



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



Trace the lasting legacy of India’s acoustic pianos through this project **P2**

ACTOR VASUNDHARA PENS A MURDER MYSTERY **P4**

**Akila Kannadasan**  
akila.k@thehindu.co.in

## Mango ice cream, Chennai

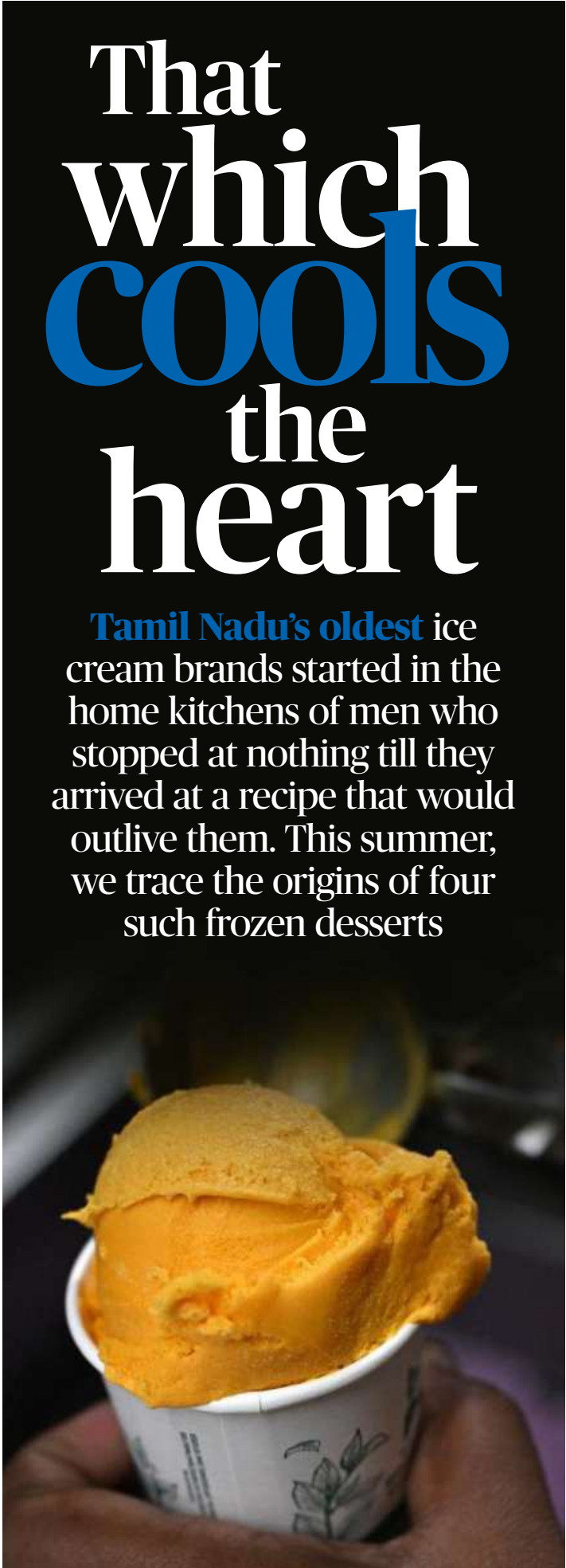
**C**unhiraman General Stores in Royapuram sells what is arguably the best mango ice cream in Chennai. To buy a cup, one has to first get a token from the store, which makes the experience all the more charming. The mango ice cream at Kunhiraman is the result of the founder’s research and perseverance.

“It was launched in 1953,” says 46-year-old Akilesh Baskar, Kunhiraman’s grandson. Royapuram, says Akilesh, had plenty of Anglo-Indian families back then, who suggested that his grandfather try making ice creams. “He came to Madras from Calicut in the 1920s, and first started a petty shop,” says Akilesh. “He later developed it into a grocery store, selling sodas and cold drinks on the side.”

Kunhiraman, based on ideas by Britishers and Anglo-Indians, started researching ice creams. “But before he could start making them, he passed away. His staff made ice cream in his memory, two years later.” The grocery store has also been selling grape juice from 1958, and Akilesh has also added chocolate milk and pista milk over the last one year. Kunhiraman’s mango ice cream initially cost less than one paisa, and was served in thick glass bowls. Today though, the bowls have been replaced by disposable ones.

“Most of our customers are from South and central Chennai,” says Akilesh, who has plans of expanding their brand. “I hope to sell our ice cream at restaurants in South Chennai soon,” he says. But the Kunhiraman experience will be complete only if the ice cream is had in front of their ancient grocery store, right where it all started.

Located at North Terminus Road, Royapuram. Call 9840227859.



B JOTHI RAMALINGAM

**Tamil Nadu’s oldest** ice cream brands started in the home kitchens of men who stopped at nothing till they arrived at a recipe that would outlive them. This summer, we trace the origins of four such frozen desserts



MOORTHY G

## Jigarthanda, Madurai

**T**he origin of this now omnipresent ice cream-based dessert can be traced to a corner shop in Madurai’s Keelavasal. It all began as an ice cream venture in the Sheik Meeran household in the 1960s. Meeran came to Madurai

## Jelly with ice cream, Nagercoil

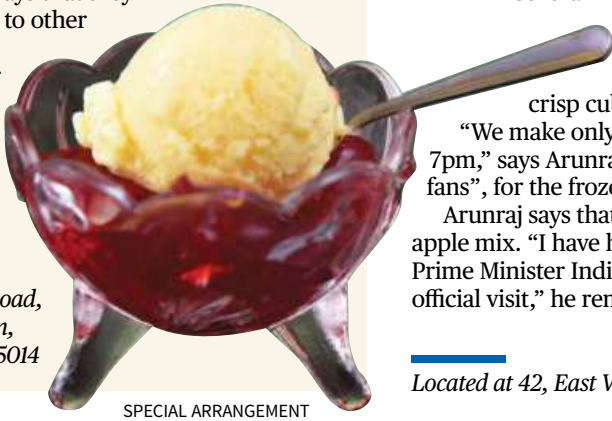
**W**hen the nation woke up to news of its independence from the British on August 15, 1947, a small ice cream shop was being inaugurated in a town in Tamil Nadu. The owner, Parameswaren, was unaware of how monumental the day was. Today, Warens Ice Cream’s main store still stands in the same spot on Balamore Road in Nagercoil. “The neighbourhood had an *agraharam* behind it then, and someone who had a radio there heard that India had attained independence on our opening day,” says Babu Arunachalam, Parameswaren’s grandson.

Warens is known for jelly with ice cream, its signature dessert that has remained a constant on its menu since 1947. “Grandfather initially sold a range of cold drinks such as sherbet that he made at home,” says Babu. Britishers, who would come to the Salvation Army Catherine Booth Hospital (CBH), near where Parameswaren’s shop was located, enjoyed his drinks. “They suggested he also make ice cream and even helped him import an ice cream machine,” says Babu.

