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Tracing India Modern: Tarun Tahiliani on the evolution of Indian fashion **P2**

WHAT'S BALAJI DOING IN SINGAPORE SALOON? **P4**



The right answer

How much do you know about Rajinikanth? Join Chennai's pub quizzing scene, which gets bigger and more competitive every year, to find out

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To the dulcet strains of 'Ala Pol Vela Pol' from the 1993 film *Yajaman*, I walk into Sin & Tonic in T Nagar where I am greeted by waiters dressed in khaki and checked shirts, sunglasses, and scarves – a very obvious celebration of Rajinikanth from the film *Baasha*.

The crowd trickles in to a playlist of Rajinikanth film songs, and a specially curated Thalaivar cocktail and appetiser menu. Abhishek Bharathkumar is set to begin the Rajinimania Quiz Night.

Chennai's pubs are where many in the city engage in some spirited competitive banter and revel in the warmth of a trivia community, while winning a prize or two. Over the last couple of years, the burgeoning pub quizzing scene has been welcoming experts and amateurs alike for quiz nights.

"Two-hundred and twenty people signed up for my Rajinikanth Quiz and we had 228 for the AR Rahman one. It was the biggest I'd hosted," says Abhishek who started out conducting quizzes on

Instagram during the pandemic, and moved on to hosting a private quiz at Black Orchid every second Sunday.

His themed quizzes in Sin & Tonic over the last year have had a loyal participant base, with scope for an occasional celebrity sighting. Cricketer R Ashwin was a participant at his Madras quiz.

Actor LakshmiPriyaa Chandramouli, who has participated in Abhishek's Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan, AR Rahman, and *Friends* quizzes says pop-culture centric themes are a big draw. "They are a perfect mix of fun and heady nostalgia. Kollywood-themed nights

Where to go

Sin & Tonic: February 1, *Friends* TV show quiz, by Abhishek Bharathkumar

Watson's: January 25 (on all Thursdays) by Arjun Mohan

Velveteen Rabbit: January 31 (alternate Wednesdays) by Arjun Mohan

Purple Chameleon: January 28 (on all Sundays) by Arjun Mohan

are so rare in the city's night scene and most of these quizzes involve Tamil music and dance," she says. Typically with five to six rounds, the quizzes have not more than 60 questions, and take place over 90 minutes.

Friends and banter

The charm of getting together with your regular quiz team, and meeting new people along the way is definitely a big draw – something Arjun Mohan especially attests to. Arjun, who has been hosting quizzes at Watson's, Velveteen Rabbit, and Purple Chameleon says that in 2019, it was at a pub quiz that he first met his wife.

"Post the pandemic, we've been seeing more of the younger crowd coming out to participate in these quizzing nights, in addition to those who were once quizzers. The number of neighbourhood pubs in Chennai have increased, and there are so many more options," he explains. Each venue in Chennai, Arjun says, has a different vibe. "My general quizzes are tailored to these audiences, and every week is different. I like to engage with the

participants, and give them a shot or two when they willingly participate in the banter," he laughs. In March this year, Arjun will be hosting a magnum opus quiz of sorts – to celebrate six years of running the pub quiz at Watson's in Chennai.

With men having dominated the quizzing space for years now, the Chennai demographic seems to have a healthy balance of genders. A regular at Arjun's quizzes, writer-actor Sukanya Umesh says there are a lot more women now, and that the atmosphere has always been welcoming.

The quizmasters and the teams prioritise on keeping the atmosphere fun. "A good 40% of the crowd that comes in are regulars, and 60% is new every edition. We observed that themes focussed on entertainment worked more in terms of audience engagement and participation," says Mridula Vinod of Striker Integrated, a creative agency working with Sin & Tonic.

Prizes galore

There are gift vouchers, sponsored travel coupons, and even bottles of imported liquor to be won in addition to shots and shooters on the house.

For the younger millennials who have lived in Chennai for over a decade, the Madras Pub Quiz from back in 2014-15 at Hotel Savera's Bay 146 was the earliest introduction to a pub quiz, complete with a grand prize of a vodka cocktail pitcher served inside a large, hollowed out watermelon.

