



# malayalam

## LITERARY SURVEY

2016 March



*Tribute to* ONV Kurup & Akbar Kakkattil



MALAYALAM  
**LITERARY SURVEY**  
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## Editor's note

Death seems to be the theme of the year 2016. The year has so far been rather unkind, especially on our artists and writers. We have helplessly watched so many talented people stolen from among us - from Umberto Eco to ONV, from Ettore Scola to Rajesh Pillai, from Harper Lee to Akbar Kakkattil...; the list would really be longish if all the losses are to be recounted. Needless to say, every death is a loss; the more lives one has touched, the more severely the loss would be felt. Hence artists and writers leave huge voids in society as they depart.

In this season of bereavement, *Malayalam Literary Survey* salutes all the great departed souls. As our tribute, we have included in this issue critical appraisals on ONV Kurup, the Jnanpith awardee, and Akbar Kakkattil, the Vice-President of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, who are no longer with us.

When one looks back at the noble contributions of all the great writers and artists who are taken away by death, one knows that they have left indelible footprints on the sands of time.

John Donne's renowned poem that begins "Death, be not proud" is one of his nineteen "Holy Sonnets" that meditate on mortality. He says that Death is not mighty and dreadful, as the people whom it takes away do not die. "One short sleep past, we wake eternally / And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."

It is death that dies, not the wordsmiths or artists.

**R. Gopalakrishnan**  
Secretary & Editor



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# I, The Man

**O. N. V.**

Translator : Dr. Vyrassery Vamanan Nampoothiri

Thousands of flowers did I dissect to learn their truth!  
 Thousands of hearts I sliced to realize their essence!  
 I abandoned the Daughter of the Earth in the jungle  
 To discharge my duties as King of the Earth.  
 Hundreds of idols I destroyed, to create a new idol!  
 I killed one thousand brothers to make  
 Five brothers win the battle of Kurukshetra.  
 When my disciple became skilled in Archery  
 I demanded his thumb as my fee!  
 Putting out all the lights, I prayed: "Lead kindly Light."  
 I created innumerable pyres in battles to establish peace.  
 The saga of my heroism is engraved in the history of this  
 millennium.  
 I planted a sapling of philosophy  
 And uproot it every day to count its roots





# Nadhapuram

**Akbar Kakkattil**

Translator : Dr. Antony Fernandez

As his bus was nearing Nadhapuram, Arif sensed a warm glow of excitement. This is the home of his best friend Jayapalan and he had always wanted to come here. They were in college together and after completing studies had parted ways. Though Jayapalan had been to his place many times he could never pay him a return visit.

Seated in the bus he was enjoying the way-side scenes that quickly passed by. Soon the copra go-downs of Peruvattumthazha gave him a glimpse and vanished. From here the bus took a different direction and peaceful village scenes began to flash into view. What might have been fields of paddy once had been turned into coconut groves and banana plantation. Paddy fields were seen only in small little patches here and there. Houses rarely appeared except a few home-stead which were old and time-worn. Sometimes a

rickety thatched hut or two popped up and flitted out of sight.

At the Nadhapuram bus-stand buses lay parked in all sorts of positions with no rhyme or reason. It was a bit confusing to Arif. His bus went curving in the direction of the circular bus-stand like a domestic fowl tilting amorously towards its hen. There was just one passage for all those buses to go in and come out. As his vehicle came to a halt he got ready to step out. Suddenly a rough voice



shouted out in typical North Kerala dialect, 'All Nadhapuram tickets clear out.' It was the bus-cleaner warning from the foot-board at the back. Arif picked up his luggage— a suit case and a shoulder-bag— and got out.

The cleaner was wantonly hurrying the passengers who were patiently getting down. As his orders grew louder his Malayalam became even worse, 'Those who want to get down better be quick. Others stay aboard!' He shouted arrogantly.

Arif was perplexed. This is his first experience with this dialect of

Malayalam. Of course, when they were together, Jayapalan had told him enough about this particular lingo. His friends too had some idea about it. But this was more than he had bargained for. He managed to slip through the crowd clutching his luggage in both his hands. When he looked round he saw school-girls everywhere. Some wore uniforms but some others didn't. There were music-stores playing cassettes of latest songs to attract the crowd.

At the same time the *kilis* -or bus cleaners- were heard inviting the passers-by to their buses. But their cry was often drowned in the sound of the movie songs.

Nadhapuram town is almost trapped between the Grand mosque and the New mosque. The roads are teeming with people, jeeps and autorickshaws. Three roads meet at the market junction. The shops exude an old-world charm with their tile-roofed tops. Jewellery Marts, bakeries, textile shops and fancy stores attract lots of shoppers. Red, green and yellow flags of political parties flutter from the roof-tops of shops and the poles on the side-walk. Arif looked round the market with interest. Suddenly a question

You see, almost every fellow wants to claim he is from Nadhapuram. This is a big place and whenever there is trouble anywhere Nadhapuram is blamed for everything. As far as I know there is no teacher here by that name and no one with a name like that has a house here.

from history popped up. Wasn't it the same market-place where the legendary warrior-girl Unniyarcha of folk-lore fame had dared the goons who tried to humiliate her?

Arif stepped into a small shop with his problem. It was a modest stationery store, selling sweets and toys. A man sat at a table with a round turban on his head. Arif posed his question to the turbaned head,

'Excuse me, do you have any idea about one Mr. Jayapalan? He is a teacher in the Chullipuram High school somewhere

here.'

The shop-keeper was amused by this question. He replied with a smile, 'Chullipuram School is a long way from here, sir. Whoever told you his house is over here?'

'I'm pretty sure his house is here in Nadhapuram.'

'Pretty sure? You must be crazy, young man! By the way, where are you from? Are you related to him?'

'I am from Bombay and he is my good friend.'

'Now you are talking. You see, almost every fellow wants to claim he is from Nadhapuram. This is a big place and whenever there is trouble anywhere Nadhapuram is blamed for everything. As far as I know there is no teacher here by that name and no one with a name like that has a house here. May be, he can build a house here if he can afford. Now let me see. Is this Jayapalan a member of some political party? If so you can easily trace him.'

'Not to my knowledge. As a student he didn't care much for politics. I don't think he'll get mixed up in politics.'

'You are crazy. No politics? Here, in this place? You must be out of your mind, sir. Have a seat anyway.'

He made him sit. Arif was careful to keep his luggage close to him. He started feeling worried. He was planning to give a pleasant surprise to Jayapalan with an unannounced visit. He had only a bare idea about Jayapalan's residence, nothing more.

'Still you haven't told me your name.' the shop-keeper reminded.

'Mohamed Arif.'

'*Assalamum alaikkum*..!' He greeted Arif in the typical Muslim way. 'I am Koya. Muthukoya is the full name.'

Noticing the worried look on his face, Koya said, 'Just a minute. I know someone who can help you. By the way, how about having lunch with me?'

'No thanks. I had my lunch from Vatakara before I started.'

Muthukoya got up, adjusted his turban and got out leaving Arif alone in his shop.

The market junction was quite congested. Vehicles from all the three sides struggled to get past one another. The drivers have a tough time negotiating back and forth through the narrow roads. A chubby lad with a tanned face placed before him a cup of tea, saying, 'Have some tea sir, Koyakka will be back soon.'

After a moment's hesitation Arif accepted the offer. He remembered how Jayapalan used to talk about the warm hospitality of his village folk. By the time Arif finished his tea Muthukoya was back. He had a youth with him.

'Arif, meet my friend Sumohan. You are lucky. He knows your friend's house. We are neighbors at Palappuram. He is an accountant at the Saw Mill near Chullipuram High school.'

They shook hands. Sumohan said, 'To tell you the truth, Jayapalan sir doesn't know

me, but I know him because he is my sister's teacher.'

He smiled proudly. Muthukoya looked at him and said honestly,

'Politically we may be different, so what? Friendship and politics are two different things. Aren't they, Sumohan? The latter smiled in agreement.

'Arif, my friend Sumohan will take you to your friend. O K? So you don't have to worry anymore.'

Arif looked a bit uncertain. He didn't want to be a problem to anyone.

Sumohan looked at Arif, 'Sir, It's difficult to reach there all by yourself. There is no direct bus to that place because it's already late. You have to walk three, four kilometers and it's a zig-zag route.'

Arif said, 'If there is no bus we'll hire a taxi.'

Sumohan quietly went out and after a while came back in an auto rickshaw. He got out of it and smiled, 'Why waste good money on cars and jeeps. If you have too much money, believe me, I can keep it for you.'

They all laughed. Arif too smiled as he got into the vehicle and started on their journey.

The road was full of pot-holes and the Auto was strutting and banging on the road. All along the way Arif was struck by the numerous offices of the political parties situated by the road-side. Banners, flags, notice-boards and hoardings of all hues were everywhere on either side of the roads. They were so many that he couldn't decide which party had more. He turned to Sumohan and asked, 'What is it, Sumohan, are you going to have an Election? You people seem to have too much of the Party spirit in you. Don't you think so?'

Sumohan nodded and said, 'You're right sir. Here people are all politically aware and well-informed.'

'I can see that. In Bombay things are entirely different. Nobody knows about anything, but

there is trouble everywhere. Every morning there is only bad news coming in. Murders are so common. No one knows how many bodies are removed every day. No one is safe.'

Sumohan heaved a sigh and said seriously, 'Sometimes we've problems, too. And once a problem starts it goes on and on and things get out of hand. But otherwise life is peaceful. By the way, are you related to Jayapalan sir?'

In reply Arif told him that his people are all in Bombay. But he had grown up in Mangalore and was educated by his uncle with whom he stayed. That was where he met Jayapalan and became friends. After his graduation Jayapalan had to return home to take care of his father who was sickly. But Arif had gone ahead to complete his P.G. and then returned to Bombay where he now manages his own business.

It was Sumohan's turn now to come out with his story. He had lost his parents early and the family burden fell squarely on his shoulders. He has two sisters and a younger brother to take care of. His job at the Saw mill didn't mean much and life has become a daily struggle. His best friend and neighbor Muthukoya has two sons in Bahrain and he has promised him a visa to get across. He is pinning all his hopes on Muthukoya's magnanimity.

As the journey progressed he noticed palatial mansions on either side of the street. They looked glamorous with highly polished marble and granite tiles on the walls. Even the compound walls and gates were of solid granite. Some gates looked more expensive than the house itself and were painted eye-catchingly in all available colors.

On the way they crossed one or two small markets with just a few shops. On the parapets of the closed shops some youngsters were seated chit-chatting without a care. Arif was amused by what he saw. As the vehicle turned to a smaller road the

passing scenes grew rich with lush green banana plantations and pepper vines. The emerald valley was a rare treat to his eyes. Mango trees were all along the way.

The color mangoes that hung tantalizingly from the tree were only ripening but the impatient squirrels are already among them. One clever fellow was nibbling into a bunch raising its tail noisily. Jayapalan would carry these mangoes and jackfruits whenever he went to meet him. Arif still remembered how he used to look forward to it with longing.

Suddenly a rude jolt interrupted his thoughts. The autorickshaw wheel had sunk into a pot-hole. Luckily a few youngsters rushed to the spot and pulled it back on the road. The auto-driver looked grave and said, 'Sorry sir, I can't go any further. Road conditions are terrible.'

Sumohan tried to argue, 'Look Suresh, this is not fair. I told you of the place to reach before we started and you had agreed. Suddenly if you leave us in the middle like this, what shall we do?'

'How can you talk like that? You just saw the pot-hole we fell into. You know Mohan, this is my only means of livelihood and I just can't afford an accident. So please try to understand. That jeep over there belongs to Mr. Krishnakurup. He is a nice man. You can try your luck with him. I am sure he'll help you.'

Arif and Sumohan had no option but to get out of the three-wheeler. The auto-driver offered to wait till they met the jeep-owner. But Sumohan paid his fare and dismissed him. Arif looked a bit glum and Sumohan tried to cheer him up,

'You know sir, this is a funny place and it has two names depending on the seasons. During monsoon it is called the slush-pit and in hot summer the name is dust-pit. Sometimes for a change they are named after the PWD ministers who come and go. So we call them either Hamza's pit or Bava's pit.'

He walked towards the big old house with tiled roof saying, ' Let me try and see if Mr. Kurup will be kind enough to spare his jeep.'

He returned after a while with a tall hefty middle-aged gentleman. The latter looked very pleased with Arif and said, ' Glad to meet you sir. How can we let a gentleman from Bombay stand on a road like this? Besides you are a close friend of the teacher who teaches my children. It is a matter of shame for us. I am so sorry sir. Please step into my house for a minute. You won't be late I promise you. I'll see that you are dropped at your friend's house in my jeep. It is such a pleasure. Your friend is very much there. We parted only a little while ago.'

Arif was overcome by this warmth. He felt so happy to hear that Jayapalan was at home.

The big man turned to a servant who was feeding cows in the yard and said, ' Hey, Kumaran! Go bring green coconuts for our guests.'

Arif and Sumohan sipped the refreshing drink and felt wonderful. When they bid farewell to Mr. Kurup, he said he was happy to leave the jeep and the driver at their disposal. It was vintage hospitality and Arif was simply overwhelmed.

As the jeep turned to a better road, a scooter was spotted coming towards them. Sumohan turned to Arif and said, ' Sir, if you'll permit me I can go in this scooter. He is my friend and he will drop me home. Otherwise I may get stuck here. Hope you don't mind. The driver knows the route very well and he'll take you to your friend's house.'