At Warens, they make their own mixed fruit jelly and vanilla ice cream. “When he started out, grandfather sold a cup for 25 paise,” says the 52-year-old, adding that today, the same costs ₹60.

Warens has two branches in Nagercoil, and Babu says that they have plans to expand to other parts of Tamil Nadu. The name is short for Parameswaren, which was easier for Britishers, their first customers, to pronounce.

Located at Balamore Road, 92A/115, Tower Junction, Nagercoil. Call 9443375014



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

from Thoothukudi’s Arampannai village to make a living. “His was a large family, and everyone, including his two sisters and four brothers, pitched in,” recalls Mohammed Rabic, a relative.

“He started selling homemade ice cream door-to-door in a *thooku vaali*,” Rabic says. “He would serve it in a leaf placed on a *vaazha mattai* (banana stem fibre).” Meeran’s venture was driven by necessity. “His family struggled for their three meals,” says the 37-year-old.

Meeran graduated from selling door-to-door to a pushcart, finally opening his own shop in 1977. He also made nannari syrup himself, and kept soaked *kadal paasi* (agar agar) that he sometimes added as toppings to his ice cream. “One evening, when there was a particularly high demand, he threw in everything he had: ice cream, *kadal paasi*, and nannari syrup and served it to customers,” recalls Rabic.

“It was an instant hit.” Meeran realised he had arrived at something special, and worked on it for six months. Thus, was born jigarthanda, meaning, ‘that which cools the heart’. Rabic says that 90% of jigarthanda consists of milk, that they source from villages near Madurai. Everything, including the ice cream and the basundi topping, is made in-house. Jigarthanda has become synonymous with Madurai, something Meeran could never have imagined.

Located at 94, East Marret Street corner, Madurai. Call 9150099971/72



MOORTHY G

## Apple milk, Madurai

**N**othing much has changed at Amsavalli Bhavan on Madurai’s East Veli Street ever since it was started 75 years ago. The hand-painted signboard, mosaic floor, a narrow flight of stairs that leads one to the dim-lit air-conditioned dining room upstairs... In the 1970s, a new dish was added to its strictly non-vegetarian menu: apple mix, popularly known as apple milk or apple ice cream. Since then, it has become a ritual for anyone who eats their seeraga samba biryani to follow it up with a cup of the frozen dessert.

“My grandfather Gopal Pillai came up with the recipe after a trip to Goa,” says G Arunraj, the third-generation owner. Gopal arrived at the current version after a lot of trial and error. Apple milk is Amsavalli’s version of vanilla ice cream served with chunks of apple. The dessert consists of plain milk, let to simmer for several hours with sugar, after which a suggestion of vanilla flavouring is added. It is frozen and served after adding diced apple. The result is a sweet, creamy, milky concoction punctuated by crisp cubes of apple.

“We make only small batches every day, that get sold out by 7pm,” says Arunraj, who adds that they have several “die-hard fans”, for the frozen dessert.

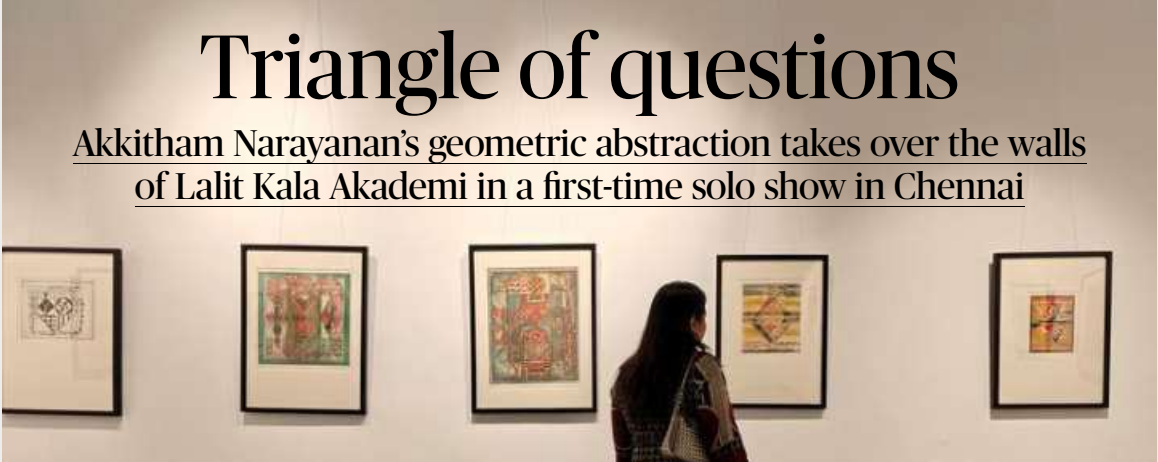
Arunraj says that several political leaders have enjoyed their apple mix. “I have heard that my grandfather offered it to the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi when she came to Madurai on an official visit,” he remembers.

Located at 42, East Veli Street, Madurai. Call 0452-2620117.

**Gowri S**  
gowri.s@thehindu.co.in

**A**kkitham Narayanan strongly believes that art cannot be translated into words, and so he shoots a friendly directive at me: “Don’t exaggerate! I have nothing to say, I am here only to show”. It is almost strange that a veteran artist, one of the pioneers of the Madras Art Movement and a darling of KCS Paniker, would throw his hands up in the air to say that there is no specific meaning to his widely appreciated, collected and studied geometric abstractions. In fact, he is not too keen on the term itself. “Any painting can be interpreted in any way. I like the forms and so I develop the forms.”

Sporting an affable smile, the 86-year-old is at Lalit Kala Akademi today, surrounded by almost 150 works of art for a partial retrospective that charts his dalliance with the form, from the 1950s to the 2020s. Large (and small) abstracts, sometimes linear and sometimes not, with a clear preoccupation for order in chaos take over the walls for his first-ever solo show in Chennai. The display, sans chronology, is a window into his revered body of work spanning decades – influences from music



## Triangle of questions

Akkitham Narayanan’s geometric abstraction takes over the walls of Lalit Kala Akademi in a first-time solo show in Chennai

to printmaking and Tantric art are unmissable and ‘noticeably Akkitham’.

The Kerala-born artist who obtained a diploma in Painting from the Government College of Art and Craft, Madras, in 1961, was one among the then-young promising artists who set up the Cholamandal Artists Village in seaside Madras.

