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ONOPAHARAM 2022-2023





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Sujith Sivaram

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers

It is with great excitement that the Publication Committee presents to you Onopaharam '23. Let Onopaharam be your companion this year during the 10 days of Onam.

On the first day of Onam, we are sure the messages from our executive committee members, past presidents, our friends from other communities, acclaimed writers and celebrities will set the scene for a great celebration ahead.

On the second day of Onam, get to know your committee members and read through the various activities of the association over the last year. Should you feel like signing up for a particular committee or activity, do not hesitate to contact us at the email below.

On the third day of Onam, join us in celebrating the Malayalee achievers amidst us in Singapore. We also take a moment to commemorate our dear departed during the last year and convey our deep appreciation for all their contributions.

On the fourth day of Onam, let's revel in the review of the book, More than the Eye can See, written by our beloved Mr Gopinath Pillai and join Vishwa and John as they take us through their experience with the book.

On the fifth day of Onam, enjoy the creative contributions from our community in Malayalam. We are fortunate to have been able to include a rich mix of poetry and prose showcasing the vibrant talent amidst our members in Singapore. These creations cover a wide range of topics from a lighthearted poem on the infamous Arikomban to a detailed book review of Kumaranasan's Nalini.

On the sixth day of Onam, let's switch channels to our creative contributions in English. These transcend you to various destinations from Kerala to Australia to Korea through interesting travelogues.

On the seventh day of Onam, continue with the endearing stories of Onam memories, interesting poems and stories by our enthusiastic writers. We bring you a good mix of content including medical journals, stories for children and lighthearted poems.



On the eighth day of Onam, enrich yourself by getting to know some of our acclaimed artists through the interviews we have obtained from them exclusively for you. This section also features Mr. Venu Rajamony, Honorable Officer on Special Duty, External Cooperation in the Government of Kerala; who speaks about our Malayalee Identity.

On the Ninth Day of Onam, the day of the children's Onam, read the interesting perspectives shared by our youth on various topics related to their Malayalee identity. We are sure that these will set us thinking about our future as a community in Singapore and what more we could do together to strengthen our cohesiveness.

On Onam Day, celebrate with your family and friends, with your hearts full, upholding the true spirit of Onam. Of course, we don't expect you to be reading Onopaharam on Onam day, but surely expect that you will treasure this humble upaharam (present) from us.

As always, we look forward to hearing your valuable feedback. Please do write to us @ Onopaharam@malayalee.org.sg. Thank you, Wishing all of you a Happy and Prosperous Onam.

Cover Page Credit

Rajeev Variyar hails from Palakkad in Kerala and has been living in Singapore since 2011 with his wife Raji Rajeev and daughter Karthika. He is a familiar face in the Singapore Malayalee community and has been helping the Malayalee organizations in Singapore capture beautiful memories. While he is a professional project manager in IT, he has had a passion for photography since young. When asked about his beginnings in



photography he said, "1996 in Delhi with Minolta film camera. More than inspiration, this was a passion and it took time to realise. I remember using someone's camera during a college days, when we went for a tour to Kodaikanal. Was thrilled to see three rolls developed that time. I remember, probably in 1992".

Rajeev continues to invest in gear and technology that helps him take better photos. "Photography is life and passion for me. The understanding of the reality that you can't photograph everything you can see, probably inspired me; And a few things that can be photographed, can't be seen by our eyes too, like this picture", he says. This particular photo of the fireworks in singapore was taken on the 8 July during NDP NE2 using Nikon Z9 camera with a wide angle lens.

SMA takes this opportunity to appreciate Rajeev's efforts and thank him for his wonderful support over the years.

Here are some lesser known facts about Rajeev. His photography idol is Ansel Adams, his favourite food is Sadya and his favourite scenic travel destination is Kerala.

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എല്ലാ സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളികൾക്കും വിനീതമായ നമസ്കാരം.

ഉറവിടങ്ങളിൽനിന്ന് ദൂരങ്ങളിലേയ്ക്ക് പോകുന്നതോടും സാംസ്കാരികപൈതൃകങ്ങൾ മുറുകെപ്പിടിക്കാനുള്ള മനുഷ്യന്റെ ആവേശം കൂടും. മലയാളിയുടെ കാര്യവും വ്യത്യസ്തമല്ല. മലയാളികൾ ഉത്സാഹത്തോടെ ലോകത്തെവിടെയും മലയാള വിശേഷദിവസങ്ങൾ ആഘോഷിക്കുന്നു. ഭാഷാഭേദമില്ലാത്തവർക്കൊപ്പം പുതിയ തലമുറയിലേക്കു കൈമാറപ്പെടുന്ന മലയാളത്തിന്മേലാണ് ഓണം. തലമുറകളുടെ വിദേശവാസം തനിമ നേർപ്പിക്കുന്നുവെങ്കിൽകൂടിയും ഓണം കാലാന്തരങ്ങളിൽ ഉണ്ടാകുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങളെ അതിജീവിച്ച് മലയാളി സ്വത്വത്തിന്റെ മുർത്തഭാവമായി നിൽക്കുന്നു. അണുക്കുടുംബവ്യവസ്ഥിതികളുടെ മുർദ്ധന്യങ്ങളിലും ഓണവും ആഘോഷവും സാമൂഹികമായ കൂട്ടായ്മയെ പുനർസൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നു. ഓണാഘോഷങ്ങളിൽ പങ്കുചേരുന്നതും ഓണസദ്യ ആസ്വദിക്കുന്നതും ഉത്സവസമാനമായ പ്രതീതി തന്നെയാണ്.

മലയാളഭാഷയുടെ പ്രോത്സാഹനവും പ്രചാരണവും ഭാഷയെ മുന്നോട്ടു കൊണ്ടുപോകാനും നിലനിർത്താനും അത്യന്താപേക്ഷിതമാണ്. മാതാപിതാക്കൾ കുട്ടികളോട് വീടുകളിൽ മലയാളത്തിൽ തന്നെ സംസാരിക്കണം. മലയാള ഭാഷയ്ക്ക് വ്യാവസായികമാനമില്ലാത്ത സിംഗപ്പൂർപോലെയുള്ള രാജ്യങ്ങളിൽ വ്യക്തിപരമായ ഭാഷാസന്നേഹത്തോടും വൈകാരികമായ അഭിനിവേശത്തോടുംകൂടി മലയാളഭാഷയെ അടുത്ത തലമുറയിലേക്ക് കൈമാറുവാൻ നമ്മൾ ഓരോരുത്തരും ശ്രമിക്കണം. ജൂലൈ 15 മുതലുള്ള ഒരു മാസക്കാലം സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ മലയാളി സംഘടനകൾ മലയാളമാസം ആഘോഷിക്കുന്നത് ശ്രദ്ധിച്ചു കാണുമല്ലോ. മാതൃഭാഷ ബാല്യത്തിൽ തന്നെ സ്വായത്തമാക്കുന്നവർ ബൗദ്ധികമായ പ്രവർത്തനമേഖലകളിലും പുതിയ അറിവുകളും പഠന രീതികളും ഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നതിലും മികവ് തെളിയിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് പഠനങ്ങൾ കണ്ടെത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഈ ഓണക്കാലത്ത് മലയാളഭാഷയുടെ ഉന്നമനത്തിനായി സ്വന്തമായും തങ്ങൾക്ക് സ്വാധീനിക്കാൻ കഴിവുള്ളവരിലും ഒരല്പം ഭാഷാസന്നേഹം നിറയ്ക്കുവാൻ സമയം കണ്ടെത്തുമല്ലോ.

ഓണം മലയാളിയുടെ സമ്പൂർണ്ണമായ അടയാളമാണ്. ഓണം നൽകുന്ന മഹത്തായ സന്ദേശങ്ങൾ നമ്മുടെ ദൈനംദിന ജീവിതത്തിലേക്ക് പകർത്താൻ കഴിയട്ടെ. എല്ലാവർക്കും ആഹ്ലാദവും സമൃദ്ധിയും നിറഞ്ഞ ഓണം ആശംസിക്കുന്നു.

Greetings to all Singaporean Malayalees! May this Onam be a time of joy and prosperity for each one of you!

The identity we embrace as Singaporeans is undoubtedly of utmost importance, as it represents our shared belonging to this remarkable nation. However, it is equally vital to recognise and celebrate our ethnic identity within the diverse fabric of Singapore. Ethnic identity grants us a profound sense of belonging and connection with fellow Malayalees who share our traditions, customs, language, and history. This fosters overall well-being and social integration while preserving and showcasing our nation's remarkable diversity. By embracing and preserving our rich cultural heritage, we maintain a deep connection to our roots and gain a profound understanding of our history. This appreciation allows us to celebrate the splendid diversity within our ethnic group, cultivating a sense of pride and self-esteem, and providing a foundation for personal growth and self-expression.

As we continue to evolve as an independent society, we must ensure that our ethnic identities remain firmly rooted, as they form the fundamental building blocks of our shared heritage. As parents, we are responsible for empowering the next generation of Malayalees to explore, understand, and embrace their Malayali identity. The Singapore Malayalee Association strives to provide platforms and opportunities for children, teenagers, and youth to engage in activities that foster their connection to their Malayali heritage. Through these endeavours, we aim to build a vibrant community that cherishes and nurtures the Malayalee identity for generations.

Wishing you all a memorable and joyous Onam celebration!



Ullas Kumar
President

Onam, not only reminds us of an era of peace and prosperity, it also reminds us that we reap what we sow. We need to sow the right seeds at the right time under favorable conditions, so that we can enjoy a good harvest in future. Knowing that the best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment, Singapore Malayalee Association has been taking the necessary steps to ensure that our future generations continue to take pride in the Malayalee culture, heritage, and language, and make significant and meaningful contributions to the wider Singaporean society. We welcome ideas and suggestions from members and non-members in this purpose driven journey of ours.

In Singapore, Onam season is vibrant and colorful with numerous Onam celebrations, both big and small, across the island, bringing the community together. It is indeed heartening to see the many Malayalee organizations coming together to support each other in these celebrations, thus exemplifying the true meaning of Onam- unity and brotherhood.

Let us continue to celebrate festivals like Onam, build bridges across people, and unite as a strong and vibrant Malayalee community, in harmony with the world at large. Wishing all Malayalees a very joyful and prosperous Onam.



Mrs. Sunu Sivadasan Ghani
Vice President

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to write a message to the annual Onopaharam magazine of the Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA) 2023. Onam is celebrated by all Malayalees worldwide including Singapore. It is a public holiday for a few days in Kerala with elaborate celebrations extending a week. Traditionally SMA continues to celebrate Onam in a large scale and this year we are celebrating Onam Nite 2023 In Collaboration with Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, on Saturday 12 Aug 2023. SMA being the oldest registered Indian organization in Singapore since 1917, makes it 106 years old. Onam village is a recurrent annual sports event we always cherish in association with Onam Nite.

Onam is a harvest festival with legendary Mahabali and Vamana story, as a dejavu back drop. It amplifies the richness, abundance, civilisation and cultural renaissance of India especially Kerala. This year we have a new president Ullas Kumar and under his leadership we can expect more active events. While Malayalees maintain our identity and culture, we have adapted to be an integral part of Singapore. I wish you all a memorable Onam Nite and Onam Village experience.



Dr V P Nair
Trustee & Past President of SMA
Senior Consultant Interventional Cardiologist

“Namaskaaram, my fellow Malayalees.

In early July, I had the pleasure of attending a marquee event organised by the Naval Base Kerala library or NBKL – the Malayalam talentime singing contest. In case you don’t know, NBKL was founded in 1954. In its 69 year journey the organisation survived some existential challenges. It fought the odds and, in my view, emerged stronger because of the sheer determination of stalwarts and members. Congratulations, NBKL for keeping the fire burning!

I would like to share a few observations.

First, I was impressed by how meticulously well the evening event was organised. It was efficient without losing the soul. It was professional while being fun and funny thanks, especially, to the two talented, energetic emcees – Gayathri and Aathira.

Second, all ten finalists performed with quality, panache and confidence that was an absolute treat. One couldn’t help feeling that there are a lot more such treasures residing in Singapore today. We need to find ways to celebrate them.

Third, all ten finalists were born and raised in their formative years in Kerala. They, and many others like them, and their parents are a gift to our country, our community. Their timely arrival over recent decades have helped rekindle the waning interest in and passion for our culture and heritage.

Fourth, even though they may not be born here, it was eminently evident that, for the singers, Singapore is home.

Finally, leaders of the Singapore Malayalee community, representing the various organisations, including SMA, were present in force. This was not just a display of support for a fellow organisation, it was esprit de corps. Perhaps more significantly, it was about coming together to celebrate the best and brightest, especially amongst our youth. This recognition by the community will go a long way in infusing a sense of belonging in our young.

This experience reminded me of something I was told constantly when I was growing up on the 1960s and 1970s. I was told the Malayalee community in Singapore punched above our weight and earned respect because we stood shoulder-to-shoulder, together.

Here’s wishing you Onam aashamsaghal.”



Viswa Sadasivan
Advisor, Singapore Malayalee Association

To my Malayalee friends,

I am thrilled to connect with you as we celebrate the vibrant festival of Onam. This festival beautifully represents our shared heritage and unity and is a time of joy, reflection, and anticipation for the bright future ahead.

Despite the unique challenges we faced in recent years, our community spirit and resilience have shone through. We have supported each other, grown together, and emerged stronger, showcasing the true essence of the Malayalee spirit.

As we look to the future, let us continue to embrace these values and build upon our successes. Let us inspire the younger generation to dream big and reach for the stars, while also fostering understanding and harmony among all communities in Singapore.

Onam is also a time to celebrate our accomplishments. Our community has made remarkable contributions across various fields, adding to the growth and vibrancy of Singapore. Let's take pride in these achievements and use them to inspire the younger generation to dream big and reach for the stars.

Let's remember the legend King Mahabali, known for his fairness and benevolence, as we strive to build an inclusive, fair, and flourishing community.

May this Onam bring joy, love, and prosperity to all of our homes and lives. Let's celebrate this wonderful festival with enthusiasm and unity, cherishing our rich culture and traditions.

Wishing you all a very Happy Onam!

Best regards,



Jayakumar Narayanan BBM
Advisor, Singapore Malayalee Association

I am excited to be addressing you, as the immediate past president. The last four years have been extremely fulfilling for me and I am thankful to my fellow committee members, and all the members at large, for the wonderful support that you had provided me with during my tenure as the president. I am relieved now that I have handed over the baton to a committed and competent team under the leadership of Mr Ullas. The activities that have been taking place since April are so encouraging and I'm delighted that the new committee is set to take the organization to a much higher level than it has ever been in the past. As we organize more and more activities to engage all our members and integrate with the larger Singapore Community, I would urge each and every one of you to come forward and participate in these activities wholeheartedly. May this Onam usher in lots of joy, happiness, and prosperity to all of you. Hope you enjoy reading the Onopaharam.

Thank you and Best wishes.



P S Prem
Immediate Past President

Namaskaram to all Malayalees and well-wishers in Singapore.

I am greatly honoured to share my humble message on the occasion of Onam 2023.

Our esteemed organisation, now 106 years old since 1927 has survived the great depression and the second world war that was especially devastating for Singapore, being the largest British fortress in the East.

We have to pay tribute to all the former leaders and members who have supported our association since its inception. Our newer generation of leaders, sponsors and volunteers have done a splendid job in expanding our membership, making major contributions and gaining recognition within the Malayalee and the general society at large in Singapore.

The enthusiasm, sacrifice and contributions of the present-day leaders, youth and without forgetting the ladies is especially commendable and notably with the adoption of current day technologies in the administration and communication.

Onam Village and Onam Nite which is to be celebrated this year without pandemic restrictions will be celebrated by all Malayalees in Singapore, irrespective of caste or religion.

The Singapore Malayalee Association has been a beacon of support for many Malayalees who faced difficulties in Singapore. Continue with the good work.

I wish Malayalees to continue making a commendable impact and contributions to make the Singapore Malayalee association a major icon in Singapore.

Hridayam Niranja Onashamsakal to all.



Stephen Samuel
Trustee - Singapore Malayalee Association

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE BY MR ANBARASU RAJENDRAN, CEO, SINDA, FOR THE SINGAPORE MALAYALEE ASSOCIATION'S ONOPAHARAM MAGAZINE 2023

Greetings and ellavarkkum hridayam niranja Onam aashamsakal!

It is with great pleasure that I wish all our brothers and sisters and the Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA) a very happy and auspicious Onam. As we celebrate this festive season, it is my hope is that this Onam brings us a sense of renewal and optimism, akin to the traditional harvest festival that the festival represents.

I am grateful that SMA has been a valuable partner with SINDA throughout the years, in our collective efforts to uplift the Singaporean Indian community. I remain confident that we will explore new ways and find synergy, joining hands to ensure our community's continued betterment and welfare.

Each year, we look forward to a vibrant edition of Onopaharam to add colour to the festivities. SMA continues to deliver on this front, with yet another wonderful edition which beautifully chronicles the rich tapestry of Malayalee culture and traditions, providing us all with a deeper understanding of its beautiful heritage.

On behalf of all of us at SINDA, I wish everyone a joyous Onam celebration and I extend my best wishes to SMA for its continued dedication to the community.



Mr Anbarasu Rajendran
Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA)

It is my great pleasure to wish all our Malayalee friends Happy Onam.

Onam has always been an occasion that brings happiness, harmony and abundance to families. In Singapore, it has also served to bring the Indian community as well as Singaporeans together, as celebrations are carried out in community clubs and in the homes of many. Many non-Malayalees partake in these events to join the festivities and of course, enjoy the Onam delicacies and meals. Hope this tradition continues to bring our community closer for many years to come.

Happy Onam everyone.



K Ramamoorthy, JP, BBM
Chairman
People's Association Narpani Pearavai



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Happy Onam, at the outset to all our Malayalee friends! As this pious occasion of Onam draws near, may all of you be blessed with an abundance of joy, good health, and never-ending prosperity.

In the last year, we have seen a wonderful surge of artistic events – art exhibitions, festivals, and stage performances from the Malayalee community of Singapore, and it was a great opportunity for many of us to also attend and participate in the same. This sense of shared celebrations augers so well for our multi-cultural Singapore.

SIFAS, looks upon this as a very important community partnership and takes pride in supporting your events, on the musical and artistic side. This collaboration will only grow with the years to come, and the new generation taking charge.

I wish you - harmony, joy and peace on this happy occasion.



K V Rao
President

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO PROMOTE MALAYALAM LANGUAGE

Since 2010, the Malayalam Language Education Society (Singapore), has spearheaded the efforts to promote Malayalam Language in Singapore. The former ambassador-at-large, Mr Gopinath Pillai, a doyen of the Malayalee Community in Singapore, was our first Founder Member and Adviser. His remit to MLES was that we should work hand-in-hand with all formal and informal organizations and groups in Singapore, who are interested in promoting Malayalam culture, arts and related activities. He envisioned that Malayalam language is the window through which we appreciate our culture, fables, proverbs, dramas and way of life.

Research carried out by Malayalee Singaporeans, Late Ms Sugadha Anandan, and Dr Anitha Devi Pillai, on the Language Shift among generations of resident Malayalee Singaporeans, clearly indicate that the use of Malayalam is declining among successive generation of Malayalee Singaporeans. Malayalees who immigrated into Singapore in the early nineteen nineties and became Singaporeans face similar challenges in that, the usage of Malayalam among their children is dwindling.

MLES is developing a framework for children, 5 years to 15 years, to learn Malayalam. We plan to establish a program where children of different age groups will learn a group of words and phrases. In the process they will be able to construct sentences using these words and phrases. The emphasis will be on conversation. This will allow Malayalee Organizations to consciously include such words in the programs they conduct. For instance, if a particular organization is conducting a drama workshop in Malayalam for children, they will ensure that the scripts will incorporate such words and phrases.

We will need the support of the entire community to roll out this program. We will be reaching out to as many Malayalee organizations including places of worship, arts and cultural associations and informal groups.

It is important that we embark on a structured program to promote Malayalam, as that will allow us to have a handle on the level of proficiency of the language among our children. MLES plans to organize an annual event, where children who are exposed to this program will have the opportunity to share their understanding of their mother tongue through poetry recitation and oratorical contests.

It is important that we take these steps to promote Malayalam Language in Singapore. The responsibility lies with every Malayalee to ensure that successive generations continue to use Malayalam. If the use of Malayalam declines in Singapore, we must realize that it will impact our appreciation of Malayalee customs, practices, culture, arts, dramas and movies.

The clarion call to preserve Malayalam Language goes out to all Malayalee Singaporeans, even those who may not know Malayalam. Please visit MLES website at 'www.malayalam.org.sg' to register your interest in promoting Malayalam.

Wishing one and all a very Happy Onam.



Mr Jayadev Unnithan
Chairman, MLES



VARNAM 2023

AN EXCLUSIVE ART EXHIBITION BY 25 ARTISTS



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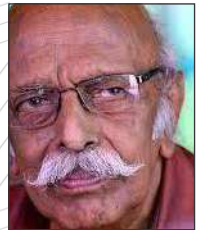


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മനസ്സിൽ പൂക്കളും ഇടുന്നവർ.

സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളി സമാജം എക്കാലത്തും മലയാള ഭാഷയുമായും സംസ്കാരവുമായും ദൃഢമായ പൊക്കിൾക്കൊടി ബന്ധം കാത്തുസൂക്ഷിക്കുന്നവരുടെ കൂട്ടായ്മയാണ്. അവർ എല്ലാവരും ഓണോഘോഷത്തിന്റെ നിറവിൽ ആഹ്ളാദിക്കുന്നവരാണ്. പൂവിളി ഉയരുന്ന ഓണപ്പുലരിയും തുവക്കുടവും മാവേലി മന്നന്റെ ഓർമ്മകളും നാക്കിലയിട്ട ഓണസ്സദ്യയും എല്ലാം അവരുടെ സ്വപ്നങ്ങളിൽ എന്നും ഉണ്ട്. ആ സ്വപ്നസാക്ഷാത്കാരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിയ്ക്കുന്ന ഓണോപഹാരത്തിനും എല്ലാ സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളികൾക്കും മനസ്സ് നിറഞ്ഞ ഓണാശംസകൾ.

വൈശാഖൻ.



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സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട മലയാളി സുഹൃത്തുക്കളേ,

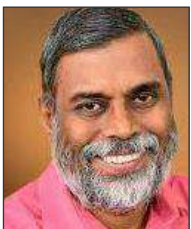
വീണ്ടുമൊരു ഓണം വരികയാണ്. കോവിഡ് മഹാമാരിയൊക്കെ കഴിഞ്ഞ്, ആശ്വാസത്തിന്റേയും, സന്തോഷത്തിന്റേയും, ആഘോഷത്തിന്റേയും ഒക്കെ ഒരു കാലമായിട്ടാണ് ഈ വർഷം ഓണം വരുന്നത്. വലിയൊരു ദുരിതകാലത്തിൽക്കൂടിയാണ് നമ്മൾ കടന്നുപോയത്. നമുക്കിനി ആ ഓർമ്മകളെ ഉപേക്ഷിച്ച്, കൂടുതൽസന്തോഷത്തോടെ, ആഹ്ലാദത്തോടെ, ഈ വർഷത്തെ ഓണം ആഘോഷിക്കാം.

മലയാളികളായ നിങ്ങൾക്കോരോരുത്തർക്കും ലോകത്തിന്റെ ഏതു മൂലയിലിരുന്നാലും ഓണത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഓർമ്മകളും ആഘോഷങ്ങളും ഒഴിവാക്കാൻ പറ്റാത്ത കാര്യമാണ്.

ഓണം, ജാതിമതഭേദമന്യേ മലയാളികളെയെല്ലാം ഒരുമിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഉത്സവമാണ്.

സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളികളുടെ ഓണഘോഷത്തിൽ എന്റെ എല്ലാവിധ ആശംസകളും നേരുന്നു.

T. D. രാമകൃഷ്ണൻ



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സ്ഥിതിസമത്വമുള്ള ഒരു ഭൂതകാലം ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നത് കഥകളിലെങ്കിലും കരുതിവച്ച നമ്മൾ മലയാളികൾ, അഭിമാനമുള്ള ജനതയാണ്. ആരെക്കാളും നമ്മൾ പിന്നിലല്ല. അതിന്റെ അടയാളമാണ് ഓണമെന്ന ഓർമ്മപ്പെരുന്നാൾ. വാമനാവതാരം സംഭവിക്കാതിരിക്കട്ടെ. എല്ലാ കുടുംബപ്പിറപ്പുകൾക്കും ഓണാശംസകൾ.

കുരീപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ



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ആശയോപഹാരം

ഓണം കേരളത്തിന്റെ വസന്തോത്സവമോ, വിളവുത്സവമോ മാത്രമല്ല, ഇന്നത്തെ ലോകത്തിന് പ്രദാനം ചെയ്യാനുള്ള വലിയൊരു ആശയോപഹാരം കൂടിയാണ്. മാനവരെല്ലാരും സമന്വാരായ, കള്ളവും ചതിയുമില്ലാത്ത വ്യവസ്ഥിതിയാണല്ലോ ഓണം സ്വപ്നം കാണുന്നത്. മനുഷ്യനും മനുഷ്യനും തമ്മിലുള്ള അസമത്വം ആഭാസകരമായി വളരുന്ന കാലത്ത്, കള്ളവും ചതിയും അംഗീകൃത നിയമമാകുന്ന വേളയിൽ, ഓണസന്ദേശത്തിന് പ്രസക്തിയേറുകയാണ്. സമത്വവും സമാധാനവും സത്യസന്ധതയുമേകുന്ന മാനവഐക്യത്തിന് മാത്രമേ കാലാവസ്ഥാ വ്യതിയാന ഭീഷണികളെ നേരിട്ട് മനുഷ്യവംശത്തെ കാത്തുരക്ഷിക്കാൻ കഴിയൂ എന്ന തിരിച്ചറിവാണ് ഇന്ന് ഉൽപാദിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്.

ഈ സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ കേരളം ലോകത്തിന് നൽകുന്ന ഓണോപഹാരത്തിന് ജീവൻരക്ഷാ ഔഷധത്തിന്റെ വിലയുണ്ട്. സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളി സമാജത്തിന്റെ ഓണോപഹാരം അത്തരമൊരു മൃതസഞ്ജീവനിയുടെ മൂല്യം സംവഹിക്കട്ടെ.

കെ.പി. രാമനൂണി



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മനുഷ്യൻ ഭൂമിയിൽ പണിത സ്വർഗ്ഗം

രണ്ടായിരത്തിപ്പത്ത് ഒക്ടോബറിൽ ആദ്യമായി എത്തിയപ്പോൾ സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ കാഴ്ചകൾ കണ്ട് എന്റെ കണ്ണു തളളിപ്പോയി. സൺടെക് സിറ്റിയും വിവോ സിറ്റിയും പോലുള്ള മാളുകളും മെർലിയന്നും ബേഡ് പാർക്കും ബൊട്ടാനിക്കൽ ഗാർഡൻസും സെന്റോസയും ഫ്ളയറും, മറീനാ ബേ സാൻഡ്സും പോലുള്ള കാഴ്ചസ്ഥലങ്ങളും ഒക്കെ ആദ്യത്തെ വരവിൽത്തന്നെ കണ്ടു. മൊബൈൽ ഫോണിലെ ക്യാമറയിൽ എടുത്തുകൂട്ടിയ ചിത്രങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ട് ഫോണിലെ ചിത്രപ്പെട്ടി നിറഞ്ഞു. അടിച്ചുവാരിത്തുടച്ചിട്ടുപോലെ തിളങ്ങുന്ന പാതകളുടെ ചിത്രങ്ങൾ പോലും എടുത്തുകൂട്ടി.

സിംഗപ്പൂരിലേയ്ക്ക് ഇനി ഒരു വരവ് ഉണ്ടാവില്ലെന്നുറപ്പിച്ച് എല്ലാം ആർത്തിയോടെ കണ്ടുതീർക്കുകയായിരുന്നു. താമസത്തിന്റെ അവസാനദിവസങ്ങളിൽ മെട്രോയിൽനിന്നും ബസ്സിൽനിന്നുമൊക്കെ അവസാനയാത്ര കഴിഞ്ഞ് ഇറങ്ങുമ്പോൾ വല്ലാത്ത സങ്കടം തോന്നി. ചാങ്ങി വിമാനത്താവളത്തിൽനിന്ന് എയർ ഏഷ്യയുടെ വിമാനത്തിൽ മടക്കയാത്ര തുടങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ അറിയാവുന്ന ഭാഷയിലൊക്കെ ഞാൻ സിംഗപ്പൂരിനോട് യാത്ര പറഞ്ഞു.

അത് അവസാനത്തെ യാത്രയായിരുന്നില്ല എന്ന് അടുത്തകൊല്ലമാണ് മനസ്സിലായത്. വീണ്ടും ചാങ്ങിയിൽ ഇറങ്ങിയപ്പോൾ ആദ്യത്തെ യാത്രയുടെ ഉൾപ്പുളകങ്ങളൊന്നും ഉണ്ടായില്ലെങ്കിലും മനസ്സ് തുടികൊട്ടിക്കൊണ്ടിരുന്നു. വീണ്ടും കാഴ്ചകൾ. പക്ഷേ വാരിവലിച്ച് ചിത്രങ്ങളെടുക്കുന്നതു കുറഞ്ഞു. ഓർമ്മ പുതുക്കലായിരുന്നു ഈ വരവിൽ അധികവും ഉണ്ടായത്. കഴിഞ്ഞ കൊല്ലം കണ്ട കാഴ്ചകൾ മായയായിരുന്നില്ലല്ലോ എന്ന് ഉറപ്പുവരുത്താനുള്ള തത്രപ്പാട്!

ആ യാത്രയുടെ അവസാനവും തലേ വർഷത്തേപ്പോലെ യാത്ര പറച്ചിലും വിങ്ങിപ്പൊട്ടലുമൊക്കെയുണ്ടായി. ഇനി ഒരു വരവ് ഒരിക്കലുമുണ്ടാവില്ലെന്ന് ഉറപ്പിച്ചായിരുന്നു ആ മടക്കയാത്രയും.

അങ്ങനെ പന്ത്രണ്ടു സന്ദർശനങ്ങൾ. ഓരോന്നും രണ്ടു മാസങ്ങൾ നീണ്ടു നിൽക്കുന്നവ. കൊല്ലത്തിൽ പത്തു മാസം ഇന്ത്യയിലും രണ്ടു മാസം സിംഗപ്പൂരിലും എന്ന രീതി. ഓരോ വരവിലും സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ പുതിയ പുതിയ കാഴ്ചകൾ ഉണ്ടായി. മൂന്നാമത്തേതും നാലാമത്തേതുമായ മടക്കയാത്രകളിലും യാത്ര പറച്ചിലുണ്ടായെങ്കിലും പിന്നെപ്പിന്നെ അതില്ലാതായി.

അതിനിടെ സിംഗപ്പൂർ എനിക്ക് എന്റെ ദേശം പോലെ പരിചിതമായി. സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ പുതിയ പുതിയ അടുപ്പങ്ങളുണ്ടായി. സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളി ലിറ്റററി ഫോറം വഴി കുറേ പുതിയ കൂട്ടുകാരുണ്ടായി. അതിസമർത്ഥനായ സംഘാടകനായി ഉല്ലാസ്കുമാറും നാവിൻതുമ്പിൽ എപ്പോഴും തത്തിക്കളിക്കുന്ന മലയാളകവിതകളുമായി ആർ. ബി. പ്രമോദും ലോകസാഹിത്യം അർച്ചുകലക്കിക്കൂടിയിട്ടു ടി. സുരേഷ്കുമാറും കൂടി നയിച്ചിരുന്ന ഫോറത്തിന്റെ യോഗങ്ങളിൽ പലതിലും പങ്കെടുക്കാനായി. സവിനകുമാരി, സേവിയർ വിനോദ്, ദിവ്യ അരുൺ, അരുൺ ഗംഗാധരൻ, താര രവീന്ദ്രൻ, എം. കെ. ഭാസിസാർ, സത്യൻ പൂക്കുട്ടത്തിൽ, പ്രേംകുമാർ, അഞ്ജന പ്രേം, പ്രദീപ്, ധന്യ പ്രദീപ്, വിജയകൃഷ്ണൻ തെക്കേമാത്ത്, ഗംഗാധരൻ കുറുപ്പൻ, രാജീവ്

വാരിയർ, ശ്രീകുമാർ, ജയകുമാർ, പിയ എം. എസ്. കുമാർ, ഹേമ ശിവരാമകൃഷ്ണൻ, മദൻ പുഷ്പകത്ത്, ദീപ മദൻ, ഗീതാകൃഷ്ണൻ, ലതാ മേനോൻ, പ്രൊഫ് വടക്കേപ്പാട്ട്, സ്മിത അഗസ്റ്റിൻ, പ്രവീൺ തോമസ്, ഉമാശങ്കർ, പദ്മകുമാർ ഉണ്ണിക്കൃഷ്ണൻ, രജനി പദ്മകുമാർ, കൃഷ്ണകുമാർ, ചിത്ര കൃഷ്ണകുമാർ അങ്ങനെയങ്ങനെ വലിയ ഒരു സൗഹൃദനിര! എല്ലാവരും കവിതയെഴുതുന്നവരോ കഥയെഴുതുന്നവരോ ചിത്രം വരയ്ക്കുന്നവരോ പ്രഭാഷണം നടത്തുന്നവരോ ആയ സഹൃദയർ. ചലച്ചിത്രകാരിയായ ശിൽപ കൃഷ്ണനുമായി സൗഹൃദത്തിലായെങ്കിലും നേരിൽ കാണാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞില്ല ഇതുവരെ. പുറമേ സുബ്രഹ്മണ്യൻ, ശോഭ, പ്രിയ, വിനോദ് തുടങ്ങി കുറേ അടുപ്പക്കാരുമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അതുകൊണ്ട് ഒടുവിലൊടുവിൽ സിംഗപ്പൂർ യാത്രകൾ എനിക്ക് എന്റെ സ്വന്തം ദേശത്തേയ്ക്കുള്ള വരവു പോലെയായി.

അതിനിടയ്ക്ക് കോവിഡ് മഹാമാരി പടർന്നു പടിച്ചതുകൊണ്ട് 2020-ലും 2021-ലും യാത്ര നടന്നില്ല. മഹാമാരിയുടെ വിളയാട്ടം ഒന്നു ശമിച്ചതോടെ 2022-ൽ വീണ്ടും ഞങ്ങൾ സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ പറന്നെത്തി. സിംഗപ്പൂർ യാത്രകൾ സ്ഥിരമായെന്ന ബോധം വേരുറച്ചുകഴിഞ്ഞതുകൊണ്ട് അത്തവണയും സിംഗപ്പൂരിനോട് യാത്ര പറഞ്ഞില്ല.

പക്ഷേ അത് അവസാനയാത്രയായിരുന്നു. മകളും കുടുംബവും ഇംഗ്ലണ്ടിലേയ്ക്കു താമസം മാറ്റുകയാണെന്നറിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ വല്ലാത്ത ഒരു വിങ്ങൽ അനുഭവപ്പെട്ടു. അവർ അവിടെനിന്നു പോവുന്നതിനു മുമ്പ് ഒരിക്കൽക്കൂടി അവിടേയ്ക്കു പറന്നുവരണമെന്ന് ആഗ്രഹിച്ചുവെങ്കിലും നടന്നില്ല. അങ്ങനെ അർഹതപ്പെട്ട ഒരു വിടവാങ്ങൽ നടന്നില്ല.

ഇംഗ്ലണ്ടിൽ എത്തിയെങ്കിലും പത്തു വർഷത്തോളം ജീവിച്ച സിംഗപ്പൂർ എന്റെ മകൾ അളകയ്ക്കും ഭർത്താവ് നിഖിലിനും പ്രിയപ്പെട്ടതു തന്നെ. ഒഴിച്ചുകൂടാനാവാത്ത ചില സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ടാണ് അവർ സിംഗപ്പൂർ വിട്ടത്. പേരക്കുട്ടി ആരാധ്യയ്ക്ക് തന്റെ നാട് എന്നു വെച്ചാൽ സിംഗപ്പൂരും സ്വന്തം വീട് എന്നു വെച്ചാൽ പുംഗോളിലെ ഫ്ളാറ്റുമായിരുന്നു. എന്റെ ജീവിതസഖി സബിതയും ഓരോ യാത്ര കഴിഞ്ഞു മടങ്ങിയെത്തിയാൽ അടുത്ത യാത്രയേക്കുറിച്ച് സ്വപ്നം കാണുന്നവളായിരുന്നു.

ഇന്നും സിംഗപ്പൂർ എന്റെ ഒപ്പമുണ്ട്. മകൾ അവസാനത്തെ ആറുവർഷം താമസിച്ച് പുംഗോൾ എനിക്ക് അത്രയേറെ പ്രിയതരമാണ്. പുംഗോളിലെ തലങ്ങും വിലങ്ങുമുള്ള വഴിത്താരകളിൽ എന്റെ കാലടിപ്പാടുകൾ പതിയാത്ത ഇടങ്ങളില്ല. വാട്ടർ വേ പാർക്കിൽ ചെന്നിരിക്കാത്ത ഇരിപ്പിടങ്ങളുമില്ല.

തീരുമാനിച്ചുകഴിഞ്ഞാൽ വെറും നാലു മണിക്കൂർ കയ്യകലത്തിലാണ് എന്റെ ഈ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട രാജ്യം. അവിടത്തെ ക്ഷിപ്രവർഷിയായ മഴയും അടുത്ത നിമിഷം തെളിയുന്ന വെയിലും ഇപ്പോഴും മനസ്സിലുണ്ട്. മനുഷ്യൻ ഭൂമിയിൽ പണിത സ്വർഗ്ഗം എന്ന് സിംഗപ്പൂരിനെ വിളിക്കാനാണ് എനിക്കിഷ്ടം.



അഷ്ടമൂർത്തി

Celebrity Messages

സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ താമസിക്കുന്ന എല്ലാ മലയാളികൾക്കും, ഓണോപഹാരം വായനക്കാർക്കും എന്റെ ഹൃദയം നിറഞ്ഞ ഓണാശംസകൾ!

വർണ്ണശബളമായ പൂക്കളങ്ങളും മറ്റുമായി സന്തോഷകരമായ, നല്ല ഒരു ഓണാഘോഷമായിരിക്കട്ടെ ഇത്തവണ.

സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ പൂക്കളം എന്നു പറഞ്ഞാൽ ഓർക്കിഡ്സ് ആയിരിക്കും കൂടുതൽ അല്ലെ? എനിക്കറിഞ്ഞുകൂടാ, ഓർക്കിഡ് ആണല്ലോ സിംഗപ്പൂരിന്റെ ദേശീയ പൂഷ്പം. അതും ഓണാഘോഷങ്ങൾക്ക് ശോഭ കൂട്ടുമായിരിക്കുമെന്ന് കരുതുന്നു.

എല്ലാവർക്കും ഒരിക്കൽക്കൂടി എന്റെ സ്നേഹം നിറഞ്ഞ ഓണാശംസകൾ!

എല്ലാവരേയും ഒരിക്കൽക്കൂടി നേരിൽ കാണാൻ പ്രതീക്ഷിച്ചുകൊണ്ട്, നന്ദിയോടെ,

നിങ്ങളുടെ ലക്ഷ്മി ഗോപാലസ്വാമി



സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ എല്ലാ മലയാളി കുടുംബാംഗങ്ങൾക്കും എന്റെ ഹൃദയം നിറഞ്ഞ ഓണാശംസകൾ.

സിംഗപ്പൂരിലും മറ്റ് വിദേശരാജ്യങ്ങളിലും നടക്കുന്ന ഓണാഘോഷങ്ങളാണ് ശരിക്കും വിപുലമായി, ആഘോഷകരമാക്കി, നടത്തുന്നത്.

ഞാൻ ഒരുപാടു വർഷം സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ ഓണാഘോഷങ്ങളിൽ പാടാൻ വന്നിട്ടുണ്ട് . വളരെ നല്ല, വിപുലമായ ഒരു സദസ്സ് ആയിരിക്കും എപ്പോഴും.

പിന്നെ, ഇവിടത്തെപ്പോലെ അവിടേയും ഗംഭീര സദ്യയൊക്കെ ഉണ്ടാക്കി, മറുനാട്ടിൽ ഓണം കൊണ്ടാടുന്നത് കാണുമ്പോൾ ശരിക്കും അതിയായ സന്തോഷം തോന്നും.

ഇപ്രാവശ്യത്തെ ഓണവും കൈകേമമായി കൊണ്ടാടപ്പെട്ടെ എന്ന് ആശിക്കുന്നു.

സസ്നേഹം

സുജാത



सुरेश गोपी
സുരേഷ് ഗോപി

Suresh Gopi

Former Member of Parliament
Rajya Sabha (2016 – 2022)



“LEKSHMI”
D-9 Temple Road
Sasthamangalam
Thiruvananthapuram
Kerala - 695 010

ONAM WISHES

Dear fellow Malayalees in Singapore,

Wishing you all a joyous and prosperous Onam!

It fills my heart with immense happiness to witness the vibrant celebrations and the commendable efforts of SMA and other organizations in Singapore in promoting our rich art and culture. This dedicated platform serves as a catalyst for a beautiful exchange of talents and art between India and Singapore.

Onam is a time of unity and togetherness for all Malayalees, regardless of our geographical locations. As you revel in the festivities, let the spirit of Onam shine brightly in all your celebrations. May it bring forth renewed bonds of love, understanding, and harmony among us.



Happy Onam!

Suresh Gopi

SMA Activities from Aug 2022 to July 2023

105'th Annual General Meeting

The 105'th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA), was held on 30th April 2023 at 10:30 am.

The Management Committee, represented by the President, presented SMA's activities for the year from April 2022 to April 2023 as highlighted in the Minutes of the Meeting.

Apart from the normal proceedings at AGM like approval of minutes, audited accounts etc, the new management committee for the term 2023-2025 was elected.

Members engaged in discussions on several topics during the "Any Other Business" segment including matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting. The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm with a Vote of Thanks by the Honorary Secretary.

Executive Summary

With the revival of public activities, SMA's flagship events like the Onam Nite and Onam Village were back in 2022 and warmly received by our members. Several other cultural and social events were also organised as detailed in the report.

Many of the virtual events continued in 2022 thus providing the members the convenience of participation in several talk series, quiz competitions and other interactive sessions.

Another major comeback of the year was the print version of the Onopaharam which was released on Onam Nite 2022. SMA's newsletters were released every quarter to update members of the various activities.

SMA's events were widely publicised on Vasantham and in local journals like Tabla from time to time.

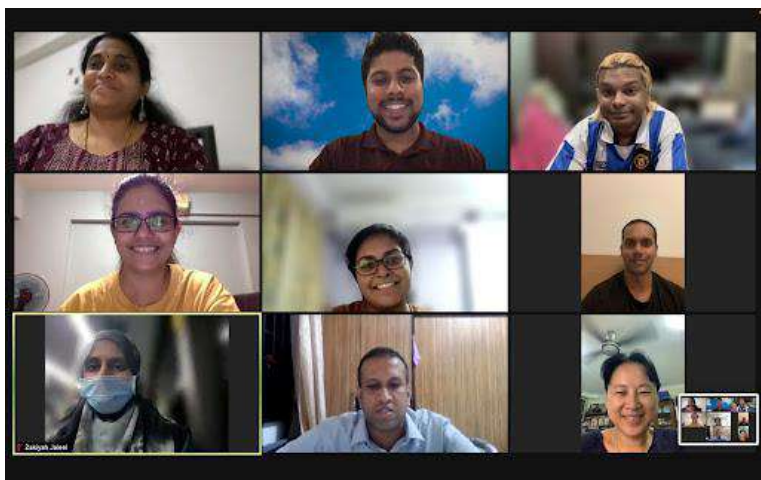
All in all there were 30 events during the year (Aug22- July23), of which 4 were virtual events. In addition, there were about 20 events that SMA participated in alongside other associations as part of Community Collaboration. These events included members across all ages, religions and gender.

A comprehensive report of our activities follows, as reported by the various sub committees.

Youth Wing

Basic Conversational Malayalam Course

Singapore Malayalee Association's Youth Wing endeavoured with determination and passion to spread our Mother Tongue, Malayalam through Malayalam classes. In November 2022, Youth Wing organised a few sessions of the very popular Basic Conversational Malayalam Class, in partnership with the Malayalam Language Education Society (MLES).



The class was originally targeted at working adults and older students, but younger students were drawn to the class as well. This resulted in two separate classes - classes for adult learners on Tuesdays, and classes for students aged between 7 and 15 years, on Fridays. The classes were well-received by our participants. The tutor, Ms. Smitha Augustine, was very detailed, and the classes were very engaging.

Other events

The second half of 2022 was an eventful one for the SMA Youth Wing.

In August, the Youth Wing members assisted and participated in the sports and cultural aspects of the Onam Village carnival.

In September, on Onam day, 'OnAmplified', a podcast/vlog series, was launched. A series of games which included trivia about Onam were played. A second season of "Kerala Cuisine: A Singapore Story" was released. It was written in English Language to cater to the wider community and spread the culture of Malayalees via food. Non-Malayalees gave reviews and authentic recommendations. The episodes are available on SMA's Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages.

Under the Food Sponsorship Programme, the Youth Wing along with the Welfare Wing distributed Deepavali snacks to 700 migrant workers on 23rd October 2022, and spread festive cheer.



On 21 January 2023, as part of the Festival Food Distribution Drive, Youth Wing reached out to seniors living in the Jalan Besar neighbourhood, to spread the Chinese New Year festive cheer. In collaboration with Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore), the Youth Wing delivered Briyani sets to senior citizens.

