



Interview with Ma Anand Sheela

PG 4

DAY'S DIARY

The Academy founded

On May 4, 1927, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, a professional honorary organisation dedicated to the advancement of motion pictures was founded

THE OSCARS

Thirty-six founding members filed the papers for the Academy. It is known around the world for its annual Academy Awards, now officially known as The Oscars



THE PROPOSAL

The proposal to start an academy was by MGM Studio chief Louis B Meyer. He invited 36 people from all branches of the film industry



PRESIDENT

Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. was elected as the first president of the Academy and its first honorary membership was awarded to Thomas Edison

Even if the time now is too fragile to merit jokes, don't give up on laughter, say members of the 38-year-old Humour Club International Triplicane

HOLDING ON TO HUMOUR



VAISHALI VIJAYKUMAR

There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour,' said Charles Dickens. While the current COVID-19 pandemic makes me want to sorely disagree with the English writer, a few comforting words from members of the city's oldest comedy club — Humour Club International Triplicane Chapter — seem to calm my nerves and change my stance. "Vaai vittu sirithal noi vittu pogum (heartily laughter is the best medicine). Reading or telling a joke gives a sense of relief in such dark times so there's no need to feel guilty; provided your jokes are appropriate and not hurtful. It helps you offer support to the sick ones," suggests R Sekharan, secretary of the club.

Comedy as companion

Since its inception in 1983, not once have the activities of the club been suspended for this long. But their much-anticipated, four-hour Annual Day cele-

brations in July will be called off for a consecutive second year. "We've been jinxed, what else can I say... Humour Club is our second home and we all eagerly look forward to the second Sunday of every month for our two-hour weekly meeting. We've been missing the 'ha ha' and 'ho ho' since last April. Trust me, it's so therapeutic to hear just that. Right now, the least we can do is regularly call and check on fellow members to ensure there's some kind of moral support for them and nobody feels lonely. Most of our members are senior citizens so they need that pat on their shoulder to tide through," he elaborates.

What started as a 15-member group with a monthly fee of ₹12 at Hindu Senior School in Triplicane, now has over 2,000 members from all parts of the globe. The board members have been sharing videos and photos from their previous events every day on WhatsApp to keep the members engaged. "Our video archive is made available on YouTube for everyone to watch for free. People who want to join our club can visit our website, get in touch with us. We're

also encouraging members to pen jokes, cartoons and memes to stay spirited," he notes.

The only respite for members — until the club's regular activities resume — is to take a walk down the memory lane by revisiting their old programme videos. "Every video evokes nostalgia. I was new to Chennai and it was a friend who introduced me to a humour club 25 years back. With time, my husband and I started enjoying the activities so much that we planned our vacations in a way it did not disrupt our monthly meetings. How many monthly meetings at clubs would gather over 800 members? Affluent Tamil speakers from all fields were invited to give talks on various topics. The standards of the club grew leaps and bounds and there was no compromising on quality," recalls Vijayalakshmi Sankar, secretary of Humour Club International's women's wing, which is four years old. "While most of the activities are common, on International Women's Day and International Mother's Day, the women's wing honours women who've made an impact. There's also a line-up of healthy



HUMOUR THIS!

1 The club was inspired by YMN Murthy, who started a humour club for the first time in Bengaluru in 1976. After which, Humour Club International Mylapore Chapter was started by Devarajan and Lakshmanan in 1979. The Humour Club International Triplicane Chapter was started by Govindarajulu in 1983.

2 The current board members are — KS Seetharaman, chairman; R Sekharan, secretary; B Kannan, treasurer; Vijaya Sundaram, program coordinator and Vijayalakshmi Sankar.

3 The club has honoured and hosted veteran speakers like Gnanasambanthan, Suki Sivam, Pulavar Ramalingam, Mohana Sundaram, and M Ramachandran. Comedians such as Vivekh and Charlie also began their career here.

Annual Day event, we allow only members with an invitation. Members from different states and regions come to attend this. It's as big as the Margazhi Music Festival for us. Even Kamarajar Arangam is houseful," he boasts.

Besides being a source of entertainment, the club also contributes to social causes. Members pool in funds to support underprivileged students for their higher education and families of martyred heroes. They performed *Sathabishegam* for 60 couples in 2013 and *Shasti Poorthy* for 140 couples in 2015. Deserving candidates and speakers are awarded their three in-house awards annually — Aachi Manorama's LifeTime Achievement Award, director K. Balachander's Lifetime Achievement Award and Thenkatchi Go. Swaminathan's (Ex- All India Radio, Chennai) LifeTime Achievement Award.

Despite the enterprising work, not many are aware of its presence. What's worse is the little to no participation from youngsters. "I'd written to colleges in the city asking for students to come and take part in humour club programmes but there's been no positive response. I'm optimistic that we wouldn't have any challenges in the near future. But it would be nice for the youngsters to carry forward the legacy for more generations. Our request for you is to just come once and then you wouldn't have the heart to leave," says Sekharan. More power to him and the team to keep us tickling through every crisis.

The annual membership fee is ₹500 and the lifetime fee is ₹5,000. For details, visit: humourclub.org/ Facebook: Humour Club International; YouTube: Humour Club International Triplicane Chapter

Despite the technological advancements, we do not believe in virtual comedy sessions as it steals the pleasure of enjoyment when there is a live audience

R Sekharan

discussions and debates on topical issues," she adds.

Not just for laughs

Regardless of the changing times, the club keeps up with its pure, unadulterated comedy that does not hurt sentiments. It has also been an encouraging platform for first-timers to express their talent. The members also ensure nobody walks out during a performance. Performing to a diverse audience has motivated them to be responsible with the content of their jokes.

