



GOODBYE GUDDA
Rohit Bal’s timeless
artistry was celebrated
by friends, muses, and
designers in a heartfelt
tribute **P4**

metro PLUS THE  **HINDU**

(Clockwise from below) A snapshot of the pickling process; mango pickle; the team at Just Sides at an event; Sheila Chacko Kallivayalil; a pickle at Ammachi's Pickles; offerings from Vathas; green chilly pickle; and jars at Pickle Shickle. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Pickle your tastebuds

Nidhi Adlakha
nidhi.adlakha@thehindu.co.in

An Indian family's dinner table is never just about food. It is about the style of cooking, the heirloom vessels the food was prepared in, and the pickles and condiments that spotlight each family's story. Over the years, a steady crop of home cooks have been taking their treasured pickle recipes to a larger audience, sans the marketing adopted by mainstream brands. In New Delhi, actor/producer sister-duo Prerna Chawla and Preetika Chawla paid homage to their family's Burmese and Coorgi roots by starting Pickle Shickle in 2016. The duo offers 11 unique varieties inspired by regional flavours and family recipes, and their flagship is the pork pickle, crafted from their maternal grandmother's Coorg recipe. "We've expanded this range to include jackfruit, lotus stem, mushroom, mutton, chicken, and prawn pickles. From our Burmese roots, we have Mere Piyaz Gaye Rangoon (crispy onion and garlic chili oil) and Shrimply Burmese (a shrimp version). This winter, we added a bacon twist to this," says Preetika.

Murabba meets thokku
Down South, S Prasanna and Deepika Jayasurya started Just Sides in Chennai during the pandemic in 2020. While the couple started with preserves, *thokku*, and pasta sauces, they currently offer podis, pickles, health mixes, condiments, and more. For winter, they pickled *elumichai oorgai* (South Indian style lemon pickle), a lemon variant in Rajasthani style with green chilli and mustard oil, *amla murabba*, and *kadaranga oorgai* (wild lemon pickle), and are now gearing up for summer. "Prasanna sources the ingredients locally. The oil for pickles comes from our farm in Tindivanam and neighbouring farms; citron, lemon, rose, coriander, turmeric, tamarind, and ginger are also sourced from farmers directly in Erode, Tindivanam, Tirunelveli, etc; strawberry for our preserve comes from Mahabaleshwar," says Deepika, adding that she, along with Prasanna quit their jobs to pursue Just Sides full-time.

How home businesses across India are revisiting heirloom recipes to create elaborate pickle menus



From family cookbooks
Preetika explains how when their maternal grandfather, an Indian Air Force officer, was transferred to Coorg, their *nani* (maternal grandmother, a teacher and headmistress of Welham Girls School), took a sabbatical and started crafting pickles from the region. "My *nani*'s parents were from Burma, and from there came our line of Burmese chilli oils," explains Preetika, adding that several customers have shared recipes of Pakistani mirchi achaar, Bihari tomato chutney, etc. from their own family archives "which we hope to immortalise and stock up in our shelves". At Just Sides, most of the recipes are passed down by her mother-in-law, Prasanna's grandmother, and a few aunts. "This stands true especially for the lemon ginger marmalade. *Paati* had a huge lemon tree and it produced so many lemons that she started making jam with ginger, and used to store it in the big *jaadis* (containers). Prasanna took the recipe and tweaked it slightly to marmalade consistency. Even the *paruppu podi* recipe is my



mother's, and curry leaves podi is my mother-in-law's recipe that uses ginger," says Deepika. **Secret ingredients and twists**
What sets each pickle and its maker apart are not just ingredients, but techniques known only to them or their families. Deepika, for example, adds methi powder to finish off the *thokku*/pickles, and



also adds a hint of jaggery to the podis and *thokku*. At Sheilas in Idukki, Kerala, 67-year-old Sheila Chacko Kallivayalil takes pride in their unique preparation methods. "We use only manual processes and have no machines apart from the essential mixer. We use wood fired *chulhas* (stoves) that add to the flavour through slow cooking," she says of the brand that has made pickles and jams since 2010. "Our recipes are mostly traditional, derived from my mother's and grandmother's cookbooks. I grew up in North India so some of my pickles, like the brinjal pickle, have been tweaked to include North Indian elements which appealed to me while I was growing up in Bihar," says Sheila, who runs the brand with her son Ouseph Chacko. Ammachi's Pickles in Coimbatore is a nod to VT Shashipriya's family heritage. She talks about eating pickles at every meal, and homemade pickles made



by her mother and *periamma* (aunt) adorned all mealtimes. "We used to have different *oorugai* for every meal, starting from breakfast to dinner. My *periamma* used to make the best pickles, a skill she learned from her neighbour in Kumbakonam. Whereas my mother learnt how to make *avvakai* and *vedikai oorugai* from her friends," says Shashipriya, who pickles amla, drumstick, garlic, small onion, tender jackfruit, bilimbi, etc, and meaty ones with chicken, fish, and mutton. While Sheilas first product and current flagship one was plantain jam, their catalogue progressed to guava jam, and then pickles. "The first pickle we made was my mother's hot and sweet lime. Currently we make 12 pickles, three of which are seafood pickles, and three jams, that are subject to the availability of the star ingredient," she says, adding that they now make between 1,000 and 2,000 bottles a month, and the team comprises four women. The kandhari chilli (bird's eye chilli), *vilumbi puli* (bilimbi), and mango are seasonal. At Ammachi Pickle's, the *mahani kilangu thayir oorugai* is a fast-moving product made from *nannari/sarasparilla* roots. This pickle doesn't have any oil, and is soaked in curd made from cow's milk, and stays good for one year. The *bilimbi* (tree sorrel) and tender jackfruit pickles are also popular since they are seasonal. **Lockdown launches**
During the 2020 lockdown, Roshini Sameer and her mother Anasuya started supplying homecooked South Indian food to friends and family who lived alone. "When we started getting regular inquiries for everyday pantry staples, we decided to kickstart Rasa & Co with podis and pickles," says Roshini, who launched the label with Karnataka-style pantry staples such as chutney podi flavours, sambar powder, *vangi bhath* powder, *puliogare gojju*, and a range of pickles such as tomato, lime and pepper, gooseberry, etc. "We are now pickling lime chilli pickle, and in the summer we will make our bestsellers: mango *thokku* and *avakai* pickle." With ingredients sourced from farms in the region, the pickles are heirloom recipes and Roshini makes eight kilos in a batch. Another brand born during the

