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THE HINDU



How to spot the juiciest mangoes of the season: Farmers in Tamil Nadu weigh in **P2**

ARANMANAI 4 IS HERE! WHAT'S IN STORE? **P4**



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Close to 100 young adults gather around the stage, their eyes focussed on a screen that will start playing songs any minute. This is for an ‘RPD’ – a Random Play Dance session where small parts of songs are played in quick succession, and the audience breaks into moves that match the steps in the music video. Every time K-Wave India, Chennai’s hallyu and K-culture club organises its annual meet, an RPD is eagerly awaited, as is a K-drama and K-pop quiz, and a slew of dance and music performances.

In 2014, when Sanjay Ramji initiated the first meet of K-wave India, around 60 people turned up. “We initially started off as a small Asian culture club – some of us were watching K-dramas and Japanese shows as well as anime, and wanted to talk about it. However, K-culture slowly started becoming popular in 2012 and K-wave came to fruition,” he says. Their K-Fest 2023 annual meet in December last year saw around 450 participants. “We definitely would have had more people join in if we had a bigger space,” he says.

The Korean Wave or hallyu, which has been seeing a rise since the 1990s world over, saw a resurgence in 2020. Now, many fans across ages, have made their way to K-culture clubs across India.

While the clubs have a majority of women, several men who are K-culture enthusiasts have joined in the last few years as well. As the final episode of the hit K-drama *Queen of Tears* was airing on Sunday night, K-Wave’s WhatsApp group which has over 300 members, buzzed fervently, as they discussed the show.

WhatsApp has been the easiest way to coordinate with the many members, Sanjay says, and it is also where he asks them for feedback while planning annual meets and their much-anticipated All India K-pop (song and dance) competition. Auditions for the

same are expected to begin this month, and the city’s many hallyu inspired music and dance groups are gearing up.

“We expect that our members do not engage in fan wars. All our events are free since we want the community to be accessible,” he says.

Digging into tteokbokki, kimbab and ramen at the many Korean restaurants in Chennai and making a beeline to the theatres to take in the rare release of a Korean film are also top on the agenda for many. The vast community has resulted in steady friendships, as well as a network that steps up for professional and personal opportunities.

Singer Madhura Dhara Talluri, says that the encouragement from the K-wave community for a gig by the Korean band Lassi & Chai she is a part of, was heartening. “As a Korean language interpreter, this has also helped with networking. Many of us who want to learn and get better at the language, have come together to talk to each other in Korean, which is much better than struggling to practise with an app,” she says.

“Thirteen of us who met through the community got together to form a dance group, Re’verse. Apart from performing at the annual meet ups, and the competition, we have also performed at the Circle of Love festival and conducted K-pop dance workshops,” says Pooja Hemalatha, a social media consultant from Chennai, who heard about K-Wave India in 2019.

It is not just enthusiasts from the big cities

who are banding together. An MBA graduate from Salem, S Roshni’s K-culture Salem club which she started after being inspired by Chennai’s hallyu club, has members from Tiruchi, Namakkal, and other surrounding areas as members. “We partnered with Sona College of Technology and had a Feel Korea fair in April, which had everything from performances, street food, and even interaction with students from South Korea. We had hanboks that people could wear and click pictures in,” she says.

As a testimony to the

growing number of K-culture enthusiasts in Chennai, around eight lakh people turned up at Express Avenue mall in 2022 for the Korea Fair in India 2022 (KFI) organised by the Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA). Sanjay and members of K-Wave pitched in, with a hugely popular K-pop and K-drama quiz, as well as dance and music performances to deafening cheers.

The support extended by local institutions like Sona College for Roshni’s club and other colleges that are now beginning to host K-culture events and workshops on campus, has been valuable. Chennai’s K-Wave India has also been backed by the Consulate-General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai for years now, with the Consul-General even singing during K-fest 2023.

“We are always looking for these access points to meaningfully engage when it comes to Korean art and culture,” says Rathi Jaffer, director, InKo Centre, a non-profit centre based in Chennai promoting inter-cultural dialogue. InKo Centre hosted the first meeting of K-Wave India, and their subsequent annual meet ups till the numbers became too big to accommodate on their premises.

Speaking about how the hallyu manifested itself differently in India given how diverse the country is, Rathi explains that these clubs which were initially below the radar have galvanised, thanks to social media.

