

malayalam  
LITERARY SURVEY



Kerala Sahitya Akademi

2010 Apl-Sep

Kerala Sahitya Akademi

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LITERARY SURVEY going



2010 Apl-Sep

classical?



**MALAYALAM  
LITERARY SURVEY**  
(VOL. 31 No. 2 - 3)



**Kerala Sahitya Akademi**  
Thrissur 680 020  
Kerala

## Malayalam Literary Survey

A Quarterly Publication of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur

Vol. 31 No. 2 - 3 April-September 2010

Price : Rs. 50/-

Annual Subscription : Rs. 100/-

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Cover Design : Vinayal

Type setting : Macworld, Thrissur

Printed by Simple, Thrissur

Edited, Printed and Published by Purushan Kadalundi

for the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Thrissur 680 020

Reg. No. 29431/77

Phone : 0487-2331069

keralasahityaakademi@gmail.com

www.keralasahityaakademi.org

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## To Our Readers

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Going Classical? – This question about Malayalam language is widely speculated today in the official and academic circles. Besides, more and more proofs are obtained regarding the fact that Malayalam has fulfilled all the criteria stipulated by the central Govt. for giving classical status to an Indian language. All the stalwarts in the Malayalam literature and a great many Malayalam scholars have commenced to highlight the eligibility of our language for classical status. Under these circumstances, all those who love Malayalam are eagerly and enthusiastically awaiting the moment of our language getting adorned with the crown of classical status.

However, apart from the technical eligibility, the fact that Malayalam language and literatures maintain classical standard is self – evident and as plain as daylight. It has been proved that several sprouts of the primitive Tamil have originated from Kerala constituting the old Chera country. Besides, the nourishment of Malayalam by Sanskrit from time in memorial has also helped Malayalam in rising to a high class world language. Above all these, the special heritage of Kerala ( in shaping which even our geographical features have played a role) too, has contributed to elevate Malayalam into its unusual

glory. The windows of Kerala have always been kept open to welcome the air and water from outside. Hence our soil has become a confluence of culture pluralism. It must have been the genius transmitted from this cultural energy that enables Malayalees to mingle easily with and shine among diverse identities.

The First part of the April – September issue of the Malayalam Literary survey contains articles related to the topic ‘Malayalam Going Classical?’ In his article ONV establishes the claims of Malayalam arguing that instead of focusing on certain literary works, the entire literary tradition should be taken into account for conferring classical status to a language. Dr. Puthusseri Ramachandran’s claims in favour of Malayalam are based on the historical background of the scripts used in Malayalam and other Indian languages. Airavadam Mahadevan analyses the geographical basis of Malayalam and Dr. C. Rajendran has focused on the nourishment of Malayalam by Sanskrit through ages.

Deep studies based on the works of some of our most prominent writers, and articles analysing the cultural implications of rituals and the various dimensions of folklore enrich the second part of this issue. And the creative basket represents the creative variety of Malayalam fiction and poetry.

**K.P. Ramanunni**  
(Convenor)

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## ON CONFERRING CLASSICAL STATUS TO INDIAN LANGUAGES

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**Prof. O.N.V. KURUPPU**

Malayalam is one of the four daughters of the Proto-Dravidian Language along with Tamil, Telengu and Kannada. The separation from the mother was a prolonged process of evolution which appears to have been spread over a period of several centuries. It is significant that Malayalam versions and commentaries of Sanskrit works were mentioned as 'Tamil Kattu' (Tamil book) for example. The Malayalam annotation of the famous Sanskrit Lexicon, 'Amarakosham' was mentioned as 'Amaram Tamil Kattu'. Even the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Malayalam Poet, Niranam Rama Panikkar says that he wants to narrate the 'Brahmandapuranam' in Tamil. It is evident that in these centuries the word Tamil was used by Keralities to denote their language though the actual language was remarkably different from Tamil. The word 'Tamil' was a synonym of the word 'langauge.' In fact this served

as a misty curtain to hide the antiquity of Malayalam Language.

While the people on the eastern side of the western ghats held a puritanic attitude in preserving their old alphabet and linguistic expressions, the inhabitants of the western side of the ghats (ie Chera/Kerala) held a very liberal attitude in accepting words and usages from the spoken and written dialects of those people with whom they have interacted and those who have settled here as evidenced in history. In the course of its development as an independent language, Malayalam has lavishly accepted words from many other languages, such as Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Marathi, Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Hebrew, Portuguese, Dutch, French & English

- Sanskrit - Through Aryan Settlers. The entire vocabulary of Sanskrit was taken over into Malayalam and the resultant richness has made Malayalam equal to any great language, in its capacity to deal with literary and non literary themes.
- Prakrit&Pali - Through Buddhist&Jain Prachers& Monks.
- Marathi - Through traders and musicians who enjoyed royal patronage.
- Arabic - Through Arabic traders & the advent of Islam in the coastal districts of Kerala.
- Persian - By local rulers in the process of modernising the administration and judiciary.
- Syriac - Through Christian missionaries
- Hebrew - Through Jews who often visited and settled here.
- Portuguese, Dutch, French & English - During the period of struggle for settlement by these three European colonial powers and finally during the period of British supremacy.

It is beyond doubt that Tamil in the Chera Country has undergone changes due to the liberal tolerant attitude and accommodative

nature of those who spoke it in this area without hurting its basic Dravidian structure.

This transition occurred in the alphabet of the local Tamil also. Along with the preservation of the old Tamil roots, Malayalam has absorbed all the phonemes in Sanskrit. The same is the case with Kannada and Telegu also. Fortunately these sister languages have won the 'classic' status while Malayalam which has undergone the same transition through centuries towards sophistication and modernisation, alone is marginalised as an outcaste from the illustrious Dravidian family of Languages. We do endorse the 'Classic' status rendered to Tamil. But while giving the same status to Kannada and Telegu, the denial of the same to an equally great language is surprisingly illogical in a democratic country where any sort of discrimination is deplorable.

The period of the first available literary work in a language should not be the sole criterion to adjudge the antiquity of that language. That should not be the decisive factor to confer 'classic' status. The first available work in Malayalam, 'Ramacharitham' evidences in itself, the rich heritage of a poetic culture of a glorious past. It is eloquent of the presence of "full many a gem" that lies hidden in the repository of ancient Malayalam Poetry. Moreover it is a historical fact that Dravidian Culture thrived in equal excellence in Vanchi (Chera in Kerala) Kanchi (Chola) and Pukar (Pandya). The 'Vanchi Chapter' is immortalised in 'Silappadikaram' which was authored by Ilango Adikal, the Prince of Cheral country who turned an ascetic. This 'Vanchi' is today's Kodungalloor, the premises of which even today invites excavators to explore Kerala's relation with European ports and the resultant cultural impact. Doesn't it speak a lot about the antiquity of Kerala's culture and its language and literature? Is it a fault that the Tamil (both its common parlance and its literary diction) used by Keralites had developed itself to greater cosmopolitan dimensions? Does this noble innate nature of its stand in the way to achieve 'Classic' status?

The vast seacoast of Kerala facing the west and the variety of rare spices produced here have benefited Kerala with a vast

exposure to Arabia and Europe. Traders who sailed to Kerala's sea ports even discovered a helpful seawind that bears a Greek name 'Hippolatus'. This constant contact with various peoples, their varied faiths, cultures, and languages enriched the diction of Malayalam as the wings of a butterfly become embedded with pollen grains from various flowers it comes into contact with.

No wonder Malayalam produced a translation of the Bhagavadgeetha by a non caste-Hindu poet like Madhava Panicker as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. No wonder a single poet has translated the Epic of Mahabharatha into Malayalam fully using the same metre as in the original. The poet was Kunjukuttan Thampuran and it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Kodungallore itself where the poet of 'Silappadikaram' had his abode. Kodungallore has become famous in history as the port where landed one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas. The same town is the abode of an ancient Muslim Mosque constructed by the last Chera King who embraced Islam and went to Mecca. Malayalam language, keeping pace with these memorable changes in the land's history has acquired a cosmopolitan nature. It is significant that Keralites have never raised their voice against any other language, especially Hindi which they consider as the language of the majority of the sons and daughters of Mother India.

We can find that Malayalam fulfils all the essential criteria for 'Classic' status.

- (i). It is ancient as it belongs to the Proto Dravidian Family of Languages. It was the language of the ancient 'Chera' Kingdom, which underwent gradual transition like its sister language Kannada and Telegue.
- (ii) It is deep-rooted in the Dravidian tradition and is not at all an offshoot of any other tradition.
- (iii) It has a rich tradition, both oral and written. If at all the poetic diction of modern Malayalam differs from that of 'Silappatikaram' and 'Ramacharitham' (12<sup>th</sup> Cent.) it is nothing but the natural consequence of historical development. Silappadikaram leaves a common heritage that

is to be shared by the entire descendants of the Chera, Chola and Pandya People of yore.

- a. The present Malayalam small Script Granthalipi can be found in ancient Kerala writings from AD 9<sup>th</sup> Century.
- b. Vazhappalli Chepped of AD 9<sup>th</sup> Century is an example. From that time onwards this script can be seen in all Kerala manuscripts.
- c. The Pallava Kings wrote Sanskrit in this script and it is proved that the script took shape out of the Brahmi Lipi later. It is from this same script that Tamil, Kannada & Telugu lipis also shaped themselves.
- d. One letter found in 2000 year old Dakshina Brahmi lipi, is still seen in Malayalam only without any change. It is Zha (g)
- e. Even in Silappadikaram (4<sup>th</sup> Cent AD) there are many words which are not present in the vocabulary of today's Tamil. These are lavishly used even in the common parlance of Malayalam - (അളിയൻ, അങ്ങാടി, അടയ്ക്ക, കുറ്റ്, തോണി, പാതി, പിഴ, പൊതി, പായൽ, വഴിപാട്) ect. to cite a few. These are termed as 'Malainattuvazhakkam' which gradually matured into Malayalam.
- f. In Kerala from AD 9<sup>th</sup> Century onwards we can find literary, scientific & political works in this script. eg: Thapathisamvaranam, Subhadra Dhananjayam, translation of Kautaliyam etc.

This means Malayalam Language has developed sufficiently much earlier than 12<sup>th</sup> century. Such masterly works cannot burst out all on a sudden but needs centuries of nurturing.

Just as the red rays of dawn and the hot silvery rays of midnight and the crimson rays of dusk, though apparently different, are all actually the same sunshine. Tamil, Malayalam, Telegu and Kannada are of the same Dravidian tradition. Hence lowering the status of one of these four languages is against historical facts that should never happen in an age of democratic justice.

The demand for 'Classic' status for Malayalam is not 'sentimental' but based on historical facts. At the same time the Malayalis not only in Kerala, but all over India and abroad cherish a very noble sentiment towards this effort to regain the status of their mother-language. The 'Classic' status will open new venues for the development of Malayalam. It will promote the most precious values envisaged by our great leaders of Renaissance. Malayalis want to build bridges of understanding with other Indian and foreign languages and thereby help the emergence of 'Universal Man' on the firm ground of our national culture. A Malayalam University with such a motto, a fond dream of Keralites, can become a reality as a result of this recognition and its associated benefits.

Wonders occur not only in Nature and Architecture as the Niagra falls or Taj Mahal respectively, but it occurs in Literature also. In the very same town Kodungalloor where Silappadikaram was written by a prince turned ascetic, fifteen centuries later, a single hand did translate the entire Mahabharatham into Malayalam—that too, the very first fullfledged translation of the great Indian Epic in a regional language of India. Kodungalloor, supposed to be the ancient port-city, Muziris as mentioned by foreign travellers was the nucleus of ancient Kerala culture. Dravidian culture is like 'Brahma,' the creator, having four faces—Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telegu. Alienating Malayalam from the other three is like cutting off one head of the creator. We should not commit that sin.

## CLASSICAL STATUS FOR MALAYALAM

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Dr. PUTHUSSERI RAMACHANDRAN

The agitation for securing the classical status for Tamil has a long story behind it. For the last one hundred and fifty years, the Tamil Scholars were fighting for getting the status of a classical language to Tamil. The Central Government maintained a list of classical languages in which Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Arabic and Persian found a place. The omission of Tamil was conspicuous and it opened the eyes of the Tamil scholars. The first clarion call to give Tamil the Classical Language status along with Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Sanskrit was made by V.G. Suryanarayana Sastriar. It was in 1887 (one hundred and twenty three years back) that he addressed his request to the University of Madras. It was he who gave the nomenclature of "Uyar Tinai Chemmoli" to the Classical Language. From that time onwards, there was a continuous movement demanding classical status to Tamil. Organisations like "Karantai

Tamil Sangham”, and personalities like Dr.V.C.Kulandaiswamy and Manavai Mustafa carried on this onerous task. The struggle gained momentum when the Chief Minister M.Karunanidhi decided to press the Government of India to enlist Tamil in the list of Classical Languages.

12<sup>th</sup> October 2004 is a red letter day in the annals of the History of Tamil Literature. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India proclaimed that henceforth Tamil Language is classified as a classical Language. In another order, the Minister of Human Resources Development approved the following steps for promotion of classical Tamil:-

- 1) Creation of a Tamil Language Promotion Board to advise the Government of India on the Development of Tamil Language.
- 2) Creation of a Centre of Excellence in classical Tamil and Dravidian languages.
- 3) Announcement of Two International Awards and one National Award for scholars in classical Tamil.
- 4) Certificate of Honour to eight distinguished scholars of classical Tamil and Five Awards to young scholars of Tamil.

This announcement was received with joy by the Tamil speaking world and there was a sense of fulfilment in the minds of Tamil people. ‘The endowment of classical status to Tamil is expected to go a long way in the Development of Tamil Studies throughout the world and enhances the chances of Tamil being recognized as an alternative medium in the field of education and administration. This will also give a fillip to the study of Tamil in the renowned universities of the world’ remarks B.K.Krishnaraj, Vanavarayar, Chairman, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Coimbatore.

Dr.V.C.Kulandaiswamy, the Vice Chairman of the Central Institute of classical Tamil has gone deep into the problem of defining the classicality of a language. When some Tamil scholars have given the impression in articles and speeches that the UNESCO has an authorized list of classical languages and that it has specified criteria

for a classical language. V.C.Kulandaiswamy wrote a letter to the UNESCO for clarifying the issue. He received a reply, explaining that it had not established any criteria for designation of classical language and it does not have a list of languages approved as classical languages. The letter further said that “It is a matter which is beyond UNESCO’s mandate.

The union Government, while considering a representation from the Tamil Nadu Government for endorsing the classical status of Tamil, approached the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, for its opinion. The president of the Sahitya Akademi constituted an expert Committee under his Chairmanship. The committee in a meeting on September 2, 2004, observed; “It was noted that the criteria for defining a classical language are not mentioned anywhere. But abstracting the standard features of what are Universally accepted as classical languages (such as Sanskrit, Latin and Greek), it was agreed that the following criteria (mentioned in later paragraphs) be applied in the case of such a designation henceforth.”

### **The Literature is classical – not the Language**

It is thus clear that the criteria for granting classical status to a language have not been stipulated explicitly and unambiguously. Against this background, we may consider the basis on which languages such as Greek and Latin were designated as classical languages.

A study of the issue leads us to the finding that the literary contributions of ancient Greece and Rome, in Greek and Latin, were considered by scholars as classical, and these two languages were designated classical languages. In other words, it is the literature that is assessed as classical, and by virtue of the literature, the languages are termed classical.

### **The Grolier Academic Encyclopedia**

What is the definition of classical literature that forms the basis for a language to be termed classical? The Grolier Academic Encyclopedia says: “The word classicism in literature refers to

those elements of style or content such as reason, clarity, order, restraint and humanitarian outlook that characterised the writing of ancient Greek, ranging from Homer, Plato and Aristotle.”

### **Encyclopedia Britannica**

The following explanation appears in the Encyclopedia Britannica: “When used to refer to an aesthetic attitude, Classicism invokes the characteristics normally associated with the art of antiquity, harmony, clarity, restraint, universality and idealism.”

The criteria for determining classical status are therefore derived from Greek and Latin literature and are not based on any arbitrary decision. The characteristics of Greek and Latin literature, by and large, are: Antiquity, Harmony, Clarity, Restraint, Serenity, Idealism, Universality, Reason, Order and Humanism.

### **Criteria for Classical Language - Akademi**

The Sahithy Akademi’s expert committee mentioned four criteria for a classical language.

- 1) The high antiquity of early texts/recorded history of over 1500 to 2000 years.
- 2) A body of ancient literature/ texts that is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- 3) The literary tradition should be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- 4) The classical language and literature should be distinct from the , and there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or off shoots.

It is seen that the criteria are based only on the characteristics of literature.

### **Tamil – A Classical Language**

When Tamil was accorded the status of a classical language by the Government of India, the decision was welcomed by linguists and people in general because it was only an official confirmation of a recognition which cultural history of the country had already granted.

But when a sum of Rs.100 crores was granted to Tamilnadu for research and development, people of other southern states felt discriminated against. Naturally, voices were raised in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and in 2008 both of the languages of Telugu and Kannada were declared as Classical Languages.

This has further exacerbated the feelings of the people of Kerala who feel ignored.

### **Political pressure is needed**

After Tamil, Kannada is to be considered for the classical status, because writing of inscriptions in Kannada language began to appear in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The first inscription in Kannada is considered the Halmidy (name of a village) inscription dated of 450 AD by Kadamba King (Kakulstha Varman. Around 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Kannada has grown to the status of a mature language and works in literature began to appear by the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards. So next to Tamil Kannada is the 2<sup>nd</sup> amongst the South Dravidian languages by antiquity. But it could win the status of classical language only after, Telugu, the 3<sup>rd</sup> member among the South Indian languages that have fetched it.

Telugu was awarded the status of classical language in 2008, four years after Tamil received it (in 2004). The formation of Telugu was only by the middle of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The first appearance of the Telugu language in an inscription is the Vipparla inscription of Jaya Simha I (633-666 A.D.) the King of East Chalukya Dynasty. This inscription is considered as the first written record in Telugu language. It was only in the second half of 7<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions in Telugu were available. Nannayya Bhatta is considered as the first poet in Telugu Language.

A language acquires classical status in the course of history by virtue of its antiquity, influence on the civilization of a people, wealth of its literary creations and capacity to generate a value system that sustains nations. The status cannot be accorded by an executive decision by a government under pressure of populist political forces.

However, now that Telugu and Kannada have been given the classical status, there is no reason why Malayalam should be ignored and neglected, when it meets the criteria drawn up by the Government.

We should like to point out the following factors which should convince the authorities that Malayalam deserves to be recognized as a classical language.

### **Malayalam – A Classical Language**

For the process of evolution of Malayalam as an independent language Tolkappiyam of 4<sup>th</sup> century grammar for Tamil – both eastern and western divisions provided the first evidences. Even in 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. the western dialect of Tamil reflects the grammatical features of its own tendency to become a separate language. The dialects of the five Nadus of the Western area - Kuttanadu, Kudanadu, Venadu, Pulinadu and Karkanadu are marked for their special features which developed later in a huge scale and finally caused for its separation from the Tamil of Colas and Pandyas.

### **The First Phase of Evolution 600 – 900 A.D.**

Cilappatikaram of 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. written by a Chera prince of Kerala staying at the capital city of Kodungallur and several love lyrics of Sangham Literature written by 30 and add poets belonging to Cerakingdom constitute the bulk of Sangham Literature. All these literary works are written in Kerala dialect which reflects the first face of the linguistic development of Kerala dialect. The culmination of this development could be seen in the Vaisava Shakti songs of King Kulasekhara, the songs of Saiva saint King Cheraman 'Perumal Nayanar and Viral menta Nayanar of Chengannur. All these works of poetry and the earlier inscriptions constitute the first stage of the development of our language.

In Olden days Kannada and Telungu were known as Kannada exactly in the same way as Malayalam and Tamil grouped as Tamil or Chenthamizh. The word 'Malayalam' was used to indicate the land of Malabar in early days. From days of Gundert, however,

this underwent change. When Gundert wrote his grammar it was called Malayalam Grammar. Gundert's contemporary, George Mathen, wrote Malayalam grammar and it was called as "Malayanmayunde Vyakaranam". Leelathikalam the well known 14<sup>th</sup> century work tells us the full story of Kerala Bhasha and its growth as a distinct language quoting a bundle of literature written in Malayalam language since 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The language of Malayalam passed through three specific periods of growth. The language of Ilanko Adikal and his poetic genius tell us the genesis of Malayalam.

By of 10<sup>th</sup> century we began hear of Perumal Thirumozhi of Kulasekhara Alwar, which is a work written in the west coast dialect in which a separate Malayalam identity could be seen.

Even in the early Sangam works where the five Tianai's are mentioned we see Kerala's language. The commentator of Tolkappiyam, Perchiriyar Ilampuranar speaks of the distinct features of the west coast dialects such as the dialelects of Kuttanadu, Venadu, Karakandu and Pulinadu from the Sangam worked to the period of Perumal Thirumozhi of 10<sup>th</sup> century. we see the early or the first phase of our language in the ancient phase.

The inscriptions issued by Kulasekhara Kings of Mahodayapuram (Kodungallur) reflects temple life and the culture of the people from 9<sup>th</sup> century. These records and epigraphical pieces, all written in Kerala dialect and in Valleluthu scripts, indicates the second phase of the development of the Malayalam language. All the Sanskrit words in inscriptions have been written in Grantha Script, which was later assigned to Malayalam language. Even today Malayalam is written in this Grantha script. Later on when art form like Koothu, Koodiyattam, Pathakam like art forms developed the artists explained the story to the natives only in the native dialect ie Malayalam, of course mixed with Sanskrit. The Twelfth Century prose works like Bhashakautaleeyam, Brahmanadapurana, Ambareeshopakhayana are all part of this Sanskrit Malayalam mixture. This blend language, very soon

developed into a separate language. Early champ us of 13th century like Unniyacharitham, Unnichirutevicharitham, Unniyacharitham etc tell us not a different story but only the extension of Malayalam Language and literature, called Manipravalam and the classic example is Leelathlakam compiled in the 14th century.

Native folk literature also developed during this period and we see works like 'Ramacharitham' by Ciraman, 'Kannasa Ramayanam', 'Kannasa Bharatham', 'Kannassa Bhagavatham', 'Bhasha Bhagavat Gita' etc. by poets of Kannassa School. Followed by Krishnagatha of Cherusseri. Then by the next century we witness the Ezhuthachan Age. The process of development was perfected by Thuchath Ezhuthachan the true founder of Modern Malayalam Literature, who polished and finalized most of the Malayalam words which we see today.

### **The Script – 1500 years old**

The script used by Malayalam writers had a longer history than that of the Telugu and Kannada scripts. It should be noted that Grantha script was used for writing Sanskrit in south India after Southern Brahmi fell into disuse. This is a script in which Malayalam is written to diary. It has got an antiquity of 1500 years. It was used first by the Pallava Kings to write Sanskrit Language 1500 years back.

The Sanskrit portion of the Vazhappally Copper Plate inscription (8th century AD) is written in old Grantha script. It was preserved by Keralites to write Malayalam. The language of the earliest inscriptions indicate decisive phonemic and morphemic changes which mark the differentiation of Malayalam even in the 8th century.

Along with Tamil, Malayalam has preserved the sound and letter (g).

The Chakyars performed their version of stories from ancient Sanskrit plays and from the Puranas. They mixed Sanskrit with native speech which formed Manipravalam (ruby–coral mixture)

in their recitals and their Dramatical Manuals (Attaparakarams) were written in the Malayalam language of the time. This process of dramatic performance was started by 9th century A.D.

Between the 12th and the 14th centuries Malayalam had grown into a major literary language and had consolidated its gains and had shaped itself as an independent language with its own grammar Leelathilakam. The first Bhagavad Gita translation in any Indian language appeared in the 14th century. The Kannassa poets brought out their versions of Ramayanam and Bhagavatham. When we consider that the Karnataka rhetorical text Kavirajamargam also was written in the 14th century, it conclusively proves the antiquity of Malayalam.

In the 3rd stage of development by the 16th century Malayalam had emerged as a language with a rich literature which includes the works of Cherusseri, Ezhuthachan, Poonthanam and others. It is widely recognized that the contributions of Malayalam to the modern progressive currents in Indian literature is second only to Bengali.

We may also mention that Malayalam can boast of four Jnanapith Award winners with G.Sankarakurup as the first winner of this most prestigious literary prize of the country.

We requeste the Government of India to rectify the injustice done to Malayalam and accord the status of a Classical Language to it with institutional and financial support to promote and develop research in Malayalam and Kerala culture.

The classical status for Malayalam is the need of the hour - it is not simply for a classical status or for a few hundred crores of rupees. It is to recognize the culture of the people of the far South of India which danced to the tune of their mother tongue- MALAYALAM- a medium through which an essentially Malayali trait had developed. Language, Literature and Culture are inseparable.

## ANTIQUITY OF MALAYALAM: RECENT EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

IRAVATHAM MAHADEVAN

I read with interest the report on the symposium on recognition of classical status to Malayalam (*DLA News* 34.7.2010). I support the plea not merely on grounds of equity, as the other three literary Dravidian languages have already been accorded the classical status, but also on the merits of the case.

There was a time when the same language was spoken on either side of the Western Ghats, probably with only minimal dialectal variations. In course of time, and due to the barrier to communication posed by the high mountain ranges, the Eastern dialect (Tamil) and the Western dialect (Malayalam) became more and more divergent. The heavier infusion of Sanskrit and the native innovations like dropping the person-number-gender terminations in Malayalam led to its emergence as a separate language with its own distinctive script. Therefore, as both were once dialects of the same proto-language.

The earliest inscription in Malayalam occur only from the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., though L.V. Ramaswamy Aiyar traced the origin of the language to about the 5<sup>th</sup> century on linguistic grounds. However, recently discovered Tamil-Brahmi and Early Vatteluttu inscriptions provide new evidence for words in characteristic Pre-Malayalam or Early Malayalam forms dating from much earlier times. I summarise briefly the new evidence.

1. A herostone inscription has been discovered recently at Pulimankombai in Theni district in Tamil Nadu (near the border of Kerala). The inscription is in the Early Tamil-Brahmi script and may be dated in ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. on palaeographic evidence. The inscription reads:

*Kūṭal-ūr ā-kōḷ peṭu tīaṅ antavaṅ kal*

‘the (memorial) stone of Tiyāḷ Antavaḷ who fell (in) the cattle-raid (at) Kūmalūr’

Note Ma. *peṭu* (Ta. *paṭu*) ‘to fall, perish’ (DEDR 3852) occurring here in the *viḷnittokai* with the name of the hero who belonged to the Tiyā caste. This is the earliest inscriptional occurrence of a pre-Malayalam word discovered so far.

2. A pottery inscription found at Pattanam, Kerala (most probably identical with ancient Muciṛi) during trial excavations is in the Late Tamil-Brahmi script of about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. as judged from palaeographic and stratigraphic evidence. The fragmentary inscription reads:

... *ūr pāva o* ... ‘woman / doll of the village...’

The occurrence of the pre-Malayalam form *pāva* (Ta. *pāvai*) (DEDR 4107) may be noted.

3. Another pottery inscription has been excavated more recently at Pattanam. The inscription is a single word *cāttan*, a personal name, in the Late Tamil-Brahmi cave inscription at Arachalur, Erode District, Tamil Nadu, which has also been dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. from palaeographic evidence.

4. An Early Vatteluttu inscription of ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. is engraved on a boulder mid-stream of the Cherupuzha river at Ezhuttukallu in the Nilambur forest area in Kerala. It reads:

*mācakōṭu nīraṇavāy*

‘mouth of the dam (across) the water course at Mācakōṭu’

The occurrence of the Early Malayalam form *aṇa* (Ta. *aṇai*) (DEDR 122) is noteworthy.

I have not included here the Tamil-Brahmi and Early Vatteluttu inscriptions at Edakkal, Kerala as they have no special features associated with Malayalam, and are already well known.

In view of the exceptional importance of the four new inscriptions for the study of the origin and evolution of Malayalam, I have requested ISDL to store high-resolution photographs and full bibliographic data in their computer system for online access by interested scholars.

(From DLA NEWS Vol. 34 No. 8 dated Aug 2010)

## KERALA'S SANSKRIT HERITAGE

**Dr. C. RAJENDRAN**

The earliest references to Sanskrit scholarship of Kerala are attested to be those found in Daōdōin, who, in his *Avantisundarikathā* [7<sup>th</sup> C] makes a mention of Kerala scholars like Bhavarāta, a commentator of some Kalpasūtras and Matradata, his son, who was also a scholar-poet. Thereupon, Sankara, through his philosophical and devotional writings established for himself and his land an everlasting place in the Sanskrit firmament of India. It is not known, however, exactly at what point of time Sanskrit was introduced to Kerala's soil. There is reason to believe that it must have been in several phases, since the Sanskrit tradition of Kerala is not a monolith of high Brahminical culture alone, but a conglomeration of diverse sources like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. To quote N.V. Krishna Warriar,

It does not seem to be historically true to equate Sanskritisation of South India as Brahmanisation, as done by some. It was the Baudhas and Jainas, who stood outside the purview of the Varnasrama system that gave leadership to the propagation of Sanskrit in Ceylon and South India, and not Brahmins. And they were not averse to give Sanskrit education to non-brahmins. Just as Sanskrit was indispensable for Brahmins for the study of Vedas and Vedangas, Sanskrit was required for non-brahmins to study result-oriented Sastras like medicine, astrology and architecture.<sup>1</sup>

We have evidence to support the view that the Brahmanical and Non-brahmanical traditions ran parallel to each other. Interestingly, we find two types of *Siddharupa* forms prevalent in Kerala side by side. One was the Hindu tradition consisting of the names of Hindu gods like *Rama*, *Hari*, and *Sambhu*. The other was based on a set of secular words like *Vrksa* [tree], *kavi* [poet], *karu* [smith], and *jaya* [wife] as epitomized in *Rupavataara* of Dharmakirti. The exact manner in which these strands made their presence in Kerala at different points of time is hard to determine. It can be surmised that Jainism probably came to Kerala after the Mauryan conquest of Mysore and Buddhism when the missionaries of Asoka reached the land. The possibility of Buddhism reaching Kerala from Srilanka cannot also be ruled out since the grammarian Dharmakirti was a Srilankan Buddhist. The immense popularity of Ayurveda in Kerala, the prestige a play of Buddhist motif like *Nagananda* enjoyed in Kerala's theatre and the numerous references to Buddhism in the discourses of Cakyars in temple theatre are all indicators of the Buddhist Sanskrit tradition of Kerala. The most prominent form of Sanskritisation, however was ushered in by the brahmanical stream. There must have been a few Brahmin settlements in the region in the last two or three centuries prior to the Christian era.<sup>2</sup> The fifth and the sixth century witnessed the intrusion of the Kadamba kings to Kerala, which led to a fresh wave of Brahmin settlers to Kerala under the patronage of King

Mayuravarman who is referred to in the Namboodiri traditions of *Keralotpatti*. By the eight-century, there came into existence the thirty-two Brahmin settlements which later on came to be the temple centered sites of sanskritisation.

