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THE HINDU

On building a socially-conscious game on ASHA workers **P2**

AUTOGRAPH RE-RELEASE:
BHARADWAJ LOOKS BACK **P4**



Chasing after the blue cap

It takes a village to raise a child, and a country to build a cricket team. Keeping India's win at the Women's World Cup in mind, we take a look at the rise in access for women playing the sport in Tamil Nadu

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On November 2, when Harmanpreet Singh's team of 11 hopefuls scripted India's cinematic victory in the Women's World Cup final against South Africa, something fundamentally changed in this country forever.

You perhaps discount the previous statement as hyperbole, yet the numbers cease to lie. An estimated 40,000 pairs of eyes were present at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai. JioHotstar's viewership on the day of the final was a staggering 185 million. Sharadha Sridharan, a BCCI-accredited Chennai-based cricket coach, says that through the breadth of the tournament, several fans including men who coach, asked her who would make for the best 11 players on the day of the final. "An interest like this has never been shown before," she said.

Prithi Ashwin, who spearheads Gen-Next Cricket Institute in Chennai, says she has been inundated with calls through the duration of the world cup. "At least six to seven calls since the win this morning," she wrote when asked what the response has been like.

Stakeholders across the cricket fraternity have stated that there has been a sharp rise in the number of women playing cricket in Tamil Nadu, particularly since 2017. With the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) setting up academies and sponsoring players and their coaching, cricket is now a viable career option for many aspiring women who have set their sights on the Indian jersey.

What resource crunch? According to data from the TNCA, there has been a 38% increase in the number of women who have

appeared for selections from the 2022-2023 (472 across districts) season till the latest 2025-2026 season (770). Although there was a drop in the 2024-2025 numbers from 725 to 700, it picked up again this year.

It was 2017 that sowed the seeds of this nation-wide rise though. That year, the Indian team which reached the final against England at the Lord's, suffered a nine-wicket loss. Yet, they captured the imagination of a number of Indians who finally acknowledged women playing

their parents. That's where the future of women's cricket truly lies," says Prithi.

The subsequent conduct of the Women's Premier League in 2023 helped cement this movement even though it was subject to immense trolling in its first edition.

Selectors, including former Indian captain Sudha Shah, say that there was once a time when people had no idea about the team having reached the finals in 2005 in South Africa. Now though, times have changed and the selection pool of players has increased. Earlier, elimination was the name of the game. "Now however the competition is tough. It is no longer a simple team to put together based on elimination," she says.

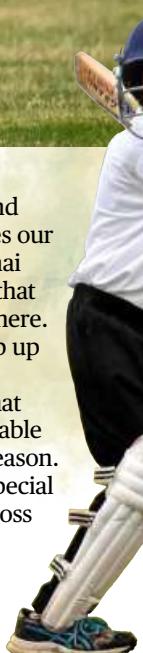
Aarti Sankaran, who has coached teams across age categories including the under-15, 19 and 23, says that she is mostly excited to see the proliferation of the sport from the districts. That is where much of the talent is from, she says, adding that teams from places like Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Madurai and Salem, have proven to have extraordinary talent as shown in the TNCA inter-district tournaments that usually doubles up as a talent scouting programme. Bhagwandas Rao, newly appointed secretary of the TNCA, says that the association has been in the process of conducting well-functioning and quality infrastructure at their satellite campuses in Tiruppur, Madurai, Theni, and Tiruchi, as well as residential

professional cricket. "The following summer, in 2018, we noticed a clear uptick. Our summer camp that year had more girls registering than ever before. The pandemic paused things for a while, but from 2021 onwards, we've seen steady momentum again. What's beautiful now is that the interest isn't just from older teenagers chasing State caps. We're seeing younger age groups, even eight-year-old girls walking in with

Women appearing for State-level selections have increased significantly	2022-23 472	2025-26 770
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facilities in Natham and Salem. "This is besides our ground here in Chennai and a top-notch gym that we have constructed here. The aim is to also amp up the experts including physiotherapists so that more people are available both during and off season. We've been hosting special camps for women across age categories where they are given a daily dearness allowance for taking part. Before selection to



Stumped! Girls and women across age groups practising cricket at AM Jain College's grounds in Chennai. AKHILA EASWARAN

the camp, they can train at all the grounds and the nets at the above locations," he says.

Bhagwandas says that the intention is to align with the National Cricket Association in order to ensure that great quality is provided to players across socio-economic strata. Safety is central too.

Aarti says that some remote and newly-formed districts might occasionally struggle to put together a team. Yet, it is just the start, she says. "There is pure grit and a need to prove themselves in a place where conveniences are not easily handed out. That is unique about the players from the district," she says.

Niranjan Nagarajan, former Indian cricketer, who has also been mentoring young cricketers today, says that there is another important reason why many young women are taking to cricket. "It is finally a viable profession," she says, adding that there is money to be made in the WPL now too. Those who do

well are absorbed by the Central and State governments too, she says.

