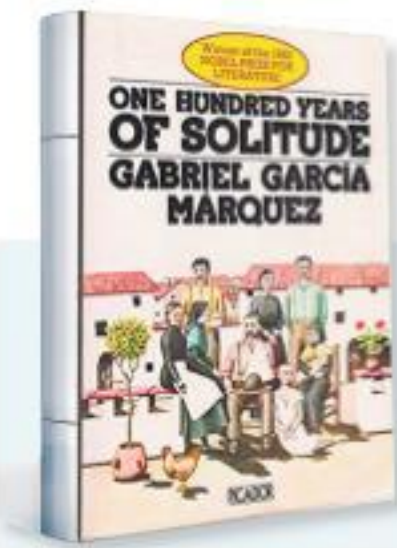




## Interview with Dinesh Krishnan

PG 3



### DAY'S DIARY

#### Book release

Widely acknowledged as author Gabriel Garcia Marquez's finest work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published on this day in 1967

### WORLDWIDE SENSATION

Considered the foremost example of his style of magic realism, the book — originally published in Spanish as *Cien Años de Soledad* — was translated into 30 languages



### PLOT POINTS

Over the years, the book sold 20 million copies. It was a story about a fictional Colombian town Macondo and the rise and fall of its founders, the Buendia family



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is known as one of the foremost interpreters of magical realism in literature and won several awards in his lifetime

Cosplayers in the city speak of the importance of the art for them, the effect of the pandemic on the community and the need for events in Chennai to boost participation

SAHANA IYER

**T**hink of your favourite fictional character and the reason they beat the second-in-line. Perhaps, it was their personality, their charm, their supernatural abilities, or simply, their appearance. Now, imagine a world in which one could transform into this character, embodying all that makes them superior. A universe of colliding franchises, an ecosystem of diverse creatures, or as cosplayers would put it, a convention. Millions around the world don elaborate costumes and make-up to cosplay — a combination of costume and play — and celebrate pop culture as a community, many living right here in Chennai. Many like Suriya Banu aka Hikari Jane, an anime, comic book and manga fan, whose first experience of Comic Con Bengaluru in 2014 opened up a thread to the then small cosplay community of Chennai. "I really enjoyed the event and loved meeting people with the same mindset and hobbies. I have continued to cosplay for nearly a decade now — from anime, manga or sometimes, the games I play. For me, it is about getting to live your favourite character for a day. It's not just dressing up but emulating the personality of the character. You might like the edginess or strength of the character and wish you had it. In that way, cosplay is liberating," she shares.

For those like Suriya, who were early in on the trend, the initial days were all about visiting nearby cities for experiences Chennai did not have to offer. With little to no cosplay scene in Chennai, it became common place to travel statelanes to Bengaluru or Hyderabad to indulge in this hobby. Fellow cosplayer Rubina Raphael concurs. Despite coming about the interest two years later, she could count the number of cosplayers in the city on one hand, she says. As an anime fan, she was introduced to Chennai Anime Federation (CAF) and subsequently, to the cosplay culture, by a friend. "Even I was initially shocked to learn about the community and so, I thought we needed more outreach programmes to make our presence known. A lot of us worked hard to promote the cosplay culture and since then, the numbers have grown exponentially. Years ago, a friend and I had hosted a special effects makeup workshop and less than 20 people

had shown up but we were happy with the numbers. But in the 2019 Phoenix Gaming and Anime Expo (where I was an organiser), we were pleasantly surprised by the large number of people who showed up," she shares. It was around the same time that Anime Con was also hosted in Chennai; things were looking up for the cosplay community in the city with increasing events and participation, that is, until the pandemic hit.

### Covid concerns

COVID-19 brought a halt to much of the world and the cosplay community in Chennai was no different. The few events that occasionally brought people together also came to a halt. Furthermore, many who took professional help for sewing costumes could not do so, and those who visited friends' places to get in costume were unable to do so too.

Where event organisers were facing hurdles, awareness of cosplay was seeping through online platforms. "During Covid, casual cosplay blew up in Chennai and beyond.

Since everything was online, people began to participate in closet cosplay where they would make something out of whatever was available in their closet. And since everyone was online during this time, a lot of awareness also was spread. Not as many people attend events; they are not as wide as the internet. There were also many online events. I judged an event that was conducted on Discord and it was posted on YouTube live and people could participate by commenting," shares Arvind R Menon, better known as Cosdemon. Praveen Manoj or Pravey-Mano, a cosplayer since 2018, adds that as the pandemic lulls in effect, cosplay events are taking on a hybrid format, splitting between offline and online platforms.

Arvind and Praveen are the two cosplay admins of the Chennai Anime Club, created to bring together anime fans in the city. Their subgroup of cosplay enthusiasts is a tight-knit circle that works together to build each other's skills and resources. "We help everyone and share our knowledge and

# THE COSMOS OF CHENNAI COSPLAY



work. We even conduct online and offline workshops on how costumes are made. Cosdemon is a foam expert and I specialise in fabric so we share what we know through reels and such," shares Praveen. Chennai Anime Club's helpful ideals seem to reflect the larger community's beliefs, for Suriya and Rubina also seem to have found longlasting friendships through their interests. "I have a close-knit set of friends. Of these, most I have met through cosplay. It's not the only thing we have in common; we started becoming friends outside cosplay and anime to a point where if I were to visit another city, I know I could call them up. There is a sense of fellowship and it's nice to be surrounded by people who think the same way and probably, process life the same way as you," Rubina explains.

