

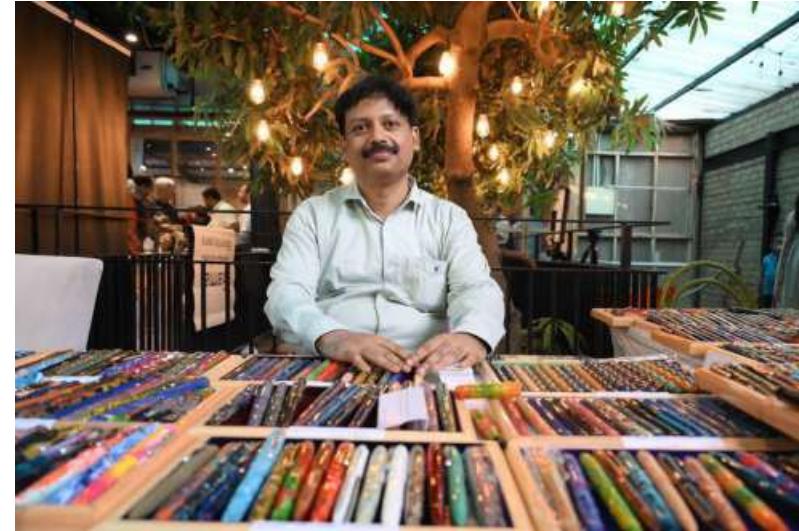


# metro PLUS

THE HINDU

**Chennai food stalls stock up** on kulambu to cater to those with little time to spare **P3**

**WHY IS PRAKASH RAJ BACKING PHOTO?** **P4**



## This story writes itself

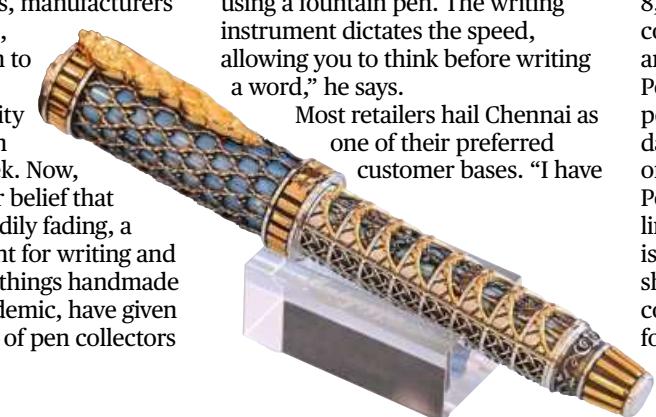
**Chennai's love** for fountain pens continues unabated as two pen shows welcome collectors in hoardes. We meet the buyers in search of the perfect nib, even if it costs 45 lakhs

Nitesh Jain, director, Makoba, says that using fountain pens is an act of patience, a discipline even. The maintenance of the pen, the control that one exerts over the nib all come into play here, he says. "One can't write as fast as they'd like while using a fountain pen. The writing instrument dictates the speed, allowing you to think before writing a word," he says.

Most retailers hail Chennai as one of their preferred customer bases. "I have

so many regular customers from Chennai. The main reason why I am here is to meet them in person," says Rajesh Pillai of Pune-based The Ink And Pen, one of the exhibitors at Chennai Pen Show, held at Fika. The show estimates a footfall of 8,000 to 10,000 with collectors coming in from cities like Bengaluru and Kolkata. Naturally, stalls by ASA Pens and Ranga Pens were populated throughout the three days, says Aditya Bhansali, organiser of the Chennai Pen Show. The Pelikan 40th Anniversary limited-edition pen worth 2.15 lakh, is the most expensive buy at this show. "A standard question that collectors hear is, 'who uses fountain pens anymore?'

After seeing the number of



### Rare picks

● **The Montegrappa Gladiator:** This pen modelled on the fighters of Ancient Rome arrives all the way from Italy and comes with a stunning display and casing of precious metals. It costs ₹19 lakh.

● **Kalaignar Pens by ASA Pens, Chennai:** This range of pens was modelled after the fountain pen used by former Chief Minister M Karunanidhi. The pen could hold more ink than a regular fountain pen, making it ideal for an avid writer. It costs ₹850.

● **The Montegrappa Automobili Lamborghini 60°:** This limited-edition fountain pen is inspired by the iconic Lamborghini Aventador and looks to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the luxury sports car manufacturer. It is only sold as a set of six, costing ₹45 lakh.

● **Music nibs, Kanwrite:** Used specifically to write musical notations. The nib, designed with two holes and two lines, makes thicker strokes upon applying more pressure. The price depends on the pen.

● **The Montegrappa Dante Alighieri Paradiso:** This pen comes in sterling silver and 18 carat gold. Priced at ₹6.92 lakh.

**Good ink-vestment** (Clockwise from far left) Stalls by Ranga Pens and Magna Carta; an enthusiast at the Makoba show; the Montegrappa Gladiator; and the Montegrappa Dante Alighieri Paradiso. THAMODHARAN B AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

