

metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Bar-tailed godwits spotted together at Pulicat Lake bring cheer to the birding community **P3**

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BALAJI'S SORGAVAASAL **P4**



Track record Snapshots from the current edition of Jagriti Yatra, where budding entrepreneurs learn from established professionals during a 15-day train journey across India. S SHIVA RAJ



Journey of a lifetime

We hop onboard the Jagriti Yatra, a special train journey that showcases the real India and hopes to kindle the entrepreneurial spirit among yatris

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The all-familiar vendor's cries of 'chaai' and 'samosa' are missing on this train. Instead, words like 'startup', 'business plan' and 'SWOT analysis' are banded about in the AC chair car coach. Elsewhere, an *antakshari* is in progress, with participants breaking into a rendition of 'Kabhi Kabhi' in unison. Life inside the Jagriti Yatra train is special. Every day is different and every passing hour, an experience. Yatris – as its passengers are called often describe it as a "life-changing moment". It is. Conceptualised in 2008, this year's edition of the Yatra picked 525 people from different parts of India, selected after a screening of 47,000 applicants in the age group of 21-27 who are interested in entrepreneurship. The participants then visit 12 destinations across India, covering 8,000-kilometres over a 15-day trip during which they meet role models, observe business enterprises and get a glimpse into



A lot of youngsters in tier-2 cities are migrating to bigger cities for jobs that aren't there. We need enterprises to nurture local development

ASHUTOSH KUMAR
CEO, Jagriti Yatra

how India works, with specific focus on tier-2 and tier-3 districts. Travelling with them is a team of volunteers, some former yatris, and also a few foreigners, trying to catch a glimpse of how rural India operates. They eat at platforms, and share seats and responsibilities in buses. As the train chugs along the heartland of India, friendships are forged,



introverts open up to strangers and somewhere along the way, business ideas are shaped. The Jagriti Yatra, organised by non-profit organisation Jagriti Sewa Sansthan is in its 17th year now, and aims to do one thing: build India through enterprise. "We want to create more job creators than job seekers," says Ashutosh Kumar, CEO, Jagriti Yatra. **Different dreams** "I hope to meet my co-founder here," says Agam Agarwal, a chartered accountant by profession and entrepreneur by passion who is undertaking the yatra. "I have a crazy idea that I want to execute with someone on this train. A majority of the rural population don't pay taxes, which leaves them away from the loans they can avail and Government subsidies that they can use." He is on the look-out for a tech guy on the train to set his plans in motion. Like Agam, there are several others with business opportunities. Take Tejaswini Kapadia, from Solapur, for instance, who quit a corporate job to pursue her entrepreneurial dreams. "My younger brother and I now run a

ghee business. Ghee is an ancient Indian superfood and we want it to go to the global level," says Tejaswini, who is undertaking this yatra to develop her personality and increase her network. Also doing that is Shivam Porwal, founder of IT consultancy firm Expertsmania. A differently-abled professional based out of Ahmedabad, Shivam's driving force was to meet like-minded people. "I strongly believe that your network is your net worth," he says. He credits his fellow yatris, all of whom he met during this journey, to have helped him during the travel. "Accessibility is an issue. I have felt exhausted on the train and found it difficult at railway stations. I understand we are a minority but just constructing a ramp will impact our lives greatly." During this trip, some participants find investors or collaborators, while some others, find their life purpose. Some find life partners, like Jignesh Talasila, an alumnus of Vishakapatnam's Gitam University, did in 2014 when he went on the yatra with his now-wife, Vyshali Sagar. Many other established professionals too attribute their success to embarking on this journey, like Prachi Shevgoankar (Cool the Globe), Aditi Madan (Blue Line Foods) and Ayush Bansal (iDream Career), all of whom have also featured in the popular business reality television series, *Shark Tank India*. While in Sri City (75 kilometres from Chennai), these yatris get a peek into manufacturing business units, and a visit to the Akshaya Paatra Foundation in Vishakapatnam gave them information on the workings of

an organisation providing nutritious meals to school children. As the train journeys into Brahmapur in Odisha, the yatris took a trip to Gram Vikas, an organisation that helps rural communities lead a dignified life by concentrating on aspects of sanitation, hygiene and education. Explains Chinmay Vadnere, COO of Jagriti Yatra, "Someone on the train is from IIT but there's also someone who is a farmer. The common aspiration for both is developing the country." From more than 8,500 people who have undertaken the journey, 28% have started their own enterprises. There are more plans in the future, as Ashutosh reveals. "We are mulling on doing two yatras per year, considering the demand. We also want to do a ship yatra." The waters will have to wait, but for now, Jagriti Yatra 2024 – which is currently on, till December 1 – is journeying through places like Rajgir (Bihar), Deoria (Uttar Pradesh), Delhi, Tiloniya (Rajasthan) and Ahmedabad. As the train travels past these towns and villages, just before lights off at 11pm, the yatris are still up