"Back then, many people came because it was a completely new concept. However, it is now a trend, and has become an expectation we have from most pubs in the city," says Abhishek Swaminathan, an avid quizzier who used to co-host the Madras Pub Quiz.

"The biggest plus here is that you don't have to have a background or experience in quizzing," he says, adding, "If you are looking to dip your toes into quizzing, the chilled out and accommodating pub quizzes are a great place to start."

On a wing

Get set to count birds at the Chennai Bird Race, a dawn-to-dusk activity by the Madras Naturalists' Society



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At the beginning of every year, birders young and old in Chennai, set out before daybreak, notebooks and binoculars in hand. The Madras Naturalists' Society's (MNS) HSBC Chennai Bird Race has become a ritual for seasoned birders as well as novices interested in the natural world. Organised by MNS for India BirdRaces, the event is back with its 17th edition.

According to G Vijaya Kumar, honorary secretary of MNS, this year's event will contribute to understanding the effect of climate change on birds and their migratory patterns. "Since we've

had good rains recently, water levels in wetlands are high in some places, and low at others," he says, adding that it will be interesting to see how this has affected birds. The focus, will hence be on noticing if there is a change in the number of species being spotted every year.

The race has contributed to understanding Chennai's many winged residents and visitors over the years, and also documenting the landscape of a constantly changing city. The race is open to anyone interested in birding, and participation is in teams of four. MNS provides a document with birding sites in

Look up! Anyone interested in Nature can participate. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Greater Chennai, but participants can choose to explore other sites to their liking as well.

The event will culminate in a dinner and get-together in the evening, a crucial part of the race, in which friendships are formed and knowledge is shared. "Participants talk about special sightings and their overall experiences," says Vijaya Kumar, "Every year, new participants sign up for the race, for whom this will be an eye-opener. They can also hear seasoned birders talk about habitat change over the years, among other issues."

Vijaya Kumar has been part of the race since its inception, and says that a lot of participants have gone on to become MNS members. "The simple exercise has triggered an interest in everyday people understanding our biodiversity, and the city they live in," he says, "This is something very peaceful to be part of; in which one pauses to look at a bird that flits by."

February 3, From 6am to 6pm. To register, visit blackbuck.org.in, write to madrasnaturalistsociety@gmail.com.



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On the buzzer At the Rajinimania Quiz Night by Abhishek Bharathkumar; (below) Arjun Mohan. B VELANKANNI RAJ AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Post the pandemic, we've been seeing more of the younger crowd coming out to participate in these quizzing nights

ARJUN MOHAN
Quizmaster





THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13569

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Across

1

High-rise building (5,5)

7

Singling (anag) — a cocktail (3,5)

8

Pointed remark (4)

9

Price paid by traveller (4)

10

Laboured (7)

12

Penmanship (11)

14

Wealthy and privileged people (3,4)

16

Stare open-mouthed (4)

19

Mumble drunkenly (4)

20

Steadfast (8)

21

Bosses (10)

Down

1

He follows beggar man in rhyme (5)

2

Layabout (7)

3

Coot or moorhen, for example (4)

4

Flat-bottomed barges (8)

5

Faction (5)

6

Sinister (6)

11

Climbing plant — I re-saw it (nag) (8)

12

Hold tenderly (6)

13

Mollify (7)

15

Approximately (5)

17

Kind of programme — kind of light (5)

18

Stick together (4)

To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated February 1, 2024.

Solution No. 13568

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R O T E G A U N T L E T

T D S G T L U

H E A V Y M E T A L

E T M S L N L

S L E E P Y B O N I T O

T D A O C O

S T U P E N D O U S

S G H I S T E

C A R D I N A L M I N E

A I S T N N

T A T T E R E D D E E D



Swing and serve Actors Arya and Redin Kingsley at the pickleball court in Chennai's Express Avenue mall. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND THAMODHARAN BHARATH

Be a sport

Fancy a game of pickleball? Check out Chennai's latest sporting arena, Ice Water

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Actors Arya and Redin Kingsley pick up their paddles and get ready for a fight. Even as onlookers cheer, Arya and Redin rally with their opponents. The first pickleball match at Ice Water, Chennai's latest sports arena at Express Avenue (EA) mall, is underway. This is the first time Arya, an actor who plays football and badminton regularly, tried his hand at this fast-growing sport. "I've heard a lot about it and wanted to try it out," says the actor. There will be more matches in the days to come. For the uninitiated, pickleball incorporates components of tennis, table tennis and badminton. Aspiring players of this sport now have a brand new facility spread over 20,000 sq. ft., which boasts three open-air pickleball courts and a 100-capacity seating pavilion. At Ice Water, there is also a futsal arena that is adaptable for box cricket. Redin Kinglsey, who also stays in the E-Residences located close by, says, "Sports is crucial and such facilities will be a big boost to Chennai's sporting enthusiasts."

