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THE HINDU

In Madurai, go on a food trail to sample several delectable Saurashtrian delicacies **P2**

ALL ABOUT VISHNU
VISHAL'S COP DRAMA **P4**



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I suspect that Thota Tharani's wise white beard flows the way it does because it is full of stories. At 75, the artist and one of Indian cinema's finest art directors, does not just share a lesson or two on life. His wit sparkles through repartee and banter – always choosing a quip between questions, ready to make his audience giggle. At his sprawling studio in the quiet, residential lanes of Thiruvannmiyur, one wades through a sea of canvases, sculptures, and tubes of paint, to sit down and have a chat. Then he begins, with a tale as old as time, about the magic of celluloid.

"My first memories of a cinema set come from when I was a young child accompanying my father [Thota Venkateswara Rao] who was an art director himself. Back then, people like Waheeda Rahman [actor], would carry me around. I spent much of my time there, drawing," he says.

It is this memory, buried under the long reels that make up life, that he hopes to unearth in his latest exhibition titled *Cahiers du Cinéma*, set to be on display between

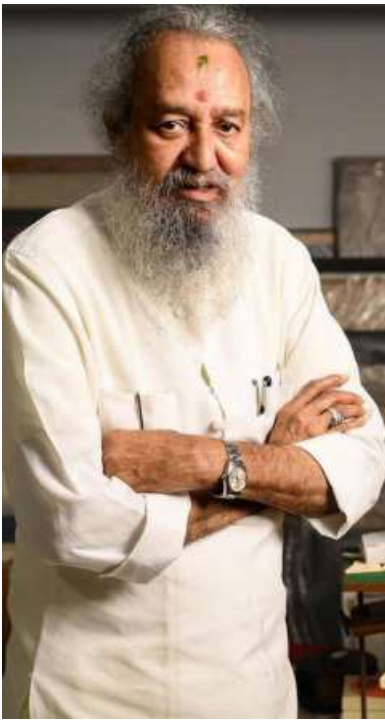
Art's all-encompassing subject

Thota Tharani, art director and artist, full of the magic he has conjured up on the silver screen, recounts his first observations of film sets in his exhibit

November 1 and 14 at the Alliance Française of Madras. In it, expect to see over 25 paintings, with frames made of discarded material – old doors, window frames, chairs, and bits of roofing. Mostly though, expect to see life in cinema from the days of yore, when horsemen were plentiful, and lightmen took years to

hone and shape the shadows.

"The sketches are made on gada cloth with sketch pens to bring together this kind of effect. The exhibition is a dedication to the young cleaning boys, cameramen, directorial assistants – people behind the scenes who helped build worlds and make cinema come alive.



I grew up with these images and spent much time observing the scenes. They have all come back and found themselves on the canvas," says the architect of some of Indian cinema's most vivid images including *Baahubali*, *Ponniyin Selvan*, *Nayakan*, and *Sivaji*.

According to Thota Tharani,

everything is a subject. In his world, observation is the best tool to inform artists about concepts like velocity. "It helps show how wind translates on paper," he says. He traces his long tryst with various subjects including figurative drawings of roosters and peacocks in the very beginning. Eventually, he began painting common sceneries, still life, gods and goddesses. It was after this stage that he chanced upon the idea of playing around with Indian scripts. "The mother tongue, it's a treasure, a *pokkisham*. In how one pronounces it, lies its beauty. I took the idea of using script as a personal challenge and began playing around with it as my next major subject," he says.

Traversing through time
Over the years, people have also encountered the artist's printmaking and quick sketches made in France between 1976 and 1977 at Atelier 17, an art school and studio that was influential in the teaching and promotion of printmaking in the 20th Century. "I travelled to all parts of the French territory, watching small ribbons hanging from fences. It is here that I envisioned my next

The all-seeing eye (Left) From a series titled *Cahiers du Cinéma*; (inset) artist Thota Tharani. SHIVARAJ S

major collection, *Symphony*. I have many sketches from the era," he says. He also did several detailed French drawings, and a series on the mysteries of the world, painting a black hole back in 1976 and 1977, on a 20 by 8 feet canvas.

Years have passed. This zest to create has ceased to die. For a long time, he insisted on creating at least one painting, drawing, or scribbling, a day and wanted to have at least one show. Today, the count stands at around 120 shows over 70 years, he says. As we speak, Thota Tharani pulls out his phone and shows us a whole stack of messages, waiting for his approval and creations for films, from producers and directors. How does he find time to create personal art? "There is no carving time. One must just do. This has been my motto since college [He studied at the Madras

School of Arts where he received a double promotion to second year, skipping the first]. Back then, one did not have a line up of jobs, particularly after completing an Arts course. We did what we had to do with focus to get by," he says. When he does not

create, Thota Tharani can be seen enjoying classical music. His favourite is Johannes Brahms despite the occasionally melancholic tonality. He also listens to the big three – Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, as well as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and Frédéric Chopin. "Tamil cinema composers are no less though. Look at Ilayairaja, he is a genius and a very intelligent fellow. He would write notes just before reaching the theatre. In another life, I would have liked to have been a conductor," he says.

For now though, duty calls. Thota Tharani, windswept in white, whizzes away to check if the placement of his works at Alliance is perfect. "Swing by one of these days. We will go over the art that I made for films," he says, parting with a promise.

Cahiers du Cinéma is on display between November 1 and 14 at the Alliance Française de Madras, Nungambakkam. Entry is free.

Thota Tharani will be part of a new podcast series from *The Hindu* titled *This Changed My Life*. The first episode releases on November 1. Subscribe to *The Hindu* Originals on YouTube to catch the first episode.

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Tamil playwright, activist, and theatre exponent Pralayan has a crew full of young and talented artistes starring in his latest play *Vanapechi* (Queen of the forest) set to premiere at the Provoke Theatre Festival. When asked about what it is like to work with Gen Z, the founder of Chennai Kalai Kuzhu, a group which began 40 years ago, Pralayan admits in jest that the "boomer uncles" and those perceived as older, cease to have a vocabulary that can engage with them meaningfully. Yet, his belief in a fundamental truth, sets him free. "I know that they are attracted to the truth," he says.

