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LOKESH'S FUTURE PLANS P5



This February, Gautham Menon completes 25 years in the industry. The filmmaker talks about his memorable journey and how music has played a vital role in it

THE GAUTHAM Instinct

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It is yet another episode in Gautham Vasudev Menon's chequered career.

GVM – as he is popularly called – completes 25 years in the industry this February. Marking the occasion, the filmmaker has put together a list of 25 memorable songs from his filmography to showcase in a curated concert, aptly titled Yennodu Vaa Veedu Varaikkum. “I was drawn into cinema because of the songs in

them. You can play any song from the 1950s or '60s, and I will tell you who the singer is, because my mother was so passionate about them,” he recalls.

This year, apart from writing and directing films, Gautham plans to organise a set of curated concerts. “I hope to drive conversation through these songs. I also wish to do a Mani Ratnam and Shankar retrospective soon, based on the memorable tracks in their work,” he reveals.

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THE GAUTHAM Instinct



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This passion for song and poetry has prompted the filmmaker to work with some of the country’s best musical talent, including composers Ilayaraja, AR Rahman, Harris Jayaraj, Karthik and Darbuka Siva. “If you’ve been to any of my film’s audio launches, it would have always been about the music and less about the speeches. They were all mini concerts. I wish I was a musician... I would have probably held on to a guitar and played; there is so much beautiful talent out there,” he says.

Showcasing this 25-track playlist (selected from among 80-plus songs in his films) will be a host of singers including Karthik, Sid Sriram, Krish, Blaaze, Sathyaprakash, Shasha Tirupati and Charulatha Mani among others.

“I’ve been lucky,” admits Gautham, when we point out the great songs featured in his films, irrespective of the composer, “There is an idea and a written script for all songs that I put out there, and after discussion with the musicians and lyricist, I sit back. I’ve been fortunate to grab the first tune that wafts through the air from their keyboard.”

Those moments have given fans of Tamil cinema some of the biggest superhits in the last couple of decades, like the melodious

“Vaseegara” (*Minnale*) and the breezy “Maruvaarthai” (*Enai Noki Paayum Thota*), to name a couple of numbers. “For me, something comes alive during song recording sessions. It’s the best feeling.” Sometimes, this feeling extends to not just the basic tune but the entire recording. “Like AR Rahman’s ‘Thallipogathay’, a number that was written over three days in cars, his office and lyricist Thamarai’s residence as it was difficult to write for that song construction.”

Ride to the top
Minnale, starring Madhavan, Abbas and Reema Sen, hit screens 25 years ago. The romantic hit flick placed Gautham Menon as a director to watch out for, which was further cemented by an upward career graph, thanks to blockbusters like *Kaakha Kaakha* starring Suriya, and *Vetaiyaadu Vilaiyaadu* starring Kamal Haasan. How does he look back at this journey comprising multiple superhits? “I look back with a lot of fondness,” he says, “I have loved being in this space and have gone through ups and downs which came at me unexpectedly. Even the downs have been educative; they have told me what not to do.”

Despite being a popular face, he feels that he got a sense of “having arrived” only recently. This, he says,



is probably due to the tremendous expectation from his long-delayed *Dhruva Natchathiram*, starring Vikram. “I am still getting used to this whole ‘GVM’ brand that people are attaching with me in recent years. Wherever I go – in airports and college events – everyone is asking me this one question: when is *Dhruva Natchathiram* releasing? I could have moved on from it, but I’m not directing any other film because I really want to put that out,” says the director, who today carries a bag with the initials, GVM, embossed prominently on it. Gautham might be well known as

a filmmaker, but he is also an actor, having done roles in prominent films including *Leo* and *Dragon*. In fact, one of the common perceptions among people is that he took up acting gigs to ensure financial stability and to release his long-delayed Vikram-starring *Dhruva Natchathiram*. “The big misconception is that I am in debt and I am acting in films to sort out those issues,” he says, pointing particularly to his sequences in Santhanam’s *DD Next Level*, which even spawned memes among fans, “He (Santhanam) did my film (*Neethane En Ponvasantham*), despite being super busy. I was just returning a favour.”



Man on a mission Gautham Menon; from Vikram-starrer *Dhruva Natchathiram* and *Selfie*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Acting offers

Gautham describes himself as a reluctant actor, and says that he will not take up acting assignments in the future. “Every acting gig I have taken up so far is to get an experience on a new set or for the people associated with the film,” he maintains, “As a director, I do not micro-manage actors, but when I go to act, sometimes I get told how to smile, and how much to cry for a sequence. The director in me keeps telling me that I wouldn’t handle it this way and that... is disturbing.”

Notably seen in films like *Selfie*, *Leo* and *Dragon*, Gautham has told his team to turn down acting gigs in the future. “The only exception I might make is for a director who recently narrated a script to me featuring a protagonist and antagonist that blew my mind. He kept insisting that these parts were written for Selvaraghavan and me. I even suggested Vijay Sethupathi or SJ Suryah for the role, and even offered to set up the project for him, but he was insistent on casting Selvaraghavan and me for the roles.”

In fact, one particular sequence, which had him mimicking Suriya’s expressions from the superhit ‘Uyirin Uyire’ song, ended up becoming troll material. “That was told to me in the last minute, but I had to do it because I had signed on to act. I felt stupid while doing it, but I did it. It was not because they were offering me some 10 lakhs to do it!”

