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Arusuvai Caterers lends a South Indian flavour to the Ambani pre-wedding bash **P3**

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Located opposite the sanguine white domes and steeples of Velankanni church in Besant Nagar, is a kiosk-esque cafe with a vibe that is antithetical to that of a quiet place of worship. At Den, the colours of the floor, counter, and fan are a sharp black. The lights are sleek and the walls are a washed-up grey. The coffee, with pumps of caramel and drizzles of chocolate, is sinful for those cheating on their diets. S Bhavesh's cafe, where he is the barista himself, has no seating space – only two tables for bags and drinks. "We have some stools on the side, if you'd like," he offers.

Bhavesh says that when he first entered the coffee business some five years ago, he never regularly drank the beverage. He was a guinea pig for a friend who had become newly obsessed with creating versions of the brown elixir. At first, he liked his coffee sugary – a milkshake almost. Nowadays, he has moved on to the quieter Americanos and espressos. His addiction has birthed this cafe where drinks cost around ₹100 and ₹200; priced economically so that more people experiment and figure out what they like, he says.

Balamurali Krishna, a cinematographer-turned-entrepreneur who began Brews and Beyond about a month ago on Nungambakkam's busy Uthamar Gandhi Salai, has a similar vision. "When travelling, we found that Bali had these tiny shops serving exceptional coffee. My partner [S] Threnethra and I wondered if Chennai had affordable specialty coffee options because going to fancy cafes meant paying through the nose," he says.

In the last year, Chennai has seen a mushrooming of small cafes with limited seating (between four and 20 seats) that serve coffee besides the city staple – the filter. These kiosks and independent coffee

Cool beans (Clockwise from right) S Bhavesh serving coffee at Den; Blue pea bliss at Brews and Beyond; and filter coffee being made at Cafe Taupe.
THAMODHARAN B AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Walk through Chennai's tiny, specialty coffee kiosks to learn about beans, roasts and your neighbourhood

shops are going on several trials with different iterations of the drink. There are macchiatos, bombons and eclectic cold brews, straying away from the more popular cappuccinos and lattes.

These cafes are also positioning themselves differently – they are now calling themselves cold brew bars, multi-roastery cafes and artisanal coffee houses that have their own customised roasting and grinding methods. Each of them say that they are learning the art of extracting the best flavour out of coffee.

Setting up coffee shops in erstwhile pan shops, abandoned houses and nooks,



Cold brew in a cutting glass



has also somehow democratised the coffee shop. With cheaper iced drinks for Chennai summers and warm cinnamon hot chocolate for its month-long winter, these coffee shops render themselves to two types of crowds. There are the quiet working professionals who want to sip on strong, determined coffee and claim a corner. Others want their kiosks and stores to become noisy, glittery and full of lights. "We'd like to throw caffeine-fuelled parties," says M Sudharsan, co-founder, Only Cold Brew in Besant Nagar.

The weight of the bean
At Only Cold Brew, where Sudharsan and his partner Ukesh Kumar are creating

interesting cold-brew based infusions including a coconut water-based drink called tender delight, the menu is currently going through its third form. "Imagine a gulab jamun with rose petals. The new menu will have you finding these notes in the cold brew," he says. Their cafe seats 24 people and overlooks the Besant Nagar beach.

He adds that at their cold brew bar, the old fashioned and their original cold brew recipe, are favourites. "The orange peel added to the drink exists in the coffee to add flavour and does not exist as just a garnish," he says. He adds that customers can walk up to the counter and ask the brewer about what beans are available for their classic cold brew.

Bala and Threnethra are also determined to keep their concoctions fresh. Their menu has a short yet pointed explanation about the brand and their cafe can seat four (a

maximum of 10 if you are willing to sit on the porch outside). Here, one understands the origin of the beans (Balmaadi Estate Coffee in Nilgiris and Valparai), the altitude, the roast (medium, light or dark), the process (washed, natural or honey) and what notes one can taste.

Vignesh V, a coffee consultant and brew crafter behind the Madras Coffee Movement and the Brews and Beyond menu, says that entrepreneurs are now far more conscious about where their coffee comes from. At Brews and Beyond, even the blue pea used in their Instagram-famous colour-changing coffee is sustainably sourced.

