

Aesthetic Makeover

Invariably, all are greatly inspired and moved by art. Art connects our conscious with our subconscious. It allows a creative mind to explore inner self and fill that urge to understand our ever-changing body, mind and surroundings. It is the food for our imagination, the most mysterious aspect of human being. The connections that performing arts make to us beyond our conscious perceptions of them are spellbinding. We are carried away, and immersed into another world of association. Theatre Art forms represent the conscience and character of a society. Good dramatists realise this and know how to control the effect they make.

The world is being revolutionised, transforming into an information society. The incorporation of creativity and innovation at every stage of shaping a world has become a practice. The digital age has also shown its way to Indian drama in a big way. Artists are often at the forefront of new thinking and performing arts have always been a stage for their creativity. The drama and theatre art forms are at the central role to direct what society needs next.

Communities can express and build their creative skills and be active in the development of their culture through drama. Community cultural development invites people to become cultural producers, and drama production is one of the most powerful and moving aesthetic experiences. Dramas are usually known to show concern in societal problems. A community's culture is explored, translated, and conveyed through performing arts aimed to educate the society and present plays with a purpose of transforming them. In Kerala, conventional drama had spawn a civic culture and played an important role in promoting apprehension across social divides.

Now there is considerable interest among the younger generation for theatre arts. Modern drama supports artistic experimentation, excellence, innovation, and creativity among the new generation. Art lovers have been seeing innovative solutions to social and economic problems which exist in the society. Ideas and best practices are to be charted out to recognise innovation and creativity among the indigenous drama which does not neglect our roots.

The Children's theatre is another experiment. It aims to improve academic performance by building up creative skills and improving self esteem. It brings forth the tremendous amount of live talent around, gives opportunity to tell their stories, interacts and increases communication skill and feels the excitement of knowing their culture.

This edition of Kerala Calling will take you through a journey, through various aspects, to see beyond the ordinary, exploring a variety of theatre art forms.

Indigenous Theatre

Fort against Foreigners



Indigenous theatre refers to a specific style of theatre activity. It is distinctly different from the one in vogue during the colonial period. It is culturally and aesthetically local, ethnic and natural. This description of the indigenous is true to all the indigenous theatres, the world over.

Almost all countries of the third world stratum, namely, the African, Latin American, Asian etc. have their own particular indigenous theatre. The freedom struggle in all these regions brought to their attention that the theatres of their masters; (rulers) could not fully and effectively express their own ethnic desires and aspirations. Naturally, during the freedom struggle, the artists started looking inwardly in search of a fresh method of expression. Rabindra Nath Tagore is the best example in India. This search was not merely for a style; on the contrary, it wanted a new concept of performance in a new space or in the space which was forgotten by the natives during the colonial regime. Thus this search, instead of remaining as an isolated experiment by a minority, has become a movement to touching upon all aspects of life – education, medical system, performance, cultural attitudes etc. Mahatma Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is part of this total movement in India.

Coming to theatre, this search aimed at a performance culture training its inspiration on the age old positive values of the natives. During the colonial period, the performance revolved round the realistic and proscenium play productions, supported by the western critical theories. Thus the plays and performance theories of the West were unnecessarily quoted and copied in

most of the colonies. India too was a victim of this. Our cultural and performance tradition of about three thousand years were thrown overboard by the foreign influences

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which dominated the country for about two hundred and fifty years. To be exact, there was a strong classical (Sanskrit) and folk theatre culture which expressed the Indian mind till 11th century AD. With the Mogul empire, the classical tradition started declining and when the Europeans invaded the country, the folk 'cult' also dwindled.

Now we are trying to retrieve the essentials of the indigenous theatre. There have been attempts all over the world in this direction. It works at different levels: political, economic, linguistic and cultural. All these are to be blended into one homogenous unit of human expression as advocated by W.B. Yeats in Ireland.

As already mentioned, Tagore's life and works point out the best examples in India. His plays and performance perspectives have been inspired by the native cultural signs. Even the problems dealt within them have an Indian base which Gandhiji epitomised in his philosophy. Much later came the IPTA (1942) with a call to the artists and cultural activists to search for our own roots and expressions in plays, songs, dances and all other aspects of creative outlet.

It is after gaining freedom that we have been officially able to consolidate the concepts and practices of indigenous theatre in India. The Sangeet Natak Academy, Delhi took the initiative in urging the performing artists, especially the theatre people to search for the 'roots' of our performance paradigm to be discovered in the folk and classical theatres left uncared for during the colonial period. This the playwrights, directors, actors and all other theatre enthusiasts tried to explore the theatrical and dramatic elements in our traditional arts. It became a sort of movement at the all India level and Kerala also had its share to contribute.

Considering Kerala Theatre, we have an immense treasure chest of folk arts with dramatic potentials. For instance, Theyyam, Padayani, Mudi yettu, Kanyarkali, Kakkarassi and a large number of allied 'lesser known' theatre forms make our foundations very strong. Classical theatre forms like Kutiyattom, Kathakali, Krishnanattom, Nangiarkoothu etc. form a well codified system of performance the type of which can not be found anywhere else in the world. Our modern theatre artists could very well explore these sources and get motivated by them in writing and producing plays. Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, G. Sankara Pillai, C.N. Sreekantan Nair and a galaxy of other playwrights who joined this stream later found a fresh area, 'Pastures new' and aesthetic reasons for their creations.

The indigenous plays thus produced have been pushed forward by a mythical ritualistic and theatrical vibrance. They are poetic in the right sense of the term. They require a performance space other than the conventional proscenium theatre used

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for the realistic plays. Philosophically, the space means a lot in the indigenous theatre. It enlivens the whole atmosphere which includes performers as well as the spectators. It is normally environmental in theory and practice, thereby embracing all the areas around, within and 'without' the performance. Both the performers and the spectators are expected to be on the same 'level; or 'plane', contributing to the success of the performance. Since the indigenous theatre of Kerala has its roots in our rich tradition, the performance sprouting out of it will be influenced by 'touritrika', an organic blending of Geet, Nrit and Vadya. These are not external development of the performance. In fact, this concept of the theme of the play is born and developed later through incidents, characters, dialogue, diction etc.

As the very birth of the theme is in a musical and poetic mould, its performance style on the stage should also be poetic. Actors have to be specially treated for the purpose. The creative and imaginative faculties of the actor are to be totally explored. The actor must be free for creation on the stage. His body, voice and mind are to be trained and well tuned for the performance. He should understand the long tradition of body training and its nuances practised by great Kootiyattom and Kathakali artists in Kerala. The folk theatre traditions also can throw much light on the creation of the indigenous theatre.

Why should we have the indigenous theatre rebuilt? Can it deal with contemporary issues? Questions like these have been asked quite often. The answer is obvious. The issues concerning modern man are the subjects of this theatre. The problems haunting any man of any country – whether it is hunger, poverty, parochialism, despotism, corruption, exploitation, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, love, frustration, success and failure etc can be made the subjects of playwriting. Provided the artist must be poetically conceiving them for better and effective visualisation. The indigenous theatre is at its bottom, strongly political, strengthening the performer and the spectator with his own identity as a fortress against further foreign invasions at all levels. ■

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Narrative Tradition Listener not a mere Listener

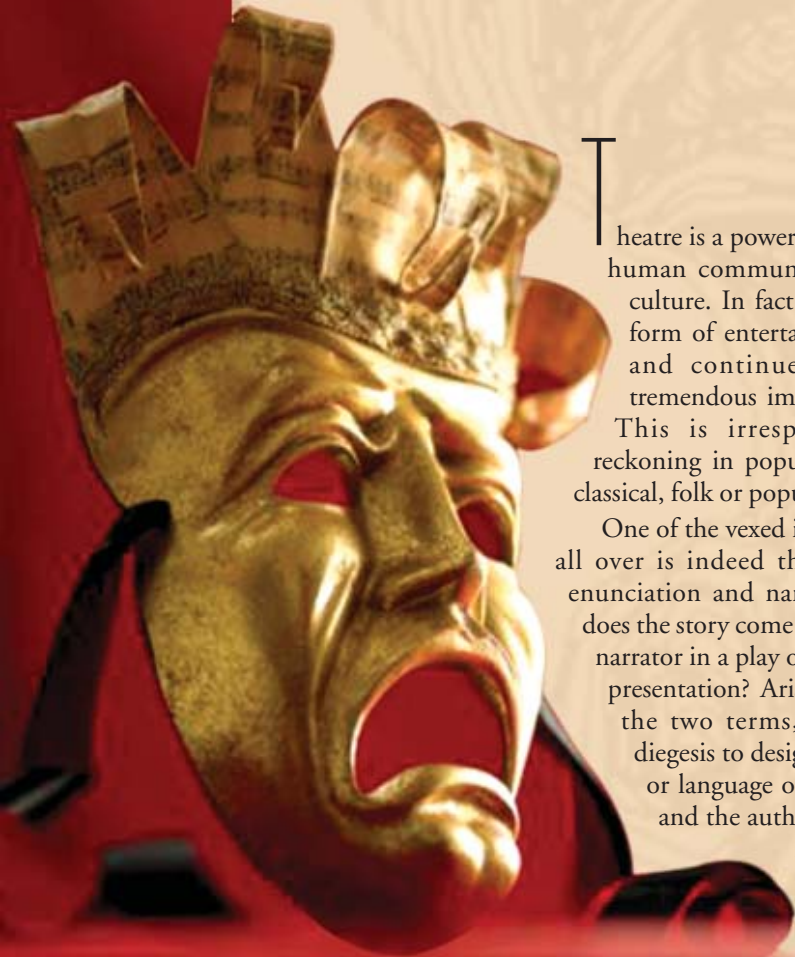


voice of the narrator is hard to locate. This has been identified either as the various stage directions given in the text of the play or actions or stage business of characters in a performance. This is primarily because the tradition of naturalist theatre that grew in the West made a clear distinction between the stage and the auditorium, or the performers and the audience. However, in most of the traditional and folk forms of theatre not to speak of postmodern theatre that drew inspiration from all these, this distinction is either non-existent or hardly visible. Instances like *Waiting for Godot*, where theatre effectively replaces drama are numerous.

However, Indian theatre in general, Kerala theatre in particular, boasts of a much more vibrant and dynamic narrative tradition. This is true of the folk and classical traditions. Classical theatrical forms, which are also dance forms, are perhaps the best examples. The practice of rendering of the lyrics from the background makes these art forms unique. Perhaps, background singing, central to our popular art/theatrical forms like drama and cinema can be traced to this tradition. In Kathakali, both the mimetic and diegetic modes of rendering the *padams* and *slokas* respectively can be seen. While the story is summarised in the narrator's voice through the *slokas*, the

Theatre is a powerful medium for human communication in any culture. In fact it is the oldest form of entertainment as well and continues to make a tremendous impact even now. This is irrespective of its reckoning in popular estimate as classical, folk or popular.

One of the vexed issues in theatre all over is indeed the question of enunciation and narration. Where does the story come from? Is there a narrator in a play or in a theatrical presentation? Aristotle had used the two terms, *mimesis* and *diegesis* to designate the words or language of the characters and the author (or narrator) respectively. In most forms of modern theatre, however, the





sense, mixing of the native and stylised (or classical) theatrical rendering is predominant in Koodiyattom.

In Mohiniyattom, Kerala's own classical dance form, the elements of drama and theatre operate differently. While Kathakali, Koodiyattom and other art forms enact stories dramatically, Mohiniyattom is more in the form of a monologue. Here too, another character's whose presence on the stage is only assumed, takes the place of a listener.

Though myths and legends underlie almost all folk theatrical forms, a full-fledged telling of a story is absent in many of these forms. At the same time, digressions and telling of parallel plots characterise some of these art forms. Theyyam and patayani are examples of this rich

It is interesting to note how a listener, an integral part of any narrative, is invoked in many of these forms. While in Ottan Thullal and Chakyar Koothu, possibilities of an interactive theatre are explored, the audience as an implied listener is simultaneously invoked. Needless to add, in these forms, theatre also becomes a vehicle of social criticism. As a matter of fact, the segments in these art forms where a native tradition in story telling is employed are areas where the emancipatory potential of the narrative is being tapped. As mentioned, in these art forms the story does not consciously address any listener. But in an art form like Tholpavakkoothu, in which the Tamil versions of epics like Ramayana, a very interesting device or figure called *mooli* (literally one who hums

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conversations of characters are rendered in the form of padams. Indeed, padams not only constitute the melodic part of the background music and mimetic recreation of the conversation of characters, they also add to the dramatic and peculiar theatrical rendering of the story. In comparison, a more complex mode of rendering is employed in Koodiyattom, the classical art form that won UNESCO's recognition for holding aloft a rich tradition. Here characters and narrators constantly change their positions depending on the context. This is done through a device known as pakarnnattom, thus to a great extent problematising the illusionistic nature of story-telling. Though Koodiyattom has been recognised as arguably the only tradition in Sanskrit theatre, the character of vidushaka and several other characters essentially of a non-Sanskritist tradition effectively question this characterisation. In a



variety. Likewise, in poothankali, popular in the kavus of south Malabar, no story is recounted. Yet, the story of how the mental prowess of a mother rescued her child from a well-meaning pootham, rendered so touchingly by Edasseri Govindan Nair in "Poothappattu" lies behind this folk art form.

as he listens to the story) is employed.

All these indicate that despite the difference in modes of rendering, Kerala theatre has over the centuries developed a unique system of story-telling, marked by a rare vibrancy and vigour. ■

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A touch of esotericism is the hallmark of all the art forms of Kerala origin. This could be ascribed, among other factors, to its peculiar geographic situation as well. It would seem that the Nature itself had intended for this land a certain degree of isolation from the rest of the mainland, cradled as it is between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats. This aspect has deeply influenced the social, cultural and political evolution of Kerala, which in many respects took a turn distinct from that taken by its neighbours.

Whereas the impulse for artistic creativity elsewhere in India flowered

into the architectural magnificence of the rock-cut temples or, covered the wall-spaces as at Ajanta with forms of infinite beauty, here it found expression in the dramatic art. The body and limbs were used as dynamic media to weave unending rhythmic patterns of significant forms. Here, man made himself the supreme material for his artistic expression. Koodiyattom, the only surviving Sanskrit theatre form in the country, is quintessential of this paradigm.

