



Navaratri celebrations get bigger with high tea and live food counters P3

TANVI SHAH ON BATTLING CANCER P4



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At the centre of the turbulent Karaikudi market, coloured by daily life, is an unexpectedly quiet oasis: a functional home, aged 108, where nine generations have lived and laughed, shared and fought, celebrated and cried. Lovingly referred to as *periya veedu* by the family, parts of the dining courtyard of this Chettiar mansion is now a jewellery store. Yet, a peek through the ornate doorway reveals a grand courtyard showing signs of daily life: perhaps a clothesline, or the odd silverware of steaming hot *sundal*.

A Chockalingam, the reticent seventh-generation part-owner, welcomes this writer in with an

Chettinad's rise as a cultural destination is strengthened by a heritage festival that introduces the world to the ways of the Nattukottai Chettians. This year, travellers soaked in the architecture, food, and arts of the region

View from a sun-kissed terrace

elaborate tour – he speaks of his moneylender grandfather who migrated to West Bengal from Burma, the 13 functional kitchens meant for as many daughters-in-law, the infamous split-system that ensures that every single member of the family – up to the last grandchild – gets their fair share of the temple *prasadam*; and the low doorways. “Even if God comes to this house, he has to stoop to enter. Humility is important,” he declares.

Only a few kilometres away, stands the “relatively new” 80-year-old Sentheniyar *veedu*: a spatial marvel divided in multiples of six, equal to the number of sons born to the family. Here, each room is a world in itself. Family photos documenting milestone

moments adorn walls that open to kitchens. Kasthuri Ramanathan who belongs to the fifth generation of the family that owns this house says, “My grandfather turned 90 three weeks back and we celebrated here. The entire family had assembled then.” The family to this day celebrates weddings, prayer meetings and festivals at the house.

While Chettinad's undeniable charm lies in its opulent mansions, turn a corner to find beauty in the most unexpected facade; some locked up, some descending into slow ruin, and surprisingly a few still in regular use.

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Call of the courtyard
The view from atop the 118-year-old Chidambara Vilas in Kadiapetti. SANGITA RAJAN



The return of Alan Walker

The masked DJ and musician talks about his connection with India and his fresh ventures with virtual reality

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Ever the hoodie-clad musical savant who redefined the terms of digital anonymity with his idiosyncratic brand of electronic music, Alan Walker, is all set for his return to India this month.

As he gears up for his Walkerworld Tour, covering ten cities across the country, you get the sense he is both pumped and slightly bewildered by his own trajectory. “India has always held a special place in my heart,” he muses. “There’s just something magical about the energy here – it’s hard not to fall in love with it. I love my Indian Walkers and I’m grateful for all the love and support!”

Best known for his 2015 breakout hit ‘Faded’, the Norwegian DJ and producer is somewhat of an enigma, yet he has managed to

cultivate a deeply personal connection with his audience.

Recalling a particularly electrifying moment from a previous gig in Mumbai, he says, “The entire audience was singing every word on my setlist. It was such a powerful and emotional moment. That kind of energy just doesn’t happen everywhere.”

This time, Alan isn’t just touring, rather, he’s bringing us a more enveloping, multi-dimensional experience. The Walkerworld project, produced in collaboration with Sunburn, feels like an ambitious merging of melody and virtual reality that works towards this immersion. “The concept for Walkerworld in UEFN was born from my desire to merge music, gaming, and immersive experiences,” he explains. “Platforms like UEFN and Fortnite allow fans to engage with music on a deeper level.”

Hailing from Bergen, Norway,

Experimental turf (Left) Alan Walker; (below) from one of his performances. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



the 27-year-old began his musical experiments on a laptop using good old FL Studio, learning the craft through YouTube tutorials. His fascination with the epic motifs of seasoned composers like Hans Zimmer and Steve Jablonsky, lent to his distinct sonic identity.

