

CHENNAI • Thursday, February 12, 2026



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THE HINDU

Stella Maris alumni explore the fragility of time, space and Nature at their art show P3

SK Jayarajan and Stella Jayarajan

A sprightly Stella Jayarajan, 74, finds her way to St Mary's, Fort St George, with practised ease. Not surprising for someone who spent 37 years of her professional life at the nearby Namakkal Kavignar Maligai that houses the State Secretariat.

Air Commodore SK Jayarajan AVSM, VSM (retired), 80, Stella's husband of 50 years, points to the arbor where they used to lunch whenever he dropped in at the fort. "Whenever I came down on leave, I dropped by to surprise her at work and we ended up having a quick 'picnic' lunch across the road under the trees," says Jayarajan.

Impromptu lunches have been their love language, even in the years when the vagaries of service kept them apart with each pursuing their own professional arc. Unusual for a couple who met as strangers and decided to wing it.

Jayarajan was introduced to Stella, an Assistant Section Officer, on a visit home. Each remembers what the other was wearing – she, a yellow cutwork sari that still hangs in her wardrobe, he, a pair of checked double barrel pants. "Fits



PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

like a shot," they say and laugh in unison referring to the ad line for the trousers. The next time they met was at the altar. "I wasn't keen on being a Forces' wife," says Stella. "Also, the idea of leaving my job didn't appeal to me. But God knows best."

With Jayarajan's encouragement, Stella managed to walk the tightrope – staying back to work in Madras, availing transfers where she could, and following the drum to wherever Jayarajan was posted across India, stepping in to fulfil her duties as a military wife.

But it was Shillong that cemented their marriage. "We moved there after our wedding and I enrolled to do another degree. His office hours were till 2pm. After classes I would reach the foot of the hill and wave out with my umbrella, and if he could see me from his office window he would come and bear me away in his Vespa scooter for lunch. And it was in the languid afternoons, walking through the

woods, collecting pine cones and driftwood, that we discovered our likes, dislikes and interests. We came back to hot tea and snacks and ABBA and Rafi on the two-in-one," says Stella. "And there was always, always time for a picnic lunch," adds Jayarajan, who retired as the Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station, Devlali.

Stella admits that the breaks from work resulted in some professional upheavals but says she would not have had it any other way. "It taught me to slip in and out of roles easily – I could take the bus to work like any working woman and also slip into the role of the unit's first lady with ease."

Both agree that the decades have gone by pleasantly well. "I think there were no surprises because we had no expectations. We've had good bosses, great friends and family, and some crazy adventures," says Jayarajan. Stella, who retired as Additional Secretary to Government, says with a laugh, "We both have a list of qualities that annoys the other. But nothing that big that a picnic lunch can't fix."



G Nanasambandan and Amutha

M adurai-based Tamil scholar, orator, and actor G Nanasambandan has named his KK Nagar home 'Amuthagam', meaning 'Amutha's place'. Over the 42 years of their marriage, during which he steadily grew in popularity, writing books, acting in movies and travelling the world for talks and pannandramas, Amutha has been by his side with her quiet strength.

"I didn't even have a job then, but she agreed to marry me," says the 71-year-old Nanasambandan. He

sometimes wonders why Amutha said yes to him. He was in his late 20s and yet to find his feet in Tamil literature when the two got married. She was 19 and went by her gut instinct and the trust she placed in her parents – theirs was an arranged marriage.

Amutha and Nanasambandan have fond memories of picnics by the Vaigai with their children followed by a dip in the river. When he started working in the Thiagarajar College, he would return home to Sholavandan by bus at around 9pm every day, to see his kids waiting for him by the front steps. "We would

A love for all seasons

With Valentine's Day upon us, we hear from three couples who have spent over 40 years together about the secret to an enduring relationship

Deepa Alexander and Akila Kannadasan

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have dinner together as songs from the *Mouna Ragam* cassette played in the background," he says.

Once their children were older, Amutha got the opportunity to pursue her higher education. "I did my MA, BEd and MPhil," she recalls.

When Nanasambandan started getting roles in Tamil films, Amutha would accompany him to film sets whenever she got the chance, and the two have travelled abroad together for several overseas events.

Nanasambandan particularly remembers shooting for *Bigil* with actors Nayanthara and Vijay, in which he played her father. He had

opted out of a talk in the US to be part of the movie and recalls actor Vijay joking to his wife during the shoot that he chose to act in a film with Nayanthara instead of offering a Tamil speech.