In February, Youth Wing was a part of Natakamela'23 and participated in two dramas titled 'Kalyana Vishayam' and 'Facebook Premam'. These were written by Mr. R K Menon.

Singapore Malayalees Exhibition

On 18 March 2023, the Youth Wing was involved in the 'Singapore Malayalees' exhibition organised by the Centre for Singapore Tamil Culture and National Library Board. Members assisted with the exhibition booths to help raise awareness of Malayalee culture and traditions.

Mayilpeeli

Appreciating Our Art Forms: Chenda

The second session in the series "Appreciating our Art Forms", was held on 27 November 2022. Sabarinath Thekkath conducted the session, giving the participants an introduction to the Chenda. The various aspects of the Chenda and the different ways in which it is used were well explained using video clips. It was a very engaging session with a very responsive audience, who had several questions for the presenter.

Singapore Malayalee Association invites you for a lecture demonstration on Chenda & Melam, one of the most popular musical ensembles so familiar to Malayalees. Understand the art form and learn to enjoy its various versions.



Tips To Study Smart

Mayilpeeli Children's Club held a virtual session titled "Tips to Study Smart" on 30th Dec 2022, for upper primary and secondary school students.

This session was conducted by Mr. Pugalenthil, author, playwright and motivational speaker who has written over 60 best sellers and has conducted more than 700 talks for parents and students.

The session was intentionally timed just before the start of the new academic year. Topics included goal setting, techniques to improve academic performance, procrastination and time management, and cyber wellness. More than 35 children, together with their parents, attended and benefited from this interactive session.



SMARtest

On 18 March 2023, the Youth Wing was involved in the 'Singapore Malayalees' exhibition organised by the Centre for Singapore Tamil Culture and National Library Board. Members assisted with the exhibition booths to help raise awareness of Malayalee culture and traditions.

On the 27th of May 2023, the annual Quiz event, SMARtest, was organised by the SMA Children's Club 'Mayilpeeli' at the SMA Hall. This event aimed to foster a broad-minded thought process in children and marked its successful 6th consecutive year. In the final round of SMARtest, four talented finalists demonstrated their knowledge in various aspects. Leading the proceedings were Mr. Sujith Sivram, the esteemed Chief Quiz Master, and former SMARtest champions Dhruv Manoj and Mathew Roy Varghese, who played crucial roles in structuring and conducting the entire show. Following a tough competition, Shriyadith emerged as the champion of SMARtest 2023. Ishaan and Adinadh for secured the 2nd and 3rd positions. Their impressive performances truly showcase their dedication and intellectual prowess. The champions will receive prestigious trophies during the SMA Onam Village event, while all participants will be awarded well-deserved participant certificates. Additionally, the event provided a valuable opportunity for interaction between Mr. Jayadev Unnithan, the President of the Malayalam Language Education Society (MLES), children, and parents. Mr. Unnithan shared insights on the importance of the mother tongue and engaged in discussions about socially relevant activities, promoting a sense of cultural awareness and pride. The event concluded on a high note, with children showcasing their diverse skills and talents. It was truly a celebration of the incredible potential within young minds.

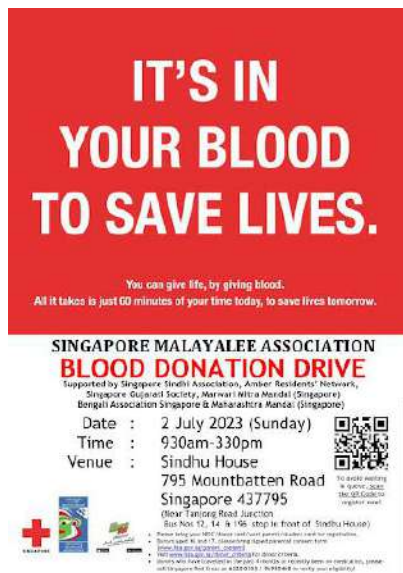


Community Collaborations

Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA) has been actively participating and collaborating with various other organisations.

Quarterly Blood Donation Drive in collaboration with Sindhi Association

Blood Donation drive was held on 2 October 2022, 8 January 2023, 2 April, 2023 and 2 July 2023. SMA members actively engaged in donating blood.



IT'S IN YOUR BLOOD TO SAVE LIVES.

You can give life, by giving blood.
All it takes is just 60 minutes of your time today, to save lives tomorrow.

SINGAPORE MALAYALEE ASSOCIATION BLOOD DONATION DRIVE
Supported by Singapore Sindhi Association, Amhar Residents' Network, Singapore Gujarati Society, Marwari Nitra Mandal (Singapore), Bengali Association Singapore & Maharashtra Mandal (Singapore)

Date : 2 July 2023 (Sunday)
Time : 930am-330pm
Venue : Sindhu House
795 Mountbatten Road
Singapore 437795
(Near Tanjong Road Junction
Bus Nos 12, 14 & 196 stop in front of Sindhu House)

QR code for registration

Logos: Singapore Red Cross, SMA, Sindhi Association, etc.

LISHA's Street Finger Food Fiesta 2022

LISHA hosted a Street Finger Food Fiesta on 10th Sept 2022 at Birch Road. A RECORD-SETTING EVENT for the 'Singapore Book of Records'. Hundreds of organisations brought in multiple types of street finger foods - one of a kind only at this fiesta!
<https://www.mewatch.sg/watch/Indian-Beat-S13-E29-322899>





LISHA's Indian New Year Celebration

LISHA's Indian New Year celebration was held on April 15, 2023, at Birch Road open field. The Guest-of-Honour (GOH) for the event was Mr. Alvin Tan, Minister of State (MCCY & MIT). Cultural performances, including by acclaimed artist Ms Vidya Unni and an exhibition with the theme on food were part of the celebrations. SMA sponsored the dessert, Adaprathaman for the invited guests. An appreciation plaque was presented to SMA representatives by the GOH.

<https://www.mewatch.sg/episode/Indian-Beat-S14-E4-372506>



People's Association (PA) Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs) 45th Anniversary

The People's Association (PA) Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs) celebrated their 45th anniversary on 7 January 2023 at the Fairmont Ballroom at Raffles City Convention Centre. The event saw more than 1,000 people in attendance, including grassroots leaders and community partners to celebrate the contributions of the IAEC volunteers in promoting social cohesion among the Indian community, as well as racial harmony with the wider Singapore community. SMA's volunteers gave a captivating Chenda performance that was well-received by the audience. An appreciation plaque was presented to Mr Anil Kumar Sankara, Honorary Treasurer, SMA, by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Lawrence Wong.



Narpani Pearavai Post Budget Dialogue

SMA sent a representative to participate in a Post Budget Dialogue Session organised by Narpani Pearavai, on 11 March 2023. Dr. Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for the Ministry of Communications and Information and the Ministry of Health, and Advisor to Narpani Pearavai, provided informative feedback and comments during the dialogue session.

Narpani Pearavai Partners' Networking Session

On 18th March 2023, SMA members attended a networking session for Narpani Pearavai Partners at Gardens by the Bay. The Guest of Honor, Mr. Daryl David, Advisor Ang Mo Kio GRC- GRO's, shared his vision for progress towards 2030. The event aimed to foster stronger relationships with like-minded partner organisations, and encourage conversation, idea sharing and collaboration on significant projects for the betterment of the wider community. The event was well-organised and attended by Indian organisations and IAEC GRL's.

Chingay Parade 2023

SMA contingent of 40 proudly showcased the Malayalee culture through a semi-classical dance performance alongside a Chenda and Elathalam ensemble. Apart from the traditional kerala attire worn by the participants, traditional umbrellas (muthu kuda) too added pomp and colour to the presentation. SMA received the Chingay Participation Certificate at the Appreciation Dinner Event at Orchard Hotel.



Preserving our culture and heritage

The Centre for Singapore Tamil Culture and National Library conducted a seminar on Malayalees in Singapore, to bring about more awareness of the Malayalee culture and traditions amongst all races in Singapore. Held on 18th March in NLB, the event included a panel discussion on Malayalee cultural practices. In addition, there were artefacts, dance, music and unique cuisine, contributed by the various Malayalee Associations in Singapore. SMA took charge of the display of artefacts like nirapara, kerala jewellery and vilakku, along with detailed description of the items. A complete Onam Sadya and Athappoo were also contributed by SMA. Our ladies and gentlemen in the traditional kerala attire added so much colour to the event while our chenda players added vibrancy and cheer.

SMA will be working closely with the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) to participate in a special exhibition that showcases the history and heritage of the Singapore Malayalee community. Titled “Ente Veedu, My Home” this is projected to be held from August 2023 to May 2024. The exhibition will document the passage and lives of Singapore’s Malayalee community from historical to contemporary times, with a focus on their evolution from Keralites to Singapore Malayalees and diasporic construction of home, identity, and sense of belonging. The tangible and intangible aspects of Malayalee heritage, culture and identity will be showcased through artefacts, anecdotes and audio-visual recordings of the community, and a variety of programmes.

Other Engagements with CCs and Singapore Indian Associations

- Members of SMA took part in the Maharashtra Mandal Ganapathy Festival held at the Global Indian International School campus.
- Attended Bengali Association Singapore’s Anandamela and Pandal where the GOHs for the two day events were His Excellency Mr. Kumaran Periasamy, High Commissioner of India, Singapore and Ms. Saswati Dey, Counsellor (Political, Press, Culture), High Commission of India, Singapore.



- Collaborated with various other Singapore Indian organisations to conduct online health talks as part of the Health & Wellness Series.
- On 6th November 2022, SMA gave a semi-classical dance performance at the Fernvale CC Deepavali show.
- As part of the Pongal celebration, Big At Heart organised various activities for our migrant workers at Terusan Recreation Centre on



15 January 2023, between 11 am and 1 pm. Among the various Indian communities who participated, SMA organised a semi-classical dance performance for the workers.

- On 9th April, Mountbatten CC - IAEC celebrated Indian New Year 2023 from 12pm to 3 pm, along with Mr. Lim Biow Chuan, Adviser to Mountbatten GROs. SMA had a booth showcasing Kerala Mural Art.





Vishu: An Interview

Mothership Singapore contacted the Singapore Malayalee Association in connection with a program they were planning to organise ahead of Vishu. The objective was to popularise Vishu amongst the Singapore community and convey information to the general public about Vishu.



Sujith Sivaram represented Singapore Malayalee Association and spoke to the Mothership representatives on the various aspects of Vishu, the origin, the celebrations, the festivities and so on. The interview was broadcast by Mothership on its channel just before Vishu. The conversation was very interesting and captured detailed information on the celebrations of Vishu which we believe helped popularise the festival a bit more amongst Singaporeans. The full video is available at the link below.

<https://youtu.be/O0x-ei8OZvM>

Engagement with Indian Organisations in Singapore

On the 26th of May 2023, SMA held an engagement session with various Indian organisations, fostering camaraderie and building anticipation. The achievements of Khalsa, including their participation in the National Football League, left a strong impression. The Sindhi Association extended an invitation to a networking event, aimed at connecting individuals and facilitating new connections. Each organisation designed programs tailored to diverse interests, actively engaging the youth. SKM emphasised the importance of continuity and youth involvement, leveraging technology to drive their initiatives forward. The introduction of a "50 under 50" initiative aimed to recognize exceptional young influencers. The Kamala Club sought collaboration with the youth, while the discussion of National Youth Council projects aimed to generate collective impact. The session also placed emphasis on community service and support for migrant workers. Mr. Jayakumar highlighted the significance of unity with a common goal and celebrated the diversity of festivals. SMA continues to maintain fruitful collaborations with these organisations for mutual benefit and shared success.



Malayalee Organisation Engagement Session



On Saturday, May 13th, SMA hosted an engagement session with various Malayalee organisations. The session aimed to provide a platform for sharing experiences, thoughts, and future visions, with a specific focus on the goals of these organisations. A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the desire for greater youth inclusivity, seeking to

develop ideas that would resonate with younger generations and enhance community outreach efforts. The unity of vision among the different organisations was particularly inspiring. Among the esteemed participants was Dr. V.P Nair, a senior member of SMA, who shared his valuable experiences, which were considered beneficial for the younger generation.

West Coast GRC organises Fellowship Event:

On the 28th of May 2023, West Coast GRC organised a Fellowship event at Boon Lay CC. This annual work plan aimed to bring together Community Organizations (COs) to foster sharing and discussion regarding their upcoming events and contributions to the Indian community within the GRC.



During the event, Ms. Aathira from SMA had the opportunity to share about SMA's outreach programs. The exchange of ideas and experiences among the various Indian Activity Executive Committees (IAECs), as well as the involvement of the Narpani Council and SINDA, added to the richness of the discussions.

Meeting with Malayalee Religious Organisations

On Friday, 19th May 2023, members of the SMA community were privileged to engage with leaders representing various Malayalee religious organisations in Singapore. The gathering



was characterised by its inclusive nature, emphasising open dialogue and collaborative brainstorming. One of the key proposals discussed was the idea of celebrating religious festivals as united Malayalee groups. The organisations put forth suggestions to inspire the Malayalee youth in Singapore to contribute collectively to the betterment of the community. Participating in such discussions and initiatives holds the potential to instil a sense of unity and belonging among the youth, reinforcing their identity as true Malayalees. To encapsulate the essence of the meeting, a poignant quote from Sree Narayana Guru resonates: "Oru Jaathi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam manushyanu," meaning "One caste, one religion, and one God for humankind." This profound sentiment was genuinely experienced and embodied during the gathering, where SMA members and religious leaders joined hands. Undoubtedly, it was a moment of genuine unity.

SMA Youth Engagement Discussion

Mr. Venu Rajamony's Visit to SMA: Promoting Malayalam and Youth Engagement.

During his visit to SMA on the 30th of May 2023, Mr. Venu Rajamony, Officer on Special Duty, External Cooperation in the Government of Kerala,



engaged in a fruitful dialogue covering various topics, focusing on promoting the Malayalam language. The Singapore Malayalee community expressed their gratitude for Mr. Rajamony's efforts in facilitating dialogues with Cambridge University to understand the requirements for qualifying Malayalam as a mother tongue in Singapore. He encouraged the community to continue working towards introducing Malayalam language education in schools.

As a recognized patron of cultural heritage and linguistics, Mr. Rajamony shared valuable insights and emphasised the importance of promoting the Malayalam language among the younger generation. His support and guidance inspire the community to preserve and pass on their linguistic and cultural heritage.

SMA extends wholehearted support to MLES in promoting Malayalam as mother tongue.

Indian Community and Friends of India in Singapore

On May 31st, 2023, the Singapore Malayalee Association organised a remarkable event titled "Indian Community and Friends of India in Singapore," which provided its members with an extraordinary opportunity to meet and engage with Sri Dharmendra Pradhan, the Honourable Minister of Education, Skill Development, and Entrepreneurship in India. During the



event, Minister Pradhan delivered a thought-provoking discourse, sharing his visionary ideas and strategies for advancing education and entrepreneurship in India. His insights shed light on the country's plans to drive progress and foster innovation in these vital areas. Additionally, the minister expressed deep appreciation for the significant contributions made by the Indian community in Singapore, highlighting their role in nurturing collaborative relationships among diverse communities. The members of the Indian community in Singapore were profoundly honoured to have the privilege of meeting and interacting with such an esteemed minister. This engagement provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and strengthening the bonds between Singapore and India.

Malayalee Youth Organisations Engagement Session

On the 9th of June 2023, passionate and dedicated youth representatives from diverse Malayalee and Indian organisations joined forces with a shared objective: to inspire and motivate young individuals through a series of remarkable "FireSide Chat" sessions. These sessions were designed to facilitate engaging discussions with notable personalities on various pertinent issues. The inaugural session of this extraordinary initiative was graced by the presence of Mr. Viswa Sadasivan, a highly respected former Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP), who served as a mentor for the first session. His invaluable guidance and wisdom





created an atmosphere of enthusiasm and intellectual exchange, leaving a lasting impact on the participants. The youth representatives, hailing from different backgrounds and organisations, brought together their collective energy and passion to establish an inspiring platform. The core vision behind the "FireSide Chat" sessions is to empower young minds, encouraging them to express their thoughts and address critical issues that

affect our society today. Mr. Viswa's thought-provoking insights and encouragement to engage in honest and open communication about complex and divisive matters prompted deep reflection on the path to address polarising issues in a changing Singapore. His inspirational musings on humanity and the narratives that shape it further emboldened the participants to take action, fostering transparent conversations and advocating for change. Moreover, the fireside chat served as a valuable opportunity for the youths to interact with like-minded individuals driven by a passion for creating positive transformations, engaging in thought-provoking discussions that encompassed a wide range of perspectives.

Book Launch : "Gowri" - A Remarkable Story of Strength and Resilience

On the 11th of June 2023, SMA had the honour of participating in launching the Malayalam translation of the book "Gowri," written by Prof. V G Kumar Das, Professor Emeritus from the University of Malaya. Initially published in 2016 as a biography of the author's mother, the book was launched by Ambassador K Kesavapany in Singapore in 2017. It has been beautifully translated into Malayalam, and the vernacular version was officially launched during a soft launch at Sree Narayana Mission, Singapore.



During the event, Dr. VP Nair launched the book in the presence of Mr. Jayadev Unnithan, President of SNM, Ambassador K Kesavapany and Mr. Devendran, the CEO of SNM. This significant occasion celebrated the incredible journey of a strong-willed mother who raised seven children in a foreign land. The book not only showcases her personal story but also provides insights into the history and cultural significance of Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia, as seen through the eyes of the mother, spanning the years from 1939 to 1998.

Felicitations Program

The Singapore Malayalee Association orchestrated a felicitations program on Saturday, 24th June to express deep appreciation to the artists and Gurus involved in IPAC (Indian Performing Arts Circle) 2023. The event resonated with gratitude, cultural performances, and special acknowledgements. To convey their appreciation, esteemed members of the Singapore Malayalee Association, Mr. Jaya Kumar BBM, Mr. Prem, Mr. Vasudevan T, and Ms. Vidya Unni, were entrusted with the honor of felicitating the IPAC members. They presented



tokens of appreciation to these remarkable individuals who consistently demonstrate exceptional talent, unwavering commitment, and dedication to their respective art forms. The felicitations program profoundly moved the audience, evoking genuine emotions and heartfelt reflections. The recipients were overwhelmed with joy and deep gratitude for the recognition of their invaluable contributions, which served as a powerful source of motivation and pride to further pursue their passions. Their dedicated efforts were acknowledged, reinforcing their sense of cultural identity and fueling their commitment. The program affirmed the significance

of their artistic endeavours, instilling a renewed sense of purpose and inspiring them to embrace their role as guardians of this cherished heritage. The felicitation program marked a significant milestone, bringing together artists, cultural enthusiasts, and community members to celebrate the vibrant spirit of Malayalee culture and the invaluable contributions of the arts exponents. The event was adorned with mesmerising moments, heartfelt speeches, and sincere expressions of gratitude, serving as a poignant reminder of the unifying power of the performing arts and their vital role in preserving cultural heritage.

Narpani Community Carnival 2023

The Narpani Community Carnival 2023, which took place at Downtown East on July 16, 2023, was a resounding success and a true celebration of unity and diversity. SMA was immensely honoured and delighted to participate, presenting our culture and heritage booth along with a captivating cultural performance involving 35 talented performers.

The presence of esteemed guests of honour, including Deputy Prime Minister Mr Heng Swee Keat and Dr Janil Puthcheary, elevated the occasion's grandeur and further emphasised the importance of cherishing cultural heritage and fostering unity within the community.



Welfare Wing

‘Health & Wellness Series’

Dr Vidhya Pillai, Senior Resident Physician in Singapore spoke on the topic “Let’s Talk About Dementia”, which covered the different types, diagnosis, and management of dementia on 30 Jul 2022.

Dr Jasmyn Angon-De Leon, Resident Physician in Singapore spoke on Stroke Awareness on 15 Oct 2022, which covered the causes, signs, symptoms, and management of stroke.

Dr Viknesh Shanmugam, General Practitioner & Medical Director at Medstar Medical Clinic & Surgery spoke on the topic, “It’s a Man’s World” on 26 Nov 2022. The talk highlighted the importance of prostate health and raised awareness on men’s health.

Project Give 2022

SMA was honoured to be a part of SINDA’s Project Give 2022. This annual initiative lends financial and social support to less advantaged Indian families and students during the festive period. Project Give spreads festive joy and encourages the spirit of giving, on top of building sustainable partnerships and strengthening community bonds. As a part of this initiative, SMA showcased different aspects of Malayalee culture through a display booth and stage activities, on 1st October 2022. The SMA booth featured an interactive Athapoo station, where members of the public could make their own athapoo (flower arrangement). Kerala snacks like Unniyappam and Banana Chips were offered and a sharing session on Malayalee festivals, food and attire was also conducted. The SMA Youth Wing put together a series of performances that included Folk Dance and Thiruvaathira kali. SMA also made a small donation to the Project Give movement.



Foreign Domestic Workers Appreciation (FDW)

Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) in Singapore dedicate their efforts behind closed doors, playing an essential role in supporting and caring for our families. Recognizing the significance of their contributions, it is crucial to empower FDWs, ensuring they receive the respect and appreciation they deserve. On 2nd July 2023, the Singapore Malayalee Association organised a heartfelt appreciation session, gathering approximately 25 FDWs who shared their valuable experiences and expressed their needs. The session served as a platform for understanding and solidarity, reaffirming SMA's commitment to supporting FDWs and implementing programs that promote their overall well-being within the Malayalee community and beyond.



Tech Forum

On 31 July 2022, Tech Forum organised a seminar titled “NFT Explained” at SMA hall. The session was well attended by about 34 tech enthusiasts. Mr. Vishnu Vadakkepat was the keynote speaker at the event. Following the keynote address, participants engaged in questions and answers with the speaker.

Varnam 2022

Varnam 2022 was an exclusive art exhibition organised by SMA. It was held from 23rd to 26th December 2022 at the Visual Arts Centre, Singapore. Admission was free. The exhibition, one of SMA’s initiatives to encourage art and culture, provides a platform for artists in the community to showcase their talents.



The 10th edition of SMA’s Varnam (meaning colour in Malayalam) featured 32 artists showcasing paintings and other art forms in various media. The artists were not just from the Malayalee community but from the broader Indian diaspora in Singapore.

Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS) president Mr. K.V. Rao was the guest-of-honour. Award-winning film writer, producer and director Mrs. Shilpa Krishnan inaugurated the show by

lighting the auspicious lamp, surrounded by a traditional Pookalam (flower decoration).

There were also painting and jewellery making demonstrations by artists throughout the 4 days.



Singapore Malayalee Literary Forum (SMLF)

The Singapore Malayalee Literary Forum is a platform that promotes Malayalam language and literature among the Malayalee community in Singapore. It serves as a hub for literary enthusiasts, writers, poets, and readers of Malayalam literature to come together and engage in literary activities.

Book Discussion



Singapore Malayalee Association organised a book discussion on the book, “More Than The Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai”, on 18 February 2023 at the Ang Mo Kio Grassroots Club. This event provided an opportunity to discuss Mr Gopinath Pillai’s book through the lens of his relationship with and belonging to the Malayalee community.

Mrs. Sunu Sivadasan-Ghani, Vice-President of SMA, delivered the introductory address while Mr. Viswa Sadasivan delivered the keynote address. Other distinguished speakers included lawyer Mr. Chandra Mohan Nair, Dr. V P Nair, Mr Jayakumar Mr Rajesh Kumar Gopalakrishnan, Mr. Jayadev Unnithan, Mr. Suresh Nair, Mr. Sreekanth, Mr. Ullas Kumar, Mr. Sathian Pookkuttath, and Mr. Gangadharan. They all narrated specific interactions with Mr Gopinath Pillai that were dear and meaningful to them in some way. His numerous contributions to the Malayalee community were recounted by the many speakers. Mr. John Vater, co-writer, shared his experience of writing this book together with Mr. Gopinath Pillai.

Mr. Prakash Pillai, son of Mr Gopinath Pillai, spoke on his behalf, and shared about how his dad’s Malayalee identity was the prism through which he saw his life, and informed everything he did.



Singapore Malayalee Association is exceedingly grateful for the constant support and guidance we have received from Mr Gopinath Pillai.

"<https://fb.watch/jV6saNvUbg> - Mr Gopinath Pillai's book review event featured in Thaalam Indian Beats

SMLF Session 6 May 2023

The novel 'Jnanabharam' recounts the life story of Kailas Patil, which is intricately intertwined with a book or collection of books. This collection encapsulates all the knowledge about the universe that humanity had grasped in the early 20th century. The narrative takes readers on a journey from the convergence of ideas to a singular book, and from there, delves deeper into the same subject matter, gradually progressing from the superficial to the profound. Simultaneously, the story follows Kailas Patil, who has found stability in his past, and Bhuvan Desai, a person who has exploited the lives of others for his own success in entertainment. As they attain their



showcases the precision and skillful use of language by the author, Santhosh Kumar. It highlights the weight of knowledge and offers a rich reading experience. 'Jnanabharam' is a literary work that transcends the boundaries of time, country, and language, inviting readers to enjoy and engage in discussions about its

profound themes. Divya Arun, took the audience through a critical review of the novel inciting deep appreciation and reflections on the intricate aspects of the writing.

Felicitation Programme

On July 14, 2023, Mr. Soorya Krishnamoorthy, founder of the world's largest cultural society, SOORYA Stage and Film Society visited SMA. His talk was centred around the theme "Uttaram kakkunna Chodyangal," mirroring the title of his recent book. The book encourages young people to ask bold



questions and advocate for justice and fairness. During his address, Krishnamoorthy provided numerous examples, emphasising that the importance of asking questions remains even when answers are elusive. He discussed the questions raised in his book, many of which naturally arise in our minds at different times. Despite the lack of answers, these questions retain their relevance. The session was highly stimulating and motivational, showcasing the inspiring insights of a true artist.



Publications Committee

ONOPAHARAM – Meet The Authors Session



Onopaharam, the annual SMA publication, was released in August 2022 in both print and digital editions. People expressed their appreciation of the Onopaharam which many felt was thoughtfully curated.

‘Meet-The-Authors’ session brought together the various authors of Onopaharam on 8 October 2022 to talk about the articles they enjoyed reading, and to share their experience and motivation behind their own creative contributions.

Vasantham channel covered the session, and the program was shown in "Thaalam", on 20th November 2022.

<https://fb.watch/jV6qLYfjBI> - Onopaharam - Meet the author session.

Quarterly Newsletters

SMA continued to publish the quarterly newsletters last year to inform members of the various activities and programmes. These were circulated both in soft and hard copies to the members.



Ladies Wing /Pioneer Wing

Ladies Wing was honoured to be a part of SINDA's Project Give Initiative held at the Indian Heritage Centre. Ladies Wing helmed the Aththappookkalam station, where members of the public could try their hand on creating their own Pookalam.

On 18 March 2023, the Ladies Wing supported the 'Singapore Malayalees' exhibition organised by the Centre for Singapore Tamil Culture and National Library Board. A display booth with artefacts representing the Malayalee culture was set up, along with an impressive Athapookalam.

On the 4th of June 2023, the Ladies Wing of SMA came together for a delightful and joy-filled gathering. Laughter and camaraderie filled the air as the ladies



enjoyed bonding and creating beautiful memories.

Chenda Class

Ladies Chenda Class is going on at SMA on every Saturday, 10.30am under the tutorship of Sabarinath Thekkath.



Singapore Onam NITE 2023

On 12th AUGUST 2023, 6.30PM

In Collaboration With 

ORGANISED BY  In Association With 

Booking Assistance & Queries  **Whatsapp**
+65 6871 4007

Ticket Booking 

<https://bit.ly/smaonamnite>
Tickets : \$100, \$75, \$45
SISTIC charges apply

Cultural Wing

ONAM VILLAGE 2022

On 28th August 2022, Onam Village kicked off with colourful Pookkalams. Sports events for kids added to the morning cheer at the lovely premises of Naval Base Secondary School, where it has been held for many years.

The guest of honour was Associate Prof. Dr. Md. Faishal Ibrahim, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for MOE, and MSF, and MP for Nee Soon GRC. Several non-Malayalee Indian organisations' leaders were invited to Onam Village, to experience the Malayalee culture and food.

Enchanting musical and dance performances by individuals and groups of all ages enthralled the audience from late morning till late afternoon. A sumptuous Onasadya, which was served on a banana leaf, was widely appreciated by all.

SMA management committee members, including a huge team of volunteers from various organisations, and SMA members, contributed to the success of the event.

Several Singapore Malayalee organisations coming together to celebrate Onam at Onam Village was certainly the highlight of this event. More than a 1000 people participated in the event.

<https://tv.mathrubhumi.com/news/world/singapore-onam-1.142025>



ONAM NITE 2022

SMA's popular annual show, Onam Nite 2022 went 'live' again for the first time since 2019. Held on Sunday, 21st August 2022 for 2 hours 15 minutes from 6.30 pm, it was presented by SMA in collaboration with Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. COVID-19 safety precautions were fully followed for this indoor event. All patrons had to verify their vaccination status at the venue and mask wearing was mandatory.

It was a wonderful night of Malayalam music and dance at the Esplanade Concert Hall. Our own home-grown dance choreographer, Rashmi Pillai started the evening with an ensemble of beautiful dances depicting the legend behind Onam celebrations. It was very well appreciated by the audience. Next, award-winning playback singer Shweta Mohan, alongside prolific playback singer Vidhu Pratap enchanted the whole audience with their songs and excellent showmanship. They were accompanied by well-known guitarist and music director Bennet Roland and his Band. There were lots of positive feedback about the whole event.

<https://www.mewatch.sg/episode/Indian-Beat-S13-E26-319341>



Natakamela

Conceived and organised by the Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA) in 2016, 'Naatakamela' aims to nurture and promote artists from the Singapore Indian community, providing them with an opportunity to uncover their talent in line with SMA's vision of "Deeper community bonding through Art". 'Natakamela' 2023, which was held on February 25th at the Grassroots' Club, featured 4 short dramas with different emotions and forms. Twenty-five dedicated art-lovers from different age groups, including SMA's Youth Wing members participated in 'Naatakamela' 2023. Many



relationship with my peers. It gave me a better understanding of how to analyse a character and act it out. Personally as someone with stage fright it was a challenge to stand in front of such a big audience. Natakamela 2023 was very

were first timers, but months of training helped them to put up a good show and receive the appreciation and applause of the audience.

Basil, a member who took part in Naatakamela shares his experience:

"Naatakamela 2023 was an exciting project to be part of. Getting together on a weekly basis for many months helped me establish better





versatile and I think it was definitely a good platform to provide people the opportunity to showcase their acting skills or to experience what it's like to act.”

The “Hunchback” (Koonan)



The “Hunchback”(Koonan), the artistic solo drama’s journey to its 2000th stage milestone, was a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and the emotional connection it forges with the audience. Through his heartfelt performance and innovative interactive sessions, the performer, Manjulan, captivated viewers and left an indelible mark on their hearts. The celebration of this milestone was not just a reflection of the drama’s longevity but also a reminder of the transformative power of art. The drama will forever be remembered as one of the best artistic performances that moved theatre enthusiasts in Singapore with a new experience

rejuvenating theatre interests. The event, organised by SMA on 20th May 2023, was held at the SIFAS auditorium, with theatre lovers joining in from various sections of the Malayalee community.



One Day Theatre Camp

“Theatre Dreams”, a one day theatre camp by Manjulan was organised by SMA on 21st May 2023 at Singapore Malayalee Association.

Pooram 2023 Appreciation Dinner

On the 27th of May, a day prior to the Singapore Pooram, an event took place in which the great masters of Kerala percussion instruments were honoured. The Singapore Music Academy (SMA) collaborated to pay tribute to the exceptional talents of Padmashri Mattannur Shankaran Kutty Marar, Sri Chottanikara Vijayan Marar, and their esteemed team. This tribute served as a significant prelude to their performance at the Singapore Pooram, where they astounded the audience with their mesmerising rhythms and extraordinary skills.



Sports Wing

SMA's annual badminton tournament was held on 11 February 2023, after a break of three years. 222 players competed in different categories at the Sengkang Sports Hall. The event kicked off with the preliminary rounds at 7.00 am in the morning and culminated with the prize distribution in the evening around 8.00 pm. SMA's team of enthusiastic volunteers kept the event going in high spirits



throughout the day. The event attracted participants from all communities, across all ages, races and gender. Mr. Ramachandran Narayanan, Director & Deputy CIO, National Library Board was the chief guest at the occasion. It was an event that got the appreciation of both the players and spectators.

The event was covered by Vasantham in their Indian Beats Section.



SNM CareLight Senior Care Centre

(Formerly known as CareLight Wellness Centre)

To reach out to seniors living in the vicinity of Bedok Reservoir Road with the objective of providing interventions that would meaningfully enable them to age in place gracefully. This inspiring collaboration is dedicated to uplifting seniors' lives and positively impacting their well-being. Sree Narayana Mission (Singapore) would run the centre given its extensive experience managing multiple Senior Care Centres. SMA Care Ltd would actively support the initiative by engaging with and reaching out to the residents.

To underscore this collaboration, Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") was signed between SCL and SNM on 11 September 2022.

"SNM CareLight Senior Care Centre" would be the new name of the centre at Bedok, which was formerly known as "CareLight Wellness Centre." The new name reflects the focus of the work at the centre, which would be both a Senior Care Centre (SCC) and in future, the running of active ageing programmes as well.



Mr Devendran, CEO of SNM says that "this collaborative project, supported by Ministry of Health, aspires to deliver a comprehensive range of senior care services. Among these are the Maintenance Day Care programme, which aims to maintain and/or improve the general, physical, and social well-being of seniors; and the Dementia Day Care programme, which offers

specialised support for individuals with dementia. Additionally, the centre will provide vital community rehabilitation services, which will assess and treat problems with movement due to disability, trauma or illness, such as learning how to walk again after a stroke”.

SCL will support SNM in the Active Ageing programme which focuses on a) Active Ageing Programmes b) Befriending and Buddying, c) Information & Referrals. These

are in addition to the senior care services provided by SNM, which can be achieved through SMA’s outreach to the community.

The SNM CareLight Senior Care Centre underwent an extensive renovation recently, with state-of-the-art amenities. These modern facilities were thoughtfully designed to cater to the evolving needs of senior citizens, ensuring their comfort and well-being. The revitalised environment will undoubtedly create a nurturing and uplifting atmosphere for the residents.

On 10 June 2023, the members of SMA, SNM and the SNM CareLight Senior Care Centre staff kickstarted the outreach training sessions for residents.

As the President of SMA, Mr Ullas Kumar puts it, “this collaboration exemplifies the power of synergy, compassion, and vision in effecting positive change. It serves as a testament to the indomitable spirit of community organisations and their collective efforts to create a brighter future for the elderly in Singapore”.

SMA is extending a warm invitation to individuals interested in serving the seniors of Singapore as volunteers.



Other Events & Updates

Foreign Esteemed Guests

On 3rd December 2022, SMA welcomed Sri Gopinath Muthukad, who updated the members about the Different Art Centre's (Kerala) activities and progress.

On 20th of February 2023, SMA team met Shri V. Muraleedharan, Union Minister of State for External Affairs & Parliamentary Affairs of India, and updated him about the issues faced by the Singapore Malayalee diaspora in Singapore.

On 11th March 2023, SMA hosted Sri Manjulan, acclaimed stage artist and Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy Award Winner from Kerala who enthralled the audience with an acting workshop. SMA recognised the artist's contributions with a memento as a token of appreciation.

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

The Singapore Malayalee Association conducted a volunteer appreciation evening



on 30th April 2023. This was to recognize and appreciate the various volunteers who had helped with the events in the past year. The event was attended by over 50 volunteers. The program kicked off with a

welcome address by the immediate past president Mr. Prem PS, who thanked the volunteers for their whole hearted support during the past year. Following that, there was an interactive session, where all the volunteers shared their experiences and came forward with suggestions for improvements and other possible activities in the future. The event concluded with a tea reception. The SMA team had put together a video showcasing the efforts of the volunteers for the various activities during the Year.

<https://youtu.be/VHrtvIUK5ns>

SMA Open House

The first Open House session of the year took place on the 9th of July, attracting approximately 30 attendees from both the SMA member and non-member categories. The event proved to be highly successful in showcasing a wide range of initiatives and activities organised by SMA to serve the Malayalee and other



communities in Singapore. During the Open House, participants showed great interest in the various activities organised by SMA, aimed at promoting the community's interests and development across cultural, educational, professional, social, sporting, welfare, and recreational spheres. The attendees appreciated the efforts made by SMA to preserve and propagate Malayalee heritage, culture, and language. They also recognized the importance of strengthening communication within the target audience. The event provided a platform for meaningful discussions, with topics revolving around the significance of preserving cultural heritage, the need for community development, and the promotion of effective communication among community members. Overall, the Open House session received positive feedback and appreciation from the participants for its informative and engaging nature.

Membership Updates

The membership updates indicate a notable increase in membership numbers, with a total of 835 members. The breakdown of member types showcases the diversity within the membership base. The membership drives held in conjunction with festivals have played a significant role in attracting new members.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue leveraging such opportunities and implementing effective strategies to sustain and further enhance membership growth. Regular monitoring of membership trends and proactive engagement with the community will be vital for ongoing success.

Type of Member	July 2023	April 2022	April 2021
Life Members	570	522	511
Honorary Members	3	3	3
Ordinary Members	111	58	51
Associate Members	143	76	69
Associate Life Members	3	-	-
Junior Members	3	1	1
Student Members	2	-	-
Corporate Members	0	2	3
Total	835	662	638



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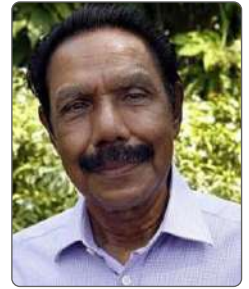
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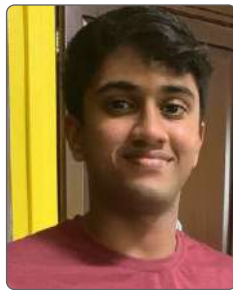
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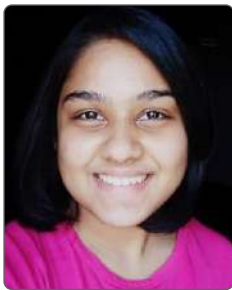
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NATAKAMELA

സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളി അസോസിയേഷൻ, നാടക രംഗം സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ സജീവമാകാനുള്ള പ്രവർത്തനം 2015ഇൽ തുടങ്ങി. അതിനോട് അനുബന്ധിച്ചു നാടകമേളകൾ സംഘടിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. ഈ വർഷം നാടകമേളയോട് അനുബന്ധിച്ചു നടന്ന ചടങ്ങിൽ കഴിഞ്ഞ എല്ലാ നാടകമേളകളിലും പ്രവർത്തിച്ച അംഗങ്ങളെ അനുമോദിച്ചു ഒരു സ്മരണിക സമ്മാനിക്കുകയുണ്ടായി. മലയാളി അസോസിയേഷൻ ചെയ്യുന്ന പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ അംഗങ്ങളും പ്രേക്ഷകരും അനുമോദിക്കുകയുണ്ടായി. ഈ പ്രവർത്തനം എല്ലാ വർഷവും തുടരുവാൻ നാടകരംഗത്തെ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്ന എല്ലാവരുടെയും പിന്തുണ പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കുന്നു.



Ajith Kumar Nair



Akash Vasudevan



Anoop Valsan



Anoo Saharajan



Balan Anil Kumar



Jayakumaran Jayasankar



Praveen Sukumaran



Ragesh P.V



Rajeev Variyar



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Saroorudheen



Sony Chacko



Swapna Koranchath



Vasudevan Thottekatt
Cultural Secretary



“More Than the Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai”

A Keynote Review by Viswa Sadasivan

Why this book is important for me

I have known Mr Gopinath Pillai for almost 40 years now, and over the years our relationship evolved. Pillai started off as a mentor to me, then as a colleague in organisations and on boards, as partners in crime, and more recently as friends. We didn't always agree on things. In fact, there were several instances where we disagreed vehemently. But we were always able to talk it through and, if necessary, agree to disagree. This was possible because we are both faithful to purpose and have an abiding respect for intellectual and emotional honesty. Our celebration of humour and wit helped.



This was why when asked if I could deliver the keynote review of this seminal work by Gopinath Pillai, I said yes, without hesitation. First, it is an honour and privilege because I respect him. Second, the book is by a man who is well placed to narrate the diary of our nation through his varied experiences and

escapades over 65 years. Thirdly, I know that I would enjoy reading the 300 pages of the book!

Three key aspects that capture the man

I would like to start by highlighting three quotations in the book that, for me, capture the author's preoccupation and dilemma that walked with him over the years.

First, in his preface, Mr Pillai said this: "I did sometimes have the worry whether all these engagements might make me a 'Jack of all trades but a master of none'. However, I have balanced this concern by gaining as much knowledge from whatever professional framework I was working in as possible – what you might call an experience-based or insider's knowledge [Page XVI] ... People might ask for your views, but if you are not excelling in your field, they might not take you as seriously....[Page XV]. It's evident that for Pillai, credibility, relevance and being taken seriously in matters that matter are of utmost importance.

The second aspect is what I see as a struggle to balance the somewhat contradicting yet deep persuasions. On the one hand he is a highly logical and rational man, yet he can't seem to avoid the appeal of spontaneity, emotions and even astrology or a "penchant for fatalism". Just before accepting a job offer with Bangkok Bank in Bangkok, he consults an astrologer. Here's how Pillai narrates the experience: "What happens if I decide not to go to Thailand and stay here instead? He gazed at me calmly and answered, 'you will go to jail'. I could not believe it! I took a Cathay Pacific flight to Bangkok in October 1962. About four months after settling in Thailand, I read in The Bangkok Post that a large number of people had been arrested in Singapore as part of Operation Coldstore in February 1963. The Malayan and Singaporean governments, taking approval from the Internal Security Council, had rounded up major leftist activists and put them in jail on the basis that they were communist sympathisers who threatened national security. It was a profound event that shaped the early political trajectory of Singapore...A lot of my friends and former Socialist Club members were detained. While sitting in Bangkok reading the newspaper, I thought back to the astrologer's prediction about my landing in trouble, which I had never taken seriously. The experience was perplexing: how did he know?" [Page 86/87]. Likewise, almost as a motif running through the book, I see Pillai striving to deconflict his latent belief in socialist values and what appears to be his survival instinct to be practical. This is what he shares: "Many of my socialist friends during this transition began to feel I had undergone a transformation – a political mind shift from socialism to capitalism...my reasoning was that a person has obligations after he marries. Looking after my family would be my primary duty now. These were friends I knew well and, to their credit, they tried to empathise with what I was experiencing. Many also held down various jobs and did not see what I was doing as strange. But I think they were perhaps watching to see how far I would stray – how much of a capitalist I would become. Occasionally, snide remarks were made in jest, like 'our friend who is waiting to become a millionaire!" [Page 113]. I

guess this is what it means to be pragmatic!

Third, Pillai is essentially people centered, be it his family, his friends or his comrades. Right through the pages of the book he shares powerful instances of how individuals helped him address tricky situations. People close to him gave him and continue to give him strength and remain at the core of his existence. He says it aptly: “My entire life, I can honestly say that I have been truly blessed by the trust and love of wonderful parents and good friends.” [Page 111.] In the concluding pages he speaks with emotional authenticity and gracious gratitude: “My family, through many turbulent junctures, has always kept me steady. I continue to view my decision to migrate from Malaysia to Singapore as the second best decision of my life; marrying Shyamala was the first! I live with my wife and two daughters in a full, happy household. My son, Prakash, lives not too far away from us. I am also a grandfather blessed with two grandsons – Arjuna and Aditya – both of whom bring me tremendous joy.” [Page 280] It’s clear that even though Pillai has had countless work preoccupations, it was the people close to him who continue to light up his universe!

Priceless chronicle of Singapore’s key turning points

True to form, Pillai has provided priceless nuggets of information on what really happened behind the scenes. I am talking about critical turning points in our nation’s history, especially in the earlier years.

Many of us may not be aware, or be able to fathom, that there was an era when university students held rallies on campus and challenged the rulers in Singapore. Pillai was intimately involved in these activities in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a student he joined the University Socialist Club or USC, best known for its feisty, anti-establishment stand. Pillai became its President. He was a frequent contributor of Fajar – the official publication of the USC. The USC was significant enough for founding Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew to become the legal advisor and aid in the Fajar trial in court in 1954 – the year the ruling PAP was formed. A very interesting event took place in July 1959. Gopinath Pillai wrote an article for Fajar titled: “Kerala - Testing Ground for Democracy”. The opening paragraph read as follows: “Much attention has been recently focused on the state of Kerala. This state first came into the limelight 27 months ago when for the first time in history, a communist party was elected into office. Today, Kerala has again hit the headlines due to the very questionable tactics employed by the opposition to compel the central government to establish Presidential rule.” [Page 61] By the time the article went to print the central government announced the decision to impose Presidential rule in Kerala. Pillai changed the title of his article to: “KERALA – Death-bed of Democracy”.