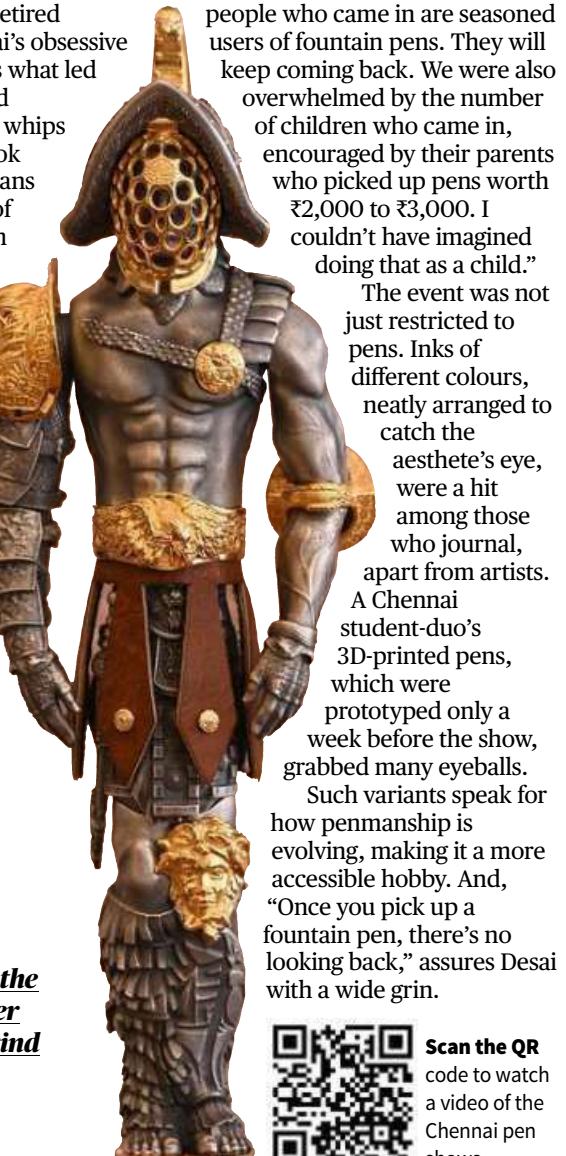
people who came in, pen enthusiasts were extremely happy that the community is coming together," Aditya says.

### No looking back

"Why do I collect? It simply gives me a strange sense of satisfaction and happiness. The way the ink rises on the paper gives you a special kind of high," says Dr Vijay Shanmugam G, a neurologist and avid collector who is famously guilty of 'pen-abling' many of his peers and friends. His initiation into this world happened as a medical intern. He refuses to reveal the number of pens in his collection, but hints that it has everything from varied vintages to Japanese Namikis.

On the other hand, retired industrialist Bimal Desai's obsessive fascination for colour is what led him to printing inks and subsequently, pens. He whips out a yellowing notebook filled with pages of slogans – all written with inks of different colours – from the standard royal blue to a flamboyant fluorescent pink. "I now have pens worth ₹10 to ₹15 lakhs in my collection." The smooth glide of the nib is what Desai looks for in a good pen, even when it is a collectible.

Mathew Mathew, a 56-year-old human resources professional in the city



**Why do I collect? It simply gives me a strange sense of satisfaction and happiness. The way the ink rises on the paper gives you a special kind of high**

DR VIJAY SHANMUGAM G  
Collector



## Tick-tock Tamil

Venba Angadi has launched wall clocks featuring Tamil numerals to bring into vogue, the once-popular format

**Akila Kannadasan**  
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**A**utomobile engineer N Bhoopathi Raja is smitten by Tamil. He is constantly thinking of ways to showcase the beauty of the language to the world, and his wife's business enterprise Venba Angadi is his tool. What started as a venture to source and sell unique gifts, has transformed into a store that focusses on products featuring Tamil letters and numerals.

His latest addition, is the Tamil numerals wall clock.

"I worked on this idea for 10 years before it became a reality," says the Coimbatore-based 40-year-old, speaking about the clock. It features Tamil numerals from zero to nine, and comes in wooden and

plastic variations. Bhoopathi wants to popularise the usage of Tamil numerals.

"Other languages such as Marathi and Kannada use their own numerals; these are used even in Government buses in the respective states," he points out, adding that this was the case in Tamil Nadu till the '90s.

"Once personal computers came in, we switched to Hindu-Arabic numerals since it was easier to enter into the system, and people found Tamil numerals confusing," says

**Making a statement** Valluvar pins, wall clocks. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Bhoopathi. He recalls the Tamil Internet Conference held in Chennai in February 1999. "It was after this conference that the layout for a Tamil keyboard was brought in, and numerals were included," he adds.

Venba Angadi's clock is an ode to these numerals, that Bhoopathi says, have remained the same for the last 100 years.

"I hope the clock encourages children to learn Tamil numerals," says Bhoopathi, who is father to two girls aged nine and five. Bhoopathi has employed the format that is now available on mobile phone operating systems. "This will make it easier for people to understand it," he

says, adding that he makes it a point to use Tamil numerals on his iPhone. "I bought my phone in 2013 and by default, it had Tamil numerals. I use them the way everyone else uses Hindu-Arabic numerals. To do so, all one has to do is change their phone's language settings to Tamil."

Bhoopathi is now working on a clock that features the Tamil *uyiresuthu*. "This will make it easier for parents to teach children the Tamil alphabet," he says.

Venba Angadi was started in 2016, with the venture's other popular product; a Tamil calendar that Bhoopathi distributes for free at Government schools in Tamil Nadu.

They also have the Thiruvalluvar-themed diary, Thiruvalluvar stickers and pins, customised Tamil name boards, and bamboo products with Tamil inscriptions.

Bhoopathi's love for Tamil was instilled by his mother, who, he says, was a voracious reader. He adds: "Tamil is the language I think in. Everything that I do is in the hope that my daughters grow up with the same love for the language."

For details, visit [venbaangadi.com](http://venbaangadi.com).




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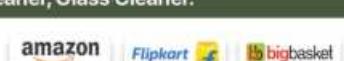

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**NC Srinivasaraghavan**

**C**hennai is well-known for being a pioneer for many reasons, but not many are aware that it is home to one of India's oldest LGBTIQ+ resource groups. Orinam, a queer collective completed 20 years recently. Started by a small group of like-minded queer individuals, the first meeting happened at an ice cream parlour in Nungambakkam in 2003.

At that time, there were many email groups and online forums where community members shared their thoughts and made friends. However, Orinam created history by offering offline spaces and support in the city through gatherings, building its network through volunteers of different age groups. From about 10 members in 2003, today, over 200 people attend events regularly. A core group of about 15 volunteers coordinate to act as peer counsellors and event organisers.