Usha Ramakrishnan, a member, narrates how the club has set a benchmark with its meaningful and improvisational humour, and not resorted to slapstick comedy or self-deprecating jokes. "Sometimes, the jokes may not be funny but we clap to encourage the elderly mem-

bers. It boosts their confidence and they feel accepted. Each of us has a style; my jokes are mostly political spoofs. Telling jokes is tougher than public speaking as it requires rigorous preparation and dedication. Jokes do get repetitive over time but you need to stay updated to not fall behind. Today's generation of stand-up comedians have a different approach. They are more open, loud and bold with content. Their jokes may be funny but we forget and move on. But laughter sessions in humour clubs stay in our memories forever because it's a one-of-a-kind experience. Perhaps, this is why it may never be easy to bridge the generation gap."

Resonating with Usha's beliefs, Swaminathan says, "A good humourist is someone who narrates well, is knowledgeable, has good body language and command over timing. When one of these goes wrong, a good joke can be messed up or an average one be spiced up. Sense of humour is a life-long skill. That's something we've picked up from the club and our friends." Beyond momentary pleasure,

SBI joins the fight against COVID-19

EXPRESS FEATURES

State Bank of India (SBI) has allocated ₹71 crore, to undertake various initiatives to help the country combat the second wave of COVID-19. The bank has dedicated ₹30 crore to set up 1,000-bed makeshift hospitals, 250-bed ICU facilities and 1,000-bed isolation facilities across some of the worst-hit states. These facilities would be set up in collaboration with government hospitals and Municipal Corporations of the respective cities.

SBI is in talks with various designated authorities to explore partnerships for the same.

The Bank will also contribute ₹10 crore for labs. Additionally, ₹21 crore is allocated to all its 17 Local Head Offices to address urgent medical needs of citizens like procuring equipment, oxygen and hospital beds. SBI will continue to provide PPE kits, masks, rations and cooked meals.



There's a community fridge outside the store, where edible food (extra food from our bistro) can be picked up by the needy

Jignesh Pujara, owner

Lyfe made simple and sustainable

VAISHALI VIJAYKUMAR

Adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle is not new to Chennaiites. What with the civic body banning plastics in 2019 and people, at least most of them, adhering to it. But when there is an opportunity to go zero waste, why not, right?

Helping residents in this endeavour is entrepreneur Jignesh Pujara, owner of Lyfe by Soul Garden Bistro. Plans were put in place last year after he studied responsible consumption and sustainability. But owing to the pandemic, his zero-waste store, Eko-Lyfe was launched in mid-April 2021.

Claiming to be the city's largest zero-waste store, Eko-Lyfe is located opposite Lyfe by Soul Garden Bistro in Alwarpet. Giving a virtual tour of the 1,200 sq ft space, its in-house facilities and the extensive line-up of products, he says, "Customers are encouraged to leave their footwear outside as a mark of respecting food. You find reusable containers and glass jars on the shopping trolley. You can either pick that up or bring your containers."

The shop is divided into different segments based on where each product is stored. Soon af-



ter you enter, to your left you'll find indigenous rice varieties such as *kichili samba*, *sona masuri* hand-pounded raw rice, *kullakar* boiled rice, *mappillai samba* boiled rice, *thooyamalli* raw and boiled rice kept in canisters. "The segments are separated by a weighing machine to measure the product purchased. To ease the process, we've placed *dals*, hand-pound flours, nuts and millets next to rice. We've invested in a machine in which fresh flour is ground and handed over to customers," explains Jignesh. Placed next to the shelves of grains are sweeteners like powdered jaggery, palm jaggery, palm crystals and palm sugar.

To make your daily cooking easier, the shop offers in-house masala and spices. In-house *idli* and *dosa* batter, ground flour, and peanut butter are made to order. Their specially curated bread menu comprising whole wheat, multigrain, *pav* bun, ciabatta, focaccia, French baguette, sourdough loaf, etc is a delight for the expats, he says.

"People have become health conscious after the pandemic. As retailers, we need to be one step ahead of their needs. Our dairy products are procured from native cow varieties. The edible cold-pressed coconut, gingelly and groundnut oil are also in demand," he shares.

A whole section is dedicated to vegan goodness. "Our frozen mock meats are hot-sellers. There's vegan curd, milk, cheese and spreads. We also offer in-house Italian low-fat gela-tos. Seasonal vegetables and fruits are also available and there's a shandy every Wednesday and Sunday," he shares. We also catch a glimpse of a collection of eco-friendly vessel scrubs, bottle cleaners and tra-



The shop opened in April 2021 | DEERADATTA MALLICK

ditional cookware at the shop. After shopping, patrons can relax at their in-house cafe Antari for quick eats. The cafe serves coffee and tea in edible biscuit cups. Other food and drinks like air-fried samosa, french fries, potato wedges, sandwiches and pastries are served in biodegradable bagasse plates and cups. Even the furniture in the cafe are made from waste paper pulp. However, due to the lockdown restrictions, they only offer takeaways.

The store reflects Jignesh's vision. "There's a community fridge outside the store, where edible food (extra food from our bistro) can be picked up by the needy. Given the situation, as a precautionary measure, for the first time in Chennai, we have installed Shycocan. The device

continuously emits photons that form an electron cloud in an indoor space. The negatively charged electrons neutralise the positive charge of the S-Protein of Coronavirus, thereby disabling it from infecting a person. At the same time, we recommend following precautions as advised by WHO," elaborates Jignesh, who has plans of opening zero-waste stores in other parts of the city. "Our priority is to offer safe food, ensure fair pricing for farmers and consumers, protect their livelihood and curb plastic use. Chennai needs more of this," he shares.

Eko-Lyfe is open from 8 am to 10 pm every day
Address: No 3, Ananda Road, Alwarpet, Chennai - 18
For details, call: 044-42187195/9080062885