Singapore’s economic Czar in the early years, Dr Goh Keng Swee established Intraco in 1968 ostensibly to blaze the trail overseas and expand Singapore’s trade. What most people didn’t know is that its remit was to do “unheard of things in far-off places”! Pillai was hired as a General Manager in 1980. Evidently, it was a ‘right of passage’ for the man into the intriguing world of intelligence

collection, foothold battles, pathfinding, deal making and smooth operations. Pillai was like fish in water here as he conducted trade operations in far flung, supposedly rogue nations such as Yemen and Ghaddafi's Libya! It fed into his spirit of adventure, palpable in the passion with which he describes his work in Intraco: "[We] were united in our buccaneer-like spirits...we went into promising, diverse foreign economies to trade; and, if there was something that we wanted, we did the deals to make that possible...if there was a security problem in any country that was seen to be a deal breaker, our group was expected to step in and have a handle on the political situation. Many of the countries we traded with...fell under the Socialist bloc. This included China, whose trade with Singapore was restricted. Trade with other countries, such as South Africa, was restricted as well due to apartheid: Western countries treated it as a pariah. Big countries like America and Britain could release fantastic rules about which countries the international community should trade with, while they could do as they pleased whenever required." [Page 143]

With entrepreneurship flowing in his veins emboldened by a penchant for taking risks, calculated albeit, Pillai started looking at doing business in India when it started opening up from 1991, when Mr Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister. The stars became more aligned in 1994 when Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was chief guest for India's Republic Day celebrations. Prompted by his clairvoyant like instincts, Pillai whispered strategically to the PM. This is how he tells the story: "Once when I was in India, I happened to cross paths with Mr Goh Chok Tong...he shared with me his plans to visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar, and asked if there was anywhere else that I thought he should visit. I suggested that he explore Ahmedabad in Gujarat. The Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time was India's current prime minister, Narendra Modi. To my delight, PM Goh Chok Tong took my advice and boarded a flight to Gujarat...He was impressed with what he saw there. This impromptu trip helped him cement a strong and lasting relationship with Mr Modi. Modi refers to Goh Chok Tong as the 'tall man of Singapore'. It might not be wrong to say this helped lay the foundation for a healthy relationship between our countries as well as a friendship that continues to this day." [Page 161/162]

Enter Gopi the Entrepreneur

Soon enough, Pillai was to profit from the cordial ties between the two countries. The opportunity didn't come to him on a silver platter. He had to fight for it every step of the way with a 'never say die' attitude. He had an enduring faith in India. Together with some close friends Pillai launched Gateway Distriparks Limited in 1994. It was an India-wide network of cold storage that went on to become a successful and highly profitable listed company. Pillai shares his journey with Gateway. It is an intriguing tale of clever deal making and firefighting with stamina and nerves of steel to deal with the constant ups and downs, especially in the early years.

The Accidental Diplomat

In 1990, Gopinath Pillai embarked on what became a 31-year honorary and honorable career with the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He spent the first 15 years as the Non-Resident Ambassador to Iran and concurrently for 7 years as the Non-Resident High Commissioner to Pakistan. He then served as Ambassador-at-Large till 2021. His interest in and knowledge of history and people management skills made him a natural trust builder – the quintessential diplomat!

Extracurricular activities for a “double life”

By this time, reading the book, I was asking myself how it is humanly possible for anyone to juggle so many things and ensure each is done with exacting standards. Then came chapter 21 of the book which listed yet another 5 leadership positions Pillai held from 1977 to the end of 1991. This is his ‘justification’: “On the side, I have...always involved myself in what I like to call ‘extracurricular’ activities – small projects that I found interesting and which, I often joke, helped to keep me out of trouble. These ‘ECAs’ gave me a sort of ‘double life’ as I strove to fulfill the duties of my regular nine-to-five job as ably as I could...when a person is passionate about something, he will find the time to set out and do it.” [Page 219]

In a nutshell these ‘extracurricular’ activities, started with Pillai becoming the President of the National University of Singapore Society – which is the university’s graduate club – from 1977 to 1979. He then served as the first chairman of the largest supermarket chain in the land – NTUC Fairprice – for 10 years from 1983. He was also the chairman of the Hindu Advisory Board and a board member of the Hindu Endowments Board. As an active board member and subsequently chairman of the Advisory Board of the Indian Heritage Centre, Pillai helped persuade the government to underwrite the cost of building the premises which he estimates was around S\$21 million. Pillai describes it as being perhaps “the most important single event from [2015]” for the Indian community in Singapore. In 2004, he was given a task which most wouldn’t consider an ‘extracurricular’ activity – setting up the Institute of South Asian Studies or ISAS as its chairman. Under his stewardship, ISAS organized 4 hugely successful South Asia Diaspora Conventions. Each had about 1,000 distinguished delegates from South Asian countries and Singapore.

Stalwart of the Malayalee Community

Gopinath Pillai’s affinity and, indeed, affection for Indian and especially Malayalee heritage and culture was cultivated when he was a little boy. A couple of years after he was born in Singapore in 1937, he spent 7 years in Kerala with his mother. It was only when he was 9 years old that he returned to Singapore to join his father who went on to publish Singapore’s first Malayalam newspaper. It was called Kerala Bandhu which, literally translated means “Relative of Kerala”. This was to have a bearing on Pillai’s deep involvement with the Singapore Malayalee community years later.

He said this of the Malayalee community in the book: “...the Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA)

started in 1917 as the Kerala Mahajana Sangham, is one of the country's oldest registered associations, and is hailed as the first Malayalee Association outside of India...since its founding, the group has gone out of its way to support the underprivileged and low-income families with a good education." [Page 249]

In keeping with this spirit, in 1998, Pillai helped bring together all Malayalee associations in the land to have a grand Onam Celebration Dinner. Then-DPM Lee Hsien Loong was the chief guest. At the event the "IT-Services Co-operative" was launched as the Malayalee contribution to the Indian community. The aim was to refurbish and upgrade used PCs and emplace them in the homes of families that can't afford them. The programme lasted a few years with more than 2,000 families benefiting from it.

Family Man

By this time, the reader of the book would ask – what about the family? Just as he started the book by talking in some detail about his parents, Pillai ends the book, most aptly, by toasting to the anchor in his life – his family, and his wife, Shyamala, in particular. Given the multitude of engagements and assignments in Pillai's life, it's evident that he would not have had peace of mind – important to a responsible man – if not for his wife taking charge on the home front. He would have envisaged the crucial importance of having the right woman by your side when embarking on an ambitious life journey. Pillai admits that "wooing Shyamala was the first major challenge I had to overcome! I started pursuing her as soon as I set eyes on her". Let's call it 'deterministic romance'. ☺

More than the eye can see

Pillai ends the book with the same question he asked at the start – whether his life made him a jack of all trades but a master of none. Perhaps the answer lies in his own words: "In my time, I have been a teacher, a journalist, a businessman and a diplomat. I have participated and invested in my cultural community. Just as there are more stories I could tell, so too do our explanations lack definitive finality; there are always more angles for looking at life. Life – with family, friends, struggle, accomplishment and community – is more than the eye can see. And it is this vastness, which we struggle to comprehend, that keeps us optimistic, humble and enterprising." [Page 280].

So, for me, Gopinath Pillai is certainly not a 'jack of all trades' or a 'master of none'. The contents of this book provide evidence of his unique ability to coalesce a multitude of trades and traits and gain mastery of the outcome. In the words of former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, "Gopi...you succeed in whatever you take on because you have the passion and you drive it with passion."

This closing address was delivered for the book discussion 'More Than The Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai', organised by the Singapore Malayalee Association at the Grassroots Club on 18 February 2023

Review by John Vater, Co-Author

I would like to begin by thanking all of the speakers for reading the book so attentively and affectionately, and for the manner of insights which they have shared—through their personal friendships and professional partnerships with Mr. Pillai—on his life as well as the various, specific episodes relating to the Malayalee community which they have brightly touched upon from these memoirs.

I am John Vater, co-author of the book. At the two other events which were organised around *More Than The Eye Can See* by the Institute of South Asian Studies, I had the privilege of delivering the introduction and speaking on the arc of Mr. Pillai's life, as well as how it intersected with a broader, national story of Singapore. I must say that it is a pleasure to anchor the discussion this time around—not from any desire to shirk the responsibility of framing a productive conversation among the speakers, but rather, because of the pleasure which I have taken listening to others' memories of Mr. Pillai, from which I have learned a great deal.

I am also grateful to the Singapore Malayalee Association, or SMA, for organising this book discussion and for the opportunity to speak on Mr. Pillai's memoirs through the lens of his relationship with, and belonging to, the Malayalee community.

I happen to be a translator from Hindi, and in preparing my notes on this theme, one word which kept coming to my mind while framing my thoughts for today's discussion was 'apnaapaa'. I came across this word one day, roughly four years ago, while translating a short story from Hindi for a magazine. I imagine many in the audience know some Hindi in addition to Malayalee; several of you probably know the word's meaning already. When I first entered it into the online ShabdKosh dictionary, I found words like 'affinity', 'self-respect', 'oneness', 'intimacy', and 'kinship'. When I searched the old fashioned way by thumbing through the Oxford Hindi-to-English dictionary, I discovered that apnaapaa redirects you to apnaapan, from which you get the same definitions that I previously described.

For a first, I thought Google Translate actually did a better job than these other resources in

translating the word through its slightly clunky, literalistic rendering: “one’s own”. This translation more closely approximated the special resonance that the word had intimated to me: the sense of something, a place or a person, being one’s own. I like the word *apnaapaa*, because it carries a ‘constitutive’ resonance; if something is said to be ‘one’s own’, you could also say it is a part of you, that it belongs to you. An individual can have a feeling of *apnaapa*, or close intimacy, for a community; and a community, likewise, can have a feeling of *apnaapa* when one of its members “does good” and goes on to achieve significant things, as Mr. Pillai has done.

The Malayalee community, I imagine, must be rightfully proud of Mr. Pillai’s achievements, much in the same way that the former ambassador spoke with personal pride about the admirable social work the Malayalee community has performed, especially in its support for the underprivileged.

If I spoke Malayalee, I might have chosen a different word on which to frame my speech. I suppose a readily available equivalent would be the title of the Malayalam newspaper started by Mr. Pillai’s father, K. S. Pillai, ‘Kerala Bandhu’, which is said to be one of the oldest Malayalam newspapers outside of India. In the book, Mr. Pillai translates the title as ‘Relative of Kerala’. Another word in the vicinity of *bandhu* in the Hindi dictionary would include *bandhan*, which carries the idea of being tied or bound to something. Mr. Pillai, throughout his life, had a special bond to Kerala and the Malayalee community, and deep ties to a family whose culture and place of origin profoundly shaped his attitude towards the world.

Mr. Pillai held leadership positions in many Indian and South Asian diaspora-related organisations. Along with the Hindu Advisory Board and Indian Heritage Centre, he prominently lists being a senior advisor to the Singapore Malayalee Association. In the latter part of the book—Chapters 22, 23, and 24—he focuses his attention on the good work he was fortunate to pursue alongside members of these South Asia-related organisations. Together with such contributions, we also structured these chapters to explore how Mr. Pillai relates himself to his South Asian cultural heritage, more broadly. He candidly told me in an interview that he did not see his Singaporean and Malayalee identities as being mutually exclusive. I may, at this juncture, go a step further in the context of today’s talk to conjecture that, to Mr. Pillai, these identities were not only not mutually exclusive, but were also, perhaps, mutually

constitutive of one another. In the same way that being Malayalee is part of Mr. Pillai's identity, the Malayalees, through their involvement in the SMA and other organisations, have constituted important threads of the warp and weft of civil society in Singapore.

Mr. Pillai recounts a specific episode in Chapter 22, in which the Indian communities had collectively honoured Mr. Lee Kuan Yew in the early 1990s to pay tribute to his legacy of multiracialism and meritocracy. The book they gifted to him on this occasion comprised articles composed in multiple Indian languages; the book was titled *A Place in the Sun*. This poetically evocative title spotlighted the ideals which Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had established in Singapore, and which Mr. Pillai also genuinely holds dear—that everyone should have their seat at the table, and the belief that all communities, if they are prepared to lift up their sleeves and do the hard work, should find their place in the sun. Mr. Pillai states at the beginning of his section “Social Work with the Community” in Chapter 23 (a section on the Malayalee community) that he had always approached the Indian community from these twin perspectives, stressing that both he and the “community” had directly benefited from them.

More Than The Eye Can See is Mr. Pillai's personal story, but it could also be called a Malayalee story, as it traces the history of his extended family in Kerala and the growth of his nuclear family in Singapore. Indeed, there is much in this book that will resonate with the Malayalee readership. He documents in his first chapter, for instance, how the Malayalees had come to Singapore since the beginning of the 20th century on the lookout for jobs, and, in fact, cites research from *Onapaharam*, a publication of the Singapore Malayalee Association, to detail the professional capacities in which they first arrived—as teachers, plantation workers as well as clerks at the British Naval Base in Seletar.

Later in the book, when Mr. Pillai reflects on the legacy of that early wave of Indian immigrants, one quality regarding his parents' generation which seemed to stick out in his mind was their desire to embark on better lives, and their willingness to work hard to seize the bright future which they had envisioned for themselves. This attitude opened a path for Malayalees to thrive, such that today many members of the Malayalee community hold prominent positions in Singapore society.

He highlights as early as his first chapter the sense of home away from home which the

Malayalees had created through their shared sense of cultural community: the elder generation spoke in Malayalam, which comforted them and which they also passed on to their children. He recalls how the community helped one another to find jobs and start families, whereby Malayalee men would go back to India to get married and return with fresh brides. Indeed, this was how Mr. M. R. Menon—the principal of the commercial school at YMCA on Stamford Road—came to arrange a good match for Mr. Pillai’s father with his mother, Malathi Pillai.

It is important to note, however, that Mr. Pillai’s descriptions of the Malayalee diaspora serve as more than just historic backdrop. One could even say that the community’s customs propelled the plot of the book and introduced a significant, pivotal turn in the trajectory of Mr. Pillai’s life story. A year before World War Two broke out, his parents had decided it was time for Mr. Pillai and his sister to visit his mother’s parents in Kerala. Mr. Pillai shared with me how Malayalees have a matriarchal society: “customarily, Malayalee Hindu women return to the parents home to give birth.” The family trip with his mother to her ancestral home in Kerala once Mr. Pillai had grown sufficiently old enough to travel, thus acted as an important catalyst which, inadvertently, led to his, his mother’s, and sister’s separation from his father and two uncles for nearly seven years during the Japanese Occupation.

From the age of three to ten, Mr. Pillai thus spent his boyhood years in the paddy fields of his grandfather’s estate in Engandiyoor; his grandfather was a local landowner then. These early years proved to be a formative experience for him. Despite the tragedy of the war unfolding abroad, he reported that being in nature, surrounded by animals, felt “indulgent, like a holiday”. He related to me how thrilled he was with the tutor situation, who would come to the house to teach, instead of him being required to attend formal schooling (as in other contexts he might normally have done). He would jest that this was one of the perks of growing up in India!

Before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr. Pillai reported going back to Kerala often to visit relatives; he describes his family members, in Chapter 4, as being considerably impressed with his Malayalam as a boy, which he made personal efforts to master, given his father’s language philosophy which emphasised on the importance of learning one’s mother tongue. Another line I excavated from old files and notebooks, which he shared with me

offhandedly one day, was “There is nothing like going back to your roots”. Indeed, the final chapters of the book, he speaks of the special way he has of relating to his ancestral tradition, often seen through the poignant stories he shares on the lessons he learned from both his mother and father.

While drafting the book with him, I could tell his boyhood experiences in Kerala continued to hold a grip on his imagination. Though he only alluded to certain cultural items in passing when first outlining such episodes, I often prodded him to say more. Maybe because I am an outsider to the community, he was—out of consideration towards me, I think—a bit diffident, initially, about going into too much detail. But one of the benefits of having a co-author is having someone else to pick up on interesting aspects of stories. I enjoyed watching Mr. Pillai perk up with delight when I requested him to speak more on pambunkav, the snake sanctuaries or snake gardens in Kerala, or the role of snake worship in Hinduism. Other cultural items I was interested in included a description of the padipura, or gatehouse, through which “the paddy fields stretched as far as [his] young and keen eyes could see.” Or the story he was so fond of telling about the ritual called mashi, part of the practice of manthravadan, which he compared to ‘black magic’, and through which—with the help of “two mediums”—he and his family were able to ascertain the wellbeing of his father and two uncles in Singapore.

Belonging, apnaapa, is tied to a place; but it also permeates the language of one’s community. The book went through multiple rounds of revision, in which Mr. Pillai and I reviewed drafts of the text together. The family was also closely involved in the editing process. From my background as a translator, I found many of the changes we had made intriguing. In the episode with the mediums, when Mr. Pillai’s sister reported that she could see an image of her father appear from the ink, or mashi, in her hand, he had originally told me that she had exclaimed, “Papa is here! Papa is here!” As we went over the text, however, Mr. Pillai wanted to change the word to Achan. Similarly, we later described the mediums wearing veshti, rather than simply sarongs. And as we worked with the family in the final editing stages, we decided to change the way his two uncles are referred to in the text—‘uncle Unni’, ‘uncle Rameshan’—to Unnimama or Rameshamama to hold onto the cultural texture.

In certain episodes, Mr. Pillai spoke on the Malayalee community’s qualities more directly. The Singapore Malayalee Association had invited Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loon as Chief

Guest for the Onam Celebration Dinner in 1991. In pondering with the community over what could be done to honour his attendance, Mr. Pillai states in the book, “I felt that, as Keralites had a keen interest in education, we should do something in modern education and training.” This led to the initiative to set up an IT Services Cooperative to put computers into the homes of the lower income group in Singapore Indian community, since in the 1990s computers were becoming increasingly important at school and in the workplace. The Cooperative was thoughtfully established to prevent such groups from falling further behind.

The importance that the Malayalees place on education appears in various contexts in the book. Indeed, during one interview, Mr. Pillai had remarked on how Keralites spent a lot of time ensuring that their children were better educated than they were. More compelling to me still were the myriad ways in which Mr. Pillai thought about the role of education. This could be another presentation in itself; but one line that always struck me, which was inspired by his youngest uncle (who, in the 1930s/40s, had left university to join the Communist Youth Movement in Kerala) was: “A degree is not as important as an education.” Mr. Pillai defines education in this context as, “learning that which would be of value to others”.

In his adolescence, Mr. Pillai had felt a strong sense of moral obligation to those who were struggling; education, from a socio-economic angle, was one way of extending practical support. From my readings about SMA, and the programmes that it has been involved in, such as raising \$500,000 in bursary for needy students through NUS, this value of education—not just via its intrinsic worth in the arts and culture – but also in leveling the playing field, is also shared amongst the Malayalees. Mr. Pillai adds in the book that many Singapore leaders invited to previous Onam Celebration Dinners had empowered the less fortunate.

Of Onam, Mr. Pillai separately explained, “it is the most important festival amongst Malayalees, and tells a little bit about them, in that they emphasise on non-religious aspects.” This gloss perhaps reflected his own rationalistic, secular values and prioritisation of openness and inclusivity. In the book, he states, “all communities are welcome to participate. Although it is a Hindu Festival, the Muslims, Syrian Christians, and Roman Catholics often attend. We have sought to bring a similar spirit to Singapore by inviting our Chinese and Malay friends.” I am happy to say that I witnessed this inclusive spirit firsthand when I was invited to celebrate my first Onam with Mr. Pillai’s family; it was also the first time I heard “Achan, Achan”

being used when everyone was being called to sit at the dining table!

It is thus with gratitude and a nod towards a similar generous spirit of inclusivity that I thank the Singapore Malayalee Association for inviting me to come and speak as a friend today on the book and Mr. Pillai's life. I greatly look forward to your questions in the Q and A.

John Vater is a writer and translator. He is co-translator of the short story collection *The Play of Dolls: Stories*, by Hindi author Kunwar Narain, and co-author of *More Than The Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai*. You can follow updates on his writing and read his blog articles on his new website johnvater.com, which will be available for viewing in early March 2023.



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KP Uma

ഉൾക്കാഴ്ചയുടെ കാണ്ഡമായി ഒരു ജീവിതപുസ്തകം

ഗോപിനാഥ് പിള്ളയുടെ ‘കാഴ്ചയ്ക്കപ്പുറം’ എന്ന ആത്മകഥ ഇരുപതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ തെക്കൻ ഏഷ്യാ ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ തന്നെ ഒരു നേർക്കാഴ്ചയാണ് വരച്ചു കാട്ടുന്നത്. സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ ജനിച്ച, രണ്ടാം ലോകയുദ്ധകാലത്ത് ജപ്പാൻ അധിനിവേശത്തിനു തൊട്ടു മുൻപായി ഇന്ത്യയിലേയ്ക്ക് അമ്മയോടും സഹോദരിയോടുമൊപ്പം വന്ന്, യുദ്ധാനന്തര സിംഗപ്പൂരിലേയ്ക്ക് വീണ്ടും പഠിച്ചു നട്ട ഒരു ബാല്യം. വ്യക്തിജീവിതത്തിലെ സംഘർഷങ്ങളെ തരണം ചെയ്ത് ജീവിതത്തിലെ പടികൾ ഓരോന്നായി ചവിട്ടിക്കയറിയ കഥ അദ്ദേഹം പറയുമ്പോൾ അനവാരണം ചെയ്യപ്പെടുന്നത് തകർന്നു തരിപ്പണമായ ഒരവസ്ഥയിൽ നിന്നും വികസിതരാജ്യങ്ങളുടെ പട്ടികയിലേയ്ക്ക് കയറിയ സിംഗപ്പൂരിന്റെ ചരിത്രം കൂടിയാണ്.

സക്രിയമായി നയിച്ച സ്വന്തം ജീവിതത്തെ തിരിഞ്ഞു നോക്കാനും ആ ജീവിതത്തെ അതിന്റെ സാമൂഹികപരിസരത്തിൽ അടയാളപ്പെടുത്താനുമുള്ള ശ്രമമാണ് ഈ കൃതി. ആത്മകഥ എന്നത് സമൂഹജീവി എന്ന നിലയിലുള്ള സ്വന്തം കഥയുടെ ആഖ്യാനമാണെങ്കിൽ ഒരൊന്നാന്തരം കഥപറച്ചിലുകാരനാണ് ഇദ്ദേഹം. ചാൾസ് ഡിക്കൻസിന്റെ ഡേവിഡ് കോപ്പർഫീൽഡ് തന്റെ കഥ തുടങ്ങുന്നതു പോലെ എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ടാണ് ഗോപിനാഥ് പിള്ള തന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിലേയ്ക്കുള്ള വാതിൽ തുറക്കുന്നത്. അകത്തേയ്ക്കു കടന്ന് സംഭവബഹുലമായ നിരവധി നിമിഷങ്ങൾക്ക് സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിക്കുമ്പോൾ നമ്മൾ തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നു, ഈ കഥയിലെ നായകൻ മറ്റൊരാളല്ല, അതിന്റെ കർത്താവു തന്നെ എന്ന്.

റെനിസന്റെ യൂലീസിസിനെപ്പോലെ ചെന്നിടത്തെല്ലാം ചരിത്രം സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്ന, അവിടത്തെ ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാകുന്ന ഒരു മനുഷ്യന്റെ ജീവിതമാണ് മുന്നിൽ തുറന്നിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഓരോ പെയ്ജിലും എന്റെ രാജ്യം എന്റെ രാജ്യം എന്ന് ആവേശത്തോടെ സിംഗപ്പൂരിനെക്കുറിച്ച് ഊറ്റം കൊള്ളുമ്പോഴും ഉള്ളിൽ ആഴത്തിൽ പടർത്തിയ മലയാളി വേരുകൾ. മറുരാജ്യങ്ങളിലെ ജീവിതക്കമ്പളത്തിൽ ഇഴചേർത്തിരിക്കുന്ന കേരളപ്പഴമകൾ, മിത്തുകൾ, ഓർമ്മകൾ, സ്നേഹങ്ങൾ. സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളികൾക്ക് ചിരപരിചിതനായ, നമ്മുടെ അഭിമാനമായ ഗോപിനാഥ് പിള്ള ഈ പുസ്തകത്തിലൂടെ നമ്മുടെ സാധാരണ സിംഗപ്പൂർ കാഴ്ചകൾക്കുമപ്പുറമുള്ള മറ്റൊരു മാനമാണ് നമുക്ക് കാണിച്ചു തരുന്നത്.

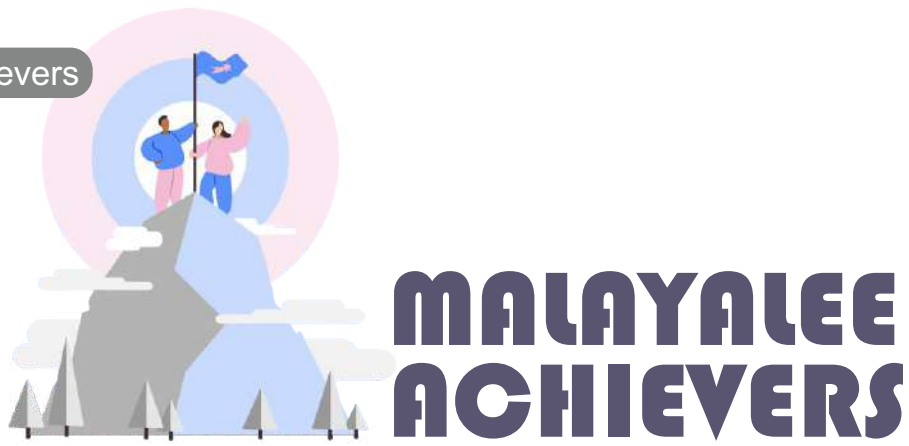
മൊഴിമാറ്റം

എനിക്കൊരു ചേട്ടനുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ പേരും ഗോപിനാഥ് എന്നുതന്നെയായിരുന്നു. മെനിഞ്ചെറ്റിസ് മൂലം ചേട്ടൻ മരിച്ചതിനു തൊട്ടു

പിന്നാലെയായിരുന്നു എന്റെ ജനനം. മരിക്കുമ്പോൾ ചേട്ടൻ ഒരു വയസ്സേ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുള്ളൂ. രോഗപീഡകൾ കൊണ്ട് വലയുന്ന മകന്റെ ദുരിതം കാണാനാകാതെ അച്ഛനമ്മമാർ ഇതിന് എന്തെങ്കിലും ഒരു പ്രതിവിധി ഉണ്ടോ എന്നറിയാനായി ഒരു ജ്യോത്സ്യനെ സന്ദർശിക്കാൻ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. (മനുഷ്യബുദ്ധിയ്ക്ക് അതീതമായ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ അഭിമുഖീകരിക്കേണ്ടി വരുമ്പോൾ ഒരു ജ്യോത്സ്യന്റെ സഹായം തേടുന്നത് ഹിന്ദു കുടുംബങ്ങളിൽ സാധാരണമാണ്.) ചേട്ടൻ ഒരിക്കലും ഈ രോഗാവസ്ഥയെ തരണം ചെയ്തില്ലാ എന്ന് ജ്യോത്സ്യൻ പ്രവചിച്ചു. ജനനമരണങ്ങളുടെ അനേകം ചക്രങ്ങളിലൂടെ കടന്നു വന്ന പുണ്യാത്മാവായ അദ്ദേഹം ഞങ്ങളുടെ കുടുംബത്തോടൊപ്പം ഒരല്പകാലം മാത്രം തങ്ങാൻ വിധിക്കപ്പെട്ടവനാണ്. എന്നാൽ നിങ്ങൾക്ക് വൈകാതെ മറ്റൊരു പുത്രൻ ജനിക്കും ജ്യോത്സ്യൻ അമ്മയെ സമാശ്വസിപ്പിച്ചു. ‘ദീർഘായുഷ്‌മാനായ ആ പുത്രൻ വാർദ്ധക്യത്തിൽ നിങ്ങൾക്ക് താങ്ങും തണലുമായിരിക്കും.’

ജ്യോത്സ്യൻ പറഞ്ഞത് കൃത്യമായി. ചേട്ടൻ മരിച്ച് ഏതാണ്ട് ഒരു കൊല്ലത്തിനുള്ളിൽ അച്ഛനമ്മമാരുടെ പ്രതീക്ഷകളുടെ ഭാരവും പേറി ഞാൻ പിറന്നു. ഒരു സുഖപ്രസവമായിരുന്നു അതെന്ന് അവർ പറഞ്ഞ് പിന്നീട് കേട്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്.

തൃശ്ശൂർ സ്വദേശിനി. കമ്മ്യൂണിസ്റ്റ് നേതാവായിരുന്ന സി ജനാർദ്ദനന്റെയും പ്രൊഫ കെ പി കമലത്തിന്റെയും രണ്ട് മക്കളിൽ ഇളയവളായി ജനനം. ശ്രീ കേരള വർമ്മ കോളേജ്, തൃശ്ശൂർ, ഗവണ്മെന്റ് വിക്റ്റോറിയ കോളേജ് പാലക്കാട് എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം. കലാമണ്ഡലം ക്ഷേമാവതിയുടെ പ്രഥമ ശിഷ്യകളിലൊരാളാണ്. ഏകദേശം 20 വർഷക്കാലം അധ്യാപികയായി ജോലി ചെയ്തു. ഏറെ മലയാള സിനിമകൾക്ക് സബ്‌ടൈറ്റിൽ ചെയ്തു. സാജൻ കുര്യന്റെ ഡാൻസിങ് ഡെത്ത് എന്ന സിനിമയിലെ ചെറുവേഷത്തിലൂടെ സിനിമയിൽ തുടക്കമിട്ടു. തമാശ എന്ന സിനിമയിൽ നായകന്റെ അമ്മ കഥാപാത്രത്തെ അവതരിപ്പിച്ച ഉമ പാലക്കാട് സ്വദേശിയും അഭിഭാഷകനുമായ ഭർത്താവ് ഗോപിനാഥുമൊപ്പം പാലക്കാട്ടെ തേക്കുറിശ്ശിയിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നു. മലയാളം മുവി & മ്യൂസിക് ഡാറ്റാബേസിന്റെ സ്ഥാപകയും ഡാറ്റാ വിഭാഗം റിസേർച്ചറുമാണ്. സഹോദരി സന്ധ്യ വേണുഗോപാൽ.



Deepa Madan

(un)focused: Then Now Beyond – A Solo Exhibition of Paintings by Deepa Madan

When Singapore-based Malayali artist Deepa Madan's passion for art and self expression travelled across shores to her roots in Kerala, the result was a celebration of colours on canvas in her hometown. Deepa presented her maiden solo exhibition titled: “(unfocused): Then Now Beyond” at the Museum of Kerala History, Ernakulam, Kerala from 28 – 30 May 2023. It was inaugurated by Hon. Justice Devan Ramachandran, Judge, High Court of Kerala.

The exhibition saw a collection of over fifty paintings in acrylic, oil and mixed media in Deepa's signature impressionistic style and offered a closer look at her artistic journey which in itself is an impressionistic representation of her personal journey over time and space starting from her cultural roots and spreading across countries and cultures. Curated and broadly classified into three segments, viewers were treated to Nature paintings, which depicted direct experiences of 'tangible exteriors' by the artist. These were followed by Cultural paintings which were impressions of 'intangible exteriors' portraying



influences of culture, history and humanity on the surroundings and people. Finally, viewers got to appreciate Abstract paintings which depicted the 'inner world', and how the tangible as well as intangible physical surroundings meld and change people's perspective.

As an Education Officer with the Ministry of Education in Singapore, teaching keeps Deepa going but painting makes her feel alive and complete. She has been exhibiting her artworks as part of the Varnam team (SMA) in Singapore since 2014. Deepa believes that art can make a difference in the lives of people. In 2018, her artworks found worthy homes and the proceeds were donated towards the Kerala flood relief drive held in Singapore. Her work is also part of a permanent collection, 'Mosaic@75' at the High Commission of India in Singapore.

Harichandra Jayashankar



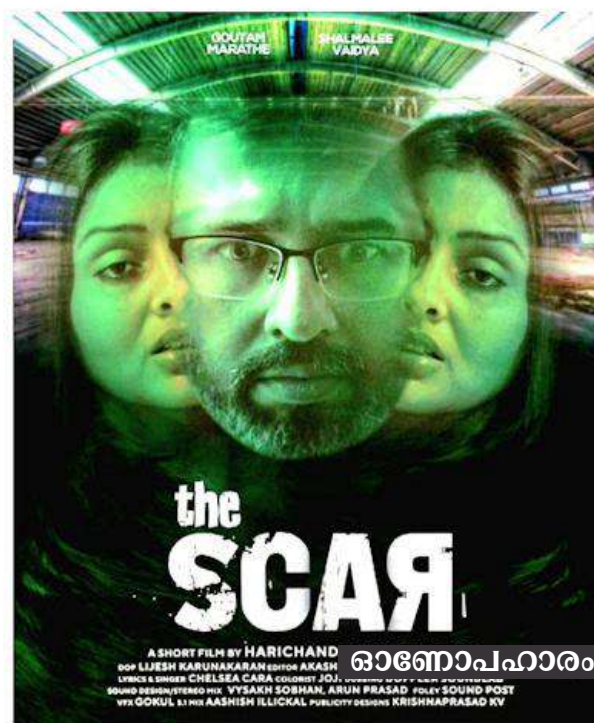
"The Scar" is a short film shot entirely in Singapore.

The Scar is a psychological movie about a lady going through PTSD. The movie reflects her struggles to cope with non-duality, and provides a real insight into how she struggles to handle post-traumatic depression.

The film was written and directed by Harichandra Jayashankar. Lijesh Karunakaran handled the photography while Akash Varghese did the editing. Nihil Jimmy composed the music. Raj Vimal Dev was the technical adviser. Shalmalee Vaidya, Gautam Marathe, Master Ruhaan, Deepa Madan, Viral Patel, Shanu Jos played the key roles in the movie.

To date, the film was won 10 awards at various film festivals including one for Shalmalee Vaidya for the best actress.

On being asked what his inspiration for making the movie was he said it was all about exploring a new creative field. He also mentioned that the film was completed in approximately a year from start to finish. According to Jay, the most challenging part was getting all actors together for shooting. However, he agrees that it was a very fulfilling experience because of the positive feedback the film received from the audience and at festivals. Jay recalls with gratitude the support of his family & friends.



Rajith Mohan

Rajith Mohan, an acclaimed director, scriptwriter, and actor, has established himself as a prominent figure among the Indie film makers in Singapore. With his passion, creative vision, and dedication to story telling, he has left an indelible mark on the industry. With each new project, he continues to sharpen his talent thereby elevating the movie experience for his viewers.

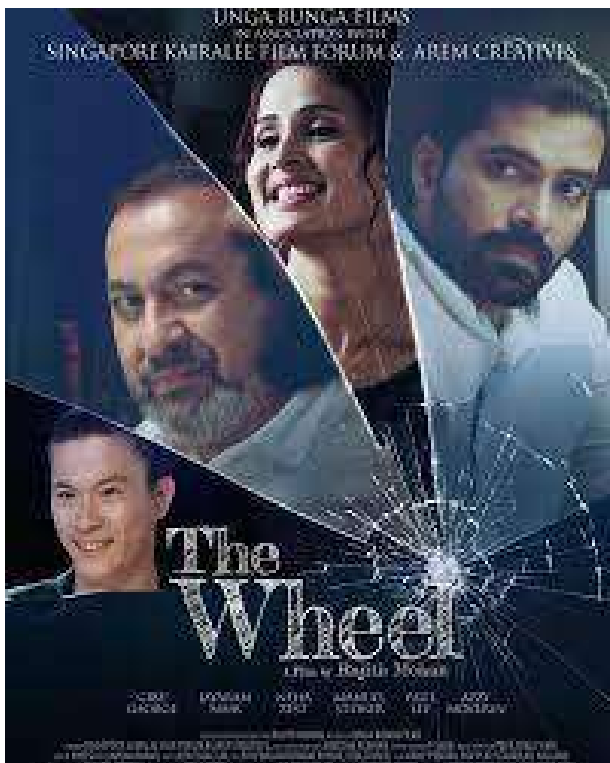


Rajith Mohan was born and raised in India, where he developed a deep love for cinema from a young age. Growing up in a country renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse storytelling traditions, he was exposed to a myriad of influences that nurtured his artistic inclinations. Drawn to the power of storytelling, he embarked on a path that would eventually lead him to become a renowned filmmaker.

In 2005, Rajith Mohan directed his first short film, "Aadya," marking the beginning of his filmmaking journey. This early work allowed him to experiment with different storytelling techniques and develop his unique artistic voice. He continued to explore his creative instincts

and directed two more short films in the same year: "Awareness in a Bottle" and "Nidra." These projects provided him with valuable experience and insights into the intricacies of visual storytelling.

In 2021, Rajith Mohan served as an Associate Director for the Singapore Malayalam short film, "Akale." Working alongside a talented team to lent his expertise to the project was a valuable learning experience for him. This collaborative endeavor allowed him to expand his knowledge and skillset in the dynamic world of filmmaking. It served as a significant stepping stone, propelling him closer to his ultimate aspiration of creating acclaimed films and breathing life into his artistic visions.



In 2021, Rajith scripted and directed "The Wheel". Crafted with meticulous attention to detail, the film showcased his exceptional storytelling abilities and resonated with audiences. Released in 2022, after completing successful international film festival runs, "The Wheel" garnered critical acclaim and received numerous awards, solidifying Rajith Mohan's position as a talented and visionary filmmaker.

Building on the triumph of "The Wheel", Rajith Mohan partnered with DreamCatchers and Zee TV in Singapore to make a feature film. In 2022, he directed and served as the screenwriter for "Dominoes," a compelling English-Hindi film. With his distinct artistic flair and ability to connect with viewers on a profound level, the film garnered critical acclaim and further cemented his status as a multifaceted filmmaker.

Rajith Mohan's artistic contributions extend beyond his work in film. His involvement as the Honorary Secretary at Singapore Kairalee Kala Nilayam and as a lifetime member of Singapore Malayalee Association, showcases his commitment to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Singapore. By actively engaging in the cultural scene and supporting artistic endeavors, he is trying to make an impact on the cultural landscape of the country.

Rajith Mohan's artistic journey is fueled by his deep passion for storytelling. He possesses exceptional directorial skills and a unique ability to forge a profound connection with audiences. With every project he undertakes, he fearlessly pushes the boundaries, constantly seeking new avenues of artistic expression. This relentless pursuit of creativity allows him to leave a positive impact on the industry. From his humble beginnings with early short films to his impressive screenplay debut and subsequent ventures into feature films, Rajith Mohan's diverse body of work serves as an inspiration to aspiring filmmakers and artists alike.

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INTERVIEW

in conversations with **SUJITH SIVARAM**

Dr Methil Devika

Dr Methil Devika is an Indian classical dancer and academic who is currently pursuing a Post Doctoral Fellowship at ISRO's Indian Institute of Space Sciences and Technologies on an arts- integrated-advance-science project ideated by her. A staunch proponent of the dance form Mohiniyattam, she stands apart because of how she brings interesting perspectives into the vocabulary of classical dance. A recipient of two national awards (Ustad Bismillah Yuva Puraskar for Mohiniyattam 2007 and the Devadasi Award from the Minister of Orissa in 2010) and two Kerala state honours (Kshetrakala Academy

Award 2020 and the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Award 2011), she has been granted the Kerala Chief minister's Nava Kerala Post Doctoral Fellowship, 2023 for conducting research on 'Temple Terrain as a New Performance Space for the Woman Dancer: A Study on How the Modern Woman Reinvents her Art in Esoteric Spaces'. Her archival film Sarpatatwam was voted into the Oscar award contention list in 2018.

Dr Devika performed at Singapore's Esplanade Theatres on 25 June 2023 for the Raga Indian Performing Arts Convention 2023. In collaboration with Apsaras Arts Dance Company, she presented Anaavaran, a Mohiniyattam repertoire ranging from the abstract to representational with esoteric and familiar approaches.



IN CONVERSATION:

Good morning, Madam: It was such an enriching experience to watch you perform here in Singapore. Thank you. Was this your first performance in Singapore? What is your impression about the arts scene here?

Good morning. No, this was not my first time in Singapore. I've performed at the Esplanade theatre before. I know that in Singapore the art fraternity is vibrant with great cross-cultural work done by artists like Aravinth Kumaraswamy. I also know a lot of artists in Singapore personally, and they are people who are doing great work in their genres.

Talking about the future of art in general, do you see a lot of upcoming professionals in the respective fields? While the Indian diaspora is known to invest heavily in classical dance training for their children, I am not sure if we see many of them turning into professionals. What does it take to be a professional dancer?

In the past, a majority of Malayali organisations abroad never gave traditional dance or music concerts as much importance, in comparison to extravagant popular shows they invested in. A lot of that is changing now. I am glad that many organisations now invite artists who have spent their lives working with a particular art form entirely and who have created a corpus within that art form, to perform.

My advice to parents would be to showcase to their children, works by creative artists and to have them attend lecture demonstrations and workshops so that they get to experience the profoundness of the art forms. Children who are exposed to these kinds of platforms and artists do pursue the art forms very seriously. They get to know the narrative of the creative process too.

Classical dance training is also systematic and scientific, and it requires years of training, just like education. The learning commences in your early childhood and teens. As you progress into your twenties, you are also ruminating about the art while continuing to learn. In your thirties, you begin creating your own art based on your learning. In the forties, you tend to seek freedom of self- expression, trying to extend or merge boundaries. When you move into your fifties, you prefer to be minimalistic in your art and in your sixties, you no longer have the need to impress an audience, taking the art to a different dimension. It is thus important to expose students to artists who have become reputed solely by virtue of their field of practice and contribution.

It's really interesting to hear you share this view. I can certainly draw a parallel with the perspectives you shared in your recent interview with Pravasi Express; especially your comments on the journey of a dancer and the performance over the years being almost like an autobiography of the artist. May I ask whether there has been a favourite character or story that has satiated you more than the others in all these years as a dancer? Or does it change from time to time?

It changes from time to time because we tend to outgrow what we think at a particular point of time. But that's the great thing about the art, even if you outgrow your views, you can revisit them because it's frozen in your art. Your impressions change. Knowledge itself is always changing. As much as you say knowledge is truth, actually it is not. Your perception of knowledge keeps changing as you age, as you grow, as you see many people and as the environment changes, as truth itself changes. Art is a reflection of reality, of society, albeit manifested as a little unreal, mystical fiction or fantasy and the changes in you or the society tend to get reflected in your art as well. Hence it is very important to preserve one's creative works from the past, which is reflective of the life and times, the thought process, the knowledge or lack of it at that point in time and serves as a valuable historical reference too.

Every work of mine, I enjoy, because essentially it is created with a lot of thought. Every character I create, I enjoy, because it has evolved through self-critiquing. I am both the dancer and the audience. Sometimes I wish we were directed by other dancers too. However, in our fraternity such productions are few and far-fetched. An artist could at times get into a monotonous mode of performance creation, which can be avoided if you have another great creator directing you.

I have particularly enjoyed doing the role of Indra and the conversation between Indra and Ahalya. I have also enjoyed my role as Vrittasura and as Ganga. The conversation between Indra and Ahalya is interestingly portrayed in the Valmiki Ramayanam. The plot opens a lot of possibilities for abhinaya in the conversation. Rather than stories, what I like doing is taking a moment in a story or an incident from a story and expanding it. That gives me a lot of scope. In dance, usually stories are enacted in the same pace that they are read. When you take a moment from the story and expand it over a couple of minutes you can really get into the realm of possibilities of the characters involved. You can give them character shades, tweak their behaviour according to the wishful world of a narrator. For example, if I were to do a Nayika, I would decide everything from her age to her walk, to her interest in general things. Even if I may not enact all that, it should be there essentially in my mind. We have a script, and we have

a subscript also. The script is what the narrative gives you, the subscript is what you do when you start acting; when you start creating the character and when you bring about your own perspectives of the character.

Dance has so many categories and it is not mere entertainment. In Mohiniyattam, you will find ten different performers having different approaches. As for myself, I have varied approaches to my performances at different points in time, space, and audience. You cannot categorise a performance into one whole as there are so many possibilities of the art form, depending on the time, space and the audience and that is what makes it truly enjoyable.

That is indeed a revelation! I'm sure that over different phases in your career you have been inspired by various Gurus and other senior artists. Who has been most influential in your career? Could you share with us some of your defining experiences/learning with this person that you think the audience should know of.

First and foremost, my first guru, Kalaimamani S Natarajan of Melattur, Thanjavur. He has influenced me greatly, albeit unknowingly, as it is something that becomes ingrained in you because you have learnt from him as a child. He was an engineer in Dubai. He was the upholder of Bhagavata Mela Nataka Sampradayam of Melattur, Thanjavur which is of the nature of ritualistic dance drama with the main deity being Narasimha.



I am indeed blessed to be a part of his lineage, as his first student. Learning from him in his small flat in Dubai in front of the Narasimha idol, I had no real gauge of his greatness. This became clear to me while doing my post-graduation in dance, where we had a whole chapter dedicated to him. He holds a prominent place in trance studies. For him, art was very ritualistic, very esoteric and a direct communication or communion with the Lord. He was not keen to propagate the art form beyond Melattur and did not believe in its entertainment value. I have learnt from him to surrender to the art and the supreme creator without worrying about opportunities.

The next influence was Dr. Saju George, my PhD mentor. He is a Christian priest. He did his PhD on Shaiva Sidhantham and is himself, a beautiful Bharatanatyam dancer. He taught me the importance of restraint in communication and the art of not talking about a particular thing unless asked about it specifically. He taught how to exercise discretion and to allow my craft to do the talking.

From my parents I learnt the importance of silence and perseverance. From my peers, I learnt the importance of protecting my fraternity. I am influenced by many people around me. I watch everything very keenly because one never knows when they may find a place in my work.

Thank you for sharing that, Ma'am. I'm sure like me, our readers are also keen to know you as a person as much as a dancer. So, would you kindly tell us a bit about yourself, your favourite childhood memories, food, music, pastimes, destinations, authors? How would your closest friends describe you as a person?

My closest friends describe me as being very mischievous. They also know that I have mastered the art of dodging. Friends call me affectionate and transparent. My students have a lot of "bhayabakthi". If there is anything they want to say, they will just say "Chechi", and the rest I am supposed to guess or extract from them. I am very grateful for whatever I have, especially my family support, my son, and my art. To create work is not easy. You can always replicate work and keep doing what you have done, but to have these bouts of creativity on a regular basis where you keep churning out new pieces – that, I think is a great blessing from my Gurus, ancestors and parents. Honesty with the people who nurture you and give you knowledge is very important, and it must even prevail over fear out of respect.

