



# metroPLUS

THE HINDU



India's list of best bars is out and Chennai's Pandan Club is on it **P2**

NASSER ON HOW HE EXPLORES CHARACTERS **P4**



VELANKANNI RAJ B

## VELACHERY

A snug, little freeway between Perungudi MRTS and Velachery MRTS in Bhuvaneshwari Nagar transforms into a small-scale athletic complex every morning and evening. The two-kilometre stretch adjacent to serpentine tracks, railway underpasses and newly-planted trees, makes for a stunning canvas at sunrise and its fairly neat roads, a track for runners and walkers.

The Lockdown Warriors, a 15-member crew of 50 and 60-somethings, once used to walk along this road as stray individuals trying to both kick-start a new habit and get out of the house during the lockdown. Today, they wear matching T-shirts, and take part in strength training post walk. The empty halls of the Perungudi MRTS are hence put to good use. "We end up chatting for a few minutes about day-to-day affairs. We have been able to create a sense of community," says I Edwin,

a member. They also huddle around the same location to drink tea in the evenings. Waving hi to this group every morning are M Mathivanan and M Sumathi who go on an hour-and-a-half long walk along this stretch, frequently checking their smart watches. The aim, they say, is to clock 10,000 steps in the morning. "It is a neat straight road that makes for a breezy walk. A team of volunteers from an organisation called Green Velachery have also

been planting saplings along this stretch so that there is green cover eventually. It would be nice if the dump along this stretch is cleaned," says Sumathi. Anil Sharma, a runner from Vibrant Velachery, a chapter of the Chennai Runners group, says that the Velachery MRTS is the nucleus of the walking community here but there is also the 100 feet road that runners frequent. To gain elevation, they also take the flyover in the wee hours of the day.

## T NAGAR

Outside Geetha Cafe in Pondy Bazaar, a gaggle of walkers and cyclists sits with steaming hot cups of coffee just as dawn breaks. At regular intervals, walkers in groups of threes and fours briskly pass by in colour coordinated T-shirts. Mahesh Bhandari, who has been frequenting the empty morning roads of Pondy Bazaar from even before the pedestrian plaza existed, says seven T-shirts in different colours were given to the regular walkers here. "This was a gesture by Mahaveer Chand Bothra, a diamond merchant, who is an integral part of the walking community here. We have a colour assigned for each day," he says, pointing to their red T-shirts for Tuesday. A stretch that is bursting at the seams with retail outlets, hawkers, and restaurants which are buzzing with activity through the day, the pedestrian plaza at Pondy Bazaar plays home to a myriad of people as the city wakes up. Early in the morning, men sit along the pavement sorting out newspapers going out for delivery and people stop by on two wheelers to pick up milk packets. The neat pavement all through and the restaurants that dot the stretch bring together walkers and cyclists, and several photographers who are filming pre-wedding shoots and modelling portfolios in the wintry early morning sunshine. "We first meet here for a cup of coffee, one that is smaller than the usual serving and then begin our walk. We are all over 50 years of age, and this community is great motivation for all of us to come and walk here," says actor Gopi Kannadasan. It is hard to miss this large group he talks of, seated at the first table in Shri Balaajee Bhavan chatting away.



VELANKANNI RAJ B

Is fitness your top priority for 2024? Team MetroPlus tracks down enthusiasts to find out which traffic-free stretches to hit for a walk or run and perhaps a post-workout snack

# Walking on sunshine

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## ASHOK NAGAR

In the heart of Chennai, 11th Avenue in Ashok Nagar unfolds as a dynamic thoroughfare. Here, the dawn chorus is not confined to birdsong alone; it harmonises with the hum of fruit juice shops eager to hydrate spirited joggers and brisk walkers on this four-kilometre stretch. "I believe that walking on the open road is better than going round in circles in a park. You get to observe the city wake up. I have a few friends here, and we walk for approximately an hour and then sometimes go to Saravana Bhavan for a coffee," says business owner VR Chandran, who has been a regular walker on 11th Avenue for the last 25 years. The stretch which is known as a paradise for walkers and joggers not only plays host to old walkers, but also welcomes new enthusiasts donning smartwatches and running earphones who had made a resolution to get healthier this year. A lot of joggers prefer the main roads, but walkers often weave the smaller streets into their circuits. A number of juice shops, healthy soups and breakfast spots seem to have replaced the age-old street side dosa, idli spots on 11th Avenue to cater to the crowds.