Gnanasambandan says that life does not always offer a rosy park for couples to take strolls and romance through. "There is a lot happening. We argue, then make up; one of the kids will have to be rushed to the emergency due to a sudden fall or sickness; we suffer health issues as we age..." he says, adding that in between all of that, love still happens.

PHOTO: SIVA SARAVANAN



Honda," he says. Night shows meant that they could enjoy the movie and each other's company without his readers recognising him.

Today, Rajesh Kumar has entered the OTT space and people from the film industry often meet him for discussions. While he is deliberately taking it slow for his wife. "I cannot keep travelling to Chennai. I have to be here for her," he says.

Dhanalakshmi cannot stand being at home without his company. "I would head to the bank for something and she would call me in 20 minutes, asking me when I will be home," he says. The other day, she gave him a list for grocery shopping and just as he was about to leave, said that she too wanted to come along. This is what 51 years of companionship does to you.

instantly knew that she was the one," recalls the 78-year-old author, adding that he noticed how beautiful her eyes were, even though they didn't get to talk during the meeting of the two families.

When Rajesh Kumar started writing, Dhanalakshmi was his first reader and critic. She still is. "I regularly get feedback that my women characters are dignified. This is because of my wife's influence," he says. When he was writing crime series for six to seven publications a month, she maintained a diary with synopses of each series. "I would note down how he

Celebrating India's artisans

Experience indigenous crafts and artistry at Crafts Council of India's exhibition

Chitra Deepa Anantharam

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The annual event organised by the Crafts Council of India, the Crafts Bazaar, moves from its erstwhile home, the Co-optex grounds at Egmore, and returns this year at a new venue. A one-stop destination for handcrafted textiles, jewellery, home furnishings, home décor and indigenous arts and crafts, the fair at The Mother Teresa Women's Complex, Nungambakkam, brings together more than 60 artisans and

weavers from across the country. Whether visitors wish to shop or explore India's rich textile traditions and art forms, the bazaar offers an ideal platform.

Chairperson of CCI, Visalakshi Ramaswamy, says the fair is returning after a gap of two years due to the lack of a suitable venue. "We aim to popularise traditional art, crafts and textiles, and create a direct market for them without middlemen," she says.

"This year, several national award-winning artists and weavers will showcase their latest creations. The native arts of our nation will



fascinate visitors, as will the richness of our textile heritage."

At the bazaar, shoppers will see a display of creations made from earth, mud, stone, wood, leather,

cotton, jute and paper. National award-winning artists Kalyan Prasad Joshi and Anuj Joshi will present phad paintings from Rajasthan, while Shilp Guru will talk about his pichwai painting. Fifth-generation artist Akshya Kumar Bariki will showcase patchchitra paintings from Odisha, and Venkat Raman Singh Shyam will present his Gond art creations from Madhya Pradesh.

The Crafts Bazaar highlights

crafts that celebrate folk, classical, festive and Nature-based traditions. Handcrafted water reed products and black pottery (Longpi pottery) by Pamshangphi Ngasainaon from Manipur will be featured. Gobind Halder will present sholapith craft, an eco-friendly art from West Bengal made from the spongy core of the shola plant, while Mohan Verma will demonstrate the traditional sanji art of Uttar Pradesh.

Textile lovers will be spoilt for choice, as several national award-winning weavers launch their latest creations.

These include Bhujodi weaves from Kutch by Vankar Poonam Arjun, Maheshwari weaves by Anas Ansari, bandini creations by Abdul Bashir Katri, ajrakh textiles from Gujarat by Mushtaq Khatri, Bhagalpur tussars from Bihar by Sushant Ranjan, Benaras saris from Uttar Pradesh by Sumaiyyia Textiles and Kalamkari, Chettinad and Kanjeevaram silks.

Jewellery made from Adivasi

beadwork, brass dhokra craft, patwa jewellery from Rajasthan, recycled materials, glass bangles and crochet will also be available at the stalls.

In addition, blue pottery from Rajasthan, ceramic pottery from UP, grass mats from Pattamadai and Veeravanallur in Tamil Nadu, soof embroidery from Gujarat by Hemant Dohat, and Khurja pottery will be displayed.

For home décor enthusiasts, the bazaar will feature soft furnishings, metal, ceramic and wooden wall hangings with motifs inspired by Nature.

The Crafts Council of India (CCI) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit NGO working for the sustainable growth and development of India's crafts and craft artisans.

@The Mother Teresa Women's Complex, Nungambakkam. February 13 to 17, 10.30am to 7pm. Entry is free. For details, call 9840541456.



