



# metro PLUS

THE HINDU

**Tracing India Modern:** Tarun Tahiliani on the evolution of Indian fashion **P2**



## The right answer

**How much do you know about Rajinikanth? Join Chennai's pub quizzing scene, which gets bigger and more competitive every year, to find out**

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To the dulcet strains of 'Ala Pol Vela Pol' from the 1993 film *Yajaman*, I walk into Sin & Tonic in T Nagar where I am greeted by waiters dressed in khaki and checked shirts, sunglasses, and scarves – a very obvious celebration of Rajinikanth from the film *Baasha*.

The crowd trickles in to a playlist of Rajinikanth film songs, and a specially curated Thalaivar cocktail and appetiser menu.

Abhishek Bharathkumar is set to begin the Rajinimania Quiz Night.

Chennai's pubs are where many in the city engage in some spirited competitive banter and revel in the warmth of a trivia community, while winning a prize or two. Over the last couple of years, the burgeoning pub quizzing scene has been welcoming experts and amateurs alike for quiz nights.

"Two-hundred and twenty people signed up for my Rajinikanth Quiz and we had 228 for the AR Rahman one. It was the biggest I'd hosted," says Abhishek who started out conducting quizzes on

Instagram during the pandemic, and moved on to hosting a private quiz at Black Orchid every second Sunday.

His themed quizzes in Sin & Tonic over the last year have had a loyal participant base, with scope for an occasional celebrity sighting.

Cricketer R Ashwin was a participant at his Madras quiz.

Actor Lakshmi Priya Chandramouli, who has participated in Abhishek's Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan, AR Rahman, and Friends quizzes says pop-culture centric themes are a big draw.

"They are a perfect mix of fun and heady nostalgia. Kollywood-themed nights

are so rare in the city's night scene and most of these quizzes involve Tamil music and dance," she says. Typically with five to six rounds, the quizzes have not more than 60 questions, and take place over 90 minutes.

**Friends and banter**  
The charm of getting together with your regular quiz team, and meeting new people along the way is definitely a big draw – something Arjun Mohan especially attests to. Arjun, who has been hosting quizzes at Watson's, Velveteen Rabbit, and Purple Chameleon says that in 2019, it was at a pub quiz that he first met his wife.

"Post the pandemic, we've been seeing more of the younger crowd coming out to participate in these quizzing nights, in addition to those who were once quizzers. The number of neighbourhood pubs in Chennai have increased, and there are so many more options," he explains.

Each venue in Chennai, Arjun says, has a different vibe. "My general quizzes are tailored to these audiences, and every week is different. I like to engage with the

participants, and give them a shot or two when they willingly participate in the banter," he laughs. In March this year, Arjun will be hosting a magnum opus quiz of sorts – to celebrate six years of running the pub quiz at Watson's in Chennai.

With men having dominated the quizzing space for years now, the Chennai demographic seems to have a healthy balance of genders. A regular at Arjun's quizzes, writer-actor Sukanya Umesh says there are a lot more women now, and that the atmosphere has always been welcoming.

The quizmasters and the teams prioritise on keeping the atmosphere fun. "A good 40% of the crowd that comes in are regulars, and 60% is new every edition. We observed that themes focussed on entertainment worked more in terms of audience engagement and participation," says Mridula Vinod of Strikr Integrated, a creative agency working with Sin & Tonic.

"Back then, many people came because it was a completely new concept. However, it is now a trend, and has become an expectation we have from most pubs in the city," says Abishek Swaminathan, an avid quizzer who used to co-host the Madras Pub Quiz.

"The biggest plus here is that you don't have to have a background or experience in quizzing," he says, adding, "If you are looking to dip your toes into quizzing, the chilled out and accommodating pub quizzes are a great place to start."

### Where to go

**Sin & Tonic:** February 1, Friends TV show quiz, by Abhishek Bharathkumar

**Watson's:** January 25 (on all Thursdays) by Arjun Mohan

**Velveteen Rabbit:** January 31 (alternate Wednesdays) by Arjun Mohan

**Purple Chameleon:** January 28 (on all Sundays) by Arjun Mohan

**On the buzzer** At the Rajinimania Quiz Night by Abhishek Bharathkumar; (below) Arjun Mohan. B VELANKANNI RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



**Post the pandemic, we've been seeing more of the younger crowd coming out to participate in these quizzing nights**

ARJUN MOHAN  
Quizmaster

**WHAT'S BALAJI DOING IN SINGAPORE SALOON? P4**



Greater Chennai, but participants can choose to explore other sites to their liking as well.