“At the end of our studies in India, Paniker insisted that we look back into India, and our own traditions. He organised tours across the East, North and West, to make us understand a cross-section of Indian art through temple and cave art,” he remembers. Out of this time came many of his figurative works –

figuration, not in human form – dating back to the beginning of his practice in the 1950s. Paul Cezanne, William Kandinsky and Rembrandt, have all played their roles in Narayanan’s life through various stages of his career. He remembers pouring over these paintings in books at the Connemara library.

Narayanan went to Paris on a Government scholarship where he studied painting under Jean Bertholle, and engraving under Lucien Couteau at the École des Beaux-Arts, from the end of 1967 to 1970. For a young Narayanan, who until then had only a theoretical knowledge of European art, the exposure and interactions in the city helped realise how enmeshed art is to life. After a year largely



carried by the dilemma of where and how to start, his practice began.

“When I went to Paris, I completely changed. I went to linear and geometric abstraction,” he recalls. It began with two forms – the fundamental symbolic forms of the triangle and the square,

**Geometry of life** (Left) The display; (below) Akkitham Narayanan. GOWRI S

which he later split from, and to this day, experiments with.

Paniker used to send him letters carrying curious enquiries and sometimes prescient advice. Narayanan remembers, “He would write asking, ‘What are you doing there? You are in Europe and you must be knowing what’s happening in India too. Compare these, and do something on your own!’ That inspired me to think of doing something different.”

Though his canvases are reminiscent of a kind of rhythmic chanting that can be alluded to Tantric art, he strips them off any religious meaning. In front of the charming miniature watercolours, it is hard not to peer into the intricacy of Narayanan’s elements. He reminds us of his realisation yet again, “There’s nothing you can explain in words, that you can’t through images. The feeling of pleasure is hard to explain.”

**A Thousand Universes** is on display at Lalit Kala Akademi, Egmore until April 15 from 11am to 7pm, and at Artworld – Sarala’s Art Centre, Alwarpet, from April 16 to May 10, 10.30am to 6.30pm.



**Chasing legacy**

The Madras Musical Association will perform Johann Sebastian Bach’s monumental *Mass in B Minor* featuring the MMA Choir and the MMA Symphony Orchestra. Regarded as one of Bach’s greatest achievements, it is a transcendent blend of intricate choral writing, virtuoso solos, and orchestral grandeur. The concert is conducted by Augustine Paul, with Eshvita Menezes as the concert master. @Museum Theatre, Egmore. April 6, 6.30pm. Tickets, priced at ₹500 and ₹1,000 at BookMyShow. For details, call 9840485558.



**Love versus devotion**

Girish Karnad’s *Flowers* is a dramatic monologue that explores the internal conflict of a priest torn between his devotion and his growing love for a courtesan, is to be staged. Presented as a dramatic monologue by TM Karthik, the presentation will be accompanied by Carnatic vocals, music, and dance, bringing together historical, mythological, and contemporary themes. The play directed by Denver Anthony Nicholas features Srividya Vadalamani on vocals, Purva Dhanashree Cotah on violin, and S Kavichelvan on mridangam. @Alliance Française, Nungambakkam. April 6, 4pm and 7pm. Tickets at allevents.in.



With regional language, especially Tamil literature, getting more recognition on audiobook platforms, one can tune into the literary world and feel at home. All you need to do is pop your headphones on

# Will you give this book a listen?



**KS Swati**  
swati.ks@thehindu.co.in

With rising screentime and shrinking attention spans, sitting down to read a book often feels like a Herculean task. But in an increasingly digital world, audiobooks have emerged as the perfect companion to help tackle those unread titles on your list. Just pop your headphones on, and let the immersive narration and sound effects transport you into the heart of the story – making the reading experience more engaging, accessible, and intimate than ever before.

“There is a considerable population which does not know how to read and write in Tamil but can speak and understand,” says Rajesh Devadas, owner of Pustaka Digital, an e-book and audiobooks publication. He adds that this is driving their market.

It is why we see as many publishers jumping on the audiobook bandwagon. To make the product more appealing, celebrities have been roped in to read, providing better visibility to some tales. For instance, actor Lakshmi Priya Chandramouli has narrated books such as *Thanneer* and *Kalvananin Kadhalai*, among others. Actor Raaghav Ranganathan who has voiced for books like Perumal Murugan’s *Koolamadari* and Sundara Ramaswamy’s *Prasadam*, had hopped on to the trend of book narration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to data shared by Yogesh Dashrath, country manager at Storytel India, more than 70% listen to regional content in India, as against 30% who listen to audiobooks in the English language. Audiobooks also help people who migrate to different cities and countries and are looking for ways to stay connected with their roots. One hence notices how audiobooks increase the consumption of books in regional languages – the content is economical, and available with just a tap.

Kunj Sanghvi, head of content at Kuku FM, noticed that YouTube didn’t have enough content for the Tamil-speaking audience, and hence began converting Tamil print books into audiobooks. On Kuku FM, the best selling writers are Kalki, Indra Soundar Rajan, Pattukottai Prabhakar, Perumal Murugan, Gokul Seshadri and Indumathi, among others.

As per data shared by Kunj, 2.2 lakh people have been listening to Kalki, and 2.1 lakh people have listened to the works of

Rajesh Kumar on Kuku FM. There are 2.5 lakh Tamil subscribers.

Audiobooks also make learning the language easier. “Put it in your pocket or listen to it on a speaker in your car. You don’t have to look at it while listening. This will reduce your screentime as well,” says Murali Kannadosan, who runs Kannadasan Pathippagam. Kannadasan Pathippagam is a bookstore and publishing house of poet, lyricist and writer Kannadasan whose works can now be accessed auditorily.

These books are also useful for people who know the language well, as not everyone has time to read says Deepika Arun, proprietor of Kadhai Osai, an audiobooks publication that has published 104 audiobooks so far.



**Hearing the written word** (Left and inset) A cover of Kalki’s *Ponniyin Selvan* and Perumal Murugan’s *Koolamadari*; (below) author Rajesh Kumar. SIVA SARAVANAN S AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

volume in which English publications operate. In Tamil publication, it is mostly a family-run business and is comparatively a small-scale industry,” says Karthikeyan.

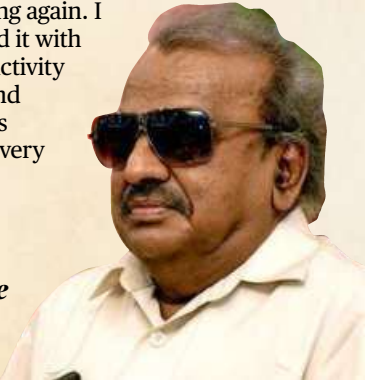
However, Deepika says that there is a lot of writers who are still sceptical about audiobooks as they are afraid that the sale of physical book will decrease. “There is a lack of awareness about how audiobooks function. It is a way for authors to make revenue out of their work on a different platform, reaching out to a different audience: a new audience,” she says.