Sanskrit theatre had a pan-Indian appeal and its history dates back to more than two thousand years. Sanskrit plays used to be staged in all the

important cultural centres of the country and the actors were highly respected. But today, while Sanskrit theatre has vanished from arc lights in all other parts of India, it still survives in Kerala in the form of Koodiyattom. That Koodiyattom itself can claim an antiquity of nearly two thousand years is evident from the reference to the enactment of the story of Tripura dahanam (burning of Tripura) by Paravur Kuthachakiyan (Paravur Chakyar) in Chilapathikaram authored by Ilango Adikal. But the contemporary form of Koodiyattom is believed to have been designed by Kulasekhara (11th century), the author

Where the actor is the stage





The credit for preserving the treasure-trove of theatre goes to the Chakyar community for whom staging of Koodiyattom was a hereditary family vocation. As they were duty-bound to stage the art form without fail in temples, the temples in turn granted them with agricultural lands as remuneration.

of Subhadradhananjayam and Tapatismvaranam. Some historical records of Koodiyattom are available only from this period.

The credit for preserving this treasure-trove of theatre goes to the Chakyar community for whom staging of Koodiyattom was a hereditary family vocation. As they were duty-bound to stage the art form without fail in temples, the temples in turn granted them with agricultural lands as remuneration. The Chakyars could not till the land by themselves as their preoccupation was abhinaya and so they rented out the land to tenants on lease.

The repertoire of Sanskrit plays for Koodiyattom is not that exhaustive, interestingly. Kulasekhara's works mentioned above apart, prominent among them are Bhasa's Patima Natakam, Pratijnayougandharayanam and Balacharitam; Harshavardhana's Naganandham; Sakthibhadra's Ascharyachoodamani; Mahendravikrama's Mattavilasam and Nilakantha's Kalyanasougandhikam. Admittedly, poet Bhasa is the most sought after playwright for Chakyars who claim that even a single word in his works provides ample scope for elaboration and interpretation, the intrinsic

technique of Koodiyattom.

Cumbersome rituals precede the presentation of a play in Koodiyattom and notwithstanding the innovations introduced by Kulasekhara, they are carried out in accordance with the tenets of Natyasastra, the two millennium old book on dramaturgy of Bharata, customary for the presentation of a Sanskrit play. Perhaps quite peculiar among these unique techniques is nirvahana which is an elaborate description of the character portrayal through his past history. Incidentally, an ingenious technique introduced by the Chakyars, nirvahana is not a part of the original text of the play. The actor delineates multiple roles during this feat, which is called Pakarnnattam. This also helps to lengthen the duration of the play immeasurably. For the same reason, a whole drama is never enacted in Koodiyattom, but only one act is presented. Small wonder then that if the whole play is to be staged, it may extend for a whole year!

While the four modes of abhinaya – angika (the gestural), vaachika (the



verbal), aharya (the costume and make up) and satwika (the psychic) - prescribed by Natyasastra are faithfully adhered to, angikabhinaya in Koodiyattom is the last word in the theatrical technique of the use of eyes, eyebrows, facial muscles, torso and hands so much so that the actor himself becomes the stage! Further, nethrabhinaya (eye) is carried to dizzy

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heights that make Kudiyyattom a cynosure among the various theatre traditions in the whole world. As for vachikabhinaya, the role of vidushaka (clown) is unique. His freedom to depart from the text improvises and interpolates and also to use the vernacular, makes him a class of his own kind. The role also highlights the dexterity of the actor to give discourses on the basic tenets of philosophic schools and religious dogmas.

The music employed is very much on the lines chanting of Vedas. According to the late scholar L S Rajagopal, the style of rendition is a compromise between the modes of chanting of the Rig Veda and Sama Veda. The ragas are also peculiar. The non-stop drumming of the mizhavu from behind the actor adds an ethereal aura to the whole show.

Formerly staged only in Koothambalam attached to temples, Kudiyyattom made giant strides as the veteran maestro Paimkulam Rama Chakyar presented it outside temple precincts with impunity nearly half a century ago. He was also instrumental in introducing a Department for Kudiyyattom in Kerala Kalamandalam in 1965 which enabled the art form to attain a secular status. People belonging to all castes could practice and admittedly the first student was a non-Chakyar, Sivan Namboodiri. Whereas only Nambiars were allowed to drum the mizhavu by tradition, non-Nambiars could be admitted to the course. Incidentally, the first mizhavu student, Iswaran Unni was a non-Nambiar. Even Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Gurukulam, Irinjalakuda known for its orthodoxy enrolled non-Chakyar students and G Venu, who has already made epochal contributions to the theatre form later, was the first non-Chakyar student. Declaration by the UNESCO making Kudiyyattom an oral and intangible tradition of mankind and Padma Bhushan award to the doyen Ammannur Madhava Chakyar were proof enough of the wide recognition the theatre form had gained recently.

With a host of young performers of proven artistry already produced by the few training institutions, one can hope that future of this rare and indigenised Sanskrit theatre of Kerala is quite bright. ■

The writer is Art critic and columnist



PHOTO: DALU PARAMESWARAN I & PRO

With Diploma in Theatre Production and Stage Management from RADA, London, Post Graduate Diploma in Design and Direction from NSD, graduation in Theatre Arts from Calicut University, Kerala, Abhilash Pillai went on directing plays in various Indian languages and also in English though theatre turned out to be too close to him even in his childhood. He has been unlearning to learn and impart the language of theatre with his innate passion and dedication. Currently dean and lecturer in acting at National School of Drama, New Delhi, Abhilash took up the pleasant responsibility of being the curator of the National Theatre Festival in Thiruvananthapuram.

'Despite time constraint in the process of selection, this theatre festival showcases some of the finest plays that address the clash with modernism in different strata. The way we are confronting with modernism finds focus in most of the plays which are extensions of our very life', says Abhilash. Theatre is much more connected with life, since the alternative way of existence is here there are many ways of seeing and understanding things. Unlike cinema, theatre can happen anywhere and everywhere and this testifies the fact that theatre has no limitation as such,' continues Abhilash.

Since the time of being an

independent theatre director, Abhilash Pillai has been part of major international theatre projects as well as theatre productions in various Indian languages. Experience has brought in many changes that made him dismiss his old notions about theatre. 'The ego of innocence', as he puts it, was replaced by the insight he acquired through the years.

"Like any other theatre student I too had my raw notions. Indeed natural they were, which ultimately made me realise that one had to unlearn to learn the lessons in one's own way. Theatre is far more organic with no hard and fast rules", adds Abhilash.

With the techno-economic culture gaining momentum, theatre also falls under its influence, like the technological devices we may use to enhance the theatricality or the theatrical productions getting well packaged, thereby reducing it to mere product.

'Life keeps changing, so theatre too. These changes must of course find expression in theatre, which is an ensemble art-encompassing all the popular expressions. Today there is this strong individualisation which can be an offshoot of market economy. Everything is now getting privatised; even the drinking water! In earlier days war was usually between nations. But, strangely

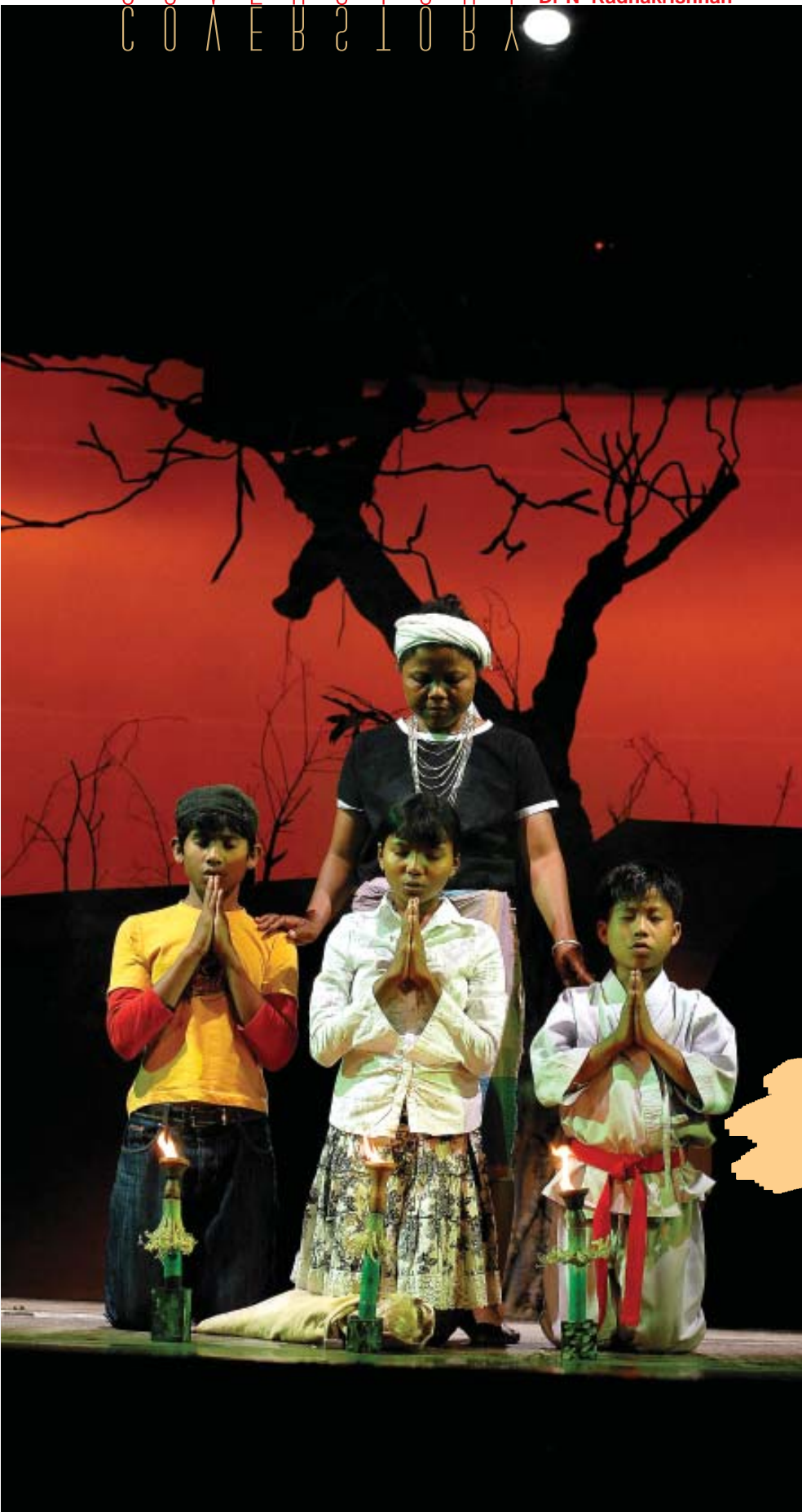
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enough, today, instead of a nation a single individual can be a war monger. This has been made possible by the same techno-economic culture. Both gun and guitar are basically technologies and they have two contrastingly different functions. But if ever we see a gun on the stage that will connote some socio-political references. The change coming into theatre is slow and steady.' 'Theatre will rather cease to exist once it becomes a mere product. Theatre in its true sense cannot be a market driven exercise', he goes on adding passionately, 'the whole theatre should not be in the main stream to an extent at least and globalisation has dwindled our choices'. Generally speaking, there was a golden age for Indian and especially for Malayalam theatre. But, in spite of theatre finding place in our curriculum, we still look back and take pride of the past. How do you look at the theatre scenario of today? 'Golden age is a reference to which we often go. Of course, we have a lot to assimilate from there, but not blindly. Malayalam theatre is still getting registered all over the country or probably across the world. We still have a large number of theatre enthusiasts. Theatre schools and their curricula will definitely bring in theatre sensibility among a majority. This is important as well. This will generate an interaction. After all theatre is this interaction. ■

Modern Theatre Expression without Limitations





‘Theatre as an expression of the life of a people’, ‘theatre for entertainment’, ‘theatre for education’, ‘theatre for propaganda’, are all well-discussed aspects and as in the case of many other ongoing discussions such as “art for arts’ sake”, “art for life’s sake,” nobody has been able to say the final word on any of these. Similarly, we have been witnessing raging arguments and discussions on various aspects of ‘Adult’s Theatre’ and ‘Children’s Theatre’.

Kerala has every reason to feel proud of nurturing a very vibrant and creative Children’s Theatre through Rangaprabhat Children’s Theatre, perhaps the only one of its kind in India. The Rangaprabhat Children’s Theatre at Alumthara in Venjaramoodu in Thiruvananthapuram District, thanks to two missionaries of theatre, Prof. G. Sankara Pillai and Guru Kochunarayana Pillai, has weathered many storms during the last 37 years of its existence as a reliable centre of education through children’s drama.

This brief discussion highlights an experiment undertaken by this group of artists and educators in Kerala under the

Children’s Theatre

Vision for the

banner Rangaprabhat to offer value creation in children and prevent school drop-out through children's drama and a host of other activities. Though this case study will describe the salient features of the general experiment, the emphasis of this discussion will be the on the nature, scope and impact of these specific programmes currently undertaken by this group:

- The efforts made to weave indigenous cultural traditions, art, music, and crafts right into the learning process.
- Intensive and self-generative programmes in forty select schools in the rural areas in Thiruvananthapuram District in Kerala to create in each of these schools an atmosphere where both teaching and learning become relaxed and enjoyable.
- Regular Saturday children's carnival to children from the schools in the neighbourhood at which a series of opportunities for the children to involve themselves in craft activities, dance, music, painting, creative dramatics, improvisations, make-up, and oratory under the general supervision of highly qualified teachers of artistes.