The event will culminate in a dinner and get-together in the evening, a crucial part of the race, in which friendships are formed and knowledge is shared. "Participants talk about special sightings and their overall experiences," says Vijaya Kumar, "Every year, new participants sign up for the race, for whom this will be an eye-opener. They can also hear seasoned birders talk about habitat change over the years, among other issues."

Vijaya Kumar has been part of the race since its inception, and says that a lot of participants have gone on to become MNS members. "The simple exercise has triggered an interest in everyday people understanding our biodiversity, and the city they live in," he says, "This is something very peaceful to be part of, in which one pauses to look at a bird that flies by."

February 3, From 6am to 6pm. To register, visit blackbuck.org.in, write to madrasnaturalistsociety@gmail.com.

## On a wing

Get set to count birds at the Chennai Bird Race, a dawn-to-dusk activity by the Madras Naturalists' Society



**Akila Kannadasan**  
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At the beginning of every year, birders young and old in Chennai, set out before daybreak, notebooks and binoculars in hand. The Madras Naturalists' Society's (MNS) HSBC Chennai Bird Race has become a ritual for seasoned birders as well as novices interested in the natural world. Organised by MNS for India BirdRaces, the event is back with its 17th edition.

According to G Vijaya Kumar, honorary secretary of MNS, this year's event will contribute to understanding the effect of climate change on birds and their migratory patterns. "Since we've

had good rains recently, water levels in wetlands are high in some places, and low at others," he says, adding that it will be interesting to see how this has affected birds. The focus, will hence be on noticing if there is a change in the number of species being spotted every year.

The race has contributed to understanding Chennai's many winged residents and visitors over the years, and also documenting the landscape of a constantly changing city. The race is open to anyone interested in birding, and participation is in teams of four. MNS provides a document with birding sites in

**Look up!** Anyone interested in Nature can participate.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT





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## A well-knit journey

### Catch celebrated designer

Tarun Tahiliani in a free-wheeling chat at *The Hindu* Litfest on the evolution of Indian fashion, Bollywood, and his new book



**Priyadarshini Paitandy**  
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Other than sartorial breakthroughs, among Tarun Tahiliani's other terms is the term 'India Modern'. Which in simple terms means taking India as an inspiration and updating it to our modern life.

"Whether you take the maharajahs or the Kumbh, or like in my case the beautiful dhonis from Kutch, how do we translate that in modern life? Simple. India modern is very rooted in India but it's

the updated contemporary version," explains the designer who is set to make his debut at *The Hindu* Litfest 2024 this weekend, where he will discuss his new retrospective book *Tarun Tahiliani: Journey to India Modern* with Rosella Stephen, Editor, *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*.

Tarun started his career as a retailer in 1987 with the launch of the multi-designer store Ensemble in Mumbai. Three years later, he went to design school.

"I did not feel comfortable putting my name on clothes until I had seven to eight years of experience because I want things to be of a



certain standard," says Tarun, who launched his book last November (published by Roli Books) at Art Mumbai 2023.

The book was mooted as an idea to celebrate his 25 years in the fashion industry in 2020. "My wife felt it was a vanity project," laughs Tarun, adding, "But I felt there was a story to tell because we were so obsessed with maharajas and embroidery that I feel

there is a much greater drape story and a more nuanced way of inference of the way we take inspiration."

What can the audience expect at his session at *The Hindu* Litfest?

"I am quite candid in my views on stylists, Bollywood, new money, old culture and multiple more. So it'll be freewheeling,"

**Thread talk** Models Lisa Haydon (left) and Carol Gracias (below) in outfits designed by Tarun Tahiliani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

says Tarun.

The book features guest articles by Nonita Kalra and Sujata Assomull, fashion journalists whose works Tarun admires. The book, he says, is for students, for people in fashion, for those interested in contemporary India.

There is a chapter dedicated to the concept sari that Tarun brought to life a few decades ago. "The concept sari was based on a very simple idea that they wear in South India. Also, I think I saw someone with an embroidered petticoat. We had done this in the early '90s then we dropped it because the idea was ahead of its time. We also did saris that were very short and worn mid-calf," says Tarun.