Shipra Sanjay

In place of coffee cups lay a pair of shining gauntlets, taking up a table's worth of space at Chennai's Hard Rock Cafe. Beside it, a glowing red LED helmet was held up to the crowd, drawing the attention of over a hundred cosplay enthusiasts.

With the third edition of Comic Con Chennai right around the corner, the city's growing cosplay community came together at a Cosplay 101 workshop on January 25. People were drawn to the workshop for different reasons – some looking to up their cosplay game and others out of sheer curiosity. The event was hosted by Chennai pro-cosplayers, Logesh Rajah and Suriya Banu, along with Mumbai-based award winning cosplayer, Akshay Churi. While Mumbai has been a longtime player in the cosplay scene, cosplay culture in Chennai has begun gaining momentum more recently.

Cosplay in the everyday
"Does anyone know how cosplay started?" Logesh Rajah asks the audience before referring to an American highschooler from the 1970s who happened to dress as a character from the *Star Trek* film franchise. Bringing up an example closer home, he recounts a screening of the 2013 Kollywood film, *Thalaivaa*, where fans arrived dressed in white shirts and blue trousers inspired by the lead character. "That's when I realised, we've already been doing



Character development

Ahead of Comic Con Chennai, a Cosplay 101 workshop brought together first-timers and seasoned cosplayers, offering a glimpse into a growing subculture

cosplay for a long time," Logesh says. Reciting an iconic dialogue or simply mimicking a character's gait, he adds, are also forms of cosplay.

For many, identifying with characters is as important as an impressive costume. "It felt like my childhood heroes were brought to life," says 26-year-old data analyst Ashwin Karthik, on his experience at the 2024 Chennai Comic Con. For him and others, cosplay means a chance to see real-life versions of the characters they have long identified with.

From wigs to WhatsApp groups

The rise of cosplay in recent years can largely be attributed to social media. A social media alias or 'cosplay handle' is now common practice. In fact, Suriya Banu is perhaps more popularly known by her cosplay handle,

Chennai Comic Con 2026: What to expect

Meet Ron Marz: The comic writer behind Silver Surfer and Green Lantern's Kyle Rayner

Indian creators: Savio Mascarenhas (Amar Chitra Katha), Alicia Souza, and Graphicurry's Prasad Bhat

Cosplay: Watch fans transform into superheroes, anime icons and gaming characters

Main stage comedy: Catch live sets by Azeem Banatwalla, Daniel Fernandes, Vivek Muralidharan, RamKumar and Kumar Varun

Music acts: Groove to hip-hop artist Kenzo Y2K and multi-lingual performer Célineedee Matahari, alongside Louis Lancien and Olga.

Fan zones: Explore the Maruti Suzuki Arena Zone, Crunchyroll Zone and the NODWIN Gaming Arena

Merchandise: Hunt for Comic Con collectables, indie comics and fandom merch

Community vibes: Connect with fellow fans, gamers and creators for a weekend celebrating all things pop culture

Suit up At the Cosplay 101 workshop at Hard Rock Cafe Chennai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Hikari Jane, Suriya or rather, Hikari, explains, "Suriya means sun, and Hikari means light in Japanese. So, from the sun comes the light." As an anime fan, her cosplays often feature the brightly-coloured hair spikes characteristic of anime protagonists. To achieve that signature gravity-defying hair is no easy feat. "One of the main things people struggle with when cosplaying is wigs," she says. Choosing the right wig is essential. Factors like heat resistance, stylability, and shape make all the difference. She says to ditch traditional shopping sites and instead explore Instagram businesses when on the hunt for that perfect wig.

Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp all serve as tools for cosplayers to share and imbibe knowledge of the craft. WhatsApp group chats, for instance, have made it possible for cosplayers to trade both wigs and advice.

Cosplay as community

For Akshay, cosplay seemed foreign at first. "I knew cosplay existed in the West, but I did not know it had such a presence in India," he says. The discovery prompted him to create his first costume – a recreation of Marvel's Iron Man. Even for a cosplayer as well versed as Akshay in 3D modelling, muscle suits and foam crafting, the cosplay scene can be competitive. This competitiveness, however, has also fostered a sense of shared identity. "We're really more friends than cosplay colleagues," he says, speaking about the community.

"Am I too old? Is my skin tone too dark to play this character? What will my friends think?" Logesh lists the worries a first-time cosplayer may have, much of which he too has had to overcome. In times like this he asks himself, "what would Zoro do?" in reference to the swashbuckling pirate from the manga, One Piece.

Cosplayer and workshop attendee, Rafia Khan, shares a similar apprehension. "I was hesitant at first," she says, chalking it up to a fear of judgment. But upon meeting others with the same passions and fears, she found belonging. "You have one life; you need to live it," she adds.