Looking ahead

Currently, the roster of promising players include the likes of G Kamalini, S Anusha, and Akshara Srinivasan.

Bhagwandas says that the aim is to increase momentum so that there is more representation of Tamil Nadu in the Zonal and National teams. "But before that, ensure that your children join your neighbourhood cricket academies so they start young," he says. In order to do so, both Sudha Shah and Aarthi suggest that coaching begin at the school-level and special exceptions be given to children, particularly girls, who want to pursue this as a career. It is also imperative to support promising players who come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to ensure that the sport, often dubbed deeply expensive, is accessible to talent too.

Prithi suggests that having some structural changes including more tournaments and avenues for women to play, will help aid not just their game but also their income. "The ecosystem for men's cricket is also far more financially structured. A boy playing even fourth or fifth division cricket can earn a match fee. A man playing first division cricket can get full time employment. For girls, that pathway barely exists right now. That is why this World Cup win feels so crucial. It is not just about inspiring players, but also parents, academics and administrators to build a pipeline and create equal opportunities," she adds.

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STEP OUT



On the edge

Artist Raghava KK's ongoing exhibition at Ashvita's titled, Figuring the Edge, turns the canvas into a site of tension — between body and image, figure and ground, movement and stillness. Edges become metaphors for contact and transformation, where thick impasto and layered pigments pulse with energy. The abstract art forms blur art and life, surface and self. Known for his futuristic works spanning painting, AI, and performance, Raghava embodies a global spirit — continually probing the limits of perception, technology, and the human experience. With Figuring the Edge, Raghava returns to the Chennai art scene after two decades, where he invites the audience to stand on the edge of art itself and reinvent themselves. *Figuring the Edge* is on at Ashvita's, Mylapore, till December 15, from 11am to 7pm, Monday to Friday. Entry free.

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Like many Indian women, Priya Goswami's mother lived a dual life: balancing her professional obligations with unpaid domestic labour. "My mother is a senior secondary teacher, and I would see her wake up at 5am every day to finish household chores before she left for her work," recalls the Hong Kong-based award-winning filmmaker, feminist tech entrepreneur, and CEO of Mumkin, an AI-based application that enables difficult conversations around gender, culture and society.

The appreciation she gained from watching her mother juggle many responsibilities drew her to the stories of India's Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), says Priya, who has recently designed an immersive, web-based original game, SUPER ASHA, which highlights the challenges faced by these workers. "When I met some of the ASHA workers, I saw the resilience of the women who brought me up. For me, the ASHA workers' story is a tribute to my mother and women like my mother who manage impossible hours."

The latest version of SUPER ASHA was recently released at the Mozilla Festival in Barcelona as part of her multimedia exhibition titled Digital Bharat, which explored the impact of Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) on health and livelihood in India via photos, videos and of course, the game. The exhibition, an outcome of an 18-month fellowship programme offered by the Mozilla foundation that she is currently part of, largely focussed on stories revolving around the world's largest invisible workforce: women. "My biggest draw was to be able to go on the ground and highlight some of their stories," says Priya, who carried out extensive on-ground research, focussing on the lives of both ASHA



Press start, persist

Award-winning filmmaker and feminist tech entrepreneur Priya Goswami on how her new video game SUPER ASHA is a tribute to the world's largest invisible workforce — women

A feminist gaze (Left) Priya Goswami; (below) Super ASHA.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

SUPER ASHA

About
Play

workers and daily-wage labourers. While doing so, "The ASHA workers' story became an even bigger one for me," she says, expanding on the series of events which led up to the game.

In October last year, she bumped into Sumita Rani, general secretary of the Haryana ASHA Workers Union, as well as a couple of other ASHA workers at a gathering held at the Goethe-Institut in Delhi. The meeting made her realise that "these women were not just forming the backbone of India's healthcare system by providing community health services, but are now gathering and digitising health records of people across India," explains Priya, pointing out that despite their essential role, they are severely underpaid, earning anywhere between ₹5,500 and ₹10,000 per month and facing constant systemic neglect.

This meeting prompted her to think about several things, she says. "The question of the largest invisible workforce in the world, women, carrying on care labour, is one angle. But another angle is also that they are now doing data labour, and do not have the option of opting out of doing it."

Additionally, this direct on-ground deployment of community health workers, which results in data being collected for a pool or tank, also raises questions about the data itself: how it is being stored, used and regulated, she says. "There is no governance, policy-based framework in India. Also, health is specifically a State

subject," says Priya, who travelled to Haryana, Maharashtra, and Kerala to meet ASHA workers and understand the challenges they faced, some of which were very specific to the states in which they worked.

SUPER ASHA, she says, was born from a need to create an immersive experience of the lives of regular ASHA workers, essentially putting "people in the shoes of these workers and letting them experience the data and care labour," she says of SUPER ASHA, which was supported by the Mozilla Foundation and Mumkin.

