are not programmed to deal with hate healthily. So the best way to stop getting affected by negativity is to ignore it," she concludes.

Lights, camera, filter

DVLS Pranathi

Social media has always taught people to erase all flaws. It is a landscape where beauty reigns supreme, and perfection seems just a filter away. However, this bottomless scrolling on Instagram or TikTok for perfection also perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards, wreaking havoc on one's self-esteem, mental health, and collective perception of beauty.

Social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, have become arenas of competition, prompting more people to alter their appearance, from using Photoshop and makeup to even plastic surgery to fit in. The French government recently took a significant step towards promoting body positivity by promoting an 'anti-filter' bill, that will make it mandatory for influencers to disclose the use of filters and Photoshop. The law requires any commercial photos that have been retouched to make a model's body appear thinner or thicker to be labelled "photographic retouchée" (retouched photograph) to indicate it to viewers. It also bans the promotion of plastic surgery.

Due to the impact of social media, people are trying hard to alter their appearance with quick remedies to fit in. Emphasising this point, Dr Shwetha Rahul, founder of Hydra

Dermatology, Chennai, says, "There are so many misconceptions when we come to the topic of skin and body. Social media propagates this concept of even skin tone throughout the body, which is a huge myth. There are a lot of patients who come and say that they are okay with their skin colour but need it to be even throughout."

She says, "People often ask for 'glow' which is a term that has a different meaning for each individual. This is one problem, dermatologists all over India have been facing since the social media boom. Glow can mean hydrated

skin, whiter skin, or skin without hyperpigmentation. Each individual perceives it differently because everyone has a different filter that makes them look flawless."

No quick fix

Shwetha adds that no remedies seem to satisfy clients. "Social media is why people want instant solutions to serious issues like hormonal acne. Fifteen to 18-year-olds are using retinol these days to avoid aging just to fit into society's bracket of 'beautiful,' she explains, adding how she has seen cases in which already existing skin issues like eczema have aggravated due to the usage of Internet-recommended products.

Prableen Kaur Bhomrah, a Mumbai-based influencer with over 313K followers is known for creating unfiltered content around skin and body positivity. "It took me time to be comfortable in my body and realise that if we don't love ourselves, we cannot expect other people to make us feel good about ourselves," she says, adding, "There have been times when people have commented horrible things on my posts. It hampered my confidence



and self-esteem, so I decided to make unfiltered content to encourage other people to be confident and beautiful."

Body-positive influencers like Diksha Singhi (with 124K followers) are changing the game. With her photos and videos of workout sessions, she creates content that openly calls out fat-shamers by replying to trolls through her stories and reels challenging fatphobia and showing people that happiness does

not have a shape. "My mother and sister were my mirror to the idea of body positivity. My mom has so many scars on her stomach due to a caesarean birth. She has been on this journey where she has lost and gained weight many times. Even my sister used to be insecure about her arms even when she was at her thinnest. Just because someone does not fit into society's version of 'beautiful' does not mean they are not," says Diksha. She also mentions that when she started her journey on Instagram in 2017 content creation was not as popular as it is today. But when she began sharing her story, many resonated with it. She adds, "The fact that so many people connected with my story

AISHWARYA KANDPAL
Digital content creator

We have a lot more to do in life other than just look a certain way. All of us are talented in some way or another; having a loud voice of our own and our appearance shouldn't stop us



What's your sari's story?

If you are looking at including some exquisite silks to your wardrobe, city-based boutique

Stories in Silk is hosting a weavers fest today. Titled Dum Dum Pee Pee Pee, it not only offers visitors a shopping experience, but a chance to meet the artisans behind the loom and learn about what it takes to weave a silk sari. At the event, guests can interact with master weavers from Kanchipuram, alongside artisans from across Tamil Nadu.

On February 24 at Stories in Silk, P Block, 6th Avenue, Annanagar. From 10.30am to 9pm. For details, call 70947777.

Ways of seeing

Next week, an exhibition by Apparao Galleries in the capital titled The Circle and the Square will feature the works of artists RM Palaniappan, Manish Nai, and Alwar Balasubramaniam. On display will be works 'that emerge from the nuanced interactions of varied realms, moving beyond traditional boundaries.'

From March 3-12 at Bikana House, Living 101, Central New Delhi

The Art of Living presents Thiruchitrambalam (Bharatanatyam & Dance Drama) by Shobana. A fundraiser for the Free Schools run by The Art of Living Foundation. 6.45 pm | Today Narada Gana Sabha. ALL ARE WELCOME. Please be seated by 6.15 p.m. Seating on a first come basis.

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(Clockwise from bottom) Cheeses from Eleftheria; Mausam Narang, who started the brand; a platter at Casaro Creamery; Benjamin and Kathrina, founders of Nari and Kage; a selection of cheese and a platter from Darima Farms. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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Eleftheria produces a couple of tons of cheese every month. "Cheese is basically separated milk solids. If we get 1,000 litres of milk, we get 100 kilograms of cheese," says Mausam, adding that they have also started ageing cheeses.