Food - I am a quintessential foodie, but I am also careful about what I eat. I fast once a while because apart from its health benefits, it is a spiritual experience.

Pastime - I love reading our epics and scriptures and also indulge in some easy reads. My all-time favourite is One Hundred Years of Solitude, and my recent favourite is Milan Kundera's "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting."

Destinations- India, South Africa and Europe are beautiful. Cape Town and Tuscany are my favourite.

Interests- My personal interest is architecture. I occasionally paint, play sudoku, and compose music for my dance.

Thank you for your valuable time. On behalf of all our readers and the Singapore Malayalee Association, here's wishing you all the best and a very happy Onam. On a final note, please tell us about your favourite Onam memory and leave an Onam message for our readers.

When I was in Dubai, our vacations there sometimes coincided with the Onam celebrations in August. For me, therefore, Kerala was always about Onam. Onam celebration was always in Alathoor, my hometown in Palakkad. Our neighbours used to get together, and we played together for several days. So for me, Onam was all about play and I recall all the indigenous games that we used to indulge in, like Kuttium Kolum, for example. I think we have to renew all that. Playing is a very important aspect of life; it is a great form of human interaction. With play, there are many things that one can learn, like tolerance and harmony. It is getting into another person's space much more freely and with warm invitation and acceptance.

Edited By: Deepa Madan

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ഓണോപഹാരം

Kapila Venu

Kapila Venu is a practitioner of koodiyattam – one of the oldest living theatre traditions of the world, from Kerala, India. She is a disciple of the legendary maestro Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar and renowned exponents Guru G Venu and Guru Usha Nangiar . She has been travelling around the world performing, teaching, and giving workshops on koodiyattam for over two decades now.

She has studied with renowned Japanese avant-garde dancer Min Tanaka and has performed in two of his choreographies – Rite of the Forest (–2005) and Thottangal (–2007). She has also had long-standing collaborations with internationally acclaimed

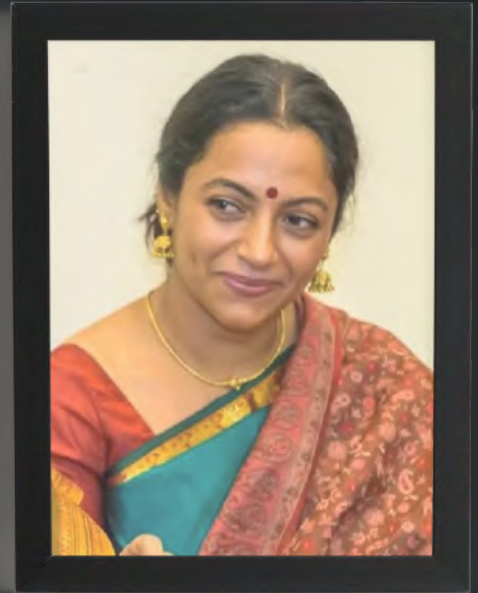
artistes and scholars such as Dr. Eberhard Fischer, Peter Oskarson and Wally Cardona.

She is a guest faculty at the National School of Drama, New Delhi and a Master Teacher at the Intercultural Theatre Institute, Singapore.

A film on the life and work of Kapila Venu titled ‘Kapila’, directed by Sanju Surendran won the National Award for the best film on culture at the 62nd National Film Awards from the Government of India, 2014.

Kapila has been awarded the highest honour for young artistes from the Govt. of India – Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, Kumar Gandharva Samman from the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh and the Sanskriti Award from the Sanskriti Pratisthan.

Kapila performed at Singapore’s Esplanade Theatres on 25 June 2023 for the Raga Indian Performing Arts Convention 2023.



Good morning Madam, it was such an enthralling experience watching you perform the Mahishasura Vadham , last week in Singapore . In that short span of time, we could see you emoting and enacting the various characters involved bringing out the vast potential of the art from in storytelling. As a new creation for IPAC, were you satisfied with the outcome? Can you tell us about the genesis of a new piece, the process, the time frame, the various elements involved etc.?



I definitely think the experience of bringing Devi Mahathmyam to IPAC at Esplanade, Singapore was worthwhile & fulfilling. Although I have been visiting Singapore to teach, this is only my second performance there. I do believe that Singapore has a diverse audience, and I am indeed happy to have been able perform for them.

Talking about the creation of Mahishasura Vadham, it started during Covid, when my musicians & I embarked on this project to stay engaged and in good spirits. That's when I had the opportunity to create a performance for an online platform called Milap from UK. The story of Mahishasura Vadham, is quite a well-known story but always when you adapt it to the language and detailed approach of Koodiyattam, it opens up the plausibility of diving deeper into the narrative. Koodiyattam is all about freezing moments and extending it to look at the details. We were able to bring in a lot of intricacies into the narrative including some interesting musical elements like Panchavadyam to give it an elevated, transcended vibe. Devi Maathmyam and Devi Bhagavatham are extensive texts with tremendous scope for performing. Thus, we went on to create a four-day long series of performances on Mahishasura Vadham & related stories from these texts. It is still a work in progress, and I expect the series to get bigger. What we performed in Singapore was an extract; unfortunately, we were not able to include the Panchavadyam element for the performance there.

Thank you, Ma'am. I remember reading your comments about how Koodiyattam requires one to "know and watch" & the need to learn to appreciate it. Do you think as a community there is something we could all do to make Koodiyattam as popular as Bharathnatyam or Mohiniyattam, thereby contributing to its sustenance for posterity.

I don't believe that popularity is something that will contribute to sustenance for posterity of an Art in its best possible form. Popularity is not something many of us aspire for because Koodiyattam is an art form which is very similar to genres like Dhurpad which is in a sense a little bit niche and requires an effort from the audience to appreciate it. So, appreciating Koodiyattam should as much be a practice as is performing it. Koodiyattam is very nuanced and has a certain depth and intensity which needs to be maintained. I fear that it might get diluted if popularised. What we need to do is generate heightened interest through educating and sensitizing the audience towards the intricacies of the art form. Creating ideal spaces to present the art form in its authenticity could be another way i.e. presenting carefully curated

performances, providing the audience with adequate information before hand, conducting lecture demonstrations and workshops. By doing so, we slowly create a culture of appreciation, which will ensure the art survives the test of time.

Thank you, fully understand that Ma'am. I am not sure if the restrictions based on caste for performing in temples still exist to date. Would you agree that this has also restricted the progress of the art form and its proliferation into the hearts of Malayalees at large. It would be interesting to know what your respected Guru's views were on this issue & of course, yours too.

My initial thoughts on this were to make it a secular space where both well trained performers as well as audience from any community could come together to appreciate and enjoy the art. However, it was later that I realized how complicated and sensitive this issue was for the traditional practitioners who are still practicing the art in the temples as part of a ritual. They do feel insecure about their family rights and name being under threat to the extent that it could result in an identity crisis for them. This was something very difficult to contest logically and therefore I began to refrain from commenting on it. Its my view that this change should occur when practitioners from traditional families themselves feel the openness to accept people from other communities into their spaces.

My Guru was a very traditional and innocent maestro who was not affected much by the happenings in the outside world. He was born and brought up in a very orthodox family. To him temple rituals were different from performances and training. So, while he taught very generously, he upheld the temple rituals sanctimoniously as well. It was a very practical arrangement; one that resonated well with other masters from the community too.

I am sure your Guru Padmabhushan Sri Ammanur Madhava Chakyar was a significant influence on your career as a Koodiyattam artist. I am sure our readers both young and old, are keen to hear some stories about your learning experiences with him, things that no one else would be able to tell us, about him; like walking back with the cows from the field, that you had shared in another interview.

When I look back, some of the best years of my life, was when I was living next door to Ammanur Ashan. For one, he was a genius, a fantastic, mesmerizing, performer with a unique combination of qualities like deep intensity, light eyes and a beautiful physical appearance.

He was an amazing teacher with a great sense of aesthetics. He even made some of his own

costumes like the uthareeyam. He was also a very simple, uncomplicated person. A living example of Mindfulness; he was always totally engrossed in the moment. He followed a diligent routine of waking up early and visiting the temple after a dip in the pond. He had a favorite cow which he tended to dearly daily. His practice of the art stemmed from his staunch sense of Dharma & Devotion was the main emotion. We can only



imagine the beauty of that life, now a days. He was unfazed by awards and accolades; he treated everyone alike, celebrities or not! As a teacher, he was very generous and non-discriminatory. What I remember so fondly of him is how he used to indulge in story telling after classes; talking to us about legends, great actors, funny experiences from his family etc.

Thank you so much so for sharing these interesting episodes with us Ma'am. Our readers would be equally curious to know about Kapila Venu as a person, the mother, the daughter, the wife etc. Tell us about your favorite things Madam, your favorite character that you like performing, your favorite food, your favorite destination, your favorite pastimes, your son- how does he react seeing on you stage?

I love to read, write, watch good cinema, and listen to music. I recently watched a great film Court directed by Chaithanya Tamhane and am eagerly waiting to watch his other film- The Disciple. My preference is for such films that unravel slowly. I am also into protecting the environment through tree planting, conservation & animal rights do engage in related activities as time permits.

My son is 8 years old now and growing up seeing a lot of art around him. He is currently also learning Kalaripayattu. He is very supportive of my practice and performance. My husband is a photographer and as you might know both my parents are artists.

I love food and am not particularly finicky about it. I enjoy trying out different cuisines like the Malay and Chinese food in Singapore. One thing I particularly love is the Annadanam in the temples in Singapore.

Having spend a lot of time studying in Japan, I feel like half my soul belongs there. Similarly, I

have spend a lot of time in Sweden and love being there as well. I really look forward to traveling to countries like Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam where I have not had the opportunity to visit yet.

Thank you for your valuable time, Ma'am. On behalf of all our readers and the Singapore Malayalee Association, here's wishing you all the best and a Very Happy Onam. Please tell us about your favorite Onam memory and leave an Onam message for our readers.

Onam is very important for us as a family. We have celebrated Onam very traditionally with Pookalam on all days, the rituals of making and praying to Thrikkakarappan on the Onam day, making of traditional offerings like the Ada etc. Thus, it is very special family bonding time for me. It is celebrated very differently in my husbands' family in Kasargode, where they celebrate it for the entire month. I would like to conclude by wishing everyone a Happy Onam. Let us delve into the particularities of the celebrations in our homes and try to get as much information as possible from our elders; that I think would be worthy pursuit for our young. Happy Onam.

Mr. Venu Rajamony

Venu Rajamony is an Indian diplomat and historian who belongs to the Indian Foreign Service. On 17 September 2021, he assumed the post of Officer on Special Duty, External Cooperation (with the rank of Chief Secretary) in the Government of Kerala.



Hello sir, it's indeed a pleasure to be in conversation with you. Thank you for the opportunity.

Thank you. I am very happy to give this interview to the Singapore Malayalee Association.

Let's start off with your current assignment as the officer on special duty in charge of the external cooperation for the government of Kerala. What is your mission and how can organizations like ours, the Singapore Malayalee Association help you in your mission?

My mandate is clearly described in the Government order by which I was appointed in Sept 2021. It essentially involves connecting Kerala to the world in every aspect; brining the best of the world to Kerala. My job is to interact with the Ministry of External Affairs and various foreign embassies based in Chennai, Bengaluru etc. and the Indian embassies in the other countries to see what the best practices in the world are and how they can be brought to Kerala.

An organisation like the Singapore Malayalee Association, can help a lot and has been helping me a lot by connecting me and the Government of Kerala to the malayalees in Singapore, who are well educated, competent and talented & highly professional. They imbibe in themselves the best qualities of Singapore and India. They can help by understanding the Singapore community, its strengths and needs & also by looking at some of the best things in Singapore with a view of brining them to Kerala. This could mean a mix of investment, trade, knowledge, expertise- either individual or collective. They could also see

and advise how Kerala could fit into Singapore's priorities like Green Finance, for example. Another area of interest would be Singapore's expertise in Global integration and its efficiency of doing things.

Even if we can achieve any of the above in small doses, that would be great. A prominent member of the community Mr. Sreekanth has been helping construction and other manufacturing companies in Kerala by exposing them to Global Best Practices, linking them up with government organizations in Singapore like BCA to emulate Singapore's model of Skill development etc. I also know that many of the community members invest in Kerala. I was able to assist with the issue of Malayalam being taught in Singapore schools by linking up the relevant departments through the Indian High Commission. The simplest and shortest way would be to promote tourism. If every Malayalee in Singapore could influence at least one of his non-malayalee friend to travel to Kerala that would mean a lot. We also look to learning from Singapore's success in tourism.

So, these are some of the ways in which we could collaborate for mutual benefit.

Than you sir. You have spent a lot of time overseas and in your recent role interacting with Malayalees in different countries. Do you agree that it is a challenge for these communities to preserve their Malayalee identity. Could you share some instances of exemplary efforts that you have seen in the direction?

It is not easy to preserve the Malayalee identity, growing up in foreign countries, where the language is not used on a daily basis. But I have to say that I have been impressed by Malayalees, worldwide. They come together to celebrate Onam upholding the spirit of oneness and unity.

Parents and the community at large should with perseverance and persistence try to uphold the Malayalee identity. The larger the community, it creates a natural propensity to learn Malayalam. Also, brining one's family to Kerala regularly and exposing them to the culture and traditions will surely help in upholding the identity.

I cannot think of a single exemplary effort but organisations like SMA are doing very well in this regard. There is also the Kerala Government's Malayalam Mission, which is very good initiative. The other way of promoting the Malayalee identity would be providing exposure for artists or experts in various fields from Kerala to overseas audiences like Singapore, not just the Malayalees but Singapore community at large.



Thank you sir. The common thing that binds all of us is our mother tongue. Or is it? How important is the language and its knowledge itself in being able to identity as a Malayalee &/or relate to one?

It is crucial that the mother tongue binds us & the language is very important. But, it should be an inclusive concept as in if there are people who are not conversant in Malayalam, they should still be able to access Kerala through English or other languages. So, the lack of knowledge of Malayalam, should not limit any one from being able to identify themselves as a Malayalee.



Thank you sir . Your family itself. Is an excellent example of cultural integration. Could you kindly share the secrets of maintaining dual identities and being comfortable with both?

Haha, all I can say is that there is no magic formula. Ours is also Work in Progress. Maintaining multiple identities is not easy. My wife comes from Darjeeling & her mother tongue is Nepali. We met in University in Delhi, where everyone shares a cosmopolitan culture. My children were born in Hongkong and Delhi respectively, they studied in multiple international schools; so they are all Global Citizens in a way. It is difficult to confine them to one identity. But, they are aware of their Malayalee connection and do come to Kerala very often. My wife, of course, has a much longer association with Kerala, including us having got married in Kochi.




Thank you sir, that is indeed interesting. I am sure our readers would love to know more of you as a person. Looking back at your beginnings in Thiruvananthapuram and later in Kochi, what were some of the strongest influences on you that underlines your Malayalee identity ?

Well, the strongest influences on me are growing up in Trivandrum, visiting my native place in Mavelikara, celebrating festivals like Onam in the traditional way with Athapoo, Oonjal, Songs, great food, dances, Onakoadi etc. Understanding the story or the legend behind Onam and taking pride in knowing Kerala was indeed a paradise, a dream that we carry with us into the future; the Kerala of our dreams that we want to create and must collectively work for. The

richness of the Malayalam language its literature, poetry, songs, have all had a strong influence on me. Growing up in Trivandrum and being exposed to the best of kerala as part of various celebrations organised by the Government, has created a strong passion for Kerala in me, which has continued through my life, wherever I have been.

Let me also add that my parents, siblings, extended family and my friends have also had a significant influence on me, since childhood. So also, all the educational institutions that I have studied in , first in Trivandrum and later in Kochi, have also influenced me like The Maharajas college in Ernakulam, one of the oldest and prestigious institutions.



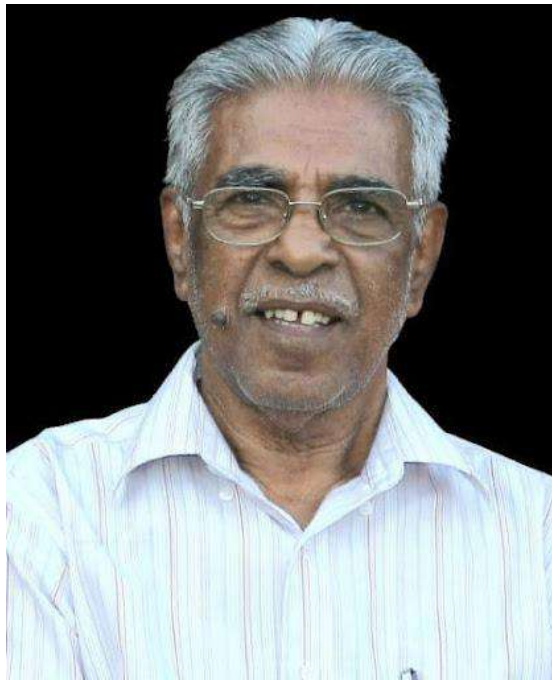
Thank you. I am sure you have spent many Onams and our traditional festivals away from home in various countries. What did you miss the most?

Well, sometimes Onam is celebrated with much greater passion outside of Kerala. I was in Dubai for 3 years where I had the opportunity to take part in extensive Onam celebrations like nowhere else in the world. Nowadays, except in Trivandrum where the government organises festivities related to Onam, in most other parts the Onam celebrations are confined to the homes of nuclear families. There too, people have started moving to buying the Onasadhya. In countries like Dubai, Singapore etc when the Onam celebrations happen, communities gather in great strength with their families and celebrates with gusto. When you are away from home your passion for home increases and this is something, we must nurture in Keralites, wherever they are.

It has been wonderful talking to you and I wish all the members, their families and the organisers all the best for Onam, Happy Onam. Never let the spirit of Onam down, we are a multicultural plural society, and we will always remain so. We must strive to ensure that Kerala remains a place where pluralism, tolerance, freedom of speech and expression and alternative thinking flourishes and we take this spirit to all parts of our country India and the world.

It has been such an interesting conversation and on behalf of all our readers let me thank you and wish you and your family a Happy Onam.

Balakrishna Pillay



If there was a ceremony to pay tribute to the pioneers of Singapore, I would wish we could do a tribute to the many brave malayalees who arrived in Singapore overcoming so many hurdles and hardships to make a mark in their adopted country Singapore. One amongst them, I would wish to have in the list would be my own dad K.Balakrishna Pillay or more fondly called Balan Pillay by his friends and those close to him. Also better known as proprietor of Vinoth store.

Those who know him, would remember this very quiet person who was a man of few words but loud on his courage and honesty. Not many could make a name for themselves and be remembered like him. Even my identity is with the tag "Balan Pillay's son". It's a title that I wish to carry proudly. He was however called away early this year and dearly missed. It was still another accomplishment for him to live till the ripe old age of 95 with his family around him.

Hailing from his hometown Mayanaad (kollam), he came to Singapore in 1952 via a passenger and cargo ship from Tamil Nadu. He had then already secured a good job at a PWD office in Mayyanad but he still didn't want to miss the opportunity to make it big in

this promised land called Singapore. When he heard the news that Singapore was about to tighten its immigration rules then, he didn't waste much time and quickly embarked on the journey to Tamil Nadu via train where the ship was to sail from. It was a solo journey that many would have dread. He had to endure 3 weeks or more on the rough seas and then to arrive and live in a total strange place. It was perhaps his first travel even out of Kerala.

In Singapore, he managed to join up with other malayalees who had arrived here earlier. He initially worked as a painter at the dockyard in Sembawang under the British Navy. It was a short stint before he passed some test to be appointed as a clerk managing warehouse stores at the dockyard itself. He probably got his business acumen while handling the stores and accounting. He was well respected by his friends being always the honest and trustworthy person he is that one can rely on to provide a helping hand whenever its needed.



It was in 1960 that he decided that he had to start a family and made his way back to his hometown where he got married soon after. He returned to Singapore and had his wife Retnamma join him in Singapore a bit later.

He had on parallel try out a few businesses but they failed but his entrepreneur spirit never left him one bit. Perhaps it only fueled him to succeed.

In 1976, Balan Pillay started a provision store under the banner Vinoth store with the help from his dear friend K Unnithan. It was here that he didn't look back and went ahead to grow his business. His name and the business name almost became synonymous to the extent of people started addressing him as Mr Vinoth. He couldn't be contended with

just being a provision shop owner and kept to the evolving environment by upgrading his business to a minimart. He kept reminding his children to be brave and stand up against wrong doings. We had observed many occasions and incidents where he stood up for his rights and never stooped low to anyone.

He had always wanted to open more outlets but his health didn't allow him to fulfil that dream.

Even in his last days he would suddenly brighten up with a sudden energy and mention about starting a new business.

Perhaps we all can take a cue from him in his famous quote "to step forward with confidence and courage. It will never fail you". Pranam to our brave pioneers.

Ramesh s/o Balakrishna Pillay

**Singapore Malayalee Association
pays homage to our dear members who left for
their heavenly abodes during the last year.**



Marthandhan Velayudhan
30/12/22



Lloyd George Fernandez.
09/10/2022

Mr Lloyd served the Association as an executive committee member, treasurer and acted in the Malayalam dramas produced by SKA. He was a quiet and unassuming person whose unflinching support for the Association was exemplary.

In loving memory of



Renjit Sreedharan

1961 - 2023

Keshavan Raveendran



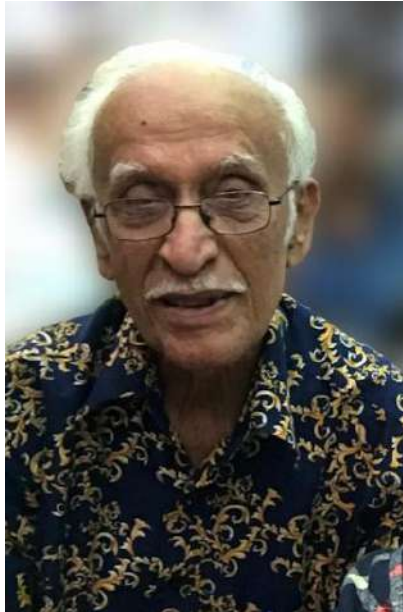
1948ൽ, 18ാം വയസ്സിൽ, ഉപജീവനം തേടി, ഇന്ത്യയിൽ നിന്നും സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ വന്നു. അദ്ദേഹം ബ്രിട്ടീഷ് ആർമിയിൽ (British Army) ആയിരുന്നു. 1956-ൽ Govt ന്റെ കീഴിലുള്ള PWD ൽ ചേർന്നു. 60 ആം വയസ്സിൽ റിട്ടയർ ചെയ്യുന്നതുവരെ അവിടെ തുടർന്നു. അതിനിടയിൽ President ന്റെ കയ്യിൽ നിന്നും Efficiency Medal ഉം Long Service Medal ഉം കരസ്ഥമാക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

PWDയിൽനിന്നും വിരമിച്ച ശേഷം, MRTCയിൽ ജോലിചെയ്തതും, ആദ്യത്തെ NS Line പൂർത്തിയാക്കുന്നതിൽ ഒരു പങ്കു വഹിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. പിന്നീട് കുറച്ചുനാൾ ഒരു Private Construction Company യിൽ ജോലി നോക്കി. 2022-ൽ, 91ാം വയസ്സിൽ മരണമടഞ്ഞു.

കോമളം രവീന്ദ്രൻ

M A Sathar

21/01/23



ശ്രീ. M A സത്താർ സിംഗപ്പൂർ മലയാളികളുടെ ഇടയിൽ ഏറെ സുപരിചിതനായ ഒരു വ്യക്തിത്വമായിരുന്നു. കലാകാരൻ, കലാപ്രേമി, പ്രൊഡ്യൂസർ, പബ്ലിഷർ, എഡിറ്റർ, Programme Organiser, പത്ര പ്രവർത്തകൻ തുടങ്ങി നിരവധി മേഖലകളിൽ അദ്ദേഹം തന്റെ വൈദഗ്ദ്ധ്യം തെളിയിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

'ഓണോപഹാരം' മാഗസിൻ അദ്ദേഹമായിരുന്നു വളരെക്കാലം നടത്തിയിരുന്നത്.

MAS (മാസ്സ്) എന്ന പേരിൽ അദ്ദേഹം ഒരു പ്രൊഡക്ഷൻ കമ്പനി നടത്തിയിരുന്നു. അദ്ദേഹം മരിക്കുവോളം ആ കമ്പനി നിലനിന്നിരുന്നു. MAS എന്നാൽ M A Sathar എന്നാണ്.

അദ്ദേഹമാണ് ആദ്യമായി ഗാനഗന്ധർവ്വൻ ശ്രീ. കെ. ജെ. യേശുദാസിനെ സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ, അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ഷോ യിൽ പാടാനായി കൊണ്ടുവന്നത്. MAS Production Company യിലൂടെയാണ് അത് ചെയ്തത്. ആദ്യം 1970 കളിൽ Victoria Theatre ലും ഒടുവിൽ 1980 കളിൽ ഹാർബർ ഫ്രണ്ടിലെ World Trade Centre ലെ Theatre ലും ഒക്കെയായി MAS production വഴി അദ്ദേഹം ഒരുപാട് Cultural Show കൾ ചെയ്തിരുന്നു..

അദ്ദേഹം നിരവധി നാടകങ്ങൾ പ്രൊഡ്യൂസ് ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്, സംവിധാനം ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്, അഭിനയിച്ചിട്ടുമുണ്ട്. അതിൽ പ്രധാനമായിട്ടുള്ളത് ചരിത്രപരമായ കഥ 'അനാർക്കലി', 'പ്രേമയാചകി' ഒക്കെ ആണ്.

വി. സുരേന്ദ്രനാഥ്, സിവിൾ പീറ്റർ എന്നിവർ പ്രസിഡന്റായിരുന്ന കാലത്ത് അദ്ദേഹം മലയാളി

അസോസിയേഷൻ കമ്മറ്റിയിൽ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു. Cultural Secretary ആയും മറ്റും അദ്ദേഹം ചിരകാലം സേവനം അനുഷ്ഠിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. പിൽക്കാലത്തും മിക്ക കമ്മറ്റികളിലും ശ്രീ. വലലനോടൊപ്പം അദ്ദേഹവും ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു.

സുപ്രസിദ്ധ കഥാപ്രാസംഗികൻ ശ്രീ. കൊല്ലം ബാബുവിനും അദ്ദേഹം സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ ഒരുപാട് അവസരങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കി കൊടുത്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. കെടാമംഗലം സദാനന്ദൻ, സാംബശിവൻ, റംലാ ബീഗം, കെ. കെ. വാദ്യാർ, തുടങ്ങി ഒരുപാട് കലാകാരരെ അദ്ദേഹം സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ കൊണ്ടുവന്ന് പരിപാടികൾ അവതരിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

'കേരള ബന്ധു' അല്ലെങ്കിൽ 'മലേഷ്യ മലയാളി' എന്ന പത്രവും അദ്ദേഹവും കൂടി ചേർന്നാണ് നടത്തിയിരുന്നത്. ധാരാളം മലയാളികൾ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്ന അന്നത്തെക്കാലത്ത്, സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ വളരെ ജനസമ്മിതി നേടിയ ഒരു പത്രമായിരുന്നു അത്.

മലയാളി സമൂഹത്തിൽ അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് നല്ല സ്വാധീനമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു.

എൻ. സി. കട്ടേൽ, ശ്രീ. എം. കെ. ഭാസി, ശ്രീ. വലലൻ, തുടങ്ങി സിംഗപ്പൂരിലെ പ്രസിദ്ധ എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ ചങ്ങാത്തവും അദ്ദേഹത്തിനുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ശ്രീ. എം. കെ. ഭാസിയും ശ്രീ. വലലനുമായി ചേർന്ന് 'പുലരി' എന്ന ഒരു പത്രമാസികയും കുറെക്കാലം നടത്തിയിരുന്നു.

മരിക്കുവോളവും അദ്ദേഹം മലയാളി അസോസിയേഷനും ആൾക്കാരും ഒക്കെയായി വളരെ നല്ല ബന്ധം വച്ചുപുലർത്തിയിരുന്നു.

ചുരുക്കത്തിൽ, മലയാളികളേയും മലയാളത്തിനേയും ഒക്കെ വളരെ സ്നേഹിച്ചിരുന്ന ഒരു നല്ല മനുഷ്യനായിരുന്നു ശ്രീ M A സത്താർ.

(ശ്രീ M.M. Dollah യുമായി നടത്തിയ അഭിമുഖ സംഭാഷണത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള പ്രസക്ത ഭാഗങ്ങൾ.)



Rajagopal PV

വേരുകൾ

പുറത്ത് ആരോ ചുമയ്ക്കുന്ന ശബ്ദം കേട്ടാണ് ഉണ്ണി മുകളിലെ മുറിയുടെ ജനൽ തുറന്ന് നോക്കിയത്. ചുമക്ക് കൂട്ടായി ‘ആരുല്ലെ ഇബടെ’ എന്ന ചോദ്യവും കേട്ടപ്പോൾ രാത്രി ഉറങ്ങാൻ കിടന്ന അതേ വേഷത്തിൽ കോണി പടികൾ ഇറങ്ങി ഉണ്ണി താഴെ വന്നു. മരത്തിൽ പണിഞ്ഞ പഴയ വാതിലിന്റെ സാക്ഷ്യം നീക്കി തുറക്കുന്നത് തന്നെ ഒരു കൗതുകമായി അയാളുടെ ഉള്ളിൽ നിറഞ്ഞു.

വാതിൽ തുറന്ന് നോക്കിയപ്പോൾ പുറത്താരെയും കണ്ടില്ല. മെല്ലെ പൂമുഖത്തേക്കിറങ്ങി ചാരുപടിയിൽ പിടിച്ച് നാലുവശവും വെറുതെ ഒന്ന് നോക്കി. സൂര്യകിരണങ്ങൾ വരാന്തയിൽ കളം വരക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങിയിരിക്കുന്നു.. പെട്ടെന്ന് അടുക്കളയുടെ പിറകിൽ നിന്ന് എന്തോ ഒരു ഞരക്കം കേട്ട് തിരിഞ്ഞു നോക്കിയപ്പോൾ ഒരു വൃദ്ധൻ താഴെ കവുങ്ങിൻ തോട്ടത്തിൽ നിന്നും പിടിച്ചു കയറുന്നുണ്ടായിരുന്നു .

അയാൾ കുറച്ച് ദൂരം മുന്നോട്ട് വേച്ച് വേച്ച് പൂമുഖം വരെ വന്ന് നെറ്റത്ത് കൈ വച്ച് ഉണ്ണിയേ കുറേ നേരം ഉറ്റു നോക്കി.

കട്ടിയുള്ള നറച്ച മീശ . താടിരോമങ്ങൾ അലക്ഷ്യമായി വളർന്ന് വല്ലാതെ ദൈന്യത തോന്നിക്കുന്ന ഒരു രൂപമായിരുന്നു ആ മനുഷ്യന്റെത്. ഉണ്ണി ആ രൂപത്തെ തന്റെ കൃതികളിൽ പരതി.

‘ആരാ ഞള് ? ഞ് മനസ്സിലായില്ല. എന്തേ വന്നത്?’ വൃദ്ധൻ ചാരുപടി പിടിച്ച് മെല്ലെ ഇറയത്തെ മണ്ണിൽ കുത്തിച്ചിരുന്നു . മുണ്ടിന്റെ കോന്തലയിൽ നിന്ന് വെറിലയെടുത്ത് നൂറും പൊകലോം ചേർത്ത് വായ്ക്കുകത്തേക്ക് തിരുകി വെച്ചു. എന്നിട്ട് ഉണ്ണിയെ ഒന്നുടെ

നോക്കി പറഞ്ഞു. 'ന്റെ പേര് താമി. ഞാൻ ബടെ മേലോടത്ത ന്യാ താമസം. ഇന്നലെ നേരം മോന്ത്യായപ്പോ പെരേലെ പെണ്ണുങ്ങ് പരേണ് കേട്ടു കീഴേപ്പാട്ട് വീട്ടിൽ വെളിച്ചം കാണുണ്ട് . പുറത്ത് ന് ആരോ വന്നി ' ന് ഓറ്റോളക്ക് ഒരു സംശയം. ആരാന്ന് നോക്കാൻ വന്നതാ കുട്ടേ. ന്റെ ചോരോ നീരും കൊറെ വീണ പറമ്പല്ലേ. ഇബടെ ആരോ കണ്ടില്ലാച്ചപ്പോൾ തോട്ടത്തിൽ കുരടക്ക വല്ലോം കിട്ടോന്ന് നോക്കി ഇറങ്ങി. കിട്ടി ഒന്നു രണ്ടെണ്ണം . എന്താ കുട്ടേ ഒന്നിനും കൊള്ളാത്ത അടക്ക. എന്തു ചെയ്യാനാ ഒന്നിനും ഒരു ജീവനില്ലാണ്ടായി'. വൃദ്ധന്റെ ആ വാക്കുകൾ ഉണ്ണിയേ വല്ലാതെ സ്പർശിച്ചു.

അതേ ഒന്നിനും ഒരു ജീവല്ലാണ്ടായിരിക്കണം.

ചാരുപടിയിലെ ഇടത്തുണ്ണിൽ ചാരി ഉണ്ണി മനസ്സിൽ ഉരുവിട്ടു. എല്ലാം ഒന്നു ശരിയാക്കണം. അതിനാണല്ലോ തന്റെ ഈ വരവും.

അയാളോട് അവിടെ ഇരിക്കാൻ പറഞ്ഞ് മെല്ലെ ഉണ്ണി എഴുന്നേറ്റ് അടുക്കളയിൽ ചെന്നു. വരുന്ന കാര്യം നേരത്തേ പറഞ്ഞതുകൊണ്ട് കാര്യസ്ഥൻ രാമേട്ടൻ സാധനങ്ങളെല്ലാം കിട്ടാൻ പാകത്തിന് അടുക്കളയിൽ വച്ചിരുന്നു. കാപ്പി തിളപ്പിച്ച് രണ്ടു ഗ്ലാസിലാക്കി ഉണ്ണി ഉമ്മറത്തേക്ക് ചെന്നു. ഒരു ഗ്ലാസിലെ കാപ്പി അയാൾക്ക് കൊടുത്ത് ചാരുപടിയിൽ തൂണും ചാരി ഉണ്ണി കാപ്പി കുടിക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങി. നല്ല ഉൻമേഷം തോന്നുന്നു. പുറത്ത് തണുത്ത കാറ്റ് വീശുന്നുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ധനുവിലെ കുളിരുള്ള കാറ്റ്. അമ്മ ആയിരം നാവിൽ വർണിച്ചിരുന്ന തിരുവാതിരയുടെ ഓർമ്മ പേറുന്ന കാറ്റ്.

കൊടുത്ത കാപ്പി കുടിച്ച് വൃദ്ധൻ മണ്ണിൽ കൈ കുത്തി മെല്ലെ എഴുന്നേറ്റു. വീണ്ടും ഉണ്ണിയെ സൂക്ഷിച്ചു നോക്കി ചോദിച്ചു. ' കുട്ടി ആരാന്ന് പറഞ്ഞില്ല . ഇബടെത്ത ആരടെ കുട്ടാ? ഇബടെങ്ങും കണ്ടിട്ടില്ലാലോ '.

'ഞാനോ? ഞാൻ മാധവൻ മേനോന്റെ മോളു് സതിയുടെ മോനാ. പുറത്തായിരുന്നു . ഇവിടങ്ങനെ വന്നിട്ടില്ല . അമ്മയും അച്ഛനും മരിച്ച് നാലഞ്ചു വർഷായി. ഭാഗം കഴിഞ്ഞു തറവാട് വീട് അമ്മക്കാണെന്ന് രാമേട്ടൻ വിളിച്ചു പറഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. ഒന്നു വരണംന്ന് ങ്ടായിരുന്നു ഇപ്പളാ സമയം കിട്ടിയത്. ങ്ട പോന്നു.'

' താമി എടക്ക് ങ്ട ഏറങ്ങു . എന്തെങ്കിലും വർത്തമാനം പറഞ്ഞ് ഇരിക്കാം. '

ഒന്നമർത്തി മുളി ആ മനുഷ്യൻ എന്തോ വിഷമം മുഖത്ത് നിറച്ച് പടിപ്പുറ കടന്ന് പോയി.

അതു നോക്കി ഉണ്ണി ഇരുന്നു. ഒരു പക്ഷെ ഈ തറവാടിന്റെ കഴിഞ്ഞ കാലത്തിന്റെ ഒരു പാട് ഓർമ്മകൾ ആ വൃദ്ധനെ അലട്ടിയിരിക്കാം. പഴയ പ്രതാപവും മാധവമേനോനും അവരുടെ മക്കളുമെല്ലാം.

ഉണ്ണി പെട്ടി തുറന്ന് തോർത്തുമുണ്ടും സോപ്പും എടുത്ത് തോട്ടത്തിലെ കുളം തേടിയിറങ്ങി. അമ്മ പറഞ്ഞ് തനിക്ക് എല്ലാം മനഃപാഠമായിരിക്കുന്ന വീടും പറമ്പും. ഈ വീട്ടിലെ ഓരോ മുറിയും കയറിയിറങ്ങണം. ഓരോ മണവും പരിചയപ്പെടണം. പൊട്ടിയ കൽപ്പടവുകൾ ഇറങ്ങി കുളത്തിലെ തണുത്ത വെള്ളത്തിൽ ഒന്നു മുങ്ങി നിവർന്നപ്പോൾ വല്ലാത്തൊരു സുഖം. താൻ വരുന്നതറിഞ്ഞാവാം രാമേട്ടൻ കുളത്തിന്റെ ചുറ്റുവട്ടം വൃത്തിയാക്കി വച്ചിരുന്നു.

നേരെ മുറിയിൽ കയറി പുതിയ പാന്റും ജുബിയും ഇട്ട് കേമറയുമായി ഉണ്ണി പൂമുഖത്ത് നിലത്ത് കാലും നീട്ടിയിരുന്നു. കാലത്തു കഴിക്കാനുള്ള ഭക്ഷണവുമായി രാമേട്ടൻ വരാം എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞിരുന്നതിനാൽ അതുവരെ ഇവിടെ ഇരിക്കാം വെറുതെ ഓരോന്ന് ചിന്തിച്ചു കുട്ടാം. കാലത്ത് കണ്ട വൃദ്ധന്റെ വാക്കുകൾ മനസ്സിനെ വല്ലാതെ മമിക്കുന്നു. അതേ ഒന്നിനും

ഒരു ജീവനില്ലാതായിരിക്കുന്നു. എല്ലാം ഒന്നൊന്നായി ശരിയാക്കണം.

എത്രയോ നാളത്തെ ആഗ്രഹമായിരുന്നു അമ്മയുടെ ഓർമ്മകൾ ജീവിക്കുന്ന ഈ മണ്ണിലേക്കുള്ളൊരു വരവ്.

അമ്മയുടെ കഥകളിൽ എന്നും നിറഞ്ഞ് നിന്നിരുന്ന ഈ ജീവനുള്ള തറവാടും അതിന്റെ പ്രശസ്തിയും അതിലെ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളും അതിനിടയിൽ വിടർന്നടർന്ന അമ്മയുടെ ബാല്യവും കൗമാരവും യൗവ്വനവും എല്ലാം തനിക്ക് എന്നേ മനഃപാഠമായിരുന്നു. തീവ്ര പ്രണയത്തിന്റെ ശക്തിയിൽ അന്നുവരെ ജീവിതത്തിന് മാധുര്യമെല്ലാം പകർന്ന് നൽകിയ രക്തബന്ധങ്ങളെ പരിച്ചെറിഞ്ഞ് കണ്ണീരിന്റെ അവ്യക്തതയിൽ ഒരിക്കലും തിരിച്ചു വരാത്ത ദൂരത്തേക്ക് തന്റെ അമ്മ തനിയെ തിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ തകർന്നടിഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ടാവുക ഏതെല്ലാം ഹൃദയങ്ങളാണെന്ന് വരെ തനിക്കറിയാമായിരുന്നു . അമ്മയുടെ മരണശേഷവും ആ പേരുകൾ മനസ്സിലാർക്കാൻ ഉണ്ണി വളരെ പാട് പെട്ടിരുന്നു. അതെ എല്ലാ വേരുകളെയും തന്റെ അമ്മയുടെ നഷ്ട പ്രിയങ്ങളെ തന്റെ കൃതികളിലെ കീഴ്പ്പാട്ട് തറവാട്ടിലെ എല്ലാ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളെയും കണ്ടെത്തണം.

താനെഴുതിയ ഓരോ പുസ്തകങ്ങളും അംഗീകാരങ്ങൾ ഏറ്റുവാങ്ങുമ്പോൾ പുകഴ്ത്തപ്പെട്ടിരുന്ന അതിലെ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളെയും കണ്ടെത്തണം രാമേട്ടനിലൂടെയും താമിയിലൂടെയും.

ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നവരോട് പറയണം

തന്റെ അമ്മ, അവരുടെ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട സതി ഒരു പാവമായിരുന്നെന്ന്, അവൾക്ക് നിങ്ങളോടുള്ള സ്നേഹവും പരിഭവവുമായിരുന്നു എന്റെ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളിലൂടെ നിങ്ങളെല്ലാം പുനർജനിക്കാൻ കാരണമായതെന്ന്,

ജീവിതത്തിൽ പക്ഷതയെത്താത്ത പ്രായത്തിൽ ചെയ്ത ചെറിയ തെറ്റിന് ഒരിക്കലേങ്കിലും തിരിച്ചു വന്ന് എല്ലാവരോടും മാപ്പു പറയണമെന്ന് അമ്മ വല്ലാതെ ആഗ്രഹിച്ചിരുന്നതായി. കാണുന്ന ഓരോ ബന്ധങ്ങളുടെ വേരിലും തന്നിലൂടെ അവരുടെ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട സതി പുനർജനിക്കപ്പെടണം. അമ്മ വാചാലയായിരുന്ന അവരുടെ കഥകൾ അവരോടു പറയണം. അതു കേട്ട് അവരുടെ മിഴിക്കോണിലെ കണ്ണുനീർ കണങ്ങളിൽ മൌനമായി നോക്കിയിരുന്ന് അതിൽ പ്രതിബിംബിക്കുന്ന എന്റെ അമ്മയെ കൺകുളിർക്കെ എനിക്ക് കാണണം.

തന്റെ മനസ്സിൽ അമ്മ പറഞ്ഞുറപ്പിച്ച ഈ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങൾ എല്ലാം തന്റെ സൃഷ്ടികളായി പുനർജനിക്കപ്പെട്ടിട്ടുണ്ടെങ്കിലും ആരേയും ഇന്ന് വരെ നേരിൽ കാണാൻ പറ്റാതെ പോയത് വലിയ അത്ഭുതമായി ഉണ്ണിക്ക് തോന്നി.

നല്ല തണുത്ത കാറ്റ് പൂമുഖത്ത് അടിച്ചപ്പോൾ സുഖമുള്ള ഒരു മയക്കത്തിലേക്ക് ഉണ്ണി മെല്ലെ വീണു.

‘ എന്താ കുട്ടേ ഇത്. വാതിലും തുറന്നിട്ട് ഇങ്ങനെ നിലത്ത് കിടക്കാണോ? വല്ല ശീതവുമടിച്ചു പനി വരും.‘ രാമേട്ടന്റെ ശാസന കേട്ടാണ് ഉണ്ണി മയക്കമുണർന്നത്.

അതെ. അടുത്ത യാത്രയിലേക്ക് . ബന്ധങ്ങളുടെ വേരുകൾ തേടിയുള്ള മറ്റൊരു യാത്രയിലേക്ക്.

പ്രിയപ്പെട്ടവരെ

ഞാൻ രാജഗോപാൽ .

സ്വദേശം പാലക്കാട് ജില്ലയിൽ പെരിങ്ങോട് എന്ന ഗ്രാമം.

ഫിനാൻസിൽ പൂനെ യൂണിവേഴ്സിറ്റിയിൽ നിന്നും ബിരുദാനന്തര ബിരുദം നേടിയതിനു ശേഷം ഇന്ത്യയിലും വിദേശത്തുമായി 25 വർഷത്തെ ഔദ്യോഗിക പ്രവാസ ജീവിതം നയിച്ചു.

ഔദ്യോഗിക ജീവിതത്തിനിടയിലും കലാ സാഹിത്യ രംഗത്ത് സജീവമായി നില നിൽക്കുകയും മസ്കറ്റിൽ സൊഫാർ മലയാളി സംഘം (SMS) നടത്തിയ കലാമേളയിൽ 2018 ബ 19 , 2019 -20 വർഷങ്ങളിൽ കലാശ്രീ സമ്മാനത്തിനർഹനാവുകയും ചെയ്തു.

മസ്കറ്റിലെ ഇന്ത്യൻ സോഷ്യൽ ക്ലബ്ബ് മലയാളം വിഭാഗം നടത്തിയ കലാ സാഹിത്യ മത്സരങ്ങളിലെ വിജയി.

അഭിനയം, സംഗീതം, വായന ,എഴുത്ത്, കവിതാ രചനയും പാരായണവും തുടങ്ങിയവയിൽ സജീവമാണ്.

