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An upcoming all-night arts festival trains the spotlight on Kattaikoothu **P3**

NOW, A TAMIL FILM ON A QUEER ROMANCE **P4**



## S Poorvaja and Sanjana Ganesh

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As the sun sets, organisers of Comic Con India are trying to reroute cosplayers at Chennai Trade Centre to step outside for a quick group photo before they lose light. The clarion call brings at least 100 cosplayers in elaborate costumes, pink, purple and blonde wigs and armour that seem true to life, into one colourful, eccentric frame. Multiple Vecnas, Piccolos, Jokers, Harley Quinns and Darth Vaders pose in front of a temple-like structure. There is no better imagery than this of the city's first comic con.

A cosplayer who rushes to join a group photo excitedly says, "I thought I'd be the only idiot in pink," pointing to her wig. However, she is in the company of others who do not favour derision and critique about cotton candy hair.

Inside the venue, it feels like nearly every attendee is now a *katana*-wielding (Japanese sword) warrior. Bobble heads and manga magazines dominate stalls. There is a rush to purchase posters, some shy meet-and-greets with comic book artists, and several unfortunate dents of the wallet. "I am going broke today," is the most repeated phrase, as participants trawl through the merchandise, which includes comic books signed by Stan Lee, the Marvel comics frontman and the co-creator of several iconic characters, for a princely sum of ₹1.85 lakh.

At Chennai's first edition of Comic Con on February 17 and 18, which drew over 32,000 participants, it is evident that everyone can be anyone they like, and indulge in fantasy that they once thought possible only in other major Indian cities. Now that the Con is finally in Chennai, judgement needs to be shredded at the entrance by the metal detectors.

**Casting the transfiguration spell** Roshini Sekhar has been walking with a cosplay medic all evening and has promised to not move around too much so as to protect her costume. "I'm already done with my rounds," she says as she carefully walks in her tiered black dress wielding a massive sword. She cosplays Saber Alter, an antagonist (rather, a dark heroine) of the Japanese visual novel *Fate/stay night*. "Most people think that cosplaying is like fancy dress. The thing they do not realise is that these are months in the making. Because I am in the industry (she's a costume designer), I make many of the pieces I cosplay," she says, adding that people spend



## Comic Con Chennai: Homecoming

We take you inside Chennai's first Comic Con, a multiverse of comic book writers, cosplayers, manga and anime enthusiasts, and tonnes of merchandise

up to ₹50,000 based on how elaborate their costumes are.

At the contest, there are over 300 memorable characters from popular anime, television shows, films, manga, gaming and comics, battling it out for a cash prize of ₹35,000. While Batmans, Jokers and Marvel characters form a chunk of the cosplayers, one can also see characters from *One Piece*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Attack on Titan*, *Jujutsu Kaisen* and the Studio Ghibli films.

Wearing a spectacular blonde wig with chunks of spiked hair cascading down his back, a Goku (from *Dragon Ball Z*) cosplayer is constantly stopped for pictures and asked to pose. For these run-ins and photo-ops, there were photo walls set up across the expansive hall, where children and adults alike stop to click photos with the roving cosplayers.

"I have always known about the existence of a small (cosplay) community in the city but to see the



size of participants is shocking. It feels good to know that there are as many people in Chennai indulging a hobby that could easily turn into an obsession," Roshini says.

The size of the audience in the city seems to have stunned all the stakeholders.

Lyricist Madhan Karky who is at

a grown-up child," he says. The lyricist adds that though Tamil pop culture has been replete with comics and illustrations in the past, a translated work requires creating context and a world that is uniquely Tamil. This means that the onomatopoeic sounds 'Bam!' and 'Boom!' that often find their way in comic-speak need Tamil iterations too. "We have made use of the Tamil letter ூ (Akku) for this," he says.

Dan Parent, writer-illustrator behind several *The Archies* comics, says that the Internet has made it far simpler to access information about comics, lives and customisations. But life was different when he created the first *Veronica in India* comic during the 1980s. Much of the research had to be done by referencing old books on the country. Tropes were stereotypical in several comics, he says, referencing the *tuk tuk*s and Bollywood stars in his comics.

"India looks back at Archies with a lot of fondness. The first con I attended here in India (in Bengaluru), drew the biggest crowd I had seen for my session," he says.



