

metro

PLUS

THE HINDU



Two of Chennai's Indo-Chinese restaurants  
reopen. And we order the Manchurian **P2**

MOHANLAL'S THUDARUM  
GETS IT RIGHT **P4**



The  
copper  
pod  
shuffle

With summer  
upon us,  
Chennai's vistas have turned  
red, pink, lilac, yellow and  
purple. Through barks, stems  
and blooms, find out about  
the city's most vibrant  
flowering season



Sanjana Ganesh  
sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in

Over a month ago, the  
brown, popcorn-like  
buds of the copper pod  
tree popped open for a  
spectacle. The tree brought us its  
delightful annual yellow surprise.  
When the first days of bloom were

upon us, K Malathy, a  
conservancy worker in T Nagar,  
says that she was miffed. Years of  
sweeping and piling these floral  
blooms in a tricky little pile, was  
getting somewhat boring, she  
said. "But I have to admit, it is  
pretty," she adds.  
The flowers of the chrome  
copper pods have long carpeted  
the roads of Chennai, signalling

**Carpet of colours** (Left) An aerial  
view of the copper pod tree; (below)  
a bougainvillea. S SHIVA RAJ

the arrival of summer. If you  
stand under one of these trees  
for long enough, the wind will  
bring you some of its offerings  
and dot your hair like a  
dishevelled garland. It is one of  
the many joys to take you  
through an otherwise  
unrelenting summer in the city.  
The copper pod however, is  
only one of the many flowering  
trees that comes alive during  
these months. One can see the  
red peaks of a gulmohar tree,  
the orange of the Indian coral  
tree, the subtle purple of the  
Pride of India tree and the  
grape-like buds of the Indian  
laburnum. Each flower  
demands an incantation from  
Keats. A thing of beauty is



indeed a joy forever.  
Pauline Deborah, an  
associate professor who  
teaches Botany at the  
Women's Christian College,  
says that it may seem like  
some of these trees, like the  
gulmohar, are Indian. They  
have after all, been  
immortalised in Tamil pop  
culture through songs and  
stills. The tree's original roots  
however, are in Madagascar.  
She says that Colonial-era  
botanists including Robert  
Wight, Hugh Cleghorn and  
Robert Brown imported seeds  
from various countries and  
grew them in the  
Agri-Horticulture Society on  
Cathedral Road. Most of these  
trees with pretty flowers were  
'avenue trees' brought in to  
ensure that the vistas of  
Madras would replicate a  
feeling similar to that of their  
homes in Britain and Scotland.  
That is when the likes of silver  
oak were introduced to India.  
Shobha Menon, founder of  
Nizhal Trust, an NGO that has  
been working on urban tree  
conservation for decades, says  
that trees like gulmohar and  
the rain trees, originally from  
South America, were planted  
across Indian cities in large  
numbers earlier because they  
grew quickly. "In the process  
though, we have lost a lot of  
our native trees," she says.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 2



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# The copper pod shuffle

CONTINUED FROM  
» PAGE 1

Walking through the Kotturpuram Urban Forest, she picks up a Pride of India (*poo maruthu*) flower and hands it over. This bloom with its soft lilac petals reminds one of origami paper. Its panicle makes it hard to press in a notebook but the flower is one for keeps.

The urban forest, located in the centre of the city is one of the many Nizhal locations where 1,000 native and naturalised trees, herbs and shrubs have been attentively planted and tended to with community involvement. An effort has been made to bring a broad diversity of trees. “For instance, the poovan and vellaal trees came in my checked in baggage from Delhi. I transferred my clothes into my hand luggage and brought them home,” she says smiling and pointing to the trees, which have metamorphosed into their full form.

Native trees do not necessarily have showy flowers. Take the neem for instance with tiny white speckles. Pauline says that trees like the Indian labernum, peepul, arjun and the pagoda have been planted by the Chennai Corporation and the Forest Department over the last 20 years. Others like the Indian elm, Indian bullet wood and pongamia trees are also on the list. Banyans were earlier planted too but are no longer considered for avenue planting. “They are an excellent keystone species for providing food for birds and small mammals throughout the year,” she says. She helped curate a list that would provide shade, fruits for birds while also being aesthetic. “A cityscape needs a diverse, good mix,” she adds.



