

Theppakad Elephant Camp is now home to two new elephant calves P2

AMBATI RAYUDU ON WHY CSK IS ‘FAMILY’ P4



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The clink of glass marbles against bottles, a burst of citrusy fizz, and a childhood memory comes flooding back. Goli soda, the iconic Indian beverage, is returning across major cities.

Also known as banta soda in North India, it is a drink made with carbonated water, flavoured syrup, and sometimes a hint of salt. The magic lies in its unique bottling method. Unlike regular soda bottles, goli soda comes in a Codd-neck bottle with a marble stopper. To access the drink, you press the marble into the neck, releasing the pressure to create a satisfying fizz.

Since the mid-20th Century, goli soda has held a special place in Indian beverage culture. However, the rise of mass-produced aerated drinks led to goli soda's decline. "Large companies came in with standardised designs and universal flavours," says Abdul Khader, co-founder of Spark Goli Soda, a Hyderabad-based brand. "They offered a taste people were familiar with, and goli soda, with its regional variations, kind of faded away."

But, over the past five years, goli soda is experiencing a delightful comeback.

Reasons for resurgence

According to Abdul, there are now about 700 goli soda brands (including hyperlocal ones) in India. Social media has played a crucial role in the drink's second wind, with eye-catching photos and videos sparking interest among younger generations, many unfamiliar with the drink. "There's a definite nostalgia factor," says Raghuraman Gobinathan, co-founder, Kaalaiyan Goli Soda in Coimbatore.

But he believes the resurgence goes beyond just fond memories. Cultural identity is a factor, too. "The Jallikattu protests in 2017



definitely played a role in the growth of our brand," he says. "There was this anti-MNC sentiment in Tamil Nadu, and people were looking for alternatives to the colas of big brands. Goli soda, a traditional South Indian beverage, fit the bill perfectly."

Goli soda also offers a distinct

Pop culture

Did you know that there are now about 700 goli soda brands in India? The drink's resurgence is fuelled by nostalgia, and a growing consumer preference for unique flavours

taste profile, often featuring local ingredients. "We focus on 'desi' flavours like *pudina* (mint) and *jeera* (cumin)," says Abdul. "These resonate with people and perfectly complement Indian cuisine like biryani. It's a return to familiar, authentic tastes."

The emphasis on hygiene and safety standards also helps. "Unlike the old days, many brands now use semi-automatic machinery and prioritise proper certification for their ingredients," says Dinesh Kumar Gopal, director, Phoenix Goli Soda in Chennai. "This focus on quality resonates with today's health-conscious consumers." It also ensures a shelf-life of six months.

Rahul Johar, founder-CEO, Oxbow Brands, which sells goli soda in Bengaluru, sheds light on the drink's

growing popularity. "Goli soda has seen a notable uptick in Bangalore in recent years. Its nostalgic resonance coupled with diverse new brands and flavours has played a crucial role in its resurgence," he explains.

This nostalgic appeal is not limited to older generations; the younger demographic is also being introduced to this cultural icon through regional

cinema and innovative marketing.

The scorching summer of 2024 has significantly boosted goli soda's sales. "This fiscal year, we have witnessed a remarkable surge in sales, with our brand Dobra Pop Goli experiencing a three-fold increase over the last two months compared to the colder winter months," says Rahul.

Fizz or fizzle?

Despite its resurgence, the drink faces stiff competition from established beverage giants. Abdul points out the pricing challenges. "Glass bottles are expensive, and while we've automated parts of the process, the production costs remain high compared to PET plastic bottles [that contain colas]," he says. This cost factor makes it difficult for goli soda to compete with multinational cola brands that offer similar volumes at lower prices.

Dinesh emphasises the cost and effort of maintaining high standards. "We don't compromise on quality, but this means our goli soda is more expensive," he explains. This price difference can be a barrier for some customers.

The lack of brand value is another hurdle. "Most goli soda companies are micro-brands with limited regional presence, which affects growth. Unlike big cola companies, we don't have the same level of brand recognition," Abdul adds. This has led to a slight dip in demand.

Reinventing the marble

Goli soda is not just

riding on nostalgia; it is evolving with modern trends. Vendors are experimenting to keep the beverage relevant, from innovative flavours to new packaging.

For instance, Spark Goli Soda has introduced a Remix line, combining multiple flavours such as Green Twister (lime and green apple) and Peach Punch (peach and lime), catering to younger and international markets.

The secret to success, according to Dinesh, is a mix of traditional and modern flavours. "When it comes to Chennai or even the whole of Tamil Nadu, nothing beats paneer (rose water) flavour," he says, "But the name causes a bit of a mix-up outside Tamil Nadu as people confuse it for the dairy paneer."

Packaging plays a crucial role, too. Traditionally sold in robust glass bottles with a marble stopper, the packaging is a nostalgic experience. However, vendors are modernising the packaging to cater to contemporary consumer preferences and regulatory requirements.