The stars shine down

Dhruva Natchathiram, a project initially announced in 2013 with Suriya in the lead that later went to Vikram, is among Tamil cinema’s most-discussed projects. The long delays plaguing this project and uncertainty over release dates,

because of financial and legal issues, have raised curiosity among fans over the years. So, what is the issue with its release? Gautham clarifies, “The people who were with the film fell out, and went to court to block its release. Without paying them, the film cannot be released, but the situation is that if we don’t release the film, we cannot bring in the money. It’s a Catch-22 situation. We are now sorting out the legal issues, and also showcasing the film to various investors. We had to sort out egos. In fact, handling the issues with *Dhruva Natchathiram* was a class in management for me. It took me all these years to battle this, but we are now hopeful of announcing its release date within a couple of weeks.”

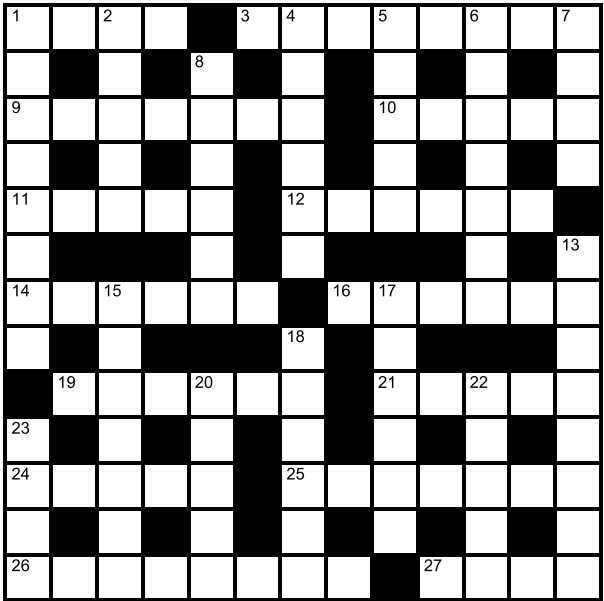
For Gautham, an engineer-turned-filmmaker, tackling the business issues that presents itself in a largely-creative industry has been “difficult”. “It was,” he admits, “I had a good set of people who would handle it, but they abandoned ship. So, it has fallen entirely on me.”

For now, though, Gautham is in the mood to celebrate as he gets ready for the next stage of his life, something that he promises will be exciting. Does he have any unfulfilled desires? “I want to experiment with an adventure film soon. I wish to do a historical someday and also work with Rajinikanth sir sometime. Right now, the unfulfilled dream is to get *Dhruva Natchathiram* released. I’m not sure what business it will do, I really want to put it out there in the theatres.”

Yennodu Vaa Veeadu Varakkum, a musical celebration of 25 years of Gautham Menon will be held on February 1, 7pm, at the Music Academy. For tickets, log on to bookmyshow

QUICK CROSSWORD #38

(Set by Doppelganger)



Across

- 1 Water bird (4)
- 3 Author of music (8)
- 9 Used for mixing colours (7)
- 10 Make larger (5)
- 11 Poison (5)
- 12 Quickest and shortest path (6)
- 14 French Brandy (6)
- 16 Attic (6)
- 19 Monetary plan (6)
- 21 Violent behaviour (5)
- 24 Opening score (5)
- 25 Dumpling (7)
- 26 Armed sailing ship (3-2-3)
- 27 Trunk (4)

Down

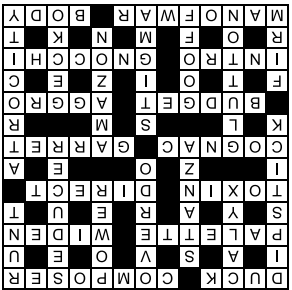
- 1 Level measurer (8)
- 2 Part of flower containing sepals (5)
- 4 Cook for too long (6)
- 5 Military strength (5)
- 6 One who leads astray (7)
- 7 Smallest in a litter (4)
- 8 Verse (6)
- 13 Cruel behaviour (8)

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- 15 He overeats (7)
- 17 Legendary nation of women warriors (6)
- 18 Social disgrace (6)
- 20 Leave (2,3)
- 22 Nocturnal lizard (5)
- 23 Determined (4)

Solution No. 38



Live QFR concert

Thursday Ladies Club (TLC), founded in 1982, presents Quarantine From Reality (QFR), a musical experience curated by music producer and analyst Subashree Thanikachalam. Through QFR, she examines noted Tamil film compositions, focussing on their orchestration, ragas and vocal elements. The concert, titled Nenjirukkum Varai, will feature singers Sai Vignesh, Santhosh, Samanvitha and Shradha. @Narada Gana Sabha, Alwarpet. January 31, 5.30pm onwards. Tickets at bookmyshow



Back to the bazaar

Delhi’s famous Dastkari Haat Crafts Bazaar is back to the city after a decade. Sample some pickles and buy yourself a painting

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Politician and activist Jaya Jaitly is not one to mince words. The founder of Dastkari Haat Samiti says that too much unaccounted work goes into handcrafting sarees, jewellery, toys and the like. “So it is a shame that people haggle over a pot made by an Indian artisan; while paintings are sold for millions. People say pots are just mud. Paintings are just canvas cloth and colour then,” she says.