Just back from a training session in France, Mausam says washed-rind cheeses is something she would like to experiment with now.

Thrissur-based Anu Joseph Palathingal, who runs Casaro Creamery along with Freddy George, recently experimented with wine-soaked cheese which sold out quickly. The cheese is aged for three months and soaked in sweet red wine at different intervals. "The outer surface has the colour of wine while the interior remains white. The flavour of the cheese has notes of wine," says Anu who started the creamery in 2018.

Starting from a 400 square feet facility, Casaro is now spread across 2,200 square feet, producing 15 different kinds of cheeses, four cheese snacks and six different kinds of cheese spreads. While they have a lot of restaurants who are their clients, they also deliver to individuals across the country, with most of the orders coming from Chennai, Bengaluru and Kochi.

The facility is in Kattoor (Kerala) and has 15 people working. "We start at 7.30 am and that's when the milk



testing happens. We get 350 litres of milk and that is converted to 35 kilos of cheese. Production is scheduled such that we make 15 varieties in two weeks. We use cow, buffalo and goat milk to make haloumi, cream cheese, and mascarpone. These are made thrice a week. We make goat milk feta and chevre once a week," she explains.

At Casaro, prices start at ₹300 for 200 grams but Anu says clients don't mind spending. "People are travelling more and getting a taste of the finer things in life and they have a disposable income. They are also more aware about what they are eating, ingredients and what goes in to their food. There is awareness about natural, unprocessed cheese."

Cheese is at a cusp right now in



Take it cheesy

India. It is in the same space where wine was a few years ago, says Arvind. When Arvind and Sourabh Vinayak started Darima Farms in 2018, it was out of passion and a very romantic idea to do something interesting. "Now we see the market evolving very fast. Smaller cheese makers are coming up. I can think of 15-18 names that have emerged in the last 10 years. The cheese market here is growing by 4-5% a year," he says.

The farm employs 10 cheesemakers, all locals trained by Captain Divendar Chouhan, the master cheesemaker at the enterprise. Other than the usual suspects like cheddar and gouda, they also have zarai (spice rubbed semi hard cheese) and chilli bomb

(red chilli infused semi hard cheese), that they came up with.

For many, like Bengaluru-based Benjamin Armel and Kathrina Salam, cheese making started as a lockdown activity. "We were eating cheese but didn't know how to make it. During lockdown it was hard to get cheese delivered. So we got into it out of curiosity," says Benjamin. They made it for themselves and their friends. But slowly the circle started growing. Eventually they got into it professionally and launched Nari and Kage. "We wanted to show that it was possible to make artisanal cheese in India. All our cheeses are made the traditional way," says Benjamin, who started collaborating with farmers.

From Manchego, a Spanish



cheese to Mexican cheese like queso oaxaca, at Nari and Kage they try to do cheeses from all over the world, including feta, blue cheese, ricotta... "I grew up in France. Every neighbourhood had a boulangerie. The area you grow up in, the boulangerie guy in that area knows you well and eventually he knows your taste and you can ask them questions. I wanted to bring that feel when we opened our fromagerie six months back," says Benjamin who came to India 10 years ago as an exchange student. He is pleased that clients who come in ask him for suggestions about what to cook and what cheese to use in the dish or with wine or in a platter. "A lot of people have no knowledge. We like to be available for them. We also organise cheese pairing workshops at the fromagerie," he says.

Starting small, they had to upscale production with demands flowing in. From two kilograms, they have gone up to making around 20 kilograms of cheese in a day. There is an audience for every kind of cheese. Blue cheese is selling very well, he adds.

With cheesemaking picking up over the last few years, there is also a growing community of cheesemakers. "We are in contact with a lot of them and we share knowledge and help each other," says Benjamin.

Spread over four acres, the distillery also hosts gin tastings in its room above the distilling space. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Kumaon in a bottle

Discover Kumaon & I, India's first provincial gin capturing the essence of the Himalayas

streams and breathtaking biodiversity, the essence of the region is difficult to articulate or distil until now.

H

immales Spirits Distillery, based in the Kumaon region, around 28 kilometres from Jim Corbett, along NH309, has intricately captured the best of the region, from its forests to the rolling hills, in India's first provincial gin, Kumaon & I.

"Kumaon is not just a region, it's an experience and while you sip this gin and revisit it, the 'I' is what's changing, so each experience is unique," explains Samarth Prasad, co-founder at Himmaleh Spirits. Born and raised in the region, Samarth's family has

Anish Khanna, co-founder,

three decades of experience in the hospitality industry (Leisure Hotels Group) and their family orchards provide the walnuts that are used in the gin, offering its delicate, buttery mouthfeel and lending a glorious texture to this gin.

