



KERALA CALLING

JUNE 01, 2024_VOL_44_No_8



Expatriate Malayalis nurture their ties with home, survey reveals.



Photo courtesy: **Shiyami**/The New Indian Express



*Drenched in
Nostalgic Moments*



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THE GLOBAL THRIVING MALAYALI

In every corner of the world, the unyielding spirit of the global Malayali shines bright, resilient and thriving against all odds.

The story of the Keralite migrant is one of incredible strength and adaptability. From the sun-drenched shores of Kerala to busy cities around the world, Malayalis have travelled far, taking with them their rich culture and strong spirit. Their success abroad comes from deep cultural values, a love for learning, and a special ability to fit into new places.

In recent years, many Keralites have moved to different parts of the world. They have integrated into the cultural and economic life of their new countries, blending their traditions with those of their host communities.

Despite the distance, Keralite migrants stay deeply connected to their families and communities back home. Their contributions have greatly impacted Kerala's growth. The upcoming fourth edition of the Loka Kerala Sabha (LKS), starting on June 13, shows this ongoing commitment. This unique platform allows expatriate Malayalis to voice their concerns and take part in the state's progress.

In this edition of **Kerala Calling**, we look at a survey about how expatriate Malayalis care for their parents back home while working abroad. The results are touching, showing the community's strong dedication to their loved ones. This dedication highlights the need for ongoing support and awareness of available resources to help care for their families.

The fourth edition of LKS is held during significant progress towards a Nava Kerala. This assembly shows the state's commitment to ensuring security and support for all, including the expatriate community. Projects are paving the way for a hopeful future, with the global Malayali community playing a key role in this journey.

As we celebrate the spirit of the global Malayali, we remember their remarkable strength and adaptability. They carry the soul of Kerala wherever they go, embracing new cultures and opportunities while staying true to their roots. The global Malayali shows enduring strength and hope, thriving in every corner of the world.

T.V. SUBHASH IAS

EDITOR

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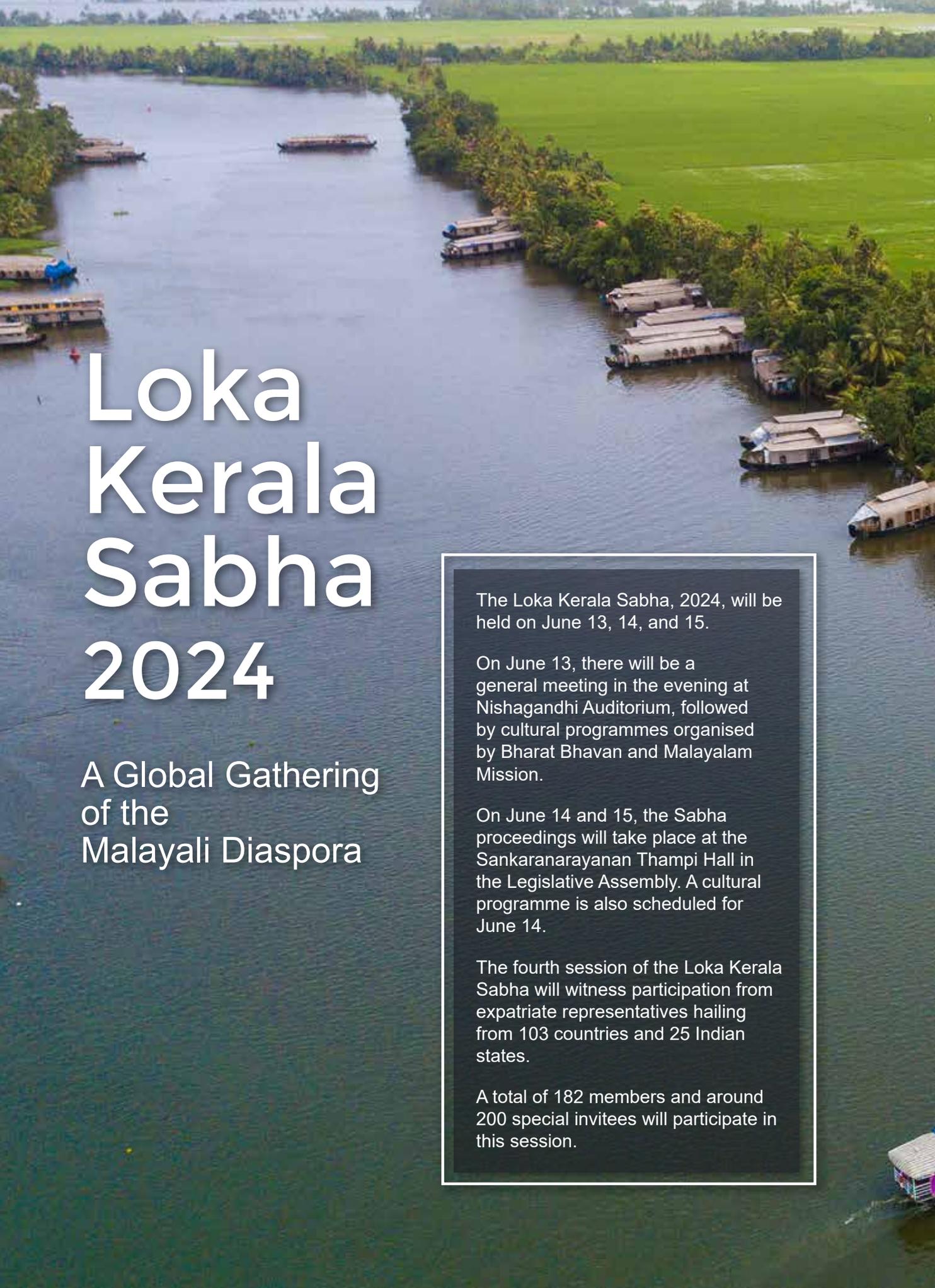
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Loka Kerala Sabha 2024

A Global Gathering
of the
Malayali Diaspora

The Loka Kerala Sabha, 2024, will be held on June 13, 14, and 15.

On June 13, there will be a general meeting in the evening at Nishagandhi Auditorium, followed by cultural programmes organised by Bharat Bhavan and Malayalam Mission.

On June 14 and 15, the Sabha proceedings will take place at the Sankaranarayanan Thampi Hall in the Legislative Assembly. A cultural programme is also scheduled for June 14.

The fourth session of the Loka Kerala Sabha will witness participation from expatriate representatives hailing from 103 countries and 25 Indian states.

A total of 182 members and around 200 special invitees will participate in this session.

Regional Topics

1. Gulf
2. Asia-Pacific
3. Europe & UK
4. America
5. Africa
6. Other Indian States
7. Returning Expatriates

Associated Programmes

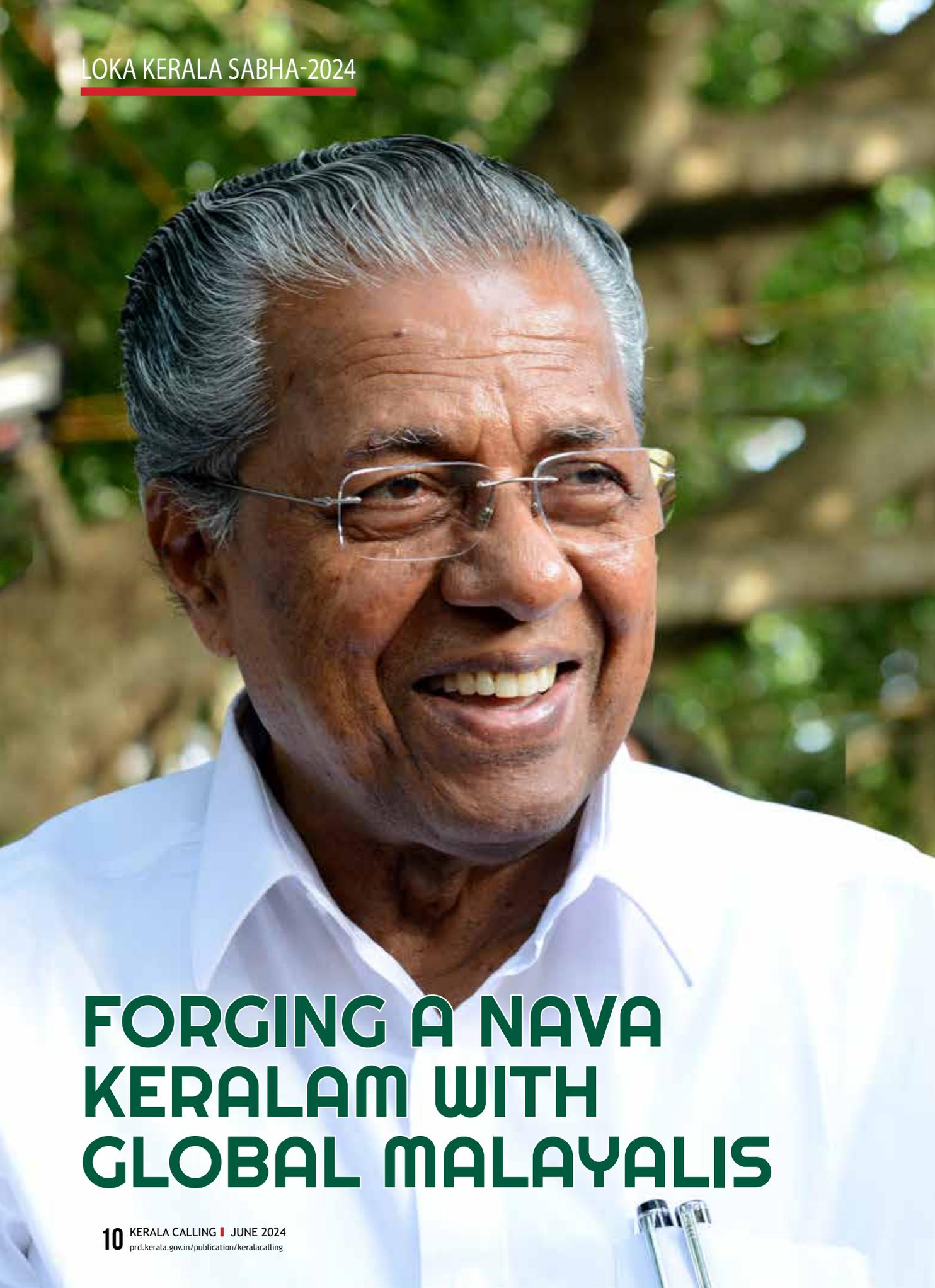
1. Loka Kerala Online Portal
2. Official Launch and Seminar of Kerala Migration Survey

Discussion Topics for the Fourth Session

1. Draft Emigration Bill 2021
2. Foreign Recruitment Programmes
3. Sustainable Rehabilitation – Innovative Ideas
4. Vulnerable Aspects and Security in Migration
5. New Employment Opportunities and Skill Development – In the Context of Migration
6. Kerala Development – New Models
7. Changing Employment and Migration Laws in Foreign Countries and Malayali Diaspora
8. Transition to Knowledge Economy and the Diaspora

As per the recommendations of the third Loka Kerala Sabha, the official launch of the Loka Kerala Online Portal and Kerala Migration Survey, followed by a related seminar, will be held at the Symphony Hall, Mascot Hotel, on June 13, 2024, at 10:30 AM in the presence of the Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan.

The Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, A.N. Shamseer, will preside over the function.

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with short, grey hair, wearing glasses and a white collared shirt. He is smiling warmly, showing his teeth. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees. The text 'FORGING A NAVA KERALAM WITH GLOBAL MALAYALIS' is overlaid in large, bold, green capital letters at the bottom of the image.

FORGING A NAVA KERALAM WITH GLOBAL MALAYALIS

Kerala proudly hosts the fourth Loka Kerala Sabha, a crucial forum uniting global Malayalis to harness their diverse talents for the state's progressive and inclusive future.

PINARAYI VIJAYAN

Chief Minister

Kerala is honoured to host the fourth session of the Loka Kerala Sabha, the common platform for the global Malayali community. This assembly is being convened against the backdrop of our significant progress on the path towards creating a New Kerala. However, many more milestones remain to be achieved. This government is advancing by ensuring adequate consideration and security for all, including the expatriate community, and by implementing visionary development projects that pave the way for a promising future.

We are striving to stimulate economic growth by revitalising the production sectors, modernising the service sectors, and building a knowledge-based society. The active participation of expatriate Malayalis, spread across various states in India and numerous countries around the world, is indispensable for the continued progress of our State.

The Loka Kerala Sabha, established with the objective of uniting Malayalis worldwide and harnessing their diverse talents for the overall development of Kerala, has already become a source of hope for expatriates. Since the inaugural session in 2018, held under the motto "Unite, Discuss, Progress," the enthusiastic support and cooperation from our Malayali brothers and sisters, spread across other states and countries around the globe, have been the driving force behind this assembly.

The past three sessions of the Loka Kerala Sabha have exceeded expectations in their success. Numerous ideas and initiatives beneficial for the future development of Kerala, as well as the safety, welfare, and resettlement of expatriates, were proposed in these sessions. The government is making diligent efforts to examine and implement these proposals effectively.

Kerala Stands with Expatriates

It is a matter of pride that Kerala, under the E.K. Nayanar government, was the first in India to establish a department for the protection of expatriates. Since 2016, the government has successfully advanced the Department of Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs (NORKA) with increased efficiency, implementing numerous welfare schemes and innovations through NORKA Roots.

The implementation of the Pravasi Mitra Portal, in collaboration with the Revenue and Survey Departments, has been highly beneficial for receiving applications, grievances, and requests from expatriates and informing them of the actions taken in a timely manner. Through this system, expatriates can track the status of their applications related to the Revenue and Survey Departments and submit complaints.

One of the key recommendations of the Loka Kerala Sabha is the creation of a digital online space for Malayalis worldwide. A comprehensive platform named 'Loka Keralam Online' is being developed to facilitate communication, share information including job opportunities, and enable cultural exchange among expatriates. Expatriates can register on this platform by providing their basic information or using their social media accounts. The Digital University has designed the project, and it will commence online operations in advance of the fourth Loka Kerala Sabha. The aim is to involve as many expatriates as possible in this initiative, with the support of expatriate organizations and members of the Loka Kerala Sabha.

Starting from the 2024 academic year, measures have been initiated to allow students to enrol in short-term online courses from foreign universities through Kerala's universities. For activities related to the export of medicines to African countries, KSDP has appointed a service provider. Preliminary steps concerning product registration are currently underway. As part of providing NORKA registration to major Malayali associations in the African region, actions are being taken in coordination with prominent associations.

For the 2024-25 academic year, universities have already taken steps to include soft skills and communication skills in the curriculum. This will be beneficial for securing employment opportunities in European and American countries. Additionally, an agreement has been reached to start the Triple Win Trainee Programme, which aids in further education in Germany, as well as the Triple Win Hospitality Project. Steps have been initiated to update the NRI (K) Commission's website and introduce systems for accepting complaints online.

The 'Startup Infinity' project has been launched with the goals of attracting expatriate Malayalis to entrepreneurship, securing investments for Kerala-based startups from high-net-worth non-resident Indians, and providing facilities and customer



engagement opportunities when Kerala Startups visit foreign countries for their business needs. In the initial phase, a centre was established in Dubai. Along with the fully operational Dubai Startup Infinity Centre, a fellowship programme is also being considered. The Startup Infinity Centre in Belgium has been set up at a location provided free of charge by Hub Brussels, which is under the jurisdiction of the Belgian government. Additionally, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to establish a Startup Infinity Centre in Australia. Steps have also been initiated to ensure the services of women officers in the NRI Cell.

One of the recommendations of the 2020 Loka Kerala Sabha was the establishment of an employment exchange to identify experienced professionals among expatriates. This online employment portal by the Labour Department will assist in the resettlement of expatriates who lost their jobs and returned to Kerala during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RestStop

With the aim of accepting investments from expatriate Malayalis in sectors beneficial to Kerala's progress and generating more employment opportunities, the Overseas Keralites Investment & Holding Limited company was established. This was a recommendation from the first Loka Kerala Sabha. Currently, the first project, the RestStop roadside rest centre, has commenced construction in Thalappadi, Kasaragod district.

The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 was

organised with the aim of collecting extensive information on expatriates. The survey results will be published in conjunction with the Loka Kerala Sabha.

To counter illegal recruitments, visa frauds, and human trafficking, the government is implementing the Operation Shubhayatra project. This initiative is being carried out jointly by the Protector of Emigrants in the Ministry of External Affairs, Kerala Police, and NORKA Roots. A 24-hour helpline number and email IDs have also been established to receive complaints related to employment fraud.

To assist those seeking safe employment migration, NORKA has prepared to implement a new project named 'NORKA Shubhayatra.' The government has given in-principle approval for this project. It will be executed in collaboration with banks in Kerala and other financial institutions, including cooperative institutions. Additionally, expatriate Malayalis are well acquainted with several associated schemes and welfare activities, such as loan facilities to find livelihoods, insurance coverage, and welfare funds.

Among our expatriate brothers and sisters are employers, entrepreneurs, participants in governance, and professionals who accelerate the development of their respective countries with their expertise. Many of them have earned recognition and respect in those lands. A significant number of them are capable of making substantial contributions to the legal and policy frameworks, as well as the development planning, of our homeland. However, we have not been able to effectively harness this vast resource.



The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 was organised with the aim of collecting extensive information on expatriates. The survey results will be published in conjunction with the Loka Kerala Sabha.

The Loka Kerala Sabha and its ongoing activities are opening pathways to achieve this. The Loka Kerala Sabha has successfully brought to attention various issues concerning the global Malayali community, facilitated discussions, and recommended empathetic actions and consensus-based decisions to the central and state governments.

The world is an open door of opportunities. The expatriate community acts as a medium to help Kerala harness the possibilities of the outside world. While fulfilling our responsibilities towards expatriates, a conscious effort is also required to utilise the potential of migration. The proceedings of the Loka Kerala Sabha are designed to undertake these two crucial missions. The Sabha moves forward with in-depth discussions and firm decisions on each of the major issues concerning the expatriate community.

On the Path of Nava Kerala

This government has entered its fourth year, and the ninth year of successive governance. The significant achievements Kerala has attained over the past eight years are a source of pride for the global

Malayali community. Alongside strengthening the welfare sector, we have made strides in infrastructural development. Over the past eight years, projects worth more than ₹83,000 crores have been undertaken through KIIFB. Numerous projects can be highlighted, including the development of national highways, the GAIL pipeline, the Power Highway, the National Waterway, Kochi Metro, and Kochi Water Metro.

