



# metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Get ready for colour, conversations and creative chaos at the Madras Art Weekend **P2**

SONGS AND SCALES TAKE STAGE THIS SEASON **P5**



**Portrait of the past** (Clockwise from left) Richard O'Connor and Harry Maclure; Helena and Bryan Peppin; the famed Shamrocks hockey team; Anglo-Indians manned the colonial Railways; and Noel 'Bully' Netto jiving. JOHAN SATHYADAS AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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For more than a century now, the row villas of Veteran Lines in Pallavaram have held out against time and tide. Some villas still have flagstone floors, cavernous rooms and resident reptiles that have made themselves comfortable in the wood pile behind the cook house. But it is the enduring friendships and languid evenings of music from the old Murphy radio, dance and Christmas toasts that still echo through the verandas as I meet Harry Maclure, Richard O'Connor and the Peppins, Bryan and Helena, outside their house Erehwon.

A legacy of colonialism in India, the term Anglo-Indian has changed to now denote people of mixed lineage dating back to a time when European powers moved from commerce to conquest and intermarried with the natives. "A people," as the Anglo-Indian novelist Allan Sealy wrote, "who spoke their father's tongue and ate their mother's salt". The community that thrived under the British was left in a twilight zone when they exited in 1947. Over the past 79 years, Anglo-Indians have migrated in droves and it is their memory that Harry and Richard have worked to keep alive for two decades now.

**A unique identity**  
"I was raised in Trichinopoly," says Bryan, who retired as head, department of English Literature, New College, in a clipped accent. "My entire world was Anglo-Indian, I knew little beyond it till I joined college. It drove me to question the insider-outsider complex and the stereotyping of the community," says Bryan, who has written many books about the world he grew up in.  
"Today, the community is more Indian than Anglo," he says, adding that Anglo-Indians have managed to surmount the challenge of the local language with their unique dialect. "Tamil Nadu still boasts the largest number of Anglo-Indians in the country. But, of course, there is a sense of loss about what was once dear and familiar."  
Bryan keeps that world alive through the house he and Helena, a retired Superintendent of Customs and Central Excise, live in. "When we bought this

## Voices on the veranda

**Ahead of the 13th World Anglo-Indian Reunion** in January 2026, Chennai's Anglo-Indian community is working on keeping its stories alive — from restoring old Pallavaram villas to maintaining digital archives



house, there was a sizeable number of Anglo-Indians here. We often went fishing in the rivulet close by," he says.

The shouts of 'C'mon boy! as generations of young Anglo-Indians dribbled their way to hockey glory have somewhat faded, but events like the recent Monsoon Ball and the upcoming Christmas Ball featuring dances and a festive spread of mutton ball curry and devil's chutney feels like an excursion back in time.

It is this old-world nostalgia that Harry Maclure, writer-director, founder, Anglo-Ink Books and editor of the magazine *Anglos In the Wind* that examines issues of the diaspora, brings to light in his work. Harry's own story has been one of struggle, spurred by the robust optimism that is a hallmark of his community.

"My great great-grandfather came from Aberdeen. I'm the youngest of a large family that moved to Madras from Trichy when my father retired from the Railways,

bidding a fond farewell to the wonderful camaraderie and the 128-year-old Railway Institute where the Christmas Ball was a hoary tradition."

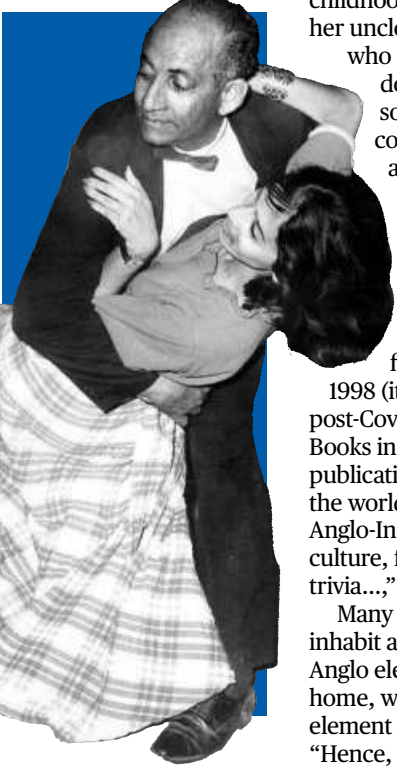
Harry grew up wanting to study English Literature and become a journalist, but started off as a waiter at the Taj Coromandel at 18. But soon, wanderlust led him to the Gulf and by the late 1980s Harry found himself a job in Kuwait. When the Iraqi invasion triggered the Gulf War, Harry became a penniless refugee arriving back in India with just his passport, jeans and a pair of slippers.

"But had I not come back I would've never found my calling. I started drawing cartoons for a Tamil magazine and it's around this time that I found Jillian, my wife and childhood friend. It was her uncle, Leslie D'Souza, who asked me 'why don't you do something for our community? Maybe, a magazine?' And for three years, he gave me seed money."

*AITW*, a quarterly magazine, was first published in 1998 (it turned digital post-Covid) and Anglo-Ink Books in 2005. "The publication travels across the world, covering Anglo-Indian history and culture, fiction, interviews, trivia..." says Harry.

Many of *AITW*'s readers inhabit a world where the Anglo element is fading at home, while the Indian element is fading abroad. "Hence, there is a quest to understand and trace one's ancestry," says Harry, adding that many from the diaspora want to embark on this journey.