A large part of Alan’s allure is his persona, or rather, the lack thereof. The mask, initially conceived as a nod to hacker culture and the gaming community, was a way to focus on the music, not the musician. “The mask has always been about more than just anonymity – it’s a symbol of unity and the idea that we’re all in this together,” he says. Yet, as he occasionally sheds this digital veil, the connection with his fans has only grown stronger. “Whether I’m rocking the mask or not, the vibe remains the same.”

Earlier this year, Alan got a taste of India’s feverish passion for cricket, having crafted an anthem for the IPL’s Royal Challengers Bangalore. “Meeting the legend of cricket, Virat Kohli, and the RCB women’s cricket team,” he says, “was a standout.”

As he prepares to take the Walkerworld Tour across India, Alan seems genuinely excited – not just for the shows, but for the cross-country experience. “Each city brings its own unique vibe,” he says. “I can’t wait to see how fans across different locations will react.”

Walkerworld Tour in collaboration with Sunburn India, will reach Chennai on October 5 at Four Points by Sheraton, OMR. Tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹1,750.

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It was to honour and save these mansions, 20% of which was at the stage of being brought down – markers of the rich cultural tapestry woven by the mercantile Nattukottai Chettiar community as early as the 19th Century – that the Chettinad Heritage and Cultural Festival was first conceptualised.

Over the years, under the austere watch of Meenakshi Meyyappan of The Bangala – fondly referred to as *aachi* – the festival which recently concluded its third successful edition spearheads the revival of a region comprising 76 villages spread across Sivaganga and Pudukottai districts. Meenakshi is 90, yet, remembers all her guests by name and face. “Everyone tells me that the festival has increased business [around the region], but the local Chettiars are not coming. I would like more and more people from the community to come back to their homes,” she says, between welcoming her guests, and recognising faces from afar.

Though its recognition as a UNESCO heritage site proved a turning point for the region, the festival’s contribution to putting Chettinad on the global map has been big. “In our community itself, there has



been a real transformation. We have NRIs who want to bring their children to the festival. We look at our own festivals and rituals with more curiosity now,” says Krishna Meyyammai, one of the trustees. Over editions, the festival’s growth has been calculated, and deliberately slow. This year, the number of guests increased to a meagre 150 from the previous edition’s 112. The Park’s new Lotus Palace – that attracted a lukewarm response for its restoration effort on the property – is the latest entrant to the hospitality partnership that offers 70 rooms in total.

A quiet cultural revolution Morning strolls in the arid, unforgiving heat led us to many mansions – typically divided into three courtyards (one for business, another for



View from a sun-kissed terrace

leisure, and the third for festivals and wedding ceremonies), each of these homes more than a century old, boast Burma teak pillars, Belgian mirrors, tiles from Italy and Spain, and stained-glass airways, apart from walls shined with limestone and eggshells: an ode to the well-travelled community’s wealth and eye for detail. From each corner jumps out yali (the mythological creature), a visual testament to the community’s roots in Southeast Asia.

This year, following unexpected showers and a quick venue change, Carnatic musician TM Krishna opened the festival with an evocative performance in the company of Belgian chandeliers and a full house at the grand MSMM mansion. A hat-tip to the Nagarathar community’s long-running patronage of the arts, every year, dance, and music performances are at the core of the programming, adds

Krishna. Credited with preserving the artistic legacy of Bharatanatyam doyenne Thanjavur Balasaraswati, grandson and artiste Aniruddha Knight performed to a long-standing ovation on Day 2. The performance was preceded by a conversation on the legacy of temple courtesans.

In another session, historian Anirudh Kaniseti, spoke about the role of Tamil merchants during the Cholas’ movement across the seas, drawing parallels to the Nagarathar community’s mercantile past.

In a stunning show of how heritage inspires fashion, famed designer Anavila Misra launched her latest collection Payanam at the festival. An impeccably choreographed showcase had models seamlessly flit in and out of the 118-year-old courtyard of Chidambara Vilas. Anavila began working on this collection after her visit last year. “Gold is a prominent



colour in Chettinad, often seen in textiles, décor, and jewellery. We embraced this but gave it a vintage twist – incorporating zari with a washed, metallic finish. Additionally, Chettinad’s rich textile history, including the famous Yandai and embroidered zaris, became a focal point,” says Anavila.