The game, which is divided into time windows, has players become ASHA workers to help them understand how exhausting and complicated the job can be. "The whole idea is that you will be her every hour and experience what she's supposed to do," says Priya, who has drawn on "hard-hitting, true stories" gathered from the field to design the game.

SUPER ASHA, is currently available on the website seva-agents.com and is accessible to all, says Priya, who especially wants to target technologists and policy makers through this game. "They should be able to play the game and understand the constraints of this job."

Even better, of course, would be this: implementing policy based on the understanding that conducting data labour, such as logging records, changes the nature of care and support ASHA's offer. "The two should not be carried out by the same human apparatus because care setting is a very different context,"

Enter Sandman

Sudarshan Pattnaik now turns to canvas, tracing the rhythms of Nature



Etched in time A visitor at Sudarshan Pattnaik's exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Life is like sand. You can hold it in your hand, but it slips away. I believe that we must leave something behind that lasts and makes an impression, and paintings are my way of doing that," says Sudarshan Pattnaik, renowned sand artist, who has won several accolades including the Padma Shri and a Guinness World Record for creating the world's largest sandcastle.

The Puri-based artist was recently in Chennai, to present his third gallery show Nature's Rhythm: Sand and Sublime, at the Lalit Kala Akademi. Comprising over 50 art works, the exhibition brought together Sudarshan's two worlds – paintings and sand. Each work had some element of Nature, and he had used sand from his hometown Puri, where he first began doing sand art.

"I started doing sand art because we did not have resources to buy paints and brushes. Tourists used to see my art and appreciate it, so it inspired me to keep going," says Sudarshan, adding that he slowly grew into an artist despite the hardships of being a child labourer. "I used to work in a tea shop near the Jagannath temple, and the tourists would see my watercolour paintings there, but as I got famous for sand art, I left paintings behind. I want to bring that back now," he says.

The exhibition, which was previously displayed at Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, and then at Galleria VSB, New Delhi, explores the conflicts arising from human interventions. "All these paintings have a connection to Nature and climate change. This one is about the turtle migration and the impact of human life on Nature," he says pointing out to a painting depicting Olive Ridley turtles that migrate to India's East coast for nesting every year.

Sudarshan, who went on to become Lalit Kala Akademi Odisha's youngest president, says that art holds an important role of spreading positivity and raising awareness in society.



Street eats

Step into the neon glow and irresistible chaos of Asia's bustling night markets. Hyatt Regency's From Wok to Wow festival transforms the space into a sensory playground. Wander through recreated hawker lanes and taste street-style bao sliders, dan dan noodles, and scallion pancakes. From November 14 to 16 and from November 21 to 23. From 7pm to 11pm. The à la carte menu starts at ₹1,299.



Slice of heritage

Step into the heart of Thiruvanmiyur this weekend as the Mada streets comes alive with art, walks, and community spirit. From photo exhibitions to live sketching and temple walks, the two-day event invites Chennai citizens to rediscover the neighbourhood through stories, streets, and shared moments of creativity. On November 14 and 15. For details, follow projectthiruvanmiymadast on Instagram.

The latest in the much-loved picture books series by Ashok Rajagopal is about the gentle elephant's sleep troubles

Nap time for Gajapati Kulapati



Trunk call Ashok Rajagopal; (below) the new book.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND TULIKA PUBLISHERS

which the final draft is ready, he puts on his illustrator cap. "I treat it like it was written by someone else," he says, adding with a laugh that this gives him the liberty to "scold the author".

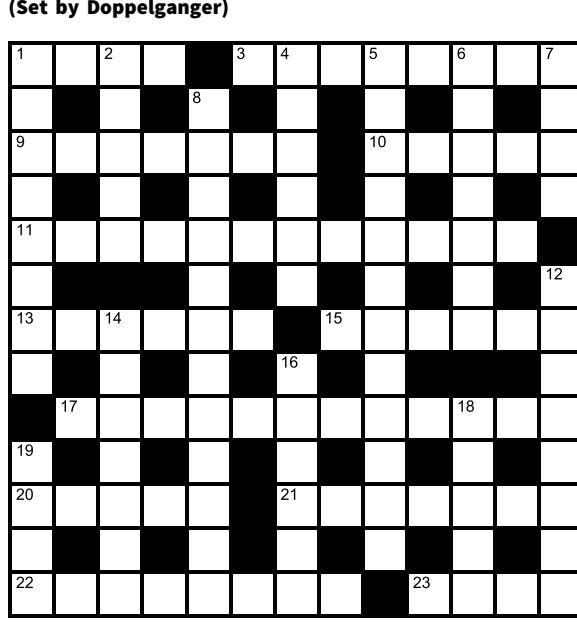
For, illustrators, who often work on tight deadlines, have to visualise the expansive world the writer creates. A task that Ashok says is not easy. Which is why his sympathies are always with the illustrator who has to bring to life scenes from words.

