

CHENNAI • Thursday, December 19, 2024



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Chennai's new Japanese speakeasy serves a 10-course Kaiseki menu P2

TELUGU CINEMA'S BOX OFFICE JUGGERNAUT P4



SR RAGHUNATHAN



Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha Arusuvai Caterers

Nsridhar, proprietor of Arusuvai Caterers and his staff are all set to ensure that rasikas enjoy the traditional elai sapad at Sri Parthasarathy Swami Sabha. This caterer has replaced the banana leaf, with huge *thanga thambalams* (golden plates) to serve the food.

Diners can enjoy a spread of South Indian traditional meals (₹600) with two types of payasam and one traditional dry sweet, paan and filter coffee.

The menu is planned for three days at a time and their weekend menu packs a punch. "We open our canteen at 7am and serve breakfast till 10.30am. After that, our focus is on lunch which is when we get the maximum footfall," says Sridhar.

"We will be offering filter coffee through the day at our dedicated

counter where decoction will be brewed fresh. We also plan to set up a stall for savoury snacks such as murukku, thattai, seedai and so on," says Soumya Ramesh, who is part of the family. "As we noticed more children accompanying their parents, we have put together a special kids' menu for the evening hours. We have fried rice, noodles and crisp ghee dosas for them. We also serve limitless cups of elaneer payasam and litchi payasam for kids during lunch time," says Sridhar.

@Arusuvai Caterers, Vidya Bharati Kalyana Mandapam, Mylapore, till January 2. 7am to 9.30 pm. Lunch will be served from 11.30am to 3pm. Dine-in only.

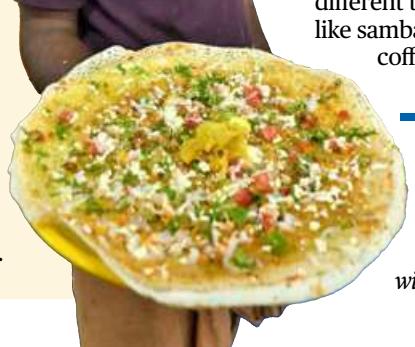
Narada Gana Sabha Sri Sasthalaya Catering

The live counters making snacks such as appams, kaara paniyarams and kuzhi paniyarams are busy through lunch at Sri Sasthalaya Catering Service's canteen at Narada Gana Sabha.

"Over the weekend, the adai aviyal was a big hit," says K Ramesh, founder, Sri Sasthalaya. He rattles off a long list of sweets they have this year – rose jangri, special khoa jangri, ashoka halwa, kasi halwa, stuffed gulab jamun and more. While there are a number of traditional dishes, Ramesh says they also have cheese dosai and appam, and even a pizza idli this time.

Their breakfast and snacks menus are the highlight of the season. For breakfast, which begins as early as 7am, people can choose from idli, dosa, pongal, and appam, with sides such as special Kumbakonam kadappa and vadacurry. "For lunch, we have mini-meals and there are all-day specials which include dosa varieties, chappati, poori, and parotta that people can order at any time," Ramesh says. Known for its great coffee, a dedicated coffee counter has been set up, serving hot cups through the day.

@Sri Sasthalaya Catering service, Narada Gana Sabha, TTK Road, till January 1 from 7am to 9.30pm. Dosa varieties, snacks and coffee will be served through the day. Call 9500028384 for details.



Krishna Gana Sabha and Vani Mahal Sattva Catering Service

Right before singers Nisha Rajagopalan and Amritha Murali take the stage at Krishna Gana Sabha at 3.55pm, a few concert-goers hurriedly down a cup of coffee. Perhaps among the most beautiful sabha canteens in Chennai, complete with pockets of green and aesthetic Chettinad pillars, the canteen at Krishna Gana Sabha by Sattva Catering Service has experimented with its evening snacks menu this year.