Over ladles of spicy fish curry, fragrant mor kolambu and the most tender mutton kola urundais, Chettinad cuisine won at every stop. Be it

the elaborate ela sappadu that does not stop at just one serving of cold badam milk for lunch or the crisp dosas stuffed with crab meat for dinner, and the jackfruit rendang that was part of the Malay-inspired dinner conceptualised by Singapore-based food writer Khir Johari, the well-curated food offerings were perhaps the festival’s biggest win.

“Life is short, always start with dessert,” said Khir, who was in conversation with

journalist Vikram Doctor on the interconnectedness of Malay cuisine and South India. Lending a closer view of the Chettiar tradition, the festival concluded with the dramatised enactment of the tying of Kaluthuru, the sacred thread in Chettiar weddings by Krishna and her ensemble. An erstwhile bride and groom and now-married couple from the community walked the audience through the rituals.

It takes a village Showcasing culture by placing it at the centre of community is no mean feat. “It’s perhaps the only festival of this scale that is not run by an event manager,” says Yakob Jacob, manager at The Bangala, amidst feverish shutting between venues. Krishna adds, “There are around 20 to 25 volunteers who set aside their everyday life in cities like Chennai to come and help. This is their way of giving back to the community. A total of around 350 people are involved in this exercise.”

Even after the mammoth success of an edition, *aachi* hardly rests. She is already working on the next. “I want to try and get William Dalrymple, because I want to bring scholars and historians who have worked on the topic Chettiars’ movement overseas,” she says.

“I also have plans to present the *Silapathikaram* as a concept. Get a bunch of storytellers...” she tapers off. Before she could finish, another one of her guests wraps her in an endearing embrace. After all, it is a family affair.

– With inputs from Sangita Rajan

The writer was in Chettinad at the invitation of the Chettinad Heitage and Cultural Fest.

Worlds within walls

Preceded by a rich history, short format art of varied styles encapsulating contemporary narratives are on display as part of Vast Meditations, at Apparao Galleries

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On a wall at Apparao Galleries, there are four abstract paintings by John Tun Sein that are colourful and chaotic. Not too far away, one can spot Chantal Jumel’s Pinpricks’ Tamil Geometry with intricate kolam patterns on white paper. Parth Kotheekar’s intricate papercut art meanwhile, makes you stop in your tracks – his use of variances in depth and scale has you peering into the frame to take in his three dimensional architecture series.

Vast Meditations, an exhibition at the Apparao Galleries which showcases small format artworks is both fascinating and intriguing, for the diversity of the art on display, as well as, the rich history that precedes it.

“Every piece of art here is different. This format has meant that we have been able to bring together and showcase completely different narratives, genres and contrasting styles. The artists featured here are a mix of newer artists and artists I have worked with over the years,” says Sharan Apparao, director, Apparao Galleries, who has curated the exhibition.

Small format artworks in India have a history, from the courts of the Mughal, Rajasthani and Pahari regions where miniature paintings thrived. Back then, these works were not just artistic expressions, but cultural documents capturing the nuances of court life, mythology and spirituality. Years later, contemporary



Miniature narratives
(Clockwise from top) Art by Vaishali Rastogi; a mixed media piece by Neeraja Chandra Peters; art by Dushyant Patel; and art by Sitikanta Samantsinghar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



artists continue to be inspired by this format and its ability to depict complex narratives and vivid scenes. They now use it to delve into modern themes, as is reflected in the art exhibited at Vast Meditations, which encapsulates varied narratives. With five paintings, Megha Joshi’s features the rudraksh bead as a metaphor for the divided self, and the quest to find order in chaos. Neeraja Chandra Peters for instance, uses abstract geometry and has mixed media pieces on

display titled ‘decoding the self’, and ‘I am work in progress’. Depicting four differently patterned paper mats through gouache on wasli paper, Tanjima Kar Sekh’s series sees her explore religious symbolism and cultural heritage.

The 20 participating artists and their work on display is also a reflection of how the varied themes they delve into, can be distilled to make compelling statements within the small format they are dabbling in.

