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THE HINDU



Now, read by the Chitlapakkam lake
in the company of fellow bookworms **P3**

KANI KUSRUTI'S FILM
GOES INTERNATIONAL P4

As Tamil Nadu heads to the Lok Sabha polls, we follow the voices behind popular political songs and party anthems

The poll playlist



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Mirage and manifestos maketh the great Indian election.

For a whole month now, rappers Dinesh and RJ Prasath, better known by their stage name Comrade Gangstas, have contributed to this mirage by performing at street-side stages and grand public meetings. They sing in support of the INDIA bloc, taking forward its left-aligned polity. Their songs, in praise of Periyar and Ambedkar and often critical of the Centre's policies such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, and violence based on religion, have gotten claps, whistles and sometimes absolute pindrop silence.

The legacy of propaganda singers is older than the free and fair democratic elections in India. These talented musicians sprout from the grassroots, have a sense of tune and are able to entertain restless masses who deserve breaks during lengthy political discourse. Over the years, the nature of the propaganda singer has changed. Today, they don colourful clothes, sing with backing vocals and even rap. Some stick by a larger governing ideology of the party they support. Others pen lyrics 10 minutes before their performance based on the parties that have recruited them.

One particular memory from this election campaign trail in 2024 has left Dinesh amused.

Just as these new-age singers began belting out rap songs at a public function in Purasaiwalkam last week, a host of women began dancing.

"We had campaigned in 2021 too, but had noticed that women usually did not take part in the dancing. However, this time they danced as though they were possessed. They really let loose during our

performance," he says.

This was at a well-attended public meeting with the likes of Tamil Nadu Cabinet Minister Sekar Babu, Chennai Mayor Priya Rajan and the Communist Party of India's (Marxist) district secretary G Selva on stage. But the singers were asked to croon on despite their performance eating into the speakers' time. "The minister said that everyone must enjoy," he recalls. "The women later came and told us that it is the only place where they get to be jolly," Dinesh says.

Were their new-age rap and fast-paced songs starkly contrasting the otherwise long, solemn public speeches about the state of the nation? "That could be one of the reasons but, we repeat the same



A vote for a voice (Left) Rapper Dinesh and RJ Prasath; (below) Pepsi Das; and Iraibanban Kuthoos. S SHIVA RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



message. The election is a spectacle but we are here to drive the discussion forward with a tune and a beat," he says.

A song for every mood

Over the years, some singers have emerged as favourites. Iraibanban Kuthoos, a singer who has belted out several hits for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) like 'Stalin Engal Stalin' is one among them. Having just returned from a slew of public meetings in Tiruchi for this year's election campaign, the singer with a distinctly Dravidian voice (a strong, clear baritone with a penchant for emotion), says that the role of a propaganda singer is evident. "We need to be able to hold a crowd with tunes that are somewhat familiar and words that are easy to grasp and understand," he says. Great stage presence and the ability to partake in repartee, is a bonus but their primary role is to ensure that the audience sits through public meetings.

Proudly, he whips out his phone and shows us a snippet of Chief Minister MK Stalin praising his first stage performance 40 years ago. "I sang at Thalapathy Stalin's first ever election campaign at Nandanam in 1984. His father M Karunanidhi was supposed to address the gathering but was delayed by over two hours. It was 10pm and the crowds became restless. This is when I came up on stage and sang the same four songs over and over again. The crowds didn't move. All was well," he recalls.

Today, Iraibanban holds several positions in the party. It is the singing and ideology that has led him here, he says.

Pepsi Das, on the other hand, has the distinct ability to pen lines on the spot and has sung for every party under the sun. "You name it, I've done it. I have made the words 'cycle chain', 'mannu (sand) lorry' and even 'kuppai (waste) lorry' rhyme with other interesting Tamil and English words. They are often the symbols for the smaller parties," he says.

This election season, Das has sung songs praising the DMK and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). He has a crew consisting of eight members who play the keyboard, drums, tabla and dholak. "My style of singing is usually ganaa. It reaches the public quicker. During my performances, you might see me asking the audience for words and coming up with songs on the spot. It keeps everyone entertained," he says.

Das is insistent that ideology does not make a difference. As a singer, he does his job. Does Das see himself entering the world of politics like his other two counterparts? "The party doesn't pay for my lifestyle or give me a job after the polls," he says.

As we end our conversation, Das shows his prowess. He begins by singing and asking for votes for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); transitions to the *kai* (hand), the symbol of the Congress and then moves to AIADMK and the DMK.

