



metro PLUS

THE HINDU

What does God look like? Tracing commercial art's focus on the divine **P3**

ALL ABOUT DHANUSH'S CAPTAIN MILLER P4



Kettavan has won cars, bikes, electric scooters and cycles at various events across the State including the third place at Alanganallur

Kettavan
Kulamangalam

In Kulamangalam, some 12 kilometres outside Madurai city, a stark white farmhouse stands amidst lush green paddy fields. In it, are 23 bulls including Kettavan which literally translates to 'bad guy', advocate KM Thiruppathy's prized possession. Kettavan has been reared here since 2016. Today, the owner has constructed a swimming pool just so that the bull's breathing and stamina gets better.

"Kettavan is a performer. As soon as he hears the mics at the venue, he will understand exactly where he is and will begin his shenanigans at the *vaadi* right before he enters, sometimes, trying to poke some of the handlers. As he enters the arena, he will spin fast and topple all those who try to touch him," he says.

He adds that the two minutes that the bull plays at the venue is enough satisfaction to fuel him for the rest of the year. "After all, it is a matter of pride when they announce that 'KM Thiruppathy's bulls have entered the arena," he says.



Chinna Komban
Pudukkottai

Former AIADMK Minister C Vijayabaskar's family has been rearing bulls for three generations now. When he is not busy with polity, he spends time with his bulls. The favourite among the 10-odd bulls he rears is Chinna Komban. "There was another bull, Periya Komban, which unfortunately died of a head-on collision while playing in the arena," he says.

Chinna Komban has now taken the senior bull's place and has been victorious in several arenas. The thing about this bull and all the others in Vijayabaskar's entourage is that they travel in style. Special air-conditioned vehicles have been arranged for these bulls to make the journey from their home in Pudukkottai to arenas across the State.

"It is a craze, a passion that got me to modify some of the vans we had as the bulls ended up getting tired on their long journeys from the farm," the former Minister says. He adds that they have built a swimming pool for training the bulls too.



Dancing Girl rebirthed

Artificial intelligence has taken another leap forward by bringing the artefact, Dancing Girl to life, with help from choreographer Mandeep Raikhy. A collaboration between Goethe Institut



The bull run

After months of training, the jallikattu bulls of Madurai gear up to enter the arena. We meet the bulls and the people rearing them

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There is only one week to go for Madurai district's annual display of jallikattu and Alanganallur, its epicentre, is crackling with energy from both the bulls and men. The bulls grunt when strangers come close. Men on the other hand, croon tales of their victories and are happy to chat about their pride.

In villages across the district, one can find the names of bulls they rear, as part of their name board and marriage invitations. The ones who have died after showcasing their might in the *vaadivasa* (arena), get elaborate burials and shrines, as though they are family.

Across Madurai, bulls are trained year-round to ensure that they are not caught by an onslaught of players who are hungry for the title of *veeran* or champion. They are fed a strict diet of cotton seed,

wheat husk and raw rice – ringing up bills of ₹30,000 a month. They are also trained to swim, walk and poke wet earth to strengthen their skills.

All bulls that enter the arena must be ferocious. Their demeanour must threaten the players enough to ensure that they do not come close. But the best bulls must stand their ground. Their sharp horns, grunts and charges, should ensure that players run at sight. "There are usually two kinds of jallikattu bulls. The first, spins in the arena in circles. The second, attacks," says AP Saravana Kumar, a bull rearer from Alanganallur. Those that shake off the players who come close are titled winners and those who especially stand their ground to fight and entertain the crowds, are crowned as champion bulls, winning cars, bikes and expensive gadgets at the end of the event.

We meet Kettavan, Ramu, Appu and Chinna Komban, among the best bulls in Madurai and nearby districts, to find out what makes these otherwise calm bulls furious competitors on ground.

