



From Dindigul, with love

Dindigul Ponram opens its first outlet in Chennai with steaming lamb briyani and hearty dalcha to go with it. We get the first look

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In 1973, a nondescript shack under a tree in Dindigul, found itself at the centre of conversation for its small yet sumptuous fare. Every day, V Ponram Yadav and his wife came together to serve plates of hot mutton biryani using a homemade spice mix. Back then, the restaurant only seated eight. Yet, there was an aspiration to serve many more plates.

Cut to 2024 where Ponram's legacy is being carried on by the fourth generation of his family and expansion is underway.

"Like Hyderabad and Lucknow, Dindigul's biryani has its own heritage. While those varieties use basmati rice, ours is made with fragrant seeraga samba. What sets Dindigul biryani apart is its locally sourced ingredients," says Ramachandran Yadav, Ponram's son.

During our exclusive first look, we see that the new

Chennai outlet features a well-lit, spacious restaurant. Each placemat maps out Dindigul, pointing to where ingredients are sourced from. "Almost everything we use for the biryani comes from in and around Dindigul. For instance, the garlic used is called hill garlic, a special variety with a single clove. It is sourced from Poombarai near Kodaikanal. The cloves are from Thadiyankudisai, and even the green chillies are of the bullet chilli variety sourced locally," shares Ramachandran.



Flavour bomb
(Clockwise from far left) Garlic used by Dindigul Ponram; a view of the restaurant; and the famous biryani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Ponram legacy has evolved with each generation, incorporating modern amenities while staying true to tradition. Today, the chain boasts seven outlets, with only two outside Dindigul. The family also owns dairy farms and processing units, ensuring the ghee for the biryani and milk for the ice cream meet their exacting standards. "Even for our Bengaluru branch, all ingredients are sourced from Dindigul. Quality is paramount – my wife used to taste raw cardamom pods from Thandikudi to gauge their potency and decide the quantity to use," says Ramachandran. "We also use only grass-grazed lamb from Dindigul, ensuring the meat is lean and doesn't overly mellow the spices or make the rice sticky."

The meal begins with hot, spicy lamb bone soup flavoured with ginger, garlic, Virudhunagar chillies, and shallots. Right after,

we are served addictive kola urundais which are fennel-flavoured meatballs that are crunchy on the outside and have a soft and subtly-spiced minced meat core. This is followed by the kari omelette, a Ponram original. This simple egg dish is elevated by spiced meat bits, and tender mutton chukka in a thick, spicy sauce.

Then comes the highlight of the meal, the biryani. Steaming and aromatic, it is served alongside its signature dalcha made with dal and a variant of green brinjal available only in Dindigul. An elumbu kuzhambu (bone broth) is served as a side too. Even a quick, small bite shows that flavours hit the spot. Ramachandran explains, "Biryani is all about balance. We only use ghee, and every ingredient – from the meat to the spices and rice – is in a precise ratio. This recipe is sacrosanct and has been unchanged for decades."

"Back then, travellers to Kodaikanal would stop at Ponram's but eat lightly, fearing a heavy meal would hinder their journey. On their way back, they'd make it a point to enjoy our biryani. Now, 50 years later, we've moved beyond Dindigul. We're ready to serve our signatures to Chennai," Ramachandran says.

Dindigul Ponram is located at 90/35, 1st Street, Ashok Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600083. A meal for two costs approximately ₹1,000.

Bring out the jammies

If welcoming the new year in your pyjamas is your jam, head to Midnight Sun in Nungambakkam where there will be music, dance and a DJ night. A movie corner with screens playing Christmas and New Year films and fun games including drunk jenga and king's cup will add to the festivities. Drinks and starters will be priced at ₹4,999 for a couple, ₹2,999 for stag entry and ₹1,999 for a single woman. Tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.

Florescent adolescence

A neon glasses party by the poolside? Le Royal Meridien is hosting a party that is inclusive of age groups from six to 60 with food, drinks and music starting at ₹1,999. There will be a fashion show, some beatboxing, a fire act and fireworks. Those who arrive with families can choose a dinner at the ballroom. Tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

On the floor, baby

It is that time of the year when there is a mounting pressure of a 'plan on new year's'. Here are the spots to head to on December 31 in Chennai to ring in 2025



When music is the vice

Motta Maadi Music, which has hosted several sing-along concerts, is inviting people from the city to convert Sri Mutha Venkatasubbarao Concert Hall, Chetpet into a party hub. Their sober new year's event promises singing and dancing along to some of Tamil cinema's greatest hits. @2.30pm and 7pm. Tickets priced ₹600 onwards and available on insider.in.

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Turn up the radio

Radio Room's 202.5 FM party will have house DJ Razz cooking up tunes to ring in the new year. Here, couples will need to pay a fully redeemable cover charge of ₹7,500 while stags will pay ₹5,000 and women will need to pay ₹3,000. Stags will have to be accompanied by couples. Last year, about 350 people partied till midnight, says a member of the team. Call 8500005672.

Got the moves?

Fans of electronic dance music and rock can party to songs in these genres playing at Brasa in Egmore. Early bird tickets for stags begins at ₹7,000 whereas early bird couple tickets are priced at ₹12,000. Both are redeemable at the bar. Call: 7299042554 or purchase tickets on bookmyshow and insider.in.