Among Tarun's career-defining drapes are many simple inventions that have evolved, like the dhoti jumpsuit. "There are a few breakthrough moments," says Tarun, who believes that the secret to being a successful designer is to have your own definition of success. "It is not just the money you make. Certainly for me I don't define myself with which actress wears what. I look at that as a byproduct of what we do."

He loves going to his studio. That is his happy space. "If I can push my own boundaries and provide employment, keep crafts alive and inspire, I think that's a life well-lived."

*Journey to India Modern* is on January 27, 12.50pm to 1.45pm at Sir Mutha Concert Hall, Harrington Road

## Staying true to your shelf

*The Hindu* has been creating portals to literary worlds, old and new, ahead of Lit Fest 2024 on January 26 and 27. Here is how to participate

### Date with the Cholas

Author Kalki Krishnamurthy's *Ponniyin Selvan*, recently made into a two-part movie, came alive on the beach sands of Thiruvanmiyur on January 21. The screening by *The Hindu* was done in partnership with Lyca Productions and Madras Talkies. It was supported by Greater Chennai Corporation with Urbaser Sumeet as the hygiene partner.



**The Hindu** Lit Fest is on January 26 and 27 at the Sir Mutha Venkata Subbarao Concert Hall, Harrington Road.

Register for the workshops — bilingual translation workshop (January 26, 10.30am), creative writing workshop for young adults (January 26, 2.30pm), mobile photography workshop by Chennai Photo Biennale (January 27, 10.30am), and an art interpretation workshop (January 27, 4pm) — at <https://www.thehindu.com/litfest/workshop/>.

The festival is presented by GSquare, in association with NITTE Deemed to be University and Christ University. The knowledge partner is Vellore Institute of Technology. Associate partner: Blue Star; FIIT JEE; Navrathan Jewellers; Shiv Nadar University, Delhi; Author lounge partner: VFS Global; Food partner: WOW! Momo; Education partner: SSVM Institutions, Coimbatore; Bookstore partner: Higginbothams; Water partner: Repute; Gift partner: Anand Prakash and Hospitality partner: Taj Coromandel; The Brew Room.

To register for the event, visit <https://newsth.live/THLitfest> or scan the given QR code.

### Spinning yarns

Young children from Chennai schools in Anna Nagar, Kodambakkam, Adyar and Tondiarpet tuned into an interactive storytelling workshop by Debjani Bhaduri and Mathiazhagan who came dressed as clowns. The students also told their own stories at this workshop organised by *The Hindu* along with ACEnovation.



### A moveable feast

*The Hindu*'s mobile library has had a steady stream of visitors at several pit stops across Chennai. Books across genres including fiction, classic literature, philosophy and science made their rounds in prominent public spaces like Besant Nagar, Semmozhi Poonga, Mylapore and Vengambakkam. The mobile van will be stationed at Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall on January 26 and 27.

**Breaking bread** More than 100 guests at Hanu Reddy's 156 ft table dine on a menu curated by Chef Regi Mathew (below). SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

by talking about how it "represents the meals we eat at home everyday. The hospitality, the abundance, the flavours..."

He talked of how, as a child, he would come to the same orchard. "My father would supervise the mango tree planting, while my mother cooked a chicken curry over a kerosene stove, because we had no electricity here then. I still get hungry when I think of that chicken."

Dinner is theatrical, with about 200-odd students from SRM College serving the guests each course with a synchronisation that clearly comes from hours of practice. "We did campus interviews and chose them from about 800 students, then had the manager from Masque in Mumbai train them. What you do in the institute and what you do in the industry is very different," says Regi.

A high-tech 8,000 sq foot kitchen was also built for the dinner, complete with a confectionary area for desserts, a lounge for the chefs, and a room for plating.

"With top chefs coming, we decided we needed to create infrastructure for them," says Regi, adding that the structure can now be used for future events.

At what Hanu Reddy referred to as the "happiest dining table in the universe," dinner is memorable, though it does take over three hours to cover 10 courses, with short videos on the chefs and dishes shown in between. When the last course, a passion fruit and coconut aïs kachang, served in polished coconut shells, by Chef Vinesh Johny of Lavonne, is sent out, the kitchen erupts into cheers as the chefs finally relax.

Then more than a hundred people rise to give them a standing ovation.



## A table for a hundred

Chef Regi Mathew curated Hanu's table, at the heart of a mango orchard, bringing together some of India's most talented chefs as a tribute to traditional, regional home cooking

**Shonali Muthalaly**  
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We gather under a tamarind tree at sundown. Set at the heart of a mango orchard, the space seems an unlikely setting for a collaboration by some of India's finest chefs.