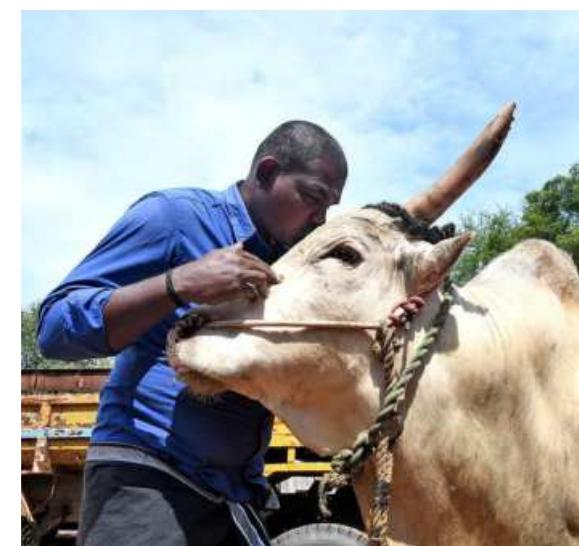


Appu
Varichiyur

PR Rajasekaran, head of Tamil Nadu Jallikattu Peraval, has a farm in Varichiyur with about a hundred cows and bulls. Cattle rearing has been in the family for generations. It is no surprise then that he chose to be in the forefront of the jallikattu protests in 2016. Anyone in the village can point to his large farm in Varichiyur just outside the city. His presence is also felt in the posters at the entrance of the village.

Rajasekaran's bull Appu is both a champion and a favourite. Appu is particularly loved because he has several child-like qualities according to his handler M Sundaravalli who has been working at this farm for the last eight years. "Appu gives you a longing look when you eat. He wants a bite of everything. Even when we drink tea and eat biscuits, he wants a little bit. He walks a little in our direction and seeks us out," she says.

Appu is an expert at *mann kuthal*, in which the bulls hone their skills by digging their horns into wet earth.



Ramu has bagged a cash prize of ₹15,000 at Tirumayam, Pudukkottai. He has also won several vessels, gold coins and almirahs

Ramu
Alanganallur

AP Sarvana Kumar alias Dissi claims that Ramu is one among the three bulls of Alanganallur which is yet to be caught once in the sporting arena. Soon after the jallikattu protests in 2017 when Dissi bought and released the bull for the first time, he knew he had a winner in his hands. This bull grunts and eyes the photographer suspiciously as he nears to get a shot. Each time he enters the arena, he leaps and jumps, sometimes kicking the players who come close. Ramu's training begins four months before the jallikattu season in January. Dissi usually tries to analyse the bull's nerves, its walk and foot placement during training to ensure the best results on the day of the event. "It is an addiction to watch the bulls perform on the day. A high," he says.



An ode to the wheel

Sixteen studio potters from Puducherry and Auroville will showcase their work at Alliance Francaise de Pondicherry over a three-day festival. Earthbound Festival claims to be more than just a potters' market. It will also host installations, demonstrations, movies, a play and workshops for children. The participants are Adil Writer, Arti Manik, Evgenia Gladkaia, Indrani Singh Cassime, Mimi Chakrabarti, Julietta Kuehle, Nausheen Bari, Nandini Hiranniah, Nalini Dharan, Puneet Brar, Rakhee Kane, Ranjita Bora, Ray Meeker, Saraswati, Sabrina, Supriya MM, and Toshia Parmar.

"A market doesn't always showcase what an individual vision for the craft is. It always doesn't showcase what's moving you to create using certain techniques. Not all things sell at par. We felt there was a need to view through the medium. We have asked the potters to bring what moves them," says Puneeet Brar, who along with Mimi Chakrabarti is organising the festival.

and Basement21, the showcase Hallucinations of an Artifact begs the question, How does an ancient artefact think, move and respond to our current times?

Mandeep was drawn to the Dancing Girl as the artefact is the earliest evidence of dance in Indian culture. "I was also interested in it because it is a contested figure," he says.

