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Art exhibition Udal, explores
the body in all its multitudes and forms **P3**

GEETHA KAILASAM ON BECOMING ANGAMMAL P4



IT'S TIME TO GET RAJINI-FIED

On the eve of Rajinikanth's birthday and his golden jubilee in films, theatres will roar again. With a couple of his classics returning to the big screen, fans are gearing up to celebrate his style and charisma once more

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Weekends are incomplete without watching Rajinikanth films on television. For many Tamil households, a relaxing day invariably means catching a Superstar film on the telly. Whether the actor is taking on a dreaded don (*Baasha*) or his own mother-in-law (*Maapilai*), the comedy and action sequences serve as wholesome entertainment for the family.

Many such Rajinikanth films have regaled TV audiences – some even decades after their theatrical release. *Padayappa*, however, remained elusive. The 1999 blockbuster was telecast just a couple of times. It was not available on any OTT platform. All this because Rajinikanth – the lead actor, producer and story writer of *Padayappa* – carefully shielded it from public eye. “I did not give the rights to any telecast player, despite multiple requests. I wanted people to watch it only on the big screen. It should be a *kondattam* (celebration) for fans on my 50th year in cinema,” Rajinikanth said, in a special video released recently.

Twenty-five years after its theatrical run, *Padayappa* finally re-releases on Rajinikanth’s birthday (December 12). Directed by KS Ravikumar, the film also stars Sivaji Ganesan, Ramya Krishnan, Soundarya and Abbas, among others, in main roles.

Apart from being celebrated for Rajinikanth’s style and panache, *Padayappa* remains unforgettable for the role of the

scheming Neelambari (played by Ramya Krishnan), whose face-off with Rajinikanth forms the most crucial part of the storyline.

‘Aishwarya Rai was not interested’
Kalki Krishnamurthy’s trailblazing *Ponniyin Selvan* has long served as an inspiration to many creative personalities. Rajinikanth is no exception.

The superstar was so smitten by the novel – and the writing of one of the female leads, Nandini – that he wanted to shape something similar. *Padayappa* was a result of that itch. “Every time I thought of the villainous female lead we had written (Neelambari), Aishwarya Rai kept coming to mind,” said Rajinikanth, “I really wanted her to play it. She was extremely busy at that time, but I realised that she was not interested in it.”



We initially wanted Aishwarya Rai to play the villainous female role of Neelambari. But, we finally zeroed in on Ramya Krishnan, whose performance everyone loved

RAJINIKANTH

The team considered other names like Sridevi, Meena and Madhuri Dixit, but they were scouting for someone whose eyes reflected arrogance and temerity. “One day, he (director Ravikumar) called me up from Hyderabad and suggested Ramya Krishnan’s name. I was not convinced initially, but after the look test, we felt that she would pull it off.”

It was a decision that would not only change Ramya Krishnan’s fortunes in the film industry, but also give Tamil cinema one of its best female villains.

And what about Aishwarya Rai? She went on to act with Rajinikanth in Shankar’s *Enthiran* (2010), and also played Nandini in Mani Ratnam’s cinematic version of *Ponniyin Selvan*.

Memories of a hit
Padayappa, which has music by AR Rahman, was completed within 70 days, thanks to the efforts of director Ravikumar and production manager PL Thenappan.

The climax featured more than 10,000 people, a sequence shot with difficulty in Mysore.

“*Padayappa* is close to my heart,” said Rajini, “It gave me the chance to closely interact with Sivaji Ganesan, who praised me saying that I was doing multiple things in life, like visiting the Himalayas and doing only one project at a time, despite having the chance to make a lot of money. The days I spent shooting for this film are close to my heart. I like the ‘punch’ dialogues in the film. In fact, right now, we are trying to work out its sequel, titled *Neelambari*. If things fall in place, that project will be announced soon for fans.”

That might take time, but this Friday (December 12), *Padayappa* will return to the big screen after 25 years. With Rajinikanth completing 50 years in the industry – a feat for which he was honoured at the recent IFFI 2025 – fans will get a chance to celebrate the Superstar’s style and charisma on the big screen once again.

Tale of a superstar



Director Suresh Krissna with Rajinikanth.

Suresh Krissna’s happiest moment as a director arrived near the steps of Maris Theatre in Tiruchi. “Nobody knew me. I had done Kamal Haasan’s *Sathyam* and a couple of Telugu films, but here I was, watching my film, *Annamalai*, starring Rajinikanth, with audiences,” recalls the Tamil filmmaker, about that day in June 1992.

That was the third day post release – the film was already declared a hit – when someone in the audience recognised Suresh as the director of the film. “A huge crowd gathered outside. They carried me, from the steps of the theatre to my car. They were overjoyed that I had made such a wholesome film with their Thalaivar.”

The Tamil director, known for his four films with Rajinikanth (*Annamalai*, *Veera*, *Baasha* and *Baba*) and two with Kamal Haasan (*Sathyam* and *Aalavandan*), is excited as *Annamalai* is scheduled to re-release this week.

Annamalai, a film based on the friendship between a poor milkman (Rajinikanth) and a rich hotelier (Sarah Babu), will be remembered for many things: its title card music, introduction song, Deva’s tracks and ‘punch’ dialogues. Based on the 1987 Hindi film *Khudgarz*, which itself was inspired by Jeffrey Archer’s classic book *Kane and Abel*, *Annamalai* was a superhit and is widely considered as among the actor’s best films.

