

weekend Vivid

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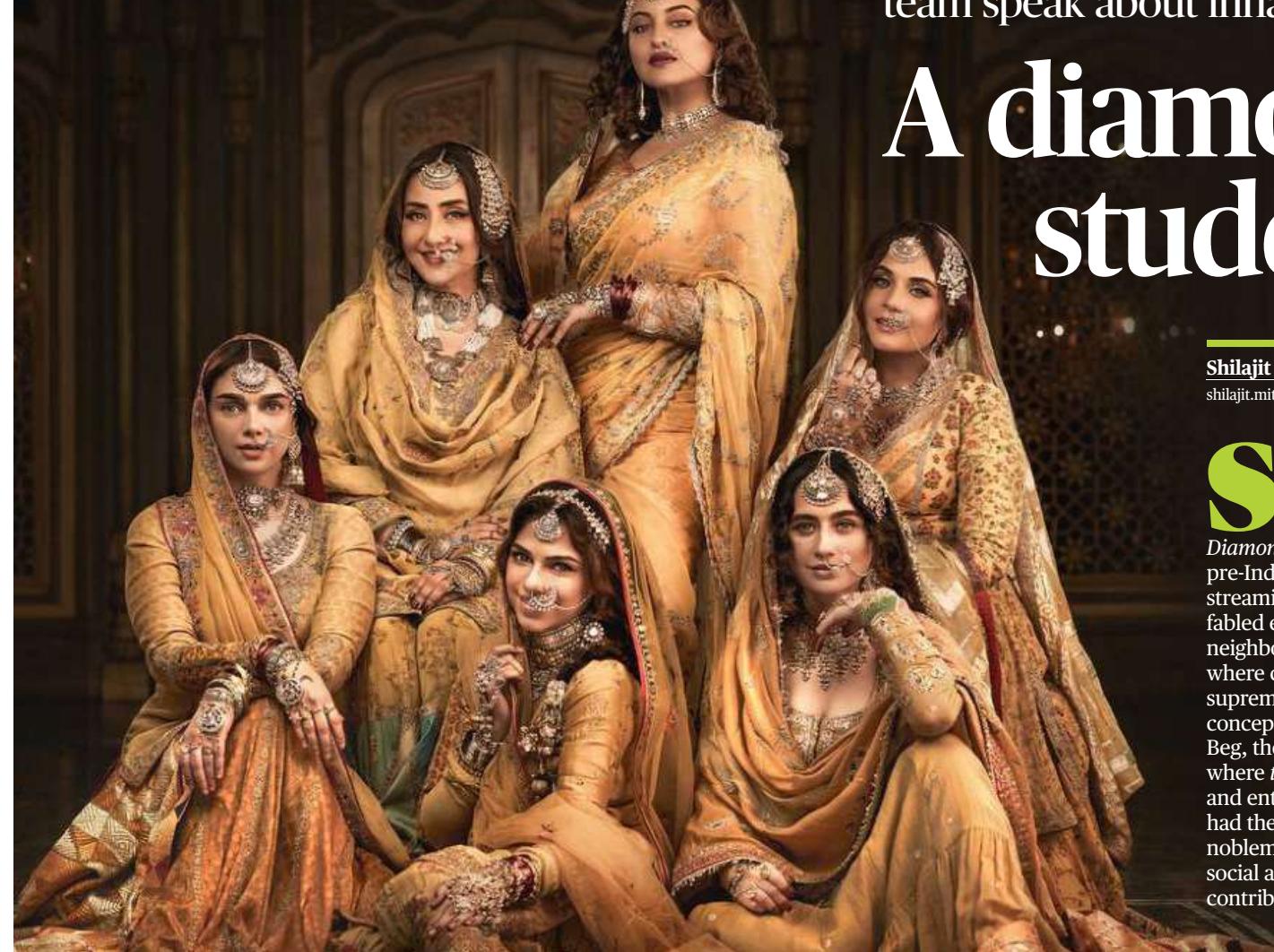


Anita Dongre's eco edit Azure champions Bemberg yarn and plastic-free leather **P4**

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Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Fardeen Khan and team speak about inhabiting the world of Heeramandi

A diamond studded *world*



Shilajit Mitra
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Sanjay Leela Bhansali pens a billet-doux to a bygone era in his latest opus, *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*. Set in pre-Independence India, the streaming series reimagines the fabled eponymous neighbourhood in Lahore, where courtesans reigned supreme. Originally conceptualised by writer Moin Beg, the series evokes a past where *tawaifs* – female dancers and entertainers of the time – had the measure of nawabs and noblemen, wielded considerable social and political influence and contributed to the freedom

movement. Even by Bhansali standards, it's a sprawling, gorgeously mounted series – spread out over eight, hour-long episodes set to stream on Netflix from May 1.

"I had little understanding of the complexities of courtesan culture in the subcontinent before *Heeramandi*," says Manisha Koirala, who fronts the show as the formidable Mallikajaan, madam of a fictitious elite brothel called Shahi Mahal. "In truth, the courtesans influenced the politics and the course of history. Their abodes were the centre of art, culture, tradition, dance and music. They were quite a powerhouse during their time."

Manisha, of course, worked with Bhansali in his debut film,

Khamoshi: The Musical (1996). Back then, the visionary director of *Devdas*, *Bajirao Mastani* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* was still coming into his own as a stylist and storyteller. How was it reuniting with him at the height of his power?

"It's been wonderful to witness Sanjay's evolution as an artist," Manisha says. "Even during *Khamoshi*, he was equally passionate, and his love for cinema and his work ethic were the same. We had made a simple, poignant film with a lot of heart. Today, I feel, Sanjay's characters are quite layered. His style of telling stories is different and grander."

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>> PAGE 4

TRENDS

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Instapick

Game for gala: Met Gala is back on May 6 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This year's show will feature the Costume Institute's exhibit *Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion* and the dress code is *The Garden of Time*, named after a short story by JG Ballard. Expect Anna Wintour co-chairing the event with Jennifer Lopez, Zendaya, Chris Hemsworth and Bad Bunny.



Talking point

Visa wise: European Commission's new visa cascade regime for India is easing the Schengen visa process. Frequent travellers can now apply for a multiple-entry multi-year Schengen visa that allows travel access to 29 European countries, including France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. So, have you packed your bags yet?

Pick of the week

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

For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Shopping spree

Shop clothes and home décor, all under ₹25,000, by nearly 40 designers, including NAC Jewellers and Wafe Kolkata, at Vandana and Aashna Palsani's **The Melaunge Exhibitions** on April 29-30 at The Park, Chennai, 10.30am to 8.30pm. Looking to update your wardrobe with ikat? Check out Translate's edit **Sounds of Basant** at Amethyst. 11am to 7.30pm; till May 3. ₹4,000 upwards.

