



# metro PLUS

THE HINDU

**Now that New York loves snails, are you likely to see it on a menu near you? P2**

**HOW 3BHK EXPLORES THE IDEA OF HOME P4**



**Neeraj Chopra has finally breached the 90-metre mark in javelin throw. He tells us why growing up in a farming family in Khandra village, Panipat, has made him so resilient**

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**N**eeraj Chopra is thrilled about having regained the top spot in men's javelin throw as per the latest World Athletics ranking. But it hasn't been an easy climb to the top, with the last year, in particular, being very tough, admits Chopra. "I was second almost everywhere," he says. But, "after a long time, I have become number one again. It feels really good," says the 27-year-old, India's first track and field athlete to win an Olympic gold medal. "I will try to keep it going."

Another recent feather in his cap: a 90.23 metre throw at the Doha Diamond League on May 16, where he finally breached the 90-metre mark he had aspired for. "I wanted to throw over 90m for a long time. People kept asking me when I would," he says. "Now that question is over," says Chopra, speaking on the sidelines of a recent fitness community engagement event held at the Under Armour store in Indiranagar, Bengaluru, where he participated in a 5-kilometre run.

He is also excited about the inaugural edition of the upcoming Neeraj Chopra (NC) Classic, an elite javelin throw meet scheduled to take place at the Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on July 5. According to him, the event came out of a desire to create a competition in India "where international athletes can participate," he says, adding that the idea to do so occurred to him during the Tokyo Olympics.

While the initial plan was to have this meet at the Tau Devi Lal Sports Complex in Panchkula, Haryana, "since I trained there and Haryana is my State," there were some technical and infrastructural difficulties with it, he says.

"There was not enough time to change things, but hopefully, it will happen in the future." Right now, however, he is looking forward to having it in Bengaluru where "the



**Fit and fabulous** Neeraj Chopra at a fitness community event in Bengaluru; (below) at the Ostrava Golden Spike athletics meet in the Czech Republic. AP AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

people compete with international athletes," he says.

He also discusses how his own training has altered since he first started competing. "We used to believe in strength and would lift a lot," he says. "We didn't pay attention to the techniques or the exercises." But, a sport like javelin also requires speed and flexibility, so "now we also do drills, sprinting,

## A golden throwback

weather is good and people support sports," says Chopra.

### Fitness first

As a young boy, he was overweight and often bullied by his classmates. So, he turned to fitness, heading to the nearby Shivaji Stadium in his hometown in an attempt to lose weight. There, he saw other athletes throwing the javelin, "so it came to my mind that I also wanted to do it. I told my family, and they supported me," says Chopra, who went on to win a gold medal at the National Junior Athletics Championships in 2012, just a couple of years after he began training seriously in the sport.

Other accolades soon followed, including a gold medal at the 2016 IAAF World U20 Championships in Bydgoszcz, another gold medal at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, an Olympic gold medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and a silver medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics. "I didn't know that I would be able to come so far when I started," he admits. "But the journey has been good."

Indian sports, especially track

and field events, have undergone considerable evolution in recent times, believes Chopra, who has witnessed this transformation firsthand. "Earlier, we didn't have much knowledge about sports or much motivation about how we do it," he says. "We used to do some old exercises, techniques and training plans."

This, however, has slowly changed because more athletes from India began coaching abroad, he says. Also, while traditionally the winners of the javelin throw were European athletes, "there are throwers from all parts of the world now, and I am very happy about it," says Chopra. He believes it will improve even more in the future. "The Government is now doing the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) top scheme. It will help

**Another recent feather in his cap: a 90.23 metre throw at the Doha Diamond League on May 16, where he finally breached the 90-metre mark he had aspired for**



and flexibility work," says Chopra, who is currently being trained by Jan Železný, a record-holding javelin thrower from the Czech Republic. Also, "to prevent injury, you have to do small, boring exercises for small muscles. A lot of athletes forget about it."

