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**WHY KAJAL IS DOING A 'MASSY' FILM** **P4**



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**S**oori has hit a purple patch in his career. Not only did he turn *kadhayin naayagan* (the plot's hero) last year with Vetri Maaran's *Viduthalai Part 1*, but a slew of films he is part of also had a stellar run in festival circuits.

The *Viduthalai* films had a special premiere at the Rotterdam Film Festival where his *Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai*, helmed by Ram and co-starring Nivin Pauly and Anjali, also premiered. Another film starring Soori in the lead, *Kottukkaali* – produced by Sivakarthikeyan and directed by PS Vinodraj whose *Koozhangal* (*Pebbles* was selected as the Indian entry for the Oscars in 2022) – premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and is now heading to the Transilvania International Film Festival.

Soori is visibly delighted about attending the premieres and mingling with a different audience from what he is used to. "Watching a film with our people gives a sense of satisfaction; that's one experience. But to take our film across borders and oceans, and visit a theatre filled with hundreds of foreigners with me and the makers in the centre, is a different experience altogether. To see them dissect our films gave me so much joy," says Soori.

"At Rotterdam where the *Viduthalai* films and *Yezhu Kadal*... premiered, festival goers were surprised to see me in both. When some of them came to Berlinale and caught *Kottukkaali*, they were shocked to see me again. It's rare for Indian films to get selected for these festivals and to see that I'm a part of multiple such films makes me happy," he adds. "Their perspective and questions are different from what we are used to here. To retrace where I started from and see where this journey has taken me, feels like a dream."

Soori believes that commercial films are equally important in this stage of his career and pins his hopes on *Garudan*, releasing this Friday. "*Viduthalai* gave a different impression about me to the audience and the promotional material of my upcoming films might give a hunch on the sort of roles I'm getting. *Garudan* will be something between these films thanks to its commercial elements," he says.

"My character Sokkan is stuck

**Soori on balancing commercial films like *Garudan*, releasing this Friday, with other projects like *Kottukkaali*, *Viduthalai* and *Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai***

## Bird's eye view



between loyalty and justice. It's different from what I did in *Viduthalai* and apart from acting, the film also has a lot more action and emotion," says Soori, pointing out how the action sequences are different from *Viduthalai* yet still realistic. "This type of action is something I'm new to. I think people feel I'm doing back-to-back action films

because of *Viduthalai* and the raw feel *Kottukkaali*'s promotional material gave. But I wonder how that's possible given just one such film has been released (*smiles*)."

Although Soori has worked in several Sasikumar-starrers like *Udanpirappe*, *Kennedy Club*, *Poraali* and *Sundarapandian*, *Garudan* might feel distinctly different for the audience

**Festival diary** Actor Soori; (below) in a still from *Garudan*. THAMODHARAN B



***I judge myself based on what the audience thinks about me. Currently, I'm being approached for lead roles but I am still up for a comedy film***

SOORI

considering the comedian-turned-lead actor is headlining the film. However, Soori says the dynamics have not changed, at least from his perspective. "I'm very proud that Sasi *anna* is part of the film. At the shooting spot, it didn't feel like I was doing a lead role and *anna* was in my film; it felt like every other film with him in which I'm the comedian."

**In tune**

Interestingly, after having Ilaiyaraaja compose music for *Viduthalai*, Yuvan Shankar Raja is the music director for *Garudan*. "Raja *appa* is an *ulaganayagan* (an universal hero) and I got to work with him and now, I got to work with his son who has made a mark for himself over the last 25 years. For all these years, many of our phone ringtones have featured his tunes and I feel lucky to have worked with him," says Soori who also responds to how both those films and even *Kottukkaali* feature female leads for him. "It happens to be a part

of the story and it's not that I'm demanding for one (*laughs*). I like how the romance isn't over-the-top or over-saturated but very practical and simple."

When *Viduthalai* released, Soori mentioned how he would love to keep doing comedy films. "But now, I'm being approached for lead roles mostly. While I'm happy, I'm still up for a full-fledged comedy film but I have not gotten them. But that's fine and I'm sticking to the roles I'm getting," says Soori. "It all comes down to connecting with the audience. I believe if I do something drastically different from what I think I can do, it will not sit well with them either. I judge myself based on what the audience thinks about me."

It has been 25 years since Soori made his acting debut and even after turning lead, he prefers to not have a plan for the type of films he chooses. "I wanted to become an actor and that happened. I never expected to become a story's lead, but that has happened as well. Though what might happen after this is not in my hands, I know I want to be in a better position than what I am now and I have to work hard to get that."



