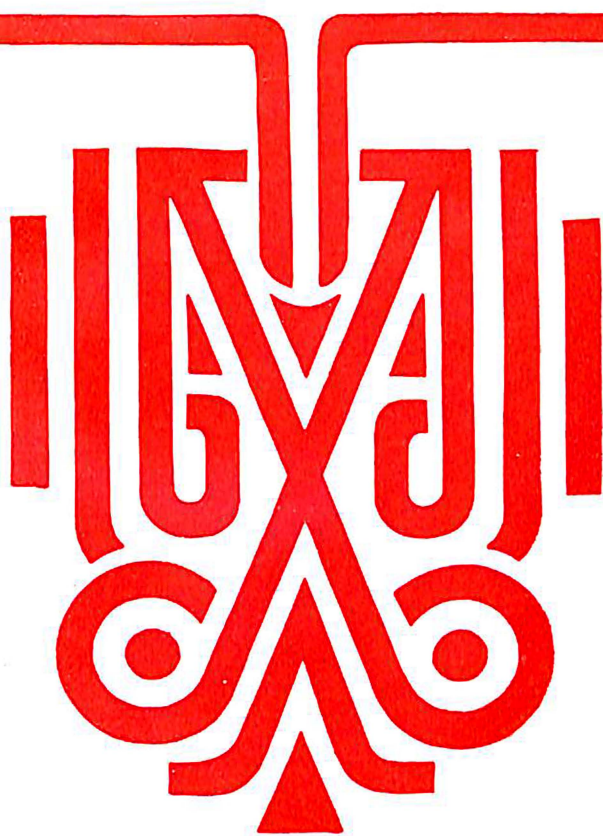


# MALAYALAM LITERARY SURVEY



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# MALAYALAM LITERARY SURVEY

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# EDITORIAL

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## About Ourselves

In the history of Malayalam literature the year 1981, which we have just left behind us, is memorable because the Jnana Pith Award was won by a Malayalam novelist in that year. It must be remembered that this is the second time that Malayalam literature is receiving the most prestigious prize for literature in India. This time the award was given to S. K. Pottekkat's novel, *Oru Desathinte Katha* (The Story of a village). We are proud of the fact that Sri Pottekkat has been associated with the Akademi from the time of its inception.

The Akademi, after completing twentyfive years of meritorious service, is now in the twenty sixth year of its life. In spite of financial and other difficulties the Akademi has made admirable progress on all fronts during the last twenty five years. The President of the Akademi, Sri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, has again and again drawn the attention of the Central and State Governments to the deplorable fact that the Akademi has not so far received adequate financial support either from the Central Government or from the Central Sahitya Akademi. The State Government's grant falls much short of the growing needs of the Akademi. Under these circumstances it is gratifying to hear that the State Government has opened in the Secretariat a separate department called the Cultural Department to deal directly with the various Akademies and other cultural organisations. We thank the Government for having taken this wise step, seeking thereby to meet a long-felt need. But at the same time we should like to point out that the creation of the new Department may not, in itself, mean much. Other steps are necessary to make it serve its purpose to the fullest extent. For one thing, adequate funds have to be placed at the disposal of the Department. For another, the special needs of autonomous bodies dealing with art and literature have to be borne

in mind while the rules and regulations of Governmental control and supervision are enforced.

We thank all our contributors and readers for the unstinted support and co-operation that they have rendered us so far. We hope to receive the continued support and encouragement of all lovers of literature.

## **Shri P. Thomas**

Shri P. Thomas, the veteran journalist, has been the Honorary Editor of this Quarterly from the time of its inception five years ago. In recent months he was finding it difficult to continue in the post owing to several personal reasons and so, at his own request, the Akademi has, with great reluctance, allowed him to retire. The Akademi wants to place on record its great appreciation of his work and its deep feelings of gratitude to him for having discharged his duties as Honorary Editor with remarkable efficiency and sincerity. The Editorial Board will continue to remember his invaluable services and be inspired by his high journalistic standards and his rare sense of dedication. We wish Shri Thomas health and happiness in his retired life.

Professor P. Rajaram Menon has been appointed Honorary Editor in place of Shri Thomas.

## NALACHARITHAM

---

Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai

*Nalacharitham* belongs to the class of poetic composition called *Attakkatha* sung at the back of the stage by musicians when the *Kathakali* artistes render it through facial expressions gestures and dance according to the traditional rules that Bharata and those who came after him expounded. These texts have their stories taken largely from the Puranas and their poetry is a mixture of narrative verses in Sanskrit metres known as *slokas* and musical items of dialogue known as *padas*. Among the more than five hundred works which have been written in this genre, presumably from the early decades of the 17th century, when the first works were composed by a ruler of the principality of Kottarakkara, Unnayi Varier's *Nalacharitham* is rated by universal opinion as easily one of the two or three outstanding ones, a conclusion arrived at from the point of view of its literary quality, its music and its stage-worthiness.

Though little is known about the author himself as undisputed facts except a few odd data here and there, the composition itself has continued to be a standing monument to his genius. As to the date of the poet the majority opinion now concurs with the view of the literary historian, Ullur. According to this view Varier lived between 1675 A. D. and 1755 A. D. As his surname itself indicates, he belonged to the community of Variers, traditional garland-makers in temples. Born at Irinjalakkuda in the erstwhile State of Cochin, he probably moved on to Trivandrum, capital of the Travancore State, and enjoyed the patronage of its ruler in the company of distinguished contemporaries like Kunchan Nambiar, the celebrated humorist and author of *Thullal* works. There are controversies on whether *Ramapanchasati*, a Sanskrit work and *Girija kalyanam*, a narrative poem in Malayalam sometimes ascribed to Varier, are really his,

If it is the sign of a classic that passages from it are on the lips of generations of readers, then *Nalacharitham* enjoys that distinction. Even as passages of *Waiting for Godot* and *The Waste Land* have become the cultural coins of an age, so have some of the lines in *Nalacharitham* been absorbed into the everyday speech of the literary Malayalee. A phrase like *akrti kantat atiromaniyam* (Isn't she beautiful!) is sometimes on the lips of a sedate scholar or on those of an itinerant Romeo on an evening stroll in front of a Women's College. And there are several similar passages in Varier's work which are favourite quotations. Not that these are indicators of the mood and ethos of an age. But they have touched some centre of sensibility in generations of readers, and have tended to be unconscious expressions of moods. Musical passages in *Nalacharitham* have been in use at the *Thiruvathira* dances which women perform on festive occasions. This too has contributed to the popularity of the work. In other words, Unnayi Varier's work has a Public, to borrow a classic coinage of Jean Paul Sartre.

The text of *Nalacharitham* is in four parts, each part intended for Kathakali performance

of one night, the total work thus contributing to four night's performance. Together these four parts or four days' plays present the drama of the life and love of Nala and Damayanti included in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharatha*.

Unnayi Varier's work shows his genius in every aspect of a work intended as literature and as text for a performing art. The innovations he has made in the plot are of high artistic value. The appearance of the golden swan at the close of the work is an instance in point. He dissuades Nala from killing the defeated Pushkara. The work thus does not end as a tragedy. In this he follows a rule in Sanskrit dramaturgy not generally observed in this genre - there are several *Kathakali* works that end as tragedies.

While not all *Kathakali* works are good or even passable as literature, *Nalacharitham* is a brilliant exception. The last lines of Book I show what ideas the poet himself entertained on good literature. There Saraswathi blesses Nala and Damayanti thus:-

May you, your wife and those who have you in mind be blessed with literature

which is rich in meaning, has a flow of pleasing words, has such verbal ornaments as *yamaka* and *anuprasa* (alliteration) and ornaments of meaning like *upama* (simile).

These words of the goddess of speech describe Variyer's own poetry. There are several passages in *Nalacharitham* famous for the word-play in them. Variyer is a master in the combination of apt words matching in phonetic felicity. Sometimes the first sounds match; sometimes the final ones and at other times groups of final sounds. It is design at its best resulting in sensuous delight. True, the poet sometimes shows a pleasing self-abandon and takes liberties with grammar, But then it is poetic licence. The use of Sanskrit words in the verses and Malayalam words in the *padas* is the rule of Kathakali literature. But the author of *Nalacharitham* reverses this order pretty often. So we find verses with pure Malayalam words in plenty and dialogues in which Sanskrit words dominate. Indeed he has not hesitated to Sanskritise even well-known Malayalam proverbs with their age-old phrases. An example is the proverb - *tetiya valli kal-*

*il chutti* (the sought has been got by chance) into a Sanskrit expression '*militam padayugale margitaya lataya*'. The colloquialisms used by Variyer, a considerable Sanskrit scholar, are arresting and perhaps indicate a certain vitality of the age when men, who had been long under despotic local chiefs, began to breathe again freely when Travancore's central power had liquidated the local rulers. On such use of racy colloquialism F. R. Leavis writing on the *Pilgrim's Progress*\* remarks:-

The names and racy turns are organic with the general style, and the style concentrating the life of popular idiom, is the expression of popular habit - the expression of a vigorous human culture.

We are reminded of this vitality of human life when Variyer uses a colloquial word like *pennu* (woman) in one of his oft-quoted lines or a phrase like *entonnu* (what is it?) and several others in the body of his work. A member of the elite group of his time by virtue of his birth and scholarship, he was also in tune with the vibrant vitality of the life of the masses of his time.

\* R. P. Bilan. The Literary Criticism of F. R. Leavis P II

Yet for Varier the word was only the garb for meaning or content. That is why he mentions 'meaning' first and 'word' only next in the passage quoted earlier. And meaning was not solely lexical for him. It was the total inner content-sense, sentiment and sensibility. The dominant sentiment in *Nalacharitham* is the sentiment of love (sringara) in both types of its manifestations, in union and separation. Other sentiments like pathos (karuna) heroism (vira) and wonder (adbhuta) contribute towards the nourishment of love. All critics are agreed that *Nalacharitham* is a supreme success in the delineation of sentiment. Presentation of dramatic conflicts, use of irony as in the episode of Nala, a lover in anguish going as a messenger of somebody else's love for his very girl; apt use of words and expressions rich in sensibility—all these help the poet in effectively conveying the intended sentiment. Not less important is the adaptation of the length and rhythm of the dialogues to suit the sentiment. Whereas the dramatic conflict in an epic narrative is latent in it, the author of the drama or *Kathakali* work on it has to recreate his character in flesh and blood, endow them with dimensions

and make them say the proper words in order to bring out the drama and sentiments in a situation. Varier has done this beautifully. His characters have dimensions and they pulsate with life and reflect living models in the community. A non-human character like the Swan, for example, has a distinct personality — witty, sensitive, diplomatic, graceful and helpful. So is the messenger Sudeva, some of whose lines in the text are oft-quoted. The poet's success in portraying the major characters like Nala and Damayanti needs no special mention. Critics have also applauded the way in which Varier has structured his work on the basis of the well-known five *Sandhis* in a Sanskrit drama. The portion of the text upto the Swan returning from his visit to Damayanti with a message of her love constitutes the *mukhasandhi*. Then there is the *prathimukhasandhi* upto Pushkara's challenge. The game of dice and episodes upto Nala's abandoning Damayanti in the forest form the *garbhasandhi*, and the separation of the couple upto Rituparna's arrival to take part in Damayanti's rumoured second marriage, covers the *vimarsasandhi*. The final portion of the text is the *nirvahanasandhi*.

Unnayi Varier was a product of his time. His mind had, doubtless, registered the sycophancy before power, the untruth and falsity of his time. We find ample expressions of his reaction to these. Thus, when the swan offers help to Nala, the latter asks:

Do you say this to please me

Or will you really do it?

The poet obviously remembers here the flattery and empty promises which characterised life in the royal courts. While a contemporary of Varier, Kunchan Nambiar, went further ahead in his criticism of society Varier's own reactions, though subdued were none the less, eloquent. We find his criticism of urban society more eloquent when the banished Nala says that the forest, where he finds himself, is a very city compared with the wicked place which goes by that name.

While Varier thus reacted to contemporary society, his moral moorings were none the less secure. There is in his work a nostalgic tendency to look back to the idyllic age of the sages, forests and hermitages. Like several other *poets* of his age, and even of later times, Varier is goaded by a wicked present to idealise the past. That past was one where stability was

guaranteed. So the poet asks: "What can one do when even gods cannot be relied upon?" It is also a past in which wickedness (*kali*) is finally defeated and virtue triumphs. In the *Mahabharatha* the Nala story is narrated to convince Yudhishtira and the other Pandavas of the evil effects of playing dice. Did Varier, selecting this story, have an implied message for the kings of his time? and before women he certainly placed Damayanti as a model of stability of character in a world of fickle affections, easy marriages and divorces. The world which Varier has borrowed from the Puranas is one in which gods are occasionally afflicted with human longings; men in the grip of passions act as rogues and fools; and the knots which human logic and realism cannot untie are loosened by magic *mantras* and heavenly voices. Consequently we find that the location of the *Nalacharitham* story is both in heaven and on the earth. As for the time-span of the work, it is difficult to determine it exactly. But a fifteen-year period may be a safe guess. However, the dramatic compactness of the work makes this time-analysis purely an academic exercise.

Nalacharitham is one of the classical works in Malayalam which reward a close structural analysis. Its outer structure is enriched by felicitous language, linkage of matching beauties in usage, a dynamic rhythm and words with evocative power. Critics have described this latter aspect as the suggestive power of Varier's language. If each poet creates his poetic dialect from the common reservoir of the community's language and converts the utilitarian into the artistic, then Varier has done it eminently in Malayalam. In the sphere of deeper structure his sense of time, his world-view and his moral code deserve special mention. Varier invokes the past through his Puranic plot and through his retrospective narration of the past on some occasions. The main representation of the present in Nalacharitham is in its narrative present. And the future? Its chief representation of it is in the hopes and poignant expectations of the

characters. Nala's and Damayanti's hopes, sorrows and frustrations humanise the sense of the future in this work. Whereas the past and present are largely time-conceptions here, the future is a framework of emotional data. And this future is a prolonged agony that a Nala or a Damayanti has necessarily to go through for a span of time, living this agony, though hopeful of relief. As for Varier's world-view we have already made some observations on it. His cynical attitude to pretensions is obvious; but he pins his hope on the stability of a past culture and its code of morals. There is anguish when this stability is disturbed by the very guardian gods behaving funnily. The basic plank of this stability, however, is the belief that each man must live his destiny - a belief voiced in *Nalacharitham* in several places. As for *Nalacharitham* itself it lives its rich destiny about which it can be proud as one of Malayalam's beautiful classics.

# TAMING THE TIGER OF TIME:

## AN APPROACH TO VYLOPPILLY'S POETRY

---

Vishnu Narayanan Nambudiri

In an age when criticism is almost drowned in journalistic jugglery and popularity is submerged by organised publicity, the plight of the true bard is often that of neglect and obscurity. But Vyloppilly Sreedhara Menon (b. 1911) is a happy exception to this. He stands head and shoulders above most of his compeers; he seldom leaves his high pedestal. Yes, there is a keen fragrance in the air he breathes and his hands are starved.

The fact that he has always refused to leave his altitude of vision offers the key to unlock the secret of his success. His muse has long withstood the rightwing as well as the leftwing temptation to come down. His first book *Kanni-koithu* (Maiden Harvest) was upheld by no less a critic than Marar as creative evidence against the progressive movement of the pink period. Today one wonders what he might have said, had he found the poet placed on the crest

of the anti-emergency movement. What disappoints many of his admirers and impresses the discerning critic is that Vyloppilly is not at all fascinated by such tributes and titles. He does not like to appear with a medal on his gown. If he has to wear it he does so with uneasiness, be it thrust on him by the revolutionaries or the reactionaries. It is to be borne in mind that this uneasiness does not come from callousness or unconcern, but just the contrary. As a poet he is most sensitive, acutely aware of the trends and undercurrents of the social stream. His response to them is not determined by any consideration of the outcome but the dictates of the deeper voice in him.

Vyloppilly's stern adherence to loftiness in voice and approach commands admiration when we consider the varied tones and the wide range of subjects and moods which he has dexterously handled. Any collection of his poems from

*Kannikkoithu* to *Makarakkoi-thu* (Second Harvest) will amply testify his mastery over the inherent music of folk rhythms as well as conventional and classical metres. He never strays out of a certain line of dignity in tone, an even level of quality in imagery and diction. Coming to his themes, they present an impressive spectrum from Alexander's invasion of India to a fox found in the zoo; from the ethical issues in a communist society to the desire for a cool feminine kiss in the hot noontide. As we shall presently see, the problem of time and space has been solved by this biologist-poet in his own inimitable way. The eternal and the ephemeral are the bulk and molecules of time, as he sees it. It is not that they are interrelated, not even that they are sides of the same coin, but that they are just the same. The *Anasuyas* and the *Vibhandakas* move of course in timelessness. Nevertheless they are of the moment too. A similar synthesis may be observed in his treatment of the general and the particular. The pangs of *Kudiozhikkal* (Eviction) reveal not only the social maladies of an aching age; they also expose the bleeding heart of a middle-

class intellectual who is afflicted with sympathy for the poor.

Such capability to harmonise the apparent dualities of existence requires, on the part of the creator, non-attachment of the highest order. He must be able to embrace the world as it is and keep his self to himself. Vyloppilly has exquisitely developed this non-attachment during his four decades of creative writing. He can, in a heaven-sent moment, receive the affectionate kiss from *Amba* or Mother Cosmos, but he knows fully well that the touch felt on his mortal flesh can be a mosquito bite. Is this cynicism? Scepticism? or disbelief? No, the poet would assure us.

We are a golden opposition

Seeing always the other side  
of good.

This tendency to look at the other side often results in a twist of his brow, and in his unreserved criticism of others including his own friends, and of himself. Much of the human drama in *Eviction* is derived out of this kind of self analysis. While welcoming and striving for a socio-political and economic revolution, he just can't help warning over enthusiastic partisans of an

imminent collapse of culture  
if they are not cautious.

‘For the body a mite will  
do; for the soul  
The entire world is not  
enough’

And he has proved in his latest work, *Makarakkoithn* that he is not unable to blend spirituality with politics. He achieves this by a happy perception of the gem of spiritual virtue in the deepest levels of our social strata. *The down-trodden*, the wretched at the bottom, are essentially instruments of change in the social world, but they are also instruments of a divine harmony in men. To our surprise the poet discovers such a spirituality even in the world of plants. And here, I suppose his loftiness of vision is perfect.

Needless to say, this balance of the opposites is not obtained as a windfall; one has to dare and risk in order to achieve it. Vyloppilly has never hesitated to say ‘no’ to any intruding influence into his inner world of creativity. And in his poetical career, especially in times of general unrest and indecision, he has never been deaf to the call of sacrifice. The whole life of the poet is a sustained and strenuous effort to fill up the void

in the Universal Design with his own sublimated self. Perhaps this is precisely what the sages called *Tapas*. In a beautiful song of his verse-play *Risyasringan* the poet presents a few young men who set out in darkness with the candles of *tapas*. They go turning their back on a feast of sweets soaked in nectar. And in the course of their spiritual adventure they conquer and tame the tiger of time; the dualities are all buried deep in the folds of their wrinkled faces.

One may well ask: What is such hard-earned wealth of the spirit for? Vyloppilly has given us a clue to his answer in *Ujvalamuhurtam* (The Glowing Moment.) Loftiness of soul does not make one escape into clouds; nor does it allow one to lie in dross. It simply brings one to where one actually belongs. Just as a mother squanders all her earnings at the wedding of her daughter, the poet, the vates, uses his spiritual eminence to uplift those who are down and out. To him it is not a question of any come-down or compromise; it is his sacred duty to help all thinking hearts of this generation to *tame* the tiger of our bad time.

# THE CAMP

G. Sankara Pillai

## Characters:

- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Master Brain | 3. First Stranger  |
| 2. Mister Brawn | 4. Second Stranger |

(When the stage is lighted up, it suggests a room in a Travellers' Bungalow. But the setting need not be realistic. A Telephone and a large window at the back wall are essentials. The window reveals the evening sky and in the fading light a low wall surmounted by a wire fence with two or three rows of wires. Quite different from the usual furnishing there is an open coffin in the room and a long broom is kept leaning on the wall, at a corner. From a peg on the wall hangs a gown or apron-like thing somewhat resembling the uniform of a hospital attendant.

On the stage are Master Brain and Mister Brawn. The former is lean and the latter is what his name suggests. Both are wearing overalls similar to the one hanging from the peg, but with a different colour. Both are engaged in cleaning the room where cobwebs can be seen hanging here and there. Master Brain is engaged in sweeping them away. The other is, trying to wipe off a stain on the floor.

Master Brain:

(behind a cobweb) The more you take it away, the more it comes.

Mister Brawn:

(still at his work, not listening). Bloodstains! Human? Or is it an animal's? Don't know

(sits thinking for sometime; resuming the work vigorously)

(Silence)

Master Brain:

(Beating with vigour an insect trapped in the web) Being trapped is not enough, should die honourably too. No use to struggle hard .....Ah! finished at last. Oh! how pathetic...

(Mister Brawn lifts his head as if disturbed from his concentration. Then he silently resumes work)

(Silence)

Master Brain:  
(Suddenly drops the broom as if he is thoroughly disgusted)  
Fed up!

But he makes no attempt to attend the telephone. Master Brain takes it)

Mister Brawn:  
(Looks up) What?

Master Brain:  
Fed up. Fed up. Fed up with this incessant sweeping and dusting.

Mister Brawn:  
(Stares as if he cannot understand)

Master Brain:  
Don't you understand what I said? No wonder. No use being built like a column; one should have something inside the head, some light.

Mister Brawn:  
You mean sunlight? (looks)

Master Brain:  
Let it not be my lot  
To carry poetry to a dullard  
(knocking at Mister Brawn's head) Oh. let it not be!

Mister Brawn:  
(suddenly jumps up. Master Brain laughs)  
Make it quick. Quick.  
(suddenly the telephone rings. Both are startled. Mister Brawn gestures to suggest the question - "Didn't I tell you?"

Master Brain:

Yes, my lord. It will be done. Yes. Everything is ready. Yes (replaces telephone) ..(in severe self-contempt) what use being fed up or even dead? This is the job to be done. Only this (takes the broom and works angrily)

Mister Brawn:

(stopping his work and smiling at the noise the other fellow is making) I told you earlier what was going to happen.

(Master Brain looks at him angrily and resumes sweeping as if in revenge. Dusts the sheets and cushions.

Suddenly he finds a kerchief among them. Dropping the broom he jumps with it to Mister Brawn )

Look (Holds the kerchief)  
Mister Brawn looks at it.

Master Brain:

May be the property of the last resident (smells it)  
A strange smell!

Mister Brawn:

Let me see (Goes near Master Brain; both inhale the odour of the unfolded kerchief, with distended nostrils)

Together:	female like a bunch of flowers.
Strange smell !	Hair reaching down to the knees, ...darting eyes, swaying limbs, graceful steps and a voice as soft as the September rains.
Master Brain: Of Attar—	
Mister Brawn: Of sweat—	Master Brain:
Master Brain: Of liquor	Idiot! Do you think a lady's handkerchief will be this big? It will only be a tiny piece of cloth that fits smugly into her vanity bag. But this...This can be folded diagonally and tied round the head of a male.
Mister Brawn: Of a feast	
Master Brain: Of a drain	
Mister Brawn: Of death	I do remember him.
Master Brain: Of a male	Mister Brawn: Don't say him. Say her! (They argue)
Mister Brawn: Of a female (They stare at each other as if asking: "what next"? Shake hands. Laugh loudly)	Master Brain: Him!
	Mister Brawn: Her!
Master Brain: But, it was a male who came here. I am sure of it.	Master Brain: Him!!
Mister Brawn: Who says so? It was a female. I am so sure.	Mister Brawn: Her!!
Master Brain: So sure, are you? I know even the appearance of the man. Very lean, fair, long nose, broad chest. And the appearance of an elegant salesman...	(They stand facing each other as if ready to fight over the issue. After looking at each other for a while both start lau- ghing at the same time)
	Master Brain: Buddy! what is it to us any how?
Mister Brawn: Keep it for yourself. It was a	Mister Brawn: I do not relent so easily.

Master Brain:  
Let us come to a truce, then.

Mister Brawn:  
Agreed.

Master Brain:  
Ha . ... Semi-success

Mister Brawn:  
How?

Master Brain:  
When there is bilateral agreement for truce talks it is semi-success. Even if the other half is lost, there is semi-success. The tension is reduced. That is how it is.

Mister Brawn:  
Stop it .. the truce...

Master Brain:  
Am I not speaking about the very same thing? Should there not be a theoretical base even for our silliest talk.

Mister Brawn:  
Not necessary

Master Brain:  
Right then. She is not a he nor is he a she How about that? Do you agree?

Mister Brawn:  
I don't get it.

Master Brain:  
It is because you are all brawn.

The top level control is too poor.

Mister Brawn:  
The last resident was...

Master Brain:  
About that we have to come to an agreement Neither male nor female. A sphinx like creature-Neither male nor female.

Mister Brawn:  
The gender M or F?

Master Brain:  
N for Neuter.

Mister Brawn;  
Your hand please (they shake hands)

Mister Brawn:  
Well, then how was its exit?

Master Brain:  
(Moving towards the window) A moonlit night ... Might have gone out for a stroll: sleep-walking ... Beyond the window ... Beyond the sandy courtyard. In the light fog it might have leaned against the wall looking into the valley...

Mister Brawn:  
What is to be seen there? The graves? ... The sand dunes ..?

Master Brain:  
In the dim light nothing will be visible. Might have looked at

the horizon. Might have looked at the moonlight that stretched far into the horizon. Feasting on it with the yearning of a man coming out of a dark chamber. Then unawares the hands might have come against the wires ... Then...

Mister Brawn:

Swish!—the shock...Like a stroke of lightning.

Master Brain:

(turning with face covered) Yes, with that ...

Mister Brawn:

Our work begins.

Master Brain:

And he ..

Mister Brawn:

What? Remember the truce ...

Master Brain:

Yes! And that thing. Say the unknown thing. A man or a bird or a dream whatever it be; must have collapsed

...Burned to cinders...

Mister Brawn:

(with emotion) Sh! stop it. What can we do for that last person?

Master Brain:

We did what we could. Didn't we? (points to the coffin).

Mister Brawn:  
Is that enough?

Master Brain:  
Why not?

Mister Brawn:  
We have hearts

Master Brain:  
Have we?

Mister Brawn:  
Of course, we have

Master Brain:  
Very well. Let us pray then.  
(Both kneel, facing the audience mechanically)

Together:

Oh; Virtuous Almighty! Make not your country the same as this one. Trap us not by laying thick grass over deep wells. To the man...

Mister Brawn:  
Woman ..

Master Brain:  
(stubbornly) To those ..

Together:  
That lie there, show not the boundless skies and thus heap insults on them. Make not jails without walls and bars, camping sites for any one. Amen.

(After showing signs of praying they get up)

Mister Brawn:  
What next?

Master Brain:

We have finished our work. We have washed our sins away.

Mister Brawn:

So what?

Master Brain:

Let us start all over again.

Mister Brawn:

What for?

Master Brain:

To commit more sins. Then only can we wash away the sins again.

Mister Brawn;

That is right. Then ... let us start sweeping.

Master Brain:

There is no other way. Come on.

(Both take up the brooms. Hand in hand they step forward chanting)

Together:

Master Brain and Mister Brawn:  
Ruled the earth long long long ago.

The hand that held the sceptre now holds the broom.

Nothing but the broom, the broom (They lift the broom.)

The machine reigns now. (They lift and replace the telephone).

The sleep walkers fall dead.

As for us we too walk,

When we are in Rome

Just camp followers

(From this point they appear to do the chores mentioned by them)

Go to sweep, and scrub the floor.

Got to fold and spread the bed.  
Got to remember how to bow down

Before each and every one.

Master Brain and Mister Brawn:  
Ruled the earth long, long ago.

The hand that held the sceptre  
Is now glued on to the big room  
...the broom... the broom ..  
(They complete miming all items of the operation of cleaning the room. A knock on the door from outside. Both become still. Holding the brooms like rifles they stand in attention on either side of the door)

Together:

Come in!

(The door opens. The First Stranger enters. dressed in winter clothing. His age cannot be determined from his appearance. He has nothing in his hands. The fatigue from travel is very evident on his face and limbs. Both bow down and stand back to the two sides, in the manner of soldiers. The stranger looks at them and at the room. The action is repeated twice or thrice,

First Stranger:  
Me.....

Master Brain:  
We know already. We are happy to welcome you (smiles formally)

Mister Brawn:  
That is the western fashion. (speaking in pure Namboodiri style) Very happy to have met you. Come and sit down (shows apt formalities)

First Stranger:  
(failing to grasp the meaning of their attitude and staring at them) My instructions - (searches his pocket...)

Master Brain:  
Mere repetition

First Stranger:  
What did you say?

Master Brain:  
Forget it.

Mister Brawn:  
Please don't say anything. Consider this your sweet home.

First Stranger:  
(Pulling out from his pocket a paper resembling a road map

Let me refer to it, please. Just to make sure I have not missed my way (looking at the paper) Second cross roads. On the right corner of it a banyan tree ...A fallen load-rest\* with one leg lost - From there... (raising his head) Correct.

Master Brain:  
As you walk four miles along the gravel path, there are to the left of it, two sign-boards pointing to the cemetery and the mental hospital that stand at...

Mister Brawn:  
Wrong. The mental hospital and then the cemetery that stand at. That is how it is. (The Stranger looks at them)

Master Brain:  
That stand at the third cross roads from there ...

First stranger:  
Very correct. I came along the very same way.

Master Brain:  
(ignoring him) From there along the road to the cemetery ...

Mister Brawn:  
(cutting in) Keeping to a side of the gravel path of hair - pin

\* *Load rest*: An old device consisting of a long thick granite slab resting on two granite legs or pillars. These were set up at intervals on public roads to offer relief to people carrying heavy loads on their heads. They could place the loads on this and rest for a while.

curves as you climb higher and higher...

First Stranger :

Correct.

Together:

There appears before you ... What? (looking questioningly at each other). An all white structure like a white dove sitting with its wings spread on the brow of a hill...

Master Brain:

Is it like a piece of white cloud?

Mister Brawn:

Or like a white washed grave?

Master Brain:

Stop it. Poor simile it was (both become silent)

First Stranger:

Then I did not miss the way (signs of negation from both)

First Stranger:

I thought I had taken the other way to the mental-

Mister Brawn:

But you have no such complaints, I think.

Master Brain:

You are very sensible

First Stranger:

By the by, how did you know about the instructions I got?

Master Brain:

Master Brain is the name by which I am known.

Mister Brawn:

Smother the brain is my motto.

Master Brain.

He is Master of Brawn We come to know all through the brain and the brawn.

First Stranger:

Can I ask a question, then?

Mister Brawn:

Why one question only? You can ask about anything. You are the guest and we are the hosts

First Stranger:

(Showing the paper) How and when did I get this...

Master Brain:

Oh. You don't know that? Is it so? (laughs)

First Stranger:

Yes. I was wandering aimlessly. Then, one day when I woke up I got this. Afterwards I walked in search of ...

Master Brain:

That is the rule

First Stranger:

Whose rule?

Together:  
(with a shrug of the shoulders)  
We don't know.

First Stranger:  
You told me that you were the  
hosts.

Master Brain:  
That is right. But nobody has  
asked this question so far.

Mister Brawn:  
There never was a necessity to  
ask.

First Stranger:  
But...then (gropes for words)

Master Brain:  
Everything will flow in (pointing  
to the telephone)

Orders commands judgements  
denials...

Mister Brawn:  
We just obey. And the time will  
pass (silence)

Master Brain:  
Why stand on your tired feet?  
Come forward, sit down.  
See! your camp is unoccupied.  
Be reborn here as if from the  
womb of your mother.

Mister Brawn:  
Yes. My Lord - This way please ... This way ...  
(Both of them lead him in respectfully. As there is no altern-

ative he moves on watching the  
room closely. It is the window  
that attracts him first. He moves  
towards it and looks outside  
through it)

First Stranger:  
How enchanting! Stretching  
beyond the limits of vision.

Master Brain:  
(moving along side) Lower down  
you see the cemetery. Beyond  
that, far away the dark horizon.

First Stranger:  
(walking around) How quiet  
and how free? (turns towards  
them) Let me be frank. I was  
moving about in the darkness.  
Missed my way in the dark forest.  
I had a feeling of bondage  
always as if my feet were  
chained ... as if a wall obstructed  
me

Master Brain:  
We know. we know

First stranger:  
Weighed down too ... with burdens  
heavy enough to break the  
back.

Master Brain:  
Then what?

First Stranger:  
On the way I got rid of them ...  
threw away... some the rest just  
got scattered (Master Brain and

Mister Brawn look at each other  
and laugh)

First Stranger:  
Why the laughter ... ?

Master Brain:  
Just because of the way you de-  
scribed it

Mister Brawn:  
And this thought about your pr-  
esent plight:

(the First Stranger notices the  
coffin)

First Stranger:  
And this ... ?

Mister Brawn:  
Can't you recognise it. It is a  
coffin.

First Stranger:  
Why here ?

Mister Brawn:  
Easier to carry from here

First Stranger:  
An empty coffin ... where to?

Mister Brawn:  
(pointing outwards) There ... to  
the cemetery

First Stranger:  
I don't understand ...

Master Brain:  
The reference is to the dead

First Stranger:  
You mean here ... Do people  
die ... Why?

Mister Brawn:  
Why do fellows die?

Master Brain:  
Some fellows get too smart ...  
that is why.

First Stranger:  
What do you mean?

Master Brawn:  
There is convenience for every  
thing here Service is our motto.

First Stranger:  
I was asking how smartness and  
death are related?

Master Brain:  
I am speaking about the very  
same thing.

First Stranger:  
Come on, tell me.

Master Brain:  
You can go anywhere ... We be-  
lieve in the dictum 'man is born  
free.' Outside, one can forget  
oneself in the heady flow of  
moonlight ...

First Stranger:  
I too noticed it. That is the  
most convenient aspect of this...

Mister Brawn:  
That is the dangerous aspect  
too.

First Stranger:

How? Instead of solving the riddles you lead me deeper into more mysteries.

Master Brain:

Isn't it fun?

First Stranger:

In being enveloped by secrets. Is that what you mean?

Master Brain:

In being profound ...

First Stranger:

Complete it.

Master Brain:

Here you have all sorts of freedom. But for one thing. You see the wire fence. It can electrocute any one.

First Stranger:

Fh! What for?

Mister Brawn:

What is the fence for? To prevent you from jumping out.

Master Brain:

To prevent anybody from jumping in too.

First Stranger:

Where is the freedom then?

Master Brain:

That is here inside. You are perfectly free. But if you try

without permission to jump out secretly-Electrocution.

First Stranger:

(Referring to the papers in his hands) But it is not mentioned here in this ...

Mister Brawn:

Why should it be mentioned?

Master Brain:

But it's mentioned in it that one can reside here freely.

Is it not so?

First Stranger:

Is this what you mean by freedom? No. To walk as I please when I want till I feel like stopping ...

Mister Brawn:

You should get permission.

First Stranger:

Whose permission?

(Master Brain points to the telephone)

First Stranger:

Make it clear. Who is at the other end? Do you know? Please say. (Both Brain and Brawn shrug their shoulders in silence ... the two parties look at each other)

Master Brain:

You don't believe, I suppose.

First Stranger:

I do believe. Because before I started on my journey I too had got a string of phone messages. I got out of my house just to escape from that. Then quite surprisingly came ... (shows the paper) At least you can ...

Master Brain:

Just to obey - the obedient flock ... Oh! What a pleasure ... ?

First Stranger:

Pleasure ?

Master Brain:

Do you need anything else ? We are ...

First Stranger:

Are you leaving ?

Master Brain:

We are not permitted to leave.

First Stranger:

Alone in this big mansion - only me ... In solitude ... Alone ...

Master Brain:

You are the only guest of the day.

First Stranger:

One guest and two hosts ...

Master Brain:

We are not hosts always. We will be servants, protectors and men who enforce law.

First Stranger:

I see. How can I get you say, If I have some doubts or if I need help or feel bored ...

Master Brain:

Boredom . the recipe for health

First Stranger:

Forget it ... where are you going ?

Mister Brawn:

We will be here itself ... But ...

First Stranger:

I am happy - within earshot ...

Master Brain:

That is so. But ...

Mister Brawn:

We won't respond to calls In this very room, being dead and reborn, night and day always

Master Brain:

All our games are limited to the inside of the room. Distant vision only through this window ... confined to this room always we are off ... Do you want..?

First Stranger:

I don't get it at all.

Master Brain:

Lucky guy!

First Stranger:

A fear of sorts ... something

deep in the mind like a creeping snake...

Master Brain:

No need for that. We declare, absolutely no need for that ... Aurevoir! (starts moving backwards with Mister Brawn. Then Master Brain suddenly turns and moves fast towards the first Stranger)

Master Brain:

Q! Just forgot to ask. Do you believe in ghosts or evil spirits?

First Stranger:

Why the question? Why now?

Master Brain:

Take it easy, just asked. That is all. Answer me ...

First Stranger:

I like the stories about them. The stories had been a big help to me once - in developing my imagination. But to see directly nymphs ...

Master Brain:

There is no chance. I was not asking about the alluring spirits that entice you but about the gruesome evil ones.

First Stranger:

Why ... this question?

Master Brain:

(pointing to the coffin) Didn't you see this box?

Many a corpse has travelled in this (pointing outside) to the cemetery beyond. If some one among them ... (signs of fear on the stranger's face)

First Stranger:

Will they come?

Master Brain:

They may choose to...

First Stranger:

Are you very particular that you should go?

Mister Brawn:

(without turning) Yes. Of course

Master Brain:

These are our instructions. There is no use in remaining beyond the fixed time. We just become dead lifeless ... Just a decorative piece for the room. Don't you keep stuffed animals in your drawing room? Just like that.

First Stranger:

When do you awake from...

Master Brain:

At the fixed time, on the receipt of orders...

First Stranger:

What a terrible dependence!

Mister Brawn:

That is wrong

Master Brain:

Yes. Perfect... severe responsibility (pointing to the broom) Don't you see? The entire room to be swept clean (The stranger does not know what to say)

Together:

Good night. (Both turn and with their backs to the audience remain static. The light gets dimmer and dimmer. Both the figures are in the shadows now. The First Stranger alone is clearly visible. He is aimlessly wandering in the room muttering to himself)

First Stranger:

(To himself) At the end of such a long journey to get such a raw deal. Ugh!

(Tired, he reclines in the chair. Lights go off. When the light comes out again, there is no direct lighting. There is only the diffused moon light filtered through the window, Faint drum-beats are heard, the tempo rising gradually and assuming a devilish tone. When the beats reach the highest pitch, the two figures which had stood static, turn with burning torches in their hands. They are wearing gruesome primitive masks. Chanting incantations they

dance around the First Stranger in step with the drum beats. The First Stranger is not asleep. He is sitting up and staring ahead with frightened eyes. Suddenly the telephone rings.

The dancing stops. As if motivated by some mechanical power, the two move back to their old positions. The torches are put out. The phone continues to ring. Catching at a straw, the First Stranger runs to the phone and takes it. Without waiting to listen to any message through the phone he speaks very fast in a frightened tone.

First Stranger:

Can't you save me? What is the meaning of this game? Giving me instructions directing me along a path and than keeping me a captive in this prison(stops and listens) What? Are you laughing? Betrayer! Devil! (thoroughly annoyed) Stop it! Stop this laughter! And answer me. Why do you do this to me (louder) Tell me! come on! Tell me! (listening) Cut off! Dead! Dead! (Places the phone back on the cradle with a loud noise) (To himself) No! Never a moment in this realm of ghosts. I want to escape. (Starts hastily for the door. Both Master Brain and Mister Brawn come back to life. They move to the

door in step with each other and  
stand barring the way. They  
wear no masks now)

Master Brain:  
Of course: the broom. There  
it is.

First Stranger:  
Are you barring my way? Are  
you living or dead?

First Stranger:  
That...

Master Brain:  
Obeying orders.

Master Brain:  
With that to be inside this room,  
Like us ... eternally ..

First Stranger:  
Then you are alive now.

Mister Brawn:  
Free to live

Master Brain:  
Got the Signal

First Stranger:

First Stranger:  
Then move away

I am the guest, not a servant  
(showing the papers)  
I have these . the instructions...

Master Brain:  
We can't.

Mister Brawn:  
We too had them.

First Stranger:  
Why can't you? You spoke  
about the freedom...

(Both pull out similar papers  
from their pockets) Still we have  
them. See! (Beaten, the stran-  
ger stares at each of them)

Master Brain:  
Freedom to remain inside. If  
you go out - the freedom to go  
near the wall - to touch the  
wire and get electrocuted. ..

Master Brain:  
If you have any doubts about it  
(pointing to the telephone) You  
can verify when the next call  
comes for you.

First Stranger:  
The Freedom for that. Isn't  
it? Otherwise....

Master Brain:  
Otherwise....

First Stranger:  
No need for it. That laughter  
beats me (reclining out of tire-  
dness) Give me a broom.

First Stranger:  
Is there such an alternative?

(Master Brain and Mister Brawn  
are exuberant. They move  
briskly. Taking the broom and

uniform they advance towards the First Stranger who is now on his knees as if in prayer. Lights fade off. When the lights come again all the three are seen holding brooms. Hand in hand they move and sing)

Master Brain  
and Mister Brawn:

In company with Monster  
Cheat

Threw off the sceptres  
in their hands

And each of them took up  
the big broom

They began to clean and to  
scrub

And to crawl on their knees

And they began to run

Along the beaten track.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

(The door is opened and the Second Stranger enters carrying two suitcases. The three present a guard of honour for the new comer. He also carries papers. He speaks looking at the papers with him.)

Second Stranger:

I have not missed the way. Second cross roads. The banyan tree to the right corner of it. An old fallen load-rest with one leg lost. From there (raising his head) correct.

All the other three together:  
Come on! Come on! Comrade.  
Welcome to this free country.  
Come on! Come on! comrade!

Here you get repose .....  
peace ... freedom a rare good  
fortune ... (They surround him  
and lead him to a chair)

Second Stranger:

(Sitting) Where am I ... ? The  
man who gave me instructions -  
who was it ? ... Who!

(The other three sit before him  
like the mythical monkeys.

The Second Stranger repeats the  
questions in a meaningless way).

Translated by  
P. K. Venukuttan Nair

# A NOTE ON M. R. K. C.

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V. T. Induchudan

The four letters 'M.R.K.C.' stand for the pen-name of an interesting story-writer and journalist of Kerala who made a significant contribution to the world of Malayalam literature during the early half of this century. His real name was Ch-enkulath Kunhi Raman Menon and the pen-name appears to have been fabricated by arranging the first letters of the four words in reverse order! Born in 1881, he was inspired by the national renaissance and he responded by the creation of good historical fiction out of legends, traditions and folklore.

M.R.K.C. established his name in the literary field as the author of the historical novel *Valluvakammaran*, which was first published in 1927. It was a very popular novel in those days and the great extent of its popularity is proved by the fact that no less a person than the eminent writer, Ramavarma Appan Thampuran, brought out a dramatic version of the story which captured the stage for some considerable time.

The plot of the novel is developed from an episode of eighteenth century Kerala history. The background is provided by the decadent feudalism of Malabar and the emerging power of Haidar Ali in Mysore.

Kammaran, the hero of the novel, is born in the aristocratic family of Valluva in the present Cannanore District. In the course of a chequered career he wins the favour of Hyder Ali of Mysore and embraces Islam assuming the name of Shaik Ayaz Khan. His loyalty, courage and wisdom win for him some of the highest honours from Hyder. The novel is full of the thrill, of adventure, romance and chivalry. Apart from the heroic Kammaran, there are many unforgettable characters in the novel—Kammaran's eccentric uncle Rairu Nambiar, the treacherous Chandu, his beautiful daughter Madhavi, the sagacious Hyder and the impetuous Tippu.

M.R.K.C. was born in 1881 in the aristocratic family of Ch-

enkulath of Calicut, but he was educated in his father's place, Baliapatam, in Cannanore District. After education, he became an official of the Government of Madras. M.R.K.C. had the opportunity to work under the famous English scholar, C.A. Innes, who was the Collector of Malabar in those days. Innes, the author of the well-known treatise, *Malabar Gazetteer*, patronised M.R.K.C. and later on, when M.R.K.C. joined the editorial staff of the journal *Kerala Patrika*, Innes nominated him a member of a group of four or five distinguished persons who attended the coronation of King George in Delhi in 1911.

The journal, *Kerala Patrika* founded earlier by M.R.K.C.'s uncle, Rao Sahib Valia Kunhirama Menon, was in those days running into rough weather and the founder sought the services of M.R.K.C; in 1909 to put the business in order. It was during this period that M.R.K.C. became the Malabar correspondent of *The Hindu*. Later he took up the management of a publishing house in Trichur and continued in this job for the next eighteen years. Most of his literary works were produced during this period. M.R.K.C. was involved in other public activities and was for a term

municipal councillor. He suffered a great tragedy at the end of this period—he lost one of his legs when part of a building of the publishing house accidentally collapsed.

In the thirties M.R.K.C. became editor of a newspaper called *Keralam*, which was a kind of organ of the Cochin State Congress, an organisation agitating for a democratic Government in the erstwhile Cochin State. In this capacity, M.R.K.C. had to clash with the authorities. He breathed his last in 1940, at the age of fifty nine.

#### Other Contributions

Besides the novel *Valluva Kammaraman* M. R. K. C. wrote a large number of short stories. Some of these are now available in two anthologies, one consisting of historical tales and the other of stories with social themes. I would say that he is far cleverer in handling the former category than the latter. I can never forget the story, *The Ghost of Machat Mala*, which is the tale of a woman who took refuge in the wilds disguised as a ghost to escape the sexual designs of a local chieftain.

The social stories of M. R. K. C. include, curiously enough, one in which two Englishmen

appear as characters, probably the product of his association with English officers and English life.

I first read his novel, *Valiuvakammaran*, during my school days in the thirties and later witnessed a performance of its dramatised version in the Maharaja's College (Cochin). I will never forget Prof. P. M. Sankaran Nambiar in the role of Rairu Nambiar, the eccentric old aristocrat of the story, and I would say that it was the most thrilling experience in my life.

Other books written by the author are *Raghuvamsa Chari-*

*tham* which is a prose version of part of Kalidasa's great epic, a book on the *Ramayana* of Kambar and *Landlords of Malabar* which is a kind of socio-economic treatise.

In conclusion I would like to point out a distinguishing feature of the historical stories of M. R. K. C. His language is very simple in sharp contrast to the highly Sanskritised vocabulary and involved sentences of C. V. Raman Pillai who is regarded as the greatest writer of historical fiction in Malayalam. The stories of M. R. K. C. have always been enjoyed more by the common man.

MACRON, a small-scale English monthly, which will be re-published from June '82, invites contributions for publication. Poems, short-stories, essays (literary and on cultural and social topics), skits, in English as well as translations from the regional languages are welcome. Each article (prose or poetry) shall be paid a modest honorarium after publication. A true-copy of the letter of permission from the original author should accompany the material if the author and the translator are different persons. Contributions, preferably typed with double space, along with the biodata of the writer and the translator, may please be sent to: The Editor, 'Macron', 20, 2nd Main, I Block, Rajajinagar, Bangalore-560 010.

Bangalore

Advt.

Abdul Majeed Khan  
Editor & Publisher

## DAMS

---

Anand

That is a valley which has witnessed history leading many a movement. Nothing was retained there for long. Men got on with their lives. Seeds from trees brought forth trees; eggs hatched out into new birds.

Water flowed through the river. During the rains, the river swelled over its banks; during the dry season it receded to its old trickle. The speed of its course varied in accordance with the season. All the same, it never ceased to flow. In spite of all the rush of water, the river as such did not move even a foot ahead.

Even at the time of the first inspection, the experts were convinced that this was just the right spot for the dam-the river swelling into many cubic feet of water, the high banks, the deserted land around, the strong top soil-all promised the ideal conditions. They arrived in jeeps and vans. Tents came up on the banks. They set about their work systematically,

measuring out the valley with levels and theodolites. Moving about in canoes, they surveyed the river in its length and breadth to the last details; charted out maps; dug up and tested the soil; traversed the parched fields and God-forsaken villages in vehicles. They made acquaintance with the villagers; talked about weather. While their jeeps glided across kicking up dust, the villagers gaped at them. They were amused as the vehicles moved on uneven plains, jerking. At the sight of the visitors, the children of the village withdrew in shyness. The elders respected and even entertained them. But no one really understood anything.

The people of the valley were crude in their habits and slow-witted. They did not inherit the glamour of the bygone civilizations and empires. Half-naked and eating just enough to survive-that was how they lived. Unware of the past and unconcerned about the future, they lived on. Sitting by the

banks they would fish all day using lines or nets. They ate whatever the fields offered them not caring to toil. They slept in the mud huts; whiled away their time chatting in the shades. Misery and complacence had become part of their existence. Poverty was their master and illness their friend both cheated them and robbed them of their lives. But they had no complaints. They heaved the corpses into the river. Those who were disgusted lost faith in existence and sometimes drowned themselves in the river. The river was their own life; the solution to their problem too.

All the same, the valley had been the centre of civilizations which revived history, and of ferocious empires that sent shudders down its spine. Centuries back, the people of the valley nurtured a great, systematic civilization. They spread a religion which helped understand and solve the problems of society. They developed beautiful straight roads, protected water supply and a drainage system. They lived in houses well ventilated. Their meeting places were spacious. Market places and granaries announcing prosperity were quite a few. The giant pagodas they constructed bore ample

testimony to their prosperity and engineering skill. These included sculptures and archways cut out of single massive stones which must have meant years of work for thousands of men. People conducted prayers and worshipped at these pagodas, and thus found some meaning in life. The civilization revolved round the pagodas. Later everything vanished, no one as yet knows how. The massive sculptures sank in the sand and got merged with it. Land, infertile and sandy, remained. Using bullocks to plough it the people cultivated the arid land. Sitting by the banks in lassitude they fished with lines and nets. They spent their lives in the mud huts and the shades of trees. The river carried the dead in its stride.

On the sandy river banks, there appeared warriors on horse-back. They wielded swords. Those who resisted were ruthlessly slain with a lot of blood-shed. And they built the foundations of an empire. The valley was later elevated to the position of the capital of the new empire. The city rose into liveliness. Houses and market places were designed and constructed. The granaries were

full to the brim. The fame of their handicrafts crossed many boundaries and spread all over the world. Their fine silk found favour in markets abroad. The place provided an international market for pearls and precious stones. Stored gold and silver stones rose in heaps. The lovely palaces and grand bungalows stood majestically, proclaiming their prosperity. These provided work for thousands of men for years. The people revelled in making strong sturdy bricks, immaculate pottery and elegant glassware. Sculptors and painters worked day in and day out. The ornamental crystal glass lanterns decorated the dancing-floors. The pleasing sound of the tabla and anklets enriched the atmosphere. Poetry recital enlivened the court. Music echoed through the palaces. Wine flowed. Their life took a different course. The people had a legitimate reason to live. They did not feel the toil oppressive. But as time went on, the people began to desert the place. Wild bushes and jungle filled up the deserted city. The sand spread all over the place, drowning the city. Archaeology has managed to salvage some strong bricks, artistic pottery, and glassware from many feet below the surface.

By dusk the technical experts relaxed after the day's work gazing at the sky in its changing hues and the river dancing daintily in its waves. They would tend to talk about the past; they wondered if any of its fragments were carried in the song of the solitary rower singing to ease his toil. But, then, they did not understand the local tongue. And so these outsiders would dwell on thoughts of the revolution that was to take shape in the valley.

Intellectuals as they were, they pitied the villagers. They believed in prosperity and hated misery. They loved life. They would dispose of the dead bodies when they came across them by the river side. Even during technical discussions on the dam, they did not forget the human side of it. They evaluated everything against human effort. Much land had to be acquired from the land-owners. Certain villages might even have to be wiped clean. Many would have to part with their traditional ways of life. All the same, a new plan, however new, cannot destroy many of the old ways. They visited the huts of the villagers to talk to them. The bright future in store for them was clearly explained to the villagers. It was their hatred

for misery that made them sympathise with the villagers. The villagers adored their well-wishers for their transistors and cameras. The villagers left their fishing lines and nets and bullocks for good and joined the new project as workers.

The experts marked out tracks for roads connecting the nearby stone-pits and fields of sand with the river. The villagers were given the construction work. Gradually a road paved with sand and stone came up. They laid rail lines built siding and station. And then, one fine day, a railway engine stormed into the valley.

On the barren land acquired from the villagers, a colony slowly began to take shape. At the exact centre of the colony was a huge water tank. Around the tank were circular roads and rows of houses. On one side were the market lines, the office buildings on the other; separate places were allotted for the school, the hospital and the cinema house; with the advent of electricity, bulbs shone in the offices.

When their families had established themselves in the new houses, the experts worked relentlessly in the offices. Pro-

cessing the data collected by the investigators they calculated and prepared designs and drawings. The plan was uncommon and magnificent. A huge big dam about two miles long was to come up, connecting the two banks of the river. Below, on a concrete raft, over two hundred feet long big pillars were to come up. Between the pillars were to be iron gates: the gate bridge above. When the gates were lowered water would be stored, forming a lake in front of the dam. The water would be let out into the canal through the regulator on the right side. The canal, twenty miles long, would be the new course of the river. After a twenty mile flow, it was again to join the mainstream. The dam would just divert the river from its lazy trickle into a new track - it was as simple as that; nothing would really change. The river would flow on and regular traffic would be ensured by locks.

But, the project would change the course of life in the valley. Of course extensive coffer dams would have to be erected every year to pump out water and then only could the basement be constructed—rows of sheet piles over which should come up the concrete raft; and on the raft should be the pillars. Unlimited

human effort was needed to build the twenty-mile canal—almost as much effort as for a new river! Additional effort was required for the locks and afflux bunds etc... Thousands of people would be assured work for many years. In the valley would spring up houses, roads, schools, hospitals, hotels, cinema-houses, workshops and factories. It would rekindle the life in the valley and a new civilization would develop.

All through the rainy season the experts inspected the valley and traversed the river in launches. With stumps and towers they marked out the position of the structures. They assessed the depth of the river and the speed of its flow. By then engines, dozers, scrapers and cranes had started showing up at the railway station. The store yards were packed with cement, steel granite and sand; workshops started functioning

—a mixture of granite, sand and cement—the employees noted down measurement, weight etc. And thus pillars began to come up from the basement. As each year, passed, more and more pillars appeared above the water level. In the valley, a canal almost as big as the river was taking shape. The river did not seem to take note of it.