Distilling journey

Samarth was inspired by the alco-bev industry while studying Hospitality Management in Switzerland, where he explored distillation techniques and diverse flavour profiles. He was keen to explore the impact hospitality has on supporting local communities and highlighting circularity in the region.

Anish Khanna, co-founder,

owes its provenance to its terroir and a local community of farmers, foragers, and harvester.

From farm to bottle

Starting with fresh Himalayan spring water with a rice-based extra neutral alcohol (ENA) as its base, the bouquet of 11 botanicals undergoes 16-hour maceration and is distilled at source for nine hours. The rice used in the ENA is grown seven kilometres away from the distiller.

Local citrus, such as *galgal* and *kinu* (vacuum-packed post harvest, frozen at -20 degrees C), *thuner* (piney Himalayan yew), *timur* (a Sichuan like pepper grown at 10,000 feet), juniper grown at the frost line, earthy local coriander, black cardamom, black turmeric (with twice the curcumin than regular turmeric), bitter and herby *kalmegh* (green chiretta), walnut, and dried rose, all lend their unique texture, taste and aroma, as you go back for another sip, each note coming to the fore,



Starting with fresh Himalayan spring water with a rice-based extra neutral alcohol (ENA) as its base, the bouquet of 11 botanicals undergoes 16-hour maceration and is distilled at source for nine hours

transporting you to the fields and forests they came from.

The 1,000 litre Hungarian bubble cap copper pot still, resplendent in the modern glass and wooden distillery, does the heavy lifting. Spread over four acres, the distillery hosts gin tastings in its room above the distilling space. The tasting room is replete with Aipan artwork, made with a white rice paste on red earth, the inspiration for the artwork on the bottle. "We wanted to show every facet of the region, so the white and red palette is from Aipan, and the black dots and lines symbolise the connection of the ingredients and the community," explains Ansh. Himmaleh Spirits Distillery ensures zero liquid and waste discharge, and has its own farming team ensuring the quality of produce. The distillery, that seeks to drive spirit-based tourism, has multiple viewing decks.

Available now across the country – priced at ₹2,700 (Uttarakhand), ₹2,896 (Goa), ₹3,000 (Gurgaon), ₹3,525 (Maharashtra), ₹3,000 (Haryana) for a 700 ml bottle, Kumaon & I uses fresh produce of the region.

It is a provincial gin that is as comfortable with South-East Asian cuisine as it is with a Kumaoni thali. Best sipped or enjoyed on the rocks, but makes a mean negroni and gimlet too. The gin is the first foray of Himmaleh Spirits, and the young founders are keen to invite spirit seekers to visit their home in the Himalayas, "for a gin tasting and soon, a restaurant that embraces the farm-to-table concept, showcasing what Kumaon has to offer," concluded Ansh.

The distillery is a little over four and a half hours from New Delhi, via NH9. The road meanders through thick fields, and colourful small towns. You could visit Jim Corbett National Park and then take NH309 for a half hour drive to Himmaleh distillery. The last stretch has lovely vistas watched over by the mountains as you reach picturesque and well manicured distillery lawns.

Anisha Menezes

As the first rays of sunlight filter through the foliage at The Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, we are treated to a cacophony of the white-crested laughing thrush, while a majestic tiger nonchalantly walks across the road.

The air is heady with the scent of sal and tall grass that paint the landscape at India's first national park, established in 1936 as Hailey National Park, and the birthplace of Project Tiger, in 1973. While Uttarakhand in general and Kumaon in particular is home to magnificent mountains, snaking

(Clockwise from right) Dining on an island on the lake at the Cinnamon Lodge Habarana; Seilama offers a Chena hut dining experience; stuffed Karukkan and pol rotis; the resort bordered by a lake. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Zubeda Hamid
zubeda.hq@thehindu.co.in

rowing up on Sri Lankan food, thanks to a parent from the country, makes me somewhat picky when it comes to how spicy my *pol sambol* is or how soft yet crisp hoppers (*appams*) need to be. And yet, Sri Lanka surprises me with its food – its freshness, dedication to detail, and sheer variety.

I am at the Cinnamon Lodge Habarana, a resort in Habarana, about 180 kilometres from Colombo.

Here, the focus is on farm-to-fork, locally grown, fresh produce. The Lodge, sprawling 27 acres, has a portion devoted to organic farming – capsicum, corn, aubergine, vanilla, ginger and beans grow alongside lemon, pomegranate, dragon fruit, star fruit and passion fruit. And of course mangoes of all kinds – different varieties are available more or less around the year, says the lodge's general manager, Murfad Shariff.

In a climate-controlled greenhouse, lettuce and gherkins are grown. Murfad says, the farm supplies to both, the 138-room Cinnamon Lodge as well as the property next door, the 108-room Habarana Village by Cinnamon. The 42-year-old properties are owned by Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts (a constituent of Lankan conglomerate, John Keels Holdings).