“Chennai, however, has the perfect customers. They never bargain. They are discerning and they are respectful to the craftpersons. It is why we are delighted to be back in Chennai after 10 years,” she adds.

Between January 30 and February 5, the campus at the National Institute of Fashion

Technology (NIFT) Chennai will soon transform into a marketplace of mirage and miracles. After a decade, the famed Dastkari Haat Crafts Bazaar replete with rows of handwoven khadi, meticulously designed rugs, and several ikat, Chanderi and Maheshwari sarees, will now be available to people in the city for perusal and purchase.

Simple beginnings

Dastkari Haat Samiti began outside a Hanuman temple in Delhi. Usually, streets adjoining the temple tend to have stalls that sell wares, particularly bangles, flowers and sweets.

“Vendors would only come for a day from their villages to the temple. On the rest of the days, the stalls would be empty. I finally managed to get



Culture calling (Clockwise from far left) Scenes from the Dastkari Haat Crafts Bazaar; a vendor showcasing handwoven textile. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



(including gold-leaf embossed pichhwais from Rajasthan), Gond, Kalighat, godna, Madhubani, phad paintings, and shajhi art.

At the bazaar, one can also be entertained as Chhau dance performers from West Bengal will take the stage. They also plan to serve traditional Rajasthani cuisine at the event.

Jaya says that in a world that is filled with such interesting artistry, the use, rather the misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) feels like a point of concern for her.

“We are at a point where craft in India is still getting GI-tagged. Sophisticated technology like AI not just promotes de-skilling but also proves that meticulously made art can be changed, replicated (although incorrectly) and sold too. India must take a very advanced and strict step about regulating AI coming into the creative industries, into the creative arts, into the creative crafts. We must not allow other peoples’ entire livelihoods to be wiped out in the click of a button,” she says.

She looks forward to seeing NIFT’s students engage with the artisans during the event, she says.

Dastkari Haat Crafts Bazaar is between January 30 and February 5; 11.30am to 7.30pm at NIFT, Tharamani campus. For details: @dastkarihaatsamiti on Instagram.



Flavour bomb A sushi platter; (below) Nobu black cod. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Japtej Ahluwalia, the other founder.

Manoj says that he and his partner Japtej got tired of restaurants ‘toning it down’ – toning down the garlic and the spice especially. It is why they are choosing to maximise the flavour profiles that Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese cuisines lend themselves to. “Chilli chicken has been sent to Jolly Indian [their newly-opened Indian restaurant one floor above] because it is now Indian but the rest is here. We want families to swarm this place, making it their spot for big get-togethers,” he says, laughing.

We order a tom yum soup to test the waters. The soup, fragrant with lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves, garlic and chilies, does exactly what it is meant to do – captivate and clear the throat.

A plate of maki soon arrives with pink, fatty salmon right atop the sticky rice. Saoirse-Monica Jackson, the lead in the Netflix hit show *Derry Girls*, says in her intense Irish accent that it is hard to mess up ‘cold rice with cold fish on top’. But the plate with four pieces is demolished in under four minutes so it is

testament to sushi’s greatness. We try the Cantonese bamboo shoot salad with beans and cherry tomatoes which requires a bit more acid to offset the bitterness of the bamboo shoot, while waiting on the main course. Yet, two other small plates – the okonomiyaki (cabbage pancake) and crispy lamb arrive instead.

The fried cabbage pancake with kewpie mayo and ketchup “is a salad” argues Manoj, and says that it is a great way for him to eat vegetables. In this version with chopped prawns, the flavour of the fish comes through effortlessly. The crispy lamb on the other hand with an assortment of long-sliced onions and bell peppers, reminds one of every great fried meat in conventional “Chinese” sauces, making it to the future “must order” list.

My favourite dish on the menu is the nasi goreng though. Topped with a perfectly round runny egg in the centre, this rice dish from Indonesia, served with a chicken satay skewer and a crunchy salad is satiating, and full of flavour from the soy, garlic and shallot-tossed glutenous rice.

There is a variety of desserts and drinks with boba (including one with taro) that you could try but I would recommend the light Thai water chestnut pudding. I will however be back to try the mochi someday. The drinks are good but can be skipped in order to eat more food.

People might ask why Chennai needs yet another Asian restaurant. Fu Fu though is exciting and deserves to be on your eat list because at the end of your meal, it is likely that you would walk out of their parking mirror-filled disco entrance with your belly full and a smile on your face. Unless its a break-up or family-feud. Don’t ask me then.

Fu Fu is on the third floor, Born Restaurants, 61/45, CP Ramaswamy Road, Alwarpet. Contact 9600037124. A meal for two is priced at ₹1,800.

What’s in a name? Fu Fu, Chennai’s newest Asian kid on the block, is full of expletives, punches, and an un-serious menu that delivers

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Let’s get straight to it. There’s a drink called mouth wash on Fu Fu’s menu (in Alwarpet) that looks as ridiculous as it sounds. This sweet, tall, blue drink loaded with ice, is served with a toothbrush (a real one, alright) with an edible paste atop.

Mouth wash does exactly what Manoj Padmanaban, co-founder, BORN (which runs Fufu) says it does. It cleanses your palate between plates of nasi goreng and crispy lamb, that is loaded with onion, ginger, and garlic. It also

gets people talking. “They say you can’t kiss after an Asian meal. Now, you can,” he says.

