

weekend

Vivid

metro PLUS THE HINDU

Shreya Banerjee

Kolkata's streets and the pursuit of love during Durga Puja are cut from the same cloth, a fabric of chance and inevitability. Every wrong turn might open like a trapdoor – into an ornate, never-seen-before pandal, or into the orbit of a stranger whose glance lingers a heartbeat too long in the *bhog* (offering) queue. The newness of the season feels conspiratorial: the thrill of a first encounter or a perfectly timed meet cute. Or on Navami, when the smoke of *Sandhi Puja* coils around the fading festivities, there is a lingering ache, a reminder of a love that never quite blossomed. By Dashami, as the goddess herself departs for her sojourn, one might even be ghosted by the Hinge date who promised so much.

For generations, Durga Puja has been more than a festival. It has been Kolkata's most democratic stage for social life, a space where young men and women exchanged glances at Maddox Square, or struck up conversations under the neon lights of Ballygunge Cultural. It was, in many ways, Bengal's original social network, its first dating app even.

The city has changed, and the pandals with it – simple structures now reborn as spectacles fit for a biennale but the pulse remains. Parents who once found love in puja clubs have children who swipe right before stepping out to hop pandals. Courtship has shifted from *adda* to algorithm, yet pujo remains Kolkata's canvas for encounters both old and new.

"I remember seeing him for the first time at a pujo pandal," recalls 57-year-old Anisha Shaw (name changed), who met her husband, Ashish Basu (name changed), at Shib

Kolkata's original dating app

Durga Puja is the city's most democratic stage. We pandal hop instead of swiping right this season



Mandir's puja pandal in 1996. "Pujo was simpler then. We friends circled around the pandal for hours of *adda* (conversation), helped with the *bhog*, ferried buckets of water, and fried *beguni* (aubergine fritters) in giant *kadhai*s (utensils). Someone's cousin would be sent running to Gariahat to fetch more mustard oil or *kasundi* (mustard). It was that kind of Pujo. Ashish and I kept running into each other. A year later, we were married."

In contrast, Anisha's daughter, 27-year-old sous chef Mishka Basu (name changed), met her fiancé on Bumble in 2024. Their romance began with a right swipe and a first date at AM PM on Park Street. Where their parents' love story unfolded between *alpanas* and serving tables, theirs began in an app's chat window.



Algorithms before *anjali*

"So in your world, multiplication is the same as division?" That was the first line 29-year-old engineer Arpan Majumdar sent to 26-year-old IT-healthcare professional Sailanki.

Nandy on Tinder – a witty reference to her microbiology background. "In cell biology, 'division' is when a parent cell splits into two daughter cells, which actually multiplies their number," she explains. "I melted right then," Sailanki laughs. "I'd chatted with so many boys, but no one bothered to write something clever like that."

Sailanki had dabbled in dating apps like Bumble and OKCupid during college, logging in "for a bit of validation" and deleting them after a few days. But in the long, lonely months of COVID-19 in 2020, she decided to give Tinder a serious try.

"Arpan was staying at his sister's house in Jadavpur, and I was in Behala. He's from Barrackpore, but our radii overlapped, and we matched," she recalls.

Durga Puja, she says, has always held deep meaning.

"I grew up in a joint family. Puja meant cousins coming back to the city followed by loud, festive days." Their first pujo together was in 2021. "We planned to meet on *ashtami* – me in a sari, him in a *parjani* (kurta). But he got food poisoning on *saptami*. I told him to rest, but

that night he insisted, 'Chol, North Kolkata te thakur dekhte jai' – let's go see the pandals in North Kolkata. I thought he was crazy. He travelled from Barrackpore despite being unwell, just so we could meet. We queued for one big pandal, but I said, 'If you need a loo break, we'll be stuck in a sea of people!' So we ducked into a café nearby, sitting close to the restroom, laughing about it."

On *dashami* morning they finally went pandal-hopping in South Kolkata, and afterward Arpan came home to meet her family. "That was our first Pujo together," she says.

User behaviour

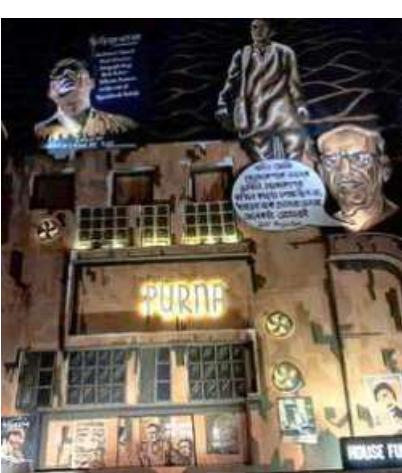
Speaking about dating patterns during the festive season, Chandni Gaglani, Indian dating app Aisle's head of business observes clear "pre-and post-festival" waves. "We see intense intent setting," she explains. "People update bios, refine filters, even tweak distance or language preferences to short list matches before celebrations begin. Usage frequency spikes, then dips once Durga Puja is in full swing, when everyone is absorbed in family and community. After the festival, there's a beautiful reflection period."

Chandni notes that social, community-driven festivals exert a very different pull than global occasions such as Valentine's Day. "These moments are deeply cultural and rooted in belonging," she says.



WESTWARD HO!

Anamika Khanna's AK|OK debut at London Fashion Week reimagines Indian craft with a modern, global flair. **P4**



Dum Dum Tarun Dal pandal

"They tap into something fundamental about identity and community."

Kolkata, she adds, sees the highest female participation on the dating app. "The city has always had a romantic, intellectual culture where relationships are treated as serious endeavours. We see that in how thoughtfully users craft profiles and conversations," remarks Chandni.

Across age groups

Aisle's users range from ages 18 to 50, but the largest group is the 26 to 35 demographic most inclined toward long-term commitment. "This cohort has typically moved away from their hometowns, established careers, and now seeks meaningful partnerships on their

own terms," Chandni explains. Thirty-eight-year-old Purnendu Guha (name changed), a reporter in Kolkata, has been using dating apps since 2020, a year after his divorce.

"Being a reporter, I don't have enough time to go out on dates, and I can't really date people from my workplace," he says. "But meeting someone during pujo is different. Across those five days, I get to interact with the person thoroughly, see how they respond to art, how they interact with people, handle money while buying from vendors, and if they're checking other people out," he laughs.

"For me, pujo makes dating safer too since it's all in public spaces. I have been doing this every year since 2020. No encounter has culminated into a relationship yet, but I've made good friends who share my values and my interest in art. When you meet someone in a café, the time is short, and the conversation stays on the surface. But during pujo, with longer hours and constant brushes with culture and art, I find both of us open up more."

This year, he already has a plan. "I'm meeting my date at a Raja Ravi Varma themed pandal in Tricone Park," he says, smiling. "I already have butterflies!"

