



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



Find the connection between human folly, abstraction, and art at Raghava KK's exhibit **P3**

WHY RUKMINI WANTS TO WORK WITH MANI RATNAM **P4**



Speaking in tongues iterations of drishti idols in Tamil Nadu. AMAR RAMESH

Nazar is as ubiquitous as envy. But *drishti* in Tamil Nadu encompasses colour, culture, and most importantly, artistry. Get a dose of good luck at *The Hindu's* Lit for Life Unplugged

Sanjana Ganesh  
sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in

“Touchwood.” “Kannu pada pogudhu.” “Nazar na lag jaye.”

The very idea of protecting nascent beauty from the evil that you may bear in your eye, dates not just back to your grandmother's tongue. Earliest sightings of these symbols exist in the form of alabaster idols with incised eyes in ancient Mesopotamia. Then there are the gargoyles of Gothic architecture in Europe, and the blue beaded eye from Turkey, promising to protect you from envy and malice.

How it came to become a formidable mustachio-ed man in chrome yellow, brandishing a menacing red tongue adorning the walls of Tamil Nadu is a story in itself. This tale will reveal itself in a conversation

between Ashvin E Rajagopalan, director, Ashvita's and Piramal Foundation, and Amar Ramesh, photographer and author of *Kolli Kannu: Drishti Paintings of Tamil Nadu* on November 28 at MadCo on Cathedral Road.

Part of the *The Hindu's* Lit for Life Unplugged, this event borrows from the popular Lectures on Tap movement that began in New York City in 2024. Experts here will speak about an array of interesting subjects, over 40 minutes, followed by a classroom-style free-for-all barrage of questions.

Ashvin says, “Nazar's function is the same as the very word. The objective is to remove the focus from the object of beauty or the self, and shift the focus of the negative energy away from the main subject, object, or person.”

He adds that iconography showcasing *drishti* can be found in every Kanchipuram stone temple since the 5th Century.

## EYES on you



Once inspired by the *yaazhi*, a mythical creature from South Indian mythology that is often depicted in the form of a lion, elephant, and serpent, *drishti* in this State now looks like a monster. A *rakshasan*. “This is because the potters of Tamil Nadu, who made terracotta masks and the Ayyannar statues, decided to play around with the form and changed it to look much like a man. The iridescent colours came to be when enamel paints were introduced in 1890,” he adds.

Amar Ramesh says that chance made him begin shooting the images of these *drishti* dolls back in 2010. “Some had symbols of scorpions, others had images of snakes. Many are based on communities too. The more I captured them, the more I was fascinated,” he says. Amar says that moulds have replaced the painted form of *drishti* which is why it is



THE HINDU  
LIT FOR LIFE  
UNPLUGGED

Lit for Life Unplugged, part of *The Hindu's* Lit for Life festival, takes place on November 28 at 6pm. Entry is free — the programming is on us, the drinks are on you. Seats are limited to 50, so do register ahead.

DM @madco\_chennai to save your spot, and don't ghost us... we've got the *drishti bommai* watching.

essential to preserve it. He also hopes to popularise it in pop culture.

“As die-hard fans of everything kitsch, colourful, and wonderfully weird, we're thrilled to host this talk at MadCo,” says Santhosh Zachariah Abraham, managing partner, MadCo. He adds, “Amar Ramesh's book is a riot of *drishti bommais* — those comically monstrous faces we've all seen a thousand times but never really looked at. It's a reminder that art hides in plain sight. Our bar has always celebrated Tamil flavours through its food and cocktails, so bringing a little culture into the mix feels just right.”

There's many other mystical reasons why *drishti* takes away from the object of desire and superimposes the negative on the grotesque. Join us, and find out why — this is an event that will definitely keep *nazar* away.



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Prince Frederick  
prince.f@thehindu.co.in

What remains barely out of one’s grasp is more eye-catching than what is in hand. Here is a “classic” flavour to this universal truth. Ranjit Pratap holds a coveted finisher’s plaque from the Classic Himalayan Drive 2025, but would not have any more of it.