The restaurant, replete with tiger prints on their seats, covers, and walls, seats 94 and has a 12-seater private dining area. What is refreshing is the music and the energy. The place refuses to take itself seriously, yet serves delectable sushi with fresh fish and nasi goreng with perfectly flavoured fried rice and well-charred skewers on the side. Why tigers? “We want to embody the spirit of the tiger. We want to usher in that intensity but the only way to really be intense is to also enjoy the process of setting up new places with great zest,” says

Whisk me away

Part-food fair, part-community gathering, the Great Madras Bake Sale returns for its fourth edition

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January is the month of vows. Sugar is sworn off with solemn resolve, and desserts are demonised. For a few weeks, restraint feels virtuous. But willpower, like frosting left out too long, has a short shelf life.

At the Great Madras Bake Sale, for one Sunday afternoon, the city is invited to pause its resolutions and remember that pleasure, when chosen deliberately, is not failure. It is participation. Quitting sugar may be a goal, but un-quitting it, briefly, can be an act of community.

Now in its fourth edition, the Great Madras Bake Sale has established itself as a fixture on Chennai’s community food calendar. Hosted by entrepreneurs Maaria Tanveer, Cindana Manickavel and Priya Anup, the one-day event returns on February 1, bringing together home bakers, small businesses, musicians and pet lovers under one roof.

The 2026 edition features 34 home bakers, up from about 30 last year, alongside a handful of commercial vendors like Boba Baba. “We go through menus and make sure each stall has something unique to offer, not just the usual brownies and chocolate cupcakes,” says Maaria.

That intent shows in the menus.

Visitors can expect milagai podi donuts from Kookies, Kakes and Bakes, Bournvita jars by Food Indulge, and samosa pinwheel puffs from Cranked Palette. Look out for elaneer payasam choux by The Kraaft Girl, pandan Japanese cheesecake from Fave Dainty, butter chicken pizza from Homemade Treats by Marzia and a chilli chocolate brownie by Dolci & Co.

A notable addition this year is a dedicated baking ingredients and supplies section by three brands Viveka Essence mart, Ossoro Flavours, and Bakersville, aimed at home bakers looking to experiment. These stalls will offer everything from essences and sprinkles to whipping cream and baking accessories.

The event continues to foreground its pet-friendly identity. A pet adoption drive, in partnership with iAdopt, returns with adoptions offered free of cost, alongside a stall selling pet-friendly cakes and cookies by Soul Blends.

The bake sale is at Chettinad Sath Sadhana, Adyar, on February 1 from 2pm. Tickets on district.in at ₹55.

Sugar and spice Chocolate chilli brownies. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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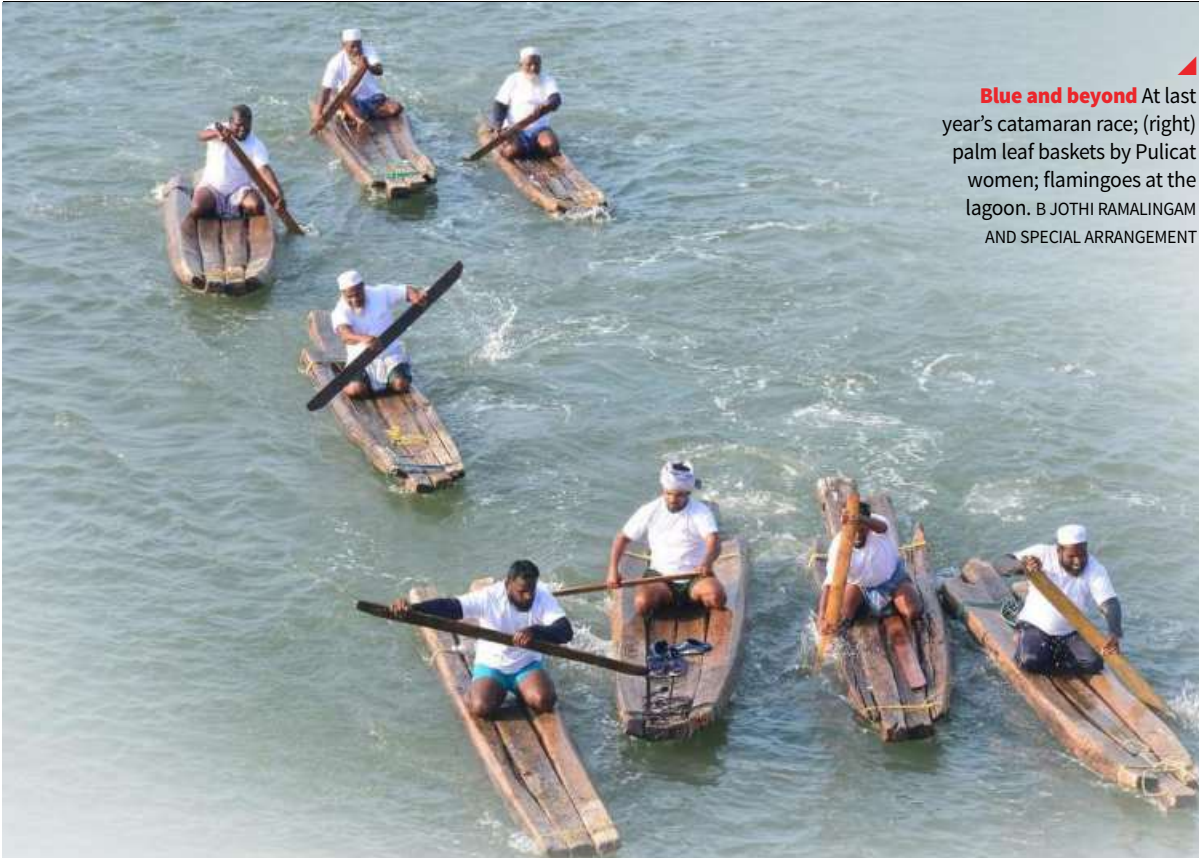
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Blue and beyond At last year's catamaran race; (right) palm leaf baskets by Pulicat women; flamingoes at the lagoon. B JOTHI RAMALINGAM AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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When the sea turns rough, Hamsa Beevi can hear the waves from her home a kilometre away in Pulicat. The whoosh of the waves is a constant in her life, so are the palm leaves she weaves deftly into boxes, bags, and purses. The 75-year-old artisan who has been working with palm leaves for the past six decades, won the Life Time Achievement honour from Chief Minister MK Stalin at the Poompuhar State Awards recently. She learnt palm leaf craft from her mother Asavi, who would spend several hours a day folding the leaves into what locals call 'petti' of various dimensions. The craft is one of Pulicat's defining characteristics and Hamsa is among the many artisans supported by the Art and Architecture Research Development & Education (AARDE) Foundation, a Chennai-based non-profit trust involved in the conservation of Pulicat. AARDE Foundation and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department are set to observe Pulicat Day on January 31 to celebrate the lagoon's people and its natural heritage. But most importantly, the event is to tell the world about Pulicat, a little gem along the East coast of Tamil Nadu. Pulicat lagoon, spread across 759 sq km is the second-largest brackish water body in the