ON THE TRAIN

WHO? Anyone in the 21-27 age group who hopes to be a changemaker or an entrepreneur can apply. Professionals above 28 years can apply to be facilitators. This year, 47,000 applicants were received, of which 525 were selected for the journey. The selected participants have to pay around ₹70,000 for trip costs, for which scholarships are available for the economically-disadvantaged sections of society.

HOW? This special train from the Indian Railways is meant only for the yatra and has 19 coaches. It stops at 12 locations across the country. Along the way, the passengers not only network among themselves, but also meet entrepreneurs and observe their business models.

WHAT? Designed as a university on wheels, the train usually runs in the night to the next location. Food is sometimes served on the train by a special catering team or on the platform. While the amenities are much like any other train, it has speakers in each compartment for communication, charging points, clothes hangers and a few bathing units. It undergoes a deep-clean service every day in the mornings when the passengers are out. For more information and to apply for 2025's yatra, log on to www.jagritiyatra.com



I was fascinated that I could meet 500 people on a train. Through this journey, you understand the pulse of India

SHIVAM PORWAL
IT entrepreneur

discussing the day's events. Come morning, when the clock strikes 6 and the sun makes a shy appearance, the yatris wake up to AR Rahman's stirring 'Yeh Jo Des' from Shah Rukh Khan's *Swades*, which plays from speakers set up in all compartments. It is a brand new beginning – they could be in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh or Odisha – and they are awake and ready. India is waiting.



TO WATCH a video from the yatra, scan QR code.

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If you have been inching towards the slow life, here is an event that brings together like-minded individuals in the space. Curated by Maithreye Rajagopal, The Honest Hustle Collective "aims to offer a platform for brands that truly make a difference, encouraging everyone to make more conscious choices," says the 34-year-old who switched from corporate marketing to marketing for social enterprises. The seed for the Collective was sown post her pregnancy, when Maithreye was looking for purpose-driven brands. "Chennai is often seen as a tricky market for sustainable brands, with Bengaluru being the preferred choice due to its more mature audience for ethical products. But I believe Chennai is just as promising. We, as a city, connect deeply with stories

A hustle for Nature

Sessions on art, mending wares and seed sovereignty come together at The Honest Hustle Collective

– the passion and purpose behind a product," she says, adding how in today's fast-paced world, "convenience often leads us to settle for what's readily available, without considering the hidden costs". Participating brands comprise Tula, Avani, Porgai, Hastha, Upasana, and Manas by Manas Ghorai, among others. The brands will showcase apparel, jewellery and more. "I was intentional about curating a line-up that embodies the spirit of social impact. This meant including only social enterprises, NGOs, and brands committed to organic farming and

farm-based products," says Maithreye, who is also offering an organic lunch thali by Safe Food Focus. The schedule in the workshops segment comprises a session by Vignesh Babu, a self-taught clay artist, artist Padma Malini of The Plain Papers Page who will guide children to create postcards with oil pastels, and Repair Cafe Collective India which is all set to collaborate with participants to mend and repurpose their items. There is also a session by Yogavahini, a yoga collective known for their work with people with Parkinson's and inner healing,



Slow life A weave by Manas Ghorai; and apparel and accessories by Hastha. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

that will focus on mindfulness and self-awareness. "And for music lovers, a surprise live performance awaits on Saturday evening," she adds. A highlight, however, is a session on the revival of Bengal muslin by Arup Rakshit from Mahatma Gandhi Gram Sewa Samaj, West Bengal. "He will share the remarkable story of Bengal's muslin revival, an effort that honours traditional craft and works towards its preservation in modern times. This story of heritage and innovation exemplifies how traditional crafts can create social and cultural impact," she says, adding how Arup's work "focusses on promoting indigenous cotton fabrics and supporting the artisans who create them". On November 30 and December 1, at CP Art Centre, Alwarpet.

A long, brightly lit corridor with a red wall on the right, a wooden balcony with a railing on the left, and a patterned carpet. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling.

The erstwhile home was the venue for recitals of the *Ramayana* for over a century. Raja Ravi Varma-influenced stained glass panels, each depicting a unique



On the first floor lies Red Room, an ode to Chettinad's Burma connect, which features everything from the decor to furniture in red

But a trip to Chettinad is also about sinking into the slow life: watching cows ambling through fields, villagers going about their day while elsewhere, a *jallikattu* begins.