After all, safeguarding one's body and staying injury-free is especially important in an individual sport like javelin. Unlike a team sport, "where if you get injured, someone else can step in for you", in this sort of sport, "if you make a mistake or get injured, it is on you," says Chopra. And while injury is often inevitable, something he has personally experienced as well, "the most important thing is that you have to do your work consistently to keep your mind and body ready," he says.

### Think like a farmer

Chopra grew up in a farming family in Khandra village, Panipat district, Haryana, a background that shaped his resilience and positive attitude towards sports. "There is a good sporting culture in Haryana," he says, pointing out that one can often spot young people routinely running on the road early in the morning. "They are enthusiastic about fitness," he says. His agrarian roots too, helped, in his opinion. "We (farmers) are tough and have a hard-working mindset," he says. Drawing a parallel between farming and sports, where one must work resolutely through uncomfortable weather, managing both rain and heat, he adds, "The fact that my mindset was like this, right from the start, helps."

## Take note

**Harini and the Tamil Jazz Collective are excited to see Chennai becoming a cross-culture music collaboration hub**



**Smooth notes** Shylu Ravindran, Harini and Sahib Singh of The Tamil Jazz Collective. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Harini had a natural predilection for Flamenco music that somehow synced with her Carnatic roots. This journey to Tamil jazz has clearly been long and eventful.

Harini explored this unique Tamil-jazz confluence with Ella Fitzgerald's track 'Misty'. She says that it is an exercise in vocal production, where you take any piece of music, and add your mother tongue to it to produce certain tonalities. "To me singing jazz in English sounded plain, I'm not Ella Fitzgerald. You can only explore that music with empathy, it is not instinctive. I felt a lot more confident and grounded singing in Tamil," she says.

**Creating a collective**  
The Tamil Jazz Collective was born during the last few months of 2024, with Sahib Singh and Shylu Ravindran, creative forces behind the fusion band, Jatayu.

Sahib Singh says new sounds usually find a mixed reception in India. "Earlier, when I had performed across South-East Asia, they were far more accepting of our experiments, than the Indian audiences. Off late, we find more crowds who come with an open mind, and enjoy the music even if they don't understand the language."

With an original Tamil version of 'Take Five' by the Dave Brubeck Quartet, with the original lyrics penned by Brubeck's wife Lola and performed by Carmen McRae in

1961, the collective has received mixed reviews online. Purists are calling out their fusion music, while others cannot wait to attend a concert, collaborate or even host them in Louisiana, the birthplace of jazz, soul and the blues.

Performing in Kerala, Chennai, Bengaluru, Coimbatore and Goa, Harini, Sahib and Shylu, plan to expand the collective with an eclectic group of musicians, possibly adding a "string section, double bass, horn section, saxophone, and ultimately a full orchestra, when the budgets accommodate multiple collaborators," adds Sahib optimistically. Currently Harini translates English lyrics of jazz songs into Tamil. However, "just translation doesn't work sometimes because the metaphors and cultural context are different," she explains. The collective has unique musical arrangements that even allow impromptu collaborations.

Harini's musicology encompasses classics like 'Summertime', 'All of Me' and 'It Could Happen to You', besides original compositions. As the collective moves forward, it has ambitions to make Chennai a hub for cross-cultural collaboration, says Sahib, while Harini is in Berlin now to study filming musical compositions, and also performing with multiple ensembles. The trio is currently booked for performances across India through 2025, and is keen on releasing their music on streaming platforms this year.

## STEP OUT



### Celebrating elegance

The Arti Bagdy Fashion Collezione (ABFC) Festive Edit 2025 is back, celebrating Indian luxury and design. This curated two-day pop-up will feature high-end fashion, fine and destination jewellery, handcrafted sarees, and statement accessories from some of the country's most talented designers and labels. From timeless festive wear to breezy summer silhouettes and elegant co-ord sets, the event promises an immersive experience of craftsmanship and contemporary style. @The Hyatt Regency, Chennai, July 9 from 3pm. To 8pm and July 10 from 11am to 8pm. For details, call 9840059933.