Toast to summer

This summer, try five different versions of sangria, from the alcoholic ones like pinacolato sangria and Sicilian sangria to the non-alcoholic 0'proof sangria. Mocktails start ₹550, while cocktails at ₹1,850 at **Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort** and Spa. If you are in the mood to make your own cocktails, call 9884447510, to register for Sanna's Mixology Session today, 11am to 12.30pm, at **Surf Turf**, Kovalam.

Ornamental details

VMan and Curato's new collection of men's bracelets, bands and necklaces is made of leather and 925 sterling silver. ₹4,999 onwards; on curato.in from mid-May. Speaking of jewellery, Platinum Guild International India and Vummidi Bangaru Jewellers' Platinum Evara Multi **Sapphire collection** has 70 pieces in multi-coloured sapphires weighing five-110 gms. ₹27,000 upwards; vummidi.com.

Play along

On Sunday, Bengaluru's Jagriti Theatre is staging a play **Tax Free** that follows the hilarious journey of four visually impaired men at blind men's club. 3.30pm and 7.30pm; Tickets: ₹300 on in.bookmyshow.com. Closer home, Crazy Mohan's play **Marriage Made in Saloon** will be staged at Vani Mahal, Chennai, on Sunday at 7pm. Tickets start at ₹300; in.bookmyshow.com.

Home sweet home

Ikea's new collection, **Tesammans**, conceptualised with Christoph Brach and Daniela ter Haar from Dutch design studio Raw Color, is a limited edition of 18 products themed on colour-blocking. ₹149 onwards on ikeacom. For serveware and table linen, check out the new collection of salad plates, creamer kettles and vases by **Plate & Peonie**. Available on plateandpeonie.com.

Laughter therapy

If you are a cinema lover, visit Fika, Chennai for a gig, titled **Women in Cinema**, by comedians Krishn, Shakti, Syama, Mounicaa and Bala; tomorrow at 4.30pm. Tickets start at ₹299 on in.bookmyshow.com. Meanwhile, comedian Aravind SA will be in Thaamara Studios, Chennai, recording his show **We Need To Talk** today at 3:30pm and 8pm. ₹1,770; in.bookmyshow.com.

Say cheese!

At Soroco House, Chennai, Akshayakalpa Organic's **cheese board workshop** will be held on May 4, 10am to noon. On insider.in, the registration fee starts at ₹1,800. Meanwhile, IDAM, Chennai, is hosting **acting workshop** today for beginners and intermediates, which will be mentored by National Award winner Lakshmi Priyaa C. 10am onwards. Tickets start at ₹5,000 on in.bookmyshow.com.

Amarjot Kaur

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A week ago, Delhi-based band Faridkot released its five-song EP, called *Ibtida*, and mounted it on record label T-Series. The EP, which the band describes as a bouquet of love songs, arrives after nearly a decade of the band's last album *Phir Se*, which was released in 2014, just three years after its debut album *Ek*. In between, Faridkot belted out about 10 singles, including the Bollywood song *Jeda Nasha*.

Band members IP Singh and Rajarshi Sanyal look back at their 15-year career in the music industry as an evolution of sorts. On a Zoom call, IP explains, "This sound is where we are at currently, and we are working on some more music and that will be probably different from this because at any point and time our music reflects where we are at and there's no certain kind of style that we like to go for."

The band actively started working on the EP some two months ago, shares Rajarshi, even though the compositions, he says, have been developing over time. "The music has been constructed in the past few months. Sonically, we wanted to keep the songs in the present, just to make the EP relevant to where we are musically right now. In fact, the word *ibtida*

A sense of a beginning

Delhi-based band Faridkot continues its experiments with confused pop in its new, five-song EP titled *Ibtida*



IP Singh and Rajarshi Sanyal of the band Faridkot; and their EP *Ibtida*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



means beginnings and this is our first EP," he says.

The band intended to explore new sounds, which led its members to experiment with different instruments in *Ibtida*. "In one of the songs, a Punjabi song, we have used the sitar as a solo instrument; I don't remember having heard sitar in a Punjabi song. We have also collaborated with musicians Jubin Nautiyal (in the song *Main Na Jaanu Kyun*) and Raghav Chaitanya (for the track *Chhad Ke Na Jaa*), who brought their own colours to the EP," says IP. Rajarshi adds that the



Sonically, we wanted to keep the songs in the present, just to make the EP relevant to where we are musically right now

RAJARSHI SANYAL

compositions in the EP also have nuanced sounds, such as the sound of scratching, writing on a piece of paper.

Lyrically, while compiling the EP, IP and Rajarshi were considerate of the chronology and silence between the tracks. "We are lucky that all the five tracks flow from one to the other. There's an invisible thread joining them. The songs in the middle have an emotional curve that reaches a crescendo. So, when you start with the first song, the emotional curve begins, it peaks in between, and then we bring it back, completing the whole circle with the last track," says IP. He shares that Rajarshi would often hear the songs repeatedly to see the order in which they were to be placed in the album. "One had to figure out the aftertaste of the song to see if it is setting the palate for the upcoming song," he adds.

The band continues to maintain its self-defined genre "confused pop", refusing to be confined to labels. IP's stance is clear: "We always want to achieve something that is liked by people, but the confusion is caused by how do we get there. There are 200 million ways to reach there, so we keep exploring them, and you can call this sound confused pop."

The band members say that they are planning to release two more EPs this year. "Besides that a couple of film projects and OTT projects are on. We want to explore the sounds and songs of India," Rajarshi signs off.

You can listen to *Ibtida* on Spotify and other music streaming apps.



Taste of India

Chennai's boho chic bistro-café Asvah has launched Indian-ish, a menu that stems from the guests' constant ask for Indian food. Curated by Chef Harish Rao, who has worked with Avartana and Dakshin, Indian-ish offers a modern twist to Indian dishes. Expect corn galouti and raw banana sheekh for starters, and gongura mutton curry and kalaki curry for mains. The dessert menu, curated by Chef Ritwik Anantanarayanan, formerly with Oberoi, Gurugram, features strawberry and champagne sorbet as well as ice creams with flavours like Parle G and masala chai.



Beat the heat

Fast&Up, a sports and health nutrition brand, is collaborating with NOTO, known for its low calorie and zero-sugar desserts, for Electrolyte Popsicles. With sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium, and chloride, along with added Vitamin C, B12 and fresh fruits, the brands claim that the popsicles replenish electrolytes and combat fatigue. In cranberry and orange flavours, these popsicles, priced at ₹102, are available on Swiggy/Zomato in Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Pune, Chennai and Hyderabad.

(Far left) Director Konstantin Bojanov with Omara Shetty and Anasuya Sengupta behind the scenes for *The Shameless*; and Anasuya Sengupta (L) and Omara Shetty (R). OMARA SHETTY AND POOJA WAGH



Omara: One day, a production designer for the film told me, "You are *The Shameless*. The one who doesn't conform to society and wants to live life on her own terms". What is shame and where does it come from? It's all just imposed. And it is her (Devika) becoming that, which is why she's dubbed *The Shameless*. So I see it as someone who's decided to break free.