But the valley had already started moving in the new direction. The villagers did not realize how much the face of the valley had changed over the years. They had even lost awareness of their own being in relation to the past. Every day hundreds of people came to the valley. The valley attracted the neighbourhood and even foreign countries. Those who came there lived in the newly built houses. Vehicles moved along tarred roads without break; fashionably dressed women and children enlivened the well-furnished houses. They moved round and played in the parks and the play-grounds. People crowded the cinema houses; neon lights gleamed in the restaurants and shops; the huts vanished. The villagers dressed neatly; they learnt to use slippers and shoes; ate plenty of meat and vegetables; and they started celebrating festive days.

By the end of the rains engines started rumbling. Work-day in and day out. And the coffer dams came up. Those working on the coffer dams several feet below the water level were all full of pride for the achievements of the human intellect. The experts checked up charts and accounts. While the buckets continuously excreted concrete

Now all amenities of modern life were available in the colony market. There were plenty of shops selling terylene clothes, tape recorders and radios. They attracted people through spicy advertisements and reduction sales. People just wandered about the shops in the evening and it became their habit. There they picked up acquaintances and chatted with them. New relations and friendship got established.

Winter was the festive season in the colony. Every year during January they had a grand 'Fair' at the 'town square'. Vendors, players and artistes from far and near would come to the valley to attend the fair. The newly constructed shops, gardens and lakes would be gaudily illuminated. They would have music concerts and plays during night while various sports items would occupy the day. People decked in colourful garments would add to the gaiety of the occasion.

Winter was also the wedding season. Love affairs blossomed and grew in intimacy. Most of them ended up in marriage. Extravagant bridal processions used to brighten up the streets; crackers, fireworks and band music would fill the air. They

celebrated births also with equal zeal. Christening and first-taste-of-food ceremony were celebrated in grand style when guests used to be entertained. They simply loved life; considered death a social loss, and mourned for the dead. The dead were cremated with all the customary rites. Society condemned suicide as a sin.

The experts no longer relaxed in the evening, looking at the fading sky and dancing waters. They had effectively controlled the very flow of the river. Now the current and waves were passively under their command. The huge dam slowly rose from the water as a giant concrete structure. Their minds were completely occupied by the dam. They forgot themselves in the din of the machinery. They were unaware of the vanishing fishing-boats; nor did they notice the absence of the songs from the boats. They had identified their own language and customs with those of the valley. The revolution they initiated became their own life and also the purpose of their lives.

And then, one day the dam was completed. It stood cutting across the river connecting the two banks as if it were the model criterion for life in the valley.

On the day of the inauguration of the dam, distinguished guests, visitors and inquisitive men gathered in the town. The whole valley was decorated and illuminated in bright exotic colours as if for a festival; cars and vans were parked here and there. A temporary stage was constructed and a loud speaker arranged. The technical experts explained to the press the statistical details relating to the dam; its length, breadth, height, the volume of water flowing through the canal and its speed; the greatness of human effort; and the achievements of human knowledge. At last man had attained happiness and prosperity! Pointing to the valley they remarked — “down there life has achieved a new meaning”.

As the regulator was opened, the water which had been trapped in between the pillars by the gates gushed out with a roar. People applauded. The press photographers' cameras clicked. The guests congratulated the labourers.

The jubilant crowd and the reporters dispersed. The technical experts moved about watching the swelling canal carrying the river on to its course. And then for some unknown reason they remembered the evenings of the fading sky and the dancing water—also the men who sat fishing by the riverbanks and returned to their huts at dusk; and the corpses which used to float on the water. Monolithic pagodas and sculptures lay sleeping many feet below the surface of the sandbags. Palaces and houses of bricks had crumbled and merged into the soil. The concrete pillars and the iron gates were now diverting the river in another direction. The flowing water.... and the river which did not move even a foot ahead.

As if in a dream they felt they heard in the distance the full-throated song of a solitary boatman—singing to ease his toil. But they were at a loss to decipher the language of the song .....

Translated by Dr S. P. Ramesh.

# BENGAL

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K. G. Sankara Pillai

## The Indian Situation :

### \* Dhritrharashtra

No news from Bengal  
Only from Bengal  
Nothing at all.  
Nothing.

All my kids, their kiddies  
My own kith and kin, all are there  
Are of several sorts, are also rich  
Each with his own well,  
Harvests, festivals and guests.  
Boundaries, neighbourhoods, jealousies and sorceries,  
And along these boundaries are cunning burrows  
Where vengeance waits in ambush.  
Thus they chopped off a stray cat's head,  
Dropped it velvet-packed into the well,  
Murmuring incantations round the clock  
And by this they divided in everything.  
Pots, pans, granaries and grinding-stones  
Basements of ancestral houses  
Idols of household deities.  
Roads, rivers, villages, cities and troops  
All did they divide, split straight apart  
Quarrelling, shedding blood for anything  
They cheat at dice and go about in disguise  
Tongues are blood-thirsty, words poison-packs,  
And all are partyguys, Gandhichaps as well  
All my kids, their kiddies,  
My own kith and kin-

Oh! Sanjaya, what are you brooding on?  
No news from Bengal;

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\* The poet regards the chaotic Indian situation as characteristic of a pre-revolutionary era.

Nothing known from there.  
 Night, dawn, noon, evening, night, dawn  
 Noon, evening, night, night -  
 I sit up like this  
 Knowing nothing, nothing at all.

No mounted messenger hurries in at midnight  
 With silver-sword and royal summons  
 No one treads up swiftly through the porch  
 No submissions, no orders,  
 No march-past, nor victory parade.

Old times are no more  
 No compromises now-a-days  
 Blood for blood, gun for gun.  
 Courage for courage; old times are gone,  
 Now'tis all burning summer, this real *Kaliyuga*  
 \* Perhaps, these may be the cruellest times,  
 The same, of which the poet spoke.

Oh! Sanjaya, someone heaves a sigh  
 In the room inside;  
 Someone wails somewhere afar  
 Fear, fear booms in the earth and the sky

Sanjaya, what are you brooding on?  
 Indistinct noises bring in loneliness  
 Sanjaya, what are you recollecting?  
 Silence takes you, far far away.

High seas lie around Bengal  
 River-valley cultures are there  
 City civilisations are there  
 Lords, slaves, centuries,  
 Ruttish continents,  
 Great battles and cyclones  
 Dark long frozen trails in the mountains  
 Fangs hidden behind smiles-all are there  
 All my kids, their kiddies  
 My own kith and kin, all are there.

---

\* T. S. Eliot : The Waste Land  
 Shakespeare : Macbeth

And these deformities of ours nightmares.  
 Contradictory words, trails, punishments,  
 Exiles to Siberia,  
 Scaffolds, doctors, hangmen  
 Deluge, Noah, Manu-all are there  
 The secrets of Bengal are altogether baffling,  
 Nothing known at all.

Sanjaya, now this time of fall  
 This very season,  
 When the dry leaves gather over  
 The entire valleys and tree-beds,  
 This burning summer  
 Fills me with a strange fear  
 Serpents and splinters  
 May not always be beneath them  
 But the dry leaf itself  
 Is the witch-mother of hunger  
 Which delivers forth heaps of evils  
 She is lying in wait  
 Even with a slight wind blowing  
 Dry leaves will rise, roaring;  
 While no one notices, they will swiftly untie  
 Great terrific cyclones, and sabotage everything  
 Aye, see them in those dirty pits  
 All lying cold and scattered they are never to be trusted.

And the cyclone, quite unawares,  
 Will rise and crush down  
 All the huge way-blocking mountains.  
 Clearly do I know all about  
 The furious secret dream of this summer:  
 It makes this earth a wasteland,  
 Makes it as barren as a hag  
 Creviced, torrid, silent and staring.  
 And the pious souls, all bewildered,  
 Their eyes blindfold with crape  
 Sing out death-song time and again;  
 They take over the stone from Sisyphus;  
 Nothing, nothing—they blurt out  
 Quoting from the scriptures of the absurd.

Sanjaya, what you saw is the truth:  
These crevices are never shelters of the unsettled  
    or coffins opened within earth for the defeated.  
The heavy footfalls  
Recurringly heard by those black kids  
Who listen, lying down close to these crevices  
Are definitely those of history marching:  
Are those of cyclones rushing up  
Through the lower-depths:  
Are those of that dragon  
With lightning in its eyes.  
Yes, what you have told, is the blunt truth:  
The new songs of these kids contain fire

This hot summer eats me up  
Leaves are falling in double the usual speed.  
Dusty fiery winds are raging  
Dry leaves are gathering power, ever more  
Beneath those thin dry branches, pointing to the heights  
And this outward semblance of coldness  
Is never, never to be trusted  
As you yourself used to claim,  
It will surge up secretly through the bottom  
Right beneath our visible feet and paths  
Beneath our own plans and estimates  
Like an awareness profound and fresh  
It will surge, surge secretly  
Oh! I am altogether afraid  
All my kids, their kiddies  
My own kith and kin, all are in Bengal.  
And from there, nothing is known at all.

Once a group of noble lords  
Returning from a joyful pilgrimage were telling tales  
And boisterously passing through Kaleeghat.  
Suddenly a cyclone rose in the street  
Starting straight from the gutter  
It smashed down reservoirs, radio stations  
Hospitals, streets, the whole city itself,

And swept away emperor Veeralal  
 Right along with His Majesty's throne  
 And when the cyclone subsided  
 The empire had changed root and branch  
 Governments, laws, customs and manners,  
 Even days and nights, were entirely new.

And it was only in the end  
 That the old ones could understand  
 That the cyclone had really started out  
 From the terrific curses  
 Of poor peasants in remote villages;  
 And that, thus too, a cyclone could happen  
 But by then, poets and intellectuals  
 Had written a huge lot about it;  
 And the dead bodies of some of those noble lords  
 Were seen caught on thorny trees  
 In forests far away from the city  
 And His Majesty's head was caught  
 In a fisherman's net, in the holy Ganges.

Sanjaya, now I feel most unhappy.  
 Today my kids and kiddies  
 May go on a pilgrimage through Kaleeghat,  
 And return quite joyfully.  
 It is impossible for me even to imagine what will happen  
 This season of fall will never make me happy  
 The thought that someone may rush in,  
 With the news of death-the death of my kids  
 Is perpetually haunting me.  
 All are, far away.  
 I am fettered here, in this hot sun  
 All my liberty stolen away,  
 Too frail to enjoy happiness  
 This place is a wasteland,  
 Everything here, strange and terrific

Far harder to explain than darkness  
 Is this hot and burning sun

Here every atom evolves into a separate sun,  
And prepares the final pyre, for me.

Sanjaya, now-a-days I tend  
To forget your words suddenly  
And evermore I like to hear  
The prophecies of the prayful lizard  
Uttered from the wooden beam  
The prophet who has foreknown  
The profundity of polar depths  
And their tragic relevance as well.  
And fortified himself with steady contemplation  
Against all situational changes  
Aye, these nonstop prophecies  
Really do I like them evermore  
And last evening I heard you lecturing to the poets  
Asking them to make a wicker-torch of their songs  
And stab the monarchs in their faces with it.

Sanjaya, like this summer  
Like the evil times of this season of falling leaves  
Like a severe crisis  
With far greater power than the blazing light of  
your hard truths  
Which do sting me painfully,  
The dim tensionless calmness of these prophecies  
Now conquers me outright  
The roots of our relationship are cut off somewhere  
My vision dims  
What I can see from here is very limited:  
Only this compartmental interior of the train.  
Through the window on this right  
Only the death-filled mountain ranges  
Only the skeletons thin and sharp  
Of brooks and flocks of goats  
All burnt out in wild fire  
Only soldiers on one side  
And amidst the ravages of war,  
Bridges demolished and smashed homes,  
Only the hands and legs cut off  
Only the eye dead and protruding

Like the Ashoka-Chakra,  
 Only the horse's head cut off and fallen apart  
 Only my child, lying in the hospital ward,  
 Only the deformed back of the Gandhicap.

And through the window on the left  
 Only the forlorn beaches  
 Where dead bodies are washed ashore daily  
 Only the gulf, the dark light house  
 And the missing watchman  
 Only the marooned ancient mariner  
 Only my camel in this eye-burning desert  
 That too, with its head frightfully raised  
 Walks away into the distance

Oh! Sanjaya, beyond this my vision fails  
 The handcuffs of hunger you mention,  
 The fortune-line blotted out by the scars left  
by hard work

The empty aluminium plate  
 The very branded back of my grandpa  
 And those projecting chest-bones  
 Hit and crushed by my own heavy heels  
 For which you always curse me outright,  
 Teardrops on cheeks looking back to the eyes  
 Oh! nothing exists, truly none  
 I see nothing; and this the truth:  
 Even while I see them afar,  
 Swift fires pierce my bosom  
 That they are all dry leaves,  
 That the dragons will unleash terrific cyclones,  
 That they will stick my kids on thorny trees,  
 That my own head too  
 Will be caught up in a fisherman's net  
 Oh! Sanjaya, blindness is no more an effective armour!

Sanjaya, and now too I have a suspicion;  
 See there, above the villages  
 The spiralling cyclone is raising  
 With the ribs of that ageold witch

Dry leaves, are in revolt  
 They, once fallen and withered  
 Are again blooming on the cyclone's branches,  
 Blossoming into fire and swirling terror,  
 Turning into dragonish trees  
 Engendering terrible fruits of havoc  
 They violate laws and smash  
 The entire governmental time-machines  
 They break open prisons  
 Burst off old step-ladders  
 Highways, dams, railways and rivers  
 Everything they ruthlessly destroy  
 And the Destroyer's furious form  
 Grows, grows and fills up the skies

In this midnight, who is he going so fast  
 Along the unseen stretch of byways  
 Waving the light of a magic-lamp?  
 Who is he proceeding quickly,  
 Through the lower depths?  
 Who is the fire and who is the storm,  
 Within the songs of all these lads?

Having crossed Bengal with three steps,  
 Who is he that rushes forward  
 To tread on the King's head?  
 Nothing do I understand.  
 Only doubts and sorrows.  
 Newspapers, radios and T. V. sets,  
 None tells the truth.  
 Something is going on there; times are strange.  
 There in the country's cellars  
 Dwells our Almighty Mahakali  
 The Black Mother-supreme,  
 Armed with limitless anger, fire-swords, claws and fangs  
 Not even a bit of news from Bangal-  
 Surely something is going on there:  
 Some are killing, some are dying  
 May be hunger is assassinating  
 Chopping off heads

And hanging them at the gateways,  
Or sticking them on the thorns of trees;  
Or torturing them inside lock-ups,  
Or a battle is raging,  
Bombs exploding and hissing  
Or it may be a terrific cyclone  
Knocking against each other trees and towers  
May be crashing  
And in the debris  
All earthly roads and bypaths disappearing;  
Or, it may be the final deluge,  
All drowning in roaring tides  
And their bodies at last floating up  
All pale and swollen  
Heard tidings are horrible  
Those unheard, are still more terrible

Sanjaya, What is it, that goes on there?  
What is it? Oh! What is it?

Translated by Sankarji

## AKADEMI NEWS AND LITERARY NOTES

### Literary Conferences and Young Writers' Camps

As part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Literary Conferences and Young Writers' Camps were planned on a zonal basis. A report of the North Zone Conference was given in the last issue. The three-day Central Zone Conference was held at Muvattupuzha from 12th to 14th March, 1982. The conference was inaugurated by Shri M. K. Menon (Vilasini) and presided over by Shri Palai Narayanan Nair. At the Young Writers' Camp classes were held for the members of the camp on the novel, poetry and literary criticism. Prof K.M.Tharakan was the Director of the camp. In addition to a Kavi Sammelan



Sri. M. K. Menon delivering the inaugural address

(Poets Meet) there was an interesting and instructive symposium on 'Literary Criticism Today' in which many well-known writers of Kerala took part. The valedictory meeting was presided over by

Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and inaugurated by Shri P.J. Joseph, the then State Minister for Education.

The four day Southern Zone Conference will be held at Trivandrum from 29th April to 2nd May 1982. A Reception Committee headed by Prof. N. Krishna Pillai has already been formed for this purpose.

### **Award of Fellowships**

As part of the Silver Jubilee Awards, the Akademi conferred Fellowships on five well-known writers of the old generation at a colourful function held on 20th December 1981 at the Akademi auditorium. An account of this was published in the last issue of this quarterly. Owing to old age and illness three of the recipients of the Fellowship were not able to attend the function on 20th December. They were Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, P Kesava Dev and V. Unnikrishnan Nair. Representatives of the Executive Board of the Akademi along with friends and admirers of these writers called on them at their houses and handed over to them the insignia of the Fellowship.

### **New Bible in Malayalam**

The Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council Bible Commission published a new edition of the Bible in Malayalam in December 1981. The Commission consisted of a team of scholars who worked for years to prepare this new translation of the Bible.

### **Chilappatikaram turned into Attakkatha**

*Attakkatha* is the name given to the literary composition which forms the text for a *Kathakali* performance. The famous Tamil classic '*Chilappatikaram*' by Elan Kovadigal was recently turned into an Attakkatha by Shri Marumakan Raja of the Cranganore royal family. This Kathakali was performed in the Regional Theatre, Trichur on 1st December 1981.

### **Rg Veda with Malayalam commentary**

Shri O. M. C. Namboothiripad, a reputed vedic scholar is engaged in preparing a new edition of the Rg-Veda with detailed

notes and commentary in Malayalam. The first volume of this monumental work was published on 14th Feb. 1982 at a solemn function in the Sahitya Akademi auditorium. Shri Anjam Madhavan Namboothiri performed the formal release of the work by giving a copy of it to Sastraratnam K. N. Divakaran Namboothiri.

### **Sahitya Parishat**

Sri C. P. Sreedharan has been elected President of the Samasta Kerala Sahitya Parishat and Sri T. K. C. Vaduthala has been elected Secretary.

### **Pottekatt honoured**

The Calicut University has conferred the D Litt. degree on S. K. Pottekatt, the winner of the Jnanpith Award for the year 1980.

### **Thakazhi honoured**

Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai has been elected a member of the General Council of the Central Sahitya Akademi. He is the President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

### **Grant from the Central Government**

The Cultural Department of the Govt. of India has sanctioned a grant of Rs 2,70,500 to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for the purpose of publishing the monumental Malayalam work *Bharathiya Sahitya Charithram*, a comprehensive history of Indian Literature.

### **Russian-Malayalam Dictionary**

Two big publishing houses of the Soviet Union are now jointly engaged in the work of preparing a Russian-Malayalam Dictionary. They have secured the services of a number of Russian and Indian scholars for the purpose. This dictionary will be published early next year.

### **Cultural Department**

The Government of Kerala has formed a Cultural Department in the Govt. Secretariat. All the important cultural institutions of the State like the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi, the Lalitha Kala Akademi and the Kerala Kala Mandalam which were working under the Higher Education Department, would now be transferred to the Cultural Department. The Government has taken this step in response to the persistent complaints from many quarters that cultural affairs were not getting as much attention as they deserved. Shri R. Ramachandran Nair

I. A. S. himself a poet and composer, is the Secretary of the newly-formed department.



#### A.I.R. Award for Akkare

In the annual All-India competition held by the A. I. R. the Malayalam play, *Akkare* won the second prize. The play was written by the well known dramatist Prof. G. Sankara Pillai and directed and presented by Shri N. R. C. Nair.



#### Award for 'Vilasini'

Shri M. K. Menon, who was for years a journalist in Singapore, is also a well-known novelist in Malayalam. He writes under the pen-name, Vilasini. His novel, *Avakasikal* in four volumes (of about 4000 pages) won the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for the best Malayalam work published during the period 1978-80. This novel has also been given the *Otakkuzhai* Award for the year 1981.



#### Bala Sahitya Award

The Sree Padmanabha Swamy Award is given by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi every year to the best contribution in Malayalam to *Bala Sahitya* (Children's Literature) of the year. This award for the year 1981 was won by Dr M. P. Parameswaran's book '*Pyramidinte Natil*' (In the land of the Pyramids). Dr M. P. Parameswaran is a reputed scientist holding a Ph. D Degree in nuclear engineering of the Lumumba University, Moscow.

## OBITUARY

## Parappurath



Parappurath (K. E. Mathai) an outstanding novelist and short story writer, passed away on 30-12-1981. His collection of short stories called *Nalal Naluvazhi* won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Short story in 1966. His novel *Ara Nazhika Neram* won another award in 1968. He was the President of the Sahitya Pravartaka Sahakarana Sanghom at the time of his death.



Sri: C. P. Sreedharan placing a wreath on the dead body of V. T. Bhattathiripad

## V. T. Bhattathiripad

V. T. Bhattathiripad (86) who was famous not only as a writer but also as a great social reformer, passed away on 12th February 1982. He was a Fellow of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.



The body of Shri Bhattathiripad was placed in the Akademi Hall for some time to enable his friends and admirers to pay their respects to him. On behalf of the Akademi, Sri C. P. Sreedharan, member, Executive Board laid a wreath on the dead body. People from all walks of life streamed into the hall to have a last look at the dear old leader. The dead body was then taken to his village home for cremation.



### E. M. J. Venniyur

E. M. J. Venniyur, Station Director, A. I. R., Bombay died of heart-failure on 9th March 1982. A reputed writer and critic of literature and art, he has made valuable contributions to Malayalam literature. He had been the Director of the A. I. R. Stations at Trivandrum, Calicut and Bhopal before he was posted to Bombay. He also rendered creditable service as Director of the Planning and Development Department A. I. R. Delhi. He was also for some time a member of the Executive Committee of the Central Sahitya Akademi and Chairman of Kerala Lalitha Kala Akademi.

## BOOK REVIEW

**AKANAANUURU** Vol. I Trans: by Nenmara P. Viswanathan Nair, Published by Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Trichur. Dis-tributors: National Book Stall, Kottayam, Rs. 25/-

Classical works are not susceptible to easy transcreation, especially when the source and target languages represent two distant cultures. In the case of Tamil and Malayalam the situ-

ation is relatively less complex as Kerala was neither a distant nor a distinct entity culturally or linguistically at the time of the composition of major Tamil classics as evidenced by the

West coast authorships of works like *Tolkaappiam*, *C'lappatikkar* and *Perumaaltirumozhi*. Naturally several Tamil classics have been translated into Malayalam including grammatical treatises like *Tolkaappiam*, *Nannul* and *Viracoozhiyam*. Two outstanding translations of literary works which deserve special mention are S. K. Nayar's verse translation of *Kamparaamaayanam* (incomplete) and S. Rameshan Nair's verse rendering of *Cilappatikaaram*. Kerala Sahitya Akademi has now brought out the translation with commentary of *Akanaanuuru* following their earlier publications of *Patittupaatu*, *Puranaanuuru*, *Manimeekhalai* and *Cilappatikaaram* besides a history of Tamil literature. A very laudable project, indeed.

One hundred and twenty poems of *Akanaanuuru* are rendered in prose with revealing commentaries in this first volume of the work. Presumably the Akademi proposes to bring out the rest of the classic in subsequent volumes. This Malayalam version is not merely a paraphrase in prose. The author besides giving an informative foreword detailing the significance of the work has arranged the original verse in an exemplary unique method

which serves to identify the type of the verse by just noting the sequential number of the poem. Each unit consists of four divisions: *avasaram* (context) *Muulam* (the original poem in Malayalam script along with the variant forms as footnotes, *Padaartham* (the exposition of textual meaning) and lastly *saaram* (the essence of the poem). The poems appear under the four names of geographical regions as expounded by Tolkaappiar. Four appendices all alphabetically arranged are added at the end: the list of the composers, the beginnings of the poems, explanations of certain important terms, and a word index.

- K. M. P. Varier

(The Hindu dated 19-1-1982)

KERALATHILE STHALACHARITHRANGAL-TRICHUR JILLA. By V..V. K. Valath; Published by Kerala Sahitya Akademi Trichur. Distributors: National Book Stall, Kottayam Rs. 16. 00

Lava and Kusa - Sri Rama's sons - founded the towns of Lavapur and Kusapur; the names were changed first to Lahawar and Kushawar, before they became the modern Lahore and Kasur. The name "India" itself can be traced to the oldest term "Sindhu" (meaning a river as well as a sea): the Persian's inability to use the letter. 'S' saw *Sindhu* change to *Hindu*.

The aspirate was dropped by the Greeks who made it 'Ind' and the British converted it to India. Place names are loaded with history; they have been a witness to our political and cultural transformation through the ages and need to be preserved. The Malabar Coast has experienced a series of intrusions by sea from the Middle East and Europe, more varied and more numerous even than those endured by the Punjab through which the northern invaders rode into India; the impact on the local history and culture of Kerala has been profound.

The name Kerala emerges in the dim glimmer of early Indian history about 2,200 years ago. It has been interpreted variously but most probably it is merely a derivation of *Cheralam*, meaning the land of the Cheras. The central thesis of Valath's prodigious study is that Kerala was a part of the ancient Tamil land which extended from Tirupathi in the North to Kanyakumari in the South and comprised the lands of the Cheras, the Pandyas and the Cholas and that most of the ancient place names are either Tamil in origin literally or derived from Tamil. The best part of the study is the manner in which the author establishes his thesis convin-

cingly, by minutiae of evidences linguistic, literary (Indian and foreign) geographical, topographical, epigraphical, archaeological, cultural and historical. The research has been meticulous (Mostly verified on the spot) and affectionately sincere but not uncritical; the result is a zestfully written and perceptively accurate (even if perhaps, not wholly definitive study,) where many sleepy villages, hills and dales, and many little known temples, monuments, forts and caves spring to life and old events take on new meanings.

Place names in Kerala have generally been based on land and water on adjacent hills and forests, temples, and festivals, on Gods, kings and saints. To illustrate — with reference to Trichur Jilla — "*Kurichikkara*" near Trichur is named after a hill close by "*Kuruchi*" being derived from *Kurinja* in Tamil meaning "hill" "*Mullasser*" after an adjacent forest derived from "*Mulla*" meaning (in Tamil) forest "*Palghat*" after a neighbouring dry area: "*Ernakulam*" after a Rishi; "*Velupadam*" after Muruga. "*Irinjalakuda*" after a temple built between two flood-waters and so on.

The study is studded with snippets from local history. For example:

Trichur is one of the 64 Nambudiri Gramams founded by Parasurama who also consecrated the Vadakkunatha ksethra.

The Chera king Senkuttawan consecrated a shrine of *Kannagi* at Kodungallur. Car festivals were held in all the Buddha temples; caves bear a distinct imprint of Jaina culture.

The Syrian orthodox church in Kerala dates from the era of Alexandrian trade. A modern Syrian Catholic church now marks the place where St. Thomas is said to have landed in A. D. 52.

Much has changed in Kerala during recent decades. But the country side — where over 80 percent of the people live and still pursue the traditional mode of life — has not changed. Going through Valath's history has been a sentimental journey across time to one, who spent his youth there. In reconstructing the history of one region, the author has captured the rich

heritage which in fact belongs to the whole of India.

—P. S. Narayanan  
(The Hindu 2-2-82)

The Journal of Oriental Research, Madras, Silver Jubilee Volume. Published by the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras,

The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras has made very valuable contribution to Oriental Studies and Indology during the last thirty five years. The Journal of Oriental Research is a periodical published by the (Kuppuswami Research) Institute. This journal publishes learned articles on Indian philosophy and culture. The book under review is a special issue of the journal brought out in connection with the Silver Jubilee of Kuppuswami Research Institute. This special issue contains very scholarly articles on such topics as the doctrine of Karma, the application of Panini's grammar to the interpretation of Rgvedic texts, the concept of Purusha in Samkhya philosophy and the concept of Brahman in Bhartrhari's philosophy. To those who are interested in Indian philosophy and culture this book will be very interesting and instructive.

—P. R. M.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Biographical notes on some of the contributors have already appeared in previous issues and are not repeated here — Ed.



### **Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai**

A reputed Scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam. From 1951 to 1955 he was Lecturer in Sanskrit, University College, Trivandrum.

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rary, Trivandrum and in 1966 he became the Director of the Oriental Research Institute, University of Kerala and also of the Manuscripts Library.

At present he is a Member of the Malayalam Advisory Board, Central Sahitya Akademi and also of the Malayalam Advisory Board, Akasha Vani. Dr. Pillai visited China in 1955 as a member of a Delegation sent by the Government of India to study the methods and system of education there. A prolific writer of books on various topics including Malayalam and Sanskrit grammar and existentialism.

### **Shri V. T. Induchudan**

He is a free-lance journalist and writer whose articles have appeared in many periodicals of Kerala. He has been already introduced to the readers in previous issues.

### **Professor G. Sanaka Pillai**

A reputed play-wright and the present Director of the School of Drama, (Calicut University) Trichur. He has already been introduced to the readers in previous issues.

Sri P. K. Venukuttan Nair who has translated G. Sankara Pillai's play (Camp) has been closely associated with the amateur theatre in Kerala for more than two decades as actor and director.



### Sri Anand

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Last year he won The Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of short stories, *Veetum Thatavum* (Home and the Prison). His novels and short stories are characterized by a deep philosophical inquiry into the meaning of life.

Dr. S. P. Remesh who has translated Anand's story (Dams) is a psychiatrist by profession, doing private practice at Trichur. He has published half a dozen short stories in Malayalam. He has also written several articles in Malayalam and English on film and music. He collaborated with G. Aravindan in doing the script for the award-winning film, *Pokkuveyil*.



### Sri K. G. Sankara Pillai

He is at present Lecturer in Malayalam, Government College, Trichur.

He is a significant poet of the younger generation. A modernist with a strong commitment to the ideology of the left he uses rhythmic prose in Malayalam with a sure touch.

Sankarji (P. Sankarankutty Menon) who has translated K. G. Sankara Pillai's poem (Bengal) is now working in the Kerala Sahitya Akademi as Museum Guide. For nine years he was Sub - Editor of *Navajivan*. He was also Publication Assistant of Current Books for some time.

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## A Hundred Years of Malayalam Drama

Malayalam drama has just reached the centenary of its birth. The time, therefore, is quite ripe and proper to make a survey of the development and growth of Malayalam drama during the last hundred years. The theatrical tradition of Kerala goes back to more than two thousand years. The origins of this tradition can be traced to some of the ancient visual folk-arts and folk-dances like the *Theyyam* and *Mutiyettu* which were performed as part of religious festivals. With the advent of the Aryan Brahmins from the North, Sanskrit drama came to the stage. When Sanskrit drama was enacted in the traditional Kerala style, with its gorgeous costumes, masks and percussion instruments, there emerged a new species of drama called *Kutiyattam*, which dominated the stage for some time. But when *Kathakali* came, it threw *Kutiyattam* a little into the shade. But both *Kathakali* and *Kutiyattam* are very much extant in Kerala.

We now come to the modern period, the last hundred years, which is really the period of our survey. This period, which had little to do with the earlier tradition, begins with Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran (Kerala Kalidasa) whose translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* was put on the boards in 1882, exactly a hundred years ago. A number of translations of Sanskrit dramas followed soon, notable among them being the works of Chathukutty Mannadiar and A. R. Raja Raja Varma. The next stage in the development of the Malayalam theatre was in the direction of comedy and social satire. The credit for introducing a number of farces full of comedy and social satire goes to C. V. Raman Pillai. Even before the beginning of this century the Tamil drama, with its undue emphasis on classical music, began to influence the Malayalam theatre. But this had little effect on the evolution of our dramatic literature. After the time of C. V., a long line of talented men like E. V. Krishna Pillai, N. Krishna Pillai, C. J.

Thomas and C. N. Sreekantan Nair developed the Malayalam drama with their creditable works. In spite of their great achievements, there was no cause for complacency. In our own times there is experimentation in diverse directions and a number of gifted writers are engaged in this adventure. Ironically enough, one of the latest tendencies in our drama is to draw upon the indigenous tradition which, till recently, has had little to do with the evolution of the genre.

To mark the occasion of the centenary we published in the last issue a translation of one of our modern one-act plays; and this issue contains two special articles on the subject.

# LANDMARKS IN MALAYALAM DRAMA

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Dr. K. Sreenivasan.

The drama in Malayalam has been in existence for a hundred years; and 1982 is being observed as its centenary year. Hence a survey of its course so far, tracing the different stages of its growth is a useful exercise, which will also help to foresee its future. As in the wider perspective of Malayalam literature as a whole, there is manifest in drama also a complexity of influences from external sources. The play in Malayalam is, indeed, a hybrid. A process of imitation, assimilation and improvisation was active all through its history, in a simultaneous and perhaps, overlapping manner. Hence any attempt to demarcate periods, influences or movements in a strait-laced way will only distort the overall picture. However, a few landmarks and a number of scattered achievements stand out in clear perspective. By observing and reckoning them, one can manage to get a general idea of the structure and growth of Malayalam drama to date.

Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran, the Johnsonian patriarch of later 19th century Malayalam literature, translated into Malayalam Kalidasa's immortal classic, *Sakuntalam*, in the year 1882. This event is generally held to mark the beginning of drama proper in the language. Perhaps, there were a few hotch-potch works anterior to it, which do not deserve any serious consideration. Anyhow one can safely say that there was no play as such till the eighties of the last century. The visual and dramatic arts, however were there all along in such folk forms as 'mudiyettu' or 'padayani' and in highly sophisticated forms like 'kathakali' and 'koodiyattam'. They are not forerunners of the play proper. The 'Chavittunatakam' had, perhaps, more elements of drama in it, but it was confined to the Christian community. Thus 1882 has to be acknowledged, by and large, as the first landmark in the unfolding history of the Malayalam play

The personality as well as the social status of Kerala Varma was such that his example immediately provoked widespread imitation. In the course of the next three decades, the major Sanskrit plays were available in translation. To have plays like *Malavikagnimitram*, *Uttararamacharitham*, *Malathimadhavam* *Ascharyachoodamani* and *Venisamharam* in Malayalam was indeed, a good turn to literature as a whole, but to the drama proper they did not directly add much. But *Sakuntalam* as it was produced and played on the stage, gave rise to far-reaching consequences. There were different translations of the play. Still, the theatrical troupes preferred Kerala Varma's version because it contained excellent stanzas which were suited for impassioned declamation. Indeed, Malayalee audiences, not unlike the Tamils, enjoyed music and song, though not to the same delirious extent.

There was wide - spread demand for witnessing *Sakuntalam* on the stage. It was a troupe of amateur actors called 'Manomohanam' who put it on the boards in different parts of the state. And all on a sudden began the spring time of the theatre. Other troupes like '*Vinodachintamani*' '*Rasikaran-*

*jini*' etc. came into being. The cumulative result of all these spontaneous activities was an unprecedented interest in the play, in the stage and in acting. Many reputations were made on the stage. Quilon Narayana Pillai, Mattom Kochu Kunju Bhagavathar, Karukathil Kesava Pillai and Attingal Nilakanta Pillai were some of the celebrities of the early state. Thus began emerging slowly the play, the actor and the audience. To begin with, there was hardly any co-ordination among the trinity. Such integrated efforts were slow to emerge.

Thus, in an accidental manner started the vogue of the play. Many a *kathakali* addict was weaned away from the world of mythological deeds to the human emotions of love, folly and repentance depicted in the theatre. And there appeared during this epoch another tendency, which helped in a way to give a new direction to drama. That was a feeble impact of day to day life. It came from an unsuspected corner. The first significant social play in the language viz. *Mariamman natakam* written by P. K. Kocheppan Tharakan was the remarkable fruit of a new theatrical awareness in the Christian community. It dealt with a live problem confronting

a bride in a Christian household—the nagging dominance of the mother-in-law, which symbolised, as it were, a social malaise that endangered not only the harmony and peace of the hearth and home, but also the overall welfare of the community.

With such casual and unpremeditated origins, the play soon degenerated into a turgid flow. Sanskrit pundits and literary hacks vied with each other to indite independent plays. This would have been welcome but for their slavish imitativeness. Nature and art were both abused with fervour and gusto. But there were also silver linings like K.C. Kesava Pillai's *Lakshmi Kalyanam* and Kochunni Thampuran's *Kalyaninatakam*. These two and *Marisamma natakam* were original in theme, but cast in the Sanskrit mould. Playwriting reached almost epidemic proportions. Actors and their entourage became a nuisance and even a threat to social well-being. The tide of this infected flow was stemmed by a timely burlesque, *Chakki Chankaram* (1883). By exaggeration, satire, ridicule and outright condemnation, its author, Munshi Rama Kurup, exposed to public gaze the prevailing abuses. While the spectators enjoyed the fun,

the playwrights and actors were sufficiently chastised, and all concerned were re-educated in the norms of correct theatre. The influence of the classical play started with a bang and ended in a whimper. Now the period of hectic apprenticeship was partly over. The play was launched for meaningful growth.

Meanwhile, a new phenomenon manifested itself—the Tamil Musical play. It supplemented the existing trends. Perhaps the two influences were concurrent as well as overlapping. And between them the stage was assured of a dynamic future. Well before the close of the last century, many troupes like those of Kalyanarama Iyer, Ramudu and Samu Iyer, had begun performing Tamil Musical plays extensively in Kerala. With the coming of the Tamil troupes, love of music which was already there, percolated to the lower strata also. The demonstrative display of the bhagavata-actors, who dominated these Tamil extravaganzas, delighted the audience. Along with music, what caught the popular eye was the spectacular scenic arrangements on the stage. Superadded to these were the romanticised episodes of *Pavizhakkodi*, *Nallathankai*, *Gulebeekkavali* and *Kovilancharithram*. The common

playgoer was feasted on these delectable dishes. Consequently the local troupes, still adhering to the stilted and antiquated conventions of the classical stage, were compelled to close shop for the time being. Soon the resourceful actors of Kerala conned a few good lessons. In some cases they even out-heroded Herod. Many a trick was refined ad nauseum. Bhagavatars were in great demand to play title roles. The music-loving Keralites sat through their acrobatics, and applauded the songs which were often out of part and irrelevant.

In spite of these drawbacks, the play gained in theatricality, even though at the expense of the dramatic element. There was a general awareness of the need for craft. The actor's place was recognised. It became obligatory to look into the tastes and preferences of the spectators. There was also a happy reappraisal among the playwrights. They had done, once for all, with the classical play. Plays modelled on the Tamil Musicals began to appear. One of the earliest was T. C. Achuta Menon's *Sangeetha Naishadham* (1892). During four decades, 18 impressions of the play, with an aggregate of 3400 copies, came out. That is an index of its popularity. This fact also te-

ifies to the deep impression the Tamil plays had wrought in the consciousness of the Keralities. And the success of such plays occasioned the spawning of hundreds of inferior works. There were also outstanding achievements like the poet-composer K. C. Kesava Pillai's *Sadarama* (1904). This took the stage by storm. In it he treated the original Tamil story with a clear eye for dramatic moments and situations, and interspersed the scenes with exquisite songs of his own composition.

The Tamil connection also helped the evolution of commercialism, which is a necessary evil in the growth of the theatre. *Sakuntalam* was acted mostly by amateur groups in the beginning. Then emerged professional sets. With the coming of the Tamil plays, the commercial angle got a slight edge over love of art and self-expression. In early times, a play, say *Sankuntalam*, was presented on an improvised stage, in the spacious yard of the chief landlord of the locality. Of course, courtly audiences and the aristocracy witnessed performances in spacious halls and indoor theatres. In the open air theatre, there was no admission fee; usually the audience gifted small amounts. Now the system of admission tickets was

copied from the Tamil companies. Again, after this connection, female roles went to women. The improvement in stage properties, including gorgeous curtains and colourful costumes, was another perceptible influence. But in this respect, the Malayalam stage stopped short of the vulgar. (The only Malayali commercial venture which fully exploited these novelties was the Permanent Drama Forum of Kalanilayam Krishnan Nair which came much later in the fifties.) During the first three decades of this century, the Malayalam stage was exposed to all these exotic trends. There was no total acceptance. But, by an eclectic method of assimilation and rejection, it was slowly finding its own moorings.

Paradoxically, Malayalam drama now escapes Tamil sway with the help of English plays. English educated scholars were eagerly bringing Shakespeare to the Malayalam readers. Adaptations were rife, eg. *The Timing of the Shrew* appeared as *Kalahini-Damanakam*.

Hereafter, there is the reign of prose and satire. The musical extravaganza with sicklied romantic stuff is no more the order of the day. The play focusses attention on social abu-

ses and personal idiosyncrasies. This somersault was in a way a loss, because thereby, for a long while, it lost the musical element and became the handmaid of prose and reason. But this was only the loss of growing up. The unfolding period is characterised by strength and vigour and over-enthusiasm which are the prelude to mature adulthood. In this happy transition from the dream world to reality, the one abiding land mark is C. V. Raman Pillai, the great exemplar of the historical novel in Malayalam

C. V. brought to the writing of fiction a dramatic imagination unparalleled in the annals of the Malayalam novel. But the prose play or farce that he was instrumental in evolving shows little of that. The farces that he wrote were just like curtain raisers done in between the works of fiction. His models were taken from English. In the farce, he handled superficial themes of topical importance, and brought to it only the dregs of his genius. He did not venture into the depth and emotional involvement of a genuine comedy. And yet he played a significant role in the evolution of Malayalam drama. *Chandramukhivilasom*, (1887) his first attempt in this genre, illustrates

his strength as well as weakness. It was enacted in the Trivandrum Maharaja's College by an amateur group of educated men. The play was directed against a non-entity, the effeminate dance master, who was a nuisance and a bore in well-to-do houses. It was like pillorying a fly. As play, it was a hotch-potch thing, harking back in certain ways to the techniques of the Sanskrit models. *Mathavilasom* (1893) was also a trifle which satirised drunkards and drunkenness. But years later, in *Kuruppilla Kalari* (A school without a Master-1909) he showed some sort of social awareness by dramatising the generation gap. The backdrop is the matrilineal joint family with its snow-balling conflicts. C. V. castigates the younger generation for its craze for fashions and urge for change. He wrote eight plays of this type. All of them were applauded by the audience, because of the topicality of the themes and the recognisable characters abounding in them. But in retrospect his achievement seems to be dated. Still he helped the play to steer clear of both the classics and the Tamil models. Both the sloka and the song were excommunicated. Dialogue became crucial. There were faint echoes of the realistic comedy of Godsmith, Sheridan and Mo-

liere. The play gained in verisimilitude. Further, the educated youngsters who acted these plays were exposed to questions of craft and structure. From among them emerged playwrights, who could raise drama into a more blended artifact.

Among the satellites orbiting around this star was a remarkable young man of "pregnant parts and quick inventive brain." That was E. V. Krishna pillai-writer, journalist and politician and above all a humorist with a keen eye for the ridiculous and the abnormal. He began hobnobbing with the stage by acting roles like those of Ummini Pillai and Tippu Sultan in dramatized versions of C.V.'s novels. A combination of such endowments, made more creative by his acquaintance with western literature, enabled him to write more satisfactory plays. His humorous plays are improvements on the farce. They have well-made plots and three dimensional characters. The humour is integrated. No concession is allowed for exotic situations or eccentricities of character. There is also genuine conflict. The satire is pointed and purposive. Thus, with E. V. the farce which owed much to Ben Jonson's Humour Comedies moves closer to Moliere. E. V.

also wrote history plays like *Seethalakshmy*, *Raja Kesava Dasan* and *iravikutti Pillai* with an eye for the heroic in human nature. In them the concern is chiefly the portrayal of character.

One of the most popular comic pieces of E. V. is *B. A. Mayavi* (The Artful Bachelor of Arts - 1933). It caricatured the world of affluent families of Trivandrum. The plot is built around the prevalent evil of son-in-law hunting among the Nair officials of the time. Other works like *Vismriti*, *Maya-manushan* and *Vivahakammattam* are also in the same mould. Among E. V.'s followers were N. P. Chellappan Nair and T. N. Gopinathan Nair. N. P.'s forte was dialogue which specialised in repartee, witticism and verbal acrobatics. Amateur groups vied with one another in staging these entertaining skits. The mantle of E. V. and N. P. fell on T. N. Gopinathan Nair who produced yearly variations of the same formula for the benefit of the amateur troupe attached to the Sree Chithira Thirunal Library. In fairness it has to be admitted that T. N. knew the stage from the inside and that his plays had stage worthiness. In the story of Malayalam drama he will be remembered at least

for the rapport he established between the playwright and the stage.

E. V. Krishna Pillai's historical plays unleashed a wave of pride and exaltation among the elite of Travancore. The fascination of C. V.'s historical romances too helped the trend to grow. And this aided drama also to advance. On the stage it did inaugurate an era of rapid growth. The Kainikkara brothers were perhaps, a creation of this wave. Their association with the drama was long as well as varied. And theirs was a wholesome influence. Distinguished educators, actors and men of letters, they gave much time to playwrighting also.

Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai's *Veluthampi Dalava* based on a historical personality, a patriotic hero, had an extended run on the amateur stage. His more famous and enduring work is *Kalvariye Kalpa Padapam* (The celestial tree of Calvary-1936) This play about Christ had a grand innings especially in Christian-dominated central Travancore. Even unsophisticated men and women were moved by this emotional recreation of the dramatic moments in Christ's life. The character of Judas supplied the

element of conflict and suspense. The fictitious Judith provided sentimentalism.

When Kumara Pillai came to making a play, his experience as an actor became invaluable. In his plays like *Harischandran* plot and dialogue receive more attention than a character. He makes ample use of the sentimental aspects of the story. In fact only those moments which would aggravate the sense of grief and pathos are chosen. In 1937 his powerful play *Mohavam Muktiyum* appeared. It is based on the story of Rugmangada. As the title itself indicates, the playwright seeks to project through this well-known story the innate conflict between Desire and Salvation. Here Kumara Pillai achieves a rare rapport between form and content. Plot and characterisation receive equal attention. It is a serious play and a work of art and hence it failed to win much popular applause.

The thirties were in search of new bearings. It was a decade of exploration and experimentation. To begin with, there was the disgust felt for the stilted prose and rhetorical dialogue of the farce and pseudo-historical play. There was a reaction against superficial realism. Again music

triumphed. The Professional stage was back in favour. At this juncture, as if by design, the '*Ochira Parabrahmodoya Nataka Sanghan*' put on the boards a dramatised version of Kumaran Asan's great narrative poem *karuna*. Swami Brahmavathan did the adaptation. The title roles were played by Oachira Velukutty and Sebastian Kunju Knnju Baagavathar, two gifted artistes who have carved out for themselves a niche in the story of the Malayalam stage. The success of *Karuna* was phenomenal. Its poetic excellence delighted multitudes. Here was a new kind of musical play, where sheer poetry reigned supreme. Artist P. J. Cherian's 'Royal Cinema and Dramatic Company' followed this new mode and presented a number of plays on Christian themes. On the whole, the professional theatre got a new lease of life. Hence forward it remained one of the vital limbs in Malayalam drama. But in spite of its many successes in the coming decades, its contribution to the growth of drama was negligible. It stood, by and large, for popular entertainment.

One of the events of far-reaching significance during the period was the coming into being of the play of social

commitment. In technique it followed the beaten track. In choosing themes, however, there was manifest a purposeful correlation with the times. In those days the complacency of the Keralites was being shocked by many socio-political movements. These had their repercussions on the stage also. V. T. Bhattathirippad's *Adukkalayil-ninnu Arangathekku* (From the Kitchen to the Open Arena-1930) arose out of the reform movement gaining momentum in the Namboothiri Brahmin community. After the publication of Kumaran Asan's poem *Duravastha* such movements took deep roots. V. T. sought to castigate the inhuman treatment meted out to women. Girls were denied education. They were entombed alive within the four walls of the Illam.\* In the play, the hapless heroine comes out into the arena of life to fight for basic human rights. M. R. Bhattathirippad's *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* and Premji's (M. P. Bhattathiripad) *Ritumathi* deal with similar themes.

The spreading of socialist ideas and the movement for freedom and responsible government were also helping to enlarge the frontiers of drama. K Damodran's *Pattabakki* (Arrears of Rent -

1938) was written to be staged during the Peasants' Convention at Ponnani. In it he projected economic issues and advocated class struggle. The land lord-peasant relationship was depicted with telling effect. Instead of sentimentalising over it, he exposed the system that dehumanises man. The denouement is bold. The protagonists are delineated with insight and understanding. The brother who is determined to fight uncompromisingly against exploitation and the sister who takes to prostitution for sheer survival are tragic figures. The simplicity of the plot, the veracity of the emotions handled, and the recognisable nature of the characters involved, make this one of the successful portrayals of a social problem.

But the one single influence that transformed the drama altogether was that of modern European theatre. Towards the end of the last century, Ibsen's plays helped to inaugurate a new era. In England Ibsenism got roots through William Archer and George Bernard Shaw. In Malayalam the credit for introducing Ibsen goes to the veteran journalist and intellectual 'Kesari' A. Balakrishna Pillai. His was a luminous intelligence to which was drawn

\* The ancestral house of a Namboodiri family is called Illam.

irresistibly some of the new talent. He translated *Ghosts* in 1936. Inspired by him, C. Narayana Pillai wrote *Mullakkal Bhavanam* an adaptation of *Rosmersholm*. It is significant that Kesary chose for translation *Ghosts* instead of the realistic plays like *An Enemy of the People* or *Doll's House*. K. Ramakrishna Pillai wrote *Thaptabashpam* avowedly an Ibsenist play, but hardly succeeding in adopting his technique.

Thus in diverse ways and owing to different influences classical, Tamil and European, the play in the language was slowly evolving itself and finding its own feet. And now it was poised for a leap forward. When the time was ripe for another take off, the right type of talent emerged. And that talent which pioneered the new drama was Professor N. Krishna Pillai.

In his history of Malayalam literature, *Kairaliyute Katha*, Krishna Pillai clarifies his aims in attempting the new play. It is clear that he aimed at certain aspects because they were not present in Malayalam. He has admitted his debt to Ibsen. But he was not a slavish imitator. As an artist, he chose to root himself in his own milieu. Alien

models helped only to the extent to which they were relevant to one's own time and place. A keen observer of human nature, he wrote about aspects which were well within his sphere of experience. Sincerity is the hallmark of his art. As he records in the history, what he undertook was to analyse, with a sense of realism, a chain of experiences. To suit that felt experience, he devised the locale, plot and characters. About dialogue, he felt that each word should further the action. In fact, he evolved an integrated and well-knit structure. In Ibsen, he found a playwright who observed this kind of discipline and decorum. He did not favour a complex plot of many strands. Instead, he was for a single skein, which took the action directly to the climax and denouement. He reduced to the necessary minimum the number of scenes. He avoided obesity and flabbiness. All these enhanced the emotional intensity of the central theme. It was such remarkable economy of means and effect which made Krishna Pillai's plays unique.

*Bhagnabhavanam*. (*The Broker Home* - 1943) was Krishna Pillai's first play. It was an instant success. The next one *Kanyaka* (*The Spinster*) is one of

the good problem - plays in the language. It dealt with the unenviable lot of a woman condemned to spinsterhood, because her parents exploited her as a milch cow. Finally she saw through the cause of their solicitude and turned her back on them. She married her office peon and wrought a sort of revenge. Her exit from the trap is reminiscent of Nora's slamming of the door in *Doll's House*. Krishna Pillai wrote ten plays in each of which he chose to analyse poignantly the existential agony of middle-class individuals.

It would be untrue to say that Krishna Pillai is uniformly successful. Still, one thing can be categorically said. After *Bhagabhavanam* there was no going back for Malayalam drama to the prolixity and muddleheadedness of its unmethodical past. Writers came to play-writing with a high seriousness. They realised the need to choose the right moment for a play to begin. Further, they were conversant with the technique of retrospective narration. The lessons of economy were too vital to be ignored. K. Surendran's *Bali*, G. Sankara Pillai's *Snehadoothan* and C. N. Sreekantan Nair's *Nashtakkachavatam* etc. illustrate these qualities. *Bali* is an emotion-

packed exposition of a basic human problem. *Snehadoothan* stands out for its technical finesse. *Nashtakkachavatam* is a brilliant problem play.

Besides there were avant-garde play-wrights like Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai and C. J. Thomas. It is a pity that Pulimana and C. J. passed away in the prime of life. Pulimana's work *Samathwawadi* (1945) is perhaps, the only expressionist play in the language. Through his four plays, C. J. Thomas brought new dimensions to our drama. His *Crime 27 of 128* breaks up the concept of the well-made plot and reminds us of the Absurd Theatre, though his affinity in the other plays is to Greek Tragedy.

Perhaps the most gifted among the dramatists of the next generation are C. N. Sreekantan Nair and G. Sankara Pillai. C. N. was the one who mooted the idea of the indigenous theatre. Indeed, in his trilogy based on the Ramayana viz, *Kanchana Sita*, *Saaketam* and *Lanka Lekshmi* he successfully turned the myth into a powerful study of human weakness and strength. His untimely death was a great loss. G. Sankara Pillai has in some two dozen plays tried to evolve a variety of dramatic patterns of great interest.

During this period the pot boilers did not add anything to the art of drama. Mention, however, may be made of a play *Yachaki* presented by the Oachira Parabrahamodaya Sangeetha Natana Sabha Choosing a lowly character, even if it was for its sentimental value, showed a significant change. Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair wrote two successful plays *Sthri* and *Maya*. He acted in them and won the loud applause of the ordinary playgoer. They became popular even though they were not musicals. Thus, it was evident that there were changing norms in the unreal world of professional drama. Kalanilayam Krishnan Nair brought to the theatre the novelty of spectacular scenic arrangements. But that was like pursuing the shadow instead of the substance.

In the all India picture of the drama, the Indian Peoples Theatre Movement of the fifties stands out as a milestone. Owing to its left-wing links, it opted for a committed theatre. In Kerala too its ripples were felt. In addition, the Progressive Writers' Organisation sought to politicalise aesthetics. It was in the Malabar region that revolutionary intellectualism was deeply entrenched. K. Damodran's play had already sponsored class

struggle. A worthy successor to it was *Koottukrishi* (Joint Farming) by the poet, Edassery Govindan Nair. With simplicity and inevitability, he portrayed relationships prevailing in the agricultural sector, and championed communal harmony from the Gandhian point of view. The play took the countryside by storm. On its heels began a popular theatre movement under the Malabar Kendra Kala Samithi. Among those who wrote plays in response to the movement's call, the most successful was K. T. Muhammad, whose *Karavatta Pasu* (The Old Cow) won unanimous acclaim. Though the movement fizzled out, its influence prevailed. K. T. Muhammed developed on independent lines and evolved a style of his own. He added a few novelties like the use of light and shade. He chose themes from the life of the common man, especially that of the indigent Malabar Muslim. Later Muhammed wrote for the commercial theatre and finally for his own troupe. The movement survived in the innumerable art groups which still function in North Kerala.

Almost similar is the role played by the K. P. A. C. in the Travancore area, where it started as a cultural adjunct of the

Communist party. It is identified with the success story of *Ningal Enne Communistakki* (You Made Me a Communist) an avowedly propagandist piece. Its telling theme and message produced a spontaneous effect in spite of the mediocrity of its structure and stereotyped techniques, Thoppil Bhasi, who wrote this play, followed it up with many others, in which there was a progressive dilution of the original ideological fervour. Perhaps owing to that he became a better artist. *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (The Prodigal Son) shows a balanced blending of both theme and form. Bhasi's achievement as a playwright is considerable. With consummate skill he unfolded lower middle class life in Central Travancore.

