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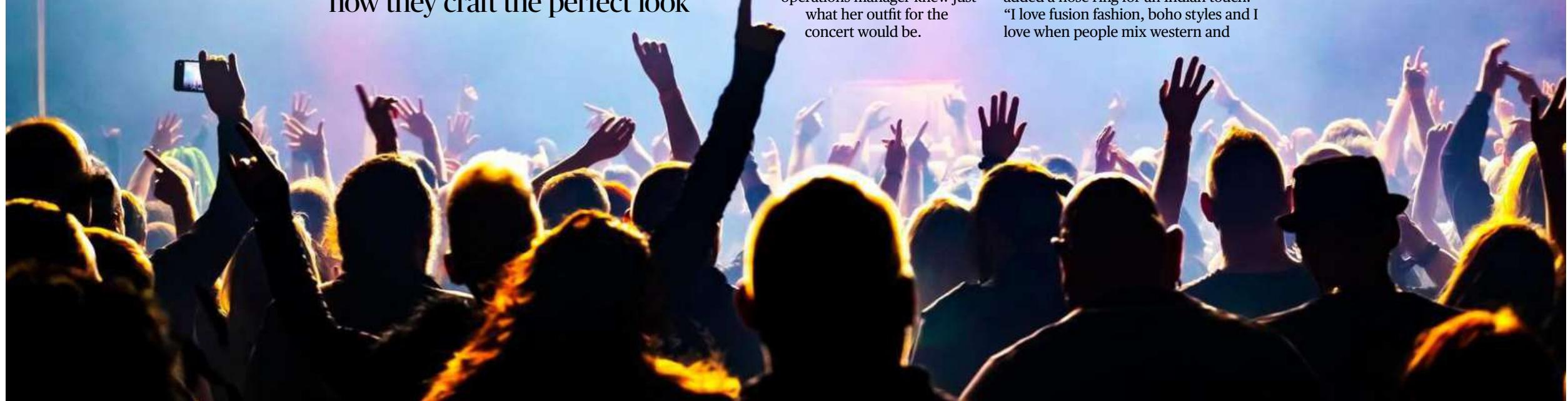


99, NOT OUT

Camellia Punjabi on the legal battle to keep London's iconic Indian restaurant Veeraswamy open **P5**

Mic and vibe check

Alongside India's booming concert economy, fan pits have emerged as a playground for bold fashion experiments. From corsets and saris to DIY gowns, we ask concertgoers how they craft the perfect look



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In 2024, Akhila Banoth remembers chancing upon a photo, on Instagram, of a sari with a unique design: rock band Linkin Park's typography and a stylised photo of its members emblazoned across the pallu by Oikkyo Calcutta. "I saved it for the future and maybe, I did manifest a Linkin Park concert in India after all," she laughs. Once news broke last year that the rock band would be performing at Lollapalooza Mumbai, the 36-year old operations manager knew just what her outfit for the concert would be.

For the country's most fashionable and the many more who are eager to experiment and jazz it up, India's growing roster of concerts and its thriving music festival circuit have become an ideal playground to put one's best sartorial foot forward.

A music lover who has always been interested in fashion, Akhila says that she does not miss out on the opportunity to dress up for concerts, and consciously puts together outfits depending on the vibe of the gig; be it techno, or jazz or even an Indian music concert.

At Lollapalooza Mumbai, Akhila paired her sari with a corset blouse and added a nose ring for an Indian touch. "I love fusion fashion, boho styles and I love when people mix western and

Indian wear. I styled my sari keeping in mind the music festival vibe and went with a corset blouse. So many people came and spoke to me at the festival about my sari," she says.

The opportunities to dress up for music in India are immense given the concert boom that is well and truly underway. The #ThrowBack2025 year-end report released by BookMyShow records a 17% growth in live entertainment consumption and read that there were 34,806 live events including concerts across the country last year.

**CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 4**

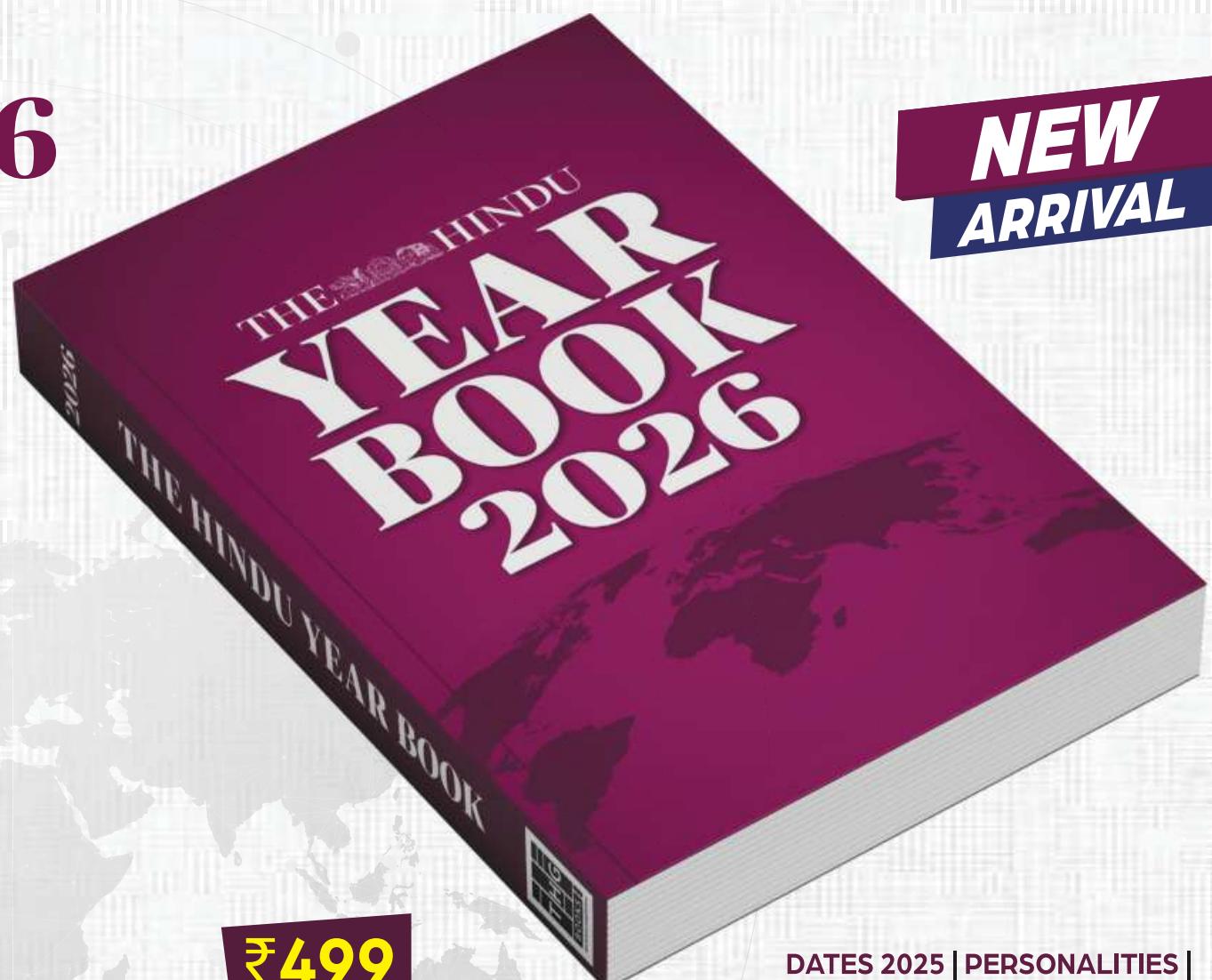


A SPECIAL PUBLICATION FROM THE HINDU GROUP

The Hindu Year Book 2026

provides chronological, contextual, and factual information on the key events that occupied public attention between January and December 2025.

It features a Calendar of Events with Profiles of People, and Data on India and the World. Expert essays cover critical topics such as like AI and the Indus Waters Treaty, while dedicated sections analyse global governance, economy, and sports through evocative photographs and factual reporting.



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pick of the week



Love bites

Fall in love one bite at a time this Valentine's Day with ITC Fabelle's The Arc of Love — a playful, poetic journey through five stages of romance, reimagined as handcrafted heart-shaped pralines. Expect white, milk, ruby and dark chocolates with layered mousses and varying flavours.

Priced ₹845, pralines are available across select Fabelle boutiques, Fabelle.in, and in online delivery platforms.



Racing time

Fasten your seatbelts. The Navitimer B01 Chronograph 43 Aston Martin Aramco Formula One Team marks Breitling's return to Formula 1, blending racing heritage with precision watchmaking. Limited to 1,959 pieces, the titanium chronograph features a carbon-fiber dial, racing-green accents, and the in-house Caliber B01 with a 70-hour power reserve.

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Lunar New Year

Little Soi ushers in the Lunar New Year with Beyond the Great Wall, a 10-day culinary festival spotlighting borderland Chinese cuisines shaped by Southeast Asian influences. The menu travels through Yunnan, Sichuan, Xinjiang and beyond, featuring hand-pulled noodles, cumin-spiced lamb, seafood and preparations rooted in tradition. Priced ₹1,600 for two, the festival is on till February 15 across Little Soi outlets in Chennai. For reservations call 8925915857



Festive spread

ABC Spring Summer Edit 2026, curated by Arti Bagdi returns with a new showcase of Indian fashion, jewellery and lifestyle, spotlighting festive spread through a contemporary lens. From handcrafted saris and occasion wear to modern coord sets, heirloom pieces, jewellery, and refined home accents, the edit brings together entrepreneurs, and artisan-led labels from across India. February 10 to 11, from 11am to 8pm at Hyatt Regency, Teynampet.



CTRL+ALT+CINEMA

(Clockwise from left) Stills from *Your Name* and *Petite Maman*. CRUNCHYROLL AND MUBI

condition enforced by distance, technology, and the slow violence of time, with characters learning to live alongside loss rather than intervene against it. *Your Name* retains that preoccupation with misalignment while introducing the possibility that history itself might be nudged through collective action. This shift would become explicit in Makoto's later films, where catastrophe presses directly against questions of agency and responsibility.