country. It plays a crucial role in attracting rain clouds across India's South-East coast. However, much like several of our natural resources, it too is in a fragile state owing to factors such as unplanned development and rapidly changing climate patterns. Organisations such as AARDE Foundation are helping create awareness on the lagoon. "Last year, we won an award endorsed by Ramsar in recognition of the interpretation centre we have been maintaining at Pulicat," says Xavier Benedict, founder-trustee, AARDE. The award and the recognition artisans such as Hamsa and four others from Pulicat who were also honoured by the State Government received has set the tone for the 15th Pulicat Day celebrations. While the day-long event is akin to a festival in the historic coastal town – there are kolam competitions, eco quizzes and drawing competitions for school students apart from cultural events

and heritage walks – the highlight is the catamaran race. Every year, fishermen from hamlets in and around Pulicat sign up for the race with enthusiasm. The race is driven entirely by the energy and spirit of the men and their wooden catamarans. "The catamarans used by Pulicat fishermen are the last of their kind in existence today," says Xavier. "Similar ones can be found only at Kodiyakarai." Catamarans, an anglicised term for *kattumaram* meaning tied wood, enable fishermen to catch prawns and crabs in shallow waters. "They are able to remain stable as the fishermen collect crabs. A fibreboat, on the other hand, might not be able to stay in the same position for a long time," he explains. The idea behind the race is to encourage fishermen to stick to catamarans without switching to fibreboats. "Around 30 kattumaram are set to enter the race," says Xavier, adding that he hopes the Tamil Nadu Government promotes it on the lines of Kerala's boat races. "Much like jallikattu, it has everything in it to be considered a traditional Tamil sport," he says. To watch the race, head to the town this weekend. It happens only once a year.

The catamaran race is from 3.30pm onwards on January 31 and is open for public viewing. Pulicat is 50 kilometres from Chennai. Call 9884013409 for details.

All aboard the catamaran

Pulicat Day is upon us – there are events lined up for children and adults from the historic coastal town – the most exciting of which is a catamaran race for fishermen

Paint every step (Clockwise from right) Visitors at the exhibition; and Sacred Moments by Shalini Biswajit. M SRINATH AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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Lalit Kala Akademi was transformed into a visual tribute to Odisha and its classical dance Odissi, over six days. In Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom, the sensuous curves, silences and rhythms of Odissi step off the stage and onto the canvas, paper and photograph. At the heart of this exhibition is Datuk Ramli Bin Ibrahim – dancer, choreographer and founder, Sutra Foundation (dedicated to promoting and preserving traditional and contemporary performing arts) – whose interpretation of Odissi has inspired artists for decades. Bringing together drawings, paintings, and photographs by 21 artists from India and Malaysia, many of the works respond directly to Ramli's body, presence and philosophy, treating him both as a medium and a muse. The exhibition is also a tribute to the late Dr Dinanath Pathy, artist and scholar who connected dance with visual work, and contributed to Sutra in many ways. Travelling through Chennai, Bhubaneshwar, and Malaysia, the exhibition showcases Odissi as a vibrant art form, one where the essence of its movements lingers well beyond the performance. From Bhubaneshwar, artist Helen Brahma's series, Penari Ulung (The Transcendental Dancer), explores her relationship between textile and culture. At the heart of her work is the Sambalpuri textile, draped around Odissi dancers. "The ikat motifs used all over the body of the dancers are intimate to my

A fluid canvas

An exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi traces how Odissi moves beyond the stage, finding form in painting, drawing and photography

cultural roots," says Helen. The portraits embody the divine feminine, but are also inspired by Ramli's moves that have moved her profoundly. Similarly, AV Ilango from Chennai, has used acrylic on canvas to bring out the subtle movements and the grace of the dance form. The palette is ripe with the colours of India – mango yellow, marigold, chilli red, royal purple, peacock blue, emerald and parrot green embracing the outfits of the dancers. The exhibition also presents a series of photographic works. Malaysian photographer Diana Lui's series of photographic prints presented at the exhibition is a selection of a larger body of work made in the 1990S. The photographs on canvas follow a younger Ramli, and his dancers caught mid-dance form, as their bodies yield to the cadence of music.