"I assure you. The night after my concert, you will find yourself humming the song that I sing about the candidate who recruited me. They are pretty catchy, my tunes," he says.

BRIEFLY



Life through lens

Neelam Publications presents Nitham Photography Exhibition, which showcases the works of 12 photographers as part of the ongoing Dalit History Month events organised by the Vaanam Art Festival.

@Artkin Centre, Alwarpet. April 16 to 22, 11am to 7pm, Entry is free.



Womanhood in art

Art Houz, is hosting the group exhibition titled, "I am a woman. I think as a woman. I see as a woman." The exhibition will showcase the artworks of Alamu Kumaresan, Rajashree Nayak and Sonal Varshneya, which will serve as a homage to the countless women who anchor our communities, highlighting their pivotal roles through an artistic

lenses. Each artwork is a narrative unto itself, inviting viewers to explore the intricacies of the female experience.

@Art Houz, Nungambakkam. April 18 to 30, 11am to 7pm. For details, call 8220308777



The allure of opera

The Festival of Opera, presented by The Chromatics, offers opera enthusiasts an opportunity to immerse themselves in passion, drama and vocal prowess at this concert. The event will take you through a rich operatic repertoire, showcasing timeless classics. Chromatics is an ensemble of young, qualified singers

who are deeply committed to classical music. The ensemble will perform classical music for 90 minutes including scenes from operas from the Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras by composers like Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, Puccini and Rossini. @The Museum Theatre, April 21, 4pm and 7pm (two shows). Tickets for the show are priced at ₹1000, ₹500 and ₹300. For details, call 9840485558



Train to the past

As part of World Heritage Day (April 18), the Integral Coach Factory, Chennai is organising a Mini Scale Model Train Show, that would showcase running train models and layouts in a miniature format. The show, on display at the Chennai Rail Museum, will showcase the rich heritage of Indian Railways for the past 150 years.

@Chennai Rail Museum, ICF, Chennai. On April 18, 20 and 21. Kids below three years can enter for free. The entry fee for students is ₹15 and for adults is ₹40. For details, call 26146306

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Now, significant moments of a wedding are captured on canvas by artists painting on the spot

Memories frozen on canvas

Neeraja Murthy
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Leti Sai Ram Pramodhini Reddy and Patel Narsimha Reddy of Hyderabad have a new wedding essential. The couple, who will tie the knot on April 24 at Rock Enclave Convention Centre at Ghatkeskar, have hired a painter to capture their special ceremony live. In an age of selfies, Instagram reels and digital images, the couple prefers to preserve their wedding memories in an album filled with sketches, colours and strokes, instead of photographs.

Artist Keerthana Adepu in Hyderabad has a busy April with five weddings. Her ‘wedding shopping’ includes a 14x18 canvas board and acrylics of resplendent red,

yellow and green to depict the couple and the wedding decor. “The focus of our work is to evoke a special feeling about the wedding day; each time the couple looks at our artwork, they go back in time and cherish memories of that day,” says Keerthana (@art.casm). Her first artwork for a wedding was an *antarpata* (the cloth screen held between the bride and the groom during the wedding) in June 2023 for a friend; then she created her first live wedding painting in November. The 22-year-old has, so far, done around 60 *antarpats* and 13 wedding paintings live in Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Vijayawada, Khammam and Karimnagar.

Narrative art
Photography/videography has become essential to a wedding irrespective of the scale of the



event. Even so, narrative art is significant, observes artist Srishti Prabakar (@anchoredhues). The Chennai-based artist believes, “A painting captures some details more than a photo would, plus there’s that human touch.” With experience in doing live event painting and stylised couple portraits over four years, she did her first live wedding painting in early 2024. “The painting was a wedding gift from the groom’s close friend, and it involved painting five events across the four-day celebration,” she says.

The artists sit in an earmarked space – sometimes near the *mandap* or in front of

a screen – and sketch/paint spontaneously as the ceremony progresses. Looking for emotions and memories to capture in those moments, Srishti uses watercolours, mostly along with ink, to paint the main scenes but uses acrylics for a snapshot of an event and the decor. She also looks for other details and the mood.

The trend of live wedding painting in Hyderabad began two years ago, says M Sanjay Kumar of Eshwariah Art Gallery, who curated art for a wedding at Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre. “The families of the bride and the groom were enthusiasts of the arts.