Weathering with You escalates the dilemma by staging romance

against climate instability, while

Suzume reframes disaster as

something sealed, mourned, and

ritually contained.

The film's intertextual circuitry makes that positioning clearer. Its body-swap premise carries echoes of *Freaky Friday* and *Ranma ½*, though Makoto drains those influences of their comedic endgames in favour of sustained unease. Its temporal crossings recall *Interstellar* and Netflix's *Dark*, in their shared interest of love stretched thin by relativistic delay. Even the final staircase encounter gestures toward the open-ended romantic closures of *Before Sunrise* and *Tokyo Story*.

Foreign affairs

Written and directed by French filmmaker Céline Sciamma, *Petite Maman* follows eight-year-old Nelly as she accompanies her parents to her late grandmother's house in the aftermath of a death that has left her mother Marion visibly unmoored. When Marion departs without explanation, Nelly wanders into the nearby woods and meets another girl her age, also named Marion, who is building a small shelter from fallen branches and lives in an earlier version of the same house, where Nelly's grandmother remains alive.

Céline refuses explanatory scaffolding, allowing the logic of childhood to govern the exchange. Nelly and young Marion meet as peers, sharing

meals, games, anxieties, and secrets. Through these encounters, Nelly gains access to this likeminded girl's childhood fears, and ambitions, while Marion receives reassurance from a future that cannot disclose itself fully but offers steadiness where it can.

Formally spare and meticulously observed, the film builds meaning through performance, blocking, and duration to articulate generational continuity without flattening difference. The casting of identical twins (Josephine and Gabrielle Sanz) sharpens this inquiry, allowing Céline to examine resemblance as both comfort and constraint, while Claire Mathon's restrained cinematography keeps the emotional field grounded in domestic textures and natural light.

Read against Céline's broader filmography, *Petite Maman* is a distillation of concerns she had already pushed to their most rigorous extreme in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, particularly her interest in relationships structured by shared attention and the ethics of looking. Where *Portrait* stages intimacy as something forged through sustained observation and delayed articulation, *Petite Maman* miniaturises that framework, replacing romantic desire with filial curiosity while preserving the principle that understanding grows from time spent together.

In this sense, *Petite Maman* shares DNA with works like Alice Rohrwacher's *Corpo Celeste*, and Lukas Dhont's *Close*, that preserve childhood perception as structurally sufficient, even as it retains the austere formal discipline that links Céline closely to auteurs such as Chantal Akerman – which also helps explain why it pairs so irresistibly with Makoto's more maximalist sensibilities in *Your Name*.

Ctrl+Alt+Cinema is a fortnightly column that brings you handpicked gems from the boundless offerings of world cinema and anime.

French minimalism, Japanese maximalism

Here's why *Your Name* and *Petite Maman* should be on your watchlist



behind written instructions to limit collateral damage.

The film's immense popularity, bolstered by J-Rock sensation Radwimps' propulsive score and Makoto's hyper-articulated backgrounds, occasionally obscures how severe

its emotional logic really is. Seen within Makoto's broader body of work, it functions as a culmination and inflection point.

His earlier films, particularly *5 Centimeters per Second* and *Voices of a Distant Star*, treated separation as an immutable



(Clockwise from left) Kim Seon-ho as Joo Ho-jin in *Can This Love Be Translated?*; Kim Seon-ho. NETFLIX



Heart over language

Following the release of *Can This Love Be Translated?*, actor Kim Seon-ho reflects on what it takes to play a polyglot

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What does it take to be the leading man in a romance K-Drama?

In Netflix's newest show, *Can This Love Be Translated?*, Kim Seon-ho, the actor at the helm of it all, plays polyglot interpreter Joo Ho-jin. He is largely detached, no-nonsense and committed to ensuring emotions do not get in the way of his job. "I only pass along the words people say, not judge what kind of person they are," he declares early on in the show.

It isn't long before this resolve is put to the test as the show takes its leads, Seon-ho and actor Go Youn-jung, to Japan, Canada and Italy. Soon enough, sparks fly under the Northern lights, at

quaint wine bars, a picturesque winery, and through winding cobblestone streets.

Seon-ho says he had to keep in mind while interpreting the character of Ho-jin, to go beyond the universal emotions and expressions that come with the genre.

"Ho-jin is not someone who is really out there or very active; he's someone who's very calm, very flat in a way, and also very reserved. I paid attention to little details that I could add to express his emotions. For instance, the way I would look at someone, the slightest movement of my eyebrows or just what he would do with

his fingers," he says, during a Zoom interview.

A seasoned theatre actor, Seon-ho further says he focused on expressing many nuanced details through reacting rather than acting, while designing the character.

Since its release on January 16, *Can This Love Be Translated?* continues to be among Netflix's top five most-watched shows in India. Seon-ho is all smiles as he speaks about the show, and says that he began prepping for his role as an interpreter fluent in multiple languages from nearly four months before they started filming.

"I met with the different coaches for each of the respective languages to study, and on the day we have those multilingual scenes, each language coach would be there on set with me. We would tweak the details and nuances together. I have to say, though, it was not easy to do," he explains. Bringing up a specific scene where he had to speak Korean, Italian and Japanese, Seon-ho recalls how difficult this was.

After starring in the 2023 action-thriller film *The Childe* and the gritty thriller show *The Tyrant* in 2024, projects that came out after a professional break following a relationship controversy, he went viral in 2025 for his short, sweet cameo in the hit show Netflix's *When Life Gives You Tangerines*.

Now, with the release of *Can This Love Be Translated?*, it is a return for the actor to the romance genre.

"I think I'm not somebody who's drawn to a genre. I'm more drawn to the narrative and the character arc of the particular character that I would be playing. I'm really drawn to the backstory of these characters, what their life was like before we get to meet them, what they are struggling with, and how they resolve those struggles," he says.

With him being onscreen for a large chunk of the show with Go Youn-jung, Seon-ho says that as an introvert, he had to consciously work on being an extrovert on the set.

"Her level of passion for acting is truly immense. I'm very grateful that she was my partner, and it was an honour for me," he smiles.

Can This Love Be Translated? is currently streaming on Netflix



Corsets, athleisure and cowboy chic

At the India International Leather Fair in Chennai, manufacturers, designers and institutes presented 2026 leather trends for buyers from around the world



Leather outfits from the fair.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Universe India 2025), Ayushree Malik (Miss Supranational India 2025), Madhurima Daga (Rubaru Mr India International 2025) walked the ramp. About 13 labels exhibited their collections. The garments, accessories, and footwear displayed a rich spectrum of textures, styles and silhouettes fresh from the world of leather. The showcase unveiled a comprehensive leather fashion collection spanning men's, women's, and children's wear.

"This show brings together the latest leather trends, colours, and textures, giving buyers a clear view of collections that are ready for business. We wanted to give the influencers an opportunity to see the products before reporting back to their companies," said Yavar Dhala, co-convenor of the fashion show.

Talking about what it takes to design a show of this stature, Bhaskaran Chandra Shekhar, the director of the fashion show, says, "Each walk is built around a brand's DNA. In a limited time, we wanted to create stories that showcase leather as versatile, wearable, and design-driven."

Kamalika Chatterjee

Be it biker chic, rock, punk, or bad boy aesthetics, leather has always been a staple. But over the years, leather has moved beyond just jackets, bags and shoes. Now, they appear as elegant outfits, embellished corsets, pencil and fishtail skirts, and as trimming details. This year's International Leather Fair in Chennai highlighted the material's potential.

Held from February 1 to 3, the India International Leather Fair (IILF) launched with a fashion show at the ITC Grand Chola. The fair draws buyers from across the world. Private labels and sourcing agents use it to place orders and identify manufacturers across the State, which makes this an especially important show for the industry.

Organised by Indian's Finished Leather Manufacturers and Exporters Association (IFLMEA) at the Chennai Trade Centre, Nandambakkam, this is said to be Asia's largest leather show.

The fashion show featured over 70 models and 14 showstoppers – models such as Manika Vishwakarma (Miss

Ruma Singh

Are you dreaming of Champagne soirées and affordable Bordeaux Grand Crus? Hold the thought. The EU-India trade agreement, announced on India's Republic Day, encompasses multiple industries, including wine. For the beleaguered European wine industry, the announcement comes at a time of stagnant growth, compounded by high tariffs imposed by the US.

As a result Indian importers and journalists have been inundated with requests for information and assistance to start the process of bringing European wine into India.

The mood is upbeat.

The initial announcement stated that the 150% central import duty would be reduced over time to 20% for wines in the premium range, to 30% for midrange wines.

But is this all? While India is the world's fourth largest economy with an annual GDP of €3.4 trillion, alcohol is taxed primarily by individual State governments.

Top markets include Maharashtra (Mumbai), Karnataka (Bengaluru), and Delhi, but several states are dry (no alcohol), while others levy varying taxes and cesses.

Excise duty is built into consumer retail prices and variable State-imposed VAT further impacts prices.