So, how did Suresh crack the friendship angle and tailor-make it to suit Tamil audiences? “Someone else was supposed to direct the film, and that did not work out... and I walked into this project 48 hours before the shoot. There was absolutely no script. Though it was based on a Hindi film, we had to change the whole storyline to suit Rajinikanth’s persona. We completely went with the flow, sometimes without even knowing what scene would be canned the next day.”

With Rajinikanth completing 50 years in cinema, Suresh hopes that the celebrations will continue in the theatres.

“So many people still share memes with *Annamalai*’s escalator scene,” smiles Suresh, adding “I know many people who still have the ‘Vetri Nichayam’ motivational track as their mobile phone ringtone. People who watch it today will revisit those times when cinema was all about fun and entertainment, and the youngsters who watch it might think, ‘Yes man, they did good cinema back then.’”

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Heritage in step
Aruna Sairam, Shankar Mahadevan and Sudha Ragunathan at Marvellous Margazhi.
S SHIVA RAJ

Chennai's celebrated Carnatic stars are preparing for the December music season

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Nithyashree Mahadevan is practising a rare *kriti* that her legendary grandmother (Carnatic vocalist DK Pattamal) once used to sing. Sudha Ragunathan is keeping herself physically and mentally fit for a busy month ahead. And, Aruna Sairam is looking forward to attending multiple concerts as a listener.

Nithyashree, Sudha and Aruna – three leading lights of the Carnatic music fraternity in Chennai – are as excited about the Margazhi music season as thousands of *rasikas*, not just in Chennai but from across the globe.

December is here and so is the Margazhi music season.

Even as Chennai prepares for a nip in the air in the evenings and early mornings, and occasional showers, the city is gearing up to celebrate music and dance with fervour. Tracing its roots back to 1927's All India Music Conference, the December music season has today grown into one of the most defining cultural markers and celebration of the arts.

A song for all

"The preparation is 24*7," says Nithyashree Mahadevan, who has been working on how to present her concerts in the season, "I have been thinking about reviving some old compositions; for instance, there is a rare composition – 'Buddhiradhu' – set in Sankarabharanam *raga* that my grandmother taught me when I was a child. I want to present it during the season concert."

For Sudha Ragunathan, the preparation is largely internal; she is currently practising meditation in



Margazhi ready

preparation for the busy concert schedule. What else does she do? "Eating the right things, exercising a lot, and sleeping more. When the physique is strong and supportive of the voice, the voice speaks for itself," she explains.

It is not just vocalists who thrive during the season; instrumentalists and accompanying artistes are much sought-after as well, even as they hop from one performance to another. Mridangam legend

Umayalapuram K Sivaraman, one of the senior most musicians in the circuit, knows a thing or two about that.

Currently 90, Sivaraman – who has been performing in the season from 1955 – is a big cheerleader for this celebration of the arts. "I remember playing at a pandal in the Music Academy premises long before the building came up," he recalls, "Playing in the season for more than 70 years feels special."

Tradition takes flight

Can the performing arts be celebrated on the ramp? It can, as was proved on Tuesday evening at Marvellous Margazhi, a unique event in which popular stars of the music and cultural fraternity hit the ramp. Even as they walked and danced their way on it, *rasikas* cheered on in what was an evening that honoured tradition, celebrated excellence and inspired future generations to embrace India's cultural heritage. Conceptualised by Lakshmi and Saraswathi of Event Art and held at Radisson Blu GRT, Marvellous Margazhi witnessed several graceful moments. Even as the legendary dancing couple, the Dhananjayans, broke into an impromptu gig, Carnatic vocalists Aruna Sairam and Sudha Ragunathan shared a warm camaraderie with legendary danseuse Padma Subrahmanyam on stage. "This is like a dream team," says Lakshmi, "This season, we also had performers from folk and jazz styles walk the ramp, because we feel artistes across genres have to be celebrated."



With each passing year, the beauty and splendour of Margazhi is growing in leaps and bounds."

The season attracts music aficionados not just from Chennai and Tamil Nadu, but also the world-over. Thanks to its generous exposure to the arts and delicious food on offer – the *sabha* canteens are a hotspot for food enthusiasts during Margazhi. The season also attracts many NRIs and expats, who usually plan a trip to the city in December, as it also coincides with Christmas and New Year holidays.

Multi-genre musician and Breathless singer Shankar Mahadevan has a dream: to stay in Chennai for three days to experience this musical bliss. "What happens in Chennai during the music season happens nowhere in the world. I want to come down from Mumbai and experience three days of sabha-hopping and do nothing else. I want to have breakfast, lunch and dinner in the *sabha* canteens, and experience *kucheris* on all the three days. It has been my dream to do this. Someday, I will."

(Below)Nithyashree Mahadevan; (left) Lakshmi and Saraswathi with Vikram Cotah of GRT Hotels.

A quintessential Coimbatore collaboration launches filter coffee and rose milk lip balms

How to bottle a memory

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C an a filter kaapi lip balm really transport you back to that unforgettable sip of filter coffee? Intrigued, I tried it and my doubts disappeared with the first swipe. The buttery lip balm leaves a subtle brown tint and carries the comforting aroma of Hotel Annapoorna filter coffee. "We have bottled a memory," says Jegan Damodarasamy, CEO of Annapoorna.

