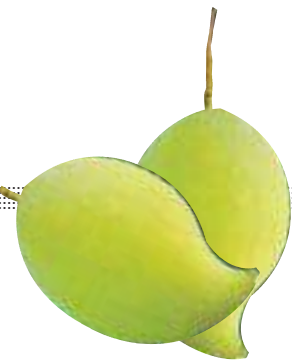




What makes the new MG Hector Plus value for money

page 2



Recognising a Kerala village's native mango heritage

page 3

Turmeric lattes are so 2016. The pandemic has given rise to a new appreciation for fresh turmeric, which is being made into golden-yellow salads, teas and juices



# Superstar spice

PRABALIKA M BORAH

Malaika Arora starts her day with a blended concoction of *amla*, ginger and an inch of fresh turmeric root. She is not alone.

In a country that has great faith in kitchen remedies, COVID-19 has prompted people from across States to return to old-fashioned 'immunity-boosters'. In the process, raw turmeric has become a prized ingredient. And it is used for far more than just *haldi-doodh* (rechristened turmeric latte in 2016 and sold at upscale cafes across the world ever since).

Commonly available in winter, fresh turmeric rhizomes have a pungent fragrance as well as taste. They are crunchy like ginger and leave a mild bitter after taste when consumed raw. Such is the demand this year that vegetable vendors are seeing a steady demand for the fresh root, which, till date, has been intermittently used for face packs or pickles at home.

**In demand**  
Iftexhar Ali, 60, a vegetable vendor in Sainikpuri, Telangana, says the demand is high but since it is off-season procuring turmeric is difficult now. "This is *haldi* sowing time. Fresh *haldi* is harvested in January. All the off-season raw *haldi* that is coming into the market at the moment is from



## Blue turmeric

Not all turmeric is yellow. "In Raiganj, Bengal, blue turmeric is being cultivated by an organisation called Forum for Indigenous Agricultural Movement. They are working with local farmers in cultivating and preserving varieties of indigenous grains, herbs, and vegetables. This blue turmeric loses its distinct colour once processed; after it is dried, it turns black. While fresh blue turmeric is used in dyeing fabrics, black *haldi* is a well-known medicine among traditional healers," says food consultant Sayantani Mahapatra

Traditionally in Bengal, Sayantani adds, "it is used to treat indigestion, relax sore muscles and heal wounds or insect bites as it is reportedly high in antioxidants. Blue turmeric when boiled and powdered becomes black, and is easily available online... but the fresh version is a challenge to find."

Ooty, and not the best quality. Buyers, however, are buying it because they are desperate to lay their hands on raw turmeric," he says.

The water content in the fresh rhizomes is what makes it difficult to store for more than few weeks. This is why turmeric farmers boil the harvested rhizomes before powdering. "I never buy more than 4 kilograms of



## Valuable commodity

Fresh turmeric is much sought after during the pandemic; (below) *haldi ki barfi* ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO AND SANGEETA KHANNA

fresh *haldi* to sell," says Ali, adding, "But, for the last few months, I have been buying over 10 kilograms and they fly off the shelves within an hour."

Hyderabad-based Sridevi Jasti, a holistic nutritionist and chef, explains how a cup of warm milk with a teaspoon of turmeric is advised, not just to cure a cold or sore throat, but also for a good night's sleep.

"*Haldi* is a wonder ingredient because of curcumin (a natural chemical compound with healing properties), which gives it the yellow colour," she says. (India's best turmeric reportedly comes from Lakadong in Meghalaya, where the curcumin ranges from 7-9%, the highest in the country.)

Sridevi says she loves using fresh *haldi* in her salads and herbal tea. "I brew a small piece of fresh turmeric with a balanced mix of spices – pepper, cumin, cinnamon and ginger." She adds a word of caution: "When buying the root, select *haldi* without mould as fresh turmeric develops



mould very quickly if not stored properly." Store it for up to a week in your fridge.

## Salad staple

Praveen Anand, who is Executive Chef – South Indian cuisines at ITC hotels, says, "I love the fresh turmeric salad prepared at my mother-in-law's home. Slices of fresh turmeric seasoned with salt, lemon and ginger is served as a side dish. It's like a fresh pickle."

Some regional Indian cuisines use fresh turmeric as a vegetable like the *haldi ki sabji* in Rajasthan, which is a common winter curry. The root is cooked with *ghee* to make it easily digestible.