In his consistent attempt at this truth telling, something that has sustained his theatre troupe through times in the 1980s when sedition cases against theatre artistes by the Tamil Nadu Government were rife, he brings to the world his new play starring actor Rohini in the lead.

Vanapechi tells the tale of Thadagai from the Hindu epic *The Ramayana*. In Valmiki's version of the tale, she is a *rakshasi*, a monster or a witch. She is slayed by the hero



Who is deemed a witch? Who is deemed a hero? *Vanapechi*, a play starring actor Rohini, is a commentary on Nature and its disfiguration, through myth

Nature's tell-tale signs

of this tale, Rama. Yet, Pralayan subverts this narrative. "This story is told from Thadagai's lens. She is a metaphor for Nature. In the epic, she is 'disfigured' or 'distorted' by Rama. This is an injustice to someone who merely wanted to protect the forest. The play, in the urban context, speaks about the steady disfiguration of Nature. We need to act now as climate change is steadily becoming an urgent global concern. It hopes to make the audience rethink our most fundamental questions -- who are

we and where are we headed," he says.

When asked why Indian theatre artistes and writers keep going back to storied epics, Pralayan replies that these tales are often only told through the lens of the victors. "In this play, we challenge that perspective. Indologists have repeatedly written that there are over 300 versions of *The Ramayana*. We do not want to impose the same arbitrary values that [in this case] Valmiki chose to say. We want to ask questions about

it. Thadagai was technically wronged. Who is she, if not a hero," he says. To him, his artistic choices inform his politics and vice versa. However, his creative expression always takes precedence over politics, he says. Pralayan chose to cast Rohini, who has starred in countless Tamil features including the likes of *Magalir Mattum* and *Marubadiyum*, because of their continued association since 2006. The two had met at an event by the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Association where Rohini was being

From the epics Actor Rohini and cast members of the play *Vanapechi*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

felicitated. It was director Balu Mahendra who suggested he meet her. "After a while, when I worked as an assistant director and writer with actor Kamal Haasan, particularly during the time of *Virumaandi*, we began interacting again. For many years now, she has been acting in plays by Chennai Kalai Kuzhu. She is now, the lead in this play," he says.

Rohini, says that the world over, cinema's greatest actors have gone back to their theatrical roots and allowed the audiences to understand the full extent of their acting potential. Yet, Tamil actors seldom tread this path. "I've been trying to change that for myself since 2010 because I have observed that some of my most favourite actors, including Nasiruddin Shah, are products of theatre. Through Thadagai, I wish to tell people that Nature isn't meek. What gives us the right to be masters of it?," she says.

Catch *Vanapechi* at the Provoke Theatre Festival on November 2 at The Music Academy, TTK Road. Gates open at 5pm and entry is free.

STEP OUT



Cinderella sings again

The Madras Musical Association brings a modern sparkle to the stage with *Cinderella: A Pop Fairytale*, a musical retelling of the timeless classic. Audiences can expect a vibrant spectacle that fuses drama, humour, and heart – all told through the universal language of music. Featuring the MMA Choir and a live band, the production blends vibrant choreography, contemporary tunes, and playful storytelling. Scripted, choreographed, and directed by Deepa Nambiar with music by Augustine Paul, the show promises a magical experience for audiences of all ages. @Museum Theatre, Egmore. October 31 and November 1, 7pm. Tickets on bookmyshow starting at ₹500.

Simple fare
(Clockwise from right)
Mullu murungai keerai
vada made at the
Mariamman
Teppakulam; at
Annapoorani Vilas
Pongal Kada; and
Vedhavathi at her
appam stall.
MOORTHY G



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Leaning against the low stone wall of the Vandiyur Maariamman temple's Teppakulam (tank), I bite into a fluffy keerai vada from a pushcart nearby. Dusk has set in in Madurai and street food vendors surround the landmark temple tank in the city, selling everything from paruthi paal to paruppu poli. But the keerai vada – made with mullu murungai leaves (Indian coral) – that is served with a sprinkling of gun powder, is truly special. It is mild, nutty, crisp and chewy at the same time, and is among the most popular dishes from the Saurashtra community in Madurai's food scene. Saurashtrians are spread across several neighbourhoods in Madurai, such as Vandiyur, Nilaiyur, Munichalai, and Avaniyapuram. A majority of them are in the food business. From karupatti appam, paruppu poli, puttu, and pongal,

Path to pongal

Saurashtrians in Madurai who are in the food business, selling karupatti appam, paruppu poli, puttu, and pongal, keep the city fed with simple vegetarian food that is also easy on the pocket

Madurai's Saurashtrians are known for their simple vegetarian food that is also easy on the pocket. But the people, according to historian C Santalingam, arrived in Madurai to weave silks for royalty. "King Tirumalai Nayak, who ruled the region from 1623 to 1659, made

Madurai his capital," he says, adding: "He brought people from Gujarat's Saurashtra to Madurai since they were skilled weavers." Over the years, when weaving lost its sheen, many of them took to cooking. "My father used to weave cotton as well as silk," says R