Across the years, several people have devoted their efforts and acted as core members of the collective which is funded entirely through donations. Felix S, who has been part of the journey as a chief volunteer from the first day says, "Orinam meet-ups were all about finding other people like yourself in the city and getting to know their journey as LGBT+ individuals in society. Queer people have a hard time fitting in and face many hurdles due to lack of social acceptance of their identities. This space provides a breath of fresh air for several members of the community who are mostly closeted."

Over the years, the support space provided by Orinam has expanded and the collective now plays a key role in organising the Chennai International Queer Film Festival (Reel Desires) in association with the Goethe Institut every year in August, as well as literary and spoken-word events through



## Creating a queer oasis

**Orinam**, one of Chennai's queer collectives, on shepherding the city's LGBTIA+ community for 20 years

QUILT (Queering Literature) meet-ups.

L Sriram, another key member of the collective, says, "Even though our support group meetings have been happening for a long time, we realised how crucial it was to have them during the pandemic when many LGBTIQ+ people faced mental health issues due to lack of support at home."

**Tight knit**  
Sriram says that over the years, the conversations around queer identities involved folks younger than 18 who reached out for support. This necessitated the involvement of parents in the meetings.

Pratibha and her husband Varadarajan, who reached out to Orinam to better understand their queer daughter shared their experience. "We could never figure out the issues our daughter was facing as we were not initially aware of queer identities. We randomly

walked into an Orinam support group meeting and gradually found ways to accept and embrace our daughter's sexual orientation making the journey easier for her as well as us," says Pratibha. Presently, the couple has stepped into a new role as supportive queer parents for many youngsters in the city, opening their home and hearts for folks who lack acceptance from their biological family.

Fred Rogers, who identifies as a man of trans experience,

**Conversion therapy "to cure queerness" is unethical and unscientific.**

**L SRIRAM**  
Member, Orinam

shares how Orinam was pivotal in making sure his ex-spouse understood his gender identity. "There is very little awareness about transmasculine persons as this identity is marginalised



*Some names have been changed to protect identities. To get in touch with Orinam, reach out to L Sriram (8056221917).*

## Spotlight on health

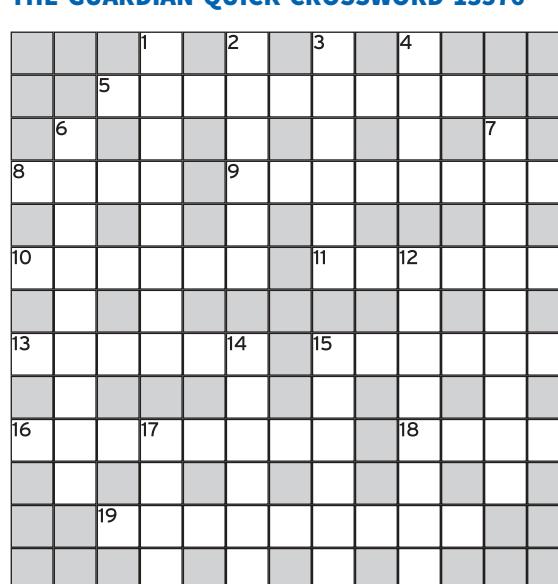
The spotlight on holistic health and wellness has become brighter since the pandemic. This weekend, a carnival that celebrates the idea of wellness, will focus on why holistic health is the need of the hour. Organised by the Rotary Club of Madras Temple City, the event that boasts diverse programming, will put 'healthy lifestyle' at its centre. "The Rotary Club of Madras has been doing more than 30 years of work. This time, we wanted to do a fundraiser event that would benefit the general public," says Dr. Bhuvaneshwari Rajendran.

The day-long event will have sessions on laughing yoga, mindful munching, meditation, fitness for seniors, eye care and sleep hygiene and free health screenings.

*The carnival is from 10am to 7pm at CP Art Centre and Seminar Hall, Alwarpet. Entry is free.*



### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13576



18 Slump (4)

19 Non-stop (9)

**Down**

1 Microbes (8)

2 Ancient burial

mound (6)

3 Contusion (6)

4 Record (4)

6 It triggers a big bang (9)

7 On the dot (9)

12 Persistently

irritating (8)

14 Dormant (6)

15 Leader of a

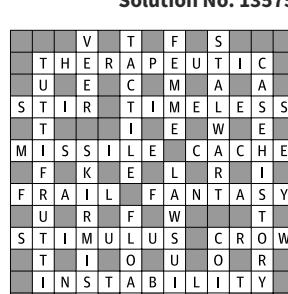
religious community

for women (6)

17 Generous — sort (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 21, 2024.

**Solution No. 13575**



**Across**

5 Tactless — to admiral (anag) (9)

8 Accomplishment (4)

9 It gets discounted fares for train travellers (8)

10 Take out a loan (6)

13 Tropical fruit (6)

15 Grand — time of the year (6)

16 Literary gathering (4,4)

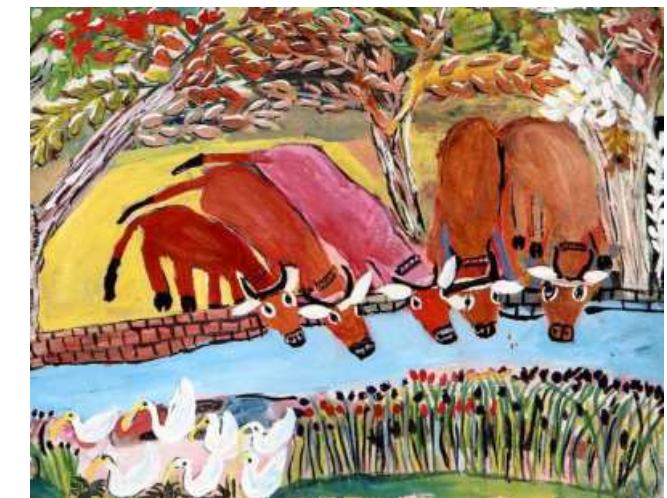
To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

CMYK

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## Art that heals

**Bindu Art School**, for people with leprosy, by Chengalpattu-based Bindu Art Trust, now has a permanent gallery space in Mamallapuram



**Lick of paint** Work from artists of Bindu Art Trust. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Liz Thottan**

**W**erner Dornik first visited India in 1977 during the hippie revolution. His purpose: live and love. But life had different plans for the 18-year-old Australian national. He happened to visit Varanasi and encountered people with leprosy for the first time. Ostracised by society, they were forced to beg on the streets.

