

weekend the hindu

metro PLUS THE HINDU



The *parotta* that went to Shoreditch

From buffalo ghee in Mylapore to no-menu meals in Madurai, a team of chefs traces a South Indian food trail through tiffin rooms, ancestral homes and late-night dosas to shape a new London menu

Karan Gokani.
OLO O SMITH

MOVE IT LIKE SAM

The actor on extending her wellness philosophy with Mile Collective, and banking on intuition **P5**



Karan Gokani

Last year, I found myself back in South India. Not as a tourist, nor as a chef chasing the next big idea, but as someone reconnecting with my past and the food of my childhood.

Hoppers has always carried the flavours and memories of Sri Lanka and South India in its bones, but with our new restaurant in Shoreditch (London) that will open its doors on February 4, I felt an instinctive pull to go deeper, to peel back the layers and rediscover the food, people, and places that first sparked the journey a decade ago.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 4

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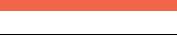
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Launches Around 1,000 Homes Across Five Prime Chennai Locations in the Presence of the Global Music Icon

DAC Developers, one of Chennai's fastest-growing and most trusted real estate developers, today announced legendary composer, global music icon, and Oscar-winning maestro A.R. Rahman as its official Brand Ambassador. The announcement was made at an exclusive and elegant press event held at The Leela Palace, Chennai, marking a defining moment in the company's growth journey. Coinciding with this milestone partnership, DAC Developers also unveiled the launch of approximately 1,000 new premium homes across five strategically located developments in Chennai — Kattupakkam (Porur), Kumananchavadi (near Porur Ramachandra), Sunguvacharam on the Chennai-Bangalore Highway, Sholinganallur, and Siruseri along the Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR).

The association with A.R. Rahman represents more than a celebrity endorsement; it is a meeting of philosophies rooted in excellence, authenticity, and long-term value creation. Globally revered for his creative genius, discipline, and timeless appeal, A.R. Rahman embodies values that resonate deeply with DAC Developers' core principles of quality construction, ethical practices, customer trust, and future-ready living. This partnership signals DAC's ambition to elevate its brand presence while remaining firmly grounded in Indian values and community-centric development.

Over the past decade, DAC Developers has steadily carved a niche for itself in Chennai's highly competitive real estate market. Known for its customer-centric approach, On-time delivery, and strong construction standards, the company has successfully delivered 110 plus projects, covering more than 4.5 million square feet of built-up area, and has earned the trust of over 3,000 happy families. Each DAC development reflects a thoughtful blend of modern architecture, practical design, and lifestyle-enhancing amenities, ensuring residents enjoy both comfort and long-term value.

Speaking about the landmark association, Mr. S. Sathish Kumar, Managing Director, DAC Developers, said, "We are truly delighted and honoured to welcome A.R. Rahman into the DAC family. At DAC, we believe that buildings should do more than just exist — they should inspire, nurture, and stand the test of time. Rahman sir is a global symbol of perfection, creativity, discipline, and humility. His journey from Chennai to the world stage, while staying deeply connected to his roots, mirrors our own journey and aspirations as a brand. This collaboration reinforces our commitment to creating world-class homes that are built with integrity, vision, and lasting value."



The newly launched homes span five high-growth corridors of Chennai, each carefully chosen for its connectivity, infrastructure development, and long-term appreciation potential. Kattupakkam and Kumananchavadi near Porur continue to emerge as strong residential hubs due to their proximity to key business districts, healthcare institutions, and educational centers. Sunguvacharam, located on the Chennai-Bangalore Highway, is witnessing rapid industrial and infrastructural growth, making it an ideal choice for both end-users and investors. Meanwhile, Sholinganallur and Siruseri on OMR remain among Chennai's most sought-after IT and lifestyle destinations, offering seamless access to major tech parks, social infrastructure, and coastal living.

Each of these projects has been designed with a clear focus on contemporary living needs, offering thoughtfully planned layouts, ample natural light, ventilation, and amenities that support wellness, community living, and sustainability. DAC Developers continues to emphasize essential luxuries — ensuring that residents enjoy premium features without compromising affordability or functionality.

Expressing his thoughts on the association, A.R. Rahman said, "A home is where our dreams begin, where families grow, and where life's most meaningful moments are created. I am very happy to begin this beautiful new partnership with DAC Developers, a brand that I see as passionate, sincere, and committed to quality. Just like music, building a home requires heart, discipline, and harmony. In DAC, I see a team that builds with love and responsibility. I trust DAC Developers to create homes that are filled with happiness, harmony, and positive energy."

As Brand Ambassador, A.R. Rahman will be the face of DAC Developers' integrated marketing and communication campaigns across digital platforms, print media, outdoor advertising, and television. The campaigns will focus on highlighting DAC's commitment to trust, transparency, design excellence, and timely delivery, while emotionally connecting with aspiring homeowners and investors who seek reliability and long-term security in their real estate decisions.

Industry observers view this collaboration as a strong strategic move that elevates DAC Developers' brand stature at a time when homebuyers are increasingly discerning and value-driven. In a market where trust and credibility play a critical role, the association with a universally respected personality like A.R. Rahman reinforces DAC's promise of quality, consistency, and ethical business practices.

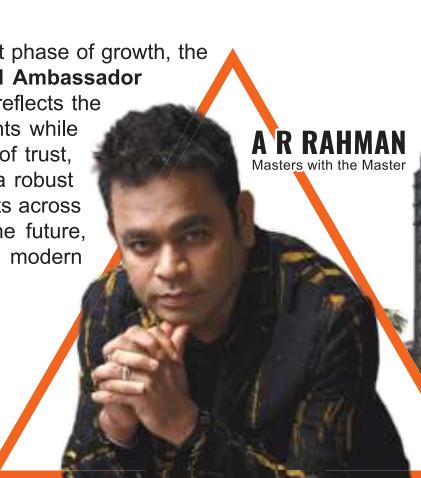
Beyond construction, DAC Developers has consistently invested in building long-term relationships with customers, channel partners, and stakeholders. The company's focus on transparency at every stage — from project planning and approvals to execution and handover — has been instrumental in fostering strong customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. DAC's approach to urban development also places emphasis on sustainability, efficient land use, and community-oriented design.

As DAC Developers embarks on its next phase of growth, the appointment of A.R. Rahman as Brand Ambassador marks a powerful statement of intent. It reflects the company's aspiration to scale new heights while remaining true to its founding principles of trust, quality, and customer satisfaction. With a robust pipeline of ongoing and upcoming projects across Chennai and an expanding vision for the future, DAC Developers is poised to redefine modern urban living in South India.

About DAC Developers:

Established in 2014, DAC Developers is a Chennai-based leading construction company with over a decade of experience in delivering high-quality residential and mixed-use developments. Driven by the philosophy of providing essential luxuries at accessible price points, DAC Developers is known for its aesthetic design, superior amenities, strategic locations, and customer-first mindset. With 110 plus completed projects, more than 45 lakh square feet of construction, and 3,000+ satisfied homeowners, DAC Developers continues to set benchmarks in transparency, reliability, and construction excellence.

For more details call 93003 93003
www.dacdevelopers.com



pick of the week



Back to 2016

2016 Rewind is a throwback to the year when every hit came stamped with a VEVO logo, Justin Bieber dominated playlists and One Direction breakups still stung. When YouTube, Tumblr and dog filters ruled our days, mannequin challenges went viral and fidget spinners were a lifestyle. Relive 2016 with music by Xirex and Harsh, and travel back to the good old days. On February 6, 8pm onwards at Secret Story, Nungambakkam. Tickets on district.com



Comedy special

Get ready for Kisi Ko Batana Mat featuring Anubhav Singh Bassi — a laugh-packed stand-up special where Anubhav brings fresh jokes, hilarious storytelling and non-stop entertainment to the stage. Building on the success of Bas Kar Bassi, this Hindi comedy tour will have two hours of uproarious fun and his signature relatable humour. On February 1, at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, Chetpet. Tickets starting ₹1,499 on bookmyshow.com



Shopping list

The Amethyst Room at Chamiers hosts Tilla, an Ahmedabad-based design studio known for handmade Indian textiles and traditional craft techniques. Explore a summer-ready edit of easy separates like tops, tunics, dresses, kurtas, pants and kaftans in silk, cotton, organza and mashroo, featuring fresh prints and relaxed silhouettes.