Coimbatore-based Annapoorna and Vilvah, a sustainable skincare brand, have partnered to launch two limited-edition lip balms – Coffee Brown and Rose Milk Pink. Jegan says the collaboration is rooted deeply in nostalgia, sustainability, and the shared ethos of two homegrown brands.

The idea came from Annapoorna's signature 100% Arabica filter coffee. The restaurant brews nearly 250 kilograms of coffee a day, and the grounds are discarded.

Jegan realised they still contain antioxidants and compounds beneficial for skincare. "Can we repurpose this into something useful?", he

thought, and this eventually led to the launch of the lip balms. "Vilvah is a bootstrapped brand that aligned with our values," he reasons.

Kruthika Kumaran, CEO and founder of Vilvah says this partnership has emotional resonance in the Kongu region. "My first instinct was to create a product that has a sensory element, a connection to taste and nostalgia, and appeals to a wide audience. A lip balm felt ideal, capable of carrying a fragrance that evokes memory."

However, developing the product came with challenges, especially getting the flavour right with the unique roasting and blend notes. The lip balm formula has 26 natural ingredients, each with its own note. Masking every note and still bringing out Annapoorna's signature coffee fragrance required intense trials and many R&D iterations. The biggest hurdle was recreating gloss and glide without using silicones, mineral oils, and petroleum derivatives.

To Jegan, this is more than a product, a statement that homegrown brands can create trendsetting ideas that enrich customers in a meaningful, emotional way.

Priced at ₹395 each or ₹699 for the duo.



Matilda comes alive

A to Zee Creativity returns with its annual play, featuring talented young actors aged seven to 17. This year, two full casts – Cast A and Cast B – will alternate performances. The production is an adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, the story of a bright, book-loving girl whose neglectful parents overlook her intelligence. Proceeds from the performances will support DakshinaChitra. Directed by Shaan Katari Libby, the play promises a lively experience. @Spaces, Besant Nagar, December 13 and 14, 6pm. @Alliance Française, College Road, December 15 and 16 at 4.30pm. and 7pm. Tickets at allevents.in.



Tiny bits of joy (Left) Author Geetha Iyer; and (inset) the book cover. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary, followed by surveys across Uttarakhand, Nagaland, Meghalaya and other parts of the Northeast.

Along with vivid accounts of the insects she discovered, the book also gives us a glimpse into the surprising ways humans have used these creatures over time – from firefly-inspired infrared sensors, bees trained as bomb detectors, to beer brewed using yeasts harvested in wasps. It is a fun read for anyone curious about the miniature world, and also feels like a nostalgic trip, evoking childhood memories.

For instance, Geetha begins the book by taking us back to when she first encountered earwigs. An excerpt from the book reads, "My grandmother's house was a storehouse of invertebrates. I first met all those deadly creatures there – the fiery red-black centipede, the dark brown scorpion... and of course, the earwigs. My grandmother's words still ring in my ear when I look at earwigs; she once pointed out a

fearsome-looking one to me and warned me to be careful, as they would creep into my ear."

Geetha admits that even with years of experience, writing a book presented its own set of challenges. "There are complex concepts from Mathematics and Physics that one needs to know to

understand the insect's structures and how they function. I discussed these concepts with experts from those fields to be able to understand them myself, so that I could simplify, explain and weave it into stories," says Geetha.

"Scientific publications can be very technical, so I needed to convert those observations into stories. If it isn't readable, who will read about insects then?" she further adds.

One of the most surprising learnings during her research journey came from India's indigenous communities. "I knew people in the Northeast eat insects, but I didn't know how," she says. Near Pakke Kessang, a district in Arunachal Pradesh, she met villagers who showed her how they remove the poisonous part of a bug before roasting it. She also saw tribal honey collectors who climb rocky cliffs to access wild hives of rock bees (the insect's stings can be lethal, she warns) using methods learned over generations.

During the conversation, she also highlights how the roles insects play in the ecosystem are often overlooked. She agrees that, despite its importance, insect research in India has chronic underfunding. "Students move to Biotechnology and AI because that's where the money is," she says.

She advises, "Look at insects differently. Give them a chance. Observe them. They're all around you, and they have so much to teach us, only if we cared to look."

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When naturalist, educator, and author Geetha Iyer speaks about the world of insects, her eyes light up with the unmistakable excitement of a lifelong learner. Yet, she is quick to clarify that her fascination with that world did not begin in her early years, or during her years of studying Zoology. Instead, she says, "The interest arose from teaching Biology."

