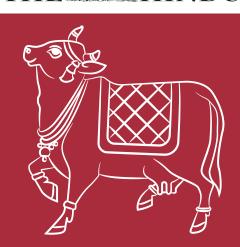
CHENNAI • Friday, October 4, 2024

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THEMOHINDU

Try tteokbokki, corn dogs and fried chicken | MANJU ON TEAMING UP at Chennai's new Korean restaurant P2

## WITH RAJINIKANTH P4



van. Speaking about the incident,

Priyamani says, "It's very shameful

women. Why don't they do that to

predominantly in Kannada cinema,

says that when she started out, there were no caravans available for

comparatively better today, Preetha

Prasad Labs for colour grading, there

were no toilets for women. This was

In 2017, weeks after the sexual assault

for the setting up of a redressal forum

Years later, she says that things

seem bleak for women everywhere, not just the film industry. Varalaxmi

women-led committee for the Tamil

country that is unsafe for women,

and problems start from the time

girls are brought up, believing that

they are the weaker sex. Women also

feel unsafe to report sexual abuse in

fear of a circle of power that they will

and the threat of being shamed hangs

has not changed, how can you expect

Veteran actor Simran, who won

critical and commercial acclaim for

her performances in Tamil cinema, says that a committee to probe

instances of sexual exploitation

be affected by. They are vulnerable,

large. When the way society thinks

the film industry to change?

film industry. "Unfortunately, this is a

says she hopes for an impartial,

of an actress from the Malayalam

industry came to light, actor

Varalaxmi Sarathkumar, in a strongly-worded Twitter post, called

for women in the industry.

technician, when we would go to

in the '90s and that's how the

situation was. Today, every DI

suite has a bathroom."

No industry for women

that someone could do that to

Preetha Jayaraman, a

cinematographer who works

technicians. The situation is

adds. "When I started as a

men?"



Shilajit Mitra

he Indian film industry is patriarchal, exploitative and needs a radical reset for the safety and sanity of female professionals engaged in the cinematic arts. This is the opinion voiced by several prominent female artistes and technicians from across regions who spoke to The Hindu in the aftermath of the Justice K Hema Committee report. The 235-page report exposed instances of sexual abuse, gender inequality, illegal bans and labour violations in the Malayalam film industry.

The findings of the Hema panel sent shockwaves across the Indian film industry. Throughout the country, film bodies and unions have been forced to reckon with the revelations of the report and enforce redressal forums. In Tamil cinema, the South Indian Artistes' Association (SIAA) (Nadigar Sangam) resolved to impose a five-year ban from the film industry on the perpetrators of sexual offences if a

complaint is found to be true. "While the #MeToo movement fizzled out in a short duration, something like the latest committee is being taken more seriously and spoken about in length," says actor Priyamani, who has worked in

## A voice for women

#### Female actors and technicians

from across film industries speak on the aftermath of the Hema Committee report and their everyday negotiations for safety

Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Hindi cinema. "Forming a committee in other industries and more such reports coming out would be beneficial".

The #MeToo movement in 2018 revealed shocking instances of sexual misconduct, leading to legal cases in some instances. Singer Chinmayi Sripada was one of the first voices to speak out from the Tamil film and music industry. stating that there were no institutional structures in the media and entertainment industry to

address issues of sexual harassment As highlighted in the Hema Committee report, male actors, filmmakers and producers wield incredible power, capable of banning anyone.

#### **Unsafe zones**

After working as an assistant director for over a decade, Indhu VS turned director in 2022 with the Malayalam film 19(1)(a) starring Vijay Sethupathi and Nithya Menen. According to Indhu, one joined a film set in 2010 with great

trepidation. "It was a place with 80 to 100 men and at the most two or three women. I was the only female assistant director. It makes one extremely self-conscious and aware of one's body and the conversations around you."

She says it never felt like a transparent workspace and was more like a 'boys' club'. "No one understands that a woman could also be passionate about cinema, finding her voice and telling her stories. Women are made to feel irrelevant."

Almost uniquely, exploitation in the film world begins even before one nas embarked on a professional



career. 'Casting couch' - the seeking of sexual favours for roles - remains alarmingly commonplace.

Actor-producer Rima Kallingal, co-founder of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), the platform whose petition led to the setting up of the Hema Committee, says that she was blessed to step into tinsel town with a filmmaker who treated newcomers with dignity. A Kerala State Film awardee, Rima made her debut in the 2009 Malayalam film Ritu, directed by filmmaker Shyamaprasad.