It may be due to the pluralistic tradition of Sanskrit in the land that the language deeply penetrated to the psyche of Kerala, cutting across caste barriers. The popularity of Sanskrit in Kerala is attested by the emergence of a hybrid form of Sanskrit and the vernacular called *manipravala* during the medieval times, and also by the high percentage of Sanskrit words found in Malayalam vocabulary. In the words of V.Raghavan,

In the whole of India, Kerala perhaps shows the greatest amount of saturation of Sanskrit, with the knowledge of Sanskrit and its spirit permeating and percolating utmost fringes of the society; fully inflected Sanskrit could be used in writing the local language.<sup>3</sup>

The history of this rich Sanskrit legacy is very rich and complex. We can see that Kerala has not only preserved in tact several strands of tradition like the Vedic lore, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, *ayurveda*, theatre, *vastusastra*, and classical literature, but also helped these traditions to blossom providing the necessary cultural ambience. We see the rare manuscripts of the works written in distant parts like Kashmir preserved carefully in Kerala suggesting great cultural interaction and absorption of diverse traditions by Keralites of the past. Practical sciences of ancient India like *ayurveda* and *vastusastra* show great innovativeness in the hands of the practitioners of Kerala. The kings and chieftains of the land provided gave institutional support for the Sanskrit tradition to flourish even when their existence was threatened due to political upheavals in the North

Kerala has played a pivotal role in the preservation and propagation of Vedic lore. This is indicated by its centuries old sacrificial tradition and the institutional support arranged by kings to the study of Vedas, Vedangas and Mimamsa. Vedic literature was preserved with diligence in Kerala from very early times

onwards. According to E.R.Sreekrishna Sarma,

Vedic tradition in Kerala has been unique in the sense that it provides for training in oral recitation, training in what is learnt, participation in Vedic rituals and taking up the sannyasa. So all that which Sriharsa, the scholar poet states in his Mahakavya, the *Naisadhiyacarita* are important with regard to Vedic tradition and Vedic studies.<sup>4</sup>

The regular rites in the temples of the Brahmin settlements of Kerala provided Brahmins opportunities to recite the *samhitas* and to receive gifts. Temples gave free food and education to Brahmin boys engaged in Vedic studies and the *samhitas* and the *brahmanas* were taught. Afterwards, those who aspired for higher learning were introduced to the studies of the *vedangas*, the ancillaries of the scripture like phonetics (*siksha*), grammar (*vyakarana*), etymology (*nirukta*), prosody (*chandasa*), and the *sruta* and *grhyasutras*. Sacrifices, especially the *soma* sacrifice were performed regularly which ensured that the performance tradition of the Vedic hymns and *Brahmanas* was kept alive. The latter day Vedic competitions like *katavalluranyonyam*, conducted annually at the Srirama temple of Katavallur tested the proficiency of students in the *Kramapatha* of the Rgveda. The kings of the principalities of Kerala vied with each other in providing encouragement to Vedic and classical literature. While the *Revati pattattanam* introduced by the Zamorin of Calicut was a great meeting point of scholars, the facilities accorded by Travancore kings for *Murajapam* was another example of institutional support provided for performance tradition of the Vedic lore.

The Vedic *sakhas*, which gained currency in Kerala, include the *Kausitaka* and *Asvalayana* recension of the Rgveda, the *Baudhayana* and *Vadhulaka* recensions of Yajurveda as well as the *Jaiminiya* recension of Samaveda. There was also a galaxy of Vedic scholars including Bhavatrata, who commented on the *Jaiminiya sruta sutras*, Sadgurusisya, who wrote the commentaries *Sukhaprada*, *Moksakaprada* and *Abhyudayaprada* on *Aitareyabrahmana*, *Aitareyanyaka* and *Asvalayana sutras*

respectively, Udaya, who wrote the *sukhada* commentary on *Kausitakabrahmana*, Akkittam Narayana, who wrote *Dipaprabha* commentary on Sarvanukramani, Nilakantha yogiyar, who wrote *Srautaprayascitta sangraha*, Nilakantha, the author of *Niruktavarttika*, and Melputtur Narayana Bhatta, who wrote *Asvalayanakriya krama* and *Suktisloka*<sup>5</sup>.

No less spectacular is the contribution made by Kerala Classical literature. The performance tradition of Sanskrit drama, which became extinct everywhere else in India miraculously survived in Kerala through the form of *Kutiyattam*, the temple theatre with a lot of ritualistic and regional elements modifying it to give a local colour, even though the basic features of the Sanskrit drama like its highly stylized acting and Rasa orientation are left intact. *Kutiyattam* as an art form presents itself as a very complex amalgamation of diverse streams like classical Sanskrit drama, the folk arts of Kerala, and the solo discourses of different religious traditions. Ancient Tamilakam had many art forms called kuttu, like *kottikuttu*, *katakkuttu* etc. performed by an acting community called Cakyars and it is probable that it is the fusion of the indigenous tradition with the performance tradition of classical drama which might have taken around the sixth and seventh centuries which resulted in the emergence of *Kutiyattam*.<sup>6</sup> This must have taken place at the time of the emergence of the temple centered Brahmin settlements all over Kerala. The popularity of King Harsa's *Nagananda*, a play with Buddhist motifs in *Kutiyattam* stage probably points to a Buddhist phase of Sanskrit drama in Kerala stage. It is remarkable that only a very few plays written by Keralite playwrights have found place in *Kutiyattam*. These include *Ascaryacudamani* of Saktibhadra, the *Kalyanasaugandhikavyayoga* of Nilakantha and the two plays *Subhadradhananjaya* and *Tapatisamvarana* of Kulasekhara, the patron king of Mahodayapura who is supposed to have reformed the Kerala theatre with the inculcation of the regional language for characters like Vidusaka, with the assistance of Tolan, his jester-minister. The other plays associated with *Kutiyattam* include parts of some of the Trivandrum plays assigned to the legendary Bhasa

like *Pratijnayaugandharayana*, *Abhiseka*, *Svapnavasavadatta*, *Pratima* and *Balacarita* the *Mattavilasa prahasana* of Mahendravarman, as well as the *Bhagavadajjuka* of Bodhayana. It is the enactment tradition of Kutiyattam which paved the way for the emergence of *Krsnanattam*, a musical opera based on *Krsnagiti* of Manaveda, *Kathakali* and other classical arts in Kerala.

The *Campu* form of literature, consisting of prose and verse, evolved into an interesting genre in Kerala called *Prabandha*, which was used for the solo discourse of Cakyars. Here the greatest name is that of Melputtur Narayana Bhatta, who wrote classics like *Rajasuyaprabandha* for the sake of his friend Iravi Cakyar. Melputtur is reputed to have composed a *Prabandha* dealing with the wailings of Surpanakha called *Surpanakhapralapa* avoiding all nasal sounds since Surpanakha, with her nose cut could not be expected to pronounce any nasal sound. Most of the episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are narrated in the *campu* form, and most of them are ascribed to Narayanabhatta himself, though it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of this tradition.

The notable Mahakavyas produced by Kerala include *Yudhishthiravijaya* of Vasudevabhattachari, a Yamaka poem of amazing lucidity, the equally famous and more lucid *Srikrshnavijaya* of Sukumara, *Musakavamsa*, a historical poem by Atula, *Sivavilasa* of Damodara Cakyar, *Srikrshnavijaya* of Sankarakavi, the grammatical poem *Subhadraharana* of Narayana, *Bharatacarita* of Krsnakavi, *Raghaviya* and *Visnuvilasa* of Ramapanivada, the *Uttaranaisadha* of Arur Madhavan Aditiri, and *Ramacarita* of Vidvan Eilaya Tampuran. The *Stotra* poem *Narayaniya* of Melputtur can actually be regarded as a Mahakavya in view of its narrative structure and poetic merit. Some of the modern works of the genre include *Visakhavijaya* of Kerala Varma, *Angalasarajya* of A.R.Rajarajavarma, *Srinarayanavijaya* of Balarama Panicker, *Keralodaya* of K.N.Eluttachan, *Kristubhagavata* of P.C.Devasya, *Navabhaarata* of Mutukulam Sreedhar and *Visvabhanu* of P.K.Narayana Pillai.

The *Sandesakavya* genre of poetry also seems to have been very popular in Kerala. Though most of them are slavish imitations of Kalidasa in form and content, the true value of them lies in the fact that most of them yield a lot of geographical, cultural and historical information about medieval Kerala in their description of the path to be followed by the messenger. The *Sukasandesa* of Laksmidasa, *Mayurasandesa* of Udaya, *Subhagasandesa* of Narayana, *Kamasandesa* of Matrdatta, *Kokilasandesa* of Uddandasastri, *Hamsasandesa* of Purnasarasvati, *Cakorasandesa* of a Payyur family member, *Kokasandesa* of Visnutrata, *Bhrngasandesa* of Vasudeva, *Nilakanthasandesa* of Punnasserri Sridharan Nambi, *Sampatisandesa* of Puliyannur Tekkeppat Namboodiri, *Sarikasandesa* ascribed to Ramapanivada and *Matrusandesa* and *Hamsasandesa* of anonymous authorship are but some of the important works of this genre.

Kerala's contribution to devotional literature is also very significant. Sankaracarya, who popularized the integration of the of the *sanmatas* of *Saiva*, *Vaisnava*, *Sakta*, *Saura*, *Ganapatya* and *Kaumara* gave shape to a mode of worship called *Pancayatanapaddhati* for Advaitins consisting of the worship of Aditya, Ambika, Visnu, Ganapati, and Maheswara. In any case, not less than sixty-five hymns are ascribed to Sankara. Though the authenticity of the traditional view is not certain, we need not doubt Sankara's authorship of works like *Saundaryalahari*, *Mohamudgara*, *Sivanandalahari*, *Manisapancaha*, and *Kanakadharastava*. The *Mukundamala* of Kulasekhara Alwar, *Srikrshnakarnamrta* of Bilvamangala, and *Narayaniya* of Melputtur Narayana Bhatta are famous all over India. Other important *stotra* works include Narayana Bhatta's *Guruvayupuresvarastotra*, and *Sripadasaptati*, and Ramapanivada's *Mukundasataka*, *Sivasataka*, *Ambaranadisastotra* and *Suryastaka*.

The philosophical output of Kerala is magnificent and only the name of Sankara is enough to bring forth its significance. In the arena of Vedanta itself, apart from the famous Bhasyas of Sankara

on *Prastanatrayi* and works like *Upadesasahasri*, the advaitic works which deserve mention include *Samkseparakariraka*, *Pancaprakriya* and *Pramanalaksana* of Sarvajnatman, Advaitaprakasa of Durgaprasadayati, and *Darsanamala* of Srinarayana Guru. In Mimamsa, the famous Payyur Bhattas were great traditional scholars. *Nyayasamuccaya* of Parameswara I, *Jaiminiyasutrarthasangraha* of Parameswara III and *Manameyodaya* of Melputtur Narayana Bhatta and *Narayana Pandita* are important works on Mimamsa produced in Kerala.

Sanskrit grammar also made a deep impact on the Kerala mind and it is not surprising that most of the Malayalam grammatical treatises themselves were modeled after Panini's Sanskrit grammar. A unique feature of Kerala's grammatical tradition is that unlike in many other parts of India, non-brahmanical sources like Buddhism also were strong here as evidenced by the popularity of works like *Rupavata* of Dharmakirti, a Sinhala Buddhist scholar. Another significant point is the progressive outlook of Kerala grammarians like Melputtur Narayana Bhattatiri who readily accepted non-paniniyan traditions also to validate current linguistic usage. It is needless to point out that the conservative tendency among grammarians to uphold tradition and censure freedom in usage all over the world is much more pronounced in India where Panini and his ilk have acquired, not without reason, almost a superhuman aura. Against this general tendency, it is interesting to note that there were a set of grammarians, like Melputtur, who believed that rules followed usage and not vice-versa, a dictum acknowledged in principle even by Paninians. Melputtur even takes the radical stand that other traditions in grammar are as authentic as the Paninian tradition and controverts the view that the latter alone is authentic.

Of all, there are about sixty grammatical works penned by Kerala authors, which are now available, including treatises, commentaries and grammatical poems illustrating usage. These include treatises and commentaries like *Pravesaka* of Trkkandiyur Acyuta Pisaroti, *Prakriyasarvasva* and *Apaniniyapramana sathanata* of Melputtur Narayana Bhattatiri, *Laghupaniniya* of

A.R.Rajarajavarma, grammatical poems illustrating usage like *Dhatukavya* of Melputtur, *Subhadraharana* of Brahmadata narayana and *Vasudevavijaya* of Vasudeva

Kerala has also made seminal contribution to science and technology enshrined in Sanskrit texts. It is now globally regarded as the haven of Ayurveda, thanks to the unbroken tradition of great physicians who preserved and further developed India's Ayurvedic tradition down the centuries. An important aspect of Kerala's Ayurvedic tradition is the innovations made by Keralites in rejuvenation therapy of *Pancakarma*, not practiced elsewhere. With regard to mathematics and astronomy, the contributions made by great Kerala scientists like Sangamagrama Madhava, (c1340-1425), and Nilakantha Somayaji (1445-1545) give lie to the once widespread belief that the development of classical mathematics in India came to a virtual stop in India around 12<sup>th</sup> century after Bhaskaracarya. In fact, the development in mathematics in Kerala was of such great theoretical importance that it is now being described as the medieval school of mathematics. According to Rajagopal and Rangachary, 'it was Madhava who took the decisive step onwards from the finite procedure of ancient mathematics to treat their limit-passage to infinity, which is the kernel of modern classical analysis'<sup>7</sup> A novel feature of Kerala mathematics is the Katapayadi formula through which numbers are represented using the alphabet. In astronomy, apart from the authors mentioned above, Parameswara of Vattasseri (c.1360-1455) and Acyuta Pisaroti of Trkkandiyur (c.1550-1621) also made significant contributions. A feature of Kerala astronomy was the periodic revision of calculations to make accurate prediction of the eclipse and the like. Keralite authors have also made significant contribution to Vastusastra also, in which branch, the *Tantrasamuccaya* of Cennas Narayanan Namboodiripad, *Silparatna* of Srikumara, *Vastuvidya* of anonymous authorship and *Masnusyalayacandrika* of Tirumangal Nilakanthan Moosath are widely acclaimed.<sup>8</sup>

The contributions made by Kerala authors to diverse fields like commentary literature, Tantra, Dharmasastra, fine arts, literary

criticism and various other branches of philosophy are also significant, but the limits of the paper does not permit me to touch upon these fields.

The impact of Sanskrit on Kerala's intellectual tradition has been tremendous. Sanskrit's linguistic influence resulted in the phonological transformation of Malayalam from a simple Dravidian structure to a more complex one, accommodating voiceless aspirates voiced stops, and voiced aspirates into its fold, in addition of admitting hundreds of loan words. Conversely, Malayalam also influenced Sanskrit, mostly in the matter of pronunciation and accent. The literary tradition of Kerala, as in other parts of India shows the influence of epics and classical literature to a remarkable degree. The classical theatre of Kerala, especially Kathakali, owes much to Kutiyattam and Krsnanattam for its technique and motif. Sanskrit was the medium of higher learning of various *sastras* in premodern times and hence the language enjoyed unparalleled prestige in the land.

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#### **(Footnotes)**

- <sup>1</sup> N.V.Krishna Warriar, *Keralapanini's contribution to Sanskrit grammar*, (Mal) State Institute of languages, Trivandrum, 1989, p15.
- <sup>2</sup> *Kerala through the ages*, Department of Publication, Government of Kerala, p.13.
- <sup>3</sup> V.Raghavan, *Foreword to The Contribution of Kerala to Sanskrit Literature* by K. Kunjunni Raja, p vii

- <sup>4</sup> *Vedic Tradition in Kerala*, p.7.
- <sup>5</sup> C.Rajendran, *The Vedic Tradition of the Nila river basin South Indian History Congress XVIII souvenir*, p.98.
- <sup>6</sup> C.Rajendran, *Kutiyattam: 'The Sanskrit theater with a Regional Idiom'* in *Living Traditions of Natyasastra*, Ed.C.Rajendran, and p 64-65.
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted by George Gheverghese Joseph, *The Crest of the Peacock*, p271.
- <sup>8</sup> A.Achyuthan and Balagopal T.S.Prabhu, *An Engineering Commentary on Masnyalayacandrika*, Introduction, p. x

## Government Notification Regarding 'Classical Languages'

**To be published in part-I section 1 of the Gazette of India**

**No.IV-14014/7/2004-NI-11**

Government of India/Bharat Sarkar  
Ministry of Home Affairs/Grih Mantralaya  
Jaisalmer House, Mansingh Road, New Delhi-110011

dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2004

Notification

It has been decided by the Government of India to create a new category of languages as 'Classical Languages.'

2. The following criteria will be used to determine the eligibility of languages to be considered for classification as a 'Classical Language':-
  - i. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a thousand years.
  - ii. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
  - iii. The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
3. It is also notified that the 'Tamil Language' satisfies the criteria listed a para 2 above and would henceforth be classified as a 'Classical Language.'

Whereas the Government of India have further decided that the following benefits shall be available to the language declared or notified as classical languages:-

- i. The major international awards for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian languages are awarded annually.
- ii. Centers of Excellence for studies in classical languages is set up.
- iii. The university Grants Commission be requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Charts for Classical Languages for scholars of eminence in Classical Indian languages.

**(K. Jayakumar)**

Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

### **ORDER**

Ordered that a copy of the Resolution published in the Official Gazette.

**(K. Jayakumar)**

Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

**To be published in part-I section 1 of the Gazette of India  
No.IV-14014/7/2004-NI-11**

Government of India/Bharat Sarkar  
Ministry of Home Affairs/Grih Mantralaya, Lok Nayak Bhavan,  
Khan Market, New Delhi-110011

dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2004

Notification

Government of India created a new category of languages as 'Classical Languages' vide Notification No. IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II dated 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2005 and the following criteria was laid down to determine the eligibility of languages to be considered for classification as 'Classical Language':-

- i. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a thousand years
- ii. A body of ancient literature/texts which considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.
- iii. The literary tradition showed be original and not borrowed from another speech community

- iv. The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.
2. Tamil Language was notified as a 'Classical Language' vide para 3 Of the aforesaid Notification dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2004
3. The Government of India has now decided to amend para 2(i) of the notification dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2004 so to read as under.  
"High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years."
4. It is also notified that 'Sanskrit Language' satisfies the above criteria and will be classified as a 'Classical Language.'
5. All other provisions of the Notification dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 2004 will remain unchanged.
6. The Ministry of Culture will take all further steps required to follow up and implement the above decisions.

(Jag Ram)

Deputy Secretary to Govt. of Indian

Tel. 24616862

To

The Manager  
Government of India Press,  
Faridabad

Dated the 25th November, 2005  
No.IV-14014/7/2004-NI-II

Copy to:-

1. Prime Minister's Office, South Block, New Delhi
2. Cabinet Secretary, Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi
3. Ministry of Culture, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi
4. Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Secondary) & Higher Education), Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi.
5. The Chief Secretaries of all the States/Union Territories.

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## My Times, My Poetry

**D. VINAYACHANDRAN**

My times and my poetry with unprejudiced transformations become unfamiliar even to myself and breaking the boundaries of words they become desolate moments of silence and the unfinished rushes of love on the silver screen. In the most material sense they cut across seven worlds. Seven confessions and the spurt of mental process. Envisioning that the earth and the earthworm have poetry, 'my poems and love are the dust that is resurrected after a quake, a few indistinct shoots, sprouting up.' It should recoup the butterflies and *surumas* that are trapped in the dilapidated souls. My glass is sanguine. Ignorance of God is filled in it. In the mad rush of a nightclub we feed on a stranger. The ignorance of God becomes the ignorance of man. We fear not death; we begain to fear life.

I won't be blind to the blank gazes of hunger, the

tanned faces of war and the wreckage of love. They are the ovens of poetry. Science says that time will end up before space and the cosmic rays that are as old as the big bang are spurting to future and so I have to refine my past to limit my future. Man has very limited idea about his brain and even his genes. The ones who made loud declaration like 'one world- great world' are now prophesying multifarious universes. Among issues like dry water-taps, explosion of bombs in the streets, whimpering of the child who is forlorn amongst the mirage of the earth and the minds these anxious contemplations are poetry's subtle nuances.

Here, because of time-constrains and because of the evident multiplicity of poetry it is not possible to establish all these points. In scorching summer we sit together with a fellow- traveller for a cup of *lassi*. We walk to wilderness in the night hearing the cries of children deep-dwelled in the earth before many a birth. A lunatic laughs seeing the bullozers and the condoms blown up and flown by naughty children. We present a basket full of oranges to him.

What I should do is to keep silence. Even if you are in hospital or in your garden turn to poetry. I who enact multiple faces on the street say only this:

*Remember the treaty*

*Between the salt and the stars*

*Remember the betrothal*

*Between the seed and the rain*

.....

.....

*Th sun will burn to ashes all that is devoid of love*

*The moon will down all that is not a dream*

There are hundreds of ways to write poetry in Malayalam. I cannot be a bonsai exhibition piece of Imagism which was once despised as transitory ploy by our eminent critic M.P. Sankunni Nair. I need a bit of place. As in our land agriculture has to be recovered in words as well. The mangroves, ground water, the distance between heat and cold and the time between noise and silence

have to be recovered. My poetry should be able to recover God, the dream that we missed in our hurry and it should also find refuge in the attempt to cure the ailing God. Poetry, after all, is not poetry alone.

Let me read out some of my short poems. As the conch does to the sea, as the lac to the woods, a fragrance that we alone distinguish and as love, these are in invitation to my pains....

**Translated by K.T. DINESH**

## Basheer and R. K. Narayan A Different Version of Prison Experiences

**Dr. ABOOBAKER KAPPAD**

Dr. Viktor Frankl, who was the head of Psychiatry Department in the University of Vienna, has narrated an interesting and amazing incident in his book *Mans's Search for Meaning*. Dr. Frankl had been imprisoned for some time in one of the concentration camps set up by Hitler. And the incident referred to here is something related to one of the female prisoners in the camp, whom Dr. Frankl happened to meet after her release. That lady had undergone solitary confinement over a long period of time in terrible conditions. As a psychiatrist Dr. Frankl wanted to know what kept her alive, and what is more, sane. The lady then revealed to Dr. Frankl the fantastic means that she had adopted for her survival as well as for keeping her mental balance.

One of the branches of a small tree was the only thing visible from her cell. The lady could consider that branch as her bosom friend and she kept on

conversing with it throughout her confinement. Thus she succeeded in converting the nightmarish prison-days into a period of bliss.

Although it seems totally incredible, Dr. Frankl asserts that we can take the whole story without even a speck of salt. That lady could look upon the entire universe-inclusive of the microscopic beings and the fibrous grass-as a single family. And she believed that being the most sensitive members of this vast family, human beings are bound to be considerate and affectionate towards all the other living-beings. Besides, they must try to communicate even with the tiniest of flora and fauna. Hence she found it quite easy to feel the presence of a sensitive mind within that tree-branch, and spent most of her time in chatting with it. Thereby she could dispel her sense of loneliness and live a life of peace and pleasure.

What is driven home through this lady's experience is that if your heart is brimming with all-embracing affection and tolerance, you can create a heaven even out of a hell. Vikom Muhammad Basheer, the legendary Malayalam writer and R.K. Narayan, the renowned Indo-Anglian writer, too, have highlighted this very truth in their novels *The walls* and *The Guide* respectively.

Raju, the hero of *The Guide* gets imprisoned on account of a forgery. But inside the prison he becomes a totally different man. He is seen everywhere in the prison as an affectionate well-wisher. He succeeds in winning the hearts of both the prison officials and the prisoners. The prisoners look upon him as their benefactor and beloved teacher. The prison authorities take him into confidence and entrust him with various duties. Later on Raju recalls all these pleasant experiences:

I visited all departments of the prison as a sort of benevolent supervisor. I got on well with all the warders. I relieved them in their jobs when other prisoners had to be watched. I watched the weaving section and the carpentry sheds. Whether they were murderers or cut-throats or highway men, they all listened to me, and I could talk them out of their black moods. When there was a respite, I told them stories and philosophies and

what not. They came to refer to me as 'vadhyaar' -that is teacher. There were five hundred prisoners in that building and I could claim to have established a fairly wide-spread intimacy with most of them (*The Guide* 226-227)

To make his stay in the prison more pleasant and meaningful an experience Raju works on a vegetable patch in the backyard of the Superintendent's house. He "grew brinjals and beans and cabbages. When they appeared on their stalks as tiny buds, I was filled with excitement" (227)

Thus having created a homely atmosphere within the prison, Raju no longer hates it; nor does he fear it. Instead he feels just the opposite:-

No place could be more agreeable (than a prison); if you observed the rules you earned greater appreciation here than beyond the high walls. I got my food, I had my social life with the other inmates and the staff, I moved about freely within an area of fifty acres. Well that's a great deal of space when you come to think of it; man generally manages with much less (228).

Hence there is not even an iota of exaggeration when he claims:-

I felt choked with tears when I had to go out after two years, and I wished that we had not wasted all that money on our lawyers. I'd have been happy to stay in this prison permanently (22)

Basheer's own prison experiences depicted in his novel *The walls* also are not much different. Most of Basheer's works reflected the fact that he was an embodiment of goodwill and affection. That is why T. Padmanabhan has commented in his article; *Basheer: Vyakthiyum Novelistum* (Basheer: the Person and the Novelist):

There is a strong undercurrent visible throughout the works of Basheer. It is the undercurrent of love. This noble feeling flowing out of this writer, who was a mystic and ascetic, embraces not man alone, but all living beings (*Basheer: Sampoorana Krithikal-The Complete Works of Basheer*-(1;28-29).

Hence similar to Narayan's Raju, Basheer also finds it quite easy to befriend the warders and his fellow-prisoners alike. The warm

friendship that exists between Basheer and the assistant Jailor (fondly called 'Brother Jailor' by the prisoners) can be read out from these lines of Basheer.

He did not visit me to inspect the lock-up. He came to chat. He had a small Alsatian dog... We talked about its training, exercise, food. I told him a number of dog stories. Brother Jailor listened to them with interest. I made black tea for him. Most people knew that I had tea and sugar with me (*Poovan Banana and other Stories* 166)

Basheer seems ever willing to prepare and serve black tea to the condemned prisoners, who desire to have their final drink just before their hanging.

The warder would wake me up. I would make some black tea and send it to him (the condemned prisoner). I would send word to him to be brave (166)

Basheer's room in the jail is the meeting place of all the prisoners including the political ones, and the warders.

There would be laughter and discussion then, a little township in itself. Arguments, noise, laughter, hubbub. Sometimes the Jail Superintendent came with Brother Jailor.... We would talk about trees and plants; about tending and manuring them. We would pace up and down talking of these things (167).

Some of his fellow-prisoners cannot approve of Basheer's fraternizing with the Jail Superintendent. They ask Basheer:

Why should one talk and smile and make up to him? Was he not the person who increased the number of lashes to be inflicted on my friend at the whipping post to two dozens? (167).

Similar to Raju, Basheer also appears to be an ardent lover of trees and plants; but unlike Raju it is a flower garden that he tends in the jail compound. Quite often Basheer "would stand still in the midst of my (his) rose garden. All around me were flowers shedding perfume. there were beauty. There was sweetness" (164).

Like the lady referred to in Viktor Frankl's book Basheer also chats with his plants.

I love every single tree and shrub. I have even felt that trees and shrubs understand what I say to them (167).

At one stage, however, he thinks of jail-breaking. This thought stems from the frustration and sense of loneliness that come over him when all his fellow political prisoners get released. But he overcomes that thought and resumes loving the prison life within a few days.

By that time I come to the conclusion that it may not be such a good thing to escape from jail. After all the trouble taken to get out what is one to do? 167-177)

If Basheer believed and proved through his deeds that life is an incessant prayer wishing happiness and well-being to each and every creature, Narayan devoted a major part of his life for nurturing his one and only daughter, who had lost her mother while she was an infant. He could not even think of a second marriage. Hence it is quite evident that he had first hand experience of the amazing possibilities of love. That is why both the writers could present before us the picture of how a prison is being converted into a happy home with the magical touch of love. With all the frightening and gloomy pictures of prison life depicted by other writers, this different version, of course, is simply marvellous.

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## On Sri Radha

P.M. NARAYANAN

The translation of Sri Radha form Oriya to Malayalam was a joint venture by Mr. N. Gopalakrishnan and me. Translating the classic poetic work was a unique and grand experience for both of us. In retrospect, we feel that it was truly a period of creativity. I have read many poems on love and death. But Sri Radha is Sri Radha, a class in itself. Now I would like to share the exhilarating experience of immersing myself in this great work that energized and enlightened me.

I had the good fortune to spend some time with Sri Ramakant Rath, the author of Sri Radha. Mr Rath had come to Calicut in connection with the release of the Malayalam translation of the book. That day, Mr. Rath spoke to us till late in the night. He also rhythmically recited two or three chapters from the book in his characteristic style.