In terms of revenue generation, Deepika says that there is an advance royalty paid to artists which is recouped by the platform. The subsequent payout is based on the number of listens.

Murali says that the requirement of a proper narrator is important, especially with regional languages. They particularly need to have proper pronunciation.

“Authors do read their works but need a professional narrator as it is a different medium altogether. It is a slow process because only small publications usually publish audiobooks. For real change, major players have to jump in,” says Deepika.

Despite the spaces for growth in this sector, audiobooks tend to provide solace. It promotes an entirely new avenue to reading, hence becoming its greatest takeaway. Indhu Priya, from Chennai, has been listening to audiobooks for the last two-and-a-half years. Her favourite genre is historical fiction. “I used to be a voracious reader. But with kids and household work, I found it hard to pick up a book and read. Audiobooks have helped me start reading again. I have combined it with my everyday activity like cooking and cleaning. It has made reading very easy.”



**Engaging with Tamil**  
These books are also an effective way to preserve regional folklore. “Unless you are deeply rooted in your culture, you’re kind of lost. You will be like a tree that has no deep roots,” says Gokul Sesadri, a Tamil historian and writer, speaking of the need to keep these tales alive in whichever format they may be.

“Audiobooks are becoming more inclusive and a hybrid model,” adds Karthikeyan Pugalendi, a third-generation owner of Sixth Sense Publications. One of the leading Tamil publishers, they have published close to 500 titles where non-fiction is their strongest suit, and other bestsellers include autobiographies, self-help, motivation, management and philosophy.

Despite these strides in Tamil literature, a lot is yet to be accomplished in this regional audiobooks landscape. For instance, bestsellers in English language have both printed books as well as audiobooks released at the same time. That is not the case with Tamil audiobooks.

“It is the sheer infrastructure and the

**As per data shared by Kunj Sanghvi, 2.2 lakh people have been listening to Kalki, and 2.1 lakh people have listened to the works of Rajesh Kumar on Kuku FM**

## Flour, fire and flavour

Ameno brings authentic Italian flavours to Chennai with handmade pastas, Neapolitan-style pizzas and a commitment to simplicity done right



**Italy, bite-sized** A spread of pizza, salad, starters and soups from Ameno. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The mushroom soup is chunky and creamy served with cheesy mozzarella bites. There is an undeniable waft of truffle that elevates the rich umami notes of the soup. For a heartier start, pick the minestrone, loaded with veggies, or the classic chicken soup. Though a little under-seasoned, both are salvaged with a drizzle of flavoured olive oil. The Ameno special salad made with a mix of tropical fruits and vegetables, topped with a creamy tangy dressing is not a pleasant addition to the table. The Greek salad, however, is a light option served with a block of feta. Pair it with a classic tomato bruschetta for a perfect beginning.

Ameno serves three cuts of their homemade egg pasta – fettuccine, tagliolini, and pappardelle, that can be paired with any of the sauces. The pesto paired with the tagliolini is a clear winner. “We also have a no-egg version for all the pastas including the lasagna, which are not handmade, to accommodate pure vegetarian customers,” says the chef. The pasta menu includes pillowy gnocchi doused in a beurre blanc sauce which is heavier on the palate.

The main event is the Neapolitan-style pizza made in a stone oven imported from Italy. The pizzas are made to order, and each one takes only two to three minutes to bake. Each pizza is fully customisable with toppings of choice and even a half-and-half can be accommodated. The crisp, yet chewy base is the result of a high hydration dough, made fresh in-house on a daily basis.

To complete the meal, either pick the tried and tested tiramisu, or the sticky coffee pudding, or better yet, head downstairs to Les Amis and indulge in a scoop or two of gelato.

*Ameno is located above Les Amis in RA Puram. A meal for two costs ₹2,000. For reservations, call 9840553635.*

**Sangita Rajan**  
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

Few things are as comforting as warm bread – dip it in flavoured olive oil or pesto, top it with marinated tomatoes, and the experience becomes even more satisfying. Italian cuisine celebrates clean flavours, transforming basic ingredients into something timeless. Yet, capturing that simplicity is often more complex than it seems.

Chennai’s newest Italian nook Ameno, located above Les Amis on Chamiers Road, serves Italian cuisine in its most authentic form. “I have worked and learnt a lot from Italian chefs over the years. That is the essence of this space,” says executive and consultant chef Rajesh Raghavan, who took a month to put the menu together.

The menu is a quantitative spread of appetisers, soups, salads, pizzas, and pastas, while specialising in handmade egg pastas and the Neapolitan-style pizza.



**Tuned in** Mirra Kannan; (below) a Steinway grand piano at KM Music Conservatory. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## Keys to the past

With World Piano Day (March 29) just behind us, meet Mirra Kannan who is documenting India’s acoustic pianos

**Akila Kannadasan**  
akila.k@thehindu.co.in

An old acoustic piano, according to Mirra Kannan, is a time capsule. Beneath its dusty lid and in between its keys, one can find “little treasures” that will offer insights into its past. “These may be old newspapers, a coin or signs of restoration by its previous technicians,” she says. The 29-year-old, who is now based in Edinburgh, Scotland, has been documenting India’s old acoustic pianos as part of her undertaking called Resonant Legacies. It is part of Paraa, her initiative that is an ‘exploration of sound’. She was in Chennai, her hometown, earlier this year, and has so far documented 15 pianos.

Mirra is fascinated by the instrument. She calls herself “a conservator of buildings on weekdays, and conservator of pianos on weekends”. Her tryst with pianos started a little over three years ago when she went to

Scotland for her Master’s in Architectural Conservation. It was there that she came across the Pianodrome, an amphitheatre made entirely of upcycled pianos. Set up by bandmates Tim Vincent-Smith and Matt Wright, the space and its many ancient pianos set Mirra’s life journey on a new path.

Mirra went on to be an apprentice under Benjamin Treuhaft, a piano tuner and technician, who introduced her to the nuances of the intricate craft of piano tuning. Opening up an old piano took Mirra back to her childhood when she would observe ‘Rao uncle’ (Chennai’s popular piano tuner S Venkateswara Rao), bent at work over her piano at her Chennai home.

For the first time, Mirra got the opportunity to not just observe a technician at work, but to tune a piano herself. “In 2023, I got to practise on the 100 odd pianos at

an abandoned shopping centre where people had given them up for adoption,” she recalls. Mirra’s interactions with these ancient pianos got her interested in the history of the instruments back home in India. “This led me to think about the piano tuners of India,” she says, adding that India’s colonial legacy has left behind several such old instruments that are living,



breathing beings that not just resonate with music, but history as well.