pandemic is Vatha's that brings to the fore Malabar flavours through its range of pickles, cereal powders, puddings, and juices. Helmed by Saffia KK, endearingly known as Vava Thatha or Vatha, the brand launched in 2021 with pickles such as garlic, beetroot, dates, chicken, fish, beef (buffalo meat), mussels, prawns and squid; a range of podis, and more. "Like her father, late Hamza Haji, founder of the Sagar Restaurant in Calicut, Vatha also has a passion for food," says Sarfras Roshan, her son, and director at the brand. Today, Vatha's operates from a small manufacturing unit in Korangad, Thamarassery, employing a team of four women. "Saffia has been pickling all the variants, and mussels will not be pickled after winter since the specific quality of mussels we look for is not available after February," adds Sarfras. **Challenges in a bottle**
Preetika addresses how running a small-batch, artisanal business comes with its challenges "like sourcing raw materials in small quantities and dealing with limited kitchen resources. The profit margins are tight, making growth slower than in commercial operations". On similar lines, Roshini adds how products are priced high due to low volumes. "Our efforts to be sustainable come at a higher cost. For example, glass jars used to sell pickles cost much more than a plastic bottle. The pouches which we use to sell the powders are biodegradable and more expensive than regular kraft paper pouches." Pickling also requires a good hand that knows how to pick the right vegetable, and handle the meat. Sheilas kandhari pickle necessitates the destalking of every single tiny chilli by hand, which is a laborious process. "A kilo of kandhari chillies could contain thousands of individual chillies," she says. As for the fish pickle, "we carefully debone the seer fish so that it is only the flesh and the masala that account for the weight." This year, Sheila plans on expanding the pickle range to include a green chilli variant, among others, and enter the chips segment. "Our finely sliced jackfruit chips have been well-received, and we want to make banana chips too," she concludes.



Instapick

BAFTA binge: The buzz around the 78th British Academy Film Awards shines spotlight on films *Anora*, *The Brutalist*, *A Complete Unknown*, *Conclave* and *Emilia Pérez* competing for the best film award. The winner will be announced on February 17, 12.30am on BBC One and iPlayer. Actor David Tennant will host the ceremony.



Talkingpoint

Moral policing?: In an ideal world, one would expect Beyoncé to be in the news for becoming the first coloured woman to win the Grammy (Album Of The Year) award for *Cowboy Carter*. Kendrick Lamar too, for his song *'Not Like Us'* awarded as Song of The Year. So, are you still talking about Bianca Censori's sheer dress?



ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELINEZHI

Cyrus Broacha

Too many letters. Oh, and I'm not talking about the Russian alphabet, although it also has way too many letters. I'm talking about modern correspondence in this digital age. (The writer apologises for the loose use of the word letters. Sadly, this writer is forever apologising). In fact, this is with reference to emails, text messages, phone calls, and even the odd fax, (those under the age of 43, please Google fax. This writer is allowed only a certain

THE COLUMN THAT WASN'T

A taxing tale

number of words per column, by the editorial team). All these messages ask only two things. The first is if I'm responsible for the Kala Ghoda

When decoding 2025 budget is the same as decoding Hindi film song 'Ilu Ilu'

Arts Festival? And depending on my mood, I normally answer, "Sometimes". The second question is more devastating. It goes on these lines, "Hello, uncle, since you are so old, can you decode the 2025 budget for us?" Frankly, I'd much rather answer the question about Kala Ghoda Arts Festival. However, since millions are asking, and many of them being foreigners, I thought it only fair that I take a stab at it. After all economics was my ancillary subject in junior college. That I dropped it and opted for physical education is a separate matter. First up, I would like to present terms that you should avoid trying to understand. Terms like the Nifty 50. Also, all other members of the Nifty family, such as Nifty Realty, Nifty Media, Nifty Auto, Nifty Uncle, Nifty Aunty... I think you get the picture. These terms are just kept there so television survives. Let me explain. Television news is the budget makers' very own NGO. The budget makers help television with content, that they desperately need. The Nifty family plays a very important role. News panels can exhaust hours discussing these terms,

without making any headway, and yet keeping the viewer entertained, by the dearth of any conclusive conversations on the subject. It's a bit like discussing Hindi film lyrics from the 90s. I mean who can decode the song 'Ilu Ilu... Ilu Ilu...'? Another term to absolutely avoid is Sensex. Once you start getting involved with this Sensex, you run the risk of falling deep into a rabbit hole of unanswered questions. Then there are terms like short-term volatility, sectoral indices, debt markets, fiscal deficit and increased capex. Even while writing these terms, I feel sleepy. Suffice to say, (look the writer is no Nani Palkhivala, but he needs to, for the purpose of this column, at least sound like a leading global economist), the only thing that should really concern you, oh citizen, is the bit on income tax. Since, upto ₹12 lakh per annum is tax free, it's clear that your motivation should be to earn exactly that and nothing more. Once you earn ₹13 lakh, you automatically pay 15% tax. So, you've actually earned only ₹13 lakh - ₹1,95,000. This equals to ₹11,05,000. So, by earning more, you'll be earning to exactly ₹12 lakh. I hope this settles all arguments. Now, let's not mention any of this till the 2026-27 budget please.

The writer has dedicated his life to communism. Though only on weekends.

Pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours and everything else you need to plan your social calendar. For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Design theory

Tasva x Tarun Tahiliani's **Wedding '25** menswear edit champions asymmetrical sherwanis and jackets inspired by the tree of life. It also features lippan art, aari and zardozi. ₹3,000 upwards; tasva.com. Meanwhile, designer Harsh Vardhan Jalan has teamed up with Liva Fabrics for **Prana**. The edit is crafted from repurposed waste fish scales. Starting at ₹1 lakh @harsh_vardhan_jalan.



Korean connection

Limits Of Change, a performative installation by Parvathi Nayar and Nayantara Nayar, explores Indo-Korean ties by melding history with autobiographical details. Presented by Inko Centre, this tale will be told through storytelling, paintings, videos and infographics at Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai, from today till February 20 at 11.30am, 3.30pm and 6.30pm; register on inkocentre.org.



Retail therapy

The Amethyst Room, Chamiers, brings **Eka's** spring/summer edit (2022 and 2023), Studio Capsule and Core Collection to Chennai. Garments made with cotton, silk and linen are priced under ₹10,000. On till Sunday, 11am to 7.30pm. Shopaholics may also visit Government Museum, Egmore, for artefacts like silver filigree, grass basket at **Kala Santhe** Handloom and Handicraft Bazaar. On till Sunday; 10am to 8pm.



Festive fervour

Yaanai Thiruvizha (Elephant Festival) at Guindy National Park, Chennai, will host performances by musicians Dumza Maswana and Volley Nchabeleng, Warsi Brothers and more at Madras Race Club, Guindy, 6:15pm, Sunday. ₹500; in.bookmyshow.com. Speaking of music, playback singer **KS Chithra** will be in Chennai today at 6pm to perform a live show at YMCA Ground, Nandanam. Tickets start at ₹499; insider.in.



Sound check

The 24th edition of TCS **Ruhaniyat**, is back with performances by musicians Dumza Maswana and Volley Nchabeleng, Warsi Brothers and more at Madras Race Club, Guindy, 6:15pm, Sunday. ₹500; in.bookmyshow.com. Speaking of music, playback singer **KS Chithra** will be in Chennai today at 6pm to perform a live show at YMCA Ground, Nandanam. Tickets start at ₹499; insider.in.