Malay artist Shivarajah Natarajan, who also serves as a curator of Malaysian artists, has his canvases unfold as a visual stage where drama, emotion, and rhythm are showcased with evocative clarity. A striking artwork titled The Great Migration embodies the ancient tales of *matsya* avatar, the fish incarnation of Vishnu. The work reimagines these ancient tales through the rising sea levels

all over the world today. The faint silhouette of the Jagannath Temple in Puri emerges in the background, drawing viewers closer to Odisha. "The aim is to create contemplative spaces where movement pauses, sound dissolves into silence, and Odissi's spirit resonates anew," says artist Shalini Biswajit, Chennai curator and participating artist. One of her artworks features a dancer caught in a swirling motion, right in the midst of the drama that surrounds every dance piece. "I have tried to capture the essence of Odissi through colour and metaphor, while each artist brings their own distinct response to the form," she further adds.

Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom is on at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Greams Road till January 29, from 11am to 7pm. Entry is free.



Sounds of nostalgia (Right) Rzhude David; (far right) Bruce Lee Mani. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Back in tune

Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David reunite for an intimate acoustic set in Chennai next week

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Sixteen years is long enough for bands to dissolve and musicians to drift apart. Next week in Chennai, musicians and ex-band mates, Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David will make their way back on the same stage, closing a distance that last opened in 2010. "Rzhude and I last played

together in 2010. It's been 16 years since we stood on stage as bandmates," says Bruce. When they reunited earlier this year for an acoustic performance in Bengaluru, the ease of the collaboration surprised them both, setting the course for what followed. The show, part of Scarlet Nights at the Alliance Française of Madras, is deliberately stripped down. Two musicians, acoustic instruments, and a set that moves between older material, newer compositions written together and independently, and a small selection of covers. Behind Scarlet Nights is Pro Musicals, a name more often associated with music technology. For founder Sudhin Prabhakar, the series marks a return to an earlier impulse. "This is really about bringing music back to the centrestage.

Not the sponsor, not the lighting, not the flash around it. Just the music," he says. The performance will be professionally recorded using Focusrite equipment, part of an effort to demonstrate how live performances can translate into high-quality recordings outside traditional studio settings. The recordings will be archived, not released immediately, a deliberate decision. "We want people to come out, sit in a room together, and listen again." Scarlet Nights is envisioned as a monthly series, each edition centred on musicians with experience. *Scarlet Nights, hosting Bruce Lee Mani and Rzhude David, is on at the Alliance Française of Madras on February 5, from 7.30pm. Entry is free with mandatory registration on promusicals.com.*

Something old, something new

In her recent book, *Aging (Un)Gracefully*, author Lalita Iyer says that growing old is both a liberation and a licence to be your true self

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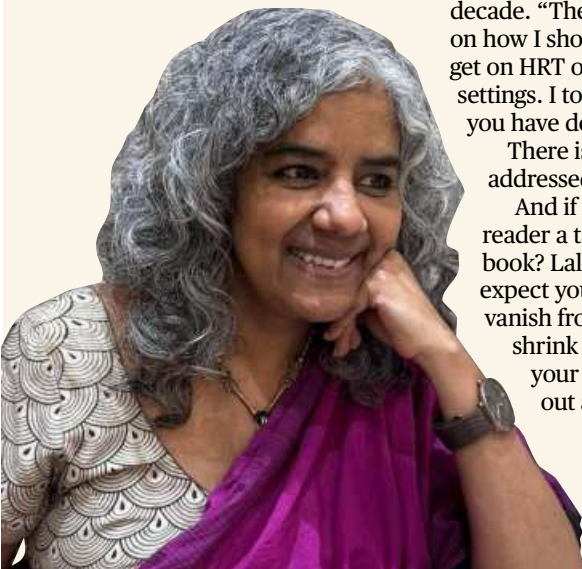
For long, when women got older, many cultures preferred it happened out of sight. That rule book has been thrown out by 50-plus author Lalita Iyer as she navigates ageing and its attendant disruptions in her latest book *Aging (Un)Gracefully*, published by Simon and Schuster. When we speak on the wire, Lalita's sprightly voice catches me off guard – she sounds decades younger. The journalist-essayist and author of books such as *Sridevi: Queen of Hearts*, lives in Kodaikanal but has been racing up and down the country promoting her latest book, which she says "was born from a series of revelations". Written over two years but one that has lived in her head for nearly five, Lalita says, "as women we are always living by the body clock – you have to get married and have kids by a certain age, they need to go to college by a certain age... I was trying to catch up because I married late and had my child when I was 41. Menopause was, for me, the turning point."