The writer was in Chettinad on the invitation of The Park Group.

At the event anchored by actor Mandira Bedi, the athletes were also part of a curated golf clinic designed to take both amateurs and experts through a golfing experience. OMEGA recently felicitated Irish golfer Rory McIlroy who claimed his sixth Race to Dubai title on November 17. This victory marked a third consecutive win for the golfer, underscoring his



dominance in the sport

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*@The E-Hotel, Royapettah.
4pm to 6pm, December 1. Entry
to the event is free and open to
all. For details and to register,
call 8800292271.*

A wide-angle photograph of the lounge area at the Ritz-Carlton, London. The room features a high ceiling with exposed wooden beams and modern lighting fixtures, including a large chandelier. The seating consists of plush, patterned sofas and armchairs arranged around tables. A bar area is visible in the background, and a large screen displays a map. The overall atmosphere is sophisticated and comfortable.

 **Local brew** (Above)
Inside the bar;
(inset)and on the menu.



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To mark this milestone, Indian Accent is taking its signature flavours on the road with a series of exclusive pop-up events across India, in collaboration with American Express. After wowing diners in cities like Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Perth, the India tour kicked off in Bengaluru on November 8. Now, it is Chennai's turn. The pop-up lands at the Hyatt Regency for three days, from November 29 to December 1, followed by events in Jaipur, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad.

“When we embarked on the journey of creating Indian Accent, our vision was to redefine the perception of Indian cuisine. We aimed to move beyond the stereotype that Indian food is

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Pitstop at Pulicat

Much to the excitement of birders and experts, five bar-tailed godwits paid Pulicat a visit

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In the early hours of November 11, city naturalist S Venkatraaman, better known as ‘Poochi’ Venkat, spotted something unusual at Pulicat lake. Five bar-tailed godwits were sitting

together on a landmass inside the lake. “It is very rare to see the birds together,” observed Venkat, adding that he shared the photographs he shot with experts from the Madras Naturalists’ Society (MNS). Bar-tailed godwits have been spotted in the region before, but not as a flock of five. “These are waders that are known to travel long distances at a stretch,”

A rare occurrence Bar-tailed godwits have been spotted in the region before, but not as a flock of five. POOCHI VENKAT



explains Subramaniam Shankar from MNS. “They fly up to 25,000 kilometres,” he adds: “Their digestive organs shrink after being loaded up with fat to extract energy for these long travels.”

The small birds with long, sharp beaks, are supposedly “audacious”. “At their breeding grounds, they are known to



Their digestive organs shrink after being loaded up with fat to extract energy for these long travels

SUBRAMANIAM SHANKAR
Madras Naturalists’ Society

constantly fight over territory,” says Subramaniam. Their call is onomatopoeic, which means it sounds similar to their name, going ‘godwit, godwit’. Subramaniam says that their exact migratory route is not known, and that they are observed on intertidal flats and salt pans with some greenery all along the Indian coast through the year. “I have seen individual birds before, but not a group,” he adds.

The reason why the birds were spotted together is a subject that requires research by ornithologists, Venkat says. “It could be due to climate change, displacement due to their forest area getting affected... this has to be analysed,” he says. On the day they were spotted, the tide was high, reducing landmass over higher areas. “However, our boatman, who is an expert in birding, told us that this was not the reason why the godwits were bunched together. He too had never encountered such an occurrence,” he adds.

Venkat and his friends travel during the first week of every month to Pulicat to document birds. While he is known for his expertise on insects, he has now ventured into birding and studying fauna as well. “With a lot of development going on around the place, we are not sure about the future of Pulicat lake,” he says, adding that the same is the case with waterbodies around Mamallapuram.

Songs of the season

The weather is nippy and a festive spirit fills the air. Here’s a list of carol concerts you can head to



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

The Madras Guild of Performing Arts rings in the festive season with its annual concert-cum-singalong, Sounds of the Season. Join both the senior and junior ensembles and sing along to some old favourites and new, conducted by Atul Jacob Isaac.

@Museum Theatre, Egmore.
November 30, 7pm-8.30pm.
Tickets at ₹499 @mdnd.in.

The Indian Missionary Society, Chennai branch, hosts its Christmas carnival featuring singers from the Genesis Chamber Orchestra, Women’s Christian College, Dishon Samuel Medley Band, Rolling Tones and Laudant. Alwin Paul Isaac, Jaffy Isaac and MK Paul will also feature. @Kamarajar Arangam, Teynampet. December 1, 6pm. Donor passes ₹1,000 upwards. Contact 9176670160.

