



# metro PLUS

THE HINDU

**Jallikattu season kicks off** with the revival of cultural pride, aiding local economy **P2**

**CELEBRATING TAMIL STORIES WITH SARIS** **P3**



**His decision to release Master in theatres revived Tamil cinema after the COVID-19 pandemic**

VISHNU KAMAL  
Kamala Cinemas



**Vijay's film is one tentpole release in a year that helps us tide over three bad months at the box office**

ARCHANA KALPATHI  
AGS Cinemas



**Vijay's films usually account for 20-23% of the total gross revenue for theatres in most years. So his retirement is definitely a huge loss for distributors and exhibitors**

SRITHER S  
Secretary, Tamil Nadu Theatre Owners Association

thriller *Bhagavanth Kesari*. Vicky says he wouldn't mind it even if that were true.

"*Bhagavanth Kesari*, on paper at least, is a film tailor-made for Vijay."

In a build-up to his swansong, Vijay fans are ensuring that there is enough pre-release buzz. So much so that they requested Kamala Cinemas' Vishnu to play a 2014 Vijay film (*Kaththi*) on this New Year's Eve, only for the evening shows to get sold out within 12 minutes of bookings opening. "This is an emotional moment for all of us. We are excited to watch his film, but the fact that we won't see him after makes it bittersweet," says Vishnu. He adds, "As a theatre owner, I am petrified because the demand for tickets has already skyrocketed. There are only 1,000 seats in a screen. How can we satisfy all those who want to watch the First Day First Show?"

Vijay has been a star who has consistently moulded himself to become what fans want him to be, while retaining his unique core. For fans, this release will be bittersweet. For, while we may not know what *Naalaiya Theerpu* holds, this Pongal belongs to the *Jana Nayagan* of Tamil cinema.

**With upcoming release Jana Nayagan, 'Thalapathy' Vijay bids goodbye to cinema, triggering heartbreak and nostalgia among fans and the Tamil cinema fraternity**

**Bhuvanesh Chandar**  
**Srinivas Ramanujam**  
bhuvanesh.chandar@thehindu.co.in  
srinivasa.r@thehindu.co.in

**F**or the fans who gave up everything for me, I'm giving up cinema itself." These words of Tamil superstar Vijay – fondly known as 'Thalapathy' – rang through Malaysia's packed Bukit Jalil Stadium a week ago, during the recent audio launch of *Jana Nayagan*.

The release of any Vijay film is special in Tamil Nadu, thanks to his popularity. But *Jana Nayagan*, set to hit screens soon, is all the more special – with this swansong, the star is bidding goodbye to films after plunging full-time into politics with his party, Tamilaga Vettai Kazhagam.

For millions of Vijay fans across the globe, this release marks the climax of a rollercoaster of emotions. "Only after I heard him speak at the audio launch, and the umpteen fan edits that followed, did it hit me that we will no longer have such celebrations at the theatres," says an emotional Vicky Vijay, a Salem-based auditor and ardent fan of the actor.

#### Path to glory

In the 1980s and 1990s, the once scrawny and self-effacing actor made a quiet entry into a power-packed Tamil film industry, ruled by the likes of Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan. Vijay had backing – he is the son of popular director SA Chandrasekhar – but his choice of roles, screen presence and penchant for action and dance was what quickly made him a force to reckon with. Today, few actors in Tamil enjoy the kind of youth following that Vijay has amassed over the decades. "We will miss him on the big screen," producer Archana Kalpathi of AGS Entertainment said, during the release of *The Greatest of All Time*, Vijay's previous film.

Archana has had multiple links with Vijay's work over the years; first as a fan, which she became after watching *Kadhalukku Mariyadhai* (1997) in school. Then, as a theatre owner – Archana is the CEO of AGS Cinemas, a leading multiplex chain – and a producer, having bankrolled projects like *Bigil* and *GOAT*.

"From an exhibitor's point of view, his film is one tentpole release in a year that helps us tide over three bad months at the box office. His one film has a guaranteed opening and collection. The revenue that we get from his film is what we use to deal with our slower months. It will be a big vacuum, and it will be hard to fill," she says.

These are indeed big shoes to fill. Srither S, secretary, Tamil Nadu Theatre Owners Association, distributor and exhibitor, says that there will be a great loss in revenue. "In the last six years, except for 2025," – only the second calendar year since 1992 to not see a Vijay film – "Vijay has had at least one film every year. And on average, his film would account for 20-23% of the total gross revenue from theatres that year. So his retirement is definitely a huge loss for distributors and exhibitors," he says.

"If we felt his absence in a year like 2025, then imagine how great a loss his retirement would cause," says Vishnu Kamal, owner of Kamala Cinemas in Vadapalani. "It's a huge loss; in a year like 2023, we had two Vijay films (*Varisu* and *Leo*) among the top five highest-grossing films. In 2024, again, *GOAT* took the top spot, and as far as Kamala Cinemas is concerned, the re-release of *Ghilli* came second, thanks to tremendous footfall. So he's a major contributor," adds Vishnu, stating that a prime reason for this is that audiences from all age groups come to theatres to watch a Vijay film.