The poet narrated to us how the poem emerged in his mind. During one of his trips abroad, he had to stay in a hotel. The weather was oppressively hot. One night when he found it difficult to sleep, he went up to the terrace of the lodge and stood there looking at the view outside. There was total silence all around. It was dark, stars were twinkling above him. In the solitude and silence a heavy sadness that had no ostensible cause enveloped his mind. "After many nights there will be a night when the stars will still be twinkling in their glory. But I will not be on this earth to witness the scene". The poet's mind whispered to him. The freezing thought of death chilled his bone. He stood there shivering in deep melancholy. Suddenly, a shining meteor fell from the heavens. For a moment he experienced a sense of emotional proximity to it. It slowly took a human form and became the queen of all lovers.....Radhika

She said: I challenged death through love. I overcame it. Write about my longings and my disappointments.

Slowly, quietly, darkness and sadness drained out of poet's heart. It is thus that Ramakant started the work on 'Sri Radha'.

The Radha of the Puranas is only a supportive element for Sri Krishna. She does not have any independent existence of her own. Sri Krishna, the complete human being, has many facets. Radha is a mere instrument to bring out one among them ---- that of the eternal lover. On hearing the melodious notes of Krishna's flute, Radha rushes to him leaving everything. She sings, dances and makes love according to his wishes. However once Krishna leaves his lover's identity and takes on the role of the king she withdraws from the scene. After this, Radha has no history. The Jeevatma that has become one with the Paramatma also does not have a history beyond the point of union.

But Ramakant's Radha, as the poet Sugathakumari says, is Sri Radha. She is not a mere shadow of Sri Krishna. She has her own identity. In love, She is a participant equal to her lover. In many moments, she is even stronger. Many a time, she takes and executes decisions.

You would exist as a mass of blue  
Carved by my command  
Or as the blue total  
Of all my known, partly known  
And unknown desires.  
Since I always dress in blue  
You too must be blue  
How can you have any other colour when  
It would break my hearts  
If you had a colour other than blue

Radha was there even before Sri Krishna's birth. She exists after his death too. She dissolves in love like a human female made entirely of flesh and blood. She possesses her lover. She leaves her parents, husband and children for her lover. For her, the most beautiful thing in her life is love. In the moments of love, she does not have past or future. Only the ever existing present is there. To exist eternally, the present also has to die every time. Time stops only in love and death. Thus each experience of ecstasy becomes a suicide and each suicide a consummation of love.

I have packed all my longings  
Into every drop of sweat  
Trickling down my body  
When we wage our erotic war  
And into kisses  
As ultimate as suicide.

In each of the celebratory moments of love, she knows that it will not last. Thus, when he leaves her forever, she faces the situation with utmost dignity. Of course, she is sad. But she never complains or cries like the other Gopikas. It is with her body itself that she loves him. But, since she has eternalized those moments, their memory is enough for her to sustain her life. She has transcended the limits of the body. For her, Krishna becomes a beautiful memory and dream. Thus she finally possesses him completely when his body dies.

My joy today  
Is uncontrollable  
If you had not died for them,  
You would not have become  
Entirely mine

In one sense, Sri Radha is only a body bound human being an ordinary woman who is joyful in love and sad in separation. But, in another sense, she transcends the limits of the body and eternalizes love and overcomes death She becomes a goddess.

Sri Radha is all this. She is also many things beyond this. How does one muster words when the heart has melted itself into the meaning of every word? Words become inadequate when one tries to describe what is within. Quite often words betray us.

## The poetic radiance in Malayalam screenplays A study of the film-scripts of M. T. Vasudevan Nair

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Dr. ANAND KAVALAM

M.T. Vasudevan Nair, the most favourite short story writer and novelist in Malayalam is also the most distinguished and well-accepted script writer and director in the Malayalam film world. He has been able to mark golden imprints in the realm of Indian cinema with his remarkable skill in the presentation of screen plays imbibing and depicting the diverse aspects, prespectives and elements of this genre in an aesthetic manner along with technical perfection. Having penned about fifty screen plays without bowing down to mere commerical interests or much compromises he stands as a towering persobality not only among regional film makers but in the pan-Indian film world with his sharp and keen sense of awareness, dedication and commitment to his medium. In fact M.T occupies a historical position as a script-writer because it was only after he began writing screen-plays the Malayali viewers began to

consider film script as a distinctive genre which has its own genuine features. Also it was M.T who elevated this medium of writing as a literary form. Until then, in Malayalam, screen-plays were not given a valuable consideration and even their importance was not much understood by the Malayalis. This is one of the major contributions M.T. has rendered to Malayalam Cinema.

Besides this there are several other factors that make him a distinguished personality in this field. M.T can be rightly regarded as the first and foremost script-writer in Malayalam who wrote screen-plays after having learnt cinema as a distinctive visual art from which has its own language, grammar and structure. This factor played a significant role in making M.T. a classic writer and path-finder of film scripts in Malayalam. He stands as a unique writer mainly due to the importance he gives to the visual descriptions in film scripts. With rare and extraordinary skill he has depicted unforgettable emotional moments with acute sense of propriety and exactness in visual descriptions and thematic presentations. His screen-plays have succeeded in presenting rich and memorable experiences to the directors, actors as well as ordinary viewers due to the keen sense of observation and concentrated efforts he maintained in the selection and treatment of visual images, symbols and scene depictions with an insight on life-situation and character psychology. The portrayal of natural background and ecological factors in his screen-plays in fact reveal the touch and imagination of a poetic genius. No other script-writer has so far been able to present the landscape, geographical elements and life-situations of Kerala in association with the mental and emotional states of the characters and the course of the plot symbolically. What makes them more relevant and remarkable is that they are presented not as mere backgrounds but as effective catalysing agents to convey the emotional aspects and the inner conflicts of the character. For an example, let us go through a scene-description in 'Iruittinte Atmaveu (Soul of darkness) which is based on his own short-story.

#### Scene 164 (a dream scene)

A full flowing river. Far away amidst the mist boats with masts are seen moving. A pleasant song is about to be sung. On the edge of a country-boat a vague view of a lady appears. Velayudhan is rowing a small boat.

Now the visage of the lady becomes more clear. It is none other than Ammukutty.

The boat is seen quivering. Before being able to control, it collides on the strip of the other boat, sound of shattering is heard.

Achuthan Nair's shout- 'Velayudha'!

What is shown through this dream scene is the hidden fantasies and desires of Velayudhan. This symbolic presentation is an effective model for the visual portrayal in a movie. This is a typical example of M.T's mental analysis of characters and the keen sense he takes in presenting scenes. There is another situation in 'Olavum Theeravum' which helps to substantiate this aspect. Here we are shown a character named Nebeesu, a young maiden who, while weaving the dreams of her lover Bapputti is encountered by Kunhali who seems to shatter her prospects. This scene very effectively proves M.T's skill of visual awareness and its presentation.

Nebeesu is seen inside her house. She is looking herself in a mirror and smiles. The news of the arrival of her lover seems to create movements in her heart. Now the reflections seen in the broken mirror gets transformed. It shows Nebeesu in her bridal dress.

When she is seen awakened from her day-dream into reality what she sees is the sight of two boots that climb the steps through the bottom of a screen. She gets up frightened. Kunhali looks at her seriously but with a slight smile. She looks at him fearfully and goes inside.

Here the visual images are presented as effective signs in a suggestive manner. The visage of Nebeesu seen reflected as if both inside and outside the mirror, her awakening to reality, the sight

of boots, the facial expression of Kunhali, the mental states of Nabeesu before and after the arrival of Kunhali etc. are shown with extreme care and suggestiveness.

Another salient aspect of M.T's screen-plays is the effective presentation of the ecological or geographical factors and elements making use of the visual possibilities of their portrayal. He has shown excellence in such depictions which no, other script-writer has attempted. The first scene of 'Olavum Theeravum' bears proof to this:

"A broad perspective of the sky where clouds are seen scattered. Far below, the river base which reflects it is seen. The music of the river is heard. The river is an active character here. Having seen its facial expressions, its banks and tides, we get a feeling of moving, towards its beginning phase. We reach towards a carrier boat tied to the shore."

This is one of the most well-written scene-descriptions in Malayalam screen-plays. It shows how closely M.T has imbibed the language of celluloid. Besides this, in most of his movies he has very aptly and charmingly used the various elements of nature to bring out the emotional conflicts and pangs of characters very intensely and powerfully as visual symbols. This scene from 'Murappennu' shows his astonishing skill in such depictions:

"Balan is seen sitting on the banks of the river looking at the rise and withdrawal of the tides in the shore of solitude. The pangs of his heart is very much visible on his face. Not much far away there is a whirlpool. A bunch of grass that came flowing enters into the whirlpool, gets turned and flows rotatingly. Near his foot steps the water-bubbles formed out of the remainings of the receded tide are seen breaking one by one."

Only a person who observes the minute forms, movements and emotions of Nature very keenly, and a person with a high imaginative potential could find out and associate the above mentioned expressions of Nature with the mental status of the character who undergoes a peculiar kind of intense emotional experience. Such scenes which are rare even in world cinema

can be seen only in the screen play of M.T. in Malayalam films. This scene very much shows the gravity of awareness he has gathered in the visual possibilities and the many - sided potentials of this media in a deeper manner. It is this awareness and sensibility which he had imbibed through his dedicated effort and observation along with his creative talent that enabled him to make powerful creations in celluloid.

Another notable and unique aspect which makes the screen-plays of M.T. memorable is the language he employs in them. He has written his screen plays after acquiring an awareness of the visual aspects of this medium. It is after regarding screen-plays as the blue-print of film or as visual form of a literature that he has given form to his scripts. In doing so, with his keen insight and awareness of the visual possibilities, he carved out a language so as to convey the emotional elements and expressions to the audience. M.T's language in filmscripts as in his short-stories and novels is highly charming maintaining brevity, lyrical quality, suggestiveness, ornamental faculties, irony and emotional undertones. The language used in film-scripts is highly visual, symbolic and at the same time they are easily communicative and highly captivating. His dialogues are noted for rich meaningful expressions and as in the case of visual documentation and thematic portrayal, the dialogue presentations are also famous for the sense of propriety which it maintains. The careful and apt usage of words in dialogues are deliberately presented so as to bring out intense emotions and expressions of character and the complex feelings and reactions of human nature. The best example of this aspect can be seen in the 83<sup>rd</sup> scene of Nirmalyam where he gives descriptions to portray the expressions of the sick bedridden father of the Oracle who happens to know the illegal relationship between his wife and Maymunni ('the eyes of father that moves, the eyes that move very fast, the eyes that seem to speak something silently, the indescribable disturbance and uneasiness which appears in his face,' and its descriptions as seen in the brief, highly suggestive dialogues between the Oracle with his wife when the incident is revealed). In the usage of such word-

combinations, meaningful and suggestive phrases with highly emotional undertones, pauses and silences M.T. has no equals in Malayalam and these qualities are observed in his scripts strictly following the grammar and structure of cinema.

M.T.'s screenplays can be generally categorized into three types. The first type contains the screenplays based on his own works. The second category consists of the plots of other writers expanded and modified through adaptations. Another group has stories developed from an idea or a thread of a theme. These three categories equally possess rare and unique charm maintaining sublime qualities in the presentation of visual descriptions, images, depiction of scenes and backgrounds and the use of languages in accordance with the grammar of cinema. What makes them more attractive and popular is that though they are highly symbolic and allusive they are lucid and communicative. At the same time they appeal to emotional and imaginative faculties alike through the heart-touching phrases which are coloured by the lyrical usages. But what makes them more remarkable is that through these poetic approaches he not only touches the subjective and emotional aspects but he succeeds in presenting many social factors also that did not get much exposition, with a sense of realism but without being didactic. At the same time he is entirely free from generalising certain communities totally as elite revealing the bitter realities experienced by them like poverty and hunger (Oracle in *Nirmalyam*, *Mambatta Namboothiri* in *Perunthachan* etc.) He is not seen glorifying aristocracy or the past feudal culture as seen in some popular films like *Devasuram*, *Aram Thamburan* or *Narasimham*. As his novels, his screen plays too portray the breakdown of human relationships and the feeling of isolation, emptiness, meaninglessness and dehumanisation of life in the background of disintegrating families in the wake of modern social set up in Kerala.

Along with these factors, another aspect which makes his scripts praiseworthy, is the genuine contribution given by him while conceiving adaptation. This is best reflected in *Oru Vadakkan Veera*

*Gatha* where he virtually breaks or de-constructs the traditional image of Chandu as a villainous character. He also reveals the fact that the so called great duels were fought merely for some border-disputes or petty self interests of some feudal lords and present the then existed social realities. Likewise in *Perunthachan* he presents the state of the architect who is neglected after the construction of the temple by the elite class and in *Vaishali* he takes care in presenting the state of the women characters who have to sacrifice their interests and even life, after they fulfil the interests of the rulers. It is this state of rejection and the torture inflicted upon the neglected character that is depicted through the portrayal of characters like *Velayudhan* in '*Iruttine Atmavu*' and '*kuttiyedathi*'. A notable aspect that can be seen here is the presentation of the emotional reactions in individuals inflicted by the social psyche.

M.T.'s scripts have won social attention for the portrayal of the social and cultural crisis in the contemporary life of Kerala. The disintegration of human values and relationship which creates identity crisis, sense of loss, dehumanization, alienation from one's own surroundings etc. have been presented in its depth by M.T. more than any other writers. The best examples are *Kanyakumari*, *Varikkuzhi*, *Vilkanundu Swapnangal*, *Edavazhiyile Poocha*, *Mindappoocha*, *Akshrangal*, *Alkkuttathil Thaniye*, *Aaroodham* etc.

Another salient feature seen in his screen plays is re-creation and interpretation of historical themes. Very few writers have shown such dedicated effort, strain and extensive research works as M.T. to analyse and portray the bygone era, its hidden mysteries and atmosphere to bring out certain untold realities. As a result of this he has been able to picture the architecture, costumes, ornaments, local customs and beliefs, life-style etc most authentically. *Vaishali*, *Oru Vadakkan Veenagatha*, *Perunthachan*, *Parinayam* etc are such films.

Thus on the basis of the above mentioned factors, M.T. can be rightly regarded as the most talented script-writer in Malayalam.

In terms of visual picturisation, psychological analysis of character, poetic presentation, exactness, propriety and emotional treatment, it is M.T. who has been able to contribute maximum perfection. Through this he has given a novel and fascinating sensibility to Malayalam screen-plays and film world. Along with this he also deserves the credit of giving an awareness to the audience of Kerala the language, grammar and structure of the celluloid after having learnt himself about it thoroughly.

## Rosy Thomas: Life Lived in a Lush Green Literary Valley of High Peaks

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**N.A. KARIM**

Rosy Thomas passed away in her ancestral place in Varapuzha near Norht Parur in Eranakulam district after prolonged illness was a colourful woman of Malayalam literature whose significance as a writer far exceeded her literary output. Her presence in literature was in a way alive even when she was not writing and publishing anything for a long time. This was because of the literary milieu with which her name was variously associated.

Borns as the daughter of M.P. Paul, an eminent profession of English and a renowned Malayalam literary critic with soild contribution in the field and whose works are points of reference in serious examination of works in a few literary forms, Rosy had the rare opportunity to come into contact with a large number of established and promising winters. some of them were members of the faculty of her father's College, M.P. Paul's Tutorial College where

they had a flourishing tutorial business. And the reputation and success of the institution of English himself attracted highly competent teachers in various subjects paying generous remuneration by then standard of poor salary of college teachers, particularly in private ones.

Prof. Paul himself was a victim of the then prevalent exploitative system of private management of one of the then reputed degree colleges, St. Thomas College, Trichur, where Paul began his teaching career. He resigned the job on principle when the management cut the salary of all teachers unilaterally even without informing them, let alone getting their consent, at a time when there was no prospect of immediate employment in those difficult days when openings were hard to come by. To add to the ire of the management, he published a booklet ***The Story of a Cut*** explaining the reason for his resignation. It required considerable guts then to take such a defiant step against the powerful Bishop of Trichur who was the manager of the College.

Her father's sense of self respect as a teacher and his intrepid spirit of independence with which resigned his job might have influenced the young child Rosy in developing immense courage with which she faced the vicissitudes of her own life. The teachers Paul's College were closely knit with the family of the Principal. Many of them were eminent teachers and reputed writers in their own right. The child Rosy grew in this academic atmosphere created by her father's colleagues and admirers.

Vaikom Mohamed Bashir was a member of this family of literate at that time he had not published even his first book ***Balaykala Sakhi*** which later came out with a profoundly perceptive introduction of Prof. Paul. Later another brilliant young man C.J. Thomas joined the faculty of the college. This was a turning point in the life of both Rosy and Thomas. They gravitated towards each other and after a long period of courting they got married. Though C.J. was not destined to live long, the promises he gave as a seminal thinker and creative were more than fulfilled in the short period of hardly a decade of his remaining life. The spark of creativity was in the heart of Rosy of which she gave

evidence during her student days at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam from where she graduated. She was very active in the literary and cultural life of the college. She was a cynosure of the student community, particularly of those who had literary and artistic bend of mind. As an ebullient and vivacious girl she made her presence felt in everything she participated with a rare quality of graceful leadership. I could personally observe this as I was senior contemporary of Rosy in the College. That she did not blossom into a writer after her studies was due to the fact that her husband did not give the encouragement and support in those days. C.J. was at the height of his intellectual and avant-garde creative best at the time of his death on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1960 in his forty-seventh year.

Rosy had three children by that time and the youngest one was just a toddler. Faced with a rather daunting situation of bringing up three children with no fixed regular income, this thirty year old widow, true to the fighting spirit of her father (who was a hero to her) girded up her saree and with a remarkable resolve faced every problem with unflinching courage.

Without losing time she joined a teacher's training college, took her B.Ed degree and took up teaching in a nearby school. Within three decades she brought up the children giving them good education and the imprint of her strong character. They are all well placed in the country and abroad. But the greater achievement was the books she wrote and the works she translated into Malayalam. Her memoir ***Ivan Ente Priya C.J.*** (This is my dear CJ) published in 1970 has already become a contemporary classic of the genre of writing called autobiography, a poor, undeveloped branch of writing in Malayalam even now. Her frank forthright narration of the life with CJ in all its joys and sorrows with a unique verve of writing has made the memoir memorable. The novel she wrote ***Annie*** based on the life of her friend has also an autobiographical touch and her characteristic frankness. Even in her translations the touch of her remarkably rich personality can be seen. The choice of George Orwell's ***Animal Farm*** for translating into Malayalam might have been

influenced by her husbands's political change, who began as communist and later became an out and out anti communist, of course, on a high intellectual plain. Another classic she chose for translation was Boccaccio stories. Her occasional writings have been collected in a volume **Jalaka Kazhchakal** (Windo Views).

Though her oeuvre is not very impressive their quality is remarkable. Her literary hero was neither her father M.P. Paul about whom he has written a book **Urangunna Simham** (The sleeping Lion) nor her husband C.J. Thomas but Viakom Mohamad Bashir. She got the opportunity of reading Bashir's first significant book **Balyakala Sakhi** in its manuscript form. The introduction that her father wrote to this book, with his characteristic sharp literary insight helped the novel in gaining immediate attention, critical and popular. Rosy was a person with an avid lust for joyful life which was reflected in her personal life and writings. Her life was in a lush green literary valley surrounded by several high peaks.

## Ritual/Ritual Body v/s colonial signifiers of Hegemonic Body Religion/Ritual/Theatre

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Dr. UMER THARAMEL

The link between religion and theatre is ritual. Ritual has two major roles in religion. 1. The pragmatization of religious ideas through rituals. 2. Ritual as a symbolic dramatization of fundamental needs. Ritual, thus, becomes a Cosmological activity. There may be differences in the pragmatization of rituals in pagan/tribal and institutional religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

Ritual has an artistic structure. It restructures the relation between language and world-consciousness through symbolic meanings. Since it reflects the world of myths and fantasies in the subconscious, it has got an anthropological and psychological significance too. Ritual is important in combining the cosmological and sociological layers of meaning and thus creating an identity synthesis.

If we pay attention to the rituals in tribal religions, we can see that they are quite different from institutionalised religions. Critics like 'Wole Soyinka have criticised the westerner's interpretation as incomplete regarding the ritual-theatre relationship in African tribal religions. The western concept of fantasy cannot explore the complete truth in the ritual forms of these tribal religions.

The definition of the inner world as fantasy be traced Euro centric conditioning or alienation. We describe it as a Primal reality, the hinterland of transition. The community emerges from ritual experience charged with new strength of action. (Wole Soyinka. *Myth World and African Literature*. P. 22

Organized religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism through their universal wandering absorbed many national myths and rituals. In the case of Islam there exist the layers like high Islam and low Islam. The high Islam is said to be fundamental and urban in nature. At the same time a synthesis of national and regional myths and beliefs could be seen in this category. The basic tenets of Islam, itself have complete forms of rituals. Fasting and Hajj are examples. Islam, wherever it flourished, has absorbed the pagan/ tribal ritual forms of the place to its mainstream. But the fundamentalists (not in the modern sense, here the term refers to one who strictly follows the fundamental principles of Islam) in the sect reject these kinds of pagan/tribal ritual forms. They call it as "Shirk" - a concept which is against the concept of single god and which also brings in other supernatural powers to its belief.

### **Kuthu Ratheebe-A Ritual with Difference**

Kuthu Ratheebe is a ritual form, which gained much popularity among the Muslims in Northern Kerala (Malabar). The Arab verbal noun "Ratheebe" means something done repeatedly. Kuthu Ratheebe is a mixed form of Arabic and Malayalam. The verb "Kuthuka" means 'to stab' or to use any weapon upon someone's body. Kuthu Ratheebe is performed at ritual festivals, mosques and homes. At homes they are done to escape from incurable diseases and to fulfil the aspirations of the people. The

oral text (vachika) of these performances is the mantras (hymns) that praise Allah and Sufis. The major hymns are about Shaikh Muhiyudheen of Khadiriya sect in Baghdad (11th century) and Shaikh Rifayee of Waseeth Basra (same century)--a decisive battle in Islam. These hymns are called Ratheebe because they are repeatedly sung.

hoo Allah....Allah hoo haq

Yes shaikh ya Muthiyudheen, Adbul Kadhir Jeelani

These are the main mantras.

Arabana (a percussion instrument) and Kinnaram are the main musical instruments used in Kuthu Ratheebe. The main performer after Vulu (purifying the body) stands in a circular position before the devotees and other common people. There will be more than twelve people to use musical instruments. Besides this there are five to six performers who use weapons. The main performer/organiser is called 'Ustad'. He starts singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments. His spectators are also participants by singing the hymns. In this ritual Mantras had to be sung lakhs of times. Since it is not possible for a single person to complete this task in a limited specified time, it is assigned to a group of people, each one repeating a fixed number of mantras, and collectively fulfils the fixed number. By one or two hours the telling of mantras to the accompaniment of musical instruments reaches its peak and a mood of ecstasy prevails. Then begins the practice of weapons.

Usually it is during the night the Kuthu Ratheebe is performed and is extended to the morning. The three weapons used in this ritual are Kathir, Khatta and Dabboos. Kathir is a thin metal rod of about one foot length with both ends pointed. It is used to pierce the ear lobe and also the skin behind the head and neck. Katara is a knife with extra length and width specially designed for the performance. This weapon is practiced upon the lower belly, hands and the back. Dabboos is the last weapon to be used. It is a thick metallic rod of about one foot length with one end pointed. The other end is a wooden grip. It is exerted mainly

upon the neck and cheeks. A shamanic ambience is created to the spectator by combining the terror and devotion. When the mantras and the musical instruments come to a descending order, the weapons are taken back and the ritual ends. The performers claim that even a single drop of blood will not be spilt and with the fondling of Ustad, the wounds get healed.

But there is another sect that performs with bloody wounds. They are called Masthans. According to the first sect, the blood that comes out of the body is polluted (najas) and it destroys the divinity of the ritual. Many people get unconscious watching the weapon practice in the ritual. Women have no direct entry to this ritual and no power to organise it. They can participate in the Ratheebe by sitting at a particular area and reciting mantras.

Mainly two kinds of spectatorship are performed in this ritual. In festivals like offerings it becomes a ritual of celebration. When it is done at mosques and homes, it is a spiritual ritual. It is the difference in spectatorship that brings the change in the nature of ritual. At certain homes it is done as part of exorcism. But this ritual cannot be done to hurt other people. In that way it is quite different from satanic rituals (black magic).

The ritual recreates the memory of great Sufis who were saintly people and were models to the common people. We can see a mix of tribal experiences and regional religious/ritual forms in this ritual. The realm of the archetypal experiences of a population who lived collectively is the undercurrent of this ritual. The urge for an identity formation in an alienated community can be detected in this performance.

### **Sufferings: A Political Approach**

Kuthu Ratheebe is one of the strongest rituals among the Muslims in Malabar. They have the great tradition of fighting against the colonial powers. Their main literary form, Mappilappattu, contains many imprints of this tradition. The most important among them are Padapattukal (war songs). Their main artistic form, Kolkali, contains the body language of resistance. They gained spiritual power through Kuthu Ratheebe and fought

against the colonial rule during the Malabar Rebellion (1921). Even though this is the case, its influence has not yet come into the Kerala theatre.

### **Some Rare Parallels**

If we examine the geography of Asia, we can see that it is the fertile land of many cultures. The political/cultural agenda of colonial modernity restricted the cultural plurality that existed here to a monolithic frame. The rituals of many tribal/religious cultures were lost in this colonial modernity. It is the intervention of colonial modernity that restricted the entry of these kinds of ritual forms into the emerging Asian theatres. Theatres are the various kinds of the representations of public culture. Now historians have started to record that a theatre culture existed in ancient Yemen, which was equal to or more sophisticated than the theatre poetics in India and Greece. "Thus it was not unusual that our exploration in Al-Qahtaniyeen land, home of Saba and Hamiar led us to the remains of theatre near the Mahreb dam. Definitely theatre existed in Yemen, Arabi's centre of civilization and development" (Ahmed Zaki). Zaki records that BC 20 itself refined theatre presentations were performed in Yemen. Receiving energy from the pagan religious rituals contemporary Yemen resists the Orientalist historiography and the colonial concept of false reality.

An attempt to secularise the human sufferings and politicise it can be seen in the Taaziya theatre from Iran. The story of the martyrdom of Iman Husyn interpreted by the colonial discourse as a chance to personal betterment and religious transformation is carried to a new post colonial meaning in this theatre form. Thus through this form it is realised that martyrdom and sufism are not two conflicting forces but something that originate from the same source. In Taaziya we see an attempt to recover the new signifier system of the theatre from the antiquity of nation culture.

Theyyams in northern Kerala is one of the strongest forms of ritual theatre. We can feel the conflict between structures of power

in Thyamms that of that depict heroic legends. Caste is the main link between these power conflicts. The new power relations that emerged during the transformation from a tribal economy to an agricultural economy are also depicted in many Theyyam performances. The concept of martyrdom is a common subject in many of Thyams. It pictures the inner political dimensions involved in all rituals in many tribal cultures. Some examples from Theyyam are Kathirvannur Veeran (Thiyya caste), Muchilottu Bhagavathi (Vaniya), Pulimaranja Thondachan (Playa caste) and Vayanattu Kulavan.

Shamanistic features existing in pluralistic tribal cultures can be seen in the above mentioned rituals. It puts forward the variant theatrical methods (different kinds of bodies) of fantasy and realism. With the domination of proscenium theatre, supported by the colonial discourses, the ethnic ritualistic theatrical practices (performing bodies) were marginalized. The concept of indigenous theatre in 1950s in Asia-African countries was developed as a strategy of resistance against the colonial discourses. With the coming of proscenium theatre pluralistic ritual bodies were deliberately sidelined or absorbed by the hegemonic white body and this white body as a monolithic power restricted the emergence of all kinds of alternative theatrical structures. For the making of pluralistic nation identities, the bodies of different population (race, gender, ethnicity) in its cultural forms have to enter into theatre. In this kind of a thinking process, ritual theatre has a role to perform.

## FOLKLORE LANDSCAPE OF KERALA

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**Dr. C.R. RAJAGOPALAN**

In Kerala -a region of inhabitants with ancient cultural imprints - the 'aborigines' in the mountainous regions of Western Ghats, numbering about forty groups of tribes, and the rural agriculture folks and craftsmen have the traditions of centuries old eco-culture. Each community has its own tradition of music, ways of ritual practices, and myths. The natives living in tune with nature have a very strong oral tradition, material culture, customs, performances and traditional knowledge encoded with a number of cultural and historical imprints. Their indigenous knowledge systems and culture impart a lot of information about their eco- history and social history; and this folklore about their landscapes was handed over from generation to generation. Their knowledge about the historical events is rich and scientific. Their myths and folk songs are indicators of their intuitive knowledge and fictionalised version of factual past history.

There are numerous performing arts of the ethnic communities, and among them both ritualistic and non-ritualistic performances such as *Theyyam*, *Thira*, *Mudiyettu*, *Padayani*, *Poothan kali*, *Kalikettu*, *Kaliyuttu*, folk dramas/performances like *Kakkarissi*, *Porattunatakam*, *Malavazhiyattom*, *Kothamoori* and *Chimmanakkali* etc are prominent. Almost all these performances are in some way or other connected with agrarian structure of the society and a portion of the harvest is offered to the deity and this has an effect of faith healing for the whole folk society. Ancient tribes had practiced a number of magic, shamanistic performances under the priesthood of the leader to ward off evil spirits considered to be responsible for various diseases. This practice accompanied by the administration of medicines extracted from plants can be termed as Relief Magic. Adiyar, Kanikkar, Malayan, Kadar are the main tribes in Kerala having medicine-magic practice combined. *Gaddika*, *Chattu*, *Muramkulukkipattu* are the prominent relief-magic theatre performances. *Muramkulukkipattu* also known as *pey pattu* (the songs to expel evil spirits) or *Vilakkumuram pattu* (Song performed in front of lamps) is practiced by Malayan, an aboriginal tribe living in places such as Peechi, Palapilly and Kodasseri high ranges of Thrissur district of Kerala.

