

KERALA CALLING

NOVEMBER 01, 2024_VOL_45_No_1

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Feel the pulse of Kerala

Kerala's boat races ignite the waters, with every row echoing a spirit of unity and celebration. Come! Feel the thrill and join the festivity!



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EDITORIAL



RISE WITH THE RACE!

This November, Kerala Calling introduces readers to the unique world of Kerala's boat races, a tradition that reflects the spirit and unity of 'God's Own Country.' More than just thrilling competitions, these races are woven into the fabric of Kerala's cultural and shared community spirit, connecting people with their heritage and each other.

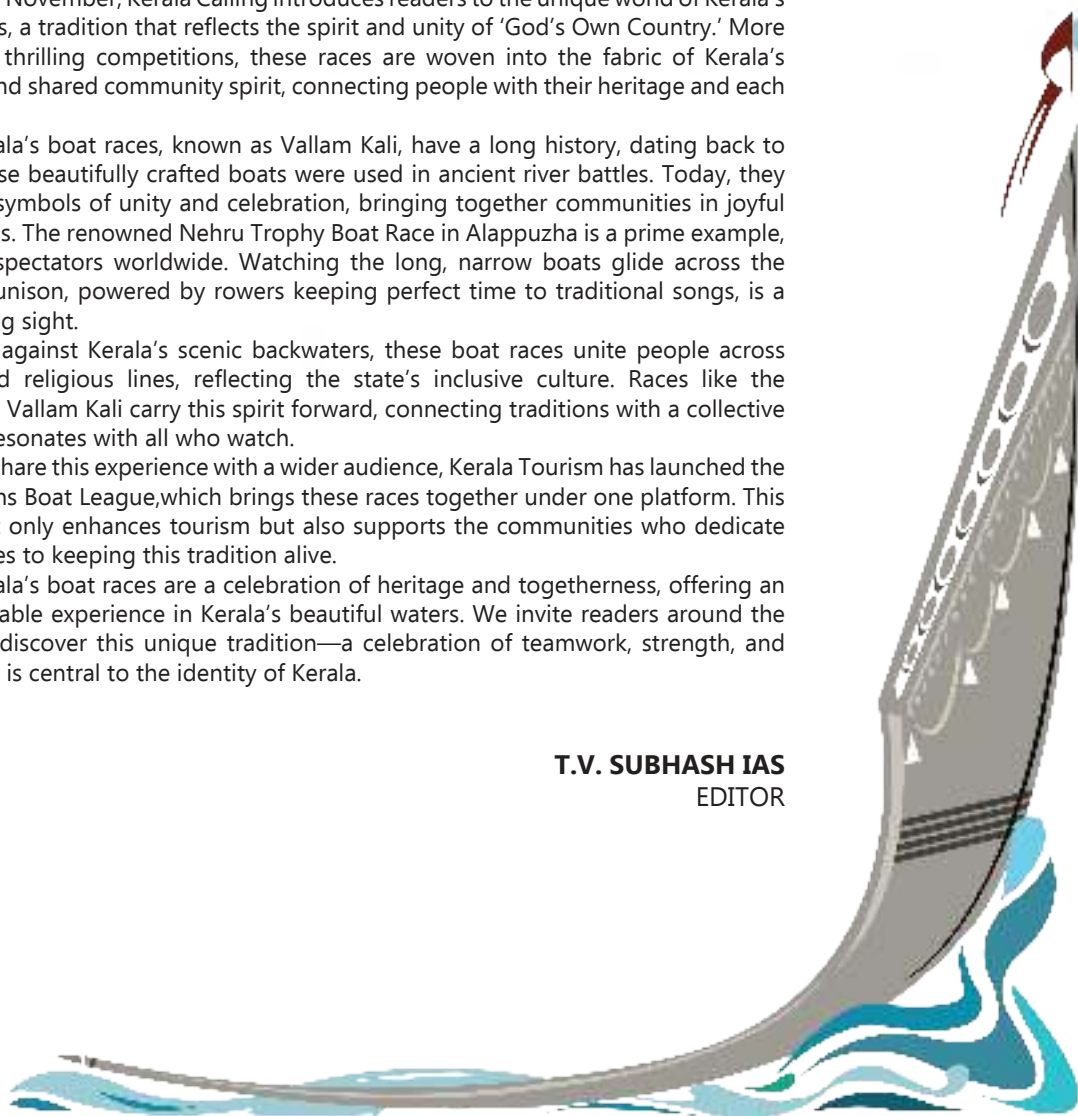
Kerala's boat races, known as Vallam Kali, have a long history, dating back to when these beautifully crafted boats were used in ancient river battles. Today, they stand as symbols of unity and celebration, bringing together communities in joyful gatherings. The renowned Nehru Trophy Boat Race in Alappuzha is a prime example, drawing spectators worldwide. Watching the long, narrow boats glide across the water in unison, powered by rowers keeping perfect time to traditional songs, is a captivating sight.

Set against Kerala's scenic backwaters, these boat races unite people across social and religious lines, reflecting the state's inclusive culture. Races like the Aranmula Vallam Kali carry this spirit forward, connecting traditions with a collective joy that resonates with all who watch.

To share this experience with a wider audience, Kerala Tourism has launched the Champions Boat League, which brings these races together under one platform. This effort not only enhances tourism but also supports the communities who dedicate themselves to keeping this tradition alive.

Kerala's boat races are a celebration of heritage and togetherness, offering an unforgettable experience in Kerala's beautiful waters. We invite readers around the world to discover this unique tradition—a celebration of teamwork, strength, and unity that is central to the identity of Kerala.

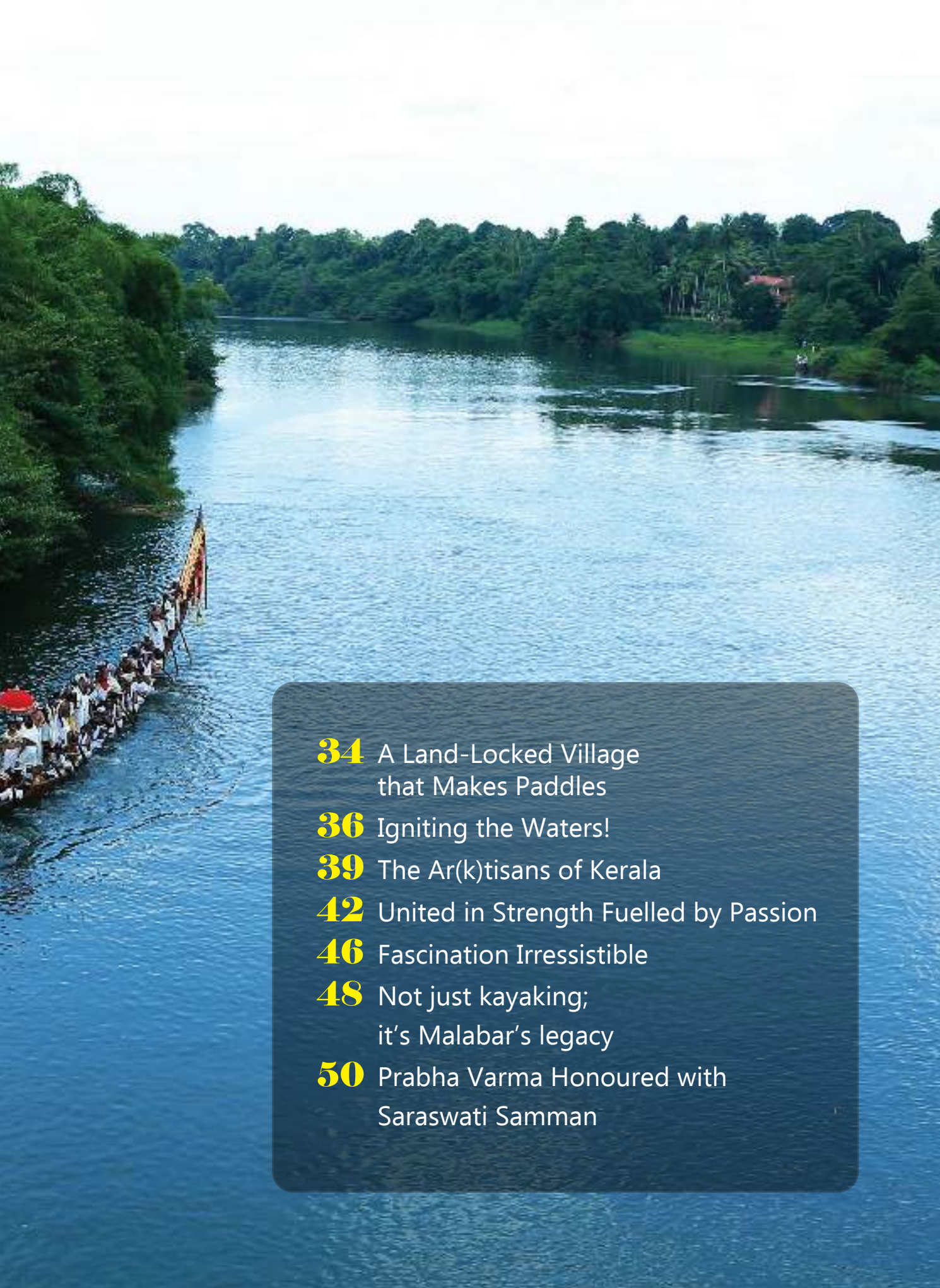
T.V. SUBHASH IAS
EDITOR



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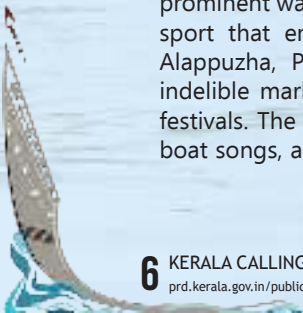
Creating Waves of Glory



ADV. P.A. MOHAMED RIYAS
Minister for Tourism

Myriad rivers, lakes, backwaters, canals, and other water bodies flow across the length and breadth of Kerala, making it a 'land of waters. Kerala is adept at assimilating the economic, tourist, and cultural sediments of the water element of its existence.

Riding on the waves of its backwaters, Kerala has become an international brand known for its picturesque charisma. Backwaters have truly become the iconic symbol of Kerala Tourism. Since ancient times, we have repaid this blessing from nature by celebrating the magnificence of backwaters through various aquatic festivals. These festivals have, in turn, enriched our culture and boosted our tourism. The most prominent water festival in Kerala is the boat race. It is the water sport that embodies every nuance of our cultural heritage. Alappuzha, Punnamada, and Aranmula have all made their indelible mark on the world tourism map as centres of water festivals. The boat races, with their rhythmic rowing, legendary boat songs, and vibrant processions, are enthralling. Spectators





Alappuzha,
Punnamada, and
Aranmula have all
made their indelible
mark on the world
tourism map as centres
of water festivals.

gather along the shorelines to vicariously experience the zeal of the participants, and even foreign tourists have been able to fully immerse themselves in the euphoria.

The boats used in Kerala's boat races are unique in design, seating capacity, and construction. Each boat has its own historical significance, representing the cultural ingenuity of the land. The boat races see the participation of not only team members and their clubs but also an entire region and its people.

The boat races are also deeply connected to the economy of the state. The first Pinarayi Vijayan government set out to create a synergy of all the boat races in Kerala by developing the Champions Boat League. The aim was to support boat races and create a source of income for those actively involved. The League, modelled on the Indian Premier League and Football League, coincides with the tourism season. This has greatly helped in popularising the sport and our backwaters beyond Kerala.

Taking into account the geography and unique features of various water bodies, we have also formulated other competitions like kayaking and canoeing. The presence of admirers from foreign countries has made these water festivals even more memorable.

Different water sports and adventure activities are also becoming increasingly popular, adding value to our tourism offerings. The Department of Tourism directly organises several water festivals. Additionally, the Tourism Department provides financial assistance to promote various regionally organised water festivals.