A year later, he returned to India with a vision to help them. He wanted to capture the essence of Varanasi through photography and in turn sell the images in the West to fund medical treatments for people with leprosy. It was then that he met Padma Venkatraman, an activist rehabilitating those with the condition.

Padma and Werner came together to start the Bindu Art Trust and eventually set up an art school at the Leprosy Colony in Bharatapuram, near Chengalpattu, where he trained members in drawing and painting.

Artists from Bindu Art School, that has now completed 19 years, had their first exhibition at Apparao Gallery in the city in 2006, which was a huge success. Werner travelled with their work across the world and was also instrumental in taking a few of the artists to Europe to meet some of the buyers.

They now have a permanent gallery for their work at Mamallapuram. The initiative has transformed their lives, and turned them into artists who tell their stories through their work.

*The 500 sq ft space, located at Othavada Cross Street 5, has over 300 works of art on display. The paintings are priced between ₹2,000 and ₹9,000. The gallery is open from 5.30pm to 9pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 1pm and 5.30pm to 9pm on weekends. For details, call 7395686077.*



## Poetry meets form

**Written in Devanagari script, the evocative poems open a window to Ramnath's childhood, life and experiences**

**Saraswathy Nagarajan**

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**W**ords rush into verse, tumble into rhyme and flow into poems. Ramnath could put pen to paper and come up with verse on any subject. After several years of wordplay and journalling, the Chennai-based chartered accountant, released a book of Urdu poems, *Bas Yun Hi* (Just Like That).

Going down memory lane, Ramnath says the book of poems is the fruition of his love affair with Urdu, which began in Kolkata, where he grew up. Eighteen poems on diverse themes, written in Devanagari script, showcase the poet's felicity for words and his ability to capture fleeting emotions in evocative verse.

The anthology was released in Chennai by Leela Samson, who also wrote an eloquent foreword. It features a cover designed by Ramnath's son, Amrit.

composer and musician) and illustrations by Subhash Bhokre.

Since Kolkata is a cultural hub, Ramnath and his siblings grew up on a steady diet of ghazals and poetry in chaste Urdu. Ramnath says he grew up speaking Bengali although he hails from Palakkad in Kerala. He recalls with a chuckle that Tamil was spoken only at home, that too with his mother.

### A tryst with letters

"My first language was Hindi and I learned Hindi literature and poetry. My father brought a cassette of Ghulam Ali and that is how I began listening to ghazals. I felt Urdu was the language that best expresses in words the emotions and moods one experiences," he reminisces.

A music aficionado, Ramnath recalls listening to greats such as Ghulam Ali, Mehdi Hassan and Begum Akhtar, to name a few. "Unlike popular perception, ghazals are not confined to romance. They embrace every human emotion and deep

philosophy too," he adds.

As his romance with ghazals deepened, he began delving into the works of the poets who wrote evocative verses. He feasted on the wealth of information on the web and began watching *mushaikhai* (poetic get-togethers) on YouTube. There, he discovered poets like Munawwar Rana and Rahat Indori.

"Indori is brilliant. He uses a lot of modern imagery that one can easily relate to. Gulzar and Javed Akhtar are two contemporary poets I follow," he



**Lyrical soliloquy** This multi-lingual chartered accountant experiments with versification in his book *Bas Yun Hi*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

says, adding, "I also listen to podcasts. There is one called 'Urdu Nama', which I listen to on Spotify. Then I started buying books from Rekhta, a popular website for Urdu books. I read Majrooh Sultanpuri's works often."

However, caught up as he was with his work and family, the lines he wrote remained with him. "As a child, I used to recite or read out whatever I had written to my sister Usha Ramesh. As I grew older, the subjects became more serious but the habit of writing continued," he says.

Eventually, he settled in Chennai and married Carnatic musician Bombay Jayashri. But he continued to "scribble verse and left it at that".

The budding poet found his readers when Usha was living in Bahrain. She was part of the Bahrain Poetry Group, which chose a theme every month, encouraging members to come up with pieces in prose and verse, some published and some written by them. That is when the actual writing of the poems in *Bas Yun Hi* took place, some time around 2015-2020.

Says Usha: "Raju (as his family calls him) would send his verse as audio notes and the listeners, including Urdu-speaking Pakistanis, were bowled over by his verse, diction and use of phrase."

"Certain experiences have been deeply ingrained in me. I see my poetry-writing as an outlet," he says, adding "Every poem has been born in the crucible of my life but there is a universal truth in each that all readers can relate to."

"Amrit and Jayashri have been pillars of support. Jayashri told me to go ahead and publish them," he adds.

And how did the title come about? "Someone asked me, 'Why do you write poetry?' I replied, 'Bas, yun hi'."