Bhuvaneshwari from the community, whose family is settled in Dindigul. "He entered the food business since weaving wasn't profitable anymore," she adds. Their sweet stop Jilebi Seshaiyer on Sandhai Road was started as a pushcart venture in the 1960s. Bhuvaneshwari says there are several Saurashtrians in her neighbourhood selling puttu, idiyappam and idli at their doorstep and on pushcarts. MG Vedhavathi is hugely popular in Madurai for karupatti appam and kara paniyaram sold with thin coconut chutney. A Saurashtrian,

her roadside shop opposite the Sourashtra Boys Higher Secondary School on Kamarajar Salai, that has been around for 14 years, is known as 'Akka kada' among her customers. She arrives with a large trough of caramel-coloured batter and steel boxes filled with butter at 6.30am, making live appams, and selling out by 10.30am. She too is from a family of weavers, and took to cooking after her grandmother who sold puttu and appam at Villapuram in the city for four decades. **Kitchen tales** What drew them to the food business? "Most of us are good cooks," says Vedhavathi's son-in-law CK Senthil Kumar, who owns a grocery store in the city. "Turning to cooking was a natural choice when weaving started failing us around 15 years ago," explains the 41-year-old. Their food, mild on the palate, is the preferred choice for lunch for many in the city. "In some neighbourhoods, one can buy meals

for just ₹20 from sellers on bicycles," says Senthil. "They sell kulambu and poriyal in small pouches from 11.30am to 2pm." While people from the community also cook non-vegetarian food, their vegetarian dishes are more sought-after. Annapoorani Vilas Pongal Kada is among the oldest Saurashtrian restaurants in the city. Located at Munichali, the eatery has been in existence for over 55 years. There is no free table, I note to my dismay, as I walk in for lunch one afternoon. AG Jayaram, whose grandfather AR Rajaram started the place, is scooping out dollops of variety rice from large steel containers on plates. He sells seven rice varieties including vegetable pulao, lemon, tamarind, and tomato rice, venpongol, sweet pongal and kesari. The golden-brown tamarind rice is surprisingly mild and not too tangy, while the tomato rice tastes like fragrant biryani. Prices range from ₹25 to ₹35; a steal considering the quantity and quality. "The cooking is done by the women in the family, namely AJ Ganga and AM Hema," explains Jayaram. The 500 sq ft space with its wooden tables, yellow walls, blue wooden door, and framed photos of gods on the walls has an old-world charm, which Jayaram adds to with his poise despite the surging afternoon crowd. There are some dishes that Saurashtrians cook only at home. One such is the paruthisor, loosely translated as 'cotton rice'. Vedhavathi explains that it is cooked for pregnant women. "To make it, we soak cotton seeds to grind and extract milk," she says, adding: "This is cooked with rice, to which karupatti syrup is added gradually until all the ingredients bind well." While in Madurai, Saurashtrians do not have a unique cuisine of sorts, their food represents the spirit of the community, and the city itself: simplicity and staying grounded.

Sixty craft years

Celebrating six decades of working with India's handmade heritage, the Crafts Council of India reflects on its journey of empowering artisans

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"The handcrafted object is not merely an article of utility, it is the expression of a way of life" – Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Founded in 1964 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the Crafts Council of India (CCI), celebrates its 60th year of dedicated service this year. Kamaladevi brought to CCI the spirit of activism, inspiring a group of committed volunteers to dedicate themselves to the cause of artisans. The CCI, headquartered in Chennai, marked its 60th year with the launch of the book, *The Crafts Council of India: Celebrating 60 Years of Craft*, written by Rukmini Amirapu. The book was released on October 26 by CCI chairperson Gita Ram, and the first copy was received by Ashoke Chatterjee, past president and currently honorary advisor to CCI. The book serves as a comprehensive record of CCI's six-decade journey, documenting its history and the work undertaken by its State councils. These efforts highlight the organisation's enduring commitment to India's craft heritage and to the artisans who sustain it.

Speaking at the event, Gita reflected on the organisation's six-decade journey. "Over these six decades, the needs and challenges of artisans have evolved. In the early years, eliminating child labour was a major concern. Later, we focussed on marketing art and craft products. We have continued to support these communities through design intervention, product development, and marketing, helping them reach a wider consumer base worldwide. The key words that describe CCI's work are 'support, promote, and sustain'. Artisans are empowered through technology



upgrades and improved techniques," she said.

Looking back Associated with the CCI for 47 years, Gita added that the organisation is now focussing on nurturing and training the next generation of artisans. "We encourage and train young people during weekends, regardless of their academic background, so that they can later decide whether to pursue a career in the arts or in another field," she explained. Gita said that marketing support remains one of CCI's key areas of activity. CCI showcases and markets artisans' products through its dedicated stores in Chennai (Kamala Crafts Shop), ensuring that traditional crafts continue to find appreciation and buyers in contemporary markets.

Documenting the journey The CCI also organised an exhibition celebrating the organisation's six-decade journey, highlighting its work and that of its affiliated State councils. The pictorial exhibition featured select artefacts that represent India's rich craft traditions, including the Kondapalli musical trio, Aranmula kannadi, leather puppetry, Narikurava beaded jewellery, Lambadi craft, and more. Alongside these displays, the exhibition presented photographs and narratives that traced CCI's evolution and its sustained efforts to support artisans across the country.

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In a unit in Alinjivakkam, near Chennai, rows of blue trays hold tufts of hair. These then go through a rigorous 14-step process that include sorting, washing, drying, segregation based on colour, texture and length, stitching, and knotting. It takes 10 to 14 days to make one wig. And soon, it finds its way to cancer warriors across the country. We are at The Cherian Foundation's wig making unit, where a team of 60 has been steadily hand knotting wigs for the last 10 years.

The Chennai-based Foundation was started in 2004 by Benjamin Cherian. Over the years, it has been focussing on various segments such as education which includes classroom infrastructure for Panchayat schools and scholarships; refurbishing Primary Health Centres; mammogram, pap smear, and cardio camps. During these efforts, the members of the foundation came across several persons with cancer. They heard their stories and eventually in 2014, started the Gift Hair and Gift Confidence campaign which donates wigs free of cost to people with cancer. "Gift Hair and Gift Confidence started with a hair donation drive that we did with Women's Christian College," says Sara Benjamin Cherian, trustee, The Cherian



Wig it to win it

This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we speak to The Cherian Foundation that donates wigs to 25 hospitals around the country