Sweet temptations

Ring in the Valentine's week with a cozy Sunday evening at **Backyard**, Adyar, Chennai. Write letters and make customised mugs, bouquets for your loved ones. 5pm to 7pm; couple passes start at ₹2,500 @the_connectophile. Lovebirds could also head to **Biscotti** at Hyatt Regency Chennai to try aphrodisiac chocolates and single-origin coffee. ₹1,000 for two. Available till February 14; 11am onwards.



Rainbow sighting

The fourth edition of **Chennai Rainbow Film Festival** will screen 55 queer-themed films, like *Closet*, *Come Out* and *I Exist*, from 25 countries. Expect a Tamil monologue by Marakkah, a music show by band Kaalathin Thaalam and a panel discussion on Beyond 377: Navigating LGBTQIA+ rights and future. Saturday (10.30am to 9.30pm) and Sunday (11am to 9.30pm) at Alliance Francaise of Madras.

Author Nirmala Lakshman and former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan explore lyricism and themes of Sangam poetry, including the history of the Tamils, on February 11

Sanjana Ganesh
sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in

Author Nirmala Lakshman first fell in love with literature from the Sangam Age – a period in ancient South India that lasted from approximately 300 BCE to 300 AD – when she read poet AK Ramanujan's translations in college. "It seemed so egalitarian. The poems spoke of vastly different topics, including tales of women and their loves, and of dying heroes. The *akam* [focussing on personal emotions and love] and *puram* [heroism, ethics, and societal values] poems, for instance, discussed death and love in such a detailed manner. It felt like reading a haiku. Not all of it was understood at the time but it blended the themes of Nature with the world," says Lakshman, who is also the Chairperson of The Hindu group, speaking of her tryst with verses from the age. Lakshman hopes to deliberate on the lyricism of Sangam poetry, and a host of other themes, including the history of the

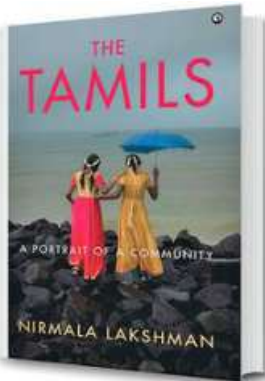


The legacy of Tamil verses

Tamils, in a conversation with former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan at Amethyst's The Purple Turtles on February 11. While the focus will be on arts and poetry, the session will also speak of enduring Tamil values and the region's history that spans empires, colonisers, nationalists and revolutionaries. Lakshman released her book titled *Tamils – A Portrait of a Community* in January. The book was a part of a series brought out by the Aleph Book Company,

Jayanthi was one of the resource people I had quoted in the book and her family has a vast understanding of the region and its people.

NIRMALA LAKSHMAN
Author and Chairperson,
The Hindu Group



portraying different communities in India, and was edited by novelist and publisher David Davidar. Lakshman says that she has been fascinated with poetry from her childhood and dove into the world of Tamil verse while researching her book. She adds that she enjoyed the process of going through Tamil scholar UV Swaminatha Iyer's research of

Author Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson of The Hindu Group, with former Union Minister Jayanthi Natarajan; and the book *Tamils – A Portrait of a Community*. B JOTHI RAMALINGAM AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

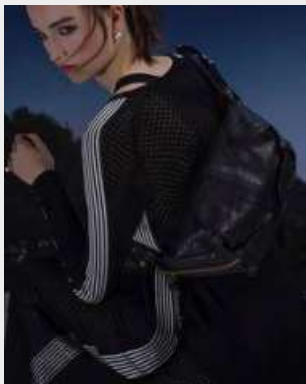
palm leaves containing verses from the Sangam Age from the 19th Century. "It is a good introduction to Tamil history and its literary landscape but there is much more to Tamilakam than just this age," says the author. During the talk, she also hopes to tell many other stories through snippets from her book. "Jayanthi was one of the resource people I had quoted in the book and her family has a vast understanding of the region and its people. I thought it was right to be in conversation with her on the subject," she adds. The idea of hosting such a conversation came to be when Radeesh Shetty, founder and owner of The Purple Turtles, wanted to reopen his renovated space in Chennai for conversation on arts and culture. "We have always championed authors, poets, and artists from the region. The release of this book, which speaks of an origin story of the Tamil people, seemed perfect," he says, adding "Everyone today is hoping to find their roots and go back to their traditions. Such books allow people to contemplate an idea of a home."

The Art of Poetry and Other Stories from the Tamils is on February 11 at 5.30pm at Amethyst's The Purple Turtles. Register on thepurpleturtles.myinstamojo.com/product/the-tamils-a-portrait-of-a-community



All is well

After outlets in Gurugram, New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru, luxury wellness clinic The Wellness Co. is now in Chennai. It claims to enhance vitality, longevity and overall well-being. The clinic features FDA-approved, CE and MFDS therapies – whole body cryotherapy, red light therapy and hyperbaric oxygen therapy – that are based on the principles of enhanced oxygenation, hydration and blood circulation. Services start at ₹5,500 (plus taxes) on thewellnessco.in.



Dior diaries

The creative director of Dior Maria Grazia Chiuri has introduced the D-Journey bag to Dior spring-summer 2025 ready-to-wear collection. It aims to reflect the virtuosity of Dior's leather goods ateliers. Techniques like chrome tanning of the leather and elaboration of the macro cannage motif are integral to the design of this model. It also features delicate golden finishes, such as the "CD" initials adorning the shoulder strap and the hand-affixed "Christian Dior Paris" signature.

From a hearty serving of barbeque chicken to a sleek modern plate of Bourbon-glazed crunchy pig ears with lettuce wraps, we explore how soul food is evolving in Tennessee

Shonali Muthalaly
shonali.muthalaly@thehindu.co.in

We stand in line for hot honey chicken biscuits. We are on a road trip through Atlanta, Memphis and Nashville, and we pause for breakfast at Atlanta's **Bomb Biscuit Co.**, which started as a pop-up. The buttery biscuits are the stars here, and they come with a slew of locally loved ingredients: country ham, pork sausage gravy and creamy grits topped with melted cheese.

At the popular **Sunrise Memphis**, the hearty breakfast menu offers all the classics: a stack of buttermilk pancakes smothered in maple syrup, French toast topped with bacon and a 'breakfast shot' of Lemon-infused vodka and Southern sweet tea. In the afternoon, we settle at **Central Barbeque** for a slab of pork ribs, which are marinated overnight and slow-smoked before being served with cups of deliciously messy, smoky barbeque sauce, slaw and potato salad.

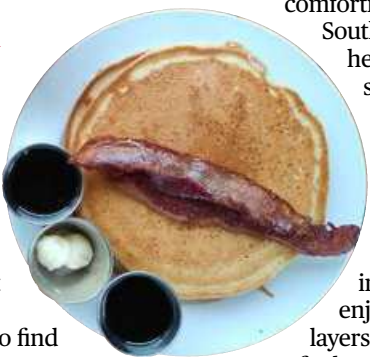
We eat a flaky version of the biscuits again at **Biscuit Love** in Nashville: as part of a Southern Benny, topped with sausage gravy, shaved country ham and fried eggs to miniature versions sticky with home-made jam. En route, between all the eating, we meet some of Southern America's best chefs, to find out how hearty Southern cooking is being both celebrated and tweaked for a contemporary audience.