Thus began Mirra’s journey to India to document pianos and meet their technicians. “Talking to the technicians, understanding their journey and experiences with different pianos, blew my mind,” says Mirra, who visited Musee Musical in Chennai, Mistry & Co in Mumbai and Braganza & Co in Kolkata. These conversations, she says, showed her that the men saw their work as something “beyond a seemingly menial task of repairing an object”.

In Chennai, Mirra has documented pianos at the Taj Connemara, Musée Musical, and the KM Music Conservatory as part of the ‘Pianos of Madras’ leg of her journey.

Mirra’s documentation involves taking several photos of the instrument. “I note down the brand, its serial number, and if I’m allowed to interact with it, I play something and record it,” she says. She feels that there are several old pianos in India, and hopes to visit sometime again this year. She adds: “I’m learning so much from such technicians and look up to them.”

*To reach out to Mirra Kannan with information on old pianos, email mirra.k9@gmail.com*





Priyadarshini Paitandy  
priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in

A blue wall with murals of cheerful sunflowers and dapper-looking girls has become an Instagrammable spot on Harrington Road.

Beyond this vibrant facade lies the House of Klothberg which is a boutique, cafe, and ice cream parlour all rolled into one. The ground floor houses clothes, shoes and accessories – made in-house and sourced from European markets. There are boots in bubblegum pink and sober white, stilletos in lime green, and outfits in varying silhouettes, colours and prints. At one end of the store is a large mural of a girl created using waste denim. “We are on our way to becoming 100% sustainable. Right now we have a lot of jute-based products, bamboo-based clothing and upcycled fabric. The Autumn ‘26 collection will have vegan leather made from pomegranate and mango-based leather,” says Rajiv Raj Jagasia, founder, House of Klothberg. Eighty per cent of the collection is made in India in factories in Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Chennai, Bengaluru, Noida and incorporate tencels and Indian cotton, as well as natural dyes.

Rajiv studied Fashion and did his Master’s at Amsterdam Fashion Institute in the Netherlands. He lived there for seven years, researching on upcycling. He started the first iteration of Klothberg in Amsterdam and then moved back to Chennai and began House of Klothberg this year. “While in Amsterdam, I was a vegan activist. After coming back, I wanted to combine conscious clothing and

# Coffee at the house of murals

**This building on Harrington Road, busy with colour, houses a vegan cafe, boutique, and an ice cream parlour**



conscious food habits,” says Rajiv.

At the House of Klothberg’s Vegan Fashion Cafe, Chef Naga Arjun is on a mission to prove that vegan food can be fun and full of flavour. So, when the first dish is placed in front of me, I am a little confused. It looks like *avakkai* (raw mango pickle), tastes like it, but after two forkfuls I realise it is avocado masquerading as *avakkai*. This is the avocado tartare, one of their bestsellers. The dish gets its tartness and flavour from yuzu and alphonso puree along with shiso dressing and tapioca

crisps for texture. “It took me four months to finalise this menu. We are bringing in flavours from Japan and Peru and will keep updating the menu,” says Arjun who trained and worked in Lithuania. The cafe wants diners to know that vegan food is a lot more than just tofu and almond milk. To prove this, the next dish served is a wakame salad made with seaweed kelp, house-marinated sauce, cucumber, daikon radish and jalapeno sauce. With its

many shades of green, it looks like a terrarium in a bowl and is perfectly refreshing on a balmy afternoon. While the palate is largely European and Asian, there are a few Indian touches in the form of sourdough pizzas with tandoori sauce, topped with chunks of soya and jackfruit mock meat. “We will also introduce mock meat versions of shrimps and fish,” says Rajiv.

After a hearty meal, I head for some gelato to the mezzanine level. This space is awash in pastel colours and more murals. After the usual hard decision of choosing from almost 15 flavours – raspberry sorbet, pistachio, coconut, matcha, and espresso among others, all made with almond milk – I settle for my usual dark chocolate. As far as gelatos go, this one is hard and frozen, and the first dollop strangely slides off the cone and lands on the floor. Cradling the second helping, I find a place by the large window. Tables are few but you can find seating outdoors under thatched umbrellas that give the feeling of being away on a vacation by the sea.

House of Klothberg is located at 17/9, Harrington Road, Chetpet.



Where does the denim go? A view of the exterior, interior and food at House of Klothberg. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## Along the silk route

Step into a world of silk, stitches, and stories as Bukhara: A Journey on the Silk Route, brings 19th Century Central Asian textiles to Chennai



Sangita Rajan  
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

Step back in time to the 19th Century, where the hues and patterns of Central Asian textiles flourished along the Silk Route, beside spices, precious metals, glassware, horses, and cultural ideas. Bukhara, a city along the route, was at the heart of this textile tradition.

Inspired by this rich history is Bukhara – A Journey on the Silk Route, an exhibition curated by David Housego and Mandeep Nagi, founders of the textile brand Shades of India. This showcase of their private collection was previously presented at the National Crafts Museum, Delhi and is now making its way to Chennai.

The focus of this showcase is *suzani* embroideries and *ikat* fabrics from the 19th Century that reflect the rich legacy of the Silk Route – drawing on motifs from Mughal India, China, and the Ottoman empire in Turkey. “There was an exhibition in Paris last year on Uzbekistan and Central Asian antiquities, and I thought, if there can be a big exhibition at the Louvre, why can’t we do an exhibition here of the *suzani* rugs and *ikats*?” says David.

“I have been a collector of *suzanis* and *ikats* for quite some time. It began when I lived in Iran, and I was struck by their aesthetic sense, their colours, and their abstract designs – almost like contemporary paintings. During my travels in Afghanistan as a journalist, I came across these wonderful *suzanis* and was able to buy one or two of them,” adds David.

The Chennai showcase will feature 26 pieces of *suzani* rugs and *ikat* cloaks, among other fabrics, with some being displayed for the first time. “You’ll see at the exhibition



Warp and weft (Top) Display of Bukhara at the National Crafts Museum, Delhi; (above) David Housego and Mandeep Nagi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

that we’ve got a number of cloaks which, in the 19th Century, were a sign of wealth in Uzbekistan,” says David.

These textiles must be seen up close to be truly appreciated. Mandeep says, “The techniques and stitches used are very much like those found in India, such as chain stitch and satin stitch, but there is a very peculiar stitch they used – a twisted chain stitch. The yarns are also silk and dyed in natural colours.”

India has a rich history of ancient textiles that have been extensively studied. However, textiles influenced by Indian handiwork remain rare, according to the husband-wife duo. “I think there’s a mystery about it. Indians have seen a lot of Kanjivaram and Benaras textiles, but these are rare,” says David.

Bukhara will be on display at The Folly, Amethyst, from April 8 to 11, from 11am to 7.30pm.



