



A new pan-Asian restaurant makes shopping a pleasant experience with ramen and sushi P3

AGAM'S NEW CARNATIC ROCK P4

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Aamir Khan is finishing a run of interviews at his Santa Cruz office in Mumbai. He looks as animated as some of his characters. “I’m going down?” he queries his associates, shuffling into an elevator. “I’m coming up again? Um-hum.” Khan is 60, looks no more than 48, and is itchy with excitement for his newest release.

This is not the man I encountered seven years ago, during the release of *Thugs of Hindostan*, clammy with unspoken nervousness about a shaky product. Or the man who disappeared behind a beard to play Tom Hanks, loudly and disappointingly, in *Laal Singh Chaddha*.

In interviews and podcasts, Khan has been open about the failure of these two films. His latest, *Sitaare Zameen Par*, finds him on a surer footing. Like a merry highlights reel, the trailer combines the best elements of Khan’s filmography: sports, humour, team assembly, social uplift.

Directed by RS Prasanna, the film is a remake of the Spanish drama *Champions*. It follows a mouthy, knuckleheaded basketball coach put in charge of a team of players with intellectual disabilities.

“This film entered my

# The coach is ready

Aamir Khan on his new film *Sitaare Zameen Par*, where he is in charge of a team of basketball players with intellectual disabilities

bloodstream,” Khan says. Here, he speaks about working with his co-stars, the miasma of trolling and negativity that befalls his recent releases, and his hopes for the theatrical business in India.

Question: You had hinted at a break



Aiming for the skies  
Aamir Khan. PTI

after *Laal Singh Chaddha*. Yet, here you are with *Sitaare Zameen Par*, a film two years in development...  
Aamir Khan: When a film or an idea inspires me, I just have to make it. My director, RS Prasanna, brought the Spanish film *Champions* (2018) to me. When I saw it, I was extremely moved by it. It left a deep impact on me. I also felt it was the ideal

Like a merry highlights reel, *Sitaare Zameen Par*’s trailer combines the best elements of Khan’s filmography: sports, humour, team assembly, social uplift

sequel to *Taare Zameen Par*. In that film, it’s the teacher, Nikumbh, a supposedly neuro-typical person, who helps the child with dyslexia. In this film, 10 neuro-atypical people are helping the coach, Gulshan. I feel *Sitaare* takes the discourse of the first film 10 steps ahead, especially in our country where people need to be sensitised to the topic of neurodivergence.

Q: Like *Laal Singh...*, this film has also been subjected to online trolling. Are you nervous about the release?  
AK: I don’t think trolling affects the box-office performance of a film. Not at all. When a film is good, no troll in the world can stop it. And if a film is bad, no producer in the world can make it work. You may assume that *Laal Singh Chaddha* did not work because of the trolling. That’s not true. If, in place of that film, *3 Idiots* or *Dangal* had released, and was trolled just as viciously, it would have still become a superhit. *Laal Singh Chaddha* did not turn out well as a film. It could not touch the audience’s heart. That’s why it failed. ...when I read comments on YouTube, I am always interested in what the real audience is saying. If someone is writing, ‘boycott!’ or ‘go to Pakistan’, I can instantly tell they are trolls. Their reactions don’t affect me.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 2

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PAGE 1

**Q:** Much like your character, Gulshan, what did you learn from your 10 co-stars?  
**AK:** They are all between the age of 18-42. The oldest is Rishi Shahani, who won the gold and silver medals in swimming for India at the Special Olympics World Games in 1999. What I learned from them is the importance of being happy. If a person has a high IQ of 195, but they are always anxious and grouchy, what is the point? I have worked with neuro-typical people for the last 35 years. Usually, on a film set, there are ego clashes and tussles. That never happened on *Sitare*. When these 10 people were on set, the whole energy brightened. They were always smiling, hugging and spreading good cheer. Their presence was so pure and innocent that no one raised their voice.

**Q:** What is the streaming plan for *Sitare* Zameen Par? You spoke out recently on short theatrical windows affecting the business adversely.

# The coach is ready

**AK:** I have received multiple offers and proposals and I have said no to all of them. I am a believer in cinema and the theatrical experience. Whatever I am today, it is because of cinemas. I am a loyalist of that format. Perhaps I am making a mistake by not selling the OTT rights upfront, as most Hindi film producers today are doing. In today's age, unless a film has sold to streaming, it cannot be green-lit. I am the only person who is holding out. Perhaps I will incur a huge financial loss as a result. But we'll see. My mission, at present, is to revive the theatrical business in India, which has been on a steady decline.