Comic Con Chennai is on February 14 and 15 at Chennai Trade Centre. Passes are available on comicconindia.com.

Why so tall?

Brachio, written by Venkataraman, and illustrated by Ananya Broker Parekh, explores self-discovery

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Venkataraman is tall, and tall enough for people to notice him everywhere he goes, so much so that he wrote an entire book about it.

Brachio, written by Venkataraman, illustrated by Ananya Broker Parekh, and published by Harper Collins Children's Books, is a tall book in many ways.

The publishers chose a long book; an elongated format to echo its tall protagonist, and emotionally, it explores themes like self-discovery and belonging.

At a towering 6 feet 5 inches, Venkataraman laughs and says, "It's really hard for me to be walking and talking to a group of people because they're so much shorter, and I can't hear what they're saying. That sort of stuff features in the book where people have to shout for Brachio to be able to hear them."

"There are always these jokes about being tall, and how I can see the stage at concerts, or the idol in the temple, even from far away. These little nuggets that I have picked up over the years also helped me shape the book," he says.



The book went through several avatars before becoming a children's picture book. "I tried it as a short story for adults, and then for children. Nothing was landing. Finally, I tried it as a 15-minute play," he recalls.

The book is rooted in complex ideas. "The storytelling is childlike, but it comes from adult concerns like discrimination, capitalism, labour and dignity," says

Venkataraman. The circus in the book, where Brachio is reduced to an entertainment, is no accident. "Anyone who is slightly different becomes a spectacle – whether it's height, skin colour, or a disability," he adds.

Piece by piece

Illustrator Ananya approached the story visually and instinctively. The artworks add to the charm of the book. "When I saw the story, I instantly started to get ideas about what I wanted to do," says Ananya. She then used a mixed-media approach, working with cloth and patterned paper to build Brachio's world by hand.

"His clothes look as though they're stitched from real cloth, giving the story a distinctly tactile feel," says Ananya.

For most of the book, Brachio is never shown fully – only fragments of his body appear on the page. "It's to emphasise his height," says Ananya.

"I want readers to feel something after they close the book. That afterglow. Maybe thinking of a friend, or calling someone," says Venkataraman.

From the pages

(Left) Venkataraman; (above) *Brachio* book cover. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pop, goes the picnic

Single or not, an exciting line-up of DJs and musical acts including Australia's mighty Alexander Flood, are ready to get you moving at the Circle of Love's third edition of the Big Picnic



Pop,

goes the picnic

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Afashionable, inclusive dance floor full of pumping beats with a hardstop Cinderella deadline of 12am. This defined the first edition of Circle of Love's Big Picnic at the Green Meadows resort in 2025. This all-out dance party with DJs and musicians like Kayan and Nami, clearly set the tone for what is to come this year. The festival returns for its second edition with international acts like Alexander Flood performing live dance music, jazztronica and jazz house music on February 14.

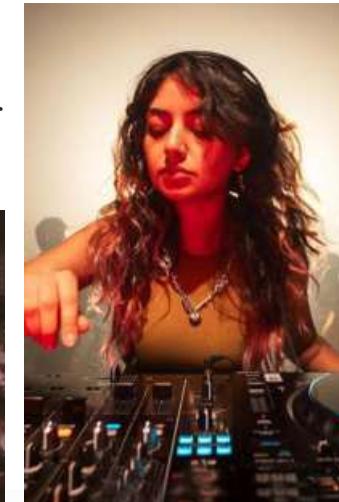
Circle of Love is clear about one thing: your relationship status does not matter here. All you need to know is

to see where the rhythm takes you. "This year, the picnic starts right in the morning with a fitness and wellness session that focusses on yoga and sound healing. Music acts, a flea market, some great brunch, and some sets to top off the night, are part of the plan. Since it is a day-long event, we'd love for families to come too. It's not a rave. It is a picnic," says musician Gooth, a member of the team.

Is it safe to say that we have

reached a point where dedicated music communities in Chennai are pulling all tricks from under their sleeve to ensure that the city accesses cool acts and DJs? If the line-up is anything to go by, the answer is yes.

Rasa, a Bengaluru-based DJ who is originally from Punjab, says that it is going to be her fifth time playing in Chennai. "It's a growing scene. And I love to be part of something that's flourishing. The electronic music scene is becoming big now in



Chennai. I'm glad to see that and contribute in every way possible," she says, adding that since she will likely close the night, she will play some high energy numbers while slipping in some lovey-dovey numbers since it is Valentine's day.