Recently, the artifact has been labelled Mother in several languages, for various exhibitions. Art historian Naman Ahuja has speculated that the Dancing Girl may have been a warrior, not a dancer.

Hallucinations of an Artifact brings the dancing girl to life, using artificial intelligence and dance choreography.

Mandeep is a Delhi-based dance choreographer who has toured with the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and worked on dance works such as Inhabited Geometry (2010), Queen-size (2016), and Anatomy of Belief (2019).

@Goethe Institut Auditorium on January 12 at 7pm. Seating is free and on a first-come first-serve basis.

Earthbound Festival is on from January 12 to 14 at Alliance Francaise de Pondicherry.

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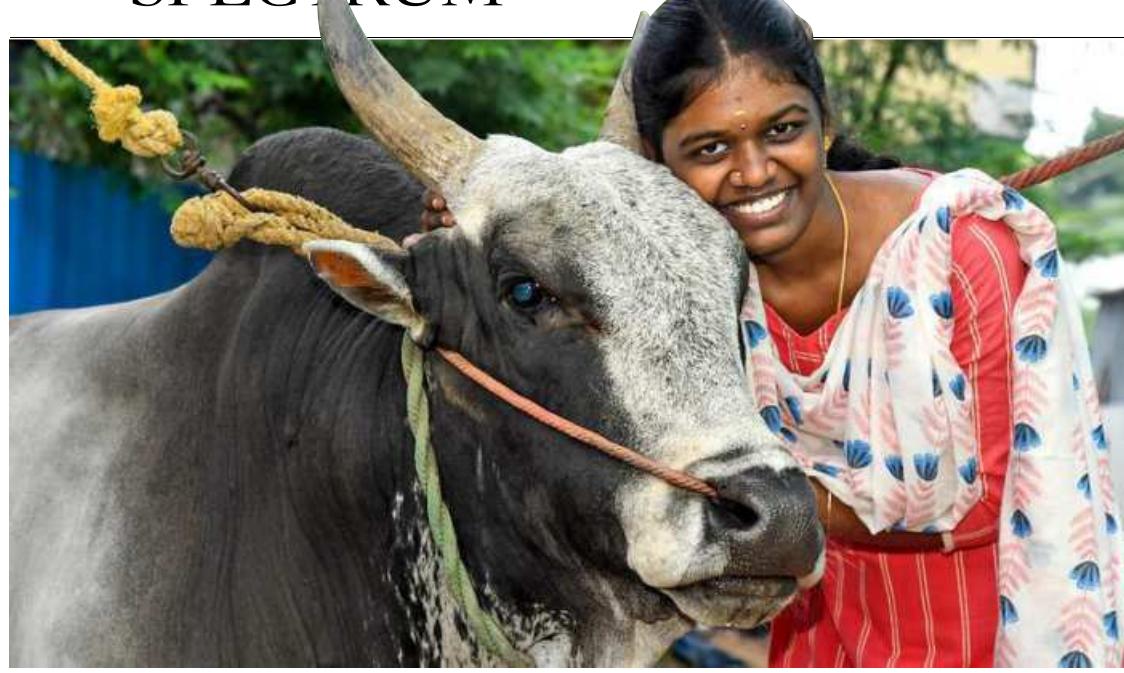
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R Dhivya Dharsini stood at the entrance of the *vaadivasal* (arena), face to face with over a hundred bull tamers. A bull owner, she had just untied Manickam, her bull, and had to cross the tamers to move to safety. "I just had a few seconds before the bull would charge outside," she says. "I elbowed past the men with an energy I didn't know existed in me," she laughs, recalling her first *jallikattu* as a bull owner at Alanganallur. This was in 2022, and the 18-year-old is among a handful of women to have stepped into the *vaadivasal*, a male-dominated zone in a sport traditionally seen as a chance for men to prove their masculinity.