Hanu Reddy, the owner of Raghava Farms — best known for its summer mango tourism events — dramatically beckons diners to follow him, accompanied by music that works up to a crescendo as we walk to our destination, a few minutes away: a 156-ft long wooden table set for dinner with flowers, strings of ruby red chillies and crockery.

Hanu's Table, which seated about 104 diners, was rather under the radar last week, despite a whopping price tag of ₹1 lakh per head, because the tickets sold out shortly after it was announced. Titled India's Culinary

Odyssey, and curated by Chef Regi Mathew (best known for his restaurant Kappa Chakka Kandhari), the event on Saturday brought together talented chefs from Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and other parts of India, to cook a 10-course meal.

"The mood and spirit inside the kitchen was electrifying," said Regi, soon after the event. While each chef cooked one course, during dinner service everyone pitched in to help with the final touches and every course was sent out with cheers and claps.

The theme for the evening was a tribute to mothers, and the food was wholesome and rooted in tradition,



but put together with contemporary cooking techniques and served with stylish plating.

Chef Avinash Martins from Goa's Cavatina, for instance, made flaky sea bass cloaked in fermented sun-dried tomato rechado. Chef Varun Totlani of Masque in Mumbai served mud crab with fluffy, just-baked pav. Chef Mythrayie Iyer from Farmlore in Bengaluru formed mini ragi mudde, fragrant with ghee, and served them in a creamy bottle gourd soup, while Chef Regi Mathew made a comforting dish of pidi, or rice dumplings, in coconut milk, served with chicken curry.

Regi said, "We have such a rich culinary heritage, we wanted to showcase the potential of Indian food, and to take it to the next level."

Hanu Reddy, the host, prefaced dinner

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**W**rapped in a blue sari, armed with bangles and a bindi, a stocky middle-aged woman peeks out of acclaimed Indian artist Thota Vaikuntam's framed artwork. She is surrounded by designer wear, greenery, and a few other friends who share almond-eyed glances while clad in vibrant clothes.

The silence of an art gallery is recreated well at Collage, a multi-designer boutique housed in a 70-year-old Art Deco house in Nungambakkam. At the entrance, past the greenery and lounging cats, stand three framed pieces from Vaikuntam's collection.

Seeking Vaikuntam, a collaborative exhibition between Artworld Sarala's Art Centre and Collage showcases pieces from Thota Vaikuntam's collection over the last decade. These timeless pieces are presented alongside contemporary luxury fashion from three brands — Amrich, II.II, and Rasa.

"Thota Vaikuntam is a mascot for art from Telangana, so we thought this kind of fusion would be interesting to see how art influences fashion and fashion influences art," says Anahita Banerjee, director of Artworld Sarala's Art Centre.

These clothing brands were



Explore the blend of art and fashion at Collage's Seeking Vaikuntam exhibition

**Art infused**  
Thota Vaikuntam's art at Collage. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

meticulously chosen to complement the art. Their ethos lies in organic, fair practices of fashion without the use of any chemicals. "We're not an art gallery or a space where you come in exclusively for the art. So in parallel, we picked three fashion brands that employ hands for their work, like block printing, or shibori. We cheekily tried to bring in clothes of a similar colour palette because we did not want to dilute from the art," says Lata Madhu, founder of Collage.

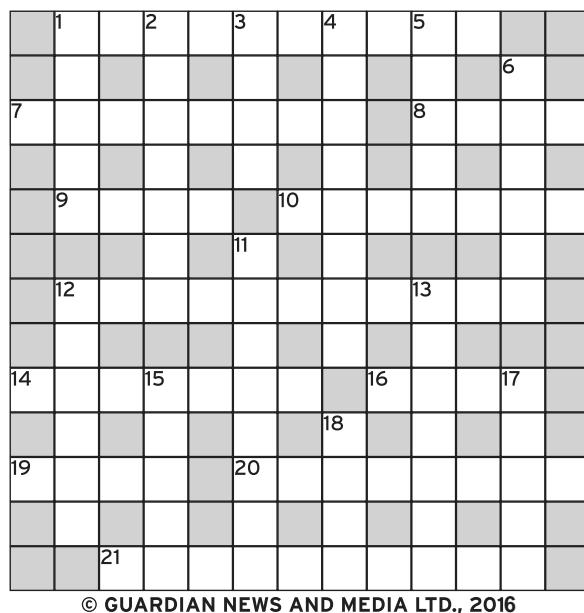
Curating an art exhibition is an art in itself. Galleries around the world are often minimalist because the art is the main focus. "It is the art that brings life to the space. I think the key is to not distract from the art, and we have tried to complement it with fashion," she adds.