"We developed a new, lightweight bottle that meets international quality standards," says Abdul, "It's similar to the bottle used for the popular Japanese drink Ramune. We have launched a discount programme for our single-use glass bottles. You'll earn points towards your next purchase when you buy a case of 24 bottles and return the empties."

Meanwhile, Dinesh emphasises their commitment to quality packaging. "We use natural colouring agents, sugar (as opposed to cheap and harmful sweetening agents), and sturdy, recyclable plastic bottles. Our bottles are properly sealed and designed to prevent children from accidentally swallowing the marble, ensuring safety and quality."

More than just a drink, it is a symbol of local tradition and a nostalgic reminder of simpler times. So, pop the marble, unleash the fizz, and savour the taste of a bygone era.

Fizzy memories (Top)  
Spark Goli Soda's appearances at music festivals; (right) 100-year-old Kannan and Co. Goli Soda in Vellore. C VENKATACHALAPATHY AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Eyes fixed on the sky above him, V Srihari takes a step back and launches his glider. It flies briefly before landing on the ground. Before his second try, he checks the direction of the wind.

"This is a triangle delta force design. If the glider has thin, long wings, it will generate too much of a lift and will not stay in the air for long," the 12-year-old aeromodelling enthusiast, who is a student of SEED Academy, explains. His glider stays afloat for exactly 3.77 seconds.

Srihari was one among many enthusiasts (totalling 150 teams), both from schools and colleges, who gathered at the grounds of Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science on an overcast day, to have their innovations take to the skies as part of an aeromodelling competition.

From being an area of interest when they were younger, a developing hobby, or even an activity they first got introduced to on YouTube, every participant at the competition had a story to tell about their passion for wings in the sky.

Commercial airplanes flying above

UP IN THE AIR

Aeromodelling enthusiasts congregated at Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science to show off their model aircrafts which took to the skies



his house prompted Syed Rayan to seek out videos online to learn aeromodelling. A student of B. S. Abdur Rahman Crescent Institute Of Science And Technology, Syed Rayan and his teammate Laila Musthafa, a student from Karunya Institute, had a model aircraft made of balsa wood that had many gathering around to see it before the competition started.

"Based on the truss structure used for bridges, this model weighs only 300 grams. We wanted to build something which was as light as possible, but also able to carry a heavy payload. Balsa wood is commonly used in the aeromodelling industry to make lightweight aircrafts," he explains. A self-taught enthusiast, Syed has participated and found success in several competitions.

"Aeromodelling is, however, an expensive passion to pursue. To make a model aircraft from scratch costs anywhere between ₹15,000 to ₹20,000," he says. Srihari, Syed and Laila's aircraft models won top prizes in their respective categories.

Fly away Participants at the Aeromodelling competition. R RAVINDRAN

An active member of the Madras Aero Club, M Siju, a student from the Indian Institute of Management Tiruchi, also emphasised on how the right guidance and mentors could help one take their hobby to the next level.

"It was a dream of mine, to make something fly in the sky," he says, holding up his model aircraft. It was just minutes ago that his remote controlled aircraft flew around the field where the competition was being held and made a safe landing, to applause from the viewers.

Most participants say that they turned into aeromodelling enthusiasts during the pandemic lockdown. Aeromodelling clubs on college campuses, including the one in Hindustan Institute saw a spike in numbers.

"Many students saw how unmanned aerial vehicles were used to drop off medicines and other aid when cities were under lockdown. This piqued their interest," says SN Sridhara, Vice Chancellor, Hindustan University.

Watching the participants come forth and exhibit their innovations, he says he is quite sure of one thing.

"Students are coming up with intelligent modifications, and this means we will have many interesting innovations in this space."



Canopy of art

Chennai-based visual artist Parvathi Nayar invites participation for a community art project that aims to highlight Chennai's urban greenery. Those interested can take a picture of a tree or plant you encounter in your daily life on your mobile phone, and email the image with your name and location. Additionally, you can write a brief note on what the tree/plant means to you.

Email your images to [arun.sankar@goethe.de](mailto:arun.sankar@goethe.de).



Jazz night

Aman Mahajan and Kirtana Krishna, a jazz piano duo, will perform live in the city. Aman is known for his versatility on the keys while Kirtana's talent lies in her vocal range. The duo's collaboration infuses traditional jazz elements with twists, creating an innovative musical experience for the audience.

@Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. May 24, 8pm onwards. For reservations, call 9790787813





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**T**hambi is angry. His milk is late, and to make it worse, his evening walk has been delayed. He flays his tiny trunk and charges ahead, knocking off a plastic chair on his way. It takes four grown men to calm the four-month-old elephant calf down. One of them hurries to make a mug of warm milk, which he offers through a tube. A little later, with a full tummy, he takes a satisfied stroll. This is enough activity for one day for the newest member at Theppakadu elephant camp, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the Nilgiris.