**Q:** Exhibitors, especially multiplex owners, point to high real estate costs to justify steep pricing. How

do you resolve this?

**AK:** I am actively working towards creating policies and coming up with ideas that can create theatres which are economical. Where ticket pricing can be moderated. In India, we have 9,000-10,000 screens for a population of 1.4 billion. By contrast, China has 90,000-95,000 screens while the US has 35,000 screens. There are so many districts in India that do not have a single theatre. In a city like Mumbai or New Delhi, the price of land is very high, so theatres have to pay huge rents. You cannot blame them. But what about the rest of the country? So we need to build more economical theatres across the country.

**Q:** You are doing an action film

with Lokesh Kanagaraj. But it won't start until next year. Why not strike a trend while it's hot?

**AK:** Yaar, I am not able to think like that. When I decided to do *Sitaare Zameen Par*, the people who are close to me told me not to do another remake after *Laal Singh Chaddha*. Everyone advised me to do an action film instead. It's the flavour of the season. But I wanted to tell this story. It's a humorous film with drama at its centre, like a Rajkumar Hirani movie.

Interestingly, when I did *Ghajini*, in 2008, the opposite had happened. I was told that action films hadn't worked for the last five years. That it was the wrong time to make action. So my films have always released at odd times, because I don't follow the industry's metrics. I follow my heart. And I have complete faith in my audience. If I have made a good film, they will come and watch.

Sitaare Zameen Par releases in theatres on June 20

The actors of *Sitaare Zameen Par*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



## STEP OUT



### Grab your plates

Food Stories by city's well-loved The Farm introduces 1/4 Plate, a dining experience that brings together ingredients, terroir, and culinary heritage through shared tables and conversation. The theme for this edition is cheese. Guests will gather at a communal table to explore a curated spread of over seven varieties of artisanal cheese, all made by The Farm's own cheesemakers. Coffee will take the place of wine as the pairing of choice, with four types of specialty brews crafted live by the baristas of Vinyl & Brew. The idea is to make cheese more approachable, breaking the myth that it belongs only alongside wine. @Vinyl & Brew, June 13, 1pm to 3pm and 6pm to 8pm. Priced at ₹1,250 per person. For bookings, call 9176050562.

### Regional revival

Right in the middle of Chennai's busiest shopping district lies this haven for meat lovers — Madurai Kullappa Mess. This restaurant brings the bold, rustic flavours of Madurai to the city, with a menu that celebrates everything from biryani to meat-based gravies. The highlight here is the use of freshly ground *arava* (stone ground) masalas, cold-pressed peanut oil, and gingelly oil in every preparation. Ingredients are carefully sourced — with *ayira meen* and *viraal meen* brought in from Madurai, and lamb meat from Tiruvallur district. Their Simmakal seeraga samba biryani — available in chicken (₹310) and mutton (₹410) — is aromatic, slow-cooked, and flavourful. Madurai Kullappa Mess, T Nagar. Open from noon to 11pm. Meal for two is ₹800. For reservations, call 6385123456.



### Sundown vibes

Get ready for something wildly fun and refreshingly unserious. The Big Picnik is coming to town, and it is not your average lie-on-a-blanket kind of afternoon. There will be music, magic, good people, and enough vibes to stretch into the sunset. The event offers a food festival, flea market, pop-ups, activity zone and treasure hunt. It is a celebration of community, sound, and spontaneous joy. Early bird tickets are priced at ₹499. @Green Meadows, Palavakkam. June 21, 4pm onwards. Tickets at sortmyscene.com.

### Prajwal Parajuly

Calcuttans of a certain vintage think the Tollygunge Club is the Taj Mahal and a membership there, the pinnacle of aspiration. But they are cackled at by members of the Calcutta Club, who, in turn, are put in their places by the Bengal Club mafia. This hierarchy of clubs is a riotous, ridiculous notion for someone who grew up in Gangtok, a town with no clubs. I haven't quite been able to understand the investment people put into being associated with Raj-era nostalgia, more pronounced in Calcutta than in any other Indian city.

