



metroPLUS

THE HINDU



Dindigul's famed seeraga samba biryani now finds a way to feed the Chennai palate **P3**

WHY SAMUTHIRAKANI LIKES DOING FATHER ROLES **P4**

Chennai Photo Biennale has opened with Indian photography's young, Tamil voices and a global retrospective of women in photography. Here's a quick guide to the three-month-long biennale

Around the biennale in 180 days



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The making of a biennale is all shades of chaos. A week ago, scaffoldings, stacked prints, and the trusty measuring tape were all that characterised the ongoing fourth edition of the Chennai Photo Biennale. But today, an elderly woman with a cascading plait walks straight into VR mall's makeshift gallery, once a 2,800 sq ft grey store space, to squint closely at Chennai-based photographer Aishwarya Arumbakkam's unconventional portraits - of hair, some plaited, some in luscious buns, and some simply a callous mess. She looks on curiously. Her plait perhaps feels seen.

Aishwarya is one of 12 curious, promising Tamil photographers who make the show Vaanyerum Vizhuthugal (translates to roots that touch the sky) that has set fire to this three-month long engagement with photography. Along with a compendium of artists from world over, who explore how women respond to their immediate world through photographic practices in a different show titled It's time. To see. To be seen, Chennai Photo

Biennale (CPB) begins.

One of the most pertinent questions today is, why photograph? At a time when every waking moment gets documented, the medium of photography finds itself amidst an existential crisis. The sheer volume of photographs that consume one's life today, and the advent of AI and its intervention into art, often begs this question: what does photography mean in today's context? CPB's fourth edition finds itself in this cross section, and takes off from photographer Dayanita Singh's ongoing exploration #whyphotograph?

"Every edition is a complete experiment that turns the last one on its head," says Varun Gupta, co-founder at CPB. The pilot was simply a bunch of mad creatives coming together to realise a dream. "Edition 2 is when we came of age with [curator Pushpamala] making us rethink what photography is," recalls Varun. To this day, the glass-stained windows of the Senate House make fleeting appearances in one's memory of a baby biennale. Edition 3, on the other hand, was caught in the quagmires of the pandemic - "so intellectually deep and critical", reminisces Varun. This



Transcending norms (Top far left) A visitor at the gallery in VR Chennai; (Clockwise from left) Photographs by Farheen Fatima, Anshika Varma, Vivek Mariappan and Sridhar Balasubramaniam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND THAMODHARAN B

time around however, the biennale wanted to be hopeful, he says. As though in agreement, behind him stands Bengaluru-based photographer Indu Antony's work titled, Cecilia-ed, that looks at gendered spaces by having her flamboyant, unbothered 75-year-old friend, Cecilia exuding 'main character energy'.

Through these years Varun says the team has also grown up. "One of the biggest criticisms that we received in 2019 was that, while we were showing the world's best talent, where was the local talent?" The challenge was to find a show that made sense not just to the local audience but to the wider world of art. Which is why this year, the biennale opened with Vanyerum Vizhuthugal, curated by Jaisingh Nageswaran. He calls it the "Tamil new wave". This curation was an attempt at bridging that gap between lived realities and image making. "The need for a show that tells stories from the inside was viscerally felt," he adds. In Lalit Kala Akademi's newly renovated first floor, are an accomplished bunch of photographers who knowingly or unknowingly subvert the moniker that invites ready scorn: 'women artists'. Shuchi Kapoor, co-founder of CPB and curator says, "It's 2024, there are enough women who have contributed to the larger spectrum of photographic practices and each of them involve visuals. One core idea was to explore the role of placemaking, to understand the places where women are taking space." Since this edition is all about asking questions, this show also emerged from questions. In Farheen Fatima's Meet Me In The Garden, photographs layered with digital drawings, almost dreamlike frames capture the longing that humans have for gardens. All this forms Phase 1.

Phase 2 is more crowded, and moves outdoors with veteran photographer Sunil Gupta's retrospective, Love and Light, curated by Charan Singh, spread across the Government Museum's premises in Egmore. And, 20 photography projects by children curated by Chennai Photo Biennale Foundation and the Children's Photography Archive, UK will take over the Museum campus along with interactive installations. While Thiruvannamiyur MRTS will be a window into some of the rarely seen images of Tamil cinema's on-set yesteryears acquired from photographer and archivist Lakshmikanthan.