"We have traditional favourites such as morkali, ammini kozhakattai, pidi kozhakattai and a range of dosa varieties," says RS Kumar, founder, Sattva. This is going to be a busy December for Sattva, who have sabha canteens set up in three other places as well - Vani Mahal, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Kilpauk, and Bapalal Bhavan in Thiruvannmiyur.

For lunch, the canteen has a traditional banana leaf 'kalyana virundhu' or wedding feast, and Kumar says that the menu is different throughout the week. Apart from regular favourites like sambar vada, rasam vada and vazhapoo vada, there is filter coffee and hot badam milk round-the-clock.

@Sattva Catering Service, Krishna Gana Sabha, Mahajapuram Santhanam Salai, T Nagar, till January 2 from 7am to 9pm. The meals are priced at ₹330. Contact 9840303403. The sabha canteen at Vani Mahal will be on till January 15.



followed by the conferment of the Lasya Choodamani award to noted vocalist Bombay Jayashri. And of course there is some good food, keeping in tune with the Margazhi sabha culture in Chennai.

"It's great that we have such a musical celebration in our locality itself. We are looking forward to the evenings this month," says Hymavathi.

Anyone familiar with Chennai's OMR will have stories to tell about traffic towards Tidel Park junction and other adjoining stretches, which has



The Music Academy Sastha Catering Services

For RK Venkatesan of Sastha Catering Services, planning the lunch menu for the Margazhi sabha canteen begins two months ahead. Keeping seasonal vegetables in mind, he plans a 25-day menu.

"We take pre-bookings, and customers can avail our parcel service this year," says Venkatesan, who has been catering at sabha canteens for the past eight years.

Though his canteen functions from 7am serving filter coffee and a traditional breakfast, the crowd congregates around lunch time in large numbers.

"We serve about 800 elai sapad on weekdays and during the weekends, it is over 1,200," says Venkatesan. Their special kalyana sapad is priced at ₹550 and they will also offer a January 1 feast at

₹650. For those who prefer a quick meal between concerts, a mini lunch is offered (₹300).

Variety is the hallmark of this caterer, who has listed 30 types of dosa and 10 types of idli on his menu. Gulkand kasi halwa, sapota kesari, strawberry kesari, aval kesari and ginger kesari are some of his signature sweets.

Try the vethala and molaga bajji, kozhukkattai, morkali and ela ada served from 4pm to 7pm.

For dinner, there are live counters making idiyappam and adai.

@The Music Academy, Mylapore, till January 8. Open from 7am to 10pm. Lunch from 11am to 3pm. To pre-book your parcel meals, call 9962919460.



AKHILA EASTVARAN

Mylapore Fine Arts Club ABC Caterers

The sabha canteen at the Mylapore Fine Arts Club opened its doors even before the music and dance festival for the season began. "We have already seen people coming in for lunch and evening snacks," says Srinivasan Narayanan, founder, ABC Caterers. It is the first time they are setting up a canteen there, and they are already enthused by the response. The canteen this year has a chaat counter in the evenings, as well as North Indian and Chinese dishes which can be made to order.

"For lunch, we have a Thanjavur banana leaf meal – full meals served on a large leaf. With over 24 dishes, the meal will have a different payasam, sweet, rasam, and vegetables everyday," Srinivasan says. Dishes such as chakka pradhaman, jackfruit payasam, coriander mint rasam and more will be part of the meals, and there will also be variety rice, bisi bele bath and bagala bath available for lunch.

Sevai, vada, and bonda feature on the menu for evening tiffin, and bhel puri, pav bhaji and dahi samosa will be part of their chaat menu. Their restaurant-style dishes such as paneer butter masala, noodles, and gobi manchurian can be made to order as well.



@ABC Caterers, Mylapore Fine Arts Club, Musiri Subramanian Road, till January 3. Lunch meals are priced at ₹480. To pre-book, call 900328633.