N Niresh Kumar, Superintendent of Parks, Chennai Corporation, says that every year, they plant between a lakh and a lakh and a half trees in the city. Some are done in partnership with NGOs, others with companies, but most are part of the State Government’s Green Tamil Nadu initiative. They have halted their efforts for summer. However, they will begin again in June, with the planting of small trees like the *Plumeria alba* with white frangipani flowers and flowering shrubs like the bougainvillea in centre medians on busy roads. They



will also be planting at parks, canals, vacant lands, playgrounds and around ponds and lakes.

“We are planning to plant trees including the Spanish cherry (*magizham*), portia tree (*poovarasu*) and lebbeck

**City in bloom** (Clockwise from left) A carpet of flowers on the road; bougainvillea and gulmohar blooms. S SHIVA RAJ

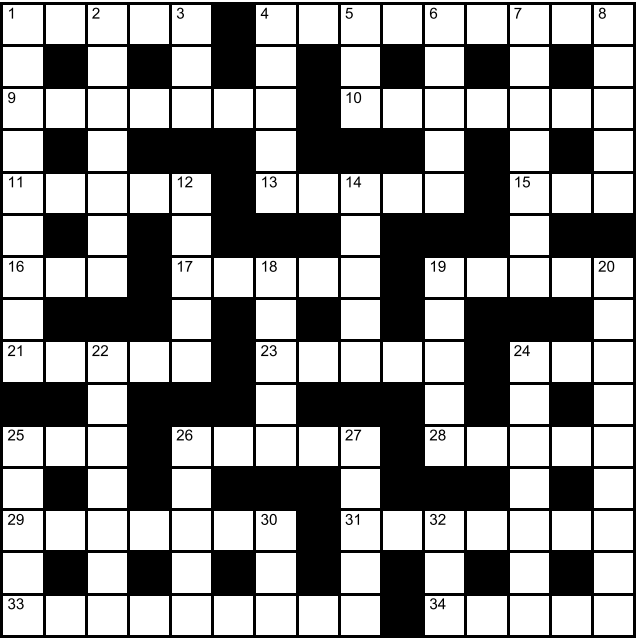


(*vaagai*) in these locations. Their longevity is fantastic and their roots do minimal damage to sidewalks,” he says. He adds that maintenance is key and explains that they have adopted the drip irrigation technique. “The key effort is not towards beautification. It is towards urban greenery,” he says.

While people stop to observe and admire a beautiful flower, the years that go into the process of receiving this gift from Nature are often not given a second thought. Shoba says that it is imperative to not just know about the flora around us, but also be proactive and plant a sapling at home, in an apartment or on the street. “Even greening your house with small plants will help today,” she says. Over the next month, go on a walk, pick up your phone, snap a picture of a tree and look at its flower. Press it in a notebook or give it to a loved one. Mostly though, Google its name and learn of the life around you. It may ignite the spark to plant that first tree.

Contact Nizhal on its website [nizhaltm.org](http://nizhaltm.org), call at 9840904621 or reach out to them on Instagram [@nizhalshade](https://www.instagram.com/nizhalshade) for any tree-related emergencies.

## METROPLUS QUICK CROSSWORD #2 (Set by Doppelganger)



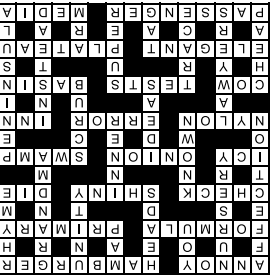
- Across**
- 1 Disturb by repeated attacks (5)  
4 Fast food from a city in Germany (9)  
9 \_\_\_\_\_ one for car racing (7)  
10 A school for 4 to 8 year olds (7)  
11 Restaurant bill (5) 13 Retired 800M Indian athlete (5)  
15 To want something very much (3)  
16 An \_\_\_\_\_ cool breeze blew across K-9 (3)  
17 Pungent bulb (5)  
19 To affect by an outpouring of water (5)  
21 Synthetic stocking (5)  
23 Difference between a measured value and a true value (5)  
24 Another name for a caravanserai (3)  
25 Holy \_\_\_\_\_ ! (3)  
26 Series of questions designed to determine intelligence (5)  
28 A small artificially enclosed body of water (5)  
29 One who is excessively fastidious in taste (7)  
31 Level off (7)  
33 Traveller who is not operating a bus (9)  
34 An agency by which something is conveyed (5)
- Down**
- 1 A feeling of attachment (9)  
2 A school before reaching 10 Across (7)  
3 The person reading this is \_\_\_\_ (3)  
4 One of the calls made by a cricket captain at toss (5)  
5 Navigation tool (3)  
6 Statue of \_\_\_\_\_ is located on the banks of the Narmada river (5)