### Little Festival, big stories

The Little Festival, Chennai's international theatre celebration for young audiences, returns with its 14th edition featuring two engaging productions from India and South Korea. The

Indian play, *The Kooks: Sunny Side Up* (July 6 to 9), is a riotous physical comedy about a team of eccentric cooks trying to save the world with a secret recipe, packed with clowning, music, and dance. From South Korea, *Super Tortoise Super Rabbit* (July 10 and 11) offers a thoughtful sequel to Aesop's classic, exploring identity, failure, and growth through a visually inventive performance with subtitles. @The Museum Theatre, July 6 to 11, shows at 11am (and 4pm on opening day). Tickets at [thelittletheatre.explara.com](http://thelittletheatre.explara.com). For details, call 28211115.



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**N**athai Perattal, a lightly curried snail meat dish, has become trendy in recent weeks ever since New York-based Chef Vijay Kumar won the James Beard Award for Best Chef: New York State in June. The dish is one of the many delicacies on Chef Vijay's menu featuring rustic and regional recipes that hark back to his native small farming village in rural Tamil Nadu.

"My grandparents lived in Arasampatti, where there wasn't even a bus. We would go there on school holidays, and we were not such a rich family, so they kept us busy with fishing, hunting and searching for snails," he said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

It spotlights the variety of Indian cuisine with rare, ethnic recipes using edible molluscs and insects.

"Foraging for and preparing dishes from scratch with nathai, eesal (winged termites) and oomachi (a smaller variety of snail) is common to many farming communities in Tamil Nadu. Snails and termites are season-specific, and cannot be bought commercially. Snails, for example, are not available when the rivers run dry. Termites on the other hand, start teeming over riverbeds a day or two after a spell of rain, and will vanish with the slightest hint of water. That's why, when the time is right, very often, the entire village is involved in collecting them for a cookout session," says V Subramanian, the farmer-chef who helms the popular Village Cooking Channel (VCC) on YouTube with his cousins V Murugesan, V Ayyanar, G Tamilselvan and T Muthumanickam, led by their grandfather and former caterer M Periyathambi.

#### Homestyle delicacies

VCC, that operates from the village of Chenna Veeramangalam in Pudukkottai district, was among the first to put out videos on hunting and preparing winged termites.

The 2018 episode clocked up over eight million views, and made the team braver about showing food rarely seen on urban platters.

"People can be very judgmental and political about food choices. Though we were initially worried



# Coming out of their shells



about the reception to our eesal recipe, the positive reactions convinced us that we were on the right path. We released three videos on snail recipes, again, to rave reviews," says Subramanian.

Snails are usually found clustered around the riverbed vegetation. Families step out with earthen pots and wade into a river's shallower spots to pluck the snails out from the mud.

"Once collected, the snails are

soaked in river water and left overnight to remove impurities. Snail flesh is removed using a pointed stick, and cooked over a medium flame for a few minutes. We prefer to keep the spices simple, such as patta milagai (dried red chilli) and salt ground with shallots, to sauté the meat," says Subramanian.

Owing to its small size, the oomachi is cooked inside its shell, and diners suck out the flesh

**Snails and winged termites**, some of the unusual ingredients of Tamil Nadu's rural cuisine, are now gaining global traction after Chef Vijay Kumar of Semma's award-winning run in New York

flavoured with salt and pepper.

Preparing eesal takes more effort. As the VCC video shows, the termites are trapped with the help of cloth canopies and dry-roasted over a low flame. Sundried and cleaned with hand-held winnowers to remove their wings, the insects are then further cooked and eaten with jaggery or puffed rice, as a snack.

#### The fisherfolks' favourite

Fisherfolk consume snails on a regular basis. In Chennai, snails are available at the Kasimedu fish market in January and February, according to fisherman M Suman.

"There are around 10,000 fishermen who depend on snails during the season," he explains, adding that a kilogram of sea snails can cost up to ₹200. "To catch them, fishermen tie several tonnes of stale fish in nets and submerge them in water, leaving the arrangement overnight," says the Pulicat-based fisherman, adding: "Snails, attracted to the strong smell, cling to the nets."