Anasuya: Shame as an emotion is a big block that's too societally embedded, and it comes up in everyone's life. And this idea of shame, it's the fear of that, right? Which doesn't let you cross over. Once you've crossed that, then there's fearlessness on the other side. I think that's very befitting for the film, for the character that I played.

Q: How do you think the film is going to be received in India?

Omara: To be honest, it doesn't matter how the audience will perceive it. It's a story that we all wanted to be a part of, and it's for

people to see, take it or leave it.

Q: Lastly, how does it feel to be representing India at Cannes?

Omara: It's an immense honour, being recognised for the work you put in. I'm very excited to attend screenings of other films and meet other Indian women who made it to Cannes this year, be it Sahana Goswami, Sandhya Suri or Payal Kapadia. I'm also excited to catch *The Apprentice*.

Anasuya: I feel so ready to take on that platform. I feel grateful but also very proud because I worked very hard. We all did... I once saw a De Niro interview where he says the most important thing to do when great things happen, is to just chill and relax. So I'm trying to keep it together, relax, and take it easy but I'm bursting on the inside.

The *Shameless* will premiere *Un Certain Regard* at Cannes 2024. The 77th annual Cannes Film Festival will take place from May 14 to 25, 2024.



(Clockwise from far left) Ksira (kheer); interiors at Avatara; Sandhita; Karuvellilas (bitter gourd). SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

perfection, they can be dipped into a tangy pomegranate or creamy chickpea mash.

The courses showcase the diversity of India's regional cuisine. For example, a dish called Shikhalu features charred babycorn served on the base of Rajasthan-inspired missi ghevar. Broccolini and carrots find themselves in a pickle along with a makhani gravy in Sandhita.

Rahul says the Mumbai restaurant serves two new signature courses, Shubhanjana and Vrishi, which draw inspiration from the culinary traditions of Bihar and Maharashtra. Inspired by Bihar's famous litti chokha, Rahul gets creative with a drumstick chokha and sattu kachori. Mumbai being his domain, the Kolhapur-inspired vrishi combines tambda bhaat (red rice) with a parsnip rassa and black lime pickle.

Of the two desserts ksira (kheer) and madhuram (sweet), it is the latter that impresses. Created by pastry chef Kamlesh Singh, it is a nostalgic take on Uttarakhand's bal mithai with milk chocolate fudge; its sweetness cut down by the tart buransh-flavoured sparkling homemade wine.

There is a lot at Avatara to appreciate, including the stunning plating to the use of seemingly-boring vegetables in creative ways paired with unheard-of flavour combinations.

A meal for two costs ₹4,500 plus taxes. Krishna Curve building, Santacruz West, Mumbai.

Bitter-sweet symphony

Avatara's vegetarian 14-course menu features neither paneer nor mushroom. Instead try its bitter gourd tikki and turnip galouti

paneer and mushroom. To take it a step further, there is no onion or garlic either.

Intrigued how that is going to pan out? So are we.

Our meal begins with a cold beverage – pineapple rasam with curry leaves. The first course, aptly titled Naivedhya, is inspired by the holy offering to the gods and comes encased in a plate with a peacock-themed design. Homemade butter, popping sugar and a bon-bon filled with panchamrit (honey, vanilla, almond milk, rose water and orange zest) acts as an amuse-bouche.

The Alaphara (which means



snacks in Sanskrit) is designed by Avatara Dubai's Chef Omkar Walve, who won the coveted Michelin Young Chef's award last year. Crisp air-fried okra is stuffed with chilli thecha and alu wadi, which transforms it into a mini taco packed with taro leaves and roots. Sol kadi, served on the side, is poured over a green apple shaped like a rose and soaked in kokam.

The next course named Jadon focusses on root vegetables such as yam, beetroot, lotus stems, orange sweet potato, tapioca and purple sweet potato. Thinly-sliced and baked to



Coffee in a minute

Nespresso is promising to brew up a storm in India by the end of this year, with home and professional machines and exclusive coffee blends. Their first boutique opens in Delhi, followed by online and national expansion. The popular global brand is also sourcing Indian coffee beans.



Unleash your athletic potential with Amul Sport

For athletes and fitness enthusiasts, the quest for better performance is never-ending. Taking note of this consumer need, Amul has launched Amul Sport – a game-changing sports drink designed to help you power through intense training sessions and grueling competitions like never before. It was official beverage partner of Women Premier League'24 and powered all the players of WPL.

India's first lactose free sports drink, Amul Sport, packs an impressive 155 kcal of energy, 450mg potassium, 150mg sodium, 150mg phosphorous, 210mg calcium

and 30mg magnesium per 500ml PET bottle for instant energy and hydration. This nutritional profile of Sport scores much higher than leading sports drink MNC brand in the country which provides lesser salt and energy at the same MRP of Rs 50 per 500ml. Whether you play sports, workout or run, Sport effectively replenishes what's lost through sweat to keep you firing on all cylinders during the most strenuous activities.

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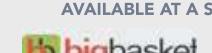
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The range comprises a variety of kaftans, dresses, saris and skirt sets

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The metaphorical iterations of the colour blue may have attributed to its aesthetic value. No wonder, it has been the muse of many fashion designers – from Charles Lewis Tiffany's trademark Tiffany blue and Yuima Nakazato's 2022 collection Blue Season to Stella McCartney and Fendi taking to its pale shade during the Spring Summer '24 runway shows. Closer home, couturier Anita Dongre is romancing the hue's association with Nature. Its prominent proportions in her newly launched collection, titled Azure, are coupled with eco-conscious craftsmanship. "True to the inspiration, Azure brings to life the colour spectrum of the ocean and the sky," says Anita, who sourced Bemberg yarn exclusively from Asahi Kasei, a multinational Japanese chemical company that specialises in chemicals and materials science, for the collection.

The range, which comprises a variety of kaftans, dresses, saris and skirt sets, was born from a dream.

"I woke up one morning, buzzing to come to work and sit with my team because I had this vivid dream involving the sounds, textures and movement of waterscapes, which really inspired me. I wanted to encapsulate the flow and fluidity of water with a quiet feminine sensuality," says the designer.

She started working on the capsule around mid-August last year and states that the Mumbai monsoon added a



lovely ambience while designing the collection.

"It took us about six months [to curate the edit] because we were quite particular about getting the right fabric that captured the flow I imagined," she adds. The motifs in the collection, she says, were designed with a watercolour aesthetic and translated on the garment using digital printing.

Beaming with Bemberg

Bemberg is a brand of cupro, which is regenerated cellulose fibre. Made from 100% cotton linter that is a pre-consumer material, Bemberg is a sustainable material that is biodegradable and compostable. "The breeziness of the fabric was a perfect match. For this capsule, while we were working on the moodboard, they [Asahi Kasei] shared their latest development of soil and marine biodegradable yarn and everything just clicked," says Anita.

