



**DAY'S DIARY**  
**Female spacewalk**  
 In 2019, NASA astronauts Jessica Meir and Christina Koch conducted the first all-female spacewalk outside of the International Space Station

**INCREDIBLE SIGHTS**

This was the fourth spacewalk for Koch and the first for Meir. Based on their position on the platform, the astronauts were able to see the Earth pass beneath their feet



**REASON FOR SPACEWALK**

Koch and Meir replaced a faulty battery charge/discharge unit that failed to activate after a spacewalk on October 11, according to the agency



**ONCE IN A BLUE MOON**

It was the first by two women in the 54 years since the first "extra-vehicular activity" by a Russian cosmonaut, sparking widespread public interest

**Interview with Laila for 'Sardar'**

PG 4



**SAHANA IYER**

If there is something to be noted from a conversation with actress Vaishulisa Vallal, it is that she is a determined woman. When the modelling industry denied her opportunities, she bared her confidence and set out to hone her skills. When her role in a movie was cut out, to her dismay, she tried her luck elsewhere and became one of the first trans anchors at Sun Music. And when she was denied membership at Chinnai Thirai Nadigar Sangam six odd years ago, she refused to quit, finally receiving her card on October 5, and making history as the first trans woman to do so. "When I first went up to ask for a card, they said they did not issue them to trans people. I was disheartened. When the government has given us identity cards, I said, why can't you? I went up to the previous president again, ready to make the payments required as well. But I was questioned about which list my name would go on and sent away. It was difficult and the culmination of this work came as tears during the recent press meet," she reminisces.

**Opening closed doors**  
 For Vaishulisa — who has



## Big leap from small screen

Vaishulisa Vallal becomes the first trans actress to receive a membership to the Chinnai Thirai Nadigar Sangam

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modelling. Why should I resort to this here? Would I have not just gone back?" she explains. But things have gotten better over the decade, she adds, with trans people getting hair stylists, make-up artists and their own caravans (like other artists) when earlier they often had to dress in some corner of the road.

**Brighter futures**  
 Receiving this membership has opened doors for other trans people as well as they can also try to join the association now (with required qualifications), she says. "I am proud. I want to say something to trans people: Whether you are with family or living alone, you have to set a goal for yourself and no matter what people say, you have to work towards it. Like me, you too can accomplish it. If you pay too much attention to what the rest are saying, you will remain in the same position. Instead, look up to those (in the community) who have achieved their goals," she says.

She also extends her gratitude to many in the trans community, members of Chinnai Thirai Nadigar Sangam and others who supported her endeavour. Perhaps soon, we could see more trans representation flourish now that one door is finally ajar.

**DIYA MARIA GEORGE**

When chartered accountant Jude Peter Damian wanted to contribute to the society that has given him everything, he couldn't think of any better way than to create a heartfelt short film. This is how *Sshasthi* came to being, an award-winning film that reflects his values. Through his work, he didn't shine the light on his career or academics, but, instead, on the virtue of humanity which is everywhere yet rare to be found. Written and directed by Jude, the film tells the story of Devi, a woman from an economically weak background, who is equated to Sshasthi, the goddess of children in Sanskrit, as she dedicates her life to her adopted child. The film, which was released in March 2022, has been receiving critical appreciation ever since and has bagged 63 awards and nominations, from 28 international film festivals.

## Telling a selfless tale



Though the movie runs for less than 30 minutes, it took over a year for me to think and write the story and screenplay again and again. The shooting of the movie finished in less than a week.

— Jude Peter Damian

**About the frames**

As the song *Kurai andrum illai* plays in the background, we see the smile of a mother that masks the helplessness she undergoes while failing to give medical treatment to her child. Devi is fighting all odds to save her child, without thinking about her own safety and concerns. In the age of instant gratification, Jude wants to paint the picture of a selfless character who dedicates her life for her son and also grows through the experience of raising him. Devi fights the odds and doesn't shy away to live her life with her son even

though society looked down upon her as a single mother. Jude shares, "The song is written by the great leader Chakravarti Rajagopalachari. This composition is unique as the writer does not ask God for any favours through his prayer. He simply asserts that he has no regrets or complaints about anything in life. The protagonist Devi is subjected

to her own set of hardships daily, yet chooses to not complain." The film also highlights the concept of adoption. In one scene the quote, "Christmas is also about celebrating Joseph's adoption of Jesus as his son" lingers on the screen giving us another perspective to the festival.