Dehradun-based Ayurvedic food, health and nutrition consultant, Sangeeta Khanna, has created an Indian *barfi* using raw turmeric with almond powder and cardamom. She says, "The *barfi* was developed as part of a wellness menu for Hotel Suryagarh in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. Ever since, it has been a popular *mithai* on their breakfast menu. I am getting queries from followers on my blog on innovative ways to include raw *haldi* in their diet. I direct them to using it in a salad."

Mention of fresh *haldi* also brings back childhood memories. Kolkata-based food consultant Sayantani Mahapatra recalls how they used fresh turmeric in winter. "Because of its anti-inflammatory and immunity-boosting properties, we were forced to chew a bit of this along with two or three peppers. As kids, we hated the fresh bulbs as it was a weekly routine for *ma* to scrub our bodies with a mixture of fresh *malai* (cream) and *kacha holudh bata* (fresh turmeric paste)," she says. Then adds, "It felt like torture then but now, as a mother, I am repeating the same with my kids."



## A storyteller first

Sundeep Rao admits, with a bit of restraint, that he has been in a good mindset in the last four months. He is aware of how the pandemic has wreaked havoc worldwide but it has allowed him to pause and reflect on his life and career. "We usually get caught up in the conversations we have with ourselves and others," says the Bengaluru-based comedian, adding, "We rarely stop and ask ourselves 'why do we do what we do?'. The last few months allowed me to think about this." This clarity of thought led him to his latest project. While several of his colleagues in stand-up comedy have been active on YouTube and other video streaming platforms, he has started a Spotify podcast – *Life Gone Wrong*, where Sundeep, who is partially blind, shares stories of people who have lived with disabilities, survived life-threatening illnesses or faced other adversities. "For a standup comedian here, it is mostly about having shows on Amazon or Netflix or doing tours. Sometimes, the stories you want to tell can get lost in the numbers business. I wanted to tell stories without much interference. Podcasts allow me to do that. Also, I don't think visually. The audio format works better for me. I also consume a lot of audio books," says Sundeep, who has another podcast, *The Babybed*, which he started in 2019. On *Life Gone Wrong*, he adds: "I don't want to be typecast as a comedian. I want to be known as a storyteller. I have neither tried to force humour into *Life Gone Wrong* nor make it too preachy. The conversation is entirely organic."

—Praveen Sudevan



# In full bloom

Kerala-based hybridiser Ganesh Kumar Anandhakrishnan coaxes the 'Ultimate 1000 petal lotus' to bloom on his rooftop

PRIYADERSHINI S

The summer solstice is an important day in the calendar for lotus grower, hybridiser and hobbyist Ganesh Kumar Anandhakrishnan. He had been seeking the extended daylight to coax, cajole and bloom the rare 'Ultimate 1000 petal lotus', also known as the Zhinzun Qianban, on his terrace in Tripunithura, Kochi, in Kerala.

On June 21, amid the pandemic gloom, Ganesh's spirits soared as he spotted a conical pink bud appear on the plant. Over the next 15 days, the bud slowly opened, "coaxed and tapped", he says, and continued to unravel layer after layer until the whole, compact 14 centimetre flower was visible. "It has

been super exciting," says Ganesh, who relocated from Agartala in Tripura to his home town in Kochi eight months ago.

The origin of the 1,000 petal lotus dates back to ancient times but was rediscovered in 2009 by a Chinese horticulturalist, Diaké Tian.

Ganesh's love for lotuses goes back to his childhood when he was charmed by the garlands placed on the residing deity at the Sree Pooranathrayeesa temple in Tripunithura. He picked up his interest in gardening from his father, and it grew manifold while he was posted in Agartala as a farm assistant with the Rubber Board.

"Our office garden in Agartala was huge but unkempt. So, we decided to make a winter garden,"

**Solace in solitude** (Clockwise from left) Ultimate 1000 petal lotus; N. 'Green Peace'; N. 'Butterscotch'; Ganesh Kumar inspecting the bloom ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



says Ganesh. He introduced a native lotus, the pink and white variety from South India. "To my surprise, it bloomed frequently," he adds.

## Road to blossomville

This experience refined his interest in learning more about cultivation. The Northeast of India became his laboratory. Soon, his knowledge covered all the varieties from single petal to multiple petals, – "the white with pink tip Assam lotus looks like a larger version of the tulip," he says – including the famed yellow lotus that adorns Goddess Meenakshi at the Madurai temple.



is the genus, followed by the name of the cultivar), which he named after his mother in 2015.