He stresses that theatre owners will miss a "symbol of hope," recollecting how the star's 2021 film *Master* – one of

# One last dance



#### 'Hold the gun, Siva!'

Clashing with *Jana Nayagan* at the Pongal box office is **Sivakarthikeyan's *Parasakthi***, and this has triggered excitement among several fans of Tamil cinema, who believe that Sivakarthikeyan is Vijay's 'successor'. This buzz gained ground after Vijay 'handed over a gun' in a scene in his previous film, *The Greatest of All Time*, to Sivakarthikeyan, something that is widely believed to be a passing-of-the-baton gesture. Scoffing at speculations of a rift and referring to his close camaraderie with Vijay, Sivakarthikeyan said at a recent event, "No matter who says what, this Pongal is an Annan-Thambi Pongal for all. It's good for cinema when we celebrate each other's films."

the first big-ticket releases during the pandemic, with a cap on 50% theatre occupancy – helped theatre owners recover from the brutal months. "I can say this confidently – the decision to release *Master* in theatres revived Tamil cinema after the COVID-19 pandemic."

**Steps to fame**  
Beyond business, what Tamil cinema would truly miss is a performer who could dance like a charm and perform

action sequences with conviction. This 'complete entertainer' is what Vicky says he would miss on screen. "Sure, we have Sivakarthikeyan slowly following in those footsteps, but today, Vijay is the only entertainer who ticks all the boxes," he says.

Tirupur Subramanian, distributor and exhibitor, too, admits that he will miss Vijay as



not perturbed about the retirement; he calls it an inevitable progression. "Since the times of Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, when a star leaves, a new star has always risen to fill those shoes. So while we are sad that he is retiring, we are also confident that someone else will fill his position." Srither too agrees. "I strongly believe that cinema will always thrive even without Vijay. The newer generations of stars will take over."

In fact, Srither believes that *Jana Nayagan* isn't his last film. "I can't divulge why I believe so. Regardless, this film will do really well at the box office. The fan who usually watches a Vijay film twice will watch this five times."

Vicky's plans with *Jana Nayagan* tell you that Srither wasn't exaggerating. "I watched *GOAT* five times, *Varisu* six times, *Master* seven times, and *Leo* 10 times. I watched both *Kushi* and *Sachein* twice when they got re-released," he reveals, "I would watch his films first to celebrate, and during the subsequent times, to observe the audience around me. For *Jana Nayagan*, I haven't fixed a count. I will watch it as many times as possible because I don't know what the future holds. Going to a new Vijay film isn't about whether it's good or bad. It's a celebration."

The fan is quite excited to watch the H Vinoth directorial because it seems to be of the same style as the Vijay commercial films he grew up watching. "That is, the films he was doing between 2003 and 2010. I am hoping it would be a *pakka* commercial potboiler."

There have been speculations – enlivened by the recently released trailer – that *Jana Nayagan* is the remake of Telugu superstar Nandamuri Balakrishna's 2023 action

**In Thottipatti near Madurai,**  
a hub for buying and rearing  
jallikattu bulls, economy is built  
around native breeds

# The making of a jallikattu bull

Deiva Abirami S  
abirami.s@thehindu.co.in

**J**anuary marks the beginning of the jallikattu season in Tamil Nadu, especially in and around Madurai. While villages get busy with bull rearers and tamers, the focus often shifts to the excitement of the event itself. However, before this spectacle begins, there is an important yet quiet process: selective breeding, careful rearing, and the sale of native bull calves to enthusiasts willing to invest years in training them for jallikattu.

Thottipatti is a quiet village in Madurai. Unlike jallikattu areas, there are no barricades here, no cheering crowds, or loudspeakers. Instead, the air carries the

rhythm of a rural economy built around native breeds. A spacious open area enclosed by netting houses native bulls, cows, and their calves. These cattle belong to the Keda Maadu, also known as Kizhakathi Maadu, a native breed commonly found in the Madurai region and often reared for jallikattu. The bulls are well-maintained, and the calves are sold to rearers who take pride in nurturing bulls that may one day participate

in jallikattu. S Duraisamy, who is involved in this business, says, "Several people in Thottipatti maintain herds of native breed cows and bulls. Unlike commercial dairy farms, milk production is not the priority here. The focus is on preserving strong native lines, particularly those known for endurance, agility, and alertness – qualities that are highly valued in jallikattu bulls."

"We have bulls of various ages, with the oldest being around 10 years old," he explains. "Every morning at around 10, the animals are taken out for grazing, and there is a pond nearby for them to drink. During this time, the sheds are cleaned, and the cow dung is collected and sold, which generates

additional income. Before sunset, the cattle return to the enclosure. The calves are allowed to feed, and we also provide hay and grains before the animals settle down for the night," he adds.