Women *jallikattu* bull rearers, while few in number, do make their presence felt in the sport every year. Dhivya is from a family that has been rearing *jallikattu* bulls for generations. As the only child of her parents, she is taking forward her great grandfather's love for raising sturdy bulls that make heads turn. She is helping raise Manickam and Military, bulls that have sent many tamers flying in the air at the arena.

With just a few days left for Pongal, Military is getting restless. Dhivya, her slender form in a salwar-kameez, leads the bull towards a mud pit at Anuppanadi, a locality in Madurai in the evening, as he

Women at the *vaadivasal*

As *jallikattu* approaches, we meet women bull rearers from Madurai and its surrounding villages who tend to formidable bulls with warmth and sensitivity

grunts and thrusts his horns ahead. "Military..." she chides him gently, as he butts his horns into the mud and flings it in the air. She later wipes his horns and face clean with a handkerchief. Military stays still enjoying the attention.

"I would talk to them every time I walked to school and back," says Dhivya, adding that the bulls at her family's cattle shed took a liking to her. She gradually started assisting in their upkeep, and has now turned a bull rarer herself, balancing her work with NEET classes. Dhivya's mother and grandmother too tend to the bulls, but it is she who takes them to *jallikattu* tournaments, along with her father and uncle.

"Bulls rarely attack women and children since they associate them with nurturing," she says, adding that she was surprised to see her bull turning protective of her at the *vaadivasal*. "He shielded me from other bulls that were lined up," she says.

At Alanganallur, set to host the event on January 17, the star bull of the village, Muthu, who belongs to

the Muniyandi temple is in the care of L Pandiseli. As the temple bull, Muthu kickstarts the year's tournament, and there is an understanding among tamers to not touch him out of respect for the deity. "He is in his prime now," says the 37-year-old holding one of his ropes as he drinks out of an aluminium trough.

Pandiseli has been assisting in the upkeep of *jallikattu* bulls from the time she was eight. "My father owned several bulls, and would involve me in raising them," she says. Her day begins at 5.30am when she feeds Muthu straw. "I then take him out to graze."

At Sennagarampatti village in Melur, K Selvarani is



A slice of Korea (Clockwise from left) Ssambap; gamja; and the grilled prawn ramyun bowl. S POORVAJA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kimbap on my mind

In a celebration of Korean culture and cuisine, dig into an array of appetisers, wholesome noodle bowls, and specially crafted cocktails as part of the K Pop Up at The Park



Tarini Vyas

The traditional dance of Bali is expressive and seeks to tell a story. A similar sensibility ran through Craft in Dance, an exhibition of dance costumes displayed at M.R.M Cultural Foundation in MRC Nagar early this week.

Curated by the founder, Visalakshi Ramaswamy, the costumes were from the Indian and Balinese textiles for the dance production Arisi: Rice to be performed in the city on January 15. Heavily influenced by the rice culture in both Bali and India, the production as well as the inspiration behind the exhibit lie in the day-to-day impact of paddy cultivation.

"Arisi is a collaborative work between Balinese dance and Bharatanatyam," says Mohanapriyan Thavarajah, the lead dancer and designer of the costumes. He is part of Apsaras Arts, a dance production company based in Singapore. "We wanted to tell the story of rice, as it is the staple of many Asian countries, and Bali was one of the first places to export rice all over the world."

Mohanapriyan has drawn inspiration from common beliefs shared by the two cultures to weave costumes that tell a story. The

Weaving tales Mohanapriyan Thavarajah; (right) artist-professor I Wayan Dibia dancing at Craft in Dance exhibition. AKHILA ESWARAN

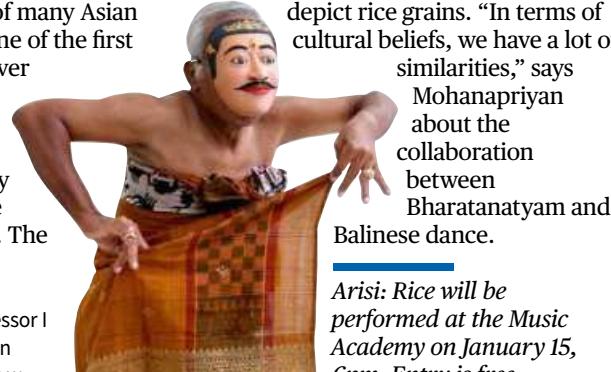
Costumes woven out of traditional Indian and Balinese textile prints feature in Arisi: Rice, an upcoming dance production

costumes, which have been made using traditional Indian and Balinese textiles and prints, describe the process of paddy cultivation through the patterns and colours used.