In 2017, his hybrid *Nelumbo* 'Miracle', a 500 petal flower, was the first lotus from India to get registered with IWGS. In 2018, he created *Nelumbo* 'Little Rain', a micro lotus. "The character of the flower is that it can be grown in a very small container too," he says, explaining that he experimented with seed hybridisation.

In 2015, Ganesh procured the 1,000 petal lotus tuber from Tian himself, and, in 2017, managed to grow and make it flower in Tripura. However, growing the lotus in the tropical humidity of southern India, in Kochi, was a challenge. "There is a difference between sub tropical

## THE ULTIMATE STORY

Based on Chinese literature, the ultimate 1,000 petal lotus can be traced back prior to Eastern Jin Dynasty around 1,500 years ago. The cultivar even survived the cultural revolution in China from 1966 to 1976, when neither private gardens were permitted nor could people own plants.

and tropical lotuses. The biggest problem to grow the temperate lotus here is daylight," explains Ganesh.

So, when he planted the 'ultimate 1000 petal lotus' he was sceptical. "After the bud appeared, the rains came down. I had to protect the plant. A coconut frond fell on it from my neighbour's garden dashing all hopes of the plant's survival," he adds.

Yet, it bloomed and the flower became the cynosure of all eyes. It stood gracefully for five days before it withered, but another bud is unraveling under his watch. "We will offer it to the [Pooranathrayeesa] temple," says Ganesh.

He adds: "During my days in Agartala, when I felt lonely, the lotus was my only solace. It is a perfect analogy for the human condition because even when its roots are in the dirtiest waters, the lotus produces the most beautiful flower."





Get set to sit pretty

NIKHL BHATIA

Take an MG Hector, replace the second-row bench with a pair of captain's chairs, add in a third row of seats and what you get is the new Hector Plus. There are some additions to justify the 'Plus', but the comfier middle row and flexibility of a third row are big draws.

Given that the Hector Plus is intended for the chauffeur-driven, it is only apt to start the review from the comfort of its middle row. Finished in premium-looking tan leatherette upholstery, the sculpted captain's chairs look very inviting. The seats are comfortable with well-judged cushioning and a wide range of seat adjustments. You can move the seats fore and aft, the backrest is reclinable, and adjustable armrests only add to the comfort. Then there is the space – you won't feel cramped even when sliding the seats forward to free up room for a third-row passenger. However, thigh support isn't the best and individuals with a large frame may find the seats a bit narrow.

**Toned down**  
MG has categorically said the third row is not meant for adults and it really isn't. Access from between the middle-row seats is cumbersome and the space is best for children. The knees-up seating and upright backrest is also unlikely to win any praise. What is nice though is that you get dedicated vents and blower controls for the third row, but its inclusion has eaten into luggage capacity. With all seats up, there is a fairly limited 155 litres of



space, which can be expanded to 530 litres by folding the third row.

Up front, the Hector Plus is near identical to the standard Hector. Drivers will love the excellent visibility afforded by the large glasshouse and low dash-



board, though the reflective cover for the speed and tachometer dials makes for uneasy viewing.

The main talking point up front, as with the Hector, is the 10.4-inch touchscreen system. It runs a lot smoother than it did on the earlier Hectors, and over-the-air updates ensure that it is largely future-proof. The Hector Plus

The middle-row experience has never been so comfortable as in the MG Hector Plus

MG HECTOR PLUS HYBRID SPECIFICATIONS

LENGTH	4720mm
WIDTH	1835mm
HEIGHT	1760mm
WHEELBASE	2750mm
ENGINE	1451cc, 4-cyls, turbo-petrol, mild-hybrid
POWER	143hp at 5000rpm
TORQUE	250Nm at 1600-3600rpm
GEARBOX	6-speed manual
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	60 litres
TYRE SIZE	215/60 R17

speed manual; a 143hp/250Nm, 1.5-litre turbo-petrol with a 6-speed manual or dual-clutch auto; and a 143hp/250Nm, 1.5-litre petrol with a mild-hybrid system and 6-speed manual, which is the Hector Plus that we drove.

While it might seem insuffi-

cient for an SUV as heavy as this, the 1.5-litre turbo-petrol does get the job done. The engine isn't outright punchy or quick revving. A light enough clutch and easy gearshifts help while the mild-hybrid system also does its work.