### Oral tradition

Before the invention of script and written language, ideas and thoughts were communicated orally. The basic elements of culture can be found in oral narration, which has diverse patterns of presentation. Proverbs, myths, legends, songs of hero worship, snake songs, puzzles, and riddles, ancient ballads, and songs connected with funeral are some of them. Males and females have different songs connected with ceremonial functions and dance performances. For children the songs are educative, and connected with games and fun.

### Songs

Songs are the main branch of verbal art, and among them, those connected with agriculture and heroic personalities are prominent

along with *Thottampattu*, *koothupattu* and *chattupattu*, etc. This tradition of Kerala is connected with dance and also activities of daily life. The people who express the mood of each situation and condition of life expressed their feelings through such songs from which indigenous ethno music began. Timing of the rhythm, the detailed verbal manifestation of *vaythari*, voice modulation, etc. grew, as that of music was divided into units. The concept of that was formulated and various instruments were made to give rhythmic accompaniment to the songs.

### 1. Songs of agriculture

The diversity of a society can be understood by the process, methods and rituals connected with agriculture. The songs of agriculture are encoded with the concept of food security, traditional technology and the worldview of the people. Most of the songs are connected with soil, water, seed, climate, local food habits, fertility, collective farming, modes of cultivation, etc.

A song in Attappady shows the relation of humans with soil and nature.

1. 'The tree exists believing the soil  
and the soil stays believing the tree,  
The branches are intact believing the tree,  
The smaller ones believing the bigger branches,  
The leaves live believing the tiny branches,  
And the flowers blossom believing the leaves,  
The seeds ripen believing the flowers,  
And we live believing the flowers,  
The land lives believing us.'

The web of life is so woven in this song that we get the outlook of life and also the co-existence of each and every aspect connect with humans, land, vegetation and everything. Here, one thing to be noted is that the humans are given 8th place in the hierarchy of natural existence of life showing the attitude of the tribe giving

importance to the nature centered being of all the creations.

## 2. A fertility song in the village

'Hail, hail, hail the luxuriant growth,  
Hail the hill and hail the pond,  
Hail the cattle and hail the land,  
Hail the trees and hail the seed  
Hail, hail, hail the luxuriant growth'

It is a wish song for the luxuriant growth of everything in nature that clearly depicts the landscape and waterscape of Kerala. The ethno music tradition of marginalised community like Paraya and Pulaya in Kerala, southern part of India, basically agricultural society worshiping Mother goddess, the fertility deity, doing dance and beating drums in post harvest rituals. Music, dance and rhythms are combined in the performance. Most of the songs in the vibrant rituals is on agricultural life circle, indigenous environmental knowledge and the worldview of the traditional community. It narrates the local myths and legends connected with the eco-history and biodiversity. The wind instrument, 'Kuzhal'/pipe accompanies with the beating instrument, 'Maram'/drum.' *Mudiyattom*' is the main performance, done by women folk, waving the hair to both sides. During the performance the dancers become in a trance-transformation situation.

## 3. Hero-worship songs (ballads)

Kerala has at least three traditions of hero-worship songs- Southern, Northern and middle land. *Thekkan pattu* is performed as part of bow-song from Kollam to Kanyakumari. These songs, ritualistic in nature, glorify the heroes and heroines who have sacrificed themselves for society in heroic actions. *Vadakkan pattu*, in the northern parts of Kerala sung the women workers in the farm, those who operate the wheel to irrigate the land, cooks while preparing food for mass feasts, praise the, sing the heroic deeds of legendary characters. These songs narrating the diversity of the culture can give information about the values, beliefs,

agricultural practices etc. of the 17th century. These songs are woven according to the oral formulaic theory.

## 4. Thottam pattu

*Thottam pattu* is sung as part of *Theyyam*, *Padayani*, *Mudiyettu*, and also in connection with the worship of serpent, *Kali*, *kannaki* and others. *Thottam* is derived from the root '*thondruka*' meaning 'to create'. The myth of the deity sung with the accompaniment of any instrument is *thottam pattu*. The aim is to make the deity appear the deity by the help of floor diagram/ picture or by making up one's body in the form of that deity. This ritual song is something that sprouts from the mind of the singer.

## Performing folklore

Kerala is rich in folk performing arts, most of which are connected with rituals and faith. Mother-goddess cult, fertility rituals, concepts connected with agriculture, the story of *Chilappathikaram* and local myths are the underlying spirit of them. The performing arts can be defined as art forms presented at the 'art space' by articulating the body language in connection with their concepts of rituals, faith, magic healing, entertainment, social aims, etc. Each of the art forms is born out of the necessity of the society during some specific contexts. The plays and games of the children and even the 'market' performances can also be included in this category. The social interaction of the humans is today received as performance, and, hence, these can be termed as social drama. Some of the main performing folk arts of Kerala are *Kothamoory*, *Theyyam*, *Thira*, *Toothan kali*, *Mudiyettu*, *Padayani*, *Porattunatakam*, games of children etc.

## Kothamoory

This performance is forwarded in the northern parts of Kerala for the security and safety of the cattle and agriculture. During the month of December the *Malayar* community of *Kolathunadu* performs *Kothamoory* from door to door of the houses in the village. *Godavai* cow is believed to be the mythical *Kamadhenu* and the legend says that *Kothamoory* and *paniyans* descend to

the earth for the prosperity of village and agriculture. The characters *Kothamoory*, *paniyans*, *kurikkal* along with the supporting drummers perform this. The main character fastens around the loins the *Kothammoory thattu*, the cow-mask and also paints the face. The *paniyans* are comic characters. The story of *Cherukunnathamma* is sung and the informal structure of a folk theatre is obvious in *kothamoory*. *Paniyans* wear the areca sheath as face mask. A very dynamic participation of the villagers is seen in *Kothamoory*.

### **Theyyam**

*Koppala*, *Malayan*, *Mannan*, *Pana* castes of Kasargode and Kannur perform *Theyyam* in *Thara*, *Kavu*, *Mundy*, *Palliyara*, etc, and in houses. Of all the *theyyams* about 39 are performed and in *Perumkaliyattom* there are a number of *Theyyams*. This performance with the participation of the whole society is based on the beliefs and concepts of tree worship, serpent worship, hero worship, mother goddess worship, kali worship etc. *Theyyam* begins with the *thottam* narrating the myth of goddess/gods, and those without *thottams* having *vellattom*. After the *thottam* the *Theyyam* with its elaborate costumes, make-up and embellishments appear. Before that there is a ritual of seeing the 'appearance' of *Theyyam* on mirror in the green room. *Nagappothi*, *Kadangottu Makkom*, *Bhiravan*, *Pottan*, *Panchuruli*, *Thayipparadevatha* and other *Theyyams* about hundred in number are very prominent, and all these are very strongly related with ancient Dravidian culture and rituals. *Pottan* and *Gulikan* are unique characters, and the legends /myths reflect the social structure of the diverse village culture landscape. The spirit and faith of the whole village is evoked in *Theyyam*. Nearly forty patters/ styles of face painting can be seen in *Theyyam*.

*Theyyam* begins with the *thottam*, the musical myth narrating the story of goddess/ spirits. Each myth narrates the heroic travel of the gods or heroes from forest to field and from sea to land etc. and now the *Theyyam* landscape is the hotspot for the cultural tourism. Many tourists and villagers experiencing the ritual journey

of the shamanistic characters in front of them during the performance lasting for 4 to 12 hours in night! The vibrating primitive music and the visual bodies of mythical spirits helps community to experience the alter state of consciousness. *Kopalan*, *Malayan*, *Vannan*, *Pana* castes of Kasargode and Kannur districts perform *Theyyam* in 'Kavu', sacred groves. *Theyyam* has elaborate facial make up and huge decorative headgears representing the heroic deeds narrated in the myths. The musical instruments and the verbal ethno music activate the performer's body to the trance/ transformation and ritual ecstasy. The magical music helps for the divination process.

### **Thira**

This is performed mainly in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts. In *kavu* and houses, this is done by *Mannan*, *Panan*, and *Velan* castes. This is mostly connected with hero-worship, animal worship, Siva worship etc. and participation of public is prominent. *Vellattu* and *Anchati thottam* are the main ritual aspects; it has got very complex face painting, attractive headgear, rhythmic steps and different styles of dance movements. The characters are ferocious who are propitiated for the benefit of agriculture, domestic animals and also to beget children and ward of the evil. The entire space of the *kavu* is used as the performing arena and mother goddess is the main deity; and there are many other characters such as *Veerabhdran*, *Gulikan*, *Karumakan*, *Kuttichathan*, *Bhagavathy* and each one indicates the unique cultural milieu of the village.

### **Poothan and Thira**

In the districts of Palakkad and Malappuram *Poothan* and *Thira* are performed in *kavu* in connection with *Velavaravu* (procession). *Poothan* is a companion *Bhutha* of *Kali*, and *Thira* is a character carrying the semi-round headgear of *kali*; and both *Thira* and *Poothan* have very elaborate body movements and have the instruments *thudi* and *para* to accompany the performance. The performance begins from *Thravattambalam* and reaches *kavu* after a long process of visiting many houses. There will be a

number of *Poothan and Thira* from different parts of the village. *Velauravu* is a festival after the harvest and the forms *Poothan and Thira* and others dance through the paddy field to pay homage and present gifts to the mother goddess after the harvest, representing the culture connected with farming in the central parts of Kerala.

### **Mudiyettu**

Crowning the mother goddess / *Mudiyettu* enacts the story of the annihilation of the demon *Darika* by *Kali*, and it is mostly seen in central Kerala. In this folk ritualistic drama, *Kali, Darika, siva, Narada, Danavendran, Kooli, Koyimbida Nair* are the characters. After completing the floor picture of *Kali* in five colour powders, this play begins by about 12'o clock in the night in *Baghavathi kavu*. One of the very ancient folk theatre of Kerala, *Mudiyettu* converts the precincts around the sacred grove into the performing arena with the participation of the folk. The term *Mudiyettu* actually indicates the victory of *kali* over the dangerous demon and blessing the village. *Kooli* is a comic character while *Koyimpiada Nair* is almost a historical character and the social structure of the period is seen criticised in the performance.

The word '*Mudiyettu*' literally means that the encrowning of *Kali*, the Mother Goddess. The performance used to be held in sacred groves where *Kali* was worshiped by local communities who are the custodians of biodiversity. This is a divination ritual performance to propitiate *Bhadrakali* in the *Kavu* temples during a post harvest festival. This folk ritual performance, very much related to fertility cult, ritual symbolism, and mother goddess myth, is connected with the indigenous agricultural landscape. One of the oldest ritualistic performances of Kerala, *Mudiyettu* is popular in the rural area. This is performed even today in about two hundred sacred groves, *Kali* temples which are open - air theatres. Those belonging to the castes of *Marar* and *Kurup* are the performers. This folk drama, which is a combination of '*Thouryathrika*' – dance, music and rhythm ( *nritam, geetham and vadyam*) is performed before the believers in an open arena theatre starting at midnight. In olden days the villagers patronised

this performance, to ward off the fear of contagious diseases especially the much dreaded small-pox. The belief was that *Mudiyettu* performance done in devotion would prevent the spread of disease. In this indigenous performance there is a live audience participation.

During this war performance there are many dramatic and trance induction elements in the performance. *Kali* sometimes gets possessed. The ritualistic active participation of the audience and the constant rhythm of the musical instruments lift the psyche of the *Kali* performer and gradually elate him into a trance. When the trance – transformation begins, the performer dances in a violent movement and makes sounds. During the process of shamanistic dance the co - actors take his crown to decrease the trance\ possession element. In this situation the 'performer' behaves like an epileptic patient and the unconscious, shamanistic behavior of the dancers generates a magical atmosphere in the ritual space. The drumming animates and articulates the bodyscape of the shaman performer.

### **Padayani**

The episode after the *Mudiyettu* story is seen in *Padayani*, which is common in the villages of Pathanamthitta. After the annihilation of *Darika*, the ferocious *Kali* starts her journey to *Kailas*. To make *Kali* sober and calm, *Subramanyan* and the *Boothas* in different forms of *kolam* take up a procession in front of her. *Pakshikkolam, Yakshikkolam, Maruthakkolam* etc. are some of them. Figures are drawn on the sheaths of areca palm in colours in which the enlarged shape of eyes in the night light glitter and seem to project up. This performance begins after the harvest and lasts for 28 days with elaborate regionally variant rituals. Each day diverse *kolams* do the performance with a number of *Padayani* songs having very strong rhythmic thalams on the instrument *thappu*. The whole village participates in it. The performance has got environmental acting / action, and the people who prepare the pictures of the *kolams* are expert folk painters. After the *Padayani* there is a ritual related to fertility called *vithidal-* sowing the seed.

### **Porattunatakam**

Seen in Plakkad district this folk theatre is also called *Manoranjam*. This may be a play of the 'outsiders' or the 'expelled'; and this is performed independently and also in connection with *Kanyarkali*. The everyday life and rift of the people and solution to the problems are the main themes of this performance. *Nallachan*, the couple and the singers comprise the team. Accompanied by songs and drums *Porattunatakam* contains a lot of information about local history, local festivals, fire works, local markets, circus, zoo, different professions, etc. The couple who got separated in the crowd of a festival later come together to pick up a quarrel, are pacified by *Vanakkukaran* is the them of it. It is full of local dialect accents, local ways of acting, and it does not have any scientifically choreographed structure. Just a temporary pandal on four pillars is the stage the three sides of which are occupied by the spectators who also can participate in the dialogue which is mostly humorous.

*Porattunatakam* (outcast theatre), the folk theatrical performance of Kerala does not have an authoritative or recognized text nor a 'director'. Also it does not have the sophisticated structure usually seen in classical/ritualistic village performances. Nearly 60 groups now in Palghat district of Kerala actively participate in these theatrical performances constructing temporary stages in the paddy fields after the harvest or in the courtyards of sacred groves, local temples, and this is known by another name '*Manoranjam*'. Modern theatre practioners have to bring out the intricate characteristics of this informal theatre such as the roots and transformation of social structure in the context of globalisation, open arena theatre, acting techniques, performance manual, acoustics, ethno music, folk musical instruments, costumes and make-up.

### **Sacred groves and Sarppam thullal**

In the ecological heritage of Kerala, sacred groves - *pampin kavu* - and mangroves have a vital role in the preservation and conservation of biodiversity of flora and fauna. All the villages

have semi-evergreen sacred groves as land part of few chief houses (*Tharavaadu*), a quarter of the area should be set apart, preferably near the pond or tank and under shady trees to the south west of the main house where the snake deities would be enshrined. The members of all communities would engage snake charmers to conduct the snake worship according to the indigenous practices in which they had been engaging from time-immemorial. It has one or more idols consecrated on a *Chithrakoodam*(a laterate permanent pedestal) by a *Pulluvan*.The idols of *kavus* could assume the representations of *Nagaraja*, *Naga yaakshi* and their descendants. They should be represented by stone images showing hooded cobras installed under preferably *Ungu* trees (*Pongania glabra*).

The performance used to be held in sacred groves where goddess was worshiped by local communities who are the custodians of biodiversity. This is a divination ritual performance to propitiate local goddess in the *Kavu* temples during a post harvest festival. This folk ritual performance is very much related to fertility cult, ritual symbolism, and mother goddess myth and is connected with the indigenous agricultural landscape. One of the oldest ritualistic performances of Kerala, *Theyyam* is popular in the rural area. This is performed even today in about five hundred sacred groves, *Kali* temples which are open - air theatres. This folk drama, which is a combination of dance, music and rhythm is performed before the believers in theatre starting at evening. In this indigenous performance there is a live audience participation .The *Pulluva* community, a separate caste group for the serpent worship performs *Pulluva* songs in sacred groves. They are the main custodians of the rituals and officiating heads of *poojas* propitiating the snake deities inhabited in *kavus*. They are also community healers who handle common diseases in children. After the agricultural harvest they wander around in the villages from house to house and sing ballad songs of prosperity with the accompaniment of *Pulluva kudam* and *Veena* as nomadic singers do.

### **Kalamezhuthu / floor painting with five colours**

*Sarpakkalams* are the picturesque representation of earthen perspective and the ritual centrepiece in *Pampin tullal*. It is a best specimen of indigenous art expertise in which *Nagakketu* - intertwined knot of different serpent- are created out of natural colour powders. A Small Series of 71 *nagas* are created and recreated through coloured powders five in colour (*Panjavarnappodi*).

The artists begin the drawing by spreading black powder in a line from east to west, and then, using white powder, draws the outline for the entire *kalam* complete with a sacred syllable (*mandram*) in the centre. The *Pulluvar* women then apply the first coloured powder, red, to the drawing. This invests the *kalam* with the specific quality of power or *sakti* of the women. The other *Pulluvar* men now enter the floor drawing and both males and females paint with the colours, placing each colour in sections of each of four sacred directions before starting with a new colour. The *Pulluvans* are folk floral painting artists with purely natural powder. Five colours, *-panchavarnappodi-* green powders from green leaves of mango tree or *Itthikkanni* leaves, yellow from turmeric powder, white from rice powder, black (called *krishnappodi*) from burned husk of rice, and red by mixing turmeric and lime. This powder is taken in a coconut shell with different holes from one inch to three. The *ezhuthu* takes as long as 4-7 hours. As days pass, the number of hoods increases. Traditionally *Pulluvans* are capable of drawing 71 *kalam*s. The growth of *kalam* reaches its climax by the day 7, 9 or 21.

The most complicated drawing *Ashta nagakkalam* -a composite diagram showing eight intertwining cobras- is on the final day. The completed drawing, some sixteen feet square, is the geometric *mandala*(abode) in which are depicted the eight mythological serpents. The *kalam* drawing representing of snake deities are the amazing examples of curvy-linear geometry with colours emphasizing the lines.

A decorative *kalam* is prepared out of knots or *kettu*. *Nagakettu* is a structural creation depicting the snake's physical features like

its bends and twists, speed and rotation. '*Kettiyaniyuka*' is the technical title for the *Kalam* formation. With *kettus*, *pulluvar* draws geometrical models like circle, half circle, square rightangled etc. These portrayals have the assumption of tying and untying making and blending of *naga* forms and their withdrawal respectively. Important *kettus* are *Inakkettu* and *Pavithrakkettu*. As drawn on the surface of Earth, it cannot be copied on camera. As the painting is with powders, it cannot be put on the walls. The *Pulluvar* male creates the outline and the female invests the form with energy. The floor drawing in *Pampin tullal* is the central aesthetic motif of the ritual performance, the element toward which all ritual performance, is directed, including the attention of participants. One way the serpent dance performance, reaches an effective level of potency is through the beauty of the floor drawing.

### **Space and Performance of 'Sarppam thullal' (snake dancing)**

The most impressive performance is *Sarppam thullal*, a ritual that may extend over 3 to 11 days. The ritual is performed in the front-yard of the house or in the *kavu*. Temporary structures called '*naattupandal*' /booth are built using areca nut stems and are decorated with flowers, leaves and fruits symbolising fertility. The tender coconut leaves are hanged in the booth. This small theatre/space represented the ecology of primitive landscape of Kerala village. The tender coconut leaves are hanged in the *pandal*. After the floor is levelled, plaster of cow dung and charcoal is applied and smoothed down. Inside the *pandal* floor, *pulluvars* decorate the geometrical design of snake figures in natural powders of various colours in folk style. During the night the deep colours shimmering by the natural oil lamps around the '*kalam*' (floral painting) impose a mystifying effect. They are the custodians of the rituals involved including the execution of coloured powders of complicated curvy-linear designs in contrasting colours of the sinuous forms of twining serpents with enormous hoods.

There are also songs of praise, songs showing about the origin of the *Pulluva* community, episode from *Mahabharatha* or the *puranas* recounting the poser of serpents and songs that give instructions on details of the ritual such as how to make the pantal. The spectators give characteristic chants and women spectators make peculiar ululating noise with their tongues (*kuravayidal*). *Pooja* to force *Garuda*, the traditional enemy of serpents to leave the sanctified site, *poojas* for *sarawathi* and *Bhagavathi* are performed which clear the way for the two family serpent deities who arrive from the grave in the form of two Nair women called *Piniyaal*. After some time, girls sitting in front of the *kalam* begin to quiver and sway their heads to and fro in tune with music and tresses of their hair are let loose. They start a frenzied dance and in a state of excitement and trance they make movements similar to that of serpents, beat upon the floor and crawl about. Along with this, they fan the flower bunches in their hands and erase the *kalam*.

'The wilderness of colour, flame, music and rhythmic beatings make the whole atmosphere something supernatural. The magical spell of the atmosphere is connected with the chromatic formula of the indigenous culture also. These abstract patterns of five colours create an emotional upsurge and psychological effect to the trance dancer. Red and black are the warm colours and green and yellow are the cool colours, and white colour balances the symmetry of the diagram. The *Pulluvan* asks the *piniyaal* in trance, various kinds of questions under the belief that they are possessed by the spirit of the serpents. The girls give replies. In certain cases, the possession of the spirit is delayed in *piniyal* inspite of the magical 'brum..brumm' sound of *kudam* and the blending rhythm of *veena*. 'Some times the Gods appear in the bodies of all these females and some times only in those of a selected few or none at all.' If the *piniyaal* destroys the decorations of the booth it shows that the snakes are not satisfied.

The colourful serpent drawings, flames of the *vilakku* and other ritual symbolism, the sounds created by *veena* and *kudam*, boisterous shouting accompanied by the serpent song 'dance

O snake, dance...' all these bring *piniyaal* to a superficial world. It involves a trance / formation magic - a shift from *kalam* to *thullal* which makes even by standing spectators to be possessed to erase *kalam* and say divine words- '*arulappad*'. After the dance or *thullal* the girls who would collapse on account of the exertions are ministered by others. They take a long time to recover consciousness. The conclusion presentation is *Guruthi*, water reddened with turmeric and lime sprinkled in the *kalam* by *piniyaal*.

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## K.Saraswathyamma: the forgotten Pioneer of Feminist Writing in Malayalam

Dr. ASHA SUSAN JACOB

The much-cliched term feminism has opened many vistas of intellectual, ideological, physical and material exercises. It has problematised power relations in all existing patterns and walks of life. Spatial and temporal variation, as in every other cultural programme, have imprinted qualitatively and quantitatively on the structure of existing paradigms. No sphere of human life escapes the impact of the demand on gender parity as it has repercussions on the home and the world. The individual and the nation, education and culture, work and worship, politics and economics come under its coverage.

Marginalisation of half the population on gender basis and categorizing them as the second sex, the other, have successfully muted many a voice and erased them from the canons of history with only a handful of exceptions. Gayathri Spivak has bracketed the second sex with the subaltern who is

denied a voice. Access to education revolutionised the hitherto subjugated selves, bestowing on them an individuality and identity different from that which was tagged to them on the basis of their relationship with, or with reference to a male. Writing or self-expression has been as liberating an experience for the women as liberation of the mind and body for the colonized or the wretched of the earth. Absence of feminine representation from history can be compensated, though inadequately, only through literary gleanings.

Feminist criticism, an offshoot of the women's liberation movements of the 1960s, endeavors an effective re-interpretation, re-evaluation of literary texts that have been either sidelined or misinterpreted in past. A re-reading of the literary corpus of the Malayalam writer K. Saraswathyamma, who has been deliberately omitted from literary canon, is attempted here.

Indian womanhood is as complex as the history of the nation. It has also surfaced through the ebb and flow of glory and defilement. The enlightenment movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century impacted a move towards greater empowerment. Caught in the vortex of the freedom movement, though it never altered her status at the hearth, she too got mobilized towards the world. Kerala too witnessed a series of social changes towards the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when derogatory caste system got challenged, and got replaced by gender. While forced consensus was there on the constructedness of caste, gender polarity was unanimously accepted as natural and logical. Though the nation was equated with the female, and Travancore had the much-mouthed matrilineal form of succession, the true voice of the female got recorded only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the literary ventures of an array of formidable writers like Lalithambika Antharjanam, K. Sarwathyamma, and Sara Joseph. Succeeding the first wave of female writers like B. Kalyaniamma, M. Saraswathibhai, T.C. Kalyaniamma, Ambady Ikkeavamma and others who commenced their literary career in the early 1920s, they have significantly contributed to the genre of Malayalam fiction resonating the modern concepts of identity and

individuality in a conservative society. But Saraswathyamma occupies a unique position for her unwavering expression of an identity apart from her compliance with man.

Her literary career spanning two decades (1938-1958), with 90 short stories, a novelette, a drama and some essays, has posited the problematic position or status, spineless, ever-suffering female paragon, to the radical feminist who defies patriarchy. The marginalized is brought to the centre not to evoke sympathy, but to expose the hidden reality where a woman often becomes objectified. Emboldened by her personal life, she has ventured to voice forth the necessity for change. She pioneered an unacknowledged movement demanding woman her rightful place.

Pointing her finger at the chauvinistic attitude of men, her pen does not spare the all-encompassing female paragon. The sarcastic outpourings of the dauntless intellectual have gained her the title 'anti-man.' In a patriarchal society where men control the logos, her attempts at redefining the masculinist definition of womanhood, her vehement, blatant criticism of the prejudiced society which eulogizes male superiority, and her refusal to be categorized as secondary sidelined her from mainstream Malayalam literary canon. Yet the fact that the renowned Malayalam critic M.P. Paul has carved a niche for her in the generation of short story writers following Thakazhi, Ponkunnam Varky, and Basheer establishes her mettle.

This propagator of gender parity proclaims the need for self-reliance. Equipped with and empowered by education, Saraswathyamma exhorts women to leave prakrit and express themselves boldly. However, she does not visualize a world without men, but a world that provides ample space for both. Armed with education, Saraswathyamma knows the value of it. Yet she is not unaware of the social pressures against it. To swim against the current is difficult for woman. Every movement against the chosen (thrust upon), trodden path will be critically observed. That female education and excellence were seldom considered significant is brilliantly portrayed through Vilasini, the intelligent, talented protagonist of *Penbudhi* (Female intelligence). While her

intelligence and creativity are appreciated in the middle school, the all-female high school looks at her with reservation. Female intelligence never gets accepted in an environment that promotes only the male, though he is in no way superior to her other than his status or label as a male.

The writer subtly criticizes the society which refuses to give the female her rights as an individual. When even worthless boys are given education, it is often denied to girls like Vilasini who prove themselves eligible. She is presented as one who is able to encounter with equanimity any approach by the other sex whether it is a teacher or her classmate. Behind her refusal to comply the role of a sister to one of her male friends is the fact that there too covertly lingers the spirit of discrimination that allows a woman only her gender ascribed roles as sister, wife, mother beloved etc. Intellectual affinity between individuals with no shadow of gender is unheard of and unacceptable in the traditionally conditioned society. Though Vilasini does not nurture any romantic notions about love, she is aware of the importance of family as a unifying force. It is not marriage that sidelines woman, but the conditions it prescribes to her. In fact the story waves the banner of the writer's concept feminism.

The cul-de-sac of marriage often offers an educated woman only ennui and frustration. Outwardly content, she may feel disturbed by an unreasonable discontent. Lamenting over her rusting intelligence Vilasini's gold medalist friend pours out. "Men need their brain till the end to earn a living and make progress. For the woman who is destined to be a parasite overintelligence is curse" (22). To many husbands a wife is an effective manager cum sleeping partner. The friend fails to see any hope for the next generation of women as well for a woman's life is entangled in tradition and culture. Experience makes her blurt out: "Sharp intelligence which urges and helps women progress is not only unnecessary, but a bane to self and others" (23). Through her the author posits the general attitude of even the intellectually and culturally superior classes towards unpaid domestic labour which is considered as female chore. In such a society a woman

with acuity will only be an exception, not a law, and therefore doomed to endure the slanders too.

That Saraswathyamma openly brandishes female wantonness and frailty with equal vehemence needs no evidence other than *Vivahasammanam* (Wedding Gift) where she projects two types of women: the wise and the vulgar. Santhy, the protagonist, tries to impart wise counsel to the immature Sukeshini who falls in love with a married Muslim. When the latter is exiled to Malaya she goes after another man, proving her waywardness. The bee-like nature of Sukeshini proves materially beneficial as she refuses to return the gifts from her former lover. Without any authorial comments the readers are invited to debate over the two women, one a foil to the other as in Kamal a Markandaya's *Two Virgins*.

Younger women often offer themselves willingly at the feet of men without realizing the ramifications. Proper guidance can equip them to comprehend the myriad forms of man-woman relationships without scalding their own selves. The author vehemently criticizes such thoughtless actions of the female in *Sthreejanmam* (Women's Life) through the protagonist Santhy. She has no sympathy to those like Malathy who excuses their action in the belief that "to be born a woman is to cry" (49), for she feels that a woman can adopt many a strategy to avoid male exploitation.

The predicament of the subaltern among the subaltern, women belonging to the low income group who dare not assert themselves and helplessly allow themselves to be entrapped by the masters, do not escape the author's gaze. The keezhjeevanakkary (low grade worker) of the eponymous story is forced to reminisce over her past at the demand of dedicating her daughter at the altar of her superior. Parukkutty's comfortable childhood topsy-turvyed with her mother's death when she was only three. The advent of the step mother and the father's demise accelerated her misery which sought solace in the new occupants in the neighbouring house. While the mother catered to her emotional needs, she reciprocated by satisfying the "desires of Gopalan Nair with self sacrifice" (55). Women seldom have any

comrades during post-degradation. Her future is permanently sealed, though her accomplice doles out a government job for her with the help of his new father-in-law. The author cannot but smirk at this woman who faithfully prays for the father of her fatherless daughter. Now when the same man in his position as her employer demands her daughter too (without realizing his fatherhood), Paukutty finds only one way out, murdering her only offspring. If the mother dedicated her body at the altar of romantic love, another female body is demanded on the merit of hierarchical power relations. It is as if the female body has always an owner other than herself: it is the object for male gaze, male use. Powerless to protest against her employer, fearful of the consequences if his 'rightful' demand is not acquiesced to, the subaltern female has only one way out. The heroism on the part of the mother is at the cost of bludgeoning a young life. Precious life wasted before it even starts to live.