Catching snails is labour-intensive, especially since only 25% of the

**A rare treat** (Clockwise from left) Seaweed divers of Chinnapalam also collect snails; freshwater snails at the Nochi Kuppam market; The Village Cooking Channel team with its haul of snails. L BALACHANDAR AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



that end up in nets with their catch. "We will rush home to cook them," laughs Suman, "The meat is tastier than mutton. The flavour retains the sweet smell of the soil in which the snail spends a major part of the day."

Within the fishing community, it is believed that consuming snails is good for the skin. "They are also good for the gut," says Suman. Freshwater snails, caught in Chennai's waterbodies such as Narayananapuram eri and Retteri, are sometimes sold in the city's fish markets as well.

The seaweed collectors at Chinnapalam village in Ramanathapuram district too gather snails. M Lakshmi from the village near Rameshwaram says that women pick snails in the Tamil months of Thai, Maasi and Panguni when they set out for seaweed collection in shallow waters. "During other parts of the year too, we bring in a handful that we cook together," she says.

Lakshmi likes to cook snails like she cooks chicken. "Once the meat is removed from the shell after boiling, I make a thokku-like preparation using plenty of tomatoes, and also add ground coconut for some variation," she says.

**Rising profile**  
The charm of rural cuisine lies in its simplicity and the implements used, says celebrity chef K Damodharan (Damu).

"Besides the actual ingredients like snails or baby crabs and the spices that are ground on stone tools like the *ammikkal* or *ural*, what also adds flavour, is the cook's physical touch, what we call *kai manam*. You will lose the authentic taste of traditional food if you overcook the dish or smother it in ready-made spice powders," says the chef.

Both Subramanian and Damu are thrilled with the buzz around rural Tamil cuisine in recent weeks due to Chef Vijay's award.

Subramanian says the news had filtered down to their village, thanks to the Internet. "We were so thrilled on Chef Vijay Kumar's behalf, and excited to see our humble ingredients being held in such esteem. I feel his award is an honour for our nathai," he says.

weight amounts to meat, while the rest constitutes the shell. While sea snails have a shiny white shell, Suman points out that freshwater snails are brownish in colour. "Both are delicious, but sea snails are more special since they are not easy to come by," he says, adding that he first boils them until the flesh is released. "I then fry the meat with onions, tomatoes, pepper, chilli powder, and cumin to make a semi-gravy that can be had with rice," he explains.

In Pulicat, fishermen gather snails

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V SUBRAMANIAN  
Farmer-chef

**As light as air** Prajwal Parajuly with the cloud pudding at Chatti in New York. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



#### SOUTHERN LIVING

# Musings on a cloud

**When Prajwal Parajuly is not mocking those who crave filter coffee abroad, he is queuing up for tender coconut pudding and ghee rice in New York. Hypocrisy never tasted this good**

Mary in London (very good). And the just-opened Chatti in New York, the first foreign foray of Chef Regi of the Kappa Chakka Kandhari fame, which is too young to earn a star.

Now, I have been a KCK fan for a while. The food that's served at the Nungambakkam, Chennai, establishment is what your nonagenarian Malayalee grandmother might whip up. Everything I have eaten there – the lobster fry, the coconut prawn, the duck

mappas – is wholesome. But my relationship with the restaurant is somewhat mangled by the cloud pudding – that ridiculous, magnificent tender-coconut dome. The blancmange is as light as a cloud, fluffy as a cloud, luminescent as a cloud. It feels like you're consuming air, if air were filled with whimsy and delight and agar agar. As a novelist, I am wary of PhD theses finding symbolism in my books where there's none, the rice dumplings in coconut milk are unlike

anything I've had before. The overnight-fermented clay pot fish curry is unusual in that it is served at room temperature.