He mentions that the cattle are primarily cared for by women from the village and that outsiders are rarely permitted into the enclosure. "These are native breeds and need to be handled with care," he states, emphasising that they are strong animals.

A Indra runs this business with her son and represents a group of women in the village who play a vital role in raising native breeds. After her husband's death, she continued this business that has been passed down for generations.

"These are not just cattle; we care for them every day, and they recognise us. They do not allow others to come near, which shows the bond and trust we have built," she says. Duraisamy explains that individuals from various districts, including politicians,

visit the village to buy bull calves. He notes that calves around three months old are preferred because they enable the rearers to develop a stronger bond with the animals. He adds, "The age and health of the cattle are typically assessed by examining their teeth. Strong teeth are considered a sign of good health. On average, more than 10 people visit the village each month to purchase bull calves. Prices vary depending on the age of the calf, with younger calves, just a few months old, priced at around ₹15,000."

While the ideal age for a bull to enter the vavasal is around three years, among the Keda Maadu breed, the three-year-olds are particularly strong, energetic, and full of spirit.

"Buying and rearing bulls is a matter of pride in Madurai," says Indra, watching the animals move across the enclosure. "No matter how many generations come, it is important that the youngsters continue to nurture and preserve this traditional jallikattu event."

In villages such as Thottipatti, the story of jallikattu starts long before the bulls arrive at the vavasal. For the rearers, these animals represent more than just livestock; they embody pride and heritage.



Preserving strong native lines  
Indra with a calf; highly valued  
Jallikattu bulls. RASHOK



## Ears wide open

This community insists on listening to an album in its entirety. Join them



Hear ye At a previous listening session. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Sangita Rajan  
sangitarajan.pb@thehindu.co.in

Chennai for something like this?" he says. The answer, they decided, would not come from speculation, but from exposure.

That idea aligned with Mother Tongue Music, a label Tenma and Mukesh have been developing. It foregrounds marginalised voices, Dalit music, and collaborations that sit deliberately outside the mainstream.

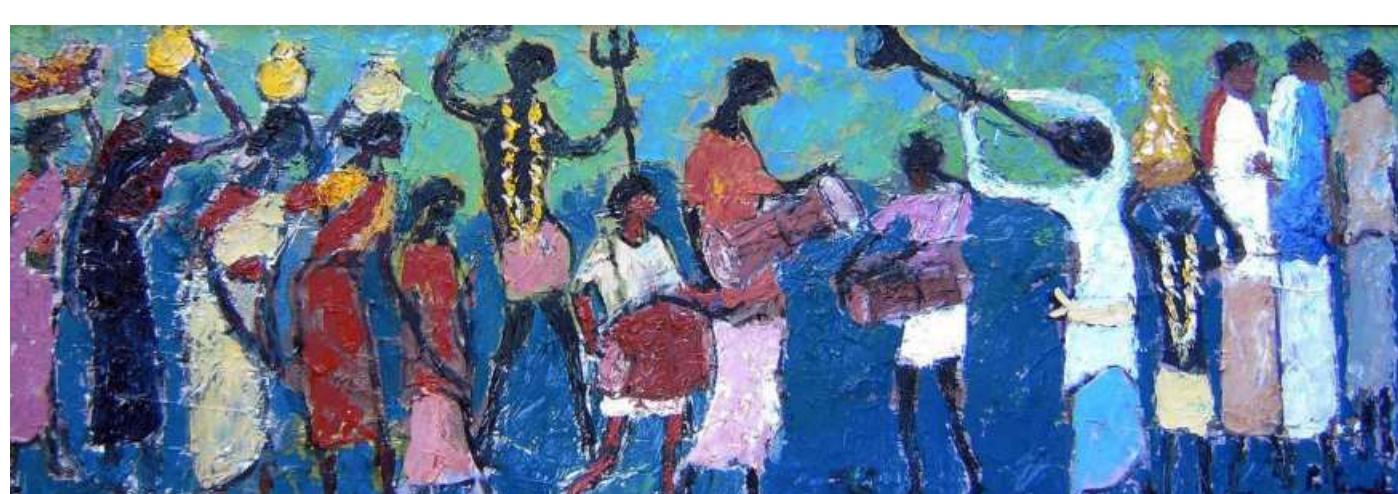
The first session set the tone. Centred on *The Ancestral Well* – a collaborative album created for the Sharjah Biennial, it featured musicians from across the world. It was unapologetically obscure, yet the response was immediate. Encouraged, they followed with a second session built around Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works 85-92*, a record that resists melody-led listening. Attendance grew. So did the conversations.

At the heart of it is a quiet resistance to passive consumption. "At the end of the day, we want people to become more conscious listeners," says Mukesh.

The next listening session will be held on January 10 at Vinyl & Brew from 6.30pm onwards. The album playing is Joni Mitchell's *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Tickets on @tenmamakesmusic on Instagram.