In *vivaham Swargathil Vachu Nadathappedunnu* (Marriages are Made in Heaven) the author focuses side of the female issue. Girls are ear-marked for marriage and become a burden to the family if they don't get a suitable match after a stipulated age ordained by the society. Even bold decisions by parents never to give dowry will give in to the accepted norms of the society for a woman has no locus stand in the society. Malathy's parents' decision not to buy a husband for her is replaced by desperation and anguish when nobody turns in for her hand. Finally when she steps into the heaven of marriage, it becomes a hell because of her mother-in-law. The story comments on the humiliation and despair female folk experience on account of dowry. Her uncommon intelligence and money power are no virtues to deserve any acclamation. The comment by an elder at the time of the trial, "If she were given education rather than marriage she should have passed all classes in the first position" (65) is indicative of the need for a change in the thought paradigm.

Achenevide? (Where is Father?) reasons why females are given education: "Not necessarily for parity with the other sex, nor to ensure employment, but for the prestige of a husband", as a

status symbol (85). Sitting beside her ailing daughter Rukmini recollects her glorious past, her blessed marriage which coveted the acclamation of many a relative. Now back at her ancestral home when her ideal husband resigned his job on certain principles, the rose bed has started showing up the hidden thorns. When the absence of the father takes away the mirth and joy of her child, the agonizing cry “where is my father?” resonates in the air. Yet Rukmini does not blame her husband, though it costs her child’s life. It does not seem that the author approves such dedication on the part of a wife. Women need to be practical and not blind admirers of their husband’s idealism.

Saraswathyamma, though does not nurture any sort of romantic love, acknowledges the passion for the other sex innate in humans. Cholamarangal is another story where she highlights the power and nature of unconditional love. The story unfolds through the chance re-encounter between Madhu, a Hindu sanyasi, and Lillykutty, a Christian nun who had been lovers. Though their love never consummated, they never regret the choice for it has taken them outside the confines of familial roles and has opened up new avenues to serve the greater mankind. She has become a humanitarian recognized by the world. Nurturing spirit can be cultured irrespective of whether one is married or single. It need not be connected with marriage. Her motherly instincts never dry up for she has channelised them to serve in the orphanage. Sr. Lillykutty acknowledges: “I feel proud that my talents have been utilized for public good rather than getting entangled in the problems of a hearth” (75). Refusing to wallow in her sorrow she had made her life meaningful through alternate means.

Through the same story the author reveals the power hierarchy and discontent prevalent in the corridors of the convents. She boldly presents nunneries as nurseries of jealousy and discrimination on the basis of the inherited wealth of the inmates; a place occupied by women in gossip, hatred, and spy work. Most of them are forced to alienate themselves from the world by filial influence: “If they had enough courage they would have gone to same communist centres” (75).

The harassment and injustice meted out to the marginals do not escape the vigilant eyes of Saraswathyamma. The poor are denied even the basic necessities of life. In *viceroys Sandarsanam* (The visit of the Viceroy) she vehemently criticizes the authorities who mercilessly destroy the dilapidated, makeshift hut of a heavily pregnant woman with a diseased husband and little children who are thrown into the heavy rain, in order to present a beautiful facade to the visiting Viceroy. The heartlessness of the top officials and their blindness to the real problems of the people are exposed here.

*Anthikkoottu* (companion for the Night) is another interesting story on the different attitudes of the society towards the institution of marriage. Gender and class differences get reflected in the perception of marriage. To the lower classes it provides social security. Compatibility is not a question that arises at the time of marriage negotiations. The story starts with Hanuman Pandaram’s sister trotting from house to house to glean 15 rupees for the marriage of her 17 years daughter to a 45 year old much-married man. For them it is a good alliance for he is employed, and to get such a man at such a rate is indeed a blessing. The bride’s words after a month about her ‘lottery’ hint about the disparity between dream and reality; a dialogue that instills doubts about marital bliss. Through the speaker in the story the author comments on the helplessness of such illiterate people who become conditioned to their lot. The narrator does not foresee any difference in the predicament of the future generations as well. To the man marriage is a lottery for it provides food at half the rate than in a hotel, and a wife to cater to his needs. Yet they need a man and his longevity at least till the marriage of their daughter, though they get only physical torture in return for all their service. For him it is a luxury, to her it is a social security. “otherwise how can a woman survive safely amidst other men?” (97)

*Pareekshanam* (Temptation), the last story in the collection is ample proof to the fact that the author is not prejudiced against the opposite sex. She is impartial enough to exhort both the sexes depending on the issue. The story serves as an eye-opener to the contemporary society where girls go wayward and surrender

their bodies and minds to the male without thinking about the consequences. The author appreciates the man who controls his carnal passions. Whether it is a flower or a female, usually his craving is to crush it. Here it is the male, an exceptional case, who leaves the place saving the girl from future ignominy and misery. The author subtly invites the readers to make judgments over such females who become willing victims.

Saraswathamma's efforts to make woman speak when she is conditioned to stay behind the curtain have bestowed on her the title anti-man. But she does not visualize an all-woman, only woman world, but a world where man and woman exist as human beings with their own individuality, each celebrating his biological position. Writing before the onslaught of feminist theories and theorists, this indefatigable voice can be rightly acclaimed as the pioneer feminist in Malayalam. In an era of re-defining and re-framing womanhood she lived her brand of reminism. She lived Germaine Grier's postulate that a woman should "begain not by changing the world, but by reassessing herself" (4).

With rare insight as an educated, empowered, alienated woman celebrating her sex without any encumbrances, she has voiced the hitherto unexpressed notions of female experience. In her we find gender issue with its concomitant cultural and temporal complexities. Living in a traditional and patriarchal social milieu she has attempted to refashion, remodel power relations, evaluating, questioning and even smirking on some strongly rooted beliefs. Her literary oeuvre with its ingrained socio-cultural significance form a platform for Saraswathamma to voice her opinion of and protest against the space ascribed to and achieved by women.

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## O.V.Vijayan's *Thalamurakal*: Social Discrimination and the Quest for Identity

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Dr. KISHORE RAM

O.V.Vijayan's *Thalamurakal* (Generations) is both historical and autobiographical, but beyond these it depicts the experiences of a traditional Ezhava family in its attempts to come to terms with the overwhelming upper caste dominated society of Kerala. *Thalamurakal*(1997) records the two century-long struggle of an Ezhava family, Ponmudi, to achieve a status that would free them from the faceless existence they had to suffer in a society bound by the *chaturvarna* system that divided people into different castes. The Brahmins and the Nairs dominated the socio-cultural domains in Malabar. Even the coming of the British could not improve the situation. Lower caste people had to keep a distance of fourteen feet while speaking to the upper castes. They were denied temple entry and had no role in social activities. Vijayan successfully pens the various social evils that existed

in the caste-ridden Kerala society during the British rule. Vijayan stresses the fact that conversion to Christianity, Communism and Atheism failed to give a new identity to the low caste people. A temporary or surrogate identity provided by the uniform of the British Army was the only escape for the low caste Hindus to achieve a new identity in the caste-bound society. Vijayan attempts to sketch the social chronicle of Kerala by way of portraying four generations of Ponnemudi *tharavad* in *Thalamurakal*.

The Ezhava identity was a hindrance to the ambitions of the members of the Ponnemudi *tharavadu*. Even their wealth failed to win them social respectability. They tried to achieve social ascendancy by attaining Brahminhood. When they failed they resorted to violent methods to attain it. Krishnammavan, the *karnavar* (eldest member) of Ponnemudi in the 18<sup>th</sup> century tried to achieve Brahminhood by learning Sanskrit and by going on a pilgrimage to Kashi, wearing the sacred thread of the Brahmins that he borrowed from Bavadratan Namboodhiri. Krishnammavan explains his aim to Chathunnivaidyar: “My aim is to prove that whatever a Brahmin, wearing a *poonool*, can achieve can also be accomplished by a low caste person: even beyond learning the diction and style of Sanskrit” (12).

His descendants tried to establish their identity by murdering upper caste people. Pongalappan ordered the killing of Kanothu Nair because his daughter Sumathi was insulted by his cry ‘Fhaa’—the shout that ordered the lower caste people to make way for the upper caste. Appukarnavar forces a Brahmin woman Shivakami to recite the *Gayathrimanthra* sitting naked. When he is not able to pronounce the Sanskrit words correctly he realizes his inferiority and rapes the Brahmin woman. Vijayan narrates the horror and absurdity of the situation:

Shivakamika knew how to recite *Gayathri manthram*. He made her write down the mantra and tried to byheart it. No, the pronunciation cannot be perfected. The dirt of the low caste was hindering perfect recital. Anger filled Appukarnavar and he woke up the sleeping Shivakami.

“Get up!”

“What?” She asked desperately.

“You recite your *Gayathri* .”

“It is not morning yet.”

“Recite now.”

“I will.”

She tried to get up from the bed but Appukarnavar objected.

“You recite now.”

“Oh! No I cannot recite like this.” Shivakami begged indicating her nudity. “Let me get dressed.”

“No need of clothes—”

Brhamamuhurtham . Shivakami’s tone filled the bedroom, “Aum Bhur Bhuvah Swah, Tat Savitur Varenyam—”

In a low tone Appukarnavar tried to imitate her, but failed. He could not tolerate her listening to his futile attempts. The lips that recited the Brahminiyam of Gaythri was molested by the rape of the *avarnan* and he gave up Sanskrit eternally. (28)

The molestation of the Brahmin woman is symbolically an attempt to conquer the *Gayathrimanthra* which is fundamental to Brahminhood. The younger generation tries to wipe off their lowness by tarring the signboards ‘Brahmin Only’ on the walls of the railway canteens and by entering temples and touch the *garbhagriha* of the temple. Chamiyarappan, the present Karnavar, as part of the Temple Entry Struggle (in 1930s) leads a march to a temple in Palakkad, demanding entry for himself and his people, but is severely beaten by the police. He realizes the futility of attempting to achieve an identity for the lower caste and quite frustrated, gets converted to Christianity and becomes a communist, but like his ancestors he too fails to attain a better identity. Velappan, the son-in-law of Chamiyarappan a Subedar Major in the army, achieves a status that is superior to the one

earmarked for his caste by donning the uniform of the British Army.

The intricacies and insurmountability of the social set-up could not be overcome with the aid of money or by the pseudo egalitarianism of social reformation. The uniform of the British Army, which reflects the might of the governing force, was the only option before a low caste/subaltern to achieve an identity. Velappan in the uniform of the British Army with the insignia of the crown on his shoulders, with the glow of the empire on his face and with a steel studded cane on which is carved *Yudhivikraman* (gallant warrior) in his hand achieves a superior status, a social sanskritization. He rises to the status of a high caste man. He gains the respect of the high caste men who call him Major Sahib with reverence. His identity enables him to get a position for his brother-in-law in the office of a railway contractor. Chamiyarappan, his father-in-law, is able to get back his land pledged with a bank. He is able to enjoy the hospitality of the Mappilas. Moreover his superior identity enables him to order about high caste men, making them do menial errands for him. The British officers have high regard for Velappan. Though he is only a Subedar, they treat him with respect. The steel studded cane with the inscription *Yudhivikraman* on it is the greatest honour that is conferred on him. This honour entirely reserved for a Field Marshal is the recognition of Velappan's merit and adds respectability to his identity.

The military uniform rescues Velappan from the rigid caste system, enabling him to achieve emancipation and self-hood. New areas so far unknown to his caste are opened up before him. On his journey to Nilambur, the station master *Ambalavasi* (a high caste) invites Velappan and his wife Pankajakshi, to have breakfast at the canteen reserved exclusively for the Brahmins. They are welcomed by the Brahmin manager as they enter the 'Brahmins only' canteen. The train waits for over half an hour in this unimportant station. This is in contrast to the experience Chamiyarappan had at the hands of the Brahmins when he led a rationalist rally to an *agraharam* (Brahmin's colony) in Kalppathi,

challenging the established norms of untouchability. He was beaten up by the Brahmins. Where his rationalist identity failed, Velappan's military identity succeeds.

Velappan's uniform enables him to circumvent the otherwise inexorable social laws. Where his identity fails he uses his might, the might of the British Empire, which the social norms and prejudice could not contain. As a child Velappan was insulted by the social discrimination his caste had to endure. He was asked to wash his own plate and glass by a Nair hotel owner to avoid *theendal* (impurification). After achieving the status of a military officer, Velappan intentionally visits the restaurant again. Chappan Nair, the owner of the restaurant, recognizes him. Though in a timid tone, he asks him to wash his plate and glass. Velappan throws the unwashed plate into a corner and walks up to Nair and slaps him. The crowd that had gathered makes way for the British military officer. Velappan's identity as an *Ezhava* and his identity as a British soldier are contrasted here. Chappan Nair saw the Ezhava Velappan beneath his uniform. Fearing *theendal*, he ordered him to wash his plate, but the crowd recognized the power behind the uniform and made way for him.

The more Velappan felt the slavery of his country; the caste discrimination became more painful. His identity justifies his act of suppressing his country's struggle for freedom. He understands that the central force that is holding him to the British Army and that which is providing him with mental strength and power to overcome the caste discrimination is his new found identity. Freedom of the country will not free him from social lowliness. Yet his military identity is not an unmixed blessing. The newfound status can be at variance with his natural instinct and emotions. Velappan faces inner conflict while suppressing the freedom struggle. One such incident occurs when he arrests Sathyamurthi, a congress leader:

There were only ten steps to climb up to the stage but it appeared like an insuperable mountain to him. He gathered all his strength and climbed the first step and stopped. He

could not move forward. On both sides of the stairs volunteer girls sang:

“Vande matharam , vanthe matharam, sujalam , suphalam, malayaja seetalam.

Vande matharam.” The motherly tone seemed to fill the atmosphere. Velappan surmounted one more step.

“Sasya syamalam. . .”

He climbed yet another step.

“ . . Shubra jyotsna pulakita yaminim phulla kusumita drumadala shobhinim...”

He could not look up at all and the remaining steps appeared tedious like a mountaineering expedition to him. Velappan felt overwhelmed and he could feel inherited grief mounting up in his mind.

“... Suhasinim Sumadhura bhashinim...”

The moment the *Gandheeva* fell down.

“*Sukhadam varadam mataram...*”

Finally when he mounted the stage, Satyamurthy was waiting for him. When he handcuffed the leader, Velappan’s eyes filled with tears and he faintly saw Satyamurthy smiling at him. (81)

While engaged in suppressing the *Mapilla Lehala* (Muslim uprising in 1921 as part of the *Khilafat* Movement) Velappan accidentally kills forty Hindu youths. This heinous act disturbs the peace of his mind. In order to escape from sin, he prays. While praying he hears the magical chanting *Yudhivikraman* in his mind. He loves his country but understands that real freedom is what he enjoys under the British rule. This realization motivates Velappan to blindly adhere to the British system justifying the British rule:

The force behind me while hitting Chappan Nair and that which made the crowd make way was the power of truth in the British Crown—the Insignia on my shoulders. (94)

The fact that Velappan’s new identity is only surrogate and temporary is established by his experience after retirement from the army. After his retirement the inexorable social norms strip Velappan of his elevated identity forcing him to return to the lowliness of his caste. Velappan loses his confidence. He does not have the courage even to enter the club of the military officers. With the intention of upholding his status and securing a new identity, he enters into a construction contract. But he meets with opposition from the labourers. The labourers cheat the *Yudhivikraman* . Ponmudi sinks in debt. Chamayarappan becomes insane and dies. Velappan who had earlier suppressed the *Mappila Lehala* bows before a few communist labourers. Velappan realizes that the power behind him when he suppressed *Mappila Lehala* was actually that of the British Empire, his identity was that of the British Army. The facelessness of Velappan is brought out here. He is not able to sustain the identity of a soldier after retirement and he is relegated to his lower caste identity.

An individual faces identity crisis and depersonalization when his social identity fails to satisfy his ego. Velappan experiences this trauma. By acquiring a borrowed identity Velappan was able to overcome the identity crises he felt deep within him and enjoyed a pseudo social status. The surrogate identity elevated him from his faceless existence. Erik H. Erikson’s comment in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* is apt in this context: “...identity is the sameness and continuity of one’s existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity” (50). The novel suggests that the low caste identity cannot be scrubbed out completely from the consciousness of the Indian society.

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Note : The quotes are translated into English by the author of the article.

## How melodious is the rendering of thy song!

SAJAI K.V.

In the month of July, when the twilight hides itself  
Under the shroud of darkness and the day retreated  
It rained incessantly, and I, the solitary sojourner  
Of the land of dreams, stayed at home all alone.

Harkening to the above lines or watching the twilight view they offer, one can listen to or live in a season of rains. It happened almost two and a half decades back. A little boy, a solitary sojourner of the land of dreams, was reciting these lines in tune with the repetitive cadence of rain that replicates the lines of G Sankara Kurup's translated version of *Geethanjali*. Thus, inadvertently, he was also treading along the farthest boundaries of the land of dreams. The boy who thus strode the land of dreams is the writer of this article.

Tagore composed *Geethanjali*, which celebrates its centenary this year, between 1906 and 1910. He translated *Geethanjali* into English in 1912. And the

rest is history- the praise showered on the poem by W B Yeats, the preface he wrote to *Geethanjali*, the coveted Nobel Prize it received, its French translation by Andre Gede, Paul Vallery's article on it- all these developments helped *Geethanjali* and its author to become well-known to the world in amazing rapidity. One can presume how the acceptance Tagore received influenced the Indian poets who were writing in their native tongue. This article tries to examine how Tagore and *Geethanjali* influenced the poets of Malayalam and the history of Malayalam poetry which is a manifestation of such influences as well.

### Kumaran Asan and Tagore

Kumaranasan, the pioneer of romantic poetry in Malayalam and the greatest poet of all times, was the first poet in Malayalam who tuned the soft strings of Tagore's lyre. In the light of Asan's stay in Begal for a short period, the poems he wrote titled *Divyakokilam* (*The divine song bird*) and *Swagathapanjakam* (*A welcome song addressed to Tagore*) and based on his self-teaching '*Vangadyoviludicha raviye snehika viswambhare!*' (*Oh world, please do worship yonder Sun – Ravi – in Bengal's radiant horizon!*) critics often judge Tagore's influence on him. It should be said that this appraisal is superficial. It fails to go deep into the imperceptible communiqué that might have happened between Tagore and Asan and detect how it shaped the power of imagination of a genuine poet like Asan. The pointers that might lead to such an enquiry are not the 'flowery canopy' of trees that are planted afar or their 'freshly sprouted branches' but the mysterious entanglement of their roots beneath.

The terrain of Tagore's imagination was romantic as well as mystic. In *Geethanjali* one can see Tagore's compositional skill as a poet in bringing the metaphors of love, parting, waiting and seeking the lover to mystic heights. It has been observed that the mystic lyrics of Tagore promulgated the indirect influence of *Vyshnava Bhakthi* Movement which was an indiscernible metamorphosed form of Radha-Krishna love knot. The focal point of his lyrics is the feminine psyche that is deeply desirous, badly bashful and

experiencing excruciating agony of separation. This is the point of affinity between Asan's romantic sensibility and Tagore's poetic vision. The facet of love explored by Asan could only be depicted through a female. The love he portrayed was overflowing with prayers emanated from perturbed souls that transform one's body into a ramshackle shrine. Many of the mystic lyrics in *Geethanjali* have a sadder and softer tone of such prayers.

'Don't hesitate to pluck this little flower of little value

so that

It will adorn thy garland before

It fades away and withers'

The above prayer in song 87 of *Geethanjali* is something that can be heard from the lips of Asan's heroines Nalini, Leela or even Vasavadatta, the licentious lady who pined for the unrequited love of a handsome Buddhist monk. In Asan it is a kind of search for God as manifested in women towards men but in Tagore it attains a romantic tone of the self which has been incarnated as a female. Interpreters like Karimpuzha Ramakrishnan were of the opinion that the relationship between Leela and Madanan whose name is synonymous with that of Cupid, creates a parallel in worldly life between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Karimpuzha makes a kind of over-reading here and to a certain extent such a reading is mechanical too. But it is an irrefutable fact that if the vast plot structure and the elaborate characterisation of Nalini and Leela were subjected to utmost saturation they would be as condensed as a lyric by Tagore. P. K. Balakrishnan, the visionary critic of Malayalam, has realised this much earlier, though in another fashion. In his book titled *Kavyakala Kumaranasilude* (The art of poesy through Kumaranassan) P. K. Balakrishnan makes a dazzling observation that the heroines like Nalini and Leela are the incarnations of the poet himself who begins his poetic career as a writer of hymns. In that long and tiresome search for self-realisation Asan touches Tagore as well. Tagore implores the Almighty to accept him in a tone that is characteristic of a lover experiencing piercing anguish.

The hymns written by Asan are not different at all. They are the mantras of a soul that endures excruciating pain in exploring the woods and meadow seeking the cosmic soul. But P. K. Balakrishnan is unmindful of the complex transformation of Asan from a composer of hymns to a composer of love poems and the indirect catalyst he may have had from Tagore's mystic imagination for such a transformation. He may have missed this fact that was so close to his eyes because of his over-confidence in the rarity and originality of the finding he had made. Whatever it is, the ensuing critical lineage of Malayalam has to underscore this fact. '*Those who seek the him/ have to seek the wind in the dense forest woods*' (Lines from Asan's *Leela*). This might tell us how these lines create a kind of invisibility and elusiveness in a protagonist like Madanan and how he got hold of the distant face-look of the quintessential omnipotent that entices the humans in disguise.

### G. Sankara Kurup's 'Pullankuzhal' (The flute of reed)

Another major Malayalam poet who later took up the flute of Tagore's mystic imagination was G. Sankara Kurup. Whatever be the self-justifications of the poet about the holy stream called *Geethanjali*, which greatly lured him at the dawn of his expedition through the boundless waters of literature, critics in Malayalam spent a significant amount of their time, most vociferously, to find something more than mere influence in it- even plagiarism and imitation. The third chapter of 'Sankara Kurup Vimarsikkappedunnu' (Sankara Kurup Criticised) by Sukumar Azhikkode, the doyan of literary criticism in Malayalam, is replete with arguments of this kind. Whatever it be, it is supposed that Sankara Kurup's, 'Sunflower', a famous poem of that title written by the poet, would not have been bloomed without the sun-like presence of Tagore; though the inclination of the sun flower towards the sun is instinctive.

The fiftieth year of Sankara Kurup's Malayalam translation of *Geethanjali* coincides with the centenary of Tagore's *Geethanjali*. It was in 1959 that Sankara Kurup's complete verse translation of Tagore's Bengali *Geethanjali* got published. It looks as if the

literary circle of Kerala, which hardly forgets any anniversary, is oblivious of the fiftieth year of the publication of this translation. It is not a work that should be ignored in such a fashion. Its musical and meditative quality is unique. We can still hear G. Sankara Kurup's lines which stand apart from such prosaic translations as 'My Lord, I don't know how you are singing! I always listen to it, in silence, surprised.' (Translation by L.M.Thomas.)

'How beautiful is the  
Rendering of thy song!  
In silence I listen to it  
with eternal esteem'

### The influence in Changampuzha

Tagore's magnificent style of rendering songs had attracted the imaginative poetic quality of Changampuzha, the greatest romantic poet in Malayalam. as well. Changampuzha's creation of 'Yavanika' (The Curtain), a long poem, modelling Tagore's 'Victory' and his translation of 'Udyanapalakan' (The Gardener) are finest instances of the influence Tagore had on him. We can also extract Tagore's influence on Chamgampuzha from indirect signs that are not that explicit. The well-known 'Poomala' (The garland) in 'Bashpanjali' (A tribute with Tears, the poets debate anthology) is itself an example. We can see the distant image of the mendicant in the 50<sup>th</sup> verse of Tagore's English *Geethanjali* who wins a gold grain from the king, when he gives the king a mere grain while he begs for alms. Isn't it the tune of the mystic song, 'I will wait the whole day/ playing my flute' (in the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of Bengali *Gitanjali*) that we hear in the song of Changampuzha's *Remanan*, the pastoral elegy that made him most popular in Malayalam, the selfless shaperd who awaits the virginal beauty? - I will sit the whole day alone/ on that hill side and sing! It could be out of weariness after seeing the quack 'mystic snobs' in Malayalam that Changampuzha wrote these lines in 'Padunna Pishachu' (The Singing Devil) which was modelled after no lesser a poet than Charles Baudelaire whose 'Fleurs de Mal' ):

When the cosmic soul tickles in the  
Armpit of the individual soul from time to time  
The rays that emit out of the tickle  
Hits at the lotus bud of life and  
Oh, remember, what opens up its lips then  
Is the crown of fragrance of mysticism.

T. K. Narayana Kurup was a minor poet in Malayalam who imitated Tagore in appearance and attire. He wrote prose poems modelled on Tagore's. He was also the editor of a magazine titled, 'Tagore'. He published an anthology titled 'Athmageetham' (Song of oneself) in 1934.

### R. Ramachandran

Later on, we see a pale shadow of Tagore in the introverted sensibility of R. Ramachandran, a late romantic, who wrote about his 'Days in dismay which were like deserted bowers!'; though spiritual alienation and distress were its basic traits instead of mysticism.

My eyes are feeble seeking the infinite sky for a merciful eye,  
The moon glow melts in the twilight blush and my love that turns

Into a shining star in the night when the sky forgets the earth and the trust

I hold in my bosom, I know how far am I from all those celestial passageways

Tagore's placid romanticism bloomed again in Malayalam poetry in the poets who belong to the last wrung of romanticism in Malayalam literature. The pure rustic image of love in Sugatha Kumari's poems reminds us of Tagore. It is not difficult to identify the veiled 'Tagorean' tone in the devotion to Krishna pictured in the most celebrated 'Krishna, Neeyenne Ariyilla' (Oh Krishna, You don't know me). The transcendental tune of Tagore is latent in some of the film songs written by O.N.V. and P. Bhaskaran without

their knowledge. 'Paduvanay vannu ninde padi vaathilkkal' ( I came to your doorstep to sing) and 'Saradindu malardeepa naalam neetti' (The autumnal moon offers a floral flame) written by O.N.V and 'Thamarakkumbilallo mama hrudayam' (My heart happens to be a lotus-cup) and 'Thamasamende varuvan...' ( Why are you late to arrive...) by P. Bhaskaran are examples that could be easily cited. Through these songs some of the rare and exquisite poetic features that reside in the ivory towers of imagination became a legacy of the common folk.

### Basheer

'Oh! Pristine beauty, what I hear are your desirous footsteps.

She comes! She comes! My love-stricken princess comes.

Why do you make my heart beat without rest?

Oh! Virginal beauty, why don't you come?'

These lines were not written by any Malayalam poet, modelling Tagore. It is in Ekanthathayude Mahatheeram (The Boundless Shore of Loneliness) written by Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, a Sufi mystic with modern sensibility who wrote quite a good number of excellent short stories in Malayalam, that these lines of Tagore's get echoed word by word! We can hear the same footsteps in verse 45 of the English version of Gitanjali and verse 62 of the Bengali Gitanjali. It is just that 'he' appears in Tagore's poem instead of 'she'.

'Don't you hear, don't you hear

The casting of footsteps

He comes, he comes,

He comes, beloved' ( Translated by G. Sankara Kurup to Malayalam)

We can hear such footsteps in stories such as Anargha Nimisham (The unforeseen moment of fulfilment) and Sandhya Pranamam (The Evening Prayer) by Basheer. (The last verse of English *Geetanjali*) is included as 148<sup>th</sup> verse in The Bengali Gitanjali.

'In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee'

G. Sankarakurup's translation (in Malayalam) is

In one salutation let me settle down

At thy holy abode

Basheer's Sandhya Pranamam begins like this:

'For the last time, Lord, for evening prayer

Have I reached

In the desertedness of this horizon.'

There is no doubt regarding of Basheer's genuineness and original genius. The aim here is to make clear the fact that the omnipresent radiance of Tagore's mystic imagination reached even Basheer in his early days of writing.

### The story of Vijayan

One more is there to be pointed out in this regard. It is an interesting fact that we can see a fairly similar image of the parting-love of birth after birth in 'Khasaakkinde Ithihaasam' (The Legend of Khasak) in a poem that appears in an anthology by Tagore, titled 'The Crescent moon'. In Vijayan's story a girl, who parts with her sister in a valley of sunset, turns a champa tree. Ages after, the tree asks the girl who plucked flowers, tearing the branches, "Alas! Little sister, you have forgotten me!" In Tagore's 'The Champa Flower' we see the child asking,

'SUPPOSING I became a *champa* flower, just for fun, and grew on a branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and danced upon the newly budded leaves, would you know me, mother?'

In Tagore's poem we find the simple and naive imagination of childhood; Vijayan's is a deep visionary imagination. Though these

are not to be compared, it hints the indirect influence that Tagore's poem has had on Vijayan as the champa flower re-appears in the latter in the disguise.

*Geetanjali* manifestation was a great poetry that had influenced Malayalam poetry and literature intensely and everlastingly. There have been multifarious translations that started with Keezhedatthu Madhavan Nair, the first translator and passed through L.M. Thomas, G. Sankara Kurup, K.C. Pillai, and V.S. Sarma and ultimately, K. Jayakumar, a poet turned IAS officer, for *Geetanjali*. New Malayalam translations may be done for that work in this century. Let's hope that this expectation won't be gone astray as is evident from N.P. Chandrasekharan's recently published poem dedicated to Tagore and G. Sankara kurup, modelling it on the Malayalam translation that G. gave for the 64<sup>th</sup> verse of *Geetanjali*.

Translated by K.T. DINESH

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## Pulayar \*

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K.P. Karuppan

The Hindu veterans of Malayalam  
Have been from the long past  
Condemning the caste of pulayas,<sup>(1)</sup>  
Treating them as untouchables.  
Haven't the people of the world  
Struck with wonder  
At the glory of fame  
Spread from this hard-working folk  
Who are blended ever  
With Indraneelam<sup>(2)</sup> splendour?  
They are not children of darkness  
But only got dark-skinned  
As they are sun-tanned;  
Or, they may be the incarnations  
Of the Dark Lord of Vrindavan,  
Of black-cloud grade-  
The sweet son of Devi Yasoda.