Ashok has been travelling across the country to participate in literary events the whole of this year, with hardly any time for him to create anything. "I'm not a great solo traveller," he says, adding that on the flip side, such events give him the opportunity to connect with children, his readers. Ashok's book readings are often raucous sessions in which the seemingly soft-spoken author turns into a completely different version of himself, much to the delight of the children in his company.

But he prefers the quiet life in the suburb of Korattur. "I've been here since 1978," he says. Long walks in his neighbourhood and the conversations with the friendly shopkeepers and tender coconut sellers are enough to make him feel content. The book's name too is a nod to his favourite Chennai suburb. "But there is no etymologic connection between [korattai which means snore] and Korattur," he laughs.

Gajapati Kulapati Korrrrrrr! is being launched on September 16, 10am, at Goethe-Institut, Nungambakkam. It is available for pre-order on www.tulikabooks.com

QUICK CROSSWORD #27 (Set by Doppelganger)



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

- 5 Industrial output (12)
- 6 Lucidity (7)
- 7 Provide with more than enough (4)
- 8 Terrorists _____ the vehicle to explode (5-7)
- 12 Military competition between nations (4,4)
- 14 Take by law of descent (7)
- 16 Wattle on a bird's head (6)
- 18 Argument (3-2)
- 19 Eldest son of Isaac (4)

Solution No. 27



- across
- 1 Type of Palm (4)
- 3 Frozen water breakers (8)
- 9 Type of lottery (7)
- 10 Abstract art using geometric shapes (2,3)
- 11 Composition for a small group of players (7,5)
- 13 One of two parts (6)
- 15 Tenacious person (6)
- 17 They have a verb and an adverb (7,5)
- 20 Lay bare (5)
- 21 Plant of nightshade family (7)
- 22 In accord with latest ideas (2-4)
- 23 Poker stake (4)
- down
- 1 Underground cemetery (8)
- 2 Punctuation mark (5)
- 4 Presides over (6)
- 5 Industrial output (12)
- 6 Lucidity (7)
- 7 Provide with more than enough (4)
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Akila Kannadasan

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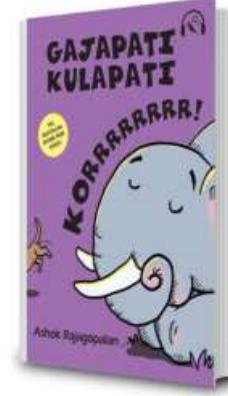
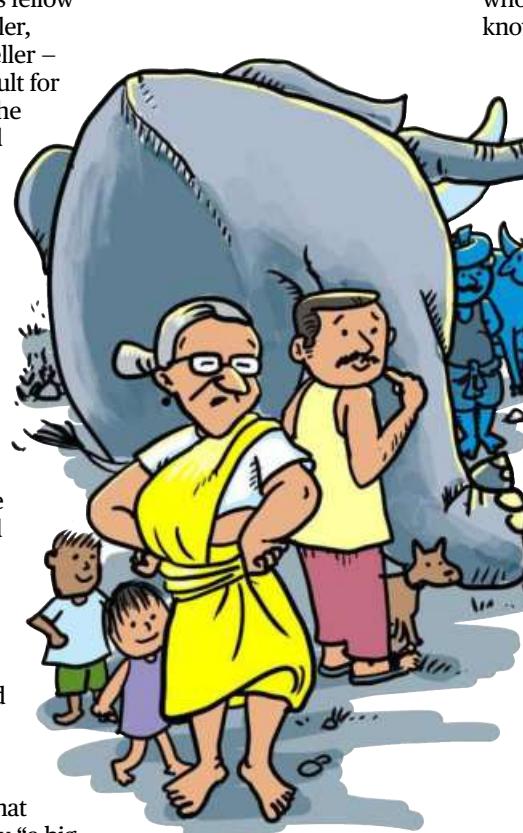
Gajapati Kulapati, the friendly elephant loved by all in the village he inhabits, is facing a problem. He is unable to sleep. His fellow villagers – the flower-seller, postman, and banana-seller – make it even more difficult for him to doze away. Does he succeed in getting sound sleep? Illustrator-writer Ashok Rajagopal's latest in the much-loved picture book series, titled *Gajapati Kulapati Korrrrrrr!* by Tulika Publishers, is about the gentle elephant's misadventures with sleep.

This is the sixth Gajapati Kulapati picture book and the 61-year-old Ashok's most popular character yet. The last one, *Little Gajapati Kulapati Kweeeee* came out in January 2024. While he initially created the character as something that would make children laugh, he realised over the years that the elephant was actually "a big

child". "Which is why mothers like to read the books to their children," says the Chennai-based Ashok, adding: "He represents their children."

From rejoicing when school announces a rain holiday, to hating baths, playing in the mud and having tummy troubles, the elephant symbolises children. This realisation helped Ashok craft the latest title since trouble sleeping is universal during childhood, especially in the early years. "I have a neighbour who has a two-year-old and know the lengths parents go to put their child to bed on time," he says.