The male calf was brought to the camp on April 10 after efforts to reunite him with his herd failed. He was found abandoned at Periyanaickenpalayam forests near Coimbatore. Nearby, in another enclosure, is a five-month-old that was brought to the camp on March 9 after her mother died of health complications at Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve. The female elephant too drinks milk – much like human babies.

How are the new members getting used to life in an elephant camp?

“They do something new every



# It takes a village

**Theppakadu elephant camp at Mudumalai Tiger Reserve now has two new inhabitants: a male and female calf**

other day,” chuckles N Saranya, forester, Theppakadu elephant camp. When the babies arrived, Saranya admits to feeling jittery, owing to the huge responsibility on their shoulders. “It is just like tending to human babies,” she says. The sleepless nights, feeding at short intervals, changing sheets, staying attentive to their hunger cues: it is the same with elephant calves.

According to R Ramesh, livestock inspector, the calves demand to be fed 12 to 14 times a day, drinking 1.5 litres of formula milk each time. “We keep a watch on their body temperature, and ensure they are resting and urinating well,” he explains. The calves are under the care of a team of five,



**The two of them, referred to as thambi and paapa, spend most of their time indoors and go for short strolls**

among whom M Raman is the senior mahout. He has experience in caring for a calf two decades ago when he worked at the Vandalur Zoo in Chennai. “The calves are always playful; they have the *kaattu buddhi* [ways of the forest] intact, and hence keep butting us with their heads,” says the 53-year-old.

The two of them, referred to as *thambi* and *paapa*, spend most of their time indoors and go for short strolls, flanked by their caretakers in the morning and evening. “All the 27 camp elephants have a training session at 8am, and we bring out the calves just then, and they run about,” says Saranya.

But this is done only if the weather is right – they remain inside if it is too hot or too cold. “They are very sensitive, which is why no one, other than their caretakers, are allowed near them,” she explains.

The calves have a fenced-in space for strolls nearby, and sleep on jute sack beds that have a thin filling of coconut fibre. “Caretakers keep changing these beds as and when the calves wet them,” says Saranya.

Even as the people at the camp speak of the calves’ shenanigans with warmth, a certain melancholy permeates the air once in a while. “Nothing can replace the care of their mother,” says C Vidhya, Deputy Director of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, (Core Area).

“Usually, in a herd, mothers ensure calves are very close by, and even if they go grazing, calves are left in the care of another female, such as an aunt,” she adds. “We have to give the calves a similar feeling; every time they stretch their trunks, they must feel there is someone around.” The calves, according to her, were brought to the camp as a last resort. “We tried our best to reunite them with their herds, but couldn’t,” she says.

Vidhya explains that the Theppakadu camp is known for caring for calves, with experienced mahouts and *cavadis* (assistants). This is where Bommi and Raghu that featured in the Oscar-winning documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* are being raised. The calves are also being monitored for their internal health.

“We have carried out a few tests and screenings and are waiting for the results,” she says, adding that they will know more about their overall health then. She adds: “We hope they grow up together.”

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13586

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**Across**

1 Mention and identify (4)  
3 Lower jawbone (8)  
8 Well ventilated (4)  
9 Game with pitchers (8)  
11 Balkan country on the Adriatic (10)  
14 Small edible crustacean (6)  
15 Depressing experience (6)  
17 Solid figure with eight plane faces (10)  
20 Discourteous (8)  
21 Brandy-like spirit distilled from grape residue (4)  
22 Behind (in France) (8)  
23 Uncouth youth (informal) (4)

**Down**

1 Accident narrowly avoided (4,4)  
2 Sailors (8)  
4 Gobsmacked (6)  
5 Firmly established (4-6)  
6 Prejudice (4)  
7 Fish (often jellied) (4)  
10 Pasta in long slender threads (10)  
12 Earnest plea (8)

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

13 Hence rag (anag) — red wine grape (8)  
16 (Proverbially mad) milliner (6)  
18 Intellect (4)  
19 Incentive (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated May 30, 2024.

Solution No. 13585

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**Fun and frolic**

Magician Shakthi will be putting up a magic show for children which includes illusions and tricks at the Lake View party hall located inside the Chetpet Eco-park. Children can also use the trampoline and igloo house, and participate in outdoor games including balloon shooting and toy car rides. A flea market will also take place.

@Chetpet Eco-Park, May 26. Entry is ₹199.

## Lights, camera, feast

**The Park Chennai pays homage to Gemini Studios through a cinema-inspired menu to celebrate its 22nd anniversary**



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**C**hennai's The Park, located by the Gemini flyover in Nungambakkam, is 22 years in the business. As homage to the land's previous occupant, the famed Gemini Studios, a cinema-inspired menu has been introduced to mark the celebrations.