She shares that her brand started working with Bemberg

An ode to the ocean

The eco-conscious clothing edit is inspired by sounds, textures and the movement of waterscapes



Bag a pichhwai

Besides the clothing line, Anita Dongre has extended her commitment to ethical fashion with her new collection of vegan accessories. These accessories are made with Mirum – the world's first plastic-free alternative to leather. Each accessory features hand-painted motifs.

"We're one of the first Indian brands to incorporate Mirum. This is our second drop of vegan accessories; the first edit was launched in January last year. This time around we've also incorporated hand-painted pichhwai on a vegan fabric base. We worked on it for over two years to understand the materials and incorporate it in our design language. The aim is to continue utilising it in our future collections too, since it aligns perfectly with our commitment to leather-free fashion," says Anita. Inspired by a 400-year-old legacy of pichhwai paintings and heritage craft zardosi, the accessories feature hand-painted motifs.

"We have also added a line of pichhwai bags hand-painted by our master artisans in Rajasthan. We work with artisan clusters across the country and strive to showcase our exquisite crafts. In the latest capsule we have also used our signature gotta-patti embroidery as well as metal-engraved artwork," adds Anita.

made entirely out of Bemberg yarn," she says.

Anita believes that Bemberg is uniquely suited for the tropical Indian climate, offering breathability and comfort in the sweltering heat, making it ideal for soaring temperatures and beach weddings. "Its soft, smooth texture adds a touch of luxury, appealing to brides or bridesmaids seeking elegant yet practical attire for destination weddings and fashion enthusiasts who appreciate high-quality fabrics with a touch of luxury," she adds.

The limited-edition, ready-to-wear Azure capsule, envisioned for summer soirees, ranges between ₹23,000 and ₹65,000 and is available across all of the designer's stores in India as well as online.



For this capsule, while we were working on the moodboard, they [Asahi Kasei] shared their latest development of soil and marine biodegradable yarn and everything just clicked

ANITA DONGRE

about five years ago. "It seemed like a natural partnership since it represents our brand mission of being environmentally conscious. Over the years, we have consistently used Bemberg yarn for many of our designs and we love how invested they are in creating sustainable fibre. The Azure collection is



Enter the House of Urmi

The Kochi-based clothing brand taps into Kerala's kalaripayattu scenes and vivid flowers

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With every print she creates, architect-turned-designer Anjali Ashok tells a story. "I am not just selling a piece of clothing. Each print is a story that resonates on a personal level with the wearer," she says, discussing her clothing brand, House of Urmi, named after a coiling sword in kalaripayattu.

The brand's prints and iconography on the gender neutral shirts, vests, kaftans, co-ords, jackets, and tunics use typical Kerala references such as theyyam and kalaripayattu. It is distinctly contemporary with elements such as bold stripes or vivid flowers juxtaposed with the prints, says Anjali who deliberates over each print, some replete with details, reminiscent of miniature paintings.

Kerala forms the basis of her inspiration, and the designer draws from teak trees, Fort Kochi, fisherfolk, the women of the Malabar, Kerala's tribal people, an old coin, writer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer and *tholpaavakoothu* (shadow puppetry). She looks for more than just visual or pictorial inspiration as the accompanying note for most collections explains.

For instance, Mugham – from her Nizhal collection – is inspired by the coins of yore, the design has faces of men

from different communities, positioned side by side, challenging any form of prejudice. "That is what I want to say through that print but the wearer could interpret it differently," says the 27-year-old.

Anjali says the first order she got was for her Rani shirt, at a time when she wasn't thinking of a clothing brand. She had made the digital print shirt for herself and worn it while on holiday in Vietnam. Co-incidentally it was a US-based Malayali holidaying there who asked about it and placed the first order. She then decided to make 50 shirts in order to test the waters and that collection set the ball rolling for the House of Urmi.

Her latest collection is an artist's edit which dropped earlier this month. The first in the collection is an ode to Raja Ravi Varma. She remembers how, when in school, her Visual Arts teacher gave her a book on the art works of Raja Ravi Varma.

She says, "The book had a collection of his works. His journey as an artist, story, palette... inspired me. The Artist Edit Volume I that I am launching is my tribute to his art. There is hand embroidery, patches and layering. It is my take on the process of creating art. The floral element, the jewellery, the figures... I take a minimalist approach to his work!"

Urmi retails on houseofurmi.in. Prices range between ₹5,000 and ₹7,000

A diamond studded world

CONTINUED FROM
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Bhansali has called *Heeramandi* his biggest production yet. Barring some outdoor scenes in Lucknow, the series was shot at Mumbai's Film City on a giant three-acre set, meticulously erected by an army of 700 craftsmen. The painstaking production design is by Amit Roy and Subrata Chakraborty, while another Bhansali regular, cinematographer Sudeep Chatterjee, has shot it with Mahesh Limaye. Since filming was to continue throughout the seasons, the makers had wrapped the sets in a protective rain cover that blocked out natural light. The actors describe the experience as walking into a 'whole new dimension'.

Sonakshi Sinha, who plays Fareedan, a rival courtesan and challenger to Mallikaajaa's throne, says she was struck by the grandness and detail of Bhansali's vision. "Every table, curtain, candle, pillow, lampshade and cushion cover was crafted with an insane amount of detailing. There was life in every object."

The point is reiterated by Taaha Shah Badusha, who plays an Oxford-returnee heir and would-be revolutionary in the show. "The art design reflects the individual humanity of the characters. Every curtain was different for every character!"

Sonakshi has played romantic, long-suffering types in period films like *Lootera* (2013) and *Kalank* (2019). In contrast to those roles, Fareedan is a rebel and an underdog, and the closest *Heeramandi* comes to offering an antagonist. "Fareedan is driven by rage, anger and vengeance," Sonakshi says. "These are not good qualities but they are human qualities. Sanjay has a way of portraying



(Clockwise from above) Fardeen Khan returns to the screen after 14 years with Aditi Rao Hydari; Sonakshi Sinha; and Taaha Shah Badusha. NETFLIX

his characters, especially women, as thoroughly human, emotional beings. That's why we resonate with them."

Another fascinating figure is Aditi Rao Hydari's Bibbojaan, who leverages her position as a courtesan to gather intel for the revolutionaries. Courtesans played a crucial if undersung role in India's freedom struggle, from the Revolt of 1857 to the Non-Cooperation Movement in the 1920s. "My mother, Vidya Rao, is a Hindustani classical singer trained in thumri and dadra," Aditi says. "She also received a fellowship from the Ford Foundation to study gender and musical form. In her conversations, I have heard stories about the courtesans and their role in our Independence struggle."

The language of *Heeramandi* is old-world Hindustani with an emphasis on its Urdu register. There is also a fair bit of Punjabi in the script. The



actors had a total of four dialect coaches – Muneera Surati, Sarfaraz Arzu, Azmeri Aftab Hah and Sunita Sharma – overseeing their every inflection. "Muneera ma'am would be sitting there with her headphones, listening to us like a hawk," Sonakshi recalls. Any *nuqta* we missed, she would scream out in disapproval."