Building on the achievements in infrastructural development and welfare initiatives, this government is striving to transform Kerala into a knowledge-based economy. Efforts are underway to link our accomplishments in the knowledge sector with the production sector. As part of this, the higher education sector is undergoing comprehensive reforms. Skill development and entrepreneurship are now integral parts of our higher education system. Initiatives such as Connect Career to Campus, Young Innovators Programme, and Industry on Campus are being implemented. Campus Industrial Parks are also becoming a reality.

To achieve progress in the industrial sector, numerous projects are being implemented. The Entrepreneurship Year initiative was launched with the goal of starting 100,000 enterprises in one year. Within the first eight months, we were able to reach the expected target of 100,000 enterprises. In the last financial year, a total of approximately 139,000 enterprises were created, resulting in around 300,000 job opportunities and attracting investments worth approximately ₹8,500 crores. Energised by the acceptance and success of the Entrepreneurship Year initiative, we are now implementing the Entrepreneurship Year 2.0 project.

To encourage the new generation of entrepreneurs, the state government is implementing a special startup policy. In 2016, there were 300 startups operating in the state, whereas today, the number has surpassed 5,000. Through venture capital funding, investments amounting to ₹5,500 crores have been raised, and 50,000 job opportunities have been created. Additionally, ₹35 crores have been distributed to 778 startups in the state. To promote entrepreneurship among university students, 466 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Centres have been established.

During times of crisis, such as floods and the COVID-19 pandemic, the expatriate community has always stood by Kerala. Therefore, through the Loka Kerala Sabha, we are increasingly recognising the global Malayali community's interest in maintaining a progressive, peaceful, and secular Kerala. We hope that the discussions at this esteemed forum will lead to constructive suggestions and tangible interventions.

ENLIGHTENING THE KERALA MODEL:

LOKA KERALA SABHA ENTERS ITS FOURTH EDITION



A.N. SHAMSEER

Speaker, Kerala Legislative Assembly

The fourth edition of the Loka Kerala Sabha exemplifies Kerala's innovative approach to harnessing the skills, knowledge, and support of its global diaspora to drive the state's development and transformation into a knowledge economy.

Kerala is engaged in remarkable transition and transformation. We are in the process of building NavaKeramam, a new Kerala. The last few years have seen our State excel in various development indexes and social welfare measures. We have won numerous national and international laurels. The Loka Kerala Sabha is yet another chapter in the much-discussed Kerala Model.

Our country comes first in the world in terms of its diasporic population. India is the largest

contributor of migrants to the world. Around 1.8 crore Indians are part of the diaspora. India also receives the world's largest foreign currency remittance. History tells us that the global economic slowdown of the 1930s triggered the beginning of emigrations of Keralites. Forty percent of our people are directly dependent on the money from expatriates. Around 30 percent of the total income of our state is contributed by our expatriates. According to the Kerala Migration Survey report 2018, there are 2.1 million emigrants from Kerala worldwide. The influential and successful Malayali diaspora is a major support for the state. The 2018 deluge saw Kerala receiving extraordinary support from its expatriates.

Malayalis are known for their skilful labour and pleasant disposition. This has helped them grab a significant space in foreign lands. The ability to excel in work with unique performance has made them the world's most coveted workforce. Ready to face challenges and willing to take risks, Keralites are able to blend well irrespective of community or country. The constant urge to renew themselves educationally, technologically, and socially helps Malayalis remain the best personnel. Malayalis assiduously maintain cooperation with fellow Keralites and create their own communities regardless of foreign lands. This helps better bonding and kindles the spirit of *Malayali* with renewed vigour.

Kerala is the first state in India to create a Pravasi Portfolio. This revolutionary decision evolved under the leadership of E. K. Nayanar, the former Chief Minister of Kerala, in 1996. At present, our government is designing an inclusive society for return migrants. Stringent measures ensure social security for expatriates returning to Kerala. The migrant community is taken into confidence so as





to invest more in social schemes and policies. These investments are coupled with creative solutions like low-cost housing, and digital infrastructure in education and health care. Collaboration and commitment with the migrant community unfold new growth paths for the State. The Loka Kerala Sabha is one such platform to embrace the scattered Malayali diaspora.

The Government of Kerala utilizes the knowledge, skill, and experience of our emigrants for the development of Kerala. The Chief Minister, Shri Pinarayi Vijayan, is of the view that the 'brain drain' can be turned into 'brain gain' if we seek the services of our NRK scientists and academicians and opt for an academic revival at our universities. The recommendations of our NRK community are incorporated in the socio-economic and political development of Kerala. Loka Kerala Sabha facilitated the Pravasi Mitra portal to address the grievances of expatriates regarding revenue and resurvey departments. It endeavours to commence short-term online courses of foreign universities through universities in Kerala. KSDP service providers are appointed to accelerate medicine export to African nations. A digital online space named 'Loka Keralam Online' integrates Malayalis globally. This expedites the exchange of ideas and provides vital information on placements. Our universities have started soft skill/communication skill courses to help aspirants find open positions in American and European nations. Moreover, the Triple Win Trainee and Triple Win Hospitality projects help migrants for further studies

in Germany. The renovated NRI(K) Commission website assists the online receipt of grievances and petitions. The recently launched Start-Up Infinity project inspires start-up investments from expatriates. Similarly, Virtual Pravasi Employment Exchange, an online employment portal, helps rehabilitate post-COVID jobless NRKs. Overseas Keralites Investment and Holding Company Ltd., NRI Construction Company, International Migration Centre (working in CDS), and NRI Cooperative Society are some other ongoing activities of Loka Kerala Sabha.

Kerala is en route to a knowledge economy. This interconnects skilled individuals with leading employers in various sectors offering both local and international career paths. Shenzhen city, known as the Silicon Valley of China, surged to an innovative centre of science and technology by virtue of the contributions of Chinese expatriates. Correspondingly, the Malayali expatriates can be influential in synchronising Kerala's human resources with global industrial projects. This can bring massive job opportunities to Kerala and thereby stimulate developments. Our State is undergoing significant transformations. The Loka Kerala Sabha is sure to be a platform for more innovative ideas that can make tremendous revolutions in our society with the direct participation of our expatriates. Moulding Navakeralam with the wholehearted participation of our expatriates is yet another Kerala model. The fourth Loka Kerala Sabha is a trailblazer in this venture.



KERALA'S GLOBAL EMBRACE THROUGH LOKA KERALA SABHA



P. SREERAMAKRISHNAN
Resident Vice Chairman, Norka Roots

The Loka Kerala Sabha bridges the gap between Kerala's rich cultural heritage and its dynamic diaspora, fostering unity and growth.

Kerala has transcended its official borders, extending its influence globally. Since the formation of the state, particularly from the 1970s onwards, the migration of Malayalis has transformed Kerala into a truly transnational community. The number of Malayalis living beyond the state's borders, in other states and countries, has significantly increased, resulting in Kerala's presence being felt both within the state and across the world.

However, despite their global presence, the Malayali diaspora had long been excluded from participating in the cultural construct that affects both those inside and outside the state. Even though these expatriates played a crucial role in the comprehensive development of their homeland while carving out lives beyond its official boundaries, they had no representation in governance.

To address this disconnect, the first Pinarayi Vijayan government established the Loka Kerala Sabha, a common platform aimed at integrating the social and political experiences of Kerala and its diaspora. The Loka Kerala Sabha served as a remedy to the democratic deficit experienced in the governance and participation of the expatriate Malayali community, in a state renowned for its highly democratic society.

For those who immediately react defensively at the mention of participatory governance, it is important to understand that the Loka Kerala Sabha operates under the principle of 'deliberative democracy,' where the opinions of representatives of a significant community are considered without the necessity of elections. In this sense, the Loka





Kerala Sabha is another exemplary model proposed by the Pinarayi Vijayan government to include the expatriate community. Without a doubt, it can be said that the Loka Kerala Sabha represents another pioneering Kerala model aimed at comprehensive inclusion.

Democracy is practised in various forms around the world. While India follows a constitutional democracy, other regions exhibit consensual and deliberative democratic systems. The Loka Kerala Sabha is not an alternative to India's established constitutional democracy. Instead, it embodies the Kerala model of effectively and exemplarily applying different democratic methods for the greater good. Those raising objections should understand this context.

The Loka Kerala Sabha is capable of discussing numerous issues that affect the broader Kerala community. Similar to the Union List, State List, and Concurrent List, a comprehensive list of topics that the Loka Kerala Sabha can consider is prepared, and recommendations are made based on this list. The intention is not for the Sabha to enact legislation on these matters. Instead, the Loka Kerala Sabha can provide detailed and substantive advisory recommendations on issues that should be considered by the central and state governments

What sets this forum apart is that recommendations deemed essential can be reviewed and implemented by the state legislature and government. This initiative, undertaken by our government to guide the growth of the global Kerala culture, has gained credibility and responsibility. It is this recognition that has united the expatriate community and the government with a common purpose.

It is also noteworthy that, unlike other states where governance structures to manage expatriate affairs are non-existent, our state has introduced the

'Kerala model' through the Loka Kerala Sabha. This model stands as a testament to our state's progressive approach to addressing the needs and aspirations of the expatriate community. The primary goal of this forum is to explore how expatriate Malayalis can contribute to Kerala's growth and policymaking. Additionally, the Sabha envisions facilitating the cultural, intellectual, and skill exchange for the younger generation. The truth is, wherever in the world a Malayali resides, there is a piece of Kerala present.

The Loka Kerala Sabha offers expatriate Malayalis the opportunity to proudly affirm their connection to Kerala, regardless of where they are in the world. It strengthens and deepens their bond with their homeland, fostering a sense of pride and unity.

It is irrational for individuals to cast aspersions based solely on their limited perspectives. Questions like "How much investment was brought in?", "Which recommendations were implemented?", or "What decisions did the government make?" are scrutinized with a narrow viewpoint, failing to grasp the grandeur of this noble concept. Those who judge the initiative merely by such criteria fall far short of understanding its true essence.

Is this a problem-solving forum or an investment summit? The answer is neither. Additionally, the answer will also include "both." While efforts to solve problems and avenues to bring in investments might emerge, the ultimate goal is far beyond these aspects. It is crucial to understand that the primary objective is not confined to these dimensions.

The Loka Kerala Sabha provides an opportunity for the global Malayali community to unite under a shared umbrella, offering a space for connection and collaboration. Everything that aligns with this overarching goal and benefits both the homeland and the expatriates will be part of the Sabha's activities, supported by our government.

SAFE MIGRATION WITH CERTAINTY

NORKA ROOTS



AJITH KOLASSERY

CEO, NORKA Roots

Celebrating 22 years of its operations, NORKA Roots, the field agency of the NORKA Department, continues to facilitate structured interventions that are unparalleled in supporting the journeys of Keralite expatriates. These initiatives have earned NORKA national accolades, setting a benchmark for the entire country. Representatives from various states frequently visit to study NORKA's schemes and services, a testament to the efficiency and effectiveness of NORKA Roots' operations.

In the 1970s, the unprecedented growth in

production, marketing, and the petroleum sector in the Middle Eastern countries created boundless employment opportunities. This surge significantly strengthened global migration. Job seekers, in pursuit of better living conditions, left their homelands for new destinations. It was during this period that Malayalis began to migrate en masse to the Gulf countries in search of employment. This influx into GCC nations marks a distinctive chapter in Kerala's migration history. Many crossed the seas to Persian Gulf countries, aspiring to realise the dream of foreign employment. Today, statistics reveal that Malayalis have ventured into 182 countries for work and education. A study conducted by NORKA Roots in collaboration with IIM Kozhikode addresses the foreign job market and future employment prospects. The study indicates that while Gulf countries were previously the primary focus for job seekers, attention has now shifted towards European nations and the

As the Non-Resident Keralite's Affairs (NORKA) Department approaches three decades since its inception, it stands as a catalyst for profound change in the lives of expatriates from Kerala.

American continent.

In today's post-COVID global order, with increasing student migration and rising numbers of young people seeking better job prospects abroad, NORKA Roots provides timely leadership and guidance for safe, legal, and structured migration.

NORKA Roots has introduced a Students Identity Scheme for students going abroad for studies. This initiative aims to collect information about students leaving the country for educational purposes and to ensure they receive necessary assistance during emergencies. Although only a small percentage of students have obtained the Students ID card since the scheme's inception in the 2020-21 period, data reveals that students from Kerala have reached over 54 countries for their studies. Efforts are underway to establish a Students Migration Facilitation Centre under the aegis of NORKA Roots to aid students in ensuring a safe and transparent educational migration.

NORKA Roots is the sole government-appointed agency for attesting educational certificates from Kerala. Services available include attestation of non-educational certificates, MEA attestation, embassy attestation, and apostille attestation. Well-equipped regional attestation centres operate in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, and Kozhikode. Currently, around sixty thousand certificates are attested annually through NORKA. To ensure transparency and security, NORKA has introduced internationally standardized, highly secure attestation procedures incorporating QR codes and holograms.

NORKA Roots' recruitment drives for systematic and legal overseas employment have gained significant public support, with around five thousand services conducted for countries like Germany, the UK, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The "Triple Win" project, in collaboration with the German Federal Employment Agency (BA) and GIZ, ensures safe and transparent job migration to Germany. This milestone initiative helps qualified nurses learn the language, migrate for free, and secure a future in Germany. The "Triple Win Trainee Programme" further supports Plus Two graduates with Biology to pursue nursing education and employment in Germany. Plans are underway to extend similar programmes to sectors like hospitality. A Joint Committee Meeting (JCM) held in Thiruvananthapuram in April with German representatives and NORKA officials has bolstered optimism for expanding employment migration

initiatives.

Learning foreign languages is vital for securing employment abroad. NORKA Roots has addressed this need through the Institute of Foreign Languages (NIFL), offering affordable language training. The first centre, inaugurated by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on March 14, 2022, in Thiruvananthapuram, was followed by a second centre in Kozhikode in February. These centres provide international-standard language education free of charge, with plans for a third centre in Kottayam and potential satellite centres supported by private entrepreneurs. To guide aspiring emigrants, NORKA's Pre-Departure Orientation Programme offers comprehensive information on job nature, salary, geography, climate, social environment, and legal frameworks abroad. Special sessions target nursing graduates and the general public in Kerala

The Department of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) has created robust mechanisms to unite Malayalis globally. The Loka Kerala Sabha serves as a forum to address issues faced by global Malayalis and integrate the latest migration trends. NORKA's Global Contact Centre enhances communication among Keralites worldwide, and the upcoming Loka Kerala Online Portal will further connect the diaspora under one umbrella. Addressing unauthorized agents, exploitation, and employment scams is critical. "Operation Shubhayatra," a collaborative effort by the Ministry of External Affairs, Kerala Police, and NORKA Roots, targets illegal recruitments and human trafficking, with a 24/7 helpline for reporting fraud. Additionally, the "NORKA Shubhayatra" project aims to assist aspiring migrants with subsidized education loans for safe employment abroad, pending final regulatory approval.



LEVERAGING NRI EXPERTISE AND INVESTMENT FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Kerala is leveraging the expertise and investment of its Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community to propel the state into an advanced middle-income society, focusing on inclusive growth and sustainable development.



BAJU GEORGE

Managing Director,
Overseas Keralites Investment and
Holding Ltd (OKIH)

Kerala has undergone a transformative era, propelled by its renowned development model, which has consistently provided a superior living standard to its residents. The state now aims to elevate its status to that of an advanced middle-income society, focusing on inclusiveness across all social strata. Historically, despite low per capita income, Kerala's socio-economic conditions, buoyed by significant remittances from abroad, have ensured human dignity and a higher standard of living for its citizens.

Recognizing the strategic advantage of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) remittances and expertise, the first Loka Kerala Sabha (LKS) initiated the formation of an infrastructure development company. This company aims to harness the skills and savings of NRIs and the returning NRIs for the state's growth by developing critical infrastructure. Consequently,

Overseas Keralites Investment and Holding Ltd (OKIH) was established as a 100% Government of Kerala enterprise, with the Hon'ble Chief Minister as its Chairman and with an authorised capital of ₹25 Crores.

Harnessing Global Expertise for Local Growth

The global experience and disciplined work ethics of the overseas Kerala community are instrumental for Kerala's next phase of development. Their annual remittances, amounting to ₹1,20,000 Crores (2023 estimate) is equivalent to nearly 30% of the state's GDP, which along with their talents and emotional connection to Kerala, positions them as the pivotal contributors. OKIH's vision, "Global Thought for Local Growth," aims to enable every NRI to contribute to the state's advancement by bringing in the best partners and through edge-cutting technologies. This initiative not only offers NRIs assured investment returns, but also provides them with added monetary benefits.

OKIH is committed to focusing on viable projects that generate value, impact, and positive community change, managed through a transparent





and accountable governance system. The company's primary objectives include:

1. **Raising Global Standards:** Improving sectors such as housing, tourism, health, skill development, infrastructure, and education.
2. **Wealth Creation:** Leveraging opportunities in these sectors to generate wealth.
3. **Transparent Governance:** Ensuring a transparent and accountable system where wealth governance is paramount.

Innovative Projects for a Prosperous Future

OKIH's inaugural initiative, "RestStop™", embodies its objectives, benefitting both society and investors. These wayside amenity centres along the National and State Highways are designed to enhance the travel experience and to set competitive standards for the private sector. Each RestStop, spanning approximately five acres, will feature 50,000 sq. ft. of retail space, fuel stations, restaurants, and other amenities, significantly improving the comfort of travellers and the local community.

The Government of Kerala has allocated a 5.5-acre plot in Manjeswaram, Kasaragod District, to develop the first Rest Stop Center. This center will serve as a gateway to Kerala from its northern boundary. The internationally reputed Meinhardt Group of Singapore has completed the design, while KIIFCON under KIIFB will oversee the project to ensure timely and cost-effective development. Leading

financial institutions have granted in-principle approval for financing the ₹35 Crore investment, which is expected to create around 1,000 local jobs and attract approximately 5,000 daily customers.

Expanding Horizons and Future Prospects

The government has identified two additional locations for Rest Stop centers, which will transform the experience of road travel across the state. OKIH plans to explore private plots for joint development and integrate operational centers into a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) under SEBI's legal framework, offering the NRIs and the returned NRIs an opportunity to invest with as little as ₹5,000. These centers, which will be leased to leading operators, promise reasonable returns through periodic rent appreciation and distribution of 95% of net income to REIT investors annually.

Looking ahead, OKIH aims to develop much larger RestStop formats in tourist centers, enhancing Kerala's tourism sector with about 50 rooms and allied facilities. The success of the RestStop project and OKIH underscores the significance of Loka Kerala Sabha as a guiding force in Kerala's development.

As Kerala focuses on knowledge-based industries to build a people-centric knowledge economy, the role of LKS in utilising science, technology, and modern skills for economic growth becomes even more critical. Through strategic initiatives such as OKIH, Kerala is poised to create a brighter, and more inclusive future for all its people.