First, there's something flagrantly racist about many clubs rolling out their frayed red carpet for foreign-passport holders, who are often exempt from jumping the same hoops as Indians to gain membership. But point this out, and a wildly gesticulating clubbie will list the virtues of their non-racist club: subsidised alcohol, central location, like-minded people, sporting facilities, 177-year history, urban oasis. For all this, a club membership is worth the sometimes-decades-long waitlist, they say.

I am a self-anointed expert on the Indian club because I can offer an outsider's perspective, untainted by memories of horse-riding and swimming lessons and Christmas roasts. My verdict is that the best club in India isn't Delhi's Gymkhana Club or Hyderabad's Secunderabad Club. It definitely isn't any of the unexceptional clubs of Calcutta. The Madras Club, Chennai's little snobdom, is without question the Number One club in the country.

I see a Delhi Gymkhana member elevate her just-threaded eyebrow and string a sentence with some permutation of "But in terms of exclusivity ...." The Tolly Club veteran will offer an opinion about its recent refurbishments. "And the Yacht Club?" a Mumbai native will say. "The views are swoon-worthy." Someone or the other will label my jaundiced take on clubs as being new money. It still doesn't mean I'll rank your club higher than the Madras Club.

When Vidya Singh, a friend of a friend, suggested we convene at the Madras Club for our first meeting, I hesitated. I had been scarred by the clubs of Calcutta — the insipid food, the laissez-faire service, and the theatrics of tipping waiters on the sly — and didn't want my social life in Chennai to replicate that. I'd also have to adhere to a ridiculous dress code when shorts and flip-flops were my uniform in Sri City. Jerry, the Madras Club martinet, actually eyed my loafers several times as I climbed up to the club's foyer. Luckily

## SOUTHERN LIVING

# Club rules apply

This writer has survived colonial hangovers, snobbery, and the tyranny of pink guesthouse soap. Now, he makes a spirited, and admittedly controversial, case for why the Madras Club is the only one worth walking into