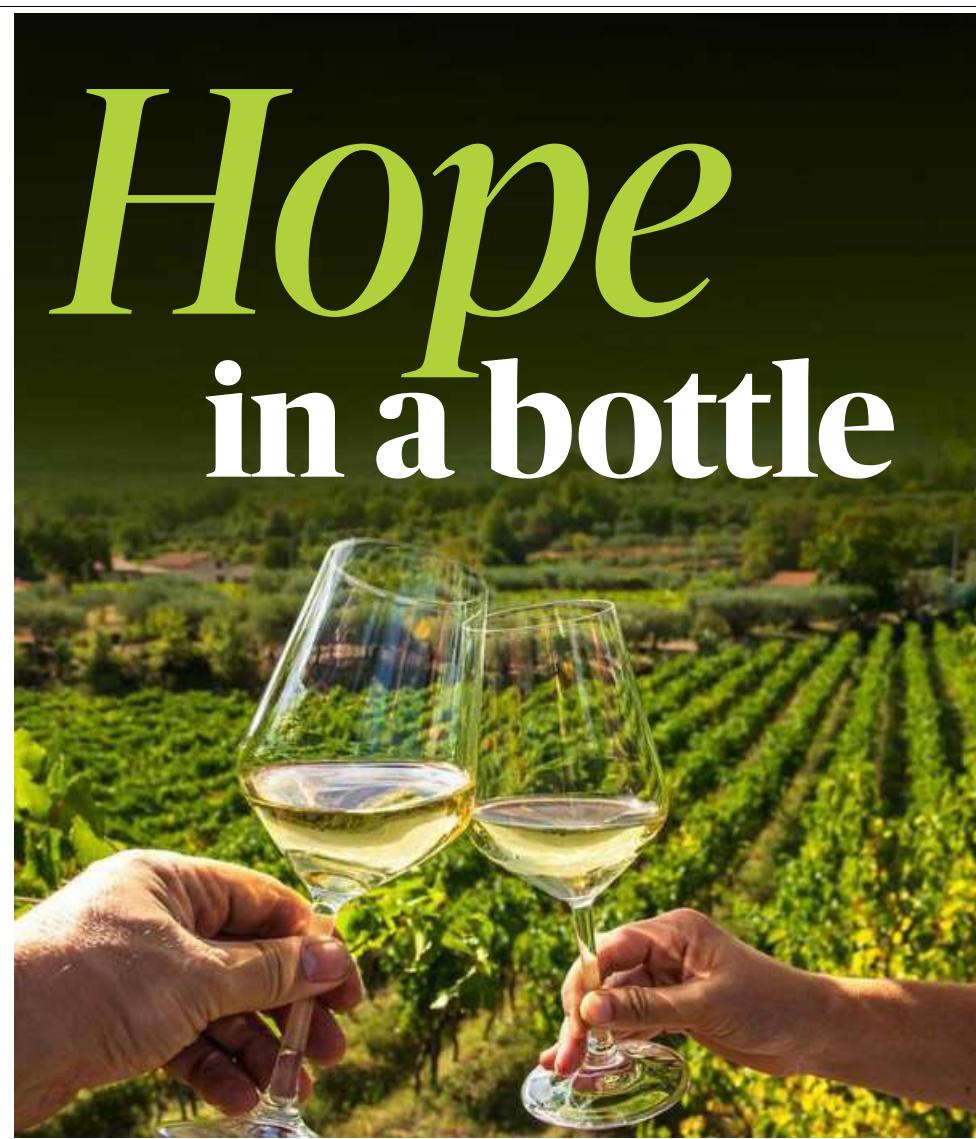
There is no one-size-fits-all scenario as far as sales of wine (or any alcoholic beverage) in India is concerned, making the wine market complex to understand. Leading importer Nikhil Agarwal of Angels Share reveals that his phone has been ringing off the hook. "Many European producers are suddenly seeing India as a saviour of the wine world; it's not quite so."

However, he adds, the trade agreement sets India's wine industry on the right path. "There are multiple factors to consider: like the high Euro rate against the INR. Even if my producers freeze their prices, costs will increase due to this instability." Nikhil does not expect things to change overnight; but says, "It will keep things stable, so I am very positive in the long term."

Top importer, Vishal Kadakia of Wine Park, is known for introducing new styles and premium wines in the market.

In 2024, he imported orange wines by iconic Friuli producer Radikon, and recently introduced the first Galician Albariño to the Indian market.

He says, "The part I am happiest about is that the wine consumer wins. In a growing wine market like India's, this allows consumers to experiment, try new styles,



The EU-India trade deal may lower import duties on wine, but State taxes and currency volatility raise one question: when will consumers see cheaper bottles?

regions, and grapes and better-quality wines overall as the customs duty drops. I foresee an increase in wine sales across the board, which will positively impact wine retail and growth in wine bars."

Premium and mid-range wines are where the impact will be felt most, rather than entry-level as duty reduction would apply only to wines above a minimum import price of €2.50 per bottle.

Others, like Amrita Singh DipWSET, co-founder, Cellar 33, a Bordeaux-based international export and marketing company, have already begun introducing niche European wines via

their Project India.

"This is a phased reduction, not an overnight reset. Duties will reduce gradually over years, with biggest benefits for premium and mid-range European wines rather than entry-level categories."

This calibrated approach is how India has structured previous trade agreements, she adds, with first tangible changes post-ratification likely becoming apparent in 2027 with a greater impact playing out over the following five-seven years.

"From a trade perspective, this is a long-term structural shift rather than a short-term pricing story. Retail prices will

not automatically fall in proportion to duty cuts, as State taxes, distribution costs and importer strategies will continue to play major roles."

Delhi-based importer and co-founder, Aristol, Sumit Sehgal believes the trade agreement will bring focus to new markets like India.

He says, "That said, structural barriers in the Indian system, such as label registration requirements, State-wise excise frameworks, and complex compliance procedures must also be addressed to fully unlock the FTA's potential. With aligned efforts from policymakers, producers, importers, retailers, and the hospitality sector, the agreement can turn into a sustainable,

long-term growth story for India's wine ecosystem."

Sumit says the current market is already inclined towards premiumisation despite current taxes: a good sign indicating that India as a market is ready to take off.

However, he cautions, "There is a pressing need for brand building by EU producers, alongside sales. This is expensive and time consuming but pays off in the long run."

Having successfully introduced 15 high-quality grower Champagne producers through two leading Indian importers last year, Cellar 33 understands Indian market sentiments well, Amrita adds. She says, "This recent trade agreement reinforces our belief that India is a strategic, long-term market where patience, education and trust are just as critical as policy changes."

Nikhil agrees. "In 2020, the sweet spot for a spend on a bottle was ₹2,000; today this has risen. People are rethinking spends on wine." He tells of a Mumbai customer who recently bought 18 bottles of Meursault at ₹18,000 per bottle and returned a week later for more.

"In the case of Australia, signatory of the AI-ECTA in 2022 with India, the signing was followed up with strong support by Australian government agencies and producers, is thus showing results. As more countries sign trade deals with India, the market will open further," concludes Nikhil. "In the end, it will be a win-win situation for the consumer."



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In December last year, when South African singer Tyla performed in Mumbai, a video of concert-goers, particularly impeccably styled women, dubbed 'concert baddies', went viral on Instagram. The comments, many not from the country, were a mix of admiration and surprise, along the lines of, "Didn't know baddies like this existed in India."

Subiksha Shivakumar, model and content creator who was also featured in the viral video feels that the shock and surprise in these comments felt racist. "We have been fashionable, and dressing like this for so long. I think it took a group of people who do not know anything about India for our own people to really start appreciating ourselves and our style more, and experimenting more," she says.

The minute her tickets are booked for a concert, Subiksha says she begins to think about what to wear. While comfort takes precedence for her while putting together a look, given the amount of walking involved, she says there needs to be a big statement piece. "It should say something and have some kind of an expression. Musicians express themselves creatively through their music, and concerts are a place for people who will appreciate expression of art, and for me that is fashion," she says.

Actor, model and musician Jason Arland also makes a case for incorporating Indian touches to concert outfits, reflecting on how many looks from the Tyla concert had statement Indian jewellery, something he says elevates any and every outfit. "I wore an intricately embroidered shawl belonging to my mother for the last concert I attended, and was asked if I was going to a sangeet or to celebrate a festival. Why can't I celebrate my culture, clothing and craftsmanship at a music festival as well? It feels like there has to be an occasion to wear our own traditional clothes because we are so westernised in so many ways," he says.

"I do not take being called a 'concert baddie' as a compliment. Indians have always been and were always the 'baddies,'" he says.

For inspiration, Jason says he most often does not have to look beyond home. "Our mothers, fathers and grandparents have some of the best closets. And I do not