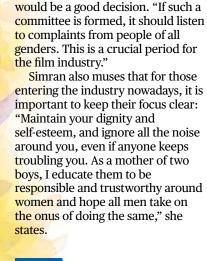
However, from there, she moved to a space where she felt "completely devalued", Rima says. "I was reminded of my 'shelf value' as a female artiste and how we have no market value. Sexually loaded comments are a constant."

Beyond exploitation, the Hema report highlighted the inhuman working conditions, including the lack of essential facilities such as toilets and changing rooms, available to women.

Recently, veteran actor Radhika disclosed an incident where she saw a group of men on a Malayalam film set watching nude videos of female actors that they had recorded with a hidden camera inside her vanity

SIMRAN

As a mother of two boys, I educate them to be responsible and trustworthy around women and I hope all men take on the onus of doing the same



With inputs from Saraswathy Nagarajan, Gopinath Rajendran, Vivek MV, S Poorvaja and Gautam

## The groovy kind of love

A group of vinyl enthusiasts gathered to share anecdotes and memories on the medium

Sangita Rajan

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n NASA's space probe, Voyager 1, there is a golden vinyl record that contains bits and pieces of information about human life. It is etched with the sounds of Nature, greetings in over 50 languages, and music from multiple regions of the world. Also on this, is an hour-long recording of the brainwaves of director Ann Druyan. She was asked to ruminate on the beauty of the universe, but instead was consumed with the thoughts of her husband-to-be Carl Sagan, who proposed to her minutes before she recorded the brainwaves. It is beautiful to think,

that somewhere out there in the vast expanse of the universe, there is love.

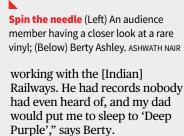
At Vinyl & Brew on TTK Road, over resounding laughter and music, many anecdotes, facts, and stories like these were exchanged among a bunch of vinyl record enthusiasts. A cross between a pub quiz, classroom lecture, TED talk and a comedy show, the evening



was hosted by Chennai-based quiz master and music enthusiast Berty

The evening began with a lesson on the evolution of speech and the effort to preserve it. The lesson was punctuated with trivia about the invention of recording devices, and moved on to the invention of vinyl records.

"My grand dad was the one who started the collection when he was



Berty went down the rabbit hole of comparing a vinyl record to the Lazarus bowl – a fictional object believed to have captured Jesus' words when raising Lazarus from the dead. "The reason I do this, is to explain the beauty of the format. It is the only format of music where the frequencies are physically imprinted onto something," he says.

Every other format of music, he adds, is mutated. "With vinyls, there is no distortion, no compression."

#### For the record

In a segment which was called Groovy Baby, a few vinyl collectors of the city, took the audience on a journey of their introduction into vinyls.

Berty showcased some of his most prized possessions like a copy of Paul McCartney's Give My Regards To Broad Street, and Frank Sinatra's 1955 release, In the Wee

Small Hours, which was the first concept album ever to be made.

The next Groovy Baby to take stage was Abhilash Sethurayar who owns every U2 album including the special editions and limited editions. "My aim now is to collect these rare albums which are iconic like Led Zeppelin 4, Hotel California, etc. I'm not looking for

Singer-songwriter MS Krsna took to the stage next. "My dad's job back in the day, was digitising old records. After a while, he started donating them. When I got older and discovered vinyls myself, I was so angry with him for giving them away," he said, showing a rare record of the 1986 Tamil film Mouna Raagam.

"When I started working with a record label, I started digging to find what was there before cassette tapes, and when I found vinyls, there was no market for them in India," says podcaster Sudhir Vyas, fondly known as Paattukaaran in Tamil music circles.

The evening was dotted with inside jokes, and experiments to determine if one can play a particular song just by observing the grooves of a record, and many cups of coffee.



