

# weekend

# WEEKEND

**metro** PLUS THE HINDU



## CHEERS TO KOLKATA

Little Bit Sober brings some nostalgia and charm from the City of Joy, to Chennai **P3**



(Clockwise from left) A train passes through the Landwasser viaduct in Switzerland; a couple enacts a scene from *DDLJ* at the famous Palat bridge; a scene from *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*; Erwin Fassler, who organises Bollywood tours in Switzerland; Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol in a scene from *DDLJ*; and a horse carriage on the streets of Gstaad. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



## In search of *Raj and Simran*

Who needs a brochure when Bollywood is your travel guide? Thirty years after *DDLJ*, fans follow their favourite movie stars around the world, running after imaginary trains and discovering destinations, one song sequence at a time

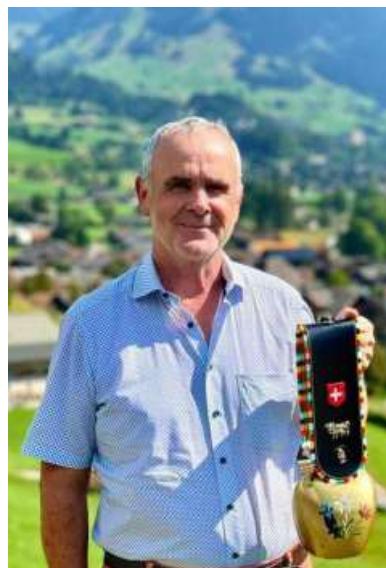
**Priyadarshini Paitandy**  
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**P**alat...Palat...Palat! If you get this reference, you are either a *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (*DDLJ*) fan or have watched the movie an unhealthy number of times. This epic scene, shot on a bridge in Saanen, Switzerland, still draws tourists 30 years after the film's release. So much so, that it is often referred to as Palat Bridge.

Bollywood tourism maybe a micro trend in the realm of film tourism but it has seen a steady rise in demand over the years. With location hunters scouring the world for new, exciting destinations, the footfall for this brand of tourism now spans Croatia (*Fan*), Greece (*Chalte Chalte, Bang Bang!*), Turkey (*Ek Tha Tiger, Dil Dhadakne Do*), the US (*Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna, Kal Ho Na Ho*), Scotland (*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*), Spain (*Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*)...

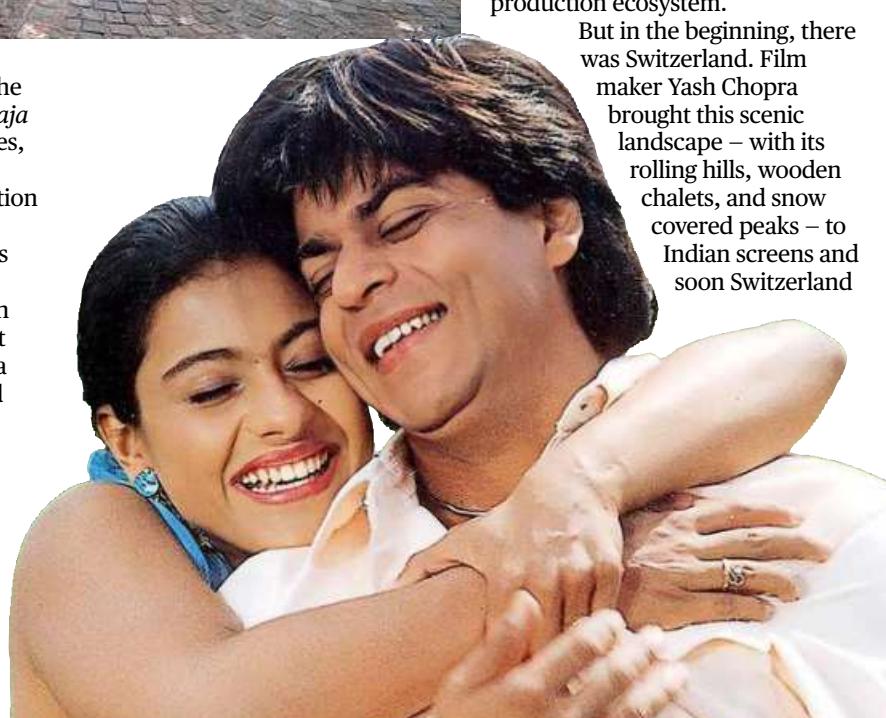
The last, starring Hrithik Roshan, Katrina Kaif, Abhay Deol, Farhan Akhtar and Kalki Koechlin, reportedly helped boost tourism in Spain with friends, bachelor and bachelorette party gangs making a beeline for it, exploring adventure sports and festivals like La Tomatina in smaller towns such as Bunol. Certain scenes, such as the one where the cast goes deep sea diving in Costa Brava, the Gothic Quarter in Barcelona, and the Bull Festival in Pamplona continue to capture the movie-going audiences' attention and in a way act like brochures for the destination.

Taking advantage of this, many governments have started luring film crews with incentives like refundable tax credit. Among them is Singapore, where movies like *Krrish 3, Badrinath Ki Dulhania* and *Dear Zindagi* have been shot. Markus Tan, regional director, India, Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (IMESA) - Singapore Tourism says, "Back in the 1960s, Bollywood's *Singapore*, starring the ever-charming Sharmi Kapoor, first brought the city's



projects to life here. It also opens doors for collaboration between local and international talent," says Markus, adding that Singapore may be compact, but it's bursting with possibilities; a dynamic blend of futuristic cityscapes, architectural wonders, and cultural diversity, all within a seamless and supportive production ecosystem.

But in the beginning, there was Switzerland. Film maker Yash Chopra brought this scenic landscape – with its rolling hills, wooden chalets, and snow-covered peaks – to Indian screens and soon Switzerland



vibrant allure to the big screen. The Kannada classic *Singaporenalli Raja Kulla*, released in the late Seventies, carried that fascination forward. Since then, the cinematic connection between India and Singapore has only grown stronger. Productions over the years have introduced travellers not just to One Fullerton Promenade, Universal Studios but also to Henderson Waves, Victoria Theatre, the National Gallery, and Anderson Bridge.

### Bringing projects to life

"To keep this creative exchange thriving, the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) launched the \$10 million Singapore On-screen Fund in 2023. The initiative supports global studios and storytellers in bringing their

became an aspirational holiday and honeymoon spot. His films like *Chandni, Darr, Dil To Pagal Hai* among others, had parts of it or songs shot here. There is a bronze statue of the filmmaker in Interlaken, Jungfrau Railway has a train named after him, and Lake Lauenen is referred to as Lake Chopra by many.

### Setting a trend

According to tour experts and travel guides, it was *DDLJ* – directed by Aditya Chopra (Yash Chopra's son) that actually started the trend of Bollywood tourism. Youngsters dreamt of setting off on a Euro trip and meeting the Raj/ Simran of their lives, or just dancing and wandering along the cobble-stoned streets.

Sathy Narayanan, who started Ruci AG in Saanen, a company that owns an ice cream factory, restaurants and travel company, says that guests who would come to his restaurant started asking about Bollywood film locations around the area. That led him to start Bollywood tours in 2018.