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



- 7 Your child’s father’s mother (7)  
8 This proposal has no \_\_\_\_\_ or reason (5)  
12 Proved or generally recognised (5)  
14 A type of circle of confidants (5)  
18 \_\_\_\_\_ are like beards; men do not have them till they grow up - Voltaire (5)  
19 Undergrowth (5)  
20 The Indian subcontinent is one (9)  
22 Ambulance chasers in the US (7)  
24 A substitute or an equivalent (7)  
25 Worthy of no respect (5)  
26 An extremely small amount (5)  
27 CSK has this in their midst (5)  
30 You’ll get one when you check-in your baggage at the airport (3)  
32 An administrative or functional branch of an organisation (3)

### Solution #2



# In Manchurian, we trust

Two beloved Indo-Chinese restaurants in Chennai have risen like the phoenix, making an effort to keep up with the times. Their menus, however, still taste of nostalgia

**Sanjana Ganesh**  
[sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in](mailto:sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in)

What is it about Indo-Chinese food that makes it a celebratory affair across the country? Is it the thick cornstarch gravy full of ginger, garlic, spring onions; doused in red chilli, green chilli, and soy sauce? Is it the family-sized portions that promise a take-away bag at the end of a dinner? Or frankly, the fact that it is among the most affordable, easy to replicate, ‘foreign’ meals in India?

There is a deep sense of comfort in knowing that each iteration of the dishes served at famous Indo-Chinese restaurants across the country, will only be marginally different from one another.

It is why I am ebullient when presented with the opportunity to visit Canton, a Chennai staple, since 1995, at its recent reopening.

Four years after having shut down during the pandemic, the restaurant resumed operations seven months ago as a cloud kitchen. In March, its founder S Jegadeesan was confident that the restaurant still had a committed audience. “We sent out 800 cards welcoming our most loyal customers over the years and blasted WhatsApp messages to the others in a



**Sugar, spice and everything nice** (Clockwise from top) An array of dishes at Canton; minced chicken and prawn roll; interiors of the restaurant. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



bid to spread the word about the new place in Teynampet. It’s been pretty full since,” he says. The 64-year-old points to certificates and awards they have accumulated over the years. He then tells us the restaurant’s origin story. “I worked as a field sales officer and did not receive any job satisfaction. I wanted to try something in the restaurant space. Chinese food has the lowest food wastage cost. It’s why I moved in that direction. We opened the doors on January 18, 1995,” he says, nonchalantly. “I eat sambar and rasam everyday but I

do enjoy the fish in onion sauce at the restaurant.” Over the years, Canton has collected several solid chefs like Pokemon, including the likes of Vikas Rai and Mohan Rai. Though everyone went their own way when the restaurant shut down, Jagadeesan worked on tracking them down from Delhi and Bengaluru before the reopening. Now, the two chefs are back to doling out plates of crowd favourites including chicken

lollipops, vegetable balls Manchurian, and crab in pepper sauce.

The rice is easy to eat with the manchurian. The lollipop’s crunch is laced with some spice and the dumplings in garlic sauce are full of an old-school, half-baked sweetness. Canton’s food delights, and it is a familiar, soothing meal, especially when it ends with fried ice cream, an Indo-Chinese restaurant staple that once fascinated me I was young.

What truly makes the restaurant stand out though, is a simple dish that the chefs came up with on a whim when they began in 1995. “We julienned carrots, onions, and bell peppers; fried some noodles and doused all of this in a sauce. We called it a kimchi salad in the beginning as not many people knew what it meant. Later, we rebranded it as the Cantonese salad,” says Jegadeesan, laughing at the absurdity of the etymology.

“I’m not claiming to compete with the best of the best in the city. But I’m confident in my product and I know my food is good,” Jegadeesan says.