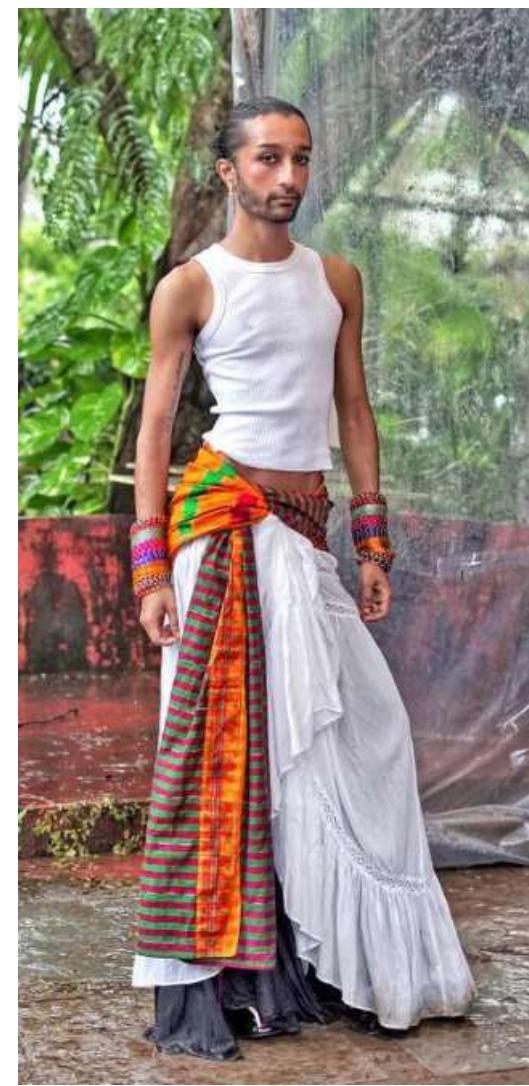
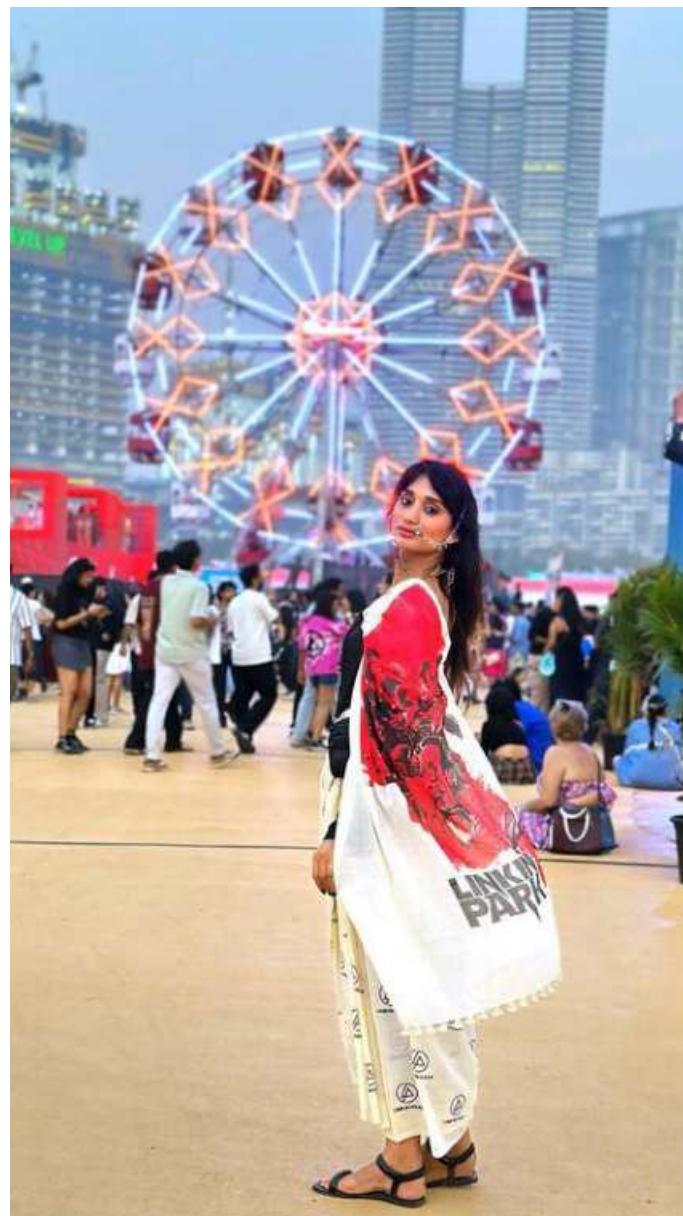


Mic and vibe check

believe in incorporating their clothes and jewellery into my concert wardrobe owing to nostalgia, but I do it because it is timeless. The last outfit I wore, where I styled my mother's shawl for a concert, felt so personal. It wasn't just about dressing up; I was being myself," he says.

'Concert baddie' or not, the path to the final concert look, of DIY-ing outfits, trawling through thrift stores, and even some last minute chaotic purchases thrown in, is an experience concert lovers say they have come to immensely enjoy.

DIY, thrift and more
When we speak to Sabista Khan, a marketing strategist from Pune, she is ready with her outfit for the evening for Himesh Reshammiya's Cap Mania Tour. "I start planning my outfit the minute my tickets are booked for a concert," she says. For the Cap Mania tour, she has a glittery dress as an ode to his repertoire of party songs, and a cap, of course. "The first thing I do is to reach out to my favourite thrift store when I start putting together my concert wardrobe. I approach this in two ways; if it is an independent artiste, I let the genre influence my wardrobe and for a music festival, I put together a look that reflects my personal style," she says.



(Clockwise from far left)
Concert-goers at Lollapalooza Mumbai; Jason Arland; Sabista Khan; and Akhila wearing her Linkin Park sari. ULLAS SRIVASTAVA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

last minute dash to shop at Bandra and picked up the first outfit she spotted in the colour scheme; a football jersey. "You dress not only for yourself and the artiste, but to feel at one with the community that is attending. As One Direction fans, for many of us, it was a dream come true to see Louis in India and it felt nice to wear those colours and share the joy," she says.

Whether DIY-ing, or consciously rewear and curating looks from their own wardrobes, or putting together outfits last minute, there is a very tangible impact that these live events have on fashion. While several brands including Levis and H&M have partnered with music festivals for merch and limited-edition drops, quick commerce fashion sites have started to curate looks as well, making it easy for shoppers.

Ahead of the Lollapalooza weekend in January, Mumbai-based quick commerce fashion platform Zilo, which promises deliveries of clothing, shoes and jewellery from a host of brands in 60 minutes or less saw a 37% spike in orders in comparison to the normal weekend buying trends of shirts and dresses, and instead saw demand for concert specific styles such as jorts, tube tops, Korean pants, and cargo pants. "We also saw a surge in searches for last-minute concert essentials like stockings and sling bags, and while we did not stock Linkin Park T-shirts, this was searched nearly four times more than all other keywords," says Padmakumar Pal, co-founder and CEO.

Live events, Padmakumar says, helps them create buzz within the platform and customers, he says, make a beeline for their app when they put together their outfits last-minute. "We also recently got stylist Anaita Shroff Adajania on board to curate looks that people can shop, and this is also something concert-goers can refer to as well," Padmakumar says.

With John Mayer all set to perform in Mumbai on February 11, millennials and a section of the GenZ who have discovered his music are most definitely working on their outfits. What will it be; a T-shirt featuring the man himself? or recreating outfits from his music videos? or just a sparkly dress to dance in with comfortable sneakers?

For a Halloween concert headlined by Punjabi singer Talwinder last year, Sabista chose a black mesh dress. When Coldplay came to India, she embraced colour, painting her nails in a spectrum of fluorescent shades to echo the bouncing balls that light up the concert venue. In anticipation of attending Taylor Swift's Eras Tour a couple of years ago, she went a step further, designing a dress from scratch, an aesthetic she describes as her favourite album *Folklore* meeting *Bridgerton*.

"I personally sourced the fabric for this Victorian outfit, with layers in a light beige and made a headband with dried rose petals and acrylic pearls. Even though I did not get to go to the concert, I loved the process so much and seeing my vision come together," she says.

Deepshika Kale, a Bengaluru-based graphic designer, says spending time on planning for and curating a concert look largely boils down to expression. "There is also a lot of inspiration on Pinterest for festival outfits. I also take Mumbai's humidity into consideration while

putting together these looks of course, and being able to comfortably jump around and even partake in mosh pits," she laughs.

It however isn't always about elaborate outfits as well. Despite having a summery outfit planned for Lollapalooza last year in Mumbai, Deepshika says that once she found out fans like her were planning to wear red and black to listen to Louis Tomlinson, she made a chaotic,



Gautam Nirmal Doshi
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At 3pm, between sets on the second day of Lollapalooza India, 27-year-old Shivang Verma, dressed in a grey Linkin Park T-shirt, waited for the band's first-ever performance in Mumbai. The software engineer from Lucknow had come for the closing act of the global festival's fourth Indian edition. Like many others, he was drawn in the moment rumours of Linkin Park headlining the festival were confirmed.

"When I heard the rumours, I started saving up," says Shivang. Attending the festival solo, he spent around ₹10,000 on flights, ₹15,000 on his ticket and another ₹15,000 on accommodation. "I had to be here, no matter what," he says, adding that like many fans, he misses Chester Bennington but was excited to see the band reunite.

In the past year, India has hosted live performances by Coldplay,

Guns N' Roses, Tom Morello and Travis Scott. With Indian artistes touring frequently as well, the surge in sold-out concerts, especially those curated for under-35 audiences, largely Gen Z, is unmistakable. Ticket prices, often justified as 'once-in-a-lifetime' experiences for die-hard fans, have risen in tandem.

"I don't spend recklessly on concerts or live experiences," says Shivang. Many Gen Z attendees I spoke to at Lollapalooza echoed this sentiment, acknowledging the steep ticket prices and exercising restraint on discretionary spending, both at the venue and in everyday life. Yet most also admitted to having felt left out in the past – social-media-driven FOMO, they said, is very real.

"There were concerts I skipped, but after seeing how they played out on social media, I did feel like I missed something," says 23-year-old Mumbai-based graphic designer Siddharth Dhevar.

According to BookMyShow's

Throwback 2025 report, live entertainment events rose to 34,086 in 2025, an 11% increase over 2024, while overall consumption grew by 17% year-on-year.

This raises an inevitable question. Against the backdrop of a recent LinkedIn survey in which 80% of Gen Z respondents said they expect job prospects to become tougher in 2026, what is driving this rapidly growing concert economy? And how do young people justify spending a significant portion of their savings on experiences like Lollapalooza India, even as over 75% of Gen Z

plan to switch jobs for better pay? "I usually save up, so when it comes to experiences like Lollapalooza, I can afford it," says Namita Chaili, 25, a Mumbai-based SEO analyst who lives with her parents. Missing out on Coldplay last year, she admits, came with a dose of social-media-induced FOMO.

Others spoke of practical adjustments. Delhi-based Poorva Patole, 25, cut accommodation costs by staying with a friend in Mumbai, while her colleague Devika Sharma, 27, who flew in from the capital, stayed with her

grandparents. "We both work from home, which helps us save," says Devika.

Several Gen Z attendees also said food and beverages at the venue were steeply priced, prompting familiar cost-cutting hacks. Many also felt that Lollapalooza tickets – priced between ₹6,500 and ₹10,000 for general admission – offered better value than single-artiste concerts, given the multi-artiste line-up.

The rising frequency of high-profile concerts, the pressure of missing out, and the true cost of live experiences are pushing young audiences to be more deliberate about how they spend their money on music-led moments. "I plan my finances around the concerts or festivals I want to attend," says 27-year-old Aditya (named changed on request), who works in finance, lives in Bengaluru, and was attending Lollapalooza India in Mumbai for the third time. "In the lead-up, I cut back on unnecessary spending – eating out, ordering

food – anything I can save on."

Then there is also the rise of a new consumer segment – event tourists', those who travel across cities or states for live concerts and festivals. According to the Throwback 2025 report, over 5.6 lakh people travelled for music concerts in 2025, an 18% jump from the previous year.