The Hector Plus is, surprisingly, easy to drive. The light steering, relatively tight turning circle and 360-degree camera make it easy to place in tight confines while the cushy low-speed ride only furthers its case as a city-friendly SUV. It is on the open road and at higher speeds that the Hector Plus doesn't feel as well rounded. There is an up-and-down movement that creeps into the experience, and it gets amplified the faster you go.

As a comfy SUV for the family, the Hector Plus works rather well. Add in MG's service and ownership packages, and you will find that your money buys you a whole lot of SUV. With prices starting at ₹13.49 lakh and topping off at ₹18.54 lakh (ex-showroom, India), the Hector Plus is pricier than the standard by ₹40,000-₹65,000, though prices go up by ₹50,000 post August 13.



An effortless commuter

The Dominar is now available with a smaller-capacity engine, but does it dampen the overall experience?

RISHABH BHASKAR

Listen, learn, improve – this seems to be the mantra that Bajaj swears by and the results are there to show. Take the new Dominar 400, for instance. Anyone who has ridden it will vouch for the fact that it is a vastly superior motorcycle and after working on feedback, Bajaj has used the same platform to spawn a 250cc version. Has the drop in cubic capacity diluted the Bajaj Dominar experience?

Design

The Dominar 400 bears one of the most unique designs in the Indian market: a fine balance between form and function. The Dominar 250 continues in the same vein. It shares the brilliant LED headlamp, 13-litre fuel tank, double-barrel exhaust, seats, and body panels with its sibling. But when the attention shifts towards the relatively skinny 130-section rear tyre, the sense of proportion is lost, giving the bike a slightly under-tyred



appearance. While Bajaj could've simply used the D400's fatter, 150-section rear tyre, it would have had a bearing on fuel efficiency and performance. This visual niggle aside, the Dominar 250 looks every bit a handsome machine.

Fit and finish are on par with the bigger Dominar with beautifully crafted mirrors that add to the sense of premiumness. One area where Bajaj saved on some cost was by using the original Dominar's split digital instrument console. It is a bit of a downer as the D250's



cluster lacks basic information such as gear position indicator let alone bits like average fuel consumption, average speed and distance-to-empty readouts, which would have been useful on a motorcycle projected as one to go touring on.

Performance

The Dominar 250's engine is based on the KTM 250 Duke's motor, but the head, with its dual-spark plugs, is Bajaj's very own design. Since the engine has a lower compression ratio – 11:9 versus the KTM's 12:5 – it produces slightly less power and torque than the Austrian motor. But the D250 is no slouch, and is a

surprisingly good performer despite its 180kg kerb weight.

Off the line, the shorter first and second gears aid acceleration and the D250 is quick to cross 60kph in 3.82sec, making it adept at gunning past city traffic. What contributes to the D250 being a good city motorcycle is an incredibly light clutch and the tractable nature of its engine. But the real essence of a Dominar is its mile-munching abilities and the D250 is up to the task. The engine has sufficient power across the range and the taller fifth and sixth gears allow you to cruise comfortably at 100-120kph between 6,000-7,000rpm. The only negative is that you will have to downshift to fifth to execute rapid overtakes. Good thing then that the twin-barrel exhaust sounds throaty and loud under hard acceleration.

Ride and handling

This is another area where Bajaj has hit the nail right on its head. Though the D250 has a narrower, 37mm front fork, the softer spring rates and the gas-charged monoshock offer a plush ride over bad roads; the D250 simply glides over

AUTO SNIPPETS



Hyundai Tucson facelift launched

Following its debut at the 2020 Auto Expo, Hyundai has launched the Tucson facelift in India with prices ranging from ₹22.30 – 27.03 lakh (ex-showroom). The mid-cycle refresh sees the SUV receive styling updates, BS6-compliant engines, a new 8-speed automatic gearbox and added tech. Standard equipment includes a panoramic sunroof, dual-zone climate control, powered driver and co-driver seat, puddle lamps, cruise control, connected-car technology and more. The Tucson is available with petrol and diesel engines, both BS6-compliant.



Honda launches fifth-gen City

Honda has launched the new City midsize sedan with prices starting from ₹10.90 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi). The City is available in three trims and comes with three engine-gearbox options to choose from. The 100hp, 1.5-litre diesel has been updated to meet BS6 norms and comes paired with a 6-speed manual gearbox as standard. The new 1.5-litre mill features a Double Overhead Camshaft (DOHC) setup and develops 121hp and 145Nm of torque. Gearbox options for the petrol include a 6-speed manual and a CVT auto.