“The numbers are just continuing to grow,” she says, adding, “Learning Korean for instance is no longer for employability, but has become a passion among many K-culture enthusiasts. We have a 100-student waiting list at InKo Centre and are looking to hire more teachers as well.”

Riding the trend Members at the K-Fest 2023 meet in Chennai; a music performance at the meet. AKHILA EASWARAN

THAMODHARAN B



Let’s go to the circus

Experience acrobatics at the Jumbo Circus, now at OMR, targeting a whole new audience that includes IT professionals and children

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If you have ever been to the circus in Chennai, you have probably trudged your way through Moore Market to get to the SIAA Grounds, where the circus has been staged for many decades.

It is here that Jumbo Circus, operational since 1977, has always pegged its tent whenever it has come to Chennai. But with development in the neighbourhood and the Central Railway station, the circus has moved shop to OMR, closer to the

residences of many IT professionals and gated communities.

The entertainment still remains the same though. “It will be a treat during the summer vacation, and we have already gotten some great responses from people, especially IT professionals and their children,” says Shaji Lal, director, Jumbo Circus.

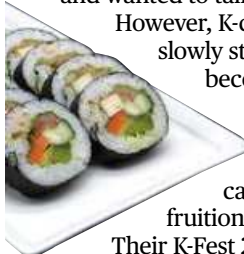
Here, you can watch some jaw-dropping acrobatic and gymnastic acts, peppered with popular film music. “We have the Space Wheel, or the Wheel of Death, as it is called. It is a

dangerous stunt that is among our biggest attractions. We also have a team from Tanzania doing pole acrobats and a vertical swing balance act.”

Regulars to circuses over the years might recall a time when animals used to be an active part of the acts – elephants wielding cricket bats, or a lion jumping through a ring of fire.

“Earlier, it was like a moving zoo,” recalls Shaji. But since the ban on animals at circuses, things have changed. You can still see a robotic version of animals when you enter this venue though – something that Shaji hopes will keep children interested. “For elders, this might be a nostalgic trip, while for kids of this generation, it will be an experience to cherish for a long time.”

The circus is on till May 12 at YMCA Grounds, OMR. Shows are at 4.30pm and 7.30pm. For details, call 8667013077 or 8281606892





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A glint of yellow

Farmers in Tamil Nadu are struggling with poor yield of mangoes due to excess heat, but there is also good news with new varieties being discovered

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When he noticed tamarind trees in his village bear plenty of fruit in January this year, P Rajkumar knew his mango yield would be poor. “This is the thumb rule my ancestors followed,” says the mango farmer based in Vanavasi in Salem district: that if tamarind trees are full of fruit, mango trees will be the opposite, and vice-versa. Mangoes this season, are not having a great run and there is a general sense of disappointment among farmers.

“In our district by the Western Ghats, mango farmers have seen only 10% of their usual yield,” says KS Jaganatha Raja, a farmer in Rajapalayam who sells mango saplings at his nursery. “This is because of excess rains and now, excess heat. Owing to excess rains, all we got were new leaves instead of flowers,” he explains, adding that some trees did flower, but they too dried up due to the heat.

Jaganatha owns a mango orchard spread across 12 acres near the foothills of the Western Ghats, where he grows and propagates several rare varieties. “The fruits have not matured enough, but fearing winds, farmers tend to get them harvested and sent to the market despite not getting good prices,” he adds. This results in traders resorting to using chemicals such as carbide and ethylene to get fruits to ripen quickly.

In his younger years, Rajkumar



says his parents would place fruits inside straw, cover them with a jute sack, and leave them alone for a few days. “When they ripened, the household would be filled with the heady fragrance of mangoes,” recalls the 60-year-old who has around 550 mango trees, and grows imam pasand, Salem Bengalura, totapuri, neelam, senthooram, and nadusalai mangoes. He is among the few farmers in the State who are managing to get a reasonable yield thanks to planning ahead. “Last year, we had good rains, and we are getting by, taking care of our trees and watering them sufficiently,” he adds.

Rajkumar explains: “For mango trees to thrive, the difference between day and night temperatures should not be more than 13 degree Celsius, but now, this exceeds 16 degree Celsius.”