This is the same for Only Cold Brew in Besant Nagar too, where the coffee comes from both Koffe Genetics and

Chennai has seen a mushrooming of small cafes with limited seating (between four and 20 seats) that serve coffee besides the city staple – the filter

Harmakki coffee company, two coffee roasting companies based out of Bangalore and Davarah in Chennai.

The paraphernalia too, at each of these locations involves several presses, both manual and machine operated, and imported coffee machines meant only for the serious cafe entrepreneurs. Bhavesh's Nuova Simonelli from the US grinds coffee fresh, makes its way into an espresso shot and finally becomes a customised drink based on preference.

"I used to work with a coffee kiosk in Anna Nagar for a long time and saw that several young, first-time coffee drinkers came here to try a latte or a mocha. They did not like the bitter taste and hence preferred sweet, cold drinks. Many also went for additions like whipped cream, Nutella and biscoff. When I began Den, I assumed that Besant Nagar would prefer their drinks the same way. Here, however, millennials and a slightly older crowd arrive, and prefer cold, strong drinks," Bhavesh says.

Since a coffee menu in Chennai is incomplete without filter coffee, places like Cafe Taupe in RA Puram (seats 18), which serves the drink through a window, says that they are cognisant of ensuring that the temperature of the water used for steeping the coffee powder as well as a non-air-conditioned ambience is essential.

Vignesh says that all these entrepreneurs are making an effort to understand the science behind coffee brewing as they are usually the ones manning the counter. Threnethra says that this has been the most interesting part about setting up her store. Dr. Hepzi, founder of Cafe Taupe, whose clinic is above the cafe, says that she manned the coffee filter and tumblers in the morning with an assistant, and continued with her consultation during the first week that Taupe opened.

The kiosks have arrived, are here to stay and are determined to convert this already coffee-loving city, into connoisseurs of the beverage.

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A highlight reel from the Mahindra Percussion Festival from last year (2023) starts with slow beats.

Glimpses of the biggest names in the business – (drums) A Sivamani, kanjira exponent V Selvaganesh and bassist Mohini Dey – can be seen giving the stage their all. Sweat beads on a sea of people, artistes and audience alike, form a rare sight in the Bengaluru weather but the beats at the festival command movement. They build to a crescendo and fall, promising an exciting, bigger second edition.

Keeping with the promise, the festival is back at Bengaluru's Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts. It has also been bumped up to a two-day show on March 23 and 24.

The aim of this edition is to spotlight young artistes. While the big guns like Vikku Vinayakram and his ghatam symphony and



Drumroll moment (Clockwise from far left) Taufiq Qureshi; Kozhikode Nanthalakoottam and Charu Hariharan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Taufiq Qureshi's band Surya, will be pulling their weight at the fest, the festival promises a deluge of rhythms in the form of rap, dance and a variety of instruments in the mix.

New rhythm
For instance, midangam artiste Charu Hariharan will be on stage with a 25-member ensemble, bringing together the Jenu Kuruba community from the border towns and villages of Kerala and Karnataka and the folk music group Kozhikode Nanthalakoottam.

Charu will be performing her own compositions as part of the quartet. "Most artistes performing as part of this festival are new to the idea of arrangement despite

knowing their compositions entirely. The Jenu Kuruba artistes also use interesting elements like plastic drums and antenna dishes in their performance, adding a beautiful texture to the music," she says. Jay Shah, vice president (cultural outreach), Mahindra Group, says that percussion has always been language agnostic and can be attributed to the sound of civilization. "Because of its universality, the festival boasts an interesting local and international lineup," he says.

VG Jairam, founder, Hyperlink and the festival director, says that a sense of raw energy from contemporary musicians can be expected at the festival.