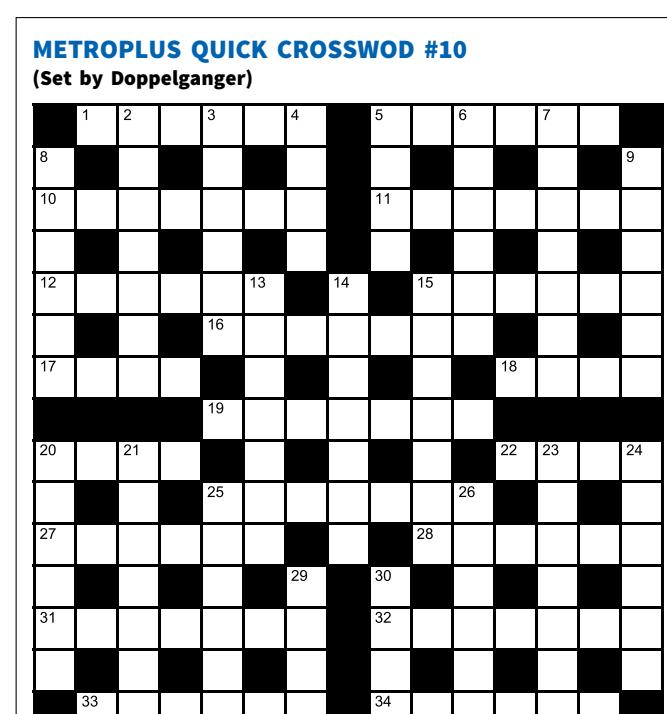
I fall for the black-chickpea kadala curry. It's so light. The snapper – spiced with tender peppercorn, gooseberry, Kandhari chilli and turmeric – makes me want to cry with joy. And there's ghee rice. How can rice – rice! – be so magical? It smells of cardamom and ghee and tastes exactly like it smells.

It's toddy-shop cuisine, so the drinks can't be far behind. The Malayalee Old-Fashioned – embellished with toasted coconut, bitters and jaggery – is theatrically revealed, but it's the tequila-based Kandhari drink, in which the flavour of the lethal Kandhari chilli has been playfully captured, that does it for me. The clarified sambar drink – appropriately named Sam Bar – is someone else's favourite.

"Will it get a star?" one of us asks. I think it will. It better. This is good, sincere food. It's quality food. It's happy food. It's food that transcends what's on the plate. It's food that tells stories.

I am eager for others to experience the dessert, my slice of Chennai, the divine dome of KCK. The cloud pudding – an eye-wateringly expensive \$16 – pinches me hard because I have eaten it in Chennai for 125 rupees. Our group is divided. Two of us declare the pudding sublime. The other two pronounce the jaggery palada superior. It doesn't matter. We order another cloud pudding. It's worth every one of those darn sixteen dollars. The chef sends us yet another.

**Prajwal Parajuly** is the author of *The Guruk's Daughter and Land Where I Flew*. He loves idli, loathes naan, and is indifferent to coffee. He teaches Creative Writing at Krea University and oscillates between New York City and Sri City.



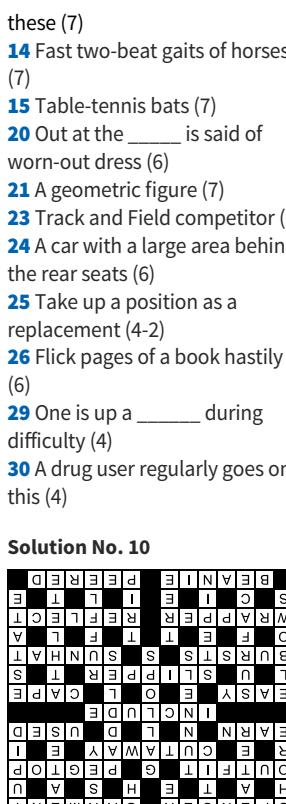
**Across**  
1 Car Nicobar is an \_\_\_\_ (6)  
5 Seize control by force (6)  
10 Hollywood star \_\_\_\_ Tracy (7)  
11 Article of clothing (7)  
12 Group of people working as a team (6)  
13 A type of 11A (3,3)  
16 Type of coat (7)  
17 Acquire through merit (4)  
18 Not new (4)  
19 Put in (7)  
20 Not strict (4)  
22 \_\_\_\_ of Good Hope (4)  
25 A type of footwear (7)  
27 Tyre \_\_\_\_ at high speed can be dangerous (6)  
28 This has wide brim to protect face (6)  
31 Material encasing (7)  
32 To bend back in Latin (7)  
33 Rounded brimless cap (6)  
34 Looked intently (6)