Vanyerum Vizhuthugal is on display at VR Mall. It's time. To see. To be seen is on display on First Floor, Lalit Kala Akademi. Phase 1 of CPB is ongoing, Phase 2 begins on January 17, 2025. Biennale closes on March 16, 2025. In association with The Hindu Made of Chennai

With inputs from Sangita Rajan



Common Nouns

Common Nouns, a curated generative art display, highlights the journey by examining objects as carriers of history and ideas. The 15 participating artists, who are all displaying for the first time, pick and choose daily objects like saris, toys, and even the feeling of home and interpret the evolution in their own ways. At the five screens at Raw Mango, each artist is given a 50-second screen time, where animations play in an infinite loop preceding a short concept note of each artist's work. *On display at Raw Mango, Teynampet in collaboration with Squadron 14 until December 31.*



Framing Margazhi

Drive by Narada Gana Sabha this Margazhi to find the portraits of 45 Carnatic musicians adorning its imposing facade. The portraits by Amar Ramesh capture the musicians in iconic Chennai landmarks like the Chennai Central Railway Station to depict how the music and dance festival seamlessly fits into the city's cultural psyche.



Light, Salt, Water

Photographer, designer, and writer Sujatha Shankar Kumar explores the elements essential for life at her photography show Light, Salt, Water which is displayed at Artworld Sarala's Art Centre. "My show is about how we take everything that feels ephemeral and turn it into something that lasts," she says. With some shot on traditional film and some digitally, the projects reflect the idea of how we interact with the world. *The exhibit Light, Salt, Water will be on display at Artworld Sarala's Art Centre, Teynampet until January 12.*

STEP OUT



Throwing it down

If we say that rap is today's version of the Shakespearean sonnet, would you disagree? This medium will now find place at The Hindu Lit for Life 2025. If you can rhyme with a beat, unleash your lyrical prowess in a Rap Battle by The Hindu. Participants can choose to rap in Tamil or English, to make your voice heard. One must simply scan the QR code, register on our microsite, sync the rap to the beat, and upload the video. Selected entries will compete in a live showdown at the festival. *Log on to: <https://forms.thehindu.co.in/Rap-Battle-Competition>. The last date for submission is December 31. The rap battle contest is curated by Catalyst 28. Associate partners: Blue Star, Uttarakhand Tourism; Bookstore partner: Crossword.*



A tower, a page

Public spaces and reading are essentially experiences that go hand in hand. The joy of losing oneself amidst pages and the life in a city passes by, is matched by only few other experiences. The Hindu Lit for Life, in collaboration with Bessy Reads, is hosting a reading session, Tales and Talks, at Anna Nagar Tower Park December 28, between 4pm and 6pm. The event aims to ensure that this city's growing community of book lovers have a place to go when they would like to relax and read. Reading will be followed by a conversation with writer and journalist Kadarkarai Maththavilasa Angadam. *Register at https://forms.thehindu.co.in/LFL_Bessy_Reads/ or scan the QR code.*



Celebration of Hallyu

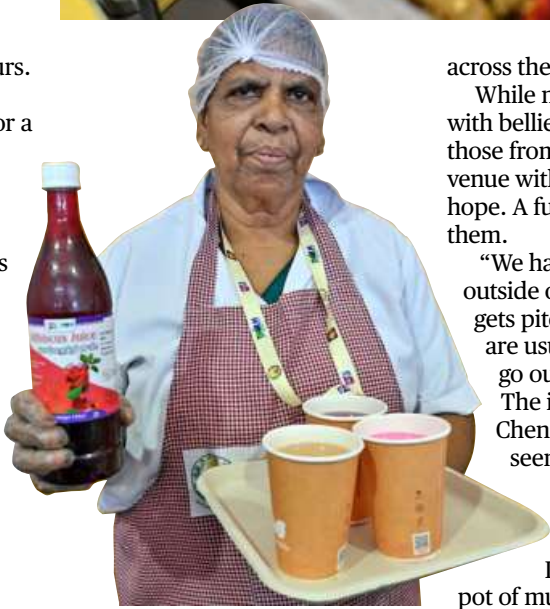
Bringing together fans of the Hallyu or the South Korean popular culture wave in Chennai, the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai and The K-Wave India, Chennai's K-pop and K-Drama community organised the annual K-Fest 2024 on Sunday. The fest, attended by over 300 people, had music and dance competitions, a hallyu quiz, and a random dance play session. "Every year, we organise this fest for the community, and it is for the fans by the fans. We had many new people attend the event this year, and experience the best of Korean culture," said Sanjay Ramjhi, founder The K-Wave Chennai. Chang-nyun Kim, Consul General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, said "I am still amazed at how much K-culture is appreciated, especially by young folks. I was glad to see our Korean community members from Chennai and dignitaries from various consulate missions also attend and enjoy the event."