**Shazam!** Cosplayers dressed up as various characters at Comic Con pose for pictures while participants indulge themselves, purchasing memorabilia. THAMODHARAN B AND S SHIVA RAJ

Much like Dan, American comic book writer John Layman who co-created the image comic series *Chew* too is thrilled. "I would rather do a Chennai Con, than say, a Detroit Con. My job is to make people happy that they've met a comic book person and to engage with the fans, which is easy here since everyone is so excited to meet, especially given how rare these interactions are. Here, I'm going to see something different, and touch people in a different way," he says.

### All for one

There is something for everyone at Comic Con. There are free gaming stations, cheap posters and stickers, as well as expensive pop-culture memorabilia for everyone to take away. However, the most crowded spaces are the stalls selling anime and manga merchandise, with children pleading with parents to be allowed one extra keepsake.

V Akshara and her sister Riddhishri are carefully perusing through the stalls with their parents and grandmother. The full battalion has arrived at Comic Con and their father is eager to take back some knick knacks from the event. Even the grandmother, Kalyani, says "*Pudichirukku*, (I like it)," when asked about her experience.

"Comic Con has ended up being surprising, thrilling and comical sometimes because of the cosplay," says Akshara. A passer-by adds that he did not expect that people in Chennai would spend ₹899 for a day at the fest but he is happy to see the uptick. He is sure that it is only the start of what could be an annual gala in the city.

Six-year-old Aarav Nair is Thor today and scrunches up his nose every time he raises his hammer. He encapsulates the spirit with more brevity. "I am having so much fun" he says, stressing on the 'ooo's, promising he will be back every year.



Scan the QR code to watch a video on cosplaying on [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com).

## Gowri S

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This is the season of literature fests. As bibliophiles travel around the country, ticking lit fests off their bucket list, a quieter two-day curation at DakshinaChitra Heritage Museum celebrates everything that connects language and culture. An annual affair, this year's LangFest is bigger, and hopes to welcome a younger audience to engage with storied culture set in the backdrop of a living museum.

Every year, the festival looks at language as a lens through which one can understand cultural narratives. To that end, this year's theme impinges on biographies and autobiographies.

"We are a museum of houses, so personal stories, biographies and life stories are already embedded into the museum's point of view. This year, we thought we'll use the idea of biography, autobiography and memoirs to understand processes, insights and the creative found of information," says Anitha Pottamkulam, director – culture, at



## Mapping cultures

DakshinaChitra Museum's annual LangFest is back with a focus on biographies and autobiographies

DakshinaChitra Museum, who also is the curator of the festival.

Day 1 begins with lighting designer, photographer, filmmaker, poet, and founder of Seagull Publishers, Naveen Kishore in conversation with the Editor of *Frontline*, Vaishna Roy on the topic, Life Stories as

Cultural Narratives. Anitha adds, "We have Urvashi [Butalia] of Zubaan and Meena [Kandasamy] talking about women writing their lives and what it means when your community starts writing or gets a



**Exchange of words** (Left) A performance by Chennai Kalai Kuzhu; (below) Jahnavi Phalke, one of the speakers. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

voice, and the larger effect of it." The day is slated to end with the Tamil adaptation of a play by Pallava king Mahendravarman I by Chennai Kalai Kuzhu titled *Mattavilasa Prahasanam*.

Day 2 begins with a performance by musician and professor Vijay Karthikeyan and Prakash Ilayaraja. The session I am an Ordinary Man will have the author discuss the book, which compiles Gandhi's writings on life after his return to India, edited by Gopalkrishna Gandhi.

Another panel discussion will discuss the impact of biographies, memoirs and autobiographies in Tamil featuring Ma. Rajendran, Kamarajan K and Sandhya Natarajan. "Another important session is the one with Dr Nikita Mehra where we are looking at the biography of an institution. We often don't think of institutions as having

the capacity, the need or the importance. Here, she looks at the life of the Adyar Cancer Institute (WIA) through three people," Anitha adds. Following this, Jahnavi Phalkey, founding director, Science Gallery Bengaluru will be in conversation with AS Panneerselvam, fellow, Roja Muthiah Research Library about Scientific Lives and Modern India.

Titled The Labour of my Ancestors, another discussion will be led by Vijay. Anitha sets the context, "He is in the process of collecting compositions of nadaswaram and tavil artists, a lot of it is already lost. He is literally going from house to house collecting them, and also performing them to give them a life in the mainstream," continues Anitha.