PHOTOS: S SHIVA RAJ

The kutcheri begins

OhMaRgazhi Festival, on till the end of December, hopes to bring Chennai's OMR into the Margazhi map

Srinivasa Ramanujam

srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

Hymavathi Raghuraman's first day of the Tamil month of Margazhi (December 16) was eventful. At 4pm she boarded a special bus from outside her residence in Sholinganallur's Ramaniyam Pushkar. Accompanying her were 20 other residents from her apartment – they headed to APL Global School, located around nine kilometres away, for the first day of the OhMaRgazhi festival.

They were treated to *bhajans* by vocalist Sivasri Skandaprasad,



A set tune (Above) Sivasri Skandaprasad's performance; (right) rasikas at OhMaRgazhi Festival at APL Global School, Thoraipakkam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

now accentuated due to the ongoing Metro Rail construction. Hence, OhMaRgazhi Festival aims to bring the "Mylapore experience to OMR".

"I hope this sabha will foster the arts," opines Bombay Jayashri, "With many residents moving to the OMR, this might become a cultural hub."

"No one needs to travel long distances for kutcheris anymore," feels Sivasri. For the singer, this is also a chance to spread her artform to newer audiences. "We are looking forward to seeing excited, newer faces, apart from our usual audience base."

While music, dance and theatre are the main attractions, there are more reasons to head to OMR. If snacks before the concert include dishes like aloo bonda, sambar vada and kara paniyaram, for the post-event dinner, sambar rice, curd rice along with chapathi is served. Layam Catering Services, based in Pallikaranai is in charge of the food.

All this is free with a simple

registration process that can be done online.

The festival is hosted by Ramanian Builders' non-profit project Lasya in partnership with the Federation of OMR Resident Associations (FOMRRA). For a substantial number of guests coming from a single apartment complex, there are car-pooling and bus services available too, for pick-up and drop-off. "It is heartwarming to see so many rasikas enjoying the culture and heritage that they have been missing ever since they moved to the suburbs. Life cannot be all about work and fighting for amenities. We've got to 'live' life too," explains Harsha Koda, co-founder, FOMRRA.

This Margazhi, they certainly are.

OhMaRgazhi Festival is on every evening till December 30, from 5pm onwards at Janaki Ammal Auditorium, located in APL Global School, Thoraipakkam. Entry is free, but registration is mandatory. For details, log on to register.ohmargazhi.com

Claus for celebration

From letters to books, how Secret Santa brings a twist to your favourite childhood memory



Here is your guide to the city's Christmas trees that celebrate tradition and sustainability

Yuletide's creative canopy

Sangita Rajan

sangitarajan.ph@thehindu.co.in

In the heart of Chennai, the holiday season unfurls its magic. Beyond the classic pine and fir, the city is adorned with innovative Christmas trees that not only illuminate the city but also encapsulate the spirit of Christmas – a season of joy, renewal, and the limitless possibilities of festive innovation; a symphony of lights and holiday cheer.

Here are four unique Christmas trees you can visit this year:



Saplings, not trees

An eco-friendly tree made of saplings stands at the Radisson Blu Hotel & Suites GRT Chennai. Guests were encouraged to plant saplings on a custom-built frame in the shape of a Christmas tree, which will later be planted in the hotel premises. The tree lighting ceremony was attended by guests and patrons who were graced with carols and a festive high tea.



Out of the pot

The Westin Chennai Velachery has a terracotta Christmas tree, crafted entirely from earthen pots, painted with red soil and hand-painted ornaments. These vessels are recyclable, reminding us of beauty in simplicity. The tree's pots will be repurposed for planting saplings after the holiday season, and the iron frame that supports the structure will also be repurposed to ensure zero waste. The initiative blends tradition and eco-consciousness: a simple reminder of how celebrations can also care for the planet.