Salt of the earth

Women from self help groups in Tamil Nadu delighted crowds at Marina beach with their culinary prowess and captivating stories

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The journey from Kunda Kotagiri in the Nilgiris to the capital city of Chennai takes a good 10 hours. This 560-kilometre trip was full of nervous excitement for a group of three women, part of a 12-member self help group (SHG), Kudikail Amman, who came all the way to cook their indigenous fare of ragi kali, sama rice and spicy avarakkai (broad beans) curry at the food festival conducted by the Tamil Nadu government between December 20 and 24. The event at Marina Beach showcased dishes and packaged food items made by over 150 women part of 65 self-help groups from



across the state. While most left their stall with bellies full, women like those from these SHGs, left the venue with confidence and hope. A future now awaits them. “We have never gone outside our hometown. It gets pitch dark by 7pm. We are usually discouraged to go out except for work. The idea of coming to Chennai and cooking seemed like a whole new ball game,” said A Saraswathi, one of the members from Kotagiri. Stirring a pot of mushy ragi kali, she

added that this SHG has been active for 10 years now. They first began by weaving wire baskets and sweaters, occasionally selling it at a stall in Mettupalayam. However, they wanted to do more. So they decided to set up a small stall near Avalanche lake in Ooty during the tourist season to serve ragi kali, avarakkai curry and sama rice at a meagre ₹50. Throwing the traditional dupatta of the Kota tribe over her shoulder, A Abhinaya proudly said, “We didn’t think we would come this far to Chennai from our small hill town and serve people our food. It is healthy

Taste of independence Women from SHGs at the food festival in Marina beach. SRINATH M



and nutritious but we did not expect that customers would line up, wanting to eat what we like.” Within 45 minutes of opening, Afsana Parveen and her team from Arcot, have managed to sell every morsel of their biryani. An announcement goes out, requesting customers to come back in an hour. “I have only cooked for my family. Only in the last year did we start making biriyani as part of Fauziya SHG,” she says speaking of the heaping plate priced at ₹150. Their five-year-old SHG based in Arcot, Ranipet has also been selling packaged chicken 65 masala, vathal and other snack items. Among the most endearing parts of the festival is 72-year-old M Thangam’s hibiscus juice and rose milk

stall. Noting the queue packed to the brim, Thangam speaks as she serves. “I don’t miss even a single chance to take our products around Tamil Nadu to showcase at exhibitions,” says this native of Kanyakumari. Thangam and her 20-member SHG made pickles and nannari juice when they began. Their district collector noticed them and asked Thangam to train other SHGs in nearby districts too. Thangam says that SHGs are essential. “The forum has helped us make something of ourselves, be it through loans or small business. Independence is everything,” she says.

Fauziya SHG can be reached at 8015541071 while Thangam’s SHG can be contacted at 9487710091.

Tales from Nilgiris

With farm-to-table feasts, Badaga traditional dance, and climate activism, the Nilgiris Earth Festival 2024 united community, culture and conservation



Dispatches from Nature A farm-to-table feast at Nilgiris Earth Festival. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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When it comes to conservation messaging, two distinct approaches often emerge. The first is a celebration – showcasing the planet’s wonders, like the comforting bird songs at dawn or the life-giving shade of an ancient forest. It gently reminds us of what stands to be lost. The second approach, stark and urgent, holds up a mirror to humanity’s ecological footprint. It confronts us with polluted rivers, vanishing species, and the smog-filled skies of our own making. The Nilgiris Earth Festival takes the first approach. It is a celebration of the wildlife, food, culture, and community that the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve offers, balanced with the understanding that it comes with a responsibility to protect it. Spanning over 5,000 square kilometers across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, the biosphere reserve is home to a network of five national parks and four wildlife sanctuaries teeming with diverse flora and fauna.

Organised by The Nilgiris Foundation, an offshoot of Keystone Foundation with three decades of experience in sustainable living, the festival has grown into a space where ecology meets culture. Now in its third year, this four-day celebration (from December 19 to 22) is as much about the Nilgiris’ food and heritage as it is about sustainability and climate action conversations.

Fresh from the farm

On the third afternoon of the Nilgiris Earth Festival, we arrive at Kikui Farms in Ooty to experience the flavours of high-elevation organic produce and farm-to-table cooking with organic farmer and chef Vishanth Kumar. He greets us with a fermented Rhubarb Soda kombucha – salmon pink, fizzy, and frothing as it’s poured.

The spread is unforgettable: sourdough pizza made with 90%

whole grain wheat, tacos, and a Badaga buffet with kale greens poriyai, gaasu gose (cabbage mashed with potatoes and peas), red rice, thupadhitu (lentil fritters), and berry tarts – all made with produce from Vishanth’s farm. A Badaga farmer by heritage, Vishanth’s family has owned a 150-year-old tea estate since the 1930s. After working as a chef in the UK, he returned to India to promote organic farming but struggled to change local mindsets. He began growing vegetables commercially, creating veggie boxes, and processing surplus into jams and hot sauces. Today, he has a steadily increasing supply network in Bengaluru.