Ashok, who has been illustrating since 1989, says that he first visualised a book "like a movie". He then sets out to writing it. After to-and-fro with editors following



the whole of this year, with hardly any time for him to create anything. "I'm not a great solo traveller," he says, adding that on the flip side, such events give him the opportunity to connect with children, his readers. Ashok's book readings are often raucous sessions in which the seemingly soft-spoken author turns into a completely different version of himself, much to the delight of the children in his company.

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Gajapati Kulapati Korrrrrrr! is being launched on September 16, 10am, at Goethe-Institut, Nungambakkam. It is available for pre-order on www.tulikabooks.com

Embers and flames

What intense moments of familial drama lead to a 15-year-old boy arriving at a burns ward? Find out at author Krupa Ge's book release on November 16

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Chennai-based author Krupa Ge's latest novel *Burns Boy* (Context) finds many ways to slip in the city through its many fast-paced pages. Familiar bus routes like 5E, mentions of floral printed sarees from Garden Vareli, the allure of the Vandulur Zoo, and the city's unrelenting heat, are characters, just as familiar as the ones in the book.

In this drama surrounding a boy admitted to a burns ward, a writer-mother, and a young impressionable sister, one is immersed and finds themselves hurrying to push past the 120-odd pages, wondering if all is truly going to be well in this family drama full of secrets, suspense, sequestering, and quiet solidarity.

"I'm not able to dream up a story in another place as clearly as I have been able to do it with Chennai in the background. I have taken the bus everywhere, and I used to go to university by the MRTS train. I am also trying to see how I can incorporate the city without feeling like I am just writing about it and so I set out to recreate the feeling of being in a space. Be it Chennai today or of the 1990s. And even Manipal," she says.

It is why her official book launch is happening in the city with a dramatised reading directed by her brother Balajee Ge, featuring artistes Mrithula Chetlur, Rajiv Rajaram, and Lakshmi Priyaa on November 16 at Vinyl and Brew. Krupa, a former journalist, has already authored two books – *What We Know About Her (Context)*, and *Rivers Remember (Context)*, besides co-authoring Carnatic musician Sanjay Subrahmanyam's autobiography *On That Note (Westland Non-Fiction)*. Her latest, *Burns Boy*, she says, was a short story that has been brewing since 2015. In it, lies a tale of familial truths that we refuse to admit. Do we assign blame on a single parent, a child who knows a secret, or a boy, who is well, just a boy at the cusp of manhood?

"After a writing workshop with author Anita



A dramatised reading of *Burns Boy* will take place on November 16 at Vinyl and Brew at 4pm. This will be followed by a conversation between the author and photographer Vinay Aravind.



Spinning yarn (Above) Cover of *Burns Boy*; and (inset) Author Krupa Ge. VINAY ARAVIND AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nair, I realised that I had this story that was inside of me and that I needed to be done with it. While I am more comfortable writing about women, it was challenging to tell this story from a young man's perspective. I forced myself to read outside my comfort zone to write this novel," she says.

She adds that an earnest attempt was made to explore the tenderness between these complex relationships that mothers and sons, and mothers and daughters share independently. Krupa says that she also wanted to show a woman attempting a living and supporting herself through art, in this case, writing. Is it perhaps because she is inspired by the writings of authors like Japanese writer Yōko Ogawa and Italian author Elena Ferrante?

Authors do not tell people how to read their books but if there is a takeaway, what would she like for it to be? "I think it would be to say that families are messed up but people are inadvertently happy and find a way to be in each other's lives," she says. She knows this to be true in her own life. After all, her inbox now has family send her pictures of themselves from Higginbothams with the book in hand, and a proud smile on their faces.

A dramatised reading of *Burns Boy* will take place on November 16 at Vinyl and Brew at 4pm. This will be followed by a conversation between the author and photographer Vinay Aravind.



What's got your goat An array of dishes at Jolly Indian, now at CP Ramaswamy Road. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



welcome addition of chicken chukka.

Jolly Indian's menu has favourites such as butter chicken, dal makhni, nalli nihari, prawn moilee and egg curry, alongside its more inventive fare like kadhi-style lotus stem fritters and a palak-paneer-inspired spinach burrata. To enable their extensive list of curries to remain the hero, the rice pairings are kept light and easy.

We settle on some flaky onion lacha parathas and pesto and parmesan naan, both soft and doused in a generous amount of ghee. The Pandra Road butter chicken has chicken in thick, creamy makhni gravy and goes perfectly well with the naans and parathas, but we decide to be adventurous and also dip the breads in some Jolly kari kozhambu, a gongura-mutton inspired dish that has mutton cooked to perfection in a tangy, and not-to-spicy gravy. Jolly

Indian's take on aloo gobi comes highly recommended by

Gopalsami Mani, partner-chef BORN, where confit potato and charred cauliflower comes plated on a curry sauce. If you choose to eschew the dals and want a mild, comfort subzi, this is a great pick.