The oldest artwork on display is a 32-year-old rare frame of a lady in white. The piece belongs to Lata who bought it when she was only 22. "This is from the White series, which is no longer painting. She brought so much colour into my life when I was in a sterile, lifeless apartment in the US," she says, adding that her favourite part about Vaikuntam's art is that he makes his women voluptuous, with relatable body types.

Seeking Vaikuntam is on display at Collage, Rutland Gate, Nungambakkam until January 26 from 11am to 7pm.



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13569



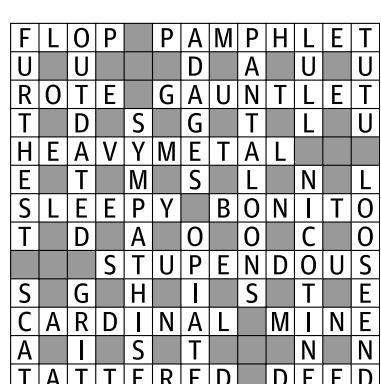
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Across

- 1 High-rise building (5,5)
- 7 Singling (anag) — a cocktail (3,5)
- 8 Pointed remark (4)
- 9 Price paid by traveller (4)
- 10 Laboured (7)
- 12 Penmanship (11)
- 14 Wealthy and privileged people (3,4)
- 16 Stare open-mouthed (4)
- 19 Mumble drunkenly (4)
- 20 Steadfast (8)
- 21 Bosses (10)
- Down**
- 1 He follows beggar man in rhyme (5)
- 2 Layabout (7)
- 3 Coot or moorhen, for example (4)
- 4 Flat-bottomed barges (8)



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



Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 1, 2024.

**Solution No.**

13568



**Swing and serve** Actors Arya and Redin Kingsley at the pickleball court in Chennai's Express Avenue mall. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND THAMODHARAN BHARATH

## Be a sport

Fancy a game of pickleball? Check out Chennai's latest sporting arena, Ice Water

### Srinivasa Ramanujam

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**A**ctors Arya and Redin Kingsley pick up their paddles and get ready for a fight. Even as onlookers cheer, Arya and Redin rally with their opponents.

The first pickleball match at Ice Water, Chennai's latest sports arena at Express Avenue (EA) mall, is underway. This is the first time Arya, an actor who plays football and badminton regularly, tried his hand at this fast-growing sport. "I've heard a lot about it and wanted to try it out," says the actor.

There will be more matches in the days to come. For the uninitiated, pickleball incorporates components of tennis, table tennis and badminton. Aspiring players of this sport now have a brand new facility spread over 20,000 sq. ft., which boasts three open-air pickleball courts and a 100-capacity seating pavilion.

At Ice Water, there is also a futsal arena that is adaptable for box cricket. Redin Kingsley, who also stays in the E-Residences located close by, says, "Sports is crucial and such facilities will be a big boost to Chennai's sporting enthusiasts."