Skoda expands Rapid line-up with new Rider Plus trim

Skoda has added a new Rider Plus trim to the Rapid line-up. Positioned above the entry-level Rider trim, the Rider Plus is priced at ₹7.99 lakh (ex-showroom, India) and offers some additional features, paint and trim options. Inside, the most notable distinction is the 6.5-inch touchscreen infotainment system, which comes with Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink connectivity. The Rider Plus comes with the new 110hp, 1.0-litre TSI turbo-petrol engine.

Q&A WITH HORMAZD



A car for daily use

I am looking to buy a car for my daily use in Bengaluru with a ₹7.25 lakh budget. I have shortlisted the Tata Tiago XZ, Maruti Celerio ZXi and the Hyundai Grand i10 Nios. Which car should I go for? Also, if there is a better alternative, please suggest.

Ranganathan Venkatakrishnan

The Grand i10 Nios is a very user-friendly car with an upmarket feel. Its engine is smooth, controls are light and the overall interior quality is better than the two cars you have shortlisted. If you can, go in for the AMT version, which will make your commute a bit more relaxed.

Getting an upgrade

I am 70 years old and have been driving a Maruti 800 for the last 13 years. I now want to replace the car and am deciding between the Maruti Alto or the Renault Kwid. Which one do you suggest frankly? I hardly drive 100km in a week.

Mohammed Ikramulla

If you have been using the Maruti 800, the Alto will seem very familiar, and it is a car you just cannot go wrong with. The Kwid, on the other hand, is a more spacious car. Overall, the Renault feels more modern and is a better package than the Alto. The only downside to the Kwid is its engine, which isn't as peppery or refined as the Alto's.

Hormazd Sorabjee is the editor of Autocar India. Mail your feedback and queries to roadshow@thehindu.co.in

A fine balance The Dominar 250's fit and finish are on a par with its predecessor



BAJAJ DOMINAR 250 SPECIFICATIONS	
ENGINE	248.77cc, single cylinder, fuel-injected
POWER	27hp at 8500rpm
TORQUE	23.5Nm at 6500rpm
GEARBOX	6-speed
WEIGHT (KG)	180kg
WHEEL BASE (MM)	1453mm
GROUND CLEARANCE (MM)	157mm
FUEL TANK CAPACITY (LTS)	13 litres
FRONT BRAKE	300mm Disc
REAR BRAKE	230mm Disc
FRONT SUSPENSION	USD fork
REAR SUSPENSION	Monoshock

handling. Despite the soft setup, the D250 is not affected by mid-corner bumps and stays true to an intended line. In fact, the D250's new swingarm, though thinner than the D400's, offers good feel about what the rear tyre is up to. In addition, the long wheelbase (identical to the D400) translates to a planted feel at high speeds or even mid-corner. As far as braking is concerned, the 300mm disc and Bybre callipers offer sufficient performance to haul the motorcycle to a stop quite well, but the feel is wooden. You will need to give the lever a hard pull for maximum braking.

Verdict

The Bajaj Dominar 250 delivers on what it promises, and it does so without feeling like a compromise. Not only is it an effortless commuter but also a quick touring machine, and at ₹1.60 lakh (ex-showroom) it undercuts every rival in the 250cc segment, except for the FZ25. This makes it a good value proposition, which is the Dominar's biggest trump card.

potholes. What also impresses is the balance that has been achieved between ride and









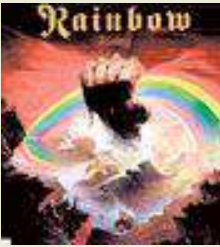
HOMING IN

**Baiju Dharmajan**, one of the country's leading guitarists, is fondly referred to as the 'God of Small Strings' for his Carnatic-inspired riffs and solos. Here is Baiju's pick-me-up **Playlist** for the times

SHILPA NAIR ANAND

'Chup ke Chup ke Raat Din' by Ghulam Ali

The ghazal transports me to another time and place – my childhood home in Kollam – to the Sunday afternoons when my father would be at home listening to music. I just need to close my eyes, I go back all those years when I was a child and I can even hear Ghulam Ali's voice. I inherited my love for music from him and my grandfather.