We might have started the evening with some cutting chai but we end the meal with the cold South Indian coffee, a creamy coffee flavoured mousse in a glass. We are told that the restaurant will soon have waiters bring over snacks such as peanut masala at the start of the meal, and cutting chai and coffee at the end, much like the vendors who sing-song their way through train carriages. This meal is on its way towards becoming a jolly experience.

Their newspaper-style menu encompassing dishes from both the North and the South has the classics, as well as inventive reimaging.

Jolly Indian is at CP Ramaswamy Road and is currently open for dinner. A meal for two is priced at ₹1,800.

Retro masala

Hajmola and poppins-inspired mocktails, chaat, the classics and inventive curries, now at Jolly Indian

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A waiter balancing cups of steaming hot cutting chai threads his way between tables toward us at Jolly Indian, Chennai's newest Indian restaurant. We have just walked in through a reception fashioned like a retro train coupe, but not before beating a drum at the entrance, announcing our arrival. From the get-go, the 65-seater Jolly Indian is sure of one thing: nostalgia and retro-Indian charm will go hand in hand with the menu.

"Our menu is a combination of the classics you would typically get in an Indian restaurant, and some other dishes with a fun twist to it. This is not fusion, but just some flavour combinations we think work well," says Japtej Ahluwalia, co-founder, BORN (Beyond Ordinary Restaurants and Nosh).

After the Double Roti relaunch

and opening of Double Dashi and Sordt earlier this year, did Indian food seem like a natural progression? "We wanted to work on a fun-dining restaurant over a fine-dining one," says Manoj Padmanabhan, co-founder, BORN, of Jolly Indian. Their newspaper-style menu encompassing dishes from both the North and the South has the classics of course, as well as inventive reimaginings under separate sections; regular or jolly.

"The papdi and palak patta chaats are the OGs and the smoked pineapple chaat and the lotus stem bhel are our OMGs," Manoj laughs.

We begin our meal with the lamb rasaa, a soup that is light, flavourful. The smoked pineapple chaat which follows is served in a pull-me-up cake fashion. The corn salsa, pineapple and froyo in this chaat however feels like an odd mix and is a tad too sweet. While the asparagus fingers, with a parmesan aioli and chilli is a

better starter, Jolly Indian's meat appetisers prove to be the stars of the meal.

True to its name, the lamb galouti and the yam galouti kebabs are melt-in-the-mouth and we dig in pâté style, spreading the minced meat on thin sourdough slices. The flavours are perfectly complimented by the crunchy sourdough. From the jolly side of the menu, I try the Chettinadu shepherd's pie with some hesitation, as one does with a dish that sounds needlessly experimental but this emerges a favourite; the spicy potato mash is much like a potato masala made in most South-Indian homes and it has the very

Their newspaper-style menu encompassing dishes from both the North and the South has the classics, as well as inventive reimaging.

Melodic memories
Take a trip down memory lane as Aarohi Charitable Trust presents Flashback, a musical evening celebrating five decades of film melodies. From the soulful tunes of the 1950s, to chartbusters of the 2000s, experience the nostalgia of Hindi and South Indian cinema brought to life by Aarohi's ensemble and Rafi's Ultimate Cine Orchestra on November 15, from 6pm onwards at Museum Theatre, Egmore. Donor passes on mdnd.in.



Secret tunes
Looking to explore new music and artists? Head to Sofar Chennai's last intimate secret concert of the year on November 16, 6.30pm. Get up close and personal with artists and meet like-minded music fans at a cool local spot. Details about the artiste and venue will be announced 36 hours before the performance to only those attending. Book your tickets on sofarsounds.com at ₹1,500.

One with the ingredients

The Ekaa X Raintree popup is packed with flavours, surprises, and drama

Dinner rush (Clockwise from extreme right) Co-founders of Ekaa, Sagar Neve, and Chef Niyati Rao; dishes from Ekaa; and a drink from Dwadash, their cocktail menu. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

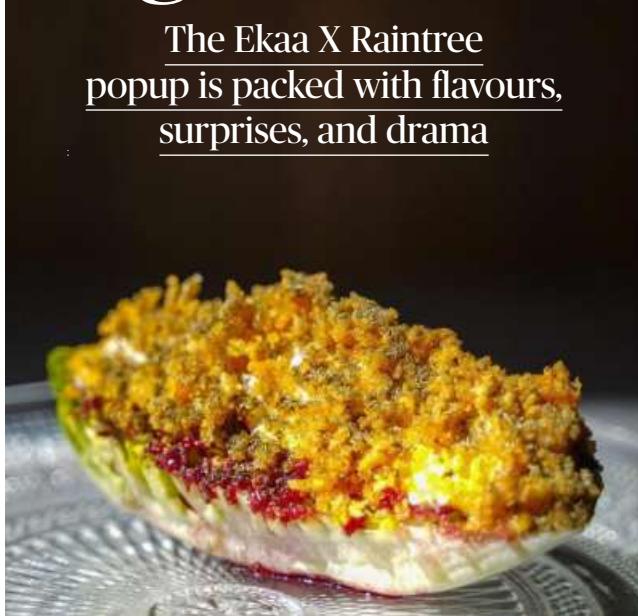


Priyadarshini Paitandy
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At Mumbai's famed restaurant Ekaa, the team follows one rule: creating something new. "If I see a tomato, I'll think of a hundred ways of making something with it which has not been done before," says Chef Niyati Rao, partner and head chef of Ekaa.