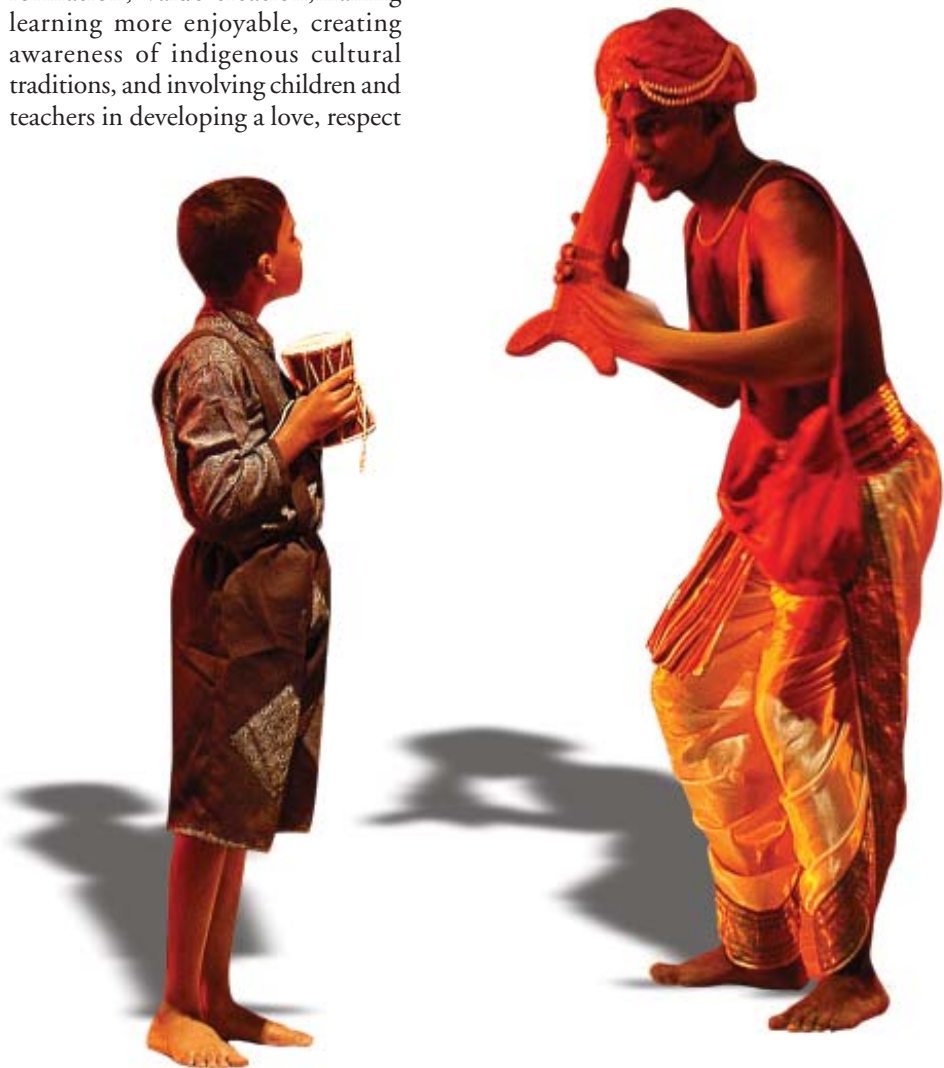
The focus was to offer select children to spend their leisure time in such activities that would enhance in them a spirit of cooperative endeavour, involvement in craft activities, creative dramatics, story telling, improvisations, creative dance and folk music. The aim was to offer facilities and opportunities to children to supplement and augment their classroom learning in an atmosphere of relaxed freedom which would promote a creative involvement in the children. This led to the gradual

development of an alternative campus or school, centred around the house and the thatched shed that was put up near the house of Kochunarayana Pillai, himself a distinguished teacher of a local school.

The experiment very soon turned out to be a quite useful one and it went a few steps ahead of the popular western concept and practice of Theatre-in-Education. The manner in which the programmes developed at this centre indicated that it succeeded in creating community consciousness, exploring the moral spiritual and cultural dimensions of education, creating awareness among the parents of the locality of the need for letting children in involving what is euphemistically described non-academic programmes, developing leadership qualities in children, confidence-building, character formation, value-creation, making learning more enjoyable, creating awareness of indigenous cultural traditions, and involving children and teachers in developing a love, respect

and pride on the folk arts of the country and encouraging them in its preservation.

The experiment began with story sessions through which both Prof. Sankara Pillai and Kochunarayana Pillai were able to attract initially. Story-telling gradually led to creative dramatics during which the children were able to improvise situations and characters. An attractive feature of this experiment was the time the children spent in child games and songs. They were encouraged to develop dramatic moments and situations from their games and songs. The atmosphere was participatory and never competitive in sharp contrast to the situations that existed at the schools. On holidays the small house and shed which had by now assumed the name of "Rangaprabhat" would be swarming with children of the age group



Buds

between five and sixteen involving themselves in activities of their choice under the guidance of elders. The emphasis was to encourage relaxed and participatory learning and acquisition of skills and confidence building.

What guided all those who themselves were involved in the experiment was the emphasis which Prof. Sankara Pillai always made, to understand children and to catch them young and lead them to an atmosphere of not under compulsion but learning through a variety of activities which are not available in the schools they are studying. There were those who could offer help in the regular academic learning so that the children did not lag behind in academic preparations also. In short, very soon the house of Kochunarayana Pillai became a center of new and bold experiments in non-formal education essentially at primary school level.

Prof. Sankara Pillai, the brain behind this experiment, was encouraged to streamline the activities or Rangaprabhat by introducing puppetry and children's drama in the experiment. He, thus launched the revolutionary concept of Children's drama in Malayalam for education, for which he himself wrote new plays and in the next 22 years he wrote several plays—all for the children of Rangaprabhat to act. His aim was not to create new actors or actresses but to help children involve in activities that would enable them to imbibe value and attitude the formal education set-up does not offer them at present. The emphasis was to help

children learn through creativity and based on what Prof. Pillai would always quote, 'the child likes to learn but hates to be taught'.

The Rangaprabhat has now become a community centre of extremely important educational experiments involving not only students and teachers but also parents. It has earned the distinction of acting like a bridge between the school and the community always appreciates what is going on in this centre. It has to weather always the strident and orchestrated criticism of a community which is caught up in the web of materialistic temptation of entertaining visions of all their children becoming doctors or engineers or professors, do not want their children to waste their time in drama activities which, according to conventional opinion, is not good. The apathy of ordinary citizens

towards creative involvement of their children is very strong and they feel that these are diversions and certainly would affect the children in their efforts to secure more marks. And it is this which the Rangaprabhat has been fighting and it should be mentioned here that Prof. Sankara Pillai, who had a vision and firm conviction of the extremely important role this experiment could play, was not ready for any compromise, for he always reminded us that we had nothing to compromise: "We are offering something new, a healthy alternative, however small it may be. The experiment aims at instilling in the minds of those who are concerned with education that what we want is the realisation of the simple truth that the child is to be respected and understood and all our educational experiments should not forget this simple and basic aspect."

The work of Rangaprabhat Children's Theatre won national and international recognition under its Founder-President Kochunarayana Pillai whose dedicated efforts were supplemented by guidance from Prof. G. Sankara Pillai who wrote a number of children's plays for this group.



What sustained the experiments which could not claim to be extraordinarily significant, was the conviction of both Prof. Pillai and Kochunarayana Pillai and their associates that the experiment is bound to influence the community, though recognition came only very slowly and, that too, grudgingly. The reluctance of a phoney society to any change could be seen here also. Opposition to any creative and innovative effort would be felt strongly and anybody except Prof. Pillai and Kochunrayana Pillai would have left this and taken to other more profitable areas but for their commitment to the cause.

The emphasis of the organisers over the years has been to develop an alternative programme of nonviolent value orientation to the children first and then indirectly to the parents as against the feverish attempts that are being made to inculcate values in the children by an elderly society which does not practise any of them. The Rangaprabhat experiment does not aim at teaching children anything, rather it seeks to offer children a variety of situations for them to choose and internalise, absorb and get themselves immersed in their own world—a world of play, game, songs, dance, painting, puppetry, fantasy, creativity, etc. It fosters the child in the child and respects the child's inalienable right to grow in an atmosphere of creative freedom and expression, in a relaxed situation which in turn helps to discover his/her latent talents. In a world where growing up has become an impossible and agonising process, the importance of relaxed learning situation offered by Rangaprabhat to children of various age groups should not be taken lightly by those who care for the future of their children.

The work of Rangaprabhat Children's Theatre won national and international recognition under its Founder-President Kochunarayana Pillai whose dedicated efforts were supplemented by guidance from Prof. G. Sankara Pillai who wrote a number of children's plays for this group. These plays were successfully presented in different parts of India and some other plays like Pushpakireedam, Gurudakshina, Maddalanganal, Venalil Virinja Poovu were highly acclaimed as masterpieces. Prof. S. Ramanujam, Dr. G. Gangadharan Nair, Dr. Santhakumari Amma and Alumthara Krishnapillai lent admirable support in the development of Rangaprabhat while Kochunarayana Pillai took the message out of Rangaprabhat Campus to various theatre groups in Kerala and encouraged them in the popularisation of the concept and practice of Children's Theatre. The Rangaprabhat has also produced quite a few young and talented theatre artists who in their own way are contributing to Children's Theatre in Kerala. After the demise of Kochunarayana Pillai, his daughter K.S. Geetha, a talented actress, singer, choreographer, who had won best child artist's award from the Government of Kerala thrice in charge of the Centre. ■

The writer is Chairman, Indian Council of Gandhian Studies

Not every footstep

can lead
you through
the right path.

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Thus Spake a Stalwart



The following 'face to face' was done way back in 1987. However, the reflections and revelations expressed therein seem relevant and significant, perhaps more so, in the present scenario of our theatre. And hence this probing piece that is revealing as well.

Almost synonymous with modernism is Malayalam Drama, G. Sankara Pillai had been a long term Professor of Malayalam at the Devaswom Board College, Sasthamcottah before he took charge as Director, School of Drama at Thrissur under the University of Calicut. Incidentally, the first Natakakkalari, spearheaded by Sankara Pillai, was held at the lake-side college and its sprawling premises by the famed Sastha shrine way back in 1967. A creative get-together of theatre-enthusiasts, the Kalari was a teaching-cum-coaching camp, accentuated by lively discussions and discourses on the diverse aspects of dramaturgy. It got off with a bang, thanks to the inspiring guidance rendered by C.N. Sreekantan Nair and such masterminds like M. Govindan, Dr K. Ayyappa Panikkar, M.V. Devan, and P.K. Venukkuttan Nair.

Despite its impressive debut,

Natakakkalari was looked down upon by many as a stupid exercise in futility. Teaching drama! – they scoffed in unison. The detractors were mainly from the field of commercial theatre. What is there to be taught in drama? - they asked almost in a refrain. If you have real talent, simply pick a play of your choice, decide the cast, learn the dialogue by heart and present it after a couple of rehearsals. Coaching camps or workshops may produce a champion athlete, but never a playwright or performing artiste of any worth. There in no substitute for talent or creativity.

In spite of such insinuations, the Natakakkalari had come to stay as a movement gaining gradual



momentum over the years. Several organisations got the cue and followed suit conducting periodical training camps on an elaborate basis. The one-time detractors too joined the bandwagon, perhaps as a penance for having denigrated it in the past. This new awareness in the inherent potential and infinite possibilities of drama did create a climate congenial for the evolution of a meaningful theatre, alive to the past and alert to the future. The healthy trends and traits, manifest especially in the sphere of Campus drama during the



Seventies and Eighties, are the happy outcome of the said resurgence.

Such niceties and nuances notwithstanding, the overall picture of Malayalam drama is far from satisfactory. While discussing at length its present state, Prof. G. Sankara Pillai was candid in his views and categorical in his concerns and conclusions. As the author of the widely-acclaimed 'History of Malayalam Drama', a Sahitya Academi publication, his approach and analysis had a resounding ring of authenticity about them.

Malayalam Drama is more than a century old, but it is yet to come of age. A paradox it may be, but true, however. There are a host of commercial troupes catering to an assorted audience almost round the year. But the fare is more or less of the escapist genre stuffed with tear-jerking sentiments and airy-fiery theatricality. The amateur groups are no better; they sprout up rather sporadically and their maiden performances, despite defiant declarations, turn out to be swan-songs. Making things worse, both are at logger-heads, invalidating any sort of interaction between them, and accusing each other of ineptness,

inertia and insidious imitation.

What is lacking is nothing but a spirit of 'professionalism'. The term, Prof. Sankara Pillai added, is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. It denotes total involvement in whatever vocation one chooses and an all-out attempt to attain perfection and excellence through exploration. Our so-called professional theatre is really commercial in concept, content and exposition and understandably so. In its frantic bid to subsist, and if possible flourish, it has to keep the audience amused. When sentimentalism fails, sensationalism takes over along with the trickery of new techniques. The bane of commercialism is not a singular phenomenon; it has befallen even the renowned Broadway theatre. That is exactly why the 'off Broadway' and 'Off off Broadway' thrive providing ample arena for genuine

activity at the end of every century in the past, Prof. Pillai added.

Turning to the recent tendency to blend the traditional elements of our age-old art-forms with 'modern' theatre, he opined that one should be over-conscious, if not cautious while attempting such an amalgam. Certain ritualistic arts cannot be transplanted to the present-day state. Teyyam, for example, is first and last a ritual and its audience is composed of ardent devotees and not bemused spectators. There are, of course, elements of drama in it as there are in wrestling too. But Teyyam involves a lifestyle closely connected with its environment. And hence when separated from its habitat, it becomes pointless and practically dead. In the changed environment, its stamina is lost beyond redemption. Rituals are valid only against the background of



experimentations in drama.

Only when the three A's – the Author, Actor and Audience – combine does a theatre evolve in full, be it amateur or commercial. Playwrights having no proper concept or professional insight can only pursue a conformist path that rotates in a predictable track. In fact, our playwrights, performers and the theatre-going public are too confused to come out of the web of their own doing. Maybe, something substantial will surface, away from the mainstream enmeshed in ever so many nonsensical notions, something radically new, dynamic and rejuvenating. The same had happened in all the spheres of human

their ethnic beliefs. Moreover, there is an enigma, a mystique at the centre of every ritualistic art that invokes a certain unconscious energy. Call it divine power or by any other name. We should earnestly endeavour to imbibe its spirit in all humility rather than ape its format or structural pattern in 'cut and paste' fashion. The costumes and colourful headgear are no doubt charming; but what relevance do they have in the modern milieu? Tradition should be interacted, not interpolated into our context.

Sankara Pillai cited the example of Lorca, the celebrated Spanish dramatist. His plays abound in the traditional spirit of Spain as

epitomised in its national game, the bull-fight. Never does he reenact the fight as such with a view to dazzling the spectator; but one gets the feel of its fiery power and passion through and through. Poetry perhaps can express it more subtly as evidenced in the famous line, 'the Sun rises as a bull on its hind legs'. In Kurosawa's 'Throne of Blood', Macbeth is interpreted in terms of the traditional Kabuki theatre of Japan. Nearer home, we have B.V. Karanth of Karnataka who had explored the Shakespearean play in the classical Yakshagana style. He had also directed Hayavadana the Karnaad-play achieving a flawless fusion of folk elements and modern ethos in the process.