As it ends

The final day of the Nilgiris Earth Festival feels like a culmination, a celebration of ideas and the land itself. Talks by Bablu Ganguly of Timbaktu Collective, Arshiya Bose of the Bengaluru-based Black Baza Coffee, and G Sundararajan of Poovulagin Nanbargal touch on topics close to the heart of this region: climate activism, food sovereignty, and biodiversity. Pratim Roy, co-founder of the Keystone Foundation and director of the festival, reflects on its evolution. “The Nilgiris Earth Festival started as the Wild Food Festival, and now it connects people to the landscape and its challenges. It’s an awareness movement rooted in the community,” he says. He looks at a future where the festival deepens its ties to the land while inviting broader perspectives across India.

As we drive back to Coimbatore, our cab driver shares stories of the wilderness. He recounts how wild animals – bison, elephants, and even a tiger – have occasionally blocked his car. We ask, “Don’t they attack?” He responds with quiet wisdom, “They never do anything. It’s us who have encroached on their space. As long as we respect that, they let us be. And we should let them be.”

His words are a poignant reminder that co-existence is not just a concept but a necessity.

George Penner runs an informal factory-style cafe in Kodaikanal offering pizza with your choice of toppings from pesto to sausages, all made in house

Pizza in the hills

Sujatha Shankar Kumar

In the touristy hill town of Kodaikanal where idli-dosa, paratha-biriyani, egg noodles and Chicken 65 run wild on the streets, artisanal-style pizza has found its niche at George’s Gourmet Kitchen. The no-bones factory-style café run by George Penner, an OCI from Canada, has an open kitchen concept and a simple menu – six types of vegetarian pizza, four types of non-vegetarian pizza, eight desserts and beverages, including flavoured sodas and a local peaberry coffee. From pesto and sun-dried tomatoes to oven-roasted tomato sauce for the pizza, it is all made in-house. Even the benches and tables are made by Vera de Jong, George’s wife, who is a skilled carpenter and accomplished artist. They can seat 20, but have squeezed in even 40 diners.

Tryst with India

George grew up in India, studying in Kodaikanal International School. His wife Vera, who he met 33 years ago in



Canada, has been a part of his adventures, right from their stint in Japan, teaching English in the 1990s. He considers Kodaikanal his hometown and with Vera, he has made their home here since 2007. “I like the restaurant business. I enjoy chatting with my customers,” says George, who managed a restaurant in Canada. Demand for his products increased during the pandemic as people became partial to natural food stores. George says their pesto is made in Kodaikanal with basil from Coimbatore. A dehydrator is used to make sundried tomatoes. “We source naturally-grown produce – oyster mushrooms from the Environmental Center (earlier part of Swedish School) and cherry tomatoes from Hosur,” he adds.

The shelves at his cafe are stacked with products labelled ‘George’s Gourmet Kitchen’ including plum jam, bitter marmalade, Dijon stone ground mustard and picnic relish. With ‘organic and natural’ a core mission, George now also makes a probiotic ginger ale: ginger, water and sugar are combined and allowed to ferment over four days. The strong ginger-flavoured ale is delicious with a light fizz.

A café in a kitchen

Sitting in this space is like being in a factory where you can see everything that is going on. Huge windows let in abundant light for hydroponic set-ups that have basil

Fresh out of the oven Pizza and babkas at George’s Gourmet Kitchen; and (below) George Penner. SUJATHA SHANKAR KUMAR

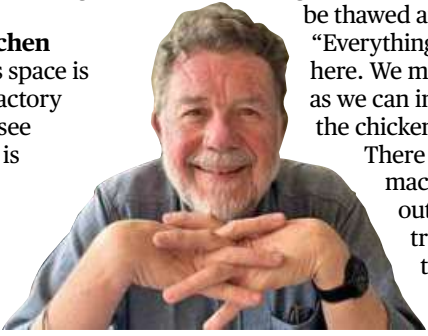


and other herbs. At the far end, one chef is pulling out trays of fresh chocolate chip cookies, while closer to the main counter, another is turning the pizza with a large paddle. George beams as the cheese sizzles and browns. “I pretty much think we make the best pizza in town and that’s partly because it’s the only thing we make at the café!”

The work flow between the café and the kitchen is organic. “We only open for lunch because from 9am to 5pm, we are engaged in production. My production staff – I’ve trained six – serve the people and go back to doing their work. The two products mesh well with each other. There are no interruptions.”

George tells me his best kept secret, that they taste good because they have stayed small and make breads that last. The sourdough bread is made dense so it lasts long. Croissants and bagels are frozen, so they can be thawed anytime. “Everything is handmade here. We make as much as we can inhouse, even the chicken sausage.

There is no machine churning out cookies. We try to cook the way you would cook at home.”