Find tech in your wardrobe

Streetwear with a side of live music? At this pop-up over the weekend, by multi-brand streetwear

store Caspsul, experience live house music as you sift through a line of kitschy apparel, inspired by the concepts of space and mind, by Spacebiskit. DJ Nich will spin house music on Saturday while Skanke (Sashank from The F16S), artist and curator, will play energetic

electronic tunes on Sunday. The event will also showcase immersive technologies including an Augmented Reality mirror powered by tech partners Imersive.io. RSVP at forms.gle/j3a1nXAQ44ELPgWQ8 On October 5 and 6, from 11am

Padmanabha Nagar, Adyar

to 8pm, at Spacebiskit, 5th Street,



Preeti Zachariah

or Aradukuttan, a member of the pastoral Toda community, the forests are a source of everything: health, food, water and livelihood. "I really feel that we people exist because of the forests," he says in a short documentary titled Nilgiris: Customs and Culturescapes, which delves deep into the lives, livelihoods and traditions of the Kurumba, Irula and Toda people, indigenous to the Nilgiri Hills of South India.

It is possibly why he strives so hard to safeguard it. This symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and the landscapes they inhabit has always existed, says restoration ecologist, researcher and writer Godwin Vasanth Bosco, one of the experts who helped shape this visual series episode, the third and latest of Ashoka University's InHERIT

"Indigenous people have always lived in a way that depends on the health and long-term survival of the forest," says Bosco, who believes that this student-led effort to archive different aspects of India's heritage visually, made in collaboration with the Helen Hamlyn Trust, an independent grant-making trust based out of the UK, gives voice to those in the margins of society.

According to Dharani Dhavamani, project leader, InHERIT, the initiative attempts to document what she thinks of as the "actual essence of heritage" Often, too often, the notion of heritage is tied to relics and monuments, but our daily life, too, is shaped by cultural traditions that we often take for granted, she says. "It's about ensuring that the rich, diverse knowledge systems

## Out of the earth



different aspects of India's

that have guided us for centuries continue to inform and inspire future generations."

heritage visually

**Beginnings** 

The genesis of the project stretches back to February 2023, when some members of the InHERIT team were still a part of the Young India Fellowship (YIF), Ashoka University's flagship year-long post-graduate leadership programme. "During our fellowship, there were often conversations centred around certain pieces of knowledge which are missing or dying out," says

Dharani, who was part of the 2022-2023 YIF batch.

An opportunity to act towards bridging this gap began with research and exploration and led to the creation of InHERIT with the encouragement of the senior members of the Ashoka fraternity. It took them a few months to fine-tune the project and put together the core InHERIT team. The first season of the InHERIT project, which officially kicked off in October 2023, focusses on two central, interwoven themes: culinary and natural heritage.

The team travelled across the

country, including to places such as the Nilgiris, the Sundarbans, Kaziranga, Mangaluru, Paradip, Ramgarh and Jaisalmer, to document myriad indigenous traditions, practices, flora and fauna. They also consulted various experts like historian Rana Safvi, naturalist Yuvan Aves and author and photographer Arati Kumar-Rao to deepen their understanding of these traditions.

The first season of the project spans 18 months and captures multiple aspects of culinary and natural heritage, including

**Recording history** (Clockwise from left) InHERIT team with Kurumba tribesmen; Chef Hussain; in the Sundarbans; a fisherwoman in Karumkulam; and at Ramgarh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of heritage and culture... because this is not something that we were taught in our schools," she says.

#### Beautiful heritage

Dharani hopes that InHERIT will inspire others to document various cultural practices and create a repository where people can come to share, learn and unlearn together.

Consultant chef, author and podcaster Chef Sadaf Hussain, who participated in the opening podcast series, agrees. "I always think of food as a living museum," he says. "As much as I like cooking and serving people, I don't want them to just eat and leave. I want to have a conversation," he says.

According to him, narratives around food are often tinctured with myths and falsehoods, making an initiative like this important because it has "nuance and logic," he says. "We need to bring in a more educated narrative around food."

More importantly, projects like this could play a role in erasing cultural hegemonies and creating a spirit of inclusion. "I feel that it is very important for people from all communities and backgrounds to lay claim to this beautiful heritage that India offers because otherwise only one kind of heritage gets talked about and promoted," says Annu Jalais, an environmental anthropologist working at KREA University, who was a part of an earlier podcast on the Sundarbans. Currently, a certain group of people, she believes, has hijacked culture and heritage for their purposes. "It is everybody's heritage, one that is inclusive, and we need to remain true to this heritage of inclusivity."

### Rebecca with a twist

Judy I Lin speaks about *The Songs of Six Realms* and its inspiration from an ancient Chinese theatre form

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

he Song of Six Realms (published by Bloomsbury), Judy I Lin's third book following the Book of Tea duology (A Magic Steeped in Poison and A Venom Dark and Sweet), was born of her interest in Xianxia drama. "The Chinese drama form involves Taoist and Buddhist beliefs," says the Taiwanese-born author over a video call from her home in Grand Praire, Canada.