Priced ₹4,000 onwards. Till today at The Amethyst Room, Chamiers Road.



Techno Illusion

A speculative fiction performance by Spry aka Tejas Nair that imagines neural networks as practitioners of technomagic. Blending Gen-AI visuals, electronic music, and remixed archival footage, the show draws from India's street magic and ritual theatre. This mixed-media experience explores how machine intelligence learns wonder from forgotten subcultures. On February 7, 5pm onwards at Aura Studios, T Nagar. Tickets at fanpit.live

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My colleague was just trying to buy *keerai* — Tamil for spinach — when Instamart suggested a men's stroker instead. It appeared between milk and eggs, with the assurance of something that had always belonged there. She was not offended, just mildly impressed by the confidence. "I was genuinely looking for greens," she said later. "But apparently, the algorithm thought I needed emotional nourishment of another kind."

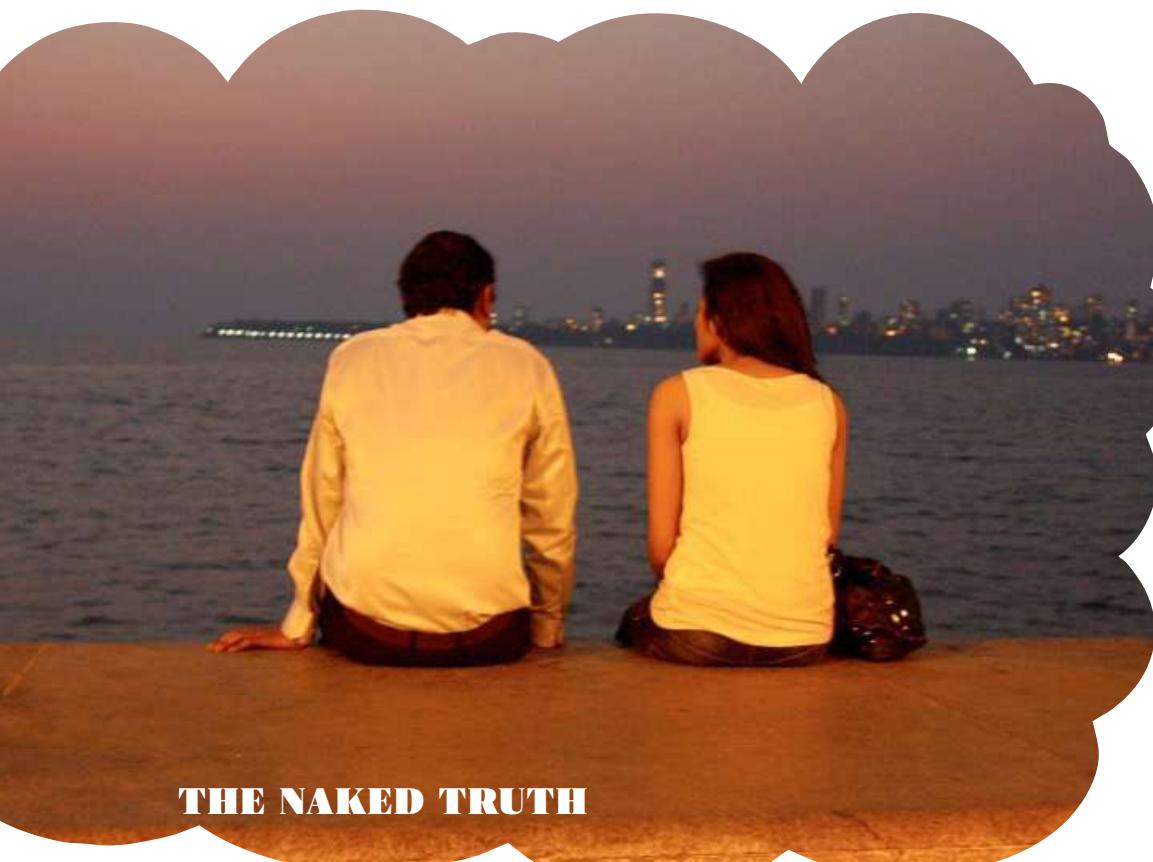
When I mentioned this to a friend over drinks, she nodded, unsurprised. "That tracks," she said. "Sex stuff has become very practical." It was not framed as a confession or a breakthrough, just useful information, shared the way people now talk about finding a better mattress or switching to oat milk.

Sexual wellness, at least in urban India, has quietly exited the realm of taboo and entered the world of logistics. It is no longer about rebellion or secrecy; it is about optimisation. Something you discuss calmly, test thoughtfully, and occasionally reorder. An errand, really. One that can sit comfortably alongside spinach.

A few days later, another friend sent me a reel she would never post herself — a sexual-wellness educator unveiling a multicoloured dildo with the solemnity of a tech launch. It bent, flexed, suctioned itself onto surfaces, and appeared to promise stamina, adaptability, and zero emotional baggage.

"I'm ready to invest," my friend captioned it. "I'm tired of explaining."

Since launching her sexual wellness brand Leezu's in 2023, educator Leeza Mangaldas tells me they have sold over 2,50,000



THE NAKED TRUTH

GETTY IMAGES / ISTOCK

Good vibrations

Has India's sexual wellness boom made us better lovers?

units across categories. "The numbers are revealing. About 60% of Leezu's customers are men and 40% are women. While many buy toys for themselves, women's toys are often picked up by men, frequently as gifts for wives and girlfriends," she says.

And despite the long-held belief that these toys are a singles-only affair, a large chunk of Leezu's customers are actually couples, using toys not as a substitute, but as an upgrade.

A married friend had a gentler take. "Toys saved us," she told me one afternoon, stirring her coffee

like it might offer clarity. "Talking about sex nearly broke us." For her, the object was not a replacement but a bridge — a way to experience pleasure without excavating years of silence all at once.

These conversations are no longer fringe. People trade product links, forward reels, and discuss lubricants with the discernment once reserved for restaurant recommendations. The market numbers reflect this cultural easing, but the more interesting shift is subtler: sex has become discussable, while

intimacy still requires actual effort.

A sexuality coach once put it bluntly. "People come in with devices," she said, "but no language." Many know exactly what they have bought, but not how to ask for what they want without feeling exposed. Pleasure, it turns out, is easier to purchase than to articulate.

Which brings the question back to the bedroom. With all this access and openness, are we becoming better lovers or just better equipped, carrying the same old awkwardness, ego, and emotional buffering into bed?

Not all the answers come from women. A male friend, in a long-term relationship, told me he has had to actively retrain himself. "I've conditioned myself," he said carefully. "My girlfriend helped."

Still, not everyone has arrived here. "I don't always want to manage someone else's feelings," one friend said. Another described foreplay that feels like a performance she's expected to applaud, regardless of whether it's working for her. These aren't

failures of technique so much as failures of attention.

Underneath it all

The politics of the bedroom rarely lie in positions. They surface in who initiates and who listens, who assumes and who checks, who believes effort alone should be rewarded. Even as sexual wellness becomes more normalised, many of us are still negotiating inherited silence, performance anxiety, and the great Indian discomfort with direct conversations about anything that matters. We read about tantra but dodge emotional truth. We book workshops on intimacy without quite practising it.

And yet, something is shifting. I hear about couples laughing mid-experiment instead of spiralling into insecurity. About men treating vibrators as collaborators rather than competition. About women saying, "That's not doing anything for me," without apologising. A queer friend once summed it up neatly: "Straight people treat sex like a presentation. We treat it like a discussion. Assumptions don't survive when nothing is default."

There is a softer energy entering the bedroom — a willingness to learn instead of perform, to ask instead of assume. The old ghosts have not vanished entirely. The fear of judgment lingers, as does the belief that pleasure is indulgent rather than necessary. But those ideas feel less immovable than they once did.