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**A dynamic ensemble**

Prepare to be mesmerised by the soulful rhythms of jazz as renowned saxophonist, pianist and composer Matt Littlewood unveils his latest project, *Beginnings*. Accompanying Littlewood on this musical journey are Sankarshan 'Shanks' Kini on vocals, Raul Mattia on drums, and Holger Jetter on bass.

@Hyatt Regency, Teynampet, May 31, 8pm onwards. For reservations, call 044 61001234.



**Inspired by the coast**

An art fundraiser, Spectrum of Possibilities, is being organised to raise awareness on autism. The art show is curated by R Venkatesh and glass artist Radhika Krish. The show will present works by various artists, and the theme is influenced by Chennai's vast coastline. The proceeds from the show will go to ARAM Charitable Trust that supports abandoned girl children.

@CP Arts Gallery, Alwarpet. June 1, 10am to 8pm. For details, call 9444073008.



**Maker's market**

Staple Centre and Adara present Sunday Market where local vendors and artisans display their products. The idea behind this initiative by Jupiter Events, is to support small businesses and build a sense of community. The stalls at the event will offer fresh produce, handmade crafts, textiles, decor, artisanal food, and much more.

@Abirami Chidambaram Community Hall, Kotturpuram. June 2, 10am to 8pm. Entry is free. For details, call 9841188334.

**Maithreyi Venkatesan, Srreya Sridhar and Jeromi Claudine**

**A**n unsuspecting crowd at the mall watched in rapt attention as 13-year-old Sri Oviyasena gracefully twirled five hula hoops while deftly solving a randomly scrambled Rubik's cube, all within the span of a minute. Many stopped in their tracks to see the two-time Guinness World Record holder's unique showcase: her world records comprised a maximum of 288 gyrations in hula hoops and successfully solving a 3x3 cube, while simultaneously spinning five hoops in under one minute.

At the Indian Cube Challenge 2024 conducted by Speedcubing India, held recently at Phoenix MarketCity, over 180 participants from ages eight to 14 competed in different categories, apart from a special open category.

Cube challenges are a kind of competitive puzzle-solving where Rubik's cube enthusiasts like Oviya challenge themselves in terms of speed and skill. These challenges also encourage the creativity of cubers, while also fostering a sense of community. Speedcubing India has been

**Chennai's recent speed cubing challenge saw over 180 cubers come together to showcase their dexterity with the puzzle**

conducting cubing competitions in Hyderabad and Bengaluru since 2014. The organisation has seen participants from across age groups, ranging from five-year-olds to even octogenarians. Pavan Kumar Akula and Vivek Prasad Mada, founders of the organisation say that this is their first challenge in Chennai.

"We understand that there is a lot of potential in Chennai, and many cubers are coming out to participate now," says Pavan, adding that they were very happy with the turnout, and saw many registrations especially in the last two days leading up to the event. Around 100 participants were expected.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the turn out of over 180 people and we expect around 400 registrations



## Need for speed: cube edition

in the next edition," Pavan adds.

The competition in Chennai had a 2x2, 3x3, and 4x4 cube solving as its main event. The special events comprised a pre-memorised solve, where the competitors were given a scramble a day before, to prepare and solve, on the day of the event. Apart from the regular cubes, there

were special cubes with different axes of rotation called mirror cubes and pyramid-shaped puzzles called pyraminx.

**Flag off**

Ayush, a Class IX cuber said that his grandmother taught him how to

solve the cube. Anirudh, a 11-year-old student from Hosur who was a first-time competitor says, "Other kids in my block would learn about the cube and naturally I was curious too. My father then got me a cube and I learnt how to solve the 3x3 cube from him. I later went online and learned about various types of cubes and how to solve them."

Oviya's journey in cubing was

sparked by a simple observation of her brother's online practice sessions. It wasn't until 2022 that Oviya, already deeply committed to honing her skills in both hooping and cubing, decided to challenge herself. "Each practice session has brought me one step closer to success," she says. Beyond her current feats, Oviya also aims for the 2032 Olympics in archery, and is currently receiving coaching for the same.

Vivek says that the organisation is planning to organise a challenge in Delhi in the coming months. The next edition in Chennai will be in September. Throwing light on the community, Pavan says, "The cubing community of India has grown since 2010." There are a few active cubing hubs in India, which include Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi. Bengaluru and Chennai have seen the largest competitions, and are actively growing their respective cubing communities through such events.

**Colour theory** (Top) Participants at the Indian Cube Challenge; (Left) Sri Oviyasena. R. RAVINDRAN





**A**





Southern Spice has been serving dishes from the South Indian states for the last decade just like it did in its previous avatar as Mysore. We try karyaru katti yerachi kola urundai, a classic mutton dish from the Chettinad region, which is tender with the warm flavour of caramelised onion melting in the mouth. Then comes a plate of steaming Kerala matta rice with creamy Alleppey fish curry, and a tangy manathakkali varthal kuzhambu.