Built with hope

At Park Hyatt, Chennai, there is a tree made with stacked wooden cubes. It carries the wishes of children from disadvantaged sections of society from Ambedkar Nagar, Poonamallee. Each cube has a card with notes on them with Christmas wishes. For example, kids have wished for clothes, shoes, books, stationery, toys and more. Guests can pay for the items or purchase them and leave them on the tree. The Park Hyatt team will dress up as Santa Claus and distribute the presents to the kids along with meals to 100 children from the community.

A tapestry of artistry

One of the grandest trees in the city is at ITC Grand Chola, and this year, it is inspired by the vibrant Athangudi tiles of Chettinad.

The intricate tile patterns have been recreated on repurposed wood by Chennai-based artist Rahool Saksena. This initiative highlights traditional craftsmanship while promoting sustainability. The tree is a symbol of the hotel's ethos of responsible luxury by employing artisans with special abilities. On display through the season, it aims to bridge the past with the present.



Khushi Bhuta

Growing up, Santa Claus was an old man from the North Pole with a white beard and an extravagant sledge. Now, as adults, our Santa looks an awful lot like the colleagues we share a cup of coffee with. As December comes around, it is time for Secret Santa, a gift giving tradition where a group of people draws names anonymously, and then secretly purchases gifts for their assigned person.

While most Secret Santas work on a budget, gifts tend to include anything that reminds the Santa of the receiver: from the vinyl of a favourite song to a utilitarian piece of decor, or even a bar of chocolate. Shreya V, a Master's student from Hyderabad who conducts Secret Santa with her friends every year, says that to her this tradition helps them stay in touch with each other: "Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Udaipur, Dehradun, we are all far off in different cities and yet we have made sure that the tradition of Secret Santa continues".

Beyond the office space, cultural departments in colleges and universities are also increasingly adopting this gift giving activity to help the batch students connect with one another. Jebisha RS, a student of Stella Maris College in Chennai, is

a representative that helps hostel wardens organise Secret Santa. She says that the game plays a key role in celebrating the festival of Christmas in the college: "It's a special event and we all participate."

The act of being someone's Secret Santa does not have to be restricted to gifts, it can also be delivered through other mediums, such as heartfelt letters. "This tradition of Christmas letters has become a cherished part of our college culture – an opportunity to express gratitude, appreciation, and love," says Abhijay Gaur, co-organiser of Secret Santa letters at Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, Pune. He explains that the timeless charm of letters is what drives the budget-friendly

tradition, "there's no better time than Christmas to spread joy and acknowledge the people who make a difference in our lives". The tradition now plays a key role in the celebration of the holiday spirit on campus.

Another unconventional form of Secret Santa, the Book Secret Santa on X (formerly Twitter) is a country-wide digital Secret Santa wherein participants are randomly allotted another individual across the country with their reading preferences following which they have to exchange books with their "Santy." Co-Founder Aamna Khan started this with fellow reading enthusiasts Suhas Motwani and Sowmya Rao six years ago because they were in search of a space like

this for themselves. "It is something we do for the community. We want people to find a book they like, and meet someone they like," says Aamna. Over 300 people have registered for the Book Secret Santa this year, and the books gifted are of varied genres.

Secret Santa is also a popular tradition at offices. Riddhi Wadhia, assistant manager, Human Resources at Pilgrim, is a part of the organising team for her office Secret Santa. While explaining the enthusiastic participation of over 180 employees, she says, "When employees are happy, they are more likely to stay with the company."

The countdown to Christmas is well and truly on. So what is Secret Santa bringing you this year?



GETTY IMAGES/STOCK

Wild and hungry

Now spot an ostrich and tuck into parotta kurma at the new Zoo Cafe in Guindy Children's Park

Priyadarshini Paitandy

priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in

At the new Zoo Cafe in Guindy Children's Park, the biggest question is, will the monkeys steal our vadas?

Raj Thiru, CEO of the cafe laughs, "We've seen quite a few monkeys make their way here. But our diners are seated inside so their food is safe."