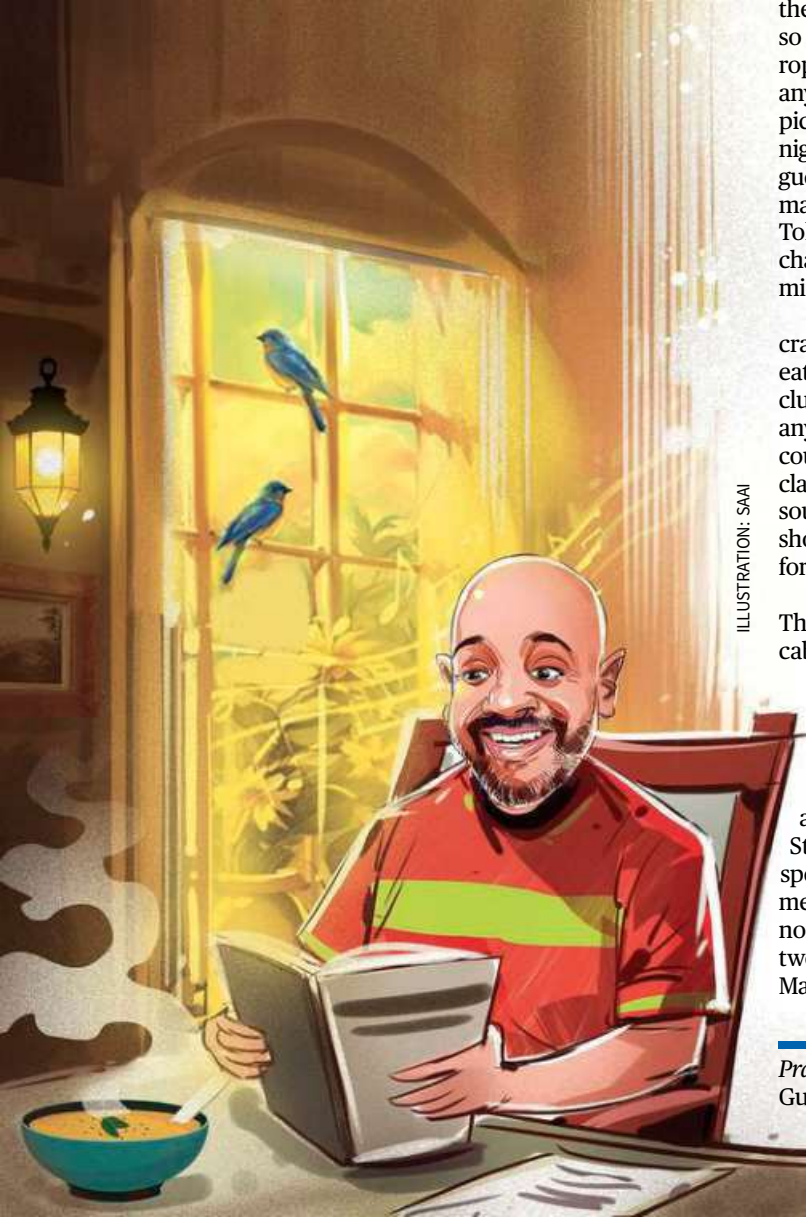


ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

Vidya had warned me: a collared shirt, shoes, and socks. Over dinner of chicken roast and mashed potatoes, I let it slip that I had been staying in hotels on my Chennai visits. "Hotels?" Vidya said with disdain. I'd stay at the Madras Club instead, she decided.

See, the nice hotels in Chennai have every amenity but grounds on which to walk. And when this Himalayan goat doesn't get his steps in, he morphs into a grump. In this eminently pedestrian-unfriendly city, footpaths aren't exactly footpaths. Parks are hard to come by. Finding a place for a stroll that's not a beach is tough. That is why the Madras Club grounds are such a privilege. The walking track here is joy in sand and clay.

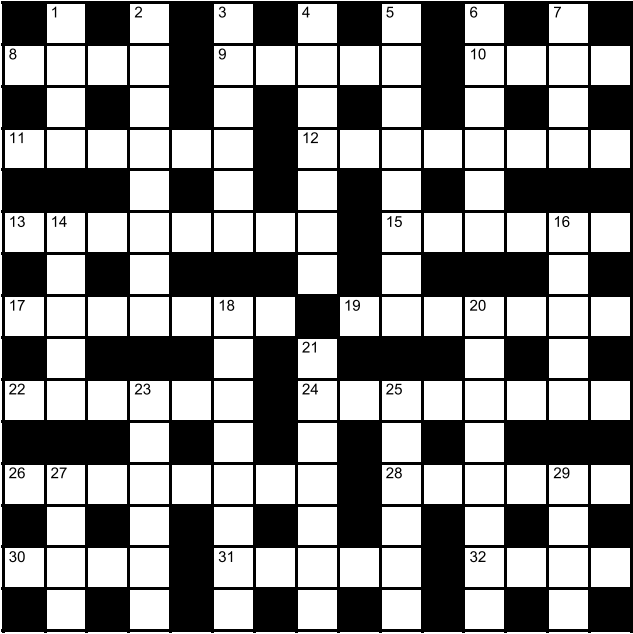
I like that the club's happy-making light yellow Palladian building isn't the deep yellow of the buildings of the Mediterranean. The cupola is handsome, the pool colossal. Staying in the rooms — so massive that you could actually jump rope in them without causing distress to any of the colonial furniture or the sepia pictures on the walls — is like spending a night in a friend's well-appointed guestroom. This, I understand, is what many clubs aspire to. It's just that the Tollygunge Club quarters have all the character of a PWD guesthouse with miniature pink soaps.

When I stay at the club, I rise at the crack of dawn, go for a leisurely stroll and eat *idli*, serenaded by birdsong, on the club verandah. I read more here than I do anywhere else. The club atmosphere, of course, lends itself to revisiting the classics. Evenings are for mulligatawny soup, supposedly invented here, and shoes (and socks) and collared shirts in the formal dining room.

My checkouts are a bit of a spectacle. The receptionist asks if he should call for a cab. I smile. I walk — yes, gasp, walk — out of the club, my suitcase rattling behind me. I leave the confines of the Boat Club Road, one of the few semi-walkable neighbourhoods in Chennai, and, politely saying no to autos, head to the Nandanam Metro Station. I nearly get run over by a speeding bike. A quick metro ride delivers me to Chennai Central. There, I take a non-air-conditioned train to Sri City, a two-hour journey as egalitarian as the Madras Club is not.

Prajwal Parajuly is the author of *The Gurkha's Daughter* and *Land Where I Flee*. He loves *idli*, loathes *naan*, and is indifferent to *coffee*. He teaches Creative Writing at Krea University and oscillates between New York City and Sri City.