AKHILA EASWARAN

## MARINA BEACH

An early morning walk down the service road that extends from the lighthouse to the Marina swimming pool has a thriving ecosystem – vegetables for the week, flowers, your morning breakfast, or even fruits and coconut kernels for a mid-workout snack. There are shops selling cut fruit, boiled sprouts and hot soup alongside big tubs of crunchy cornflakes. "Many walkers stop by to pick up fruits and sprouts which they can pack into their children's lunch boxes for school," says N Perumal, who has been there for the last seven years. In matching T-shirts that say 'Work it, own it', friends Kailash Parihar and Rajendran Kumar tell me their plans for the new year – to walk here at least five days a week. Muthulakshmi Raguraman, points to her T-shirt that says 'My life, my fitness' and says she lands up here with her gym buddies for a long walk, followed by a run on the sand and a meditation session. "After the Chennai marathon, I am now looking forward to participating in the Auroville marathon and am training for it," she says, hurrying off.



AKHILA EASWARAN

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If you have lived in Chennai long enough, you must have encountered Chola Sheraton or My Fortune hotel in some way, shape or form. Today, this property which began in 1975, opens its doors as the WelcomHotel by ITC after a 360 revamp. Prepare to be enamoured by all things Madras as you walk through the entrance on ever-busy Cathedral Road. The hotel aims to incorporate facets of the city to invite younger guests. It also hopes to embellish its walls and menu with bits of the hotel's own legacy. The change this time includes a modern twist on the cuisine and decor and incorporation of sustainability practices. "At its core, it is all about memories – old and new. For instance, we have left [a popular] Nataraja statue in the same spot it has been in since '75. We didn't move it even during renovation. It is sentimental for all of us and our guests as well," says Ila Prabhu, general manager. Our first stop is the 93-seater WelcomCafe Marina in shades of



## Welcome change

The iconic Chola Sheraton, opened in 1975 on Cathedral Road, is now WelcomHotel. We get the first look of its revamped avatar

blue. "Almost all the art one can find in here is made by local artists. The private dining area is known as the Mylapore," adds Ila. Here the buffet and à la carte menu feature the Taste of Madras. "We enjoyed putting this menu together as there is something for all ages. It is a reimagination of

the dishes the city has grown up eating," says Mayank Kulshreshtha, area executive chef-southern region, ITC Hotels. We try the rasam ramen bowl that comes in kozhi (chicken) and pepper variants. The non-veg bowl comes with a tangle of idiyappam in place of noodles,

Shaking it up (Left) A renovated look of Chola Sheraton; (below) The 1975 cocktail. THAMODHARAN BHARATH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

succulent pieces of chicken and a shard of a vathal (fryum) made with black rice. As the hot rasam is poured into the bowl, the ingredients float up asking to be eaten. This is followed by a savoury bite of the buttery pepper lamb roast at the restaurant. We then make our way to the Durrants bar, a retro-looking space, named after Charles Durrant, Madras's first wine merchant. "Each drink has a story behind it. For instance, 1975 is named after the year of opening of the hotel – a drink that is topped off with wine to honour Charles Durrant," says Rohit Bhat, Food and Beverage manager. We give the Night Manager cocktail a try – a nod to all the night managers who are in need of a 'pick-me-up' to make it through their shifts. It is a version of espresso martini with deep and creamy flavours in a vodka-based drink. For those who are looking

for good ol coffee without the works, there is the Sunbeam cafe. The hotel is also home to Mahjong Room, a Chinese restaurant featuring dishes from Hunan, Canton, and Sichuan provinces. We try the appetisers which include crispy corn kernels, fried mushrooms, fried chicken and classic American chop suey with saucy pan-fried noodles. The hotel has 90 rooms in three variants along with its iconic Mandapam and Sagari banquet hall spaces which have also been redone. The hotel management has focussed on making the property sustainable with energy-efficient air conditioning and heating systems. The landmark hotel which has served icons of Chennai like late Chief Minister MG Ramachandran, superstar Rajinikanth and hosted the '83 cricket world cup winning team is open to guests again from January 18. WelcomHotel by ITC is at Cathedral Road, Parthasarathy Puram, Teynampet.