The 8,000 square feet cafe is spread across two floors. The ground floor serves vegetarian South Indian favourites such as parotta kurma, thattu idli, benne dosa, bisi bele bath, and Madurai jigarthanda, among others. "Everything here is priced under ₹100," says Raj.

The first floor is more jazzed up with rattan cane pendant lights and walls bright with the paintings of birds, animals, and



Jungle call A view of the Zoo Cafe; and sambar vada on the menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



cheerful banana plants. "Here, we serve non-vegetarian as well and the menu includes continental and multi-cuisine options such as noodles, pasta, and pizza, with prices starting at ₹200," he says.

While Zoo Cafe is near the parking lot, yet another cafe has launched in the heart of the park. A 20-minute walk takes us to Mulyal Cafe. We walk past excited kids rolling down slides, couples looking at peacocks and black bucks, and more kids and families squealing at the sheer size of an ostrich,

while the rest of the snap-happy crowd clicks numerous pictures with the other inhabitants of the zoo. It feels like a carnival. "It's amazing that we have such a green space in the middle of the city," says Raj.

Mulyal Cafe is a small space with a tiled

roof cocooned amidst tall green trees. Despite serving only popcorn, ice cream, chips, and soft drinks, it draws a crowd. The thatched seating space outside is taken.

"Since it's located inside the park, we are not allowed to light a fire here to cook. But on request we can get our guests food from our other cafe. Soon we will serve sandwiches, samosas, and cutlets," says Raj.

It took a year to build both cafes. Other than the greenery, what drew Raj to this place is "the ample parking space, good footfall, and the fact that it is child-friendly as well as pet-friendly," he says, as another bus full of school children pulls into the park.



The secret door to Tokyo

Ananya Desikan

ananyaa.d@thehindu.co.in

Hidden doors always pique curiosity. Here, a shelf stacked with cup noodles and soy sauce opens into a cosy restaurant, accessible only if you have the password for the day. Otherwise, the hostess is just a nonchalant customer, and the shelf of noodles is just that – a shelf.

Tokyo Diner is a speakeasy that does not serve liquor. Instead, the Japanese-inspired restaurant offers a 10-course Kaiseki menu, a result of meticulous planning and six months of trials and experiments by head chef Ralph D'Souza. "A lot of the dishes on

salty-sweet butter.

We pick from an assortment of colourful, ornate chopsticks and move to the second course. The cold plates feature two variants: a green apple, plum, and pickled daikon crudo, and a red snapper and plum crudo. Both arrive as tightly rolled rosettes, studded with pickled onion pearls. A citrus Japanese ponzu is poured over, followed by a few drops of herb burnt scallion oil.

The sushi on offer is Osaka-style. Thick sushi is sandwiched between two delicate sheets of nori and is best eaten by hand – unless your chopstick skills are impeccable, and mine are not. It comes in two variants: spiced roasted carrots with spicy Kewpie mayo and wasabi, or a bold unagi with unagi glaze and nori.

The beef tartare is a standout, served with a tempura shiso leaf, wasabi, pickled daikon, and tempura nori.

While sampling the sushi, a coffee pot-like vessel arrives with a filter on top containing shredded nori and aromatics. A cloudy miso broth is poured through at the table, producing a clear broth below.

Comforting with its umami-rich, slightly salty notes, it acts as a palate cleanser before the next dishes.

Sushi makes another appearance – this time, fried. The vegetarian variant includes Kyoto mushrooms, cream cheese, and crisp

leeks, while the tuna sushi is served on a slice of golden toasted brioche. The fresh tuna is paired with bright, lacto-fermented hot sauce and fresh scallions.

The laboriously prepared karokke chicken wings with whey and fish sauce caramel fall short, perhaps due to an overstimulated palate, but the Malaysian-inspired Japanese curry puff with edamame, potato, reduced curry, and nori dust is a winner. "This puff is practically a fried croissant. While inspired by the curry puff, we've infused it with Japanese flavours," Ralph explains.