Foundation, adding, "In 2017 Adyar Cancer Institute came up with a clinical study. Fifty patients were given wigs, and 50 were not given wigs. The ones who received wigs, responded better to treatment. This study was a great motivation for us that we were on the right track." Eventually, patients from other hospitals started enquiring about wig distribution. So, we decided to take this initiative to a pan India level, she says. In 2018, Mount Carmel College, Bengaluru, came onboard and there was a talk organised by the

foundation. Before that they had received only five registrations for hair donation. But after the talk, they managed 400 hair donations the same day. "Progress has been steady, and now there are 25 hospitals under our belt. The list includes Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi, MNJ Institute of Oncology, Hyderabad, all the Tata Hospitals, and Sringeri Sharada Equitas Hospital, Chennai," says Sara. These hospitals have also been requested to set up wig banks. In a month, The Cherian Foundation receives around 500 packets of hair donation

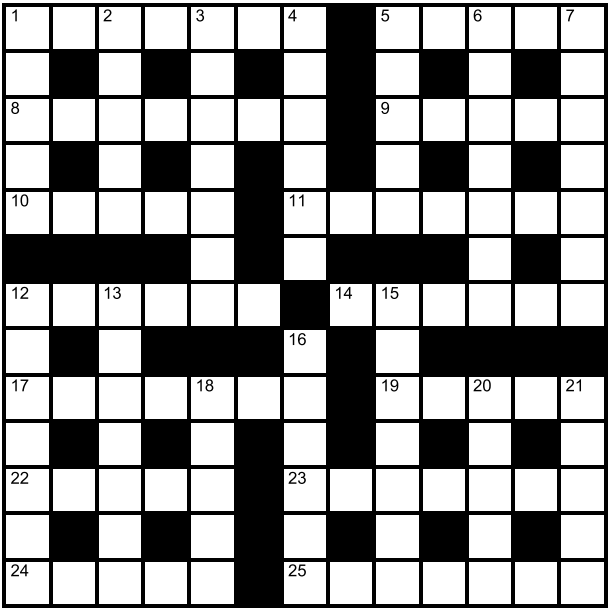
Locks to talk about Wig making in progress at The Cherian Foundation's unit in Alinjivakkam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

from all over the world. There is variety: curly, wavy, silky, straight, dark brown, grey, silver, jet black, and these work well as one size, one look may not fit all patients. So, an assortment of wigs is sent to the hospitals. "It costs ₹8,900 rupees to make a wig. Of which ₹3,000 is borne by the foundation," says Sara. Each wig has the capacity of being refurbished at least four times. The shelf life is four years. Ideally, a patient requires it only for 12 months. Hospitals send them to the foundation for refurbishment and re-sanitation, where it is done free of cost. While efforts are on to reach further and touch more lives, Sara says, "The Cherian Foundation has made a commitment to provide 10,000 wigs by 2033, and we have already done 1,600."

For details, log on to cherianfoundation.org



QUICK CROSSWORD #25 (Set by Doppelganger)



Across

- 1 Cultivation of land (7)
- 5 Feelings (5)
- 8 Not at all famous (7)
- 9 Show smug satisfaction (5)
- 10 Violaceous garden plant (5)
- 11 Take to task (7)
- 12 Printing process (6)
- 14 Cereal of grass family (6)
- 17 Swagger (7)
- 19 Copper and Zinc alloy (5)
- 22 Tie up (5)
- 23 Positive terminal of battery (7)
- 24 Pass rope through a hole (5)
- 25 Depict something (7)

Down

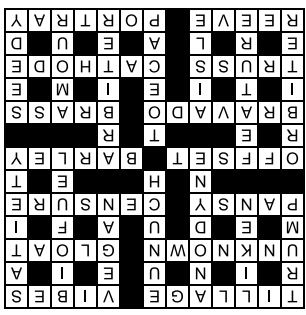
- 1 Current U.S. President (5)
- 2 Compare (5)
- 3 Pain relieving medicine (7)
- 4 Former guard of a harem (6)
- 5 Eats plant products only (5)
- 6 Source of energy (7)
- 7 Fully gratified (7)
- 12 Space probe that does not land (7)

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



- 13 Characteristic (7)
- 15 He/She settles arguments (7)
- 16 Reinforced covering of part of boot (6)
- 18 A passage in the church (5)
- 20 Secret love affair (5)
- 21 Disreputable (5)

Solution No. 25



A legacy as old as time (Top) The exhibition showcasing crafts revived by the CCI; and (left) the commemorative book. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Wok the talk

Same Same But Different, Chennai's new Thai restaurant, offers flavourful dishes, minus the stereotypical curries

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I hand over my key to the valet, and ask him the way to Same Same But Different. He shrugs and says, “No idea, madam.” He is probably as confused as I am, because till a while ago, this was a place that dished out paper roast dosas. Now, it is redolent with the aroma of coconut milk, charred meat, and basil.

Do we really need one more Thai restaurant in the city? Well, Same Same But Different – true to its name – plates up familiar flavours in fresh ways. The food aims at being authentic, but instead of sticking to stereotypical red and green curry, it offers small (and often fiery) plates inspired by the land of smiles.

“The food here is inspired by the different regions of Thailand. For example, flavours in the North are more spicy, less coconutty, while in the South it’s milder and creamier,” explains Sandesh Reddy, chef and restaurateur, who started Same Same But Different. While all the dishes may not be authentic, it gave the team the creative freedom to build something that is inspired by Thai cuisine and yet, is not too far out to be on the menu. But when it comes to basics like pad Thai or tom yum and the base of the curries on the menu, it remains true to its roots. The sauces and pastes are handmade in-house. In that sense there is a



lot of authenticity, Sandesh explains. Set on the first floor, past a demure fluted glass door, the space is intimate and fun, with bright colours offering a range of backdrops for selfies. Other than the name of the restaurant, the art is also inspired by many colloquial Thai phrases and pop culture references, says Sandesh. We start with the pulled chicken and crisp wonton salad. It arrives heaped with crisp curls of wonton and chicken, with slivers of carrot and cucumber. Tossed in the bright flavours of Thai herbs and sweet chilli sauce, we eat it quickly while the wontons are still crunchy.