“We watched several movies here to put together the menu for Chef’s Cut. Each of these dishes is of great significance to the movies, but we present them with a twist,” says Ashutosh Nerlekar, executive chef, The Park Chennai.

The menu, which opens out like a film reel, features 11 dishes from Indian and international films. While there are predictable picks like Pixar’s *Ratatouille* and *The Lunch Box* starring Irrfan Khan, the list also features films like *Tampopo*, a Japanese film which released



Available for lunch and dinner at 601, The Park Chennai, Nungambakkam until May 25. Dishes start at ₹425.

Reel magic Dishes on the menu as a part of Chef’s Cut at The Park, Chennai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mozzarella on top. It is served with a fluffy braid of masala brioche.

Although the menu is a homage to Gemini Studios, which played a significant role in the development of Tamil cinema, the list unfortunately does not feature any Tamil movies. Instead, Chef Ashutosh brings us the *Tampopo*-inspired ramen bowl that is reminiscent of a rasam made in a Tamil household. A tangle of Somyeon noodles sits in a bowl of peppery tomato and curry leaf broth with steamed baby bok choy, fluffy mini Mysore bonda, and a thick prawn thokku with a hit of chilli.

We are then served a big piece of rib-eye steak with buttery lion’s mane mushroom and a thick Bordelaise sauce, based on the 2007 romantic comedy *No Reservations*.

Finally, we get to live every movie lover’s dream with a golden ticket from *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* that comes in the form of a silky French chocolate cake, topped with a crunchy peanut crumble and vanilla-whipped rich ganache.



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**L**ast month, a group of 10 art enthusiasts sporting pop art-inspired outfits and headbands, got together at Hotel Savera in Mylapore for a soiree. When artist and furniture designer Ansaline Sruthi, the host of this paint party, said it was time to pick up the brush, the gathering grew thoughtful, interpreting Andy Warhol’s art. They painted filter coffee instead of the iconic painting involving Coca-Cola bottles; and Aishwarya Rai instead of Marilyn Monroe.

Sruthi has been curating these monthly thematic paint parties in Chennai since the beginning of the year. Each gathering is a celebration of a renowned artist whose work serves as inspiration for the evening’s festivities. Attendees are not only treated to an painting experience but also indulge in a specially curated menu that pays homage to the featured artist’s cultural influences and personal preferences.

“Chennai has a lot of art enthusiasts who feel intimidated to paint amidst others who are more professionally skilled. At these paint parties, they get to learn about famous artists like

## High tea with Frida Kahlo

**Recreate the world of SH Raza or Andy Warhol with stencils, stickers and paneer**



Salvador Dali or Andy Warhol and paint their own interpretations of their work without any insecurities,” says Sruthi.

Painting the greats

The first artist to be featured was SH Raza, who is known for his geometric, abstract paintings. This session was followed by Dali in February whose meditative rose became the primary focus. Next came Frida Kahlo’s self-expressionist work with

bold colours.

“I provide the participants with all the supplies needed, from colours to brushes and sometimes even stencils or carbon paper. It is not as intimidating to recreate the

**Among the line drawings and cutouts provided in the Andy Warhol edition, Rajinikanth’s image became the most popular pick.**

Imitation is flattery (Left) Enthusiastic participants at the art soiree; (below) host Ansaline Sruthi; and food at the event. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



work of Raza because it was primarily geometric patterns. But in the case of Dali or Warhol, I provide stencils and stickers. For Frida Kahlo, we looked at what her art meant, which is self expression, and the participants put their own identities on the canvas,” she explains.

Among the line drawings and cutouts provided in the Andy Warhol edition, Rajinikanth’s image became the most popular pick. To go along with the theme, Chef Jesu Lambert from Savera sent in chicken and paneer sliders, fried chicken, and a mac and cheese.

“For the Raza edition we served Indian food, the Dali edition had a lovely Spanish spread and for Frida, we had bold Mexican bites. I usually recommend that my participants dress up,” shares Sruthi.

While these parties are conducted in an elaborate fashion with a paid entry and different pre-booked venues only 10-15 participants can take part in one edition. The next artist to be featured is Katsushika Hokusai with special focus on his iconic *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* on May 25.

If you wish to participate, contact Ansaline Sruthi at 6374902909. Entry is ₹4,500.



**Fifty Indian sculptors** come together to showcase their work in metal, wood, ceramic, paper clay and fibreglass

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At Nungambakkam's Art Houz gallery which is tucked-away from the limelight, stands metal, wood and ceramic in all shapes, sizes and forms; 52 of them precisely. Delicate human figures, wooden animals stitched with leather and fabric, ceramic plates, and even large monochrome blocks in clay, all take up space. Here, a cross section of India's contemporary sculpture landscape comes alive. Titled AI 50, the show is an offshoot of AI 100, a similar outing that focussed on painting last year.