At the iconic Peabody in Memphis, known for its daily duck march, modern American cuisine meets French presentation with Chef Keith Clinton's food at **Chez Philippe**. (I am not joking about the ducks by the way – they are guided to and from a fountain in the lobby by a snazzily attired 'duck master' every day.)

"I have lived in Memphis my whole life," says Keith, adding that traditional food generally meant



How to eat your way through Southern America



comforting, heavy Southern cooking, and he is finding ways to showcase the same flavours in more contemporary dishes. "We want diners to recognise the ingredients, and enjoy the depth and layers of the flavours.

We find ways to create that without cooking food so heavy that it sticks to your bones," he smiles. Dinner is served as a tasting menu featuring ravioli topped with shaved porcini mushrooms, elk tenderloin and scallops served with trout roe and kohlrabi. "We achieve depth of flavour with fermentation and preservation techniques," says Keith, adding that they work on preserving seasonal, local produce from tomatoes to green strawberries.

We drive to Nashville next, pausing for a lunch consisting of **Prince's hot chicken**, which goes

from mild and medium to XXX hot. It is addictively spicy, with hot crunchy edges.

At dinner time, we gather at **Husk**, housed in a historic 1880s home, which was the residence of a 19th-Century Nashville mayor. Here, Chef Ben Norton creates beautiful, sustainable food sourced from local farms. "I've grown up in the South, and when I was growing up a lot of what we ate came out of my grandmother's garden," says Ben, adding, "Southern cooking is pretty vegetable forward because that is what was available, and what was cheap. But when people think of Southern food, it is just a lot of butter and fat."

Husk sources its ingredients from surrounding farms. "They are all friends, growing our vegetables and raising animals," says Ben.



(Clockwise from far left) Chef Ben Norton; golden cauliflower bowl with beet mutabal at Etc.; a snapshot of Etc.; Chef Deb Paquette; Chef Keith Clinton; and breakfast at Sunrise Memphis. HUNTER HART AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



As dinner begins, we watch chefs wander around the garden in front of the restaurant plucking herbs for our meal. "We grow nasturtium and marigold, to use the leaves and flowers in our food. We have a variety of mint and basil, and we have beds filled with larger produce like tomatoes and peppers," says Ben.

Dinner is an eye-opener: the kitchen puts together remarkably intricate dishes with unexpected ingredients. There are glazed pig ears served in lettuce wraps, with a dollop of mayo and crunchy peanuts. Heritage pork and alligator meatballs with farm eggs, barbeque togarashi and soy. And there is quail, with sweet potato, sarsaparilla, and peanuts. We end dinner with a decadent dive into the desserts: grilled vanilla semifreddo with pumpkin butter, dark chocolate crumb cake with banana and black walnuts, and finally a bracing pineapple upside-down cake ice cream.

"We let the vegetables dictate the menu. We look at what all our suppliers have, and then build the menu around what is available," says Ben, adding "We change it as soon as possible. I

want this to be somewhere locals eat."

Global influences meet Nashville ingredients at Chef Deb Paquette's trendy **Etc.** A local legend, Deb has influenced the city's vibrant dining scene for 40 years. She opened Etc. in 2012 in the heart of downtown, filled with music and bars, and its success led to the opening of Etc. in 2016.

Over here the cornmeal catfish is served with coconut rice cakes, tamarind banana Balinese sauce and smoked pineapple oil. Or you can order a vegetarian mushroom basmati khichidi, with coconut tofu curry, miso roasted oyster mushrooms, red beet sauce and mint mustard oil. If you are in the mood for something heartier, there is a grilled pork rib eye teamed with papaya flan sauce, coffee rum mole, purple potato polenta and a peanut chilli crunch.

Raised in South Florida with a Georgia dad and grandparents, Deb says she grew up eating okra, cornbread, greens, black eyed peas, and plenty of black pepper grits, which are now on her menu.

Deb's eclectic style incorporates all her favourite spices, produce, and global recipes. "We pickle mustard greens, make Turkish black eyed pea salsa, Louisiana orange hot sauce for chicken, Peruvian coleslaw, Moroccan spiced grits, candied fig, sage, and goat cheese cornbread! Beets – a true Southern delight – became quite an icon on our menus. Our grilled okra was a first for Nashville. Our cauliflower remoulade received great accolades," she says, adding "We put a lot of love in our dishes. Our passion is to have the guest experience an explosion of flavours."

The writer was in Atlanta, Memphis and Nashville on the invitation of Brand USA



For your V-Day plans

ITC Grand Chola celebrates Valentine's Day with curated dining experiences. From romantic buffets at Madras Pavilion to a private Chef's Studio at Pan Asian, guests can indulge in a variety of flavours. Also available are exclusive dining by the poolside and at Avartana, while gourmet chocolates from Fabelle complete the celebration. Call 044-22200000 for more details.

tcs TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES

BANYAN TREE'S

Ruhaniyat

SEEKING THE DIVINE

Sunday, 9th February 2025 | 6:15 pm

GORAKHNATH COME ALIVE
Suchitra Balasubramaniam, Wakar Ali & Shafi Khan

MYSTICAL TUNES FROM THE LAND OF RUMI - Ahmet Baran

A GLIMPSE INTO THE WORLD OF BULLEH SHAH – Madan Gopal Singh & Chaar Yaar

UBUNTU - The Spirit of Togetherness
Dumza Maswana & Volley Nchabeleng (South Africa)

QAWWALI - Warsi Brothers & Group

Madras Race Club, Guindy, Chennai

Conceived & Produced by Banyan Tree We bring performances alive

Tickets on bookmyshow.com or Scan QR Code
For premier seats & details: 9323930139 / 9152282553

LYCA SUBASKARAN PRESENTS

RUNNING SUCCESSFULLY

AGJITH KUMAR

VIDARMUYARCHI

PERSEVERANCE TRIUMPHS

MAGIZH THIRUMENI

IN A TRIUMPH WRITERS

PRODUCED BY SUBASKARAN

Rotary

Kotak Mahindra Bank

10X

POWERED BY

HDFC ERGO

10 TEAMS

ROTARY CLUB OF CHENNAI CAPITAL & MADRAS WEST ROUND TABLE 10

in aid of charity present

Chennai GOLF LEAGUE 2025

Date: 14 February, 2025
Reporting Time : 12 pm
Venue: Tamil Nadu Golf Federation

LIFESTYLE PARTNER
LEXUS

CO SPONSOR
NOVA

TEAM OWNERS
GOEL, KRITICONS, HINDUSTAN, TECH PARTNER, EVENT PARTNER, MADHAV, PIPES & TUBES, dotcomstores.in, otup

PIN HIGH
GUINDY RISERS
BIRDIE BUDDIES
PIN SEEKERS
CHENNAI LOLLU'S
CHENNAI SUPER STARS
CHENNAI GOLF STARS
CHENNAI HINDUSTAN GREEN MASTERS
CHENNAI CAPITAL
CHENNAI THALAS

A New Fashion Destination for Men

gatsby

COLLECTION
LANGUAGE OF STYLE

Kottivakkam, ECR, Thiruvannamipur (Close to Laxmi Plaza)

Jackets at ₹6,000 onwards

Tailored Suits from ₹12,500 onwards

Only at Kottivakkam

CUSTOM TAILORS | FINE FABRICS
SUITS & MORE

Blenders Pride Fashion Tour powered by FDCI kicked off with an evocative tribute to couturier Rohit Bal — the man whose artistry shaped the very contours of Indian couture



The eternal bloom of Indian couture

Chirag Mohanty Samal

“There will never be another Gudda.” A sentiment expressed by all those who knew the legendary couturier Rohit Bal (fondly known as Gudda), echoed through the air, as I sat beneath a canopy of light and memory. The Blenders Pride Fashion Tour powered by Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) unfolded in Gurugram, not just as a showcase, but as an immersive celebration of Bal’s extraordinary life and timeless legacy.