Heritage, visually Senior artist Gita Hudson, presents an exhibition of paintings titled Murals Revisited. Her paintings are inspired by the temple murals of Tamil Nadu, the earliest of which are a thousand years old. These murals were painted with natural pigments and thus have a limited colour palette. Gita has attempted to have a contemporary tone, depth and texture transported onto her canvases. @CP Art Centre, Alwarpet. On till January 31, 10am to 7pm. For details, call 9841266149.

Snake hysteria NatGeo fame herpetologist, Gowri Shankar is organising a workshop for animal lovers, snake rescuers, and all those looking to enhance their careers in ecology. You can learn how to manage snakes entering your property at this workshop. This event is by Scientific Training on Reptile Management which aims at reducing human-animal conflict and creating a new breed of ethical snake rescuers. @Jacob and Klooster Farm, Thalambur, OMR. On January 27 and 28 from 9am to 5pm for a fee of ₹6,850. Suitable for 18 years and above. For details, call 99404 88880.



**Delhi's Sidecar** wins the title for India's best bar, again. However, the 30BestBarsIndia list also features a new award for non-alcoholic craft drinks, won by Chennai's Pandan Club



**Spirited away** (Clockwise from left) Pandan Club's specialty craft drinks; the team at Cobbler & Crew; and Sidecar; and Manoj Padmanabhan, one of the partners at Pandan Club, receiving the award for the best non-alcoholic cocktail menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



# A cocktail trail to India's best bar

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It is midnight in Goa and the graveyard shift is on at Elephant & Co. Seven popular bars from across India are doing takeovers in turn, making cocktails for a heaving crowd, with the menu changing every 45 minutes. The influential 30 Best Bars Award have just been announced in an action-packed ceremony at the Taj Cidade De Goa, with Sidecar from Delhi, winning the coveted title of the country's best bar. The well-loved, multiple-award winning space, styled as a neighbourhood bar, is known for its trendsetting cocktail

programme, which includes drinks dedicated to the capital city. The high energy team from Cobbler & Crew in Pune, a crowd favourite, comes in second, and Lair in Delhi, known for its experimental cocktails, is third. They are followed by Copitas at the Four Seasons in Bengaluru, Hideaway in Goa and ZLB23, a luxurious speakeasy at the Leela Palace in Bengaluru. The awards also introduced a new category this year for the best non-alcoholic cocktail menu, recognising a surge in demand for thoughtfully crafted drinks that move away from the syrupy mocktails of the past. It is won by Chennai's



Pandan Club, a Peranakan restaurant helmed by MasterChef Australia winner Sashi Cheliah and co-owned by Manoj Padmanabhan. The restaurant blends storytelling with fresh fruits and spices to create refreshing drinks that offer the complexity of a cocktail, minus the alcohol. Vikram Achanta, who co-founded 30BestBars with Radhakrishna Nair, says they created the award when they noticed a growing trend of bars catering to people cutting back on, or cutting out, alcohol. "We realised the drinks were becoming more sophisticated, with the same techniques applied to alcoholic cocktails," he says, adding "I think this is part of the evolution of the Indian bar landscape... It gives people more opportunities to have a good night out." Recognising changes in the country's bar and restaurant scene, 30BestBars also launched an award for the best work in sustainability last year.

This year it went to two bars, both from Pune: Soy Como Soy, along with Cobbler & Crew. (Cobbler & Crew had a good night out, winning the Best Bar Team, with its star bartender Aashi Bhatnagar also winning an award for best bartender.) Explaining the process of putting the awards together, Vikram says about 275 people connected to the industry voted to determine which bars make the short list. "We have about 350 bars on the long list, and about 60 self nominations. In addition to the cocktail programme, we look at the quality of bar talent and management, the design and aesthetics. We look at how much they are investing in ice, and glassware," he says. Stating that many of the rankings this year were closely fought affairs, especially among the country's top bars, which were separated by just a few votes, Radhakrishna adds, "Every year, we re-evaluate our award categories to stay relevant with what's taking place in the bar landscape, both nationally and internationally." In its fourth year, 30BestBarsIndia shifted the ceremony to Goa from Delhi to recognise the State's vibrant restaurant and bar scene, with inventive new spaces opening through the year. As a result, Goa was festive with activity, particularly over the weekend of the awards, with about 35 to 40 bar takeovers, all culminating with the joyful after-party at Elephant & Co.