"While locations for *Chandni, Chori Chori Chupke Chupke, Dhadkan, Hero No 1, Bachna Ae Haseeno*, are on the tour list, people mainly ask for *DDLJ* tours. We take them to Gstaad where the horse carriage scenes from a song were shot, Luzern, Interlaken, Lauenen, Saanen church, train station, and bridge. We involve our clients, recreate scenes from the movie with them, click around 300

photographs; they are the stars of the tour," says Sathy, adding that during tours many have also proposed to their significant other at these locations. There are two trips: an express tour spanning 90 minutes and a full tour that takes three hours.

Before setting up the tour and finalising the itinerary, Sathy and his team spent five months watching movies and discovering locations. And it is not just Indians, but movie lovers from all over including the US, the UK, Bangladesh, Pakistan, West Asia, Australia etc, who sign up for these tours. A lot of clients, Sathy says, come from Zurich and other parts of Switzerland as well.

Ipsita Barua, a former resident of Zurich, did a *DDLJ* location visit with Erwin Tours of Switzerland in 2023. She was accompanied by her parents. Her father, she says, is a huge movie buff. But 28 years after the release of the movie, what was it that drew her to the tour? "I had always

fantasised about visiting locations of iconic Bollywood movies," she says adding that during the time of *DDLJ*'s release in 1995, she met her partner in school. Called the Raj and Simran of their school, they are now married to each other. But unfortunately her "Raj" could not join her for the trip, "so there were no flowy chiffon saris or running after missed trains," she laughs. She also visited the hotel in Interlaken that was in the movie *Sangam*, and Gruyere and Castle Hunegg, where a song from *Simmba* was picturised.

Erwin Fässler, who started these tours in 2012 in Switzerland says he started hunting for these locations way back in 2008. A Shah Rukh Khan fan, he watches Bollywood movies on a German cable channel every Friday night. He offers six different Bollywood tours – starting in different parts of the country with duration varying between nine hours to two days – and he personally drives his guests in his Range Rover. The number one tour is the *DDLJ* Tour, he says, followed by the King of Romance tours – a homage to Yash Chopra and Yash Raj films.

The location for movies like *Sangam, An Evening in Paris, Hum Apke Dil Main Rehte Hai, Dulhan Hum Le Jayenge, Yaraana* etc are also covered by him.

Every time Erwin watches a movie filmed in his country, he takes multiple screenshots and sets out looking for those exact spots. But despite all the different movies, he chose to stick to Bollywood as he has a personal connection with India. "I lived there for a year in the 1980s," he says. Erwin hopes that someday the Badshah of Bollywood would join his film tour.

Erwin notices interesting patterns during these trips. "Most of my clients are between the ages of 30 and 50. A couple celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary with us and the first movie they watched after marriage was *DDLJ*. There is the generation that was in their 20s and fell in love the first time they watched the film. Now they have adult kids and come with them."

Sathy says that Bollywood tours have been instrumental in getting people to explore lesser known destinations. It has also worked as a bonding experience where parents introduce their children to their favourite movies. He adds amused, "And sometimes there are kids who watch their parents embarrassing themselves doing scenes from the movies, like running behind an imaginary train."

## pick of the week



### Abstract forms

Step into a world where colour becomes emotion and form pulses with rhythm. *Echoes in Colour*, brings together contemporary abstract artists from across India in a vivid exploration of texture, imagination and movement. The showcase features works by Abhijit Kumar Pathak, S Anand, Barati Shah, and more. On view till November 5, the exhibition runs daily from 10am to 6.30pm at 123, Sterling Road, Nungambakkam.



### Speak boldly

Step into the spotlight at Oratoria 2025 – Talk Your Way to Singapore, the inter-school oratorical competition by Union Christian Matriculation Higher Secondary School. Open to students of Classes IX–XII, this year's edition introduces a debate segment and features prizes worth ₹90,000, including a return ticket to Singapore for the top orator. On October 31, at the UCA Auditorium, Chetpet. More information on [unionchristianschool.com](http://unionchristianschool.com)



### Gut revolution

Beverage brand Misfits is shaking up India's beverage scene with a bold spin on fizz. Founded by brothers Aditya and Yash in Mumbai, the brand introduces the country's first prebiotic soda — crafted with plant-based ingredients, natural sweeteners, and zero preservatives. Backed by third-party lab reports, Misfits blends gut-friendly functionality with standout flavours like grape and mango, redefining what a soda can be. Shop at [drinkmisfits.com](http://drinkmisfits.com)



### Wicked feast

When the night turns eerie and pumpkins glow, dinner takes a deliciously sinister turn. Haunted Harvest, the restaurant's Halloween feast, transforms comfort food into clever, creepy creations like toxic sludge in green slime, a broccoli and zucchini soup with squid, or drums of hell, spicy tangdi kebabs. At Taj Coromandel's Anise, October 31, dinner, ₹3,250 (all-inclusive). For reservations, call 66002827 or 78248 62310.

**Neeraja Murthy**

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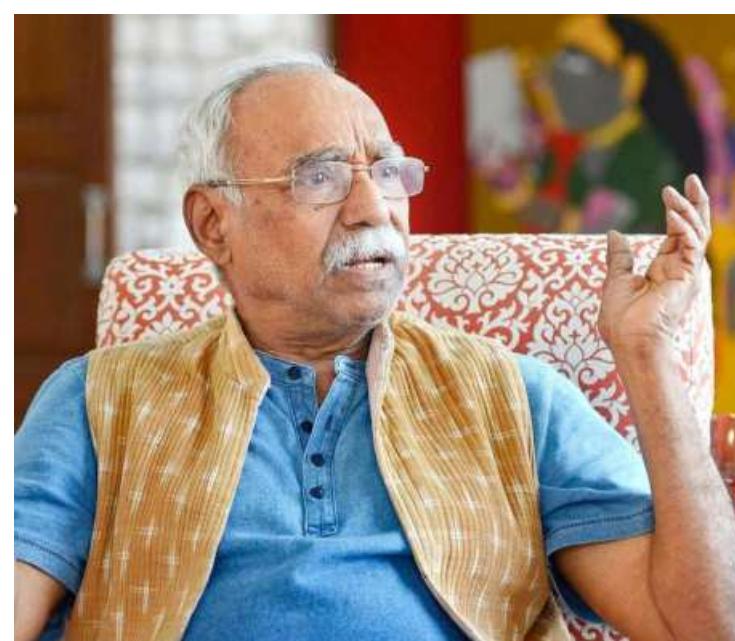
**W**hat connects the VIP lounge at Terminal 1 of Delhi Airport, Shangri La Hotel, the domestic arrivals section at Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, and the Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC)? All feature a sculptural representation of a rustic Telangana woman by renowned artist Thota Vaikuntam.

These eight-foot resinated fibreglass heads, painted with automotive colours by the artist burst with exuberance — a red *bottu* (*bindi*) on a turmeric-smeared forehead, ornate jewellery on the nose and ears, elaborate hairstyles, and kohl-rimmed eyes that radiate vibrancy. The master artist does not sculpt himself; instead, a team of artists at a Delhi workshop brings his drawings to life in three dimension.

"The space transforms into a cultural hub with these painted heads. Each exhibit has subtle variations but remains instantly recognisable as the iconic 'Telangana woman' created by Vaikuntam," says the artist's son, Raj Manohar Thota.

