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KERALA CALLING

APRIL 01, 2024_VOL_44_No.06

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Grace of Androgen

The story of men in classical Indian dances goes back a long way, with men leading the way in starting many dance styles and being key to their growth and performances

Athirappilly Falls





Embracing Change, Inspiring Hope

This issue of Kerala Calling shines a light on an evolving narrative within the world of Indian classical dances, where traditional gender roles are being expanded to welcome men into realms previously dominated by women, such as Mohiniyattam. This change reflects a broader evolution towards inclusivity and diversity in cultural expressions, breaking down long-standing barriers and fostering a richer, more varied artistic community.

The magazine also turns its attention to the pressing issue of climate change and its impact on agriculture, a critical sector for many regions, not just Kerala. The unpredictable weather patterns, including erratic rains and increasing temperatures, pose significant challenges to farmers and threaten food security. These concerns call for a swift and innovative response to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change on agriculture, ensuring sustainability and economic stability for farming communities.

In celebrating World Health Day, Kerala Calling spotlights the initiatives and advancements that are paving the way

towards more accessible and equitable healthcare. This edition is a tribute to the collective efforts and strides being made towards a health system that is inclusive and caters to everyone, highlighting the shared journey towards achieving health equity.

The edition doesn't miss the chance to celebrate the power of words on World Book Day, intertwining the joy of reading with the transformative impact of literature. Through these diverse themes, the magazine not only offers a rich blend of cultural insights and contemporary challenges but also inspires a reflective dialogue on the evolving dynamics within Kerala's socio-cultural and environmental landscape.

As Kerala approaches the parliamentary elections this April, this edition includes articles related to the elections, emphasizing the importance of electoral participation. Readers are sure to find this edition particularly engaging, offering a broad spectrum of content that spans a variety of themes and interests.

T.V. Subhash IAS
Editor



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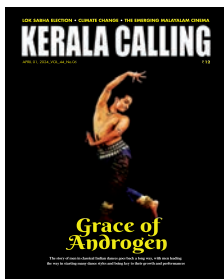
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India General Election 2024



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Role of Elections in Democracy



Elections are fundamental to the theory and practice of democracy. Theoretically, the right to vote is the basis of the ideals of democracy such as equality, freedom, justice and so forth. Practically, without free and fair elections, there can be no democracy.



Dr. Josukutty C.A.

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There is a real tangible connection between election and people and the various processes and activities involved in it. Casting a vote is not merely a symbolic, expressive gesture but a communicative act, signalling to the governments and political parties the attitudes and approaches of the people. Elections are a constitutional mechanism for orderly political change. Popular sovereignty, one of the fundamental principles of democracy, is ascertained and renewed in elections. It ascertains the sovereign will of the people on matters of policies and the choices of representatives to various representative bodies.

Elections are relevant both for the people and the political system at different levels. One, elections give people the self-confidence and the much-needed opportunity for political participation and in the making and unmaking of governments. Two, it provides an opportunity for to people influence policy matters. Through these two functions, ordinary people are empowered and become part of the government. During elections, people evaluate the performance of the government and ensure that the system adheres to the professed values and principles of democracy. People get an opportunity to vent their grievances –express their anger and frustration and also have satisfaction in elections. Accordingly, people support, oppose or remain indifferent or neutral to the policies and programmes of the government.

At the political system level, elections are occasions for the renewal of its legitimacy through the peaceful and orderly transfer of power from one party to another or re-election of the same party. It gives legitimacy to the



Training for polling officials

ruling dispensation and the opposition. Both represent the people and together constitute what is called substantive democracy. Elections elicit the allegiance of the people for system maintenance and support building. This is affected by the performance of several vital functions which are fundamental to the health of a democracy. One is the political stability of the state for continued functioning of the government for system maintenance. Two, integration of the citizen into the system of government. By voting and electing a government, a citizen becomes part of the government- a pattern of integration between the citizen and the system. Three, protection of the interests of the people vis-a-vis a government. The promises made during an election are essentially related to the interests and welfare of people. Fourth democracy is an act of regular communication between the government and the governed. Elections times are the peak of political communication on myriad issues. Effective communication connects the people and government and leads to democratic conflict resolution of problems faced by the people. Five, political awareness or education of the people about the country, their problems, and the position of different parties on various issues. Political awareness adds meaning to citizenship and their role in the political system. Six, elections are occasions

to recruit and train people for public offices as political activists, parliamentarians and thus enlightened citizens. Seven, political accountability or control functions, elections ensure accountability of the elected to the people. The rulers are held responsible for what they have done and not done through elections.

In short, elections are the mechanism by which a democratic political system acquires legitimacy and obtains the consent of the governed through the participation of the citizens in elections. Election times are seed times and harvest times in a democracy. It is seed time as new ideas, perspectives and solutions are thrown open and submitted to the people. That is why it is said elections are a celebration time for democracy and Arend Lijphart more colorfully characterized elections are the dance of democracy. And in this process, elections have transformed the self-understandings of people, the very manner in which they imagine themselves and conduct themselves in a polity. In other words, elections are occasions in which people behave based on their perception and attitude to democracy. And this is valid only if citizens exercise their right to vote. In this sense, every election is an opportunity to reaffirm faith in the theory and practice of democracy. That is why the right to vote is the most sacred right in a democracy.





The Changing Face of Election Campaigning

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India, being the greatest democracy in the world, is all set to conduct the largest democratic exercise of its general elections. Political campaigning is the mainstay of elections for reaching information-deprived voters, undecided voters and also influencing the voters with higher media exposure and greater access to information. While elections are considered a cornerstone of people's rule, election campaigning is a tool to promote accountability, transparency, electoral participation, political communication, election awareness and to connect directly with their future representatives. Over time, India's political landscape has evolved, giving rise to non-conventional and innovative campaigning methods. It was in 2013 that the entire notion of election campaigning underwent a radical transformation.

Since the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, the popular forms of election campaigning have been, door-to-door canvassing, letter writing to influence the literate, celebrity endorsements, street plays, magic shows, talking dolls, films and the use of tele-link services to deliver prerecorded messages. Print, television, radio and the use of toys and trinkets also played an important role. The 2014 election campaign was significant in several ways. The remarkable change was the move from conventional methods to innovative methods like social media, crowd fundraising, digital rallies, and robocalls along with huge road rallies and holographic presence. The introduction of cutting-edge interactive websites and the use of YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Hangouts for offline and online marketing were unprecedented.

Social media has become the sole medium to conduct more targeted outreach online leveraging the growing digital population.

The unprecedented internet diffusion in India with more than 800 million internet users and more than 462.0 million social media users in the year 2024 makes this platform apt for political campaigning and mobilization. While in-person mass campaign rallies are expensive, labour-intensive and time-consuming, virtual campaigning could be an effective medium to reach out to voters given its ease of work and the ability to attract a much wider audience. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ban on physical rallies by the Election Commission further accentuated political campaigning through various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Twitter played a key role in reaching out to the masses. WhatsApp groups of political parties were created to disseminate political messages and influence their voting choices. The 'Digital Saathi' app and 'cell phone pramukhs' were the WhatsApp efforts to promote public

opinion in their favour. However, online misinformation campaigns, trolling and manipulation of political messages pose a serious threat to this large democratic process. Despite the shortcomings, social media continues to be the most effective campaigning method in this new generation to connect with the younger demographic. This trend is visible in not just general elections, but also in state assembly polls.

Kerala, being a politically active society and a highly democratic state, has a vibrant and unique form of election campaigning. As opposed to other states, the nature of campaigning has been slightly different here and has also undergone a major shift over the years. During earlier times, the conventional forms of campaigning were house visits, door-to-door campaigning, street-corner meetings, displaying posters, small meetings at bus stands and town centres, installing flag posts, and mic announcements. Unlike huge rallies and road shows in other states, there wasn't any large-scale mobilization of people on roads.



Interestingly, the small rallies and road shows of various parties were organized and disciplined so as not to create any havoc. Nevertheless, massive road shows and long rallies were later profound in the state, led by state leaders with a heavily crowded population carrying party symbols. The finale of the campaign, known as “Kottikalasham” will have even intense massive participation. A distinctive aspect of campaigning in Kerala even now is the exquisite calligraphic wall writings that bear the candidate’s name and the party emblem throughout the state.

The 2016 Kerala Assembly election saw the proliferation of non-conventional methods of election campaigning like cleaning roads, go green policy, puppet shows, and playing outdoor sports like football. Social media has been one medium that politicians have significantly relied on for campaigning, especially since the 2016 Kerala assembly polls. To make social media profiles easily available on smart phones, a candidate from Kottayam utilized Quick Response (QR) codes in his campaign posters—a first for Indian politicians. Even veteran politicians have taken to social media through





Facebook posts and tweets. Recently, several Lok Sabha candidates in the state are turning to social media like Facebook to easily connect with youngsters and maiden voters.

With the 18th Lok Sabha elections just around the corner, campaigning is going on in full swing. From rallies to road shows to online platforms, candidates all across India are engaged in meeting people directly and virtually. Interestingly, even social media influencers are involved as part of digital campaigns. Generally speaking, the online presence of the major and regional parties

is on the rise. There is a huge potential for reaching the maximum number of voters online, but there are also challenges that need to be managed effectively. Yes, online campaigning can certainly increase political mobilization, but other forms of face-to-face meetings and gatherings will also be important. Nevertheless, online campaigning is an innovation in itself. Thus, the dynamics of the election campaign have undergone a tremendous transformation with a mix of social media and traditional means giving the election campaign a unique face. ■

Grace in Every Move

The Role of Men in Indian Classical Dances

The participation of men in Indian classical dances has been significant, providing a diverse range of creative input and support to these age-old art forms, reflecting an inclusive approach that values the contributions of all performers



**Sreevalsan
Thiyyadi**

Art Critic



*Odissi
Arjuna Vallabha*

CLASSICAL DANCE



*Bharatanatyam
Shijith Nambiar and
Parvathy Menon*

Mohiniyattam, the *lasya*-centric form, typically has women as practitioners and teachers, even as men have been a minor presence in the domain for four decades now. A handful of them learned the art either through private classes or from a couple of other dance institutions that never imposed restrictions on men learning Mohiniyattam. Historically, the 1930-founded Kalamandalam had introduced courses in this Kerala dance a couple of years after its inception. The earliest Mohiniyattam teacher was male: Korattikara Krishna Panikkar.

In the Tamil city of Thanjavur, north of the Krishna Vilas Tank, Serfoji's palace functioned not just as his living abode but as a bustling hub of performing arts. Dance, drama, and music flourished in a big way, and one of the products of that boom was a foursome who

became renowned as the Tanjore Quartet. The brothers—Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Sivanandam, and Vadivelu—excelled respectively as a dancer, composer-vocalist, mridangam percussionist, and violinist. Together, they contributed pivotally to Sadir that eventually gained global fame as Bharatanatyam in post-Independence India. Soon after 1832, when Serfoji II died at the age of 55, ending up as the last ruler of the Bhonsle dynasty of the Maratha principality of Thanjavur, the four brothers shifted to Travancore to serve under Maharaja Swati Tirunal Rama Varma. The polyglot Malayali genius (1813-46) was then just out of his teens but had already been regarded highly for his love and contributions to the arts. A music composer and patron of dances, Swati's verses have enriched Carnatic classical as well as popular choreographies in Mohiniyattam to date. Of the foursome, Vadivelu Pillai (1810-45) effectively uplifted

*Manipuri
Bipin Singh*





Kathakali

Margi Vijayakumar and Kalamandalam Gopi

Mohiniyattam by bringing its dancers to the Maharaja's court and facilitating their addition of aesthetics to the art.

Researchers point out a dearth of literature about the Mohiniyattam repertoire before the times of Swati. "Some dance pieces such as Mukkuthi and Kurathi were performed by Mohiniyattam dancers in northern Kerala, where the influence of the repertoire from Travancore was limited," according to scholar-guru Nirmala Paniker. Tracing back, pioneering performer Kalamandalam Sathyabhama (1937-2015) notes that 'Balarama Bharatam' by ruler Karthika Thirunal (1723-98) carries the earliest reference to Mohiniyattam (as 'MohiniyattaNatanam'). Impressed by Dasiyattam dance of a neighboring kingdom, he entrusted his courtiers to go for formatting, sketching the rudiments of Mohiniyattam. Poet Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949), too, records in his 'History of Kerala Literature' that Mohiniyattam was prevalent in the 18th century, only that it took Swati's period to earn a distinct enrichment with items such as cholkettu, jatiswaram, varnam, padam, and tillana. Today, at a pan-India level, Mohiniyattam is among the eight dances conferred with

an official 'classical' status. And Kerala, through Kathakali, is the only state that has contributed two to the list by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the country's 1953-founded apex body for performing arts. The peninsula has two others in the category: Bharatanatyam (Tamil Nadu) and Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh/Telangana). Adjacent to it is Odissi (from Odisha). From the Northeast are Manipuri (Manipur) and Sattriya (Assam). The extended Hindi belt, from Rajasthan to Bengal, has Kathak.