Despite wanting to get into films for over 30 years, Jude worked in accounts and related functions in Chennai until 2020-21, when he had his directorial debut after a course on Film Direction at LV Prasad Film Academy.

**Crossing hurdles**

Starring Semmalar Annam in the title role, the film is also a collaboration of passionate technicians and actors. Struggles were also a part of the process. Speaking of the challenges, Jude states "We used live audio recording in the film, which was the toughest thing to do. While shooting in Panaiyur, near Injambakkam, we had to constantly consider this sound adjustment. The editing also took more time than I had expected. For almost two months we were perfecting the edit and reducing the duration to 30 minutes to suit the film festival preference."

*Sshasthi* continues to represent Tamil Nadu in International film festivals and has bagged awards in all categories including Best Director and Best Short Film. Jude aspires to create more socially relevant films and he hopes to submit his next work for the Cannes Film Festival 2023.

*Sshasthi* is available on iTunes (Apple TV); <https://apple.co/3PpIXNj> and Google Play; <https://bit.ly/3JXxoOD>

**SAHANA IYER**

Education in India is more often than not synonymous with academics. But for every spoken word and written theory, there is a creative skill or artistic talent to be explored that is increasingly gaining relevance in today's content-consuming world. Making the same accessible to students of the government school in Pullanthope is Chennai Photo Biennale (CPB), which is collaborating with fellows of Teach For India (TFI) to provide a six-month photography workshop with children of Class 3, 4, and 6. "The students have expressed interest in doing more things and so, the fellows are bringing in art programmes to the school, photography being one of them. This programme gives them an avenue to be creative and have fun with their classmates. It's been a stressful few years for kids; it's been a lot of pressure on them and teachers to get back. Our programmes make sure that school also remains a place for enjoyment and pleasure, and a place where children are allowed to be expressive and tell their own stories," shares Gayatri Nair, director of education, CPB.



Stillts from earlier classes held by CPB



## To capture and coach a community

Their efforts in these six months will culminate into an exhibition of their works in the hope from Aishwarya. "The exhibition would be the constructive outcome but other than that, (at the end of it, I hope) they have a sense of what representation is and how their community is represented by people who do not belong to their community. We have a lot of films and music about North Madras in mainstream media and there is a certain way it is represented. There are people from the community who go on to

represent the community but that's a very small number. I'm hoping that the children go on to have a sense of this — how the community is represented and how it must be. It is not about being politically correct but about portraying their culture and heritage. There are a lot of things that Pullanthope in particular and North Madras in general is known for; other than gang wars and substance abuse. These are also things that the children want to talk about; they have told me," she shares.



**Access and availability**

Having recognised the importance of arts-based education in schools, CPB began its journey of teaching schoolchildren in 2018. "What I think our system never did was leave room to breathe, be creative and have fun. Creativity is an important 21st century skill; everybody wants a more creative employee in their workforce as opposed to a cookie cutter box. It's also fundamental that art is a way to (better) mental well-being and happiness, and we have seen it during Covid, how such creative outlets have helped calm children down when everything else seemed so broken," notes Varun Gupta, director-Chennai Photo Biennale.

But there is also a need to acknowledge that there is a lack of resources and a subsequent lack of accessibility. When it comes to government schools, Aishwarya says, it depends from school to school as the infrastructure changes in each one. Some have the room and space for children while many don't. The teacher-to-student ratio also often makes it difficult for such activities.

To support this programme, CPB is raising funds from the public to cover mentor costs, exhibition production, and logistics (equipment, travel, food and stationery). Perhaps, you're looking to lend a hand?

To donate towards the programme, visit bit.ly/jundraiser\_tfi or @chennaiphotobiennale on Instagram.