So are we becoming better lovers? Possibly — unevenly, and at different speeds. The toys, the workshops, the guides are not solutions. They are permission slips. Signals that pleasure is not shameful, that intimacy can be learned, and that communication is not unsexy.

My colleague did eventually get her spinach. She did not comment further on the stroker. The algorithm had already said enough.

A fortnightly guide to love in the age of bare minimum



(Clockwise from left) The Chowmahalla Palace at night and Aamir (standing) with the guests seated for a royal dining experience at the palace.
SIDDHANT THAKUR

After hours at the palace

Chowmahalla Palace welcomes visitors for a guided night tour, royal dining and music

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When the 19 Belgian crystal chandeliers, of the 300-year-old Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad's Old City are lit, the moment feels almost theatrical. I have visited the palace several times — as a tourist, a reporter and a wedding guest, and each experience has felt distinct. But seeing Chowmahalla after sunset reveals a version of the palace that few ever encounter.

Usually open only during the day, the palace has now begun hosting The Chowmahalla Experiences (TCE): private, guided evening tours followed by a musical programme and a royal dinner. The initiative reflects a growing interest in experiential heritage hospitality, where monuments are not merely preserved but thoughtfully activated to engage contemporary audiences.

Launched in November, TCE is a premium offering inspired by the popularity of supper clubs, curated dinners and private heritage walks. "The idea was not just to promote the palace, but the culture of the city around it," says Aamir Tameen, curator, The



Chowmahalla Experiences.

Guests arrive after public hours, in limited numbers, and begin with a guided heritage walk through the palace. "The experience goes beyond a conventional dinner," Aamir explains. "It starts with a detailed walkthrough of key halls and courtyards, designed to contextualise the architecture, royal customs and lesser-known

stories of the Nizami era. The walk unfolds as an immersive narrative rather than a standard museum tour."

For the ones who are not aware of this palace in Hyderabad, Chowmahalla's construction began around 1751 during the reign of Nawab Salabat Jung, the third son of Asaf Jah I. When Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II shifted the capital from

Aurangabad to Hyderabad, he added several mahals during his reign, shaping the complex into the ceremonial heart of the Nizams.

Even during the guided walk, the palace's collections remain a highlight: the Nizam's private Quran collection; the fleet of vintage cars — including a 1912 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, a 1934 Ford Tourer, a 1953 Packard, two 1906 Napier and a Buick convertible; royal garments and textiles; and, of course, the chandeliers imported from Turkey, Belgium and Venice.

Nizami recipes
A six-course, sit-down menu — available in vegetarian and non-vegetarian options — draws on traditional Nizami recipes. The courses are divided into shorba, gazaak, dastarkhwan, akhri and khilwat meetha. In the menu, Maraq with sheermaal is a constant along with Shikampur and *pattash ka gosht*. Some of the dishes to look forward to are zafrani biryani, Nizami handi, dahi ke kebab, double or qubani ka meetha.

Behind the elegance lies meticulous planning. "Operationally, hosting an evening event within a protected heritage monument requires extensive preparation," says Aamir. This includes securing special permissions, coordinating security, designing heritage-safe lighting, setting up controlled electrical systems, planning acoustics for live classical or ghazal music, training staff in palace etiquette and adhering to strict preservation protocols to ensure zero impact on the artefacts and architecture.

The curated event is ticketed, price depends on the events and menu.

To book this experience, keep a watch on their Instagram page @thechowmahalla_experience

Keyboards meet Carnatic music

The new PSR-I series keyboards feature sounds from instruments such as the tabla, tanpura and shehnai



A new addition to the Yamaha PSR-I series; (below) Allan Preetham. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kamalika Chatterjee

Music is a universal language that goes beyond geographical borders. A belief that resonates with Yamaha Music India. Their new range of keyboards is an example of that.

The Japanese brand recently unveiled two additions to their PSR-I series keyboards — the PSR-I 1510 (₹27,990) and the PSR-I 1610 (₹34,990). Designed and manufactured in India, the keyboards are aimed at Indian musicians, students and beginners.

The keyboard now has a *riyaz* mode that has over 40 voices, enabling players to practise using the sound of instruments like the tabla, tanpura, harmonium and shehnai. There is also a style function that enables users to play Indian rhythms to match their chords. The keyboards also incorporate foundational Carnatic music elements such as geetam, swarajathi, korvai and abhyasa, alongside Western music features.

The keyboards include free apps and songbooks aimed at younger

artistes, beginners and students. And then there is Looper, a musical tool that allows you to play your melodies continuously in a loop to allow layering of music. Then Auto Chord Play, which generates musical backing along with the user's melodies.

Ryoji Maruyama, sales unit head, Musical Instruments, Yamaha Music India, says, they entered the Indian market by starting in Gurgaon in 2008 and launched a factory in Chennai in 2019, adding, "This launch is a long term commitment to India and establishes our future connections."

"I have been endorsing Yamaha for eight years, and it's been a fantastic journey. What stands out is how progressive and innovative the brand is, especially with these new India focussed features."

As a musician, it's been a pleasure to compose a demo song (along with musician Allan Preetham) for these keyboards," said Gulraj, the musical composer behind 'Pakeezah' (Ungli), 'Jaagran Gondhal' (Aarpur) and 'Shukra Guzaar' (Kakuda).



The doll took over 18 months to create in partnership with US-based non-profit Autistic Self Advocacy Network. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Mattel launches its first autistic Barbie doll in India with sensory-considerate details and inclusive accessories

Seen on the shelf

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imed at turning our toy aisles inclusive, toy company Mattel – the creator of iconic brands such as Hot Wheels, UNO and Fisher Price – has now launched its first autistic Barbie doll in India. This doll clad in a pastel striped dress and sensory-considerate accessories is the latest edition to the brand's Fashionistas range, an inclusive collection that features Barbie with Down syndrome, Type 1 diabetes, visual impairment, and varied skin tones and body types.

The doll took over 18 months to create in partnership with US-based non-profit Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), an organisation run by and for autistic people. Jamie Cygielman, global head, Dolls, Mattel, says, "The intent was to ensure that autistic

hands with India Autism Centre for advocacy, awareness and long-term support for the autistic community. A portion of proceeds from the sale of the doll will go to the organisation. Colin Killick, executive director, ASAN, says, "We offered feedback and guidance at multiple stages of development based on community-informed perspectives. This included discussions around visual representation, articulation, accessories and overall presentation." Having said that, Colin explains that the autistic community "is incredibly diverse, and one doll could never represent the experience of every single autistic person. Rather, the focus was on ensuring the doll reflected experiences many autistic individuals may relate to, while avoiding stereotypes."

Addressing the key design features of the doll that ASAN was particularly keen to have included, Colin says the focus was on design elements that acknowledge sensory and communication differences. "Having an Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC) device was key, because non-speaking autistic people are highly underrepresented in the media and popular culture. Subtle details like eye gaze and articulated elbows and wrists to allow for stimming movements also celebrate the way we move our bodies in unique ways. We also thought it was critical that this doll represented an autistic woman of colour, as autistic women and people of colour have historically been underdiagnosed."

For Aarushi, being a part of this project was personal as it "aligns closely with my own journey as an autistic individual and as a designer who uses art as a form of expression and communication". The biggest challenge, she says, "was ensuring that the narrative stayed honest and respectful, without simplifying or romanticising autism."

Priced at ₹799, the doll is available online



children, as well as their peers, see autism represented with thoughtfulness, respect and authenticity."

Designed by autistic Indian-American fashion designer and visual artist Aarushi Pratap, the doll's design includes details such as articulation to allow natural hand movements, sensory-considerate clothing, and accessories like noise-cancelling headphones, a fidget spinner and an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tablet, "all developed through expert and community guidance," says Jamie.