It is a quiet morning at Jayabheri Meadows, a gated community in Hyderabad. Dressed in a grey kurta and *lungi*, 83-year-old Vaikuntam sits on a rattan sofa. On a nearby table rest unfinished fibreglass sculptures — an eight-inch and a 12-inch Telangana man and woman. Pointing to them, Vaikuntam speaks of his central theme: the vivid portrayal of rural Telangana and its bustling life that has long defined his work. "I have never moved far from my people," he says. "But there are also sculptures of Ganesha and the Dancing Shiva (Nataraja)."

Vaikuntam's signature paintings took a sculptural turn on a friend's advice. Immersed in the creative process, he worked closely with sculptors who translated his two-dimensional figures into three-dimensional forms. "Sometimes, the team doesn't understand the



## The head-turner

**Master artist Thota Vaikuntam on reimagining his iconic paintings of Telangana women as fibreglass sculptures that are now displayed across India**

traditional elements in my drawings," he says.

This year marked a new chapter in his artistic journey, with public art displays showcasing his muse — the rustic Telangana woman, reimagined as a sculptural head. "It was again a friend who suggested focussing on just the head," he recalls. "I agreed. You can only look at a full figurative statue for so long. The face, however, leaves a lasting impact."

The Padma Shri awardee often travels to Delhi to collaborate with the sculptors. "Art lovers look at the work and say, *Yeh toh*

*Vaikuntam ka head hai* (This sculptural head is by Vaikuntam)," he laughs, his voice filled with childlike joy. Even as he embraces this new form of expression, his artistic voice has remained constant for over four decades. He has never felt repetitive with his chosen theme — instead, consistent practice has helped him refine nuances, carve his niche, and create a distinct identity. "Finding an identity in creative work isn't easy. I never imagined I'd find mine." He admits this shift in perspective came to him late. "When my teacher KG Subramanyan once asked what



in the mid-1980s, Vaikuntam jugged his roles as an artist and an art teacher at Jawahar Lal Bhavan, often working 12-hour days. Despite his legacy, he says he never pushed his children to follow in his footsteps. Currently he is busy with his paper drawings.

As he reflects on his journey, a sense of fulfilment colours his words. "All I wished for was that people in Hyderabad would know me, that my art would grace their homes. But now I'm known in Mumbai, Delhi, even abroad. When former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao liberalised the economy in 1991, interest in art grew too. Those who once collected only artworks of MF Husain saab or SH Raza began looking at regional artists; it gave us a big push."

**In the mid-1980s, Vaikuntam jugged his roles as an artist and an art teacher at Jawahar Lal Bhavan, often working 12-hour days**



### FOMO FIX

# When dudes go soft

Through stories of love, conflict, and redemption, a look at how these films capture the audience's attention

**Sudhish Kamath**

**W**hen Cameron Crowe first asked John Cusack to hold up the boom box in *Say Anything*, the actor was uncomfortable with the idea. He thought it would make him a wuss. It was only after much convincing that Cusack lifted the boom box on the last day of the shoot with an angry, defiant expression — and that was the take that made it to the movie, with Peter Gabriel's *In Your Eyes* underlining what is today an iconic moment in pop culture history.

Heroes traditionally have felt shy of playing soft. It's not alpha enough for their idea of a hero.

Maybe that's why Pradeep Ranganathan, despite his fair share of haters — which will only go up if he keeps up his poor-cousin variant of Dhanush, who himself is a poor-cousin variant of Rajinikanth, with mannerisms that are a copy of a copy — is still watchable.

But to his credit, Pradeep works despite all his cringing, wannabeness, and lack of originality because he is not afraid to be vulnerable on screen. Every time a character in his movies slaps him or spits at him, we feel represented, because he plays the most despicable of incels — be it the sexist hypocrite who has more dirt on his phone than he judges his girlfriend for in *Love*.



Today, or the obnoxious, cigarette-chain-smoking Dragon, or now, the *Dude* who gate-crashes his ex's wedding to know why she dumped him!

If Rajinikanth is Superstar and Dhanush is self-proclaimed soup boy, Pradeep has made Supreme Soup Boy his brand. He's willing to play the scum — representing the worst of male behavior — to show that even they have a shot at redemption.

It's a step forward for Tamil hero types for sure, but all the progressiveness in *Dude* is, at best, surface-level, because

Pradeep plays the softboi with aggressive male toxic energy — be it the snap of his fingers or a slap across the girl's face. The kind of softboi who feels entitled to an award or another heroine by the end for doing the bare minimum decent thing. The "donkey who does not know the smell of camphor," or the slowboi.

Or maybe it's



### Dead on arrival

Ayushmann Khurrana has made a career of playing the vulnerable softboi, and in Maddock's *Thamma*, which tries to expand its *Street* franchise to include vampires, the vegetarian softboi is bitten, brought back to life by love, and becomes a post-human Beta.

And just like that, the heroine with superpowers, Tadaka (played by Rashmika), is relegated to playing his supporting girlfriend in the second half

because the makers — who started off with feminist themes in *Street* — have regressed back to the Chosen One template in poor taste. There's no redeeming quality in the hero that makes us feel he deserves to be a superhero.

The writing is as detailed as Varun Dhawan's wardrobe in his post-*Bhediya* transformation cameos — barely enough to nonexistent to cover its back.

Considering we just saw a much superior *Lokah* in the same genre, this low-resolution script version is best skipped and caught on OTT if you are ever that bored.

### The softboi fighter

Dhruv Vikram really comes of age in Mari Selvaraj's *Bison*, where an underdog softboi whose world singularly revolves around his love for kabaddi has to fight his way out of situations by avoiding violence — that's only second nature to the world he inhabits. A world where othering is a way of life and seeds of division are sown in the minds of the young through the language of violence.

This is a film where sport transcends differences and divides that are decades old, and all characters, no matter how evil, are shaded with humanity — except maybe the naysayer coach, the stand-in for the broken Indian sports system. This is a film where the older girl (played by Anupama Parameswaran) decides who she wants, and the sister fights for the brother, while the men in the world are fighting with knives. A film that truly makes us root for the softboi.

From the hottest shows to hidden gems, overlooked classics to guilty pleasures, FOMO Fix is a fortnightly compass through the chaos of content.



Scan the QR code to watch the video

## Tracing the artist

Chunilal Dutta Gupta's showcase revisits his journey from advertorial sketches to iconic portraits

**Priyamedha Dutta**

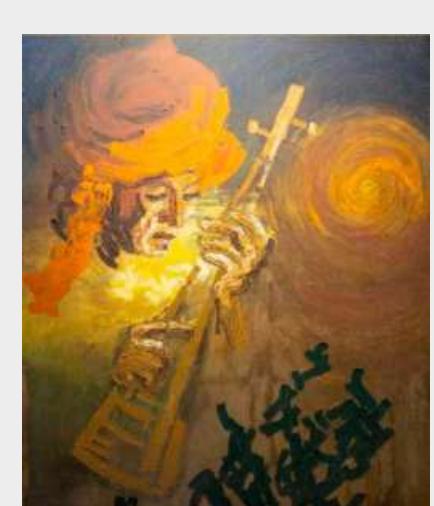
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**T**his month, the walls of Lalit Kala Akademi paid homage to Bengal: its Baul singers, the riverfold, and quiet rhythms of the countryside. This, courtesy of artist Chunilal Dutta Gupta's acrylic brushstrokes. But, long before the artist became associated with these iconic portraits of Baul musicians, and the quiet poetry of rural landscapes, a young Gupta would finish college, walk across Kolkata's Maidan, and sit on the ghats of the Ganga, sketchbook in hand, teaching himself the art of observation that paved the way for his artistic journey.