The economic impact is significant. Using Coldplay's Ahmedabad concert as a case study, the report notes that for every ₹100 spent on tickets, an additional ₹585 went towards travel, hospitality and shopping. The concert generated an estimated ₹641 crore across industries, much of it driven by event tourism.

Tears of witnessing history being made were evident on several faces as Linkin Park closed the festival. With all things being said and done, sometimes a price tag for such experiences can be overlooked because in our hearts we know that our inner child deserves it.



(Clockwise from far left)
Snapshots from Lollapalooza India 2026. BOOKMYSHOW LIVE

Price of FOMO

As ticket prices climb and job anxiety looms, India's Gen Z is budgeting, travelling and cutting back elsewhere to afford live music experiences – from Lollapalooza India to global arena tours

Throwback 2025 report, live

entertainment events rose to 34,086 in 2025, an 11% increase over 2024, while overall consumption grew by 17% year-on-year.

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(Clockwise from below) An old picture of diners at the restaurant; present-day interiors; Camellia Panjabi; and crab biryani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Nidhi Adlakha
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“We showed the British how to eat Indian food,” says

Camellia Panjabi. Group director of Veeraswamy's parent company MW Eat, which also runs other fine-dining Indian restaurants in London such as Chutney Mary and Amaya, Camellia is fighting to keep the doors of her 99-year-old restaurant open. Veeraswamy is under imminent threat of closure as its lease remains unrenewed by its landlord, The Crown Estate.

Camellia asserts, “The Crown Estate (reporting to the Treasury of the British Government) has terminated the lease of Veeraswamy. And apart from petition and public outcry, we have initiated legal action, arguing that the restaurant has a protected tenancy and that the redevelopment plans are very flimsy. A court hearing is expected between March and June 2026, with the restaurant remaining open until then.”

A spokesperson on behalf of The Crown Estate says, “We need to carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of Victory House to both bring it up to modern standards, and into full use. We understand how disappointing this is for MW Eat and have offered help to find new premises on our

A legacy you can't move

At 99, London's iconic restaurant

Veeraswamy is fighting a legal battle over the termination of its lease. Camellia Panjabi on why 20,000-plus people have signed a petition to save it

portfolio so that the restaurant can stay in the West End as well as financial compensation.” He adds, “The Crown Estate has a statutory responsibility to manage its land and

property to create long term value for the UK and return its profit to the UK Government for public spending.”

The legal battle

Camellia counters that it is “common” in England for buildings to be renovated by preserving the ground floor tenants while doing so. “The two entrances of the restaurant and the building are separate,” she says. “Veeraswamy was established and run by British owners for the first 40 years. It is a symbol of great Indo-British cooperation in jointly creating a meeting place for two cultures.” The restaurateur has raised an online petition to Buckingham Palace as well.

The legal battle aside, Camellia is unhappy with the lack of support from Indian counterparts. “Apart from the media writing about the imminent closure of the restaurant, there has been little support from India... Over 20,000 people have signed the petition to the landlord



When it all began

It was in 1926 that Edward Palmer (the great-grandson of a Mughal princess, Faisan Nissa Begum, and General William Palmer, military and private secretary to Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India) established Veeraswamy at London's Regent Street. He was in England in 1880 to study Medicine, but given his passion for Indian food, life had other plans.

Influenced by his maternal grandmother in Hyderabad, he set up a spice business in 1896 and sold pickles, pastes, and chutneys under the brand Nizam Mango Chutney.

With Veeraswamy, Edward aimed at educating Londoners on ‘exotic’ Indian dishes. Sir William Steward, Member of Parliament for Woolwich, acquired Veeraswamy in 1935 and owned it up to 1967.

Sir William is said to have travelled over 200,000 miles to and within India and neighbouring countries to find recipes, artefacts and staff. He brought the tandoor to the UK in the early 50s shortly after it was introduced into Delhi in the late 40s.

After the 1960s, Veeraswamy was run by a series of Indian owners till Namita Panjabi and Ranjit Mathrani acquired the restaurant and named it ‘Veeraswamy’ in 1996.

decades. “Nearly 30 or 40 years ago, there were elderly English men who would dine solo to remind themselves of their time serving in India. You could often hear them address waiters as ‘bearer’! The restaurant has been through various owners, not all of whom gave it the care and love it deserved but when Namita Panjabi and Ranit Mathrani took it over, they gave it a new glow,” says Iqbal, who was also editor of trade journal *Tandoori Magazine*.

He adds that restaurant attracted the great and the good. Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Charlie Chaplin, among others. “Veerawasmy may not get talked about as much these days as more edgy Indian restaurants like Gymkhana or Dishoom are around but it has an unrivalled place in the history of London dining and the evolution of Indian food in Britain.”

UK-based Chef Radhika Howarth explains how Veeraswamy introduced flavours, formats and rituals of dining that were unfamiliar to London when it opened in the 1920s. She adds, “It did more than teach London diners what to eat; it also taught them how to approach Indian food with curiosity, respect and openness. They understood that Indian food abroad doesn't need to be diluted to be accessible, and never felt the need to apologise for complexity or depth. That's a lesson many restaurants still struggle with.”

Recalling her last meal at Veeraswamy featuring raj kachori, green masala prawns, and Kerala prawn curry, Radhika says the restaurant is a living archive of Britain's relationship with Indian food. She adds, “It represents one of the earliest moments when Indian cuisine entered the British dining room not as novelty, but as something to be respected, celebrated and savoured. If a place like this closes, we don't just lose tables and menus; we lose stories, continuity, and a physical connection to the past. In a city like London, which prides itself on being global and layered, that loss feels particularly profound.”



Priyamedha Dutta
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In Chennai, a quiet conversation unfolds between cloth and memory. Textile entrepreneur Darshan Mekani Shah's upcoming exhibition in collaboration with Silkworm Boutique brings together shibori and kantha – two techniques shaped by time and touch. Featuring silhouettes such as kurtas, kaftans, open jackets, and co-ord sets, the collection has a muted palette of beige, brown, rust, grey, maroon and indigo. For Darshan, founder, Weavers Studio, this exhibition reflects a lifelong belief: that textiles carry history within its fold.

When Darshan speaks about textiles, she does not focus on the fabric alone. She talks about migration, memory, loss, recovery, and joy. For over three decades, Weavers Studio has worked insistently to build an ecosystem where craft from the past is not just nostalgia, but living, breathing knowledge. “I didn't come from a background in textiles,” says Darshan. Her family's story, like many in Bengal, is one rooted in displacement. “We came to India from Rangoon in 1948,” she recalls. Her father was a professional in the jute industry. “Business was never on my mind.”

Born and raised in Kolkata, Darshan later moved to Mumbai after marriage, where she completed her Law degree and a Management programme. Divorce brought her back to Kolkata, where she started exploring different fields such as management, finance or academics. “I started doing small

Woven conversations

Darshan Mekani Shah's ongoing exhibition with Silkworm Boutique showcases how craft practices evolve into contemporary design language

entrepreneurial projects – organising exhibitions, taking tuitions, doing consultancies.”

Textile travels

Drawn instinctively to natural dyes and encouraged by her friends from NIFT in Ahmedabad, Darshan began working with textiles on consignment. With curiosity in mind, she travelled across the globe, learning from the great masters in the textile world. From Toofan Rafai, Sheela Balaji, and KV Chandramouli in India, to Ruby Ghaznavi in Bangladesh and Professor Hiroyuki Shindo in Japan, Darshan immersed herself in block printing, embroidery, indigo, shibori, and natural dyes. “It helped me build my sense and sensibilities,” says Darshan. “Whenever I travelled, I kept collecting fragments, swatches

(Left) Darshan Mekani Shah; and (below) an outfit from the exhibit. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and samples.” That instinct led her to build an archive of over 1,500 textiles and a library of 3,500 books – all of which can be found in Weavers Studio Resource Centre (founded by her in 2007) as an extension to her retail brand Weavers Studio Kolkata.

For her upcoming exhibition, she draws inspiration from her earlier learnings in Japan and her engagement with Bengal's embroidery traditions. “In Bengal, 90% of hand embroidery is kantha; it's social and fits into women's lives.”

As fashion accelerates and crafts are at risk of dying, Darshans's work reminds us that knowledge survives only when it is practised, shared and re-imagined.

The Silkworm Boutique exhibition in collaboration with Weavers Studio is on till February 8 at Silkworm Boutique, Nungambakkam.