Dancers from Kerala

Kathakali, with its elements of drama, is counted as a dance-theatre, occupying the only such slot in the Akademi's list of 'classical' forms. Such is its 400 years of history that Kathakali has primarily been male-dominated. Only into the second half of the 20th century did the form see a trendy entry of women as performers. From the 1970s, Tripunithura, a little south of Kochi, even saw the formation of a ladies' troupe, following which present-day Kathakali has reasonably decent female participation. That apart, the masters, performers, and students primarily continue to be male. Be it Nalan Unni (1807-65), Kunchu Karthavu (1829-97), or the 20th

Kathak
Birju Maharaj



century's illustrious Mathoor Kunjupilla Panikar, Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, or reigning lord Kalamandalam Gopi and his famed partner-on-stage Margi Vijayakumar, men occupy the plum slots.

Bharatanatyam in Kerala has veteran P.S.A. Manu, who is from near Thrissur but left his Kulimuttam village for Tamil Nadu to pursue higher studies. Back in his native state in the last decade, the master, who will turn 70 next year, is a Muslim by birth (with Manaf as his original name). In Manu's district is Kalamandalam, where the earliest Bharatanatyam teacher was A.R.R. Bhaskara Rao of Thanjavur.

As for Mohiniyattam of the current times, RLV Ramakrishnan has been a leading name. Having learned from RLV College at Tripunithura, this native of Chalakudi in Thrissur district has won widespread appreciation with his artistry that blurs any conceptual boundaries between male and female grace. With his body language firmly following the grammar of Mohiniyattam, Ramakrishnan has his eyes and facial muscles capable of emoting well.

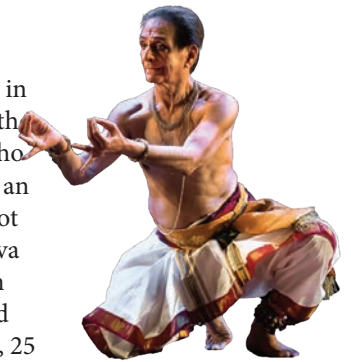
Also, from RLV is Jolly Mathew, a middle-aged dancer who won the first rank of his batch and went on to become the first

Mohiniyattam dancer to bag the Union Culture Ministry's Senior Fellowship. As director of the Swati Tirunal Trust in Tiruvankulam, just outside Tripunithura in Ernakulam district, his mentors include the iconic Kalyanikutty Amma (1915-99), who redefined the course of Mohiniyattam as an early-batch student at Kalamandalam. Not all dancers join institutions for study. Reva Krishnakumar is one such Mohiniyattam practitioner, who learned under seasoned Kalamandalam Kshemavathy at Thrissur, 25 km north of his Irinjalakuda town.

Four decades ago from today, an early teenager won laurels at the state festival's school-level competitions called Yuvajanolsavam. Vineeth Radhakrishnan, who dressed as a female at the Mohiniyattam contest, went on to become a Bharatanatyam dancer while also pursuing a career as a film actor. The artist from Thalassery near upstate Kannur lives in Chennai.

Dravidian stalwarts

Bharatanatyam has long had males as icons. For instance, top danseuse Alarmel Valli learned from Chokkalingam Pillai and his son Subbaraya Pillai of the Pandanallur



*Bharatanatyam
C V Chandrasekhar*

*Kathak
Rajendra Gangani
Pandit Durga Lal
Shambhu Maharaj*





*Manipuri
Singhajit Singh*

style. Equally celebrated Malavika Sarukai, also in her mid-60s, was trained under Kalyanasundaram Pillai (Thanjavur) and S.K. Rajaratnam (Vazhuvur). One of the most senior dancers in the field today is C.V. Chandrasekhar, 88. Trained under K.N. Dandayudhapani Pillai, he was mentored by Rukmini Devi Arundale at her Kalakshetra in Chennai. A Padma Bhushan awardee, Chandrasekhar taught at vintage universities in Benares and Baroda.

Across east and north

Bordering Andhra is the land of Odissi, which has a long list of male dancers. The most iconic is Kelucharan Mahapatra (1926-2004). Instrumental in the revival and popularization of this dance in the second half of the 20th century, the Puri-born maven also did extensive research in the traditional Gotipua and ritualistic Mahari dances of the region. His son, Ratikant Mahapatra, is a leading dancer today, seen sometimes sharing the stage with his wife Sujata.

In fact, the coastal belt of Cuttack has an Odissi foursome: Pankajacharan Das, Debaprasad Das, and Mayadhar Raut, besides Kelucharan. Pankajcharan (1919-

2003), who taught the three others besides Bhagaban Sahu (1914-2002) of Ganjam, choreographed episodes based on the lives of classical poets Kalidasa and Jayadeva (of the GitaGovindam fame). In mid-life, he taught at Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya. A noted dancer from this institution in Bhubaneswar was Gangadhar Pradhan (1948-2010).

Debaprasad (1932-86), who also worked with Kumar Dayal Sharan, taught Indrani Rahman, besides several other disciples. The males in the list include Srinath Raut, Sudhakar Sahoo, Durgacharan Ranbir, Dhuleswar Behera, Ramli Ibrahim, Gajendra Panda, Manoj Behera, and Gopa Biswas. Mayadhar, now 93 and residing in Delhi where he taught at Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra for a quarter-century till 1995, has trained Surendranath Jena, Hare Krishna Behera, and Ramani Ranjan Jena (besides his daughter Madhumita).

Deep in the country's northeast, Manipuri, too, has had a legacy of male enrichment. Among them are married couples as dancers, Delhi-based Singhajit Singh and Charu Mathur being one. Singhajit, 82, trained under male teachers: Ojha Iboton Singh, Amubi Singh, Thambal Angou

*Kuchipudi
Jayarama Rao
with wife Vanashree
Raja Reddy
Vempati Ravi Shankar*





Mohiniyattam
Jolly Mathew
RLV Ramakrishnan

Singh, Chauba Singh, and Ojha Gaura Singh. If Manipuri, with the Krishna-Gopi Raaslila in focus, has dancers even in the country's west, it is owing to maestro Naba Kumar going to Ahmedabad in 1928. Soon Mumbai, too, welcomed Manipuri, courtesy of Bipin Singh (1918-2000). Other male gurus who have embellished Manipuri subsequently include Nileshwar Mukherjee, Senarik Rajkumar, Chandrakanta Singha, Nilmadhab Mukherjee, and Haricharan Singha. Sinam Basu, 36, and Pukhrambam Bilash Singh, 42, are promises.

Assam's Krishna-centric Sattriya of the 15th century gained Akademi's classical tag in 2000. Its contemporary doyen is 90-year-old Jatin Das of Dergaon in Golaghat district. Trained under maestros Gopiram Bayan and Babula Bayan, besides Bishnuprasad Rabha, Dutta Muktiyar, and Raseswar Saikia Barbayan, he established a dance academy named Alok Shilpi Sangha at his native place of Adhar Sattri in 1953. While Ramakrishna Talukdar is another titan, other top Sattriya dancers include Ghanakanta Bora, Hariprashad Saikia Borbayan, Gobinda Saikiya, Tarali Das, and Bhabananda Borbayan.

From Kolkata westward to Rajasthan

has Kathak as a classical dance with two major schools: Lucknow and Jaipur.

A star from the Uttar Pradesh region was Birju Maharaj (1938-2022), hailing from Handia of Allahabad district. The family was full of dancers; Birju's first guru was his father Jagannath 'Acchan' Maharaj. Later, Birju learned under uncles Lachhu Maharaj (1901-78, a disciple of Bindadin Maharaj) and the 1910-born late Shambhu Maharaj (whose son Ram Mohan is a flagbearer of the tradition). Jaipur Gharana has had Kundan Lal, whose son Rajendra Gangani leads the biggest Kathak institution in Delhi. In the city flourished the career of Kathak dancer Jayant Kastaur, who was secretary of the Akademi. The tallest of Jaipur exponents of the 20th century, though, was Durga Lal (1948-90). A pupil of Sunder Prasad, Mahendragarh-born Lal was also a singer and pakhawaj percussionist. His brother Devi Lal, also short-lived, was a Kathak exponent, too. Jaipur also had Sita Ram, whose disciple Kumar Sharma of Punjab is in Mumbai. Far away, Kolkata has Devesh Mirchandani and Gauresh Shetkar in the new generation. The branches are spread across even as the roots remain deep.

Odissi
Gangadhar Pradhan



Climate Change and Kerala's Agriculture Scenario



Dr. Gopakumar Cholleyil

Agro-meteorologist
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Climate Change has become a critical environmental issue due to the rise in atmospheric temperature from increased greenhouse gases like CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, and HCFCs. The escalating greenhouse gas concentrations raise concerns about future climate changes across various systems such as the atmosphere, lithosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and cryosphere. The repercussions on sectors like water, forestry, agriculture, animal agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity, and health are significant, with a vast economic impact. Recurrent droughts and desertification threaten over 1.2 billion people reliant on land, and the global economy suffers from extreme weather events, forest fires, landslides, and sea-level rise.

Human activities have significantly contributed to global warming and climate change through increased emissions, deforestation, land-use changes, forest fires, and loss of wetlands. The rise in aerosols,

depletion of ozone, and human-induced deforestation and wetland loss are key factors in climate variability. CO₂ levels, stable at 280 ppm until 1850, have surged to about 421 ppm due to industrialization and fossil fuel combustion. The increase in CO₂ is mainly from fossil fuel use and land use changes, with deforestation and wetland loss disrupting rainfall absorption, leading to erosion, floods, droughts, and faster soil drying during dry periods.

Changes in rainfall and temperature, occurrences of extreme weather events are evident in India also. The onset and its further distribution of monsoon are erratic in recent decades. Extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, heavy rainfall, avalanches, landslides, heat and cold waves, cyclonic storms, thunderstorms, hailstorms, sandstorms, and cloud bursts are not uncommon and likely to be frequent in ensuing decades under the projected climate change scenario. The impact of drought on Indian food grains production is much more

predominant when compared to the effect of flood/heavy rainfall during monsoon since large areas of cultivable land experience drought at a given point in time. Deficit monsoon during 1965, 1966, 1972, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2015 led to drought and adversely affected Kharif food grains production. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of climate variability or climate change on crop production as a proactive measure to sustain crop production in the event of climate change and global warming.

The State of Kerala, under the Humid Tropics, is one of the wettest places in the Humid Tropics, where annual rainfall is of the order of 3000 mm, ranging from less than 1000 mm to greater than 5000 mm. About 68 percent of the rainfall is obtained during the southwest monsoon, while 16 percent in the post-monsoon and the rest from summer (14 percent) and winter rainfall (2 percent). A bi-modal rainfall pattern is noticed towards southern districts due to the influence of both southwest and northeast monsoons, while a unified-modal rainfall pattern towards northern districts of Kerala. Coconut productivity is better towards the south despite the dreaded disease of root-wilt when compared to that of northern districts due to

fewer dry spells during summer. Floods during monsoon adversely affect paddy production in the State, while prolonged droughts during summer, in the absence of post-monsoon rainfall, adversely affect plantation crops' production to a considerable extent. The wetlands in Kerala are rich sources of water during summer and act as a sink during the monsoon season. Such wetlands are fast declining in Kerala and converted as garden lands. Decreasing wetlands might be one of the reasons for frequent floods and droughts in Kerala in recent years. The forest cover of Kerala also declined from 70 percent to 24 percent over a period of one hundred and fifty years due to deforestation and forest fires. The years 1983, 2004, and 2016 experienced prolonged summer droughts in Kerala, and many plantation crops' production was adversely affected, and the State's economy was hit badly. The onset of monsoon and monsoon behaviour appear to be erratic in recent years. Frequent failure or break in monsoon across the State leads to low water levels in major reservoirs and adversely affects hydropower generation. There is a significant change in the cropping pattern too over a period of time. Rice and cashew area was declining while the area under rubber and coconut increasing. Vanilla and cocoa were introduced, and in the same fashion, vanilla disappeared, and the area under cocoa declined. An increase in the area under black pepper was noticed across the State and now declining. There was a time that oranges were plenty in Wayanad District and now almost disappeared. The paddy lands in Wayanad District are mostly converted to areca nut and banana gardens. As a whole, the index of food crops was declining while increasing non-food crops due to various socio-economic factors. The climate change-related issues over Kerala may be a decline in rainfall, wetlands, land and ocean biodiversity, an increase in temperature and sea level, floods and droughts, landslides, groundwater depletion and saline water intrusion, a decline in forest area, frequent forest fires, unusual rains, and hailstorms. It is believed



that almost all the crops are likely to be under threat due to climate change/variability in the ensuing decades under the Humid Tropics. The threat from global warming and climate change could be seen in the form of a decline in cropped area, production and productivity, and quality of grains.