"Hindustani is not only a poetic language but also makes for beautiful communication," Aditi adds. "We were stuck to a spoken word style. There is a weight to it but it doesn't feel heavy."

Sharmin Sehgal, Bhansali's niece, has assisted him on films like *Goliyon Ki Raasleela*



Ram-Leela (2013), *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022). In *Heeramandi*, she collaborated for the first time with her uncle as an actor. She plays Alamzeb, Mallikaajaa's younger daughter who aspires to become a poetess.

Asked about her uncle's meticulousness, Sharmin relates a telling anecdote from the shoot of *Bajirao Mastani*. "We were framing a wide jib shot of 300 people standing in the peshwa's *darbar*. There was one junior artiste in the crowd with his shawl held the wrong way. My uncle noticed it through the monitor and made me run down to have it fixed."



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(Clockwise from left) A snapshot from the restaurant; and dishes from the menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Ranjit Bindra, managing director and founder of Bastian Garden City.

Like in Mumbai, Bastian in Bengaluru features a seafood-forward menu. "A large part of the menu is the same as Bombay, but we have also tried to incorporate some local seasonal ingredients that we get here, as a lot of our seafood comes from Mangaluru," says executive Chef Daniel Hernandez Punzo. We try the pan-fried salmon, topped with creamed spinach and a Parmesan puff. The salty salmon exudes freshness, and complements the creamy spinach. We also order the crab roll, which consists of crab meat combined with fresh, aromatic herbs including basil, and coriander with house-made ponzo drizzled on top, along with rich truffle oil.

While Bastian is famous for its seafood-forward menu, the meat dishes are thoughtfully curated like their tenderloin tiradito combined with chipotle ponzo and pico de gallo relish, then topped with crispy corn strips. We also try the pork belly, on Daniel's recommendation. You know meat is well-done when it is juicy at its first bite. The pork is pan seared in gochujang glaze, with pickled onion, topped with crispy garlic and sesame.

The meal ends with mango tres leches cake, a favourite of Chef Dhiraj Jankar from the pastry department. If you prefer something more Instagrammable – after all, social media has become an essential part of the Bastian



Bandra comes to Bengaluru

Set in a converted old bungalow, Bastian Garden City's city-centric menu features fish from Mangaluru

Priyamedha Dutta

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Imagine yourself holidaying in Greece, wandering through the small towns of Italy or spending a night under the Kenyan sky.

Located on St. Mark's Road in Bengaluru, Bastian Garden City might be your answer to those much-anticipated trips. Designed by interior designer Minal Chopra, the restaurant is set in a converted 60-year-old bungalow covered by lush greenery and an enchanting atmosphere that provides a respite from the urban bustle. Co-founded by actor Shilpa Shetty, the Bengaluru outlet has a more relaxed setting in contrast to its Mumbai outpost, which seems constantly buzzing.

The décor draws inspiration from holiday destinations around the world, and the boho-chic vibe is complemented with cool-tone interiors in shades of beige, white and taupe. The hues

of a neutral palette intertwine with statement design elements such as the sprawling open bar, lazily undulating vertical ceiling fans, and modern chandeliers that cast a warm glow.

The space is spread across 22,000 square feet with two levels, one that opens up into an alfresco dining area, a nice addition for those particularly breezy evenings.

"Converting the first floor of the bungalow was a labour of love. Harnessing natural light became a priority, prompting us to embrace glass ceilings and open up the space from all sides. This transformation not only invited the outdoors in but also allowed us to showcase the beauty of the surrounding old trees," says

experience – try the feuilletine 'pull me up' cake. It tastes as good as it looks, with dense chocolate cake layered with chocolate sauce, then topped with chocolate shavings.

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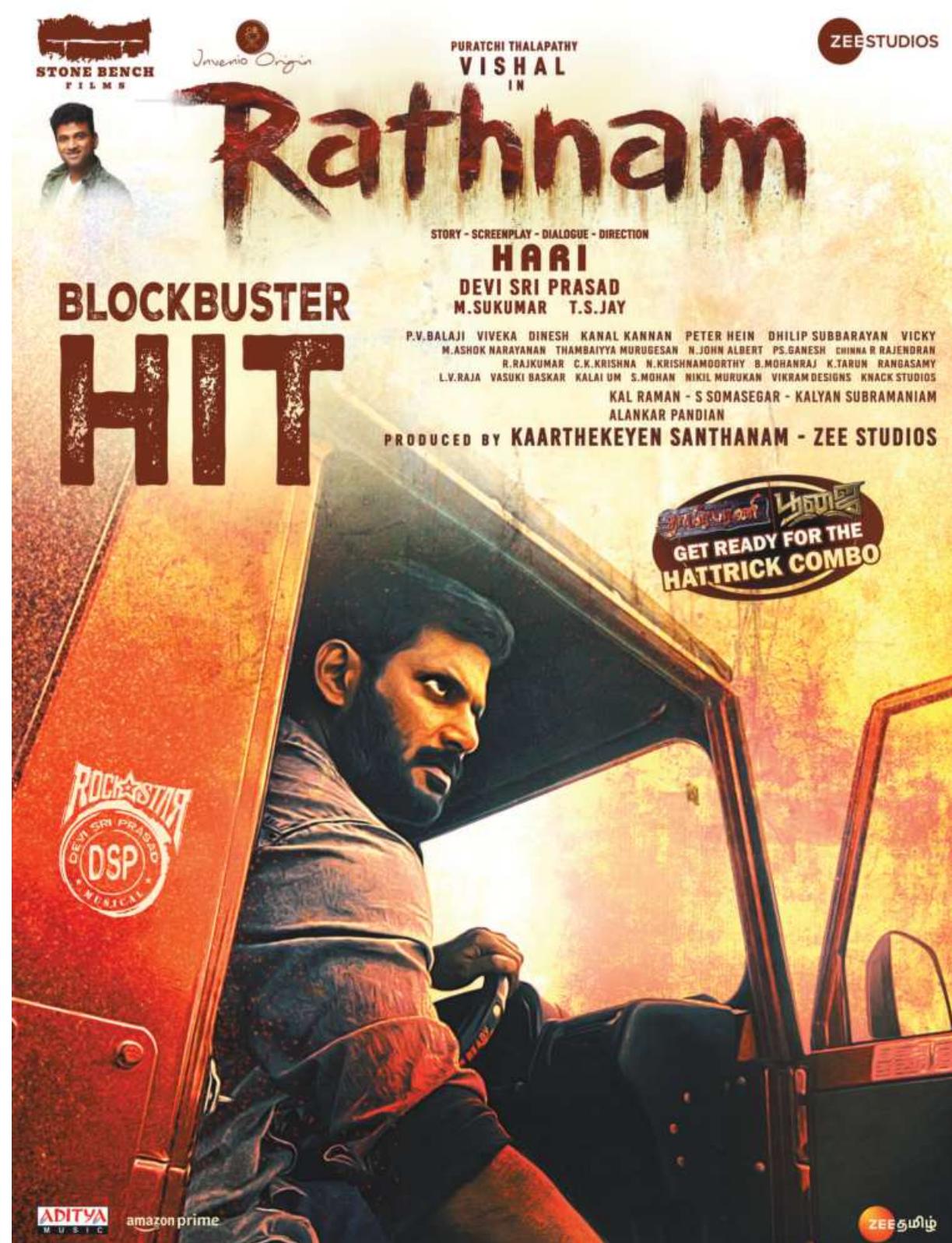
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Hindi