In this, Harry found a twin soul in Richard O'Connor, Assistant Commissioner, Customs. "I have a job, and then I have my passion," says Richard, whose great-grandfather, an Irishman, made landfall



**We still hope to do a round-up of the railway colonies, like Jolarpet, which were once peopled by us: there is an urgency as time is running out**

RICHARD O'CONNOR

in India nearly 110 years ago. "I'm a Madras boy — grew up in the Anglo-Indian haunts of Royapettah and Vepery and now live in St Thomas Mount."

As the neighbourhood, once flooded with members of the community emptied out, Richard and Harry decided to document the last of Chennai's Anglo-Indians in their own localities.

With Richard as the primary storyteller the series of documentaries moved from Santhome, Royapuram, Vepery, St Thomas Mount, Pallavaram, Perambur, Pudupet, Madhavaram, and more, interviewing a cross-section of people, still living a life of gentility fraying at the edges. The YouTube series that was filmed first in 2016, is ongoing and Richard hopes to make a coffee table book of it.

"At work I found myself to be an oddball; I realised how wonderful and generous our culture was. And then I happened to meet Harry. We ended up doing an *AITW* special on hockey. And that was an opus — the Anglo-Indian was to hockey what the Brazilian is to football. And from there it went on to helping people find lost graves and travelling to McCluskieganj

that has its own place in our history. We still hope to do a round-up of the railway colonies, like Jolarpet, which were once peopled by us; there is an urgency as time is running out. Some places like Whitefield and Kolar could've been preserved," says Richard, wistfully.

Not everything is about looking back. With an active All India Anglo-Indian Association that celebrates its centenary in 2026 and the upcoming world reunion in Kochi in January, the trio agrees that "the youngsters are doing a great job at preserving the Anglo-Indian way of life. We are not keen on a permanent memorial but maybe a digital space that people interested in us can look up".

Still speaking, we walk under the trees creaking with the weight of history to the house of Melanie D'Nazareth where Harry and Richard pose for photos, in a setting much like the sepia pictures at Erehwon. The place of the Anglo-Indian in the Indian cultural world may have changed but the old, weathered house remains a tenderly written love letter to the numerous lives they have touched.

### STEPOUT



#### Feminist stage

Bangalore's Sandbox Collective joins Berlin's acclaimed She She Pop for the first time in the group's 35-year history, bringing their award-winning production *Wait To Be Seated*, to Indian audiences. The performance examines hospitality through a mix of real and farcical scenes. The artistes question who benefits from the rules of hospitality, what remains when formalities fall away, and how gender, race, and colonial histories shape social encounters. By foregrounding diversity and multiple perspectives, the collectives create a liminal space where identities can be acknowledged and new connections formed.  
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Colouring Madras (Right) Artworks by Jayasri Burman; (below) and the late Jamini Roy. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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Chennai is about to swap its filter coffee for a shot of creative adrenaline as Madras Art Weekend returns with its fourth edition from December 3 to 6, featuring a curated celebration of contemporary art, design and creative dialogue. Spread across iconic venues – from the halls of Taj Coromandel to the historic charm of the British Deputy High Commission and the cultural enclave of Amethyst – this four-day festival brings together galleries, artists, designers, thinkers, institutions, and patrons to celebrate the many languages of Indian art.

This year's theme, Madras Reimagined, aims to celebrate the city's heritage landmarks, everyday rituals, and living traditions. With an impressive line-up of galleries, including Dhoomimal Gallery, Art & Soul, Gallery G, Art Magnum, Sarala Art Centre, DakshinaChitra Museum, and more, it brings together a cultural movement – one that emphasises collaboration, conversation, and new ways of expressing art.

Upasana Asrani, founder, Madras Art Weekend, shares, "Our focus this year is on examining Chennai's culture and traditions through both historical and futuristic perspectives. The theme highlights the many elements that form

# Art takes Chennai

The four-day Madras Art Weekend brings together galleries, artists, designers, thinkers and patrons to celebrate the many languages of Indian art

the very fabric of Chennai's cultural identity and brings them to the forefront."

Madras Art Weekend opened on December 3, with an invite-only preview at Taj Coromandel, offering patrons and guests the first look at the curated gallery showcase. The evening continued with the first of several panel conversations – The Impact of Private and Public Patronage, moderated by Deepali Goyal and featuring industry leaders such as Amit Khanna of Amaya Ventures, Siddharth Somaiya of Somaiya School of Art, Rhea Kuruvilla of Frieze VIP Consultant and Narayan

Lakshman, Opinion Editor, *The Hindu*. The session explored how public and private patronage shape the arts and cultural ecosystem.

The night continued at the British Deputy High Commission, where Rosella Stephen, Editor, *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*, moderated, The Designer as Disrupter, with a panel that includes designer Tahir Sultan, multidisciplinary designer Nimish Shah, researcher and curator Kallol Datta and designer Vivek Karunakaran. The panel explored the evolving relationship between artistic expression and design innovation.

The day also saw an indigo installation by 11.11 / eleven eleven, a craft-driven, natural-dye fashion house at the Collage, Rutland Gate. The showcase marked the debut of the brand's plant-based Indigo Paste, an innovation that enables printing and large-format mark-making without the use of chemicals, expanding the possibilities of natural dye artistry. Select pieces from this activation will remain on display through Madras Art Weekend until December 6.

The second day, December 4, opens with Curatorial Cartography, a public event at the Taj Coromandel, moderated by Pallavi Khandelwal, featuring directors and artists from Art & Soul, Art Magnum and Dhoomimal Gallery.