### METROPLUS QUICK CROSSWORD #7 (Set by Doppelganger)



#### Across

- 8 Rough water left by a ship (4)
- 9 28.35 grams (5)
- 10 Most experienced and cunning (4)
- 11 Large marine mammals with blowholes (6)
- 12 You must finish this \_\_\_\_\_ happens (8)
- 13 The circular or flattened bell-shaped body of a jellyfish (8)
- 15 They may be laid on sleepers (6)
- 17 Plants related to a cabbage (7)
- 19 To propose or suggest an idea? (7)
- 22 A company that produces films (6)
- 24 A problem that needs careful handling (8)
- 26 Type of building (8)
- 28 Never having existed before (6)
- 30 A venerated and idealised person (4)
- 31 A direction to play in the stated timing (5)
- 32 The gentleman is \_\_\_\_\_ in matters of etiquette (4)

#### Down

- 1 He got led down the garden \_\_\_\_\_ (4)
- 2 4D is mostly made by them (8)
- 3 Colloquially a curiously antiquated person (6)
- 4 Carrot-nosed winter figure (7)
- 5 The train \_\_\_\_\_ 10 minutes late (8)
- 6 Some court hearings can be

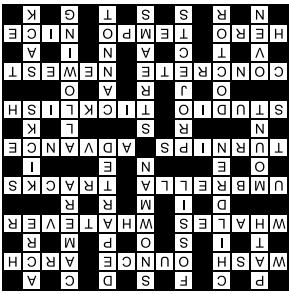
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held in this! (6)

- 7 4047 square metres (4)
- 14 Put a picture in a frame (5)
- 16 Does something for thrills! (5)
- 18 Ascribes (feelings of one's own) to other people (8)
- 20 Permitting something to happen (8)
- 21 Flows continuously in large quantities (7)
- 23 Falsify information (6)
- 25 You \_\_\_\_\_ but admire her perseverance (6)
- 27 An appliance used by potters (4)
- 29 You hit this when you are tired! (4)

Solution No. #7







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**S**ichuan Crispy Chicken, hibachi fried rice and dorayaki pancakes are a welcome addition to the options available at Express Avenue mall. You Mee, which opened recently, is already popular with diners. The welcoming manga-inspired decor at this pan-Asian restaurant, in white, black and red, is at once dramatic and cheerful, setting the tone for an immersive and inviting experience.

Pan-Asian food is having its moment, as Indian diners get more adventurous, experimenting beyond fried rice and Schezwan noodles. You Mee offers a glimpse into trending cuisines and dishes from Japanese ramen bowls to dimsum. The model has proved so successful that they have opened across the country, including in Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Mohali and Pune.

I begin with a prawn tempura sushi roll, which is light and crisp with perfectly-cooked prawns. The roll is accompanied by crumbled fish roe, cucumber, and a touch of mayonnaise.

The menu offers a well-balanced mix of vegetarian and meat dishes and vegan options. In a bid to cater to a

# Through the cherry blossom

**You Mee offers** a thoughtfully curated and competitively priced menu that includes ramen bowls, chilli cheese dim sum and sushi

larger audience, the food is designed for Indian diners, so there is an interesting variety of vegetarian dishes from eight different types of sushi to an addictively simple Japanese salad made with spinach and seasoned with a creamy sesame dressing.

Among the appetisers, while the crispy lotus stem is fairly standard fare, the chilli coriander chicken dumpling and crisp chicken Sichuan, stand out for their punchy

flavours. The coriander chicken dumpling, filled with minced chicken, red chilli, and shiitake mushrooms, has the right balance of spices, and goes well



*You Mee is at Express Avenue Mall. From 11am to 11pm. Cost for two is ₹1,500. For reservations, call 8329002213.*

**Sushi tales** (Left) An assortment from You Mee; (inset) chicken ramen. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

with its tangy coriander sauce topping.

We also try their New York chilli cheese oil dimsum, a signature dish at You Mee. This is a cheese lover's dream with a generous stuffing made of cream cheese, mushroom, water chestnuts, then drizzled with chilli oil. Tempted by the description of their crisp chicken Sichuan, we order that as well, and it turns out to be a bold spicy dish of stir-fried chicken with Himalayan chillies, black beans and Sichuan pepper.