Simultaneously the purely professional sector also thrived. P. J. Antony's Prathibha Club scored a hit in his play *Chakravalam* Ponkunnam Varkey and S. L. Puram Sadanandan are among those who added grist to the mill of the commercial theatre. C. L. Jose stands apart, and in a quiet manner holds his mirror up to nature to chronicle the humdrum lives of ordinary mortals. His realism and truthfulness make him a hot favourite of the amateur stage in colleges and schools. Playwrights like

C. G. Gopinath and Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair and troupes like Kalidasa Kala Kendram and Geetha Arts Club must also find a place in any objective reckoning. N. N. Pillai and his family troupe cannot be ignored. Most of his plays draw record crowds, because they are produced with great skill and probably because they spell out a heady ingredient viz. perverted sex and incestuous relationships.

Before closing this survey, a word is due to a new trend in modern Malayalam drama. It looks like revivalism in a way, but is actually an attempt to go back to our traditions in search of vitality and strength. A fancy for the indigenous elements in our art and culture is a pardonable sin. The chief figure in this movement is Kavalam Narayana panicker, who is an indefatigable experimenter. In plays like *Daivathar* and *Avanavankadamba* he has sought inspiration from dance dramas like 'Kathakali' and 'Koodiyattam.' Such efforts are welcome because going back to our roots is one of the ways of escaping from the banal and the mediocre.

Of late the arts in Kerala have begun to receive more official patronage especially after the

establishment of the Sangeetha Nataka Akademi. Awards of different kinds are incentives to more sustained efforts. Whether owing to greed or love, the arena of Malayalam drama is now a place of hectic activity. At another level, the School of Drama of the Calicut University under its Director, Professor G. Sankara Pillai, the famous dramatist has become an active centre for the study and practice of theatre arts. Professor G. Sankara Pillai's book on the History of Malayalam Drama published by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi is a useful study. C. Gangadharan Nair's exhaustive bibliography of our dramatic literature is another recent work of significance. Kainikkara Kumara Pillai's collection of essays, *Natakeeyam*, spells out

the art and craft of drama. Mekkolla Parameswaran Pillai and N. N. Pillai have written treatises on the subject.

Of late there have been persistent efforts to transplant into Kerala the experimental theatre of the West. Waiting for Godot was translated and staged recently. Young playwrights like Vayala Vasudevan Pillai and Narendra Prasad tread new paths. While Vasudevan Pillai seems to have lost his soul to the eccentricities of present-day European drama, Narendra Prasad has delved deep into the racial unconscious to discover his own soul. Either way these efforts are full of promise. The prospects for Malayalam drama are undoubtedly bright.

# Introducing N. Krishna Pillai

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G. Kumara Pillai.

Kerala's traditional dance-drama, *Kathakali* has won international recognition and students of literature in other parts of India know something about our fiction and poetry. But little is known about our drama outside the borders of Kerala. This is not a preface to any tall claims on behalf of our playwrights. But, conscious as I am, of the limitations of Malayalam drama, I feel that it deserves to be introduced to the outside world so that it may be set in the large perspective of modern Indian drama. These thoughts were first aroused in me when on September 21, 1976 we celebrated at Trivandrum the sixtieth birthday of N. Krishna Pillai, the foremost living dramatist in our language.

A retired professor of Malayalam, Krishna Pillai is an inspiring teacher, a perceptive critic and a discerning historian of Malayalam literature. But his chief interest has been drama and he is the first of our writers to direct his creative energies

mainly to this branch of literature. He is not, of course, our first dramatist. When he came on the scene in 1942, Malayalam drama had already a history of some sixty years behind it. Boisterous comedies by C. V. Raman Pillai (1857 - 1922) delightful comedies and historical plays by E. V. Krishana Pillai (1894-1938) mythological and historical plays by the two Kainikara brothers-Padmanabha Pillai (1898 - 1976) and Kumara Pillai (6. 1900) and plays of social criticism by V. T. Bhattathiripad (1896-1982) and K. Damodaran (1912-76) were no mean achievements as pioneering efforts. But the plays of social criticism lacked form, while the plays which showed a sense of form followed the Shakespearian technique in serious drama and the models of 18th century English comedy in light drama - and in neither case were the themes of great contemporary relevance. The stage itself was dominated by popular drama which with a few honourable

exceptions aimed at being time-killing entertainment. Before Krishna Pillai, the only writer who took the art and craft of drama seriously was Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, but drama was only one of his major interests. Krishna Pillai came with the determination to give a new turn to Malayalam drama both in content and in form and rescue it from the level of a historical, mythological or social document, or an idle show of an empty evening. He has himself said that his aim was to analyse some serious basic issue of life with subtle realism, to adopt only those elements of plot, character and dialogue, time, place and action which were indispensable for the delineation of the issue and to focus all these elements on the full dramatic expression of the adopted theme.

A careful student of European drama, Krishna Pillai found his models in Henrick Ibsen and his contemporaries and disciples who embodied live social theses of contemporary relevance in strictly disciplined dramatic form. Ibsen had already been introduced to the Malayalam speaking world by A. Balakrishna Pillai in his translation of *Ghosts* (1936), C. Narayana Pillai in his free rendering of *Rosmersholm* under the title

*Mullackal Bhavanam* (1937) and K. Ramakrishna Pillai in his original book *Thaptabhashpam* (Hot Tears 1934). Ibsenite in theme, though not in form. Thus a new perspective was emerging and the impulse to turn it to creative account was Krishna Pillai's contribution. This does not mean that he was a blind imitator of Ibsen. What he has done is to make the fullest use of the lessons he learned from Ibsen and his school in creating a solid body of live drama in Malayalam.

The volume of his collected plays published in connection with his sixtieth birthday contains all his ten original full-length plays. These plays are *The Broken Home* (1942) *The Spinster* (1943), *The Tug of war* (1945), *The Vision* (1949), *Reconciliation* (1950), *The Investment* (1953), *Towards the Estuary* (1955) *The Sackcloth and the Sceptre* (1956) *The Light Under a Bushel* (1972) and *The Oasis* (1972)

Of these, *The Vision* is a dramatic version of the dramatist's conception of a writer's function. Written against the background of Progressive Literature with its insistence on the writer's commitment to the Communist Party, it declares a humanist's rejection of all partisanship and all commitment

except to his own personal vision of life.

All the other plays deal with domestic themes, the painful conflicts inherent in the relations between members of a family. Krishna Pillai's first play *The Broken Home* is a moving domestic tragedy, it is the story of three unfortunate sisters who are frustrated in love and marriage owing to misunderstandings, temperamental incompatibilities or sheer caddishness on the part of the man. With their liberal-minded and affectionate father they move through a nightmare to what seems to be a pre-destined doom. The eldest goes mad, the second commits suicide and the third is left with an illegitimate child in her womb. And the father cries out in utter bitterness: 'O, you blind God, you have shattered my little mud-hut'.

In fact, *The Broken Home* will, in a certain sense, be an appropriate common title for all the nine plays. This does not mean that these plays are monotonous repetitions of the same theme in the same form. Though the theme of domestic conflict and the well-knit form serve as bonds of unity, there is a great diversity in the situations and the characters. Of the nine plays, *The Sackcloth and the Sceptre*,

intended for children, deals with a mythological theme—the broken home of King Dasaratha on the exile of young Shree Rama to the forest. All the other plays have a contemporary setting. But the tone differs from play to play. *The Broken Home* with the dark shadow of fate hovering over it from first to last ends in nothingness. *The Spinster* and *the Tug of War* end with a bang of protest. In these plays the destructive element is dominant. From *Reconciliation* onwards the constructive element gets the upper hand except in *The Light Under a Bushel*, which, like *The Broken Home*, ends in a sheer sense of despair. Even the constructive element emerges in different ways in the four remaining plays.

In *The Spinster* the unmarried career-woman who feels frustrated in the fulfilment of her instinct for wifehood and motherhood explodes with resentment, resigns her job and clears out of her parental home in the company of her office peon. *The Tug of War* deals with the theme of the conflict between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law. But Krishna Pillai does not treat it in the traditional way. With the help of new insights provided by psycho-analysis he depicts it

as the struggle between the mother and the wife for domination 'over a young man's soul. The submissive younger daughter-in-law dies of a broken heart, but the strong-willed older one shakes the dust off her feet and she drags along her brother-in-law as she storms out of the house.

In *Reconciliation* the main character is the elder brother, Kittu Pillai, who has remained single and sacrificed everything for the advancement of the younger brother, who when he grows up, breaks free of the charted path and takes to public work instead of trying to climb the ladder of official hierarchy as desired by the old man. When his efforts to bring him round fail, the old man commits suicide. This opens the eyes of the young man's wife who sees the futility of self-centred stubbornness and, instead of sticking to her earlier plan to leave her husband, she stays on to argue him into a new life of give and take. In *The Investment* the human problem is much more complex. In the words of the author, it tells how in the grave-yard of one marriage the flower garden of another marriage is raised. The man who undergoes the strange experience is a minor civil servant, Prabhas

karan Nair. At the instance of his wife he takes into their household Shyamala, an intelligent and ambitious but very poor girl, who comes up from the village for her higher education. Gradually, Nair becomes infatuated with the girl and ultimately his wife falls ill and dies of a broken heart and he marries Shyamala. The story is told with such understanding and sympathy that there are no villains in the piece except a minor one who does not count.

*Towards the Estuary* is the picture of the decline and fall of an aristocratic family which clings to out-moded feudal prejudices, unaware of the changing times, it also indicates the growth of a new family based on the concept of the dignity of labour. *The Light Under a Bushed* is the strange story of a woman who loves her two-step children much better than her own only son and is ultimately rejected by all of them. She does this by way of penance for what she believes to be her role in the death of her step-children's mother. The intended theme is the woman's sacrifice but in effect it is a story of crime and punishment. *The Oasis* is a study in contrast. It portrays two brothers who have lived apart, one a self-important cynic and the other an

exuberant extrovert, their unexpected meeting and the conversion of the former by the latter.

I have spoken about the contemporary setting. But the plays are not naturalistic documents. The dramatist is mainly interested in the psychology of the characters, in their inner conflicts, in their hidden motives and unconscious impulses. In this respect *Towards the Estuary* and *The Oasis* are rather weak because in the former social sources are given greater importance while in the latter the main characters who are juxtaposed are caricatures. The six plays of psychological realism show a rare insight into the complexities of human nature. In fact, these are not problem-plays in the narrow sense of the term though *The Spinster* *The Tug of War* *Reconciliation* and *Towards the Estuary* do highlight certain significant social problems and all the plays contain a discussion element. The dramatist's strength lies in the "inwardness" of his plays. And his main limitation is that though this 'inwardness' penetrates the emotional, intellectual and even moral levels it does not reach out to the spiritual level without which the greatest drama cannot be created. But for this, Krishna Pillai's record is very impressive.

Krishna Pillai is not a blind imitator of Ibsen, though Ibsen's middle plays served as a model for him. He has brought to bear on his work a rigorous sense of disciplined form. In *The Vision* he has employed elements of the medieval morality pattern and the modern expressionistic technique. In the other plays he observes a classical sense of economy which creates a rare unity of impression. Economy in the number of characters and scenes and crispness of dialogue are the hallmark of his plays. His best plays have no long speeches and they have no more than three or four characters and three or four scenes. In his early work the tempo is very fast and the dialogue breathlessly tense. In *The Investment* he allows himself some relaxation, but it is still very compact. *Towards the Estuary* with its nine scenes is the only play in which there is a comparative looseness of structure.

These dramas have not been very popular on the regular stage. This is not because they are not stage-worthy. They are not, of course, meant for the professional stage which, in Kerala, means, by and large, the commercialised stage. These plays make demands on the direction

and the actor and the audience itself. All these plays have been tested successfully on the stage by troupes of the best and brightest of our amateur actors especially in Trivandrum. Krishna Pillai has a keen sense of stagecraft; in fact, our very talented amateur actor, the late P. K. Vikraman Nair, was one of the sources of inspiration behind his early work.

Malayalam drama has now gone beyond the level to which Krishna Pillai took it. The late C. J. Thomas (1918-1960) who could create the simple grandeur of a Greek tragedy and the bizarre complexity of an absurd play, the late C. N. Sreekantan Nair (1928-1976) in his *Ramayana* trilogy could plumb the

depths of spiritual anguish, G. Sankara Pillai (b. 1930) the dynamic Director of the School of Drama under the Calicut University, who in some two dozen plays, has struck out in diverse directions and Kavalam Narayana Panikker (b. 1928) who has evolved a very interesting form of poetic drama rooted in the indigenous tradition have done excellent work to raise our drama to higher levels. But their contribution would have been difficult without Krishna Pillai's work and in a sense his work would have remained meaningless without theirs. In fact, Krishna Pillai's work is the greatest landmark in the history of our drama and half a dozen of his plays bid fair to stand the test of time.

#### Note:

Malayalam titles of the plays:

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. The Broken Home                   | - <i>Bhagnabhavanam</i>        |
| 2. The spinster                      | - <i>Kanyaka</i>               |
| 3. The Tug of War                    | - <i>Balabalam</i>             |
| 4. The Vision                        | - <i>Darsanam</i>              |
| 5. Reconciliation                    | - <i>Anuranjanam</i>           |
| 6. The Investment                    | - <i>Mutakkumuthal</i>         |
| 7. Towards the Estuary               | - <i>Azhimukhathekku</i>       |
| 8. The Sack Cloth and<br>the Sceptre | - <i>Maravuriyum Chenkolum</i> |
| 9. The Light Under a<br>Bushel       | - <i>Kutathile Vilakku</i>     |
| 10. The Oasis                        | - <i>Maruppaccha</i>           |

# Comparative Indian Literature

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Dr. K. M. George.

When I say that we in India have not given much thought to the usage or rather the title 'Indian Literature' as a single entity, it may surprise some of my listeners. But it is a fact. We use the term 'Indian Literatures', in the plural meaningfully. However "Indian Literature" in the singular has been and is being used frequently by non-Indians who are interested in our literature and culture. There are quite a few universities in Europe, America and Australia which offer Indian literature as a subject of study. In the Indian Universities, however, we have only courses in individual Indian languages and literatures like Hindi,<sup>1</sup> Bengali or Tamil. We have yet to consider the prospects and desirability of having a course in Indian Literature in our colleges and universities. For some of the European Indologists of the 19th century, Indian Literature was only Sanskrit literature, as revealed from some of their

writings. But for us, Indian Literature is the sum total of the literatures of the various modern Indian languages and classical Sanskrit literature; and many would prefer to call it 'Indian literatures' in the plural.

From this brief discussion, it has become clear that we have been accustomed to using the term 'Indian Literature' in the singular and also 'Indian literatures' in the plural. But what is the position when we refer to *the languages* which clothe the ideas and convey the emotions of the literary works? We always refer to Indian languages in the plural only and never in the singular as *the Indian language*. Why?...

Hindi, Bengali, Tamil and Malayalam are Indian languages. There is no language which can claim to be 'the Indian language.' All our languages are national languages. How do the writings in these many languages make up one literature? Is it a fan-

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\* Text of a talk broadcast from the Calcutta Station of All India Radio. (July 82)

tastic idea or are there some identifiable common characteristics in the writings of various Indian languages? The National Sahitya Akademi has been propagating the idea that 'Indian literature is one though written in many languages'. Is this a mere slogan, politically motivated to impress on us the cultural unity of the country, literature being a natural expression of our culture? This surmise seems to be too facile. Yet, can we say with conviction that the literatures of the various languages are but different manifestations of the same culture? One should honestly confess that we have yet to discover fully (and without ambiguity) Indian Literature in the singular.

How shall we go about the task? There are 15 major languages recognized by the Indian Constitution in addition to quite a few others with sizeable literatures. Even if we take only the 15 major literatures, there is no one who can read all these literary works in the original. And translations of even the most important works in all these languages are not available in any medium, be it English or Hindi. So there is little chance of proving the oneness of these literatures, unless comparative studies of the various literatures

are facilitated. And comparisons can be made only between like objects.

With this end in view, a very important project has been planned by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi under the title '*Comparative Indian Literature*'. About 3½ years ago the Executive Committee of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi decided to launch this stupendous scheme and invited the present speaker to be director of the project and the chief editor of the reference work. The chief editor is helped by 15 distinguished editors, one for each language. To mention only the names of the editors of the eastern region, we have had the co-operation of Dr. Satyendranath Sarma for Assamese, Professor Naresh Guha for Bengali and Shri. Sitakant Mahapatra for Oriya. Other editors are Shri Gulabdas Broker (Gujarati) Dr. Nagendra (Hindi) Professor L. S. Seshagiri Rao (Kannada) Professor P. N. Pushp (Kashmiri) Dr. Sukumar Azhicode (Malayalam) Professor M. V. Rajadhyaksha (Marathi) Dr. Harbhajan Sing (Punjabi) Dr. E. R. Sreekrishna Sarma (Sanskrit) Professor D.K. Mansharamani (Sindhi) Shri M. Arunachalam (Tamil) Dr. C. N. Sastri (Telugu) and Prof. Mohammed Hasan (Urdu). On the

recommendation of the editors about a dozen outstanding scholars in each language have been invited to write the articles. All the articles are first written in English. I shall briefly indicate the general design.

The work is planned in 2 volumes of six sections each. As pointed out earlier, in order to facilitate comparative studies, a generic approach to the history of literature has been accepted. The first section is on Language. This gives a brief but dependable background for the surveys which follow. The second section deals with Folk Literature. Then come two important sections on Traditional Poetry and Modern Poetry. This is followed by the section on Drama. After this come the branches which reveal the greatest impact of the West viz., the Novel and the Short Story.

Then comes General Prose, followed by Biographical Writings, Literary Criticism and Children's Literature. The last section entitled 'Movements and Institutions' does not deal with literature proper but with extra-literary forces which have fostered literary productions—forces emanating from religion, politics and social factors.

The title *Comparative Indian Literature* may appear somewhat

presumptuous; because comparative studies as such are not attempted in the volumes. The surveys written with the motive of assisting students of Comparative Literature form the bulk of the work which contains, in addition, select bibliographies and pointers to common areas and distinctive features. This will considerably help the researcher to discover our national identity.

As a pioneering attempt intended to get a total view of Indian Literature with a comparative bias, the work has its own limitations. It should be taken only as the first step, but a very important step, in the right direction. Though the emphasis is on information, by and large, the articles do not read like stereotyped statements of facts as found in some encyclopaedias. They contain examples and excerpts from great works and also gists of plots and stories which give a taste of the literature discussed. The evolution of each genre is discussed with suitable critical evaluation. All the details found in standard histories of literature may not be available here, and the ideal has been to *focus on the peaks*.

Though, the detailed surveys deal with only the 15 languages, there are useful appendices con-

taining single but long articles on Indian writing in English and on the literatures of Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Rajasthani, Konkani and Nepali. There is a very useful compilation of the lists of the 'most outstanding works in the 15 languages coming under the categories, Traditional Poetry, Drama, Novel and Short Story. This will help preparation of various types of national anthologies in translation. Then there are two appendices, one giving a glossary of the literary terms used in all the Indian languages and the other giving equivalents of English literary terms in the Indian languages.

The introductions to sections contributed by erudite guest-editors like Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, Smt. Kapila Vatsyayan, Professor V. K. Gokak, Professor V. V. John, Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, Dr. Sujit Mukherji, Dr. M K. Naik, Dr. Sivaram Karanth, add to the prestige and usefulness of the reference book.

After having read and edited all the 200 articles envisaged

under the scheme, I must say that I have been profoundly impressed by the like-minded response of our creative writers in the many languages to the thought currents and forces emanating from religious, political and social ideas. Many writers seem to operate on the same wavelength, so to say. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have tremendously influenced the literary creations in all our languages. The Bhakti movement, the impact of the West and the resultant literary renaissance, the national awakening, the progressive literature movement with a leftist bias- all these are great landmarks clear in every literature. Though each Indian literature has its own distinctive flavour and fragrance, they all seem to belong to the same species with identifiable common characteristics. I do hope that when the new work is published, the readers will get the same feeling of having had a good grasp of our national identity and that we will be able to say with full conviction that Indian literature is *one*, though written in *many* languages.

*[The Kerala Sahitya Akademi will be publishing shortly a monumental work called "Comparative Indian Literature" in two volumes. It is a brief but comprehensive history of the literatures of the major languages of India. Dr. K. M. George, the Director and Chief Editor of this work was assisted by a number of scholarly editors, each of them representing one language and the literature of that language. We publish below the opinions expressed by some of these scholars about the importance and value of this great work. The opinions of the other editors will be published in the next issue.]*

Ed.

### **Dr. Satyendranath Sarma – Editor For Assamese**

Indian literature resembles a multi-coloured lotus where every petal, being an organic part of the whole, nevertheless presents some special characteristics in form and colour. Each Indian literature, inheriting some common heritage from the Indian cultural history, has also developed some significant traits which differentiate it from other sister literatures of India. To understand and to appreciate the Indian cultural developments, roughly from the tenth century A. D., the study of the regional literatures manifested through

different languages, is very much essential. From this point of view a comprehensive work on the comparative Indian literature has been a desideratum. All lovers of Indian literatures owe a great debt to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for pioneering the project of preparing the 'Comparative Indian Literature'. The work will, no doubt, facilitate the process of emotional integration of our vast country by unfolding the essential unities of cultural and aesthetic development underlying the apparent diversities.

## Shri Gulabdas Broker - Editor For Gujarati

The compilation of Comparative Indian Literature is, to my mind, an achievement which has a tremendous significance for the various languages and literatures of India. This work contains within its pages all that one would like to know about the various languages of India and their development, as well as the various forms of literature that they have developed, right from the beginning to the present day. Some of the Indian languages have a very rich literature which can compare quite well with other developed literatures, but up to now, I do not remember to have come across any one work which contains within itself all the information about the various languages and literatures of India that this work contains. Here in a single book of reference one can learn about the various stages through which the various languages of India have passed, and the way in which they have developed themselves as well as the various forms of literature.

I am sure this work fulfils a long-felt need both for the Indian as well as the foreign student of literature. After the publication of this work, one will not have to look up many volumes and sources of informa-

tion, but will only have to refer to this volume for a glimpse of the state of affairs in a particular language or literature. It will be only for a more detailed study that he will have to turn to other sources, information about which also, he will get from this source book.

From these points of view, I welcome the publication of this very important work, in the compilation of which its Chief Editor, Dr K. M. George has taken such tremendous trouble. But for his untiring efforts, this work would not have seen the light of day.

I can say this because as the editor of one of the languages and literatures in this volume-Gujarati, I know how stupendous the task has been. If it was so for me who had to look after only one language-my own-how much more so must it have been for the Chief Editor who had to look after all the languages of India, and who had to see that the work maintained a certain uniform standard of scholarship.

I consider it a privilege to have been able to work with Dr. K. M. George in this venture of his. I retain very happy memories of my work with him.

### Prof. L. S. Seshagiri Rao – Editor For Kannada

Comparative Indian Literature, it seems to me, is part of the process of India discovering itself. Political rivalries and military clashes have added black and bloody chapters to the history of this land. But through them all the people have endeavoured to define the good life, to build scales of values, to control evil and promote good to explore the human mind and to understand the universe. The opportunity of learning English exposed the people - the educated ones directly and the others indirectly - to a challenging new influence. At the same time it brought the British and European writers closer while the giants even just outside our states remained strangers.

The multiplicity of languages in India need not be only a problem and an embarrassment, it

is also an asset. A whole people, unquestionably the builders of a single culture, but comprising as many groups as a whole continent, have made them the media of self-expression. India has, therefore, produced in all her languages, literatures at once rich, varied and fascinating. Through these literary creations, from the ballads of anonymous poets to the experiments of the latest *avant-garde* writers, the speakers of different languages get to know one another and themselves better. And the world outside will understand India more deeply and truly. *Comparative Indian Literature* offers a collection of critical studies by scholars who can speak with authority. It opens up inviting fields of comparative study both to the Indian student of literature and to his counterpart anywhere in the world.

### Prof. P. N. Pushp – Editor For Kasmiri

The forthcoming work on *Comparative Indian Literature* (a Silver Jubilee Publication of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi) is unique in more than one respect. It offers a representative Miscellany of India's literary culture, within an authentic framework of comprehensive reference. Its methodology of presentation aims at working out

a sort of unity in diversity highlighting the significant variety of literary expression comprehending the totality that is India. The volume thus facilitates closer peeps into the comparative vistas of creative as well as critical writings unfolding the universal rooted deep in the regional (nurturing the national).

### **Prof. Sukumar Azhicode - Editor For Malayalam**

'Comparative Indian Literature', sponsored by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, is a publication of great daring, novelty and purposiveness. It is meant to break new ground in the area of what is popularly described as Indian Literature, viewed as the meeting ground of all the literatures flourishing in the various provincial languages of India. The points of variation and resemblance as well as the problems of individual identity and cultural consistency revealed in the course of the evolution and growth of the living literatures in India have been never

before scientifically and comprehensively chronicled and analysed. The vacuum developed in this neglected area of the comparative study of Indian Literature is sought to be filled by this pioneering endeavour which is the outcome of an intense concentration of contemporary literary scholarship in India. It will serve writers, scholars and students of Indian culture from India and abroad as a reliable tool for an over-all understanding of the integrated history of Indian Literature and of India in general.

### **Prof. M V. Rajadhyaksha - Editor For Marathi**

We have at least fourteen major languages in the country. with their literatures; and each of them has a distinct identity rooted in a life fashioned by a variety of circumstances. The identity is manifested in a particular tradition. And yet this apparently forbidding diversity is tempered by certain factors. A common heritage of thought and literature derived from the ancient past has formed the core of these traditions in varying measure. In the more recent past, with the accident of history bringing British rule, and thro-

ugh it an English education, the literature and thought of Europe has coloured and enriched an aspect of the traditions. There has also been a profitable interaction between the traditions at various levels. The diversity has thus not meant fragmentation. There are bonds, not all of them so obvious, which make for analogous features, even for a broad homogeneity. The comprehensive account of the growth of the literatures in India should bring this home to the perceptive reader.

Such a reader's study would be truly comparative with the book devoting each of its sections to the growth of a particular literary form in all the literatures, instead of merely stringing together the histories

of the literatures, which is what most histories do. It is a vast literary scene with a bewildering variety. But mapped in such meaningful manner, it should make rewarding reading.

### Shri. Sitakant Mahapatra - Editor For Oriya

Because of its multi-lingual context the Indian literary situation sometimes gives the impression of being a Tower of Babel. An educated Indian interested in poetry, for example, may know more about Greek or French poetry than, let us say, the poetry of his sister States' languages. This is for no other reason than that a Cavafy or a Henri Michaux is available to him in English translation while the same is not true for the poe-

try of his sister States' languages. Any endeavour to make known the creative works of one linguistic region of India to others is, therefore, a step in the right direction of creating the awareness of an *Indian literature* and the creation of a Pan-Indian readership. The project 'Comparative Indian Literature' sponsored by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi is a very valuable step in this creative venture of immense national significance.

# PARAPPURATH

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K. M. Tharakan

Malayalam literature lost one of her finest votaries in the untimely demise of Parappurath K.E.Mathai. The death occurred in the early morning of 30th Decemder 1981. K.E Mathai waa born in November 1924 as the *son of Nina Eso* and his wife Soramma, in the house of Kizhakke Painum Moottil at Kunnam, a village in Mavelikkare in South Kerala. After his education at the English High School, Chettikulangara, Mavelikkara, he joined the army in 1944. He served the army as a Havildar clerk for twenty one years. In 1952 he married Ammini and three sons and two daughters were born to them. Mathai's married life was peaceful; only that till his retirement from the army in 1965 he could come home only occasionally. This partly accounts for the powerful nostalgia he has expressed in his writings. Even while in the army he was watching with keen interest the developments in the cultural field of Kerala. Back from the army,

he settled down in Kunnam. He started a printing press of his own. Very soon he became a part of the cultural life in the State. He was nominated a member of the Advisory Board constituted by the Kendra Sahitya Akademi for the Kerala region. He was several times elected a member of the Board of Directors of the Sahitya Pravartaka Co-operative Society. He was its President at the time of his death.

Parappurath was a good short story writer and an eminent novelist. The first literary piece he wrote was the short-story *Bed No. 40* which gave a sensitive account of his harrowing experiences in a military hospital as a small-pox patient. The first short-story of his that saw the light of day was *Putriyude Vya-param*. (Business of the Daughter.) It appeared in the periodical *Lokavani* in 1948. The same year he assumed the pen-name 'Parappurath'. Thereafter his short stories were published in all the leading periodicals in

Malayalam. He brought out his first collection of short stories in 1952. This won the approbation of critics. Parappurath's collection of short stories come to more than a dozen. Of these 'Nalal Nalu Vazhy (Four Men, Four Types) won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for the short story in the year 1966.

The short stories of Parappurath are delightful. He is at his best in the portrayal of the life of the Syrian Christian Community of South Kerala. He deals with his experiences in the army as well. He is the short-story writer of the heart-throbs of the middle class. His language is sensitive; it brims with feelings and emotions. However Parappurath's short-stories may not be described as superb. They lack suggestive power. The epiphany is there but it is not brilliant. Certainly the short stories of Parappurath are the works of a master but they are not masterly.

As a novelist Parappurath is second to none in Malayalam literature. He had powerful experiences of his own to express through the medium of the novel. Even when he was contributing short-stories to the periodicals in the early period, he started working on a novel. With the

publication of his first novel *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal* (Blood-Stained Foot-steps) in December 1955 Parappurath found himself famous. On its basis, unprejudiced critics came forward to acclaim Parappurath as a novelist of the first order. Literary historians point out that along with M. T. Vasudevan Nair and Kovilan, Parappurath steered the course of the Malayalam novel to the modernist channels of new sensibility.

It is hard to assess the early literary influences on Parappurath. Certainly he must have read some of the best works of fiction in Malayalam. It is probable that he had read some of the best novels in English too, at least the works of Ernest Hemingway. However he was not imitative. He had something unique to express, and he expressed it in a unique way. As a novelist he is a class by himself. By the time Parappurath made his entry into the literary field, the Malayalam novel had attained a maturity of its own. The first good social novel in Malayalam, *Indulekha* (1889) by O. Chandu Menon and *Marthanda Varma* (1891), the historical novel by C. V. Raman Pillai established the genre of the novel in Malayalam literature. C. V. Raman Pillai's *RamaRaja*

*Bahadur* was published in 1919. Then for some time no remarkable work of fiction was produced in the language. There was a great revival of the Malayalam novel in the forties and the fifties. P. Kesav Dev, Thakazhy Sivasankara Pillai, Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, S. K. Pottekkatt and Uroob (P. C. Kuttikrishnan) enriched the genre in this period. They covered different fields of social life, each sought to interpret life in his own way. At first the emphasis was on the presentation of the social structure which enslaved the lower sections of people. Later attempts were made to study the working of the human mind and to solve the riddle called human existence. By and large the novelists of the period blended romanticism with realism. Whereas some of the novelists exploited sociological realism, others applied the method of psychological realism. They shared a common faith in the great traditional human values. Even when they painted the most sordid aspects of life, they had faith in the progress of the country, the growth of man, and the triumph of the great human virtues.

As early as 1955, Parappurath saw life in a different perspective. Born and brought up in a Syrian

Christian (Orthodox) family of South Kerala, he looked for certain values of life which he thought would prevail in society. The Indian tradition which he inherited, also nurtured in him hopes about the triumph of certain perennial values in life. But his experience of reality forced him to question the relevance of the traditional values in the present context. In the independent India which was to realize the great ideals held aloft by the ancient sages, the great values of life seemed to have lost their contents. They were but hollow words signifying nothing.

As against the note of faith and optimism in the novels of the forties and fifties, a note of agony and despair was sounded in *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal*. It warned the people of the advent of an era of gloom that would shatter our rosy hopes about our land. Mathew, the main character of *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal* is an ex-service man. How much had he suffered in the army! He had thought that the sacrifices made by the Jawans would help to create a better India. But something went wrong somewhere. Mathew found that the village of his birth had changed. The woman he had loved also had changed. There was nothing he could do

about it except to carve out an existence of his own. Farewell to the plumed days of romance and robust optimism. Life was a sort of bondage that man was condemned to suffer.

Parappurath continued to write, one novel after another; for he was born to write. Writing to him was also his rebellion against the vanity of life. In almost every novel he was searching for a meaning to the enigmatic phenomenon called existence. He has twenty novels to his credit. It is a tribute to a work of art that it is excellent and at the same time popular. Such works approximate Tolstoy's conceptions of great art.

There are many aspects of fiction in the novels of Parappurath that appeal to the varied sections of readers. The novels are well constructed. They question the relevance of the existing values of life, but they do not negate them altogether. The narration is effortless; the language is rich and has a music of its own. The novels disturb us, they make us restless; at the same time they give sheer delight. Each of the novels has a story to tell and the story moves our heart. Yet if these were the only merits of these works, they could have hardly put forth their claims to greatness as con-

temporary Malayalam classics. These merits certainly count, but it is Parappurath's vision of life, and his unique method of expression in life-patterns symbolic of his vision that have made his works of fiction remarkable.

Of the twenty novels of Parappurath, five are outstanding, *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal*, *Anweshichu Kandethiyilla Pani Theeratha Veedu*, *Ara Nazhika Neram* and *Akasathile Paravakal*. As in *Ninamaninja Kalppadukal* the story is set against army life in *Anweshichu Kandethiyilla*. Susamma, an upright nurse is its central character. In the army she successfully resists many temptations. With her virtue unsullied she comes back to her village to settle down in Kerala. She seeks a suitable man to marry her. But her own society now rejects her as unclean; she seeks but does not find. (The title of the story means; 'sought, but could not find.') Jesus had said "Knock, it shall be opened, ask, it shall be given, seek, you shall find." Such words of faith have little significance in the present situation. The footsteps of Mathew were blood-stained, like those of the Nazarene. But Mathew lacked the courage of his convictions and Susamma

lacked the strength to overcome her despair. These characters are helpless beings, who have come to the realization that man can at best only strive, he seldom reaches the heaven of peace.

The tragedy of the modern is delicately presented in *Panitheeratha Veedu* (House Unfinished) The central character of the novel is Jose. He is working as a Havildar clerk in the army in Nainithal, U. P. We get a complete picture of his family through the letters from his mother in Kerala and through the flashback of his memory. Jose's father, a Syrian Christian of South Kerala shifts with his family to a forest area in Central Kerala in the hope of finding a better life there. If he had not been an alcoholic, and if the crops had not failed, the family would have succeeded in constructing a house of its own there. But Jose's father is killed in a brawl, crops fail. Jose finds it hard to save enough money to support his mother, sister and younger brother. The construction of the house, symbolic of the construction of India, is not completed. The novel gives us a memorable picture of Nainithal. Different shades of army life are dexterously brought out. We get in the novel a number of episodes, which are pivoted

on Jose. There is the moving tale of the sweet innocent Jeevanthi whose life is at the mercy of the rich *Settu* Sahib. The family of Thangayya who serves the *Settu* lead a miserable life. Old Mussy, a good friend of Jose, meets with a tragic end. The life of Chakravarthy is miserable. Rachel John and her daughter, Rohini, try in their own way to find happiness. All these people are good in themselves, but happiness eludes them. These human beings are like pieces of a broken old china, but who will put them together again? Towards the end of the novel, we see Jose preparing to go to the war-front. It is an act of rebellion against the oppressive mood of pessimism that has gripped him. Even such acts offer us no solution to the riddle of life.

*Ara Nazhika Neram* (Half an Hour to Live) which won for Parappurath the first Sahitya Pravartaka Award and also the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1968 is by many critics adjudged his masterpiece. It is the story of a Syrian (Orthodox) Christian Octogenarian, Kunjenachan and his family. Most of the story is presented in the stream of Kunjenachan's consciousness. The mind of the old man is steeped in the Old

Testament texts and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament. As such the language of the novel attains a biblical grandeur. It is richly allusive and many-splendoured. The atmosphere of the novel is enveloped in the thick darkness of the starless nights of the Old Testament, steeped in lust, sin and despair. It reverberates with the apocalyptic pronouncements of the prophets of Israel upon the unrepentant people and the cry of the psalmist for mercy. Kunjenachen subscribes to the verdict of Solomon that everything under the sun is illusion. Life is ephemeral; even three score and ten allotted to man is as short as half an hour.

Kunjenachen sowed wild oats in his youthful days. He lost his wife and one of his sons, Kunju Thoma (Kunjoma). The other sons were there, Keevareeth, Kunjucherukkan, Philipose and Mathewkutty. They were married and had children. Keevareeth would not let his daughter Kuttiamma marry her lover, for she was employed and he needed her salary. Kuttiamma eloped with her lover and married him. But she came back home with her husband. They were both good. The sons of Kunjucherukkan did not come to any good. The eldest son

was imprisoned for doing illicit trade. Philipose was rich, but immoral. His son eloped with his servant-maid on whom he too had an eye. That drove his wife mad. Mathewkutty had a son, Rajan by his first marriage. Rajan was in the army. Mathewkutty as the youngest son lived in the ancient house with his second wife Deenamma. Sivarama Kurup was Mathewkutty's partner in business. He would often come to Mathewkutty's house. He supplied Kunjenachen with the opium he needed to get relief from his rheumatic ailments. Rajan married Santhamma. Leaving her at home he went back to the army. As ill-luck would have it, Rajan died in the battle field. Nobody in this community finds happiness. Kuttiamma and Santhamma are good at heart; As for the others there is not a soul that is pure. No one is at peace with oneself. What is the meaning of existence? Where are the great Christian virtues that upheld the community through centuries? Where are the great traditional values of India? Kunjenachen had trust in the goodness of Deenamma who attended on him. But he happened to see her in the arms of ... Kurup. That broke the old man's heart. His death was hastened by the poison administered by Kurup to save the repu-

tation of Deenamma. The story is gripping, the characterisation is faultless. Once again it is Parappurath's vision of life that elevates this novel to the level of a classic. As Kunjenachen lies dying, he puts forth a heroic struggle against death. As he sinks into the depth of nothingness he stretches his arm up to hold on to something that may uplift him. But alas! there is nothing to hold on to:.

It was in 1979 that *Akasathile Paravakal* (the Fowls of the Air) was published in book form. Like the titles of certain other novels mentioned earlier, this title too has its biblical overtones. Jesus told his disciples: "Behold the fowl in the air, they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor do they store-The Father in Heaven takes care of them". Parappurath took an aspect of the expression 'Fowls of the Air' and gave it his own interpretation. In this novel he gives us a lucid picture of his village and its neighbouring parts. Like the river, Achen Kovi, that runs through it, life too flows neither ebbing nor flowing unduly. It is neither absolutely pure nor totally filthy. Like the white-winged gulls that sail across the sky, mortals live their lives; as they carry on the flight, they fall and perish. This

suggests the utter purposelessness of life, its vanity. Human beings are also as much creatures of natural instincts as any other species. In one perspective life seems to be nothing but a struggle to gratify the primary instincts. It is true that man fights against the vanity of life by building myths about eternal reality and God. Do these myths sustain him, elevate him to a higher level? I do not think that Parappurath was a disciple of Freud, that he loved D. H. Lawrence. Yet like them he also seemed to have thought that neither the present form of religion nor the present form of civilization helped man transcend himself. Hence man's relapse into the stratum of instinctive life despite his efforts to rise above it.

Parappurath describes the story of two generations in *Akasathile Paravakal*. A number of characters, each with distinctive individuality, make their entrances and exits in the novel. There are three major communities in the scene of action, the Nairs, the Ezhavas, and the Christians. The story of Gangadhara Panikkar represents the development of the Ezhava Community in this area; the representation is by no means complete. The lives of

Keelvarchen and Kochuvarkey succeed in depicting the life of the Christian community in the locality to a great extent. The novelist chiefly concentrates his attention on the Nair community and the vicissitudes in the lives of Damodara Karanavar of Eddsseriath and his son, Gopinatha Kurup. He achieves remarkable success in presenting full-length portraits of these two extraordinary men.

The novel is an epic of the rise and fall of Gopinatha Kurup, a formidable revenue officer who spares neither time nor effort in gratifying his lust for money, property, power and women. Unscrupulous to the core and aggressive by temperament, he marches forward pulverising everything that stands in his way. With him, the end justifies the means. He offers his love 'Malu' to his superior officer to earn promotion; yet he rejects her and marries a rich bride. He acquires property by unfair methods. Almost every woman he desires falls a prey to his lust. He repudiates his father who didn't help him in times of need. However, in the end social and economic forces beyond his power discomfit his move to retain his properties. He becomes sickly, addicted to drink, and excessively fond of

an old flame of his, Karthyayani. Against the advice of his doctor he drinks and sleeps with Karthyayani. That spells his doom. As he dies, Karthyayani commits suicide. Gopinatha Kurup is a powerful figure. But his father is a greater figure, lustful aggressive and indomitable. In sheer grandeur the father eclipses the son. To both life meant gratification of the primary instincts. In seeking to be united with the woman of his choice man makes a simultaneous trip, backward and forward, backward into the womb of his mother and forward into the peace of the sepulchre. Normally as he does, so the woman conceives giving rise to another generation. Isn't this what we call the drama of life? Neethi-man Kochuvarkey, Keelvarchen and even Gangadhara Panikkar fail to give an alternative to the life of Gopinatha Kurup. Only his uncle Sreedhara Kurup presents a different option: Renounce desire, live in total detachment, attain *mukthi*. The novelist leaves this option to the readers but does not affirm it.

Parappurath challenges us to revalue life. His novels are works of neither negation, nor affirmation. They are works of doubt. The novelist had his obstinate questionings and grave

misgivings about the meaning of life and the relevance of traditional values. At the same time he had faith in man; and he was filled with the milk of human sympathy. He understood every one of his characters, for he sympathises with them all, with the wicked as well as the innocent. His claims to greatness as a novelist rest chiefly with his broad sympathy for man in his helplessness and the exquisite verbal structures he wove for his new sensibility. ○

# A ROYAL GENIUS

---

K N. Nair

Of all the monarchs who sat on the throne of Travancore, Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (1813-47) was undoubtedly the greatest patron of arts and letters.

A prince among poets and a poet among princes, he achieved immortal fame during his short span of 34 years. Though there were heroic warriors and able administrators among his predecessors as well as his successors, he is the only ruler of Travancore who is still remembered and admired by all as a great hero in the field of culture.

As a child, Swathi Thirunal was brought up in an atmosphere of music, dance, literature and other arts. His father, Raja Raja Varma Koil Thampuram, was a Sanskrit scholar and his mother, Rani Lakshmi Bai, was a patron of arts. His maternal aunt, Rani Parvathi Bai, was a versatile veena player. Swathi Thirunal's elder sister, Princess Rukmini Bai, was a musician and composer. Mahakavi Irayimman Thampi, the bicentenary of whose birth falls

next year, and the great musician, Shadkala Govinda Marar, were among the courtiers of the Travancore palace at that time.

Before he became the ruler at the age of 16, Swathi Thirunal had mastered as many as ten languages—Malayalam, Sanskrit, English, Hindusthani, Telugu, Persian, Arabic, Marathi, Kannada and Tamil. He had also learnt to handle musical instruments like the *venu* and the *sarod*. He studied *Bharathanatyam* under expert teachers. He had also attained proficiency in Astronomy, Mathematics, History and the *Sastras*.

When the young ruler ascended the throne he decided to make his court a meeting place of great artistes. He might have had in his mind the example of King Sarabhoji of Tanjore (1798-1830) who was a Sanskrit poet and patron of arts. The advice of his tutor and guide, T. Subba Rao (who later became the Dewan) must also have influenced him.

Thus began a great revival of arts and music under his patron-

age and his court attracted poets, musicians, dancers, scholars and painters from the four corners of India. He was so liberal in his grants and awards to the artistes that he even overlooked the financial condition of his treasury. And no deserving artist who went to his court ever failed to get recognition and patronage at his hands.

Old palace records of Travancore bear ample testimony to the numerous grants, presents, awards, encomiums and honours he had bestowed upon the scholars and artistes who flocked to his court. According to these records the earliest present given by the Maharaja was to a Bharatanatyam artiste, Nagarithama in 1825. She was presented with a shawl and Rs 350/-. This was when he was hardly 12 years old.

Swathi Thirunal took great interest in musical instruments. According to palace records, in the year he took over as ruler (1829) a 'Musical Box' was purchased at a cost of 3085 panam (about Rs. 400/). Many local artisans and craftsmen were engaged by him to manufacture various musical instruments and they were paid handsome rewards. Those instruments not available in the state were imported from outside.

Swathi Thirunal's great interest in painting is evident from the palace records which state that soon after his ascension to the throne, he ordered the purchase of painting - materials and commissioned artists to decorate the palace with paintings. Pedda Dasani of Tanjore, an expert in mural painting was appointed on a monthly salary to decorate the palace buildings inside the Fort.

The Maharaja was equally interested in the eastern and western schools of painting. Once a European painter named Schufis visited the palace to see the paintings there. He sought the permission of the Maharaja to paint his portrait. The Maharaja readily agreed and when it was finished the painter was given a reward of Rs 12,000 which undoubtedly was beyond the dream of any artist in those days.

Though he was a lover of all the arts, music and dance received special patronage from Swathi Thirunal. Among the musicians of repute at his court was Meruswami (Anantha Padmanabha Bhagawathar) a great vocalist in Hindusthani and Karnatic music and an exponent of *Kathakalakshepa*, Meruswami who once adorned the court of king Sarabhoji of Tanjore,

was awarded the title of 'kokila kandha' by Swathi Thirunal. He was given a monthly salary of Rs.100, a free house and a palanquin.

Kannayya Bhagavathar, a disciple of the great Thyagaraja, was another musician who adorned his court. Four famous brothers who were disciples of Sama Sastri, namely Vadivelu, Sivanandam, Chinnayya and Ponnayya were among his courtiers.

Other noted musicians of his court included Palghat Parameswara Bhagavathar, Subbukk uath Ramanuja Iyengar, Raghu nath Ram, Venkatadri Bhagavathar, Ganapathi Bhagavathar, Chinthamani, Devaraja Bhagavathar, Nand Ram and Mukund Ram.

Swathi Thirunal himself was an excellent poet and composer. The author of some five hundred musical compositions in various languages, he is remembered outside Kerala as a great composer in the line of Thyagaraja. He gave unstinted patronage to Hindustani music. Famous Hindustani musicians like Syed Sulaiman (Punjab) Lakshman Das (Gwalior), Alla udin (Mysore), Khan Saheb (Hyderabad), Sukh Dev (Oudh), Ramarjun (Punjab), Haridas

(Bengal) and Govinda Das (Banaras) were among those patronised by him. Western music also found a patron in Swathi Thirunal who organised a western music section in his court under the guidance of a European musician.

There were North Indian and South Indian dancers permanently at his court besides those who used to visit his palace often to give performances. Among them Sachidananda Bhagavathar of Poona, Meenakshi and Sathyabhama of Tanjore were the notable artistes.

Swathi Thirunal's interest did not confine itself to the realms of arts and music. His *Vidwath sadas* comprised eminent scholars, astrologers, physicians, scientists and writers from all over India. According to the palace records two *hakims* from Delhi were also among his courtiers.

Sankarnath Jyothsiar, a famous Malayali scholar, statesman and astrologer who was at that time serving in Punjab as a Minister and adviser to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was invited by Swathi Thirunal to Travancore and appointed the Chief Justice of the Travancore High Court (then known as Sadar Court). As desired by the Maharaja

Sankarnath Jyothsiar translated *Devi Bhagavatham* from Sanskrit into Malayalam.

Swathi Thirunal was the first ruler to establish an English High School in a native State. The observatory, the Manuscript Library and the Zoo in Trivandrum also owe their origin to him. He contributed liberally to the funds of the Public Library of Trivandrum. His interest in the development of Malayalam language was evident from the assistance he gave to Rev. Benjamin Bailey author of the first Malayalam-English Dictionary and the help given to Rev. Joseph Pitt, the author of the first Malayalam grammar. Official records were written in Malayalam during his regime.

From this royal poet and composer not only Musicians, poets, dancers and artists received

patronage, but also acrobats, boxing champions, Chinese Magicians. French horse-riders and many others. He had a soft corner for anybody who had some originality and histrionic talents. And everyone of those who went to his court readily received recognition and liberal patronage.

Lovers of Malayalam literature remember him as a sensitive lyrical poet, a generous patron of two memorable Malayalam poets, Irayimman Thampi and Kareendran Thampuran, a perceptive benefactor of the Malayalam language at a crucial stage in its development, an ardent advocate of general culture and a devoted promoter of the performing arts who indirectly made the emergence of an art-form like drama possible within a few decades. ○

## THE BOATMAN

---

Karur Nilakanta Pillai

The streetlights were on by the time the copra transaction was over. 'Come let's go now', said the merchant to the boatman as he stepped into the boat. 'Hand me that lamp of yours'.

Carlos lighted the tin lamp, walked over the roof of the boat and held it out to Johnny who took it and placed it by his side. Johnny counted the notes once again, wrapped them in a piece of paper and secured the whole thing at his waist. Then he started mentally calculating the profit and loss of the day's deal.

'It is difficult to be a match for these fellows' said the boatman while pushing the boat forward. 'If there is a yellow stain on a single piece of copra, they pick on it and fix the price of the whole lot accordingly.'

'I am fed up with this business,' said Johnny.

'You invest money, work yourself to death for a couple

of weeks and at last when you look at the accounts after the transaction, you realize their trick.'

'The newspapers would report high prices. What does it matter to them? They don't buy the stuff! They are free to write what they like. But when you take the stuff to the market they dictate the price.'

'One can ignore that. But it's impossible to be reconciled to their way of discounting. They have deducted at the rate of two pounds from our stuff.'

'That's it. When our stuff is shaken out of the sack for weighing, it jingles like bells. And two pounds for that! How much money did we lose there? Fifty-nine by two. Sixty by two. Six two sare twelve; one hundred and twenty. So one hundred and eighteen. Seventy rupees gone just like that!

'Only seventy? Do you know the price they offered for that inferior stuff? Didn't it come

to four measures?!' 'You needn't have sold it. Only I didn't openly say so. Still you aren't a loser, are you?'

'Why not? When you buy copra from these dirty rogues who buy coconuts from fellows who crop the nuts twice a month and dry them in a single day's time, you can't help running into such loss.'

'That's true. Even if we deduct half the weight, for the copra, it's a loss for us. Then what's it after all? A job which helps five or six families to eke out a living.'

'Why should I stand to lose in letting these families earn a living? So I have made up my mind. I am seeing the last of this copra business. Any idea how much I have lost in today's deal?'

'If you tell me. Even other wise I've a vague idea. Henceforth we needn't sell the stuff at Quilon; Alleppy is better.'

The merchant opened his pan pack and started chewing pan. He took off his shirt, hung it on a bamboo hook inside the boat and put out the lamp. The thought of the day's profit thrilled his mind; the cool pleasant breeze caressed his body.

He enjoyed the pan he was eating and felt good.

'Looks like there's a good wind; better unfurl the sail'.

Carlos walked over the boat top to the prow and returned to the stern, holding the rope bound round the mast. He whistled softly to awaken the wind.

'I talked to that boy as best I could: when you come in the boat, you have a responsibility till you return to the jetty and so we shall go back together. But then he was in a damn hurry to reach home. if he were here to hold this rope...

'If he were that anxious to leave, why did he hang around till sunset?' said Johnny.

'He wanted to get his busfare from you.'

'We shall be able to reach home before moonlight fades' shan't we?'

'If there is a good wind, we shall reach earlier'

'Did you have rice to eat at night?'

'Hi boat, to the left.... there was rice and curry. But then one of our kids turned up and so I gave it the food'

'Your kid? From where?'

'My kid in the sense that there's some relation. Hearing I am in this boat the child came asking for two or three rupees and I gave the kid the food'.

Johnny felt inwardly grateful to Carlos. Suppose he had approached him with the request for a loan besides his wages; what would he think if he failed to oblige him, especially with so much money in his hands. He was quite pleased that Carlos was not one of those guys whose needs grow when they see money in others' hands, who indulge in generosity with borrowed money.

'Are you so rich that one should come to you for a loan?'

'That kid isn't the type to approach everybody: it is in such a dreadful plight.'

'If one knows one can get money for the asking, one will speak about difficulties and distress.'

'Oh no, she isn't that sort; her husband is working in an office at Alleppey.'

'Was it a girl who asked you for money? What her husband gets there may not be enough for them. How much money does one need to stay at Alleppey for a month?'

'It's five or six months since he came to see her. He doesn't send home a single pie. She and her mother-in-law live alone in the house. If men are so irresponsible, what should poor women do?'

'Then how do they manage?'

'That's what I too wonder.'

'Mm. And now?'

'She wants to go to Alleppey.'

'She wants to go and meet him there because he doesn't come home. That's fine!'

'Some other guy would have married her; there were several fine strapping young men who would have gladly given money instead of receiving a dowry, to marry her.'

'Ah, was she such a gem of a girl?'

'One would have been struck by her beauty. Such a pretty girl Boat, to the east...Her father too was a boatman. That chap married her by winning over the old man with liquor. They lived together for three or four months. It was then that he left for Alleppey.'

'Did these things happen recently?'

'There comes the boat; one from the front and another from

the rear. My' what crowds  
are there in these boats and  
buses.'

The boats passed on.

'What did you ask, Sir? yes,  
the marriage took place last  
year.'

'How are you related to her?'

'It is none too easy to speak  
about that. Her father liked  
me a lot. At first I was work-  
ing with him. I used to frequent  
their house.'

'So it was nice that you skip-  
ped your meal and gave her  
something to eat. It wasn't  
without reason that she approa-  
ched you for money.'

She knows that if I have any  
money on me, I would give it.  
Not only to her; I don't know  
how to say 'no' to any one in  
dire need. I took this barge-  
pole in my hand in my fourteenth  
year. It is sixteen years since  
then. I haven't saved one bit,  
I tell you; but do I starve?  
Neither. Oh, how these sixteen  
years have whirled away.'

'You are only thirty? Just two  
years older than I am?' The  
copra dealer started chewing pan

'Sweet maiden, soft-voiced  
like the cuckoo

Intoxicated with tender man-  
go-leaves

And singing in rapturous  
tones..'

Carlos went on singing. 'Like  
weaving a mantle of gold for  
the night, serene and beautiful'.  
Johnny kept rhythm on the  
boat-step.

'The birds playing among la-  
burnum branches sporting clus-  
ters of blossoms. Softly tickled  
by the south wind, sing in praise  
of your beauty.'

Johny was also humming.  
There was silence for a while  
'The wind rose when you sang  
Carlos Chettan\* said Johnny.

'Do sing the rest of it.'

In reply there was something  
like the sound of water falling  
into water, as though from a  
narrow pipe.

'What song I' said Carlos 'It's  
all gone. Now all I think of  
is how to buy one's ration.'