Archana Kadam, Dilip



Kumar Kesavan, Dushyant Surabhay Patel, Madan Meena, Mayuri Chari, Megha Joshi, Pankaj Saroj, Prabhakar Kolte, Shijo Jacob, Shrinath Ishwaran, Sitikanta Samantsinghar, Vaishali Rastogi, Vanshika Rathi, Yogesh Ramakrishnan, and Yugal Kishore Sharma are among the artists exhibiting as part of Vast Meditations.

The exhibit will culminate in a symposium on miniatures in Indian art, where Priyani Roy Choudhury, visiting faculty of Visual Arts, Ashoka University, will deliver a series of talks on Exploring Vast Meditations, from October 5 to 8.

“When we are doing an exhibit of small format art, it is very important to talk about miniatures in India, and its history. We are keen on educating and inspiring, as well as taking steps to make these talks accessible to a wider audience,” says Sharan.

Vast Meditations is on at Apparao Galleries, Wallace Gardens 3rd Street till October 8. The symposium on Miniatures in Indian Art is on from October 5 to 8. For registrations, contact 28332226 or 28330726

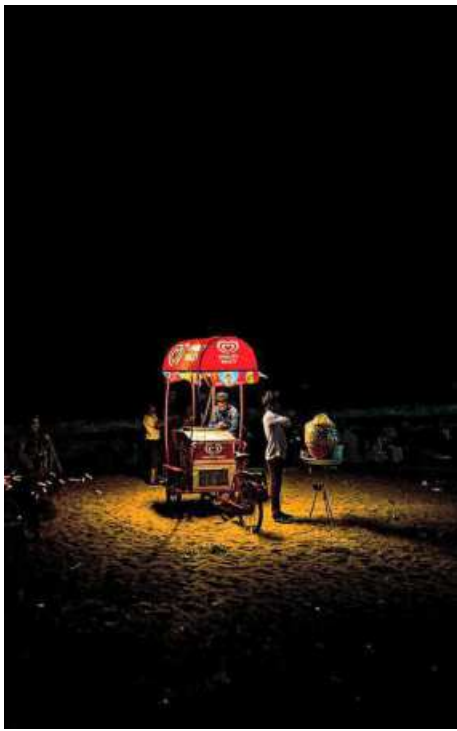
The city’s highlights

As part of the *The Hindu* Made of Chennai campaign, budding photographers from the city were asked to send in photos on the theme, Life in a day of Chennai.

From over 1,000 entries, some stunning visuals have been shortlisted. Here are five entries from among the photos we received.

The Madras Photo Bloggers were expert partners for the contest.

Rail tale Tejaswini AR



Let there be light Priya Jain

Work is worship Ramsuresh K



Flying high Suresh Kumar G

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Navaratri is here. The bubble-wrapped dolls in the attic have been brought down and arranged thematically on the golu padi (steps). It is that time of the year when friends and families make the rounds to socialise. However, today, families that display the golu, do not just offer prasadam/naivedyam such as sundal or puttu to the guests but, also meticulously plan an elaborate menu and gifts.

Padma Devadoss of VGN Builders says she hires caterers to serve an elaborate high tea in bandhi style (where guests are seated and food is served on a banana leaf). “There is puja every day of Navaratri, and I invite guests home in the evenings. I plan the menu by July and inform Arusuvai Arasu Catering Services. Guests are slotted into four categories: relatives and cousins, business contacts, school and college friends, and neighbours. This way, I get to spend time and socialise with them,” says Padma, who started these grand Navaratri celebrations in 2015.