Do not get this wrong. This is not the existential emptiness that sometimes shadows achievement; not the bottomless pit of despondency lying right below the summit. Ever since the plaque made it to the gallery wall at his home in Chennai, Ranjit has grown a couple of feet taller, and there is an evident spring to his step. He defines the experience of rolling through the Himalayas as fulfilling and Team Firefox’s conduct of the event (November 1-10) as impeccable, particularly the massive resources ploughed in to cushion the edges. And in this state of elation, Ranjit has taken a calculated decision not to reprise the effort that begot him this enriching experience and recognition. Because “it is too tough on the system”.

Ranjit is referring not entirely to his body and mind, but to the wheels that carried him through this 10-day adventure. He headed into the Drive with a 1977 Peugeot 504 (diesel). That is par from the course. The Classic Himalayan Drive, which has five editions to its name, is designed exclusively for classic and neo-classic cars with their birth years ranging from 1958 to 2002.

The route for this edition was

# Driven to the limit

Is the gruelling Classic Himalayan Drive possible in an older classic car? Ranjit Pratap tests the limits, steering a 1977 Peugeot through steep climbs and rough stretches

Noida-Ramnagar-Corbett National Park-Rishikesh-Theog- Jalori Pass-Rohtang Pass via Atal Tunnel and Koksar-Manali-Chandigarh.

The Classic Himalayan Drive runs on nostalgia, the route seeking to recreate the ones followed by the iconic Himalayan rally of the 1980s, but removing the ragged edges. But the drive happens in a real estate of a kind where danger can be minimised, not wiped off the map. The drive is non-competitive and every finisher is a winner. However, participants compete against steep inclines, hairpin bends, washed-off roads, and narrow roads caressing boulders. And ironically, they are pitted against their own machines, particularly

those at the wheels of older classics.

Ranjit’s driveway resembles a shopping complex’s parking lot boasting a wide collection of classic cars. On the face of it, he



had a job on his hands deciding on the machine that would go with him and his wife Uma Ranjit (as navigator) to the Himalayas. In the end, the four-speed, 2.3-litre (diesel) 1977 Peugeot 504 seemed like a great choice.

He did not have second thoughts about the decision until Day 7 of the Drive when he found himself staring up at the Jalori Pass, with the braking capacity of his car reduced to 20%. At that point, he had a wistful longing for his 2000 Prado, which was well within the 1958-2002 cut-off.

A majority of the participants – particularly those from other shores including the United Kingdom, France, Kenya, Malaysia and Singapore – had gone in for younger classics better suited for the unhelpful conditions. There was also a clutch of contemporary four-wheel drives as an add-on. The Indian contingent included half-a-dozen older classics, out of which only two (Ranjit’s 1977 Peugeot 504 and Kolkata-based Prithivi

Travel tales Ranjit Pratap, Uma Ranjit and the 1977 Peugeot 504 back in Chennai from the Classic Himalayan Drive; (below) during the drive. PRINCE FREDERICK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Raj Tagore’s 1959 Mercedes-Benz 180 Ponton) made it to the finish.

On the Drive, the limitations of this car could not be swept under the snow. It was still a rear-wheel-drive machine thrust into a business better left to four-wheel drives. Ranjit recalls that at Jalori Pass, he tackled a scary incline that lasted seven kilometres by reducing his option to just the first gear, keeping the engine humming, careful enough not to slave-drive it lest it fumed at him, overheating and squatting down in an act of non-cooperation. And the slope on the decline was scarier still, as the car was braking at 20% of its braking capacity due to a failed brake booster.

On the hair-raising drive up and down Jalori Pass, Ranjit had a taste of the “hedge” around the nearly 40 participants put in by Team Firefox – “six Deputy Clerks of the Course with of course, the Clerk of the Course, Sudev Brar; two sweeps, one of them being Brar himself; and a full-fledged team of mechanics and a good number of recovery flatbeds and ambulances”.

