

# weekend WORLD

**metro** PLUS THE HINDU



## Amama

Amama's nail claws look menacing but sexy. It is something you would expect to see on a stylish Disney villain like Maleficent or Cruella de Vil. But the idea behind this bijouterie is simple. "A lot of women do not have the time to get their nails done, they can just pop these on," says Nikita Gupta, founder of Amama.

Made of metal with pearl and stone embellishments, these are her bestsellers along with earrings that have "gone viral". "For example, we sold around a thousand of the Infinity danglers worn by Jacqueline Fernandez," says Nikita, who started her brand in 2017.

Before getting into the jewellery business, Nikita says she spent a lot of time scouring the markets of Paharganj and Chandni Chowk looking for interesting pieces. Eventually, she put her discoveries up on her blog posts. "People started asking why I wasn't selling these. So I started curating jewellery and that is how Amama started," says Nikita, adding, "Our first lot had Afghan jewellery but I added my tweaks to them and it did well. I had some ideas of my own too and started working with karigars. I came up with our next line Rangrez, for which, I created embroidered jewellery and jewellery on fabric; and the success of that is what got us here."

From two a day, Nikita found her orders increasing to almost 100. Last year, Amama started in-house manufacturing in its unit in Noida. "We are a team of 100, of which 60 are karigars," she informs.

In 2023, they launched their stores in DLF Promenade and DLF Avenue in Delhi. They also have a new store coming up in DLF Mall of India, Noida. Amama is also doing bags and wants to get into the accessory space. "From weddings to vacations, we want to cater to all occasions," says Nikita who studied Retail and worked with brands such as Louis Vuitton and Forever 21. Her new launch, Lumina, has blingy holiday favourites like statement resort bags, hair accessories, studs enhanced with coloured crystals and pearls in 22 carat gold.

"We are known for big statement jewellery. When you wear something, people should notice it," she adds. She is also aware that copies of her designs often end up in local markets. But as Oscar Wilde said, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery..."

Prices start at ₹1,500 and go up to ₹15,000 on [amama.in](http://amama.in)



## MNSH

Have you seen a scarf that is actually jewellery? Or a glove that doubles up as a rather blingy bijoux? Made of rhinestone, these accessories are some of MNSH's bestselling pieces. The brand wants its designs to be conversation starters.

"Earlier people were conservative but after COVID, YOLO has become the mantra and people are open to trying different things," says Mansha Mittal whose brand MNSH is a pandemic baby.

A student of Apparel Design, Mansha admits to not having any background in fashion jewellery. But it is her love for ornaments that made her take to this field. "I've always been a fashion jewellery buff. I poured myself into it," she says, adding, "I used to buy from a lot of brands. After buying three or four products from the same brand, the pieces would all start looking the same. I was looking for



## TOAST TO TOSTONES

Chef Alex Sanchez spotlights Latin-American cuisine with Otra in Mumbai **P4**

**Apollo SUNDAY CLINIC**  
Doctor Consultations on Sundays too! (In 10+ specialities)  
Every Sunday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm  
Call 044 4040 1066  
At Greams Lane, Thousand Lights 5, Meenambalam units only



## Roma Narsinghani

For Roma Narsinghani, venturing into jewellery design seemed like a fortunate twist of fate. In 2016, in the midst of her wedding preparations, she stumbled upon a stone-adorned hair bun cage that was a family heirloom. "Intrigued, I decided to put my own creative spin on it for one of the ceremonies. This sparked a chain of experiments, eventually leading to the birth of the first few pieces," says Roma, who launched her eponymous brand in 2017.

Though offbeat, the hair buns have remained a constant in her collections; manifesting in different shapes and designs, from hexagon to spiral and encrusted with Swarovski crystals and rubies. These are her bestsellers, followed by chokers and rings.

"My jewellery embodies a unique fusion of motifs and structural elements, drawing inspiration from a juxtaposition of raw textures, culture, travel, architecture and the self," says the Mumbai-based designer. Her first

collection, titled ArchGeo, was inspired by Mumbai's Art Deco heritage and architectural plans. The entire collection was hand-made and featured big, bold designs.

"While I admire the beauty of delicate designs, I have always felt compelled to explore the same concept in a more unconventional manner. My designs are a reflection of my evolving journey as a designer, constantly influenced by my surroundings, experiences, and personal growth," she says.

In that vein, her latest collection, Lola & Koki, is a heartfelt tribute to her Sindhi heritage and also has pieces named after food, like rabri studs and aloo tikki brooch, adding a touch of whimsy.

"It's inspired by the

essence of Sindhi rotis – lola represents the sweet roti, while koki is the salty one. Crafted with eco-brass and adorned with algae beads, each piece reflects my journey of rediscovering my roots."

Roma's unconventional design aesthetics resonate with today's clientele, which is seeking pieces that reflect their individuality. Some of the pieces have been crafted for special collaborations, such as the striking face gear designed for Amit Aggarwal's fashion week finale and the avant-garde head gear created for Chola the Label's Lakme Fashion Week showcase.

Roma adds, "Currently, I am exploring pixel patterns using Swarovski crystals. One of my ongoing projects involves creating a metal mesh top adorned with skin-coloured crystals, forming a mesmerising pattern that resembles a woman's torso."

Prices start at ₹3,000 and go up to ₹20,000. Available on [romanarsinghani.com](http://romanarsinghani.com)

# The bling edit

## Pratyadarshini Paitandy

[pratyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in](mailto:pratyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in)

Loud, edgy, dramatic – jewellery today resembles art in a gallery. Driven by a demand for bolder pieces, a crop of young designers is creating jewellery that deliberately moves away from traditional patterns. From funky reinterpretations of heirlooms to intricate hair buns, rhinestone gloves, metal nail claws and over-the-top necklaces, these creations defy trends and encourage wearers to make a personal statement. We look at options for your wardrobe.



## Anatina

Aakanksha Kotwala is from a family of jewellers. "But what my family does is completely different from what I do," says Aakanksha, a brand developer who started Anatina, her own jewellery label in 2021. "It's global in nature, contemporary but rooted in our culture, and speaks of our craftsmanship," she says.

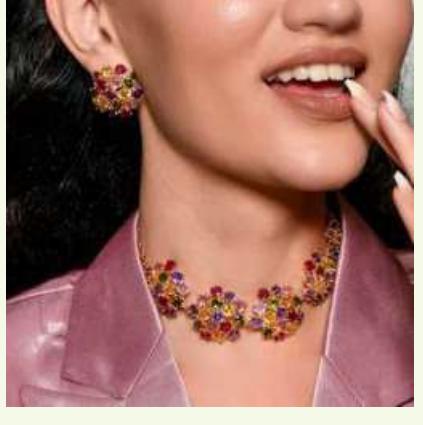
To begin with, Aakanksha was not sure if she wanted to be part of this trade. But, she was inspired by the 250-year-old legacy of her family business. "In India we make everybody's jewellery, Jaipur is a hub, but not many brands from here are known well internationally. Our country is so rich in craftsmanship; using that I wanted to give jewellery a new twist," she says.



## MNSH

different designs for different occasions. There weren't too many contemporary designs that you could wear both with a sari and jeans," says the designer who grew up in Los Angeles and Singapore.

When exploring the market, Mansha also noticed that the pricing for quality jewellery was on the higher side. She decided to create



something trendy and affordable. "Every individual is different and so is their personality; brands have to cater to that," she says.

Which is why at MNSH, to keep up exclusivity, they believe in phasing out their earlier collection. Twenty-odd pieces are made for each design. Only the classics remain. The range here is so varied that it has designs for 18-60 year olds. "Recently Zeenat Aman was styled in our Baroque pearl necklace," she adds.

MNSH has just launched its Boheme collection, which embodies summer. There are chains and bracelets in fun colours with stones like malachite and lapis.

She is also launching a stack of bangles with the words *nidar* (fearless) and *shakti* on them as a tribute to the women of today.