**Abstract expressions**  
Grayscale Artworks presents Inner Vibes '26, a group exhibition of 54 abstract artists. Focussing on a monochromatic theme, it explores the interplay of light and shadow, offering a perspective on depth and form. @Lalit Kala Akademi, Egmore. Till January 10, 11am to 7pm.



Chitra Deepa Anantharam  
chitradeepa.a@thehindu.co.in

**D**akshinaChitra Museum opens Looking Southwards: The DakshinaChitra Vision of Craft, Art, and Cultural Heritage on January 9 at the Varja Gallery, offering a timely reflection on how South India's craft traditions and modern artistic practices intersect, influence, and reshape one another.

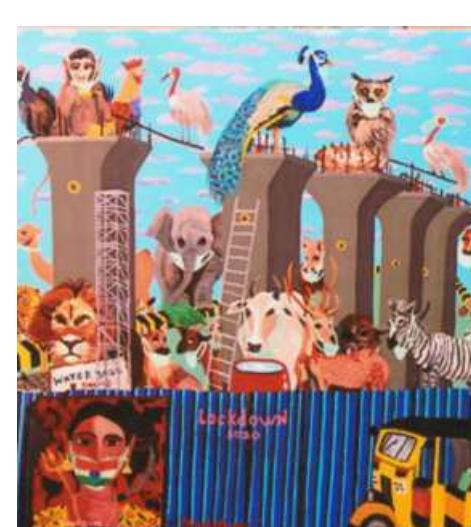
Curated by Chennai-based art historian Shruti Parthasarathy, the exhibition draws attention to DakshinaChitra's long-standing commitment to regional cultural heritage while questioning the conventional divide between "fine art" and traditional craft. Instead of treating these as separate or hierarchical categories, Looking Southwards places them in active dialogue, underscoring their shared social histories and material concerns.

"The exhibition seeks to historicise DakshinaChitra Museum as an institution, foregrounding its sustained commitment to the arts, since its founding in 1996," says Shruti.

## Stories from the peninsula

**Looking Southwards, an exhibition at DakshinaChitra Museum, brings modern and contemporary art into dialogue with South India's living craft traditions**

At the heart of the exhibition is DakshinaChitra's modern and contemporary art collection, developed with a conscious South Indian focus. Works by artists associated with the Madras Art Movement – key figures in the region's mid-20th-Century modernism – appear alongside later Indian contemporaries and a select group of international artists. These are illustrated through conversations with living craft practices, including secular and ritual-votive traditions, revealing the range and vitality of South India's visual culture. "What is particularly compelling is DakshinaChitra's sustained engagement with artists through its various artist camps and the outcomes



Artistic identity

Vibrant modern paintings from DakshinaChitra's collection.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

that emerged from them. This long-term nurturing of artistic practice by an independent institution is remarkable," she

points out.

The curator frames the exhibition through a textile metaphor: enduring craft

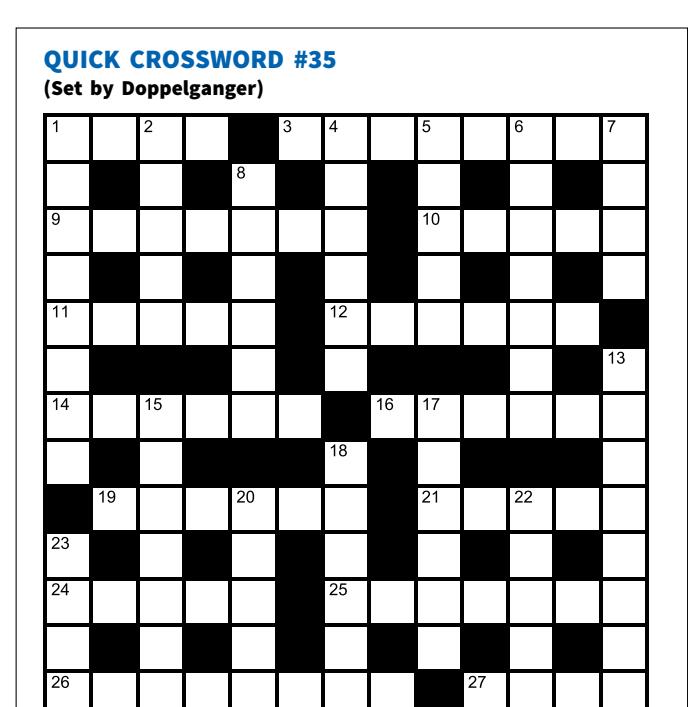
traditions form the warp, while modern and contemporary art constitute the weft. Together, they produce a single fabric – suggesting that cultural identity is not static, but continuously woven through continuity and change. A key highlight is a travelling shrine dating to early-mid 20th Century, from Telangana – a box-like structure richly adorned with vibrant traditional paintings and housing an idol of a devi. Historically, such shrines were carried by nomadic musicians as they travelled between towns and cities, serving as mobile sites of devotion, performance, and storytelling.