Weather and climate play an important role in crop distribution and production. While climate determines the adaptability of a particular crop in a region, weather determines the yield attributes of the crop. Over a period of years, changes have occurred in the natural climate of the earth's atmospheric system mostly due to human interventions in the form of the emission of large quantities of greenhouse gases (GHGs). The present level of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has crossed the 421ppm level. It is now a topic of concern to society. The global mean atmospheric temperature has risen by 1.2°C since 1901. As a result of the dumping of GHGs, the earth's atmospheric system is getting warmer at an alarming rate, which led to a state called global warming. This will lead to changes in the earth's climate system. Its impacts are evident in different sectors of society. Extreme weather events are recurring year after year around the globe

In Kerala, the occurrence of weather extremes is not uncommon. Unusual summer rains from March 13-23, 2008, devastated paddy production considerably in Alappuzha District and Kole lands of Thrissur District. The summer showers during March 2008 coincided with the paddy harvest season. The harvested paddy and fields under harvest were flooded, causing the paddy to germinate due to wetness, leading to heavy losses. Over one lakh tonnes of paddy were lost during 2007-08 due to floods and unusual summer rains, accounting for a 17% loss in grain yield. It was estimated that the loss due to damaged paddy amounted to Rs.100 crore. Ripened paddy, cashew, and black pepper were damaged. The unusual summer showers

during March-April 2015 caused significant damage to crops and infrastructure. Heavy and untimely summer rainfall due to thunderstorms adversely affected the paddy crops of Kuttanad and Kole lands. The ripened paddy, which fell to the field, could not be harvested due to inundation followed by heavy rainfall, wreaking havoc on hundreds of hectares of paddy fields in these areas. Strong winds devastated banana plants in Kasaragod district during April 2015. Very heavy rainfall on a single day in April 2015 (22nd April) inundated the Capital city of the State and low-lying areas. Monsoon rains during June and July appeared to be less compared to normal rainfall, particularly evident in 2014 and 2015. The monsoon rainfall deficit over Kerala during 2015 was 26 percent, with uneven rainfall distribution. The devastating floods of 2018 and 2019 also wreaked havoc on the state's agricultural sector. The unusual winter rainfall during 2021 across the state, especially in Idukki district, devastated winter crops (fruits and vegetable crops). Unusual winter rainfall in December-January across the State was a threat to paddy growers and greatly devastated Kole land paddy. Recurring events of mud slips/landslides across the mid and high ranges of the State during the rainy season pose a threat to the life and property of the inhabitants residing in those areas.





Abnormal atmospheric phenomena like heat bursts caused scorching of vegetation across the coastal belt in Kerala during June 2015. A decline in monsoon rainfall with fewer rainy days, floods and droughts, increasing ambient air temperatures (both day maximum and night minimum), a decline in the groundwater table, a decrease in wetland area and surface water resources, loss of biodiversity both on land and water, an increasing number of forest fires and deforestation, increasing events of mud slips/landslides during the rainy season, indiscriminate sand mining from river beds, saltwater intrusion, sunburns, sunstrokes, heatwaves, and increased UV radiation due to ozone depletion are significant climate change/variability-related issues the State is facing. A significant increase in maximum temperature across the State indicates that Kerala is warming in tune with global warming, moving from wetness to dryness within the Humid Climate.

The State of Kerala, located in the Humid Tropics, features a unique system of homestead farming with various crop combinations. Its economy is predominantly based on a plantation economy. Coconut, cashew, cocoa, cardamom, rubber, tea, coffee, black pepper, and areca nut are significant plantation crops in the State, though rice is the

main food crop. Coconut is the predominant plantation crop in terms of area and production in the State compared to other plantations. The crops grown in the State must adapt to the climate variability/change observed concerning rainfall and temperature. An increase in daytime temperature and a decline in nighttime temperature are noticed across the high range regions of the State (Idukki and Wayanad). This leads to an increase in the temperature range (the difference between day and night temperatures) across the region, with the rate of temperature increase being relatively high across the high ranges. Crops such as cardamom, tea, coffee, areca nut, and cocoa, grown across the high ranges and sensitive to temperature, will be threatened in the event of rising temperatures, in addition to deforestation due to forest fires. Forest fires are not uncommon across the high ranges during summer.

Trend in rainfall

Trend in rainfall over Kerala shows a decline in monsoon rainfall with an increase in post-monsoon rainfall, though cyclic trends of 40–60 years were noticed in annual and monsoon rainfall. The decline in annual rainfall has been evident for the last 50–60 years. The percentage contribution of rainfall in the monsoon season to the annual rainfall is declining, while it is increasing during the post-monsoon season. However, the increase in post-monsoon rainfall may not compensate for the decrease in monsoon season rainfall. There has been a shift in climate due to changes in thermal and moisture regimes over Kerala, moving from wetness to dryness within the Humid Climate from B4 to B3 over the last 100 to 150 years, possibly due to alarming deforestation and forest fires in the Western Ghats.

Temperature projections

Temperature projections show that warming in Kerala is real, with a significant increase in temperature since the 1980s in tune with

global warming. The rate of temperature increase is high across the Highranges, followed by the lowlands, with a moderate increase along the midlands. This could be attributed to alarming deforestation across the Highranges and the effect of increased sea surface temperature along the Coast. At the current rate of temperature increase, the maximum temperature is likely to increase by around 1.5°C by 2100 A.D., while the minimum temperature may increase by 0.3–0.4°C. The mean surface air temperature is likely to increase by less than 1°C by 2100 A.D. The decade 2011–2020 was the warmest and driest in Kerala, affecting plantation crops' production considerably. The year 2016 was the warmest, followed by 1987 and 1983. An increase in night temperature during winter in recent years has adversely affected the flowering of fruit crops, particularly mango.

Climate change and coconut

Climate change and its impact on coconut production are evident, with severe summer drought leading to a decline in production under rainfed conditions, though annual coconut production depends on weather factors three-and-a-half years ahead. Good summer showers with shorter dry spells are likely to favourably influence coconut yield in the following year. Drought effects on monthly nut yield start in the seventh, eighth, or ninth month after the drought period, depending on pre-monsoon showers or the onset of monsoon, and continue for twelve months. The decline in monthly nut yield is maximum in the 12th/13th month after the drought period. Most coconut gardens in Kerala show a decline in yield the following year due to drought, explained by the sensitivity of critical crop growth stages to soil moisture stress, which ultimately decides nut yield. A marginal decline in coconut production is also noticed due to long-term climate change, likely affecting nut size and oil content quality due to increased temperatures.

Agriculture remains the mainstay of Kerala, with its diverse topography, climate, and soil features conducive to a diversified cropping pattern comprising cash crops, food crops, and plantation crops. The sector has seen significant changes, such as a shift from food to non-food crops. Over the last two decades, the share of non-agricultural area in the total geographical area of the State has increased considerably. Agriculture and the allied sector contributed about 11.28 percent to the total Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in 2021–22(Q) at current prices. The 13th Five-Year Plan period saw the agriculture sector severely impacted by cyclone Ockhi (2017), the major flood in 2018, and the COVID-19 pandemic. After attaining an annual growth rate of 2.11 percent in 2017–18, it declined to negative growth rates in the following two years. However, growth improved to 4.64 percent in 2021–22 from 0.24 percent in 2020–21, higher than the national growth rate. With limited scope for increasing the cultivation area due to shrinking land availability, increasing crop productivity is essential. This requires reliance on modern agricultural science and practices ensuring higher farm business income and ecological sustainability. Diversification of agriculture is important for income security for farmers, with emphasis on value addition, employment opportunities, improving



Table. Effect of weather extremes on plantation crops

Weather elements	Coconut	Arecanut	Cocoa	Pepper	Cashew	Rubber	Cardamom	Coffee	Tea
Rainfall (Monsoon)	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+
Rainfall (Summer)	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
Maximum temp. (Low altitudes)	-/+	-/+	-						
Minimum temp. (High altitudes)	-	-						-	-
RH (%)	Leads to insect pest and diseases. Hence, negative effect on all the crops. Tea requires high relative humidity for better yield.								
Solar radiation	Not adequate during monsoon period and hence it affects crop production. High rainfall with low solar radiation during the monsoon while low rainfall with high solar radiation during summer adversely affect most of the plantation crops production in the Humid Tropics.								
Wind	Moderate in Kerala except in the Palakkad gap region. Mundakan (rabi) rice is affected in the above region. Beneficial to crops where winds are moderate.								
Evaporation	Evapotranspiration is restricted during the monsoon due to heavy rains. Atmosphere is relatively saturated under the above conditions. Therefore, uptake of nutrients may be restricted.								
Drought	All plantation crops do suffer due to prolonged summer drought except cashew and black pepper. Of course, mortality rate is high in young pepper vines during summer.								

exports, and strengthening domestic supply chains as thrust areas (Economic Review, 2022). Vagaries of monsoon, unusual and untimely rainfall, frequent occurrences of droughts and floods, scorching heat during summer, water scarcity for irrigation, and other extreme weather events pose threats to the farming sector in a warming and climate change scenario. Untimely heavy to very heavy rainfall during the crop season in Kole lands of Thrissur during 2021 and 2024 are examples. Occurrences of insect, pest, and diseases are another menace widely noticed across the farming tracts of paddy in Kole and Kuttanad regions. Non-receipt of timely monsoon for the Virippu crop threatens paddy growers in the state, as experienced in recent years in paddy-growing tracts across the State.

Traditional farmers of 'Anchunad' in Idukki, a village bordering Tamil Nadu, expected to recover from pandemic-inflicted losses, were hit again by adverse untimely and unusual winter rainfall in 2021. Anchunad refers collectively to five villages in Idukki: Kanthalloor, Marayur, Vattavada, Kottakkamboor, and Keezhanthoor. The unprecedented rains during January 2021 damaged paddy, sugarcane, and vegetable

cultivation in these regions. Anchunad, especially Marayur, is considered rain-shadow areas and mostly receive rains from the Northeast monsoon. The traditional belief was shaken when rains hit in the first week of December and the second week of January. Even in the midlands, paddy cultivators suffered due to untimely winter rainfall. This type of unusual and unprecedented weather is likely to occur and reoccur in the State in a warming and climate change scenario. Winter rainfall received during 2024 was similar to 2021 but with a minor impact

Kerala, a coastal state in the Humid Tropics, faces frequent weather and climate-related disasters, particularly heavy rainfall during the monsoon season and often scant rainfall from November to May if pre-monsoon showers fail, a situation likely to worsen with climate change. The primary climate change issues in Kerala are a decline in rainfall and a rise in temperature, compounded by year-round UV-B radiation due to ozone depletion, harmful to living organisms. Since 2010, sunburns have been reported in central Kerala (Palghat and Thrissur Districts). Temperature increases vary within the state, being higher in the high ranges and lower along the coast, attributed to deforestation and rising sea surface temperatures. The years 2010 and 2009 were among the warmest in India, with 2016 being the warmest in Kerala. Kerala experiences summer droughts, contributing to its shift from wetness to dryness within the Humid Climates. The State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) projects an increase in summer maximum temperatures by 1°C to 1.5°C under RCP 4.5 and 1.5°C to 2°C under RCP 8.5 across all districts, with winter minimum temperatures also expected to rise. Mean annual rainfall is projected to increase under both RCP scenarios, with extremely heavy rainfall events also expected to rise.



Salinity intrusion along the coast due to sea level rise is alarming. Alappuzha, Palakkad, Wayanad, and Idukki are identified as 'Climate Change Hot Spots' in Kerala, with Alappuzha and Palakkad being most vulnerable to climate change. The absence of northeast monsoon and summer showers leads to prolonged drought, significantly affecting plantation crops such as coconut, areca nut, cocoa, cardamom, tea, coffee, and black pepper. Severe summer droughts in years like 1983, 2004, 2014, and 2015 led to massive crop losses and economic downturns. Weather extremes affect perennial crop production not only in the same year but also in subsequent years, depending on the crop's phenology. Climate factors such as increased temperature, aridity index, and decline in rainfall and moisture index have led to a marginal decline or stagnation in coconut productivity. Climate variability is a major threat to plantation crops' productivity, with integrated farming or crop mix showing better resilience. The relationship between black pepper and coffee production illustrates that when one crop thrives, the other may suffer under the same climatic conditions.

Recent findings highlight that climate change affects not only crop output but also commodity quality and price, with the recent hike in coconut price partly attributed to the previous year's summer drought and crop losses in neighbouring states. It's crucial for government agencies and policymakers to proactively devise short-term and long-term strategies to mitigate the impacts of weather-related disasters through community participation. The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) emphasizes 'Sustainable Agriculture' as a key area, aiming to make agriculture more resistant to climate change by developing thermally resistant crop varieties capable of withstanding extreme weather, as part of the National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA). Kerala requires

similar initiatives focused on developing technologies against weather extremes, such as saline/flood resistance and drought resistance/tolerance, rather than just thermal resistance. A State Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture (SICRA) should be established to address the needs of plantation crops, horticulture, medicinal plants, and integrated/homestead farming, given the agriculture sector's dominance in Kerala. This initiative should become operational promptly, considering the significant threat of climate change and variability to plantations and the broader agricultural sector in the Humid Tropics.

The impact of weather on plantation crops is multifaceted, with seasonal rainfall being a key variable. Kerala's shift from a predominantly wet climate to a drier one, characterized by a decrease in monsoon rainfall and an increase in temperature over the past 60 years, particularly affects plantation crops. The state's reliance on summer monsoon for 70% of its rainfall, coupled with a prolonged dry season, impacts crop production variably; crops like cashew, black pepper, and coffee benefit from the extended dry season, particularly in the northern mid-highlands, due to their adaptability to rainfed conditions

and less harm from prolonged dry spells. In contrast, excessive rainfall can harm crops like coconut and cardamom through waterlogging, while mixed cropping systems offer a way to mitigate adverse weather impacts through diversified income sources.