In India, Mattel has joined

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The parotta that went to Shoreditch

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

I travelled with two people who are at the heart of how we cook at Hoppers, and just as hungry as I was to understand these regions properly. Renjith Sarathchandran, our executive chef from Ernakulam, Kerala, is a sponge for anything new. Kavinda Dasun, our Sri Lankan development chef from Colombo, brings a curiosity that is genuinely infectious. In Chennai, we were joined by Sandesh Reddy (who runs Oji Ramen, Tokyo Diner and Atlas House in Chennai, and Katana in Bangalore, among other restaurants), and he became our host, guide, translator and eating companion on non-stop expeditions that really should have come with medical disclaimers.

From the start, we knew this was not going to be a checklist trip, or one built for social media. We were hunting the real stuff: tiffin rooms packed with locals, mess halls, restaurants that do one dish and do it perfectly, tea shops where gossip travels faster than steam, and home cooks passing down recipes like heirlooms.

It began, as it should, in Chennai. Humid, hectic, and alive with the perfume of ghee, traffic, and jasmine flowers. Within hours of landing, we were seated at **Ayya Mess**, presented with a spread that would have made my Gujarati vegetarian ancestors panic, but had the cook in me grinning like a kid. Offal gravies, brain masala, fish fry, coconut rich curries, all served with the kind of confidence that comes from cooking food you have

been perfecting for years. South India does not do hospitality with fanfare. It simply appears, generous and steaming, right in front of you.

We scoured the city for the “best rose milk in town,” but ended up instead at **Mylapore Ganapathy’s**, a tiny shop where we tasted buffalo ghee so nutty and aromatic it felt like discovering beurre noisette with a Tamil accent.

The next morning began, as every good Chennai morning should, with idli and filter coffee. At

Murugan Idli Shop, we ate pillow-y idlis drenched in ghee and podi, and an onion uttappam so soft it almost melted as I lifted it. Of course, research trips have their disappointments too. We stayed at **The Bangala**, less a plush hotel and more an extension of the Meyyappan family home. After years of reading about her and being inspired by her stories and food, we finally met the legendary matriarch Meenakshi Meyyappan. *Aachi*, as she is lovingly known, is 92 years old, razor sharp, and still the undisputed queen of Chettinad cuisine.

There is no ego in her kitchen. Only discipline, generosity, and a deep respect for heritage. Every menu is precise, planned and written to *Aachi*'s exacting standards. Standing there, stirring a pot of pepper rich gravy under her watchful eye, we were reminded that food is never just flavour. It is anthropology, memory, time and place, and most vitally, emotion.

Next, we were guided through Madurai by Chef Ram Prakash, an authority on the region. The street food there has a swagger and see



(Clockwise from left) A dish at Hoppers Shoreditch; (left to right) Renjith Sarathchandran, Karan Gokani, Sandesh Reddy, and Kavinda Dasun; food at Hoppers Shoreditch; the restaurant; and food at a Madurai mess. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



an unassuming precision. And then there is jigarthanda, that iconic cold, creamy drink dessert hybrid that somehow feels both soothing and wildly indulgent. The best one we had tasted like nostalgia you didn't know you owned. Milk, almond gum, ice cream, syrup, and a calm sweetness that cut straight through the city's intensity.

We only had 24 hours here on this trip, but put them to full use until our stomachs gave up. Lunch was at **Eswari Mess**, a local favourite on the outskirts of Madurai, while dinner was just what I had imagined – parottas of every shape and form at **Madurai Bunparotta Kadai**. The dishes that stayed with me most were the crab curry and omelette at lunch, and that threadlike nool parotta at dinner. Those flavours now have a home in Shoreditch, with a new hybrid dish on our menu that brings all three elements together.

Bengaluru surprised me in a completely different way. It is a city where you can start your day with a *darshini* breakfast and end it in a bar that could comfortably sit in London or New York, except someone is still ordering filter coffee and paan at midnight.

We started the day with a full carb laden breakfast at the original **MTR**. We were guided by Pratima Chabbi, who has written a book on MTR, knows the inner workings of this breakfast mecca, and seems to be on first name terms with everyone who matters there, including the owners.

We had access to every corner and the cleanliness and efficiency of the kitchen genuinely blew us away.

Many rava idlis, vadas, upmas and filter coffees later,



instantly why it is often called the food capital of Tamil Nadu. You taste the passion in a deeply rich kari dosa, cooked slowly on the tawa until the edges crisp while the centre stays soft. You taste it in the quiet fire of a peppery broth ladled from a steel pot. You feel it in the way even something as humble as a parotta seems engineered for maximum pleasure, defying both gravity and physics. Threadlike nool parotta, fluffy bun parotta, deep fried omelette, crab curry that manages to be both comforting and thrilling. It is excessive and messy, but carried out by



Vaalon Hindustaan Hamaaraa Hai' kindled the nationalistic spark in people. These days, where cinema – from *The Kashmir Files* to *Dhurandhar* – plays a massive role in shaping political opinions and national identity, this chapter reminds us that the silver screen has always been a potent battlefield for the soul of the nation.

Breaking norms

Freedom is not just about removing a foreign power; it was about the internal struggle to redefine ourselves. Our story of a “fake wife” used as a cover for Rash Behari Bose's revolutionary activities is a narrative that speaks to the breaking of social norms and the shattering of gender taboos during a time of crisis.

When Bose, as an unmarried man, was refused a house on rent, his close associate Ramswaroop's wife, Yamuna, offered to pose as his wife just to find him a safe haven to execute their underground activities. These stories of subversion depict that the movement provided a rare space for individuals, especially women, to step out of traditional roles and claim their agency in ways that were radical for the era.

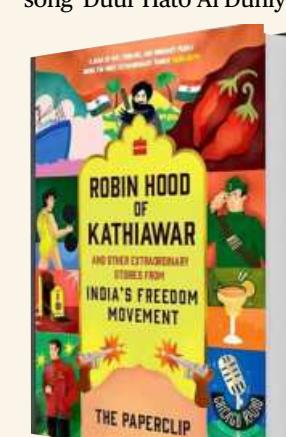
Stories that matter
By moving away from the “great men” theory of history and focussing on the outlaws of Gujarat, the widows smuggling pistols, and revolutionaries in Tokyo. This book is the story of these overlooked fragments

(From left) Dr Rajendra Prasad driving in State on January 26, 1950; Subhash Chandra Bose; and the book's cover. THE HINDU ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



manufacturing raincoats and gumboots for the soldiers. When “Make in India” is a modern mantra, this story serves as a reminder that the quest for economic dignity is a core part of our national DNA.

We explore the intersection of entertainment and activism with a Hindi film song that managed to sneak the message of “Quit India” past the British censors. The film was *Kismet*, and the song *Duur Hato Ai Duniya*



This book is a collective labour of love by team Paperclip. The Paperclip is a platform dedicated to capturing storytelling, binding stories from India and beyond. Paperclip is also the creator of the Audible Original podcast *Long Story Short*. Paperclip is run by Abhinabha, Indranath, Priya, Saumyajit, Srinivansu, Subhajit and Trinanjan.

We knew this wasn't going to be a checklist trip, or one built for social media. We were hunting the real stuff: tiffin rooms packed with locals, mess halls, restaurants that do one dish and do it perfectly...



Passage to freedom

India's freedom movement also unfolded among the outlaws of Gujarat, widows smuggling pistols, and revolutionaries in Tokyo. This book is the story of these overlooked fragments

Other Extraordinary Stories from India's Freedom Movement. Published by HarperCollins India and curated by the storytelling collective Paperclip, it is a curated collection of 50 incredible tales that celebrate the wild, the odd, and the profoundly human side of our journey to 1947.

Paper trail
The seeds of this collection were sown through journeys across Mexico, Japan, Argentina, and Trinidad. In Mexico City, we found traces of a revolutionary nightclub; in Tokyo, the scent of an

Indian curry recipe passed down generations; in the Caribbean, a pepper variety named “Barrackpore”.