Prices starts at ₹2,500 and goes up to ₹15,000. Available on [mnsh.co](http://mnsh.co)



## Instapick

**Somebody's home:** The iconic *Home Alone* house in Winnetka, immortalised in the 1990 film, is up for sale at \$5.25 million. Renovated in 2018, it boasts a movie theatre among other modern upgrades. The Georgian-style residence features five bedrooms, six bathrooms, and spans over 9,000 square feet. It was originally purchased for \$1.58 million in 2012.



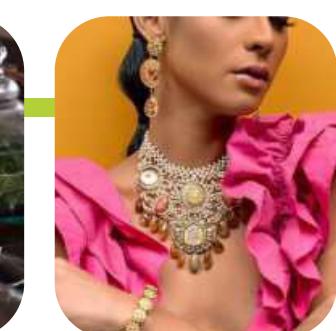
## Talkingpoint

**BTS hugsplosion:** A thousand BTS fans queued up in Seoul for a hug from Jin, who returns as a K-pop idol after 18 months of military service. This three-hour marathon marks his first public event since being discharged. The 1,000 lucky fans were chosen via raffle. The 31-year-old, the eldest in the band, completed his service and left the 5th Army Infantry Division.

## pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours, and everything else you need to plan your social calendar.

For events, contact us on [weekend@thehindu.co.in](mailto:weekend@thehindu.co.in)



### Chic ensemble

Join clothing label **Hastha** for a unique summer pop-up alongside Bhomra Design, Alankara, and House of Thinai, at the CP Art Gallery, Alwarpet, today from 11am to 8pm. Also create your own block prints. To shop for bags to go along with your summer looks, check out **Hidesign's** Sahara collection. Shop sling bags, wallets, bucket bags, cross body bags and more on [hidesign.com](http://hidesign.com) starting ₹1,859.

### Laugh riot

**Vir Das** is back to make us all laugh with his Mindfoot India Tour! After a successful global run, Vir returns with his unique style of comedy with sharp wit and hilarious storytelling. It might just be food for your thoughts. Witness one of India's top comedians in action on July 5 at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, Chennai at 8pm. Tickets on [bookmyshow.com](http://bookmyshow.com) starting ₹499.

### Musical hideaway

Looking to explore new music and artistes? This might be right up your alley! **Sofar Chennai** is back with another secret concert tomorrow at 5.30pm. Get up close and personal with artistes and meet like-minded music fans at a cool local spot. Details about the artiste and venue will be announced 36 hours before the performance only to those attending. Book your tickets on [sofarsounds.com](http://sofarsounds.com) at ₹650.

### Pet palette

Join Pawga's **Art with Puppies** workshop and practise mindful art as puppies play around you. Open to all, this session focusses on expressing emotions through art, with prompts for meditation. Make artworks and take them home with you today from 11am to 12.30pm at Backyard, Adyar. Book your tickets on [pawgapetsyoga.com](http://pawgapetsyoga.com) at ₹950. Proceeds help raise funds for the shelter.

### Piazza palooza

**La Piazza**, the Italian restaurant from Delhi is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a popup in Chennai. Indulge in a culinary experience at Focaccia, Hyatt Regency Chennai. Savour classic Italian pizzas and pastas, witness live cooking stations, attend chef masterclasses, and be transported to the heart of Italy. Until June 16. Call 9884369333 for reservations.

### Plant odyssey

Goethe-Institut Chennai, Alliance Française of Madras, and the French Institute of Pondicherry are coming together to host a unique **travelling plants exhibition**. The exhibition features works by Karolina Grzywnowicz, Wendy Thermé, Waylon D'souza, and Rashmi Mala. On display until June 29 with activities and workshops every week. For details, log on to [afmadras.org](http://afmadras.org) on Instagram.

### Urban elegance

Divya Bhasin's latest jewellery collection is on display at **Evoluzione**, Khader Nawaz Khan Road today from 11am to 7pm. The collection redefines traditional Indian jewellery with bold, urban contemporary designs. To shop more luxury jewels, check out **Rose's** colours of life collection. Shop earrings, rings, necklaces, bracelets, and more inspired by Nature on [therose.in](http://therose.in) starting ₹98,000.



**Priyadarshini Paitandy**  
[priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in](mailto:priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in)

There are walk-in closets, we know. But Anusha Ashyanth has a walk-in crockery closet that is brimming with exquisite pieces bought from her travels around the world. And now it also has collections created by her. "My wardrobe is smaller than my crockery closet," laughs Anusha who stated Aura Design in December 2019. The company specialises in dining ware and stationery, something that Anusha wanted to do after she completed her Visual Communication course at MOP Vaishnav College for Women.

"Art is a crucial part of my life," she says. But she had to wait for 18 years before she could start her brand. "Life had

## Dinner's on me

With 22 carat gold bands and elegant motifs, this collection of dinnerware will make you want to throw a party soon

other plans. I got married, had children. The kids have grown up, so now is the time to do what I love," she says, adding, "Crockery needs lot of R&D. We had to understand it, the way it's fired, etc. That took 18 months."

And finally in 2020 Aura unveiled its line of crockery. "We launched four collections in one

go. They were based on history of art and inspired by Baroque, Renaissance, Art Noveau and Medieval art," she says.

Aura's new drop this year includes four collections with names that



### Crockery needs a lot of R&D. We had to understand it, the way it's fired... That took 18 months

ANUSHA ASHYANTH,  
Founder, Aura Design



ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

scarcity of jobs, and a never-ending wedding. People seem distracted by the above, and have turned off some more pressing local issues which trouble our society at large, and by "our" society, I mean people of Walkeshwar, Malabar Hill, Mumbai.

**Observation #1:** Slow walkers. There is a new illness which is growing at a massive scale, of purposeless walkers. Increasingly our roads, (again Walkeshwar, Malabar Hill, Mumbai), are being filled with walkers with no agenda. They walk like they are in

a perpetual coma causing traffic jams, and people jams.

Since they are rarely on the pavement, they seem to target vehicles with their meandering aimless gait. Ambulances on emergency duty are defeated in this war of attrition.

Even India's greatest tradition the "VIP red beacon cavalcade", has suffered at these merciless sloths. Oh, not all of them are on their mobiles, and even less of them seem to be actually on their feet.

**Observation #3** (To keep you on your toes and to make sure you are not one of those purposeless walkers, this writer, I mean the residents of Walkeshwar, Malabar Hill and the southern tip of Mumbai.

sans conversation. Why do that? How audacious and spiteful have we become? After interrupting a person with an unnecessary greeting, you just leave them hanging? Also, there is no conclusion after the greeting. No 'bye' to follow the intensive 'hi'. It's just 'hi', and off you go. Have we lost all shreds of human decency? Is there no empathy for a fellow human? (Generally, human refers to a few, but not all residents of Walkeshwar, Malabar Hill).

**Observation #2** This is the worst one of all. Some soulless monsters, have their chauffeurs bring the car to the building lobby or gate, in readiness for the great one to arrive. The average time spent in this wait is 37 minutes.

Due to this malicious act, other cars are forced to form queues to get in or out, leaving the driver angry and frustrated. In a recent case, a blocked car operator suffered a heart attack, as after the 37 minutes wait, the 'memsahib' about to enter her vehicle realised she had forgotten her glasses, and so went back to her abode to retrieve them. The extra 27 minutes was too much for this sensitive soul.

Not to take our GDP, melting glaciers, and so on lightly, but we must as a society look at all our ailments holistically, and by 'we', I mean the residents of Walkeshwar, Malabar Hill and the southern tip of Mumbai.

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

## THE COLUMN THAT WASN'T

# Slow walk, small talk

Cyrus' neighbours in South Bombay have three annoying behavioural traits. They loiter, meander and forget to say goodbye

(Clockwise from left) Verandah and Ashrafi from Aura's new collection; and Anusha Ashyanth. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



sound poetic. Nizam-e-Gul, Ashrafi, Kanika Vriksha and Verandah. The foundation for this is traditional design and art that prevails in India with an aesthetic modern touch added to it.