May be it possible  
 That the Lord, to perpetuate earth  
 And feel rejoiced,  
 Has let life prosper at large  
 With abounding grains  
 Of cereals and fruits  
 For which He has transfigured himself.  
 Some days of incessant rain,  
 Other days of heat intense,  
 Some days of icy cold,  
 And too of strong wind:  
 Forbear they ever with will of endurance-  
 Are Pulayis, Yogies of Lord Shivarima?  
 From the glory of the rising sun  
 And many visions of celestial splendence,  
 Forgetful with complacence,  
 Remain those Pulayis dear,  
 With their heads shaved:  
 Aren't they lofty Yogies?  
 From morning till evening"  
 Involved they are tirelessly in toil  
 So enterprisingly alert-  
 Are they promoting Idols  
 Of earthly service of cultivation?  
 Fulfil they their work  
 Willingly and peacefully.  
 Aren't spade-workers great,  
 And the bright prosperity they bring  
 To our Mother country  
 So widely gets renowned?  
 These Valluvis<sup>(3)</sup> would enthrill  
 The peasants of intense enterprise.  
 Are they not hence graceful dark clouds fresh  
 Duly transformed into humans?  
 Aren't the space-workers  
 Fatherly to Earth

Who would till the soil  
 And embellish Earth  
 With the innocent emerald silk of paddy  
 Bringing at length the granaries within,  
 Splendid grains of harvest?  
 Are they the grooms of Earth,-  
 The pretty deer, tender-,  
 With her glory of Fame unblemished,  
 Who let her well-clad and adorned  
 With the silk of the ripe ear-clusters of paddy?  
 Aren't they, as people,  
 The beetles fond of imbibing  
 The hectare of the majestic Turns  
 of Lord Krishna's eyes,  
 Getting rid of the grid of Earth?  
 Timely food, work and journey  
 With the Happiest, every day-  
 Do they outmode in this way  
 Even the loftiest in <sup>(4)</sup>Bilathy?  
 Are they the descendants of <sup>(5)</sup>Parasuram,  
 Deserving to be praised even,  
 Who have spade in their hands  
 To till and level the whole of Kerala?  
 Thoughts several in this way  
 Evaluate the spade-workers  
 As commendable to be virtuous and blessed!  
 Shouldn't these tillers, of power  
 And too of compassion,  
 Be bestowed from others, with some Good?  
 Flowers of grace splendid  
 Are shed from Valluva lips  
 like streaks of lunar splendour  
 That steal from dark clouds  
 And spread along the earth.  
 Space-workers at lead shed  
 Their hot sweat incessant

During their prolonged endeavour  
 Voluntary and strenuous,  
 When their masters selfish  
 come up, all sudden, with greed  
 To devour their fruits of effort.  
 The Valluvis bound for hard work,  
 And the advanced Hindus for boluses of rice-  
 The 'Have-nots' any how to make food,  
 And the 'Haves' to provide and relish!  
 The reaped ears of corn  
 Have been brought into the granary;  
 But Pulayis are condemned by all means  
 And left in deep tears.  
 The feet which are selfish to the core  
 Push their canoe off from the shore!  
 Don't be generous, Oh Mankind,  
 To abuse and intimidate  
 These Valluva group of workers!  
 How can one cut off the roots  
 of trees which are useful!  
 Why do you treat these spade-workers  
 Like victims of untouchability  
 As practised in the long past  
 By thoughtless and selfish Minds?  
 Why should we set fire to our abode  
 To defeat and surrender rats?  
 Aren't <sup>(5A)</sup>Cherumar, Hindus?  
 Just think: should we not support them?  
 Why should we keep within  
 Thoughts of rejection and contempt?  
 Captured fish will cease to swim  
 And meet its gradual death.  
 The innocent Valluvis  
 Are all our Hindu brothers.  
 Discard not these pitch-dark bodies-  
 Let your lucid bodies seek compromise!

Valluvis belong to the <sup>(6)</sup>Manu caste renowned  
 And they are sure Hindus.  
 Why should you have enmity  
 To feel harsh towards your own brothers?  
 Deer commits nothing faulty:  
 Yet a tiger tortures its life.  
 So also would shrewd idiots do harm  
 To Minds innocent; Obstruct Hari<sup>(7)</sup>  
 The path of <sup>(8)</sup>Sankara Valluva.  
 Tigers are friendly and loving  
 Towards one another;  
 So is one rat to all of its kind.  
 In this <sup>(9)</sup>Black Age strange  
 There are people who form a caste quite diverse,  
 Of demarcated feeling of fraternity!  
 Pulayis though industrious in works varied  
 Are left unhappy  
 And kept off from the blessings of Fate:  
 May the iron-writing rod of shrewd Destiny  
 Get crested with rust,  
 Of a disrupting Puranic ancients!

## Notes:

1. The traditional spade-workers.
2. Sapphire-type of precious stone of dark blue colour.  
Here, the blue-blended block colour of their body.
3. Caste-title for a section of Pulayis.
4. Common old usage to denote British countries.
5. Rama, the hatchet-bearer.  
Son of Jamadagni conceived as an incarnation of Vishnu. According to legends he reclaimed the land of Kerala from the sea.
- 5.A. Another section of Pulayis-hence, synonymous.
6. Manu-father of mankind, the renowned and blessed architect as mentioned in puranis.

- 7, 8. Two symbolic names for persons of forward and Backward communities. Persons belonging to Backward communities were not allowed in the remote past to walk freely along with those of the so called forward communities.
9. 'Kali Yoja' - the last of the four Ages-the Age of vice, strife and wickedness, with Kali as the presiding deity.
- \* Translation of Malayalam Poem 'Pulayir' composed by late Pandit K.P. Karuppan. The poem is included in his collection of poems entitled 'Kavya Petakam'

**Translated by Paravur Gopalakrishnan**

## The verandah

VEERANKUTTY

I am not fond of the verandah  
as my mother is  
She leaves the door ajar  
at night lest the verandah  
feel left out  
cold and lonely.  
In the morning  
as she hastily  
opens the door  
the verandah  
sits waiting  
with the milk packet, the newspaper or  
the newborn kittens of the  
night before  
in her lap.  
Mother rubs  
mirror clean  
the verandah with softest velvet cloth.

In the heat of the noon  
she sleeps  
pressing close to its belly.  
perhaps,  
the verandah creeps upto the kitchen  
quietly through open doors  
when alone.  
During nights of  
Genie-dreams  
could the verandah lead my home-bound  
mother out through  
the garden gates?

Translated by ZAHIRA RAHMAN

## Silence

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AMRUTHA

Upon the hot springs of great tragedies  
the sea is calm...  
Saturated in the twilight meditation  
the waves are silent  
Inside the mute cluster of rocks  
resentment boils....  
Though no gentle breeze is blowing  
a terrible storm may be blowong.....  
Though words don't drop as meanings  
'Nadabrahma' may be softly opening  
in mind's lotus flower!  
When the dark clouds of rain gather in the skies,  
When riot and staugher tear the country,  
The cool springs of life are plundered  
and life sinks into fathomless depths and  
crrents.....  
When the sea sanches away  
the sand under your feet

and the country becomes a terrible forest  
where cannibals reign,  
A new history evolves out of pomp and power!  
When even the gods move off  
from thier value system,  
Shakunies wake up  
Shrinking off their lethargy,  
The mouths of volcanoes  
seem to be serene.....  
Thier hearts, where motlen lava boils,  
may be longing for an eruption.....!

Translated by Dr. MARY NIRMALA

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## The Silent Beast

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M.R. RENUKUMAR

Be up  
before the crow  
touches the ground  
Must clear the crow dung.  
Clean the cowshed  
before he's here,  
The milking-man  
The milk-pot,  
the oil-can,  
Must keep them handy.

When he's gone,  
the milking done,  
the milk measured,  
Mark today's volume  
with a pencil  
on the calendar.  
Don't forget  
The haystack's thinned.

Even so,  
 must climb up,  
 pull down some,  
 for it to feed

Go  
 to three houses  
 of the neighbours.  
 Must slip into the  
 backyards,  
 get the leftovers.  
 Mud pot on hip,  
 must cross,  
 scorching glances  
 of men  
 angling by the canal.  
 Stir, stir  
 as the snout dips,  
 searching for feed  
 still dry.  
 Must swat hard, quick,  
 Finish off  
 that bloodsucker,  
 the leopard-wasp,  
 on its belly.  
 Scratch  
 the folds  
 on its neck,  
 as it stretches out,  
 belly full,  
 chweing the cud.

Must sharpen  
 the sickle  
 on the rough wasing stone.  
 Go, cut fresh grass  
 in the priest's yard.  
 Must wait for passers-by  
 to help lift

the bundle.  
 Be careful.  
 Don't slip  
 while crossing  
 the single-long bridge.

Must drink up the rice-gruel.  
 Wash the bowl.  
 Must blow out the lamp.  
 Rest head,  
 on left hand,  
 Turn body,  
 to one side,  
 Fill up the depth  
 of the soul  
 with nothingness.  
 Must  
 be up  
 before the crow  
 descends  
 to the ground.

---

**Translation of 'Mindaapraani'**

## Colour

ROSHNISWAPANA

1

There's not a bit left to mix-  
 Dawn, noon, evening, night, yesterday,  
 today, tomorrow.....  
 Nothing at all.  
 Not a drop of water  
 Should spurt and fall  
 On the cloth on line  
 Swaying in the wind.  
 A spurt-second would suffice  
 For the colour to change;  
 A half-stroke will do.  
 Renting the minds of raindorps,  
 A blue light leaps forth.  
 It's sunny.  
 Holding an umbrella,  
 The colours step into the tarred road.  
 If buffeted by wind,  
 They bound back indoors on their own

Try pouring a green blob  
 On wilted dry leaves.  
 this musters a mob  
 Whole bluster well-high  
 Resounds in all four directions

2

There's wind  
 On the colour's outer limits-  
 A question that hardly has any answer!  
 It tripples down  
 On the white head-dress  
 Of disgraceful words,  
 Fastening the colourless light.  
 The face, a white sheet of paper  
 Where, coloures spill over and ooze out.  
 It'll rain  
 And the renegade of a "vethalam\*"  
 Will come to take a list of the springs.  
 How many colours there are  
 For the silence of the gaping eyes of idols.  
 The colours, of which we say  
 "How secculent they are"  
 Are brought down by wind from the mountains  
 These, for which we endure  
 The scalding heat, are those  
 That spring out of the earth's cleavage  
 These, of which, we bracingly reckon  
 "how cool it is!"  
 Only those fingers that ache  
 Sans wounds, know  
 How quickly water blends with colour.  
 As to the case among us  
 How easily a colour  
 becomes a sea  
 turns out be a wall  
 changes into a non-colour.

\*. Vethalam : a cropse possessed by evil spirits

## STORY

## NEYPAYSAM

MADHAVIKUTTY

Carrying out the last rites in a most brief way and expressing gratitude fittingly to the fellow friends in the office, he returned home late in the night. Let us call him father, since, only three little children recongize his value in that town. They call him 'father.'

while sitting amidst many strangers in the bus, he contemplated over every second of the day, one by one.

He worke up hearing her voice:

'Unni, is it good to lie rolled up under the blanket, even now? Is not today Monday?' She was waking up the eldest son. Afterwards, wearing an old and wrinkled sari, she made herself busy in the kitchen. She brought him coffee in a big tumbler. Then, then what happened? Did she utter any unforgettable words? Oh! no. It is impossible to recapture any word she spoke after that. 'Unni, is it good to lie rolled up

under the blanket, even now? Is not today Monday?' Only this sentence remained unwashed. He quoted this sentence as a chant. Alas! If he forgot that sentence, his loss will be so abrupt and intolerable, he thought.

As he felt for office, the children too accompanied him. She brought their small aluminum Tiffin boxes filled with snaks for school. He noticed some turmeric powder smeared on her right hand.

While in the office, she never ever crept into his memory. Now flash of thought passed through his mind of their long, two years passionate love, which resulted in their wedlock, of course, without the consent of thier family members. Still, never once did he guilty about it. Financial crisis, ailments of children and similar misfortunes often enervated them. In spite of it, she had no plains, but she seemed to have lost intrest in adorning herself. Gradually his sense of humour and laughter too, drained.

Nevertheless, they loved each other. Their children too loved them. Three boys, Unni who was ten, Balan, seven and Rajan only five, always appeared with oil-smeared faces. They possessed neither great beauty nor intelligence. However, their father and mother used to comment with great concern:

'Unni has a taste for engineerig. He is always mending something or the other.'

'We must make Balan a doctor. Did you notice his broad forehead? It is a sign of intelligence.'

'Rajan is least afarid to walk even in darkness. He is brave. Probably he is a stuff made for the military.'

They were residing in a small locale in the town where middle class people lived. It was a three-bed roomed flat in the first floor with a small verandah in front of a room where hardly two can dig in at a time. there grew a rose sapling in a flower pot which mother had watered and nursed but never once bloomed.

Several brass spoons and spatulas hung on the many hooks in the kitchen walls. There was a wooden plank-almost worn out

on which mother usually sat, placed near the stove. It was while she sat there and made chappathis that father used to return home from office.

As the bus stopped, he got down. He felt a slight pain on his knee. Is it a warning to be cautious of old age afflictions? If bed ridden, who would look after the children? His eyes filled. Wiping his face with a faded handkerchief, he hurried towards home.

The Children, have they slept? Have they eaten anything? of else, have they gone to bed tired of weeping out their heart? No. They are not brave enough even to cry. Otherwise, why did Unni sat and unmoved without crying when he carried her into the taxi? Of course, the youngest one cried or fussed, but only to get into the taxi. They were surely too young to understand the meaning of death.

Did he know it himself? No, he never did. Did he ever expect that she, who was a constant presence in their home, would be lying dead near a broom on the floor, without even bidding farewell to anyone?

When he returned from the office, he glanced through the kitchen window. She was not there.

In the courtyard, the children were playing and the full throng of their voices was rising in the air.

Unni was calling out: 'First class shot.'

He took the key and opened the front door. Then he noticed her, lying on the floor, sideways, mouth slightly open. Thoughts crept into his mind. She might have collapsed of overstrain. Perhaps, she had even fallen down unconscious. In the hospital, the doctor said, 'Heart attack. It is one and half hour now. She is dead.....'

Feelings thronged. An unreasonable hatred flushed towards her. Resting all responsibilities on his head, gone, gone, gone for ever.....!

Who will, hereafter bathe the children? Who will ever make delicious snacks for them? Who will nurse them with care, when they become sick?

'My wife is dead.' He chanted to himself. 'As my wife died today of a heart attack, I urgently need two days leave.'

That would be a great 'request' for leave! It is not that the wife is sick, but that she died. The superior officer may call to his office room and say, 'I am sorry, my heart-felt condolence.'

Ha....ha....ha, his condolence! He does not know her. Her beautiful, curly hair at the end, her weary smile and her slow walk, nothing does he know. All these are losses.....only, only my losses.

When the door opened, the little one came running from the bedroom and said: 'Mother has not yet come.'

Have they forgotten everything so soon? Did the little one think that the body, which he carried into the taxi, would come back alone? He held the little one's hand and walked towards the kitchen.

He called Unni, who was half-asleep in bed. 'Unni.....'

'What fatehr?'

He came rushing, getting up from the cot.

'Balan is asleep.'

'Um....Have you all had your food?'

'No.'

He lifted the lids of each vessel kept on the kitchen slab. Her menu was quite appetizing-chappatti, rice, potato curry and in a glass bowl, the most special and delicious dish which she often makes for children-neyapasam.

He could sense the touch of death in every dish! No, You cannot have these food items.

'You must not eat.'

'I will prepare some uppuma for you all. All these have turned cold.' He said.

'Father.' Unni called out in anguish.

'Um....'

'When will mother come? Is she not cured of her illness?'

Let the truth patience enough to wait for one more day, he thought.

What is the use of making the child feel sad in this night?

'Mother will soon come.' He replied.

He cleaned the plates and placed them on the floor.

Two plates.

'Don't call Balan. Let him sleep' He said.

'Father.....neypayasam.' Rajan said dipping his forefinger into the bowl of sweet neypayasam.

He sat on the wooden plank on which she used to sit.

'Unni....Will you serve food? I feel so sick.....my head is throbbing.'

Let them have a full meal. Here after they cannot savour any food made by her, this.....this is the last supper, the last supper made with her hands.

The children started relishing the tasteful, sweet payasam. He sat looking rather transfixed.

Seconds later, he asked:

'Don't you want rice, Unni'?

'No father, payasam.....this payasam is so tasty.' He was licking the last bit of payasam in his plate.....

Rajan too smiled, 'Yes, mother has made this neypayasam so well, it is tastier than what she has ever made before.....'

Tears rolled down his eyes. To escape from his children, he hurriedly slipped from the scene into the wash-room.

**Translated by GEETHA NAMBU DIRIPAD.**

## STORY

### Mother's Advent

**V.P. SIVAKUMAR**

Ramakrishnapillai in a white immaculate attire got down from the second-class compartment of the Island Express. After having lived for so long in this world, he could not manage to own a house or gain the love of a relative or a friend in his native land. He stood there confused not knowing where to go. Not having a place to go, he stepped up the forecourt of his alma mater. It was holiday and the school was in slumber. He gazed at the green lawn that shone in the golden light. Like bits of husk cut and thrown away from tender coconuts in the empyrean oasis, memories passed his mind one by one. The subtext the Great Heroes of Kerala, the class meetings with sandal, lemon and essays on showing reverence to teachers, the football match played with vigour between 9C and 10B, the quarter rupee liquorice, Sivanandan chettiar's mono act - thoughts proceeded one by one.

With an aura of seasoned coconut oil and *Aithiyamala* the biographies of great men, Ramakrishnan spent years of studenthood here. Now he wondered where his classmates were. He himself had changed a lot. The poet, revolutionary and sceptic have become an ardent lover and adulterer.

With an indifferent sulky look of a grandfather playing hide and seek with his grandson, with slow pace he moved in between the buildings, peeped into the roofless toilet to see the remains of what Purushan has scribbled on the walls, confirmed whether the litmus paper still changed colour in the lab and thought he heard the well chiselled words of Sukumaran the Geometry teacher.

These are habits and they mould one's life. It is not easy to escape from them. It is not like sitting in the Island Express cracking foolish jokes and waving hands to bid goodbye to those in the platform.

Ramakrishnapillai sat down beneath an old mango tree and looked around for fallen mangoes. His mind had found a niche like humming bird fluttering round and round the pandanus bush to make a nest. Thoughts had gone beyond reason and no longer denied fate. He thought: Darkness creeps on the lighted face. Slowly two teeth protrude out. He believed that the mother of this universe would one day hold up her golden earrings above the sky to help him, who groped in the dark.

With that, the tall buildings built with the money from the Middle East vanished before him. The yellow and red magic lamps were blown out. An energetic young man Ramakrishnan jumped down enthusiastically to the mud path, closing the school gate.

A solemn home at dusk with oil lamps lit on either side. The evening breeze touched the forehead, damp with sandal and sweat. Kids were reciting the multiplication tables. The evening had collected itself like a lamb nibbling tender leaves in the backyard of a hut. Evenings come and go by. The sound of cooking and the noise of spoons in the porridge vessels were heard.

With agonizing anxiety of adolescent love, he strode through the dust with a burning heart to meet his beloved whom his friends nicknamed 'feeding bottle.' It is along these dusty roads that he ran like a fiery demon burning with passion and lust. He had lain down on the lap of this mud road many a time with blood saturated with intoxication.

When the four corners of the world, deep in silence, shudder at the roaring of Chambakulam Pachupilla's Trigarthan\*, the paths lead him to the first light. When the world awoke, it saw toothless old men sitting with their back towards time, pounding areca nuts.

After breakfast the young men take their cloth bags and walk away.

To the left of this mud path, the place where Brigadier Umman's house stood, there was a small house where an old woman and her grandson lived. At the end of the road stood the Melukavu Bhagavathy temple. Every Sunday at dusk, Ramu used to walk four kilometers to the temple with his mother, pray and return with sandal on his forehead.

## II

The story is going back to a blurred past. Ramu an eight-year old boy clinging to his mother is following her to Melukavu aarattu\*\*. The whole place is up and decorated with tender palm leaves. Oil lamps were lit before every house and beside them adjusting the wicks were beautiful girls with half closed eyes. Ramu buys a plantain, drinks a bottle of soda water and once a while chews a sweet from his pocket. He runs, skips and stops. He lifts his shorts and pisses.

There is a carnival with magic shows, tricks and games. There is the man driving a motorcycle in the well. In the nearby sesame fields Tamilian women are dancing with a record player.

Mother and son flowed in the moonlight. Someone informed of a fight in the ground. People rushed to the place. Mother held her son close and in order to avoid the crowd took him to the

pavillion where a child without a mouth was exhibited. The child had only a hole instead of a mouth. It was lying on a carpet eating a bonda. Ramu could not stand the repulsive odour that came from the child's wounds. So he walked outside and waited for his mother.

The clang of cymbal was heard near the banyan tree where a temporary stage was set up and someone had begun to recite Sambasivan's Kathaprasangam\*\*\* *20th Century*. After hearing it for sometime he felt sleepy. He searched for his mother most probably sitting in some corner chewing bettle leaves. She was not seen anywhere. Tired, he bought some nuts and went into the temple where he fell asleep.

"Ammal!" He jumped up from his sleep. The moonlight had dimmed and the temple lights were off. It was derkness all around. The kathaprasangam stopped and the audience growled. The temple folks had gone to sleep and there was no one to lit the lamps.

A speck of light shone from inside the temple. It was from the oil lamp from the shrine. A breeze heavy with the smell of flowers and camphor reached him. As if in a trance, Ramu went inside and closed the door of the shrine.

### III

The electricity lineman Ittiavirah had swallowed a bottle of arrack and was lying down by the roadside in fornt of a shop. He was in complete bliss but the audience who was mad after the kathaprasangam pulled him up and shook him to life. Ittiavirah staggered to the switchboard but happened to peep into the shrine and lost his consciousness again. Inside he saw a pretty women, dressed and decked with flowers, sitting on a small stool with a child on her lap. It held the divine sword in its hands and the divine anklets on its legs. The tender body was covered with drops of sweat that looked like rashes. The mother was wiping away the sweat with her attire and patting her son's cheeks and hair.

The long awaited moment came. Cheers were heard from afar. The procession was coming back. Fireworks were coming nearer

and looked like the slithering golden serpnt. The smell of rose water, the jingling of anklets and the sound of conches prophesying peace and harmony filled the air. The mother is coming back, the mother who is the creator and the preserver of the universe.

An exotic perfume fills the air. Floweres drop from the heavens. The heavy bells of time toll wihtout rest. Along with the nine planets, the sixteen-armed mother, the mother of the whole of humanity arrived like a huge dark mountain bellowing loudly ha! ha! ha! The drums reached frenzy and swaying along with it, the mother arrived.

### IV

That child Ramakrishna did not grow up to be either Ramakrishna the youth or Ramakrishnapillai the middle aged man. He died at the age of eight. Ramakrishna and Ramakrishnapillai were only possibilites. Ramu was the only truth. On the rough floor of his hut, in the dark light of the kerosene lamp, on the fungus covered mat, on the lap of his mother whose tears had dried up, Ramu lay. Before dying he enquired, "Dis the mother come?"

He was the victim of Scheroderma. At eight his teeth dropped. His hair turned grey. His skin wrinkled. The ailments of old age scooped him and threw him into the sand banks of immortal time.

When the procession of the deity was coming closer, I remember having heard the shriek of his mother. One does not need pomp to die. Before 1947, when people did not know much about medical science, the doctors and their assistants who had resigned form the Malayalism estates had not heard of such a disease. Even today this discease is not diagnosed in an ordinary citizen.

**Translated by GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY  
(A translation of V.P. Sivkumar's *Amma Vannu*.)**

\* a Kathakali performance

\*\* a temple festival

\*\*\* a story told in verse and prose

## STORY

When the angels flap their wings

C.V. BALAKRISHNAN

A divine spectacle in the sky. Four angels appeared with golden wings.

Last summer Father Williams began painting four angels-four flying angels. Somewhat at the same time an eminent member of the parish, Isac Varghese began building a sty for his pigs and piglets. Because of many inevitable problems, the priest could not complete his work. But Isac finished his little house within five days.

Father Williams had planned to sketch two angles on either side of the vast sky that filled most of his canvas. He had the necessary paints sent from Italy by his friend who was his classmate in the monastery. Four bugles echoed in his mind when he opened his parcel with the Italian stamp on it. His face brightened with wonderment looking at it.

Isac Varghese did not do his work alone. Kunjukunju

helped him laying the bricks for the floor. Isac himself cut down the branches from the tree to erect the pillars. He did not need help to dig pits for the four corners and pillars in between. But the next day carpenter Varu came with his saw and chisels. Both of them fixed the frame of the roof and the doors. They laid bamboo sticks and thin branches of trees on the frame of the roof and tied them up. Finally they spread plam leaves and on them the thick long reeds collected from the bank of the river. Thus without investing much capital, Isac could fix a sty to house twenty-five pigs. The door was strong and he had a lock on it. Isac was completely satisfied. Walking around the sty, he grunted, showing his satisfaction. He produced such sounds only during his sleep.

Now we go back to father Willams. He was the representative of the group of artists who believed creation of art to be the toughest of jobs. Art was a painful experience for him. He was not like M.F. Hussain who painted without exertion. He took a lot of time to finish a work, yet had not till day been satisfied with any of them. He did not want his paintings on angels to be one such work and foresaw in it the birth of a masterpiece. Anxiety and ecstasy ebbed in him.

On summer afternoon after lunch he told his cook, "Vincent I am going to paint a picture. Vincent was not interested and was the least interested in this priest's endeavour. He was heard telling a visitor that the priest had begun yet another mad plan of painting.

How many unfriendly circumstances an artist has to face in order to give birth to a great work of art! How they toil to attain that solitude needed for a creation! For example, look at Father Williams. Hardly had he fixed the canvas and begun with the sky than a visitor came. It took an hour to send the person away and he returned to spread the blue. He hoped and wished to finish his work within two weeks. But when the two angels on the left hand had begun to show their presence, the Bible convention came up. After spending days for it and completing it successfully,

he came back to his canvas. But then the church needed a renovation and the committee members seriously began to think of the expenditure. To collect money they planned to conduct an auction to sell a part of the cemetery to families who want them slowly to bury their family members. That again took days and when the church was beautiful, it was time for the feast.

Thus the whole of the summer passed by without any development in the painting. The usual masses, the special masses, baptisms, the last rites, weddings, scripture classes, administration - engagements came one after another and Father William did not get any spare time to pay attention to his canvas.

In between, Isac's pigs increased in number. The piglets ran about the sty with their pink bodies and short tails. The sty was always noisy.

Father Williams wrote to his friend in Italy.

"This place is the perfect milieu for a painter. There is a tempting peace here. After the rains the greenery around is getting denser day by day. Nowhere can you see a red tinge. I am thinking of painting a picture with only the different shades of green. Maybe I'll get time during this rainy season. That which I had begun in the summer will soon be completed."

Three weeks after this letter was posted, Father Williams received another parcel. Another box full of paints. Once again the priest was filled with wonderment. The postman pulled up his trousers and walked back in the rain.

Father Williams lived in the double storey building behind the church. His bedroom was on the western side. The two rooms to the east were left vacant for the priests who were guests. The first room towards the left of the stairs was the storehouse of the musical instruments of the church - violin, guitar, tabala, harmonium, saxophone and deserted piano were dumped there. Father Williams considered this room his studio. When he mixed his sounds there he thought he heard the sound of music. When he explained this to Vincent, the cook was petrified. He was reminded of his grandfather, who at the age of eighty climbed a

coconut tree in order to reach heaven.

Father Williams hadn't finished with the two angels on the left of the canvas. Their tender bodies needed embellishments. The smiles on their lips should be more solemn and halo should appear above their heads. He kept it for the finishing touches and one fine afternoon mixed colours for the wings.

It was pouring outside and the cook was taking his usual afternoon nap. There was no one around.

Merina the deaf and dumb daughter of Isac was running down the hill, all wet in the rain. She ran through the rubber estate, through the cashew grove, between the pepper climbers, through the ginger, turmeric, cardamom and brambles. Her dress was drenched and the raindrops dripped from her body. With tear filled eyes she ran towards the church.

Father Williams heard the frantic steps up the stairs. But he did not move away from the canvas to see who it was.

Merina was beginning to run across the corridor when she saw the priest standing near the canvas on the left. She stopped and Father Williams looked at her astonished. She leaned on the door and panted. He woke up from the shock and walked towards her with his long brush in hand.

"What happened?"

She was still panting. He looked at her wet eyes and waited.

He asked again. A noise escaped her throat. Her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears.

Father Williams tried to read her gestures, but it was hard. She continued her gesticulation with her face ready for a scream. He tried to concentrate. Pigs?

Isac Varghese was an eminent breeder of pigs and so Father Williams believed that the girl wanted to talk about something concerning pigs. Pork was his favourite dish. Whenever Isac slaughtered pigs, he sent a share to Father Williams through Merina or her brother Jenson. So the priest was very keen in the

welfare of the pigs. He somehow got the idea from Merina's gesture that the pigs were in trouble.

He was anxious. What happened to them?

Merina further showed gestures related to the sty. Father Williams knew it well. He had seen the sty before and had expressed his awe. What might have happened to the sty? The strong wind last night might have blown it away. or did it catch fire? Did all the pigs burn in it?

Father Williams was confused. He once more concentrated on Merina's gestures.

"Should I come?"

"Yes" she nodded

Father Williams looked at the brush in his hands and at the canvas. He remembered sadly that it was after a long gap that he had taken up the brush. Still he decided to go with her, for he wanted to know what had happened at her house. He could not control his anxiety.

Taking his umbrella from his room he went near Merina.

"Let us go." he said

Down the stairs he woke up Vincent who was sleeping in the dining room. By the time the priest and the girl had reached the forecourt, Vincent had gone to sleep again.

Father Williams held Merina close to him. The umbrella was big enough to hold them both, but the rain was very harsh and wet them thoroughly. The mud path with rubber trees on either side was drowned. A brown dog ran past them as if it had no place on earth to shelter itself. Lightning slashed on the hilltop and Merina shuddered.

They moved from the gravel road to a side path. There were date palms here and there and dim light shone between the gaps. The screech of the crickets mingled with the sound of rain falling all around.