These stories were pieced together from anecdotes shared over dinner in foreign cities, trivia found in obscure local museums, and physical memorabilia that acted as a bridge across time. The result is a narrative that proves the Indian freedom struggle was a global phenomenon, fuelled by individuals who were as diverse as the geographies they inhabited. While these stories are over 75 years old, many resonate with a startling poignancy in our current

social and political landscape. Take, for instance, the origin of an iconic Indian brand Duckback, manufacturer of raincoats, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's call for self-reliance. Surendra Mohan Bose, who had just returned to a tumultuous India from the US after completing his higher education at Berkeley and Stanford, was motivated by Gandhi's clarion call to boycott foreign goods and promote Swadeshi products. Having read accounts of how our Indian soldiers were ill-equipped for muddy terrains during wars, he decided to address it by

we headed to Bengaluru Café for a second breakfast, because this is Bengaluru and it would be rude not to. Here, the dosas are crisp and aggressively hot, smelling of toasted butter and fermented batter, served with chutneys that don't apologise for their heat. Like the rest of India, we became obsessed with benne dosa. All that richness, all that crunch. It instantly made sense why Bengaluru treats it with such reverence. Closely followed by a Death by Chocolate at Corner House, of course.

What struck me most, across states and cities, was how profoundly regional South Indian food remains. It is not just South Indian food but hundreds of micro traditions, dialects, preferences, ingredients and rituals co-existing. You cannot talk about curry here. You must talk about *this* curry, made this way, in this home, with this spice balance, because anything else would be dishonest.

That spirit of specificity and place is what we wanted to bring back with us. Not replicas or Instagram plates, but respectful interpretations grounded in real kitchens, and stories we'd tasted and lived. That is why making the trip in person, and reconnecting with these memories, was so crucial. Our new menu draws from five culinary heartlands: Chettinad, Madurai, Bengaluru, Kochi and Chennai. It is not a greatest hits list. It is an invitation to go deeper, and to discover the South beyond what most of us think we already know.

While shaping our menu, the journey also reshaped us. Renjith rediscovered flavours from his childhood with the clarity that only distance brings. Kavinda found echoes of Sri Lanka in unexpected places, proof of how deeply intertwined the food cultures of the Indian Ocean truly are.

And I, somewhere between a plate of goat trotter curry and a soft serve filter coffee ice cream, realised how much of my own story holds memories of the South.

The writer is an author, chef, and restaurateur who runs Hoppers, a Sri Lankan and South Indian restaurant in London's Soho with JKS Restaurants.

significant story in the collection is that of a young Indian boy who gave his own turban to help make a Pakistani flag during the tumultuous days of the Partition.

In our current political climate, often defined by polarisation and historical revisionism, this story captures a moment of raw, instinctive humanity that transcended the borders being drawn in ink and blood.

What does this say about us as a nation? It suggests that our foundation was built not just on political consensus, but on an inherent capacity for empathy and shared identity. As we look at how we have evolved, or perhaps stalled, as a nation, this story asks us to reflect on whether we have retained that spirit of grace under pressure.

Stories that matter
By moving away from the “great men” theory of history and focussing on the outlaws of Gujarat, the widows smuggling pistols, and revolutionaries in Tokyo. This book is the story of these overlooked fragments

Indranath Mukherjee

Indian history, as we are taught in school, is often a matter of dates, treaties, battles, kings and grand proclamations. We memorise the years of the First War of Independence, the Quit India Movement and the names of random Governor-Generals, but, in the process, we often lose sight of the people.

The Indian freedom movement was not just a political transition; it was a sprawling, chaotic, and deeply human epic whose impact spanned continents. It did not just create a sovereign nation; it generated several strange, moving, and brilliant stories that have, until now, remained tucked away in the corners of family lore, foreign archives, and dusty memorabilia.

This is the premise behind *Robinhood of Kathiawar and*

Lights, camera, lunges

Samantha Ruth Prabhu joins Mile Collective, a wellness-led activewear brand

Geetika Sachdev

For the past five years, actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu has been building an entrepreneurial portfolio that mirrors her personal ethos around health, wellness, and mindful living. She has invested in 12 brands, ranging from the clean perfume line Secret Alchemist to the superfood brand Nourish You.

"It's always been about alignment," says Samantha. "Unless the brand reflects who I am, I don't invest." Her latest venture, Mile Collective, co-founded with Harshita Motaparthi and Pravishtha Nadella, is a natural extension of that philosophy. The homegrown contemporary activewear label is designed not just for performance but for everyday living for women, with a product mix of leggings, shorts, tank tops, T-shirts, jackets and sports bras, alongside accessories such as tote bags.

"It had to be something I could



live in," Samantha explains. "From the gym to coffee to meetings, it moves with you, like second skin."

The guiding principle

"For me, business is more than trends or sales," she adds. "The focus is durability, wearability and fabric." The actress sees this as a conscious departure from the usual celebrity playbook. "Over the last few years, I've stepped away from the conventional way of associating with brands and moved towards something more personal," she shares. "I'm betting on myself – on my intuition, on the knowledge I've gained from my experiences – and on founders who share the same mission."

This shift in mindset has also reshaped how she views wellness, moving beyond performance to a more holistic approach that prioritises listening to the body and choosing clothes and tools that make everyday life easier.

Filling a gap

Mile Collective's roots trace back to the pandemic, when it began as Mile Active. After graduating from Law school, Harshita found herself at home, working out with her mother and sister or simply lounging around. "Even though we belong to different age groups and have different preferences, there were hardly any Indian

(From far left) The actor; outfits from Mile Collective; and co-founders Pravishtha Nadella and Harshita Motaparthi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

brands that ticked all the boxes," she recalls.

Quality was a key concern, especially for activewear. "Brands either focussed on style or performance, rarely both. We wanted to fill that gap, giving equal importance to performance, style, comfort, functionality, and durability," Harshita says.

The debut collection started modestly with just four SKUs, without a heavy marketing push. Pravishtha, who joined the brand in early 2025, was drawn to Harshita's intentional approach. "She wasn't rushing to capture market share," Pravishtha says. "She cared deeply about the product and the customer. Watching her build everything herself, from design to finance, made me confident I could contribute by scaling the business effectively."

Designed for real life

Mile Collective's attention to detail is deliberate. Fabrics are soft, breathable, and suited to India's



diverse climates, while cuts and silhouettes cater to multiple body types. Women can feel confident and comfortable whether at the gym or running errands.

"Another important factor is, we wanted the brand to feel like it's not intimidating because when it comes to working out, there are a lot of women who are just starting out while others are experienced; we want to meet them wherever they are," shares Harshita.

Samantha emphasises durability over fast fashion. "We want you to buy it, but we discourage excess. Our products are built to last." Prices for their OnTheGo collection range from ₹1,500 to ₹2,500 for core products, with accessories starting from ₹500. The collection is sold primarily via the brand's website, with plans for selective omnichannel expansion.

Listening to women

Customer insight continues to shape Mile Collective's identity. "We constantly ask our customers, 'What else can we solve for you?'" Harshita explains. Feedback drives decisions on fabric and silhouettes. "Moving forward, the plan is to make sure that the cuts are something that Indian women feel comfortable in," says Harshita.

Pravishtha challenges a common misconception. Indian women are not necessarily price-sensitive; they are price-conscious. "If a product is delivering and comes at a slight premium, people are willing to pay, as long as it meets expectations," she says.

That value-driven mindset also informs Mile Collective's growth plans. While the brand is currently focused on activewear, its next phase will lean into athleisure. "These are pieces you can wear beyond a workout, something you can dress up or down," says Harshita. "We also want to get into innerwear and swimwear."

How to cook at the Rashtrapati Bhavan

The Naar chef served a multi-course tasting menu highlighting flavours from the Himalayan belt and the Northeast at a State dinner attended by President Droupadi Murmu, the Prime Minister, EU leaders and diplomats

Priyadarshini Paitandy
priyadarshini.p@thehindu.co.in

Chef Prateek Sadhu has cooked in many kitchens around the world. Yet, cooking in the kitchen of the Rashtrapati Bhavan was nerve wracking, he admits.

This week started with Prateek and his team from Naar whipping up a multi-course meal on January 27 – showcasing flavours from the Himalayan belt and the Northeast – for the President of India, the Prime Minister, EU leaders, diplomats and members of the Cabinet.