The Union Christian Association presents Gloria, a Christmas carol concert featuring a host of carollers from UCA school and college’s combined choir, The Minstrels, Dhvani, Women’s Christian College, CSI Holy Trinity Church, Madras Mar Thoma Syrian Church, St Thomas Orthodox Cathedral, Northeast Christian Fellowship, Celestial Voices, and St Peter’s and St Paul’s Orthodox Church. @UCA Auditorium, Nowroji Road, Chetpet. December 8, 6pm.

Join The Minstrels in the spirit of celebrating Christmas at their 45th carol service, Echoes of Christmas Day. The evening will feature the Adaikalanathar Lutheran Choir, Voyz Male, Rolling Tones, Bella Voci, Satya Family, Dhvani, Lutheran Men’s Voice and Mount Ensemble. @CSI St Mathias Church, Vepery. December 13, 6.15pm. For details, 9884029700.

The Confederation of Tamilnadu Malayalee Associations presents Carol Bells, a Christmas carol concert free and open to all. @Malayalae Club Auditorium, Club Road, Chetpet. December 14, 6pm onwards.

The CSI Redeemer Church hosts its carol concert, Magnificat, for the 30th year. The 50-strong choir, conducted by Emmanuel Ponraj, will sing a wide range of music from traditional carols in refreshing arrangements, popular classical excerpts from Handel, Mozart and Bach, and contemporary Christmas music with lively rhythms. The children’s and junior choirs will also perform accompanied by a 15-member strings ensemble and Hannah Jane on the piano. @CSI Redeemer Church, Anna Nagar East. December 15, 6.30pm.

The Madras Musical Association’s 67th Carols by Candlelight is a community carol singing event by candle light. @St Christopher’s College of Education, EVK Sampath Road, Vepery. December 21, 6.30pm.

Nature navigator
A chance to be one with the earth as the startup emden.in, offers a two-day workshop on being a Nature educator. @Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and VGP Marine Kingdom, ECR. On November 30 and December 1; 9am to 5pm. Registration is ₹500 and includes lunch. For details, call 8056108916.

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13618

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Across

1 Go along with (9)
8 Appeal (4)
9 Playground game using numbered squares (9)
10 Brainwave (4)
13 Silky strands (5)
15 In a nonchalant manner (6)
16 Like Lord Peter Wimsey or Count Dracula, say (6)
17 Business magnate (6)
19 A good deal (6)
20 Weapon — search (5)
21 Pipe (4)
24 That’s fine! (informal) (4-5)
25 Spoken (4)
26 Runway lights to guide a pilot when landing — 1942 Terence Rattigan play (5,4)

Down

2 Harvest (4)
3 Kiln for drying hops (4)
4 Under the weather (6)
5 Most pleasant (6)
6 Young and inexperienced — newcomer (9)

7 Sly as a dad (anag) — one’s youth? (5,4)
11 Divide — or paint it (anag) (9)
12 Curios (4-1-4)
13 Baffle (5)
14 Move furtively (5)
18 Five cents (6)
19 Musician (Casanova, perhaps) (6)
22 Stunning success (4)
23 Give expression to (4)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated December 5, 2024

Solution No. 13617

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When a blind date goes right

Read a book that a stranger picks out for you — Bessy Reads’ latest community initiative mimics a blind date, but with books

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On a pleasant Sunday afternoon, 30 strangers gathered at Crafe, T Nagar, each feeling a mix of excitement and curiosity. It was not your typical blind date event — there were no introductions or small talk. Instead, everyone was there to meet a book, handpicked by Bessy Reads based on their favourite genres, along with their favourite coffee.

Bessy Reads, a silent reading community that meets every Sunday between 6am and 9am at Besant Nagar and Thiruvannamiyur beaches, organised the event. “Ever since Bessy Reads hit the 10K mark on Instagram, I have wanted to explore ideas that could engage our community of book lovers,” says Kruthika Kumar, one of the organisers. “We have quite a lot of ideas that we are working on as a team but wanted to implement one and see how it goes,” she says.