### When wellness is practice

The Good Deeds Club founded by Apsara Reddy is hosting a wellness party exclusively for women. “We bring in Vibuti Arora to talk about natural facial sculpting techniques, a dancercise demo, and a health panel comprising four people who will share their fitness and health journey,” says Apsara Reddy. The event will have gourmet live counters by Chef Balaji, Park Hyatt, as well as skincare products and botanicals. Attend the Wellness Party and try your hand at rejuvenation. @Park Hyatt, Guindy, on April 8, 12pm onwards. To register, call 9444032321.



### Art, awareness and inclusivity

On World Autism Awareness Day, an inclusive art exhibition is being organised by A Brush With Art. The exhibit will showcase the creativity of 17 young neuro-diverse artists. The initiative aims to raise awareness and provide a platform for these artists to share and sell their work. The artwork will be on display at Piano, Hotel Savera’s coffee shop. @Hotel Savera, Mylapore. On till April 13, 10am to 7pm. For details, call 9841079163.

### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13636

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

- 7 Slashed (9)  
11 Events beyond human control (4,2,3)  
12 Captivated (9)  
13 X (5)  
14 Hand over the money (3,2)  
18 Taken unlawfully (6)  
19 Celestial being (6)  
22 Part of a procedure (4)  
23 Cereal fibre (4)

- Across**  
1 Made more obvious or prominent (4,5)  
8 Replete (4)  
9 Doctor (9)  
10 Employer (4)  
13 Hamper movement (5)  
15 Unfounded rumour (6)  
16 West Indian gangster (6)  
17 Ski run (6)  
19 Far from obvious (6)  
20 Soak (5)  
21 State of panic (4)  
24 Relating to the sense of smell (9)
- Down**  
2 Small stream (4)  
3 Care for (4)  
4 Amity (6)  
5 Annual Recording Academy award (6)  
6 No longer valid (3,2,4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated April 10, 2025.  
Solution No. 13635

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Salman Khan

Sajid Nadiadwala's

# SIKANDAR

An A.R. Murugadoss Film

IN CINEMAS NOW

A PEN MARUDHAR RELEASE

## BOOK YOUR TICKETS NOW

**CHENNAI CITY :-** PVR SATHYAM CINEMAS (Royapettah) | PVR ESCAPE CINEMAS (Royapettah) | WOODLANDS THEATER (Royapettah) | DEVI CINEPLEX - DEVI BALA (Mount Road) | PVR AMPA MALL (Aminjikarai) | INOX CITY CENTER (Mylapore) | EGA CINEMAS - ANU EGA (Kilpauk) | PVR S2 CINEMAS (Perambur) | PVR PALAZZO (Vadapalani) | PVR PALAZZO (IMAX) (Vadapalani) | AGS CINEMAS (T.Nagar).

**CHENGALPET CITY :-** AGS CINEMAS (Maduravoli) | AGS CINEMAS (Vilivakkam) | AGS CINEMAS (Omri) | INOX NATIONAL (Vivugambakkam) | INOX THE MARINA MALL (Omri) | INOX LUXE PHOENIX MARKET CITY (Velachery) | INOX LUXE PHOENIX MARKET CITY (IMAX) (Velachery) | PVR GRAND MALL (Velachery) | CINEPOLIS BSR MALL (Thuraiyakkam) | MAYAJAAL (Kannathur) | PVR VR MALL (Anna Nagar) | PVR AEROHUB (Meenambakkam) | PVR GALADA MALL (Pallavaram) | PVR HERITAGE RSL (Ecr) | PVR GALAXY MALL (Redhills) | MIRAJ CINEMAS (Perumpakkam) | EVP CARNIVAL CINEMAS (Chembarampakkam) | KASI TALKIES (Jafferkhanpet) | ROHINI THEATER (Koyambedu) | RAKKI CINEMAS (Ambattur) | SRI MURUGAN CINEMAS (Ambattur) | SIVASAKTHI CINEMAS (Padi) | VIJAY PARK (Injambakkam) | BABU CINEMAS (Kanchipuram) | VARADHARAJA CINEMAS (Chitlapakkam) | SRK CINEMAS (Chengalpet).

**NORTH ARCOT :-** PVR VELOCITY MALL (Vellore) | INOX SELVAM CINEMAS (Vellore) | VISHNU (Vellore) | ALANKAR CINEMAS (Vellore) | THIRUMALAI (Vellore) | SAKTHI CINEMAS (Tiruvannamalai) | BALASUBRAMANIAM CINEMAS (Tiruvannamalai) | SAKTHI CINEMAS (Gudiyatham) | CGC CINEMAS (Thirupathi) | THIRUMAGAL KALAIMAGAL COMPLEX (Thirupathi) | RAJKAMAL KAMALA COMPLEX (Ambur) | SAKTHI CINEMAS (Vaniyambadi) | LAKSHMI CINEMAS (Arcot).

**SOUTH ARCOT :-** PVR THE CINEMA PROVIDENCE MALL (Pondy) | PVR V SQAURE (Cuddalore) | JANAS (Vilupuram) | MAHALAKSHMI (Kallakurichi) | RANGA (Neyveli).

**COIMBATORE :-** PVR THE CINEMA BROOKEFIELDS MALL (Coimbatore) | INOX PROZONE MALL (Coimbatore) | PVR ALVEAL SAVVY MALL (Coimbatore) | CINEPOLIS (Coimbatore) | BROADWAY CINEMAS (Coimbatore) | BROADWAY CINEMAS (IMAX) (Coimbatore) | MIRAJ CINEMAS (Coimbatore) | KG CINEMAS (Coimbatore) | SRI SAKTHI CINEMAS (Tirupur) | KSB CINEMAS (Tirupur) | VARANASHI MULTIPLEX (Tirupur) | SRI SAKTHI CINEMAS (Erode) | MAHARAJA MULTIPLEX (Erode) | SANGEETHA (Somanur) | ARNOTHAYA (Palladam).

**MR CITY :-** INOX VISHAAL DE MALL (Madurai) | VETRI CINEMAS (Mattuthavani) | VETRI CINEMAS (Madurai) | RADIANCE CINEMAS (Madurai) | MINI PRIYA (Madurai) | KANNANDEVI (Thirunagar) | AARTHY (Dindugal) | THE CINELAUNGE (Rannad) | VETRI CINEMAS (Theni).

**SALEM CITY :-** INOX RELIANCE MALL (Salem) | SPR CINECASLE (Salem) | ROX DMC CINEMAS (Salem) | AASCAR (Salem) | ARRS MULTIPLEX (Salem) | DMC CINEMAS (Dharmapuri) | GRAND CINEMAS (Hosur) | LAKSHMI CINEMAS (Hosur) | K THEATER (Krishnagiri).