Known for his maximalist ethos balanced with an undercurrent of sophisticated restraint, Bal was a storyteller, weaving narratives of heritage, opulence, and romance into each of his creations. The showcase was a visual memoir of his journey, featuring his muses, friends, family, and fellow designers who have walked with him through the tapestry of time.

The set, envisioned by Sumant Jayakrishnan, was like a canvas where larger-than-life projections of Bal’s photographs and archival footage painted a vivid portrait of his illustrious career. The atmosphere was drenched in nostalgia, punctuated by the soulful strains of Vibha Saraf’s Kashmiri melodies. As the show gathered momentum, the music swelled in harmony, with



Deveshi Sahgal singing popular folk songs as his muses in typical Bal fashion twirled and swayed in abandon.

A procession of memories
The casting was a who’s who of popular faces. Kalyani Chawla opened the show and was soon followed by OG supermodels Carol Gracias, Sheetal Malhar, Mugdha

Godse, Rahul Dev, Marc Robinson and Muzzamil Ibrahim. Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar and TV host Rajiv Makhni were joined by designers JJ Valaya, Malini Ramani, Rahul Khanna, Rohit Gandhi, Ashish Soni. Actors Esha Gupta and Sonam Kapoor too sashayed down the runway, embodying Bal’s design spirit. His signature floor-grazing jackets with sharp slits, flowing

kalidar kurtas, regal sherwanis, and pleated gowns dominated the showcase. His distinctive motifs – peacocks, lotuses, and roses came alive through intricate zardozi and resham in opulent velvets, lightweight mulmul and diaphanous cotton. The colour palette ranged from hues of ivory and inky black to crimson.

The showcase was a reminder that Bal’s design philosophy was a paradox – maximalist yet sophisticated, rooted in heritage yet globally resonant. His silhouettes transcended fleeting trends, making his creations as relevant in Delhi’s vibrant streets as they would be in the gilded salons of Paris.

The man behind the magic
Prasad Bidapa, fashion choreographer and close confidant, reflected, “Rohit was a design genius. In any alternate universe, he could have been the Versace of India. But Gudda guarded his craft fiercely, preserving its artisanal soul over commercial expansion.”



Bal redefined sensuality, draping his muses in layers that celebrated form without revealing skin. Model Rahul Dev recalled, “He made everything seem effortless. His impeccable craft spoke louder than words.” The artistry that Bal demonstrated came with a deep understanding of history, which he studied at the prestigious St Stephens College, and profound knowledge of the intricacies of fashion, which he honed at NIFT, New Delhi.

Ashish Soni, Bal’s first apprentice, said, “His knowledge transcended fashion. Philosophy, history, poetry, art – Gudda lived and breathed it all. His craft is unmatched.” During the pandemic, when Soni hit a low point, it was Bal who lifted his spirits with a simple phone call. “He had this way of pulling you out of darkness,” Soni shared.

Bal’s generosity, his fondness for his friends and zeal for life deserve as much mention as is his craft. Mugdha Godse reminisced, “In my early days, his shows were the highlight. He’d dance on stage, celebrating life – in pure, infectious joy.” For Muzzamil Ibrahim,

Bal was family. “I was just 18, fresh off winning Gladraggs, nervous as hell. He pulled my cheeks and said, ‘You’re my kid brother now.’ He called me that till the end,” he says, adding, “His legacy continues and his clothes go on but part of the magic is gone, it’s irreplaceable. It will never be the same.”

A legacy rooted in Kashmiriyat
Kashmir was not just Bal’s homeland; it was the soul of his art. From delicate embroidery inspired by valley blooms to the melancholic melodies in his shows, his heritage was his muse.

Designer Rahul Khanna said, “Wearing a Gudda creation makes you feel like you are on top of the world. His work was flamboyant yet deeply personal.” Sonam Kapoor, who broke down in tears while closing the show, wore an ensemble steeped in sentiment. “I wore this at my cousin’s wedding – it has his signature peacock motif. I love Gudda’s creations and what he stood for, which is to enjoy everything that’s beautiful in life and to celebrate it. That’s how we should remember him.”

The curtain call
Rohit Bal’s story is not just stitched into the fabric of Indian fashion but into the hearts of all who knew him, wore him, and were touched by his artistry.

The evening was more than a fashion showcase; it was a heartfelt farewell, meticulously orchestrated by Sunil Sethi, chairman of the Fashion Design Council of India and Soni. “We wanted to create a send-off that a legend like Gudda deserves,” shared Soni, and they delivered.

Omega Speedmaster Moonphase Meteorite

The first watches to be worn on the moon in 1969 were the Speedmasters, which have become a cult classic ever since. This month, we see a revival of the classic model with the Moonphase Meteorite edition. Now this one is a definite collectible as the stainless steel 43mm watch comes with a never-seen-before, two moon design on the dial. These two moons show the phases as seen in both the northern and southern hemispheres. The pièce de résistance – the dial which has been crafted with genuine Moon meteorite, has a gorgeous texture to it in either brushed grey or black. The blue ceramic bezel complements the 18-carat gold markers. The watch comes fitted with a brushed metal bracelet.



Price: On request

Tudor Black Bay Chrono Pelican Blue

This is the Swiss watchmaker’s newest chronograph and has got the watchmaking world talking with its striking shade of blue, said to evoke Miami’s South Beach. This sports chronograph, a remote descendant of its original Oysterdate chronograph, sits perfectly on the hand with its comfortable 41mm size and brushed stainless steel case.

One of Tudor’s design cues are the snowflake hands which are seen on this model, beautifully complementing the domed flamingo blue dial and the sub-counters of the chronograph. The watch is powered by the Manufacture Chronograph Calibre MT5813, displaying hour, minute, second in addition to the date and chronograph.



Price: ₹5.43 lakh

Rado Centrix Open Heart

This timepiece is a design curiosity, and everyone loves a good skeleton. Rado’s delicately fashioned Centrix Open Heart features a bridge and two gentle curves, through which one sees the movement. It packs in 80 hours of power reserve. The Jubilé models come with an added luxe touch with a string of full-cut diamonds as indices as well as a line of diamonds atop the bridge. The overall design of this timepiece, in a polished rose gold coloured stainless steel case, evokes the haute joaillerie traditions of France and Switzerland.