Using the fabric of ikat, Balinese costumes, usually worn like a sarong, are redefined. The inspiration for Indian costumes comes from kosavam sarees with pleats at the back, usually worn by women in villages for functional use. A running motif that can be seen is a sickle to denote harvest. The first dance costume on display, in varying gradations of green, was inspired by the landscape of Tamil Nadu's rice fields. The dance for which this costume is worn depicts a bird's eye view of a paddy field, says Mohanapriyan.

"One side of the costume is light green, and the other, dark green. The dark green denotes the marshy ground in the paddy fields, and the lighter green denotes the tender leaf of the paddy stock," he says. A single, running border for the costume denotes a single stalk of paddy. He has also used beads to depict rice grains. "In terms of cultural beliefs, we have a lot of similarities," says Mohanapriyan about the collaboration between Bharatanatyam and Balinese dance.

Arisi: Rice will be performed at the Music Academy on January 15, 6pm. Entry is free



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I can hear the faint strains of 2PM's 2009 hit 'Again & Again' playing, as I bite into a gamja – a Korean chicken dog. The hot and crisp snack is a K-drama favourite, best enjoyed by the lead characters when out on a wintry, evening date.

At The Park's A2 restaurant however, I am seated near a large window overlooking the swimming pool. The gamja is a part of K Pop Up, its new Korean pop up, an ode to Korean cuisine, culture and music.

For the next two months, A2 will have a Korean menu on offer, which includes snacks and appetisers, noodle and rice bowls, an array of meat preparations, and a special dessert. All of this will be accompanied by a peppy K-pop

playlist. Having worked extensively with Asian cuisine over the last many years, Chef Ashutosh Nerlekar, director, food production at The Park says that an understanding of the different elements that make up Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Thai cuisine, as well as delving deep into all that the Internet had to offer played a big role in curating the menu.

"We are proud of what we have come up with, especially the number of appetisers on the menu. Diners can choose from teokboki, kimchi pancakes (jeon), gyeran mari or rolled eggs, gochujang chicken, and the big favourite – Korean fried chicken," he says.



If your starting point to the world of Korean food has been via hearty meals on K-dramas, several onscreen favourites find a place on the menu here. Choose from kimchi fried rice, guksu (wheat noodle soup), japchae (sweet potato noodles), and Extraordinary Attorney Woo's favourite – a selection of kimbap.

To add an element of DIY to your meal, there is a Korean ssambap, where you can make your own wraps using perilla leaves, lettuce, vegetables, and pick from shiitake mushrooms, chicken, tenderloin, or pork belly.

We move on from the gamja to honey and soy glazed Belgian pork belly, and lamb chops generously glazed with Korean hot sauce. The meat is cooked to perfection in both dishes, and the pork in particular is soft, juicy, and bursting with flavour.

I might not be enjoying the winter in Seoul, but the cloudy Chennai skies prove to be the

perfect foil for the main course, the shin ramyun bowl. The wholesome bowl, complete with a tangy chilli soya broth, a jammy shoyu egg, seaweed sheets, fresh grilled prawns, and wheat noodles proves to be the ultimate comfort dish – the flavours here aren't too complex, but the finishing touches more than make up for it. There is nothing that stands out in the other dish we try for the main course, the Atlantic salmon bulgogi with sticky rice. The salmon, while fresh, needs a sharper and more flavourful sauce.