പ്രശസ്ത സംവിധായകനും ഗാന രചയിതാവുമായ ശ്രീ. കെ. ആർ. പി. വള്ളിക്കുന്നത്തിന്റെ പ്രണയ തേൻ മഴ എന്ന സംഗീത ആൽബം , പ്രശസ്ത സംവിധായകൻ ശ്രീ. ജിനോ ജോസഫിന്റെ മത്തി എന്ന നാടകത്തിലും അഭിനയിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

പ്രശസ്ത സംഗീത സംവിധായകൻ ശ്രീ. വിദ്യാധരൻ മാസ്റ്റർ ഈണമിട്ട 'പ്രിയതരമാമേതോ ' എന്നു തുടങ്ങുന്ന ഗാനത്തിന്റെ രചന നിർവഹിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ഭാര്യ : അംബിക

മകൻ : നവനീത്



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Sunil Sivadas

കോൺക്രീറ്റ് പൂത്തു

കോൺക്രീറ്റ് പൂത്തു.
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 കനകാംബരങ്ങളായി.
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 ആർപ്പുവിളികൾ.
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 കുട്ടികൾ ഫോണിൽ നുള്ളി കലപില കൂട്ടുന്നു.
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 കൊഴുക്കുന്നു.
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 മൂക്കുറ്റിയായി പൂക്കുന്ന കാലത്തോളം.



Anu

നീലവെളിച്ചം

കുറെയേറെ വർഷങ്ങൾ പിന്നോട്ടു പോയാൽ, രാത്രികളിൽ നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും മഞ്ഞ വെളിച്ചമായിരുന്നു! മഞ്ഞ ബൾബുകളും , മെഴുകുതിരികളും മറ്റു തിരിയിട്ട വിളക്കുകളുമായിരുന്നു കൂടുതലായി കാണപ്പെട്ടിരുന്നത്. അങ്ങനെയൊരു കാലം! പിന്നീട് പതിയെ കൂടുതൽ ഭംഗിയുള്ള ട്യൂബ് ലൈറ്റുകളും, എൽ.ഇ.ഡി ബൾബുകളും ഒക്കെവന്നു. നമുക്കുചുറ്റും നീല കലർന്ന വെളിച്ചം നിറയാൻ തുടങ്ങി! നമ്മുടെ വീടും നാടുമൊക്കെ കൂടുതൽ പ്രകാശം നിറഞ്ഞതായി. തിളങ്ങുന്ന ഡിസ്‌പ്ലേ ബോഡുകളും ഹൈമാസ്റ്റ് ലൈറ്റുകളും അലങ്കാരവിളക്കുകളും കൊണ്ട് രാത്രികൾ, പകൽ പോലെ വെളിച്ചമുള്ളതായി മാറി. ഇവയെല്ലാം നല്ലത് തന്നെ! എന്നാൽ ഈ വെളിച്ചം ഒരു വില്ലൻ കുടിയാണ്!

നമ്മളറിയാതെ, അല്ലെങ്കിൽ അറിഞ്ഞിട്ടും അധികം ശ്രദ്ധ കൊടുക്കാതെ, എപ്പോഴും നമ്മുടെയെല്ലാം ഒപ്പമുള്ള നീലവെളിച്ചം എന്നൊരു വില്ലനെ പരിചയപ്പെടാം.

മാറി മാറി വരുന്ന പകലും രാത്രിയും അനുസരിച്ചാണ് നമ്മുടെ ശരീരത്തിന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ ക്രമീകരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. നമ്മുടെയെല്ലാം ഉള്ളിൽ ഒരു ജൈവഘടികാരം (circadian clock) ഉണ്ട്. എല്ലാ ജീവജാലങ്ങളുടെയും ജീവതാളം അഥവാ 'സിർക്കാർഡിയൻ റിഥം (circadian rhythm)' ഈ ക്ലോക്കിനെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയാണുള്ളത്. ഈ ക്ലോക്ക് എങ്ങനെയാണ് 24 മണിക്കൂറുള്ള ഒരു ദിവസത്തെ പകലും രാത്രിയുമായി മനസ്സിലാക്കുന്നത്? നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും വെളിച്ചം ഉള്ളതും ഇല്ലാത്തതുമായ അവസ്ഥയെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയാണ് പ്രധാനമായും

നമ്മുടെയുള്ളിലെ ക്ലോക്ക് പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നത്. നമ്മുടെ സ്വഭാവത്തെയും മാനസികാരോഗ്യത്തെയും നിയന്ത്രിക്കുന്നതും ഈ ജീവതമാണ്. നമ്മുടെ ക്ലോക്കിന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനം തെറ്റിയാൽ ഇതൊക്കെ തകിടം മറിയും! അതുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ, പകൽ സമയങ്ങളിൽ നാം സൂര്യപ്രകാശം കാണണം. രാത്രിയിൽ നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും പൂർണ്ണമായ ഇരുട്ടും ആയിരിക്കണം.

ശരീരത്തിനുള്ളിൽ ഈ ക്ലോക്ക് എങ്ങനെ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് നോക്കാം. ഇപ്പോൾ നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും വെളിച്ചം ഉണ്ടോ ഇല്ലയോ എന്ന് നമ്മുടെ ശരീരം എങ്ങനെ തിരിച്ചറിയും? നമ്മുടെ സ്വന്തം ക്യാമറയായ കണ്ണിലൂടെയാണ് നാം കാഴ്ചകൾ കാണുന്നത്. എന്നാൽ കാഴ്ചകൾ കാണാൻ മാത്രമല്ല കണ്ണ് നമ്മെ സഹായിക്കുന്നത്, ചുറ്റുമുള്ള വെളിച്ചം തിരിച്ചറിയുന്ന ഒരു ലൈറ്റ് സെൻസർ (sensor) കൂടിയാണത്. അതായത് ഇരുട്ടും വെളിച്ചവും നമ്മുടെ ശരീരത്തിനു മനസ്സിലാക്കി നൽകുന്ന ഒരു സെൻസർ! ശരീരത്തിനു ഇരുട്ടും വെളിച്ചവും തിരിച്ചറിയേണ്ടത് വളരെ അത്യാവശ്യമാണ് എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞല്ലോ!

നമുക്ക് കാണാൻ കഴിയുന്ന പ്രകാശത്തിൽ പല നിറങ്ങളുണ്ട്, പ്രധാനമായും ചുവപ്പ്, പച്ച, നീല നിറങ്ങളാണ് ഉള്ളത്. അവയിൽ നീല നിറത്തിനു മാത്രം എന്ത് പ്രത്യേകതയാണ് ഉള്ളത്? ഈ നീല വെളിച്ചം എങ്ങനെയാണ് നമ്മുടെ ആരോഗ്യത്തെ ദോഷകരമായി ബാധിക്കുന്നത്?

നമ്മുടെ കണ്ണുകളിൽ, കാഴ്ച കാണാൻ സഹായിക്കുന്നതല്ലാത്ത മറ്റൊരു തരം കോശങ്ങൾ കൂടിയുണ്ട്, അവയാണ് പ്രകാശത്തിന്റെ സെൻസർ ആയി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നത്. ഈ കോശങ്ങളുടെ പ്രവർത്തനം കൂടുതലുള്ളത് ഏകദേശം 480 നാനോമീറ്റർ തരംഗദൈർഘ്യമുള്ള പ്രകാശത്തിലാണ്. അതായത് നമ്മൾ കാണുന്ന പ്രകാശത്തിലെ നീലനിറം! നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റുമുള്ള നീലവെളിച്ചത്തിന്റെ തീവ്രത, ആ വെളിച്ചം നാം കാണുന്ന നേരം, ദൈർഘ്യം ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള പല ഘടകങ്ങളെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയാണ് നീല വെളിച്ചം നമുക്ക് ദോഷകരമായി മാറുന്നത്. രാത്രിയിൽ അമിതമായ നീലവെളിച്ചം നമ്മുടെ ആരോഗ്യത്തിനു ഹാനികരമാണ്. ഇത്തരത്തിൽ നമ്മുടെ കൃത്രിമ വെളിച്ചം മൂലമുണ്ടാകുന്ന ദോഷങ്ങളെ പ്രകാശ മലിനീകരണം (light pollution) എന്ന് വിളിക്കുന്നു.

രാത്രിയിൽ അമിതമായ വെളിച്ചം ശരീരത്തിനു അപകടകരമാകുന്നതുപോലെ തന്നെ പ്രധാനമാണ് പകൽ ഓഫീസുകൾക്ക് ഉള്ളിലിരുന്നു ജോലി ചെയ്യുന്നവർക്ക് നാച്ചുറൽ ലൈറ്റ് കിട്ടണം എന്നുള്ളതും. പകൽ സമയം പൂർണ്ണമായും സൂര്യപ്രകാശം കടക്കാത്ത ഓഫീസുകളിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നവർ ഇടയ്ക്ക് പുറത്ത് വരുന്നതും സൂര്യപ്രകാശം കാണുന്നതും ആരോഗ്യത്തിനു നല്ലതാണ്.

മഞ്ഞ വെളിച്ചം ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരുന്ന നമ്മൾ ഉയർന്ന തീവ്രതയുള്ള എൽ.ഇ.ഡി. ലൈറ്റുകളിലേക്ക് മാറിയപ്പോൾ, നമ്മുടെ ശരീരത്തിലെ ക്ലോക്കിന് കൺഫ്യൂഷൻ ആയി. രാത്രിയും പകലും തിരിച്ചറിയാൻ പ്രയാസമായി. കൂടാതെ ടിവി, മൊബൈൽഫോൺ, ടാബ്ലറ്റ് തുടങ്ങി നീലവെളിച്ചം അധികമായുള്ള ധാരാളം ഡിസ്പ്ലേ ഉപകരണങ്ങളും നമ്മൾ

നിത്യവും ഉപയോഗിക്കാനും തുടങ്ങി. രാത്രിയിൽ ഇത്തരത്തിൽ വീടിനുള്ളിൽ നിറയെ എൽ.ഇ.ഡി. ലൈറ്റുകളുമിട്ട്, മൊബൈൽഫോണും ഉപയോഗിച്ച്, ടിവിയും കണ്ടിരുന്നിട്ടു, പെട്ടെന്നു ഇതെല്ലാം ഓഫ് ചെയ്ത് ഉറങ്ങാൻ കിടന്നാൽ നമ്മുടെ ശരീരത്തിനു രാത്രിയായി എന്ന് മനസ്സിലാകില്ല.

ഉറങ്ങാൻ മെലാടോണിൻ (melatonin) എന്ന ഹോർമോൺ ആവശ്യമാണ്. എന്നാൽ രാത്രി വളരെയധികം വെളിച്ചമുണ്ടായാൽ മെലാടോണിൻ ഉത്പാദനം കുറയുകയും നല്ല ഉറക്കം കിട്ടാതെ വരികയും ചെയ്യും. മാത്രമല്ല, നമ്മുടെ ക്ലോക്കിന്റെ താളവും തെറ്റും. ഇത് നമ്മുടെ മാനസികാരോഗ്യത്തെ ദോഷകരമായി ബാധിക്കും, തുടർന്ന് വിഷാദരോഗം, മൂഡ് സിങ്ങ്സ് തുടങ്ങിയ അവസ്ഥകളിലേക്ക് നയിക്കും. ഒപ്പം ഉറക്കമില്ലായ്മ, തലവേദന, മൈഗ്രേൻ തുടങ്ങിയവയ്ക്കു കാരണമാകുകയും ചെയ്യും.

അമേരിക്കൻ മെഡിക്കൽ അസോസിയേഷന്റെ (AMA) മുന്നറിയിപ്പ് പ്രകാരം ഇത്തരം അമിതവെളിച്ചം ചിലതരം ക്യാൻസറുകൾക്കും, പ്രമേഹത്തിനും അമിതവണ്ണത്തിനും കാരണമാകും. ഉയർന്ന പ്രകാശ തീവ്രത (intensity) ഉള്ള എൽഇഡി സ്ക്രീനുകളിൽ അധിക സമയം നോക്കിയിരിക്കുന്നത് റെറ്റിന തകരാറിലാകാനും സാധ്യതയുണ്ട്. കണ്ണുകൾ വരണ്ടുപോകൽ, തിമിരം, മാക്യുലർ ഡീജനറേഷൻ തുടങ്ങിയ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാകാനുള്ള സാധ്യതയും കൂടുതലാണ്.

ഇതിനു പരിഹാരമായി നമുക്ക് എന്തൊക്കെ ചെയ്യാം? എന്നും കൃത്യമായി ഉറങ്ങുന്നതിനു മുൻപ് നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റുമുള്ള നീല വെളിച്ചം കുറച്ചു കൊണ്ട് വരണം. നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും ഇരുട്ട് ആകാറായി എന്നും ഉറങ്ങാനുള്ള സമയം ആയെന്നും ശരീരത്തെ മനസ്സിലാക്കാം. മൊബൈൽ ഫോണുകളിൽ നീല ഫിൽറ്റർ ഉപയോഗിക്കാം. ഉറങ്ങുന്നതിനു മുൻപുള്ള കുറച്ചു സമയം ടിവി, മൊബൈൽഫോൺ, ടാബ്ലറ്റ് എന്നിവയുടെ ഉപയോഗം പൂർണ്ണമായും ഒഴിവാക്കാം. വീടുകളിൽ സ്മാർട്ട് ലൈറ്റുകൾ ഉപയോഗിക്കാം.

നമുക്ക് ചുറ്റും എപ്പോഴുമുള്ള, നമ്മളറിയാതെ നമ്മുടെ ആരോഗ്യത്തെ നശിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഒന്നാണ് നീലവെളിച്ചം! അത് മനസ്സിലാക്കി, വീട്ടിലുള്ള വെളിച്ചത്തെയും ഡിസ്പ്ലേ ഉപകരണങ്ങളെയും ശരിയായ രീതിയിൽ ഉപയോഗിക്കാം. ശ്രദ്ധാപൂർവ്വം നമ്മുടെ മാനസികാരോഗ്യത്തെയും ശരീരത്തെയും സംരക്ഷിക്കാം.

ഡോ. അനു ബി. കരിങ്ങന്നൂർ

കൊല്ലം ജില്ലയിലെ കരിങ്ങന്നൂർ സ്വദേശിയാണ്. മദ്രാസ് ഐ. ഐ. ടി. യിൽ നിന്നും ഫിസിക്സിൽ പി.എച്ച്.ഡി ലഭിച്ച ശേഷം സിംഗപ്പൂർ നാഷണൽ യൂണിവേഴ്സിറ്റിയിൽ പോസ്റ്റ്ഡോക്ടറൽ ഗവേഷകയാണ്. പ്രൊഫ. സി വിജയനുമായി ചേർന്നു വെളിച്ചം എന്ന മഹാത്മ്യം പുസ്തകം രചിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഏഷ്യാനെറ്റ് ഓൺലൈനിൽ ശാസ്ത്രപരമായും ശാസ്ത്ര സാഹിത്യ പരിഷത്ത് പ്രസിദ്ധീകരണങ്ങളായ യൂറീക്ക, ശാസ്ത്രകേരളം, ലൂക്ക എന്നിവയിൽ ശാസ്ത്രലേഖനങ്ങളും എഴുതുന്നുണ്ട്. ശ്രീ കെ. ബാബുസേനന്റെയും ശ്രീമതി ജി. ലതയുടെയും മക്കൾ. ഭർത്താവ്: ഡോ. സുരാജ്. ടി. എസ്.



Sandeep

അജ്ഞാതനായി മാറിയ ആ താടിക്കാരൻ

താടിയുള്ള ആളുകൾ കൂടുതൽ അപകടകാരികളായി നിങ്ങൾക്ക് തോന്നുന്നത് എന്തുകൊണ്ട്?

ഇവിടെ ഒരു ജോലി ചെയ്തിരുന്ന കാലം. ഏതൊരു വിദേശ ജോലി സ്ഥാപനത്തിലും എന്നപോലെ അവിടെയും ലോകമെമ്പാടുമുള്ള നിരവധി വിദേശ തൊഴിലാളികൾ ഇവിടെയും ജോലി ചെയ്യുന്നു. അവർ വ്യത്യസ്ത ഭാഷകൾ സംസാരിക്കുന്നവരും വ്യത്യസ്ത മതങ്ങളിൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നവരുമാണ്. അവർ എല്ലാവരും സൗഹൃദത്തോടെ, ഒരുമയോടെ സന്തോഷകരമായി ഇവിടെ ജോലി ചെയ്യുന്നു.

എല്ലാത്തിലും സജീവമായി ഇടപെട്ടിരുന്ന ഒരു സഹപ്രവർത്തകൻ ദിവസങ്ങളോളം നിശബ്ദനായത് സുപ്പർവൈസറായ സുഹൃത്ത് ഞങ്ങളെ അറിയിച്ചു.

സുഹൃത്ത് ഇയാളെ നിരീക്ഷിച്ചതിനൊരു കാരണം ഉണ്ട്. ഈ ജീവനക്കാരൻ മറ്റുള്ളവരെ അപേക്ഷിച്ച് എല്ലാ ജോലികളിലും വളരെ സജീവമായിരുന്നു. അവൻ തന്റെ ജോലി കൃത്യസമയത്ത് പൂർത്തിയാക്കുമായിരുന്നു. അവന്റെ പെട്ടെന്നുള്ള മാറ്റം സുഹൃത്തിനെ അത്ഭുതപ്പെടുത്തി. സുപ്പർവൈസറുടെ ചോദ്യങ്ങൾക്കൊന്നും അവൻ മറുപടി പറഞ്ഞില്ല. തമാശകൾ കേട്ട് ചിരിക്കാനും കൂട്ടാക്കിയില്ല. ജോലി സമയത്ത് അവനെ ഇടയ്ക്കിടെ കാണാതാവും. അതിനിടയിലാണ് പതിവില്ലാതെ അവന്റെ താടി വളർന്നു വലുതാകുന്നത് ശ്രദ്ധയിൽപ്പെട്ടത്.

സൂപ്പർവൈസർ അറിയിച്ച പ്രകാരം മറ്റുള്ളവരും അവനെ നിരീക്ഷിക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങി. സൂപ്പർവൈസറുടെ സംശയത്തിനു മറ്റൊരു കാരണം കൂടിയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു, അത് അവന്റെ പേരായിരുന്നു.

കൂട്ടുകാർ കുറച്ച് ദിവസം അവനെ നിരീക്ഷിച്ചു. അവർ അവനെ പുറത്തു കൊണ്ടുപോയി സ്വകാര്യമായി സംസാരിക്കാൻ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. അപ്പോഴാണ് അവനെ തളർത്തിയ സത്യം കൂട്ടുകാർക്ക് മനസ്സിലാക്കിയത്.

അസുഖ ബാധിതയായി കഴിഞ്ഞ അവന്റെ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട മാതാവ് ഇന്നലെ വിടപറഞ്ഞു. അവരുടെ അവസാന ആഗ്രഹമായിരുന്നു മകനെ ഒരുനോക്ക് കാണുക എന്നത്. നാട്ടിൽ പോയി കുറച്ച് മാസങ്ങൾക്ക് മുമ്പാണ് അവൻ തിരിച്ചെത്തിയത്. അതിനാൽ ഉമ്മയുടെ അവസാന ആഗ്രഹം നിറവേറ്റാൻ സാധിച്ചില്ല. നാട്ടിലേക്ക് മടങ്ങാൻ ആവശ്യമായ പണം അവന്റെ പക്കലില്ലായിരുന്നു. കൂട്ടുകാരോടു കടം വാങ്ങാൻ അഭിമാനം അനുവദിച്ചതുമില്ല. ആ ദുഃഖത്തിൽ ആയിരുന്നു യുവാവ്. രോഗം മുർച്ഛിച്ച മാതാവ് സുഖം പ്രാപിക്കാൻ ഈശ്വരനോട് ഉള്ളുരുകി പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുകയായിരുന്നു. ഈ നാളുകളിൽ ഷേവ് ചെയ്യുന്നതുൾപ്പെടെയുള്ള കാര്യങ്ങൾ ആ യുവാവ് മറന്നു. അവനവനെ തന്നെ മറന്നു. ജീവിതം മതിയാക്കാൻവരെ തീരുമാനിച്ചു. ഇതായിരുന്നു അവനെ വിരുപനായി കാണാനുള്ള കാരണം.

വിദേശത്തു ജോലിചെയ്യുന്ന സുഹൃത്തുക്കളുടെ പൊടുന്നനെയുള്ള പെരുമാറ്റം മറ്റുള്ളവരിൽ സംശയം ഉളവാക്കാം. എല്ലാ കാര്യങ്ങളും ചർച്ച ചെയ്യാൻ, എല്ലാവരോടും മനസ്സ് തുറക്കാൻ എല്ലാവർക്കും കഴിഞ്ഞെന്നും വരില്ല. പകരം നമ്മൾ സുഹൃത്തുക്കൾ അവരെ മനസ്സിലാക്കി ചേർത്തുപിടിച്ച് കുടുംബമായി നിന്ന് അവർക്ക് സുരക്ഷ ഉറപ്പാക്കുക. ചില അനുഭവങ്ങൾ അവരെ തെറ്റായ തീരുമാനത്തിലേക്ക് നയിച്ചേക്കാം. അതുപോലെ ആർക്കും സംഭവിക്കാതിരിക്കട്ടെ.

അടുത്ത ദിവസം മുതൽ ഞങ്ങൾ അവനെ സാധാരണ മനുഷ്യനായി കണ്ടു. ഞങ്ങളോട് സംസാരിച്ചപ്പോൾ, അവന്റെ ഹൃദയഭാരവും ദുഃഖവും കുറഞ്ഞെന്നു പറഞ്ഞു കേട്ടപ്പോൾ ഞങ്ങൾക്കും എന്തെന്നില്ലാത്ത സന്തോഷം.

ഞാൻ സന്ദീപ്, 1998 ൽ ഇവിടെ എത്തി. ഹൗഗാങ്ങിൽ എന്റെ കുടുംബത്തോടൊപ്പം ഈ നാടിന്റെ മനോഹാര്യത ഹൃദയത്തോട് ചേർത്ത് മനുഷ്യഹൃദയത്തെ കൂട്ടിയുറപ്പിച്ച് സന്തോഷത്തോടെ വസിക്കുന്നു. ഓർമ്മയിൽ ചെറിയ ഒരു കഥ ഞാൻ ഇവിടെ കുറിക്കുന്നു.



Ratheesh Kurup

ജാൻമെ വഴികൾ

വർഷങ്ങൾക്കിപ്പുറം ചെന്നു ഞാൻ വീണ്ടുമെൻ
വശ്യ ഗ്രാമത്തിന്റെ കാഴ്ച തേടി
വെറുതേ നടന്നു ഞാൻ ആ ഗ്രാമ ഭംഗി തൻ
ഹൃദയ തുടിപ്പുതൊട്ടല്പ നേരം..

മഴ പെയ്തു തോർന്ന നാട്ടിടവഴിയോരത്തു
നിനവിൽ നിൻ പുഞ്ചിരി കാത്തു നിന്നു..
നെറുകിൽ കളഭവും മിഴികളിൽ നാണവും
ചൂടി നിന്നോർമ്മകൾ പൂത്തു നിന്നു..

പരിഭവം ചൊല്ലിപ്പിരിഞ്ഞു നീ പോകുമ്പോ-
ലൊരു കുഞ്ഞു കാറ്റൊന്നെ തഴുകിപ്പോയി..
നാണത്താൽ നിൻ കവിൾപ്പൂക്കൾ തുടുത്ത
പോൽ

മാനത്തു സന്ധ്യ ചെഞ്ചായമിട്ടു ...

കൈകോർത്തു നമ്മൾ നടന്നൊരാ വീഥിയിൽ
കൈതപ്പൂ പൂക്കളും തീർത്തു വച്ചു..
നാട്ടു വഴികളിൽ പൂത്തുലഞ്ഞീടുന്നോ -
രോർമ്മകൾക്കെന്നുമേ നിൻ സുഗന്ധം...!!



Vijayakrishnan T

രണ്ടു മരണങ്ങൾ

‘നാണോ, എണക്കാരാടോ ഇതൊക്കെ ചെയ്യാൻ?’

കാഴ്ചകൾക്കപ്പുറമുള്ള ആകാശഗർഭത്തിലിരുന്ന് വലുത്താമൻ ചിരിച്ചു; എട്ടു പതിറ്റാണ്ടുകൾ നീണ്ട ജീവിതയാത്രയിലുടനീളം ഭൂമിയിൽ മുഴങ്ങിക്കേട്ട ആൺപോരിമയുടെ ചിരി.

‘ആണുങ്ങൾ തെക്കോട്ട് തിരിഞ്ഞിരിക്കൂ, പെണ്ണുങ്ങൾ കിഴക്കോട്ടും’ . മഴ മാറിനിന്ന തുലാ മാസപ്പൂലരിയിൽ കർമ്മി നാണു തലമുറകൾ കൈമാറി വന്ന മരണകർമ്മങ്ങൾ പടിപടിയായി ഉരുവിട്ട് കൊണ്ടിരുന്നു.

‘മൂന്നുരുള വെച്ച് മൂന്നുപ്രാവശ്യം വെള്ളം കൊടുക്ക’;

‘മോതിരം ഊരിവെച്ച് അടുത്താളിരിക്ക’ അരയിൽ ഒരു തോർത്തുമുണ്ട് മാത്രമായിരുന്നു കർമ്മി നാണുവിന്റെ വേഷം. എണ്ണക്കുറുപ്പിൽ എഴുപത് ഡിഗ്രി വളഞ്ഞ ശരീരം. വായിൽ പല്ലെണ്ണു പറയാൻ രണ്ടുമൂന്ന് കറുത്ത കുറ്റികൾ അവശേഷിച്ചാലായി. കയ്യിൽ മടക്കാനും നിവർത്താനും പറ്റുന്ന ഒരു പിച്ഛാത്തി. ഒട്ടിയ വയറും കുഴിഞ്ഞ കണ്ണുകളുമായി ദാരിദ്ര്യത്തിന്റെ ആൾ രൂപമായിരുന്നു അയാൾ.

‘ഞാൻ ചത്ത് അടക്ക് കയിഞ്ഞാൽ എല്ലാർക്കും പോകാം.ബലിടാനും കാക്കേനെ തീറ്റിക്കാനും ആരും ഇവിടെ നിൽക്കണമെന്നില്ല’

വീട്ടിൽ വിളിച്ചു വരുത്തിയ അനന്തിരവൻമാരോടായിരുന്നു വലുത്താമന്റെ കൽപ്പന.

വെളുത്തു തടിച്ച ശരീരം; തിളങ്ങുന്ന കഷണ്ടി; കഞ്ഞിയിൽ മുക്കിയ ചെറു മുണ്ടും ഷർട്ടും; അധികാരം സ്പർശിക്കുന്ന നോക്കും വാക്കും; മുഖത്തു കൃത്രിമമായി പിടിപ്പിച്ച പോലെ നേരെ നോക്കുമ്പോൾപോലും രണ്ടു ദ്വാരങ്ങളും വ്യക്തമായി കാണുന്ന പരന്ന നാസിക; കറ കളഞ്ഞ കോൺഗ്രസ്സ് സ്നേഹം - അതായിരുന്നു വലുത്താമൻ. പാരമ്പര്യമായി കിട്ടിയ ഏക്കറു കണക്കിന് ഭൂമിയും തെങ്ങിൻതോപ്പും ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുവെങ്കിലും പേരും പെരുമയും തികഞ്ഞ തറവാട്ട് കാരണവസ്ഥാനം അലങ്കരിച്ചിരുന്നുവെങ്കിലും വലുത്താമൻ വിവാഹം കഴിച്ചിരുന്നില്ല; കാരണമെന്തെന്ന് വലുത്താമൻ പറഞ്ഞില്ല, ചോദിക്കാൻ ആരും ധൈര്യപ്പെട്ടുമില്ല.

ശരീരത്തിനുപരി ആത്മാവിലും മോക്ഷത്തിലും വലുത്താമൻ വിശ്വസിച്ചില്ല.

‘അപ്പുട്ടാരെ, നിങ്ങള് നിങ്ങളുടെ ശരീരം, നിങ്ങളുടെ മനസ്സ് എന്നൊക്കെ പറയുന്നുണ്ടല്ലോ, ഇതൊക്കെ നിങ്ങളുടേതെങ്കിൽ ഉടമസ്ഥനായ നിങ്ങൾ ആരാണ്? അതാണ് ആത്മാവ്. തുടക്കം, വൃദ്ധി, മാറ്റങ്ങൾക്ക് വിധേയമാകൽ, ക്ഷയം, ഒടുക്കം എന്ന പ്രക്രിയ പ്രപഞ്ചത്തിലെ സകല ചരാചരങ്ങൾക്കും ബാധകം തന്നെ. ശരീരം പഞ്ചഭൂതങ്ങളിലേക്ക് തിരിച്ചു പോകും; പക്ഷെ ആത്മാവിന് ജനന-മരണാദികൾ ഇല്ല എന്നല്ലേ പണ്ടുള്ളവർ പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ളത്?’ - സ്കൂൾ മാഷും സ്ഥലത്തെ പ്രധാന സാത്വികനും വലിയമ്മാമന്റെ ആത്മ സുഹൃത്തും ആയ പണിക്കർ നാരായണമ്മാഷ് പറയും.

കവിതയും ചൊല്ലിക്കൊണ്ടാണ് എപ്പോഴും പണിക്കർ മാഷ് വരിക.

‘സമർത്ഥനായ സീസറും പ്രസിദ്ധനായ ഹോമറും

സമത്വമറ്റ സോളമൻ തുടങ്ങിയുള്ള വിജ്ഞരും

അമർന്നുപോയി കാലചക്ര വിഭ്രമത്തിലെങ്കിലീ

നമുക്കു പിന്നെയെന്തു ശങ്ക? മാറ്റമൊന്നുമില്ലിതിൽ.’

അന്ന് സിസ്റ്റർ മേരി ബനീഞ്ജ യായിരുന്നു മാഷിന്റെ നാവിൻ തുമ്പത്ത്.

‘മരിക്കുമ്പോൾ ശരീരത്തിന്റെ മനുഷ്യസ്വഭാവം നഷ്ടപ്പെടും എന്ന ഉള്ളു; ജീവൻ ആധാരമാകാൻ പിന്നെയും പറ്റും; പുഴുക്കളായും ഈ കാണുന്ന മാവിനും പ്ലാവിനും വളമായും നമ്മുടെ ശരീരം മാറും. അവയും ജീവൻ തന്നെയല്ലേ അപ്പുട്ടാരെ?’

‘പിന്നെ മരണം എന്നത് രംഗബോധം ഇല്ലാത്ത കോമാളിയൊന്നും അല്ല; സ്നേഹിതനായും വില്പനായും കോമാളിയായും ഒക്കെ വേഷം കെട്ടാൻ കെൽപ്പുള്ള അസാധ്യ നടൻ തന്നെയാ’

‘ആത്മാവ് കാക്കയുടെ രൂപത്തിൽ വരുമോ മാഷേ’ വലുത്താമൻ തമാശയായി ചോദിച്ചു.

‘ഈ കർമ്മങ്ങളൊന്നും മരിച്ചവർക്കുള്ളതല്ല അപ്പുട്ടാരെ; ഇതൊക്കെ ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നവർക്ക് സമാധാനിക്കാനുള്ളതാ’ - പണിക്കർ മാഷ് ചിരിച്ചു.

മരണശേഷം വലുത്താമന്റെ കൽപ്പന പാഴ്വാക്കായി ഭവിച്ചു. അനന്തിരവന്മാർ വലുത്താമന്റെ സഞ്ചയനവും പതിനാറും എല്ലാം കേമമായിത്തന്നെ നടത്തി; വേറിട്ട വഴികളിൽ

സഞ്ചരിക്കാൻ അവർ വലുത്താമനപ്പോലെ വളർന്നിട്ടില്ലായിരുന്നു.

‘നാണോ, എണക്കാരാടോ ഇതൊക്കെ ചെയ്യാൻ?’

കുടപ്പിറപ്പിന്റെ മരണത്തിലും കുലുക്കമില്ലാതെ നിന്ന വലുത്താമൻ ചുടലയിൽ നിന്നും അസ്ഥി പെറുക്കാൻ കവുങ്ങിൻ പാള ചുടാക്കി വളച്ചു താത്ക്കാലിക ചെരുപ്പുകൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്ന നാണുവിനോട് ചോദിച്ച ചോദ്യമാണ് വലുത്താമന്റെ മരണകർമ്മത്തിനിടയിൽ ഓർമ്മയുടെ അടുക്കുകളിൽ നിന്നും സ്ഥാനം തെറ്റി വീണത്.

‘ഞാക്ക് ഒരു മോളെ ഉള്ളൂ കമ്മളെ’

‘പിന്നെ ഇതൊക്കെ പടച്ചോൻ തീരുമാനിക്കുന്നതല്ലേ’ - കർമ്മി നാണു ചിരിച്ചു.

‘പടച്ചോൻ ഇതല്ലേ പണി’ - പാതി ആത്മഗതമായി വലുത്താമൻ പറഞ്ഞു.

വലുത്താമൻ മനുഷ്യരിൽ വിശ്വസിച്ചു. ആ വിശ്വാസത്തിൽ ജാതിയുടെയോ മതത്തിന്റെയോ ആശയ-വിശ്വാസ പ്രമാണങ്ങളുടെയോ അതിർ വരമ്പുകൾ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല.

‘ഞാള് പോയിട്ട് വരാം കമ്മളെ’ കർമ്മമൊക്കെ കഴിഞ്ഞു പതിനാറിന് കർമ്മി നാണു യാത്ര പറഞ്ഞു .

‘ഇഞ്ഞി പോയിക്കോ നാണോ, പക്ഷെ വരണ്ട’; വലുത്താമൻ ഉറക്കെ ചിരിച്ചു.

ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ രണ്ടു ധ്രുവങ്ങളിൽ ഇരിക്കുന്നവരെങ്കിലും സ്നേഹവും പരസ്പര വിശ്വാസവും ചേർത്ത് വിളക്കിയെടുത്ത ആത്മബന്ധങ്ങൾ ആ തലമുറക്ക് അന്യമല്ലായിരുന്നു

വലുത്താമന്റെ മരണശേഷം വർഷങ്ങൾ കഴിഞ്ഞ് കുടുംബത്തിലെ ഒരു മരണകർമ്മത്തിന് കർമ്മിയെ അനലക്ഷിച്ചാണ് ഞങ്ങൾ ഇറങ്ങിയത്. വിശ്വേട്ടനായിരുന്നു ഞങ്ങളുടെ വഴികാട്ടി. ചെറിയ ശരീരവും ശരീരത്തിന് ചേരാത്ത കട്ടിമീശയുമായി നാടിന്റെയും നാട്ടാരുടേയും കഥകൾ പരത്തിപ്പറയുന്ന വിശ്വേട്ടന് നാടിന്റെ മുക്കും മൂലയും പരിചിതമായിരുന്നു.

പുഴക്ക് കുറുകെ പുതുതായി പണിത പാലം കടന്ന് പത്തു കിലോമീറ്ററോളം കിഴക്കൻ സംസ്ഥാന പാതയിലൂടെ സഞ്ചരിച്ച്, കുണ്ടും കുഴിയും നിറഞ്ഞ ചെറുപാതയിൽ കയറി വീണ്ടും നാലഞ്ച് കിലോമീറ്ററുകൾ താണ്ടിയശേഷം കുന്നിൻ ചെരിവിലെ നാലും കൂടിയ മൂലയിൽ ആ യാത്ര അവസാനിച്ചു.

നേരം പുലർന്നു വരുന്നതേ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുള്ളൂ. അവിടെ ഒരു ചായക്കട മാത്രം തുറന്നിരുന്നു. ചായക്കടയോട് ചേർന്ന് പൊട്ടിപ്പൊളിഞ്ഞ ഒരു കിണറും ശരവേഗത്തിലോടുന്ന കാലത്തിന് ദൃക്സാക്ഷിയായി മനുഷ്യർക്കും മൃഗങ്ങൾക്കും പക്ഷികൾക്കും തണലും കുളിരും പേറി നിന്ന വയസ്സൻ ആൽമരവും ഭൂതകാലത്തിന്റെ നിറം മങ്ങിയ ചിത്രം പോലെ നിന്നു.

അല്ലാ, നളെ കർമ്മി നാണുൻറെ പൊര ഏട്ടാ?’ വിശ്വേട്ടന്റെയായിരുന്നു ചോദ്യം.

‘ഇങ്ങങ്ങേടുന്നാ?’

എഴുപത്തിയഞ്ച് വയസ്സെങ്കിലും പ്രായം ചെന്ന വൃദ്ധനായിരുന്നു ചായക്കടക്കാരൻ.

‘കുറച്ചു ദൂരെന്നാ, ആടെ ഒരു മരണം ഉണ്ട്’ വിശദേന്ദ്രൻ പറഞ്ഞു.

‘അപ്പോൾ ഇങ്ങളൊന്നും അറിഞ്ഞില്ലേ?’ അയാൾ ദുഃഖഭാവം മുഖത്തു വരുത്തിക്കൊണ്ട് പറഞ്ഞു, ‘നാണു കയിഞ്ഞ ഡിസംബറിൽ മരിച്ചു’

പിന്നീട് ആ കഥ അയാൾ ഞങ്ങളോട് പറഞ്ഞു.

കർമ്മി നാണുവും ഭാര്യ കാർത്തുയനിയും കുന്നിൽ ചെരിവിലെ അഞ്ചു സെന്റിൽ ഓല മേഞ്ഞ ഒരു ചെറു കുടിലിൽ ആയിരുന്നു താമസം. വളരെ വൈകിയാണ് അവർക്കൊരു പെൺകുഞ്ഞു പിറന്നത്. കറുത്ത് മെലിഞ്ഞ ഒരു അപസ്മാരരോഗിയായിരുന്നു അവൾ.

പത്താം ക്ലാസ് തോറ്റ് പഠനം നിർത്തിയ ശേഷം നാണു അവൾക്ക് കല്യാണം അന്വേഷിക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങി. പത്തൊൻപതാം വയസ്സിൽ കൊയിലാണ്ടി കടപ്പുറത്തെ സാമ്പത്തികമായി ഭേദപ്പെട്ട ഒരു കുടുംബത്തിലേക്ക് അവളെ കല്യാണം കഴിച്ചയച്ചു.

രണ്ടു വർഷം കഴിഞ്ഞ് അവൾക്കൊരു പെൺകുഞ്ഞ് പിറന്നു. കുഞ്ഞിന്റെ മൂന്നാം പിറന്നാൾ ദിനത്തിൽ ഇടിത്തീ പോലെ നാണുവിന്റെ പുറയിലേക്ക് ആ വാർത്ത എത്തി.

‘ഓള് തുങ്ങിച്ചത്താൾത്തു’ - സൈക്കളിൽ എത്തിയ പാൽ വാങ്ങി അകത്തേക്ക് വെച്ച് ചായക്കടക്കാരൻ പറഞ്ഞു. ‘ഓൻ കൊന്നതാന്നും പറയിന്നിങ്ങ്’ .

മരണത്തിന്റെ ഏഴാം ദിവസം കൊയിലാണ്ടിക്കടപ്പുറത്ത് നിന്നും നാട്ടുകാർക്ക് പരിചയമില്ലാത്ത ഒരു പെണ്ണ് അലറിക്കരഞ്ഞ് നാണുവിന്റെ വീട്ടിൽ എത്തി.

‘നാണുന്റെ മോള് ഓളുടെ മെയ്മേൽ* വന്നതാ; ഓള് പറഞ്ഞ് നാണുന്റെ മോളെ ഓൻ കൊന്നതാണ്’

‘ഞാളെ അതുവരെ കണ്ടിട്ടില്ലാത്ത ഓക്ക് ഞാളെയൊക്കെ മനസ്സിലായി . അന്നേരം ഞാളെല്ലാരും ഉറപ്പിച്ച് മേയ്മേൽ വന്നത് നാണുന്റെമോള് തന്നെയാന്ന്.’

‘നല്ലൊരു ചെറിയോളായിരുന്നു’- അയാൾ പാതി വലിച്ച് തീർന്ന ബീഡി നിലത്ത് ചവിട്ടിക്കെടുത്തി.

‘മോള് മരിച്ചതിന്റെ കൃത്യം നാൽപ്പത്തി ഒന്നിന് കാർത്തുയനി പൊയേലേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങിപ്പോയ്ക്കാളുണ്ട്. ഓള് അത്രേം കാലം മിണ്ടാണ്ടും പറയാണ്ടും ഇരിക്കായിരുന്നു’ .

മോളും ഭാര്യയും മരിച്ച ശേഷം ഒരു ഭ്രാന്തനെപ്പോലെയായിത്തീർന്നത്രെ നാണു. അയാൾ കിട്ടിയ വിലക്ക് വീടും സ്ഥലവും വിറ്റു. വീടിന്റെ അപ്പുറത്തും ഇപ്പുറത്തും സ്ഥലം വാങ്ങിക്കൂട്ടിയ പുത്തൻ പണക്കാരൻ തുച്ഛമായ വിലക്ക് നാണുവിന്റെ അഞ്ചു സെന്റും സ്വന്തമാക്കി.

‘ആടെ ഒരു മാളിക വീട് കാണുന്നില്ലേ ? ആടയായിരുന്നു ഓന്റെ വീട്

പുത്തൻ പണക്കാരൻ ആ സ്ഥലം ഇടിച്ചു നിരത്തി റോഡിനു സമം ആക്കിയ ശേഷം അവിടെയൊരു മാളിക വീട് പണിതു.

‘നാണുന്റെ മോളെ എല്ലാം മുടിം ആട്ന്ന് കിട്ടി. അത് പിന്നെ പഞ്ചായത്ത് ശ്മശാനത്തിൽ അയാള് മറവും ചെയ്തു’

‘ഇങ്ങിളിത് കണ്ടോ?’ സോഡാക്കുപ്പികളുടെ ഇടയിൽ പത്രക്കാരൻ തിരുകിവെച്ച പത്രം തുറന്ന് ഉൾപ്പെജിലെ വാർത്ത വായിക്കുകയായിരുന്നു വിശ്വേട്ടൻ.

‘മ്പളെ ആനപ്പൊയിലിലെ പുതിയ മെഡിക്കൽ കോളേജ് ഇല്ലേ? ആട് ഞെ പരമ്പ്ന്ന് ഒരു ശരീരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗം നായ്ക്കള് കടിച്ച് പുറത്തിട്ടെന്ന് ; കുട്ടേളെ പഠിപ്പിച്ച് കയിഞ്ഞ് കുയിച്ചിട്ടതാണെന്നാ നാട്ടാര് പറയുന്നത്’.

‘ഇങ്ങക്കറിയോ?’ ചായക്കടക്കാരൻ കേൾക്കാത്ത മട്ടിൽ സംഭാഷണം തുടർന്നു . ‘നാണു ഈ പീട്യെന്റെ മുന്നിൽ കിടന്നാ കയിഞ്ഞ ഡിസംബറിൽ മരിച്ചത്. ഓൻ ചത്ത് കിടക്കുന്നത് ഇത് പോലെ ഒരു പുലർച്ചക്ക് ഞാനാ ആദ്യം കണ്ടത്’

‘ഓന്ന് സ്വന്തക്കാർ ആരും ഇല്ല; ഇങ്ങള് പറഞ്ഞ മെഡിക്കൽ കോളേജ് ഇല്ലേ, ആട ഓന്റെ ശരീരം പഠിക്കാൻ എടുത്തുനന്നാ കേട്ടത്; ഓന്റേതു വല്ലാത്ത യോഗം തന്നെ ആയിപ്പോയി’ അയാൾ പറഞ്ഞു നിർത്തി.

അപ്പോൾ കിഴക്കൻ മലയിൽ നിന്നും ഒരു തണുത്ത കാറ്റ് അരയാലിലകളിലൂടെ ഊളിയിട്ടെത്തി.

‘നാണോ, എണക്കാരാടോ ഇതൊക്കെ ചെയ്യാൻ?’

ആൽമരത്തിന്റെ ഇലകൾ വലുത്താമന്റെ ചോദ്യം ആവർത്തിച്ചത് വാഹനത്തിലേക്ക് തിരിച്ചു കയറുമ്പോൾ പതുകയൊന്നെങ്കിലും ഞങ്ങൾ കേട്ടു.

*പ്രേതം ബാധിക്ക



തനി നാടൻ വിഭവങ്ങളുമായി

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Savina

മുറിവ്

മുറിവേൽക്കുമ്പോൾ
എനിക്കൊരു പക്ഷിയാവണം.

മൂർച്ചയേറിയ വാക്കുകൾ
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തുവലുകളെ ഉപേക്ഷിച്ച്,
നീറുന്ന വേദനയിൽ
ചാരനിറമായ ആകാശത്തിലൂടെ
കാറ്റായ കാറ്റൊല്ലാമേറ്റ്
മഴയായ മഴയെല്ലാം നനഞ്ഞ്
നിന്നിലേക്ക്
പറന്നിറങ്ങണം.

നീയപ്പോൾ ഒരു കാടായിരിക്കും.

കാടേ, എനിക്കൊരു കൂടു തരാമോ
എന്നു ഞാൻ ചോദിക്കുമ്പോൾ
ഏറ്റവും പഴകിയൊരു വാത്സല്യത്തിൽ
നീയെന്നെ വാരിയെടുക്കും.
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മരത്തിന്റെ
ഏറ്റവും ഉയർന്ന
കൊമ്പിൽ
ഏറ്റവും തുഞ്ചത്തൊരു
കൂടു നീയൊരുക്കും.
തളിരിലകൾ മെത്തയാകും.
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ചിന്തയിലേക്കു ഞാൻ ചിറകൊതുക്കും.

കരുതലിന്റെ കാട്ടുമരുനെന്നിൽ നീ
ഇറ്റിക്കുമ്പോൾ
നീറുന്ന
വേദനകളെ
ഞാൻ കരഞ്ഞുകളയും.
ഇലകൾ സ്നേഹമെന്ന മന്ത്രമുരുവിട്ട്
കാറ്റുതീയെന്റെ നേർക്കെറിയുമ്പോൾ
നിനക്കൊരു മന്ത്രവാദിനിയുടെ
മുഖമായിരിക്കും.