Traditional, with a twist
Chef Santosh of Canvas Cafe, Alwarpet, who has been catering for Navaratri high tea, says that the trend of hiring caterers for two or three days during the nine-day festival is catching up. “We stick to traditional food, but with a twist. For example, we make cone-shaped millet idlis steamed in peepal leaves and thematic cupcakes. We make stuffed kozhukattai, using sprouts or microgreens. Our dahi dosa is popular, wherein I make mini dosas, and stuff them with different types of filling such as potato, mushrooms, sprouts, and roll them, and arrange them in a shallow tray. Over this, we drizzle curd beaten with spices and sprinkled with pomegranate seeds and minced coriander leaves,” he says, adding that they ensure the items do not contain onion or garlic. For Andal Aghoram, educationist and co-founder of Veranda Learning Solutions, Navaratri is a grand



Feasting, fasting

Navaratri celebrations scale up as families hire caterers to serve elaborate traditional high tea for guests with live counters for appams and jalebis

celebration in her joint family. “My sisters-in-law and I together organise the celebrations, the return gifts and guest list two months ahead and discuss the menu with the caterers. We ensure that we serve only traditional food items, although we indulge children with ice cream,” says Andal. As many people fast during Navaratri, Andal makes sure there is sabudana kichdi or vada and poha on the menu. As the family invites

guests for two days during Navaratri, they rope in caterers to serve the guests. They prefer counters to be set up for mini idli (served with different podi options), poori and dosa counters. Appam and idiyappam are also popular. Apart from this, there is also a variety of sweets. The golu at Andal’s residence is thematic, and last year’s theme was Tirumala Tirupati and the year before it was Shirdi Sai Baba. This



year they have decided to highlight gold-plated dolls. Soumya Ramesh, of Arusuvai Catering Services, who along with her brother N Sridhar, takes up catering services says that this idea of an elaborate traditional high tea has been gaining popularity over the last decade. “We begin with a welcome drink (fresh juice or rose milk) and normally, set up idli, dosa, and appam stations. We have one variety

Celebrations galore Traditional tiffin varieties are preferred for the high tea; (below) cone-shaped millet idlis by Canvas Cafe and the golu at Latha Ganesan’s residence. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



kheer. Based on requirement we either use the bandhi style or have a buffet,” she says, adding that some families prefer just one counter with pani puri and bhel puri, a welcome drink and filter coffee. Bharath K of Arrvee Catering in Alwarpet says that they just prepare the food and send it across. He offers a set menu of mini samosa, bonda, sundal, podi idli and mini oothappams. Chef Santhosh says that he ensures that his staff who serve are also thematically dressed in veshtis and silk saris during Navaratri. Septuagenarian Prema Srinivasan, looks forward to this festival as she gets the opportunity to meet her school and college friends. “We end up spending a couple of hours, and my cooks prepare a good spread,” she says.

Embracing change
Latha Ganesan says that this is a positive trend. “Ahead of the festival, I prepare three or four types of traditional sweets such as badusha, Mysore pak, and varieties of ladoo. During this annual get-together, I divide the invitees into friends and relatives. More youngsters are attending these get-togethers. Due to the city expanding and people travelling from afar, I always serve an elaborate meal for guests during Navaratri,” she says. This year, however, Latha and her four friends plan to have a potluck at one of their homes. Sixty-year-old Lakshmi Krishnan, who has been displaying golu since 1993, says she looks forward to two days during Navaratri every year. “It is a great opportunity to connect with my cousins and close friends and I always serve dinner and spend quality time with them. We hire caterers and it is usually tiffin, served in the lawn, and for the elderly inside the house. Each day I invite close to 35 to 40 people,” she says. “Whatever religion we may follow, we must celebrate festivals with fervour. It is not easy to coordinate and organise everything and send out invitations, but we make an effort and make it memorable. Especially Navaratri, as it is a community festival where everyone can participate,” says Andal.

Win big this Navaratri

Looking forward to Navaratri and putting together an elaborate golu? Take part in the Kolu Kondattam contest of *The Hindu Downtown*, which looks out for unique arrangements. Extra points for entries that include a pack of ITC Mangaldeep and Aroma Ghee in their arrangement.