Next up, chicken dumplings. But there is a twist! The menu describes this as ‘dumplings take holiday in Thai coconut spa’. These neat little parcels are doused in a rich coconut broth with chilli oil added for good measure. The result – we eat them with our eyes shut and gentle happy moans escaping our lips. With the following dish, our expression of pleasure is even more apparent. The lamb chops are rubbed in Thai spices, marinated in kaffir

► **Thai kick** Dishes including the khow suey and pulled chicken, and wonton salad at Same Same But Different. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lime and lemongrass, and perfectly char grilled with a smoky flavour. They need more than a moment on the lips. Even after we are done with the meat, we keep gnawing at the bone which has a sweet charred taste. On further perusal of the packed menu we notice the words: All Meat, No Diet. On cue, we order a portion of crisp fried beef. It is subtly crunchy on the top and satisfyingly chewy on the inside, with a faint hit of heat from the burnt chilli jam. And before we know it another portion is ordered, savoured, and demolished within minutes. The other interesting entries on the menu include soft crab omelette, raw jackfruit curry, spicy corn ribs with Thai coconut chilli dust. The heat is the result of bird’s eye chilli, coconut and citric acid.



Since Thai food is incomplete without stir fry, we try the sassy saucy killer beans and Asian greens. Both crunchy and deliciously garlicky. Greens, if done this way, can become a permanent addition to my lunch box. For main course, the pad Thai with a generous smattering of egg floss and chicken lives up to its image of poster boy of Thai cuisine.

My only regret from the evening, is the all things Thai fried rice that is fiery enough to induce hiccups. The red flakes of chilli dotting the rice, stare back at me as if mocking my inability to handle the heat. I go back to my pad Thai and immerse myself in it, finding comfort in its mild sweet, tart, and salty flavour and in the crunch of crushed peanuts.

Same Same But Different is at St Marys Road, Alwarpet. Meal for two is priced at ₹2,000. Call 47776999.

Conversations in colour

The exhibition unites diverse artists exploring the varied moods and expressions of abstraction

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At Art Houz, the walls come alive – not with portraits or landscapes but with the language of abstraction. Here, colours converse, merge, and integrate to create shapes and forms that tell stories of their own. Titled, Echoes in Colour, the ongoing exhibition brings together the diverse works of 17 artists. Some canvases feel familiar, like fragments of home; others bring in a sense of what a home can be.

Take, for instance, Karishma Wadhwa’s series titled Opus, inspired by her travels around the world and her experiences moving between cities like Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. “I observed that people are often obsessed with their origins and view everything through the lens of their home and identity. I realised that when I stepped back and viewed the entire world, my home and identity are just a small speck. The realisation became a key aspect of my work.” In her paintings, viewers initially see structures and forms, but upon stepping back, they notice the smaller details, colours, and hidden underlayers.

“We brought together artists who work around the theme of the exhibit, where they are not creating some kind of form, but are letting colours and textures speak more on the canvas,” says Poornima Shivram, curator of the exhibition.

Chennai-based Isaarasi Annamalai’s series Akash, delves into the concept of space, exploring the ever-changing nature of forms within it. The different shades of blue in the series represent the shifting quality of space – the light and dark, near and far, known and unknown. “Through the dissolving forms and the subtle play of colours and textures, I aim to invite the viewer into a journey of discovery, where the boundaries between form and void are blurred, and where space itself becomes a living, breathing entity.”

In Pooja Si’s series Abstraction in Kaleidoscope, we are instantly taken to our childhood days of holding a



► **In brushstrokes** Pooja Si’s series Abstraction in Kaleidoscope. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

kaleidoscope in our hands and the joy of witnessing the shifting colours and forms. “My experiments and study with geometry of abstract forms have gradually led me to look at the kaleidoscope as a point of reference and as a device that creates beautiful forms, patterns, geometrical shapes and colours. I am wholly appealing to the concept of *sattva guna*, an Indian philosophy that speaks about purity, goodness, and harmony, in the painting with the use of bold colours and shapes to define joy, intelligence, positivity, divinity, and pleasure.”

In S Anand’s Woven Hues series, he uses Sgraffito technique, to create an Impasto style abstract, where he applies thick coats of colours in two layers to get the textural effect. The result is a piece that has an underlying coating of contrasting colours. “To get a result of sgraffito technique, I scratch the top layer of paint, while still wet, to reveal a bottom layer of a different colour. In the technique, I can use a variety of tools, like the edge of a painting knife, the tip of a brush handle, a wire brush, or any sharp tool.”

Through these works, a dialogue of colour, textures and emotions emerges – a reminder that art exists in all forms and feelings.

Echoes in Colour is on till November 5 at Art Houz, Nungambakkam from 10am to 6.30pm. Entry free.

The sweet side of things

Chennai’s newest confectionery brand Inippu Indulgence draws on heritage and brings together native flavours and toffee

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Pooja’s Srinivasan’s bite-sized toffee, Inippu Indulgence, she says, has come to represent many things. Heritage, identity, introspection, and a daily routine she best enjoys with her espresso in the afternoon.

“Around a year ago, I began tinkering around in my kitchen, trying to perfect making this toffee. It made sense to me; it is a global confectionery, so universal that every culture across the world seems to have a version of it,” she says.

A Le Cordon Bleu graduate, Pooja is no stranger to the world of confection and all things sweet. She and her sister Kavya Srinivasan have been integral in helping run their father’s bakery, CakeWalk on Sterling road, for over a decade now. When I meet her, it is at Crisp Cafe right above the bakery where the shelves continue to be filled with slices of their legendary chocolate truffle cake amongst many more sweet treats. “The journey at CakeWalk has been incredible. I have worked on and introduced new products, have been involved in operations, and even launched our chocolate brand Sugar Coat chocolates in the past,” she says.

The Inippu Indulgence journey however, was different. “No one knew what I was working on in my kitchen for the longest time. I did not want early validation from people who knew me and instead set to work on perfecting the recipes, FSSAI approvals, and getting export certified,” she explains about her toffee which is preservative free and has a shelf life of 90 days. “A lot of Inippu comes down to identity for me; and showcasing my roots,” she adds.