The Mahindra Percussion Festival, in association with The Hindu, is co-sponsored by Mahindra Finance, Paul John Visitor Centre and Carlsberg Smooth Soda and promoted and produced by Hyperlink Brand Solutions. Tickets are on bookmyshow.com

MAHINDRA PERCUSSION FESTIVAL
In Association With

THE HINDU

The lineup

On March 23, Charu Hariharan quartet, Two Summ featuring Viveick Rajagopal and Anantha R Krishnan, Vikku Vinayakram's ghatam symphony featuring Grammy award-winner V Selvaganesh, V Umashankar and Swaminathan Selvaganesh among others, will be performing. The final act of the day will be Swarathma Percussive Experience, featuring Thavil Raja and Beat Gurus.

The second day's lineup will begin with a performance titled Rhythms of India, an ensemble bringing together artistes who blend the Indian classical sounds and the contemporary sounds by Darshan Doshi, Varijashree Venugopal, BC Manjunath, and Praveen Rao. The next performance will show eight archetypal heroines from ancient Indian literature in a performance titled Ashtanayika through classical Indian music, modern jazz, Bharatanatyam and rap narratives. Taufiq Qureshi's band Surya, will be the closing act of the festival.

A beat for every mood

The Mahindra Percussion Festival is back and aims to spotlight young artistes



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Village vistas on canvas (Clockwise from right) Komakula's paintings; the artist. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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First, you notice the goats. With distinct personalities and cheeky expressions, they frolic across Komakula Raja Sekhar paintings. "I noticed that goats look different everywhere. In my village, they are smaller, the ones in Shantiniketan are tall, and in Hyderabad they have long ears," says Komakula, leaning forward earnestly to point out the differences in his paintings.

This attention to detail is evident in Komakula's solo show *Choreographing Nature*, now on at Focus Art Gallery. Using pencils, ink pens and water colours on thick acid-free paper, the artist, who was born in Narsipatnam, near Vishakapatnam, brings his childhood alive with cheerful references to home in his work.

Growing up in the village, where he says his father raised pet roosters, some of whom now strut across his canvases, Komakula says he always wanted to be an artist. "I would draw cartoons for school competitions," he says, adding that his uncle

Three billy goats gruff

Komakula Raja Sekhar uses tea, turmeric and blue pea flowers to create intricate paintings of village life, vibrant with colour and friendly animals

encouraged him to pursue a Masters in Fine Arts at Shantiniketan.

He specialised in printmaking, learning different styles from etching to old school lithography. "I chose it because there are so many possibilities with printmaking, you can play with textures," he says.

Over the years his work evolved gradually, influenced by his travels. He started adding elephants, for instance,

after a visit to the Vishakapatnam zoo. And the typical Telangana houses he draws, began getting brighter after he saw the homes in Goa.

Influenced by the iconic artist Laxma Goud, who he met at a studio in Hyderabad, Komakula puts a lot of work into each intricate painting.

"When I sit alone, and the paper is empty, I draw a tree trunk," he says. "Then I put flowers at the base. Then I start work on



the leaves, which takes a long time."

He points at a painting to explain how the leaves are drawn and painted in, in a gradient of colour that imitates Nature. "I use coffee, turmeric and tea for the different shades," he explains. "I was working with just browns and blacks earlier, I moved to colour in 2020," says Komakula, adding that he started with natural dyes and blue-pea flowers for

colour, then added in watercolours.

With fluid and confident lines the paintings are vibrant with activity, from elephants sneaking berries off trees to peacocks majestically perched on branches. All surrounded by a collection of red, green and yellow houses, with curly grilles, quirky curtains and red-tiled roofs. Stating that the detailing takes time, Komakula points at a green wall of a house, saying that it has been painted in four layers, till the texture looks almost real.

Mayur Shah, who runs Focus Art Gallery and curated this show, praises the 35-year-old artist's commitment and adds that the work stands out because of Komakula's attention to detail. Stating that it took a couple of years to collect the 39 paintings and prints that are on show, Mayur says, "Nothing is monotonous. I've not seen any young artist doing this kind of meticulous detailed work before."

The show is on till March 10. Focus Art Gallery is at 11, Kasturi Estate 2nd Street, Alwarpet.

Women at ground zero

Poovulagin Nanbargal presents a photo exhibition on the impact of climate change on women, particularly those from marginalised communities

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Wherever he went with his camera, documentary filmmaker Vignesh A found that his lens sought out stories of women. This was not a conscious thing, rather, the result of the circumstances of the people he was documenting. The 30-year-old, who is part of Poovulagin Nanbargal, a Chennai-based collective working on socio-environmental issues, has been documenting matters related to people and land politics for the past six years.