The inspiration for each is diverse. Verandah captures the essence of the charming, old world balconies of Kolkata. These are depicted on the crockery in the form of green

balusters entwined with pink bougainvillea. Kanika Vriksha has elements drawn from Tamil Nadu. You can see banana trees, goddess Andal's parrot, and kolam designs in 22 carat gold. Inspired by the chintz motif, Nizam-e-Gul, with its bright pink flowers and green leaf motifs, is like a garden in full bloom. While Ashrafi, with Bidri patterns crafted in gold and platinum, sees a departure from the usual white, pink, green colour scheme that the former three ranges showcase.

There are charger plates, dinner and side plates, tapas plates, big and small serving bowls, drink ware, tea pots and cups, all made of bone china. "It takes a month or two to come up with an idea. Designing takes two months and production takes another five months. We consciously stay away from Pinterest and Shutterstock," she says. After the designs are finalised, they are sent to vendors who create the final product.

"The process sounds simple but is not." Usually, the initial colour on paper looks different from the one on the computer screen and on wares. By the time it matches, it takes six to eight months, she explains. "For example, it took eight tries to get the green right in Kanika Vriksha," says Anusha.

For the next collection the team at Aura Design wants to explore geometric patterns and stoneware. "It's going to be more minimalist and casual," she says.

*Aura Design's collections are on display at The Folly at Amethyst till June 16, 10.30am to 7.30pm.*



### Gourmet masterclass

Phoenix MarketCity and Palladium, Chennai are hosting *MasterChef Australia* Season 6 finalist Sarah Todd for a culinary masterclass today from 4pm onwards at the Central Atrium, Palladium. Known for her innovative cooking style, Sarah will demonstrate three signature dishes. Attendees can try the food along with a Q&A session. Tickets on [bookmyshow.com](http://bookmyshow.com) ranging from ₹999 to ₹2,499, with options including meet-and-greet sessions and gourmet meals. For more details, call 044 6134 3008/61343088.



### Hack the future

Calling all developers, students, and fintech enthusiasts! Bank of Baroda, in collaboration with Microsoft, has launched a nationwide online hackathon on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Open to individuals and teams, this two-month event will focus on building ground-breaking solutions using GenAI to tackle real-world challenges in customer service, finance, and more. Win cash prizes up to ₹5 lakh and your ideas will be implemented. Register now and submit your ideas by June 30 on [bobhackathon.com](http://bobhackathon.com).



# The provocateur

The filmmaker-actor on *Maharaja*, *Bad Cop* and the state of artistic freedom in India

**I**t was only a matter of time before someone cast Anurag Kashyap and Gulshan Devaiah in a kitschy crime thriller together. Kashyap, acclaimed director of films like *Gangs of Wasseypur* and *Ugly*, has built a lucrative second career playing snarly heavies and agents of corruption. And Devaiah, who started his career under Kashyap's wing, has flourished wonderfully on streaming, as the twin successes of *Duranga* and *Dahaad* – plus an outlandish cameo in *Guns & Gulaabs* – showed.

In *Bad Cop*, premiering on Disney+ Hotstar on June 21 and adapted from the German television series by RTL, Devaiah and Kashyap square off in a tale of cops, criminals, mad twists and some slo-mo-assisted Gun Fu. The series is directed by Aditya Datt (*Commando 3*) and marks the first fiction offering by Fremantle India.

We ask Kashyap, who also essays the antagonist opposite Vijay

Sethupathi in the Tamil film *Maharaja*, what endears him to these roles. It is a stereotype he appears to exult in, unlike, say, someone like Rick Dalton, the fading movie star played by Leonardo DiCaprio in *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*.

"I love dying," Kashyap says with a grin. "I tell my directors to give me incredible death scenes. (laughs)." His favourite death scene, he adds, is when Quentin Tarantino explodes near the end of his own *Django Unchained* (2012). "My biggest fantasy is that, at the end of my life, I'll get Amit Trivedi or AR Rahman to compose a song and put together all my death scenes."

It is all fun and games at the *Bad Cop* junket, though other issues



(Left and below) Anurag Kashyap in stills from *Maharaja* and *Bad Cop*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

loom large. Kashyap, in a recent interview, fulminated against India's tendency to 'take credit' for the achievements of independent filmmakers. The swell of national pride that erupted at the Cannes Film Festival last month with Payal Kapadia and Anasuya Sengupta winning top honours was undercut by the fact – earlier raised by Resul Pookutty – that their movies were international co-productions, and fell way off the mainstream.

"Any artistic endeavour that is risky and challenging will need support," Kashyap says. "There was a time when some of the strongest cinema in this country emerged out of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). Even in recent decades, films like *The Lunchbox* (2012) and my own *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010) wouldn't have been made without their help. But I don't know how much they do now."

He says he has not attended the Film Bazaar, the official film market organised by NFDC alongside the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa, in years. "I know a lot of subsidies and rebates have been announced. One of my films went to a festival. There was a fund announced (Film Promotion Fund, in 2016) to provide financial aid to films that get selected for festivals. But I did not get any support and neither did any of our films. Announcements bahut hote hai, hota kuch nahi (announcements happen, nothing comes of them)."

There is also the threat, as many have indicated, of preferential treatment based on filmmakers' political views and affiliations. Films ideologically aligned with the ruling dispensation have been granted tax-free status in multiple states in the recent past. Kashyap, too, has had his fair share of run-ins with the establishment. In 2018-2019, two of his films, *Mukkabaaz* and *Sandh Ki Aankh*, were denied shooting incentives under the Uttar Pradesh Government's film scheme. "My

producer suffered losses because of me...because I talk a lot," he says.

The streaming space appears no more liberating, or liberated.

Kashyap concedes that a hard-edged, sociopolitically-engaged series like *Sacred Games* – which he co-directed with Vikramaditya Motwane and Neeraj Ghaywan – cannot be made in the current climate. "The reason *Sacred Games* happened is because it was greenlit from the US and not India. I had my show *Maximum City* cancelled at Netflix. Dibakar Banerjee's film (*Tees*) is stuck. Anyone who is currently in a position of decision-making, their choices are dictated by a lot of external factors. It's not like they have a personal problem."

## Villains Inc.

Returning to his acting work, Anurag says that his character in *Bad Cop*, gangster Kazbe, is worlds apart from the one he essays in *Maharaja*, his third Tamil film after *Imaikkaa Nodigal* and a cameo in *Leo*.

"Kazbe is a more demonstrative criminal while my role in *Maharaja* is quite realistic. Director Nithilan Swaminathan has made an outstanding film. It's like a gritty South Korean revenge movie made in India." Kashyap has a long-standing equation with Vijay Sethupathi and holds the actor in high esteem. "We worked together in *Imaikkaa Nodigal*. I was the first one who went to cast him for *Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota* (2018), but that didn't eventually work out."

Kashyap is also making his Malayalam acting debut in *Aashiq Abu*'s upcoming *Rifle Club*. The film also features Dileesh Pothan and Soubin Shahir. Another Tamil film, *One 2 One*, is on the cards with Sundar C.

"I have so much fun working in the southern cinemas," Kashyap says. "There are no vanity vans on a Malayalam film set, for instance, no unnecessary expenses or *showbaazi* (pretence). Everyone is passionate about making great cinema. Unlike in Bollywood, where we make 'projects' and not films."



## A TASTE OF HEALING

Raghu Dixit's new album, *Shakkar*, is a heartfelt creation born from overcoming personal struggles, featuring songs in four languages and artiste collaborations

Praveen Sudevan  
praveen.s@thehindu.co.in

**R**aghuram Dixit's recent music video, 'Shakkarpari', is a sugary delight for the eyes. It perfectly captures the heart-warming message of his upcoming album, *Shakkar*. Released in four languages, the video transcends mere translation of sounds to visuals, transporting its viewers to a simpler time and place reminiscent of RK Narayan's idyllic Malgudi.