Her house was nearing and Merina began to sob. The whimpers

shook her lean body and Father Williams could sense it.

"Don't cry child. We are there."

He knew that she hadn't heard it. But his voice also meant that their journey was going to end and that they could escape the rain. They crossed a small stream with pebbles and walked through the wild banana plants and coffee bushes towards the house. The sound of gravel against the rubber slippers of Father Williams filled the air.

There was no one in the forecourt of the house. When Father Williams began to look here and there suspiciously, Merina led him to the pigsty. The pigs standing close to each other were squealing loudly. There was a stout pig standing near the door of the sty. The priest peeped into the sty through a gap in the wooden planks. But suddenly his body convulsed. Merina who was standing behind wailed loudly. A lightning slashed past them.

"Tresa," Father Williams called loudly.

Tresa was sitting in one corner of the sty. On hearing the call she wriggled like the corpse given life in the graveyard. The pigs that were standing close to her naked body moved back a little.

What am I seeing? The priest could not believe his eyes. He once again peeped into the sty.

Merina's mother held up her face a little. The unruly hair was falling on her face. The red swollen eyes showed as if from great depths. She flinched on seeing the priest and tried to cover her naked body with her arms. The pigs helped to cover up the rest of the body.

The sty was sealed with a big lock. Father William tried to pull it out.

"Where is the key?" he asked Merina who was standing in the rain.

She gesticulated. Her father had taken it.

"Where is he?"

Merina pointed to the distant mountains. The priest understood that Isac had dumped the naked Tresa into the sty and had gone to the mountains with his son. He had five acres of land there.

The priest took his eyes from the mountains and once again peeped into the sty.

“Tell me Tresa, what happened?”

But she said nothing. Father Williams repeated his question, but she could not utter a word. She and her daughter kept crying.

All of a sudden the priest heard the sound of bugles. He heard the heavy flap of wings from the sky and felt many hands pulling him up.

Between truth and untruth his body shivered helplessly.

Translated by GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY

(A translation of C.V. Balakrishnan's 'Malakhamar *Chiraku Veshumbol*')

## STORY

### What is your Caste

---

K.P. RAMANUNNI

A resounding laugh, Talk punctuated by vigorous gestures. He would appear among them spinning around like a ball of fire. “How long is it, man, since I saw you. Haven’t you been going out at all since your wedding?” He would hug people he’d met only at literary seminars, like long lost friends. Head to foot, he would take accurate aim at the little worm creeping down the collar and flick it away. “You didn’t spend anything on the wedding. Winding his arms around their shoulders, shaking them from

Come on, let’s go to Apsara.” Pulling goading, exchanging jokes. Fake threats. In short, the man we are in the process of describing was simple and straightforward, with no sadistic tendencies, no secretiveness. Besides, the confidential information that he belonged to an excellent TARAVID and was in some way a distant nephew of VM Nair made writers and readers of stories like us even happier.

But, for the last few days, Ravi Master, the man who we've just finished describing, had sat closeted in his room in the lodge, forlorn and deeply depressed. Unaccustomed to quaffing even a glass of water without company, he had divided a tall bottle of Green Label into twelve one inch portions with equal measures of soda and was working his way through each, all by himself, at half-hourly intervals. A photograph of Koman Valia-ammaman, his granduncle, which he'd discovered after much rummaging in Amma's old wooden box, stood on the windowsill. The sun and moon shapes carved by silverfish on the photograph hinted at the light years that separated space from time past. Ravi Master scrutinized the photograph of his Valia-ammaman, seated in the wooden chair with a stricken expression on his face, and tried to read his body language. His granduncle's right hand seemed to be gripping an invisible walking stick. There was ;unwarranted force in the way he squared his wide shoulders, the rounded, arrogant ears defied deafness.

Comparing his own reflection in the mirror with Valiaammaman's physique and expressions, Ravi Master felt more and more damned. The architectural principles that had created Ravi Master, Koman Valia-ammaman, as well as Trivikraman Nair, the Thashildar of Kanhirappally, had followed a special system of measurements: A backbone that was girderlike, the triangle that took shape, when they stood hands planted on the waist, that was an exact mirror image of the entrance to the courtyard of the traditional four-winged TARAVAD home, the NALUKETTU.

"It is not you who determine the way you stand or sit or walk, Ravi Master, but your genes. The same DNA that fashioned you, fashioned your father, your uncle and your granduncle. The stylish way they hitched up their mundus as they walked towards the paddy sheaves, and the swagger with which they sat in the TARAVAD hall have repeated themselves through history, hence it is that the Kanhirappally Nair and the Nairs of your TARAVAD look so alike."

Ravi Master remembered Neeli Raman describing the Nair physiology on the veranda of the Taluk Office. He determined

to shatter the shackles of tradition in a flood of intoxication and wrench out the man, that Sisyphean rock. He poured a tall whisky but did not drink it at once.

His words and actions had to be further analyzed in accordance with Neeli Raman's theory of the "subconscious Nair mind." Ravi Master went over the whole episode once again, playing the scene on the day of the seminar over in his mind, when he had welcomed each speaker to the Town Hall. His intention was to study the discrimination that had insinuated its way into his attitude towards each of them, according to their caste. He began by recalling the manner in which he'd greeted the Dalt woman speaker from MG University and the royal blooded thampuratti who was professor in a college, belonging to the princely family, the kovilakam- "Hullo, Neeli Raman," "Hullo, Sudha Varma." - and then examining how condescending was the "Hullo, Neeli Raman"; how much more deferential the "Hullo, Sudha Varma."

It was the literary and culture seminar held a month earlier that had created the need for this ordeal by fire self-examination. The literary organizers of the place had entrusted the preparation of the programme to Ravi Master with the sole intention of placing a man with no vested interests at the helm of affairs. Working round the clock, denying himself sleep, he had hurried through his work at school, correcting the children's answer papers and preparing pamphlets for the Science Parshad, before springing enthusiastically into the preparations for the seminar. From choosing the cloth for the banners to personally inviting the speakers, he had to shoulder every responsibility. Already slim, Ravi Master opened now into three, four slender petals, each petal rushing around simultaneously, one to arrange for a microphone, another to post programme notices, to get the badges ready.....

It was while officiating as the moderator for the lengthy discussion on the cultural implications of caste during the last session that it happened. When Neelli Raman, with her dark skinned cast iron face, her lips molten as if turned red-hot in a furnace, and her incredibly white teeth, got up to speak, Ravi Master had a

premonition that she was going to put a spanner in the proceedings. And, no sooner did he pass her note under the microphone stand, telling her that she had to keep to the stipulated time limit, she had barked.

“Stop interfering, Nair! Hasn’t this been going on for centuries, this business of keeping people in order?”

Instead of rhetoric, sounds like the cracking of green bamboo poles rent the air. When inappropriate words are pronounced on a dais, it shatters in a material sense and something indefinable and uncultured happens in its place.

The waves of sound that burst from Neeli Raman’s abuse devastated all the modern arrangements in the Town Hall. The decorative lamps that burned at high voltage began to flicker and grow dim, the tube lights went out and a spluttering like that of mustard seeds and chillies in hot oil disturbed the clarity of the loudspeakers. A murky darkness, like that found in ancient houses, cast shadows over the faces of all those seated on the dais and in the hall. The young Dalit woman who has shyly pinned her delegate’s badge on the curve of her breast had mutated into the power and fury of a colonized forest. The realization that the situation in the Town Hall was a volatile one, terrified Ravi Master. Clenching his hands between his legs, as if safeguarding something very valuable, he called out,

“All you need to do is to call my name. Don’t be impertinent.”

It was the most moving declaration of protest a Nair could have made against caste. To think it was he, a true comrade in the Communist movement, that a young woman had insulted in public, calling out his caste.

The image of his father, who had adorned the puja room of his *TARAVAD* home with portraits of Marx, Lenin and AKG, rose before him, veins jutting out of his neck in support of the Kuthali Estate Farmer’s Revolt. flags, banners and pandals put up for the protest workers had blossomed all over their estate and its vicinity. The games that the police, the landowners and the goondas had indulged in had been bloody and terrible. It was

only when Communist martyrs, spattered with fiery red, felled by guns and lathi charges, lay scattered on the ground that the demonstration had come to an end. When Achan, his father, had come back home, his face sunburnt and unshaven, Amma sat him down on her sickbed. He had heard her say all sorts of things to Achan as she struggled to breathe. That very day, Gangadharan Master had ushered Ravi out of his class, before he could finish drawing the map of India, and had taken him home. Amma lay unmoving in a strange sleep in which she was not tormented by breathlessness or any other suffering. Since that day, every time his father had gathered him up in his arms and rushed out, he had participated fully in countless processions and demonstrations, holding on to Achan’s fingers and shouting, :Inquilab!”

When Sudha Varma, Dr. Thomas, MR. Mallisery and Aboobacker, all seated on the stage, looked at him surreptitiously from the corners of their eyes, the man who had been a Comrade from infancy lowered his head, as embarrassed as if the red flag had suddenly turned into a pattukonakam, a red lion cloth. He realized that he would no longer be able to control the discussion in a disciplined way.

By that time, Neeli Raman, her mouth too close to the microphone, had begun her speech.

“Isn’t what I said right?” she asked, running her eyes over the high caste people in the audience as she detailed the sufferings that subordinates had endured for centuries. Her question roared through the silence that had blocked the great throats of the loudspeakers. When Neeli Raman shot a look from her half-moon eyes towards the stage, Ravi Master knew it was aimed not at the coordinator, but at the Nair that he was.

A complaint about a Dalit being insulted by having his caste called out is wicked, a mocker. It is like opening your mouth wide and clicking your tongue, uttering the distasteful sound, “tchh.” However, knowing that a high caste man suffers because his caste has been called out evokes everyone’s respect and compassion.

And, as soon as the meeting was over, intellectuals like Thomas, Mallissery and Kannambilly crowded around Ravi Master and embraced him, as if he were some sort of hero.

“Oh, Ravi Master imagine calling someone like you by the name of your castle! Where is our country going to..... nothing but caste and religion everywhere.”

And it was the buzz at the drinking session at the Amalapuri that evening.

Kissing Ravi Master’s cheek with drooling lips to express his respect and admiration, in memory of the Nair women he had once been in love with, Mallissery the Ezhava proclaimed,

“Whatever caste.....or religion, all we want is the human beings be good.”

“Go....go....go....” Pouring out the last peg into all the glasses, Kannambilly, professor and left wing intellectual, conducted a rite of exorcism. “Hindu, Muslim, Nair, Teeyan, Cheruman, may all kinds of evil caste spirits leave us and be doomed by the sorcery of liquor, may the real person within us emerge-dead drunk!”

The clamour and camaraderie of the cultural seminar party ended in some dark ravine of inebriation where space and time followed no order. Having heard the proclamation of strategy-Humanity, Humanity, Humanity! -echo around them, they all went back home and hearth without straying from their path: Thomas to Thresiamma, Mallissery to Radhamani and Aboobacker to Fathima. Only Ravi Master, who was not yet married, though the silver clouds of moon had descended on his beard, went back to his pillow that smelt of oil, in the old Paradise Lodge inhabited by teachers and clerks.

He came slowly, to the snakelike touch of sticky vomit and cigarette smoke, feeling something more than a headache clinging to consciousness. Ravi Master realized it was Neeli Raman’s call, singling him out as a Nair, a leech that brought out drops of blood on his skin.

It was Lambodaran Master at school the next day who first

teasingly called him a Nair. When he went back to the lodge, the lively, dissolute Mani Kurup repeated it, One by one, as they came to hear of the frightful comedy that had taken a dig at the seminar, all those close to Ravi Master began to have a dig at him. However skilfully dissolved the comedy into laughter and drained the laughter into intoxication, he found no peace of mind. Master, leave it alone, urged Sankarankutty and Habbullah, inmates of his lodge and colleagues at his school, making light of it. But it kept coming back, like regurge, to give him nausea.

It was at this point that Ravi Master decided, bolstered by the large peg he usually had at dusk, to talk directly to Neeli Raman and ask her to explain why she had called him a Nair. It was a mystery to him how she had discovered his antecedents, the horrible truth which only found mention in the appropriate column of his SSLC book, a secret that not even his close friends knew about.

Sankarankutty and Habibulla were quite startled when he suddenly threw down his cards, abandoning the game that evening and muttered, “Certainly and clarity are what we need in all things. Even if I have to go to Kottayam. I will do so and I will confront her there.”

“That is sheer madness, Master,” they said to him, scolding him for the way he had changed since the seminar. But take the bus he did, to Mundakayam from the Kottayam bus stand, and got off at Chittadi. The ghat road that went up from the left stretched on for quite a while before ending in the rubber estate. A craggy path from there on wound and twisted itself along the edge of the estate. The house that the arrow drawn with a thick felt pen indicated became visible as soon as the path ended.

Clutching the piece of paper with the drawing he had got from the University hostel, Ravi Master, who had set out in search of Neeli Raman’s house, realized the hardship of uneven pathways. The kilometers spanned out when he climbed the slopes, and knocked at his knees when he descended them. Rebellious stones rolled around under his feet, threatening his equilibrium, yet he

hurried on, anxious to come upon Neeli before the courage of the small peg he had drunk petered out.

“What is it, child. where are you from, is it to see her?”

Neeli Raman’s father Kochuraman, welcomed Ravi Master. His missing teeth, a symbol of the childhood of the human race, flashed a smile. “Neeli.....” His call swept through the house in search of her, while Ravi Master waited in the courtyard, taking a bird’s eye view of the place-the upside down hills, the rubber forests, the little stream that mined silver in the buried abyss. He realized that the stamp of these surroundings had entered the Town Hall along with Neeli’s body and that this was why her mild assault had suddenly turned the atmosphere savage.

Neeli Raman appeared from within her house and stood there with no trace of the aggressiveness she had shown at the seminar. When she said in a happy voice. “Who is it? O, Ravi Master!” he retorted a little viciously, “No, Ravi Nair!” and plunged headlong into the subject.

First of all, he wanted to know how she had discovered the fact that his father and mother were Nairs. Second, she must convince him that she had reason for insulting him, progressive that he was from head to foot, by calling out his caste.

Neeli Raman stood smiling all the while. Only her eyes shifted from where they sat, face to face with wooden ledge in front of the house-to the mountain ranges, the rubber forests and the sky that hung upside down in a yogic sheershasana posture between them.

The place was so peaceful, so soporific, that it relaxed all the tautness in him. When he realized that Neeli was in no mood to talk, he too dissolved into the phenomenon of nature, seeking there for deeper replies to simple questions.

Neeli Raman laid out a lavish spread for Ravi Master with rice, boiled and flavoured buttermilk, tapioca, steamed sardines. Then a walk circling the High Range that sent a pleasant ache of fatigue creeping up his knees. As the ghat evening gathered, with the

kind of enormous shadows that people living on the coast never see, Kochuraman poured out mature palm toddy for him.

Whenever Ravi Master brought up the questions that were the object of his journey, Neeli Raman replied, “I’ll show you.”

That was how, the next day, they went to see Trivikraman Nair, the landlord of old, in the Tashildar’s office and how, on the grounds of the physical similarities between Trivikraman Nair and Ravi Master, she lay down her case-points one, two, three-for having called him “Nair” in the seminar hall.

When they got back to her room, Neeli explained the deductions she had made from her research on the physiology and psychology of caste. The changes in the anatomy of different castes who, over generations, had been engaged in different kinds of jobs, the diversities in their mental makeup. As organic parallels to all these, the great variations that occur in the production of adrenalin, the expansion of the thyroid glands and the predilection for salty, sour or sweet flavours-why, the way the influence of caste determined sexual deviations! She wound her way through proofs and statistical data with the impartiality and accuracy of a scientist. And all the time, her regret for the human suffering that lay behind historical truths gleamed moistly in her eyes.

Having become a believer after listening to all this, Ravi Master began to fill in the answers to the questionnaire she had given him as a final test, and arrived with absolute exactitude at the column marked “Nair.”

After an analytical study that ran into hours, they leaned back in their chairs on either side of the table. The optimistic belief in the oneness of man had disappeared with the two pegs Ravi Master had had that morning. Sorrow darkened his face like blood splatters a sacrificial stone on which history has dashed its head, Neeli Raman too noticed this and became melancholic.

They became continents of distress and the vastness of the table between them turned into a sea and danced like one possessed. Then, suddenly melting, Neeli Raman lunged forward. Locking

her fingers into the bridge over the sea, she caught hold of Ravi Master.

“Never mind. Accept the truth first. Then we can rebuild it differently.”

Returning on Kannur Express, Ravi Master spent the night relearning his life in the context of his past. Gingerly he touched the eyes, the nose, the chest, the genitalia, of his alter-ego, that Nair Siamese twin who existed alongside his progressive self. The prototype for the resemblance between Trivikraman Nair, the Tahsildar of Kanhirappally, and himself was not his father. He knew now that it was his mother’s uncle, Koman Valia-ammaman—the village wresting his share of the produce from the tenants: the stud bull who established his ownership over tenant gatherings by impregnating them. He recalled Amma saying that his laugh, his quick temper, his insistence that if he planted a banana tree, It had to bear fruit the same day, were all inherited from Koman Valia-ammaman.

“What is this, Comrade? Just because a woman called you Nair do you have to change completely?” asked KEN, an old friend and comrade-in-arms, who had hurried to see Ravi Master on getting wind of the fact that all was not well with him after the infamous incident at the seminar. Sankarankutty and Habibulla had reported a couple of days ago that, with the trip to Kottayam, the phone calls to Neeli Raman and all that, things were no longer under control.

Ignoring the question, Ravi Master opened the half-filled bottle on the table with a feeble smile and poured out two pegs each for himself. Sankarankutty and Habibulla. He filled the fourth glass with soda and pushed it towards KEN.

“Tell me, Ravi Master, what then is the problem?” Sankarankutty asked quickly, anxious that KEN’s question should not be an isolated one. Engrossed in adding soda to the drinks and downing his own, Ravi Master ignored him. However, it transpired that the effect of those large pegs was incendiary. They merely fireballed into one huge outburst.

“Valia-ammaman, Koman Valia-ammaman!” Ravi Master screamed suddenly, his closed fist breaking an invisible mud pot on his chest. He looked fearfully at the corner of the room, as if a corpse had just risen from the burning ground. Sankarankutty and Habibulla rose from their chairs, their muscles twitching with shock. Ravi Master spoke unblinkingly, single-minded as an arrow.

“Koman Valia-Ammaman, here is your nephew, your spitting image, your heir, flesh of your flesh, an exact replica of your qualities. A caricature of the feudal character.... a carbon copy of arrogance. And...and.... “His tone, which climbed inch by inch to a threatening crescendo, ended in an angry outburst that drove Koman Valia-ammaman away: “Chi pol!”

Exorcized, or at least exhausted, Ravi Master embraced KEN and lamented like a son who has not been able give his forefathers peace even after performing all the recommended rituals in the most sacred places.

“However deeply one is involved in progress, evil spirits stay on with one, Comrade. Do you know who I am? The infant ghost of Adhikari Pandikkakalathil Koman Nair. The same likes and dislikes, the same impatience, the same tendency to brag, why even the same ISI stamp at the back of neck and on the lower chin.”

He detailed the conclusive evidence of Neeli Raman’s research, begun in mockery, about the decisive influence of caste and tradition on person’s makeup. Although KEN tried to rebut his argument, fighting with words like *human*, *history* and *class politics*, he felt that nothing held water for Ravi Master. If only a human being were like what the Comrade said! Even as he cried out, Ende, Trikavilamma! a sign spun like a whirlwind around him....no, a human beings is not like that.

Once Sankarankutty and Habibulla realized that they would gain nothing by argument, they changed their tactics and handled Ravi Master as if he were out of his senses, completely drunk. Using phrases like, “Have this buttermilk and water, now,” “Pour a couple of buckets of water on his head,” they made ready to

discipline Ravi Master, to rescue KEN from his clutches, and send him home on his scooter.

From that day on, Ravi Master was treated with ridicule or disbelief by all the other lodgers. Gathered in the Teachers' Union Office, his colleagues, including Sankarankutty and Habibulla, concluded that the way the Comrade was going was clearly dangerous.

The Union secretary, whose eyes were surrounded by a forest of warts, spoke in a hushe voice, "We must keep an eye on the Comrade." And from then Ravi Master's daily routine was monitored down to its smallest detail. "Oh look, that's the fifth peg you've finished today!" they would say, their words taking on the protective tone that guardians use for children and the mentally disturbed. However, no one dared to talk to Ravi Master on one subject-the explosive topic of caste. Only Mani Kurup, coming in one day, riding high on his liquor and a woman hunting sessions.

"So, Master, you've begun to believe in the caste? I don't know about men, but I've known for ages that women have caste, Women like your Kottayam character, Master, are good for rheumatism, and it is a fact that body aches and join pains will disappear in a second. Then, there is the aristocratic, tender touch of Namboodiri women, the deadly games that the sensual Thambutattis of royal birth play, the gymnastic skill of Nazrani women. I'm not going to die, Master, until I know the women of every caste mentioned in the gazette, ha ha ha!"

Ravi Master had no idea where the alarming HIV decisions concerning caste, that had come about os unexpectedly, would take him. Only in the telephone conversations with Neeli Raman did he experience the thrill of light spreading through worlds that had been plunged in gloom.

"I believe an American company has discovered a chemical weapon that seeks out and kills only certain tribes." He called Neeli as soon as her read the report in *Science Today*.

"I read it too. I've written to ask for more details. But isn't the caste species nambidi kanakkova, that includes people like our

CR Parameswaran, being annihilated without the use of chemical materials of any kind?"

When Neeli Raman laughed at the other end, the gurgling of mountain streams gushed towards him through the receiver.

"Look, Pulaya woman, you are going to receive a bonus for having worked in the sun all this time. Even when the ozone layer weakens, the melanin pigment in the black skin resists ultra violet rays. While fair-skinned people like us go through hell with cancer, darkskinned ones like you will escape." The suicidal Nair within Ravi Master, dreaming of his own death, suddenly spoke.

"But Nair, long, long ago we became as immune to being driven away and spat upon as we did to ultra violet rays. So we do not immediately realize it if someone attacks us. The superiority complex I display is a kind of anticipatory bail," Neeli replied.

"Do you want Adhikari Koman Nair's crooked intelligence? I have plenty of it in stock."

"Mm. Many other things will have to change hands before that."

Ravi Master's telephone conversations with Neeli Raman provoked the inmates of the lodge to the kind of insecurity and malice that people feel when listening to a foreign language. He was seen as isolated from everyone, like a planet that has left its orbit. Sankarankutty and Habibulla felt themselves growing smaller every time they made fun of their colleague or scolded him in an attempt to change him, for Ravi Master would respond only with a low laugh, making no attempt to conceal the contempt that dribbled from the corner of his mouth. Or with a deep sigh. Or a long silence. In reality, this was an alien personality poking fun at them, wearing the guise of their old Comrade.

Unable to bear the insult and fear any longer, his colleagues laid the problem open for discussion once again in the Union Office.

"Why not have a psychiatrist look at him?" The Union Secretary, clearly distressed, blinked his warty eyes.

"What we should do is catch hold of him and give him a couple of blows. All this dressing up as an intellectual and having

philosophical discussions with a pulaya girl!" Sankarankutty was losing his patience.

But what they finally accepted unanimously was the crafty warfare of middle-class trade unionists rather than direct combat.

Ravi Mater did not receive any of the telephone call Neeli made to the lodge-his calls to Kottayam were intercepted by Neelakantan, the owner of the booth near the school. And all the letters from MG University were intercepted at the Post Office.

Meanwhile, Ravi Master spent all the time available to him trying to discover a concept resembling Mendel's Genetic Theory. He used himself, Koman Valia-ammaman, and Sekhara Ammaman as the three prototypes. Placing Koman Valia-mamman in the F1 generation, Sekhara Ammaman in F2 and himself in F3, he was attempting to draw a chart of the metamorphosis of certain inherited characteristics.

Ravi Master first assumed that cruelty towards those at a lower level and slavishness towards those at a higher one would be one characteristic. This he named C. Hence, Koman Valia-amma's actions-from the high point of standing next to the tenant while the paddy was being boiled and measuring out the products from the tenants' field, to the depths of being spat upon on his face and standing obsequiously in the Illam, the Namboodiri residence, where he held the post of manager-would be noted down in the F1 generation column as C1. Sekhara Amman, who had been a Police Inspector, had, on the one hand, killed someone who had been in his custody and on the other, crested even his wife for his master's pleasure. Since the quality marked C appeared much more sharply in the F2 generation than in F1. it would become C0 since he had only done discipline on certain Class IV employees, pick up the school Inspector's handkerchief when it fell down and so on. (Even so, it had to be understood that the characteristic is still latent in C0 and that 0 never indicates emptiness.) In a cultural revolution like that in China, the factor C would swing around, harass people on top, gladden people at the bottom, become C1 and appear in the F4 generation. If, on

the contrary, the Emergency was going to be repeated, C, in its qualitative strength, would become C3 or C4 and appear in the F5 generation. This was the methodology that Ravi Master used to analyze the way in which traditional components were transformed in accordance with new circumstances, in the Nair species.

Once the hypotheses, theses, charts, graphs, footnotes and research papers were complete, he grew taut with eagerness to share them with Neeli Raman.

Ravi Master presented himself over and over again at the phone in the lodge, in Neelakantan's phone booth and in the yard of the post Office. It may very well have been because of the genes of the oldsambandam man, Kadupottan Namboodiri, who used to visit the women of Ravi Master's *travad*, that he did not understand their evil machinations. And so the phone boy with his sheepish smile, Neelakantan's phone booth with its calamitous sounds, and the post poen who turned his head the other way, continued to play their tricks on him.

"What's happening, no replies to my letters, nor can I get through on the phone," he said to himself, yearning to rush to Kottayam.

As the days spun out, the hideous activities they were engaged in began to worry Sankarankutty and Habibulla. The mountains of intercepted letters and telegraphic messages, the endless phone calls-it became a habit for Postman Madhavan to complain about disciplinary proceedings and for the phone boy, sunny, to grumble about, "the Kottayam Problem."

Likening Neeli Raman to the fearful with in the horror stories his grandmother had told him, Sankarankutty asked Habibulla, "Will that yaks come searching for him here?"

"Mm," snorted Habibulla, who belonged to a high caste Mapilla family and made regular offerings of payasam to the temple of the bramarakshasu, "Let her come, we'll somehow get rid of her."

Ravi Master's colleagues sighed tragically on the day they learnt

that Neeli Raman was in. Listening in on the phone, Sanakarankutty's face grew progressively more shrivelled like a pickled tender mango and his voice gave way, as he broke the news, with the solemnity of imparting the announcement of a dear one's death, to the other teachers in the staff room. The news soon reached Sukumaran Nair, the Union Office Secretary and Habibulla, who had gone to look into some matter concerning the side business in readymade garments that he ran. Professor Kannambilly lost his temper and KEN was plunged in thought.

"Didn't he walk into her lap, this boy from an excellent family? She'll never let him go."

"She's a southerner, remember? And a Kottayam woman too!"

"She has sexy eyes, the yakshi, I noticed them on the day of the seminar."

Ravi Master respectable friends were lavish with their sexist comments, comments that we all tend to make but which are seldom dwelled upon later.

As soon as the phone, Sunny, brought the news that Neeli Raman and Ravi Master had arrived at the lodge, Sankarankutty, Habibull, the Union Secretary, Professor Kannambilly and the others rushed there. Sunny, who was waiting on the veranda, indicated with a single kathakali gesture that they were both inside the room.

Feet moved stealthily through the corridor, tapping out the multiplication tables that multiply four by two, in front of Ravi Master's room the twin door panels were glued to each other by a thread of light. Since a half-closed door is also a half-opened one, it follows that a fully closed door is a fully opened one. Therefore, since they saw everything inside the room clear by, Sankarankutty, Habibulla, the Professor and the Union Secretary said to themselves.

"What a pity! In the end, she got Ravi Master....." (Echoing the standard lament of those who chance upon the bones and hair

that the yakshi, having devoured her victim, strews under the palm trees of history!)

Tchh (The first muffled question). Tchh tchh (The loud question). Tchh tchh What Sankarankutty's finger tapped out on the door was the rhythm pattern of his great grandfather shoopalani variety's (a world famous magician in his time agitation. tchh tchh tchh tchh tchh tch (The long scream of fury).

"Should we break open the door?"

"Isn't this insolence?"

"Open the door quickly, man."

Each one grew angrier and more impatient, as if in an agony to empty his bowels, unable to stand it any longer.

"Ravi Master, Ravi Master!" Kannambilly pushed the two cries out of his throat like some ritual.

At this point I would like to request the readers to stop reading for a minute and conduct a small soul-searching exercise. In the impatience of all those who want to have the door opened at once, is there not, beyond mere pleasure, a slightly murderous intent? A woman, and that too one from another caste like Neeli Raman, to come in search of Ravi Master, get into his room and shut the door? Is there not in this something that weakens the unconditional support of readers for the heroes and heroine.

Kada kada

kada kada kada kada

Although each member of the four-men army banged on the surface of the closed door in turn, the heartwood of the shutter, saturated with heavy monsoon rains, held on.

Ravi Master and Neeli, who were compassionately discussing the results obtained from their research on caste, grew tired of the irritating noise. Ravi Master closed his notebooks and records, lay down flat on his cot, and closed his eyes. Neeli sat beside him looking at him emotionlessly.

“Stop your insolence, Nair!”

No sooner did Ravi Master begin to laugh at the image he had in his mind of himself than he was transformed into a vast sky that could perceive the entire Nair horizon.

After a long time, he felt as if the scent of rain drenched earth had enveloped him completely. The slippers that were wrongly placed, the unbuttoned shirt, be witness to the fact that he had reestablished the bonds he had so resolutely cut off with the earth.

“We have many things to exchange with each other, Ravi Master,” Neeli’s liquid voice flowed gently into his right ear. Remembering that, since the earth was round, the sky could situate itself not only above but underneath as well, Ravi Master lay flat, not moving.

Lacking the strength to touch them and be polluted, the clamouring elements beyond the door moved away into the distance.