"I wanted to write my variation on that, drawing inspiration from myths that I heard growing up featuring immortals, demons, ghosts, and gods who interfere in the lives of mortals."

The novel, telling the story of a young, talented musician, Xue, also has echoes of Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca. "That came later.I was always drawn to Rebecca and how the narrator of the story doesn't even have a name! She's just a young, naive girl, who encounters a mysterious, older man who sweeps her off her feet. When she goes to his sprawling estate, she realises he's hiding a secret. I was interested in telling a version of that story."

Drawn to stories about women coming into their power, Judy says she did not want to retell Rebecca. "I wanted to give it a fantasy twist. People familiar with Rebecca will see similarities in how the story develops. I take the story in a slightly different direction with the incorporation of myths. It was fun playing around with that inspiration and pulling out what originally drew me to the classic."

#### Title deed

The title, Judy says, comes from the fact that music is a major part of the story. "My editor actually helps me with my titles, because I'm very bad at it (laughs). My main character, Xue, is a musician and the music develops into her magic."

For the world building Judy says she focussed on the Tang dynasty. "I knew music and poetry were going to be an important part of the story. In imperial Chinese history, the Tang dynasty is a golden age of poetry. A lot of classic poems originated from that era. I researched Tang



how they lived and their famous cities." Since her novels are not historical fantasy, Iudy says she draws inspiration from different time periods. Judy does not wish to bog the narrative with details. "I have to strike a balance between creating a world that draws the reader in, without making it boring with details. There is always a push and pull I feel when I'm writing."

Xue is a master of the qin, a prominent instrument in Chinese history, says Judy. "Nobility played it; you see it in many Chinese dramas. A beautiful and simple instrument, a qin has seven or eight strings. There are few variations but the gin is capable of beautiful and emotional music."

The story of Xue is complete in *The* Song of Six Realms, says Judy.

The Book of Tea duology were YA quest novels, The Song of Six Realms is a romance and Rick Riordan Presents: The Dark Becomes Her, coming out in October, is horror.

"I have fun writing both fantasy and horror. They have commonalities, as both are speculative fiction. My fantasies are inspired by history, whereas my horror is set in contemporary times."

The Dark Becomes Her, Judy says, is the story of a Taiwanese-Canadian girl

who realises her sister is slowly becoming possessed by a demon. "It is set in Vancouver, Canada's Chinatown.We have the ghost month every summer, where it is believed that ghosts return to the world of the living to visit their family and the people they left behind. I wanted to bring some of that into the book and because I live in Canada, it was fun to imagine some of those beliefs and how they would blend into Canadian life."



## Street-side story

Chennai's newest Korean restaurant Samchon Bunsik serves street food classics

S Poorvaja

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amchon Bunsik, the latest addition to Chennai's ever-growing Korean food scene, is surprisingly packed on a midweek afternoon.

Kim Myung-soo and Kim Hyo-jin, a couple from South Korea, moved to India with the hope of setting up a restaurant nearly a year ago, and it was not long before they fell in love with Chennai.

Myung-soo is the Samchon, or uncle of Samchon Bunsik. Bunsik is a generic term used to refer to inexpensive dishes that

make up street food. "I am excited to show people different kinds of Korean street food, or bunsik," Hyo-jin says.

Chennai's well-known Korean restaurants have a gourmand spread, with grilled meats and an extensive selection of dishes. At Samchon Bunsik however, things are a lot more simple and come at a price point that is a lot easier on the wallet .

The K-Drama staple fried chicken is our first order of business, and we try three variants – the Samchon special chicken, yang-nyeom or a spicy and sweet chicken, and the honey chicken, which is a sweet

Snack time Samchon Bunsik; and ttekbokki. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

leaf-wrapped cooking,

in the Sundarbans, Thar,

Jaisalmer and Kaziranga. It

involves three major outputs, says Dharani. These include eight

20-minute-long visual series episodes,

a podcast series that supplements the

workshops focussed on high school

kids that will enable "big conversations

about things like food and Nature... to

get them to be fascinated about topics

visual series and experiential

fishing practices in Odisha

and stories of people living

and crisp chicken that comes with a special sauce. While there is an option to order a dipping sauce, the fried chicken, especially the Samchon special variant, comes so well seasoned that it works best by itself. The crunch is on point.