Bathed in the warm glow of a South Indian afternoon, the video unfolds in a quaint Karnataka town. We meet a kind-hearted schoolgirl, her eyes brimming with empathy as she witnesses her classmate's dejection after a punishment for tardiness. A late arrival caused by morning chores. A tear rolls down the boy's cheek. Determined to melt away his sadness, the girl hatches a plan, sweet as the song's title: to save money to get him a peanut-jaggery candy bar.

Raghuram is not just the mastermind behind the music; he is also the video's director and screenwriter. The kind-hearted schoolgirl in 'Shakkarpari' becomes a charming reflection of himself. This connection is particularly poignant when considering Raghuram's actions during the pandemic. He was battling his

own mental issues. "I didn't feel like continuing. Every night, I'd go to bed hoping I wouldn't wake up," he says. With a friend, he set up a mental health helpline for people to process the COVID-19 grief.

In the video, the peanut-jaggery candy bar costs a mere ₹65 – a seemingly insignificant amount to most. For the little girl, however, it represents a treasure of saved coins and a sacrifice made with love.

**From frustration to flow**  
One of his primary motivations for making an album after a decade is to say this message: even the smallest gestures, fuelled

by genuine kindness, can have a profound impact. In the midst of a creative rut, a glimmer of inspiration arrived in the form of John Paul, a Kolkata-based musician. John's relentless pursuit sending Raghu demo after demo via WhatsApp, initially annoyed him. "Dude, how much validation do you need?" he asked John. However, John did not seek validation; he just wanted to work with Raghu. And that took the latter by surprise. On a whim, he called John to his studio.

The spontaneous act sparked a period of intense creativity. "We ended up blocking out 15, maybe 20 days – we ate, slept, and breathed music in that studio," recalls Raghu. "We came out with over 45 tunes!"

This outpouring of creativity, fuelled by John's infectious enthusiasm, proved to be a turning point. "Working with John did more than just spark creativity; it slowly lifted me out of that dark place. It showed me how much music I still had in me."

While the initial spark for the album ignited quickly, Raghu faced a two-year roadblock. His voice simply would not cooperate. "My pitch was off, and even autotune couldn't fix it – it sounded unnatural." It returned, however, as if by a miracle, on its own, during a recording session. And he recorded the core of the album within a week. However, the journey was not over. Since this would be his first album in 10 years, he wanted it to be special. He wanted to do something unique.

One of the USPs of *Shakkar* is that its songs are available in four languages: Kannada, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu. Bringing the album to life with four variations for each track added another three years to the

process, making the album a five-year labour of love.

Another USP of the album is the sheer number of collaborations involved in its creation. *Shakkar* started with John. Then, during the song-writing stage, his long-time friend and leading Hindi lyricist Neeraj Rajawat Singh came on board.

**Creative symphony**  
Raghuram sought collaborators who could not only translate his ideas but also share his vision. From the long-admired Kannada lyricist Kiran Kaverappa to the "generous" Tamil lyricist Madan Karky to the serendipitously connected Telugu writer Kittu Vissapragada, each collaboration brought a unique spark.

Raghuram did not stop there. He "chased down some incredible musicians from around the world," as he puts it – friends he was fortunate enough to collaborate with. The list is impressive: Bela Fleck, a Grammy winner, played banjo on the first song, 'Shakkarpari'. There is also Rajhesh Vaidhya on one track, Purbayan Chatterjee on another, Casey Driessens on violin, Michael League on a Moroccan instrument called a gimbri, and even a Brazilian ensemble on two songs.

For Raghu, *Shakkar* is more than music; it is a personal victory born from a period of despair.

"Ten years ago, my reasons for making music might have been more superficial. Now, my mission is to reach out to people struggling like I once did. People who might not feel comfortable talking to anyone; who don't have a support system. If my music can offer them a lifeline, a thread of hope to hold onto, that's incredibly fulfilling," he concludes.



(Above) A still from the song; (right) The Raghu Dixit Project. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## First look of *Twilight of the Gods* out

Zack Snyder's upcoming animated Netflix series, *Twilight of the Gods*, is set to premiere on September 19. The series, based on Norse mythology, is a joint effort from Snyder's Stone Quarry studio, Jay Oliva who executive produced Netflix's *Trese*, and Apple TV's *Foundation* writer Eric Carrasco. *Twilight* debuted its first look with a release announcement video. The cast includes Sylvia Hoeks as Sigrid, Stuart Martin as Leif, Rahul Kohli as Egill, Paterson Joseph as Loki, Pilou Asbæk as Thor, and John Noble as Odin.

## Catherine Lagaaia to lead Disney's *Moana*

Catherine Lagaaia will star opposite Dwayne Johnson in Disney's live-action *Moana*. Johnson will reprise the role as the demigod Maui in the upcoming movie. "I am really excited to embrace this character because Moana is one of my favorites," said Lagaaia, the 17-year-old from Sydney, Australia.

New Zealander John Tui as Moana's father, and Rena Owen as the revered Gramma Tala will join the cast of the movie. *Moana* is set to release on July 10, 2026. To be directed by Thomas Kail, the screenplay is written by Jared Bush and Dana Ledoux Miller.



**JOCKEY FACTORY SECONDS UPTO 50% OFF\***

CMYK

10 am to 8 pm • Open All Days • Master / Visa Card Accepted

ONLY LEISUREWEAR, ACTIVEWEAR, KIDSWEAR, THERMALS & SOCKS

**Cathedral Road**

**Venue In Chennai**

Dass Community Hall  
No.55, Opp. Maris Hotel - 600 086

Org. by Surya Agency Pvt Ltd.

Suman Mahfuz Quazi

**W**hen we enter Otra, Mumbai's spanking new culinary addition, helmed by Chef Alex Sanchez and his life-plus-business partner, Mallyeka Watsa, it is blanketed in a deceptive quietude. The hum of a pre-service and team line-up in the dining room of the restaurant starts simmering. A moment later, the stillness is intercepted by the sharp polyrhythms of Latin-jazz. "This is a delicious playlist," Alex observes, as he perches atop a high-banquette.

It is easy to draw parallels between the Cincinnati-based band, Tropicoso – whose song *Jungle Fire* is the first one on this scrumptious playlist – and the restaurant for they are both, Latin in form but American in substance. "It's quite intentionally vague... the name alludes to the fact that it is heavily inspired by Latin-America. But, otherwise, it really is just another side of us," Alex ruminates. Otra, Spanish for 'other', is the duo's second stroke at restauranteurship. The first one being the frequently bustling (especially on weekends), Americano, which is located only 220 metres away.

Alex's culinary oeuvre – from when he arrived in India a little more than a decade ago to take the reins of The Table, another Mumbai fine-dining space – has been inextricably bound with farm-to-table, clean, signature Californian food. He broke the mould with Americano, where pizzas became the "anchor", and is pushing the envelope a little further with his new offering that spotlights contemporary Latin-American grub in a new garb.

Yes, there is guacamole, chips, tostadas, and tacos – the familiar stuff. But in essence, it is also an expression of his part-Puerto-Rican, part-East-European, heavily-West Coast, and somewhat-Indian identity. "I didn't grow up with this incredible gastronomic identity. My parents had split up and my mom cooked food that she could basically whip up in 30 minutes to an hour because she was also working full-time. So, a lot of the foods that I enjoyed were ethnic, available in San Francisco, whether it was Chinese or of course, we have this incredible

Chef Alex Sanchez and Mallyeka Watsa of Mumbai's popular Americano launch a contemporary Latin-American restaurant

## Welcome to the Otra side



(Clockwise from far left) Watermelon aguachile; the restaurant's interiors; the piña colada softy sundae; and tostones. NIRMALA PATIL

heritage, manifests in dishes like jerk chicken. Whereas his repertoire in farm-to-table cooking finds reflection in their Masa programme, which has entailed tying up with specialty flour venture, Three One Farms, in Punjab, who cultivate corn, especially for the restaurant's homegrown tortilla programme.