"When I got the call to cook at a State dinner, at first I thought it was a prank call. The caller said she was calling from the President's residence," laughs Prateek on a call from Naar, his restaurant in the hills, near Kasauli.



Team Naar at Rashtrapati Bhavan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

However, a string of video calls followed, to help Prateek understand what was required. He learnt it was a bigger showcase, a trade deal, and a crucial dinner.

Normally State dinners have a set format that includes a *thaali* along with soup, starters, and dessert. This time, they did away with the *thaali*

and Prateek served a tasting menu. It featured five small bites before the distinguished members sat to eat, and five after. Favourites such as Sunderkala thichoni; yak cheese custard and bhaang mathri; nimbu saan; guchhi, poppy seeds, burnt tomato sauce, rice; Himalayan ragi and Kashmiri apple

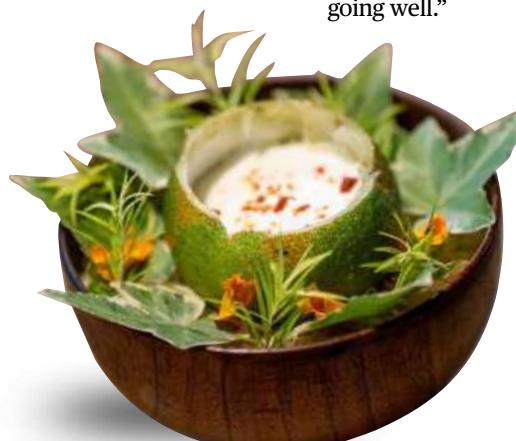
cake with timru and seabuckthorn cream... from the Naar menu featured at the dinner.

"A bunch of tasting sessions were done for the President's team. The

final tasting happened with President Murmu herself, who said it was amazing," says a now relieved Prateek.

"On D-Day the five-course sit-down menu was to be completed in 45 minutes – that was the brief; a departure from the otherwise languid

sit-down meals people normally expect from dinners at Naar. There were 12 of us and we served 86 people," Prateek adds. While the dinner was on in full swing, Prateek stood at a spot from where he could see the plates. He says, "When I saw them coming back clean, I knew it was going well."



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DIRECTOR ABHIRAJ MINAWALA PRODUCER ADITYA CHOPRA

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PVR ESCAPE	Royalpettah	Vellore
EDEN CINEMAS	Kilpauk	SOUTH ARCAT
PVR AMPA MALL	Aminjikarai	PONDY
PVR PALAZZO	Vadapalani	PROVIDENCE MALL
PVR S2 CINEMA	Perambur	COMBATORE
AGS CINEMAS	T.Nagar	PVR THE CINEMA
CHENGALEPET	Kanathur	BROOKFIELD MALL
MAYAJAAL	Villivakkam	INOX PROZONE MALL
AGS CINEMAS	Orme	CINEPOLIS FUN MALL
AGS CINEMAS	Omr	BROADWAY
AGS CINEMAS	Virugambakkam	SHRI SAKTI CINEMAS
AGS CINEMAS	Anna Nagar	MR INOX VISHAAL
AGS CINEMAS	Meenambakkam	DE MALL VETRI CINEMAS
AGS CINEMAS	Ecr	SALEM
AGS CINEMAS	Thiruvallum	INOX RELIANCE MALL
AGS CINEMAS	Thirupakkam	ROX DNC THEATERS
AGS CINEMAS	Chembarambakkam	GRAND CINEMAS
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AGS CINEMAS		Trichy

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Malayalam

Fails to work due to dated approach



SR Praveen

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Fifteen years ago, Malayalam cinema was not in the pink of health when the screenwriting duo of Bobby-Sanjay came up with *Traffic*, which would give a new sense of direction for the industry. In 2026, when the same duo returns with *Baby Girl*, after a mix of memorable and forgettable films in the intervening years, they borrow some of the elements from their most successful film yet. But then, times have changed and the tastes of the audience too have evolved, and things that worked back in the day might not work now, which is what unfortunately happens with *Baby Girl*.

The film, directed by Arun Varma, revolves around the happenings on a day when a newborn baby goes missing from a hospital. Sanal (Nivin Pauly), an attendant at the hospital, also gets caught in the drama, when his suspicions about the possible abductor immediately sets the police on a hunt. Parallel to this runs the drama involving the families of the young parents, who are still in college, and another track of a woman who is facing emotional struggles after having a stillborn baby.

Baby Girl

Direction: Arun Varma

Cast: Nivin Pauly, Lijomol Jose, Sangeeth Prathap, Abhimanyu Shammy Thilakan

Storyline: A newborn baby goes missing from a hospital, leading to a hunt involving multiple suspects.

If it was just the template of the narrative that happens in a day and the multiple parallel strands that the screenwriters reused from *Traffic*, the movie might have still worked at some level. But, what ultimately brings it down is the treatment, which has 'dated' written all over it, be it in the visual style or the editing patterns or the background score. Filling a good part of the runtime are sequences of police cars running aimlessly in the city with wireless sets chattering non-stop in the background, big screen visuals from the control rooms and characters poring over CCTV visuals.

Towards the end of the film, a sequence depicting the meeting of two mothers gives one a hint of the emotional potential that the film held, but this comes too late in the day. Lijomol Jose, as one of the mothers, is one of the few saving graces in the film. Nivin Pauly's character appears superfluous at several points, with the screenwriters often taking evident efforts to insert the star into the drama. Neither does the role provide any scope for performance to the actor, nor does he add much to the movie.

With the thriller track losing steam by the halfway mark, the rest of the film plods along with the aid of the emotional drama and a few convenient contrivances. But the dated approach ensures that much of this does not create the intended impact.

Baby Girl is currently running in cinemas



A rustic drama

The electric duo of Raj B Shetty and Duniya Vijay do justice to Jadesha K Hampi's intense story, though the film gets undone by melodrama and overt messaging

Kannada

▼

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After 45, director Jadesha K. Hampi's *Landlord* provides ample proof of the strong potential of multi-starrers in cinema. Give the big stars interesting characters, offer them room to perform, blend their roles convincingly with the story, and watch the magic unfold on the big screen. Arjun Janya executed the process with little success in 45, whereas Jadesha marches several steps ahead in the game, though he just about falls short in providing a near-perfect experience.

Jadesha was the co-writer of the Darshan-starrer *Kaatera* (2023). Directed by Tharun Sudhir, that film was set in a time when feudal landlords ill-treated the farmers. The core story of *Landlord* is the same. Legal justice has no place in the violence-stricken village, as the greedy Zameendars call the shots. The oppressed labourers dream of owning land, but it comes with a heavy price.

In *Kaatera*, Tharun brilliantly balanced the 'actor' and 'star' in Darshan; in *Landlord*, Jadesha has the daunting task of doing it with two performers – Duniya Vijay and Raj B Shetty – and he fairly manages to give equal significance to the two. But, it's just not star power that works in favour of *Landlord*.

Landlord

Director: Jadesha K. Hampi

Cast: Duniya Vijay, Raj B Shetty, Rithnya Vijay, Rachitha Ram, Umashree

Storyline: In a village crushed under a brutal landlord's rule, fear silences the poor, and justice is denied. What follows is a costly fight to reclaim dignity, justice, and the power of the Constitution.

The film's politics grabs your attention. Kannada cinema is known to shy away from themes of caste discrimination; however, Jadesha here offers a serious, even if not unfamiliar, look at the fight between the haves and the have-nots. It's interesting how Raj B Shetty's character (which doesn't have a name) sends shivers down the spine of those who are thinking of registering a complaint in a police station. It's surprising how insignificant the police station is in the village, and the director gives a backstory for it as well.

The visual symbolism, which even includes BR Ambedkar's favoured colour blue, which symbolises Dalit empowerment, adds to the world-building of the movie. Raj B Shetty's brutal landlord uses the golden bracelet as his weapon, as opposed to Duniya Vijay's Rachayya, a common, oppressed man, who wields the axe to fight for equality.