Ice Water sports arena is located in Express Avenue and open from 6am onwards. For bookings, log on to icewater.in/web or call 7845776742



Ennore's ghosts and dreams

Through Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams, artists show us that the wetlands and fishing grounds have become tiny specks in this once-thriving landscape

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"In aspiring to make Chennai a good city, we threw Ennore under the bus," says environmental activist Nityanand Jayaraman. Since early December, the deeply damaging oil spill and a gas leak at Ennore has manifested in the form of protests, research into the ecological impact of the oil spill and the people who have inhaled ammonia. On January 26, 27 and 28, an art exhibition titled Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams, invites the people of Chennai city, living a comfortable 20 kilometres away from the location of



the ecological mismanagement, to see what Ennore looks like today. Curated under the Good City project by the Coastal Resource Centre, it hopes to showcase sculptures and paintings by four Fine Arts College students — M Adhithya Mohan, M Elavarasan, S Kirubavathi and M

Maps and faces Some of the artists exhibiting at Ashvita's Art Gallery. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rajesh — who have spent time in the Ennore-Pulicat region. Satwik Gade, the curator of the art exhibit, says that visitors will be able to see cartographic storytelling through vibrant maps displaying a changing Ennore landscape. Ghosts, Monsters and Dreams is at Ashvita's Art Gallery, 2nd Street, RK Salai, Mylapore on January 26 (3.30pm onwards), 27 and 28 (10am onwards). For details, contact 8807278544 or check @thegoodcity on Instagram.

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Let's Start!

CM YK



Beauty matters RJ Balaji in a still from *Singapore Saloon*; (below) Gokul. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Filmmaker Gokul on the inspiration behind the RJ Balaji-starring *Singapore Saloon*, releasing today

DIRECTOR'S CUT

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After casting an alcoholic as the hero in *Idharkuthane* Aasaipattai Balakumara, a con artist in *Kashmora* and a comical gangster in *Junga*, director Gokul is back, and this time, his protagonist is in a more mainstream profession. The filmmaker is teaming up with RJ Balaji for *Singapore Saloon*, in which the latter plays a hair stylist.

me. I based my protagonist on him.” Excerpts from an interview:

Question: Given how each of your films is in a different genre, what defines your style? **Answer:** Having no style is my style (laughs). I wonder if I should have just stuck to similar stories and I would’ve been known for a particular style of films. But it doesn’t excite me to do the same story again. *Singapore Saloon* is special because of the miracles that happened behind the scenes. I had a scene in the rain and for that, I needed lorries of water to make a dry, long stretch of tarmac look wet. The permission to shoot was after 10 pm and it

rained precisely till 8.30 pm and stopped. It feels like a lot of positive things fell into place for this film to happen.

Q: RJ Balaji’s films have been mostly with his close associates. Recently, he has started working with new collaborators. Tell us about this collaboration? **A:** Every protagonist of mine will have their own characteristics that I take an effort to script. That said, we have to take other aspects, such as the film’s business, into consideration. Producer Ishari Ganesh sir really liked the story and this is one of the most expensive films for Balaji. The story itself is about an ordinary man fighting the odds, and so, I needed an artist without an

image or the need for heroism.

Q: Apart from the lead star, all your films also have senior actors in well-etched roles...