Stars and the silver screen

A movie night with a screening of the cult Tamil film Panchathanthiram starring Kamal Haasan and several other talented actors could be the perfect start to your new year. VGP Golden Beach resort provides the perfect opportunity to do the same. The film will be followed by a DJ set. Tickets start at ₹2,799 and go up till ₹8,700 on bookmyshow and insider.in.



PVR-INOX CINEMAS (Sathyam - Royapettah | Escape - Royapettah | City Centre | Ampa Mall - Aminjikarai | Palazzo - Vadapalani | S2 - Perambur | Grand Mall - Velachery | Grand Galada - Meenambakkam | SKLS - Red Hills | VR Mall - Annanagar | RSL MALL | S2 - Thyagaraja | Luxe | The Marina Mall - OMR | National - Virugambakkam) | CINEPOLIS (BSR Mall) | ANU EGA {Chennai} | DEVI {Chennai} | ANNA THEATRE {Chennai} | SANGAM {Chennai} | KAMALA {Chennai} | WOODLANDS {Chennai} | RAKKI {Chennai} | MURUGAN {Chennai} | MAYAJAL (Kanathur) | KASI TALKIES (Ashok Nagar) | EYP CARNIVAL (Sembarambakkam) | RAKKI (Tiruvallur) | KUMARI (Dhukottai) | MR (Tambaram) | GREEN CINEMAS (Padi) | BABU (Kanchipuram) | KARTHIKEYAN (Kanchipuram) | ARUNA (Kanchipuram) | LATHA CINEMAS (Chengalpet) | SRK (Chengalpet) | VELA CINEMAS (Tirunindravar) | ROHINI (Koyembedu) | SUNDAR (Poonamally) | BAGAVATI (Poonamally) | VENKATESHWARA (Guduvanchery) | SIVASAKTHI (Padi) | GANESH (Anakaputtur) | MANI (Minjur) | RADHA (Redhills) | PANDIYAN (Moolakadai) | C3 CINEMAS (Mamandur) | SR (Madurantakam) | LAKSHMI BALA (Padi) | VETRI (Chrompet) | VETRI (Chrompet) | GK CINEMAS (Porur) | GK CINEMAS (Porur) | GANGA (Kolathur) | DEVIKARUMARI (Virugambakkam).

FARNAZ

Link to luxury

La Maison Syr by Chennai-based Rashi Jain has luxury cufflinks in classic patterns and offbeat designs



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It was a pair of cufflinks in the form of a martini glass and a cocktail shaker – a generational piece passed down from her husband's family – that inspired Rashi Jain to create her own line of cufflinks. The shape and uniqueness of the design intrigued her. She started out designing pieces for her husband. This was in 2009, when she moved to Paris after marriage. As she explored the city, she imbibed all the artistic creations she saw there.

"We moved around quite a bit. We stayed in South Korea, Qatar, the UK. The business started taking shape in Doha. It was 2015, and the city was getting ready for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. We drove around seeing stadiums being built and all the work that went into them. I also used to visit the souks and met pearl divers. All these influences came together in my creations," says Rashi.

"In Qatar, the men who wear the thobe (Qatari national garment), wear cufflinks with it. So, I created a few for a clientele there," says Rashi, who then moved back to Chennai with her family earlier this year. The formal launch of the brand happened last week in the city. The brand is called La Maison Syr, a nod to her time in France and everything she learnt there. "Syr" in French means 'gods'. And it seemed perfect as it also brings together my husband, daughter and my name – Saurabh, Yashica, and Rashi," she explains.

The collection now has 20-odd pieces. These include classic patterns and offbeat designs like Nilgiri tahrs in tailcoats (one holding a Champagne bucket and one, a tray of glasses); the sun and moon; masula boats; a make up box and a poker-faced lady; a hibiscus with a screw

on stigma and filament where you can store a bit of lipstick or kumkum. All the creations are primarily in platinum, gold, and white gold, with sapphire, emerald, ruby and diamond detailing. "I also do bespoke cufflinks; these depict my client's story and personality," she says.

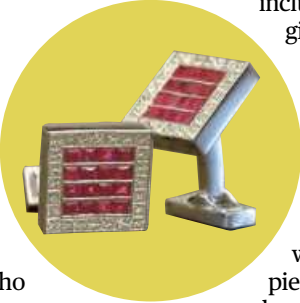
The sparkling pieces are all showcased at Kanakavalli at Kingsley, Ahalya's (founder of Kanakavalli) charming boutique that houses beautifully curated saris and jewellery. "This is the first time I am doing a display. I am nervous," admits Rashi, adding, "Ahalya believed in me and that's how it started."

Rashi comes from a finance background but soon realised that art was her calling. "I did a course at Van Cleef & Arpels - L'Ecole School of Jewelry Arts in Paris, and Lao - Le Arti Oraffe in Florence, Italy, and learnt a lot about jewellery making including how gouache works, how to give shape to an idea on paper, and transform that to wax and learn fabrication challenges before the concept goes in for metal casting, fire enamelling," she adds.

Now, the designer is working on a Him and Hers collection which will have interchangeable pieces that can be used both by men and women as cufflinks and earrings.

While most think of cufflinks as a piece of jewellery, Rashi sees it as a bond. "A cufflink holds two pieces of fabric together. It creates a connection," she smiles. Her days are now filled with ideating, a lot of drawing and more erasing. "Everyday is a school day and I am learning something new."

Available at Kanakavalli at Kingsley, Spur Tank Road. Prices start at ₹2 lakhs.



Design tales (Top and inset) Pieces from La Maison Syr; and (left) Rashi Jain. R RAVINDRAN AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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