Back to sushi for course eight, this time deconstructed and presented in a shell-like bowl with bright orange roe and fluttering bonito flakes.

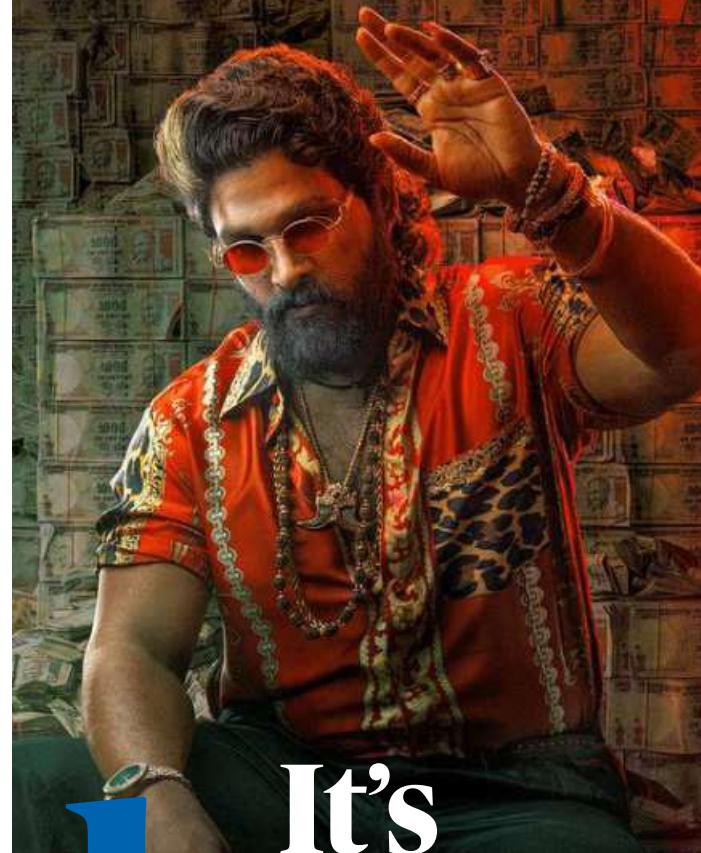
The meal concludes with desserts. The pretty melon sorbet with basil oil, yuzu, basil powder, and berry tuile is flavourful and would have been better placed earlier in the meal. The matcha namelaka dessert is a satisfying finale.

Though slightly overwhelming with its heavy use of rice and miso, the meal is an adventure.



Tokyo Diner operates exclusively for dinner. The Kaiseki menu is priced at ₹2,500 per person. And as for the location? Let's just say Nungambakkam, and you will have to make a reservation to get the details. On bookings: airmenus.in/tokyodiner/order

Pushpa 2: The Rule is the fourth Telugu film overall and the second this year, after *Kalki 2898 AD*, to have crossed the ₹1,000-crore mark at the box office



It's box office

but it has witnessed a resurgence.”

The marketing of *Pushpa-The Rise* began days before its release in December 2021, when director Rajamouli, sensing the film's potential, urged its director Sukumar and producers Mythri Movie Makers to dub the film in Hindi.

Smart marketing
Anurag Reddy, co-founder of marketing agency First Show, observed how Allu Arjun's character, Pushparaj, resonated with the audiences in the Hindi-speaking heartland. "The working class felt represented when Pushpa sat cross-legged after toiling to earn his wages, unmindful of his employer's presence."