Besides this, the menu at Otra is succinct. While the segments are divided into *botanas*, *pequeños* or, *grandes* (Spanish for snacks, small shares, and large plates respectively), alongside tostadas, tacos, etc., the offerings within it are not squarely cuisine-specific. A tomato tostada, for instance, comes with the stringy stracciatella cheese (originally from Puglia, Italy) and *koshō*, a Japanese seasoning made

This is true because Otra is many things. At first glance, it is dark, stygian even. But as the space billows up turning heavy with gleeful chatter and fragrance of luxury perfumes, you realise: it is hard to put the restaurant in a box. It is as serious, as it is unserious; as fastidious, as it is fun. It simply depends on how you 'curate your experience' or look at it. There is a Spanish adage that feels

appropriate to quote at this juncture. It goes:

*Siempre hay otra manera de ver las cosas* (There is always another way to see things).



Otra is at 105, Mubarak Manzil, Kala Ghoda, Fort, Mumbai. Meal for two: ₹5,000.

(Left) Al-Diablo at The Park Bengaluru; (below) an offering from Maverick & Farmer. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pina colada. "A twist on the all-time classic with fresh tender coconut water is completely next level," says mixologist Yangdup Lama who owns Sidecar.

Launched two years ago, the drinks do not feature on their regular menu but appear on "seasonal menus and on guest requests". Earlier, people were sceptical about coconuts in their drink. But if you do it right, it works well and coconut water works well as is instead of the fruit. In the Coco Curry Hi Ball, it blends perfectly with the curry leaves," says Yangdup.

And it is not just cocktails. Two years ago, Beachville Coffee Roasters, Chennai, launched Nutcase, a drink combining coconut water with a rich nitro cold brew. Founder Divya Jayashankar says the drink is popular during summers, especially during the months of April and May when "coconuts are at their sweetest". "During this window, we source coconuts from local vendors. Outside of this period, we use bottled coconut water," she says.

The summer menu at Bengaluru's Maverick & Farmer's this year features four new drinks – Classic, Melonnaire, Floral and Fizzicality – that blend tender coconut with cold brews. Ashish Dabreo, coffee roaster and co-founder, Maverick & Farmer, says, "Coffee and tender coconut water work together just as it is. There is no need for adding any sweetener. However, to make it more exciting, we enhance it by infusing certain flavours, and textures in terms of carbonation, aeration, etc."

While Classic is the perfect ratio of 18-hour cold brew and tender coconut water, Melonnaire features refreshing musk melon-infused cold brew with tender coconut water, and Fizzicality uses aerated tender coconut water, cold brew and organic vanilla. The bestseller, however, is Floral wherein "we infused a blend of two different syrups from a brand called Chunnillai in Bikkaner. It is a legendary institution, which has been making sherbets for many years and is well-known across the country. We worked with them and created a different sort of a very floral fruity syrup, which has been used to create one of the drinks and it's really working well," concludes Avinash.

At New Delhi's Sidecar – that won India's best bar title by 30 Best Bars India earlier this year – tender coconut features in the Coco Curry Hi Ball (curry leaves infused gin with tender coconut water, lime acid) and a version of their clarified



Cocktails and coffee get a coconut-twist courtesy bartenders and coffee experts

## Drink up the drupe

Nidhi Adlakha

nidhi.adlakha@thehindu.co.in

If 2024 trends are anything to go by, experts predict hyper-seasonal cocktails, and minimalist drinks ruling menus. This season, it is all about the coconut and if you are looking at making your cocktails a bit hydrating, bartenders have you covered. At Aqua, The Park Bengaluru, new launches this season include Al-Diablo (with Byadgi chilli infused gin, tempered tamarind pulp, tender coconut water) and the tender coconut water wash. "These drinks have been popular this summer," says Kiron Kumar, director, Operations at The Park, Bengaluru.

At New Delhi's Sidecar – that won India's best bar title by 30 Best Bars India earlier this year – tender coconut features in the Coco Curry Hi Ball (curry leaves infused gin with tender coconut water, lime acid) and a version of their clarified



## Metamorphosis of a menu

Housed in a 150-year-old villa in Assagao, Chef Tarun Sibal's Taupe by Titlie is an ode to regional flavours

Ria Gupta

"**W**hen it comes to concepts, I never repeat myself," says Tarun Sibal. After the serene views at Titlie and headliner agave cocktails at Barfly, the chef-entrepreneur's newest venture, Taupe by Titlie, has brought me to Goa in search of an answer: what is new this time?

Standing on Anjuna Mapusa Road, Taupe shares a wall with Barfly in a 150-year-old Portuguese villa. The modern Indian restaurant completes the second and final phase of a holistic dine-and-drink experience that was conceived by Tarun, Bipin Sibal, Karrrit Dhingra, and Shyaam Khurana – all partners at Titlie Hospitality. "While Barfly launched as a cocktail-forward bar last year, Taupe is meant to be a dining space," says Tarun.

Tidle enters this love triangle by way of the name. "Taupe is a colour spectrum. Think greys, blues, mauves – the many shades you spot on a butterfly (titlie). So, we named it as such in connection with our first bar, and also incorporated the palette throughout the space," shares Karrrit. And though minimalist, the hues are hard to miss. Past the palm pots and jackfruit trees lining the villa, soft pink windows let the rays into the high-ceilinged grazing room. Beige and green walls complement the grey linens of the rattan furniture, a feature that runs common through the indoor and outdoor areas. Ample space for ambling belies the 90-seat cover, which takes various forms across the dining areas, patio seating, and outdoor platform constructed for more intimate gatherings.



Shades of taupe colour everything, from the leaf-imprinted flooring to the fabric roof swaying in the wind.

In making the space, the villa received a complete makeover to reflect on new-age hospitality while preserving the old Goan charm. While the restoration was undertaken by interior design studio SKID during the making of Barfly, Karrrit and Shyaam helmed the designing of Taupe. "We've redone almost every corner of the place. Only the glades and trees were left as they were," says Karrrit. The sprawling space inspires languid conversations and long, drawn-out meals.

**Indian at heart**  
The menu at Taupe is as decisive as the drinks at Barfly. Regional Indian dishes find a

interesting as well. The Malwani chicken sukka comes with missi roti, the tawa meat with phulka, and the balchao with poi. The dal khurchan is served with a biscuit bread," says Tarun, explaining that the comforting classics are given a twist to add to the dining experience.

On page four of the menu, pastas and pizzas break the inertia of a journey through Indian food. "We're a family dining space in Goa, so it's hard to ignore that sometimes you'll need simple comfort food on the table. And that comfort can mean different things for different people. Which is why we've dedicated a page to what everyone from the kids to the non-experimental can have," Tarun confesses.

With food taking centre stage at Taupe, the cocktails complement the nostalgia that local flavours evoke. Take the Jamun Kokum Highball, for instance, which tastes of mischief, summer and childhood with spices like bhuna jeera cutting through the gin. The Parra Road Colada comes with coconut water and coconut liqueur. Each cocktail speaks through its ingredients, with fresh flavours that are not too sweet but just right on the palate, leaving the desserts to take care of a sweet ending. The basque cheesecake is balanced with a punchy berry compote, while the coconut panna cotta comes decked with cool, diced mango. The classic *khher* comes in variations of apple and banana caramel, paired with gelato for the perfect prelude to a *susegad* afternoon of post-lunch napping.