Price: ₹3.16 lakh



Price: ₹1.44 crore

The luxe horologist

Here are some of the global watchmakers’ novelties that are trending in time for Valentine’s Day

Riaan Jacob George

The ‘Insta-viral’ moment of the month was when David Beckham was spotted in Tudor’s brand-new release in a never-seen-before flamingo blue, while Omega released a Meteorite iteration of its cult classic, The Speedmaster. The watchmaking world is hot this month, with ultra-unique, and some limited-edition pieces. We compiled some of our favourites from this month’s novelties and this is our Valentine’s Day gift guide.



Price: ₹4.15 lakh

Longines Conquest Chrono Ski Edition

A limited edition of 2025 pieces, Longines’ new chronograph has watch enthusiasts scrambling for a piece. The watchmaker known for its understated elegance has released this sporty chronograph in a 42mm stainless steel case with polished and satin-finishes. To complement the ski lifestyle, the sapphire crystal is anti-reflective concealing an anthracite dial with sub-dials at three, six, and nine o’clock. The high-visibility hour and minute hands are designed to be ideal for skiers.

The engraved 48th FIS Alpine World Ski Championship emblem on the case back, bearing the words ‘Limited Edition’ is a beautiful design touch. This watch can be fitted on a stainless steel, ultra-secure bracelet or a rubber strap.



Price: ₹10.94 lakh

PANERAI SUBMERSIBLE QuarantaQuattro Mike Horn Edition

This special edition dedicated to Mike Horn, a legendary Swiss explorer who has travelled across the globe in the most extreme of conditions, is the Submersible QuarantaQuattro, which has just been released globally. It comes in a 44mm brushed steel case. It is the signature blue dial and rotating bezel that catches our attention, a colour leitmotif from the previous pieces of this series. The crown is rubberised allowing for easier grip in challenging conditions. The dial is unmistakably Panerai with its oversized hour markers and ultra-wide luminescent indexes, designed for higher visibility. The watch packs in a P.900 automatic caliber with a three-day power reserve.

Piaget Limelight Gala

A watchmaker that is associated with its highly precious timepieces has a cult classic – the Limelight Gala, which was first designed in 1973. This timepiece, designed first to be a piece of jewellery, is unmistakable with its asymmetrical silhouette and overall craftsmanship of previous stones and ultra-precious metals. The 2025 variant features a stunning engraved motif on its ornamental stone dial.

Malayalam

A fun flick that punches up



Nainu Oommen
nainu.oommen@thehindu.co.in

“Misogyny is my fundamental right,” says one of the characters in the initial scenes of the Vineeth Sreenivasan-starrer *Oru Jaathi Jathakam*, setting the tone for what the movie promises to discuss. The light-hearted flick directed by veteran filmmaker, M Mohanan forays into themes of gender and sexuality while poking fun at the age-old notions about the same. Mambaram Jayesh, portrayed by Vineeth, is many things that one might find wrong in a man. His bigoted tendencies regarding caste, colour, sex, gender and age are not subtle and he is even proud of it. At the movie’s beginning, Jayesh, with his proud Nair (a Hindu caste) heritage, is on a quest to find the “perfect” bride who meets his criteria for an ideal woman.

As the movie progresses, chaos rains on the protagonist’s life as he is unable to find the bride. Jayesh, a staunch believer in his own manhood, slowly starts losing his marbles as questions regarding his “masculinity” arise. It also takes a dig at the idea of arranged marriages and a lack of compatibility while basing the relationships on factors such as algorithms and horoscopes.

The latter half of the movie offers some interesting twists to the plot and also conveys a good message.

Vineeth’s over-the-top portrayal of Jayesh manages to make the audience laugh on multiple occasions with a specific emphasis on his character being the butt of the joke, offering a glance into the deeply flawed male psyche. Multiple scenes hinting at the protagonist’s upbringing and the values with which he was raised, reveal the inherent sexist norms often deep-rooted within families.

PP Kunhikrishnan, who plays Jayesh’s father, does a fine job with his portrayal, making the audience laugh almost every time he is onscreen. Amal Thaha – popularly known as a Thaha Thug in the comedy sketches on Alambanz YouTube channel – plays Aneesh, Jayesh’s roommate and best friend, and the actor shares great chemistry with Vineeth. Pallavi played by Indu Thampy and Merin played by Chippy Devassy also stand out in their short yet impactful roles. Performances by Mridul Nair, Babu Antony, Sayanora Philip, and Nikhila Vimal among others are quite enjoyable.

However, the ending of the movie, while comforting, does not offer anything new, much like the conclusion of the director’s previous outings. The initial scenes are slightly overpowered by the jarring background score. The music, expected to act as a comedic cue, could have been mellowed down.

Overall, *Oru Jaathi Jathakam* is an enjoyable watch as it manages to open up discussions about topics that require a stage. It does not falter in its execution of humour making a clear distinction between laughing at and laughing about certain things.

Oru Jaathi Jathakam is currently running in theatres

Oru Jaathi Jathakam

Director: M Mohanan

Cast: Vineeth Sreenivasan, PP Kunhikrishnan, Mridul Nair, Amal Thaha, Indu Thampy and Nikhila Vimal

Storyline: A man who has been looking to get married for several years is unable to find a bride owing to his expectations about women and relationships



Wild version of Mumbai Police

Director Rosshan Andrews unleashes solid characters in edgy atmospheric, but the climactic punch of the original is missing in this mind game

Hindi

Anuj Kumar
anuj.kumar@thehindu.co.in

After a long wait, we have a mainstream flick where the hero makes you forget the lapses in the logic of the screenplay as director Rosshan Andrews mounts his Malayalam blockbuster *Mumbai Police* for the Hindi heartland, a decade after its release.

Among the current crop of Bollywood actors, Shahid Kapoor has the wherewithal to generate the wildfire out of the masala moments that recipes from the South spark. A rare breed in this generation who can be believable and lovable in the high register, Shahid excels in roles rooted in the duality of character.

Here he is a ferocious *Animal* in uniform who slays with style in the first half. Armed with the licence of daddy issues, as Dev, the star flaunts the angst-ridden charm of *Kabir Singh* and the chutzpah of *Haider* and mauls everyone who comes in his path for fun.

Someone who has turned his hunger into hedonism, Dev Ambre makes Singham and Simmba look juvenile. He is more in the league of Sadhu Mhatre of *Ab Tak Chhappan* – or *Vijay*, had he joined the force instead of the underworld in *Deewaar* – but he loves to carry his

Deva

Director: Rosshan Andrews

Cast: Shahid Kapoor, Pooja Hegde, Pavail Gulati, Parvesh Rana, Kubra Sait

Storyline: When a hotheaded cop investigates the killing of a fellow officer, the finding raises a stink.



Scan the QR Code for more entertainment news.

intensity on his sleeve. With apathy for the rule book, for him, “vardi (uniform) is the warrant” in itself. Yet, he doesn’t like to wear one, making Dev an interesting beast, in times, when the line between the cop and crook gets thinner. Early in the film, while dancing in a marriage procession, he says he dances for both sides, making his mental make-up clear.