Arif didn't want to trouble him anymore. As they said goodbye he felt so grateful. He could never imagine someone in the city going this far for a total stranger like him. Friendship over there seldom went beyond a polite hi and bye. But the people here are so warm. The milk of human kindness is definitely the mark of this village, thought Arif. He wanted to say it so honestly but

ended up saying,

' So great to have met you, Sumohan. I will be with Jayapalan at least for a week and I'll certainly come to see you and Mr. Muthukoya before I return.'

When they shook hands and parted, Sumohan looked extremely pleased, ' It is a pleasure sir. I'll be very happy to see you again.' He quickly got on to his friend's scooter and they were gone.

The jeep started its journey with Arif as the lone passenger. The road lay parallel to a river. This must be the river Vaniyam locally known as Vaniyam Puzha. Jayapalan had gifted him lots of round pebbles picked from this crystal clear river. They looked like cute little potatoes and Arif still has them carefully show-cased in his living room. As the golden rays of the twilight sky shimmered on the water his eyes widened at the magnificence of nature.

After they crossed a bridge they came to a small market-place with just a few shops. It was small market, but buzzing with activity. Where the row shops ended was a gate framed in granite masonry. The jeep passed through the open entrance and braked in front of a building. Jayapalan's house at last!

Hearing the engine sound a man came out of the house. Arif wondered who it was. Jayapalan? It looks like him alright but he seems to have aged a bit.

Jayapalan could not believe what he saw. Arif? But how? He has never surprised me like this, he thought. Arif thanked the jeep-driver and saw him off.

The friends hugged each other and remained locked in a long tight embrace. Slowly the other inmates of the house came out one by one, Jayapalan's mother, wife and son. They had known each other for long though they had not met before. Arif was such a towering presence of love and affection in their family and it was really a pleasure to have him.



His mother Karthiyayani amma looked into his eyes and said, 'Why didn't you inform us that you would be coming, my son? Thank God there isn't any trouble now. If you had come when there is trouble we'd have been really worried.'

'Trouble? What trouble?'

'So you don't know? Nadhapuram is a troubled place. Any time, anything can happen. No one is safe. Nobody can say what will happen next.' She explained.

Arif was totally confused. Such a lovely place! Blessed with nature's bounty unlike anything he had seen. A village where even a total stranger gets a warm welcome! What can be wrong with this village? He suddenly remembered Sumohan also saying something about trouble erupting sometimes and he became thoughtful. Jayapalan noticed this and said,

'We'll talk about all that later. Come let's go in.'

Jayapalan picked up his suitcase and Praseeda carried his shoulder-bag. Arif held Arun's hand and they all went inside. Arun, Jayapalan's only son, was a 3rd standard student.

What followed was three memorable days of joyful celebration! Arif had quite a few interesting experiences. The neighbors came to have a look at 'that man from Bombay', mostly ladies. Then came the "collectors" with their receipt books to raise funds for common causes. Among them were local leaders representing all political parties, the party in power as well those in the opposition. They were united in their goal namely, to collect donations for the medical treatment of a tree-climber who had broken his bones in an accident while plucking coconuts. Next it was the turn of the Mosque committee, again for donation in cash. After they all left, Jayapalan explained that it was all part of their normal life!

'They have somehow found out that my

guest from Bombay has pots of money', he joked.

Arif loved the sprawling compound around the house. Whenever he got a chance he went round and had a look at everything. One day he tried his climbing skills on a Jack-tree. As Jayapalan and family watched from below he clambered up the tree till he reached its top. Perched on a branch he looked down triumphantly and announced to Jayapalan,

'I am celebrating my freedom, man. This open sky and the vast earth! Oh My! What a breath-taking view! Only a bored flat-dweller can feel this thrill. I am going to enjoy my life here. O.K?' They all had a good laugh at his expense.

The beauty of the Alangat Hills was only at a walking distance from the house. Trekking up-hill was exciting though a bit tiring. If the murmuring brook was music to his ears, stepping into its cool stream was heavenly! A dip in the placid river Vaniyam Puzha was an experience no words could describe..

Secretly, they even enjoyed the taste of coconut-toddy —the local drink— with tapioca mashed with chillies, popularly known as *puzhukku*. It was all truly idyllic. Jayapalan's little boy has now become Arif's close associate. When he opened the bag to take out the toys he had brought, Arun eagerly asked,

'Uncle, haven't you bought a gun for me?'

Arif was a bit shocked. He looked at Jayapalan who only smiled.

'I remember when I was a kid my dad used to get me toys every year from the 'Orkkatteri Fair.' It was always a whistle or a flute, at the most a rattle. How things have changed! Now all that a child wants is a gun. Just imagine. Gun is their favorite toy!'

From a distance they heard a low clamor which was growing louder. Arif turned to listen. Jayapalan said to him, 'Sounds like a show of strength. Today there is a Protest

meeting at Kallachi. There was a minor issue over there yesterday. Wish it is nothing serious.'

Arif grew anxious. He had no idea about anything.

'Your mother also was saying about trouble brewing. What is going on?' He asked Jayapalan.

'You don't seem to have any idea about this place. Your newspapers won't carry anything about it. There are too many editions for every newspaper now.'

Arif remained silent. He had almost given up reading papers. There was hardly any time for such things. His company is in a crisis. He is a worried man and he wanted to take a break. In fact he has come all the way from Bombay to rest his tired nerves and restore his stressed self.

'Why didn't you inform us that you would be coming, my son? Thank God there isn't any trouble now. If you had come when there is trouble we'd have been really worried.'

Jayapalan went on, 'According to our Police Commissioner everyone here between the age of 6 and 60 seems to be making guns and bombs at home. May be he is exaggerating. But things have changed and life is different now. You know this place was once so well-known for its role in our Freedom struggle and also for the Communist Uprising. It was a glorious period. What is happening now is a big shame!'

The clamor was drawing near. It grew more and more noisy. It was not just loud slogan-shouting. It was a wild roar, almost a war-cry. Over the compound wall they could see two violent groups of people on opposite sides of the road ready to clash with one another. They looked ferocious and impatient to pounce upon and tear each other apart. Between the two groups a heavy police force stood ready for anything.

Arif could not believe what he saw. It was the

same group of people who had come the day before requesting donation for the injured tree-climber. The same people who came to meet him as friends were now at each other's throat swearing like mad. He felt sad. Jayapalan said to him, 'Hope there is no stone-throwing and lathi-charge. Don't stand too close. Come let's go.'

They went inside. The shouting mobs moved away and what could have been a serious situation was averted thanks to the smartness of the cops.

'Here it's all so sudden. A small incident can result in mayhem and law and order will go haywire. But in a matter of minutes

everything will be once again normal,' Jayapalan explained.

The next morning Jayapalan took him to see another beauty spot- the Peruvannamoozhy Dam. He had a cool dip

in the river and felt calm. The freshness helped him forget his uneasy feeling. Next day Jayapalan was planning a trip to Wynad,

'You know Arif, tomorrow we are going to see Wynad, sometimes called Kerala's own refrigerator. It is simply stunning and I am sure you'll love it. You just cannot miss it. There is a short-cut from here to this place via the river Neravil.'

Arif looked up and said, 'Looks like it is going to rain.'

In the distance a low thunder was heard followed by an uneasy breeze. The atmosphere became misty all around. They started on the return journey. When their car reached Nadhapuram town Arif saw police everywhere. This town was so busy till the other day when he was passing by. Now it looks abandoned. When they came near Muthukoya's shop he saw that it was burned

down. Smoke was still rising; the furniture was smashed into bits. The near-by shops were all scattered with remnants of broken glass. Two unwary pedestrians were being chased by lathi-wielding constables. One young cop caught up with them and hit one of them hard on the back with his baton. He dropped down howling in pain. The policeman didn't stop but went on punishing him with his stick and kicked him with his boots. It was brutal. After venting his fury he withdrew from the victim. Just then the latter saw his chance, got up and scooted off like a zombie.

It was too much for a man like Arif. It was a sickening sight and he started shivering. A police officer suddenly motioned to stop their car. Jayapalan braked immediately. When he came close his expression changed,

'Oh, Jayapalan sir! It is better to go home quickly. After some time no vehicle will be allowed to pass.'

Luckily the officer is known to him, 'Any problem sir?'

'There has been a political murder in Palappuram and there is every chance of a retaliation. Nadhapuram is heating up once again. Means more work for people like us.'

Arif had many questions to ask but he was too scared. Meanwhile Jayapalan had no time to waste. He started the car saying, 'Relax man, and don't get upset! Forget it. We must get back fast. Home is our only focus now. May be there are trouble-makers on the way waiting with sticks and bombs in their hands. There could be nice guys too who don't mean any harm. We cannot predict these things. Rest all depends on our fate.'

He fell silent and concentrated on his driving. A little way off a small group of people moved slyly through an alley. They had bags in their hands. After they passed, Jayapalan let out a sigh of relief and said, 'Thank God those fellows didn't notice our vehicle. They must have bombs in those bags, I'm sure. When trouble starts bombs are hurled from all sides and they burst like fireworks. They sound very much alike. You cannot tell the difference between the two.'

Every murder was deliberate and pre-planned. The killers just barged into innocent people in the dead of night and cut them down in front of their parents. The next morning Peace committees were formed and Peace marches were organized. It was all drama and nobody was serious.

Arif asked nervously, 'Are you the member of any political party?'

He was afraid some violent killer would pounce upon them to settle some political score. Jayapalan looked at him, 'See Arif, out here, you don't have to be a member of any Party. You will be branded never-the-less.'

In fact the people of this place are all very good and friendly. But when political issues crop up and they begin to join their respective groups they all change into something else. And then it is terrible. You know there have been 9 murders in a short span of time!'

Arif almost jumped up from his seat. This was much worse than he imagined. Jayapalan went on, 'Most of the victims didn't know why they were targeted. Every murder was deliberate and pre-planned. The killers just barged into innocent people in the dead of night and cut them down in front of their parents. The next morning Peace committees were formed and Peace marches were organized. It is all drama and nobody was serious. If the leaders of the warring groups decide not to protect and shelter the criminals in their ranks the problem solves itself. But that never happens and that is the real issue.'



Arif felt sick when he heard more details of brutality. An innocent boy on his way back from college was butchered in a by-lane close to his home. His crime was that he was the sympathizer of a particular political ideology. When he was chased he tried to escape clinging to a mud-wall. He was pulled down and hacked to death. His parents heard him struggling for breath. They thought someone in the neighborhood was chasing a newt from the bush. In another chilling incident an old man was woken from his sleep and chopped to pieces. Arif could hear no more. He plugged his ears in horror saying, 'No more please.' How could Jayapalan, a sensitive soul while in college, describe all those gory details without batting an eye-lid, he wondered.

They were quiet for some time saying nothing to each other. Jayapalan drove through a lonely road. He had travelled through the same paths earlier. But it was hard to believe it was the same road. The silence was deafening and the atmosphere, downright scary. It seemed like the calm before a storm, he thought ominously. The coconut palms and the banana leaves trembled like possessed ritual dancers in mad ecstasy.

From a distance they heard something explode. The noise was repeated. When they reached home mercifully his mother came to Jayapalan and said, 'O my children, as soon as you left there was a landslide on the Alangad hill and a man died in the accident.'

Jayapalan said in reply, 'There was one in Nadhapuram too killing one more.'

'Yes, yes, Our Krishnakurup has been attacked and his jeep smashed. Every single coconut tree in his compound has been destroyed.'

Arif felt a wave of pain in the depth of his heart. But he tried to look normal.

That day they didn't allow him to stir out. He was advised to remain within four walls and not even walk in the yard. Praseeda and

Karthiyayaniamma were very particular. They said, 'Nobody knows you, Arif, neither the policemen nor the party people. The bomb doesn't know anyone from the other. So it's up to us to be careful.'

Jayapalan decided to go out to feel the pulse of the situation and sense the general mood. Even to make a phone-call he had to walk to a friend's house a little way off. He could reach the spot through a safe short-cut. He came back quickly. As soon as he came in he said, 'It is one Sumohan who is dead. His neighbor Muthukoya is the killer.'

Arif felt his head spinning. He broke into a sweat and felt he would collapse. Muthukoya.. and Sumohan! He said to himself, this is not true. It is impossible, he mumbled. It is only a lie, a wicked lie.

The next minute the confusion cleared. In a moment of truth his mind spoke to him, 'Arif, listen. You heard it right. It's happened. It is true.'

Jayapalan has not heard these names before. Arif had told him about some fine people he met on the way, who had helped him to reach his house but not the details. Why tell him now about the two friends who are dead?

Jayapalan continued, 'Tomorrow is a declared Bandh. Police reports say things are going to be worse. You are not safe here anymore. People have come to know a stranger is staying with me.'

Arif was struck dumb and his friend tried to console him, 'I have already requested the Police and they have agreed to drop you safely at the Vatakara railway station. So you've nothing to worry.'

Just then a police jeep passed by warning the public that a Curfew has been clamped and that nobody is to stir out.

That night Arif could not sleep. He saw nameless figures screeching and rushing towards the house asking for him. His own image in the bedroom mirror appeared to

torture him. He asked himself,

‘ Do I look like some politician or party-follower?’