Later in the afternoon, design takes centrestage with Design Through Our Lens. Moderated by Samir Wadekar, the panel features founders of design studios across India, such as Sachin Gupta (Beyond Designs), Farah Ahmed (FADD Studio), Faisal Manzur (FMDS) and Shruti Reddy (Ceebros). The conversation foregrounds interior design as a form of storytelling, where objects, materials and spaces create their own narrative pulse.

The evening will feature Truths Our Clothes Told Us, an exclusive walkthrough by Kallol Datta at the Raw Mango store. Guests will engage with the designer's approach to fashion as an art form.

December 5, will feature a panel titled Art of Restoration at Taj Coromandel, where Pradeep Chakravarthy will be in dialogue with architect Abha Narain, together they unpack what it means to preserve heritage in an urban world that is constantly rushing towards the new. The day culminates with a poetic performance by multidisciplinary artist Lekha Washington, titled Unbecoming or Ways to Survive the Apocalypse. Hosted at Amethyst's Wild Garden Café, this intimate evening will showcase an atmospheric performance blending text, movement and imagination.

The weekend, December 6, concludes with a full-day walkthrough of the gallery spaces at Taj Coromandel, offering students, educators and the general public a guided exploration of the artworks on display.

The Madras Art Weekend is on till December 6, at Taj Coromandel. Registration at [urbanaut.app](#). Find the complete schedule @[madrasartweekend on Instagram](#)

## Here we come a-carolling

December arrives with its nip in the air and a spirit of joy that is warm and rich like plum cake. Here's a list of carol concerts, open to all, that ushers in the season of peace and goodwill across the city.



**December 7:** The Ecumenical Carol Concert at Arulnathar Lutheran church, Kellys, opens a fortnight of carol singing at 6pm.

**December 12:** Madras Christian College will resound to the sounds of the Heber Chapel Carol Concert at its Tambaram campus at 6.30pm. ● The Minstrels presents its 46th Christmas carol concert titled Echoes of Christmas Day at St Matthias' church, Vepery at 6.15pm. Among the choirs that feature are Dhvani, Rolling Tones, Voyz Male and Bella Voci.

**December 14:** The Union Christian Association presents Gloria, a carol concert also featuring Celestial Voices, The Faithfarers and St Thomas Orthodox Cathedral Choir at the UCA auditorium, Nowroji Road, Chetpet at 6pm.

● CSI Redeemer's church, Kilpauk, presents its annual Christmas concert at 6pm.

**December 16:** The Madras Christian College Alumni Carol Concert will be held at MCC School grounds, Chetpet at 6.30pm.

**December 20:** The Madras Musical Association's Carols by Candlelight will be held at the Women's Christian College auditorium, College Road at 6.30pm.

**December 21:** The carol services of the Emmanuel Methodist Church, Vepery, and St Andrew's 'The Kirk', will be held at their respective venues at 6pm.



## A box of Christmas joy

Celebrate the magic of Christmas with Just Gateaux's Sweet Holiday Edition Hamper, filled with festive treats such as traditional Christmas fruit cake, pistachio snowball cookies, red velvet cream cheese brownie, berry jam, hot chocolate mix, and a festive candle priced at ₹1,850. You can also order the Christmas fruit cake separately at ₹675 for 500 grams. Shipped across India. To pre-book your orders, call 9061068219.



## A glimpse of Pashmina heritage

Master weaver Firdose Ahmad Jan, an eighth-generation artisan from Srinagar, will deliver a talk on the techniques and symbolism behind authentic Kashmiri pashmina. Known for its intricate embroidery and softness, his pashmina pieces will be on sale as well. @Kamala Crafts Shop, TTK Road, December 4 at 4pm. On exhibition till December 6, 11am to 7pm. Call 9840700445.

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"I feel more confident now," says Mohana Sundari.

Back from her first international trip, she shows no signs of fatigue. She is, in fact, "more than ready to take on the world".

Mohana, an auto driver who operates from Chennai's Aynavaram neighbourhood, recently won the Kamla Bhasin Award (South Asia) - Driving the World towards Gender Equality in an event held in Kathmandu, Nepal. She is the first winner from Tamil Nadu to bag this prestigious honour, instituted in the name of feminist icon Kamla Bhasin to celebrate individuals working to challenge patriarchy and promote gender justice.

Instituted by The Azad Foundation, National Foundation for India, and iPartner India, the Kamla Bhasin Award is in its fourth instalment currently and celebrates practitioners of a non-traditional livelihood. The award includes a trophy, letter of appreciation, and prize money of ₹1 lakh.

"It is a huge inspiration for me. I became emotional while receiving this award because all I did is to speak from my heart about issues that affect me. Many people I met during the function congratulated me for my views on gender equality. I believe that instead of just talking about equality of men and women, it is important to practise it in everyday life, which is what I am trying to do in the transport sector," she says, proudly.

Mohana, who drives her autorickshaw every day in Chennai for multiple travel aggregators, is also the president of the Veera Pengal Munnetra Sangam (VPMS), a cooperative that aims to ensure better working conditions and monetary benefits for more than 600-plus women autodrivers.

Trailblazing Chennai auto driver Mohana Sundari chats about her fight for dignity in the transport sector, which led her to winning the Kamla Bhasin Award 2025

# Wheels of change



Ride to fame  
Mohana Sundari receiving the award in Nepal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"55% of our members are single parents. For us, taking care of our children and bringing in money becomes difficult. So, the driving and transport industry – be it cars, autorickshaws or even food delivery options – is a boon. Being a united cooperative, the income that we get helps our members financially in case of emergencies and also makes them eligible for schemes like ESI and PF, she explains, "As women become more financially independent, they will be more equipped to take on the world."