'Stargazer' by Rainbow

I was in my 20s when I first heard this song and it moved me on so many levels. Ronnie James Dio, the vocalist, is too good here. This 1976 song, by the British rock band Rainbow, formed by former Deep Purple founder and guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, is a classic. I like its musical quality – guitar and drum solos – and its emotional appeal. I heard this when I was dreaming of becoming a musician, and to hear musicians achieving something like this was stunning!

'Kalabham Tharaam' by KS Chitra

A list like this would be incomplete without KS Chitra's 'Kalabham Tharaam' from the 2006 film *Vadakkumnathan*. This one is superlative – she renders each stanza with so much emotion. The refrain is expressed differently each time, she inserts so much feeling and elevates the song.



'I Still Believe' by Mariah Carey

When I heard Mariah Carey's song the first time, it brought tears to my eyes. It was instant. At the time I didn't pay much attention to the lyrics. It was how she was singing, the musical element of her voice. Her sheer vocal range. As a musician the notes appealed to me intensely. Others might have sung better, but this one ranks high on my list.

We would love to know how you are keeping busy at home. Tell us who you are listening to at metro@thehindu.co.in

'Madaari' by Clinton Cerejo feat Vishal Dadlani/Sonu Kakkar

'Madaari', performed at the second edition of Coke Studio India, appeals to me for its Sufism – that a higher power controls our actions. The poetry of the idea touches something within me. Think about it... it puts things in perspective.



# Chikankari on my shoes

Who said *gota* was only for elaborate *lehengas*? Designer Shruti Kasat embellishes sneakers with hand-work and organza, adding character to ordinary footwear

PRIYADARSHINI PAITANDY

If designer Shruti Kasat could change one thing about her wedding, it would be the footwear she wore for the ceremonies.

A self-confessed sneakerhead, Shruti, who has now started a brand called The Saree Sneakers, wishes she had these options then. "The idea behind this brand is to get sneakers in to the Indian wardrobe," says the designer. And so, adding a touch of bling, intricate handwork and embroidery and of course memory foam for comfort, she rolled out her collection. There is a conscious effort to showcase different art forms and materials from India on these footwear. There is *chikankari* embroidery on cotton; laces made with organza that have *gota* on them.

Interestingly, 30% of her clients are brides. "We are doing shoes for grooms as well and sisters and friends of the bride," Shruti says.

Right now, The Saree Sneakers is matching bridal outfits with sneakers. There have also been instances where they have had to customise pairs to go with a bride's jewellery. "We sourced emerald look-alike stones for the sneakers to go with her emerald set," says Shruti. The other funky trends include embroidering the couple's initials or surnames on either pair or writing words like *patakha* or *dulhaniya* with colourful thread.

The shoes might be flamboyant and loud but they are also versatile and can even go with a pair of jeans and shorts.

"We are vegan so the sneakers are not leather," says Shruti. The



**Designs from the sole** Shruti Kasat (left) employs Indian fabrics and traditional thread-work

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



work is mostly done on black or white shoes to make them wearable with a large palette of colours.

It has become trendy to wear sneakers for *sangeet* and *mehendi* ceremonies and some brides even wear them on the day of their wedding.

"They want the quirky element. They are not shy to embrace the unusual any more," says Shruti, adding that some credit also goes to celebrities such as Sonam Kapoor and Deepika Padukone who wore

sneakers at their wedding after-parties. There really is no fixed age group for her clientele. "I even have 50-year-old women with back issues or those who cannot wear

**It has become trendy to wear sneakers for sangeet and mehendi ceremonies and some brides even wear them on the day of their wedding**

heels, buying my shoes," she adds.

This is not just a passing fad, believes Shruti. "It is here to last given the comfort sneakers offer. Especially when everybody wants to dance, chill and have fun."

She has now started planning her sari according to the shoes she decides to wear for an event. "And it is the same story for a lot of my clients," she laughs.

*The Saree Sneakers is available via its Instagram page and on websites like Pernia's PopUp Shop.*



Digital tales A still from *Kalki*; (inset) Pallav Bajjuri

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in 2016, founded by Pallav Bajjuri, who had returned to Hyderabad after completing his Masters in Computer Science Engineering from the US. The idea was inspired by the Canada-based portal Wattpad and tweaked for India.

The origin story

Pallav had earlier spearheaded Sadha Haq, a portal that reported on social issues. "We had to pause Sadha Haq owing to multiple issues. However, the response to Kahaniya as a platform for storytellers was encouraging and we saw the possibility of connecting writers with publishers and filmmakers. We registered the company in 2019; funds came in from family and friends," he says.