In Salem, according to farmer Sathish Ramasamy, the quality of fruits is excellent, with many of

them ripening fast. He sells what he harvests at his Sangagiri farm online, and has customers across India. Sathish recommends varieties such as Salem Bengalura, nadusalai, panjavarnam, and the tiny but irresistibly sweet sakkarakutty.

From the orchard

Sathish also grows Miyazaki, said to be the most expensive mango in the world. A kilogram can cost around ₹15,000, and this year, he hopes to harvest the variety. “Some of my customers are fond of this variety. But if you ask me, it tastes just like senthooram mangoes,” he adds. Overall, mango prices have gone up by 30 to 40%. “Last year, we sold a kilogram of imam pasand for ₹200; whereas now, it costs around ₹300,” he says.

Sathish has just returned from harvesting mangoes in the searing heat and urges people to appreciate every mango that

reaches their hands. “So much of effort goes into each fruit, and people like us spend long hours in the sun to pluck and transport them,” he adds.

Baskar K, who owns a 40-acre orchard in Palani, where he grows around 500 mango trees organically, says he is set to harvest from May 15 onwards. “Since there was no flower to fruit conversion, there are only 10 to 15 fruits in my trees,” says Baskar, who has regular customers in Chennai and Bengaluru But he looks forward to see if his trees will yield fruits unseasonably. “This is a cycle; hopefully, next year, things will be better,” he says. For mangoes generally yield every alternate year.

Jaganatha, meanwhile, continues to revive rare varieties at his farm. Last year, he happened to eat the tastiest mango he has ever had. “It was juicy, sweet, and had no fibre at all. There is only one tree of the kind at a farm in Rajapalayam, and the owners did not know what variety it was. The tree came up where the farmer’s father threw a seed after eating a mango many decades ago,” he says. After summer, he is all set to graft and propagate 1,000 plants of this variety at his orchard. If things go well, this variety will soon get a name, and will perhaps reach our tables in a few years.

Season’s harvest In Salem, the quality of fruits is excellent; (left) Jaganatha Raja at his orchard in Rajapalayam.
MOORTHY G AND R ASHOK

Meet Chennai sailor Nethra Kumanan who is prepping for her second stint at the Olympics, this time in Paris

Sail’s up for Paris

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It was the summer of 2011. A brutal sun, and strong yet friendly winds proved company as a 14-year-old Nethra Kumanan won her very first weekend sailing race at an annual summer camp held by the Tamil Nadu Sailing Association. Back then, though Nethra’s entire weekends were taken over by different sports camps, sailing quickly became dear. It was perhaps that very first race she won among other small campers that led to this instant affinity, she recalls today. “It was interesting to me that a sail, some ropes and a stick could control an entire boat. It was fun to see how the boat responded to the tiniest manoeuvres that you make!” says Nethra.

On April 26, the Chennai sailor secured India’s second Paris Olympics quota in sailing, claiming it under the Emerging Nations Program banner at the Last Chance Regatta, an Olympic qualifier, in Hyeres, France. She was the first Indian woman to qualify for the games in Tokyo 2020, and this is her second stint.

Nethra’s international career shot up in 2014 with an Asian Games qualification. “I had to leave school and start open schooling. Because I was representing India at an early stage in my career, my parents were very supportive and they pushed me with everything they had,” says Nethra.