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13622

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

Across

1 Covet (4)
3 Preachy (8)
8 Boy attendant (4)
9 Given to bragging (8)
11 Zest (10)
14 Actuate (3,3)
15 Small building with a wide view (6)
17 Mercurial (10)
20 Idle (8)
21 Paste made from fermented soya beans, used in Japanese cooking (4)
22 Container for leftovers? (5,3)
23 Gambit (4)

Down

1 Strong black coffee (8)
2 Lead a quiet life (8)
4 Emblematic (6)
5 Siestas can (anag) – help (10)
6 Upper-class gent (4)
7 Monastic

accommodation (4)
10 It’s often used in pies and canapés (4,6)
12 Lasting reminder (8)
13 Drudge (8)
16 Unimportant details (6)
18 Discovery (4)
19 Product of hunger (or guilt?) (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated January 2, 2025.

Solution No. 13621

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Bling empire
GRT Jewellers turned 60 and to celebrate the event, they broke their own Guinness World Record by fashioning the world’s heaviest pair of gold earrings. At a massive 3.5kilograms in 22 karat gold, the artisans attempted to pay homage to the rich cultural heritage of South India.



From Dindigul, with love

Dindigul Ponram opens its first outlet in Chennai with steaming lamb briyani and hearty dalcha to go with it. We get the first look

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In 1973, a nondescript shack under a tree in Dindigul, found itself at the centre of conversation for its small yet sumptuous fare. Every day, V Ponram Yadav and his wife came together to serve plates of hot mutton biryani using a homemade spice mix. Back then, the restaurant only seated eight. Yet, there was an aspiration to serve many more plates.

Cut to 2024 where Ponram's legacy is being carried on by the fourth generation of his family and expansion is underway.

"Like Hyderabad and Lucknow, Dindigul's biryani has its own heritage. While those varieties use basmati rice, ours is made with fragrant seeraga samba. What sets Dindigul biryani apart is its locally sourced ingredients," says Ramachandran Yadav, Ponram's son.

During our exclusive first look, we see that the new

Chennai outlet features a well-lit, spacious restaurant. Each placemat maps out Dindigul, pointing to where ingredients are sourced from. "Almost everything we use for the biryani comes from in and around Dindigul. For instance, the garlic used is called hill garlic, a special variety with a single clove. It is sourced from Poombarai near Kodaikanal. The cloves are from Thadiyankudisai, and even the green chillies are of the bullet chilli variety sourced locally," shares Ramachandran.



Flavour bomb (Clockwise from far left) Garlic used by Dindigul Ponram; a view of the restaurant; and the famous biryani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Ponram legacy has evolved with each generation, incorporating modern amenities while staying true to tradition. Today, the chain boasts seven outlets, with only two outside Dindigul. The family also owns dairy farms and processing units, ensuring the ghee for the biryani and milk for the ice cream meet their exacting standards. "Even for our Bengaluru branch, all ingredients are sourced from Dindigul. Quality is paramount – my wife used to taste raw cardamom pods from Thandikudi to gauge their potency and decide the quantity to use," says Ramachandran. "We also use only grass-grazed lamb from Dindigul, ensuring the meat is lean and doesn't overly mellow the spices or make the rice sticky."

The meal begins with hot, spicy lamb bone soup flavoured with ginger, garlic, Virudhunagar chillies, and shallots. Right after,

we are served addictive kola urundais which are fennel-flavoured meatballs that are crunchy on the outside and have a soft and subtly-spiced minced meat core. This is followed by the kari omelette, a Ponram original. This simple egg dish is elevated by spiced meat bits, and tender mutton chukka in a thick, spicy sauce.

Then comes the highlight of the meal, the biryani. Steaming and aromatic, it is served alongside its signature dalcha made with dal and a variant of green brinjal available only in Dindigul. An elumbu kuzhambu (bone broth) is served as a side too. Even a quick, small bite shows that flavours hit the spot. Ramachandran explains, "Biryani is all about balance. We only use ghee, and every ingredient – from the meat to the spices and rice – is in a precise ratio. This recipe is sacrosanct and has been unchanged for decades."

"Back then, travellers to Kodaikanal would stop at Ponram's but eat lightly, fearing a heavy meal would hinder their journey. On their way back, they'd make it a point to enjoy our biryani. Now, 50 years later, we've moved beyond Dindigul. We're ready to serve our signatures to Chennai," Ramachandran says.

Dindigul Ponram is located at 90/35, 1st Street, Ashok Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600083. A meal for two costs approximately ₹1,000.

Bring out the jammies

If welcoming the new year in your pyjamas is your jam, head to Midnight Sun in Nungambakkam where there will be music, dance and a DJ night. A movie corner with screens playing Christmas and New Year films and fun games including drunk jenga and king's cup will add to the festivities. Drinks and starters will be priced at ₹4,999 for a couple, ₹2,999 for stag entry and ₹1,999 for a single woman. Tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.