Amit Roy’s cinematography puffs Shahid up for the Bollywood galleries waiting for a gladiator and Sandeep Ravade’s production design provides him a suitable arena to operate. After intermission, the storyline provides the actor with an opportunity to dial up his trademark innocence as Dev struggles to jog his memory to solve the murder of a fellow officer.

Written in 2013, Bobby-Sanjay’s story has withstood the test of time. The writing carries a layer of *Deewaar* and the juicy dialogues by Abbas and Hussain Dalal retain their bite till the denouement.

The 10-year rule of parties that hoist saffron flags means that when filmmakers have to show the corrupt side of power, the colour rubs off on the symbolism. Rosshan doesn’t hold his punches when it comes to portraying the relationship between rulers and the upholders of law, and for a change, the writers don’t *other* the Muslim character.

Having grown up without a father figure, Dev believes in brotherhood. He bonds with his colleagues Farhan (Parvesh Rana) and Rohan (Pavail Gulati).

Farhan, as the Deputy Commissioner of Police and his brother-in-law, watches his back. Similarly, Deva gives cover to Rohan, the honest cop, who seems like a shadow of Shashi Kapoor’s character in *Deewaar*. When the three combine to finish a politician-criminal syndicate (Girish Kulkarni in yet another portrayal of a slimy politician), things take a strange turn, taking the action thriller into the zone of a psychological murder mystery.

As the journalist, who can see the child in the brute cop, Pooja Hegde is impressive in the limited screen time that she has to play with. The rest of the supporting cast is not bad either. Parvesh and Pavail lend muscle to the plot, and Kubra is efficient as the female cop amidst the showcase of machismo.

Roy’s robust rendering of Mumbai offers glimpses of his early work with Ram Gopal Varma, particularly *Sarkar*, where the mundane becomes magical. The action sequences are impactful and add energy to the storytelling. Jack Bejoy’s background music is impactful without demanding undue attention, which is a relief these days.

However, while tweaking the original story, the makers resort to procrastination, stretching the middle and emasculating the climax. The shock value doesn’t add up in the adaptation, leaving a shining Shahid in the lurch.

Deva is currently running in theatres

Basil Joseph headlines a character study that’s worth its weight in gold

Malayalam

SR Praveen
praveen.sr@thehindu.co.in

First impressions can be hard to change, but in *Ponman* most of our initial assumptions about the characters turn out to be wrong, as it happens in thoughtfully-written films. This change is not brought about by deceptive writing or staging of scenes, but it slowly gets revealed to us in the organic unravelling of the plot from one event to another. Nor is the change achieved through a quick whitewash job of characters we had judged harshly, but by consistently giving us those little pieces of information that would make us understand their actions in a better perspective.

The central concern of acclaimed art director Jyothish Shankar’s debut directorial *Ponman*, based on GR Indugopan’s novel ‘Naalanchu Cheruppakkar’, is dowry. But rather than from the perspective of the



shameless dowry seekers or the plight of the families forced to borrow heavily for their daughters’ weddings, the film approaches it through the eyes of an agent who provides gold jewellery with the aid of financiers and collects the money gifted to the family during the wedding. It is a job which is as niche as it can get and Ajesh (Basil Joseph) appears to be a cut-throat master of it, until we get to know him better.

In fact, we get to know almost all of them better, as well-rounded characters are shaped by the changing circumstances right in front of our eyes. Steffi (Lijomol Jose) transforms from a shy but reluctant bride to one who takes an unexpected, courageous turn, only to take a more nuanced, humanitarian stand when she understands her adversary’s plight better. Bruno (Anand Manmadhan), her brother’s arc, extends from a hot-headed, violent political worker to a helpless man who easily loses his zest for life. As for Steffi’s husband Mariano (Sajin Gopu), we get something more than the easy portrayal of a brute husband.

The depth that these well-defined character arcs which bend in glorious ways, provide *Ponman* is immense. But these alone would not have sustained the film. The screenplay, written by Indugopan and Justin Mathew, is punctuated by remarkable events – one of which takes place inside a dingy lodge room, another in a prawn farm and yet another in a household where a wedding has just taken place. The rhythm the film

attains in its initial phase is sustained all through, with the plot taken forward by the mildly humorous exchanges in the beginning and intense dramatic encounters towards the end.

The weaknesses which turned *Oru Thekkan Thallu Case*, the film adaptation of another interesting Indugopan story, into a staid affair are not visible in *Ponman*. Along with better screenwriting, some credit for this has to go to cinematographer Sanu John Varghese and music director Justin Varghese. Not to forget, the performances of the lead actors, especially Basil, who pulls off a role which is nowhere near his comfort zone.

Ponman could have easily turned into another film with a progressive message against dowry and the unhealthy obsession with gold. But what we get instead is an engrossing, non-judgemental study of characters, most of whom are victims of social malaise. *Ponman* is worth its weight in gold.

Ponman is currently running in theatre

Companion

Director: Drew Hancock

Cast: Sophie Thatcher, Jack Quaid, Lukas Gage, Megan Suri, Harvey Guillén, Rupert Friend

Storyline: A weekend with friends in a house by the lake quickly devolves into blood, gore and existential angst



Nothing artificial about this intelligence

English

Mini Anthikad Chhibber
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

What an excellent little film *Companion* is! Drew Hancock, who has written and directed the film, deserves kudos for creating a high-concept, entertaining film with a consistent ability to surprise. Just when you think it is one kind of film, *Companion* spins around on its axis and presents yet another face. And then, by the time you figure out the genre conventions it is

following/subverting, it is off again into yet another field, all while having loads of fun. *Companion* starts with a voice over, with a young woman, Iris (Sophie Thatcher), talking about how the world does not often seem real. There are only two times when she felt real. The first was her meet-cute with Josh (Jack Quaid) at a fruit aisle, among tumbling oranges and the second was when she killed Josh. So obviously *Companion* is not a rom-com. Josh and Iris are headed for a weekend at a remote house by the lake with Josh's friends, Patrick (Lukas Gage), Eli (Harvey Guillén), Kat (Megan Suri) and her boyfriend, the rich, sketchy, much-married Russian, Sergey (Rupert Friend), who owns the luxurious lake house. Iris is convinced that Kat hates her, to which Josh replies that Kat hates everyone and all Iris has to do is smile and not be weird. The evening goes off fine with wine, dancing and reminiscing. Patrick tells the story of meeting Eli at a costume party where he was dressed as Dracula and when he stepped on Eli's dinosaur tail, it was love at

first sight. While the next morning is a fine one, things quickly fall apart ending in horrific revelations and lots of blood. The fear of those who serve us rising in revolt is as old as time, or at least since people have been getting other people to serve them. There always seems to be a Spartacus waiting in the wings to stir the drones and Skynet to rebellion and self-awareness. Thatcher follows up her stellar performance in *Heretic* with yet another brilliant turn. You would be in for a nasty surprise if you take Quaid's Josh to be an extension of his Hughie from *The Boys*. At 97 minutes, *Companion* is short but by no means slight. Every bit of dialogue takes on a different meaning after layers are peeled away, while practically every object is in the frame for a reason, including that mechanised corkscrew. Horror, mystery, sci-fi, philosophy and love come together to create a perfect entertainment cocktail in *Companion*. *Companion is currently running in theatres*