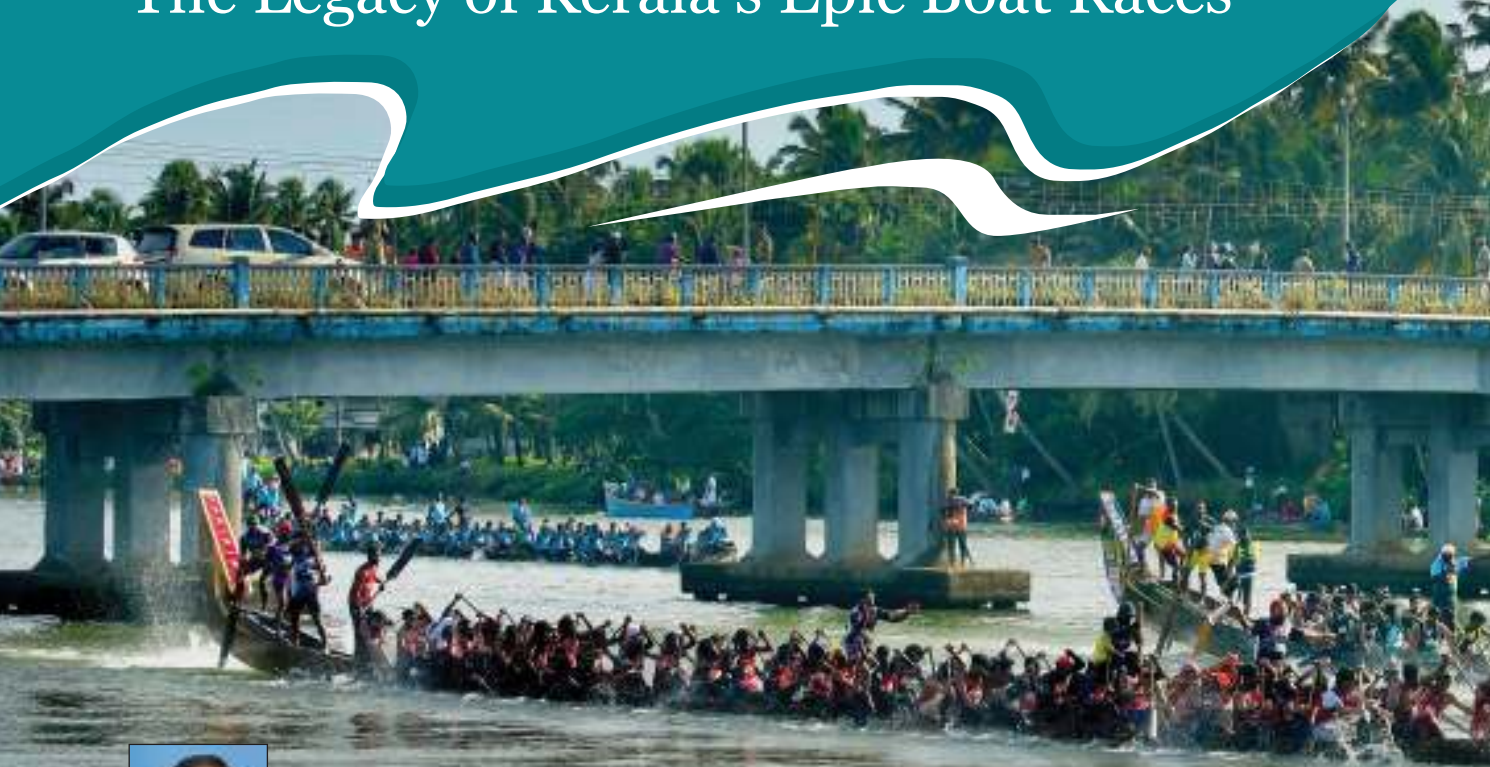
Kerala has been successful in introducing new products into the sector to increase commercial opportunities. From small canoes, coracle rides and boats to cruises, Kerala Tourism now offers a range of products that grace our water bodies for tourists to enjoy. The Kochi Water Metro is the latest addition to this array. Kerala's backwaters and indigenous boats have become an indispensable element in strengthening the brand of Kerala Tourism. ■



400

Years of Splendour

The Legacy of Kerala's Epic Boat Races



PROF. CHERIAN ALEXANDER

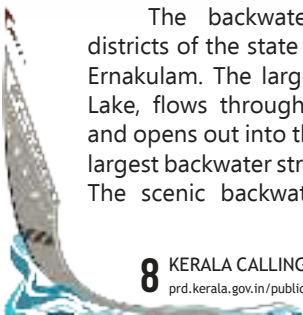
Former Journalist and Retired Professor


Boat races in Kerala are events of cultural re-enactment and community gathering. A spectacle of passion, celebration, and strength, the legendary Snake boat races are much more than just a competitive sport. They reflect the very pulse of the land.

The backwaters of Kerala mainly cover four districts of the state – Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Ernakulam. The largest backwater body, the Vembanad Lake, flows through Alappuzha and Kottayam districts and opens out into the sea at the Kochi port. The second-largest backwater stretch is the Ashtamudi Lake at Kollam. The scenic backwaters of Kerala comprise a pristine

sketch of lakes, canals, and lagoons located parallel to the coast of the Arabian Sea. 'God's Own Country' enjoys unique geographical features: an equitable climate, a long shoreline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations, exotic wildlife, waterfalls, sprawling plantations, paddy fields, Ayurvedic health holidays, enchanting art forms, magical festivals, historic and cultural monuments, and exotic cuisine – all these make Kerala a much sought-after tourist destination.

Come Onam, it is also the season of boat races. The series of boat races begins with the Moolam Boat race at Champakulam. The Nehru Trophy Boat race is normally held just before the month of Chingam, the New Year in the Malayalam era. Boat regatta or Vallomkali is part of the life of the people of Alappuzha, 'the Venice of





The Boat Race is Kuttanad's 'Olympics on Water'. It is the greatest team sport. The Boat Race is the magnificent expression of a country's communal harmony.

the East'. This has now acquired worldwide acclaim. The Nehru Trophy Boat race is normally held on the second Saturday of August every year. It is tagged by many as the greatest show on water. It is held at the palm-fringed, picturesque Punnamada Lake, near Alappuzha.

As many as 74 boats, including 19 Chundan Valloms or Snake Boats, participated under 9 categories in the 70th edition of the Nehru Trophy Boat race. The Nehru Trophy Boat race springs out of the ethos of the geographical heart of Kerala, Kuttanad. The land itself is situated below sea level, surrounded and laced by water bodies, and lakhs of natives are born, brought up, toil and moil, and leave their footprints – nay, their water prints – here, because their lives are intricately interwoven with water and water-related activities. The Boat race is

Kuttanad's 'Olympics on Water'. It is the greatest team sport. The Boat race is the magnificent expression of a country's communal harmony. It is rocked to mirth in the cradle of unity and tolerance. It is the mirror that reflects the transformation of ordinary folks into epitomes of ethnic integration. For those who are spectators for the first time, the Boat race is a mind-boggling affair. The rows of thirty-five-metre-long snake boats, each carrying nearly a hundred oarsmen, with four at the helm and others sitting on the sides, paddling in unison to the rhythm set by a band placed at the center, and the boats crawling fast like giant centipedes on water, or darting like black arrows, emitting water hot sparks, are a sight to be watched for the mere thrill of it. The 1,150-metre course, which is twenty metres wide, is divided into four tracks. The fact that the snake boats take only a little more

than four minutes to cover the distance is something to be seen to be believed.

The Snake Boats have a hoary past. The ruling principalities of Kerala owned fleets of boats that were used for naval battles. The story of these battling boats goes back more than 400 years. The Rajas of the erstwhile principalities of Chempakassery, Kayamkulam, Thekkumkoor, and Vadakkumkoor in the old Travancore area, which were part of the present Alappuzha district and Kottayam district, frequently crossed swords on the backwaters of Kuttanad. The Chempakassery troops suffered heavy casualties at the hands of the superior navy their rivals commanded. It soon dawned on the Chempakassery Raja that the real defect was with the war boats, which were sluggish and cumbersome. He called all the boat architects of the land to his court and informed them of his desire to have better and faster boats for his troops. After days of hard labour, a man who was reputed to be the best boat architect in Chempakassery,

Koduppunna Venkitanarayan Asari, came up with a specimen that satisfied Raja's requirements. It had speed, maneuverability, and capacity to carry 100 able-bodied warriors on board, and its eel-like construction was most ideal for launching an ambush since it could be easily kept concealed behind the overhanging bushes on the riverbanks. The Asari was generously rewarded, and in the subsequent battles, the Chempakassery Raja emerged victorious.

The defeated Kayamkulam Raja sent a spy to Chempakassery to learn the secret of the new war boat. The spy, a handsome youth, succeeded in winning the Asari's daughter. The girl's mother felt happy at the prospect of getting the youth as her daughter's bridegroom. She persuaded her husband to teach him the construction of the boat. The deceitful youth disappeared the moment he felt that he had mastered the art. Asari was imprisoned by the Chempakassery Raja for treason. But he was released and showered with many honours



when the snake boats built by the Kayamkulam Raja proved to be no match for the war boats of Chempakassery in the next battle. The subtleties of the snake boat's design are hard to pick up, and even today it requires years of apprenticeship under a master boat architect before one could independently undertake the construction of this ancient boat.

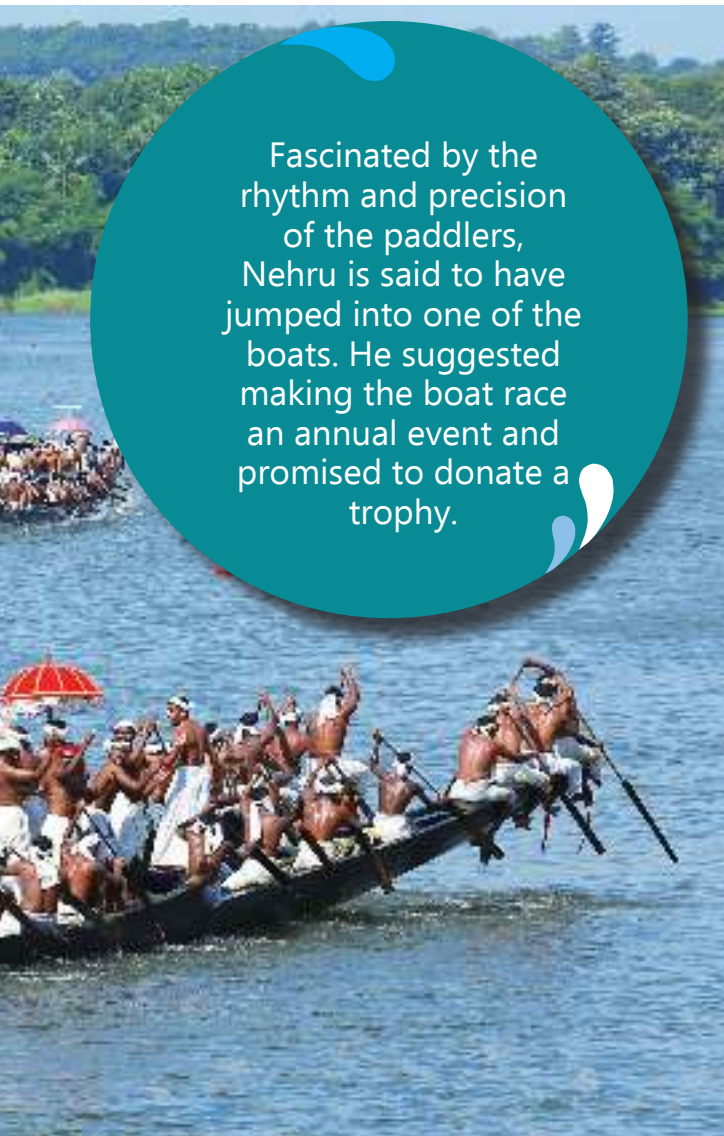
When the days of princely splendour ended, the five-ton behemoths became a luxury, if not a liability. Then, boats began to be used for pageants and water sports. The origin of the Nehru Trophy Boat race dates back to 1952 when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited the state. He chanced a trip from Kottayam to Alappuzha by boat. A pageantry of snake boats accompanied him on the trip. Fascinated by the rhythm and precision of the paddlers, Nehru is said to have jumped into



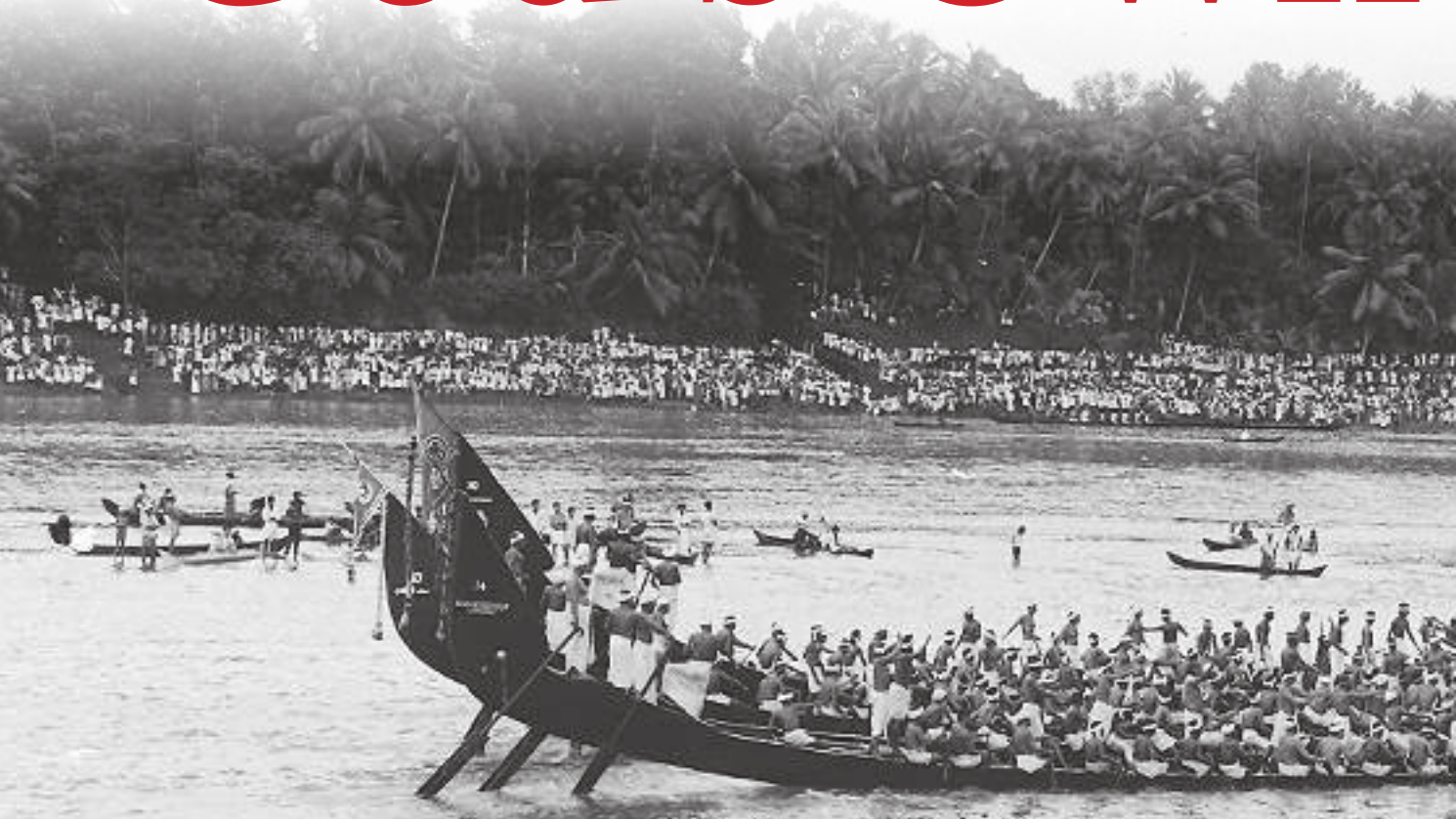
Fascinated by the rhythm and precision of the paddlers, Nehru is said to have jumped into one of the boats. He suggested making the boat race an annual event and promised to donate a trophy.