CONTINUED ON
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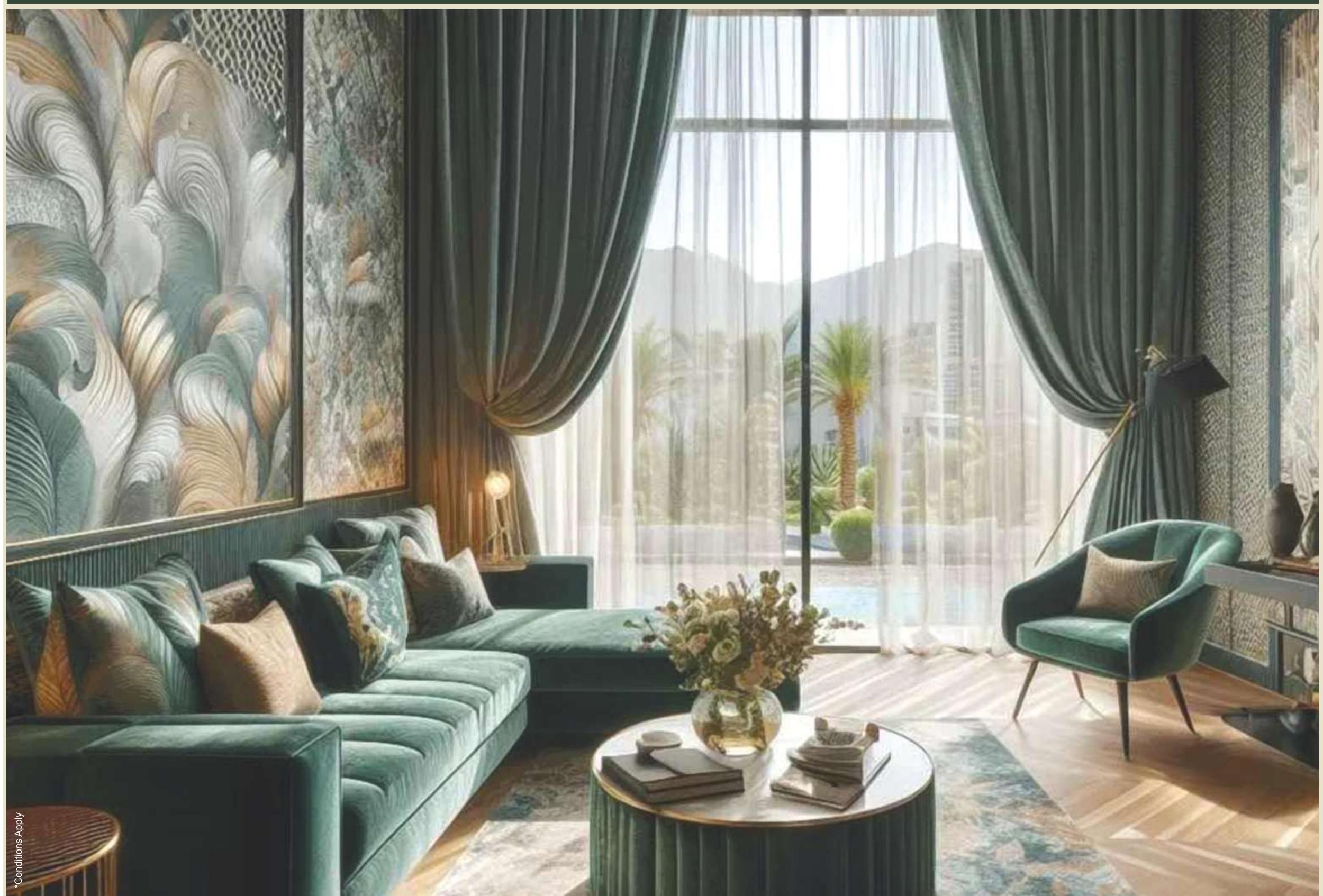
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(Clockwise from right) Mayil Maguri; Meenu Subbiah; and a display at the museum. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

India's first private museum for Chettinad jewellery just launched in Karaikudi. Pettagam, curated by Meenu Subbiah, spotlights Nagarathar history and traditional jewellery unique to the community

Jewel in Chettinad's crown

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In every Chettiar household sits a *pettagam*, a large, traditional iron chest or strongbox that stores the family's valuables. More importantly though, it holds the jewellery passed down through several generations. These iron chests come with complex lock combinations and, in some households, have remained unopened for years, as newer generations are yet to find a way to bypass the mechanics.

A cheery, bright-yellow building, with green windows, tucked away in Karaikudi, however, promises a deep dive into the rich and layered history of the jewellery of the region. This is Pettagam, India's first private museum for Chettinad jewellery, conceived by jewellery designer Meenu Subbiah.

Among the earliest graduates from South India at the Gemological Institute of America, Meenu has been working on traditional Chettinad jewellery and exploring contemporary designs through her brand, Meenu Subbiah Jewellery, which she founded with her father in 1993. "Chettinad, much like its mansions, cuisine, and textiles, has beautiful jewellery, created with deep meaning. Every motif you see has a purpose and



history. However, this fascinating legacy has not been documented well enough," says Meenu.

This led her to embark on nearly 20 years of research, as she sought to delve deeper into the Natukottai Nagarathar community and their history with trade, precious gems, and jewellery. "I travelled across the country, and to Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and several other places to speak to members of the community, historians, and anyone else who could share some insight and nuance," says Meenu.

In Karaikudi, we step into the

culmination of her travels and research at Pettagam, where the first floor is dedicated to tracing the history of the Nagarathar community that Meenu belongs to.

Looking back

She points out that the *Silappadikaram*, the Tamil epic, documents the Nagarathars as traders of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls as early as the 2nd Century.

Through jewellery unique to the community – such as the *kazhuthuru*, an ornament given to a Nagarathar bride during marriage, and the *gowrisankaram*, considered to be the most important ornament worn by men during events and ceremonies including weddings – we learn about the rare and dwindling art of the close-setting technique.

This technique, used in less than 10% of traditional jewellery, securely encases diamonds or other precious gems from the sides and back, in the precious metal used to make the piece. "This is a rather complex and time-consuming art, and we unfortunately have a dwindling number of artisans who still practise it. Through Pettagam,

we were keen on reviving this dying art. Pieces made with this technique are sturdy and come with so much nostalgia; they are pieces of the heart, and no machine can make this kind of jewellery," Meenu says.

At Pettagam, a separate display showcases the tools used in crafting jewellery through the close-setting technique. Another facet she highlights are the unique motifs – from crabs and peacocks, to bows, laces, and conches that recur in Nagarathar jewellery.

"Nagarathars who travelled were said to follow the crab routes, which is why it finds a place of prominence in many pieces, including our *thirumangalyam* (marriage ornament). Bows and laces are believed to have originated from visits to the royal family in England," she says.