In a State that truly places value on its ‘gopi manjuri’, 30-year-old Canton does not just survive. It thrives.

At 58/13, Sriman Srinivasa Road, Kasturi Estate, Teynampet. A meal for two costs ₹1,500. Call 9840755626.

## Finding history in a wok

**Sanjana Ganesh**  
[sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in](mailto:sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in)

Back in 1980, Susy Liu, newly married to her husband Liu Koufee, arrived from Calcutta’s Tangra to the sentinel streets of Chennai with hopes and dreams of a new life. Eight years after her marriage, she and her sisters began Liu’s Beauty Parlour in Adyar. When she would get the time in the evenings, she would help with prep work at her husband’s already famous restaurant, Liu’s Waldorf (established in 1974) on the busy roads that now lead to Kasturba Nagar and OMR.

For years, they doled out their specialties, chilli pork and beef, and found resounding success with the student community who studied at IIT-Madras and Anna University. The promise of a good wonton is enough to entice me. So I walk into a freshly painted Liu’s, full of paraphernalia that is evidently reminiscent of a typical Indo-Chinese restaurant – Buddhist symbols of good luck, neat placemats and a lot of the colour red.

My meal starts with a thick broth – the chicken China soup. Full of minced chicken and bite-sized vegetables, this soup stabilised by corn starch, demands focus. If not finished fast enough, it will lose its very soul. I move on to the wontons. Light, airy and stuffed with a small delicious dollop of



**Noodles of love** (Left) The interiors; (below) chicken wonton. SANJANA GANESH

chicken, the wontons disintegrate in the mouth as a texture bomb. Served with a chutney that is called a ‘hot garlic’ sauce, this starter must not be missed. Next, the Chinese cabbage, chilli chicken, chilli pork and the Waldorf special chicken arrive. With the chicken and egg noodle as my base, I try every permutation possible. The succulent, well-spiced fatty pork



finds its way to the top of the wonton. The chicken meets the hot garlic sauce and the blanched cabbages in a mild soy-filled runny sauce have been consumed with the noodles. The chicken and egg noodle is delicious on its own. The Waldorf’s special chicken with cauliflower, capsicum, carrots, onions, mushroom and bell peppers, leaves me confused. This, I’d give a miss.

Susy says that most of us who are used to Indo-Chinese fare, may not like the traditional meals they make at home. Having grown up in Tangra, a popular neighbourhood of Chinese immigrants in Kolkata and having studied in a Chinese school there, Susy continues to hold on to much of the People’s Republic. “I just have a congee with minced chicken and some vegetables, seasoned with ginger. You will definitely not like it,” she says.

Long-time staff P Narayanan asks if I would like a bite of the American Chop Suey and their fried rice. My chopsticks are however placed in an ‘X’ over my plate, signalling the end.

Liu’s Waldorf is at 14, Sardar Patel Road, Sriram Nagar, Taramani. A meal for two will cost ₹1,200. Contact 22350499 for reservations.



**Weaving change** (Clockwise from right) Vino Supraja; models wearing garments from the Therukoothu collection; a bag made from Bhavani jamakkalam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Gowri S

gowri.s@thehindu.co.in

“For somebody who is from the small town of Vandavasi; who did her schooling in a Government school; and had a lot of insecurities about speaking English; to go to the British Parliament and talk about our culture, was a surreal, happy moment,” says designer Vino Supraja. She was recently honoured with the title of Global Sustainable Fashion Trailblazer at the House of Commons, British Parliament.

The 45-year-old designer, now based in Dubai, has had a long, fragmented sojourn in the world of fashion.

For a long time, Vino dabbled in media studies. After a brief stint in radio, Vino shifted base to China. In China, while scouring websites for possible study or job opportunities, she chanced upon only two sites in English. “One was a business school and the other, a fashion school. I somehow associated numbers with business so I opted for the other! That’s my official entry into the world of fashion,” she recalls, laughing. Vino’s graduation collection went on to receive two international awards, and made its appearance in the 2014 Shanghai Fashion Week.

Then life moved to Detroit – where her collection was walked at the New York Fashion Week, and then the Brooklyn Fashion Week. Five years into the industry, after moving to Dubai she started recognising “the dark side of the fashion industry”. “I wanted my brand to adopt a sustainable path. That is when we started working with the Chennimalai weavers.