Habarana is located in Anuradhapura district, a dry zone, which is one of the major paddy-growing areas in the country. Murfad tells us that the Lodge too cultivates paddy. The plantation has a composting unit and a sewage treatment plant to ensure water supply in the dry season. It is bordered by a lake, on the other side of which are agricultural fields melding into the forest. The Lodge has two restaurants, two bars, and several location-dining experiences – on the jetty, treetops, on an island and at a hut, Seilama. We have dinner at Seilama: a mud-floor structure with a thatched roof (called



Notes from a

Serendip kitchen

The Cinnamon Lodge Habarana champions farm-to-fork Sri Lankan cuisine, including hand-ground sambol, firewood oven bread and *wattalapam*



a *Chena hut*) with wooden tables and benches laid out with terracotta crockery. Outside, there is a large earthen structure, a replica of *Vee Bissa* (a traditional paddy storage apparatus). Though some of the food may look familiar, especially to Indians from the southern states, when it comes to the influence of coconut and the predominance of rice, Sri Lankan cuisine is uniquely its own, drawing from its local landscape, ethnic diversity and its one-time colonists, the Dutch and Portuguese.

Banana leaves are laid out on clay plates (or woven baskets). We start with soup, rasam-like,



known as *Thambun hodi*, served with warm, crusty *dara poranu paan*, firewood oven-baked bread. Chef Sampath says this is

what farmers' wives served their men after a hard day's work. If it was meant to revive their strength, it must have amply served its purpose – the bite of intense pepper towards the end will shake you out of any drowsy feelings the mellow atmosphere may bring about.

On the menu are *pol* (coconut) rotis, and *idiyappams* (string hoppers) with a touch of colour – not just the white and red rice flour ones, but also those made from butterfly pea flower. There are *elawalu* rotis (stuffed vegetable) and stuffed chicken rotis too with Sri Lankan dal curry, *polos ambala* or baby jackfruit curry, Jaffna prawn curry, a vegetable stew and chicken curry. The rice is *Dunthel bath*, a flavoured, fragrant yellow rice, along with red rice, made of *kurula thuda*, a traditional red rice variety, which Chef Sampath tells us is chock-full of fibre. Accompaniments include three sambols: *pol* (coconut-y), *katta* (spicy) and *seeni* (sugary), along with *gotukola*, or pennywort that is cooked *poriyal* style.

We end with *wattalapam*, which Chef Sampath describes as the Sri Lankan caramel custard, topped with a cube of jaggery: refreshing, and not as sweet as its European cousin. Warm and replete, we watch the unseasonal rain spatter the grass outside. Monkeys, swinging on the massive banyan tree's roots earlier in the day, have scuttled away. The walk back to the room may be damp, but waiting just inside, there is an armchair, a misty window and a cup of Ceylon tea.

The writer was in Sri Lanka at the invitation of Sri Lankan Airlines.

Sustainable farming

Under a sustainable farming initiative run in partnership – via the John Keells Foundation, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts and Modern Agri – small farmers in Sri Lanka are provided with knowledge and technical support on modern agricultural practices. Seven farmers from the Habarana Complex are part of this initiative. Another pilot project, the Bees that Sustain Lives has 15 persons from the locality involved, trained and equipped with beekeeping tools. The project is underpinned by a buy-back mechanism facilitated by the Cinnamon group.

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Breaking barriers through music

Pakistani music producer Talal Qureshi on his journey and collaborating with Indian artistes

Amarjot Kaur

amarjot.kaur@thehindu.co.in

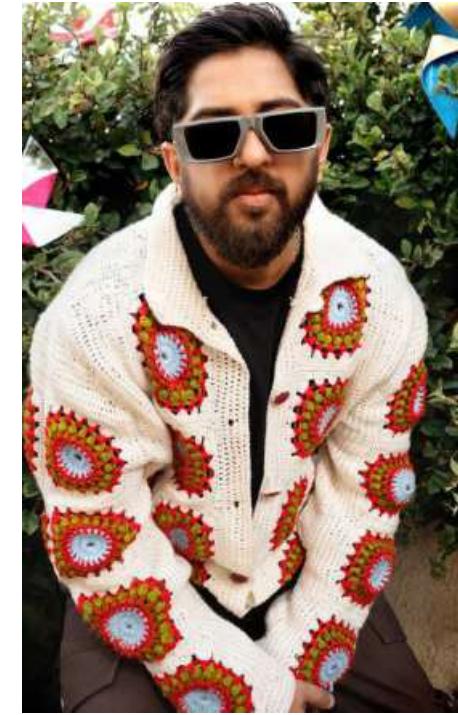
For his first-ever interview with an Indian newspaper, Pakistan-based songwriter and music producer Talal Qureshi seems relaxed.