**Beginning anew**  
Mohana has dabbled in several industries, like food, beauty and private security, before settling on her current profession as an autodrivers, post a big financial setback during the pandemic.

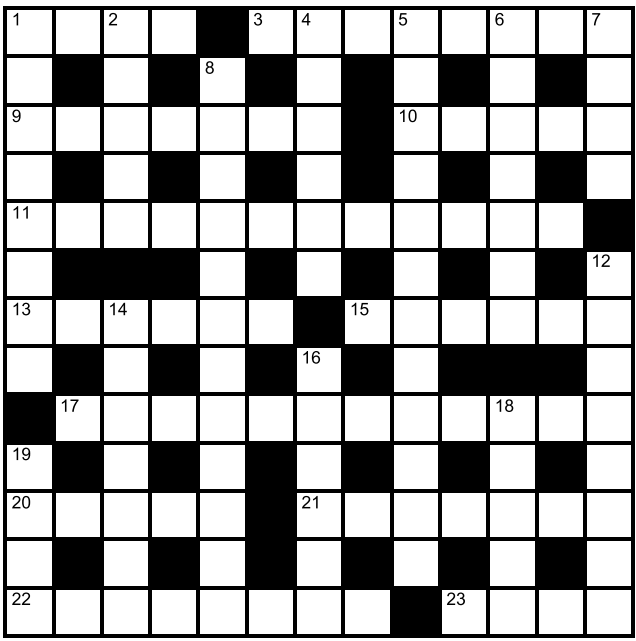
"I remembered that I had a valid driving license, and took to driving an autorickshaw as it gave me a daily income to run the household. Here too, I faced significant opposition from male autorickshaw drivers, who used to taunt me

without realising the difficulties I faced," she recalls.

Over time, she met several women autorickshaw drivers like her, who had many horror stories to share. "All these only spurred me on. I realised that the minute we achieve a certain level of financial independence and are united under the umbrella of a cooperative, society will view us differently. We still talk about inequalities in rural areas, but here in a big city like Chennai itself, there are several women silently suffering," explains Mohana, whose VPMS is supported by a non-profit organisation called the Alliance for Community Empowerment (ACE), represented by Vijay Gnanaprasad, an IT employee who also backs community-based initiatives.

Mohana, who is also the lead of a Tamil documentary film titled *Auto Queens* that will premiere in Chennai soon, adds, "Our goal is to motivate all women auto-drivers to voice their problems better, and gain more respect in the eyes of society."

## QUICK CROSSWORD #30 Set by Doppelganger



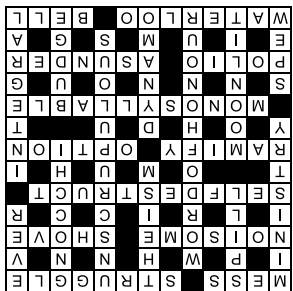
- Across**
- 1 Communal dining room (4)
  - 3 A contest (8)
  - 9 Offensive (7)
  - 10 Forceful push (5)
  - 11 Suicide (4-8)
  - 13 Separate into sections (6)
  - 15 Something chosen (6)
  - 17 Yes or No perhaps? (12)
  - 20 Infectious viral disease (5)
  - 21 Into pieces (7)
  - 22 Napoleon was defeated here (8)
  - 23 Do something dangerous: \_\_\_\_ the cat (4)
- Down**
- 1 Government department (8)
  - 2 To scatter from containment (5)
  - 4 Belief in God (6)
  - 5 Without moral principles (12)
  - 6 Italian dumplings (7)
  - 7 At any time (4)
  - 8 Assurance which cannot be

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- broken (4,2,6)
- 12 Forming a whole (8)
  - 14 A clear \_\_\_\_ night (7)
  - 16 Tirelessly active person (6)
  - 18 To make something move (5)
  - 19 Stream out (4)

## Solution No. 30





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Shopping trail (Clockwise from left) Christmas decor at Raave's Evergreen; a nativity set from Roy's Wonderland; and a decoration from Raave's Evergreen. VELANKANNI RAJ B



the space. From classic pine cones, red berry stems, and golden bells to snowflake ornaments, ice cream cone baubles and even a nutcracker quietly standing in the corner, the collection is endless. What stands out is a sea of red ornaments dominating the shelves this year. "Every year we bring in a new concept, and this time the theme is wine red," says Selvaraj, the store owner. With Christmas just around the corner, he quickly returns to assisting customers – often guiding them on what they should look for.

At Roy's Wonderland, College Road, Nungambakam, this year's star attraction is a pre-lit Christmas tree that changes colour at the tap of an app on the mobile phone – one button and the fairy lights shift seamlessly from red to blue and many more. "From classic trees to rare collectables, every piece is imported from nearly 10 festive corners of the world – the US,

Germany, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Indonesia," says Nivedha Roy, who joined the family-run business, founded in 1996, and now heads digital marketing. Also a crowd favourite this year at Roy's is a steam train circling a Christmas tree – a delight among the kids, says Nivedha.

From wholesale markets to boutique stores, each brings its own flavour – some rooted in nostalgia and others inspired by global trends.