Be it at Neyveli, a hotbed of protests due to standoffs between locals and the NLC India or at Chennai's Ennore which was affected by an oil spill and gas leak in December last year, he says that it is women who are most affected. Over 45 photos from his series on Neyveli and Ennore, with focus on the struggles of women, are set to be displayed at an exhibition in the city. The event will also have photos shot by Thiyyagu Gurusev, also with Poovulagin Nanbargal.

Vignesh was in Neyveli in March, July and August last year. "I did not know much about coal mining and how it was affecting people there before I joined Poovulagin," he says. As he interacted with locals who were affected, he realised that a lot of them were women. "Women spend a lot of time in the town, taking care of agricultural land. Whereas men leave to other cities in search of work," he points out. With no one to take care of the family, it all comes down to the woman of the household to keep her children afloat.

"My photos show climate change," he says, speaking of a shot of women walking along a landscape that was once pristine. "It has been drastically altered due to coal mining, and the presence of the women in the frame is to indicate how they tend to suffer the most due to the issue."



Through her eyes A shot from the series on Ennore. VIGNESH

The exhibition will also feature Vignesh's work at Ennore, where he documented the protests by fisherwomen from the region over the oil spill and gas leak in December 2023.

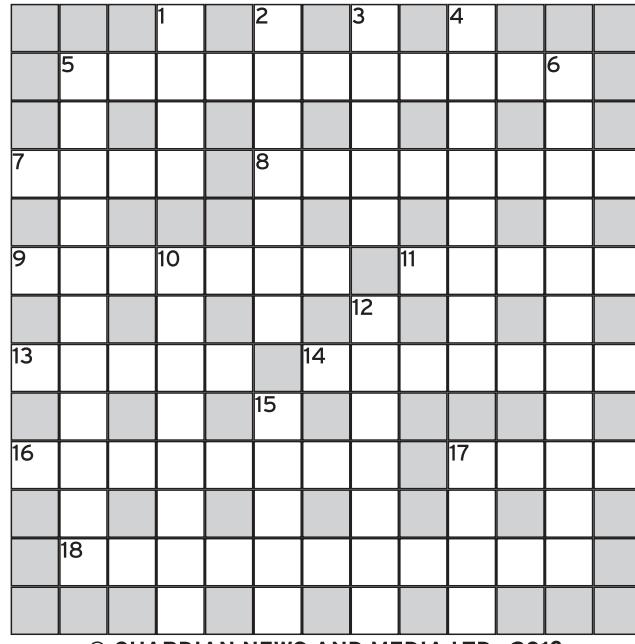
"I saw how they struggled to sell their fish," he says. He was witness to anger and frustration, evident in a shot of two fisherwomen seated at their stall. "They told me how they couldn't sell more than a kilogram a day due to the spill," he says.

He also recalls photographing a little girl watching her father's boat from a distance. "The water was black from the oil and she looked on for sometime, then walked away," he says. "I later realised that her fisherman father had returned empty-handed and she felt bad for him. She had hoped he would bring back something."

He speaks of the protests, chiefly women-led. Vignesh says, "I've heard about women-led protests, but to witness one was something else. It made me feel hopeful."

The exhibition Climate Change is Anti-Women is at 4.30pm on March 8, at Anna Centenary Library. It will be inaugurated by filmmaker Vetriramaaran. There will be a special address by development economist Jayati Ghosh on the economic impacts of climate change on women. Prior registration is needed. To register, call 9094990900.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13575



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Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated March 14, 2024.
Solution No. 13574

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Across

- 5 Healing (11)
- 7 Commotion (4)
- 8 Immortal (8)
- 9 Similes (anag) — weapon (7)
- 11 Save up for future use (5)
- 13 Feeble (5)
- 14 Daydream (7)
- 16 Encouragement (8)
- 17 Gloat (4)
- 18 Shakiness (11)