**Down**  
2 11A worn in winters (7)  
3 Area approximately between 0° and 66° 34'N (6)  
4 Challenge someone (4)  
5 A \_\_\_\_ official is one who is eminent (4)  
6 British breed of cattle (6)  
7 Sires (7)  
8 Opposite of at sea (6)  
9 Showing lack of comprehension (6)  
13 The Viet Cong made many of

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these (7)  
14 Fast two-beat gaits of horses (7)  
15 Table-tennis bats (7)  
20 Out at the \_\_\_\_ is said of worn-out dress (6)  
21 A geometric figure (7)  
23 Track and Field competitor (7)  
24 A car with a large area behind the rear seats (6)  
25 Take up a position as a replacement (4-2)  
26 Flick pages of a book hastily (6)  
29 One is up a \_\_\_\_ during difficulty (4)  
30 A drug user regularly goes on this (4)

**Solution No. 10**



**Prajwal Parajuly**

I am often asked what I do when I want Chennai food in New York. I matter-of-factly say I go to Semma – the best-known Indian restaurant in America – like getting a table there isn't an ordeal. In truth, though, I have long dismissed people who live between countries and hanker for one place when they are in another. This applies to those fools who complain about the lack of good pizza in Delhi while they eat at an Indian restaurant in London every third day. Ditto for those craving the perfect filter coffee in San Francisco and then crying about the inauthentic Mexican food in Pune. One of the privileges of actually living between cities is that you don't have to miss a particular food for too long.

Besides, why would I want to eat Indian food outside India, I have often argued.

All that was, of course, until I started seeing someone who has taken it upon herself to convince me that no cuisine can quite measure up to Indian. After countless battles about where to eat, especially when we travel, we have come to a compromise. Because my deliciously alliterative name would be well accentuated with a middle initial – Prajwal P for Pretentious Parajuly – I have consented to visiting an Indian restaurant abroad only if it has at least a Michelin star.

So, yes, I'll allow myself to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to one of the seven starred Indian restaurants in London or to the above-mentioned Semma, the lone starred Indian place in New York, all the while feeling smug that I have come out far ahead in the bargain. Sometimes I'll altruistically make exceptions for non-starred restaurants: Bungalow, Dhamaka and Kanyakumari in New York (fair, good, good). Chutney

Mary in London (very good). And the just-opened Chatti in New York, the first foreign

foray of Chef Regi of the Kappa Chakka Kandhari fame, which is too young to earn a star. Now, I have been a KCK fan for a while. The food that's served at the Nungambakkam, Chennai, establishment is what your nonagenarian Malayalee grandmother might whip up. Everything I have eaten there – the lobster fry, the coconut prawn, the duck

mappas – is wholesome. But my relationship with the restaurant is somewhat mangled by the cloud pudding – that ridiculous, magnificent tender-coconut dome. The blancmange is as light as a cloud, fluffy as a cloud, luminescent as a cloud. It feels like you're consuming air, if air were filled with whimsy and delight and agar agar. As a novelist, I am wary of PhD theses finding symbolism in my books where there's none, the rice dumplings in coconut milk are unlike



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## Through the looking glass

In Tambaram, we step into Kannadi Cupboard, a quaint everyday gallery



practitioners and nearly 50 people sent us an object each, from the glass cupboards in their homes. We laid all of these out in an interactive setup and welcomed people to come to our space and see this," Prasanna says. The glass cupboard at the everyday gallery still houses these objects, a mix of dolls, ceramics, artwork, crafts, cassettes and more, a representation of what Indian households across the country showcase and cherish.

Nearly six months on, Kannadi Cupboard now hosts regular Zine Club meetings, where Prasanna and Keerthana's vision for encouraging everything self-published and creative comes to the fore. "From tailoring cloth waste to posters for periodicals, we use a host of different material to work with in every session. Zines are traditionally magazines but for me, it is any self-published material in any form, any size and about anything with no

A nurturing space A Zine Club session in progress; (below) art by Poorvaja Rathi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

censoring involved," Prasanna explains.