# Culture on the ramp

**Dubai-based designer Vino Supraja** who hails from Vandavasi in Tamil Nadu was named Global Sustainable Fashion Trailblazer at the British Parliament

That led me to London Fashion Week.”

The ancient Tamil folk art form of therukoothu has always inspired Vino, especially as Vandavasi is only 10 kilometres from Purisai, one of the main, still-thriving centres of the folk



form. “I decided that this was the time to platform therukoothu,” says Vino. “I went to Purisai and met someone who I have admired from my childhood – Purisai Kannappa Thambiran Ayya. They were very happy to collaborate. I learnt how to dress a character and do their makeup. We came to Chennai to record the audio, and showcased a one-minute presentation at the London Fashion Week before the models walked the ramp. The western world was shocked to see so many colours on one person.”

Her next visit was to Bhavani in Erode district to understand the crafting of the famed jamakkalam. “I could see that the craft was diminishing and many weaving looms were left unattended. Small businesses were suffering. This made me wonder what I could do with my brand.”

Stripes, solid colours, very minimal – the jamakkalam’s aesthetic was decidedly global. “The stripes of the Bhavani jamakkalam are on a par with Gucci stripes! This year we launched the J collection, with bags.”

With the new, rather heavy moniker of Global Sustainable Fashion Trailblazer, the responsibilities increase. While sustainability has been a buzz word in the fashion industry for the last five years, it is now being overtaken by AI, she says.

Vino is now working on reimagining the Bhavani jamakkalam to make products other than bags. “I want to give prompts to the world, which anyone can adopt and enhance their creativity with.” With fabrics and techniques that deserve global attention, Vino crusades to bring the world to South India, one jamakkalam at a time.

# Call of the coast

**An art show at DakshinaChitra Museum unearths an overlooked maritime narrative**

Aditi S Bade

Echoes of the Coromandel, an art show currently exhibited at DakshinaChitra Museum, takes viewers on a voyage along the south-eastern coast of India, previously a thriving maritime connection to Southeast Asia. Developed by a team of 10 interns working through the museum’s year-long Dak Chola Internship, the show interweaves research and design to bring a lesser-known aspect of maritime history to the fore.

“Trade narratives often focus on the West coming to India,” says Mugdha Chavan, one of the interns, adding, “but for Southeast Asia, we were the West. There was an entire cultural and commercial exchange happening in that direction, and we wanted to highlight this lesser-told story.”

The group was divided into two teams – research and design. While the researchers traced routes, cultures, and commodities, the design team brought them to life in visual form. Most of the pieces on display were crafted by hand. Inscriptions were carved with the

help of the museum’s in-house artisan.

Divided into three segments: The Beginning, The Peak, and The Echoes, the exhibition thematically maps this trans-oceanic connection. The first section presents archaeological and literary evidence, including Sangam verses that mention ports, and commodities that were traded.

The next section explores traditional navigation techniques that used finger-measurement and the alignment of stars to navigate.

The final section, The Echoes, illustrates the cultural footprints left behind, like temple architecture, language, and mythology that resonate across borders. The towering statue of lord Muruga in Malaysia, leather puppets depicting *The Ramayana*, and similarities in temple design across Southeast Asia, all point to the cultural infusion enabled by trade.

*Echoes of the Coromandel, on view until May 18, invites visitors to discover a shared history. While at DakshinaChitra, one can also check out Four Aesthetics, an art exhibition on view until May 11.*



**Finding narratives**  
The artists at work. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Tech that

**This Chennai team’s AI-driven solution bagged a grand prize of ₹50 lakh at Hackathon 2025**



**Over the cloud** Rajaseeman PS, Yogeshwar Andi Sudhakaran, Mayur Kinhekar, Sheetalraj Gangadhar and Vijay Kalidasan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Srinivasa Ramanujam

srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

AI is everywhere. AI is everything. These five beaming faces know a thing or two about that. Part of the Chennai-based Bounteous x Accolite Salesforce team, this team clinched the grand prize of ₹50 lakh at the recent Agentforce Hackathon 2025, held during TrailblazerDX in Bengaluru.