"The show invites viewers to contemplate the interplay between form, material and theme," says Poornima Shivram, curator. The power of connection and communication stands at the core of the collection.

The small gallery space packs everything – from forms and figures that capture the very essence of human experience to literal animal figures that exude techniques of a medium that is hard to master. In senior artist Venkatachalapathi's winding bronze sculpture titled Harmony, it is hard to miss the



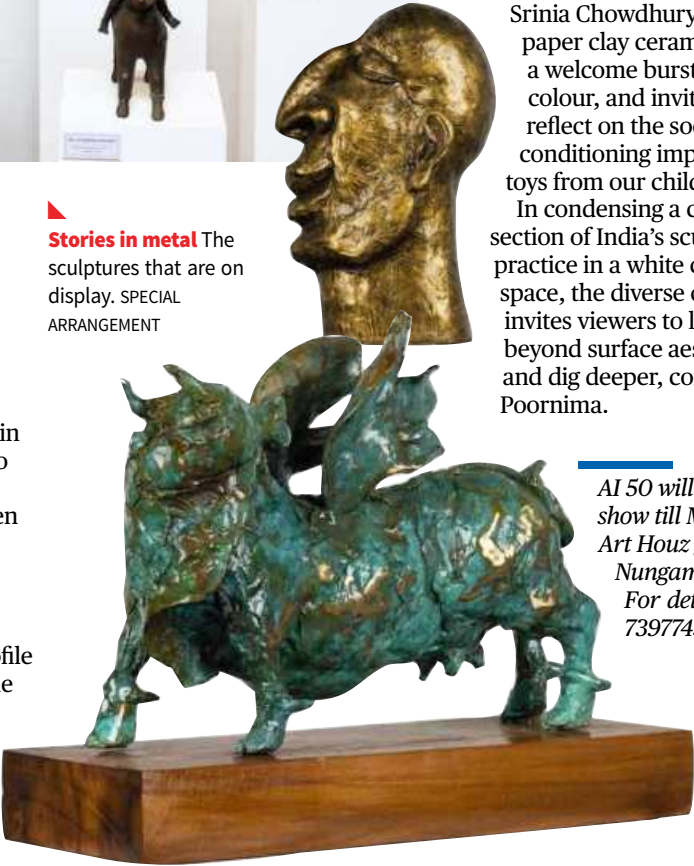
## Life, made by hand

marriage of classical and modernist influences.

While the form itself may seem abstract, his familiarity with the medium of bronze speaks volumes of the artist's decades of experience with sculpting. S Kantha Reddy's large, almost turquoise piece in bronze titled Capcut is hard to miss. A tad bit surrealist, the piece, maps the tussle between the pace of urban life and traditional values, showing a weary face bogged down by protruding threads of molten metal. Face 5, a large side profile of a bust by M Basavaraj, made of fibreglass, is another distinctive attempt at capturing the natural world in all its mystique.

G Subramaniam's small

**Stories in metal** The sculptures that are on display. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



sculpture of a girl wielding a flute, titled Flute Player, is nothing short of a delight. The artist known for his collages started experimenting with sculptures in 2019. "I lost my daughter when she was nine years old. This May 19, she would have turned 40," he says. The artist's famed 'girl' series is an ode to his late daughter and his early memories of her. "Though I was very interested in bronze, my preoccupation with the girl series stayed even through my collages," adds the artist who finds solace in the 'lost wax method' when it comes to sculptures. Shanta Samantha's 2020 work titled Jumping, shares a similar sensibility; the figure of a girl, mid-leap is somehow indicative of wild abandon and joyous liberation. The detailing in both these works make the forms seem nimble, and delicate.

Among the greats, stand quirky, contemporary collectibles too. Neelam Chauhan's piece that is reminiscent of Edvard Munch's painting Scream is one such. Srinia Chowdhury's small paper clay ceramic work is a welcome burst of colour, and invites one to reflect on the societal conditioning imposed on toys from our childhood. In condensing a cross section of India's sculpting practice in a white cube space, the diverse collection invites viewers to look beyond surface aesthetics, and dig deeper, concludes Poornima.

AI 50 will be on show till May 30 at Art Houz gallery, Nungambakkam. For details, call 7397745684.



## Crafting perfection with the goodness of milk

Who doesn't want to wake up to the aroma of freshly brewed tea or coffee? On top of that if you get that perfect creamy touch, that's just absolutely marvelous. And that's where Amulya Dairy Whitener comes in. With its creamy texture and rich flavor, it becomes the ideal companion for all tea and coffee lovers across India.