Pooja says she also drew on the expertise of her colleagues from CakeWalk who have been there in the business for years – Reji K Paul, general manager and Joem Moyalan, CakeWalk’s internal auditor. Three months ago, Inippu Indulgence launched with five flavours of chewy, soft, and fudgy toffee. “It felt fulfilling to work on something with ingredients that are deeply rooted to South India, sugar and jaggery of course, but also using sea salt from Tuticorin, and spices from the Malabar region for example. We have all the native ingredients here to create a top quality heritage confectionery that can go global,” she says. As smaller bites, Inippu, Pooja adds, is a mindful indulgence which is in trend now given how health conscious people are. Wrapped in bite-sized pieces and arranged neatly in boxes of 16, Inippu Indulgence comes in filter coffee, Tuticorin sea salt, Malabar spice, Dakshina cocoa, and pure vanilla bean flavours. For the monsoon, and

► **Bite-sized indulgence** In different flavours, Inippu Indulgence comes in boxes of 16 pieces which can be customised. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



spooky season ahead of Halloween, Inippu has two new flavours; roasted pecan Malabar spice, and brown sugar salted butter. “These two new flavours will be available for only fifty boxes this season. We will keep bringing in new flavours though, and already have a couple ready for the upcoming Christmas season,” Pooja says.

While customised boxes of four are also becoming popular as wedding favours both in India and abroad, a recent order that they worked on has Pooja immensely excited. “For the WTA 250 Chennai Open tennis tournament, we worked on toffee boxes which will be given to all the participating athletes. This was a big opportunity for us, as a brand that has created something Tamil Nadu can showcase to the rest of the world,” she says.

Inippu Indulgence is priced at ₹750 for a box of 16. For orders, DM them on Instagram @inippuindulgence

SPOOKY SEASON



The Park, Anna Salai

The Halloween buffet unfolds in eerie elegance, beginning with a witch’s spiced pumpkin brew and caprese eyeballs, and wickedly good devilled eggs. Guests can savour chicken sausage fingers, demon-eye manchurian and mutton biryani. Vegetarian delights take a dark turn with palak paneer, and spinach cannelloni. On October 31, 7pm onwards. Priced at ₹1,849 plus taxes. For reservations, call 42676000.



November 1, 6pm onwards. The buffet is priced at ₹1,099 plus taxes. For reservations, call 8062210190



The Warf 2.0, Mamallapuram

Fright Tide by Wharf 2.0 brings Halloween to the coast with beats by DJ Prashant alongside a spooky staycation prize in the costume contest. There are themed cocktails, food, and an unlimited buffet by the bay. @Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay, Mamallapuram. On October 31 and

Park Hyatt, Guindy

The Flying Elephant brings to Chennai Boos and Booze, a night of music, costumes, and celebration. Guests can step into a world of dark beats, dazzling energy, and wickedly good spirits. Packages begin at ₹3,500 for food and soft drinks, with an optional upgrade of ₹1,500 for unlimited cocktails and premium pours. October 31, 8pm onwards. For reservations, call 893987112.

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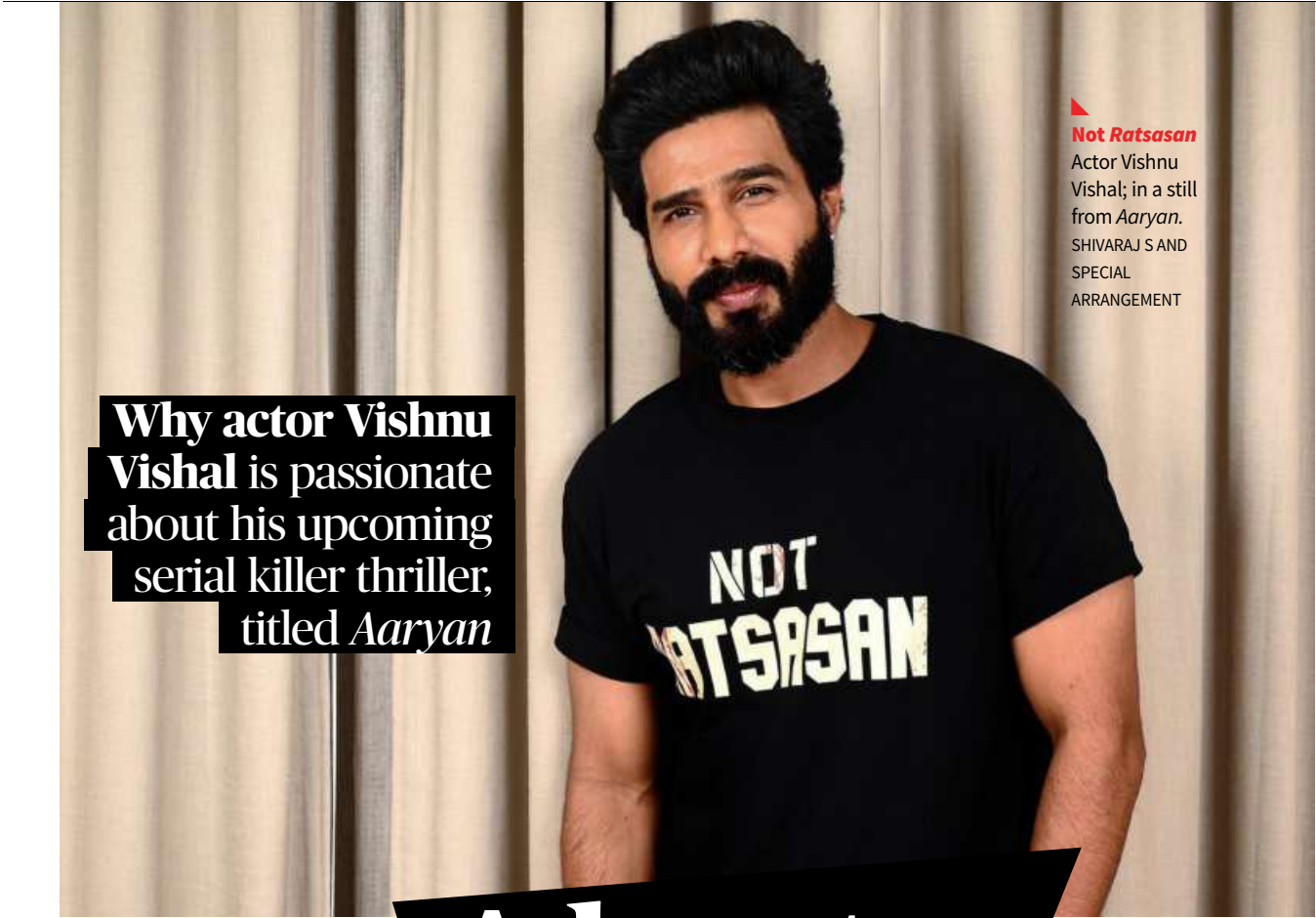