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### Across

- 1 Complete failure (4)
- 3 Tract (8)
- 8 Learning by mechanical repetition (4)
- 9 This is thrown down as a challenge (8)
- 11 This is Spinal Tap's kind of music (5,5)
- 14 Drowsy — dwarf (6)
- 15 Food fish, like a small tuna (6)
- 17 Awesome (10)
- 20 Leading Roman Catholic bishop (8)
- 21 Explosive device (4)
- 22 Ragged (8)
- 23 Action (4)

### Down

- 1 Most remote (8)
- 2 Old hat (8)
- 4 Proverbs (6)
- 5 Baggy trousers — slap on a ton (anag) (10)
- 6 Quiet time (4)
- 7 Former Archbishop of Cape Town (4)
- 10 Commiserate (10)

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



- 12 Addictive substance in tobacco (8)
- 13 Unfinished business (5,3)
- 16 Heroin, for instance (6)
- 18 Shoo! (4)
- 19 True \_\_\_\_, film starring John Wayne (1969) and Jeff Bridges (2010) (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated January 25, 2024.

Solution No. 13567

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# Straight from the oven

The Great Madras Bake Sale, a Chennai home baker's delight, is back for its second edition with Japanese cheesecakes and live indie music

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Nothing short of a carnival: this is what entrepreneurs Maaria Tanveer, Cindana Manickavel and Priya Anup envision for The Great Madras Bake Sale's much-awaited second edition. In this age of weekend pop ups and makeshift markets, this bake sale attempts to be different. "We feel that home bakers don't get opportunities to do any sampling, because they bake only on orders. And most often, there is rarely any budget for marketing. Which is why we chose this format," says Maaria of Adoniyaa who started off as a home baker. "It also helps the public choose between the many options." This edition will feature 25 bakers. "It was a highly curated list. You won't find the same flavour of cake in two stalls." Maaria adds that there are exclusive stalls for puff pastry, strawberry bakes, DIY brownies, and so on. "We in fact have a baker bringing pet-friendly bakes. The event is also pet-friendly," says Maaria. Ruqaiyah Bakes, Edible Sins, Fresh Cakes by Bakerzoh and Hew and Frost are some of the popular names on the list. Pet treats from Mommy baby kitchen, Japanese cheesecake from Favedaintylicious, baklava from Dianzz Paradise, a reinvented iconic McRenett pista cake from Bakeman and a donut and berliner stall by Chokolat Culture are some desserts to look out for.



**Bakers' day out** Some of the products on display. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The last edition had around 2,500 walk-in customers, and all the bakers sold out quickly. "To avoid that, this time, we have stalls by a few commercial vendors – Batter, Mexe, Butterheads, Boba Baba to name a few." The sale intends to challenge the bakers, says Maaria. "It's a good thing for seasoned bakers to experiment. They should be encouraged to play with flavours, textures and have fun with what they create. Packing and presentation also matters." As a fitting backdrop, the event will also have live music by independent city artists, Nitika Raj, Tarini and Manoj Krishna.

On January 28, from 2pm to 8pm at Chettinad – Sath Sadhana School, Gandhinagar, Adyar. Contact @thegreatmadrasbakesale on instagram.

**Looking inward** Some of the students' photographs. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



# Vignettes of Vyasarpadi

Eight school and college students from the neighbourhood take us through the unexplored bylanes of North Chennai with a set of thoughtfully framed, powerful photos

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Try taking a taxi to Vyasarpadi," says photographer M Palanikumar. "Most drivers will refuse to come inside. I know of auto-drivers from other parts of the city who back off the moment a passenger asks to be dropped in the neighbourhood." This part of the city, home to daily-wagers and people from marginalised communities, is also relatively unexplored. Palanikumar has worked with eight students from the area to encourage them to tell their stories through the camera.