THE RISING TIDE OF WOMEN MIGRATION FROM KERALA



DINOOP K

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Kerala, renowned for its high literacy rates, robust healthcare system, and progressive social indicators, also experiences significant workforce migration, particularly among females, to foreign countries.

Migration from Kerala is not a new phenomenon. Historically, Keralites have migrated to the Middle East, Europe, and North America in search of better employment opportunities. The 1970s oil boom in the Gulf countries acted as a catalyst, accelerating these migration trends. Initially, this wave primarily involved male workers, but over time, an increasing number of women, particularly in the healthcare and nursing sectors, have joined the migration stream.

Factors and Trends in Female Migration

Several factors have contributed to the migration of women from Kerala – the most significant being better economic opportunities abroad, particularly in the healthcare

sector, where wages and employment conditions are notably higher. Despite a well-developed education system, the local job market often does not match the qualifications of many highly educated women, leading them to seek better employment abroad. Kerala's progressive society supports female education and employment, making it socially acceptable for women to pursue careers abroad, with strong family support facilitating this migration. Besides, personal ambition and the desire for a better quality of life motivate many women to migrate for personal growth, professional development, and a higher standard of living.

The surge in female students enrolling in universities in India and abroad is a primary driver. Kerala has been at the forefront of sending women healthcare professionals abroad, especially in the last decades. High migration literacy and a substantial expatriate population have further bolstered passport penetration among Kerala's women. Moreover, family reunions of overseas skilled workers from Kerala are now more frequent compared to other parts of the country. Kerala also leads in sending families on international holidays, further contributing to the high number of passport holders among rural and urban women in the state.

According to the Kerala Migration Survey 2018, out of the 21 lakh emigrants, an estimated 3.35 lakh were women who migrated from Kerala. Over the two decades from 1998 to 2018, the number of female migrants saw a substantial increase, rising from 1,26,000 in 1998 to 3.35 lakh in 2018. The primary destinations for female migrants from Kerala include the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Female migration showed greater diversity in destination countries compared to male migration. While more than 90 percent of male migrants head to the Gulf region, the proportion for female migrants is less than 75 percent (2.47 lakh). Significant numbers of women migrate to the UK, USA, and Australia, indicating their higher levels of education and skills. The healthcare sector, especially nursing, is the predominant field in which these women find employment. Kerala has a vibrant nursing education system, producing a large number of qualified nurses who are highly sought after in the global job market.

The gender distribution among migrants from Kerala varies significantly, as does their educational background. Over half of the female migrants have attained at least a degree, whereas a similar proportion of male migrants have completed only their higher secondary education. While the average age of female emigrants was 28.3 years, it was 36.4 years for male emigrants. However, despite migrating at a younger age and for a shorter duration, female emigrants had

a slightly higher average of 12.1 years of schooling compared to 11.6 years for male emigrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted migrant nurses globally, exacerbating existing labour shortages in the nursing sector. Demand for international migrant nurses remains high as destination countries, including the Gulf region and OECD nations, struggle to achieve self-sufficiency in healthcare staffing. India, a major supplier of nurse labour, faces its own shortages, with only 1.7 nurses per 1,000 population compared to the WHO recommendation of 3 nurses per 1,000. Kerala contributes the largest share of nurses working in India and abroad. Between 2010 and 2017, the count of registered nurses and midwives in Kerala surged from 109,393 to 261,951, marking an average annual growth rate of 16.15%. Subsequently, in 2017, 2018, and 2019, the numbers in Kerala were 261,951, 275,544, and 288,971 respectively. Moreover, in 2018, there were 23.4 nurses per 10,000 population in Kerala. The USA and UK emerged as the top choices for nurse migration, while Gulf or Middle Eastern countries like Dubai, Kuwait, Muscat, and Qatar were previously favoured due to simpler migration procedures. Nurses also expressed interest in relocating to Australia and Canada.

In a significant shift in migration patterns from Kerala, women from the state now hold the highest number of passports issued in the country until 2023. This trend is closely followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Gujarat. Kerala boasts the highest total number of passport holders in India, with 98.92 lakh passports issued, encompassing both males and females. However, when it comes to male passport holders, Uttar Pradesh takes the lead with 70.58 lakh. Kerala's female passport holders number 42.17 lakh, highlighting a noteworthy trend in the state's migration dynamics.

The predominance of female passport holders in Kerala highlights a new trend of young Keralites, particularly female students, pursuing higher education abroad. A 2023 survey by the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) reveals a significant increase in women seeking overseas educational opportunities, with female participation in migration rising from 15.8% in 2018 to 32% in recent findings. This trend is exemplified by nearly half of the 7,200 students securing Canadian visas being female. Driven by global job market demand and Kerala's high educational standards, female migration is expected to continue, offering benefits like financial remittances and gender empowerment, while also presenting challenges such as ensuring migrant worker safety and mitigating social impacts on families. Supporting female migration will remain crucial for Kerala's socioeconomic development.

WE DID IT. 2018 AT HOME 2024 IN OUR SECOND HOME



RESHMI RENCHEN

Entrepreneur / Freelance Journalist,
Dubai / Saudi Arabia

The Gulf region, known for its arid climate and reliance on scientific methods like cloud seeding to induce rain, recently experienced an unexpected and severe downpour. Typically celebrated by expatriates on social media, this April's rainfall brought hardship instead of joy, disrupting the lives of countless residents.

Dubai, renowned for its rapid transformation from desert to a global marvel, was temporarily paralyzed by the heavy rains. The UAE government had warned of a depression in the Arabian Sea, which materialized from April 15, bringing light showers that intensified into torrential downpours by the 17th. The UAE recorded 254 millimetres of rain in 24 hours, the heaviest in seventy-five years, while Oman saw 180 millimetres.

The relentless rain, coupled with thunderstorms, strong winds, and hail, halted daily life across the region. Oman's northern provinces, including Al Sharqiyah, faced severe flooding. Rescue and rehabilitation efforts were swiftly organized by Oman Civil Défense, Oman Police, and volunteers. Neighbouring



countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iran also experienced similar unstable weather.

The Gulf's infrastructure, unprepared for such deluges, struggled with inadequate drainage and proximity to sea level, exacerbating flooding. Even elevated desert areas were submerged, complicating rescue operations. This unprecedented weather event highlighted the region's vulnerability to extreme climatic conditions, underscoring the need for improved infrastructure to cope with future anomalies.

Despite claiming to be fully prepared to handle climate changes, the governments ensured the safety of citizens by taking emergency precautions in line with predictions from national meteorological centres. In Dubai, the Indian Consulate established a special helpline for expatriates, providing much-needed assistance during this crisis.

Unity in the Face of Torrential Downpours

Following the unstable weather warnings and persistent waterlogging on the roads, many workplaces in Dubai declared holidays and allowed employees to work from home. Most schools shifted to online classes. Despite these precautions, the heavy rains and subsequent floods resulted in casualties and significant damage. In the UAE, four

lives were lost, and in Oman, around twenty people, including school children, perished. The relentless rain flooded major roads, including Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai, where normally swift traffic came to a halt as traffic signals failed. Traffic was paralyzed for hours. On waterlogged streets, people abandoned their luxury cars worth millions and fled for their lives. In Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, and Al Ain, roads collapsed, and tunnels were submerged, leaving major city thoroughfares deserted and still.

In Ras Al Khaimah, a seventy-year-old man lost his life when his car was swept away by the strong currents. Others who stayed in their vehicles awaiting help met a similar fate. However, social media was also filled with stories of timely rescues by emergency response teams, celebrating the lives saved amidst the chaos.

Disruptions at Dubai Airport

Dubai International Airport, one of the busiest airports in the world, faced significant disruptions with over 1,500 flights delayed, rerouted, or cancelled over three days, making headlines worldwide. Numerous flights between Kerala and the UAE were cancelled, causing confusion and frustration among passengers. Many travellers were stranded at Dubai Airport, demanding ticket refunds and expressing their discontent. Additionally, bus

services connecting the emirates and the Dubai Metro were brought to a standstill, further compounding the chaos.

Cautious Expatriate Community Support

Many residential areas became isolated due to waterlogging. Nearby supermarkets, small shops, and online food delivery services ceased operations, leaving people unable to purchase essential items. In several apartment complexes, the lift systems failed, making it difficult for those living on higher floors to receive food supplies, essential medicines for children, the elderly, and the sick, without relying on delivery services. In some flats, unexpected water and electricity outages added to the woes.

National Disaster Response Force, Dubai Police, and various volunteer groups, including Malayali expatriates, came to the rescue, providing crucial support and relief efforts during this challenging time. Dubai KMCC, AKCAF, Sharjah Indian Association, Abu Dhabi Malayalee Samajam, Overseas Malayalee Association, and various women's groups from residential communities and flats actively participated in the distribution of food, medicine, and clothing. Volunteers used alternative transportation methods like fiber boats to transport those needing urgent medical attention to hospitals and those requiring travel to the airport.

Malayali expatriates organized special websites and volunteer help groups on social media to coordinate assistance requests and deliver necessary aid to those stranded by the flood. These efforts significantly supported coordination and relief activities. Gulf media, radio stations, and online platforms also played a crucial role by providing accurate information to the public.

Due to waterlogged roads and the cessation of public transport, many people found themselves stranded with no way to return home. In this time of crisis, numerous households across the emirates opened their doors with utmost hospitality.

“In the face of an unprecedented downpour that paralyzed the Gulf region, Malayali expatriates stood as pillars of support, organizing relief efforts and providing essential aid, showcasing their unwavering commitment to humanitarian service.”



Restaurants and pharmacies offered free delivery of essential items such as food and medicine at any time. Hospitals and nursing staff were fully prepared, taking on extra duty hours to provide emergency services.

Remedies and Solutions

The government has directed efforts to assess and repair the damage to essential infrastructure in the areas affected by the heavy rains. As soon as conditions stabilized, an intensive campaign was launched to restore Dubai to its former state within just one week. This included urban cleaning and preventive measures to control epidemics. The Dubai government, seeking the cooperation of building constructors and management companies, tasked the Dubai Land Department and the Real Estate Regulatory Agency with coordinating these efforts. The focus was on cleaning and making habitable homes, villas, and flats that had been flooded, as well as providing emergency relocation facilities.

Within a week, damaged roads were repaired and reopened for traffic, airports, and public transport systems resumed operations, and normalcy began returning to daily life. This swift recovery is a testament to the country's resilient efforts.

The Threat of Climate Change

The recent rainy season experienced by the



“Malayali expatriates exemplified unity and altruism during the Gulf’s severe floods, mobilizing volunteer groups, setting up helplines, and ensuring the distribution of food, medicine, and essentials, proving their dedication to community welfare in times of crisis.”

Gulf countries serves as a stark reminder that global warming and climate change are undeniable realities. During discussions at the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Dubai in 2023, the evolving and alarming manifestations of climate change were highlighted. The downpour that engulfed the Gulf underscores the myriad challenges and uncertainties related to this crisis, emphasizing the need for proactive solutions.

The Gulf region must now prepare to face not only extreme heat but also the looming threats of heavy rainfall, floods, and rising sea levels in the coming years. This April’s rains serve as a warning to the Gulf nations, urging them to gear up for these

impending threats and adopt effective measures to combat the adverse effects of climate change.

However, the impact of natural disasters is profound and lingering. The suffering caused by the floods has not yet ended in many emirates. Numerous small lives are still struggling to return to their pre-disaster state. Basic infrastructure, small businesses, and commercial units damaged by the heavy rains, as well as unusable villas and vehicles, have resulted in significant economic losses. Compared to global insurance rates, those in the Middle East are generally lower. Few people, apart from vehicle owners, insure their other assets in the Gulf. Approximately 30,000 to 50,000 vehicles in Dubai alone became unusable after the flood. Comprehensive insurance policies with strict conditions are necessary for compensation, which poses a setback for a large number of expatriates.

Whether it is a natural disaster, civil unrest, war, or pandemic, collective human efforts driven by altruism to alleviate human suffering have always been historically significant. When calamity struck the land that provides sustenance, expatriates, including Malayalis, were among the many who selflessly volunteered for relief efforts. This selflessness and dedication to humanitarian service will forever be remembered as one of the most beautiful and exemplary chapters in the history of the Gulf’s floods.

SURVIVED CONFLICTS. THRIVED IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

As a journalist in Sharjah, P. P. Mathew observed how Malayali expats balance their pursuit of financial stability with the challenges posed by regional conflicts. Their stories of resilience, adaptation, and unwavering commitment to their families back home reflect the enduring spirit that defines the Malayali diaspora.



P.P. MATHEW

Former Global News Editor,
Gulf Today

In 1990, when Saddam Hussein's forces marched into Kuwait, my cousin Joji had to walk across the desert to Jordan with his wife and children to take a flight to India. I visited him at a hospital in Aluva. "I will never go back," he told me, his eyes wet, as he held my hand. "Iraqi soldiers were at my building," he said, his eyes signalling horror. "I lost everything, brother, I lost everything that I earned over seven years."

I felt his agony. I could not offer a word of comfort.

However, after six months, I was at the airport to see him off. Wishing him well, I told myself: If I were in your position, I would never have gone back to the Gulf.

Seven years later, however, I was flying to Bahrain to join a new newsroom.

The call of money is indeed the driving force in such choices. While Joji settled down in Kuwait and received his compensation, he started earning well. He could get over memories of the suffering that he endured.



I was confident God would guard me, as I decided to fly to Bahrain. Here was a chance to become an expat and earn what I was desperately in need of. I didn't want to give it up.

In 1998, I moved to Sharjah from Bahrain in the hope of better prospects. The proximity to Dubai, a city of opportunities, was a temptation indeed. After all, that matters a lot for an expat.

Years rolled by. We were peaceful. But as we stayed on, we started realising we were also in the proximity of major conflict zones. The Intifada was happening in Palestine. Yemen was in the grip of a civil war. Sudan was. Saudis were living under the shadow of terror attacks, mostly targeting foreigners.

We were also worried, because any major

conflict risked closing our skies and breaching our communication channels. In a country where the import of essential commodities was a must, there could be the danger of shortages too.

My colleague at the Gulf Today in Sharjah was all agony as he rushed into the newsroom one day, sometime in 2014. "My sister is getting married next week," the Delhiite said, his eyes reflecting a fear that looked a bit strange to me.

"Well, that's good, but why do you look so worried? Your leave is cleared," I said calmly.

"Chaos in Bahrain... sir!" he said as others in the newsroom looked convinced that was indeed a worry. "I have booked, but am afraid... will there be cancellations...."



We have helpful people everywhere, too. That's an additional factor comforting expats, wherever they are. Such social bonding is one element in the life of every expat.

All I could do to reassure him as a senior was that he should remember we are in a peaceful country. "We won't be affected."

But Saudi forces were marching in to crush a political revolt in Bahrain, triggered by its Shiite majority which had support from Iran. That was no joke.

A concern about a threat from just across the waters hung on us. A UAE-Iran dispute over three islands had been going on for years, but the worry kept coming back as Iran's then president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad raised his rhetoric.

The UAE hasn't seen a calamity of the kind that Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or Bahrain has experienced. But for every expat, a worry always lingers about possible external threats. Such worry is part of an expat's life. Not just in the Gulf. It's everywhere -- be it

the Gulf or the US or the UK or elsewhere in Europe, or even in Africa -- whichever foreign land one chooses to live and work in.

Because the world is too full of conflicts.

Close To Conflict Zones

I have often asked myself how I survived in the Middle East for nearly two decades. In fact, many of us from Kerala and other areas of India, as well as our colleagues from as far as the African continent, or Pakistan and the Philippines in Asia, used to discuss the point. It's not about any worry about the system in the UAE, where we lived, or the lack of resources, or any hardship in going along in a multiracial, multinational society. No. The nearly 100 nationalities in the Emirates live in harmony because the country has a leadership that cares for everyone without exception.

What then is the worry, one would naturally ask. Well, it's pretty simple: the region is always on the boil. The Middle East is a conflict region. And any conflict in the region could impact the millions living there. Kuwait saw Saddam's forces rushing in, looting, killing, and destroying at a time when life was all joy. The Saudis have faced several terror attacks and currently have the Houthis blasting their oil fields



from Yemen, across the border. Qatar and Oman are relatively calm, but tiny Bahrain had its share of political turmoil. Invariably, such situations trap expatriates.

Israel, Gaza, Yemen, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria: conflict areas aren't few in the Middle East. Expats from India are everywhere too. Back in their homes, the worries are inescapable as they are in the places they work.

The Gulf in the early 1990s saw the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of expatriates from Kuwait. The Iraqi invasion had been a shock to the Gulf kingdoms which have preferred to live in peace. Entire homes were looted, and businesses run by expats were ransacked without any exception. Memories of people fleeing Kuwait through the hard deserts, many on foot, are hardly ever forgotten.

I remember visiting Kuwait a year after the invasion when the country was pushing reconstruction on a massive scale. Expats had by and large returned, thanks to the dedicated efforts by the government to compensate them and restore their lives. Businesses were reopened, people had their jobs back, and children were back at schools. I asked a friend how the family is doing. "We're okay," he said. "After all, we have certain guarantees here in the Gulf. It's just not that we get good money, we are also able to raise money in case of emergencies. Jobs and workplaces are good, so are schools. There is a system in place."

Yes, that matters. There is a system in place. We had certain guarantees despite the tensions in the region.

We have helpful people everywhere, too. That's an additional factor comforting expats, wherever they are. Such social bonding is one element in the life of every expat. There are associations, and there are individuals who are ready to help in a crisis.

No one ever forgets them either. They make a difference from the expat bodies and consulates that are not of much use in many situations.

Some would raise the question: Is it time to fly out? We would always decide we stay, because, all said and done, we would have much to lose. Much in every sense: Money, the prime compulsion, certain

As for the UAE, many of us considered it a second home, because the rulers had wisdom and a firm commitment to ensure our comforts too.



comforts of life that are a result of the country's affluence and leap to modernity. Then, of course, commitments back home. There's no sense in pretending that these compulsions do not influence an expat much. They do, and they are primary. We go abroad for money and what other benefits that we receive are part of our mission.

Another factor was that we got used to the threats as time passed. Sitting in a newsroom, one is closer to such threats than those who read or hear news. And they invariably spark a discussion, though private. Often someone would ring up, wondering whether the situation was worrisome. But as life went on, we realised that any fear of an external threat was unwarranted. And to fulfil our commitments we were ready to take risks. We had to.

Yes, commitments are always primary. Wherever you are.

Conflicts are never-ending in the region, but we mostly ignored those that were a bit far. Like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We shared the feelings of Palestinian colleagues, but we were assured that a peaceful country like the UAE would never be a partner in such situations.