There is also a special award given for entries that portray the theme Life in a day in Chennai. *The Hindu* Made of Chennai Kolu Kondattam is presented by Gopuram, co presented by Mangaldeep, Associate Partner: Aroma Ghee, Rajamanicka Mudaliyar Company, Education partner: Saraswathi Vidyalaya, Food partner: Madras Coffee House, Gift partners: Aachi, Medimix, Amman Sareez, Thiruvannamiyur Cotton House, Naga, A1 Chips, PS Tamarind, Repute, Hanbao, Maestro Electric Cooker, RAS Chekku Oil

The last date to enter the contest is October 7. Upload your kolu photos on newsth.live/THKC2024CH or scan the QR code

Listen to the masterpiece

The Madras Guild of Performing Arts (MGPA) presents the India premiere of composer Franz Joseph Haydn’s final masterpiece *The Creation*. Though renditions have been staged, it is for the first time this oratorio is being performed in full in India. The concert features the choir of the MGPA, performed with the Orchestra of The Gustav Mahler Society of Colombo led by Srimal Weerasinghe, sung by Kristina Ammatil, Ramon Branch Biescas, and Maximilian Catalano as soloists. Atul Jacob Isaac will be conducting this annual fund-raiser concert in support of CAN-STOP (Cancer Support Therapy to Overcome Pain). @Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, Harrington Road, October 5, 6.30pm onwards. For tickets priced at ₹450, ₹1,000 and ₹2,000, call 7200808165.

Run for a cause

The third edition of Chargebee Chennai Runs 2024 is organised by Madras Round Table 1 (MRT1). The Chennai Runs initiative focusses on improving educational facilities and resources for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Tamil Nadu. This year, MRT1 will collaborate with Bhoomika Trust. The event has various categories: three kilometres, five kilometres, 10 kilometres, and a half marathon of 21.1 kilometres. The event is scheduled for October 27. For details log on to www.chennairuns.com

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4 Sea facing Venice (8)
5 Big cat hybrid (5)
6 Sound made by a turkey cock (6)
11 Hair plucker (8)
12 Lack of stability (6)
13 Difficult problem (7)
15 Drama with singers and orchestra (5)
17 Of an area (5)
18 Outlook (4)

14 Belly (7)
16 Interrogate (4)
19 Down (4)
20 6 January celebration of the Three Wise Men’s visit to the baby Jesus (8)
21 Kind of printer — eyelid wash (anag) (5,5)

Down
1 Seabirds of the cormorant family (5)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated October 4, 2024.
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Looking ahead
Tanvi Shah.
ADHARSH

A second life

All about 'Jai Ho' singer Tanvi Shah and her recent battle with cancer



I have started doing my riyaz for Hindustani classical. I am also trying to create rhythms for the new songs that I wish to write

TANVI SHAH

burns due to radiation and lost much of her hair. "I could not get myself to look at a mirror for three months. Believe me, for women, our hair is our ego. Also, I usually don't like asking for help. What I've realised thanks to this phase is that it's okay to ask for help and it's okay to not be strong."

These were the weeks that Tanvi slowly went into a cocoon. "The doctors advised me to speak to people, but I did not want to burden anyone. I did not want people telling me what to do or share experiences of someone they knew who had undergone something similar. All I wanted was peace of mind and the courage to push through this."

What helped during this arduous phase was the singer's regular workout sessions at Primal Patterns and several Shambavi meditation sessions. "I was at peace during those days."

The music will continue
Tanvi did not switch on music, which her life has largely revolved around all these years, for nearly 45 days.

"Mentally, I was not okay to switch on the shruti box..." After completing three weeks of radiation, the Grammy Award winner is now getting back to business. "I am doing my riyaz for Hindustani classical. I am also trying to create rhythms for the new songs that I wish to write. I took out a pen from my fountain pen collection to write only recently..."

She is also getting calls to do shows. "Funnily, people are requesting for my 'Tansha' band to sing Spanish, Arabic and world music. I'm blessed that the few who have called me have been patient and understanding."

Tanvi promises to make a big comeback as a musical artiste and will soon start recordings and doing shows, like before. "I haven't disappeared," she assures, "I will come back and when I do, I will come back super strong. Now, I feel like I have got a second life."

Shankar Raja and AR Rahman, among others.