one of the boats. He suggested making the boat race an annual event and promised to donate a trophy. Later, Nehru sent an autographed silver replica of a snake boat as a trophy, engraved with a handwritten message: "To the winners of the boat race which is a unique feature of the community life in Travancore – Cochin". Yes, the boat race is also a symbol of the communal harmony prevailing in the state. Even in the days of untouchability, it was a feature of the regattas to have Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and the downtrodden in the same row of the boat, symbolizing communal amity. In Kerala, it is not a rare sight to have a mosque, a church, and a temple in the same lane or ward. At Alappuzha, within a radius of four hundred metres, are situated the Pazhavangadi Church, the Mullakkal Temple, and the Kallupalam Mosque. The same is the case at Purakkad and Ambalappuzha. People of different castes and creeds live in perfect brotherhood in the terra firma of the state.

The Boat race is a congregation that radiates energy and charm, whether you are on a snake boat or on the fringe of the lake. The razor-sharp race to the finishing point with delectable thrusts of oars in the deep blue waters, accompanied by a boisterous and full-throated crescendo of voices encouraging the teams, emerging from the weather-beaten faces assembled on the shores, is breathtaking, and the recollection is always inspiring. Above class, creed, or political affiliations, the Boat race affords an occasion for the manifestation of social and cultural solidarity among the people. No wonder boat races in Kerala have captured a prominent place on the World Tourism Map. ■



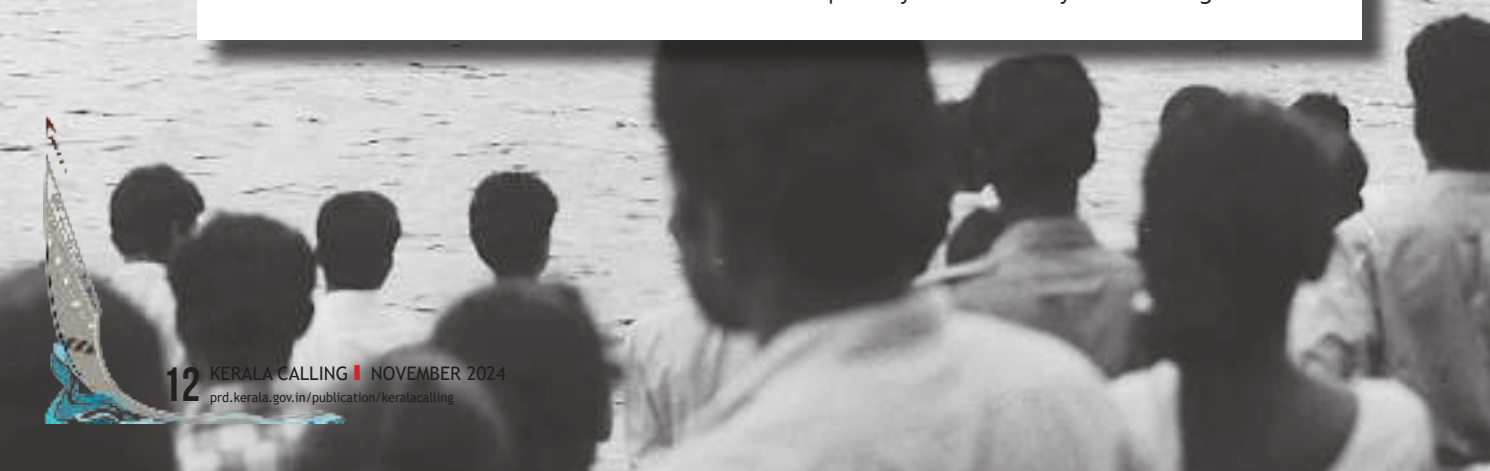
God's Own



DR. M.C. VASISHT
Historian

God's own country is equated with rivers and backwaters. The region is renowned for its stunning backwaters and abundant water resources. Forty-four rivers define Kerala's plains. Waterways in Kerala were primarily used for the movement of products long before the British administration was established. Our waterways were the primary means of human mobility during the pre-colonial era.

Kerala's history and culture were significantly shaped by its waterways. According to Tamil



Boat Race



anthologies from BC 300 to AD 300, the Yavanas or the Romans gathered pepper, or kari, from the high mountains and transported it to the coast via the lowlands' rivers. Additionally, the Chera inscriptions mention boats. Jewish Copper Plates (1000 AD), which were issued by the Chera Perumal Bhaskara Ravi Manukuladitya (962–1021), state that boats transported commodities to Muyirikode, which is commonly known as Kodungallur in central Kerala. The well-known Manipravalam work Unnuneelisesandesam (1362 AD) mentions numerous waterways in southern Kerala. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British

were among the European maritime forces that constantly attempted to control our rivers and canals.

Dutch traders who arrived in Kerala in the 17th century researched the natural resources and river system to exploit the resources of the land. They made an effort to gather additional information about our rivers and natural features, which ultimately led to the creation of the enormous botanical work Hortus Malabaricus. The British and the French fought each other for control of the Mahe River in the 18th century. These historical indications all point to the importance of rivers in the life of the people of Kerala.





The Department of Tourism can initiate the organization of Kerala tourism festivals in countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea. These festivals will serve as a platform to promote our beautiful boat race.

The locals were well accustomed to using water transportation, which may have helped Kerala's boat races flourish.

Boat races are one of the major attractions of Kerala that draw tourists from all around the world. The primary locations for boat races are our rivers and backwaters. A literary and musical subculture known as Vanchi pattu flourished alongside the boat race.

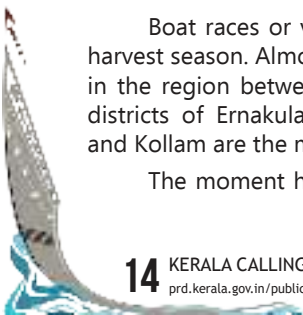
Boat races or vallam kali are usually conducted after the harvest season. Almost all the famous boat races are conducted in the region between Central Kerala to Southern Kerala. The districts of Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, and Kollam are the main centres of boat races.

The moment has arrived for us to take advantage of our

trademark's sales potential and international markets for our own boat race. Over the years, Kerala tourism has effectively promoted its top offerings and reached the North American and European markets. However, there is still untapped potential lying in the markets of South Eastern countries, such as China, Japan, and South Korea. A widely popular traditional sport in China is the Dragon boat race, which takes place in the Yangtze River in southern China. There are notable resemblances between our boat, known as vallam, and Chinese boats. The history of Kerala and China shows a long-standing connection during the Medieval period of Kerala's history, which spans from the 13th to the 16th centuries. The resemblance between Kerala's vallam and Chinese boats may be attributed to these significant cultural ties.

The Department of Tourism can initiate the organization of Kerala tourism festivals in countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea. Additionally, they can conduct roadshows as part of these festivals. These festivals will serve as a platform to promote our beautiful boat race, as well as traditional art forms/knowledge systems like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kalaripayattu, and Ayurveda. The government of Kerala can also invite media personnel from these countries to showcase our rich boat race.

The beauty of these boat races can be shared with their nations and their citizens through print and electronic media professionals. This will undoubtedly draw foreign visitors to Kerala from these countries. A drawing of tennis legends participating in a boat race was posted on Wimbledon's official Facebook page in 2023. In fact, this momentous image declared Kerala tourism's victory on a global scale. We have to build on this victory. Let us hope the boat race photos/videos will be featured on the front pages of major newspapers and television screens across the globe. ■











Fusion Saga of Kerala

Kerala's Vallamkali tradition includes many different boat races, each with its own story and importance. From the famous Nehru Trophy Boat Race to the sacred Aranmula Vallamkali, these events bring people together to celebrate Kerala's heritage on its beautiful backwaters



P. SREEKUMAR
Journalist

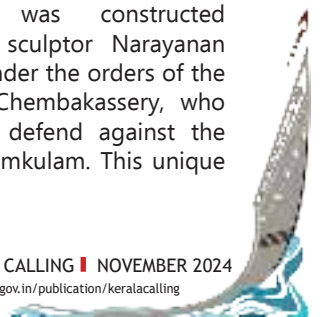
During his 1952 visit to Kerala, Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru witnessed a spectacle that would forever bind him to the soul of Kerala's backwaters – the thrilling Vallamkali, or snake boat race. As nine majestic snake boats surged forward, cutting through the waters with synchronised vigour, Nehru was so swept up in the excitement that, breaking all decorum, he leapt into the victorious Nadubhagom Chundan to join the jubilant rowers. This impromptu celebration marked a moment of pure joy and unity. So moved was Nehru by the experience that he later sent a silver trophy bearing his signature to Kerala, christening it the "Prime Minister's Trophy" in honour of the race that captured his heart. Thus, the legendary Nehru Trophy Boat Race was born, cementing itself as one of Kerala's most cherished traditions, where the thrill and spirit of those waters live on year after year.

The stunning backwaters of Kerala, with their unique blend

of rivers and lakes meeting the Arabian Sea, serve as a grand stage for Vallamkali, the traditional boat race. The districts of Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta hold a unique place in the history of Vallamkali, with their contribution to Kerala's water sports legacy. Each year, the race for the coveted Rajapramukhan Trophy, held on the Champakulam River in Alappuzha, kicks off the state's boat racing season. This race, conducted on Moolam Naal during Midhunam, follows the departure of the Idavapathi monsoon and is one of Kerala's premier events. The best chundan vallams (snake boats) from across the state gather to compete in a thrilling display of skill and tradition.

The Nehru Trophy Boat Race, a 70-year tradition on Kerala's backwaters, remains distinct with its thrilling competition among various boats, symbolising the unity and spirit of celebration in Alappuzha.

The history of these races is steeped in heritage, particularly linked to the idol at Ambalapuzha Sreekrishnaswamy Temple. Historians suggest that the concept of the chundan vallam originated here. Initially designed as a battleship, the prototype of the chundan vallam was constructed by the sculptor Narayanan Achari under the orders of the King of Chembakassery, who sought to defend against the King of Kayamkulam. This unique





boat, crafted to hold numerous oarsmen and warriors, was agile and formidable on the water. Today, the Vallamkali boat races celebrate this legacy, bringing together communities and reinforcing Kerala's cultural identity.

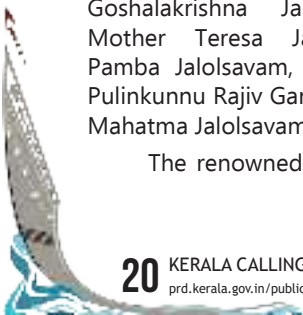
Over the years, the Nehru Trophy Boat Race has become a 70-year tradition, a magnificent festival of the backwaters that brings pride to Alappuzha. Alongside the main races of Chundan, Churulan, Iruttukuthi, and Veppu Vallams, the district hosts a variety of races, such as the Payippad Jalolsavam, Thiruvandoor Goshalakrishna Jalolsavam, Prayikkara Mother Teresa Jalolsavam, Neerettupuram Pamba Jalolsavam, Pallana Kumaranashan Jalolsavam, Pulinkunnu Rajiv Gandhi Trophy Jalolsavam, and Mannar Mahatma Jalolsavam.

The renowned Aranmula Vallamkali stands out as

The Aranmula Vallamkali is more than a race; it's a deeply rooted tradition that draws thousands of devotees, celebrating Kerala's cultural heritage with unmatched fervour.

more than just a sport, deeply intertwined with tradition. The Aranmula Valla Sadya draws devotees from across the nation, celebrating this heritage with fervour. In Kottayam, additional races such as the Kumaranalloor Oruchuttu Vallamkali, Kumarakom Sreenarayana Jalolsavam, Kavanattinkara Jalolsavam, and Kottayam Thazhathangadi Jalolsavam further enrich the legacy of boat racing in the region.