# Festive aisles bloom

From wholesale markets to boutique stores, the spirit of Christmas is here, along with pre-lit trees and dancing elves

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As the festive season sweeps into the city, Chennai begins to glow – churches string up lights, streets brim with last-minute shoppers, and homes ready themselves with their annual holiday makeover. At Parry's Corner, the holiday rush is in full swing, especially inside Rahaman Decoration Centre, a 30-year-old wholesale shop teeming with parents, children, and couples sifting through endless aisles. The crowd here is not aiming for a trendy pink Christmas tree or ceramic Santa, but the charm of old school decor – star lanterns,

plastic Santa masks, nativity sets and everything reminiscent of Christmases past. "It's quite a busy time for us. Being a wholesale shop, we get customers ranging from store owners to college and school teachers," says Afreen Fathima, daughter of Syed Karimullah, the owner of Rahaman Decoration Centre. At Advent Christmas Store on RK Salai, Josh Groban's 'Believe' is playing in the background as a couple debates which decor would best suit their living room. The shop itself feels like a miniature Christmas wonderland – its aisles packed with ornaments and decor that replicate the very English and American Christmas aesthetic. From vibrant colour Christmas

trees to carousel figurines, and even ceramic mugs and bowls, the store is brimming with festive charm. Founded in 2019 by siblings Tinu Santiago and Alex, Advent has already grown to three outlets in Bengaluru, Kochi, and Chennai. "We've been crazy about Christmas since we were kids. In 2018, we joked about doing something with that passion, and before we knew it, six months later, we were actually working on it," says Tinu. This year, Advent Chennai's standout piece is a seven feet-Alaskan white Christmas tree with an elf attached to it – press a button, and it springs to life. The shop also has metal ornaments, something that Tinu says, "can be passed down for generations". If you have been in Chennai long enough, chances are you are already familiar with Raave's Evergreen store in Egmore. Established in 1997, the shop instantly evokes a sense of nostalgia – the kind of place you must have wandered into with your parents after school. Rows of Christmas trees, bells, and wreaths in classic green, rose gold and even fuchsia pink fill



# Wonderla opens with a jolt

The long-promised theme park launches with 43 rides, and a push for public access, even as rain-triggered outages mark day one

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A day at a theme park demands a rare trifecta: perfect weather, the stamina of a pro athlete, and a pair of comfortable shoes. After 10 years of planning, when Wonderla Chennai finally opened, it was welcomed to the city with a downpour. What followed were power outages and rides getting stuck due to continuously lashing rain. However, Arun K Chittilappilly, executive chairman and managing director, Wonderla Holidays, the team worked through unexpected challenges and glitches caused by fluctuation in power, ultimately powering all the rides with diesel generators, so they could run smoothly. Despite the rain, the park welcomed 2,000 people on opening day. Spread across 64.3 acres along Old Mahabalipuram Road, Wonderla Chennai is a city-sized playground. Visitors can tackle 43 rides ranging from high-adrenaline coasters and spinning attractions to gentle kids' rides and sprawling water slides. The Tanjora, India's first Bolliger & Mabillard inverted roller coaster, twists through the air with multiple inversions, while Spin Mill: the country's tallest spinning ride at 50 metres flings riders through vertical loops and 4.5G forces. "We signed an MOU with the Tamil Nadu Government almost 10 years ago, and it's been a long journey getting here. But we didn't want to bring just any amusement park – we wanted to bring the best, with rides and facilities that are second to none. This will be the most premium park we've built to date," said Arun at the opening of the

park last week. Even with a few rides still under construction and final testing, and patches of fresh landscaping awaiting their full bloom, the park is buzzing with excitement. Access for all Reaching the park, too, is set to get easier. Wonderla Chennai sits in Illalur, a little over an hour from the city, but the team has been working with the Government to streamline access. Arun says that they are in talks to introduce public bus routes from multiple parts of Chennai. Plans also include discounted tickets for those who take these buses. The park will also have shaded pathways and climate-responsive layouts in the next couple of months will offer respite from Chennai's midday sun. Kids' zones, wheelchair access, and shaded rest areas for seniors ensure the park is welcoming for families and visitors of all abilities. Beyond the thrill, Wonderla Chennai has eight themed dining venues serving local specialties alongside international favourites. Retail spaces showcase Thanjavur and marapachi dolls, along with park merchandise. Lockers are provided, so guests can stow valuables and enjoy the rides without worrying. He promises that they are also paying attention to safety. Arun says "We've been running amusement parks for 25 years. We understand how the rides work, the water systems, and the safety measures. Every ride, every system, is internationally certified. Guests should only feel butterflies in their stomachs, not fear."

Wonderla Chennai is located at 45/IF, OMR Road, Thiruporur, Illalur, Tamil Nadu. Tickets are available on wonderla.com starting at ₹1,508 for adults, ₹1,205 for children and ₹1,130 for senior citizens.



Wonderstruck Tanjora at Wonderla Chennai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

# Let it stew

Chef Regi Mathew revives the traditional Christian wedding spread with a six-course featuring 18 dishes

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Chef Regi Mathew was nine when he was first introduced to *theenmura* at a wedding in Pala, Kottayam. He specifically remembers the cake and wine that was served. "But my mother took away the wine," he laughs. Decades later, last year, the chef introduced this celebratory Christian feast from Kerala at his restaurant Kappa Chakka Kandhari. Given its success, *theenmura* is back for its second stint. We brave the rains and flooded roads to tuck into a six-course menu featuring around 18 dishes. We are not the only ones. The meal begins with a slice of cake and homemade non-alcoholic wine – the festive combination that heralds the beginning of the Christmas season. The cake – neatly wrapped in butter paper – is from an old bakery in Pala. This is followed by a chicken cutlet, crisp, with delicate flavours of ginger and curry leaf. The fluffy traditional wood-oven baked *borma* bread (sourced from Thrissur), with chicken roast is an instant favourite. The sweetness of the bread offsets the heat from the pepper in the chicken. This is also one of Regi's favourites. "During my graduation days in Pala, the hostel would serve this every Sunday," he says. The meal features grilled king prawns, which may not be a fixture in traditional menus. "It differs from region to region. For example, people from Thrissur also include pork," Regi explains. The avalanche of food continues with duck *mappas*, mutton stew, *puliserry*, *thoran*, appam, shards of *poppadam* that look like confetti, and beef fry. The *meen vattichathu*, a recipe that Regi borrowed from his mother is a comforting spicy, tangy fish curry that is cooked and stored in