The exhibition also features Adivasi art forms such as Gond and Warli, presented not as static or archival traditions but as living practices that continue to evolve, responding to contemporary forms, ideas, and contexts.

Looking Southwards highlights DakshinaChitra's vision of dissolving the often rigid distinction between art and traditional craft practices, treating them not as separate categories but as interconnected modes of creative expression. Within this framework, sculpting, painting, textile weaving, and indigenous craft practices are brought together under a shared artistic continuum.

The exhibition promises to be of particular interest to students, researchers, and visitors keen to understand how South India's artistic past and present remain deeply entwined.

@DakshinaChitra Museum, Muttukadu, Varja Gallery, 10am to 5pm. The exhibition will be on view from January 9 to February 15, and from March 9 to March 30. Contact 9841020149.



QUICK CROSSWORD #35  
(Set by Doppelganger)

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Across

- 1 Small amount (4)
- 3 Free from imperfection (8)
- 9 Of great consequence (7)
- 10 Uniform cloth colour (5)
- 11 Enthusiastic (5)
- 12 Did not remember (6)
- 14 Lure into danger (6)
- 16 Relating to the stars (6)
- 19 Tenant (6)
- 21 Loyal subject (5)
- 24 Soldier metals (5)
- 25 Windpipe (7)
- 26 Legal document (4,4)
- 27 Consistent with fact (4)

Down

- 1 Innocent (4-4)
- 2 Move in a curving motion (5)
- 4 Fruitful result (6)
- 5 One who accepts a bet (5)
- 6 Captivate (7)
- 7 Propel oneself through water (4)
- 8 Disorder of the nervous system (6)



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

13 Estrange (8)

15 Aged 13 through 19 (7)

17 Muslim ruler (6)

18 Relating to the mind (6)

20 Meek person (5)

22 Anaesthetic (5)

23 On the cot (4)

Solution No. 35

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D	E	M	E	M	A	S	T	R	A	L	A
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# Pleats of stories

**Designer Naushad Ali** and Sundari Silks collaborate on contemporary saris that celebrate craft and Tamil culture

**S Poorvaja**  
poorvaja.sundar@thehindu.co.in

For designer Naushad Ali, inspiration for his latest collection, a collaboration with a legacy Chennai brand Sundari Silks, was all around him; in a language he loves, and in Tamil heritage that he deeply respects.

Jasmine flowers in various stages of bloom, markings from the *panchangam* or the traditional Tamil calendar, narrow temple borders, and motifs representing anklets, *nethi chuttis*, and pieces of jewellery. On saris in bright purples and blues, subtle beige, yellow, ivory, mint and a gauzy gold, these are just some elements that are woven in, each with a special significance, and a story of culture to tell.

"I was drawn to elements that have shaped Tamil visual culture for centuries. These references hold a quiet sense of ancestry and identity. My own design language has always leaned towards minimalism, restraint, and clarity, and I wanted to bring that sensibility into the sari form without disturbing its essence," Naushad says.

Featuring 24 saris, the collection, which was unveiled in Chennai on Tuesday has been nearly two years in the making. A few years ago, Puducherry-based Naushad

worked with Sundari Silks on a menswear collection. The decision to collaborate on saris is something he says has taken people by surprise.

"I have designed saris for my label's collections in the past; but it usually is to break the monotony. One sari would probably feature in a full collection. This collaboration with Sundari however was an interesting challenge," he says.

To begin work on the collection, Naushad and Manmohan Ram, managing partner, Sundari Silks recall their journey to

Benaras, to meet with weavers, decide on colours and ultimately, get the saris woven there. "This was a collection that was initially conceived for Kanjivarams, but we realised that we had to play around with silks given the work we wanted done on the saris. The saris had to be light, comfortable and wearable," Naushad explains.

Given the intrinsically Tamil elements that inspire the collection, zeroing in on the colours of the saris too was a well-thought out effort. "We have colours like 'Ramar pacchai', a type of green for instance which is very unique to our culture. I wanted to bring these colours back but with a fresher approach, while also wanting to break what a typical sari from South India looks like. We experimented with combinations like pastel mints with reds, and a translucent beige with gold motifs for instance," the designer says.

From gulmohar flowers, jasmine buds described in Tamil poetry and narrow temple borders, the motifs might be many, but have been used sparingly through the

saris. This is deliberate, Naushad says, to let the colours and weaves take precedence, letting a minimal aesthetic shine through.

"We know many young sari wearers for instance, do not like accessorising with heavy jewellery, and were excited about having a sari that featured jewellery motifs instead," he says.

At the T Nagar Sundar Silks showroom, Manmohan says that the collection will be made available for sale and displayed in a way that reflects the thought that has gone into its making. "The collection has just the right balance, with Naushad bringing together traditional and contemporary design elements and motifs," he says.