Down

- 1 Swerve (4)
- 2 Touchy-feely (7)
- 3 French woman (sometimes fatale) (5)
- 4 Reliable (8)
- 5 1955 Little Richard hit (5,6)
- 6 Information detailing patient's illness (4,7)
- 10 Scuffle (8)
- 12 Legal action (7)
- 15 Suggest — drift (5)
- 17 Loop (4)

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Solution No. 13574



History enthusiasts gathered to celebrate Puducherry's rich heritage at the vibrant Pondicherry Heritage Festival, reliving the town's cultural tapestry and colonial legacy

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As the blistering afternoon sun of Puducherry slowly set, a group of history enthusiasts gathered by Palais de Mahe, one of the town's biggest boutique hotels, to walk through the old town and learn about its unique and interesting history.

Puducherry was once occupied by the French and hence, educating tourists about the history and heritage of the town has been of paramount importance for its residents and the Government.

The Pondicherry Heritage Festival (PHF) is one such initiative. For the last 10 years, citizens have come together to educate the locals and tourists about the importance of preserving the unique architecture and culture of the town.

At present, visitors who flock to Puducherry for the aesthetic cafés, beaches, and the colonial French architecture have started to take an interest in the town's history, culture, traditions, and local cuisine.

"You will see tour guides giving

heritage walks at every corner over the weekends. We have trained a lot of people who now run their own private businesses," said Ashok Panda, co-convenor of INTACH's Puducherry chapter.

Ashok, who has been involved in the restoration of colonial buildings in Puducherry for the last 20 years, conducted a heritage walk as part of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival on March 1.

He started the walk with a brief history lesson about the French rule in India. "In the 18th Century there were wars between the French and the British, and the town was almost razed to the

ground. What we see here today are mostly buildings built after the 1800s," he said while walking down one of the streets.

"Puducherry was built like a small town in France. The streets are narrow, there is a crossing every 100 metres and the place is for people to walk, and not for cars and big vehicles," he said, making way for a queue of tourist vehicles to pass through.

Since the coastal town does not have a natural deep sea port, the British did not find it to be of much strategic importance, especially since they had already occupied Madras. "The French, however, built a jetty into the sea,



Vintage voyage (Clockwise from left) One of the streets in the old town of Puducherry; École Française d'Extrême Orient; INTACH's heritage walk by Ashok Panda. SANGITA RAJAN



where the ships could be stationed and goods, loaded and unloaded."

The French influence is still very visible in the old town in the form of street names and signboards in French, English, and Tamil.

One of the oldest buildings that still stands tall, is a high ceiling, pillared white building with an open courtyard and intricate French detailing and windows. The building is currently used by the Catholic church – the Sisters of Cluny, which is a French Catholic order, as their embroidery centre.

Till date, the old town of Puducherry is governed by rules of design for new buildings popping up to maintain the aesthetic value. "The rules clearly state that the front of any new building coming up, will need to have a beautiful front matching the French style of architecture. The buildings cannot be over two storeys high," said Ashok, adding that since Puducherry's climate is warm all year-round, the buildings tend to have higher ceilings and an open courtyard for cross-ventilation.

The walk concluded with a visit to the Notre Dame des Anges church right on the promenade. The pink domed church with its vaulted ceilings and beautiful stained-glass windows is one of the oldest buildings standing tall in the town, built in 1855.

Creative vision

The 9th edition of the annual festival by DakshinaChitra Heritage Museum, Utsavam, will be themed on Artistic Allies - A Festival of Creative Partnerships and will have dance, theatre, storytelling, visual art and creative writing. The festival will also have a woman-centric marketplace at the venue which will host local businesses run or owned by women entrepreneurs.

@DakshinaChitra Heritage Museum, Muttukadu, March 10, 11am onwards. Entry is free.



Art with puppies
Here is a chance to spend some time playing with pets and even adopt one. At Pawga's Art with Puppies, open to all age groups, you would practice mindful art as puppies run around you. The workshop is not focussed on technique but on expressing emotions through art. Everyone would be given a prompt and asked to meditate on it. @Backyard, Adyar. March 9, 10.30am to noon. Entry fee is ₹850 onwards. Contact 7358458117.