Among Kerala's boat races, the Nehru Trophy Boat Race remains distinct due to the participation of various boats, setting it apart from the more devotion-driven races. Interestingly, this 70-year-old tradition predates the Alappuzha district, which is 67 years old. This year, as always, the Nehru Trophy and other boat races were held with great grandeur, ensuring that the spirit of celebration and tradition will continue to inspire future generations. ■











Champions Boat League (CBL)

Reviving Kerala's Tradition with a Grand Spectacle on Water



BIJU E PAUL
Journalist

In 2019, Kerala's passion for boat races found a thrilling new platform as the Champions Boat League (CBL) set sail, marking a historic milestone in the state's rich tradition of water festivals. The Tourism Department's bold initiative to create a professional boat racing league brought together Kerala's heritage, athletic spirit, and tourism potential, transforming the traditional boat races into an organised championship event. The inaugural season, despite a year's delay due to the massive floods of 2018, became a sensation and won fans from across the globe.

Kerala's boat races, especially the Nehru Trophy Boat Race (NTBR), are renowned worldwide, drawing thousands of visitors to the backwaters of Alappuzha. For years, the state's boat race enthusiasts envisioned a





structured competition that would elevate these races into a global spectacle. Responding to this demand, the Tourism Department conceptualised the Champions Boat League, aiming to create a league that would showcase the state's traditional boat races on a national and international scale. The initial groundwork for the league was set in 2018, but unprecedented floods forced the project into a temporary hiatus as the focus shifted to relief and rehabilitation efforts.

In 2019, with Kerala recovering from the aftermath, the department revived the plans, and CBL was launched with a grand opening alongside the NTBR at Punnamada Lake on 10 August 2019.

A World-Class Experience

The Champions Boat League, or CBL, was designed as a three-month championship series, with 12 rounds of races organised across the state, taking place on weekends to align with Kerala's traditional water festivals. This setup not only preserved the essence of these cultural festivities but also provided continuity, making it an exciting season-long event for both locals and tourists.

With a budget allocation of Rs. 40 crore for the first season, Kerala Tourism ensured a world-class experience for participants, viewers, and sponsors alike. CBL spanned some of Kerala's most scenic backwaters, including prominent water bodies in Alappuzha, Kollam, Kottayam and Ernakulam, with each venue adorned with festive decor, attracting thousands of visitors. Nine teams joined the competition, including famous clubs from various parts of the state, making each event a fierce contest of skill, stamina, and teamwork.

The inaugural season of CBL began on a high note with the 2019 Nehru Trophy Boat Race on 10 August. Punnamada Lake in Alappuzha was brimming with enthusiasm as crowds gathered to witness this

historic launch. In this maiden CBL edition, Nadubhagom Chundan, representing the Pallathuruthy Boat Club and popularly known as the 'Tropical Titans', emerged as champions, setting the tone for a competitive league season.

The excitement carried through each race weekend, with fans eagerly awaiting the next venue and watching their favourite teams navigate Kerala's picturesque yet challenging waters. The final showdown took place on 23 November with the President's Trophy Boat Race in Kollam, culminating the season in a grand finale attended by dignitaries, celebrities, and an enthusiastic crowd.

With its unique blend of cultural tradition, athleticism, and professional organisation, the Champions Boat League is poised for a promising future.



Raking it in

CBL was not only thrilling in its format and organisation but also ambitious in its prize offerings. With a total prize pool of Rs.5.9 crore, it quickly became the fourth-highest prize-giving sports event in India, setting a new standard for traditional sports in the country. Each race came with substantial rewards for the top three finishers: Rs.5 lakh for first place, Rs.3 lakh for second, and Rs.1 lakh for third. Furthermore, every participating team was eligible for a bonus prize of Rs.4 lakh per race, which helped encourage all competitors and kept the races competitive throughout the league season.

The inaugural season of CBL exceeded expectations with its massive viewership. An impressive 1.8 crore people tuned in to watch the event live across eight television channels, both in India and internationally, while 22 lakh fans viewed the races online. The extensive media coverage played a crucial role in promoting the league, ensuring that audiences beyond Kerala could witness and appreciate the thrill and skill that define traditional boat racing. By bringing this spectacle into living rooms across the globe, CBL created a cultural and sporting connection between Kerala and the world.

Promoting Culture through Championship

CBL's significance goes beyond sports, as it represents a deeper connection with Kerala's cultural heritage. Snake boat races, known locally as 'Vallamkali', have been an integral part of Kerala's traditional festivities for centuries. These races are often associated with religious rituals and community bonding, with each boat's crew dedicated to rigorous training and discipline. By formalising these races into a league format, CBL preserved the tradition while giving it a modern appeal, encouraging more local participation and fostering pride among Keralites.

The league also significantly boosted Kerala's tourism industry, attracting tourists eager to experience the charm of the state's backwaters, traditional houseboats and hospitality. The CBL season coincides with Kerala's peak tourism months, thus providing visitors with an immersive cultural experience. Tour operators, hotels, and local vendors benefitted from the influx of visitors. At the same time, the Tourism department's

strategic marketing campaign put Kerala in the spotlight, reinforcing its status as 'God's Own Country'.

Although the inaugural season was a success, CBL's journey was not without challenges. The 2020 and 2021 editions had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought global tourism to a standstill. These cancellations were a setback for the league, as organisers and participants missed two critical years that could have cemented CBL's position on the sports and tourism map.

However, the resilience shown by the Kerala Tourism Department, local clubs, and the participating teams underscored the importance of this event. Despite these interruptions, preparations resumed post-pandemic with renewed vigour, and there is a collective optimism about the league's return in future seasons.

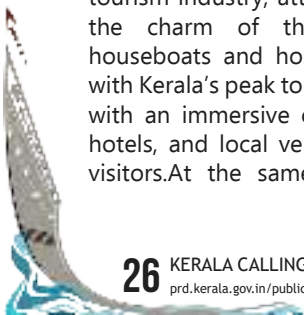
With its unique blend of cultural tradition, athleticism, and professional organisation, the Champions Boat League is poised for a promising future. Plans for expansion, improved infrastructure, and enhanced viewer engagement are on the horizon, as Kerala Tourism aims to make CBL an annual event of global significance. The league's success has also inspired other states to consider similar initiatives, showcasing the potential of integrating traditional sports into the mainstream, organised sports landscape.

By 2019, CBL had already made its mark, setting a benchmark in terms of organisation, prize money, and viewership. As it continues to evolve, the league will likely add new dimensions to the races, incorporating technological advancements, broader media partnerships, and greater international collaboration. The hope is that CBL will become not just a league but a brand synonymous with Kerala's vibrant culture, thrilling sportsmanship, and scenic beauty.

The Champions Boat League is a testament to Kerala's enduring passion for its water heritage and the state's dedication to preserving and promoting it. By blending age-old tradition with contemporary sports organisations, CBL has created a model that celebrates Kerala's unique cultural identity while also enhancing its tourism and economy. As the league sets sail into future seasons, it promises to continue capturing the imagination of audiences around the world, inviting them to witness Kerala's most cherished tradition transformed into a world-class sporting spectacle ■



The CBL was designed as a three-month championship series, with 12 rounds of races organised across the state.





Uthrattathi regatta

A timeless rhythm of tradition

K. JYOTHINATH

Just as the monsoon invigorates Kerala, the village of Aranmula, situated along the banks of the Pampa River, comes alive in a vibrant display of color, rhythm, and devotion during the annual Uthrattathi Boat Race. Recognized as the oldest boat race in the region, this event symbolizes a rich legacy that unites 52 villages, stretching from the hilly terrain of Edakulam to the tranquil backwaters of Chennithala in Alappuzha, all in homage to Lord Parthasarathy, the deity of the Aranmula Temple.

Pallyodams- the pulse of the Pampa

As the preparations commence, a renewed energy courses through the Pampa, with villages unveiling their majestic snake boats, known as pallyodams. Each boat, measuring 100 feet, stands as a testament to the area's heritage, beautifully adorned with traditional artistry. Gathered together, barefoot oarsmen dressed in white dhotis and melmundu respond to the lively beats of vanchipattu, traditional boat songs. Rowing in perfect harmony, they navigate towards the shores of Aranmula,



welcomed by enthusiastic crowds. Upon arrival at the temple ghats, the oarsmen ascend the steps leading to the Sree Parthasarathy Temple. Their synchronized procession, carrying offerings, infuses the temple grounds with a spiritual essence, deepening the significance of the occasion.

Feast meets festivity

No celebration in Aranmula is truly complete without the Vallasadya, a lavish feast dedicated to Lord Parthasarathy. Within the temple's dining halls, oarsmen gather to partake in a meal comprising 64 distinct dishes. This interactive ritual allows them to recite playful couplets to request their preferred dishes, fostering a sense of camaraderie. From July to October, the Vallasadyas evolve into joyous communal gatherings, celebrating their shared cultural heritage through the act of serving and enjoying a grand feast.

The mythical voyage of Thiruvonathoni

During the festival of Onam, the celebration takes on a mythical dimension with the arrival of the Thiruvonathoni, a special boat carrying provisions for the grand Onam feast. Departing from the ghats of the Kattoor Mahavishnu Temple upstream, this ritual re-enacts an ancient tale of unity and protection. Local legends speak of how communities once defended a similar boat against marauders to ensure

its safe passage to the temple. As dawn breaks, the Thiruvonathoni arrives at the temple ghats in Aranmula, greeted by devoted followers and a flotilla of palliyodams. Its cargo is then utilized to prepare a feast that honors both tradition and devotion.

Rowing in rhythm with the divine

Four days after Thiruvonam, the Uthrattathi Boat Race reaches a thrilling climax in Aranmula. This event, commemorating the anniversary of the idol's installation at the Sree Parthasarathy Temple, transforms the river into a vibrant stage of devotion and strength. The rhythmic sounds of vanchipattu resonate along the banks as oarsmen propel the sleek palliyodams with synchronized strokes. This race not only attracts a significant number of tourists but also immerses spectators in the lively festive spirit. The Kerala government, in collaboration with the Palliyoda Seva Sangham, ensures the seamless continuation of this tradition, overseeing security, river patrols, and transportation for the influx of visitors. The Pampa Irrigation Project plays a vital role in maintaining water levels, while additional buses from KSRTC facilitate transport for thousands to Aranmula. As September concludes, the celebrations gradually come to an end, but the spirit of the event endures. More than just a festival, it is a tradition that deeply roots its community in their shared heritage, leaving a lasting impression on all who visit Aranmula each year. ■



The 'Pooram' in Backwaters

The Kandashamkadavu Boat Race in Thrissur celebrated on the Canolly Canal during Onam, is a thrilling water festival that captures the spirit of Kerala's cultural heritage, much like the city's iconic Pooram.



AISWARYA P S

Thrissur, the city of the legendary 'Pooram', also plays host to the Kandashamkadavu water festival. The first boat race in Thrissur district was held in Kandashamkadavu, organised by the Manaloor Panchayat as a celebration of the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956. The boat race took place under the leadership of the first President of Manaloor Panchayat, VadakkethalaThottungal T. M. Antony. At that time, only two snake boats were competing. Later, the boat race became an integral part of the annual Onam celebrations for the people of Thrissur. It is held on the second day of Onam each year.

Since 1977, the Jalavahini Boat Club, formed by labourers, has been at the helm of conducting the boat race during Onam. The Canolly Canal in Kandashamkadavu



The local people and the many tourists who visit Kandashamkadavu vouch for the fact that the boat race, with its grand splendour, is truly another 'Pooram'



witnesses the fervent competition for the Chief Minister's Ever-Rolling Trophy every year. This boat race is also unique, as spectators can watch the competition from close quarters.

It is a collective effort, with the people of the region chipping in and contributing generously to ensure the smooth organisation of the boat race. Today, the Kandashamkadavu boat race is an amalgamation of the artistic, cultural, social, and political groups of the region.

A permanent pavilion and allied buildings have been constructed for the boat race by the Department of Tourism. The second phase of construction is also progressing swiftly, and once completed, it will be an asset for the tourism development of the area. ■

Kollam's Legendary Boat Race Legacy



Kollam's legendary boat races capture the spirit of Kerala, blending tradition with thrilling aquatic spectacle.

IGNATIUS PEREIRA

Kollam, renowned for its abundant and picturesque water bodies, holds a prominent position in Kerala's snake boat calendar. The district hosts three major snake boat races, which have garnered significant attention at both national and international levels. They are the President's Trophy Boat Race, the Kallada Boat Race, and the Kannetti Boat Race.

Out of these three, the Kallada and President's Trophy boat races are clubbed into the Champions Boat League (CBL) series of thirteen boat races featuring the best snake boat teams in the State and held from August to November/December. While the opening boat race of the CBL series is the renowned Nehru Trophy Boat Race of Alappuzha on the Punnamada Lake, the closing race is the President's Trophy Boat Race held on the Ashtamudi Lake.

The President's Trophy Boat Race is a relatively new event, inaugurated on August 30, 2011, by the then President of India, Dr. Pratibha Patil and named in honor of the President of India. The trophy for the race is also awarded in the President's name. The maiden President's Trophy was bagged by the snake boat Sree Ganesh Chundan. Last year's boat race was won by Veeyapuram Chundan.