She consulted another doctor, and followed up with multiple tests. March 27, 2024, changed Tanvi's life; it was the day she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation sessions followed. "The process was difficult; my mind went for a toss. It was a task to even get through the day, and I felt damaged. I could not hold a pen; my hands would shiver. I couldn't journal, I couldn't write my songs," she recalls.

Tanvi also had second-degree

had her hands full with performances and film song recordings.

Concerts kept her on her toes even till September last year, when one day she felt something was not right. A doctor's reassurance that nothing was wrong kept her going, as she was busy with her musical performances. "From September 2023 to March 2024, I was constantly travelling and quite busy, but I kept thinking that something was not right," recalls the singer, well known for her Tamil hit tracks with Yuvan

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“When God throws things at you, you should not disrespect it,” singer Tanvi Shah had told *The Hindu* a decade ago. Back then, she was one of the most happening singers in the film industry; apart from being the first Indian woman to bag the prestigious Grammy for AR Rahman's global hit 'Jai Ho' (*Slumdog Millionaire*), Tanvi also

Tales of time

Actor Jin Ha and showrunner Soo Hugh reflect on *Pachinko*

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Any time a book is adapted for the screen, debates and discussions are aplenty. Does the show or the film manage to recreate the magic of the book?

For a book as celebrated as Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, these questions have always loomed large over the TV series adaptation, which is now back for a second season. Creative liberties were aplenty in season one, the biggest being the show choosing to do away with the linear narrative structure of the book and instead simultaneously focussing on its central protagonist Sunja in the past and her grandson Solomon Baek in the present.

It seems rather befitting that we get to interview Soo Hugh, the showrunner, along with actor Jin Ha, who plays Solomon. "What was most interesting in the writers' room for this season was Jin Ha's Solomon," Soo Hugh smiles and points to his star. "We went through most of Solomon's storyline from the book in season one, and worked on taking this forward for season two. For the past, however, focussed on Sunja, we still had a strong foundation with the book," she explains.

Hugh has previously worked on shows *The Terror*, *The Whispers*, and *The Killing*, to name a few. For *Pachinko*, which debuted in 2022, she has been credited as showrunner, executive producer, writer and also acknowledged as the visionary who has adapted the series from the acclaimed novel of the same name.

In the first season, we see Solomon take on a temporary move from the US



By the book A scene from *Pachinko*. APPLE TV+

to Japan, where he finds his ideals of fairness challenged, all while grappling with an identity struggle. In the new season, Solomon is a lot more wary. "Solomon's storyline is really tricky: it is both subtle and delicate, and yet loud and expressive," says Soo Hugh.

When asked about the importance of a show like *Pachinko*, Soo Hugh acknowledges the universality of the story. "The fact that we are thousands of miles away from one another, and are yet discussing these characters that feel so universal, tells you how important this story is. There are so many shows like *Pachinko* that cross boundaries, time periods, and reveal a history one might not be familiar with," she says.

For her, a story like this makes the world smaller, kinder and more humane. "I know that if there was a similar story; an 'Indian' *Pachinko*, I would watch it in a heartbeat," she affirms.

The second season of *Pachinko* is currently streaming on Apple TV+



December 2019, its technical team features cinematographer Kartheeban, music composer Yuthishtran E and editor Anand, among others. *Jilla* is currently streaming on the OTT platform, Blacksheep Value.

Reality bytes

Divya Bharathi's debut feature film, *Jilla*, tells the story of a transgender sex worker navigating life's challenges while yearning for something as simple as a good night's sleep. Divya Bharathi, known for her documentary works like *Kakkoos* and *Orutharum Varala*, states in a release, "I want to bridge the gap between the discussions that happen on social media platforms and the reality of oppressed communities at the grassroots level. I will continue making films that speak to this reality." The cast of *Jilla* includes several individuals Divya met during her research, such as Dharini, Sudha, Revathy, Lakshaya, and Shallu. Shot in Villupuram in

With Shah Rukh Khan stealing the show, here is how IIFA 2024 unfolded

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A fan on the green carpet of the IIFA Awards 2024 in Abu Dhabi confessed she was here only for SRK. "They will do anything for him in Dubai. They love him so much," said a local scribe. To call the three-day (September 27-September 29) extravaganza a one-man show would not be an exaggeration, as Shah Rukh Khan was the hot topic from the word go.