Rice and shine *Theenmura* at Kappa Chakka Kandhari. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

an earthen pot overnight allowing flavours to seep in. We move on to a trio of dessert and get acquainted with *churuttu*, black halwa, and the pick of the lot: *paniyum pazhavum* – an unpretentious but fulfilling combination of humble banana topped with grated coconut soaked in *paani* (syrup made of palm sap). *Theenmura* was a practice that was fading away, says Regi. But he is pleased to notice its revival. "I had guests in Chatti (his restaurant in New York), who said that they prepared *theenmura* by following my reel," he smiles. Reacquaint yourself with the elaborate traditional meal before Regi takes it to New York to introduce America to the pleasure of red fish curry, appams and stew for Christmas. *Theenmura is on at Kappa Chakka Kandhari in Chennai (10, Haddows Road, Nungambakkam) and Bengaluru till December 14. Priced at ₹1,690 plus taxes. For reservations, call 9858591010.*



# An impressionable slice

With experimental pizzas, double-fried oysters and brunch, Coimbatore's Van Dough reinvents Alliance Francaise's iconic cafe

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Some six months ago, when Alliance Francaise of Madras' famed cafeteria stopped dishing out its iconic lemon tea, cutlets, and chocolate cake, wonder arose among the community about everyone's changed snack-time circumstance. Van Dough pizzeria, all the way from Coimbatore, seemed to have arrived with a menu full of experimental topping combinations on soft, perfectly charred, well-hydrated pizza dough. Is it worth a try? Quite simply, yes. We begin the meal with a cherry tomato and garlic confit, full of basil leaves and balsamic vinegar that bursts in the mouth quite literally. Served with bread, this dish is for everyone who likes jammy tomatoes and spreadable garlic, a small hint of

sweet and umami. What's interesting about the Van Dough menu is that it seems to have been constructed from the lives of its many founders. "My co-founder Siddharth [Sethi] would often visit a street-side shop in Pune for his meals and asked the vendor if he could make him something new. Within seconds, he walked across to a sugarcane vendor who was selling canes. Added minced chicken on a stick with strong aromatics, and then presented the dish to us. This sugarcane chicken is an attempt, but not an exact recreation," says Dhiren Khaturia. Eaten with green chilli oil full of scallion, chives and the like, the chicken is loaded with kaffir lime. If you like Asian flavours, this is a great pick. Before we move to the next dish, Dhiren and investor Vignesh KR, ask me to take a breath. What is about to arrive,

they say, is their magnum opus, a fan favourite if you may. Double-fried oyster mushrooms in a delicious, light batter, seasoned with a hot spice powder [blend of cayenne, Kashmiri red, and interestingly, veg broth powder], served with an in-house hot honey and whipped cheese sauce, this dish bangs. As for the pizzas that arrive quickly, try the ghee roast chicken pizza, sherry leek and



French influence Menu spread at Van Dough in Alliance Francaise of Madras; coffee. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT thin-cut roast potato slice, and the beetroot pesto with mushrooms. Dhiren says that the kitchen staff spends hours stirring the ghee roast paste made with kandhari chillis to get the perfect level of capsaicin, along with a hit of sweetness. The beetroot pesto is a homemade recipe that comes from Dhiren's mother, when Van Dough was a tiny cloud kitchen in RS Puram called The Cloud Kitchen Project. Times have changed but the iteration of this recipe remains untouched. Van Dough also makes their own handmade pastas including one with capers and artichokes and another with gochujang but the former requires a firmer al dente texture and the latter needs more seasoning. But, "We are also coming up with a burger, sandos, and brunch menu. There is coffee round the clock at the cafe and desserts by Paris Plage at the counter," says Chef Pratham. Van Dough seats 30 at its cafe library where one can read and dine, 20 in its picturesque outdoor space, and 30 more at their private dining area where brunches and private events can be held. A month into running the operations in Chennai, founders Dhiren, Siddharth, and Pavithraa Priya, along with Vignesh, say that loyalists of the brand from Coimbatore have been sending their friends to the cafe to sample a slice. Where does Van Gogh feature in the grand scheme of things? I'm sure the founders have a solid story that is not just a pun. Have they left an impression though? You bet.

Van Dough Pizzeria and Cafe is at AF Madras, Nungambakkam. A meal for two costs ₹1,500. Contact 9840894518 for reservations.



# This bar has no name

The four-level resto bar blends the breezy vibe of a Bengaluru microbrewery with food and cocktails



**Namedropping**  
The bar on the first floor; tandoori pomfret. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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The German language is known for having compound words that describe nuanced feelings. One such word is *gemütlichkeit*, which is used to convey a feeling of warmth, friendliness, and good cheer. While Tamil is one of the oldest languages in the world, this feeling is difficult to name in a single word. So what does one do when a newly opened resto bar evokes these feelings of warmth and good cheer? Give it no name!

Chennai's latest addition to the nightlife scene is No Name on Chamiers Road. A four-level resto bar, it blends the breezy vibe of a Bengaluru microbrewery with gourmet food and cocktails. "In Chennai, the party scene is mostly Friday and Saturday. But in cities like Bengaluru, even on a Tuesday you'll see 300 people having a meal and a beer. There are no weekends there. I wanted to bring that culture to Chennai," says Hari Chandran, founder and owner of No Name.