The second day ends with a rap performance with a clear sense of the genre being oral history. Tamil Nadu's first all-women rap ensemble Sollisai Sistahs, ShankaraTPK and AKalaiva will be on stage.

*LangFest 2024 will be held at DakshinaChitra Museum on February 23 and 24. The event is free and open to all.*



### The power of kindness

The Kindness Foundation is back with the second edition of The International Kindness Festival. The event highlights the powerful impact of kindness across different aspects of life. The focus this year will be on themes such as science, politics, ethics, technology, the arts and education.

The speakers are Con Conlan ( founder and CEO of Merit Group), Lalitha Kumaramangalam (politician), Nawabzada Mohammed Asif Ali, Natasha Jethanandani (co-founder and CTO of Kaleidofin), Kiiran Patel (founder of Wellness Cube), Robin Chaurasiya (social activist and co-founder of Kranti) and Nibin Mathew (tennis athlete and digital accessibility professional), to name a few. The festival will also showcase a silent auction fundraiser, live music and literary performances, art installations, open mics, a bazaar and food stalls. There will also be workshops and networking opportunities.

@Sri Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall, Harrington Road, February 24 and 25. For details, call 9940255751. It is free and open to all with prior registration at <http://bit.ly/49jprUK>.







Kattaikuttu Sangam's annual arts festival has their latest work *Parvai* in the line up

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Complex stories, bright costumes, expressive eyes, song, and dance will take the stage all-night long as a part of the annual performing arts festival which celebrates the musical theatre form, Kattaikoothu. In its 34th year, this annual festival organised by the Kattaikuttu Sangam seeks to be an immersive experience.

# Follow the gaze



With five different performances which begin on the night of February 24, the festival will extend into the early

hours of February 25. "Our new production *Parvai* or *The Gaze*, will open the festival. This is a complex story set in

**Immersive stage** A past performance by Kattaikuttu Sangam. AKHILA EASWARAN

colonial India in the 19th Century and follows an interracial love story between a Dutch person, and a Tamil koothu actress," says Hanne M de Bruin, co-founder of the Kattaikuttu Sangam. Hanne worked on conceptualising the play along with P Rajagopal, co-founder of the Kattaikuttu Gurukulam. "In *Parvai*, we turn the gaze around and look at colonial south India through the eyes of a dancer. The story is set in 1877 which was when the Madras Famine ravaged the region," Hanne explains. While the Kattaikuttu

Sangam's company Punjarasantankal will stage *Parvai*, the Pachayamman Terukuttu Nataka Mandram will perform *Dakshya Yagam*. The Shri Panchaliyamma Yagasena Terukuttu Manram will perform *Hiranya Vilasam*, the Shri Krishna Kattaikuttu Kuzhu will perform *Mayil Ravanam*, and the festival will come to a close at 4am with *Minnaloli Sivapuja* performed by Shri Renukambal Kattaikuttu Kuzhu.

@Open air stage, Kuttu Kalai Kudam, Punjarasantankal village near Kanchipuram on February 24 from 9.30pm. Entry is free. For details, visit [www.kattaikuttu.org/festival-2024](http://www.kattaikuttu.org/festival-2024)



**Inside an artist's mind**

The exhibition *The Unseen John Tun Sein* will pay tribute to artist John Tun Sein through illustrations and objects, and aims to showcase his sensitivity to the world around him. The exhibition will highlight his mastery in capturing the moment in its fragility and transcendence. @Goethe Institut, Rutland Gate, Nungambakkam on February 24 from 5.30 pm onwards. Entry is free.

**Food from another era**

The Chola Mandalam food festival curated by executive chef Jesu Lambert has dishes such as Oon Soru (aromatic rice cooked with meat and condiments), Meen Kozhunkurai (a traditional, ancient fish preparation mixed with rice and served), Nei Adisil (a jaggery-based sweet), and Vetrilai Kozhi (chicken cooked with betel leaves) on the menu. The menu has been sourced from regions in and around Thanjavur, Tiruchi, Pudukottai, Thiruvallur and Nagapattinam. "I understood that meat eating was common during the Sangam period, where the cheftian brought the hunted animals to the village and the meat was shared equally among the villagers. The book *Sanga Kaal Samayal* was my point of reference for the recipes we have recreated for the festival," says Chef Jesu. @Hotel Savera, Mylapore. On till March 3, a la carte menu for lunch and dinner. Call 9710421422.