A taste of the South

Arusuvai Catering Services ran the South Indian counter, with idlis and dosas, at the Anant Ambani-Radhika Merchant pre-wedding festivities

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Celebrity couple, Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's pre-wedding festivities featured an extensive menu between March 1 and 3. Feeding guests at what is now being referred to as Jamnagar's Met Gala, was Chennai's own Arusuvai Caterers. Their counter, among 35 helmed by world-renowned chefs, was busiest between midnight and 5am, and saw Bill Gates lining up for

vadas and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan indulging in a rava dosa.

"We were roped in a few months ago and our team of 40 reached Jamnagar by February 29. Weeks prior to that, we had deployed a few of our chefs to serve the Ambani family. All raw material, equipment and groceries were provided in a restaurant-style set up, and I had to only take idli rice and idiyappam flour from Chennai," says N Sridhar of Arusuvai Caterers (founded by his father late N Natarajan Iyer in 1962).

This is not Arusuvai's first

tango with the Ambani family. They were part of the catering team during the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations at Antilia, the family residence valued at over ₹15,000 crore. "We go as a small team and make tiffin items such as idli, dosa, idiyappam as well as snacks such as murukku and thattai," says Sridhar.

Tiffin to the fore

This association hence secured a bustling counter at the wedding. "We were requested to make only



tiffin items and avoid any rice dishes. Idli and dosa were to be made available 24/7 on all three days. So we worked and cooked in three shifts in order to prepare fresh food." As Sridhar was requested to keep his menu list crisp, he focussed on a variety of dosas and idlis. They also made pongal, upma, kesari, sakkara pongal and ashoka halwa.

Anant, the groom stopped by at several stalls including the one by Arusuvai, requesting a pesarattu. "I suggested that he eat it with inji thokku (ginger chutney). For Mukesh sir, I made his favourite sakara pongal, payasam and sweet potato chips. Nita Ambani ate the idli with coconut chutney and sambar without any souring agent as madam avoids food with tamarind, tomato or lemon," says Sridhar.

When the service staff came with orders, Sridhar would ask them out of curiosity whose order it was. "Salman Khan ordered rava dosa, Amitabh Bachchan ordered the ghee podi dosa and later even medhu vada. Idlis were high on demand among most of the Hollywood celebrities. We made an onion-tomato thokku for the dosas, which was appreciated," he says.

The only challenge that Sridhar faced was when it came to a wet grinder. He says, "As we had to prepare a huge volume of idli and dosa batter, we were hoping for two huge grinders, but we ended up sharing one huge wet grinder with Italian counter. We used the grinder in the evening and let the Italian chef take over at other times."

Ladakh by the plate

For the next few days, Chef Nilza Wangmo's workspace promises to be a lot more different from her restaurant, the all-women run Alchi Kitchen, in Ladakh. "I am used to a smaller, and a more open kitchen back home. People who come to eat can see us make everything they order from scratch," she says, hurrying in and out of the kitchen at Stix at Hyatt Regency.

In Chennai, Nilza is gearing up to present a five-day food pop-up, showcasing an interesting pick of dishes from Ladakhi cuisine, many of which feature prominently on the menu of her restaurant. Nilza's menu has a choice of appetisers, soups, mains and dessert, with both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

Among the dishes on offer are mok mok or Ladakhi momos, namthuk, which is a warm soup made of barley and yak cheese, O-stew or a Ladakhi orecchiette pasta in milk and yak cheese sauce, yarkhandi pulao, and their famed chhatagi, which is a Ladakhi whole wheat pasta with a tangy sauce, potatoes and meat or vegetables.

@Stix, Hyatt Regency from March 6 to 10. Dishes are priced from ₹899 onwards. For lunch and dinner reservations, contact 9884369333.



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One for the pages

Chennai Pen Show, a three-day event, will see over 30 exhibitors from across the world in attendance. The show will have everything from inks, hand-carved pens, nibs, notebooks and collectibles.

Among the exhibitors are Indian pen makers, vintage pen sellers and importers of

international brands. Some of the major Indian brands include the world's largest nib makers, Kanwrite and India's first indigenous ink maker, Sulekha Inks, Ranga Pens and Gem & Co. The event will also have workshops on fountain pen nib maintenance and calligraphy.