The first floor is a dedicated space for jewellery showcases. "Apart from heirloom pieces my



family owns, I hope to have a rotating display of exquisite traditional pieces sourced from different families in this region. Alongside this will be a showcase of jewellery from my brands as well, which will also be available for purchase," Meenu says.

Across traditions

Her newly launched brand, Vilasam, which specialises in traditional Chettinad jewellery will have a place of prominence at the museum, also highlighting the close-setting technique. Contemporary jewellery from her Menaya brand, and jewellery specific to different parts of the country, including *guttapusalu* from Andhra Pradesh and *kaasu maalai* from Kerala, adapted as part of the Vamsam range, will also be showcased.

Pettagam now joins the ranks of private jewellery museums across the country, like the Amrapali Museum in Jaipur, which spotlights unique craftsmanship and techniques while documenting jewellery legacies.

Meenu adds, "Every region in our country has a beautiful ancestral legacy in jewellery, and these legacies deserve to be protected and preserved. This museum is an important archive of Chettinad and its jewellery, while also underscoring the importance of preserving traditional jewellery-making techniques."

Pettagam, SRM Street, Karaikudi, opens on October 1. Visit by appointment via concierge@meenububbiah.lux or on 9566503736. Entry is free.

Mount Fuji on your pallu

RmKV Silks' festive collection of handcrafted silk saris is inspired by Japanese art and Indian heritage



The Van Gogh lino checks silk sari features a flowing pallu inspired by Van Gogh's *Field of Irises*.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Chitradeepa Anantharam

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Marking its 101st year, RmKV Silks has launched 15 new creations as a part of its festive collection that brings together traditional Indian weaving techniques and designs inspired by Japanese art. Expect sashiko embroidery, korvai weaves with traditional Japanese motifs.

The Mount Fuji sashiko sari, for instance, showcases intricate sashiko geometric patterns alongside a Mount Fuji framed by cherry blossoms. The naturally dyed peach-gradient sari employs a palette of six peach tones, achieved through natural lac and sappanwood dye.

For those seeking contemporary flair, the Van Gogh lino checks silk sari stands out as a wearable tribute to the legendary artist. This lightweight sari features a flowing pallu inspired by Van Gogh's *Field of Irises*. The brand has pioneered the use of pneumatic handlooms that not only ease the weaver's work, but also empowers women artisans by providing sustainable livelihoods.

The collection is available at RmKV's flagship showrooms across Chennai, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, and Bengaluru.



It's all about labels

Celebrated designer Rahul Mishra has lent his signature design philosophy to create a limited-edition Deepavali bottle, bringing together the artistry of couture with the rarity and craftsmanship of Johnnie Walker Blue Label, a premium Scotch whisky. The design reflects his intricate detailing and celebration of Indian heritage, making it a collector's piece. Additionally, the packaging of the bottle that will be released on October 20 reflects a thoughtful design showcasing Rahul's designing prowess.

Play of contrasts

Twilight Gala, part of Twamev's Truly You campaign, is an Indo-western evening wear collection that plays with contrasts. Women's silhouettes explore saris with jackets, corset blouses, mermaid skirts and more. Menswear features sharp tailoring with kurtas and heavily embroidered jackets. Textiles include cotton twill, velvet, silk, and organza adorned with tribal embroidery, kala dori, Parsi stitch, zardozzi, sequins, 3D accents, beadwork, and cutwork.

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pick of the week



Glow up

H&M steps into the world of beauty in India with the launch of H&M Beauty. The collection brings together over 200 products — from makeup and fragrances to beauty tools — blending global trends with local craftsmanship. Key offerings include lipsticks, mascara, blush, and vegan perfumes, designed to make self-expression effortless and accessible. *H&M Beauty concept will be available from October 2 across all H&M stores in India and online at hm.com.*



The revival

Raw Mango's latest collection, Playground, reimagines Mashru, a silk-cotton textile with a storied past. The line celebrates vibrant colours and playful stripes through saris, pairing bold borders with pin-striped patterns that explore proportion, colour, and form. Mashru now returns in silk through-and-through. *The collection is available at rawmango.com and across all their stores.*



Wedding vibes

Phoenix MarketCity Chennai is turning wedding dreams into reality — without the vows! The mall transforms into a grand fake wedding with Vows & Vogue — The Wedding Gala, a three-day extravaganza designed like a real wedding celebration.

Think mehendi, sangeet, fashion, beauty pop-ups, live performances, and a dazzling shaadi finale — all the joy, colour, and drama of a wedding, minus the pheras.

Till September 28, at Phoenix MarketCity, Velachery.



Festive flavours

SALT Indian Restaurant brings the flavours of Navratri, with dishes prepared without onion and garlic. Expect shakarkand aur nadru chaat, sabudana ki tikki, and bhindi kurkure, followed by mains like jeera aloo methi, dudi kofta malai curry, and foxtail millet khichdi. To end on a sweet note, there is chironji aur makhan ki kheer, malpuwa with rabdi, and strawberry kulfi. *Till October 5, at all outlets in Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune.*



FOMO FIX

(Clockwise from left) Stills from *The Ba**ds of Bollywood*; and Steve Martin, Martin Short and Selena Gomez at *Only Murders in the Building* NETFLIX AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



A star is made

Satire, parody, farce and everything in between

Sudhish Kamath

What's the difference between a satire, a parody or spoof, and a farce?

Satire critiques. Parody caricatures — like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Cash*. Farce goes further, capturing the chaos of the whole system with exaggerated comedy that spares no one, not even the creator.

Aryan Khan's unapologetic farce *The Ba**ds of Bollywood* — now streaming on Netflix — is most likely to be misunderstood, if taken literally. Aryan refused interviews, letting the work speak, and it does: messy, loud, and rooting for outsiders,

underdogs, has-beens, and strugglers in the city of dreams.

Polarising for its offensive adult content, the show draws drama from *Om Shanti Om*, tone from *Delhi Belly*, and sometimes plunges into *Borat* territory — crass, wicked, politically incorrect. Not for the easily triggered.

Aryan leans into the clown persona. Twice the "Directed by Aryan Khan" card is itself the punch line. He roasts himself, his father, and Bollywood cameos (though Salman is wasted).

What's impressive is how he hides the farce in heartfelt beats of bromance and heartbreak until the finale reframes everything as one big punch line hiding in plain sight.

The zingers fly: "Born nahin

sir, made." Or the heroine's slow-motion entry undercut with: "Bhaiyya, pankha bandh kijiye."

Privilege gets skewered with precision — like the billionaire who forgets he owns a channel.

Aryan also slips in modern WIFs: "The intimacy coach cancelled — he's going through a divorce." Vulnerability too: "I'm not strong enough to face that kind of failure, so I can't fail."