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TICKETING PARTNER





Not Ratsasan
Actor Vishnu Vishal; in a still from *Aaryan*. SHIVARAJ S AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Why actor Vishnu Vishal is passionate about his upcoming serial killer thriller, titled *Aaryan*

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Vishnu Vishal makes a statement as he walks in for the promotions of his upcoming film. His T-shirt reads, in bold letters, “Not Ratsasan.”

There is a reason for that: it is to announce that his next, *Aaryan*, despite being a crime thriller, will be different from his 2018 superhit (*Ratsasan*), also a crime thriller.

“Over the last decade, *Ratsasan* has become a sort of textbook on how to make a thriller. I can never probably beat that, but *Aaryan*, on the other hand, will be a new experience,” said the actor.

This confidence stems from many aspects, prime among them being the unique one-liner that director Praveen K narrated to him a few years ago. “Thrillers revolving around serial killers are most interesting because you want to know who is behind the murders,” he explains. With *Aaryan*’s trailer, the makers reveal who it is, which likely points to the character essayed by Selvaraghavan. But is there a twist there? “Well, the storyline was unique,” laughs

Vishnu, “I respect writers and directors who come up with elements that are seemingly impossible.”

Here, Vishnu plays a cop trying to crack a mysterious case, something that his father (Ramesh Kudawla, a former Director-General of Police) has seen quite frequently in his professional life. “When I told him the one-liner about a situation this cop is in, he was zapped. That a policeman as experienced as him felt that way gave me a lot more

confidence to back this project.”

Post 2018, Vishnu underwent a tough phase in both his personal and professional life. While he was separated from his then-wife before the divorce was finalised, his films kept getting dropped due to various reasons. “Nine movies got dropped,” he states, “I didn’t understand what was happening.”

Slowly, he was able to pin all these disappointments to one reason: that his 2018 flick

Sillukuvarpatti Singam did not do well at the box office, which sent across a message to prospective producers that he was not a bankable star. “It is another matter that the film was released along with seven others, thus decreasing



its chances of theatrical collections,” explains Vishnu, who went on to bankroll his own projects, like the 2022 action thriller *FIR*.

Variety fare

On the subject of collections, Vishnu points out how the success of films like *Lokah*, *Pushpa* and *Kantara* augurs well for the industry. Why, then, has Tamil cinema not yet churned out that big pan-India blockbuster? Vishnu ponders, “*Enthiran* (2010), in my opinion, was the first pan-India blockbuster, but I feel after that, we have missed a trick. I feel the reason that films work across the country is because they are rooted in the milieu they are set in. We in Tamil cinema are missing our roots. We think that pan-India is about star combinations, which it is not. Also – and this viewpoint might be controversial – Tamil cinema stars are overpaid. I’m saying this despite being an actor myself. In the process, the budgets for the actual making of the film come down.”

Vishnu has busy years ahead of him, where he will dabble in a variety of genres: there is a love story titled *Irundu Vaanam*, a comedy flick *Gatta Gusthi 2*, a sports-based film with Arunraja Kamaraj, and another romance film with *Bachelor* director Sathish Selvakumar. But among these, *Aaryan* is special because it is named after Vishnu’s own son, who is eight years old now. “I did not see him grow, as I had separated from his mother by then. Plus, it was during the COVID-19 phase. Despite not having spent enough time with him, I am extremely emotionally attached,” he feels. This attachment also comes with a fair bit of pressure, he cautions.

“Someone asked me why I was looking stressed these days, and that is because though I am extremely happy with the way *Aaryan* has turned out, it has to live up to my son’s name. In future, when he grows up, he should feel happy watching it.”

Aaryan is set to release in theatres on October 31



The Family Man Season 3 locks release date

Prime Video has announced that *The Family Man* Season 3 will premiere globally on November 21, marking the much-awaited return of Manoj Bajpayee as Srikanth Tiwari. Created by Raj & DK under the D2R Films banner, the new chapter

promises higher stakes than ever before. “The hunter becomes the hunted,” teased the creators, hinting at Srikanth facing a threat that could destroy both his career and his family. Season 3 also introduces many new cast members, including Jaideep Ahlawat as the mysterious antagonist Rukma. Raj & DK co-direct the series with Suman Kumar and Tusshar Seyth, who also share writing credits.



R Madhavan’s first look as GD Naidu from upcoming biopic out

The first look of actor R Madhavan as Indian inventor and engineer GD Naidu from the upcoming biopic *GDN* was released. Directed by Krishnakumar Ramakumar, the film also features Sathyaraj, Jayaram, Priyamani, Dushara Vijayan, Thambi Ramaiah, and Vinay Rai. It has music scored by Govind Vasantha and cinematography by Aravind Kamalanathan. Varghese Moolan Pictures and Madhavan’s Tricolour Films, who previously collaborated on *Rocketry: The Nambi Effect* (2022) are producing *GDN*.

Sounds of *Kantara*

Ajaneesh Loknath opens up on creating the soundtrack for Rishab Shetty’s hit prequel film



Music of deiva
(Left) Ajaneesh Loknath; (below) Rukmini Vasanth and Rishab Shetty in a still from *Kantara: Chapter 1* RAVICHANDRAN N AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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“Music *romba nalla irukku* (music is really good),” said AR Rahman to Ajaneesh Loknath, and for the music composer who grew up listening to the legendary composer’s chartbusters, the words of praise for his work in *Kantara: Chapter 1* meant a lot.