Rasa says that she is most excited to see Australian



Make the move (Clockwise from far left) Drummer Alexander Flood; DJ Rasa; and artiste Gooth. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

drummer Alexander Flood perform with his band. Her sentiment is sure to find resonance among others who are attending the festival to catch the headliner. Flood, who has been performing with his band across India, brings together a collision of jazz, funk, and rhythmic dance music. Speaking to *The Hindu*, the musician says that he didn't ever doubt that the people in the country would vibe to their music. "A festival like this allows us to reach people outside of those who'd attend a club gig. We are putting together a set that appeals to a wider audience," he says.

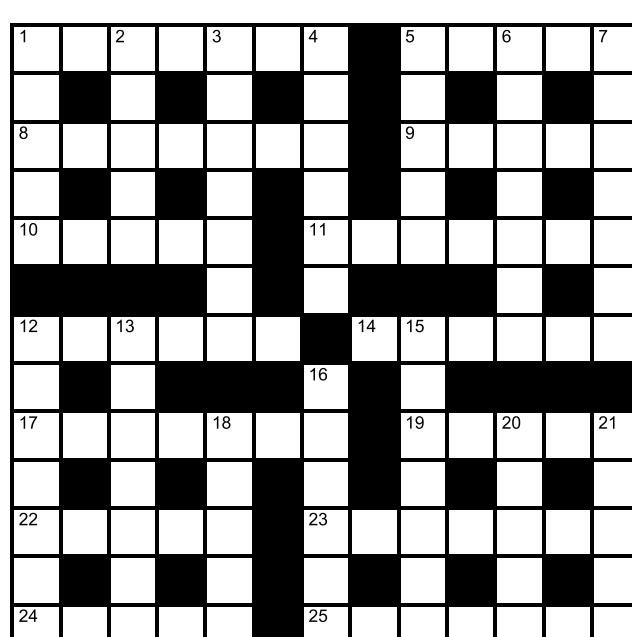
Gooth says that Circle of Love is an effort to champion indigenous musical talent. It is why artistes like Siiry, Harry Shanthi, Ana.Gha, Vardhan, and Nami, will be part of the line-up too, besides Gooth's own performance with Kabir and Tushar who have been part of the early Chennai rap scene.

An interesting addition to this year's festival will be a workshop on DJ-ing by Bootcamp Goa. This is besides a vinyl pop-up by The Revolver Club where people can browse through old vinyls and add them to their collection.

The Big Picnic by Circle of Love is on February 14 at Green Meadows starting 7am till midnight. Tickets are at ₹1,499 for a couple and ₹999 for singles.

QUICK CROSSWORD #40

(Set by Doppelganger)



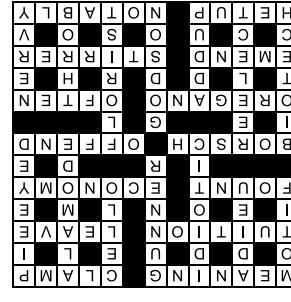
- Across**
- 1 Idea associated with a phrase (7)
- 5 Tool for gripping (5)
- 8 Paid instruction (7)
- 9 Go away from (5)
- 10 Spring (5)
- 11 Careful management of money (7)
- 12 Beet soup (6)
- 14 Be unpleasant (6)
- 17 Sweet-smelling herb (7)
- 19 Many times (5)
- 22 Make improvements (5)
- 23 He enjoys making trouble (7)
- 24 Agitated (3,2)
- 25 Significant (7)
- Down**
- 1 Single design or symbol (5)
- 2 Bid farewell (5)
- 3 Showing foolishness (7)
- 4 An artillery soldier (6)
- 5 Four-stringed instrument (5)
- 6 According to prevailing style (1,2,4)
- 7 Intoxicated (3-4)
- 12 Genetic engineering (7)