Suddenly in the dark night a painful cry rose from Arun’s bedroom. Arif jumped out of bed and ran towards the child. He saw Jayapalan sitting on the bed with the boy in his lap. He was asking his son, ‘ What my son, what happened?’

Praseeda was crying uncontrollably and asking the same thing, stroking his hair.

Arun must have had a nightmare. His face said it all. He uttered a few words haltingly.

‘ Bomb.. Bomb. Someone is throwing bombs at our house. They burst mom, dad, uncle Arif all..all..’

He couldn’t complete his words. His jaws kept moving. He was trying to say more. But words didn’t come out and he broke into a cry. But the cry weakened into a whimper and he began panting in terror.

Looking at the boy Arif felt darkness creeping into his eyes. Horrendous noises rendered him deaf.

Arun’s eyes stared vacantly and he couldn’t even utter a cry.

Only tears came out of his eyes, a flood of tears. Arif saw the tears turning into a stream of many colors, red, green and yellow. Instantly they became a rushing torrent which carried him spinning like a whirlpool into the depths of a mysterious gorge.



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# Now You Sleep, I Will Stay Awake

**Dr. C.R. Prasad**

**Translator : Antony Fernandez**

ONV, the living legend of Malayalam literature, is no more. He was truly the people's poet of Kerala. There were certain tenets in his poetry which some people held as his strong forte while others held them as his weak points. They were his unfailing sense of rhythm and the markings of the geography and culture of Kerala. The present paper attempts a re-reading of his poetry to gain fresh insights into these differing perspectives. Needless to say, it is precisely these varying shades of opinion that have won him a unique place in the literary hall of fame and made him a house-hold name in Kerala.

It is not every poet who finds a place in the heart of the common man. Rendition of one's verse to a musical ear might bring some popularity to a poet for some time and poets of all ages have found this an easy way to reach their verse to the readers. This kind of populist fame lasts only till the next singer-poet comes along singing his verse to an admiring public. But if the poetry perse is no more than pedestrian, the poet will be exposed and before long he will be unceremoniously dumped into the waste-bin of oblivion. What a pity the new generation of poets fails to take note of this truth and therefore this farce gets repeated over time.

As a rule poetry must have a solid theme at its core apart from a rhythm of its own. It must have compassion and not just passion. Few poets seem to have knowledge of this. Only those who realize this truth can survive the changing trends in literature and maintain their place in the hearts of the readers. They should know that poetry is not just music but it must be deeply rooted in the life of man and his culture. They need to take time to meditate over the impact of their words and their



rhythm and grapple with their evocative power as well as the accompanying nuances. They would never compromise on the value of their art. ONV, the dear old bard of Kerala, was of this breed in Malayalam literature.

Any combination of words set to music may render itself to singing but it is hardly poetry. There is a group of self-styled New-Generation poets who do not heed this advice but stubbornly justify themselves quoting from the author of *Ramacharitham* as well as from the exponents of modern poetry including ONV himself. According to them all those poems were songs too. As such they argue that it is unfair to criticize them for being musical. It may be too much to ask them to read through Classics like the *Ramacharitham* or the *Thullal Krithis* to get to know what quality is all about. At least they should read the poems of a contemporary like ONV to compare them with their loud presentations. It would be good for them, and, more than that, it would provide some relief to their readers. It is not because I have any hope in them that I write like this, but it is because I love Malayalam poetry.

The presence of metre or *vritham* is a notable feature of ONV's poetry which he knows is a rich legacy handed down to poetry by our predecessors. Likewise musical rhythm or

*thalam* manifests itself powerfully in a collective atmosphere rather than in the solitary space of the inner self. It is the presence of a group of voices or a variety of notes that can heighten the appeal of a composition and its movement. Every individual singer's pitch of voice has to accommodate the presence of other sounds in a performance. This is evident when we listen to any of our percussion instruments. Music finds its true rhythm when it is played in a group or performed together in multiple voices to the accompaniment of a variety of instruments. This is true of poetry as well. The presence of multiple voices is what adds power to verse rather than a mono tone. During the modernist phase of Malayalam poetry there was a trend towards total negation of the poetic metre. This rejection of convention probably reflected the sense of alienation which was at the centre of their attitude to life. But ONV was keen to usher in a social presence and a sense of togetherness in his creative ambience. He used poetic rhythm to enhance this idea. It is this rhythm and its innate music which made him a people's poet. Readers are at first struck by the harmony of his music but slowly as the thought beneath the surface sinks in, the poem gains in depth. His poem 'Dinantham'[ End of the Day ] is an attempt to unify the two strands of life—

Birth and Death-through the connecting link of 'Time' and the 'Vicissitudes of Life' that invariably accompany the passage of time. This is how he voices this theme in verse,

When I follow the light that has fled from the earthen lamp

It is my song that keeps me company.

The small lamp that I hold in hand

While searching for the lost humaneness  
Is nothing but my song.

It is my song that follows me everywhere

It is my sibling, my own shadow.

The verses reveal a poet who never gets carried away in the musical cadence of his lines. It shows ONV, the poet as a creative self that perceives the rhythm that still retains its humaneness as his own shadow.

"Dinantham" can be approached in more ways than one. While it is a sincere search for the streak of humanity that runs through the whole gamut of his poetry it is also an effort of the intellect which merges the rhythm of life with the notes of his song to proclaim his true mission as a poet. This explains why the poet often re-works his ideas in terms of images we are already familiar with.

"Dinantham" may also be read as an independent composition on the birth of man, his first steps towards manhood, the dark phase of his ignorance and the dawn of wisdom as well as his misadventures which threaten the very existence of planet earth itself. The ominous ticking of time, the belated realization about the apocalyptic fall-out of man's actions, the consequent anxieties and the crises of his life all find expression in this period piece.

The poem begins on the note that though man is born into a social milieu he is essentially a lonely, sensitive creature. This loneliness is what leads him to a world of thoughts. Notice the metaphor in the following lines,

'As the drum-beat rises to a crescendo  
The beads that lace the dancing anklet

Scatter sometimes and litter the floor  
But the anklet may not even know it.'

Loneliness is the plight of the scattered beads which have lost moorings with the anklet that held them together. Man should at least be aware of this disconnect with society and take serious note of the loss. Otherwise, the loss would be for the anklet that symbolizes society.

From the second canto of the poem to the eighth the poet dwells on the genesis of knowledge, its flourishing phase as well as its evolution. Childhood and adolescence are stages of curiosity when forays into fresh realms of experience do not lead to knowledge or awareness. Visuals dominate this stage of life. These short-lived thrills and kicks gathered from superficial impressions take time to mature and ripen into knowledge. Knowledge brings awareness about injustice, death and the struggle for survival. Here we meet the poet in the midst of the hunter and the hunted and he says, 'I remember those fated to be victims in all hunts  
And I caress their grief.'

Fate comes to the fore as Hunter in the fourth canto and offers an explanation for this in the fifth. The next section tells us how these experiences turn out to be an education in itself. His musings on reading as a tool of education are significant. Reading is like a pilgrimage for him to the widening horizons of knowledge and enlightenment. It is life's most exciting journey which brings to him the realization that,

'The sorrows of others are deep oceans .  
Your grief, mere sea-shells on the shore.'

This realization is crucial to humanity. The poet says it is this awareness that humanizes him and deepens his sensitivity to man and his pain. From now on every succeeding canto dwells on the journey of man and the saga of his onward march. We have an extended view of man's fight for

survival, the varying shades of human misery, man's sacrifices on the war-front to keep from starving and the great leaders of history who are transformed into men of destiny. These are the dominant themes of the poem till the twelfth canto. How art and culture took shape in human imagination also gets mentioned in passing. The Biblical myth of Adam and Eve, their idyllic life in Eden, how their children turned enemies and the result — all find expression within the frame of this poem.

ONV touches upon every conceivable facet of human life and subjects it to a creative scrutiny which is also an aesthetic introspection and a sort of self-assessment of his life as a poet and artist. This probably explains the recurrence of lines from his earlier works. This way he revisits the literary paths he had already traversed like a pilgrim on a sacred journey. It also buttresses a pet notion of his that a writer has to be an alert human being with his senses wide awake to his social milieu and always ready to care and protect and take charge when the need arises. In 'A Song for Orpheus' he makes a passionate appeal to this effect:

' This spinning earth is just a charcoal lump  
But in its depth I'm awake, like the inner fire.  
To ignite it, to light the sweet wicks of verses,  
Come, O good old singer of Greece, come!  
Make yourself immortal through me, O  
hallowed one!  
Rise from the grave of your buried past  
And be reborn through me, I pray. '

ONV touches upon every conceivable facet of human life and subjects it to a creative scrutiny which is also an aesthetic introspection and a sort of self-assessment of his life as a poet and artist. This probably explains the recurrence of lines from his earlier works. This way he revisits the literary paths he had already traversed like a pilgrim on a sacred journey. It also buttresses a pet notion of his that a writer has to be an alert human being with his senses wide awake to his social milieu and always ready to care and protect and take charge when the need arises.

When the times turn bad and value systems break down, only committed souls will perceive the truth and stand up for it. A poet should be eternally vigilant to the happenings around him. When peace is disturbed, the whole society feels its

reverberation. When unrest prevails no one can sleep in peace. According to ONV, a writer's mission is obvious. He has to strive to make the society a safer place to live in. This is a recurring theme of his poetry. There is a line in *Shaarngka Pakshikal* where he offers to forgo his sleep to keep vigil,

' Now you sleep, I will stay awake.'

In a similar vein again he sings from his heart in 'Sooryane Kaathu' [Waiting for the Sun],  
'Appu dear, sleep on,  
my son

Your Dad will wake you

up in time.'

He believes that a writer should be prepared to lose his sleep for the larger society that has nurtured him. When he handles the theme of Death he goes beyond the event and airs his concern for the victim who was done to death by Life. In the poem "Ente Maranam" (My Death) he pleads for a decent burial and adds,

' Let me like a breeze caress  
the body that I've surrendered  
for death to claim as his own.

Only this body of mine, I tell you.'

Again in his poem entitled "A Day in the Next Century", he dreams of his return to earth in



the future:

'Wherever be the world of Death,  
Though I know not the doors that lead to it.  
Without the dark guards knowing,  
I will return to my earth, for sure.'

When we consider the fact that it is from the same poet that we have poems like  
"Bhoomikkoru

Charamageetham"

[A Requiem for Planet earth], and  
"Sooryageetham",  
[Sun-Song] we begin to marvel how a sensitive mind can read the signs of the times and respond to the challenges of this complex world. Only an intensely committed artist like ONV can register the subtle nuances of a life in flux and accomplish his poetic mission with such uncanny precision.

He believed that life on earth is best lived in the company of one another. In other words he was an ardent votary of social life and prescribed it as a sure recipe for human welfare vis-a-vis the solo life. Though death appears in his poetry in the forbidding images of blackness, wind and drought, it is not to stir fear of destruction, but to remind his readers of the possibility of transcending the fear through social unity. But the mood of despair is short-lived and is quietly dispelled by the synergy of the vibrant images from nature. This is how he achieves this in his poem 'Sun-Song' where we see life and death walking hand in hand,

'The serpent creeps in the sacred shrine;  
The falcon moves in the sky above,  
But pigeons roost in the temple loft.  
The kingfisher with glint in the eyes  
Keep watch on the river-bank.

Poets like ONV, P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar and Pudusery Ramachandran became known for their pro- people stance and democratic leanings. Their world-view was reflected in their progressive humanism which found clear expression in their verse. This humanism was rooted in the conviction that man cannot be fragmented on the lines of caste, creed, color or money. ONV has stood steadfast in his humanist commitment as a writer.

But the mother-fish with the little ones  
Glide calmly through the water  
In perfect bliss unknown.'

The idea is not to down-play the presence of death but to face the terrors of life with dignity and courage gathered from the certainty of death. It is to underscore this philosophy that the charm of a quite

countryside and the culture of its people are purposely chosen as the back-drop. The social fabric of Kerala derives its power from its rich variety. The grandeur of its earth and sky, the changing hues of its weather, its music with an amazing variety of drums, their quaint names, the surprise-notes they make, the myriad flowers in the wild, the numberless birds of the air and their melodious songs all fill the poems

ONV with an energy that supports and sustains the spirit of his Malayalee brethren and give them a hope and a reason to get on with their lives.

The lines that are quoted below though randomly selected poems of ONV give us an idea about his versatility.

'Like a tiny drop of water that clings to the petal- tip  
of a flower that sways and dances in the breeze.'

("Nalumani Pookkal")

[Flowers that Bloom in the Evening]

'Fields and forests with tender shoots of  
screw-pine  
And shadowy bushes ringing with the wood-  
sparrows' song.  
The saga of a blessing and the fortune  
granted

In exchange for a handful of gracious rice-  
flakes.  
The oarsmen's song from the boat  
As they paddle through the backwaters  
With the cranes and the canoes that dot the  
lake.  
They form the still scenes of life on the  
shore.'

"Choroonu"  
[The Rice-Feeding Ceremony]

'As I whirled like a rainstorm  
My cry was washed away  
On the red earth  
Like a swirl of rain water.'  
"Valappottukal" [Bits of Broken Bangles]  
'The darkening landscape was  
A face of hushed ecstasy.  
On its cheek an intense  
tear-drop lay frozen.'