A: It comes down to creativity. For example, in *Idharkuthane*..., I came up with the ‘annachi sugar patient’ trope for Pasupathy’s character. That opened up a whole new set of



Singapore Saloon is about an ordinary man fighting the odds, and so, I needed an actor without an image or the need for heroism

GOKUL
Director

On the same pitch

Actors Shanthnu and Prithvi Rajan on upcoming sports drama *Blue Star*

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For those who spent their youth playing cricket in the streets and public grounds in the late Nineties, the game held a special place. That long-gone era is the period to which filmmaker S Jayakumar wishes to take you with his upcoming film, *Blue Star*, set to release in theatres this Friday. Produced by Pa Ranjith’s Neelam Productions, and starring Ashok Selvan, Shanthnu, Keerthi Pandian, Prithvi Rajan and Dhivyaa Duraisamy among others, *Blue Star* is a sports drama that explores the lives of a bunch of cricket-frenzy youngsters in Arakkonam, Chennai, in the Nineties.

For actors like Shanthnu and Prithvi, who witnessed the boom of street cricket in their

childhood, *Blue Star* was quite the experience. “Going back to Arakkonam, playing that form of cricket, wearing a pad on just one leg, and running in just slippers was a lot of fun.”

Apart from being a sports drama, the film is also a political drama that draws parallels between sports and life. “It speaks of the politics between two teams or between players of the same team, and how the politics from outside disrupts things on the ground,” adds Shanthnu.

In *Blue Star*, Shanthnu plays Rajesh, a young man who takes on Ranjith (Ashok Selvan’s character) in the playground. Shanthnu has no qualms in saying that though he likes Rajesh, his favourite character in *Blue Star* is the one played by

Prithvi. Prithvi plays Sam, Ranjith’s younger brother. Prithvi says, “Sam is a nice guy who does things out of impulse. Also, whatever he does in the film, even though he does with serious intentions, would look a bit funny to the audience.”

Shanthnu and Prithvi share a decades-long friendship, thanks to how close their families are. Shanthnu is the son of veteran actor-director K Bhagyaraj while Prithvi is the son of ace actor-filmmaker Pandiarajan, who started as an assistant director to Bhagyaraj. *Blue Star* is the third film in which both actors share the screen, after *Vaaimai* and *Kasada Thapara*. “We have played a lot of cricket together and I am happy that cricket has once again brought us together,” says Prithvi.



The folk route
Mohanlal in *Malaikottai Vaaliban*; (below) Lijo Jose Pellissery.

Tales of a warrior

Lijo Jose Pellissery on his Mohanlal-starrer *Malaikottai Vaaliban*, releasing this week

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With hair knotted in a bun and dressed in vintage clothes, a man roars while dragging two heavy ropes. This was filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery’s introduction of Mohanlal’s character in his new film, *Malaikottai Vaaliban*. The trailer that followed showed a sneak peak of a tale of romance, treachery, valour and redemption. Shot in Jaisalmer and Puducherry, cinematographer Madhu Neelakandan’s frames depict a scarred and battle-worn land set in a different time, and the presence of a hardened warrior.

Releasing on January 25, the film has created waves of excitement as Lijo and Mohanlal come together for their first project. Although it was originally planned in Tamil, Lijo altered the idea to something larger, especially in terms of the character and the landscape. “There is the feel of a folk tale to the whole story but I wanted the vocabulary to be rooted in the soil. I knew that Rafeeq (scenarist) would be the best person to get the language right.”

Agreeing that Mohanlal’s prowess as a prize-winning wrestler during his college days certainly helped in fleshing out the character, Lijo says it was merely one of the factors to cast the actor in the lead. “I wanted to use a very Indian terrain and the

characters to be rooted in that background. But I have taken elements from around the globe, from the Samurai culture in Japan and from Westerns.” Lijo used to be fascinated by cinematic extravaganzas and remembers watching the first day, first show of movies like *Thalapathi* and *Kolillakam*. “*Malaikottai Vaaliban* is for that wonderstruck cine fan in us. Just the dialogues are enough to understand the vibe of the character. He is a hero, not anyone from real life.”

Lijo’s deep interest in Tamil films was evident in his previous film, *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*, where he had used songs and dialogues from Tamil films to give the flavour of a different era. *Malaikottai Vaaliban* also seems to have a Tamil influence. Is the title a tribute to the Tamil classic *Vanjikottai Vaaliban*?

“There is a definitely a Tamil flavour to the film. My maternal grandfather was from Tamil Nadu. I grew up watching Tamil legends on screen such as MGR and Gemini Ganesan,” chuckles Lijo.

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