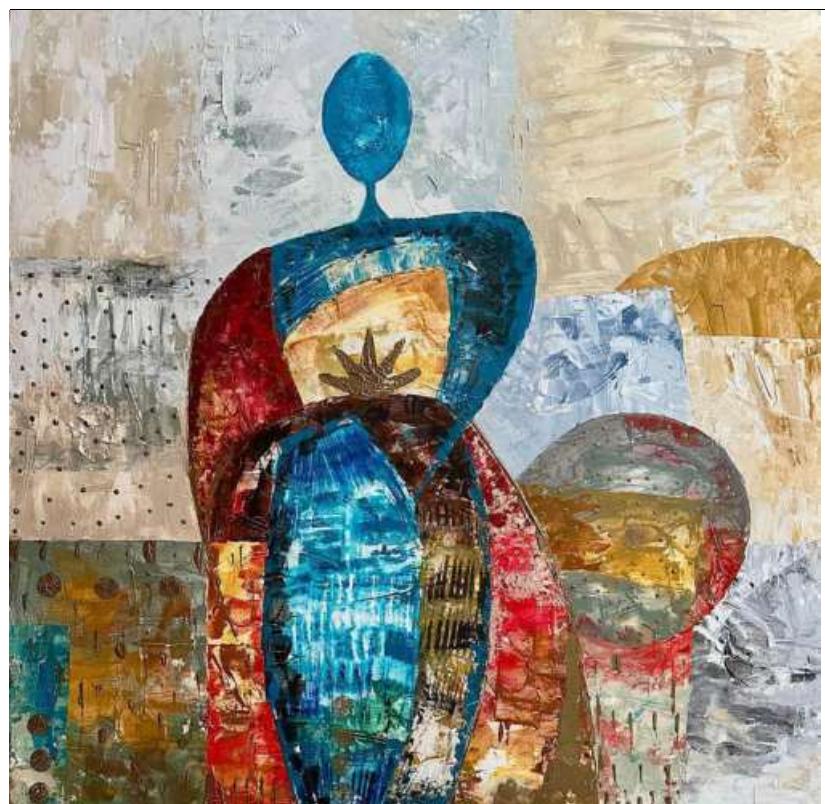
To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.



- 13 Select someone again to office (7)
- 15 She makes bouquets (7)
- 16 Male infant sponsored by an adult (6)
- 18 Put together (3,2)
- 20 To beat (5)
- 21 Excitable (5)

Solution No. 40





The comeback collective

Twenty alumni of Stella Maris College's Department of Fine Arts reunite for an exhibition exploring the mystique of the ocean and the fragility of time and space

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The gallery at Chennai's Lalit Kala Akademi hums like an unruly classroom at 11am. Voices overlapping, footsteps echoing, instructions cutting through the air. The environment feels apt since the space is currently hosting The Art of Becoming: Stella(r) Alumni Canvas, a coming-together of 20 artists shaped by the Department of Fine Arts at Stella Maris College.

Some are adding final touches to their installations, making sure the

sculptures are sitting right, writing notes and instructions on how to view the works best. At the centre of it is curator Ashrafi S Bhagat, once their professor, now an art historian and critic, moving from work to work with a measured eye. The classroom may be decades behind them, but the discipline remains.

"I conceived this exhibition around two interconnected ideas – the mystique of the ocean and the fragility of time and space," says Ashrafi. "Both are powerful, enigmatic, and ever-changing. Nothing stands still. If you look at the fragility of time and space, for me it is memory; time plus the space it

occupies in your mind. And that same fragility exists in the ocean's ecosphere. It is weathered, altered, sometimes consciously degraded. Both are aspects of life that are constantly in flux."

The result is not thematic uniformity, but divergence within a shared framework. Some artists have immersed themselves in both concepts; others have anchored themselves firmly in one.

For Thejomaye Menon, also one of the organisers of the exhibition, the ocean becomes energy in motion. Long associated with a personalised figurative language, she has consciously stepped into abstraction to explore force rather than form. In this series, currents surge across the canvas in layered chromatic fields, circular movements echoing both tidal rhythm and planetary orbit. "I've worked on the depth below the

sea and connected it to the universe. When we speak of the fragility of time, I feel it is determined by planetary change. The planets influence movement. We may not fully understand it, but time shifts with these forces. It's a mystery," she says.

"Each of these paintings took about three months," says Preetha Kannan, standing before a canvas layered in dots of blues and greens. To understand the intricate details in each painting, she presents the viewer with a magnifying glass. Having stepped away from painting to pursue volunteer work in Chennai and later with Baba Amte in rural India for environmental and social causes, Preetha returned to art with sharpened environmental urgency.

In her paintings, she depicts scenes beneath the surface of the ocean. Metal, plastic, bullets and

Memory on canvas (Clockwise from far left) Paintings by Shalini Biswajit; Beenu Govind Rao; Thejomaye Menon. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

other debris gathers while marine life appears to adapt around what humanity leaves behind. The ocean, here, is not mystic spectacle. It is an archive holding evidence of war, waste and survival.

Shalini Biswajit on the other hand, approaches the fragility of time as a spiritual urgency. Drawing from years of studying scripture, particularly Vedantic thought, her work centres on what she calls "inner leisure", which is a state of stillness that withstands the inevitable highs and lows of life. On canvas, that appears as measured squares in muted ochres and blues. Installed alongside are metal figures of a man and a woman on two sides of the same metal sculpture. "In the time span we are given, we must prioritise the very reason we have this human birth. You don't know what will happen tomorrow. There is an urgency in recognising that," she says.