Kruthika, along with fellow members Divya Maheshwari, Sri Sivakumar, and Janani Umaphathy, initially considered bringing a few books from different genres and letting attendees choose based on clues. However, they quickly realised how specific readers’ preferences can be. “It took us three days to match books to genres and another full day to package them. We even added clues on the wrapped books,” Kruthika shares. There were 30 books in total. Each book, wrapped in a newspaper giving an old-school charm, had clues penned inside. For instance, Deborah Rodriguez’s *The Little Coffee Shop of*

A library, some bable Participants chatting over coffee and books. AKHILA EASWARAN

Kabul had a note that read “Brews and biscuits in a war-torn land, life and hope blend with a steady hand.” Along with promoting the reading habit, the team is committed to supporting small, independent bookstores through these events. The team got these books from three bookstores: Subashini Book House, Tambaram; Sriram Bookstore and Booksbykilo, Nanganallur. “The kind of personal connection we used to

have with books and the person at the bookstore, who curates books with affection, is dwindling in the digital era,” explains Kruthika.

Sruthi Muthukaruppan, 29, says, “This is such a unique experience. Here, reading is celebrated, not judged. It’s a great space to meet people with diverse literary tastes and

make new connections.” She recently finished *It Ends With Us* and is of the opinion that the novel was better than the TV show adaptation which aired on Netflix recently. Harold Prabhu, 27, a regular at Bessy Reads sessions, says his go-to genres are non-fiction, productivity-help, self-growth and at times, biographies. “The event fosters a sense of belonging. It’s wonderful to gather with like-minded people and exchange book recommendations,” he says. For Adithya Dushyanth, 29, the surprise element was the highlight. “Having someone else pick a book for me adds an exciting new perspective to my favourite genre,” he says. At the event, he received *Coming Home* by Rosamunde Pilcher. “It’s a coming-of-age novel and I love the sound of it,” he says.

Looking ahead, the Bessy Reads team is brimming with ideas: a book reading session at a sanctuary or zoological park where they will gift books or plants to people, a women-only reading session, and reading retreats to serene locations. “Author meet-ups, and podcasts featuring writers are also in the pipeline,” adds Kruthika.

Today, when connections can disappear in the blink of an eye, there is something reassuring about losing yourself in a book.

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Eight and counting

Tamil stand-up Praveen Kumar's latest show, 8, is a funny take on a few memorable incidents in his life

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If you follow the Tamil stand-up comedy scene, you probably know all about Praveen Kumar's life. That he has a daughter who shares his birthday. That he loves biryani and hates upma.

Popular Tamil stand-up comic Praveen Kumar – aka The Family Man – is now back on stage with a brand new show, titled 8. Inspired by Rajinikanth's popular song in *Baasha* that divides a person's lifetime into eight stages, Praveen's 8 is a collection of incidents that happened in his life, narrated in humorous fashion.

"These are stories from eight stages of my life," says Praveen. These include his experiences going to karate class when he was a little boy, college tales, staying with roommates, his first on-stage outing and how he taught his daughter to ride a bicycle. It does not talk about the most significant story of his life – his marriage – but that is because it has already been explored in his previous stand-up special, *Kancheepuram Maapla*.

How comfortable is he sharing a large part of his life with the public? "If I write a joke about a common topic, there are many comedians who would have thought on similar lines. I remember wanting to write a set about a Taj Mahal visit, but saw another comedian who had presented something similar. With general issues, it is difficult to avoid a clash of ideas. The only thing that differentiates you from other comics and memes is your life itself. Also, if someone has to get offended with my jokes, let it be me," he laughs.

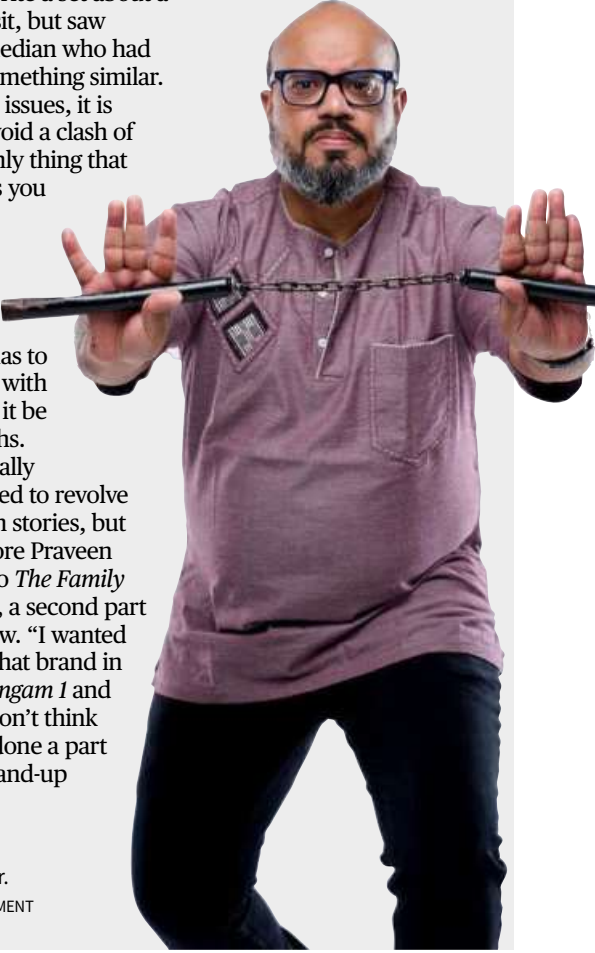
8 was initially conceptualised to revolve around seven stories, but that was before Praveen decided to do *The Family Man Returns*, a second part of his hit show. "I wanted to establish that brand in detail, like *Singam 1* and *Singam 2*. I don't think anyone has done a part two in the stand-up