A different take Lalita says she felt the hormonal changes were preparing her not for the endless whirlpool that most women drown in, but "for a new kind of freedom" because she felt she finally had "permission to just be alive". Before Lalita headed for the hills, she was a Bombay girl through and through – graduating from the Institute of Chemical Technology,

finding her groove in copy-writing and journalism, marrying and raising her son in the city until the COVID-19 pandemic hit. "I moved to Goa during the pandemic and it was a liberating time," she says, adding that it was also the time the physicality of perimenopause set in – the bodily changes, anxiety, the greying, the aches... "But pain teaches you to be still. I was forced to be compassionate to my body. As a result, I started, for the first time in my life, putting myself first." "When I started writing posts online on confronting ageing, many wrote back and I discovered that there were different ways to deal with this stage. I realised that maybe there is a book here, and not a quiet prescriptive one at that," says Lalita. "I was also experiencing being in the sandwich generation where I am raising a child and my parents at the same time. I was also learning that now I have to raise myself too. I learnt I could say no. You don't have to be invisible or inaudible as you age. The book is about encouraging women to laugh together."

The writing is not always linear. The chapters tell it as it is – In Which I Pressed My Reset Button, Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety, and My Friends are Worried About My Sex Life. The writing is light and conversational and dwells on an attitude that grabs life by the horns. Lalita discusses how her late motherhood came at the brink of perimenopause, and she writes about going through that and a divorce all within a span of a decade. "There was plenty of advice on how I should strength train or get on HRT or restore my factory settings. I told myself and the world you have done enough combat." There is also an entire chapter addressed to her ex-husband. And if she had to give the reader a takeaway from the book? Lalita says, "People will expect you to shrink as you age, vanish from the workplace, shrink socially and invalidate your feelings. Don't do it. Go out and reclaim yourself."

Telling it as it is Lalita Iyer. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Tharun Bhascker on his dark turn in *Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi* and directing *Ee Nagaraniki Emaindi 2*



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So far, Tharun has

ENE 2 is expected to release later this year. Meanwhile, Tharun will also be seen in a film directed by debutant Kashyap and another directed by first-timer Badri.

What are director Lokesh Kanagaraj's plans for his cinematic universe? The *Coolie* director opens up

A lot has been spoken about ace filmmaker Lokesh Kanagaraj over the last year. Despite collecting more than ₹500 crores at the box office, his previous film, the Rajinikanth-starrer *Coolie*, drew a lot of flak from audiences. Further, there were speculations that it led to Lokesh being dropped from the much-awaited Rajinikanth-Kamal Haasan

The real curveball, however, came a few weeks ago. While the audiences were waiting to get an update from Lokesh on *Kaithi 2* – his much-awaited Lokesh Cinematic Universe film starring Karthi, which has been in the talks after

Now, on January 26, a composed Lokesh addressed the media in Chennai to put to rest many of these controversies. First, Lokesh thanked the audience for the reception his film *Coolie* got and said that he was grateful to know that the film ran for 35 days and turned out to be a profitable venture for Sun Pictures despite the criticism. "The criticism made me think

Lokesh also feels grateful for how his fans have stuck with him during these difficult times; even their criticisms come from their heart, he notes. "For instance,



Clarifying his exit from the Rajini-Kamal project, Lokesh stated that it was purely due to creative differences. "They both were quite eager to do a film together, and that was a very big opportunity to me, because that'd mean that they're acting together after 46 years. It was a privilege that they thought of me as the one to direct it." Lokesh worked on the script for a month, after which he narrated it to the two legends. "They seemed very excited about the script. However, they noted how they've been doing a lot of action films of late. So they wanted how to do a light-hearted subject together. However, I can't make a light-hearted film, and so I backed out of that project."



The first edition of the Touring Talkies Frame and Fame Awards 2026 was held at the Kamarajar Arangam in Chennai on January 25. The organisers honoured artists, technicians, and creative professionals who have made remarkable contributions to the industry. The event was attended by acclaimed actors, filmmakers, technicians, and producers. As a major highlight (late) award for *Idli Kadai*, while *aman*. Abishan Jeevithan, who *aman* was awarded Best Picture. The Touring Talkies, along with