**Translated by GEETHA KRISHNANKUTTY**

## STORY

### INDOORS

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**P. SURENDRAN**

I was left with only that plot to build a house in. A piece of family wealth inherited by an unlucky fellow.

There was a tree that branched itself wide on that plot. Its roots helped the soil from eroding away in heavy rain.

Didn’t I need a house too?

I ran from pillar to post in my vicinity to shell out some money to build a house. Sweated out doing different kinds of jobs. Had to lie out in shanties and suffer sunburns.

After every journey, I used to return to the shade of the tree. Resting on its roots, I dreamt of my unbuilt house. It was the nest building bird community that taught me lessons on co-existence. It was the guest wind that brought in news of employment from afar.

I traversed all those distances.

Assured of finance sufficient to build a house, I took the help of a *moothaashari*\*. That was when the tree turned trouble. Moothaashari was in a fix, unable to draw a plan of the house with the tree outside it. The ill-effects of felling the tree had already been noted in the horoscope. Ill-effects that had no remedies.

Therefore moothaashari turned down my plea.

I cannot even think of felling the tree. The roots touch my forefathers. They live up my life with memories of my dynasty. They lie strewn all around this tree.

The woollen elephant doll was gifted to me by Abida beneath this tree. It was brought by her father from Malaysia. It had been dear to her. Even then it was given to me. It was this same tree beneath which I slipped a ring made of grass onto her golden finger. A swing would usually be made on the branch of this very tree. That swing showed me the beauty of her feet draped in anklets and legs usually covered in long flowing skirts. I vividly remember mannan\*\* Krishna who'd unmask himself after every *pothamkettu*\*\*\* and take rest below this tree. He used to narrate stories of the victories of *Bhagavathy*\*\*\*\*

Moothaasari's helplessness reminded me of our temples.

Muthassikavu

Ammachikavu

Periyakavu

Cheriyakavu

So many similar temples.

The sight of the mango and banyan trees standing together on the bank of the stream, came to mind. A single tree for men and birds. It bore sweet fruits to its maximum capacity.

Thoughts of temples bring forth images of huge trees. Those trees were never removed in order to construct temples. Bearing the halo of Gods in their souls, they would be protected within the walls of the temple compound.

I told moothaasari about that.

“Isn't temple craft a different matter, my child?”

asked moothasaari.

“Don't change the calculations. Don't fell the tree either. Let the house be a temple too. I want a house around the tree.”

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\* master carpenter

\*\* a native tribe of Kerala

\*\*\* a role in the folk art Theyyam

\*\*\*\* a goddess

**Translated by ANNIE GEORGE.**

## Sea

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**M.K. CHANDRASEKHARAN**

The open window showed her the vast sea. And small boats intersecting it. And occasionally a ship. She saw it all from her window. Lying on her bed. And the birds flying to horizon. To that spot where the sea meets the sky. What happens after they both meet there?

She woke up at five in the morning . The municipal siren woke her up everyday at five in the morning. She would be the first to wake up. She broomed the rooms, took a bath, completed her prayers and then waited for the sun to show its face. Sun was never as urgent as she was. He came at his own will, took his own time, She waited. She didnt have the luxury to watch the eastern horizon from this room. And so she looks at west. She sees the east through west. She could see small black spots moving away towards horizon. Those were boats of the fishermen, the country boats or some speed boats or a ship

anchored away in the sea.

Atleast occasionally the sea gave another wonderful sight to her. Of an empty sea. A sea which was not being interesected by anything. The blue clear sea spread all around. That made her horripilate. She painted that picture in her mind. Couldnt copy it on to a paper as painting was all Greek and Latin to her.

It's almost a year since she is closeted into this room. That did hurt her in the beginning. She took time to reconcible to the fact. But could do it, Finally. Long hospitalisation didn't help. And when the Doctor decided that continuing in the hospital was of no use, it was she who insisted that this room should be hers. Her mind filled with those pictures drawn by sky and the sea and their joining spots she had watched from this room. The changes that occur to the sea. Sea was generally quiet in nature. But, on occasions it takes a devilish demonish form and starts attacking everything. Those attacks frightened and disturbed her, The monsoon wind brought water drops inot the room through these rains. Its more than a fun, more than mere enjoyment to stand beside this open window which allowed wind to bring in those rain droplets, get the hairs wet and..... she didn't even bother to close the wind. And didn't allow her mother to do it. She didnt want to miss that opportunity of watching nature turning to a Durga, reading to destroy everything. She used to analyse the reasons for this change of mood of nature But never did her analysis give a complete answer.

Once she was enjoying the sight of sea lashing hard at the sea walls built not from her house. Her mother was worried. " God! Where will I go with these kids if the sea advaces futher?"

"Dont worry mom. She will not advance further. I am sure about it"

" How can you be sure? It has already created havoc around. Anthu's house has fallen down. The fishing boat of Nanu Muthalali has disaappeared in the outer sea. People say that Anthu too was there in that boat. It's more than twenty four hours since they had gone to the sea,"

She kept her lips tight. She wanted to talk a lot.

Anthu is lucky. He could be a guest to Mother sea. She would have decided not to leave him back. That may be the reason why she decided to take his house too.

She couldn't tell this to her mom. If she utters those words, mom would get more bothered, worried. This would be a new subject for her botheration.

The sea wall is beside her house. It appeared there only three to four years back. She had heard that the sea used to get violent. That was before this sea wall was constructed. But she never had an experience of the sea entering their compound.

When sea becomes violent, she lost many of her usual and regular sights. The sky would also be cloudy in those days. It would be windy too. The rain would be pouring. The waves would be lashing one after other. None would dare to take their boat out to the sea. This would continue for two to three days. Or for a maximum of a week. And then, the great sea would return to its peaceful days.

Clear blue sky, blue waters. And they would be wondering where to meet.

Was the horizon starting where the sea ended or was it from where the horizon ends...

The very next day after the sky cleared she had to be shifted back to the hospital. It started with a fever. Then it took a different form. A slightly violent form. She lost her consciousness. She was blabbering. She was told about it after she returned to normally by her younger sister.

It was pain to be in consciousness and at the same time stay back in the hospital bed. When none was near, she called the duty nurse and requested that she wanted to talk to the doctor. The doctor came to her. She told him.

"You know that I have now fully recovered. And the weakness of my legs....that has come to stay, will not now recover. What I

need is peace of mind. I need to be in my house, In my room for that. I want to see the sea from my room. I want to see the sky from there. I want to see the colour of setting sun from there. And for that"

Doctor understood her state of mind.

"I will discharge you immediately. But, don't forget to take these medicines continuously. And visit me once in a month."

She watched the sea from her bed in her room. She watched the horizon. Silently. They talked to each other. In a language which only they understood.

When she used to go to the school, she used to run towards the sea shore immediately on reaching home from school. She would be eager to play with her playmate. "Let us start....." she would shout happily as soon as she reached there.

And when the first wave comes she will start counting". Yes here we go... let us start...One".

And when the second one comes she will continue "Two"

And there comes the third "There"

And again "Four"

The game was known only two of them. None wins or none loses in that game.

Oh! how much do you have? Where do you hide all these waves?

Before the sea could reply she would hear the call from her mother.

"Let me go now. You know how my mom shouts. It's a non-stop machine. I don't want her to start."

The sea bid her bye with a gentle wave. The sea washed her feet with that gentle wave. She took that wave in her hand and washed her face. With all due respects she cleaned her eyes with that wave and poured a drop on to her head, as she does with the sacred water the temple priest gives her when she visits the temple.

That was their last meeting. That night she was down with fever.

The rain was pouring. Her mother came in and closed the windows. She pretended as if she was sleeping. And when she was sure that her mom had slept she opened the windows. The wind whistled in. The rain was in full fury. She could hear the roaring of the sea.

Next morning when she was being shifted to the hospital, her mother was seemingly upset with what she had done. "Why should you keep that window open always? I had closed it. You are not that young that I should keep on watching and advising you."

And when she returned from the hospital and she insisted that she should be kept in this room her mom didn't object. She noticed her mom's eyes becoming wet and she hid it from her and wiping those tears as if nothing had happened. She took her eyes off her mom and watched the sea.

Many neighbours visited her. They had a handful of news to share.

"Sea took Janaki's hut. She and her kids have taken asylum in the school"

"I saw Thevan's dog's dead body on the beach today"

"That big country boat of Asan has broken into two pieces. Asan is in full of tears and is cursing the sea."

But the sea avoided her house and the compound around it.

That night she looked at the sea through the window and asked. "What happened? Why were you so furious?"

When she repeated this question many a time she could hear her sea whispering to her through its waves. "Curse they carry from their earlier births. They were supposed to experience it."

"Then what about me?"

The sea smiled and sent a gentle wave towards her. That wave whispered "You have not sinned."

"Then why did you decide to part us?" She wanted to ask. But didn't. The words didn't come out.

"What sin did I do?"

She waited for nights together to get an answer. But didn't. She continued to wait expecting that her friend will send that answer to her. It was in those days that she had to be hospitalised again. She was unconscious for almost a week. Then under observation for a fortnight. It took another full week for the Doctor to be convinced that she can be released. And when she returned.

The construction of a big building had started between her house and the sea. The construction was in full swing.

She was devastated. She cried. Why did I become so obstinate and insisted that I shouldn't return? Her mind and heart were being pierced with a sharp knife. The pain in her legs didn't bother her.

"Nanu Muthalali has decided to construct a building there. His son would be shifting his fish business to this new building."

That means that she would henceforth be able to see only the far away sights of the sea. A torn piece of sky only. And slowly even those sights would be taken away from her. It may take at the most another three to four days for the newly coming up building to cover everything from her.

That night, when she was sure that everyone had slept, she wept. Sobbed and asked her friend which had reduced to a spot far away.

"What sin did I do in my earlier lives?"

The sea heard her sobs. She too was upset. Sea informed her that she didn't have an answer to that question. And with that message did it send a huge wave. She saw that huge wave getting ready to lash the shore.

Then the sea regained its normalcy. The sky too was clear. Moonlight smiled over them.

"Why did you abandon me?"

She asked the next wave.

I have lost that precious sight, the first sight which I used to see

when I wake up from my sleep. I have lived this long, even after my limbs failed to move, only because you were with me. I have imagined you talking to the sky at your meeting point, the horizon.

Did the sea get her message? It should have. It was upset. It was becoming furious. It was becoming violent. All in no time.

It's exactly one year since I have been confined to this bed now. It was you who gave me that strength to carry on. The whispers you used to send and the silent chats we used to have. You too were ready to understand my position. And tried to make me happy. That made me hopeful and my eagerness to live on.

You, even when you were violent and was lashing at everything on the shore, used to be smiling and silent when I look at you. And then you renewed our friendship forgetting that you were violent till now.

All those days would be just memories now.

She asked again "Why did you leave me?"

She looked at the sea far away. The sea had reduced to a small spot. She understood that the sea was in no happy mood. Sea's mind was more upset than hers. Sea was becoming ferocious. Sea had taken over her sorrow. Sea was becoming dark. The sky too turned dark. The wave rising from the sea couldn't move forward and were engulfed in whirlpool.

Then the rain started to rattle the roofs. It started to pour. The nature had changed its mood. She could see the half built building of Nanu Muthalali oscillating in that fury.

Then someone started to bawl. But a thunder soaked it abruptly.

She couldn't see the sea. Nor the sky. What she saw was darkness and only darkness.

She turned..... and it surprised her... yes she could move her legs. She pressed her hand on to the sides of the bed and slowly walked towards the door.

She asked herself "What benefit is there with these living legs now?"

She has lost that sea shore which gave freedom to move around. She has lost those waves with whom she used to play.

Once that shopping complex comes up, the owner of her beloved sights would be he. His boats and his men would fill the sight. She is sure to lose her freedom to talk to her sea.

She was determined. She opened the door ignoring the pain. She stepped into the rain.

She understood that the fury of rain was increasing. But that fury couldn't stop her. She walked through the narrow path by the side of the upcoming building. On to the sea shore.

She was happy when she reached the shore. A happiness which could not be defined. They shared their happiness.

It looked as if the rain had stopped.

She walked on the sea shore. Each wave looked happy to see her. To welcome her. They smiled at her. They became gentle than the gentler. She was not seeing the sea. It was not the sea which she saw from the window. It was her play mate. A play mate whom she had not met for years now. She slowly walked into her play mate's hand.

Into the castle of mother sea. The chariot was ready. She stepped into it.

The sound by the wheels of the chariot produced the sweetest music she had ever heard. The wind fanned her. She enjoyed that journey.

## STORY

The dead body to Life

ISSAC EAPPAN

There were sixteen houses in my street. Out of which fifteen were surrounded by compound walls of six feet high and protected by huge watch dogs. This includes a house, where in the frontyard clusters of white grapes hang slantingly with a door, having black lock and bolt and another one which attracted the attention of all by its artificially made lotus pond, in which is roosted in meditation a heron made by clay, spreading its melancholy all around. The pathways were silent. On the row the sixteenth house, a thatched one, was ugly with cracked walls. It was a disgrace to other magnificent houses as it was like a stray dog, and it was mine.

But I lived small rooms where dwell silence and cob webs. While sleeping on the subtlety of an easy chair abandoned by my father, and while listening to the lullaby enfolded in love and dreams of my mother, the house developed in me as an enormous fort of refuge.

That fort unfurled the wings of shelter. But all the fifteen residents bargained for our hut always. I recollected those days in which dreams were built up in the palships of evenings and were watered to grow with the tears of expectation extracted from the eyes of my mother.

I had acquaintances only with a few families in the street. That developed, by seeing the nameboards regularly, hanging on the compound walls. Accordingly the first one was a bank officer, the second one was a Gulf repatriate, and the third one.... In the thirteenth house lived the retired Judge, Justice George. The glittering letters on the name board on the compound wall always gave feeling of fear or mockery. I have never seen this house open. Whenever I pass by it, I thought of the Judge's family- his wife and children. In the country yard of his house there was others simply due to human instinct. In the rain as well as summer alike no others dried garden, in which never sprouts a plant, even though water was poured abundantly. Often a girl appeared in the garden in a state of patting and watering it..... I failed to ascertain her relationship with the Justice.

The out of line relationship of the other fourteen houses always made puzzled. In fact I have no business to enquire about all these things. Why should I interfere in the life of others as I am a person who spends most of the time in reading Dostoyevsky and Camus who were so beloved to me, next only to my mother and spends time with the friendship in the dusk, simply dreaming of all impracticalities. Yet I was forced to know about neighbour interfered my thoughts Justice George who stayed in the thirteenth house.

Then it happened in an ordinary evenings. As usual, I was walking. On that evening, contrary to the usual scene, the gate of Justice George was open. Near the gate stood that girl with a worried look, whom I used to see often she was black in complexion. The house was still in darkness as there no lights on. The opened gate, the melancholic looking black girl, darkness..... I felt some inconsistency.

But who is bothered about the rich man's life. Who knows the pros and cons of the rich, I thought.

But suddenly she cried out loudly "the Master lives in here is dead, will you please help?"

I stopped abruptly and turned to look at her face. I saw the fear lurking into her eyes.

She said again "the master is dead, I don't know what to do."

Slowly I dropped in and asked "How did he die? Didn't you inform anyone?"

"I know nobody here"

"Who are you to him"

"A distant relative....name Susy."

She revealed her name without my asking. I began to think that I should help her. But I was sure that since it's a death, that too the death of a retired Justice I should be more careful.

"How did he die, tell me" I insisted.

I don't know. He failed to wake up after the usual nap at 4 o'clock. When I tried to wake him up he was cold and stiff.....

"You killed him or he committed suicide?"

But my witty remark made her weep. So I had forsake my jest and to go along with her.

She was walking in front...I followed through an unfamiliar path. Home we reached and then she earnestly invited me to drop in.

'Put the light on' I asked her. She put a few lights on in the house which has a number of rooms. I walked through the lights in search of the dead body. But what mostly attracted me was the big house than the dead body. I saw the rooms slumbering in the annals of history, with an ancient odour. The small insects living in between the cob-webs and dust were seen running realising the presence of a strange person. The bats in the ceiling and the cooing of the pigeons in the planked upstairs took me to the backyard of history. The cots and chairs made of teak and

mahogany astonished me. Finally she took me to the big room where the dead body was lying. At first nothing was visible....She switched on the lights and showed me the body.

Yes, he was an ordinary man.....in full length, upright and dead. But what came to my sight first was not the deadbody, but the book, "Human Justice A natural view." It was lying on his chest. The smiling face of the tribal girl on the outer cover of the book seemed to be kissing him. He knows nothing. He is dead. And in death there is no knowledge, No rigidity of sense of justice, or perplexity, but only calmness.'

"No relatives to this gentleman?" I asked her.

"No, Nobody"

"What was the illness?"

"I don't know. To me he speaks nothing. I came here by the insistence of my father. I prepare meals and serve. He eats it and then disappears to his room."

O' God, how many persons this man might have sentenced to death...and how many were rewarded with justice.....I thought, justice is, in fact, a relative word and its existence is in power only.

"What to do next?" she asked again.

We must inform the neighbours. But don't think any body will help us at once. That doesn't matter, but the problem of money.....?

She listened to me attentively. When stepped out, she followed me.

By then I felt she was veiled by an anxiety, whether to close the front door or not. How to close the door, when the master is inside, but how to open it when he is lying dead.

At last we came out after bolting the door from outside. We, most regretfully informed the matter of death to all the houses in the street...house no 1...2...3 capital some of them encountered us with indecipherable dialects some others grilled

us. Yet as a duty we went on informing the entire street. The Justice (retired) was still enjoying the smile of the aboriginal girl, pictured on the cover page of the book. Then it dawned upon me that if he continued to lie like this he would be more rigid than while he was alive. Therefore I removed the book "Human Justice" from his chest.

With the help of Susi I removed his outer garments and Pyjama. When I entered into the transparency of his inner garment Susi blushed. She feared, I felt, perhaps I might remove that too. We cleansed his body in lukewarm water. Whenever she touched him, a state of perplexity, fear and reverence surrounded her. Finally I wrapped the dead body in the white dhoti given by Susi and made him lie handsomely. By then it became dark.

Till then, no neighbour turned out and made any enquiry. Alone we sat near the dead body.

'What next', Susi asked.

"Get the candles, if available. Should be lit up..." I said.

I lit the candles she brought and placed them near his head. In its light the face of the retired Justice was illuminated. This is the most enchanting verdict he ever declared, I thought. The verdict nurtured by the great time for him.

Myself and a poor girl, both recipients of the scoff of the world are the only witnesses for the judgment. What shall we do? Even otherwise how much time we can spend with a dead body of a person not related to us? She told me that she would prepare tea for me. I consented to it. She lifted a special cup and showed it to me.

'This is the cup the Master drinks tea' she said.

"Today I will use it" I said.

She liked that boldness. I thought she accepted the moment as a symbol of social equality which destructs Feudalism.

After having tea, we again walked up to the dead body. She had an apprehension that I might leave her by the dead body as the

night thickened. Hence she stood close to me. The candles kept above the head of Justice George were about to cease burning.

What to do next?

I sat near the dead body with Susi. Then I slowly hugged her closely. Slowly I commenced to travel through her black body. She had begun to love me. We in turn, began to love the Justice as well.

We were near the dead. And the Justice lied there as a witness to these wild games. He silently opened his eyes and looked at us. The dead was enjoying all our performances, as if he were in the Court listening to the witness.... Perhaps it is for the first time in his life (read as in his death), he wore the uniform of a witness. He slowly uttered.

'You showed a new and hitherto unknown world to me which is beyond all truths, hood, justice and injustice.... Now I request you to receive my abode from me. You should retrieve a life which I failed to enjoy.'

I also conversed with him from an other end of memory.

'What happened?' Susi asked. I then, left all thoughts and returned to Susi's body.

I now held her close and said,

'Is this the way one should behave when a death occurred in the house? We must inform the Parish Priest. The funeral must be conducted majestically.....?'

While she stood perplexed, I walked towards the telephone.

**Translated by Mr. V. SREENIVASAN**

## STORY

## Champk Trees

SREELATHA

“We don’t want these champk trees here in this courtyard anymore. Enough of thier flowering. If I had planted a mango tree instead, how much money would I have made by this time.”

Her husband declared obruptly.

Wrapped in a bath towel he was pacing in the portico, massaging his oiled body. Winter worsened his arthritis. This doubled his inherent choler. She was watering the Jasmines in the courtyard. The culprit was standing near the parapet with bent head, flowers ready to be plucked conveniently from the terrace. The pleasant aroma of the flowers filled the air.

“Had Ajayan called?”

He asked suddenly, pausing midway.

“No. why? Doesn’t he always call on sundays. Today is saturday only.....”

“Oh..... is it like giving ‘biksha’ to beggars..... calling on auspicious days only....”

“You always find fault with him. Is he that much rich to call us daily....”

“Thanks for your sermon on richness. During the time of registration was this son of your’s richer? He used to call daily those days.” He spat into the courtyard spitefully.

“Is anything important happening now....to call us daily?”

She queried.

“Had Rajan and Rema called?”

She got wild.

“What is this? Are you taking a list of your children and questioning me...? If they had called wouldn’t I tell you? Or you yourself can hear.... You are not going anywhere are you?.....”

I am getting older. She told herself.

This short temper is its symptom.

Hadn’t she mastered the art of smiling with anger suppressed within?

A choleric husband and a silent wife were the occupants of the house.

Through all these years this champak tree stood as her companion, often leading her gently down memory lane. It gladdened her by showering flowers incessantly, and supported her whenever she faltered. For all others this champak tree was an ordinary tree, a useless one. And she a dreamer for growing a useless tree in a tiny 10cent plot.

If she had planted a mango tree or even a cashew tree instead, how much money.....

She wanted to shout at them.

Do you know.....these champak trees...they are my life..... I myself..... Umpteen champak tree bloomed in her thoughts. The grey green bark and broad rough leaves. The gentle aroma of the yellow red flowers, a deep sign rising from the interiors of the tree which lingered as a sweet dream refusing to fade. When the senses were filled with the sweet scent of the flowrs she could overcome any hurdle in life in one easy leap. That scent became the key to unlock the store houses of past smells and sounds. Her parents, grand mother and brother who had left for 'the' cold, dark and unknown worlds came back to see her.

Father returned home rolling his rally cycle. A bag hung on the carrier containing his lunch box and fish bought from the market. His voice dispersed into the silence which followed the rain.

"Didn't get anything, amma..... How can the fishermen go fishing in this torrential rain? Got only 'thoodapodi' Ammama's trembling voice could be heard from yesterday.

a small sea fish. grandmother.

"Doesn't matter.....If only thoodapodi it is enough. How can one eat anything without at least the smell of fish....."

Fifty odd years have not destroyed the vibrance of those voices.

Ammama's prayers could be heard distnity.

'Nama Shivaya Sankari.....

Namashivaya parvati..... Sunita close the manger doors.....Nama Shivaya.....

The sound of breeding cows could be heard from the manger.....

The sharp smell of frying dry fish pierced her nostrils. Her mouth watered.

Suddenly she was startled from her reverie.

The hose had slipped from her hand.

She was standing still in a daze.

Her husband, pausing, was staring at her.

How did I reach here..... This double-Storeyed terraced building, from a one-storeyed house?.....She wondered.

"Dreaming in this old age....." he sneered.

She closed the pipe without replying.

"Where is that boy.....? He continued.

He had not come yet to pay off the bill.....and tomoarrow is the last date..... How much will have to pay.... including not only the bill but also the late fee....I myself shall go to pay it tomorrow.

"You need not bother to stand in the queue with your arthritis. I shall pay thebill."

"Come on, have you ever gone anywhere alone.....even to a shop.....Don't tell me you can do it.....

She felt tired. She sat on the verandha, stretching out her legs. Vericose veins created ugly maps on her thighs . Shots of pain tore at the maps. She leaned on the wall and closed her lyes, gently massaging her veins.

The soothing aroma of flowers floated around her. In her minds eye appeared 'amma' with the youthfulness of thirty, wearing a cotton sari, trailing behind her the train of children. Amma carried a bag in one hand and a flast hung on her wrist. She held an open umbrella in the other hand.

She can't do without an umbrella for fear of head ache.

Once in a while she will collapse with severe headache. It is the duty of the daughters (She and sister) to make a smooth paste of root skin of gooseberry and apply it on her forehead. She will catch headache even if she misses the tea at 11'o clock.

The flask contains tea. Amma also kept a bottle of bournvita mixed with milk with her. It was for me, she remembered. She was afflicted with children's tuberculosis at the age of four. By long treatment it was cured. Thenceforth amma was cautious to give her nutritious food only.

<sup>1</sup>Chechy and <sup>2</sup>chettan always raised complaints on account of this.

“amma you didn’t love us. That is why you are giving egg, fried fish, and chicken liver and bournvita to <sup>3</sup>‘unni’ alone.

She could hear amma’s soothing words distinctly from the distance of decades.

“Don’t you know unni is very weak. She will again fall ill if we don’t give her milk, egg and fish and chicken in plenty.....

The procession to school led by amma who is a teacher at the school and they students, can still be seen, she thought. On each side of the road were cashewtrees growing thickly.

Next was the stone cultverst. Next to it on the left side of the road was the road side shelter built for the bye-passers.

On its ruined steps sat the beggar called <sup>4</sup>‘Thinkalaazhcha’ pasu on all Mondays. Pasu wore a black dhoti and black shirt and kept red hibiscus flowers upon both his ears. They were afraid of pasu. He always pelted stones at children and chased them away with his long, stout walking sticks.

On the right side of the road were the small coconut leaf-thatched houses of <sup>6</sup>‘kuruppanmar’

Menflok could bend their heads before Bala Kurup once in each month. Once in a while she and chechi also. It is to trim their hair. Trimming will

- 1 elder sister
- 2 elder brother
- 3 youngest kid.
4. Monday
5. Barbers

enhance the growth of hair.

She could even now get the smell of cut hair and hear the advice of Balakurupp....

“Go....tell amma to oil the cut ends of “your hair and tie it up tightly.”

Frequently Balakurup’s amma <sup>1</sup>kurupathi will pay a visit to <sup>2</sup>ammama. She takes ammama to the bathroom. When both go into the bathroom aunti Sunita will start giggling!

She didn’t know at that time what both of them were doing in the bathroom.....

Thye will see Baby Teacher near the houses of kuruppanmar. Baby Teacher was <sup>3</sup>Achan’s teacher. Teacher liked her much and she will bring champaka flowers for her. She will reach the school in a trance, smelling the flower and being carried away by the enchanting smell of flowers.

One day the teacher gave her a champak sapling. She planted it in a broken stonepot filling it with sand, dried cow dung and ash. She herself watered it with a tiny pot. But one day the sapling disappeared mysteriously from the pot. She cried bitterly for long. Teacher gave her another champlalc plant. Aunti Radechi had come home at that time from her in-laws house. It was Radechy who had planted the plant this time.

There was a belief that the person who plants the champaka tree will die in the year in which the tree first blooms. (After her marriage Radechy belonged to <sup>4</sup>maman’s house. That may be the reason why she did not die)

After many years she bought a champaka sapling from the nursey to plant in this 10 cent plot. Anyway she didn’t try to pursue the applicability of the superstition. She got it planted by the new servant and it started to bloom from the third year onwards.

“There started shedding tears again?..... this time no use of your tears.....When Mani comes the first thing I will get him to do is the cutting of this chanpaka tree and the planting of a <sup>5</sup>‘moovandan’ Mango tree in its place. Are you still a young girl to strut up and down donning flowers in your hair? Before whom you are exhibiting yourself?

“Yes. Somebody is interested in me. This is to lure him. Who won’t get fed up with daily dessert even if it is sweet?”

1. barbar Women
2. grand mother
3. father.
4. Uncle’s
5. a variety of mango

There ended the joke.

“I know for sure. No woman would decorate herself without any reason. I know that very well.”

“Enough of this nonsense. Better take your bath before the water turns cold.....”

He continued complaining as if he did not hear.

“She thinks I won’t understand anything because I am old.....”

She didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. He was sixty five and she fifty eight. But he still behaved like a jealous and suspicious husband of a 30 year old wife

“Where is my dhoti? its always misplaced. When will you learn to keep things in the right place.....?”

She got up hearing the pandemonium inside of opening and shutting shelves. Throughout the thirty eight years of married life has he ever taken his dress from the cupboard without her help.

While taking the dhoti out eyes came across the empty medicine kit. Yesterday he had gone to the town to buy medicines for both of them for one month. But had forgotten to remind him to buy pills for controlling blood pressure. If she remind him now....better to keep mum now....otherwise another quarrel will ensue. After all there was only one medicine for the permanent cure of her illness. And it was nothing else, but the presence of her children.

Non existing medicine for the incurable illness. She has now given up hope of breathing her last in the presence of her children.

The only relief in the alienation and ailment is the champaka trees. Its presence sustained her as her dearest kin in the hostile world. It revived in her memories of her childhood and adolescence. I have the feeling that I am not alone because of ‘her’ . The presence of my parents, my brothers and sisters is regained to me just because she is here. She recreates in me the memoirs of long bygone childhood and adolescence. I could see

my children plucking the flowers of the champaka tree and I could hear their chatters...

“Amma... see this Rajettan is pushing me down”

Rema screams.

- “Amma you know why? This greedy monkey wants all the flowers all by herself....to show off before her friends in the school”.

I could hear my own words.....

“The terrace is slippery. Don’t fall fighting both of you.....”

The feel of their soft skins brought goose pimples to her aged wrinkled flesh now.

Told myself. No I have not lost anything. It’s just my feeling.....nothing is lost. ‘She’ is consoling me. ‘Don’t worry I am always with you.’

I am not alone. Everyone.....my children my in - laws, grand children, siblings.....all are with me.

For them to be with me ‘she’ should also be with me here itself.

Neither a mango tree or some mangoes nor a few currency notes can create this comfort and relief.....can they.....?

Please tell me?.....she pleaded to him silently.

If they can.....only if they can..... do chop this tree.....or else when I die may this bosom friend of mine also turn to ashes along with my mortal body in my ancestral home. Please don’t ever.

tell me that you are going to cut her down.

**Translated by Prof.K. USHA.**