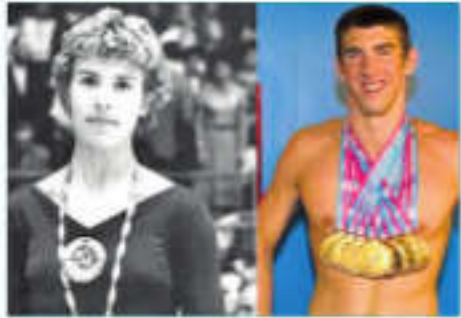




DAY'S DIARY

Olympic record

On this day in 2012, American swimmer Michael Phelps broke the record set in 1964 by Larisa Latynina for the most medals won at the Olympics

THE 19TH MEDAL

Michael Phelps won his 19th medal in the 4x200-meter freestyle relay, moving one ahead of Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina, who got her haul in 1956, 1960 and 1964



ABOUT MICHAEL PHELPS

He is the most decorated athlete in Olympic history with 23 gold medals. At 15, Michael was the youngest record holder in the 200-meter butterfly



RETIREMENT

He first announced his retirement after the 2012 Olympics, claiming that he was 'done with the sport'. He officially retired in 2016

Sharvari starts shooting for spy-thriller Alpha

PG 4

VIVEK Ramadevan, chairman and managing director of Catalyst Entertainment Consultancy, is a seasoned talent manager and film marketing expert. Besides managing several leading celebrities in Malayalam cinema, he has also spearheaded the marketing of many recent blockbusters, including Aadujeevitham and Guruvayoor Ambala Nadayil. In this insightful chat, Vivek discusses his extensive experience in celebrity management, building the careers of fresh talents, the designing and marketing aspects of film projects, and much more.

Excerpts:

When you began your career in the early 2000s, the concept of celebrity management was non-existent in Malayalam cinema. How did this idea strike you?

During my MBA days, I read a book called 'What They Don't Teach You At Harvard Business School' by Mark H McCormack, the founder of celebrity management in the West, which ignited a spark in me. After graduation, I joined an advertising agency in Palakkad, owned by V A Shrikumar (the director of Odiyan). One of our clients was Kalyan Jewellers, who sponsored an event celebrating Mohanlal's 25th year in cinema. During this event, I pitched the idea of celebrity management to them, but most were unaware of it. Prithviraj, however, had an interesting response— "How will you manage my career? What background or knowledge do you have in cinema? Since I was born into the world of cinema, I would know more than you," he told me. It was a valid and relevant question. I knew marketing and branding, but not the medium. So I decided to introduce new talents to the cinema, who won't ask me the same questions. It started with Padmapriya in Kazhcha. She was the first actor I started managing and we collaborated on around 50 films.

What were the reactions like when you initially approached actors?

Typically, most actors were helped by the people who introduced them to cinema, often parents or non-

experts in the medium. Directors or producers are not career managers and exploitation due to naivety was common, as seen with Kavya Madhavan's parents. Asin's father was an exception as he smartly managed her career throughout, till she moved to Mumbai. Unlike today's digital age, reaching out without a film background was difficult. This is why nepotism has always thrived—film families understand the business better.



How does celebrity management work? Do you attend script narrations as well?

Yes, I read scripts or attend narrations for most people I work with, including directors. Some managers excel at negotiations and business, but I focus on content, making people comfortable with my script opinions. With freshers, it's an added responsibility since they trust my judgement entirely. Each decision can be costly in this industry.

Do you take responsibility for managing the entire trajectory of a celebrity's career? With Padmapriya, I have done that. I also played a significant

In a conversation with *TNIE*, Vivek Ramadevan talks about the science of marketing, which is slowly finding a footing in Malayalam cinema industry



PIC: A SANESH

role in Sudev Nair's journey. I have also worked with actors like Shwetha Menon, Rima Kallingal, and Parvathy at different points of time, and some choose to manage careers on their own.

How do you select whom to represent?

I don't filter much. Trust and comfort are crucial. Celebrities are not commodities. I work according to their needs and aspirations. I welcome everybody because I believe in supporting anyone who needs my services. Everyone with talent deserves a chance. Early in my career, I used to be prejudiced and make mistakes by underestimating talents, just based on their looks. With time, I've realised that there's a space for everyone in this industry, given they have the patience and passion. Patience is crucial as the journey can be morale-breaking.

Sometimes, their struggles affect you because this job cannot be done by staying emotionally detached. Though I can't always help beyond a point, our effort, irrespective of the outcome, makes a difference.

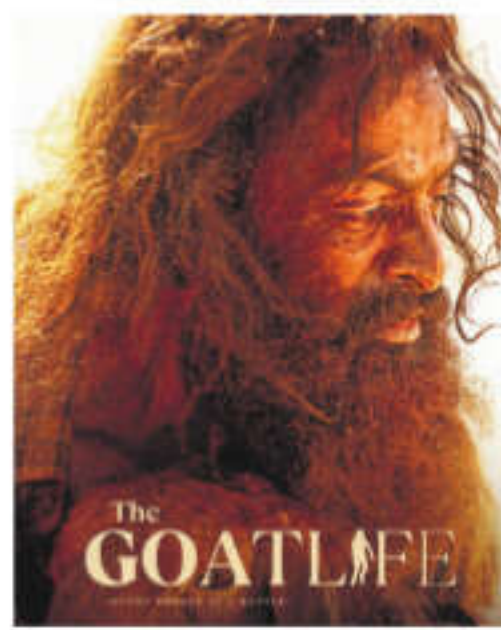
Controversies and negative press are part of the film industry, so as a talent manager, do you specifically prepare the actors to handle such situations?