For the final part of the meal, the popular shaved ice dessert Bingsu, Chef Ashutosh says they managed to procure a shaved ice machine, which finds a place of pride behind the bar at A2. With generous dollops of condensed milk, spoonfuls of berry compote, dried fruits and mascarpone cream on top, the deceptively large dessert is light and refreshing.

Unlike popular restaurants in the city serving Korean cuisine, the tables here are bereft of small dishes of unlimited kimchi, and other sides or banchan. This probably also explains the competitive pricing. Alongside this specially curated menu, the restaurant is also offering a selection of curated cocktails, and their usual sushi bar remains operational as well.

As we finish the last of the bingsu, we are told that guests and diners can also choose to sit by the rooftop pool and order from the Korean menu. "Gamja and kimbap are already becoming favoured poolside snacks," Chef Ashutosh says.

The K Pop Up will be on at A2, The Park till March 5. A meal for two costs ₹2,400. For reservations, from Tuesday to Saturday, call 42676000.

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- 1 Utiring — I fled a beating (anag) (13)
- 8 Short erect tail (4)
- 9 Bird sounds (8)
- 10 Act without due caution (4,3)
- 12 Straighten out (6)
- 14 Basement storage space (6)
- 15 Deeply agitated (10)
- 19 Like an angel (8)
- 20 Tender and full of juice (4)
- 21 TV operating device (6,7)

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of bitter oranges from an island in the Dutch Antilles (7)

16 Fencing sword (5)

17 Dark (5)

18 Brogue or moccasin, say (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated January 18, 2024.

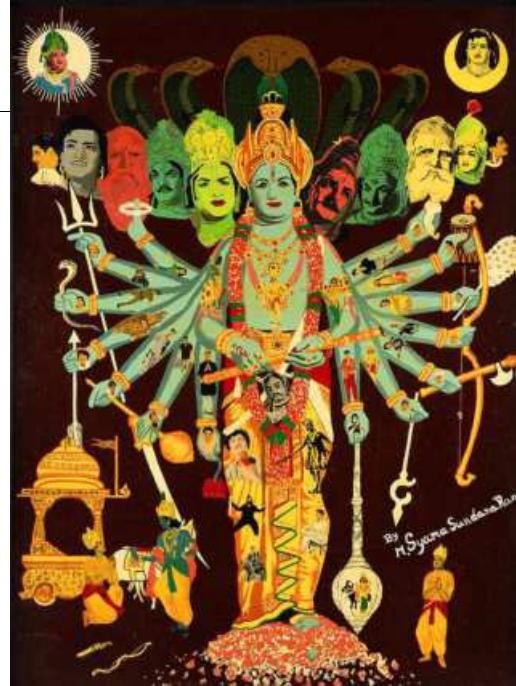
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History at your feet

A literary walk at Fort St. George by Historian V Sriram focussing on books which have been inspired by this seat of colonial administration will take place on January 13 at 7am as part of The Hindu's Lit for Life. Registrations for the Readings on Fort St George is now open. Check <https://newsth.live/LitfestWalk> or scan the QR code.





Celestial goes mainstream
(Clockwise from far left) A print used in yesteryear advertisements; a canvas by M Syamasundara Rao; and cinema's influence in Aykan's work.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

How did Hindu gods and goddesses take over commercial art?

Divine intervention



popular, it is not wrong to call them contemporaries. "Kondiah Raju set up photo studios and started painting the backgrounds for these studios. With the advent of the matchbox and firecracker industry in Sivakasi, he started to understand the market, and the demand for print materials. That's how these artists from the South forayed into religious art," says Nafeesa. Most of the god figures in their paintings are modelled after their own kin, which in turn makes them relatable.

In its final piece, commercial art's more contemporary manifestations (1940s to '70s) take over the wall. Here, one cannot miss cinema's indelible mark on the industry as contemporary artists like Aykan and Maniam created work that gave a visual identity to magazine covers, comic panels and advertisements of the time. A particular canvas by M Syamasundara Rao has actor NTR as the 10-headed demi-god Ravana, each face distinct with emotion.