Cashew trees thrive under dry conditions, particularly during the reproductive phase, leading to improved yields. However, prolonged drought beyond the tolerance of specific varieties can negatively impact yield. Temperature extremes above 35°C during the reproductive phase can also affect yield and quality, particularly on the East Coast, whereas more moderate temperatures on the West Coast are beneficial for nut development. Wind speeds and high temperatures in certain periods can limit yields, emphasizing the importance of understanding cashew's drought tolerance mechanisms.

Cocoa yield is influenced by geographical factors in line with the Hopkins Bioclimatic Law. High temperatures followed by heavy monsoon rains, particularly under waterlogged conditions, are detrimental. However, cocoa's shade-dependent growth and thermo-sensitivity mean it might

withstand gradual temperature increases, though sudden spikes pose a risk. Climate variability, including extreme weather events, poses a greater threat to cocoa than long-term climate changes.

The shift in cultivation from tea and cardamom to coffee and black pepper may reflect the advantages of mixed cropping under current climate conditions, offering income stability through diversification. Cardamom yields are heavily dependent on rainfall, with different regions showing varied climate risks. The development of drought and pest-resistant cardamom varieties has helped mitigate some impacts of climate variability.

Rubber production is more affected by erratic rainfall patterns than temperature changes, with issues like fungal infections and soil erosion reducing yields. The use of resistant planting material is key to sustaining rubber production amidst climate variability.

Coffee depends heavily on specific rainfall patterns for optimal yield, with Arabica being more weather-sensitive than Robusta. The use of irrigation techniques can offset the absence of natural showers, and the quality of certain specialty coffees is directly linked to monsoon intensity, necessitating research into climate effects on coffee.

Black pepper benefits from a long dry season, but summer showers during this period can reduce yield. The relationship between coffee and black pepper yields is complex, often inversely related, highlighting the benefits of mixed cropping in mitigating the effects of dry spells. Temperature increases pose a risk to black pepper, particularly in the context of recent climate trends, warranting further study.



Tea production is highly susceptible to sudden weather changes, with recent declines in yield attributed to climate variability, pest attacks, and changes in leaf quality. Increased pest control costs and quality degradation in tea leaves have been noted, with climate variability playing a significant role in pest and disease proliferation.

The quality of plantation crops is vital for the export economy but remains under-researched in the context of climate variability and change. The quality of products like Monsoon Malabar Coffee and cashew nuts is influenced by climate factors, including temperature and rainfall patterns, highlighting the need for further investigation to ensure food safety and marketability under changing climate conditions.

Weather, climate and rice

In Kerala, rice is a crucial food crop, yet the state's production falls significantly short of demand, relying on imports from neighbouring states like Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. With a demand for 40 lakh tonnes, Kerala's rice production hovers around six to seven lakh tonnes, fulfilling merely 15 percent of its annual requirement. Cultivation area has dwindled over time, with rice grown in three seasons: Virippu (May/June-September/October), Mundakan (October/November-December/January), and Puncha (January/February-April/May). The success of the first crop is monsoon-dependent, the second benefits from post-monsoon rainfall or supplementary irrigation, and Puncha requires irrigation facilities, albeit limited in area.

The monsoon's onset, behaviour, rainfall quantity, and distribution are crucial for the first crop yield. Excessive and prolonged monsoon rainfall can damage transplanted paddy. Monsoon patterns significantly impact Virippu crop output, grown under rainfed conditions. Breaks in the monsoon, leading to dry spells,

are common in Kerala. Continuous rainfall during Virippu reduces evapo transpiration due to lack of sunshine, hindering potential yields. Temperature also plays a vital role, with both high daytime and nighttime temperatures being detrimental to paddy growth. Kerala's rainfall trends show a decline in annual and southwest monsoon rainfall, with a post-monsoon increase. Temperature increases of 0.99°C (max), 0.33°C (min), and 0.70°C (mean) have been recorded, with night temperature rises particularly impacting rice yields, indicating climate change effects.

Agricultural land in India is diminishing, and food grain production is stagnant, mainly due to weather aberrations. Temperature increases could reach 3°C by 2100, impacting food grain production. Severe drought years have historically affected kharif food grain production. Crop simulation models suggest a decline in rice and wheat cultivation areas, threatening total food grain production due to temperature rises and rainfall uncertainties. To address stagnant crop productivity and meet the growing population's needs without imports, a second green revolution focusing on research and development in agriculture is essential under the climate change scenario.





Climate variability and rice production in Kerala

In Kerala, the decline in annual and monsoon rainfall, coupled with temperature increases, affects rainfed rice. Variability in monsoon onset alters planting dates, and drought during reproductive stages can lead to crop failure. Thermal regimes impact rice growth, development, and productivity. With mean annual temperatures rising, there's a notable impact on thermo-sensitive crops. The year 2016 was Kerala's warmest, with recent decades showing the driest and warmest trends, exacerbating the impact on rice production. Studies indicate that a 1°C temperature rise reduces paddy yields by 10 percent, highlighting the adverse effects of warmer nights on rice production.

Flood occurrences during the Virippu season threaten rice production. Although only eight flood years have been identified since 1952, many production dips could be attributed to high rainfall, often a localized phenomenon. Documenting flood impacts, especially during Virippu, is essential. As weather extremes are expected to increase, enhancing weather-based forewarning mechanisms at the district level through IMD and KAU collaboration is crucial for minimizing losses.

Sea level rise poses a threat to rice production in key areas like Kuttanad, Kole, and Pokkali, where rice is the only viable crop due to unstable water levels and salinity. These productive deltas, crucial for Kerala's rice bowls, are at risk from rising sea levels and human interventions along the coast.

Rice, the staple food for a significant portion of India's population, sees a clear shift from food to non-food crops in Kerala, with drought during the kharif season impacting national food grain production. Floods and unusual summer showers further jeopardize rice production in Kerala, contributing to food price inflation, underlining the need for comprehensive studies on the climate's impact on rice production and strategies to mitigate these effects under the climate change scenario.

Weather insurance

Weather insurance is critical for protecting crops and farmers against climate-induced calamities. Farmer suicides in India, often resulting from loan burdens and crop failures due to weather extremes, highlight the urgent need for weather insurance schemes. Compensation should be provided for crop losses caused by weather anomalies like unusual rains or temperature extremes. Ensuring farm-level expected income during weather calamities can help sustain rural livelihoods. Accurate weather forecasting and dissemination of agro-advisory services based on integrated weather forecasts can guide farmers in taking precautionary measures to minimize the harmful effects of weather abnormalities. Strengthening the meteorological network and enhancing proactive measures against weather aberrations are key to reducing crop losses and addressing the challenges posed by weather and climate disasters.



My Health My Right



**Dr. Anju
Angel Alex**

It was a regular OP day for Dr Steve Paul, a geriatrician based out of Bangalore when Shekhar came to him with an x ray of his 75 year old father's hip joint. Thimmappa (names changed) had a history of cardiac failure, liver disease and lymphedema (swelling) of both feet. Shekhar said that his father had been having difficulty in walking. Dr. Steve was quick to notice that the elderly gentleman's X Ray showed a bilateral hip fracture. Quite naturally, he advised hospitalization -not just for fixing the fracture but also to manage Thimmappa's co-morbidities. Shekhar refused.

When the World Health Organization came up with the slogan "My Health , My Right", it might have had a different cohort as its priority with those in war ravaged and conflict struck zones and those tormented by hunger ,distress and displacement topping the list. But its noteworthy that the right to health is one that is being violated all around us ,at times inadvertently, at times willfully, mostly

subtly.

On this World Health Day, it is worthwhile to remember that the very constitution of the WHO in 1948 after the Second World War was in the light of 'the highest standard of health attainable' being recognized as a fundamental human right irrespective of 'race, religion, political belief or economic and social condition'. Today, one will have to add 'sexual orientation' to this broad definition. These ideals by the World Health Organization at its inception hold good to this day where we find transgressions of this 'right' albeit in less conspicuous ways which we don't even realize many a times .

When you do not know that you can get free medicines for your lifestyle disease from the government run institutions, your right to health is at stake. So also, when an HIV positive patient with tuberculosis sits crestfallen at home because there is no one willing to give him an injection, or when a migrant worker is anxious as to how to visit the hospital for getting a basic



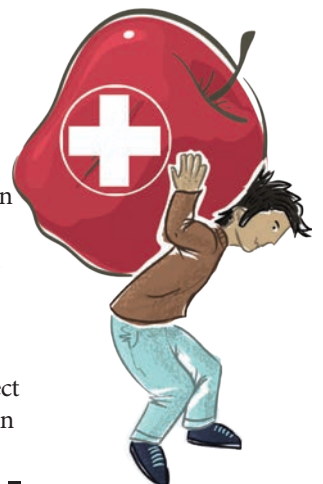
eye checkup.

Rakesh Gupta (name changed) who heads the CSR (corporate social responsibility) section of a mammoth oil company in a hamlet in Kochi has been busy coordinating with the doctor in the nearby health centre and NPCB (national program for control of blindness) officials to conduct an eye check camp on World Health Day for the workers in their company, most of whom are illiterate migrants, unable to find their way around in the new city. What he chose to do is as good as what ASHA worker Rethi did when she got a call from a young woman named Sapna (name changed). 35 year old Sapna had come to take care of her mother though she had been a resident of another district after her marriage. The young woman was devastated when she was diagnosed from the GH as having tuberculosis. It was impractical for her to go to her place of residence to get her anti TB medicines. She was lucky that Rethi was unbiased and harboured no discrimination and visited Sapna at home and coordinated everything thereafter. Today the once timid and scared Sapna is confident and visits the Health Centre if she has any worries. But not always is everything hunky dory.

In Thimmappa's case, after much prodding Dr Steve understood that lack of proper knowledge and the lack of funds was holding Shekhar

back. The kind doctor arranged for a clinician to visit Shekhar's father at home. It turned out that the old man had a massive scrotal swelling and extensive bed sores. Shekhar finally managed to mobilize funds to get his father hospitalized and treated. Dr Sreeshyam, a community medicine resident in a medical college in north Karnataka says "There are a multitude of programs targeted at specific groups which should ideally ensure that the health needs of just about everyone is met. And yet, not always is health accessible to everyone", he notices with sadness. "When I say 'health' I don't mean merely the access to medicines. It has a wide range of dimensions to it including right to information, psychological support, and clean air to breathe and so on", he adds.

Times that we live in are such that every new challenge- from the ruthlessness of crimes around us to the ecological changes brought about by our unrestrained meddling with the ecosystem, finally ends up reflecting on one's health. Hence the relevance of this year's slogan cannot be over-emphasized. "Why should health be offered to only those who can afford it? It is a basic right. Many a times irrespective of your purchasing power, health takes often takes a toll on your finances as well. Why should health be the prerogative of only a select few?" Dr Steve Paul's questions loom large even amidst stories of positivity like Sapna's and ventures by Rakesh Gupta.



Gulf Expatriates and Health



Nowadays, a large number of people we meet in urban multi-specialty hospitals and in front of doctors' consulting rooms are expatriates. More than that, their faces are filled with fears of disease rather than pride in being an expatriate.



Joby Baby

Registered Nurse,
Kuwait

Diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, kidney stones, other urinary diseases, back pain, and many other diseases are constantly bothering the expatriate Malayalis today. Due to unaffordable medical expenses in the Gulf countries and lack of availability of expert doctors, most of the expatriates seek doctors for treatment when they come home for leave. Due to extreme heat and not being able to drink enough water during busy work, the Gulf Malayalis used to suffer from bladder diseases in the early days. But according to the rate of changes in food habits and lifestyle in recent years, many diseases are waiting for these people.

Most expatriates seek treatment with the symptoms of a 'new generation' disease called metabolic syndrome, which is a combination of diabetes, cholesterol, blood pressure, and obesity. Due to the wrong lifestyle and not being able to recognize and treat the disease at the beginning, they become chronic patients later. In this regard, the experts in the health field have the same advice: it is more effective to prevent the disease from occurring instead of treating it. Most diseases can be detected early through regular medical check-ups. Tests conducted as part of medical check-ups may also give an indication of future diseases. Earlier, regular medical check-ups were prescribed for people above 40 years of age, but now, when lifestyle diseases are widespread, doctors say that the necessary medical tests should be done as soon as you turn 35.