Born in Mymensingh district (now in Bangladesh), Gupta migrated and joined his elder brother Makhan Lal Dutta Gupta in Calcutta in 1940 for his schooling. A move, that like many journeys of that time, was one filled with displacement and hope. He later studied at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta, where the city's vibrant cultural scene shaped his artistic vocabulary. "My school was near Kalighat, called Kala Dhan. I would observe the people there, and they became a source of inspiration for many of my works."

During the course, Gupta had to make the life-altering choice of whether to choose sculpture, fine arts, or commercial arts. Thinking of the financial aspect, Gupta took up commercial arts.

Graduating in 1953 with the first-rank was not just an academic milestone, but a doorway that led him to the world of advertising. He began his career at J Walter Thompson in Calcutta, a space brimming with creative energy, of illustrators and artists. Gupta, who had once sketched riverbanks and local folk, now found himself drawing products for clients and characters for campaigns. In Thompson, he met Charles Moorehouse, who gave him his first



An acrylic painting by Chunilal Dutta Gupta. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

project: "At that time, Horlicks had just come to the Indian market, and he wanted me to sketch the advertorial for it. He told me that he had seen my sketches, and impressed, he wanted me to work with them."

Thereafter, he started working for newspapers like *Jugantar*, *Statesman*, and *Dainik Basumat*. In 1957, the artist was transferred to the agency's Madras branch — a move that would shape his life for decades. He found warmth in the city's artistic circles, forming friendships with artistic legends. "I met RK Swamy, who was the manager of JWT Madras, which later became Hindustan Thompson Associates. He was one of the people who supported me during my time in Madras," he shares.

When Gupta retired in 1995, he returned to the easel as a full-time painter. His art blossomed into an exploration of themes deeply personal, resonating with a life lost in a different Bengal, and comprised scenes of rural life, fishing, and musicians.

At 96, Chunilal Dutta Gupta still begins some mornings by picking up a pencil. The advertising deadlines are gone, the riverbank is far, but his love for sketching lives on.

Kolkata's hip bar  
Little Bit Sober  
brings a slice of  
the city's cocktail  
culture to The  
Park in Chennai,  
with a bar  
takeover

S Poorvaja  
poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in

**W**hat if you could sample Kolkata's Nahoum Bakery's heavenly fruit cake in Chennai... but in the form of a cocktail?

On Saturday, Chennai will play host to a small piece of Kolkata's cocktail culture, with a bar takeover by Little Bit Sober at The Park's Leather Bar. Gyan Ranjan Barik and Biki, two of Little Bit Sober's star bartenders, will be behind the bar here, to showcase and mix up cocktails from the Kolkata watering hole's new Friends of the Bar menu.

"We turned three in June this year, and Little Bit Sober has always been about building the culture of cocktails and supporting the community here in Kolkata," says Rudradipta Mukherjee, founder, Little Bit Sober. "We have been working with different brands and establishments; both the young and the legendary to showcase the best of Kolkata, and our Friends of the Bar menu is an ode to the culinary landscape of our city," he adds.

In the bustling, historic neighbourhood of Chawringhee in Kolkata, Little Bit Sober is housed in an old office building that is seemingly frozen in time, with a bright blue boat-shaped bar, checkered bar stools and pops of red on the walls.

In 2024, it was ranked 35 on the



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Gyan Ranjan Barik and Biki from Little Bit Sober; and the cocktail Friday, 7PM?  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

top 50 entries in 30 Best Bars India, and has been slowly making its presence felt in the trending cocktail scene across the country. The cocktails often feature local ingredients ranging from sandesh to nolen gur.

The Friends of the Bar menu, which launched in Kolkata last month, features a tribute, not in ingredients, but in intent, to Kolkata icons which include Flurys, Nahoum, Craft Coffee, Fabelle and more.

There are also six negronis, a cocktail Rudradipta says has a lot of character and lends itself to a diverse slate, a legends section that features returning guest favourites, and a growing Zero Proof programme to ensure that the cocktail experience is inclusive.

The new menu, the team believes, is not just a themed one, but a citywide thank you note.

The Chennai menu will also have My Little Secret, a vodka, spice mix, cucumber seltzer and watermelon blend, and The One With The Sorbet, which brings together Hibiscus Camino Blanco Tequila, goji berries, genmaicha cordial, chia seeds and passion fruit. The gin cocktail named Friday, 7pm? will have a blend of citrusy flavour with cranberry and lime, topped off with salted litchi foam.

In bright colours and with fun garnishes, Little Bit Sober's Chennai bar takeover menu has its Instagram aesthetic sorted.

From 7pm onwards on October 25 at The Leather Bar, The Park Chennai.



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Sudhish Kamath

**I**ctober, 1995. I was 18, starting out as a film writer, when I first watched and reviewed Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* – or *DDLJ*, as people still call it 30 years later.

As a generation or two grew up with one of the most seminal films of Shah Rukh Khan's filmography, our thoughts on the film too have evolved and changed with the times. So, a trip to Maratha Mandir, where *DDLJ* continues to play every day for the last 30 years (barring the pandemic shutdown) at its sole 11.30am show, was nothing short of time travel. For ₹50, you get a balcony seat – and yes, about 200 of those were occupied that day. It is common practice to let the audience fill the balcony so the auditorium looks full.

Maratha Mandir itself feels frozen in time – a relic from 1958 near Mumbai Central renovated recently with fresh lighting, where my film critic friend observed that some patrons drop by less for the nostalgia and more for the air-conditioning. The place, with its cheap tickets doubles up as a kind of informal waiting room – people chatting on phones, occasionally glancing up at the screen annoying regular fans who have made trips across the city or country for their bucket list.

#### Love letter to patriarchy

"This is London... Nobody knows me except for the pigeons," the film begins with the voiceover of the patriarch (Amrish Puri), who misses his Punjab and longs to fly back home. "Roti paav ki zanjeer ban gayi hai" (Bread has shackled my feet), he laments, feeding the pigeons.

The almost full balcony on the day after Deepavali erupted into applause when the opening credits introduced Shah Rukh Khan as Raj and Kajol as Simran – as if the makers knew how these characters would become

# Going home to DDLJ

As Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* clocks three decades, we watch it at Mumbai's iconic Maratha Mandir, joining fans as they cheer favourite scenes

household names.

While debut director Aditya Chopra's generation saw it as a desi *Before Sunrise* (1995), featuring Raj and Simran falling in love on a Eurail route, father Yash Chopra's generation saw it as a tale of two NRI fathers played by traditional Amrish Puri and liberal Anupam Kher. One believes the daughter should get used to her tears and pick herself up, or in the words of the mother played by Farida Jalal, "had no right to dream". And the other wants his son to go live his youth as well if he feels he has missed out on it – a youth that flew by as he tried to make a living.

This could very well be every Indian

parent in the 1990s – with different rules for sons and daughters – but here was a film that was going to start an important conversation and inspire generations of filmmakers to subvert it.