With Bilal Siddiqi and Manav Chauhan, Aryan builds a terrific ensemble where even side characters get their moment.

Smart, funny, uncompromising, *The Ba**ds of Bollywood* announces a bold new voice — one that loves and hates Bollywood clichés, roasting and romanticising the dream factory in equal measure. Irreverent,

adult, unaframed — this one's destined for cult status.

A star is made.

More murders in the building

Steve Martin, Martin Short and Selena Gomez are back for another season of *Only Murders in the Building* and the satire continues to skewer all things pop culture, with another set of really cool celebrity cameos.

Christoph Waltz, the best of the bunch this season, wonders if the title of their podcast limits the scale of their investigation and the audience since they specialise in solving murder cases strictly in the building. Another points out that the murders became a regular feature only after they started their podcast.

And the person managing the



building trash knows everything about the residents by sorting through their trash.

This time, it's the doorman — the gatekeeper to the building's secrets — who is found dead as the show turns its attention and focus to the people who are always downstairs and about to be replaced by robots.

Creator Steve Martin makes switching between drama and comedy effortless in this satire that lets the tongue-in-cheek humour take us through the most ridiculous of escalating stakes and situations.

Making of a train wreck
No amount of farce and satire can prepare you for the life of Charlie Sheen.

The new Netflix documentary *Aka Charlie Sheen* tells us his story through all those who had a ringside view to the train wreck of his life — his closest childhood friends, fellow actors, collaborators from *Two and a Half Men* including Chuck Lorre who killed his character off as a joke in the show, wives, children, the woman who supplied him with sex workers, his ex drug dealer...

We do miss Martin Sheen's absence from the doc — he refused to participate but it's easy to see why his own father refused to be a part of his story.

The documentary is candid, it doesn't try to build him up or break him down further with the participants weighing in on his substance abuse and addiction that they saw as a disease that changed everything about who he used to be fundamentally.

From the hottest shows to hidden gems, overlooked classics to guilty pleasures, FOMO Fix is a fortnightly compass through the chaos of content.



(Clockwise from left) Models at the show; Jacqueline Fernandez; Sonam Kapoor; and Anamika Khanna. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



started," the designer says. The collection includes flowy capes, slouchy trousers, long coats, and oversized shirts featuring elements of reimagined traditional craft. Chikankari embroidery, for instance, features on long coats, and silver elements referencing Indian jewellery feature on jeans, skirts and boots. Working with nuances such as the Indian *churidar* or

AK|OK, since the time of its inception, always had global ambitions and the potential to be a brand out of India that is relevant in terms of ready-to-wear fashion

ANAMIKHA KHANNA

becomes a challenge, as to where to draw the line. So, all of this together was something I had to keep in mind," Anamika explains.

After eight shows in India over the last four years, for AK|OK, Anamika says the London debut only felt natural given how the city is fashion forward, experimental and accepting.

"AK|OK, since the time of its inception, always had global ambitions and the potential to be a brand out of India that is relevant in terms of ready-to-wear fashion. Obviously for that, you need your clothes to be showcased and you need people to see them in a certain way which is why I felt like London as a platform became really important, given how it is very receptive to different cultures," she says.

With the London debut being a pivotal point in AK|OK's journey, Anamika says that the brand continues to evolve every single day. "It is like a whole universe, and not just about fashion. It is about a lifestyle, a mindset — either you are AK|OK or you are not. It is about a way of life where you allow ease, and it starts with the way you dress," she says. More and more people, she says, are getting the brand's ethos. "If you make a mistake, it is okay. If you are not perfect, it is okay. If you're wearing the wrong mix and match, it is okay as well," Anamika says, encapsulating what the brand stands for, in fashion and otherwise.

This year, Anamika branched out towards South India with her first flagship store in Hyderabad, designed Isha Ambani's MET Gala outfit, and opened Lakme Fashion Week with her collection, Silver Collar. "It has come to a point where the more creatively I am challenged, the better it is. I am in this mindspace... fashion is like that," she laughs.

About what else this year has in store for her, Anamika says, "We have also just finished shooting for our couture collection, have bags coming up, and I am looking forward to the opening of another Mumbai store."



Heritage home comes alive for Navratri

A 75-year-old bungalow on Eldams Road is the setting for Under the Mango Tree, a five-day Navratri festival presented by My Bungalow in partnership with Acharyanet Foundation. The event transforms the heritage home into a stage for art, music,

food and tradition, inviting audiences to an intimate celebration beneath a sprawling mango canopy.

Every evening till September 28, between 4.30pm and 7.30pm, the backyard garden will become a performance space, where performances and scholarly talks will unfold in an intimate setting. Here is the schedule of the events:

September 27, 4.30pm - 5.30pm: Nalangalai Allitharam Mahalakshmi, Part II. 6pm-7.30pm: Bhagavathy, a tale of the goddess of Kodungallur. Concept, choreography and presentation by Divya Nayar.

September 28, 5pm-5.30pm: Maayamma: presentation by the students of K. Gayatri. 6pm-7.30pm: Pancha Tanmaatra Sayaka: Soundarya Lahari. A talk by Dr Sudha Seshayyan.

Complementing the programme is a saree showcase by Chettinad handlooms (10am to 8 pm), an exhibition of goddess-themed paintings by Meghna Unnikrishnan (11am to 8pm), and a menu by Arusuvai Arasu Catering Services (3pm to 8pm daily). The festival blends performance and tradition in a heritage space that radiates festive warmth.

At My Bungalow, Eldams Road. On till September 28. Entry is free and open to all. For details, call 8925620040

Cultural remix

Indian designer Anamika Khanna tells us about AK|OK's debut collection at the London Fashion Week and the brand's global ambitions



angrakha silhouettes in this collection and to look at them from the lens of a foreigner, Anamika says, were things she personally found very exciting.

"I am so proud of my heritage. This is where I come from. I want to derive from here and yet make clothes that neither look like a costume, nor are unapproachable and unwearable. This

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The iconic toy store Hamleys at Regent Street, London, might at first sound like an unlikely setting for a fashion show. But for designer Anamika Khanna's label AK|OK's debut at the London Fashion Week on September 22, the venue seemed to be the right choice.

AK|OK's debut collection had models sashaying past shelves of toy cars, plushies and more. It delves into nostalgia, honours the designer's endeavour to look at India with a modern lens and celebrates the country's textile and craft heritage.