Ranjit elaborates: “Every day, we had to cover between 200 to 250 kilometres, and overall, we had clocked around 2,000 kilometres; looking back, it seems like a miracle that we made it across this distance and survived treacherous road conditions, including a lot of washed-out patches and those hit by past landslides. It was possible because of Rajan Syal’s team taking care of the minutest details, not to mention the 1980s nostalgia that egged us on.”

## STEPOUT



**Coastal soundstorm**  
CoZye — Nagaland’s Coffee and Zayie will debut in Chennai, by the sea. Coffee, a two-time Northeast India Beatbox Champion, builds basslines,

percussion and melody using just his voice and a loop station, and Zayie, a Northeast India Guitar Champion, is celebrated for transforming a single acoustic guitar into a full-band experience. The duo is known for merging beatbox and fingerstyle guitar into a seamless performance. @The Beach Terrace, Injambakkam at 7pm on November 22 and 23. Tickets priced at ₹499 at bookmyshow



## Heart smart

Chennai’s pickleball crowd has something new on the calendar: a heart-health session shaped around the needs of regular players. The workshop looks at the basics which includes how to eat well, avoid common injuries, and build habits that support long-term cardiac health. A short question and answer rounds off the session. @Cardiac Wellness Institute, Besant Nagar on November 22. Registration is ₹500 and mandatory. Call 9940408828 for more details.

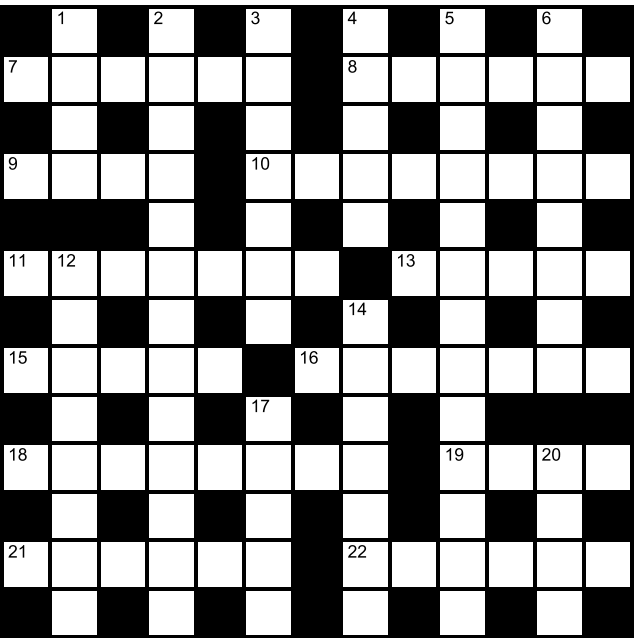


## Culture comes alive

Minna Minni, an organisation dedicated to the classical arts, is presenting a three-day multicultural event, The Melange Fest. The festival showcases Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, theatre and visual arts, all featuring renowned artistes alongside young and emerging talent. @Medai, Alwarpet. November 21 to 23 from 6pm onwards. Tickets at tikkl.com.

## QUICK CROSSWORD #28

Set by Doppelganger



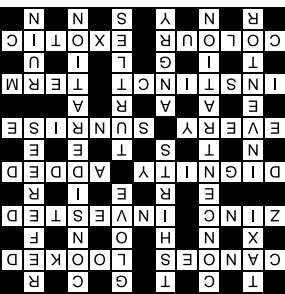
- Across**
- 7 Light, narrow boats (6)  
8 Turned one’s eyes on (6)  
9 Ductile bluish white metal (4)  
10 Endowed with authority (8)  
11 Formal bearing (7)  
13 Amounted to (5)  
15 All without exception (5)  
16 Daybreak (7)  
18 Foresight (8)  
19 Division of academic year (4)  
21 Not black and white (6)  
22 From a foreign country (6)
- Down**
- 1 Move slowly before take-off (4)  
2 Intensive mental effort (13)  
3 Tops (1-6)  
4 Boxers wear this (5)  
5 A payment (13)  
6 Arbitrators (8)