#### Sri's Kulambu Kadai, RA Puram

R Murugan arrives on his two-wheeler by 10.30am at RA Puram Second Main Road, and is followed by an auto carrying home-cooked food in large stainless steel containers. He quickly sets up shop at his takeaway kiosk, selling a variety of dishes made by his wife Indrani, who is assisted by two helpers. "We prepare lunch and bring it here, and by 6pm, restock dishes for dinner. It is a tedious task but we love the joy of serving good quality food to our customers," says Murugesan. His shop sells vegetarian gravies (kulambu, rasam, kootu and poriyal) by weight, as well as non-vegetarian gravies. Sambar is priced at ₹50 for 500ml, kara kulambu at ₹70, and rasam at ₹40. Kootu is priced at ₹70 for 200 gms and poriyal is ₹80 for 200 grams. Customers can also buy coconut rice, lemon rice and sambar rice at ₹60 for 500gms. High on demand are chapathis (₹10), ragi idli (₹15) and idiyappam (₹10). "On weekends we stock kadugu (mustard) kulambu and karuveppillai (curry leaves) kulambu. We also sell mutton (chukka and gravy), chicken curries, prawn thokku and fish kulambu. Items such as crab roast and biryani are available on pre-order. Open from 11am to 9pm. Contact 94444084150. Small party pre-orders are taken.

**Options galore** Choose from an array of interesting kulambus and side dishes. AKHILA EASWARAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



# Get on the gravy cart

#### Chitradeepa Anantharam

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Post the pandemic, a trend seems to have emerged in the city, where every neighbourhood has a kulambu kadai, selling competitively priced homemade gravies and side dishes. They cater to young couples who work from home, bachelors, and elders who do not want to cook everyday. The customers prefer these gravies, prepared in home-style kitchens, to ordering from hotels. We try some of the push carts and stalls that make meal planning easier.



#### The Kulambu Box, Shenoy Nagar

Manish Kumar Jain was always pampered with good food at home by his mother Meena Jain, a talented and passionate cook. "I took to cooking at the age of 10, and learnt South Indian and North Indian dishes. When my son came up with the idea of a kiosk to sell only gravies after the pandemic, I was excited," she says. Everyday, they prepare and sell vegetarian gravies (sambar, rasam, puli kulambu, mor kulambu, rasam and many Gujarati dishes) and keep adding new dishes to the menu," says Meena.

"During the lockdown, we helped many of my wife's colleagues, mostly bachelors who were living alone, by sending them gravies. Gradually the demand grew and I finally decided to set up a kiosk in Shenoy Nagar and launched The Kulambu Box, in 2022," says Manish.

Customers can place their order the previous day and they can pick it up between 5pm and 9pm from the kiosk. "We customise as per requirement, and offer no onion, no garlic, less spice levels, and vegetables as requested," says Manish, adding, "We were surprised to see many customers sending out an assortment of our kulambu and thogayals as gift boxes to friends."

Though the menu is extensive, the puli kulambu, capsicum cashew chutney, karuvellipai and kothamalli thogayals sell fast. Meena's authentic theecha (a Gujarati chutney), and Bhangerupet pani puri (originating from the Kolar region of Karnataka) have also won over many of their customers.

Open at Shenoy Nagar from 5pm to 10pm. Contact 9043400507.

#### Kulambu Mama Kadai, West Mambalam

N Kalyanasundaram, who used to be known as 'sundal mama' at Bakthavatsalam Street, near Ayodhya Mandapam in West Mambalam is now better known as kulambu mama. His work begins as early as 7.30am so that customers can pick up food for their school and office lunch boxes.

Having gained experience from the catering business he ran for over two decades, he sells kulambu, rasam, kootu (stew) and poriyal (stir fry) from a stainless steel push cart. "Mess culture might be thriving but with changing lifestyles, many young couples who have toddlers and senior citizens at home, prefer to pick up gravies and side dishes so they can cook less at home," says Kalyanasundaram.

Everyday, he serves up two types of sambar, one puli kulambu, two types of rasam, two types of kootu, and usually three or four vegetables (stir fry and roast). "My menu enables my customers to choose what they prefer to eat. During the weekends and holidays, I prepare aviyal, potato or colocasia roast, and milagu (pepper) kulambu. All gravies are priced at ₹30 for 200ml and vegetables are priced at ₹40 for 200gms," he says.

Contact 9344732640. Customers are encouraged to bring their own containers.



#### Kittu Mama Veetu Tiffin, Mylapore

In Mylapore, Kittu Mama Veetu Tiffin has become popular for the variety rice on its menu, which is sold in buckets.

Veena Krishnamurthy, the founder, says their focus is affordability. "Be it office get-togethers or small functions at home, we serve puliyodhare, coconut

rice, lemon rice, sambar rice, brinji rice, coriander rice and curd rice in portions that are cost effective. The rice is priced at ₹350 per kilo. We also provide gravies, kootu and poriyal as well," says Veena. In the style of non-vegetarian bucket biryani, you can order from this vegetarian tiffin room in portions that range from half a kilo, to four-kilo packs.

Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Contact 9840276377.



## STEP OUT



#### Our culture through art

The Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) and SAHMAT (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) present, Hum Sab Sahmat, an exhibition of texts and images by 280 writers, artists and photographers, and performances and screenings celebrating India's plural, inclusive culture. This event will commemorate the lived and cherished pluralism of Indian culture through multiple expressions of art, music, and more.

On March 15, at 5.30pm gaana songs will be performed by Gaana Vimala, followed by two short plays in Tamil written by Pralayan and staged by Chennai Kalai Kuzhu. On March 18, the film Kaya Taran, directed by Sashi Kumar will be screened at 10am. A dance presentation by Nrithya Pillai will take place on March 22 at 5.30pm followed by Dafs musical concert by fakirs. On April 5, Chennai Kalai Kuzhu will stage King Mahendravarman Pallavan's Mathavilasam Prahasanam, dramatised and directed by Pralayan at 5.30pm.

@MS Subbulakshmi Auditorium, ACJ Campus, Taramani. Exhibition is on till April 10, 10am to 6pm. Free, and open to all. For details, call 22542842



#### For canine pals

Tail Alert, an NGO that focusses on the rescue and rehab-rehoming of adult dogs is conducting a fundraiser, Garden Carnival, where animal loving artisans, designers, bakers and home chefs, jewellery and craftspeople will participate. The funds collected will be utilised for the care of abandoned dogs. Visitors can bring along their pets for this event, and there will also be dogs up for adoption.