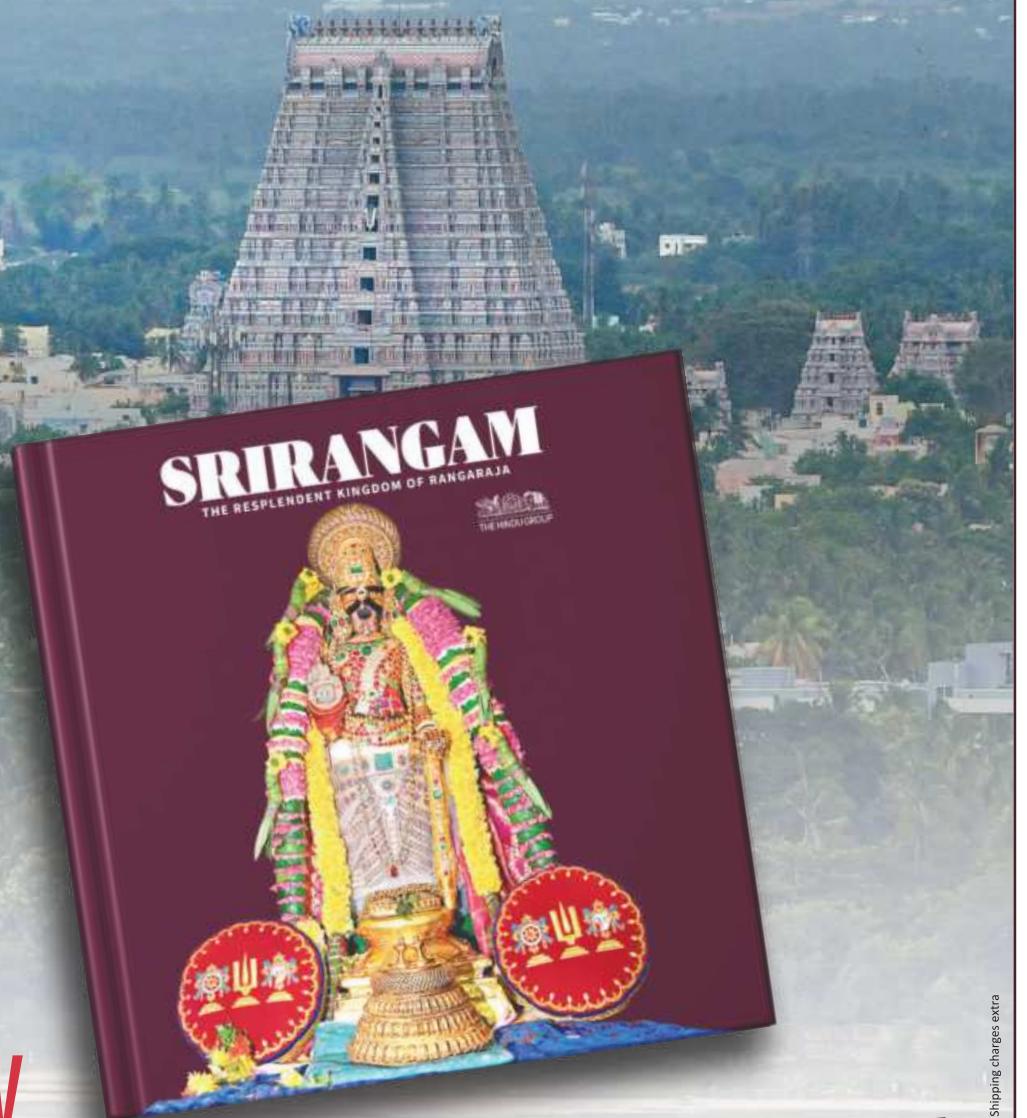
*Ice Water sports arena is located in Express Avenue and open from 6am onwards. For bookings, log on to icewater.in/web or call 7845776742*



*Ice Water sports arena is located in Express Avenue and open from 6am onwards. For bookings, log on to icewater.in/web or call 7845776742*

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# Ennore's ghosts and dreams

Through Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams, artists show us that the wetlands and fishing grounds have become tiny specks in this once-thriving landscape

### Sanjana Ganesh

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"In aspiring to make Chennai a good city, we threw Ennore under the bus," says environmental activist Nityanand Jayaraman.

Since early December, the deeply damaging oil spill and a gas leak at Ennore has manifested in the form of protests, research into the ecological impact of the oil spill and the people who have inhaled ammonia.

On January 26, 27 and 28, an art exhibition titled Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams, invites the people of Chennai city, living a comfortable 20 kilometres away from the location of



**Maps and faces** Some of the artists exhibiting at Ashvita's Art Gallery. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rajesh – who have spent time in the Ennore-Pulicat region.

Satwik Gade, the curator of the art exhibit, says that visitors will be able to see cartographic storytelling through vibrant maps displaying a changing Ennore landscape.

Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams is at Ashvita's Art Gallery, 2nd Street, RK Salai, Mylapore on January 26 (3.30pm onwards), 27 and 28 (10am onwards). For details, contact 8807278544 or check @thegoodcity on Instagram.

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**Let's Start!**



## DIRECTOR'S CUT

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**A**fter casting an alcoholic as the hero in *Idharkuthane Aasaipattai Balakumara*, a con artist in *Kashmora* and a comical gangster in *Junga*, director Gokul is back, and this time, his protagonist is in a more mainstream profession. The filmmaker is teaming up with RJ Balaji for *Singapore Saloon*, in which the latter plays a hair stylist.