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



- 12 Edison, for example (8)  
14 Marine reptiles (7)  
17 See red (5)  
20 Collapsed state (4)

### Solution No. 28



Two photographers bring together monochrome stillness and abstract motion in a show that invites viewers to rediscover the power of light

Sangita Rajan  
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

Legendary American photographer Ansel Adams once said, “Landscape photography is the supreme test of the photographer – and often the supreme disappointment.” It is a line that sums up the quiet brutality of the genre, and one that Chennai-based photographer Srinivasan Periaithiruvadi relates to immediately. “The challenge with landscape photography is that it requires a lot of patience,” he says. “You have to think about composition, what to include, what to leave out.”

Srinivasan has been photographing the wilderness

since 2005 and has shown his work at several solo and group exhibitions. This week, he returns to The Folly, Amethyst with a new body of monochrome landscapes titled Mountains and Mugil, that were shaped over years of travelling through high-altitude terrain in Kashmir and Ladakh. His friend Jayanand Govindaraj will exhibit a series of abstract photographs that explore intentional camera movement alongside.

Srinivasan’s photographs distil mountains, clouds, and light into something almost meditative, inviting viewers to slow down and stay with the silence between forms. “I chose monochrome because it’s a challenge. Today, millions of colour images are



made on phones every minute. Black and white strips all of that away, and it leaves you with only tones, light, and form. I wanted to experiment

Form and figure (Left) A photograph from Mountains and Mugil by Srinivasan Periaithiruvadi; (below) an abstract photograph by Jayanand Govindaraj. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and see how people respond to that on the walls,” he says.

On display are 17 monochrome landscapes, all printed by Srinivasan – a final step he treats as part of the creative process rather than an afterthought. “For me, capturing, processing and printing are all equally important. A photograph isn’t finished until it’s on paper,” he says.

Fourteen of the 17 photographs were shot on a digital achromatic camera – a device that captures photographs only in black and white. “Most people shoot in colour and convert it later, but this camera records only tones, like the old black-and-white film days. It forces you to think about light very differently,” he explains.

If Srinivasan’s images chase stillness, Jayanand’s contribution to the show, leans into movement, abstraction and a little bit of deliberate blur. A photographer since 1962 – long enough, he jokes, “to have shot everything from family birthdays to seven continents’ worth of wildlife”.

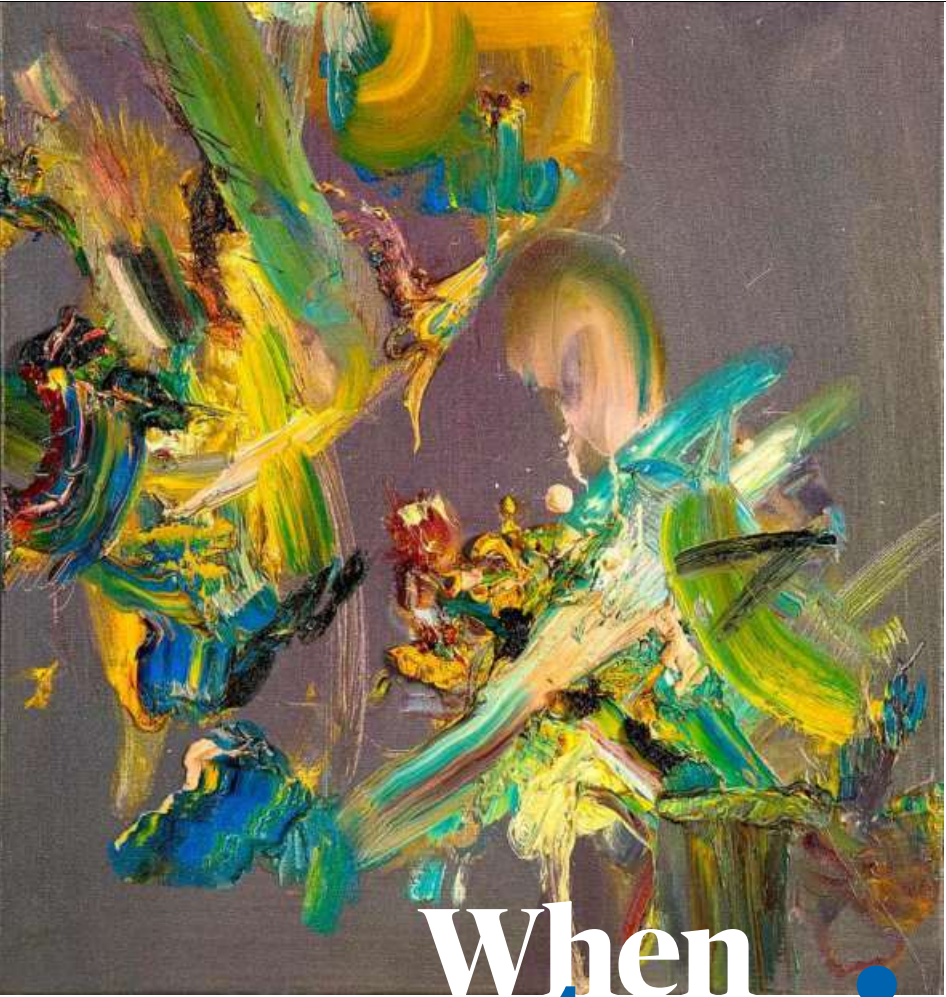
For Jayanand, the shift toward abstraction began just before the pandemic, when he encountered the Field of Light installation at Uluru in Australia – acres of illuminated bulbs that he was compelled to photograph without a tripod. “I had to rethink everything,” he says. Back home, he kept