Even the supporting characters are made essential to the story. The talent of Gopalkrishna Deshpande, Achyuth Kumar, Shishir Baikady and Sampath Maitreya isn't left untapped. The set pieces keep coming, often at the expense of smooth storytelling, but they are hard to dismiss. Rachitha Ram, as a resilient wife, and Rithnya, as an aspiring cop who challenges gender norms, get powerful scenes. The best of the lot is the portrayal of the protagonist as a Robinhood, though Jadesha doesn't explore the concept to the fullest.

Landlord strongly reminds you of Vetri

Maaran's *Asuran* (2019). It has the film's storyline of a superheroic man who fights against systematic oppression. The repeated stress on the importance of education from the protagonist makes the comparison more valid.

The film is also an example of two lead actors trying not to be image-conscious. Vijay is a vulnerable protagonist who gets insulted in front of a village. The actor has always been natural in common man roles. Raj B Shetty makes you hate his presence in the antagonist role. He is brilliant in a scene where his character loses sanity when his manhood is questioned.

That said, *Landlord* fails to reach the heights it wishes to thanks to a timeline that feels rushed. The over-the-top melodrama, which hasn't disappeared from the grammar of Kannada filmmaking, is a big drawback. The overt messaging also kills the good impact of portions with realistic drama.

Interestingly, *Landlord* has hit theatres 50 years after BV Karanth's classic *Chomana Dudi* was released. Choma dreamt of tilling his own land, but faced the harsh realities of the one-sided system. Rachayya here takes the fight head-on. The concept still stays relevant in Kannada cinema, but the treatment has become more cinematic. The impact of a social issue lies in the balance between 'mass' and 'messaging,' and *Landlord* tries to crack it with mixed results.

Landlord is currently in theatres



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A crime drama that occasionally thrills

Telugu

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There are two strands to *Cheekatilo* (*In the Darkness*), the Prime Video original Telugu film directed by Sharan Kopishetty. On the surface, it is a crime drama that attempts to build an edge-of-the-seat whodunnit. At its core, however, it is a social commentary that urges silenced voices to speak, heal and find closure to long-buried wounds. In a film led by Sobhita Dhulipala, this second strand proves far more compelling.

True to its title, cinematographer Mallikarjun cloaks the film in a moody, low-lit palette. The darkness suggests threats lurking in the shadows while doubling as a metaphor for the emotional fog that engulfs survivors of violence. Even daylight scenes are deliberately underlit, reflecting the characters' inner worlds as they search for a



sliver of light.

Sandhya Nelluri (Sobhita) anchors a television crime show and soon finds herself at odds with the channel's boss over its sensationalist tone. She would rather probe the realities of crime and the emotional toll on victims than chase ratings through lurid storytelling.

Sharan Kopishetty, who shares writing credits with Chandra Pemmaraju, gradually peels back his

characters through conversations punctuated by telling silences. Snatches of dialogue reveal that Sandhya studied criminology, while her demeanour underscores a dogged determination to get to the truth. Strained exchanges with her mother (Jhansi Laxmi) hint at unresolved wounds from childhood.

Running parallel to the true-crime narrative is Sandhya's relationship with Amar (Vishwadev Rachakonda).

Where Sobhita plays Sandhya with stoicism, Vishwadev brings an easy warmth to Amar. Their conversations are economical, revealing just enough – his shift from an IT career to entrepreneurship, a café as a passion project – to explain why he stands by Sandhya when she follows her instincts and turns podcaster.

When the film tracks Sandhya's pursuit of truth after a gruesome incident, the investigative portions could have used more bite. Familiar genre elements surface – patterns in crimes, reopened files, false leads – these sections offer nothing new and hence, stop short of delivering a true edge-of-the-seat experience.

It is the smaller moments that resound more. An emotional outburst by a victim's family member forces Sandhya to reflect on her own methods, while a scene in which she reaches out to an older woman (Aamani), who laments the absence of female friendships after marriage, adds tenderness and depth.

The final reveal, however, feels overwhelming. Whodunnits

typically either plant clues in plain sight to let the audience connect the dots, or introduce a new subplot to explain motive. *Cheekatilo* opts for the latter, and despite a compelling backstory, the larger resolution – particularly where a medical condition is invoked – lacks conviction. It is unsettling, but not quite weighty enough.

The film's strengths lie in its 124-minute runtime and assured performances. Sobhita makes the

Cheekatilo

Director: Sharan Kopishetty

Cast: Sobhita Dhulipala, Vishwadev Rachakonda, Chaitanya Krishna, Jhansi

Storyline: Shocked by the murder of a dear one, a podcaster gets to the bottom of the story. It takes her on a larger, dangerous journey.

most of an author-backed role, shedding glamour to inhabit Sandhya as a grounded, girl-next-door presence. Her Telugu dialogue delivery is precise, lending the character emotional heft. Vishwadev delivers a measured, breezy turn, while supporting performances by Ravindra Vijay, Chaitanya Krishna and Aamani are effective within the limited screen time.

Jhansi is particularly striking as a mother who urges silence to avoid shame. In real life, she is among the most vocal members of the Voice of Women support group in Telugu cinema; here, playing the ideological opposite, she convincingly embodies a mindset that prefers to bury discomfort and maintain appearances.

Cheekatilo is an engaging, thoughtful drama that finds its strength in empathy rather than spectacle, but it could have benefited from sharper writing.

Cheekatilo is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video

Ponies Season 1

Episodes: 8

Creators: Susanna Fogel, David Iserson

Starring: Emilia Clarke, Haley Lu Richardson, Adrian Lester, Artjom Gilz, Nicholas Podany, Petro Ninovskiy, Vic Michaelis

Storyline: Two American embassy wives in Moscow decide to step in to find out the truth about their husbands' mysterious deaths



Snippets



First look of Vijay Deverakonda's *Ranabali* is out

The makers of Vijay Deverakonda's 14th film, referred to as VD 14, revealed its title: *Ranabali*. The film stars Rashmika Mandanna as the female lead and is directed by Rahul Sankrityan, who earlier helmed *Taxiwaala* and *Shyam Singh Roy*.

Ranabali is produced by Mythri Movie Makers and is scheduled to release in multiple languages on September 11.

The video offers a peek into the 'legend of the cursed land - 1878' when the British ruled India. The story unfolds in drought-ridden areas of Rayalaseema. Vijay essays the character of Ranabali and exudes a commanding presence, while Rashmika is cast as Jayamma.



Taapsee Pannu reunites with Anubhav Sinha

Taapsee Pannu and Anubhav Sinha are set to reunite for an upcoming investigative thriller, *Assi*, the makers announced by sharing a first look motion poster on January 23. The film marks the third collaboration between Taapsee and Anubhav after *Mulk* (2018) and *Thappad* (2020).

It also stars Kani Kusruti, Revathy, Manoj Pahwa, Kumud Mishra, Zeeshan Ayyub in pivotal roles, with special appearances by Naseeruddin Shah, Supriya Pathak, and Seema Bhargava.

Assi has been produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, and Anubhav Sinha and will be released in theatres on February 20.



Ravi Teja's next with Shiva Nirvana titled *Irumudi*; first look out

Ravi Teja's next film with director Shiva Nirvana has been titled *Irumudi*, the Telugu superstar made the announcement on Monday (January 26, 2026). The film is produced by Mythri Movie Makers.

Ravi's first look from the film was also unveiled to make the announcement. The actor dons traditional attire as he is seen holding a child in a celebratory mood. *Irumudi* will feature music by GV Prakash.

Director Shiva Nirvana is known for making films like, *Ninnu Kori, Majili, Tuck Jagadish, and Kushi*. Meanwhile, Ravi was last seen in *Bhartha Mahasayulaku Wignyapti*

A haute spin to the Cold War

Streaming

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We first meet Bea (Emilia Clarke) in a market in Moscow politely asking a lady for the eggs she paid for. The lady does not seem to understand until Twila (Haley Lu Richardson) tells Bea to curse the woman in Russian, and when she does, the woman sniffs and hands over the eggs.