The Japanese-style miso soup that we order arrives hot, with a pleasing umami flavour from the dashi stock and miso paste. The soup comes with an option of tofu or prawn.

For our main course, we decide on the spicy chicken ramen. The menu also offers five vegetarian ramen options, which include a vegan coconut curry, braised tofu and kimchi. Our ramen arrives piping hot, filled with stir fried chicken chunks, bell peppers, and vegetables in a spicy miso broth. The dish is not overly fiery but has a pleasant, gentle heat.

Our meal ends with the coconut palm jaggery pudding, described as a Japanese soufflé. With all the familiar flavours of a traditional jaggery dessert, this rich, caramelised pudding, is made with coconut milk, palm jaggery and egg yolk, and flavoured with cinnamon and lemongrass. A drizzle of caramel sauce completes the dish.

With generous portions and a thoughtfully curated menu, You Mee offers well-executed Japanese elements alongside pan-Asian influences, as well as a tasty break from shopping.

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**Shhhh-oo-be-doo-be-doo-da-day**  
Sofar Sounds is back to bringing its secret concert experiences to Chennai. On June 15, Sofar promises an evening of live music by indie artists where the location and artists will be revealed incrementally. Seating is on the floor, so take a cushion or blanket along. From 6.30pm. Tickets are priced at ₹750 and are non-refundable on [sofarsounds.com](https://sofarsounds.com). Outside food and alcohol is not permitted. The exact location will be revealed 36 hours before the event.



Shot on OnePlus #FramesofIndia

## Get rolling

**Roll Baby Roll hops on the gochujang bandwagon and dishes out gluten-free rolls**

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**T**he Roll Baby Roll story started on the streets of Chennai back in 2018 when the Hallyu wave was yet to submerge the country and gochujang still sounded like an onomatopoeic Tamil word akin to 'jinguchan'. Now, boxes of this savoury, sweet and spicy red chilli paste are stocked in Roll Baby Roll's central kitchen as they are embracing new food trends that

have taken over the world. With the opening of its 15th store in Perambur as of May, Gandharv Dhingra, co-founder and CEO of the enterprise, says that he has been consistently surprised by Chennai. The brand has been co-founded by Nikesh Lamba. While Dhingra initially thought that the brand would cater to crowds looking to have a snack or a late night bite, a pivot has been observed. More people in the 17-35 age group, who tend to order from the restaurant, prefer eating these rolls as meals

**Hot pocket** (Left to right) The Korean roll, paneer shawarma and kung pao roll. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

as they tend to have an element of protein, some vegetables and a healthy wrap option.

"When I began my career at ITC in Chennai, I ended up managing several restaurants and a night club. A roll was my go-to. Now, others are doing the same. They do want a variety though," he says. It is why they have launched two new flavours of kaati rolls, their mainstay, as well as a number of other options including gluten-free no-oil wraps, shawarmas and kebab rolls.

### From start to finish

Each roll takes about five months from conceptualisation to reach the menu board at their canary-yellow walled stores that are a maximum of 400 sq.ft. "Recipes take a couple of months to draw up and many more months to test and taste. Only after extensive trials with comments from friends and family, do we bring out a new flavour. Currently, we have a menu with over 70 rolls," he says.

As part of their new launch, the Korean chicken roll offers bite-sized deep fried chicken pieces doused in a medley of yin and yang flavours that often define the gochujang experience. Their new Delhi-style kebab rolls wrapped in a roomali encasing, could do with softer fillings or more sauce to ensure a satisfying meal. The shawarma paneer roll with hummus, mayonnaise and the occasional pickled onion is a treat to eat, especially since the pita is soft. The kung pao paneer is heavy on the coriander and could do without the interruption of soggy peanuts.

The Roll Baby Roll experience is designed for a quick bite on the go. The brand will hence only be remembered by the taste each element of the roll offers – the crunch of the onion, the texture of the meat or paneer, and the sauces on the kaati roll. Gandharv is keen on ensuring that each element shines. "We hope to open 800 stores country-wide," he says.