Works to be cherished (Clockwise from left) Dhanushya Pallam painting at a wedding; Keerthana Adepu (in salwar) looks at her art with the bride and groom; Chennai-based Srishti Prabakar’s canvas. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Sometimes people also engage artists to paint portraits of guests at weddings akin to a mehendi artist creating mehendi designs for guests, or a bangle seller helping guests try out what suits them,” he says.

Buoyant scene
Live painting is picking up in tier-2 cities too. For instance, many in Vijayawada are keen to do this, says software engineer-turned-live wedding painter Dhanushya Pallam (@dhanupaintslive). The process involves applying varnish once the paint is dry, so she suggests that clients keep the artwork aside for at least six hours before framing it.

The process also poses challenges. “Having to complete the painting at the speed at which the event happens is tough,” says Srishti. “Also, people at the wedding keep interrupting to comment on your work or ask many questions. It’s difficult to continue to work with focus, but still be polite to guests.”

The price of the artworks starts from ₹20,000 and goes to ₹2 lakh (based on size and requirements) and the artist’s travel and accommodation expenses is to be borne by the client for an outstation wedding.

So next time you plan to take a selfie with the bride and the groom, look around; an artist might also have captured this moment, on canvas.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13581

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Across

- 1 Take what’s offered or get nothing at all (7,6)
- 8 Rocky hill (3)
- 9 Beef cut — net’s odour (anag) (9)
- 10 Tavern (8)
- 11 Dwell (4)
- 13 With a submissive manner (6)
- 14 Nasty (6)
- 16 Desensitise (4)
- 17 Causing 18 (8)
- 20 Proviso (9)
- 21 French friend (3)
- 22 Distraught (6,7)

Down

- 1 Unforeseen obstacle (5)
- 2 Historic west Suffolk market town (4,2,7)
- 3 Honestly (anag) — surreptitiously (2,3,3)
- 4 Landed gent (6)
- 5 Go to the gallows (4)
- 6 Of an ambiguous nature (13)

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



- 7 Attempted (7)
- 12 Piffle (8)
- 13 Car for hire as a taxi (7)
- 15 Gambling establishment (6)
- 18 Heartache (5)
- 19 Bound (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated April 25, 2024

Solution No. 13580

B	L	A	B	B	E	R	M	O	U	T	H
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Sparkling elegance

Vimonisha Exhibitions presents a blend of brands with Drapery Silk and Adaia’s Lab Diamond Jewelry showcasing their saree and jewellery lines. Adaia Diamonds is known for innovation rooted in craftsmanship and designs, using lab-grown dimonds. The sarees by Drapery hold a timeless allure, across cultures and time. They blend heritage with innovation to create bold, elegant designs.

@Hyatt Regency, Teynampet., April 20, 11am to 8pm. Entry is free. For details, call 9820043549



Please cast your vote, says Sweety

Wayanad’s election mascot is a new species of dragonfly, the Red-rumped Hawklet, which was discovered in 2023

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As poll fever rages, Kerala’s Wayanad constituency has got itself an election mascot – a dragonfly. The species *Epithemis wayanadensis* or the Red-rumped Hawklet, discovered from the region, will be driving voters to polling booths.

Named Sweety after the title of the initiative, Spreading Wayanad’s Election Enthusiasm through *Epithemis wayanadensis*, the dragonfly was chosen by the Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation Programme (SVEEP).

Initiated and conceptualised by Renu Raj, the District Collector of Wayanad and her team, Sweety aims not only to encourage voter participation but also to showcase the rich biodiversity of Wayanad. The larger goal is to integrate natural conservation efforts into electoral discussions.

SVEEP has planned a series of programmes aimed at empowering citizens to exercise their voting rights, making new voters aware of the processes, hosting competitions among students and the general public to foster a culture of electoral literacy. And Sweety will play a big role in these campaigns, according to the Government of Kerala’s portal.

The dragonfly was discovered collectively by Vivek Chandran and Subin K Jose, researchers at the Environmental Science Department at Christ College, Irinjalakkuda, geneticist Zeeshan A Mirza from Max Planck Institute for Biology in Germany, and naturalist and wildlife photographer David Raju. “Mascots of Nature play a crucial role in raising awareness about biodiversity conservation and its intersection with electoral processes. Sweety symbolises the unique biodiversity of Wayanad and



Rare messenger
The Red-rumped Hawklet. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

highlights the need for sustainable development practices within the electoral discourse,” says David, who is also the general manager of CGH Wayanad Wild, a property of CGH Earth at Lakki in Wayanad.

In 2022, David had spotted a peculiar dragonfly, the Ruby-tailed Hawklet at the Pookode Lake in Wayanad. He later found the same dragonfly at the CGH Wayanad Wild property, but on close examination, found that there were distinct differences in morphology and genetic makeup.