There are attempts in Malayalam too to revive the dramatic elements in our folk and traditional arts so as to reinstate the same in the theatre. Behind the façade of trumpeted experimentation, such 'reinforcements' invariably result in shallow adaptation of the surface sheen and gloss of the old forms, devoid of their dynamic spirit. A sort of stylisation sets in limiting the behaviour-pattern of the actors, whatever the theme of the play or its treatment. The novelty is apparently skin-deep and it subsides through stupid repetition. As long as there is no conceptual and executional lucidity, the concocted elements will stand out spoiling the totality of presentation.

It takes years of patient study and practice to evolve a theatre-language of one's own. Only a consummate artiste can absorb it in full. The stage, make up, lighting and other technical devices are metaphoric props; but theatre-language is something distinct. It involves the language in the play and of the play. Peter Brook took ten long years to prepare the dramatic text to our great epic, 'The Mahabharat' and to fix the final texture of its treatment. What we lack today is the indomitable will to acquire such skill of rare magnitude capable of conjuring up a brave new world of dramatic experience. ■

Influence finds its way

Modern theatre today is struggling for its existence. It is believed that film, television and such other electronic media are posing threat to theatre in its struggle for survival. However one may feel that it is a wrong conclusion. Theatre could move forward even after the arrival of films and evolution in the cultural and communication scenario. The problem today is that theatre is not able to attract audiences, as it could earlier. The developments in modern theatre often compel the audiences to keep mum and walk away silently. The theatre artistes believe that the silence of the audience is an approval of their efforts.



But the audience feels that silence is the apt reaction as they are the learned group. *Mounam Sammatha Lakshanam* and *Mounam Vidhwanu Bhooshanam* are the two paradoxical dictums applied here. The over 'physicalisation' in the production of modern dramas do create hindrance for proper 'Aswadana' for the 'sahrudaya'. Sometimes physicalisation, though decorative and visually attractive, does not communicate the soul of the play. In fact the impact of the theatre is primarily based on the soul and spirit of the theatrical ensemble.

It is interesting to see that theatre played an important role in the lives of the two great personalities, one the most creative and noble and other, the most destructive and dangerous. Theatre, especially, drama has made great impact in the life of Gandhiji in moulding his future. Adolph Hitler too was influenced by theatre in a different way. When we

analyse the two different aspects of theatre, which influenced the lives of two different personalities, we can even draw certain conclusions regarding the problems of modern theatre.

Gandhiji has written in his autobiography how drama and theatre influenced the course of his life.

"My eyes fell on a book purchased by my father. It was



Today theatre artistes, especially the modern theatre directors are after the body of theatre, where as the soul of theatre is neglected quite often. The fact remains that the theatre will be everlasting if the soul is kept alive.

'Shravana Pithrubhakthi Nataka', a play about Shravana's devotion to his parents. I read it with intense interest. There came to our place about the same time itinerant showmen. One of the pictures I was shown was of Shravana carrying by means of slings fitted for his shoulders, his blind parents on a pilgrimage. The book and the picture left an indelible impression on my mind. 'Here is an example for you to copy', I said to myself. The agonised lament of the parents over Shravana's death is still fresh in my memory. The melting tune moved me deeply, and I played it on a concertina which my father had purchased for me.

There was a similar incident connected with another play. Just about this time, I had secured my father's permission to see a play – 'Harishchandra' – captured my heart. I could never be tired of seeing it. But how often should I be permitted to go? It haunted me and I must have acted Harishchandra to myself times

without number. "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me. I literally believed in the story of Harishchandra. The thought of it all often made me weep. My common sense tells me today that Harishchandra could not have been a historical character. Still both Harishchandra and Shravana are living realities for me, and I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again today"

Adolph Hitler was interested in the 'theatrical' aspects rather than its message. The element of "make belief" was his point of attraction. Theatre artists were on his payrolls for teaching Hitler the way he should stand, the way he

could cut his mustache, the way he should speak, get dressed etc. Hitler was interested in the body of theatre, where as Gandhiji was immersed in the soul of theatre – the very essence of theatre : the everlasting message acquired through 'Sadharanikarana' and 'rasaaswadana'. Gandhiji lives even now beyond his body just like the ideals he conceived from theatre. Hitler is no more as he was perished along with the body.

It seems, today theatre artists especially, the modern theatre directors are after the body of theatre, where as the soul of theatre is neglected quite often. The fact remains that the theatre will be everlasting if the soul is kept alive. The body of theatre is evolved from the respective lands, societies and cultures. The theatre of the earth will never die if the theatre artists will give a stir to it soul. ■

The writer is Asst Director and Head, Doordarsan, Thrissur

As far as Kerala's Natyakala is concerned it is divided into three main streams from the point of view of its purpose, occasion of its application and the style of its presentation. These streams were classical arts, ritual arts, and folk arts.

Elevation through the Ages



Numerous small States and divisions existed in Kerala who were fighting each other even for women and wealth till the middle of 20th century. Though such a condition existed, Kerala was mainly divided into three territories politically such as Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. King Marthanda Varma was the person who annexed all the small States in the southern part of Kerala and thus state of Travancore was formed. Small states in the northern part of Kerala came together mainly to oppose the invasion of Tippu Sulthan of Mysore. Later Malabar Cochin and Travancore were unified by the British. The infight of tiny kings and chieftains was the main cause for the British to take the reign of India.

When this political and regional disintegration was quite rampant, there were other such factors like religion and casteism, which also played important roles in creating

divisions among the people. Religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahminism were widely spread here; Islamic and Christian religions also established their way while the region's Dravidian faith was also strongly rooted in the soil, along with different castes and sub castes like Namboodiri, Nair, Ezhava etc. The social evils like untouchability were prevalent and therefore Kerala was presenting a variety of discordance, disharmony and thereby a sort of complex and difficult social system was the order of the day. Tamil, Sanskrit and Malayalam were the main spoken languages, which too were creating different cultural disorders and disintegration. The majority of people were peasants who were fighting with the fertile soil and living like slaves had been maintaining all sorts of socio-cultural inequalities and the diverse customs, conventions and ritual practices. Besides, the variety and richness of our natural resources and fertile soil attracted the foreigners and they could easily exploit the situation and establish their own supremacy due to the internal prejudices, pretty differences, and disintegrative tendencies.

All these small complexities and differences had a direct bearing on our cultural life and created numerous religious and regional ethos. Naturally all these trends, traits and peculiarities did help the growth of different literary and artistic expressions. Since the temple administration and political power were with the upper class some of the important art forms were developed under their patronage and control. When such art forms were restricted, regulated, and confined within the precincts of their abodes and lower castes were not permitted to enter there, spontaneously they were

compelled to find out their own artistic expressions and forms reflecting their own imaginative inputs and cultural pursuits. The net result of all these was the formation and growth of a variety of ritual and folk performing forms. Along with these, those who were following other religious practices and faiths too had their own religious activities, prayer methods and ritualistic worships, which all contributed greatly to their own performing forms. If we look into all these aspects one thing is very clear that Kerala's political, cultural and religious atmosphere did create a number of enriched performance art forms that were originated, developed and brought to lime light.

Needless to say

that Kerala has had many rich and diverse audio-visual traditions, numerous performing forms and unique artistic expressions. Owing to all these, basically all the audio visual performing forms have a very dominating and important position in the socio-cultural set up compared to other regions of India. They were fundamentally different both in the methodology of performing techniques and visual presentations. Our traditional paintings, murals, and architectural marvels amply testify this richness. Despite all these, we have to admit that there was no concerted

or systematic effort in chronicling the origins and developments of these performing arts. We therefore categorically put it here that there is no clear and authentic history on this subject. Whatever the materials such as the available evidences, general characteristics of the existing forms and the suggestive hints and indications cannot help to write the history. By and large many of these forms are as old as about one thousand years.

The above mentioned factors are applicable to the acting oriented art forms of our audio-visual arts. There is no doubt that as far as acting is concerned one could get more new insights and various methodological diversities. As mentioned earlier, all the regional, religious and caste differences as also the cultural synthesis prevalent during those days have paved many ways for adopting numerous acting styles and their performing methodologies and applications. Take the case of classical Sanskrit theatre like Koodiyattam and its allied art forms like Chakkiyar Koothu, Nangiyar Koothu etc. They have their own separate entity, sustainability and independent methodologies. The classical forms like Ramanattam,

There is no doubt that as far as acting is concerned one could get more new insights and various methodological diversities. All the regional, religious and caste differences as also the cultural synthesis prevalent during those days have paved many ways for adopting numerous acting styles and their performing methodologies and applications.



Krishnanattam, Kathakali etc. originated in the 17th century, Oattam Thullal in 18th century and Chavittu Nadakam in 16th century. The advent of Portuguese and their influence in the formation of Chavittu Nadakam, in the ritual art forms like Theyyam, Thira, Patayani, Mutiyettu, Ayyappan-Theeyattu, which have grown due to the peculiar circumstances of Kerala and the forms like Kakkarasi Natakam, Porattu-Natakam, Kurathi-Attam etc have come into existence to entertain middle class and all these have different performing applicabilities. All these performing forms amply indicate that Kerala has had her own completely independent and totally different performing art forms that all had separate performing styles and presentational methods. From this entire diversified and rich repertoire, we can divide them into three main categories.

Generally acting can be termed as Natya Kerala or dance with songs and orchestral music. As far as Kerala's

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Elevation through the Ages

Natyakala is concerned it is divided into three main streams from the point of view of its purpose, occasion of its application and the style of its presentation. These streams were classical arts, ritual arts, and folk arts. The name of each stream itself indicates its characteristics and applicability. The external element that determines the classical arts is the specific grammar and tenets for their presentation. In the case of ritual arts, the factors that governed them are occasions of presentation, purpose of presentation and the participatory character of the performers and the involvement and collaborative theatres have lot of artificiality and exaggerative elements with the main aim of entertaining onlookers. Folk theatres are by and large meant for absolute loftiness and enjoyment for the audience, which were accomplished through artificial presentational styles and methods. It can be attributed here, there are three different stages of popular culture of the people; such as aesthetic ecstasy, ritual process and mass entertainment and because of these, theatrical performances of all the three categories have different approaches in their applicabilities and functions.

It is said by some historians that Kerala theatre is having only 150 years of age, while the world theatre has a history of 2500 years. But it is absolutely incorrect, even hundreds of years ago Kerala was abundant in theatre activities. Our own tribal, folk and classical theatre existed long ago. It is the duty of every theatre activist to study and propagate our art forms in and out of Kerala to make aware of our theatre background to all and also to make every keralite to be proud of our heritage and how the history of Kerala theatre elevated. ■

The writer is Lecturer, Centre for Performing and Visual Arts, University of Kerala

Theatre, like any other living art form is a changing phenomenon. In the early 20th century, there appeared a real fear that the electronic media should sound the death knell for theatre. However, today's theatre is quite clear that the fears of doom were quite unfounded.

After a lull, the theatre in Kerala is active today. There are theatre competitions at University, School and Panchayat levels. We also see luxurious composite cultural programmes organised by the T.V. channels who get huge revenues from colourful advertisements from multi-national companies.

Theatre, like any other living art form is a changing phenomenon. In the early 20th century, there appeared a real fear that the electronic media should sound the death knell for theatre. However, today's theatre is quite clear that the fears of doom were quite unfounded. In the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkatta, there are times when it is difficult to get tickets for good plays. These theatres have had a very distinct identity with its specific aesthetics, artistic expressiveness and innovative creativity, which are very relevant in today's life. Indian theatre cannot make much headway without coming into terms with our

Fear not; Theatre has wings





tradition. It was just possible, these translations from Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen and Brecht remained as literary exercises and never meant for performances. Even if somebody tried to perform, they produced these translations / adaptations into the form of proscenium theatre which was the order of the day. Any theatre form whether it is dance or drama, ballet or opera is essentially a performing art before the audience.

Unfortunately, these great translators and adaptors have never gone abroad with a view to witnessing Shakespearean or Victorian theatres. To them literature was important and if any attempt is made to present these, it was all a hotch-potch affair ignoring the guidelines of Western dramaturgy and Bharata's Natyashastra specifications. It is a fact that we have plays

Prof. G. Sankara Pillai says, "In all spheres of human activity newness is produced not only of void, but out of new types of synthesis". In certain cases, the synthesis is total and perfect; and in some, it is not. We have the examples of Kathakali and Chavittu Natakam for such synthesis. The first has effectively synthesised elements from the ritualistic forms, Natyashastra and the martial art forms or religious rituals and Kalaripayattu. The fusion is so complete and perfect that identification of the component parts is at present very difficult. After the arrival of Portuguese, Chavittu Natakam developed because of a similar attempt, an attempt to synthesise the foot-works of Kalaripayattu and made use of the costumes of Western theatrical forms. Here the blending of two theatrical elements is not that complete and perfect.

In the beginning of last century itself, attempts to synthesise old theatrical traditions with that of modern theatre activities were made in Europe. Started probably as a revolt against the conventional ways of play production, Western directors'

unique cultural tradition, to which eminent Western theatre directors are now turning to India.

In Kerala, trends are indicative that we may have to wait for a good production to take place in the near future. All is not well in our theatre. Controversies, court cases and even physical fights are the byproducts of some of these youth festivals and other such festival competitions.

The history of dramatic literature in Malayalam is said to date back from the translation of Kalidasa's Shakuntalam by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran around 1880. These historians never cared to look into our rich classical (Sanskrit) traditions and variety of folk heritage thinking that it was below their dignity. Probably this high bread literary Pundits wanted to separate the 'drama' whether it is Indian or Western from the mainstream theatre activities for which each of our villages had a living

In the beginning of last century itself, attempts to synthesise old theatrical traditions with that of modern theatre activities were made in Europe. Started probably as a revolt against the conventional ways of play production, Western directors' interest was mainly towards the visual elements of folk, ritual and classical performing forms.

galore, translations of almost all Sanskrit plays, Western and Russian plays, but how many of them are meant to be presented on the stage. And when accidentally if any translation is presented they preferred to produce it on the lines of Parsi theatre or Tamil musicals, of course they too were influenced by the colourful Victorian stage.

Probably due to that not so glorious background, we are under a new and healthy influence, which is at once fresh, different and creative.

interest was mainly towards the visual elements of folk, ritual and classical performing forms. They were not only interested in traditional art forms of their own countries but also the rich and varied folk arts, myths and magical practices of South East Asia and Africa.