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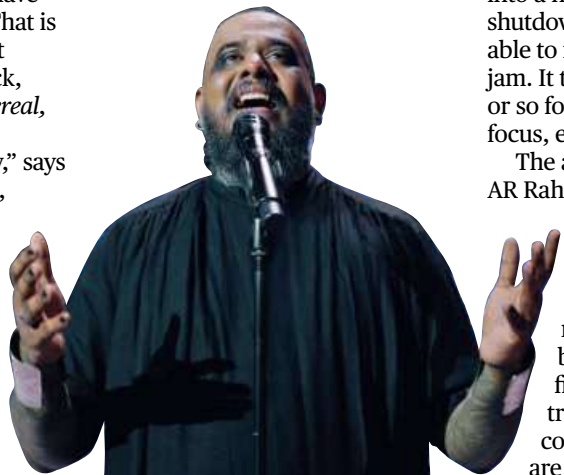
**Ragas with a twist**  
Members of the band AGAM.  
MOJIN THINAVILAYIL

# When Carnatic meets rock

**How band AGAM** tapped into its rich musical expertise to conceptualise its latest album

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“This is the most personal thing that we have made.” That is how AGAM, the band that makes Carnatic music rock, defines *Arrival of the Ethereal*, its third studio album. “It encompasses our journey,” says Harish Sivaramakrishnan, lead vocalist of the Bengaluru-based progressive rock band. The band, formed in 2003, and active on the live show circuit since 2007, has taken almost eight years to bring out this album. Although work on it started after



the release of its second studio album, *A Dream To Remember* (2017), the pandemic upset its plans. “The plan was to release it in 2020. But when COVID-19 struck, there were no shows,

zero income and total uncertainty. We came back from a situation where we had no self-belief.” T Praveen Kumar, lead guitarist, adds, “All of us went into a hole; there was creative shutdown since we were not able to meet each other and jam. It took another two years or so for us to get back our focus, energy and spirits.” The album has eight songs. AR Rahman recently launched the first song ‘The Silence That Remains’. Three more will be released in the next few months, and the rest will be out next year. While five tracks are based on traditional Carnatic compositions, the others are originals.

The delay had also much to do with the fact that the album has been mounted on a bigger scale. Over 300 artistes, including international musicians are part of this project. “The Czech National Symphony Orchestra has played for us. Big brass bands from Argentina, orchestral conductors from Italy, choir musicians from Hungary and the US, musicians from West Asia ... the album has it all.” Among them is Grammy-winning audio engineer and producer from Argentina, Andres Mayo, who has done the mixing with Martin Muscatello. Mastering is done by renowned engineer Sai Shravanam. Mohanveena exponent and Grammy winner Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt has also collaborated on a track. “We have also used a *chenda* ensemble in the album, which is not the usual *chenda melam*. Several new instruments have been incorporated. It is a first for AGAM’s soundscape and musical dimension.” According to Swamy Seetharaman, who is on the keyboard, the band had set the bar high for the album’s soundscape. “We put ourselves on the edge. Exploring several emotions through the songs has been a different experience. It has not been easy, especially, executing it with so many

voices, instruments etc... the whole thing was at a different league for us.” So, what was the emotion behind going big? “First, our age,” Harish says. “We are all on the wrong side of 40. It became a now-or-never situation. As Praveen says, five years ago would have been too early and five years later would have been too late.” ‘The Silence That Remains’, is based on Tyagaraja’s composition, ‘Mokshamu galada’, which ruminates on the philosophy of attaining moksha (salvation) and the cycle of life and death. “This composition is generally treated with soft orchestration. It has not had such an aggressive orchestral treatment. So it took time to arrive at that form,” Harish explains. Swamy adds, “It is largely about the five elements, depicting the struggles of material life. We have used 30-35 tracks for this alone.” Harish says they go through a long process to select the Carnatic compositions. The second song Harish says, is “an interesting take on a composition every South Indian would know.” The remaining two will be released by August after which the band will set out on a world tour with the album.