"Yuga Sandhya"  
[The Twilight of an Aeon]

'A stormy wind came raging, crossing  
The bends in the hills beyond.  
Trembling and dancing in ecstasy  
Like an Oracle, possessed and wild.  
Sucking the tenderness of the earth  
Like the blood of the fowl killed in ritual  
To quench his thirst.  
The wind retreats like the sound of  
The Oracle's anklets that fade away'  
"Ashanthi Parvam" [The Canto of Unrest]  
'When the twilight spreads on the river  
where do the butterflies sneak off  
with the vanishing sun?'

"Oru Sandhya Koodi"  
[The Twilight Once again]

'Let the Symphony begin  
and let the drummers of *Elathalam*,  
*Maddhalam* and *Edaykka*  
Perform in unison with  
the players of *Kombu*, *Kurunkuzhal* and  
conch  
and rise up to the pitch of Omkara!  
Sing, O golden waves on the  
surface of river Nila!

Sing, O the bamboo bush  
With its luxuriant hair spread out  
And dancing in the wind,  
Sing'

"Smrithilahari"  
[Heady Memories]

There are countless lines like this that point to the awesome range of ONV's creative genius. It is not only the power of his voice, but the presence of the quintessential charm of Kerala's geography and culture that made ONV the poet of the Kerala readers. He was proud of the diversity in our society which enhances its vigor and broadens the outlook of its people. It makes a culture more humane and consequently a lot more vibrant. He took delight in celebrating this vibrancy in his poems.

Romantic poetry in Malayalam has prescribed dreams as a means to alleviate human misery. The onset of Modernism elevated the phenomenon of death to a philosophic plane and almost totally negated the brighter side of life. A poet like Vailoppilly took his position in between these two extremes and was hailed for the same. Poets like ONV, P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar and Pudussery Ramachandran became known for their pro-people stance and democratic leanings. Their world-view was reflected in their progressive humanism which found clear expression in their verse. This humanism was rooted in the conviction that man cannot be fragmented on the lines of caste, creed, color or money. ONV has stood steadfast in his humanist commitment as a writer. He was always alert and in the issues that concerned his mother-tongue and native culture, even when the Malayali chose to doze, or make pretence of sleeping, ONV has stayed awake, keeping vigil. And that alertness often woke up the public sentiment and led the fight for justice.

He will be justly remembered in the history of Malayalam literature as the poet who kept himself awake so that others could sleep.



# Concern for the Other: Selected Stories of Akbar Kakkattil

**Dr. Reeja V**

**Translator : VineethaMekkoth**

**T**he stories of Akbar Kakkattil literally take the readers on a journey through the lives of the people in villages, portraying their simple hopes, desires, emotions, apprehensions, virtues, vices, anxieties, shocks, and vengeance. Kakkattil is well known for the presentation of the common people in their natural environment and his extreme concern for them. Every story bears evidence of Kakkattil's minute observation of the people and his participation in their main concerns. The readers get the feeling that the author is portraying their own lives. The jokes, the feelings of right and wrong etc become the readers' too. At times the story teller stands by as a mere viewer; at other times he narrates the story directly. The narrator is always present as a character in the stories. All of Kakkattil's stories are character-centred. Arif in 'Nadhapuram', Netto in 'Luis Alphonsa Netto', Kannan in 'Mayakkannan' [ Krishna, the Illusory Being], Narayanettan in 'Jathayil Aale Kootan Eluppa Margamenth?' [ What Are the Ways to Lure More People to the Procession?], Kuttappi in 'Nalla Ayalkar' [ The Good Neighbours] all are characters with individualities of their own. Kakkattil uses the story as a tool to try to establish peace with exhortations to stop the killing, looting and arson in the village, revealing himself to be a writer with great social commitment, with the concern for the other reigning supreme in them.

Nadhapuram, a place in Kannur district, is the backdrop of many of Kakkattil's stories. He even wrote a story so titled. The historical importance and political tradition of Nadhapuram are presented with details in this story. The story 'Nadhapuram' starts with Arif who comes in search of

Mr. Jayapalan's house. By the time the story concludes the reader gets acquainted with not only the history but also the topography of Nadhapuram. In this story, the narration is one that includes humour, terror and hallucinations. The journey to Mr. Jayapalan's house and the villagers' interactions fill Arif with astonishment. Arif even recollects the poetic saying, "The countryside is full of virtues". Another character, Sumohan, tells Arif the name given by the villagers to the road that leads to Mr. Jayapalan's house, which is pocked with pits and pot-holes. "This place has two names, sir. In the rainy season, this is called the mud-pond and in the summer, it is called the dust-pit. Sometimes we name it depending on the ruling minister; if it is Bava, it is *Bava-pit* ; if it is Hamsa, it is *Hamsa-hole* and so on."

The different ministries that come to power are powerless in repairing the road. The travellers keep falling in the pits and pot-holes and break their bones. Kakkattil thus uses an arrow tipped with a bit of cruel humour to find its mark.

The different faces of Nadhapuram come up forcefully in the story. When a guest arrives in the countryside, it is but natural that everyone comes to take a look. To see Arif who has come from Bombay, the neighbourhood women, the donation committees, the mosque committee, the local leaders, all gather. The committee formed to give financial aid to the coconut tree climber who broke his bones and is bedridden also arrives headed by members of both the ruling and the opposition parties. This is only

one face of Nadhapuram. Nadhapuram has another face too, a face of cruelty."Nadhapuram is a place where fights keep breaking out", says Karthyayani Amma. On the next day Arif also becomes witness to the political rivalry between the members of the financial aid committee who now fall into their different partisan groups and roar out against each other. People who a moment ago had come together to help one another, split into groups in the next minute and without any pity or sympathy, fight and kill themselves. Whoever happen to come upon the scene at times of such violence would also become victims. The



hurry with which Mr. Jayapalan wants to send Arif back to Bombay is proof of this. "Tomorrow there is a *bandh*. The situation will deteriorate, say the reports. You should not stay here anymore. There is a gossip about a stranger staying here." Arif is stunned. The hallucination-like incidents towards the end swallow up the story.

Political murder is again the theme of the story 'Jathayil Aale Koottan Eluppa Margamenth?' [What Are the Ways to Lure More People to the Procession?]. In the fight that breaks out in the fish market, Kunhananthan stabs Kammaran with the knife used to cut the kingfish. To protest against this incident, meetings are held with Narayanettan at the helm. "Among those who beat up Kunhananthan, I am sure there will not be a single local. I had given specific instructions that he should not be killed, whatever happens. So break the culprit's hand and cut it off." This was Narayanettan's order. There were to be protest meetings against the beating up and stabbing of Kammaran. Lathif is given the responsibility of gathering people for the procession. The day of the protest meeting and procession collided with the day of the telecast of a movie starring the superstars Mohanlal and Mammooty. Sarojini Amma, the Ladies Wing convenor, informs the leaders that not a single woman will come for the procession, for they want to watch Mohanlal and Mammooty. The youth who wanted to watch the live telecast of cricket too informed them about their inconvenience. One of their members is going to the Gulf and a party has been arranged at Mahe, so the day is not convenient, says Kelappan, the leader of the Coolie Wing. To all this Narayanettan replied, "That is not a problem. There will be no electricity here tomorrow. There will be a *bandh* in the town. Not a single vehicle will run." This is political strategy. Before dusk somebody stabs and kills Kunhananthan. The responsibility for the murder is placed on

the husband of Narayani, Kunhananthan's keep. Thus the story exposes the strategies and tactics adopted by political leaders to increase their party's power. Kakkattil's sympathy lies obviously with the victims.

Be it politics or communalism, the tiffs that break out into major fights tread on the individual. Akbar Kakkattil's concern rests with the common man who is trodden upon rather mercilessly.

'Nissahayathayude Neettam' [The Smouldering Pain of Helplessness] is a story where riots form the subject. A killing in response to a killing is the political scenario that leads the story forward. Earlier if it had been political murders that rocked the peace, now it has changed to Hindu-Muslim communal killings. Kakkattil uses the experiences of his village to bring out the global phenomenon of communal politics. The village now boards not only the natives but people who have been brought in from outside also. So is the case with the police too. This is the age of imports; the age of bringing ideas and things from abroad. The land now turns to the imported people for breaking as well as establishing peace. There ensues a condition where no one can take any side. The people are so helpless that they cannot even inform the police. The current political scenario where innocents are crucified is portrayed by Kakkattil in a beautiful manner.

Communal clashes form the theme of the story 'Mayakkannan' [Krishna, the Illusory Being] too. Mayakkannan arrives with miraculous powers to do away with communal clashes. He changes the bomb to a garland of flowers. However, the peace restored is short-lived. There will always be a section among the people who see only the opposite extreme. They suspect that the powers that Kannan uses now may later be used for bad deeds. Soon enough in a deserted house, Kannan writhes in pain as he is reduced to a pile of ashes. The author becomes witness to this.

Realising that he will be the next victim, the author breaks out in cold sweat.

The stories in Malayalam about thieves centre on the mischief of the protagonists. However Kakkattil's thief overhauls this traditional image in the story 'Nalla Ayalkaar' [The Good Neighbours] that offers scathing social criticism. It reveals the non-concern that some people in society have for the sufferings of the individual. The central character of this story is K.K. Kuttappi, a manual labourer who has passed tenth standard. He is of the opinion that there is no need for any savings scheme or life insurance. K.K. Kuttapi decides to take the little savings he has made from his daily wages, to the private banker cum government man T.T. Kochappi, with the hope of increasing these savings. But on the way he is robbed of the money by a youthful thief. K.K. Kuttappi is injured in the attack but neither the political leader nor the sales girl who come that way help him. They have their reasons for that.

The leader thought, "I'm now on my way to attend the party committee. The candidates for the coming elections will be decided today. I have to be there before the committee arrives and make some planned moves. Only if that is done will my candidature go through. And if I stay back to help this chap it will become a problem... If somebody says that I am responsible for his condition then everything is finished. If the rival is from the opposite party one can stand one's ground. But when the attack comes from the rival group within the party, defending oneself becomes difficult."

Kakkattil is highlighting here the phenomenon of internal rivalry and groups within a party that often takes away from man love for the suffering human beings.

The salesgirl, a trainee, is selling household appliances through instalment scheme. When she hears Kuttappi's groans and moans, she pauses to think, "I'm a worker at a place on the brink of collapse. The

'Managing Director' wants to scoot after making some more money. Till then credibility has to be maintained... When the business goes down, I too have to disappear." The pressure cooker that the boss 'manufactured' has to be given to Mr. Damodaran. With the money she gets from there she plans to go to the beauty parlour. If she stops to help this man, she might land in some trouble. The girl also considers, "Suppose I accuse him of attempting rape and say that as the reason for his condition? Or else, no need of that. I will have to then tear this sari and blouse. To act the tragedy queen is a bit difficult." The story brings out the increasing selfishness of human beings.

Soon a young writer who comes that way saves him. The writer is on a journey to do a feature for a magazine. The money received from the magazine is in his bag. He gives first aid to Kuttappi and with much difficulty, takes him to the hospital and later takes him to his own room in the lodge. In his mind he even prepares a newspaper report titled, "Writer to the rescue of a helpless man". He then goes to call his friend at the newspaper office. On returning he finds Kuttappi and the advance from the magazine missing. "You have taken something from my life. Instead of that I am taking your money", says the note that has been left behind. And thus, Kakkattil made a new structure of art, life and thieving for the thief story that portrays the non-concern that the majority has for the other. It is significant that the one who shows concern is a writer; but the way he is "rewarded" shows ironically the lack of concern.

'Kalikaalam' (The Age of Kali) is a story of four educated young men who are labelled thieves and are beaten up. The characters of the story have been oddly named as A, Aa, E, Ee, the first four of the Malayalam alphabet. The four friends camp in a distant town to write an exam and reach Kathirur at an odd hour. Unable to bear the thirst and hunger anymore, they approach a lighted

house asking for water. Only 'A' goes to the house, conveys their condition and requests the occupants for water. When he finishes drinking, the rest of them come forward. Just as 'A' signals them to come, the lights go out and the scream of the middle-aged house owner rings out in the darkness. 'Thieves!', people start yelling. The four of them run for about a mile then sit exhausted by the roadside. Seeing the lights of an approaching vehicle 'A' signals it to stop. "It is them", the middle-aged man says. "A man who robs will definitely be caught", they say and beat up the four young men accusing them of all the recent robberies in the neighbourhood. The next morning, the villagers see four young men moaning in pain by the roadside. No one goes near. Is the incident political or communal? It could not be confirmed. Among the onlookers were three young men who too had gone to write the test. Their thoughts are the story's climax! Thousands of young men had come to write the test. At least these four will now be out of the way...