Hate mail to the Internet



Shilajit Mitra
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Dibakar Banerjee trawls the seamy, cynical underbelly of cyberspace and finds more seaminess and cynicism. *LSD 2* – a conceptual sequel to his 2010 thriller *Love Sex Aur Dhokha* – is a puzzling, grotesque, desperately bitter take on technology and cringe culture. Banerjee has, for years, been one of our keenest satirists, his darkly contoured films verging on observational comedy. But *LSD 2* finds him at the end of his patience, like someone sending angry and undigested hate mail.

Like the first film, *LSD 2* presents a triptych of stories, chaptered 'Like', 'Share' and 'Download'. In the first segment, transwoman Noor (Paritosh Tiwari) is a contestant on a *Bigg Boss*-like reality show. When Noor's estranged mother (Swaroop Ghosh) enters the farce mid-season, the hunt for approval ratings gets hilariously bizarre. The second story follows Kullu (Bonita Rajpurohit), a transgender janitor at a Delhi metro station, in the aftermath of sexual assault. Finally, we wind up with Shubham (Abhinav Singh), an 18-year-old gamer on the brink of influencer superstardom.

It promptly becomes clear how Banerjee – co-writing with Pratik Vats and Shubham – views the Internet subcultures of today: as a cesspit of pretence and instant gratification, and people's identities commodified, fetishised. The vitriol flows in every direction, from the performative social justice allyship of private firms to the flaky creator economy percolating through middle India, complicit in its own oppression.

Banerjee takes on a lot, from transphobia to cyberbullying to big tech mind control, and the muddle of ideas and avenues leaves the film an inchoate mess.

The 2010 original broke ground in digital cinematography in India, simulating the grainy ubiquity of hand-held camcorders, CCTV footage and spy cameras. The operative word in found footage cinema is 'found', a sense of surreptitious discovery missing in *LSD 2*.

The film's visual invention, instead, lies in Tiya Tejpal's production design, which works in surreal details in the background. The young actors are all memorable, especially Abhinav Singh as the streamer Game Pappi.

In a recent podcast, Banerjee jokingly referred to himself as a "hectoring professor and biblical prophet rolled into one." His alarmist doomsaying is not out of place. The director's last film, *Tees*, about three generations of an Indian Muslim family, was shelved by Netflix. You can sense Banerjee channelling all these disparate frustrations in *LSD 2*, which is disdainful of corporates and algorithms, the soothing call of Big Brother and the animated bleating of electric sheep.

Love, Sex Aur Dhokha 2 is currently running in theatres

Tamil

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It is not hard to imagine the kind of film that director Priya V wanted her latest release, *Pon Ondru Kanden*, to be: a simple, light-hearted tale about two quirky middle-aged men who put their lifelong enmity aside and become friends only to fall for the same woman, refuelling their hatred for each other. Yes, even as a one-liner, it does not really inspire novelty, but this is a film written and directed by Priya. So, the prospect of her reintroducing the charm of her *Kanda Naal Mudhal* or *Kannamoochi Yenada* to new generation of youngsters surely intrigues.

Unfortunately, *Pon Ondru Kanden* is anything but a patience-testing, shockingly joyless, colossally derailed attempt at that. From start to finish, the film feels like a drear fest of cardboard cut-outs of cliche archetypes. Ashok Selvan's Siva is a



modern, city-bred youth, while Vasanth Ravi's Sai is a youth from Kumbakonam who spent the last four years taking care of his mother (Sachu) suffering from dementia. The two childhood enemies become friends at a school reunion. Becoming friends is fine but what makes them become such good

friends seems to be a question Priya wishes you did not ask.

Now, how do we show their background while ensuring that Sai depends on Siva to navigate city life? Show Siva as the one who goes on multiple dates to posh bars and show Sai as the naive small-town man who does not know how to talk

to women or behave "normally" in any situation. These are the kind of cliche tropes that *Pon Ondru Kanden* is filled with.

Such shallow writing extends to even the female lead, Sandy, a.k.a Sundari (Aishwarya Lakshmi), a young woman working as a chef, who we realise shared a history with one of the two men, and is now in close equations with the other. Naturally, this develops into a love triangle, but we never truly understand what goes in Sandy's mind as she becomes a mere puppet stuck between two vexingly one-dimensional man-children.

Adding to the woes is the utterly monotonous plot, replete with cliches, that we see these characters traverse. There is a lot of convenience in how the story progresses. For instance, whenever we need to put one of these characters in the path of the other, Siva's job as a gynaecologist is what mostly comes to the rescue.

Making this wafer-thin plot more difficult to get through is the casting of Vasanth as Sai; a character so starkly different from his previous

ones was a much-needed departure for the actor, but Sai is surely not what was needed. At times, you wonder if anyone speaks in, and even if so, whether that was a necessary trait when nothing else about this character really comes through.

In fact, the one good stretch in the film comes when we do not follow

Pon Ondru Kanden

Director: Priya V

Cast: Ashok Selvan, Aishwarya Lakshmi, Vasanth Ravi, Sachu, Deepa Shankar

Storyline: Two middle-aged men, who were once childhood enemies, become good friends, only to fall in love with the same woman

Sai; this is when we see Shiva and Sandy at a medical camp. The frames, the lighting and the music add up so well. In a film filled with over-the-top writing, this portion is the only respite we get. But how the subplot between Sandy and Shiva is written after that scene is again another matter of worry.

Tamil cinema seems to be in quite a pivotal place when it comes to cracking the romance genre for a new-gen audience. While the success of a film like *Good Night!* has ushered in more serious attempts to explore relationships, it is the Malayalam film *Premalu*'s triumphant success that really excites one at the prospect of similar romance comedies in Tamil that cater to the new-gen audience.

Perhaps, that is the kind of film you expect from a filmmaker like Priya, and in retrospect, maybe *Pon Ondru Kanden* was meant to be one such attempt in some capacity. Unfortunately, it is miles away from what it could have been.

Pon Ondru Kanden is currently streaming on Jio Cinema



A tale of diminishing returns

Bright performances and inspired writing light up Shrisha Guha Thakurta's perceptive yet light-hearted take on the changing matrix of marriage

Hindi

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Somewhere between a light-hearted and a heart-warming take on marriage and extra-marital affairs, *Do Aur Do Pyaar* generates emotional resonance because of its immensely believable leads and inspired writing.