"We have always been experimenting across our womenswear, menswear and even accessories, and this was an opportunity for us to work on a contemporary collection and champion creativity," Manmohan adds.

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# Colonial hangover?

**Rewind to the glamour of the 1950s** at The Quarter, offering South Indian tapas, quirky cocktails and an opulent space for quiet conversation

**Sanjana Ganesh**  
sanjana.g@thehindu.co.in

**S**alon doors set the tone for the evening. At The Quarter, set in The Savera's premises, we step into Madras of the 1950s, a city exiting the coloniser's presidency, in the midst of creating an identity of its own.

This cocktail-forward bar, blends South Indian tapas, Madras Checks, and old world charm – and brims with opulence. The lighting is dim, and the music, quiet. The display wall, filled with miniature Premier Padminis and Ambassadors, shares an intimate personal collection.

Nirvuti Reddy, who comes from a

long line of entrepreneurs, including her mother Nina Reddy, and is behind 60-year-old Savera Hotel's younger brands, Brew Room and Andhra Tiffin Room, says that The Quarter centres the city as an emotion.

"It is not a themed bar. It is a quiet, comfortable place without jarring music aiming to ensure there is both food and shared conversation. We've tried to keep the menu fun. There are bar nibbles, small plates and mid-plates that play to our strength, especially with our South Indian flavours" she says.

While the glamour of the intimate 40-seater bar by Studio Reve is a draw, what allows The Quarter to break-free from Colonial

primness, is the playfulness of the menu and the space. Wrapped in jade, with a private-dining area called Suite 101 (the first ever suite at Savera) the bar lends itself to high-pitched laughs, and secret conversations.

Our meal begins with an unlikely vadumanga focaccia served with delectable gongura, garlic and podi butter. The buttery-soft bread is made in-house, through Savera's well-established bakehouse. Lotus stem chips, and sweet potato fries, both quoted in an in-house

seasoning similar to piri piri, are finished with a hot honey glaze. Nirvuti says that the portions have been kept small and priced accordingly because here, one should ideally order many tapas portions to share. "You don't want to be stuck with one starter alone. This way, you try a variety and decide what you like," says Nirvuti.

Accompanying the nibbles are a slate of cocktails, all Madras-based, hoping to rekindle the memory of lost flavours and scents.

We try two savoury cocktails, the Biryani and the Thenga Manga. The

Biryani, served with a raita that sits like a pearl thanks to molecular gastronomy, is surprisingly delicious. While one can smell the long-grain basmati rice before sipping the glass, the drink, with bourbon as the base, is spiced with biryani masala and vetiver, and sweet with bourbon. The pea-foam atop the Thenga Manga sundal is a bit dense but the drink, made with rum, raw mango and coconut, is delicious. All pours are a generous, (and now standard) 60ml.

Try the Guntur Accent, The Quarter's take on popular picante. With tequila as the base, this cocktail is spicy with Guntur chillies, and gongura pickle. If you like gins, you are in for a treat. At The Quarter, the gin-based drinks including the Amrutham, Mukkani, and Burma Bazar, with infusions of bael nuts, jackfruit, mango, and Chettinad spices, are

delicious and the perfect amount of sweet.

To ensure that you eat enough carbs to offset the alcohol, order paruppu podi arancini, and chicken 65 sliders. Also try the Andhra rotti where the meat is shredded and smothered with spices, served atop buttery bread. And bite-sized prawn upthams, served with a papaya chutney.

Our mid plate recommendations cannot be complete without the cloud mutta thokku, the bar's take on the classic eggs Benny, served with a fried bread, chili Hollandaise, and a jam-like tomato thokku.

The gilma biryani bowl, akin to a nasi goreng bowl, is full of chicken 65 pieces, and pineapple jam. Also try the Nallampatti paneer, topped with a thick Kongu special gravy, served with tiny coin parottas. "We were insistent that there were just as many vegetarian options. They are certainly not focussed on paneer alone," Nirvuti says.

Before you leave, do not forget to try the classic Madras Coffee Cake served in a brown paper cover, laden with soft, fluffy coffee cream. This is our pick over the filter coffee cocktail which looks beautiful but is unfortunately corrupted by the taste of acerbic cloves. If you like an amalgamation of Reese's pieces and Bounty, the foreign chocolates, our Dubai and US aunts and uncles used to bring, end the meal with peanut, chocolate, coconut, and crunch instead. The Quarter's expansive menu, and stellar

ambience, seems like a promising place for grown ups to have a drink and conversation, without grinding techno thudding in the background. That should be reason alone to make a reservation.