Geetha says her formative years of education were spent studying lifeless specimens. "One dead snail, one dead earthworm, one dead fish." She was determined her students would not have the same experience. The moment she stepped outdoors with them, the insects introduced themselves, which eventually led to the journey of writing three books on this fascinating

Inside miniature worlds

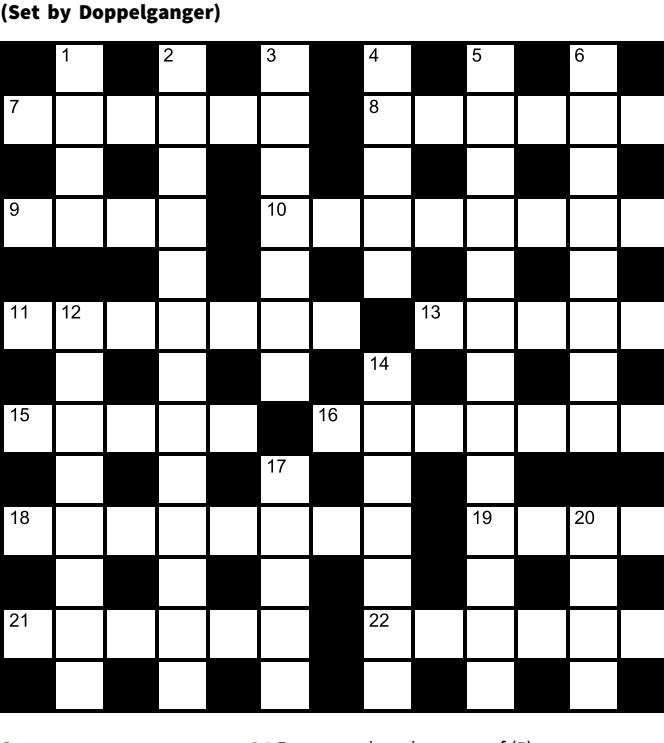
Geetha Iyer's new book *Miniature Giants*, brings together her field adventures, scientific insight, and childhood memories to show how insects shape our ecosystems

world. Her new book, *Miniature Giants: Insect Stories Beyond the Ordinary*, published by Penguin Viking, was launched in Chennai by the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) on December 5. The book delves into the fascinating world of insects, inspired by her years studying them in the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR), and



QUICK CROSSWORD #31

(Set by Doppelganger)



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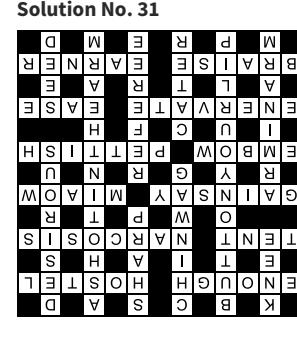
Across

- 7 Adequate number (6)
- 8 Caravanserai (6)
- 9 Canvas shelter (4)
- 10 Condition of deep stupor (8)
- 11 Declare to be false (7)
- 12 Animal cry (5)
- 13 In the form of an arch (5)
- 14 Ill-tempered (7)
- 15 Deprive of vitality (8)
- 16 Freedom from difficulty (4)

Down

- 1 Joint with a cap (4)
- 2 Shut up (6,4,3)
- 3 Tattle (4,3)
- 4 Astute (5)
- 5 Something that revitalises (1,4,2,3,3)
- 6 Wishful (8)
- 7 Closely involved with (3,2,3)
- 8 Arbitrator (7)
- 9 Attend to the needs of (5)
- 10 Plant ovule (4)
- 11 Brown and cook slowly (6)
- 12 Breadwinner (6)
- 13 Earwig (4)
- 14 Hostile (7)
- 15 Through (4)
- 16 Hostile (7)
- 17 Attend to the needs of (5)

Solution No. 31





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Sinking your teeth in

How does a body change in intimacy and protest? Udal, an art exhibit, meditates on its primacy



An artist's touch Work by artists including Rah Naqvi, KG Subramanyam and Arpita Singh displayed at Udal.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of Udal, Reading the Body from the Avtar Collection at Alliance Française of Madras until January 13. According to a release, the artworks from South Asia, span two centuries,

covering the gamut of premodern imagination across secular Rajput miniatures, contemporised ritual tantra and folk art, to 19th Century Company paintings.



right next to FN Souza's work showing the female nude in a slick, sensual light.

All the pieces on display are from art collector and entrepreneur Jaiveer Johal's collection who began Avtar Foundation in 2024 with the aim to bring fine Indian contemporary art to Chennai, and take contemporary art from here to other parts of the country. Speaking about this exhibit, the collector says that one is eased in with a fairly straight-forward piece of the female body form by Indian contemporary artist Jamini Roy. The viewer then proceeds to witness bodies sans form through works like that of Prabhakar Kamble's Chandelier made of ropes, metal, brass bells, cowry, leather, terracotta pots, celebrating the working class communities, particularly Dalits, whose labour has been foundational to the development of India.

An interesting aspect of the display is also the several manifestations of the male nude. Take for instance Pallavi Singh's five-panel work titled The Bather, where a woman's gaze falls upon a man whose long, flowing hair is in a bathtub. Much like the erotic sringara often employed towards women who dress themselves, this and another painting by Lakshya Bhargava shows a rare image of a man shaving his leg. Painted on plywood, the texture lends itself to a playfulness, making it seem like there is indeed hair on the canvas. "The exhibit aims to look at bodies in many different lights including one where it is wounded, intimate, political, and around other creatures. The aim is to front the centrality of the human experience. The body is after all, the home we carry," Jaiveer adds.

Udal, Reading the Body from the Avtar Collection is at Alliance Française of Madras, Nungambakkam until January 13. Avtar is doing curated walks throughout the month. For details, @avtarfoundation on Instagram

Several such works offering a multitude of perspectives about the body in opposition, love, pain, and desire, are now part

+

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Before they hung the new board of Perch, a cafe nestled between the chaos of Vidyodaya school's classroom and the cacophony of Nungambakkam traffic, they was Egco. This cafe that served coffee and eggs opened in January 2024 and quietly won the hearts of people, young and old, who wanted to come for their morning cuppa and a solid bite of protein. Not to forget their delicious truffle hashbrowns, bacon, and cold chocolate. When they decided to move to ECR, regulars crowded the cafe, swiping off every last piece of bread, cheese, and coffee grind, bidding farewell to a beloved neighbourhood 'spot'. Mojiz Khan was among them.