Evaluating if love is enough to sustain a relationship, the bickering doesn't get emotionally draining and the resolution feels safe but director Shrisha Guha Thakurta gets the pulse of the urban, upper-class relationships right. Without judging the straying of partners or villainising the other in the matrix, the film, drawing from American actor-writer Groucho Marx's popular quote, tests the boundaries of marriage as an institution with a light touch and a perceptive gaze. As the narrative flows, the sexual energy between the characters gets contagious and the emotional flux feels believable.

Bangla boy Ani Banerjee (Pratik Gandhi) and Tamil girl Kavya (Vidya Balan) are in the middle overs of their love marriage. They spend the night on the same bed but are not physically hitched anymore as their emotional wavelengths have more troughs than crests. They have even stopped fighting with each other. Well, both have found love and physical intimacy outside. Ani is dating an emerging actor Nora (Ileana D'Cruz) and Kavya has become the muse of a hotshot photographer Vikram (Sendhil Ramamurthy).

Based on Azazel Jacobs's *The Lovers* (2017), the film's twist comes when Ani and Kavya start rediscovering their lost touch. As their scoring rate soars, it threatens to unhinge their newly formed bonds outside of home.

Taking off from the Hrishikesh

Do Aur Do Pyaar

Director: Shrisha Guha Thakurta

Cast: Vidya Balan, Pratik Gandhi, Ileana D'Cruz, Sendhil Ramamurthy

Storyline: A couple rebuilds their spark while in the midst of extra-marital relationships

Mukherjee brand of slice-of-life cinema, writers Amrita Bagchi, Eisha Chopra, and Suprotim Sengupta use familiar tropes of funeral, family and festival to tie the knots between unfulfilled expectations and forbidden relationships. Drawing from the allegory that everyday life presents, they generate moments that make you chuckle and introspect at the same time. Be it the salt water of the Bombay Sea as a symbol of corroding relationships or referring to laugh lines for both age and ageless appeal, or commenting on vegan food choices, the writing makes a cliched theme refreshing. The bickering over Bangla food and stainless steel utensils in the kitchen works well to underscore the fault lines in an inter-community marriage.

Thankfully, Nora and Vikram are not depicted as emotional parasites. Though Ani and Kavya hide their illicit relationships, their moral ambiguity is not underlined with a highlighter. They are just responding to circumstances. Ani lost his carefree voice and infectious energy after his father's demise, making Kavya feel insecure and unwanted. Ani is in a shell at home for he finds Kavya too decisive. The wandering photographer is

looking for a home and warmth that Kavya exudes and Nora needs a caring shoulder like Ani's as her struggle in her career is getting longer. The good thing is that the writers focus on the moments rather than indulging in a match-the-following exercise wholesome.

The performances add vigour to the writing and remove the creases when the writers begin to flaunt their wordplay. Walking the thin line between tragic and comic, sharp and vulnerable, Vidya and Pratik form the thumping lifeline of the film. They share an easy chemistry and comic timing. As a woman seeking validation, Vidya once again drops vanity to expose emotional wounds. The narrative expects her to explore Kavya's sensual as well as exasperating side and Vidya ensures that the transformations don't jar. One of the underrated actors in the Hindi film industry, Pratik shows his class as an everyman who neither imposes himself in a relationship nor expresses himself fully. In the scene where he plays football with a mobile phone in hand, Pratik beautifully brings out this in-betweenness in Ani's character.

Sendhil, who seems like a new Milind Soman in a meaningful film, plays the brooding wanderer yearning for the shore. Ileana is an absolute delight as the charming ghost of a girl circulating between Kavya and Ani.

Before the audience starts feeling that the characters have too much time for two-timing, the makers draw the curtains and take a safe exit.



Do Aur Do Pyaar is currently running in theatres

A vexingly dull, caricaturish rom-com that tests your patience

Tamil

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It is not hard to imagine the kind of film that director Priya V wanted her latest release, *Pon Ondru Kanden*, to be: a simple, light-hearted tale about two quirky middle-aged men who put their lifelong enmity aside and become friends only to fall for the same woman, refuelling their hatred for each other. Yes, even as a one-liner, it does not really inspire novelty, but this is a film written and directed by Priya. So, the prospect of her reintroducing the charm of her *Kanda Naal Mudhal* or *Kannamoochi Yenada* to new generation of youngsters surely intrigues.

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Pon Ondru Kanden

Director: Priya V

Cast: Ashok Selvan, Aishwarya Lakshmi, Vasanth Ravi, Sachu, Deepa Shankar

Storyline: Two middle-aged men, who were once childhood enemies, become good friends, only to fall in love with the same woman



Baby Reindeer

Creator: Richard Gadd

Cast: Richard Gadd, Jessica Gunning, Nava Mau

Episodes: 7

Storyline: An aspiring comic finds his life derailed by a random act of kindness

Riveting take on obsession, abuse

Streaming

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After the eminently bingeable *Fallout*, comes Richard Gadd's equally binge-worthy *Baby Reindeer*, which talks of a different kind of fallout. Where the former dealt with the fairly straightforward apocalypse caused by a nuclear war, the latter deals with the far-reaching consequences of a random act of kindness.

Donny (Richard Gadd) is a struggling stand-up comic in London. One day, a woman, Martha (Jessica Gunning), walks into the pub where he works, and

something about her forlorn gaze draws in Donny, who offers her a cup of tea on the house. Though Donny realises Martha is fragile and ill, he talks to her and she becomes a regular fixture at the pub.

Donny thinks he is just being friendly but Martha seems to twist everything he says to fit her version of reality, in which the two are an item and have a life together. Martha ploughs on regardless of Donny's attempts to create boundaries. She floods his inbox with e-mails supposedly sent from an iPhone when she clearly does not have one.

When Donny looks up Martha online, he discovers to his horror that she is a serial stalker jailed for harassing her boss, behaviour that got her debarred as a lawyer. It raises certain questions: Why did Donny accept her friend request online? Why did he not block her mails? Why did he try to be nice to her instead of shutting her out?

As a young man trying his luck at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Donny meets Darrien (Tom Goodman-Hill), a writer of a hit comedy, who tells Donny he has a great future ahead. Donny comes to London and joins drama school where he meets Keeley (Shalom Brune-Franklin). The two get together and move into Keeley's mum, Liz's (Nina Sosanya) house.

Even after they break-up, Donny

continues to live at Liz's place. Martha finds out where he lives and begins to sit at the bus stop close to his house for over 15 hours!

Donny meets and falls in love with Teri (Nava Mau), a trans woman, but Martha is there between the two of them too. As Martha begins to attack Donny's parents in Scotland, Keeley and Teri, Donny is forced to take action and that is when he finds the police less than helpful. Since Martha is an experienced convicted stalker with training in law, she seems to know just how far she can go legally.