Bea and Twila are embassy wives while their husbands,

Chris (Louis Boyer) and Tom (John Macmillan) are ostensibly doing boring work for the ambassador to the USSR, but they are actually spies for the CIA.

When Chris and Tom are killed in an air crash, Bea and Twila convince the Moscow station chief, Dane (Adrian Lester) that they could be spies as no one in the KGB would pay any attention to a couple of women, "ponies" – people of no interest, as opposed to people of interest. Dane reluctantly agrees seeing the strength of the argument.

Soon enough, Bea and Twila are involved in meeting a secret agent, Sasha (Petro Ninovskiy) who prefers the codename Radford (after Robert Redford) to the one the CIA gave him – CK Solar. A KGB agent, Andrei (Artjom Gilz), is interested in Bea and Dane asks her to cultivate him.

When Twila discovers that vulnerable women are being murdered, and that the police are treating them as isolated incidents, she decides to investigate, with help from mild-mannered Ray (Nicholas

Podany) who also works in the embassy and lets his life be run by his harridan wife, Cheryl (Vic Michaelis).

There are double and triple crosses, missing sisters, and old women working as spies, including Bea's grandmother, Manya Caplan (Harriet Walter). The period detail is wonderful including the cars and bell bottoms, broad belts and shiny jumpsuits. Adding George HW Bush (Patrick Fabian) as the director of the CIA was a nice touch, given that the former U.S. president was DCI for a year in 1976.

The needle drops (each episode title is a '70s pop song including songs by Fleetwood Mac ('Second Hand News'), Boney M ('Rasputin', naturally), Steely Dan ('Do It Again'), and David Bowie ('Moonage Daydream'), are thoughtful choices.

With Budapest standing in for Moscow, the noir palette, complete with rain-slick streets, grim buildings and the rich, faded grandeur of glorious old buildings is delightful.

Clarke and Richardson have great chemistry and are one of

the strongest reasons to watch the show (the music comes a close second). Clarke shrugs off her Daenerys persona from *Game of Thrones* to reveal her tough side under a silken glove. Richardson, (Portia from *The White Lotus*) once she stops echoing Natasha Lyonne from *Poker Face* or *Russian Doll*, is fun to watch.

There are some cavernous plot holes that one can fly a plane through, but *Ponies* is such a cheerful show that you are reluctantly willing to let its weird narrative choices go.

The finale with its Elton John (Alistair Mumford) concert, is action packed and twisty, with friends and allies turning into antagonists on a dime. There are more than a few unresolved plot points, and that cliff-hanger to the tune of Billy Joel's 'The Stranger' is suitably jaw dropping. Hopefully, there will be a season 2 or else we will wonder forever about what happened to the probably good/bad guys and girls.

Ponies is currently streaming on Jio Hotstar



Monumental trial of self-worth

Josh Safdie maps the American Dream as a gauntlet of self-inflicted abasement, with Timothée Chalamet selling his soul to stage the most punishing audition for greatness

English

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Josh Safdie opens *Marty Supreme* with an admirably vulgar sort of confidence, suggesting ambition will now be treated as a decidedly corporeal function. He does so by staging the opening credits as conception itself, where a human egg is fertilised and immediately aestheticised into a spinning ping-pong ball set to shimmering '80s synths, as though destiny were something you could manufacture through sheer force of want. Timothee Chalamet's impossibly vainglorious titular character spends the next two and a half hours behaving like a man convinced that the universe already endorsed him retroactively, which leaves everyone else stuck living inside the aftershocks of his self-esteem.

Set in 1952 but vibrating with a restlessness that belongs to no single decade, *Marty Supreme* follows Marty Mauser, a Lower East Side shoe salesman whose prodigious table-tennis talent matters less than his belief that talent should entitle him to speed, access, and forgiveness.

Marty enters the movie already mid-hustle. He is sleeping with a married woman in the back of a family shoe store that he yearns to escape, and he speaks about his future with a cocksure certainty. Chalamet plays him as verbally overclocked, a half-beat ahead of everyone else in the room because he refuses to wait for permission to finish a thought. That confidence sows the seeds for what follows since every subsequent choice grows logically from Marty's refusal to accept friction or setback as anything but a temporary inconvenience.

Safdie frames early-'50s New York as a pressure cooker in which money, sex, and ambition circulate through the same greasy ventilation system, so that the table-tennis club becomes a combined flop house, chapel, and delusion factory, endlessly incubating Marty's male fantasy. Marty flourishes in this compressed

Marty Supreme

Director: Josh Safdie

Cast: Timothée Chalamet, Gwyneth Paltrow, Odessa A'zion, Kevin O'Leary, Tyler Okonma, Abel Ferrara and Fran Drescher

Storyline: Marty Mauser, a wily hustler with a dream no one respects, goes to hell and back in pursuit of greatness

environment because compression rewards loudness, yet the moment he leaves it, the limits of his velocity become impossible to ignore. His refusal to bunk with the other players, followed by his immediate relocation to the Ritz, plays as strategic self-importance, since Marty intuits that being *seen* matters at least as much as being good, and often pays better. Losing the final to Koto Endo deflates the coronation fantasy, although Safdie withholds real punishment until later.

When Marty slingshots back to New York, the film shifts gears from propulsion to fallout, and pressure begins redistributing itself onto every person foolish enough to still stand nearby. Rachel's (Odessa A'zion) pregnancy detonates the fantasy of endless postponement by demanding consequence in calendar form, while Marty's preferred improvisations disguised as ingenuity mutate into a chain of increasingly deranged schemes involving a kidnapped dog, an increasingly irritated gangster, suburban bowling alleys, and the systematic liquidation of trust..

The Safdie brothers have been flattened into a vibe by criticism that describes their films as simply "stressful" or "anxiety-inducing" rather than to ask what that stress is actually doing, and *Marty Supreme* makes the poverty of that shorthand impossible to ignore. The connective tissue running from *Good Time* through *Uncut Gems* and into this film has little to do with nerves and everything to do with exposure, since Josh Safdie keeps returning to capitalism as a system that demands ritualised abasement before it offers even the illusion of mobility. Marty's life becomes a syllabus of required humiliations, each one framed as a reasonable toll for continued participation, whether that toll arrives as a fine, a ban, a public paddling on the bum, or the gradual erosion of everyone who believes in him.

Marty Mauser embodies a peculiarly American fantasy in which destiny metastasises into a personal branding exercise, and Safdie has obvious fun letting that fantasy curdle into parody. His conviction that greatness is owed to him

feels eerily current, especially when paired with the image of orange table-tennis balls stamped with his name and patriotic promise, since it echoes the way American power loves to aestheticise itself as a product. Watching Marty hustle his way across borders boasting over his exceptionalism, it becomes hard not to think of another orange symbol of the American Dream™ ping-ponging across the country fueled on unfounded machismo and aggressively merchandised fascist fervour.

Safdie also slips one of the film's sharpest knives in sideways, through a bit involving Holocaust "honey" that renders historical violence as something thick, marketable, and endlessly siphonable once you know how to sell it. The metaphor surfaces as Marty prods his former-rival and Auschwitz survivor to casually invoke inherited suffering to grease access to a certain Shark (who unfortunately features prominently in the film). Marty never articulates this system, yet he benefits from it instinctively, which is precisely the point, since Safdie seems to be alluding to how historical trauma becomes an endlessly renewable resource that could justify just about anything, which of course rings sonorous with a particularly well-worn state-level playbook.

It is difficult to watch *Marty Supreme* without recognising that Chalamet had been rehearsing for this role long before cameras rolled, especially once you recall his unapologetic declaration of greatness at the SAG Awards last year. Chalamet plays Marty with a brazen thirst that feels at once, exhausting and magnetic, and the film benefits from his willingness to make ambition look depraved. As much as it pains me to admit it, watching an insufferable white boy channeling the pathology of an even more insufferable white boy results in something undeniable, because Chalamet finally aligns his own pursuit of validation with a character built to interrogate it.

May thy paddle chip and shatter, Timmy Tim.

Marty Supreme is currently running in theatres.