The restaurant which opened its doors in Mumbai in 2021 is bringing its ingredient-centric flavours to Chennai this week. This is Ekaa's first ever popup here and the venue is The Raintree St Mary's Road.

The dinner features an eight-course menu. "At Ekaa (Mumbai) this is our sixth tasting menu. We are bringing our favourites from our six menus. It has a lot of storytelling and emotions, and that makes it so special,"



she says, adding, "It was important to make sure our favourites paired well with each other. They had to go well and not clash." But finalising the menu took time – sifting through six menus and picking out only eight meant arguments, a lot of discussions and upset chefs (including herself, she says) as some of the dishes did not make it. "We will bring them next time," she smiles.

The menu is cuisine-agnostic which means you will find diverse flavours that are not restricted to one country, culture etc. "We have

become masters at procuring ingredients, be it sea urchin, and Indian durian from the South of India, or trout eggs from Kashmir," says Niyati, adding that a lot of the times her guests are unaware of these being available in India.

Niyati wants to keep the courses under wraps, so the diner gets to experience the surprise and drama that comes with every course at Ekaa. But she gives a little teaser: Butter beer... butter beer that you can eat, to be precise. Each bite brings out a whisky-caramel-like flavour. "There's an illusion of whisky without adding



menu, Dwadash which means 12 in Sanskrit – a nod to Ekaa's 12-course cocktail tasting menu based on 12 botanicals. Four of these will be available here during the two-day popup.

Ekaa is not new to popups. It did its first one as a fledgling, four months after launching. What is interesting, Niyati says, is the fact that restaurant popups are not limited to metropolitan cities anymore. "We recently did one in Bhopal and one in Madurai."

She believes, every popup helps create new relationships and learnings as you work with different kitchens and adapt their style of working and vice versa. Adds Niyati, "We go to places where people are open and accepting of something new and adventurous."

The Ekaa X Raintree popup will take place on November 14 and 15, from 7.30pm onwards. The meal is priced at ₹5,999 plus taxes. For reservations, call 7824000171.



We are bringing our favourites from our six menus. It has a lot of storytelling and emotions, and that makes it so special



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**Love is in the air**

What connects late Carnatic violinist Kumbakonam Rajamanickam Pillai and the latest Tamil romantic film *Aaromaley*? The film has been directed by Sarang, who is the son of veteran Tamil actor Thyagu, and the great grandson of the renowned Carnatic musician. Starring Kishen Das, Harshath Khan, Shivathmika Rajesh and VTV Ganesh in main roles, this recently-released film revolves around the themes of love and friendship. "We consciously zeroed in on this genre, because we have seen a lot of films dealing with violence and guns in recent times," says Sarang, whose favourite genre is romance: his favourites are *Alaiyayutha, 500 days of Summer* and *Vinaithaandi Varuvaya*. "The positive response to *Aaromaley* gives me a lot of hope to work harder on my next script."

**A new vision**

Producer Guneet Monga Kapoor's Sikhya Entertainment has announced its first Tamil feature film with acclaimed filmmaker Karthik Subbaraj. Sikhya Entertainment — the Oscar-winning studio behind *The Elephant Whisperers* and the National Award-winning *Kathal* — has teamed up with the filmmaker, who has delivered a string of hits including *Pizza, Jigarthanda* and *Petta*. Karthik Subbaraj called the collaboration "special and deeply personal." He added, "Their films align with the kind of artistic vision I strive for. This story is very close to my heart."

**All is well**

Looking for a fun way to celebrate the upcoming Children's Day? You could catch a Tamil children's film titled *Kinaru*, which hits screens on November 14. This film, produced by Madras Stories and directed by Harikumaran, follows four nine-year-olds who are forbidden from playing near a village well and hence, set out to dig a new well themselves. Starring Kanishkumar, Vivek Prasanna, Manojkannan, Ashwin and Sri Hariharan in key roles, the 110-minute movie has also bagged multiple international honours, including being christened an award winner at the Pegasus Film Festival 2024.

**Watch out for Indrans**

If you have watched a lot of Malayalam films in recent times, especially post the pandemic, you will be aware of actor Indrans. This popular actor and former costume designer has donned a new look in Malayalam film *Station 5*, currently streaming on Manorama Max. He portrays a Tamil-speaking character called Chevambai in the film, which also stars Priyamvada Krishnan, Puthirajinte Ri Vilayath and Santhosh Keezhattoor, among others. Prasanth Kanathur, who has earlier made short films and a documentary, marks his directorial debut with *Station 5*, which has been shot by Prathap Nair and has edited by Saleesh Lal.