'Were you a better singer  
before?'

'You are asking me! We had  
a drama troupe. I had the role  
next to the hero's'

'Why did you chuck it away  
for this job?'

\* Literally, elder brothers: a polite way of addressing elders.

'This is better. I can find work everyday and can eke out a living. If I were with the troupe, I might occasionally get something and would drink it away. Even otherwise drama is no good. It's good to watch if some one else acts on the stage. In those days, if even I went to her house, she would make me sing all the songs in my repertory and still wouldn't let me stop.'

'She is so much in love with your singing?'

'The Jasmine, the champak, chrysanthemum and ixora,

The mogra the rose and the waterlily

All bloom eagerly, yearning to be caressed by your glance?

'No wonder she pressed you to sing more when you sang such songs'

'Now I've forgotten everything.'

'This song is about her, isn't it? Aren't you a boor to refuse two rupees to the girl who is so much in love with you?'

'Two rupees? What can she do with two rupees? She has to go to Alleppy to seek him, may be she should have something for the return trip also. Could

you let a young woman go alone? You can't manage without five rupees.'

'Why should you think about the fare for the return trip? Isn't she going to her husband?'

'That's why she is going there: it's five or six months since he came, she says.'

'He might also think she has got into trouble.'

'She isn't that sort'.

'What did you finally tell her?'

'I can't evade the issue, but what can I do without any money in hand?'

'That's all rot. If you were that keen, wouldn't I have given you a loan of five rupees?'

'Yes, I know. I was waiting for us to reach our destination.' 'Why do you need money now, after you have packed her off. Everything you uttered after you got into this boat is an arrant lie. I know you are talking in order to keep yourself awake and you want me to listen without falling asleep. Even otherwise I won't sleep. The two of us have traversed together some four or five times. Do you recall a single occasion when I didn't spend the night sitting on the step here?'

'What I said is no lie, Sir. That girl came and asked me for some money to go to Alleppey. I told her I wouldn't let her go alone and that I would take her. She agreed. I can get a loan of five rupees from you which I shall repay by working for you; tomorrow morning we shall go to Alleppey; with these thoughts in mind, I asked her to lie down by the side of the bundle of empty sack.'

'What, her in this boat?'

'The poor thing. She may be fast asleep somewhere there. She may not have heard anything of our conversation. He called out 'Little Marceley.'

The boat trembled a little as the sail ruffled, shrank and fell unfurled on the other side. His Marceley made no response. The boat entered the narrow canal, leaving the lake behind.

Nobody spoke for a while.

'Carlos Chetta' called the merchant.

'Hi boat, to the east.'

'Why didn't you tell me so far that there was somebody else in the boat?' The tone wasn't too strong.

'I was coming to that.'

'It wasn't proper-your allowing somebody to sleep in the boat without taking my permission. Have you got a box of matches? No, there's no need; I've got one here.'

Johnny lighted the lamp. Holding it, the young man looked beyond the sixty or so empty sacks piled behind the middle step of the boat. As he stood bending, the figure that lay there, rose

'I wasn't lying Sir', said Carlos. 'Little Marceley must have been fast asleep, poor thing.' She sat with her head bowed. Johnny left the lamp on the sack pile, walked back to the mid-step and stood looking at her.

There seemed to be some truth in what Carlos said about many fine strapping young fellows being anxious to give rather than receive money in order to win her hand. Johnny struggled with a smile.

The boatman drew the boat to the shore, rolled the sail and placed it in the boat. He went to the merchant and stood grinning.

'I must have a drink'.

'How much do you want?'

'Would you like to have some coffee, child?'

'I don't want anything'. She said with her eyes lowered. 'What kind of a man are you! If you were to offer her something instead of asking her, wouldn't she take it?'

Carlos grinned. Johnny smiled. She sat motionless.

'Then give me half a rupee. Do you want me to buy something for you, Sir?'

'Nothing'

Carlos walked away. 'Don't sit there spinning yarns. Come back quickly,' shouted Johnny.

The young merchant sat looking at the woman.

He felt an urge to say something to her. His limbs were restless. Should he hum a tune? He didn't. She must have driven away her husband; how on earth.

Could a man bring himself to leave such a woman?

What was the girl thinking? She too must have been thinking. A young man. In the prime of health. . . . Lots of money in his hand. The midnight hour. . . . Inside the boat. . . . Absolutely no one around. . . . Carlos chettan said she wasn't related to him; no unmarried virgin either. In dire need too. And Carlos chettan was banking on the merchant.

'Carlos chettan hasn't come back yet' She murmured looking towards the stern.'

'He is like that' said Johnny looking out. 'He will be talking his head away. He won't be back in less than four hours' time.'

The merchant opened his pan-pack, chewed pan and spat aloud

He saw Merceley yawn.

Johnny felt he was standing on the verge of danger.

Merceley lifted her head and looked at him. His eyes were on her. She might be cursing Carlos. Or was she grateful to him for leaving them together? Johnny felt light in his head. Was it all true, what Carlos said?

A woman looking for her husband in the company of a young man. Not any woman. A twenty-year-old beauty.

That, too, at night. There seemed to be something fishy about the whole affair. Carlos might have talked her into eloping with him. . . . Maybe people have seen her get into this boat. Suppose they come and catch me redhanded, the boatman will wriggle out. Suppose she has evil designs and as arranged earlier, her people were to surprise us when we are talking together in the boat all by ourselves?

No, I'll pack her off, here and now. Why did he allow her to get in without my permission? Let Carlos come; let him get rid of her. He need move the boat only after that.

'He is not yet back,' said the respectable gentleman in him.

Marceley might have thought:

'This merchant is a good man

That my be the reason why Carlos chettan did not hesitate to go leaving us together. Else he would never leave the woman he loves with another man at this time of the night. Why should this guy sit looking at me in this lamp-light? If he would oblige by putting out the light, I could lie down. 'May be they are boiling the water for the coffee.'

'What folks have you got at home?' The young man asked.

'Didn't Carlos chettan fell you? All that is true.

This night.....'

.....'

'How awfully hot'.

'What smoke inside!'

'Shall I put out the la ..'

'Carlos chettan might misunderstand...'

Johnny was at a loss for words.

Carlos came back. She ate what he had brought for her.

After that there was no conversation, no song.

The lamp remained there, without use. Marceley looked as though she were saying. 'Now I would rather go to sleep' and she lay down. The boat drew near the western shore of Ponmana lake. Johnny got down.

'I would like to have five rupees, Sir,' said the boatman. 'Must take this girl to Alleppy.'

'Wait till morning.' Johnny's tone gave the impression that he heartily disapproved of the demand for money. 'What are you going to do now?'

'How can I go any where at this time of the night? I shall lie down here in the boat.'

Johnny felt as a sudden urge to slap him across the face? He paused for a moment and walked homeward without a word. In the morning Carlos took five rupees extra by way of loan, besides his wages.

The rumour that the merchant had brought a young woman with him in the boat at night and that Carlos had received five rupees as reward, reached the ears of the merchant's wife. And the interesting drama that followed!

Translated by S. Santha Kumari

## The Ballad of the Pootham

---

Edasseri Govindan Nair

It's dusk. The lamps are already lit. The chanting of prayer is finished. The sleepy mouth has also repeated the multiplication table. There is yet time for the meal. Let's listen to a song on the Pootham.

Haven't you heard the drumbeats  
Along with the noise of the anklets of bronze?  
The black Pootham is arriving  
Adorned with the mark of the crescent moon;  
She is wearing large ear rings of brass  
And on her neck are singing chains;  
On her head is a painted crown  
Bedecked on the sides with tassels;  
On her full shapely breasts  
Are garlands of fragrant flowers;  
Her shining copper-coloured locks  
Do cover her back down to the knees  
Lined with deep-red bands of cloth,  
Her waist is girdled with a chain of jingling bells,  
Dressed in milk-white skirt she comes.  
Dancing, dancing all the way;  
Where is she coming from? Do you know?

During the day she lingers  
Behind that pariah's hillock  
Casting her stern eyes through the slit  
Under the rocks on the sides.  
The shepherd-boys, when they are weary,  
Seek at noon the balmy shades of trees;  
It's then that she drinks  
The milk of solitary cows.

---

\* The Pootham is a kind of witch in our folklore from which the theme of the poem is taken.

And, when, at fragrant even-tide  
 Men hasten to join their kith and kin  
 She would lure them away from their path  
 And get from them the betel-leaves\*

She laughs and begins her long walk. The realization comes at the end. It's enough if the travellers offer some chewing material. They should place it on the roadside. Then the path becomes clear. When they are gone, she comes and chews the betel leaves, and spits on the ixora bush. No wonder then that these flowers are scarlet in colour.

In the profound vacuity of the vault of midnight,  
 When magic lamps are lit in bright array,  
 She waits on the sides of lonely paths  
 Combing her locks and smiling sweet  
 She lures the straying young men coming that way  
 And sits them on top of the tall palm trees  
 Which, to their spell-bound eyes,  
 Look like seven-storeyed mansions!  
 While youngsters sleep in her embrace  
 She tastes their warm saltish blood with glee.  
 And throws their hair and bones  
 On the rocks behind the pariah's hillock.

I know you are about to raise a question: "Why do we give clothes and paddy to this evil Pootham?" The answer is simple. It's sin to deprive her of her due. True, she did evil things. But she does not murder any more. She is now full of remorse and is not free from deep sorrow. Do you want to know the reason? Listen:

In that big house  
 On the bank of the river  
 A child was born - a long - awaited event.  
 Many a golden ornament  
 Bedecked that tender baby.  
 Nangeli fed him and gave him all,  
 She played with him,

---

\* Tradition has it that the Pootham lures young men into her fold by offering them betel-leaves and arecanut to chew.

Sang many a song with him  
And showed the moon to him  
She never left him on the floor  
Lest ants pester him  
And she never placed him on her head  
Lest lice should pester him.  
Nangeli would go to sleep  
Only after putting the baby to sleep  
On the soft and silken bed,  
Spread on the golden cot,  
By singing soft and lulling rhymes,  
And caressing him on the tender thighs.

The boy was seven,  
And learned to look at the world;  
There arose in his mind,  
A wish to go to school.  
Nangeli would take much care  
To give the boy the best attire.  
When he was ready to go  
She would fondly dress his hair  
And rub his cheeks;  
She would give him a stylo  
With a golden handle  
And well-seasoned palm-leaves to write on.  
She would eagerly watch  
From the threshold of her house  
Till he disappeared from her sight.  
The boy would climb the hill  
And see the cattle graze.  
The scarlet flowers would peep through the bush  
And smile at the hastening boy  
He would see flocks of sheep  
Dance on the top of the rocks  
And he would look at the beetles  
Hovering about the wild flowering trees.  
The boy walked on  
Through the land of the pariahs  
He hastened and reached  
The other side of the Pariah hillock.

The Pootham then opened  
 The window-slit  
 Among those huge rocks  
 And saw the tender boy  
 Go on like a lily borne by the stream,  
 Like the crescent moon, like the ripening fruit!  
 The Pootham felt a mother's love  
 In the deep caverns of her heart.  
 She took the guise of a young woman  
 And waited for the boy under a flowering tree.

The Pootham then said to the boy in a very sweet tone:

“Oh, my dearest boy,  
 You look like a tender beam of the sun  
 Throw off, in to the forest, the pen and the palm-leaves  
 And come with me.”

“Oh, my sweet woman,  
 Who weaves a web of light,  
 If I throw off the pen,  
 The teacher would certainly be sore.”

“Oh, my dear boy,  
 Who shines like a golden ray,  
 With a light jasmine pen  
 May you write  
 Tender on the mango leaves,  
 In the soothing breeze.  
 Throw off the pen and palm-leaves  
 And hasten to me, my boy.”

“Oh, my sweet lady,  
 Who weaves a web of light  
 Under the flowering tree,  
 Here, see, I'm throwing away the stylo and the  
 plam-leaves.

After that the boy didn't go to school. You may think he was very happy. But, listen. The stylo that he had, was made of iron. When that was lost \* the Pootham whisked the boy away to the nearby bush.

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\*\* It is believed that the Pootham cannot harm a person if he is in possession of something made of iron

It was dusk,  
The yellow rays of even-tide appeared  
Clouds gathered in the skies.  
"Where's my boy?" Nangeli cried;  
The mother searched for the boy  
Far and near on the banks of the river.  
The small fish swimming in the deeps  
Stood still, listening to her wail:  
The mother ran here and there  
In the solitary fields.  
The soil ploughed anew  
Echoes her sighs and wails,  
She searched for her boy  
Among the sharp stones on the hillside;  
Listening to her lament

The owl would stick out its enquiring head from its hole  
She searched the woods and the meadows  
And wept when she failed  
The Pootham listened to this wail,  
Sitting under the flowering tree,  
With the boy who looked like a ripened fruit,  
Weaving garlands of wild flowers.

And then? She didn't budge. But how could she escape this nuisance?

The Pootham tried to frighten the mother away,  
But she stood firm.  
The Pootham came as a whirlwind,  
But the mother stood rooted like the stump of a tree:  
The Pootham came as wild fire,  
The mother quenched it with her own tears  
The Pootham came as a tiger, a leopard,  
But the mother stood still and asked for her boy.

Having understood that this was of no avail, the Pootham resorted to another trick.

She pushed away the mighty rock on the hills  
Like a tender flower:

Look! what a glittering array  
 Of gold and precious jewels!  
 "I'll give you bales and bales of gold  
 And jewels; give me the boy."  
 The mother didn't care  
 To see the gold and the jewels;  
 She plucked out her own eyes  
 Which matched the lotus, red and bright  
 And lo, offered them to the Pootham  
 She said, "Restore to me my son, he is costlier  
 far to me."

Do you want to know what the Pootham did, now that the mother had no eyes?

The Pootham took the magic wand  
 And chanted many a tune.  
 She made another baby  
 And told the mother: "Now take him, oh, woman!"  
 The mother took the boy with glee  
 And kissed him on the head,  
 Caressed him with love, but, alas!  
 She got up, wailing,  
 "This baby isn't mine."  
 How could you cheat a mother,  
 You foolish creature?  
 She was about to raise her hand  
 To curse the Pootham,  
 With all her might:  
 The Pootham was aghast,  
 Fell on the ground, and let the baby go:  
 "Mother, take your baby  
 Never in the future  
 Shall I claim your boy:  
 Be kind to me:  
 Thou shalt regain your eyesight;  
 See, is it not your own son?"  
 The Pootham stood with folded hand  
 And went down in shame.  
 The mother opened her eyes,  
 And saw the merry child,

Smiling its own sweet smile,  
Which gave sheer delight to her new-lit eyes.

Thus the mother was reunited to her child. But what about the poor Pootham?

The boy was about to go,  
When lo, the Pootham lifted him up  
And kissed him many a time.  
She shed copious tears  
And sent up many a sigh,  
And listened to the mother,  
Who spoke with love  
And laughter straight from the heart:  
"We'll expect you every year  
When the harvest is up,  
When the granary is full,  
When the field is ploughed for a second crop  
Your visit will give the boy  
A lot of mirth.  
Your presence will bring luck to our home  
And happiness to us all.

"I'll come to you as you wish",  
Said the Pootham and disappeared.  
Then, year after year, when the winter harvest is over,  
The Pootham visits the houses,  
She looks for the self-same house  
Where the boy was born. .  
Woe unto her, she hadn't cared to know  
Where exactly her dear boy's abode was  
The mother too didn't give the address,  
For, she also forgot, or was it for fear  
That, if the Pootham came again,  
Her child would be whisked off  
Once more to the Evil Spirit's abode?  
And so the Pootham would go  
To every house and seek her baby there,  
And wake fun and frolic, thinking all the while,  
That she was playing with her own dearest boy.  
She would run from house to house

And many a man would mock:

“Do you need the boy? Do you need the boy?”

Listening to these mocking words

She would run off, here and there, when, within her heart,

A rhythmic drum beat was heard,

With the echoes of a wailing pipe!

Haven't you heard the drum beats

Along with the noise of the anklets of bronze?

The black Pootham is arriving

Adorned with the mark of the crescent moon.

Translated by C. P. Sivadasan

## 'A rather big one' gets a big Translator

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Dr. S. Velayudhan

*'Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant':*

Three stories of Muslim Life in South India, by Vaikom Muhamed Bashier, translated by R. E. Asher, Achamma, and Coilparambil Chandrasekaran, Edinburgh University Press, 1980 pp. 204 Available in Hardbound and paperback editions.

Felicitating Basheer, Pottekat said recently that it was time we stopped calling him the Sultan of Beypore; instead we should call him Bhsheer Maharshi. Sultan or Maharshi, he certainly is a rather big one, indeed the biggest that we have among us to represent us all at Stockholm, let us hope, one of these days, to join the galaxy of world writers. If this pious hope were to come true, I have no doubt in my mind that this translation would be the golden link between him and the rest of the world. Basheer has long been a living legend. He is full of years, achievements and honours; this volume which has been accepted in the United Nations translations collections is another sig-

nificant tribute to the writer and an honour which he shares with Thakazhi, whose *Chemmeen*, incidentally, was the first ever Malayalam novel to have a UNESCO translation.

The three stories included here are *Childhood Friend*, *'Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant* and *Pattumma's Goat*. These are certainly among the best of Basheer's creations and they represent three distinct phases of his career. Dr. Asher and his team have done a splendid job in rendering these into English. Considering the fact that Basheer is a meticulous writer, translating him is a difficult job. Capturing the full import of his dialogues, for example, in any other medium, can be an exacting exercise. Let me quote an instance each from the three translations to show that they are faithful to the text and transparent to the sense.

'You Understand? - No!'

'Look! Let this fellow go somewhere. Let him go around the country and learn how people like us live.

You understand? — No!'

'He's started again! If he says anything, immediately it's either go away or leave the country!

.....But why do you always say this?'

He's got no brains!'

'Others have plenty of brains!'

Umma's sharp tongue!

Would bapa let it pass?

'What he's got is your brains! You understand? ..... No!'

'Oh, so nowadays my brains are no good! It is Rabb's will!'

'Otherwise, do you think he'd get such an idea? All told, my brothers and sisters have twenty six children: all your brothers and sisters together have forty-one, with appetites like the demon Vaka! When any of this lot come and eat here all the time, do I say anything? —No!'

'In the name of all the saints! What I have to put up with!'

'You call on a thousand saints. Will that give you brains?'

— 'No! Can you understand what I'm saying? — No!'

'Write it down and show me!'

Umma, who cannot read, said thia.

When he heard it, bapa burst out laughing. Umma's white *kuppayam* was spattered red from the betel he was chewing.

'You'd better go!' bapa ordered. 'Go and change your *kuppayam*. You understand? No!'

Umma went off, and came back after changing her *kuppayam*.

'Write it!' bapa continued. 'Did your bapa learn how to write? — No! of course not! Did your brothers learn? — No!

Will umma let that pass? Hardly! 'Oh, all your people learnt a great deal!'

For a long time bapa had nothing to say by way of a reply. Bapa never learnt how to write. Neither bapa's bapa nor bapa's umma learnt how to write. Because umma reminded him of that, bapa got angry.

'If you talk too much,' bapa bawled, 'I'll kick the life out of you: You understand? —No!'

(Childhood Friend pp. 19-21)

The Booby!

One day at noon Kunju-pattumma saw her neighbour, the kafir woman who was something of a show-off, by the lily

pond taking off her sari and blouse.

That young woman was standing in her bodice and slip.

'Oh. A tight bodice under her *kuppayam*... And under her *mundu* .....,' Kunjupattumma thought to herself. Then suddenly she remembered.

'Oh, my God! That small kafir woman's going to bath. The leeches'll bite her to death!

Kunjupattumma ran out. Her hair came down. Yet she kept running. 'Don't bath! Don't bath! she called out. Panting she came up to the young woman.

Without showing any excitement, the young kafir woman said to Kunjupattumma, 'Booby! ... You should say, "Don't bathe, don't bathe".

Kunjupattumma said nothing. Right! Then let the leeches bite her to death. Hm... So I should say, 'Don't bathe, don't bathe What if I say 'Don't bath, don't bath'? See the way she shows off!-Kunjupattumma thought' All kafir women must be like this! But then she thought of the old days; she pictured bapa taking her to the river all dressed up. During those days, all those kafir school-mistresses were really kind and friendly to her.

Although like them this girl wore a sari ..she was more of a swank than them. Kunjupattumma moved towards the edge of the lily pond to look at the murrall.

'Oh what fine hair!' the swank was saying. 'And a black mole! Beautiful!' And with this she put on her blouse and wrapped her sari and went up to Kunjupattumma. Then, very seriously, she asked, 'Sundari! Anyone so beautiful must be called Sundari. Is there any law against the public bathing in this lily pond?'

'My name if not Thunnari!

'Tunnari you say!' The show-off laughed. 'Boody, you must say *Sundari*. Very well, what is your name?'

'Kunjupattumma.'

'Oh. A beautiful name! Fine. What happens if one bathes in this lily pond?'

'The leeches will bite you!

'Male leech or female leech?'

'There were both husband and wife. One of them bit me and drank all my blood!' Kunjupattumma continued. Then the murrall swallowed it whole. There are water-snakes and turtles too.

(Me Granddad 'ad an Elephant p-88-90)

## The Admirer

Umma got cross and went off.

I called Anumma and told her to get me some tea.

Anumma went next door and got a boy to fetch some. While I was sitting there enjoying the bedi after drinking the tea, along came a lovely, dark-skinned girl! She would be around sixteen years old. It must be for jambus. Was she one of the quarter-anna lot? Or did she want half an anna's worth? I would give the donkey small ones only. But she did not look in the direction of the jambu tree. She came straight up to me and greeted me respectfully with folded hands. Then she said, 'I know you, Sir. I have read all your books. My father told me you had come. That's why I am here. Would you please write something in my autograph book and sign it?'

'Oh, you dark beauty come to save my self-respect. My blessings on you!

'Tell me! What's your name!' I asked.

'Suhasini,' she said.

'What form are you in at school?'

'The sixth.'

'Who are you?'

'I am Madhavan the porter's daughter.'

The daughter of a labourer?

Long live labourers!

I went indoors to fetch a pen and wrote in Suhasini's autograph-book, 'to Suhasini: all good wishes.' Then, after signing it and giving it back to her, I asked Suhasini, 'Do you want to eat some jambus?'

'Yes please,' she said.

I fetched a large piece of paper, climbed into the tree and picked about fifty big red ones, which I wrapped up and gave to her, saying as I did so, 'Suhasini, I'm the one who planted this jambu tree'

'Really?'

'Really!'

With folded hands, she took leave of me.

That night I heard a special bit of news.

'Pattumma's goat will soon be giving birth! It was not just in kid, but about to give birth. Why was it that I did not know about this? It did not appear to be in kid. Sometimes its belly bulged out; sometimes it went

in. Would that be the case if the goat was in kid? I asked Umma, who said, 'It's about to give birth.'

Was it true? I had my doubts, (Pattumma's Goat pp. 159-160)

Daisaku Ikeda, the greatest living Japanese scholar writes that in spite of his having read the ancient Japanese classic, *The Tale of Genji*, over again, he understood it fully only when he read Arthur Waley's translation of it. He says he felt the greatness of the book when he completed reading the translation. A translator cannot bring in a new dimension which a work does not already possess, but I hold that a gifted translator can reveal that third dimension; ordinary translators end up with the first two dimensions!

As works of art these three books are among the best our fiction can boast of. The hardest of all things for a novelist to communicate, it is said, is the extraordinary ordinariness of most human happiness—as distinct from the thrills of sexual consummation, of professional triumph or tragedy or of aesthetic experience. Jane Austen, Chekhov and a few others bring it off. R. K. Narayanan and Basheer are among them. Professor Asher has made it possible

for a discerning non-Malayali reader to see Basheer in a national and international perspective. Kerala owes him a deep debt of gratitude for his abiding love for our literature and his very personal friendship with Basheer that has helped this excellent translation gain all the aura its originals have gained over the years. When the great Kawabata Yasunari received his Nobel Prize in 1968, he declared to the whole world that he owed it to his translator, Edward Seidensticker, his inseparable companion and interpreter. One of the visions that I have is that of Ron Asher holding Basheer's hand and leading him to the Concert Palace in Stockholm to be presented to the Swedish King. How deep and affectionate their relationship is can be seen on the title page—the book is presented to 'Shahina and Aneez, David and Michael'—the first two are Basheer's and the last two are Ron's children the great bridge-builders. The Akademi and the Universities in our state would be honouring themselves by a significant acknowledgment of Ron's invaluable service to our literature. The Department of Cultural Affairs of our State in association with the Akademi and the Universities could think of commissioning him, who is a senior Professor

at the University of Edinburgh, for a grand translation project. The Macmillan Company of India will shortly bring out an Indian reprint of this volume. I recommend it to all Malayali readers for a re-discovery of the brilliance of these stories in their new garb. A review is not a vote of thanks; but still, let me tell Ron. E. Asher how grateful we are all to him.

The land of 500,000 Villages - Stories from Rural India By Ludger Kuhnhardt. Published by the author. Distributors: Jyothi Book Centre, Trichur, Price: Rs. 15.00

Ludger Kuhnhardt, the author of this book, is a native of

Munster, West Germany. A journalist by profession, he undertook a study-tour through Southern Asia in the course of which he visited India twice. He spent several weeks in two typical villages of India, Manikpur in Uttar Pradesh and Mullakkara in Kerala. The book gives us a vivid picture of the poverty, misery and hardships of the people in the villages of India. Anyone who wants to study the conditions of life prevailing in the villages of India will find this book interesting and instructive.

P. R. M.

## Lexicography in Kannada

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Sir,

This has reference to the articles on Malayalam Lexicography published in the January-March (1981) issue of the Malayalam Literary Survey, Shri M. Arunachalam of Tiruchitrambalam has taken exception to the statement made in it by some of the learned writers that no Indian language other than Sanskrit had any dictionary till about the 18th century; and in his letter published in the April-June issue he has traced the history of lexicography in Tamil, commencing with *Divakaram* of the 9th century.

Kannada also has a similar story to tell. Unfortunately a wrong notion is current among Malayalam writers that Kannada suffered the same poverty as Malayalam in this field. The original sin was committed by the celebrated author of *Leelathilakam* who made a sweeping statement that Kannada and Telugu did not have a dictionary. Assuming this as true, and considering 'Mangaraja Nighandu' (1398 A. D.) as the first Kannada dictionary, Professor Sooranad

Kunjan Pillai put the date of composition of *Leelathilakam* prior to the compilation of *Mangaraja Nighantu*. The author and his commentator had little access to truth and consequently went wrong. This will be proved by the facts noted below;

1. Ranna, the great poet and contemporary of Chavundaraya of Gomateshwara fame, compiled the first Kannada dictionary in about 960 A. D. in 'Kanda' verse form and the work is known as *Rannakanda*

2. Nagavarma II wrote *Abhidhana Vasthu Kosha* in 1145. He is also remembered for his Kannada annotation of *Abhidhana Ratnamala* of Halayudha.

3. *Sabdamani Darpanam* (1260 A. D.) of Keshinaja is held in high esteem as a masterpiece and it is also considered a dictionary in as much as it contains 3 chapters entitled *Prayoga Saramemba Sabdartha Nirnayam*, *Samjna Prakarana* and *Dhathunirnaya*. In *Dhathu Nirnaya* he compiled a list of 973 Kannada verbs with Sanskrit meanings.

*Nachirajeeya* (1300 A. D.) is the Kannada annotation of *Amarakosha* by Nachiraja.

5. Then came *Mangaabhidhana* of Abhinavamangaraja in 1398.

6. *Karnataka Sabda Saram* (1400 A. D.) is a prose work by an unknown author. This gives the meanings of 1416 words in 675 sentences.

7. *Kabigara Kaipidi* (1400 A. D.) is a dictionary in 99 *kanda* verses. Another dictionary with the same title was written in 1530 by a Veerasaiva poet called Lingamanthri and consisting of 100 verses in Vardhakashatpadi.

8. *Chathurasya Nighantu* (1450 A. D.) is a work in 130 *kanda* verses by a veerasaiva poet called Chathurasya Bomarasa.

9. *Karnataka Sabda Manjari* (1650 A. D.) consists of 120 vardhaka-shatpadi verses by Virakta Thotakacharya.

10. *Karnataka Sanjeevana* (1560 A. D.) is the work of Sringeri Kavi Bharata Nighantu and Sabdagama are also works of the same time. *Nanartha Rathnakara* in 169 stanzas written by Devothama Kavi in about 1600 is another work worth mentioning.

Thus it can be seen that Rannakanda, the first dictionary was written thousand years ago, and the credit goes to the Jains. It needs special mention that the first Mahakavya and the first prose work in Kannada are also the contribution of the Jains. Presumably it was the result of a purposeful and well-directed movement, meant to counter the domination of Sanskrit, the legacy of the vedic culture. Whatever be the provocation, it is only true that a lot of work was done and much achieved from the 10th century in the field of Kannada lexicography.

C. Raghavan,  
(Triveni, Kasaragod)

## AKADEMI NEWS AND LITERARY NOTES

### South Zone Conference and Writers' Camp

As part of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, literary conferences and young Writers' Camps were held in different parts of the state on a zonal basis. Reports of the North Zone and Central Zone conferences have already been published in previous issues of this quarterly. The South Zone Conference held at Trivandrum was a grand function that lasted for four days from 29th April to May 2nd 1982. The celebrations began with a public meeting which was inaugurated by Shri Kainikkara Kumara Pillai and presided over by Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of the Akademi. At the young writers' Camp with 35 participants instructive lectures were given on different aspects of poetry, drama and the short story and in the discussions that followed each lecture the members of the camp took part. The Camp was directed by Professor S. Guptan Nair and Professor G. Kumara Pillai. There was a *Kavi Sammelan* (Poets' Meet) in which twenty poets read their own compositions. The *Kavi Sammelan* was inaugurated by Shri M. P. Appan and presided over by Smt. Sugata Kumari. The valedictory meeting was presided over by Dr. K. M. George and inaugurated by Shri Sooranad Kunjan Pillai.

### Akademi's Anniversary

The twentyfifth anniversary of the Akademi was celebrated on 13th June 1982. The celebrations began with a meeting at 2. 30 P. M. in the Akademi Auditorium. An interesting discussion was held on the topic 'Humour in Malayalam Literature'. The discussion was based on a paper read by professor K. M. Tharakan. Professor V. Anandakuttan Nair presided over the function. Shri Velloor Krishnankutty, Shri Kakkanadan, Shri V. P. Muhammed, Shri V. P. Sivakumar, Shri T. K. C. Vaduthala and Professor S. K. Vasanthan spoke on different aspects of the topic. Shri Pavanan, Secretary of the Akademi, welcomed the participants and the audience and Professor George Onakkur thanked them.

One Colourful item of the celebrations was the unveiling of the portraits of five great contributors to the development of Malayalam, at a public meeting held at 5.30 P. M. in the auditorium. The portraits of Vennikulam Gopala Kurup (poet) K. C. Mammen Mapilla (Journalist) Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair (Scholar) Punnasseri Nambi Neelakanta Sarma (Scholar) and K. P. G. Namboothiri (Poet) were unveiled respectively by Professor G. Kumara Pillai, Shri Puthankavu Mathan Tharakan, Shri C. P. Sreedharan, Dr. Sukumar Azhikode and Shri C. Unniraja. At the meeting prizes were given to the winners in various competitions. The Shri Padmanabha Swami Prize for the best contribution to Children's literature was given to Dr. M. P. Parameswaran. The Thunchan Memorial essay competition prize was given to Shri B. R. Prasannan (Nisanth, 902, Prasanth Nagar, Ullur, Trivandrum) and the C. B. Kumar Memorial Prize was given to Shri K. Balakrishnan (Valliyottu Veedu, Cherpazhassi P. O. Via Kolacheri).

### Resolutions of the Akademi Executive

The Executive Committee of the Akademi held a meeting on 25th July 1982 in order to discuss some urgent matters. The members of the committee wanted to express their deep concern at the steady growth of violence, lawlessness and insecurity all over the state. A resolution expressing this concern was moved by the President, Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and was unanimously passed. The resolution urged the Government to take stern steps immediately to establish peace and order in the state. By another resolution, which was also passed without dissent, the committee exhorted the Government to give Malayalam the place and importance it deserves in our educational institutions. The Committee also decided to conclude the Silver Jubilee Celebrations in December 1982.

### Jnanpith Award

The Jnan Pith Award, the most prestigious prize for literature in India, for the year 1981 was won by the Punjabi poetess, Smt. Amrta Pritam (B. 1919). The award winning work is her collection of poems called *Kagaz Ke Tanvas*. A reputed poet and writer in Punjabi and author of the novel "Fortynine Days", Amrta is now the editor of the Punjabi literary magazine called *Nagmani*. The Government of India had honoured her earlier by the award of the title, "PadmaSree"

## Financial Aid

The Harijan Welfare Department of the Government of Kerala has decided to give financial aid to writers of the scheduled and Backward classes for publication of their books. This year the aid will be given to fifteen writers.

## Author's Guild

The Kerala chapter of 'The Authors' Guild of India' has been constituted and the following office-bearers have been elected:

Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai	— President
Dr. K. Ramachandran Nair	— Secretary
Smt. Sugata Kumari	} — Joint Secretaries
Shri M. K. Madhavan Nair	
Prof. George Irumpayam	
Shri Roscot Krishna Pillai	
	— Treasurer

## Silver Jubilee Special Awards

The Akademi had decided to give two awards, each of Rs. 10,000/- as its Silver Jubilee Special Awards, to the two best works in Malayalam, one imaginative and the other informative, published during the twenty five years ending in December 1980. The Awards have been won by Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon's *Makara Koithu* (Winter Harvest) and professor N. Krishna Pillai's history of Malayalam literature, *Kairaliyute Katha* (The Story of Kairali). The selection in each case was made by an expert committee from five books chosen in the first round on the basis of an opinion poll among writers and lovers of literature. These Awards will be given to the recipients in November 1982 when the Silver Jubilee Celebrations will be concluded.

## Vyloppilly Award

The Sahrdaya Samiti, a cultural organisation of Trichur, recently instituted an Award in honour of the great poet, Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon. The first recipient of this Vyloppilly Award was Dr. Sukumar Azhikode. The Award is given for distinguished achievement in the literary and cultural field.

## Lakshmi Award

The Lakshmi award instituted by professor P. Lakshmikutty Amma, is granted every year to the woman who has done the

greatest service in the social and cultural field in Kerala that year. This year the Award was won by Smt. Leela Damodara Menon.

#### **Doctorate for Prof. Ramachandran**

Sri. Nandiyode Ramachandran, Professor of Hindi S. N. College, Nattika has been given the Ph. D. Degree by the Meerut University for his thesis on a comparative study of the works of the Malayalam poet, Kumaran Asan and the Hindi poet, Jaya Sankar Prasad.

#### **Sahitya Akademi Award Rejected**

Shri. Narala Venkatesvara Rao, whose play *Sitaosyam* (Telugu) won an award from the Kendra Sahitya Akademi, has refused to accept it because an adverse comment on his play was published by the Akademi in one of its own journals.

#### **The Chief Minister visits the Akademi**

The Chief Minister of Kerala, Shri. K. Karunakaran paid a visit to the Akademi on 16-7-82. He was given a warm reception by the secretary and the office staff. He was impressed by the publications, the library, the auditorium with its picture-gallery and the working of the various departments.

#### **Dr. K. M. George Honoured**

Dr. K. M. George, Vice President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, has been nominated a member of The Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation, Calcutta. Dr. K. M. George is the first person from Kerala to receive this honour. Nominations to the Foundation are made by the Department of Education of the Central Government.

#### **Edasseri Award and Memorial**

The Edasseri Award instituted in honour of the memory of the great poet, Edasseri Govindan Nair, has been awarded this year to Shri N. K. Desam for his collection of poems, *ullekham*.

Shri Akkitham Achutan Namboothiri has been elected president of *The Edasseri Smaraka Samiti* and Kadavanatt Kuttikrishnan has been elected Secretary of the Samiti

## OBITUARY

**Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair**

Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair, an eminent Zoologist and man of letters passed away on 8th June 1982. After taking his doctorate in Zoology, he started his career as a Lecturer in Zoology in the Science College, Trivandrum. He soon rose in his official life holding such high posts as Professor of Zoology, Principal of University College, Trivandrum and Director of Collegiate Education. In him there was a rare combination of scientific talent and literary taste. He had the head of a scientist but the heart of a poet. He has enriched Malayalam literature by his numerous essays on literature, science and culture which are all examples of his deep knowledge. The great appeal of his essays comes from his incomparable style which has a great charm of its own. The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has special cause to mourn his death because he was, for some time, Secretary of the Akademi. His death is a great loss to the world of science as well as to Malayalam literature.

**Karimpuzha Ramakrishnan**

Karimpuzha Ramkrishnan, a well - known scholar and educationist passed away on 4 May 1982.

**C B. Menon**

C. Bhaskara Menon, a retired professor of English died on 7th May 1982. Author of a number of delightful short stories in English, he has also done good service to Malayalam literature by translating some Malayalam poems into English.

**Thomas Mundasseri**

Thomas Mundasseri, the second son of the late Joseph Mundasseri, died on 2 June 1982. As the Proprietor of Current Books he published a number of good books in Malayalam.

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

[Biographical notes on some of the contributors have already appeared in previous issues and in such cases details are not repeated here]



### Dr. K. Sreenivasan

A teacher of English by profession, Dr. K. Sreenivasan retired from the Kerala Collegiate Education service four years ago; but he has continued to work as a Professor at University College, Trivandrum under a U. G. C. Scheme.

Widely known by his pen-name 'Sreeni' he has made a mark as a scholar, critic, short story writer and translator. His most important works in Malayalam are two volumes of literary criticism, *Divya Kokilam* (The Divine Cuckoo) and *Kaviyum Kavyavum* (The Poet and Poetry)

Dr. Sreenivasan has also published two scholarly works in English - *Kumaran Asan - the Profile of a Poet's Vision* and *John Steinbeck - a Study*.

### G. Kumara Pillai

A retired Professor of English, G. Kumara Pillai is noted for his remarkable scholarship not only in English literature, but in Malayalam literature as well. He is a well-known poet in Malayalam.

### Dr. K. M. George

A renowned scholar and critic Dr. K. M. George is currently Vice President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Chief Editor of the Akademi's prestigious publication *Comparative Indian Literature* which is nearing completion.

### K. M. Tharakan

A Professor of English by profession, he is a prominent figure among the younger critics and literary historians in Malayalam.

### K.N. Nair

A Veteran journalist, K. N. Nair is at present a member of the Editorial Staff of the Malayalam daily, *The Express*.

**Edasseri Govindan Nair (1906-1974)**

He was a major poet who belonged to the generation of G. Sankara Kurup. A classicist in literature and a Gandhian in politics he exemplified, to a great extent, the purer elements in both. He showed how classical restraint is not incompatible with the delineation of modern themes and how the Gandhian outlook is nothing if not radical. Of all the poets of his generation it is Edasseri who is regarded as a spiritual ancestor by many modern poets. His works include a popular play in prose *Koottukrishi* (Joint Farming) a powerful narrative poem, *Panimutakkam* (The Strike) and several volumes of shorter poems. A typical villager Edasseri was a great admirer of folk lore and the poem 'The Ballad of the Pootham' Published in this issue, clearly brings out this love of folk-lore.

Shri C. P. Sivadasan who has translated this poem teaches English at the University of Calicut. He is a Competent critic and translator.

**Karur Nilakanta Pillai (1898-1975)**

Karur belonged to the group of distinguished writers responsible for the great creative period in the history of the Malayalam short story. He wrote some two hundred stories which are now available in a two-volume edition. A primary school teacher by preofession, Karur was not greatly influenced by western models; perhaps that was one of the sources of his originality. His theme is the day to day life of ordinary people; but he brings out what is unusual in such life and in such characters. He tells his stories in a simple conversational style which is often full of wit and humour and depends for its effect on subtle suggestiveness. He has given us some of the most remarkable stories in the language and 'The Boatman' is one among them

Smt. S. Santhakumary who has translated this story is Professor and Head of the Department of English, Government College for Women, Trivandrum.

**Dr. S. Velayudhan**



He is currently Head of the Department of English, University of Calicut. A student of both linguistics and literature, he had his higher education in the U. K. and the U. S. A. Dr. Velayudhan has published a number of papers on linguistic and literary topics. He has also done a lot of translation from English into Malayalam and vice-versa.

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# MALAYALAM LITERARY SURVEY

JULY — DECEMBER 1982

## MALAYALAM LITERATURE 1981

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# Malayalam Literary Survey

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## *Editorial*

### **Malayalam Literature 1981**

As usual this is a Special Number Combining Nos III & IV of the current volume (VI). The salient feature of this Special Number is a symposium entitled 'Malayalam Literature, 1981'. We hope to make this an annual feature so that our readers are regularly provided with a brief survey of the previous year's work in Malayalam.

The aim of the survey of this kind is to highlight the main trends, the significant books and the important authors of the year in each major branch of literature along with an account of the publishing industry so as to give an over-all picture of the literary scene. We are sorry that we have been able to get only five of the seven articles we had commissioned. The missing ones are those on drama and the publishing industry; and the symposium is incomplete to this extent. But we hope that the five articles we have been able to include give a fairly good account of the developments in the novel, the short story, poetry, literary criticism and general prose during the year 1981.

When we undertook this task, we were aware of the difficulties and risks involved in organizing and publishing a survey of this kind. About a thousand books are being published in Malayalam every year and this means that the number of books in each major category runs into hundreds. Few critics will find it easy to go through all these and to select the books and authors to be highlighted. Apart from this there is the problem created by the critic's likes and dislikes or at least his personal points of view. So there is bound to be some difference of opinion regarding any kind of selection. If, in spite of this, we thought it worthwhile to go forward with this scheme, it was because we believed that a survey of the previous year's work in Malayalam would promote the study of literature and help the evolution of our literary culture.

## S. K. Pottekkatt (14-3-1913 to 6-8-1982)



S. K. Pottekkatt is no more. After a brief illness he passed away at Calicut on 6-8-1982. He was in his seventieth year, was on the Executive Board of the Central Sahitya Akademi and had won (1980) the Jnanpith Award, the most prestigious prize for literature in this country. Hence, as the cliché goes, he died full of years and honours. But he was at the peak of his creative power and was engaged in writing a novel about his experiences at Delhi as a Member of parliament (1962-1967) when death came unexpectedly. Malayalam in particular and Indian Literature in general are, the poorer for his passing away.

We have included in this issue a special article on Pottekkatt's life and work. He began as a poet but fiction was his forte. He belonged to the brilliant group of writers including Dev, Thakazhi Basheer and Uroob who made the short story one of the glories of literature in the thirties of this century and then proceeded to usher in the second creative period in the history of our novel. He was given the Jnanpith Award for his novel, *The Story of a Village*. But travel was his passion and there are those who consider his travelogues his unique contribution to literature.

Pottekkatt was associated with the Kerala Sahitya Akademi from its very inception as a member of the General Council or of the Executive Board. He was its Vice-president for a term and served also on the Editorial Board of the Malayalam Literary Survey we have a special sense of loss at his death.

Sankarankutty Pottekkatt is no more. May his soul rest in peace. May his tribe increase.

# The Herald of the Sangam Age in Malayalam Literature

---

M. Govindan

Death, by its very design and deliberation, is painful: to the one whom it takes away and to those who are close to him. Karoor's death evoked sorrow in everyone, dear and near to him. His passage to the realm of the unknown, at the age of seventy-seven on 30th September 1975 was a passive affair, so to say. His demise occurred at the Medical Centre Kottayam at 10 p. m. just a couple of hours after he was admitted. He was a chronic patient of bronchial asthma which had to wait and wage its battle for years to snatch him away. A man of medium stature, fairly brown in complexion, soft-spoken with a surplus stock of smile and laughter, his features were cent percent Malayali. In figure, fibre and calibre he resembled a life-size sculpture made of teakwood that is found in abundance on the mountain ranges around the town of Kottayam. There was nothing fussy about him; nor was he at any time prone to become furious

or even angry. Yet he had led an active life till the moment of his death. A common man, one might say. But how uncommon was that common-ness! Even the all-consuming deity of death might have stood before him for a few moments in bewilderment and reverence.

Life too has its own norm and rhythm. It is the sojourn from the womb to the tomb, a pre-fabricated deterministic pattern of emergence, advance and disappearance. The hands of time rock the cradle and carry the coffin. The interval, between these acts, is life. Death itself is not the end of anybody. It needs the co-operation of life to become self-sufficient, for death is ultimately assessed and adjudged by the mode and moral code of one's life, the meaning it acquired and the model it presented to those who are left behind.

When one views Karoor's death in this perspective, the normal sentiments of condolence

assume the characteristics of consolation. Karoor Neelakanta Pillai lived almost a full life, a simple life, sincere to the core, meaningful and manifold, magnificent even in minute details and dealings. His literary excellence was an extension of these exquisite qualities in verbal form-life and letters fusing in creative union. Stories blossomed out of him with native charm and chaste like flowers from the tree deeply rooted in the soil and expansively immersed in the sunlight as well. Karoor knew the process of photosynthesis in the art of writing. His artistic mastery of telling tales filled chlorophyll even in dry incidents and made them evergreen and raw yet with a delicate taste. Unique is his contribution in this sphere. He evolved a kind of fiction in Malayalam literature, all by himself, for he was monolingual and hence innocent of any alien influence or intrusion. Many a critic overemphasised this aspect and tagged the cliché, "scent of the soil" on to all his stories, of course with good intention, yet rather indiscriminately. The craft of story-telling as in Karoor's blood. In expression he was uni-lingual, but his experience had multi-layered deposits, in the totality of which originated the springs of his creative urge.

His stories are not *that earthy*, all in all, as some of the critics have claimed them to be. They do have ethereal and mineral elements sprinkled with sparks and currents that illuminated the hidden recesses of the human psyche in its variegated and contextual configurations. Archetypal association, depth psychology and Freudian moorings can be read into them. The late C. J. Thomas, a perceptive critic and a noted playwright has written a significant essay on his story *Poovampazham*, analysing the theme as well as the structure from the Freudian angle. *Wooden Dolls* is another story which defies the commonplace classification of the critics. There are any number of stories by Karoor of a peculiar genre that could be called simply Karoorian in Malayalam literature. Among the older generation of Malayalam writers of fiction Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and Karoor Neelakanta Pillai stand out, each in his own original domain, but almost on equal footing with regard to quality. Karoor has written two novels and a playlet. His achievement as a writer of stories for children is unequalled in Malayalam literature. As a story writer he is the most loving and lovable grandpa to the kids; a helpful guide to

the young writers and competent compeer to the elders.

And now, to the multitude of his admirers, he himself has become a story. The rare story of a man who willed, fashioned and shaped not only his life but afforded living facilities to many of his fellow writers. The Sahitya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham with its headquarters at Kottayam is, in the main, a positive product of Karoor's vision and supervision. The role played by M. P. Paul, D. C., C. K. Mani, C. J. Thomas Kesavadev, Ponkunnamm Varkey, N. Krishna Pillai, P. K. Balakrishnan, S. K. Pottekkatt, C. P. Sreedharan and quite a host of others who did their best to develop this institution cannot be under-rated on any account. And the list of industrious collaborators and co-workers does not end up with these few names. In a co-operative society every member is an effective constituent authority and a decisive participant. The SPCS too had its teething troubles and infantile ailments as it grew up. Contradictions developed within the ambit of co-operation. A paradox, indeed! Yet it survived all these measles-like diseases and corrosive discords.

For this marvel, the prime credit has to be given to Karoor

Neelakanta Pillai (in his own way, he was an Ayurvedic Physician too) who devoted twenty years of his active career to the growth and consolidation of SPCS. In fact he was into pilot. Small wonder, a man of his stamina and standard stood firm like the captain of a newly-launched ship into a rough and tough sea, steering its course in a forward direction, carefully avoiding icebergs and hungry sharks hurking hither and thither to swallow the inmates in the eventuality of wreckage.

Karoor was a born teacher and co-operator. He taught children as a primary school teacher. After retiring from the educational service, he pursued the same profession, this time to give lessons to the young and middle-aged writers on the benefits of co-operative endeavour and to train them in the spirit of concerted action, instead of hawking their wares for a niggardly sum at the doors of the publishers in a beggarly manner. As a story-writer he valued aesthetic forms. As the founder-secretary of SPCS he held fast to ethical norms

Basically, writers are the organisers of words. They are not adepts in organising men. Over-sensitive and extra-allergic to external persuasion and

pressure, some of the writers prefer to be individualistic and a few of them even idiotically egoistic to suit a fastidious fashion or the fad of the day. Writers, in general, are the worst material out of which one can give shape to a sound organisational structure.

Karoor made this impossible thing possible, with ease tact tenderness, tenacity of purpose, and tightened discipline. He employed those attributes, as was warranted by each specific situation. So long as he was at the helm of affairs of SPCS, his was the credo that guided the institution. In form, it was a co-operative society, in content, a joint family in which the great elder managed the affairs in a spirit of commonweal. Karoor never paid any heed to the confabulations in the corridors or to the artificially fermented feuds at the counters. When someone took the tales to him he smiled them away and chided the informant with a stern warning. At the meetings of the Board of Directors or the General Body, he encountered criticism and entertained the very critics exposing their own fallacies and false notions. His gentle, cogent argument and answers, interspersed with facts and figures, delineated the borders of fiction and truth in

unambiguous terms. He had the power of persuasion, the inner compulsion to integrate men and matters when they exhibited symptoms of indifference, inaction or misunderstanding.

Karoor Neelakanta Pillai is dead. But he is *not* no more. He is there in Kerala-in the hearts of his kith and kin, his friends and fellow-writers. He lives beyond the borders of Kerala too, among his friends like Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din of Srinagar, Gulabdas Broker of Bombay, Padmaraju of Andhra, Gopalakrishna Adiga of Bangalore, Dr. Prabhakar Machwe, Ka. Naa. Subramanyam, Vasant Davatar, C. S. Chellappa, Gangadhar Gadgil and a good many others who had come to know him personally. Above all, Karoor lives in the characters he created; they speak his language, inhale and exhale his spirit. They will reveal his portrait and inner personality every now and then. It is to be added here that his eldest daughter Srimathi B. Saraswathi is a short-story writer and a secondary school teacher.

How full a life he had! Almost full, as stated earlier. He left a rich legacy to writers and readers. He commanded them. He demanded nothing from them, neither gratitude nor love.

He was a man of vision, not a wishful human being. He envisioned a network of Writers' Co-operative Societies all over India that would enable the writers in various Indian languages to stand on their own legs, to understand each other through the publication of their works in translation, and thereby link life and letters by a technique of cultural engineering like the linkage of the major Indian take rivers. This vision is yet to shape. A writers' Co-operative Society has come up in Tamil Nadu. It is functioning, more or less well. The Authors' Guild constituted under the guidance of Justice G.D. Khosla, D R. Mankekar and Ka. Naa. Subramaniam has taken up a comprehensive scheme of this kind, with the help and active involvement of regional literary organisations. But among the writers their own words overwhelm the deeds, words sometimes wholesome and at other times just hallow and hackneyed. The danger of Indian writers turning in to jockeys riding others' horses is a grim prospect. It behoves the writers to behave themselves, to check and prevent such slips and falls. At the time of Karoor's retirement from the Secretaryship of SPCS an Indian Writers' Seminar was held, at Kottayam. Kashmiri Short-story

writer and novelist, Akthar Mohi-ud-Din, who was an active participant in the deliberations, made a very fanciful, yet quite pertinent, observation, though the self-centred sentries of Indian literatures and its orthodox gentry found it a little too much. Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din said "Karoor Neelakanta Pillai hails from Kottayam the nighbourhood of Kaladi, the birthplace of Sankaracharya. It was Sankaracharya who consolidated the culture of his times by establishing centres of learning and scholarship from Kerala to Kashmir. In a way, Karoor is also an Acharya, a teacher. He has founded a literary Mutt, the SPCS at Kottayam. Suppose, if we had a number of Mutts of this type all over India ....."

It is said there were three Sangams in Tamil during the ancient days at the capital of a Pandya kingdom, Madurai. Those were the great golden eras of art, letters and thought in Tamil Nadu. The unique classics of Tamil literature emerged out of these Sangams—*Thirukkural*, *Chilappathikaram*, *Manimekalai*, etc. The grand memories of those days handed down from generation to generation and the great legacy that still thrills and enriches the Tamil psyche, could retain the classic character of a people in

whom stability and change, tradition and innovation co-exist without contradiction.

Malayalees can boast only of one Sangam, Sahitya Pravartaka Sahakarana Sangham, just thirty odd years in age, yet if we meticulously measure its growth

during this short span of life, the age can be reckoned as three full centuries. Incredible, yes, yet innocently true.

The herald of this modern Sangam age in Malayalam literature is none other than Karoor Neelakanta Pillai.

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# Continuity and Change in the Kerala Theatre - Some Early Forms

---

V. Aravindakshan

Today the theatre in Kerala presents a spectacle of heterogeneous modes and ill-assorted techniques. The fashionable experiments aimed at "going back to the roots" or "shaping a native theatre" or "learning from Brecht" or "imbibing Grotowski" or "shuffling off the coils of the proscenium stage" are less genuine attempts at innovation than indications of a thirst for strangeness and novelty. Most of them spring from blind adulation either of the latest in European techniques or of native ritualistic forms. Naturally, some of them prove to be non-starters and some of them linger on, rather convulsively, as exercises in futility. Instead of methodical and purposeful experiments we have haphazard essays, and instead of a meaningful synthesis we have an eclectic hotchpotch. The apparition that rises to view is a thing of shreds and patches. A rapid survey of the rich, colourful variety of our theatre tradition may, in the circumstances, help

us to discover some method or at least unfold a pattern of continuity and change.

The co-existence of the archaic (or classical) and the new (or modern) is a unique feature of our theatre. There are still alive a number of traditional forms which combine dramatic and narrative elements or dancing and acting in different proportions. The more prominent among these are *Ottanthullal*, *Koothu*, *Kootiyattam* and *Kathakali*. Undoubtedly *Kathakali* is the most distinguished of all the traditional or classical forms. This 'dumb-show' is also the form closest to pure drama despite its use of masks, stylized acting, dance and music and persistent dependence on *Puranic* myths.

Cultural anthropologists have conclusively established that the origin of most dances and dramatic forms of the present day can be traced to the rituals of the vegetation cults. "This

is as true of Kerala as of other lands, for from its place in religious worship the dance has made its way into everyday life, giving us many of the plays which now entertain and amuse us, such as the *Ottanthullal*, *Mohiniattam* etc attaining the perfection of its refinement in the *Kathakali*, the spectacular dance-drama of the land, with its happy blending of the elements of the religious dance adopted to the dramatic rendering of the incidents and episodes in the epic forms of Ramayana and Mahabharatha" (M. D. Raghavan, *Folk Plays and Dances of Kerala* 1947) Read "primitive magic" for "religious worship" and the observation is perfectly truthful. The debt *Kathakali* owes to fertility rituals like *Thira* and *Theyyam* is quite apparent.