As for the UAE, many of us considered it a second home, because the rulers had wisdom and a firm commitment to ensure our comforts too. Indeed, the nearly 15% local population had privileges that we could never hope for, but we are never treated as second class. That's beyond nationality or religion.

WOVEN IN EXPAT LIFE

Sheela Tomy's Diasporic Tales and Loka Kerala Sabha Dreams



DR. APARNA AJITH

Asst. Professor in English
S.N.C.W.
Kollam

Sheela Tomy, a writer from Kerala's Wayanad district with over two decades of Middle East experience, has spent 27 years in the Gulf (20 in Qatar and 7 in Abu Dhabi), focusing her writings on expatriate life. Her debut novel, *Valli*, dedicated "For forests ravaged by fire, for people rendered voiceless, for languages without scripts," reflects her deep connection to her homeland and won the Cherukad Award for Malayalam Literature in 2021. Its English translation by Dr. Jayasree Kalathil won the V. Abdulla Memorial Translation Prize (2023) and was shortlisted for several prestigious awards.





Her other works, *Melquíadesnte Pralayapusthakam* (2012) and *Aa Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruth* (2023), have also earned accolades. Invited to many literary festivals, Sheela Tomy's writing bridges years and places, reminding us that the place we love is our true home. Here's Sheela Tomy in an online conversation with Dr. Aparna Ajith for Kerala Calling

As the fourth edition of Loka Kerala Sabha is on the anvil, what are your expectations?

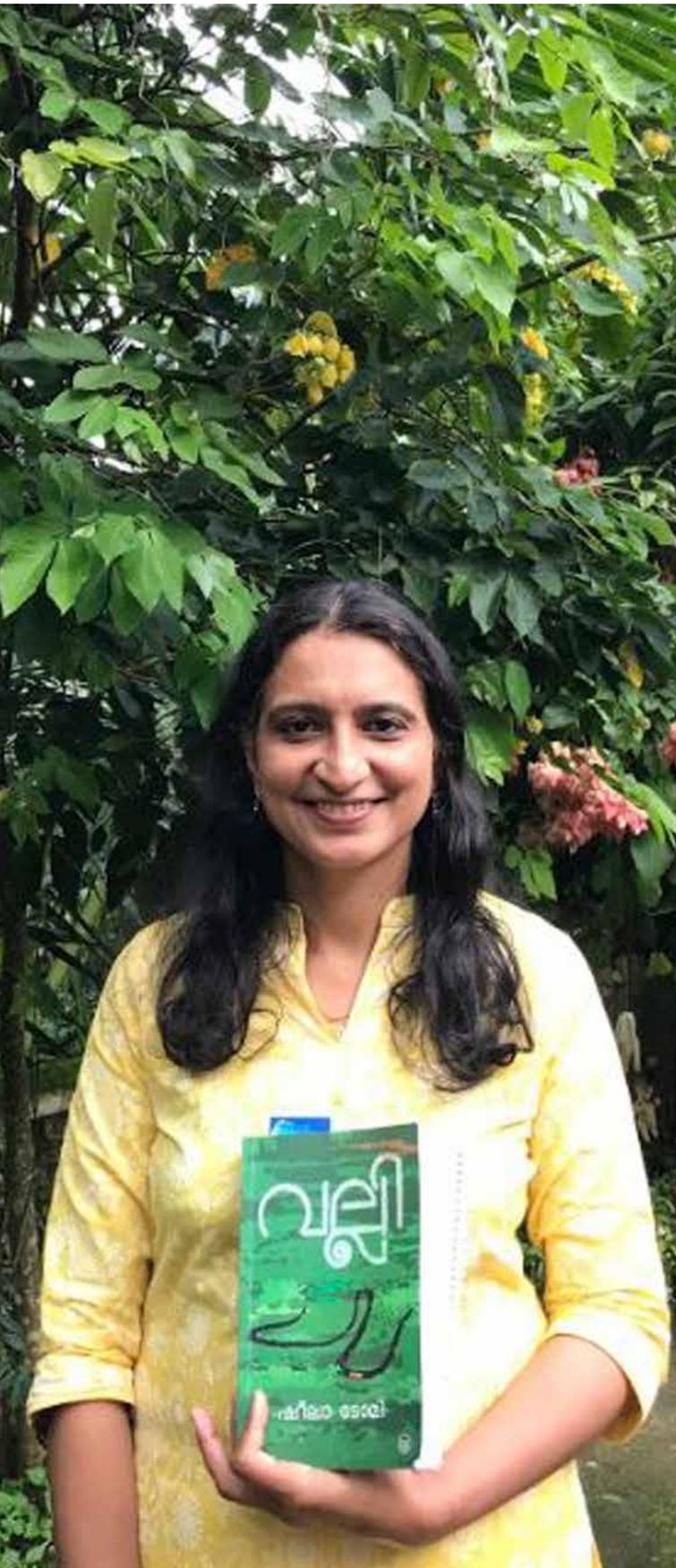
Loka Kerala Sabha is indeed a great initiative to bring together Malayalis from all parts of the world. We are the ambassadors of our country and our state. We have opinions to share and concerns to be addressed. Through such conferences and mutual interactions, Kerala can become aware of different development prospects around the world and utilise the skills and knowledge of migrants for nation-building.

Could you share your fond memories about Kerala?

Will the repertoire of memories ever end? Memories find new life as stories within the pages of novels. The seeds of every creation are hidden in our homeland's memories and lingering fragrances.

How did the idea of writing short stories pop up in your mind?

Since my childhood, I have loved books. I began my writing journey in my school days, actively participating in youth festivals and Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishath. During those days, I used to pen poems and stories, a passion that flourished in my college years. The stories I have written often amidst the myriad facets of life in the Gulf and raising my children came out as my maiden anthology of short stories entitled *Melquíadesnte Pralayapusthakam*.



Could you describe your experience as a diasporic writer?

Loss and separation, at times, create great works. Had I not experienced the life of a diaspora, I would not have written *Valli* with this intensity. I, too, have lost the land like the Susan of *Valli*. Diasporic life could endow many experiences, immersing me in new cultures and phases of life that go beyond what one can explore through Google. Migration bestowed me with the novel *Aa Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruth*. We are yet to unearth umpteen treasures from the kaleidoscope of diaspora, and I believe that many talented diaspora writers will emerge into the mainstream in the future.

Could you share your creative journey from the short story collection *Melquiadesnte Pralayapusthakam (Melquíades's Book of Floods)* to the debut novel, *Valli*?

After publishing my story collection, I wanted to dedicate my debut novel to my land, people, and their untold stories. *Valli* had been in my mind for over a decade. I aimed to reflect on the transformation of my land over the last five decades due to human greed, leading to lost biodiversity. I wanted to show that the Adivasi people who once fought for *Valli* (wages) are still fighting for *Valli* (earth), and poor farmers are still on the brink of suicide. Writing *Valli* involved reading related books and understanding the history, politics, flora, and fauna of the land. For three years, I devoted every spare moment to the novel. My family, Tomy, and our children were incredibly supportive. This novel is a tribute to my late father, who inspired me to write but passed away before I began this journey. Constructive feedback from friends helped refine *Valli* and bring it to life.

Both the novels *Valli* and *Aa Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruth* unfold stories about people who remain geographically different and distant from each other. Could you please share your experience in writing these novels?

Valli centres on my homeland and familiar people, with characters and lives that naturally emerged from my childhood familiarity and research into Adivasi language and songs, along with ancestral tales of agrarian life and migration.

Writing about the Palestine crisis in my second novel was far more challenging, requiring six months of intense research into the history and politics of Palestine and Israel. Conversations with friends working with Jewish families in Israel provided valuable insights. While Malayalam literature has few stories about Palestine, world literature offers many works by Palestinians. The ethical dilemma of narrating as an outsider was significant, but I chose to tell their story with honesty.

A Palestinian colleague's experiences inspired the novel. Initially, I was working on a script about Malayali women searching for jobs abroad, but the narrative shifted to the Palestinian people's sorrows, reflecting the universal face of human rights violations and oppressive regimes.

Could you please elaborate on the selection of such a metaphorical title as *Valli* for the saga of the innocent residents of Kalluvayal?

Valli has different meanings. *Valli* is Earth. This is a novel for earth and nature. *Valli* is a climber plant found abundantly in the forest. *Valli* tells the story of the forest. *Valli* is wages, the contract labor system prevalent in Wayanad, where the Adivasi workers and their families were forced to work for the same Janmi for a whole year for a certain measure of rice (*Valli*).



Don't ask the trees for their names,
Don't ask the valleys who their mother is ...
All the hearts of the people are my identity
So take away my passport



They were given severe punishment for breaking the contract. Finally, *Valli* is a woman. *Valli* is the story of women, nature, the forest, the migrant farmers, and the Adivasi people of Kalluvayal. But anywhere in the world, you can find a Kalluvayal!

Could you express your thoughts on the influence of the renowned Palestinian author Mahmoud Darwish on your creative world?

Mahmoud Darwish, the voice of Palestinian struggles, has powerfully portrayed migration's harrowing experiences, enlightening the world about its atrocities. His poems, embodying Palestinian cultural essence, have profoundly influenced me. When I decided to write a novel set against the backdrop of Palestine, I revisited the works of Darwish, Mourid Barghouti, Mahmoud Shukair, and Najwan Darwish. The title of my novel is inspired by lines from Darwish's poem *Passport*:

“Don't ask the trees for their names, Don't ask the valleys who their mother is ... All the hearts of the people are my identity So, take away my passport.”

How do you view the English translations of your creative works, considering the challenges of conveying ideas from the source language?

Many things remain untranslatable when conveying ideas from the source language to English. However, I was fortunate to have extremely skilful translators for both novels. Jayasree Kalathil did a magical job with *Valli*, keeping its essence and doing justice to my poetic language and the Paniya language, which has no script. Her passion for nature and Wayanad perfectly reflected the land and its soul in the translation.

Ministry IAS translated *Aa Nadiyodu Peru Chodikkaruth* with the English title *Don't Ask the River Her Name*. Her deep understanding of the Palestinian issue and her balanced, humanistic worldview allowed her to capture the essence of my thoughts. From my experience, if the translator is meticulous and proficient in both languages and can capture the book's soul, there is nothing untranslatable—they will find suitable substitutes

Your token of advice to aspiring writers?

Writing is a creative journey of one's mind. Each writer traverses through unique routes, making advice somewhat irrelevant. However, reading plays a crucial role in becoming a good writer. Immerse yourself in fiction and non-fiction and keenly observe the people and events around you.

A SYMPHONY OF HERITAGE AND HARMONY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Janaki Easwar, Kerala's fifteen-year-old musical prodigy, has captivated audiences worldwide with her extraordinary talent and deep musical pride.

Hailing from a musically rich family, Janaki's journey began when her family migrated from Kozhikode, Kerala, to Australia, bringing their rich heritage with them. Immersed in both Indian classical and Western music, Janaki has been profoundly influenced by her father, Anoop Divakaran, a singer, and her uncle, a playback singer in South Indian cinema.

Janaki showcased her songwriting skills with her single "Clown" in 2020 but truly gained recognition in 2021 as the youngest contestant on "The Voice" at just 12 years old. Her blind

audition performance of Billie Eilish's "Lovely" earned unanimous praise from the judges, and her choice to wear the traditional 'kasavu' garment highlighted her deep cultural roots.

In 2022, she performed alongside the Australian rock band Icehouse and Zimbabwean-Australian singer Thando Sikwila at the T20 World Cup final in Melbourne, adding pride to Indian fans despite the team's early exit. Janaki's versatility is evident in her Western musical interpretations and her command of Indian classical music, making her a standout artist on the global stage.

Kerala Calling has an exclusive interview with the young artiste Janaki Easwar.

Interviewed by



CAROLIN T PAUL



DAKSHINA S

Excerpts from the Interview

Interviewers: Janaki, you have achieved incredible success at a very young age. Can you share a bit about your journey into this world of music? What influenced you on this journey, and how was your experience?

Janaki: Both my uncle and my dad sing. So, from a young age, they've always wanted me to have music as a big part of my life. I danced for a while, too, so they wanted me to be part of any type of performing arts. I started singing when I was six years old. I did Carnatic music. It was the first genre of music I was working on. My first guru was my Carnatic teacher. And then, at eight, I started doing Western music. So after that, I basically started taking part in small competitions in Australia here and there. Through that, I gained more experience. I was surrounded by other amazing musicians through these competitions, and I got to meet a lot of people. Then, around 2020, I decided I wanted to go into "The Voice." It was the true beginning of my musical journey, the big breakthrough. So, in 2021, I participated in "The Voice," which was an amazing experience. It helped me so much, opened so many new opportunities for me, and I met even more amazing people. And I wore Indian clothes when I was doing the blind audition and sang an Indian song. So, that reached Indian media as well. And through that, I got a few more opportunities, like interviews and shows in Kerala and singing songs for movies. Even before that, in 2019, I recorded a cover of "Ennadi Mayavi Nee,"

which was a Tamil song. That was the first professionally recorded cover that I did. After its release, I started getting more recognition through it as well. And now, I am here.

Your audition in "The Voice" made all Indians proud, especially us Malayalis. You have a very beautiful voice and pour all your emotions into your songs. But, apart from this, do you have any other hobbies or interests?

Yes, I'm interested in quite a few things, actually. I did dance for a while. I did Bharatanatyam. And also, hip-hop and contemporary forms. Even though I don't have any classes, I still dance at home. So dancing is one of my hobbies. I like to watch dance videos as well. I also enjoy food, and I find myself researching them. I don't cook much, but I want to try it. I always try to explore new places in Australia, and anywhere I go. I'm into fashion as well. So, I look into a lot of styling because I want to get into fashion design. So yeah, I think those are my main hobbies.

That's amazing. So, will you be performing anytime soon in Kerala or in India?

Will I? Nothing is lined up right now. I sang a song for a movie called Teenz, which was D. Imman's composition. So, for that, I went to Chennai for the audio launch. That was the most recent thing I did in India. A while ago I did a few projects for Kappa TV as well. I did a Carnatic song, "Kurai Ondrum," and that one was released. There's actually one more song lined up as well. Hopefully, it'll be released soon, and that's my original song.

Can you share your experience performing in the closing ceremony of the T20 World Cup? What was it like performing on such a prominent platform? Were there any moments of nervousness, and how did you manage those feelings in such a high-pressure environment?

Yes, it was an enthralling experience. I was not that nervous, to be honest, compared to other shows I've done. I think it's because the crowd was huge, nearly 100,000 people. There were so many people that it just didn't



feel real. It felt like no one was looking at me, so I wasn't nervous. I performed alongside amazing artists like Icehouse, the band, and Thando Sikwila. I was offered a lot of support, and the whole process was amazing: picking up the costume to wear, doing all the makeup, and performing stage rehearsals. My parents are huge fans of cricket. So, being able to perform at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and just standing on that ground was an extraordinary and surreal experience.

Could you share some challenges you've encountered throughout your music career?

Thankfully, I haven't had any huge challenges so far. It was mainly about choosing what I wanted to do and what path I wanted to take, whether I wanted to focus more on the Western or Indian music industry or write my own songs. The only problem I had was that there were so many options to explore, and I still

hadn't decided what I wanted to do. I definitely want to be in the music industry as a career, but there are many things that I enjoy doing, like songwriting. And even with songwriting, I face many challenges, like writer's block and finding my own soul and identity. These are the main challenges that I faced.

Are there specific aspects of Kerala or Indian culture that you find yourself particularly missing or longing for while abroad?

Yes, I do miss India. However, the Indian community in Melbourne is big, and there are a lot of Kerala communities in Melbourne as well. I'm always surrounded by my Indian friends. My parents migrated from Singapore, where there were many Malayalis, and we came to Melbourne all together. So there is a huge friend group, and we all celebrate Onam and Vishu. We always celebrate everything with our friends. My parents have made sure that I

don't lose touch with my Indian culture and Kerala heritage. And I visit every year to meet my family, back in India. They come here as well. So there's not really an opportunity for me to miss it as much because I'm surrounded a lot by my culture.

Is there any specific food that you love to have while you are in Kerala?

Of course I do. I like to have authentic Kerala food. It used to be Biryani, but I've had it too much now. So, I think Porotta and beef are my favourite food.

What is your opinion about the Loka Kerala Sabha? How has being part of the global Malayali community influenced your life and career, and how do you see Loka Kerala Sabha play a role in this?

Being part of the global Malayali community has shaped who I am and my career. Growing up in Melbourne, I was always connected to Kerala's rich culture, which added a unique flavour to my music. It keeps us connected to our roots and instils pride in our identity. Sharing our traditions, language, and arts enriches the global community and ensures that future generations appreciate their heritage.



My parents have always supported me unconditionally. No matter what I choose to do, they are always there to support me. I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for them. My whole career is because of them.

Your family's support is undoubtedly a big part of your musical journey. How has your family influenced and supported your career?

My parents have always supported me unconditionally. No matter what I choose to do, they are always there to support me. I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for them. My whole career is because of them. Everything that I am doing right now and what I have become is truly because of their support; they are organising and initiating it.

Are there any upcoming projects or collaborations that we can look forward to?

I am working towards it now. I'm not exactly sure when it will be released but definitely soon.

Any message you would like to convey to music aspirants?

Definitely, it is to follow your dream, but the main thing is to never lose your love for it by overdoing it or forcing yourself to do it. Keep a balance between having fun, exploring other things, and not always doing music to the point where it feels like a job, and you just don't want to do it anymore. Try your best to talk to people in the industry, make connections, always surround yourself with different musicians, and open yourself to different genres of music, so you can get a wider inspiration to figure out what you want to do because there are so many things you can do in the music industry. It could be producing, songwriting, being a singer, or a performer. There are a lot of possibilities in this industry. Work hard, practice, and take any opportunity you get.

With her exceptional talent, powerful voice, and immense dedication, Janaki continues to make her community and fans proud. She exemplifies an artist who blends her cultural heritage with contemporary influences, creating a compelling musical identity. We wish her immense success in all her future endeavours and look forward to witnessing her rise higher in the global music scene.

MEET THE FIRST BBC PANORAMA REPORTER FROM KERALA



C. RAJESH

Balakrishnan Balagopal's inspiring journey from Kerala to becoming the first BBC Panorama reporter from his state highlights his resilience and dedication to both journalism and community service.

Photo: Deepak Dominic

Balakrishnan Balagopal's journey from Kerala 30 years ago as a migrant was marked by significant challenges. Despite attending Infant Jesus Anglo Indian High School in Kollam, his life was filled with adversity. He lost his father in a car accident while in ninth grade and his mother to cancer during his first year at Fatima College Kollam. Balagopal began his career as an English teacher at Sabarigiri Residential School in Anchal, Kerala, but his true passion lay in journalism.