We Keralites too did not lag behind in search of experiments. Playwrights like C.N. Sreekantan Nair, G. Sankara Pillai, Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, Narendra Prasad and a host of Trissur School of Drama,

National School of Drama products and foreign trained directors came to the scene with such plays and presented before the discerning theatre lovers. Some eminent Western theatre artistes too started showing interest in our theatrical practices and experimented with some of these elements. Thus started our search for new idioms from the real roots of theatre, which is now spread not only in Kerala but nationally and inter nationally as well particularly the plays of Kavalam and some young directors like Abhilash Pillai, Roysten Abel, M.G. Jyothish etc.



Some eminent Western theatre artistes too started showing interest in our theatrical practices and experimented with some of these elements. Thus started our search for new idioms from the real roots of theatre, which is now spread not only in Kerala but nationally and inter nationally as well particularly the plays of Kavalam and some young directors like Abhilash Pillai, Roysten Abel, M.G. Jyothish etc.

This school of thought argues that Kerala theatre must have a separate identity and must be an indigenous theatre rooted in our theatrical traditions (Thanathu Nataka Vedi). Despite their strong arguments and supporting institutions with their productions, there is another school, whose cup of tea is just not the theatre rooted in tradition. Most of our commercial (professional) and amateur theatre productions especially presented before audiences in the festivals, temple compounds and church court-yards were of a mixed fare mainly influenced by Western proscenium trends. It is absurd to discard this altogether.

Influence or no influence, roots or no roots a theatre should be a theatre with some theatrical actions and audio-visual impact. It is important to see that the external structure and the innate actions are inseparably and harmoniously blended. Are our Japanese, Chinese and even African theatre components too untouchable? If the play demands certain congenial ambience, there is nothing wrong in giving it a folksy flavour. In such a play, if some Western or for that matter Eastern or African elements are crept in which have dramatic significance, please do not brand them as trash. We should not close our eyes to the modern

technological developments and scientific advances made in the show biz. Some of the young directors are now effectively utilise multi-media techniques, such as computer animation, film clippings, directional lighting devices and the most modern sound modules to reach out the modern audiences and it is therefore not wrong in encouraging them.

It is also not wrong in reviving some of the extinct ritual, tantric or traditional forms for theatrical presentation provided they are flexible enough to bring about a total dramatic experience. The question here is whether they are socially relevant or not. Are they palatable to the common theatregoers? Do they reflect the contemporary ethos and common man's aesthetic sensibility? Of course certain rituals are extremely attractive and visually appealing for the stage adaptation. However, some

are not. Once this writer was a mute spectator to a gruesome act on the stage in a central Kerala village. A possessed man in trance (not acting) killed a cock in public view and sprinkled the blood on the stage and the rest gulped like the 'holy water'. This is outrighting revulsion and disrespect to the audience. Should we need such visuals in the name of modern theatre? In Sanskrit theatre, there were 'dos and don'ts' on the stage. These days they are not practical to bring in some theatre effect. However, any criminal action on the stage should be banned and the performer be punished.

Premachandran (name changed) was a very good actor on the Delhi Malayalam stage. Once, in G. Sankara Pillai's play 'Bandi' he crush-killed a parrot for which the jury reprimanded him and gave negative grading. Premachandran should have been

declared as the best actor but for this despicable act. The aftermath of this act was that Premachandran's fans did create some ugly scenes after the performance. In 'acting' creation with the sub-conscious mind is permitted but not with the unconscious. Besides, bringing the live parrot on the stage was another mistake. Instead, it should have been a stage-prop and crush-killing should have been acted in an illusory manner with perfect synchronisation of the pre-recorded sound effects if the action is to be shown in a realistic manner.

One should also forget the most important function of any performing art, i.e. communication with a capital 'C' as in the case of any other aural

raised platform or a proscenium stage. There was no training, no rehearsal, no planning and no conceptualisation. Why all these? Time has come to stop encouraging such play productions. Instead, we should produce competent play producers or directors. Trained directors are the need of the hour. How to achieve this? We must have enough number of Theatre Institutes like the National School of Drama, New Delhi, the School of Drama, Thrissur and Theatre Departments in the Universities. There should be more short and long-term courses and intensive theatre workshops under their supervision. Remember we have no Alkazis, Shambhu Mitras, Utpal Duts, Habib



and visual art. Without communication no art can survive. Let theatre be a confluence of all the above streams to build up a genuine theatre.

It has been the bane of Malayalam theatre, through out its history that hundreds of trashes have been pouring in with either appearing on the stage or participating in the competitions and festivals. Even for silly reasons; for Trade Union's anniversaries, school and college function, we used to have a play enacted on a makeshift

Tanvirs and Karanths and a net work of playhouses with a band of committed theatre workers. At the same time one cannot close his eyes on Kavalam and his meaningful Sopanam activities. Rich contributions made by outstanding artistes like Prof. Narendra Prasad, Bharat Gopi, Nedumudy Venu, Bharat Murali etc. were also not very active due to their other commitments. ■

The writer was with the Song and Drama Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Laurels for the

When he passed out of the Film and Television Institute of India Resul Pookutty would never have, even in his wildest dreams, thought that he would bring laurels to his institute or even his country.

Even walking the red carpet on the Oscar night, the dream of every cinematographer in the world, was only an illusion in his canvas of life.

Today, with his winning of Oscar for Best Sound Mixing, Resul has put the name of his small village on the world map.

The Oscar also brings with it a big burden for technicians in Indian filmdom – that of excelling in their chosen field, to be the best in the world. For an Indian has proved it.

That achievement also brings laurels to Mollywood, as Malayalam film world is more often called in the rest of the country.

Even the fact that he is sharing the honours with three others does not even one bit lessen the glory of the achievement.

Born in Vilakkupara, a small village in Kollam district, Resul walked the 6 km to the nearest school and with no electricity he had to study in the light of a kerosene lamp, perhaps making him keenly study the shadows that the light cast and the sound of crickets chirping during the dark nights.

He very well brought out his feelings towards his work when he referred to the universal word, Om, in his acceptance speech.

On the night when he walked up the stage to receive the award at the 81st Academy Awards at the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles, California, Resul would have been





Country

ruminating over the past 13 years that he had been in the industry.

After passing out of the FTII Resul started his career with Rajat Kapoor's little-known Private Detective in 1997. His work in Black in 2005 brought him to the limelight. Without any songs Black was talked about for its sound.

Gandhi My Father, his next venture, was a challenging experience since the film demanded extreme attention on the variations in Gandhi's voice from his youth to old age. However, his hard work paid off when he got an opportunity to work with one of his favourite directors Danny Boyle in Slumdog Millionaire. His other noted films include Saawariya (2007), Ghajini (2008).

Jai Ho, the song that won A R Rahman Oscar for Best Original song, has brought more than an award for his home country. It exemplifies the spirit of this country. It may not be rated as the best of the compositions by the Mozart of Madras. But it is the crowning glory for the fabulous music he has been making for over a decade. And to top it all he also became the first Indian to bring home two Oscars by also winning the award for best background score.

Chinna, chinna asai, his song for the Tamil film Roja, brought the son of one of the best known musicians in Malayalam R. K Shekhar, to the lime light. Even today, it is rater as one of the best

songs in the country. Late Shekhar was a composer and conductor in the Malayalam film industry.

Born in Chennai on January 6, 1966 as A.S. Dileep Kumar, he started learning the piano at the age of four. When he was nine, his father passed away. Since the pressure of supporting his family fell on him, he joined Ilayaraja's troupe as a keyboard player at the age of 11. Due to some personal crisis, Dileep Kumar embraced Islam and came to be known as A.R. Rahman. In 1987, he moved to advertising, where he composed more than 300 jingles over 5 years. In 1989, he started a small studio called Panchathan Record Inn, which later developed into one of the most well-equipped and advanced sound recording studios in India.

Allah Rakha Rahman played many instruments and later joined some of the well-known names such as Zakir Hussain, M.S. Vishwanathan, and Ramesh Naidu on world tours. He also obtained a degree in Trinity college, Oxford where he graduated with a degree in western classical music.

In his acceptance speech, Rahman attributed all his success to his mother who encouraged him to take music lessons in the face of adversities.

Since Roaj, be it te album 'Vande Mataram' or the musical 'Bombay Dreams', Rahman's brand of world music has reached out across countries and cultures. He is the first Indian musician to win the Golden Globe and the BAFTA award.

Rahman was awarded with Rajat Kamal and best music director at National film awards.

Some of his noted and renowned work in Hindi cinema which created a vibe for more than a decade are Roja (1992), Bombay (1995), Rangeela (1995), Fire(1996), Daud (1997), Dil Se, Earth (1998), Taal (1998), Zubeidaa, Nayak (2000), Lagaan (2001), Sathiya (2002), Lakeer, Meenaxi (2003), Yuva, Kisna, Swades (2004), Rang De Basanti, Guru (2006), Jodhaa Akbar, Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na, Yuvraaj, Ghajini (2008), Slumdog Millionaire, Delhi 6 (2009). ■

Overcome

Overweight and obesity of women increase with the increase of age. And also underweight is more common among young adult women. Proportion of overweighed women is high among currently married and widows and one by third of the unmarried women are underweighed. Another interesting thing is that rural women were much more likely to be overweighed and obese than urban women.

Nutrition research in India has focused primarily on under nutrition, particularly among vulnerable women and children. There is convincing evidence that total energy intake is related to body weight. Most of the studies suggest that people with normal weight have healthier nutrition habits than obese or overweight persons. The World Health Organisation has declared that obesity is the biggest unrecognised public health problem with very substantial impacts on both morbidity and mortality of populations throughout the world (WHO, 1998). The risk of death from all life style diseases increases throughout the range of moderate and severe overweight for both men and women in all age groups (Calle, C, E, 1999).

It is proved that obesity and overweight were less prevalent among daily smokers and physically active persons (Villus Gra Bauskas et al., 2003). Changing standard of living, popularity of fast foods, food from outside, fizzy drinks, sedentary life styles, increased pocket money, lack of sports and increased TV and

computer watching have led to a change in the way of life, the effects of which have to be studied. There is some evidence of an emerging nutritional transition in India. NFHS-2 (National Family Health Survey, 1998-99) data for India show that more than one third of women aged 15-49 years have a BMI (Body Mass Index) less than 18.5 kg/m², whereas nearly a quarter of urban women, who account for 27 per cent of the sample population, are overweight or obese.

Though India is a country still combating the communicable diseases, Kerala on the other hand has an admirable health status comparable to the west and is now going through an epidemiological transition where non-communicable diseases are more prevalent. Kerala has a unique position in the demographic transition as well as health transition in the country. In the area of overweight and obesity too we can see a peculiarity in the Kerala situation, within the Indian context. Based on NFHS-2 data, the prevalence of overweight was high in Kerala (17.0).

Obesity is an excess of body fat





ILLUSTRATION : PRAKASH

frequently resulting in a significant impairment of health. It results when the size/ number of fat cells in a person's body increases. A normal sized person has 30-35 billion fat cells. The expert committee on the treatment and prevention of obesity

and the International Task Force on obesity suggest that BMI is an accurate and easily available method to screen for obesity. BMI is measured as the ratio of weight of a person in Kilogram to height in Metre Square. Here BMI Variable is categorised into

four groups that classify women's nutritional status, using the WHO (1995) recommendations for preliminary analysis. The four groups that identify women those who are obese, BMI is greater than 30 kg/m², Overweight; BMI 25.0 to 29.9 kg/m², normal weight; BMI 18.5 to 24.9kg/m² and BMI is less than 18.5 kg/m², underweight, .

Results

Data of 3370 women in Kerala in the age group 15-49 whose BMI is available in NFHS-3 (2005-06) is taken for analysis. Among them 27.8 per cent are overweighted and 17 per cent are underweighted.

It is very clear from the data that overweight and obesity of women increase with the increase of age. And also underweight is more common among young adult women (15-24 age groups). Proportion of overweighted women is high among currently married and widows and one by third of the unmarried women are underweighted. Another interesting result obtained is that rural women were much more likely to be overweighted and obese than urban women. Among SC/ST women underweight is more common than the other groups.

With the limited dietary information available in the data set, it is observed that women who more frequently eat fish, chicken or meat and drink alcohol are more likely to be overweighted. Study also proves that women who watch Television and read newspaper daily have a more chance of being overweighted than others. These two results show that overweight is common among those who consume heavy food and spend more time for watching Television and reading Newspapers. It suggests that consumption of heavy food and absence of physical activity may lead to an increase in the number of overweighted persons in Kerala.

Analysis with economic variables gives the result that women who are in the richest level on wealth index

Contd. on page 39

Overcome the Overweight

are more likely to be overweighted, whereas nearly half of the poor women are under weighed. Therefore underweight is a common character of the poorest group of sample women who never uses milk or curd, pulses or beans, dark green vegetables, and chicken or meat, and occasionally uses fruits and fish. This emerging nutritional transition and rapid change in overweight among high income groups lead to the high occurrence of non-communicable diseases in Kerala. This is evident from this study itself that most of the women who suffered from diabetes, asthma and goitre or thyroid are also found to be overweighted.

Although under nutrition is experienced by nearly 17 per cent of women, majority of them may be poor, and may face serious associated health problems. Highest

Women who more frequently eat fish, chicken or meat and drink alcohol are more likely to be overweighted. Study also proves that women who watch Television and read newspaper daily have a more chance of being overweighted than others. These two results show that overweight is common among those who consume heavy food and spend more time for watching Television and reading Newspapers.

percentage of underweight is seen among the poorest group of sample women who usually may have a poor diet pattern. This result pointed out the need for continued commitment from Government to ensure food security for the poor and adequate access to health services. Information dissemination and programmes are also needed to help the women both poor and rich to understand the components of a healthy diet as well as the importance of physical exercise to maintain their weight for leading a healthy life. ■

The writer is Population Information Officer, Department of Demography, University of Kerala

Manifesting the Rich Culture

An extravagant blend of art and culture
A unique temple art form of the Central Travancore region of Kerala

The shivering nights of *Makaram* and *Kumbham* here in the beautiful Central Travancore lure the art-lovers worldwide with an extravagant feast. The benevolent goddesses of this beautiful land of festivals, the land of Onam, the Onattukara, who dance with hearts brimming with blessings and satisfaction of the well again harvest.

The thunderous beats of the big drums, *Veekkuchentas*, along with the harmonizing *Chendas* echoing in the chilly dense mist make the hearts tremble and the devotees thank and please their beloved goddesses raising cheering sounds like *kurava* and *aarppu*.

In the quietness of the nights and in the buzz of the days, one will be attracted by the special rhythms that the breeze brings from a corner of the vast paddy fields, the white sandy village roads or the high spirited dwelling places of the village. The natives will be preparing to receive their village goddess. The young and the old flow to the spot. It is the fabulous *Jeevatha Ezhunnallathu* of Onattukara.