We move onto the dal-galbi deopbap, a rice bowl with spicy chilli paste chicken. Cooked with slivers of carrot and spring onion, the chicken on hot rice here makes for the perfect comfort meal. For a spice fiend like me, the spice levels are not too intimidating, and actually lean more into hot-and-sweet territory.

The fuss-free, usual suspects all find a place on

the menu corn dogs, kimbap, kimchi fried rice, japchae or glass noodles, and kimchi jeon or kimchi pancakes. Most dishes come with vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, and the restaurant even has fried cauliflower seasoned with the flavour options available for their fried chicken. No deep dive into Korean street food feels complete without a taste of tteokbokki. We sample the original, spicy sauce one, which arrives steaming with a sliced boiled egg on top. With Chennai's monsoon not too far away, the tteokbokki or even the instant ramyun bowls on their menu are sure to be worthy weather companions.

Myung-soo and Hyo-jin are eager that we end our meal with the dalgona latte, a sweet latte topped with pieces of dalgona or a crunchy melted sugar street candy you probably know of, thanks to Squid Game. For the strong and sweet coffee, the dalgona feels much too sweet, and is probably best had as a separate treat.

Having only been open a couple of days, the Korean couple seem buoyed by the city's response. "I really like

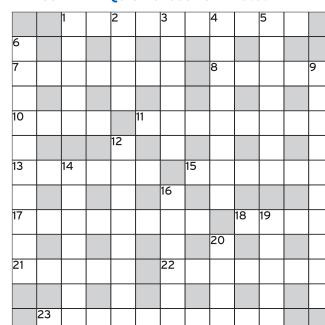
Chennai. It matches my personality," Hyo-jin

says, smiling. In a corner of the restaurant, tuho, a fun game is placed where diners can try throwing in sticks into baskets of varying

sizes. "More than just being about the food, we want people to experience and learn about Korean culture," she adds.

Samchon Bunsik is at Fourth Main Road, Kamaraj Nagar, Thiruvanmiyur. A meal for two *costs* ₹1,000.

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#### Across

- **1** Fed up (7,3)
- 7 Full (7) 8 Explosion (5)
- 10 Ark builder (4)
- 11 Fast and furious (8)
- 13 Underpass (6) 15 Nun's headdress (6)
- 17 Investigation (8)
- 18 Suspicious (4)
- 21 Jewelled headdress (5)
- **22** Canadian province (7)
- 23 North American pit viper (10)
- 1 Tea (informal) (5)
- 2 At any time (4) 3 Oloroso, say (6)
- 4 Suave (8) **5** American aircraft carrier (informal)

- **6** Main revolving rod in a combustion
- engine (10) **9** Absolutely fine (informal) (7-3)
- **12** Miner's safety lighting (4,4) **14** Swagger (7)
- 16 Robustness (6)
- **19** Filled with enthusiasm (5)
- 20 Eyelid swelling (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated October 10, 2024.

Solution No. 13605



dynasty fashion, food,

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Unbox a treat (Clockwise from left) Hampers by Paper Thundugal; glassware by Bodhai; and a potli bag by Karpagam K.



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n the run up to Navaratri and all the golu-hopping set to commence, Karpagam K is busy at work, fashioning potlis or drawstring bags from silk saris and shawls.

"I wanted to make and gift something that was not just different, but useful as well," says the Chennai resident. Much like Karpagam's handmade bags, return gifts during Navaratri are no longer just about blouse material, with several people and brands taking to innovating and delving into customised creations for the festive season.

Karpagam says she has made more than 75 bags so far, in 10 different designs. "Apart from using the sari or shawl for the outer material, I used two layers to line the inside of the bags. I was very particular about the bags looking professionally made," she says. Having seen gifts being passed around in a circle during the festive season, Karpagam says she designs the bags keeping in mind its usability and appeal. "The size is big enough to hold a clutch purse, and comes with a handle. People will not want to palm this off to others," she laughs.

Bags, pouches and anything utilitarian have enjoyed a steady draw. At Sura, a women's collective from rural Tamil Nadu co-founded by Nisha Subramaniam and Dravina Seenivasan, bags and pencil pouches have been consistent bestsellers.