"I have always felt that there was a need to push the boundaries when it comes to presenting India anywhere in the world. And when I started thinking about this collection, specifically what we were going to show at London Fashion Week, I thought of this cool Indian London girl," Anamika says. "This girl has roots in India because she has Indian grandparents, and when she visits them, she discovers a few pieces. I thought about what she would do with these pieces when she got back, and this is where the collection story

City of lights

From Victoria Memorial to old clock towers, synagogues and markets, a citizen-led illumination project is bringing history alive in Kolkata

Shreya Banerjee

As monsoon clouds darken Kolkata, towards late evening, something magical happens. The skies turn inky blue, and iconic, British-era buildings are swathed in mellow, yellow LED lights. After sleeping through years of soot, rain and crumbling plaster, the clock tower of Magen David Synagogue, domes and minarets of Burhani Masjid, and the wind-whirled angel of victory atop Victoria Memorial, amongst several other buildings, are learning to speak again. Their language being the madeleine-soft yellow luminescence.

The notion of draping the city's British-era facades in light came to heritage conservationist Mudar Patherya almost by accident. Driving down Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road one day, he saw the dome of Maniktala Market and was dismayed. The crumbling structure wore a giant advertisement like a scar. Mudar got the building freshly painted, only to find its renewed beauty enveloped by the night. Illumination, he decided, was the

answer. The first lighting revealed an unexpected magic, and it sowed the seed of a larger idea – to highlight more of the city's sleeping landmarks.

"I passed the hat among friends and industrialists who funded my illumination project," Mudar recalls. "We needed a name that captured both, the city and the action we were taking, so I called it Kolkata Restorers. And that's how the movement began. Kolkata Restorers is not an organisation. It's a WhatsApp group. No president, no chairman emeritus, no functionaries. Just a broadcast thread. That's how simple, functional, effective, and relevant we have kept it."

In a year and 10 months since its inception, Kolkata Restorers has illuminated as many as 95 buildings including independent homes, the General Post Office, Raj Bhavan, and the Ishwar Kalachand Jiu temple.

Light designer of the illumination project, Suyash Narasaria, founder of Optilux Electricals LLP, says, "The structures guide us. We don't force light onto them, we highlight what



the architect imagined a century ago. The idea is to respect the heritage, not drown it."

Cost efficient LED technology has been the lighting team's ally. "With smart controls, timers, and dimming options, we make sure the building looks stunning while consuming minimal power," says Suyash. Describing the temperature of the colours, he explains, "For heritage structures, we lean towards warmer tones because they bring out the richness of stone and brick, and give the building a timeless aura. Cooler tones are



(Clockwise from above) Burhani Masjid; Hindu Mutual Building near Hindustan Building on Chittaranjan Avenue; St Paul's Cathedral; The General Post Office; and Palmars Bridge Pumping Station Office. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pradeep? It looks wonderful," they said. A lot of night tours have emerged. Sujoy Sen, who runs tour company Travel Together Everywhere, conducts night tours that take visitors around the illuminated buildings. Mudar believes that in the coming months, more such tours will feature every alternate Saturday.

He says, "Some event organisers are also thinking along the lines of having festivals around my illuminated structures. One needs to go beyond illumination, otherwise, the place will only remain as an illuminated structure. We need to have performances, or even night cuisine."

His wish list is ambitious. The building he wants to light up next is the Writers' Building. "Writers' Building would be defining. I have got the provision to light up the Indian Museum and Howrah Station. The feasibility of these buildings has to be explored," explains Mudar, whose vision is to touch 200 structures.

As the streets thin out, the LED lights keep their nightly watch. What the day hides in smog and haze, the night reveals in wattage. Look closely, the soul of the old city treads softly at night.

Farm on a villa

Around 40 species of leafy greens and 10-12 fruiting crops are being cultivated in a 10,000 square-foot hydroponic farm at a 129-year-old Portuguese villa



used to it because they aren't going to have too many choices when it comes to their food, in the future."

About The First House Produce
The First House Produce is a relatively recent venture by this 10-bedroom, fully serviced, single-key luxury property (rentals start at ₹2,50,000/night), once the home of a Portuguese diplomat. The villa, built in 1896 and redesigned by Ayaz Basrai of The Busride Studio 2020, is currently owned by Rakhee and Rakesh Shah, who relocated to Guirim, Goa, from

Mumbai during the pandemic. "We target people coming in a larger bunch to celebrate milestones," says Yogi Shah, who co-founded the Villa Escape, a Mumbai-based premium travel planning company that runs and manages the property.

Old world charm

The First House's interiors – airy, bathed in light, and filled with finely-crafted furniture, artefacts and art – and lush grounds exude quiet luxury. And the hydroponic farm, with its focus on slow, sustainable living, is an extension of this ethos.

"It is a beautiful property with so much history and a homely vibe," believes Suchna Hegde Shah, the other co-founder of Villa Escape, pointing out that having a farm-to-fork experience elevates the ultra-luxe experience for a guest.

As they travelled the world, they encountered the social movement to produce food more locally, says Yogi, which had them thinking about creating a farm-to-fork experience at First House. "Since we had the space, we decided to get into hydroponics and have a farm-to-fork. That is the whole reason why The First House Produce came about," he says,

adding that while there was already a small, nascent hydroponic setup in the house, it has expanded considerably in the six-to-eight months and mushroomed into a distinct fresh produce brand. "While we don't call ourselves 100% farm to fork, we try to see that whatever you eat at The First House is as organically grown and local as possible," he says.

The bowl of fresh greens, topped with avocado and tomatoes, that makes its way to the lunch table, clearly indicates that this decision is bearing fruit: literally. Not only does the produce lend itself to delicious in-house meals, it is also currently being supplied to hotels, restaurants and private houses in Goa. The vegetables, which range in price from ₹300/kg for lettuce to a few thousand for heirloom tomatoes, are currently being sold via WhatsApp, Instagram, or directly at The First House. "We have garnered an excellent response, says Yogi. "We are shocked at the number of people who want fresh, organic food. It has been amazing."

The writer was in Goa at the invitation of The First House, Goa.

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Kolkata's original dating app

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Speaking of how pujo has changed, 33-year-old software engineers Kaustav and Arjoyita Banerjee recall a different time.

"Back then, you could actually stand in front of a pandal and take it all in," Kaustav says. "Now it's near stampede crowds."

A sense of anonymity still matters, says Megha Palit, a 34-year-old event planner and lesbian who meets women mostly through dating apps. "Hinge is where the first hello happens," she explains, "but pujo is where you find out if the chemistry is real."

She remembers her college years, long before swipes and matches, when Durga Puja was the only place she could risk a

cheeky flirtation with another woman. "It's crowded, anonymous, and oddly protective," she says. "The city is so busy worshipping the goddess it forgets to police you. Even now, after we've matched online, that's where I take a date first. In the middle of the lights and the *dhak*, you can breathe and maybe fall a little in love."