Brought to life by designers Daphne Dmello and Nirali Bathia from Studio Kaleidoscope, each floor at No Name comes with a vibe of its own. The first floor opens into a dance-floor with a full bar. Stained-glass windows, paintings akin to the Sistine chapel behind the bar, and chandeliers hanging low make it a tricky dance floor to let loose in, but the city will sin nevertheless. In the second floor, there are floor to ceiling windows, low sofas, comfortable seats, and the aroma of Thai curry. The last two floors are where No



No Name is at 128, New no 22, Chamiers Road, Nandanam Extension, Nandanam, Chennai. A meal for two costs ₹2,500. For reservations call 9600077556.

Name channels its inner Bengaluru. Open terrace, hanging fabric lamps and an easy setup that can accommodate open mics, live music gigs and more.

The spinach corn and cheese dumplings, served with a sweet chilli oil makes the perfect bite to start the evening, as do the big boy nachos that are loaded with beans, cheese, jalapeños and topped with a big dollop of sour cream. These small bites pair well with their signature drinks.

The bar's eponymous signature cocktail, which is flying off the shelves, has six secret ingredients that are served with a dramatic flair in shot glasses and mixed at the table. It is a vodka-based drink with blue pea flower syrup, but the rest of the recipe is tightly guarded by the bartender.

For the main course, we try the signature Pad Thai, which is tangy, spicy, and nutty in equal measure. The red Thai curry, made in-house from scratch, arrives with fragrant jasmine rice and comes alive with a squeeze of lime. With salads, soups, sushi, burgers, pizzas, pastas, rice, noodles and practically everything you can think of, the menu alone demands a second, third, even fourth visit.

And if the menu does not pull you back in, the vibe certainly will. The place shapeshifts to whatever you need it to be. A party when the lights go down, a quiet family lunch in the day, an easy hangout with friends, a low-pressure first date, even an easy-going anniversary dinner.



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Once December arrives and that familiar nip in the air (or the occasional torrential downpour) sweeps through the city, it finally begins to look a lot like Christmas. And for nearly three decades, The Little Theatre's annual Christmas pantomime has been part of that magic, ushering in the season with songs, dances, dames, and a gaggle of bright-eyed children ready to act their hearts out onstage.

In a whirlwind lead up to the pantomime with only a week left, Krishnakumar Balasubramanian (KK), artistic director of The Little Theatre is busy with rehearsals and is running in to check how the sets are coming along. "I first auditioned for the pantomime in 2007 as an actor, and have been directing it since 2011. When children grow up and show up for the auditions of the adult cast, you realise how time has passed. It has been an amazing journey of knowing people for so long, and how special and easy it is to work with them as well," KK says.

This year, The Little Theatre stages *How To Sway Your Dragon*, a pantomime set in Lord Odin's magical village of Burp, which is responsible for producing all the

# Adventure awaits

The Little Theatre is back with song, dance and drama at its annual Christmas pantomime, *How To Sway Your Dragon* at Museum Theatre



**Breathing fire and music** The cast and crew of *How To Sway Your Dragon*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

joy found in the world. What happens when the mysterious Ice King and his band of musical demons pose a threat to the production of joy? An unlikely hero emerges in Teacup, as he sets out with a trio of Odin's warriors. Directed by KK, the pantomime is as always, a group effort, with many cast and crew members pitching in to shape the script and work on its various facets.

"We were discussing working on something exciting and new although we do have the habit of pulling out old fairy tales. I remember watching *How To Train Your Dragon* with my daughter and falling in love with how lovely it was. Earlier this year, we also saw *Kpop Demon Hunters* and were very inspired by the amazing songs and how it all came together," KK says, of what inspired them for this year's show.

Over 50 children will take over the stage in addition to the adult cast which includes Kaivalya Krishnan, Deepthie Orintelu, Mark Thomas and Navin Krubhakar. Produced by Aysha Rau, the pantomime has been choreographed by Kavya of Black Swan Studio and Vikas Rao of Signature Studio, with Lavita Lobo as the music director.

"Every year there's a good balance of actors, mimicry artistes, singers and dancers. This year, we have an exceptional number of singers who are at an incredible level of skill including Mark Thomas and Nadisha Thomas," KK says.

The cast and crew have been rehearsing together since August and Rohini Rau, CEO, The Little Theatre says year after year, the workings of their productions seem like a well-oiled machine.

"While convincing someone to come and watch the pantomime for the first time is always the most challenging, I ask them to trust us and come and experience the show with their children. Many families plan their December around the pantomime, and it is heartening that we have repeat audiences in such large numbers. We keep the tickets priced in such a way as well," she says.

*How To Sway Your Dragon* will be staged at Museum Theatre, Egmore from December 12 to 18. For details log onto <https://thelittletheatre.explara.com/events>



**Laughter therapy** (Left) A still from *Perfect Family*; and (below) Pankaj Tripathi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

as a presenter. Pankaj took no time to say yes as he found resonance with how the show aimed to break the stigma around mental health and therapy. "There is still some awareness about it in certain pockets of urban areas but not so much in other places," Pankaj says. "Going to therapy should be as normal as visiting the doctor when you have a cold and flu."