"We have also made potli bags in gada raw silk and brocade, as well as open cotton tote bags that can be embroidered," Nisha says. With Deepavali not too far away,

## that spark joy

This festive season, gifting is all about being different, useful, customised, and artistic

their laptop sleeves are usually in demand for corporate gifting orders. "There are a lot more people willing to experiment with return gifts now, and when they come to us, we also give them recommendations on how to diversify their gifts for different age groups," she adds.

At Chennai-based Bodhai founded by Lavanya and Ananya Shankar, the flavour of this festive season is glassware repurposed from bottles. "We have jugs, tea and coffee cups, ice cream bowls, snack bowls, shot glasses, wine glasses, cocktail glasses and an entire series of resin-filled goblet glasses as well," says Dakshana

Rajaram, an artist with the brand. This year, she says, it has been heartening to see people seek out gifting options that are useful, something the brand focusses on as well, along with customisation.

An unlikely product is the



There are a lot more people willing to experiment with return gifts now

NISHA SUBRAMANIAM



Varsha S who runs Paper Thundugal, a small business

#### The teetotaller's heaven

Pandan Club's recently launched Zero Fake menu offers creative, non-alcoholic cocktails

Ananyaa Desikan ananyaa.d@thehindu.co.in

eing sober at a party where everyone else is drunk is sometimes looked down upon. Even on menus, non-alcoholic drinks are condescendingly dubbed mocktails. Manoj Padmanabhan, co-founder of Pandan Club, is on a mission to change this perception. "They're not called mocktails here," he clarifies.

The new Zero Fake line-up features drinks like stout, rosé, champagne, sake, and Americano. "The name was inspired by a recent trip to China, where I saw shops selling original brands and many selling first-copy products. This menu is called Zero Fake because they are originals," Manoj explains. The programme was launched on September 19 by former Australian cricketer and ODI master Michael Bevan, alongside Kedar Jadhav and the Southern Superstars cricket

To celebrate the launch, we open a bubbly. There is a mild effervescence in this Champagne-inspired drink, made with coconut yeast and sugar. This Kerala toddy-like beverage uses fermentation techniques to create fizz. "We make a batch daily to ensure the drink doesn't fully ferment into alcohol," Manoj shares.

We try a glass of fruity rosé. This variation, made with jamun and paneer grapes, is muddled with the skin and seeds for extra flavour. Sweet, slightly spicy from the seeds, and boasting a bright, pinkish-red hue, the rosé pairs beautifully with Pandan Club's Asian and Peranakan cuisine.



Fizz and pop Zero Sake; and (below)Zero Stout. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The O Stout looks like stout, complete with a frothy top, but it is actually a nitro-brewed coffee drink. With Guinness' roasted malt and hints of pandan and coconut, it comes with a kaya lollipop to add a touch of sweetness.

We finally try Manoj's favourite -Americano. This robust drink's secret lies in a visit to a naatu marundhu kadai (country medicine shop), where Manoj sourced the 16 herbs and botanicals used to craft

this Chavanprash-like beverage.

'Our previous zero-ABV selection became popular, with people customising them into cocktails. But these options will remain non-alcoholic for now, as we want people to enjoy them sans the buzz," Manoj says.

Pandan Club is located at Star City, 39, Bazullah Road, T Nagar. Call 7871515515 for reservations.



highest seller this season at Just Sides, says its co-founder Deepika Jayasurya. The Chennai-based brand that specialises in homemade and preservative-free podis and preserves, has also found a steady customer base for their foot soaks, body wash and hair wash powders. "Packaged in small glass jars, our customers have the option of making combos of these products and this works well for people who want to gift a variety of small things," Deepika explains.



focussed on gifting and curation,

acknowledges that the gifting

plethora of options available to

that appeals to each sense – for

instance, it's a mix of something

that smells nice, something to eat,

tinkling bells or anything else that

one can hear and so on. We also

group," says Varsha. Their Ember

Pack and Radiance Pack gifting

hampers have motichoor ladoo

hand-carved wooden haldi and

in a woven box made of palm

most exciting, Varsha adds.

kumkum boxes, all of which come

leaves. Beyond the product alone,

the experience of gifting is what is

With October heralding the

festive season, it truly is time to

candles, Channapatna toys,

have something for every age

"Our hampers have something

industry is booming, with a

choose from.

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Buy 1kg Sweet & get

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Flavours of Malay

with the Consulate-General of Malaysia, Chennai, is organising a Malaysian food festival, Taste of Malaysia 2.0, at Seasonal

festival, that presents nasi lemak; chicken rendang, pandan chicken; chicken satay, squid sambal and mee goreng.