Sreejita Chakraborty, a 28-year-old entrepreneur, and her 32-year-old husband, Aditya Sengupta, a sales strategist, met on Tinder in 2021. "Being a Bengali who grew up in Delhi, pujo for me always meant four packed days at CR Park," Aditya says. "Sreejita is

(Clockwise from above) Mishka and her partner; a girl posing in front of a pandal; and a Raja Ravi Varma themed pandal

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



from Kolkata and my first pujo with her was so special," recalls Aditya. After their marriage, he remembers a moment that stayed with him, "As our flight descended upon the Kolkata skyline, the bright lights below felt like they were speaking to me."

Over the years, as their relationship deepened, Pujo has taken on a richer meaning. "It's not just about romantic love," he says. "Now it's about wheeling my 90-year-old grandmother through the pandals, because the joy of discovering new pandals and

appreciating the artistry of each means little unless it's shared with family," smiles Aditya.

Kolkata has always left its doors ajar for mystery and awe to wander in. Durga Puja takes the heart of its people and blurs the range of immersive

experiences each year. The goddess comes and goes but leaves behind a thousand small awakenings. Apps may start the conversation now, but the real magic still happens under those restless, fevered nights when Kolkata forgets itself and remembers desire.



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Hindi

A potent courtroom drama



Anuj Kumar

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This week, Subhash Kapoor, who has mastered the art of sugar coating the bitter pill with satire, rewinds to the farmer agitation against land acquisition in Greater Noida's Bhatta Parsaul in 2011 to drive his *Jolly LLB* franchise forward.

Kapoor relocates the source of the story from Uttar Pradesh to Rajasthan, but its soul echoes with the farmer's distress across the region.

Rajaram, a marginal farmer and a poet in Parsaul village in Bikaner, ends his life after the system cheats him to serve the interests of a real estate magnate, Khetan (Gajraj Rao). When his widow Janaki (Seema Biswas) seeks legal support through an NGO, she approaches two Jolly good advocates (Arshad Warsi and Akshay Kumar) that Kapoor created in the first two instalments. The two might not be well-versed in the language of the law, but they have the grit and spirit to take on the mighty.

Though he bats for the farmer's interest, Kapoor, like an old-school journalist, keeps space for opposing points of view in his reportage. He articulates the capitalist's

concerns about our Gandhian guilt regarding the accumulation of wealth. The film counters the demonisation of NGOs by exposing the think tank culture where subservience to corporate interests raises a stink.

Of course, the tone becomes one-sided after a point. It puts the case of landed farmers and keeps the farm workers, who proved to be the real capital of the politician-corporate nexus, out of the picture, but Kapoor once again punches above the genre's weight to say that in the social contract there cannot be separate clauses for the haves and have not's.

Having said that, the franchise cinema comes with its pitfalls. There is little room for experimentation with the structure. It becomes a handicap because the space is no longer a novelty. Kapoor submits to a pattern: set the stage and switch to courtroom dialogue that becomes increasingly preachy as the case progresses.

By switching from Arshad to Akshay, Kapoor had raised the commercial value of the venture. The pitch had become louder, but his voice became a bit feeble. Here, he tries to strike a balance between the two stools, and the effort shows.

Once again, Saurabh Shukla is the biggest star of the show as he keeps the franchise fresh. His Judge Tripathi has already become one of the iconic characters of Hindi cinema. In the third instalment, Shukla adds a few more nuances to his performance as Tripathi discovers a new meaning of date. Meanwhile, you keep a date with this hearing to understand the plight of the peasant.

Jolly LLB 3 is currently running in theatres.

at the movies



Vijay Antony's political premise

Arun Prabu Purushothaman's ambitious film could have become a generation-defining political thriller had it sustained the beat and style of storytelling that it promised

Tamil

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If everyone in the nation becomes a beggar, from whom will he rob? "Why should the victims be scared when the perpetrators aren't? In a democratic nation, the one on top must be scared of the one below and not the other way around." "The old man who taught me bravery also taught me that while we can use a cane to support ourselves, we must also learn when to use it to whack someone when needed."

These are some of the many political dialogues uttered in actor-producer Vijay Antony's *Shakthi Thirumagan*, a political thriller with a fantastic premise and grand execution that ultimately falls short in effect. Now, a reader who hasn't watched the film might be sceptical of such straightforward political sloganeering, but the good news is that this Arun Prabu Purushothaman-directed film is backed by some solid ideas and engaging screenwriting that hardly anything falls out of place, at least for the most part.

Say what you want, Vijay Antony knows the pulse of the audience, and he deserves credit for his conviction over the masala template. Time and again, the actor has demonstrated a knack for selecting the right script and extracting the best from a director to craft a compelling mainstream film with a Vijay Antony-esque twist. And after 2021's political masala drama *Kodiyil Oruvan*, directed by Ananda Krishnan of *Metro* fame, the actor has once again collaborated with a filmmaker to make a film that is unlike anything they had done before. In fact, an uninformed viewer might be surprised to know that the director behind *Shakthi Thirumagan* is the

Shakthi Thirumagan

Director: Arun Prabu Purushothaman

Cast: Vijay Antony, Cell Murugan, Sunil Kripalani, Trupti Ravindra

Storyline: A street-smart broker, operating his own secret government, takes on a powerful foe

same man who made films like *Aruvi* and *Vaazh*.

Even the tonality of the film takes you by surprise, and *Shakthi Thirumagan* races through its set-up at breakneck speed, at times almost making you wish for a breather to take it all in. We are introduced to the world that Kittu (Antony) has built for himself. Shadowing as a pimp, he is secretly operating his own government as a lobbyist with pull so deep that he could even facilitate the transfer of an Inspector General of Police! Kittu just needs a few phone calls to get the job done, and he helps everyone without bias – from an old man who lost his lifetime savings to a bribe, and a swimming athlete who can't afford necessary sporting gear, to a judge seeking to launder his black money, and a personal assistant of a party leader who wants to gain her respect.

It's a shadow governance that operates with the help of mutual favours, but Kittu's real talent is in pulling the right strings to get the job done without raising any alarms. The film's sharp and slick pattern of editing also works in its favour, because by the time you process how this well-oiled machinery works, the job is already done and Kittu is onto the next. Arun Prabu seamlessly introduces the many characters who take pivotal positions in this world (it truly is heartwarming to see Cell Murugan get a full-fledged role after a long time; the actor plays Kittu's manager Maaran). Also, moments that a different director would have felt compelled to hog onto and embellish – like Kittu's romance with his wife Vembu (Trupti Ravindra) – Arun Prabu handles with modesty.

The first half of *Shakthi Thirumagan* sails like a theme park ride, as we see Kittu level up steadily with the stakes getting higher and higher. Eventually, he goes out of his depth, ending up in the crosshairs of his boss, Abhyankar Srinivasa Swamy (Sunil Kripalani), a nefarious industrialist who has several

central and state ministers in his pocket. Soon, Kittu ends up in a major complication – after all, it is necessary to throw such an obstacle at such an overpowered protagonist – and you begin to wonder if he could ever escape this quagmire. Unfortunately, everything goes amiss for *Shakthi Thirumagan* from here.