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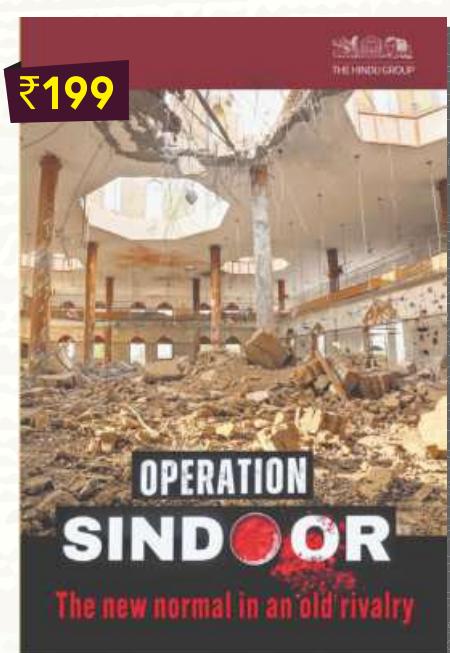
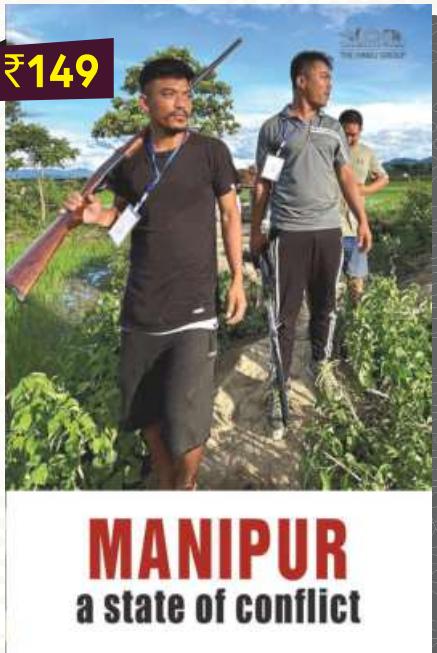
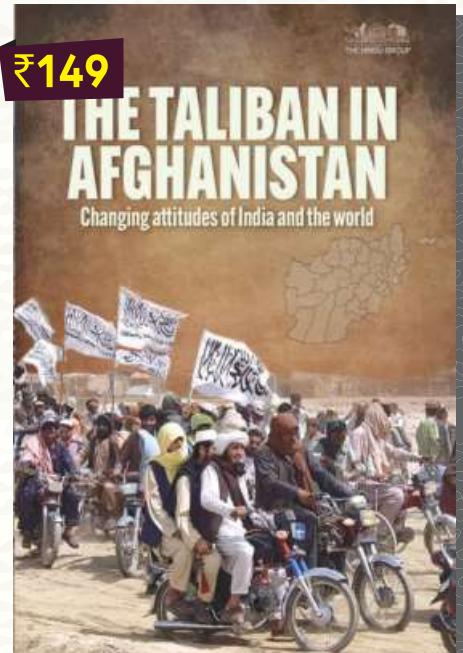
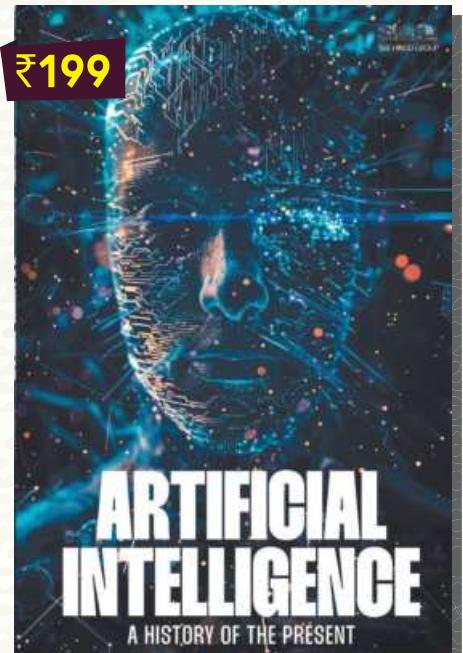
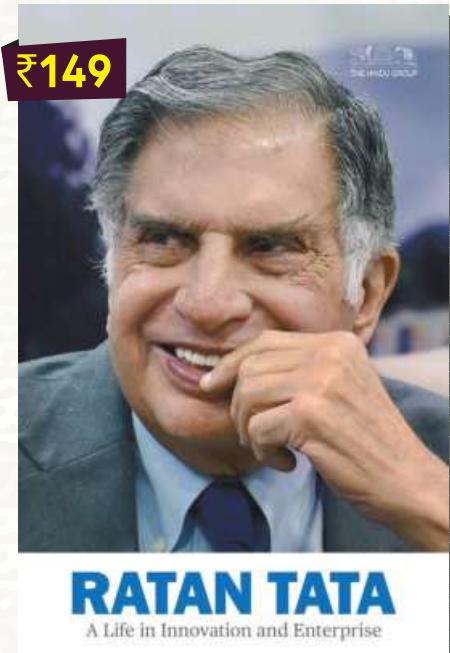
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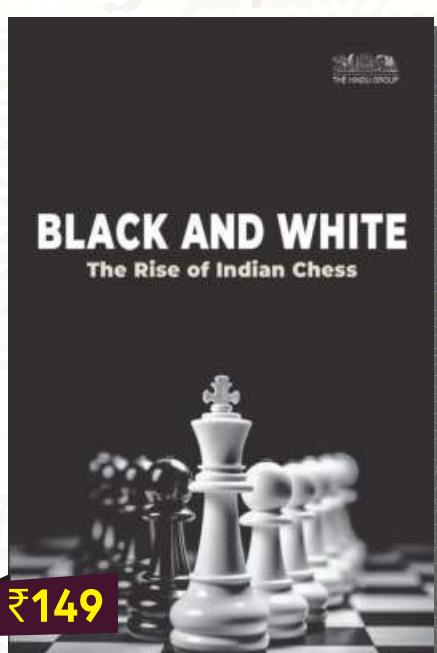
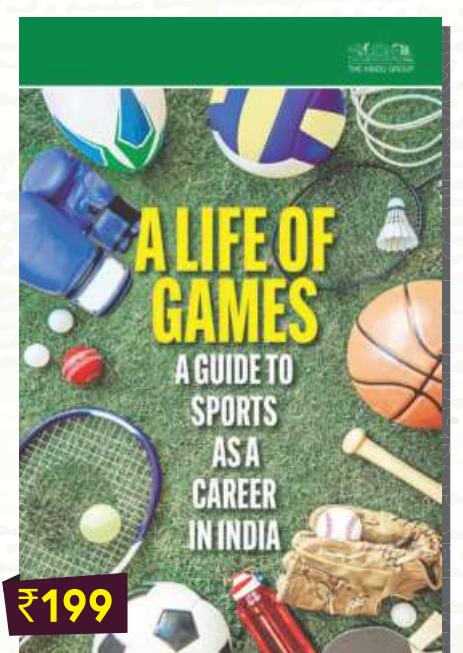
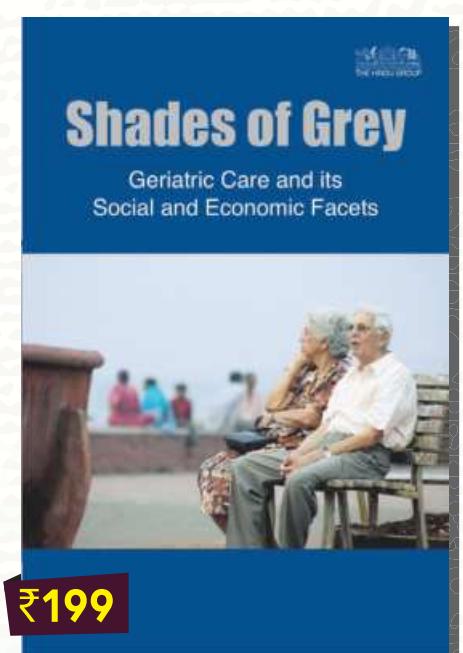
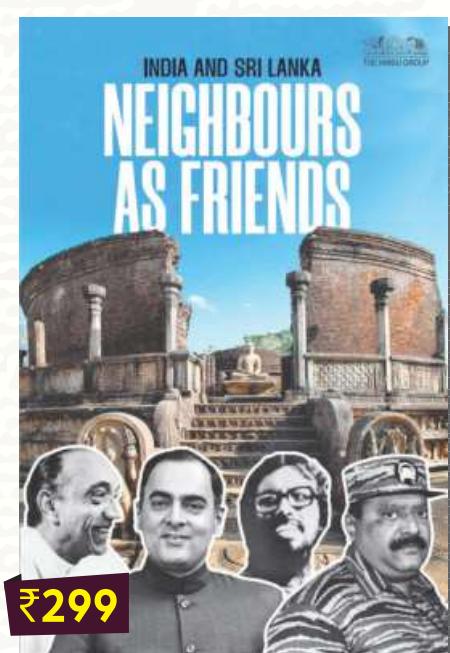
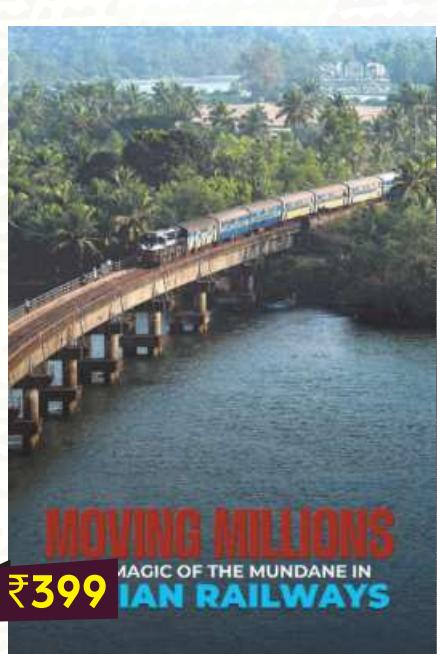
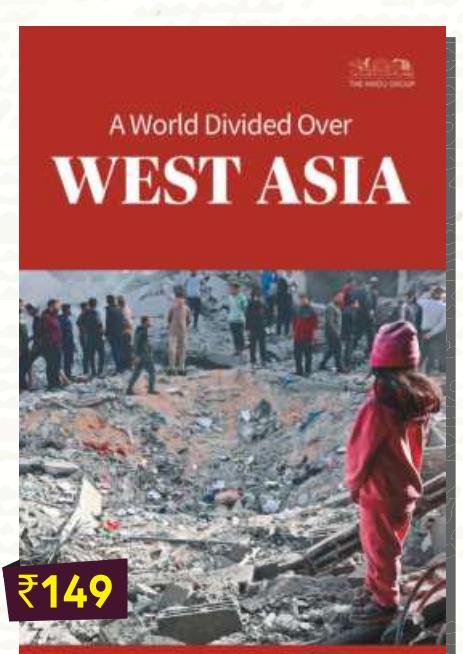
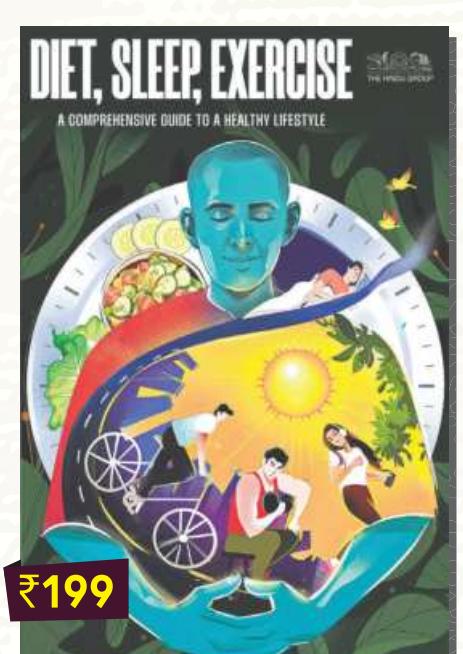
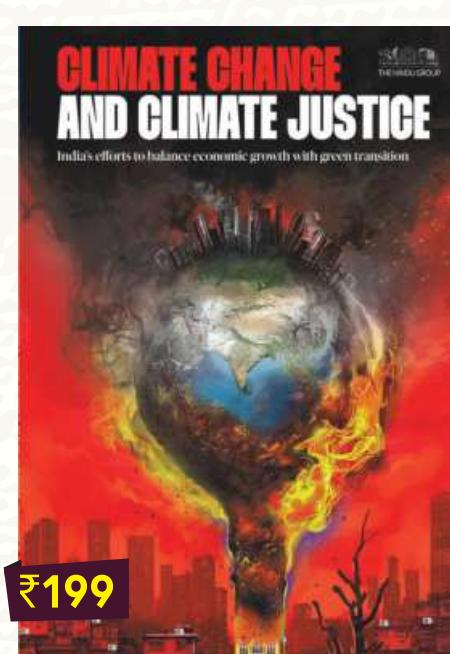
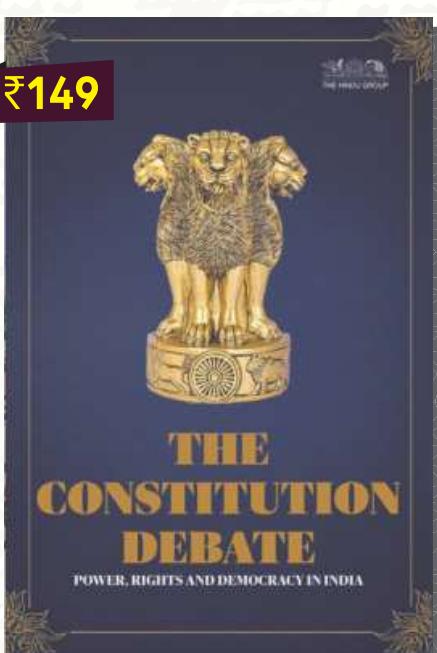