**The vanishing game**  
In the mood for some magic? PC Sorcar (Porush) is set to present his performance through *Indrajala*, a mega magic show set to take place in the city. With an assortment of card and stage tricks, Porush hopes to keep audiences entertained. Porush, who is the legendary magician PC Sorcar’s grandson, is also a painter and drummer. He hopes to carry on the legacy left behind by his illustrious grandfather. *The shows kickstarts from June 14 (only on weekends), with two shows (5pm and 7.15pm), at Museum Theatre, Egmore. For bookings, log on to bookmyshow and for queries, call 9840671677*



**Stories from Seoul**  
The Korean Film Festival returns to Chennai with a lineup of contemporary and classic Korean cinema. It invites audiences to explore the richness of Korean storytelling through five acclaimed films. Organised by the Consulate-General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, it opens on June 13 with an inauguration at 6pm, followed by a screening of *The Book of Fish* (6.30pm, June 13). Screenings continue over the next two days with *Sunset in My Hometown* (1.30pm, June 14), *Age of the Rampant* (3.30pm, June 14), *Feng Shui* (6pm, June 15), and *The Classified File* (8pm, June 15). *The festival is at Tagore Film Centre, RA Puram, June 13 to 15. Entry is free on a first-come, first-served basis.*



**Child’s play**  
Remember singer Poovaiyar? The young boy, who shot to fame for his singing abilities and worked with Vijay in *Bigil* and *Master*, has now turned protagonist. His film, *Ram Abdullah Antony*, revolves around school students who are led astray during their formative years. Debut director T Jayavel has written and directed this film, produced by TS Clement Suresh of Annai Velankkani Studios. Ajay Arnold and Arjun will be seen playing the other school kids alongside Poovaiyar. Also part of the starcast is Vela Ramamoorthy, Thalaivasal Vijay, Chaams, Vinodhini Vaidyanathan, Arnav and Raj Mohan, besides Vanitha Vijaykumar, who will make a special appearance.

**A new avatar**  
Telugu actor Sunil has been making waves in Tamil cinema of late, with memorable performances in films such as *Maaveeran*, *Jailer*, *Mark Antony*, and *Good Bad Ugly*. Now, the actor has joined the cast of filmmaker Vijay Milton’s upcoming Tamil-Telugu bilingual film. Starring Bharath, Aari Arujunan, Raj Tharun and Paal Dabba in the lead, the upcoming film will feature Sunil as Poongavanam, an “intense, layered character with emotional depth,” said the makers. Speaking about Sunil’s casting, director Vijay said in a statement, “Sunil is not just a crowd favourite — he’s an actor of great depth and instinct. I believe audiences will rediscover him in this.” This comes close on the heels of another announcement; that Sunil has joined the cast of Malayalam actor Antony Varghese’s upcoming film *Kattalan*, directed by Paul George.

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For Vinod AK, his directorial debut, *Moonwalk*, is a trip down memory lane to an era when a generation was addicted to breakdance, Michael Jackson and, of course, the moonwalk. Vinod has packed it all in this slice-of-life narrative about a bunch of young men in the late Eighties, who fell in love with the dance style even as they navigated the ups and downs of their personal lives. The ad filmmaker’s journey to *Moonwalk* can be attributed to his student days in Thiruvananthapuram. “We were fans of the disco trend and loved watching the likes of Kamal Haasan and Mithun Chakraborty grooving. But when we were introduced to breakdance, you can’t imagine the kick we got from the moves, the music, the steps and the style. I was wonder struck when I first saw it live on stage. A group of us friends used to go for all such programmes and some of us got on stage as well.” He had not planned to make a film on this subject. “I had other stories with me and had almost reached the production stages of a project, but had to drop it. That was when I thought of a movie on the breakdancing community,” he says. Vinod admits that *Moonwalk*



is inspired by several real-life stories. “It is a compilation of what happened in the lives of multiple dancers. But we have tweaked those true events because some of these stories are heartbreaking,” he says. A portion of the film was completed in 2020, Vinod says, and the rest in 2023 and 2024. But there was confusion about taking it forward and the production got stalled during the post-production stage. That was when Lijo Jose Pellissery stepped in. He backed the project and steered it through all the obstacles. Lijo brought in Listin Stephen as the co-producer. “It was Prashant Pillai (composer of the movie) who told Lijo about the project. He liked the film in the unfinished form and

**Little steps** A still from *Moonwalk*; (below) director Vinod. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



(Sudeep), Appu Asgar (Anikuttan) and Sibi Kuttappan (Sura). “They were trained by State award-winning choreographer Sreejith Dazzlers. I contacted him after watching his work in *Amen*. The best thing is that he is familiar with the breaking styles in Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi, which have many differences.” The *Moonwalk* team also brought in some veteran breakdancers from across Kerala for promotions. Vinod is disheartened that they could not use original Michael Jackson songs or footage. “It is sad that we could not use his songs or moves. That would have taken the film to another level,” he says.



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