The writing begins to lose both the punch and the conviction we found in the first half. Hackneyed ideas, like using a cyberhacker to hack into public systems, further dampen the proceedings, but the real trouble is how preachy it all gets. Sure, we get the customary flashback, but must it be filled to the brim with so many political punchlines? At times, you begin to wonder if the same message could have been told in the same cadence and style of the political thriller that it initially posed to be. The same film that believed in its audiences' intellect to read between the lines, turns expository in its latter half.

Don't get me wrong, the message delivered is noble – Indian society is indeed a crocodile-infested lake where only the corrupt and apathetic 1% can live scot-free, and it's gut-wrenching to think about how there are many mediators who, unlike Kittu, only think about filling their own bellies. However, what should have been an epilogue becomes a long, didactic sequence. A sermon addressing the gallery in a poorly staged scene becomes the tipping point as *Shakthi Thirumagan* ends with a limper.

During the intermission break of the film, I heard a moviegoer compare the effect of the first half to that of some classic Tamil political dramas like *Mudhalvan*, *Gentleman* and *Indian*. If only Arun Prabu had cracked a better resolution for this well-written premise, we might have gotten the *Indian* that the current generation of Tamil audiences deserves.

Shakthi Thirumagan is currently running in theatres



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Not bad at all, Aryan Khan!

Hindi

Anuj Kumar

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Social media might have bridged the distance between Bollywood stars and the common man, but the curiosity of fans and trolls to look at the view behind the camera remains unsatisfied. Over the years, directors Farah Khan, Zoya Akhtar, and Karan Johar have used their access to inside stories to whet this appetite by creating pieces of entertaining cinema and peeping talk shows.

Taking this 'silsila' forward, debutant Aryan Khan pulls back the curtains and brews an intoxicating concoction of gossip, news, and salacious details in between to mount a sharp take on the movie mafia, as Karan describes Bollywood biggies in the series, and their shenanigans and hypocrisy.

Aryan uses his access to his father's friends and colleagues not to paint a tribute, but to create



subversive graffiti. He roasts his father's friends, plays with their image, spoofs his detractors, and in the end gives the series a climactic

twist, a quirk of fate that would make Mammootty Desai proud. The self-awareness of the insider doesn't become frictional in the rollercoaster

ride, and it is what separates *Ba**ds of Bollywood* from *Tees Maar Khan* of yore, giving it more heft than *Om Shanti Om* and more colour than *Luck By Chance*. When the asterisks in *Ba**ds* give way to the letters, the spirit of the series shines through.

Tantalisingly perched on the boundary wall between fact and fiction, the seven-episode series follows the journey of an outsider, Aasman Singh (Lakshya), from Delhi to stardom in Bollywood. Moving in the fast lane, Aryan ticks the boxes of nepotism, predatory producers, underworld, paid media, drugs, and ephemerality of fame in a language that is profane, but the emotion it carries is deep and relatable. There is an easy layer of satire and secular values beneath the style and shimmer.

The confident Aasman reminds one of a young Shah Rukh Khan with his cheeky attitude, witty repartees, and the ability to take the villain's punches. The endearing bond between Aasman and a perky Pervaiz (Raghav Juyal) is the driving force of the series, and the chemistry

between Lakshya and Karishma (Sahher Bamba) provides the hormonal rush. Together with Anya Singh, as the perky manager of Aasman, the age-appropriate, talented cast makes even the predictable portions engrossing.

Addressing a paying public that is

not as much interested in the craft of

the brooding actors as it is in crafty attitudes of movie moguls doing everything to save their brood, Bobby Deol emerges as the surprise package of the series.

After a long time, he finds his natural range and delivers a power-packed punch as the reigning star, Ajay Devgn, who doesn't want his daughter, Karishma, to be launched opposite an outsider. Mona Singh is more than just the sweet mother of the aspiring star, and Manish Choudhary doesn't let the haughty, hamming producer become a cardboard cutout.

Manoj Pahwa is reassuring as ever as the gutsy uncle who didn't get his due from the industry. The cameos by Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, SS Rajamouli, Ranveer Singh, Arshad Warsi, and Shah Rukh are coded into the storyline, and Anirudh Ravichander and Shashwat Sachdev create a groovy score that oscillates between heady and rowdy. Time to howl, Ghafoor!

B**ds of Bollywood

Director: Aryan Khan

Cast: Lakshya, Raghav Juyal, Sahher Bamba, Anya Singh, Bobby Deol, Mona Singh, Manoj Pahwa

Storyline: When a Delhi boy seeks to make his presence felt in the badlands of Bollywood, he faces opposition from the establishment.

*B**ds of Bollywood* is currently streaming on Netflix

**Him**

Director: Justin Tipping

Cast: Marlon Wayans, Tyriq Withers, Julia Fox, Tim Heidecker, Jim Jefferies

Storyline: An up-and-coming football star's career-ending accident paves the way for a chance of a lifetime

Pretty frames and little else

English

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This is not a Jordan Peele film. The *Nope* and *Get Out* director has produced *Him*, which is directed by Justin Tipping. With that out of the way and also the wildly misleading trailer marketing the film as horror, what we are left with is an exceedingly beautiful, slightly unsettling movie that meanders past

some interesting concepts to a bloody, brutal ending.

Him is not a blood, guts and gore horror film. Unfortunately, no heads are fed into wood chippers (*sigh*). Incidentally, it is not a sports film either, and definitely not one of those with the training montage set to a rousing anthem from the '80s, where the talented youngster shows the entitled prat what makes a true winner.

While it is not any of these things, it is also about all of them; from football, ageing, retiring, and toxic fans to dodgy doctors and pushy parents. Since he was a cute little boy, Cam (Tyriq Withers) lived and breathed football, aided and abetted by his father, Cam Sr. (Don Benjamin). The film begins with Cam sitting in front of the telly waiting for the game to start. Legendary quarterback for the San Antonio Saviors, Isaiah White (Marlon Wayans) suffers a horrific on-field injury but Cam Sr. tells his

wide-eyed son, real men do not let an injury get in the way of greatness.

Fast forward to Cam on the brink of greatness, about to attend the Combine and land a sweet deal, when an attack by a crazed fan leaves him with probable brain damage. Just as things seem to be falling apart, Cam's manager, Tom (Tim Heidecker), offers him a dream deal – a week's mentorship with his idol, Isaiah.

Cam sets out for Isaiah's remote desert compound with great hopes. He meets Isaiah's vaguely sinister crew including his outright creepy influencer wife, Elsie (Julia Fox), the sad and strange doctor, Marco (Jim Jefferies) and other fighters.