**TT CITY :-** LA MARIS (Trichy) | LA SONA MINA (Trichy) | STAR THEATER (Trichy) | VETRI E SQAURE (Tanjore).

**TK CITY :-** PSS MULTIPLEX (Tirunelveli) | MUTHURAM CINEMAS (Tirunelveli) | ALANGAR CINEMAS (Tirunelveli) | PERISON CINEMAS (Tuticorin) | BALAKRISHNA (Tuticorin) | KARTHIGAI (Nagercoil) | PVP MULTIPLEX (Nagercoil) | SATHYABAMA (Kovilpatti) | PSS MULTIPLEX (Tenkasi).



# A new chapter

Why Tamil actor Vasundhara turned author with *The Accused*, a murder mystery

Write approach  
Vasundhara.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Srinivasa Ramanujam  
srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Writing is almost as difficult as being on a diet,” laughs Vasundhara.

Familiar to fans of Tamil cinema, thanks to her performances in films like *Thenmerku Paruvakaatru*, *Thalaikoothal* and *Kanguva*, among others, Vasundhara recently forayed into writing. She has debuted as an author with *The Accused* (published by Westland), a mystery that features Inspector Rajesh trying to crack a murder case.

“When we are constantly exposed to news, we start posting our theories on it. When you say something often enough, it becomes the truth. The idea of *The Accused* stemmed from that; how people make assumptions about a suspect even before the investigation kicks in,” she explains about her debut novel.

Her tryst with words started many years ago, when as a young girl, she used to receive books as gifts. “My family was into reading. I used to get a lot of books as gifts, and really got into it,” she says, recalling the many days that went into sinking her thoughts into the Secret Seven and Famous Five novels, “I always wanted to be an author or a journalist.”

#### A day on the sets

Life had other plans, because when she was in Class XII, popular Tamil director Saran spotted her photograph and cast her in a small role in the Arya-starrer *Vattaram* (2006). “It was a rather inaccurate representation of how the

film industry was... because it was such a safe and friendly set. They treated me like a kid who had to be protected. Based on that experience, I fell in love with the film industry,” she recalls.

One thing led to another, and soon, Vasundhara found herself in the thick of the film industry, with films like *Peranmai* and *Thenmerku Paruvakaatru*, among others. Despite more than 15 years in the industry, she feels she has not got the kind of opportunities she ought to have. “It’s probably because I wear my heart on my sleeve, and that’s not a good thing in the film industry.”



***I keep telling filmmakers to offer me villain roles because they do not require me to dance***

VASUNDHARA

It is ironic, because Vasundhara is a Tamilian who can speak the local language fluently, a quality that should have worked in her favour and fetched her big-ticket projects. Unfortunately, that has not happened. “It is disappointing,” she rues, “We take great pride in our language. I wish we had pride in our people as well. A lot of success also depends on how much you socialise and how much luck favours you.”

She still is in love with her job. Which explains her choice to do guest appearances in upcoming films, apart from a project titled *Kali* and a Telugu film with Priyadarshi, directed by Sunil.

When she is not on set, Vasundhara likes to work on her painting and writing. She has taken dance lessons but unfortunately, “I’m not getting it and my masters are getting tired,” she laughs, adding, “The reason I keep telling filmmakers to give me villain roles is that they do not require me to dance.”



Creating an impact  
AS Venkatesh.  
SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM

Shot on OnePlus

#FramesofIndia

## All for change

Chennai-based AS Venkatesh shares his experience of moderating a global training programme

Srinivasa Ramanujam  
srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Venkatesh’s life changed when he attended a Rotary meeting. “My objective was to make friends beyond my work circle,” recalls AS Venkatesh. The meeting, in which he was seated in the last row with little knowledge of what was happening, changed his perspective. “They (the members) were talking about constructing three classrooms at Tiruneermalai, because students did not have enough facilities. I watched that conversation in awe.”

Venkatesh, a Chennaiite with IIT-Madras, IIM-Ahmedabad credentials, thought he was doing his bit to society by paying the school fees of his domestic help’s children. “This bunch – all ordinary people, much like me – were doing something grander in scale, which would positively influence so many children,” he says.

That day, he decided he would become a part of it. Today, Venkatesh aka Venky is a distinguished Rotarian. His latest feat is becoming the first Indian Rotarian to be a moderator, which involves planning and executing a week-long training programme for District Governors Elect from 534 districts across the world.

Held at Orlando, Florida last month, Venky spent sleepless nights putting together the content for Rotarians. “The challenge was to find a common ground that would appeal to people across the world. For instance, if

someone from India is looking at healthcare or education sectors, someone from an advanced nation would look at mentoring students.”

To ensure that, common training content and schedules were chalked out much in advance, so things went like clockwork. “In the 26 breakout rooms operating simultaneously, the same topic would be handled in the same way for the same time period, in different languages. This was to ensure all participants had the same experience.”

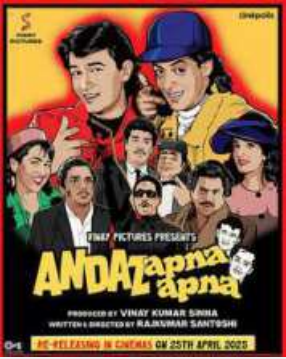
Being a moderator, a first for an Indian, gives him and the country a boost in the eyes of the world, feels Venky. “It has also been a great learning experience,” says Venky, who heads a civil construction organisation which employs over 1,400 people, “I interacted with someone who contributed significantly to the reduction of mortality rate due to malaria in Zambia. The next day, I was speaking with someone who impacted an old homeless couple. Both macro and micro changes have impact.”

Both are important, believes Venkatesh, who, after completing his under-graduation at IIT-Madras, had a decision to make: head to a top university in the US or study at IIM-Ahmedabad and live in India. He chose the latter. “In IIT, I paid ₹200 a term. In IIM, I paid ₹80 per term. My studies were highly subsidised thanks to many Indian taxpayers. I felt like it would be a disservice if I didn’t provide employment to atleast 10 people here.”



#### Set for a face-off

Malayalam star Fahadh Faasil stars alongside actor Vadivelu in upcoming Tamil film *Maareesan*. Directed by Sudheesh Sankar, the film will release in July this year. The film, which has music by Yuvan Shankar Raja and is backed by Super Good Films, appears to promise an intense stand-off between the acclaimed actors. Vadivelu and Fahadh Faasil had featured together in Mari Selvaraj’s *Maamannan* (2023). Meanwhile, Fahadh, who was seen in *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, has Malayalam and Telugu films lined up too.