Today, facilities for medical check-ups are available even in small rural hospitals. NRI desks for non-residents only have started functioning in big hospitals in cities. A mini health checkup is available in most hospitals



today, which includes tests such as complete blood, urine, and stool tests, ECG to assess heart function, chest X-ray, LFT, and RFT to diagnose liver and kidney disease. This check-up can provide clues about common diseases. Based on the reports of these tests, further tests may be conducted if required. In addition to the tests in the mini-checkup, the general health checkup includes abdominal ultrasound scanning, thyroid function test, blood test before and after eating, lipid profile test to detect isolated cholesterol, certain genetic diseases, and pancreas function. Cervical cancer screening for women is also available in some hospitals. Along with these tests, master health checkups with detailed heart health tests such as echo test and TMT test are also available in some hospitals. Along with these tests, a physician's examination, diagnosis, and treatment, and, if necessary, the services of a specialty doctor are available. Nutritionist or dietitian services are also available if tests show signs of lifestyle diseases. Some hospitals also offer special packages for women that include a variety of scans, mammography, and Pap smear tests for early detection of breast and uterine cancers, uterine tumors, and ovarian tumors. Even in the best hospitals of our country, if you pay one-tenth of the cost of such check-ups in the hospitals of the Gulf countries, they are available. People with hereditary diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer should

definitely start getting regular check-ups after the age of 35. If diseases or the possibility of disease are detected through such tests, treatment should be started immediately and changes in diet and other lifestyle should be made. Heart, liver, and kidney disorders, cancer, diabetes, etc., which can end fatally, can be completely cured with short-term expert treatment. Due to this, treatment costs can be significantly reduced, and health can be restored quickly. They send money for the treatment of relatives and their own in the country and do not care about their own health at all. If the expatriates who are on a leave of one or two months do not have any serious diseases, they forget about their own health and focus on things like housework, marriage of their children, visiting relatives, and sightseeing, and approach hospitals for such tests only when the leave is over.

Even if the diagnosis can be made through health check-ups conducted just before returning to the workplace, these people will not have time for effective treatment. These are also problems that affect recovery. To overcome such problems, every expat needs to undergo health checkups at regular intervals. If leave is in the country, he should undergo health check-ups as early as possible and should be ready to take treatment from the country if he is found to be sick.



KERALA – The Foster Mother of Musicians



Shenkottai Harihara Subramaniam and Mathangi Satyamurthy highlight Kerala's role as a dynamic cradle for Carnatic music virtuosos.



Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Music Critic

Kerala has given birth to a lot of extraordinarily talented Carnatic musicians. But most of them have pursued their artistic career out of the state, in a large measure. While singers like Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, M. D. Ramanathan and Palakkad K. V. Narayana Swamy, violinists like T. N. Krishnan, M. S. Gopalakrishnan, M. S. Anantharaman and V. V. Subramaniam, and mridangists like Palakkad Mani Iyer, Palakkad R. Raghu and T. V. Gopalakrishnan chose Tamil Nadu as their karmabhoomi, the talented composer, scholar and singer, Puthucode Krishna Murthy followed his musical profession in Delhi and Tamil Nadu. Perhaps during that time, it was because Kerala did not have a

robust financial environment to retain and nurture them, that they sought greener pastures elsewhere.

The past couple of decades however have witnessed a sea change in the field of Carnatic music in Kerala. Both Carnatic and Hindustani music have become hugely popular so much so that many young talents in the field have opted to remain in this home-state of theirs, and follow their passion. As an extension of this trend, many musicians from other places are opting to come to Kerala in order to lead a fruitful professional life here. Today, Kerala has become a foster mother who nourishes their artistic abilities. In a sense, this is a typical case of the Law of Compensation coming into effect.

This article is about two musicians who have come to Kerala, and chosen to make their fortune here – Shenkottai Harihara Subramaniam who has settled down in Thrippunithura and Mathangi Satyamurthy who has made Kottayam her home. It is noteworthy that both artistes are natives of Tamil Nadu, the major patron state of Carnatic



Shenkottai Harihara Subramaniam

music.

Harihara Subramaniam was born in Shenkottai in Tamil Nadu in 1978. He inherited his talent from his mother. As his father also enjoyed music thoroughly, there was a vibrant musical atmosphere at home, and Harihara Subramaniam grew up singing all the time. While he was still very young, the Tamil film *Sindhu Bharavi* was released, and its music, composed by Ilayaraja, cast a spell over him. He constantly crooned the songs of that film. Observing this, his family sent him to a teacher named Jayanti to learn music. Two years later, Harihara Subramaniam started looking for another teacher who could train him further. He found the guru of his choice in Shenkottai Parameswara Bhagavathar but the latter did not show any enthusiasm in taking the young boy under his wing. Intrigued, he sought the reason for the Bhagavathar's indifference, and soon learnt what Shenkottai Parameswara Bhagavathar had confided in Harihara Subramaniam's mother. Pupils studied under him but eventually abandoned music and went in pursuit of other jobs. Therefore, he did not fancy pandering to the wishes of students who were frivolous about studying music.

One day, as Shenkottai Parameswara Bhagavathar was on an evening stroll, Harihara Subramaniam fell prostrate before him on the street. The prospective student swore in the

name of all the gods he worshipped that music was his life-breath and that he would not be able to give it up ever in his life. He refused to release his hold on the guru's feet until Shenkottai Parameswara Bhagavathar promised to accept him. The guru's heart melted, and he gave his word that he would train Harihara Subramaniam. The music classes began at three in the morning and stretched up to seven. Harihara Subramaniam would wake up at two, finish his ablutions, and walk to his tutor's house, a good half hour away. The guru was extremely strict but Harihara Subramaniam continued his studies under Parameswara Bhagavathar for seven years. That was his journey towards becoming a complete singer.

In course of time, Harihara Subramaniam wished to do his higher studies at the Music College in Madurai but his father dissuaded him, arguing that it was impossible to eke a decent livelihood by following a musical career. At one point, even Shenkottai Parameswara Bhagavathar concurred with that opinion, and advised his pupil to give up his decision. As a result, Harihara Subramaniam joined a college in Tenkasi, choosing Physics as his subject of undergraduate study. However, he did not loosen his hold on music. Under the aegis of the Nehru Yuva Kendra, he participated in the college-level, national music competition that was held at Lucknow, and won the first prize. He received a gold medal on that occasion.



Mathangi Satyamurthy



Mathangi Satyamurthy

On completing his graduation, Harihara Subramaniam hastened back to Chennai. His aim was to train under the famous mridangam artiste Srimushnam V. Raja Rao. While he was studying there, his father came in search of him in order to persuade him to take an M. Sc. degree in Physics. Compelled by his guru, Harihara Subramaniam had to return with his father, and join a college in Tirunelveli to do his post-graduate studies. When the results came out, Harihara Subramaniam was declared the topper in the university. He received his degree certificate and gold medal for his academic excellence but Harihara Subramaniam, leaving both symbols of his merit in his father's hands, left home. He had resolved that he would make a living by following his heart's desire, and the father had no alternative but to agree with the son's decision.

On reaching Kozhikode, Harihara Subramaniam joined the music academy run by Kaithapram Damodaran Namboodiri, as a tutor, and taught students for two years. Occasionally, he went to Chennai and continued his training under Srimushnam Raja Rao. Later, he settled down in Thrippunithura. In a brief span of time, Harihara Subramaniam became an asset in the field of Carnatic music in Kerala. Today, he is the most sought-after and busiest musician of Kerala. The hallmark of his style is the Dravidian beauty that pulsates in his Carnatic renditions. Harihara

Subramaniam has himself testified that the greatest virtue of the rasikas in Kerala is that they welcome artistes, no matter where they come from, with open arms. He asserts that his Kerala audiences do not look at differences in language, place of birth or culture from a narrow perspective. Harihara Subramaniam is married to Lakshmi, a native of Thalipparamba in Kerala. His opinion is that there is no unnecessary rivalry or tug-of-war among musicians in Kerala. As soon as one music programme of his gets over, he gets booked for another.

He was once invited to be the music composer for a Tamil film but he turned down the offer. "I worship pure music, and have accepted this land and its people as mine just as they have owned me up as one of their own. I cannot even dream of making a name for myself after giving them up, ever in my life!" Undoubtedly, these words come from the depths of the ardent heart of Shenkottai Harihara Subramaniam.

Mathangi the musician was born in 1958 in Turaiyur in Tiruchirapally district in Tamil Nadu. She virtually became the daughter-in-law of Kerala, on marrying Satyamurthy, a native of Parippu village in Kottayam district. All the members of Mathangi's family in Tamil Nadu, even while having high academic qualifications and holding high positions in their respective professions, are famous for their



deep knowledge of and interest in Carnatic music. Mathangi Satyamurthy herself is gifted with a rich and deep voice as well as physical stature that are comparable to evergreen doyennes in the field, like M. S. Subbalakshmi and D. K. Pattammal. Today, she enjoys a reputation that is on a par with or perhaps higher than any living genius in the world of music in India. The factors that set her apart are the emotive range of her voice and her total commitment to the art. More importantly, the absence of an unhealthy competitive spirit, the indifference to fame, and the refusal to madly pursue awards and recognition ennoble her musical culture even further. Her world vision that encompasses a respect for knowledge and wisdom, commands the love and respect of her audiences.

The marital alliance between Mathangi and Satyamurthy was fixed by their families. Satyamurthy had gained admission to medicine but opted to take up farming that his family was engaged in. He had deep knowledge of music too. At the time of the traditional bride-viewing, although he expressed his unwillingness to accompany her on her music tours, he ended up being her strongest pillar of support. Mathangi proudly states that her life exemplifies the reverse of the adage – ‘Behind every successful man, there is a woman.’ Mathangi has a special affinity towards the musical style that characterizes the performances of D. K. Pattammal and her brother D. K. Jayaraman. She goes into raptures as she sings ragam-thanam-pallavi in the same style as D. K. Pattammal.

She states that the initial days of her married life in Kottayam were very amusing. Her husband would leave for work in the fields very early in the morning. And all she had for company was music! In the beginning, her neighbours, hearing her singing to herself, would tease her endlessly. “But gradually, a few students of music in the neighbourhood began to flock towards me. Some of them were vocalists, others violinists, and still others, mridangists. Soon, they started singing with me and playing the violin as well as the mridangam. In that manner, I became their guide. That was the beginning.”

Mathangi’s first musical recital was in Kottayam

district itself. The venue was Ranjini Sangeetha Sabha. The second was at the Mahadeva temple at Vaikom on the auspicious occasion of its famous Vaikkathashtamifestival. Her performances at both these places had such a profound impact on the rasikas that she was inundated with invitations for musical recitals all over Kerala. “The number of programmes I have conducted outside Kerala may be equal to those that I have done in Kerala. In the field of music, although Tamil Nadu is my birth mother, Kerala is my adoptive mother. I can say confidently that this is the land that has made me who I am today,” Mathangi Satyamurthy asserts.

“Although I have had many interesting experiences while conducting music programmes in Kerala, let me narrate one specific experience. Once I was singing at a concert organized by the Library Council in Kottayam. I was so completely absorbed in it that I closed my eyes as I sang. At some point of time, one member of the audience came up the dais, inserted a five hundred rupee note in the notation book that lay open in front of me, and left. After the recital, I was wonderstruck to see the money. It was one of my accompanying artistes who told me about what had happened!” Mathangi reminisces.

“I am proud that I have contributed a little towards creating a refined aesthetic culture in the field of Carnatic music in Kerala. People from all walks of life – retail traders, railway porters, police personnel, barbers, bus conductors and so on – sit right in front of the audience, and listen to my music. What is really amusing is that these people have formed a Fan’s Association in my name at Ettumanoor – Mathangi’s Fans’ Association! This is a recognition that has not be given to any other singer in this area! My musical career in Kerala has upturned the general notion that a Carnatic singer has a future only in Chennai. Maybe this was true earlier. But today, that is not the case. I have been able to prove that the Thanjavur bani of Carnatic music has a fertile ground in Kerala. I’m sad that my spouse is not alive to see these successes of mine. But I continue to do my duty. After all, this land and its people are with me.” These words are an eloquent testimony to the cultural atmosphere of Kerala in the present times. ■





The Digital Renaissance in Women's Reading

Dr. Suneetha T. V. delves into the relationship between women and reading in the digital era.



Dr. Suneetha T.V.

Professor, Malayalam University, Tirur

The quote “A well-read woman is a dangerous creature”(Liza Klaypas) stumbled upon me online while searching for quotations about women's reading, ignites curiosity about how the world perceives women readers and when it began acknowledging them.

A notable scene from medieval English literature involves women attacking books, prominently depicted in Chaucer's “The Wife of Bath's Tale”. However, reality paints a different picture, showing that women always sought opportunities to read and write, regardless of adversities. Studies suggest that the 18th century saw an increase in women's engagement with reading, as they gained more access to education and books.

Women's Reading in the Digital Age

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized all aspects of life, including reading. Printed reading materials now share the space with electronic reading and audio books. This transformation in reading mediums, from books to digital platforms like computers, tablets, and mobile phones, has altered the reading landscape.

Technology and Women

Traditionally, technology was viewed as a male-dominated field, with a strong perceived link between masculinity and technological proficiency, whereas women were considered guardians of nature. Techno feminism studies the complex relationships between technology and gender. However, digital technology has disrupted this dichotomy, as observed by thinkers like Donna Haraway and Sherry Turkle, who see it as a new frontier for feminist liberation, offering a platform to transcend



gender binaries and explore multiple identities.

The Contemporary Woman Reader

According to a 2021 study, half of the global population spends an average of two and a half hours daily on the internet/social media. However, a significant portion of this time is not devoted to serious reading, with content like reels and memes dominating our digital consumption. Despite this, there's a segment of the population engaging with audio books, e-books, and online articles amidst the digital noise.