Each day is dedicated to one aspect of training including pain, vision and sacrifice. Cam finds himself going down a rabbit hole of toxic visions, including one of himself in a Last Supper-like configuration,

and troubling violence. Are the visions a product of the drugs Cam is injected with, the brain injury, or the supernatural? One also wonders if artists' visions are prettier than those of non-artists. A wandering mind is not a good sign in a supernatural thriller, just saying.

The movie drifts, like Cam's mind, through lovely, symmetrical frames until the rather unsatisfactory bloodbath at the end. Wayans and Withers do what they can with the confusing material. The music drips like chocolate in the veins.

If you were to go into *Him* without watching trailers or expecting a Jordan Peele film, you'd either be pleasantly surprised or you might just bite your arm in frustration at the lost opportunities for smart takedowns of all the malaise of modern times.

Him is currently running in theatres

Snippets



Deepika Padukone out of Prabhas' *Kalki 2898 AD* sequel

The makers of the sequel of *Kalki 2898 AD* have parted ways with actor Deepika Padukone for the movie. Directed by Nag Ashwin, the futuristic action drama stars Prabhas in the lead. In a statement on their social media handles, Vyjayanthi Movies stated that "they were unable to find a partnership" with Deepika. "After careful consideration, we have decided to part ways. Despite the long journey of making the first film, we were unable to find a partnership," the banner added. In the first part, which hit the screens on June 27, 2024, Deepika played a lab subject yearning for a better life and motherhood. The film, also starring Amitabh Bachchan.



Malayalam actor Unni Mukundan to play Narendra Modi in biopic

Malayalam actor Unni Mukundan will play Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the latter's biopic *Maa Vande*, directed by Kranthi Kumar CH. The announcement was made on September 17, coinciding with the 75th birthday of the Prime Minister. The film, which comes with the tagline 'The Anthem of a Mother', will trace Modi's journey from "childhood to becoming the leader of the nation", with emphasis on his relationship with his late mother, Heeraben Modi. In a post made on his Instagram handle, Unni mentions that having grown up in Ahmedabad, he knew of Modi as "my Chief Minister during my childhood."



Demon Slayer breaks box office records in India

Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba Infinity Castle released in India on September 12 and has stormed the box office, setting new records for an anime release. It has the highest opening weekend for an anime/animation of all time. *Demon Slayer* was in cinemas in close to 600 cities, with 480 new cities that had never seen a theatrical release of an anime movie. The film was available across the country in multiple languages – Japanese, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and English. Directed by Haruo Sotozaki, the film revolves around Tanjiro and the members of the Demon Slayer Corps finding themselves in an epic battle. The widest release of any anime film in the past covered 120 cities.



An immersive historical epic

With scrupulous attention to historical and cultural accuracy, this marvellously produced and acted tale of Hawaii's unification is equal parts thrilling and tragic

Hawaiian, English

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

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Chief of War opens with an almost god-like Kaiana (Jason Momoa), with burnished skin and rippling muscle, diving under water to lasso a shark. As predator and prey wrestle, it serves as a powerful metaphor of the show, which tells the true story of the unification of Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, and Kauai, by Kamehameha (Kaina Makua), between 1782 and 1810.

After bringing the shark onboard, Kaiana says, "in your death may life be preserved," underlining the close relationship between man and Nature.

By choosing to tell the story from Kaiana's perspective, rather than Kamehameha's, as originally planned, creators Thomas Pa a Sibbett and Momoa (who also executive produces) have given themselves room to explore different narrative threads.

Kaiana was the first, high-ranking islander to travel the world, returning with an understanding of European ways and weaponry. Kaiana is also a tragic figure, who, through his travels learns that "the pale man's greed is stronger than any god or prophecy".

Chief of War

Season 1

Episodes: 9

Creators: Thomas Pa a Sibbett, Jason Momoa

Starring: Jason Momoa, Luciane Buchanan, Te Ao o Hinepehinga, Te Kohe Tuahaka, Brandon Finn, Siua Ikale'o, Mainei Kinimaka, Roimata Fox, Keala Kahuanui-Paleka, Moses Goods, James Udom, Benjamin Hoetjes, Kaina Makua

Storyline: A war chief, Kaiana, returns from his travels around the world to join in the unification of Hawaii

Kaiana served King Kahekili (Temuera Morrison) as war chief but leaves his service after the battle of Oahu, disturbed by the slaughter of innocent farmers.

On the run from a vengeful Kahekili, Kaiana travels with his step brothers, Namake (Te Kohe Tuahaka) and Nahi (Siua Ikale'o), his wife, Kupuohi (Te Ao o Hinepehinga) and her sister, Heke (Mainei Kinimaka). While there is history, politics, prophecy and bloodshed, the creators should be commended for celebrating the human heart of the story.

There is Kamehameha's love of farming and growing things rather than war and destruction. He learns from the land, saying, "The quality of the taro is seen in its shoots." There is his queen, Kaahumanu (Luciane Buchanan), a woman far ahead of her times, wishing the best for her husband, her land and herself. There is also the growing attraction between Kaahumanu and Kaiana, much to the dismay of her father and Kamehameha's chief counsellor, Moku (Moses Goods).

Keoua's (Cliff Curtis) jealousy and anger toward his cousin, Kamehameha, who is his father, King Kalaniopu's (Branscombe Richmond), chooses as war chief instead of him has dire consequences with Keoua knocking his tooth out to signify the end of mourning his father and the start of war.

Prince Kupule (Brandon Finn) is increasingly wary of his father, Kahekili's excesses. With Kaiana gone for a long time and no news of his whereabouts,

Namake and Kupuohi find comfort in each other, which shifts the balance upon Kaiana's return.

The westerners who come to the islands include John Young (Benjamin Hoetjes), who is shipwrecked on the island, Captain John Meares (Eroll Shand), who rescues Kaiana from Maui, and Tony (James Udom) who teaches Kaiana English and about "red-mouthed weapons".

Much has been said about Olelo Hawaii, a native language of Hawaii, used in the show being a stumbling block. It actually helps in immersion into the world. From the third episode on, with the arrival of the Europeans, English is spoken with a solid reason given for using English – to avoid spies! The action is relentless and fairly graphic (one of the episodes is called Day of Spilled Brains). The holua sled racing sequence is breathtaking.

The cinematography from green-clad hills and azure seas, to angry, lava-belching volcanoes, is stunning as are the costumes including the proud feathered headdress, the mahiole and the fascinating tattoos. Composers Hans Zimmer and James Everingham worked with native Hawaiian musician, Kaumakaiwa Kanakaoe to create a lush, layered, addictive score.

Though originally conceived as a mini-series, the finale leaves the door open for an eagerly awaited Season 2.

Chief of War is currently streaming on Apple TV+