ഞാൻ മയങ്ങും.
ഇലത്തുമ്പിൽ നിന്നൊരു തുള്ളി
പൊഴിയുന്നതറിയാതെ .
ഇളവെയിലിന്റെ സൂചിക്കുത്തറിയാതെ ..
നക്ഷത്രങ്ങളൊട്ടിച്ചു വെച്ച
ആകാശം കാണാതെ...

നിന്നിലപ്പോൾ ചിരിക്കായകൾ പൊട്ടിപ്പറന്നു
നടക്കുന്നുണ്ടാവും
അതിലൊരു ചിരി പറന്നെന്റെ ചുണ്ടിലും
പറ്റിച്ചേരും.

അതിഗൂഢമായൊരാണത്തിലേക്കു
ഞാനുണരും .

ഇനി ഞാനൊരു പക്ഷിയോ
നീയൊരു കാടോ അല്ല

നീ ഞാൻ മാത്രമാണ്.



Pia Jayakumar

കുമാരനാശാൻ തന്റെ നായികമാരെ ലൗകിക പ്രണയത്തിൽ നിന്നും പതിയെപതിയെ ആത്മീയതയിലേക്ക് കൈപിടിച്ചുയർത്തുന്നതായി തോന്നിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. പ്രണയത്തിന് ഒരു ആത്മീയ പരിവേഷം നൽകുന്നതുപോലെ! അത്തരം ഒരു യത്നമാണ് കുമാരനാശാൻ നളിനിയിലും നടത്തുന്നത്. നളിനിയുടെ പ്രണയത്തെയും ഒടുവിൽ ആത്മീയതയിൽ അല്ലെങ്കിൽ മോക്ഷമാർഗ്ഗത്തിലെത്തിക്കുന്നതുപോലെ!

വീണപുവിൽ, വീണപുവിനു മോക്ഷം ലഭിച്ചു, നിസ്വാർത്ഥമായി ജീവിച്ചപ്പോൾ.

ചിന്താവിഷ്ടയായ സീതയിൽ, സീത ആദ്യം തന്റെ അവസ്ഥയിൽ പരിതപിച്ച് കേഴുന്നു; ശ്രീരാമന്റെ പ്രവർത്തിയെ വിമർശിക്കുന്നു, പിന്നെ സത്യം കണ്ടെത്തി, ന്യായീകരിക്കുന്നു;

ഒടുവിൽ അത്മീയഭാവത്തിൽ എത്തി, തനിക്കിനി ലൗകികവാസം വേണ്ടെന്ന് തീരുമാനിച്ച ഭൂമിയിൽ അലിഞ്ഞു ചേർന്ന് മൂക്തിപ്രാപിക്കാനൊരുങ്ങുന്നു. കരുണയിൽ വാസവദത്തയും ഒടുവിൽ ചൂടലക്കളത്തിൽ കിടന്ന് യതിയെ കാണുന്നത് ഒരു ദിവ്യമായ ഒത്തുചേരലിലൂടെ ആണ്. ശരീരമില്ലാഞ്ഞിട്ടും ആത്മാവിൽ ശേഷിക്കുന്ന പ്രണയം, യോഗിയുടെ ദർശനം അവളിൽ പതിയുമ്പോൾ മോക്ഷം കിട്ടി ആ ആത്മാവ് വാനത്തിലേക്കുയരുന്നു.

നളിനിയും അപ്രകാരം ബാല്യ കൗമാരത്തിലെ പ്രണയത്താൽ അകപ്പെട്ട വിഭ്രാന്തിയാൽ മരിക്കാനൊരുങ്ങുന്നെങ്കിലും, ഒരു തപസ്വിനിയുടെ ആശ്രമത്തിലെത്തി അവിടത്തെ ചര്യകൾ അവളെ ആത്മീയമായി ഉയർത്തുകയും; ഒടുവിൽ, തന്റെ പ്രിയതമൻ യോഗിയായി മുന്നിൽ പ്രത്യക്ഷപ്പെടുമ്പോൾ എല്ലാം ഏറ്റു പറഞ്ഞ് അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ മാറിൽ തന്നെ വീണ്

കുമാരനാശാന്റെ
നളിനി



സമാധി പ്രാപിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു

മൂന്നിലും പ്രണയം ഉണ്ട്, എങ്കിലും സാക്ഷാത്കാരം ഇല്ല. ഒരുക്കണക്കിന് ഈ സാക്ഷാത്കാരമില്ലാത്ത പ്രണയങ്ങളാണ് നായികമാരെ മുകുതിയിൽ എത്തിക്കുന്നതും!

നളിനിയെ പറ്റി പറയാം

ഹിമവൽസാനുക്കളുടെ അരികിൽ ഒരു ആശ്രമത്തിനടുത്തുള്ള ഒരു കുന്നിൻ മുകളിൽ അത്യന്തതേജസ്സുള്ള ഒരു യുവയോഗി (ദിവാകര യോഗി) നിൽക്കുന്നതാണ് കവിതയുടെ തുടക്കം. അദ്ദേഹം ആ കുന്നിൻ മുകളിൽ നിന്ന് അത്യന്തം ഭംഗിയാർന്ന കുന്നിന്റേയും താഴ്വരയുടേയും ഒക്കെ പ്രകൃതി രമണീയത ആസ്വദിച്ചുപോകുന്നു. ('യോഗികൾക്ക് പ്രകൃതിരമണീയത ആസ്വദിക്കുന്നതിൽ തെറ്റൊന്നും ഇല്ലല്ലോ' എന്ന് കവി ആശ്വസിക്കുന്നു.) അദ്ദേഹം ആ ഭംഗിയിൽ ആകൃഷ്ടനായി സാവധാനം താഴേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങുന്നു. അപ്പോൾ പെട്ടെന്ന് ഹൃദയത്തിൽ അസാധാരണമായ ഒരു നെടുവീർപ്പ് ഉയരുന്നു. ഇതെന്തു കാരണം എന്ന് യതി ഓർക്കുന്നു. (കവി തന്നെ ഉത്തരവും നൽകുന്നു. 'ജീവികൾക്കു വാസനാബന്ധം ജീവൻ വിട്ടുപോകും വരെ അവരെ പിന്തുടരുക തന്നെ ചെയ്യുമല്ല' എന്ന്)

ആ യോഗിക്ക് തോന്നിയതുപോലെ ഒരു അസാധാരണത ആ മരങ്ങൾക്കപ്പുറം പതിവായുള്ള അനുഷ്ഠാനങ്ങൾ കഴിഞ്ഞ് ഈറനോടെ മരത്തിൽ ചാരിനിന്ന അതിസുന്ദരിയായ ഒരു യുവതിയിലും ഉണ്ടായി. അത് നളിനി ആയിരുന്നു. അവളിലും അസാധാരണമായ ചില ചാഞ്ചല്യങ്ങൾ ഉളവാകുന്നു. ദിവാകരനെ വേർപെട്ടു; തന്റെ മാതാപിതാക്കളെ നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടു; ദുഃഖത്തിൽ നിന്നൊക്കെ കരകയറാനാണ് അവൾ ആശ്രമത്തിൽ അനുഷ്ഠാനങ്ങളിൽ ആവൃതയാവുന്നത്. എങ്കിലും അവൾക്ക് അത്രയൊന്നും പുരോഗമിക്കാനായിട്ടില്ല. ഇപ്പോഴും ദിവാകരനിൽ തന്നെയാണ് അവളുടെ ഹൃദയം. ആ ദിവാകരയോഗിയാണ് ഇപ്പോൾ കുന്നിൻ മുകളിൽ എത്തിയത്. ദിവാകരന്റെ (യോഗി) സാമീപ്യമാകാം നളിനിയെ കൂടുതൽ ചഞ്ചലയാക്കിയത്.

അവൾ പെട്ടെന്നു തോന്നിയ ഒരുതരം ശോകത്താൽ തടാകത്തിൽ കണ്ട താമരയോടായി പറയുന്നു, (പാടുന്നു) 'താമരേ തരളവായുവേറ്റ് നീ ദുഃഖിക്കേണ്ട, നിന്റെ ജീവിതം ധന്യമാണ്, കാരണം നിനക്ക് നിന്റെ ആത്മശോഭ സൂര്യനും; തേൻ, വണ്ടിനും കൊടുക്കുവാനായല്ലോ എന്ന് സമാധാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. (അതിനർത്ഥം തന്റെ ഹൃദയം ദിവാകരനും ആത്മാവ് ഭഗവാനിലും സ്ഥിരമാക്കി, താനും ധന്യയാണെന്ന അർത്ഥമാകാം.)

നളിനി താമരയെ നോക്കി ആലപിക്കുന്ന ഗാനം കേട്ട് ആത്മസംയമനം നേടിയ യതി അല്പം ആശ്ചര്യപ്പെടുന്നു. അത്യന്തം മധുരമായ ആ ശബ്ദം കേട്ട് അദ്ദേഹം കൂയിലിനോട് 'അക്ഷരങ്ങൾ ഇല്ലാത്ത പാട്ട് നിർത്തുക' എന്നുപോലും പറഞ്ഞു പോകുന്നു. വള്ളിക്കെട്ടുകൾക്കപ്പുറം വീണ്ടും നളിനിയുടെ പാട്ട് കേട്ട് 'വള്ളിക്കെട്ടിൽ മറഞ്ഞിരുന്ന് പാടുന്ന കിളിയോ ഇത്?!' എന്ന് കരുതി യതി അവിടേക്ക് ചെല്ലുമ്പോൾ അതിസുന്ദരിയായ നളിനി നദിയിലേക്ക് ചാഞ്ഞ് കിടക്കുന്ന ഒരു ദേവതാരൂപവ്യക്ഷത്തിൽ ചാഞ്ഞ് കിടന്ന് പാടുകയാണ്!

ദൂരെ നിന്ന്, തന്നെ നോക്കുന്ന യുവതിയെ കണ്ട് നളിനിയുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ പൊടുന്നനെ വിടർന്ന് -യതിയെ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞ്-(കവി പറയുന്നു, നാരികൾക്കുള്ള സവിശേഷതയായി, അവർക്ക് തങ്ങൾ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നവരുടെ സാമീപ്യം പെട്ടെന്ന് തിരിച്ചറിയാനാവും എന്ന്), സംഭ്രമത്തോടെ ഒരു നിമിഷം ശങ്കിച്ചു, പിന്നെ സംഭ്രമം വെടിഞ്ഞ് യതിയുടെ നേർക്ക്

ഓടിചെല്ലുന്നു. ('കെട്ടിനിർത്തിയ വെള്ളം അണമുറിയുമ്പോൾ അതിവേഗതയോടെ നദിയെ നോക്കി ചെല്ലുമ്പോലെ എന്ന് കവി വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.) അവൾ ഓടിചെന്ന് ' അഗതിയായ എന്നെ അനുഗ്രഹിക്കണം' എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് യതിയുടെ പാദങ്ങളിൽ ഒരു സ്വർണ്ണ വടിപോലെ സാഷ്ടാംഗം വീഴുന്നു. അവളുടെ ഒറ്റപിരിയാ മുടി യതിയുടെ പാദങ്ങളിൽ വീണകണ്ട് അവൾ ചാരിതാർത്ഥ്യപ്പെടുന്നു. എന്നാൽ വളരെ സംയമിയായ യതി അല്പം പിറകിലേക്ക് മാറി യതികൾക്ക് ചേർന്ന രീതിയിൽ അവളോട് സഹതാപപൂർവ്വം എണിക്കാൻ ആംഗ്യം നൽകി, അവളെ അനുഗ്രഹിച്ച ശേഷം വിടചൊല്ലുവാനായി ഭാവിക്കുന്നു.

യതിയുടെ നിസ്സംഗത കണ്ട് നളിനി നിരാശയോടെയും ദയനീയതയോടെയും എണിക്കുന്നു. മാറിൽ നിന്ന് വേർപെട്ട വൽക്കലം നേരെയാക്കി, ഭക്തിയോടെ യതിയുടെ പാദം തൊട്ട് നമസ്ക്കരിച്ച്, തനിക്കു പറയാനുള്ളത് പറഞ്ഞാൽ അമ്പർത്ഥം ഭവിക്കുമോ എന്ന ആശങ്കയാൽ നളിനി നിൽക്കുമ്പോൾ യതി, 'നിനക്ക് മംഗളം ഭവിക്കട്ടെ, നിന്റെ ഭക്തിയിൽ ഞാൻ സന്തുഷ്ടനായിരിക്കുന്നു. 'നീ എങ്ങിനെ ഇവിടെ വന്നുപെട്ടു?' എന്നു തിരക്കുന്നു.

(യതിയും നിർവിചിന്തം ശാന്തമായി ഒഴുകിവരുന്ന ഒരു തടി നീർചുഴിയിൽ പെട്ട അല്പം ഒന്നുലഞ്ഞപോലെ അല്പം ചഞ്ചലമാവുന്നുമുണ്ട്)

നളിനി, തന്റെ കളിത്തോഴൻ തന്നെ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞില്ലെല്ലോ എന്ന ചിന്തയാൽ, വല്ലാതെ വെമ്പ്രാളപ്പെട്ട് വിഷണ്ണയായി, സംഭ്രമത്തോടെ. ഞാൻ അങ്ങയ്ക്ക് പണ്ട് ഇഷ്ടമുണ്ടായിരുന്ന അങ്ങയുടെ കളിത്തോഴിയായ നളിനിയാണ് എന്ന് തന്നെ പരിചയപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. അങ്ങയെ ഒരിക്കൽ കാണുവാൻ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ച് തപസ്വിയെപ്പോലെ ഞാനീ കാട്ടിൽ വാഴുകയാണ് , എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞ് കരയുന്നു.

യതി അവളെ തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നു. യതിയിൽ നളിനിയോട് അപ്രകാരം ഒരു പ്രേമം തോന്നിയിരുന്നില്ലായിരുന്നതിനാൽ അദ്ദേഹം അവളെ ആശ്വസിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. കഴിഞ്ഞത് കഴിഞ്ഞു, നിന്റെ കൗമാരത്തിലെ ആ ഇഷ്ടം ഞാൻ അറിഞ്ഞിരുന്നില്ല താനും. ഇപ്പോൾ നമ്മൾ പക്ഷമതികളല്ലേ?, നല്ല ഒരു പാത തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. അന്യർക്ക് നന്മ ചെയ്ത് നമുക്ക് ഇനി ജീവിതം ധന്യമാക്കാം എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് നളിനിയെ സമാധാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

നളിനിക്ക് തന്റെ മനസ്സിലെ ഭക്തി / സ്നേഹം, അദ്ദേഹത്തെ അറിയിക്കാതിരിക്കാനാവുന്നില്ല. അതിനാൽ അദ്ദേഹത്തോട്, ഞാൻ അങ്ങയെ ധ്യാനിച്ചാണ് ഇത്രകാലം ജീവിച്ചത്, വീട്ടിലും ഈ ആശ്രമത്തിലും ഒക്കെ. എന്റെ ഹൃദയവ്യഥ അങ്ങയോട് അറിയിച്ചോട്ടെ, എനിക്ക് അത് പറയാതിരിക്കുവാൻ ആവുന്നില്ല. അങ്ങ് എന്നെ തെറ്റിദ്ധരിക്കില്ലല്ലോ? എന്ന് ചോദിക്കുന്നു. കാരണം മനുഷ്യർക്ക് ഉള്ള അതുപോലെ മറ്റൊരാളെ അറിയിക്കുവാൻ പറ്റുകില്ലല്ലോ, വാക്കുകളുടെ സഹായം വേണം. വാക്ക് ശരിയായും മതിയായും തോന്നിയില്ലെങ്കിൽ തെറ്റിദ്ധരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും. അതുകൊണ്ട് നളിനി ആശങ്കയോടെ നോക്കുന്നു.

യതി അനുകമ്പാപൂർവ്വം, യോഗികൾക്ക് എല്ലാവരോടും കരുണമാത്രമേ ഉള്ളൂ. നിനക്ക് എന്നെക്കൊണ്ട് എന്ത് സഹായം ആണ് വേണ്ടതെന്ന് പറയുക എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് സമാധാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

നളിനി അല്പം ശാന്തയായി, തന്റെ കഥപറയുവാൻ തുടങ്ങുന്നു; അല്പം ആശങ്ക സംഭ്രമം ഒക്കെ ഉണ്ടെങ്കിലും അവൾക്ക് പറയാതിരിക്കുവാനാവുന്നില്ല. അവൾ തങ്ങളുടെ കുട്ടിക്കാലത്തെ കളികളും ഇഷ്ടവും ഒക്കെ വിവരിക്കുന്നു. കുട്ടിക്കാലത്ത് തങ്ങൾ ഓടിക്കളിച്ച സ്ഥലങ്ങളും പൊയ്കകളും, പുൽത്തകിടും, പൂമരങ്ങളും, എഴുത്തുപള്ളിയും, കൈകോർത്തുപിടിച്ച് ചിത്രശലഭങ്ങളോടൊപ്പം കളിച്ചു നടന്നതും, ആൺകുയിലിന്റെ പാട്ട് അനുകരിച്ച് കളിയാക്കി ദിവാകരൻ ഏറ്റുപാടിയതും, ഉച്ചയാവുമ്പോൾ തണലിൽ ഇരുന്ന് പുസ്തകം വായിക്കുന്നതും, മുല്ലപ്പൂക്കൾ ഇരുത്ത് മാല കെട്ടി മുടിയിൽ അണിഞ്ഞതും, എണ്ണിക്കളിക്കുമ്പോൾ നളിനിയെ പിന്നിലൂടെ വന്ന് കണ്ണുപൊത്തി വേദനിച്ച്, നളിനി കരയുമ്പോൾ കണ്ണുനീർ തുടച്ച് ആശ്വസിപ്പിച്ചതും ഒക്കെ ഒന്നൊഴിയാതെ നളിനി-ഓർത്തുവെച്ചിരുന്നതൊക്കെ-പറയുന്നു. പിന്നെ പെട്ടെന്നൊരിക്കൽ ദിവാകരൻ നാടുവിട്ടപ്പോൾ താൻ തലചുറ്റി വീണതും. അച്ഛന്റെ പരിചരണത്താൽ -എന്നാൽ മഴയില്ലാത്ത ചെടികളെ കർഷകൻ കിണറ്റിലെ വെള്ളം കോരി നനച്ച് ജീവൻ നിൽനിർത്താൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നതുപോലെ- താൻ ജീവിച്ചതും. യൗവനയുക്തയായപ്പോൾ അച്ഛൻ വിവാഹമാലോചിച്ചപ്പോൾ അതുൾക്കൊള്ളാനാവാതെ, തന്റെ പ്രിയ സഖികളെ ഓർക്കാതെ, നളിനി ഏറെ ഭയപ്പെടുന്ന രാത്രിയെപ്പോലും ഓർക്കാതെ ഒരു കാട്ടിലെത്തി ജീവൻ ഒടുക്കുവാനായ് ആമ്പൽ നിറഞ്ഞ ഒരു തടാകത്തിൽ ചാടുന്നു. അപ്പോൾ ആമ്പലിന്റെ കെട്ടുകളാലോ എന്നവണ്ണം പുഴയിൽ താഴാതെ ഏതോ കരങ്ങൾ നളിനിയെ താങ്ങുന്നു. അത് അതുവഴി വന്ന ഒരു യോഗിനി ആയിരുന്നു. യോഗിനിക്ക് നളിനി പറയാതെ തന്നെ ഏറെക്കുറെ എല്ലാം തന്നെ മനസ്സിലാവുന്നു. അവർ നളിനിയെ കുട്ടിക്കൊണ്ട് ആശ്രമത്തിൽ ചെന്ന് ഹുറൻ മാറ്റി അവളെ സമാധാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. നളിനി തുടരുന്നു, 'ഭവാനില്ലാത്ത ഈ മനോഹരമായ കാടിലെ പുലർകാലം എനിക്ക് ആസ്വദിക്കാൻ തോന്നിയില്ല തന്നെ. ഞാൻ പതിയെ മനസ്സ് ഏകാഗ്രമാക്കാനായി കഠിന സാധനകൾ ഒക്കെ പരിശീലിക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങി. പക്ഷെ ഇന്നലെ വസിഷ്ഠ പത്നി എന്റെ സ്വപ്നത്തിൽ വന്ന്, 'നിനക്ക് അഭീഷ്ടം സിദ്ധിക്കും' എന്ന് അനുഗ്രഹിക്കുകയുണ്ടായി, അതാവാം അങ്ങയെ എനിക്ക് കാണുവാനായത് ' എന്നും പറഞ്ഞ്, പറയാനുള്ളതൊക്കെ പറഞ്ഞ് വിധികാത്തു നിൽക്കുമ്പോലെ യതിയുടെ വാക്കുകേൾക്കാനായി കാത്തു നിൽക്കുന്നു.

യതി പറയുന്നു, 'നിന്റെ കഥകളൊക്കെ കേട്ടു കഷ്ടം തന്നെ. പക്ഷെ എല്ലാം കഴിഞ്ഞുവല്ലോ. ഇപ്പോൾ നീ സാഹസികതയോടെ കാട്ടിൽ ജീവിക്കയല്ലെ, ഞാനും യതിയായിരിക്കുന്നു. ഒരു കണക്കിന് നാം രണ്ടും ഒരേ പാതയിലൂടെയാണല്ലോ സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്നത്. ചിലരുടെ ആശ സഫലീകരിക്കില്ല. ചിലർക്ക് അപ്രതീക്ഷിതമായി എല്ലാം സാധിച്ചുകിട്ടും. മനുഷ്യർ നമ്മളൊക്കെ കർമ്മഗതിക്കനുസരിച്ച് ജീവിക്കുന്നവരല്ലെ, ശരിക്കുള്ള അറിവ് (മോക്ഷം) കിട്ടുന്നതുവരെ നമ്മളൊക്കെ ഇങ്ങിനെ ജീവിക്കേണ്ടി വരും. നിനക്ക് രക്ഷയ്ക്കായി കാട്ടിൽ ആശ്രമവും ഉണ്ടല്ലോ, വിധിയുണ്ടെങ്കിൽ നമുക്കിനിയും കാണാം' എന്നുപറഞ്ഞ് യോഗി മെല്ലെ നടന്നകലാൻ തുടങ്ങുന്നു.

നളിനിക്ക് ഈ വേർപിരിയൽ സഹിക്കാനാവുന്നില്ല. നളിനി യോഗിയെപ്പോലെ അത്ര കഠിനസാധനയൊന്നും ചെയ്ത് പക്വമായിരുന്നില്ലല്ലോ, യോഗിയിൽ അർപ്പിക്കപ്പെട്ട അവളുടെ ഹൃദയം ആ വഴിക്കുതന്നെ ഗമിക്കുന്നു. അവളിൽ വല്ലാത്തൊരു ഭാവപ്പകർച്ച ഉണ്ടാവുന്നു. അവൾ എല്ലാം മറന്ന് കുരരപ്പക്ഷി അലറുന്നമാതിരി കരഞ്ഞ്, 'അങ്ങ് പോയാൽ എന്റെ ജീവൻ എന്നെ വെടിയും പോലെയൊന്നും അത്, വെള്ളം വറ്റിയ ചിറയിലെ മത്സ്യം

പോലെയാവും എന്റെ ഗതി' എന്നു വാവിട്ട് കരഞ്ഞുകൊണ്ട്, ഹംസം അകലാൻ പോകുന്ന താമരയെ പിടിക്കാനായി ആയുസ്സോടെ (അത്ര സുന്ദരിയാണ് നളിനി) മുന്നോട്ടാണത് വീണ്, രണ്ടു കൈകളാലും യോഗിയുടെ കാൽകൾ പിടിക്കുന്നു. എന്റെ ഏക ധനവും ജീവനും, ഭോഗവും മോക്ഷവും എല്ലാം അങ്ങുമാത്രമാണ്. അങ്ങില്ലാതെ എനിക്ക് ജീവൻ ഇല്ല എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് കേഴുന്നു. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കാൽകൾ കണ്ണീരാൽ കഴുകുന്നു, ധൈര്യം നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട എന്നെ ഉപേക്ഷിക്കരുതേ എന്ന് യാചിച്ചുപോകുന്നു.

യതിയും മനസ്സലിഞ്ഞ് ('നിർമ്മലപ്രേമമാം വലയിലാരു വീണിടാ' എന്നു കവി),

നളിനെയെ സമാധാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. 'നിന്നിൽ കരുണയുള്ളവനാണ് ഞാൻ . നിന്റെ പരിശുദ്ധപ്രണയം ഞാനറിയുന്നു. നീ അറിവില്ലാത്തവരെപ്പോലെ ദുഃഖിക്കരുത്, നിന്റെ പ്രണയമാകുന്ന വിശിഷ്ടപുഷ്പം ; അത്, ശവശരീരങ്ങളിലും അശുഭമായതിലും അർച്ചിടായ്ക! (യോഗിമാർ പ്രേമം അർഹിക്കുന്നവരല്ല എന്ന്). സ്നേഹം പരിശുദ്ധമായി തന്നെ വയ്ക്ക! കാരണം, സ്നേഹമാണഖിലാസാരമുഴിയിൽ, സ്നേഹസാരമിഹ സത്യമേകമാം.. , 'ആ' വലിയ സ്നേഹത്തിനായാണ് ഞാൻ ഈ ഭൂമിയിലെ സ്നേഹം വെടിഞ്ഞത് എന്നു പറഞ്ഞ് നളിനിയെ ബോധവൽക്കരിക്കുന്നു. 'ആ പരമസുഖം' കിട്ടിക്കഴിഞ്ഞാൽ പിന്നെ ഒന്നും വേണ്ട എന്ന രഹസ്യം ഓതുന്നു.

അതുകേട്ട് മനസ്സ് തെളിഞ്ഞപ്പോലെ നളിനി സ്വയം എണ്ണീറ്റ്, യതിയുടെ ദിവ്യമായ കണ്ണുകളിൽ നോക്കി (ഇടിനാദം കൊണ്ട് മൊട്ടിട്ട പൊൻ കടമ്പയുടെ കൊമ്പുപോലെ യതിയെ നോക്കി) ആ ശരീരത്തിലേക്ക് ചായുന്നു. അദ്ദേഹം അവളെ താങ്ങുന്നു; ഓളം അടങ്ങിയ വീചിപോലെ; നാദം മറ്റൊരു നാദത്തിൽ കലരുമ്പോലെ; കാന്തിയിൽ മറ്റുകാന്തി കലരുമ്പോലെ; ഒന്നായി നിൽക്കുന്നു അവർ.

അപ്പോൾ നളിനി അനുഭവിച്ച സുഖം ഈ ഭൂവിൽ ആർക്കും അനുഭവിക്കാൻ ഇടയില്ലാത്തവിധം ശ്രേഷ്ഠമാണ് എന്ന് കവി പറയുന്നു. പ്രേമവും ആത്മീയതയും കലർന്ന ദിവ്യമായ ഒരു ഒത്തുചേരൽ. ആത്മാവ് പരമാത്മാവിനോട് ചേരുമ്പോലെ നളിനി ദിവാകരന്റെ ആത്മാവിൽ അലിഞ്ഞ് മറയുവോലെ. നളിനി കണ്ണീരിൽ കുളിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് 'ഓം' എന്ന മന്ത്രണത്തോടെ ജീവൻ വെടിയുന്നു; വ്യോമമണ്ഡലത്തിലേക്ക് മറയുന്നു. (ഇതുപോലെ ഒരു മോക്ഷ പ്രാപ്തി ആണ് വീണപൂവിനും, വസവദത്തക്കും, സീതയ്ക്കും ഒക്കെ ആശാൻ നൽകുന്നത്!)

കാറ്റുനിൽക്കുമ്പോൾ പതാകവീഴുമ്പോലെ, നളിനിയുടെ ചേതനയറ്റ ശരീരം യോഗിയിൽ ചേർന്ന് കിടക്കുന്നു. അതുകണ്ട് യോഗി, 'ഇതെന്തൊരുതരം സമാധിയാണ്! സുപ്തിയല്ല, ലയമല്ല, യോഗവുമല്ല.. !' എന്ന് ആശ്ചര്യപ്പെടുന്നു. ഇത്ര ഇളം വയസ്സിലേ നിനക്ക് മോക്ഷപ്രാപ്തി കിട്ടിയല്ലോ!; പാറ്റ തീയിലേക്ക് തന്റെ ജീവൻ വെടിയും പോലെ മോഹമാർന്ന ഹൃദയത്തിൽ തന്നെ നീ ജീവൻ വെടിഞ്ഞല്ലോ. (പരിശുദ്ധ പ്രേമവും മോക്ഷത്തിലേക്ക് നയിക്കുമല്ലോ . രാധികമാർ അങ്ങിനെയാണല്ലോ മോക്ഷാർഹരായത്). ഞെട്ടിൽ നിന്ന് അടർന്നു വീഴുന്ന പൂക്കളും ഹിമത്തിൽ നിന്ന് അടർന്നുവീഴുന്ന തുള്ളികളും ഒക്കെ നീ അനുഭവിച്ച ഈ സ്വർഗ്ഗസുഖം അനുഭവിക്കാനായില്ലല്ലോ എന്ന് ദുഃഖിച്ചേക്കാം (മരിക്കും മുൻപുള്ള ആ ആത്മസാക്ഷാത്ക്കാരം).

യോഗി ഒരു നിമിഷം പശ്ചാത്തപിക്കുന്നു. ചെറുതിലേ മൊട്ടിനുള്ളിൽ ഒളിഞ്ഞിരുന്ന മധുവെന്നപോലുള്ള നിന്റെ അനുരാഗം ഞാൻ അറിഞ്ഞില്ല; എങ്കിലും വിധി നമ്മെ

സമാഗമിപ്പിച്ചല്ലോ, നിന്റെ തേന്മൊഴികൾ നിന്നുപോയതിൽ ഞാനും കുണ്ഠിതനാണ്. ഇനി അത് ഇവിടെ അലയടിക്കില്ലല്ലോ. എങ്കിലും അത് ഈ കാട്ടിൽ അലിഞ്ഞുചേർന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. അത് ഈ മരങ്ങൾക്കും സിദ്ധസമൂഹങ്ങൾക്കും ആ ദിവ്യത അനുഭവിക്കാനാവും. ഭൂമി ഇതാ നിന്റെ വേർപാടിൽ ശ്രേണി തലമുടിയഴിച്ചിട്ട് കരയുമ്പോലെ; ക്ഷോണി ഗുഹയിൽപ്പെട്ട ശബ്ദം പോലെ, കേണീടുന്നു. (ക്കൈയും യോഗിയുടെ ദുഃഖം) സൂര്യൻ ഒരുനിമിഷം വിണ്ണിൽ നിശ്ചലനായി നിന്നു! കാടും നിശ്ചലമായപോലെ, കന്യകേ നീ പോയപ്പോഴുണ്ടായ ആ ഊക്കിനാൽ കാലഗതിപോലും അല്പസമയം നിന്നുപോയപോലെ! (യതിക്ക് തോന്നുന്നു.) ഞാനും നിന്നെപ്പോലെ ഒരു ശിക്ഷ്യക്ക് ഗുരുവാകാനായതിൽ ധന്യനായിരിക്കുന്നു. (നളിനിക്ക് അനശ്വര-ആത്മീയ-സ്നേഹത്തിന്റെ ശാശ്വതത്വം വെളിപ്പെടുത്തിയല്ലോ ദിവാകരൻ) നീ ഇപ്പോൾ ജ്ഞാനിയായിരിക്കുന്നു. നീ സിദ്ധിയാർന്ന എന്റെ ശരീരവും പുണ്യഭൂമിപോലെ പവിത്രമായിരിക്കുന്നു.

തന്റെ ഗൗരവമൊക്കെ അല്പം ഉലഞ്ഞ് ഈ വിധം ഓരോന്ന് പറഞ്ഞ് ആ യോഗി നിൽക്കുമ്പോൾ അവിടെ നളിനിയെ തേടി ആശ്രമത്തിലെ യോഗിനി എത്തുന്നു.

ദിവാകരനിൽ വീണുകിടക്കുന്ന നളിനിയെ കണ്ട് അലമുറയിട്ട് കരഞ്ഞ് , വിഗ്രഹത്തിൽ ചാർത്തിയ വാടിയ ഹാരം മാറ്റും പോലെ , പതിയെ നളിനിയുടെ ശരീരം അടർത്തിമാറ്റി, ഇരുവരും ചേർന്ന് നിലത്ത് പുൽത്തകിടിയിൽ കിടത്തുന്നു. അപ്പോൾ ആനയുടെ തുമ്പിക്കൈയാൽ വലിച്ചെറിഞ്ഞ മനോഹരമായ ഒരു പുഷ്പം പോലെ തോന്നുന്നു നളിനിയുടെ ഉടൽ(കവിഭാവന).

അവർ പിന്നെ യോഗിനിക്ക് യോജിച്ച വിധത്തിൽ കുഴിയെടുത്ത് നളിനിയെ അടക്കം ചെയ്യുന്നു. എന്നിട്ട് കൃപണർ പോലെ രണ്ടുപേരും രണ്ടുദിക്കിലേക്ക് നടന്നകലുന്നു. ദിവാകരൻ സന്യാസത്തിനും യോഗിനി ആശ്രമത്തിലേക്കും.

ദിവാകരയോഗി അനേകനാൾ സാധനകൾ തുടർന്ന് ഒടുവിൽ സമാധിയടഞ്ഞു മുക്തനാവുന്നു.

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മലയാളത്തിലെ ഏറ്റവും തലപ്പൊക്കമുള്ള നോവലിസ്റ്റ് ആരാണ് എന്ന ചോദ്യത്തിന് ഒരു ഉത്തരമേ ഉള്ളൂ, ഉറുബ്ബ് എന്ന പി സി കുട്ടികൃഷ്ണൻ. തന്റെ തലമുറയിലെ കാമികരിൽ ഏറ്റവും ഉന്നതശീർഷനായ ഉറുബ്ബിന്റെ കഥാലോകം സുന്ദരികളുടേതും സുന്ദരന്മാരുടേതുമാണ്, നന്മ നിറഞ്ഞവരുടേതാണ്, നല്ല മനുഷ്യരുടേതാണ്.

‘കുറ്റം നടന്നു വന്ന വഴിയേ നോക്കിയാൽ കുറ്റവാളികളോട് സഹാനുഭൂതിയേ തോന്നൂ. അറിയാതെയൊന്നെങ്കിൽ പോലും മനസ്സിൽ രൂഢമൂലമായ ഈ വീക്ഷണം മനുഷ്യൻ അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായി ചിത്തയല്ല എന്ന ബോധം എന്നിൽ ഉണ്ടാക്കി.’ അദ്ദേഹം എഴുതുന്നു. തെറ്റുകളും കുറ്റങ്ങളും ചെയ്യുമ്പോൾ പോലും അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായി മനുഷ്യർ സുന്ദരികളും സുന്ദരന്മാരുമാണ് എന്ന തോന്നൽ തനിക്കുണ്ടാവാൻ കാരണം ഈ മനോഭാവമാണ്. ‘ഇത്ര കൂടി അദ്ദേഹം കുട്ടി ചേർക്കുന്നു, ‘വൈരുദ്ധ്യത്തെയും സൗന്ദര്യത്തെയും വേർതിരിക്കുന്ന അതിർ വരവ്, അതു കാണുന്ന വ്യക്തിയുടെ മനസ്സിലാണ്, അതുകൊണ്ട് തന്നെയാവണം, പരിണാമത്തിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും മേലെ പടിയിൽ നിൽക്കുന്ന, സഹ ജീവിയായ മനുഷ്യൻ സുന്ദരനായി മാത്രം എനിക്ക് തോന്നിയത്.’

ഈ ജീവിത വീക്ഷണത്തിന് തീർത്തും അനുയോജ്യമാണ് ഉറുബ്ബിന്റെ രചനാ രീതി. മനുഷ്യ മനസുകളെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള ആഴത്തിലുള്ള ജ്ഞാനം, വ്യക്തികളുടെ ബലഹീനതകളെയും, ദൈന്യതകളെയും കൃത്യമായി ഉൾക്കൊള്ളൽ, അവയെ രചനകളിൽ അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തൽ. ഇതിന് ഉറുബ്ബിനെ സഹായിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളത് ജീവിതത്തോടുള്ള അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ നിലപാടുകളാണ്.

ഒപ്പം അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കരുത്താർന്ന ധർമ്മബോധവും കവിതയോട് അടുത്തു നിൽക്കുന്ന ആഖ്യാന രീതിയും.

ഉറുമ്പിന്റെ കഥകളെ അവലോകനം ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ട് പ്രശസ്ത നിരൂപകൻ പ്രൊഫ . എം അച്യുതൻ ഈ വസ്തുത എഴുതിയത് ഇങ്ങനെയാണ്, ‘സ്നേഹിക്കുമ്പോഴും വെറുക്കുമ്പോഴും ദുഃഖിക്കുമ്പോഴും മനുഷ്യരിൽ സൗന്ദര്യം കാണുകയും മനുഷ്യ ജീവിതത്തെ ആരാധിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന ഉറുമ്പിന്റെ കഥാ ലോകത്തിൽ സ്നേഹവും സഹാനുഭൂതിയും നന്മയും മാനവീയതയുടെ സുഖകരമായ നീരൊഴുക്കും ഉണ്ട്...’

പരുത്തുള്ളി ചാലപ്പുറത്ത് കുട്ടികൃഷ്ണ മേനോൻ എന്ന ഉറുമ്പ് ജനിച്ചത് 1915 ജൂൺ 8 നാണ്... പൊന്നാനിക്കടുത്തുള്ള പള്ളിപ്രം എന്ന സ്ഥലത്ത്.. അച്ഛൻ കരുണാകര മേനോൻ, അമ്മ പാറുക്കുട്ടിയമ്മ. ഹൈസ്കൂൾ വരെ മാത്രമേ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം ഉണ്ടായുള്ളൂ. അതിന് ശേഷം ഈ വിശാലമായ ലോകമായിരുന്നു അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ വിദ്യാലയം. തുടർന്ന് അധ്യാപകൻ , കോംബൗണ്ടർ, കറസ്പോണ്ടന്റ്, ക്ലാർക്ക് , വർക്ക് സൂപ്രണ്ട് , സൂപ്പർവൈസർ, ആകാശ വാണിയിൽ പ്രൊഡ്യൂസർ, പത്രാധിപർ എന്നിങ്ങനെ തികച്ചും വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന അനേകം തൊഴിലുകളിൽ അദ്ദേഹം വ്യാപരിച്ചു. എന്നിരുന്നാലും അധ്യാപക വൃത്തിയാണ് ഏറ്റവും തൃപ്തിയോടെ താൻ ചെയ്ത തൊഴിൽ എന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം പറയുമായിരുന്നു.

കുട്ടിക്കാലത്ത് ഒരു സ്വപ്ന ജീവിതമായിരുന്ന ഉറുമ്പിന് ഭാവിയിൽ ഒരു കോമരം ആവണം എന്നായിരുന്നു മോഹം. പിന്നീട് ആ മോഹം ആനക്കാരന് വഴിമാറി. വലിയ ആകാരമുള്ള ആനയെ വരുതിക്ക് നിർത്തുന്ന ആനക്കാരൻ ചില്ലറക്കാരനല്ല എന്ന തോന്നലിൽ നിന്നാണ് ആ ആഗ്രഹം ഉണ്ടായത്. പിന്നീട് അത്തരം മോഹങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് തെന്നിമാറി ഒരു പോസ്റ്റ്മാനിൽ എത്തിച്ചേർന്നു ആഗ്രഹം. പക്ഷേ അദ്ദേഹം അതൊന്നും ആയില്ല . അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട്, ‘ആർക്കെങ്കിലും ആഗ്രഹങ്ങൾ പൂർണ്ണമായി സാധിക്കലുണ്ടോ?’

പാലിക്കാത്ത ഇത്തരം ആഗ്രഹങ്ങളും കവിതക്കമ്പവും കൂടിച്ചേർന്ന് തന്റെ ഉപബോധ മനസ്സിൽ ഉണ്ടാക്കിയ ഒരു തരം രാസപ്രക്രിയയുടെ ഫലമായിട്ടാണ് കഥ പറയാനുള്ള ഔൽസുക്യം തന്നിൽ ഉണ്ടായത് എന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട്. ചെറിയ കുട്ടിയായിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ രാമായണവും മഹാഭാരതവും അദ്ദേഹത്തെ ആകർഷിച്ചിരുന്നു. രജസ്വലയായ പാഞ്ചാലിയെ വസ്ത്രാക്ഷേപം ചെയ്ത് അപമാനിച്ച നീചനായ ദുശ്ശാസനൻ, ഒട്ടനേകം ജീവിത പ്രാരാബ്ധങ്ങളോട് കൂടിയ നമ്മുടെ നാണുനായരാണ്. ദുശ്ശാസനന്റെ മാറിടം പിളർന്ന് ചോര കുടിച്ച ഭീമസേനനോ, പരമ ശാന്തനായ കുറുപ്പും... വെറും മുത്തശ്ശിക്കഥകൾ ആയിട്ടല്ല, ചെറിയ കുട്ടിയായിരിക്കെ തന്നെ അദ്ദേഹം പുരാണേതിഹാസങ്ങളെ ഉൾക്കൊണ്ടിരുന്നത് എന്നതിന് ഉദാഹരണങ്ങളാണ് ഈ രീതിയിലുള്ള വായന. അവിടെയും മനുഷ്യ മനസ്സിന്റെ സൗന്ദര്യവും നന്മയും കാണാനായിരുന്നു അദ്ദേഹത്തിന് താത്പര്യം.

കവിതകളെ ഏറെ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടിരുന്ന ഉറുമ്പിന്, ആശാൻ കവിതകളോടായിരുന്നു ഏറെ താത്പര്യം. താൻ അനുഭവിച്ച മാനസിക സംഘർഷങ്ങൾ എനിക്ക് ആശാൻ കവിതകളിൽ

വായിച്ചെടുക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു എന്നാണ് ഈ താത്പര്യത്തോടുള്ള കാരണമായി അദ്ദേഹം വിശദീകരിച്ചത്. കൂട്ടത്തിൽ ആശാനോട്, തനിക്ക് വേദനയോടെയുള്ള അനുരാഗമായിരുന്നു എന്നും അദ്ദേഹം സൂചിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട് ഒരിക്കൽ.

ഉറുമ്പിന് പതിനാല് വയസ്സുള്ളപ്പോഴാണ് അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ ആദ്യ കവിത മാതൃഭൂമിയിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിച്ചു വന്നത്. പൊന്നാനിക്കാരൻ തന്നെയായ മഹാകവി ഇടശ്ശേരിയാണ് ഈ കവിത വായിച്ചിട്ട് മാതൃഭൂമിയ്ക്ക് അയക്കു എന്ന് നിർദ്ദേശിച്ചത് എന്ന് ഉറുമ്പ് ഒരു അഭിമുഖത്തിൽ ഓർത്തെടുക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ചില പ്രത്യേക പ്രമേയങ്ങൾ കവിതയുടെ നാലതിരുകൾക്കുള്ളിൽ ഒരുങ്ങുന്നില്ല എന്ന് മനസിലായപ്പോഴാണ് തന്റെ തട്ടകം, കഥാരചനയാണ് എന്ന് അദ്ദേഹം തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞത്. 'വേലക്കാരിയുടെ ചെക്കൻ' എന്ന് പേരിട്ട തന്റെ ആദ്യകഥ അദ്ദേഹം ആദ്യം വായിക്കാൻ കൊടുക്കുന്നത് കുട്ടിക്കുഷ്ണമാരാർക്കാണ്. കഥ തരക്കേടില്ല, ഇനിയങ്ങോട്ട് കഥയാണ് തന്റെ തട്ടകം എന്ന് മാരാറാണ് അദ്ദേഹത്തെ ബോധ്യപ്പെടുത്തിയത് . ആ ഉപദേശം നൽകിയ ആത്മ വിശ്വാസമാണ്, പിന്നീടങ്ങോട്ട്, മലയാളം എക്കാലവും ഓർത്തുവയ്ക്കുന്ന രാച്ചിയമ്മ പോലുള്ള കഥകളിലേയ്ക്കും ഉമ്മാച്ചു, സുന്ദരികളും സുന്ദരന്മാരും, അമ്മിണി, അണിയറ തുടങ്ങിയ നോവലുകളിലേയ്ക്കും വളർന്നു പന്തലിച്ചു മഹാവൃക്ഷമായി രൂപാന്തരപ്പെട്ടത്. മറ്റൊന്നു കൂടിയുണ്ട്, തന്റെ പാരമ്പര്യത്തെയും മണ്ണിനെയും ബന്ധപ്പെടുത്തിയല്ലാതെ ഒരു വരി പോലും എഴുതിയിട്ടില്ല ഉറുമ്പ്.

മായന്റെയും, ഉമ്മാച്ചുവിന്റെയും കഥ പറയുന്ന ഉമ്മാച്ചു, രാമൻ നായരുടെയും കുഞ്ചു കുട്ടിയമ്മയുടെയും കഥ പറയുന്ന സുന്ദരികളും സുന്ദരന്മാരും - ഈ കഥാകാരൻ പറയുന്ന കഥകളൊന്നും തീവ്ര അനുരാഗത്തിന്റേതല്ല .. പിന്നെയോ, അടിസ്ഥാനപരമായി മനുഷ്യരെല്ലാം ആത്മാവിൽ സുന്ദരികളും സുന്ദരന്മാരുമാണ്, നല്ലവരാണ് എന്ന ഉറച്ച ബോധ്യത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ഉയിർകൊണ്ട സത്യ പ്രസ്താവനകളത്രെ.