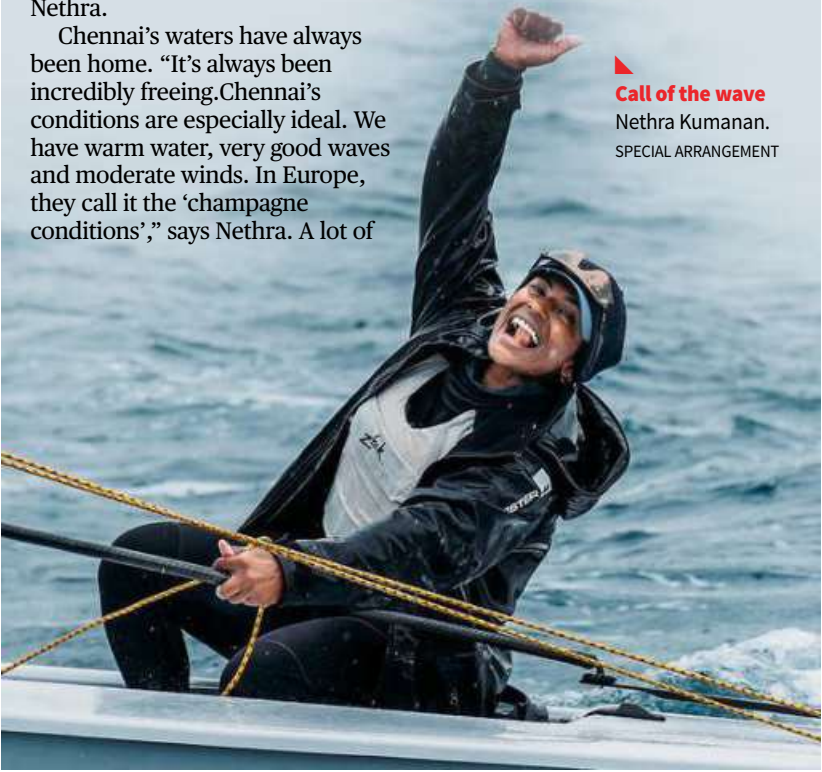
Chennai’s waters have always been home. “It’s always been incredibly freeing. Chennai’s conditions are especially ideal. We have warm water, very good waves and moderate winds. In Europe, they call it the ‘champagne conditions’,” says Nethra. A lot of

the early skill building began here. The boat that she sails is an ILCA6 class, a single-handed dinghy. “It’s only me on the boat. It really depends on how hard you push. Small movements end in big changes. The more consistent you are with your focus, the better you reap,” says Nethra. The solitary nature of the sport is perhaps its biggest draw. While it means complete control, it also means equal responsibility, says Nethra.

The Last Chance Regatta which helped her clinch the qualification was no cake walk. It was a cold week, she remembers, filled with very long days. “I usually train at Gran Canaria islands off north-western Africa and their waves are massive, like two meters. Two months ago, we moved to the southern coast of France which also happens to be where the Olympics for sailing will take place. In order to get used to the conditions and the weather, we trained at Hyeres along the same coast for a month and a half.”

Now, on the heels of the qualification, Nethra is on a two-week recovery break in Chennai before heading to Marseille for a training camp.

“If you had asked me a few years back, I would have said it’s the sailing that I enjoy,” she says adding, “But now I will say that it’s the racing that I enjoy more. Using a specific skill to be one metre ahead of someone else is fun. I love competing!”



Call of the wave
Nethra Kumanan.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Entertainment Unlimited, an event powered by *The Hindu*, showcased music, comedy and food



Summer fun (Clockwise from left) Rajhesh Vaidhya; Participants at the carnival; audience at the performances; stand up comedian Aadhavan interacting with the audience. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



A family affair

Summer is synonymous with weekend family outings. The recent Entertainment Unlimited, an event powered by *The Hindu*, blending music, comedy and food, drew audiences from across the city.

Held at the G Square Pavilion the evening was witness to renowned

musician and veena maestro Rajhesh Vaidhya, whose melodies transcended genres. Ringing in laughter was stand up comedian Aadhavan of *Konjam Nadinga Boss* fame who performed next.

Apart from the performances, the event offered a colourful array of

local food stalls, and a Kids Zone, with activities such as mini-golf, Catch the Fish, Jenga Tube and more.

Latha Aranganathan, chief marketing officer of G Square said, “The event was designed to whisk families away from their ordinary routine into a world of excitement and relaxation.”

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Across

1 Floating wreckage (7)
8 Get rid of (7)
9 Bounce back (7)
10 Formal discussions (7)
11 Get rid of (5)
13 Called off (9)
15 Praiseworthy (9)
18 Radiant (5)
21 Vein in the neck (7)
22 Heated metal cooking surface (7)
23 Entourage (7)
24 Propose (7)

Down

1 Got along (5)
2 Planet's path (5)
3 US state, capital Columbia (5,8)
4 Infuriate (6)
5 Duplicity (6-7)
6 Horizontal beam over a door (6)
7 Ran after (6)
12 With a flavoured sugar topping (4)

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

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated May 9, 2024.