The past comes alive

With Cheran's 2004 Tamil hit *Autograph* re-releasing this week, we take a trip down memory lane with its music composer, Bharadwaj

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In front of a packed audience in Chennai's Museum Theatre last week, Bharadwaj started singing.

He sang just a couple of lines from his popular 'Nyabagam Varuthey' from Cheran's *Autograph* (2004) — and had the whole audience captivated.

What Bharadwaj did recently at the ICAN Awards 2025 ceremony was rekindle nostalgia with one of his most popular songs from a superhit Tamil film that, ironically, was all about nostalgia.

That past hit is being served again for audiences. With *Autograph* re-releasing this week — replete with fresh visuals and what looks like a makeover — reminiscence is back in flavour.

Making his presence felt again is music composer Bharadwaj, who has worked in Tamil cinema for three decades and composed several superhits.

Autograph is close to his heart and he is thrilled that it is being re-released now. "It is special. I remember the time when we sat down to compose 'Nyabagam Varuthey'... though film music consists of exaggeration, we wanted this particular track to reflect reality. We wanted anyone hearing this track to remember their past."

And that is exactly why when Bharadwaj sings this particular track in concerts, the audiences feel a tug at their heartstrings. "I would say *Autograph* is one of those movies that gave me extensive mileage outside the movie industry as well, because people reflected on their own lives while watching and hearing the music," explains Bharadwaj,

who also had the popular motivational track 'Ovvvaru Pookalume' and other significant tracks in the album.

A musical path

Autograph might be in the spotlight now, but if you ask Ramani Ramaswamy aka Bharadwaj to reminisce about his life, you'll have to begin in Delhi. There, Bharadwaj grew up studying Accountancy; he is a Chartered Accountant. But the passion to do something big in music was always gnawing at him, which led him to explore Chennai's film music scene. "Chennai was ruled by music stalwarts like Ilaiyaraaja, AR Rahman, Deva and Vidyasagar. In fact, it had the greatest musical talents in India, which made me wonder at times: what exactly was I doing here? How do I stand out?"

Self motivation helped. "I

**New twist**

Back in 2004, when Cheran wanted to make *Autograph*, he approached several top heroes who all declined it due to various reasons. An undeterred Cheran ended up playing the lead role himself, a decision that turned out to be beneficial, with the film doing well at the box office. For the film's re-release this week, Cheran has made a few tweaks to the original material for it to appeal to today's audiences. The film's duration has been reduced by 15 minutes, apart from the material undergoing colour correction and the sound being presented in Dolby Atmos.

Does he listen to a lot of Tamil songs today? "Being an analytical person, I have always believed that you should have a strong reason to make a song. Today, the reason for a track is only to give you hook steps for Instagram," he states, "Without belittling the younger composers of today, I feel that what we regarded as a film song is not the same anymore. Today's songs support more of movement and dance rather than explore aspects of life and soul. Having said that, musicians have to cater to what sells at the moment." So, who is his current favourite? "I love Anirudh's work."

Bharadwaj is looking forward to the next year, in which he promises some exciting concerts. "Whenever I travel, I keep meeting the Tamil diaspora who have kind things to say about my work and the impact that it had on them. That gives me great joy."

Beyond the score

All about GV Prakash's interesting line-up of projects

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Fresh off from winning a National Award for his music direction for the Tamil film *Vaathi*, music composer, actor and producer GV Prakash has an exciting slew of films up for release both as composer and actor.

During a recent interaction at *The Hindu*, he said that he has completed filming for four films which are slated for release. "Directed by Pa. Ranjith's longtime assistant Moses, I will be starring alongside Sreenath Bhasi which will be Neelam Productions' next release after *Bison Kaalamadaan*. I am also producing and starring in Selvaraghavan's next film *Mental Manadhil*, which is a crazy love story. After a long time, he is getting back to love stories," he said.

Also up for release are a coming-of-age film that explores a father-son bond, and a horror-fantasy film called *Immortal*, which revolves around a girl who never ages and has lived for thousands of years. "All four films are different from each other, and I am very excited," he said.

Having worked on the music for several films starring actor Dhanush, Prakash has in the last year also scored the music for two Dhanush-backed films, *Nilavukku Enmel Ennadi Kobam and Idli Kadai*. "Our friendship started when I met him at the *Polladhavan* audio launch and we once again came together with director Vetrimaaran to work on *Aadukalam*, which took us to another level of recognition," he recalled.

He reflected on his creative partnership with Dhanush, and said that this was never something they had planned, but that they compliment each other. "We have similar journeys, but seem to be on parallel roads. There is a moment when we join, and some magic happens." Prakash said, of Dhanush.

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