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Malayalam

Lost in a maze of its own creation



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Puzzles, crosswords and word mazes are often associated with lazy Sunday mornings for a reason. For that is usually when a good number of people find enough mental space to indulge in the pleasure of solving one. These certainly are not meant for highly stressful situations such as the one in Jeethu Joseph's *Valathu Vashathe Kallan*, where the protagonist, running against time to save someone's life, stops midway to solve a word maze.

Of course, saving the person depended on solving the maze, but the whole placement of the series of puzzles in the narrative to generate the thrills hardly feels organic. This downward spiral that the movie takes in its final hour is unfortunate, since it had at its core a compelling story of a guilt-ridden man finally facing his reckoning. Screenwriter Dinu Thomas Eelan might have chosen to take that contrived path to resolve the conflict owing to the general expectations from a Jeethu Joseph film.

No space for ambiguity exists in *Valathu Vashathe Kallan*, as far as character traits are concerned. Early on in the film, Circle Inspector Antony Xavier (Biju Menon), with a display of polished evillness, dissuades a sexual assault survivor from filing a complaint. Even though it is quite a punchy start to the film, in hindsight, one realises that there are no more nuances to this character than what is evident in that initial scene.

When a young woman (Vyshnavi Raj) goes missing from the city, the police officer's paths cross with that of Samuel (Joju George), an ethical hacker. Their confrontations raise the exciting prospect of an intriguing war of wits between two battle-worn souls. But then, they choose to go about it using a super contrived puzzle game involving phone numbers, case numbers, and random coincidences. What begins as a situation involving the lives of people almost turns into a competition between two individuals to show their IQ. Towards the end, an unconvincing attempt is made to stitch a message to the film. But compared to Jeethu's previous film *Mirage*, which drowned the audience in one twist after another, *Valathu Vashathe Kallan* appears a tad more believable.

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Part of the film works because of the presence of the two towering performers in Biju Menon and Joju George, who, even when they are not at their best, lend some gravitas to the proceedings. Although Jeethu's films are not particularly known for their visual or technical aspects, here the darker tone sits well with the theme until the screenplay spoils the game.

For over a decade now, every Jeethu Joseph release has led to some level of anticipation, riding on the *Drishyam* wave. But most of his recent works have only contributed in chipping away the sheen that his career got through that landmark film.

Valathu Vashathe Kallan is currently running in theatres



A sharp critique of patriarchy

Director AR Sajeев adapts the Malayalam original with heightened drama and a Telugu cultural lens

Telugu

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The 2022 Malayalam film *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* was not subtle in its take on patriarchy, opting instead for an intentionally over-the-top reversal of power. In adapting the film into Telugu and relocating it to the Godavari region, director AR Sajeev stays largely faithful to the original. *Om Shanti Shanti Shantih* is a partly fun, partly simmering emotional drama, shouldered by compelling performances from Eesha Rebba and Tharun Bhasker. While it does not always strike the right note, the film effectively captures the many ways patriarchy continues to stifle women, and how both men and women often enable it.

The childhood portions establish how the female protagonist is short-changed at every turn – in toys, books, clothes, and even something as simple as being denied the fruit of her choice – under the guise of others knowing what is best for her. Some character writing is especially sharp, notably the nosy, supposedly well-meaning uncle, a familiar figure who believes he has the right to dictate everything from a child's education to her leisure.

Early on, when the girl's father expresses a desire to raise her like the fearless Rani Lakshmi Bai, he is swiftly corrected by this uncle on what society

Om Shanti Shanti Shantih

Director: AR Sajeev

Cast: Eesha Rebba, Tharun Bhasker, Brahmaji, Surabhi Prabhavati

Storyline: When a woman decides that she has had enough in a toxic marriage, she encounters resistance at multiple levels.

would find acceptable. The father's lack of resolve and the mother's internalised patriarchy shape how Prashanti (Eesha Rebba) grows up. Nanda Kishore Emani's dialogues not only root the film firmly in its regional dialect but also mirror everyday conversations with unsettling accuracy.

Om Shanti Shanti Shantih begins lightly before steadily exposing layers of social hypocrisy. Writer Nanda Kishore Emani appears briefly as a professor whose lofty talk of women's empowerment amounts to little more than lip service.

At the matchmaking meeting, Prashanti's conversation with Omkar Naidu (Tharun Bhasker) barely moves beyond his fish business. The humour lies not just in his limited interests, but in how these seemingly throwaway remarks are cleverly used in the narrative later.

The sections set in Naidu's home, as Shanti adjusts to life as a new bride, go beyond depicting his rage. They raise pointed contradictions. Is a man who insists on the same breakfast every day – idlis made only from stone-ground batter – an emblem of simple living, or merely intolerant of change? What role does his family, especially his mother, play in excusing his behaviour? The film resists easy binaries, urging viewers to read the subtext. Refusing dowry alone, it reminds us, is no green flag; an unchecked ego can make everyday life unbearable.

The narrative turns on the slap – a device long used by mainstream cinema to silence women – and reframes it as a catalyst for change. Viewers unfamiliar with the original will find the twist

effective and a lot of fun, even if the shift feels abrupt rather than gradual. It is dramatic, but cathartic and whistler worthy.

In these portions, Vishnuvardhan Pulla's production design and Deepak's cinematography create a convincingly lived-in world of a middle class home without drawing attention to themselves. For a film centred on a handful of characters, performance is its backbone.

Eesha Rebba delivers one of her most assured turns yet, balancing vulnerability with resolve. A dependable actor who has long been underappreciated, she handles both the lighter beats and emotional undercurrents with ease. Tharun Bhasker, shedding his usual affability, is striking as a man shaped by entitlement. Even when the momentum dips, the performances of these two actors help to stay invested in the drama. Brahmaji, Surabhi Prabhavati and the other actors add weight in well-judged supporting roles.

The latter portions stretch on, though the film's exploration of male toxicity remains pointed. The finale, though buoyed by a dramatic score, delivers poetic justice.

In pushing back against the glut of alpha-male narratives in mainstream cinema, *Om Shanti Shanti Shantih* makes its stance clear. When the protagonist asks whether she needs a man's permission to study, work, or simply exist – right down to her choice of food – the question lands with uncomfortable force.

Om Shanti Shanti Shantih is currently running in theatres



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A Rani Mukerji project that loses steam after half-time

Hindi

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Mounted more than a decade ago as a challenge to the action-hero archetype, *Mardaani*'s third instalment begins as a fiercely committed, unflinching crime thriller that delves deeper into the horrors of child trafficking and the beggar mafia, delivered with raw brutality and social urgency.

Anchored by Rani Mukerji as Shivani Shivaji Roy, the story centres on a tough cop's investigation into a high-profile kidnapping that unravels a vast network of child exploitation.

It begins with the abduction of two girls – one from a privileged background and the other from a marginalised one – from the outskirts of a diplomat's farmhouse in Bulandshahr in western Uttar Pradesh, forcing Shivani to navigate official pressures, criminal syndicates, and moral dilemmas. Do



the two lives carry the same weight? Her superiors repeatedly tell Shivani to focus only on the diplomat's daughter, even after it becomes clear

that the kidnapping doesn't have a political motive but has a social dimension.

Both the system and the syndicate

know whose life matters, setting off a game of one-upmanship between two fiery women: Shivani and Amma, the queen of a beggar mafia. While Shivani uses the social difference between the victims to bring the kidnappers out of their shell, she eventually realises that it compromised the life of the guard's daughter. Finding herself shackled in the uniform, Shivani lets her rage take over the rules of the game.

Director Abhiraj Minawala and writer Aayush Gupta create an imperfect world run by flawed characters. The antagonists, Amma (Mallika Prasad) and Ramanujan (Prajesh Kashyap), have backstories that suggest they are products of the rot they now rule.