"The idea is to help them acquire a journalistic voice," says the 33-year-old. The photos will be exhibited at Life in North Chennai, an event hosted by Vyasai Thozhargal, a collective that helps educate youngsters in Vyasarpadi. The show is supported by People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), Chennai Climate Action Group



(CCAG), and Palani Studio. Palanikumar says he worked for over a year with the team, which comprises S Nandhini (18), E Imman (17), D Vigneshwari (15), S Vinodhini (19), S Naveen (18), A Rashiya (21), P Thirisha (20) and N Sakthivel (28). Among them, Nandhini is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Journalism. "There are very few children who take up journalism from Vyasarpadi," points out

Palanikumar. He hopes that with exposure and training, more students come forward to wield the camera. "Their perspectives are unique," he adds. "They tend to take in their stride what people from the outside may deem painful or pitiful." In the exhibition, there will be photos of the people who make up North Chennai, detailing their lifestyle, problems and joys, the little things that constitute their world... "They have captured colourful shots of clothes drying on lines, cramped one-roomed homes that hold all their belongings, portraits of family members," says Palanikumar, adding, "There are so many single mothers here, working long hours to support their family; conservancy workers;

women chopping wooden chips that hold nails on walls, through the day..." The students, who were armed with cameras that he provided, have shot about 4,500 photos, out of which he picked 220 for the exhibition. Through his studio, Palanikumar imparts free training to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. "This is my way of giving back to society," he says. His photography lessons mainly comprise sharing his perspectives on treating one's subject with respect. "My technical classes are over in a day," he points out, adding that the actual learning happens on the field. He hopes that the exhibition will help people from other parts of the city open up to North Chennai. "We plan to take visitors on a tour of its many by-lanes, show them how life is here, in its real form," he says. This, will contribute to changing the prejudices surrounding its people.

Life in North Chennai is on from January 19 to 21, 9am to 8pm, at Dr Ambedkar Pagutharivu Padasalai, 4th street, JJR Nagar, Vyasarpadi. The event is being inaugurated by filmmaker Vetrimaaran.





believe that we are not competing with regular theatres," he adds.

From iconic classics to cult favourites, SCC screens movies that make the audience indulge in nostalgia while keeping it light. "We all have a list of movies we love, but never get to watch on the large screen. For example, we screen *Home Alone* around Christmas every year," says Sahil, adding that the SCC takes film recommendations from its audience and bases its screenings on polls via social media quite often.

Sahil says that Chennai being a coastal city has given them another opportunity to recreate their old concept, Movies by the Sea, and is currently on the lookout for beachside open-air venues.

"We have had a lot of repeat audiences, so we started an annual subscription model," says Sahil. The annual subscription costing ₹3,000 gives you unlimited access to all screenings by the SCC. Members can also bring one other guest for open-air screenings and three guests for drive-in screenings.

"The club membership is unavailable in Chennai for the time being. We'd like to have at least two to three venues before we open subscriptions, which we're aiming to have by April," he adds.

The screenings will begin with English movies, but they also plan on screening Tamil films.

Drive-in cinemas under the stars, rooftop flicks with a view, and resto-bar film nights – Sunset Cinema Club will not just redefine how we watch films, but where we watch them.

*The premiere weekend of Sunset Cinema Club on January 19 and 20 will screen 50 First Dates and Pretty Woman. Book tickets on [sunsetcinemaclub.in](http://sunsetcinemaclub.in) starting ₹500 per person.*

**I**f your resolution for the new year is to indulge in new experiences and make moments count, here is some great news. The way you watch movies is about to change because Sunset Cinema Club (SCC) is finally making its way to Chennai and will screen movies on a large screen, under an open sky.

The SCC has been orchestrating a symphony of cinematic experiences across five cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad) since 2016, and now, Chennai gets the front-row seat to the magic.

"We have been eyeing Chennai for around two years now, since

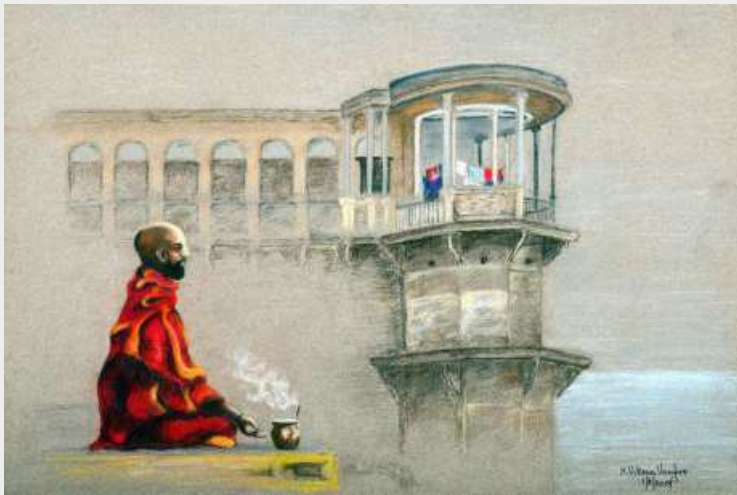


the city has a captive audience. We are starting with one venue and have plans to expand to different parts of the city,” says co-founder Sahil Kapoor.