The grandeur of culture

Jeevatha Nritham is a traditional and devotional art form that prevails only in a few villages of Central South Kerala. It is unique in its special adaptations of classical South Indian rhythms, dance steps, traditional architectural parameters, traditional indigenous metallurgic technology, embroidery and handicraft.

A *Jeevatha* is a miniature palanquin, with an elaborately decorated front called *kolam* or *thitampu*, in which the goddesses of the local temples visit the houses of the natives during harvest season. This rare art form is an integral part of the cultural life





of Karthikappally and Mavelikkara Taluks in Alappuzha District. In December, January, February and March, these villages will be echoing with the rhythmic beats of drums called chendas and veekkuchendas when the goddesses of around 25 temples including the famous Chettikulangara temple make their visit.

Each temple has its own Jeevatha to carry the idol of that particular goddess. Jeevatha is carried by two priests on their shoulders like a palanquin. Each goddess makes individual visits to the devotees' houses in the surrounding areas with drums, trumpets and other accompaniments.

This seasonal visit is called Parayetuppu. It is termed so because the visiting goddesses are welcomed, offering paddy in paras, the traditional measuring vessel. Accepting the offerings at each doorstep, the satisfied goddesses will dance showering their blessings. The two priests carrying the Jeevatha from the front and back will rotate in clockwise direction with rhythmic steps, swaying left and right and

A Jeevatha is a miniature palanquin, with an elaborately decorated front called kolam or thitampu, in which the goddesses of the local temples visit the houses of the natives during harvest season. This rare art form is an integral part of the cultural life of Karthikappally and Mavelikkara Taluks in Alappuzha District.

forward and backward. Jeevathas are rotated in both directions in certain temples.

The Brahmins (Nampoothiris) who perform the dance carrying the jeevatha on the shoulders have a special style of wearing the dhoti and turban made out of another dhoti.

Architecture of Jeevatha

By the structure, Jeevathas are of two types - Kettujeevatha and Chattajeevatha. Each Jeevatha has mainly two parts - a well decorated front called Mukhappattu and a small cabin behind it called Jeevathakkoodu. Jeevathakkoodu in which the idol is kept, is a miniature of the sreekovil, the sanctum sanctorum in typical Kerala temples. A Kettujeevatha differs from a Chattajeevatha in the structure and

decoration of the Mukhappattu.

Mukhappattu of Kettujeevatha is a bordered velvet cloth ornamented with golden bubbles, crescent moons, small idols of various gods and goddesses fixed on an arch-shaped wooden sheet. In Kettujeevatha, the ornamented velvet Mukhappattu is shorter and the remaining upper part is decorated with fan-shaped cotton cloth and bronze mirrors. Twenty one pieces of such white cotton cloth shaped as fans are tied to the frame by fixing bronze mirrors at the centre of each. This process demands great expertise, artistic talent and patience.

The Jeevathakkoodu, the house like structure behind the Mukhappattu is more complex. It is made of wood, strictly following the fixed measurements proportionate to the traditional measurements of the

Sreekovil, prescribed in the Thachusasthram, the ancient architectural science of Kerala. In fact, the making of the Jeevatha itself offers a wide topic of research.

Rhythms and Accompaniments

The indigenous and carnatic rhythms like panchari, lakshmi, champa, chempata, eka, thripata, atantha, muriyatantha, marma, kuntanachi and vishamakuntalam are specially adapted for this highly localised devotional art form. Though

accompany the jeevatha also have an important role. It also rotates in both directions following the rhythms. This becomes a laborious task when the rhythm passes to the more speedy fourth and fifth stages (kaalam). The temples at Chettikulangara, Chennithala Karazhma, Pandavarkavu, Ramapuram, Koippally Karazhma have got some sort of specialities.

The traditional methods of teaching the rhythms are followed here also to pass it on to the new generations of the two practising communities, the Brahmins and the marars.

Each jeevatha is accompanied by a cluster of instruments including the traditional chendas, veekku chendas (larger than the ordinary chenda which makes 'dhim' sound), thavil, ilathalam, kurukuzhal, kitipiti and shanghu (conch). This rhythmic extravaganza will vibrate in the minds gathered around.

The huge flat umbrellas called Mezhusvattakkuta, and oil lamps hanging at the end of long metal rods carried on the shoulders add to the splendence of the whole show.

Jeevatha Processions

For the annual festivals of these temples, jeevathas from six or seven temples join together for the colourful procession. Then all the drums will be playing the same rhythms one by one harmoniously and all the jeevathas will be dancing together. The charm of this spectacle humbles the rest of the procession.

As we have seen, it is a unique art form having special adaptations of classical South Indian rhythms, dance steps, traditional architectural parameters, traditional indigenous metallurgic technology, embroidery and handicraft.

Even though this rare art form is an integral part of the cultural life of

the Central Travancore, people outside Onattukara are little aware of this beautiful and enchanting devotional art form. If a detailed documentary portraying all the above mentioned aspects of Jeevatha is produced and screened among domestic and international tourists and devotees of other parts, they will be attracted to these places in the prayeduppu season to experience this cultural fiesta.

Now-a-days this artful performance is not getting sufficient media or tourist attraction. If proper publicity is given, a large number of tourists from other parts of India and abroad can be attracted. If the jeevatha kootiyezhunnallathu or koottamkottu, the procession in which five or more jeevathas perform together as part of the annual festival processions is properly projected, it will be included in the tourism calendars and in various tourism packages by the Tourism Department.

The communities involved in the making and playing of Jeevathas have almost given up this traditional job and are seeking other livelihood in other areas. So the artistic value of Jeevatha Ezhunnallathu is deteriorating and the art form itself is facing serious threat of extinction. It is to be remembered that the metallurgic technology involved in making the Jeevatha is the same used in making the unique Aranmula Kannati, the world famous bronze mirror of Kerala.

The Jeevatha Ezhunnallathu is believed to have a history of centuries. But so far no research has been conducted on it. To trace its history, the archaeological and historical documents of the Royal family of Travancore, local kingdoms, temples, local administrative and revenue offices and the archives need to be referred; historians as well as local veterans should be interviewed, and legends to be collected and analysed. Besides this a number of historians and experts are to be interviewed. But unfortunately no such efforts are being initiated from any corner. ■



this art form exists only in a few temples, the style of playing the rhythms and dance has variations from region to region. There are at least four different styles having their own individualities.

In one of these styles called the Chennithala style, the drum artists get a unique chance to perform their talents by the detailed playing of rhythms. A single rhythm will be played in detail for a long time. Here the colourful flat umbrellas that

Chemical units Need Imagination

The economic development of a country depends on the expansion of industrial units in that country. In the development of economy both the public and private sectors have a great role to play. In the pre-British period India consisted of isolated and self-sustaining villages depending mainly on agriculture. The towns were the centres of commerce, pilgrimage and manufacture of handicrafts with poor means of transportation and communication. The popular belief that India had never been an industrial country is not substantiated by available historical data. Though it is true that agriculture has always been the dominant occupation of the people, it is also a fact that products of Indian industries were distributed

all over the world and enjoyed worldwide reputation. But, later it was proved beyond doubt that the country should not be a passive observer, but should become an active participant in economic development. The result was the origin of public and private enterprises.

Public Enterprises

Public enterprises are those enterprises, which are organised either by Central or State Governments or both, and they are basically organised for the welfare of the people. The word 'public' denotes public purpose, public control, public ownership and public accountability. This is because every public enterprise is organised for public purpose. The ultimate

objective of any public business concern is to provide suitable service to the public at large. Public ownership denotes that it is being owned by the Government which itself is an entity created by the public. Public control implies that the public enterprises are supposed to show their accounts in Parliament thus making them accountable to the people.

Private Enterprises

Private enterprises are those enterprises, which are organised by private individuals under the control and the guidelines of Government of the respective State. Private enterprises

a nation. The economic development of a country is rendered possible through the establishment of various chemical units. They help to promote self-dependence in strategic sectors of economy, accelerate industrial development and encourage social control on trade and industry for equitable distribution of goods and services. At present chemical units, in addition to the above achievements, create more employment opportunities; reduce disparities in income and wealth in the country.

Views of Financial Executives

To know the attitude of chief executives of chemical units regarding the evaluation of financial performance of their units, an opinion survey was conducted among 20 financial executives of chemical units in Kerala. The major findings of that survey are summarised below.

Fifty per cent of respondents report that their designation was financial manager, 15 per cent have designation as financial controller, five per cent have designation as financial executives and 30 per cent have other designations. Half of the 20 executives have claimed that they have more than 10 years of experience. All the financial executives participated in the sample survey agree that the objectives of their organisations are clearly defined.

In respect of authority for evaluating capital expenditure proposals, about 70 per cent of respondents claim that it is done by the board of directors. Forty per cent of financial executives state that among the criteria used to evaluate capital expenditure proposals,



Suggestions to Both Sectors

profitability index method is followed. Seventy five per cent of the respondents admit that their organisations are not working profitably and 70 per cent executives are of the opinion that they fail to earn sufficient return on investment. While 60 per cent of respondents face shortage of working capital frequently, 50 per cent of respondents do not face any difficulty to get loan from public financial institutions. 75 per cent of respondents claim that their organisations are not overstaffed.

The study reveals that about 80 per cent of the chief executives are fully satisfied with the resources generation of the units. Only 20 per cent are not satisfied with these aspects. Those who are not satisfied belong to private



are better suited for rapid industrialisation, mainly due to economic motivation of industrialists in private sector, better profitability due to better operational management, less waste and more aggressive marketing. The rate of growth in industrialisation, especially at the level of small scale industries, is bound to be high in the case of private sector. Among such private and public enterprises, the chemical industry occupies an important place.

Chemical Enterprises

Chemical enterprises play a very significant role in the development of

Chemical units play a very significant role in the economic development of Kerala. It helps to promote self-dependence in strategic sectors of the state, build up different infrastructure facilities for the development of the state, accelerate industrial development and encourage social control on trade and industry for ensuring equitable distribution of goods and services.



The chemical units in Kerala should try to minimise their operating expenses. The management of the chemical units should take the required steps scientifically. Besides, cost control and cost reduction techniques should be adopted on a priority basis so that they can improve their operating profits substantially.

High wage payment paves the way for continuously improving human skill. Without an ideal wage payment system it is highly impossible to achieve the goals of an organisation. Hence wage payment should be linked to efficiency of the workers. Ultimately, it leads to a high level of productivity in the chemical industry.

It is seen that many chemical units depend too much on long term borrowings. Chemical units are paying more interest on debt finance than equity dividend debt capital. The management of the chemical units should increase their equity base from the public or from the Government so

as to bring in trading on equity. Such reorganisation should be attempted on a priority basis. It ultimately leads to avoiding debt trap in the future.

Financial executives have opined that the financial planning is poor or ineffective. Greater emphasis should be given to improving the quality of product and enhancing the marketing efforts. For that, executives should be given more power to take quick decisions. This is necessary because of the liberalised economic set up emerging in India.

The major problem experienced by the chemical units in Kerala was lack of professional approach in management. The management of the chemical units should take all possible measures to convert their traditional management approach that is 'getting things done through others' – to getting things done with others, the modern approach.

sector chemical units.

As far as executives are concerned, poor market strategy, lack of timely funds, under utilisation of capacity, insufficient capital etc, are perceived to be the prime reasons for the financial losses of chemical units.

Suggestions to Public Sector Units

Management of the chemical units, especially public sector, should take necessary steps to market inventories speedily so that the stock holding position is reduced at a minimum level. For that purpose the marketing network should be strengthened.

Capacity utilisation is not adequate in public sector chemical units. Concerted efforts should be made to increase the capacity utilization by identifying the factors hindering the same.

Compared to private sector chemical units, the personal expenses of the public sector units are very low. If this situation continues, it will lead to low labour productivity. Hence the management of the public sector chemical units should devise an ideal

package system that will attract and also retain the best talent in the industry.

Public sector chemical units should introduce effective strategies to improve assets utilisation methods. It will help them to reduce the operating expenses of the units.

Hectic measures should be taken to improve profits (both gross profit and operating profit) of the public sector chemical units as in the case of private sector chemical units.

Suggestions to Private Sector Units

Effective measures should be taken for the speedy collection of receivables in chemical units especially in the case of private sector units.

Contribution to Exchequer by the private sector chemical units was very meagre. It is the duty and obligation on the part of the private sector units to pay their tax dues promptly. The Associations of the private sector chemical units should educate these units and convince them to honour their tax liabilities.

Resource generation ratio in the case of private sector units was very

low. The management of the private sector chemical units should make every effort to strengthen internal resources generation scheme.

Chemical Units in Kerala have made the Green Revolution possible by producing basic chemicals for fertilisers and pesticides. They have paved the way for an easy transition to petro-chemical industry, biotechnology industry and the pharmaceutical industry. The greatest achievement of the chemical industry in Kerala is that it is continuing to contribute its mite to the nation at large and the southern region in particular, in spite of the vagaries of Government policies, international competition, unpredictable market conditions, outmoded technology, erratic power supply and a plethora of financial and labour problems. Because of privatisation and globalisation, the future of chemical units is bright since there is scope for inflow of foreign investment leading to upgradation of technology and better physical and fiscal management. ■

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Films with a message emerge as a new trend in Malayalam Cinema. Innathe Chinthavishayam, KadhaParayumbol, Mizhikal Sakshi, Veruthe Oru Bharya and the latest in the row is Makante Achan. A seemingly 'Sreenivasan film', Makante Achan captures the contemporary realities of life with pungent satire. The writer Samjad Narayanan has rightly incorporated the social issues of pseudo Swamis, their involvement with land and sex

mafia, the entrance mania and the corrupt bureaucratic system.

The protagonist of the story is Viswanathan, a village officer who hates corruption.

He has a son, Vivek, and a daughter, Dhanya. His whole dreams are centered round his son, who represents the teenagers of the time. Viswanathan is a typical father who is so much worried about the future of his child. He wants to make his son appear for the entrance

examination and get admission to some engineering discipline. As the order of the day, he secures admission for Vivek in an entrance-coaching centre. The coaching centre looks like a jail where a retired military officer dictates things.

Rema is the obeying wife and loving mother. Her only vocation in life is to look after the well being of Viswanathan and her children. She is a humble housewife who has trust in both her husband and children. In fact, she is supporting Vivek and is not eager for his passing the entrance examination. She proves that Mother's court forgives all the bad deeds of children.