(Clockwise from above) A snapshot of the restaurant's interiors; mushroom cornetto; and onion and sumac kulcha. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

modern play of textures, flavours, and ingredients in dishes like the creamed burrata *papdi* chaat, which comes spiked with jalapeño, an achar purée and amchur chutney. The prawn balchao, a staple in Goa, takes on a new dimension with hollandaise and the addition of tobiko. The tawa meat feels tender to the bone even though we dig in only after taking photos for what feels like forever. Made with yams, the vegetarian take on haleem goes well with khamiri roti. "The bread combinations are

Taupe by Titlie, Anjuna Mapusa Road, Saunto Vaddo, Assagao, Goa. Meal for two from ₹2,000

## Telugu

# A lighthearted rom-com with fun moments



Sangeetha Devi Dundo

sangeethadevi.k@thehindu.co.in

**A**ctor Sharwanand is in his element in the Telugu rom-com *Manamey*, where director Sriram Aditya presents him as a manchild who does not want to grow up. In a typical case of opposites crossing paths, he is contrasted by the mature and responsible female lead Subhadra (Krithi Shetty). The film rests on a predictable storyline, and makes its narrative breezy and entertaining. Some of the fun lines around Sharwanand's character work but after a point, fatigue sets in.

Vikram has a way with women; he is happy not to be tied down with relationships and responsibilities. Things take a turn when his best friend Anurag and his wife Swati succumb following an accident, leaving behind their two-year-old son. The boy takes a liking to Vikram, but he wants no responsibilities. Subhadra, a friend of Swati, arrives around the same time. Vikram and Subhadra are talked into being temporary caretakers for the child. In the meantime, Subhadra hopes to convince her fiance Karthik (Shiva Kandukuri) to adopt the child.

From thereon, everything happens along predictable beats. The fun stems from the lines given to Vikram who is torn between the love for his childhood friend and having to mend his carefree ways. Considerable time goes into establishing his happy-go-lucky lifestyle, flirting with women and guzzling beer and spirits, it becomes repetitive. Vikram and Subhadra spar over everyday tasks. To amp up the humour quotient in their run-ins, other characters including Vennela Kishore as a paediatrician and Rahul Ramakrishna as Vikram's Man Friday step in.

For the most part, *Manamey* is content being a lighthearted entertainer and when it brings in an antagonist (Rahul Ravindran), it does not hit the right note. The part is poorly written. A business rival of Vikram's friend, he periodically tries to kidnap and kill the child! At first projected as a monster, it is laughable how he is cut down to size and is later nowhere to be seen.

The drama that revolves around Vikram, Subhadra and Karthik in the later portions is reminiscent of rom-coms we have already watched. The emotional heft comes from Vikram's conversations with his parents and when a few universal truths are spelt out, it can make at least some of us want to call and talk to our parents. The film could have done with a few more such moments to give it some gravitas.

Hesham Abdul Wahab's music is the lifeline of *Manamey* but on several occasions, the background score preempts every move and amplifies emotions without a pause. In any case, his melodies cannot make up for the lacklustre writing.

*Manamey* is currently running in theatres



# Far from riveting drama

Barring a few interesting segments, *Satyabhama*, headlined by Kajal Aggarwal, falls short of being an intriguing cop drama due to its convoluted narrative

## Telugu

**Director:** Sriram Aditya

**Manamey**

**Cast:** Sharwanand, Krithi Shetty

**Storyline:** When two opposites come together as temporary caretakers of their friends' son, romance blooms

**Sangeetha Devi Dundo**

sangeethadevi.k@thehindu.co.in

**W**e do not often come across Telugu films headlined by a female protagonist, that too in a narrative that gives her the scope to deliver solid punches. To give credit where due, the makers of *Satyabhama*, the cop drama led by Kajal Aggarwal, take that leap of faith to present a film where the woman takes centre stage. Directed by Suman Chikkala, the film acknowledges the part played by SHE Teams and the SHESafe app for women in distress. Kajal features in 'mass' segments with slow-motion walks and action sequences set to pulsating music by Sriharan Pakala. However, the film chooses not to go the *Singham* or *Kartavyam* way. It tries to do a balancing act and explore a brooding drama in which the cop has to fight back demons from the past to find closure.

ACP Satyabhama (Kajal Aggarwal) is a cop who puts the call of duty above everything else. It helps that her husband, writer Amar (Naveen Chandra), is almost always supportive and patient, even when she turns up a few hours late for their wedding. This lack of friction takes the anxiety of balancing the personal and

## Satyabhama

**Director:** Suman Chikkala

**Cast:** Kajal Aggarwal, Naveen Chandra, Prakash Raj

**Storyline:** When a woman seeks help in a case of domestic abuse, ACP Satyabhama's plan goes haywire. She has to deal with setbacks, overcome guilt and trauma and unravel the truth

professional life off Satyabhama's shoulders but she soon has to deal with a setback that begins to gnaw at her personal life as well.

The narrative tries to shatter a few stereotypes. For instance, several mainstream films have lines in which 'wearing the bangles' becomes a metaphor for a lack of courage, read masculinity. In a scene, Satyabhama walks into a lockup, dressed in a red sari and bangles, knocks a man out of his wits and makes him spill the beans. Such small instances aside, the initial sequences that project her as a tough cop do not go beyond the mainstream templates with a rousing background score, slow motion walk, slick hairdos and power dressing. While it helps to set the tone of the narrative, some innovativeness in how she tackles the cases would have helped raise the bar.

The story takes off when a woman named Haseena walks into the police station and seeks protection from her abusive husband. Things do not go as expected and Satyabhama finds herself answerable to Haseena's brother, Iqbal, and his elderly father. Long after some of her higher-ups think the case is closed, it haunts her and she sets out to find the truth. Several characters are introduced as sub plots emerge and Satyabhama wades through a maze, unable to move on in the professional and the personal spheres.

Several characters come into the fore – played by Ankith Koya, Sampada, Payal

Radhakrishna, Neha Pathan and Prajwal Yadma. A subplot of friendship and love adds a new dimension to the drama but outlives its welcome. Actors Prakash Raj, Nagineedu and Ravi Varma are cast in characters that do not make an impression. Naveen Chandra is also wasted in an underwritten part. A political angle is explored, only to be dropped as soon as the plot introduces an AI-incorporated game, chat windows, impersonations, terrorism and more. A subplot touches upon religious stereotyping but ultimately, when the seemingly complex puzzle is solved, it ends up being a simple revenge drama. It is hard to stay invested in what is happening or feel genuinely anxious for any of the characters involved, including Satyabhama. What salvages the climax portions, to an extent, is how Satyabhama approaches the crisis and it stands as a subtle comment on gun culture.

Kajal Aggarwal makes the action segments work and her demeanour is designed to give away very little in terms of emotions; she is expected to convey her trauma with measured emotional outbursts. It works in some portions while in others, we barely resonate with the plight of her character.

*Satyabhama* could have been a riveting cop drama, especially since its screenplay is by Sashi Kiran Tikka (*Goodachari* and *Major*) but this one falls short.

*Satyabhama* is currently running in theatres



Scan the QR Code for more entertainment news.

# A superhero film that's more a make-believe game with action-figures

## Tamil

**Bhuvanesh Chandar**

bhuvanesh.chandar@thehindu.co.in

**M**ovies often tend to become products of filmmakers who are stuck in echo chambers, refusing to look beyond and above their own fascinations and perspectives. Guhan Senniappan's superhero film *Weapon* is the latest testimony to that. Despite all the fuss behind Marvel and DC's poor show in the last five years; despite how some Hollywood productions have popularly managed to deal with growing superhero fatigue; despite previous attempts in Tamil cinema teaching us the perils of not rooting the story to the milieu; we have *Weapon*, a two-hour showreel of done-to-dust superhero tropes.

From start to finish, the film lacks any sense of flow but just the first 30 minutes should tell you how trite the ideas are, and how messy screenwriting could get. In *Weapon*,



the superpowers come from a superhero serum that was stolen from the Nazis by an Indian soldier during Netaji Subhash Chandrabose's meeting with Hitler

in 1942. When the Swastika brigade comes to India to retrieve their prized possession, the soldier injects it into his son, Mithran, who grows up to become a superhero

(Sathyaraj) with superhuman strength, telekinesis, and telepathy.