Hoping he would make an appearance, the paparazzi stood in anticipation for a mind-boggling 12 hours. Well past midnight, the wait was worth it for star-stuck fans and the media as the Bollywood superstar – after enthralling the crowd with his wit and charm inside the Etihad Arena – walked the carpet, shining in his black suit and stylish watch. He greeted a young boy with a smile, wrapping up his IIFA experience that began with frenzied fans mobbing him at the airport in Mumbai.

SRK's comeback

"It's good to be back," said the star as he bagged the Best Actor award for his



The stars shine down

performance in Atlee's *Jawan* (2023). Shah Rukh had overcome a lean patch with blockbusters such as *Pathaan* and *Jawan* to enjoy a dream 2023. However, the craze for him at the event was yet another indication that the

actor was beyond box office validations.

Even as he performed with impeccable energy and left the audience in splits with his humour, Shah Rukh took a moment to reflect on his difficult phase. "We were

going through a tough time while making *Jawan*," said the star, indirectly referring to his son Aryan Khan's high-profile drug case.

Apart from King Khan, the hit track 'Tauba Tauba' from *Bad Newz* also got fans on their feet. Be it at a press conference, on the green carpet, or during the show, Vicky Kaushal did not hesitate to ask the guests or co-actors to join him to groove for Karan Aujla's peppy number. Interestingly, the awards were not just about glitz and

The show goes on Mani Ratnam and AR Rahman present the Best Actor award to Shah Rukh Khan at the IIFA Awards 2024; (below) Venkatesh and Devi Sri Prasad. IIFA/INSTAGRAM

glamour. "Who are you wearing today?" was the obvious question asked of those showcasing a unique fashion sense. However, the conversation also revolved around filmmaking and its challenges in today's time.

"I am 72 years old, and I want to tell you all 'don't give up'," said Vidhu Vinod Chopra, talking about the phenomenal success of his movie *12th Fail*, starring Vikrant Massey. "You must have immense faith in your material," said the director, revealing how several filmmakers did not give him a chance.

Rakesh Omprakash Mehra of *Rang De Basanti* fame was

not entirely impressed with the mention of artificial intelligence. "Artificial intelligence isn't shaping screenwriters. Machines can't replace humans," he said. Kabir Khan, who made back-to-back quality sports biopics in *83* and *Chandu Champion*, spoke about reviving the done-to-death genre. "It's all about filming a realistic story more than worrying about the genre," he said.

Future stars

In the world of music, the legendary AR Rahman wished for one change in his field. "I hope to see more classical music in films. I would love to see movies like *Sankarabharanam* (1980) and *Sindhu Bhairavi* (1985). Makers should concentrate on delving deeper into classical music and create more melodies," he offered.

While the seniors from the

industry reflected on their years of experience and spoke about reinventing themselves, upcoming stars from Bollywood commented on expectations from them. Siddhant Chaturvedi of *Gully Boy* and *Gehraiyaan* was addressed as one of the "future stars of Bollywood" during a press conference.

The actor said reputation is a big responsibility. "Let's see how it goes. It's a challenge to stay on top of the game," he said. Lakshya, basking in the glory of the violent action drama *Kill*, spoke about maintaining consistency. "It's difficult to choose scripts wisely. I am learning that."

The IIFA Utsavam event was an appreciable idea to bridge the gap between Bollywood and the four film industries from South India. Inside the Etihad Arena, the atmosphere was in stark contrast to the scenes outside, as die-hard fans cheered for their favourite regional stars. The power-packed dance performances of Devi Sri Prasad and Prabhu Deva were the highlights here.

The likes of Mani Ratnam, Shah Rukh Khan, AR Rahman, Chiranjeevi, Rekha, and Hema Malini gathering under one roof was an occasion for the ages. The awards, as such, were easy to guess. However, the coming together of the big stars and what they bring to the event make the IIFA awards one to look forward to every year.

The writer was in Abu Dhabi at the invitation of IIFA 2024