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A visual treat Sun Dance, a 360-degree dome theatre. THAMODHARAN B

# Take a ride with Aladdin

Chennai gets a 360-degree immersive dome theatre called Sun Dance

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We watch two characters taking a roller coaster ride on the walls across the room. We feel like we are on the ride too. At Sun Dance by Casagrand, said to be India's first 360-degree immersive dome theatre, characters and locations come to life. Located at the Kelambakkam-Vandalur Road, this new Chennai experience hopes to attract audiences of all ages, especially children.

Audiences can watch shows like *Aladdin*, *Peter Pan*, *Saving Tinkerbell* and *Moby Dick*, among others. Each screening will be about 20-30 minutes each.

Thanks to software that enables a single video being played across the room on all sides, Sun Dance will offer an immersive experience to audiences, believe its promoters. "You become part of the entire show and feel like you have experienced the story first-hand. We believe Chennai's audiences will

support this technology, especially children of various ages and their parents too," says K Ravichandran, vice president, Marketing, Casagrand.

Multiple shows, from 4pm to 9pm, are being planned. "Based on public feedback, we will increase the number of titles. We also plan to take this concept to other Indian cities soon," he adds.

The outer layer of the dome is waterproof, and that, paired with the negative pressure immersive screen, ensures an uninterrupted experience regardless of external elements. "We also believe that this will create a brand-new entertainment zone in the popular Kelambakkam-Vandalur Road," adds Ravichandran.

Shows will play from 4pm to 9pm at Sun Dance, to be launched on February 23, at Casagrand Sun City on Vandalur-Kelambakkam Road. Tickets, priced at Rs 100, will be available on bookmyshow. For details, call 8925558533

Director Jayaprakash Radhakrishnan on tackling a queer romance in his upcoming film *Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai*

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Jayaprakash Radhakrishnan's last film *Thalaikoothal* might not have a huge theatrical success but is having a good run on Netflix. While the theme of love was just a trope in that film on senicide, it takes centre stage in his upcoming release *Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai*. The filmmaker, known for his take on contemporary topics, dwells on a queer relationship and how a family comes to terms with it.

**The first spark**  
The idea for *Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai* (roughly translating into 'love is for all') is not new; in fact, Jayaprakash had it right after his first directorial *Lens* (2016). This film features Lijomol Jose and



# Lens of love

Anusha Prabhu in the lead roles while the supporting cast includes Vineeth, Rohini, Kalesh Ramanand and Deepa. "We are often programmed to think what we are used to seeing... is what is correct. So



when something else is witnessed, for some, the immediate reaction is to blurt out that it's unnatural, perverted or a psychological issue that needs counselling. But what matters in the end is humanity. If two people are in love, it's their choice; who they are, how they can love each other and anything related to that is their call," he says.

Jayaprakash believes in a methodical approach to filmmaking, which is apparent when he says, "I have to tell a story from within that world and that world will have a conflict. I try to convey the multiple dimensions of that



**The film is simultaneously about instilling hope, confidence and an eye-opener. People will talk about it, and try to learn more about LGBTQIA+**

LIJOMOL JOSE

problem with multiple characters or situations. A work of art should be the current expression of the writer and the director."

Love seems to be the underlying theme of Jayaprakash's last film *Thalaikoothal* and the core idea of *Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai* as well, and the director says that it will always be a part of his works. "Isn't it (love) everything? It's not freedom that gives us the

**A sensitive approach** A still from *Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai*; (inset) director Jayaprakash Radhakrishnan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

purpose of life, but our dependence on someone."

**For the love of cinema**  
The filmmaker also strongly believes that the lines between commercial films and what's considered parallel cinema are as distinct as ever. "Streaming platforms are also buying big films just so that their subscribers will keep streaming. As their budget gets exhausted on acquiring such big films, they are not taking the smaller films."  
Recalling how a friend asked him why he is not making commercial films, he says, "It's not that I'm avoiding them but just that I have not gotten a solid idea. That's when he said, 'All commercial films are clichés' and it made sense when we look at the relationships, characters and plots in them. Clichés also work with stars and producers because they are already used to it. That's why a new story feels risky to them. It made sense to me. *Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha Kaanom* is one of those rare films with a unique plot and now, *Good Night*."

*Kaadhal Enbadhu Podhuudamai, which is still doing its festival run, is scheduled to hit theatres soon*

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