"I used to frequent Egco all the time because it was quiet and had a decent cup of coffee. At the time it was shutting down, I was keen about starting a venture of my own. I had handled the operations of Radio Room, Bay 6, and Bask so I had accumulated enough knowledge in the food and beverage space. But the idea of taking over this space was entirely based on chance," says Mojiz, now the owner of this new establishment which has retained Egco's resplendent trees but has made the cafe more roomy, perhaps even prettier. But does pretty alone cut it?

Perch's menu, full of coffee truisms like cold brews, matcha, finger food, and breakfast platters, is small but sufficient. "We wanted to add more things but the kitchen is small and we're making do with one oven," he says.

To experiment with the coffee (it's brunch, don't judge), we try the coconut caramel latte, a perfectly cold coffee to have on a day when



Sip on this (Clockwise from left) Mango matcha latte; spanakopita and a coffee from Perch.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Coffee under a canopy

Is Perch cafe ready to take on the mantle of becoming the neighbourhood coffee hang?

sunlight chooses to stream in slits. This is a great coffee if you like to try new things, especially since the coconut milk and caramel swirl perfectly in a cup. The coffee has been curated by Aasma Khan of Brew Basics Academy. The banana pudding matcha that follows in tow, however, needs a banana punch. The matcha (though, ceremonial grade), takes over the drink, leaving little room for the

playful taste of banana pudding. The table next to us raves about the aesthetic looking mango matcha though. "We custom made these cups and are hoping it continues to fit the grab and go culture," says Mojiz.

What stands out at Perch is their meatballs in a tomato and tahini yogurt base. The tahini's stoicism in the yogurt perfectly complements the tang from the tomato and the

heartiness of the meat. Their pesto, both in the form of a chicken crostini and their pasta, is delicious too. It is evident that the sauce is loaded with parmesan and garlic (matcha made in heaven).

Their breakfast plate, complete with hashbrowns, sausages, eggs to order, and baked beans, isn't rave worthy. This plate would benefit from some butter and marmalade

as the toast is wonderful and thick. The omelette, though, requires more seasoning. The chef is perhaps a little heavy handed with the mayonnaise in the chicken sandwich but it makes for a decent bite. The chilli cheese toast however, desperately needs real Indian chillies instead of the tame jalapenos. The meal is on the pricier side overall so one becomes cautious while ordering.

Quickly though, the pace again changes. If you like butter, order the feta and caramelised onion spanakopita. The triangular bits of foreign samosas glisten in the light. It is a solid appetiser that leaves you licking your fingers.

The banana bread with fig compote, off their breakfast menu, is an excellent way to end the meal. The toasted slice of banana bread is slathered with a thick dollop of butter cream. The compote cuts through the sweet and fat, making way for a great last bite.

Outside of the meal though, Perch is a great place to work. It is usually quiet, isn't too crowded, and the music does not blare in your ears. The trees make for a fantastic canopy, making it a great place to be lost in your thoughts.

"We knew that Egco was a habit for many. So in the time between when Perch opened and Egco shut, we left a board outside stating that people could come in for an espresso or americano, and some cookies on the house," says Mojiz.

He adds, "We're taking time to learn. We're ensuring that there's a face, a person to speak to at the cafe. We just want to be an easy place to hang out at."

Perch is at 8/19, 1st Cross Street, T Nagar, Near Vidyodaya. A meal for two costs ₹1,200.



As the city cheers Fah Beer; and (below) Motorbike Taxi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

High on tuk tuks

At The Park, Chennai, Fah Beer will whip up Bangkok-inspired cocktails

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How does one capture Thailand's many facets in a cocktail menu? The speedy tuktuks and bike taxis that zip through traffic, rows of snack shops at street markets, the pulsating nightlife, and so much more.

For Suchada "Fah Beer" Sopajaree, owner-chief bartender of Bangkok bar Lost in Thaislation, crafting a cocktail menu inspired by her city means having a story to tell, and a philosophy to share. "Bangkok is chaotic, fragrant, humid, loud, and deeply emotional, and I love that," she says.

On December 12 and 13, Fah Beer brings her whimsical, inventive cocktails, and sustainable, zero-waste behind-the-counter mixology to The Park, Chennai, for a two-day popup One Night in Bangkok at The Leather Bar and Lotus.

"The city's vibrancy inspires me with bold and unapologetic flavours and its contrasts are reflected in my drinks that are sweet and salty, floral and earthy, and refreshing but fiery. The movement; the energy of the streets, markets, and nightlife

constantly evolve, and my drinks follow that rhythm," Fah Beer says.

On the menu is Motorbike Taxi, a drink inspired by the crushed ice drinks in plastic bags carried by bike taxi drivers, Gai Yang Sanam Muay, which

attempts to infuse the flavours of roast chicken and crisp snacks sold behind bustling Muay Thai stadiums, and the Thai Fruit Cart, an ode to the streetside fruit and juice stands of Bangkok. These Bangkok-inspired cocktails will be served alongside snack options that draw inspiration from some classic cocktail favourites which includes negroni char sui pork and chicken, as well as crisp pina colada chicken filo pastry, grasshopper toffy popcorn and mojito cold ramen with tempura.