Clad in an Adidas jumper, fixing his EarPods, he connects with *The Hindu* on Zoom to explain the three-track addition to his first album *Turbo*, which now makes it *Turbo Deluxe*, and his experience of working with Indian musicians. The clock strikes 12.30pm on a weekday. "I just woke up; slept at six in the morning," begins the 36-year-old. Debatably, burning the midnight oil may have contributed to his success in the desi-pop electronica genre, but there is no substitute for talent, he believes. After all, he has come a long way from 2013 when he released his first instrumental EP, *Equator*. "I don't have any formal training in music. I used to work in a radio station in 2010-2011. The only reason I wanted to work there was because they had a studio and I couldn't afford one. I would do my work, at the same time I would make music. That's how my first EP came about, with a job that paid me just Pakistani rupees (PKR) 5,000," he shares.

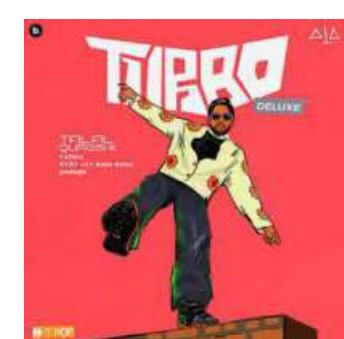
At the age of 13, Talal was first introduced to music-making through PlayStation. Reticent about reaching out to fellow musicians for collaborations, he stuck to making instrumental tracks for a long time. "I wasn't good at networking. I remember connecting with rapper Faris Shafi, the first artiste I teamed up with, and sending him beats. He told me that there's no space for him to rap. That's when I realised that I was only invested in crafting melodies. I started working with more artistes gradually and learnt that I can utilise my melodies in vocal production too."

For *Turbo*, Talal collaborated with Indian artistes, singer Mitika Kanwar (for songs 'Aya', 'Chayn' and 'Dunya') and rapper Yashraj. "Mitika can sing anything at any key. She is as passionate about her music as I am. In my album, I wanted to have people who I genuinely like listening to," he says. With Yashraj, Talal belted out 'Kundi' and 'Aya.' "Yashraj is so versatile that he can adapt to any style and still be Yash. That's what I like about him; his music is so tight and unorthodox. Working with these artistes has been a pleasure," he adds.

Though *Turbo*, a 12-song album, was released in September last year, he added three more songs to it and launched it again in February this year as *Turbo Deluxe*. "I have been trying to make an album for the last seven or eight years. It took me nearly two years to come up with *Turbo*," he shares, stating that he wanted



Talal Qureshi (above); artwork of *Turbo Deluxe*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



he says. "South-Asian music is on the rise; people have been accepting electronic music even before, and now it's making its way into the mainstream. I quite like the song 'Doobey' from *Gehraiyaan*, for instance," he says. Among artistes who Talal wishes to collaborate with, singer Atif Aslam tops the list. "But I want to go global too. I would love to work with Mark Ronson and Skrillex someday," he signs off.

Turbo Deluxe is now streaming on all major audio platforms.

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ACP Bhawani is back

Anuja Chauhan speaks about her next novel, *The Fast and the Dead*, and the return of the avuncular ACP Bhawani



Mini Anthikkad Chhibber

mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

ACP Bhawani Singh is back in Anuja Chauhan's latest whodunit-romance, *The Fast and the Dead* (Harper Collins). There was serendipity in his return, the 53-year-old author says. "When I wrote *Club You To Death*, I was working with an idea of this pudgy, gentle oldie who radiates so much sympathy that people can't help talking to him."

Bhawani, Anuja says, was a vibe, not a face. All that changed with *Murder Mubarak*, based on *Club You to Death*, that is dropping on Netflix this March. Directed by Homi Adajania, the film features an ensemble cast including Sara Ali Khan, Vijay Varma, Dimple Kapadia, Karisma Kapoor, Sanjay Kapoor, and Pankaj Tripathi as Bhawani. "I kept picturing him (Tripathi) in my head, as I wrote," says Anuja. "That was a little hard to break out of. Luckily, he's quite a dream casting, in fact a lot of my readers are saying when they read the book, they were imagining Pankaj as Bhavani..."

Club You to Death, about a trainer who ends up very dead in a posh health club, is set in Delhi. *The Fast and the Dead* moves the action to Bengaluru – Bhawani is on holiday. When a jeweller dies in Habba Galli, Shivajinagar, there is no shortage of suspects – from the local veterinarian, Jhoonar Rao, to superstar Haider Sait and several others.

That the jeweller's wife broke her Karwa Chauth fast (that some women observe for their husband's long life) before the moon came up does not help matters. "The book pairs two issues that have come up often in my life, and which have always intrigued me – street dogs (menace or blessing?) and Karwa Chauth (faith versus feminism)."

As with most issues nowadays, Anuja says, a street dog is never just a street dog. "One heated WhatsApp altercation with your neighbours, and swiftly he/she rises to become a barometer of your decency, your patriotism, and your standing in society. Ditto with Karwa Chauth – keeping it or not should be a matter of individual choice, but society is not content to let it be just that."