Along with the team of researchers, a DNA analysis was done to ascertain that the new species was different from the Ruby-tailed Hawklet. It was then described as the Red-rumped Hawklet.

Using mascots during elections is not a new thing. While Bengal Tiger Baghu is creating awareness about voters’ rights in South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, Odisha’s Sambalpur district administration has announced ‘Voter Dada’ and ‘Voter Nani’ as election mascots dressed in traditional Sambalpuri attire.

Global palate (Clockwise from right) Seafood platter; Nalli roganjosh; and Bleu’phoria, a cocktail. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Adobo in Akkarai

Capella, a newly-opened restaurant at Palomar by Crossway, allows one to experiment with cuisines from around the world

Sanjana Ganesh
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The East Coast Road is no stranger to new restaurants. With the city limits expanding, a crop of eating spots has taken over Akkarai junction. Rumour has it that the best Andhra cuisine in the city lies hidden in the lanes of this stretch and its parallel, the OMR. But that is a conversation for another day.

More recently though, a trip down this stretch lasting 45 kilometres, has promised hungry wayfarers dishes from across the world, even a little bit of Filipino adobo on the plate.

Capella, a fine-dining restaurant in Palomar by Crossway, does a quick lap around different continents, serving food from New Orleans, the Caribbean, Morocco, France, Italy, West Asia and even Sub-Saharan Africa.

Though opened only two months ago, this boutique hotel seems fairly busy on a weekday afternoon. “It is a pitstop for



those travelling down the coast. A pool and a bar (The Spotted Deer) make it conducive for a staycation too,” says Yangya Prakash Chandran, founder and CEO of the Crossway group.

When the food arrives, it becomes easy to make some declarations. Capella’s gochujang pork and Peruvian lamb, make the place well-worth a halt. The pork, served with jasmine sticky rice, in-house kimchi and a side of spinach all make for a hearty meal bowl. The pork is tender

with a sweet-spicy kick while the iceberg lettuce in the kimchi mix provides a bite. The Peruvian lamb, deflected from the traditional grilled and cilantro-heavy base. It is instead stir-fried here, but tastes familiar and interesting nevertheless.

The hotel’s executive chef Virgil James says that much of what he has learnt, has been through his experience working with counterparts from across the

world during stints in various other restaurants. “We tried 252 items and then narrowed the menu down,” he says. The desert options are vast too. Hasnain Abbas, managing director of the property and the pastry chef behind Bakestagramz, their in-house pâtisserie, is insistent about fresh products on display every day. There are many iterations of bread including the American rye bread, focaccia and cheddar biscuits besides the usual eclairs and choux pastries.

Reviewing food is lonely business. It is intentionally so. At Capella though, there is never a dull moment. The chef walks in to explain a dish; Naresh, the bar manager speaks about techniques like fat-washing incorporated in his concoction called the popcorn brew; and a third person walks in with profiteroles from the bakery where all the dessert is made. One is hence left with notes that say ‘good’ next to crunchy honey chilli lotus stem and podi idli, ‘chewy’ next to the Mongolian beef, ‘no overpowering cardamom’ besides the murg malai.

In the midst of all this chatter, I forget to ask where the name Palomar comes from. Is its etymology from the Portuguese pigeon mountain, the fishing knot or the observatory? The only way to find out is to make the excursion back.

Capella at Palomar by Crossway is at 4A1, East Coast Road, Akkarai, Chennai. A meal for two including alcohol costs ₹2,000.





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When you catch sight of the hustle and bustle around Chitlapakkam lake on Saturday morning, it becomes evident that the weekends are for anything but sleeping in. There are large groups of people going on brisk walks, runners warming up, and many others sitting and chatting. Even the cormorants here seem busy, bobbing around the white and pink water lilies.

A group of readers seated right in the middle of it all, on the steps of the amphitheatre by the lake, remains engrossed in their books. This is the second meeting of Lake Reads, the city's newest silent reading chapter. Silent reading communities in Chennai, and the world over encourage readers to bring in books of their choice, and read quietly as a group.

After having regularly made the trek to Besant Nagar beach to be part of Bessy Reads' busy Sunday mornings, Arvind Balasubramanian, a Chitlapakkam resident says he was inspired to start a similar initiative in his locality. "There were so many readers from Tambaram, Chitlapakkam, Chromepet and Pallavaram who wanted to be a part of a reading chapter like this, and I thought that there was no better place to start than here," he says, pointing to the lake and its sylvan surroundings. "This lake, is our beach," he laughs.