Amulya Dairy Whitener has the highest milk fat content among all dairy whitener brands in India. With a massive 20% milk fat, it's the creamiest dairy whitener that you would ever come across. That is exactly what sets it apart from others and naturally brings it to the spotlight. The perks are not just limited to its creamy goodness. It is also a multipurpose product. Whether you're whipping up a batch of sweets, baking a cake, or making a creamy cup of curd, Amulya Dairy Whitener is the perfect ingredient to take your recipes to the next level. It's basically a sweetened substitute for milk, making it a must-

have in every kitchen. Produced in state-of-the-art, fully automatic, ultra-modern, and hygienic powder plants using fresh Amul milk, you can trust that every sip or bite of Amulya Dairy Whitener is packed with nothing but pure, creamy goodness. On reconstruction as per directions, just 1 kg of Amulya Dairy Whitener can provide you with 8 litres of sweetened toned milk mix. Talk about getting bang for your buck! Plus, with its attractive packaging and wide range of pack sizes available in tin, carton, and pouch packs, it's not just convenient but goes easy on the pocket too.

So, whether you're enjoying a cozy evening at home with a hot cup of cocoa, treating yourself to a pleasant dessert, or simply looking to add a touch of creaminess to your everyday dishes, Amulya Dairy Whitener is the perfect choice. With its creamy texture, rich flavor, and unmatched utility, it's guaranteed to become your new kitchen staple.

"CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE"



### Crafts of India

All India handloom and handicrafts expo, organised by Basumoni Handicrafts presents handloom silks and cotton from across the country, handicrafts, jewellery, handcrafted toys, tribal paintings, home decor, home linen and much more. There is a 20% discount on handloom and 10% discount on handicrafts and jewellery. @Sri Sankara Hall, Alwarpet. On till May 30, 10am to 9pm. For details, calls 9042503042



**Little acts of kindness**  
S Jayakumar spends a third of his income on purchasing these water bottles. AKHILA EASWARAN

have a conversational relationship, he has been able to chart out a map of the homeless across the city. They greet him with kindness too, he says.

"Let's go near the Museum Theatre. There is a kind elderly blind man there," he says.

Abdur Rahman grins when he hears Jayakumar's voice. "Yaaru? Auto driver ah?" he asks. "Be well," he says as Jayakumar hands him a bottle. "The police sometimes drive us away but we find our way back. People like *thambi* help us survive," he says.

Jayakumar says though he feels a sense of satisfaction at the end of each day, there is a cost. "There have been days when I drive to familiar spots and not find the regulars. An enquiry at the tea shop would usually reveal that they have died. It is a silent and undignified death. This leaves me disturbed," he says.

But he is resolute. "I have no choice now, do I?" he adds. The auto, he says cannot stop.

## Helping hands

For the past nine years, this auto driver has been distributing water bottles to those in need

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"Do you mind if I stop here for a second," asks S Jayakumar.

This auto driver who has journeyed through Chennai for 23 years has seen an expanding city, an intermingling of autos and technology, and a sharp rise in temperature during the summer lately. He reaches for a large carton of one-litre bottles placed behind the passenger, pulls out one bottle, and hands it to a waste collector.

Jayakumar starts his auto again and continues to drive. Few words are exchanged between him and his beneficiaries except an occasional raised hand signalling a blessing and a muttered 'thanks'.

"Sometime around 2015, I saw another person distributing bottles of water to those

who could not access a clean water source. I wanted to replicate that. Everyday, I buy three cartons with 36 bottles and hand them out to those in need. Everyday... except Tuesday. It is my day off as there is not enough *savari*. I don't like to make a fuss about it," he says, smiling. Jayakumar says that his mother is supportive and contributes some extra money during the summer, especially because the last few years have been exceptionally hot. "During the monsoon, I buy two cartons instead," he says.

Though Jayakumar has been taking part in this

exercise for nine years now, he does not know the names of most people he hands out water to. "I stop while driving passengers. I cannot afford to waste their time. It is not a chatting sort of relationship. Sometimes they [the passengers] chip in for a bottle or two but there is no obligation," he says.

Although he does not



**Everyday, I buy three cartons with 36 bottles and hand them out to those who need one**

**S JAYAKUMAR**  
Auto driver

## GAME-CHANGER ALERT: SAY GOODBYE TO KNEE PAIN WITHOUT GOING UNDER THE KNIFE WITH PLASMA THERAPY

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On May 17, something remarkable unfolded at the Cannes Film Festival. A 4K restoration of Shyam Benegal's parallel cinema classic *Manthan* was screened at the Salle Buñuel theatre in the Cannes Classics sidebar. The film, released 48 years ago, was India's first crowdfunded film: 5,00,000 farmers donated ₹2 each to bring the project to fruition. Its unusual patronage was in keeping with the grassroots movement it extolled: the efforts of Varghese Kurien to drive a milk co-operative in Anand, Gujarat.

Kurien, popularly remembered as the Milk Man of India, was the architect of the nation's dairy revolution. His modernising efforts liberated dairy farmers from the clutch of monopolisers, turned India into the world's leading milk producer and transformed the Anand Milk Union Limited (AMUL) into a global brand. Today, AMUL is the largest co-operative dairy brand in Asia.