Traditional Ayurvedic Treatments & Therapies

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- Weight loss Therapy
- Stress Therapy
- Beauty Therapy
- Rehabilitation Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Sports Injury Therapy

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ആനയെ സ്വന്തമാക്കാൻ ആഗ്രഹവുമില്ല
അരിക്കൊമ്പൻ പോലുള്ള ആനയെ
മെറുക്കിയെടുത്ത് നാട്ടാനയാക്കാം

അവന്റെ ആവാസസ്ഥാനത്തുനിന്ന്
മാറ്റിയത്രെ ശരിയായിട്ടുമില്ല
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അതു മോഷ്ടിച്ചു തിന്നുവാൻ തുടങ്ങി

അവനും ചക്കക്കൊമ്പനും പാറുവും
സ്വച്ഛന്ദം വിഹരിച്ചു ചിന്നക്കനാൽ കാട്ടിൽ
ഇല്ലാക്കഥകൾ കെട്ടിച്ചമച്ചവനെ
നാടുകടത്തി ചിന്നക്കനാൽ കാട്ടിൽ നിന്നും

ഭീമമായ തുക ചെലവാക്കിയവൻ
കോളറും കെട്ടിവിട്ടു

ചില മാഫിയാ മുതലാളിമാർക്കുവേണ്ടി
വനവും വന്യമൃഗങ്ങളും നാടുന്നീങ്ങി

ഇനിയുമെഴുതുവാൻ പലതുമുണ്ട്
എഴുതിയാൽ പൊറുക്കില്ല വനമാഫിയ
നേരെഴുതിയതിൽ ആർക്കെങ്കിലും
വിഷമം തോന്നിയെങ്കിൽ ക്ഷമിക്കുക.

ആന മുതലാളി





Febin

മയിൽപീലി

ഒരു മയിൽപീലിതൻ അഴകായി എൻ
മുന്നിലെപ്പോഴോ വന്നെത്തി

നിൻ മൃദു സാമീപ്യം ആനന്ദ കുളിർ മഴയായി
എന്നിൽ നിറഞ്ഞു

എൻ മനതാരിൽ വേണുഗാനമായി നീ നിറഞ്ഞീടവേ

എൻ നിശ്വാസമാകെ നീ നിറഞ്ഞിടുന്നു

എൻ മനം സംഗീത സാന്ദ്രമാക്കി

എന്നിലെ എന്നെ നീ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു.

പ്രിയ കണ്ണന്റെ പീലിത്തലമുടി നീ
അലങ്കരിച്ചീടുമ്പോൾ

നിത്യ ചൈതന്യമായി നീ എന്നിൽ വീണലിഞ്ഞിടുന്നു

പ്രൊഫൈൽ

എന്റെ പേര് ഫെബിൻ എസ്. ഞാൻ കേരളത്തിലെ കൊല്ലം സ്വദേശിയാണ്, കഴിഞ്ഞ 10 വർഷമായി സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നു. ഞാൻ ഇന്ത്യയിൽ നിന്ന് നിയമത്തിൽ ബിരുദം നേടി, സിംഗപ്പൂരിൽ ഒരു ലീഗൽ കൺസൾട്ടൻസി സ്ഥാപനം നടത്തുന്നു. ഞാൻ എന്റെ ഭർത്താവും മകനും ഉൾപ്പെടെ എന്റെ കുടുംബത്തോടൊപ്പമാണ് താമസിക്കുന്നത്. ഫോട്ടോഗ്രാഫി, സംഗീതം, കവിത എന്നിവയിലാണ് എന്റെ താൽപ്പര്യം.



Venmony Bimalraj

പുനർജ്ജനി

ഇന്നാവണം പുനർജ്ജനിയുടെ ആദ്യദിനം
ഇന്നു തന്നെയുയിരാർന്നു പറക്കണമുലകിൽ
അന്നു മുതൽ നീയെന്റെ ചിറകിനു മേലെ
അദ്യശ്യമാമൊരു ചങ്ങലക്കൂട്ടിൻ വല മുറുക്കി

തിരികെ തരികെന്റെ ലോകവും ശ്വാസവും
തിരികെയാ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യച്ചുവടിന്റെ താളവും
ഇന്നു വരെ ഞാനിങ്ങനെയീ വിലങ്ങിട്ട കൂട്ടിൽ
വിങ്ങുന്ന വേദനപേരി കിടന്നിട്ടില്ലയീപ്പരിൽ

ഉള്ളിലേക്കിറങ്ങിയിറങ്ങി തിരിച്ചു പോം
വിരഹമാം വേദന ചൂഴ്ന്നിറങ്ങുന്നു നെഞ്ചിൽ
അതുകൊണ്ടു മാത്രമല്ലലിതു ജീവിതമെന്നു
ഉൾബോധത്തിൻ തിരിച്ചറിവു വന്നു നിറഞ്ഞ നാൾ ..

ഇത് മുഖമറകളിൽ ഒളിക്കാത്ത പേടിയുടെ മുഖം,
നേർമുഖങ്ങൾക്കു മേൽ ആരോ അഴിച്ചു വെച്ചയിടമാണ്,
പേടിയുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ ആർക്കുമില്ലാത്തയിടം
എല്ലാർക്കും രോഗാർത്തമായ ഒരേ നിശ്വാസങ്ങൾ..

ഒരു മാർഗ്ഗവും ഒരു നേർ നിയമവും ചേരുന്ന കാഴ്ചകളിൽ,
മരിച്ചില്ല ഞാനെന്നു സ്വയമാശ്വസിച്ച് ഉൾച്ചിരിയിൽ,
മുഖമറയുടെ വിടപറയൽ കാത്തിരുന്ന നിമിഷങ്ങളിൽ,
ഇനി നീ വരതീ വഴിയിലൊരു ശാപരുപമായ് ഒരിക്കലും .

വിശ്വസിക്കാൻ പറ്റുന്നപോലുണ്ടുമായിരുന്നില്ല ലോകം,
വിശ്വസിക്കാനാവുന്നില്ല ,തിരികെയെത്തിയെന്നു നീ ലോകം,
ആരുമൊന്നുമല്ലെന്നുനാർക്കും അറിയും പോലെ മാറ്റി കാലം ,
ഓരോ ചുവടും ,നിശ്വാസവും ഒന്നും ഈ കരങ്ങളിലല്ലെന്നും .

കറുത്ത മേഘപടലങ്ങൾ പറന്നുപോയ മുഖമറകളിൽ,
മറന്നു തുടങ്ങിയ പുഞ്ചിരിയുടെ ജീവസ്ഫുരണം,
തളിരിട്ടു മെല്ലെയുയരും വേഗതാളത്തിൽ തുടിയ്ക്കാൻ
മനുഷ്യനെന്ന ജീവിത പാഠമായി, ലോകതുടർച്ചയിൽ ചേരാം.



Deepa Madan



SOLO TO SEOUL

One of the pleasantest things in the world is going on a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.' – William Hazlitt 'On Going a Journey' (1822)

Father: Alone? But why? Can't you find one other person to go with you?

Mother: Can't you get M, M or M to go with you? Which country is it? How are the people there?

Is it safe? (A 1001 questions...)

The girls (M&M): Go, Amma. Why are you deliberating so much?

Hubby (M): Send me the itinerary and hotel booking so that I can have a look at it!

So, that was it! DONE! Made that resolution to travel solo a reality!

Destination: Seoul, South Korea | Duration: 4 nights



Why Seoul, S.Korea? Relative proximity to Singapore. One of the safest places for women in the world. Good public transport system and easy access. A nature-shopping-culture-food paradise. And of course, it was autumn there. It had been my long-cherished dream to experience fall!

Acquired a visa, booked the flight and hotel, bought travel insurance, bought a data plan. Voila! Set! There was no turning back!

The excel sheet is drawn out: a rough daily plan is worked out after intense research – right down to where the fall colours are best viewed, with info on the weather, and a train and bus guide. The rest – I decide to wing it. After all, it is a holiday and I have no one to please but myself! My Korea go-to person is of course, my lovely ex-colleague G, who sent me an info pack from her many trips to K. Priceless! A more-or-less budget trip with my own daily itinerary planned.

Finally, a mid-October Monday night!

Feeling: Excitement peppered with a bit of uneasiness (no fear or guilt, mind you!)

The trip to the airport – the mind is blank. The flight is at 1.39am. Not sure what M is thinking as he drops me off – but there are no words of warning or unnecessary advice. Grateful for that. Comfortable flight. After a quick nap, as the flight lands, reality strikes. I REALLY am on my own! A feeling of confidence and sense of empowerment set in. I am loving it!

‘The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases.’ – Hazlitt

Breakfast it is, first! Coffee and fries (limited veg options). Energised, I navigate the AREX train, complex subway, multiple flights of stairs with luggage and reach the destination in the city. (Though the signboards are in English too, reality sinks in that seeking verbal information in English is a problem here.)

I begin to soak in the sights and sounds of this new land! It is close to 10.30am and at that time of the day, the commuters are mainly the elderly – all on their own, going about their business! No one to escort them or mollycoddle them. How independent they are!

Fortunately, early check-in becomes a breeze. Lovely cosy room on the top floor with a view of a section of the city. My home for the next four nights! Unpacking is done. As is the practice during our family trips, I spare no time. With my backpack packed with essentials, and destinations fixed, I set out on foot. Staying at Myeongdong, the heart of Seoul, connectivity and access is a breeze. So, on day one, cultural immersion becomes priority. The Namsangol traditional garden is where I am heading to. It is impressive. The autumn colours beckon me and my heart sings! The evening sunlight dances and plays with the foliage and I revel in it. The traditional houses, Hanoks, and their architecture transport me back to my own tharavadu in Kerala. The living quarters, the fireplace and mortar and pestle in the kitchen, the inner and outer courtyards of the houses – all strike a chord and highlight how similar the homes, the family structure, traditional roles, and rules in Asian households are. I feel a connection!

It is turning dark, and I decide to move to the busier part of the city. (Now, this becomes a problem. The Google map ‘walking’ feature is disabled here, and I was totally counting on it! After a few detours and broken guidance from the locals, I spy the lights of the busy streets of Myeongdong. They lure me. There are people and more people there. The night market is on! Street food! The aroma of quaint and fresh food wafts through the air. Munching on a buttered corn cob, window-shopping it is, for the next couple of hours. At 7pm, I call it a day (much to the chagrin of M&M who felt the night was still too young and I had wasted the hours). I convince myself that some good hot food – ramen, in the warm comfort of the hotel room after a good shower might be good. The family/ extended family connect on Whatsapp video across continents to ensure I am safe. The beauty of technology! (The comfort of family connection; but absolutely no homesickness!)

Day 2

It is a day for the city girl in me. Bursting with confidence and enthusiasm, I set off to conquer the city and its palaces. Gyeongbokgung palace – the main palace in the city believed to have been built in 1395, home of the kings of the Joseon dynasty until 1598 when it was destroyed by fire. Restored 200 years later, it was again destroyed by the Imperial Japanese in early 20th century before it was designated as a national heritage in 1963. One is overwhelmed by the sheer grandeur and history of the palace and begins to think about human life and its transience. Deliberating whether to rent a Hanbok and be truly immersed in the culture, I veto it as my attention is caught by the bustle of activity outside the gate. It is time for the changing of the guards – a spectacular ceremony reminiscent of the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace. Such parallels!

I decide to walk to the Bukchon Hanok village, yet another site of traditional homes – a weak spot of mine; perhaps the lingering nostalgia of my childhood! I try to snap and store as many memories as possible as I definitely want to take a piece of this place back with me. It is close to 2.30pm. Hunger pangs strike! I set off in search of some local cuisine and find a quaint little place that says 'Bibimbap' on its menu. Seated at a table for two, I find that it is not easy to communicate that I want vegetarian Bibimbap! The waiter disappears after conversing with me for two minutes, frustrated at my lack of comprehension! Two young ladies seated at the



next table, taking pity on me, pull out their phones and try to translate my sounds in English, and finally get what I am saying. They convey this to the disgruntled waiter and in a few minutes, one of the best dishes I had ever had, spicy, piping hot veg Bibimbap is on my table! Yummilicious!

The Insadong precinct is next – an absolute treasure-trove for art lovers and those interested in traditional Korean crafts, and gifts. A couple of hours later, after coffee at a quaint café and a

few exquisite, handcrafted pieces in my bag, I am ready for the last leg of the day. It is not all rosy now as fatigue catches up after a couple of misadventures trying to find the right train. I am drained by the time I reach the Hongdae shopping area. Lined with shops and more shops selling practically anything under the sun for the young and trendy, it is a young shopper's paradise. Window shopping does its magic and I am energised. After a quick visit to Ewha shopping area (I had to strike that off too from my itinerary list), which does not excite me, I call it a day! That's enough of the city! It is time for nature the next day!

Day 3

Seoraksan National Park and Nami Island

It is an early 7.30am start and I arrive at the pick-up point with a Starbucks coffee and cream bagel. Tom, the young tour guide ushers us to the bus and I look forward to the 3-hour drive. This is going to be a dream come true – seeing autumn in all its glory! The landscape is beautiful. The mountainous terrain has set the stage for the fall party. There's glam and glitter with dance and music in the form of a gentle breeze and a drizzle. The trees, tall and proud on the sides shake hands with the



shrubs. The young leaves are dressed in green while the adventurous ones choose pale-yellow to enliven the party. They join the lemon and cadmium yellow bunch who are competing with the cadmium red, burnt sienna and crimson team to vie for the best dressed trophy. But there is no clear winner! It is the party burnished by the sun's rays that wins the cheers.

The roads are a dream. The journey, with a short break in between, is enjoyable. I have my airpods for company.

A short distance from the park, at the base of the mountain, Tom challenges us to take a short 30-minute hike up to the base. The majority choose to walk up, and what a visual treat it is! Seoraksan is experiencing the peak of fall colours! At the base, Tom urges us to explore the area for the next 3 hours. I feel a little lost, not sure whether to climb up to the peak (10.8kms) which I promptly shun or visit the Budha shrine which I decide against. I am enchanted by the board that reads 'To the Falls. Lo and behold, it is a choice that I know, I will never regret – just 2.8 kms of trek up the mountains with the most breathtaking view of the splendid mountain ranges and a riot of colours! Nothing prepares me for that! With Arijit Singh, Sid Sriram, Chithra, Shreya Ghoshal and others as company, I explore the track. At each point I devour the view, thinking that this is the best, but each step further takes me to greater heights. Beauty unparalleled. Nature at its best! After the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps this is ultimate glory! I feel humbled in the presence of nature and thank the powers that be for this gift. My heart wishes then that my loved ones are there with me to share the moment! My camera tries in vain to capture the beauty before me. My heart feels light, and my eyes are hungry for more. I trudge even higher, careful not to slip. At one point, at the hanging bridge, I realise that I cannot afford to go on as the walk down would be an arduous one. I sit on one of the rocks and drink in the sound of the falls, the running stream, the light breeze, basking in the clear rays of the sun and the shadows of the fall-coloured leaves. I am one with nature. This is the icing on the cake. I call M (who has just signed off from a meeting) to share the glory of the moment.

The climb down is perilous, with a not-so-perfect knee. The 2pm deadline looms. Definitely not a place to be explored in three hours. I make a mental promise to return, at some point in the future.

Two hours to Nami island. The very mention of the name evokes thrilled giggles from the young ones and K-drama lovers on the bus. The 5-minute ferry ride to the island sees passengers exclaim in glee as they identify the locations of their favourite K-dramas. The next three hours is a free and easy session. The island plays host to the fantasy of couples, the young and old, irrespective of nationalities (the popularity of K-drama!). The fall colours, predominantly yellow, lend the perfect backdrop to it.

The weather has turned chilly by the evening and the thought of hot noodle soup is inviting. It has been an exhausting day to say the least, but thoroughly gratifying. A hot shower and a quick call later, I call it a day, my dreams, a kaleidoscope of colours!

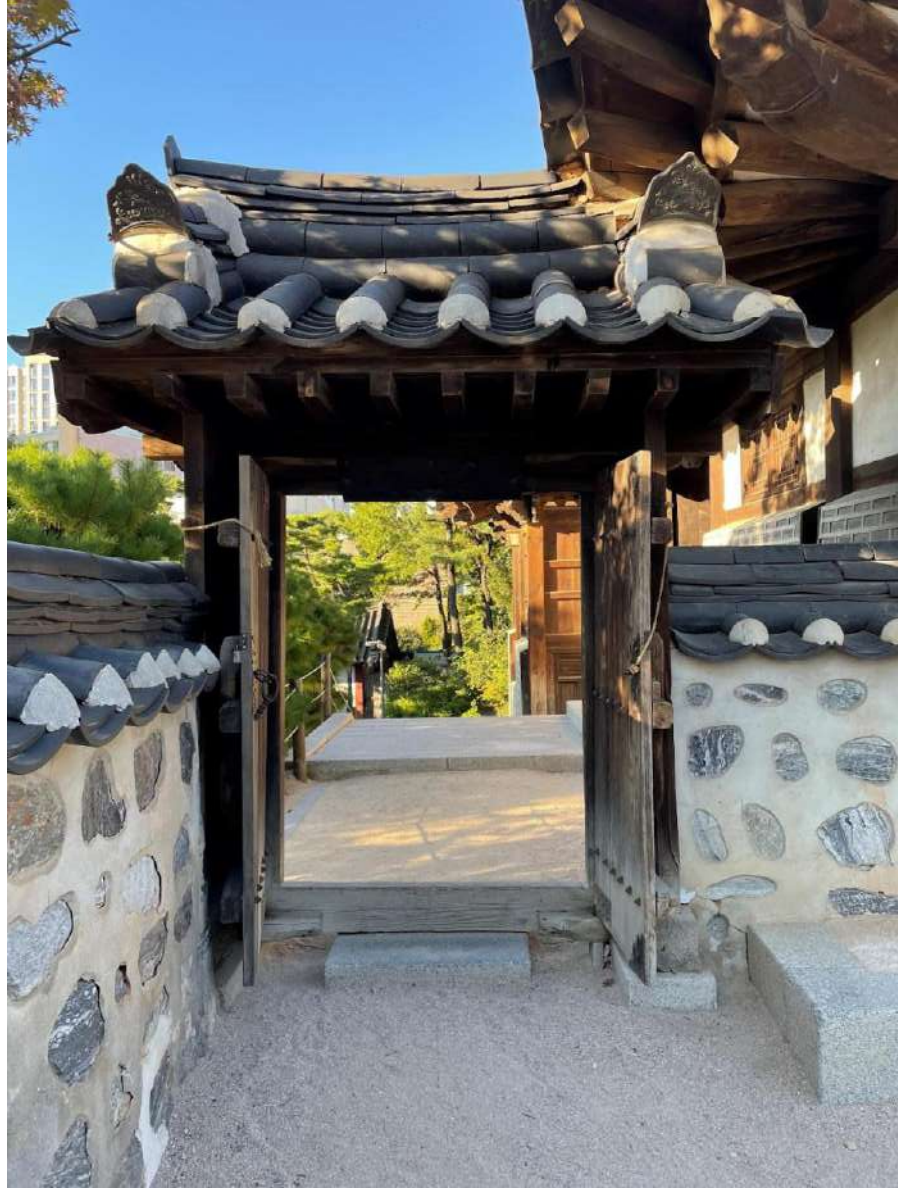
Day 4

It is my last day in Seoul. There is too much to do in a day. I have to pick and choose. I skip the tourist city spots for Namdaemun and Dongdaemun markets. I am stunned by the sight of large areas in the city set aside for niche markets - hundreds of shops (and that's not an exaggeration) selling textiles, baby goods, leather goods,

cosmetics – everything that Korea is famous for. The streets are bustling with storekeepers shouting, haggling, attracting customers, packing stuff in bulk, loading them onto lorries – dispatching them to customers all over the world. Sensory overload! The shopaholic in me is thrilled! I watch, observe, experience and revel in this whole novel activity happening around me. A macrocosm of the experience one gets, walking along busy Broadway in Ernakulam. Trade, commerce, global markets! After a mandatory peep into the chic Lotte Department store a short distance away,, which doesn't impress me much, I head to the hotel for a quick rest.

I am now ready for the finale – the Nanta Show at 8pm at the Myeongdong Nanta Theatre – the longest running show in Seoul. An amazing visual treat – a hilarious non-verbal musical performance featuring traditional Korean rhythms and instruments. A fitting finale! It is 10.30pm. Wishing to savour the final few lingering moments in this fine city, I navigate through the bustling Myeongdong night market again, tasting delectable dumplings and cheeseballs.

There is laughter all around – the young and old, shopping, eating, hanging out, enjoying the



night under the moon and clear sky. I feel safe and free and hope and wish that every place around the world is as safe as this at night for a woman (young or old) or even a man.

Back on the flight to Singapore the next day, I ask myself, 'Would I do this again?'

I answer myself – 'Why not?'

So, were there hiccups? Yes, of course, but you learn to deal with them yourself.

It was not a tour of self-discovery or one to prove my independence. It was just a venture to do something I had never done before and to enjoy it. One item off my bucket list!

BUT...truly...to quote Hazlitt again – 'I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

YES...I agree. I believe it is knowing that you have a home and hearth to return to and cuddle by, that makes a solo trip so gratifying.

To all of you out there who would like to venture out on your own – Go for it! But, thou must be comfortable with thyself and thine own company!



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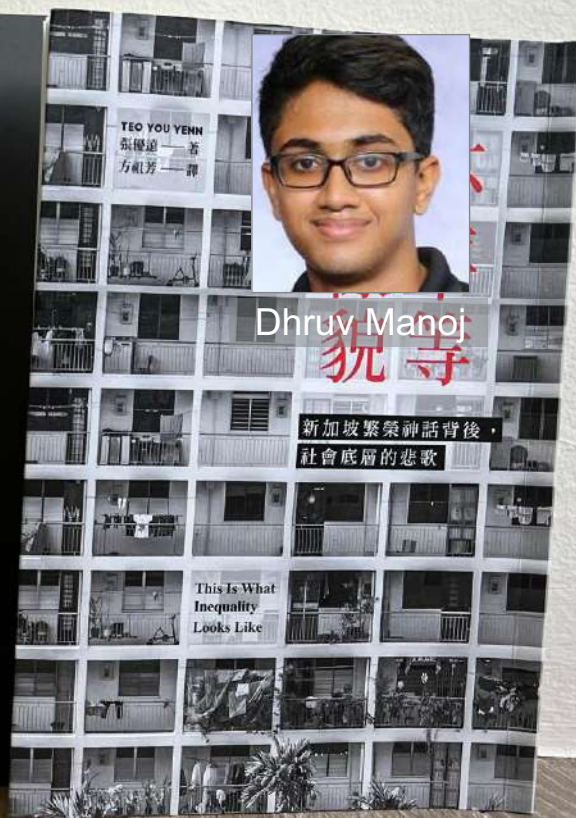
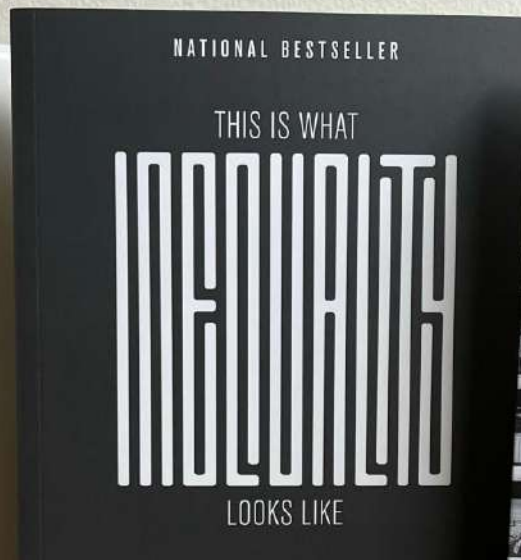


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ESSAYS BY
Teo You Yenn



Dhruv Manoj

INEQUALITY IN A UTOPIA

A Review of **This Is What Inequality Looks Like**

by Teo You Yenn

The Singapore we live in today is nothing short of a miracle. We have all heard the stories - once a sleepy fishing village, now a modern metropolis, where every person is entitled to the luxuries they can afford by the strength of their merit. Within a generation, a tiny island the size of Jakarta became one of the world's wealthiest nations. These narratives have become an integral part of our lived experiences as Singaporeans; the belief that we will be rewarded for our talents and efforts, the trust we have in our abilities being recognised, and the motivation to do our best can be ascribed to the credence we lend to these beliefs, and to a large extent, the meritocratic system rewards most of us. However, it would be bold to assume everyone has benefited equally from these systems, as many still struggle to survive in our country.

Over the past few years, discourse regarding inequality has become mainstream, with media outlets engaging in more conversations regarding the widening income gap and the problem of generational wealth. A seminal work looking at Singapore's inequality titled "This Is What Inequality Looks Like" by Teo You Yenn provides, in her own words, an ethnography of inequality in Singapore. Teo compares the families' lived experiences against prevailing narratives of meritocracy and economic survival which obscure and justify the plight of these

families. Teo argues that this has resulted in policy focused on self-reliance through employment and traditional family structures. The result is “differentiated deservingness,” an idea Teo introduces to depict how Singaporeans have “different types of access and degree of public support depending on who they are and how they live”. In other words, one’s status heavily influences access to quality public goods and services like healthcare or education.

Inequality, Teo argues, is inextricably tied up with one of the greatest narratives we tell ourselves is about our education system, which is globally renowned for producing students who regularly score amongst the highest in the world on standardised tests. Indeed, education has been a great social leveller in Singapore. Singapore, it seems, has inherited the same problem as other high-income societies, where the rich remain rich as they pay for expensive tuition which poor families cannot afford, endowing their children with social and educational capital that can never be replicated in poorer families. This perpetuates cycles of poverty which, while paling in comparison to the conditions of the destitute in other countries, continues to disadvantage youth today who have every right to mould their own future.

As she closes her book, Teo invites her readers to reframe their lives through the perspectives she presents. She asks that the middle and upper class majority in Singapore understand the consequences of their decisions and actions and how they inadvertently enhance the inequality and indignity faced by our fellow citizens. While those who are reading this piece may not be privy to the phenomena of poverty - especially against the hypercapitalistic backdrop of Singapore - we cannot remain ignorant of the experiences of our fellow citizens. It is our responsibility to act to support those in need.

Cousins Meet up and Fun

Meeting of cousins was the best part of life and we waited impatiently for the school holidays to start. The bags had been packed long earlier and we waited excitedly for the day to arrive that we would be travelling to our native place. The day arrived and now we were happily settled in our native village, in our ancestral home.

All term holidays were spent here and we loved it. In this holiday season there was a wedding in the family so we looked forth for more fun.

It was sheer happiness the day my cousin arrived from his town with his parents to join us. We three cousins were waiting eagerly for him to join our gang. We squealed with delight every time he came up with some comment even if it wasn't humorous or funny. We loved giggling for everything.

We trooped around a four member gang `poking our little noses into everybody's affairs. Mostly all the adults avoided us or pretended as if we didn't exist. That didn't bother us, we stole around stealthily running, scurrying, and hiding as if we were being chased though in fact



Chithra Krishnakumar

nostalgia

NOSTALGIA; GROOM GETS THE BROOM

we were ignored.

We ran, we climbed trees, swung high on swings tied to the trees, lay swinging on sacks tied to trees, went chasing the hens and the cocks and the lambs. We never felt tired. We were always looking for new adventures. It was just happiness!!!!

Relatives distant and near had gathered for the wedding of our aunt so there was lot of activity and preparations going on in the house. We did our part by hiding materials used by workers or family members setting up the place. Then we hid and watched their exasperation trying to figure out how it could have disappeared in a trice. We often replaced it immediately just to see their priceless expressions of relief and awe of magical happenings. Faith in God seemed to increase in the house as things mysteriously disappeared and reappeared.

The Groom

The groom was not to our liking. We thought he was too old for the bride. His demeanour was stiff and rude. We thought he looked like her father and we giggled. So every time his name popped up we looked at each other said 'Achen' (father) and giggled. He had an air of superiority and a mocking attitude.

Being known to the family he often visited the house and sneaked off into the house.

Every time he walked past us we giggled. We were kind of omnipresent. So he could never avoid us or our giggles. He glared at us and taunted us whenever we walked past him but we ignored him discussing loudly among ourselves how 'Achens' in general were infuriating.

Our ancestral home was big with lots of small rooms so we roamed around investigating. Some we had peeped into looked dusty and dark with ancient looking artefacts. A few times we saw 'Achen' coming out of these dark rooms and walk surreptitiously away.

A day was fixed a week before the wedding for a big Sadhya, feast, for the family members. There were rituals also planned for the ancestral deities that week. This called for more activity in the house. All the elderly were busy or pretending to be.

We sat in the attic and our cousin wondered loudly, "Why was our aunt being married off to this man?" Another cousin replied, "Money. People always marry for money." We thought we will give our elders the money we had in our piggy banks so then she won't need to marry him.

We then realized we were hungry. So we decided we will buy ourselves some snacks first and

the balance we will give them.

We ran out. Since we had nothing in particular to do we roamed around aimlessly in the pleasant countryside occasionally pelting small stones at nothing in particular.

Newspaper Article

Then we went to the nearby tea shop to snack. That's when we came across a newspaper that had a picture of a woman that said that this woman from the neighbourhood had been found dead. Our cousin read out the article. The people in the tea shop were discussing the same topic.

That's when we cousins recollected in unison.

Walking around a bend two days back we had come across the car of our 'Achen' groom. Looking ahead we saw him talking agitatedly to a woman. We saw him raise his hand and strike her. She fell to the ground sobbing uncontrollably.

We had blended behind a tree and tried to listen to the conversation. We had seen this woman in our house. She was one of the cleaners. She seemed to be begging him to leave her alone but he viciously kicked her and shouted I will teach you a lesson and stomped off.

Reading this news now we thought this called for some action.

So we ran home and told our mothers about the groom talking to the woman in the newspaper.

Everybody was so busy nobody paid any attention to us.

Thankfully one of us remembered the name of the woman from the news report so we called out the name loudly. That had the desired effect.

There was a hushed silence.

We announced loudly that we saw the groom talking and hitting her just two days back. We pointed at the news in the paper.

Heated arguments broke out and we gaily ran out, our job done.

As we ran out we bumped into none other than the groom. He had heard us. He was fuming. He leapt and caught hold of our cousin and started to beat him up. Our rescue instincts were set alight and we instinctively threw ourselves at him and we bit. That freed our cousin but he

was so angry and excited that he caught hold of the groom's hand and bit him hard.

The groom started to yell with pain but we clung on like cannibals not wanting to let the prey go.

When we started to hear our names being shouted and relatives rushing forth to save the groom we let go of our prey and we ran away as fast as we could.

Exhausted we ran to the attic thinking it was a safe place to be for a while. Soon we were called in and scolded but surprisingly not whacked. One of our uncles whom we knew to be in the police force asked us more details with more precise time, location and date.

Revenge

The day of Sadhya arrived. A sumptuous feast had been prepared and people were feasting. As we sat down to eat the groom caught sight of us. His hand was still plastered. He raised a commotion saying children should not be sitting there. People intervened and moved us to a faraway table. Here the servers were not paying any attention. So they missed out serving us many of the delicious curries and the payasams, sweet dishes.

We were angry and after lunch as we sullenly walked past the groom he said we should not have been served at all.

We thought he should be taught a lesson. So we schemed and schemed.

A little later we walked back to the Sadhya hall.

Our dear cousin brought out his rubber snake and with pretentious giggling we walked towards the groom and quickly our cousin dropped the snake and all of us screamed 'SNAKE!!! In the melee that followed the groom who was standing near the big urli (bowl) jumped in fright as my cousin had thrown the snake on to his feet. The groom lost his footing and fell backwards right into the urli. Our cousin quickly retrieved the snake pushed it into his pocket and quietly we dashed off in different directions.

Looking back we saw him being helped out by people. The stuff in the urli was only mildly hot as it had been made early and it was now afternoon but everyone grumbled that now the rest of it cannot be used. It was a sweet revenge as we came to know that it was the payasam, sweet dish, into which he had fallen.

All is well that ends well

The next day we came to know that the groom was being questioned as he was not only involved in the death of the woman but also in stealing and selling artefacts from the house. The wedding with this groom was called off. But since all relatives had gathered they did not want the wedding date to be cancelled so they arranged another groom for the bride.

This groom looked normal. We warmed up to him as he was quite nice and friendly to us.

The wedding was grand and got over. Bidding farewell to cousins was painful. We parted eager to meet again for the next holidays with more fun plans.

(A Chapter from the unpublished book 'Nostalgia' by the author)

About the Author: Dr Chitra Krishnakumar is passionate about dance and music. She is the President of Soorya (Singapore), a non-profit voluntary society promoting fine classical arts.



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R Asokan

VACATION IN PERTH

Every once in a while, I will embark on a journey to Perth, the capital of Western Australia as I have two sisters and a nephew living there. This year, I did so in February 2023. It was an occasion for bonding, reminiscing about childhood memories, and touring without the imposed travel restrictions following the onslaught of the COVID-19 epidemic. Perth, a vibrant coastal metropolis nestled on the southwestern corner of the continent, is renowned for its idyllic beaches, pristine parks, and cosmopolitan charm.

High Wycombe

I stayed in an area called High Wycombe which is a suburb of Perth, Western Australia, within the City of Kalamunda. In contrast to densely populated Singapore, the area is sparsely populated and people are housed in residential units. I noticed that every household had a car as it is deemed a necessity rather than a luxury in Perth. The public transport system requires one to plan one's journey in advance before leaving home, making it a challenging system to navigate. This was one of my observations.

Farther away in Perth city, there are shopping complexes, offices, government departments, and eating establishments serving various cuisines from around the world. Come evening,

there is not much nightlife except for pubs, clubs, concerts and rooftop bars. I had lunch at a Moroccan restaurant where I found the food was good. I also visited Wycombe Tavern and Boab Tavern where they serve good Australian beer.

Wildlife

Australia is also known for its incredible wildlife, and Perth is undoubtedly a destination to witness this beauty. I sighted koalas nestled on eucalyptus trees, kangaroos, emus, horses, and quokkas at various national parks in Western Australia. Some of the famous ones are Nambung National Park, Kangaroo Point, Yanchep National Park and Hangover Bay. Observing these animals has provided me with a profound appreciation for Australia's unique and diverse fauna.

It also deepened my understanding of the importance of preserving and protecting our fragile ecosystems. I was told that in some places, wild kangaroos moved freely across open landscapes and even on busy highways. This has caused many accidents, and many of these wild animals were killed after being hit by speeding vehicles. In fact, while my sister, Sulekha, was driving along the Great Eastern Highways one night, she knocked down a kangaroo that had suddenly crossed her path. Unfortunately, the kangaroo did not survive the accident.

Pinnacles

The Pinnacles are located in Nambung National Park, approximately 200 kilometres north of Perth, Western Australia. This incredible area is also home to some of Australia's most fascinating wildlife and birdlife. We went hiking in the Pinnacles Desert, which was littered with natural limestone structures, some of which were a towering 3.5 meters high! A walk in this entire desert would take about five hours; a feat only fit and experienced trekkers can accept. There were parking bays for people to park their cars before going on foot. Pinnacles faces the Indian Ocean. Staring into the ocean with the wind blowing into your face, all in solitude has a calming effect.

Musical Performance

I also had the opportunity to watch my nephew, Nishanker, in action at the Convenience, Perth's only live venue for musicians. He is a guitarist who also composes songs. A member of the rock band Gematria (death metal music genre), his performance was part of the Australian Tour 2023. The event saw many young people in attendance, making it a sell-out concert. The pulsating energy, roaring crowd, and electrifying performances created an atmosphere of joy and celebration. It was a night of pure exhilaration that reminded me of the power of music in its ability to unite people from diverse backgrounds by transcending the barriers of language and culture.

Philosophy Discussion

I had the privilege of being treated to an intellectual feast in the form of a philosophy talk I attended. The session indeed stimulated my curiosity and broadened my perspectives. My sister, Ambika, worked at the High Wycombe Public Library in Perth and was the coordinator of Philosophy Discussions held every fortnight. Some 25 ‘philosophers’ gathered to discuss the topic “Do All People Deserve Respect?” on February 17, 2023. Philosophers of yesteryear, such as Plato, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, were quoted and debated on. It was an enriching experience that challenged my preconceived notions and encouraged me to delve deeper into the realms of knowledge and self-reflection.

In conclusion, my trip to Perth was filled with inspiring encounters, intellectual stimulation, and unforgettable moments. From the encounter with wild animals to the thought-provoking philosophy talk and the rock band concert, every experience has undeniably contributed to my personal growth.



Arun PC

Hidden Gems: Exploring Singapore's Independent Film Scene

One thing typical of being a Malayali is our love for quality cinema. Debates such as "Who is better - Mohanlal or Mammooty?" have been raging among Malayalees for decades. Not only movie stars, but writers and filmmakers like Padmarajan and KG George have also achieved "cult" status among us. We may be a critical and discerning bunch of people but we are also open to novel ideas.

Malayalees in Singapore are not spared from the cinema bug, and it is heartening to see a bunch of talented artists showcasing their good work on YouTube. Below are three that I found interesting and recommend you to check out! I have chosen these from three different genres and formats and listed them in no particular order. I hope you find my recommendations interesting.

Akale – Genre: Drama (short film)



This explores the relationship between the employer and his maid in the Singaporean context. It shows how their relationship is bound by values such as respect, appreciation, and friendship. It displays how society may not necessarily appreciate these values and plays a

spoilsport in a healthy and beautiful relationship.

Athazham – Genre: Comedy, satire (web series)

This is my favorite and probably the most entertaining work from the island. The actors, Shilpa



and Balaram, are very relatable, sarcastic, and authentic. Their common love for tasty Kerala snacks and conversations around the dining table are witty and satirical. Each episode is about ten minutes long, and you can complete all the episodes in a single sitting.

Grahanam – Genre: Thriller (full movie)



This is an ambitious project and a full movie shot across multiple locations. It is definitely a brave attempt by the crew to create something as close as possible to mainstream cinema. The subject is interesting, with an ending that has decent suspense. While it falls short in a few places, this doesn't take away from the resourcefulness and the attempt made by the filmmakers Anand Paga, Gibu George, Devika Sivan and crew.

Disclaimer: I am not a movie expert, and this article is just my perspective. I am sure I have missed a dozen of good movies made in Singapore. Please let me know your recommendations!

Written by,

Arun – Father of two beautiful children, husband to a patient wife. Originally from Kochi, currently residing in Singapore. Contact me arun.pc@gmail.com



Avyukth Ratheesh

I WISH I COULD BE YOU

"Fishie, oh Fishie
I wish I could be you,
Swimming in the seas so blue
Moving merrily through and through"
"Oh no! my child,
It isn't fun, as matter
Being food for your platter!"

"Birdie oh Birdie
I wish I could be you,
Flying around in the sky so high
Facing problems without a cry"
"Oh no! My child
It is fun, in the wild
But as I soon will age,
I'll be shut in a cage."

"Apple tree, Apple tree
I wish I could be you
Everyone praises you
Your fruit is tasty too!"
"Oh no! My child,
My fruits are always taken
'nd soon my body, broken ."

"Kiddo, oh kiddo
I wish I could be you!
So free and wild,
You're just a child!"
"Oh yes my friend,
With you all around,
My joy knows no bound!"



Dr VP Nair

PROTON THERAPY

The ideal modality to treat certain cancers.

Introduction

Proton therapy, also known as “proton beam therapy”, is a radiation treatment that precisely delivers a beam of protons to disrupt and destroy tumour (cancer) cells. Compared with traditional radiation, protons have unique properties that allow doctors to better target radiation to the size and shape of the tumours.

Atoms, Electrons, Protons, and Neutrons.

On 6th and 9th August 1945, the United States of America detonated one atomic bomb each over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. That resulted in the end of World War II, which lasted for six years, from 1939 to 1945, a great relief for the people worldwide. But the aerial bombings together killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians, and remain the only use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict. Atoms, as the finest particle of matter is a familiar term known to people around the world. But atom is something more than that

Science Behind the Technology:

All matters, including mineral crystals, is made up of atoms, and all atoms are made up of three main particles: protons, neutrons, and electrons. Protons are positively charged; neutrons are uncharged or neutral and electrons are negatively charged. The negative charge of one electron balances the positive charge of one proton. Both protons and neutrons have a

mass of 1, while electrons have almost no mass.

The element hydrogen has the simplest atoms, each with just one proton and one electron. The proton forms the nucleus, while the electron orbits around it. All other elements have neutrons as well as protons in their nucleus. Oxygen atom has 8 electrons, 8 protons and 8 neutrons. The positively charged protons tend to repel each other, and the neutrons help to hold the nucleus together. The number of protons is the atomic number, and the number of protons plus neutrons is the atomic mass. For hydrogen, the atomic mass is 1 because there is one proton and no neutrons. For helium, it is 4, two protons and two neutrons.

For most of the 16 lightest elements up to oxygen, the number of neutrons is equal to the number of protons. For most of the remaining elements, there are more neutrons than protons, because extra neutrons are needed to keep the nucleus together by overcoming the mutual repulsion of the increasing numbers of protons concentrated in a very small space. For example, silicon has 14 protons and 14 neutrons. Its atomic number is 14 and its atomic mass is 28. The most common isotope of uranium has 92 protons and 146 neutrons. Its atomic number is 92 and its atomic mass is 238 (92 + 146).

Imagine a 196-ton, cancer-killing machine that can target a patient's tumour with a sub-millimetre precision while sparing nearby healthy tissues and minimizing side effects. In its most simple terms, that's proton therapy.

Standard radiation therapy has evolved and improved over the years and is effective in controlling many cancers. However, because X-ray beams are composed of primary photons and secondary electrons, they deposit their energy along the path of the beam, to the targeted tumour and beyond, and deliver radiation to healthy tissues before and after the tumour site. This radiation "exit dose" may cause health issues later because it can damage the normal tissue or organs near the tumour or area of concern.

Photon versus proton

Photons, or X-Rays, are pure energy and have no mass. Protons have energy and are relatively massive and heavy. The advantage of proton therapy is that the physician can control where the proton releases the bulk of its cancer-fighting energy. As the protons move through the body, they slow down and interact with electrons, and release energy. The point where the highest energy release occurs is the "Bragg peak." A physician can designate the Bragg peak's location, causing the most damage to the targeted tumour cells. A proton beam conforms to the shape and depth of a tumour while sparing healthy tissues and organs. The

Bragg peak is a pronounced peak on the Bragg curve which plots the energy loss of ionizing radiation during its travel through matter. For protons, α -rays, and other ion rays, the peak occurs immediately before the particles come to rest. It is named after William Henry Bragg, who discovered it in 1903.

Organs Treatable by Proton Beam Therapy

1. Central nervous system cancers, including chordoma, chondrosarcoma, and malignant meningioma
2. Eye cancer, including uveal melanoma or choroidal melanoma
3. Head & neck cancers, nasal cavity and paranasal sinus cancer and some nasopharyngeal cancers
4. Lung cancer
5. Liver cancer
6. Prostate cancer
7. Spinal and pelvic sarcomas, which are cancers that occur in the soft-tissue and bone
8. Noncancerous brain tumours
9. Breast Cancer
10. Cervical cancer
11. Gastrointestinal (GI) cancers
12. Kidney cancer
13. Lymphoma
14. Mesothelioma
15. Paediatric cancers
16. Oropharyngeal cancer
17. Pancreatic cancer

How does proton therapy work?

The best way to understand how proton therapy works is to take a look at the physics and engineering inside the proton accelerator, or the synchrotron, and the beam delivery system.

Synchrotron is a cyclotron in which the magnetic field strength increases with the energy of the particles to keep their orbital radius constant. A cyclotron is a type of particle accelerator which repeatedly propels a beam of charged particles (protons) in a circular path. Medical radioisotopes are made from non-radioactive materials (stable isotopes) which are

bombarded by these protons.

The proton begins its journey at the ion source. Within fractions of a second, hydrogen atoms are separated into negatively charged electrons and positively charged protons.

The protons are injected via a vacuum tube into a linear accelerator and in only a few microseconds, the protons' energy reaches 7 million electron volts.

Proton beams stay in the vacuum tube as they enter the synchrotron, where acceleration increases their energy to a total of 70 million to 250 million electron volts, enough to place them at any depth within the patient's body.

After leaving the synchrotron, the protons move through a beam-transport system comprised of a series of magnets that shape, focus and direct the proton beam to the appropriate treatment room.

To ensure that each patient receives the prescribed treatment safely and efficiently, the facility is controlled by a network of computers and safety systems. The gantry can revolve 360 degrees, allowing the beam to be delivered at any angle.

As protons come through the nozzle, a custom-made device (the aperture) shapes the beam of protons, and another custom-made device (the compensator) shapes the protons into three dimensions, delivering them to the depth of the tumour. At maximum energy, a proton beam travels 125,000 miles per second, which is equivalent to the two-thirds the speed of light. From the hydrogen canister to the patient, a proton typically travels 313,000 miles.

Pencil beam and intensity modulated proton therapy

Pencil beam proton therapy, also called scanning beam, and intensity modulated proton therapy (IMPT) are special and accurate ways of targeting the beam. Pencil beam technology and IMPT build on the benefits of proton therapy. With a proton beam just millimetres wide, these advanced forms of proton therapy combine precision and effectiveness, offering unmatched ability to treat a patient's tumour and minimizing the effect on a patient's quality of life, during and after treatment. They rely on complex treatment planning systems and an intricate number of magnets to aim a narrow proton beam and essentially "paint" a radiation dose layer by layer.