Karan Johar, who plays the hero's best friend in *DDLJ*, went on to produce the Dulhaniya franchise with Varun Dhawan and Alia Bhatt, where the girl called the shots and the boy had to develop a spine. Luv Ranjan went one step further by showing the ugly side of what really happens in an arranged marriage setup, even if the boy is IIT/IIM



(Clockwise from left) Snapshots from Maratha Mandir; and stills from the film. INDRANIL MUKHERJEE AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



#### Chutki sees DDLJ with her mom, 30 years later

Pooja Ruparel, who charmed audiences as 12-year-old Chutki in *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, is now an actor and stand-up comic. She celebrated 30 years of the film by watching it with her mother at Maratha Mandir

#### How does it feel that it's still playing?

**Pooja Ruparel:** Surreal... sad, and yet grateful beyond words. It was the first time I went to Maratha Mandir in 30 years. I had always planned to go, especially with my mum, but never made it – so this time, I bought a ticket for her and went to watch *DDLJ*.

It was surreal to see people coming from Ahmedabad and Rajkot every year. Their continued love for this piece of cinema, made 30 years ago, is almost like a religion – but one of love. The songs communicate the emotion, and the actors are like messiahs delivering the message.

It was also sad in ways I cannot put into words, because the ones I do it all for – my parents – weren't there physically. Yet, I feel their presence and pride all the time. To share it then with the raw lifeblood of this phenomenon, the die-hard fans, felt like something I will never cease to be grateful for.

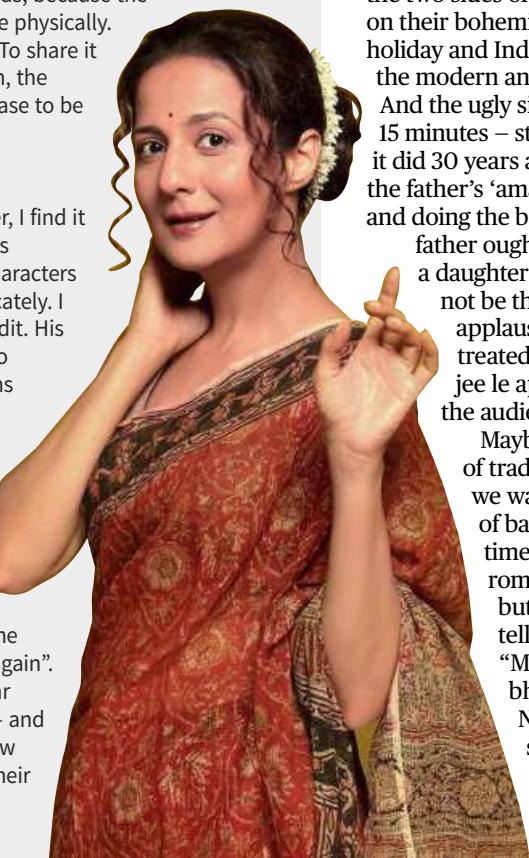
#### Thoughts when you watched it now.

**Pooja Ruparel:** Seeing it now, 30 years older, I find it more beautiful than I remembered it to be. It's nuanced, so well written and conceived. The characters are rich, and so many themes are handled delicately. I love SRK's comic timing – it deserves more credit. His character transitions so authentically. Kajol is so natural and believable as Simran; she really wins your heart. I also love all the cameos from luminous actors – they bring so much flavour to the film.

#### Chutki post-Raj and Simran?

**Pooja Ruparel:** Chutki would probably love the way her *didi* travelled the world and became a stand-up comic. She shows all the makings of one in the film, and her tagline would have to be "come fall in love again and again".

Chutki would probably come home each year with someone new – in contrast to her sister – and Bauji would lose all his hair keeping up with how much she's making them grow and change in their golden years! Hahaha.



educated. Themes of marital rape in *Akash Vani* disturbed audiences as many walked out of halls halfway. More recently, Aryan Khan in *The Bads of Bollywood* roasts the hypocrisy of the patriarch in his love letter to his father.

The true test of a film is to see when the audience claps hardest 30 years later. Of course, they still clap for Shah Rukh Khan in his shorts, running with that oval rugby ball in the rain, or when Kajol gets drunk and starts dancing to 'Zara Sa Jhoom Loon Main' – but the biggest cheers in the first half came for Shah Rukh bursting into 'Ruk Ja O Dil Deewane' – storytelling via choreography by Farah Khan – the chemistry that later created *Main Hoon Na*, *Om Shanti Om* and *Happy New Year*. The other songs were by Saroj Khan. So yeah, the times were changing.

The most unexpected applause was towards the end of 'Ho Gaya Hai Tujhko' when Simran waves at an imaginary Raj, and again when, outside House No. 13, Raj finds out Simran and family have left London – but then he finds the Swiss cowbell, bringing in the whistles at intermission. The beauty of the film is how well it contrasts and balances the two sides of Indians – Indians on their bohemian European holiday and Indians at weddings – the modern and the traditional. And the ugly side of *DDLJ* – the last 15 minutes – still feels as cringe as it did 30 years ago. Simran is not the father's 'amanat' to give away, and doing the basic decent thing a father ought to do, considering a daughter's happiness, should not be the generous, applause-worthy gesture it's treated as. Yet "Ja Simran... jee le apni zindagi" still gets the audience cheering.

Maybe we think so little of traditional minds that we want to applaud acts of basic decency. Yes, times have changed, romance has changed – but as the liberal father tells his son:

"Mohabbat ka naam aaj bhi mohabbat hai."

Never mind situationships, love is still called love, indeed.

# When romance met red flags

Back in 1995, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol's *DDLJ* romance was seen as rebellious, chic, and sexy. But when the youngest writer on our team finally watched it, he hated every minute – and is now at war with the rest of us. Whose side are you on?

Ayan Paul Chowdhury

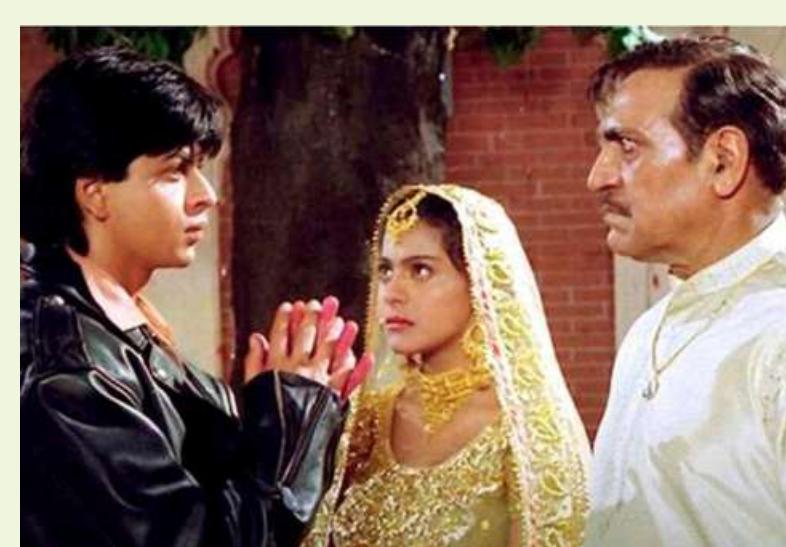
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**T**hirty years. That's how long this cinematic relic has been held aloft as the holy grail of Bollywood romance. It took every fibre of my mortal being to survive its three hours, but for the sake of cinema history (and at the risk of being ceremonially excommunicated and lynched by *film* loyalists), I'll try to keep things short, civilised, and only moderately heretical.