But then, franchises are all about reheating the same dish over and over again, hoping it doesn't lose its flavour. Soon, the veneer of social empathy and feminist tone gives way, and we can clearly see the product's formulaic, fearless protagonist, blended with a hard-hitting social issue, taking on an intense antagonist. The experiment and freshness are

limited to the introduction of the villain and their lair. After that, the writers serve Shivani's image and Rani's fans. Rani continues to operate in the massy grammar, structured like a counterpoint to the male action stars, perhaps not realising that familiarity dulls impact. The overwriting limits her ability to emotive in silence. It borders on forced messaging, where her intensity feels performative.

Unlike the previous instalments, where Tahir Raj Bhasin and Vishal

Mardaani 3

Director: Abhiraj Minawala

Cast: Rani Mukerji, Mallika Prasad, Prajesh Kashyap, Janki Bodhawala, Jisshu Sengupta

Synopsis: Shivani Roy returns to combat a massive, organised child-trafficking network, facing off against a ruthless Amma.

Jethwa were given potent character arcs, here Prasad is short-changed after an ominous build-up where her dynamic with Rani promises a delicious conflict before getting diluted. After pitting a menacing female villain against a strong female cop, it seems the makers realised that the franchise's stated goal demands that Rani reduce misogyny to pulp, and for that, you need a male antagonist to punch.

As a result, the storytelling and world-building stumble in the second half due to plot holes, overwritten moments, and tonal inconsistencies, such as the foreign conspiracy angle that is introduced late in the second half. We could see the true colours of Ramanujan from a distance and pretty much guess the job of a young Muslim female police officer in the narrative. As the thriller builds to the climax, the narrative turns feel routine, diminishing tension and resulting in an uneven experience.

Mardaani 3 is currently running in theatres.

Bridgerton Season 4 Part 1

Episodes: 4

Creator: Chris Van Dusen

Starring: Adjoa Andoh Julie Andrews Nicola Coughlan Ruth Gemmell Claudia Jessie Luke Newton Golda Roshevvel Luke Thompson Yerin Ha Katie Leung

Storyline: Benedict meets Sophie at a masquerade ball and is smitten while Sophie has to find a path true to herself



Snippets



Anurag Kashyap's long-delayed *Kennedy* finally on OTT in India

Anurag Kashyap's long-delayed neo-noir thriller *Kennedy* is finally set for its Indian release, with the film scheduled to premiere on ZEE5 on February 20, 2026. The digital launch marks the first time Indian audiences will be able to officially watch the film, nearly three years after its world premiere.

Kennedy, written and directed by Kashyap, stars Rahul Bhat and Sunny Leone and marks their third collaboration following *Ugly* and *Dobaaraa*. The film debuted in the Midnight Screenings section at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, where it received a strong reception, including a standing ovation. It later toured an extensive international festival circuit.



Henry Cavill unveils first look from *Highlander* reboot

The first look of Hollywood star Henry Cavill from his new action outing — the reboot of *Highlander* from *John Wick* filmmaker Chad Stahelski.

Cavill took to Instagram on Wednesday, offering his fans an early glimpse of his latest work.

In the photos, Cavill is seen as the latest incarnation of Connor MacLeod — the immortal Scottish swordsman battling across the ages. The reboot is Cavill's next major franchise venture after portraying the DC Comics superhero Superman in multiple DC projects and headlining Netflix's fantasy series *The Witcher* for three seasons.

The original *Highlander* movie released in 1986.



Legendary filmmaker Singeetam Srinivasa Rao returns to direction

Legendary filmmaker Singeetam Srinivasa Rao is set to don the director's hat again. After lending his inventive mind to Nag Ashwin's *Kalki 2898 AD*, the filmmaker has now taken charge of his next directorial venture, tentatively titled *SSR 61*.

The project was launched on January 31, 2025, with a puja ceremony. The makers released an announcement video celebrating Singeetam's illustrious career. Singeetam is known for his enduring influence on generations of filmmakers. Vyjayanthi Movies has positioned *SSR 61* as Singeetam's most ambitious film ever. The title and additional details are to be revealed soon.

Swoon-worthy Cinderella story

Streaming

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The Ton is back sweater and sexier for its fourth outing. Season 3 of *Bridgerton*, the alternate-history Regency-era romance based on Julia Quinn's novels, ended with Colin (Luke Newton), the third Bridgerton, marrying Penelope (Nicola Coughlan), who reveals herself as Lady Whistledown (Julie Andrews, voice), the recorder of all the sex and scandal in the Ton.

Season 4 begins with Benedict (Luke Thompson), the second Bridgerton with a rakish reputation, disappointing his mother, Violet (Ruth Gemmell), yet again with his debauchery. Lady Agatha Danbury (Adjoa Andoh), the doyenne of the Ton, and practically the only person who can stand up to

Queen Charlotte (Golda Roshevvel), wishes to take a step back from society and visit her home country, but the queen is unwilling to let her go.

Violet is throwing the opening ball of the season, a masquerade, and insists Benedict make an appearance. At the ball, Benedict sees a beautiful masked woman and is smitten. She flees before the unmasking, leaving behind a glove (not a slipper) and a heartbroken Benedict who searches high and low for the lady in the silver dress.

We see that the lady at the ball is Sophie (Yerin Ha), a maid working for Lady Araminta Gun, the Countess of Penwood (Katie Leung). Sophie was the illegitimate child of Lord Penwood and was banished to be a maid of all work by Araminta upon his death. Araminta has two daughters from an earlier marriage: Rosamund (Michelle Mao) and Posy (Isabella Wei).

The queen chooses Benedict as the catch of the season, as the debutantes have been

disappointing. Eloise (Claudia Jessie), the fifth Bridgerton, has decided not to marry and is saddled with chaperoning her younger sister, Hyacinth (Florence Hunt) through all her various etiquette and dancing lessons. Penelope and Colin have a bonny baby boy. Francesca (Hannah Dodd), the sixth Bridgerton, is married to the Earl of Kilmartin (Victor Alli), but there is trouble in the marriage.

The romance between Benedict and Sophie is at the centre this season with Thompson and Ha sharing a crackling chemistry. Even the sub plots are interesting in varying degrees.

Francesca's search for sexual fulfilment in her marriage, though a bold arc, is not particularly interesting. The friendship between the queen and Danbury is poignant, while Violet's "I am the tea" declaration to Marcus Anderson (Daniel Francis) is sweet and affirmative.

The maid wars speak to the

balance of power, while also giving Mrs. Varley (Lorraine Ashbourne), the Featheringtons' faithful housekeeper, a chance to tell a few home truths to Lady Portia Featherington (Polly Walker) and get sacked for her troubles.

The clothes, jewellery and crockery are drop-dead gorgeous as always. Continuing the trend of instrumental pop music covers, Season 4 features Coldplay's "Life in Technicolor", Third Eye Blind's "Never Let You Go", Taylor Swift's "Enchanted" and Paramore's "All I Wanted" among others.

With Benedict making an indecent proposal to Sophie and the new neighbours to Bridgerton House finally revealed, Part 2 of Season 4, dropping on February 26, promises more drama, which, as we all know, is a Shondaland speciality.

Bridgerton is currently streaming on Netflix



A darkly comic survival thriller

Sam Raimi pits an underestimated employee against her entitled boss, powered by game performances from Rachel McAdams and Dylan O'Brien

English

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Sam Raimi's return to his *Evil Dead* roots is something to look forward to in the New Year. The *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* director mostly delivers, with sufficient amounts of gore, boar-hunting, and eye-gouging. This meek-shall-inherit-the-earth trip is completely satisfying — until a character makes a call that lands them firmly on the naughty list and stops us rooting for them in our tracks.

As a result, the epilogue, instead of being rousing and uplifting, feels faintly hollow, leaving ash in the mouth rather than the sweet taste of a well-deserved win.

Linda (Rachel McAdams) is a brilliant and conscientious worker in her company's Planning & Strategy Department. Her people skills, however, are lacking, and her colleagues invariably

Send Help

Director: Sam Raimi

Cast: Rachel McAdams, Dylan O'Brien

Storyline: A woman and her dreadful boss are stranded on a desert island. Who will survive the shift in the balance of power?

laugh at her even as they take credit for her work.

All is meant to change when Bradley (Dylan O'Brien) takes over the company upon his father's death. Bradley's father promised Linda she would be promoted when Bradley took over. The promise is broken when Bradley promotes his friend from college, Donovan (Xavier Samuel), instead. Bradley is a standard-issue entitled person who treats everyone with a mix of condescension and entitlement, including his fiancée, Zuri (Edylib Ismail).

Though Bradley, who is repulsed by Linda, wants to banish her to a dead-end part of the business, Franklin (Dennis Haysbert), a senior executive, says Donovan will not be able to manage the important merger coming up. Bradley tells Linda to come along for the merger, with the idea of using her expertise until the deal goes through, before exiling her to an obscure position.

On the flight to Bangkok, as Bradley and Donovan laugh over Linda's audition tape for *Survivor*, the plane develops engine failure and crashes into the ocean. Only Linda and Bradley wash ashore on a deserted island off the Gulf of Thailand.

The tables are properly turned now as Linda with her endless watching of

Survivor has all the skills needed to live off the land. Bradley repeatedly fights against the perceived loss of control — a control he never truly possessed, having merely inherited the company his father built. It is just that on the island, survival and power are stripped of their language of文明.

McAdams wades into her role with gusto, and we root for her as she transforms from office nerd to skilled survivalist. McAdams and O'Brien are the only two people on screen for most of the movie and they do the heavy lifting, riffing off each other as the micro-aggressions scale up to full-on war.

There is gore, eye trauma (in 3D, no less) and grossness as well as humour. The island is gorgeous and could have been an Eden, if only snaky human nature could let it be.

There are all kinds of readings one can make into the psychological survival thriller, or not. *Send Help* can also be enjoyed as a nifty exercise in an extreme what-if, provided one can accept the choice Linda makes when survival tips into something else.

Send Help is currently running in theatres