The chapter schedules its meetings every Saturday, from 6am to 9am. People are free to join and leave at any time.

Turn a page by the lake

Chennai's latest silent reading chapter, Lake Reads, encourages you to pick up a book and sit by the scenic Chitlapakkam waters



Companionable silence Readers sit by the Chitlapakkam lake; visitors browse through the books kept on display. AKHILA EASWARAN

At its first meet up on April 6, around 18 residents showed up to quietly delve into their books.

Apart from the allure of this sense of community coupled with the lack of pressure to socialise, Nithya Nagarajan, a Tambaram resident who made her way to the second session of Lake Reads says she loves the idea of setting aside time to do nothing else but read.

"I like having this one hour on a Saturday morning to unwind with my book, and get some fresh air. There is so much happening through the week, and I have hardly find the time to catch up with reading otherwise," she says, as she settles down on the steps with a copy of the Korean bestseller *I*

want to die but I want to eat *Tteokbokki* by Baek Sehee, translated by Anton Hur.

Recalling how she was not able to make it to the other reading chapters in Chennai given the distance, Vasilakshmi Rajamani, a West Tambaram resident says she hopes for this reading community to give her a much-needed push to read regularly. "I want to also talk to people about books, after the reading sessions. I started off by collecting novels, but am enjoying self-help books now," she says.

Curious residents take a detour from the walking track and peer at the books, which include issues of the Tamil magazine *Thumbi*, and a few Stephen King favourites

arranged neatly on the stage at the amphitheatre as the group continues to read.

For the residents of Chitlapakkam and other surrounding areas, the lake has been a nucleus, and an important part of their community with many having worked with the Government on the restoration of the water body. Residents like Sunil Jayaraman, a volunteer with Chitlapakkam Rising, an active resident group, are buoyed by the blossoming of initiatives like Lake Reads which is bringing more residents together. Along with a few other volunteers, Sunil is busy picking up trash from the banks of the lake, most likely thrown by some careless tourists. Gowri Raman, a retired Tamil teacher who comes in to read greets him and Arvind, both of whom were her students in the past.

"We have always stressed on the importance of green public spaces, and it is heartening to see how these community spaces are being used," he says. The amphitheatre was built keeping in mind art and music initiatives which the residents hope will also kick off in the future.

Lake Reads is on instagram @lakereads_chitlapakkam. They meet every Saturday from 6am to 9am. Entry is free.

Head to Samarpanam at Forum Art Gallery, where Thejomaye Menon's art breathes life into poems by Jyothi Ganesh



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Poetry is often enjoyed with a healthy side of imagination. However, picturing words as images is a skill not everybody possesses. Some end up being visual learners. If you fall under this category, head to Forum Art Gallery where art exhibition Samarpanam is on display. This unique showcase features paintings by Thejomaye Menon, inspired by poems from Jyothi Ganesh's book of the same name. Each artwork offers a visual interpretation of a poem, creating a dialogue between the written word and visual art.

On the ground floor of the art gallery, with paintings all around, a crowd gathered on April 8 for the opening of the exhibition, that also features an evening of slam poetry. Thejomaye and Jyothi sit in front of the audience while the

Poetry on a palette

poems are read out with dramatic flair. Instead of just listening, the audience is asked to look at the artwork inspired by the poetry.

"Thejo and I have been friends for a long time, and I asked her a few months back if she would be interested in bringing alive my poems as paintings. She readily took up the offer," says Jyothi, adding that the idea for this project came from her personal experience of visualising her previously written poems as raagas.

One captivating piece, Lotus, depicts the poem's words: "Blossoming in muddled mired waters, long stalked buds opening to the



Painted verses (Clockwise from left) Lotus; Eclipse; Jyothi Ganesh and Thejomaye Menon at the opening of Samarapanam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

first rays of the sun, at dawn". Jyothi's evocative language is brought to life through Thejomaye's brushstrokes showing lotuses in water and a ray of warm sunlight upon them.

"She (Thejomaye) has taken off in a different direction, deviating from her usual style, and interpreted them in her own way. The artist should have the liberty to do that," says Jyothi.

"An invisible force guided me through the artistic process, as is the case with many other artists who speak of a gut feeling when it comes to their art," says Thejomaye.

Another painting, Sunlight, showcases Thejomaye's artistic vision. Inspired by the words "Light blinding white and stark, characteristically crystal clear," she portrays both light and darkness, two sides of the same coin. "There is life in sunlight," she explains, incorporating leaves within the light.