experimenting at night, chasing the way plants, shadows, and passing light could dissolve into painterly streaks. What emerged is Pairs – a series of abstract photographs placed side by side, sometimes clearly linked, sometimes barely, nudging viewers to find the conversation between them. Though abstraction is his current preoccupation, Jayanand’s instincts were shaped over decades of photographing living subjects. The shift to non-literal imagery did not erase that history; it sharpened it. “Photography isn’t about sharpness or equipment,” he says. “It’s about what you feel when you look at something.” It is a line of thought he returns to often. For him, the point is not technical perfection but emotional resonance.

Together, Srinivasan’s monochromes and Jayanand’s abstractions make a good argument for slowing down and looking deeper at landscapes, at light, and at the instinct behind the shutter. In a world saturated with colour and speed, the exhibition makes a simple, almost old-fashioned demand: pause long enough for the image to meet you halfway.

Mountains and Mugil and Pairs will be on display at The Folly, Amethyst from November 21 to 23, from 10am to 7.30pm. Entry is free.





**In brush strokes** (Clockwise from left) Artworks from Raghava KK's Figuring the Edge series; and Raghava KK. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Priyamedha Dutta**  
priyamedha.dutta@thehindu.co.in

There is a quiet intensity in how artist Raghava KK speaks – part philosopher, part performer, and part painter, unlearning everything he once knew. His latest series, Figuring the Edge, at Ashvita's, channels that spirit through abstraction. This is a body of work born not from a narrative, but the undoing of it.

For decades, Raghava has been known as a storyteller who has blurred the boundaries between art and technology, and emotion and intellect. But here, he steps away from the story. “Stories make us what we are,” he says. “Stories are the cause of many innovations and helped homo sapiens master the world; they are also the source of much destruction, so when you hold on to stories very tightly, they break; I want to show what happens when stories break.”

A few years ago, Raghava's own story broke. After two decades in the US, collaborating across continents, his life collapsed when he went through a divorce. “Suddenly, everything I thought was me, started falling apart,” he says. “So I came

# When stories break

Through his new series, Figuring the Edge, Raghava KK turns his work into a meditative act of unlearning and rediscovery



back to India, to my mother, trying to make sense of it all.”

His brother, Karthik Kalyan Raman, a philosopher and economist, was going through a similar reckoning. “He began asking me these questions – when the stories that make you break, who are you?” These questions became the centre of Figuring the Edge – each work beginning as a written inquiry, then a sketch, and then a painting. “Each artwork is

accompanied by a question, and the painting becomes the answer.”