*Kathakali* at the apex and *Thira*, *Theyyam* and such other folk-plays at the base these are the two frontiers of our theatre. In between is a multiplicity of dramatic forms which make use of devices borrowed from both western theatre idioms and traditional lore. It is this middle theatre that has released a flood of dramatic literature whose centenary we are celebrating this year. This is a middle class theatre.

A word about *Kootiyattam*. We have religiously preserved this ancient (strictly speaking medieval) sanskrit drama. Uncompromising tradition has ordained that it be a monopoly of a shrinking community, namely the chakiars. Recently some bold and enterprising artistes have ventured to bring it out of temple precincts and its fame has reached distant shores.

*Kathakali* is not without its history. From the drama of blood of the early days to the splendid romantic comedy of *Nalacharitham*, the story of its evolution is interesting though not eventful. May be "evolution" is not the right word, because *Nalacharitham* represents an abrupt mutation and is a unique phenomenon. To our great loss the potentialities created by the play got dried up for want of understanding and nurture. Enthralled as they were by tradition the sponsors and patrons as well as the artistes of *Kathakali* failed to recognize the virtues of the revolution wrought by the genius of Unnayi Varier in *Nalacharitham*. The form which emerged from the twilight world of *Darikavadhom*-the gory tale of the vanquishing of the evil demon, *Darika* by the universal benefactress Kali - has by and large the nature of an

allegorical revenge drama. The plays cast in that mould represent melodramatically the conflict between Good and Evil in which Good invariably triumphs and Evil is totally annihilated. Look at the more popular *Vadhom* stories. All of them exhibit the same pattern of violent episodes, stock characters and blustering speeches interlaced with conceited descriptions.

Unnayi Varier is the first and only playwright who adapted the age-old tradition of Kathakali for his own purpose. His subtle artistry modified as well as adapted the conventional devices. The happy outcome was a radical change from the *Vadhom* of the senecan kind to the iridescent tragi-comedy of Shakespearean depth and brilliance. What remained for a large time a mere "drama of the stage" was transformed into a genuine "drama of the human heart." *Nalacharitham* is remarkable for the imaginative handling of its plot, the variety and vividness of its characters and the dramatic quality of its dialogue. While the best of the other Kathakali plays—those of Kottayath Thampuran—are mostly specimens of good rhetorical drama, Unnayi's masterpiece

stands apart as a glorious piece of poetic drama.

Another play of some distinction is *Thatakavadhom* by the gifted scholar Krishnan Thampi. The recent contributions of Shri Olapamanna, Sri N. V. Krishna Varier, Professor Marumakan Raja, Professor Krishna Kaimal, Prof. Vijayan and Kalamandalam Kesavan are also worthy of note. The Kathakali adaptations of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and Marlowe's tragedy *Dr. Faustus* are particularly interesting.

*Kathakali* has been regaling large rural audiences as well as feudal connoisseurs all through its history. Nevertheless it would have languished as a mere "temple art" but for the energetic efforts of poet Vallathol and Manakulam Mukunda Raja to breathe new life into it. Now its enlarged audience includes the urban elite too. Further the lively interest it has roused in other parts of India and in other countries has given it a new impetus.

The folk-plays of Kerala can broadly be categorized into two: ritualistic and recreational. Some of them also combine characteristics of both kinds.

*Theyyam* is essentially ritualistic, being a form of fertility ritual. Notwithstanding its ritualistic function and form occasionally it takes elements of social criticism. A few of the *Theyyam* songs contain passages complaining of the iniquity of the caste system. *Ottanthullal*, on the other hand, is full of realistic and satirical portrayals of contemporary life. But it betrays traces of the ritualistic material out of which Kunchan Nambiar fashioned it.

The purely ritualistic forms are embodiments of beliefs and fancies deeply rooted in the minds of the peasantry and their affiliations with agricultural labour are quite evident. They are mimeticrites of primitive clans. Transplanting them on the

modern stage will deprive them of their ecology and cause them to wilt and wither. It is wonderful indeed that they are still vigorously alive in spite of the socio-economic changes fatal to their cultural environment.

The recreational forms of the traditional folk-theatre have already lost something of their vital energy. *Porattu natakam*, *Kakkarissinatakam*, *Korathiyaattam* etc. are fighting a losing battle. They have been routed by the massive on-slaught of the middle theatre. They are on their last legs. The mushrooming *Kalasamithis* of the villages have given them the go-by, unfortunately, without realizing that these traditional forms may provide a sturdy foundation for a genuine 'people's theatre'.

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# Release of 'Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram'

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Dr. K. M. George

In November 1980 when the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi were Inaugurated in grand style by our revered Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, she graciously handed over the first part of the MS of *Comparative Indian Literature* to Macmillan, India. Today His Excellency the Governor of Kerala will be releasing the first volume of *Bharatiya Sahitya Charithram* as a part of the grand finale of the Jubilee Celebrations. The first one was an MS. in English entitled *Comparative Indian Literature* and the second is a printed book in Malayalam bearing the title *Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram*. What is the connection between the two? We say that the book is a Malayalam version of the MS in English. But then, why are the titles different? *Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram* means History of Indian Literature; and the English version is *Comparative*

*Indian Literature*. Ofcourse the common ground is Indian Literature. But is it a history or a comparative study? It can be either or both.

A proper history of Indian Literature is yet to be written, though there are about half a dozen books in English with that title. Some of them written by Western orientalists deal only with Sanskrit literature: others are fragmentary or partial accounts dealing with certain aspects of Indian Literature, but not an integrated comprehensive history. There are valuable histories of individual literatures in the concerned languages; but no serious comparative study with a wide sweep has taken place. In this context, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi's project seeks to combine the historical and the comparative aspects in a special way. It is obvious that comparison can be effective only when like-objects are

Speech delivered by Dr K. M. George on the occasion of the release of the book (11th December 1982)

considered. It is not easy to compare a novel with a poem. Therefore a generic approach to literary division has been accepted and within each genre or literary form, chronological surveys have been incorporated. This is the general design. Thus in the first volume we have, after a brief section on the languages of India, sections on folk literature, traditional poetry, modern poetry, drama and the novel. Under each such division, surveys of literary achievement in the various languages have been presented. For instance, the section on the novel commences with a general introduction on the Indian Novel giving pointers to the common aspects and distinctive features of the various literatures. We have taken care not to over-play the claims of individual languages but to view Indian Literature in its totality.

*Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram* is history with a difference; it is a special history of Indian Literature designed and written in such a manner that comparative studies are made feasible. It also seeks to discover our national identity and to emphasise our cultural unity of which literature is a natural expression.

Just as *Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram* is a history with

a qualification, it is also a reference book with a difference. The common run of reference books like literary encyclopaedias, contain information in a stereotyped manner and being piece-meal accounts, they are not meant for continuous reading. But here we have surveys giving a continuity of literary evolution, also providing excerpts from great works and gists of plots and stories giving a taste of the literature discussed. And with the help of the exhaustive Index, the reader can get access to all important authors, outstanding works and topics of cultural importance. However, this is only the first step in presenting an integrated picture of Indian literature.

Friends, it has been an exciting and exacting experience for me to organise this project. I am beholden to the Kerala Government for approving this scheme and suggesting it to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for implementation, and also to the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for asking me to be the Director and Chief Editor of the project and giving me its full support. No State or Regional Akademi has so far undertaken such a project of national significance.

I have worked hard during the last four years and in this

formidable task the 15 editors (one for each language) have been my great succour. They have not only suggested suitable contributors from their languages, but edited the concerned articles, contributed at least one and thus co-operated in this great venture. I am very happy that many of them are present here at this meeting. I have been taxing them considerably by pestering reminders and irritating queries, but in their generosity they have forgiven me and considered this a labour of love. We have 201 articles in the two volumes contributed by over 170 writers, the cream of the intelligentsia in the sphere of Indian literature. The success of the Malayalam version depends to a large extent on the efficient

co-operation extended to me by the Assistant Editor and the translators. I feel truly overwhelmed when I try to thank them for their invaluable co-operation in this pioneering venture.

It is a happy augury that we have with us Sri C. Achutha Menon, who gave the first green signal to the project as the then Chief Minister, to receive first copy of *Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram*. Nothing would be more appropriate. On behalf of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, it is my proud privilege to request His Excellency the Governor of Kerala Shri P. Ramachandran to release the first volume of *Bharatiya Sahitya Charitram* on this auspicious occasion.

## VISHAKANYAKA

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# S. K. Pottekkatt: A Tribute

---

Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai

S. K. Pottekkatt died in Calicut on the 6th of August 1982 when he was nearing seventy. His death marked the end of a life at once many-splendoured and richly rewarding. He was a poet, novelist, short story writer, travelogue writer and literary and cultural leader rolled into one.

While he was much greater as a novelist and short-story writer than as a poet his greatest contribution was doubtless in the field of the travelogue. Pottekkatt was easily the greatest travelogue-writer in Malayalam and was equal to the all-time greats in that field in any language in the intrepid travels he did and the interesting accounts he wrote about them. He began his foreign travels significantly with a tour of Africa in 1949. Here he travelled the length and breadth of the Dark Continent, braved situations which called for courage to face them, and discovered man in his habitat whether it was a city or

a settlement of head-hunting tribals. Starting thus with Africa, he travelled successively in Europe and Asia. Within India itself he was often an interested traveller. His published travelogues cover more than three thousand pages and would probably outrank in length many of the travelogues published by his contemporaries in international languages. Yet this traveller travelled with little money, in less comfort and certainly not receiving a VIP treatment wherever he went. Nor did he have the research facilities and secretarial assistance which a John Gunther, for instance, on commanded. He has put it record that his articles on some of his travels did not fetch enough money to cover the expenses on cigarettes incurred during the journey. The prompting which drove him on as a traveller came from a permanently lit inquisitive nature and a desire to see man wherever he lived, and as he lived. Pottekkatt did not care to pack his travelogues with data of every kind-geographical, historical, political

and what not. He was more interested in the way in which humans everywhere faced this phenomenon called life. He liked to see man face his little problems and cross his big hurdles. Consequently his travelogues are moving human documents written in the warm, humorous style of a kindly but detached observer.

This last-mentioned observer status is seen in his novels and short stories too. It saves his Jnan Pith award-winning autobiographical novel *The Story of a Village* from self-pity, self-glorification or mere sentimentality. The novelist maintains his aloofness and observer status even in the midst of intensely personal situations. The result is that objectivity and subjectivity are evenly balanced in the work. The novelist has achieved what James Joyce once described as "artistic economy"—a formula for the artist's simultaneous involvement in and withdrawal from life around him. The former is needed for the very substance from which he creates; and the latter for his artistic technique.

*The Story of a Village* is also noted for the width of its canvas and the rich variety of its characters. In it Pottekkatt, the

traveller is combined with Pottekkatt the novelist; The space the novelist covers is that of his own life and those of the persons he meets. And Sreedharan, the protagonist of the novel being a personal for Pottekkatt, the traveller, we have here a coverage of such good geographical space. As for time it begins with the lives of Sreedharan's parents and carries the tale forward till he becomes a Member of Parliament and re-visits his village.

The kindly observer and narrator in Pottekkatt accounts for the leisurely pace of his style whether it is in his novels, short stories or his travelogues. Pottekkatt is an unhurried writer savouring his characters, his language and the often unexpected turns which events take in his works. He is aware of his reader in a friendly sort of way and is rather telling a story than writing it. Yet his style has none of the stuccato quality of the simplicity of some of his eminent contemporaries among fiction writers. His prose is not prosaic and the poet in him after an efflorescence in formal poetic moulds appears to have been content with the role of giving a poetic flavour to his prose.

An earlier novel *Ooru Theruvinte Katha* (The Story of

a Street) is also written in the same framework and style except that the work is more objective, not being autobiographical. These two novels spread specially rather than flow logically towards culmination. They are more like flooded fields than like flowing rivers. Characters appear in their natural settings and convey the oddities with which they are endowed. But everybody's pace including that of the novelist is leisurely. Each strand of the events with which the work is meshed will suffice to be an independent story. Consequently we find in these novels a remarkable complexity of events and characters coupled with a deceptive flexibility of structure.

We have a different kind of novelist in one of our writer's earlier novels. In *Vishakanyaka* (The Poisonous Virgin) he narrates the story of a group of people who had migrated from Central Travancore to the hilly tracts of Vynad in Malabar. They battle with inhospitable conditions in cultivating the land. Theirs is a saga of tears, toil and malaria.

Pottekatt's short stories form a community with his novels in their style and charm of narration. His manner is

straight forward and not mysterious except at the end. His stories often end in an unexpected event and delightfully so. There is, for example, the story of a working girl who steals her English boss's time - piece. The girl is badly let down by the instrument which rings merrily as it lies nestled inside her blouse. One would expect the girl to go to jail; instead Pottekatt marries her to the Englishman.

Not hilarious like this, but intensely poignant is the story entitled the Mail Carrier which this writer had had occasion to render in English and publish. The mail carrier is a young tribal entrusted with the job of carrying the mail to and fro between the main P. O. in the city and a small P. O. situated on the fringe of a forest. And he has to trek the elephant-infested forest in the discharge of his duties. The man is intensely proud of his job, considering himself a member of the Raj. And he loves his mail bag as he would a bride and he plays with the elephants daily while on his way till one day a bus arrives to take his place and he receives his last pay-a new sparkling ten-rupee note. An involvement like his can only end in tragedy when

rudely disengaged. And that is what happens. The bus crushes him again, this time physically.

S. K. Pottekkatt belonged to a group of young writers who appeared in Malayalam in the 'thirties. That was a time when the Malayalam writer saw visions of new frontiers and of new techniques. The proletarian urge was intensely felt and mysteries were offloaded from literature which was entrusted with specific social objectives. In this ideological atmosphere wrote men like P. Kesava Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, S. K. Pottekkatt, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer and Ponkunnam Varkey. But oddly they did not take similar lines and the proletarian ideal touched them differently. While Thakazhi, and more than him Kesava Dev and Varkey sounded the proletarian bugle more consistently, two writers namely, S. K. Pottekkatt and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer stayed close to the special quality of their genius and wrote works that were individual in character. To them, it appeared that the proletarian man, or the economic man was only a part of Man, in capital letters. The odd situations in which Pottekkatt portrays his man, the gentle humour with which he

pictures his foibles, the broad canvas on which he sees mankind—all these bespeak of his broader concept of man. Yet Pottekkatt's affiliation with the left ideology and policies has never been ambiguous; he was a Member of Parliament in the Communist group.

S. K. Pottekkatt's was a life of continuous literary labour. Born in Kozhikode in 1913 he held a variety of assignments before he took up a career of travel and literature. He was a teacher and Government official till 1945 when he undertook his trip to Kashmir. He travelled in Africa and Europe in 1949-1950. In 1952 he went to Ceylon, Malaya and Indonesia; 1955 saw him in Finland and the Soviet Union. He was a member of the Lok Sabha from 1962 to 1967. He received several awards for his literary works, the last and the culminating glory being the Jnan Pith award in 1981 for *The Story of a Village*.

Pottekkatt was an active member of the literary and cultural community of Kerala specially and of India in general. He was President of Kerala's famous Writer's Co-operative and a member of the Executive Board of the Kerala

Sahitya Akademi; he was a member of the Executive of the Central Sahitya Akademi at the time of his death. His wife Smt. Jayavalli predeceased him by two years. He has four children.

Pottekkatt was a prolific writer who has left more than fifty works. His earliest work—a collection of poems was published in 1936 with the title *Prabhatakanti* (The Splendour of Dawn). There are two other fruits of his intermittent poetical labours. These are *Prema Silpi* (The Architect of Love-1958) and *Sanchariyute Geetangal* (The Songs of a Traveller-1954). There are more than twenty collections of short stories written by him. It shows that the short story was a major field of his interest. Some of these stories are quite famous, e.g., *Nisagandhi* (The Flower of the Night), *Rajamalli* and *Pulliman* (The Spotted Dear).

Besides *The Story of a Village*, *The Story of a Street*, and *The Poisonous Virgin*, Pottekkatt also wrote such well-known novels as *Natan Premam* (Rustic Love), *Premasiksha* (Love's Punishment) and *Mutupatam* (The Veil).

S. K. Pottekkatt was a gem of a man to know. The great warmth and the sense of humour which his works exude are part of the man. Meeting him again after the lapse of a number of years one used to be greeted with as much warmth as if one had parted from him the day before. He was incapable of the pettiness not unknown in ambitious literary men. The result was that when he died, the vast numbers who read his works and those who partook of his friendship mourned for him. He was one for whom both life and literature created monuments in the hearts of men.

## Bibliography of Malayalam Works

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# Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair and Adoption of Malayalam as Official Language

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T. N. Jayachandran

Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair (1913-1982) is very well-known as a distinguished scientist, great teacher and an eminent writer particularly on subjects relating to art and science. He is one of the very few writers in Malayalam who could explain the secrets of science to ordinary readers in a simple, elegant and direct style. He was one of the greatest essayists of modern times in Malayalam. He could write with equal facility on literary and scientific subjects. He made a mark as a distinguished teacher as he could guide his students into the secrets of science with excellence and expertise.

All these are well-known. I would like to touch upon a comparatively unknown aspect of his career, namely, his association with the efforts for the adoption of Malayalam as the official language of Kerala.

As is well-known, the State of Kerala was formed on November 1, 1956 as a consequence of the reorganisation of the States of the country on the linguistic basis. One of the major planks of the struggle for Independence was that, people speaking the same language and residing in a contiguous geographic area must belong to one and the same State. As far as Malayalam was concerned, people speaking the language were scattered over three administrative—units the Malabar District which was part of the Madras Presidency and the Princely States of Cochin and Travancore. A strong and effective struggle for United Kerala had been unleashed as a result of which, immediately after securing Independence the United States of Travancore and Cochin came into being on July 1, 1949. The struggle continued as Malabar was still kept outside

United Kerala. On November 1, 1956 the State of Kerala was formed.

The first popular Ministry headed by Shri. E. M. S. Namboodiripad assumed office on April 5, 1957. One of the first issues of importance which the E. M. S. Ministry tried to tackle was the adoption of Malayalam as the official Language of the State. The Namboodiripad Ministry appointed a Committee on August 31, 1957 to submit a report to Government on the measures to be taken for this purpose. The Chairman of the Committee was Shri. Komattil Achutha Menon, Trichur; and Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair, who was the Principal of University College, Trivandrum at that time, was one of the members of the Committee. (The other members of the Committee were Shri. K. Damodaran, Retd. Head Translator to Government, Shri. P. T. Bhaskara Panicker, President, District Board, Kozhikode, and Shri. L. C. Isaac, Advocate, Kottayam). The terms of reference of the Committee were to prepare a glossary of the terms to be used, to suggest stages at which the progressive adoption of Malayalam could be introduced,

to examine the system of shorthand and typewriting in Malayalam to suit the increased use of Malayalam as official language and to suggest necessary transitory measures. The term of the Committee was one year and contrary to the usual practice of Committees the Achutha Menon Committee was in position to submit its Report on August 16, 1958 before the completion of its authorised period of one year. The report which was slim and short and written in an elegant and chaste style in Malayalam is a classic in itself and is certainly an epoch-making document in the history of Malayalam. The Committee recommended that it should be feasible to adopt Malayalam as the official language within a period of seven years in all segments of activities in which it was possible. It may be paradoxical to note that the next notable step towards adoption of Malayalam as the official language was taken only in 1970 when an Official Language Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri. C. Achutha Menon, Chief Minister, was set up. In other words, nothing much had happened by way of adoption of Malayalam as the official language during the period of

seven years recommended by the Komattil Achutha Menon Committee.

The Official Language Committee was reconstituted in July 1973. Dr. Bhaskaran Nair was a member of the reconstituted Committee. He continued as a member of the Committee thereafter. Dr. Bhaskaran Nair evinced very keen interest in the adoption of Malayalam as the official language. It may be recalled that one of the terms of reference of the Committee was improving Malayalam typewriting and shorthand. Dr. Bhaskaran Nair rendered yeoman service in this respect. Shri. C. Achutha Menon took a lot of interest in the adoption of Malayalam as the official language while he was Chief Minister and he made use of the services of Dr. Bhaskaran Nair for the reform of the Malayalam typewriter. Even earlier a Malayalam typewriter was in vogue, but the problem with the typewriter was that its operation was time-consuming owing to the multiplicity of letters in Malayalam. By an ingenious method of splitting letters, Dr. Bhaskaran Nair was in a position to design a keyboard in which the number of letters was drastically reduced. At the

request of the Government Dr. Bhaskaran Nair went to Calcutta and held negotiations with a leading typewriter manufacturing firm and the new Malayalam typewriter which is in use at present was brought out. Even though Dr. Bhaskaran Nair was not completely happy about the outcome; he was satisfied that at least this much could be done to reform the Malayalam typewriter.

There was a new wave of enthusiasm for the adoption of Malayalam as official language during 1978 when Shri A. K. Antony became Chief Minister. At his instance, a five-year programme for the adoption of Malayalam as the official language step by step at various levels of administration was adopted. By this time Dr. Bhaskaran Nair had retired from Government service and had left Trivandrum and settled down in Cannanore. It was my privilege to go to him as Secretary to Government in charge of adoption of Malayalam as official language and request him personally to associate himself with the activities in connection with our programme. I remember with gratitude that he attended the District Seminar held at

Cannanore in connection with the adoption of Malayalam as the official language and delivered a very inspiring address. He was not very happy about the way he was treated in connection with the improvements effected to the Malayalam typewriter and he did express his feelings in the matter in no uncertain terms. All the same his love for Malayalam was so strong and his thirst for its adoption as the official language so great that he ultimately did readily agree to

associate himself with our activities.

The Malayalam typewriter is not in the best possible shape at present. I remember Dr. Bhaskaran Nair telling me that he knew the technique to perfect it. But, owing to various reasons the secret lies buried with him. The day may not be far when one of the brilliant successors of Dr. Bhaskaran Nair will be in a position to unravel the mystery and make the Malayalam typewriter perfect.

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# K. P. S. Menon—His Life and Work

---

T. R. K. Marar

K. P. S. Menon, doyen of Indian diplomats, died in his home at Ottappalam in Palghat district on 20th November, 1982. A month earlier he had completed 84 years, a landmark in life that is rarely reached. In astrological parlance he had seen a thousand full moons. His death marked the end of an era; a period when distinguished and cultured men, those who, Indian in spirit, imbibed the culture and wisdom of the West, and who were thought fit enough to hold the reins of administration. This type is rare today.

His academic career was brilliant. From Madras University he went to the legendary Christ Church College, Oxford, founded by Cardinal Wolsey. There he took First Class Honours in modern history. Next he wrote the I. C. S. Examination, topping the list of competitors and joined the Foreign and Political Department of the Government

of India. Thus began a career which took him on many assignments in India and later saw him serve as India's Ambassador in different countries, confronting delicate problems of international relationship with ease, success and distinction.

K. P. S. Menon gave the title *Many Worlds* to his autobiographical book. His life justifies the title. A life that began at Kottayam near Kerala's blue and beautiful lagoons moved later to England. Then, back in India as a member of the coveted Indian Civil Service, it started its remarkable round, going from Tiruchirappalli to Hyderabad, New Delhi to Rajasthan and Baluchistan, and from there to the exciting but dangerous North-West Frontier. Next he became the Government Agent in Kandy, Ceylon; and went on a special mission to Zambia, Kenya and Uganda, returning to the Secretariat at Delhi. The next assignment

took him to Rajaputana (new Rajasthan) as Chief Minister of Bharatpur State. In 1946 he went as Ambassador to China, the first of the many who took up that delicate position. Meanwhile he had also served on the U. N. Commission to Korea and as Adviser to India's Delegation to the United Nations.

Menon rounded off this varied political career by taking up the post of Ambassador to Russia during the twilight years of Josef Stalin. He was concurrently Ambassador to Poland and Hungary.

Menon spent nearly 10 years at Moscow. They were the best years of his life, when, inspired by Nehru, he helped to lay the foundations of India's foreign policy. Along with Girija Shankar Bajpai and N. R. Pillai, he gave shape and character to his country's foreign service, seeing to it that the country's representatives abroad presented a proper image of the people and the civilization. He taught them the art of forging friendships, behaving with dignity, always standing straight without stooping in a servile manner. An ideal Ambassador himself,

he wanted the young men and women of the foreign service to keep up the tradition.

Our continued friendship with the Soviet Union owes a great deal to him. He personally maintained it beyond his official term. He was an authority on the Russian people and the Russian leaders. No wonder he became President of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society. Realising the value of his work, Russia awarded him the Lenin Prize. His own country conferred on him the title of Padma Bhushan.

Menon was always an excellent speaker. His speeches as an Ambassador are considered ideal examples for recruits to the Foreign Service. They form part of their course of study. His words, proper, elegant and laced with subtle humour or sublime seriousness, as the occasion demanded, are often peerless.

As a general speaker, Menon was much sought after. I heard him first at the Main Hall of Maharajah's College, Ernakulam. His theme was *A Day in an Undergraduate's Life at Oxford*. It was a regular treat, and a vision of that city

standing among groves, green meadows and clear streams rose before us. We saw, as in a vision, "The line of festal light in Christ Church Hall" and heard the story of a day's life, narrated with rare vividness and humour. In the same Hall, I heard him speak on Korea and deliver the Jubilee Memorial Lecture, his subject being Muslim influence on Indian art and culture. The last was almost like a poem, a stream of *hazals*, that suited the subject perfectly. Menon's forte was expression, clear and apt, *appropriate*. The words were well chosen, even where he quoted from others. His wealth of literary reminiscence assisted him in giving what he said a pleasing flavour. He always spoke like a truly cultured man.

Two years before his death, he gave a talk over the All India Radio on *Wander-Lust* and after recalling briefly his wanderings round the world, he spoke of that last journey into "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns". The quotation was happy as art, but saddening to hear. This capacity to honour other men's words is the mark of the civilized reader and speaker. Doctor Johnson's words on Addison can very well

be applied to Menon's speeches. Those who want to cultivate a style of speech, "familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious" can very well go to the volumes of Menon's addresses.

While serving in Madras Presidency, he married Saraswati, daughter of the famous Sir C. Shankaran Nair. He refers constantly to her in his writings as "Anujee". Her figure flits through accounts of his varied assignments too. She was a perfect complement to him, and became a well-known figure in diplomatic circles—a hostess of rare charm and efficiency.

K. P. S. Menon has written a good deal. Most of his books are in the form of travelogues. They describe experiences in most regions of the world. He saw "men, manners, governments" in all their variety and wherever he went was "himself not least but honoured of them all." Like Tennyson's Ulysses, he was a part of all that he had met. What he saw and heard, he made his own. Experience made him a full man. During his long existence, he saw the world change, from the dress suit to the sherwani and Gandhi cap, from the mild

sound of protest to the roar of hungry hordes in revolt, from cultivated sophistication to natural simplicity, from artificial restraint to loud and jolly bonhomie.

We have already seen how Menon gave his autobiography the title *MANY WORLDS*, a very appropriate one. Later, as a sequel, he wrote *MANY WORLDS REVISITED* completing what he had begun, adding more material, recalling old experiences, describing new ones. It is equally interesting, but, perhaps, some repetition could not be avoided. Another book of travel is *Journey Round the World* encompassing various places in Asia, America and Europe.

*Russian Panorama* is the result of his ten years as India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Political relationship is not the theme. A reader looking for diplomatic secrets and revelations of international intrigues will be sorely disappointed. It also contains pictures of life in Poland and Hungary. The narrative is marked by felicity of expression and delicacy of humour.

Menon's prose style has a special charm. It is charged with the wealth of his reading.

We frequently come across quotations. Some of them are direct. Others just give a pleasing aroma to his words. This does not mean that his writing reveals labour and artificiality. On the other hand, its chief mark is ease and fluency. As we read through accounts of journeys or encounters with people, we enjoy the experience with the writer, we almost become one with him. His tone appeals to the general reader as well as the scholar.

K. P. S. Menon was a great lover of the arts. He was for a term President of the Central Sangeeth Natak Akademi, Music and dance he cherished, but poetry was his passion. He loved to attend poets' assemblies; often poets gathered at his house to recite their compositions. He was a patron of arts like Kathakali too. The lilt of sounds, the rhythm of feet, the music of words in happy combination—all thrilled him. This love of the fine arts was inborn and genuine and his familiarity with varied cultures promoted it. All this points to a versatility that produces richness of mind, elation of soul and maturity of vision.

What is it, we often wonder that attracts the many to a few?

What inborn power is it that makes some men stand out even in the limited sphere of their activities? It is their culture. This culture encompasses a love of one's fellowmen, a passion for beauty a rapturous worship of what is grand and good. Such men are well-read and carry their reading with them. Art enthuses them and all that gives pleasure they come to cherish. Their outlook is always international, their politics, the politics of peace and goodwill

among men. Jawaharlal Nehru was a symbol of these virtues and it is no wonder that the Nehru era produced an Indian diplomat of Menon's culture and calibre. Our obituary note on him could very well be that of Mark Antony on Brutus:

His life was gentle;  
and the elements  
So mix'd in him that  
Nature might stand up  
And say to all the  
world, *This was a man!*

Given below is a list of the important works of K. P. S. Menon who was an internationally known Indian writer in English:—

1. Delhi-Chungking, 2. Russian Panorama, 3. Flying Troika, 4. Many Worlds-An Autobiography, 5. Lamp and the lampstand, 6. India and the Cold War, 7. The Resurgence of India, 8. China Past and Present, 9. Lenin Through Indian Eyes, 10. Russia Revisited 11. Journey Round the World, 12. Twilight In China, 13. The Indo - Soviet Treaty, 14. Biography of Sir C. Sankaran Nair, 15. Memories and Musings, 16. Changing Patterns of Diplomacy.

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By Parappurath

Translated by Prof. K. M. Tharakan

Jose belongs to a poverty-stricken family in Kerala. He finds a job in the Military Accounts Department in Nainital, and divides his life between his office and the godown he lives in.

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# Basheer and His Stories

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6. Kumara Pillai

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer is one of the writers whom I love to read again and again. And every time I re-read him, I do so with immense relish because his stories never lose their freshness of appeal. I am sure that this is an experience which I share with thousands of Malayalam speaking people who read fiction. A literary artist in the full sense of the term, Basheer strikes us by the range and intensity of his vision of life and the power and beauty of the inimitable style in which he communicates this vision. No anthology of a dozen of the best short stories in Malayalam can omit him and any catalogue of a dozen of the best novels in the language is sure to contain the name of one of his works. In the realm of shorter fiction his work compares favourably with the best work of his contemporaries not only in Kerala but anywhere else in the world.

Basheer is the kind of man who becomes a legend in his lifetime. Though he is popular with all sections of the reading public, very few of his readers have seen or heard him. This is the strangest of strange things in a land where every writer is expected to be a public speaker and public meetings, conferences, seminars, symposia and cultural meets are incredibly numerous. A warm-hearted person with a large circle of friends, he is a brilliant conversationalist. But he shuns public appearance and is never seen on the platform. This has given him an aura of mystery which is re-inforced by the glimpses of his life as revealed by his stories, by reports of interviews with him and by the funny letters he sends to editors who publish them in their journals in lieu of his stories. Abandonment of school and home in early youth, active participation in the fight for freedom and consequent police persecution and a few terms in

Introduction to a collection of Basheer's stories selected and translated by Shri V. Abdulla and to be published by Orient Longman Ltd. in their 'Sangam Books'.

jail, eight years of adventurous wandering throughout the length and breadth of India and even beyond, years of starvation as a struggling writer, spells of mental derangement, a late marriage and the evolution of an irresponsible bachelor into a devoted husband and a doting father—these are chapters of an eventful life which lend colour to the image of his personality. And besides all this, the character of the man leaves its imprint on the reader as a portrait of the artist as a jesting prophet.

Basheer's literary output is comparatively small. Apart from a one act play *Kathabeejam* (The Seed of a Story), an autobiographical fragment *Ormayute Arakal* (Chambers of Memory) and a volume of miscellaneous writings *Nerum Nunayum* (Fact and Fiction) he has produced only some one hundred short stories and about a dozen short novels or longer tales in a writing career of more than forty years during which he had practically no other occupation. But what he lacks in quantity he gains in quality. A perfectionist by temperament, he has given us little that is slipshod. The only limitations or defects that can be pointed out are that he has not attempted

the longer novel and that once in a way he seems to delight in describing the sordid for its own sake as in some parts of his short novel *sabdangal* (Voices). Except for these, he has given us a body of work which bears the indelible impress of an authentic master in the art of story-telling.

Prose fiction in Malayalam was born about a hundred years ago. But though we had fine writers like Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar (1861-1915) and K. Sukumaran (1876-1956) in the first generation and E. V. Krishna Pillai (1895-1938) in the second generation who could spin out a humorous skit or contrive a well-made tale, the Malayalam short story came into its own only in the thirties of the present century. As for the novel, we were fortunate enough to have two giants at the beginning—O. Chanthu Menon (1846-1899) whose *Indulekha* was published in 1889 and C. V. Raman Pillai (1857 - 1922) whose *Marthanda Varma* came out in 1891; but after their time the novel languished until a new life was given to it in the forties of this century. It was the same generation of writers who ushered in the golden age of the short story in the thirties and

proceeded to inaugurate the second creative period in the history of the novel in the next decade. Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (b. 1910) belongs to this generation of highly gifted writers who made fiction one of the chief glories of our literature. The other major writers of this group are P. Kesava Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, S. K. Pottekkatt, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Karur Nilakanta Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey and P. C. Kuttikrishnan (Uroob). They share a deep concern for contemporary social realities and their style is by and large based on conversational idiom. Beyond this no generalization is possible about them; in fact, any generalization is misleading to a great extent because each of them has an individual way of looking at life and a distinctive approach to the craft of fiction.

From the sociological point of view Basheer is of special significance to us. He was the first major writer to emerge from the large Muslim community in Kerala and thus he made a signal contribution to the evolution of Malayalam literature into the literature of the entire Malayalam-speaking people. His introduction into our

literature of the Muslim background, imagery from Muslim religious lore and telling phrases and expressions peculiar to the community is of more than sociological import. It adds a special colour to some of his works especially, three of his novels *Balyakalasakhi* (Childhood Sweetheart-1943): *Ntuppuppakorantarnnu* (My Grandfather had an Elephant - 1951) and *Pathummayude Aadu* (Pathumma's Goat-1959). It should be emphasized that the abiding appeal of Basheer's writings comes from his deep humanity which transcends all partisan considerations and that the Muslim element is employed to give it a 'local habitation and a name'. *Balyakalasakhi* was one of the earliest works which heralded the second creative period in the history of the Malayalam novel. A simple story of passionate young love set against the background of a declining middle-class Muslim family, it was the first important literary work in Malayalam to portray Muslim customs and manners. But it is remembered mainly for the flaming intensity of the tragedy of Majid and Suhra. *Pathummayude Aadu* is a moving tragicomedy woven out of the everyday life of a large impoverished Muslim

family. Here too the appeal is universal because it comes from the alchemy of the author's art which transmutes the most trivial things of day-to-day occurrence into the stuff of exquisite art. *Ntuppuppakoranentarnnu* is perhaps the only work in which there is an obvious message for the Muslim community. The story is woven round the love of Nissar Ahmed for Kunjupathumma. But the dominant character is Kunjupathumma's mother who gloats over the glory that was and the central theme is the conflict between the values she upholds and those of the educated, forward - looking Nissar Ahmed. The message of the need for modernization is embodied in a story with the strange beauty of a myth. It is spiced with pleasant humour and coloured with images and anecdotes from Muslim religious lore.

Any student of Basheer's short stories and longer tales is struck by the variety of theme and tone in them. He has enshrined in them every kind of experience from the pangs of hunger and sex to the rapture of mystic visions. Its range includes stark realistic pictures of the material world and the realm of fantasy haunted by

ghosts and spirits. He has written on love and hate, on politicians and pickpockets, on the foibles of women and the mystery of the mind of man, on the fancies of childhood and the disillusionment of adult life. His vision of life is comprehensive enough to perceive everything from the sublime to the ridiculous. He has an intense sense of the tragedy of life and at the same time an irrepressible sense of humour. The present volume is a carefully prepared selection which represents as many facets of Basheer's art as possible.

One of the secrets of Basheer's success is the rare kind of intimacy he establishes with the reader. This kind of rapport arises from the fact that the writer creates the impression that he is revealing his own personal experience. In *Mother* he writes: "I am saying this about my mother; whatever I intend saying hereafter is about my mother," *The Blue Light* opens with the words: "This story of mine; *The Blue Light* is one of the amazing incidents in my life". Some kind of personal involvement on the part of the author is suggested in most of the stories. In a story like *Mother* there is a genuine subjective element. In fact

many of his stories have an autobiographical element in them and his stories are the richer for the unusual variety of experience he has actually gone through. But whether the 'I' of a story is the author or not, this device is very effective as a part of the narrative technique. In this respect he is just the opposite of his famous contemporary, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, whose approach is that of the impersonal narrator, of the uninvolved observer and objective analyst.

There is a vivid strain of realism in stories like *Mother*, *Tiger* and *Bully Panicker* but they are arresting for other qualities as well. Stories like *The Birthday* and *Hunger* characterised mainly by stark realism have been excluded from this anthology probably because they are not uncommon. A piece like *the Shore of Solitude* belongs to the other extreme of the spectrum of his art. It comes from a group which consists of pieces which are poems in prose rather than stories and explore a level of experience akin to the mystical. It reminds us of the Sufi mystics, of Tagore and Gibran. It portrays the luminous image of a love that is beyond the

trammels of the flesh, beyond the bounds of time and space. It is the soulful yearning of the eternal lover for the immortal beloved. Basheer is endowed with a rare poetic gift and we get glimpses of it in many stories like *When I See the Moonlight* and *the Walls*. But it is in pieces like *the Shore of Solitude* that the poet in him finds the fullest expression.

Basheer has a flair for the portrayal of the unusual, the mysterious and the supernatural. In stories like *when I see the Moonlight*, *the Blue Light* and *the Snake and the Mirror* he creates a world of fantasy which he makes absolutely convincing by his superb skill in inducing in us the necessary "willing suspension of disbelief". The weird experience of living for days and nights in a haunted house with no company except the ghost of a beautiful young woman; or the eerie encounter with a cobra which coils round one's left arm and from that position calmly enjoys the beauty of its own reflection in a mirror—Basheer can narrate such things with the sure touch of authenticity. The little piece *A Man* shows how even a purely human story can be invested with a sense of mystery by the unexpected revelation of the

enigma that man is. *A Little Old Love Story* does not seem to belong to this category. And yet, in spite of its realistic framework, it deals with the unusual experience of a dream suddenly turning into a nightmare.

But Basheer's stories are not all concerned with the supernatural and the unusual. The vast majority of his stories are rooted in the earth and are irradiated by his love for his fellow-beings. His imaginative sympathy is such that their joys and sorrows and all their problems become as much his as theirs. *Elephant Wool* is a fascinating story showing an extraordinary insight into the psychology of a nine-year-old boy. The little jealousies, triumphs, humiliations and adventures of the age at which one cherishes a peacock feather or an elephant hair as a priceless treasure are described realistically and yet so unsentimentally with an artless simplicity which defies analysis. It reminds us of the child Majid who declares in *Balyakalaskhi* that one plus one is a slightly bigger one and the native Kunjupathumma in *Ntuppuppakorantarnnu* to whom marriage is just something which bestows on her the

privilege of chewing betel. It is a far cry from the innocence of childhood to the complex mind of a criminal. But Basheer can depict both with equal understanding. His longer tales dealing with the characters of the underworld have the durability of folklore. In *Muccheettukalikkarante Makal* (The Cardsharp's Daughter), *Anavaariyum Ponkurisum* (The Elephant-Lifter and the Gold Cross) and *Sithalathe Pradhana Divyan* (The Chief Local Celebrity) he has created a little world of petty thieves, pickpockets, small time gamblers and two princes of their trade, Raman Nair, The Elephant Lifter and Thoma of the Gold Cross all of whom he has immortalised not as criminals but as colourful human beings with a different way of life.

Basheer's unbounded love for mankind made him a rebel in his youth. The uncompromising opposition to all kinds of tyranny, hypocrisy and superstition is a recurring theme in his writings. Sometimes this opposition took a negative turn as in the bitter anarchism and grim cynicism of the short novel *Sabdangal* (Voices, 1947). But very often his voice has been that of passionate idealism especially in the earlier stories.

One of our few writers who have actively participated in the nationalist movement, he has written some brilliant stories which recapture the agony and the ecstasy of the stormy days of our struggle for freedom. *Mother* is a powerful story of this group which includes other pieces like *Mother India* and *The Policemen's Daughter*. By interweaving the pathos of an individual's situation with the general suffering and by juxtaposing the conflicting calls of the mother and the motherland, he has given a remarkable intensity to a straightforward, unadorned story in *Mother*. *Tiger and Bully Panicker* deal with soulless tyranny against the background of jail-life with which Basheer became familiar, as a freedom-fighter and as a 'dangerous writer'. The effect of the strong indictment of oppression is conveyed to us without the use of rhetoric or sentimentalism.

Basheer views life as a tragicomedy. His sense of the comic is one of the most outstanding traits that contribute to the wider appeal of his writings. He has a fresh and delicious sense of humour and a brilliant mastery of wit, irony and satire. As

he says in *The Walls*, he never loses an opportunity to laugh and he regards laughter as 'God's special gift'. The hilarious humour of longer tales like *The Love Letter* and *The Elephant Lifter* and *The Gold Cross* is one of the most delightful things in the whole range of our literature. In almost all of his novels and longer tales the serious and the comic are interwoven in different ways.

In *The Love Letter* which is included in this volume we have the youthful Basheer at his very best. The theme is obviously love and love thwarted by religion at that. It is the romantic love of a Nair (Hindu) youth, Kesavan Nair, for a Christian girl, Saramma. She is a damsel in distress—a burden on her father and her stepmother, she is unemployed and has no dowry to offer a prospective Christian bridegroom. It is a serious situation giving plenty of scope for rhetoric, sentimentalism and melodrama. But Basheer tackles it with a rare lightness of touch and he does it without evading any of the numerous problems inherent in the complex situation. In fact, one of his famous dictums on humour occurs in this story: "Humour

is the perfume of life". Kesavan Nair is a bank clerk lodging with Saramma's father and she approaches him for help in finding a job just to escape from the hell of a home. After great deliberation, he offers her a regular salary and a permanent vacancy in his own heart. She accepts the offer and goes on receiving the salary and keeping her cool for months on end without so much as allowing him to touch her. He emerges triumphant at the end with his love's labours won, and she graduates into one of the merriest of the merry wives of Kerala.

Of the short stories that Basheer has written in the lighter vein, *Poovan Banana* is perhaps the most amusing. It is a pity that philistine critics have accused the author of antifeminism in his writing this modern version of the taming of a shrew. Even though a love of sheer fun is the most remarkable feature of Basheer's comic vision, he often employs an ironical or satirical tone. When he makes the famous writer reveal his original prescription to end all wars..... "every man and woman living on this earth must get dry itch like me" (*If War is to End*), he is not only having a comical dig at the futility

of disarmament schemes, no-war pacts and peace offensives, but also poking fun at the importunate journalists who expect every famous man to express his views on everything under the sun. The bizarre story, *The World renowned Nose* is a striking satire on the psychology of the masses whose curiosity is aroused by anything slightly unusual and the inveterate tendency of politicians to exploit anything and everything for partisan ends.

For Shri V. Abdulla, the translation of Basheer is a labour of love. It is the consummation of his life-long appreciation of Basheer, the man and his work. This translation of thirteen representative stories is not Shri Abdulla's first work in this line. It is a sequel to his earlier volume, *Voices / The Walls*, a fine rendering of a short novel and a long tale by Basheer. Proficient in both languages and well-experienced in original writing as well as in translation, Shri Abdulla has done his work with steady competence and loving care. There are special difficulties that a translator of Basheer has to face. His language is very simple, but his style is

terse and without any rhetoric. His writing is full of colloquial idioms and very often he produces a rare effect by a subtle turn of phrase. Above all, he is a writer with the magic touch and his artless art has an elusive charm. In spite of all this, Shri Abdulla has succeeded in producing an English version which can

communicate as much of the beauty and power of the original as is normally possible in any such version. I am sure this book gives the non-Malayalee reader an opportunity to share in the enjoyment of what we regard as one of the best and brightest achievements of Malayalam fiction.

## **ASURAVITHU**

**By M. T. Vasudevan Nair**

**Translated by V. Abdulla**

This is the story of Govindankutty a man trapped by the social aspirations of his family and the traditional rigidities of his milieu.

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## Indulekha

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S. Guptan Nair

*Indulekha* the first novel proper published in Malayalam (December 1889) has been holding the ground against the onslaughts of fashion and fancy for a century now. Its present-day admirers are no less enthusiastic about it than their predecessors of a hundred years ago. This is something of a literary miracle Chandu Menon's forerunners and imitators in the field have all been relegated to the archives if not altogether forgotten. But Chandu Menon still rules the roost. It is as it should be because Chandu Menon almost unconsciously produced a classic. He was our first novelist who knew that he was writing a novel while his predecessors were only fumbling through moral tales and heroic adventures.

Chandu Menon by his own admission was an avid reader of English novels and was in the habit of conveying their gist to his circle of intimates. And his listeners became particularly interested in those ready

summaries. Sometimes it became a passion with them and they (here the plural suddenly changes into the singular and this particular 'person' is by all evidences his wife) egged him on to translate an English novel. The translation was promptly started but soon fizzled out and the original mind of Chandu Menon was already afloat on a new novel. He left his first model Lord Beaconsfield's *Henrietta Temple* far behind and plunged into the warm currents of Malabar life. Chandu Menon was a Nair and evidently proud of his pedigree. But he knew how life in those murky inner circles of the feudal mansions under despotic uncles was stagnating. That cloistered life, he thought, was in urgent need of some stirring. Chandu Menon did it with an air of pretended innocence and a fund of humour. And these I believe are the two abiding qualities of Chandu Menon's writings. One cannot read *Indulekha*, even if it be for the nth time

without breaking into peals of loud laughter. Chandu Menon himself enjoyed a good laugh either at somebody else's expense or at his own.

The story centres round the aristocratic Nair family of Poovalli headed by Panchu Menon, a short-tempered old man of seventy. There are in the family his nephews, nieces grand-nephews and grand-nieces as also his daughter and grand-daughter subjecting themselves sometimes willingly, often grudgingly to their ignorant, self-willed, irascible *Kaaranavan* (Chief). The chief's charming grand-daughter Indulekha is in love with his grand nephew Madhavan. This is quite natural in the days of cousin-marriages and these two young ones are meant for each other. But something happens in between and the chief swears by his family deity that he won't permit their union to take place. Subsequently he invites to his house a very rich and influential Nampoothiripad (high class Brahmin) who represents the rich, licentious, unsteady pleasure-seekers of those days. Nampoothiripad fails shamefully in his attempt to win Indulekha's favour and

Panchu Menon in order to please him, hastily gives an ignorant grand-niece in marriage to the profligate. She is literally engaged by Soori Nampoothiripad in his palanquin. Then follows Madhavan's misunderstanding, his running away, wanderings, return and the happy consummation; takes the hand of his sweet-heart and they live happily ever after.\*

Chandu Menon dramatically introduces in the very first chapter the battle of generations threatening the good relations in the family. The quarrel is over the question of educating a distant grand-nephew (Sinnan) Madhavan wants to take the boy to Madras to educate him. Panchu Menon flatly refuses to allow this. Harsh words pass between the old patriarch and the young graduate. Probably those words (not spelt out by the author) formed a key-note address on the affairs of the family. Panchu Menon, the despot is abetted by the passive innocence of the female members, of the house. But Madhavan, undaunted by the opposition goes ahead. He is preparing for a redefinition of the word *gurutwam* (respect for the elders),

\* In this summary I have freely borrowed phrases and sentences from Chandu Menon's own letter written to his translator W. Dummergue M. C. S.

The immediate result of Madhavan's defiance is that he is denied the hand of his sweetheart. Tempers are frayed and the calm of the house spoiled. In the midst of it all stands Indulekha in dignified aloofness. She is not only not unnerved but even seems delighted with the discomfiture of her grandfather and the defeat of her foolish suitor.

Soori Nampoothiripad is one of the greatest comic characters in the whole range of Malayalam fiction. Among the most hilarious scenes in the novel are the confrontations between Nampoothiripad and Indulekha. He is drawn in some detail by the author and in every scene he appears, there is laughter. Look at the passage in which he emerges as a modern Cupid. "There leapt out of it (a palanquin) a golden form. Its head was covered with a gold-coloured cap, and its body was clad in gold-coloured robes. Gold was the colour of its garments throughout and on its feet were sabots studded with gold. Gold rings were on all the ten fingers and as though this were not enough it was enveloped over the above robe in a cloak all golden in colour and it carried in its hand a small golden mirror to be frequently consulted". Chandu

Menon is unwilling to sanction human status to this pretentious fool and hence uses the pronoun 'it' instead of 'he'.

It is through the portrayal of Soori that Chandu Menon introduces some of the most pungent and biting social criticisms aimed at cleansing the Nampoothiri community. The Nampoothiris were at the apex of the social pyramid in Malabar for many generations. They were distinguished for their intellect and ability. They produced geniuses in various fields. Nevertheless the prurience of the average Nampoothiri was incorrigible and it was pernicious to the whole community. Chandu Menon thought that they should be exposed to better ways of life and that their libidinous instincts should be sublimated into something more creative. Soori is contrasted with the gentle and intelligent Cherusseri to give us a glimpse of the brighter side of the community. Menon knew that the Nairs also, as a class, were imbibing the worse traditions of the Brahmins and spoiling their wealth and wisdom in pomp and splendour.

The 'mana' (Nampoothiri-house) and the 'tarawaad' (Nair

joint family) were the two grand institutions in the feudal set-up of Kerala. They were veritable 'oblomovkas' of Malabar where atrophy had reached a point of no return. The wealthy ones of the former after their daily rituals engaged themselves in playing chess, looking at elephants and listening to endless hours of orchestrated drumming. Unlike the Nampoothiris the Nairs gave more freedom to their women which in turn encouraged the Nampoothiris when invited to enter into marital alliances with Nair women. Such alliances without responsibilities were more often than not, informal sex relations sanctified by custom.

All this had irritated Chandu Menon's cultivated mind and he with his amiable good humour and sharp intellect wrought a story around his spiritual unrest.

Chandu Menon was a non-matriculate but he had learned his English well and qualified himself for the uncovenanted civil service. He admired the disciplined English officers under whom he worked and they liked him too. He knew Sanskrit fairly well and believed in the Hindu faith sans its superstitions. Such a person who assimilated the best of two

cultures knew what could be done to improve our society. He prescribed English education as the panacea for our ills. English education, he thought would bring discipline and decency into our life. With this object in view he made his hero and more especially his heroine, products of English education. Educated women were a very rare species in those days. (One in eight hundred according to a Report of the National Committee on Women's Education, 1959) Chandu Menon's Indulekha was given an excellent education at home. She knew English, Sanskrit, Western and Indian music and a few more useful arts such as knitting. The courage which she exhibits particularly in adhering to her own choice of Madhavan as her partner in life at the risk of antagonising a despotic grandfather could appropriately be attributed to her English education. Chandu Menon expresses it in so many words: "I have thought it necessary that my Indulekha should be conversant with the richest language of the world" (Menon's letter to W. Dummergue, 19th December 1889).

Yes, Chandu Menon willed it so and made his heroine a little over-qualified. Imagine

a Nair lady belonging to a sleepy hollow like Poovalli playing on a piano! That I think is the limit of going West in 1889.

What Chandu Menon desired was not a mere knowledge of English but the resultant scientific outlook free from worn-out traditions and meaningless conventions. He wanted to let plenty of fresh air into the stuffy and suffocating interior of the Nair tarawaad. He did not want the joint family to disintegrate or fall into ruin but he hoped to see the uncles more sensible and warm-hearted, the women folk a little more enlightened and strong-willed and the young men more rational and unsentimental. It is obvious that Madhavan's running away from the way-side inn in a fit of despondency is disapproved by the author. If he were more rational he would not have made such a fool of himself; instead he would have stayed on to enquire into the veracity of the gossip that Soori had taken away Indulekha.

To be rational is not to be a 'rationalist'. Chandu Menon disapproved equally strongly the rationalism of the Bradlaugh-Huxley type. This incidentally

explains the introduction of a full-dress debate on rationalism. The much-maligned eighteenth chapter of *Indulekha* was meant as a testament of Chandu Menon's social and political aspirations. This he confesses was written at the special request of some of his friends. The chapter could neatly go into a modern intellectual's novel in any language because the subject is discussed with such verve and logic.

In the three - cornered discussion it is plain that Chandu Menon's views are those of Madhavan. Madhavan believed in religion and worshipped his gods but it was a free thinker's worship. He was also a 'moderate supporter of the Congress'. He envisaged a Congress which would persuade the English government to make no difference between us and Englishmen and to redress specific grievances. This might sound amusingly innocent today but let us remember this was written hardly four years after the foundation of the Indian National Congress. For all his naivete we should congratulate Chandu Menon on making his hero a politically mature and intellectually alert young man. Even Govindankutty who exhausts himself in ventilating

borrowed western thoughts is an intellectual who ferrets out Charles Bradlaugh's lectures from his portmanteau at the slightest provocation. Only a Chandu Menon could create such a character in the 19th century Malabar setting. It would be disrespectful to call him a revolutionary. He was a progressive-minded social thinker who dreamt of pulling out people from their ennui and stupor. But let me hasten to add that it was not because of these liberal opinions that Chandu Menon's novel became a classic. His opinions counted little in those palmy days of the Empire. The most famous Malayali of his period, Sir C. Sankaran Nair was to begin his presidential address to the Indian National Congress (1897) "with a fulsome homage to Queen Victoria on her Diamond Jubilee". It was part of the mystique in which imperialism was clothed. (K. P. S. Menon: *Sir C. Sankaran Nair*.)

Chandu Menon was an artist in his own right. His artistry was untutored; it was natural and spontaneous. He wrote as the grass grows. He did not try a single artifice to make his novel exciting. Like an old grandpa he takes the readers

into his confidence and starts. There is no involution, no sleight of hand, no suspense. The natural happenings in a big house—a Mansfield Park of the Jane Austen model—are narrated in the every-day language of the people. The emphasis is, as in the case of Jane Austen, on right conduct and on human dignity. His infectious humour enlivens the narration. In short it is a plain tale for plain people. *Indulekha* has nothing of the epic grandeur of C. V. Raman Pillai's fictional masterpieces. But his natural grace and unpretentious narration gave us our first taste of realism. God knows whether he had heard anything about European realism but he knew that the artist should be close to nature. Barring a few examples of exaggerated description, he remained true to life. His rendering of the individual traits of each character also became typical of the class to which each of them belonged

*Indulekha* is not a deep novel but it is a fascinating novel. C. V. commands awe and admiration while Chandu Menon draws us to him with warmth and affection. He is our Dickens and Jane Austen rolled into one.