Solution No. 13582

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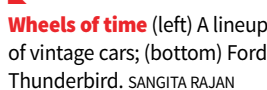


Ranjit, who owns several

Vintage meets velocity

A recent show saw discussions about cars, old and new, over several cups of coffee

Juxtaposed against vintage beauties were modern masterpieces like the Rolls-Royce Phantom, various Lamborghinis, Porsches, and Aston Martins.



The event was not just for vintage and modern car enthusiasts. Die-cast car collectors also joined the gathering. Die-cast cars are miniature, collectible, metal vehicles, usually scaled to 1:64 of their real-life counterparts. Sidhant Nichani, a professional barista and avid collector, displayed his collection, ensuring he had diecast versions of some of the actual cars present. “The idea was to create a miniature car meet within the car meet,” he says.



Participate in an improvisation theatre workshop for kids aged between 7-12 years. The workshop provides the opportunity for children to engage in spontaneous, unscripted theater where performers create scenes, characters, and stories on the whim. Conducted by Ramalingam Natarajan and Divya Ezhil, children will embark on a journey of creativity, communication, and confidence-building. *@Backyard, addy. On May 4, 4.30pm to 6.30 pm. Fee is \$699. For more details, call 9884164697.*



The Piano at Savera is kicking off its annual Summer Fest celebrations. It includes a special buffet spread, as well as chilled mocktails and falooda to beat the heat. For children, there is magic show performance, live caricature stall, tattoo art and face painting. If you go as a group of five, you can pay for three. @Savera, Mylapore. On till May 31, for lunch and dinner. Call 9841079163 for bookings



Artist Balanivetha is conducting a tulip painting workshop for teens and adults. At this beginner-friendly workshop, you can learn to sculpt using sculpture-paste and palette knives. The fee includes all materials. @The Purple Turtle Store, Royapettah. May 4. Fee is ₹2500. Call 6366843598 for details.

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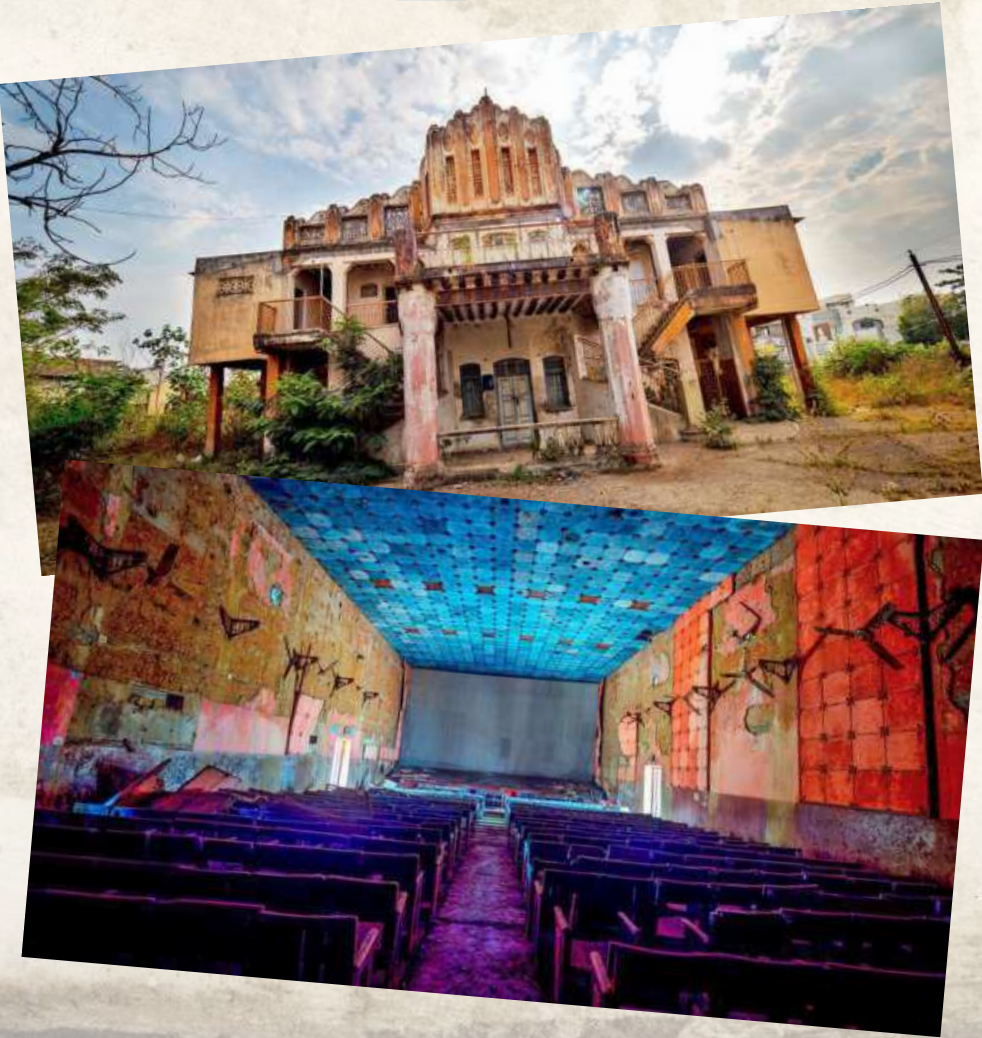