He relocated to Oman and worked for the Times of Oman. After marriage, he moved to the UK, where securing a journalism job was difficult, leading him to work as a manager at Kent County Council. Nonetheless, he pursued journalism through his online portal, www.ukmalayalee.com, which became a vital resource for migrants in the UK.

Twenty-three years later, Balagopal received an offer from BBC London, which he embraced by leaving his government job to join BBC Panorama.

His documentary on the exploitation of overseas healthcare workers highlighted issues like exorbitant recruitment fees, lengthy contracts with financial penalties, and constant job-related fears. This work sparked important discussions with the UK government about the need for better regulations and protections in the sector.

Online Petition for One-Year Extension on UK Government Policy

Balagopal has launched an online petition urging the UK government to grant an additional one-year extension to healthcare migrants who are currently unemployed in the country. This extension aims to give these migrants more time to find employment, enabling them to pursue their careers and make valuable contributions to the UK's healthcare industry.

The image shows the BBC logo, consisting of the letters 'B', 'B', and 'C' each inside a dark square, arranged horizontally.

Panorama

BBC Panorama is a well-known and long-running investigative documentary series in the UK, known for its in-depth reporting on a wide range of important issues. It's been on air since 1953 and has covered everything from political scandals and social issues to interviews with prominent figures like Princess Diana.



UK Government Officer

Balagopal's 23 years of experience as a local government officer with Kent County Council has proven invaluable in assisting newly arriving communities to settle and adapt during their early days in the UK. His managerial role within the government sector has equipped him with valuable insights into staff management, recruitment, and the overall functioning of the government sector. This expertise allows him to provide well-informed advice and guidance to the communities he serves, aiding them in navigating complex processes and systems with confidence and ease.

Migration Stories

Through his YouTube channel, The Migration Stories, Balagopal has played a crucial role in educating newly arriving healthcare workers about their rights and in raising awareness within the community about fraudulent recruitment agents. His interviews with solicitors have helped simplify complex legal jargon related to migrant rules, enabling individuals to better understand and comply with the regulations. Balagopal has also partnered with various organizations and individual groups to expedite the repatriation of deceased Keralites from the UK. Thanks to his unique background as a UK-based journalist and former UK government officer, he has been able to effectively communicate with relevant authorities, ensuring a smooth and timely repatriation.

Mentor

Balakrishnan Balagopal consistently provides mentorship to between five and ten newly arrived migrants at any given time. His trustworthy and open communication style creates a safe environment for mentees to discuss sensitive topics, ask questions, and seek feedback without fear of judgment. He supports new arrivals by offering guidance on job opportunities, providing tips for successful interviews, and helping them overcome challenging situations. His support also includes liaising with legal professionals, drafting letters and emails on their behalf, and offering advice on tenancy and property matters, among other things.

Community leader and Social Activist

Balakrishnan Balagopal commenced his community work in the UK in 2003 when he was elected as the chairman of the Kent Malayalee Association, a position he held for three years. Subsequently, he assumed the role of Company Secretary for the Medway Ethnic Minority Forum, an organization representing 27 groups from diverse countries. During this period, he effectively provided crucial support and guidance to migrant communities in a position of leadership.

“Yes, Our Parents are Well Cared for Back Home”

Survey on Parental Care Among the Malayali Diaspora

Kerala Calling conducted a survey among the global Malayali diaspora to understand their experiences living away from home and caring for their parents in Kerala. The results reflect a strong commitment to family despite geographical distances.

Survey Questions

1. Communication Frequency

with Parents in Kerala:

- Every week
- Once a month
- Less frequently

2. Financial Support:

- Fully support them
- Contribute to specific needs (e.g., healthcare, groceries)
- Unable to support financially

3. Remote Care Services:

- Use online services (e.g., grocery delivery, medical consultations)
- Rely on friends/family in Kerala
- Do not use remote care services

4. Confidence in Medical Attention:

- Confident in providing resources and support
- Somewhat confident, may need more resources
- Not confident due to distance challenges

5. Biggest Challenges for Parents Living Alone:

- Loneliness and isolation
- Difficulty with daily tasks
- Access to healthcare
- Other

6. Confidence in Remote Care Methods:

- Very confident, parents feel well-cared for
- Somewhat confident, some unmet needs
- Not confident, concerned about loneliness

7. Emotional Strain Due to Distance:

- Experience guilt and worry
- Sometimes feel strain, especially during health concerns
- Manage emotions well, focus on staying connected

8. Confidence in Managing Parents' Care Over Next Five Years:

- Very confident, reliable support system
- Somewhat confident, concerned about challenges
- Not confident, may need significant changes

9. Awareness and Use of Kerala Government Initiatives for Senior Citizens:

- Aware and utilize some programs
- Not aware of any programs
- Unsure, interested in learning more

10. Societal Pressure to Return to Kerala:

- Strong expectation to return
- Some pressure, balanced by career abroad
- No pressure felt

Survey Responses on Parental Care

Communication Frequency:

- Weekly: All respondents

Financial Support:

- Fully support: 4 respondents
- Contribute to specific needs: 5 respondents
- Unable to support: 5 respondents

Remote Care Services:

- Use online services: 2 respondents
- Rely on friends/family: 3 respondents
- Do not use services: 8 respondents

Confidence in Medical Attention:

- Confident: 9 respondents
- Somewhat confident: 3 respondents

Challenges Faced by Parents:

- Loneliness and isolation: 6 respondents
- Difficulty with daily tasks: 5 respondents
- Other: 2 respondents

Effectiveness of Remote Care:

- Very confident: 7 respondents
- Somewhat confident: 3 respondents
- Not confident: 1 respondent

Emotional Strain:

- No strain: 6 respondents
- Experience guilt: 4 respondents
- Sometimes strain: 2 respondents

Future Care Management Confidence:

- Very confident: 4 respondents
- Somewhat confident: 7 respondents

Awareness of Government Initiatives:

- Aware and utilize: 1 respondent
- Not aware: 10 respondents

Societal Pressure to Return:

- Somewhat pressured: 6 respondents
- No pressure: 6 respondents

Conclusion

The survey reveals that the Malayali diaspora maintains strong weekly communication and financial support for their parents in Kerala. Most respondents rely on friends and family for remote care and feel confident about addressing medical needs. Loneliness and isolation are significant challenges for their parents. There is a general confidence in managing care over the next five years, though awareness of government initiatives for senior citizens is strongly recommended. Societal pressure to return to Kerala exists but is balanced by career and life abroad.

The Malayali diaspora's commitment to ensuring their parents' well-being despite geographical distances is commendable. It highlights the importance of continued support and increased awareness of available resources and services to further assist in caring for their loved ones.

By Kerala Calling

This survey captures the resilience and dedication of the Malayali community in balancing their lives abroad while ensuring their parents' well-being back in Kerala.

KEEPING MY PARENTS SAFE IN KERALA



JOVITTA THOMAS

Georgia

I have been living in Georgia for eight years now, but my heart remains firmly Indian, with no plans to change my nationality or immigrate permanently. Originally from Thrissur, within the city limits, I spent five years studying in Changanacherry and another four in Thiruvalla. Despite my extensive time outside Kerala, my connection to my homeland is unwavering. Currently, I reside in Tbilisi, Georgia, with my family. My daughter attends school here, and my husband works here as well. I work as a Senior Operations/Social Development Consultant for the World Bank Group, focusing on multiple projects in Afghanistan.

My journey outside India began in 1999, taking

me to less typical migration destinations like Kosovo and Afghanistan, before settling in Georgia in 2016. Despite being an Indian citizen with no intention of changing my nationality, I've observed the recent trend of Keralite migration to Georgia, especially among students. When we arrived, there were very few Indians, but the number has surged, with over 15,000 Indian students now, including around 2,000 temporary transfers from Ukraine. Indian students, mostly Keralites, make up more than 55% of the foreign student population here.

The Keralites in Georgia: A Snapshot

a) Student Demographics: The majority of Keralites in Georgia are medical students, aged 17 to 26. A smaller number are enrolled in courses like management and aeronautics. Recently, some have started working in Indian restaurants and food delivery services.

b) Economic Impact: While remittances from Keralite earnings here are not significant, the financial contribution to the local economy is substantial. Each medical student spends an average of USD 75,000, significantly boosting Georgia's economy. Some medical university classes consist entirely of Keralites.

Survey Insights



c) Diverse Backgrounds: Keralite students here come from various backgrounds: a significant number from the Middle East/Gulf countries, followed by those from the Muslim belt of Kerala, other parts of India, and students with passports from countries like the US, UK, and Australia.

d) Tourism and Connectivity: Georgia attracts many Keralite tourists from the Middle East due to visa-free travel for Gulf residents. Parents of students also visit frequently, often viewing it as their closest

experience of Europe.

Living in Georgia, a nation rich in history and culture, while maintaining strong ties to my roots in Kerala, presents unique challenges and opportunities. The growing presence of Keralites in Georgia, primarily through education, underscores the adaptability and resilience of our community. Despite the physical distance, our bonds to Kerala remain strong, driven by a deep sense of duty and love for our families and heritage.

STANDING IN UNITY FOR KERALA



SHERRY JOSEPH

Sherry Joseph has been a resident of Botswana for 25 years and an HR by profession.

As the Malayali diaspora in Botswana continues to grow, their presence serves as a testimony to the enduring spirit of the Malayalis.

Amidst the vast expanse of the Kalahari Desert, a vibrant community of Malayalis has found a home in the southern African country of Botswana. The resilient expatriates from Kerala have carved out a unique niche, embracing the challenges and opportunities of living in a foreign land. From skilled professionals to entrepreneurs and educators, the Malayali diaspora in Botswana represents diverse professions and backgrounds.

In the late 70s, the first group of Keralites moved to Botswana for jobs, mostly in the government sector. By the mid-80s, a few others from neighbouring countries had moved in, and slowly, a commune was in the offing. It started at a garage, a makeshift venue, reeking of the aroma of tamarind-soaked sambhar on

Thiruvonam, and those were the days when banana leaves were sneaked in from Zambia for the 'sadya.'

As years passed and migration patterns changed, things were structured. Kerala Samajam Botswana, a cultural and charitable society, was registered in 2005, and since then, it has fulfilled social responsibility activities in the interest of the larger populace.

Over the years, the Samajam has donated houses to needy families, conducted eye camps under the guidance of doctors from India, and supported the National Poverty Eradication Programme, the Nation's Housing Appeal, and the "Light up" Botswana project. It also went all out in lending support to the state of Kerala during the floods of 2018.

The Malayali community in Botswana has stood together through tough and testing times, the testimony of it being the Kerala Samajam Botswana being the only association for the entire country. Every festival is celebrated and displayed in all its hues and splendour and often fused with local flavours and rhythm. The community has established Malayalam language classes and cultural programs to ensure the younger generation remains connected to their heritage.

Vistas of Botswana

Botswana, renowned for the world's largest inland delta and shimmery diamonds, is marked by the Tropic of Capricorn. With a population of 2.6 million, nature conservation tops Botswana's vision. After British decolonisation in 1966, the largest open-pit diamond mine was found in Orapa in 1967.

Landlocked and rich in wildlife, Botswana



Survey Insights



Sherry Joseph maintains regular communication and is confident in her ability to manage her parents' care from abroad, despite occasional emotional strain and challenges of loneliness faced by her parents.

borders South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It is home to the 'Big Five' animals, yet surprisingly, hippos cause the most fatalities. With an elephant population of 130,000, elephant crossings, such as those between Botswana and Namibia, are a common sight. The International Court of Justice awarded Sedudu Island to Botswana, exemplifying its vibrant ecosystem.

Gaborone, the capital, greets visitors with an elephant ivory sculpture, emphasizing natural

conservation. The 'golden hour' on the Chobe River, with Sundowners against the setting sun, and the Okavango Delta's exclusive wilderness offer unparalleled experiences. Makgadikgadi salt pans and Gcwihaba caves are star-gazing and spelunking havens.

The Malayali diaspora in Botswana exemplifies cultural preservation and integration, enriching the nation's diverse society and strengthening ties between the two nations.

BALANCING MUNICH LIFE AND KERALA ROOTS: A MALAYALI'S JOURNEY



GIRIKRISHNAN G.R.

Munich, Germany

Balancing life in Munich's bustling IT sector while maintaining strong ties to my roots and family in Kerala, I navigate the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the Malayali diaspora in Germany.

Germany has long been a destination for Malayalis and other Indians, beginning with the significant wave of healthcare professionals in the early 1960s. Many early migrants, lacking German proficiency, faced numerous challenges, often relying on church networks for support.

The early 2000s marked a shift with Germany's "Green Card" initiative to attract IT professionals. Though it didn't achieve long-term retention, it paved the way for the Blue Card, job seeker visa, and Ausbildung programs, drawing many Indians, including Malayalis. Despite these opportunities, language remains a significant barrier.

Recently, the collaboration between the German employment exchange and NORKA (Non-Resident Keralites Affairs) focuses on recruiting nurses and



Survey Insights



Ausbildung students from Kerala, streamlining the process for newcomers.

The Malayali community in Germany has distinctive characteristics: many naturalize and maintain OCI cards, migration trends have diversified beyond healthcare to include IT and students, and a second generation has grown up with German as their first language. Frequent visits to Kerala and active community associations foster cultural continuity.

New arrivals often struggle with a lack of preparation, while generational challenges vary between managing Indian assets and finding employment in Germany.

Living in Munich, with its blend of tradition and modernity, has been transformative. The thriving Malayali community, despite unique challenges, showcases resilience and adaptation, maintaining strong ties to their homeland while embracing Germany's cultural diversity.

FINNISH BLISS AND FAMILIAL TIES



**AJU KRISHNAN &
ARYA BALU SINDHU**

Aju Krishnan and Arya Balu Sindhu, R&D engineers in Finland, balance their professional life with a deep commitment to their parents in Kerala.

We came to work as R&D engineers for Nokia Solutions and Networks in Finland five years ago. We live in the beautiful municipality of Tampere. Aju is also an enthusiastic photographer who possesses an engineer's analytical mind. His sharp attention to detail and love of creativity guide him as he explores the digital world of photography and the tangible realm of engineering.

Finland needs no introduction. It has been chosen as the happiest country in the world by the UN for the past several years in a row. As is often said here among the expats, "You don't choose Finland, but Finland chooses you."

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Many of us reached here mostly for studies and work, partly sceptical about how this cold and sparsely populated Nordic nation might welcome us. But many wouldn't have to look back and would settle here, even go on to adopt Finnish citizenship. Pristine nature all around, the welfare state, absence of corruption and crime, and the so-called Finnish Sisu (stoicism in the face of hardships) are some of the many secrets of Finnish happiness.

The Malayali community is rather small in Finland and is not often in the government's official list. In the municipality of Tampere, there are only about 70 adults and about 20 kids. Tampere University has very few Bachelor's and Master's students studying here.

Most of the Malayali professionals here work in the technology and industrial sectors, where English language proficiency is enough. Very few work in the services sector, which demands native proficiency in the Finnish language. This is because Finnish is one of the most difficult languages in the world to learn.

Gone are the days when expats toiled hard and sent all their savings back home. The Malayali community in Finland has followed the changing trend of trying to settle here and spending the major share of their earnings in Finland, and vacationing in the Nordics and Europe. They want to have a better life and good time and a bright future for their next generation, which Finland promises them.

CARING ACROSS CONTINENTS

BALANCING LIFE IN IRELAND WHILE ENSURING PARENTAL CARE IN KERALA



SHINITH A.K.

Ireland

A dedicated Keralite share his experiences of living in Ireland for 15 years, managing his career, and maintaining a strong connection with his parents back home.

For the past 15 years, I've been living in Ireland, working as a system administrator at the Bank of Ireland. Yet, my heart remains deeply rooted in Thalassery, Kannur. Committed to my Indian citizenship, I have no plans to change my nationality or immigrate permanently.

This dual existence has enriched my life, offering countless opportunities and unique challenges, especially in maintaining ties with family back home. As an active member of various Keralite communities, including Kranthi—a leftist cultural and political organization—I've played key roles in organizing cultural events, supporting new migrants, and fostering connections between Keralites and the broader Irish society. Our efforts ensure a vibrant, cohesive community that contributes positively to Ireland's multicultural landscape.

The Malayali Migration to Ireland

Keralite migrants have established a meaningful and influential presence in Ireland, significantly contributing to the country's diverse cultural fabric while staying deeply connected to their roots. Despite the challenges of global migration, Keralites in Ireland have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability, attributes that can be traced back to our strong cultural values, emphasis on education, and ability to integrate smoothly into new environments.

Ireland has become a popular destination for Keralites seeking better job opportunities, higher education, and an overall improved quality of life. Keralites have settled in various parts of Ireland, from the vibrant capital city of Dublin to smaller towns, each making unique contributions to the local economy and society.

Balancing Responsibilities and Emotional Ties

Personally, being a Keralite settled in Ireland involves a delicate balance of responsibilities and emotional ties. Regular communication, financial support, and the utilisation of remote services are crucial in ensuring my parents receive the care and connection they need. Government initiatives also play a crucial role, offering a safety net that enhances their well-being.

Survey Insights



Contributing to Kerala's Development from Abroad

Keralite migrants in Ireland support their families back home through remittances and play a crucial role in Kerala's socio-economic development. Our contributions include funding educational initiatives and supporting healthcare and infrastructure projects. A prime example is when Malayali cultural and social groups rallied to help flood-stricken Kerala, leveraging their integration with the Irish community by organising food stalls and other activities to raise aid.

Strong community networks among Keralites

in Ireland help maintain and celebrate our cultural traditions, fostering a sense of belonging and unity within the diaspora. Personally, I believe that leveraging community programs and local support networks in Kerala can mitigate feelings of loneliness and absence, fostering a sense of belonging and connection. Despite the challenges, the bond we share remains strong, bridging the gap between continents and cultures.

The journey of a Keralite in Ireland is one of resilience, adaptation, and deep-rooted connections. Our community continues to thrive, contributing to both our host country and our homeland, embodying the spirit of unity and cultural pride.



A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND CONNECTION

In Scotland, Kurian Jacob balances a thriving career and active community involvement while diligently caring for his parents in Kerala through regular communication, financial support, and leveraging remote care services.



KURIAN JACOB

Scotland

Scotland, a country snuggled in the north of the British mainland, wasn't traditionally a hotspot for Malayali migrants. Initially, the Malayali community here was modest, mostly comprising students and healthcare professionals. However, the dynamics shifted significantly post-COVID-19, with our numbers multiplying three to four times.