## The Living, The Dead

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M. Mukundan

It was from Kittu, the peon, that I heard of Chandrasekharan's death. Kittu did not know of what illness Chandrasekharan died-neither does it matter now, for Chandrasekharan, dead, will never come back to us again. I felt sad. It was only the day before yesterday that he and I had a drink together, and had sat on the beach, chatting about Kausalya of Vallikkat. When the wind from the sea turned damper and the beach became deserted, Chandrasekharan stood up and said: "Get up, man, let's go up to Vallikkat."

We walked two miles and reached Kausalya's house. I was feeling quite listless-so I sat down on the bench in the veranda, while the toddy I had drunk surged up in spasms to my throat. Chandrasekharan went inside. It was midnight when we returned home together.

Now I couldn't either sit quietly or do any work in my

office. So I took permission from my boss, Appukutty Menon, and got out. As I walked along the road, all my thoughts were about Chandrasekharan. I could not quite decide whether he was an unlucky or lucky fellow. Then I tried not to think at all about him. But how could I do that? After all, it was Chandrasekharan who had died, and here I was, going to his house to see him. So it was impossible that I should think of anything else except him.

As I drew near Chandrasekharan's house, I saw Marar coming from the opposite direction. One glance at him told me he was coming from Chandrasekharan's house. His eyes were red; also, from the distance I could see him wiping his eyes with the towel slung on his shoulder. When Marar, came upto me, I was wondering whether or not I should ask him what illness Chandrasekharan had been suffering from. Then I decided I wouldn't, as

any such mention of Chandrasekharan, I felt, would add to the other man's grief. But Marar himself made the remark, "It's all fate. When you're summoned, you've got to go. What a strong young man he was—all steel! It wouldn't have been so shocking if he had been laid up with some disease or the other and then ....oh God! However will that poor old Nanu Nair bear this terrible shock?"

When Marar walked away from me, I could see him again dabbing his eyes with the towel. It was a good thing. I had met him on the way—I could at least get the information that Chandrasekharan had not been ill. I guessed he might have died of a heart attack.

By this time I came to a stop in front of Chandrasekharan's house, I was all tired and upset. My feet in my slippers were perspiring, I entered the compound trying hard to control my feelings. The barbers were sitting near the gate—they had a traditional right to the coconuts and silk cloths which would be given away later. For some reason I felt more agitated when I saw them. Sweat broke out all over my body. I sat down on a bench in the compound. I wiped my face with the end of

my *dhoti*, and, unbuttoning my shirt, blew on to my chest. "My son", someone was addressing me with his hand on my shoulder. I lifted my head and looked up. It was Raman Master, who had taught me and Chandrasekharan. Master was not wearing a shirt. He had a towel round his neck, the ends of which fell over his hirsute chest. I now realized I was not merely imagining the heat, but that it really was a hot day.

"My son" said Master, "why grieve? This is everyone's lot". I sat silent, with bowed head. "They were friends". "They grew up playing and laughing ... together" "Naturally, wouldn't he feel sad?" I could hear folks around me remarking this about Chandrasekharan and me. And these observations seemed only to make me sadder. How I wished they would all shut up!

Master sat down on the bench beside me. I raised my head and looked at him. His face wore a peaceful expression. Even when full of grief, he had the capacity to control it—for he was a man who had seen and heard quite a few things in life. But my condition was different. For one thing Chandrasekharan and I had grown up and gone to school together. Even as adults,

we were always together. Besides, I don't have Master's capacity to endure suffering.

Kelu came up with a spade on his shoulder. Mud was sticking on its blade. I could see that he had just then dug the grave. He squatted down beside the barbers and lit a beedi. Kelu profited when somebody died-it ensured him a day's food. "Two skulls," he said, "I dug out two skulls from the pit. Nowadays we don't find space even to bury our dead". I heard what Kelu said. Blood seemed to have congealed in his eyes. "When there are deaths everyday, where can we bury all the bodies?"- he asked. One of the claimants to the silk cloths remarked, with a smile brought on by some happy memory: "It is not yet five days since Kunjuraman *Muthalali* died."

Master once again laid his hand on my shoulder. "My son, please go in and console Nanu Nair. But how could I, who could not console myself, offer consolation to Nanu Nair? However, since Master had asked me to, I got up from the bench, placed my slippers on one side of the steps and entered the porch. Nanu Nair was sitting in an easy chair, his head with its white hair bent

over his chest. There was a two days' growth of white beard on his face, his eyelids were swollen. I walked up to him quietly and stood by his side. He neither moved nor looked up at me. I continued to stand near the chair, not knowing what to say. From the compound Raman Master was observing me. I felt annoyed with him for sending me in to talk to Nanu Nair. Without uttering a word, I sat down in the chair next to him. Gradually, I could sense a growing heaviness in my head. I was finding it difficult to breathe. From the distance Master must have noticed my distress. He gestured to me to go down to him. I looked at Nanu Nair's face once again. He was sitting motionless in the same posture. I said nothing, but went down the steps and sat down beside Master.

"Young men should have some measure of courage" Master spoke in a reproving manner, but I could discern the sympathy and sorrow on his face. After all, he was aware of the bond that existed between me and Chandrasekharan.

The kith and kin of Chandrasekharan were coming one after the other, bearing silk cloths and betel leaves in their hands. Still, even though so

many hours had elapsed, I had not gone in to see him. I wondered how I could bear to look at him lying dead. Whenever the urge to see him came over me, I felt my heart beating out of rhythm. How I wished I could somehow enter the room and take one look at him! The body would be carried away only after 3 p. m. I fervently prayed I could, before that time, overcome my weakness and gather enough mental strength to go and see him.

By evening, after school and office hours, the compound was filled with people. From Chandrasekharan's office came his colleagues with wreaths of flowers. There were four of them. I saw them going straight into his room, and then coming out to console Nanu Nair. I wished I had their courage. They came and sat down on the bench. Kripakaran lighted a cigarette and blew out smoken rings. "I couldn't even recognize him" he said, "How could such a great change take place?"

I wondered whether Kripakaran was talking about me or Chandrasekharan.

"Not a drop of blood on his face"

"My dear fellow, how can you expect a deadman's face to looked ruddy?"

"Does the blood drain out of the body immediately after death?"

I resented this conversation between Kripakaran and his friends. But then, whatever it was, I could not find fault with them-for, had they not gone in to see his body, laid wreaths on it and then come out to console Nanu Nair? But me? How long was it since I had sat there doing nothing?

Kripakaran moved closer to me. "There's something I want to ask you"- he said. "You know Prema, the postmaster's younger daughter, don't you? She and Chandrasekhar, I, am told ....."

I kept quiet.

"I heard they were to get married in the month of *Vrischikam*-was it true? You were Chandrasekharan's close friend. You must have known all this-that's why I am asking you about it. Please don't misunderstand me."

"It's a fact"- I said.

Chandrasekharan has left us forever. What's the point in discussing such matters now? I

wanted to ask Kripakaran. I hoped he wouldn't come up with some more such questions. Kripakaran must have read the expression on my face-whatever it was, he did not mention anything again.

There was a movement amidst the waiting crowd. I observed everyone looking at the road. So I too turned my eyes in that direction. Two coolies were bringing in the cot to carry the body away for burial. I felt my insides quivering. Whenever I see this cot, made with the wood of the mango tree with bars built in all around it, I get this sensation. Kelu and the barbers helped the coolies put it on the ground. The coolies sat down to relax.

It was in the self-same cot that Kunju Raman *Muthalali* had made his final journey five days before.

Somebody came with a large vessel full of lime juice and poured out a tumblerful each to those assembled there. Kripakaran and his friends went up to the porch after drinking their lime juice. I followed them. As we crossed the threshold and entered the room, we could hear the wailing of the women. The low-roofed

hall was packed with people. Standing on the tips of my toes, I strained forward over their shoulders and took a look at Chandrasekharan. In the soft light shed by the *nilavilakku*\* surrounded by the fumes of burning incense, bathed and clothed in a new shirt and *dhoti*, he lay there. The room was full of smoke and the fragrance of the smoke.

Kripakaran and his friends took leave of me and stepped out into the compound. They had to get back to their office. Just before they got out of the house, they lit up a cigarette each and blew out the smoke. Kripakaran sent out smoke rings.

Chandrasekharan was wrapped up in red silk and placed on the cot. When I heard the wailing from the hall, tears welled up in my burning eyes. Those sitting all around in the compound and in the porch stood up. The cot was borne by Raman Master, Appunni Nair, K. C. Panikker and Sreedharan. Behind them walked Nanu Nair and in his shadow, I. All along the route, standing on both sides of the road, Chandrasekharan's neighbours bade farewell to him. I could see many of them

\* Oil lamp with wicks.

wiping the tears off their eyes with the backs of their hands.

Chandrasekharan was lowered into the pit, six feet long and four feet deep, dug earlier by Kelu. Nanu Nair, Panikker and others, each picked up a pinch of soil and scattered it over his face three times. On Raman Master's instruction I too did the same.

When the burial was over and everyone had left, I took leave of Nanu Nair and headed for home. But instead of reaching my house, I found myself at the sea-side. I sat down on the still warm sands, my head between my knees. I don't remember how long I sat thus. It was on hearing the voice of Chandrasekharan that I raised my head. "I had just gone up to Vallikkat" he said with

a mischievous smile. I was aghast. Who had died? I began to wonder - me or Chandrasekharan? Perhaps Chandrasekharan noticed my bewilderment, for he sat down by me on the sands. The sea-breeze carried the smell of toddy to me.

"I won't die this way, man" he said, "not me alone, none else for that matter". He put his hand on my shoulder, and continued, "No one dies in this world, nothing perishes."

I did not at all understand the meaning of what he said. I have neither his knowledge nor his intelligence to comprehend matters. Whatever it be, I am infinitely happy to note that Chandrasekharan, my friend, is not dead.

*(Translated by A. P. Sarada)*

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## Delhi 1981

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M. Mukundan

Rajinder Pande opened the window and looked out. On the other side of the road were rows and rows of shops and behind them a broad meadow. But the meadow was not visible from the road. Rajinder's room was on the first floor, facing the road. So, standing by the window, he could clearly see everything—the road below, the rows of shops and the meadow beyond.

A narrow path ran through the centre of the meadow. It was a short cut to the main road leading to Chirag Delhi. The meadow was always deserted. Only once in a while could you see someone going up or coming down the narrow path. During the day time pigs roamed around on the meadow. On its western side was a ruined tomb dating back to the days of the Mughals. Now it was the haunt of pigeons, and their soft cooing and the flutter of their wings could always be heard here.

Pande stood by the window, with his hands on its bars, looking out indifferently. His room-mate Kishore Lal had turned on the radio and was listening to the songs. Pande had no interest in film songs, so he went on looking out through the window, not knowing how else to kill time; presently, he saw Raghuvir and Nanak Chand come walking up the road below. They were the ruffians of the locality, both quite young. Raghuvir had spent two days in the lock-up for molesting some girl students of the I. P. College at the bus stop. As for Nanak Chand, he had gone to jail five times. The last time was when he snatched away a gold chain from a woman's neck.

Pande saw the two toughs going down to the meadow by the back of Amir Singh's 'Dry Clean Shop.' They then sat down on a stone and began to smoke.

At a distance, from the other side of the meadow Pande

discerned a yellow shadow approaching and gradually becoming clearer to the view. There was a taller shadow beside it. After some time, he could make them out to be a woman in a yellow sari and a man. When they drew nearer, he could also see that there was a child in the man's arms.

Raghuvir, who was sitting on the stone, turned his face and looked at the man and woman. Then he turned to Nanak Chand and said something to him. The latter too, then glanced at the man and the woman. Again, the two said something to each other. Then they got up and started moving slowly along the meadow.

"*Abbe* Kishore, want to watch some fun? Then come," Rajinder Pande invited Kishore Lal to his side by the window. Kishore Lal, however, placed his finger on his lips and motioned his friend to silence. He was listening to the song sung by Amitabh Bachchan in Lavaris.

Nanak Chand and Raghuvir, hands on each other's shoulders and puffing at the same cigarette by turns, began walking nonchalantly towards the centre of the meadow. The man and the woman had by this time

reached almost its centre. Pande, standing by the window, could not get a clear view of the woman's face. but he could guess that she was quite good-looking. The young man accompanying her was tall and slim. Evidently they were a happy family consisting of husband, wife and child.

The young woman, probably to shield her face from the heat of the sun, covered her head with the ends of her sari. The couple had by now crossed the centre of the meadow.

Nanak Chand and Raghuvir slackened their steps. There was now no one in sight anywhere in and around the meadow. Even the pigeons had become quiet.

"*Abbe* Kishore, *band karo* your radio, man. Come, *yaar*"—Pande again called out to Kishore.

Nanak Chand and Raghuvir were now near the small family.

"*Are jaldi* come, *yaar*" Pande had his eyes fixed on the centre of the meadow. Kishore Lal got up without turning off his radio and joined him at the window.

Nanak Chand and Raghuvir stood blocking the way of the couple. Nanak Chand, his

hands resting lightly on his buttocks and the cigarette still on his lips flashed a smile at the young man. The young man's face turned red. "Move away, you ruffians" he said, "rascals!". Nanak Chand and Raghuvir pretended not to have heard him. The young lady pulled the ends of her sari tighter around her head and stood there nervously. Her cheeks flushed.

"Are *yaar*, what are Nanak Chand and Raghuvir up to?" Kishore Lal asked Pande.

"Let's wait and see," said Pande, "give me a cigarette, *yaar*."

Kishore took out a packet of Red and White from his pocket and held it out to Pande. They lighted a cigarette each and with mounting interest looked out through the window at the meadow. The heat was burning out there.

"They must have started out for a matinee show, *yaar*", observed Pande. Indeed, where else could they be going at this time of the day, in this heat?

"Hai, yellow birdie, let's have a look at your face," Nanak Chand pulled the sari away from her head. Her face was very beautiful with round cheeks

and large wide eyes. There was *kumkum* on the parting in her hair and *sindur* on her forehead.

Nanak Chand turned to the young man standing there with the baby in his arms, and said to him, "Are brother, you're really a lucky fellow—to have a wife who looks like Hemamalini."

The young man had evidently reached the end of his patience. He was seething inside. But his wife was by his side and the child in his arms. So he controlled his anger and spoke in a conciliatory manner. "Friends, what is it that you want? This sort of indecent behaviour is bad. After all, you're educated young men. Please allow us to go." He clasped the baby closer to his chest, took his wife by her hand and prepared to go past them.

"Wait, don't be in such a hurry to go!" Raghuvir placed his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Don't move from here without our permission, O. K.?" Immediately the young man drew back his hand and slapped Raghuvir on his cheek. The child in his arms started crying loudly.

"*Sale Kuthe*, how dare you?"

Nanak Chand pulled out a knife from the pocket of his pants. The young woman's heart began throbbing like that of a pigeon. Her eyes seemed to entreat her husband not to enter into any quarrel. But he handed over the child to her and stood there waiting, prepared for anything. "*Sale Kuthe*—"

Raghuvir stroked the cheek that was slapped and turning on the young man, caught hold of him by his shirt. The young woman, with the crying child in her arms, looked all around her helplessly. She was trembling from head to foot with fear.

"One more cigarette, *yaar*"—Pande stretched out his hand towards Kishore, never once taking his eyes off the meadow. He lighted the cigarette and blew out smoke, saying "*Yaar*, very interesting."

While Nanak Chand and the young man were exchanging blows, Raghuvir walked a little distance away, picked up a big stone and came back with it. He then held the stone poised above the young man's head. Seeing this, the young woman nearly collapsed with terror.

A white shadow now appeared on the other side of the meadow.

It was a corpulent gentleman, past middle age, with a briefcase in his hand. He observed the scene on the meadow and stood hesitating for a moment. Then he continued to walk forward, clutching the briefcase in his hand.

"Who's that pig now?" asked Pande. This newcomer, he feared, would be a wet blanket, spoiling all the fun they were enjoying.

The young man and Nanak Chand were still scuffling with each other. Raghuvir held the stone in his hands and now and then raised it over the young man's head. And every time he did that the young woman's heart beat violently. When she saw the gent coming across the meadow, she collected her breath and cried out aloud, "come, oh please come quickly, or he'll kill my son's father." The newcomer quickened his pace. His bulky frame quivered as he hastened towards the young woman.

When he was at about a hundred yard's distance from them, Raghuvir turned round on him. "*Badmash, dafa hojao* from here," he shouted, and aimed the stone at him. The gentleman stood rooted to the

spot. He had also noticed the long-bladed knife in Nanak Chand's hand.

"*Baago*, run!"..... Hesitating for just the fraction of a second, the newcomer turned away, heedless of the young woman's wailing. "Go on, run". The gentleman, briefcase in hand, broke into a run, his fat body shaking. "*Sabash*"—Pande and Kishore, standing by the window guffawed heartily.

At that moment, Raghuvir raised the stone and brought it down hard on the young man's head. As he stood swaying, Nanak Chand lifted his leg and kicked him on his navel. With that the young man bent like a bow and fell forward on his face.

"Oh, this Nanak Chand Raghuvir—they're great, Really great, O. K. *yaar*?" exclaimed Pande "Very, very great O. K. *yaar*", agreed Kishore Lal in his broken English. Both of them had their eyes glued on the centre of the meadow.

"Get up, sister." Nanak Chand caught hold of the young woman's hand as she sat sobbing by her husband's side. "Come with us, to that tomb."... He pointed to the ruined tomb. "Please, please don't do

anything to me", she begged them with folded hands, her eyes brimming with tears. Nanak Chand pulled her up forcibly and pushed her forward. The baby lay on the ground, crying loudly. Raghuvir at once took out a big kerchief from his pocket and stuffed it into its mouth. The baby's eyes popped out it ceased crying.

The young woman struggled out of Nanak Chand's grasp and began to run across the meadow. "*Behan, Chooth, abbe' catch her*" he shouted, furious. Raghuvir chased her and caught her. Then both of them pushed her forward and dragged her towards the tomb. From above the broken walls of the tomb, the pigeons disturbed, agitated, looked on.

"*Are yaar*, they're taking her and away to rape her," said Kishore Lal. And they started at the meadow as though they were watching an Eastman cinemascope film.

Nanak Chand and Raghuvir together picked her up and entered the tomb. They tore off her sweat-drenched yellow blouse and propped her up against the broken wall. She had by now lost all powers of resistance. Her head dropped listlessly to one side.

"Who'll do it first?" Kishore Lal asked.

"Nanak Chand, of course. Who else?" said Pande...

Raghuvir stood her up, pressed firmly against the wall. Nanak Chand undid the buttons on his pants...—

At this moment, the room of Rajinder Pande becomes transformed into a huge city. Skyscrapers loom up here. Rajinder Pande and Kishore Lal are transformed into a mammoth fiftyfive-lakh-strong populace. On raised platforms, amidst thundering applause, stand the

leaders dressed in *khadar* and Gandhi caps, orating endlessly in Hindi. Around the tables in the coffee houses, where the smoke from cigarettes hangs heavily around, the country's intelligentsia, young men bearded and longhaired, with satchels suspended from their shoulders sit, arguing heatedly ..... ..

At this moment, from the darkness of the tomb a fledgling pigeon comes flying out and with its tender beak pecks at the head of Nanak Chand ..... ..

*Translated by A. P. Sarada.*

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# Satheesan

---

—Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan

You know Satheesan  
he is just the same.  
He says:

“I quit the goddamn press;  
quit the bloody black printer’s ink  
the composed lies  
and the worthless sweating.  
She is still with me”.

Bored of the damned city  
he is back in the village,  
nested with the wild fowls,  
limping among the bushes by the narrow stream.  
along the vastness of the village paths,  
flying with the birds,  
pecking;  
stoning the river in its myriad eyes,  
howling echoless like a wild beast,  
shrivelled up like a sick coconut trunk.

Satheesan shakes all over like a doll  
with mirth that recks of arrack  
and fills our shame.  
All are his friends  
yet he has no friend.  
He says:

“Pimping is no good any more  
You gentlemen are big bores;  
want everything under cover of darkness  
but wouldn’t pay.  
got a closed fist for a heart

Then the curses of these women  
all big airs  
the real worth shows at close quarters.  
O well, nothing against you  
just no more business with you  
that's all."

He does nothing  
remembers nothing  
sticks to nothing  
just flows  
through the drains  
through the winding lanes  
through the village paths  
blown like a will-o'-the-wisp.  
He says of his lost son:

"He hadn't sprouted wings  
I would bring food in my mouth  
and feed his little mouth.  
He was all his mother had;  
took him for a bath in the river  
it was slippery  
and the current swift and treacherous  
it snatched and swallowed him  
I couldn't give him a hand  
He was found the next day  
buried in the black silt  
'there, Sir over there!'

Black weeds spread  
over the son's marshy grave.  
Satheesan doesn't sweat nor pant  
just shakes with laughter  
reeking of arrack.  
He says:

"I am fine now no more worries  
Simply live on.  
They are straight fellows these bootleggers  
help them a bit

you could have your fill of arrack  
 and some cash on the side;  
 fetch water, get the fire going  
 or keep watch for the excise men  
 who come sniffing like bitches,  
 barking, wagging their tails  
 and biting at times."

He continues:

"Life is fun  
 simply live on as it comes  
 You should give up this nonsense of poetry and all.  
 the earth doesn't revolve around you  
 it is here under my feet  
 it does my bidding.

If out of balance

even the elephant falls  
 I too would fall  
 and if caught in the swift current  
 it would swallow you.  
 it is even pleasant  
 to get under the black weeds,  
 under the earth  
 and lie beside my son.

There is good stuff-  
 not government supplied but genuine.  
 Want to try a pint? No?  
 All right then,  
 It isn't in your stares."

He is laughing  
 with the happiness of a blind tearless child  
 he is laughing  
 his happiness smelling of breast milk  
 Suddenly they burst into bloom around him-  
 a few little red flowers.  
 the white purity of his fate  
 mingles and spreads  
 with the evening's red.

Satheesan explodes in his drunken laughter  
 into a thousand pieces of glass  
 Satheesan seeks resurrection  
 in the colours of the shocked rays thrown by the broken glass  
 Arrack bottles hiding in secret nooks under the earth  
 burst forth in shock.  
 Satheesan flows  
 foaming, frothing  
 in violent spate  
 through the yawning of the night  
 through the ecstasy of the drains  
 through the wild fields  
 through the narrow brooks  
 His son rises like lightning  
 above the violent current  
 and calls out "Papa!"  
 Satheesan creeps slowly  
 towards some youngsters  
 coming his way.  
 You know Satheesan  
 he is just the same.

*Translated by M. S. Gopinathan*

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## 'The Man of Letters, Udayabhanu'

---

A. P. Udayabhanu

It seems you are unaware of the great title that has got prefixed to my name 'The Man of Letters, A. P. Udayabhanu'. While the B.A. and B.L degrees acquired after years of unstinted hard toil just trail behind my name like a mere tail, the honorific title Man of Letters moves ahead in all majesty, sending a thrill of adulation about me: my movements become right royal. Certainly this honorific title is more valuable than the University degrees I have acquired after a long and arduous struggle. Would I have ever wasted my days hunting after the empty degrees, if I had dreamed of getting the title? Now-a-days these degrees are a liability which just tug at your coat tail. They are a nuisance so much so that these days I don't carry them along.

The title Man of Letters is different; if he goes as the vanguard you can be sure of your glory; you can put on certain airs even. Take care,

don't tuck him behind like a tail, hold him like the mighty tusk of an elephant.

Do you think that it is enough to call Kumaran Asan merely 'Kumara Kavi' instead of 'Mahakavi Kumaran Asan'? Of course, there is a school of thought which feels so. It is wrong; totally absurd. The mighty elephant is not caparisoned on the tail but on the majestic forehead and down the proboscis. Kumaran Asan and all poets for that matter must be caparisoned with 'Mahakavi' on their foreheads though often bald. When they come thus caparisoned, all heads bow before them in utter adoration. Will caparisoning on the tail do this trick? No; not at all. Therefore I will put my title right in front and will strut behind. Look at the old Maharajas, they always put the 'Arattupattany' (the ceremonial dwarf) ahead of them so that the people would get alerted of the Right Royal person who followed. Otherwise they would

have been lost in the crowd, and jostled about. Let there be no doubt, I put the title right in front of me.

Now in all moral outrage I ask you a question: did any one of you ever think of conferring the honorific title on me? What poses, garments and attitudes did I not adopt to win your attention, and gain the title! I grew my hair and combed it down my nape. You began to make fun of me, calling me 'Guru Gopinath' and 'Dancer Chandrasekharan' and the rest of it. But no title of Man of Letters. Not that I was averse to passing for a dancer, but I was ashamed because I knew that my gestures would look quite vulgar and the rhythm of my steps would be beyond the range of your drums and even your gongs. So I gave up 'project-hair!'

Then I tried 'project beard'. I remembered that Tagore, Tolstoy and even our Narayana Kurup of Quilon became famous literary figures on the strength of their beards. And I found a lot of beards around me. I looked back through centuries and found that our first Poet Valmiki had his beard, so did Vyasa flaunt his. This therefore was the sure way to enter the

realm of literary genius. So, in all enthusiasm I started growing a beard. But to my great despair and discomfiture my beard refused to grow. The few hairs that grew made my face look silly. You know the people around us: they are cynical. They began to whisper that I was growing the beard to mourn my mother's death, though it was several years before that the old lady left me an orphan. Others said this was preparatory to a pilgrimage to Sabarimalai. Some went to the extent of saying that the barbers had boycotted me, forgetting that theirs was the one art that I was capable of pursuing; at least the chin I could manage. The worst part of the whisper campaign was that I was going nuts. It was then that I decided to abandon 'project beard'.

Then I hit upon 'project book-bearing'. I joined most of the libraries in the city and went about taking the biggest volumes and carrying them openly and ostentatiously. But the boys and girls began to laugh behind my back; they found that many of the volumes wherein scripts which I didn't follow; and that all of them were irrelevant to any one who had any literary interests. Thus 'project book-bearing' too came to a sad end.

It was in this desperate situation that a well-meaning friend came and gave me the right advice. He narrated the story of an impressive number of giants and gnats in the fields of art and literature and told me that wine and women were the two things that made a man a genius. At least it would ensure the company of men who would make a marvel of you. As the purgatives move your bowels to a state of non-control, liquor moves your brain to the point of poetry. Ezhuthachan, the father of Malayalam poetry sang 'para para para paramapahimam after imbibing 'para para' which was nothing other than today. But I could not take it; apart from its cost, it would stink. However much infatuated you were, how could you taste it if it would stink? And once intoxicated, you would lose all appearances of dignity. So liquor was not for me.

Apart from this I reviewed in my mind the names of great Malayalam writers like Vallathol, Ulloor, Asan, Sankara Kurup, Chandu Menon, C. V. Raman Pillai and others. At the worst they were spiritual, not spirituous. If liquor could turn men into literary and artistic geniuses our toddy shops and arrack shops would have become our Academies.

As for philandering, the other source of genius, I was totally in the grip of fear. Like God Almighty my wife could see through everything, even the remotest of my thoughts; and unlike God, she was unforgiving. Her fury would be enough to evaporate into thin air the most solid part of my literary talents. Apart from this, none indicated any inclination from the other side. Moreover, I was told, it could put you in quite embarrassing and dangerous situations. So I couldn't tread that path of the genius.

Some say that the pen is mightier than the sword; others call it a great engineering tool. Whatever that be, a man with the pen must impress others. So I had an impressive array of pens of different hues and sizes in my pocket. As ill-luck would have it, none took me for a literary genius but took me for a pen vendor, the tribe you meet in all the bus-stops.

How could it be otherwise? The writers are a very envious lot. Their tendency is to reject and not to accept. I tell you, they are a worse lot than politicians and journalists. I say this with authority: I have belonged to these tribes and I know what I felt like in those days. If you

want to see unadulterated jealousy, go to the litterateur. You may imagine that they are milk and honey; musk and civet. Yes, they secrete civet and are like the civet cat. Can you imagine a dirtier, a more stinking and ferocious creature? It feeds on rats, frogs lizards and what not. If you go very close it will bite off your nose and chew it with great relish. By all means collect the civet but leave the wild cat at a safe distance; don't try to pet it or adore it. I say this because the tribe did not accept me as one among them.

But well sir, recognition came to me and came through the right channel at that. It came according to 'yuga-dharma', the spirit of the times.

At Ernakulam I was resting at Hotel Mahendragiri. I was tired; felt thirsty. I pressed the bell; the bearer came. I asked for soda. He came back with a bottle of soda and some other mysterious bottle, in a try. He came, stopped, measured me up and enquired my name. Since I had no programme for the night which demanded my name to be kept a closely-guarded secret, I gave my name in full: A. P. Udayabhanu. His young face beamed and he asked with enthusiasm; Are you the man of letters Udayabhanu? I said in

all humility. "I am not the one who sings. Of course, I scribble something now and then". "Oh! that is right sir, you are the writer Udayabhanu. I have read one or two of your essays sir, and I have enjoyed them."

I was immensely pleased. Then my young admirer told me that though I asked only for soda he had brought-what must go with it. I was very reluctant to disappoint my admirer and lower myself in his esteem. But what could I do? I told him almost apologetically that soda alone agreed with me and not the other stuff. In a tone of mild surprise he exclaimed "So, you write without any inspiration".

I said. "No, with out any liquid inspiration".

"That is alright sir. You go ahead and write more. I like the way you write." So saying he disappeared down the staircase leaving me to drink my innocent and insipid soda. Till he disappeared fully I had my palpitations. Who knew, in sheer disgust he might not revoke the title conferred on me! He did not he affirmed it. From that moment I have become the Man of Letters A. P. Udayabhanu.

This honorific title of mine is the most genuine one. In this socialistic era who is more competent than a hotel bearer to confer such a title? He did not do it whimsically; he did it after reading some of my essays. My title is greater than the bogus doctorates conferred by Universities on men and women in authority to please them and get favours. It is a shade better than the title *Vidwan* conferred by Swathi Tirunal Maharaja on Azhakathu Kurup. With retrospective effect we devalue everything that belongs to the past. So my title is a shade

better than the 'Kavithilaka' title conferred by the Maharaja of Cochin on the writer Kottarathil Sankunni. Why! I place it higher than the title 'Uddanda' conferred on the scholarly Sastrigal by the great Zamorin of Calicut.

Mine is a title conferred by a genuine member of the Great Proletariat in all sincerity. Hence hereby, I demand and command that my name should hereafter be prefixed by the great title, Man of Letters.

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# On Comparative Indian Literature

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## **D. K. Mansharamani (Editor for Sindhi)**

In this great sub-continent we are unfortunately ignorant about the richness of our own languages spoken in different parts and are totally in the dark as regards the beautiful mosaic of our literary traditions. We are also not conversant with various literary movements, trends and experiments going on in these languages. This ignorance has resulted in a lot of misunderstanding and a sort of estrangement between Indians and Indians. I sincerely believe that the publication of *Comparative Indian Literature* both in Malayalam and in English, sponsored by the

Kerala Sahitya Akademi will bring about better understanding amongst the different linguistic groups and impress upon them that we are all faced with the same problems and that we generally feel and think alike even though our medium of expression might be different.

This work which has been prepared with the co-operation of hundreds of scholars and under the guidance of Dr. K. M. George, can also form the basis of a course of studies in Indian universities which may in the long run pave the way for national integration.

## **M. Arunachalam (Editor for Tamil)**

The Indian sub-continent is the home of more than a score of important languages, each with its own hoary past in literature and culture. There have been many fine attempts at interpreting the different languages and their literary culture to a wider audience through the English language

and each has served some useful purpose in its own way. But the very conception of attempting to bring together the great history of the evolution of all the languages within the framework of two volumes is a very bold one and Dr. George has now steered the project successfully through the

labyrinths of time, finance, the writer's traditional indifference and similar depressing factors. The volumes before us give us the best in 15 languages, under the different aspects of language and literature highlighting not only the best in the past but also the chief trends in the modern milieu.

The volumes are comparative in the sense that under the twelve chosen aspects of literature we have each aspect dealt with by a modern expert in each language and the essays on each aspect are given for all the languages together. The

discerning and inquisitive reader may be able to browse through the essays on each branch of the different literatures and discover the common thread of Indian nationalism which strings together so many gems of brilliant lustre shedding their multicoloured illumination on the pages of Indian history and making up the great culture that is India.

The organisers are to be congratulated on their successful venture which has resulted in these great volumes, which will be authoritative source books for the critics and scholars the world over.

### **Dr. C. N. Sastry (Amarendra) (Editor for Telugu)**

The Silver Jubilee Project of Kerala Sahitya Akademi has an abiding value and significance to lovers of literature all over India. There are scholars who know much about French, German, Italian, Greek, Latin and Russian but there are many who do not know anything about the literature in the neighbouring States in India. This project helps writers, readers and lovers of literature to catch glimpses of the literary endeavour that is going on in the different parts of the country. Masterpieces and

makers of significant works in several Indian languages are projected in these pages with perceptive insight and critical acumen by leading men of letters in their respective regions. Under the able and astute editorship of Dr. K. M. George, these volumes not only highlight the literary achievements of the different states but also proclaim the unity in diversity expressed by Indian writers who represent the essential oneness of spirit though they choose different languages as their media.

### **Mohammad Hasan (Editor for Urdu)**

I am very glad that a stupendous task has been accomplished by the untiring Dr. George and the first work of its kind on Comparative Indian Literature has been compiled. Its utility and significance cannot be overemphasized. Indian authors writing in various Indian languages know much more about English or other Western literatures than their neighbouring literatures.

This volume, I hope, will open new avenues of cultural exchange between various components of Indian literature which is being

written in different languages and will pave the way for a new cultural ethos.

The book has been planned with imagination and edited with perception and precisions. Every contributor was subjected incessantly to the queries and suggestions of the General Editor who has taken extra pains to give all contributions uniformity and standardisation. I am sure it will be one of the most significant publications in the field of Indian literature in the course of several decades.

### **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (Guest Editor)**

I welcome this publication, for it highlights and focusses attention on certain basic characteristics of Indian literature. The most important of these, in my opinion, is its composite character while vividly reflecting a variety of special regional forms. Far from these elements causing confusion, they stand out recognizable and distinguished.

It also draws out the crux of the relationship between language and literature, as language is the outward

expression of a certain physical parameter containing certain specific elements which operate on the literary expression, such as, historical, social and economic. One may say that the chief characteristic of the Indian literary tradition emerged out of a world of unhurried tempo of living, a sense of timelessness, and spacelessness which formed the base and background to provide a single identity to the diverse expressions. This has been particularly seen in the field of drama.

### **Dr. Mulk Raj Anand – (Guest Editor)**

I compliment you on the preparation of the book on Comparative Indian Literature.

I feel that integrating process of various Indian consciousnesses

can only be carried out through such books of knowledge.

I hope that this volume will leave a sediment in the new young from which new flowers will bloom.

### **C. D. Narasimhaiah – (Guest Editor and Contributor)**

As contributor to these volumes in Comparative Literature I feel somewhat inhibited to express an opinion. But it is a grand conception and that a State Akademi with its limited resources should have carried out this stupendous and very rewarding project is a tribute to anyone concerned with it, most of all its indefatigable chief editor Dr. K. M. George. I can't praise the usefulness of this venture

sufficiently when I realise standards are not possible except in comparison. Academically speaking, a department of literature, (any literature) which refuses to look beyond its frontiers and help its members gain a sensible awareness of other literatures, in this case, other Indian literatures, is doomed: it develops complacency and cannot grow. Therein lies the value of this venture.

### **Dr. M. K. Naik – (Guest Editor)**

'At the heart of India's seemingly bewildering diversity, there is an unmistakable cultural unity' is a truism often more stated than demonstrated. The Kerala Sahitya Akademi's Comparative Indian Literature project is an ambitious attempt to bring out this fascinating dual aspect of literature in India, by bringing together, perhaps for the first time, a compendium of

authoritative historical accounts of literature in all the major Indian languages.

A project like this was as necessary as it was difficult to accomplish. The Kerala Sahitya Akademi can certainly feel a legitimate sense of pride in having met the challenge of this formidable task successfully and made this undertaking a reality.

## An Essay on My Essays

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A. P. Udayabhanu

What are my ideas about essays and essay-writing? I have no ideas; I write as it comes: what flows from my heart I just put on paper. That is all.

When did I first essay to get into the realm of essays? Of that too I am not very certain. May be in one of those monthly rituals conducted by our village libraries, Jnanapradayani and Vijnanavikasini. It need not necessarily be so: might have been in one of those debates organised by the school debating society. I was elected secretary of the junior debating society as soon as I entered the middle school in what was then known as preparatory class. Like the erstwhile Travancore coins this class too has ceased to exist. Don't entertain the wrong notion that I was elected on the strength of my popularity; I was elected since my name was proposed by the class teacher Shri Pachu Pillai. It was the strength of the cane that he wielded which forced my unanimous election. I guess. I am one who enjoyed

the warmth of his cane even in the third form; the highest class in those days. Like the currency, even the names and grades of classes have changed. So, you may not be able to figure out what this third form was, It was equivalent of what is today the seventh standard. In those days the teachers never spared the cane and it was presumed that the children were unspoiled. I am not sure of the latter part of the proposition.

The command to write an essay came in all its seriousness from Shri C. P. Parameswaran Pillai, the Professor of Malayalam in what was H. H. the Maharaja's College of Science where I had just joined the Junior Intermediate class, now christened Pre-Degree. The first Malayalam class was that of C. P. Munshi, as we called him in those days. A very revered old man with an agreeable sense of humour. We were asked to do an essay on the teacher who influenced us most.

Your guess must be that I wrote about Shri Pachu Pillai. Oh no, you are mistaken. I wrote about N. G. Koshy. I had not forgotten the last thrash I had from Pachu Pillai. The last memory overshadows the earlier ones; bitter tastes always get the better of the sweet.

Whatever that be, my essay was adjudged best so declared in the class.

But that did not make me quite confident as an essayist. Then came the days when Dr K. Bhaskaran Nair initiated the publication of a journal *Mukulasmitham*. Of course, in those days Bhaskaran Nair was a student like any one of us; he had not become even a compounder, let alone a doctor. In that publication which ended gloriously with one issue, I wrote an article which I found in solemn print. The piece was entitled 'Under' the shadow of the *Elanji* Tree 'It depicted the agony of the parting of two kids in the primary school! But do you know what the sinister cynics had to say? They said that I was transferring to two innocent children my feelings, for the lady who was later on to become 'my lady'!

Even with that essay I did not become an essayist. Those were

the days when Bhaskaran Nair had begun writing in the *Mathrubhumi* Weekly. I too felt like writing for the Weekly. But I was a very timid person and still am. I apprehended that my valuable essays, instead of landing in the columns of the Weekly, would end up in the bowels of their waste paper basket. I did not very much relish such prospects. So I thought best it to keep my essayistic urges well within myself.

Many a paper, daily, as well as weekly, passed through my hands and I was editor of quite a few. Even then I did not venture out in my own name; I always took refuge under some pen-name or other. Of course, I wrote quite a lot; all of it had political overtones; most of it was downright partisan material. It was through the article 'Arthavum Anarthavum' that I came out in the open, under my own name. I was in my late 'forties: the period when I joined the Kerala Public Service Commission; the year in which I left charge of the *Mathrubhumi* daily whose Cochin edition was started with myself as the Joint Editor. Even then I dared to send the article to N. V. Krishna Warriar, Editor of the Weekly only after

the stuff was scrutinised by A. D. Hari Sarma and M. K. Sanoo! The article attracted a lot of letters from the readers; all of them complimentary. For my evolution as an essayist I owe a good deal to N. V., the *Mathrubhumi* Weekly and those readers who wrote those generous letters. I overcame my timidity and just started writing. This flame in me has been kept burning by the generous readers who through personal letters pour their love on me like sacred oil. In fact, I fall in love with them. But don't be scared; it is all postal; not pysical. Even the thin wall of a room keeps 'love' at a very safe distance, what of the miles and miles that separate people?

To be frank, even now my coyness has not completely left me: the first move must come from the other side; once that happens, I respond passionately. I send articles only on request.

Writing the introduction to my second collection of essays Guptan Nair described me as a squirrel hopping from one branch to another sucking honey and gathering nuts. Perhaps the image he had in his mind was that of our good old cousin, the monkey; but Guptan is too refined a soul to put it so plainly. I accept it both ways;

truth has to be accepted at least once in a way 'Satyameva jayate' is our motto. Of course, mottoes are meant only for others

Even though I have left the body of the monkey and the squirrel the instinct of the previous births must be pursuing me.

In the field of Essays who is my model? I am just in the embarrassing predicament in which Jabalike was placed when her dear son enquired the name of his father and his gotra. What could the poor old lady say except that she did not know? Don't put me in such an embarrassing situation; I must say plainly 'I don't know.' Where was the time for me to pitch up on a model and follow him? I never had the time or the patience. I never planned to be an essayist or writer.

I recall my sister discussing and debating with our cousin the *Essays of Elia*. She was doing her B. A. I was struggling in the school final class. That is the nearest I went to that great essayist. De Quincey and Washington Irving, I had to study in the college. In the Intermediate class I had to study *Kesari*, a collection of the essays of Kesari Vengayil Kunhiraman

Nayanar. All these may have influenced me. Kochikkal Balakrishnan Thampy's classes, conversations, discussions, and debates too must have been an influence. He was my teacher and later on, colleague in the Legislative Assembly. He never had the patience to sit down and write; but he is easily one of the wittiest persons I have ever come across. Of course, I have read E. V. Krishna Pillai and Sanjayan. But if I am to 'name' a single person, I will put the 'blame' squarely on Kunhiraman Nayanar. I lost the textbook of the Intermediate class and could not find another copy. But its memory lingers in my soul like the fragrance of a flower.

Of all the men or things that mould our minds and shape our emotions we may not be fully aware. Many men, events and incidents must be imperceptibly entering our subconscious mind, influencing us. But whenever I become conscious of another's verses or words or ideas in my essays I try to mark them out with quotation marks. Even Pandu must have called his sons only as Dharmajan, Anilajan, Indrajana, and Aswinijar. If I faced the lot of Pandu I would have chosen to go to the hell called

Punnagam instead of opting for Pandu's lot. Of course we may have to be generous, and allow our wives to consort with others for their fulfilment. But why call the offspring our sons? To prove my creative genius I have not claimed other's progeny as mine. I am sure, advance translations of my essays have not appeared in other languages. But men all over the world may have identical reactions to men, events and the various phenomena of nature. Who has not felt that the waves are many-hooded cobras? One need not necessarily be imitating another when the same images occur. Who knows my humble soul may have in certain contexts reacted in an identical way with some great soul? Till now, no great mind, to my knowledge, has reacted in exactly the same way as my humble soul. I hope I am lucky that way.

I have been terribly in love with poetry since my childhood. I longed to write poetry. But don't be scared, I am too timid a person to force my love on an unwilling soul. My pride too does not permit the same. Not that I have not made some 'passes' but there was no response. The donkeys bray and get relief to their love instinct; I just

recite other peoples' poetry and get some outlet for my pent-up emotions. I remember college girls like cows in heats bawling out the verses of Changampuzha when he visited our college. Which young man would not have felt like going poetical in that atmosphere! But what could be done? As Kainikkara Kumara Pillai has observed, my poetry would have carried all the rhymes and metres in one stretch and everyone would have called it base prose. Thus poetry escaped me and of course, all of you at that.

Some well-meaning friends, in all earnestness have advised me to write novels instead of wasting my time on silly essays. These are days when people are crazy about novels. Even if you collect a few almanacs, stitch them up as a book and call the same a novel, people will sit down solemnly and read through them in engrossed interest; you will be acclaimed a great novelist; creative writer and what not (I have committed a petty theft of E. V.'s ideas here—please keep this a secret). So I am planning to christen a collection of my essays a novel. I must get the co-operation of my publishers in this matter.

In sheer financial despair one will be compelled to use this

ruse. The libraries descend on the bookstalls and make a bee-line to the shelves displaying novels; they exhaust their entire funds and then only leave. Even poets languishing on shelves; what about poor essayists?

Why not write a novel and get affluent and popular? My very name is lifted from a novel. That was and is the influence of novels. Awaiting my 'original', quite a number my of 'translations' must be sitting longingly in the bookshelves of other languages. I have only to find them out and then write the original. After all, novels are works of fiction. i. e. 'falsehoods'. One of my grand-uncles accused his younger brother, Komathu Kunju Panickker of being a downright liar because he wrote a book of fiction; *Dakshayani*. The elder of the two grand uncles threw up his arms and shouted: "Who will ever believe Kunju Panickken? Has he not fabricated a whole book of lies?" That elder grand-uncle haunts me and I don't dare write "a book full of lies".

So, my choice is limited to the realm of essays and essays are 'stateless persons'; at best they are only second class-citizens. You have no admission

to the main dining hall; you are served in the verandah; you are served in small plates; you have no main dishes; no full courses. You are like the petty gods in the main temple. There is no festival in your honour.

Well, one must accept one's humble lot. However humble, let us follow our 'dharma' it is better than being a false god.

Why do you write, you may ask. Not for money. My needs are pretty limited. The stimulation of plain water is good enough for me; a simple vegetarian meal is sumptuous. I know the worth of the moneyed worthies. For fame and name? Yes; to a certain extent. But even that is becoming tricky; I have lost my identity. I am often being waked from sleep and straight away plunged into conversation leaving me bewildered. They are seeking my namesake! If only they had looked into the telephone directory a bit carefully! But why blame them? At that hour of the night they may not be in a fit condition to do that. Often I despair that I have lost my own 'self'. Even then I continue to write.

Even then I continue to write! Why? It is the 'I' in me! This small 'I' wants to grow and

merge in the big 'I' which pervades and permeates the Universe. It is this inexorable urge that drives me on. The petty joys and woes the little pleasures and pains that seize the small 'I', I want to transmit to and share with the great 'I'. Then I feel that my small 'I' will get eventually lost in the big 'I'. How far can this be achieved? At best I can get melted into the heart of a few of my readers. And they are a very limited number. Even the enduring sympathetic response from a single cultured soul is a great joy. How wonderful to see your little self being reflected in so many other 'selves'. It is with great trepidation that I started out in the dense forest that literature is. I ventured in, not as the roaring lion but as a timid, humble buck-deer. The forest is said to be infested by terrible carnivores, red in tooth and claw! These are critics and they are said to pounce on any animal and tear it to pieces. So I proceeded only under the protection of N.V., G. Kumara Pillai, Guptan Nair, Sukumar Azhikode, Sano, and Anandakuttan. The introductions written by my friends, who were well-established in the literary field were a source of strength and inspiration. And I was

quite lucky, none pounced on me; many gave me grass, water, fruits and lovingly patted me. So the critics are not a ferocious lot; nor are they vicious. To me they have been kind and generous. So on a few occasions, I ventured out on my own.

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## Malayalam Literature, 1981— The Novel

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K. M. Tharakan

I love literary works, whether they be poems, plays, short-stories, novels or critical works. I love to read the best of them. I have a special liking for novels. I look forward to the arrival of new titles in Malayalam and English. We get some of the best books originally produced in English, certainly not all of them. We also get English translations of masterpieces produced in other world languages. Unfortunately there is no publication machinery in India even at the Central Sahitya Akademi level to make available to readers all over India at least English translations of the best works produced in the various Indian languages. The yearly survey given by *Indian literature* doesn't help us to get a feel of the best works in produced different languages in India every year. I therefore find it difficult to present novels produced in Malayalam against

the background of the Indian Novel of 1981 taken as a whole.

From a list supplied to me by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi I could see that just over a hundred novels appeared in Malayalam in 1981. It is a laborious task even for the most voracious reader to read them all; but I browsed on them. Most of them are but 'pot boilers', they have little to do with the evolution of Indian life or Indian culture. Their sole aim is entertainment or to be more specific, helping the people pass time. From another point of view they are time-killers, just waste of time, money and energy. Yet people love them, as they love many other things in life, which is an aspect of mass psychology which is to be studied in some detail, but not in the present context. And I turn my attention to novels that appealed to me by virtue of their aesthetic qualities and

their attempts at social and cultural evaluations.

I choose five works out of the one hundred, the percentage is not too low, for it is an yearly assessment. Five good works for a year is not a poor performance for any branch of literature in any language. The only question is whether they are good enough.

Here is an entertainer, *Vilayattom* (The sport), a novel by the modernist Sethu. Among the exponents of modernism in Malayalam Sethu occupies a prominent place. His *Pandavapuram* published in 1979 has broken new ground in Malayalam fiction with its daring handling of time as reality and reality as time. The narrative technique employed by Sethu in this novel is of the stream-of-consciousness novel or space-time novel. There are streams within streams in this work that renders its impact on the reader's sensitivity irresistible. But "*vilayattom*" is different. Its frame-work is that of a detective novel. An idol installed in a temple in a village is stolen. One can imagine the consequences of such an incident. The police came to the temple. A private detective also undertakes to unravel the

mystery of the theft. A number of people who belong to various sections in the village community are involved in the events that follow the theft. The casual reader takes this novel for an exciting detective story. But he is disillusioned in the end, for the mystery of the theft remains unrevealed to the end. The police and the detective are befuddled; two people die, a love story has a tragic end. But the theme of the story is not just the theft of the idol. The story is a satire on the genre of the detective story. It is also a satire on our society. The twenty-first chapter of the novel makes this unmistakably clear. The narrative style is different from that adopted by the novelist in the early chapters of the book. The novelist assumes the role of a commentator.

The novelist writes, "When we take into consideration the circumstances under which this strange theft has taken place and the highly complicated and intricate events that followed it we realize how hazardous it has been to find their clue. By convention as the writer of this book I am bound to reveal all secrets about this event that led the readers into such a cerebonian bog. In fact, it is my bounden duty to restore the reader to the

original state in which he remained before he started reading this book. Our respected critics term this process 'catharsis'. The novelist admits that he has not effected this process. However he makes the reader think about the theft and its consequences. Many are involved in this case—the priest at the temple; Unni, the young man who is in love with Sreedevi, a girl of the Varrier cast; Marar in safari suit, who also loved Sreedevi, Viswam the rationalist; Kamalakshi the strumpet with whom Viswam has illicit relations; Kunjappa Menon, president of the temple restoration committee; each claims our attention playing a representative role. Religious beliefs, superstitions, social set-up, the governmental machinery are all held up to criticism. The theft of the idol described in the novel marks a turning-point in the history of Kerala according to the novelist. Till then religious beliefs and superstitions and romance ruled the minds of the people in spite of the intermittent upsurge of rationalism. But that was ten years ago. Now things have changed. The old type of game has given place to the new type of game. Now money reigns supreme. The novel thus has a

point; however the reader need not stress the didacticism too seriously. Take this piece as a sheer entertainer. But it is new; and it foreshadows the arrival of more powerful works of fiction of the species in future.

*Ira* (The Prey) by Anand consists of three powerful novelettes, *Benai Shom*, *Poundraka Vasudevan* and *Kettitheeratha Mala* (The Incomplete Garland) Anand is one of the noteworthy novelists of modernist sensibility. His *Aalkkootam* (The Crowd) though lacking in structural beauty is remarkable for its portrayal of city life varied, and colourful and yet dehumanising. His *Death Certificate* is a Kafkasque novel, his short stories engage our attention with their presentation of the new consciousness

The style of the narration is what matters most in the modernist novels. Anand's narration is controlled, terse, sharp and pungent, piercing and piquant. It disturbs the complacent reader and jolts him into an awareness of the tragic and agonising modern human predicament. All the three novelettes in the book *Ira* are remarkable for their modernist style and presentation of the modernist sensibility.

*Benai Shom*, is a statue without its head. Even when it was installed at the heart of the city it had no head. Like the theft of the idol in Sethu's *Vilayattom*, the installation of the statue also marks a turning-point in the history of the city and for that matter the country "Just as all history is divided into two periods pre-Benai Shom installation period and post-Benai Shom installation period, the statue also symbolises the self-realisation and the second birth consequent upon it, achieved by our culture that has attained permanence, after a long and insistent fight against change". Our society has refused to change; whatever change we witness are superficial, not at all substantial. Benai Shom according to the novelist is an average Indian who died an ignoble death at some dark hour in the heart of the city. The police identified this man as one who lived in some hutment in a settlement of the classless and casteless people. They invented the story that he was a revolutionary; papers and periodicals wove a variety of tales about Benai Shom. There was spread a rumour by a section that Benai was actually alive. Time rolled on; many things happened in the city; it was evident that Benai Shom was

dead by the time; yet people did not leave him in oblivion. The people, their representatives and the mayor developed a variety of crazes, such as craze for games and religion. Each season of the year brought to the people its evils and also relief measures and joys. Through thick and thin, through many a vicissitude Benai Shom's legend drove roots into the culture of the city. His statue, headless though it was, was installed in the city. The statue as is evident symbolises the aborted revolutionary enterprises of the Indian people for the establishment of a just social order. For one thing it has no head. Also its roots have never run deep into our culture which stubbornly resists every attempt at revolution.

*Poundraka Vasudevan* is narrated in the form of an episode from mythology. But every sentence is packed with black satire, and is rich in political overtones critical of the situation obtaining in India. Poundrakan according to mythology was a king, son of a Vasudeva. As he assumed both the title and position equal to those of Lord Krishna in Poundrakan, he was killed by the Lord himself. The novelist emphasises the point that

Poundrakan is a very poor country. Its people were from time out of mind devotees of Vasudeva. When they came across a fake Vasudeva they made him king and idolised him. He was in truth, a thief. But the new Vasudeva exploited the devotion of the people to Vasudeva and tyrannised over them. He had his deputies and plenipotentiaries who paid obeisance to him, who in their turn started exploiting the people. The novelist suggests that the present state of affairs is not dissimilar to that of Poundrakan. The story reads like a narrative piece from the Puranas. But it disturbs us and pains us without letting sentimentalism into its field of consciousness.

*The Incomplete Garland* presents to us a person lying almost dead in the street. The body of the person represents the man under the poverty-line in India. The novel concentrates on the reaction of the fellowmen to the tragic plight of this man "who according to reports is dying and yet not dead." We see a street, perhaps in Calcutta and people in object misery moving from one point to another without any specific destination. They are devoid of compassion, hope or a zest for life. In the

present situation each person, is a prey to some monster or other. "Here everything gets rotten, in the market, court and temple and everywhere else." Man in modern society is like a lamp led to slaughter. This is how Anand concludes the novelette! 'In this black night when everything falls a victim to everything else I get myself totally alienated. I lose even their helpless and innocent anguish. I withdraw myself upon the altar and into my home which are exclusively mine. The night that is mine alone densifies around me. For myself I have the walls I have built the stone I have carved and the goddess I adore. I am my own victim and prey..... I see her approaching, my own goddess who weaves garlands with the heads of human beings; your garland is not yet complete? If so here is another, my own head which I offer you to complete it.'