Kannadi Cupboard is also set to host the first of many artist showcases, this weekend, with an exhibition titled Maayai by Chennai-based artist Poorvaja Rathi, where she attempts to bring through her reflections on the duality of the city she grew up in. "In a typical gallery setting, there will not be as much freedom for an artist to showcase her art in its truest form. Kannadi Cupboard has focussed on nurturing the process more; I was even allowed to paint on the floors if I wanted to and it has been all about using the space to the best of my ability," says Poorvaja.

Keeping with Prasanna's vision of being an evolving space for the community, one that encourages people from different foci to create, work out of and display, Kannadi Cupboard's line up of upcoming events is varied and interesting. While they hosted a mango potluck in June which had people bringing in everything from a prawn and mango stew, mango bhel to a mango tres leches, a salad potluck is on the calendar for July 13. Aithihya Ashok Kumar, animation film director from Studio Chitrakoothu will be leading a workshop on animating on lightbox on July 20, and for August, Kannadi Cupboard just announced its annual self-published book fair Padithavudan Kizhithuvadavum.

"As we grow, we are also reframing the whole idea behind this space and have a host of ideas constantly about all what we can do with design research and publication, as well as with solo-shows and clubs. We hope to have focus groups, discussions, and generally keep the conversation going about the city, its creators, artists, spaces and how they are encouraged," Prasanna adds.

Kannadi Cupboard is on the 2nd floor, 49 Venkatesan Street, New Market, West Tambaram. Poorvaja Rathi's show Maayai will be held on July 5 and 6 from 11am to 8pm. Follow @kannadi.cupboard on Instagram for more details.

They were convinced that Chennai needed a space like this, which could grow on to become a community-building space in the long run. When the space was launched in December, they did so with a callback to the Kannadi Cupboard; a glass cupboard found in every home. "We reached out to a host of creator



Shot on OnePlus

#FramesofIndia

# Hope and Home

**How difficult is it to build your dream home?** Tamil film *3BHK*, releasing on July 4, explores this thought

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**S**mall is the new big in Tamil cinema this year. A few buggies of 2025 might have disappointed fans, but the relatively-smaller ones keep giving.

*Tourist Family*, a film about a Sri Lankan family finding a new home in Tamil Nadu, won big at the box office earlier this year. It also stole many hearts for its emotional performances.

*3BHK*, slated for release this Friday, hopes to do the same. Starring Siddharth, Sarath Kumar, Devayani and Meetha Raghunath in lead roles – as a four-member family whose

dream is to own a house – the film's trailer has had overwhelmingly positive comments, most of which highlight its emotional and



## 'Cinema is a writer's medium'

Actor Siddharth's biggest challenge in *3BHK* was to be a specific person from start to finish without catering to commercial requirements. "My most exciting performances are playing a flesh-and-blood hero and the challenge there is to stay in character throughout. Like the lows and highs of Eswaran in my previous film *Chiththa*, in *3BHK*, Prabhu has to travel through different time periods. We hope people see Prabhu exactly the way director Sri Ganesh has written it," says Siddharth, who has also sung a song in the film. The actor describes this Friday as one of the most important days in Tamil cinema, with both director Ram's *Paranthu Po* and *3BHK* hitting screens. "It's amazing that both of us have made happy, feel-good films. *3BHK* helped me reminisce and remember a lot of my life and helped me understand about my co-actors' lives. Cinema is a writer's medium. I want Sri Ganesh to win big, so that we can judge the size of films based on quality of the script as opposed to the budget."

Produced by Arun Viswa, *3BHK*'s central core is how buying a dream home takes an entire lifetime for a few families, like the one showcased in the film. "For some, it defines their entire life; either they have to spend their entire lives planning for it, or shell out EMI," says Sri Ganesh, whose earlier films were *Kurudhi Aatam* and *8 Thotakkal*.