This exhibition pushes Thejomaye's boundaries. "As a figurative painter, this is my first entire body of work focussed on one theme," she says. "It has been challenging to interpret and simplify my thoughts," she adds.

Samarpanam is on display at the Forum Art Gallery, Adyar until May 11. Entry is free.



Each artwork offers a visual interpretation of a poem, creating a dialogue between the written word and visual art.



Pick your kool this summer

Whether it's a romantic date, a casual hangout with friends, a celebratory moment, or a sad break up, catering to the diverse tastes and kaleidoscope of emotions of consumers requires a beverage brand that goes beyond mere refreshment. With a product line meticulously crafted to suit every occasion and emotion, India's largest dairy beverage brand, Amul Kool stands as a beacon of innovation with all possible nonalcoholic beverage categories in its portfolio comprising of 150 packs and counting.

Kool isn't just a beverage; it's a companion, a confidant, and a catalyst for unforgettable moments. With its unparalleled adaptability and

unwavering commitment to excellence, it has been a choice of beverage for over 20 years.

The launch of Amul Kool's latest ad film is a testament to understanding the dynamic demographic. This carnival themed larger-than-life advertisement not only showcases the diverse range of Amul beverages but also caters to the occasions & emotions that everyone can resonate with.

Shot in one of India's biggest studios this film premiered on IPL Amul Cricket live along with entire bouquet of TV channels and social media. With its high impact virtual effect, it virtually transports the viewers to Kool Street where they experience the interesting properties such as

Kool express train, Mast Koolandar ice man, roller Koolster dragon, etc. Embracing the complexities and aspirations of its consumers, Kool has set a new standard for customer-centricity and authenticity with its promise to bring the Kool Street experience to the physical world. So, don't be surprised if you find yourself on a Kool Street while you chill you dil with Amul Kool in the summer of 2024! Check out the new Amul Kool ad film at <https://shorturl.at/bdflQ>



"CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE"



Clothes speak (Left) Nithya Prakas, founder of the brand; (Below) models in Alonge's debut collection. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ALONG CAME ALONGE

This Chennai-based fashion label, introduces a line of knitwear created using iCotton

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It's pronounced 'along'. Because clothes are always with you," says Chennai-based Nithya Prakas of her just-launched label Alonge. "We added the 'e' so it is easier to find us on the search engine," she laughs.

After completing a course in Fashion Technology from PSG College of Technology in Coimbatore, in 2007, Nithya waited 17 years before starting her label. "This had always been my dream. But my children were very young and I didn't want to get into it till they were able to take care of themselves," she says.

Alonge is a knitwear brand that mirrors the aesthetic of quiet luxury. The designs are minimal and elegant. "It is a slow process and more of an innovation project. Knitwear is made of cotton but our clothes are made of iCotton (intelligent cotton), a material we developed. It has got the shine of polyester and the softness of viscose; is stretchable and breathable," says Nithya, adding that the clothes also

incorporate the flow motion technology, where the fabric is fluid and flows with the wearer's every move.

One-and-a-half years of research went into creating iCotton. Nithya wore garments made with this fabric for a year before introducing it to the market. Once the material was developed and tested, the next step was to make it fashionable and trendy.

At Alonge, we value quality over anything else; that is our USP, says Nithya. "Even after 50-plus washes, our garments look brand new. I believe in investing in everyday clothes," she adds.

The debut collection features sweatshirts, jackets, lined camisoles, knee-grazing dresses, shorts, pants, co-ords, skirts, oversized T-shirts in ecru, black, white, warm pink, lavender, blue, grey, and green. Florals appear prominently with blooms ranging from hibiscus to protea and birds of paradise – hand painted, embroidered, embellished with metal threads.

There is a lot of focus on hand embroidery and stitches. For example, their show-stopper sweatshirt – one of Nithya's personal favourites – has flowers that took eight hours to embroider, using sequins and beads. While the designing happens in Chennai, the unit is in Tiruppur and the materials come from all over the world including beads and sequins from Japan, lining from Germany, and zips from Hong Kong.

Nithya has started work on the next collection. The mood board on the wall of her studio offers hints as to what it might be. By the looks of it there will be more florals. "And more attention to detail," she says, adding, "This is my personal style translated into patterns. We also want to work with natural fibres in the future."

The price range starts at ₹3,990 and goes up to ₹19,000. Available on alonge.in.