We end the evening at La Patisserie, where there are sweet mango swans made with soft choux pastry and sinful chocolate pyramids made with old-school chocolate cake and rich ganache.

**Taj Coromandel**, the hotel that hosted Queen Elizabeth and where superstar Rajinikanth got married, celebrates its golden jubilee

We set out on a restaurant-hopping adventure, starting with Anise, the all-day diner. “Back when it used to be called The Pavilion, there used to be a raw mango and chicken

Over the years, while much has remained the same at the Taj Coromandel, it has also evolved to keep up with a changing clientele. "I have seen three ballrooms change, the lobby has changed twice and the restaurants have been renamed

One of the most endearing qualities of Amul cheese is that its taste appeals to all age groups. Loved by children and adults, it has become a cherished addition to school lunch boxes,

As we continue to embrace the rich flavours that define Indian cuisine, as it carries goodness in every bite, it also takes forward the essence of tradition, the warmth of nostalgia, and the promise of delicious taste. So, the next time you reach for that familiar block or slice of Amul Cheese, take a moment to savour the taste of tradition and say with pride, "Ye Mera Cheese Hai."


## “CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE”




The students of Sai University are staging their theatre production titled, *The Bones of The Earth*. The play is an adaptation of the story with the same title by Ursula K Le Guin. It narrates the story of a profound relationship between an apprentice, Silence, and a wizard teacher, Duncie. It is a captivating story of love, care, and affection, for one another, set across generations.

@MS Subbulakshmi auditorium, Asian College of Journalism, Taramani, June 1, 5pm. Entry starts from ₹150.






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# The action begins

**Kajal Aggarwal, headlining Telugu film *Satyabhama*, on training for action sequences post her maternity break**

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**K**ajal Aggarwal has been in the thick of interviews and promotions for her new Telugu film, *Satyabhama*, over the last few weeks. At an apartment in the vicinity of HITEC City, Hyderabad, which doubles up as her workspace, the actor who has just completed a photoshoot takes off her chunky earrings and puts her feet up to sit comfortably on the sofa as we begin to speak. *Satyabhama*, directed by Suman Chikkala with screenplay by writer-director Sashi Kiran Tikka (of *Goodachari* fame), is Kajal's 60th film, scheduled to

release on June 7. Since she headlines the film, the promotions are worked around #Kajal60 and she is termed 'Queen of the masses'. "The tag came from my fans and the makers incorporated it; it was not like my team made a sales pitch for such a tag. I am grateful and consider myself lucky for the loyalty, support and encouragement I have been receiving for 17 years," says Kajal, adding that *Satyabhama* is a 'massy' film. "My character – ACP Satyabhama – is in a commercial space, yet off the beaten track."

**Emotional connect**  
Playing a cop in an action drama has been on her wishlist but Kajal asserts that *Satyabhama* is not akin to a

female version of *Singham*. She features in full-fledged action sequences but the narrative, she explains, shows the emotional vulnerability of a female cop. "Satyabhama is feisty and can use law and order to help the oppressed, but we also see how she gets affected by everything that happens around her. It was emotionally and physically a tough film to do."

The task was tougher since Kajal swung into action mode after a maternity break; she has been juggling between being a new mother and fulfilling her work commitments, including director Shankar's *Indian 2* headlined by Kamal Haasan. Before discussing the action sequences, Kajal recalls being emotionally invested in the

cop drama when she heard the narration of *Satyabhama*. She had discussions with the writers (Suman Chikkala, Sashi Kiran Tikka and Prashanth Reddy) on the backstory of her character. "The makers had several hypothetical situations that made me understand how my character would behave in different situations. The screenplay does not explain

## Off the beaten track

Kajal Aggarwal in *Satyabhama*.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

much and trusts the intelligence of the audience. We had workshops and I made notes on my copy of the script."

## Action mode

The action sequences required Kajal to deliver some solid punches. Like most actors, she has been fitness oriented for years. In 2018, she began learning Kalaripayattu for *Indian 2*, Krav Maga for a Telugu film that she let go following pregnancy, and mixed martial arts.

Getting back to her fitness routine after delivery was not a cakewalk, she says, "I began doing yoga two weeks after my son was born. Earlier I would do 108 Surya namaskars with ease and here I was struggling to do five. I could squat while lifting several kilos earlier and post delivery it was tough to squat with just my body weight. I spent the first few weeks at my mother's place; my mom thought I had lost my mind to begin exercising that soon. I wanted to work for the dopamine effect. At that point, it was not about any film. My husband, my trainer and friends asked me to take it slow. I learnt to not expect quick results and take it one day at a time. My muscle memory kicked in and I slowly regained my stamina."

