

Laughing with Lola

Anu Menon, popularly known as her avatar Lola Kutty, on the famous character she created over a decade ago

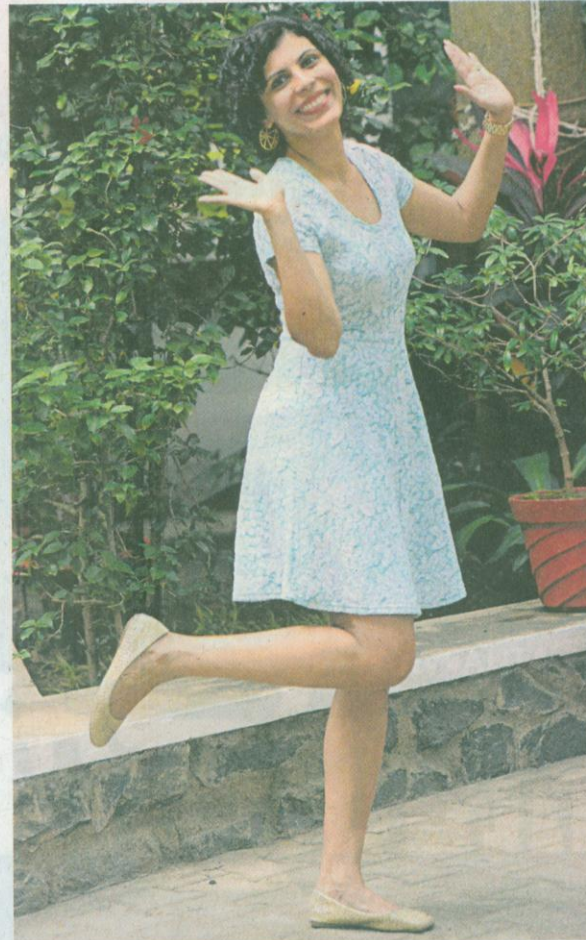
RAVEENA JOSEPH

Anuradha Menon says she has a flawed face. There's a mole, she points out, and says that when she first moved to Mumbai, in 2003, to pursue theatre, someone suggested she have it removed, so that she can look 'perfect'. "I actually thought about it, but then decided, no, I'm not going to surgically remove my mole; it's done no harm all these years. Besides, Cindy Crawford made it," chuckles Anu.

Yet, her "unconventional face for film and television" is one that many remember. In her VJ avatar, as "Channel [V] resident beauty on duty", the bespectacled loquacious Lola Kutty, clad in Kanjeevaram saris and sporting jasmine flowers on her curling black locks, Anu created ripples on the small screen.

In 2004, when she first played the role, most people believed she was truly a heavily-accented Malayalee, for she never broke character even when she appeared in public. "Sometimes, I feel people are disappointed with me in person, because I look and speak normally," chuckles the actress, who played Lola for seven years.

Anu, who was recently back in Chennai, her hometown, to perform in *One on One - Part 2*, a play by Rage Production, says that now the role that takes up most of her time is that of being a mother to her three-year-old son. Travelling for work happens over the weekends, and while at home,



LAUGH OUT LOUD Anuradha Menon is known for her unconventional face for film and TV PHOTO: M. VEDHAN

she auditions for plays and works on her stand-up comedy content. Sometimes, she says, at corporate gigs, people still request she play Lola. "The image is so stuck in their heads that I can't be anything else."

It was in a eureka moment

that she created Lola Kutty, who is the antithesis of cool, and possibly the last person one would expect to see on a hip music channel at the time. The channel, she says, took a big risk in putting her on air in her famed avatar, and thankfully, it paid off for both

parties — she won many awards and fans from around the world, and the channel's ratings were considerably boosted. "Today, if I'd come up with Lola, I think I would have gone the YouTube way, because TV has become more conservative with its content, and everything is more web-centric." She's been dabbling with the online medium too, she adds, with her recent web series *Stuck with #fame*, where she gets trapped in an elevator with a celebrity — like Kalki Koechlin, Kunal Kapoor and Vivek Oberoi — and strikes up a conversation with them.

But after her work in many notable plays like *Sammy!*, *Only Women* and currently, *God of Carnage*, isn't she considering pursuing a career in films? "At the end of the day, I'm a lily-livered South Indian. I'm not very pushy; I feel very 'Que sera, Sera' (whatever will be, will be). And it's not a question of not being ambitious. Beyond a point, it's the kind of profession where a lot of it is luck and chance. If it works, great; if not, I am not overly fussed, because I'm happy doing what I'm doing," smiles Anu.

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Ms. Anuradha Menon, BA English Literature, 1997 - 2000