Living in Bengaluru rural with Nandi Hill views and leafy roads empty enough to cycle on, Anuja has recently acquired "a teeny-tiny flat" in the heart of the city. "It is walking distance from all the main shopping and party districts, and of course my muse for this book – Shivaaji Nagar." It is the energy of the bazaars that attracts Anuja. "The intimacy, and the fact that a good time doesn't cost much, the magic is accessible and the thrills are cheap. Nobody even went broke shopping in a good, old-fashioned bazaar."

When we last spoke about setting a novel in Bengaluru, Anuja said she was working on getting the keys of the city. "I think it was the language. I took Kannada lessons for three months, and while I am far from fluent, I can at least communicate!"

Vivek MV

vivekmv@thehindu.co.in

Alia Bhatt's love for Nature and wildlife began when she was a child. "As kids, my sister (Shaheen Bhatt) and I would rescue kittens," says the actor. She has now come on board as the executive producer of the upcoming web series, *Poacher*, a crime drama which revolves around Forest officials trying to uncover an ivory poaching ring. "We have a responsibility towards our planet, and that's one of the reasons why I became a part of *Poacher*," says Alia, during an interaction with *The Hindu* in Mumbai. "Animals bring so much joy to us. It's important to reinstate the significance of the coexistence between humans and animals. I thought *Poacher* conveyed this message. The series speaks for an important cause," she shares.

Alia adds that she and her daughter Raha enjoy connecting with Nature. "My daughter grows up around animals, and she has so much love for them. As you grow older, you get occupied with school and college. And then, life takes over with excessive human interaction. In this context, a scientific explanation makes so much sense – it says that when you see greenery, your brain releases dopamine and you feel calm."

Writer and director of *Poacher*, Richie Mehta, who won the International Emmy Award for web series *Delhi Crime*, calls the Malayalam thriller a conscience-driven project. "There are just about 40,000 Asian elephants left in the world. Statistically, and eventually, they could go extinct. We don't understand

(Clockwise from below) Stills from *Poacher*; and Alia Bhatt.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Animal instinct

Alia Bhatt, along with director Richie Mehta and the cast of *Poacher* on how the series is entertaining yet relevant

what extinction means because we never grapple with it. What does it mean when something is gone forever?" asks Richie.

About the process of creating the series, he adds, "The art of balancing a strong social theme with the pace of your film or a series depends on many factors. The result is a mixture of editing, music, and tone. I keep my scripts as real as possible, and that helps. Thrillers are paced a certain way, and with

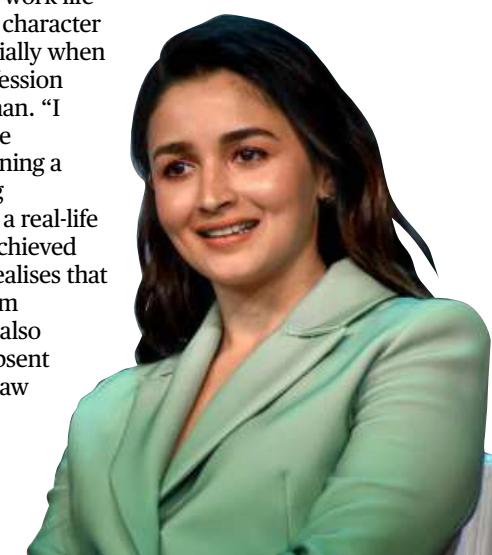
every episode, the story moves faster. That's what I have tried to achieve in this series."

Actor Nimisha Sajayan plays a fierce Forest Officer, while Roshan Mathew essays the role of a computer programmer who fights wildlife corruption while staying undercover, in the series. After starring in Tamil films *Jigarthanda: Double X*, the hit sequel to Karthik Subbaraj's *Jigarthanda* (2014), and the widely acclaimed

character," he explains.

Actor Dibyendu Bhattacharya, while speaking about his role of a Field Director in the Kerala Forest Department, says acting is an evolving process. "As an actor, I prepare every day," he adds.