The Kallada Jalotsavam is a popular boat race held on the Kallada River at Munroe Island, taking place 28 days after Onam. That day is also an important festival in Kerala called the 28th Onam. The race is conducted on a 1400 meter aquatic track along the straight course of the Kallada River ahead of where the river empties into the Ashtamudi Lake. Veeyapuram Chundan was also the winner of last year's Kallada Boat Race.

The Kannetti Boat Race for the Sree Narayana Jayanthi Trophy is held over the Kannetti Lake on the outskirts of Karunagapally in Kollam district. This boat race forms part of the Onam celebrations and is held on the Chathayam day in the Malayalam month of Chingam. That day marks the birth anniversary of the renowned social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. This boat race, which has a history that dates back to 1939, is now organised and conducted by the Kannetti Boat Club. A unique feature of the Kannetti Boat Race is that spectators along the banks of the racecourse can see both the starting and finishing points, no matter where they are positioned.

When the winning boat crosses the finish line, it brings a wave of jubilant celebration, but for all participants and spectators, the real victory lies in honoring a tradition that binds their past to the present, celebrating Kerala's enduring spirit on its timeless backwaters. ■

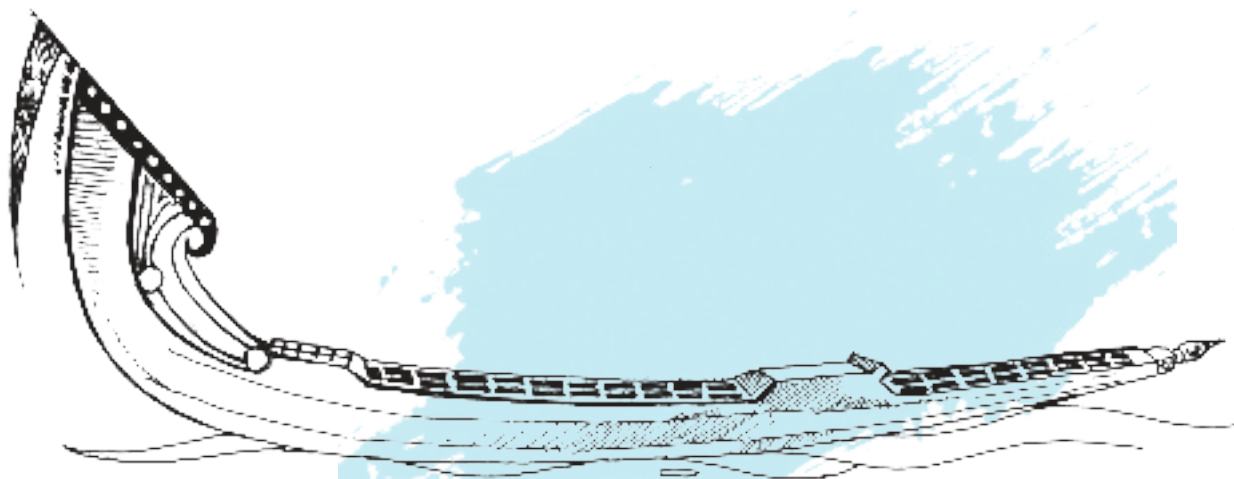


Gliding with Precision

From combat vessels to thrilling race boats, Kerala's traditional vallams embody the perfect blend of skill, speed, and heritage

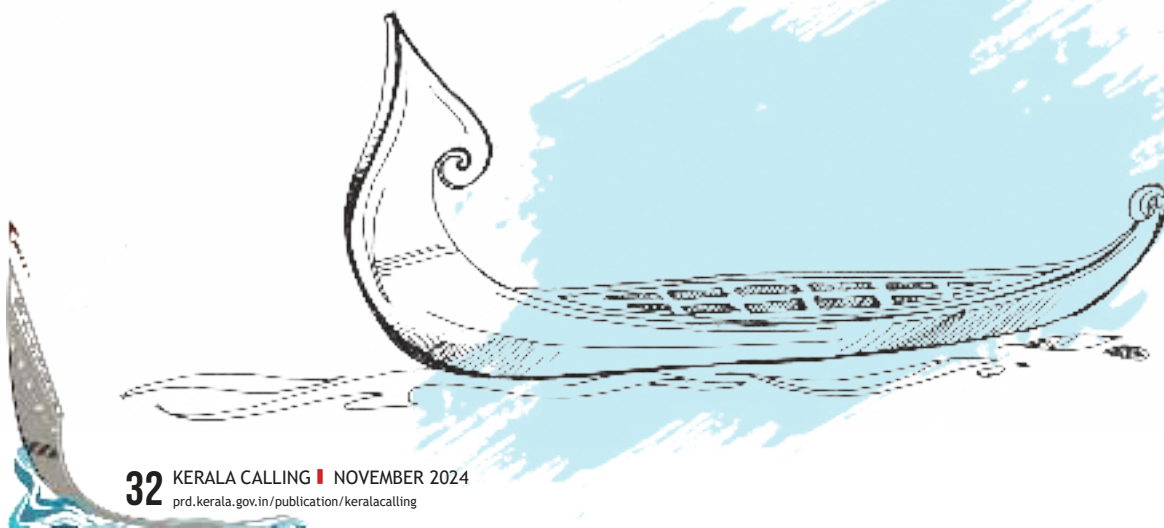
THE SNAKE BOAT aka CHUNDAN

One of the main characteristics of chundan vallam is its unusual shape, which can tear through water resistance. The base's ability to cut through the water adds convenience, while one-third of the chundan vallam stays above the water, significantly lowering friction. Its compact design and the fact that the oars hit the water before the boat's body gives it an advantage over other boats in terms of speed. The stern provides the boat with extra propulsion as it glides off the water's surface. Originally, they were employed in combat to quickly approach and assault enemy vessels. Today, the idiyan stands where the cannon once stood. Each chundan vallam will have 75–95 rowers, 5 oarsmen, and up to 9 nilakkars.



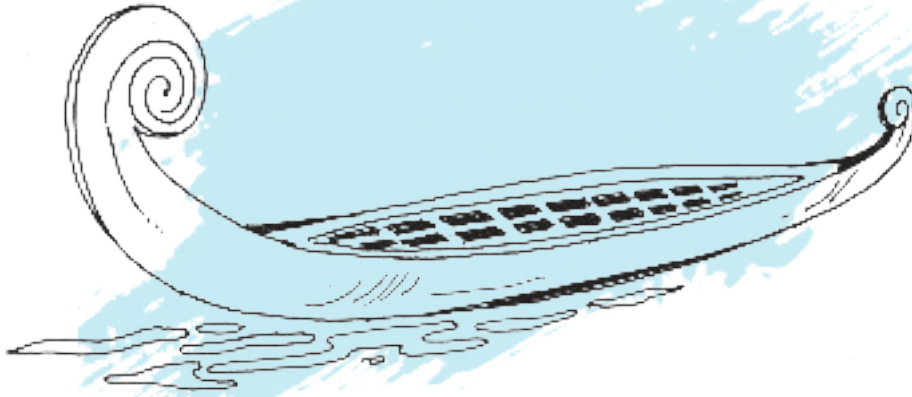
THEKKANODI

Race boats called thekkanodi have historically been a part of ceremonial processions. They are mostly used for competitions in the women's category. At least thirty rowers must participate in each thekkanodi. Although five men are allowed in the boat to maintain safety and steer the race boat, they are not authorized to row the oars.



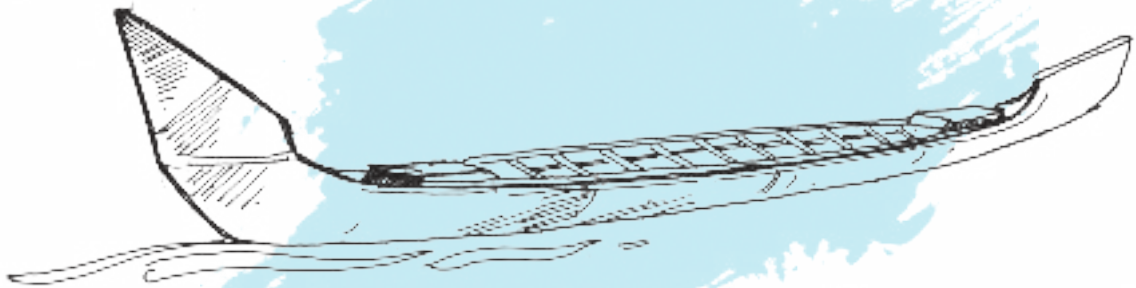
CHURULAN

In Kuttanad, the traditional travel boats are called churulan. Originally, they were employed for water transportation. They are unable to take advantage of speed since they row closer to the water's surface. Each churulan vallam will have 25–30 oarsmen, participants, and standers.



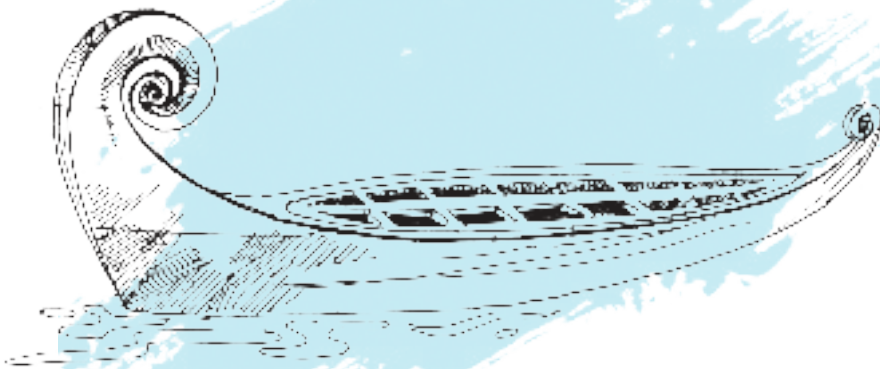
VEPPU VALLAM

The distinctive feature of veppu vallams is their rose bow (koombu) and stern, which resemble the classic chundan vallam. Originally, they were used to provide food to soldiers in the chundan vallams during times of war. In addition to standers, there will be oarsmen in grades A and B, who will number 45–60 and 25–35, respectively.



IRUTTU KUTTHI

The iruttu kutthi vallams cut their way through the water's surface to continue their voyage. They are the only race boats that can outperform the chundan vallams due to their narrow shape and pointed ends, which make it easy for them to cut through the water. Unlike chundan and veppu vallams, they have no stern, which adds to their advantage in terms of aerodynamics. There will be 45–60 rowers in an A-grade iruttu kutthi, 25–35 rowers in a B-grade, and fewer than 25 rowers in a C-grade iruttu kutthi, in addition to oarsmen and participants





Panachikkad

A Land-Locked Village that Makes Paddles



**Home to the legendary temple of Saraswathi or Goddess of Knowledge,
Panachikkad is well-renowned as Dakshina Mookambi.
Now, the village is paddling to greater glory through its craftsmanship.**



VEENA RAJAN
Freelance Writer

As the waves on the Punnamada Lake ready themselves to host the grand water festival, Panachikkad village in Kottayam district gets prepared to supply paddles to the rowers of race boats. As the paddles rise and fall vigorously to the beat of the vanchippaattu [boat songs], spreading sprays of enthusiasm all around, the majestic spectacle gives Panachikkad virtual goosebumps of joy and pride. And as each boat appears to sprout fins, and zips through vast water bodies in pursuit of the first prize, Panachikkad, a tiny, land-locked village, feels both nervous and excited. Panachikkad is the prime producer of paddles that send hearts racing in most water festivals and competitions, including the prestigious Nehru Trophy Boat Race.

The Mlanthadam family in this village has been making and selling paddles for the water festivals for many years now. This practice began when Masha was the karanavar [head] of the family. It is the third generation of the family that is now involved in the business.

All the work involved in the creation of a paddle – from finding and chopping the right palm to fixing the handle in order to complete the structure – is done with complete dedication of mind and body. The first step is to cut the log into different sizes, with an electric saw. Thereafter, wedges and sledgehammers are used to split each piece, which is then chiselled to a smooth finish. After it is properly dried, the paddle is ready for sale. If a craftsman works hard throughout the day, he will be able to create up to five paddles.

Before the onset of each boat race season, various boat clubs place orders for paddles. When a new boat is launched, it will require around 100 paddles. Each paddle may be six to seven-and-a-half inches wide, and according to the width, the price of one paddle may go up to Rs 400 or more. The paddles used in boat races are wider than usual.

Those made at Panachikkad have gained so much fame that they are in great demand not only among boat clubs participating in the Nehru Trophy Boat Race but in various other competitions as well, including the Aranmula, Champakkulam, Kumarakam and so on. Even after the racing season is over, paddles are made here because they are sought by owners of small boats, and in

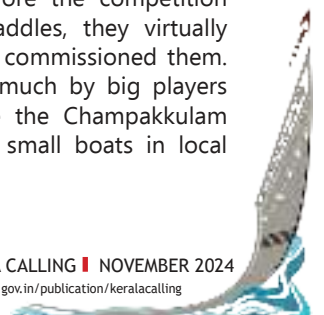
demand for sale in shops.