Women's journey in reading has historically been fraught with challenges, from managing dual responsibilities at home and work to societal barriers restricting access to public and educational resources. M.D. Radhika observes that often, only mothers and good teachers genuinely appreciate women readers. Experiences of discomfort in public libraries, except in educational institutions, highlight the social stigma attached to women seeking knowledge through reading. Narratives like "oru Vayanasala Viplavam" by Yama and "Achamakku Sambhavichathu" by K.R. Meera humorously portray women's forays into traditionally male-dominated reading spaces, their transformative reading experiences, and society's often hostile reaction to such changes. Today, libraries are becoming more inclusive

"From the pages of Chaucer to the screens of the digital age, women's quest for knowledge and expression through reading has evolved, yet the thirst for words remains unquenched."

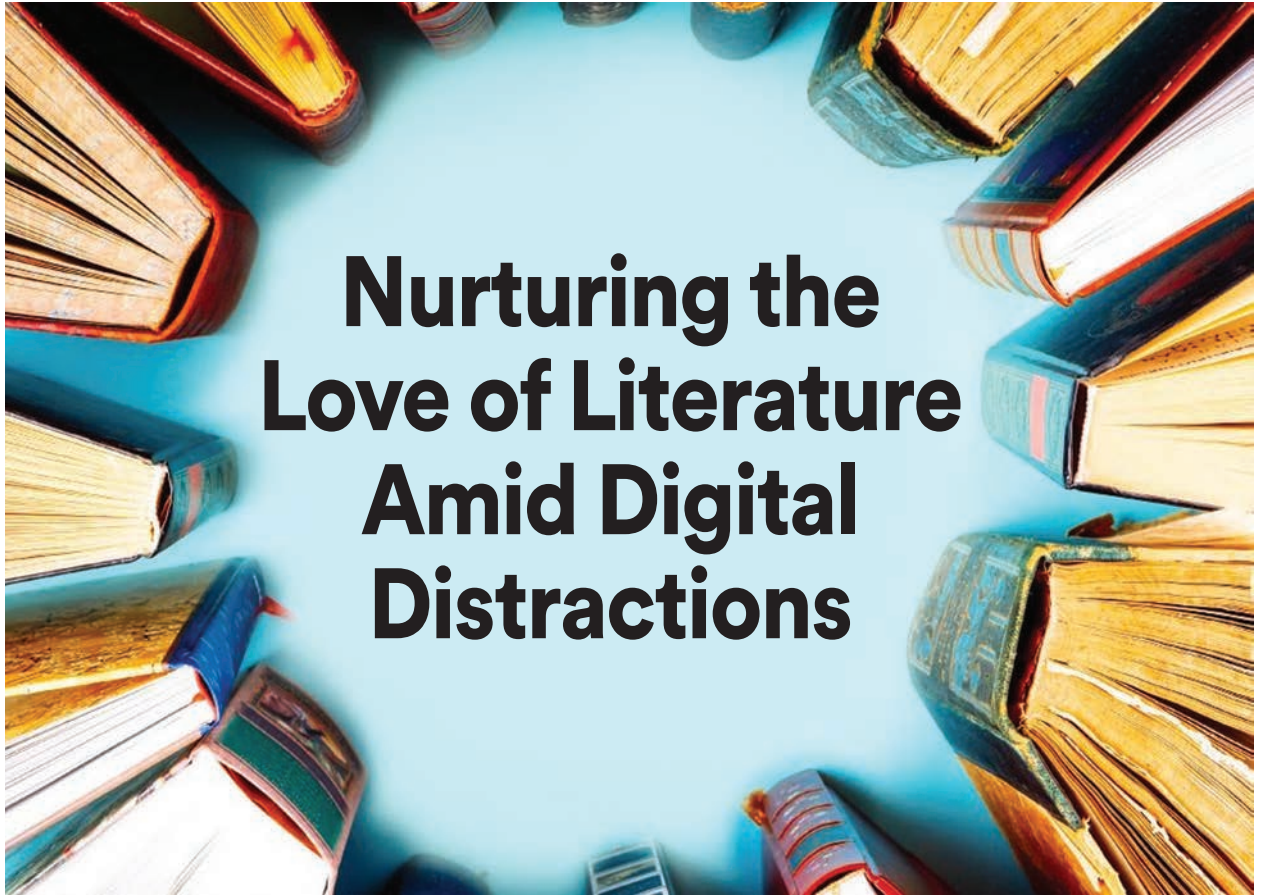
"Digital technology: once a realm dominated by masculine narratives, now a frontier for feminist liberation, reshaping the contours of women's reading and writing."

of women, a positive development. However, the real game-changer is digital technology, which has made reading more accessible to women, allowing them to carry their reading materials on mobile devices, facilitating reading and writing during travels, at work, and leisure times. This digital revolution in reading has somewhat addressed issues of resource availability and access, putting the power of choice in readers' hands. It's now up to the readers to use this resource wisely for personal growth, keeping in mind Thomas Dreyer's insight that claiming "no time to read" is akin to intellectual suicide, reminding us of the importance of finding time for meaningful reading amidst the deluge of digital content.

Lisa Klaypas meant that a well-read woman is likely to be someone who isn't afraid to ask questions and possesses a sense of independence. Reading is indeed one of the best ways for women to achieve freedom, self-awareness, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem. It's not just about having a path; the realisation comes from walking it to reach the destination

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Nurturing the Love of Literature Amid Digital Distractions

“A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies”

- George R. R. Martin



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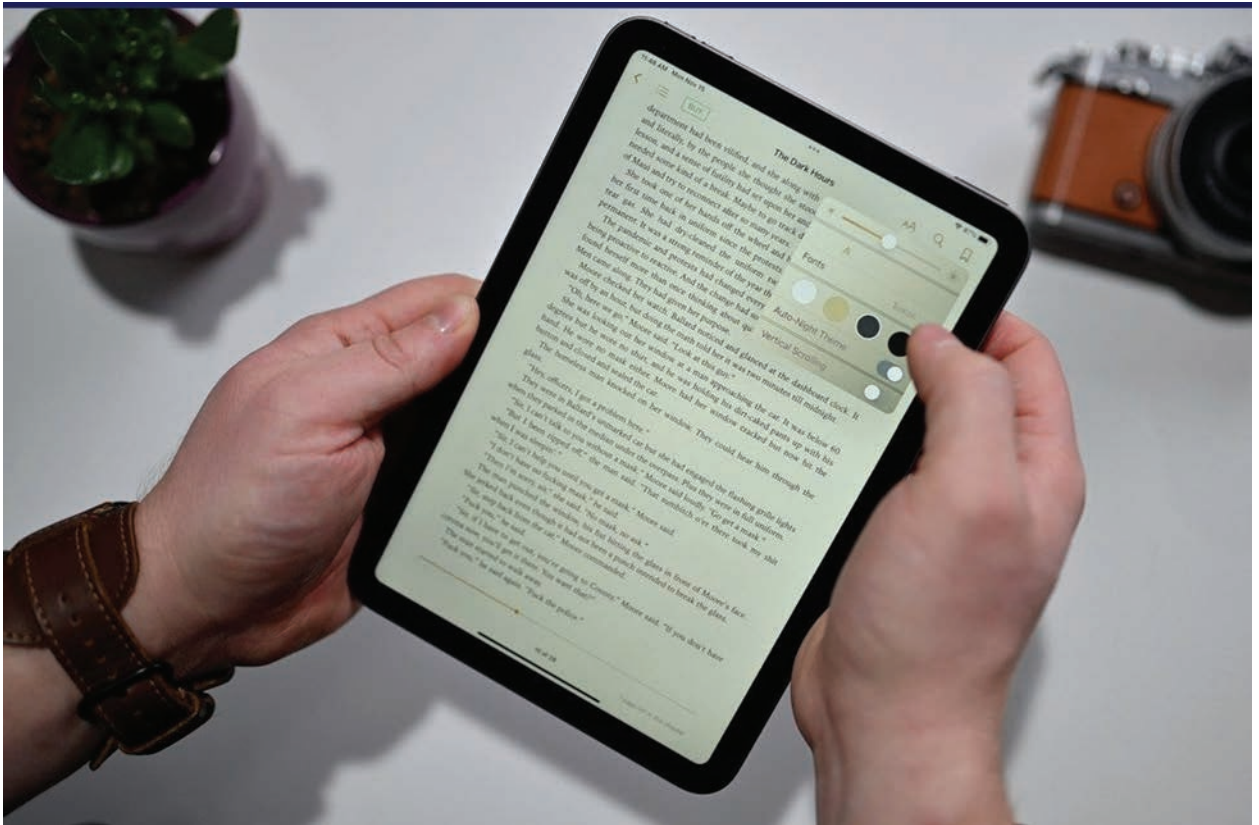
In an age dominated by screens, instilling a passion for reading in children is more crucial than ever, celebrating the timeless works of authors like Shakespeare and Andersen.

Every year, the 23rd of April is particularly relevant to book lovers across the world as it celebrates the birthday of the world-renowned poet, playwright, and actor, William Shakespeare. But what only a few people know is the fact that Shakespeare and other prominent writers like Miguel de Cervantes and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega also died on the same day, which prompted UNESCO to declare this day as World Book and Copyright Day.

While revering these literary giants, we can also commemorate the birth of great writers like Hans Christian Andersen, Charlotte Brontë, and Maya Angelou who were also born in April. As our discussion on reading pertains to children, the most important names from the above list of writers are those of William Shakespeare and Hans Christian Andersen. But before delving deep into the contributions that these two writers have made to the realm of children's literature, let us briefly analyse the crippling circumstances that have led to the loss of reading among the public in general and children in particular.

Onslaught of Digital Devices

The present age is hailed as the age of the information revolution that has been ushered into our lives through digital devices like smartphones, laptops, iPads, and tablets, to



name a few. The ubiquitous use of such devices by people belonging to all age groups across the world has brought myriads of amenities close to us. Consequently, devices like smartphones have become our extended brains that record, process, and execute hundreds of tasks for ordinary individuals in their day-to-day lives. But the flip side of this convenience is the extent of dependency which we have on our gadgets. They rob us of our quality time, which we used to devote to our deeper contemplative-meditative activities like reading.

Lifestyle Changes

As digital devices rule our world, they also drive us into the marketplace with the convenient option of online marketing of goods and services. This has led to an excessive bent towards materialistic pleasures where we find people becoming digital nomads in search of food, clothing, and exotic travel destinations. There is a constant compulsion among people to prove to the world that they are enjoying their lives to the fullest, and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and

WhatsApp help them to flaunt it before others. Success has been equated to the number of followers you have on social media. Reading, being a completely reclusive and private activity, fares badly in a world of publicity stunts.

Coming to the world of children, the lifestyle changes that occur in their family influence them to a large extent. Parents who are busy with their jobs and spend their spare time in a world of digital euphoria can seldom instil good values in their kids. Parenting is a responsible job where one needs to lead by example. But children, more often than not, are stifled by a heavy syllabus and a load of extracurricular activities, leaving little or no time for them to engage in the pleasures of reading.

Toxic Tendencies in Reading

There is an emerging school of thought that argues that reading is not dead in the digital age and that people are engaged in active online reading. This is partially true as we see the surge of digital content that appears as personalized blogs, Facebook and Instagram stories, and WhatsApp forwards. But often these digital



contents are created by individuals with a particular religious agenda, political alignment, and an immature worldview. Their opinions cannot be compared to those of age-old authors whose books are enough to nourish our souls for a lifetime. The biased digital content that is often mindlessly consumed by people of all ages has a detrimental effect on the collective intellect. So, a judicious approach as to what should and should not be read in the digital world is a serious responsibility of every individual.

Retrieving the Sacred Art of Reading

With all the above facts still in place, it is heartening to understand that the art of reading has not become completely obsolete as we witness the huge sale of good books, proliferation in the number of bestsellers, the great number of online and offline book clubs, and literary festivals that promote reading. There is a large chunk of the populace still exploring, enjoying, and criticizing books belonging to all genres. Digital devices like Kindle and several online reading sites that offer free digital books have revolutionized

reading in the modern age.

George R. R. Martin has famously said, “A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies.” Books take us to people and places we never knew, show the multifaceted aspects of life, and make us laugh and cry at the oddities of the world. Apart from improving our vocabulary and language, they help us in connecting with people, make us smarter, and instill humane qualities in us. The seeds of the habit of learning should be sown at an early age. Parents and teachers can play an active role in developing this habit in children. In school, they should be sent to the library and introduced to quality books by great writers. At home, a quality time slot can be set aside by parents each day to sit together with children and make them read while reading along with them. Here we make a full circle of our discussion as the names of Hans Christian Andersen and William Shakespeare are indispensable when it comes to the world of children’s literature.

Best known for his collection of fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen, the famous author from Denmark, has captivated the imagination of children through centuries. “The Emperor’s





New Clothes,” “Thumbelina,” “The Ugly Duckling,” etc., are some of the tales that have been translated into almost all the world languages and are part of the repertoire of bedtime stories the world over. Andersen’s tale is the best starting point for a tiny reader to get initiated into the world of letters. William Shakespeare is a canonical writer who has intrigued even the well-educated mind with his deep philosophical insights and would seem to be a difficult choice for kids. But the marvel of Shakespearean plots has been made available to kids by several great writers in simple and abridged form. “Tales from Shakespeare” is such a wonderful book combinedly authored by Charles and Mary Lamb and published in 1807, which offers the best taste of Shakespeare for kids in beautiful language.