**The Quarter is at The Savera, Dr Radhakrishnan Road. A meal for two costs ₹2,500 including drinks. Reservations are mandatory. Call 9841310006. Open from 6pm to 12am.**



**Madras musings** (Clockwise from left) Mount Road mutta puffs; interiors; and Mylapore Degree. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**A heritage meal** This weekend, popular Chennai Chef Gokul Kumar Mohit (Goku), and cookbook author Vishalla Vairavan will present the traditional Nagarathar Virundhu. The feast showcases a cuisine shaped by the Nagarathar (also known as Nattukottai Chettiar) community's trading legacy. The non-vegetarian menu features mutton uppupari, meen kulambu, eral masala and kozhi milagu kari. Vegetarian highlights include masala cheeyam, palakka kola, thayir keerai, vellai poondru sadham, pacha milagu kulambu, vathal kulambu, along with thogayal, kootu and poriyal. The meal concludes with carrot payasam and aadi kummayam and other traditional sweets. On January 11, Vishalla Vairavan's residence, Adyar, Slots at 12pm, 1pm and 2pm. The meals costs ₹1,200 for vegetarian and ₹2,000 for non-vegetarian. Pre-booking: 9841074777.



**Jewels and weaves** Amethyst hosts an exclusive Pongal pop-up celebrating fine jewellery and handloom heritage, featuring Amrapali Jewels, House of Masaba, and Dharki. A key highlight is Fine Jewellery Volume II by House of Masaba in collaboration with Amrapali Jewels. Also, Dharki's selection of Benaras sarees and blouses, created through ethical, loom-to-label practices that honour India's weaving traditions. On January 8, 9 and 10 between 11am and 7.30pm at Amethyst, Royapettah.



## Chew on this

Remember Caramilk from the 1990s? The golden-brown chewy toffee gets a revival of sorts with makers across the country reinventing the toffee

**Why toffee?** But what is it about toffee that has got these brands invested? Nikita says the love received from customers across the country has been a driving factor. "The toffee is made by hand in small batches, and slow cooked. "Nothing is

mechanised. We stir by hand, watching closely as colour and texture develop, and relying on experience rather than metrics. Wrapping and packing are all done manually too. It's hands-on work. The human judgement involved is what gives the toffee its character."

For Pooja, veering away from social media trends was key. "Our

says. At her brand too, toffees are entirely handmade. "I started with trials in my home kitchen and I have slowly stepped by step increased production in a commercial kitchen tweaking the product as our volume increases."

Another brand born out of kitchen trials is Tarvoti. Based in Goa, Preethi Hirendra Dhekne, 44, launched the label in 2023. "My husband is in the merchant navy and while sailing with him I discovered a new joy of picking up local treats from various countries. During Covid, my husband took a break from sailing and we missed our dose of foreign chocolates. One day, we curated a unique toffee at home using local cashew, and an idea to market this unique concept as a 'gift of Goa' was born." And hence the name Tarvoti, which means 'sailor' in Konkani.

The brand offers three different flavours: roast almond, cashew coffee, and country cashew. "The latter is a rustic combination

of ginger used in traditional Goan sweets. We will soon introduce new regional flavours such as coconut, banana, and mint". She explains how sugar and butter are cooked together to form a creamy caramel that is then mixed with nuts and other "secret" ingredients to form the core of the toffee. "Toffee squares are then coated with chocolate and sprinkled with nuts."

**Keeping it handmade** As with any business, the challenges of running an artisanal confectionery business in India are many. Nikita says one of the biggest challenges is consumer awareness. "Reaching customers and helping them understand why an artisanal product behaves differently from a factory-made one. For instance, while some consumers immediately recognise shorter shelf lives as a sign of freshness, many still associate

longer shelf life with better value, not realising it often comes at the cost of high usage of artificial preservatives," she says. Pooja agrees. "Toffees have a nostalgic touch to them so for it to be revived, organic word of mouth has been the best way to get the word out."

Given that the concept of artisanal confectionery is not very popular in India, Preethi says most people tend to associate toffee with mass products like say a Coffee Bite or an Alpenliebe. Manufacturing is also not easy. "We need to maintain strict atmosphere control during the production process as our toffee is very sensitive to humidity and temperature," says Preethi who once tried using freeze-dried fruits in the toffee, but they went soft.

At Big Bear Farms, the initial hiccups faced were in trying to figure out how to ship a fresh product across the country. "Through the seasons, particularly the summer months, when they would begin to melt. We were determined not to use artificial preservatives, which meant learning the limits of the product: how it reacts to temperature changes, travel time, and storage. There were moments when we chose not to ship at all, or redesigned our packaging entirely, simply to protect the toffee," says Nikita.

**A win-win** It took Pooja four months of trials in her home kitchen to launch the brand. "I had made the toffee entirely out of brown sugar and jaggery, focussed on each piece being sizeable enough that it was comparable to an Indian sweet like a Mysurpa." Initial feedback was that it was too sweet and too big, and that led her to modify the recipe to what it is today, by experimenting with different types of sugars and cooking processes.