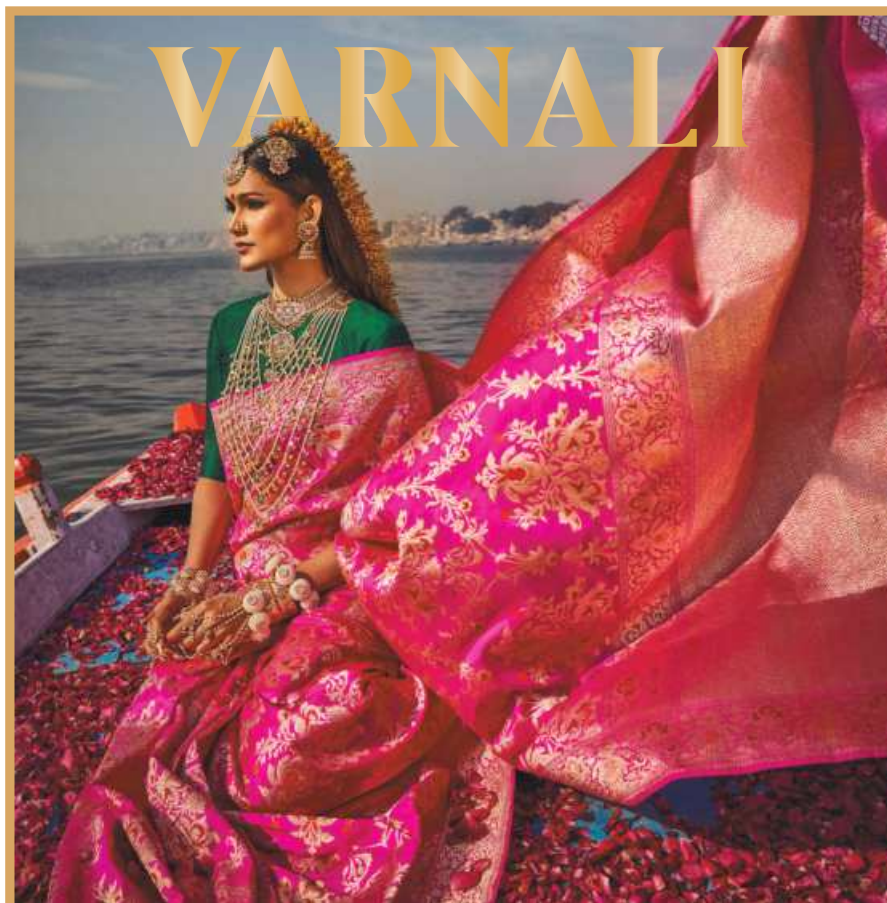
of the evening, Dhanush won the Best Actor in a Leading Role (Male) award for *Idli Kadai*, while Aishwarya Lekshmi won the same in the female category for *Maaman*. Abishan Jeevinth won the Best Direction award for *Tourist Family*, while his acclaimed film was awarded Best Picture. The show was organised by veteran journalist Chithira Lakshmanan's Touring Talks, along with eminent PROs Singaravelu, Riaz K Ahmed, and Paras Riyaz.



Acclaimed actor-director Basil Joseph, who was recently seen in a cameo appearance in Sivakarthikeyan's *Parasakthi*, is set to make his Tamil debut as a lead in the upcoming Tamil-Malayalam bilingual film *Raawadi*. Directed by debutant Vignesh Vadivel, the comedy film also stars LK Akshay Kumar, the young actor who recently turned heads with his performance in the Tamil movie *Sirai*. The cast of *Raawadi* also features John Vijay, Sathyam, Shariq Hassan, and Aishwarya Sharma. With music scored by Jen Martin, the film has cinematography by Leon Britto and editing by Barath Vikraman. *Raawadi*, produced by SS Lalit Kumar of Seven Screen Studio, is scheduled to release this summer.




Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming actioner, *King*, finally has a release date. The Siddharth Anand directorial will be released in theatres on December 24 this year. The promo video unveiled to make the announcement features Shah Rukh standing atop a snow-capped mountain. Earlier, a teaser of the film was released which gave a glimpse into its high-octane, bloody world of action. *King* has Deepika Padukone starring as the female lead, marking her sixth collaboration with Shah Rukh. Notably, the superstar's daughter, Suhana Khan, actor Jaideep Ahlawat and Akshay Oberoi will also play pivotal roles in the film.



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Lokesh Kanagaraj.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

For now, after months of silence and online negativity, Lokesh seems quite positive about his place in cinema, and most importantly, unperturbed by the online toxicity that he has been subjected to.



<i>a yash raj films' worldwide release</i>			
CHENNAI CITY	LOCATION	NORTH ARCOT	LOCATION
PVR SATHYAM	Royapettah	PVR VELOCITY MALL	Vellore
PVR ESCAPE	Royapettah	SOUTH ARCOT	
EGA CINEMAS	Kilpauk	PVR THE CINEMA	
PVR AMMA MALL	Amminjikarai	PVR PONDY	Pondy
PVR PALAZZO	Vadapalani	COMBATORE	
PVR S2 CINEMA	Perambur	PVR THE CINEMA	
AGS CINEMAS	T.Nagar	BROOKFIELD MALL	Coimbatore
CHENGAIPET		INOX PRIZONE MALL	Coimbatore
CHENNAI		CINEPOLIS FUN MALL	Coimbatore
AGS CINEMAS	Kanathur	BROADWAY	Coimbatore
AGS CINEMAS	Vilivakkam	SRI SAKTHI CINEMAS	Tirupur
AGS CINEMAS	Maduravoyal	MR	
AGS CINEMAS	Omr	INOX VISHAAL	
INOX THE MARINA	Omr	DE MALL	Madurai
INOX GRAND MALL	Velachery	VETRI CINEMAS	Madurai/Thattavani
INOX NATIONAL	Virugambakkam	SALEM	
INOX LUXE PHOENIX	Velachery	INOX IN RELEANCE MALL	Salem
PVR VALLAM	Anna Nagar	RDX DNC THEATERS	Salem
PVR AEROHUB	Meenambakkam	DMAX DNC	Dharmapuri
PVR HERITAGE	Ecr	GRAND CINEMAS	Bsor
INOX GALADA	Tirusulam	TI	
CINEPOLIS HSR	Thuraispikam	LA CINEMA MARIS	Trichy
VELS THEATRE	Chembarambakkam		
SEVEN SCREENS	Kilambakkam		

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