Shah Rukh Khan's turn as the patron saint of subtle red flags has long been celebrated as the archetypal romantic hero. He radiates a boyish charm that is supposedly meant to soften his smug expat bro energy. Kajol meanwhile, seems to embody the docile virtues expected of "good

Indian women" in diaspora stories. Simran's sudden gullibility is so ridiculous because she falls in love the second this man-child says "sorry" for joking about assaulting her while she's unconscious.

If Raj's reverent heart-eyes at the pious object of his affections praying in a Swiss church weren't already grating, his daytime fantasies of carrying his newly sanctified bride in a red lehenga down a church aisle during the later, 'Tujhe Dekha Toh' sequence, made that subtext embarrassingly loud. His persistent 'courtship' relies on a series of humiliating flirtations followed by an apology as a reset button. This conceited template for romantic license is one that Indian cinema seems to have absorbed and emulated for years to come. From my limited understanding, earlier screen romances indulged in unabashed



melodrama. Yet while *DDLJ* proclaimed itself some sort of radical vanguard of "modern love", it still reinforced the same gendered dynamics of obedience through glossy non-resident privilege.

Then we hit India, where apparently escaping arranged-marriage purgatory is off the table because Raj insists on Bauji's "permission". Here, the lyrics of 'Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhsa' and the Karva Chauth sequence only further sanctify female

sacrifice as devotional instinct. And the climactic slapstick smackdown quite literally stages Simran as the prize to be released only after the patriarch concedes ownership. The film attempts at challenging this internalised misogyny through performative nods and juxtapositions with the Western idea of modernity, but it's ultimately devoid of any meaningful structural critique.

Three hours of Shah Rukh's unrelenting nonsense, seemed to



Stills from the film. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the knee to the very authority it pretends to defy.

People defend this film as a "product of its time." Absolutely not. "Its time" was 1995, not the Stone Age. Fond nostalgia and "good-ol' fashioned fun" can't shield this from scrutiny. For the life of me, I cannot fathom what makes this film so beloved. Maybe my generation will just never get it. Or maybe I'm just too sane. Call me a snobbish, fun-sucking hater if you must, but assessing this film through a contemporary lens only exposes its vaunted 'legacy' being venerated for achieving less than the bare minimum.

So, *ja DDLJ ja*. I hope we never cross paths again. Happy 30th, I guess.

## Telugu

# A messy drama about tangled relationships



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In an early scene from *Telusu Kada*, chef-restaurateur Varun (Siddhu Jonnalagadda) berates his staff for failing to meet his exacting standards. His friend and moral compass (Harsha Chemmudu) reminds him to see things more practically: for Varun, a loner, the restaurant is his world; for his staff, it is just a job.

In another moment, Varun reprimands the domestic staff at his residence when things are not spotless. His obsession with order and the luxurious spaces he inhabits mask the chaos of his personal life, particularly his complicated relationships with Raaga (Srinidhi Shetty) and Anjali (Raashii Khanna).

Costume designer-turned-director Neeraja Kona, making her writing and directorial debut, steers clear of easy sentimentality. *Telusu Kada* is far from a feel-good romance – the red flags are visible from the start, signalling a story that is bound to divide opinion. However, the visual finesse cannot compensate for the gaps in writing.

Given Siddhu's earlier films where his characters have faced heartbreak, some of the dialogues echo familiar territory. Harsha's character adds relief, often voicing

what the audience might be thinking. When he questions why Siddhu's characters are always caught between women and why he must witness it, the self-awareness draws a smile.

Without giving too much away, the drama centres on the idea of family and parenthood. Things do not go as planned, and Varun's lack of clear communication makes matters worse. His reaction to his partner's medical situation stems from self-pity rather than empathy. By the film's end, his backstory explains his emotional turbulence – a man masking fear with machismo.

For a story built around three characters, the writing feels thin. Under the guise of cinematic liberty, *Telusu Kada* overlooks basic sensitivity, especially while addressing surrogacy. The narrative remains surface-level in its portrayal of the women and their circumstances.

The focus stays on the male protagonist. Varun's contradictions are written in detail, and his dialogues, at times bordering on misogynistic, draw applause but expose the film's uneven gaze.

*Telusu Kada* brushes past the emotional complexity it sets up. It criticizes Varun's alpha-male traits yet the women are shortchanged – one burdened by guilt for not wanting motherhood, another forced to compromise in marriage.

*Telusu Kada* raises pivotal questions but stops short of answering them with the honesty it promises.

*Telusu Kada* is currently running in theatres



# Mari Selvaraj's extraordinary film

Mari's most commercially conventional film yet is a politically razor-sharp and tonally strong social sports drama that hits the bullseye every step of the way

## Tamil

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"I have to constantly leap over the many fences they keep placing in my path, and I don't know how far I should run to reach a place without any fences," says Kittaan, the young protagonist of *Bison Kaalamaadan*. Tired of the many communalist obstacles that keep him from his dream to become a national kabaddi champion, Kittaan runs, and runs and runs some more, through many stretches of the film, almost self-immolating his mind, body and soul. Later, when the aforementioned dialogue recurs, a different character utters it to call attention to the struggles that many boys like Kittaan face, but the word 'far' is replaced by 'high' – because for many like Kittaan, freedom from social shackles comes not by running afar or running away but only by tearing through the roofs of oppression. This dialogue perfectly encapsulates what master filmmaker Mari Selvaraj discusses in his fifth film, *Bison Kaalamaadan*. It's a politically sharp and tonally strong drama that is also his most commercially conventional work yet.

Following up on his masterpiece *Vaazhai*, Mari creates a vicious world where hatred is sown so deep in the hearts that even a casual brush between two unassuming people can spark a violent upheaval – he showcases this unflinchingly in a nightmarish scene where a man commits a blood-curdling act of sacrifice aboard a town bus. This is one of the many excellently written scenes in *Bison*, as it tells you so much about why Kittaan's (Dhruv Vikram) father (Pasupathy) advises him against his Kabaddi dreams in a land like theirs. But it also subtly says something about how even a sacred custom can develop morbid meanings. Which fascinatingly, also applies to the violence we find lurking behind Kittaan's eyes, and the violence propagated by two caste groups – Pandiarajan (Ameer Sultan) and Kandasamy (Lal) – with a long-standing feud between them. The violence, from

## Bison Kaalamaadan

**Director:** Mari Selvaraj

**Cast:** Dhruv Vikram, Pasupathy, Lal, Ameer Sultan, Rajisha Vijayan and Anupama Parameswaran

**Storyline:** With the social reality of his times throwing one obstacle after another, a young boy perseveres to become a national kabaddi champion

these divisive groups, is fuelled by hatred, while for Kittaan, it becomes a means to survive and a right to defend himself.

Inspired by the story of Indian Kabaddi champion and Arjuna-awardee Manathai Ganesan, *Bison* tells the tale of the innumerable perils that fall upon a young boy who dared to look beyond what was deemed his 'worth.' There are concentric layers of battles to be won, the first of which begins at home, as he needs to convince his ever-protective father to let him play

Kittaan then has to take on the problem on his street: his father's feud with a relative is creating new conflicts. This is tricky, since the latter's sister Rani (Anupama Parameswaran) needed more space make a mark) bears feelings for Kittaan (it boldly breaks the notion that it's taboo for a young man and an older woman to fall in love). Beyond that, Kittaan has to bear the weight of the hatred deep-rooted in his town, and then of the bias for the state he represents in the Indian team, and so on.