Kakkattil has written a number of stories with the school as the background. The best instrument for social criticism is the school atmosphere. This is brought out in Kakkattil's story 'Bharathastreeyum Gas Stove-um.' (The Indian Woman and the Gas Stove). By giving this topic for essay writing, the writer is using dark humour to highlight a contemporary problem. The story is of those times when every other day housewives used to die from explosion of the gas stove. The problem of exploitation of women cannot be more well represented. Of a similar genre is the story 'Vilayeriya Vidyabhyasam Athava Karutha Kannanmaash Velutha Kannanmaashaakunna Vazhikal' (Expensive Education or Ways by Which Black/Dark Kannan Master Becomes White/Fair Kannan Master). In the first part of the story, Kannan master who is a government school teacher enrolls his son in an English medium school

and is taunted for this by his young colleagues. However, when his son passes the SSLC exam with 577 marks, Kannan master's wife, in his presence, asks his colleagues: "If my son had studied in your school, do you think he would have scored so much?" Once children pass the SSLC where should they join for Plus One or higher secondary? Should they become doctors or engineers? Which coaching centre is good? On these topics the dark Kannan master and his wife, the fair Kalyani have a lengthy discussion. At the end they decide to enrol him in the town school next to the coaching centre. It is only when he reaches the town that dark Kannan master realises that 'education is strange'. 577 is not such a big deal, one needs only a minimum of 563 marks for applying. If you come from an outside district, to get admission in the desired coaching centre you need to have studied in a CBSE syllabus un-aided school. Also a 'donation' between twenty thousand to fifty thousand rupees has to be given. Apart from this, a fee of One Lakh rupees is required annually. An ordinary government employee cannot bear this burden. Dark Kannan master shares his anxieties with a parent he meets on the way. The man's reaction is, "Nobody has forced us to admit our children over here." With this, dark Kannan master decides that his own school is the best of the lot. But his family pressurises him and he runs to the money lender 'Blade Ponnachan' for the money. Education is now a business. The interests of the children are not given any importance. The parents want their children to become doctors or engineers at any cost; and the story questions the very standards of education.

The stories that have been analysed here are those in which the land and its people have been portrayed with realism. They reflect the writer's inner concern for the condition of his land/ country.



# Where is Radha?

**Sugathakumari**

Translator : Dr.M.Leelavathy

Dusk has set in; no lamp is lit  
 Ambadi is still and silent  
 Calves do not run about  
 Nor do the boys; their flutes are mute  
 Damsels today wait for none  
 In forgetful abandon  
 Now is time for cows, return  
 None is seen waiting in concern  
 Neckbells jingling the flocks arrive daily  
 Udders full they move in slowly  
 Spreading dust as dusk sets in  
 But alas! today none is seen  
 In their midst a blue full moon of a lad  
 His attire ruffled, soil-clad  
 His tender limbs drenched in sweat  
 Running homeward, soaked in dust  
 Peacock feathers loose in tress  
 Singing and dancing free of stress  
 He and his pals used to come  
 From pastures, daily at this time.  
 Alas! today the eve is all gloom  
 As if in a pervading doom

Radha Evide? (Where is Radha?) is a long poem by eminent Malayalam poet, Smt. Sugathakumari. What is given here is the translation of the first part of that poem by another eminent writer Dr. M.Leelavathi

Songs choked in throat, the birds sit mute  
Winds forgetful of running about  
Spreading fragrance all around  
Even to lick the calves the cows do not care  
Minds stricken by a care that is rare  
Their cheeks wet in tears running down  
In their dumbness is a loud mourn  
Mothers and girls—where are all gone  
Ambadi looks deserted and forlorn  
Air is still; cattle still  
Heart beat stopped, Brindavan still  
Today's indeed was the darkest dawn  
Which rose to see their darling gone  
Where is Radha? Where is she gone?  
Her corporeal frame anywhere fallen?  
Do make a search oh! breathless winds  
Do start in search oh! restless minds  
She is seen nowhere on the sands  
Of sobbing waveless Yamuna's banks  
She is not there in the jasmine bowers  
Under the drooping creepers with no flowers  
Nor under the banyan tree  
Whose leaves forgot their dancing spree  
Weeping and wailing, Yashoda sinks into a swoon.  
Is Radha by her side? No, not there even  
The damsels in tears are telling tales  
Of his sportive mischief in details  
They weep for his love, wail for his guiles  
Tears flowing, saddest are their smiles  
Telling the tales they forget sleep  
Is Radha among them? Just have a peep.  
No, Radha's presence not even there  
The Bride of Brindavan is seen nowhere  
Peacock feathers on the hairs.  
Head to foot adorned in flowers.  
A crescent line of sandal paste  
Put on forehead in good taste.  
Attire blue-black as the night. As rising moon she looked so  
bright.  
Hand in hand they strolled in state,  
She and her blue-black playmate.  
Since he left, none has seen the girl  
Brindavan's bride, pride and pearl.  
Along hollow darkness I make my quest  
Till I find her I wouldn't rest  
Rest? Not until I find

Radha's state without Govind  
Pointing to a cottage someone says,  
That is where Radha stays.  
There I find none but a parrot  
Radha's pet, her tiny tot  
Upon Radha's shoulder, on sari-swing,  
She used to sit, lisp and sing  
A miming song "Kanna Kanna" in Radha's tone  
And would whistle to a flute's tune.  
The orphaned pet in scare flutters  
"Where my Rani" is the care in her twitters  
Rows of torches are seen here and there  
They are all in search of her.  
Gopas and Gopikas are out with lamps  
Find they must where she camps  
In the dense darkness where is she gone?  
Their gem of a bride gone alone.  
Crying, loudly they call out her name  
Knowing well she will never be the same.  
How can she pass this dreadful phase  
Drawn away from Madhava's face?  
Do make the search oh! breathless winds  
Do start in search oh! restless minds



# A Day for the Ancestors

Narayan

Translator : E.V. Ramakrishnan

Marykunnil Avarachan, leaning against his car, exchanged small talk with his friends, after coming out of the church. Meanwhile, he looked back once more.

Annamma was among the women walking down the courtyard of the church, like a leader. As they approached in a group, Avarachan was standing alone. Annamma kept on the back seat of the car the Bible, with the golden string marking the page where she had stopped reading. As the women and children moved to their cars, they cried out: *Grandpa, Grandma, bye-bye. Please tell Babychayan that we enquired after him. Auntie, see you.*

As the cars left, Avarachan waved hands, *bye*.

The driver held the car door open. Annamma was the first to sit inside. Avarachan always sat on the left side.

Mary Hill was the new name of Velan Hill. Rubber trees tossed in the wind. It is not exactly a hill, only a slope, the lower side of which was leveled for a huge gate. Pipes were paved before it to prevent cattle from entering. As the car entered the compound, the pipes shook with a ringing sound.

Baker Villa. The car halted in the porch. The couple got down.

Thomas, the driver, extended the key and said, "Sir, May I leave?"

"Take this twenty five rupees. For the Sunday trip to the church."

As he entered the house, taking the newspaper lying on the veranda and glancing at it, he cried out: "Annamma....Here,

here is the news Bony mentioned.” Annamma did not like being called from behind. She turned back, “What news?” “Only those who follow traditions and rituals deserve reservations.” Annamma was piqued. “Have we no heritage? Say something auspicious after Sunday prayers...”

“Not that. The hereditary traditions our ancestors abandoned a century and a half. Where are we going to search for it? We are not going to find them even if we search. We are going to lose the concessions we receive now.”

To silence him, Annamma said, “Come, eat something. I am starving.”

Even during breakfast, his eyes were searching the newspaper. He was saying, “This is going to spell trouble.”

Staring at him, Annamma stood up, wringing her hands in the bowl. She was not amused.

“Are we not getting the yield of a quintal rubber every day? Together we also receive pension of about forty thousand rupees. Then, what the hell...”

Annamma, brimming with hate, recalled all those rituals she had heard about in those days. Who preserves those rituals? If anyone form amongst us does it, they are being untrue to their Christian faith.

Avarachan who could read his wife’s thoughts, remembered the words of the priest.

“Can we justify injustice with our deeds? Such people would never achieve pure-blooded perfection. Our ancestors got converted, leaving behind the robes of the savage. We held the sign of knowledge in our mind and the lamp of faith in our hand, took oath without soul, after listening to God’s words. But what did we do after that?”

“We did not clear the darkness of the mind with the light of knowledge. We did not

empower the weak ones. In fact, we weakened them further. We tried to uproot their clans. We did it by gaining access to their privileges, pretending that we are the weak ones. Those weak ones never knew what their rights were.”

Those who entered the mainstream earlier became people with status. How can those who came later dislodge them? Destroying age-old traditions is considered a virtuous act, and those who do it attain holiness. And of course, anthropology is there to assist and inspire them.

Six generations after conversion, that is, a hundred and fifty years later, the blood of the new generation becomes pure. They have nothing to do with the uncivilized ancestors or their old generations.

But the priest will certify that the members of the seventh generation also belong to the community of the savage. When you take that certificate to the Village Officer, he would reply, *Let me see*. He would not be convinced.

Annamma delivered ten children not because the community was short of members. When her husband began to feel a little bit ashamed about it, she discontinued the practice.

Since God looked at them with His right eye, all their children have come up in life. All were smart. For studying they had concessions, and for administering they had government jobs, all of them meant for the uncivilized. As if it was not enough to exterminate them, displace them or convert them, all done under duress.

It is good that the eligibility norms for rights are stipulated in the constitution. Exploitation is constitutional.

I am only getting what is legal, one can say.

To those who claim it is unjust, the counter-question is: should we always walk in the forest with bow and arrow made of bamboo sticks?

"You have a call" Salikutty, the domestic, brought the cell phone to Avarachan.

"Is it Margaret Rani? My dear, what is new? Oh, your dad can take care of that. Aren't there about four surgeons in the family? Yes, the M. Phil papers...I will get it done."

When the line got disconnected, Avarachan thought, the fight is yet to begin.

There is the myth of Hanuman's tail that stopped Bhima on his way to procure the rare flower

*Kalyanasougandhikam*.

Priests had forbidden such stories. It is the Supreme Court's order that blocks the path, as if the Himalayas have turned over. Nobody seems to mind. Is it because they are trying to overturn the judgment or have they given up, thinking that the right is not legitimate, though they have enjoyed it for generations?

The great sorrow of Avarachan was that there was not a single District Collector or Police Superintendent among their children. When you declare, I am the father of the District Collector or Superintendent of Police, the other man will get a jolt. He will fumble and one naturally gains the upper hand. It is such pleasure! About three of them are Heads of the Departments, and then there are doctors, engineers and lawyers. But none has the authority of a District Collector. It was a mistake made in reading the trends of the future, Avarachan used to say. His sons should have learnt the art of twisting the law.

Truth and justice are on the side of those who can wield influence. Once something is

proved to be true it will endure as truth. Till someone proves it to be untrue.

Grandchildren are all studying in reputed schools and universities — even the children of some of the grown-up grandchildren. I can't even recall all their names. They only

have to remember two words, grandpa, grandma.

Elizabeth Christian, the youngest daughter, has a job superior in status to her husband. She is the mother of Margaret Christian. What they heard on the phone shocked Avarachan and also Annamma who was reading the Bible.

Margaret Christian was called for an interview to the post of a translator in a reputed University.

The chairman of the

panel saw the certificates and then asked, "What is your caste?" She repeated what was stated in the certificate. Then came the question, "Please describe the rituals observed by your community during marriage and also on childbirth."

Margaret had never even seen a tribal. She could speak the mother tongue only with some effort. How can she speak of traditions? She felt she was being insulted by the officials. She said, "Haven't I given a certificate showing that I am from tribal community?" "Yes, but why are you hesitant to speak on the rituals of the community?" "But I am a Christian," she screamed. The official asked, "Then why did you come here?"

She did not get the job. That is fine. But the girl has not slept for the last three days. "We have to teach a lesson to that old man who humiliated her. He is supposed to be the

"Only those who follow traditions and rituals deserve reservations." Annamma was piqued. "Have we no heritage? Say something auspicious after Sunday prayers..."

"Not that. The hereditary traditions our ancestors abandoned a century and a half. Where are we going to search for it? We are not going to find them even if we search. We are going to lose the concessions we receive now."

Head of the Department. Dad, you must help us.” “Daughter, how can we do it?”

In the evening Avarachan put on the shawl with the wide golden border. He also put on the long sleeved shirt made of Khadi along with the golden cross. Annamma asked : “Where are you going to?” “To your father-in-law’s mansion. Are you coming?” Avarachan retorted angrily. “Go wherever you want,” Annamma said.

The car filled the porch of the Baker Villa. It flowed out and stopped at the gate of the man he wanted to meet. “The verdict is unequivocal”

He was referring to the report on those who are tribal only on paper. Once they get the concessions for education and employment, the women marry into *savarna* or forward-caste families. But their children and their families are considered tribal. The number of ‘*savarna* tribals’ have gone up like anything. If only it was notified that the child will inherit only the mother’s caste!

Ours is a nation of castes.

There is documentary proof to show that Mrs Annamma Abraham had changed her religion twice. When she was worried that she would not get the seat under reserved quota for M.Sc she became Vijayamma. It was due to some rumor that the Central Government was to prevent converted Christians from enjoying the privileges meant for the tribals.

Once she completed her education, Vijayamma got selected for a reserved post. She once again became Annamma to marry Mr. Abraham who was a research officer.

The grandchildren cannot claim the privileges under the tribal identity since the father of Margaret Christian is Earl Christian who is not a tribal.

Avarachan came out, not bothering to challenge the official. While sitting in the car, he thought, the girl did not qualify in the

interview because of her ignorance and arrogance. It is not because the certificate was inadequate. Who the hell can answer questions on heritage and tradition now?

He was back home. He changed his clothes. Annamma approached him with a glass of cold water. One of those moments when she convinced him that she was his wife, with a daughter who will not get a job.