Thick impastos, shifting pigments, and restless strokes shape the artworks on the wall. “I wanted to create something new where I reinvent myself.” The ‘edge’ in the series is a stage of being.

“While doing this series, I realised that artists are supposed to live on the edge of society, we are never designed for the centre, we are designed to push the boundaries.”

“From a distance, the artworks are like humans; the more you come closer, the more it starts revealing itself. You can see all its flaws, it holds its own story,” says Raghava.

Born into a Tamil Hindu family in Bengaluru, raised in a Muslim neighbourhood, and educated in a Catholic school, Raghava's artistic journey is a multitude of perspectives. “I can play my Christmas carols, sing the *azaan*, and also do my *sandhya vandanam*.” His canvases reflect this multiplicity, and each viewer sees something different – a figure, a face or a landscape.

With Figuring the Edge, Raghava is returning to the Chennai art scene after two decades. His canvases turn into a site of tension – between body and image, figure and ground. Through his abstract work, Raghava invites the audience to stand on the edge of art itself and reinvent themselves.

*Figuring the Edge, is on at Ashvita's, Mylapore, till December 15, from 11am to 7pm, Monday to Friday. Entry free.*

## Are we human?

I'm Not A Robot, explores the opportunities and obstacles of the 'AI' era, where every one of us is swamped by technology

**Priyamedha Dutta**  
priyamedha.dutta@thehindu.co.in

In an age where our screens dominate our lifestyle, artist Anamika V returns with an important reminder of what it means to feel human. Her latest exhibition, I'm Not A Robot, opening on November 21 at Espace, Alliance Française of Madras, delves into the fragile threshold between memory, imagination, technology and lived experiences. Curated by N Ramachandran, the show brings together Anamika's newest body of mixed media works.

I'm Not A Robot explores the opportunities and obstacles of the 'AI' era, where every one of us is swamped by technology, and where it is leading us – to no man's land.

“For over three decades, since passing out of the College of Arts, Chennai, where I studied painting and printmaking, I have always worked in long, immersive series that span six to eight years. My current body of work, which has evolved over the past several years, comes from observing the technological boom around us. Technology has made our lives efficient and comfortable, but somewhere in this rapid advancement, I feel we are losing something essential,” says Anamika.

“Everywhere we go – apps, mass media, the digital world – we are constantly asked, ‘Are you human?’ It is ironic, because these questions are posed by machines, yet the deeper question is one we should be asking ourselves: What makes us human? This thought pushed me into a space of introspection. I began

to reflect on psychology, environment, technology, mass media, and the subtle ways they shape and influence us, which ultimately became the influence for this body of work,” she further added.

“In an era dominated by AI, smartphones, fibre optics, and an overwhelming flow of information, her work asks a simple, piercing question: “What do all these mean to a child who only wants to play and be normal?” As she has employed mixed media with forms dissected and overflowing with layers like a dream, questioning the



**Framed** Shifting Semblances by Anamika V. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

existence of humanity ... the drawings by the artist intervene in layers and forms, confusing the actual reality we live in,” says Ramachandran, curator of the exhibition.

From broad strokes to minute dots, the paintings move away from the fixed and familiar toward openness and experimentation.

*I'm Not A Robot will be on display from November 21 to 28. From 10am to 6pm, at Espace, Alliance Française of Madras, Nungambakkam.*

## Leon's hits Chennai

From smash burgers to boba lattes — Bengaluru's Leon's comes to Chennai with a serving of nostalgia and fries



**Priyamedha Dutta**  
priyamedha.dutta@thehindu.co.in

If you have lived in Bengaluru or passed through it, chances are you have heard of the legend of Leon's. When it landed in Bengaluru in 2015, it became a go-to for broke college kids and burger purists at a time when the city was still flirting with its gourmet burger scene. Now, the same classic brand has opened its first outlet in Chennai.