@Kingsley, Spur Tank Road, March 16, 11am to 8pm.

For more details, call 9551544556

# The nine-lives cafe

Does the smoke and mirrors show at Eko Lyfe in Abhiramapuram jazz up the new iterations of this neighborhood cafe?

#### Sanjana Ganesh

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A couple of days ago, I was mentioning to a friend that Abhirampuram's Eko Lyfe is now a restaurant serving tacos and pizzas. "Wait. Wasn't it always one?" they asked in return.

Eko Lyfe has lived three of its many cat lives. What began as a zero-waste store then hosted a small cafe serving coffee and a limited menu of treats on its premises until recently. Over the last month, it has undergone a makeover, with a variety on the menu – cauliflower wings, mezze platters and sliders are only some of the options on its all-vegetarian menu.

The restaurant continues to sell conscious produce in one corner, but the focus is now on the smoke and glass domes covering our coffee and pizza. Eko Lyfe is clearly catering just as much to Instagram as it is to its menu.

The owner, Jignesh Pujara, says that there have been several foreign nationals walking in, seeking vegan food. "I guess the word is already spreading," he says.

Jignesh is fundamentally opposed to using the term 'vegan' as it has not done his business much favours in the past. The community in Chennai is small, he says. We hence settle on guilt-free (the food has no white maida, sugar, salt or dairy) and hope that nobody takes offense and loses themselves in the jargon. We would rather focus on the food.

At Eko Lyfe, nearly all food is made at a station in front of us. The servers know the menu by-heart and prattle off the favourites, the chef's recommendations and their own preferences. The chef also arrives at our table, encouraging customisation.

**Tucking in**  
We begin by trying the pea soup, drumsticks, and a large mezze platter before the fried food arrives. An incident in my youth involving smushed peas being equated to eyes has ruined the vegetable for me but the soup, which bears no resemblance to still eyes, is of great consistency (nudged between thick and thin) and taste. The peas shine through and a hint of cream is



drizzled atop to offset the green. As we eat the soy drumsticks, my lunch companion says that it is the perfect replacement for the famed chicken cutlet. The soy is cooked and shredded perfectly, leaving no space to wonder about whether mock meat can really do the trick.

The mezze platter remains the highlight of the meal for me. Falafel and pita with a couscous salad that can be swapped with several dips like the tzatziki, hummus and baba ghanoush could make a hearty meal for one. Since few restaurants truly pull their weight and show their technique with the humble pickled vegetable, I am happy to declare that Eko Lyfe passes the test.

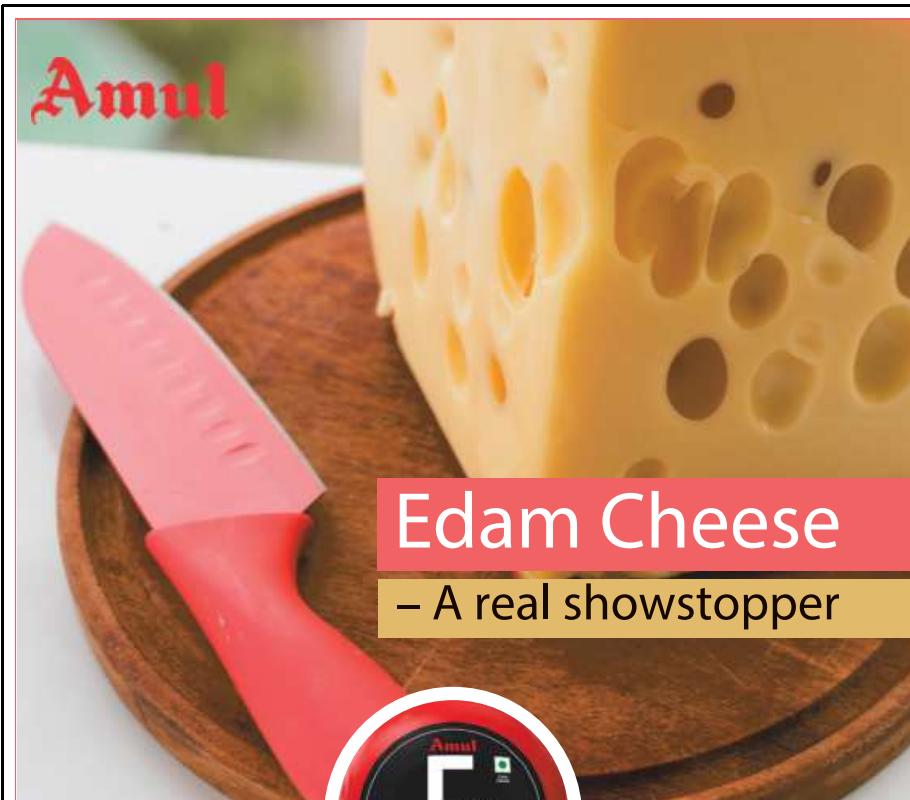
As we speak, the crowd favourites arrive. The first is a plate

of sticky Korean wings which is now on nearly everyone's order list, says the owner. The sweet and spicy gochujang sauce smothers a fried cauliflower floret, desperate to conceal its identity. Longer marination of the cauliflower will perhaps help the flavours seep a little more into the dish.

The next is a smoked tofu pizza. The dish arrives in an encased glass bowl propelled by tofu smoke to add to the smoke and mirrors show. The addition of tofu on the pizza is hardly offensive but the marinara requires work. Also, unfortunately nobody till date has been able to make vegan cheese that I enjoy eating. This is perhaps another deterrent to my pizza experience. The soft tacos, however, with bits of crispy mushroom, beans, vegetables and sour cream, are the best part of the meal. The messy first bite checks all the boxes of texture as the smush-to-crisp ratio is well-aligned.