Meet Hemant Chaturvedi, who quit Bollywood to document old cinema halls across India

A ticket to the past

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Sometime in 2015, after working for 30 years as a cinematographer and helming big Hindi films such as *Company*, *Maqbool* and *Kurbaan*, Hemant Chaturvedi quit Bollywood. “I stopped enjoying working for other people. It became tedious and pointless,” says Hemant, 56, “At the end of the day, the movie does not belong to the cinematographer; it belongs to the actor, director and the producer.” It was a decision made to take up meaningful and signature work, but the path was not easy; it took more than two years to come to terms with it. “I battled depression, for various reasons, circumstantial mostly.” In 2017, however, the tide changed, and Hemant found his niche. Despite quitting



Bollywood and getting into full-time still photography, his fascination for cinema remained. Which is probably why he set out to embark on a mammoth project, one that would see him drive - all alone - a staggering 45,000 kilometres, covering more than 18 states and 900 towns. During this journey, he photographed 1,077 single screen cinemas. All this effort, he says, is to document the life and times of single-screen cinema theatres, which are, in the face of multiplex invasion and OTT platform proliferation, slowly giving way for expansion. “Of the 1,077 I photographed in the last few years, I think 400 do not exist anymore. Sometimes, I go looking on the map for places I have already been to, and I find a *maidaan*...” This passion project not only dishes out nostalgia to a generation that witnessed cinema in such theatres that operated on print projectors, but also captures life during simpler times. He says, “I wanted to document this era of entertainment that was dear to every Indian. People had a relationship with these structures. In fact, someone once told me, ‘In a small town, all you need to know are three people: the Police Commissioner,

District Magistrate and... a cinema owner.” Not only did this project yield rich cinematic heritage, it also fetched Hemant some interesting film memorabilia that he treasures. Over the course of this journey, he collected 900 film tickets, has been gifted 35-mm cinema projectors and projection lenses and old glass advertising slides. “Fifty years from now, if someone says there was a beautiful theatre

in, say, Venkatagiri, there should be an image and a story behind it. That’s what I am trying to do,” says Hemant, who also helmed a documentary film titled *Chhayaankan - The Management of Shadows*, a tribute to the creative journeys of 14 senior cinematographers who worked primarily in the Mumbai film industry from 1960-2010. In Chennai, where he was a few weeks ago, Hemant met his old set of cinematographer friends, which includes Nirav Shah, and displayed his photographs on the walls of the popular city cafe, Bask by Coffee?. He also devoted time during this visit to a couple of his other projects - on Parsi cemeteries and tombstone art on British cemeteries. Hemant plans to head to Karaikudi to document theatres such as Sivam Cinemas and Rajavilasam, after which he will head to Tirunelveli, Arani and then to Karnataka for more cinema theatres and cemeteries. Hemant promises to drive on and discover as many places as he can. “Being curious keeps me going. I also believe in whimsicality as a working ideology. I could just be driving down, and if I see something interesting I like, I will stop and spend some time there.”



I believe in whimsicality as a working ideology. I could just be driving down, and if I see something interesting. I will stop and spend time there

HEMANT CHATURVEDI



JOHAN SATHYADAS

The facade of a single-screen, The interior of a cinema hall, Hemant Chaturvedi.