But make no mistake, Mari's narrative doesn't follow that sequence. In fact, the film begins non-linearly to show Kittaan, now a player in the national team, sidelined from playing a key match against arch-rivals Pakistan, where Mari makes a point about the futility of all enmity, including India-Pakistan, at the Asian Games in Japan, 1994.

In yet another showcase of fluency in his storytelling language, Mari also gradually finds the rhythm to imbue his visual form with the surreal ideas in text, like imagery depicting the local deity Kaalamaadan and a sacred goat, or how a shot of two marsh fish in a cage is intercut with Kittaan and Rani lying entwined in a swamp. Very few modern Tamil filmmakers celebrate the natural state of their worlds so earnestly, and the many breathtaking montages and drone shots throughout the film earn praise of their own. But interestingly enough, *Bison* also beats *Karnan* as Mari's most mainstream film. We even get an elaborate gangster drama arc, featuring the two caste leaders in a war for power, and the filmmaker does shock you with how unrestrained he is in showing the macabre unleashed.

In some instances, the picture gets a tad too unsettling as knives plunge

through bodies and pieces of flesh lie scattered on the floor in a pool of blood. But Mari's cinematic violence only speaks of the futility of it all, and the message comes through loud and clear. Both Lal and Ameer's gangster characters are two sides of the same coin, stuck with their necks too deep in the rot, and that you begin to even empathise with them only makes it harder when you see them tear each other apart. What Lal shows through a noble act, Ameer says outright – that what started as a fight for equality has turned into a vengeance-fuelled thirst for power.

Mari's profound political statement slaps a question on the terrorising faces of the oppressors, but also asks those from the oppressed sects to introspect whether the fight is still about equality or for domination.

Dhruv Vikram impresses as Kittaan. It's a performance that requires him to hide an ember behind his eyes, and the actor moulds steel to become an angry young man that angry young men can look up to. In moments when he gets to unleash some of that fire in his belly, the crowd is bound to erupt. Dhruv's trained moves and brawny physique leave no room for doubt in essaying a professional Kabaddi player, and Mari too ensures that this is a sports drama at the end of it all. Kabaddi isn't a sport that easily lends itself to a gratifying depiction in cinema since there aren't many slow-motion-worthy moves palatable to the mass audiences. And yet, the choreography makes the games feel so real and present. It's not every Friday that multiple genres blend this seamlessly, and *Bison* fuses elements of a sports drama, a biopic, a social actioner, and a gangster saga into a singular experience.

There are very few filmmaking voices that make you stand up and applaud for posing such artistic prowess and conviction, and Mari is inarguably the most original of modern Tamil greats. "When have they ever written our names so easily?" wonders a character in *Bison*. His fifth directorial is another proof that Mari Selvaraj has long immortalised his name as a rare game-changer.

*Bison Kaalamaadan* is currently running in theatres



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# Pradeep Ranganathan's goofiness powers this Gen-Z love tale

## Tamil

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Comparisons can be frustrating. If you are Pradeep Ranganathan or Sai Abhyankar, it can be all the more frustrating.

The young actor has been compared with another senior star, probably because his expressions and body language remind you of the star in his younger days. The young musician has been compared with another musical rockstar, probably because of the sound in his music and overall personality.

These two characters get together in *Dude* to dish out a fairly engaging romantic comedy.

*Dude* opens with the shot of a wedding hall, with the popular 1990 Rajinikanth track 'Nooru Varusham' playing in the background. A girl called Amudha is getting married, and Agan (Pradeep Ranganathan) is standing in queue to congratulate her.



She stares at him nervously. He stares back. What follows is a firecracker of a start with Pradeep doing things that are quite...Pradeep-like. His goofiness lights up the screen everytime he arrives, and this opening stretch is a testament to his screen presence.

What he says to Amudha is inconsequential, because that opening scene serves but as an introduction into the main female

protagonist – Kayal (Mamitha Baiju). Rich and privileged – she is the daughter of a wealthy minister (Sarah Kumar) – Kayal is as integral to the story as Agan is.

And so, we get a tour inside the hearts of Agan and Kayal, who are relatives by birth and friends from childhood. They have been best buddies and see each other almost every day – in fact, Kayal is also part of the 'surprise party' business run by Agan. But somewhere, friendship blossoms into love... and you know where *Dude* is headed.

Any film about the tribulations of the heart is bound to drag a little – and that *Dude* does, majorly in the second half, when, at one point of time, we wish the leads would make up their minds about each other. But that's not to take away even a bit from their performances. While Pradeep scores not only in the humour part but also in the emotional sequences, Mamitha displays a range of expressions, especially when she is caught in a tug-of-war like situation during a wedding. Their chemistry is what makes *Dude* tick.

Where *Dude* misses out unlike Pradeep's previous hit, *Dragon*, directed by Ashwath Marimuthu, or even *Love Today*, is its writing of the characters other than the protagonists. Sarah Kumar's arc has promise initially, but a crucial detail reveal and subsequent change of heart during an extreme circumstance seems all too convenient and sudden. The dip into the emotional quotient in the second half, too, is a tad jarring for an otherwise lively film.

Cinematographer Niketh Bommi's

## Dude

**Director:** Keerthishwaran

**Cast:** Pradeep Ranganathan, Mamitha Baiju, Sarah Kumar, Hridhu Haroon, Rohini

**Storyline:** Impulsive decisions ruin the lives of two best friends. Can they reconcile?

frames keep up with the lead's oscillating minds, filling most sequences with colourful props, going well with the film's intention to target Gen-Z members among the audience. The camerawork in the popular 'Oorum Blood' track is a nice ode to live locations in modern-day Chennai, something that Tamil cinema usually steers clear of, considering practical complications and curious crowds. Sai Abhyankar – the man behind the music – delivers tunes that naturally fit the milieu and situations; his 'Oorum Blood' tracks (the film version and the unplugged version) are massive earworms.

Like him or not, *Dude* marks Pradeep Ranganathan's arrival on the big stage. He might have recently refused being the chosen one to direct the proposed *Rajinikanth-Kamal Haasan* biggie, and that might just be a blessing in disguise for his future as an actor and star. Are we all screaming 'Doooode' yet?

*Dude* is currently running in theatres





## Good Fortune

**Director:** Aziz Ansari

**Cast:** Keanu Reeves, Aziz Ansari, Seth Rogen, Keke Palmer, Sandra Oh

**Storyline:** An angel is fired after his good intentions result in a body swap

# Aziz Ansari-Seth Rogen body-swap zinger

## English

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**W**hat a divine comedy this is! Set in the City of Angels, Los Angeles, *Good Fortune* tells the adventures of a slightly bumbling angel, Gabriel (Keanu Reeves). At a meeting of angels, Gabriel, who is responsible for watching over texting drivers, feels he is not doing meaningful work, especially after he hears another angel, Azrael (Stephen McKinley Henderson), saving yet another soul by showing them the way.

He asks his boss, Martha (Sandra Oh), to give him more responsibility, but Martha tells him to concentrate on his work. On earth, Arj (Aziz Ansari), a documentary editor, is struggling to make ends meet, working various jobs

and sleeping in his car, while hiding the bleak reality of his life from his father. In his job at a hardware store, he meets Elena (Keke Palmer), who wants to fight for better working conditions.