The interiors are classic Leon's – casual, unfussy, the kind that screams, “come as you are”.

We begin our meal with falafel fries in garlic sauce. It comes piping hot: smashed falafel topped with homemade chilli garlic sauce. The falafel is crunchy enough to reassure you that it was freshly fried. Next comes the Louisiana chicken burger, a simple, reliable, comforting, an after-college, late evening kind of burger that does not do much to impress with just onion, lettuce, cheese, and a chicken patty.

We then order the OG Smash Burger, which comes with a pillowy brioche bun and two smashed chicken patties,



caramelised onion, and lots of cheese. With caramelised onion and plenty of cheese, it is hearty, savoury and sweet enough to keep you going.

What is a burger without fries? Here, the burgers come with V- Crispers and an addictive creamy mayo dip. If only I could reach out and have an unlimited supply of those crisp fries.

While I focus on the non-vegetarian side of the menu, my friends jump to the vegetarian side with a veggie supreme burger. Here is where it turns out to be a little dull.

While most burger joints nail the meat, the real test is the vegetarian burger. The patty here is soggy, lacks flavour, and the jalapeño sauce is what rescues it.

We also ordered the veg pizza pockets – deep-fried dough stuffed with saucy veggies. Is it indulgent? Absolutely. Should you order it? Only if the cheat day is having a cheat day.

Leon's is not fancy, and it does not pretend to be – if you know how to order correctly, it hits the right notes.

*Leon's is at 4th Avenue, AC Block, Anna Nagar. A meal for two is priced at ₹ 1,000.*

## The Grinch before X'Mas

Get ready for some festive cheer with Mellow Circle's annual Christmas play that is back with a production titled Trials, Tribulations and Christmas Decorations



**Tis the season** The cast at rehearsal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Privadarshini Paitandy**  
priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in

From July to September every year, Michael Muthu is a self-confessed grinch. That is when the search for the annual Mellow Circle Christmas play begins. He goes through

various scripts and does not come out of grinch mode till he finds the perfect one. “We are running out of good plays; there aren't enough Christmas plays available in the world,” he says, a tinge of worry lacing his tone. This year, they found a play online. “We had to rework it. It required a lot of editing and

rewriting, and now we have a play ready,” he adds.

It is titled *Trials, Tribulations and Christmas Decorations*. The two-hour production revolves around John, who is visited by his daughter Kimberly and her husband. Kimberly wants her father to get into the holiday spirit, and invites people to

John's house to celebrate the festive season. When a blizzard strikes, all of them get snowed in together, leading to heart-warming and comedic exchanges.

John, is the archetypal grinch. But he was not always like this. He used to be a fan of the festive season – his house would shine with lights, decorations, and decked up trees, and his doors were always open to friends and strangers. Circumstances changed him. The play will reveal what led to this, and if he will go back to being the John of yore.

“It's a feel good story that has a bit of comedy and emotions. It also talks about how people have trials and tribulations and how it's resolved with the love of companions,” says Michael, who directed the play. The nine-member cast includes Yohan Chacko, Tehzeeb Katari, Roshan Poncha, Anushka Maria, Rohan Philip, Katya Philbert, Larissa Philbert, Arya Saravanan, and Serah Jachin.

No Mellow Circle play is complete without the choir. A 40-voice choir – directed by Roshni Sharon – will present around five beautiful songs of the season. This is Mellow Circle's 26th Christmas production, with Michael directing at least 21 of those, he says. This year marks a special milestone for Mellow Circle as it launches its new initiative – Prathyasha Home for Destitute Women, a project dedicated to offering shelter, care, and dignity to abandoned and vulnerable women in the community. The proceeds from the musical will go to support the operations of this home.

*The shows will be staged at the Museum Theatre, Egmore, at 6.30pm on November 28, 29, and 30. Donor passes are available through Premier Tickets, with denominations of ₹400, ₹750, and ₹1,500 for Friday, and ₹500, ₹1,000, and ₹2,500 for Saturday and Sunday. For details, contact 9841074841 on WhatsApp.*



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