“We are thrilled. This is a big achievement, and we are proud to be called AI agents and part of a team that will pave the way for AI usage in the future,” says Mayur Kinhekar, senior consultant.

Mayur, along with his colleagues Rajaseeman PS, Yogeshwar Andi Sudhakaran, Sheetalraj Gangadhar and Vijay Kalidasan, formed a team that called itself Aichemist. Their mission? To ensure smoother operations in the hospitality industry using cloud-based platform Salesforce.

Competing against 195 teams, the AI-driven solution provided by this Chennai team wowed tech geeks at the hackathon. Their Smart Hotel Agent uses data cloud and loyalty tiers to ensure personalised hotel services to customers, handled through Slack, and a service tablet. “With our AI model, we wanted to make life a lot easier for customers wanting to book a hotel. Our solution focussed on reducing human interaction between a customer and hotel staff,” says Rajaseeman PS, team lead at the Hackathon.

“Someone spills water on the floor, for instance. In today’s scenario, you call the front desk, which probably asks you for your room number and then assigns it to housekeeping. Our AI solutions sends notifications to the respective departments which can directly address the problem,” he adds.



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# The common man

Filmmaker Tharun Moorthy on the Mohanlal-headlined *Thudarum*, which is having a dream run at the box office

Athira M  
athira.m@thehindu.co.in

It is a hattrick for Tharun Moorthy. After the commercially and critically-acclaimed *Operation Java* and *Saudi Vellakka*, the filmmaker has scored big at the box office with *Thudarum*, headlined by Mohanlal and Shobana.

Despite a predictable storyline, Tharun managed to draw in the crowds with the setting, treatment of the narrative and some incredible performances. *Thudarum* is the story of a common man, ‘Benz’ Shanmughan (Mohanlal), a former fight master in the film industry, whose life is thrown into disarray.

Tharun believes he was destined to do the film because producer M Renjith had been trying to make this film for around 12 years with Mohanlal. He had approached six directors. “I had written my first two films and was not sure if another person’s story might excite me. So I had decided that if I didn’t connect with the story I would not make it. But I loved the story [by KR Sunil],” says Tharun.

A self-confessed Mohanlal fan, was he worried about meeting the expectations of the actor’s fans? “There was pressure. But, thankfully, a majority of his fans stood by my vision. I had interacted

with his fans’ associations on this account. But the challenge I had was dealing with those who were misleading the audience with fan-made posters and imaginary content. We were all confident about the content. Even though we did not expect this level of success, we knew the film would strike a chord with the audience. We aimed at presenting a free-flowing narrative, from scene 1 to 92,” he says.

Tharun is quick to point out that there has been no deliberate attempt to bring vintage Mohanlal on screen, referring to the buzz around the film ever since filming started. “The only thing that Renjith chettan [producer Renjith] told me was that, if possible, let us bring the Mohanlal of *Aye Auto* in the first half. I tried and even included one of the dialogues from that

movie, for instance the famous line ‘Go to your classes.’”

Instead of creating a vintage version, the narrative weaved in a range of emotions that Mohanlal has showcased with aplomb throughout his career. “Mischievous, playfulness, romance, affection, love, downfall, fear, fury, revenge.... Shanmughan goes through all these emotions,” he says. His favourite scene? “The scene where Shanmughan breaks down in the bathroom. I told Lal sir to cry without covering his face and collapse in the space available. We didn’t expect him to fall that way. We all were stunned when he did that.”

The filmmaker observes that he and Sunil, the script writer, were on the same page. The toughest to crack was the characters’ journey through the forest in a car. “Sunil had clarity about the mood, the ambience, the climate, and terrain. We had to work a lot on creating the setting – mist, darkness, festival, mystery of the forest...” Tharun explains. The film was shot over 99 days in Thodupuzha, Palakkad, Kambam, Theni, Chennai, Ranni etc.

On the film’s end note, ‘Mohanlal Thudarum’ (Mohanlal will continue), Tharun says, “His story will continue. The character Shanmughan will live on, nursing his wounds. The thought came at the editing table.”

Mohanlal was simultaneously shooting for *Empuraan* while acting in *Thudarum*. “He slipped into Shanmughan, the common man, from Khureshi Ab’raam, the don, with so much ease. That comes from 47 years of experience.”