As a gig worker, he meets Jeff, a tech bro, who agrees to a trial week of Arj as his assistant after Arj tidies Jeff's garage. Arj's duties include finding a shaman and setting up a disco floor for Jeff's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday bash. A series of unfortunate events cause Arj to lose his job and when his car is towed away as he dozes off at a Denny's, it seems Arj has definitely hit rock bottom.

That is when Gabriel thinks of making things better. He wants to show Arj that life will not be any better with money and body swaps Arj and Jeff. He fails spectacularly, as most of Arj's troubles are easily solved with Jeff's money. Martha takes off Gabriel's wings for interfering and sends him to earth as a human. Jeff is in for a shock living like the plebs while Gabriel is quite pleased to be human falling in

love with dancing, tacos and milkshakes even as he washes piles of dishes and watches baby elephants online.

The only way for Gabriel to get his wings back is if Arj willingly switches back to his life. All three learn important life lessons – from money not solving all problems (it does smoothen the way) to the hardships of the gig economy (it is so easy to draw parallels with our app-driven lives greased by delivery people run to the bone).

The cast riff off each other, sparking all sorts of good energy – from Reeves grooving to some secret music in his celestial head and Oh's rarified wisdom, to Rogen's horrified discovery of how the rest of the world lives. Ansari, who has written and directed *Good Fortune*, has been quoted as saying he wanted to "write about things that everyone is dealing with that no one is talking about" and he does so with style in the charming film filled with good humour and feelings, where the jokes and observations land consistently. Last thought – is Arj a play on Raj?

**Good Fortune** is currently running in theatres

## Snippets



### Disney sets two-part documentary on making the *Avatar* films

James Cameron's *Avatar* universe is getting its own behind-the-scenes spotlight. Disney+ has announced *Fire and Water: Making the Avatar Films*, a two-part documentary series premiering November 7 that explores the groundbreaking filmmaking process behind Cameron's sci-fi epics.

Directed and produced by Thomas C Crane, the docuseries chronicles the making of *Avatar: The Way of Water* while offering early glimpses of the upcoming *Avatar: Fire and Ash*. Featuring never-before-seen footage and new interviews with Cameron, the late producer Jon Landau, and stars, the series promises a rare inside look at one of cinema's most technically ambitious franchises.



### Iranian filmmaker Nasser Taghvai passes away at 84

Acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Nasser Taghvai passed away at the age of 84, his wife confirmed on October 14.

Taghvai's wife, actor Marzieh Vafamehr, announced the news on social media handles, writing, "Nasser Taghvai, an artist who chose the difficulty of living freely, has earned his liberation."

Born on July 13, 1941, in Abadan, Taghvai began his artistic journey as a story writer and documentary filmmaker. He made his debut in 1972 with *Tranquility in the Presence of Others*, an adaptation of Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi's story 'Nameless Anxieties.' The film earned Taghvai global critical acclaim.



### Michael Fassbender to lead Netflix's *Kennedy* drama series

Netflix has greenlit *Kennedy*, an eight-episode drama series chronicling the rise of America's most storied political dynasty. Academy Award-nominated actor Michael Fassbender is set to headline the series as Joseph Kennedy Sr., the ambitious patriarch whose influence shaped generations of the Kennedy family.

The show, produced by Chernin Entertainment, is adapted from Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Fredrik Logevall's book *JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917–1956*. According to the series synopsis, *Kennedy* will delve into "the intimate lives, loves, rivalries, and tragedies" that shaped the family's legacy.



# Glittering performances

Debora Cahn's public and personal drama is a perfect Deepavali treat, with outrageous plot twists, everyone throwing hissy fits, exquisite insults, or longing looks, while countries teeter on the brink of war

## Streaming

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**S**ure, *The Diplomat* plays fast and loose with the real work diplomats do, but then *Mad Men* was not really about marketing. The *West Wing* and *Homeland* veteran Debora Cahn's political thriller, while focusing on the US Ambassador to the UK, Kate Wyler (Keri Russell), is also about her contentious relationship with her political superstar husband, Hal (Rufus Sewell), and behind-the-scenes machinations, driven as much by policy as passion.

Season 2 ended with the death of US President Bill Rayburn (Michael McKean) while on the phone with Hal, who was revealing Vice President Grace Penn's (Allison Janney) wicked deeds. Season 3 opens with the UK mission scrambling to find a suitable setting for Grace to take the oath as President. Is the US Embassy in London on American soil? Should the oath-taking be in the lobby with or in front of the massive artwork of the Constitution?

Then there is the question of who will administer the oath. A US judge is in London for a wedding and could administer the oath, but he has not

## The Diplomat Season 3

**Creator:** Debora Cahn

**Cast:** Keri Russell, Rufus Sewell, David Gyasi, Ali Ahn, Rory Kinnear, Ato Essandoh

**Episodes:** 8

**Storyline:** A new President means new alliances while old loves and sins jostle for space

brought his robes on holiday, so it is time to trawl the "Harry Potter" stores. The hunt for a good-looking Bible, "adult size and written by Jesus," ends when the British Prime Minister, Nicol Trowbridge (Rory Kinnear), brings the Gutenberg Bible, no less.

When Grace offers Hal the position of Vice President, there is another seismic shift in the Wyler dynamics. Will Kate continue as Ambassador in Britain, or will she resign to be full-time Second Lady? Will they have a public marriage and a private separation? Grace's husband, Todd (Bradley Whitford), learns the pleasures and pinpricks of being the First Gentleman of the United States.

CIA station chief Eidra Park (Ali Ahn) is in trouble as a person in a CIA safe house dies by suicide. She is not convinced Deputy Chief of Mission of the US embassy Stuart Heyford (Ato Essandoh), with whom she was in a relationship, can help.

Truths about the shooting down of a British aircraft carrier, HMS Courageous, in the Persian Gulf, which resulted in the death of 41 sailors, surface, and a Russian submarine sinks 12 miles off the coast of England probably carrying a scary nuclear bomb.

British spy, Callum Ellis (Aidan Turner), seems close to Kate, much to Hal's discomfort, while the UK Foreign Secretary, Austin Dennison (David Gyasi),

for whom Kate had a soft spot, gets married after a short courtship.

The finale, "Schrodinger's Wife" (for Kate, who is a wife and not one), sees an awkward dinner at Chequers and fractious talks between Grace and Trowbridge over the Russian submarine and the shooting down of the HMS Courageous.

Just as everything seems sorted, a major twist sets up a giant moral dilemma for Kate in Season 4, which has already been greenlit. *The Diplomat* zips by in a flurry of sharp dialogue. There is Hal describing the US as a "Shrinking island kingdom that diddled its economy and rabble-roused its way to global irrelevance," and Trowbridge saying the US is a "military-industrial complex papered over by a constitution."

Russell and Sewell are riveting as ever, while the rest provide able support. The clothes are lovely, Kate's trousers are to die for, as are Hal's more formal outfits. The houses are a dream, be it gracious old manor houses or the President's home in Long Island, complete with a heated pool. Hal, incidentally, does not stand for either Henry or Harold, and just as Kate is about to reveal what it stands for or whether that is his full name, another geo-political crisis explodes. Hopefully, we will find that out in Season 4.

**The Diplomat** is currently streaming on Netflix