For Ashrafi, the exhibition is less about nostalgia and more about continuity. The artists may differ in language and medium, but the intellectual rigour remains visible. "I don't allow homogeneity," she says with a smile. "I wanted individuality. The styles, the techniques, the expressions must reflect their own sensibility."

The Art of Becoming: Stella(r) Alumni Canvas is on until February 16, 11am to 7pm at Lalit Kala Akademi.



STEPOUT



Elegant heritage
Vimonisha, in collaboration with Mumbai-based Shobha Shringer

Jewellers, presents an exhibition celebrating craftsmanship rooted in gold and polki jewellery traditions. The showcase will also feature the brand's diamond line. @Hyatt Regency, Teynampet. February 12, 11am to 8pm. Call 9820043549 for details.



Romantic melodies
Satrangi will present its upcoming musical programme, Prem Katha, featuring romantic songs from Hindi films of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The concert will be presented by singers Promod, Smriti, Abhishek, Ramya and Jyothi with pre recorded music. @Teach Auditorium, Taramani. February 13, 5.45pm. For tickets, call 9884778073.

Folk narratives

A storytelling performance by Vikram Sridhar, titled *Mann Vaasanai*: Stories from the Soil, will take audiences on a journey through the landscapes and legends of Tamil Nadu. The programme weaves narratives that range from royal histories to human relationships, and blends storytelling with folk songs, lullabies and riddles. @Backyard, Adyar. February 15, 7pm. Ticket priced at ₹294 at instamojo.



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Pitch report

From Afghanistan to Alandur:
How Chepauk came alive for the
T20 World Cup



What's the score? Cricket fans at Chepauk watching a recent ICC T20 World Cup match; (below) Mohammad Imran. RAGU R

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There is never a dull moment in T20 cricket. Usually associated with windy evenings, India's floodlit stadiums come to life with nail biting encounters and bitter sporting rivalry. So, when I trudged my way on a lazy Sunday morning to the hallowed MA Chidambaram stadium, for the New Zealand-Afghanistan match at the ongoing T20 Cricket World Cup, I envisioned a tepid encounter. But thanks to Chennai's 'Knowledgeable Cricket Crowd' – a sobriquet earned over the years for the fans' support of a good game irrespective of the playing teams – the morning was as much a spectacle as any IPL high-energy game.

Waiting patiently in line to get into the ground was Mohammad Imran, a fan who had come just a few days ago from Afghanistan. A few excited local cricket fans wanted to take selfies with him – probably drawn to his grand dress and turban, which made him stand out among the crowd. After posing for a few pictures, he told me that he was here for a couple of days to take in the cricket frenzy, apart from a little sight seeing. "It's great to see the support for cricket here. I even saw quite a bit of support for the Afghan team which was quite heartening," he said.

If Imran came all the way from Afghanistan, 25-year-old Ramana arrived from Alandur, taking the Metro to get here. I caught him bargaining for a New Zealand T-shirt from one of the many roadside shops that spring to life at the periphery of the stadium during match days. "Akka, Santner T-shirt kudunga (give me the T-shirt with the lettering 'Santner')," he said, referring to the New Zealand captain



Celebrating a rock legend
Bay 146, in collaboration with Blue Birds, will present To Sir, With Love, a musical tribute to legendary rock musician Jesudasan Rajasekaran. The event will feature over 20 of Chennai's leading musicians, who will celebrate the life and legacy of a pioneer of Indian rock music. Born in Madurai in 1948, Rajasekaran, well known for his powerful vocals and dynamic stage presence, joined Blue Birds in 1973, transforming it into one of India's most celebrated rock bands. He won acclaim for his performances of music by The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Queen, earning him the title "the Mick Jagger of India". He also composed popular songs such as 'Kannamma' and 'Dhavani'. Though he parted ways with Blue Birds in the 1980s, he reunited with the band in 2011, with Bay 146 becoming its signature venue. Rajasekaran's final performance was held on December 26, 2025, days before his passing, making this tribute especially significant. All proceeds will be handed over to Rajasekaran's family.
@Bay 146, Saver Hotel, Mylapore. February 13, 8.30pm onwards. Tickets at district.com



Style mantra
Malavika Mohanan sporting her favourite New Balance 9060.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Meet the hypebeast

Actor Malavika Mohanan on her love for sneakers and her upcoming release *Sardar 2*

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Malavika Mohanan is a self-confessed sneakerhead. We refrain from embarrassing her by not asking how many pairs she owns. "I eventually had to stop buying shoes because my mom was like there is no space anymore," laughs Malavika, who, fittingly, inaugurated the New Balance store at Express Avenue.