Florescent adolescence

A neon glasses party by the poolside? Le Royal Meridien is hosting a party that is inclusive of age groups from six to 60 with food, drinks and music starting at ₹1,999. There will be a fashion show, some beatboxing, a fire act and fireworks. Those who arrive with families can choose a dinner at the ballroom. Tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

On the floor, baby

It is that time of the year when there is a mounting pressure of a 'plan on new year's'. Here are the spots to head to on December 31 in Chennai to ring in 2025



When music is the vice

Motta Maadi Music, which has hosted several sing-along concerts, is inviting people from the city to convert Sri Mutha Venkatasubbarao Concert Hall, Chetpet into a party hub. Their sober new year's event promises singing and dancing along to some of Tamil cinema's greatest hits. @2.30pm and 7pm. Tickets priced ₹600 onwards and available on insider.in.

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Turn up the radio

Radio Room's 202.5 FM party will have house DJ Razz cooking up tunes to ring in the new year. Here, couples will need to pay a fully redeemable cover charge of ₹7,500 while stags will pay ₹5,000 and women will need to pay ₹3,000. Stags will have to be accompanied by couples. Last year, about 350 people partied till midnight, says a member of the team. Call 8500005672.

Got the moves?

Fans of electronic dance music and rock can party to songs in these genres playing at Brasa in Egmore. Early bird tickets for stags begins at ₹7,000 whereas early bird couple tickets are priced at ₹12,000. Both are redeemable at the bar. Call: 7299042554 or purchase tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.

Stars and the silverscreen

A movie night with a screening of the cult Tamil film Panchathanthiram starring Kamal Haasan and several other talented actors could be the perfect start to your new year. VGP Golden Beach resort provides the perfect opportunity to do the same. The film will be followed by a DJ set. Tickets start at ₹2,799 and go up till ₹8,700 on bookmyshow and insider.in.



Link to luxury

La Maison Syr by Chennai-based Rashi Jain has luxury cufflinks in classic patterns and offbeat designs

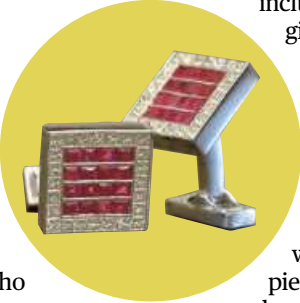
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It was a pair of cufflinks in the form of a martini glass and a cocktail shaker – a generational piece passed down from her husband's family – that inspired Rashi Jain to create her own line of cufflinks. The shape and uniqueness of the design intrigued her. She started out designing pieces for her husband. This was in 2009, when she moved to Paris after marriage. As she explored the city, she imbibed all the artistic creations she saw there.

"We moved around quite a bit. We stayed in South Korea, Qatar, the UK. The business started taking shape in Doha. It was 2015, and the city was getting ready for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. We drove around seeing stadiums being built and all the work that went into them. I also used to visit the souks and met pearl divers. All these influences came together in my creations," says Rashi.

"In Qatar, the men who wear the thobe (Qatari national garment), wear cufflinks with it. So, I created a few for a clientele there," says Rashi, who then moved back to Chennai with her family earlier this year. The formal launch of the brand happened last week in the city. The brand is called La Maison Syr, a nod to her time in France and everything she learnt there. "Syr" in French means 'gods'. And it seemed perfect as it also brings together my husband, daughter and my name – Saurabh, Yashica, and Rashi," she explains.

The collection now has 20-odd pieces. These include classic patterns and offbeat designs like Nilgiri tahrs in tailcoats (one holding a Champagne bucket and one, a tray of glasses); the sun and moon; masula boats; a make up box and a poker-faced lady; a hibiscus with a screw



Available at Kanakavalli at Kingsley, Spur Tank Road. Prices start at ₹2 lakhs.

Design tales (Top and inset) Pieces from La Maison Syr; and (left) Rashi Jain. R RAVINDRAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

PURPLE

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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