The filmmaker adds that he chooses to ignore the discussions comparing the two movies. “I am impressed by the visual scope of *Empuraan*. The scale at which Raju [actor-director Prithviraj] mounted the movie opened the market for Malayalam cinema in other languages. *Empuraan* is a big reason for *Thudarum* getting a big opening and entry into other markets,” adds the filmmaker, whose next is *Torpedo* starring Fahadh Faasil and Arjun Das.



# The case is solved

Director Sailesh Kolanu on his recently-released crime drama, *HIT: The Third Case*

Sangeetha Devi Dundoo  
sangeethadevi.k@thehindu.co.in

**H**IT: *The Third Case*, or *HIT 3*, has brought cheer to the box office. A few days after the release of the Telugu film starring Nani and Srinidhi Shetty, which has also been dubbed in other languages, its director Sailesh Kolanu is relieved, happy and filled with gratitude.

“It is great to see the energy in the theatres, and satisfying to see full halls,” says the director. Excerpts from a chat:

**Question:** When you work on a film for a year or more, you are too close to the material at every stage. How critically are you able to evaluate the film?

**Answer:** We lose objectivity midway since we are so married to the content. We have to remind ourselves of the intent and excitement with which we began the film. That keeps us going towards the finish line. Sometimes during post-production, I take a two-week break, revisit the footage to assess it better.

**Q:** Tell us about both the joy and challenges of directing actors of whom you have been a big fan – Venkatesh in *Saindhav* and Nani in *HIT 3*?

**A:** In the beginning, going to the sets and saying ‘action’ and ‘cut’ to the stars I greatly admire was overwhelming. Slowly I told myself that there is a job at hand; I have been entrusted the task of making a good film.

It took me a week to stop

treating Nani like a star. He, too, gave me a pep talk to put me at ease.

**Q:** In *HIT 3*, some dialogues refer to Nani’s career and image. These are fanboy moments. How do you decide how much fan service can be done while staying true to the story?

**A:** As I was working on the screenplay, I thought it would be fun to have these ‘meta’ references. Those moments are evoking great response in the theatres since they work in the context of the actor as well as the story.

**Q:** The first two films in the *HIT* universe or *HIT*-verse played out like whodunnit crime novels.

The third begins similarly but moves into a high action zone. How happy are you with the amalgamation?

**A:** I wanted the transition to be seamless, so that the audience does not feel a disconnect with the *HIT*-verse. We began with the investigation and transitioned into a survival thriller.

**Q:** Mickey J Meyer’s background score is quite unconventional. What was your brief to him?

**A:** We wanted the music to work in the background, without preempting the emotions or screaming for attention. I prefer it that way. I want people to say they watched a good film, rather than single out the music.

**Q:** What’s next?

**A:** I will begin writing my next film, which may be a romcom or fun film without blood and gore. That will help me return to this cop universe with a fresh approach.



Nani in *HIT 3*; (top) Sailesh Kolanu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## AK is back

Missed Ajith Kumar’s *Good Bad Ugly* in the theatres? Here’s a chance to catch it at home. The hit film, directed by Adhik Ravichandran, is set to drop on Netflix today. The movie will stream in Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. The movie, which became popular for several references from Ajith’s filmography, has had a great run at the box office. The lead cast of the film include Trisha Krishnan, Prasanna, Prabhu, Priya Prakash Varrier and Arjun Das. *Good Bad Ugly* is Ajith’s second release of the year. The actor also featured in *Vidaamuyarchi*, a road thriller directed by Magizh Thirumeni.



## Vijith Bachan takes charge

Fans of Ilaiyaraaja have reason to be happy. The music maestro celebrated the success of *Symphony No. 1* (Valiant) last month, and now, his songs can be heard in upcoming Tamil film, *Peranbum Perungobamum*. Touted to be a social thriller with elements of love, this film features Vijith Bachan, son of popular director Thankar Bachan. He sports three different looks in the film, which will also star Shali Nivekas, Mime Gopi and Arul Dass. Directed by S Sivaprakash and produced by ES entertainment, the story revolves around events that take place in three different periods in the life of the protagonist.