### Staging a success

Armed with creative skills, love for pop culture and finding strength in numbers however, cosplayers in Chennai are ready to showcase their transformations but still struggle to find a stage to do so, one such as Comic Con. There are several reasons for the same, it seems. According to Suriya, climate is a concern. "It's very hot, so we can only host an event in certain places like malls. Not everyone will feel comfortable with costume and makeup in the heat and generally, there is the Chennai culture; it's a bit difficult to explain what cosplay is," she details. Rubina adds that the anime, cosplay and comic community in Chennai is not as well connected and

public event rules in the state may be a cause for concern for organisers.

The travel that the two had took upon in 2014 and 2016 seems to still continue, as Praveen confides, "The cosplay culture is rampantly growing in the city and many need a platform. Every year we travel to other cities to participate in events. It is the only way we can be part of the larger cosplay community. Those who can't travel, miss out. With increasing popularity of superhero movies, many fans here would love to have a Comic Con or something similar. If we have something pop-culture related, it would mean everything to us, not just to cosplayers but also to other fans. For this, we have to show that Chennai has potential. There are other people here who want a stage. If we could tell organisers that we have people interested, they will definitely see potential in Chennai."

While events could promote cosplay in Chennai, it would also bring together the larger community in the city to interact, as Arvind puts it. "No matter how many online events we have, I think that a live event would be preferred by the community. They would love it more when they could interact and be themselves with their fandom. And Comic Con is not only for cosplayers but all kinds of artists. A lot of art and artistry is overlooked here. Chennai has it all but doesn't have a platform. If it did, it would boom," he shares.

As an organiser at the Phoenix Gaming and Anime Expo, as well as a fellow cosplayer, Rachita Saha sees Chennai as a passionate, energetic and eccentric. They have huge energy, are creative and always think out of the box, she mentions. But when it comes to events, there is much that could be done, it seems. "Events are a huge investment. Unless there is a guaranteed return on investment, they are a big gamble for organisers. Therefore, one must take a step back and ask, why aren't there many international gaming companies, Esports brands with branches in Chennai? I believe the Indian government can do a lot more to encourage the growth of pop culture genre in India. If the Tamil Nadu government can step in and provide subsidies to pop culture events/companies; promote initiatives with local artists, invite international brands, organise funded business-to-business initiatives, it will flourish like never before all over the city," she says, adding that events are a haven for cosplayers in India. "They feel motivated to cosplay during events, hang out with other cosplayers and just showcase their art at places where they feel they won't get ridiculed. Events are one of the most important aspects in keeping the culture alive." It seems Chennai is ready to take on events, in numbers and spirit. Now the question lies, what fictional character would you pick to attend?



We help everyone and share our knowledge and work. We even conduct online and offline workshops on how costumes are made. — Praveen Manoj

## WEDDING TOAST WITH A TWIST

DIYA MARIA GEORGE

**M**ost of us anticipate a wedding toast to have a quick, fun speech followed by a few claps and glasses clinking to each other murmuring 'cheers'. But, Vijay Prabhakar went above and beyond for his friend's wedding. He took the microphone to announce a fun quiz designed specifically for Gireesh and Surya's wedding guests. Vijay, the sales head of Nexus Consulting, has been conducting quiz shows and curating content for big tel-

evision shows and corporate organisations. "We curate questions for shows like *St Gits Big Q Challenge* by Malayalam Manorama, and South Indian versions of *Who wants to be a Millionaire?* This is our first time conducting a quiz for a wedding," said Vijay.

The thirty-minute quiz conducted at NVR Marriage Hall, Nanganallur, on Thursday was hosted by Venkatesh Srinivasan, CEO and co-founder of Nexus Consulting. The theme of the quiz 'Indian weddings' and questions were based on pop



culture, movies, technology, culture, and customs. "Indian weddings are a huge deal, and the numerous traditions have their own significance. As a re-

sult, my team and I chose to pose questions on the topics that everyone would be familiar with. If we had asked profoundly technical or religious

questions, it would have been tedious," shared Venkatesh. The crowd, which included people across age groups, was enthralled by the quiz and

ready to provide answers. The bridegroom, Gireesh, said, "The quiz brought a lot of enthusiasm to the celebration." A guest, Ishan Pant, enjoyed the quiz since he learned more about the culture and practices of South Indian marriages. Another attendee, Akanksha, said, "It was so much fun."

"Based on the audience's response, we want to do this more frequently. Quizzing has never been about being nerdy or memorising things for us. It is an excellent source of information. If you ask the correct set of questions that match the event, everyone wants to engage," Venkatesh added. Claimed to be India's top quiz and content research company,

Nexus Consulting has conducted more than 800 quizzes around the country. "For us quizzing is not about who is winning or taking the lead, it is about enabling people to bond over that and experience the 'aha' moment. Learn a few things through this. That excitement element is something we bring to the table. Our aim is to keep doing more quizzes."

Most of the people don't welcome this idea because they think it's academic. It is not being looked at as a sport, instead it is looked at as a skill. We, as a company, are trying to promote it as a sport. There is a very vibrant quizzing community in the country and we want them to flourish," opined Vijay.