Chennai Pen Show is from March 8 to 10 at Fika, Adyar from 2pm to 7pm. Register at www.chennaipenshow.com.

Through the lens

When you imagine women outdoors, where do you see them? Is she immersed in a phone conversation, while at work in a vegetable shop? Or is she with a friend, sharing a quiet giggle as they climb down a flight of stairs? At the Women Outdoors photography exhibition by The Kala Collective, a myriad of these moments will come alive through the work of six photographers. The exhibition will be a part of the women's day celebrations to be held at Goethe-Institut Chennai. "The Kala Collective was started around two years ago as a space for women photographers and filmmakers. What started as a small group where we kept in touch, and shared details of work opportunities, has now evolved into a little community," says Gayatri Nair, the founder of the collective.

Shreya KA, Anjali RB, Arundathi Thillai Rajan, Harshini, Lekha and Jinkal Dabi, will be showcasing their work as a part of the exhibit. @Goethe Institut, Max Mueller Bhavan, Nungambakkam. Inauguration is at 5pm on March 8 and the exhibition is on till March 17.

Amul Gouda Cheese, A CULINARY MASTERPIECE

Nestled in the heart of the Dutch countryside, Gouda is not just a picturesque city; it's the birthplace of a culinary legend — Gouda cheese. Made of pure milk, culture and vegetarian rennet, this cheese has a bright outer yellow covering and has a rich flavour. And the one way you can experience this delectable savoury treat is with Amul Gouda Cheese.

Made in India, Amul Gouda undergoes a meticulous crafting process. From the sourcing of pure cow milk to the careful aging in state-of-the-art facilities, each step is a dance of precision and dedication.

The cheese can be sliced, grated, or even melted making it suitable for various dishes.

It can be served with breakfast, fruits, or vegetable salads, and even with crackers. Its unique taste makes it perfect for sandwiches and can also be used in combination with other cheeses for pizza making.

Part of Amul's gourmet range of cheese, Amul brings the much-loved international Gouda cheese to the people of India, so everyone can enjoy new varieties of cheese and experiment with cooking.

As an experience, this cheese is a flavourful journey through time, inviting all those who encounter it to savour the essence of Dutch cheesemaking mastery. Enjoy Amul GOUDA with fruit and wine, sandwiches, desserts, dark bread, and salad.

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Take the road

Meet the team
behind upcoming Tamil film
Nalla Perai Vaanga Vendum Pillaigale



A memorable journey Pradeep Kumar and Prasath Ramar; (below) a still from the film. S SHIVA RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Question: Fans are aware of your work as a singer and music composer too. But producer...well, how did that happen?

Pradeep: Prasath and I first met during the recording of the 'Mogathirai' track in *Pizza*. I was supposed to score the music for one of his projects back then, and was keenly keeping track of his scripts because I love his writing.

When he worked on his debut film, *Enakkul Oruvan*, I was part of it as a singer, thanks to composer Santhosh Narayanan. At one point of time, when I read the script of *NPVVP*, I wanted to do it as I felt it was an essential story that needed to be told.

Q: Tell us about the journey of the film and how you zeroed in on its cast and crew...

Prasath: It is a road trip film that happens on a single day; based on an incident that happened to a friend of mine, but we have tweaked it to suit the language of cinema. As creators, we think of several one-liners, but only a few ideas call out to us. *NPVVP* was one such idea.

Q: Apart from singing for many composers, you have composed for a few projects too. How did the musical soundscape of *NPVVP* fall into place?

Pradeep: When I was the composer for this film, Prasath said there were not going to be any songs (*laughs*). But after I became the producer, I insisted on keeping the songs! It is a fun film but very close to reality, so the fear was that songs might dilute the screenplay.

But the film grew on us, and at one point of time, we started getting ideas for the songs, like the 'Kadala' track or the 'Raasa Magarasa' song. They fit magically into the course of the film. Thanks to my experience with bands like La Pongal and Yodaka, I feel my strength is in presenting traditional elements in a contemporary manner, and I could tap into that forte for this film.

Q: Shooting the entire film on the road must have been challenging...