Poacher is now streaming on Prime Video



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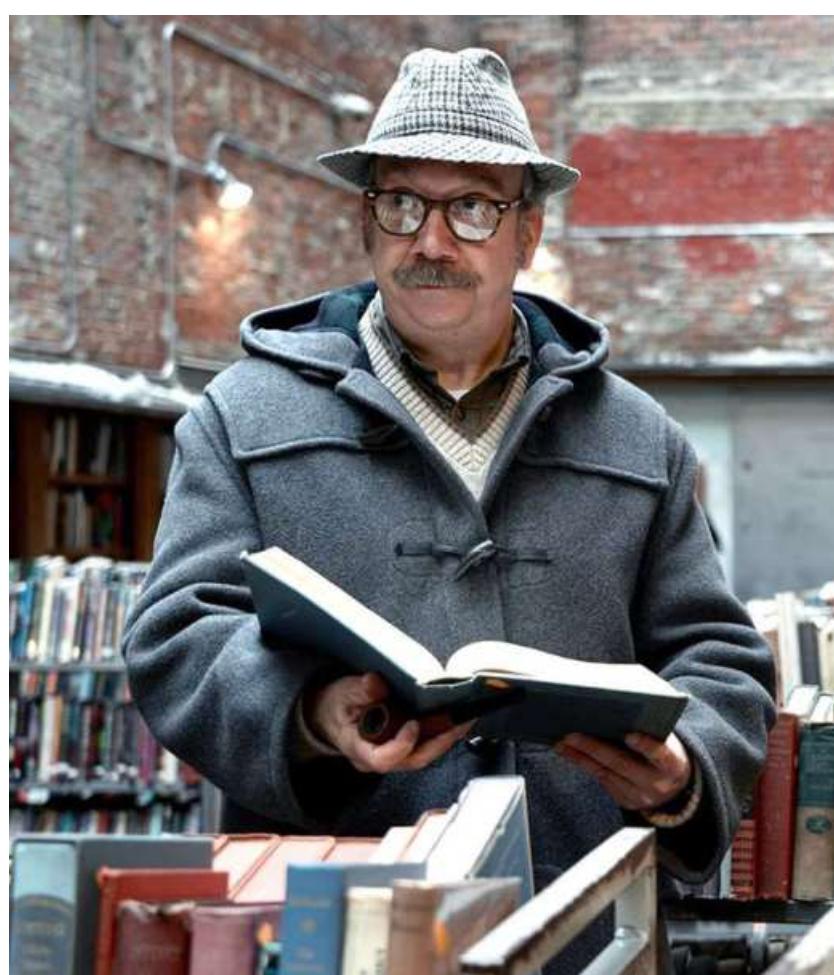
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The Holdovers

Director: Alexander Payne

Cast: Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Dominic Sessa

Storyline: While stuck on campus during Christmas break, a curmudgeonly instructor forms an unlikely bond with a troublemaker student and the school's head cook, who has just lost her son in Vietnam



A moody Christmas miracle

English

Gautam Sunder

gautam.sundar@thehindu.co.in

It is impossible not to reminisce about Alexander Payne's previous collaboration with Paul Giamatti, *Sideways* (2004), while watching *The Holdovers*.

In both films, Giamatti plays a mopey, curmudgeonly sad sack of a teacher, forever burdened by the weight of unrealised potential, a lack of romantic entanglement and an unfinished epic book project. If *Sideways* introduced to the world at large an actor-director duo to watch out for, *The Holdovers* cements their legacy as amongst the finest.

Taking place in 1970s New England, Payne's latest sets up shop at an

all-boys boarding school called Barton during the winter holidays where an unlikely trio find themselves in the (unwanted) company of each other.

There is professor Paul Hunham (Giamatti), the most pompous of professors who teaches ancient civilizations and particularly delights in making life hell for all his privileged students. Paul has strabismus (both eyes do not line up in the same direction) and trimethylaminuria, a metabolic condition giving him a foul body odor, making him an easy target to make fun of.

Then we have Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa), a bright but somewhat troublesome student whose honeymooning mother and new husband have left him behind and now cannot be reached over the phone; he tries to cover up his discontent with a facade of sarcastic quips and flailing bravado.

And completing the oddball gang is the cafeteria's head cook Mary Lamb (Da'Vine Joy Randolph), a recently-bereaved mother mourning her son Curtis, a graduate of Barton who died in the Vietnam War. Mary took up the job only so that her son could attend a school of this stature, but now spends her days smoking and drinking, trying to forget what she has lost.

From then on, the three trot along a predictable path, and each of them learn there is more to their personalities than meets the eye. Secrets are shared, traumas are unearthed, and eventually, bonds are forged. There is even an off-kilter Christmas party, an almost-romance, and a road trip all thrown in for good measure.

This is Payne's eighth feature, and he is in spectacular control over the script written by David Hemingson. The narrative is sprinkled with the specific kind of melancholy and tragic humour that the director specialises in. But there is also a smattering of themes, though Payne ensures he retains the distinct specific spirit of 70s American cinema throughout.

Easily the director and actor's finest work since their merry wine jaunt 20 years ago, it should stand them both in good stead at the Oscars next month.

Above all, *The Holdovers* is a moody little reminder that clichés and life lessons can never go out of style, and that nobody really does disappointment better than Payne.

The Holdovers is currently running in theatres

Snippets



Sivakarthikeyan's film with Rajkumar Periasamy titled Amaran

Amaran is the title of actor Sivakarthikeyan's upcoming film directed by Rajkumar Periasamy, the makers announced with a first-look poster and a teaser.