The actor feels that mental health issues have become more prominent with the penetration of mobile phones. "The same feelings of anger and guilt, which one would experience in reality before, have now entered digital spaces. We get affected if someone makes a bad comment on our social media posts," Pankaj says while reflecting on how there is too much information available online which can be overwhelming to witness. "I had health anxiety myself. I used to search about my illness on Google to know more about its reasons and cures. When I went to the doctor and began telling them about my condition, they asked me where I had studied all that. Then I realised everything cannot be searched online," he adds.

Pankaj, who had gone through some rough patches before he shot to fame with *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012), says that he does not get as affected by success and failure. "I have lived in Mumbai for 10 years without work and then, in the last 10 years, I have over-worked myself in the same city. It's like I have

witnessed rain, endured drought, and lived through floods. All of that has made me a bit relaxed," he says.

The actor has further plans to produce more films and shows, however, his choices will invariably be different than his acting work. Pankaj is particularly averse to action and gore. "The world is already dark, I don't want to show that on-screen too," he says.

*Perfect Family* is available on the YouTube channel *Jar Series*

# All in the family

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who backed a recent comedy-drama series, chats on the need for increased awareness about mental health

**Shreyas Pande**  
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Pankaj Tripathi breaks the mould as he turns producer with the recently released comedy-drama series, *Perfect Family*. With a Zen-like composure in his voice, Pankaj says that he understands what it is like to produce a project. "It is like preparing for a girl's wedding, where you have to do the casting of the girl as well," Pankaj quips.

*Perfect Family* stars Gulshan

Devaiah, Girija Oak Godbole, Neha Dhupia and Manoj Pahwa and tells the story of a dysfunctional family that decides to go to therapy together. It is also the first show released directly on YouTube with a pay model. Two episodes of the series are available to watch for free and the rest are accessible at a one-time payment of ₹59. Pankaj says that the decision was taken as they didn't want another creative involvement on the show. "We also wanted to



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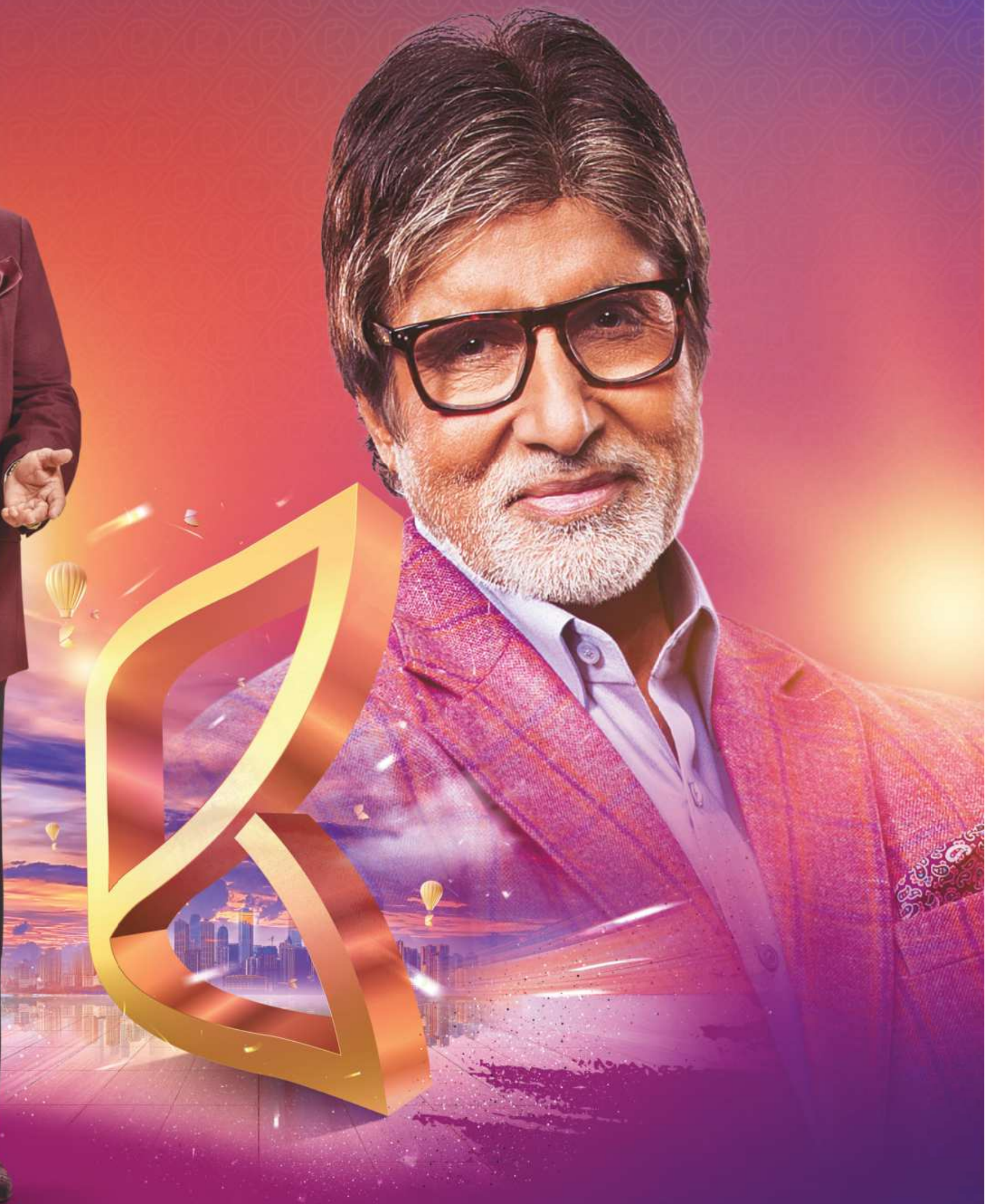
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