Obviously! During such situations, proper decision-making is important. You have to decide which way you want to go—whether you speak up or remain silent, how you counter at a given point in time, all of these are closely monitored by the public. Unlike before, we now prepare celebrities for such scenarios, and even the ones who manage them are also prepared for the same. We work with Priya Varrier, a victim of continuous backlash, but we don't have an answer for it. As an artist, she can only focus on her work, do things positively and move on.

Considering Priya Varrier's experience with social media bullying, how would you advise her to handle such situations?

Everybody has a personality and you can't tell people to change themselves completely. They can never be something which they are not. I've been friends with Ranjini Haridas for long and I recall her reading negative comments aloud, almost enjoying them. She has a unique personality and take things lightly. This attitude and her Malayalam, in turn, became a part of her brand. She stayed true to herself, and her brand was shaped by her resilience.

Similarly, Priya Varrier has a person-



ality before entering the cinema. Once you're in the limelight, you can only be who you are. Priya has a substantial following, though much of the criticism seems to come from the Kerala market. It sometimes feels like we escalate negativity to an extreme level here. I haven't observed such viciousness toward celebrities outside Kerala. For instance, we've

faced significant backlash for films like Mamangam, and it's puzzling when these critics haven't even seen the film.

Do you have a strategy for managing negativity and hate, especially if it recurs? We have a long strategy planning for everybody's brand or career. When one controversy happens you can't change the entire set of well-thought plans and backtrack into something else. You also know today that backlashes are inevitable. So, you have provided it in your plan itself. Very rarely do things happen that you haven't thought of. When a backlash happens, we advise the celebs to react and sometimes not to as well. But after that uproar, you go back and stick to the plan. If you put in extra effort to compensate, the people of Kerala will see through it. So it's better to stick to your plan. Prithvi is one of the most intelligent people in the industry and yet, he faces backlash for what he is. I admire him for his personality—candid and straightforward, which people can't take. But what can he do about it?

After the controversy during Manorathangal launch, Asif Ali has been showered with love from all over. Do you think it will positively impact his new releases?

Asif, like most actors from Malayalam, doesn't like giving interviews or doing PR. They're lazy and feel awkward about self-brand promotion. Some are also inherently introverted. It's only because of this situation that Asif is being pushed to do more interviews. I don't think he has any choice.

No one likes controversies, but I think there should be some occasional ones. It helps build your brand and personality. Unlike before, it's not feasible to be just known for your films, like a Lalettan or Mammookka.

An actor's brand should be what they stand for; their personality, and you better communicate it. This helps differentiate you from others. Tovino has done this brilliantly. Through his workout videos, etc, we now have an idea of him. Regarding Prithviraj, we know he is a straight-forward, well-read guy. This differentiation is very essential, especially since competition is so high and social media is a good tool for it.

Continued on P4

YOUNG FATHIMA PAINTS THE TALE OF RAMAYANA

PARVANA K B

RELIGIOUS art is not always about faith, rather, it's about finding joy in the craft itself. This has been brilliantly proven by Fathima Siya P, a Class VIII student of Sreekrishnapuram Higher Secondary School in Palakkad.

Fathima is on an ambitious mission to present the events from the Ramayana through a series of illustrations. This 'Rekha Ramayana' series was initiated on the first day of the Malayalam month, Karkidakam, under the guidance of the school's art teacher, T K Vibin Nath.

Vibin elaborates on the importance of the project. "It is not about religion because all epic heroes—be it the Prophet, Christ, or Rama—have all shared the same messages. We have chosen the Ramayana illustration as part of the Karkidakam month celebration. We have held similar programmes before," he explains.

Fathima is no stranger to success in arts, he adds. She has previously secured first place in various art competitions. In addition to her talents in drawing, she has proved her skills in cartoons, poetry writing, and quizzes. She says her family, including her father P Shamsudheen, a



chess arbiter, her mother Laila, and her brother Siyan, is the biggest pillar of support in her artistic journey.



"Vibin sir suggested this project to me, and I was very excited about it. I was initially unaware of the story, but sir narrated the whole Ramayana to me. And I also watched some videos about it on YouTube. This helped me gain knowledge about the epic. The first illustration I drew was of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana going to exile, which I chose as a picture narrating the story of sacrifice," said Fathima.

Her father says her family recognised her talents from a young age. Being a chess arbiter, he always had a chessboard at home, and Fathima learned to arrange it when she was only two. "I used to buy her drawing books, and she would colour them. Gradually, she started sketching. Participating in and winning competitions after joining school has motivated her. We try to support her as much as we can, from buying drawing materials to encouraging her to reach new heights," he says.

Regarding the Ramayana project, Shamsudheen adds, "When she started this project under Vibin's guidance, we were

not concerned because we believe art has no religion, and I believe, twisting it into something else is unnecessary."

Fathima's artistic journey is also marked by her self-taught skill in Arabic calligraphy, which she picked up from watching YouTube videos. She shines not only in art and quizzing but also in her studies, having earned scholarships like LSS and USS.



I was initially unaware of the story, but sir told me the whole Ramayana... The first illustration I drew was of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana going to exile, which I chose as a picture narrating the story of sacrifice

Fathima Siya P, student

After the series is done, Vibin says they are planning to release the series as a book with introductions by famous artists from Kerala. Also, the completed illustrations will be showcased in an exhibition and a digital display at the school.

"The characters are drawn by preserving their essence without losing their unique identity. When these illustrations reach the public, we want them to be a reinterpretation of Ramayana, especially in the illustration format. It won't take as much time as reading, yet the ideas can still be understood. That is the intention," he says.

SPOTLIGHT ON WHISPERS FROM THE MARGINS

TNIE EXAMINES THE RELEVANCE OF FILMS THAT SPEAK ON COLLECTIVE SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE CHANGING POLITICAL TIMES —

PAGE 3



FARNAZ