The club curates a reel tapestry that unfolds in settings ranging from sandy beaches to hip bars, with the seating comprising comfortable beanbags. It is not just

about the movies, but an immersive rendezvous with storytelling, ambience, and maybe even a hint of the unexpected.

“Our screenings are unique. Unlike a regular theatre, we have discussions, food, drinks sometimes, and even break out in dance. We focus more on the experience than the film, and



**I** love travelling. Whether it is the narrow bylanes of George Town, Chennai, or the teeming ghats of Varanasi, I like walking around with a sketchbook and pen in my

hand,” says Chennai-based artist Vikram Varghese.

Vikram's solo exhibition, Treasures of India, currently on at Cholamandal Artist's Village, chronicles his travels through India. A set of 100 paintings, this includes watercolours and pastels.



“When I come across anything that stirs up strong emotions in me, I quickly make a sketch and take some notes. These could be anything – a *sadhu* in Varanasi, meditating, oblivious to the chaos around him, secrets whispered by an abandoned heritage building, sights seen and stories told by an old louvred window from the British Raj. To me, all these things have an essence of timelessness that cannot be captured fully by a photograph,” says the artist, who had his first solo exhibition in 1995. “But it is only when I get back home and begin to convert these sights and emotions onto canvas that these experiences acquire meaning and depth.”

“My father encouraged me to take up art as a profession,” says Vikram. In 1995, Vikram started training with the well-known artiste, theatre personality, and director of Indra-Dhanush Art School, AV Dhanushkodi.

“Dhanushkodi sir was an inspiration. He taught me the finer nuances of sketching, water colours and pastels. He used to always tell me, ‘train your heart to see more than what your eyes perceive’ . That is essentially at the core of what I try to do,” says Vikram.

On his preferred medium of painting, Vikram says, “Watercolour is a difficult medium to work with, but for me, it is all about the transparency and luminosity that you can achieve with it. Another unique characteristic of painting in watercolour is the sense of free flow. Often, it is in this freeness of allowing the paint to flow a bit by itself that can turn an artwork into one filled with unexpected surprises.”

**@Cholamandalam Artists' Village, Injambakkam. The exhibition will be inaugurated at 4pm on January 26 and will be on display till February 4.**

Satrangi's presentation Aap Ke Anurodh will feature memorable songs of the legendary singer Kishore Kumar. This is a unique programme which will be based on songs requested by the audience. Songs from movies like *Amar Prem*, *Mere Jeevan Saathi*, and *Aradhana*, will be presented by Pramod and Smriti.

@ TEACH Auditorium, Taramani ( Near  
Writer's Café) on January 24 from 5.45pm.  
Tickets are priced at ₹400 and ₹250, can be  
home delivered. Contact 9884778073.



**I**n varying shades of purple and green, each quilt spread out at The Square Inch, a quilting studio in Chennai, has a story to tell. There is a butterfly hovering around an intricately embroidered flower on one, and a bunch of bright purple blooms on another. On a third quilt, there are splashes of colour all around a laughing child.

These quilts are among 58 entries received as part of an annual challenge run by The Square Inch. This year, entries were invited on the theme of Abundance, and the Quilt India Foundation has curated a theme-based art quilt exhibition in the city.

“Every participant who registered was given the same bundle of fabric, and were asked to interpret the theme Abundance, however they wanted. The only riders were that they had to use the fabric given to cover at least 50% of the surface area of the quilt, and that the dimensions had to be 20x20 inches,” Tina Katwal, founder, The Square Inch says.

Varsha Sundararajan, co-founder, Quilt India Foundation says that a range of techniques which include cross stitch, applique work, confetti quilting, and even printing photographs on fabric have been used by the participants.