Usually, five kinds of paddles – Mongoose, Koombu, Thokku (Nattaassery), Amara and ordinary (small paddle/ Nayambu) – are made. The Mongoose is a wide paddle that is used to push away water by rowers in the middle rows; the Koombu, by rowers sitting at the higher level (stern) of palliyodams [boats used to ferry deities or royal personages]; the Thokku, by rowers in the front and back of the chundan vallams [snake boats]; the Amara is the steering oar used by the steersmen.

The paddle-makers of Panachikkad experience indescribable joy when rowers, after winning the Nehru Trophy, celebrate their victory on the boat and in the water. As they sit in their small sheds, members of the Mlanthadam family and their labourers, give as much

Panachikkad is the
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attention to their work as the rowers themselves, who train vigorously for a month before the competition begins. While they chisel the paddles, they virtually craft victory for the boat that has commissioned them. Their craftsmanship is sought as much by big players participating in mega events like the Champakkulam Boat Race as by those who row small boats in local competitions. ■



Igniting the Waters!

The energy radiated by boat songs

The author, a former MLA, strove hard to bestow the deserving tribute to boat races and boat songs. He did this, in his inimitable style, by reciting boat songs in the Legislature of Kerala. Here is a personal account of how he found his purpose and achieved his goals.



C.K. SADASIVAN
Former MLA

The prolific heritage of Kerala is not encapsulated exclusively in Kathakali, the Aranmula mirror or Ayurveda, but remarkably in our boat races and boat songs too. The centuries-old boat songs or Vanchippaattu and the boat races or Vallom Kali that symbolise hand power, body power and mind power have immense significance in Kerala. The sport, dubbed as 'Olympics on waves', is not limited to certain areas. It has won hearts in all the regions blessed with water bodies in Kerala. The boat songs ignite the passion, the competitive spirit and the charm of the boat races.



The snake boats
are an exquisite
example of our
adventurous and
superlative artistic
and sporting
excellence.

Astounding handiwork of our great artisans, the traditional snake boats of Kerala are sure to sweep admirers off their feet. Whenever foreign dignitaries visit Kerala, we present replicas of snake boats or Kathakali artistes as souvenirs. The snake boats are an exclusive speciality of Kerala. The contest of snake boats is also indigenous to Kerala. In places like Singapore, there are races featuring swan boats and dragon boats that can seat 30 people. Canoeing, kayaking and rowing competitions are held in other countries as well. In our snake boats, over 100 people can be seated comfortably. It is quite a sight to behold as the helmsmen, the rowers and the boat song team line up in the boat. These boats are an exquisite example of our adventurous and superlative artistic and sporting excellence.

Ever since the Nehru Trophy was kick-started in 1952, Ministers from the Union government and state government take part as chief guests. Despite the grandeur, back in the days, boat races and boat songs were not accorded the deserving honour. As a person born and brought up in Kuttanad, the land of backwaters,

I felt it was my responsibility to take up this cause. After all, I was the Secretary of United Boat Club, Kainakary and their team captain for twelve years. It was my good fortune that I could formulate the mass drill that attracts not only tourists but all fans of the Nehru Trophy Boat Race. I could also serve as the official and chief co-ordinator of Nehru Trophy for several years. I have penned some boat songs and have been able to present them in a popular way. It was my fervent desire to make boat races and boat songs eternal in the cultural realm of Kerala and save its rich legacy for posterity. I set myself on a mission to get boat races acknowledged as a sports item and get them associated with tourism. I also strongly felt that efforts must be taken to include boat songs as a competitive item in school and college-level art competitions. Thus, when I became an elected representative of the people of Ambalappuzha, I resolved to make a mark for boat races and boat songs. After a lot of deliberation, I decided to raise a point of order in the Legislature of Kerala.

It was 31 July 1995. A.K. Antony was the Chief Minister of Kerala. I raised a point of order in the Kerala



Some notable boat songs of Kerala

Kuchela Vritham by Ramapurathu Varrier

Karuna by Kumaranasan

Kshethra Pravesana Vilambaram by

Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer

Poraa Poraa Naalil Naalil by

Vallathol Narayana Menon

Swapnavihaari by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai

Gurupooja by Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panicker

Shakunthalam by Pandit K. P. Karuppan

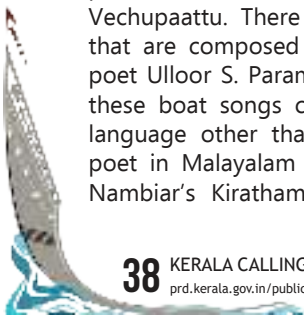
Boat songs by *I.C. Chacko*

Boat songs by *Ambalappuzha Kunju Pillai*

Legislature calling for the Chief Minister's attention. As with harvest songs, the boat songs too emerged as the rhythm of respite of the toiling labourers. Over the years, they evolved as an integral part of the Malayalam literary world. The boat songs are sung in a metre that illustrates the rising and falling intonations. These are presented in three styles – Aranmula, Kuttanad and Vechupaattu. There are also very popular film songs that are composed in the Vanchippaattu style. Great poet Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer had once opined that these boat songs could not have taken birth in any language other than Malayalam. Almost every great poet in Malayalam has penned boat songs. Kunchan Nambiar's Kiratham Vanchippaattu is known as the

first boat song of Malayalam. It is imperative that we preserve these precious verses for future generations. I requested the honourable Legislature of Kerala to include boat songs as a competitive item in the school youth festival competitions. While doing so, I recited a boat song in the State Assembly, in fact, one of my own creations. I implored that this move would help pass on our cultural elements of yesteryear to the next generation. Children from every generation will learn these boat songs to participate in the school youth festival, and the public will continue to hear it. It must be remembered that many art forms in Kerala still continue to be in popular memory solely due to the youth festivals. Upon the raising of my point of order, the then Minister for Education, P.K. Abdurubb, promised prompt action. Subsequently, Vanchippaattu or boat songs were included as a competition item in the school youth festival. The Government of Kerala also granted the status of a sports item to boat races. Thus I feel extremely gratified that I could be instrumental in bringing an eternal imprint for boat races and boat songs in Kerala. I believe I was destined to champion this cause because of my inseparable bond with boat races and boat songs.

Later, the Government of Kerala originated the innovative idea of Champions Boat League, an IPL model boat race. I had the opportunity to head the subcommittee appointed by the Nehru Trophy Boat Race Society to study the prospects of CBL. The League is held in the tourist season so as to attract maximum tourists to this event. CBL is conducted in Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Kollam districts. The teams that win in each race are given a sizeable bonus and cash prize. The Champions Boat League thus became a breather for the boat clubs and race organisers. Today, the boat races in Kerala have earned their rightful place. They draw admirers from all over the world. And the boat songs reverberate in every nook and corner of the state. I am indeed grateful and contented. ■





JAMESKUTTY JACOB
State President,
Kerala Boat Club Association

Construction of boats is not merely an occupation. In Kerala, it is a legacy bequeathed by master craftsmen and a revered mission.



Umamaheshwaran Achari

When different regions and clubs openly divide themselves into separate camps, and loudly cheer for their favourite chundan valloms [snake boats] that slice through the waters, leaving their wakes to form quarrelling ripples over the lake, there is one family to whom all the competing boats are like its own children. The reason is that nearly all the snake boats which participate in the water festivals and competitions have been lovingly chiselled to perfection by the artisanal hands of men who belong to the family of the master craftsman, Kozhimukku Narayanan Achari. Members of the next generation, comprising Umamaheshwaran Achari, Sabu Narayanan Achari and Soman Achari, have chosen to follow in their father's footsteps, and are currently very active in the field of boat construction.

The Ar(k)tisans of Kerala





Kozhimukku Narayanan Achari dedicated a good part of his life to building sturdy vessels, until his demise in 1994 at the age of 72. In all, he made 13 snake boats and three palliyodams [boats specially designated for ferrying deities or royal personages]. He passed away before he could complete the construction of the Ambedkar snake boat, directly commissioned by the state government. At this juncture, the eldest son of the family, Umamaheshwaran Achari stepped into the field of boat building in order to complete the project his father had begun. His siblings lent him a helping hand, all of them having learnt the indigenous science of boat building from their father.

The very next year, Umamaheshwaran Achari and his team constructed the Alappadan snake boat, followed by the Payippadan snake boat. Since then, there has been no looking back. So far, in a span of 29 years, he has built six veppuvalloms [smaller versions of snake boats in which, originally, food used to be cooked in order to serve warriors who travelled in snake boats] one palliyodam and 17 snake boats, including the Kadavil St George snake boat that was launched in 2024.

Among these snake boats, eight have won the coveted Nehru Trophy. The Champakkulam snake boat, that won the Nehru Trophy on its debut appearance, and the Payippadan snake boat that won the trophy four times are all the handiwork of the same craftsman. In fact, the snake boats built by Umamaheshwaran Achari emerged first in the racing competition and won the Nehru Trophy for eight years in a row, from 2010. He was and continues to be assisted by three of his sons as well as Soman, his brother. Another brother, Krishnankutty, who was active in the same field died in 2015.

Sabu Narayanan Achari, who used to help Umamaheshwaran Achari, struck out on his own in 2010. He began working independently by reconstructing a veppuvalloam. The first snake boat he made was Aayamparambu Pandi in 2012. Since then, he has





made seven snake boats, including St Pious, Thalavady, Cheruthana and Melppadam, and three veppuvalloms. Right now, he is constructing a new veppuvallom. The Veeyapuram snake boat that emerged the winner and took the Nehru Trophy in 2023, and the Nadumbhagam snake boat that won in 2019 were his creations.

This is how a boat takes birth

The first step is to find the right kind of wood for building the boat. The trunk of a mature wild jack tree [*Artocarpus hirsutus*] is the most commonly used one. In the artisan's opinion, the wild jack found especially in Meenachil taluk is of the best variety. The reason is that the quality of the soil gets reflected in the sturdy pith of the trunk. The craftsman himself goes to the site and makes the choice. Vrikshapuja is conducted, (i.e., the tree is worshipped and prayers offered for the creatures whose lives would be disrupted) before it is chopped down. A boat-construction shed (malippura in the vernacular) is put up, and a ritual called Ulikkuthu (uli is "chisel" in Malayalam) is performed before the actual construction begins.

A sketch of the boat is drawn, in which it is divided into eight equal parts. Next, a mould of the boat is made, using planks made from a mango tree. Then, five planks of the chopped wild jack log are placed on the mould. In the beginning, construction of the boat is done with it

facing downwards. Eravupalaka, or the plank that forms the bottom of the boat, is placed first. The ones placed on its sides are called mathaavu. Once this basic structure is complete, the boat is turned to face upwards. Thereafter, more planks (called vankupalaka) are attached to raise the flanks of the boat.

In many places, the wooden planks will have to be curved to be properly fitted. In earlier times, the planks were smeared with cow dung, and heated over embers made from coconut shells and husks, to give them the required curvature. The modern method is to place the wooden plank between two frames, secure it using ropes, and then bend it to shape. The planks are glued to one another with the help of an adhesive that is a mixture of coconut oil, cotton and chechalyam (a resin produced by native pine trees). The joints are further fortified with iron and copper nails. Beeswax is smeared on iron nails to prevent rusting. Further chiselling is done to ensure that the thickness of the wooden planks on both sides of the boat is the same. The boat is then cleaned with turmeric and coconut oil, after which the decorative pointy piece is fixed to the bow, and metal bubbles along the sides. It is then loaded on a bed of raw coconut husk for transportation. The paddles and the rudders are handed over to the owners at the spot where the boat is launched into the water. It takes six to eight months to build a boat, and the cost comes to anywhere between Rs 40 and Rs 70 lakhs. ■



United in Strength Fuelled by Passion

Intense training and unbreakable teamwork transform oarsmen into a unified force, driving the spirit of Kerala's iconic boat races.