On the streaming front

How women filmmakers in Tamil Nadu are using OTT platforms to up the ante

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After the boom of streaming platforms and the myriad range of content it introduced to housebound consumers during the pandemic-induced lockdown, it's safe to say that the medium has settled with the masses. It has evolved into an avenue for content we seldom see on the big screen, and as a space for filmmakers to go beyond what is considered commercial or mainstream cinema. It has also been hugely beneficial for female filmmakers across the country, especially from the Tamil film industry.

From the heart
Director Nandhini JS who made one of the first Tamil web series, *Nila Nila Odi Vaa* in 2018, recently returned with Prime Video's latest series, *Inspector Rishi*. The filmmaker feels that while the

creator's gender is not of concern, the same cannot be said about the end consumer. "For films, you need to pitch it to a hero and a producer; that limits the kind of stories coming out. These actors and producers also opt for heroism-loaded scripts that men would like as most of the theatre-going population are men. It's become so much that a film gaining a family audience and getting women to theatres to watch it has become a feat," says Nandhini, adding that women creators need a male-centric story to crack this and get a project done. "They cannot go with a script based on self-expression or a story that reflects their life. On OTT platforms, you can tell a wider range of stories. Hence, for women technicians, there are more opportunities here." Director Madhumita echoes Nandhini's thoughts. The filmmaker, whose *KD Engira Karuppudurai* received a warm reception on streaming after its theatrical run, also helmed a segment in Prime

Video's *Putham Pudhu Kaalai Vidiyaadhaa* and has worked for two OTT platforms consulting and commissioning projects. "In streaming, the platform does not greenlight scripts directly for shoot; it takes six to eight months for it to get approved. For first-timers as well as experienced filmmakers like us, not only does it give us multiple



OTT platforms offer a wider range of stories and they are up for hearing any genre. For women technicians, there are more opportunities on the streaming front.

NANDHINI JS

medium of release, target audience and such factors. I would say more opportunities have opened up for all filmmakers with streaming, and you will be seeing us traversing both mediums in the future." Adds Madhumita, "While we might be celebrating films like *Manjummel Boys*, *Premalu* and *Bramayugam* – all happen to be in Malayalam – it's still the violent, action film that every star wants to go for as that is the genre which is working theatrically. If some filmmakers don't want to tell such stories, then OTT allows them to explore that."

Corporate culture
Director Halitha Shameem is another creator who has had a fair share of experience working with non-theatrical avenues. Her film *Aelay* skipped theatrical release for a direct-to-television premiere after which it found its audience on Netflix. Halitha had also helmed a segment in Prime Video's anthology series *Putham Pudhu Kaalai Vidiyaadhaa*. She states the professionalism of the OTT platforms sets them apart from a creator's standpoint. "When you're doing a feature film, you're the boss as you've got complete freedom over it. But you have little to no control over what happens to it after the end of production. What was promised as a theatrical film might end up having a direct OTT release or even a television premiere. But this does not happen with OTT platforms," says Halitha. Madhumita, who is currently helping the Hindi adaptation of the action drama *Angamaly Diaries*., adds how a filmmaker's love for the big screen will never be compromised due to the rise of streaming. "As a director, to sit and watch your film with a live audience is mind-blowing. OTT should be treated as another medium which allows you to unapologetically tell the story you want to tell without the pressures of a hero's value and numbers."

perspectives but also the time to soak in the idea and improve on it."

What sets streamers apart
A point that all directors make is that female filmmakers working on OTT platforms are not an indication that the medium is comparatively easier to crack. Director Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi, who made the ZEE5 web series *Paper Rocket*, says, "If your passion lies in cinema, being a filmmaker precedes gender, the



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Kani Kustruti was under the weather, bracing for another work trip to Kerala when the news broke. Her forthcoming film, Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light*, had been selected in competition at this year's Cannes Film Festival. It is the first time in 30 years that an Indian film will be vying for the prestigious Palme d'Or. "I was at home in Goa, where I currently live, when the messages started pouring in," Kani says. "I was busy packing for a shoot in Kerala, and a little tired and sick, or else I would've responded to each text." *All We Imagine...*'s selection marks a big occasion for Indian cinema. The country has, in recent years, risen in

profile and visibility at Cannes. Yet, despite films like *Masaan* and *All That Breathes* bringing home top honours, we have rarely basked in main competition glory. The only Indian film to ever win the Palme d'Or – then known as Grand Prix du Festival International du Film – is Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* (1946). Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen's films were fitfully nominated, with Sen's 1982 domestic help drama *Kharij* winning the Jury Prize. In 1994, Malayalam director

Kani Kustruti on the Cannes selection for her forthcoming film directed by Payal Kapadia

Shaji N Karun's rural-set classic *Swaham* was the last film from India to compete for the Palme d'Or. Serendipitously, *All We Imagine as Light* is the story of two Kerala nurses working in Mumbai, and both its leads, Kani and Ariyippu actor Divya Prabha, are Malayalis. In all, it has been an ecstatic few weeks for Kerala film fans, with the tidings from Cannes and movies like *Manjummel Boys*, *Aadujeevitham* and *Aavesham* breaking out wide.