## Room for everyone

Siddharth, Sarath Kumar, Devayani and Meetha Raghunath in *3BHK*; (above) Sri Ganesh. SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Does it bother him that today's audiences, used to watching films on OTT platforms from the comforts of their drawing rooms, are visiting theatres these days in search of a visual spectacle? "The big screen is not only for visual spectacles. I feel we go for an emotional experience; it can be an action, comedy or a feel-good film. While technical aspects are important, for a film like *3BHK*, we would have achieved what we set out to do if you walk out of the theatre full of emotion," says Sri Ganesh, who describes director Vikraman's 1997 film *Suryavamsam* as 'life-defining', apart from picking *Vaanathaipola* and *Anandham* as his favourite Tamil feel-good movies.

*3BHK* has a strong technical team, with cinematographers Dinesh Krishnan B and Jithin Stanislaus, and art director Vinoth Rajkumar adding value. Also adding strength is young music composer Amrit Rammath's tunes. "When we started designing this album, we wanted to do something like 96. It was a soulful album, a result of thinking purely about the music and beyond what is trending on Reels," he says.

Sri Ganesh's early inspirations were comedian-actor Crazy Mohan – he has worked on the sets of a few plays of the playwright – and director Mysskin – he has watched *Nandalala* multiple times and assisted the filmmaker. He was also a part of *Naalaya Iyakkunar*, the popular TV programme that nurtured many current-day filmmakers. "I have evolved a lot as a writer in the last few years. When I did my debut film *8 Thotakkal* in 2017, I wrote it as a fast-paced thriller because I was anxious to get the attention of audiences. Now, I am confident that I can hold audiences with just emotions and drama. My aim is to tell heartfelt stories."

## Caller tune

**Revathy S Varmah's latest Malayalam film, *Ee Valayam*, talks about mobile phone addiction**

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**F**ilmmaker Revathy S Varmah has worked with A-listers such as Shahrukh Khan, Sachin Tendulkar, and Amitabh Bachchan as an ad filmmaker. She is also working on a PT Usha biopic. But she holds her latest, *Ee Valayam*, close to her heart. She says, "This is a film that needed to be made, for society, for the next generation."

*Ee Valayam*, which released on June 13, pangs on nomophobia, or the fear of being without a mobile phone. It tells the story of Nilaavu, a high school student, her mobile phone addiction and the downward spiral it causes. While the story is by Revathy, Sreejith Mohandas has written the screenplay.

"We did not sensationalise or dramatise the subject,"

she says, "It is a movie for the family, an entertaining, commercial film with all the elements of one. Making a commercial film is easy but turning a subject such as *Ee Valayam* into a full-length commercial film is not."

When classes (school and college) shifted to the online mode, mobile phones, which until then were optional, became a necessity. "We hear of children who have stopped interacting with friends, refusing to get out of their rooms and going down the Internet rabbit hole. We need to talk about it."

The film has Renji Panicker, Muthuman, Nandu and Shalu Rahim in important roles, besides newcomer Ashly Usha. "I deliberately picked new actors because they would bring in a certain freshness," says the director, whose last outing in Malayalam was 2013's *Maad Dad*, starring Nazriya Nazim.



**Life cell** Renji Panicker, Nandu and Muthuman in a scene from the film. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## New beginnings

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal's daughter is set to make her acting debut. Vismaya Mohanlal will play the lead in Jude Anthany Joseph's *Thudakkam*. Mohanlal took to social media to congratulate his daughter for bagging her maiden film. "Dear Mayakutty, may your 'Thudakkam' (beginning) be just the first step in a lifelong love affair with cinema," Mohanlal wrote on X. Jude Anthany Joseph said he is set to make a "small, humble film". "I see this as a calling. When my dear Laettan (Mohanlal) and Suchichechi (Suchitra Mohanlal) entrusted me with their beloved Maya's debut film, I saw the sheer joy and hope that filled their eyes. I'm not making any grand claims; this is a small, humble film. I have always made films that speak to my heart, and this one is no different," Anthany wrote. Prior to her film debut, Vismaya was involved in poetry. *Grains of Stardust*, published by Penguin Random House India, was a collection of her poetry.

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