Jayen Mehta, MD, Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), known by its brand name AMUL, walked the red carpet with Naseeruddin Shah, Ratna Pathak Shah, and late actor Smita Patil's son Prateik Babbar. Also in attendance was Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, founder-director of the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF) that undertook the restoration, and Nirmala Kurien, daughter of the late Kurien. Shyam Benegal, 89, could not

## A new page in the dairy



attend the festival owing to his frail health.

The *Manthan* contingent had a tight itinerary: a media briefing at the Bharat Pavilion at Cannes, followed by the red carpet and screening. The film received a five-minute standing ovation in a packed hall, shares Mehta, who joined Shah, Babbar and Dungarpur for a Q&A session on stage. "I spoke about the current-day relevance of *Manthan* and shared some statistics with the audience," Mehta says. "AMUL's turnover 50 years ago was a humble ₹20 crore. Today, our target revenue is ₹80,000 crore. Milk is the largest agricultural crop and

we have 2,00,000 milk dairy co-operatives in the country."

"When people measure the success of a film, it is by the box-office numbers," he adds. "But *Manthan*'s success in this light is incalculable."

Benegal's film, which won the National Award for Best Hindi Feature, was India's submission to the 1976 Oscars and had a lasting impact, highlighting the plight of dairy farmers in newly independent India and the barriers of caste and gender oppression they faced.

"It raised pertinent issues like women empowerment that continue to resonate," says Mehta. The film forms an integral part of the cultural

Cannes 2024: Amul MD Jayen Mehta on restoring *Manthan*, India's first crowdfunded film

**Moving story** Jayen Mehta, Naseeruddin Shah, Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, Prateik Babbar and others at the Cannes red carpet in France last week. ANI

camera negative over a 17-month period. The Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation funded the venture.

"The work that the Film Heritage Foundation has done with *Manthan* is awe-inspiring," Mehta says. "The sound, colours, textures, grain... it's all come out wonderfully. In fact, when Benegal saw it, he said it looked better than the original." Sanjay Jaju, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, who attended the *Manthan* briefing, reiterated the Government's intention to restore 4,000 films in our National Archives, Mehta adds.

Following the reception at Cannes, the restored version of *Manthan* will be released in select theatres in India on June 1 and June 2. A premiere show is also planned in Mumbai, with Benegal and other surviving cast and crew members in attendance. "The film will be released in a minimum of 30 cities across leading multiplexes," Mehta says.



**The restored version of *Manthan* will be released in June in a minimum of 30 cities across leading multiplexes**

JAYEN MEHTA  
MD, Amul

legacy of AMUL. "Anyone who joins the co-operative... the first film we show them is *Manthan*."

Mehta is effusive in his praise of the ultra-high-definition restoration of *Manthan*. The film was restored and digitised from its original

## What love is

The documentary, *Amma's Pride*, revolves around Tamil Nadu's first registered marriage of a transwoman and a man

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This is not your average love story. Of course, it starts with two people falling in love. But what makes it extraordinary is their journey: the first registered marriage in Tamil Nadu, of P Srijja, a Thoothukudi-based transwoman and B Arun Kumar, a cis-gender male, was extensively covered by the media when the news broke in 2019.

When documentary filmmaker Shiva Krish came across the story, he saw the potential it had, and immediately started research for what would become his first independent documentary film, *Amma's Pride*.

The film is set to premiere at the 64th Krakow Film Festival in Poland on May 29. It is being produced by Chithra Jeyaram, a US-based filmmaker and D'Lo, a queer/transgender Tamil-Sri Lankan-American actor, writer and comic.

When Shiva, who is based in Chennai, reached out to the couple, they did have inhibitions about sharing their story with an outsider. But gradually, they let Shiva into their lives, and his camera, from the end of 2019 to 2023, captured 40 hours of footage shot at various intervals. The 31-year-old filmmaker has previously worked with several NGOs, interacting with people from the LGBT community, which helped him approach the story with sensitivity.

"Love is love, no matter what gender one is of," says Shiva, adding that he set out to document Srijja and Arun's story based on this view. But as he got to know the couple and their family, he discovered the source of their strength: Srijja's mother.

"I discovered this over the process," he says, adding that the specialty of documentary filmmaking is that when the filmmaker spends time with the people being filmed, he discovers such gems.

"She is Srijja's diving force," he says, "Srijja is able to achieve so much in life because of her mother."

Which is why eventually, he started telling the couple's story through the eyes of Srijja's mother, Valli.

Valli accepted Srijja for who she was, which made all the

difference to her daughter's life. Shiva hopes to drive home this message through his 20-minute-long documentary film, which has music by Karthikeya Murthy; Venkat Ramanan CS is the co-producer and editor.

Shiva says that he will simultaneously look for ways to distribute it, and is open to doing so on any platform. But more importantly, he has planned social impact campaigns surrounding the film in major cities in India and the US.