Spiritual and Vernacular Expressions from the South is on display till February 20 at Ashvita's Gallery, Dr Radhakrishnan Salai.

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Gods and goddesses have been part of South Indian homes in the most unusual forms since the late 19th Century.

It is not rare to find a stray calendar, an invitation card or even advertisement pamphlets featuring the ideal depictions of gods tucked into a wallet or in the puja room. Today, on Ashvita's brick-laden walls is an attempt to trace the points that mark commercial art's journey in the State. Spiritual and Vernacular Expressions from the South, currently on display is thus a survey exhibition spread across centuries of work.

A Tanjore painting with a wooden frame worn by time and dotted with specks of gold, is the starting point of this visual narrative.

"It starts from Thanjavur with the *palagai padams* as they were called in Tamil Nadu, and moves to reverse glass paintings, and later to chromolithographs," says Nafeesa Khaderkutty, curator. She points to a hand painted lithograph from

1889 that depicts king Rama's *pattabhishekam* (coronation).

The reverse glass paintings show a more economical face of these commercial canvases with a religious bend, when compared to a Tanjore painting. Chromolithographs are what popularised commercial art to the extent to which we see remnants of the industry even today. The Raju community from Andhra Pradesh, of which the pioneer C Kondiah Raju and his students were part of, has been largely credited with South India's interaction with commercial art. Though Raja Ravi Varma was admittedly more

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Aye, aye, captain

How director Arun Matheshwaran worked with Dhanush in *Captain Miller*, releasing this week



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Arun Matheswaran has had an unusual yet scintillating start to his career as a mainstream filmmaker in Tamil. His debut film, 2021's *Rocky*, struggled to fill screens during its release, picking up pace only due to good word-of-mouth marketing. His sophomore project *Saani Kaayidham* in 2022, starring Keerthy Suresh and Selvaraghavan, was released directly on Prime Video.

His third project, *Captain Miller*, starring Dhanush, hits screens this week. Excerpts from an interview:

Question: Where did the idea for Captain Miller germinate from?

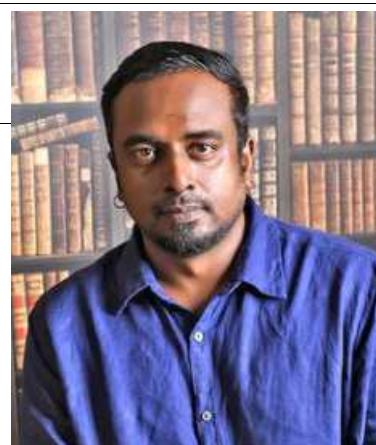
Answer: This is a story about the oppressed fighting for freedom. My uncle was in the Army and the idea originated from everything he told me when I was a child. I have also taken some inspiration from the events that happened in the 1980s during the Sri Lankan Civil War. I worked out a story based on all of that, but materialising that script in that original form wasn't possible; many producers were apprehensive because it was based on the Sri Lankan War. I then thought of basing it on the British Army to make it more acceptable.

Q: In both *Rocky* and *Saani Kaayidham*, apart from the internal journey of the character, the story also takes a journey through road. Does Captain Miller have that aspect too?

A: I wouldn't call this a road film. But there are elements of travel because these characters are like nomads; they are dacoits who don't have a permanent residence. This film is about the journey of this young boy whose innocent decision changes his life forever.

A long journey Dhanush in a still from *Captain Miller*; (above) Arun Matheshwaran.

THAMODHARAN BHARATH



Q: Extracting performances is something very subjective because the actors bring their own methods and ideas. How was it working with Dhanush?