Baby Reindeer is based on true events. Without a neat ending or cathartic closure, the show is as raw and real as it gets. There are no easy answers and no black-and-white separations to take comfort in.

Donny's observation that "there is nothing like getting everything you want in life to realise it is not for you," will resonate a hundredfold. His tragic realisation, "that is what abuse does to you, makes you the sticking plaster for all life's weirdos," is painfully poignant. The acting like the writing is so good. While there is nothing cute about *Baby Reindeer*, it is an extraordinary, important, unmissable piece of art.

Baby Reindeer is now streaming on Netflix

Snippets



Riz Ahmed boards Wes Anderson's next film

Actor Riz Ahmed has joined the cast of Wes Anderson's latest film, currently in production in Berlin. The project, which has been shrouded in secrecy regarding its plot, features Ahmed alongside stars such as Benicio Del Toro and Bill Murray. Tentatively titled, *The Phoenician Scheme*, the film is being co-written by Anderson and Roman Coppola and marks Ahmed's first collaboration with the auteur. Originally scheduled to begin filming in Fall 2023, production was delayed due to unforeseen circumstances. Distribution details for the project are yet to be finalised. Anderson's previous film, *Asteroid City*, was released by Focus Features.



Premalu 2 starring Naslen K Gafoor and Mamitha Baiju to release in 2025

The makers of *Premalu* have announced a sequel to the hit Malayalam romantic comedy. Bhavana Studios, the production house behind the original, has said *Premalu 2* will hit the screens in 2025. The lead actors of the movie, Naslen K Gafoor and Mamitha Baiju, will return for the sequel. Girish AD, who helmed the original, will direct the second part as well. Actor Fahadh Faasil, writer-director Dileesh Pothan and writer Shyam Pushkar will produce the film under the banner Bhavana Studios. *Premalu*, released on February 9, went on to become a massive hit.



Steve Buscemi joins cast of Wednesday Season 2

Steve Buscemi is set to join the cast of Netflix's *Wednesday* for its highly-anticipated second season. While specifics about Buscemi's character remain shrouded in mystery, insiders hint that he will portray the new principal of Nevermore Academy. The upcoming season of *Wednesday* will see Jenna Ortega reprising her role as the titular Addams Family scion navigating her teenage years at the sinister school. The first season left viewers on the edge as *Wednesday* Addams unravelled a web of murders while safeguarding Nevermore Academy from impending doom. *Wednesday* debuted to widespread acclaim in 2022.



Zack Snyder redeems himself

After an underwhelming hour that reminds one of all that went wrong with *A Child of Fire*, Zack Snyder unleashes himself with an exhilarating battle sequence

English

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Sir Anthony Hopkins, as the voice of Jimmy – a mechanical knight and also our narrator – gives us a concise one-minute recap of *Rebel Moon - Part One: A Child of Fire*, as the sequel to Zack Snyder's dream space opera opens with a *Star Wars*-esque introduction to show Ed Skrein's Admiral Atticus Noble reviving from the dead. And just like that, the soulless character writing, the rushed storytelling, the blurry anamorphic images, and all the wasted potential in myth-making come rushing back from the first film.

As Noble – recuperating in The King's Gaze dreadnought ship – vows to take revenge on Kora (Sofia Boutella) and her team at Veldt, an unmotivated audience is reminded that for the mess that it was, the first film was just a recruitment exercise for Kora and Gunnar, and much of the story was evidently reserved for the sequel. Though still riddled with similar issues, Snyder redeems himself in glorious fashion, in what turns out to be an adrenaline-pumping experience that cinephiles and his fans thrive on. *Rebel Moon - Part Two: The Scargiver* is both a dramatic space telenovela cut from the same cloth as its predecessor, as well as a showcase of the popcorn cinema magic you expect from the divisive filmmaker who calls it his dream project.

The larger arc of the film revolves around Kora, with the help of General

Rebel Moon Part Two: The Scargiver

Director: Zack Snyder

Cast: Anthony Hopkins, Sofia Boutella, Ed Skrein, Charlie Hunnam, Staz Nair, Djimon Hounsou, Doona Bae

Storyline: Kora and her gang of warriors prepare the villagers for war, as a resurrected Noble seeks vengeance

Titus (Djimon Hounsou), Gunnar (Michiel Huisman), Tarak (Staz Nair), Nemesis (Doona Bae) and Millius (Elise Duffy), preparing the villagers of Veldt with a solid battle plan to take on Noble and Cassius' (Alfonso Herrera as Noble's right-hand man) dreadnought ship... and then the battle begins. But with a runtime of around two hours, Snyder finds ample space to tell us everything that he teased in the first film. From a young boy adorably curious about the partly-mechanical Nemesis, to the blooming romance between Aris (Sky Yang) and the farm girl Sam (Charlotte Maggi), several subplots with good human drama work wonders for the film, more in retrospect than during.

Characters, especially our rag team of warriors, find more space to breathe, becoming more than just the uninspiring clichés they seemed to be like earlier. And yet, the familiar demon reappears and Snyder's restlessness in storytelling allows for some campy scene writing to play major spoilsport. Rather than letting them organically find their moment to tell their backstories, we are given a sob-fest of a scene at a dining table as Titus, Nemesis, Tarak and Millius relentlessly go back and forth. It's disconcerting since these flashbacks, had they appeared more organically, might have made you empathise more with the neglected soldiers.

The biggest fumble in the screenwriting is where Snyder lets Kora (now in a deepened romance with Gunnar) tell him the secrets of who she truly was before her exile to Veldt, and why she is Imperium's most wanted criminal; a potent piece of information

that *Rebel Moon* has been keeping close to its chest gets wasted as one of several rushed expositions.

But after an hour of what feels like unchecked boxes being ticked, Snyder rises to the occasion and uses the canvas to its full potential. We get an hour of captivating cinema as Kora's team and the villagers channel their might at the Imperium in an exhilarating battle sequence. It's nothing that hasn't been seen before, but the good old larger-than-life sensibilities, a rousing score, and visuals that marry Akira Kurosawa with modern *Star Wars*-esque weapons come together for a proper spectacle. This is precisely what the first film missed in its epic final showdown, and you are thoroughly invested in the events despite the blurry aberrations and the sci-fi backdrop.

For all the doubts that Sofia's emotionless act in the first film had raised, the actor's Kora goes from strength to strength this time around. Meanwhile, Skrein and Hounsou offer truly devoted turns; Noble manages to appear more sinister than even the tyrant Balisarius, and just the slow-motion shot of the hunky General Titus using a scythe to weed out wheat demands a second viewing.

Rebel Moon - Part Two: The Scargiver gives us a proper dose of the quintessential Zack Snyder epic that was initially promised, but it remains only half a film at that. But with so much more to explore – and the ending leaving you with a hint of what to expect next – there is hope for a better trajectory to come.

Rebel Moon - Part Two: The Scargiver is currently streaming on Netflix