#### The laughs are back

Rajkumar Santosh’s comedy, *Andaz Apna Apna*, starring Salman Khan and Aamir Khan, will re-release in theatres on April 25, 2025. The comedy-of-errors has been restored and remastered in 4K with Dolby 5.1 surround sound. Multiplex chain Cinepolis is distributing the re-release. Recently, both Aamir and Salman weighed in on plans for *Andaz Apna Apna 2*. “We would all want *Andaz Apna Apna 2*. We have told Raj ji (director Rajkumar Santosh) to work on the script. Salman and I would definitely want to work on it,” Aamir had said recently.

Praveen Sudevan  
praveen.s@thehindu.co.in

“Dhu, Palakkadu jilla-yile Dinomukku” (This is Dino Mukk in Palakkad district), announces the narrator in a familiar, almost nostalgic tone. The visuals unfold: rolling green hills, misty fields, and the quiet charm of rural Kerala. It could be a scene from an old episode of *Krishi Darshan* on Doordarshan. But then, the surreal takes over. A T-Rex, towering yet oddly domesticated, carries a tender coconut and hands it to a farmer. In the fictional town of Dino Mukk, dinosaurs are not prehistoric relics but farm animals, helping with agriculture, providing eggs and meat, even playing with children.

## Dinosaurs in the field

Meet Dino Mukk, the AI-generated dinosaur town in Kerala that has gone viral

This AI-generated minute-long Malayalam mockumentary by Storytellers Union has struck a chord, amassing over 2.2 million views on Instagram and earning praise from film stars like Sivakarthekeyan and Aishwarya Lekshmi. The short video feels like a time capsule and a glimpse into an alternate reality, one where nostalgia meets science fiction.

#### College dream

For Gokul S Pillai, one of the founders of Storytellers Union, filmmaking was an ambition nurtured since his college days. As a BTech student, he and his

childhood friends, Sanjay Siby and Sidharth Sobhan, started making short films. What started as a collective of freelancers soon transformed into a creative agency, working with leading brands.

With the rise of AI tools, the team began experimenting – first using AI for pitches, storyboards, and voiceovers, and later exploring AI-driven video generation. By early 2025, they had developed an

AI-generated teaser as a pitch tool for a feature film. The success of that experiment led them to refine their AI workflow further, culminating in the idea for *Dino Mukk*. The concept of a rural town farming dinosaurs emerged during a brainstorming session, with Sanjay Siby drawing inspiration from Kerala’s classic agricultural TV programmes like *Krishi Darshan*. The first AI-generated shot – a dinosaur playfully kissing a child – came out so well that it bolstered their confidence.

#### The future of storytelling

Considered an agricultural hub of the State, Palakkad’s lush paddy fields and mountainous backdrops provided the perfect setting for a dinosaur farm. But blending dinosaurs into this world was a challenge. “We didn’t want them to be aggressive, like in most films.

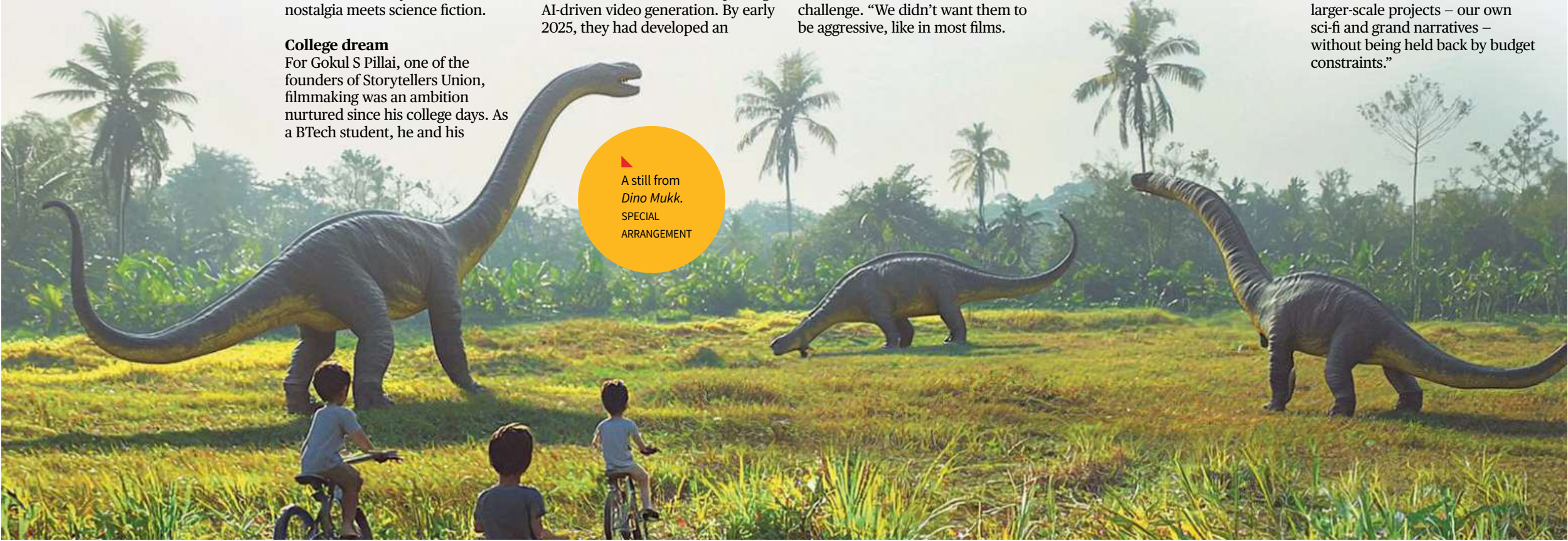
Instead, we aimed to make them cute,” Gokul says. Through careful selection of angles and character interactions – such as a dinosaur playfully standing beside a grandmother pouring water – they ensured that these creatures felt both surreal and endearing.

The AI-driven production process was a mix of offline and online tools. Gokul first fed AI models with reference images of Kerala’s landscapes, traditional attire, and common people to achieve authenticity. “I googled a lot of different dinosaurs and Kerala imagery and trained the AI accordingly,” he explains. He used tools like Midjourney, Krea AI, and Freepik for image generation, while Kling and Sora played a key role in video production. A combination of

local and cloud-based AI processing allowed them to fine-tune the visuals to cinematic perfection.

But for Gokul, AI is not just a tool; it is a storytelling method. “There are many AI artists creating deep fakes and reels, but when you use AI for storytelling, it should resonate with people,” he says. He believes AI is democratising content creation, allowing independent filmmakers and agencies to push creative boundaries. “The real magic isn’t in the technology itself, but in how you use it to tell a story.”

With aspirations of becoming one of India’s first AI-driven production houses, Gokul sees AI as the next big leap for filmmaking. “Malayalam cinema has always been about grounded stories. Now, we have the chance to create larger-scale projects – our own sci-fi and grand narratives – without being held back by budget constraints.”



A still from  
*Dino Mukk*.  
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