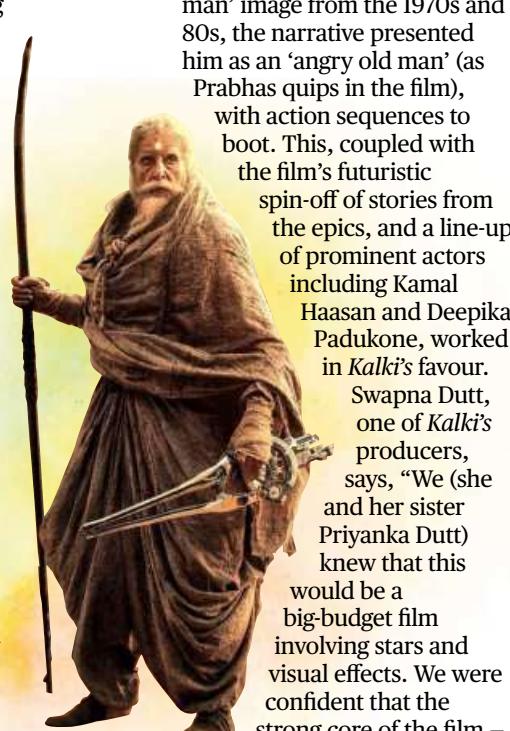
The ‘thaggede le’ (‘jhukega nahi’ in Hindi) catchphrase caught on like wildfire. In *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, Pushparaj states that his name is not only synonymous with fire, but

wildfire!
Anurag says the team's strategy for the sequel aligned with the film's content. "The first poster and teaser featured Allu Arjun dressed as a woman (during the Gangamma *jatara* celebrated in the Chittoor region). It became a talking point as people began to look for details of..."

The angry young man
A few months ago when director Nag Ashwin's *Kalki 2898AD* was released, riding on the popularity of Prabhas in the post-*Baahubali* era, the surprise package was Amitabh Bachchan as the immortal Ashwatthama. Channeling Bachchan's iconic 'angry young man' image from the 1970s and 80s, the narrative presented him as an 'angry old man' (as Prabhas quips in the film).

A vertical photograph of a person from the waist up, wearing a brown leather jacket over a light-colored shirt, and blue jeans. They are holding a rifle with both hands, looking down its barrel. The background is dark and out of focus.

Prabhas quips in the film), with action sequences to boot. This, coupled with the film's futuristic spin-off of stories from the epics, and a line-up of prominent actors including Kamal Haasan and Deepika Padukone, worked in *Kalki*'s favour. Swapna Dutt, one of *Kalki*'s producers, says, "We (she and her sister Priyanka Dutt) knew that this would be a big-budget film involving stars and visual effects. We were confident that the strong core of the film –



A dramatic illustration of Rama in his golden armor, holding a bow and arrow, with a large circular halo above him against a sunset sky.

the story of the birth of Kalki – would connect with Indian audiences. The complex worlds that Nagi (director Nag Ashwin) created gave a new visual experience.”

In the case of *RRR*, a well-planned promotional

strategy by Hyderabad-based marketing group Walls and Trends leveraged Rajamouli's popularity post-*Baahubali*, and the familiarity with NTR and Ram Charan, thanks to the telecast of the dubbed versions of their Telugu hits in Hindi over

Stills from *Pushpa*
and *Kalki 2898 AD.*
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the years. The 'Nāatu Nāatu' ('Naacho Naacho') hookstep was an added advantage.

A section of the audience
rues the trend of
larger-than-life action
entertainers ending with a
cliffhanger – leading to a
sequel – to cash in on the
possibility of a franchise.

However, that path may not end soon. In the pipeline are sequels such as *Pushpa 3: The Rampage*, *Kalki 2*, *Salaar 2*, and *Devara 2*. As Pushpa declares that he is going international, some of these films too are in the process of making international collaborations to further widen box office prospects.



The wait is ove

Vidaa Muyarchi, Ajith Kumar's film with director Magizh Thirumeni, is in its final leg of shooting. Ajith, donning a tuxedo, looks stylish in the stills alongside Trisha. The makers are planning on releasing the film during Pongal in January 2025. Ajith's other film, *Good Bad Ugly*, directed by Adhik Ravichandran, is also due soon.