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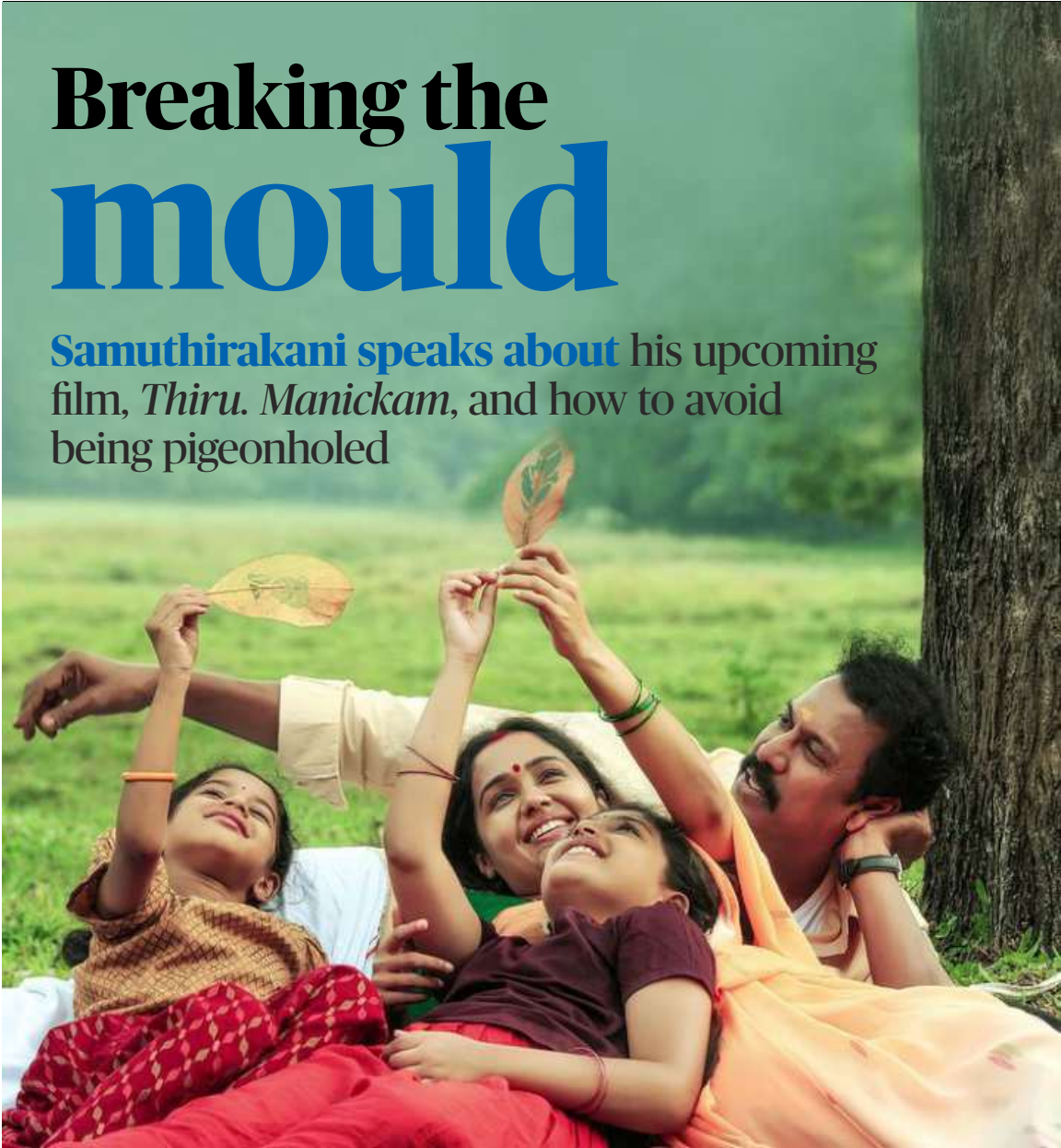
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FARNAZ



Breaking the mould

Samuthirakani speaks about his upcoming film, *Thiru. Manickam*, and how to avoid being pigeonholed

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Samuthirakani has been a busy man. In the last two years alone, the actor was seen in more than a dozen Tamil films, six Telugu films (one of which he also directed), and a Malayalam film. This week, he will be seen in two Tamil films, releasing on the same day, *Thiru. Manickam* and *Rajakili*. He will start 2025 with Shankar's *Game Changer* and Bala's *Vanangaan*. You look at his resume and wonder how much of his line-up is planned. He acts in little gems like *Thalaikoothal* and *Aelay*, balances them with supporting roles in big-star films. "I don't consciously try to juggle all these hats. If I start thinking along those lines, I would get them all wrong," says Samuthirakani.

Excerpts from a chat:

Question: How has 2024 been for you and Tamil cinema?

Answer: It's been amazing. We have had so many wonderful films this year and I am elated that I got to be in some of them as well. With the curtains closing on the year, I am glad to bring two films, *Thiru. Manickam* and *Rajakili*, to the big screen. It feels great to end the year with such good creations.

Q: Watching you as a happy family man is a sub-genre by itself. What can you tell us about *Thiru. Manickam*?

A: I will be happy only for a fraction of the film (laughs). It's a film about a simple, honest man who is in touch with his inner truth. Many of us hide the truth



we carry. When we are pushed to the brink, we might even do things we don't wish to do. But here's a man who says that even when you test him, he will stand by what's right, and the film explores who he is and why he is the way he is. The film debunks the prevalent myth that those who can't bend the rules to survive would lose everything.

Q: You have done a lot of films like *Velai Illa Pattadhaari*, *Appa*, *Don*, *Thalaikoothal*, and *Aelay* that speak about the father-son relationship...