A: Dhanush is a phenomenal performer. He read the script and he knew the ins and outs of the character. Now, when Dhanush comes to the set and performs, it might at times seem like he lacks interest. Only when I sat down at

the edit table did I see how subtly he had performed. Generally, there's a belief that you need to perform loudly when you are a part of a big-scale film such as this. In this film, we didn't want it to be over-the-top because the characters are commoners who are fighting against the system.

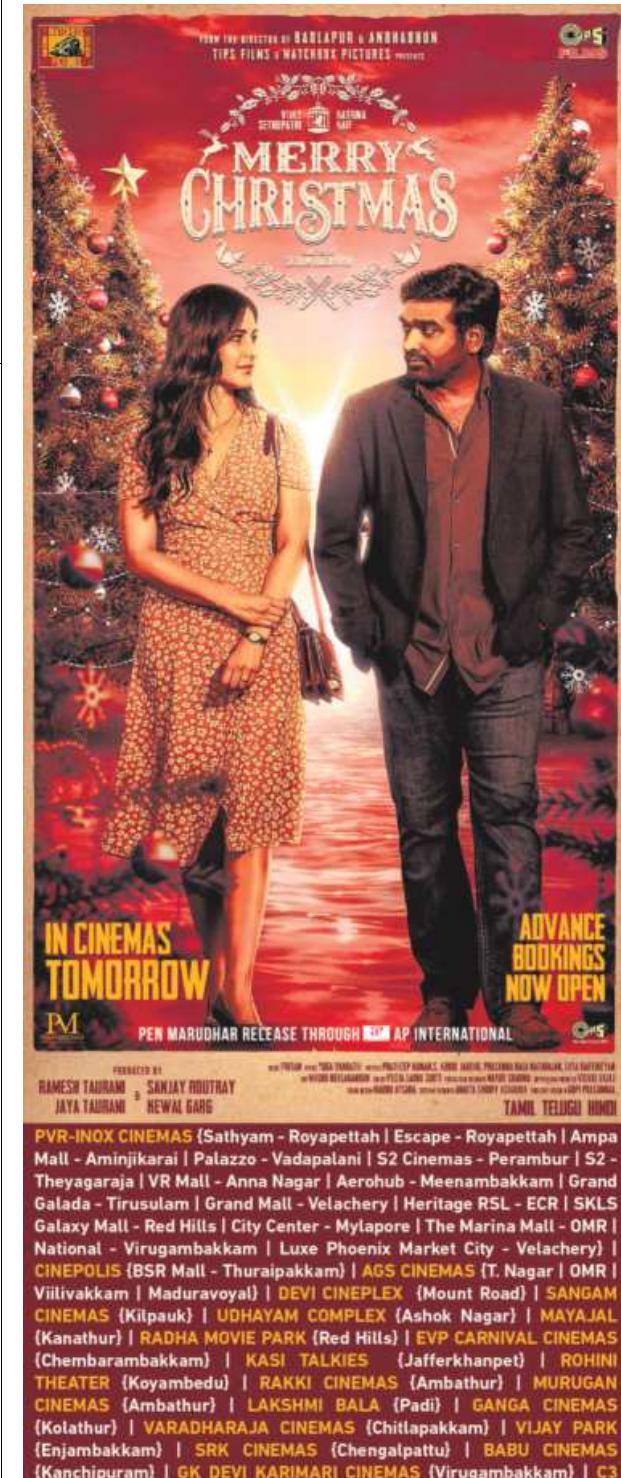
Q: You are making the films you want to but beyond that, what is the bigger artistic journey that you are pursuing?

A: Making films for stars is like playing for the gallery. At the end of the day, those films are all about the collections. But there is cinema beyond that and I want to explore that space. The point of making big films like these is to earn money and to produce my own films independently.



Lal Salaam will arrive soon

Aishwarya Rajinikanth's *Lal Salaam*, which was set to release on Pongal, will now release on February 9. Bankrolled by Lyca Productions, the film is headlined by Vishnu Vishal and Vikranth. Rajinikanth and cricketer Kapil Dev play cameo roles in the film that has music by AR Rahman.



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