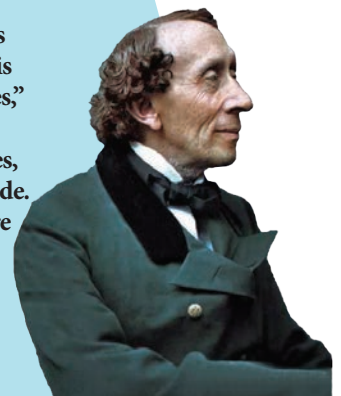
Let our kids embrace the solitary pleasure of reading by getting acquainted with the great men of the literary world. Rather than dissipating their creative energies in the shallow world of digital excitement, let us help them to cherish books and make their hearts roam through the pastures of evergreen literature written by literary stalwarts across the world.

Key Dates to Remember:

- **April 23:** Celebrated worldwide as **World Book and Copyright Day**, honouring the birth of William Shakespeare and the deaths of Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega.
- **Notable April Births:** Hans Christian Andersen, Charlotte Brontë, and Maya Angelou.

The Master Storyteller for Children

Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish author famed for his magical fairy tales, has enchanted young minds for generations. His stories, such as “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” “Thumbelina,” and “The Ugly Duckling,” transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries, becoming beloved bedtime staples worldwide. Andersen’s ability to weave tales that capture the complexities of human nature and the beauty of imagination makes his works an ideal starting point for children venturing into the world of literature. His legacy continues to inspire a love for reading and storytelling in children across the globe.



■ Hans Christian Andersen



Beyond Stardom

In a historic turnaround, Malayalam cinema is now captivating audiences across South India, heralding a new era of content over stardom.



A. Chandrasekhar
Film Critic

Though Chennai was once the mecca of South Indian Cinema, Malayalam Cinema never gained wide commercial acceptance across the movie houses in Tamil Nadu until recently. Undeniably, Malayalam Cinema has always been inspiring filmmakers in other languages since its origin, and many of its hits and superhits have been remade into other languages as well. Malayalam film technicians were also much sought after, and their talents were utilized in other languages to a great extent. Talents like Kamal Hassan sprouted off in Malayalam Cinema, and the first-ever National Award for Best Movie from Tamil was directed by K.S. Sethumadhavan, a Malayali director. Yet, Malayalam Cinema

couldn't gain attention amongst the audiences of other South Indian states in its theatrical presence. Malayalam movies during the eighties and nineties were dubbed and released in other states as soft porn movies with uncensored visuals, creating an aversion in the audience. On the contrary, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi movies were well celebrated in Kerala, along with its own productions, through wide theatrical release across the state. Such other language movies also held the same status as mainstream Malayalam movies in terms of theatrical revenue.

However, over the past two months, Malayalam Cinema has been witnessing a historical comeback by creating ripples in the theatres of surrounding states, especially in Chennai. Industrial experts and business analysts unequivocally acknowledge that it has been Malayalam Cinema that has salvaged hundreds of movie houses that were about to close due to repeat box office failures from their own industry. Academicians, critics, and social

media influencers all have much to praise about the content and presentation of mainstream Malayalam Cinema and recommend its filmmakers observe the way Malayalam Cinema is being made. They also highlight Malayalam Cinema for being content-oriented and not dependent on superstardom. A small-budgeted romantic comedy titled “Premam,” produced by Fahadh Faasil, Nazriya Nazim, Dileesh Pothan, and Shyam Pushkaran and directed by Alphonse Puthren, sowed the seeds for this ongoing saga of success. With comparatively new faces in its star cast, it got widely accepted among the youth in other states as well. S.S. Rajamouli, the director of the Oscar-winning “RRR” and “Baahubali,” himself presented the Telugu version of the movie with much appreciation and praise for its content and presentation. However, “Premam” was released in selected theatres, especially in urban cities and townships, as has been the practice over the years, targeting the resident Malayali audience.

A few weeks after the release of “Premam” in Tamil Nadu and the neighbouring states, another offbeat mainstream movie from Malayalam, this time a big starrer, “Bhramayugam,” too got released and was commercially well-accepted all over. The movie proved to be a big success, though it denied the stardom of a megastar who is one of our

greatest actors of all time, Mammooty. Shot in black and white and presented with only five actors, the movie featured Mammooty in an extremely dark shade as the core anti-hero. Yet, this horror-themed movie won the hearts of thousands in South India. Critics and experts started critically talking about the meaninglessness of celebrated stardom that had overridden the content of their mainstream cinema over the years. They started citing Malayalam Cinema as the ideal example of how content should be focused on more than superstar charisma, paving the way for an open debate amongst industry folks on improving the quality of movies as opposed to being overly dependent on stardom.

The real magic was yet to come. In 2024, “Manjummal Boys,” a small survival drama from Malayalam, produced by actor-director Soubin Shahir and directed by a young filmmaker named Chidambaram, was released in selected theatres in Chennai. The film didn’t have big names other than Soubin in its credit line. The majority of the actors were newcomers and upcoming stars. To add to all, “Manjummal Boys” was a movie without a heroine too! Surprisingly, the film was well-accepted over the theatres. Tamil audiences started queuing up in front of theatres to watch “Manjummal Boys,” as if they were about to watch a Vijay starrer or a Rajinikanth starrer. Initially, critics



K.S. Sethumadhavan



were reluctant to accept the reality and started attributing the reference to Kamal Hassan's "Guna" movie, its location, and the inclusion of the iconic song "Kanmani Anbodu Kadhalan" in the movie as the reason for this unparalleled, unexpected, and phenomenal success. Writer-critic Jeyamohan went to the extent of criticizing the movie for celebrating alcoholics and imposed his observations as the traits of Keralites in general. Though the opinion triggered significant criticism from inside and outside Tamil Nadu, "Manjummal Boys" gained more acceptance, and its distributors were forced to release it all over the state, even in B and C theatres, as is the case with a commercial mainstream Tamil movie. The movie was based on a real-life incident that happened two decades ago when one of the tourists during their visit to Kodaikanal accidentally fell into the deep cleavage at Guna cave, a tourist place known after the Kamal Hassan movie, and was heroically rescued by his friends with the help of local authorities. "Manjummal Boys" was presented as a visual tribute to the master craftsman Kamal Hassan, and the crew of the movie didn't hesitate to make it public. Kamal Hassan himself expressed his desire to watch the movie and personally invited them to Chennai and appreciated them for their brilliant craftsmanship. Superstar Rajinikanth also followed suit.



Kamal Hassan

Sooner or later, the industry seems to have woken up to reality, understanding the strength of content from the historic and epic success of "Manjummal Boys" as a theatre release in Tamil Nadu. Film lovers and buffs who were disappointed with the stereotypical repeats of superstar movies were all in praise of this small Malayalam movie and started celebrating it in movie houses. Thus, in an array, "Premam," "Bhramayugam," and "Manjummal Boys" have created a series of commercial successes across neighboring states by registering record collections, being celebrated by the regional audience just out of word-of-mouth publicity. Now, serious discussions are in the air, where offbeat filmmakers like Samuthirakani have openly stated that the local audience should be ready to accept such small-scale productions from their state as well. Eminent directors from South India have openly admitted that the success of "Manjummal Boys" should be carefully studied, and mainstream filmmakers should learn a lot from Malayalam Cinema. It's ironic that a small movie from Kerala could trigger a discussion about focusing on content in a language where superstardom rules over content. Going to the depths, one would realize that the phenomenal success of "Manjummal Boys" is not accidental. It has a very well-crafted script. It is extremely well-filmed, and the technical aspects like its production design





(the art and set department), music, and cinematography are unmatched.

Following the repeated success of Malayalam Cinema over South India, the fourth release that happened last month too had proved to follow the success line. Blessy's masterpiece "Aadujeevitham," another epic survival drama in Malayalam, spun over a superhit novel, has turned out to be another big success. Unlike the other three movies mentioned here, "Aadujeevitham" is a movie produced on a large scale with a preparation and process that lasted for 16 years, starring Prithviraj, who has already been established as a Pan-Indian star. The film has big names like A.R. Rahman, Resul Pookutty, and Sreekar Prasad associated with it. Now, "Aadujeevitham" is in the limelight as the pivot of critical debates. It's undeniable that of late, South Indian film industries have started realizing the creative quality of Malayalam Cinema and have started acknowledging it, both in its scale and for its content by receiving it commercially. Thanks to the COVID lockdown and the advent of OTT platforms, Malayalam Cinema has now graduated itself to a demanding position across other states too with subtitled prints. Now, all the language film industries, including Bollywood, are anxiously looking forward to the latest happenings in Malayalam Cinema and are ready to release it all over without even being dubbed or remade.

Of course, from a commercial point of view, this is a commendable achievement and a drastic advancement for the Malayalam Film Industry. Thus, by becoming the torchbearers of Indian Cinema through iconic filmmakers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, Shaji N. Karun, and T.V. Chandran, etc., in the Art House genre, Malayalam Cinema has successfully gained the same status commercially.

The Rise of Content over Stardom

Malayalam cinema's recent successes, like "Bhramayugam," and "Manjummal Boys," have shifted focus from superstar-led films to content-rich narratives, changing audience expectations and industry norms.



A.R. Rahman

Cinematic Innovations

The unique storytelling techniques, such as the black and white presentation in "Bhramayugam" and the hero-less narrative of "Manjummal Boys," that Malayalam cinema is bringing to the forefront, challenging conventional film-making.

Cross-Regional Impact

The wider acceptance and commercial success of Malayalam films like "Aadujeevitham" in non-Malayali speaking regions, indicating a growing appreciation for diverse content and storytelling across South India.



Resul Pookutty

Global Warming Intensifies Weather Severity



Dr.S. Abhilash

Director,
Advanced Center for
Atmospheric Radar
Research, CUSAT

Dr. S. Abhilash, Director of the Advanced Center for Atmospheric Radar Research at CUSAT, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate the escalating risks posed by compound multi-weather hazards, intensified by human-induced climate change.

The 6th Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states with high confidence that the human contribution to global warming is causing an increasing frequency and severity of hot extremes worldwide, and many of these extremes were virtually impossible without climate change. The planet’s average surface temperature has climbed 1.2 degrees Celsius compared to the 1850-1900 baseline period. It has been hypothesized that every 1-degree

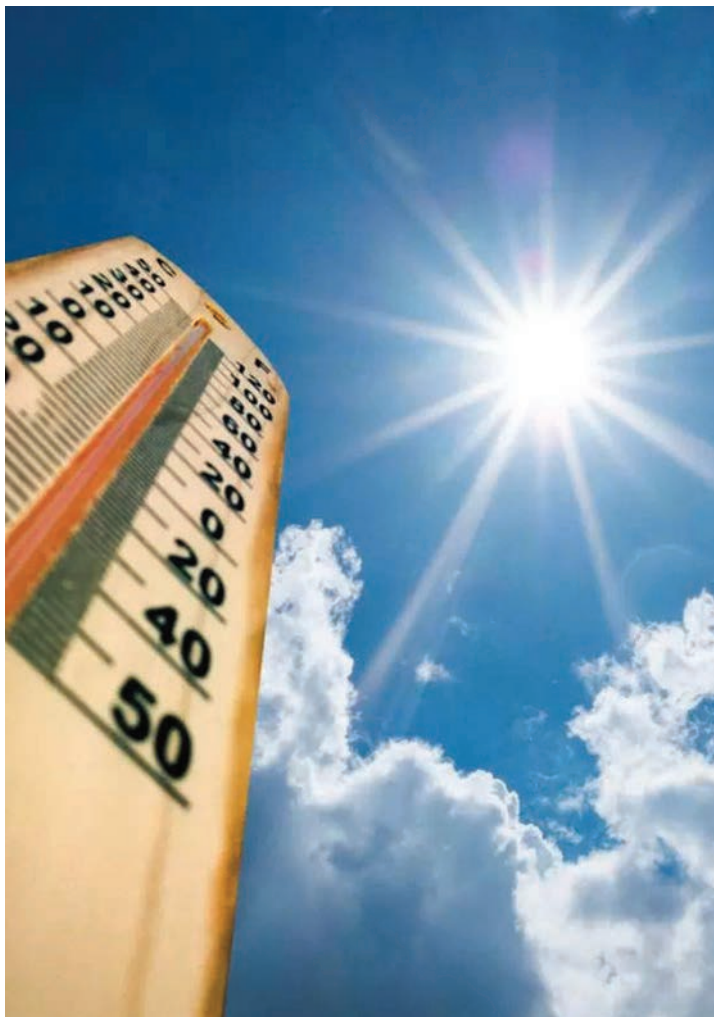
temperature rise increases atmospheric water availability by 7%, causing heavier rains and rapid runoff. Increasing temperature can increase land evaporation, intensifying the dry season and drought. The faster water cycle caused by global warming can worsen floods and droughts. Back-to-back droughts and heatwaves in 2015–2016, the first cyclonic storm “Ockhi” in 2017, which caused major damage at sea, and historical floods and recurrent landslide episodes in the last five years have drawn attention to climate change in Kerala. Short-term heavy rain may increase runoff, soil erosion, and nutrient leaching. It will increase urban flash floods and challenge most cities’ inadequate drainage infrastructure. Degrading land owing to human activity like converting forest area to plantation or crop fields and massive construction can worsen the impact of cloudbursts, landslides, and flash floods. According to the IPCC assessment report, rising sea levels will adversely affect Kerala’s coastal

areas and islands worldwide. The impacts depend on terrain, coastline morphology, and flooding susceptibility. Certain low-lying coastal areas of Kerala will see more frequent or permanent flooding. Large coastal sections of Kerala are only marginally above sea level, making them more vulnerable to sea-level rise. Since 1901, the global mean sea level has risen by 0.2–0.3 m and is rising faster. By 2100, the global mean sea level is expected to rise by 0.38m (0.28-0.55m) under low emission scenarios and 0.77m (0.63-1.01m) under high emission scenarios. When one weather disaster feeds into and worsens another, “compound” extreme events are likely to increase. More tropical cyclones may form near Kerala’s coast. The north Indian Ocean, especially the Arabian Sea, may become a breeding ground for strong cyclonic systems due to rising sea surface temperature (SST) and ocean heat content. This again impacts coastal life and livelihoods. Storm surges from tropical storms will worsen extreme sea-level problems along the 600 km Kerala coast. Compound events including sea-level rise, cyclone-induced storm surges, coastal erosion from wind and wave activity, and coastal development are predicted to impact coastal communities heavily. Due to excessive rainfall, spring tides, higher river water discharge from land, limited backwater carrying capacity, and potential ground subsidence, most Kerala coastal regions are more vulnerable.