It is evident that Eko Lyfe's food works where it tries the least. Their smoothies, the mezze platters, the taco and the appetisers are the best parts of the meal. They are good old bowls of food that we would order without the glitter and glam of social media.

Eko Lyfe cafe is at 3, Ananda Road, Alwarpet. A meal for two costs ₹1,200.



## Edam Cheese

- A real showstopper



Born in the quaint village of Edam nestled on the banks of the Markemeer River in Netherlands, the Edam Cheese is a traditional Dutch cheese that is shaped like a bright red wheel. Part of the gourmet range and made of culture, milk and vegetarian origin rennet, this cheese is Amul's endeavour to bring international flavours to the heart of India.

Sourced from India itself to make it more affordable, Edam cheese can be consumed in raw form. Aimed at encouraging you to inculcate it in your cooking experiments, it can be sliced, grated, or melted to enhance the taste of your culinary projects.

Straw coloured with a mild nut-like buttery flavour, the cheese has a unique taste profile and can be used

for making sandwiches and pizzas. It can also be served with hot beverages, salads and crackers. Dig in for deliciousness!



"CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE"



Sterlin Nithya, Khatija Rahman, Lavita Lobo at the launch of music video 'Woman Of Power'.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## Triumph in tune

**Khatija Rahman's latest anthem, 'Woman of Power', highlights common women**

**Sangita Rajan**  
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**A**fter the dust has settled on Women's Day celebrations, an anthem of empowerment has emerged for the common woman and her struggle for financial freedom. A music video by vocalist Khatija Rahman, composer and music director Sterlin Nithya, and lyricist Lavita Lobo was launched recently in Chennai.

Naturals Salon founder and co-founder Veena K and CK Kumaravel facilitated the anthem, aimed at catalysing the conversation around women's empowerment. The launch event for the music video, titled 'Woman of Power' drew attention to the often-overlooked aspirations and capabilities of women beyond their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters.

The music video, now streaming on YouTube, seeks to inspire women to pursue their ambitions independently. Khatija Rahman said, "Singing this anthem was not just about music; it was about amplifying the voices of many women."

Sterlin Nithya expressed satisfaction in creating music with fellow powerful women. "I have always felt that these women are very inspiring, and wanted to work with them. This seemed like the perfect opportunity," she said, highlighting the fact that the lyrics written by Lavita helped her steer the music video in a better direction.

'Woman of Power' was conceptualised over the course of four months, with the video depicting the challenges faced by women who are constrained by financial limitations. Featuring real-life women, it celebrates their resilience and triumphs, and how they pursued their dreams beyond maternal responsibilities.

Lavita Lobo shared insights into the creative process, and said, "we did not want to bring the brand name in the lyrics and wanted it to be independent. We came up with the term 'women of power' and stuck to it because it resonated with us."

### What's playing on TV?

When movies are showcased in top quality, can television serials be far behind? Surely not. A recent collaboration of Dolby Laboratories and Sun Group has ensured that audiences can now watch daily soaps in four different languages in high-dynamic range in Sun NXT, thus providing life-like images.

"A customer is seeking premium experiences, both in cinemas and the living room," says Sameer Seth, director, Marketing - India, at Dolby Laboratories. "A recent consumer study we undertook points out to key behavioural changes in consumers post the pandemic, including being willing to upgrade their home equipment and subscription packs to enable a high-definition experience."

Apart from this, 70-plus popular Tamil titles including *Ayalaan*, *Sarkar* and *Beast* are also available on the Sun NXT app with high-quality sound and visuals. In 2012, Dolby Atmos made its way into cinema halls – its first Indian theatrical was the Rajinikanth-starrer *Sivaji 3D* in Chennai in 2012 – and slowly made its entry into living rooms and even automobiles. "Placement and movement of sound is at the core of Dolby Atmos," adds Sameer, "It lets you experience sound the way the human ear would listen to it."