But in the grand scheme of things in the world of *Weapon*, Mithran is a mere cog in the wheel. In the present day, a blast at a Neutrino power plant spools out many interconnected subplots, one no better than the other and with characters as shallow as it can get. We have Agni (Vasanth Ravi), a YouTuber chasing after superheroes to use them for ecological preservation. Then there is the Black Society 9, a Hydra-like organisation that controls the Indian economy, headed by Dev Krishnav a.k.a DK (Rajiv Menon); he's a Lex Luthor figure with the intellect of Kingpin, who uses children to illegally test his Limb Regeneration serum taken from lizards. Oh, did I mention a beefed-up assassin named Solomon who gets blackmailed to go on a final mission?

Also getting screen time is a rag-tag team of assassins, the concept of "Kundalini energy", the aura that humans apparently possess, glowing bees-like flying devices, and a Cyborg-esque lead to a sequel.

And none of these characters or ideas manage to register in this hotch-potch mess. Even veteran actor Sathyaraj gets the raw end of the deal. Having a superpower that demands minimal action ensures that the 69-year-old Sathyaraj looks as formidable as this

Logan-meets-Professor X-meets-Jean Grey figure. But he is hamstrung in a plot that uses him only as a showpiece to centre the plot around. If there was any scope for an emotional investment in the story, it was in the pathos that birthed it all –

## Weapon

**Director:** Guhan Senniappan

**Cast:** Sathyaraj, Vasanth Ravi, Tanya Hope, Rajiv Menon

**Storyline:** A YouTuber searching for a mysterious superhero crosses paths with a secret society headed by a supervillain

how Mithran grew up to be – but using slideshows of shoddy-looking AI-generated images adds a certain plasticity.

Now, while all this signals a poorly-written screenplay, what makes watching the film a more testing exercise is its editing, conception of scenes, and staging. In a pivotal scene, a child crossing a road is saved by a 'mysterious figure' from a recklessly driven lorry; in the plot, it is meant to birth pivotal surveillance footage evidence of superhumans. And just the writing, execution, and editing of this scene – and the way the surveillance footage is shot – should tell you that while Guhan might be a fan of superhero cinema, the filmmaker in him with a zeal to make superhero content needs to step out of his filter bubble and explore. For now, on Marvel's Earth-1218 and DC's Earth 33, his film remains a forgettable misfire which none of his superhumans manage to save.

*Weapon* is currently running in theatres





### Bad Boys: Ride or Die

**Directors:** Adil and Bilall

**Cast:** Will Smith, Martin Lawrence, Vanessa Hudgens, Alexander Ludwig, Paola Núñez, Eric Dane

**Storyline:** The bad boys ride once more tangling with drug cartels and more to clear their captain's name

## This ride is a thankless slog

### English

**Mini Anthikad Chhibber**

mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

The adrenaline runs high and there are insane shootouts in a chopper and abandoned alligator park (abandoned by all except the toothy reptiles). Despite all this, the fourth installment of the buddy action comedy does not have the secret sauce to keep one engaged.

Mike (Will Smith) from the Miami Police Department, has finally grown up and is marrying his therapist (physical, not mental

therapist, the film makes a point of noting), Christine (Melanie Liburd). At the wedding, his partner in the force, Marcus (Martin Lawrence) has a heart attack. After a near-death experience, where he gets advice from the great beyond, Marcus is a new man and not very happy when his wife, Theresa (Tasha Smith), has trashed all the salty snacks and turned vegetarian to support him in his recovery.

Then it is time for the bad boys to ride again (forget Marcus' dickey heart), when their dead captain Conrad Howard (Joe Pantoliano) is accused of being crooked and accepting money from the cartels. In a message from beyond the grave, Conrad tells Mike and Marcus that there is someone dirty within the police. The two decide to investigate further and clear the Captain's name.

Kelly (Vanessa Hudgens), Dorn (Alexander Ludwig) and Rita (Paola Núñez) from the Miami Police Department and US Marshall Judy (Rhea Seehorn), who is Conrad's daughter, are also in the hunt for truth. Lockwood (Joan Grifffudd) is running for mayor and Rita's latest boyfriend.

Mike's son, Armando (Jacob Scipio), who is in jail for killing Conrad, holds a crucial bit of evidence. And there is an Army ranger, McGrath (Eric Dane) whose teeth-gnashing sneers mark him out to be a truly horrid chap.

Smith and Lawrence's riffing is fun up to a point, especially the bit about Smith being a donkey in his last birth. It however, quickly becomes stale and there are those slaps, which will bring back horrid memories of the Oscar slap-gate. The video game shoot 'em up style of the action sequences captures the eye as do the jolly crocs, but then soon enough, your mind wanders to the action sequences in Lokesh Kanagaraj's *Leo*, which were much more edge-of-the-pants and a whole sight more thrilling.

It is time for the franchise, which started almost 30 years ago (1995 to be precise) directed by Michael Bay, who has a cameo in *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*, to be laid to rest in peace or pieces – the choice is in the Hollywood bean counters' hands.

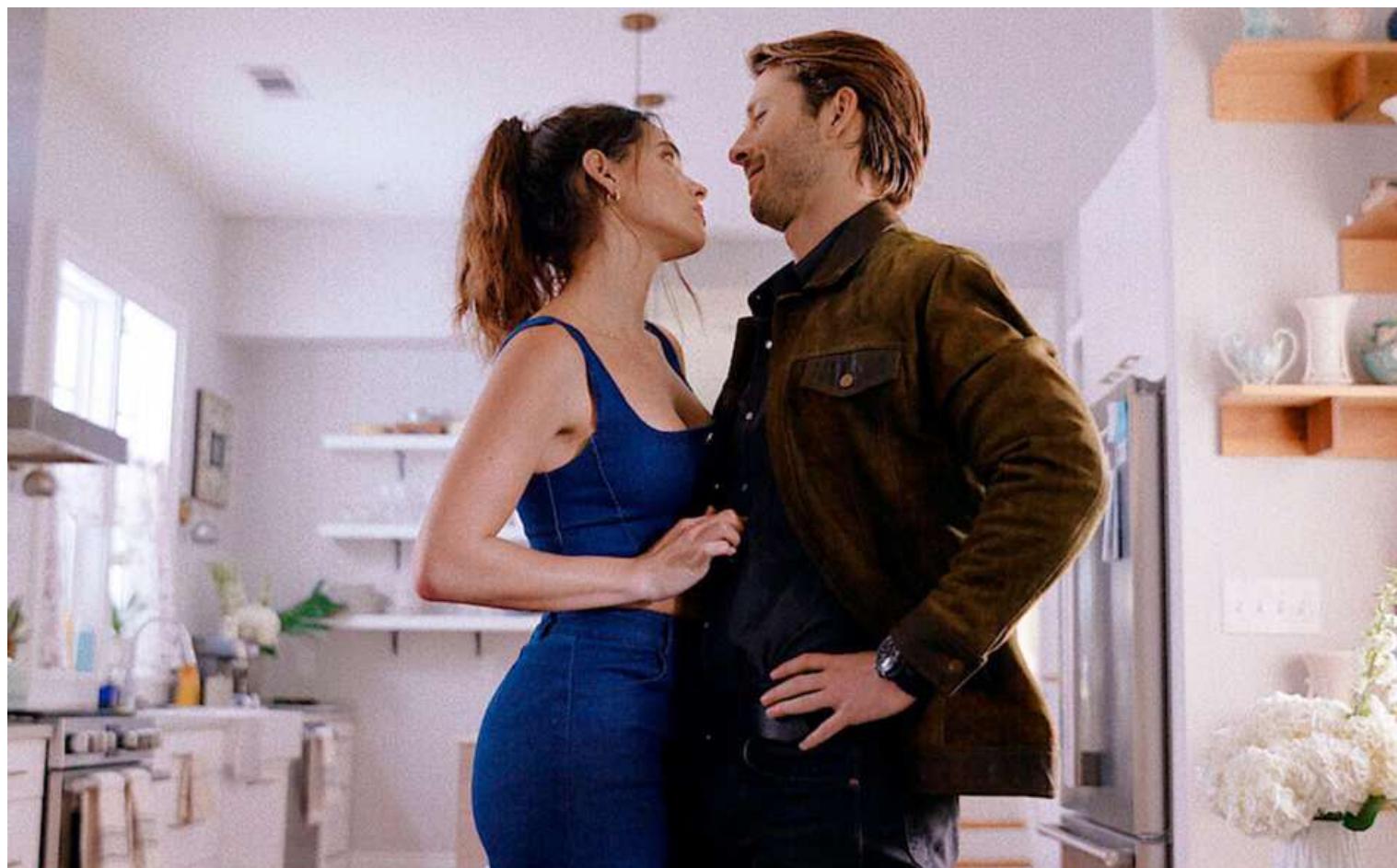
**Bad Boys: Ride or Die is currently running in theatres**