Thermal Stress Inequalities in a Progressively Warmer Planet

Recent studies showed that heatwave increases in the past four decades were more pronounced in low-income nations, with 40% higher exposure from 2010 to 2019 than in high-income ones. Lower-income regions have reduced adaptation capacity to warming, which compounds the impacts of higher heatwave exposure. Often, lagged adaptation in low-income regions increases heatwave exposure and heat-stress disparity. The poorest countries will be exposed to 2 to 5 times more heatwaves than the richest by the end of the century.

The exacerbation of heatwave and heatstroke conditions in Kerala can be attributed to the combined effects of anthropogenic global warming and heightened urbanization. The concept of the urban heat island effect refers



to the phenomenon wherein densely inhabited and highly developed metropolitan regions experience greater temperatures in comparison to their rural counterparts. Kerala is currently experiencing rapid and extensive urbanization, which may significantly contribute to the exacerbation of the severe and unusual heat conditions in the region. The incidence and severity of heatwave conditions in Kerala are influenced by the changes in Land Use and Land Cover resulting from human activities. Another significant aspect that contributes to heat-related discomfort is the presence of the expansive warmer ocean water surrounding Kerala, which results in a more humid atmosphere compared to other drier inland areas. The primary determinant of heat exchange between the human body and the environment is temperature. However, humidity is recognized as a significant criterion for evaluating the severity of heatstroke situations in densely populated coastal areas of Kerala. Excessive temperature poses inherent risks, and when coupled with elevated humidity levels, it can impede the human body’s ability to effectively regulate temperature through sweating, hence exacerbating potential health complications. Therefore, in order to evaluate human comfort in relation to specific temperature and humidity levels,

researchers have developed an additional metric referred to as the “Heat Index.” The concept of “apparent temperature” is commonly acknowledged as a metric for assessing human comfort, which involves the integration of temperature and humidity. At a temperature of 37°C and a humidity level of 65%, the perceived temperature, commonly referred to as the “feels-like temperature,” is approximately 50°C. This is the primary cause of the continuous rise in discomfort along Kerala’s shoreline. The main factor contributing to the rise in sunburn occurrences during the season is the direct exposure to sunlight. Given that the Sun’s vertical rays traverse a shorter distance through the atmosphere when positioned overhead, there exists a possibility for heightened levels of Ultraviolet (UV) radiation to reach the Earth’s surface. Exposure to direct sunlight during peak sun hours increases the likelihood of sunburn due to the high UV index.

It is noteworthy to find a significant rise (fall) in the occurrence of heatwave (HW) days in Kerala during El Niño (La Niña) seasons. During hot weather seasons, a notable increase in the severity of heatwaves is noted over the Kerala region in recent times. The commencement of summer in February 2024 has resulted in significant and unprecedented effects on several sectors in Kerala. Additionally, it is worth noting that the period of 2023-2024 is characterized by the El Niño phenomenon, which is projected to persist until the end of April. In summary, it is projected that the future climate of the Kerala region will experience increased warmth, particularly during the summer season when it aligns with conventional climatic variability patterns such as El Niño.

Infants and children below the age of 4, as well as people aged 65 and above, have an elevated susceptibility to heat-related disorders, contingent upon their capacity to control body temperature. Additional susceptible populations encompass those with chronic illnesses who are prescribed medication. Individuals engaged in outdoor pursuits, such as construction workers, sports, and individuals who like prolonged exposure to direct sunshine, have a heightened level of risk. Engaging in physical effort, particularly during intense physical activity in

high temperatures, elevates the likelihood of experiencing dehydration and heat-related ailments. There exist numerous measures that can be undertaken to mitigate heat-related disorders. The main tips for staying safe from heat-related illness are to keep cool, stay hydrated, and avoid direct exposure to peak sun hours.

While the pre-monsoon season in Kerala contributes to less than 10% of the total annual rainfall, it is anticipated that the occurrence of pre-monsoon thunderclouds may lead to an escalation in weather dangers. In the future, there is a possibility of an increase in both the frequency and severity of lightning strikes, flash floods, cloudbursts, and microbursts. The rise in atmospheric instability can be linked to the heightened surface heating and moisture content in the atmosphere.

The most severe consequences of climate change and global warming will disproportionately affect individuals who possess limited capacity for adaptation. They are mostly the poor and indigenous people who are more connected to the sea and land for their livelihood. Unfortunately, indigenous people are often out of the development agenda, and we need to integrate indigenous knowledge with climate science to achieve mitigation goals and adaptation challenges of climate change. In order to accomplish all 17 of the sustainable development goals, now is the time to consider a paradigm shift that integrates ecosystem-based approaches with technology-based solutions.

The deployment of a multi-hazard early warning system necessitates the adoption of a “bottom-up approach,” wherein the active participation of local people is crucial. Given the increasingly localized nature of extreme weather events, it is imperative to establish an early warning system that is actionable, local-level, people-centric, and decentralized. The absence of active participation by local authorities and vulnerable communities may result in insufficient government and institutional actions and responses to hazard events, particularly in light of the increasing occurrence of unconventional and extreme weather phenomena

- **Human Contribution to Climate Change: The 6th IPCC Report highlights the significant human impact on increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather conditions.**
- **Vulnerability of Kerala: Kerala has faced back-to-back droughts, heatwaves, and severe cyclonic storms in recent years, emphasizing the state’s susceptibility to climate change impacts.**
- **Rising Sea Levels: Projected sea-level rise poses a significant threat to coastal areas, with Kerala’s low-lying regions at increased risk of frequent or permanent flooding.**
- **Heat Stress and Vulnerable Populations: Heat stress disproportionately affects infants, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses, highlighting the need for targeted protective measures.**
- **Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems: A bottom-up approach involving local communities is essential for establishing effective, localized early warning systems for extreme weather events.**

Spirit-Lifting Performance

Three Kerala Women Excel in WPL Cricket



Sanil P. Thomas
Sports Journalist

It's a triumph over adversity by all means. Three women cricketers from Kerala played stellar roles in three different teams in the second edition of the Women's Premier League (WPL), and these teams finished first, second, and third. Asha Sobhana of the Bangalore Royal Challengers helped her team win the title, while Minnu Mani was with the Delhi Capitals, who finished as runners-up. Sajana Sajeevan's Mumbai Indians came in third. Sajana also won the special prize for the best catch, a spectacular diving effort off UP Warriors' Sofie Ecclestone's bat that was duly rewarded.

The stunning performance from the Kerala trio is of great significance for a transitional side. Women's cricket in Kerala has indeed come a long way, with about half a dozen players ready to participate in the next WPL season. Thanks to better coaching methods

and aggressive talent scouting, the grassroots level has started delivering.

For Minnu and Asha, this marks the second consecutive contract with Delhi and Bangalore, respectively. For Sajana, it was her debut. Minnu has played for India in the T20 series against Bangladesh and was part of the Indian team that won gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023. Asha became the first Keralite to be selected for the Under-19 Indian camp in 2009. Despite excelling as a leg spinner, she struggled to secure a regular place in the Railways team, where she has worked for the last 13 years, currently with the Hyderabad division. Fortunately, cricket legend Mithali Raj is her sports officer. After being dropped from the department team, she turned to commentary, which led her to the Puducherry team at the invitation of her former teammate Sweta Misra. She captained the team and took 16 wickets

in the first season, propelling her to the Royal Challengers. Minnu, too, has recently been selected for the Railways.

Asha Sobhana took 12 wickets in the second edition of the WPL, including two crucial wickets in the final. In her first match against the UP Warriors, she took five wickets for 22 runs. In the playoff against the Mumbai Indians, she conceded just six runs and took one wicket when Mumbai needed 12 runs to win, a fantastic performance that led her team to the finals.

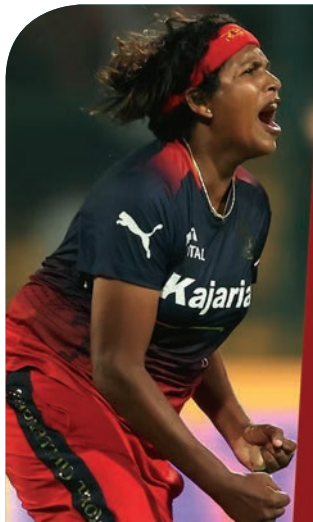
For Sajana, it was her towering six on the last ball that won her team's first match against Delhi. Mumbai needed five runs on the last ball, and she delivered, earning the nickname "big hitter." Minnu took the wicket of Bangalore captain Smriti Mandhana in the final.

Both Minnu and Sajana hail from Mananthavady in the Wayanad district and belong to the Kurichiya Adivasi group, known for their archery skills. Minnu's parents work for daily wages, while Sajana's father is an auto driver and her mother is a councilor with the Municipality. Asha is from Peroorkada, Thiruvananthapuram, where her father also works as an auto driver, and her mother is a homemaker. All three faced financial difficulties in their early years. Minnu and Sajana also faced opposition from their community and locals who believed that sports, especially cricket, were not suitable for girls. They traveled 36 km, changing four buses every day to reach Krishnagiri Stadium in Meenangadi. Their perseverance paid off, and they now both own two-wheelers.

Shortly after the second WPL season, Minnu led the South Zone team in the Senior Interzonal Multi-Day Cricket Tournament, a significant honor. She took six wickets for 73 runs against the West, and Sajana, playing for the same team, scored 74 runs off 130 balls with 10 fours in the South's first innings. Both played crucial roles in achieving the first innings lead against the West.

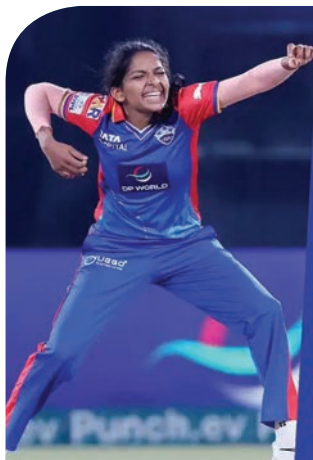
These three players from Kerala, all all-rounders, have established themselves in their specialties: Minnu as an off-spinner, Asha as a leg spinner, and Sajana as a hard-hitting batter. They have added an unprecedented chapter to the history of Kerala women's cricket. From T20 to one-day internationals and beyond, we await the day

when a Kerala woman earns a Test cap. These ladies, determined role models, make that day seem inevitable.



Asha Sobhana's Journey

- First Keralite selected for the Under-19 Indian camp in 2009.
- Struggled for a regular place in the Railways team; turned to commentary before joining the Puducherry team.
- Captained Puducherry, taking 16 wickets in the first season, leading to her selection for the Royal Challengers.
- Took 12 wickets in the WPL second edition, including two crucial wickets in the final.



Minnu Mani's Achievements

- Played for India in the T20 series against Bangladesh.
- Part of the Indian team that won gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023.
- Second consecutive contract with the Delhi Capitals in the WPL.
- Took the wicket of Bangalore captain Smriti Mandhana in the WPL final.



Sajana Sajeevan's Memorable Moments

- Won the special prize for the best catch in the WPL.
- Made her debut in the WPL with the Mumbai Indians, coming in third.
- Known as "big hitter" for her last-ball six that won Mumbai's first match against Delhi.
- Scored 74 runs off 130 balls with 10 fours in the South Zone's first innings against the West in the Senior Interzonal Multi-Day Cricket.

Munnar