"The idea took shape when I met a hair stylist on the sets of *Kashmora*. He was a stylish chap whose attitude and attire attracted

rained precisely till 8.30 pm and stopped. It feels like a lot of positive things fell into place for this film to happen.

**Q:** *RJ Balaji's films have been mostly with his close associates. Only recently, he has started working with new collaborators. Tell us about this collaboration?*

**A:** Every protagonist of mine will have their own characteristics that I take an effort to script. That said, we have to take other aspects, such as the film's business, into consideration. Producer Ishari Ganesh sir really liked the story and this is one of the most expensive films for Balaji. The story itself is about an ordinary man fighting the odds, and so, I needed an artist without an

image or the need for heroism.

**Q:** *Apart from the lead star, all your films also have senior actors in well-etched roles...*

**A:** It comes down to creativity. For example, in *Idharkuthane...*, I came up with the 'annachi sugar patient' trope for Pasupathy's character. That opened up a whole new set of



**Singapore Saloon is about an ordinary man fighting the odds, and so, I needed an actor without an image or the need for heroism**

**GOKUL**  
Director

me. I based my protagonist on him." Excerpts from an interview:

**Question:** Given how each of your films is in a different genre, what defines your style?

**Answer:** Having no style is my style (laughs). I wonder if I should have just stuck to similar stories and I would've been known for a particular style of films. But it doesn't excite me to do the same story again.

*Singapore Saloon* is special because of the miracles that happened behind the scenes. I had a scene in the rain and for that, I needed lorries of water to make a dry, long stretch of tarmac look wet. The permission to shoot was after 10 pm and it

was a bit funny to the audience."

"The idea took shape when I met a hair stylist on the sets of *Kashmora*. He was a stylish chap whose attitude and attire attracted

**Filmmaker Gokul on the inspiration behind the RJ Balaji-starring *Singapore Saloon*, releasing today**

**Beauty matters** RJ Balaji in a still from *Singapore Saloon*; (below) Gokul.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

situations. My films are performance-based; that's why actors find working with me to be tough, but love me after seeing the final output. Working with someone like Sathyaraj sir showed me the layers of acting a seasoned actor brings to the table. Every time I see the film, there's a nuance in some scene that he surprises me with.

**Q:** Your protagonists are either over-the-top characters or silent and intense. Are they intentionally-written traits?

**A:** It depends on the story, just like how our reactions are based on the circumstances.

Kashmora is a fraud, so he has to be a loudmouth and Junga is a miser and that's why even his moustache is small. The characterisation extends to even the look and attire. I sometimes feel comedy isn't valued much these days. Comedy can't stand on its own and works only when emotions are added to it. *Love Today* is a perfect example of this. Similarly, my film also has a wow factor in the end.

**Q:** Is Corona Kumar still on the cards? At your film's audio launch, Vijay Sethupathi asked you to come up with a script featuring him and Sathyaraj. Will that materialise too?

**A:** My next film is *Corona Kumar* and it will be the end of the comical cycle I embarked on. It belongs to the *Idharkuthane...* universe but will be 10 times more fun. I cannot do a film in which both Sathyaraj sir and Vijay Sethupathi are heroes, but they can be villains! Let's see how it goes.

## On the same pitch

**Actors Shanthnu and Prithvi Rajan on upcoming sports drama *Blue Star***

**Bhuvanesh Chandar**

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**F**or those who spent their youth playing cricket in the streets and public grounds in the late Nineties, the game held a special place. That long-gone era is the period to which filmmaker S Jayakumar wishes to take you with his upcoming film, *Blue Star*, set to release in theatres this Friday. Produced by Pa Ranjith's Neelam Productions, and starring Ashok Selvan, Shanthnu, Keerthi Pandian, Prithvi Rajan and Dhivya Duraisamy among others, *Blue Star* is a sports drama that explores the lives of a bunch of cricket-frenzy youngsters in Arakkonam, Chennai, in the Nineties.

For actors like Shanthnu and Prithvi, who witnessed the boom of street cricket in their

childhood, *Blue Star* was quite the experience. "Going back to Arakkonam, playing that form of cricket, wearing a pad on just one leg, and running in just slippers was a lot of fun."

