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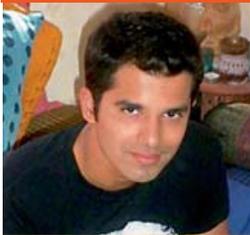


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HEADLINERS ...3

SHADES OF GAY

Nolan Lewis is all set for Mr Gay World, 2013



MOVIETHEQUE ...4

JACQUELINE'S RACE

Why the star is not in B'wood to make friends



HIGH LIFE..6

THE LUCKY DOGS

From spas to personal chefs, these pets get it all



FAN FRENZY HAS BEEN GIVEN A WHOLE NEW DEFINITION BY SUPERSTAR RAJINIKANTH'S LEGION OF FANS. NOW, A YOUNG DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER GETS TO THE HEART OF THE MADNESS

Rajinistaan

● VISHAL MENON

Fan frenzy is a madness all in its own — beyond rationale, defying logic. But what is irrefutable is the strong connection the layman feels with the screen icon. Superstar Rajinikanth commands perhaps the strongest brigade of fans in India. Even today, the release of a Rajini film is met with widespread celebrations,

acts of respect which hold little logic and an opening which requires films to be premiered either two weeks before or a month after his film's release.

Intrigued by the Rajini phenomenon and his legion of fans, a young lady has quit her lucrative career in Amsterdam to make a documentary on what makes Rajini so super special.

Rinku Kalsy worked as a programme director for Ned2

(Dutch TV) in Amsterdam. Life took a new turn for her after a chat with a friend who was working in Tamil Nadu. She says, "My friend Joyjeet was working in a place close to Ooty the impact of computers among school students in small towns and villages. Youngsters

there enthusiastically told him that they'd want to become software engineers when they grew up. When he asked them why, they unanimously spoke of Rajini's character as a software engineer in the 2007 blockbuster *Sivaji* as their inspiration."



“ G. Mani, an ex-convict, pawned his wife's gold to put up film hoardings around the city during the release of *Sivaji*

— RINKU KALSY, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

TURN TO
PAGE 2

Rajinistaan



Crew members of documentary film *For the Love of Man*, based on the amazing fan following of Rajinikanth, that is slated for a November release



Intrigued by the Rajini phenomenon, Rinku Kalsy (top) and her friend Joyjeet (above) decided to pool in their savings and make a film on what makes the Superstar so special for die-hard fans

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

This phone call made her sit up and take notice of the phenomenon. Several months went into researching the viability of a documentary on this subject. She travelled to India in 2010 to catch the first show of Rajini's film, *Enthiran*. "This was my point of no return and I decided that all my efforts and savings, along with Joyjeet's who joined in as the producer, would go into making a documentary on Rajini and his fans," says Rinku. Since then, she has spent close to three years and several hours of footage to create the film. "In this process, I have met so many passionate people who share the same love they have for *Thalaivar* (a term of respect, that translates as 'leader', used by fans to address Rajini) with

me, just because I'm making a film associated with him," she says.

She is astounded by the lengths people are ready to go for their star. She recalls the captivating case of G. Mani. "He is an ex-convict who says he was convinced he could mend his ways and live an honest life after listening to Rajini through his films. Mani, who is now a part of the Mylapore Rajini Fans Association and claims to have stopped all his illegal activities, pawned his wife's gold to put up film hoardings around the city during the release of *Sivaji*," she says.

Mohan Raman, actor and film historian, is not surprised. He says the nature of the following and the devotion with which the common man looks at stars here started during the period of

MGR and Sivaji Ganesan. "M.G. Ramachandran was the pioneer in setting up fan associations. He carefully planned and took pains to organise fan clubs around Tamil Nadu, which served as a great platform for him when he decided to start his own political party. People who served as presidents of these fan associations even made it to his Cabinet when he first came into power," he says.

Rinku doesn't think most of Rajini's fans expect a ticket in the future if he decided to step into politics. "That may be the case for a few people, but not in general. I once met a man in Tokyo named Takeshi Nakayama who has his own Rajini fan association there. He explained how he watched *Muthu* at a time when his company was bankrupt and he on the verge of depression. He told me that he found something mesmerising in the film, watching Rajini. He held out 36 tickets to the movie, which he had seen repeatedly over weeks. Takeshi believes that Rajini was the man with the answers to his life's questions and felt the star was asking him telepathically to start a flamenco bar in Tokyo to turn his life around when he met him in Chennai. He is quite successful now running the bar."

Despite this phenomenal following in

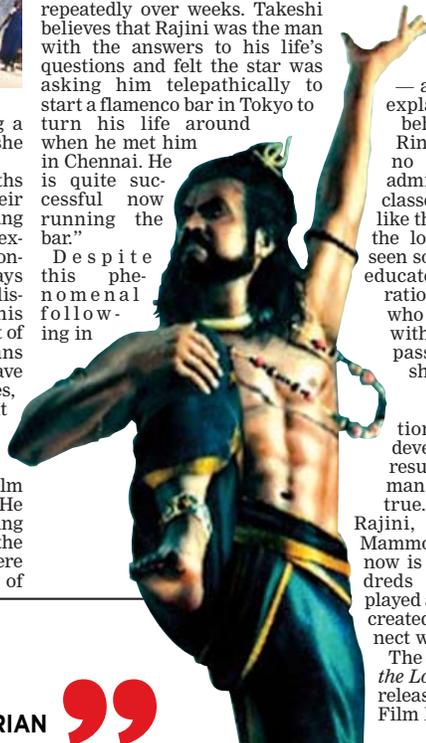
the South, and several foreign countries as well, Rajini hasn't had the same luck in North India. Even Bollywood stars like Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan elicit reactions that are mellow in comparison. Bejoy Nambiar, the director of *Shaitan* and *David*, says, "It's not that they don't have fans in large numbers or of the same kind. The main difference is that in the North they don't have a culture of creating associations. Plus, the region being so vast, people don't generally come together to form groups like in the South."

G. Dhananjayan, Chief, Studios South at UTV Motion Pictures, too echoes this opinion. He says there is a basic difference between the audiences in the South and North. "People in the South take films more personally. Like any other necessity, watching at least one film a week is engrained in the culture of Tamil Nadu. They idolise their stars and give them the position of an elder brother or a leader," he says.

Despite these reasons — all very plausible — to explain the phenomenon behind the fan frenzy, Rinku still says there is no rationale to it. She admits that it cuts across classes and logic. "It is not like these fans are limited to the lower classes. We have seen so many people who are educated, logical and very rational in their thinking who still follow his films with the same amount of passion and madness," she says.

Bejoy adds, "There is also a misconception that these actors develop a following as a result of playing superhuman characters. That is not true. Be it the case of Rajini, Kamal, Mohanlal or Mammootty, what they have now is the result of the hundreds of characters they played as common men which created a deep emotional connect with the audience."

The documentary film, *For the Love of Man*, is slated to release at the International Film Festival in November.



M.G. Ramachandran was the pioneer in setting up fan associations. He carefully planned and took pains to organise fan clubs

MOHAN RAMAN, ACTOR AND FILM HISTORIAN