In Scotland, Malayalis predominantly work in the healthcare sector, either with the National Health Services (NHS) or private care providers. The country's prestigious universities attract a large number of students from Kerala, drawn by the quality education and relatively lower living costs compared to other UK cities. Additionally, Scotland's robust financial services industry employs many Indians, especially in IT roles.

Survey Insights



My Role in the Community

Today, I serve as the Secretary of one of the largest progressive cultural forums in the UK, with a presence across Britain and Northern Ireland. We aim to foster cultural exchange and provide a support network for Malayalis here. I also hold the position of Secretary at the Mayilpeeli Malayalam School, the first online Malayalam school in the UK, which is run entirely by volunteers dedicated to preserving our language and heritage.

Kurian Jacob's unwavering commitment to his parents in Kerala shines through his regular weekly communication and financial support, ensuring they are well-cared for despite the miles apart.

PARENTS WELL PROTECTED IN KERALA

Dileep Kumar is confident



ADV. DILEEP KUMAR

Northampton, UK

As a solicitor, local councillor, and chairman of the Malayalam School in Northampton, UK, I have navigated the complexities of living abroad while ensuring my parents' well-being in Kerala, highlighting the unique challenges and triumphs of the Keralite diaspora.

Northampton has become a notable migration destination for Indians, especially Keralites, over recent years. When I arrived in 2009, there were few Keralite families; now, approximately 300 families reside here. A significant portion of Keralites in Northampton are nurses working at Northampton General Hospital. The community also includes students at Northampton University and entrepreneurs running local businesses, such as restaurants and hotels. Students often find employment in care homes and Indian restaurants, balancing their studies and work.

Challenges in Northampton

Northampton faces challenges, particularly in housing and healthcare, exacerbated by the influx of students. The student population's growth has led to a shortage of housing, making it difficult for them to find affordable accommodation. This increase has also strained local healthcare services, resulting in longer waiting times at hospitals. Recent changes in UK immigration rules have reduced the number of incoming students, which may alleviate these pressures.

Another pressing issue is the prevalence of visa scams. Unscrupulous recruitment agents have lured many individuals into paying exorbitant fees—ranging from 15 to 30 lakhs—for jobs in care homes, only to face unfair dismissal once in the UK. As a member of the Loka Kerala Sabha from the UK, I have urged the Kerala government to regulate these agencies. We understand that the government is in the process of enacting a law to control recruiting agents, a development I hope will be implemented soon.

Living abroad poses significant challenges, especially in ensuring the well-being of elderly parents back home. While Northampton has become a thriving community for Keralites, issues like housing, healthcare, and visa scams persist. My ongoing communication and support for my parents, coupled with reliance on friends and family in Kerala, help bridge the distance. As I continue my work with the Malayalam Mission and advocate for better regulation of recruitment agencies, I remain committed to balancing my responsibilities in the UK and caring for my parents in Kerala.

Survey Insights



“Maintaining daily communication with my parents and contributing to their specific needs, I ensure they receive the support they require despite the distance.”

BRISTOL



ANOOP SASIDHARAN

Bristol, UK

Living in Bristol, Anoop Sasidharan balances his professional life and commitment to his parents with unwavering dedication.

Bristol, my home in the southwest of England, is the birthplace of the renowned author JK Rowling and the UK's only European Green Capital. Recognised as one of the best places to live in the UK, Bristol is geographically near the southern coastal side of England. The city boasts

a significant presence of Keralites and other Indian communities, primarily working in the healthcare and IT sectors. Many Indians are employed at Southmed Hospital and BRI, two of the most reputed hospitals in the area. Additionally, Bristol is well-known for its aerospace manufacturing units, with many Indians working for Airbus, specifically in the manufacturing of flight wings and landing gears.

Bath, a town in Bristol, is ranked the first among England's must-visit places. The city offers job opportunities across multiple sectors, top-tier universities, excellent living conditions, and numerous tourist attractions, making it an ideal choice for those looking to settle in the UK.

My parents occasionally visit from India and enjoy exploring Bristol and its surroundings. They often talk about the ease of transportation from London and other parts of England, which adds to their appreciation of the city.

While the distance from my parents in Kerala presents challenges, a robust support system and regular communication help bridge the gap, ensuring their well-being and my peace of mind.



BRIDGING HEARTS AND HOMES

EMPOWERING THE DIASPORA THROUGH PROGRESSIVE LITERARY ACTIVITIES AND RELIEF EFFORTS IN MALTA



Jobi, a prominent figure within the Malayali community in Malta, has been instrumental in the success and growth of the Yuvadhara Cultural Forum. With a deep-rooted passion for cultural preservation and community support, Jobi has tirelessly worked to bring together the diaspora through various progressive initiatives.

Survey Insights



As Yuvadharma Cultural Forum, Malta celebrates its fifth year, it stands as a pillar of support and cultural enrichment for over 8,000 Malayalis residing in Malta. This forum has significantly contributed to the community through progressive literary activities, such as introducing Professor M.K. Sanu's works to European university libraries, and providing vital relief efforts including food distribution and travel assistance. Yuvadharma's initiatives also encompass sports, with their youth football team winning multiple titles, and arts, nurturing local talent. With a growing membership of over 7,000 across 20 youth community newsgroups, Yuvadharma continues to empower the Malayali diaspora, fostering a sense of unity and cultural preservation in Malta.

Survey Insights

Respondent :
Ramachandran Kutty Melbourne

1

**Communication
Frequency**
Every week

3

**Use of Remote Care
Services**
No, do not currently
need any remote care
services.

5

**Biggest Challenges for
Parents**
Difficulty with daily tasks
(e.g., housework,
errands)

2

Financial Support
Not applicable

4

**Confidence in Medical
Access**
Confident

6

**Confidence in Current
Care Methods**
Very confident

8

**Managing Care Over the
Next 5 Years**
Somewhat confident

10

**Societal Pressure
to Return**
No, does not feel
this pressure.

7

**Emotional Strain Due
to Distance**
No, manages emotions
well and focuses on staying
connected.

9

**Awareness of
Government Initiatives**
No, not aware of any
programs.

Survey Insights

Respondent:
BENILA AMBIKA, Melbourne



Survey Insights

Respondent SANDHYA, Melbourne

1

**Communication
Frequency**
Every week

3

**Use of Remote Care
Services**
No, do not currently
need any remote care
services

5

**Biggest Challenges for
Parents**
Other

2

Financial Support
I contribute to specific
needs

4

**Confidence in
Medical Access**
Confident

6

**Confidence in
Current Care Methods**
Very confident, well cared for,
and have ways to connect with
me regularl

8

**Managing Care Over the
Next 5 Years**
Somewhat confident

10

**Societal Pressure
to Return**
No, does not feel
this pressure

7

**Emotional Strain
Due to Distance**
No, manages emotions
well and focuses on staying
connected

9

**Awareness of
Government Initiatives**
Not aware of any programs

Survey Insights

Respondent:
Pramela R.N, Melbourne, Australia



Nostalgia Reimagined

Melbourne's Malayali community has transformed nostalgia into a vibrant daily experience, merging the essence of Kerala with Australian life.



LALITHA GOURI

Dr Lalitha Gouri is a freelance writer and researcher based in Melbourne, Australia.

Melbourne, two decades ago, was a very different city. It had a sizeable Malayali community, but as a newly uprooted young family in Australia, life felt very different. This was the situation in most Australian cities and places around the world. We lived with heavy nostalgia, weighed down for almost 23 months before diverting all our savings for that lifesaving ticket back home for a few weeks of bliss.

Food was a top item of nostalgia. We almost felt deprived with no access to culinary delights like chemba rice, banana chips, avial, pazhampori, pappadam, kappa—the list goes on. In those years, it wasn't unusual for us to hunt for white rice (the only available variety) and spices at a handful of Indian grocery stores across the suburbs.

Fast forward, and almost every suburb of Melbourne has an Indian store selling specific varieties of Kerala food. Now, what do we miss in terms of food? Almost nothing. It's common to find several varieties and brands of banana chips direct from Kerala, shelves stacked with curry powders, bags of Palakkadan matta rice, sweets like ariyunda, ellunda, achappam, chakka varatti, Kozhikodan halwa, Guruvayoor pappadam, and products like Chandrika soap, Medimix, murivenna, pindathailam. Seeing Kerala brand names written in Malayalam provides instant visual satisfaction before we even buy and taste them.

From traditional Kerala cuisine to Malayalam theatre and education, discover how the essence of Kerala permeates Melbourne, creating lasting memories for the next generation.

In Melbourne, several Kerala restaurants offer a slice of home with Thattukada-style dishes, Kerala porotta-beef curry, and more. Malayali-owned restaurants serve special feasts for Onam and Easter, and there's even a Kallu Shaap. Shops provide Kerala sari and kasavumundu, making home feel closer.

One key item missing was the nenthrippazham and banana leaves for sadya. This changed when Malayalis in northern Queensland started plantations of our cherished banana variety, now distributed across Australia. Recently, we even got real banana leaves for sadya, couriered to Melbourne. Pricey, but priceless for the experience. This has significantly eased the nostalgia.

The growth in the Malayali population isn't just numerical but driven by enhanced interactions enabled by technology and policies. The distance between Australia and India has diminished, making Australia a mature multicultural, egalitarian society. Migrants initially came for work and better opportunities for their children but now settle, proudly maintaining their culture, language, and individuality. Australia has become a true home away from home, where children grow up and parents join them. However, first-generation migrants still have deep cultural roots in Kerala, living its essence in their leisure. It will be interesting to see how the second generation creates their Kerala memories in their new homeland.

Other than Kerala cuisine, what do we have for the next generation of Malayalis, our kids who grow up here? What do we offer them besides food, which feels like home, our culture, the root they have to draw from all their life? We have been responsible and enterprising over the decades, replanting almost every aspect of Kerala life here for those who choose to seek them. Religion, politics, arts, creative pursuits.

Literature, language, films, and publications are carving a space in our Australian life. Major Malayalam movies now premiere on the same day as in Kerala, not just in niche, arty theatres but mainstream multiplexes. Recently, a Mammooty Fans Association was formed in Melbourne, celebrating recent Mammooty movies with much fanfare.

Visits from film and music personalities from Kerala have been common and popular for many decades. Recently, this trend has evolved into literature and Malayalam theatre. Writers visit regularly. Malayalis here are publishing books—poetry, short stories, novels, memoirs—interweaving the experience of both cultures. Malayalam theatre is slowly but strongly coming to Melbourne. Occasional theatre festivals with established artists from Kerala offer a feast for drama enthusiasts. The opportunity to experience such cultural variety firsthand will certainly be part of the second generation's nostalgia.

SBS Malayalam, a mainstream radio station with daily service, online presence, and podcasts, bridges the gap for many as it focuses on the Malayali community and connects them to relevant local news and topics in our language. Malayalam segments on M4TV and 92.3 FM keep Malayalam on the air. Malayalam classes run by a dedicated team of teachers, with a brilliantly developed curriculum merging the language with local life, have succeeded in getting Malayalam as a second language in the main curriculum of vocational education schools in Victoria. Kids studying Malayalam as a subject in school was a distant dream a few years ago.

In Melbourne, the Kerala experience is becoming more complete. The once homogeneous diaspora



has diversified. Despite these changes, our primary identity as Malayalis remains intact. Whether you seek belonging through political parties, ideologies, or religious denominations, Melbourne offers it all.

For us nostalgia was everything Kerala meant; it was a retreat to the homeland for that much awaited, passing holiday. Now Kerala has settled here; it permeates everyday life. The flavour spreads slowly, and it is there to stay, for our children to make their memories and will be part of their nostalgia as they spread wings.

AGEING- THE KERALA STORY



SHEEBA V. T

HOD in Economics
NSS College, Changanassery

While Kerala boasts the silver lining of longevity, this article delves into the state's innovative policies in navigating the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly ageing population.

If you ask me what the demographic footprint of development is, it's ageing. The global phenomenon resulting from increasing life expectancy, declining fertility, and birth rates is poised to transform the twenty-first century. The shape of the population pyramid has changed, and ageing is the inevitable demographic reality. The changing size and composition of households, living arrangements, intergenerational ties, and migrations

have inspired nations worldwide to design innovative policies for dynamic human resource management and sustainable development.

An increasing trend in the percentage share of the elderly to the total population has been observed in India since 1961. It has increased from 5.6% in 1961 to 7.4% in 2001, 8.6% in 2011, and an estimated 10.1% in 2021 [Elderly in India, MoSPI]. However, the proportion of elderly people in Kerala's population is above the national average. It was 10.5% in 2001, which increased to 12.6 in 2011 and an estimated 16.5 in 2021. The projected figures for 2031 for India and Kerala are 13.1 and 20.9, respectively. While the general population in Kerala has a growth rate of 0.5%, it is 2.3% for the elderly [Rajan & Mishra 2014]. Reports of population projections by the Registrar General of India also convey that the old-age dependency ratio or number of aged persons per 100 persons in the age group 15-59 in Kerala is also higher when compared to the national average. All of this is not surprising since Kerala has the highest life expectancy at birth for both males and females in India, along with higher female literacy and lower fertility. [SRS Report, 2014-18]. Is it not something to celebrate? The priority given to social welfare and heavy investments in health and education has paid off.

The impacts of ageing on any economy are lowering labour force participation rates, saving rates, increasing health expenditures, and stress on social security pensions. Women live longer than men, and Kerala, with the most favourable sex ratio in the country, experiences the feminisation of ageing, and more and more elderly and vulnerable women are demanding care and attention. But Kerala has managed the situation well and has employed active policies to counter the myriad issues the elderly face.

The old age pension scheme was introduced in Kerala as early as 1960, making it one of the first states in India to do so. Kerala was a trailblazer in implementing a senior citizen policy under the Social Justice Department, which later evolved into the State Old Age policy in 2013. The primary goals were to promote physical activities, improve health systems, offer institutional care, and ensure economic security.

And how has the Kerala government addressed the issue? The Social Security Mission of the government has three innovative programs under Vayomithram, Aswasakiranam, and Caregivers for institutions. Vayomithram caters to municipalities and urban areas and provides free medicines, palliative care, counselling services, and health care. Aswasakiranam is a scheme that provides financial support to physically disabled elders in rural and urban areas. The third scheme provides assistance to care providers in old-age homes. The Local Self Govt. departments are given financial assistance to open old-age homes and daycare centres. To meet the multi-morbidity situation of the elderly, schemes like Vayomadhuram, Vayoamrutham and Mandahasam are taken up, and Sayamprabha provides daycare facilities in association with LSGD.

Kerala is the first state in India to initiate a pain and palliative care policy, and MFHW (2012) reports that the state has 841 out of 908 palliative services in India. Palliative care projects under the NRHM operate in all districts. There are also prominent NGOs and charitable organisations operating in the state which provide commendable palliative services. A Government initiative, Smruthipadham takes care of the elderly with dementia and other cognitive disorders-promoting awareness, setting up memory clinics, and providing health care. Harsham Geriatric Care addresses the issues of the elderly across the state.

The security of the elders needs to be paid utmost attention; notably, the state has also recorded low crime rates against the elderly. The crime rate per one lakh population against senior citizens was, on average, 26.7 in India compared to 16.3 in Kerala, as against 93.8 in Delhi, 85.4 in Gujarat, 73.2 in M.P., and 33.4 in Tamil Nadu. [Crime Statistics in India-2019]. The elite Kerala society is highly aware of the need for

Vayomithram



Aswasakiranam

Vayomadhuram



Vayoamrutham

Mandahasam

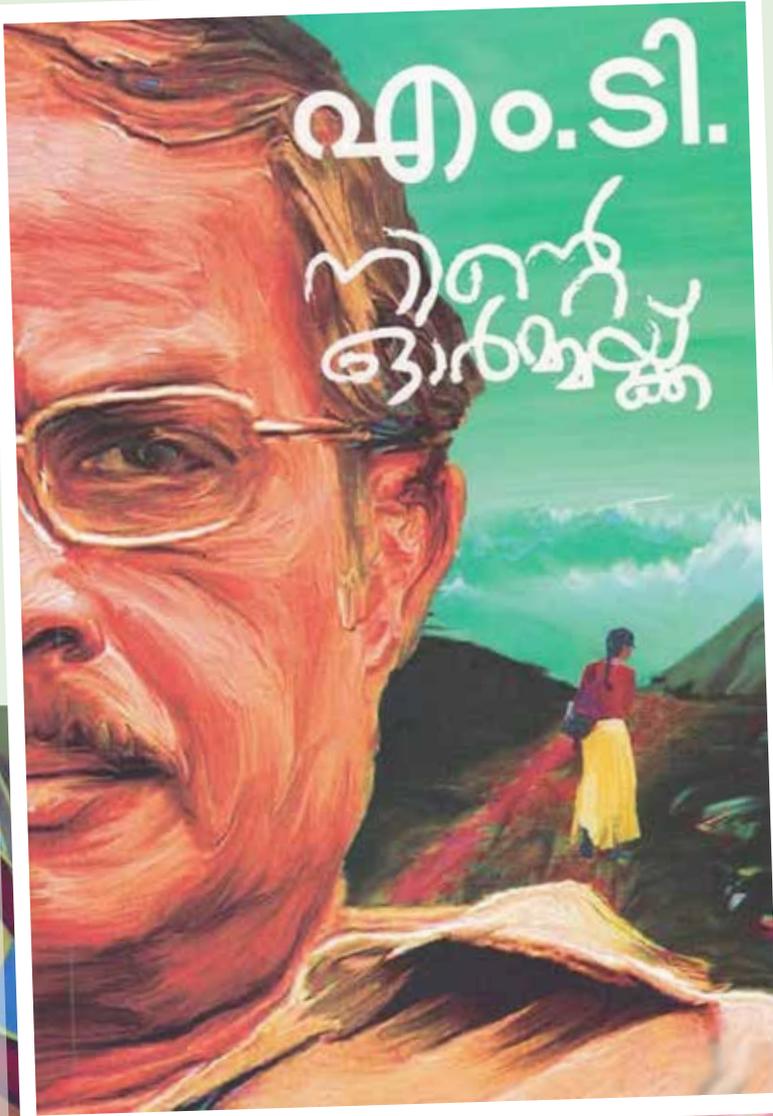


Sayamprabha

care and security for its elders. The Government has resolved the multidimensional issue commendably and can guide the other states.

Approximately 10% of the population in Kerala has been exposed to international migration, and the state accounted for about 19% of the total remittances in India in 2017 [Kerala Migration Survey-2018]. Remittances constituted 19.3% of the state's NSDP in 2018. The long history of migration has globalised the Kerala economy, and the globe-trotting migrant Malayalis can successfully manage their elderly members because of the health care and support system available in the state.