And all this effort by brands has not been in vain given the rise in demand for artisanal toffee, and proof is in the many gifting hampers with boxes of these chewy treats. Says Nikita, "We continue to receive stories of how the toffees take them back to childhood, their nani, their school-days, holidays, and hill stations. It's truly amazing to know that our toffees evoke such warm memories."



Learn to identify deep fake, take a tour of the fascinating world of the Tamil-Brahmi script, understand investments, and write your own play at *The Hindu* Lit for Life's workshops

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There will also be a screening of the documentary *Wild Tamil Nadu*, that has been produced by Sundram Fasteners and directed by wildlife photographer Kalyana Varma, on January 18; 11am to 12.30pm and 3pm to 4pm at Lady Andal Seminar Hall.

## As the lotus blooms

At Sharan Apparao's workshop *The Many Lives of the Lotus: Between Sacred History and Contemporary Claims*, the visual motif of the lotus will take centrestage. She will engage with questions of iconography, visual continuity, and cultural transmission through the lotus as both motif and symbol. Sharan, an art curator and the founder of Apparao Galleries in Chennai, has been associated with the visual arts for four decades.

*The Many Lives of the Lotus* is on January 17, 12.30pm to 1.30pm at Lady Andal Seminar Hall.

## Money matters

Rohit Sarin, who has three decades of experience in private banking, will explain in simple terms about how to build the habit of investing. At his workshop *Unlocking Wealth: Secrets to Getting Rich at Any Age*, people across ages can learn to build wealth and grow their corpus. It will not only look at how money works, but also at how to make it work.

*Unlocking Wealth: Secrets to Getting Rich at Any Age* is on January 18, 10.30am to 12.30pm at Ground Floor, Annex Building. For those aged 18-plus.



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## Mind and body

Health and fitness coach Priti Chawla's session will be an interactive one with movement and breath work involved. "I have divided the workshop into two parts," says Priti. "The first will be about fitness' general components and learning to follow a structured fitness programme," she explains, adding that this will be followed by a 25-minute practical component. "We will then move on to the philosophy of fitness and wholesome living, delving deep into what one needs to do to achieve a healthy living plan for life."

*Beyond the Body: The Philosophy of Fitness and Wholesome Living* is on January 17; 10.30am to 12.30pm at Ground Floor, Annex Building. Open for 18-plus.



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## Deeper than deep fakes

With AI being the buzzword now, learn how to create a lasting narrative for yourself at Shantanu Tungare's workshop titled *Owning Your Digital Self in the AI Era*. "The session is about deep faking yourself before deep fake deep fakes you," says the Mumbai-based Shantanu, a filmmaker who is best known for his pioneering work combining cinematic craft and AI-driven creativity.

Shantanu will teach participants how to create a strong narrative online in an era in

which a profile photo and a few seconds of voice recordings are sufficient to deep fake a person to doing or saying things that might do harmful things for their identity.

"I will show how to build an online brand using AI tools; what exactly AI does, how to identify deep fake and how to build narrative immunity on deep fakes," he explains. Shantanu says that AI can never be countered with technology. "It will always outsmart you," he says, adding: "But what it cannot outsmart is the narrative you put of yourself."

Shantanu suggests we use our instinct to pivot into something that AI can never know. "I'll also be teaching how to clone your voice, how to clone yourself and how to use ChatGPT and Gemini to have a two-way conversation to figure out who you are, what your motivations are and come up with a strong narrative about yourself."

*Owning Your Digital Self in the AI Era* is on January 17, 10.30am to 11.30am and 3pm to 4pm, for those aged 18-plus at Lady Andal Seminar Hall.

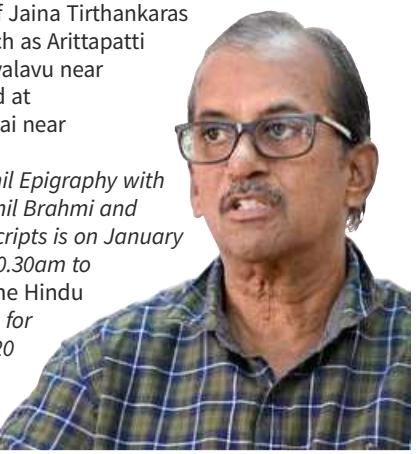


To register for *The Hindu* Lit for Life, scan the QR Code

## Demystifying epigraphy

V Vedachalam, a retired Senior Epigraphist from Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, will take participants into the fascinating world of the ancient Tamil-Brahmi script. In his workshop *Early Tamil Epigraphy* with the focus on Tamil Brahmi and Vattelluttu scripts, Vedachalam, who holds a doctorate, will be teaching participants to read and write the scripts, also throwing light on the bas-reliefs of Jaina Tirthankaras in places such as Arittappatti and Keezhavalavu near Madurai, and at Kazhugumalai near Kovilpatti.

*Early Tamil Epigraphy with focus on Tamil Brahmi and Vattelluttu scripts* is on January 17 and 18, 10.30am to 4.30pm at The Hindu studio. Open for those aged 20 and above.





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