### Snippets



#### Siddharth's next film titled *Miss You*

Actor Siddharth, has signed up for a romance film titled *Miss You*. The film will mark the maiden production of branding and marketing firm 7 Miles Per Second, headed by Samuel Mathew. The film is helmed by N Rajasekar of *Maapla Singam* and *Kalathil Sandhippom* fame. *Miss You* stars Ashika Ranganath as the female lead. Ashika is known for starring predominantly in Kannada films like *Raambo 2*, *Raymo* and *Madhagaja*. She made her Tamil debut with *Pattathu Arasan* back in 2022. The extended cast of *Miss You* includes JP, Ponnannan, Naren, Anupama, Rama, Bala Saravanan, Karunakaran, Maaran and Sashtika. The technical team of the film includes music director Ghibran.



#### Vid�ut Jammwal joins the cast of Sivakarthikeyan and AR Murugadoss' next

Vid�ut Jammwal, who previously starred in AR Murugadoss - Vijay's *Thuppakki*, is reuniting with Murugadoss for his upcoming film with Sivakarthikeyan. The makers of the film, tentatively titled *SK x ARM*, took to social media to share the update. Produced by Sri Lakshmi Movies, the film marks the first time the two are teaming up as the actor and director. *Sapta Saagaradaache Ello* film fame Rukmini Vasanth, who is making her Tamil debut with Vijay Sethupathi's *ACE*, has been roped in as the female lead for the film. Anirudh will be handling the music for this film.



#### Richard Linklater announces next film titled, *Blue Moon*

*Boyhood* director Richard Linklater is reportedly setting his sights on his next cinematic endeavor, tentatively titled *Blue Moon*, that will explore the famed American songwriting duo Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart and their parting of ways. While the details are still unfolding, Linklater is in the developmental stages of this project. Inspired by the titular 1934 ballad penned by Rodgers and Hart, *Blue Moon* is said to look at the their partnership, particularly focussing on Hart's struggle to reconcile his own aspirations with Rodgers' soaring success, with the Broadway triumph of *Oklahoma!* The script is penned by Robert Kaplow.

## A sultry Linklater rom-com

A smart, provocative rom-com that dives into professional ethics and human morality, but its efficacy draws on nostalgic old-school sex appeal from the Powell-Arjona duet

### English

**Ayaan Paul Chowdhury**

ayaan.paul@thehindu.co.in

Not since the final outing in Richard Linklater's adored *Before* trilogy over a decade ago has the American director produced an addition to the rom-com genre as invigorating as *Hit Man*. A measured blend of smart humor, seductive undertones, and a delightful lead performance from Glen Powell, the *Boyhood* director's 23rd feature film, presents a sexy, offbeat rebranding of film noir.

The film's buoyant confidence pulls us into the unusual life of Powell's Gary Johnson; a Psychology professor-turned-faux hit man for the New Orleans police department. The film works as Linklater's sly commentary on the genre of hitman cinema, mischievously subverting expectations and critiquing the notion of the lone assassin as a cultural myth.

Powell, who also co-wrote and produced, sheds the machismo typecast that the high-octane *Top Gun* academy seems to have thrust upon him and delivers a fresh tour de force. Sporting a dorky hairdo and penchant for explicating Nietzsche, Jung and more philosophical schools of thought, Gary seems an unlikely candidate for the criminal underworld. By day, the ironies of inspiring his students with quotes about living dangerously don't seem lost upon the avid birdwatcher: the highlight of his day involves a lonesome dinner with his (cats) Id and Ego. When thrust into the role of an undercover hitman for hire however, Gary displays an unexpected talent for duplicity, morphing

### Hit Man

**Director:** Richard Linklater

**Cast:** Glen Powell, Adria Arjona, Austin Amelio, and Retta

**Storyline:** Professional killer Gary Johnson breaks protocol to help a desperate woman trying to flee an abusive husband and finds himself falling for her

into a master of disguise, a man with many faces.

The film's narrative, inspired by a true story, explores the dichotomy between Gary's unassuming daytime existence and his exhilarating nocturnal activities. The real Gary Johnson, whose life inspired the film, never crossed the line into actual murder, instead using his talents to ensnare those who sought his lethal services. Powell captures this chameleon-like quality with effortless charm, toggling between Gary's everyday nerdiness and his theatrical alter-egos with the ease that evokes the early "rubberface" impersonations of Jim Carrey.

His transformation scenes, where he dons outlandish costumes and adopts various accents, are pure comedic gold, each one more outrageous than the last. Powell throws himself into his roles with gusto, experimenting with everything from flamboyant accents to hyper-detailed backstories. The costumes are equally inventive – Gary switches from biker leather to psychopathic jumpsuits, from suave, suit-clad Patrick Bateman (from *American Psycho*) to a dishevelled, down-on-his-luck, red-neck drifter.

Gary's expertise in psychology shines through as he tailors his characters to the psyche of each would-be client, creating personas that are convincing and diverse. His performances are so over-the-top that even his usually stoic police handlers can't suppress their laughter (and sometimes their libidos). Yet, beneath the costumes and accents, Powell keeps a thread of Gary's true self visible – an awkward, fundamentally decent man who's just a bit too eager to live out his undercover fantasies. It's a balancing act that Powell handles with aplomb, ensuring that each disguise feels like an extension of Gary's repressed desires and latent talents, rather than a simple

costume change.

The film's romantic subplot features *Andor* star Adria Arjona as Maddy, a woman desperate to rid herself of an abusive ex. When Gary, posing as the suave hitman "Ron," convinces her to reconsider her drastic plan, sparks fly in the most unexpected of places. Powell seamlessly shifts between Gary's bumbling earnestness and Ron's confident swagger, perfectly complementing Arjona's portrayal of Maddy's vulnerability. Each sensual interaction is magnetic, with flirtatious quips exchanged in dimly lit bars, steamy moments of bedroom cosplay and stolen glances that accentuate the Hawke-Delpy sexual tension Linklater fans have come to know and love.

Gradually, Gary's journey becomes increasingly complex. His relationship with Maddy deepens, blurring the lines between his real and assumed identities. This culminates in a climactic showdown that keeps you on edge; Powell and Arjona's chemistry reaches its zenith here, their performances imbuing the scene with a heady concoction of passion and built-up tension.

No Linklater feature seems complete without philosophical musings, whether alluded to or explicit. The film touches upon themes of identity, morality, and the constructs of self, drawing on Gary's academia to enrich its motifs. However, these elements are handled with a lightness of touch that thankfully doesn't teeter towards morose existential angst.

*Hit Man* is a smart, sexy rom-com that puts Powell's recent on-screen tryst with Sydney Sweeney to shame. It's a relatively safer Linklater excursion that dives into professional ethics and human morality, but its efficacy draws on some nostalgic old-school sex appeal from the Powell-Arjona duet.

**Hit Man is currently streaming on Netflix**