"Quilting is considered a craft, but we think it is a lot more than that. It is an art. We encouraged participants to pause and acknowledge abundance in its various forms, and bring out this interpretation on the quilts they worked on," she explains.

Apart from the themed entries, Varsha says that they will also showcase a collection of temperature quilts. "These quilts have been worked on all year long by quilters, and depict everyday temperatures



through colours and patterns," she says, pointing to a quilt which has the temperatures recorded in Chennai in 2021, through shades of green and yellow.

At The Square Inch, Tina has been seeing several middle-aged as well as senior citizens coming forth to learn quilting, and pursue it as a hobby.

"However, we are now also seeing an increase in youngsters interested in quilting as a stress release, and to consciously take some time away from screens. We would love for more people to explore quilting as an artistic pursuit," she says.

As a part of the exhibition, a workshop and demonstration will also be held on January 20 at 11am. Anitha Manohar, director, National Institute of Fashion Technology will be the judge for the challenge, and will decide on the top two entries. The Square Inch, will also give a special award titled The Royal Inchworm.

*Abundance, an exhibition of theme-based quilts will be held from January 20 to 22 at Sri Sankara Hall, TTK Road. Inauguration is at 4 30pm on January 19. Entry is free.*





The league of ordinary gentlemen

All about comedy Malayalam web-series *Perillloor Premier League*

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**P**erillloor Premier League (PPL) breezes through the lives of a bunch of quirky people in a fictional village, Perillloor. With the seven-episode web series winning hearts, its director Praveen Chandran is a happy soul.

The series is the first independent directorial venture of Praveen, who has worked in Malayalam cinema for over two decades. Praveen says that PPL happened because of its writer Deepu Pradeep, who has written

*Kunjiramayanam* and Vipin Das' upcoming Prithviraj-Basil Joseph movie, *Guruvayoor Ambalanadayil*. Praveen admits that the web series format was unfamiliar for him since he has worked only in movies. "However, web series gives you more freedom as a director. This applies to scripting as well since you can go into sub plots without moving away from the main emotion. It was equally challenging and thrilling to bring so many characters on screen in PPL," Praveen says.

The series is set in Sulthan Bathery and Ambalavayal in Wayanad district. "These locations have not been explored much. We had visualised a village in our mind and were



**Funny lines** A poster of *Perillloor Premier League*; (below) Praveen Chandran.

able to identify such spots. Our cinematographer [Anoop V Shylaja] was able to capture the beauty of these picturesque locations."

Praveen asserts that the humour works only if the right cast is in place. "We were able to bring in the best actors, that too working within the budget."

PPL has almost all the actors Praveen has cast for his first film that will go on floors soon. Some of them are from theatre, some have acted in sitcoms and a few have been doing small roles in movies. "I haven't worked much with humorous content although I love watching comedy. My first movie is going to be a light-hearted one. The best thing about PPL was that there was not a dull moment on the set."

*Perillloor Premier League* is streaming on Disney+ Hotstar

**Deep dive**  
Nasser; (below) with Konkona Sen Sharma and Manoj Bajpayee in *Killer Soup*.  
S SHIVA RAJ AND NETFLIX



Gopinath Rajendran  
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**N**asser has been in the industry for almost 40 years with more than 700 films under his name, playing everything from soldier to chief minister, mad scientist to godman. Unsurprisingly, the role of a cop in Netflix's latest series, *Killer Soup*, is not the first time the veteran has donned khaki. Over the years, he has played the righteous police officer in films like *Hey Ram* and a hilarious one in *Vettai*. He gets to indulge in both those characteristics in Netflix's *Killer Soup*, which he says he enjoys rather than repeating similar characters that would "make it look stale".

"I don't believe in having my own style," says Nasser, as we discuss the new series. "That's why I try to change how my character looks, even if it's another cop. When I read this script, I realised I needed a different

Spicy soup

Nasser, seen recently in Netflix's *Killer Soup*, on why he still panics at every shoot's first day



***I would like to surrender to the creator who has already created the character I should be. If that base is created, I work atop that***

NASSER,  
Actor

approach. I took the cop part of the character away from the narration and characterised him based on what makes him. And then, I interpreted that he's got a job, and that's of a cop. I didn't make his profession his character."