Sivakarthikeyan plays the late Indian Army officer, Major Mukund Varadarajan, who led the Indian Army's 44 Rashtriya Rifles Cheetah Company. In the 90-second teaser we see the Major readying his men for a risky counterterrorism operation.

Major Mukund was martyred while fighting militants in Shopian, Kashmir, in April 2014. He was posthumously bestowed with the Ashok Chakra.

Amaran features Sai Pallavi as the female lead. Details regarding rest of the cast remain unknown at the moment.



Emraan Hashmi officially boards Adivi Sesh's G2

Bollywood actor Emraan Hashmi has joined Adivi Sesh in *G2*. A sequel to the 2018 Telugu film *Goodachari*, *G2* marks the next chapter in Sesh's self-written spy franchise.

This is Hashmi's second venture in Telugu cinema. He is also part of the upcoming action film *OG* starring Pawan Kalyan. Hashmi recently portrayed the villain in *Tiger 3*, fronted by Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif.

G2 will feature Banita Sandhu as the female lead. The film is produced by TG Vishwa Prasad and Abhishek Agarwal, under the banner of People Media Factory, Abhishek Agarwal Arts, and AK Entertainments. It is directed by Vinay Kumar Siriginedi.



Jr NTR's Devara: Part 1 gets a new release date

Jr NTR is reuniting with director Koratala Siva for a film titled *Devara*, which will be released in two parts, and the first one was previously scheduled to hit theatres on April 5.

The makers have now confirmed that the film's release date has been pushed to October 10.

Devara marks Janhvi Kapoor's entry into Telugu cinema and stars Saif Ali Khan as the antagonist. Prakash Raj, Srikanth and Shine Tom Chacko are also part of the cast.

Produced by NTR's brother Nandamuri Kalyan Ram, *Devara* has onboard production designer Sabu Cyril, editor Sreekar Prasad and cinematographer Rathnavelu. The film's music is by Anirudh.

Mildly-engaging origin story

While not an over-stimulated three-hour marathon peopled with growly meta-humans, this superhero movie is an easy watch and just as effortlessly forgettable

English

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

The fourth film in the SSU (Sony's Spider-Man Universe), following the *Venom* films and *Morbius* (ugh), *Madame Web* is vaguely amusing. This is not a film that would drive you to bite your arm in frustration nor will it have you staring at the screen in shock and awe. At a relatively short running time of under two hours, *Madame Web* tells the origin story of Cassie Webb (Dakota Johnson).

Differing from the comic, *Madame Web* shows Cassie as a young woman in her 30s discovering her psychic abilities and not an elderly woman on life support. The movie starts in the '70s in the Peruvian Amazon with scientist Constance (Kerry Bishe) very pregnant with Cassie, looking for a rare spider with miraculous healing powers. She finds the spider, and betrayal in the form of explorer Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim).

Cut to 33 years ahead and Cassie is working as a paramedic in New York with Ben Parker (Adam Scott). After a couple of instances of Cassie's social awkwardness including one at a baby shower for Ben's sister-in-law, Mary (Emma Roberts), she

Madame Web

Director: S. J. Clarkson

Cast: Dakota Johnson, Sydney Sweeney, Celeste O'Connor, Isabela Merced, Tahar Rahim, Mike Epps, Emma Roberts, Adam Scott

Storyline: A young woman discovers her psychic powers after an accident and must confront her past to face her future

meets with an accident and everything changes dramatically for her.

Suddenly burdened with psychic powers where she can somewhat see the future, Cassie wonders if she is losing her mind. Elsewhere, Ezekiel is living in his digital cocoon and seems to spend his ill-gotten super-powers obsessing over his death. He sees three young women, Julia (Sydney Sweeney), Anya (Isabela Merced) and Mattie (Celeste O'Connor), as the



cause of his downfall. He bullies his tech support team of one, Amaria (Zosia Mamet), to track the teenagers down.

Cassie with her *déjà vu*, *presque vu* and *jamais vu*, realises the girls are in trouble and reluctantly takes them under her wing. The rest of the movie sees the fab four fleeing Ezekiel and Cassie making a quick trip to Peru (no jet lag or never-ending immigration lines for superheroes) to meet Santiago (José María Yazpik) from the secret spider tribe in Peru, Las Arañas, to learn about her past, heritage and sundry things.

Madame Web has some serviceable action sequences, the women are all competent and it is nice to see *Severance's* Scott as a younger Uncle Ben. Rahim wades into his wickedness with gusto. Including the birth of Peter Parker in the movie can be looked at as cute or cringe-y myth-making depending on your frame of mind. *Madame Web* is not an over stimulated three-hour marathon peopled with angst-ridden growly meta-humans and it does not have a mid or end-credit sequence.

That is about all one can say for this film that one would most probably forget by the time one reaches the parking lot or the bus stop—yay for public transport.

Madame Web is currently running in theatres