Vivek is, in fact, not interested in attending the entrance coaching classes. His passion is music and he proves it in the special programme organised in the coaching center. Viswanathan's dreams are shattered when he realises that his son has not got through the entrance test. In his fury he shouts at him and Vivek leaves the house causing all the unhappy incidents following. In the end we

Sons and Fathers



see Vivek in a music reality show as a winning candidate.

The corrupt peon, Krishnan Kutty is well off and he tempts Viswanathan unsuccessfully to accept bribe from the public. But Krishnankutty and his wife Santhanavally are the only people helping and consoling Viswanathan and his family in times of distress.

Swami Himavalchaitanya is a character influenced by the recent media reports. But there is nothing new in his make up. We have witnessed similar Living Gods in so many films. The scriptwriter has failed to lift the swami to a new height. The character of the director of the coaching centre is also drawn from real life. It is no wonder that there are so many coaching centres in our State where the students are treated like the inmates of Nazi concentration camps.

Seven Arts International is a banner synonymous to good cinema in Malayalam. The producer G. P. Vijayakumar has given all support to the director V.M.Vinu to translate the script into a family drama foaming with emotional overtones and critical evaluation of the present realities.

The lyrics penned by Kaithapram and Anil Panachooran are brilliantly scored by M.Jayachandran. The cinematographer Manoj Pillai and the editor P.C. Mohanan capture the mood and pace of the story. The film is unique in the sense that actor Sreenivasan and his son Vineeth play the roles of father and son in the film. The veteran actress Suhasini is also making a return to Malayalam Cinema through her role as Rema. Thilakan , Jagathy Sreekumar , Salimkumar and Bindu Panicker, as in most cases, overdo their roles. V.M.Vinu has given them a free hand, which makes their performances all the more disgusting.

One should approve that the director V.M.Vinu has successfully portrayed the anguish and apprehension of a father, bringing out the burning issues of 'generation gap'. Truly, Makante Achan, is an eye-opener to all fathers, as the publicity posters boast, 'To all fathers yet to be born'. ■



Petunia

Annuals Popular

Petunias are one of the most popular annuals that are available in a dazzling array of colours and attractive foliage. The plants may be upto 45 cm. height with a trailing habit and small rounded and thick leaves. They bloom all summer with little maintenance and make perfect centrepiece to home gardens.

Petunias grow best in full sunlight but will survive in shaded areas that provide at least six hours of full sun light daily. The flower colours may be white, rose, pink, crimson, red, scarlet, blue, pale blue, violet, cream, yellow, salmon-rose, mauve or purple and in some varieties the flowers are bicoloured with star-like patterns. The flowers may have frilled and beautifully veined and marked petals and there are also varieties with fully double flowers. The plants are very free flowering and the flowering continues for a long period.

There are a wide variety of petunias to choose from like the dwarf and compact bedding types, large-flowered grandifloras, smooth-edged varieties, frilled (fringed) varieties, balcony and pendula varieties and all doubles.

Seeds are best sown from August to October and also sometimes from March to June in the plains. The tiny seeds are mixed with fine sand before sowing to ensure even distribution. The seedlings are transplanted after about a month of sowing. The all-double varieties are usually propagated from cutting. They require a well-drained and light soil for a good growth. They are pinched back when they are about 15 cm. high to make them bushy. Occasional feeding with fertilisers or liquid manure during flowering promotes profuse blooming. The faded flowers should be removed frequently to prolong flowering. The plants will flower within three to 3½ months from the time of sowing.

Petunia is excellent for beds, borders, edgings, mass plantings, rock gardens (dwarf varieties), window-boxes (balcony type), hanging-baskets (balcony type) and pots. It is also used as cut flowers.



Watermelon cools cools

Heaps of watermelon seen in every nook and corner of the state during hot summer months show how people of Kerala value this delicious and refreshing fruit as a heat fighter and thirst quencher. Though most of these watermelons arrive here from neighbouring states, watermelon now grown in a limited area mainly in the Malabar region has got great scope to be cultivated in the entire state. Watermelon known as Thannimathan in Malayalam and as *Citrullus lanatus* botanically is a member of the family of pumpkins and gourds. The round, oblong or spherical watermelon fruit has a smooth, green and yellow, often spotted or striped exterior rind and a juicy, sweet, usually red, but sometimes orange, yellow or pink interior flesh. The



fresh sweet juicy pulp is consumed as such or as juice or cool drink and is relished by poor and rich alike. Fruit contains 95% water, 3.3% carbohydrates, 0.25% protein and 0.3% minerals and is also an excellent source of vitamins. Watermelon is rich in antioxidants like lycopene which reduce the risk of diseases like asthma, atherosclerosis, diabetes, colon cancer and arthritis. Watermelon rind can be used for pickling while its seed kernels are used for adding to sweets. Watermelon is a vegetable carver's delight as it is rather easy to carve out beautiful eye-catching sculptures from the fruit with its intrinsic red, white and green multi-layer combination.

Watermelon prefers warm dry weather with abundant sunshine for its growth. The best time for growing this crop under Kerala conditions is December - April. Deep sandy loam soil is ideal for this crop. The varieties, Sugar Baby, Arka Jyothi and Arka Manik come up well here. Of these, Arka Manik is a multiple resistant variety possessing resistance to diseases, downy mildew, powdery mildew and anthracnose. Watermelon is a direct sown crop and seeds are sown in either in pits or furrows. The seed rate varies from 1 to 1.5 kg/ha and the spacing recommended is 3 m x 2 m. Watermelon plants require more care and attention during initial stages of crop growth. Two to three hoeings should be done during this stage to keep down the weeds, enhance soil aeration and conserve soil moisture.

The fertilizer recommendation for this crop is 70 kg nitrogen, 25 kg phosphorus and 25 kg potash per hectare, apart from 20 to 25 tons of farm yard manure. Full quantity of farm yard manure, half dose of nitrogen and full doses of phosphorus and potash have to be applied as basal dose. Remaining half dose of nitrogen is to be applied as top dressing in two equal split doses at vining and full blooming stages. The crop is to be irrigated at an interval of four days. Watermelon plants are allowed to trail horizontally over the ground. It is better to spread dried twigs or leaves as mulch in the plant interspaces. Weeding, raking and earthing up are the other cultural operations to be taken up. The crop is ready for harvest in about 75-100 days after sowing depending upon variety and season. For local market, harvesting should be done at full maturity while for transporting to distant markets, it is done slightly earlier. Harvest maturity of watermelon can be judged from withering of tendril at the fruit axil, change of the colour of the ground spot to yellow, yielding of rind to pressure and the dull sound produced on thumping the fruit. The fruit yield will be around 30 tonnes per hectare.

The major pests infecting watermelon are epilachna beetle, red pumpkin beetle and fruit fly while the major diseases are anthracnose, downy mildew and powdery mildew. Integrated pest and disease control strategy with an emphasis on installation of bait traps, use of multiple resistant varieties and application of biopesticides and biocontrol agents will take care of these pests and diseases.

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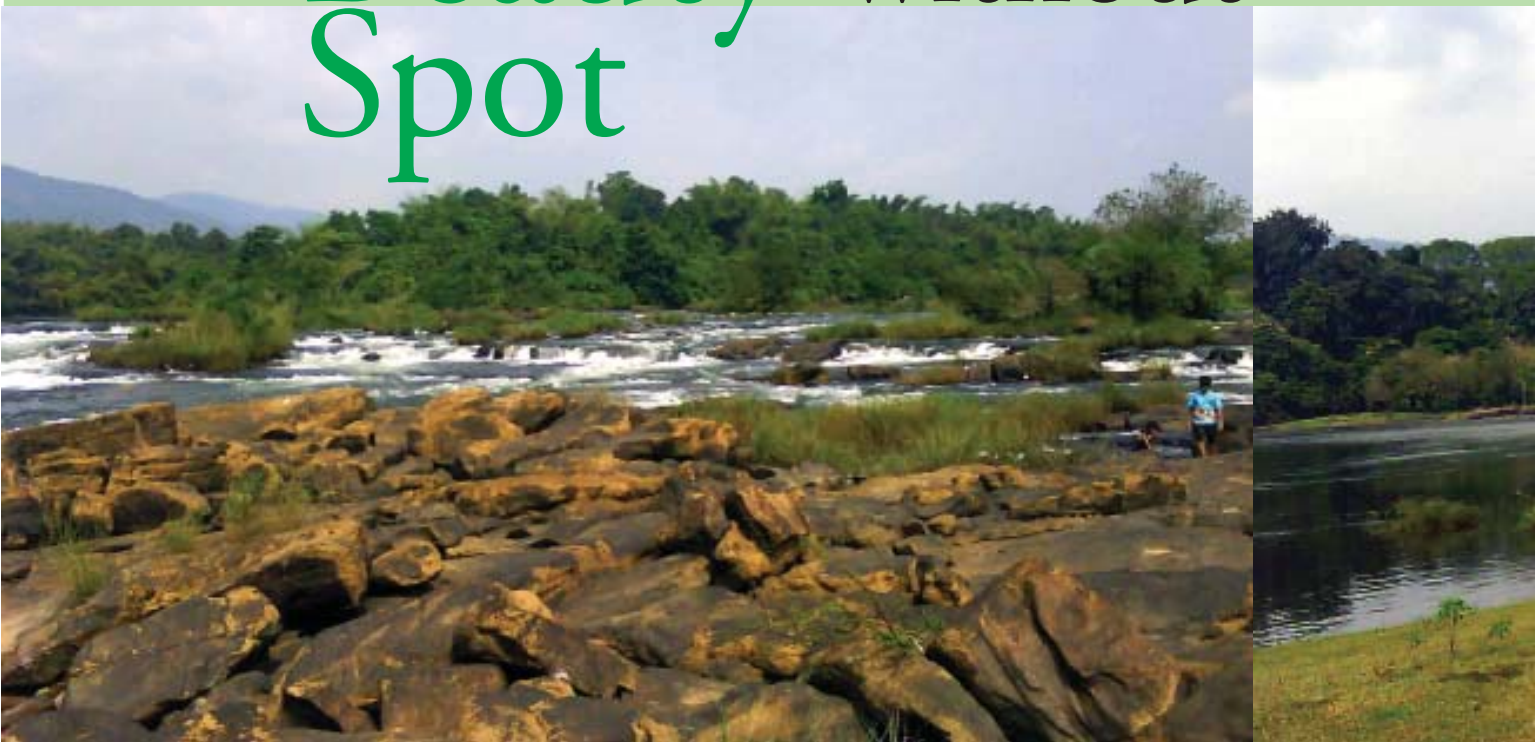
A weekend getaway at minimal cost, this was what there in my mind when I set out with family after a hectic week. Our batteries were badly in need of a recharge. But it was not in my wildest dreams that this weekend would give us so much enjoyment and refreshment. My sister suggested this place which is called some what strangely 'Paniyeli Poru'. It is not very clear how the place got this name. 'Poru' in Malayalam means 'fight.' The people of this place say this name could have been derived out the usual fights that used to break out between raft-rowers who frequent the river, carrying bamboo, all strung together like rafts, from the forests of Edamalar. This might have also been derived from the wild streams

that tumble over rocks and fall into the river.

We started from Moovattupuzha, on a cool morning by car. The drive to Poru took us about an hour. The route was dotted with trees and greenery which itself provide a lot of scenic beauty and joy. Paniyeli Poru is a gateway to the rain forests through the midst of which river Periyar flows. A lot of films have been shot in this area, largely due the astounding scenic beauty of this region. The Department of Forest has been doing a great job of preserving this region and keeping it eco-friendly. Plastic is banned in this area. The Vana Samrakshana Samithi volunteers work round the clock to keep the place clean and also act as guides.

The very sight of Periyar which flows though the rocks and dense forests is refreshing to both body and soul. At some places the Periyar looks like intertwined roots snaking its way through the rocks and trees of this rain forest. There are a number of hidden retreats along these banks of the rivers where people can take bath and enjoy the crystal clear water. I spend quite some times lying prostrate in the gushing river enjoying the feel of cool water on my body. This has a massaging effect and after that a sense of freshness engulfed me. Locals say that it is safer than the purified water sold in bottles. I can vouch for this as I drank quite a lot during this picnic. One couldnot help wondering if our children and the future generations

Paniyeli Poru Beauty without Spot



would be quite so lucky. But that is what responsible tourism is all about, giving our children a chance to enjoy these natural heritages. These places have to be persevered and conserved by inculcating a sense of responsibility among the public. Both tourism and sustainability should go hand in hand. Kerala's future lies in sustainable tourism, which is just another facet of responsible tourism.

Poru is about 20 km from Perumbavoor, 14 km from Kuruppampady and 60 Km from Kochi. The place is serviced by few private buses but is better to use a private vehicle and also carry some food along. Just spending the time in the banks of the Periyar enjoying the tranquility is in itself an unforgettable experience. During summer, the area around Poru is very cool and refreshing. Trekking from Poru to Bhoothathankettu which is about 20 kms from there is another option. It is better to take the services of a local guide during these trips. Another option is crossing the river and trekking to Malayattoor, a natural habitat of elephants. This requires permission of the Forest Department. The Department insists on travellers to carry their garbage in bags and deposit it in containers meant for it.

This is one of the ways of preserving this place and its enchanting beauty.

The Periyar flows from east to west through Malayattoor and Kalady in the north and Edamalayar and Perumbavoor in the south. The reserve forest area here comes under the jurisdiction of the Divisional Forest Office, Malayattoor. The forest headquarters is at



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Kodanad, nearly 10 kilometres from Poru. This is also a place which houses orphan elephant calves. The department of forest have managed to provide some open spaces in these places where children can enjoy themselves. Also a few swings have been put up among trees to make the experience more enjoyable.

One of the best things about this place is the whirlpools and natural bathtubs formed on rocks. Even during the heat of the noon, the water is cool and rejuvenating. But a word of caution, do not mix drink with bath as it could turn out to be a fatal combination. Some places in this region are dangerous and it is advisable to seek the services of a guide when venturing deep into the forest areas. We were a group of four adults and four children and at times were lucky to avoid slippery rocks. There are trekkers who venture deep into the forest and camp there for days. For this permission has to be taken from the forest department.

Many people have lost their lives here by being careless while bathing. The deep cracks between rocks can prove treacherous especially during rains. Hence it is always advisable to test the water before venturing into it. But it goes without saying that this is a place which can change your mood and will drive away your blues. 'A perfect weekend getaway' - this aptly describes Paniyeri Poru. ■

The writer is Senior Lecturer, KITTS, Thiruvananthapuram





An alumnus of the College of Fine Arts, Thiruvananthapuram and a recipient of many awards including those of Kerala Lalithakala Akademi and Kerala Forest Department, **C. D. Jain** has been honoured by the Rippon Kapur Fellowship (from Child Relief and You) also.