Prasath: Yes. In fact, during the Mayavaram-Poompuhar road schedule, it was the time of Vinayaka Chaturthi processions and we found it tough to pull off shooting on a few days. The biggest challenge was to get the actors to blend with the public and the environment we were shooting in, and I think we have succeeded in that.

Q: You have a thriving career as a singer, and you are a producer now. What are your future plans?

Pradeep: I am soon planning to release my first independent album that will feature songs that I have written and composed. I also hope to finish work on a musical documentary that has been in the works.

The jungle is home

How Nimisha Sajayan approached her role in crime-thriller *Poacher*



The green side Nimisha Sajayan in a still from *Poacher*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Saraswathy Nagarajan

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Who will say no to Mala Jogi?" Nimisha Sajayan laughs as she asks the rhetorical question. Nimisha says director Richie Mehta is someone she has always wanted to work with. So, when he approached her to play the lead of Mala in the eight-part crime thriller *Poacher*, she did not have to think twice to say yes.

Her role as the tough, no-nonsense Mala, a Kerala Forest Range Officer, in *Poacher* is winning accolades for the talented actor. "She (Mala) is close to my heart. She is fearless, sensitive and goes through a rollercoaster of emotions."

The series is based on a real-life incident when dedicated officers of the Forest Service busted an international ivory smuggling racket that targeted elephants in the Western Ghats. Nimisha admits that she was unaware about the poaching until Richie told her about it. "Mala is an amalgamation of three officers in the Indian Forest Service. I talked to one of them for more than an hour to understand how he interacts with his colleagues and his family. That was my only preparation to portray the character," says Nimisha.

"I asked him 'Chettan, how do you react when you hear of such cases (of poaching)? Then he asked

me 'Nimisha, how would you react if something close to your heart is taken from you?' I told him that I would be heartbroken. He told me that is how he feels when he hears about such cases. He told me 'The jungle is my home'. That one sentence helped me understand how emotionally connected he is to the jungle."

The fact that she is comfortable in Malayalam, Hindi and English helped her flesh out Mala. The actor has had a happening 2023, making her debut in Tamil and Hindi films and topping it with the multilingual *Poacher*, streaming on Prime Video. SU Arun Kumar's Siddharth-starrer *Chiththa*, in which Nimisha made her debut in Tamil, is centred on child abuse. She essayed Shakthi, a sanitation worker with a past, who is in a relationship with Eswaran (Siddharth's character). It was followed by Karthik Subbaraj's *Jigarthanda Double X*.

Nimisha credits her directors for helping her breathe life into her roles. "My process of acting exists between action and cut. In the case of Mala, Richie's script was so detailed that I did not have to take any extra effort. Being true to my characters and their emotions is my process."

Next up for her is *Dabba Cartel*, a Netflix series along with Shabana Azmi, Jyotika and Shalini Pandey, among others. Nimisha has much to look forward to in 2024.

"There is one Tamil project, one Bengali film and one British Indian project titled *Footprints on Water*."



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Search for clues

Netflix has unveiled the trailer of its upcoming thriller *Murder Mubarak*. Directed by Homi Adajania, the film follows a death at a posh recreational club and the investigation around it. The film is a book-to-screen adaptation of Anuja Chauhan's *Club You To Death*. Starring Pankaj Tripathi as ACP Bhavani Singh, the rest of the cast includes Sara Ali Khan, Vijay Varma, Dimple Kapadia and Karisma Kapoor.

In an earlier statement, the film's director said, "It's a colourful murder mystery that will make you want to rewind and watch it over again when you wonder how you missed all the clues." *Murder Mubarak* is slated to debut on March 15.

Make way for Suraj

National Award-winning actor Suraj Venjaramoodu, known for starring in Malayalam films like *Android Kunjappan*, *Driving Licence*, *Jana Gana Mana* and *The Great Indian Kitchen*, is all set to make his Tamil debut. The actor has been roped in for an important role in *Chiththa* director SU Arun Kumar's upcoming film with Vikram which is tentatively titled *Chiyaan 62*. Produced by Riya Shibu of HR Pictures, the film also stars SJ Suryah. GV Prakash is handling the music of the film, which will go on floors from April.

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