As a novelist and short-story writer M. Sukumaran is second to none in the field of Malayalam fiction. His short stories excelled in depicting the tragic plight of the 'have-nots' and their futile fight for liberation. His *Seshakriya*, is a powerful novel, something like Koestlers *Darkness at Noon*. His novelettes in *Vanchikunnam Potti* are powerful though their

allegorical frame creates problems in easy communication. In 1981, M. Sukumaran brought out two novelettes *Kunjappuvinte Duswapnangal* (The Terrible Dreams of Kunjappu) and *Asura Sankeerthanam* in one volume titled *Asurasankeerthanam*. Sukumaran's style is surcharged with the breath of real life as lived by Indians. It is not so subtle as that of Anand. Yet it is more lively. The theme is also directly related to everyday life. Kunjappu was a wai fHe would collect pieces of tin and sell them; thus would he make a living. For once he got a job. He was asked to be the helper of a tea-shop keeper. The little shop was on the roadside at a junction. There was some mass gathering at that place that evening. There was a huge crowd. The police were there to keep law and order. Business was brisk at the tea-shop and Kunjappu worked hard all day hoping to get some money from the shop keeper. But what happened turned everything topsyturvey. The masses grew rebellious, the police opened fire. People ran helter-skelter. The shop-keeper lost all his earnings. And what about Appu? To begin with he had nothing, and after a day's work his plight was much more miserable And

into what 'heaven of freedom' is our country awakenings?

*Asura sankeerthanam* narrates a more poignant story. It exposes the shallowness and irrelevance of charity in a period that clamours for justice. Seshayyar is well-placed in life, he is noble and generous, and his wife is also a nice lady. Seshayyar and his wife stand for the benevolent rich in our country Parasu, the Harijan stands for the upright and the honest poor man of the country. He is illiterate law abiding, and loyal. He has no aspirations. He is not a fighter. Seshayyar has been very kind to him, in fact, in a sense, unduly generous to him. Seshayyar is a very honourable, upright man. But his goodness has not lifted Parasu from a state of object misery. Parasu believes that 'man himself is the god of man', but man didn't care to uplift man. Sure, there are benevolent rich men in India, but what can they ever do to the poor of this land? This is a sorry state of affairs. One is tempted to ask what would have been the reaction of Sheshayyar if Parasu who suffered untold misery turned against him and said: "We don't want the charity of spineless men like you, we want justice". The poor Indian

has not yet learnt to ask this question.

M. Govindan's *Sarpam* (serpent) consists of two novelettes, *Sarpam* (Serpent) and *Daivathinte Punnara Pravu* (The Beloved Dove of God). Of these novels *Serpent* was written as early as 1968. The second novelette is a later production. To M. Govindan, a poet, and critic, the novel is a medium for giving an adequate image for some idea, related to psychology or to philosophy. *Sarpam* is an admixture of psychology, philosophy and political satire. It ostensibly deals with the thoughts and feelings of an artist. It has a lot to convey about art. All art is self-communication. The artist wants to communicate with himself. What is man? How is his psyche formed? What are its governing motives? Faith, fantasy and fragmentedness are the three aspects of human psyche. But these three may not be integrated. Faith has not succeeded in reinstating reason in its conventional place. And so the mind remains fragmented and devils are at work in the deep caverns of the mind. Govindan does not allude to Xanadu, but that is the land searched by both Freud and Jung. The novelist labours at striking a compromise

between the Freudian and Jungian interpretations of the mind. The chief exponent of the novel is a newly-wedded young man, Mr. Briggs, an artist entering the bridal chamber, his mind is preoccupied with thoughts about his elder sister and her marriage. He lost her when she got married. The hero Mr. Briggs analyses lust and love. He hopes that sooner or later art will take precedence over love. Art shall be the passion of the future. Even sex is but a sort of mad excitement at work at the highest realm of art. The novelist has too much to say in this novel. The objective correlative he has woven lacks the strength to bear the thoughts expressed in the work. In fact herein thoughts are not transformed into sensibility. Moreover the thoughts are not chiefly eastern, nor do they offer a creative criticism of the western thoughts against Patanjali or Vatsyana. M. Govindan has the intellectual stamina to do it. But in *Sarpam* he fails to achieve what he set out to accomplish. It is one of the most thought-provoking literary works in the language though not an excellent novel. As a novel *Daivam thampurante Punnara Pravu* is much more satisfying than *Sarpam*. Its style is entirely new and fresh; however

it does not have the vitality to renovate the narrative style of Malayalam fiction. The 'Dove of God' is the story of Appu, the poet and lover dear to his mother. He is now dead. Appu went into the other world, and from God got permission to be reborn into this World as some being. God allowed him to be reborn as a dove, lovely and delicate, a dove that can talk, but cannot sing. The dove came to a countryside in our land. It was greeted by a mother and her child. Life seemed to be quiet and peaceful on the whole, beautiful in the villages. But the city was different. It was almost dehumanised and rendered monstrous. The city did not welcome the dove. (It symbolises the innocent ecstasies and virtues of the paradise that humanity has lost once for all). The dove returned to the other world. It preferred the other world to this world, which it once loved.

The novels discussed so far are novels of the modern sensibility. Despite the powerful impact of modernism, traditional novels continue to appear in Malayalam. Tradition never dies, rather as Eliot explained a few decades back, individual talent gets itself submerged in tradition. Even

the new sensibility, we shall see, will be absorbed by tradition. K. Surendran's *Pathaka* (The Flag) that runs to nine hundred and four pages is a social document like Thakazhi's *Kayar*. Surendran is at his best in novels that depict the working of the human mind and also offer scope for discussions of subjects both ethical and political. *Pathaka* is an imaginative re-creation of the social and political history of Travancore from the first decade of the present century up to the present time.

The novel is divided into two parts. The first part is much more powerful than the second. In the first part, the novelist could see the historical events maintaining the aesthetic distance needed for a balanced appraisal of them. All the top leaders of Travancore's struggle for freedom figure in the novel—Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, T. M. Varghese and C. Kesavan and Mannathu Padmanabhan to mention but a few. The political situation is set against the social situation. The domestic life of the leaders is also vividly portrayed. Love, jealousy, feuds, clashes, mass movements, deliberations, insurrections, political plots and counter-plots, all contribute to

make the narration lively. The novelist does not enter into the subconscious or the unconscious of his characters. There is no attempt to allegorise the events. The narration is straight, and moving. There is no attempt to befuddle or puzzle the reader. *Pathaka*, like Yashpal's *Jutta Sach* or Uroob's *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum* is the story of the evolution of Indian society. The frame of this novel is almost as wide as that of *Kayar*. One remembers even the minor characters who just appear and disappear. Also the analysis of the social and political situation is masterly. As a work of fiction *Pathaka* has many qualities worthy of our praise. However one wishes that it was a little more powerful and that it had attained greater heights of aesthetic excellence.

As we have a closer look at the novels published in 1981, we wonder whether anyone of them is representative of the 'eighties in particular. The novels of modernist sensibility sound a note of despondency and despair. But novels of tradition take a different stand. It is true that India has a number of economic problems to solve, but many have already been solved and we move forward without despair. The note is neither of the robust optimism of the 'fifties nor one of the pessimism of the 'seventies. India stands at the crossroads. That is what the novels of 1981 suggest. The greatest achievement of the Malayalam novel recently has been the vitalisation of its narrative technique and prose style and this gives us hope of better productions in the future.

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## Malayalam Literature, 1981-Poetry

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K. P. Sankaran

An attempt to assess the achievements of Malayalam poetry during 1981 in the span of such a brief article is destined to be imperfect. Whether the sources consulted are adequate will be an issue of debate. The list of books made available can seldom be exhaustive in the normal course. Serious limitations are bound to creep in at this stage, especially when one undertakes the assignment, remaining as I do outside Kerala. Journals and periodicals are generally ignored here, for the simple practical reason that they presently happen to be beyond my reach. This omission perhaps is unfortunate because sometimes the whole foretaste of a coming spring can be offered by a single bud. I do not deny the possibility of some such bud having opened itself up in some unknown page of a humble journal. Then there is the serious issue of interpretation.

These and similar questions apart, there is the more crucial one: the critic's being, undesirably close to the subject of his concern. Any literary evaluation, to a legitimate extent has to be left to time. I am well aware of all such pitfalls, when I venture to assess the Malayalam poetry of 1981.

Towards the end of the seventies, Dr. Ayyappa Paniker seems to have revealed that the post-modernist period in Malayalam poetry had already set in. The revelation probably was not as startling as the earlier one, about two decades ago, regarding the heralding of modernism. Yet, coming as it did from a major enthusiast of modernism, it could not be ignored either. Was one to take a hint that the historical relevance of modernism as a movement in Malayalam poetry had ceased to exist by then?

Without hastening to answer the question, let us for the time

being leave this question alone. All the same, I wish to observe here that the overcharged slogans of modernism are now slowly being forgotten. The din and bustle it once made are gradually becoming a thing of the past. May be a more mature approach to the whole issue is in the offing. What was worthwhile in the modernist movement has apparently merged into the mainstream. The rest of the tide having receded, one can perhaps examine now whether it has really left any genuine pearls on the shore, or just some shells and dirty deposits only. Astonishingly, most of the prefaces to the poetry collections that I presently go through for the purpose of preparing this article, tend to condemn modernity or rather the dubious external features of it. Arguments can probably be put forward from the other side as well. However, it is time for one to conclude that by now our taste has more or less attained a balance. We maintain that mere modernism may not constitute an essential poetic quality. This assumption, I feel, will serve as an adequate frame of reference for the evaluation of the poetic works of 1981.

Statistics need not always necessarily provide a reliable

resource for literary criticism. Yet, value judgement apart, when one wants to identify the underlying trend of a given period—the entire year of 1981 in this instance—statistics also has to be taken into account; and of the forty odd titles published during this year, not even half a dozen may make any claim to modernism. There is evidence on the contrary to prove that age-old trends are still strong. Whether the exercises on these lines yield any appreciable result is an altogether different aspect of the problem. For that matter, if quality is the only criterion, many of these works do not merit mention in an evaluative endeavour like this. Let me, however proceed under some such assumption.

What surprised me most was perhaps a fairly large volume (85 pieces; 370 pages) by Nenmini Raman Bhattathiripad. This author, now over 84, reportedly had the initial impulse to write as late as 1957. Still he deemed it worthwhile to take a dip in a traditional stream, which is undoubtedly a hundred years old now. Who prohibits, at least in the world of poetry, the potential pleasures of nurturing a conventional mind? Whatever be the intrinsic value, one can consider

*Nenminikkavithakal* as a pointer to the plurality of features that co-exist in the field of Malayalam poetry even in 1981.

It is significant, then that in his amiable foreword to an anthology of selected poems of 1981, brought out by D. C. Books, Kottayam, Prof. M. K. Sanoo underscores this aspect of plurality, though the anthology does not represent it in full measure.

Another example for the compilation of almost all the contributions of an individual author is available in *Patiathinte Kavithakal*, a posthumous publication of the poems by the late K. P. B. Patiam. Mostly creations of the early, fifties no wonder one encounters an essentially different, sensibility in these poems-different from those that prevailed during the last two decades. An irresistible emotional throb, an undeniable appeal of everything that the poet addresses himself to all poured out sweetly in set native metres: yes, these are poems leaving the stamp of a basically romantic mould. Certainly, one is reminded of Changampuzha, that celebrated Orpheus of Malayalam. Whether this poet would have been able to survive the all-powerful influence of Changampuzha and ultimately

discover his own style is presently a debate of no avail. Because after remaining almost silent under tragic circumstances for a pretty long period of 16 years, Patiam passed away in 1969. We are of course grateful to his younger brother Viswanathan for perpetuating the poet's memory through this neatly brought out volume.

Age, if not varied experiences, sometimes gives an enchanting hue to the otherwise dull vision of a poet. This is what welcomes you in *Muthachante Kannuneer* (Grandfather's Tears) a collection of 28 short poems, by Kadathanattu Madhavi Amma. The title poem with which the collection opens is on Bheeshma on his bed of arrows. The sentiment it embodies becomes symptomatic of many other pieces in this book. A twilight glow seems to permeate the atmosphere here, which so naturally sets in a mood of introspection and evaluation of life. Madhavi Amma at her best might probably be realized in this collection.

Instead of turning to this introspection and the evaluation be based on it, old age occasionally tends to dole, out advice under an enforced assumption that everything has gone wrong. I wonder if

M. N. Paloor has fallen a victim to this tendency. It is sad, for in his case old age is almost a self-inflicted one, and the promises he held out years ago have only been partially fulfilled. In his collection *Kaliyugam* published in 1981, Paloor hardly offers anything original. Of late, his conviction appears to be that, in this Kaliyuga a poet can do nothing better than to echo the words of that eternal sage Vyasa. The extent of effectiveness with which Paloor discharges this duty is probably beyond the point there. We will now just note it as one of the attitudes Malayalam poetry has evinced in the year under review.

P. Bhaskaran is still celebrating his sentimental return to his first love, namely poetry. The year 1981 enabled us to enjoy the fruits of this return, through a fairly representative collection *Kaayalkkattu* (Wind from the Backwaters), of 46 short poems. Some of these poems may stand out significantly in the study of this author, especially of the transformation that he seems to have undergone. Some project the political changes of recent times and the poet's posture in relation to them. This in itself deserves to be

debated upon; but not in the context of such a cursory review. The issue of immediate relevance here is how far Bhaskaran has succeeded in making his presence felt with a refreshed and reassuring sensibility. In order to answer it, I prefer to adapt a policy of 'wait and see'. What is possibly gathered from the present collection is a sense of loss of direction both in terms of theme and form. In short, the poet presumably suffers from a sort of sensibility gap.

Against this background, one feels all the more happy that there are one or two poets unaffected by this kind of fickleness, the fret and fever of everyday incidents — for instance, K. a d a v a n a d u Kuttikrishnan with his collection *Vedanayude Thottam* (The Birthsong of Pain). It may be just incidental that a well-known philosopher Nityachaithanya Yathi introduces this collection. What is fundamental is the philosophic maturity that the poet himself brings to bear upon his treatment of seemingly silly themes. Significantly enough, the subject of a poem here is 'newness', wherein the poet subtly substantiates the dualistic relationship of old and new. Anything new, according to him,

is in fact only an extension of the old; the impression of newness alone is new! One may actually be tempted now to apply this finding and highlight the meaninglessness of the fight between the traditional and the modernist factions in Malayalam poetry. Irrespective of labels, any discerning reader can ill afford to ignore the mellowed vision reflected in the poems in *Vedanayude Thottam*. This is an achievement about which the year 1981 can be legitimately proud.

Far behind Kadavanadu Kuttikrishnan, but more or less in the similar category, comes a relatively recent poet Thazhathedom Raghavan Nair. To expect the same amount of maturity from him will be unrealistic. In fact, his collection '*Oru Indian Pourante Gaanam* (Song of an Indian citizen) one might find, leaves much to be desired - clarity of expression, composure of vision etc. Yet the poet's class is revealed in this collection itself, which undoubtedly can be marked for better realization.

N. K. Desam is not a new name for real lovers of poetry. He has been there for the last two decades or so as an embodiment of an exquisitely refined sensibility. This

sensibility may not be essentially modern; yet it has absorbed into it some of the substantial aspects of modernism such as irony, an awareness of the realities around and an antiheroic unromantic attitude towards them. So long as these saving graces were there, one could safely ignore the obvious formal overtones he generally indulged in. But in their absence, he stands rather exposed - this is the impression one possibly gets from his new contribution *Pavizhamalli*, a collection of 18 short poems. These poems are, by and large, the products of pre-determined situations to which the poet responds in a set tone. The tendency to play with certain traditional traits of form therefore becomes almost a burden here. Does *Pavizhamalli* represent a phase of stagnation? Does it tell us that Desam has practically withdrawn himself into a shell, where the stress seems to be on extra embellishments instead of inner vigour. Failing sometimes to come to terms with the surrounding problems, his frail but gay poetry now moves back to a mood of nostalgia (The very title *Pavizhamalli* is perhaps suggestive of it) There fed chiefly on personal themes, it continues to sing, but seldom

succeeds in transcending those themes to provide a universal appeal. To what extent the song can be made relevant then? This anxiety is evoked not by Desam alone, but a few fellow-poets as well. However, I still feel that the sensibility of Desam will eventually break this shell and bring about a refreshing relevance. It hopefully holds out promises of evolution yet.

Encounter with modernity, may be in its more menacing form, is what '*Vamsagaadha*' by Vinayachandran offers to us. I should refrain from commenting on it, because, despite a descriptive introductory note by K. S. Narayana Pillai, I still remain baffled. I do not know if it is wrong to expect something beyond the surface and indulge in reading between the lines.

V. K. Narayanan in his *Kara* (Spot) probably provides us a more convincing insight into the process of evolution, which his sensibility underwent before becoming modern. There was a phase in his life, way back in the childhood, when grandmother used to wake him up, make him chant prayers; then over a cup of hot tea, he would copy down the lesson neatly, identify accurately the metres of poems to be

learnt, attempt to work out sums without errors ... At each of these stages, elders were there to extend a helping hand. But, alas, now - everything has turned out to be teasing and torturing. A deep sleep seems to be the only escape. Still the poet is pressed to take painful care to keep himself awake. This collection includes evidence to that effect. To deal with the experiences of that earlier phase is relatively simple, but the second phase poses challenges, and in reacting to them the poet probably is till at a stage of forging his tools.

Sachidanandan has enriched Malayalam poetry in the year 1981 with his sound contribution *Peedana Kaalam* (Period of Torture) The title may prompt one to associate these poems with the author's recent experience of imprisonment. But the 'peeda' (anguish) here actually encompasses the present human predicament as a whole, and no other Malayalam poet appears to have handled it with such a sharp and subtle sensibility.

Yes, this unique sensibility is the great achievement of Sachidanandan. In a piece entitled 'Poetry and Police' (*Kavithayum Policum*) which

perhaps has ready reference to that experience of imprisonment, he recalls how this sensibility enchantingly seeks escape from any method of onslaught on it. The piece is highly reminiscent of P. Kunhiraman Nair's earlier account of the poet's encounter with the critic-*'Kaviyum Niroopakanum'*-(The Poet and the Critic). Without going into further details, let us deduct atleast one thing out of it: the real challenge for a poet is to preserve his sensibility, to keep it alive and in tact against any odds.

And the odds are too many, especially in these days. There is the establishment all around, the sole aim of which seems to be to blunt the edge of individual sensibility. The so-called sophistication, educational system, political set-up and what not! In different pieces and in distinct idiom, Sachidanandan deals with each of them. It is rewarding to see that he does not simply succumb to their dictates; instead, he holds aloft his individuality and hence hope for Malayalam poetry also. If this is precisely what modernity has to offer, I think it is up to us to make necessary adjustments in our personal taste and prepare ourselves to share this experience

more sincerely and meaningfully.

It is quite in order that a certain genre, in a given period, comes forth with specimens for all categories of quality-good, bad or indifferent. This evidently happens in the field of fiction, where the second and third categories abound like anything rather than the first. I was somehow under the impression that poetry, probably much less a victim to popular norms, might prove an exception here. The form itself will impose a discipline in this case, helping to restrict the multiplication of indifferent works-this is what I had hoped. But the fact is just the reverse: even in the area of poetry, one has to often confront any number of colourless odourless commodities! Some of them try to appear glorified under the guise of satire, but the label hardly leads to any difference. In fact, satirical poetry, to be effective in our times, calls for a really higher level of equipment.

More than these collections as such, what perplexes me is the certificate that many carry with them in the form of preface. For instance, the collection *Award* by Aranmula Satyavrathan is just childish by any standard; yet it carries a

quality certificate from no less a person than P. Bhaskaran! Reliable quality control is as much a felt need in literature as it is in industry. Or, ours happens to be an age when literature itself tends to turn into an industry and even poetry is incapable of resisting this impact beyond a limited extent.

Thanks probably to its peculiar geographical position, Kerala has always encouraged translations. Much of the progress that Malayalam literature has registered might be the positive result of such translations. In a survey of the Malayalam poetry of 1981 mention should be made of at least one achievement in translation. N. V. Krishna Variyar has offered to Malayalam his masterly rendering of a hundred poems, selected discerningly so as to represent a broad spectrum of Sangham works, the substantial wealth of classical Tamil. The rendering, elaborate notes for each individual piece, an extensive introduction by the learned author himself—in every respect, this *Akam Kavithakal* is a valuable volume. This is a period when loud demands are made for the revival of the

'native elements' not in drama alone but in poetry also. If the movement is to yield any healthy result, then as a prelude to it, we will have to penetrate into our real legacy and rediscover ourselves. The volume *Akam Kavithakal* offers solid help in this regard.

Does the year 1981 present any debutant to Malayalam poetry? The definite name that comes to me is that of Nenmini Raman Bhattathiripad, an author above 85 now! Still, one need not strain to read any irony into this situation, because at the other end of the line there are a few beaming new faces. *An Anthology of Selected Poems of 1981*, referred to earlier in this article, introduces them to us.

This brief survey, to sum up, may remind one of an observation by Mahakavi Vallathol, though made in a different context: 'The cloth that we are supplied with is a product of varied threads. 'Yes' the Malayalam poetry of 1981 is a cloth made of different threads. The kind and quality of the texture may not be equally satisfying everywhere.' Yet, the variety itself is something we can be glad of.

## Malayalam Literature, 1981 General Prose

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K. N. Nair

During the past few years there has been a proliferation in Malayalam prose-writing. The number prose works are on the increase as years pass by. On a rough estimate, more than a thousand volumes have come out in the year 1981. Of these, 'general prose' works—both original and translations—alone exceed four hundred. Essays, biographies, memoirs, travelogue, pen-pictures, political and legal works, books on history and other miscellaneous categories could be included under this title.

In a short survey like this, it will be neither feasible nor necessary to deal with them all. I only propose to make a reference to a few outstanding works.

Three auto-biographies published during the year—namely *Smaranakal Mathrom* (JUST REMINISCENCES) by C. H. Kunhappa; *Thirinjuno-kkumpol* (WHILE LOOKING BACK) by K. A. Damodara

Menon and *Moulaviyude Atmakatha* (MOULAVI'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY) by E. Moidu Moulavi, deserve special mention. The first two authors have passed away recently, while the third one through older is still happily alive.

C. H. Kunhappa was a gifted prose-writer, literary critic, translator and scholar. Because of his pre-occupations as a journalist for more than four decades, Malayalam literature did not have the good fortune of having many books from him. A collection of his essays—*Vicharakorakam*—and his translation of Nehru's auto-biography had received wide acclaim. A self-effacing person, he was an ardent nationalist and a true Gandhian. Unlike the other two authors, he was never in active politics, but he had the occasion to get a 'ring-side view' of the eventful half a century spanning the period before and after our independence. His *Smaranakal*

*Mathrom* gives us a rare insight into the social structure and the relations which existed between various sections of the people in Malabar during the early decades of this century. In this book we come across brilliant portrayals of many prominent personalities in the political, social and cultural fields. The author takes us back to many a memorable event in our recent history especially the national movement. Written in his inimitable, lucid style, this is a book worth reading and preserving.

K A. Damodara Menon was a rare type of intellectual turned politician. He belonged to the school of Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai. An outstanding editor of yester-years, he had also made his mark as a writer, orator, freedom fighter, parliamentarian and administrator. It was after a brief stint as a teacher in Burma that he plunged headlong into the freedom movement responding to the call of Gandhiji and the Congress. In the eventful years that followed he was in the thick of the struggle. His *Thirinjunkkumpol* (though incomplete) is a good record of the political, social and cultural events of our times. Painted on a wide canvas it is much more than a politician's autobiography.

Nonagenarian E. M o i d u Moulavi is the oldest living Congressman in Kerala. Though not a literary figure in its strictest sense, Moulavi has written a few books and edited a few newspaperrrs. He is also a scholar and linguist. As a youth he plunged into the freedom struggle and was in its forefront from the early days of the non-co-operation and Khilafat movements. An eye-witness of the Malabar rebellion popularly known as "Moplah Rebellion", Moidu Moulavi had to undergo untold hardships at the hands of British Rulers as well as orthodox fanatical sections of his own community. He was jailed many a time. Throughout his long life he has upheld Gandhian values. This book written in a frank and pleasing style, reflects his ardent patriotism, sincerity, honesty, selflessness and dedication to secularism and non-violence. Moulavi has recorded his reminiscences without any ill-will or rancour *Moulaviyude Atmakatha* is a book which should be read by every Malayali - especially of the younger generation.

"*Marakkatha Anubhavgal*" (Unforgettable Experiences) by C. Achutha Menon and '*Samsarikkunna Diarykurippukal*'

(Self-expressing Diary Jottings) by the late S. K. Pottekkatt are two collections of personal memoirs. Achutha Menon, former Chief Minister of Kerala, is not only a politician but also a writer of standing. In this new book he narrates some memorable experiences in his personal life and public activities. Written in a simple style the incidents referred to are capable of stirring our minds deeply.

Gnanpith award winner pottekkatt the master storyteller was also the most popular travelogue-writer of our times. In his diary jottings, he takes the reader to many lands and many strange situations. Written with a great deal of human touch, these jottings are highly interesting.

The late Swadesabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai the veteran journalist and writer became a legendary figure in Kerala following his externment from the old princely state of Travancore in 1910. He fought against injustice and autocracy and thus became a martyr. But people knew very little about the proprietor of the *Swadesabhimani* who stood firmly behind his daring editor, making a great sacrifice. Vakkom Abdul Quadir Moulavi

who started the *Swadesabhimani* and gave Ramakrishna Pillai all freedom and encouragement was a great idealist and a very remarkable person in many ways, V. Mohammad Kannu in his biographical work *Vakkom Moulavi* unfolds the many-sided activities and interests of this progressive-minded Muslim scholar.

The late Pandit K. P. Karuppan was a noted litterateur, scholar and social reformer whose birth centenary falls in the year 1985. Born in a backward community he had championed the cause of downtrodden throughout his life. *Pandit Karuppanum Malayala Kavithayum* (Pandit Karuppan and Malayalam Poetry) by K. A. Krishnan is an exhaustive study on the life and work of this poet and social reformer. It is a timely Publication in view of the poet's forthcoming centenary.

*Rashtriya Darsanam* by prof. G. Sukumaran Nair is a collection of biographical studies of great political thinkers of the world. The reader will find it highly informative and interesting.

Only very few books have been written in Malayalam dealing with the history of the

Indian National Congress which is entering the centenary year shortly. "*Indian National Congress*" by K. M. Antony is a timely publication in this context. Though the author has taken pains to make it informative, it has not been properly edited. The quality of its production is also very poor.

*Bharanaghatana ykku or u Bhashyam* (A Commentary on the Constitution) by E. K. Krishnan Ezhuthassan is another notable work which has come out during the year. Being the only one of its kind, it is a unique publication in Malayalam. The author, besides being a known writer in Malayalam, was a member of the judicial service. He had the opportunity to serve in the Union Law Ministry also. This background has helped him much in the preparation of this exhaustive and up-to-date commentary of our Constitution brought out for the benefit of the Malayalam speaking public.

In the genre of the personal essay an outstanding book was published during the year. This was A. P. Udayabhanu's twelfth collection *Ente Manorajyangal* (My Reveries). A deep regard for human values, a genuine sense of humour and a capacity for meaningful social criticism have, along with a conversational style, made these

essays abundantly entertaining and highly enlightening.

Dr. K. Velayudhan Nair's *Aravindadarsanam* is another book which deserves mention. The first-full-length study of Aurobinda in the language, it deals at length, with the great man's life and work, political, literary and philosophical. Careful study and competent writing have made the book valuable.

The translation of the autobiography of Vice-President M. Hidayathulla by Dr. A. N. P. Ummerkutty; *Ormakalile Bristo* a collection of articles by various writers on the life and work of Sir Robert Bristo the creator of the Cochin port, *Management-Kalayum Sasthravum* (Management-art and science) by N. Gopalakrishnan Nair of the Indian Administrative service; biographical works meant for children in the series *Mahacharithamala* published by Kairali Children's Book Trust, world classics retold for children in the series *Viswasahityamala* are some other notable works besides those mentioned earlier. In addition to these the several publishing houses in Kerala the Central Sahitya Akademi and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi have also brought out a few good prose works of interest to Malayalam readers.

## Malayalam Literature, 1981 The Short Story

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K. Jayakumar

Modern trends in Malayalam literature were most poignantly manifest in the short stories published in the early seventies by a band of young writers. They were weary of an idiom that had deteriorated into cliché and themes that had lost their relevance. Shocking the sensibility of a generation and undoing an aesthetics, these writers fed the appetite of the times by their outright and at times bawdy narration. Their themes were hitherto untouched and sometimes absurd. The folk lore simplicity of O V. Vijayan and Zachariah was unmistakable. Mukundan's wild fantasy was something novel and Kakanadan's mystic criticism irresistible. The stories of Padmarajan and Madhavikutty had the effect of shock therapy. A freshness distinguished T. Padmanabhan's stories, while a dreamlike quality permeated Sethu's creations. These writers have given the Malayalam short

story a new tenor and dimension.

Novel though they were, the sincerity of these writings was often questioned. Their indebtedness to the ideologies of the west which had no bearing on our socio-political milieu was very often criticised. The pseudosense of nothingness accentuated by debauchery and contrived identity crisis had no justification in our social context. Coupled with it was the social aloofness and stark individuality of the writer. Commitment to society was foreign to many writers. At best we can only discern individual fascinations and perversions in these early writings.

Over a period of ten years, things have changed, as we witness in the stories under review. Vague fancies have given way to concrete ideas and commitments. Ideas which were borrowed have been replaced by

deeply felt concerns. The nebulous atmosphere of the early period seems to have crystallised. This does not mean that the writers have started treading a beaten track. Experimentation in form and style still continues. In fact the jargon which dominated the early days is not to be seen any more. The writer today has a devotion to language, greater awareness of form. If the writer of the early seventies, lamented the values that had collapsed like a pack of cards, his voice was imitative and contrived. The same writer when he portrays the picture of a youngman, hereft of the so-called values, sounds much more convincing and directs. In the story *Enthinu* (why). T. Padmanabhan depicts a young man Gopi, who mocks at a society guided by false values. The indignation is not a direct outburst rendered in rhetoric but manifest in the portrayal of a rather self-destructive life style.

In the captivating story *Oru Nasrani Yuvavum Goulisastravum* (A Christian Youth and the Holy Lizard-Lore) which has the candour and simplicity of folk-lore, Zachariah brings into bold relief the dehumanising effect of blind commitment to an

ideology. The theme obviously has great relevance to our times. In keeping with Zachariah's style, direct satire often surges up as an attempt to localise the folk-lore and lend it more credibility, as we see in the following passage:-

“Faith in lizard craft overpowered Mathukutty. Like other ideologies like Existentialism, Marxism, Augustinian theology, Socialism, Multiplication table, 25 poin programme etc. lizard-craft also exacted from Mathukutty total conviction and dependence”.

Society is again assaulted in the stories of Padmarajan and Sethu. The imagination of both of them is original, but the tenor of their writings is different. Padmarajan writes with the gusto of youth while Sethu has the suavity of mellowed imagination. Look how differently they picturise an individual in society. Padmarajan's *'Kaivariyude Thekkeyattam* tells the story of a harmless nobody 'Pappachy' who was elevated to the status of a greatman, whose death anniversary is being observed, and after whom roads and junctions are named. The hollowness of the cherished values of society are ridiculed

in a style which is far from subtle.

Sethu while recording the biography of Gopalan II, drives home how society conditions the individual and guides his destiny. Sethu's stories are a befitting reply to the allegation that the modern writer is oblivious of society. Here is an author who is keen to sketch the life of an individual circumscribed by his environment and inheritance. In a later story *Oru Cheria Manushyan* (A Little Man) Sethu says how futile it is for man to try to overgrow the constraints he has inherited. More than a relapse to fatalism, this represents an awful realisation of the limitation of human existence.

Punathil Kunhabdulla has been toying with the idea of the mini story for sometime, which he thinks is an effective medium for humour and satire. However, the mini stories he has published declare their limitations rather than their potentialities. Although, they make delightful reading their satire is somewhat blunt.

Whatever be the various experiments with form in the short story, it has been

essentially story-telling. And plainly so in the collection published by Anand, titled *Odiyunna Kurishu*. (The Breaking Cross) These stories written during and after the emergency has freedom as their central theme. In fact to underscore the value of freedom, Anand narrates the entire political history of the country. These stories however can't claim great literary value. The transparency of the allegory and the plainness of the allusions definitely dilute the aesthetic import of these stories, as had an earlier similar venture of another brilliant writer M. Sukumaran in his well known collection *Marichittillathavarute Smarakangal* (Memorials to those who are not yet Dead).

The attitude to sex as revealed in some of the earlier short stories of the new writers had been often criticised as being degenerate and perverted. Kakanadan is the one writer who had excelled in such themes, *Sreechakram* being a brilliant instance. In fact most of the writers have approached this theme with varying degrees of fervour. N. T. Balachandran, who is a promising writer has attempted in the story *Komaram* the fate of a girl who is forced by circumstances to eschew sex.

The earlier indulgence of the writer and his keenness to dabble in sex is no more to be seen.

V. K. N., Madhavikutty, Kakanadan, and O. V. Vijayan have not contributed much during the year under review, of course the few stories published in periodicals do not count much while delineating the prominent trends in the short story

The mellowing effect that we notice in almost all the writers

today is a heartening symptom. Now they write to express, not to impress. They are more than ever alive to the ailments of society, and the predicament of the individual in it. Commitment to oneself, rather than to alien philosophies is of course to be welcomed. So too are the healthy experiments with style, which will definitely fructify in making our stories multidimensional and meaningful.

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## Malayalam Literature, 1981 Literary Criticism

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Dr. M. Leelavathy

Creative writers have generally been critical of critics in Malayalam, their main grievance being that they are not properly assessed. By "proper assessment" the aggrieved writers mean that they are not adequately praised. And this 'adequacy' has invariably a meaning of their own. If a creative writer is deservedly or even unduly praised by a critic, he possesses an 'adequate' sense of criticism and talent for assessment according to that writer who is at the receiving end of the praise. But he will be a worthless critic according to others who are not brought to the lime-light. There are exceptions, of course, who do not suffer from this disease of jealousy which is in all fairness, a byproduct of "the last infirmity of the noble mind". In spite of their vast number, the writers are generally known to each other personally, the area of this state being small. This must be one of the reasons

why critics turn to creative writers of yesterday ignoring the contemporary writers and their grouse against lack of proper attention.

In spite of such discouraging factors, criticism has flourished remarkably and is not less in richness than other branches of literature though the important works happen to have concentrated their attention on the literature of yesterday.

Literary criticism in 1981 can be divided into several categories - research - degree - oriented investigations by members of the academic community; interpretations of ancient eastern critical theories and their applications; studies based on certain western critical concepts; general criticism of critical approaches, literary attitudes and modes of sensibility; anthologies of critical essays on a particular author by different critics; critical editions of the works of

an author with analytical preface; studies of performing arts and their librettos; collections of miscellaneous critical essays etc. etc... To belittle the magnitude of these endeavours is to underrate critical activities. Critical writing is yet to be paid its due.

Three Ph D theses came out in book form in 1981. Each is important in its own way and a contribution to literary criticism.

Dr. Sukumar Azhicode's book on the history of literary criticism in Malayalam is the most outstanding among them. It deals with the beginnings growth and evolution of literary criticism in Malayalam but the author has not tried to assess the development of criticism in the last two decades despite the vastness of the growth in the period. One has the liberty to choose where to concentrate. If somebody questions why this thesis does not give a comprehensive picture of contemporary criticism, the simple answer is that it was not the author's intention. But then, the title will appear to assume much more than the actual contents. Except for this incompleteness, the work is a dependable guide for students of literature. The assessment of

the critical evaluations done by critics of older generations, evinces in general a well-balanced approach. The subjective element is, at any rate, unavoidable. Purely objective criticism being a myth, there will be ample room for others with different orientations to disagree. This book has a unique historical importance being the first comprehensive history of literary criticism in Malayalam. Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai whose scholarship and talent for critical judgement are widely acclaimed writes in *Indian Literature* (November-December 1982) that the claims of literary research and literary criticism are evenly honoured in this thesis which shows accurate academic data and critical acumen.

A study of the lyrical poems of G. Sankara Kurup is the thesis of Dr. D. Benjamin. He has analysed practically all the poetical works of 'G', as his main contributions are lyrical poems, without any prejudice or predetermined notions, as the case should be in genuine research. He possesses the right sensibility which is required for the analysis of romantic lyrics and the proper mental

equipment which helps response to genuine poetry- The work is a significant contribution to the criticism of poetry. All the important aspects of lyrical poetry in general and of the poems of 'G' in particular are subjected to detailed analytical study, though the author's claim that this is the first comprehensive study of the works of 'G' is not a correct statement. The endeavours of others can be belittled but cannot be beheaded.

Another Ph. D thesis is the study of the 'champus' of Neelakandha, a medieval poet, by Dr. T. G. Ramachandran Pillai. The general characteristics of champus and the works of the poet are properly and exhaustively analysed.

Expositions of the eastern critical theories and their applications in the analysis of Indian Literature are getting less and less popular among the younger generation of readers. Yet this does not deter scholars of the older generation from their faith. *Kavyadarsanam* by P. C. Vasudevan Elayadu is a substantial exposition of eastern critical theories and their applications and can be recommended to students of literature for serious perusal. It

contains nine essays. The first four deal with eastern critical theories and the remaining five are analysis of certain aspects of Indian classics like the *Ramayana*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Narayaneeya* etc

Another investigation on the same lines is *The concept of Brotherhood in the epics* by Kotuppunna. There are a dozen essays in the book. The title of the book is the caption of the first essay which reveals the different faces of brotherhood depicted in the *Ramayana*. The other topics include interpretations of certain concepts of Kalidasa, an outline of Literary criticism in Malayalam, exposition of the theory of 'Riti', etc.

"*Maunam tetunna Vakku*" (the literal translation is 'Word in Search of Silence' and the sense appears to be word that tends towards silence) by V. Rajakrishnan, a passionate young critic has made an impact on the minds of readers of the younger generation. The author claims that this second book of his deals with the philosophical silence that pervades our consciousness of the universe, which is beyond words and images. The first essay is an illustrative stylistic analysis of the works of three living

novelists Thakazhi Siva Sankara Pillai, O. V. Vijayan and M. T. Vasudevan Nair. It traces the evolution of style illustrating how the struggle 'to express the inexpressible' and the consequent sublime philosophic silence that pervades both language and form have been more of a creative agony for the modern novelists compared with their counterparts of the older generation who had concentrated more on social commitment than on the art of style. The author has not confined his investigations to literary works alone. He equates other media like art-films with works of literature with respect to the genuine struggle of the creative artist to express himself. His extensive reading, his knowledge of the world-wide experiments in the art of the film as an expression of the creative mind, his insight into the psychological depths of the creative spirit of man and his powers for comparative study and original analysis are his strong points. Linguistic style being one of the topics of his interest, he will acquire clarity of expression in due course, the lack of which and the verbal repetitions are the main defects of this work.

A collection of essay *chitayile Velicham*. (The Light that

Emanates from the Funeral Pyre) is the most significant work of literary criticism produced during the period and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for literary criticism in 1982 was given to the author, Prof. M. N. Vijayan. He did not accept the award in faithful adherence to his avowed conviction that all awards and especially those connected with the Establishment are aimed at 'taming the lions' or corrupting the vulnerable. According to him recognition should come from the readers and not from a body of 'experts', some of them self-proclaimed; this is the topic dealt with and vehemently argued out, in one of the essays in the book. —'Gold fish' But this apart, Professor Vijayan is a person who has the courage of his convictions, and is not easily taunted into compromise on principles. As a critic he occupies an incomparable position. His strength of convictions, originality of analysis, rare critical insight and above all his powerful style have endowed his writings with a creative splendour. He does not believe in being prolific. But his articles invariably shed new light on the topics he chooses to deal with. This book contains seven essays. The first is an analysis of the 'literary

approaches of the old and the new critics. The myth of the infallibility of the older giants is exploded here with incredible ease. Vijayan's well-founded arguments disarm the opponents and those who come to scoff remain to praise. The essays on modern poetry and the predicament of the moderns for whom the only light is the light of their own pyre, reveals his wide knowledge of world-poetry, and his warm sensibility that vibrates in the same frequency as that of the poets and enables him to have a genuine, response to poetry. The essay on A. Balakrishna Pillai gives a comprehensive picture of the magnitude and significance of his writings and makes us realise how as a real epoch maker, his insight and foresight inaugurated a new era of progress and expansion in Malayalam. The essay on Classicism and Romanticism gives a clear picture of what these, literary terms actually signify and succeeds in enlightening confused minds that have been groping in the muddled thinking of the veterans of the past.

Among the compilations of essays by different authors the book on the works of Vylloppilli brought out by the

Desabhimani study circle is outstanding. Professor Vijayan's essay (on *Eviction*) written three decades ago adds weight to this publication.

Two political leaders who are ex-chief ministers appeared on the scene of literary criticism in 1981. They are E. M. S. Namboodiripad and C. Achutha Menon. The book by E. M. S. is *Asan and Malayalam Literature* a printed version of his Kumaran-Asan Memorial-Extension Lectures in the University of Kerala. He has sought to analyse the sociological background that influenced Kumaran Asan and has not bothered to look into the inner spiritual conflict of Asan, the poet. Thus, among all the works of Asan, the author has focussed his attention on *Duravastha* (The Adverse Situation) alone. The singular importance of the work is that it emphasises the social revolution that has to take place in the immediate future. According to the critic this commitment alone is sufficient. He is totally silent on the literary merits of Asan's other works, where there is no scope for eloquence on sociological commitment. Thus the title of the book is too ambitious and

the content too limited. It is an essay intended to present only one aspect of the poetic self. To acknowledge this limitation giving a befitting title would have been a gracious gesture.

We find a happy difference from this in the collection of essays by C. Achutha Menon. Rigid political theories have not stifled his literary sensibility. His approach also is sociological but not at the expense of aesthetic sense and sensibility. A combination of both has endowed him with a healthy literary perspective and his assessment of the works of eminent authors of the past and the present is flowless.

Thayattu Sankaran who is an acknowledged upholder of sociological criticism published a volume of selected essays in 1981. Curiously enough half of the essays do not bear even a semblance to sociological criticism. The approach on the whole is aesthetic and impressionistic. The volume won the first Kuttippuzha Award, a newly instituted award for Literary criticism in the name of the late Kuttippuzha Krishna Pillai an eminent critic of the older generation who had faith in the Marxist ideology and had worshipped freedom of thought,

with strong conviction in their competitiveness.

Another work belonging to the branch of sociological criticism is one with an enigmatic name *Paradise of Pr aj a p a t h i s* by Sri. R. Viswanathan Nair. The author is of opinion that the fundamental principles of eastern literary criticism like the Rasa theory are not contrary to the principles of Marxian criticism, but considers certain western concepts of art, literature and philosophy like cubism, sur-realism and existentialism as reactionary. Taine's theory of race-milieu-moment and the Humanist and Marxist philosophies are amalgamated and the product is considered to be the proper ground to build up the author's literary approach.

N. V. Krishna Warriar the noted poet and critic has given expression to both talents in his translation of the Tamil *Akam Songs*, published by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. There is an extensive analytical study of Sangham Literature in general and Akam songs in particular in the preface. His scholarship in Tamil and Sangham Literature combined with his poetic talents has achieved not a mere translation of the poems but a

transcreation. Both the preface and the text carry the imprints of a versatile genius.

The collected works of the late V. C. Balakrishna Panicker poet and journalist is another publication of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. The critical edition with a good study of the works as an introduction has been prepared by K. Gopala-krishnan.

The studies of ancient and medieval dramatic art along with their librettos have a place in Malayalam Literary criticism. K. P. Narayana Pisharoti who is an authority on *kutiyattam* and a renowned Sanskrit scholar has written an exhaustive study of *kutiyattam* and the librettos that were most popular among the Chakkiyars, the exponents of the art. This book has a unique place in the publications of 1981. It has to be remembered that no one in Kerala is so competent as Pisharot to write a book like this. The exponents of the art are generally not well-versed in the art of writing; and the writers and admirers of the art lack scholarship in the librettos and knowledge of the intricacies of staging this dramatic art. As the most eminent among those who possess both Pisharoti is *the*

person to write a book of this kind. His contribution is singular and deserves special recognition from all patrons and admirers of dramatic art and literature.

Kathakali, the dance-drama which is another exclusive pride of Kerala, also has enriched our literature. Professor Aimanam Krishna Kaimal has traced the influence of Kathakali in Malayalam Literature in his book with the very same title. Another contribution of his belonging to the period is a study of the 'attakkathas' (librettos of khthakali) of Irayimman Thampi whose bicentenary was celebrated recently.

Our critics do not lag behind in their attempts to study foreign literatures. Professor K. P. Sasidharan's *what is Russian Literature and why* is a study of various aspects of Russian literature. This book published by Prabhat Book house won the Soviet Land Nehru Award. *Pratibhayute Jwalagni* (The Flames of Genius) by Professor M. Krishnan Nair, brought out by the same publishing company, is a collection of studies of some of the world-famous works of various

foreign authors like Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Yasunari Kawabata, Jean Cocteau, Herman Hesse, Jorge Luis Borges etc. etc. Professor Krishnan Nair, a critic and a columnist, has taken up the task of refining the literary taste of the reading community by introducing to them great literary compositions by foreign authors. This book is one of the volumes of such collected essays.

Letters of great literary critics invariably bear the marks of their methods and principles of criticism. One such volume has been published in 1981— the letters of the late Kuttikrishna Marar. It contains several references that give a glimpse into the green-room of his criticism and also the literary scene of his period.

Collections of critical essays are many. *Manushyakam* (Humanity) by N. P. Mohamed is a miscellaneous group of essays on the short-story, the novel, the film etc; it is a bundle of serious thoughts and original ideas. *On the wings of Thought* by M. K. Valsan contains good studies of criticism, poetry, fiction, philosophic concepts etc. Valsan has a wide range of thought and perspective. With no false

pretensions he makes an earnest endeavour to enter into the spirit of the creative works in which he writes. *On the Wings of Thought* is a substantial volume. The 'wings' do carry promise to take the author to greater heights. Some of the other important collections of essays are *Anuseelanam* by Shoranur Karthikeyan, *Upasana* by Dr. V. S. Sarma, *Artharuchi* by M. Sivadasan, *Upasikkunnu dukkhatte njan* by Dr. George Irumbayam, *Visakalanam* by M. N. Karasseril, *Sahityathinte Natakavaliute* by Prof. Mavelikkara Achyuthan, *Asanum Kavyekalayam* by K. R. Thirunilattu (a study of the poems of Asan) and *Asan-kerala kalidasan* by Prof. P. Meerakutty (another study of the poems of Asan).

'*Unnathangalil, Udattangalil*' by A. P. P. Namboodiri is a collection of critical studies of twenty two important works. Though they appeared in periodicals as book-reviews, they maintain a very high standard of criticism not found in ordinary reviews. Professor Namboodiri's response to good poetry and good criticism is unreserved, warm and well-balanced. His studies are therefore illuminating. Free from prejudices and unreasonable bias, this work, as

the title 'Among the Great, Among the sublime' suggests, takes you for a pleasant trip into the thoughts of some of the greatest of our writers. Among the twenty two, one finds Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Sankaracharya, Melputtur, Vallathol, G. Sankara Kurup Joseph Mundassery, S. K. Pottekkatt and others. Almost all branches of literature are discussed here; Professor Namboodiris competence to deal with any branch is an accepted fact. Another collection of importance is *Sameekshanam* by Dr M. M. Basheer, where a variety of topics presented in an original perspective.

Before concluding I wish to emphasise the fact that critical endeavours in Malayalam have always been of a very high order. But duerecognition and importance have never been given to the same and I think the critics themselves are responsible for it. Professional rivalry among them makes them indulge in adverse criticism against each other. The year 81-82 has witnessed the worst

cockfight. The intellectual equipment and attainments of one critic cannot be identical with those of another. But the diversity will contribute to the total enrichment of criticism. The response of readers to critical writing is as lively as to creative writing. Dr. Raghavan Pillai writes: "The awareness of Malayali reader for intellectual discussions has always been of high order. Consequently foreign ideas have always been welcomed for scrutiny by the Malayali Reader... This explains the fact that the copies of the first edition of a work like *The Existentialism of sartré* (1980) were sold out in barely four months and second edition was called for". (*Indian literature*-Nov.- Dec. 1982).

The presence of such a dignified, enlightened community of readers offers a challenge that should be taken up by the critics in an equally responsive manner befitting their distinguished intellectual equipment.

# Literary Works On Celluloid

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## Cinic

The film, the second youngest of the mature arts, and those who have no television as yet, still the dearest of this century, is a visual verbal and oral medium presented before a large audience. It is essentially narrative, where a variety of characters are depicted in a series of dramatic conflicts. Movement is its vital driving force; light, shadow and colour its inevitable components.

The film and the traditional arts overlap at several points. The film bears not only perceptible traits of the drama, the novel and the short story but also of the ballet and painting. It is, in fact, a conglomeration of bits of each of these, their ratio varying according to the demands of the occasion.

Literary works and films often reveal strong similarities though the two media vastly differ from each other. (The Novel has three tenses; the film only one). Sometimes the abandonment of literary elements is so severe that the

new filmic mutation takes a totally new shape bearing scant resemblance to the original.

This is only natural since they belong to two separate genres. The literary piece is primarily a linguistic medium; the film is visual. Their governing contentions vary vastly. Their origins, audiences and modes of production are different. Literary works, produced by individual writers, appeal largely to the smaller literate circle. The film is for the masses and is produced by the conjoint cooperative efforts of several persons belonging to different artistic sectors. Literary works are marked by a conceptual form whereas the film relies largely on the perceptual form.

Since rendition of mental states cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language, in place of dreams, memories, conceptual consciousness etcetera, which only language can approximate, the film depends on spatial variations, photographic images

of physical reality and the principles of montage and editing.

The noted pioneer of Cinema, D. W. Griffith, remarked correctly that the task of the film maker is to make us see. Well that of the writer, obviously, is to make us hear, feel and sense things by the power of the written word. The difference between the two media therefore lies between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image. All the same, the fact remains that fiction has been, through the decades, the main art from which the story departments fed the anvil of film production.

Many complain that literary classics lose most of their worth while transformed into films. Instances in plenty are adduced as supporting evidence. *Madam Bovary* and *Moby Dick* are the striking examples often quoted. But then, what about the numerous literary classics that have been transformed into memorable films through the years? Do they not reduce the earlier assestion that great literary works should not be filmed to a hasty unwarranted conclusion?

"*Birth of a Nation*" the best silent film and *Gone with the wind*

the best sound film and the best all time film, are outstanding film versions of famous literary work. Numerous prestigious prize-winners have been quite successfully transformed to the screen. *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Good Earth*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *from Here to Eternity*, *The Robe*, *Quo Vadis*-these are only a few examples picked at random to disprove the highly questionable statement that great literary works never make great films.

It has also been pointed out that second rate novels (literary works) make first rate films. Lesser rated fiction may have turned out to be first class films probably because of the inherent potency of material and the brilliance of the director. The question is did all good novels become poor films? Did all second class novels become first class films? The answers is "No" in both cases

Factors deciding the success or failure of a film transmuted from a literary work are many and varied. The two important ones among these are the skill of the screenplay writer who Initially changes the literary work into the film form and the ability of the director who gives it the ultimate shape and

quality. If these two are gifted with the know-how and have imagination, then all goes well with the transformed film Version.

It is highly regrettable that screenplay writing has not been adequately developed in our country as an independent art form demanding special skill and acumen. Margaret Kennedy's opinion that "screen writing is no more a work of literature than is the recipe for a pudding" cannot be taken wholly at its face value. Apart from the tendencies of the medium the exigencies of the market also makes it difficult. The person who gives the initial-even crucial-shape to the final product has necessarily to be competently equipped for the skilled task.

A well-knit screenplay is an essential prerequisite to the making of a creditable film. The director has initially won his battle if the script is adept enough to render the director's Job easy, smooth and facile.

A good screen arisit should sense all the hidden potentialities of the material in hand and strive as a good architect to make it convenient for the actual builder to erect the structure strong, beautiful and imposing.

He should therefore be well-versed with the medium and envisage clearly the broad outlines of the director's intents and purposes. There should be perfect harmony and rapport between both.

Better results are achieved when the director writes the screenplay himself or atleast associates himself with the screenplay writer. That is, provided he is skilled in the art of screen writing as well. Possibilities of exploiting the rawmaterial to the utmost should be discussed at length and the optimum best obtainable prepared for the actual filming.

There are even knowledgeable ones who posit that the story is not that important. They contend that it is the narration that is all important; the artistic manner in which it is presented is what makes a film click. This view is certainly questionable. It has to be contended that the story is equally important. If there is nothing substantial to be said how can the eventual result succeed fully even if the narration is top class? It would be like an essay written in brilliant style but with very few relevant points. Again, if what is proposed to be stated is first

rate material the ultimate outcome will certainly be decidedly superior, granting the narration also is quite good. As long as the original nucleus is powerful, even if the mode of presentation does not turn out to be masterly, the inherent strength of the material chosen is apt to come to the film maker's rescue and prevent the finished product from becoming mediocre.

Hindi and regional films of yester years reveal that enormous strides were made in the path of progress of Indian cinema by pitching upon literary classics for film versions. Malayalam films began contributing towards better cinema only after our film makers embarked on using some of our outstanding literary pieces for the making of their films.

This sensible and worth while practice has been tried by almost all the regional film sectors of India. Premchand, Saratchandra, Tagore down to, Atre and Kamaleswar have been brought to the screen through the decades. It was C. V. Raman Pillai's famous novel *Martandavarma* that was chosen for our first Malayalam film. Appan Thampuran's *Bhootha Rayar* followed suit,

though unfortunately the attempt proved abortive. It was Thakazhi's noted *Chemmeen* that won for the Malayalam cinema its first ever President's Gold Medal. Incidentally Kannada cinema's blossoming up, Suddenly and gloriously, was mainly due to successive filmisations of outstanding literary works ranging from *Samskara*, *Vamsavriksha* etc. to *Kadu*, *chomana Dudi*, *Pallavi* and the like.

The mere fact that filmisations of literary classics have not come up to expectations does not necessarily warrant any to point an accusing finger at the literary piece or at its unfortunate author. Causes for such failures have to be sought elsewhere. Survey in this regard is being confined strictly to the Malayalam screen hence forward, lest the discussion become inordinately lengthy. That too is being further restricted to some significant or characteristic works.