*Srinivas Ramanujam*

**Why veteran actor Prakash Raj is emotional about the upcoming Kannada film Photo, which he is backing**

**Vivek MV**  
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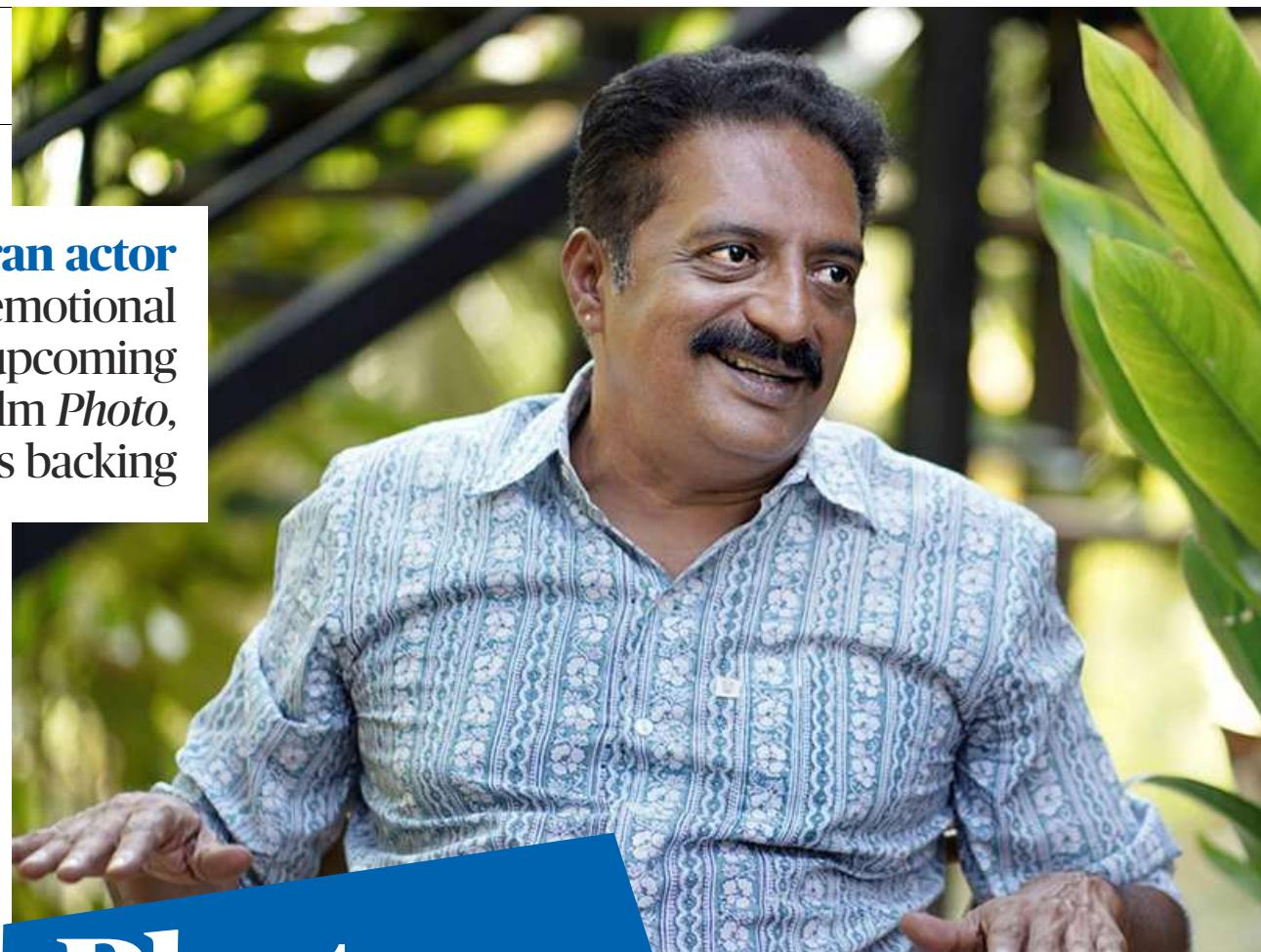
**P**rakash Raj, known for his outspoken views, had an emotional moment last month. The seasoned actor could not control his tears after watching the Kannada film *Photo*, directed by debutant Utsav Gonwar. Now, the actor is presenting the film, releasing in theatres on March 15.

*Photo* revolves around a young boy who dreams of clicking a photo of himself in front of the Vidhana Soudha, but the pandemic derails his plans. The film depicts the migrant exodus during the COVID-19 outbreak. "When some wounds of the society resurface, it disturbs you a lot," says Prakash Raj. Excerpts from a conversation:

**Question:** What made you emotional about *Photo*?

**Answer:** I am an emotional person. *The Colour Purple* by Steven Spielberg made me cry, but I teared up for *Photo* for a different reason. Charlie Chaplin says, "Life is a comedy in a long shot and tragedy in the close-up." *Photo* is that sort of a film. During the pandemic, when I saw hundreds of people walking to their homes barefoot on the highways, I cried and didn't know what to do. All I could do was cook food for 500 people. Now, we have swept everything under the carpet and behave like everything is fine.

But there are certain wounds in civilisation that you should never forget. I told myself I would not sit



**Point of the matter**  
Prakash Raj.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Photo finish

and regret that I could not make a film like this. So I decided to stand by the movie and help it get a theatrical release.

**Q:** The film's talking point is that it questions the system. Do you agree?  
**A:** We had our homes to stay safe in the pandemic, but what about construction workers and other migrants? They were on the streets, and the roads were blocked. It's not just about the Government's failure. It's about us not being sensitive about what's happening around us.

**Q:** Do you feel sad that those who loved your work do not admire you as an actor anymore because of your political views?

**A:** I don't get disappointed. I want to be known for what I am rather than being someone who plays to the gallery. People can disagree with my opinions, but they should know what I stand for. I have chosen to live life the way I want to, and it's worth it.

**Q:** What's your opinion about social media? You are very active on X...  
**A:** I don't do advertisements, so my account is quite genuine. When people comment on my views, I am happy they follow me despite not liking me. It means I am disturbing them and making them think. For those who yell at me, I want to tell them that we are fellow human beings and that we must have a conversation.



language, I need to speak the language of the people the film is made for. Only then will they accept me as their own. There is joy in this process.

Surrendering myself to my roles gives me a window to see new cultures. I know there is hard work involved in learning a language, but it is worth it. I am not known for my handsomeness or beauty. I am known for the way I depict the characters, and I am happy about it.

**Q:** You have proven your versatility on-screen multiple times. However, why do we mostly see you only as an antagonist nowadays?

**A:** People relate to intense roles. I am popular as an antagonist. Some call me a 'villain actor', and I laugh at it. It's their way of branding me. However, I have also done films like *Iruvar*, *Kanchivaram*, *Abhiyum Naanum*, and *Ok Kanmani*. I balance both sides of my image as an actor. People on social media say I am a villain in reel and real life. Some say I am a villain on screen and a hero in real life. You don't let these comments affect you. They are all just opinions.



### Kabaddi tales

Bollywood-based Applause Entertainment is collaborating with Neelam Studios to present Mari Selvaraj's untitled project starring Dhruv Vikram. Scheduled to commence production this year, this sports drama, directed by Mari, will be based on kabaddi. A release stated, "It is a story of a man who defied the lines on his hand to achieve what no one thought possible, to choose sport over a gun, peace over violence and life over death." Mari Selvaraj said, "This film will be a raw sports drama which goes back to the roots of kabaddi and to be working with Dhruv, a strong talented youngster, will definitely add up different perspectives to the film."

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Let's Start!