Aiming high
Director
Sundar C.
THAMODHARAN B

One for the family

Director Sundar C on his latest flick *Aranmanai 4*, a horror-comedy that features an ensemble cast

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Sundar C’s office is decked with photos of his family, framed graduation certificates of his daughters, and photographs of his wife, actor Khushbu, with her colleagues from the Eighties and Nineties shot during their yearly reunions. The importance of the word ‘family’ extends to his target audience as well, something he considers to be paramount for his 30-year-old career as a filmmaker. “*Aranmanai* worked as a franchise because it catered to family audiences,” says Sundar, as we discuss the fourth film from the franchise, releasing on May 3. Excerpts from an interview.

Question: Two of the Tamil film franchises with the most number of films seem to be the ‘*Aranmanai*’ and ‘*Kanchana*’ (Muni) series. What about it gives this genre its longevity?
Answer: It’s a package; if you take *Aranmanai*, it’s not just horror and humour. There is emotional bonding, nice visuals, an ensemble cast and divine intervention at the end. I like how all the films in the franchise, negating the flashback sequence, will unravel within three to four days, with the climax happening in just a day. The challenge is to come up with a compelling end to that story within the timeframe. I believe all of this, along with good music and CG, make the franchise what it is.

Q: The recent entries of the franchise saw negative reviews and yet became box-office hits. How do you see this dichotomy?
A: When you’re a commercial



filmmaker, you should be prepared for negative reviews. Critics rate commercial films lower than other styles of films. I don’t mind it and believe commercial films aren’t their cup of tea. My target audience is families and children. You can’t watch *Aranmanai* with the same mentality as watching *Schindler’s List*. But imagine watching it like you’re seeing *Lion King*. I love animated films; my all-time favourite is *Finding Nemo*.

Q: Your casting choices for supporting roles have always been interesting and this franchise in particular has two films each starring Hansika Motwani, Andrea Jeremiah and Raashii Khanna...
A: *Aranmanai* films are all female-fronted ones with strong women characters. Star power is required to pull it off, especially in the flashback sequences where we have to make an impact within a 15-minute window. The audience should also connect with the character. That’s why those roles always feature top heroines. All my films have an ensemble cast. The strength of a banyan tree is in its roots and the supporting cast forms the core strength of the story. I also cast a comedian for a main character so the serious sequences turn interesting.

Q: You are entering your 30th year as a director and also your 18th as an actor. How has it been for the experienced filmmaker and the reluctant actor?
A: I’m still a reluctant actor (smiles). I was used to entering a set thinking about what I was going to shoot and profusely sweating as I worked behind the camera. As an actor, sitting for hours for makeup was tiring. As a director, I don’t know what got me so far. I feel that my judgment is similar to that of the audience.

Cycle of life



Director Kamalakannan talks about making *Kurangu Pedal*, presented by Sivakarthikeyan

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Kamalakkannan’s cinematic vision isn’t forged by the spectacle of superhero movies or the vast expanse of space operas. His inspiration seems closer home, in the whirring efficiency of a ceiling fan or the comforting hiss of a kerosene stove. These mundane machines held a profound magic for him. He felt they silently shaped our lives. Bicycles, in particular, captured his imagination. This fascination probably led him to *Cycle*, a short story by filmmaker Rasi Azhagappan, 15 years ago. “Even as I was reading it, I felt it had the right elements to be made into a film: a bicycle, childhood, a summer setting, a father-son bond, and was set in the 1970s. Luckily, Rasi Azhagappan let me adapt it into a film,” recalls Kamalakannan. It almost became his debut film. “But I realised that this story with children at the centre wasn’t the right fit for a

first-time filmmaker. So, I shelved it,” he says. He went on to make *Madhu Banakadai* in 2012 and *Vattam* in 2022. But *Cycle* stayed with him. He narrated it to everyone he met, and everyone’s response was positive. Finally, a decade later, Kamalakannan made it into a film, *Kurangu Pedal*,

which premiered in the Indian Panorama section at the 53rd International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in 2022. The film, presented by actor Sivakarthikeyan, is slated for theatrical release on May 3. *Cycle* underwent some changes to become *Kurangu Pedal*. “Translating a short story



Short and sweet
A still from *Kurangu Pedal*; director Kamalakannan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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