Containing his rage, he paused for a minute. “She can’t get away with her grandma’s tricks. God will not come to one’s rescue when one reads the Bible after deliberately committing mistakes. Haven’t we accumulated a lot of assets? Why do you need higher education and a job? Why not start a hospital or a college? You can earn more than what you get from the rubber plantation. Social good is an empty word on a piece of paper.”

There is something bothering her husband. It will come out on its own. Annamma pretended indifference

From the next day, Avarachan kept going out often. And he did not reveal anything, even when pressed.

One day he was seen with two people in the site-out. One of them was old and in shabby clothes. From appearance both seemed to be tribals. Avarachan did not bring them in for anything. Whatever the old man spoke was recorded by the tape recorder kept on the window sill, unseen to them. Secret documentation. The machine had a smiling yellow light. The fools were unaware of all this.

They came again after a week. They, along with Avarachan, went into the rubber plantation with a long knife and a spade. They halted near a big tree there. Avarachan had a close look at the colossal tree. Most of its branches were cut. It would easily fetch about five lakhs. The other man cleared a small area on the floor. They planted twigs and made a small marquee of knee length.

They went on doing some more things.

When it became dark they planted a burning torch made of a stick with rags on it. Shadows moved here and there. Some sounds were heard.

The cry of a cock in its death-throes followed by a shriek. In the light of the torch, the flash of the blood-stained blade of the knife. Annamma who was watching all this through the window cried out loudly, "Avaracha..." The sound did not rise very much. Was there some devil blocking her throat? Annamma began shivering with rage. She was sure that her husband was doing something against their faith. She will confront him when he came back.

Avarachan came back with a triumphal expression. The voice recorder hung from his shoulder like a camera. He was in his working clothes. The marble floor became dirty from his soiled feet. As Annamma looked in anger and disgust, the fire-proof cabinet inside opened and shut. There was a bundle of notes in the hands of Avarachan as he came out. "Where are you taking this? What are you up to in this night?" He ignored her protests. As Annamma was a diabetes patient she felt weak now with blood sugar rising.

Avarachan came back after some time. He kept the voice recorder on the table. It was covered with filth and dirt in some places.

When he emerged fresh after a bath and change of clothes, she confronted him. "What nonsense are you doing? What am I to you?" "Do you know what is inside?" "How do I know?" "You must know. When your seventh or eighth generation is questioned about their heritage they should not have Margaret Christian's experience."

Annamma conceded defeat. She smilingly asked, "What is inside this?" "You listen to it on track. "Why don't you explain it all to me?" "It was not easy to follow their directions. I could cope because I am a

male. I also had my pegs of brandy." "What you had beneath the tree, was it the climax of all that?" "Yes, a day dedicated to the ancestors." "Can a Christian do all this?" "Honestly, it is not allowed. But you and your relatives have it certified that you are savage tribals. The priest gives it in writing. Still, does any one of you know how ancestors are propitiated? You only wanted to root out.

"You pray for the soul of Grandpa before his tomb, lighting candles. This is not the tradition of that savage. If you retain his rituals and rites you should not try to rob him of all his privileges.

Annamma had no answer. She sat with bowed head.

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# The Upanishad of Love

**V. J. JAMES**

Translator : Radhika P. Menon

It has been 19 years since Annieamma and I got married without any prior love. Actually, our nuptials took place quite by accident. Annieamma was 23 and I was 26. The use of the phrase “by accident” is deliberate. The groom intended for her was Ulahannan, but since I too was Ulahannan, the marriage bureau had sent the letter to my address by mistake and that has brought us together. God alone knows what happened to the other poor fellow, but I'm sure he is doing fine. So 19 years have passed! Annieamma and I had almost forgotten the carefree, happy times of the pre-marital days and were tagging on till now. That is, till recently, when my mind started going astray.

This is the point I want to make – just as it is only after constructing a house that we actually learn how not to construct one, it is in my 45th year that I realize the mistakes I had committed in my attempts on love in the past. I attained that insight while sitting under a fan in a bar in much the same way as Lord Buddha gained enlightenment sitting under a Bodhi tree. My life had been quite a normal one till then. Our children – a daughter, studying in the tenth standard and a son in the seventh – shared the ground floor of the house while we occupied the upper storey. When one lives like this, what is the best way to turn to philosophy other than by reflections on love?

Those who tread their ordinary paths in a mundane way are only too likely to feel that the theme of love has already been sullied enough by film makers and literary men of every hue, and therefore it does not deserve any more verbosity. But one day, I was given a fresh-scented idea while relaxing on one-and-a-half pegs. I wanted to enjoy the flavor of love again!



It is quite an injustice if one does not get an opportunity to rectify all the mistakes one had made in the love-life of the past and fall freshly in love again. I feel that after traversing some distance in life one has to turn around and boldly ask some questions to life. And life cannot shrug off its responsibility of answering a middle-aged man's posers.

"O Life! What have you done to me in matters of love?"

To tell you the truth, I fell in love for the first time when I was in the third standard. The girl was Juliet, a fair, plump, doll-like Anglo-Indian. I plucked a water lily from a pond, gave it to her and said, "I love you". She gave me a Parry's toffee in a green wrapper and replied, "I too love you!" That brand of toffee is no longer available now, but its milky taste has lingered in my tongue till today. Juliet and the Parry's toffee wrapper always come to mind whenever I watch that scene from the movie *Manjil Virinja Pookkal* when it is telecast –Shankar unwrapping a chocolate with his lips and Poornima Jayaram making a tiny doll out of the wrapper while both weave colourful dreams about their future. I fell in love again only after seven years of self-control, that is, when I was in the tenth standard,. The girl was Sudhamani. The only physical contact ever made between us was just once when our fingers grazed while passing the Malayalam Reader on. I had a fight with Radhamohan who had boasted that if he were in my place, Sudhamani would have been ten months pregnant already! Needless to say, I lost in the fight. By the time I joined a college in the town for pre-degree course, my love for Sudhamani lay discarded behind the village library. Later on, several girls had trampled upon my heart

But who will love me in my middle age?

The only lady in my office is Jagadamma, a typist, who can stake no claims to beauty. She looks like another soiled file amidst the mounds of dust-laden files. Leave love alone, Jagadamma will not inspire even happiness in any mortal!

and went their ways after some time.

My claim about several affairs implies that none of them had reached a point of consummation.

Well, if love becomes complete, will anyone pursue it further? Will a man be able to eat even a single banana after a rich meal? A

philosophical state where nothing can be added or subtracted will follow such a satiated man — like the *mantra* in the Upanishad about *poornatha* or perfection.

But which follower of Cupid can ever claim to be sated? Look closely at love, and one can see that the pith of most romances is shriveled, and infested with termites.

Today, as I stand at the threshold of 45, I realize with regret that I too have not been able to experience love in its fullness. This late realization has happened to many men and women too, and it is likely to happen to the future generations as well. I am sure that all of them, like me, nurse a vain hope in their hearts that, given an opportunity, they will correct their mistakes, recapture the ardour of their first love, and immerse themselves in the pure and heady frisson of romance again.

But everyone conceals this truth and pretends to be dignified.

I strongly oppose the social norms that put obstacles in the course of true love just because one happens to be a married man and father of two children. I did try to arrange my thoughts in various symmetries to philosophically block my emotions. My life had been following a regular pattern – quarrelling occasionally, burying the hatchet, going to watch movies once a month and

making love whenever the urge became irresistible. But I don't know why, all on a sudden, a thought of love rose from the past, crossed the years and arrived at the present.. Cupid has driven into my heart a really sharp arrow.

But who will love me in my middle age?

The only lady in my office is Jagadamma, a typist, who can stake no claims to beauty. She looks like another soiled file amidst the mounds of dust-laden files. Leave love alone, Jagadamma will not inspire even happiness in any mortal!

I had been a perfect man after my wedding and had no secret from my wife. So I tried repeatedly to muster courage to reveal the fever of my love-sickness to Annieamma. But I shied away from it with an equal measure of diffidence. Unless one is very careful, such blunt courage can really be dangerous. Think of *Vava Suresh* who catches snakes from any nook and corner quite effortlessly. If an ordinary man imitates Vava Suresh, he is certain to get bitten and turn blue in the end. But surely there was a first time even for Vava Suresh; he could turn pro only after having his first experience! In that case, why can't I too become a professional snake-catcher?

One night, after a dream of my capturing a majestic-looking, venomous krait, I felt the surging of some measure of self-confidence in me. The next morning, fluffing myself up, I set out to confess my love-crisis to Annieamma. Although many sounds got lost – some choking in my throat, and others falling down the food pipe – Annieamma clearly heard what I said. But when she looked at me as if I were a nitwit, I feared that things had gone out of hand. However, no life-threatening disaster happened. Maybe I am destined for long life!

"The whims of old age!"

She laughed as though she had cracked a joke. When she responded like any other

ordinary woman, I could only send my sigh into the space.

I understood that Annieamma had not understood my lovelorn state. Obviously, all things do not affect everyone in a similar way. If this woman who had known me closely all these years did not understand my plight, who in this whole world would? This is particularly true in the context of Indian ethical standards, for finding a new love is seen as something immoral by the Indian moral code. But then I felt irritated that even the husbands in foreign lands, unhampered by such rigid views, have never bothered to explore and embrace intense love.

To those cruel men, love relationships were like simple knots to be tied and untied at will every week. When I realized that it is not possible for a married man who lives with his wife and children to rectify his past mistakes in love and walk straightforward into a fresh love affair, I decided to give up my ideas on love — like a disappointed lover. And, as this fantasy was born in the bar, I felt that the bar itself would be the most appropriate place to cast it off. But a cat tied up in a sack and abandoned miles away from home will somehow find its way back home. Like that, my thoughts on love too returned. In short, my efforts to drive it away met with failure.

But in life where there is no justice or fair play, sometimes one has to take certain decisions, however heart-rending they may be. I too did the same.

It was when I tried giving up my novel idea on love that I found it to be as painful as death. I cast off my formal self that had scoffed at lovers who committed suicide, because by now I know that love and death are close to each other. Every love draws hope about life, standing on the promontory of suicide. So lovers who kill themselves certainly deserve eternal peace.

It was when I had thrown my arm around the



shoulder of death that a new idea lit up, as if ignited by the lovers dead. Why not love Annieamma, my own wife? After all, those who have done research in the field of love have come up with the theory that nothing matters in love be it eyes or nose or age or gender differences. So won't there be a new imaginativeness if, in the middle age, one rectifies the wrongs and begins to love one's own wife?

But the problem is, when I say that I shall love my wife hereafter, the implication is that I didn't love her truly until now. Such a declaration was certain to make Annieamma whimper. But, surely, such worries should not be allowed to provoke an honest lover to deceive himself.

The holy sayings in the chronicles of love mention that courageous love will own up everything, corrects all mistakes, shows courage in the face of crises, and so on. So, one day, overwhelmed by a kind of dangerous self-confidence, spurred on by the chronicles of love, I revealed my love through carefully chosen words:

"Annieamma, I am going to start loving you once again!"

It was a rare display of boldness from my part!

But I forgot something in the frenzy of the moment. Annieamma had not trekked the mountains of philosophy as I had done. She must have wondered at the kind of madness that gripped her man, that too, nineteen years after the wedding!

Alas, she saw my plea for love only as a dwarfish joke wearing a fool's cap! I could read that message clearly from what looked

like a laugh in the vague expression she showed. Yet I was not ready for a retreat. I was prepared to supply right amounts of whatever it took – fertilizers and water – to make my love-creeper bloom. My days of experiments with love had begun. As the first step, I racked my brains and prepared a list

of things, in their decreasing order of importance, that might have gone wrong while showing love to Annieamma all these years.

My problems have always begun and ended in matters related to money. After all, as a clerk in a government office in the town – a post I got appointed to via sports quota – there is a limit to the financial

burden I can carry. Incidentally, let me state that once I was skilled in shot put. But all that is forgotten history. After my wedding, either because my muscles became weak or the gravitational force of the earth increased, the shots I threw refused to go far. They settled down as close to me as possible. When my office recorded my defeats in all the competitions I attended, they thought it wiser to save at least the money needed to sponsor me.

Annieamma could never understand the difficulties I had to face, deprived of TA and DA! Yet because of her endless demanding of it, I bought a television set on installment basis. My hope was that she would remain silent at least as long as she watched it. Sponsored serials assisted a great deal in making my prediction come true. However, a side-effect was that I had to suffer from constipation as I could not listen to the 7 o'clock Malayalam news. It was only natural for the timings of serials and news telecasts to clash every now and then. But in my

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pursuit of true love I decided to manage my bodily functions without the help of news.

Next to serials, astrology-related programmes were Annieamma's favourites. Besides, she would participate in "Your Choice," "Online Quiz" etc and make STD calls to attend to them. As a result, I had to pay hefty telephone bills. One of the songs she wanted to listen to in "Your Choice" was "*Anganamaar Moule*" [Oh, you, the greatest woman of them all] that Sugunan sir, her tutorial teacher, used to croon. It evoked nostalgic memories of her pre-degree course!

When she participated in the "Online Quiz" the very first question stumped her. To the question "How many colours make our Tricolour flag?" although Annieamma said "three" within ten seconds, the quiz master simply hung up, saying "Do ring us again!" What a pity! As for the Astrology expert, he responded only to her sixth letter. What the omniscient guru does not know even now was that she had lied to him. The letter that he thought was her sixth one was actually her first!