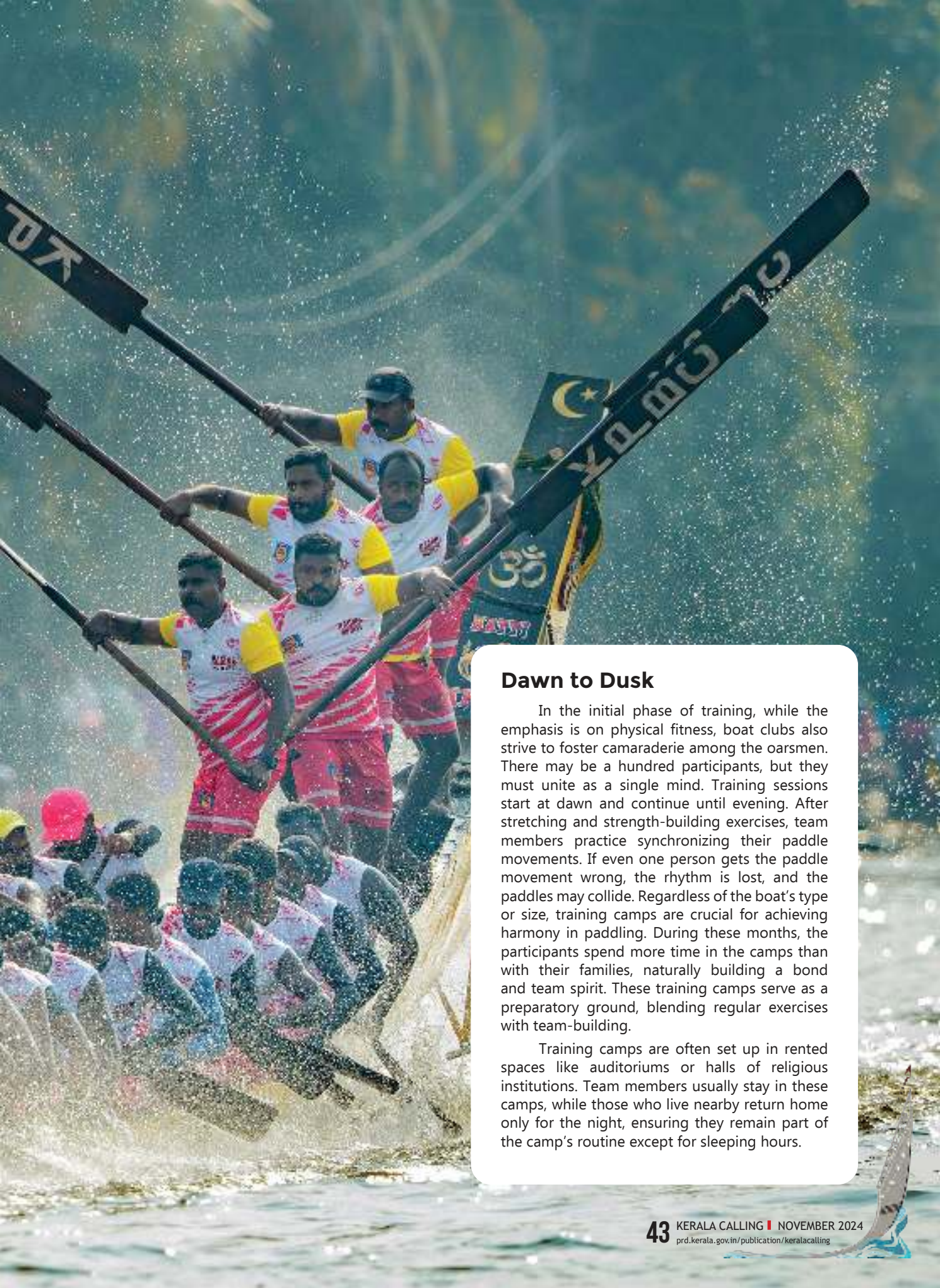
RENJITH N

Boat races are the ultimate spectacle of festivity and excitement for spectators. The celebratory and competitive spirit of the oarsmen is unparalleled. However, the hard work behind these grand events is equally unmatched.

While boat races are known for their vitality, the journey for the participants can be equally arduous. Before each race, the oarsmen undergo rigorous physical training and thorough psychological preparation. The training camps of boat clubs serve as arenas for significant physical and mental transformation.

Boat races are renowned as the greatest team sport, especially the snake boat races, where a team may have as many as 100 participants. A single mistake from any one of them can disrupt the speed and momentum of the boat.

While athletes in other sports may practice for months or even years, boat clubs can typically only afford a maximum of two months of training. This period is divided into two phases. During the first month, the focus is on building the oarsmen's physical fitness. To achieve this, boat clubs often enlist retired military trainers to design exercise regimens. Trial practices in the boats generally begin only 20 to 30 days before the actual competition.



Dawn to Dusk

In the initial phase of training, while the emphasis is on physical fitness, boat clubs also strive to foster camaraderie among the oarsmen. There may be a hundred participants, but they must unite as a single mind. Training sessions start at dawn and continue until evening. After stretching and strength-building exercises, team members practice synchronizing their paddle movements. If even one person gets the paddle movement wrong, the rhythm is lost, and the paddles may collide. Regardless of the boat's type or size, training camps are crucial for achieving harmony in paddling. During these months, the participants spend more time in the camps than with their families, naturally building a bond and team spirit. These training camps serve as a preparatory ground, blending regular exercises with team-building.

Training camps are often set up in rented spaces like auditoriums or halls of religious institutions. Team members usually stay in these camps, while those who live nearby return home only for the night, ensuring they remain part of the camp's routine except for sleeping hours.



Camps in Full Swing

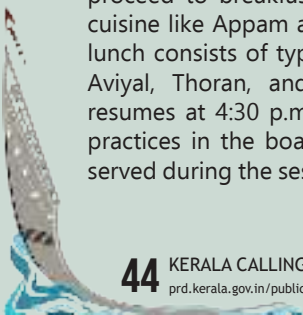
The camps begin daily at 6 a.m. In the initial days, the oarsmen are served soaked groundnuts, green gram, and Bengal gram to support muscle building. Exercise sessions start at 7 a.m., followed by practice in the boats. They have four ten-minute sessions or two to three twenty-minute rowing sessions. Between sessions, each participant is served two boiled eggs. After rowing, they proceed to breakfast, which includes traditional Kerala cuisine like Appam and Idiyappam. A break follows, and lunch consists of typical Kerala dishes such as Pulissery, Aviyal, Thoran, and fish curry. The evening session resumes at 4:30 p.m. with stretching exercises and trial practices in the boats. Snacks of oats and bananas are served during the session, and the day ends with a dinner

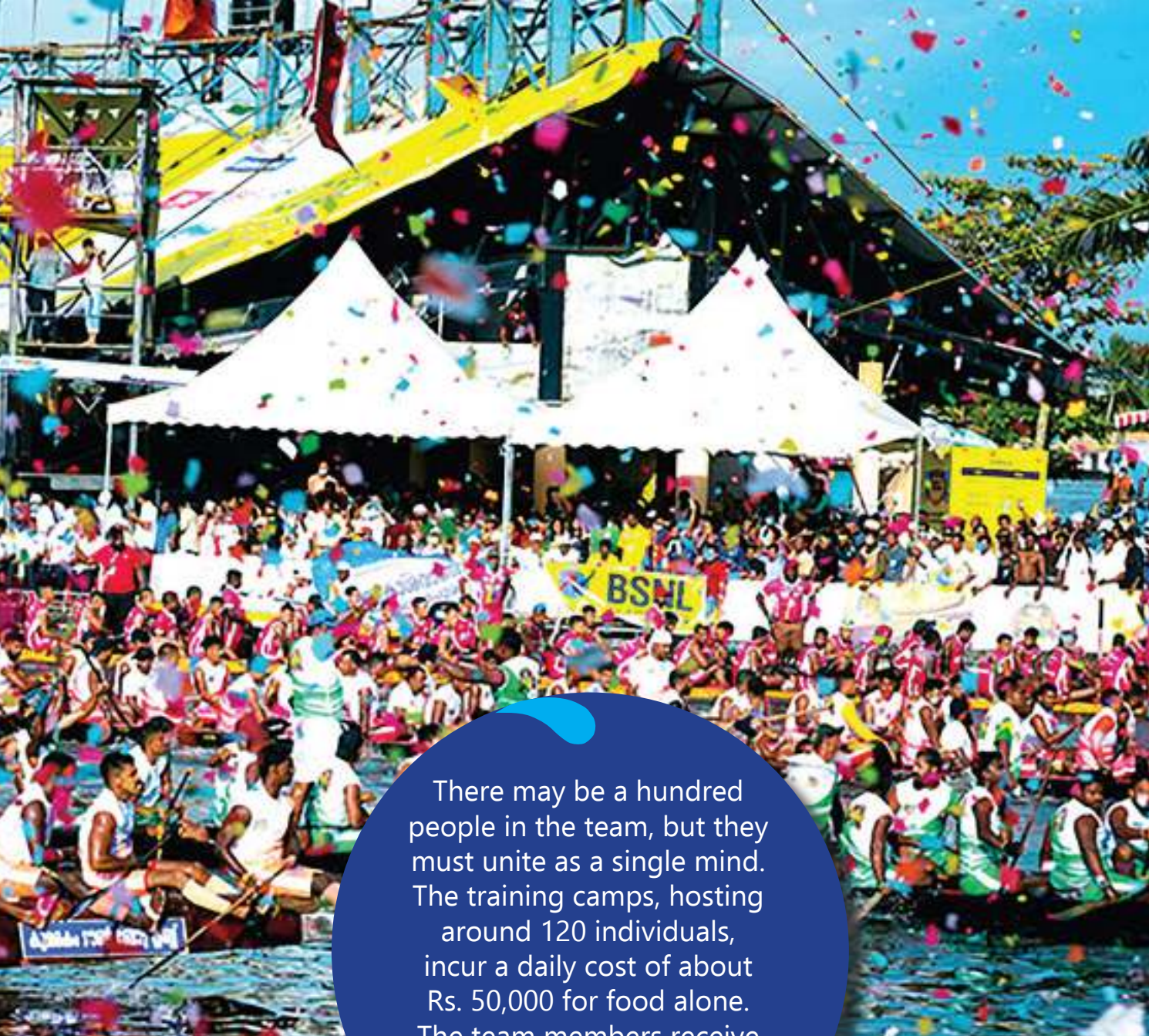
of Chapati, Appam, or meals with chicken curry. The participants head to bed by 10 p.m.

Let's Spice It Up at the Race

Special attention is given to the health and diet of the oarsmen. A dedicated team of cooks prepares meals throughout the training period. While Kerala is known for its spicy cuisine, the oarsmen are served milder food, especially fish and chicken curries. Oily foods are avoided, and ginger and garlic are used liberally to prevent heartburn during paddling.

The camps, hosting around 120 people, incur a daily cost of about Rs. 50,000 for food alone. Additional expenses include hall rentals and cooks' salaries. Villagers often assist with cleaning and other supporting roles





There may be a hundred people in the team, but they must unite as a single mind. The training camps, hosting around 120 individuals, incur a daily cost of about Rs. 50,000 for food alone. The team members receive training based on their specific roles in the contest

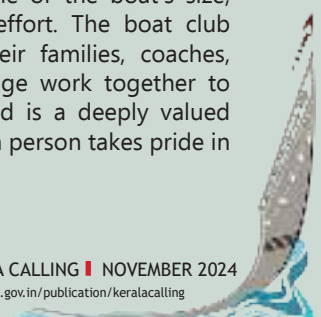
at the camps. Moreover, boats that accompany the racers during practice also charge a fee.

Attendance is a Must

Coaches note that training practices have evolved over time. Previously, most training took place directly in the boat, and the day's meals were considered payment. Today, warm-up exercises and stretching are integral to the regimen. Training starts with running, followed by rowing trials. Attendance is compulsory, as the absence of even one participant can disrupt the team's rhythm. The oarsmen receive role-specific training for the competition.

Beyond a strict diet, rigorous training, and adequate rest, boat clubs ensure that participants are free from physical or mental strain. Alcohol and narcotics are strictly prohibited.

Regardless of the race's scale or the boat's size, the training process is a social effort. The boat club management, team members, their families, coaches, support staff, and the entire village work together to secure victory. This training period is a deeply valued time for everyone involved, as each person takes pride in being part of the boat race. ■





AROMAL ANIL
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Fascination Irresistible

The Backwaters of Kerala

An irresistible fascination awaits in Kerala's backwaters—a world where nature, culture, and tradition flow seamlessly together

The backwaters, a stunning network of lagoons, canals, and lakes, are part of Kerala's natural and cultural heritage. This ribbon of productive habitat, stretching 900 km, enchants visitors with its landscapes and lies at the heart of the region's people's economic and cultural heritage.


Tourist Destinations

Kerala's tourism industry relies heavily on the backwaters. Key locations like Kochi, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram, and Alappuzha attract tourists seeking a unique experience. Houseboat trips offer an immersive journey through rice terraces and rural villages. In addition to drawing attention worldwide, the annual Nehru Trophy Boat Race celebrates the rich local culture. The backwaters are a living tapestry of Kerala's history, where each encounter with the

environment tells a tale.

Cultural and Economic Considerations

The backwaters, beyond their scenic beauty, have a complex relationship with the culture and economy of the region. Communities engage in fishing and agriculture for their livelihoods, and the areas rich in backwaters have fertile land suitable for growing rice. Tourism enhancement strategies have led to an increase in homestays, local crafts, and small businesses, thus providing an economic base for the people in the region. The infusion of tourism into local culture does not detach communities from their fundamental social structures; instead, it enhances their dignity as they showcase their rich traditions to guests.



Kerala's backwaters weave a vibrant blend of culture and nature, drawing visitors into a world of serene beauty and timeless tradition.



Environmental Importance

The backwaters also serve as an environmental necessity, supporting various life forms. This ecosystem includes fish, migratory birds, and other species. The unique mix of salt and freshwater is essential for sustaining life within the system and contributes to environmental health. The backwaters also aid in water purification, functioning as a natural filtration system.

The backwaters of Kerala hold great potential for sustainable development. Special activities, such as eco-friendly green houseboats and progressive fishing practices, can enhance visitors' experiences while promoting sustainability.

In sum, the backwaters of Kerala embody the most beautiful aspects of nature, humanity, and opportunities for growth. Thanks to a commitment to sustainability, Kerala can continue to showcase this remarkable resource to the world while preserving it for future generations. ■

Not just kayaking; it's Malabar's legacy

Malabar River Festival, an international kayaking competition, draws top athletes and thrill-seekers to Kerala, boosting the state's adventure tourism.