Next up is *Indian 2* and she has new films lined up, which are yet to be announced. Having ticked off the wish of doing an action film, Kajal hopes she will get to feature in a mythological drama. "One of my new films will see me doing something in a small capacity, but I would love to be part of a full-fledged mythology. I am a greedy actor."

## Kajol, Prabhu Deva back again

Kajol and Prabhu Deva, the duo who danced its way into Indian pop culture with cult classic songs like 'Vennilave' and 'Mana Madurai' in 1997 Tamil film *Minsara Kanavu*, are collaborating once again after 27 years. The duo is reuniting for director Charantej Uppalapati's upcoming film *Maharagni*. *Maharagni* also stars Naseerudin Shah, Samyuktha, Jishu Sen Gupta, Adithya Seal, Chaya Kadam and Pramod Pathak. Said to be "an explosive cocktail of intense drama, raw emotions, and mind-blowing action sequences", the film is produced by Harman Baweja and Venkata Anish Dorigillu under the banners Baweja Studios and E7 Entertainments, respectively. GK Vishnu has been roped in as the cinematographer while Harshavardhan Rameshwar is in charge of music. The first schedule of *Maharagni* is reportedly completed and the makers are expected to announce the film's release date soon. The film will be released in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.



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## Journey of a coolie

**A**mjath Meeran is gearing up for his debut Tamil project *Metro Coolie*, one that will have several sub-plots and thus, will be divided into two parts. "The first part revolves around a search for the brother, in the backdrop of illegal labourers. The second part is about who the coolie is and his conflict with a billionaire," said Amjath, on the sidelines of the launch of his company, Meeran Theatres.

In this film, Amjath – apart from helming story, dialogues and script – will also play a vital character called Solamalai.

*Metro Coolie* will adopt a unique distribution strategy, he adds. "When we finish both parts, we will have almost seven hours of footage with us. After releasing the film in theatres, we plan to convert the content into original series for OTTs and stream it as 14 episodes, with two seasons." *Metro Coolie*, which is targeting release by end 2024, will be edited by Yoga Bhaskar, have cinematography by Antonio Terzio, art direction by TN Kabilan and music by Guruprasad Subramanian.

**Srinivasa Ramanujam**

**Amjath Meeran**



Sasikumar and Unni Mukundan in *Garudan*.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# WHO'S THE HERO?

***Garudan* is like a relay race with Soori, Sasikumar and Unni Mukundan, says its director RS Durai Senthikumar**

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**F**or director RS Durai Senthikumar, a hero is an ordinary man with the grit, resilience, and capabilities "to tackle the most extraordinary of circumstances, for a larger cause or his own benefit". His upcoming action film *Garudan* shows a God's eye view of three such heroes, who make the film a relay race of sorts, "as each of them takes up the baton and spearheads this story one after the other".

A multi-hero subject such as this is right up Durai's alley as such an effort to give ample space to secondary leads and supporting characters is visible in almost all his films. Durai credits this quality to the experience of working with his mentors, Balu Mahendra and Vetri

Maaran. "These are things I must have picked from the interactions I had with them. But even aside from that, a story told for over two hours cannot be one-sided; that will only result in a templated product," he says, adding that strong supporting characters help in adding drama and strengthening the conflict in the story.

These are discussions quite refreshing to indulge in as heroes in Tamil cinema, for long, have been reluctant about projects that might have them share the limelight with others. "But now, even in bigger films, having multiple artistes has become a necessity. Heroes are more aware of that as well." This is why, Durai says, actor Soori – who

has famously started a second innings as a serious actor since Vetri Maaran's *Viduthalai* – has chosen a multi-hero subject like *Garudan* for his sophomore attempt as a hero. "He knows that despite the presence of others, he could shine in a story like this, and it becomes a challenge to overcome."

*Garudan* features Sasikumar and Malayalam actor Unni Mukundan as best friends, and Soori as the watchful protector of Unni's character. Casting is the centrepiece of all the hype around *Garudan*. Sasikumar's casting in this role is a no-brainer; the actor has for long become the go-to choice for such a rural action film.

"We wanted an interesting choice for the character opposite Sasikumar, and that's when the Malayalam film *Malikappuram* was released in Tamil. That's what led us to Unni Mukundan." Durai is aware that

Soori's makeover, and the success of Soori's yet-to-be-released *Kottukkaali* in the festival circuit, has added to the expectations from *Garudan*. "However, though this is being projected as Soori's film – and it is ultimately his film – I am hoping that it reaches the audiences as a good story with all these characters bringing their own to the front," says Durai.

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