But the problems generated by television did not end there. Due to her overweening faith in astrology, if a daily forecast predicted the possibility of theft in the house, Annieamma spent the entire day waiting for a masked intruder to make his appearance. If it spoke of the likelihood of conception, she served me fenugreek gruel for dinner and slept alone peacefully in the next room. Annieamma was privy to her grandmother's sage counsel that fenugreek gruel was good not only for tackling diabetes but for subduing libido as well. I never asked Annieamma why her grandmother had twelve babies, one after another, in as many number of years. Nor did I poke fun at that arch villain of her grandfather who could not be shackled even by fenugreek. Instead, like a true lover of experiments, despite my ignorance about my ruling star, I tried to find it with the help of fenugreek. I kept a watch

on the days that Annieamma was predicted to conceive and I was fated to drink that gruel, to see which zodiac sign was the villain. Finally, through the scientifically approved trial-and-error method, I found out that my zodiac sign was *karkadakam* (cancer). Considering my special fondness for crab curry – and the knowledge that *karkam* means 'crab' – it could not be otherwise!

True that I bought a television set for her, but the fact is that I had perversely turned down most of Annieamma's demands, citing one lame excuse after another. During crucial situations, I would slash her desires using razor-sharp verses cleverly selected from the Bible. As she was not in the habit of reading the holy book regularly and also because it had been ages since she attended week-long charismatic meditation programmes, Annieamma could never recall any Biblical verse to counter mine with. Praise the Lord! As she looked longingly and a little enviously at the necklaces and bangles worn by stylish girls in the neighbourhood, ornaments that changed every so often with short-lived fashion trends, I used to distract her attention by quoting St Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians. I didn't even buy foreign panties with a flower print in the middle, as she had wanted. Instead, like a boor, I teased her asking whose attention she hoped to capture with the floral design on that part of the body.. The vigil I maintained to ensure that Annieamma's curiosity was not drawn towards anything that went beyond what a government clerk's wife could aspire for was THE real vigil! Being a man who has not given her any love-token all these years, is there any point in going to her now with words like "sweetheart," and "darling"? If genuine love is to sprout, sacrifice is essential, and that includes financial sacrifice too!

The day I got my next salary, despite my severe financial crisis, I bought what Annieamma had been demanding for long –

a Kancheepuram sari and foreign panties with the centrally located floral print.

“Jesus! What happened to you, *Ichaya*?” she wondered.

A light blue Kancheepuram sari had been on her mind for a long time. Holding it close to her body, Annieamma looked at the red flower on the blue panties and on my face, by turns, repeatedly. She knew really well that I was not a fool to squander money. From her stares I could see that she understood those expensive gifts as symbols of my desire for a nocturnal pastime. A few of her friends, claiming to have richer personal experience, had warned Annieamma that men, on turning 40-45, were prone to flirting. The word they used to describe it was “recirculation”. If the wife remained as dry as a harvested field during the husband’s recirculation phase, he was likely to go in search of more fertile lands. To prevent such a calamity, wives were supposed to be at least eight years younger than their husbands. That there was only a three year age-gap between us gave Annieamma real cause to worry. In her frank thoughts, I appeared to be suffering from the recirculation ailment. This reaction from her caused my blood circulation to increase! Kancheepuram sari . . . my three thousand rupees! Lost forever!

But I was determined to experience love in its full beauty. I resolved to sever and remove all mental attitudes that came in its way. My tongue had the habit of calling Annieamma “*Edi*,” “Hey, you fool!” and so on. I cast them away and brought to mind the endearing term I used to call her by during the early days of our married life. *Molutta*! For several years now, caught in our everyday rush, I had never used that word. It had even fallen in my esteem as a mushy word in the dictionary of the newlywed men.

What a soft and sweet word it has become all on a sudden! But I never found it to be so in those days! Did that mean the middle-

aged man of today has become more mature than the youngster of those years? I felt that it was my ego – and not my real self – that had grown up. No wonder love had gone its way from marriage and life had become a matter of mere adjustment! In that case, it was high time I gave my ego a rap, and checked for myself whether I stood to gain or lose if I became humble.

Anxious to try out the experiment, I surrendered my ego and called Annieamma “*molutta*”. It struck her like a bolt from the blue! She stared at me again. This time I noticed a fleeting tenderness in her look. It was a term which she had once eagerly waited for. Suddenly I remembered what Annieamma had divulged once – the first term of endearment a man uses to address his girl will become her favourite. The truth is that I, and later Annieamma, had forgotten that word, walking as we were along the rough roads of life. Now that shady trees have started growing on the new pathways of my love-experiments, I began to recall everything I had lost in the past. And, to a certain extent, it ignited Annieamma’s passion too.

The next day, breaking all the knots that had bound my tongue, I said openly to Annieamma “Do you know how deeply I love you?”

Shouldn’t I say such loving words so that she could understand my feelings? It is only natural for a mature man to feel shy about speaking in a playful manner like young lovers do. But if love, shorn of all its defects, is to be brought back to life, shame and ego should not be permitted to erect towering walls.

Maybe because I had been flowing wide, Annieamma appeared to be getting slightly soggy. She too may have started mulling over the meanings of her husband’s statements. I had injected appropriate doses of creative language into our conversations to serve the purpose. As any loving couple

begin to settle down in life, children join them in the course of time. Thereafter the children's needs get priority, the daily routine becomes hectic, and as life gets moulded to suit the busy schedule, love becomes an invisible undercurrent. But how many can claim, hand upon heart, that they are able to enjoy love to the fullest? It is true that Annieamma and I love each other. It may be similar in the lives of most others too. But if we were to segregate love- lives like cashews and mangoes, according to their qualities, most would fall into the fourth grade reserved for the sour and the worm-eaten specimens. I am not looking for that kind of love between us. I am looking for unconditional love from Annieamma.

However I did not ask for it openly. What is the point in keeping one's love buried inside, like a locked treasure chest? She has to reveal it on her own. It should come out in the form of an irrepressible, violent explosion. Otherwise, love will taste rancid, like a mango squeezed to ripeness. One day I'll hear about Annieamma's love for me from her own lips. And it will exude its natural taste, like a fully ripe Malgova mango. Therefore I took every possible effort to display my love at various levels in order to raise it to that point.

One of the discoveries I have made about women is that they have a tender nature that will melt like wax at the least warmth. A few simple gestures of affection are all it takes to send them to ecstasies. If one starts at the softest spot, women can be easily moved. Such an opportunity came to me before long.

When Annieamma fell ill, I who had never before entered a kitchen, prepared for her a medicinal concoction of basil leaves, pepper and dried ginger, made her eat salted rice gruel, did a week's laundry . . . not in an automatic washing machine but manually, and ironed the clothes. I did not do this to please her. It surprised me to discover that all

these were natural manifestations of my love. Sacrifice in love is as beautiful as love itself.

After her recovery, Annieamma became a new woman as though her soul had taken a fresh birth.

As I escaped from the mounds of files in my office and reached home, Annieamma started waiting for me, with my favourite Bru coffee. We started competing with each other in sacrificing – Annieamma wanted to give up seeing her serials so that I could watch news and I tried to surrender news telecasts so that she could enjoy her serials.

She began to observe me closely and anxiously every day for signs of physical weakness, to ply me with half-boiled eggs laced with pepper powder.

"Come molutta, let us lie in each other's arms" I would say lovingly and take her to bed. I knew that to an outsider's eyes this would look like a Mills and Boons romance. But it is because those who have discarded for long the exhibitions of fresh passion will not be able to tread those superficial paths again.. If maturity is artificiality, I am giving it up for good now. Now I can see fresh, blooming flowers, flitting butterflies and clear rainbows all around me. Life seems to have become colourful all over again.

I never had the habit of telephoning Annieamma while in office. Now I rang her up three times a day. In the process, I discovered that conversations over the mobile phone are seldom vibrant. Whatever scientific explanation you may summon to prove me wrong, it is the land phone-to- land phone talk that is clearer.

"Hold the mouth piece closer to your lips, won't you?" I asked Annieamma.

"What's wrong, *Ichaya*? Can't you hear me?"

"Of course, I can. But I want to hear the sound of your breath as well!"

When Annieamma sighed, I took it in as if it were my life breath.

Soon I felt that our teenage daughter has begun to notice a new romance in the air. Even the seventh standard boy in his own way seemed to sense something abnormal. But neither of them said anything about it.

One day I was watching a dance programme in one of my favourite English channels. The boys and girls were being taught how to dance. It was a kind of dance where the partners had to interact closely. I listened to the clear instructions about how the boys and girls should train themselves with certain steps and watched them perform. . A very attractive performance full of romance. I felt greatly drawn towards the dance. I called

Annieamma immediately.

“Why don’t we try these steps?”

“Shame on you ! Don’t you have anything else to do?”

“Molutta, this is what happens in the valley of love. Come, let’s give it a try. We may perhaps be the only couple in the whole of Kerala to watch this programme and dance with the performers.. That’s the beauty of it.”

Although she hesitated initially, love had begun to overwhelm her and under its sway Annieamma came to me with halting steps. Like a lover embracing his lady for the first time, I threw my left arm around her waist and held her shoulder with my right hand. Annieamma followed suit. I could feel a slight tremor in her arm as if she were touching a man for the first time. Then we started taking steps together, following the instructions.

O my pretty pretty girl, I love you

Like I never ever loved no one before you!

How meaningful the words were!

Although the words were otherworldly, the steps were rather difficult to follow. Our initial attempts were like a baby learning to walk. But we laughed loudly when we made mistakes and enjoyed ourselves. Gradually, as our steps fell into place with repeated

attempts, we grew enthusiastic. What a wonderful experience! For both of us it was as though the magical world of movies had come down to our daily routine. I experienced a sense of loss that such lighter moments had been lost so far in our tense life .

When my tenth standard daughter – studying in the adjacent room – went to the

kitchen under the pretext of drinking water, wearing an ‘I-understand-all-this’ look on her face, Annieamma struggled out of my embrace and stopped dancing.

So that was the reason! The presence of children prevents the flow of true romance. It is only natural. But we can take necessary precautions.

I suggested sending them to my ancestral house for a few days when the school closed for the summer vacation. That had never been our practice. Whenever I took leave, all of us went home, and returned together after a week. This time we forced the children to go on vacation so that our love could scale greater heights.

I told Annieamma, “Today onwards, until our kids come back, our house will be named ‘Eden’. I am Adam and you, Eve. In this private space, we won’t need even a fig leaf between us. Shame is nothing but a dirty dress that covers true love, darling! Only if we don’t restrict it with clothes can we

Although initially I suspected that I was going overboard on the romantic front, Annieamma had no doubts about my amorous protestations. She had morphed into a true-blood Eve of the Garden of Eden. That week we did not have to wash our clothes. Life in paradise helped us save on soap, as well as bring down water and electricity bills.



release romance from its ordinariness and turn it into universal love. Let me buy a few apples . . . you can tempt me occasionally with the forbidden fruit . . .”

Although initially I suspected that I was going overboard on the romantic front, Annieamma had no doubts about my amorous protestations. She had morphed into a true-blood Eve of the Garden of Eden. That week we did not have to wash our clothes. Life in paradise helped us save on soap, as well as bring down water and electricity bills. If anyone called, we attended the phone in our birthday suits. The people on the other end would have covered their eyes or fled had they seen us.

One day when the phone rang, Annieamma, in her nudity, rushed to answer it. But when she found that the caller was the parish priest, she banged the receiver on its cradle crying “Oh my God!” and ran away. It was only after hastily draping herself in a bed sheet that she came back to the room. However I spoke to the priest fearlessly, without covering myself. The shepherd had called to invite his lambs to a family prayer the next week. How was he to know that a billy and a nanny were gamboling in paradise, nibbling green leaves and enjoying themselves? I wanted to ask him whether prayers were meant only for people who have been driven out of paradise . . . so that they could return to Eden? Once they reach Eden, they have to go naked. If so we were there already! Fondling my testicles I wanted to ask him why he wanted to drag us out of Eden..

“Ugh! Cant’ you put on some clothes . . . at least when you’re talking to a priest, *Ichaya?* Priests are very close to the Almighty . . .”

“Didn’t Adam and Eve live close to God, dear? Weren’t they the first naked people? You know what that means? Covering the body in clothes indicate distancing oneself from God. Who knows, the priest too may have stood naked as he spoke to us over

phone. They too might do things people never suspect them of!”

Hearing my philosophy, Annieamma drew a holy cross on her forehead. I laughed in my mind, thinking of the endless crosses she will have to draw from now onwards on different parts of her body. The reason for my mirth was that I remembered a mildly indecent story I had shared with my friends during the heady days of youth – a story with a priest, a cross and an offertory box as characters. I would have hesitated to share such stories with Annieamma earlier. But now that there are no smoke screens between us, and we have no secrets from each other, I can very well share with her this story that goes with the context.

The story begins with a very devout rustic Christian, forced into marriage by his relatives and family members. As an extremely pious man with no thoughts other than those about God, he never bothered about making love to his wife. When she reached the end of her tether, the woman went to the parish priest and spoke of her sorrow. The wise father gave her a simple way of solving it. . “Before going to bed, draw a cross on your forehead and on your cheeks, making sure that your husband sees it.” Following the advice, the wife drew a cross on her forehead at night. The man who was in the habit of devoutly kissing any spot where a cross was drawn, instantly kissed her on the forehead. The wife drew a cross on her cheek. He instantaneously kissed her on the cheek. She drew more and more crosses and he kissed them all — on the lips, neck, breasts, navel . . . As he went down with the kisses, he saw the offertory box, deposited a 25 paise coin in it, and turned to the other side to sleep. As soon as I finished the story, Annieamma started laughing.. She laughed and laughed till her stomach started to ache.