ANUSREE A
Journalist

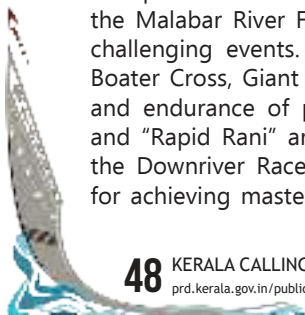
The Malabar River Festival, a premier white-water kayaking competition held annually in Kozhikode, Kerala, has become a centerpiece of adventure tourism in India. Organized by the Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society, Kerala Tourism Department, and District Tourism Promotion Council, the event draws international attention to Kerala's pristine rivers and adventurous spirit. This year, the festival's 10th edition was held in July, which was an exhilarating blend of kayaking prowess, cultural performances, and diverse pre-event activities.

Set against the picturesque backdrops of the Iruvazhinji, Chalipuzha and Meenthullippara rivers in upland Kozhikode, the Malabar River Festival presents kayakers with a variety of challenging events. Competitions such as the Extreme Race, Boater Cross, Giant Slalom, and Downriver Race test the skills and endurance of paddlers. Annually, the titles "Rapid Raja" and "Rapid Rani" are awarded to the quickest competitors in the Downriver Race, adding a cultural touch and recognition for achieving mastery over the fast waters of Kerala. The pre-

events were held in nine gram panchayats and Mukkam municipality ushering in a festival ambience among the public. In 2024, twelve elite kayakers from countries including France, Italy, Norway, Germany, Russia, and New Zealand have participated, alongside a remarkable roster of national entrants from India and Nepal. Manu Wackernagel from New Zealand and Marissa Kaup from Germany had emerged as Rapid Raja and Rapid Rani respectively. The festival's international participation reinforces Kerala's growing reputation as a hotspot for water sports enthusiasts, and for many onlookers, witnessing kayaking legends navigate Kerala's rivers is a thrilling experience. The spectacular performance of nine-year old Kayaker, Rayan was the ice in the cake of this year's event.

A Boost for Local and International Tourism

The Malabar River Festival has made a





name for itself as an event that captures considerable tourist interest, and its significance in fostering adventure tourism in Kerala is undeniable. It not only attracts international kayakers but also draws in spectators, adventure enthusiasts, and families who are captivated by both the event and the stunning landscapes of the region. The rivers and scenic views of Kodenchery, Thiruvambady and Chakkittappara, which may have otherwise gone unnoticed by mainstream tourism, are now drawing a specialized crowd eager for adventure tourism. In addition to the sporting events, the festival also highlights Kerala's dedication to ecotourism and responsible travel practices. By promoting the state's natural wonders through environmentally conscious activities, Kerala Tourism seeks to engage tourists who are interested in sustainable travel, which benefits both the local environment and the economy.

Pre-Events a Community Engagement

The festival's pre-event activities feature an exciting array of options that actively involve the local community and provide tourists with a variety of adventures. Activities like mountain biking, water rallies, water polo, mud football, off-road competitions, kabaddi tournaments, rain walks, cycling, and mountaineering workshops offer tourists unique insights into the area's natural beauty. These offerings are integral rather than merely supplementary, fostering local pride and strengthening the bond between tourists and residents.

Honoring Kerala's Legacy

Enhancing the festival's appeal, cultural programs highlight Kerala's dynamic heritage, featuring performances from the Folklore Academy and a concert by renowned playback singer Athul Narukara. These cultural experiences immerse attendees in the state's rich traditions, making the festival an ideal combination of adventure and culture.

Advancing Adventure Tourism in India

Kerala's efforts to enhance adventure tourism have been crucial in establishing the state as a hub for high-adrenaline activities. By hosting a globally recognized event like the Malabar River Festival, Kerala's tourism organizations are creating a distinct niche in the international adventure tourism scene, especially in white-water kayaking. The Malabar River Festival also spurs investment in the region's tourism infrastructure. With the growing number of tourists attending the event annually, local businesses, hospitality industries, and transportation services experience a significant boost in revenue. Additionally, the festival motivates residents to engage in adventure sports and develop a newfound appreciation for the local river ecosystems.

The Malabar River Festival is not merely a kayaking event; it is a tribute to the wild rivers of Kerala, its rich culture, and the expanding adventure tourism industry. As the festival brings together kayakers and adventure lovers from across the globe, it also shines a spotlight on Kerala's lesser-known gems. By presenting a harmonious blend of competition, community initiatives, and cultural displays, the festival emphasizes Kerala as a top destination for both adventure seekers and cultural explorers. ■



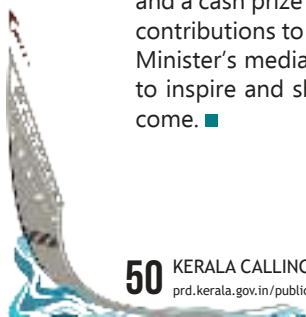
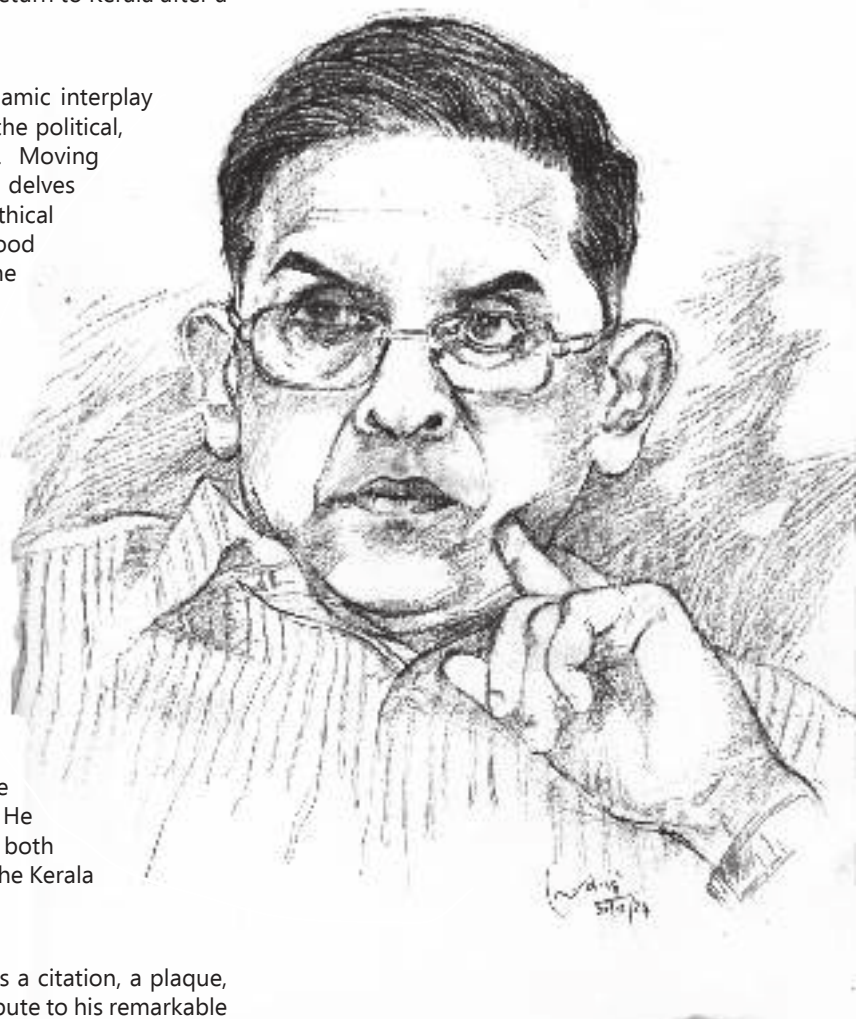
Prabha Varma Honoured with Saraswati Samman

In a momentous achievement for Malayalam literature, renowned poet and lyricist Prabha Varma was awarded the prestigious Saraswati Samman for 2023, for his profound poetic work Roudra Sathwikam. Instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation in 1991, this coveted award celebrates India's most exceptional literary contributions, marking a special return to Kerala after a twelve-year interval.

Roudra Sathwikam captures a dynamic interplay of politics and power, the personal and the political, and the role of art and its patrons. Moving beyond historical realism, Varma's work delves into political moralism, complex ethical quandaries, and the classic struggle of good versus evil. Unlike many recent works, the book strikes a rare balance between a captivating storyline and profound intellectual depth, cementing its place as a modern classic.

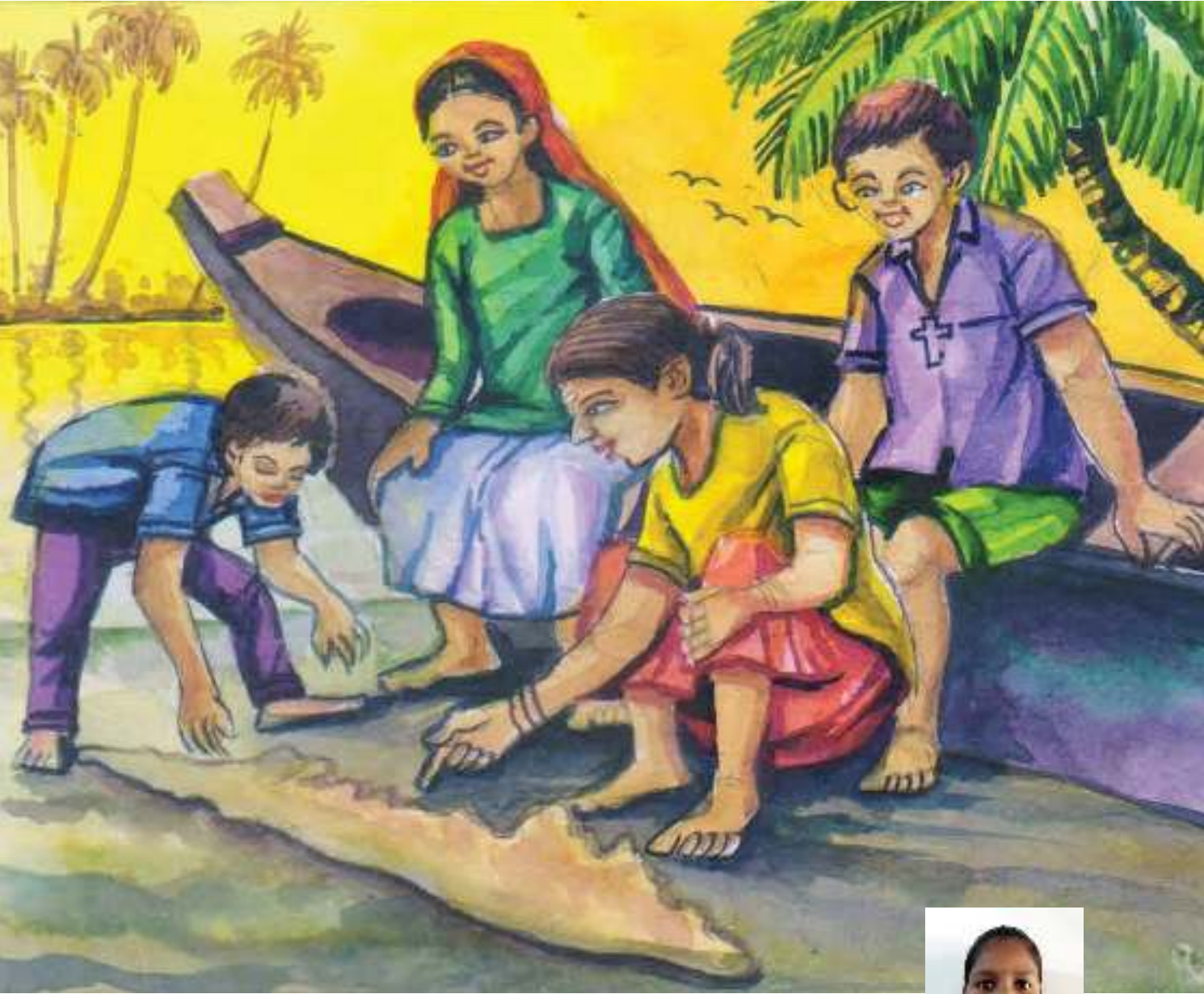
Born in 1959 at Thiruvalla, Prabha Varma has become a towering figure in Malayalam literature, celebrated as a poet, lyricist and journalist. His illustrious repertoire includes many titles, with novels both in English and Malayalam and acclaimed verse novels like Syamamadhavam and Kanalchilambu. He has earned more than seventy accolades including the Kendra Sahitya Akademi award and the National Film Award for the Best Lyrics. He is one of the rare few to be honoured by both the Kendra Sahitya Akademi award and the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award.

Along with the title, Varma receives a citation, a plaque, and a cash prize of Rs 15 lakh, a fitting tribute to his remarkable contributions to Indian literature. Currently serving as the Chief Minister's media secretary, Varma's enduring legacy continues to inspire and shape the literary landscape for generations to come. ■



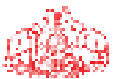
FINISH





Creating Nava Keralam

A painting by Thanmaya an 8th - grade - student from Govt. HSS Kannadipparamba, Kannur, was selected for the 2024 Children's Day stamp



**Information & Public
Relations Department**

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