A: That list is endless. I should do a

► **Different dimensions** Stills from *Thiru. Manickam*, featuring Samuthirakani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

get-together with all those who have acted as my sons in these films. On one hand, there are actors like Dhanush, Sivakarthikeyan and Manikandan, and on the other, there are those small kids I had acted with who are all now grown up into young adults. The boy who acted as my son in *Appa*, J Vignesh, has grown up to become a hero himself. They all still call me *appa* and I do wish to meet them all.

Q: Did you ever wonder if you would be typecast if you kept performing as a father?

A: Every father is unique and so every character will be unique. If someone asks me to do a father's role, I would immediately agree, as I am someone who yearned to win my father's affection and I miss my father a lot. In fact, I thought of *Thalaikoothal* as a debt I had to pay to my father.

Q: So, you are confident that filmmakers wouldn't confine you to a box...

A: I am confident that I cannot be confined to any boxes. I have shot for three drastically different roles simultaneously, and that's when I realised how I could transform myself into the roles. I just need to wear the costume, sit still for 10 minutes on the sets, and think about the character to get under its skin. If you are playing a police officer, you need to charge yourself and be prepared to embody that character. I am playing a cop in *Drishyam* director Jeethu Joseph's next; we are starting the shoot in March but I need to start preparing for it from now. We need to be honest and respect the character; only then will the camera see us for who we are. Only then can one actor seem so distinct in every role he plays.

Thiru. Manickam releases in theatres on December 27, 2024

To the Max

Kannada superstar Sudeep on his latest action drama and future plans

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Kannada superstar Sudeep, whose *Max* has just hit screens, is a relieved man. "I have deprived my fans for two-and-a-half years," he admits. After the big-budget suspense thriller *Vikrant Rona* (2022), Sudeep is back with an action drama, directed by Vijay Kartikeyaa and produced by Kalaipuli S Thanu. Excerpts:

Question: Was filming *Max* a nice break for you right after the big-budget *Vikrant Rona*?

Answer: I didn't want to do a film that was huge in scale. I needed to come back to movies that I always enjoyed doing. I play a very believable character in *Max*, and the film is quite realistic. Vijay Kartikeyaa, the movie's director, will turn out to be a surprise for people when they watch *Max*. I love to work with newcomers.

Q: Are today's superstars feeling the heat of finishing projects quickly?

A: It depends on what the actor believes in. After a long time in the industry, you feel like choosing only exciting

projects. In my case, after *Vikrant Rona*, no other project was ready to go on floors because of COVID-related challenges. To make matters worse, I got hit by COVID twice. It almost took away one-and-a-half years from me. Due to the medicines, I had less energy. I couldn't lift weights. So, I had to get back in shape. Finally, *Max* went on floors. We even released a teaser with a caption that said, 'Soon, sooner and soonest.' I didn't know it meant December (laughs).

Q: Vikrant Rona was discussed for its box office collections rather than its technical excellence.

A: We should go with the times. What is wrong with movies aiming for big numbers? If a person can switch jobs because of a better designation or a hefty pay, why can't filmmakers wish to do big numbers? Technical and creative aspects of a movie should be discussed, of course. That said, it's also common for people to speak about numbers outside of the film. People are never satisfied. They might even feel *Jurassic Park* or *Titanic* could have done better at the box office. The bigger the number, the bigger the success of the movie.

Back in action
Sudeep. RAVICHANDRAN N



Mental Manadhil shoot begins

Mental Manadhil, filmmaker Selvaraghavan's upcoming film with actor, composer and producer GV Prakash Kumar, went on floors recently. *Mental Manadhil* has garnered a lot of hype since the film marks the

eminent filmmaker's return to the romance genre after 2007's *Aadavari Matalaku Arthale Verule*. Madhuri Jain plays the female lead in the film. Apart from starring in and producing the film, Prakash, who earlier composed music for Selvaraghavan's *Aayirathil Oruvan* (2010) and *Mayakkam Enna* (2011), will also score music for *Mental Manadhil*. On the technical side, the film has cinematography by Arun Ramakrishnan and editing by Balaji.



Nolan to adapt *The Odyssey*

Christopher Nolan's next cinematic venture is of epic proportions. He will direct an adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey*, the ancient Greek epic chronicling Odysseus' arduous journey home following the Trojan War. Described as a "mythic action epic," the film will employ cutting-edge IMAX technology. Homer's epic has previously inspired several adaptations, from the 1954 classic *Ulysses* to the Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* While Nolan is no stranger to historical narratives, having directed *Oppenheimer*, which explored the creation of the atomic bomb, and *The Prestige*, a tale of 19th-century magicians, *The Odyssey* ventures into the realm of gods, monsters and mythological intrigue.



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