scene before," says Praveen, whose latest show is about 90-minutes long.

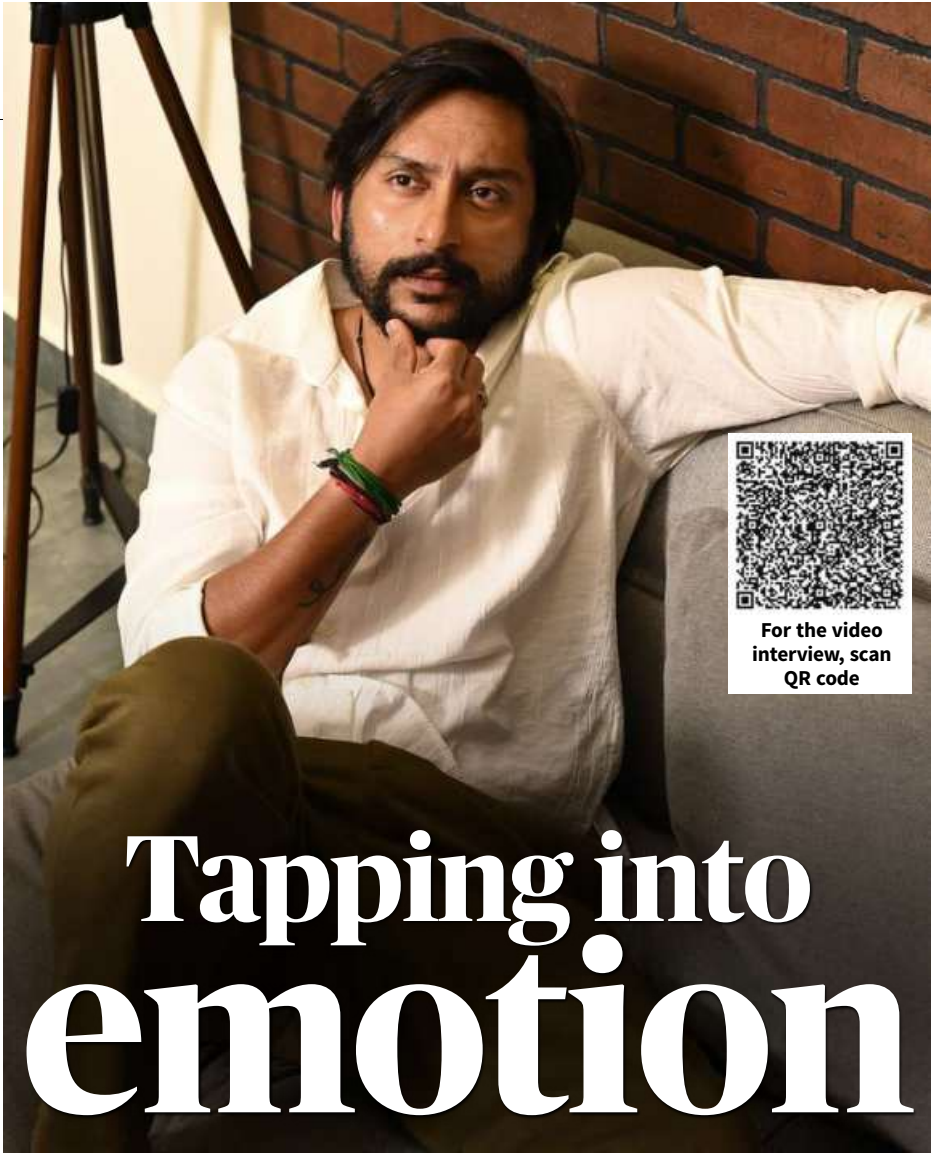
While he is looking to stage this show in multiple locations, including towns like Tirunelveli, Thootukudi, Namakkal and Neyveli, Praveen is firm on one thing: that his content will always be family-friendly. "I cannot write an adult joke. I also believe that people who see my face in the posters trust that this will be a family-friendly show. I don't want to break that trust. You don't need to make arrangements for the kids to be at a grandparents' house while watching 8; you can bring them along."