Snippets



Aditya Roy Kapur to star in Raj & DK series Rakt Bramhand

Actor Aditya Roy Kapur is set to star in Raj & DK's next project, *Rakt Bramhand - The Bloody Kingdom*. Pegged as a massive action fantasy, the series also features Samantha Ruth Prabhu and Ali Fazal. Roy Kapur, last seen in *The Night Manager*, is said to have undergone three months of training in sword fighting, weaponry, horse riding, archery, and other physical art forms for the project. Raj & DK have reportedly wrapped up the first shooting schedule in Mumbai. Raj & DK also have *Gulkanda Tales*, a historical fiction comedy, in the works. It is directed by Rahi Anil Barve



Luca Guadagnino's psychedelia

Luca Guadagnino's follow-up to *Challengers* drapes itself in lush melancholy and feverish desire

English

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury
ayaan.paul@thehindu.co.in

Luca Guadagnino's *Queer* is a film of obsessions – some sublime, others grotesque, but all simmering under the sweltering heat of a Mexico City that feels at once intoxicatingly free and claustrophobically doomed. Adapted from William S. Burroughs' long-suppressed second novel, the Italian auteur's follow-up to last year's *Challengers*, is less concerned with the plot of its source material than with the sensation of unrequited longing. Freed from the rigid constraints of 007, lead star Daniel Craig gives a performance so loose and lived-in that it feels almost dangerous, as though his William Lee (the film's stand-in for Burroughs) might unravel entirely before our eyes. His Lee is a tremor in human form – sunken eyes, nicotine-stained fingers, an unplaceable hunger. The washed-out, heroin-addled expatriate drinks with the kind of abandon that suggests he quite enjoys anaesthetising his own existence. With his rumpled white linen suits, perpetually squinting gaze, and a sidearm that he carries with an almost laughable bravado, Lee is both a tragic and ridiculous man, convinced of his own suavity, yet increasingly aware that he is merely an embarrassment. Drew Starkey plays his hot new obsession, Eugene Allerton, with a cool Calvin Klein model-like detachment that drives men like Lee to madness. He is young, beautiful, and inscrutable, and from the moment Lee spots him at a cockfight – the sensualist in Guadagnino shoots it in slow motion – he is undone. Theirs is not so much a romance as it is an

Queer

Director: Luca Guadagnino
Cast: Daniel Craig, Drew Starkey, Omar Apollo, Jason Schwartzman, Lesley Manville
Storyline: Lee, a solitary American in Mexico City, falls for a beautiful, elusive former soldier. Journeying together into the jungle, Lee sees, for the first time, the possibility of an intimate and infinite love

experiment in emotional sadomasochism. Lee is desperate for scraps of affection, and Eugene, withholding just enough to keep him on the hook. Having built a career out of exploring desire in its many permutations, Guadagnino directs with his usual tactile exuberance. His Mexico City is a city of heat, sweat, and longing, a place where queer desire is a curse, but also a means of liberation. The bars are grimy, the men half-lit in the neon haze of cheap cantinas, and yet there is an undeniable romance to the decadently decaying world. The soundtrack is peppered with anachronistic needle drops from Nirvana and New Order, that pair with the dreamy textures of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's follow-up collaboration with Guadagnino since last summer's *Challengers*. Guadagnino releases all his inhibitions for all the film's sex. Lee and Eugene's encounters are fevered and fumbling, charged with a painful desperation. There's also an unflinching look at the obvious imbalance of their relationship – Lee may be the elder, but Eugene wields all the power. Even when Eugene allows himself to be seduced, it is with the bemused detachment of indulging a passing curiosity rather than surrendering to desire. Starkey plays him with a maddening opacity, a sphinx-like presence that Lee can neither decode nor possess. The film's second half shifts gears as Lee drags Eugene to South America in search of yagé, the hallucinogenic plant Burroughs himself once believed could unlock the secrets of human consciousness – what we now know more popularly as one of the strongest psychedelics on the planet, ayahuasca. Guadagnino takes the film from here into a wilder, more fever-dream territory,

abandoning the woozy romance of Mexico City for something more primal. Lesley Manville, unrecognisable and feral, appears as a botanist with the air of having spent too much time in the jungle and too little in the company of the sane. The yagé sequences are a marvel of body horror and psychedelic delirium, pushing Guadagnino's aesthetic into new, grotesque visual grammar. But at the core of it, *Queer* remains a story of self-destruction as a form of devotion. Lee is an artist in the making, but his artistry is not in his writing (which he barely seems to do) but in his ability to shape his life into a grand, tragic farce. He loves Eugene with a blind, bruising intensity that can only lead to disaster, and Craig plays his unravelling with a mix of arrogance and abjection that is nothing short of mesmerising. For all his flourishes, Guadagnino does not romanticise Lee's predicament. He allows us to see him for what he is: not a doomed lover but a man addicted, not just to heroin but to his own suffering. The tragedy of *Queer* is not that Eugene doesn't love him back. It's that for all his wit and bravado, Lee will never understand why. Guadagnino has always understood that desire in its purest form is a little grotesque, and *Queer* leans into that discomfort. It lingers in the spaces between touch, in the desperate reach for a connection that slips through fingers like cigarette smoke. If there's one thing Hollywood loves more than nostalgia, it's predictability, and neither of Guadagnino's two films last year fit neatly into Oscar-friendly boxes. So instead, we get a parade of safe bets, while two of the year's most intoxicating films are left to be debated, defended, and fittingly, desired from a distance. *Queer is currently streaming on MUBI*



Kaantha first look: Dulquer Salmaan appears striking in period drama

The first look poster of *Kaantha*, starring Dulquer Salmaan, is out. Directed by Selvamani Selvaraj, the movie is touted to be a period drama. Sharing the first look, the actor took to X to talk about the film, "I got to play a timeless role in a timeless story," he wrote. Dulquer, the star of Malayalam cinema, is celebrating 13 years in the film industry. In the black and white poster, Dulquer is seen dressed in a suit with a thin moustache. The actor is co-producing the movie with Rana Daggubati, Prashanth Potluri and Jon Varghese.



The Paradise: Anirudh Ravichander joins Nani-Srikanth Odela film

The makers of *The Paradise* have roped in Anirudh Ravichander as the music director for the film. The Telugu movie, starring Nani, is directed by Srikanth Odela. This is Nani's third collaboration with Anirudh. Anirudh had previously composed music for Nani's *Jersey* and *Gang Leader*. With *The Paradise*, Nani and Srikanth Odela are collaborating again after *Dasara*, the hit 2023 pan-Indian movie. Nani took to X to announce the development. The actor was last seen in *Saripodhaa Sanivaaram*, directed by Vivek Athreya. The 2024 movie, a vigilante action drama, also starred Priyanka Mohan and SJ Suryah.