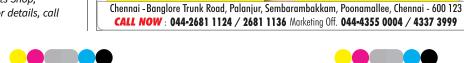
On till October 6, dinner only. For

reservations, call 8939892056

decor Bring home the enchanting beauty of marapachi dolls, which are traditional handcrafted wooden dolls displayed in golus during Navaratri.The

**Festive** 

Crafts Council has these dolls, symbolising prosperity and joy, in different sizes for the festive season. @Kamala Crafts Shop, Royapettah. 11am to 7pm. For details, call 9840700445



This offer cannot be combined with any other offer.



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sunglasses. "All credit goes to my

the team of Vettaiyan," she adds.

blend with the superstardom of

forward to see a Rajinikanth film

with Gnanavel's signature. They

a beautiful fusion," she states.

getting overshadowed by the superstar? "Not really because I

certain expectations from a

are poles apart but I expect to see

But, did she ever think about

trusted the director. Of course, the

audience, which includes me, has

Rajinikanth movie. It is here that

Gnanavel sir comes in. I strongly

Vettaiyan is her third Tamil film

after Asuran opposite Dhanush

(2019) and Ajith-starrer Thunivu

(2022). On being asked why she is

not seen more in Tamil films, the

forward to good roles. "I want to

do solid characters and when I

wait for that, it takes time," says

Manju, who is also excited about her next two big Tamil projects,

Viduthalai 2 with Vijay Sethupathi.

returned to the big screen in 2014, with How Old Are You?, after a

The 46-year-old actor, who

14-year break, has since been the

toast of Malayalam cinema. She is

brand endorsements. Her looks,

style statement and, of late, her

tagline 'lady superstar' sit well

motorcycle adventures, have gone

viral on social media. So, does the

with her? "I genuinely do not want

now among the highest paid female actors, be it in films or

*Mr X* with Arya and Gautham

Karthik, and Vetrimaaran's

actor points out that she looks

the sensibility of someone like

believe that he has given due

importance and space to all

characters in the film," she

Rajinikanth? "I am looking

friend-cum-stylist Liji Preman and

So how does Gnanavel's craft



# All the right 1110Ves

Manju Warrier chats about shaking a leg and acting with Rajinikanth in the upcoming *Vettaiyan* 

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t felt like winning a double jackpot." That is how Manju Warrier sums up her being part of Vettaiyan, starring Rajinikanth, and directed by TG Gnanavel, who made the critically-acclaimed Jai Bhim.

"When the offer came from Gnanavel sir's side I didn't know that Rajini sir was in the movie. The fact that I was getting a chance to work with Gnanavel sir was enough for me to say yes," says the Malayalam actor, over phone from

Manju adds, "Later when I learnt that I was acting opposite Rajini sir, it was like 'wow'. I cannot even call it a dream-come-true moment because I had never dreamt about acting with him! I can't express what I felt

She plays Thara, Rajini's wife in the film, which boasts a stellar star cast including Amitabh Bachchan, Fahadh Faasil, Rana Daggubati, Ritika Singh and Thushara Vijayan.

The icing on the cake was the release of the lyric video of the high-energy dance number, 'Manasilaayo', featuring her alongside Rajinikanth and Anirudh, the composer of the track. Her look, moves and swag have gone viral on social media. "It was when I saw the reels that I realised its virality. I have not done a song with such a vibe in my career. Tamil audiences are used to watching such songs

but it was all new for me," she says. As per her Instagram posts, the 'Manasilaayo' wave has hit 400k reels and the lyric video has

crossed 45 million views. Choreographed by Dinesh, the song was shot over five days. "Even though the team said that I needn't rehearse, I insisted on doing it. I didn't want to make mistakes on the day of the shoot and delay the proceedings," she adds.

Ever since the lyric video (and not the full song) came out, netizens have called her the surprise package of the song. Viewers are raving about her look - red sari, heavily embroidered blouse, hair left open and black



I have not done a song like 'Manasilaayo' in my career. Tamil audiences are used to watching such songs but it was all new for me

to be called that!" she stresses. MANJU WARRIER Vettaivan releases in theatres on October 10.