It has rightly been observed that age is the ladder to wisdom, and ageing is the ripening to perfection. Old age should positively be considered a harvest season, reaping the fruits of wisdom and insight, not the loss of youthfulness. In most geriatric studies, the major problem faced by the elderly is loneliness and insecurity. The young ones in the family should be taught to care for them and give them the company they so badly crave. This culture can address the intergenerational gap inside families as well. Extending a helping hand to them whenever and wherever they need it will provide them with emotional security. Then, for the elderly, the world will be a better place to live. Mechanisation and digitalisation are here, but humanity is still the greatest virtue. A unified approach of the society towards geriatric care is the key. It is time to care for those who cared for us; it should be considered both an honour and a duty. Please treat them with dignity and let their sunset be calm and cheerful.



വിളരിയ നിറത്തിൽ
വട്ടമുഖവും വിടർന്ന
കണ്ണുകളും കഴുത്തുവരെ
വളർത്തിയ ചുരുണ്ട
ചെമ്പൻമുടിയുള്ള ഒരു
പെൺകുട്ടി... എന്നെക്കാളും
ഉയരം കാണും

അച്ഛൻ
അവളോടെന്തോ പറഞ്ഞു.
എനിക്കജ്ഞതമായിരുന്നു
ആ ഭാഷ.

THE MALAYALI LEGACY IN CEYLON



**ULLATTIL MANMADHAN
(MADDY)**

History Enthusiast, North Carolina, USA

Exploring the lost stories of Malayali workers in Ceylon, their cultural impact, and enduring connections to Kerala.

Ceylon or Sri Lanka, the Taprobane of the Greek sailors, the Utopia of Thomas More, a territory controlled by the 16th Century Portuguese, and the home base for the 17th -18th century Dutch VOC, was also a fertile island where cinnamon grew and where the British cultivated coffee and tea. The Adam's Peak on the island was revered by the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims, while the island itself was considered the home of Ravana and where Sita of the Ramayana was interned. What many may not recall is that during the first few decades of the 20th century, it was also home to many thousands of Malayali workers, whose story is lost in the mists of time.

While reports on the lives of the plantation Tamils can be read here and there, hardly any could be found on the travails of the many Malayalis who worked in the lowlands and cities. A lone mention can be found in a popular short story and some afterthoughts penned by the great novelist, MT Vasudevan Nair, whose father worked in Ceylon. The story Ninte Ormakku (In your memory), and the travelog on Kadugannawa provide you but a brief and blurry view into the private life of a Malayali in Ceylon.

MT's short story, based on a real-life incident involving his father, is about a man who sets up shop at Kadugannawa and brings home to Kerala a cute little girl named Leela, rumoured to be his daughter borne to a Lankan mistress, who then goes on to spend a happy vacation there with her stepbrother. Facing pressure at the ancestral home from his wife and relatives, who refuse to accept Leela, the father goes back with her, never to return. Many years later, MT travels to Ceylon to see if he can dig up some information on the girl or his father, but fails to find any and pens his travelogue Kadugannawa Oru Yathra Kurippu, a poignant retelling of the events in the third person. MT clarifies in a later interview that the parentage of the girl is hazy and that it may have been his father's friend's daughter.



The intercourse between the island and India dates back to ancient times and is mentioned in various epics and legends. It is only natural that folk travelled across the short stretch of water separating them, perhaps over the Ram Setu bridge, or on sailboats as overseas trade intensified. Buddhism was prevalent not only in Ceylon but also in the Cheranad/Malayala part of Tamilakam (the area now occupied by Kerala) and monks would have surely moved back and forth.

We come across mentions (Sillapadhikaram) of Gajabahu coming to Vanchi to meet King Chenguttavan for the consecration ceremony at the Kannaki temple (Kodungallur Bhagavathy) in the 2nd century. Following this and his return with a Kannaki idol to Ceylon, the Pattini (Pathini) cult manifested itself in Lanka. The people of Mattakkalappu or the Batticaloa were the first Malayala immigrants who arrived in Lanka, apparently at Gajabahu's invitation. They practiced matrilineal customs and spoke archaic Tamil. There are many such legends concerning Malayala kings and Lankan rulers of mainland origins. Similarities in architecture could be found in certain regions, and also between the martial arts -Kerala's Kalarippayattu and Lanka's Haramba Salva. Mercenaries and the Kuruppu trainers travelled back



By 1936, the campaign had become virulent and Gunasinha encouraged his supporters with slogans like 'Kochi Marana' (Kill the Cochinis), 'Ceylon for Ceylonese', etc., and policies were devised to exclude Indians from Ceylonese civil services, the Ceylon municipality, port positions, and so on.

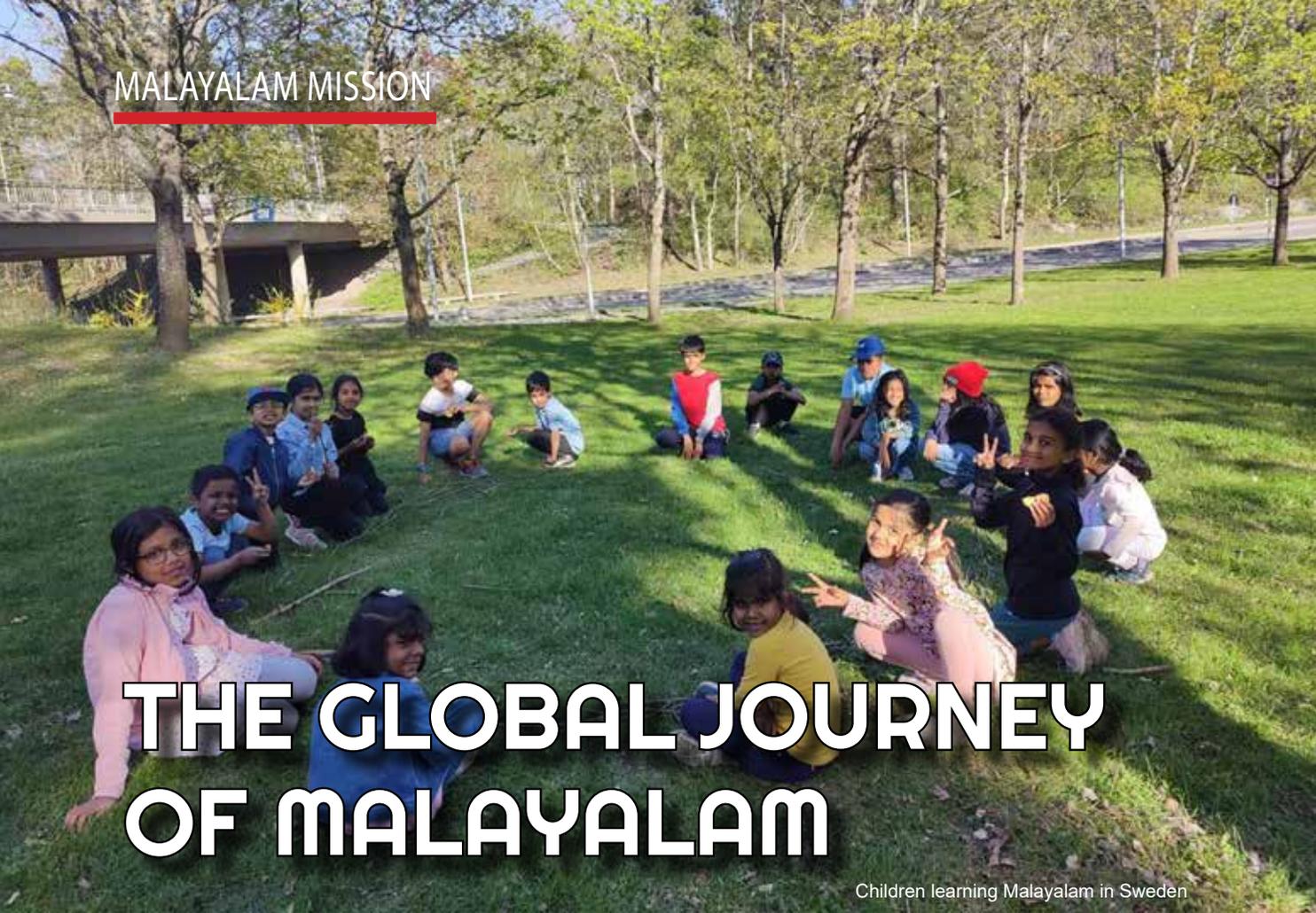
CR DeSilva, an event that became a personal affront to Gunasinha. This was exacerbated when some of Gunasinha's strikes elsewhere were broken by strike-breakers (blacklegs or Karingalees) brought in by the British owners from Madras, some rumoured to have been Malayalis. Sensing general reticence against the Malayalis among the Sinhalese, Gunasinha started attacks against the community, using inflammatory language, articles in the press and enforced by his retinue of goondas and rowdies, between the two communities.

By 1936, the campaign had become virulent and Gunasinha encouraged his supporters with slogans like 'Kochi Marana' (Kill the Cochinis), 'Ceylon for Ceylonese', etc., and policies were devised to exclude Indians from Ceylonese civil services, the Ceylon municipality, port positions, and so on. In 1938, as the Ceylon government discontinued the employment

of Malayali labour, the British Indian government retaliated by banning all migration, creating further unrest. AK Gopalan from Kerala's Congress Socialist party who later visited his LSSP comrades in 1939-40, for example, had his meetings disrupted by Gunasinha's men. For a while, activism subsided due to the country's focus on WW II. Nevertheless, Malayali immigration slowed to a trickle and Malayali non-estate workers started to return home, ending the two-decade period when hundreds of thousands of Malayalis teemed the Lankan labour scene. Some things remained, especially Malayali food items such as the Vellayappam and Idiyappam originally brought in by the 'Appu' cooks, as well as the Puttu and curry, to later become Lankan favourites.

The turbulent days have by now been forgotten, only memories remain, and some may recall M Gopala Menon, who moved from Palghat to Kandy, for it was one of his sons returning to Madras who shot to fame not only in filmdom but also in politics, to end up as the revered leader of Tamil Nadu. Others may remember Madhavan from Palghat, who performed Kathakali across Lanka in the '40s, and also the many radio jockeys who worked in Radio Ceylon. Last but not least, there was A.T.Kovoor who continued his tireless fight against godmen and superstition.

Today there are still many of our estranged brethren left there, who braved the world war, the 60s, the LTTE years, the many economic downturns, etc., to lead a calmer life. I am sure they remember occasionally their connections with Kerala, her customs, traditions, and festivals. Hopefully, this article will remind them and us of a time, when the waters were not so clear.



THE GLOBAL JOURNEY OF MALAYALAM

Children learning Malayalam in Sweden



JACOB ABRAHAM

Project Head Radio Malayalam,
Malayalam Mission, Writer

A new generation of Malayali children around the world is discovering the beauty and richness of their mother tongue, Malayalam, through the Malayalam Mission

When young Sidharth began attending Malayalam classes in Stockholm, Sweden, his Malayalam vocabulary was quite limited. “Amma,” “Acha,” “Ammoomma,” and “Appopa” were among the few words he could speak. Concerned about this, his parents decided to enrol him in a nearby Malayalam Mission study centre. After a few weeks of dedicated learning, Sidharth began to grasp the language by actively listening, speaking, and writing alphabets and words. He enjoyed the interactive learning environment at his new school, where education was both enjoyable and engaging. Now, he confidently recites famous poems and stories in Malayalam, much to the delight of his parents. Like Sidharth, over 55,000 children from the expatriate community of Kerala are also learning their mother tongue, Malayalam, and embracing Kerala’s rich culture through the Malayalam Mission. As third-generation migrants in Europe, Sidharth’s parents take pride in passing on their mother tongue, Malayalam, and Kerala’s cultural heritage to their children.

Yes! Malayalam is going global. The Malayalam Mission is at the forefront of promoting the Malayalam language and culture worldwide. Established in 2010 as a vision of the Government of Kerala, the mission aims to preserve and nurture our mother tongue and Kerala culture among the Pravasi community globally. The “Malayalam Pallikoodam” in Sweden has been instrumental in imparting our culture and language to the younger generation, thanks to the dedicated teachers. With over 50 children enrolled in Malayalam classes across two schools – one in Stockholm and a newly opened one in Gothenburg – the young ones can now converse with their grandparents in Kerala in their mother tongue, thus strengthening their bond

with their roots. Our native language is an integral part of our identity. The relevance of the Malayalam Mission continues to grow, especially as more Malayalis migrate to Western countries. Ginu Samuel, the Secretary of the Malayalam Mission in Sweden and a member of Loka Kerala Sabha, commended the initiative, saying, "Kudos to the Malayalam Mission and the Kerala government for this wonderful initiative!" As a software professional and travel writer, Mr. Ginu Samuel is an ardent advocate for the Malayalam language through the Malayalam Mission, and he is joined by many other young professionals who are similarly committed to spreading Malayalam and Kerala culture across the globe. The Malayalam Mission is active in Asian, African, and European countries on all continents.

Apart from its main objective of teaching Malayalam to expatriate Malayali students, the Malayalam Mission fosters connections between Kerala and the global community. Murukan Kattakada, a renowned poet and Malayalam Mission Director, says, "Bhasha Kondu Adayalapeduthiya Bhoopadam," which echoes with our tagline. The Malayalam Mission is a programme dedicated to promoting the Malayalam language and Kerala culture. This year, we are expanding our reach to serve communities across the globe. Proudly supported by the Government of Kerala, our mission is to provide Malayalam language and cultural education to children residing outside Kerala. Our services cater to the expatriate community, offering Malayalam classes to individuals aged 6-60, thereby promoting language and cultural exchange.

We offer a curriculum-based study system consisting of the Kanikonna Certificate Course, Suryakanthi Diploma Course, Ambal Higher Diploma Course, and Neelakurinji Senior Higher Diploma Course. These courses form the basis of our four-level study module. Upon completion of the final level Neelakurinji Higher Diploma Course, students are eligible to take the Neelakurinji Thulayatha Pareeksha, which is conducted by the General Education Department of Kerala with the support of the Malayalam Mission. This year, we successfully conducted the Neelakurinji Senior Higher Diploma Course Certificate Examination with the assistance of Pareeksha Bhavan, General Education Department of Kerala, and achieved a remarkable 96% pass rate. This achievement is particularly significant as it was the first time we administered this examination. It represents a long-held aspiration of both the teachers and students of the Malayalam Mission ever since its establishment.

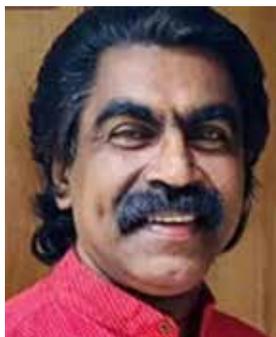
As we are all aware, Kerala's global migrants are dispersed across the world, and for many of them, Malayalam holds great emotional significance. We aim to establish 150 or more chapters worldwide this year. Both our global and Indian chapters are operating effectively, with numerous study centres



MURUKAN KATTAKADA
Director, Malayalam Mission

actively engaged in teaching Malayalam under these chapters. We refer to our language teachers as language warriors, as they are committed cultural ambassadors of Kerala. We are providing Malayalam language training to migrant workers who come to Kerala for employment through the Ananya Malayalam project. This initiative enables them to access information about legal rights, social security, and other services offered by the Kerala Government. In addition, the Malayalam Mission is furthering its reach by establishing Kutty Malayalam Clubs in various schools in GCC countries. Furthermore, we have initiated an ambitious project called Vishwa Malayalam with the goal of establishing a GCC country as a 100% Malayalam-literate community.

Malayalam Mission supports our study centres by providing them with textbooks, study modules, and an annual grant. Each year, we organise three camps: Malayanmma, Kadalasu Thony, and Guru Malayalam. Through these training sessions, we aim to creatively empower our selected teachers



VINOD VAISAKHI
Registrar, Malayalam Mission



and students. Malayamma is commemorated on February 21, World Mother Tongue Day, during which we honor our chapters and teachers with Excellence Awards such as Sugathanjali Pravasi Puraskaram, Kanikonna Puraskaram, Bodhi Adhyapaka Puraskaram, Bhasha Mayooram Puraskaram, Bhasha Prathibha Puraskaram, and Pravasi Sahithya Puraskaram. Furthermore, we present a literary award for the best Malayalam book written by a Pravasi writer, recognising the migrant literature of Kerala. Malayalam Mission operates as a media house, promoting the Malayalam language and literature worldwide through platforms such as Radio Malayalam Online Radio (www.radiomalayalam.in), Bhoomi Malayalam Magazine, Pookalam web magazine, Bhoomi Malayalam Open Online Course, and various social media platforms.

We take great pride in promoting Malayali culture in a unique way through our Souvenir

Shop. Our shop offers a variety of items, including sarees, dhotis, bags, mugs, and more, all featuring beautifully etched Malayalam letters. Our goal is to elevate the status of Malayalam as a growing language in communities around the world. Today, the Malayalam Mission is widely recognised as a leader in language instruction and cultural exchange. The Institute of Management in Governance of the Kerala Government has honoured our Bhoomimalayalam Open Online Course with the Best Learning Portal award for e-learning in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

“As we all know, migration has been a reality in Kerala since the 1950s. In the first phase, we went for livelihood; now, our students seek study opportunities in foreign universities. Malayalam Mission is connecting Kerala to the rest of the world via language and culture. Our work ranges from setting up teaching centres in different parts of the world to bring the scattered world of Malayali under one roof of mother



tongue, Malayalam,” says Mr. Vinod Vaisakhi, Registrar, Malayalam Mission.

In each academic year, the Malayalam Mission operates with a dedicated academic curriculum. “Similar to any school in Kerala, students experience the joy of learning at our study centre; we organise Praveshanolsavam during admission time and Padanolsavam during annual exam time. We also offer online classes for our teachers to support and strengthen them through on-site training sessions,” explained Mr. T Satheesh Kumar, Language Teacher at Malayalam Mission.

The Malayalam Mission plays a crucial role in connecting people from neighbouring states through their mother tongue and culture, with a strong presence in almost all states in India. “The Karnataka Chapter of Malayalam Mission has created opportunities for expatriate children in the state to learn Malayalam. Over the 12 years of our existence, we have established a presence in districts such as Bangalore, Mysore, and Udupi and are actively expanding to other districts as well. Throughout these years, approximately 500 dedicated volunteers from various walks of life have helped nearly 5000 students

“The Malayalam Mission is at the forefront of promoting the Malayalam language and culture worldwide.”

learn Malayalam.”