On the subject of kids, Praveen has a show targetted at children that is in the works. He is also writing an entire stand-up set on Tamil cinema, a subject close to his heart. Does he dream of a step into Kollywood as an actor or director someday? "I have starred in a small role in the upcoming Tamil film *Kadhalika Neramillai*, directed by Kiruthiga Udhayanidhi," he reveals, "But I wish to write a movie script sometime. It is a dream."

8 will be staged on December 1, 6.30pm, at Museum Theatre, Egmore. Tickets on bookmyshow



Funny vibe
Praveen Kumar.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



For the video interview, scan QR code

Tapping into emotion

RJ Balaji, whose upcoming film is *Sorgavaasal*, on his evolution as an actor and director

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RJ Balaji is not one to forget his humble beginnings. His office is filled with the awards and memorabilia he received in his past life as a radio jockey before becoming an actor-director. His earlier experiences on the road to achieving stardom are nuggets he shares in his interactions for his upcoming film *Sorgavaasal*.

Excerpts from the conversation:

Question: After a slew of comedy films some of which you even co-directed, you ventured into the serious films category with *Run Baby Run*. How was it to transition to serious films?

Answer: I've directed two films (*Mookuthi Amman* and *Veetla Vishesham*) and wrote and almost co-directed one film (*LKG*). I realised I liked to act more as it takes close to two years to direct a film. I



Doors open RJ Balaji; (below) with Saniya Iyappan in a still from *Sorgavaasal*. S SHIVA RAJ

wanted to direct family entertainers and star in films that are genre-centric. *Run Baby Run* was one such experiment.

Q: *Sorgavaasal* also seems to be a raw and rustic film.
A: *Sorgavaasal* was made for a different actor but the team and its producer were in two minds whether to go ahead with that actor and asked for my feedback. I liked the story; it's about a guy stuck in jail due to circumstances. The hero they had chosen initially has a well-built physique that wouldn't invoke the sense of helplessness the character possesses. They were shocked when I said I would like to do it. It's because they had a general perception that I only do fun, commercial entertainers. They called *Sorgavaasal* a raw, action film but I saw it as an emotional drama with action sequences.

Q: You began as a radio jockey, got into acting as a comedian, became a cricket commentator, started doing lead roles and are now directing *Suriya's* next. Do you see redefining yourself as a journey or a destination?

A: At the end of my career, I know my destination will be completely different from where I began. Like every normal middle-class guy who loves cinema, I took up the chance to act after being recognised for my work in radio. I prefer not having long-term goals and do a good job of what I'm currently occupied with.

Q: Do you think Tamil cinema is moving towards a more genre-specific space?

A: *Poovizhi Vasalile* was a complete thriller while *Kadhalukku Mariyadhai* was

a romance; genre-specific films have always been there and if they are good, they do well. *Mookuthi Amman* is no cult classic but it became a comfort watch for many. That's why I wanted to do another family film and *Veetla Vishesham* happened. But in hindsight, I shouldn't have taken a rigid call on what films I should stick to doing and allowed me to explore. Though it's a remake, I still consider *Veetla Vishesham* to be my best as a writer.

Q: After co-directing two films, at what point did you decide to direct on your own, especially when your next venture is *Suriya's 45th* film?

A: With Saravanan sir who I co-directed *Mookuthi Amman*, and *Veetla Vishesham* it was a collection of two thoughts. Compared to my *LKG* days, my ability to handle a big star with my writing and aesthetics has improved. *Suriya 45* is my next scale in the world of cinema and it's not just because of Suriya sir; the scale of writing is higher. It started with an idea I cracked and my team liked it as the idea is huge.

Q: Circling back to your earlier days as an actor, how has this journey been?

A: My earlier films gave me a sense of insecurity. As a supporting actor, I was told to randomly throw a line during the take. There were a lot like me who got caught in this trend of playing the hero's friend which Santhanam sir perfected for 10-15 years. I'm glad films like *Sorgavaasal* and *Happy Ending* are coming my way after working six years as the lead. From here, the idea is to pick up and go from strength to strength.

Sorgavaasal is releasing in theatres on November 29.