The actor played the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M Karunanidhi in *Thalaivi* a couple of years ago. Ask him how he compares taking direct references to such roles and coming up with his own interpretation for others and he says, "I was just talking to Manoj Bajpayee about how getting similar roles again and again is a curse as it stereotypes you." The veteran has no qualms in stating that most of the mainstream film characters are two-dimensional. "For example, for the role of a rich and strict father, that's all the cue I'm given. That's not

enough for an actor to play a role. That's where the interpretation comes in; did I get rich by winning a lottery, was it inherited, did I rob a bank, cheat a friend or was it because of years of hard work? These reasons make a difference as they take us deep into the skin of the character and make us more comfortable. Getting paid so much, I just can't be delivering lines in a particular manner (*laughs*). I make that interpretation even if the script or director doesn't demand them."

Though he is clearly loving the process of interpreting the characters given to him, Nasser affirms that he would prefer the director to flesh them out for him. "If the makers give us the details on the type of character we are playing, it would be great, but it rarely happens. That's the case with almost all the characters, and when they're acting in a certain way, I will have to tag along as well. Otherwise, my performance would stand out. That's why even after 700 films, I panic on the first day of a new film's shoot; I need to settle down and know what the director wants and what the character demands."

Nasser heaps praises on *Killer Soup*'s lead actors Konkona Sensharma and Manoj Bajpayee. "They're too good; they approach their work ritualistically and patiently read the 800-page script. With talents like them next to me, I have to be at a similar pace."

The *Baahubali* films, which Nasser was a part of, were some of the first titles to get the pan-India tag. "A pan-Indian film does not mean it should have actors from different industries across the country. Films like *Sholay* are beyond terms like pan-India. Even before that, Mr SS Vasan had made *Chandralekha*. So such films had always been there."



Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams  
Local Advisory Committee, Tamilnadu & Puducherry

Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Kshetra  
Prana Prathishta Celebrations

Daily upto 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
Bhajans from 9.00am to 12.00pm

Daily upto 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
Chanting of  
Sri Tharaka Rama Mantram

SPECIAL PROGRAMMES ON 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2024  
On the occasion of Pran Prathishta of Ayodhya Sri Ramjanmbhoomi Kshetra

6.30am - 8.00am	- Sri Vishnu Sahasranamam Chanting
9.00am - 12.00pm	- Bhajans
12.00pm - 2.00pm	- Vedaparanam by TTD Vedaparanadars
2.00pm - 3.00pm	- Veena Concert by Smt. Jayalakshmi Sekhar
3.00pm - 4.00pm	- Mandolin Concert by Sri. U B Raju
4.30pm	- Chanting of Sri Tharaka Rama Mantram
5.15pm - 6.15pm	- Vocal Concert by Kum. Madhavi & Kum. Vaishnavi Delhi.
6.30pm - 7.30pm	- Vocal Concert by Padma Bhushan Sangeetha Kalanidhi Dr Sudha Raghunathan

Programs upto 26th January, 2024

Music & Dance

8th Jan., Thu	- 5.15pm - 6.15pm - Sri C V P Sastry - Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.15pm - Veena Concert Sri B Kannan
	- 7.15pm - 8.00pm - Dance by Padmabhushan Awardee Dr. Padma Subramaniam
19th Jan., Fri	- 5.15pm - 6.15pm - Sri Pramath Subramaniam
	- Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Smt Sameera Bharadwaj
	- Vocal
20th Jan., Sat	- 5.15pm - 6.15pm - Kum. Prakruthi Reddy - Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Smt Soujanya & Kum Sireesha Bhagavathula - Vocal
21st Jan., Sun	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Sri Patanjali & Sri Viswanathan - Flute
22nd Jan., Mon	- 5.15pm - 6.15pm - Delhi Sisters - Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Padmabhushan Awardee Dr. Sudha Raghunathan
	- Vocal
23rd Jan., Tue	- 5.30pm - 6.00pm - Smt Geetha Kesavan - Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Sri R P Shravan - Vocal
24th Jan., Wed	- 5.15pm - 6.15pm - Kum. Gayatri Vibhavari - Vocal
	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Kum. Lavanya Sudarshan
	- Vocal
25th Jan., Thu	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Kum. Nagathisya - Vocal
26th Jan., Fri	- 6.30pm - 7.30pm - Dr V L Sudarshan & Group
	- Vocal

All are welcome

Pranaams: J S R Infra Developers P Ltd

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