Anyone can upload a story in prose or poetry format. Kahaniya's editorial team tries to keep pace with the content that gets uploaded. "A few hundred copies are submitted each day, so it gets tough to proofread," says Pallav.

Machine learning comes into play to check the content but Pallav admits there are grey areas: "On rare occasions, stories with adult content get uploaded late night, when our team is not at work, and it gets noticed by readers; the next morning, we are faced with questions. Though machine learning-based story edits are in place, not all keywords in regional languages are easy to spot."

While most writers share their content for free, a few want readers to pay. In such cases, the editorial team takes up the request and assesses the story.

'Kahaniya Launchpad' segment tries to connect new writers with publishing houses, and 'Kahaniya Connect' liaises between writers and the film industry. "We look for stories that can potentially be used for cinema or web series, and pitch it to producers and directors," explains Pallav.

The team schedules appointments, arranges a narration session, and if the story is approved, helps the writer with paperwork, payment and due credit.

"The copyright of the story stays with the writer, and the payment is shared approximately on a 70:30 basis, with the larger sum reaching the writer. We are strengthening our bank of stories and want to be a marketplace that connects writers and filmmakers."

Soon, the platform will be uploading 21 stories in Telugu written by Tanikella Bharani and six by LB Sriram, both veteran actors with a background in theatre. Director Praveen Sattaru will be sharing the screenplays of his Telugu films on the site. Talks are on with other filmmakers as well.

Kahaniya began as an experiment



## Go ahead, tell a story

Kahaniya, a platform for storytellers, has caught the attention of Telugu filmmakers looking for new, original content

SANGEETHA DEVI DUNDOO

Everyone loves a good story, especially filmmakers who are constantly looking for content that is worth narrating on the screen, big or small.

Now, filmmakers have found a new platform they can turn to for stories. When the Telugu film *Kalki* (2019) released, Kahaniya.com also got noticed. Director Prasanth Varma had picked up a story he read on this

website, written by Mahbubnagar-based Saiteja Deshraj, for the big screen.

Since then, Kahaniya (website, and app for iPhone and Android) has been on the radar of Telugu filmmakers. The platform has nearly 30,000 stories in 11 languages, with a chunk of content in Telugu and Hindi, followed by English, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Bengali.



## GET READY FOR NIVIN'S PADAVETTU

Liju Krishna debuts as director in the film starring Aditi Balan as the female lead

The first look poster of the Nivin Pauly-starrer *Padavettu* has been released. The film, bankrolled by actor Sunny Wayne's production company, Sunny Wayne Productions, will be helmed by debutant director Liju Krishna.

The poster has a bearded Nivin Pauly in a 'mass' look. The tagline to *Padavettu* announces 'Chaos... Struggle... Survival...' The *Padavettu* will continue as far as humanity prevails... While Nivin announced it on his Twitter handle, Tamil actor Vijay Sethupathi too shared it on his handle.

The poster shows Nivin holding a sickle, in a bearded avatar reminiscent of his look in *Premam*, with three men in the background.

Aditi Balan, who acted in the Tamil film *Aruvi*, is the female lead. Manju Warrier will essay a pivotal role in the film; alongside are actors Shine Tom Chacko, Shammi Thilakan, Indrans and Vijayaraghavan. The music is by Govind Vasantha.

## When luck forces a calling card change



An actor, fashion designer and a polyglot who is adept at speaking seven languages, Sushma Nair wears many hats. Born in Chennai and educated in Bengaluru, the actor is a familiar face on the small screen and appears in TV serials such as *Sumangali* and *Nayagi*. Acting, Sushma says, happened to her by chance. "I started off with costume designing. My friend was asked to design costumes for the Kannada film *Gudugudiya Sedhi Nodu* (2018). She had other commitments and asked me to take it up. The director liked my work, and I was roped in as the costume designer for the film," she adds. And then, when one day an artist who was to appear in the film did not turn up for the shoot, the crew asked Sushma to face the camera.

She has acted in the yet-to-be-released Kannada films *Brhamaka* and *Rhymes*. "Rhymes was set for a May 2020 release, but the release

was postponed due to the pandemic," she says. Now, the actor has her eyes set on making a break in Malayalam cinema. Will she quit designing if her career as an actor keeps her busy? "I am passionate about acting and designing, and will try and balance both as long as possible," she adds.

— Shilpa Sebastian R