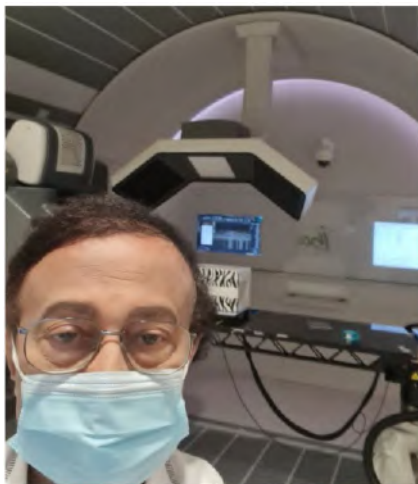
Pencil beam is very effective in treating the most complex tumours, like those in the prostate, brain, eye, and cancers in children, while leaving healthy tissue and other critical areas unharmed. IMPT is best used to deliver a potent and precise dose of protons to complex or concave-shaped tumours that may be adjacent to the spinal cord or embedded head and neck

or skull base, including nasal and sinus cavities, oral cavity, salivary gland, tongue, tonsils, and larynx.

Advantages of proton therapy

Advantages of proton therapy compared to conventional radiation therapy are minimal dose of radiation to normal structures. For example, cancer tumours in the head and neck spares normal tissues as it gives very minimal radiation to common structures around that are involved in taste, swallowing, hearing, seeing and smell. Thus, there is minimal radiation damage to surrounding tissues while focusing on the target never achieved before. It also improves quality of life both during as well as after therapy. Each individual is pre-armed with optimal management before, after and during therapy with the best functional outcome.

Proton Therapy for Prostate Cancer can be directed to a prescribed depth in tissue in the prostate, which minimizes dose to healthy surrounding tissues, such as the bladder and rectum. It optimizes the ability to treat a patient's prostate tumour without compromising quality of life, during and after treatment. Proton therapy precisely targets even the most difficult to treat and reach tumours and allows higher doses of radiation to be delivered to the prostate with fewer side effects. Unlike treatment with conventional X-ray therapy (which may require 8 beam angles), treatment with proton therapy can be achieved using just two beams.



IBA proton therapy
@ Mount Elizabeth
Novena Hospital
(MENH), Singapore



EPILOGUE

Shreya Sreekumar

If I could see the end of the world, how would it seem?

Would there be a finish line that no one can see?

Would we celebrate our wins or commemorate our losses?

Would we forget our sins or embrace our rejoices?

Would everyone be equal? Will people believe in the truth?

Would they trust themselves or remain uncouth?

Would there be remedies for a broken heart?

Would there be memories that will depart?

Would everyone be united despite their past?

Would they stand up for a good cause?

Would they give their best?

Would women be respected, appreciated for good?

Free to express themselves, just as they should?

Would failures be tolerated?
Would downfalls be accepted?
Would everyone succeed?
Would they achieve what they intended?
Would dreams still exist?
Would wishing prevail?
Would they be chased, or would they be forgotten?
Would love have boundaries?
Would gender determine one's rights, what's allowed or what the future could bring ?
Would everyone respect another and treat them like a human being?
Would they finally understand that sharing is caring?
Would children of today be leaders of tomorrow?
Would they regain trust that they lost or borrowed?
Would friendships be true?
Would the bonds be tightened; will they be there for each other?
Will they stay like this forever?
If I could see the end of the world, how would it seem?
Would there be a finish line that no one can see?
Would it all be worth it or did we waste time?
But as we move on, will everything be fine?



Dinesh Nair

ALONE IN *God's Own Country*

I did tell a couple of my family and friends that I was going on a solo trip to God's own country, Kerala to discover myself and my roots. Some teased me and enquired if I was on a mission to find a nice suitable girl for myself. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the past going to Kerala would mean spending 4 to 5 weeks of my December school holidays at our family home and visiting relatives or attending an extended relative's wedding. Having solo traveled in certain countries in Eastern Europe in the past, I was confident that traveling alone in Kerala would be simple.

"Kerala is not what you think it is. You better get a driver to bring you places. Public transport can be slow and unreliable" as my mother cautioned me. She passed me the contact details of a reliable driver arranged from a relative of ours and requested that I contact him. Prior to my week long Kerala adventure, I had only pre-booked my accommodation at a small hotel near Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple and a beautiful Airbnb in Thuravoor, some 27km away from Ernakulam, Kochi.

These were some highlights of my travel:

Day 1

One of the best way to start my week long adventure in Kerala was to get darshan(blessings) from Lord Vishnu, the main deity presiding at the Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple. As I alighted from my auto, I was greeted with a warm smile from an elderly gentleman. He asked me if I would like to procure a “mundu”(sarong worn by men on the waist) and a shawl. It came to 100 rupees(\$1.60). I requested the elderly gentleman to help me tie the “mundu”.



The carvings on the temple were intricately designed much to the awe of modern day architecture. I walked slowly marveling the beautifully carved out statues and listening to the sound of the temple bells. There is a feeling of grandeur as you walk along the corridors of the temple. Soon several temple priests quickened us to seek darshan of Lord Vishnu. After darshan, I made a visit to the Pazhavangadi Ganesha Temple nearby to seek blessings.

I hailed an auto rickshaw and made my way back to the hotel for a simple breakfast. It was great to start my Friday morning with a piping hot-cup of Indian tea and some appams with kadala(chickpea) curry.

Day 1 (Afternoon and Evening)

My driver was an elderly gentleman in his late 60s. Throughout our car journey, he peppered me with questions about my life in Singapore. He seemed to be in awe of Singapore’s success story from a small fishing village to a world class city. He then went on a tirade about the failures of the current government in Kerala and yearned that the young generation of men and women in Kerala would emulate the success of our Singapore leaders. He joked with me that in Kerala, drivers usually get by sounding their horn frequently. If the horn did not work, they would bring it

It was great catching up with my grandmother’s nephews and their to the repair-shop straightaway. We passed by many paddy-fields on route to the birth place of my maternal grandmother. The views were scenic and picturesque. At times, I would request the driver to stop his vehicle so that I could take a picture or two. children over chaaya (tea) and snacks. It definitely brought back many wonderful memories of my time spent as a young boy relaxing in the compound during the school holidays.

This was followed by a visit to the birth place of my maternal grandfather. As I stepped out of the car, I stood beaming in pride as I reflected on my grandfather's personal journey. My grandfather's journey growing up as a young boy had been a tumultuous one. He had studied up till Primary 4 and then dropped out because his family could not afford to pay their school fees. Job opportunities in post-colonial India were limited. In 1954, after his marriage to my grandmother, he decided to bring grandmother and move permanently to Singapore for a better life and future.



My grandfather's niece was full of praise for the noble deeds done by him. Then, grandfather often sent back money to India and ensured that all his nephews and nieces were educated. Grandfather's actions reminded me of the African philosophy of "ubuntu" which loosely translates to "I am because we are". My grandfather's success story is attributed to the Malayalee community and family both in Singapore and Kerala that had shaped him the way he was. Personally, his

success story is a reminder that hard work and integrity would place one in higher echelons of any organization, thus commanding respect from the community.

(Ernakulam Kochi)

I was going to spend the day at my Airbnb accommodation in Turavur, a town some 25 minutes by train from Ernakulam North Train station. One of the best things about train journeys is the opportunity it gives to experience the local way of life. After all, Kochi's local trains are the lifeline of the city and traveling on them is a whole new experience in particular for someone coming from Singapore.

The station had many beautiful paintings; mainly depicting traditional Kerala folk artforms and places of interest in Kerala. It was nice to see an air of buzz at the train station with locals having snacks, sipping tea and chatting about their usual lives with their friends/families. At Platform 1 (the platform nearest the ticket counter), I met a middle aged police officer and made an enquiry about my travel to Turavur.

"Which platform do I board the train to Turavur?" I enquired. She looked at my train ticket and confidently said Platform 1. I trusted this police officer and didn't make any other further

enquiry. At 11am, I boarded my train all excited. It was a very quiet morning. However, almost half an hour into the journey, I saw no signs of Turavur train station.

“Ah Kerala trains perhaps going a little slow. Give it another 15minutes or so!” I silently muttered. Still no signs of Turavur. It was at this juncture that I realized that I boarded the wrong train when I confirmed it with some local passengers seated opposite me. I was very naïve when I foolishly believed the police officer at Ernakulam train station.

On this particular leg from Trishur to Turavur, I squeezed in with many local commuters standing close to 2 hours before I finally managed to sit down for the last 30 minutes. It was certainly an uncomfortable experience standing throughout; but I guess the cool breezy weather made up for all that discomfort.

I felt somewhat triumphant when I finally reached Turavur train station and made my way to the AirBNB location. I felt so happy looking at the clear blue skies and the little rain droplets hitting the lake right in front of the property. I felt a sense of calm and peace admiring the view; feeling blessed to escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. At some point, the number of mosquitoes got a little overwhelming and I retreated into the comfort of my bed sipping chaaya and reflecting on my adventure(or misadventures) thus far.



My adventures thus far in God's own country had been exciting and interesting. I got to see the kaleidoscopic colours of Kerala which gave me a fresh breath of adventure for this energetic solo traveler from Singapore. Having been an indelible part of this experience has been fantastic and I look forward to more such adventures.



Sreenivas Kurup

MY ONAM MEMORIES

My Onam memories from childhood were marvellous, filled with joy and so much fun! It's a time that may never come again in the lives of my children or in the future generations. Today, those fond moments are well-cherished memories which we share with our children in the hope of preserving them for the generations to come. 10 day long school holidays were what always marked the beginning of our Onam celebrations. Preparations would typically start with the circular Attapookalam Thattu (Attham Platform) made using clay/mud, filled with cow dung a day or two before Attam begins.

On the day of Attam, we would go to the neighbouring empty spaces grounds as early as 5 a.m. and gather different types of flowers. Many children from our neighbourhood would join us in collecting the flowers, even though it was still dark outside. We would challenge each other every day to see whose Attam was the best. On the last day, Thiruvonam, we would place three clay statues of Onathappan (two days before Thiruvonam, we would prepare two small and one slightly bigger Onathappan and let them dry for the last day). We would place the Onathappan on the Attapookalam Thattu and covered/filled it with Thumbha (a kind of plant used for pooja), Thumpa flowers (very small white flowers), and Tulsi. We would not use

any other flowers on the last day, and even the Thumbha and Tulsi had to be collected a day before. It was believed that we should not pick any flowers or plants on the day of Onam because we believed that they too deserve to enjoy Onam.

Some of our neighbouring ladies would perform a traditional dance called Thumppi Thullal. It was accompanied by interesting songs, and they would wear traditional Kerala saris. As children, we would indulge in playing games the whole day, sometimes stretching till midnight. This was one time of the year when no parents would insist that their children study or revise their schoolwork. What was also unique about Onam celebrations in my childhood was that caste, religion or any other divisions posed no bar to commemorate this festival. It was an integral part of our lives.

I am sincerely grateful to the Singapore Malayalee Association for organizing the Onam events every year. It's a great opportunity for our children growing up in Singapore, who will not have the same opportunities we had in our childhood, to understand and carry forward our traditions, beliefs, and way of life while living in a multicultural society.

Additionally, my heart goes to the other Malayalee organizations that organize Onam Sadhya and other Onam programs. These events bring us together in terms of culture and create harmony among people of different religions and traditions.

Wishing all the Malayalees in Singapore Hridayamniranya Onam Ashamsakal from me and my family!



M.M Dollah



Good Old Days

Malayalee Population in Singapore, at its peak, was estimated to be 100 000. The number dwindled after the British pullout in 1971. Malayalee shops selling Kerala goodies and meals were a common sight those days. There were several shops selling Malayalam books and magazines in Malayalee heartlands.

Annual General Meeting (AGM): It was a bright Sunday morning in 1957. The scene was in front of old Victoria Theatre. Loads of buses and Lorries were transporting Singapore Malayalee Association (SMA) members from its 14 branches scattered across Singapore. Soon Victoria Theatre was filled with a Malayalee wave. It was the Annual General Meeting of the Singapore Malayalee Association. SMA AGM was one the most exciting events of the Malayalees those days. The event was always held in bigger venues like Victoria Theatre and Singapore Badminton Hall. Heavy canvassing prior to the AGM was a norm. Key posts were hotly contested. It was truly a General Election atmosphere.

Onam Show was the most glamorous event in the SMA calendar. It was usually held in the 5000 capacity National Theatre (now defunct) It was always packed with Malayalee families. Admission was free and controlled by invitation. Generous donations by the members of the community helped to organize the show. The entire cast was local artistes and no foreign artistes were involved. Those who failed to get admitted to the theatre watched the show from

the hilltop facing the stage of the open theatre.

Onam Village was another popular event of the Malayalee community those days. It truly created a Malayalee atmosphere with events like Oonjal, Uriyadi, Arm Wrestling, Tug of War etc. Tug of War was usually between Malayalee organizations. Singapore Kairalee Kala Nilayam and Singapore Malayalee Association were the finalists On most occasions. Seeing the participants attending the event in traditional Malayalee attire was indeed a feast to the eyes

Vallam Kali (boat race) was a novelty event. Initial boat races were land-based. The first route was from Bukit Timah Road to Farrer Park. SMA participated in the local Boat Race Competition with a team brought in from Kerala under the auspicious of Kidangoor Gopala Krishna Pillai, the then Indian High Commissioner to Singapore. Though the team did not win the competition, it was a great experience for the entire Malayalee community.

Katha Kali: A Katha Kali troupe was once again commissioned to perform in front of a capacity crowd at the Singapore Conference Hall. It was well-received by the local audience, especially those who witnessed this unique art form for the first time in their life.

Malayalam Dramas: SMA was actively involved in the production of Malayalam dramas. They staged dramas of famed contemporary Malayalam playwrights like Thoppil Bhasi, N.N.Pillai etc.





G.P. Sasidharan

SOMAN'S NIGHT OUT

Soman stepped out of his home, waved to his wife and with purposeful strides, made his way towards the sea shore near his home, in the village of Gramapuram. It was late evening. On the horizon, the setting sun blushed as it sought refuge for the night. Lights were being switched on, under thatched roofs, in a feeble attempt to stave off imminent darkness. The incessant cawing of the crows was about to cease as they sought shelter in the canopy of the coconut palms. Soman could see and hear the waves splashing gently against the granite-laden shore.

He walked into the village pub by the seashore, makeshift shelter, with rickety, wooden benches. A gas stove was on and Soman loved the smell of fresh fish being fried. He sat on a bench, put a foot up on it, took the day's soiled newspaper nearby and turned to the sports page. As he read the report of a twenty year old athlete who had done the state and the nation proud, his thoughts went back to his youth. He would have been a great athlete too, had he not left school early, to work, to support the family. He felt his muscular, welltoned body and sighed. At fifteen years of age, he had been the best athlete and soccer player in school.

After high school, he could no longer further his studies, as his father wanted Soman to 'learn the ropes' of the job, that he had been doing for thirty years.

"Son," his father had one day said, "I'm getting old and am not too well. I want you to come with me and learn the job. You may have to take over soon, to support the family."

Soman had resisted, as he wanted to go to college and get out of the rut he was in, in the village, but his father was adamant.

"You know that I can't afford it. How much do you think I earn at this job? What I get is barely enough to keep us going. I'm getting old and I'd like you to take over soon."

Soman lost his cool. "Take over your job? Do you expect me to spend the rest of my life climbing coconut trees, tapping toddy and plucking coconuts? Do you think that I want to be at the beck and call of every village 'uncle' and 'aunt', to go to their properties, climb the trees and pluck coconuts for a pittance? No way! I'm not going to do it!"

Soman could see the hurt in his father's eyes. "I understand you son. I know that you can study. But

there's no other way. We can't send you to college because we just can't afford it."

Soman was a filial son. He understood and accepted his station in life and thus began, at the age of seventeen, to learn how to swiftly climb up a coconut tree, to twist, pluck and throw coconuts safely to the ground. He learnt how to trim and prune the trees and how to tap the tree for toddy, the drink loved by most of the men in the village.

It had been thirteen years since then. Soman was now a strapping young man of thirty, with sinewy arms, broad chest and country-boy good looks. He had become an expert at the job his father had trained him to do. His father had passed on, five years earlier and Soman was now head of the family. He was married a year earlier and lived with his wife, a six-month old son, mom and younger brother, who was a student at a polytechnic in the nearby town. Soman was determined that neither his younger brother nor his son, would ever inherit his job.

He worked hard and by village standards, was doing well. He had cut a deal with all the landlords whose coconuts he harvested. They agreed to give him ten per cent of the coconuts. He knew that they would agree because_ he was the only good, reliable and honest guy at the job. Soon things were looking up. He was earning good money, for the labour he provided, selling not just his coconuts but also the husk, which was used for the coir industry. His good looks and friendly disposition made him a popular guy around. His wife was the envy of many a woman in the village. And Soman had no complaints, as he discreetly welcomed favours from some of the 'aunties', a discretion which they too appreciated. Soman was quite content with life.

The familiar voice of the shop assistant came on, "Good evening brother, what's your wish for tonight? The toddy is very fresh."

Soman smiled and said, "Yeah, I ought to know." He asked for a bottle and a plate of fried herring. When the toddy came, he finished the drink in three gulps and bit into the spicy fried fish. Then he called for another bottle of the milky drink. He looked at the other three familiar faces around and greeted them, as they continued talking animatedly, gesturing and at times slamming a palm on the table to make a point.

They were all at ease. Tongues were loosened and inhibitions if any, had gone through the door. Topics for discussion ranged from politics in the state and the nation. One of them lamented on the state of the economy. Another griped about his wife and life in general. They were all very concerned about the very poor system of public transport in the state. Listening to them, Soman wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and called for another round.

As he drank, his cell-phone rang. He looked at the number, smiled and saying, "I'll be there in fifteen minutes," switched off the phone. He took a final gulp of the drink and said, "Got to go guys." He clutched one end of his 'dhoti', wiped his mouth and smiling broadly, hurried off for his tryst.

Freud and his Encounters with the Mystical



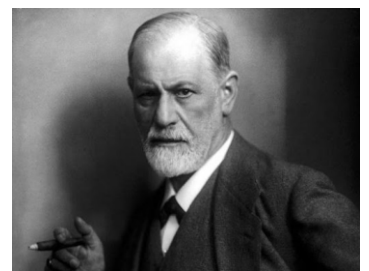
Krishna Kumar M

Background: At SMA (Singapore Malayalee Association), we have a literary forum, called SMLF (Singapore Malayalee Literary Forum) where we often to meet physically and/or virtually to discuss various works of literature (Malayalam, English and sometimes other languages too) and sometimes related topics like psychology and philosophy (to know more about SMLF or if interested in joining, pls contact SMA). In one such intellectual exchanges, one highly knowledgeable member wrote thus:

Psychoneurosis അവസ്ഥയിലെത്തിയ Compulsive Actionsഉം അർത്ഥരഹിതമായതോ അല്ലാത്തതോ ആയ ചിലതരം Religious Exercisesഉം ഒരേ മാനസ്സികാവസ്ഥയിൽ-നിന്നുളവാകുന്നതാണെന്ന് ഫ്രോയ്ഡ് 1907ൽ എഴുതിയ ഈ ലേഖനത്തിൽ പറയുന്നു. 'One might venture to construe neurosis as individual religiousness and religion as universal compulsive neurosis എന്നാണ് ഫ്രോയ്ഡ് ഇവിടെ താക്കീതുതരുന്നത്.

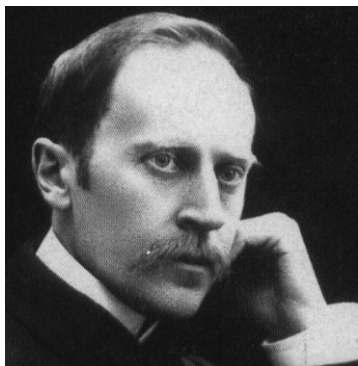
ഇതിന്റെ തുടർച്ചയെന്നോണം 1921ൽ എഴുതിയ വിഖ്യാതകൃതിയായ Mass Psychologyൽ വ്യക്തി ആൾക്കൂട്ടമായി പരിണമിക്കുന്നതിലെ മന:ശാസ്ത്രം വിശദീകരിക്കുന്നു. ഇതിന്റെ അവസാനപുറത്തിൽ അദ്ദേഹം ഇങ്ങനെ എഴുതിയിരിക്കുന്നു The neurotic creates his own fantasy world, religion and system of delusion, but in so doing he is merely echoing the institutions of humanity in a distorted form.

Here, he is referring to the opinions of Freud, the great Austrian neurologist/psychologist/thinker and the founder of **psychoanalysis**, regarding religions. While it very well known that Freud was a strong rationalist who in the words of one of his students, Carl Jung, who himself later became a celebrated psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and founder of **analytical psychology**, considered himself as a shatterer of illusions, who undertook to overthrow false gods to rip the veils away from the mass of dishonesties and hypocrisies. Freud saw himself as a warrior on the side of modernity and humanity to scientifically liberate ourselves from religion which like a black tide threatens to overwhelm the conscious mind and the tool which Freud weaponized on the side of science against religion, occultism, mysticism, and illusion was sexuality - Eros. ("New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud, 1933).



With such a background, it will seem rather unlikely that Freud will have anything to do with mystics or mysticism. But that was not the case at all.

Freud and the Mystic



Freud's mystic connection was with another great celebrity intellectual *littérateur* of his time, Romain Rolland (1866 – 1944). He was a French dramatist, novelist, essayist, art historian and mystic who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915 "as a tribute to the lofty idealism of his literary production and to the sympathy and love of truth with which he has described different types of human beings". The Nobel was awarded mainly for his 10 volume work, "Jean-Christophe", which brings together "his interests and ideals in the story of a German musical genius who makes France his second home and becomes a vehicle for Rolland's views on music, social matters and understanding between nations". Rolland was a lifelong pacifist and described as "the moral consciousness of Europe", until his pacifism and peace activism was seen as unpatriotic and earned him the reputation of the traitor! Rolland was a great Indophile, who had close interactions with Gandhi and Tagore, wrote his magnificent works, "Life of Ramakrishna", "Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel" and "Gandhi". During the height of his fame, he had many fans and one such was Sigmund Freud.

They physically met only once, when Rolland travelled to Vienna for the Richard Strauss Classical Music Festival, where Freud was living too. But, between the years 1923 to 1936, the two of them had quite a warm and long series of interactions through correspondence. Following this visit, Freud described Rolland as, "an unforgettable man whom he cherished and carried the solitary visit with him in his memory". Freud wrote later, "Unforgettable man, to have soared to such heights of humanity through so much hardship and suffering!. When I finally came to know you personally I was surprised to find that you hold strength and energy in such high esteem, and that you yourself embody so much will power". This admiration wasn't just one-sided. Rolland in turn described Freud as, "the great confessor of souls, the Christopher Columbus of a new continent of the spirit, even in his old age displayed admirable lucidity". Rolland boasted of having discovered Freud via his work, "Interpretation of Dreams" in a little bookstore in Zürich, long before Freud had become famous in France. The relationship between the two men exhibits all the hallmarks of a deep emotional attachment, what Freud calls "transference," based on mutual admiration and idealization. Why his own

popularity had not reached those of his friend mystic, somewhat troubled and baffled Freud. Freud wrote, “ . . . but a great part of my life has been spent trying to destroy illusions of my own and those of mankind. Unlike you, I cannot count on the love of the people I have not pleased, comforted and edified them. My writings cannot be what yours are: comfort and solace for the reader.” One of the most notorious illusions which comforted mankind in Freud's view was religion, and in 1927 he set out in the “Future of an Illusion”, to dismantle the illusion of religion with the tools of psychoanalysis with his very scientific attempt to demonstrate that religion was nothing other than the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind, an attempt to circumvent our collective father figure issues with the help of one supreme Father, the God. Freud, very proud of his work (“Future of an Illusion”), sent a copy to Rolland, hoping to get his reaction. He immediately (Mar 1923) sent Freud a copy of his play of 1919, “Liluli”, in which he inscribes the following remark: “To Freud, the Destroyer of Illusions”. The drama is named after, Liluli, the mischievous goddess of illusion (for her name signifies ‘L’illusion’). In December 1927, Freud got what he wanted. Rolland responded to Freud with a letter praising the lucid and spirited little book, appreciating, “the way you critiqued a juvenile form of religious belief prevalent amongst the bleeding masses”. Rolland felt that Freud had taken arms against the strawman of religion, criticizing its weakest form while leaving what Rolland took to be the best of religion untouched. This best of religion, its original foundation and finest expression in Rolland's opinion, of course, was mysticism. Rolland returned to Freud with a challenge writing:

“Your analysis of religion is right. But I would have liked to see an analysis of spontaneous religious sentiment or, more precisely, religious feeling, which is different than religion proper and a lot more durable.

I mean: [a feeling] that is altogether independent of dogma, Credo, and any organization of the Church, Holy Book, hope for personal salvation, etc. – the simple and direct fact of a feeling of **“the eternal”** (which may very well not be eternal, but simply ***without perceptible limits and so somewhat oceanic***) . . .

I think that you will classify it [the feeling] also under the Zwangsneurosen [obsessive compulsive disorders]. But I have often had occasion to observe its rich and beneficent power . . .

I am myself familiar with this feeling. Throughout my life it has never failed me, but has been a vital source of renewal. In this sense I am deeply “religious,” without this abiding state . . . interfering in any way with my critical faculties and freedoms – even as it concerns the intimacy of this inner experience.

Let me add that this “**oceanic**” feeling has nothing to do with my personal aspirations . . . And as I recognize the same feeling (allowing for shades of difference) among many living souls, it has allowed me to comprehend that this was the true underground source of all religious energy – which is gathered, channelled, and dried up by the churches.”

The Oceanic Feeling and Freud

This phrase, “The Oceanic Feeling”, used by Rolland, mirrors that of the mystics quoted in William James's highly influential, “The Varieties of Religious Experience”(1902). In this work, James records the utterings of the mystics, “Presence came, and I was aware that I was immersed in the infinite ocean of God”, “Moments divine, ecstatic hours; and deep as the respiration of the ocean, serene and limitless as the blue firmament”, “I was impelled to kneel down, this time before the illimitable ocean, symbol of the Infinite” etc.. Not to mention Sri Ramakrishna's own experience when he first encountered the Divine Mother Kali, ‘saw an ocean of the Spirit, boundless, dazzling’, as described by Rolland in his “Life of Ramkrishna”. Rolland said that it is precisely this **oceanic feeling**, of being at one with no limits, borders and boundaries, is the true subterranean source of religious energy, experienced by countless people in the past and present, in both the religious souls of the West and in the great minds in Asia and it's not just a fleeting inconsequential feeling indulged by escapist purveyors of pleasure. What thinkers like James and Rolland sought to do, was to go directly to what they saw as the true source of religion, the feeling of an encounter with infinite, prior to the accoutrements of dogma and creed and church and ritual, back to that supposedly pure, unassailable, unspoken, original and limitless experience of the mystic. If Freud is brave enough for the challenge, Rolland retorts, he must not only take on the dry, desiccated, emaciated residue of religion as found in the churches, synagogues, and mosques, dogmas, creeds and beliefs, but he must go back and face its vibrant pulsating organic source and find the **oceanic mystical experience** - the direct unmediated encounter with the infinite, the absolute and eternal.

Freud's Response

Freud did not respond to Rolland's letter for over nineteen months. Later he wrote, “Your remark about a feeling you describe as ‘oceanic,’ has left me no peace”. Freud's final response to Rolland on the issue, took the shape not of a private letter between friends, but as the first chapter of his next book to the public, “Civilization and Its Discontents”, in 1930. Its opening chapter, had the response, referring often to an unnamed friend (none other than Rolland) and his idea of this **oceanic feeling**. This short book is considered one of Freud's

most important and widely read works, and was described in 1989 by historian Peter Gay as one of the most influential and studied books in the field of modern psychology. According to its editor, “is about the irremediable antagonism between the demands of instinct and the restrictions of civilization”, a theme which Freud explored throughout his life and works. The conflict between what our primal selves really want and what society as a whole deems appropriate for us to want and act upon. In Freudian terms, as the conflict between the “id”, our deepest desires and the “superego”, the voice of conscience coming from the civilization telling us what we should and shouldn't do.

The first chapter is Freud's attempt to psychoanalyze the mystical experience or the oceanic feeling. Freud, the self-appointed iconoclast attempts to shatter the illusion of mysticism. Freud responds with a great deal of respect saying firstly that has no right to deny the existence of this experience for others, but perhaps somewhat lamentably yet frankly admits to being unable to discover this oceanic feeling himself. Due to his limitation of direct first hand experience, Freud proposes another way out. Freud resorts to the ideational content which is associated with the “Oceanic feeling” – i.e. while he can't examine the feeling itself, he can examine the ideas produced by or associated with it. This shift of attention from the experiential to the ideational is a very clever move by Freud, as Rolland just stuck to the raw subjective psychological facts, making no metaphysical, theological or soteriological claims. Analysing and comparing to the development of the ego from that of a baby to the adult, Freud acknowledges the reality of the oceanic feeling - but instead of seeing it as an authentic reflection of a deeper state of reality, and for its redemptive empowering life-affirming qualities, Freud instead dismisses it as a state of ego expansion, a regression to or hangover from infancy in which the baby at the mother's breasts, does not know where his ego ends and the external world begins - hardly an enlightened state.

Addressing the question, whether this feeling of oneness is the true source and origin of religion, Freud reaffirms his prior diagnosis that the psychological need for religion is the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by this helplessness - the deep need for a strong father figure, whether earthly or heavenly, to bring us fragile humans, a sense of safety in the face of the capricious state of the world. Freud treats this feeling of oneness with the universe which constitutes the **oceanic feeling**, as merely a defense mechanism against a harsher reality of the world being separate from the mystic! Towards the end of the first chapter, Freud also talks about a friend saying, “Yogis by their practices of withdrawal from the world, concentrating attention on bodily functions, peculiar methods of breathing, actually are able to produce new sensations and diffused feelings in themselves which he regards as

regressions to primordial, deeply buried mental states. He sees in them a physiological foundation, so to speak, of much of the wisdom of mysticism.” Freud ends the chapter with a quote from Schiller, “Let him rejoice who breathes up here in the roseate light!”, perhaps revealing his own helplessness in the matter and the higher potentialities of the subject.

Land-dweller vs the Oceanic

For Freud, sexuality seemed to include spirituality. In Jung's view, this reduced Freud to a tragic figure, a great man in the grip of his demon who was working against himself, unaware that his need to explain everything through the lens of sexuality. Freud sought to treat himself as a “land dweller”, to contrast him and his rationality away from the Oceanic mysticism of Rolland - one who wished to swim in the unknown an treacherous ocean of the unknown and occult. The front page of the copy of “Civilization and its discontents” which Freud sent to Rolland in Mar 1931, contained a playful inscription - **“from the Landtier to his great Oceanic Friend”**. Rolland replied, “ I am also an old Frenchman was able to see through illusions was able to bear a life without them, who no longer needs them and that he too contests illusions. **One of the greatest illusions**, Rolland claimed, is the artificial separation of reason and mysticism, between the land dweller and ocean dweller. As he said in his, “The Life of Ramakrishna”, “In our days an absurd separation has been made between these two halves of the soul, and it is presumed that they are incompatible. The only incompatibility lies in the narrowness of view, which those who erroneously claim to be their representative, share in common”. This contrasted imagery of land dweller and oceanic being that ran playfully throughout their correspondence.

This peep into Freud's and Rolland's friendship and correspondence, tracing letters that flowed between them, gives us a unique perspective on each of these great men. To quote, “Reading Freud's letters sometimes feel like listening to a beautiful song or friendship written by a man proud to be tone deaf” and Rolland's letters back show “a man trying to convey time again with really his life as a whole that one could be a mystic, and remain, not despite it, but because of it, an intellectual a social prophet and a cultural critic.”

Freud's relationship to mysticism was a complex one, a clear understanding of which still remains hidden beneath murky waters. Only some pointers are given in this essay. Freud despite his ardent protestations against the mystical, found his own ground breaking psychoanalytical methods, dismissed by critics as an evil and proceeding from mystical tendencies and dangerous to the medical profession. Freud, wrote Ernest Jones (a Freud biographer), his favorite quote borrowing from Shakespeare's Hamlet was, “there are



more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy”, referring to supernatural and spooky tales quoted and experienced psychiatric patients, that Freud was very fond of. Freud, in his “New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis” (1933) would enshrine this Shakespearean quote, writing, “mysticism, occultism, what is meant by these words, they refer to some sort of other world lying beyond the bright world governed by inextricable laws which science has constructed for us. Occultism asserts that there are in fact more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Well, we need not feel bound by the narrowmindedness of academic philosophy. We are ready to believe what is shown to us to deserve belief.” Freud is believed to have said, “Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id”.

Finally, to quote from the Late Sigmund Freud, “Rolland makes a curious but important distinction, one that is meant to underscore the partiality, indeed absurdity, of Freud’s self-conception as rationalistic land dweller. Rolland claims that the “existence” of the invisible forces, such as the oceanic feeling, “does not establish ... their truth. It only establishes their reality.” It is a distinction Rolland learned from Vivekananda, namely, between the metaphysical and the physical, the internal and the external. “Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world,” Vivekananda says, “just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with the truths of the physical world”. The implication is that Freud’s rationalistic concern for external truth – the truth of the external world – comes at the expense of the lived reality of internal truth, which is essentially a mystical experience. “



Pranav Bryan

Malayalee identity is a segment where various members of the SMA Youth Wing expressed their feelings and values of coexistence and respect for diverse beliefs, which were carried forward into the multicultural society of Singapore. Embracing the Malayalam heritage has been a joyous journey, and the Youth Wing members take immense pleasure in sharing its richness with their Singaporean friends, deepening their understanding while strengthening their own connection to my roots. With an open-minded and accepting attitude, they strive to strike a balance between preserving their cultural identity by actively participating in the broader cultural tapestry that defines Singapore.

I am **Merin Shaji**, a 3rd year undergraduate at NUS. I have spent most of my life in Singapore and have been fortunate enough to be a part of the Malayalee community here. Over the years I have learnt to strike a balance between embracing my malayalam heritage and being a part of the broader multicultural society in Singapore.

Selected question: How do you strike a balance between embracing your Malayalam heritage and being part of a broader multicultural society in Singapore?



Having spent my early years in Kerala, I was already exposed to the harmonious coexistence of Malayalees from diverse religions and beliefs. It was not uncommon to witness a church, temple, and mosque nestled within a single neighborhood, showcasing the essence of mutual respect. When I moved to Singapore, I carried this crucial value with me, along with an open-minded and accepting attitude towards individuals from vastly different cultures. As I matured, I discovered a newfound delight in sharing my Malayalam heritage with my Singaporean friends. This not only deepened their understanding of my culture but also enriched my own connection to it.

MALAYALEE IDENTITY

Pooja Haridas

Greetings, all! I go by the name Pooja Haridas and I am currently pursuing my undergraduate studies in Computer Science at the University of London. For more than a year, I have actively participated as a member of the Singapore Malayalee Association and currently hold the position of Social Media Coordinator in the Youth Wing. My deep connection to my Malayalee heritage keeps me closely intertwined with our rich culture, and I wholeheartedly embrace and immerse myself in its vibrant aspects.



Qn: What might be some challenges youths face that deter them from embracing the Malayalee culture and heritage completely?

One of the challenges that prevents young people from fully embracing our culture is the pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture and prioritize mainstream values. Assimilation can be influenced by a variety of factors, including social pressure, media, and peer influence. They may feel the need to meet society's expectations and adopt practices that differ from the Malayalee culture in order to conform to the majority of society.

Cultural assimilation is a natural part of multicultural societies, but it is important to find a balance that allows individuals to maintain strong ties to their cultural roots while still being integrated into the wider community. Providing opportunities for cultural engagement and encouraging pride in our heritage can help address the challenges of cultural assimilation and encourage Malayalee youths to embrace and celebrate their cultural identity.

Gayathri Udayakumar



I am Gayathri Udayakumar and I am a medical technologist at Woodlands Health.

Since I feel happy helping and giving mental and emotional support to others, I love to do volunteering activities. I also like to plan and organise get together events. Apart from this, I play Veena and perform if given the opportunity; I enjoy singing and listening to music, reading documentaries, non-fiction and fiction books and watch movies.

With regards to outdoor activities, I love doing workouts, trekking, exploring new places and

attending events or concerts.

I do not have any definite or strong aspirations as of now. I have planned to continue with my career and maybe I can be a music composer or singer in future upon parents' support. It all depends on individual's destiny from my point of view.

Qn: What are some key elements of Malayalam heritage and culture that you feel are important to preserve and promote in Singapore?

Some key elements include language, festivals, performing arts, cuisine, and literature & music.

Malayalam is the language spoken by Malayalees which is an integral part of the cultural identity. Malayalee festivals, such as Onam and Vishu, are vibrant celebrations that showcase the cultural heritage of Kerala. Malayalee culture is renowned for its diverse forms of performing arts, including Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Ottamthullal, and Thiruvathira.

Malayalee cuisine is known for its distinct flavors and culinary techniques. Promoting Malayalee cuisine through restaurants and food festivals can introduce the wider community to traditional dishes like appam, puttu and avial. Last but not least, Malayalam literature has a long and esteemed history, with renowned authors, poets, and literary works.

By preserving and promoting these key elements of Malayalam heritage and culture, the Malayalee community in Singapore can maintain a strong connection to their roots, foster a sense of cultural pride and create opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

Malavika Mini

My name is Malavika, currently a diploma student in RP and I'm also a member of Youth Wing Singapore Malayalee association.



Qn: How important is your Malayalee heritage/ culture to you?

As a Malayalee, I take pride in my cultural heritage as it serves as a means of connection to my roots, family, and community. The cultural values and practices passed down through generations, such as the importance of community and social harmony, play a crucial role in shaping my Malayalee identity.

For many Malayalee in Singapore, cultural events and festivals like Onam, Vishu, and traditional weddings provide an opportunity to celebrate their heritage, strengthen family

bonds, and maintain a sense of belonging. We have a variety of Malayalam events that take place in Singapore and this brings out Malayalee identity in every Singaporean Malayalee. I'm really proud of who I am right now as I've been taught well to respect my own culture as I grew up as a Malayalee in Singapore.

Sathyarth Pisharody

I am Sathyarth Pisharody. I am working as a Production support Engineer at DBS bank CBP. I am pursuing my higher studies in cybersecurity which is basically my interest. I play for a Cricket club in the Singapore Domestic League called SPARTANS CC. My passions from childhood have been Cricket, chenda and riding bikes which I am pursuing currently, so I am a happy person right now.



Qn: How did you learn about your Malayalam heritage and culture?

Growing up both in India and Singapore, I have been fortunate to have a diverse cultural exposure. However, my family has played a crucial role in ensuring that I understand and appreciate my Malayalam heritage and culture, through storytelling, language lessons, and visits to different nations, I have developed a strong understanding and admiration for our customs, rituals, and artistic traditions. The key elements of Malayalam heritage and culture that are important to preserve and promote in Singapore include traditional art forms like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Theyyam, chendamelam, and Pooram experiences. The rich literary works in Malayalam, the vibrant festivals like Onam and Vishu, the authentic cuisine featuring dishes like appam, avial, and puttu, and the values of respect, community, and inclusivity that are inherent in Malayalee culture.

Aathira Unnithan

I am Aathira Unnithan. I currently work in the eldercare space. I also serve in the SMA Main Committee & Youth Wing. My passions include dancing and volunteering for various causes.



Qn: How would you describe your understanding of Malayalam heritage and culture, considering your upbringing in Singapore?

In Singapore, we are very broadly categorised by the CMIO model, and I have always known that we fell under the I category. However, the first time I was made aware that I hold a different identity than that of other Indians was in Primary 1, when a Tamil classmate candidly remarked that I wasn't "Indian" because I was Malayalee. Although it was a rather misguided, naive thought, it got me thinking about my Malayalee identity and culture. I started noticing subtle but beautiful differences in terms of our cuisine, our festivals and our language, just to name a few. I have had the privilege of attending and participating in various Malayalee events organised by the many Malayalee Organisations in Singapore, which greatly enabled me to have a better understanding and appreciation for our heritage. For me, learning our language and our art forms played a huge role in forming my identity.

Deepika Anilkumar

I am Deepika Anilkumar, a final year student at NTU. I am a first generation Singapore Malayalee.



Qn: How do you view the role of the Malayalam language as a way of expressing your Malayalee identity?

Malayalam serves as a unifying factor for Malayalees, creating a sense of belonging and community. It enables communication and connection among Malayalees which allows us to express ourselves authentically and connect with others on a deeper level. I believe that speaking or hearing Malayalam can evoke a deep emotional connection to our roots, heritage, and familial relationships. It provides a medium for expressing affection, love, and cultural nuances that might be challenging to convey in other languages. Additionally, the language serves as a representation of various cultural expressions such as the performing arts, music and literature which has influenced our Malayalee perspective and experiences.

Dinesh Nair

My name is Dinesh Nair. I work as a Financial Consultant at Prudential Singapore. My hobbies include solo travels, watching standup comedies, football and emceeing.




Qn: What makes you proud to be a Singaporean Malayalee?

My grandfather was a strong believer of embracing one's identity and roots even though he



spent the latter part of his life here in Singapore. Having learnt Malayalam through my conversations with grandmother has allowed me to feel a great sense of pride when I speak my mother tongue with other Malayalees. In terms of arts, I used to take part in Malayalam singing competitions with my sisters & cousins. We bagged all the top prizes. I promise there was no favouritism involved. It made us more confident on stage and enhance our appreciation towards Malayalam songs.

Kerala food is simply amazing. From puttu to appam to the delicious sadhya meal on the banana leaf, the eclectic array of these meals bring more colour to the ever wonderful culinary delights of Singapore. When my Singaporean friends gather over a meal, the dining table has a variety of Kerala food (appam/puttu) and cuisines from other cultures. Our conversations revolve around a broad range of topics. But my head swells with pride when I see them enjoy mom's home made appam with chicken curry.



I feel very blessed because my family has exposed me to the many colourful fabrics of Malayalee culture in multicultural Singapore. I sincerely wish that this colourful fabric continue to inspire more Malayalees here in Singapore in their appreciation of their identity.



Recipe by

Mrs. Panicker

(Anjana Balakrishnan)



Stuffed Lemon Pickle

Ingredients :-

- Indian Lemon (in malayalam cheru naranga) - 500 gms (12 lemons)
- Red chilli powder - 40 g
- Kashmiri Chilli powder - 10 g
- Himalayan Pink Salt - 50 g (Slightly grind salt in mixer of use a mortar)
- Salt - 1 tsp for rubbing on lemon
- Fenugreek powder - 25 g (fenugreek seeds where dry roasted ,powdered and sieved)
- Asafoetida pdr - 4 g
- Sesame oil or Nallenna
- Take the pre-prepared glass bottle .Dry it well .I place it in sunlight and dry.
- Keep a clean cotton cloth ready ,dipped in hot sesame oil.I use butter cloth,washed well and dried in sunlight.You can easily get this online.
- Heat a few tablespoons of oil and keep aside to cool down.

Steps:

- Wash the lemon well,dry it using kitchen towel.Rub salt around and keep it aside for few minutes.This will help to remove any moist on lemon
- Prepare the masala mix and keep it aside.Heat chili powders to remove the raw taste and smell.I used my iron wok - so i heated the wok well,switched off the flame,added chili powder and saute for few seconds till fragrant. Add all other powders including salt and saute . The heat of the iron wok is sufficient enough to heat the masala. This will help to remove any moisture

present in any ingredients

- Heat a separate kadai or pan. Pour 5 tbsp of oil. Once hot add the lemon to the oil. Saute while stirring till the lemon burst and juice flows out. Do this carefully on medium heat. Use a oil cover to ensure the oil doesn't splatter on you while stirring.
- Remove the lemon from oil using a thong and keep on a kitchen towel. DON'T use the oil used for frying lemons.
- Let the lemons cool down. Wipe the lemons well to remove any residue from frying.
- Since the lemons already have a cut due to bursting while frying, slightly increase the opening either using a knife. The opening should be wide enough for filling the masala in.
- Fill in the mixed masala into the lemons. Fill it well enough and keep it aside.
- Layer the bottom of the bottle with left over masala powder. Arrange the lemons filled with masala as layers. Add oil around in between. Layer the lemons on top with masala powder and pour oil over.
- Lastly put the soaked cloth on top and pour remaining oil on top of the cloth.
- Close the bottle tightly and keep in away from sunlight and heat. Can take the pickle to use after 1 month.

Recipe by

Rekha Dinesh



LOTUS ROOT CUTLET

Ingredients :-

- 1 medium size Lotus Root (peeled, sliced and finely chopped)
- 2 Big Potato (Boiled and mashed)
- 1 Big onion (chopped)
- 2 Green chilies (chopped)
- 1 small piece of ginger (peeled and finely minced)
- 1 tsp of coriander leaves (finely chopped)
- ¼ tsp Turmeric powder
- ½ tsp Garam masala powder
- 1 cup Breadcrumbs
- 1 or 2 egg whites
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Vegetable oil for frying

Steps :-

- In a pan, pour some oil and sauté onions until it becomes soft.
- Add the ginger, green chilies and chopped lotus root. Stir well for 5 minutes.
- Add Turmeric powder, pepper, garam masala, coriander leaves and salt to taste, stir well. After 5 minutes, remove from gas.
- Allow the mixture to cool. Then add the mashed potatoes and mix well.
- Make a small ball with the mixture and roll into desired shape.
- Beat the egg whites in a small bowl. Put the breadcrumbs on a plate.
- Dip each cutlet into the egg whites and then into the breadcrumbs.
- In a pan, pour some oil and deep fry the cutlets until golden brown.
- Transfer the cutlets onto a kitchen towel to get rid of excess oil.
- Serve hot with chilli sauce.

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