"When you work behind a bar every day, you begin to understand how much potential is hidden in things people usually throw away: citrus peels, herb stems, tea leaves, even spent fruit pulp. Citrus skins become cordials. Herb stems become tinctures. Overripe fruits become ferments. Even melting ice can be repurposed for dilution-controlled batches," says Fah Beer, of her zero-waste mixology, which is rooted in respect for ingredients, craft and the environment.

From her popup in Chennai, Fah Beer says people can expect Thai flavours in a way they haven't tasted before.

"I am excited to showcase tea-driven cocktails that highlight Thai aromatics and signature drinks that blend elegance with playful Thai notes. For me, the popup is also about bringing my bar's soul to a new space," she adds.

On December 12 and 13 at The Leather Bar and Lotus, The Park, Chennai. Contact 9962725601.

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Where's the kutchery?

What to expect at this unique Margazhi experience, which kickstarts this Saturday



Artistes who are part of the Kutty Kutchery Festival; (below) Laasya Narasimhachari

Srinivasa Ramanujam

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December is here. It is that time of the year when sweaters and monkey caps make an appearance to battle chilly Chennai evenings.

It is also that time of the year when Carnatic music and classical dance play out in various sabhas (performing spaces). But the saba can be intimidating for some, and a little too formal for others.

At Kutty Kutchery Festival 2025, which kickstarts in the city this Saturday (December 13), the tone is intentionally informal and conversational – ensuring proximity, dialogue, and connection between artiste and audience.

The current third edition of the 10-day festival will be a celebration of Indian performing arts, including 10 performative conversations across classical, folk, contemporary dance, music, and theatre. "From Carnatic music to classical Portuguese traditions, from traditional and experimental natyam – spanning classical, folk, and contemporary storytelling – to musical shadow puppetry, from ancient instrument ensembles to contemporary classical works and vibrant tribal music, this edition gathers artistic voices that are reflective, fearless, and reshaping the contours of creative expression," says



Laasya Narasimhachari, founder-director, Rasaham, a public charitable trust and multi-venture arts organisation, which curates the festival.

Each curated 75-minute performative conversation will include a performance segment, personal artistic stories that have contextual references to the history and evolution of the art form, besides an interaction with the audience.

Among the artistes featured in this year's edition are Vyjayanthi Kashi (Kuchipudi), Funky Bodhi and the Irular Ensemble (tribal folk music), OS Arun (Carnatic) and Anil Srinivasan, Sikkil Gurucharan and Madhan Karky (contemporary Carnatic music).

Audiences will also have a glimpse into some shadow puppetry (The Open House), Fado (featuring Sonia Shirast) and Harikatha (Vishaka Hari), among other performances.

Over the years, this festival has played out at terraces, art galleries, cafes and yoga studios. This year will be no different – with venues including Marthaki Studio, Vinyl and Brew, House of Kavayam and Hanu Reddy Residences, among others. "We believe that space becomes an experience," explains Laasya.

Kutty Kutchery Festival 2025 will be held from December 13 to 22. Entry is free, but registration is mandatory. To register, visit rasaham.org