Global appeal Kani Kustruti.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"I feel the more regional the treatment of a film is, the more it speaks an international language," observes Kani, who remembers watching *Swaham* in a theatre as a child. In *All We Imagine as Light*, Kani plays Prabha, the head nurse at a Mumbai hospital. She rooms with Anu, another nurse, who is younger. Prabha is estranged from her husband, while Anu is seeking privacy in the big city with her boyfriend. "One day, the two nurses go on a road trip to a beach town where the mystical forest becomes a space for their dreams to manifest," reads a plotline.

Payal Kapadia's documentary, A Night of Knowing Nothing (2021), won the Golden Eye at Cannes. Before that, her student short, Afternoon Clouds (2017), was selected in the cinéfondation category at the fest

Kani says she was initially approached by Payal to play the younger nurse. But the project took years to get off the ground, and she winded up with the role of Prabha. "Prabha is not someone I relate to," Kani states. "She is someone who carries a lot of baggage due to social expectations. Although she has found economic independence, her conscience is torn between her desires and what others want her to do." Kani is a rockstar on the Indian indie circuit. Her 2020 Malayalam film *Biriyaani* won a host of awards; more recently, her film *Girls Will Be Girls* premiered at Sundance. She has an equally prolific streaming career; this year alone, she has featured in high-profile shows like *Killer Soup*, *Poacher* and *Maharani Season 3*. So it is a surprise when she admits that, circumstances permitting, she avoids attending jazzy festival premieres or red carpets. "I get easily overwhelmed in crowds," she laughs. Will she attend Cannes, though? "I am shooting on those days. If it's possible, I will go. I understand it's a humongous deal, India competing at Cannes and all that. But more than anything, I would want to watch this film with the entire cast and crew that worked on it. The joy of creating something special together is still alive."



Adventure beckons
Vikram is known to go great lengths to get into character. That seems evident in his transformation for upcoming film *Thangalaan*, a glimpse of which was released yesterday, on the occasion of the actor's birthday. Produced by Jio Studios and Studio Green Films, *Thangalaan*, written and directed by Pa Ranjith, is set against the backdrop of the historic Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) in the early 1900s. It is reportedly a historical adventure that narrates the role of oppressed communities in the exploration of gold. In a statement, Pa Ranjith said, "*Thangalaan* is a vision to present a historical adventure story based on true events." Apart from Vikram, *Thangalaan* also stars Parvathy Thiruvothu, Malavika Mohanan, Pasupathi and Hari Krishnan Anbudurai. It has music by GV Prakash Kumar and is currently in the post-production stage.



Russia calling
Tamil filmmaker's Ram's upcoming film, *Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai*, is set to be screened at the Moscow International Film Festival. The movie, starring Nivin Pauly, premiered at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in February. The Moscow International Film Festival will be held from April 19 to April 26. Soori and Anjali are the other noted actors in the movie, which has music by Yuvan Shankar Raja. The makers are yet to make an official announcement about the release date.



Akshay Kumar joins Kannappa
Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar has joined the cast of Telugu star Vishnu Manchu's upcoming pan-Indian action movie, *Kannappa*. The film, which also stars Mohanlal, Prabhas and Nayanthara, will mark Akshay's debut in Telugu cinema. According to a statement from the makers, Akshay is set to join the film's shooting schedule in Hyderabad, "to capture crucial scenes, including a significant portion of the film's climax." Vishnu said in a statement, "It is thrilling to be shooting with Akshay sir. We will kick off the film's climax together. To have an actor of his mettle joining us is a huge honour. His addition makes *Kannappa* a truly pan-Indian film." Directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh, *Kannappa* features Vishnu as Bhakta Kannappa, an atheist and fearless warrior who became a devoted follower of Lord Shiva. *Kannappa* also stars Mohan Babu, Sarath Kumar, Brahmanandam, Preity Mukhundan, Madhoo, and Mukesh Rishi.