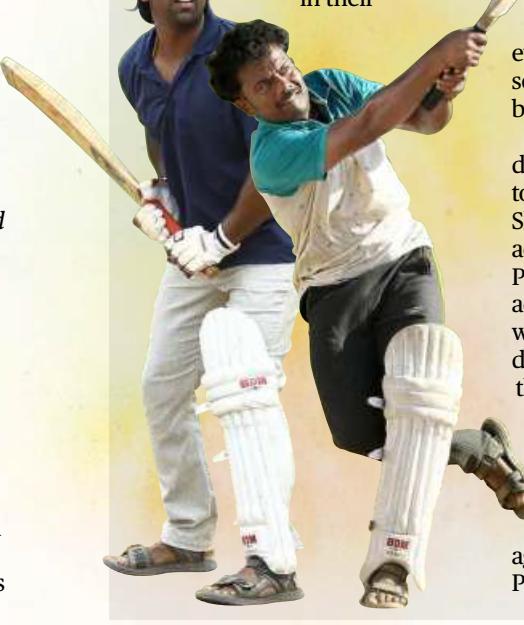
Apart from being a sports drama, the film is also a political drama that draws parallels between sports and life. "It speaks of the politics between two teams or between players of the same team, and how the politics from outside disrupts things on the ground," adds Shanthnu.

In *Blue Star*, Shanthnu plays Rajesh, a young man who takes on Ranjith (Ashok Selvan's character) in the playground. Shanthnu has no qualms in saying that though he likes Rajesh, his favourite character in *Blue Star* is the one played by Prithvi. Prithvi plays Sam, Ranjith's younger brother.

Prithvi says, "Sam is a nice guy who does things out of impulse. Also, whatever he does in the film, even though he does with serious intentions, would look a bit funny to the audience."

Shanthnu and Prithvi share a decades-long friendship, thanks to how close their families are. Shanthnu is the son of veteran actor-director K Bhagyaraj while Prithvi is the son of ace actor-filmmaker Pandiarajan, who started as an assistant director to Bhagyaraj. *Blue Star* is the third film in which both actors share the screen, after *Vaaimai* and *Kasada Thapara*.

"We have played a lot of cricket together and I am happy that cricket has once again brought us together," says Prithvi.



**The folk route**  
Mohanlal in *Malaikottai Vaaliban*; (below) Lijo Jose Pellissery.

## Tales of a warrior

**Lijo Jose Pellissery on his Mohanlal-starrer *Malaikottai Vaaliban*, releasing this week**

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**W**ith hair knotted in a bun and dressed in vintage clothes, a man roars while dragging two heavy ropes. This was filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery's introduction of Mohanlal's character in his new film, *Malaikottai Vaaliban*.

The trailer that followed showed a sneak peak of a tale of romance, treachery, valour and redemption. Shot in Jaisalmer and Puducherry, cinematographer Madhu Neelakandan's frames depict a scarred and battle-worn land set in a different time, and the presence of a hardened warrior.

Releasing on January 25, the film has created waves of excitement as Lijo and Mohanlal come together for their first project. Although it was originally planned in Tamil, Lijo altered the idea to something larger, especially in terms of the character and the landscape. "There is the feel of a folk tale to the whole story but I wanted the vocabulary to be rooted in the soil. I knew that Rafeeq (scenarist) would be the best person to get the language right."

Agreeing that Mohanlal's prowess as a prize-winning wrestler during his college days certainly helped in fleshing out the character, Lijo says it was merely one of the factors to cast the actor in the lead. "I wanted to use a very Indian terrain and the



characters to be rooted in that background. But I have taken elements from around the globe, from the Samurai culture in Japan and from Westerns."

Lijo used to be fascinated by cinematic extravaganzas and remembers watching the first day, first show of movies like *Thalapathi* and *Koilikkam*. "*Malaikottai Vaaliban* is for that wonderstruck cine fan in us. Just the dialogues are enough to understand the vibe of the character. He is a hero, not anyone from real life."

Lijo's deep interest in Tamil films was evident in his previous film, *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*, where he had used songs and dialogues from Tamil films to give the flavour of a different era. *Malaikottai Vaaliban* also seems to have a Tamil influence. Is the title a tribute to the Tamil classic *Vanjkottai Vaaliban*?

"There is a definitely a Tamil flavour to the film. My maternal grandfather was from Tamil Nadu. I grew up watching Tamil legends on screen such as MGR and Gemini Ganesan," chuckles Lijo.