It is only meet that this assessment is begun with Chandu Menon's *INDULEKHA* our first and widely acclaimed novel. Kalanilayam Theatres filmed the *Indulekha* they had dramatised, as it was on the stage, sans star cast and

eschewing outdoors totally. Sreekala, a second rate artiste, was allotted the all important part of the heroine; and she naturally messed it up. Raj Mohan's Madhavan was insipid. Cherusseri was puerile. Aravindaksha Menon's Soori Namboodiripad and Sankaradi's Kasuthedam were fairly good. A mere photographed play; and dismally poor at that!

Kesavadev's *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter) was directed by Sethumadhavan and featured Satyan as Pappu and Kaviyur Ponnamma as Kalyani. Both the artistes did well. Still one felt that, on the whole proper Justice was not meted out to the celebrated original. Dev's *Rowdy* was not much. His *Swapnam* looked almost written with an eye to get it filmed eventually. And it was! The film version was passably good.

Some of Thakazhi's novels luckily got kinder treatment. *Chemmeen* directed by Ramu Kariat made history by bagging unprecedented top laurels. His *Anubhavangal Palichakal* also was good. Satyan gave a sparkling performance as the rough-hewn lead character. "*Enippadikal*" (The Ladder) was not at all scathed. However Thakazhi's best novel

*Randidangazhi* (Two Measures of Rice) suffered most. The film version failed to capture its spirit and did not succeed in retaining any elements of the excellence of the original.

Uroob, who set the new trend for whole some purposeful films in Malayalam through the illustrious and Popular *Neelukuyil* (The Blue cuckoo) had the misfortune to see his great classic *Ummachu* become only Just above average fare despite P. Bhaskaran being at the helm of its production. The Cine Version scarcely did adequate Justice even to the great principal characters Uroob's "*Mindapennu*" and '*Aniyara*' did not fare very well. Parappurath has been singularly fortunate in so much as most of his good novels escaped getting mauled when made into films. *Ninamaninha Kalpadukal* (Blood stained Footprints) directed by N. N. Pisharody and *Adyakiranangal* (The first Rays) directed by P. Bhaskaran were both fairly good films. His magnum opus *Ara Nazhika Neram* (Half an Hour) produced by M. O. Joseph emerged as an absorbingly interesting Malayalam film under Sethumadhavan's competent baton. The great Kottarakkara

made Kunhenachan truly memorable, as great as in the novel. Making the errant Deenamma end her life was a change that did not heighten the films tragic tone. *Pani Theeratha Veedu* (The unfinished house) also remained unscathed.

S. K. Pottekkatt was not wrong when he stated that scant Justice had generally been done to his works when filmed. His *Nadan Premam* (Rustic Love) was not a success on the screen. His *Pulliman* (The Spotted Deer) fared better, though the rare lyrical charm of the short story was never fully projected. How true that "while the written story discourses the film must picture"! *Moodupadam* (The Veil) happens to be the best of the film versions of Pottekkatt's works.

Vaikom Muhamed Basheer's fascinating *Balayakalasakhi* (Childhood Sweetheart) scarcely retained any vestige of the exquisite charm of the novel when filmed despite the author himself doing the screenplay. "*Mucheettu Kalikkarante Makal* (The Card Sharper's Daughter) also was nothing much of consequence. But his short story *Neela Velicham* (Blue Light) ably scripted by Basheer

himself emerged : into the creditable *Bhargavi Nilayam* with Madhu doing well in the lead role and Vincent directing it imaginatively.

Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's *Yakshi* was fairly attractive. His "*Ponni*" was medio erc. His *Odukkam Thudakam* was nearly a sad failure. Among Perumbadavam Sreedharan's novels turned into films *Abhayam* was easily the better of the lot. As regards G. Vivekanandan only *Kallichellamma* emerged successful with Sheela memorable as the sparkling heroine Films like "*Arikari Ammu* were miserable. Pamman's *Adimakal* was fairly engaging C. Radhakrishnan's *Agni* scripted and Directed by the author was impressive to some extent, especially with Balan K. Nair's sterling renoition of the key role. V. T. Nandakumar's *Randu Penkuttikal*, with a lesbian theme, was fairly well done by Mohan without any Vulgarly. Vettoor Raman Nair's "*Jeevikkan Marannu Poya Sthree*", (The Woman Who Forgot to Live) N. P. Muhamed's. *Maram*; (The tree) and Valsala's "*Nellu*" (Rice), are some of the other fairly good filmisations of our good stories

though none of them were as good as their literary counterparts. Madampu Kunhikuttan's '*Aswathamavu*', Padma Rajan's '*Prayanam*' are literary works which did not lose much of their strength and attraction in their film versions. Madampu Kunhikuttan's '*Bhrashtu*' however could not deliver the goods.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair's '*Asura Vith*' (Demon's seed) did not come up to expectations. But his '*Iruttinte Athmavu*' (The Soul of Darkness) was fine with PremNasir scaling great emotional heights as the demented Velayudhan. Directed by P. Bhaskaran it missed the gold medal only narrowly. M. T. made ample amends later through contesting his short story '*Pallivalum Chilambum*' into the exquisite '*Nirmalyam*' and bagged the elusive gold Medal, doing the screenplay and direction himself. His first ever script was '*Murappennu*' from his own '*Snehathinte Mukhangal*'. Its thumping success under Vincent's direction augured well for him and he has not looked back since then. His '*Kuttiedathy*' and '*Idavazhiyile Poocha Minda Poocha*' and '*Bandhanam*' had short comings; but were good enough all the same. His

*Oppol* enabled Sethumadhavan to stage a successful comeback and gave Balan K. Nair coveted Bharat Award.

Two of our noteworthy poems also found their way to the silver screen; *Karuna* and *Ramanan*. Unfortunately, both were very far from satisfactory. It was nothing short of sin to disfigure these literary gems so callously, obviously for commercial benefits. The avaricious infidel has no moral right to trespass into and pollute sacrosanct precincts.

Many of the shortcomings of our films can be traced to weak, ill-knit, incompetent screenplays written by over enthusiastic aspirants to fame and easy lucre who are not properly initiated into the arduous task. Truly dependable class Malayalam screenplay writers are only a few in number. M. T. is easily the best among them. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, another master of the art, has been doing only screenplays for his own directorial vehicles. Padmarajan is also good. So is S. L. Puram Sadanandan, to a great extent. These are decidedly not very many more who could be rightly included in this choice band.

A good many of our successful plays have been made

into films. Not all of them have become, screen successes, mainly because, those responsible for the mutation were belabouring under the misapprehension that films were not much more than lensed plays. The colour film version by T. R. Sundaram of the award winning Muslim play "*Kandam Becha coat*" by the late Mohamed Yousuf was not bad. Thopil Bhasi many plays that have reached our silver screen the most outstanding is easily *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (The Prodigal son) ably directed by Ramu Kariat using Bhasi's own screenplay. The film bagged a regional award and was highlighted by the unforgettable performance of the inimitable Satyan. Film versions of other plays by Bhasi were not brilliant; neither were they unpaletable. K. T. Mohamed,

a good play wright, could see his *Kadalpalam* fairly salvaged on the screen; but not so his *Srishthi* C. N. Srikantan Nair's goodplay *Kanchana Sitha* remained only a mere opology for Aravindan to weave his own version of the tale.

The process of transforming our worthwhile novels, short stories and plays into films continues unabated, of course, with the usual attendant ups and downs, as before. Sadly, the ups are fewer, the downs outnumbering them often. Some of our good literary works, it has been seen have certainly made good films. where ever they have failed or not quite come up to the mark, as in many cases, the fault has not been mainly of the material chosen! It has been either inapt script or poor direction

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# Agnisakshi

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M. Shanmukha Das

[Malayalam Novel by Lalithambika Antharjanam published by S. P. C. S. Kottayam. 6th Edition 1980 English version by vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, Publishe by Kerala Sahitya Akademi Distributors: Orient Longman Ltd.]

One of the most lyrical as well as vivid talents in twentieth century Malayalam fiction is Lalithambika Antharjanam (born 1909). Known primarily for her remarkably sensitive short stories, Lalithambika is the author of just one novel "Agnisakshi".

It is extraordinary enough for a writer to turn to the novel form when one has already moved into one's late sixties; especially if one is temperamentally and congenitally a writer of short stories. Inevitably, reviewers and novel-gazers were all the more astonished when the resultant novel turned out to be very, very unlike any novel they happened to be familiar with. They expected a fairly massive production, or may be a medium sized compact work saturated with social realism and a measure of controlled lyricism,

Antharjanam's novel is rich in social realism and is lyrical too but the manner in which she blended them - or more accurately, counterpointed them - is so unusual so strange, so unprecedented that even sympathetic critics were non-plussed in a superlative degree. Several of them tries to assert their infallibility by claiming that 'Agnisakshi' was no novel at all - that is possessed neither the requisite length, nor the structural unity that a 'true' novel can 'hardly' dispense with! They conveniently forgot that the novel is the most Protean of literary forms.

Critical thick-headedness notwithstanding 'Agnisakshi' has fared very well indeed. Novel or no novel this most unusual masterpiece ostensibly dealing with "the fortunes of a Namboodiri family in Kerala" and rich in "glimpses of our

Namboodiri society continued to be very much a closed society right into the third decade of this century). The heroine of 'Agnisakshi' however, is a twice 'twice-born figure! Thethikkutty—that is her name is, to begin with the sprightly sister of P. K. P. Namboothiri. This worthy gentleman is a social reformer and something of a revolutionary; he will have nothing to do with the soul-killing imbecilities of the general run of custom-chained Namboodiri folk and Thethikkutty is very much his sister this not in the merely blood-relation sense.

In her first 'Incarnation'; (that is in her second 'birth') she is not Thethi but Devaki, i. e. Devaky Antharjanam of the redoubtable Manampally Illom; she has become the life partner of the Unni Namboodiri of that glorious Namboodiri household. But this elevation is plain hell to her, as Unni Namboodiri has no turn or inclination for his wife. Ultimately she escapes and seeks refuge in the movement for the reform of her community and then in Mahatma Gandhi's Vardha Ashram. Here her name is Devi Bahen and she dedicates her life to the cause of social progress and service to the nation. Unfortunately she is

unable to abide in this second incarnation for long. The day dawns when India is freed of foreign rule and yesterday's freedom-fighters turn into grabbers after power and wealth. Pained beyond words, disillusioned to the core, Devi Bahen quits the Ashram. When next seen, she is Sumitrananda Yogini, a Sanyasini who has given up all ties with the world. The entire story is narrated in flashback—the first fifteen chapters from the viewpoint of Mrs. Thankam Nair, a 'Nair' cousin of the heroine's husband (Namboodiris were not averse to having Nair sex-partners on a permanent basis, despite the atrocious 'custom' that forbade them even to 'touch their Nair Children') and the last three chapters from the viewpoint of the heroine herself. Mrs. Nair is a sophisticated, yet intensely warm-hearted, lady. So fond is she of her long-lost 'sister-in-law' that she has even christened her little granddaughter Devaki. The most unexpected, heartwarming emotional meeting between the 'worldly' woman and the dead-to-the-world woman is handled with marvellous artistic skill; realism is there all the time, but this does not preclude judicious use of myth. The

opening paragraphs of 'Agnisakshi' resplendent with evocations of Mother India's cultural heritage indeed have a most profound effect on the reader. Mrs. Thankam Nair and Sumitrananda Yogini are reunited (temporarily in fact, eternally in spirit) on the banks of the Ganges. And Himavant is so near, so tangibly present. The River as well as the Mountain assume a soldier reality than the fleeting human actors; nay, the human actors become part and parcel of the Eternal River and the Eternal Mountain.

She was ensured in the matted locks of the Lord of Kailasa. A mere speck ..... a dream ..... frozen Hundreds of years passed by ..... thousands of years ..... After the lapse of a few yugas, the voice of a saintly king crying "please come ..... come down ..... Redeem my ancestors from their sins. Give us life.

The flame of his penance rose upto *Kailasa* ..... melting ..... moving ... .. overflowing ... .. the soul of man in agony, calling ..... Responding to the call, she flowed down—From the heavens to the netherworld. From the heights to the depths.

What a gorgeous fall it was. Like a thousand broken crystals strewn, foaming, she ran forward ..... rather flowed..... the gurgling sound, whispering ..... coming ..... coming ..... I have come ....."

This reviewer experienced extreme delight in the opening invocation in Agnisakshi quoted above. He does not in the least doubt readers of all hues will take it to their hearts. The English translation of 'Agnisakshi' is by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, herself a fervent admirer of Antharjanam's fictional art (Vasanthi Sankaranarayan's rendering is more 'recreation' than a 'translation'. Her loving care and devotion have proved eminently fruitful. The English version does give us the feel of an 'Indian novel' in the full sense of the term). The absolute oppositeness of the Bhagirathi myth deftly woven into a saga of social realism just cannot be overpraised. A lyric poet (in verse) of no mean talent, and widely admired as a teller of Puranic tales, Antharjanam the novelist is here seen 'humanising Goddess Ganga, literally metamorphosing her into a 'human mother.' In addition the penance and the razors's-edge experiences of the heroine

are indirectly and more the less effectively - implied in this invocation.

Myth is intergral to this novel and very much of realistic too! The God of Fire is physically as well as metaphorically present in most of the central situations for example in the scene where Sumitrananda Yogini throws the 'thali' into the fire (The 'thali' is a small pendant symbolising marriage) She, the yogini, the Holy Mother, had at one time been a bride a coy ardent girl madly longing for her man's tenderness; she had failed to get it from him; probably he had thought sex a sin. In bitter frustration, she had half-heartedly given up the world, had become a disciple of Gandhiji and had sent the 'thali' back to her husband. Now that husband is dead (her worldly cousin has 'chanced' to meet her and told her so; she herself has tasted perfect blin and 'isolation' for so many years) her cousin places the thali in her right palm

Then without any change in her facial expression, she placed it in the fire: 'O Agni! This belongs to you and not to me.'

Like the thin stands of worldliness, the thread burnt

itself up soon. The heated gold glowed and shone. The Holy Mother took out that burning hot metal fearlessly with her bare, slender long finger she dipped it in the Holy water of the vessel and chilled it. She placed it in her palm and rubbing it vigorously made it shining. Then placing it in the palm of the girl (Thankam's little granddaughter) who was as beautiful as the dawn and as pure as the flowers of worship said:

"Child! Take this. This is pure gold. Don't adulterate it. Melt it, beat it and reshape it into whatever your generation deems fit. Never try to lessen its quality. May you have peace, peace!

The author then tells us that at that moment the Holy Mother seemed to be 'perpetuating the ultimate Being as though she was merging with the (ultimate) Brahmin. In that realm, there is no sorrow, no desire, no frustration."

Hindus believe that the God Agni (Fire) presides over all marriage. (hence the very title of the novel Agni - Fire Sakshi - witness). The chastest women, so goes vedic, belief has four husbands. The girls parents give her to the God

Soma, Soma gives her to Gandharva, Gandharva passes her on to Agni, and Agni gladly yields her to the human male for whom she is destined by the Gods As Aurobindo says:

"Agni is said to be all the other gods, he is the one that becomes; at the same time he is said to contain all the gods in himself; as the nave of a wheel contains the spokes, he is the One that contains all; and yet as Agni he is described as separate deity, one who helps all the other exceeds them in force and knowledge yet is inferior to them in cosmic position and is employed by them as messenger priest and worker-the creator of the world and father, he is yet the son born of our works he is, that is to say, the original and manifested indwelling Self or Divine the one that inhabits all.

(The Life Divine P. 145)

It is Agni and none else that transfigures frail Thetikutty into the Holy Mother to whom the whole of humanity has verily become 'son-daughter'

"Son, my son!"

The future generations must have heard this cry

"Mother!"

"Son!"

“Mother!”

“Son”

All the creatures the living the stationary must have heard this cry.....”

This passage practically constituting the ‘conclusion’ of the novel, reminds us of the most famous sloka in *Srimad Bhagavatham* Vyasa has lost his ‘human’ son Suka, and in the process has gained all beings (animate and inanimate) as children to himself. So has Sumitrananda Yogini (an actual person whom Lalithambika knew personally but universalised by the novelists vision) as glorious a symbol of Indian Mother hood as has ever been imagined. Rarely have reality and vision achieved a more meaningful marriage. The novel comes off very well in the scenes embodying the suffocating nightmarish atmosphere of Malayali (especially Namboodiri) social life half a century ago, as well as in the scenes that breathe the profound peace achieved and communicated by the yogini whose rebirth it celebrates with such convincingness. “O Fire, thou movest within, having knowledge

of book the Births” says a Rig Vedic hymn, and ‘Agnisakshi’ makes us see how.

The novel is not without minor faults: there are hitches in the narrative, and some of the characters are not adequately realised. By and large Antharjanam’s characters even minor ones like Mad Aunt and the even more eccentric Water Imp Grannie—have ample life, vitality and complex force.

In his introduction to the English translation of *Agnisakshi*, the late K. P. S. Menon has beautifully summed up its excellence: “When one reads the book, one is carried away by the skilful unfolding of the plot and the beauty of the style. At the same time one gets some idea of the serenity-cum-futility of old-fashioned codes of dharma in a fast-changing century. One also gets glimpses of our heroic struggle for national liberation—liberation not merely from the clutches of foreign rule but from the bondage of native custom. Above all there lingers in one’s mind the halo of the heroine who, to use of lovely metaphor from the Gita, shines like “a flame in a windless pot which will not flicker”.

## Venattadihal

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Modern scholars of Malayalam and its literary history generally know of only two saints who had sung devotional hymns, namely Seraman Perumal Nayanar (c. 700 A. D.) and Kulasekhara Alvar (8th century A. D.) from the modern Kerala area. Both of them hailed from the royal dynasties which ruled parts of Kerala (then part of Tamilsham) in the respective periods. The songs of Seraman in 3 poems. (131 verses, in 1055 lines) are included in the 11th Book of the Saiva Canon. The songs of Kulasekhara Alvar, known as Perumal Tirumoli, (105 verses in 420 lines) are grouped in the 1st Thousand of the Viashnava Canon, the *Nalayira Prabandham*.

But most scholars do not know about a third poet in the Saiva canon who hailed from the area of the modern Kerala state, in the 10th century. He is Venattadihal, a saintly poet who wrote ten verses set to music, included in the 9th Book of the Saiva Canon. Venattadihal was a member of

ruling dynasty. The title *adhihal* indicates this. His personal name is not known, Venad is the South Travancore region and it is referred to in the commentaries on Tamil grammatical treatises, like *Tolkappiyam* and *Nannul* as one of the 12 regions on the periphery of Sentamil nadu. The inscriptions of the Cholas mention the rulers of Venad as Venattadihal, from the 12th century onwards.

This Venattadihal seems to have had some physical ailment (verse 4 of his song) to get rid of which he went to pray at the Nataraja Temple of Chidambaram Prince Gandaraditta (later King Gandraditta Chola 950-957 A. D.) was in the city and recognizing the poetic talents of this Venad Prince, he suggested to him to compose a song on Lord Nataraja. Adihal sang a song of ten verses and presumably he was cured of his ailment. We may also notice here the cordial relationship between the Venad Prince and the Chola Prince.

The poem of Venattadihal is the 21st poem in the 9th Book having 29 poems. The poems are all called *Tiru-Isaiapa*, the Book of Sacred Songs. Venattadihal's poem also is a sacred musical poem. It is significant that this poem is placed next to the poem of Gandaradittar himself, which is the 20th poem.

In each of the ten verses, Adihal employs a proverb to emphasize the point that although he might be under serving of any mercy at the

hands of his master, the Lord who is impartial would bestow His grace on him also. All the verses portray in moving language the Dance of Nataraja at Chidambaram (Tillai). Seraman Perumal had sung two poems on Nataraja at Chidambaram and one poem on Siva enshrined at Tiru Arur, the favourite place of his friend St. Sundaramurti, who loose the title Aruran (the Saint of Arur). The poems indicate the great devotion and veneration in which the saintly poets of the West Coast held Lord Nataraja.

Tiruchitramblam P. O,  
Mayuram Taluk, Tamil Nadu.

M. Arunachalam

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# Akademi News and Literary Notes

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## **An interview with the President**

Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai President and Shri. Pavanan Secretary of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi visited Giani Zail Sing, President of India on September 13, at Ernakulam. The varied activities of the Akademi, its role in promoting literary and cultural activities, fostering inter-regional understanding and generally helping the cultural integration of our country were all explained to the President of India.

## **T. K. C. Vaduthala**

Sri. T. K. C. Vaduthala has been nominated as the member of the General Council of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi by the Government.

## **Akademi honours British linguist**

The Kerala Sahitya Akademi has decided to confer its fellowship on Dr. R. E. Asher, British linguist and writer for the meritorious services rendered by him his luminous interpretation of Malayalam literature and Kerala culture to the English speaking world. Dr.

Asher has devoted more than two decades to the study and interpretation of Malayalam Language and literature. He has published numerous essays on these and translated some outstanding Malayalam literary works into English. This is the first time the Akademi is conferring its fellowship on a non-Keralite.

## **Research Scholarships**

Shri. Perunna K. N. Nair, Shri C. K. Moosad and Shri P. S. Warriar have been selected by the Akademi for its research scholarships for the year 1983-84. The research scholarship is of the value of Rs. 500/-per month.

## **Correspondence Course**

A correspondence course in literature is being conducted in Malayalam by the Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishat. The course was inaugurated by Shri K. Karunakaran Chief Minister of Kerala in the month of July, Sri. C. P. Sreedharan, President of Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishat Presided over the function.

**K. Surendran SPCS President**

Shri. K. Surendran one of outstanding novelists in Malayalam has been elected President of SPCS (Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society).

**Workshop for Senior Journalists**

A three-day workshop was held at Calicut on October 15, 16 and 17 for the Senior Journalists of Kerala. The Workshop, under the auspices of the Kerala Press Akademi, was inaugurated by Shri. K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister of Kerala. Shri. T. K. G. Nair, chairman of the Press Akademi Presided over the function.

**Kunjan Raja**

Shri. P. Kunjan Raja has been appointed Secretary of the Kerala Kalamandalam. He succeeds Shri. P. Chitharan Namboodiripad.

**Birth Centenary of Malayalam Drama**

The birth Centenary of Malayalam drama was celebrated at Trivandrum under the auspices of KPAC on 13, & 14 the November 82. There was a symposium on the growth of Malayalam drama and its current trends. Shri. Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair presented the main paper. Sarvashri

Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, O.N.V Kurup K. T. Mohammed Kaniapuram Ramachandran and P. N. Damodaran Pillai participated in the discussion that followed. The celebrations were concluded with the performance of the drama *Ningalenne Communistakki* (You Made, Me a Communists)

**Workshop for Street Drama**

A three-day workshop for 'Street Drama' was held at S. N. V. Sadan, Alappat in Trichur Dist. in the 2nd week Nov. 82 under the joint auspices of Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi and Chazhoor Darsana Vedi

**Documentary on****K. P. Kesava Menon**

Shri. K. P. Udayabhanu, music director of All India Radio, has decided to produce a documentary film about the late K. P. Kesava Menon who was a towering personality in the social and cultural life of Kerala. The script and direction of this film will be done by Shri. M. T. Vasudevan Nair.

**Film on Basheer**

Myth Makers—a newly formed Youth organization is producing a film on Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, one of India's outstanding novelists. In this film *An Artist in search of an Artist*

by name all the characters in the novels of Basheer will be revealed through the illustrations of the famous artist Namboodiri. The script and the direction of the film are by M. A. Rahiman.

**South Indian languages should be taught**

A meeting of the Hindi Sahityamandal held recently at Ernakulam has asked the concerned authorities to arrange necessary steps to teach South Indian languages in the North Indian states.

### Manuscript Library

A manuscript Library has started functioning in the Malayalam Department of Calicut University.

### Irayimman Thampi Memorial

The Government of Kerala has decided to install an art theatre at Trivandrum to mark the 200th birthday of Irayimman Thampi, a poet laureate of Kerala.

### CULT

The inaugural function of Calicut University Little Theatre (CULT) was held at the School of Drama, Trichur. Vice-Chancellor Prof. K. A. Jaleel inaugurated the theatre. Prof.

G. Sankara Pillai, Director of the School presided over the function.

### The best Film

The Malayalam Film *Oridathoru Phayalvan* has been selected as the best film in the Asian Film Festival. The script and direction of this film are by Shri P. Padmarajan, a noted writer in Malayalam.

### Asan Memorial Lectures

This year's Kumaran Asan Memorial Lectures were delivered by Prof. G. Kumara Pillai on October 13, 14 and 15 at the University senate Hall, Trivandrum. The function was conducted under the auspices of the Kerala University.

### Death anniversary of Mundassery

The 5th death anniversary of Prof. Joseph Mundasseri the eminent critic was observed on October 24, at the Mundasseri Memorial, Trichur. Shri C. Achutha Menon presided over the function and Dr. M. Leelavathy, Shri Pavanam, Prof. R. Narendra Prasad Shri P. Chithran Namboodiripad, Shri P. K. Kunhuvareed, and Shri K. Chandrasekharan spoke on the occasion.

**102nd birthday of Kuttamath**

The 102nd birthday of poet Kuttamath was celebrated on September 27 at Kasaragod. Shri Pavanam, Secretary, Kerala Sahitya Akademi inaugurated the celebrations and Shri Melath Narayanan Nambiar Presided over it. There was a Symposium led by Shri P. Appukkuttan on the cultural crisis in the country. The concluding session held in the after-noon was presided over by Shri C. P. Sreedharan, and the Kuttamath Memorial Speech was delivered by Prof. O. N. V. Kurup.

**Museum for Classical arts**

The Kerala Government has decided to open a museum for Classical arts at Kottarakkara Palace. The name of the proposed museum is 'Kottarakkara Thampuram Memorial Museum of Classical Arts.'

**104th birthday of Vallathol**

The 104th birthday of poet Vallathol was celebrated on November 16 at Kalamandalam. Kerala Minister Shri C. M. Sundaram inaugurated the function. Sarvashri Vylloppilli Sreedhara Menon, M. R. B. M. S. Menon, P. Chithran Namboodiripad and Prof. P. G. Purushothaman Pillai spoke.

**Memorial for Shatkala Govinda Marar**

A memorial for the great musician, Shatkala Govinda Marar will be instituted at his birth place Ramamangalam, Moovattupuzha.

**SPCS Awards**

The 1981 SPCS (Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society) Awards were distributed in a public meeting held on July 11 at Kottayam. This year's winners are: Prof. G. Kumara Pillai (Poetry), Thoppil Bhasi (Drama), Dr. K. M. George (Essays), Prof. M. K. Sanu (Biography) and Vilasini (Novel).

**Edasseri Award Presented**

The 1982 Edasseri Award has been given to Shri N. K. Desam for his collection of poems *ULLEKHAM*. Instituted in memory of Edessery Govindan Nair eminent poet, the Award amount is Rs. 2000.

**Karunakaran Nambiar Memorial Award & Lecture**

This year's Karunakaran Nambiar Award has been given to Fr. Vincent Alappat for his 'Aakasakkappal'

**Critic's Circle Award.**

Prof. G. Sankara Pillai and Shri Kavalam Narayanan

Panikkar received the Critic's Circle Award instituted by the Newspaper Critics Association of West Bengal. The Award is on account of the valuable services rendered by these dramatists to Malayalam drama.

### Vayalar Award

The prestigious Vayalar Award for the year was given to Prof. O. N. V. Kurup for his collection of poems *Uppu*. The award was presented to the poet in a colourful function held at Asan Memorial School, Madras by Shri C. Achuthamenon, President of the Vayalar Award Committee, on 27th October. Dr. Sukumar Azhicode presided over the function.



O. N. V. Kurup

The Award instituted in memory of Vayalar Ramavarma carries a cash prize of Rs. 25,000.

An outstanding poet in Malayalam, Professor O. N. V. Kurup is the recipient of numerous literary awards and prizes, like the Central Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, SPCS Benefit Fund Award, Soviet Land Award. He has received several times the state Award for the best film songs in Malayalam.

### The best radio feature

*Minnaminungukal* a feature written by Shri Vinayan has received the first prize for the best radio feature in Malayalam on family planning. The

competition was conducted by Family Planning Foundation of India.

### Sakthi Award

The 1982 Sakthi Award has been given to Shri C. V. Sreeraman for his collection of short-stories *Vasthuhara*. The Award has been instituted in memory of this well-known writer Cherukad.

### Soviet Land Award

Shri K. P. Sasidharan, professor of English, Maharaja's college, Ernakulam was given the Soviet Land Nehru Award of 1982 for his book.

### Vennikkulam Award

The 1982 Vennikkulam Award was given to Kattakkada

T G. Das for his collection of poems '*Kattalanmar*'. The award has been instituted in memory of poet Vennikkulam Gopalakurup.

### Kairali Children's Book Trust Award

The 1982 Kairali Children's Book Trust Award was presented to Shri K. P. Babudas for his play *Sandarsanam*.

### Abraham Vadakkal Award

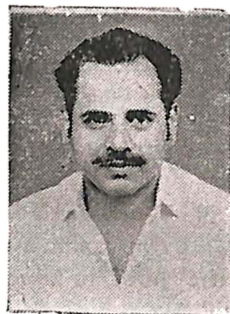
The 1979 Abraham Vadakkal Award was presented to Shri. Kainikkara Kumarapillai for his '*Natakeeyam*' the 1980 Award to Dr. K. M. George for his '*Anwesha nanga / Padhanangal*' and the 1981 Award to Sri. A. P. Udayabhanu for his '*Ente Manorajyangal*'. This is an award for outstanding essays in Malayalam.

### Trichur Rotary Club Award

The 1981-82 Trichur Rotary Club Award was given to Shri Therampil Sankunni Menon for his valuable services in the field of Malayalam language and literature. Shri Therampil Sankunni Menon is the honorary editor of the *Masikasoochi* (bibliography of journals) of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Awards for V. K. N and Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai

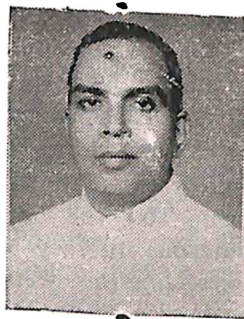
The 1982 Central Sahitya Akademi Awards were declared for 22 works in Indian languages.



V. K. N.

Shri V. K. N the well-known Malayalam short story writer and novelist won the award for his collection of short stories in Malayalam *Payyante Kathakal*.

Dr. P. K. Narayana Pillai, the famous critic and Sanskrit scholar was given the Award for his Sanskrit epic *Viswabhanu*.



Sri. P. K. Narayana Pillai

### Unveiling of Portraits

The portraits of the well-known writers V. T. Bhattathiripad Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair and Parapurath were unveiled at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi on October 24 by Shri. M. R. B., Dr. K. M. George and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai respectively.

### Birth Centenary of MRKC



Dr. Sukumar Azhicode inaugurating the Symposium

The MRKC (Chenkulathu Cheriya Kunhirama Menon) birth centenary was celebrated on October 15th under the joint auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Kerala Press Akademi. The venue of the programme was Maharani Auditorium, Calicut.

Dr. Sukumar Azhicode inaugurated the programme, and Shri Moorkoth Kunhappa presided. Prof. A. P. P. Namboodiri presented a paper on 'The works of 'MRKC' and Shri V. M. Korath on MRKC

and contemporary journalism.' In the discussion that followed Dr. M. M. Basheer, Dr. George Irumbayam, Shri P. V. K. Nedungadi and Prof. Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai participated

The valedictory meeting held under the presidentship of Shri T. K. G. Nair, Chairman of the Press Akademi was inaugurated by Prof. S. Guptan Nair. Shri Thikkotiyan, Shri R. M. Manakkalath, Shri Theruvathu Raman were the main speakers on the occasion.

### 200th Birthday Celebrations of Irayimman Thampi



Sri. R. Ramachandran Nair Special Secretary, Cultural Dept. Govt. of Kerala  
inaugurating the 200th birth day Celebrations of Irayimman Thampi.

The 200th birthday of the great poet Irayimman Thampi was celebrated at many places in Kerala, and the grandest function held was at Trichur on October 17th under the joint auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi and Kerala Kalamandalam. The venue of the function was the auditorium of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi, Trichur.

The seminar on the life and works of Irayimman Thampi was inaugurated by Sri. R. Ramachandran Nair, I. A. S. Sri. Olappamanna, Chairman of the Kalamandalam presided. Guru Gopinath presented a paper on 'The performing elements in the Attakkathas of Irayimman Thampi,' Shri Kavalam Narayana Panicker on the 'musical elements in the Attakkathas of Irayimman

Thampi' and Shri Ambalapuzha Ramavarma on the 'literary elements in the Attakkathas of Irayimman Thampi'.

The public meeting was presided over by Shri C. Achutha menon and inaugurated by Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. Prof. O. N. V. Kurup, Prof. S. Guptan Nair, and Prof. V. Vijayan were the main speakers.

Shri Aymanam Krishnakaimal a scholar who has prepared popular editions of three

Attakkathas of I r a y i m m a n Thampi was honoured at the meeting Shri P. B h a s k a r a n Chairman, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi presented a Ponnada to him.

At night there were musical concerts and stage shows of Mohiniattom, Kathakali etc.

Kerala Sahitya A k a d e m i Published a new edition of I r a y i m m a n T h a m p i ' s Attakkathakal in connection with the bi-centenary celebration.

### j Subrahmania Bharaty Birth Centenary Celebrations

The birth centenary of the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi was celebrated under the auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi on November 21st at Kerala Sahitya Akademi Auditorium.

The poets' meet was held in this connection at 2 p.m. under the presidentship of Sri.Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon and a large number of well known poets of all generation's participates in its.

The public meeting held at 5 p.m. was presided over by

Sri. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai; president of the Akademi and inaugurated by Sri P.Bhaskaran, Chairman of Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi. Dr. K. M. George Vice-President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi welcomed the gathering and Shri O.N.V.Kurup and Sri. T K. C. Vatuthala were the main speakers on the occasion.

Malayalam book *Subramania Bharathi: Biography and selected poems* prepared jointly by Sri. P a v a n a n and Sri. S. Rameshan Nair



Shri Thakazhy Sivasankara Pillai delivering his presidential address in the meeting.

for the Akademi was released at the meeting by Shri Babu Paul I. A. S., who presented a copy to Prof. Nadkarni, Kannada novelist.

Sri. Pavanan proposed the vote of thanks.

After the function there was the recitation of some of Bharathi's poems under the auspices of All India Radio, Trichur.

### Kuttippurath Kesavan Nair Birth Centenary

The birth centenary of Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair, famous Malayalam poet, was celebrated on 19th December at Ernakulam Sahitya Parishath Hall under the joint auspices of

Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishath. The symposium held in this connection was presided over by Sahityanipunan T. M. Chummar, and inaugurated by

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon. Prof. A. P. P. N a m b o o d i r i, Sri. Chemmanam C h a c k o presented papers and Dr. M. Leelavathy, Prof. S. K. Vasanthan and Sri. P. K. Deever participated in the discussion that followed.

The poets meet held at 2.30 p. m. was inaugurated by Prof. G. Kumara Pillai. Sri. Ponjikkara Rafi presided.

In the concluding session Shri. C. P. Sreedharan, Chairman of the Samastha Kerala Sahitya

Parishat was in the chair. Shri Vaikkom Chandrasekharan Nair inaugurated the function. Prof. P. S Velayudhan, Prof. M. Achuthan, Prof. Mathew Ulakamthara and Shri Nandan spoke on the occasion. A collection of poems of Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair was released by Shri Vaikkom Chandra Sekharan Nair at the meeting. Shri Pavanam welcomed the audience earlier and Shri P. K. Ramakrishna Pillai proposed a vote of thanks.

### Commemoration of S. K. Pottekkatt

A function to commemorate the late S. K. Pottekkatt was held under the auspices of Kerala Sahitya Akademi on 24th October at the auditorium of the Akademi.

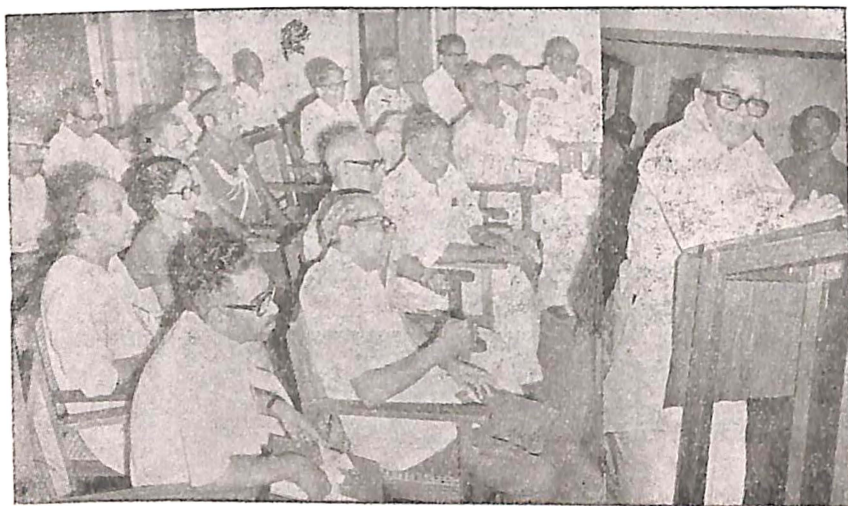
The opening session of the commemoration was a seminar on S. K. Pottekkatt and his contributions to Literature. Before the seminar there was a recitation of musical renderings of some of Pottekkatt's poems by the students of Vimala College Trichur. Shri Thakazhi

Sivasankara Pillai presided over the function. Shri N. P. Mohammed presented a paper on the subject 'S. K. - the man', Dr. M. Leelavathy on 'The poems of S. K.', Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai on 'Travelogues of S. K.', prof. K. P. Saratchandran on 'The novels of S. K.', and Prof R. Narendra Prasad on 'The short stories of S. K.'

In the public meeting that was held at 5 p. m. Dr. Sukumar Azhicode delivered the commemoration speech.

## Silver Jubilee Celebrations Concluding Phase

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Sri P. Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala inaugurating the Concluding function of the Silver jubilee celebrations of the Akademi.

The Silver Jubilee Celebration of Kerala Sahitya Akademi which was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Indiragandhi on 10-11-80 came to a conclusion with various functions held at the Akademi Auditorium on 11th and 12th December 1982.

The opening session of the function was inaugurated by Sri P Ramachandran, Governor of Kerala, at 5. p m. on 11th December. Dr V. K. Narayana Menon Chairman of the Central Sangeetha Nataka Akademi

presided. Sri. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi delivered the welcome speech. A concise report of the activities of the Akademi in connection with the Silver Jubilee Celebrations was presented by Shri Pavanam, Secretary of the Akademi. Dr. K. M. George, Vice-President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi invited the governor to release the first volume of 'Bharatheeya Sahitya Charithram', the Akademi's prestigious Silver Jubilee

Sri. P. Ramachandran released the publication by presenting a copy of it to Sri. C. Achutha Menon, former chief Minister of Kerala.

The Silver Jubilee Special Awards and Akademi Awards of 1982 were then distributed by the Governor. Dr. M. Leelavathy introduced the Silver Jubilee Special Award winners and Prof. K. M. Tharakan introduced the Akademi Award winners of the year. Name of the Award winners and their works are given below:

#### Award Winners

The Silver Jubilee Special Award for the best work of creative literature published in the last 25 years went to Shri Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon for his collection of poems '*Makarakkoythu*' (Winter Harvest) and for the best work on other categories went to Prof. N. Krishna Pillai for his '*Kairaliyude Katha*' (The Story of Malayalam Literature). Each Special Award carries a cash prize of Rs. 10000/-

The Akademi Awards of 1982 went to Shri. Sethu, (Novel); Shri G. N. Panicker (short stories), Shri M. T. Vasudevan Nair (Drama); Shri Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan (Poetry); Shri Thottam

Rajasekharan (Miscellaneous writings); Shri Thayat Sankaran (Kuttippuzha Award) Shri A. P. Udayabhanu (C. B. Kumar Award); Dr. V. R. Prabodhachandran for (I. C. Chacko Award). Dr. J. Kattakkal (K. R. Namboodiri Award) and Shri Kilimanoor Viswambharan (Shri Padmanabha Swami Award for children's literature); Shri Thayat Sankaran, Shri M. T. Vasudevan Nair and Shri Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan could not attend the function.

Prizes for winners in the literary competitions were also distributed in the meeting. The winners are Shri V. Chandrababu for his essay on 'The Aesthetic Value of Ezhuthachan's works' (Thunchan Prize) and Shri P. V. Puruhothaman for his essay on 'Parappurath's Novels-A study (C. B. Kumar Prize).

After the Presidential address of Dr. V. K. Narayana Menon Prof. M. V. Rajadhyaksha delivered a felicitation speech. Shri Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon, Prof N. Krishnapillai, Shri A. P. Udayabhanu and Dr. Jacob Kattakkal spoke on behalf of the Award winners Dr. M. M. Basheer proposed a vote of thanks.

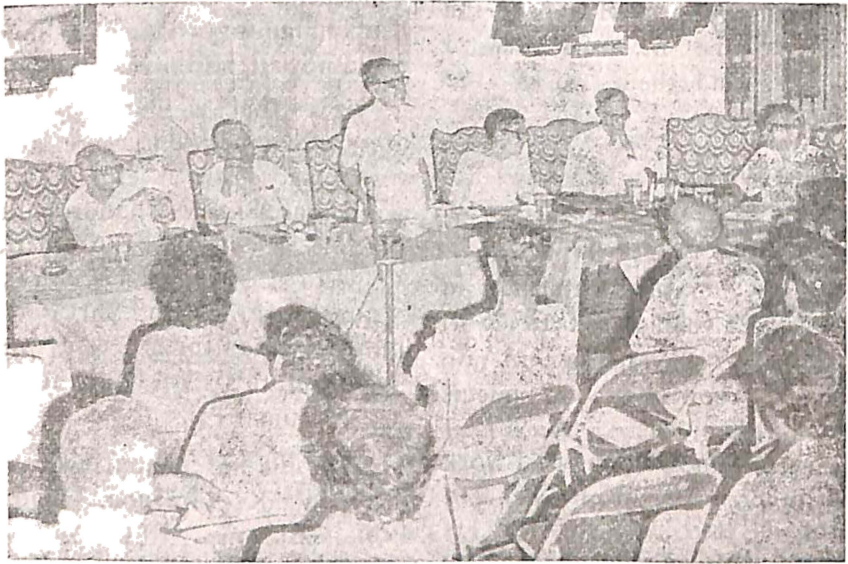
From 8 to 10.30 p. m. there were stage shows of Mohini Attom, presented by Kerala

Kalalayam, Trippoonithura, under the guidance of Kalamandalam Kalyanikkutty Amma.

### Symposium

On the 12th there was the Symposium from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 on 'The Renaissance of Indian Literature -Its Social Aspect. Prof. G. Kumara Pillai was the moderator. Dr K. M.

L. S. Sheshagiri Rao (Kannada), and Dr. Sathyendranathasarma (Assamese) presented papers representing their languages. In the discussions that followed Prof. N. K. Sheshan, Shri. Pavanan, Dr. K. M. George and Prof. S. Guptan Nair participated. The symposium ended with the concluding speech of Prof. G Kumara Pillai who summed up the discussions and indicated



Prof: N. S. Seshagiri Rao presenting his paper in the symposium.

George delivered the welcome speech. Dr. Prabhakar Machwe (Hindi), Dr. Amiyadev (Bengali), Prof. M. Arunachalam (Tamil), Dr. Satheendersingh (Punjabi), Dr. C. N. Sasthri (Amarendra-Telugu), Shri Gulabdas Broker (G u j a r a t h i) Prof. M. V. Rajadhyaksha (Marathi), Prof.

the social aspects of the renaissance in Malayalam Literature.

The valedictory meeting held at 5 p.m. was presided over by the Akademi President Shri Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and inaugurated by Sri. Gulabdas Broker. Prof O. N. V Kurup

welcomed the guests. The main speakers on the occasion were Prof. L. S. Sheshagiri Rao, Dr. Prabhakar Machwe and Shri C. Achutha Menon.

The English translation of Uroob's famous novel *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum* (The Beautiful and the Handsome) published by the Akademi was released at the meeting by Dr. Prabhakar Machwe who presented a copy of the book to Shri Gulabdas Broker.

Shri Pavanan, proposed the vote of thanks.

The session was concluded with performance of the play *Agni* written and directed by Prof. Vayala Vasudevan Pillai and presented by 'Suvarnarekha', Trivandrum.

An exhibition of Akademi publications was also organized as a part of the programme at the central Hall. The Exhibition proved very popular.

All the sessions were patronised by a large number of literary minded people from all over the state.

### ഔഷധി

ദി ഫാർമസ്യൂട്ടിക്കൽ കോർപ്പറേഷൻ (ഇന്ത്യൻ മെഡിസിൻസ്) കേരള ലിമിറ്റഡ്,  
തൃശ്ശൂർ 680 001.

അംഗീകൃത വിദഗ്ദ്ധ ആയുർവേദ വൈദ്യന്മാരാൽ ശാസ്ത്രീയമായി തയ്യാറാക്കപ്പെട്ട 330-ൽ പരം മേന്മയേറിയ ആയുർവേദ ഔഷധങ്ങൾ മിതമായ വിലയ്ക്ക് ലഭിക്കുന്ന വിശ്വാസയോഗ്യമായ

കേരള സർക്കാർ സ്മാപനം

ഔഷധി തയ്യാറാക്കുന്ന പ്രത്യേക ഔഷധങ്ങൾ ഗംഗായരച്ചുണ്ണി, തങ്കഭസ്മം, സാമസ്വതരിഷ്ടം, അജമാംസരസായനം, ശിവ ഗുളിക, താലഞ്ചസ്, ഗന്ധതൈലം, മുറിവെണ്ണ, അഹിഫേനാസവം, കർപ്പൂരാസവം.

സി.വി. സീതാ തങ്ങൾ. എസ്.എം.എൽ.എ. ചെമ്മർമാൻ

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# Obituary

## Krishnaswami Reddiar

R. Krishnaswami Reddiar (59) well-known publisher and industrialist passed away on August 20 at Quilon. He was the founder of the Kumkumam group of publications which owns a number of popular periodicals like the *Kumkumam*. The famous Kumkumam Novel competition Award of Rs 5000/- was instituted by him.

## Sankarji



Sankarji (P. Sankarankutty Menon) notable writer and Museum guide of Appan Thampuran Memorial under the Kerala Sahitya Akademi passed

away on December 8. He was 51. He had been sub-editor of Navajeevan, Publication Assistant of current Books. Trichur and Assistant Editor of the journal *Nava Germany*. He had also worked as the honorary editor of the *Sahitya Chakravalam*, the monthly journal of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. A reputed writer translator and critic of music. Sankarji had done a study of Beethovens compositions. He had 5 books to his credit.

## Cinic

Cinic (M. Vasudevan Nair), film critic and author died on December 21 at Calicut. He was 63. He had 10 books to his credit including a study of Malayalam Cinema.

## K. P. S. Menon

By the death of K. P. S. Menon 85 on November 21, at his residence in Ottappalam, the country has lost a towering personality. He had served India as the country's representative at the U. N. O. Ambassador to China and Russia and in various other capacities. He was chairman of the Central Sangeetha Natak Akademi. Member of the governing body of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Member of the U. P. S. C. and Chairman of the Indo-Soviet cultural society. He was the recipient of the 'Padmabhushan' award in 1957. A well known in English, he had 18 books to his credit.



K. P. S. Menon

K. P. S. Menon had an abiding love for Malayalam literature and was a friend, guide and patron of the Akademi. He was keenly interested in the growth of the Akademi. We join with others in paying homage to this eminent son of Kerala.

# Our Contributors

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*(Biographical notes on some of the contributors have appeared in previous issue and in such case details are not repeated.)*



**M. Govindan**

B. 1919. An outstanding intellectual who has influenced a number of younger writers, Shri M. Govindan is a man of many-sided achievement as poet, essayist, dramatist, story-writer, critic and editor. Besides editing the prestigious quarterly the *Sameeksha*, he has published half a dozen volumes of poetry, many volumes of essays, a drama, a novel and a collection of short-stories. He was the

recipient of the first Kumaran Asan Award for Malayalam poetry in 1979. Editing in English the Kumaran Asan Birth Centenary Volume of the *Sameeksha* entitled *Poetry & Renaissance* Shri Govindan had rendered a significant service to Indian Literature as a whole.



**V. Aravindakshan**

B. 1930. A Professor of English in Shree Kerala Varma College, Trichur, Shri Aravindakshan is a perceptive critic of literature and of the performing arts. A former political activist and journalist, he has translated some twenty books from English into Malayalam.

**Dr K. M. George**

A renowned scholar and critic, Dr. K. M. George is currently Vice-President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and Chief Editor of the Akademi's prestigious publication *Comparative Indian Literature* the first volume of which is to come out shortly.

**Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai (b. 1920)**

Formerly Director, Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library, University of Kerala, Dr. Raghavan Pillai is a reputed scholar and critic.

**T. N. Jayachandran (b. 1936).**

An Officer of the Indian Administrative Service, Shri Jayachandran is currently Chairman of the Cochin Port Trust. He is a well-known writer in Malayalam who had specialized in the study of the novel and has published books include *Novelistinte Silpasala* (The Novelist's Workshop)

**T. R. K. Marar (b. 1917)**

Formerly Professor and Head of the Department of English, Maharajas College, Ernakulam, Shri Marar has published many essays on literary topics in Malayalam journals.

**G. Kumara Pillai (b. 1923)**

Currently Hon. Editor of the *Malayalam Literary Survey*, G. Kumara Pillai is a retired professor of English and a well-known poet in Malayalam.

**S. Guptan Nair (b 1919)**

A retired Principal of the Kerala Collegiate Education Service, Shri Guptan Nair has worked as Professor of Malayalam in Government Colleges and in the Calicut University. He was also Deputy Director of the State Institute of Languages for some time. He is currently Research Guide in the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. An eminent literary critic in Malayalam, he has published essays on Malayalam Literature in English also. His published works of literary criticism include *Adhunika Sahityam* (Modern Literature) and *Isangalkkappuram* (Beyond Isms)

**M. Mukundan (b. 1942)**

An official in the French Embassy at Delhi, Shri Mukundan is a major figure in contemporary Malayalam fiction.

Smt. A. P. Sarada who has translated Shri Mukundan's stories was formerly Professor of English, JIPMER, Pondicherry. She has published many English poems in journals.

**Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan (b. 1935)**

Winner of the Kumaran Asan Award and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1982, Shri Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan is an outstanding figure among the younger poets in Malayalam. A two-volume edition of his collected poems has been a best-seller, his poetry-reading sessions attract large crowds and in this art he had

few rivals. His poetry first attracted attention by the elemental force of its rhythm and imagery. But the poem included here belongs to the latest phase of his development-it is almost an anti-poem. He works in the Postal Audit Department.

Dr. M. S. Gopinathan has translated the poem who is a young scientist who is interested in the arts as well. He teaches at the I. I. T. Madras.

**A. P. Udayabhanu (b. 1915)**

A very distinguished figure in the public life of Kerala, Shri Udayabhanu was formerly President, Travancore-Cochin Pradesh Congress, Member, Kerala Public Service Commission and Resident Editor, Mathrubhumi Calicut. He turned to literature rather late in life, but soon established a reputation as the best contemporary essayist in the language. His personal essays published in periodicals have been collected in fourteen volumes; more volumes are in the press. Marked by wits, humour and criticism of life, these essays are often enriched with anecdotes and sometimes coloured with poetic touches.

**K. M. Tharakan (b. 1930)**

A Professor of English by profession, Shri Tharakan is a prominent critic and literary historian in Malayalam.

**K. P. Sankran (b. 1939)** A young literary critic concentrating on poetry, Shri Sankaran has published a number of perceptive essays and book reviews. Some of his essays have been collected in volumes like *Sameepanam* (Approach) and *Rithuparivarthanam* (Chanigng Seasons). Shri Sankaran who has been teaching Malayalam in the Regional College of Education, Mysore, since 1967 has also translated Dr. U. R. Ananthamoorthy's *Samskara* from Kannada into Malayalam.

**K. N. Nair (b. 1923)**

A veteran journalist and a former official of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Shri K. N. Nair is the author of many books.

**Dr. M. Leelavathy (b. 1927)**

A former Professor of Malayalam and currently Principal, Government Brennen College, Tellicherry, Dr. Leelavathy is a prominent literary critic in Malayalam.

**K. Jayakumar (b. 1952)**

A young Officer of the Indian Administrative Service, currently working as the Chief of the District Industrial Centre, Alleppey, Shri Jayakumar is a poet in Malayalam. He has also done some critical writing and translation

**Cinic-M. Vasudevan Nair (1919-1982)** who usually wrote under the pen-name Cinic was a noted film critic. The essay published here is one of his last compositions.

**M. Shanmukha Das (b. 1928)**

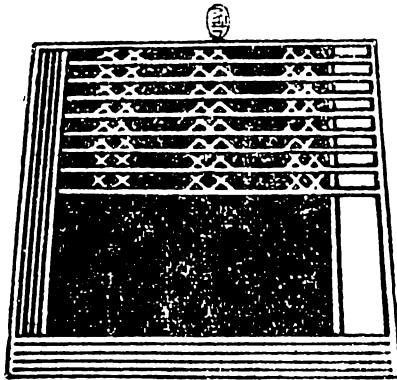
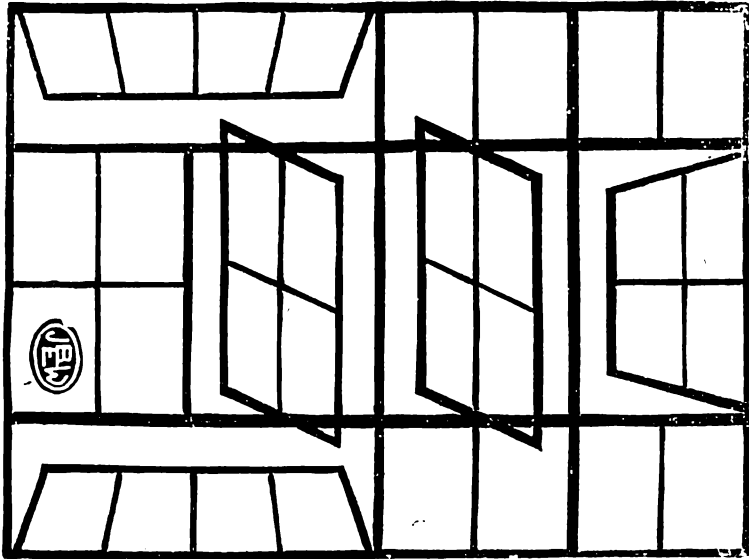
Formerly a lecturer in English and a journalist, Shri Shanmugha Das is now engaged in literary research. He has half-a-dozen books to his credit. He is a noted critic.

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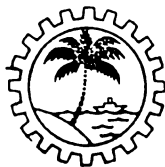
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