Ajaneesh is basking in the biggest success of his career, as *Kantara: Chapter 1* has emerged as India’s highest-grossing film of 2025 so far. A decade into his career, the success comes as a fitting milestone for the composer, and it has arrived with his regular collaborator, actor-director Rishab Shetty.

Ajaneesh opens up on the hit ‘Brahmakalasha’ from *Kantara: Chapter 1* to state Rishab’s deep connection with music: “The first 40-50 seconds of the song are enhanced by the use of Alaap [the introductory and improvisational melodic section that sets the tone of a song or a performance]. In the era of musical hooks, it’s very rare for an actor or a director to allow a composer to use Alaap in a song. Rishab was very clear from the beginning. He wanted the music to have international standards.”

Brahmakalasha is an arresting devotional song. It has the masterful use of different ragas combined with a soundscape that is authentic to ancient history depicted in the movie. Singer Abby’s soulful voice lends further strength to the song, which is also a visual marvel. “Abby’s voice is a lot similar to mine. Our voice isn’t too masculine. It has a soothing quality that’s needed for a song like ‘Brahmakalasha’,”

explains Ajaneesh.

“Madana Mana Mohini,” a melodious love track involving Rishab and Rukmini Vasanth, begins in a captivating fashion. “I used *thanam* [an improvisational technique to elaborate a raga] to start the song. The ‘Brahmakalasha’ song begins with an instrument. So, this had to be different. The song had to have an element of *shrungara* [element of love]. When I placed a *thanam* at the beginning of the song, it had a charming effect, and Rishab loved the idea.”

The romantic number is sung by Vijay Prakash and Ananya Bhat, the duo that sang the popular ‘Singara Siriye’ from *Kantara* (2022). “I was worried that people would compare ‘Madana Mana Mohini’ with ‘Singara Siriye.’ Vijay *ji* instilled



confidence in me. He said that my song has the ability to grow gradually on the listener.” Vijay was proven right, as the song has slowly gained popularity after initially being under

the radar.

Ajaneesh calls *Kantara: Chapter 1* his most challenging project yet, with the week before the release testing his potential to the maximum. “I struggled to score for the climax portion of the movie. It was as if I had reached a dead end. I don’t know how, but eventually, just before it was too late, I managed to create the background score in just 30 minutes. We also had to take the output of 25 songs as the film was dubbed in five languages. Till the last moment, I was awaiting many approvals. I believe a divine force helped me sail through these challenges. It’s hard to explain,” he says.

The composer, who has had a packed couple of years, has *Mark*, starring Sudeep, and *Devil*, headlined by Darshan, coming up next.

Digging deep

A mystical well in a remote village in Erode district is the focus of a new documentary titled *Bhaavi* by Balaji Maheshwar

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One’s first impression of Solaganai, a tribal village tucked deep in the thick confluence of the Eastern and Western Ghats, is cemented through a story that a village elder says about an ancient, spiritual well.

Three hundred years ago, during a tense summer of intense drought in this hamlet buried amidst the trees of Anthiyur forest in Erode district, a tiger that frequented these paths was found late in the night with water dripping from its mouth. “Until then, people would cross two or three mountains, walking for days to have their thirst parched,” the village elder says in a convergent Tamil and Kannada dialect, one that

people from both sides of the border would disassociate from, yet understand in entirety.

In *Bhaavi*, a documentary film by Balaji Maheshwar, one sees the restoration of this marvel of a well located at least two hours away from the nearest town, as part of a larger project – the Public Well Revival Movement started by Tamil Nadu-based Cuckoo Movement for Children, which strives to make childhood meaningful for children located in Tiruvannamalai district. The film will be screened at the Dharamshala International Film Festival between October 30 and November 2.

“I grew up in a city with piped water supply. The founders of Cuckoo Movement for Children and I had been in touch for a while. They asked if I would be interested in



documenting the restoration of an old well. It was easy to agree to because it would be visually stunning – a village in the hills. But very quickly, a story, both mythical and enchanting, unfolded. Here, the people think of the water source as a spiritual entity. The revival of the well or *bhaavi*, was surrounded by mysticism,” the director says.

Till date, the revival movement has restored 15 wells in Tamil Nadu, especially in the face of stringent policies surrounding the sinking of borewells in the State that require elaborate permissions for domestic use. Madhu Manjari Selvaraj is one of the architects in the project and features in the film too, directing the villagers on the construction of the well.

Balaji says that the work of restoration happened over about six or seven months. Unlike in cities or towns, one could not use machines to blast the big rocks to be sensitive to ecology in this forest densely populated by creatures of all kinds including elephants. “The process of reviving a well works at a snail’s pace. I went with my

Well up A still of villagers moving rocks to make way for the new well in *Bhaavi*; (below) Balaji Maheshwar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

associate, M Mari Muthu, for a stretch of about 10 days every month or two to document the progress,” he says. In *Bhaavi*, the audience visualises the story from the point of view of its subjects. Balaji says that he has chosen to employ an observational style of filmmaking, inspired by Japanese filmmaker Kazuhiro Soda, who often exists, observes, and shows.



“One can never verify how old someone or something truly is there. Much of the lore including the one about the tiger has been passed on through ages. Much of it is believed to have been true as well,” he says. “Many of the interactions and reactions at the village were unanticipated. The people there are not just generous. They are clearly, preservers of ancient systems of knowledge. Food is foraged, grown and eaten. There is some form of logic to every action, even if it is in the form of a story. The well is one such tale,” he adds.

The intention of the project is to take the story of the Public Well Revival Movement to more people and have more conversations around conserving already existing water distribution systems. “But first, the plan is to go to Solaganai and show the folks there the film. They’ve asked if they are going to become stars,” Balaji says.

Bhaavi will premiere at the Dharamshala International Film Festival between October 30 and November 2 in the short and mid length film category.