"These are events that will raise awareness on the subject by starting a discussion," he says, adding: "I know things cannot change overnight, but it must be remembered that cinema is a powerful tool."



**Stories from life** A still from the film; (above) filmmaker Shiva Krish. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### Kottukkaali goes places

After premiering at the 74th Berlin International Film Festival, Tamil movie *Kottukkaali*, starring Soori and Anna Ben, has been selected for the official competition of the Transilvania International Film Festival. *Kottukkaali* marks filmmaker PS Vinothraj's sophomore effort. Notably, Vinothraj's critically acclaimed debut *Pebbles* (*Koozhangal*) won the prestigious Tiger Award at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2021 and was selected as India's official entry to the 94th Academy Awards. *Kottukkaali* is billed as a drama addressing themes of misogyny, superstition and complex human emotions. The film is produced by Sivakarthekeyan Productions in association with The Little Wave Productions. It has cinematography by B Sakthivel and editing by Ganesh Siva. The Transilvania International Film Festival is set to take place between June 14 and 24.



### Camp Chennai

Ambati Rayudu shares a deep connection with Chennai. He played a lot of under-13 cricket games here, a time he fondly remembers. "We used to stay at Libra Lodge in Triplicane and walk in a line to a nearby mess to have idlis for breakfast and meals for lunch. I have played a lot of junior cricket and then Ranji Trophy at Chepauk. I have enjoyed the food, and have always felt very emotionally close to people from Chennai."

## Batting for change

Ambati Rayudu, now a cricket commentator, reminisces about his time with MS Dhoni and the Chennai Super Kings

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A lot can change in a year; Ambati Rayudu knows that. Last May, he was jumping with joy at the Chennai Super Kings' dugout in Ahmedabad, having contributed to one of IPL's most memorable finals

that the men in yellow won off the last ball. Late into the night, MS Dhoni would receive the trophy and hand it over to a beaming Rayudu in his last IPL match as a cricket player.

This May, Rayudu – now a commentator with Star Sports and talking about the game with as much passion as he once played it – was desolate, as he saw his

former team get knocked out of TATA IPL 2024 on a rainy Saturday evening in Bangalore. In a video that is now going viral among cricket fans, Rayudu sits, his face buried in his hands, in disbelief.

Rayudu was showing his emotions, like he has always done. "Yes, I am an emotional being," he tells me over a virtual conversation, a day before the CSK-RCB match,

**A fine drive** Ambati Rayudu during an event in Hyderabad. STAR SPORTS

"I've always wanted things to be fair, and always fought for what I believe is right."

Currently, the six-time IPL champion is busy with a hectic commentary stint. It is not something he would have fancied when he was a player, but Rayudu is enjoying it nevertheless. "I didn't know if I would be good at it, because I hardly spoke during my playing days. But, with friends and family, I used to love discussing cricket. I'm just happy I am still connected to the sport."

### Batting for CSK

IPL 2024 might have ended on a sour note for CSK, but Dhoni and Jadeja – the two men who were at the crease during the last moments of the recent Bangalore game – have been Chennai's favourite IPL stars for many years now. Recalling the moments leading up to the famous CSK win of 2023, Rayudu says, "Remember Dhoni lifting Jadeja after he won us the game? We all know what CSK means to Dhoni, but it proved what it meant to Jadeja, who has been the team's go-to man, be it batting, bowling or fielding."

Rayudu was a star with Mumbai Indians in the earlier editions of IPL but has been vocal about his support for Chennai Super Kings, with which he had a successful stint. So, what is the amazing team environment that everyone raves about? "CSK is family. They let you be. Every player feels like he belongs. Even players who are not playing are constantly looked after; when that happens, you want to

give your best. This is why players, who might not have played so well for other franchises, bloom here."

Rayudu has been associated with Indian cricket for a long time – playing for India was *the* most memorable moment of his career – but he feels that the IPL, conceptualised in 2008, has brought the game closer to fans. "They understand T20 cricket better, and they identify more with the players. The league is also a game-changer in terms of identifying talent. Previously, even if you were a talented player, you could get lost in the system if you are not identified by a certain set of selectors. But the IPL has been a great platform and throws the spotlight on players; a cricketer like Ashutosh Sharma (Punjab Kings) might not have been identified if he played only for the Railways. That's the beauty of the IPL."

The cricketer also dabbled in politics for a while, and this election season, he actively supported popular actor and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan. He hopes to play an active role in public life in the future. "I believe sport can be a unifying factor in bringing people together," says Rayudu, who also runs a foundation in Guntur that helps people from disadvantaged sections of society, "I believe equal opportunities should be available; I have suffered in the past due to a lot of factors. I hope that a player, even without any godfather, should be able to play the sport just based on his or her talent."

Watch the TATA IPL playoffs and final this week on Star Sports Network