Reflections of Childhood

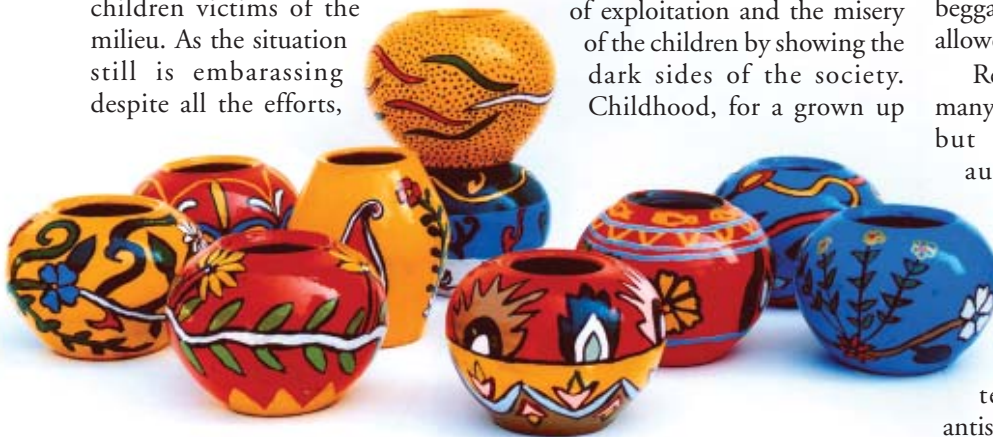
Every child has dreams but undoubtedly the circumstances are the main factors that make children what they would be in future. All our policy makers and care providers make statements about the need to provide protection and healthy atmosphere for the future citizens of the nation, but the reality of the situations is worsening day by day. However, the vulnerable situations cannot be controlled by the government authorities alone. The home, school and public places are morally, socially and economically polluted that make the children victims of the milieu. As the situation still is embarrassing despite all the efforts,

the social activists are awakened in a meaningful manner to present the grim picture before the public. The communicative media used by the activists may vary; but can there be anyone among the artists' fraternity to feel the pulse of the society and project it to the people to make them aware of the situation in this market oriented art economic conditions when gallery pampered artists rush for gold?

Yes, C.D. Jain, a committed artist, has dedicated himself to be an art activist and child educator to explore and expose the horrifying realities of exploitation and the misery of the children by showing the dark sides of the society. Childhood, for a grown up

person, gives a lot of reminiscences, ranging from happiness to frightening pathos. It is the lives of the children he met at different place in the country that shaped Jain's artistic plight to direct his conscience to devote himself to a great cause. "Don't Scratch My Face" is the expression he wants us to remember as these are the words the child told him when he was sketching a rag picker. The poverty stricken face, melancholic expression, painful memories of abuse, insult etc. are the existential marks of the identity of the destitute children. They are sold, resold, kicked, made beggars and prostitutes and finally allowed to fall into oblivion.

Reflecting on the childhood days many have created a lot of art works, but most of them are autobiographical or sweet memories. But how many among us have found the stark circumstances of so many Oliver Twists who are around us? Thieves, criminals, prostitutes, terrorists and all kinds of antisocial are moulded out of these





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broken and vulnerable children. The dark childhood of the marginalised and the forsaken grows into a universe of despair and crime.

C.D. Jain, when paints the world of child misery as well as innocence, keeps the visual language systematically naive to encode the childlike purity of existence. As the innocent souls are criminally moulded by the unconcerned society he pictures them as bent, uncouth, distorted and desperate with vacant look or with pathos but also with throbbing wish and expectation. Without exaggerating or sentimentalising the situation he presents the reality of facts in line and colour. For C.D. Jain, painting is a language of communication and medium of education; but at the same time his commitment to a great cause does not sacrifice the quality of art.

Nowadays the real question about art and artist is raised when artists are branded in market by galleries. The socially and aesthetically committed sense of expression is seen in his lines and colours, which are as tender as the children themselves are. The colours somehow remind us the innocent and naive dreams of the child mind, but ironically Jain suggests the shadows of exploitation and sexual abuses hidden behind. The artist who witnessed the cases of child abuse and child labour, is depicting children in various moods portraying his own moral responsibility and commitment to the relations among children themselves. The dark side of the childhood of these innocent souls is balanced with the dreamy sense and their quest for happiness. The charcoal drawings are a little more 'cruel' as the subjects he deals with are considered. The girl child is more vulnerable and more exposed to all kinds of cruelty.

An alumnus of the College of Fine Arts, Thiruvananthapuram and a recipient of many awards including those of Kerala Lalithakala Akademi and Kerala Forest Department, C. D. Jain was honoured by the Rippon Kapur Fellowship (from Child Relief & You - CRY) also. The exhibitions focusing on the existential agony faced by children conducted across the country have invited the attention of social activists, educationists and artists not only from India but from abroad also. Jain, an Artist - Educator dreams -high like a child, and the children in his works also have dreams as he visually announces through his paintings. ■



VARADA

Valuable Gift

Varada has become a favourite of the growers not only in Kerala but also in other parts of the country such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Andra Pradesh etc. owing to its high yield and good quality.

If India is the Land of Spices, Kerala is a Cafeteria of Spices! Black pepper, ginger, turmeric, cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, all spice etc. grown in the backyards and homesteads of the State besides as large plantations.

Kerala is the leading producer of ginger currently in the country with about 12,000 ha under the crop. Ironically till recently there was no ginger variety suited to the State,

though our Cochin ginger, Wayanadan ginger, Kozhikodan ginger etc. are well known in the trade. This shortcoming has been circumvented with the arrival of *Varada* in 1996 followed by *Mahima* and *Rejatha* later on. These three varieties are from the Indian Institute of Spices Research, Kozhikode. Currently there are four more improved ginger varieties available in



the country viz. Suprabha, Suruchi, Suravi from Orissa and Himgiri from Himachal Pradesh. Of course there are as many 50 land varieties too in ginger such as Maran, Himachal, Nadia, Mananthody, Wayanadan etc. in addition to the exotic types like as 'Rio-de-Janeiro' etc. cultivated to varying extent.

However, among all the varieties, Varada has become a favourite of the growers not only in Kerala but also in other parts of the country such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Andra Pradesh etc. owing to its high yield and good quality. Success stories of the variety from different parts of the country regularly appear in the print and electronic media.

A selection from the germplasm, Varada yields on an average 22.6 t/ha (fresh) ginger and matures within 200 days. Its dry recovery is 20.7 per cent essential oil 1.75 per cent and fibre 3.29-4.5 per cent. The rhizomes are plummy. However, many farmers report much higher yield than the average yield.

Value addition of spices not only fetches good profits but also makes it

Among the spices, ginger is one commodity having excellent scope for product diversification. Many value added products from ginger like ginger beer, ginger wine, ginger candy, ginger cookies, ginger flakes, ginger in brine, salted ginger, ginger powder, ginger paste etc. are now available in the super markets.

suiting to various end products.

Among the spices, ginger is one commodity having excellent scope for product diversification. Many value added products from ginger like ginger beer, ginger wine, ginger candy, ginger cookies, ginger flakes, ginger in brine, salted ginger, ginger powder, ginger paste etc. are now available in the super markets. Success and acceptability of the end product to a great extent depend on the choice of a suitable variety. In this context too Varada is found very suitable for ginger candy owing to its low fibre feature and bold rhizomes plus good yield.

The Kerala based Nadukkara Agro Processing Company Ltd. (NAPL), a public sector agro processing

company at Avoly, Muvattupuzha has now found that Varada variety of ginger is best suited for the export variety candy it manufactures, as the variety meets very well the consumer preference. The company in collaboration with Traid Craft, a UK based charitable fair trade organisation that fight poverty through trade is all set to assist farming Varada for candy. The company propose to plant two tonnes of Varada during the coming season. Traid Craft plans to procure 40 tonnes of candid ginger from the company based on buy-back agreement with the company for making ginger cookies. Traid Carft will also conduct social audit of the farmers involved to ascertain their welfare. ■



Statement about ownership and other particulars of Kerala Calling Monthly

(Form IV – See rule 8)

1. Place of Publication	:	Thiruvananthapuram
2. Periodicity of Publication	:	Monthly
3. Printer's Name	:	P.K. Lal
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Addl Director, Information and Public Relations Department, Govt Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram
4. Publisher's Name	:	P.K. Lal
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Addl Director, Information and Public Relations Department, Govt Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram
5. Editor's Name	:	P.K. Lal
Whether citizen of India	:	Yes
Address	:	Addl Director, Information and Public Relations Department, Govt Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram
6. Name and Address of individual who own the newspaper	:	Government of Kerala

I, P.K. Lal, declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Thiruvananthapuram,
07.03.2009.

Sd/-
P.K. Lal
Publisher



Why teeth in a single row

A SYSTEM of opposing genetic forces determines why mammals develop a single row of teeth, while sharks sport several, according to a study published in the journal *Science*. When completely understood, the genetic program described in the study may help guide efforts to re-grow missing teeth and prevent cleft palate, one of the most common birth defects.

Gene expression is the process by which information stored in genes is converted into proteins that make up the body's structures and carry its messages. As the baby's face takes shape in the womb, the development of teeth and palate are tightly controlled in space and time by gene

expression. Related abnormalities result in the development of teeth outside of the normal row, missing teeth and cleft palate, and the new insights suggest ways to combat these malformations.

The current study adds an important detail to the understanding of the interplay between biochemicals that induce teeth formation, and others that restrict it, to result in the correct pattern. Specifically, researchers discovered that turning off a single gene in mice resulted in development of extra teeth, next to and inside of their first molars. While the study was in mice, past studies have shown that the involved biochemical players are active in humans as well.

Antibiotic Combination Defeats Extensively Drug-resistant TB

A COMBINATION of two FDA-approved drugs, already approved for fighting other bacterial infections, shows potential for treating extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB), the most deadly form of the infection. This finding is reported by scientists from Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in Science.

TB is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (Mtb). Globally, cases of active TB have increased significantly since the 1980s due to the AIDS pandemic and the emergence of Mtb strains resistant to standard antibiotic treatment.

In parts of Asia, 70 percent of new TB cases are multi-drug resistant, meaning they don't respond to the two antibiotics most commonly used against TB. Recently, an even greater health threat has emerged: extensively drug-resistant (XDR) bacteria that resist at least four of the drugs used to treat TB and can prove deadly.

China lunar probe mission ends with planned crash

CHINA'S lunar probe crashed into the moon in a controlled collision at the end of a 16-month mission, state media reported.

Xinhua News Agency cited sources at the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense as saying the *Change 1* lunar satellite hit the moon on Sunday.

The satellite was under remote control by two observation and control stations in east China's Qingdao and Kashgar, a small city in northwest China, Xinhua said.

China launched the probe in late October 2007 to have it survey the entire surface of the moon. Slung into space by a Long March 3A rocket, the satellite surveyed the moon's surface using stereo radar and other tools.

China staged its first manned mission in 2003, becoming only the third country after Russia and the United States to launch a person into space.

Last year, it claimed a new landmark with its first space walk. Future ambitions including building a permanent orbiting space station and landing a man on the moon.



HIV adapts to 'escape' immune response

THE HUMAN immunodeficiency virus (HIV) adapts so well to the body's defense system that any successful AIDS vaccine must keep pace with the ever-changing immunological profile of the virus, according to researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and the University

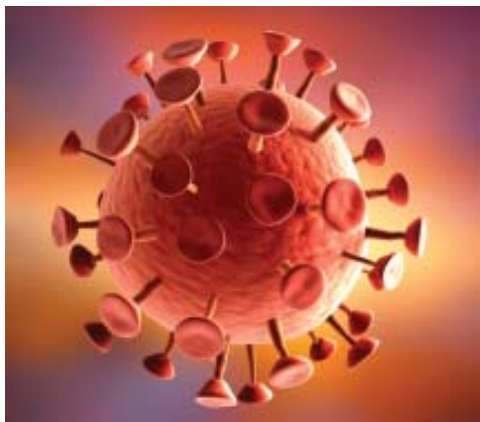
of Oxford in England.

A new study better describes HIV's ability to adapt by spelling out at least 14 different "escape mutations" that help keep the virus alive after it interacts genetically with immunity molecules that normally attack HIV.

The researchers analyzed genetic data

from more than 2,800 HIV-infected patients on five continents. The findings are published online in the journal *Nature*.

The future of vaccine exploration will need to address the escape mutation capacity and identify new drug targets that work against an ever-changing HIV immunology landscape, said Philip Goulder, M.D., a professor of immunology at the University of Oxford and the study's senior author.



Major Changes in Polar Regions Due to Global Warming

A study presented this week in Geneva from the International Polar Year reveals that global warming is taking its toll on the Polar Regions, with ice and snow under severe decline. The findings are being released by the World Meteorological Organization and the International Council for Science.

Scientists from more than 60 countries warned that in the Arctic, 2007 and 2008 were the years with the two lowest sea ice levels in the three decades since satellite records began. Furthermore, it looks like Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are also losing mass, and at levels more accelerated than previously estimated.

The researchers have also confirmed that there is an above-average warming in the Southern Ocean, and that ocean circulation might soon suffer major changes.

All these changes appear to be influencing the rich life in the Antarctic Ocean, as species begin migrating poleward in response to global warming, the study finds. Overall, Antarctica seems to be going through some changes that older predictions did not foresee.



Prints Show a Modern Foot in Prehumans

FOOTPRINTS uncovered in Kenya show that as early as 1.5 million years ago an ancestral species, almost certainly *Homo erectus*, had already evolved the feet and walking gait of modern humans.

An international team of scientists, in a report in the journal *Science*, said the well-defined prints in an eroding bluff east of Lake Turkana "provided the oldest evidence of an essentially modern humanlike foot anatomy." They said the find also added to evidence that painted a picture of *Homo erectus* as the



One of the fossilized footprints discovered in Kenya.

prehumans who took long evolutionary strides — figuratively and, now it seems, also literally.

Where the individuals who made the tracks were going, or why, is beyond knowing by the cleverest scientist. The variability of the separation between some steps, researchers said, suggests that they were picking their way over an uneven surface, muddy enough to leave a mark — an unintended message from an extinct species for the contemplation of its descendants.