#### All eyes on 'Thalapathy 69'

Vijay is teaming up with filmmaker H Vinoth for his next film, which will be his last outing before he gets into full-time politics. Now, the makers of the film, tentatively called Thalapathy 69, have announced that Pooja Hegde has joined the cast. This project will also star Bobby Deol who will be making his Tamil debut with the Suriya-starrer Kanguva. Thalapathy 69, likely to be a political drama, will have music composed by Anirudh Ravichander. Thalapathy 69 is produced by Venkat K Narayana of KVN Productions and co-produced by Jagadish Palanisamy and Lohith NK and is slated to hit screens in October 2025.

Vijay's recent film, GOAT/The Greatest of All Time, is currently running in theatres and will stream on Netflix from today.

#### What's the new normal?

Scenes from a Pandemic, a 20-minute English-Hindi short film written and directed by Tanmaya Shekhar, is a throwback to the time when life, as he knew it, had to be altered to suit the 'new normal' during lockdowns. The film, streaming on HumaraMovie's YouTube Channel and produced by Tanmaya and Molshri, explores the tumultuous changes in the relationships of a 22-year-old, through a slice-of-life narrative. The film that was nominated for the Critics Choice Awards (2024), hosted by the Film Critics Guild of India, uses Instagram, WhatsApp and Zoom call visuals as narrative tools. Tanmaya's narrative intersperses the small memories of lockdowns such as instant noodles flying off the shelves of supermarkets to the horrifying reality of searching for hospital beds and oxygen concentrators.



# The queen of SWag

Ritu Varma discusses her new Telugu film, where she portrays the dual character of a queen and a civil engineer

#### Sangeetha Devi Dundoo

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n many of her films, be it an urban rom-com or a con-drama, Ritu Varma has enacted characters with a voice, and never considered pushovers. Yet, when director Hasith Goli gave her a detailed narration of Swag, she was surprised. Swag, the Telugu film releasing on October 4, is short for 'Swaganika vamsam'; the story that unfolds over different timelines has Ritu in a dual role – as queen Rukmini Devi in the past, and civil engineer Anubhuti in the present.

Ritu says, "I liked Hasith's first film, Raja Raja Chora, and thought he would narrate a romcom. Nothing prepared me for what I was going to hear." She describes Swag, starring Sree Vishnu, as an entertaining satire on gender dynamics, inheritance and lineage.

Satire on gender equations

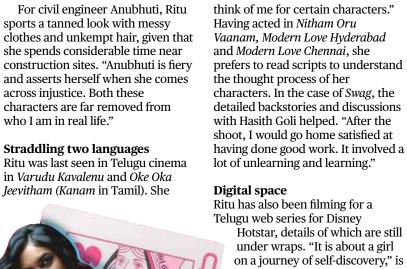
concepts of matrilineal and patrilineal societies, Ritu explains, gave her the scope to do something she had not done before. "It felt like a breath of fresh air and came to me when I was eager to sign a Telugu film."

portrays a domineering queen who does not take kindly to male heirs. Hasith gave her few references of queens of India and she also keenly observed Ramya Krishna as Sivagami in

is dressed regally, with jewellery, has a unibrow and wears coloured lens that heighten her authoritative demeanour."

For civil engineer Anubhuti, Ritu sports a tanned look with messy clothes and unkempt hair, given that she spends considerable time near construction sites. "Anubhuti is fiery and asserts herself when she comes across injustice. Both these characters are far removed from who I am in real life.'

in Varudu Kavalenu and Oke Oka



films, one an entertainer and the other, a murder mystery. Since she states that she never planned to be an actress, has she ever wondered what course her life might have taken had she not entered cinema? "I have an Engineering degree but cinema is

all that she can reveal now.

Coming up next are two Telugu

looks at Swag as an entertaining yet experimental film that will help her make her presence felt. "To date, I am touched when people come up and talk to me, at shooting spots or when I am travelling, sometimes recalling scenes from Pelli Choopulu,

Varudu... or my Tamil film Kannum

planned to be an actress and I am grateful for this recognition." Ritu has featured in Telugu and Tamil films, and says, "It is a good

space to be. I will not claim that I get

challenge to find interesting films. But I am thankful that filmmakers

too many scripts; it is still a

Kannum Kollai Adithal (Kanulu Kanulanu Dochayante). I never

> what I love. Initially, I had no long-term plans but gradually, I began enjoying acting and became passionate about my work." When not in front of the camera, she spends her time painting or reading (she mentions Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments and The Palace of Illusions among her favourite reads). "Reading and painting help me escape reality for a while and I enjoy that too."