When she is not working, and is not dressed for a role, she lives in sneakers. "Because I am jumping from one airport to the other, or travelling. I love exploring, and it involves a lot of walking. I go on a lot of wildlife safaris."

While she juggles different things in her personal life, Malavika prefers not to do the same when it comes to films. However, while shooting for the soon-to-be-released *Sardar 2* with Karthi, the actress was also working on *Hridayapoorvam* (with Mohanlal) and *The Raja Saab* (opposite Prabhas).

"In a utopian world, I would have preferred being committed

to one project and being in that zone. But we don't live in an ideal world," she laughs, adding, "Timelines kept shifting. Date clashes happened."

All three roles she played were in different languages and completely diverse genres – a period spy film, a heart-warming drama, and a horror comedy. While this fortunately did not affect the characters she played, Malavika says it did result in sleepless nights as she travelled from one shoot to another.

"It got really tricky on a lot of days." Sometimes, she would land up at one set and start speaking in Tamil, when she had to speak in Telugu. Well, you live, you learn.

In *Sardar 2*, Malavika plays a



For *Sardar 2*, my next spy thriller, I had to do many challenging action sequences, for which I underwent a lot of technical training

MALAVIKA MOHANAN

role she considers unique to everything else she has portrayed before. "In this exciting spy thriller, I had to do challenging action sequences. I went through a lot of technical training." She narrates how she had to climb 200 metres by stairs, and jump from there. Even though she had the safety of the harness, the challenge was to get the body language right, maintain a tight core and stretch her hands forward at a certain angle. "Nerve-wracking in the moment, but an adrenaline rush later."

Known for her versatility and choice of roles, her wish list includes romantic films and a period drama, where she gets to dress like a princess. Next, Malavika is gearing up for a Tamil film. Details, of course, are still under wraps.

After 12 years in the industry, how does Malavika decide between commercial appeal and creative satisfaction when choosing roles? "It's a fine balance between the two. I want to reach as many audiences as I can. You never know what can reach who, and it's important to dabble in all sorts of cinema and just have fun with it."



Romance, down memory lane

2002's *Mounam Pesiyadhe*, 2001's *Minnale*, and 1999's *Kadhalar Dhinam*, are all set to re-release this Valentine's Day

Two of the most cherished Tamil romance films of the early 2000s, 2002's *Mounam Pesiyadhe*, starring Suriya and Trisha, and 2001's *Minnale*, starring Madhavan and Reema Sen, and the popular 1999 film, *Kadhalar Dhinam*, starring Kunal and Sonali Bendre, are all set to re-release this Friday, on the occasion of Valentine's Day. *Minnale* also completed 25 years earlier this month, a landmark that also marked 25 years of director Gautham Vasudev Menon.

The news about the re-releases has come as a sweet surprise to Tamil cinema fans who have been witnessing a drought at the box office since Pongal in January.

What has further ramped up the hype is a video that actor Suriya has shared ahead of the re-release of *Mounam Pesiyadhe*, which was directed by Ameer. After uttering a famous dialogue from the film, Suriya said, "I have been seeing many such dialogues from *Mounam Pesiyadhe* on WhatsApp statuses, reels and shorts. 20 years since its release, *Mounam Pesiyadhe* continues to be a favourite film for many. It was director Ameer's debut film, and I would call it one of my best

films." He added that the film had three heroines (Trisha, Laila and Neha) and that it was a romance with great songs by Yuvan Shankar Raja. "However, a generation of audiences may not have seen it. So after all these years, Ganesh Raghu of Aparajeeth Films is re-releasing it. I wish to catch at least one show of the film with you all," added Suriya.

Mounam Pesiyadhe followed the story of a rugged youth's tryst with romance and how a twist changes the way he sees love and life.

Meanwhile, *Minnale*, Gautham Menon's debut film, follows the story of a young man, played by Madhavan, who assumes the identity of another man (coincidentally, his college-time rival, played by Abbas) to woo his crush (Reema Sen). The film also features chartbuster songs by composer Harris Jayaraj.

Meanwhile, the makers of the hit 1999 film, *Kadhalar Dhinam*, starring Kunal and Sonali Bendre, have also announced a re-release, something that will bring a smile to fans who dig romance subjects. The film, which follows the story of two strangers who meet online and fall in love, was directed by Kadhir and also had superhit tracks by AR Rahman.

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