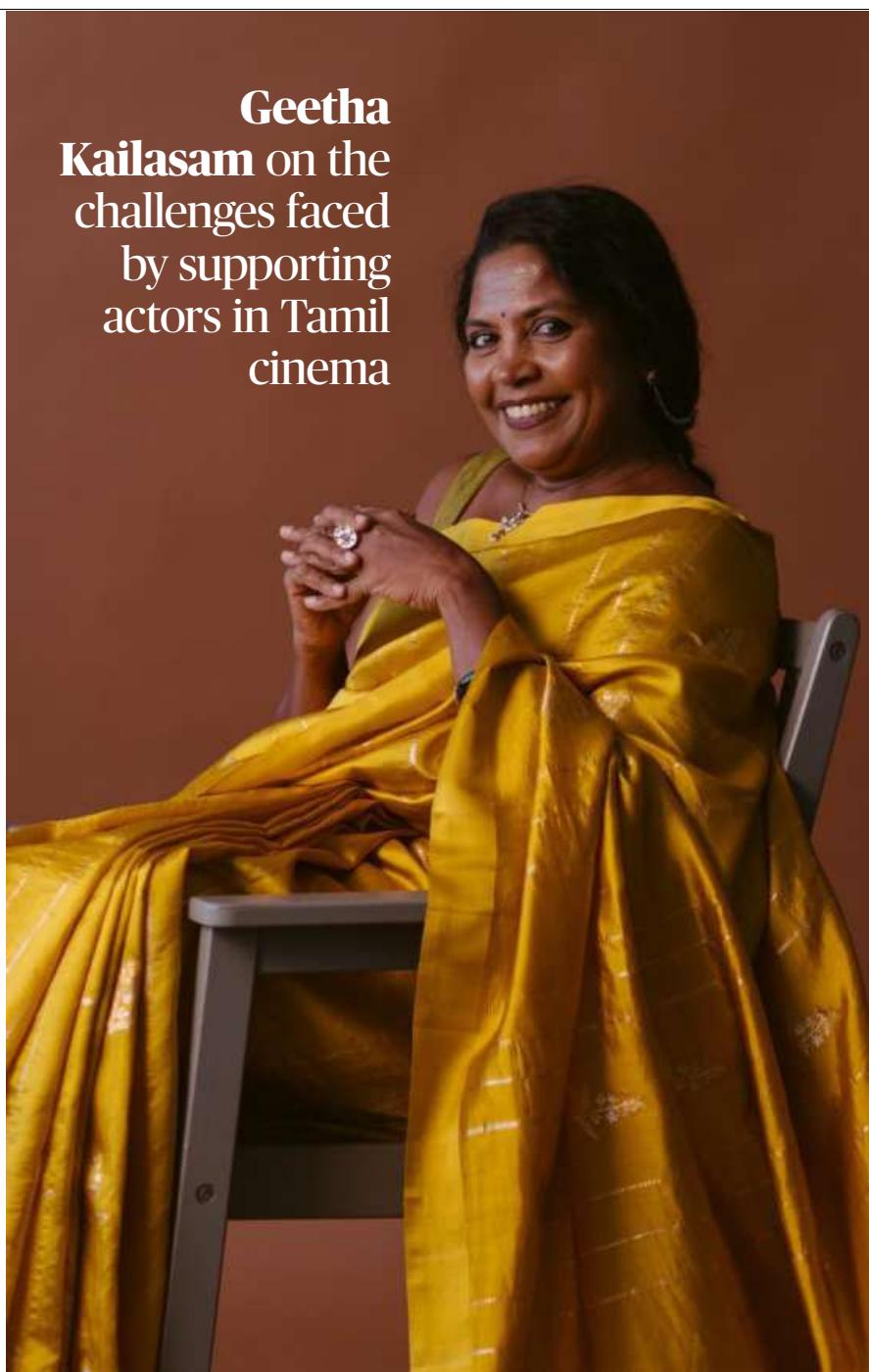
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A humble little film is turning heads in Chennai theatres. If you were to give it a chance, you might end up watching arguably the best Tamil film of the year.

Angammal, directed by Vipin Radhakrishnan, tells the tender tale of an elderly woman who has to fight for her identity when her son forces her to wear a blouse and behave as he deems necessary to impress his in-laws. Vipin's film is so enchanting that audiences might cease to realise that there's an actor behind Angammal's time-worn gaze. Geetha Kailasam, who has cemented her place as a sought-after character artiste, plays Angammal with the conviction of a veteran.

Geetha Kailasam on the challenges faced by supporting actors in Tamil cinema



True to character
Geetha Kailasam; (below) a still from the film.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

notes of *Angammal* are rooted in her milieu – she doesn't wear a blouse, smokes like a chimney, and walks barefoot when she isn't riding her moped.

Geetha first hesitated to act without a blouse. "They then introduced me to the costume designer and I learnt about the kind of saree I had to wear. I started practising wearing a saree without a blouse at home." Then came the smoking bit: "I am not a smoker, so I had to practise how to strike a matchstick shielding it from the wind to light a *beedi*," adds Geetha. "They told me something about smoking with swag, when in fact, I didn't know what 'swag' meant. I have seen superstar Rajinikanth do it, but I was then just a female character artiste who had done some three films!"

Angammal, a milk vendor, rides around on a blue moped, and Geetha

says that while learning to ride again – 25 years since she last rode a scooter – the experience was fun. "I went to a class, and when I learned to balance the two-wheeler again, I found a child-like enthusiasm for it. I reminisced about the moments I rode a scooter during my college days."

One of the stand-out subplots in *Angammal* revolves around her equation with her crush, another elderly man. Geetha had earlier received a lot of love for a scene in *Sarpatta Parambarai*, in which her character gets a tender romantic moment with Pasupathy's character. The actor says that she hasn't got any story pitches for a film that revolves around middle-aged romance.

"If they let me, I will write it myself (laughs). Because I am interested in writing film scripts, and I want to do rom-coms, while looking the way I do in real life. It doesn't matter the age; there are so many nuances to a couple's relationship."

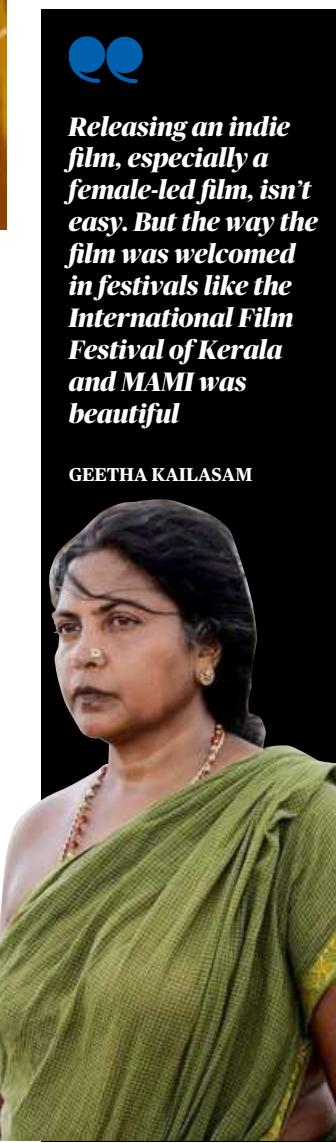
In her six-year career so far, Geetha has largely played the role of a mother. That and the fact that she has worked with many directors makes one curious if she notices a pattern in how directors are writing such roles. "The experience has been different with every one of them. While some films were entirely about staying true to the story, some are all about commercial success. And because of that, directors are missing out on progressive ideas or bringing in nuances to their female characters."