## A glimpse of Coolie

*Coolie*, starring Rajinikanth and directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj, is nearing its release date. The highly-anticipated Tamil movie, bankrolled by Sun Pictures, is set to hit screens on August 14, 2025. With 100 days to go for the movie, the makers recently released a short glimpse in which Rajinikanth is seen standing at a port. Lokesh had previously confirmed that *Coolie* will not be part of his popular film universe called the Lokesh Cinematic Universe, which includes movies such as *Kaithi*, *Vikram* and *Leo*.

Priyadarshini Paitandy  
priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in

Meet the doctor who has a gut feeling about everything. This is a pun that gastroenterologist Dr Pal (Palaniappan) Manickam, is well used to. Interestingly, he is also a standup comedian and perhaps that is why, for him, puns are as important as probiotics.

He likes to call his genre of comedy MedCom (medical comedy) and his repertoire covers everything from fermented foods and diet plans to menopause, bowel health, and fatty liver. Guest speakers like cricketer S Badrinath and renowned doctors also feature in his Reels to discuss current topics.

Originally from Madurai, and now shuttling between Sacramento (California) and Chennai, the doctor consults and also does stand up shows across the US, and Chennai. He did a few shows in Malaysia, and Singapore, with



# Hey pal, you gut this

Meet Dr Pal Manickam, the doctor who can treat your gut and tickle your funny bone, one laugh at a time

upcoming acts scheduled in Seattle, Minneapolis, and Chicago in May and in Mumbai in July.

“I like being on stage and talking to people,” says Dr Pal, during a recent visit to the city. “My wife and sons (aged three

and five) moved to India last year because my wife wanted to raise our kids in Chennai; she is from here. And we also wanted them to spend time with their grandparents – that bond is important,” he says. In the next six months, Dr

Pal plans to set up a gut health clinic in Chennai. “We practise something called preventive gastroenterology,” he says, adding that he focusses on sustainable lifestyle changes.

A believer in intermittent fasting, Dr Pal says this is

Gut instinct  
Dr Pal Manickam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

something he started doing when he had a health scare in 2015.

“I was working as a full-time gastroenterologist in 2015 in California. While examining a patient, I started getting palpitations and chest pain. I was sitting on a medical bed thinking what did I do wrong? I was 100 kilos. But when I had moved to the US, I was 60 kilos. So, I started doing everything from paleo and keto diet to yoga and personal training. I realised everything is scattered around and despite being a medical professional, I was not able to follow it. I came across intermittent fasting and realised that it could also reverse fatty liver. I learnt about diet, macros, fibres, proteins. My weight came down to 70 kgs and I continue to be the same weight since 2017. Mindful eating is important,” he adds.

Through Medcom, Dr Pal uses his medical knowledge to educate a larger group of people via social media; he has 1.6 million followers on Instagram.

And just like the Marvel Universe, there is a Dr Pal Universe with its set of characters. There is Saravana Kumar, his wife Tirupurasundari, and a patient named Aarogyasamy, the earnest Subramani who listens to everything the doctor says, Kapil Sharma, Marc Anthony, Abhijit Chakraborty... “Then to add masala, I made Aarogyasamy, Tirupurasundari’s ex-boyfriend,” he laughs.

During the pandemic, his first video about COVID-19 awareness went viral. It received five million views. The next video he uploaded got an embarrassingly low number of views. “So, I thought I was a one-time wonder,” he laughs.

Then in January 2021, he uploaded a video about Covid vaccines and that went viral again, after which he also got a

call from Bldg 18, a comedy club in San Francisco Bay Area.

“I realised comedy is serious business. So, I did a course at Punch Line Comedy Club in Sacramento, on how to write a set. If I deliver something and people laugh, that gives me a high,” he says.

He suggests the 30-3-1 rule to boost gut health. “Thirty grams of protein for breakfast (for example three whole eggs and three egg whites), three fermented dishes in a day (maybe idli in the morning, curd in the afternoon, and dhokla, kanji for dinner) and one hour of physical activity,” he says, adding, “Most importantly, people should stop looking for quick fixes. Bad gut health is directly proportional to the amount of abuse that you have put your gut through in the past. For example, if you have abused your gut for 10 years, you cannot expect it to go back to normal in a week. It is a minimum three-month process and requires a lifestyle change.”