At the point where differences between the decent and the profane vanished, I felt the richness of a feeling of oneness with her. No



wonder the conjugal bond had become very strong.

When her laughter subsided, I said with an open heart, "Annieamma, Annieamma . . . you know what? When we men see the beautiful body of the woman, we burn all over. We try to possess her, at least in our minds. Now that our love has come alive, there shouldn't be any more secrets between us. Don't you women feel the same when you see macho men?"

Maybe because she smelled something dangerous in that query, Annieamma hesitated to open her heart immediately. But she did it and told me: "I've felt like hugging them."

"Who?"

She mentioned three names.

"What about you, *Ichaya*?"

I mentioned ten names, leaving Annieamma far behind. Then, hugging her hard and bestowing a kiss that blocked her breath, I said, "But that was in the past. I won't feel like that anymore . . ."

"I too!"

It was a moment of discovery for me that love that stands revealed can give the peace of a confession. Love was intoxicating me, and I was sure it was doing the same to Annieamma too. But I will not ask her about her love-inebriation. Let her reveal it on her own without my asking. I was prepared to wait till then.

O couples living on the earth, what I wish to tell all of you now, hand upon heart, is that you should correct the mistakes you have made in your love affairs in the past and recapture true romance in the present. Love's treasury is to be looked for inside your own homes, not anywhere outside. If you ignore that and go elsewhere, you will only be taking your problems with you. I feel that I

have the right to say this as I have experienced love's return to our lives. I have discovered that through amorous unions deeper than those shared during youth, love becomes an invisible force that binds homes. In other words, love that is the primary cause of creation is the force of attraction that resides right in the centre of the nucleus.

One day as I was unconditionally enjoying the ecstasy triggered by my vacant thoughts while seated under a fan in a bar, I wrote the title "My Experiments in Search of Love". Beneath it, I scribbled "*To make love, even one's own wife will do!*"

But I could not say this to Annieamma as she might misinterpret it that I had settled for my wife because no one else was available. So I concealed my discovery and savoured it privately. But the very same day Annieamma who could not keep a secret to herself told me, almost as if to prove that even our thoughts had become one, "*Ichaya*, I've discovered one thing. *To make love, even one's own husband will do!*"

**Upanishad** > The Upanishads are a collection of texts in Sanskrit which contain the central philosophic concepts of Hinduism.

**Manjil Virinja Pookkal.** The Flowers that Bloomed on the Snow. A 1980 Malayalam romantic thriller directed by Fazil, starring Shankar, Poornima and Mohanlal in the main roles.

**Purnatha** > The fullness of the infinite as explained in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. *Om purnam adah purnam idam purnaam purnam udachyate, Purnasya purnamaadaaya purnam evaavashishyate*. "That is complete, this is complete. From the complete (Paramatma), only the complete manifestation (this universe) has emanated, because incomplete cannot be the result of the complete./ "From That complete when this complete is taken away, what remains is still complete."

**Vava Suresh** > (b. 1974) an Indian wildlife conservationist and a snake expert, known for his relentless efforts to rescue snakes straying into human-inhabited areas in Kerala.

**Ichaya** > A term used by a Christian woman to address or refer to her husband

# The Evolution

**Madhavan Purachery**

Translator : Chandrika Balan

Sidhartha moved on, weeping and weeping  
And finally waking the female within.  
She hugged and held close to her  
The spaces with the smell of death,  
The wounded dove, the lame lamb  
And the stoned dog.  
As she held them close and patted them  
Her whole body was filled with breast-milk.

It was an evolution.  
The virile manhood, lapsing in to silence,  
And, burning slowly in extreme grief,  
Was evolving into a body full of milk-filled breasts  
That anyone could resort to,  
That could heal any wound.

# ...But I can't spare the money

**Manampur Rajan Babu**

Translator : Dr. T.M Raghuram

To cook my rice and curry  
I need a good gadget  
But then, I can't spare the money for it.  
To wash and clean my clothes  
I need a washing machine  
But I can't spare the money for it.  
To sleep through the cold nights  
I need an ever-warm blanket  
But can't spare money for it too.  
To guard my house  
I need a loyal animal  
But just can't spare the money for it.  
To accompany me in my car  
I need a dressed-up doll  
But can't spare money for it either  
Strangely, how soon  
my wishes came true !  
Without spending a penny  
I got it all-  
A multi-purpose machine  
that fulfilled all my needs  
and came with loads of money too.  
When years roll by  
And i get tired of it all,  
so easy to get rid of.  
At the most I'd have to pay back  
the money I'd received then...  
No need to pay any interest either!  
When I get a new one  
The money'll pour in again.  
Subtract this amount from that  
and I still stand to gain, gain, gain...!

# Madness

C Ayyappan

Translator : Geetha Namputhirippad

Two or three days back you came to my quarters with my neighbour and Panchayath president. I hope you have not forgotten what happened here then. But I will say that now. An incident has to be perceived at least by two persons with their own eyes or spectacles in order to comprehend at least a bit of its meaning. So please lend me your ears.

On that morning you and your gang knocked at my door. I opened the door. You and your bondmen started talking rapidly like a waterfall. I stood confused. When the confusion subsided a bit I comprehend two things from your words. One: My sister's insanity has become more serious. Two: I must help to get her admitted in the nearby hospital.

I still remember the reply I gave – “Don't put on the show that you know my own sister's illness better than I. It is not she who is mad, but you. You who go around and collect money in her name and now, coming here with a car. You are mad.”

Then you pointed your fingers towards my sister in the car who was howling and trying to break the chains. I asked: “What is it? I can't see anything.” Even though I went pale on hearing the questions of surprise and pain, I closed the door in a very dramatic way and made my escape.

This incident has subverted all your perceptions on me, right? You might have thought that I was behaving like a savage. You may also blame me for forgetting my state as I have got a good job and a beautiful wife. For the time being I won't respond to any of these. Let me continue to tell you of that incident.

To tell you the truth, even I did not understand my action.

When I realized it, I was impressed with myself. I have acted very intelligently. I preened myself.

You may not be getting what I am saying. Hence I will go through the matter again. The aim of this monologue is to make you understand and also to find the way my mind works.

Have you ever thought of the consequences if I had obeyed you, and heeded the words of my dear friend, and the public?

Just imagine that I came with you to the mental hospital. It is not far from the quarters I live. Hence there is a chance for the people here to understand what the matter is. Even if no one understands, that writer fellow who steals intelligent words and sentences from award winning works, will definitely smell it out. With that everyone residing in these quarters will know that Krishnan Master's sister is insane.

You may feel that it is not much of a problem. But then the next step will lead to danger. Some of the residents of these quarters will come to the hospital. At least some will notice the difference in status between my family and I. Let alone the insane; the problem is with those who stay back to nurse her. My dress and theirs will go in for comparison. With that the residents of the quarters will say: Krishnan has accidentally become a master, his relatives are very down trodden!

Needless to say, this matter is a shame for me. I was ready to face even that, but, there was another problem, more serious and fiery-eyed.

Since my diseased sister got admitted in a hospital nearby, everyone will expect my wife

to go to see her. I too have no difference of opinion. But my wife is a person who hates all the relations of her husband. Though done with an ill-feeling, her reactions are very natural and truthful. This need not be seen as impropriety as my wife did not look like a lower caste; she is beautiful with a rich complexion; so she looks at the ancestors, who survived on dead cows, with utter contempt.

Even though the matter is like this, she can be silenced and taken to the hospital. She will get tired after some time if I pay a deaf ear to the depraved words she speaks about my people's lack of culture. She can be tamed thus, to a certain extent.

Since my diseased sister got admitted in a hospital nearby, everyone will expect my wife to go to see her. I too have no difference of opinion. But my wife is a person who hates all the relations of her husband. Though done with an ill-feeling, her reactions are very natural and truthful.

But I am being imprisoned in yet another problem from which there is no outlet. The door to it is opened by our only daughter. This girl is of a peculiar character. In look as well as in lack of foresight I can say that she is a miniature of her mother. Have I told you about the insult and pain my own mother had to suffer from when she came just to see her? I will tell you.

The incident happened years ago, five to eight years since we settled here. Mother had come here with much expectations to see her son's daughter. She had brought some *pappadavada*, a traditional Kerala snack, bought from our manager's tea-shop. She brought it, covered in a newspaper. My daughter was then six years old. She did not even go near her grandmother in spite of her repeated entreaties and my angry orders. She ran away to her friend's quarters shutting the front door, without even turning back.

She came back only on getting the news of my mother's return. I did not say anything

then. Isn't she only a child? I felt there was a slight mistake on my mother's part too. It could not have been a great problem that it was for the first time she was seeing my mother. But mother could have worn a bright and clean mundu and blouse. Moreover, mother is not at all fair.

My daughter was not familiar with black-coloured people. My daughter's friends are mostly like the mannequins kept in front of big textiles, colourful dummies that look like angles of this earth.

You may think that such problems become critical because of my inability to deal with them. But in truth, the problem of incapability or inability does not come up here.

My wife and daughter have no ill-manners, but their contempt towards my relatives is genuine. My wife could accept them only by way of principles. My daughter has not even the principles of her mother. Born and brought up as the daughter of well-employed and middle class parents my wife has very little knowledge of the outside world.

My daughter's issue is more complex. She has been born and brought up in the midst of these quarters of the upper middle class. Here she has seen only the Tamil servants and beggars among the people who are black, who wore dirty dresses. Unfortunately my relatives too had the colour of them.

If my wife and daughter refuse to come along with me, why can't I go alone to see my ill sister? This question has much significance. I ask you the counter question why my helplessness is not counted at all.

If I stay back to nurse my sister in the hospital it will surely result in a family dispute. When my wife and daughter get

But mother could have worn a bright and clean mundu and blouse. Moreover, mother is not at all fair. My daughter was not familiar with black-coloured people. My daughter's friends are mostly like the mannequins kept in front of big textiles, colourful dummies that look like angles of this earth.

angry they don't look beautiful. It would be useless to think of some way of helping my relatives. How will I escape from my acquaintances who would look at me through the spectacles of scorn? It will

weaken me if people came to know that I was the brother of the insane woman who was admitted in the hospital with the money collected from the public. Even otherwise they go around saying that my bent posture and limping are due to my inferiority complex.

No my friend, there is nothing wrong in what I have done. Now, one

more question and I am the one asking that.

Whatever be the case isn't there any responsibility on the part of a brother to visit his sick sister in the hospital at least once?

I don't hesitate to admit that it is good that the dear and near of the sick visit them. I have even understood that in such situations the wicks of human love and culture will be ignited.

But I have no intention of doing it. Don't think that it is because I am a cruel man. There is no use in my visiting my insane sister. She won't be able to recognize me; hence my visit is nothing to her. Why should I do a useless deed that will result only in losses for me? I feel that even now you are reluctant to admit that I have a bit of intelligence. Otherwise, you, my childhood friend, would not have asked me

"Krishnankutty, are you also mad?" You had thrown this question at me when I looked at my sister screaming from the car and asked -- "What is it? I can't see anything."

Are you convinced now that I don't have any problem?



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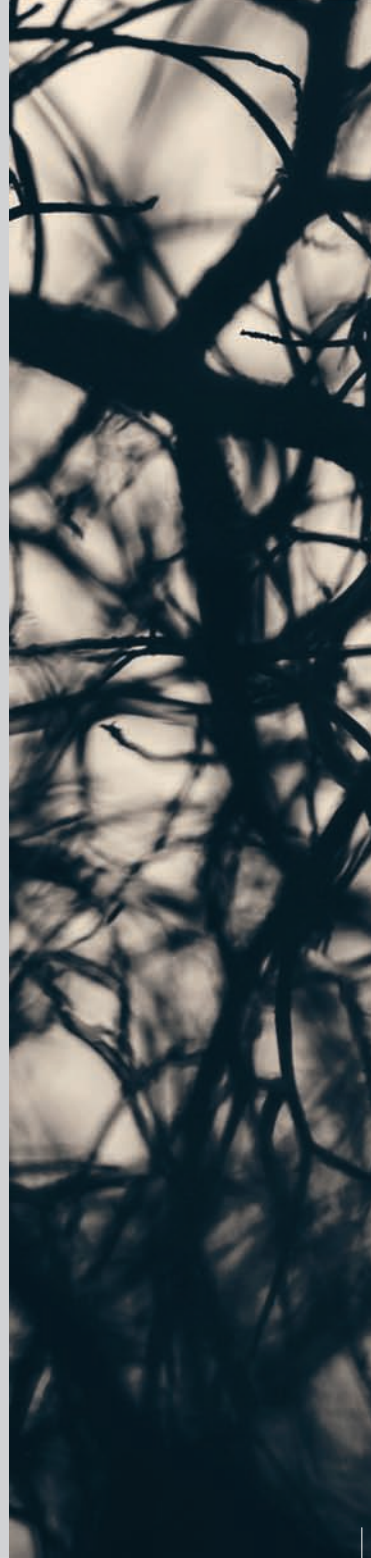
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