Geetha has also decided to cut back on melodrama. "I have decided not to pick such roles hereafter. But most of the new directors are thinking about women characters."

She also notices how most on-screen mothers have a fixed character arc.

For now, she is eager to see how audiences are receiving *Angammal*. "I am hoping other directors also watch and promote the film, and my desire is for my favourite actors, superstar Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, to see the film, because they have always supported good films," she signs off.

Behind Angammal's gaze



GEETHA KAILASAM

Geetha has been travelling with *Angammal* for more than a couple of years – the film, which was completed more than a year ago, has been a crowd-favourite in the festival circuit, and has finally seen the light of day now. "Releasing an indie film, especially a female-led film – and of an actor who doesn't have decades of experience – isn't easy. But the way the film was welcomed in festivals like the International Film Festival of Kerala and MAMI was beautiful," says Geetha, who also won the Best Actor award at the acclaimed Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. The film also won the Best Film award at the New York Indian Film Festival.

The character

unveil its exciting slate of films, shows and non-fiction titles in Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam. Tamil titles in the line-up include the third season of the crowd-favourite drama series *Heartbeat*, and the second season of the legal drama series *Good Wife*, starring Priyamani.

Other Tamil series titles announced at the event include

New-age stories

Apart from a ₹4,000-crore investment in South India, JioHotstar has also signed a Letter of Intent with the Government of Tamil Nadu to boost the State's creative and production ecosystem. Sushant Seeram, Head of SVOD Business & Chief Marketing Officer, JioStar, said that JioHotstar aims to "build the entertainment future of tomorrow, one that's rooted in the rich storytelling heritage of our great country and its many facets, powered by cutting-edge technology, and serve as the default destination for Indian entertainment everywhere."

He added that regional is now becoming national, and that ethnic is the new international. "Stories born in Madurai, Malappuram, Mandya or Machilipatnam are no longer 'regional cinema'; they are national cultural events."

The event saw the streamer

the coming-of-age sports drama *LBW - Love Beyond Wicket*, starring Vikranth; underdog story *Resort*, starring YouTuber Vijay and Thalaivasal Vijay; sports action thriller *Lingam*, starring Kathir and Divya Bharathi; a K-drama adaptation *Love Always*, starring Jaya Prakash, Jayasudha and Gowri Kishan; and the much-awaited Vijay Sethupathi starrer, *Kaattaa*.

Kenatha Kaanom, starring Yogi Babu, and *Lucky The Superstar*, starring GV Prakash Kumar and Anaswara Rajan, are the two feature films announced in Tamil. When it comes to non-fiction, the streamer unveiled a new reality series hosted by Ramya Krishnan titled *Second Love*.

Mohanlal, who was recently bestowed with the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke award at the 71st National Film Awards, was felicitated by Vijay Sethupathi and Nagarjuna. During his speech, Mohanlal called *Bigg Boss* a show full of positivity, "one that carries a lot of entertainment, human emotion and discipline."

Nagarjuna echoed Mohanlal's statement, stating that in *Bigg Boss*, the contestants are the kings. Vijay Sethupathi said that *Bigg Boss* helps understand human beings. "While watching the show, both contestants and the audience become residents of that house. Moreover, *Bigg Boss* is like a mirror for me. I was also hesitant about hosting the show, but after hosting Season 8, I realised that it's a great book on human beings. More than answers, I like questions, and *Bigg Boss* raises a lot of questions towards me," he added.

Rooted in South Indian soil



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JioHotstar unveils an exciting array of films, shows and non-fiction titles in Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam, workshops for next-gen filmmakers, and investment plans in South India at a star-studded event in Chennai

JioHotstar, a streaming platform that has tasted tremendous success in southern India, recently announced its upcoming line-up of South Indian titles and investment plans in the region. The streamer made the announcement at South Unbound, a star-studded event in Chennai.

The event was graced by dignitaries such as Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, actor and Member of Parliament

Kamal Haasan, Minister of Information and Publicity of Tamil Nadu, MP Saminathan, and top executives of JioHotstar. Also present were the three superstar hosts of television show *Bigg Boss*: Mohanal, Nagarjuna, and Vijay Sethupathi along with several other actors, filmmakers and technicians from the South film industries.

As a highlight of the event, JioHotstar announced its plans to invest ₹4,000 crore over the next five years to boost creative economy in South India. The streamer had recently signed a Letter of Intent with the Government of Tamil Nadu to establish a partnership to accelerate the State's creative and production ecosystem. As part of this, the streamer said that it will aim to strengthen the State's creative economy "by introducing regional-first formats, new-age stories and storytellers scaling their work beyond geographical boundaries".

In a press note, the platform also promised initiatives such as "writing labs, mentorship programmes and skill-building workshops aimed at nurturing the next generation of filmmakers, writers, editors and digital storytellers".

Kamal Haasan said that the

A new beginning (Clockwise from left) Actors Mohanal, Nagarjuna and Vijay Sethupathi; Udhayanidhi Stalin and Kamal Haasan at the event.

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