Pages of history

Nikkhil Advani on adapting his recent political thriller, *Freedom At Midnight*

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Very few contemporary filmmakers have switched genres like Nikkhil Advani has. Still fondly remembered for the mushy *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, Nikhil over the years, has developed a diverse palette where of late, lesser-known historical accounts told with the flourish of a dramatic thriller, form the dominant shade. After making heads turn with *The Empire* and *Rocket Boys*, Nikkhil is currently in the news for *Freedom At Midnight* – SonyLiv's seven-part series based on Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins' eponymous novel that depicts the backroom politics and ideological battles leading up to India's independence and the Partition.

Excerpts from an interview:

Question: What inspired the perspective you chose to explore this pivotal period in history?

Answer: When Danish Khan (executive vice president, SonyLiv), said in passing, that the series was about a history you may not know, rather a history you should know, it became the mantra with which we approached the writing. The events between August 16, 1946



Nikkhil Advani.
SPECIAL
ARRANGEMENT

when Jinnah gave a call for Direct Action Day and January 30, 1948, when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated are indisputable, but how each personality responded in the discussions could be debated.

Q: How did you work with half a dozen writers?

A: I felt if there is a diametrically opposite view to what we intend to say in the series, we should know and possibly try and understand it. This understanding has subconsciously reflected in our expression, making it richer.

Q: Were you conscious that the book was written from the perspective of Viceroy Mountbatten?

A: Absolutely. Lapierre and Collins admit in the preface that Mountbatten called on them to write about one of the most defining events of history. For us, the protagonist is India, not Mountbatten, not Gandhi or Nehru and Jinnah for that matter.

Q: There has also been a debate

over your casting choices, particularly young Sidhant Gupta playing Nehru...

A: This is subjective. We needed a competent actor to justify Nehru's age from 25 to 58. Casting choices are also governed by the demands of the prosthetic artist. It is easier to make a young person look older than the other way around. Hailing from Jammu, Siddhant has a sharp nose like Nehru. All the actors had to submit themselves to the look for one-and-a-half years.

Q: What should we expect in the second season?

A: If the first season is about backroom politics, in the second, the time bomb would explode as we move outside to see the opposition to Gandhi, the response to the Partition in Punjab and Calcutta, the plight of the refugees, and the question of Kashmir.

Freedom At Midnight is currently streaming on SonyLIV

Over 200 pieces of art by Pallava Artist Village are on display at Lalit Kala Akademi

Melting pot

Canvas connect Art by Sujatha Narayanan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Khushi Bhuta

Walking through Lalit Kala Akademi today envelopes one in a journey of the city's artistic culture. For one sees the dance of Radha/Krishna on a canvas as well as their grandmother's folktales come to life, all within the same walls. Drawing its essence from India's rich flora among other things, Pallava Artist Village's A Mixed Bag, currently on display at the gallery, features senior as well as budding artists from the city.

Curated by National Award-winning artist A Viswam, the exhibition is an homage to the artworks of late artists 'Village' Mookkaiya, Veera Santhanam, M Balasubramaniyam and Natesh Muthuswamy. The display features over 200 pieces of artworks and sculptures by over 80 artists from different walks of life. The gallery will be showcasing work by several

renowned artists and sculptors including G Raman, Asma Menon, Athiveerapandian, Manohar Natarajan and Elanchezhayan.

A stroll through the right side of the gallery engrosses one in a sea of abstract artworks by curator Viswam. With brushstrokes that run across blues, greens and reds, he is inspired to mirror the uniqueness of movement in Nature. He says, "I was inspired by Nature and its five elements. I particularly wanted to show the floating aspect of Nature."

KR Karthikeyan, an artist from Pallava Artist Village, is a textile designer who has translated his interpretation of the 'tree of life' in his art. His artworks feature unknown flowers and leaves seen in the wild and mimics their unsung, vibrant details. "My concept is that the tree is the forest. I wanted to show unity through my work," he says.

On the other hand, budding artist Sujatha Narayanan connects with art through the medium of

spirituality. She is inspired by Andal, the only female poet among the 12 poet-saints in Vaishnavite texts. Sujatha sees the saint as "a feminist symbol since she is given the right of prominence over men". Also growing into the world of art is young artist Rekha Senthoo, who captures the realm of landscapes through acrylics. "The hero of my art is not the tree, it is the acrylic paint. I want to go with its flow," she says.

The gallery will also be featuring artworks of students from the Government College of Fine Arts, Egmore and Kumbakonam College of Arts alongside more seasoned artists. In order to inspire artists from all disciplines, the exhibition will feature evening interactions with writers and filmmakers at the end of every day.

A Mixed Bag will be on till December 3 from 11am to 7pm at Lalit Kala Akademi, Greams Road, Chennai. Priced at ₹5000 onwards.