In addition to our weekly Malayalam classes, we host a variety of academic events such as workshops, seminars, and competitions to enrich students’ language, communication, and interpersonal skills. We also spearhead initiatives aimed at fostering students’ overall development through social responsibility, environmental efforts, and cultural activities. Our passion and dedication have even motivated native Kannada speakers to engage in learning Malayalam. In essence, this endeavour goes beyond language acquisition. It has allowed us to establish a dynamic platform for cultural exchange, where students can appreciate the rich heritage of Kerala while embracing Karnataka’s culture, transcending barriers of religion, community, and background,” shared Hitha Venugopalan, Secretary of the Malayalam Mission’s Karnataka chapter. Today, the Malayalam Mission serves as a connective thread for people from Kerala residing in other states of India and abroad, offering a space for language, culture, and unity. With a strong presence in 25 states in India and 60 countries worldwide, Malayalam is steadily gaining global recognition.

Programmes by Malayalam Mission

1. Malayalam Mission Padanakendram : Establishes study centres globally for interactive and engaging learning.
2. Ananya Malayalam Project: Provides language training to migrant workers in Kerala.
3. Vishwa Malayalam Project: Aims to create a 100% Malayalam-literate community in a GCC country.
4. Kutty Malayalam Clubs: Sets up clubs in international and Indian schools to promote language and culture.
5. Comprehensive Study Modules: Offers courses like Kanikonna Certificate, Sooryakanthi D Diploma Course, Ambal Higher Diploma and Neelakurinji Senior Higher Diploma.
6. Cultural Camps: Organises camps like Malayamma, Kadalasuthoni and Guru Malayalam for creative empowerment.
7. Excellence Awards: Honours chapters and teachers with awards
8. Migrant Literature Awards: Recognizes the best Malayalam book by a Pravasi writer.
9. Media and Publications: Promotes language and literature through Radio Malayalam, Bhoomimalayalam Magazine and Pookalam web magazines.
10. Souvenir Shop: Sells items with Malayalam letters to promote the language.
11. Training for Teachers: Provides online classes and on-site training for teachers.
12. Workshops and Seminars: Hosts events to improve students’ skills.
13. Social and Cultural Activities: Initiates programs for students’ development and cultural exchange.
14. Global Expansion: Aims to establish 150 chapters worldwide
15. BMOOC- Open Online Course

THE HEARTBEAT OF GLOBAL HEALTHCARE



JOBY BABY

Registered Nurse
Kuwait

Nurses play a crucial role in both public and private healthcare systems. They are responsible for the well-being of their patients throughout their time in a medical facility. Collaborating with doctors and other medical professionals, they provide essential medical care, monitor patients' health and vital signs, advocate for them, and create a comforting environment. As a result, nurses have earned a reputation as one of the most trusted professionals worldwide. Kerala, often referred to as the nursing capital of India, is renowned for offering its nurses exceptional theoretical and practical training. Currently, over half a million nurses from Kerala are employed overseas, providing care to patients abroad while also improving their own and their families' lives back home.





Supported by robust initiatives from the Kerala Government and agencies like NoRKA-Roots and ODEPC, Kerala's nurses continue to gain international recognition, with successful recruitment drives and training programs enhancing their opportunities abroad, including prestigious agreements with countries such as the UK, Germany, and Canada.

The Kerala Government always supports Nurses

Two government agencies, NoRKA-Roots, the field agency of the Department of Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NoRKA), and Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultants (ODEPC), a Kerala government undertaking, have together recruited 13,000 nurses to various countries, including those in Europe, over the years. NoRKA-Roots recently entered into agreements with government agencies from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Maldives, Canada, the U.K., Germany, and so on to recruit nurses. The global reputation of Kerala nurses has helped government agencies enter into agreements with foreign employers to recruit nurses from here. The government is providing training for selected candidates in IELTS and the OET exams. The ODEPC is providing training in German and Dutch to facilitate migration to Europe. The recruitment of nurses has gained good momentum in the past five years. According to experts, individual migration to various countries would be 5-10 times the migration through government agencies.

Other initiatives for Nurses

- In 2023, the Government of Kerala successfully facilitated the release of 19 Kerala nurses who were jailed in Kuwait for violating residency rules by the Kuwait Manpower Committee.
- The government worked to evacuate over 1000 medical students, including Malayalis, from Ukraine during wartime.



- NHS Wales is poised to receive 250 nurses and doctors from Kerala following an agreement between the governments of the two nations.
- The government of Kerala provided assistance in evacuating nurses from conflict zones in Iraq, Palestine, Israel, and Yemen.

Nursing, a profession that commands the utmost respect, saw Kerala nurses making invaluable contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like frontline soldiers, they donned PPE kits and cared for patients with compassion and selflessness. This dedication is not new; Kerala has a tradition of nursing excellence, and Malayali nurses are known worldwide for their commitment. Their role in emergency care and their contribution to the state's economy should be acknowledged and celebrated.

THE CHRONICLER OF COMMON PEOPLE

A gust of hot wind blew in from the sea.
The shamal, the winds of bad omen.



ASWATHY DAS MANGALATH

Assistant Professor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham

Over the years, back home, their wives, with no word from their men, grew impatient, frigid, indifferent, and, finally, distant. Their flesh lost hunger, blood its youthful gurgle, their dreams lay thwarted prematurely in the untimely sweeps of frustration and angst.”

— *Shamal Days* (Sabin Iqbal)

In March when the last vestiges of winter greyed the skies over Polish city of Poznan, an Indian novelist was taking questions from the audience on ‘a changing India’ at Poznan Book Fair following a brief reading from the Polish translations of his novel *The Cliffhangers*.

Later he signed copies of the Polish translation of the novel, which is set in his hometown Varkala and the Cliff, and tells the story of people living in and around it.

Sabin Iqbal is one of the very few contemporary Indian writers who have been translated into Polish. With the translated edition of his debut novel, which *The Hindu* called ‘a poignant tale of growing up in a place that is on the cusp of cataclysmic change caused



SABIN IQBAL

by the spread of religious jingoism, Iqbal has taken what *The India Today* described ‘beautifully maps different aspects of Indian life: small-town India’s English-speaking aspirations’ to all-too new readers in Poland.

In the realm of contemporary Indian writing in English, Iqbal emerges as a striking voice, crafting narratives that seamlessly blend the complexities of expatriate life with the resilience of the rural spirit. Through his critically acclaimed novels, *The Cliffhangers* (Aleph, 2019) and *Shamal Days* (HarperCollins, 2020) Iqbal has carved a niche for himself, capturing the nuances of the Indian diaspora’s experiences in the Arabian Gulf region while offering pro-found insights into the lives of men and women navigating the intricate web of cultural identities and societal expectations.

Shortlisted for The Best First Book at TATA Litfest in 2019, *The Cliffhangers* is a searing exploration of communal divides and shifting societal

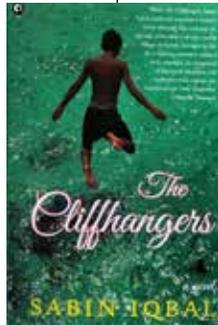
dynamics in India. The novel revolves around a group of childhood friends—Moosa, Usman, Thaha, and Jahangir—whose lives are caught up amid escalating religious and political turmoil.

The characters in *The Cliffhangers* are a tapestry of emotions, masterfully crafted, multi-dimensional figures, grappling with resistance, anger, and disillusionment, but hanging on to a flicker of hope. No wonder that *The Cliffhangers* is now part of the University of Kerala's BA English curriculum.

A nephew of the late filmmaker M Azad, who made perhaps the first Malayalam film on the lives of Gulf expatriates (*Vilkanundu Swapnangal*), Iqbal in *Shamal Days* gets deeper into the expatriate experience, through the lens of Abbas, a lonely editor of a newspaper who finds himself caught in a web of lies and ensuing troubles and in a cocoon of his own loneliness.

If *The Cliffhangers* zips by like a cool summer breeze—like a refreshing lemonade on a hot day—*Shamal Days* carries a heavy weight. Set in the context of the West Asian conflict, it delves into Abbas's deep suffering, a reflection, perhaps, of the author's own experiences during his 15 years in the Gulf.

Love, denial, and guilt are threads in Iqbal's writing, creating complex human relationships and characters grappling with intense internal conflicts. Moosa's forbidden love for his sister-in-law and Abbas's extramarital affair, for example, become mirrors reflecting societal realities. But he avoids moral pronouncements, instead presenting their narratives without judgement, inviting readers to become active participants. In a world quick to condemn, Iqbal seeks humanity's potential for good.



Iqbal's female characters serve as powerful voices, shedding light on the unique struggles and triumphs of women navigating the expatriate and rural lives. They shatter stereotypes. Rasheeda, Thahira, Moosa's mother... Their minds are intricate, their struggles real, and their willpower unshakeable. They often leave men bewildered by the depths of their experience. Shrouded in an aura of mystery, these women, make powerful choices, their strength a constant counterpoint to the helplessness of the men around them.

If V.S. Naipaul serves as a source of inspiration for Iqbal, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's writing is his bible. Paul Beatty's fluid writing style has also influenced him. Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize win served as a pivotal moment for Iqbal, prompting him to realise that he too had a story to tell. Though firmly rooted in realism, the author, inspired by Marquez, is not afraid to take a magical turn.

The novelist next door

Sabin writes with a genuine heart. This ingenuity spills onto the page, where his novels capture the vulnerability of the human heart. He crafts characters not as heroes or villains, but as complex individuals with flaws and virtues mirroring our own. This allows readers to see themselves reflected, fostering a deeper connection and inviting them to make their own judgments about the characters' journeys. The author's narratives also emphasise the importance of mending fractured ties, underscoring the therapeutic strength of forgiveness.

As Curator of Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters (MBIFL), he has brought to Kerala diverse voices from around the world, and has also celebrated the richness of Indian literature, which has firmed up his position as a prominent figure in Indian literary landscape.

His next two novels are coming out from Penguin Random House (*Tales from Qabristan*) and Westland (*A Calamitous Afternoon*), both set in Kerala. While *Tales* is set in a backwater village somewhere south of Thiruvananthapuram, *A Calamitous Afternoon* is totally set in the city of Thiruvananthapuram.

Iqbal's works offer a poignant menagerie of the lived experiences of ordinary individuals, capturing the essence of their aspirations, struggles, and resilience in the face of adversity. A chronicler of the common man.





MALAYALI EXCELLENCE CELEBRATED AT CANNES WITH MAJOR WINS

A.CHANDRASEKHAR

Film Critic

Malayalis have made a significant mark at the Cannes International Film Festival, with Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine as Light" winning the Grand Prix and Santhosh Sivan being honoured with the prestigious Pierre Angénieux Excel Lens in Cinematography, showcasing the immense talent and dedication of Kerala's artists on the global stage.

After a span of 30 years, an Indian cinema has created history at the Cannes International Film Festival, France, by winning the Grand Prix honour, the second biggest award after the Palm d'Or. A small-budget yet sincere movie written and directed by FTII alumna Payal Kapadia created ripples with its nomination itself, not only for being an Indian movie competing in the festival after a long gap, but also for being the debut of a woman filmmaker, which narrates the lives of three ordinary Indian women. "All We Imagine as Light" made the Malayali proud for obvious reasons. Centered mainly on the lives of Malayali nurses working in Mumbai

Metro, 80% of the film is shot in Malayalam with brilliant actors Kani Kusriti and Divya Prabha in the lead, along with a bunch of other actors from the state in its star cast. The movie started its seeding in the year 2018 when the writer-director got introduced to a home nurse dedicated to looking after her ailing grandmother and sprouted out after four years of disciplined planning and scripting. All along this journey, she was creatively associated by one of her juniors at the Pune FTII, another Malayali, Robin Joy from Palakkad, Kerala, as her assistant director.

Payal's achievement at Cannes is simply unparalleled for Indian cinema as none of our movies have entered the final list of nominations to its competitive section ever since Malayali director Shaji N Karun's "Swaham" (1994). This time, "All We Imagine as Light" got the same score (6 stars with 3.3 points) from the critics as the American movie "Anora," written and directed by Sean Baker, which won the Palm d'Or. "All We Imagine as Light" was adjudged for the Grand Prix award by an international jury of eminent film personalities from all over the world, headed by actor and producer Greta Gerwig.

Though many movies have been made about the lives of Mumbai before, including Mira Nair's "Salaam Bombay" that won the Camera d'Or in 1988 and Oscar-winning "Slumdog Millionaire" (2008) directed by Danny Boyle, all of them focused on the lives and aspirations of the slums of Dharavi. On the contrary, mainstream Bollywood concentrated on the underworld of Mumbai in movies like "Shootout at Lokhandwala." But Payal's "All We Imagine as Light" is extremely different as it portrays the lives of immigrant workers from other parts of the country. It revolves around Prabha and Anu, two nurses from Kerala working in a rundown hospital in Mumbai city along with another lady who is striving hard to rescue her home from the realtors.

We meet Prabha (Kani Kusriti), a weary nurse, on the train home after a long shift. The city lights are a blurry mess outside the window. Even though her life isn't easy, there's a fleeting moment of beauty as she holds onto a pole for balance, the night wind blowing through her hair. It's almost like being on a carousel. This scene shows the director's talent for finding poetry in the ordinary routines of everyday life in India.

Despite her own struggles, Prabha devotes herself to her patients. She treats everyone with kindness, even the most challenging cases, like an elderly woman with hallucinations or her friend Parvati (Chhaya Kadam) facing eviction by developers. In this community, husbands are often absent. Prabha's own arranged marriage ended years ago when her husband left for Germany, promising to take her with him. But his letters have become

Malayali pride shines at Cannes as Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine as Light" wins the Grand Prix, a historic moment celebrating the talents of Kani Kusriti and Divya Prabha.

increasingly rare.

Prabha's junior colleague and roommate Anu (Divya Prabha), a younger, attractive nurse, is secretly dating Shiaz (Hridu Haroon), a Muslim boy. Anu, representing a freer generation, mocks Prabha, who seems old-fashioned. Prabha disapproves of Anu's secretive relationship, fearing it will damage Anu's reputation. There's a clash between tradition and changing times. After long resistance, Prabha agrees to go for a nighttime walk with Dr. Manoj (Azees Nedumangad), a newcomer to Mumbai struggling with the local language, and they end up sharing some personal thoughts and feelings with each other.

The film paints such a vivid and immersive picture of Mumbai that it feels almost jarring when the scene shifts. In the second half, Prabha and Anu travel to a coastal village where Parvati is returning



Payal Kapadia

The film paints such a vivid and immersive picture of Mumbai that it feels almost jarring when the scene shifts. In the second half, Prabha and Anu travel to a coastal village where Parvati is returning to her childhood home.



Kani Kusruti

Kani has emerged as a wonderful actor since her portrayal as Khadeeja, the heroine of National Award-winning “Biryani” (2019) directed by Sajin Babu and a handful of internationally acclaimed web series namely “Maharani,” “Poacher,” and “Killer Soup.”

to her childhood home. This shift in location might seem abrupt, but it ties into the film’s exploration of displacement. Both Anu and Prabha are originally from Kerala. This escape from Mumbai’s chaos allows us to see their strong bond more clearly. The film reveals that their seemingly fragile friendship holds surprising resilience. In the quiet of the village, away from the city’s scrutiny, Anu’s secret relationship with Shiaz is revealed when Prabha finds him there. This peaceful setting also allows Prabha to see things differently. Lost in Mumbai’s anonymity and nearing middle age, she might have faded away unnoticed. But here, with Parvati, Shiaz, and especially Anu, she realizes she has a support system of her own. Perhaps it’s time to stop waiting for a husband who might never come back.

The film is much praised by critics for the brilliant performances by Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha, and Chhaya Kadam. Kani has emerged as a wonderful actor since her portrayal as Khadeeja, the heroine of National Award-winning “Biryani” (2019) directed by Sajin Babu and a handful of internationally acclaimed web series namely “Maharani,” “Poacher,” and “Killer Soup.” Divya Prabha established her imprint as a serious actor through the nationally acclaimed movie “Ariyippu,” directed by Mahesh

Narayanan. Chhaya Kadam, too, is much familiar to the Malayali audience as the character “Nani” played by her in the movie “PaachuvumAdbhuthavilakkum” directed by Akhil Sathyan.

The star cast also includes Tintumol Joseph (Shannet Nurse), Ardra KS, Sisira Anil, Aparna Ram, and Nikhil Mathew, who plays a male from Kerala. Apart from them, the film also stars Bipin Nadkarni, Shweta Prajapati, Loveleen Mishra, Anand Sami, and Madhu Raja. The film is notable for its outstanding cinematography by the director’s batchmate and FTII product, Ranbir Das, and the brilliant editing by Clément Pinteaux. The background score has been rendered by Topshe, the R&B sensation. “All We Imagine as Light,” an Indo-French co-production jointly ventured by Petit Chaos owned by Thomas Hakim and Julian Graff and Chalk & Zica Maitri’s Cheese Films, is, of course, a movie to be cherished by the Malayalis, written and directed by a non-Malayali.

Payal Kapadia’s artistic path began in Mumbai in 1986. Raised by Nalini Malani, a painter and video artist, and Shailesh Kapadia, a psychoanalyst, she was surrounded by creativity from a young age. Her interest in film was further nurtured at Rishi Valley School, a boarding school where the film club exposed her to the works of renowned directors like



Divya Prabha

Celebrating Kerala’s excellence, Santhosh Sivan becomes the first Asian to receive the Pierre Angénieux Excel Lens in Cinematography at Cannes, highlighting the global impact of Malayali artistry.



Ace cinematographer and filmmaker Santhosh Sivan also made history at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival. He was awarded the prestigious Pierre Angénieux Excellens in Cinematography, becoming the first Asian recipient of this honour. This award recognizes exceptional contributions to the art of cinematography, solidifying Sivan's place as a global leader in the field. India's technical brilliance in moviemaking was acknowledged when he got a standing ovation while the award was presented to him by Indian actress Preity Zinta.

Ritwik Ghatak and Andrei Tarkovsky. After earning a bachelor's degree in economics, she continued her education with a master's program. Determined to pursue filmmaking, Kapadia applied to the prestigious Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, and secured admission on her second try. Payal Kapadia's films have garnered international acclaim. Her documentary "A Night of Knowing Nothing" won the prestigious Golden Eye award at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival. Even earlier, in 2017, her film "Afternoon Clouds" made history by being the sole Indian entry selected for the 70th Cannes Film

Festival. As a filmmaker, she has a high opinion of Malayalam movies and considers them to be the best produced in the country.

Cannes this year also earmarked something to make us Indians feel extremely proud. It is when Anasuya Sengupta, an actor from Kolkata, etched her name in Cannes history, grabbing the coveted Best Actress award for her captivating performance in "The Shameless," directed by Bulgarian filmmaker Constantin Bojanov. This win signifies a monumental leap for Indian cinema on the international stage.



Feeding Mother's Love

K. G. Babu's exquisite painting captures the tender affection of our state bird, the Hornbill, for its chick.



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